Living…

Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska

David Mudrick

Living Too Far North

Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska

by David Mudrick

With 80 Original, Updated, and New Cartoons from

Too Far North: A Northern Cartoon Odyssey

Reston, Virginia

July 2024

To Pat

This work, although framed around my cartoons, is really a grateful tribute to my eternal companion, Patricia McDaniel Mudrick, always the motivator and usually the originator of our adventures together, as a couple and as a family.

Living Too Far North: Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska

2nd edition
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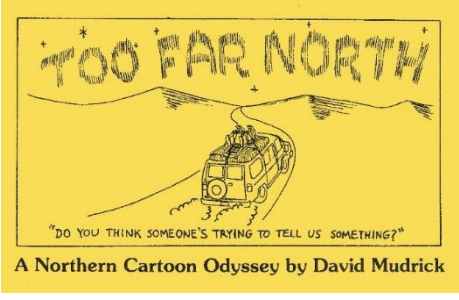
Covers and Introduction from the First Edition of *Too Far North*



Gakona Junction, Alaska
February 1987

Dear Reader,

My wife, Pat, our five kids, and I arrived in Alaska in August 1986 to experience a winter in the North. We settled in the Copper River Valley at Gakona Junction, a few houses and a hotel at the intersection of the Richardson Highway and the Tok Cutoff. Although jobs and money were in short supply, there was no shortage of humorous material concerning the verities of life in the North — the road, bush pilots, dog mushers, hunting and fishing, cabin fever, and the like.

I began "The Bush League" cartoon for the *Copper River Country Journal*, a new regional newspaper. Some people thought they were funny, which was all the encouragement I needed. Soon, I decided to collect some of those cartoons and others into the present book. I hope you enjoy them.

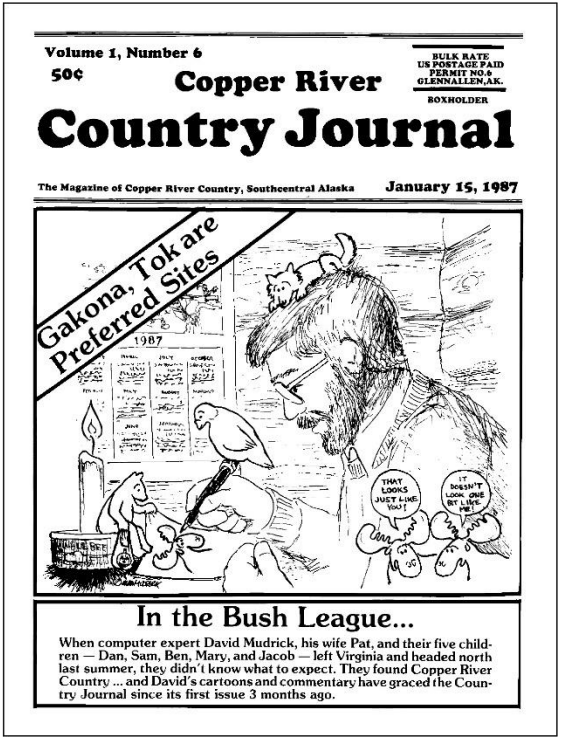
Sincerely,

David Mudrick

Foreword

In this winter of 2021-22, in the midst of surges of variants of the Covid-19 novel coronavirus, I started compiling a new edition of my 1987 book *Too Far North: A Northern Cartoon Odyssey*. When completed, it would include updated and colored versions of the 61 original black-and-white cartoons, plus 19 additional ones mostly produced after that collection was published. The reason for the first edition is briefly summarized in the 1987 "Dear Reader" letter above. I created the cartoons during the fall of 1986 and the winter that followed in our small cabin in the tiny settlement of Gakona Junction, Alaska. The drawings were executed in drawing pen on note paper, by lantern light after our five kids were asleep.

I had been drawing the cartoons for *The Copper River Country Journal*, a new bi-weekly local newspaper published by our friends Linda and Jeremy Weld. Along with their three boys, their cabin housed a large press, plate maker, and other necessary equipment. Linda did most of the writing and layout, and Jeremy ran the press. The


Volume 1, Number 6
50¢
Copper River
Country Journal
BULK RATE US POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO.8 GLENNALLEN,AK.
BOXHOLDER
The Magazine of Copper River Country, Southcentral Alaska
January 15, 1987
Gakona, Tok are Preferred Sites
1987
THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU!
IT DOESN'T LOOK ONE BIT LIKE ME
In the Bush League...
When computer expert David Mudrick, his wife Pat, and their five children — Dan, Sam, Ben, Mary, and Jacob — left Virginia and headed north last summer, they didn't know what to expect. They found Copper River Country ... and David's cartoons and commentary have graced the Country Journal since its first issue 3 months ago.

Journal, which was mailed free to every postal box holder in the valley, was funded by ads from local merchants and organizations. *Too Far North* was another way to raise revenue. It was intended for an Alaskan audience and for visitors who wanted to take home a more memorable (and humorous) picture of life in Alaska than that furnished by postcards. We laid out and printed 1,000 copies of each of the 16 different sheets, 8 book pages on each, and the yellow covers, which were then cut, compiled, and bound, with the aid of family and some high-school-aged friends.

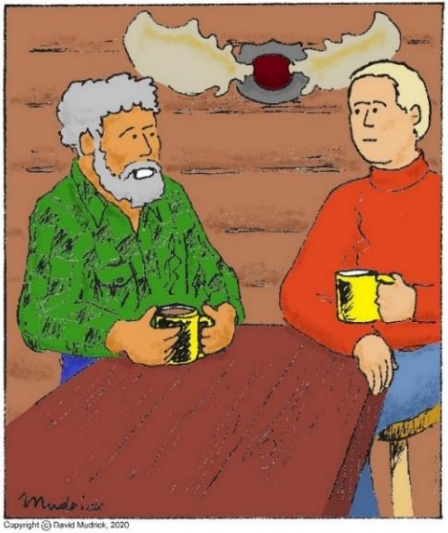
We went to Anchorage, and later Ben and I to Fairbanks, where we sold 400 copies to the news services that supplied bookstores and outlets in those cities. The remaining 600 were purchased in lots of a single copy to a couple dozen initially by lodges, gift shops, and other retailers we visited along the Alaska Road System and then in June, as we headed back to Virginia after the school year ended, at ports on the Alaska Marine Highway. Other than the two news services, which got a volume discount, we sold them at $3.00 per copy to be "keystoned" (doubled in price) by the purchasing outlet. One dollar of each copy's sale went to the Welds, one to us, and one more to whoever sold the copy. Our family used our share of the proceeds to finance that month-long trip home, where our sixth child, Jesse, was born the following February. When asked later if he was sorry that he didn't see Alaska, he replied, "I saw Alaska. I saw it through Mommy's ear."

During the pandemic, some three decades plus, later, the impetus for updating and coloring the cartoons was the Welds' resurrecting the *Copper River Country Journal* as an online news publication (www.countryjournal2020.com), to combat the lack of reliable information about the Covid-19 pandemic for the scattered residents of the huge Copper River Valley. The Welds had stopped printing the *Journal* in 1999, and subsequently there had been no similar news source in the region. I started sending them the

reworked cartoons to add humor and visual punch to the website, although the gags weren't necessarily any funnier than when in black and white.

With the cartoons now updated, we began talking about publishing a new edition of *Too Far North*, if and when tourism returned to Alaska. I started authoring commentary on the drawings and on the rural life they depicted, but we decided it wasn't appropriate for those just wanting a collection of cartoons. Hence, the creation of the book you are now reading, *Living Too Far North: Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska.* It contains all 61 of the original cartoons, now almost all reworked in color, and 19 not in the book or otherwise unpublished that will be in the new *Too Far North*, plus all that excessive commentary and more features. It is written for family, friends, and anyone else interested in a different look at off-season life in rural Alaska. This second edition has been resized and revised a bit from the original 2022 online version. Now, as then, I hope you find it amusing and informative and maybe even a bit thought provoking. Thanks for being a reader.

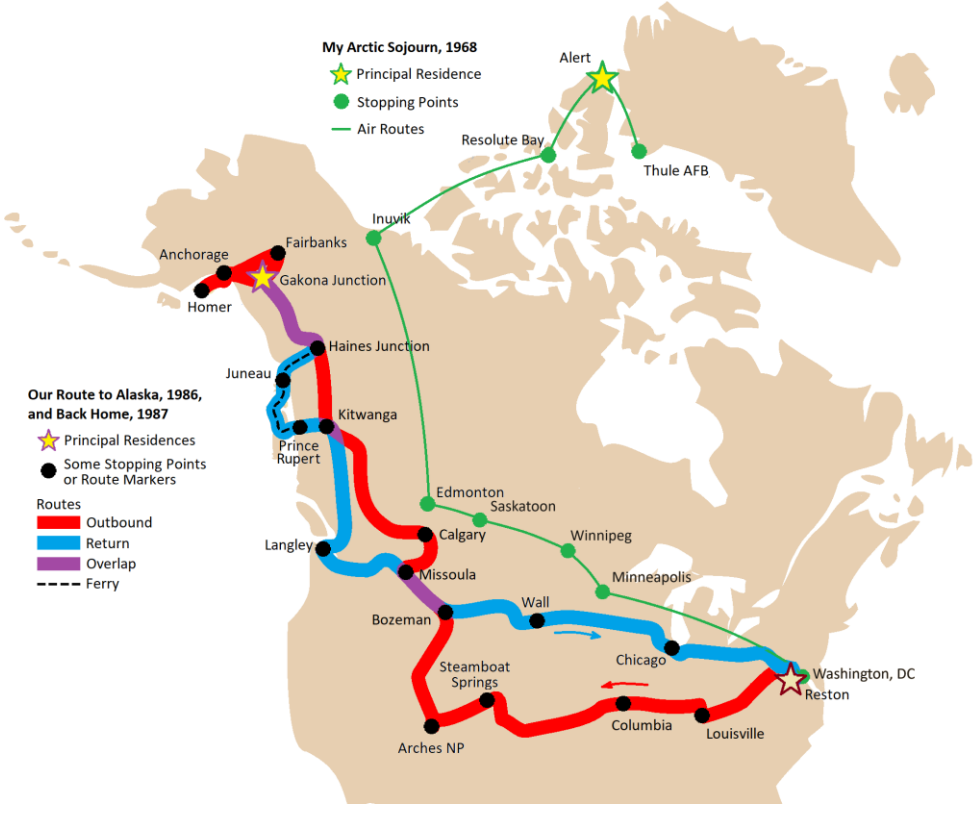
– David Mudrick, Reston, Virginia, July 2024



"You know, that's a darn good question.... Just why did I come here twenty-five years ago in the first place?"

x

Backstory: Why North and Why in Winter?



Most visitors to Alaska, most sane ones, at least, come to the state between late spring and early fall to see its spectacular scenery, experience its exotic human and animal life, and otherwise partake of its boundless expanses and opportunities for adventure. They also rub shoulders and other exposed body parts with the indigenous population of mosquitoes, but that's one of the few drawbacks. We were different. We arrived August 15th after a month and a half on the road, but with the intention of

wintering over to experience life there more fully. One of our principal reasons for heading north was to see the Northern Lights, something one is less able to do in more southern latitudes, but not even in Alaska during the longer daylight hours in summer. Mid-August may be summer, but a killer frost prior to our arrival had already killed off the mosquitoes, one of the few bonuses of a winter sojourn.

Nineteen years earlier, during my undergraduate college days, I had been much farther north, more than a thousand miles above the top of Alaska, when I spent three months interning with the U.S. Weather Bureau in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. I didn't expect to see the Northern Lights there, for two reasons: We were close to the magnetic north pole, where they are less likely to occur, and, more importantly, it was summer, when the sun never sets for two or three months, depending on your latitude. So, it was still on my wish list to see the aurora borealis, which was only a part of what has been a lifelong preoccupation with the North. From when I was a small child, I remember my mother singing "Fuzzy Wuzzy" to me, about a bear who "lost his crop in an arctic barbershop." My more serious interest was sparked by reports from such personalities as Lowell Thomas and his son Lowell, Junior, and particularly by Mike Rose, who worked as an office-furniture salesman for my dad in Washington, D.C., while studying for his law degree. In 1957, Mike and his wife, Bea, headed to the then territory of Alaska, ostensibly for two years, to help it become a state. They settled in Anchorage and never left, becoming active in the community and state and helping to establish the first synagogue in Alaska. Mike served for a term as a state legislator. He tried to convince my dad to come to Alaska and create a market for office supplies and furniture. I remember some family discussions, and I think Dad was tempted, but in the end he declined.

When people today hear about our family's year on the road, with its school year in rural Alaska, they ask, "How did you ever talk your wife into that?" I answer, "It was her idea." Pat wanted to support my wish

to go there, and she also knew that with our oldest child, Dan, about to start middle school, it was an opportune time to leave our suburban life for a while. She felt that once he entered high school, when peers become so important, it would be a more difficult transition.

Pat and I were semi-nomads ourselves for the first 9 years of our marriage, having moved 14 times before ending up for the last 41 (minus our year in the North) in Reston, Virginia. We headed out west a year after our 1971 marriage in Wheaton, Maryland, in a used, orange Dodge window van (which we christened "Truck a l'Orange" to distinguish it from Pat's sister Alice's pickup, "Toulouse Lautruck"). We left good paying jobs in the D.C. area, intending to eventually settle in Davis, California. After a couple of months meandering west by way of Boston, New Hampshire, Vermont, Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, north around Lake Huron and Lake Superior, over and back to Isle Royale National Park (to hopefully hear wolves and see moose), on to Topeka, and Denver, we ended up in Provo, Utah, where Pat had previously attended Brigham Young University. We had considered stopping permanently in rural Vermont after staying two weeks there over spring break-up, with Mike Goldfinger, a friend of mine from back home. Mike lived in one room of an abandoned bobbin mill. He worked with wood and eventually produced museum-quality craft furniture.

Shortly before our marriage, Pat had earned the final credits she needed to graduate from BYU by hiking hundreds of miles across southern Utah for a month with a youth-leadership survival class. The hikers were fed minimum rations, lived off the land for a couple of days, and carried only a blanket, canteen, and an over-the-shoulder "possible bag," fashioned from the leg of a pair of old blue jeans, to hold anything else. Her stash included a pocket-knife and small Bible and was increased with rocks and petrified wood samples she picked up along the way to present to her grandmother on her return. By day they hiked over

rocks and ridges, crossed clean and dirty rivers with occasional patches of quicksand, and, if necessary, rappelled and scrambled down steep cliffs. At night they slept under the stars, wrapped only in their blankets, sometimes having to break the frost off anything left out damp the night before. For several days they stayed in solo isolation, each in a different meander along a stream bed.

I, too, had done my share of ill-equipped camping, as well as low-budget cross-country travel and hitch hiking, so we were no strangers to a more Spartan way of life. We had left for the West partly because our life in suburban Maryland was becoming too materialistic and hectic.

In the fall of 1972, a couple of months following our arrival in Provo and still two years BC (before children), we moved to a small uninsulated frame cabin at 7,000 feet on Mount Timpanogos. Timp, as it is known locally, is a 12,000-foot peak in the Wasatch Range, dominating the skyline north of Provo. I was the winter caretaker for BYU's Aspen Grove Family Camp, which operated during the spring, summer, and fall. We were there to make sure things were maintained during the off season. Once snow began to fall in earnest, the highway department stopped plowing the road, the Alpine Loop around Timp, at Robert Redford's Sundance Ski Resort, which was 2 miles of switchbacks and 1,000 feet of elevation below us. We left Truck a l'Orange parked there well into spring and had to cross-country ski in and out, which Pat did daily to work at Sundance.

Redford (whom we occasionally interacted with) and his caretaker each had a home with their families not far above the parking lot and were our closest permanent neighbors. We were the highest residence on our side of the mountain, about even with the tops of the ski runs. Early in the fall, "Bob," as the Sundance staff called him, came up to play tennis with a partner on our court at Aspen Grove. Not certain who he was, I asked him if he had permission to use the court. "Yes," he said. "I'm Redford, the owner of

Sundance, and this is [so and so, maybe Sydney Pollock]." I answered, "I'm Mudrick, the caretaker here."

That winter was the worst in 35 years, dumping over 30 feet of snow, with sometimes as much as 3 feet of new powder overnight. Over time, the snow packed down into depths of 10 or more feet, which had to be removed from the roofs of the summer cabins and through which I had to clear trails. Our little one-room home was buried on its uphill side for months. Temperatures would hover around minus 30 for a week at a time. The inside surface of our front door acted as a thermometer, with the height of the frost showing where room temperature transitioned from below freezing to above as it approached the ceiling. The line was often at least halfway up the door. We raised our bed to take advantage of the heat gradient. We had to shut off our running-water system when the toilet bowl froze solid in November. We melted snow for drinking and bathing until spring on our propane-adapted kitchen stove. Heat was provided by three portable electric space heaters when the power wasn't knocked out by storms.

Pat would arrive at Sundance in the dark before dawn, after skiing down the 2 miles of snow-covered road, to open the snack bar and start preparing sandwiches for the day. Seeing herself in the ladies' room mirror one morning, with an inch of frost on her eyebrows, she said she looked like Omar Sharif in a Russian winter in the movie *Doctor Zhivago.* Most days I would come down after finishing my chores and inspections of the neighboring cabins, which were sealed for the winter, to hang out until it was time to accompany Pat back home. One time, as I was helping to adjust bindings in the ski shop, I got into a conversation with a stranger. After a bit, I noticed a couple of women standing in the doorway giggling. It turned out the stranger was Paul Newman, although I didn't figure that out until later. What impressed me most about him and Redford was how short they were.

Even before the road closed, guests were few. Pat's mother and sister came during the beautiful early-fall

weather. Carol Harden, a high-school friend adept at outdoor life and mountaineering, arrived on a snowy day. The top half of Timp was socked in, obscuring its imposing visage from the valley and the view of the cliffs towering above our cabin from our front door. To see what we saw daily, watch Redford's movie *Jeremiah Johnson.* Many of its snow scenes were filmed nearby on Timp, and it has numerous shots showing the mountain and our view of the cirque above us. At one point Redford's character refers to it as "those passes there," but it was the route to the summit. The movie was filmed the previous winter and was released December 21st. We had a minor accident New Year's Eve driving back from seeing it, when we skidded on black ice on the canyon road. We avoided going into the river but managed to just clip the back of a passing car, seemingly the only other vehicle traveling that night. All were unhurt, but the other car had a dented fender, while our van suffered a crushed headlight. We still had to park at Sundance and ski home in the dark. It was pointed out to me by the state trooper who arrived at the scene that our back tires were worn to their cloth belts, the product of many miles and few financial resources. Some 13 years later in Alaska, I made a similar discovery when I couldn't get up a hill past Gakona following the first major snowfall, although the belts this time were metal, not cloth.

The photo of us behind our van was taken months later by my brother, Steve, after the road was reopened as far as Aspen Grove, when he and my sister-in-law, Joan, flew from Massachusetts to Utah for a visit. Other people would unwittingly try to continue farther up the Loop past the road-closed barrier, in anything from a Mustang (which immediately high centered in the snow) to a four wheel drive Land

Cruiser (which conquered an additional hundred yards but had to be turned back downhill by attaching its winch to successive aspen trees). As the only light and phone in the vicinity, we were involved in rescues, usually at night, sometimes driving the hapless adventurers to Provo 15 miles below in the valley.

The camp was run by BYU's Alumni Association, where Pat got a job shortly after our arrival in Utah. She learned about the caretaker position, which a friend, Karl Stice, had held the previous two winters and was ready to move on. I think I was hired because no one else applied, assuming anyone else had even heard about it. It wasn't an official university position. Aside from the rent-free cabin, we were paid only $100 a month. In addition to that and all the snow we could eat, the only other tangible benefits included free electricity and propane for the stove from a large bottle uphill next to the cabin. (Late in the winter, it ran out and we had to dig it out from under the snow that buried that side of the cabin.) We had a pay telephone on a tree 30 feet from our door. The phone had no dial but, instead, an operator on a ring-down party-line circuit. We could pick up calls at the phone booth at Sundance if we heard our personal code of four long rings. (When the snow got deep, we couldn't get to the phone before the operator would stop ringing. I convinced the phone company

to move it into our cabin and helped the lineman who came.) There were no retirement or medical benefits, but the best perks were the intangibles: the spectacular location surrounded by a forest of quaking aspens in the shadow of Timp's summit, the sightings and telltale signs of the local animal life, the pristine star-filled night skies, nearly bright enough even without a moon to cast shadows, the isolation together with only a cat we had brought up from Provo, the daily springtime cascades of avalanches from the cliffs above us, and the challenge of surviving whatever came our way.

Pat had spent 5 years shuttling between Utah and Maryland while earning her degree. We arrived in Provo together in early July 1972. At Pat's urging, I set off soon afterward for southern Utah to attend BYU's archaeology field school in Montezuma Canyon east of Blanding. Another friend of hers, Bruce Verhaaren, was there, and she wanted me to be able to indulge my interest in archaeology, along with my passion for the high desert of the Four Corners region. She stayed in Provo working at the Alumni Association, while I drove the van down to Montezuma Canyon for the second half of the summer. During that time, she got another friend to drop her off at Aspen Grove to join a hike to the 12,000-foot summit of Timpanogos with a group of BYU women. The hike had been cancelled but she hadn't been notified. By the time she figured out why no one else was at the trail head, her possible ride back to Provo had left. She did the Pat thing and took off by herself up the trail and through the cirque, to the mountain's summit some 4,900 feet above. Enroute, she spent a night alone under the stars and finished the summit ridge hike in the company of a badger who warily proceeded her for part of the time.

So, it was not out of character when, 14 years later in July 1986, we once again left home and jobs, gave away or crammed all our belongings into an 8 x 10 storage unit, rented our house to friends for a year to cover our mortgage payments and care for a different cat, and headed to Alaska. This time we were

accompanied by our then five children Dan, Sam, Ben, Mary, and Jacob, who ranged in age from 11 years to 6 months, respectively. For the trip, we acquired an 8-year-old Chevy Beauville full-size van from a volunteer fireman who had maintained it in good working order. We outfitted it with a storage platform, side and rear screen doors, protective headlight baskets, a spare tire mounted on the back, and a bench seat that unfolded into a bed. We bid farewell to family and friends and drove and camped for the next month and a half to Alaska by way of Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory.

I'll just mention one particular stretch of the trip, because it was representative of some of our travel in Alaska. The road we took north from the Yellowhead Highway in British Columbia into the Yukon was the Cassiar Highway. Although today it is paved, except for some short stretches, back then it was dirt and gravel for much of its 450 miles. We chose it because, according to *The Milepost* ("the Bible for travelers in the North"), it was more scenic than the customary parallel stretch of the Alaska Highway. It also saved us 130 miles (if no time) and avoided additional miles of backtracking after visiting dear friends Buck and Martha Nunn and their family in Vanderhoof, B.C. While in Vanderhoof, we mounted a second spare tire on the front of the van in anticipation of the road ahead. The scenery delivered as promised, as did the warnings about the road surface. Most of the time, except for logging trucks heading south, we were the only vehicle in sight in either direction. Once, a helicopter followed us for several miles, only far enough overhead to avoid the treetops. I don't know why unless it was their way of having fun. One evening we pulled into an empty campground and started to set up our tent and prepare dinner. Shortly after that, a pickup with a camper in the bed, pulled in next to us. The occupants were Phyllis and Verl Averitt, older friends from Virginia, returning to their current home in Utah after visiting family in Alaska. Once, on a

business trip in the California desert, I unexpectedly ran into one of their sons. We are amazed by such occurrences, considering the odds against them, although I suspect they are far outnumbered by times when, in unusual places, we are unknowingly in close proximity to others we know. We'll never be sure, unless Google admits they've been tracking us longer than we think.

