

COLVILLE UPDATE

Arctic Ploverland News

Vol. 1 No. 1

Spring, 1996

Greetings from the Jim Helmericks Family

Introduction

Many of you have not heard from us for over a year. Our last general newsletter was so late in the year of 1994 that we neglected writing in the spring of 1995. Now we hardly know where to start. Life goes on here at the Colville about the same as ever, except the two older boys are gone most of the year at either college or jobs. Most of our time is spent maintaining the *homestead*, working on improvements, and handling the same businesses we've operated for many years now. The commercial fishing is holding its own, the air taxi business has dramatically decreased, the guiding is primarily focused on birding tours, and logistical support jobs have mostly entailed providing meals and lodging or boating work.

Jim and Teena

Jim and Teena celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary last June 3rd. Since it's impossible to go out to dinner or most other traditional ways of celebrating such an event, we went for a special flight. Jim flew an extended survey of the Colville

River Delta while Teena videotaped the break-up of the river ice that was in process below us. Teena always thinks flying with Jim is a treat - one not often afforded her.

Derek

Derek is now 23 and in his fourth year at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks studying mining engineering. He rents a small cabin off campus, still drives his little Ranger truck he bought his first year of college, and he's very anxious to be done with formal schooling and get on with other things. He has been home only during Christmas vacations the past two years since he has had summer jobs elsewhere. (There is always a feeling of loss when a member of the family is gone.) When home, Derek usually bones up on his taxidermy skills by mounting or study-skinning numerous birds.

Jay

Jay graduated with many honors and scholarships in June of '94 right here at our Colville home, just like Derek. Although he was accepted at a prestigious university in the "Lower '48" in

their aerospace engineering program, he ultimately decided to stay in Alaska and attend the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where most of his expenses were paid. He is presently a second year electrical engineering major, lives on campus, and is an official in the Honors Program. Jay and Derek see each other often and occasionally attend the same classes. Jay was able to work here at home last summer as our chief boat handler and all-around handyman. He is still the master computer operator for the family, and we depend on him to solve many of the problems on our computers whenever possible.

Isaac

Isaac is now 17 and completing a few eleventh-grade courses before forging ahead on twelfth grade. He's scheduled to graduate in June '97, and though he is a good student, lessons can be a real drag when so many more interesting and enjoyable activities beckon. He loves to hunt, drive his snowmachine, handle our birds, go boating, or anything that allows him outdoors. He's looking forward to hunting his first muskox this March. He drew a rare permit for one of the very few bulls allowed taken on the North

Slope. With Jay and Derek gone much of the time, Isaac is now Jim's right-hand man with chores and maintenance jobs. He is careful and reliable, and whatever he does is done well. Isaac has also developed taxidermy skills and is "Director of Skinning" for the Golden Plover Museum. Both Derek and Isaac have added substantially to our museum.

Aaron

Aaron is 14 and in the eighth grade. Despite being the baby of the family, he is now taller than his dad, and will probably be the tallest in the family eventually. Reading and computer games, his favorite past-times, act as great incentives to get him to complete school lessons quickly. Contributing to the chores and general family activities gives Aaron lots to do apart from school and hobbies.

Travel

Various family members have made some fun trips in the past year and a half. Teena visited friends in North Carolina for two weeks in Nov. '94, and had some wonderful experiences including a stay at an Atlantic beach resort. Then Aaron and Teena traveled around in Arizona last March and saw the Grand Canyon, tramped around many Indian ruins and museums, visited relatives, and soaked up sun. Another trip closer to home included Teena, Jay, and Isaac on a boating trip

upriver on the Colville River in July. They camped out and had great fun exploring area that was new to them, though Jim is well acquainted with it all. Derek explored places in Northern Canada before school started this fall when he drove with friends up to Inuvik on the Dempster Highway. He enjoyed seeing trees that extended clear to the ocean there. (Here at the Colville, we are about 250 miles north of the treeline.)

Over the past year and a half, the usual trips to Fairbanks occurred for aircraft maintenance, shopping, general medical check-ups, and visiting - usually a combination of all of these. Jim is the obvious one to take the planes to town, being the only pilot. Teena usually drives the Pipeline Haul Road (Dalton Hwy.) to town, which often makes for interesting adventures. On one trip last fall ('94) she was caught mid-way by washed out roads both in front and behind and was stranded until heavy equipment repaired the road.

Highlights

Summer activities and the return of the thousands of birds are the highlights of each year for us. As Jim said, "If it weren't for the birds, I probably wouldn't live at the Colville." One very special event with our bird projects occurred last summer. We had two female king eiders and one female Oldsquaw duck return to our place that we had hand-raised and released back into the wild

several years ago. These birds had traveled thousands of miles over two years of their juvenile lives, yet returned to the one little spot where they had been hatched and reared. It is a thrill to have a wild bird show up at our home who quickly displays tame characteristics, and remembers how to eat treats from our hands. These traits identify a bird as one we raised, and individual legbands confirm it. The wild Pacific black brant we raised in 1988 is still returning with her mate every summer to raise another family right next to our house. All other offspring make quite a flock of wild brant who claim our yard as their territory. These brant winter in southern California or Mexico, and it is amazing to think how many times these small geese have made this round-trip of thousands of miles in order to return *home* each summer.

Closing

Speaking of summer, we are approaching another one with the usual anticipation. Winter, with its cold and blizzards, still holds us in its icy grip.....but the sun is back from its vacation south and bathing the snowy prairie with its beauty and warmth. Sunbeams, like old friends, shine in our windows bringing pleasure to people and house plants alike.

Love from all of us :

*Jim and Teena, Derek,
Jay, Isaac, Aaron*