

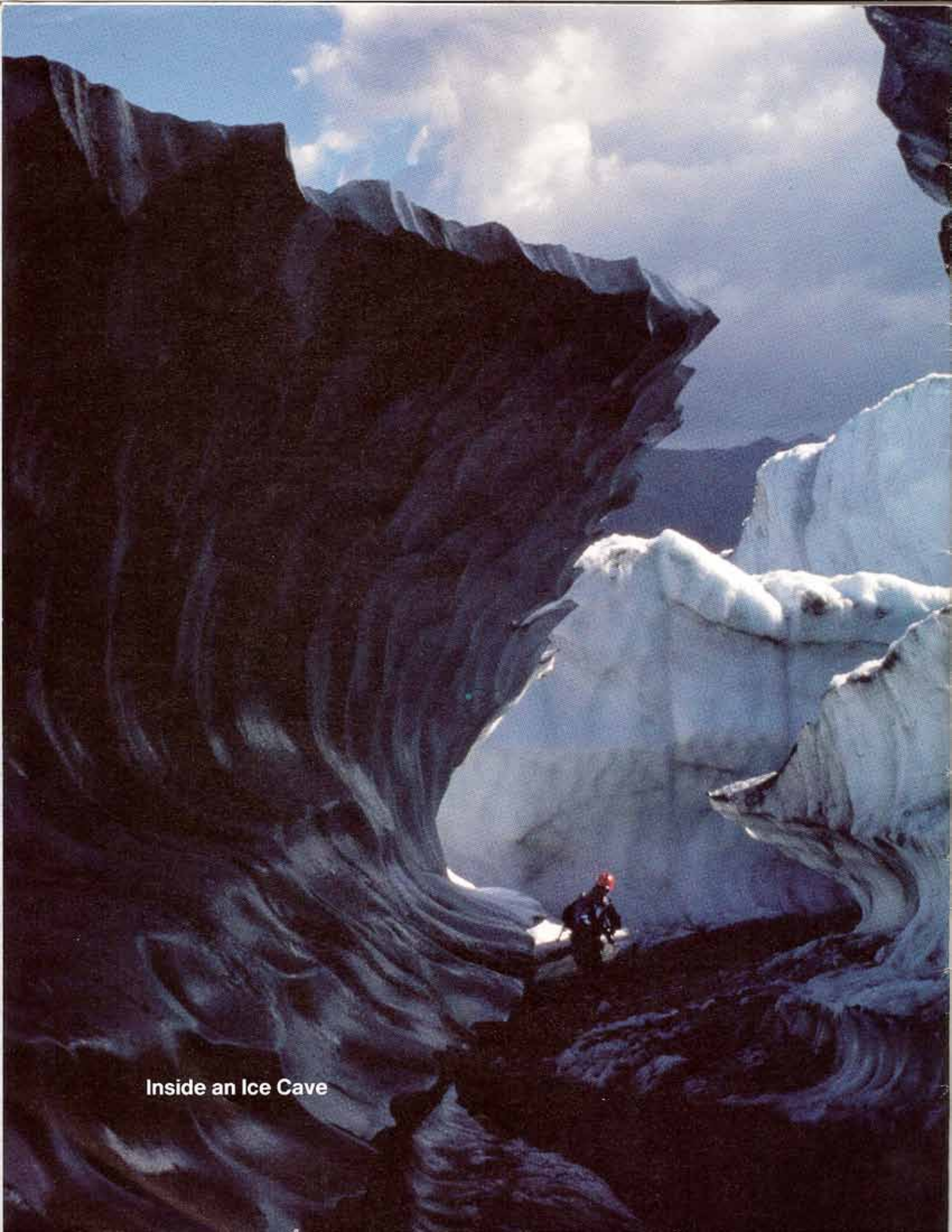
McClatchy

InnerView

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Alaska's Wild!



Inside an Ice Cave

*Let us probe the silent places, let us seek what luck betides us;
Let us journey to a lonely land I know.
There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star a gleam to guide us,
And the Wild is calling, calling... let us go.*

— Robert Service

Call of the Wild

The joke is old but everybody tells it: The best thing about Anchorage is it's so close to Alaska.

Anchorage could be Anywhere. And the workers at the Anchorage Daily News are like the workers at any other McClatchy company. They curse traffic jams, eat Big Macs, shop at the JCPenney mall. They could be in Fresno or Tacoma or Sacramento.