Like our decision to take the road less traveled, not out of character but slightly out of our minds, we had left home with no job prospects, figuring we had enough money to last us 2 months, in which time we would find full-time work. We hoped to live in Fairbanks, because it was the farthest north city, and find a job in my field at the University of Alaska in College, outside Fairbanks. Otherwise, we supposed we might end up in Anchorage. However, Alaska, was in the throes of a deep oil depression that had flattened the state's economy, and jobs were scarce everywhere. After entering the state, we toured portions of its road-accessible area for a week or so, visited with Mike Rose in Anchorage, and searched unsuccessfully for work for the next two weeks, while we stayed in College with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Perry (no relation to the arctic explorer). They were the parents of friends from our church ward back in Virginia. We decided that living there in a cheap apartment, with traffic lights and McDonald's, would be little different than living in northern Virginia, except for long, dark, cold nights and ice fog. Further, by Alaska standards, the Fairbanks area turned out to be relatively unscenic. If we were going to scrape through for the school year, we wanted to settle in a more challenging environment. So, we headed to rural Gakona Junction, where our friends Linda and Jeremy Weld lived. We had visited with them on our way into the state. The junction is one of two main crossroads in the Copper River Basin. The basin, or valley, is the remnant of an ice-age lake the size of West Virginia, surrounded by four mountain ranges, including a semi-active volcano, Mt. Wrangell. The area's sparse population of perhaps 3,000 lived mostly along the roads, in

scattered small settlements. Gakona Junction was barely a place, so small it would have said "Welcome" on both sides of the sign if there had been one. We were 150 miles from the nearest McDonald's, in Palmer, which was also next to the nearest traffic light.

Life in the valley is hardscrabble at best. Residents, Native and non-Native alike, hustle during the short summer to accrue enough money and supplies to carry them through the winter. Because we planned to return to Virginia after school ended, we decided not to compete with the locals for any full-time work, hoping to subsist on part-time opportunities and very frugal living. Prices for basics like groceries were very high. For example, bread and milk cost at least three to four times more than back home. There was a Tastee Freez 16 miles away in Glennallen, the region's largest population center with perhaps 500 people. A hamburger that would cost about a buck back home went for four or five. After the initial shock of pricing a meal for seven – accurately depicted in this unpublished cartoon – we never ate there. The high cost of food, services, and other necessities might have made our rural stay impossible, in conjunction with the long nights, dangerous roads, killer temperatures, blizzards, and hazardous animals.

Fortunately, however, Costco and a similar warehouse store, Price Saver, had come to Anchorage about a year earlier, as Mike Rose pointed out to me when got there, bringing with them prices comparable to those "Outside" in the contiguous 48 states. An 8-

hour, 400-mile round trip to Anchorage every other month kept us in supplies, as well as providing opportunities to see a movie, attend the annual Fur Rendezvous (aka "Fur Rondy"), and, yes, dine at McDonald's. I don't remember eating Eskimo Pies while we were in Alaska, but I did hear they were popular in some of the remote arctic villages, even if not properly renamed "Yup'ik Pies."

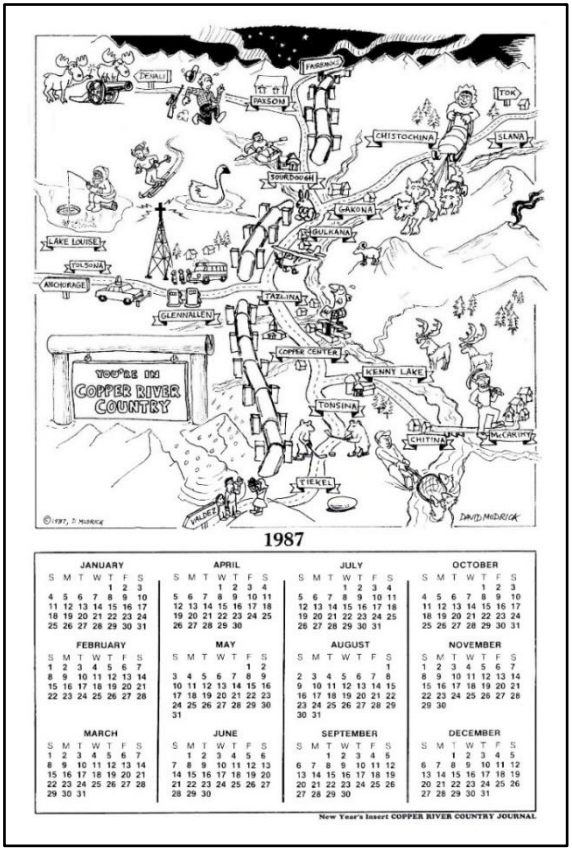
Dan, Mary, and Sam try out their thrift-store cross-country skis, while Ben supervises from the uncompleted arctic porch and Jacob takes it all in through the front window.

Over time, I worked at light construction and did a lot of substitute teaching. By the end of our stay, we were pretty well integrated into the community. Pat and I were asked to take over the operation of the two-room 1-through-6 grade school outside the nearby Native village of Gakona when the teaching couple, Bob and Joanne Carnahan, had to go to Anchorage for the last month of the school year to treat her cancer. As noted above, I also provided cartoons and drawings for the Welds' *Copper River Country Journal*, and together we produced *Too Far North.*

I think that's enough backstory, so on to the cartoons and further excessive commentary.

Cartoon Map of Copper River Country

In December 1986, the *Country Journal* distributed a wall calendar for the coming year featuring my black-and-white cartoon map of Copper River Country. One of my fondest memories is seeing the calendar on the wall in a Native home in Gulkana Village. In 2020, I revised and colored the map for use in the Welds' website. The version below is the most recent update. There are many changes from the 1986 map, such as additional flora and fauna, labels for highways, mountain ranges, and other places, and the family at Thompson Pass taking a selfie instead of a snapshot. Hopefully, famed Chistochina dog musher Lena Charley is now recognizable. Sadly, Sourdough Lodge burned to the ground after 1986 and has been removed from the map. Other lodges and historic roadhouses not pictured have also been lost to fire, including one at Gakona Junction and, most recently, the Point Lodge at Lake Louise, February 25, 2022. The Tazlina Trading Post reopened 13 months after burning down on December 20, 2020.

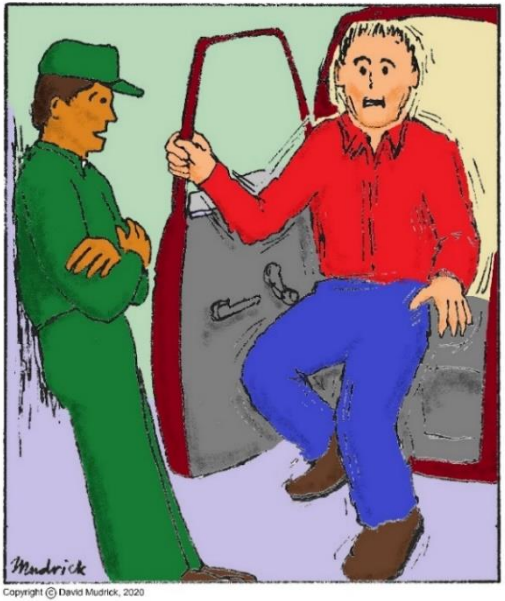


2022 update of the Copper River Country map

The Copper River Basin houses a string of small settlements, mostly on its two main roads, the Richardson and Glenn Highways, including the Tok Cutoff. Tiny Gakona Junction, where the map's rabbit is sitting, lies between two Native villages, Gulkana and Gakona, with perhaps 80 to 100 persons in each when we were there. Today, 35 years later, as if frozen in time as well as winter, the valley hasn't changed much, but earlier, in the 1970s, a decade before we arrived, the population had boomed to around 10,000 in support of the construction of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. (The Pipeline, accompanied by the Richardson Highway, bisects the map and the valley.) The project brought people and money into the region, along with an increase in drugs, alcohol, prostitution, and their accompanying side effects. For good or ill, those boom days are long gone. Staff at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the nation's largest national park and which we overlooked from Gakona Junction, liked the new map enough to post it on their Facebook page. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services also liked it, and it may have helped convince them to clarify the Copper Valley's boundaries and separate its Covid data from Valdez-Cordova statistics. There was also talk of using the map in an effort to convince local authorities to fund a new public well in the valley.

The egg-shaped object by Tiekel is "The World's Largest Pet Rock," which we saw on our trips to Valdez. The last time it was covered with snow. Its host lodge closed for a while, but a couple years ago reopened its dining room. The rock was still there. In truth it lay on the west side of the highway.

On and Off the Road



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"How was the road?"

Two-thirds of the residents of Alaska live in urban centers like Fairbanks, Juneau, and Anchorage (where the majority reside). Otherwise, they live on the road, on the coast, or in the Bush. "On the road" means accessible by car or truck; "on the coast" by air or sea; and "in the Bush" by air, water, ATV (all-terrain vehicle), dog sled, snowmachine, on foot, on skis, or on snowshoes, but in all areas, accessible only if weather, terrain, and circumstances permit it. Although more than twice the size of Texas, Alaska lies between Connecticut and New Hampshire in its number of road miles. I modified an old clipart map to create one of the Alaska Road System and Marine Highway System. Don't be misled by all the placenames off the road, which are mostly tiny, isolated Native settlements, not tourist towns with quaint commercial centers or accommodations. The great majority of the state consists of unimaginably vast tracts, unpopulated other than by permanent and migratory fauna. Still, some stretches of highway that from the road appear to be unpopulated reveal from the air isolated homes and other buildings. These are usually on their own bulldozed gravel or dirt road.


The Alaska Road System
Major paved routes
Major seasonal, partially paved, and/or unpaved routes
Major Canadian paved routes
The Alaska Marine Highway System
Mainline, day boat, and shuttle ferry routes
Routes precluded in winter by weather restrictions
Barrow
Wainwright
Point Lay
Point Hope
Kivalina
Noatak
Kotzebue
Shishmaref
Selawik
Taylor
Teller
Council
Koyuk
Nome
White Mountain
Gambell
Savoonga
Unalakleet
St Michael
Alakanuk
Flat
Scammon Bay
Pilot Station
Sleetmute
Hooper Bay
Kalskag
Tununak Bay
Bethel
Kwethluk
Mekoryuk
Kipnuk
Kwigillingok
Nondalton
Ekwok
Dillingham
Clarks Point
Egegik
Pilot Point
Ugashik
Chignik
Perryville
Fort Randall/Cold Bay
Sand Point
False Pass
King Cove
Akutan
Pavlof Harbor
Dutch Harbor/Unalaska
Nikolski
Adak
Atka
Attu
Prudhoe Bay
Wiseman
Beaver
Fort Yukon
Circle
Livengood
Rampart
Minto
Tanana
College
Fairbanks
Nenana
North Pole
Eagle
Delta Junction
Tok Junction
Tanacross
Dawson
Fort McPherson
Inuvik
Carmacks
Nabesna
Gakona
Copper Center
McGrath
Curry
Glennallen
Talkeetna
Palmer
McCarthy
Valdez
Anchorage
Tatitlek
Cordova
Cape Yakataga
Yakutat
Whittier
Kenai
Seward
Chenega Bay
Homer
Seldovia
Port Graham
Port William
Ouzinkie
Kodiak
Port Lions
Karluk
Old Harbor
Whitehorse
Skagway
Haines
Juneau
Gustavus
Hoonah
Tenakee
Angoon
Pelican
Petersburg
Kake
Wrangell
Sitka
Ketchikan
Metlakatla
Klawock
Hydaburg
Prince Rupert
To Bellingham
Kilometers
0 100 200
Miles
0 100 200
These distance scales are approximate because of map distortion, probably most accurate in the central area of Alaska.
Much-adapted clipart from here: 1994 MAGELLAN GeographixSM Santa Barbara, CA (800) 929-4MAPS

The red lines mark main roads, excluding the complexes around urban centers. Brown lines are roads that are unpaved for long stretches, if not completely, and may be closed in winter. The northernmost unpaved road, the Dalton Highway, follows the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline from outside Fairbanks to Deadhorse and Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean. It has few (if any) settlements and very few services along its 415-mile length. Another mostly unpaved road, the Denali Highway, covers 134 very scenic miles from Paxson (on the Richardson Highway) to Cantwell (on the Parks Highway) near the entrance to Denali National Park. It is a significant shortcut across the Alaska Road System in miles – not time. It's closed in the winter. Sadly, people attempt winter travel on the Denali, despite barriers and warnings, sometimes with fatal results. "Highway" is a euphemism when applied to such roads, but even Alaska's open, paved roads can be tricky: miles and miles of two-lane blacktop, often without shoulders and flanked by dangerous borrow ditches and white-knuckle-inducing terrain, such as crumbling cliffs rising on one side and precipitous drops on the other. All road surfaces – asphalt, gravel, and dirt – require maintenance for rockfalls, washouts, and permafrost damage. When traveling in Alaska, you should always carry emergency supplies, including food, water, clothing, and first aid gear, against breakdowns, weather, and sudden encounters with large, unpredictable animals. The orange roads on the map are Canadian routes to Alaska and between Haines and Skagway and the rest of the state. The lower road on the right is the Cassiar Highway, which we took north, but back then was a "highway" in name only.

The Alaska Marine Highway System is a state-run vehicle-ferry fleet – not a surface road as assumed by some unknowing travelers – serving communities in Southwest Alaska (the easternmost Aleutian Islands, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Kodiak Island Archipelago), Southcentral Alaska (the Kenai Peninsula and the Gulf of Alaska shoreline), and Southeast Alaska (the "Panhandle"). Out-of-state stops include Prince

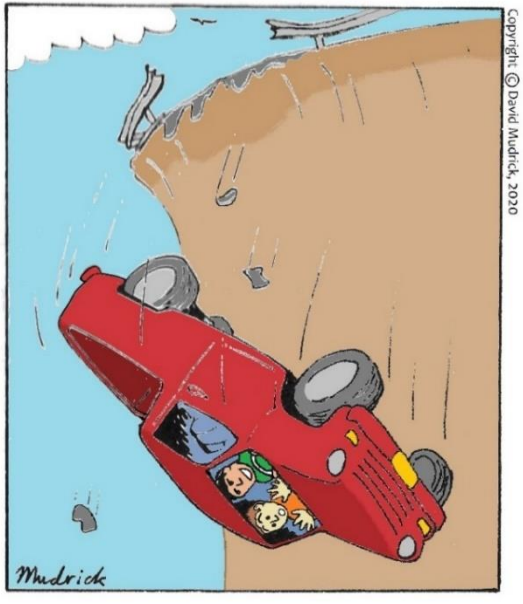
Rupert, B.C., and Bellingham, Washington. The routes west of Kodiak Island do not operate in winter, because of weather restrictions. We used several ferries on our way out of Alaska, from Haines to Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, spending the last night crossing rough open water on the way to Prince Rupert. Pat wasn't feeling well at the time. We found out later she was in her first trimester carrying Jesse (he who was seeing Alaska "through Mommy's ear").

Even with the potential perils and pitfalls of Alaska's land and marine highways, there are still possibilities for humor if you're of a mind to find them. You can decide for yourself how well I did.

As young Dan once said, "Some things are funnier in the telling than in the happening." That was certainly true of our more-harrowing experiences while driving, as illustrated by the "How was the road?" cartoon. I met with an *Anchorage Daily News* editor, Howard Weaver, to discuss the possibility of periodically posting individual cartoons from *Too Far North* in the paper. The original of this cartoon appeared in the sports section. However, along with everyone else in the state, the paper didn't have extra money to budget, so no others were used. I offered them for free, but space, too, was at a premium. A rival newspaper, *The Anchorage Times*, published a review of *Too Far North*. The reviewer, Ann Chandonnet, concluded her comments with, "The drawings are not polished, but some of the gags are really funny. The book's cover drawing shows ed a station wagon [actually, our Chevy van] loaded for a long journey facing the words 'Too Far North' written in aurora borealis above the horizon, and the line, 'Do you think someone's trying to tell us something?' Could that someone be David Mudrick?" This review and another are presented in the Rearword section.

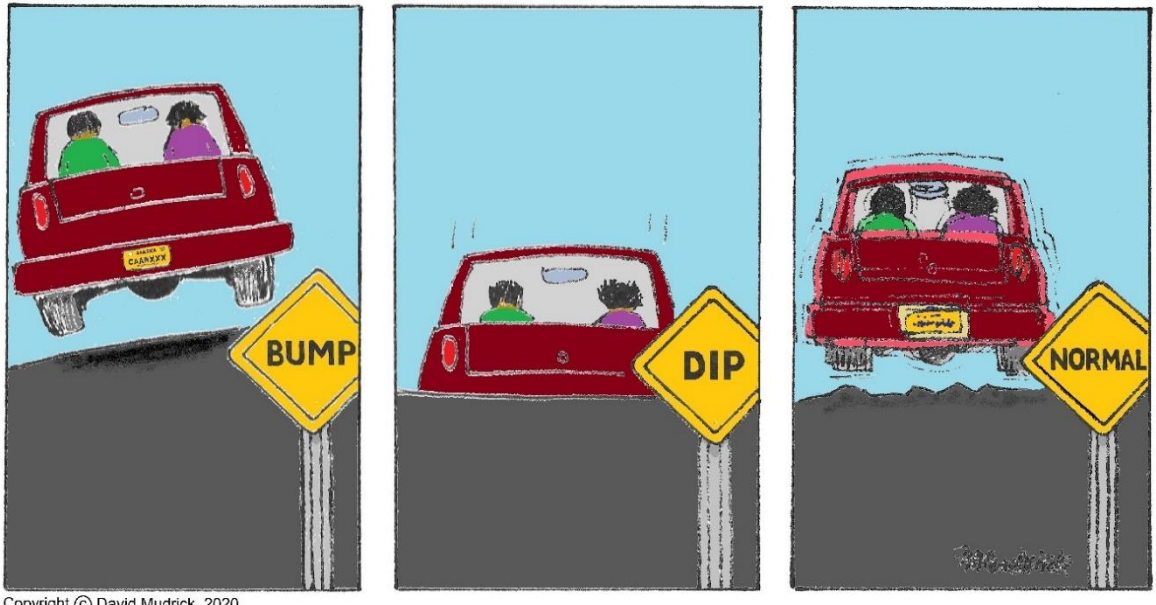
It's not exclusive to Alaskans, but drivers sometimes tend to rely more on technology than on caution,

often to their detriment. Driving over a cliff, even in four wheel drive, would only be funny in the retelling, if at all, and only if it didn't happen to you. Although the "four wheel drive" cartoon was not meant to be a specific location, some readers of the *Country Journal* website have identified it as Long Lake Hill, one of the many hazardous spots on the Glenn Highway enroute to Anchorage. One reader said the driver looked like his son.



"Don't worry, it's in four wheel drive!"

I had a lot of fun with road signs, as you can see in “Bump Dip Normal” and subsequent cartoons. That one is not much of an exaggeration of actual conditions.



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The Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline runs 800 miles from Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean to Valdez on Prince William Sound. It bisects the Copper River Valley on its way, often paralleling the Richardson Highway.

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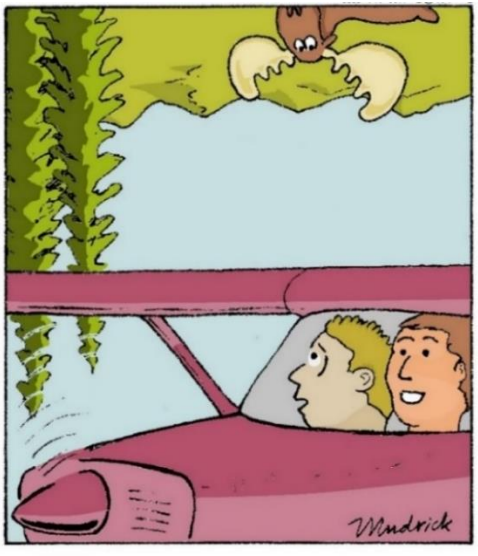
Its construction during the 1970s greatly, if temporarily, upset life in the valley, bringing in a surplus of people and money. One tragic side-effect was the increased access to alcohol in the valley and the social, physical, and medical problems that attended it, including automobile fatalities among the residents.

For much of its length, the Pipeline is well elevated above the permafrost because it carries heated oil; otherwise, as in the vicinity of Glennallen, it is buried.

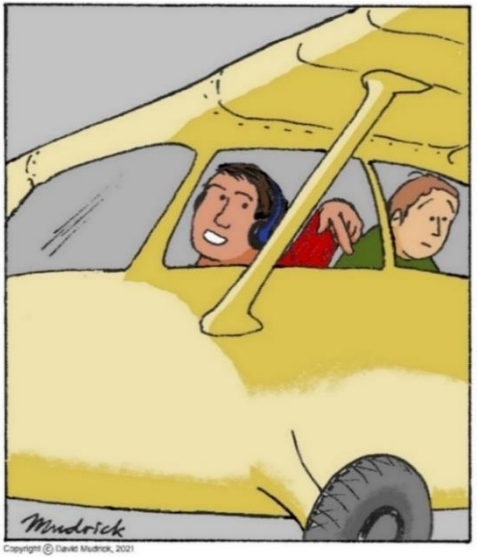
Environmentalists were concerned that the raised sections would block the routes of migratory animals, like caribou, so higher sections were constructed at strategic points. However, I don't think the environmentalists or anyone else foresaw road crossings like the one in the "Pipeline Xing" cartoon.

We'll see more road and sign cartoons in subsequent sections, but for now we'll just scratch our heads and continue.

Off the Ground



"Ever notice how you can lose your sense of direction in those fog banks?"



"...and down there, if you could see it through the fog, is the largest glacier in the region...."

Airplanes are the lifeblood of most Alaskan communities and many state-wide operations. Local and private landing strips are very common. Our friend Mike Shelton and his son Dwayne completed a home-built two-seater airplane in their garage over the winter. We were privileged to witness its maiden flight from Gulkana Airport to a private grass strip near their home.

During the production of *Too Far North,* we needed to go to Anchorage to purchase more paper. Because road conditions were too hazardous, Jeremy and I hitched a flight from nearby Gulkana Airport with Central Alaskan Missions pilot Richard Nalos in CAM's Cessna 206. In Anchorage, we purchased

sufficient reams of 11x17 paper and cover stock, but with conditions worsening rapidly, we almost got stranded there. After we were finally cleared for takeoff, the return flight was foggy, with limited visibility. Nevertheless, it provided the inspiration for the first two cartoons in this section. In retrospect, the upside-down one is not as funny as it is tragically accurate. The "see it through the fog" cartoon is what we saw or couldn't see from the air.

Two days after Dan started the seventh grade at the K-through-12 school in Glennallen, Pat received a call saying they weren't sure what to do with him. The first thing she thought was, "Oh no! He's been beat up!" In fact, they had quickly determined he needed some advanced courses, which we had quietly suggested but were ignored. One was a high-school-level math class. Another, called aerospace science, consisted of him reading the FAA ground-school flight training manual, after which he could have taken that portion of the pilot's examination. He might have continued with private flight lessons on his own, although at 12 years old he was probably too young to receive his license. Exciting as that might have been, we didn't check, not having the resources nor intending to be in Alaska long enough.

