



Alaska Travel
Industry Association
Winter Media Information



When the sky begins to dance

Northern Lights Viewing Can't be Beat in Interior Alaska

By Melissa DeV Vaughn

When my husband was a boy growing up in Denali National Park, he used to be spooked by the aurora borealis, those mysterious-looking lights that fill the northern skies like paint over a canvas. When the soft glow of lights would begin to flicker across the sky, fading in and out of focus in greens, pinks and whites, he swore they were specters. In fact, no matter how much his parents tried to explain to him, he thought they were shadowy ghosts, hovering above in the darkness.

But he was equally as fascinated by the aurora or “northern lights,” as they’re more commonly called. This Far North phenomenon turns an average winter, fall or spring night into a widescreen extravaganza like nothing else. When you see the lights for the first time, there is often no words, no description that can match their magnificence. You say nothing; do nothing. You can only watch and wonder. Such beauty is a rare and oft-admired thing.

So, we Alaskans are lucky to count the northern lights as one of our winter “attractions.” Searching for them is not quite like wildlife-viewing, in which if you look long enough you will definitely see an animal — a beaver, a rabbit, a moose or bear. No, the northern lights are on their own timetable, coming when atmospheric conditions align in such a way as to make their activity more predictable. The northern-lights watcher can only hope to be in Alaska when those conditions are right, and to be thankful for it when the aurora does come.

Auroras most often occur in the spring and fall because of Earth’s tilt in relation to the sun. But in the winter, when darkness prevails, the lights stand out even brighter and can be seen longer.

In fact, the aurora borealis will dance stronger this year over Alaska, according to Aurora forecasters. Sunspots and solar flares are the root of the aurora, according to Charles Deehr, aurora forecaster at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute, who says the northern lights are caused by solar flares that ionize particles in the upper atmosphere. The charged particles are drawn through space to the magnetic

north (and south) poles, where they travel down the poles like beads on a wire. When the particles hit the earth's atmosphere, ribbons of purple, blue, red and green weave together, turning the winter sky into a celestial kaleidoscope.

Bright yellow-green — almost lime-colored —lights are the most common, hovering some 70 miles up in the sky. Purple and blue hues are particularly beautiful.

Fairbanks is one of the best places on earth for aurora watching because of its close proximity to the North Pole. There are several tour companies that offer aurora expeditions or opportunities to view the northern lights. Remote cabins, away from the city lights, will bring you closer to the auroras. Or travel by dog team at night: Guided tours will take you into the high country to see northern lights AND learn about mushing.

“The reason it's so great is because we are geographically in the perfect spot,” said Katie Orth, Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau visitors' services manager. “We're in something called the ‘auroral oval’ that happens to cross over the Interior of Alaska, so we have so many nights in which the lights are out. Also, we have the advantage of that we are a city, but not so big that there is the distraction of city lights to diminish the sightings, You can drive five minutes outside of town to see them.”

There are many facts surrounding the northern lights. For instance, according to the Geophysical Institute, one of the leading northern lights research institutions, the best time to see the most auroral activity is at about midnight, give or take an hour depending upon daylight savings time. Or, how about this fact: In Alaska, the northern lights actually occur anywhere from 40 percent to 100 percent of the nights in an average year, depending upon the location in the state (the further north you travel, the more frequent the occurrences). However, climatic changes such as clouds, snow, or summertime daylight can affect the viewing of the lights.

Don't worry, though. In Fairbanks and points north, the lights just come to you. You don't have to search them out.

My husband and I prefer the more mystical side of the northern lights. Once, while driving along a beachfront road in Kenai, a town in Southcentral Alaska, we had to stop the car. The lights were so dramatic, so sweeping in blues, greens and faint tinges of pink, that it was hard to concentrate on driving. We just had to stop and watch. Another time, while camped outside with my sled dogs, I watched the lights dance behind the mountains across the valley and could have SWORN I heard them (the Geophysical Institute has found no proof that the lights make sound, but says a swishing noise reported by observers over the years could be attributed to leakage of the electrical impulses from the nerves in the eye into the part of the brain that processes sound.)

Whatever you choose to believe — science has discovered much about the northern lights, but a little mystery is fun, too — a visit to Alaska in the wintertime is not complete until you've seen the sky dance.

IF YOU GO NORTHERN LIGHT VIEWING:

Alaska Travel Industry Association (800) 862-5275

www.winterinalaska.com

Fairbanks Convention & Visitors Bureau (877) 551-1728

www.explorefairbanks.com

Geophysical Institute Information Office (907) 474-7558

www.gi.alaska.edu

Chena Hot Springs Resort (800) 478-4681

www.chenahotsprings.com

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Dog dreams

When the Snow Flies, Mushing is Sure to Follow

By Melissa DeVaughn

Whoever conceived of training dogs to pull a sled must surely have done it out of necessity. Historical photographs can be found in museums and galleries throughout Alaska, showing images of early Alaskans using their teams to check traplines, visit other villages and travel safely in winter.

In fact, according to the International Federation of Sled Dog Sports, archaeological evidence shows mushing goes back some 4,000 years in the northern regions of North America and Siberia. Think of sled dogs as working animals, and that evidence makes sense. Just as early American farmers depended upon draft horses to plow fields, so too, did the people of northern regions depend on sled dogs for survival in harsh winter conditions.

So, perhaps it's the long history, combined with the romantic Jack London-inspired tales of man and dog, which attracts people to mushing today. In Alaska, mushing is part of life in winter, and dog drivers of all ages and abilities take part in what has now come to be considered the state sport.

Visitors, too, can benefit from the sport's popularity. Many mushers offer learn-to-mush programs, or simply offer short dog sled rides for a small fee. It is great training for the animals, and helps the people who own the dogs keep them in shape for competition.

"I think the most popular things we offer here in the winter are northern-lights viewing and dog mushing," said Katie Orth, visitors' services manager at the Fairbanks Visitors and Convention Bureau. Fairbanks is recognized as one of the state's most popular areas for mushing, although opportunities for sled rides exist throughout the state. "Those are the requests we get from the most people who walk in the door."

Whether it's a quick ride in a sled that you prefer, or a weeklong dog sledding adventure, Orth said it can be arranged.

"We have one company that's right behind Beaver Sports (a local sports shop) who do

tours right out of there,” she said. “It’s a real brief 15-minute type of ride for those who just want to say they did it.”

Or there is the other extreme, offered by such tour operators as Denali West Lodge, located in Alaska’s Bush in an area called Lake Minchumina. During the multi-day, all-amenities included adventure, you’ll fly from Fairbanks to Lake Minchumina, step off the plane and onto the runners of a dog sled. The team will carry you back to the lodge, where you’ll spend the day relaxing and learning about the dogs, followed by a back-country trip to the base of Mount McKinley, North America’s tallest peak.

Another Fairbanks-area mushing opportunity includes Leslie Goodwin’s PAWS for Adventure Sled Dog Tours, located in Two Rivers, perhaps the bulls-eye of mushing communities. Her tours can be arranged on a half-day, daylong or overnight schedule, or can even include multi-day trips later in the season, when the conditions are best.