Except for one thing: When they want to get away, they can, in half an hour, reach lands so untouched and so isolated they could stay weeks without encountering another human being.

That's Alaska.

It's possible to drive to the Alaskan wilderness from Anchorage. But only two roads lead out of the city: one north, one south. And they don't go far in this icy, mountainous state. Getting into the deep wild means flying — usually in tiny planes fitted with floats or skis. Alaskans often fly themselves — there are more private planes per person in Alaska than in any other state — or they pay pilots to fly them.

It isn't easy to get to the wilderness in Alaska. But the real Alaska is still the wild, and the call of the wild is hard and mighty.

Debbie McKinney, Daily News lifestyle writer, answered the call six years ago. She came with a boyfriend to stake mining claims in the bush. She left the boyfriend but says she will never leave the state.

"I was intrigued by the place," she said, "and I still love it. It's like no other place."

McKinney skis, rafts, skates, kayaks, hikes, bikes. She enjoyed the same sports in the "Lower 48," but in Alaska, she says, they're different. In Alaska, she thrives on the challenge of the ruggedness and the solitude.

Despite the cold, black days, winter is McKinney's favorite season — she starts looking forward to it in July. Her favorite winter sport is skiing — Alaska-style.

McKinney ignores the state's one major ski resort and heads for the nearby Chugach or Talkeetna mountains. She's often the only skier there.

"You can ski all day and not see another person," she said. "You can get to the top of the mountain of your own accord. I'd much rather spend half my day trudging up the mountain to ski than standing in the lift line."



When the snows melt, she skis on glaciers. Glacier snows, because of the ice below, melt later than snow on the ground. If she works at it, she can ski on slushy glacier tops all summer. The sport is not without its own dangers, however.

"The glaciers have to be static — not moving," she said. "And they can't have crevasses."

Competitive skier Tammy Bass, retail sales representative, also glacier-skis. "It takes more work but it makes for a great day," she said.

She has skied in her bathing suit on warm spring days. On one trip to the glacier at Alyeska Ski Resort south of Anchorage, Japanese tourists took pictures and movies of her group as they skied in their summer clothes.

When she isn't skiing, McKinney finds quiet, frozen creeks and lakes and simply slips on her skates and takes off. On other dark winter evenings, she joins friends and neighbors at traditional community dances.

"Dancing is a big thing here," she said. "We get a couple hundred people at these dances. It's a way of passing the winter."

In summer, McKinney has taken up a fairly new sport — ocean kayaking. In her 19-foot double (for two people) kayak, she glides through the ice floes of Prince William Sound, east of Anchorage. She shares the waters with seals, sea otters, sea lions and whales.

"It is beautiful," she said. "I've never seen anything like it. You're paddling along and there are all these little faces lifting up out of the water looking at you."

Ocean kayaking demands keen skills to conquer the dare of the water's currents and tides, but on rivers, canoes — more open and less stable than kayaks — can be just as challenging. And the rivers of Alaska can lead into wilderness that admits no other kind of transportation.

Mark Sutherlin, a major accounts executive who grew up in Alaska, let a friend talk him into a canoe trip three years ago. One time and he was hooked.

He and his brother now own a canoe together, and they frequently take three-day trips with friends along isolated rivers between Anchorage and Fairbanks. In that region, within driving distance, he says, some of the state's best rivers can be found.

Before they set out on the water, Sutherlin and his friends deposit vehicles at the entering and leaving points. Once on the river, usually above the tree line, they may be in wilderness so deep it would take days to hike out.

"That's kind of what gets you hooked on it," he said, "pitting yourself against nature like that. You're a long,

long way from civilization."

Sutherlin spends his quiet time fishing — "some of the best in the state" — and watching the native wildlife. "We see an awful lot of eagles," he said. "And moose, standing in the water browsing on the vegetation. Once we saw an entire herd in the water."

And bears. Only so far — thankfully, he says — always in the distance.

"The one thing I don't want to happen is have a bear come into my camp. I carry a rifle for that."

Though bears rarely attack humans, the gun isn't a frivolous precaution. Alaska is bear country. It is the only state that is home to all three species of North American bear — black, brown (including grizzly) and polar. Tens of thousands of bears roam the Alaskan wild. No one, even in Anchorage, is ever far from a bear.