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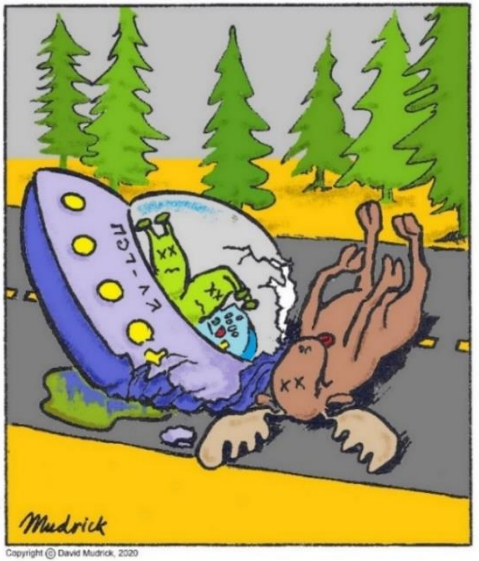
"Wire the Ayatollah not to hijack any more bush pilots!"

The 1987 "hijack" cartoon shown here is now out of date, but it wouldn't have been particularly appropriate even if updated. At the time, hijacking by state-sponsored terrorists was not uncommon, although not in obscure, unprofitable places like the Alaskan Bush.

Nevertheless, despite the potential for humor, I questioned the efficacy of including a political cartoon, because of the volatile nature of politics in general and the potentially short lifespan of the specific material, funny or not. Of course, I included it, anyway, but this time I'm not going to. Oops, too late. Well at least I'm not going to color it. You can wire that to the Ayatollah.

While we're still on the subject of flying, why is the UFO-hits-moose cartoon funny? Maybe it isn't, but if you want my opinion, read the short essay, "My Brush with Alaskan Humor - or - What's So Funny about Running into a Moose?" in the Rearword section. Or just suffice it to say that it makes me laugh. I didn't see any UFOs in Alaska, despite the clear skies and despite the area being a hotbed for conspiracy theorists. (There *is* that giant underground pyramid "bigger than Gizeh, not that far from Valdez" that's suppressing consciousness, isn't there?) Personally, I don't think representatives of a civilization with life that intelligent would select rural Alaska given alternatives like Cannes, Acapulco, or Bayonne, New Jersey. Then, again, maybe they'd come for the same reasons we chose to live there, or maybe their GPS (galactic positioning service) would route them there if they chose "no tolls."



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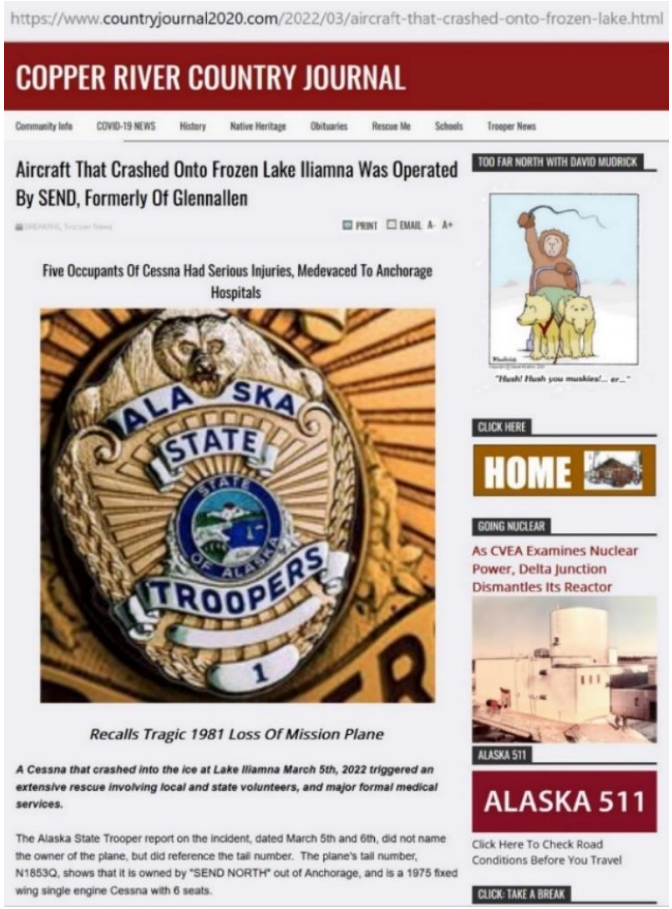
!!! Breaking News !!!

Here's an ironic reminder that while you may sometimes find comedy in the harsh environment of rural Alaska, there's always the potential for tragedy. While editing this manuscript Monday, March 7, 2022, breaking news from the *Country Journal* flashed on my phone. The headline, "Aircraft That Crashed Onto Frozen Lake Iliamna Was Operated By SEND, Formerly Of Glennallen," grabbed my attention. I had been doing research for the commentary on my two "airborne" cartoons and found my notes, below, from our flight to Anchorage. You can see my sketch of the plane and notation of its tail number, N1853Q, as well as my hesitancy about its model, which I wrote as "Cessna 260(?)". The wind at Gulkana Airport that morning made hearing difficult when I asked Richard for the model. I learned in my research that there was a Cessna 206, not 260. To confirm that Richard was flying for CAM, I googled the tail number and found the owner now listed as SEND NORTH, the



https://www.countryjournal2020.com/2022/03/aircraft-that-crashed-onto-frozen-lake.html

COPPER RIVER COUNTRY JOURNAL

Community Info | COVID-19 NEWS | History | Native Heritage | Obituaries | Rescue Me | Schools | Trooper News

Aircraft That Crashed Onto Frozen Lake Iliamna Was Operated By SEND, Formerly Of Glennallen

PRINT EMAIL A- A+

Five Occupants Of Cessna Had Serious Injuries, Medevaced To Anchorage Hospitals

Recalls Tragic 1981 Loss Of Mission Plane

A Cessna that crashed into the ice at Lake Iliamna March 5th, 2022 triggered an extensive rescue involving local and state volunteers, and major formal medical services.

The Alaska State Trooper report on the incident, dated March 5th and 6th, did not name the owner of the plane, but did reference the tail number. The plane's tail number, N1853Q, shows that it is owned by "SEND NORTH" out of Anchorage, and is a 1975 fixed wing single engine Cessna with 6 seats.

TOO FAR NORTH WITH DAVID MUDRICK

"Hush! Hush you muskies!... er..."

CLICK HERE

HOME

GOING NUCLEAR

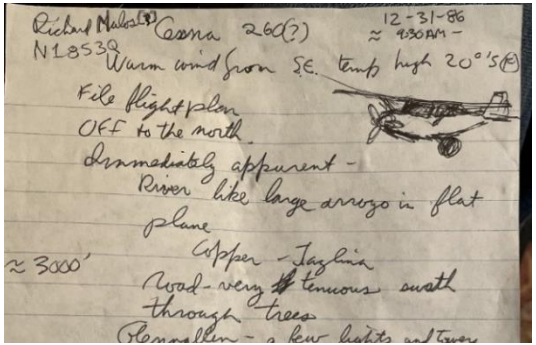
As CVEA Examines Nuclear Power, Delta Junction Dismantles Its Reactor

ALASKA 511

ALASKA 511

Click Here To Check Road Conditions Before You Travel

CLICK: TAKE A BREAK

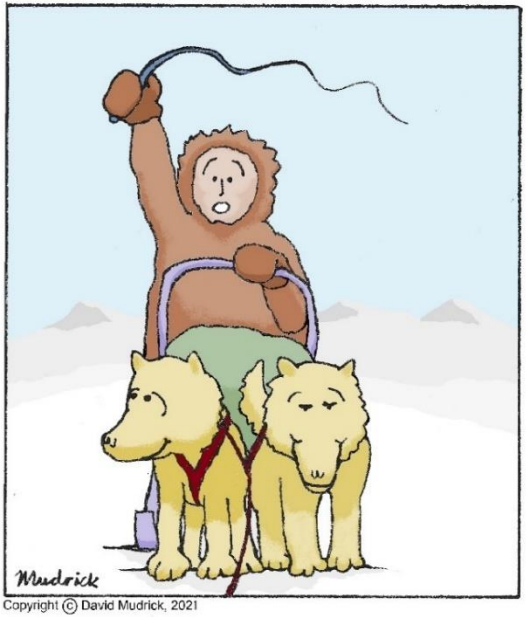


former CAM of Glennallen, then owner of the Alaska Bible College and station KCAM. The Welds' article described the March 5th incident with details from the Alaska State Trooper report, which didn't list the plane's owner but did give its tail number as N1853Q. Linda ascertained the operator, SEND, the same way I had. When I saw that name and number in their article, I realized it was the very plane we had flown to Anchorage! Linda and Jeremy were surprised when I let them know. There were no fatalities listed, but five occupants were medevaced to hospitals in Anchorage with serious injuries. Richard is no longer with SEND, which had maintained the aircraft, built in 1975, for the 35 years since our flight, and maybe for its entire life.

Our flight was on New Year's Eve, Wednesday, 12/31/1986, which might be another reason we chose to fly to Anchorage: to stay ahead of the holiday and possibly a long weekend without printing supplies. We returned in time to set off fireworks that evening in the snow outside our cabin in celebration of the New Year, a local custom as you will read later in this manuscript. This is my photo of Richard and Jeremy, left to right, by the plane. My sketch left out the tricycle landing gear's nose wheel and the cargo hold, where we stowed our purchased paper. We needed the paper because the lot we were using was cut wrong and jammed the press.

Mush, You Huskies!

Throughout the state, mushing, aka dogsledding, is a popular occupation or sport, depending on your needs and desires. However, the romance and the reality of mushing don't always mesh. During our initial weeks of touring, we watched a dry-land sled demonstration in Denali National Park. A female park ranger came over to Pat and discretely advised her not to let seven-month-old Jacob near the sled dogs. She said that they viewed little children not as humans but as prey. This was later corroborated by Linda Weld, who told us of having to pull her toddler's booted foot from the jaws of one of her dogs. I've heard some people say they prefer snowmachines, because if you break down, they won't try to eat you.



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"Hush! Hush you muskies!... er..."

When we were staying near Fairbanks, I spent time with our host's son in his small dogsled factory. Traditionally, sleds are made of wood, but he had acquired the inventory of a defunct ski company and was fabricating fiberglass sleds with parts cut from the skis he had purchased. In

"Mush to you, too, fella!"

theory they would be superior to wood sleds when racing because they were more flexible, allowing more of the runners' surface to be in continual contact with the ground over rough terrain. This should make the sled's passage over the ground faster. Apparently, it wasn't a hair-brained idea, and some top mushers, including Iditarod champion Susan Butcher purchased sleds from him to try it out. That's all I know.

Once settled in Gakona Junction, we attended a community event in the Native village of Chistochina, where we met famed local musher Lena Charley, featured on my map of the Copper River Valley. The Iditarod may be the most famous dogsled competition in the world, but the Copper Valley hosts its own grueling and respected annual event, the Copper Basin 300, billed as "the toughest 300 miles in Alaska." It was first run in 1990, 3 years after we left the state. Susan Butcher finished first in 1991 and 1992. Martin Buser finished second each of the first 8 years it was run, finally finishing first in 1999. The race was cancelled in 1996 due to weather, which says a lot about how harsh conditions can be in the valley. Whereas finishing first may be the ultimate goal of most mushers, just finishing at all is often a feat in itself. Some races, including the Iditarod, give a Red Lantern

Award, to the musher who comes in last to highlight the difficulty of just staying the course.

My cartoon of the dreaming husky may bely the actual treatment of sled dogs by most mushers, which seems to be very caring. Strict rules are in place in most races to ensure the safety of the dogs, if not the mushers. In 2007, 20 years after its publication, I saw a similar illustration from the early 1930s by William Yanert, labelled "The Old Dog's Dream." Of course, any good cartoon idea is likely to have been used previously, and not-so-good ideas even more likely.

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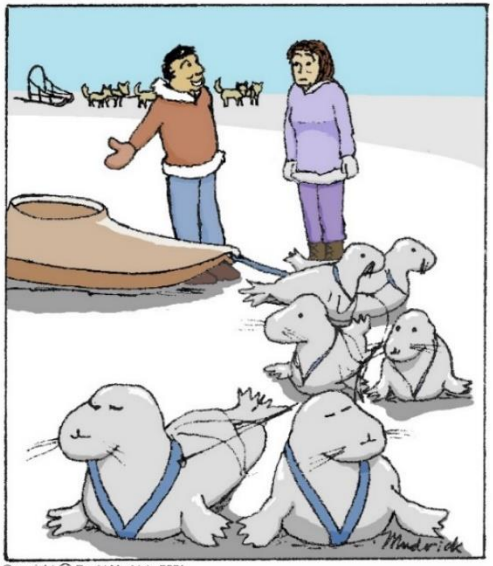
Whether or not the sled-dog-and-the snowmachine cartoon was a good idea, when adding color, I also added the shadows. I hope they make it clear that the dog is not jumping off the seat, as some had supposed in the original black-and-white version.

Whereas the cartoon of the ocean-going sled team may be an example of whimsical fancy, I think the one of the befuddled musher in his cabin is all too realistic. I recently found the first draft of the latter, which I'd forgotten pictured rabbits instead of sled dogs. The



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"...and this is my ocean-going model."

published version is much funnier and more universal. I probably intended the other as a shout out to our neighbor Alan LeMaster, who ran the Gakona Junction Village hotel, a hundred yards or so from our cabin. While we were there, Alan saved several dozen laboratory rabbits from extermination and installed them in an old barn, partly out of kindness and partly because Gakona is the Athabaskan word for "rabbit." When he and Shirley went "Outside," that is, left Alaska, for a winter break, he hired our 10-year-old son Sam to water them each day and collect the carcasses of any that had frozen to death. He also handed Sam a .22 rifle to keep any feral dogs away from the rabbits. He knew the way to a boy's heart. One memorable cloudless night when Sam and I were carrying jugs of warm water to the barn, a spectacular double-tailed meteor lit up the sky in front of us.

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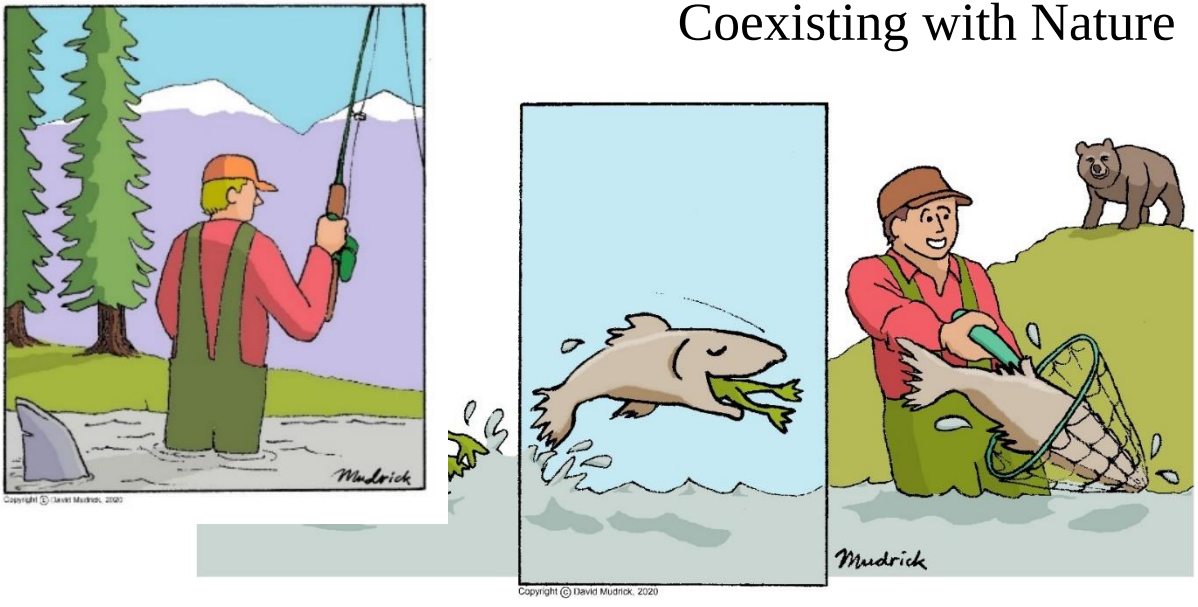
"I just can't figure out why she left me!"

Coexisting with Nature



The food chain

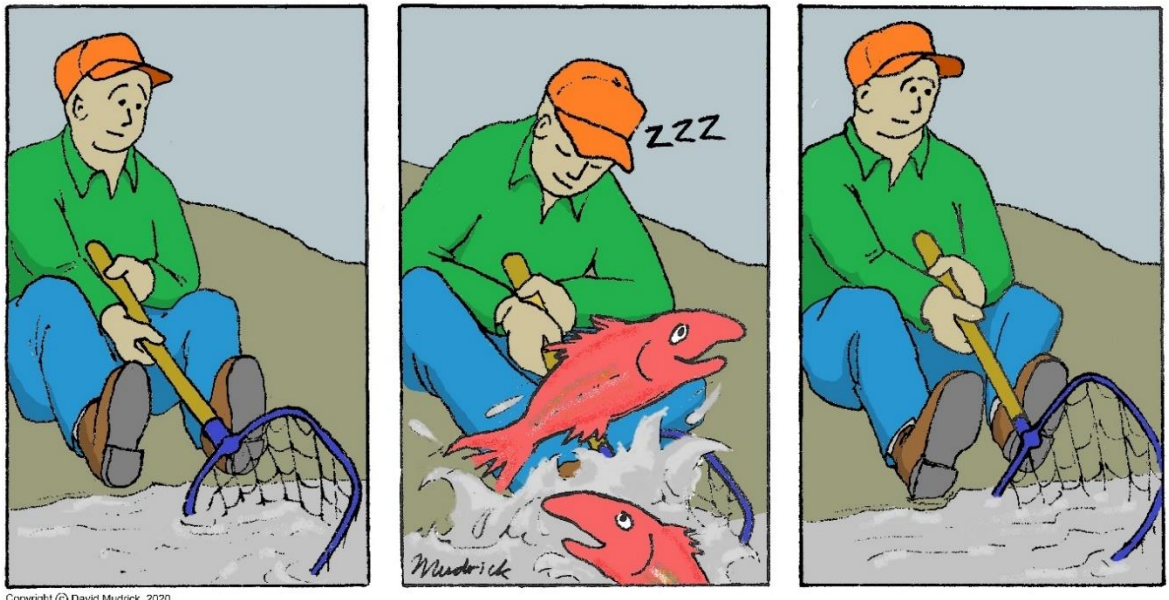
Some rural citizens gather edible plants and berries to supplement their diets, while many harvest wood for shelter, furniture, or fuel. Traditionally, many residents also depend to some degree on the available wild-animal resources through trapping, hunting, and fishing, or if not hunter-gatherers, themselves, may be the beneficiary of others in their families and communities. When interacting with those trapping, hunting, and fishing resources, some degree of coexistence must be practiced to ensure healthy animal populations,

as well as healthy human individuals when, say, coming into close contact with a bear or moose.

If my "food chain" and shark cartoons suggest that animals pose the greatest threat to fishermen, the biggest danger really is underestimating the power of running water. Glacier-fed rivers like the Copper are particularly lethal. Their milky gray color comes from the heavy load of powdered-rock sediment they carry from their sources, and the resultant opacity masks their swiftness. The combination of force and weight overtopping and filling a pair of hip boots can quickly drag a fisherman under, while the numbing shock of the ice-cold water saps his or her strength.

The fisherman in the "food chain" cartoon might deserve his impending fate, as he may be illegally using his net, even if only for cartoon-flow purposes. Dipnetting is allowed only in opaque glacial waters, where once you submerge the basket of your long-handled net, you can see neither it nor any fish wending its way upstream toward it. The high drama of sitting for hours, waiting for something to go bump in the net, and hopefully pulling out a 30-pound salmon mimics the bears patiently perched by falls, waiting for leaping fish to pass within reach.

Artistic necessity accounts for the shortness of the handle and the net's placement too far out of the water in the dipnetting cartoon. Jeremy and I once hiked down a steep defile to the edge of the Copper River, where he manned the net. As a non-resident, I was not permitted to dipnet. Nor did I have a fishing license. After the *de rigueur* couple of hours, he had netted three fish, one filled with roe. We loaded the



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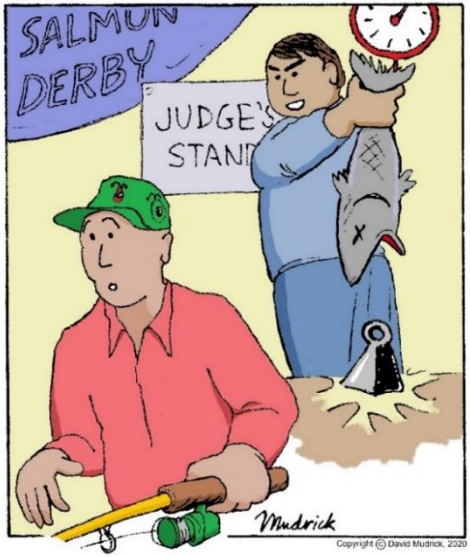
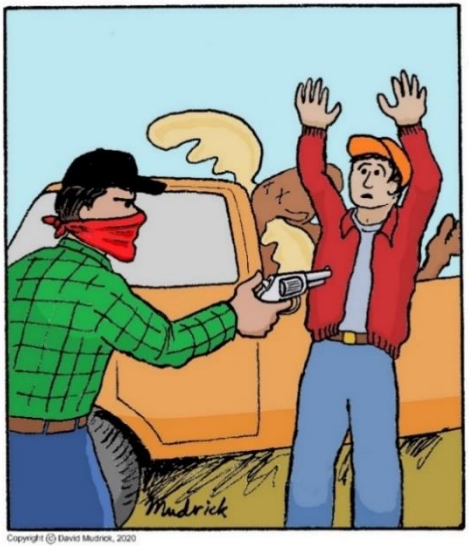
90 or so pounds of catch into the wicker pack we had brought, which I volunteered to carry up the defile on my back. One small step at a time for a man, one giant load for our larder. I never saw a salmon derby, but, as a little kid, I read of one, drawn by Carl Barks in the August 1954 *Walt Disney Comics and Stories.*



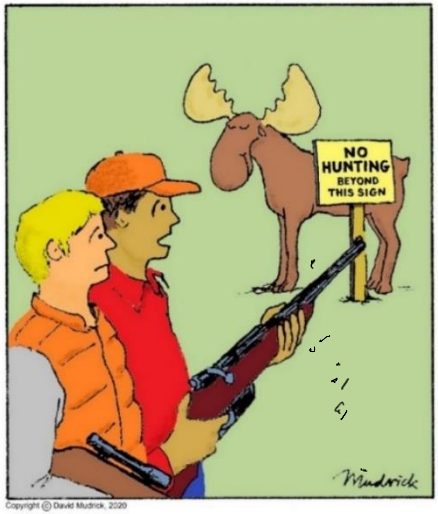
"Not so fast!"

We were the beneficiary of fish from a local fishwheel, an invention adopted by the Natives. Once installed in a river like the Copper, it can scoop up passing salmon in its rotating baskets, powered by the water's force. Some salmon species were only served to sled dogs, frozen whole or chopped into a slush. I probably would have considered them okay to eat.