Closer to Alaska’s largest city, Anchorage, the possibilities are just as plentiful. Just north of town is a series of mushing trails in the bedroom community of Chugiak. At least one Chugiak kennel, Birch Trails, offers daylong, learn-to-mush programs, as well as more lengthy expeditions.

“For the first hour (of the Learn-to-Mush program), we talk all about the dogs, the harnesses, booties, brake, sled and snow hook, and everything else they need to know to stand on that sled and handle it,” said Angie Hamill, who runs the kennel with her husband, Tom. “It gives (clients) the chance to understand what it’s really like.”

At the other end of the Anchorage area, along Turnagain Arm, there is another option for mushing, available in the ski town of Girdwood with Chugach Express Dog Sled Tours. The trips are arranged through Alaska 4 Seasons, and one of the most popular tours among visitors is the one-day Moose Meadow trek, in which dog and man are paired for a relatively short but all-inclusive sled ride through some of the flatter land in the area. It’s a great way to break up a skiing vacation with something a bit different, and will make for a great tail — er, tale — when you get back home.

Alaska 4 Seasons also books lengthier mushing tours at Lucky Husky Kennels in Willow, some 50 miles north of Anchorage. Ask about the half and full-day tours.

More off-the-beaten-path locations include an overnight mushing adventure in the historic Bettles Lodge, in Bettles, a village in the Brooks Range accessible by airplane only. This trip also includes the option of adding mushing days to your itinerary, or just relaxing at the lodge, watching the northern lights (nearly guaranteed to come out if the nights are clear), or visiting the neighboring village and its Indian and Eskimo residents.

So, now that a mushing trip has been moved to the top of the to-do list, there are a few more bits of information to tuck away. First, come prepared so you’re ready to have fun.

Many tour companies provide warm clothing and boots, but ask ahead. If not, dress extra warm and in layers. Also, don't wear the fancy fur coat or leather jacket unless you don't mind it getting dirty. Sled dogs are affectionate creatures, and even the best behaved of them can't help but jump up and down a bit when they get excited for a run.

Second, remember this one very important rule: Never, ever let go of the sled. Most likely, this will not be an issue for those who attend a tour because the kennel owners use only extremely well-trained dogs that are unlikely to try to run off. Even so, be prepared and hold on tight.

IF YOU GO MUSHING:

Alaska Travel Industry Association (800) 862-5275

www.winterinalaska.com

Denali West Lodge: in remote Lake Minchumina (888) 607-5566, P.O. Box 40AC, Lake Minchumina, Alaska 99757, www.denaliwestlodge.com

PAWS for Adventure Sled Dog Tours: in Two Rivers just outside of Fairbanks (800) 890-3229, P.O. Box 16046 Two Rivers, AK 99716, www.pawsforadventure.com

Birch Trails: in Chugiak, about a half hour north of Anchorage (907) 688-5713, 22719 Robinson Road, Chugiak, AK 99567, home.gci.net/~birchtrails/b&b/b&b.html

Chugach Express Dogsled Tours: available in the ski town of Girdwood through Alaska 4 Seasons (907) 346-1270, 4821 E. 115th Avenue/B Anchorage, AK 99516, www.alaska4seasons.com

Lucky Husky Kennels: in the town of Willow, north of Wasilla (907) 495-6470, H.C. 89, Box 256 Willow, AK 99688, www.luckyhusky.com

Bettles Lodge: in remote Bettles above the Arctic Circle, (800) 770-5111, P.O. Box 27, Bettles, AK 99726, www.bettleslodge.com

Photo credits in order of appearance: Tourism Yukon, ATIA, ATIA.

Great Dog Sled Races of Alaska and the Yukon

For those wanting a true taste of adventure in the Far North, look no further than the Yukon Quest and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Both are drawing visitors from all over the world during the heart of the winter.

The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race is a 1,150-mile (1850-km) race over the rough and vast terrain connecting Anchorage and Nome on the western Bering Sea coast. Whether you decide to attend the start in Anchorage or the race finish under the burlled arch in Nome, it is an extraordinary experience.

More than 60 teams compete in the race each year with teams of 12 to 16 dogs. The mushers cover the monumental distance in anywhere from 10 to 17 days. Rugged mountains, tundra, forest and miles of windswept coast greet the racers as they hurtle towards the finish line in Nome. The route alternates every other year, one-year going south through Iditarod, Shageluk and Anvik, the next year north through Takotna, Cripple and Unalakleet.

The Iditarod Trail, named a National Historic Trail, had its beginnings as a mail and supply route. The race also commemorates the 1925 Serum Run to Nome. Facing temperatures 30 degrees below zero, as well as severe winter storms, more than 18 mushers drove their dogs 50 miles a day to get an antitoxin for a diphtheria outbreak to Nome. The serum left Anchorage by train on January 26 wrapped in an insulating quilt and arrived with Gunner Kaassen and his team of tired sled dogs in Nome on February 2. Kaassen's lead dog, *Balto*, is memorialized with a statue in New York's Central Park.

The Iditarod was first staged in 1973. The ceremonial start begins in downtown Anchorage every year on the first Saturday in March with the official restart in Wasilla the following day. More than 400 mushers have completed the race, representing more than 13 countries. Spectators gather at the finish line in Nome each year, celebrating the victory of each musher, whether they are the first team through or the last.

Yukon Quest

With starts alternating between Whitehorse, Yukon and Fairbanks, Alaska, the Yukon Quest runs 1,000 miles between these two cities over some of the world's most spectacular

and rugged terrain. Musher and their dogs make their way over routes made famous over a century ago during the Klondike gold rush. And, just as the prospectors were challenged by the elements, so too are the men and women who embark on this world-famous, unique and difficult adventure.

The trail is formidable. The extremes in weather complete the picture. But the Yukon Quest is a true distance race that demands everything. Sleds can't be replaced during the race. Stoves and equipment can't be flown into any of the checkpoints. And with distances between checkpoints sometimes more than 200 miles, all their supplies have to be carried with them.

Like most great exploits, the Yukon Quest started out as a conversation in 1983 around a table in a bar — the Bull's Eye Saloon in Fairbanks, to be exact. Four mushers sat together telling stories, dreaming and wondering about a sled dog race. And so it was that Roger Williams, Leroy Shank, Ron Rosser and Willie Libb brought the Yukon Quest to life that day. The name pays tribute to the mighty Yukon River; the old highway of the North, and the trail traces the path the prospectors trudged to reach the Alaska Interior from the Klondike during the Gold Rush of 1898.

The first race left Fairbanks in February 1984 with 26 teams. Over the next 16 days, 20 teams made it to Whitehorse. Six teams dropped out along the way. Sonny Linder, the first Yukon Quest champion, completed the race in 12 days.

Today, the Yukon Quest draws people of all ages from around the world to watch, cheer on their favorite musher and visit the remote, rugged communities along the trail. Each year more visitors arrive to follow the race in person, and more than one million people around the world log on to the race's website to follow the mushers' progress.

