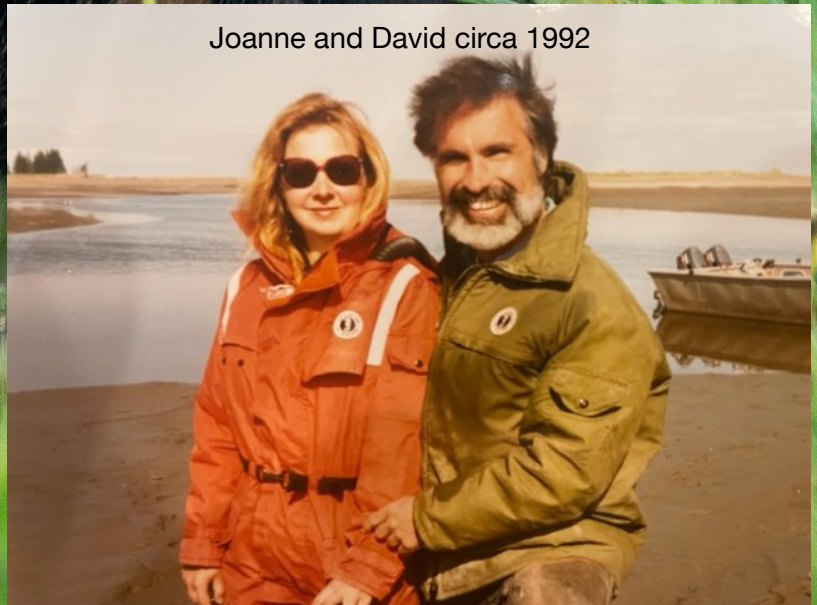


Silver Salmon Creek News

Recapping the 2023 Season

FROM DAVID AND JOANNE'S DESK

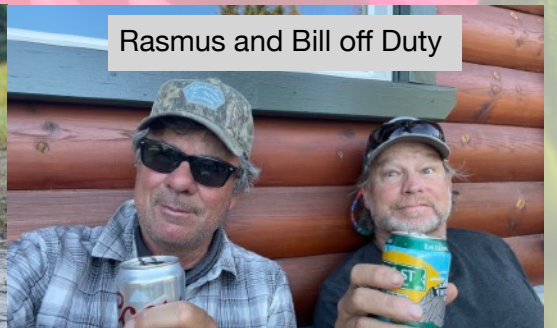
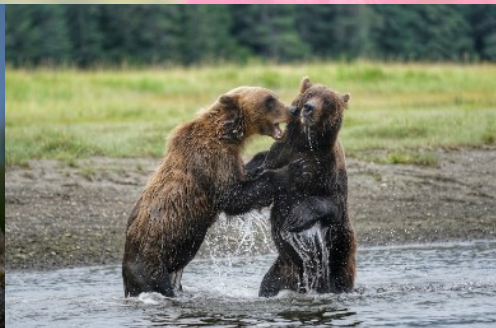
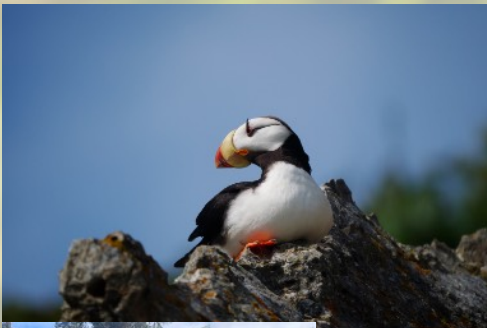
Last fall, as we finished our 40th year of operating Silver Salmon Creek Lodge, it was a good time to reflect on the decades of change, transformation, and growth. We determined that SSCL had reached its maximum growth, that our daily totals would not exceed current levels and that we'd strive to optimize guest comfort and care, with added amenities as needed. This last summer we added Starlink to our wi-fi services which provided speedy internet services for all. Most staff returned from the previous year, and the new ones added to what became a stellar year for employee participation and contribution. The second year of the Homestead Lodge, acquired the year before, evolved smoothly with Oliver managing the acquisition and providing astute services for one visiting photo group at a time. The Tent Camp was a big hit as usual, with bear sightings and sport-fishing producing high levels of entertainment for visiting parties, some of whom split their time between the camp and the lodge. Changing weather patterns again surprised us with 2023 being the year of a cold spring and early summer, accompanied by inclement weather which caused numerous delays and cancellations of small plane transfers. We transported approx. 75 people back and forth by charter boat across Cook Inlet from early June to mid-July. Cool and wet temps are very suitable for bears, and we experienced a stellar year of bruin activity. Joanne and I traveled to Rwanda for a gorilla trek and this fall enjoyed time along the Caribbean coast of Columbia, along with a short side trip to Death Valley and Sequoia National parks, and a March trip to Belize. We truly enjoyed all of our 2023 guests and are looking forward to seeing many of you again in 2024!