I couldn't afford the $900 non-resident hunting license fee, but I could accompany Jeremy as his gun bearer on a couple of fruitless but enjoyable moose and caribou hunts along the Pipeline route and on the euphemistically named Denali Highway, that mostly gravel 134-mile-long scenic route between Paxson, north of us, and Cantwell, near the entrance to Denali National Park. As in real estate, hunters swear the key to success is location, location, location, as the masked-gunman cartoon confirms. Likewise, the answer to the oft-asked question, "Where did you shoot your moose?" was usually, "In the neck." Sadly, pandemic-raised younger readers might miss the meaning of the mask.

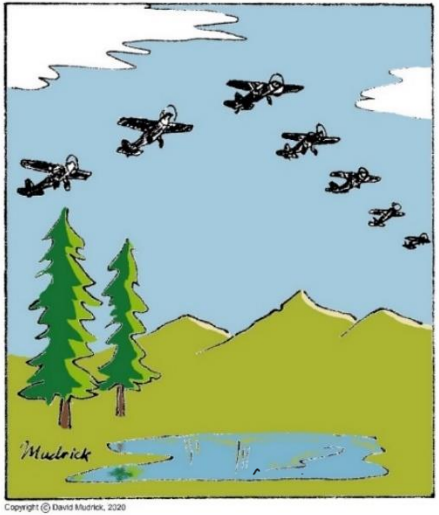


"I don't want your money. Just tell me where you got your moose!"



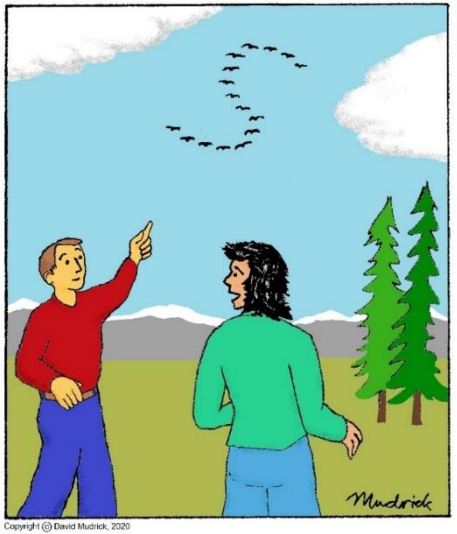
"I suppose we could wait for him to move, but somehow I think he deserves to get away!"

In lieu of game, we filled our two families' red-meat needs by jointly purchasing half a steer from Quaker farmer Sam Lightwood, who lived 50 miles to the south, in Kenny Lake. We arrived after the hour-long drive and watched as Sam placed a short-barrel shotgun against the steer's forehead. "You've had a good life," he gently and tearfully told the animal before dispatching it. We helped him hoist the carcass by its hind legs for aging. We came back some days later and helped him cleave it in two down the center line. We took our half home, where we determined it had not only led a good life but also a tough one, grazing and wintering in the cattle-unfriendly Copper Valley. You've seen a butcher's chart of a side of beef divided into its various cuts: chuck, rib, brisket, etc. Our side was so tough and gristly that, after hacking, sawing, and chopping it into unrecognizable portions, we made a similar chart with all divisions labeled "stew." We occasionally dined on caribou or moose during our time in Alaska, but I don't remember eating any fowl other than store-bought chicken or turkey, that is, no duck, swan, or ptarmigan.



Duck hunters flying in

While we were there, the US Air Force announced plans to select either Tok or Gakona as the location for an Over-the-Horizon Backscatter Radar installation to monitor Soviet activity. The other Cold War was coming to the Copper Valley. A site outside Gakona was eventually selected, which environmentalists pointed out was an area where trumpeter swans nested. Construction started after we left, but eventually the project was shut down, still uncompleted, when made obsolete by advances in technology.



"No, those aren't geese. They're swans."

Years later the site was revived to house the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program, or HAARP, the poster child for in- and out-of-state conspiracy theorists, who see it as the source for all sorts of ills. They decry its alleged ability to weaponize global weather but have yet to explain why, if so, HAARP staff haven't done anything to improve the local weather for their own benefit. More threatening, in 2016, a plot to kill HAARP staff was busted up by police in faraway south Georgia, USA (not USSR). I have yet to hear Covid blamed on HAARP, but maybe my tin-foil hat is interfering with my reception of false-news broadcasts. I included HAARP's location in the Copper River Country map, but surreptitiously, to discourage future attempts to disable it. So, what, if anything, happened with the swans? I don't know, but you can't blame the swans' behavior in the cartoon on HAARP, which didn't exist at the time.

Still, if you haven't picked up on it, already, Alaska is a mecca for stranger things, but enough about crazy people for now. Instead, let's talk about wacky animals.

Animal Sign

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In retrospect I've noticed there are themes running through my cartoons, like the road and road signs, hunting and fishing, and, of course, cold weather. I also include a lot of strange actions by both humans and anthropomorphic animals. We've seen several already. "Sign" can mean a posted message but also indications of animal presence through things like tracks and calls, or with moose, the ever-popular "moose berries" and high browse marks on trees. The moose-crossing cartoon combines a few of these themes and both types of sign.

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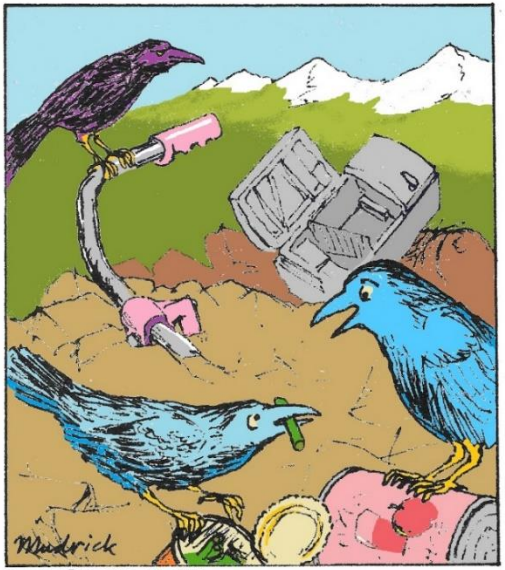
"I only howl after eleven, when rates go down."

The howling-wolf cartoon is out of date and may not make sense to readers who didn't grow up with land lines and telephone monopolies. I liked it and colored it, anyway, because it was fun to do. Time zones, if not rates, still present a challenge when scheduling calls between, say, Virginia and Alaska.



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"Don't you ever tire of eating out?"

I have been interested in v
arctic with the Weather B
pack. I stumbled upon on
our surplus-vehicle dump,
comrades. It was a large
55-gallon oil drum at the
stouter body of many arct
reducing their surface-to-
across the bay, probably
researched a little into the
and sled dogs, they tend t
same pitch as one another
joined in, then continued,
probably had just made sc
hair. Sometime after that,
20 years or so before the

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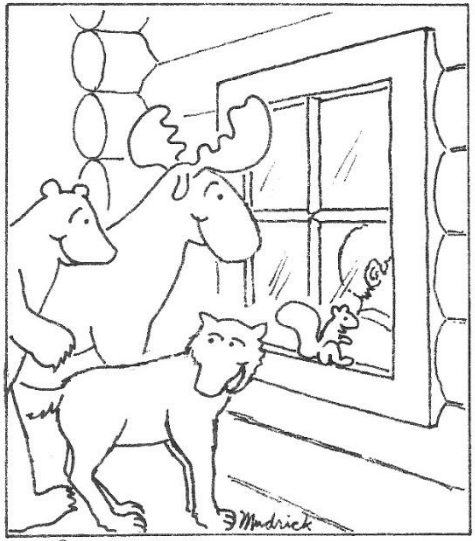
"Vroooom vroom! Rat-a-tat-tat!"

Speaking of dumps, our cabin was on the "dump road," a segment of decaying pavement left behind when the Richardson Highway was rerouted for a stretch. Road surfaces would become unusable due to frost heaves and slumps caused by changes in the underlying permafrost. When they became too disturbed to repair, one solution was to run a new segment of pavement around one or the other side of the bad stretch, which was also a way to straighten the old, less direct roads. This created isolated bayous and oxbows, as with meandering streams. It also made places where cabins could be built off the highway but with easy access to it. Our stretch included what had become a local dumping spot, where one could drop off anything and shop for

what someone else had deposited. "Eating out" for the ravens in the dump cartoon was probably cheaper there than at the Tastee Freez, although I hope the fare was better at the latter. An ironic feature of our local dump is employed in the cartoon: a scenic location. Ours overlooked the valley of the Gulkana River, a crystal-clear waterway in which fish that avoided glacial streams, like grayling, thrived. There are other dump-related cartoons in this collection, so that's another theme.

Let's examine more animal antics as we continue to coexist with nature. The one of the squirrel on the bush plane, as well as some other ones, got a comment of its own from Alaskan author Jean Anderson, who reviewed *Too Far North* in *The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* in 1987. (See the review in Rearword.) She said, "But nature isn't always the enemy here. I especially enjoyed the Walter Mitty-like squirrel perched on the roof of a two-seater plane and making engine noises…" Just seeing the review was a surprise, and, also, that she might not have recognized that "Rat-a-tat-tat!" was a machine-gun. My favorite quote of hers, however, is, "Though Mudrick isn't likely to give sleepless nights to Charles Schultz, Jim Davis, or Gary Larson, his enjoyable books should offer a few good chuckles to Alaskans." That may be damning with faint praise, but she did mention me with some better company, if you don't count being associated with *Garfield.* Overall, the review was fun, and I appreciated her taking the time to produce it.

The plane in the cartoon is a stereotype of a bush plane, with taildragger landing gear and oversized, low inflation "tundra tires." The former keeps the propeller up and away from the rough terrain of an oversized pilot and passenger, which indicated the increased lifting power of the plane.



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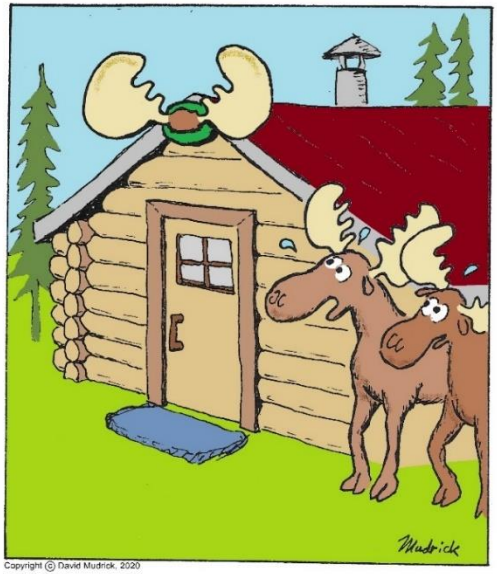
"Hurry! 'The Cosby Show' is about to begin!"

While we're still on the past, the "Cosby Show" cartoon is obviously out of date, if not out of favor. I could change the caption to refer to another program or presentation, but that, too, would eventually age or fall o

ut of favor, although hopefully not for the same reason. I altered the cartoon a bit for this publication by shortening the wolf's neck, but it's not a great drawing.

My cartoon renderings of animals are not consistent, nor were they meant to be, since these cartoons were not part of a continuing story with its own characters, unlike my comic strip *Tom Duck and Harry.* But then, neither are my renderings of Tom and Harry consistent, even from panel to panel. The moose in the "Headhunters!!" cartoon are not drawn the same as the Cosby Show moose, although they all probably owe some of their features to my exposure to Bullwinkle J. Moose when I was



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"Headhunters!!"

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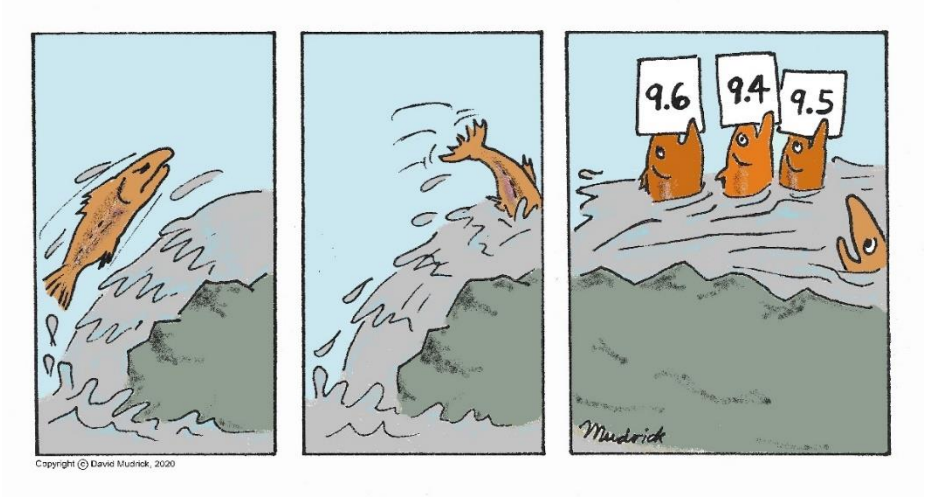
"Get born, swim to the sea, grow up, return to your birthplace, spawn, and die.... There's got to be more to life than that!"

On that note, from the sublime to the ridiculous, there's the cartoon of the salmon jumping the falls as an athletic event. The real judges of those leaps were the aforementioned bears, expectantly leaning over the edge

young. I think the "J" comes from Jay Ward, one of the creators of Rocky and Bullwinkle.

"Get born, swim to the sea…" is a cartoon that had been working its way out of my brain since grade or middle school, after I saw a film about the life cycle of salmon. I was dumbstruck by the single purpose and inevitability of their life, which I contrasted with our freedom as humans to choose our path. Now, I realize that we, too, are just about as programmed as they are. We just delude ourselves into thinking otherwise. Still, that's not a bad arc for a life, and not an unworthy goal. We, indeed, are part and parcel of everything else on the planet, if not in the universe.



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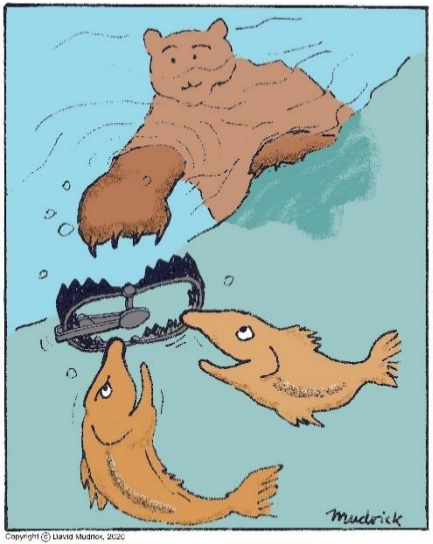
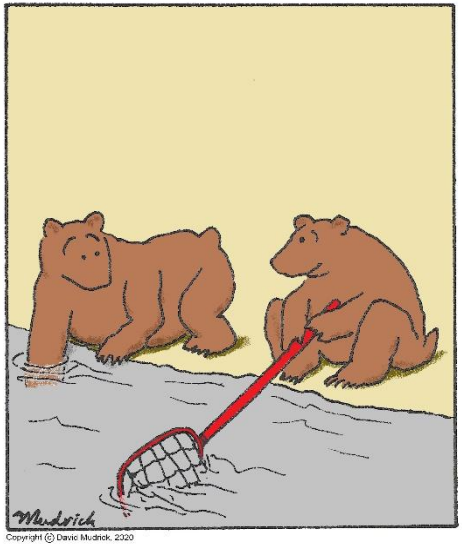
or standing in the water. I attempted to make the three panels flow together, as in the "food chain" cartoon. In *Tom Duck and Harry*, I sometimes try to have one single background panel with the characters working their way across it, from left to right. This makes me wonder about ever publishing in the Middle East, where writing proceeds from right to left. However, the presence of Harry A. Pig might already make the strip unpalatable to those Jewish and Muslim cultures.

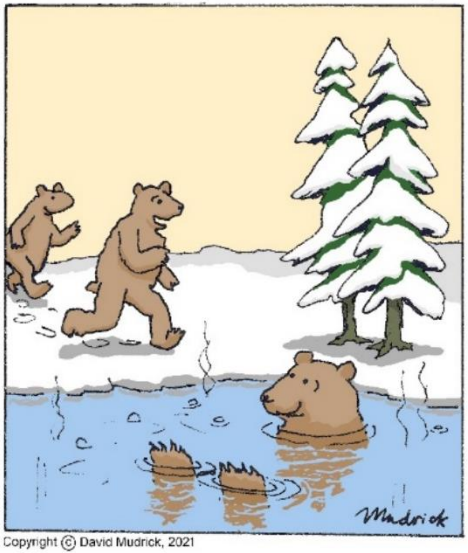




As you can see in the bear-trap and dipnetting cartoons, below, the salmon sometimes have the last laugh over the bears, but the bears can play the technology game, too.

We literally crossed the continent driving to Alaska. Starting 'Back East" and continuing into the American West, we saw a lot of bear "sign," but this time I mean posted signs warning about the dangers of bears, either the black or brown variety, depending on where we were. American parks were dotted with such warnings, especially around garbage-collection areas and rest rooms. Yet, we didn't see a single bear, black or brown, until Mount Robson Provincial Park, well into Canada. There, we didn't see a single bear warning sign, but we did see our first grizzly, rearing on its hind legs across a meadow. We were in a ranger-led discussion of bears, with all the children in the group decked out in construction-paper bears' ears, when it appeared, as if paid to show up on cue.

Distinguishing between brown bears and black bears may be a valuable skill, as suggested by this 1987 draft cartoon of a couple considering an epitaph in a graveyard. Brown bears include the larger, usually more intimidating grizzlies and Kodiak bears, but black bears, though generally smaller, are just as dangerous, especially because of their stealth. We have them back east in the Appalachians, and sometimes they stray into or migrate through more populated areas. Smokey Bear was a black bear. Whichever type, hikers are advised to wear bear bells on their clothes or hiking gear when passing through bear country. These small tingling annoyances are meant to warn the bears of our approach, since bears are supposed to avoid contact with humans, thus giving them time to move away without being startled by our sudden appearance from the underbrush. Another thing to avoid is getting between mama bears and their cubs. True for moose moms and calves, as well.



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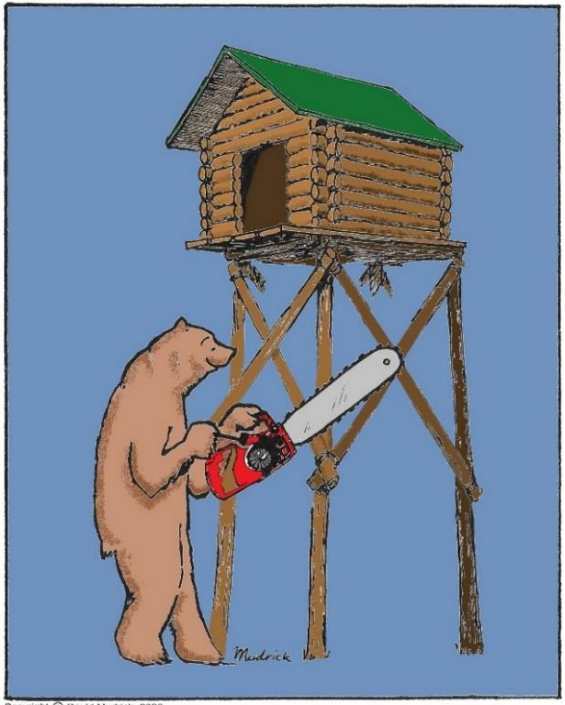
"Last one in the hot spring is a polar bear!"

One of the alleged ways to distinguish brown from black bears is to examine their scat, or fecal deposits: If they're from a brown bear, they'll contain bear bells. Another way, perhaps more practical if less useful, is to climb a tree. If it's a black bear, it will climb the tree and eat you. If it's a brown bear, it will knock the tree down and eat you.

We saw our next grizzly when we visited Denali National Park enroute to Fairbanks. There, the bear was once again at a distance, this time tearing at the ground. The ranger accompanying us explained that it was attempting to root out a vole, or other small burrower, for a snack. Late summer and early fall provide the last opportunities for the omnivorous bears to fatten up for their long winter nap, and they will eat anything to that end. When we later went over to examine where the bear had been, there was, indeed, a long patch of unearthed tunnel.

We never saw bears in the wild again while in Alaska, but grizzlies were in our neighborhood, attracted by the dump. Once, when I entered the home of our neighbors Chuck and Sandy McMahan, I had the feeling someone was looking over my shoulder. Turning around, I found a huge stuffed polar bear looming over me. If I remember the story correctly, Chuck shot the bear when he was thirteen, out on the ice in the arctic. We didn't have polar bears as far south or inland as we lived, despite their mention in the hot spring cartoon.

The drawing of the bear with the chainsaw includes an arctic cache, a raised shelter designed to prevent bears and other critters from getting into your food supply. The drawing was realistic style, intended to be part of a set of greeting cards we could sell separately. This was the first and last one, however.



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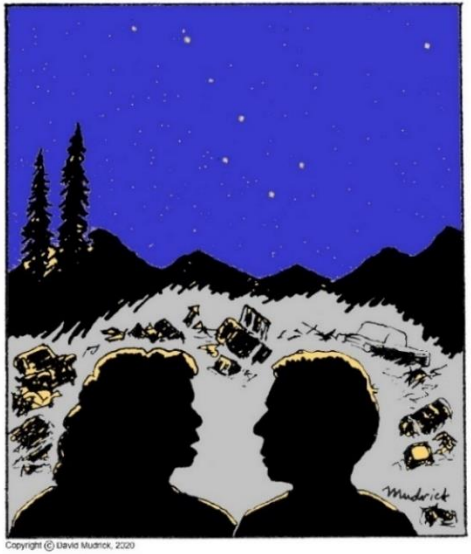
People Sign

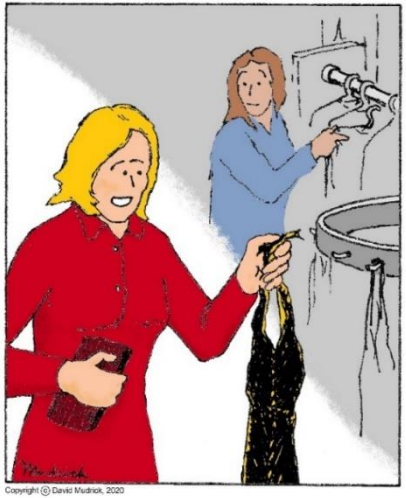
Like anywhere else, Alaska has its share of unique customs and idiosyncrasies that may not be familiar to a new arrival. However, if one is attentive and practices discretion, he or she will sooner or later learn the local lingo and practices, or, if not, decide to leave town rather than risk offending a largely armed populace.



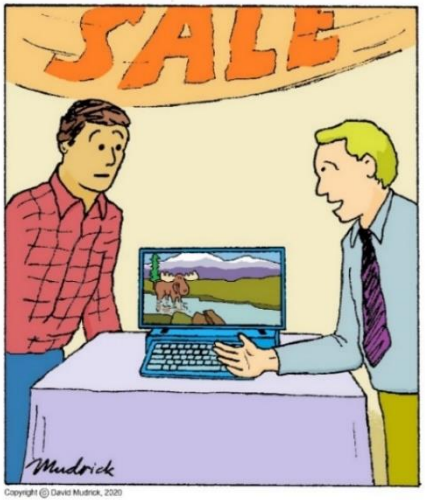
"Sure, the stars are pretty here, but..."