IF YOU GO:

Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race

www.iditarod.com

1-907-376-5155

Yukon Quest

www.yukonquest.org

1-907-452-7954

Mushing 101: A primer to impress

Mushing is to Alaska what baseball must be to Indiana or Iowa or Texas. They just GO together. Mushing is the state's official sport, so it is not surprising that a growing number of wintertime visitors are here to experience this very special Alaska activity. If you're in the ranks of wintertime visitors who want to run with the dogs, peruse this helpful list so you'll be prepared come mushing time.

Types of Mushing

There are several types of mushing, but in general, you'll find three styles of running dogs. Sprint mushing is what it says — a sprint. Dogs are trained to run as fast as they can for speeds as short as two miles to as long as 20. Sprint mushers use lightweight sled that look like space capsules, as well as old-fashioned but also-lightweight wooden slat-style sleds.

Distance mushers train dogs to travel over long periods of time for high endurance. These ultra canine-athletes can cover 40, 80, even 100 miles at a time with brief rests. Racers of the well-known Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race train their dogs for these conditions.

Recreational mushers, the bulk of Alaska's mushing population, have small kennels ranging from two to 20 dogs and use their teams for pleasure. They may go winter camping, they may race in a local event for fun or they may just like spending time with dogs. Often recreational mushers will have dogs who haven't the stamina or skill to keep up with the more competitive team.

The lingo

No one uses the term “mush” to get their dogs to go, so don't try it. Instead, something like “OK,” said very encouragingly, or “Hike!” will work best.

There are three basic commands to get your dogs moving. To get the team to turn right, say “gee” (I learned to remember this by the fact that the word “right” has the letter “G” in it).

To get the dogs to turn left, say “haw.” And, just as a horse rider would say, slow those huskies down with a gentle “Woah.”

The lineup

There is a basic lineup for dogs when in harness. The dogs up front are called “lead dogs.” They are the quarterbacks of the team.

The dogs directly behind the leaders are in “swing” position — the second-string leaders, often. Dogs harnessed directly in front of the sled are called “wheel” dogs, and often the biggest, most powerful workers who love to pull.

All of the dogs in between are “team” dogs.

The equipment

The gangline is the main line attached to the sled.

The tug lines (or towlines) attach to the rear of the dogs' harnesses, and the necklines attach to their collars.

The snow hook is the anchor that keeps the dogs in place when stopping for any reason.

The “track” or “drag” is usually a rubberized piece of flat material that is attached to the brake and helps slow a team gradually and keep them safely lined out along the gangline when the musher stands on it.



Ski Alaska

Strap on the Skis and Hit the Trails; It's Not Winter Otherwise

By Melissa DeVaughn

In Alaska, the question is not: “To ski or not to ski?” Rather it is: “Where do I ski, what style, and how often?”

In Alaska, skiing is a way of life. It is a rare Alaska child who has never been on skis, and adults of all ages, sizes and levels of physical fitness get out there and swish. Never has a sport been so much a part of a community as skiing is in Alaska.

The thing about skiing is that the possibilities are endless. You’ve got downhill skiing for the adrenaline crowd, Nordic for the folks who like a good workout in the fresh air, snowboarding for thrill-seekers, telemarking for backcountry adventurers, skate skiing for competitive folks — the list goes on. So, if skiing is on your list of to-do activities, relax, scroll down the list and find a place that sounds interesting. No matter what, you won’t need to worry about being alone.

SOUTHCENTRAL

For those who prefer the luxury of ski resorts, there is no better place to tip your skis than Alyeska Resort, located a half hour drive south of Anchorage in the quaint ski town of Girdwood. The resort offers winterlong skiing and snowboarding lessons, and countless runs to sample from beginner to advanced.

Alyeska boasts some 1,000 skiable acres, nine ski lifts and 68 runs, so there is truly something for everyone here. Half of the runs are designed for intermediate skiers, but more than 10 percent of them are suited for beginners. Advanced skiers can keep themselves occupied on nearly 40 percent of the runs and never tire of the fun. Snowboarders especially enjoy the half-pipe and park.

In Anchorage, there are two other downhill skiing and snowboarding options, at Hilltop Ski Area and Alpenglow at Arctic Valley. The former is on the south end of town and includes a ski school and a decent downhill skiing area for youngsters to learn and refine their skills. Its in-town location is convenient and affordable, and lessons range from group to individual settings. Volunteers of the Anchorage Ski Club run alpenglow at

Arctic Valley, on the north end of town. There is a T-bar, one lift and another in the process of being revamped for the 2003 season. In 2001, volunteers installed a terrain park, which is proving popular among the more daring snowboarders.

Cross-country skiing can be had, too. Kincaid Park instructors, teaching through the Anchorage Parks and Recreation division, can help fine-tune cross-country skiing skills from classical to skate skiing. There are roughly 1,500 acres of parkland criss-crossed by more than 60 kilometers of trails for skate- and cross-country skiing. There are two classical-only trails for those who get intimidated by the faster skiers.

Anchorage's Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, part of which is in Kincaid Park, is a popular place to start because access is easy and you can ski as far or as short a distance as you like. Groomers maintain tracks for classical skiers, and there's plenty of room for the speedier skate skiers to whiz past. It's a good place for beginners, too, with relatively few hills until you get near Kincaid Park, which is best left for those who are more experienced.

Two other fun and free Anchorage trail systems to check out: Russian Jack Springs Park, which offers classical-only skiing on terrain suited for beginners; and, the Hillside Trail System near Service High School.

Across Prince William Sound, there is Valdez, perhaps the snowiest place in Alaska and a true gem of a skiing destination. While there is no resort to cater to pampered skiers, there are countless events that attract ski-loving spectators.

According to Sharon Crisp, director of the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau, snowboarding championships draw hundreds of the world's best snowboarders, and free-skiing events attract a crowd, too.

"One of the big ones is the Alaska Big Mountain Master Extreme Snowboard Competition, or 'King of the Hill,' which is what everyone calls it," Crisp said. "It is more like a free-skiing event where people come from all over. It's amazing to watch."

INTERIOR

While the downhill crowd can find what they want further south, go north for some ultra-impressive cross-country skiing.

"We've got some great cross-country skiing here," said Katie Orth of the Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau. "In fact, the 2003 Junior Olympic cross-country ski championship is in March, and the trails will be ready." The newly built Birch Hills Recreation Area — site of the Junior Olympics — promises to be popular, and a trail system at the University of Alaska Fairbanks also is heavily used. But perhaps the most popular method of cross-country skiing involves just going out the door and hitting the most readily available wild spot.

“We’re so plunked down in the wilderness that a lot of us just head out and do our own thing,” Orth said. “There’s just a lot of space.”

Downhill skiers needn’t fret, though. Speed can be had at a few locations in the Fairbanks area. Moose Mountain Ski Area, off Murphy Dome Road, offers more than 1,250 feet of vertical sloop on the sunny — and warmer — side of the mountain. There are bunny slopes and the North Slope for the more experienced, and ski and snowboard lessons available for all.

Mount Aurora Skiland is another option, with slopes for the beginner to advanced, a double-chair lift and daylodge. Ski and snowboard lessons are available, as well.