Barbara Wheeler, retail sales representative, found that out recently during a routine afternoon of golf. When she arrived at the Russian Jack course six blocks from the Daily News, she was greeted with this sign: Look out for bear and cubs spotted on holes 7 and 8 this morning. Wheeler played her game whistling and singing loudly to let the bears know she was there. "The one thing you don't want to do," she said, "is surprise a bear."

Dixie Wise, retail sales representative, and Sandy Marwick, major accounts coordinator, didn't trust



Photo/Dick Schmidt

Of thousands of glaciers in Alaska, the Matanuska is one of the few that visitors can explore.

noisemaking to keep bears away on their Fourth of July hike along Resurrection Trail on the Kenai Peninsula. Like Sutherlin, the two women, for whom arms-bearing is distinctly unnatural, carried a rifle. They had no illusions about the protection it offered them.

"My reason is you take a gun in the woods so you don't hear yourself scream as the bear eats you," quipped Wise. Then, getting serious, she added: "Bears are real hard to kill, and once they're wounded, they're real dangerous. It takes a lot to take a bear down."

They didn't, as it turned out, encounter any bears on their trek, but they did see other Alaskan animals, including ptarmigan (the Alaskan state bird, a grouse with feathered feet), marmots (woodchuck-like rodents — "just everywhere") and porcupines.

Though experienced hikers, Wise and Marwick found their 31-mile trip, beginning from Hope, about an hour south of Anchorage, to be as challenging as it was exhilarating. Normally, they said, the hike takes four or five days; their goal was to do it in two.

"It doesn't seem like that much because walking 15 miles isn't that hard," said Marwick. "But when you're above the snow line and going uphill and you have a lot of weight, like a tent, on your back, it really makes a difference."

"We did a lot of 'Boy we're going to feel good when this is done, boy this is going to be great when this is done,'" said Wise. "We hurt, but we really felt good about it."

Alaska has its own character for hikers, the women said. They camped in snow, waded across near-freezing creeks, saw few other hikers. And it never got dark.

"It's really neat to be somewhere where the days are so long," said Wise. "The second day we hiked a long, long time. It would have been dark anywhere else."

It's also prettier to hike in Alaska, they said. At the time of their trek, wildflowers were in full bloom. "There were some I've never seen before," Wise said. "It was so beautiful."

"The main thing hiking in Alaska has to offer," said Marwick, "is it's certainly not city life. It's really remote. You can get to a real isolated place in a short period of time. It's not like you have to drive for hours to get out of town. Out of town is real close."

Though Wise and Marwick hoped to avoid bears on their trek, some Alaskans seek out the magnificent animals.

Jean Hansen, classified assistant supervisor, spent four days in July 1985 watching bears in their natural habitat from just a few feet away. No barriers protected her from the animals.

Hansen won the right to observe the bears in a lottery conducted every spring by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. During the summer, when the salmon are running upriver to spawn, Park Service rangers escort small groups of people to the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary on the Alaska Peninsula. At waterfalls along the river, the normally solitary brown bears congregate to feed on the plentiful fish. And the humans, admitted only by permits issued through the lottery, settle in the nearby grass for eight quiet hours each day to observe and photograph the busy animals.

"There's nothing but you and the bears," Hansen said. "No bathrooms, no fires, no food. You keep your food in a cook house. You can't have food at the bear site." The rangers do keep rifles at hand "just in case," but so far they have not had to use them.

"The bears are interested in the salmon, not in you," Hansen said. "They don't see you as a threat because people come day after day, year after year, and they're predictable. There was no occasion when I felt threatened."

Getting to the McNeil River is an adventure in itself. Hansen, with her tent and food, drove to Homer, 226 miles south of Anchorage, then waited a day and a half for a float plane (one that lands on water) to fly her across Cook Inlet.

"When you're flying in small craft, you have to make allowances," she said. "They can't always go, because of the weather."

Once the plane landed — "there's no place but in the water" — Hansen, in hip boots, had to wade ashore and hike for a half-hour, wading through streams along the way.

McNeil is one of the few places where bears come together in groups. "Normally," Hansen said, "bears don't stay around other bears. You never see a herd of bears."

During her four days there, as many as 30 bears congregated at the falls. "The bears were all different," she said. "The males and females stayed separate. The cubs fought over the food, and the females fought with other females to protect their cubs. Some bears were more aggressive, some more playful. You always think of bears as fierce and dangerous, but when you see them with their young and interacting with other bears, you realize they have a whole social system also."