Joanne and David circa 1992

JOHNSON MINE ALERT

As most of you are aware, there is a proposed gold and copper mine near the headwaters of Johnson River, which empties into Cook Inlet only two miles from Silver Salmon Creek Lodge. The land used for the proposed mine is on a private inholding within Lake Clark National Park. The owner, Cook Inlet Region, Inc, an Alaska based Regional Native Corporation, was granted guaranteed access to tidewater for ore removal, prior to formation of the park in 1980. One option for routing of the industrial road corridor leading to a deep-water port for shipping, is along Johnson River, an area where many of you have enjoyed brown bear photography/viewing and sport-fishing for Coho salmon in a pristine wilderness setting. A road in this river basin capable of transporting massive quantities of ore would irretrievably damage the sensitive eco-system of this valley which supports large runs of anadromous salmon and char species and is home to critical denning habitat for brown bears. The proposed mine, operated by High Gold (highgoldmining.com), a Canadian firm, is in an advanced exploratory phase of development and seeking permits for further testing and access in the upper Johnson region. Many of you have expressed your concern and asked ways in which you could help protect this delicate ecosystem. As this process unfolds and moves towards an actual mine and determination of routing for ore extraction, we are asking interested parties to submit their names and contact information to be used as public leverage to elevate the concerns that a mine, roads, trucks, a deep water marine port and ships would pose to the Johnson River Valley and the wildlife in Lake Clark National Park. Please send name and contact information to protectbearcoastalaska@gmail.com and we will be happy to update you with periodic developments, thanks.



Rasmus and Bill off Duty

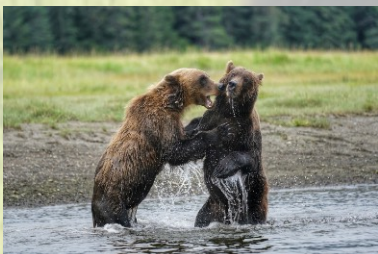


Gettles hoisting David



BEARS OF 2023

2023 was an outstanding year for coastal brown bear activity in the Silver Salmon Creek and Johnson Valley region. We simply had an incredible season regarding bear sightings, moms with spring cubs, and approachability. Almost all our visiting guests enjoyed the sights and antics of two female bears (one being “crimp ear”) each with first year offspring, lasting well into September. With early June presenting a generous crop of juveniles, moms with 2nd year cubs and the larger boars, the mating period lasted well into July with no lessening of daily encounters. In some years, August results in a ranging tendency, with bears seeking other salmon streams or staying further inland where spawning salmon are easier to catch. 2023 showed a healthy subset of coastal bears still frequenting the grassy meadows where the best photo and viewing opportunities take place, including clamming behavior which often slows during August. After a large storm inundated and re-shaped the beach close to our Sawmill property (3 miles south of SSCL), we temporarily enjoyed a mini set of waterfalls, where salmon collected in a pool which lent itself to excellent “chase and catch” scenes during the first half of September. Along with bears, we had a wolverine sighting, a few river otters, and in late August/September, several large moose traversed the tidal flats, usually at a quick-moving pace due to the presence of bears. With a robust mating period in June, we expect another good year for spring cubs and bears in general. The key to Silver Salmon Creek maintaining its stature as one of Alaska’s premier bear viewing and photo destinations is through cooperation among all visiting parties and common sense approach protocols. Here, we enjoy the absence of viewing platforms and have no hard distance rulings. We believe that “best bear viewing practices” as agreed upon by the NPS and private landowners within Lake Clark National Park is the best approach. You can access the Lake Clark National Park bear viewing best practices at <http://www.nps.gov/lacl/planyourvisit/ber-viewing.htm>