SOUTHEAST

Juneau, surrounded as it is by steep mountains, is the perfect place for a mini snow resort. It’s much smaller than Alyeska, but the Eaglecrest Ski Area offers Southeast residents — and visitors — a great place to carve snow.

“They’ve got Nordic skiing, downhill, and they’ve even got tubing hills, which are very cool,” said Juneau Convention and Visitors Bureau employee Jennifer Lockwood. “And they have lots of snowboarding up there, too, of course.”

Lockwood said the ski area’s lodge is warm and cozy, and ski lessons are available for those who want to learn.

“But the best thing, I think, about Eaglecrest is that it is still owned by the city of Juneau,” she said. “You can go up there for a weekend and ski for 40 bucks. Where else can you get that? It’s just great.”

IF YOU GO SKIING:

Cross-country and backcountry skiing is easily accessible in just about every Alaska community, whether it is via groomed trails or trackless mountainsides. But if your skiing plans must include the comfort and familiarity of a lodge, chairlifts and a place to gather with friends, try a few of these skiing gems:

Alaska Travel Industry Association (800) 862-5275

www.winterinalaska.com

Alyeska Resort: The granddaddy of skiing locales in Alaska, located in the town of Girdwood, a half hour drive south of Anchorage. (800) 880-3880

www.alyeskaresort.com

Hilltop Ski Area, South Anchorage: ski hotline (907) 346-2167, ticket office

(907) 346-1407, 7015 Abbott Road, Anchorage, AK 99507 www.hilltopskiarea.org

Alpenglow at Arctic Valley, North Anchorage: Run by the Anchorage ski Club. The ski area is accessible off Arctic Valley Road off the Glenn Highway (907) 745-7526 or www.skialpenglow.com

Moose Mountain Ski Area, Fairbanks: (907) 479-4732, off Murphy Dome Road north of Fairbanks www.shredthemoose.com

Mount Aurora Skiland, Fairbanks: (907) 389-2314 or (907) 389-2000, 2315 Skiland Road, Fairbanks, AK 99712 www.skiland.org

Eaglecrest Ski Area, Juneau: (907) 790-2000 on Douglas Island, 12 miles from downtown Juneau www.skijuneau.com

Photo credits in order of appearance: Alyeska Resort, Alyeska Resort, Alaska Division of Tourism.

Vertical thrills: Heli-skiing an option for backcountry thrill-seekers

The idea of plunging out of a helicopter onto an almost vertical slope of snow-swaddled mountain can make the head swim. It's the kind of thing that you might associate with the extreme skiers of action videos. Yet in Alaska, heli-skiing is becoming a sport for the average — well, let's face it, the “above-average” skier.

The heli-skiing season runs in late winter, from about February through April, when snow conditions are optimal, there's lots of light and flying conditions the safest. The most popular areas for heli-skiing in Alaska include the Prince William Sound communities of Valdez and Cordova, Girdwood in Southcentral Alaska and the Southeast Inside Passage communities of Haines and Juneau.

“We offer five- and seven-day packages, depending on what you want to do,” said Jill Kief of Chugach Powder Guides out of Girdwood. “Everyone gets a safety briefing and a transeiver drill... Depending on the package, you can ski 50,000 to 60,000 vertical feet... Typically, you're getting about eight to 10 runs a day.”

Below is a just a sampling of the heli-skiing operators in Alaska:

Chugach Powder Guides, Girdwood: (907) 783-HELI, www.chugachpowderguides.com
Southeast Alaska Backcountry Adventures, Haines: (877) 617-3418, skiseaba.com
Out of Bounds Adventures, Haines: (907) 767-5745, www.alaskaheliskiing.com
Points North Heli-Adventures, Cordova: (877) 787-6784, www.alaskaheliski.com
Valdez Heli-Camps. Valdez: (907) 783-3243, www.valdezhelicamps.com
Valdez Heli-Ski Guides, Valdez: (907) 835-4528, www.valdezheliskiguide.com

For those who would rather view heli-skiing as a spectator, Valdez holds its annual Chugach Mountain Festival in April. Contact (206) 935-4464 or visit www.cmfvaldez.com. The 10-day event includes the Adrenaline Film Festival, Sloppy Cup Mountain Bike Race, the Alaska Pipeline Raid for orienteering enthusiasts, and, of course, the World Free Skiing Championships.



Fast and fun

Snowmachine Adventures Appeal to Those Who Want to See Backcountry in Style
By Melissa DeV Vaughn

No matter where you go in Alaska, chances are you're not too far from some spectacular wilderness area itching to be explored, but snow piles high in Alaska, and even the hardest of skiers can become winded after pushing through miles of powder.

Enter the snowmachine — basically a motorized sled that can skim across the snow like a jet ski on water. Today's machines are a far cry different than those designed in the early 1920s, though. The engines are quieter, cleaner and oh, so much more powerful.

It's easy to enjoy Alaska by snowmachine. A growing number of tour operators offer treks into the backcountry, both guided and unguided, for snowmachine riders of all abilities. Here's a sampling from across the state:

Girdwood:

This popular ski town is located in Southcentral Alaska, just 30 miles south of Anchorage, and the snowmachining is endless. Alaska 4 Seasons can arrange tours that include a three-hour introduction to snowmachining. Learn a little about the mechanics of the snowmachine and take a sightseeing ride into the surrounding country. More experienced snowmachiners might choose the five-hour trek that leads into a remote valley just outside of Girdwood. Even multiday trips can be arranged.

The locally operated Glacier City Snowmobile Tours offers a snowmachine adventure that takes in area glaciers of the Chugach National Forest. There's even a stop at an area ice cave for exploration. The all-day tour includes a meal, all the appropriate gear and a request from the owner: Don't forget your camera.

Alaska Snow Safaris also organizes snowmachining tours through Alyeska Resort, including multi-day adventures for those who really want to see the backcountry.

Fairbanks:

This Interior city attracts snowmachiners galore, who appreciate the vastness of the land, much of it going on for hundred of miles at a time before approaching civilization.

Options for snowmachine tours in Fairbanks include Alaska Snowmachine Adventures, which guides clients of all abilities. Tours can be custom-designed or cover popular local areas. Beginners and families are welcome. Night riding is also an option for those who want a chance to see the northern lights.

Another option for snowmachine planning is the Fairbanks Snow Travelers of Alaska snowmachining club, which can help put you in touch with an appropriate guide for your trip.

Valdez:

If you want snow, there is perhaps no better place to visit than Valdez. Where there is snow, there will be snowmachines. Valdez receives something in the neighborhood of 325 inches of snow per year, and that's just the average. One year, there was a whopping 560 inches on the ground.

“We have a very active snowmachine club, and the good thing about them is that they have a lot of safety courses, a lot of avalanche courses, so they're making sure people are learning about safety,” said Sharon Crisp, director of the Valdez Visitor and Convention Bureau. “At Thompson Pass, we have several glaciers that go into the heart of the Chugach (mountains). The snowmachine club does several competitions and several snow crosses throughout the winter, and they set up a race track for those who like to go fast.”