Mike Smith



Jean Hansen



Bruce Hinson



Debbie McKinney



Photo/Michael Penn



Photo/Jean Hansen

Bear Facts

Brown bears, normally loners, gather when the salmon run to fatten up before their long winter's nap. During the sleep — scientists now know it is not a true hibernation — the bears will not eat or drink. Males and females feed and den separately, but mothers stick close to their cubs for the first three or four years. Feeding habitats, such as this one at the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary on the Alaska Peninsula, are protected. Humans are allowed in only by permit — and only to watch and take pictures.

Encounters with bears are not unusual in Alaska, but the number of bears in the state, says Hansen, is one way Alaska is unique. "They are what makes Alaska the last frontier," she said. "We still have bears in vast numbers, but when you go to McNeil, you can't help but come away with a real feeling that this is a natural resource that has to be conserved."

Bruce Hinson, circulation dispatcher, feels the same. He led bear hunts in the wild for four or five years. Then, he says, he "came to an understanding with the bears. You don't have to kill them. I'm not big on killing animals."

Hinson's bear hunts were not rough and rustic ventures. They were first-class excursions into the Alaskan wild.

"We took 20 people at a time," he said. "I met some real interesting people — Ted Kennedy, Daniel Moynihan, Merlin Olson. The trips cost \$5,000-to-\$10,000 per person per week. We had cabins set up and a main lodge with people to serve meals. We had hot water and a generator run on diesel fuel. Everything had to be flown in. That's why it was so expensive."

After giving up the bear hunts, Hinson for eight or nine more years led the rich and famous on fishing expeditions to Bristol Bay. Guides would fly the guests to different fishing spots each day.

"The bay runs 42,000,000 total salmon a year," Hinson said. "It's the largest run of fish in the world."

His guests also fished for rainbow trout, but they didn't keep any they caught. Instead, they took pictures of the big ones and threw them back in. The guests were there for the sport, not to fish for food, Hinson said. For anyone who wanted one, he would have a realistic mount made of a big catch.

"Everybody's got different motivations for why they fish," he said. "I love fishing, but I've gotten to where I don't like to kill the fish. I still keep one or two to eat. The rest I throw back."

He will never, though, give up fishing.

"I love it," he said. "There are thousands and thousands of lakes and rivers — probably literally millions of lakes — 300 miles due west by air from Anchorage. You don't see anyone else in a day of fishing out there. It's really a spiritual thing. You're really in the wilderness, and wilderness is a part of my soul."

Mike Smith, retail graphic artist, has turned his love for fishing into a business. When the seasons open, he takes vacation time and joins his brother on their boat to bring in halibut, cod, red snapper, skate, shark or eel.

This, he says, is an example of what's wonderful about fishing in Alaska:

"We were out cod fishing, in March or April, and woke up in the morning and there was about a foot of snow all over. The night before there had been nothing. There was even snow on the water. It looked like you could walk right to shore. Everything smelled real good, nice and cool. The sea lions were coming up and breaking through the snow."

The scenery is another reason he likes to fish. "We see glaciers all over close to the Kenai fjords, and giant ice fields that turn into glaciers. There's this little pass that you can cruise in and out of with waterfalls everywhere. And we see sea lions, seals, porpoises, whales, puffins (parrot-like birds). Eagles, too. I've seen eagles swoop down and take salmon out of the water."



Mike Smith drew this sketch of his fishing boat after waking one morning to find a foot of snow had fallen during the night. The majesty of Alaskan waters is one of the state's prime attractions, he says.

Dave Kuta, retail advertising manager, has found another typically Alaskan sport that leads him to the incomparable beauty of the wild. He climbs glaciers.

He took up the sport, he says, partly to conquer his fear of heights: "It helped. You have no choice."

Kuta usually climbs in the summer, often wearing shorts, on the Matanuska Glacier 100 miles north of Anchorage. He wears spikes on his shoes that allow him, with the help of a harness, screws and an ice pick, to walk on the glacier and pull himself up the sheer faces.

One of the rewards of ice climbing, Kuta says, is exploring ice caves formed as the glaciers move. "It can be dangerous to go inside because the ice does move," Kuta said. "Sometimes you can hear the creaking while you're in them."

