



TIDELINES

*News from the Long Beach Group, Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club
March-April 2007*

Visit us at <http://angeles.sierraclub.org/longbch>

NEW YEARS NORTH OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

By Carol Churchill

It all started with this question: "Would I be completely insane to go to the Arctic Circle for New Years Day 2007? After all, the temperature is known to get to minus 50 degrees below zero and, although I recycle and reuse like crazy, I am more a cerebral environmentalist than a rugged outdoors type. That was the question I posed to "Bettles Annie". Her response was, "of course not. It is the best time of the year."

She assured me that the Northern Lights were active, there will be a bonfire and fireworks to celebrate New Years, and the whole town will have a party, drink, and dance." So, off I went to Bettles, Alaska, December 28 to January 4, 2007.

Annie and Bernard Browne run the **Spirit Lights Lodge** in Bettles, Alaska. Bettles is a "city" of approximately 26 people about 35 miles north of the Arctic Circle, or a 1-hour flight from Fairbanks, Alaska. The town is made up of a small dirt airstrip used by bush pilots to bring in fuel, food, and people. There are no roads into Bettles. The town sits at the base of the Brooks Range, a favorite jumping off point for National Geographic writers, photographers, hikers and campers.

To get to Bettles, you have to fly from Fairbanks in a small 9 seater with a bush pilot. In the cold winter, the locals will build an "ice road" between Bettles and the Dalton Highway IF the weather drops to a steady -20 to -40 degrees below zero. The water on the many rivers and lakes will not freeze hard enough to drive over unless the weather is that cold for an extended period of time. Without the ice road, everything and everybody flies into Bettles with the bush pilots. The natives or rugged locals may snowmobile or dog sled the 26 miles along the Ice Road through the frozen black spruce forest from Bettles to the Dalton Highway, but most people wait for the Ice Highway.

One of the first residents in this area around the late 1800s was a tall, dark native, Old Tobuk. He married Dinook (sometimes spelled Dinuk in local literature). They had many children, some survived, some didn't. David and Frank were two of the boys. This family is known as the "Clan of Wolf." No surprise, because I saw lots of wolf tracks in the village and could hear them howling at sunset.

The story goes that in the early 1900s, David was playing with some local children near the river when his mother Dinook heard a terrible cry. She ran outside and saw a black wolf biting David. David was wearing his animal skin parka, which probably saved his life, but may have attracted the wolf who mistook David for food. Dinook ran up to the wolf, struggled for David, and frightened the wolf away, but David had severe bite marks on

Continued on p. 2

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHANGES

There was an unfortunate and as of yet unexplained mix-up wherein one of the candidate's statements did not get printed in the Sierran for the Regional Group elections. For that candidate the Sierran indicated that no statement was submitted. Predictably, that candidate received fewer votes than the others. An investigation has been launched to prevent any similar mistake from happening in the future. Those who were elected to the Long Beach Group ExCom are Bea Avcollie, Brenda Rogers, Rudy Vietmeier, and John Zappe. A thank you to all the candidates, and to all of you who voted. Without you, we could not have an election. A thank you also to Michele Gross and to John Fries, whose terms have ended, for their service on the ExCom. Michele has indicated that she will remain active with us, and John will continue on as our treasurer. In a related matter, Carol Churchill has relinquished her seat on the ExCom and Michael Milroy was appointed to fill out the remainder of her term.



THE LONG BEACH SIERRA CLUB NEEDS YOU!

Volunteer Position Open

The Long Beach group needs a Fund Raising Chair to help solicit the funding we need to keep our group in operation.

LEADERS NEEDED!

Do you like to show people new places? Do you like to open people's minds to new ideas and experiences? Are there outings you think the group should be conducting, but isn't? Would you like to help lead conditioning hikes? If you answered yes to any of these, consider becoming a leader. Leadership candidates must complete basic first aid and CPR, participate in several outings, review the leader's handbook, complete the take-home test, attend the Leadership Training Seminar, and plan and conduct a provisional outing. The next seminar will take place on April 14th at Griffith Park. Registration for this event must be completed by March 31st. Talk to one of our leaders if you're interested, or contact Todd Williams (see Leader Directory in Schedule 304) for more information.

Continued from p. 1

his face. Dinook was pregnant. According to shaman dictates, Dinook built an ice cave to have her baby, Frank, the next day. Native mothers were required by the shaman to remain at the ice cave with the new baby for 4 or 5 days before returning to camp.

David survived the attack, but was scarred. He married. Old Bettles was hit by a flood, and the town was moved to its new location about 6 miles away. New Bettles, with its airstrip and lodges, is surrounded by Evansville, the native owned village consisting mostly of the relatives of Old Tubuk.

David's daughter, Rhoda, became the Chief at Evansville, and was serving in that capacity on January 1, 2007.

Frank, Dinook and Tubok's son, married. His daughter Florence Nictune also lives in Evansville with her daughter Debbie. Debbie is an artist and, like her mother, makes beautiful native crafts.

Shortly after New Years day, Rhoda died. The native council met and elected Florence Nictune. Florence's sister, Sonya, and her children Wyoma and Wayne still live in Evansville. Wyoma's daughter, Shyanna, a 12 year old who attends school in Fairbanks because she is the only school aged child in town, offered to go cross-country skiing with us. We were also invited to their home for a New Years Eve Dance.

