



Leaving the tourists, and common sense, behind

WORDS AND PHOTO BY TED TAYLOR

Alaska is like Oregon on steroids, its vast wildness stirring something buried deep within our genetic, instinctual makeup. We humans have been hunters and gatherers for 99.9 percent of our time on this planet, and sometimes a trip to Kiva or Albertsons doesn't quite satisfy that primal urge to confront the raw landscape and fight to survive among other predators.

So, driven more by obsession and fantasy than common sense, I invited Daniel, my grown son living in Reno, to fly north and join me in Juneau for a dangerous and slightly absurd nine-day Alaskan wilderness adventure.

Our destination was the spectacular Taku River. But you can't drive to Juneau,

and there are no roads to the Taku. So here was the plan: Fly to Juneau with an inflatable boat and outboard motor in my luggage, drag the gear to the water and take off on a great adventure up a miles-wide river known for tidal surges, half-submerged snags, hidden sandbars, grumpy swimming moose and surprise glacial floods sweeping down from Canada.

Sound good? Quite possibly. Here's what I learned during nine days last July.

The Weather and Clothing

Gore-Tex jackets (especially old ones bought at Goodwill for six bucks) will keep you dry for about four hours. It can rain for a week without stopping in Southeast

Alaska, even in summer. And water will trickle down your pant legs and fill your waterproof boots. The Alaskan solution? Heavy PVC bib overalls and jackets, worn with rubber boots. Don't like toxic PVC? Expect to shiver and maybe die.

Typically, people who bring all the right rain gear will experience warm, dry days their entire trip.

Soggy wool-polyester socks after three days in leather boots take on a peculiar aroma that is indescribable. Essence of rotting alligator carcass, perhaps?

Blue jeans are comfy and warm only when dry; they are heavy and cold otherwise. A wool hat with a brim can save your life. Waterproof gloves in July? Oh yeah.

After several days in the wilderness, coin-op laundries assume an almost mystical quality, as do Mexican restaurants.

The Water

The Gastineau Channel between Juneau and the Taku River is part of the Inland Passage and can be flat as glass or rolling like the open sea. We experienced it all, including a 20-foot tsunami-like wake, most likely from a distant passing cruise liner. OK, it was only a 10-foot swell, but still scary in a 10-foot boat.

The Bugs

The time to put on a mosquito head net is before the mosquitoes arrive. Otherwise, all



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