

# Welcome to Alaska



## “The Last Frontier”

The contrasts are as different as Night and Day. On the one hand, there are majestic mountains and vast wilderness. Occasionally, your backyard may be visited by a stray moose or bear.

The Alaskan Pipeline crossed many untouched territories.

Alaska’s total population “estimate in late 2011 was 722,718.”

(Demographics of Alaska From Wikipedia)

According to the “Bing” search engine, Alaska is “2.5 times larger than the state of Texas.” Yet, it has a population of less than half the size of a major city, such as Chicago or Illinois.

The exact population of **Chicago City** (per census on April 1st, 2000) was 2,896,016 people.

In 2011, the entire state of Alaska had less than one million people, while downtown Chicago had a population of nearly three million.

## Alaska



A land of Mountains, Rivers, Glaciers & the Alaskan (oil) Pipeline

A typical day as a policeman in Fairbanks, Alaska, might include crowd control for the “Golden Days Parade” (with the assistance of the Fairbanks Police cadets) and then being prepared to shoot dinner (usually a Grouse) as I drove home from work.



By day, I could receive a dispatch to deal with a Moose in someone’s backyard or a porcupine in their tree.

Each night offered an entirely different scenario.

Because of the Alaskan Pipeline, the big money it brought into the state, two military bases near Fairbanks, Alaska, and the challenges businesses face. Now factor in the bars, excessive drinking, drugs, prostitution, and gambling. You can only imagine these things in a state where adults can legally, openly carry weapons.

Downtown Fairbanks was two blocks long. In that two-block area were approximately eight bars. In 1977, the city was being worked by up to eighteen prostitutes. Fairbanks had a population of about 14,000 and was managed by 24 police officers. A supervisor later told me that I was hired to fill the token minority slot in the group to put the police department in a better position to receive federal assistance in purchasing new vehicles and equipment. We also dealt with the spillover problems of having two large military bases nearby. An Army base, Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks, and Eielson AFB, 40 miles to the East..

My first arrest was that of a black, “out of work barber” (really a Pimp) who chased (in his chauffeur-driven Cadillac) a second Pimp through downtown Fairbanks, shooting at him. The second Pimp had somehow infringed on the territory of the first Pimp. Shooting into the driver’s door and hitting the occupant in the leg. Keep in mind that downtown Fairbanks was only two blocks long.

In addition to my regular job, I coordinated Home Bible Study groups, ran classes and seminars, and worked with a North Pole Home Fellowship, Fairbanks Fellowship groups, and a

new Fellowship on the Army base. I also volunteered to assist the University of Alaska as a Swimming Instructor with their Senior Citizen swimming program.

I coordinated a program with the Fairbanks Police Cadets (a branch of the Explorer Scouts), focusing on Police Work. I introduced training programs on First aid, Accident Investigation, Searching Crime Scenes, and Firearms Training to keep the groups motivated. This developed into a Citywide program that included the Explorer Scouts from the Alaskan State Troopers and a Cadet group from the University of Alaska Fire Department. A traveling trophy was introduced, and the Scouts competed semi-annually.

Through my work with the Explorer Scouts group, I was introduced to Urban Rayhoe, a bush pilot with two hunting/fishing lodges in Southeastern Alaska.



An example of the type of plane that Urban used to fly groups into his lodge

Urban Rayhoe offered to annually fly an Explorer group into a hunting lodge on Rock Lake. This was the staging area for a trip over the mountains to another nearby lake, Ptarmigan Lake. This was for a 10-day stay at his hunting/fishing Cabin on Ptarmigan Lake. On each leg of the trip Urban's plane could only carry three people and their gear. He provided his guests with a cabin on Ptarmigan Lake, a wood-burning stove, and a 12-foot fishing boat and motor.

Showers were taken by heating water on the wood-burning stove and pouring it through a 5-gallon can with holes punched through the bottom. At the end of our 10-day stay, the pilot would return to pick up his guests. Because of the remoteness of the location, no cell phones or outside communication were available.





## Ptarmigan Lake

Ptarmigan Lake is nestled between two mountains. It is approximately 7 miles long, one mile wide, and 700 feet deep. The crystal-clear waters are filled with Lake Trout. The lake trout that we caught ranged between 8 lbs. – 16 lbs. late one evening, we hooked into something that literally dragged the boat for about 3 minutes before straightening the hook and getting away. With a gold or orange lure, a fisherman could literally catch a Lake Trout with nearly every cast.