Some of the applicable taboos may reflect those in any other rural area, as, to some extent, the entire state is one huge small town where it seems that everyone knows or knows of everyone else. While the locals may freely gossip and complain about one another, you, as a newcomer, may not realize that the person you are discussing, who lives 200 miles away in Chicken, Alaska, is, say, your listener's brother's former mistress. That happened to me, but in Auke Bay, a neighborhood of Juneau, not in Gakona. I was talking with Vivian Hegg, a former co-worker from Virginia who had moved back to Alaska and whom we were visiting on our way home. Juneau is over 400 air miles from Chicken, but no direct flights between them are listed on the internet. There is a 2,500-foot dirt/gravel airstrip in Chicken, according to Wikipedia, whereas Juneau has commercial jet service.

People adapt. Take dating, for example. Despite the "Sure, the stars are pretty…" cartoon, there are romantic places with open skies in the Copper Valley, but there aren't too many indoor venues for urban style dating. I'll pick on the Tastee Freez, again, but it was one of just a handful of restaurants in the area, and none were consistently five-star rated. Then, again, in those pre-internet days, I'm not sure any of them were rated, at all. Other dating spots, like movie theaters, were nonexistent, although people ran VHS video outlets out of their homes. Most community activities took place either in a church, lodge, or local-school facility.



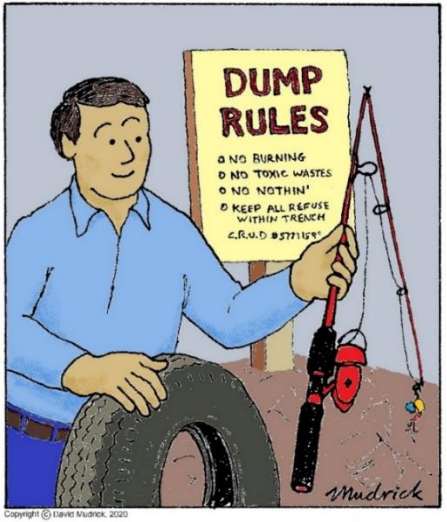
"Look! A down-filled swimsuit!"



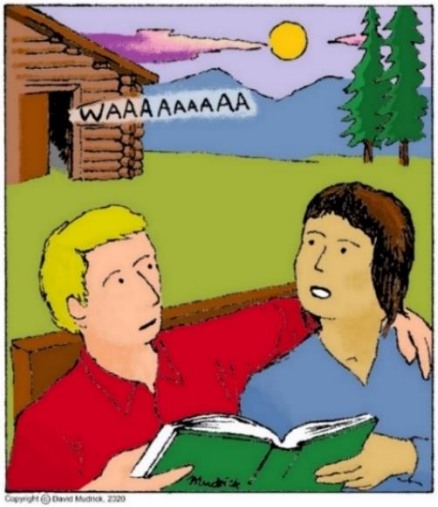
"...and this is our bush model. It runs on propane."

This has been a problem for maintaining community life. Over time, many lodges and historic roadhouses have burned down, one a couple weeks prior to writing this. Some local schools, like Gakona, have been closed in favor of regional ones. Now, the Covid-19 pandemic has devastated the area, with neighbors who have always depended on one another sometimes not knowing that someone in the community has died. The traditional support system has been weakened.

In much of America, shopping is a social activity. Even today, with malls and other brick-and-mortar outlets going under, there's still Target or Costco. Not in our valley, where there were only a few small groceries and general stores, but also a dearth of merchandise to choose from, in conjunction with a general lack of disposable income. Local wares were more utilitarian, like home and building supplies and clothing for outdoor work and warmth, although I don't remember seeing a down-filled swimsuit. Although there were differences in wealth, it wasn't as apparent in what people wore. Richer or poorer, kids might all have shoes patched with duct tape, partly because a variety of shoes weren't available and partly because duct tape was. Equipment and supplies for hunting, fishing, and camping were also available, sought after by locals and seasonal tourists.



The town shopping mall



"There goes the 'call of the child.' "

I didn't see any bush-model computers, either; the only computer-type venue was a Radio Shack run out of someone's home. Still, we in Gakona Junction had our local "mall" – the community dump – although non-Junctionites "bought and sold" there, as well.

I updated the "call of the child" cartoon, I made the baby's wail more apparent. Previously, some readers hadn't noticed it, giving the caption a more suggestive meaning. Even so, romance isn't dead in the Copper Valley. 'Nough said.

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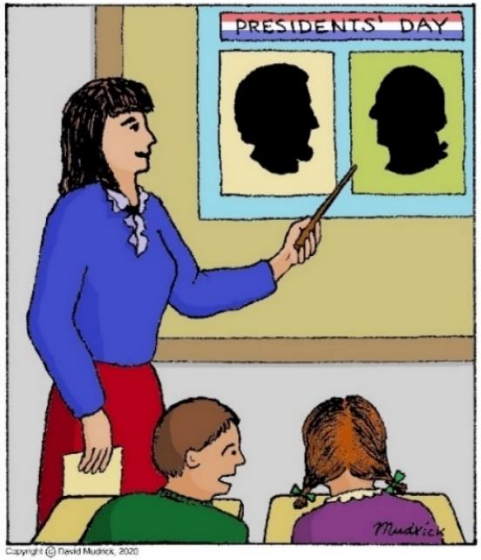
"Uh... yes, I guess this is the first house I've ever seen made entirely of duct tape."

What more can I say about the duct-tape-house cartoon? I wouldn't be surprised if someone *did* make a house from duct tape, with the possible exception of the windows, which could have been made from clear packing tape. I think bush pilots were required to carry an emergency roll of duct (aka "100-mile-per-hour") tape.

Like most everything else, even my two other favorite "media" – wire coat hangers and cardboard shirt boards – the quality of duct tape has declined over the years. Instead of cloth tape, now you may find plastic duct tape. It is weaker and deteriorates quicker, but it doesn't smell as bad, which is the only plus. I guess having duct tape available in so many colors now is another plus. The ones I use are white, black, and the old silver-gray. I discovered aluminum duct tape some years ago, which you actually do use on hot furnace ducts. One exception to decreasing quality is blue painters' tape, a newer product. I made some pinwheel weathervanes 5 or 6 years ago that have stood in front of our house since then. Their steering fins are a wire perimeter spanned with blue painters' tape that has lasted through heat, cold, sun, rain, snow, ice, wind, and cicadas. I have no plans to build a house with blue painters' tape, though.

Yes, the teacher in the Lincoln-and-Washington-silhouettes cartoon does look like Pat, but I don't think I did that intentionally. As I mentioned, we ran and team-taught Gakona School for the last month of the school year. We each earned about $50 a day, as uncertified substitutes. Had we been certified, it would have been $90 a day, each. (I was certifiable, which didn't count.)



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"What's the big deal? We live in a log cabin and chop down trees, too!"

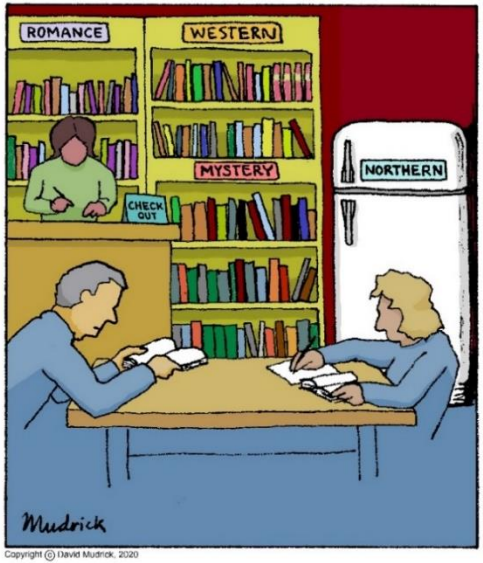
On days Pat worked, she gave half her earnings to Judy Shelton, who watched Mary and Jacob. When we received our paychecks, we found the Copper River School District had paid us at the certified-teacher rate. We pointed out the error, which they were happy to rectify by cutting new checks. Pat went on to become a certified teacher-librarian in the Fairfax County School District, one of the nation's best, after our return to Virginia. In truth, $50 barely covered gas and other expenses the days I substituted at Slana School, a 120-mile round trip on the often-icy Tok Cutoff. Our van got a consistent 12 miles per gallon, uphill, downhill, fast, slow, into a headwind, with a tailwind, or when a valve lifter failed returning from Lake Louise.

Slana was my first substituting call and followed the first snowfall, which is when I discovered my tires were bald. I'd left home in the cold, dark, and snow at 5:00 AM to allow time to open the school and warm it up. Because of my worn tires, I never made it up the first big hill and spent the rest of the day at a garage outside Glennallen having four new studded tires installed. We had rear wheel drive, but front

studs improved steering on ice. The studs were shot into existing holes in the tread one at a time with an air gun. Studs or chains are the only viable solutions for ice, and I had no trouble after that. By law, studs are prohibited from April 30 to October 1, so, later, I had to pry each one out with a screwdriver. The shop couldn't get the tires' beads to seal on the wheels, so I also had inner tubes installed. That was okay with me, because I remembered a story I had heard from a Latter-day Saint friend who had served a mission in Alaska. One freezing night, while he and his companion were inside a church member's cabin, the host's dogs peed on all their pickup's tires. The tires had already frozen solid, and the pee, which pooled between each tire and its wheel, froze and expanded, creating openings through which the air escaped. Later, as they drove off, a half mile or so down the road, the tires warmed up enough to soften and lose their inflated shape, all going flat simultaneously. My friend may have walked back to kick the dogs.

"This is Dan. He just got back from 'the Slope.'"

The Tok Cutoff, the highway to Slana, featured blind hills hiding stands of caribou in the middle of the road and moose charging the van obliquely from the shoulder. Less than 30 miles outside Gakona Native Village, the radio lost contact with KCAM, the only AM station in the valley. No FM station penetrated that far, so I depended on cassette tapes for entertainment, practically wearing out a couple of my favorites, *Old Corrals and Sagebrush* by Ian Tyson and *Pancho and Lefty* by Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson. The title song from the latter still brings a tear to my eye, as well as a heightened alert for caribou and moose if I'm driving.



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I mentioned the need for a newcomer to understand the local jargon. Knowing that "the Slope" refers to the oil-rich North Slope region between the Brooks Range and the Arctic Ocean may be crucial to understanding the "Slope" cartoon. Still, understanding that doesn't necessarily make it funny but might increase the odds.

Did I warn you that unlike mosquitoes, puns survive the first hard freeze? I didn't use too many in the cartoons – although one may be too many – and I suppose the library cartoon incorporates another visual one.

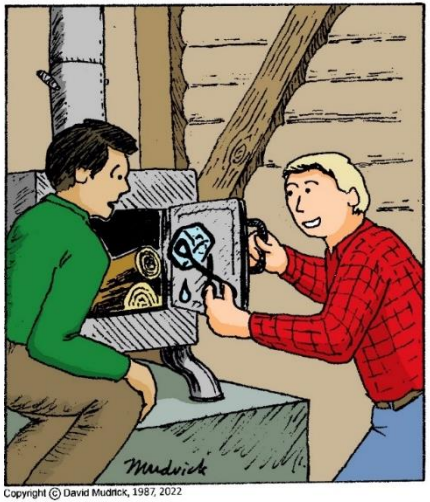
The local library, which was in Glennallen, was a small but pleasant place to take the kids on a cold day. It was also interesting to chat with the librarian, an older woman with dyed-black hair who I was later told had been one of the "ladies of the night" during the Pipeline boom days a decade before, as may have been a local postmistress.

Pat would read stories from those library books to the kids and me at night, as we all snuggled together on our legless bequeathed sofa, under the frosty picture window that looked out on the black spruce trees silhouetted against a swath of night sky. The light from inside the window glowed on the half completed arctic porch, while the wood stove, which never glowed red because of the reduced energy in the deadfall and rotting wood gathered late in the fall, warmed the cabin sufficiently to require only thick sweaters. We depended on deadfalls, because we couldn't afford a cord

of firewood, especially after we found out that the tank of fuel oil for our furnace had to be replaced with winter-grade oil. The summer oil had too much paraffin, which would have frozen in the cold and clogged the feeder line. We didn't have a wood stove when we first arrived, but a week-long period of Chinook winds with 100-mph gusts convinced us we needed a backup to the electric-ignited oil furnace.

Fortunately, Chinooks are warm winds. Unfortunately, our Chinooks repeatedly toppled the shallow rooted spruce trees onto electric lines throughout the valley, cutting power for hours to days at a time and rendering the furnace with its electric igniter and blower fan useless. Deciding we might need a heat source in the middle of winter not dependent on electricity, we got permission from our landlord, Jim Stenberg, to install a heavy sheet-steel wood-burning stove borrowed from the Welds. We bought triple-walled stove pipe to help prevent flue fires and used some applied math to calculate the elliptical hole in the roof for the pipe.

We got permission also to preemptively fell a tall tree abutting the cabin. It was rocking precariously in the strong gusts, with one of its roots lifting out of the ground. In our front yard lay a pile of oversized plywood partitions and lumber left over from crates used in the Pipeline-construction days to ship the long sections of pipe to the job site. At the time, many locals had acquired these castoffs. I used one huge, stout panel to prop against the house to help deflect the tree if it should fall in the wrong direction. It turned out to be unnecessary, as my woodsman skills with an ax proved adequate, dropping the tree parallel to our driveway, neither onto the cabin nor into the swampy run-off pond a few yards away. The wood from the



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"Our local water contains so much natural gas, we use ice cubes for fire starters."

felled tree was too green and had too high a sap content to burn in our wood stove, so we continued to rely on scavenged wood.

The “ice cubes for fire starters” cartoon was a local reference to our valley, where we hauled water to our cabin in 30-gallon trash cans in the back of the van. A gallon or two would splash out on the way home. Our cleaning water, from the local free well by the firehouse 20 miles away, contained a lot of natural gas. It was said that if you let it stand overnight in a closed container, you could burn the escaped gas off with a lit match after popping the lid. A friend from Homer said in her home she couldn’t extinguish a match under the faucet, because of the gas in the stream. She may have been joking, but I later saw a program on the side effects of fracking for oil, where a match held next to the tap continued to ignite gas from the water. Our culinary and drinking water was very pure. It came from a different well, at 25 cents for 30 gallons. At 20 below zero, pumping water from the van into the house was not a popular chore. I wasn’t going to update the cartoon because of its limited application, but I found out recently it might prove useful in a drive to get funding for a public well in the Valley, so it’s now in color.

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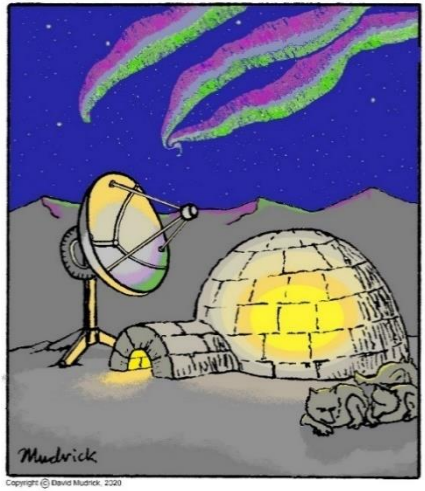
I’ve concentrated for the most part on cartoons about life in the Interior, because that’s where we lived, as did the audience for *The Bush League* comic strip in the *Country Journal*, where a lot of the cartoons appeared. Still, many of them were applicable anywhere in the state and some maybe anywhere else, because of their universal humor. I created a few cartoons involving iconic Alaskan Native themes, trying not to offend cultural sensitivities. Things may have

changed enough in the last 35 years to make some of the cartoons offensive, but you have to draw the line somewhere, especially if you're drawing lines in the first place.

Because many readers didn't "get" the black-and-white original of the torn-hide cartoon, I updated it by adding the stars emanating from below and by facing more of the participants in that direction. If you still don't get it, google "blanket toss."

Back to the Northern Lights, which many people associate with the frozen tundra, although they appear over diverse northern environments: The igloo-antenna cartoon incorporated the aurora borealis, but only to indicate night. The humor was the ironic juxtaposition of modern and ancient technologies. This is one cartoon where I think the coloring helped clarify the humor and added an artistic dimension, so I've included the original black-and-white version for comparison.



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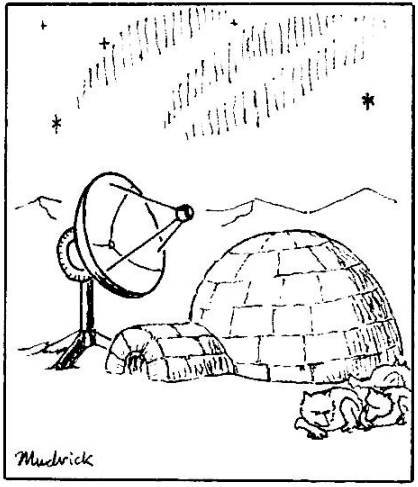
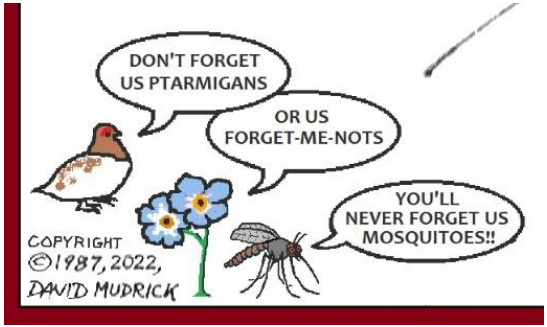


Weathering

This section is primarily about winter. Summer in Alaska is spectacular, or so we were told. Technically, we entered the state in summer – August 15th to be exact – but after the first major frost of the season had spoiled most of the wild berries and killed off the mosquitoes. The latter wasn't necessarily good news, because I had planned to finance our stay by harvesting mosquito pelts and selling them to the tourists. Three pelts make a mitten: one each for the front and back and one for the thumb. You may have missed this gag in the Copper River Country map:

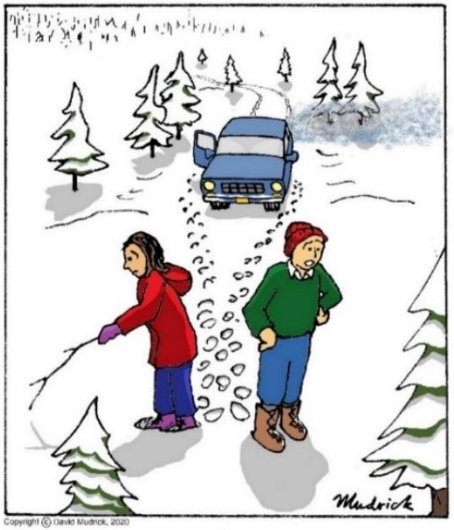


As I said, we came to Alaska to spend the school year, with its long, dark nights when you could see the Northern Lights. Summer skies are far too light, even around midnight, which is why in Alaska fireworks may be shot off on New Year's Eve, rather than on the Fourth of July. With winter comes winter weather. The winter of 1986-87 turned out to be a mild one by local standards, reaching 50 below zero only a couple of times. The occasional, but too frequent, warm Chinook winds interfered with the usual practice of

The Big Chill

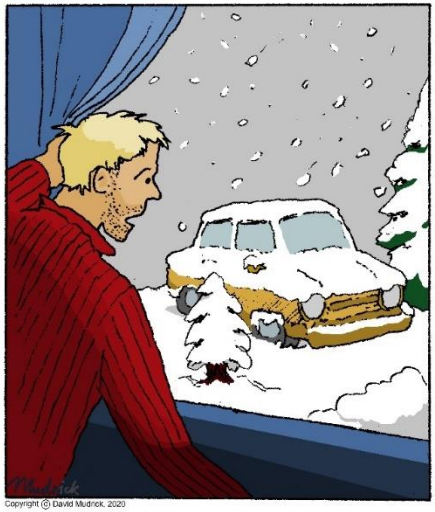
grading snow-packed roads to a smooth surface, instead causing highways to be icy and bumpy most of the season. They also prevented our log cabin walls from chinking fully with ice, resulting in drafts inside all winter. Yet, there was enough snow in the region to make the occasional trips to Anchorage "exciting," along with a mid-winter trip through snow-filled Thompson Pass to Valdez, where the streets were snow-walled canyons and the houses were buried up to the second floor. (See "Last Word" in the Rearword section.)

Although even our "mild" winter was still dangerous and sometimes precarious, it was also rewarding, educational, fun, and especially meaningful because we were able to become a part of the local community, leaving many new friends behind when we departed at the end of May.



"Remind me to mark the road before the next snowfall."

The Big Chill was a popular 1983 movie. "The Big Chill" cartoon had nothing to do with it other than its name, which came to my mind after the first major snowfall in the valley. This was just a whimsical drawing expressing the sudden change to the landscape. It wasn't meant to be funny, but it was funny when people would ask, "What's so funny about it?" and I'd answer, "Nothing." They'd point out that in that case it shouldn't be included in a book



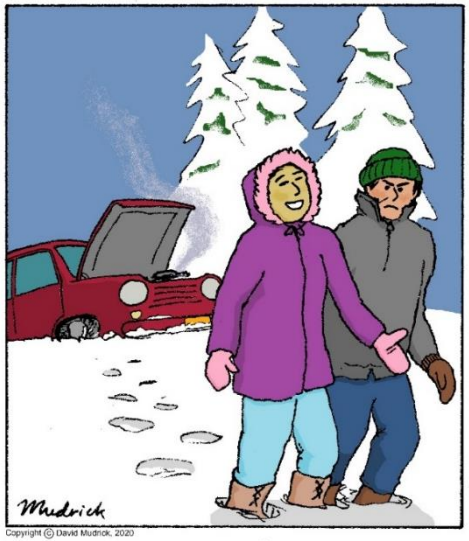
"You think it's too late to put in the antifreeze?"

of funny cartoons. They were right, and I didn't update it for this edition.

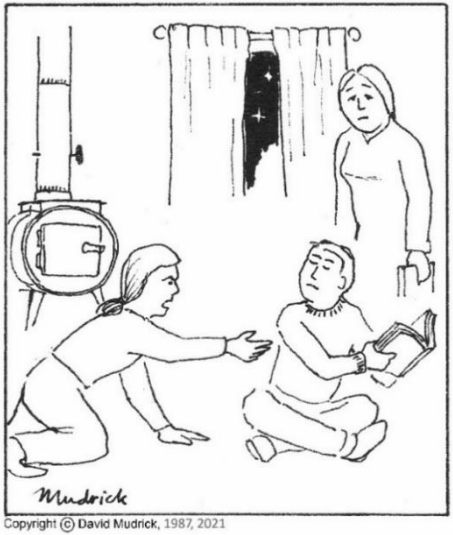
That first big snowfall was a wake-up call for more than tires. Alaskans are known for using their yards as filing cabinets, which works until a heavy snow turns them into cold storage units. That thing you didn't put away in time just might have to wait until spring to be used again, let alone seen. That's the message of both the "mark the road" and "put in the antifreeze" cartoons, but the latter was true in Virginia, as well.

Even if inconvenient, the first snowfall is usually beautiful, not only because it covers up those objects strewn all over the yard, but also for the sculptural shapes and patterns it creates. The late-fall frozen foliage is covered over with a pristine wrap.

The limited foot and motor traffic, once you get away from the main road, lets the snow remain whiter and more undisturbed for a longer time. Then, there are the surprises, like animal tracks indicating activity that previously went unnoticed. As the "winter



"♫...Walking in a winter wonderland!"