Kuta, who came to Alaska from Florida in 1979, says he never expected to become a devotee of winter sports. "My idea of outdoors before I came to Anchorage was a beer by the pool," he said.

But the wild beckoned, and Kuta found his own niche in the vast Alaskan wilderness. And his own reasons: "Climbing glaciers is not like being on anything else or being anywhere else that you can be. A glacier is something that's very awesome. It's not something you can experience any other way than going on a glacier. The ice, everything that surrounds it, is just beautiful."

Some Alaskans captivated by the wild will never leave. Others answer the call, taste the adventure, then move on. But they never get too far. There's another saying in Alaska, and everyone who's heard a glacier calve, beheld the snowy peaks of Mt. McKinley, paddled a lonely river or danced in the midnight sun knows it's true.

Once you've come to Alaska, you never quite go all the way back.

*On its first anniversary of McClatchy ownership,
the Tacoma News Tribune isn't just a local paper any more.
The Pierce County Herald definitely is.*



Tacoma, not known for its sunshine, basks in a view of Mt. Rainier on a clear day. "Actually," says Herald publisher Brad Bradberry, "the weather around here has been wonderful ever since McClatchy bought the papers."

It Was A Very Good Year

The biggest news at the Tacoma News Tribune is that it isn't any more.

It's still a newspaper, of course, and it's still the News Tribune. What it isn't is the *Tacoma News Tribune*. And the omission of that one word — Tacoma — from its name tells the tale of the paper's first year in the McClatchy family.

Before McClatchy Newspapers began publishing the Tacoma News Tribune and nearby Pierce County Herald, on Aug. 1, 1986, the Tacoma paper was, in the words of human resources director Jack Wilson, "a local paper — there's no question about it."

Just as the city it serves has been overshadowed by much-bigger Seattle, across Puget Sound, the News Tribune also has lagged behind the prominence and penetration of Seattle's two dailies. The *Post-Intelligencer* and *Times* have about twice the circulation of the News Tribune.

But Tacoma and its paper are coming of age. The city's port won the huge Sealand shipping contract two years ago, and downtown Tacoma is being restored and revitalized. An industrial economic base is giving way to a 21st-century service-and-information society.

And The News Tribune is taking on its big-city rivals. "We want to be bigger than we are," said publisher Bill Honeysett. "We want to do a better job in (Tacoma's) Pierce County, and then we want to do a better job in (Seattle's) King County. We want to do a better job with what we've got than where we are."

They don't want to be just a Tacoma paper any more.

Probably the most visible change in the paper is represented by a new addition to its nameplate: the word "morning" in colored script. The paper switched from afternoon to morning delivery April 6.

"We're a much more efficient operation as a morning paper," said Jeff Stalcup, production and operations



director. "For example, on Wednesday, we used to print four editions, for distribution on the newsstands at 10:30, then for deliveries noon, 1 and 2 p.m. Now we print only one. ... We tried to do everything. ... It wasn't an efficient way to operate."

Managing editor Norm Bell had a more succinct view: "This beats the hell out of being here at 5 a.m."

With his new schedule, Bell has been able to make positive changes in the newspaper's format. The day the morning edition hit the streets, so did a new Monday business magazine, *Inside Track*.

"We couldn't have had *Inside Track* until we went morning," Bell said. "Now we are better able to package business news and tell readers what the numbers mean even if they aren't quite as new."

On Sept. 1, the *News Tribune* took another step in its drive to become a northwest regional newspaper: It opened two new offices in King County. One, a Seattle bureau, is staffed by four reporters covering courts, cops and county government. The second, in south King County, has three reporters covering local news for a daily zoned edition distributed in that area. The two offices operate under one editor.

"We're (setting up the new offices) to increase circulation and our advertising base," Honeysett said. "We will be competing with both Seattle papers for circulation in this county and will be selling advertising in the entire Tacoma-Seattle market. It's a very competitive market."

The paper's goal, Honeysett said, is to double its present 3,000 circulation in the south King County area. About 200 new news racks also will be installed there.

The News Tribune added new weekly magazines.

Even without the expansion, circulation is on a promising upward trend, said Ron Mladenich, circulation director. "We had a very dramatic increase last year," Mladenich said. "We had the best calendar year for circulation in 1986."