Because of the large number of fish, this area also had a large population of Grizzly bears. Every day, we could see Grizzlies feeding in the valley across from our cabin.



In 1977, I led my first group of Explorers into Ptarmigan Lake. Five kids, ranging in age from 14 to 17, were in the group. All had gotten their parents' written permission to take the trip and qualified with our weapons.

Because of the age of the kids involved and the fact that we were going into "Grizzly Country," each member was required to take a three-month-long gun safety class that I taught at the police range. The gun safety classes began with B B guns but evolved to include the accurate firing of a 44-magnum handgun, Remington 870 shotgun, 357-magnum handgun, and a 30-30 caliber rifle.

Kids are prone to do foolish things, and Grizzly Country is not the place to make mistakes. Also, we would catch and handle fish, which is a large part of a Grizzly's diet. Much of my training program focused on helping the teens understand that we would visit the Grizzly's home territory. We needed to be sharp but remember that our visit was as a guest in their home. There would **NOT** be any arguments over fish we would catch if a hungry bear decided he wanted them. I told the kids to "sit the fish down, slowly back away and asked the Grizzly if he wanted salt or pepper to accompany his fish dinner. "

## **Our first trip to Ptarmigan Lake would challenge all of us and many things that I thought I knew about Alaska.**

Friday morning, we met at the Police department, loaded my station wagon with five Police Cadets and their gear, and hit the road.

We traveled from Fairbanks through Tok Junction all day and much of the night, stopping near the Alaskan border. 83 miles South of the Alaskan/ Canadian border, we parked our car at a little grocery store  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from the large pond where we had arranged to meet our Bush pilot

At 7:30 a.m., we were at the pond with our gear to wait for Urban (the bush pilot). As we waited for the plane, we watched a pair of beavers busy building their home and preparing their dam for winter. As we waited, we listened to the sound of our plane.

The pilot landed on the pond but could only take three members of our group of six with him each time he landed. I decided that Frank, the Elected Captain of the group, and Rob and Jim, two Explorers who had done well in their training, would go to the cabin ahead of us on the first flight. With them, I sent their gear and a 44-magnum handgun and a 30-30 rifle and shotgun. First, the pilot refueled his plane using two five-gallon fuel cans that he had carried in the plane. It was fun watching him climb onto the wing of the plane and then watch as he poured gasoline into the gas tanks located in the wings.

As the first group boarded the plane and took off, I remained behind with the second group. Several hours passed while we waited for the plane to return. When the plane returned, we loaded our gear.

As we flew off the pond, the pilot flew over Rock Lake and turned south between two mountains. The pilot had banked the plane in a right-hand turn and was flying approximately 800 feet above the ground, enjoying the view (the mountains, a mother moose with her baby) when suddenly the plane flipped nearly upside down. After a long silence, the pilot asked, "You realized that we nearly lost it?"

I was surprised by his comment. The pilot appeared to be in his mid-seventies (and had a long history of flying in Alaska). I thought he was giving us a thrill by flipping the plane.

What happened was that the wind had picked up after the first group had been flown in and was blowing hard through the mountains in a Northerly direction. As we swung around the mountain in a banked turn, our plane was hit by a strong cross wind that flipped it as we entered the pass.

In correcting the flip of the plane, the pilot also reversed our direction. We were now headed back to Rock Lake and his Lodge. The pilot decided that attempting to fly to the cabin at Ptarmigan Lake was no longer safe. The pilot was concerned about how much the afternoon wind had picked up.

It was approximately 3 p.m. by the time we settled on Rock Lake and got out of the plane. Gung ho, to get to the cabin and reconnect with the rest of the group, I asked the pilot how far it was to the cabin. The answer was, "Oh, maybe 4 – 5 miles."

That's no big thing! We will walk over, I responded. The pilot had explained that a path ran alongside and over the mountain that led to the cabin. Besides that, there was only one cabin on the other lake. From the pass, it should be a piece of cake to spot.

**Hosea4:6** ***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:***

Less than a year earlier I had broken an 11-year-old, physical fitness record at the Alaskan Police Academy. I had maintained a high level of fitness since leaving the Academy. I had two teenagers with me. Shoot, the kids, and I would knock that out in less than 4 hours!