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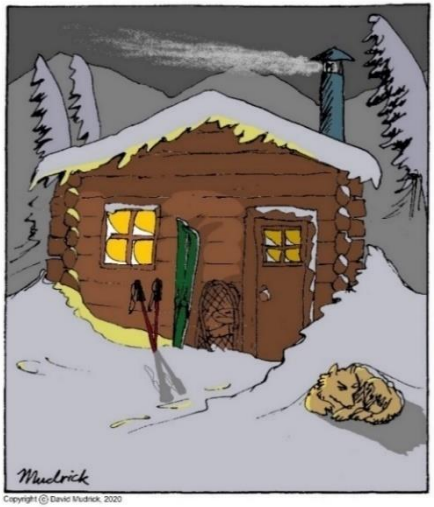
"Mom! It's my night for the Sears catalog!"

wonderland" cartoon points out, even with accompanying pain, sometimes happiness is just a matter of perspective.

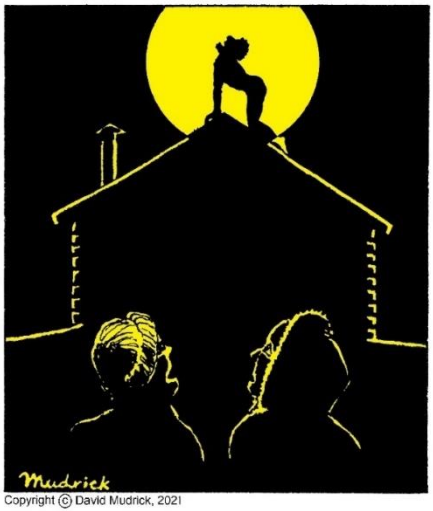
Sadly, the Sears catalogue cartoon is now out of date, although the concept isn't. Catalogue sales were like online shopping in their day, and you could spend hours looking at the tools, togs, or toys, depending on your personal interest. The local catalogue store was a counter in a commercial establishment in Glennallen. Delivery was another matter. Forget about online shopping today. In those days, Alaska was still the last frontier for delivery. I don't remember ordering anything; we were never sure it would arrive in time to use it.

That was true with the US Postal Service, as well. There was no home mail delivery, so we drove down to Gakona to pick up our mail during post office hours most days. Assuming they got there at all, any packages would arrive ripped open or at least exhibit teeth marks, none of which the postal service acknowledged. Still, along with library books and with no TV, the Sears catalogue was one part of our home-entertainment package. Two other major components were an AM-FM clock radio that, because of our remote location, could only pick up two stations and a Fisher-Price child's cassette tape player-recorder that got constant use with our small library of tapes and dubbing interesting programs off the clock radio. Our friends Fred and Harriet O'Neal successfully mailed us a much-welcomed batch of tapes for the holidays.



"Who forgot to refill the ice cube trays?!"

Long nights and cold weather can bring out the best and the worst in people. Pagans were right in reverencing the winter solstice – when the daylight hours start increasing again – and the Christian church in co-opting it with Christmas. We, too, were moved as the sun overcame the horizon and the twilight more each day. We celebrated with the community at Gakona School and in our tiny church branch. We decorated the cabin with paper snowflakes from the floor to the rafters and strung our countertop cut-spruce sapling with lights, popcorn strings, and paper chains. It had to be out of reach of Jacob, now a toddler and officially a one-year-old on Christmas Eve. Holiday music joined Ian Tyson on the tape player.



"Cabin fever."

I should talk about our Halloween. Even though it was in fall, not winter, by then it was too cold for door-to-door trick-or-treating. That didn't really matter because the doors were too scattered or inaccessible to walk between. I drew a cartoon for *The Bush League* of a couple cowering by the door they had just opened to expose a giant bear with a trick-or-treat bag. The wife is saying to her husband, "Bear *or* seven-foot teenager in a bear suit... Either= way, give him anything he wants!" Another Halloween cartoon showed three

bundled up kids, one telling another, “Under *my* parka, I’m a princess, and Billy, there, is a pirate. What are you?”

As we did later for Christmas, we had a community Halloween party at night at Gakona School. Pre-kindergartener Mary was awarded “most beautiful” in the costume contest, as a snow princess. Pat had dressed her in a frilly borrowed dress and crowned her head with a fox pelt we acquired in B.C. on the way up, the fox’s face centered over her forehead. Ben was a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, with a colored headband and a shell made from a small wheelbarrow bed. Dan dressed up as a highway cleanup bag, decked out in a stuffed, state-issued yellow plastic one. Sam was a mummy, if I remember correctly.

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"Your little brother's been out there ten minutes. Go see if he's frozen to the seat."

Despite the increasing daylight and additional holidays – Martin Luther King, Jr’s Birthday and Groundhog, Valentine’s, Presidents’, and St Patrick’s Days – winter seemed like forever. (I’m not sure that Groundhog Day is even a thing in Alaska. *Of course* there will be six more weeks of winter. If only it were *just* six more weeks!)

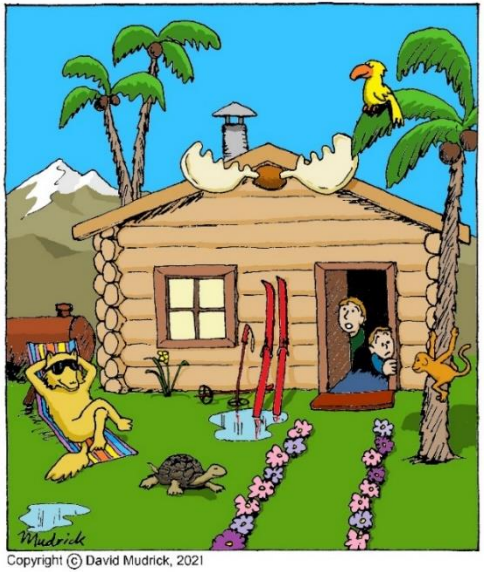
The next big thing was spring breakup, when the ice started going out of the river, and puddles formed that were always a half inch higher than the kids’ breakup boots. The frozen skating pond by our cabin returned to its role as run-off swamp, breaking into all-night song that sounded like the background of an old Tarzan movie. I’m happily reminiscing here, although the remaining cartoons mostly reflect the throes of winter. No surprise, since the book was published before warmer weather really kicked in.

The outhouse cartoon was hardly an exaggeration, which requires some out-backstory: Our cabin opened to a front room with a kitchen alcove in one corner. Two bedrooms lay beneath a shallow storage loft along the back wall. The left one led to a small bathroom that took up one half of an extension on the back of the cabin. The other half housed a 300-gallon water tank for the bathroom and kitchen and an exit door to the backyard. It was our intention to fill the tank, but Jim Stenberg advised us that because the cabin had stood vacant for some time, the tank would need to be flushed of old water and thoroughly disinfected. Before we could do that, we learned that the company that hauled water in the valley considered us to be too far off their normal route and too small a customer to be worth serving. So, we abandoned Plan A and, along with it, the existing flush toilet and functional sinks. Hence, the need to haul water in the back of our van.

To make a short story longer, executing Plan B, we installed a Swedish Clivus Multrum composting toilet, borrowed from the Welds, in the tank room. By November, because that room proved too cold for composting, we switched to Plan C, digging a pit privy behind the cabin. So, the backup outback outhouse became our go-to to-go choice. The story continues: I installed the privy with its hinged door just as the aforementioned week of Chinooks began. Strong gusts blew the door off its hinges the first night. Throughout that week, the door was strategically propped over the opening for privacy, but you could look around it to catch any Northern Light activity from where you sat. Coincidentally, November and March are the best months for auroral displays. Flash forward: Since it was still functionable, I had left the door like that until spring, when I rehung it. Sure enough, that same night, the wind sprang up and tore the door off, once again.

Back to fall: In anticipation of snow, I put a large pair of snowmobile boots inside the back door, telling the kids that if they ever needed to run to the privy, they could quickly slip their bare or shoed feet into the larger boots. Shortly after that, Mary was out playing front with her friend, Lacey Hatley, when she suddenly ran into the house. I followed her and found her crying by the back door. She had had to "go" and, instead of heading to the privy outside, thought she needed to first run into the house and put on the boots. As a result, she hadn't made it in time.

From a spectacular fall, the days turned progressively colder as we descended into December. If you're an experienced user of outhouses, you check under the seat for spiders and such before sitting down. That's true most places year-round but not in Alaska in winter. There and then, you drop the seat first, not to dislodge bugs, but to knock off an inch or so of hoarfrost. That was a long explanation for why the outhouse cartoon wasn't exaggerating… much. Actually, in Alaska in the summer, porcupines and the odd bear in the latrine are a bigger problem than spiders.



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"Chinook!"

As true to life as the outhouse cartoon was, the "Chinook!" cartoon was a deliberate fantasy, although not so much if taken in the legendary context of Chinooks. There are tales of mushers furiously driving their teams to just keep ahead of the melting snow caused by these so-called "snow eaters." I mentioned that the warm winds, which normally might have been welcome, disrupted road travel and even cabin life. The milled landscape timbers in our walls were chinked with strips of insulation, which over the years had been penetrated in many places. A constant outside sub-freezing temperature would create ice in the niches and gaps in the chinking, forming a wind barrier, but the erratic Chinooks melted these stop gaps, leaving it drafty inside.

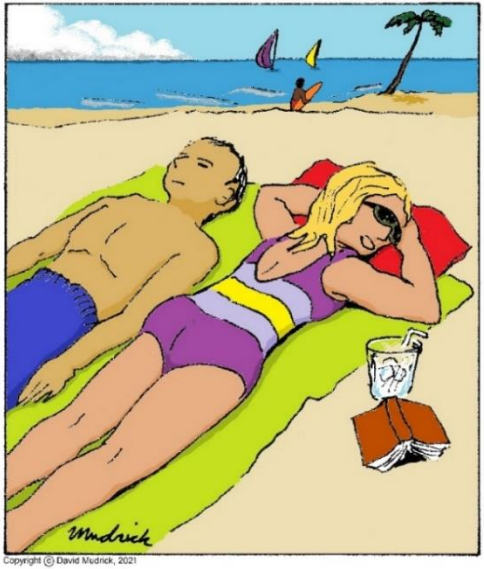
The stereotyped cabin I incorporated in that cartoon and several others was roughly like ours, except for our raised floor and half-constructed "arctic porch" on the front. (See the cabin photo in the Backstory section.) An arctic porch is an anteroom between outside and the inside living space. It may be unheated, but it still provides a place to hang coats, discard snow- or mud-packed gear, and change into interior shoes or mukluks. Our cabin also lacked an iconic set of moose antlers. We did recover a decrepit 5-foot-long half of a caribou rack from the dump, shortly before we left for home. I mounted it conspicuously to the front of the luggage rack that topped our van, a gift from Don Johnson of our branch. It stayed there all the way back to Virginia, which embarrassed the kids when occupants of passing cars would point at it. We came close to losing the half rack when reentering the States at the Blaine, Washington, border crossing. The U.S. Customs officer asked me, "Do you have a permit for that antler?" It took me a moment to figure out what he was referring to, after which I replied, "Oh, that thing? We pulled it out of our local dump. It's gnawed on and moss covered… but you can have it." He quickly responded, "I didn't see anything!"

"Frost heave."

I guess the "Frost heave" cartoon is the companion piece of the "Chinook!" one. The land surface in much of the North is a thin layer of soil, overlaying a deep expanse of permafrost – permanently frozen ice, soil, rotted vegetative matter, and rock. "Permanently" only until it isn't. Roads and buildings built directly on permafrost put pressure on it, which causes it to heat up and melt. At some point the overload may start sinking into the ground, as was happening with our cabin. Despite having a foot or so of open space under the floor, which was propped up on short piers, the center of the cabin was considerably lower that the ends. Frost heaving is the opposite, when sufficient moisture in the ground freezes and pushes up the soil above it. Both processes are destructive to surface structures. Solutions involve trying to keep permafrost cold and, with frost heaving, trying to stabilize or remove subsurface moisture. Frost heaves don't occur as suddenly as in the cartoon, but they can form literally overnight and significantly warp the surface.

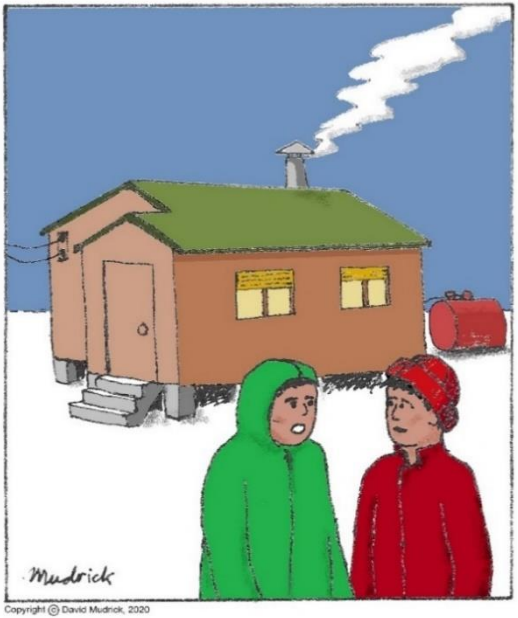
Ice lenses are the reverse of frost heaves: A large accumulation of underground ice melts away, even after a thousand years, leaving behind an invisible hollow cavity. Robert Perry's son in College, Alaska, described to me how a previously unknown ice lens in his driveway had melted. It collapsed suddenly when a bulldozer drove over it, swallowing the machine and almost the driver, who barely escaped.

Increasing global temperatures are especially threatening to Alaska, as close to 85% of the state may overlay permafrost that is beginning to melt precipitously. Permafrost depths range from a few feet to a couple of thousand depending on latitude and underlying geologic structures. In addition to creating surface instability, melting permafrost, which contains an abundance of frozen plant mass, further accelerates greenhouse warming by releasing carbon dioxide and methane as the frozen vegetation resumes rotting. Such rapid changes in the environment disrupt the habitat to which animal and plant life have adapted over millennia. This is not the place for a detailed discussion, but those two cartoons may be as much humor as I should attempt to extract from changing temperatures.



"Frankly, I couldn't care less what the low was at home last night!"

Let me clarify that. The humor in the beach cartoon is also derived from changing temperatures but changing them by changing your location. Some Alaskans are fortunate enough that they can afford to – or desperate enough that they have to – go "Outside" to Hawaii or other warm places during the winter. That cartoon caused me years of soul searching, albeit editorial, not about fleeing the cold. (We had sought out the freezing temperatures.) Originally, it read, "Frankly, I could care less what the low was at home last night!" Now it reads, "… I



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"You wanna run the dogs or go inside and play computer games?"

couldn't care less..." I went back and forth several times in 1987 deciding which to use. A lot of people say "could," but they mean "couldn't," which is logically correct. I decided to go with usage the first time but, 35 years later, changed my mind. Next time?

We're not quite done with winter cartoons. The humor in the one about running the dogs or playing computer games is the same as that in the igloo-antenna cartoon – the ironic juxtaposition of modern and ancient technologies – as is true with some others in this collection. One difference between those two is in the housing depicted. The igloo represents a traditional, if temporary, structure, whereas the frame house, supposedly permanent, is one thrust on the Natives by a non-Native culture. Still, in both, as in reality, the locals have adapted the electronic age to their own situation.

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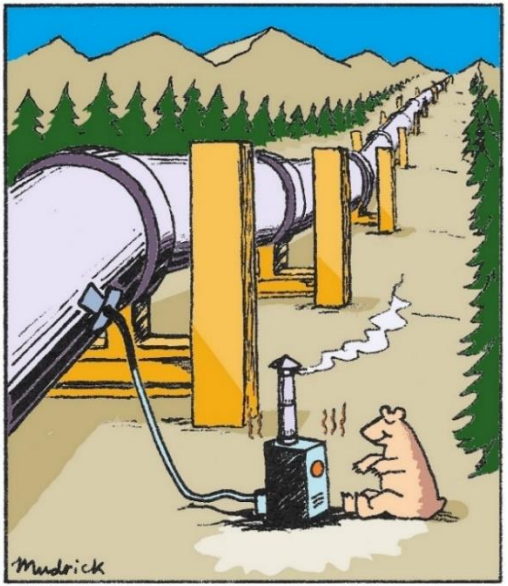

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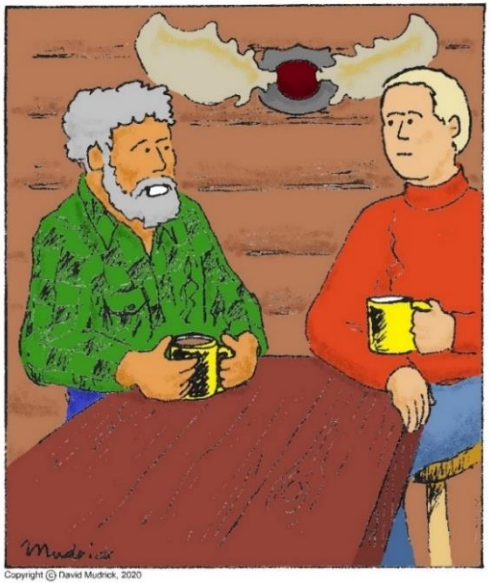
Does the cartoon of the sled dog with its plugged-in electric heater have the same theme? What about the one of the bear tapping the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline for heat? Decide for yourself. I don't really care, since all such judgements are after the fact and weren't consciously part of my creating any of the cartoons.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"You know, that's a darn good question.... Just why did I come here twenty-five years ago in the first place?"

With the "darn good question" cartoon, the final one in this section, I have included an original or modified version of each of the 61 cartoons from *Too Far North* in 1987, and in approximately the same order as then. The next section, New Oldies, presents mostly updated versions of cartoons that didn't appear back then, most of which were drawn after the book was published. And of course, there's more commentary, which I hope doesn't detract from your enjoyment of the cartoons, in particular if there's more discussion of the nature of their humor, which may be an unanswerable question.

I suppose the question in the cartoon, "Just why did I come here twenty-five years ago in the first place?" might be unanswerable, as well. Still, I trust I've given you a taste of the adventures and growth we experienced as a family in that amazing winter hinterland, the acceptance and help that the community showered on us, and the enjoyment I derived from creating the cartoons.

At the least, I hope it has answered the question, "Just why did we go to Alaska 35 years ago in the first place?" If you want a more credible answer to that question, read Pat's introduction to her planned memoir on our trip, in the Rearword section.

New Oldies

Neither the cartoons in this section nor their original versions appeared in the 1987 edition of *Too Far North*, mostly because they were drawn after its publication. Some originally (that is, in black-and-white) did appear in the print version of the *Copper River Country Journal* as part of *The Bush League* comic strip, and most of the updated (in color) versions have been posted recently online in the Welds' *Copper River Country Journal* website (www.countryjournal2020.com). Some were originally drawn after we left Alaska. Not surprisingly, it became more difficult to think of ideas once we were Outside. I think their content and the nature of their humor may reflect that.

I returned to Alaska for a week in 2006, while studying environmental concerns with a seminar from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. We visited Juneau, Anchorage, and Seward. I didn't get back to the Copper Valley, but I did reunite with the Welds in Anchorage. One particularly graphic image for me on the trip was not being able to see the Mendenhall Glacier, outside Juneau, from the visitor center as we had done 19 years earlier on our way out of Alaska. The visible evidence of rising global temperatures

On a lighter note, here are pictures of me on that trip holding hands with a normal-size marmot at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and with the world's largest marmot (a doctored stuffed polar bear) at the top of the Mount Roberts Tramway in Juneau.

On to the new oldies…

As a youth, like many of my peers, I read the works of Jack London, in fact, probably more than most. In addition to the popular or assigned standards – *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild*, and the short story "To Build a Fire" – my dad introduced me to London's semiautobiographical novel *Martin Eden*. After that, I read a lot more of his books, most of which were not about the North, but still often about struggle, against man or nature, self or society. As a younger child, another northern "reference" for me was Robert Service's doggerel poem "The Cremation of Sam McGee," which, if read properly, could bring chills to its hearers. So, this first cartoon is a nod to those and other Northern portrayals, authentic or otherwise.

Similarly to me, Pat grew up on Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books, which, as she relates in her memoir included in the Rearword section, whetted her appetite for a more rugged and austere lifestyle.

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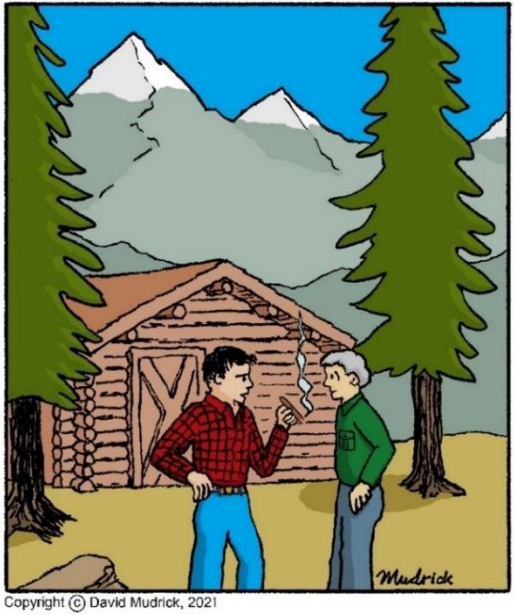
"Henry, would you mind coming out here and reciting a few stanzas of 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' for these good folks?"



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"Frankly, I moved out here so I could smoke without being hassled."

For some, rural Alaska, in additon to being a place to test your mettle against the elements, is somewhere to escape, from whatever or whomever. Many Alaskans value their independence from what they consider meddlesome community or government oversight and regulation. Still, they sometimes require help, for which they are usually grateful and which they, in turn, are quick to provide their neighbors. This cartoon was originally created after we returned home and recently colored, but not previously published, maybe because smoking is even more out of fashion.

One of the things I observed during my stays in the Arctic and Alaska, is that people who go to isolated places sometimes do so to get away from people like themselves. So, they find themselves surrounded be their own worst enemies.

I think this cartoon illustrates the universality of teenagers. I explained that, in part, we moved to Alaska to take Dan out of his customary environment prior to his entering high school, along with its peer-centered culture. To his credit and his siblings', they all adapted quickly and well to their new temporary home. The benefits of their exposure to new places and situations were long term. Perhaps most importantly they learned that people are basically the same and worthy of our respect, wherever and however we find them. Life in the Copper Valley also taught them the unimportance of excess material goods, but also gratitude for necessary and helpful ones and the need to share them with others.

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"It must be at least 40 below out there... The teenagers have put on their hats!"

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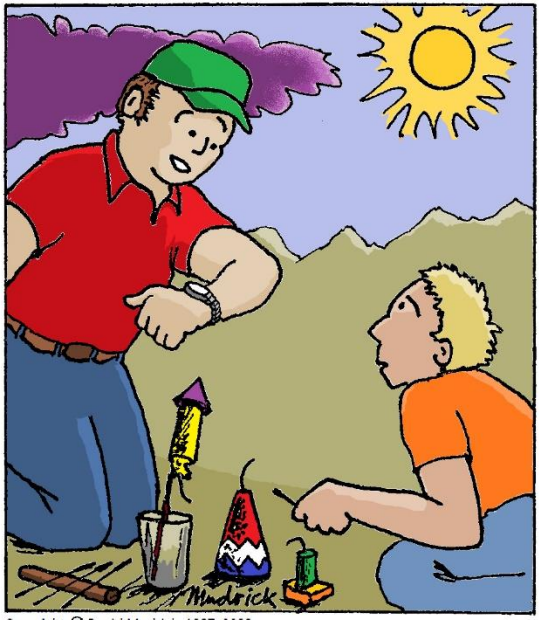
"Dear grandma and grandpa,
Today I was voted smartest, cutest, and most likely to succeed in the senior class. The other half of the class was voted most athletic, most talented, and and funniest."