Both Eskimo and Athabascan people live in Evansville and surrounding areas. The local people still practice their native craft of making fur lined boots, bead-embroidered moose leather gloves and purses, and fur caps trimmed with fox and other local animals, although it is getting harder to locate fine quality native crafts made the old fashioned way.

Debbie and her 4-year-old daughter Anna wore the hand-made leather gloves, hats and boots made by Florence Nictune. Examples of the native crafts can be seen at the University of Alaska, Museum of the North in Fairbanks. This is a new museum, which has beautiful views from its hilltop setting. There are two major exhibits: Gallery of Alaska includes the state's largest display of gold, Alaskan animals, native clothing and tools, and the world's only Ice Age steppe bison mummy. The Rose Berry Alaska Art Gallery presents a full spectrum of Alaskan art, traditional and modern, including ivory carvings, ceremonial objects, tools, and photographs.

Before the prospectors and missionary set up posts, the Eskimo and Athabascan tribes were migratory and lived off different parts of the land. The Eskimo, who lived closer to the water, use to hunt whales and fish for salmon and other local fish as their primary source of survival. The Koyukuk River separated the two tribes. The Athabascan natives lived inland and primarily hunted moose, bear, caribou, lynx, fox, and other fur animals. They are migratory people, moving with the animals. "Above the Arctic Circle, The Alaska Journals of James A. Carroll 1911-1922" documents the weather patterns, lifestyle of the local people, the gold speculators, the missionaries, and the shopkeepers in the Arctic Circle, in a down-to-earth way. The Carroll family still resides near Fort Yukon.

Chuck Edwards, a local Eskimo from Alatna confirmed that the weather in the Arctic region is much warmer than when James Carroll explored the area in the early 1900s. During my stay the

weather did not get colder than minus 20 degrees. The natives are use to temperatures averaging minus 40 to minus 50. Chuck pointed out that the migratory path of the caribou and other animals had changed because the land was warmer and their food source remained farther north. The rivers were not freezing, so moving from place to place became more dangerous, not just for people but for animals who can drown in the rivers as they migrate. The Northern Lights still appear but there is evidence that their pattern is changing. The warmer it gets, the more clouds and the less likely you will see the spirit lights. Toward the coastal areas, polar bears have been found starved or dying because the ice is melting and they do not have the strength to swim 400 miles to get to their food source.

I met Doug, a local expert on grizzly bears, polar bears, and wolves. Doug lives in Evansville when he is not out in the field. Over the many years he has lived in the area, Doug built three log cabins in the wilderness, one by himself and two with the help

"...the Arctic region is much warmer than when James Carroll explored the area in the early 1900s. During my stay the weather did not get colder than minus 20 degrees. The natives are use to temperatures averaging minus 40 to minus 50."

of his boys. He lives just like the rugged outdoorsmen of the past. According to Doug, the whale parts not consumed by the natives will be set aside in a "bone yard" for the polar bear to provide a food source. The Federal Government has just recognized the possibility of the loss of the polar bears' habitat and the melting ice fields, and has agreed to "study" the problem. If something is not done soon, the locals fear for the loss of the polar bear population.

The Spirit Lights Lodge is an excellent jumping off place for summer camping or winter adventures. Register with the local park rangers before taking off on a hike. This is a true wilderness area. The Gates of the Arctic is over 7 million acres of pristine Arctic Wilderness, a maze of glaciated valleys and gaunt, rugged mountains covered with boreal forest and arctic tundra. If you stay at the Spirit Lights Lodge, you will find three large meals a day, the option of cabins or large apartment style lodges that easily sleep 4 with kitchens, hot showers, television and internet access. Annie can arrange for any type of activity you would like to pursue. If you need "bunny boots" or winter parkas, they are on hand. Dress warm, in layers. Winter activities include dog sledding through frosted forests of black spruce, snow shoeing, cross country skiing, and snowmobiles. Summer allows you to hike and camp in the Brooks Range, and air flights that land on the many lakes so you can float down the river for a wildlife tour. For socializing, local residents are invited to your dinners and there are lots of books available for reading about local history.

For more about Spirit Lights Lodge, contact Bernard or Annie at www.spiritleightslodge.com or bttlannie@aol.com. The World Ice Block Carving Championships are in Fairbanks in March, and to warm up, you can sit in the hot springs at the Chena Resort north of Fairbanks. For the best salmon you will ever eat, ask for the poached wild white salmon at Lavelle's Bistro, a Wine Spectator Award recipient, in the Marriott Fairbanks Spring Hill Suites.

**LONG BEACH GROUP
SIERRA CLUB
PO BOX 91301
LONG BEACH, CA 90809**

TIDELINES BY MAIL?

To have the full print edition of *Tidelines* delivered to your home via First Class Mail, send a check for \$5 per year, payable to Sierra Club Long Beach, to:

TIDELINES SUBSCRIPTION
LONG BEACH GROUP
SIERRA CLUB
PO BOX 91301
LONG BEACH, CA 90809

Please include your name, mailing address, telephone number, and/or e-mail address (in case we need to contact you). *Tidelines* is published bi-monthly.