Urban said that it took him 4 hours to walk to the other cabin. He was in his early 70's...

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**Pro 16:18** ***Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.***

**Nine hours later, we arrived on a ridge ½ mile above the Cabin!**

I learned the hard way that I knew absolutely NOTHING about hiking in Alaska! What looked like a peaceful valley at a distance turned out to be filled with thousands of “tussocks”

**Tussock** (plural **tussocks**)

1. A **tuft** or **clump** of green grass or something similar forms a small **hillock**.

This means that what looks like a green valley was actually many thousands of tussocks, mounds of moss approximately 1 foot tall, maybe 6 – 7 inches apart. Because they are made up of a moss-like growth, it is impossible to walk on the tops of them because they roll forward from your weight. Because they are so close, stepping between them is also very difficult.

My thoughts went to climbing the mountain and crossing over it to get to the other side, hoping to find a better way to travel.

After an hour of trying to negotiate our way between and around the **tussocks**, we discovered the path along the mountainside that the animals used to travel through the valley. After many hours of traveling through the area, we reached the valley's far end.

As we continued, there were a series of small pools of water. These pools were 3 – 12 feet long and 2 – 3 inches deep, but we could see bear tracks in the mud at the water's edge of each of these pools. The hind feet on some of these bears were as large as mine. I wear size 14 shoes. Though the tracks seemed recent, they were 3 – 4 inches deep, in an area where I barely left a footprint with my 230 lbs. It was safe to assume that these bears were very, very large.

As we continued, suddenly, an odor hit my nostrils, much like passing near a hog pen.

I had read that you would often smell a bear before seeing them. We were passing an unusually dense wooded area.

By this time, we were nearing midnight, and even with the Alaskan summer sun, it was getting dark. What do we do? I also read that the worst thing you can do is surprise a bear. With one hand on my 41-magnum pistol, I told my companions to make a lot of noise.

As we began to sing loudly (and poorly), suddenly, the woods exploded. Though we did not see anything, it sounded like a herd of elephants traveling away from us through the heavy brush.

As we reached the peak and looked down, we could see THE CABIN!! Praise GOD, it was there. It was still a half-mile away, but at least we could see it. Thanks GOD.

We quickened our pace as we made our way down to the cabin. Exhausted and elated, I approached the cabin and stepped onto the porch when suddenly GOD YELLED, **“DON’T TOUCH THAT DOOR!”** I remember arguing with God as I reluctantly backed off the porch. God, you know that I’m tired and want to lie down! Ok, God, what do you want me to do?

What? -**“Throw pebbles at the ten roofs”**? Why? Reluctantly, I began to pick up pebbles and throw them at the roof. Clunk, tap, tap as they hit the roof, bounced down it, and fell to the ground. My companions looked at me like I was crazy but picked up and threw pebbles at the roof. Clunk, tap, tap, tap... Ah ha! **(Then It dawned on me: Bear, don’t throw rocks!!!)**

From inside the cabin, Frank, the Captain of the advance group that I had sent in, yelled, “Andy, is that you?”

1) These young men had been flown in many hours earlier, and because there were no cell phones or towers in the mountains to relay the call, they had given up on seeing us until the next morning.

2) They had been thinking about Grizzly Bear, and there was no way to lock the door on the crudely built cabin.

3) They had heard us coming through the woods and had every firearm aimed at the door, expecting a bear to go through. Had God not stopped me, they would have seen a big dark silhouette in the doorway (and as I had trained them), and they would have started shooting. I would have been full of holes and, in all likelihood, DEAD!

It had taken us over nine hours to walk to the cabin; one of the kids who had come in with me would have had to...

- a) Walk 9 hrs. back to the Pilots’ lodge,
- b) Wait for the pilot to refuel the plane,
- c) Fly into Ptarmigan Lake, {wind permitting}
- d) Load what was left of me into the plane,
- e) Then fly 2 hrs. to Fairbanks Memorial Hospital.

Even with the best possible scenario, getting me to the nearest hospital would have taken at least 12 hours.

## **We had a fantastic time because I listened to God and obeyed His voice.**

In 2 hours of fishing (while waiting for the plane), we caught 50 lbs. of Lake Trout.



Alaskan Lake Trout

**“Average 5 to 12 pounds & Up to 50 pounds.”**  
(Alaska Fishing Magazine)

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