The Audit Bureau of Circulation, which publishes official figures for all major U.S. dailies and some weeklies, tallied the *News Tribune's* circulation for the 12 months ending March 1987 as the highest ever — nearly 110,000 daily and 122,000 Sunday. The increases over the 1986 figures (3,407 daily, 4,838 Sunday) also were the highest ever, Mladenich said.

The increased circulation is not only the result of strong selling efforts and a new delivery time, Mladenich said. He also attributes it to changes and improvements in the paper's look and its editorial content.

"We're putting out a better newspaper than we were a year ago," he said. "The editorial product has been improved. We're providing more complete coverage in national, international and regional news, and sports news. We've beefed up the product we're putting out onto the street."

That beefing up includes a dramatically new look — smaller type, more color, better artwork, more creative graphics.

Plans for the improved editorial package, say two of its editors, had been on the drawing boards before last year's sale. But it was not until the *News Tribune* became a McClatchy newspaper that many of those ideas could be turned into reality.



Norm Bell



Jeff Stalcup



Blaine Johnson



Bill Honeysett



Bill Trandum



Jack Wilson



Ron Mladenich

"What McClatchy really allowed to happen," said Blaine Johnson, assistant managing editor, "was to let us accelerate the ideas that were already there. It was more like (McClatchy said) 'Where are you going and we'll go faster.'"

Perhaps McClatchy's greatest contribution, said managing editor Bell, was its good name. "Certainly the McClatchy reputation has helped us attract more and more quality people," he said.

"From what I've seen in recruiting," Johnson said, "the McClatchy name comes with an aura of high-level journalism. It gives you that extra calling card of credibility."

That "calling card" has enabled Bell and Johnson to make significant improvements in the newsroom staff. They recently hired a new photo editor (from Denver's Rocky Mountain News) along with several new photographers. The hires were the first additions to the photography staff in nine years, Johnson said.

Newsroom size has grown, too. "At the time McClatchy took over," Johnson said, "we had about 25 jobs to fill (in the newsroom) out of 95. In calendar '87, we'll be adding about 25 new jobs."

Some of those people will be assigned to the new King County offices. Others were recruited for three new zoned Neighbors sections introduced in May.

Bell also has brought on a legion of columnists with a view to building the newspaper's personality. "When you're number three," he said, "you gotta yell a little louder."

It's not only the product that has undergone dramatic revision in the last year. Company policies, with McClatchy's expertise as a resource, also have changed.

Every new employee now takes part in a half-day orientation, which includes a tour of the building and lunch in the board room with key managers. Meetings are held frequently to keep employees informed about company happenings, and performance appraisals are conducted regularly for every employee.

In addition, Bill Honeysett early this year started a new program — Lunch with Bill.

"We invite a dozen or so employees from different departments, and I have an off-the-record lunch with them in the conference room," Honeysett said. "They talk about whatever they want to talk about. Their concerns are brought up, and it's a chance also for a cross-section of employees to see what is going on in other departments. I've really enjoyed those lunches. I've never had one where I didn't come out with two or three really good ideas or two or three concerns that could be fixed."

A better product, aggressive expansion, improved employee relations: Are the changes paying off?

Bill Trandum, chief financial officer, says yes. "Last year," he said, "our financial performance was head and shoulders above what it was a few years ago."

When he came to the News Tribune three years ago, Trandum reorganized what he calls "the archaic, home-designed financial-reporting system" then in use and installed in its place sophisticated computerized financial-management systems. He also gave more of the company's employees decision-making responsibilities.

"My feeling is," said Trandum, "that virtually every employable person is perfectly capable of making sound decisions. If you trust people, allow them to make mistakes and help them correct them, they'll feel good about their jobs and grow with the organization."

Jack Wilson is upbeat about the opportunities at the News Tribune. "It's a tremendously exciting place to work," he said. "The change is fast. I've been here almost three years and I've gotten 10 years of experience in that time. I've been able to do all kinds of things that 40-year-old people don't often get the opportunity to do. There's probably no more exciting newspaper to be in than this one right now."



Managers do a little bit of everything at the Pierce County Herald, says publisher Brad Bradberry. Five of them are, from left, acting circulation manager Teresa Chébuhr, production manager Jake Strauss, Bradberry, advertising manager Carla Royter and editor Bryan Welch.



Except, perhaps, the Pierce County Herald. Under publisher Brad Bradberry's direction, the small (circulation: 18,000) twice-a-week publication in Puyallup has undergone a dramatic turnaround in the past year.