In April, Crisp said, there is a hill climb for those who want to push their snowmachines to their highest potential. Called The Mountain Man Hill Climb, the event awards more than \$40,000 in prizes, and is continuing to grow every year. Another event, the Mayor's Cup, is a 200-mile cross-country race over Hogback Mountain and Valdez Glacier.

So, snowmachine away. The trails are endless and the opportunities infinite. Alaska Snow Safaris of Valdez offers tours of the area. The company takes groups of four to six riders over glaciers, across untracked snow and through open valleys teeming with wildlife. Expect to cover about 200 miles a day — in other words, expect to see a LOT of country.

Haines:

Here's a snowmachining hot spot that offers wilderness tours in untracked snow. According to Michelle Glass, tourism director in Haines, it doesn't get any better than Haines.

“We don't get as much snow as Valdez, but it's still cool,” she said. “I love living in Haines because, scenically, it's the most gorgeous place in Alaska. As for snowmachining, there's the Alcan 200 high-speed snowmachine race, where they are averaging speeds of like 119 mph. And in Haines Pass, it is just wide open. We get a lot of Canadians who come down for snowmachining, and when they're all up there, we basically have this lit-

tle city that opens up on the pass.”

Snowmachiners can have their choice of places to ride and companies to guide them. Northern Nights Adventures offers trips that follow old historic trails, forest service roads, frozen rivers and open valleys and passes. Trips include stops for bits of history, a bite to eat, a stay in a cabin, if you like.

Big Country Snowmobile Tours is another guide available locally. They specialize in two- and three-day packages that include overnight stays at an area lodge, meals and guided snowmachining during the day.

Kenai Peninsula:

While the peninsula may appear to flatten out between the towns of Cooper Landing and Homer, look off in the distance to see that the mountains are still quite close. It is in these mountains, and the area known as the Caribou Hills that snowmachining can be had. Despite the area’s name, you’ll more likely spot moose than caribou, but be on the lookout for old homesteader cabins, too. It’s intriguing to think of the hardscrabble folks who once eked a living out in such a harsh but beautiful environment.

If you have your own machine or plan on renting one elsewhere, the place to set up base camp is Caribou Creek Cabins, in Ninilchik at the base of the Caribou Hills. There’s plenty of room for snowmachine parking, and the cabins offer a cozy and close-by retreat for your daily outings.

IF YOU GO SNOWMACHINING:

A sampling of snowmachine tour operators throughout the state:

Alaska Travel Industry Association (800) 862-5275

www.winterinalaska.com

Alaska 4 Seasons: A booking agent that can set up tours in and around Girdwood. (907-346-1270) 4821 E. 115th Avenue/B Anchorage, AK 99516 www.alaska4seasons.com

Glacier City Snowmobile Tours, Girdwood: (907-783-5566) mile 90, Seward Highway
www.snowtours.net

Alaska Snow Safaris, Girdwood and Valdez: (888-414-7669) www.snowmobile-alaska.com

Alaska Snowmachine Adventures, North Pole: A family-run tour operator just north of Fairbanks at 907-488-1330.

Fairbanks Snow Travelers of Alaska, Fairbanks: The club can help recommend places and people with whom to travel. E-mail questions to www.fairnet.org/fst/

Northern Nights Adventures, Haines: (907-767-5454) P.O. Box 1127
Haines AK, 99827 www.aptalaska.net/~jteal/

Big Country Snowmobile Tours, Haines: (907-767-5404) P.O. Box 1188 Haines, AK
99827 www.alaskasnowtours.com

Caribou Creek Cabins, in Ninilchik on the Kenai Peninsula: No snowmachine guiding
here, but the cabins are a base for those who bring their own machines. (907-567-7330)
P.O. Box 39347, Ninilchik, AK 99639 www.cariboucreek.com

Photo credits in order of appearance: Clark Mischler/Alaska Division of Tourism, Craig Medred, ATIA.



Winter playground

White Mountains National Recreation Area a Must-see for Fairbanks Visitors

By Melissa DeVaughn

It took only one visit to White Mountains National Recreation Area to convince me that it is the ultimate wintertime destination. Packed into its 1 million acres of land, just 30 miles north of Fairbanks, are more than 200 miles of groomed and maintained trails, a dozen public-use cabins equipped with many necessities and scenery that will leave you stunned into silence.

It's a winter-lover's paradise, and everyone is welcome — dog mushers, snowmachiners, skiers and snowshoers. It is not uncommon to pass groups consisting of all of the above, combining their respective sports of choice with an opportunity to spend time together.

That is just what Congress envisioned when the White Mountains National Recreation Area was established nearly 20 years ago. The passage of the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act was designed to set aside valuable acreage for multiple purposes, but creating another national park could have restricted such users as snowmachiners and hunters. So instead, this recreation land was created, an oft-used winter getaway for snow-loving Alaskans located on Bureau of Land Management land. Not only does the Bureau maintain the trails and cabins for winter use, but it has established two campgrounds and created hiking areas for those visiting the land in the summer. In the fall and winter, moose and caribou hunters frequent the area on all-terrain vehicles. Today, the White Mountains National Recreation Area is the largest national recreation area in the United States, the only NRA in Alaska and the only one in the nation managed by the BLM.

To best appreciate the White Mountains, visit in early spring, about March, when the days are lengthening and the temperatures are more moderate — in the 20s generally. By then, the snow is at its peak, and the trails are usually smooth and well groomed. It is still dark at this time of year making northern lights viewing an almost-guaranteed event.

“I come skiing out here in January, when it's really cold,” Fairbanks resident Toursten Chlupp once told me. I ran into him skjoring with his giant McKenzie River husky, Ben - easily twice the size of my slender sprint-type dogs. He was just man and dog

alone in the wilderness. Chlupp spent his summers guiding clients on the Class I, 127-mile Beaver Creek National Wild River, which winds through the NRA boundaries. But after the river froze up each year, he still yearned to return.

“I come when it’s 40 below,” he told me, sipping instant soup from a cup. “I like it. ... I love it.”

No matter the temperature, the White Mountains NRA is a visually stunning landscape. Many of the trails stay above treeline, allowing views as far as the eye can see. Occasionally, the landscape changes and the trails lead through thick wooded areas with trees taller and more dense than one would expect this far north. Along one particularly beautiful trail, called Fossil Gap, the path leads up and over a knoll toward a cabin perched on a treeless ridge, overlooking a mass of craggy, gray rocks called Limestone Gulch. It stands out in stark contrast to the white blanket of snow covering the land.

The White Mountains National Recreation Area is a hidden wintertime gem in Alaska’s Interior, but I’ve a feeling the secret cannot remain hidden forever. In fact, since its inception, the number of visitors has increased by some 5 percent to 6 percent each year. In general, according to statistics gathered by the BLM in 2000, snowmachine users make up 41 percent, 25 percent are skiers and/or skijorers, and 15 percent are dog mushers. The remaining percentage is split among all-terrain vehicle users, hikers and groups made up of more than one type of user.

