



Travelogue

'Living vicariously through the adventures of our friends'

'We were deep in the wilderness and had only ourselves to count on. Next time I see a windsurfer with a fanny pack and five extra downhaul lines, instead of snickering, I'll ask what part of Alaska they're from.'

Katie Crafts is addicted to high latitudes: Wanders and wonders in Antarctica and Alaska

By KATIE CRAFTS
For the News

"How much money do you have?"
"Are you really asking me how much money is in my bank account?" I ask the Canadian customs agent, confused. "Yes. I want to make sure that if anything happens to you while you're in our country, you won't be a burden to our economy."

And so it begins. I feel a new grey hair sprout during her short interrogation of when my last paycheck was and when my next one might come. Four months ago I had a stable job and a home. Now I'm living in my converted Toyota Matrix with my dog. Alaska-bound, with enough clothing in the "closet" to move, should the whimsy strike.

What. Have. I. Done.

Antarctica pic:

This is Antarctica (lower right). I visited two years ago as a tourist, hoping it would cure my polar fever. Once there, surrounded by calving glaciers, awkward penguins, and breaching humpbacks, the Polar Bug bit. Hard. Fast forward a year and I've sold my Hood River home, quit my lucrative job, and just returned from 10 weeks as a bartender on a Russian tourist ship, the Akademik Ioffe. My name is Katie, and I'm addicted to high latitudes.

Boat pic (Photo by Pete Biskind)

A couple hours after this photo, we found ourselves stuck on a sandbar. The mountain-guide-men rigged a three-to-one pulley system and two of us hauled the pulley rope while the other two shook the boat free from the fine silt. An hour later, toes sufficiently numb, we were released. Made it off the river around midnight, just in time for the endless sun to, well, be high in the sky.

This was one of many lessons in Alaskan self-reliance; we were deep in the wilderness and had only ourselves to count on. Next time I see a windsurfer with a fanny pack and five extra downhaul lines, instead of snickering, I'll ask what part of Alaska they're from. We had to figure it out and git'er done.

Alaska was a lesson in learning new things, being resourceful and self-reliant, and trying on new lifestyles

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THE VIEW of Talkeetna from a 1946 Aeronca, above. Also the first entry in my student pilot logbook (turns out taking a flying lesson is cheaper than booking a scenic flight). At left: Soup's on! This Toyota Matrix was a 20 cubic foot home for me and my dog for our 2-month adventure. In lieu of seats, I built a raised bed platform and a shelf in the back to separate the "closet" from the "kitchen." Mollie-dog and I slept in rest stops, grocery store parking lots, and beautiful riverside roads leading to glaciers. This photo demonstrates the gourmet single burner propane stove that fueled our journey. The car was sufficiently comfortable (though it felt a bit small after five days in an Alaskan downpour). The only thing I truly missed was the safety and stability that you don't get when you go to bed wondering if tonight is the night that you wake up to a cop or a murderer or a hungry bear.

Photos by Katie Crafts



Photo by Pete Biskind

"EVERY MAN'S DREAM" — according to one of the men. One lady fishin', one lady rowin' us home to North Pole, near Fairbanks, Alaska. A group of friends enjoying the endless evening. I'm the on fishing.