Another thing our kids experienced in the Copper Valley was the small number of children their own ages. Dan's seventh grade class of 27 was the largest in his K-through-12 school, which was 16 miles away in Glennallen. Even though it was the largest school in the region, it had a total enrollment of only about 200. Gakona School, 2 miles downhill from us, where Sam and Ben attended, had 2 classrooms and 2 teachers, who split between them the 32 students in grades 1 through 6, there being no kindergarteners that year. Home schooling, which is now strongly supported in Alaska with equipment and curricula, may further cut into the size of the student body at any school. Parents home school for different reasons, from living too far off the road to religious convictions to political or polemical concerns.

This cartoon is one of the only ones dealing with summer, which we missed. Fireworks might be set off in Anchorage on the Fourth of July, as they are in places farther south, like Juneau, but they rarely are in the Copper River Valley. There, they are publicly displayed on New Year's Eve. A too light summer sky is one reason, but another is the extreme fire danger outside of wetter or snow-filled seasons. Wildfires are a serious problem in Alaska, and the melting permafrost with its attendant methane release, will only further fuel the danger, literally.



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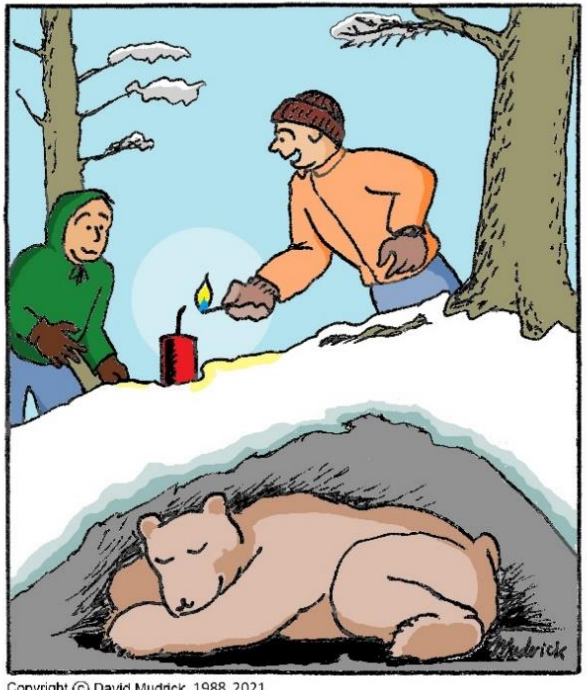
"It ought to be dark enough to set them off by... September 2nd."



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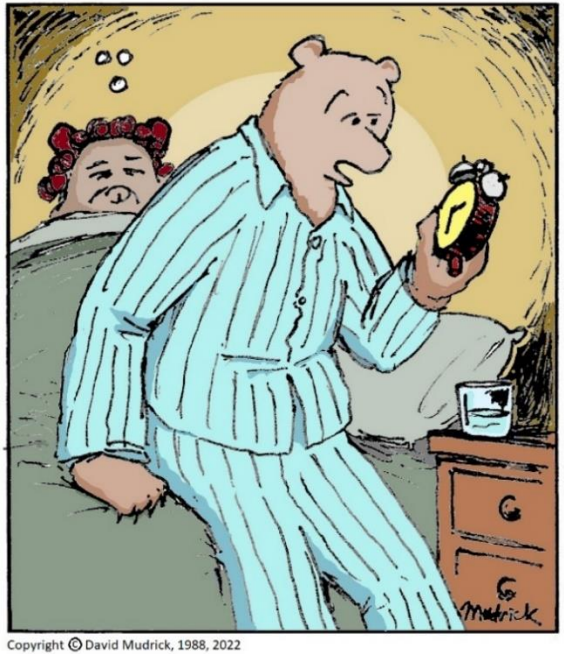
"Oh, boy! This firecracker ought to start the new year with a bang!"

Not surprisingly, our kids were amazed by the availability and potency of legal fireworks in The Last Frontier, from Roman candles to bottle rockets, firecrackers to M-80s. We set off some more benign ones on New Year's Eve in front of our cabin. I was impressed by the "butterfly" that whirred loudly as it spun around on the board we had laid in the snow. I was even more impressed when the next one shot past my ear and over the cabin. I'd lit the first one upside down without realizing those butterflies were meant to fly.

We intended to use this cartoon as a New Year's card after not getting anything out by Christmas, but that didn't happen, either.

I think this is the only cartoon where the animals totally populate a human-like world, but it's one of two where a clock or watch is being checked. The other is the Fourth of July cartoon.



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**"I must have set the alarm wrong...
It's only half past February!"**

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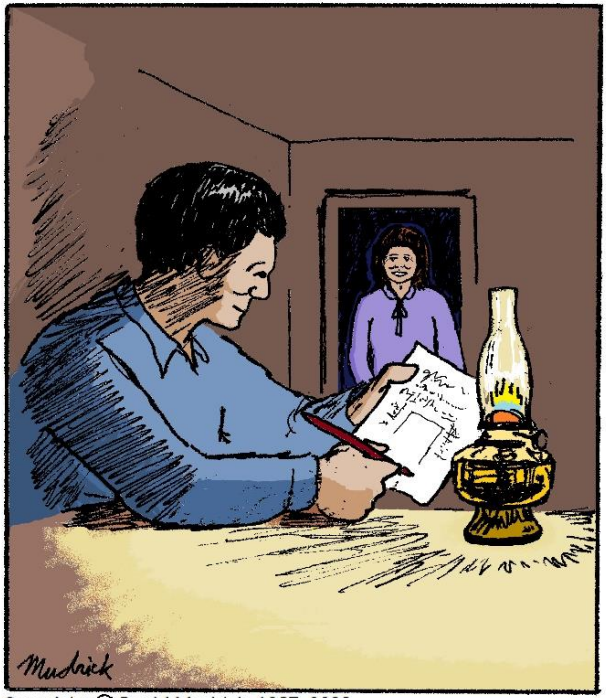
"Search party? Heck, no, I'm from the IRS... Your taxes are late!"

This cartoon is like the out-of-date "hijackers" one, in that it's political and includes an airplane. Well, not really political, just taking a cheap shot at a government strawman.

It has not been previously published. We'll see what happens after April 15th.

With its reference to seal oil, this is another cartoon ostensibly outside the Copper Valley realm, but it's really more about me drawing cartoons late at night on our dining room table after the kids were asleep. However, that's not me or Pat or our dining room table. In fact, we didn't have a dining room, *per se.* The table was in the one-enclosure entry, kitchen, living room, family room, dining room, conservatory, study, library, den complex. A log-cabin version of the game of *Clue* based on our home would play much faster than the original, which was set in "Mr. Boddy's multi-room palatial mansion."



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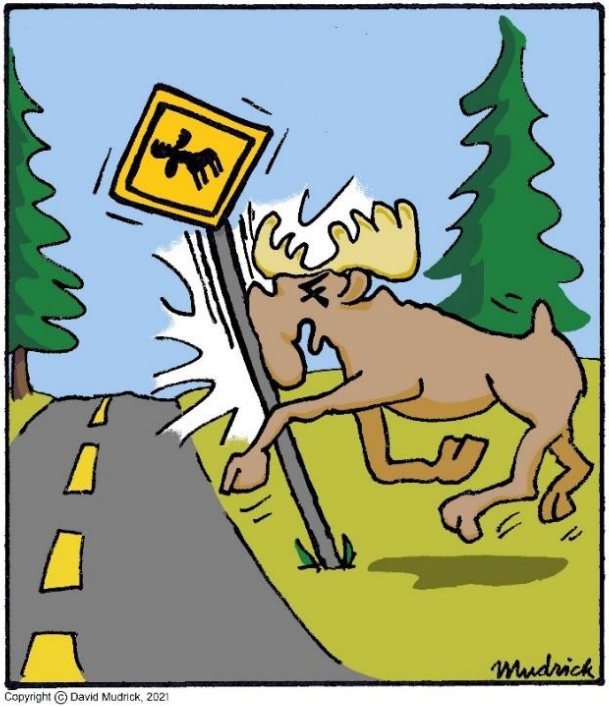
"Are you still 'burning the midnight seal oil'?"



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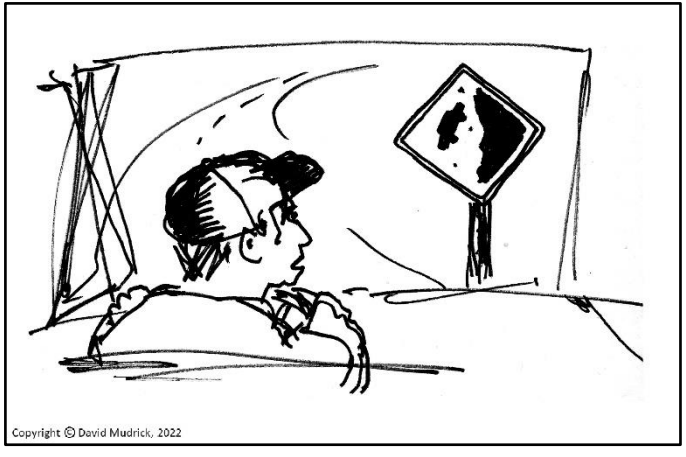
I'm still amused by this drawing, which I think may be the quintessential Alaskan cartoon. Or maybe it's my just revenge for so many close encounters of the moose kind.

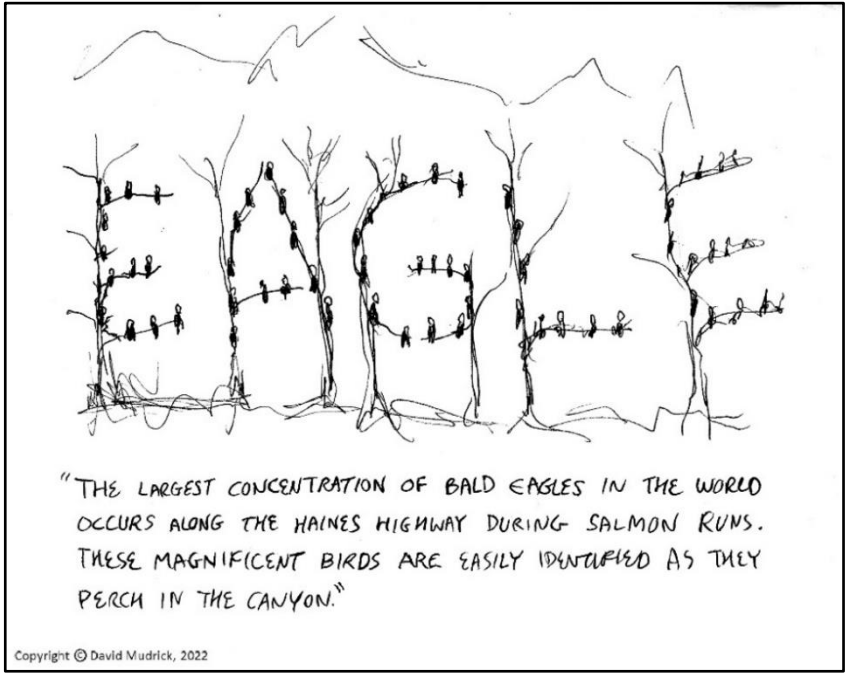
Moose are very nearsighted, as we had found out years earlier on Isle Royale, when they would stumble past us on the trail and in the darkness.

These four sketches are some unpublished cartoon ideas. You saw this hamburger one, from 1987, in the Backstory section. Like the "outhouse" cartoon, it wasn't that much of an exaggeration, but it was local, appropriate to our valley, if not other remote places in the state.



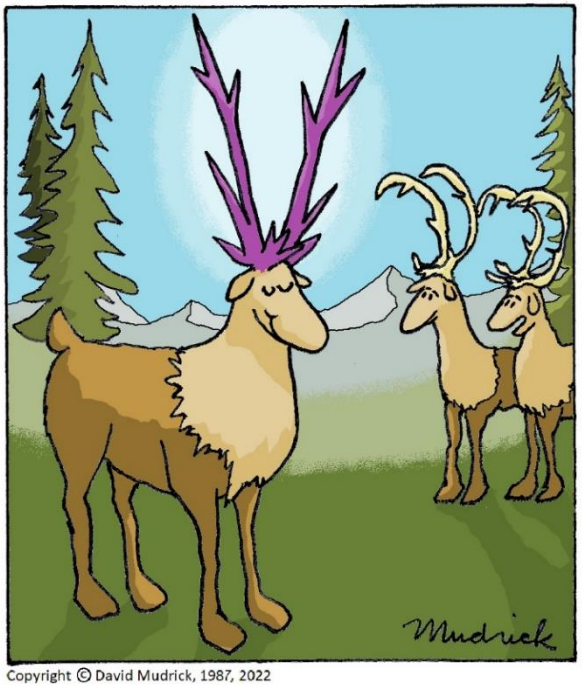
This sketch was probably done while we were still in Alaska. I suppose it's sort of a sequel to the "four wheel drive" cartoon.

Slightly exaggerated, maybe, I sketched this on the drive to Haines from Gakona Junction on our trip home. Bald eagles were abundant, although not as literate as pictured. The quote is from a forgotten travel-info source, unless I made it up. In Haines we boarded our first Alaska Marine Highway System ferry.



I inserted this unpublished sketch earlier, in the Animal Sign section's discussion of bear-type identification. It's rather dark humor, but that may not be why the gag wasn't used in *Too Far North.* It probably wasn't authored until after we left Alaska.

I'm not sure if "punk" is a current hair style. Nor am I sure what the environmental advantage of large, normal caribou racks is – maybe for defense or sex appeal. Interestingly, both male and female caribou carry them. They drop off in the fall, except for pregnant females, who retain theirs through the winter. I've pondered the nature of the "drunken spruce forests" of Southcentral Alaska, with their short-limbed trees, reasonably spaced one from another. ("Drunken" because the shallow-rooted trees lean in the thin soil topping the permafrost.) Had the foliage been more dense, as in the forests of Virginia, the caribou might not have been able to navigate it while sporting such huge headgear.



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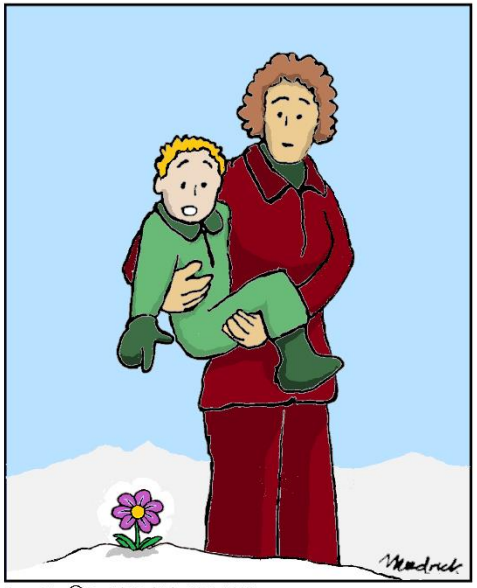
"I think it's called 'punk'..."



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"Look, Mommy... What's that?"

I recently found the black-and-white 1988 drawing for this previously unpublished cartoon. I colored it and sent it to the Welds, who published it on the Country Journal website to highlight the first indications of spring following what was an interminable snow-laden winter.

This is another recently recovered and recolored previously unpublished cartoon, this time displayed on the *Journal* website to accompany an article on proposed changes to the Permanent Fund Dividend program. I used an abstract background design, that unintentionally suggested the colors and shape of a roll of duct tape.

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"It's from the Governor... 'As a cost saving measure, in lieu of this year's Permanent Fund dividend, I'm sending every man, woman, and child a roll of duct tape.'"

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"Business has really picked up since we started advertising locally with the *Country Journal!*"

I also recently found the black-and-white original of this unpublished cartoon, but it had no caption. I've updated it here \as a tribute to the Welds' local publishing efforts and their effect on the region, and as a thank you for their friendship over the years. In actuality, whereas the old print edition of the *Country Journal* depended on advertising, the website version does not currently display ads.

Can you think of another caption? How about, "The moose uses cash, and the bear carries a slightly mangled credit card."

We can’t close this section and the discussion of the cartoons without another nod to duct tape.

Is this one another example of the ironic juxtaposition of modern and ancient technologies? Yes, but I think it’s funnier if you don’t think about that.

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"Good heavens... It's duct tape!"

A Word about Leaving Alaska

One task we had to attend to before leaving was to find a home for Thumbs, our young male striped cat with an extra digit on each forepaw who, before the first snowfall, showed up crying at our cabin door the morning after a mouse ran across Pat's foot while she was sewing at "the table." We were able to leave him with the Hatleys in Kenny Lake, who also had a striped cat. The two bonded immediately.

Although I have described what may sound like a difficult way of life, which it was, we managed well enough, especially with the help of friends and neighbors. We seriously considered staying in Alaska, although our original plan was to return home and to my job after a year away. Had we stayed, we might have relocated to Homer or Valdez, two small cities of about 3,500 each in 1987. Both are literally "at the end of the road," Homer is the terminus of the Sterling Highway, on the coast of the Kenai Peninsula. As you rode into town, you looked out on a spit that took you into the water of Kachemak Bay, across which rose a set of mountains with the appearance of a distant lost world. Valdez, on Prince William Sound, is the southern ending point of the Richardson Highway and the Trans-Alaskan Oil Pipeline. Sea otters played in the harbor on our two trips there, in water that was open in fall and ice-strewn in winter. The seashore was a blessing and a curse, providing access and commerce but harboring dangers. The town was wiped out by a tsunami caused by the great Easter Sunday quake of 1964 and was relocated out of the direct line of future tsunamis. Then, not quite 2 years after we left Alaska, the supertanker Exxon Valdez, ran aground in the hazardous sound, spilling 11 million gallons of North Slope crude oil into that remote, ecologically sensitive area, in what was at the time the largest oil discharge into U.S. waters in history and a large-scale environmental disaster. Had we been living there, things might have gone differently. I

might have accidently backed into Captain Hazelwood's car the day before, injuring him enough that he wouldn't have been at the helm of the Exxon Valdez that day. Alternatively, he might have been skippering the ship while reading a copy of *Too Far North* (from a batch I would have sold in Valdez had we gone there after it was published) and been even more distracted, wherein the entire 53 million gallons aboard might have been discharged into the water. Fortunately or unfortunately, we didn't move there or to Homer, which had an enticing organic bakery. Instead, we stuck to our plan and left for Virginia. Admittedly, on the way home we were tempted to remain in Bozeman, Montana, but, ultimately, we felt the need to remain close to family, particularly to help care for our aging mothers.

At Pat's urging, my mom, Elsie Mudrick, a widow and seventy-four at the time, flew to Anchorage from her home outside Washington, D.C., to stay with us for our last few days in Gakona Junction. Her luggage did not arrive on the same plane, so we spent more time in Anchorage than we had planned, but she did get to reunite with Mike Rose and to shop at Price Savers, where she bought a small gold-nugget pendant. The trip that evening to Gakona Junction was illuminated by another bright moon, and little Jacob impressed her by shouting "Boo! Boo!" at the sight of caribou running across the Glenn Highway ahead of us.

Mom rode with us the first 4 days of the trip Outside, through the Yukon Territory to Haines and on the ferries of the Alaska Marine Highway System, via Juneau and Sitka, to Ketchikan from where she flew home. We did our usual van-tent camping, while she stayed in B&Bs or guest houses. She ate meals outside with us, wrapped in a warm coat, as spring was present but not fully warmed up. It was an unforgettable adventure for her, although sometimes tiring, especially having to listen to the same Ian Tyson tapes over and over for hours. She was a trooper. (It meant nothing to her that one of the tapes, *Cowboyography*, was brand new to us. Ben saw it in a sales rack behind the counter of a restaurant in the

Yukon on the way to Haines. He came running back to our table shouting excitedly, "Mom, Dad! They have a new Ian Tyson tape, here!)

Ironically, we didn't use either of our two spare tires on the Cassiar or during our nine and a half months in Alaska, where even the best roads were sometimes iffy and some of the so-called highways were unpaved. Then, within 2 hours of disembarking from the Alaska Marine Highway System ferry at Prince Rupert, B.C., and proceeding across central B.C. on the well-paved Yellowhead Highway, we experienced a cracked windshield, probably from a rock dislodged by a passing car, followed by a flat tire. A second flat tire occurred a few days later, back in the U.S.A., on Whidbey Island in Washington state. That was within a day of another of those "amazing" coincidences, like the one on the Cassiar: While we were still on Whidbey Island, Pat was browsing in a used bookstore in Langley, where she found a copy of *Lone Cowboy, My Life Story*, by Will James. It was one of the library books she had read to us in Alaska, along with *Smokey the Cow Horse,* by the same author. In talking with the bookstore owner, it came up that we lived in Reston, Virginia. He asked, "Oh, where in Reston? I have a cousin there I've never met." Pat explained it was a pretty big place, but as they narrowed it down, his cousin turned out to be our friend, Maryanne Lyons, who lived two doors away in our townhouse cluster.

I haven't included too many details of our life in Alaska, other than what corresponded with the cartoons. (You'll find more stories from other family members in the Rearword appendix section.) Nevertheless, I think you can see that our year away, with its schoolyear in Alaska was a great, if unheroic, adventure for all of us. The real heroes of the story were and are the people of the Copper River Valley, who live that adventure every day.

Rearword

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Last Word: A Winter Daytrip to Valdez and a Final Note 115

This section contains related material, starting with copies of the two 1987 newspaper reviews of *Too Far North*.

The short essay is from my website *Tom Duck and Harry: Ohio Gothic* (www.tomduckandharry.com), which may or may not answer the question of whether or not running into a moose is funny.

Pat wrote the next piece in 2013 for a class in memoir writing, as an introduction to a planned longer work about our trip. I recently rediscovered it, along with the remembrances that follow, which she collected for her story from our four children who were old enough in Alaska to remember it.

To fill up the last page, I've inserted a Last Word with an account of our winter daytrip to Valdez, along with a couple of photographs taken in snow-packed Thompson Pass.

And, of course, a Rearword section can't close unless that Last Word also includes a Final Note.

Two 1987 Newspaper Reviews of *Too Far North*

We sold 400 copies of *Too Far North* to the news services in Anchorage and Fairbanks that provided periodicals, books, and other resources to local bookstores. To my surprise, two Sunday reviews appeared a short time later, one in *The Anchorage Times,* May 24, before we left, and the other in The *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner,* June 21, while we were on our way home.

I've tried to format the reviews so you can read the photocopies by making them as large as possible. Apologies in advance for any eye strain.

We'll start with the second one. The reviewer, Jean Anderson, is an Alaskan author, with such works as *In Extremis and Other Alaskan Stories, in 1989,* and *Human Being Songs: Northern Stories,* in 2017. She was very helpful when I contacted her about using the review.

Cartoons caper across the North

"TOO FAR NORTH, A Northern Cartoon Odyssey." By David Mudrick. 62 pages, © 1987. Northcountry Communications, Box 336, Glennallen 99588. $4.95, paper.

If you're still looking for a last-minute Father's Day gift, you might consider a new book of Alaskan cartoons by Gakona Junction resident David Mudrick. Mudrick came to Alaska last summer with his wife, Pat, and their five children, all hoping "to experience a winter in the North." "Too Far North" shares the Mudricks' experiences—and then some.

"Although jobs and money were in short supply," as Mudrick says in his book's cheerful introduction, "there was no shortage of humorous material concerning the verities of life in the North—the road, bush pilots, dog mushers, hunting and fishing, cabin fever and the like."