Accessing the White Mountain National Recreation Area is easy. From Fairbanks, just drive north on the Elliott or Steese highways, depending upon where in the NRA your trip will begin. Four pullouts, two along each highway, allow for long-term parking.

The hard part is deciding what to do. Cross-country skiing, snowmachining and dog mushing are the latter’s most popular activities in the winter, and hiking near Wickersham Dome and Mount Prindle (the highest point in the White Mountains at 5,286 feet) is popular in the dry summer months. Floating the Beaver Creek National Wild River is fast becoming popular, too.

IF YOU GO TO THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

The White Mountain National Recreation Area is located about 30 miles north of Fairbanks, on the Elliott or Steese highways.

BLM cabins are available up to 30 days in advance for \$20 Sundays through Thursdays and \$25 on Fridays and Saturdays. Reservations can be made in person at the BLM Public Room, 1150 University Ave., Fairbanks AK or by calling (907) 474-2200.

Or call the Alaska Public Lands Information Center in downtown Fairbanks at (907) 456-0527.

Out-of-town travelers can visit the White Mountains National Recreation Area Web site at www.aurora.ak.blm.gov/WhiteMtns/html It includes mileage between cabins, general White Mountains information and a detailed map of the area.

Contact the Alaska Travel Industry Association at www.winterinalaska.com
(800) 862.5275

Photo credits in order of appearance: Alaska Division of Tourism, Alaska Division of Tourism, Grant Klotz/ACVB/Alaska Division of Tourism.

While grizzlies are away, these animals will play

Alaska is home to the grizzly bear, and as one might expect, catching a glimpse of these mighty creatures in their habitat is a real possibility for the Alaska visitor. Come winter, the grizzlies go to sleep, so bear-viewing is not an option.

Not to worry, though. Alaska is home to many species of wild animals, and looking for them in the winter can be just as exciting.

MOOSE

The chance that you'll see a moose greatly increases in the winter. When the snow piles high in the mountains, the moose wander to the lowlands, looking for food and more comfortable conditions. That means it's more likely to come across a mama moose and calf wandering through the neighborhood yards of Anchorage. Or maybe, a bull moose will take up residence beside a mountain ash in the city square. It may irritate the city's gardeners to see their prized trees chewed to nubs, but the photographs you'll take home will be priceless.

EAGLES

One of the best places to see bald eagles in wintertime is in Haines, where in mid- to late-November, as many as 3,000 of the regal birds gather for a late run of salmon on the Chilkat River. It is considered the largest gathering of eagles in the world because it is one of the last ice-free places for them to find their food of choice — salmon. A bald eagle festival is held in Haines every year, and thousands of visitors flock to the area as well, armed with cameras to capture the scene. For more information on the festival, set for Nov. 12-16, 2003, visit baldeaglefest.org or call (907) 766-2202.

RAVENS

These jet-black giant birds are mysterious creatures. The Highlanders of Scotland believe the birds are predictors of death, change, life, renewal — it all depends on how many are seen and under what circumstances. In Alaska, ravens are extremely symbolic, particularly by the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian Native people of Southeast Alaska, who view the raven as the creator of the world. The raven also is important in the creation of myths by the Eskimo. Winter is a good time to see ravens, and most interestingly, watch them in action. They are comical, if not irritating creatures, that congregate in populated areas, scavenging for food. It is not uncommon to see them near Dumpsters, scattering unattended garbage or stealing your dog's food. Still, they are an important Alaska icon, and well worth searching out.

ARCTIC FOX

They are stealthy animals, and you have to look hard for them, but one glimpse of an arctic fox in its pure winter white coat and you'll never be the same. If you're in Alaska's far north, look for them near the sea ice, where they'll often venture to eat the remains of seals killed by polar bears.

SNOWSHOE HARES

Another white wonder of the woods, these quick creatures change from a luscious brown to snow white just in time for the snow to fly. Although they blend in well with their surroundings, they also are more active, seeking food. A careful eye will look for blurs of motion in mixed

spruce forests, wooded swamps and brushy areas. They feed on spruce twigs and needles, bark, and buds of aspen and willow branches or bushes.

LYNX

If you see a lynx, count yourself incredibly lucky. These elusive creatures keep to themselves and are out mostly at night. Still, they can occasionally be spotted better in the winter when they are more likely to stand out against the snow. Lynx feed primarily on snowshoe hares, so look for them in similar territory. Look for their telltale black-tipped tail and large, furred feet, good for navigating in deep snow.

CHICKADEES

No grand sighting, the chickadee, but to Alaskans, these hardy little songbirds are cheerful reminders that we are NOT, in fact, crazy to live here in the winter. If these 5-inch-long creatures aren't affected by the cold, why should we be?

If you've never seen a chickadee, look for little round bodies, and a soft combination of whites, grays and blacks topped with a pointy little black beak.

While most songbirds say adios and head for warmer ground come winter, the chickadee sticks close to home. Their dense plumage and remarkable ability to put on fat makes them perfect wintertime companions.



Snow on wheels

Studded Tires, Warm Clothing All you Need to Keep Cycling in the Winter

By Melissa DeV Vaughn

Alaskans are a hardy group of souls who have learned to adapt to, and even embrace, the changing climate of winter. When the snow piles high and the mercury dips to the single digits or lower, life doesn't change all that much. Alaskans simply acclimate.

Take bicycling, for instance. Common sense would have it that these two-wheeled recreational machines are put away into storage sheds or garages come winter. Not so in Alaska, where man and bike have stuck together for as long as a century. The Eagle Historical Society boasts one particular photo showing Ed Jesson, an adventurous gold seeker from 1900, poised with his big-wheeled, single-gear bicycle. Jesson took that bike and rode for a month, covering 1,000 miles from Dawson to Nome using the frozen Yukon River as his trail.

Jesson's account of the trip includes this quote, collected from the Alaska Gold Rush Centennial Task Force: The bicycle "stood the trip in splendid shape and to my great surprise I never had a puncture or broke a spoke the entire trip."

Today, a growing number of intrepid cyclists visit Alaska with that same spirit of adventure, and the added luxury of improved mechanics and cold-weather gear. Mountain bikes are equipped with studded tires, multiple gears and better lubrication to withstand cold temperatures. The cyclists themselves have warmer clothing, battery-operated lighting systems and any number of accessories to make winter riding — or "snow biking" as it is commonly termed — a joy.

"I'd say (snow biking) has been growing pretty steady for at least the past three years," said Tony Lombardo, a shop technician at Alaska Mountain Bike Source in Anchorage. "We're also seeing an increase in technology with winter gear for mountain bikes, which is making it easier for people to get out. There are a lot of good studded tires out there."

Off-road mountain biking has indeed been gaining momentum for the past 10 years. In 1990, the National Sporting Goods Association didn't even track the sport's popularity. But by 2000, an estimated 7.1 million people took to the trails on their fat-tired bikes.

So, it's no surprise that snow biking is becoming more popular, too. As cyclists better learn to handle their bicycles, they are more willing to experiment in cold weather.

