

Colville Update

Arctic Ploverland News

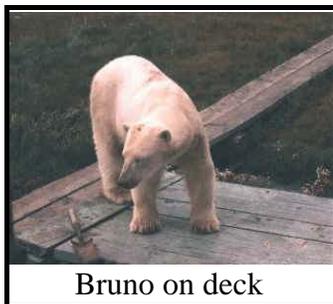
Spring, 2000

Greetings From the Jim Helmericks Family

Out of the Ordinary

Here on the edge of the Arctic Ocean, life goes on much the way it does for most families. Sleep, wake, work, play, eat, cleanup, talk, share.... So what can we share with you that might be out of the ordinary, something that might be newsworthy? Well, after careful thought, the 18 day visit of a young polar bear this fall might fit the bill. Bruno, as we named him, showed up September 1st quite early in the morning. Jim spotted him strolling down the river bank when he took Toby out for a morning run, which came to an abrupt end as the dog was hastily called back indoors before he saw what he would immediately take as an intruder. That morning we took numerous pictures of the young male as he wandered around sniffing out whatever he could find of interest, which turned up half a sack of fish lying near Toby's doghouse.

Those were soon history. Bruno checked out the various buildings, including our porch and deck around the house, before wandering off to sleep draped over a large straw pile by our barn. We no longer have barnyard animals or birds that would have been endangered by our visitor, so we decided to give the bear free rein as long as he posed no threat. He ended up staying around for 18



Bruno on deck

days. We would go about our day, giving Bruno a respectful distance, and he would watch us and act not the least concerned or menacing. He found and dug up some fish we had buried for fertilizer and snacked on those. He claimed the area around the unused barn, and his favorite lounging area was on top the straw pile in the shade of the barn. Sometimes he would lie in the edge of the lake to cool off, or go for a swim. We all enjoyed watching him and wondered what had brought him ashore during those late summer days, when normally polar bears live out on the ocean ice eating seals. Toby was not happy to be cooped up indoors all those days with only carefully orchestrated housebreaks in the opposite direction of wherever the bear happened to be. After living a life of ease at Colville Village, Bruno finally decided to head back out on the sea ice where he truly belonged. He had given us ample opportunities to observe and

photograph him, even to the point of having to shoo him off our front deck several times when he grew fond of napping there, or eating plants out of Teena's flower planter. How inconsiderate!

Family News

All the family is doing well. Teena and Jim are getting a taste of an "empty nest" as this letter is being

written, since all four boys are down in Fairbanks this week. ♦Although he is gone to town for dental/eye appointments temporarily, Aaron is the only boy still at home on a regular basis as he completes his senior year of high school. Aaron plans on attending the University of Alaska Fairbanks this fall and



Aaron, Isaac, Jay, Derek

majoring in computer science. He continues to make us proud with academic excellence, and hard work ethics during his home an summer jobs. ♦Isaac now works full-time for Alaska Airlines in Deadhorse, and divides his days off between staying with his brothers in Fairbanks, coming home to the Colville, and traveling. ♦Jay is closing in on completion of his master's degree at UAF and has continued to lead the student rocket research there, even heading up the successful rocket launch with a student designed payload. ♦Derek is still working as an engineer at the Fort Knox Gold Mine, and Melanie on her advanced Geology degree, and they continue to live in Fairbanks.

Special Event

Teena was able to attend the launch of the UAF Student rocket at the Poker Flats Launch Facility just outside Fairbanks in January. NASA had