"We have changed everything," Bradberry said. "There's not one department that remains untouched."

Of 12 managers at the Herald when Bradberry arrived a year and a half ago, only one is still there. From nearly 90 employees then, the paper now has a staff of 70 — and half of those were hired within the last year.

The housecleaning seems to have had positive results. In April, the paper turned its first profit. "In '85 and '86, we lost money," Bradberry said. "But the second quarter of '87 showed two months out of three as profitable."

The biggest change in the Herald occurred on its first anniversary as a McClatchy paper. The paper dropped its Thursday edition, leaving it a Tuesday and Saturday publication. Along with the new schedule, the twice-a-week package includes a lot more color, spiffed-up front pages and a new TV magazine. The Thursday paper has been combined with the Saturday edition into one big weekend package.

"Publishing twice a week has been a very positive move," Bradberry said. "Three times a week is absurd. If you have three, you might as well go five."

The papers now are thicker, and advertisers like the weekend package, he said. Only four subscribers canceled because of the change.

In the newsroom, the new publishing schedule has been especially well received, says editor Bryan Welch.

"We'll cover more things, and we'll cover them better two times a week," Welch said. "At three times a week, we had lots of deadline days, lots of production days." Total news content will remain about the same.

The Herald "spiffed up" its front pages.

Since joining the paper last October, Welch has changed news and headline type styles, moved to more modular layouts, added columnists. He kept his newsroom staff of nine intact.

"This was a nice community newspaper when we came," he said. "Its strong suits were its local character and its aura of community involvement. But it had weaknesses — its lack of sharp focus on the readership area, for one. I think that's been corrected in the last year. We're no longer carrying many stories that aren't local."

Banking on the knowledge that readers can't get their local news from any other paper, Bradberry raised the newsstand price from 25 to 35 cents. The move was successful: Newsstand income has increased. "I made a serious mistake," Bradberry said. "I should have gone to 50." He also introduced an ads-only weekly shopper for non-subscribers.

A lot of outdated equipment has been replaced since McClatchy took over. A favorite addition is the new computerized NEC Voice Mail phone system, which will give and receive messages automatically. The first McClatchy paper to try the system, the Herald will eventually program it to take classified ads 24 hours a day and provide a 24-hour headline service for readers.

Like the News Tribune, the Herald has benefited from McClatchy's financial support. "Without it," said Bradberry, "we could not have made half the progress that we've made."

Jake Strauss, production manager, agrees. "Under McClatchy, there were more things done in a shorter period of time than perhaps had been done in many years prior to that. That's not to say that all problems have been taken care of, but the biggest ones have."



Reporter Shares Squalor, Pain with Thailand's Hmong Refugees

Two things about Amy Pyle's trip to Thailand were very hard. The first, said The Fresno Bee writer, was when the baby died. The second was putting the story in words.

Pyle spent four-and-a-half days in Ban Vinai, a Hmong refugee camp. Ban Vinai, with 43,000 people jammed onto three acres of land, is the only city in the world with more Hmong than Fresno.

Pyle took with her letters and pictures of Hmong in Fresno and names of relatives to look for in the camp. One of those relatives was Pa Xiong, sister of a Fresno insurance agent. Despite her brother's attempts to bring her to the United

States, Pa had found excuses to remain in the camp. "(The Hmong) are torn among allegiances to relatives in the camp, to those who have departed for the United States and to those who remain in Laos," Pyle wrote.

When Pyle found Pa, the widowed mother of four was nursing a gravely ill child. Pa's 1½-year-old son, Seng, sick with dysentery, could not walk or talk and weighed less than a newborn. Two days later, Seng died. Pyle, devastated, went to the funeral.

"If Pa had taken her four children to live in her brother's Clovis apartment, her youngest son almost certainly would still be alive today," she wrote.

Those may have been the saddest words Pyle had to express about Ban Vinai, but none of the three articles she wrote came easy. "The people were so wonderful to me," she said. "It was really emotional, and then to write it, it seemed that no words were right."

The project seemed exactly right to George Gruner, executive editor of The Fresno Bee. "Amy did a fantastic job," Gruner said. "She organized the coverage, arranged to have a photographer meet her there, shot some of the pictures herself. It was an exceptionally good job of international reporting brought home to the hometown reader. To those Hmong refugees, the promised land is Fresno."