“The people I've been getting are curious — we're at the curiosity stage,” said Doris Lundin, who rents snow bikes to guests at Fairbanks Hotel in conjunction with the local sports shop, Alaska Outdoor Rentals (which also rents its bikes at Chena Hot Springs Resort, near Fairbanks). “They're afraid there's a problem with it. They're afraid it's going to get too cold. But once they try it, they say, ‘This is kind of neat.’ “

Snow biking's appeal is best known in the larger Alaska cities of Anchorage and Fairbanks, where groups of riders will embark on outdoor rides on area trails. Commuters, too, depend on their bikes to take them to and from work, even in the coldest of temperatures.

“I do use my bike for commuting and it's great in the winter,” said Don Love, who works in the bike department of Anchorage's Recreational Equipment Inc. outdoor gear store. The key is a good lighting system, studded tires and dressing appropriately, he said. Other than that, the rules of the road remain the same.

In general, a snow bike is simply your average mountain bike equipped with a few cold-weather modifications.

“The type that I have at the hotel is your basic, 27-speed mountain bike, with front suspension, and they've got good gearing that's very well maintained,” Lundin said. “The bikes are lubricated for low temperature. If you used normal grease that would be good in Phoenix, at the temperatures we have here, you probably couldn't get the crank to go around. They also have studded tires, so when you're riding on a slick day when you can barely walk, it's like riding on Velcro.”

At Alaska Outdoor Rentals, an even beefier snow bike is available with tougher rims and wider Snowcat tires, ideal for off-road riding on trails and backcountry locales. For those who want to experience such biking, guided tours through Alaska Outdoors Rentals can be arranged.

In Anchorage and the surrounding area, snow biking also has a following. Mark Gronewald, owner of Wildfire Designs Bicycles in Palmer, custom builds bikes equipped for ultra-cold weather. And Bryan Kennedy, of Alaska Mountain Bike Source in Anchorage, is developing Kevlar-beaded custom-studded tires for customers who want to go beyond the basics or who compete in the growing number of snow-bike races, including the Iditasport and Susitna 100 races.

So, if you're coming for a visit and want to check out snow biking, getting started is pretty simple. When snow conditions are hard-packed and firm, just let a little air out of your tires, to about 10 to 15 pounds of pressure, to increase surface area. Fat, nubby

tires are best. Snowcat doublewide rims are an option, too, like the ones available for rent at Fairbanks' Alaska Outdoor Rentals.

In ice, or for commuting around town in traffic, studded tires are a must. There are all sorts of studded tires out there, but in general, ask for tires that have at least 296 studs per tire. Anything less, and you'll lose too much stability.

As for clothing, use common sense. Dress in layers, use clothing with lots of zippers for ventilating, and avoid cotton. The extremities, especially your feet and hands, are particularly vulnerable, so avoid the spandex. Instead of clipless pedals, try wearing big boots and extra-wide toe cages in extreme cold, as well as mittens instead of gloves. Balaclavas are good for wearing underneath helmets.

Other things to consider: use slow, controlled movements when steering and pedaling, and don't use the front brakes if the bike begins to slide. Be careful to keep ice from building up on cables and breaks, and always make yourself visible with lights or reflective clothing.

IF YOU GO SNOW BIKING:

Alaska Travel Industry Association (800) 862-5275

www.winterinalaska.com

In Fairbanks:

Alaska Outdoor Rentals (907-457-2453) P.O. Box 82388 Fairbanks, AK 99708

www.akbike.com

Fairbanks Hotel (888-329-4685) 517 Third Ave., Fairbanks, AK 99701 www.fbxhotl.com

Chena Hot Springs Resort, (800-478-4681) P.O. Box 58740, Fairbanks, AK 99711

www.chenahotsprings.com

In Anchorage:

Alaska Mountain Bike Source/Pinnacle Ski Shop (907-245-8844) 2375 E. 63rd Ave.

www.alaskamtnbike.com

Recreational Equipment Inc. (800-426-4840) 1200 W. Northern Lights Boulevard

www.rei.com

Wildfire Designs Bicycles in Palmer, (907-745-2453) 824. S. Colony Way, Palmer, AK 99645 www.wildfirecycles.com

Photo credits in order of appearance: Craig Medred, Alyeska Resort, Craig Medred.

Winter Schedule

FEBRUARY

- 1 Ice Worm Festival - Cordova - SC. (907) 424-7260. www.corovachamber.com
<<http://www.corovachamber.com>>
- 1 26th Annual Peninsula Winter Games - Kenai/Soldotna - SC. (1-2). A family weekend with everything from ice sculpting to snow machine racing (907) 283-1991.
- 7 Anchorage Fur Rendezvous - Anchorage - SC. (14-23). More than a hundred wild and wacky events at various venues around Anchorage including World Champion Sled Dog Race, snowshoe softball, ice bowling, parade, snow sculpture competition and fireworks. It is one of the biggest winter carnivals in the nation (907) 277-8615.
- 8 Klondike 400 Snowmachine Race - Big Lake - SC. (2nd weekend in February). “The Eliminator” snowmachine race starts at the Call of the Wild (907) 892-6372.
- 9 Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race - Fairbanks - INT. 1,000-mile sled dog race from Whitehorse to Fairbanks. (907) 452-7954 www.yukonquest.org
<<http://www.yukonquest.org/>>
- 15 Iditasport Race or Susitna 100 - Big Lake - SC. For joggers, skiers, bikers; starts at Big Lake Lodge (907) 345-2282.
- 20 Alaska Trailblazers Snowmobile Club “Tok to Dawson Run” - Tok - INT. (Feb. 20-23, Feb. 27-Mar. 2, Mar. 6-9). Snowmobile poker Run from Tok, Alaska to Dawson City, Yukon Territory. (907) 883-SNOW www.alaskatrailblazers.com
<<http://www.alaskatrailblazers.com/>> ; www.trekovertthetop.com
<<http://www.trekovertthetop.com/>>
- 21 Winterfest in Denali - Healy/Denali National Park - INT. (21-23). Winter events, dancing, chili cook-off and pancake breakfast.
- 21 Iditarod Days Festival - Wasilla - SC. (Feb. 21 - Mar. 2). Ten days of festivities ending with the Iditarod Restart on Sunday (907) 376-1299.
- 28 Valdez Ice Climbing Festival - Valdez - SC. (Feb. 28 - Mar. 2). The frozen waterfall ice of Valdez tests world-class ice climbers in speed climbing, technical placement and endurance (907) 835-5182.