2023 Staff

Almost all of the 2022 staff returned for the following season, with the five person guide team made up again of Dave Rasmus, Rob Zimmer, Rugger Reiman, Bill Mohrwinkel, and newcomer Art Leforestier. Art stepped in later, with Brooke Bartleson guiding in June, the two of them bringing new energy and astute bear and photography skills from their previous guiding and bear photo excursions. Dave, Rob and Rugger bring boundless energy and experience to their work setting, always emphasizing client interest. Bill stepped in to help when needed, providing an extra measure of cheer and professionalism. The culinary program was again headed by Andrew Maxwell, who has perfected the art and science of fine dining in a remote setting drawing rave reviews. Our baker this year was Morgan Bennett, who with a big smile kept homemade bread, high-end desserts, cookies, pastries and appetizers flowing from the kitchen every day of the season. House-management was headed by Jill Berny and Allison Click, who hosted “happy hours”, and were integral members of the culinary team. They also cared for the garden, and tirelessly kept up the house and cabin maintenance. Taylor Burke returned for a third season as lodge “roustabout”, pivoting from one request to another in rapid succession as lodge needs presented themselves. Oliver managed the Alaska Homestead Lodge, which was acquired in 2022 and kept busy with its organization, in addition to operating the boat as captain for halibut fishing and puffin trips, flying to town for supplies, general management, and endless equipment maintenance issues that a remote lodge requires. Steve Toth, although seldom seen by our guests, holds one of our most critical positions as an expeditor, gathering groceries and supplies in Kenai/Soldotna for the almost daily needs of SSCL. Rick Collins transformed the outside of the lodge, spending endless hours completing the re-staining project. We are now turning our eye towards the remaining cabins over the next few years. Natron Air was a tremendous support bringing us groceries and supplies in addition to our guests from Soldotna. Cody Hesse, a highly skilled builder, once again joined us in the spring for our carpentry projects, having first come to us from Colorado at age 11 with his father. “It takes a village” appropriately describes the united, vested and committed efforts our whole team subscribed to in rendering services to our many guests in 2023, and we’re so thankful that it appears everyone is returning!

Judy, Roger, Mary Lynn, Greg and John



Roger Cook with a nice 60# Halibut



FISH REPORT, 2023

While we’re still carefully monitoring returns of Coho Salmon to the tidally affected West Cook Inlet streams, we were encouraged by the anecdotal reports from fishing guides and anglers in 2023. With 2022 being the lowest return rate in the 40-year history of the lodge, last summer showed a definite uptick, posting what could be called an “average year.” We balanced our angling efforts between Silver Salmon Creek, Johnson River and Shelter Creek in order to defray and spread out the impact and encouraged proper catch and release methods of sport-fishing. Johnson River has become a popular half day trip of finding secluded “fishing holes” where only one group is usually present at a time. Oliver captained the boat and guided the halibut fishermen for their catch of flat-fish, doing well on every excursion. The limit for 2024 will again be two fish/day, with one of any size and the second one 28 inches or less, and no fishing on Wednesdays.

SHELTER CREEK TENT CAMP

It was our 40th summer hosting campers at Shelter Creek, and once again Felix Schneider and his friend Ronnie provided an excellent camp environment for those wanting a secluded wilderness experience, away from crowds with fewer amenities. Tents are WeatherPorts (Quonset style), large enough to stand up in and elevated cots are utilized with large square cut sleeping bags. Fresh water and food is flown in frequently, and a small generator charges batteries for cameras. On high tides, a sea-kayak is available for paddling upstream and the sport-fishing is less than a hundred-yard walk from the camp site. Shelter Creek is in dense bear habitat, so many visitors there have cameras ready at any given moment for bears, eagles, porcupine, and occasionally wolves.

VICTORY FOR BEARS, SEALS, SALMON AND VISITORS TO SSC

A major victory was scored in March by a proposal passed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries that restricts drift gill net vessels from deploying their nets within one mile of the mouth of both Silver Salmon Creek and Shelter Creek (where our tent camp is). We have been pursuing such a closure for over 20 years, underscoring to Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game, United Cook Inlet Drifter's Assn, and the National Park Service that a public safety issue is present when on commercial fish days, drift boats lay their nets in shallow water only ¼ mile from the creek mouth, naturally attracting bears to their nets who easily extract salmon from the webbing. To ward off the bears (and seals) and salvage their nets and fish, boat operators often shot rounds of rifle shells at and around them, which typically doesn't work as a deterrent. A juvenile bear was wounded in 2013 and several harbor seals have washed up on the beach with bullet holes in them. Silver Salmon Creek visitors and park rangers often found themselves in close proximity to active gunfire while watching and filming coastal bears. Another positive spin-off of this passage is that more salmon will return and spawn in the critical salmon-rearing area, producing the needed protein source that bears require for their winter denning period. We enthusiastically applaud the near unanimous approval of this proposal, the result being a less chaotic August and early Sept along the coast where salmon have been a magnet for bear viewers, commercial fishermen, sport-fishermen, coastal bears, and seals.





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