MARCH

- 1 Idivarod Trail Sled Dog Race - Anchorage to Nome - SC/FN. World-renowned race across 1,049 miles of awe-inspiring wilderness. "The Last Great Race on Earth" from Anchorage to Nome. (907) 376-5155 www.iditarod.com
<<http://www.iditarod.com>>
- 1 Nenana Ice Classic Tripod Weekend - Nenana - INT. (1-2). Official start of Alaska's largest guessing game. Contests, games and entertainment for the entire family. (907) 832-5446 www.nenanaakiceclassic.com <<http://www.nenanaakiceclassic.com>>
- 1 North Pole Winter Carnival - North Pole - INT. (1-2). Dog sled rides, kitty cat snowmachine races, Turkey Bowling, Salmon Slalom, craft and food booths, demonstrations, entertainment, and more. (907) 488-2242.
www.fairnet.org/npcc/CommunityEventIndex.htm
<<http://www.fairnet.org/npcc/CommunityEventIndex.htm>>
- 2 Idivarod Trail Sled Dog Race Restart - Wasilla - SC. The Wasilla area offers a multitude of viewing opportunities in the city and along the trail of the internationally known sled dog race. (907) 376-5155 www.iditarod.com <<http://www.iditarod.com>>
- 2 Tour of Anchorage - Anchorage - SC. Glide along the city's many downtown ski trails during this annual race. It is a premier ski marathon that is part of the American Ski Marathon series. (907) 561-0949 www.tourofanchorage.com
- 5 World Ice Art Championships - Fairbanks - INT. (5-16). International ice sculpting event featuring over 180 sculptures. <BOLD> Best viewing March 16-22. (907) 451-8250 www.icealaska.com <<http://www.icealaska.com>>
- 7 Gene's Chrysler Limited North American Championship Sled Dog Race - Fairbanks - INT. (7-9). 80 teams from around Alaska compete. Indoor and outdoor spectator viewing. Souvenir and food concessions (907) 457-MUSH www.sleddog.org
<<http://www.sleddog.org>>
- 7 Mayor's Cup Cross-Country Snowmachine Race - Valdez - SC. A rugged 200-mile cross-country race over the snowy landscape of Valdez. (907) 835-2373.
Chatanika Days - Chatanika - INT. (8-9). Winter festival with outhouse races and snowmachine tug-of-war in the historic gold mining town of Chatanika (907) 389-2164.
- 9 Idivarod Festival - Nome - FN. (9-15). Week-long party at the end of the trail. (907) 443-6624 www.nomealaska.org <<http://www.nomealaska.org>>

10 U.S. Ski Association Junior Olympic National Championship - Fairbanks -INT. (10-15). Largest, most important and most prestigious junior cross-country ski event in North America. (907) 474-4242 www.ptialaska.net/~nordic
<<http://www.ptialaska.net/~nordic>>

14 ACS Open North American Championship Sled Dog Race - Fairbanks - INT. (14-16). World's fastest mushers compete in the oldest continuously run sled dog race in the world. Begins at 1:00 pm. Start and finish in downtown Fairbanks. (907) 457-MUSH www.sleddog.org <<http://www.sleddog.org>>

14 Tok Race of Champions - Dog Sled Race - Tok - INT. (14-16 - Jr. race champions, 21-23 - Sr. race champions). Annual race of champions. (907) 883-MUSH. Bering Sea Gold Ice Classic - Nome - FN. Play golf on frozen Bering Sea. (907) 443-6624 www.nomealaska.org <<http://www.nomealaska.org/>>

21 Buckwheat Ski Classic - Skagway - IP. (21-23). Race designed for the lazy, infirmed and a few who are fast (907) 983-2354.

APRIL

4 Mountain Man Snowmobile Hill Climb Competition - Valdez - SC. (4-6). The premier hill climb in the State of Alaska. The area's best riders compete in a variety of classes for over \$40,000 in prizes (907) 835-2373.

4 Chugach Mountain Festival and World Free Skiing Championships - Valdez - SC. (4-20). Includes Sloppy Cup Bike Race, Adrenaline Film Festival, AK Backcountry Raid, World Free Skiing Championships. (206) 935-4464 www.xonet.org
<<http://www.xonet.org/>>

11 Tesoro Arctic Man Ski & Sno-Go Classic - Fairbanks — INT. Ski race with snowmachine partner with drops of up to 1,700 feet. The Ultimate Adrenaline Rush! (907) 456-2626 www.arcticman.com <<http://www.arcticman.com/>>

19 Tok Trot - 6K Run/Walk - Tok - INT. Annual 6K run/walk (907) 883-5393.

19 Alyeska Spring Carnival - Girdwood - SC. (19-20, tent.). This carnival wildly welcomes spring with great skiing, zany events like the "Slush Cup," prizes & activities, a beach party, food, drinks and fun. (907) 754-2209 www.alyeskaresort.com
<<http://www.alyeskaresort.com/>>

OCTOBER

13 Alaska Bald Eagle Festival - Haines - IP. (13-16). An event celebrating the peak of the winter gathering of eagles. Educational seminars, tours and family special events. (907) 766-2202 www.baldeaglefest.org

13 BP Top of the World Classic - Fairbanks - INT. (13-16). Division I basketball teams from top national universities compete (907) 474-5977 www.towc.org

17 NYE Frontier Classic - Anchorage - SC. (17-18). See four top-ranked college teams in this first annual hockey tournament. Held second weekend in October each year (907) 786-1230 www.goseawolves.com

NOVEMBER

13 Alaska Bald Eagle Festival - Haines - IP. (13-16). An event celebrating the peak of the winter gathering of eagles. Educational seminars, tours and family special events. (907) 766-2202 www.baldeaglefest.org

13 BP Top of the World Classic - Fairbanks - INT. (13-16). Division I basketball teams from top national universities compete (907) 474-5977 www.towc.org

25 Carrs/Safeway Great Alaska Shootout - Anchorage - SC. (25-29). Fast-paced basketball tournament in which both men's and women's college teams compete in this nationally-recognized event (907) 786-1230 www.shootout.net

DECEMBER

6 Wilderness Woman Contest/Bachelor Auction - Talkeetna - SC. Single women compete for title, followed by Benefit Bachelor Auction (907) 733-3939.

JANUARY (Dates for 2004 will be posted in October)

Sled Dog Races - Anchorage - SC. (Jan.-Feb.). Weekend races at Tozier Memorial Track by the Alaskan Sled Dog & Racing Association. (907) 562-2235.

Russian Christmas and Starring - Kodiak - SW. Singing choir visits homes of the faithful (907) 486-3854.

50th Anniversary Celebration of the City of North Pole - North Pole - INT. Enjoy fireworks, birthday cake and cocoa at North pole high School (907) 488-2281 www.northpolealaska.com <<http://www.northpolealaska.com/>>

Alcan 200 Road Rally - Haines - IP. Snow machine race from the US/Canada border to Dezadeash Lake on the Haines Highway and back. (907) 766-2503.

Kuskokwim 300 Sled Dog Race - Bethel - SW. A 300 mile sled dog race, Bethel - Aniak and return. (907) 543-3300. www.k300.org <<http://www.k300.org/>>

Polar Bear Jump-Off - Seward - SC. Individuals jump into Resurrection Bay to raise money for American cancer Society. (907) 224-8051 www.sewardak.org <<http://www.sewardak.org/>>

Willow Winter Carnival - Willow - SC. Dogsled racing, snowmachine racing, x-country ski event and talent show. (907) 495-6633.

Klondike 300 Sled Dog Derby - Big Lake - SC. Sled dog race starts at Call of the Wild. (907) 892-6372.