Mudrick first examined these subjects in a cartoon series called "The Bush League," published in the regional newspaper, the Copper River Country Journal. When that series met with a bit of success—"some people thought they were funny, which was all the encouragmeent I needed," Mudrick reports—he decided to do a book.

"I only howl after eleven, when rates go down."

"Cabin fever."

"Too Far North" collects the Bush League cartoons and a few others to create a whimsical grouping that brings a newcomer's eye to all sorts of things Alaskan. Though Mudrick isn't likely to give sleepless nights to Charles Schulz, Jim Davis or Gary Larson, his enjoyable books should offer a few good chuckles to Alaskans.

Of those three well-known cartoonists, Mudrick's sensibility is probably closest to Schulz's. Like Schulz, Mudrick is a gentle satirist with little feel for the savage wit so often practiced by Garfield or the stunning absurdity sometimes seen in "The Far Side."

But there's toughness here, too. Mudrick's eye for geographical absurdity is quite good. For instances, there's the cartoon that shows a car careening over the edge of a cliff while its driver says to the passenger, "Don't worry, it's in four wheel drive."

Like the book's cover, which features a long, winding road below northern lights spelling out the collection's title to the migrating humans in their well-laden statin wagon, Mudrick's cartoons most often see people caught in wry juxtaposition to nature.

But nature isn't always an enemy here. I especially enjoyed the Walter Mitty-like squirrel perched on the roof of a two-seater plane and making engine noises, and the female shopper pulling an item off the department store's rack to display to another shopper: "Look! A down-filled swimsuit!"

Mudrick also has a good sense of the way technology manages to enter even the most "natural" lifestyles. One cartoon in this vein shows a sled dog with an electric collar standing plugged in among the cars in a parking lot. Another has two boys standing in the clearing outside a typical cabin-type Alaskan residence while one asks, "You wanna run the dogs or go inside and play computer games?"

Those ready for some enjoyable Alaskan cartoon games should look up the small northern odyssey encapsuled in "Too Far North."

—Jean Anderson

Jean Anderson is a local fiction writer who has recently been named a finalist in a nationwide Emerging Writers Competition sponsored by Passages North. Stories by her appear in current issues of The Chariton Review and Alaska Quarterly Review.

The *Anchorage Times* review, below, included seven works being considered by Ann Chandonnet, an Alaskan self-described author of poetry, literary nonfiction, and children's literature, as well as retired journalist, now living outside Alaska. From what I can see on the web, she's also been a prolific contributor of books and articles on food and food history, among other topics. I've highlighted the relevant portion of this article. I didn't notice the typo in the headline – "Springs" instead of "Spring" – until recently, and certainly not at the time. Apparently, no one at the paper did, either.

The Anchorage Times is no longer in business, which we can't blame on that mistake, but probably more likely on today's information and misinformation environment and its accompanying technologies. I was unable to contact Ms Chandonnet.

The Anchorage Daily News is also experiencing difficulty remaining a viable print-based newspaper.

Springs brings up new crop of Alaska books

TEMPTING FATE
By Laurie Albers
Houghton Mifflin. 342 pages. $17.95

THE ALASKA ADVENTURE BOOK
Alaska Illustrated. 118 pages. $12.95

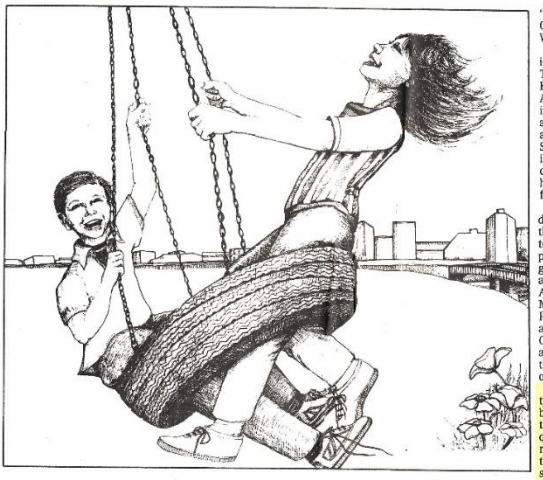
THE MILEPOST, 1987
Alaska Northwest Publishing. 530 pages. $14.95

SMALL WONDERS: Year-round Alaska
By Mary Shields
Pyrola Publishing, Fairbanks. 96 pages. $14

FUN GUIDE ANCHORAGE: A Kids' Guide to the All-American City
By Kathy Madison
Madison Avenues, Anchorage. 32 pages. $3.50

TOO FAR NORTH: A Northern Cartoon Odyssey.
By David Mudrick
Northcountry Communications, Glennallen. 65 pages, no price listed.

UUTUQTWA
Bristol Bay High School, Naknek. 60 pages. $6.



By Ann Chandonnet
Times Writer

Spring is not only the season of new buds, new ducklings and new grass, but also the season of new books.

The new Alaska books are a mangy bunch — some with table manners, and some without. But let's not judge a book by its manicure — er, binding. There are novels, guidebooks galore, cartoons and kids' books.

Derelict boats, chained huskies, sex and salmon — those are the ingredients of "Tempting Fate." "Tempting" is both a verb form and an adjective here, and the interplay of those two meanings sums up the plot. Many things tempt the heroine, Allie, and she gives in to almost all temptations — trying to find her niche in the world.

The book takes place in fictitious Vladmir, Alaska, somewhere near Petersburg. When asked, midway through the story if she's thinking of leaving Petersburg, Allie says, "There's still things I want to learn here. I haven't used this place up."

"What do you think you can learn here?" asks Sonny, one of Allie's friends.

"How people live. You know, where I come from, nobody knows anybody. . . . Here, everybody knows everybody, and they care."

"Tempting Fate" is "On the Road" with a female protagonist: "Who was she?" Sonny wonders. "She was like some kind of train rolling along on her own little track, and whatever was happening around her didn't really matter, because when the whistle blew, she'd be gone."

For those who enjoy raw realism, this is the real McCoy. In other words, it's not a pretty picture postcard of Alaska.

Those who like to wile away leisure with pretty postcards should take a look at **"The Alaska Adventure Book."** Packed with color photographs, this is one huge travel brochure for those who want to get away to parks and refuges, wilderness lodges, cruises or museums; those interested in hiking, biking, kayaking, birding, sailing, rafting, fishing, camping, hunting, sled dog racing, horseback riding and other Alaska activities.

If you're not a resident of the state, some of the photos are a bit misleading. Take the one next to the Hatcher Pass Lodge description on page 14. What's in the photo is not Hatcher Pass Lodge but Independence Mine. On page 15 are three colorful photos — with no locations given, just photo credits. Unfortunately, there's much of this kind of error. But the biggest omission of the whole book is that it lists neither prices nor price ranges. It would also be helpful to know more of the background and experience of some of the hunting, climbing and fishing guides.

However, if you have relatives about to invade you, and you want them *out of the house* — send them this book to peruse before they arrive.

Since the 1940s, **"The Milepost"** has guided adventurers up the Alaska Highway. The book takes its name from the official mileage markers found along northern roads, modeled after stone markers traditional in Britain since the days of early stages.

The 38th edition of "The Milepost" is 530 pages. It is an advertising-supported publication, so almost every page contains, before the mile-by-mile register of scenic vistas, highway junctions, bridges and camping areas, small display ads for service stations, lodges, gift shops, cafes, and general stores. The package is a handy one for the newcomer trying to find diesel fuel or some frozen bait herring.

There's a handy pullout map, and a "field editor report" where readers can report changes they find along the way.

And there's one big improvement in this year's "Milepost." In the past, although it listed everything from the zip codes of all towns in Alaska to Southwest ferry schedules and rates, what to wear, where to find geodes, common wildflowers and directions for sending telegrams, it never included an index to find those towns. This year there's a complete index of communities, highways, national parks, national wildlife refuges and other attractions on page 5. At last!

May Shields looks and looks. She really sees what she looks at, like a woodpecker's home in a standing dead spruce, and then she tries to get that vision just right in words: "Its entrance hole, chipped out of the soft, decaying wood, is decorated with a wreath of frost flowers, intricate, crystaline accumulations of the woodpecker's breath.."

"The world is different, and I am different," says Shields, writing after a walk in the Fairbanks woods on snowshoes in November.

Shields has penned a very personal portrait of Alaska season by season in **"Small Wonders: Year-Round Alaska."** The book is illustrated in pen and ink by Nancy van Veenan. The dated passages have been accumulated in 14 years of living here, and Shields has created a special calendar to "help put the small wonders in their place." The calendar is round — no beginning, no end; it is an insert given to the reader to use, too. To emphasize the continuity of the year, the book begins with April and ends with March or "Winter-Spring."

"Small Wonders" is just what its title says — a celebration of tiny changes in climate, flora, fauna, of things like 200-year-old trees, the song of Swainson's thrush, smoked moosehide mittens, pungent currant patches and wolverine tracks in the snow. In other words, this book is in the tradition of "Walden," "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," and "One Man's Wilderness."

Spring's new crop of books includes several for children. The most promising of the lot is Kathy Madison's **"Fun Guide to Anchorage,"** a coloring book that includes mazes, hidden objects, and lots of facts and figures about Anchorage. While coloring Sue Burrus' excellent illustrations, children 7 and up could Anchorage's geography, history, architecture, flora, fauna and lifestyles.

This is no empty collection of drawings to color in, but a thoughtful production that tourist grandparents could feel proud to take back to the grandkids. Adults could use it as a guide to places children new to Anchorage would enjoy — like McHugh Creek Campground, Potter Marsh, the section house and the museum. The "Fun Guide to Anchorage" is available at Book Caches, Carrs, Penneys, the Alaska Treasure Shop and other local shops.

Ever tried to repair a typewriter with a clip clothespin because the solder didn't make the supply barge? Ever lived in quonset hut or a cabin whose roof leaked right onto the bed, so the couple of the house had to sleep under a Visqueen quilt? Maybe one has to have had such "wilderness" experiences to enjoy David Mudrick's cartoons in **"Too Far North."** One shows two gentlemen looking at a small house. One has obviously just finished building this gem. The other, looking rather surprised, exclaims, "Uh . . . yes, I guess this is the first house I've ever seen made entirely of duct tape."

Another shows salmon leaping up falls, one saying to another, "Get born, swim to the sea, grow up, return to your birthplace, spawn, and die. . . . There's got to be more to life than that!"

Mudrick's "Dear Reader" page says that he, his wife Pat and their five children moved to Gakona Junction in 1986 to experience a winter in the north. To wile away the cold months, he began drawing "The Bush League" for the Copper River Country Journal. This collection is the result, with lots of jokes about bad roads, pipeline crossings, flightseeing in fog, fishing, wolves, Hawaiian vacations, native Americans, bears, sled dogs, sled seals, hot springs, caches and the real truth about the "winter wonderland."

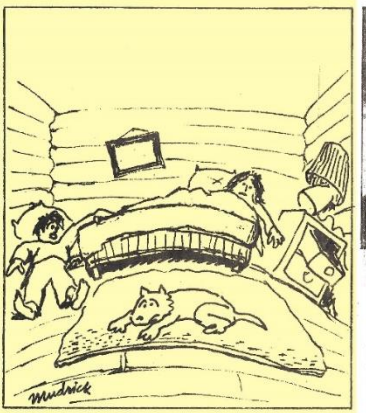
The drawings are not polished, but some of the gags are really funny. The cover drawing shows a station wagon loaded for a long journey facing the words "Too far North" written in aurora borealis above the horizon, and the line, "Do you think someone's trying to tell us something?"

Could that someone be David Mudrick?

"Uutuqtwa" is the annual oral history magazine of Bristol Bay High School in Naknek. The word means "I go home." This particular issue contains oral history, traditional tales, stories and how-to articles. There's an article on Russian Orthodox-style funerals, a profile of one of the last residents of Old Savonoski, and how-to's for pickled fish and butchering moose and caribou.

The guide to skinning a fox is very detailed and could be followed by someone who just happens to have a dead fox lying around the house, and the superstitions associated with death and spirits are similar to some collected in English Bay by another high school Foxfire project.

These projects are valuable ground-level collections. They preserve a miscellany of facts and beliefs that might otherwise be lost because no one bothered to listen.



"Frost heave."

Kathy Madison's "Fun Guide to Anchorage," top, focuses on fun things for children to do in Anchorage. Most will be learning and having fun at the same time. David Mudrick has complied his cartoons, left, into "Too Far North," a humorous look at life in the Last Frontier. Above, Laurie Alberts, author of "Tempting Fate."

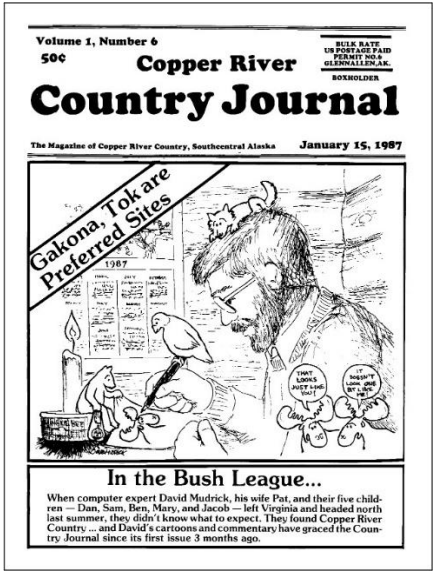
My Brush with Alaskan Humor - or - What's So Funny about Running into a Moose?

June 2007, revised February 2022
With selective memories of Gakona, AK

[Until we lived in Alaska, I thought AK should have stood for Arkansas, but now I know it's the sound you make trying to inhale at minus 50 degrees F.]

In May 2007 I received an email asking permission to use portions of my book, *Too Far North, A Northern Cartoon Odyssey,* in an exhibit of Alaskan sequential art (aka cartoons). We had produced it over twenty years before in Gakona, Alaska, with publisher friends Linda and Jeremy Weld, in the dead of winter. The requesting exhibit was to be held in June 2007 in a small gallery between College and Ester, on the Parks Highway, "the road" that runs between Fairbanks and Anchorage. By national standards, this area would have been too small to call "podunk," especially in midwinter when there's not enough unfrozen liquid around to dunk anything, rich or po'. Nevertheless, I couldn't have been more honored, even if it were the New York Museum of Modern Art. (Well, that's probably not true, but I don't have to worry about finding out.)

In 1986-87, my wife and I, along with our then five kids, were wintering in Alaska to see the Northern Lights, with plans to return to northern Virginia after the school year and spring breakup. As winter progressed, we needed to raise enough funds to stay fed and get home. I had been drawing cartoons for our friends' new bi-weekly news magazine, the *Copper River Country Journal*, which they published through



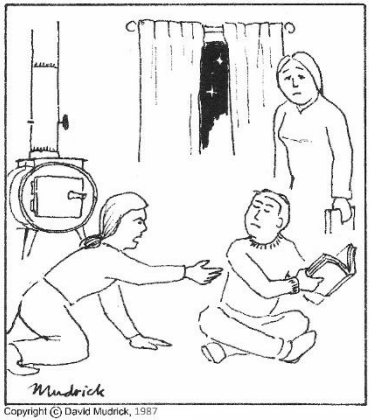
Volume 1, Number 6
50¢
Copper River
Country Journal
BULK RATE
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO.6
GLENNALLEN,AK.
BOXHOLDER
The Magazine of Copper River Country, Southcentral Alaska
January 15, 1987
Gakona, Tok are Preferred Sites
1987
THEY LOOKS JUST LIKE TOK!
IT DOESN'T LOOK JUST LIKE MY HOME!
In the Bush League...
When computer expert David Mudrick, his wife Pat, and their five children — Dan, Sam, Ben, Mary, and Jacob — left Virginia and headed north last summer, they didn't know what to expect. They found Copper River Country ... and David's cartoons and commentary have graced the Country Journal since its first issue 3 months ago.

their company, Northcountry Communications, Inc. We decided to publish the book, which was a collection of those cartoons and others. The cartoons were usually executed in drawing pen on note paper, by lantern light after the kids were asleep. My greatest compliment at the time came from a Journal reader in Tok who wrote, "This is real Alaskan humor." If so, then, what is real Alaskan humor? Certainly, it runs the same gamut as any other humor genre, perhaps more often on the cruder side to meet the preconceptions of tourists. However, with the penetration of The Last Frontier by technology and the internet, just about anything can be had or viewed there now, whereas when we were there, satellite broadcast was sometimes the only way to communicate. The satellite dishes were pointed almost to the horizon, which was a visual and visceral indication of just how far into northern latitudes we had come.

Copyright © David Mudrick, 1987

"Uh... yes, I guess this is the first house I've ever seen made entirely of duct tape."

My cartoons focused on the more quirky aspects of rural Alaskan life as we experienced it. No, I never really saw a house made entirely of duct tape, but I suspect more than one exists. No, swans do not return for the



Copyright © David Mudrick, 1987

"Mom! It's my night for the Sears catalog!"

summer in "S"s, but rather in the same "V"s as other migratory waterfowl. No, my kids never fought over the Sears catalog as a source of indoor recreation, but they did decorate the cabin with paper snowflakes and listened to the output of our home entertainment center, which consisted of a kids' Fisher-Price cassette recorder and an AM-FM clock radio, that only picked up two stations. (The story of the gentleman phoning Sears to order a case of toilet paper, and when being asked for the catalogue number replying, "Lady, if I had the catalogue, I wouldn't need the toilet paper!" is probably anecdotal, but not too far off the mark.)

Alaskan humor reflects the same vagaries of the human condition found elsewhere, though Alaskans may be reticent to admit it. More than elsewhere, Alaskan humor must also pay homage to the larger population of two-, four-, and six-footed, pawed, clawed, winged, or otherwise appendaged denizens of the state, not to mention the finned or flippered river and sea folk. Unfortunately, like mosquitoes, puns can exist that far north. Even more unfortunately, but unlike mosquitoes, puns do not die off in winter.

Copyright © David Mudrick, 1987

Having a moose in it doesn't make it Alaskan humor, although adding a flying saucer, that probably crossed the galaxy only to run into a moose on "the road," just might. This also was the only way I could work

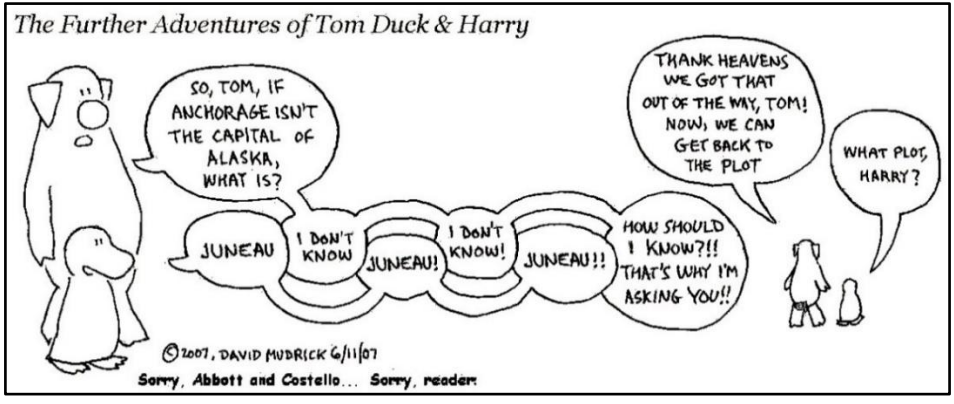
roadkill moose into a humor context, since those encounters were often fatal for both the moose and the occupants of the vehicle. To add insult to injury or death, you or your survivors wouldn't benefit from the windfall of moose meat. There was a list of families, who maybe couldn't hunt, waiting to get a phone call telling them their moose was available, perhaps 200 miles away in Talkeetna. We had more than our share of close encounters of the moose and caribou kind, and they were only a laughing matter after the fact, if at all.

Oh, yeah, the Northern Lights. We did see them. They can stay almost motionless for hours and then suddenly start dancing at breathtaking speed, so you have to decide in advance just how long you will stand there watching. Otherwise, your brain might freeze, and you might forget to go back inside. We also saw them from the doorway of our north-facing latrine. The door was no obstacle to viewing as it had blown off in the fall during a week of 100-mph Chinook winds. Of course, when using the latrine in the winter, you had to let the seat drop hard first to remove the two inches of hoarfrost.

Springtime was another source of humor, when kids would measure the depth of ice-melt puddles by wading into them. The water was always at least a half inch above the tops of their "breakup boots." By that time, we were packing to return home, and the nights were now too light to see the aurora, but the local fauna springing back to life all around our cabin sounded like a Tarzan movie. On the drive back "Outside," after surviving the winter with little more automobile trouble than a broken valve lifter, we experienced a cracked windshield and a flat tire within two hours on the Yellowhead Highway, the first major paved road we hit in British Columbia: Good ol' Alaskan, or maybe just northern, humor.

* * *

Sorry, folks, I know this cartoon from my website may not be true Alaskan humor, but I had to include it.



Pat's Introduction to Her Memoir of Our Trip to Alaska

[From David: I rediscovered this document, dated October 9, 2013, on an old hard drive as I was nearing the completion of this book. Pat originally authored it for a memoir-writing class she was taking at Politics and Prose, a nationally known bookstore in Washington, D.C. This is the introduction to what she intended to be a larger document but, unfortunately, never got back to.]

Chapter 1: In the Beginning

Pat Mudrick

This is my introduction to a memoir of our year-long, ten thousand mile family adventure to Alaska. The last paragraph will eventually be expanded into several chapters.

I trace the idea of packing our five children into an old van and driving to Alaska to the books my husband, David, and I read as children. I devoured all of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books and dreamed of being as brave and resourceful as those pioneer children. David escaped into the adventures of sled dog mushers, sea cooks, and even *Martin Eden,* a fictionalized autobiography of author Jack London.

Throughout our young lives we were drawn to activities that kept us outdoors and challenged our strength and nerve. The summer after his freshman year of college David landed a summer job with the weather bureau at a joint United States/Canada weather station at Alert, Northwest Territories, the northernmost permanent habitat in the world on the edge of the Arctic Ocean, 500 miles from the pole. One of the highlights of his summer was seeing and howling with of a pack of large, white arctic wolves, earning him the nickname "Howls with Wolves" – years before the release of the movie with a similar title – which we

sometimes still use as a term of endearment. His one disappointment was never seeing the northern lights because the sun never sets during the high arctic summer.

To get the last credits necessary to earn my bachelor's degree, I spent the month of April prior to our May 27, 1971, wedding on a month-long survival trek in the Canyonlands area of southern Utah. I hiked hundreds of rugged miles, rappelled and scrambled down cliffs, and waded through rivers with occasional patches of quicksand. I camped with no equipment except an army blanket, a knife, and a possible bag, a homemade shoulder bag to carry anything else I thought I needed or found and wanted to take home. It was hard. It was wonderful. I worried that the announcement of our marriage would include, "The bride wore a stars and stripes band-aid on her badly sunburned nose."

Now we could plan our adventures together. One memorable one was a fall and winter sojourn in a one room cabin at 8,000-ft elevation on Mt. Timpanogos in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. David was the winter caretaker of a summer camp located 1,000 feet and two miles of winding mountain road above Sundance Ski Lodge where I worked at the snack bar. The record snowfall that winter forced the road crews to stop plowing the road beyond Sundance and us to park our van in the lot there for several months. This meant my cross-country skiing down to work early each morning and any other time we needed our van to get to town. We later discovered that the staff at Sundance had bets as to whether we would make it through the winter. We did.

For the next few years, I worked on my master's degree and David worked as a mechanic in a large rental business, planted trees for the Forest Service, went on archaeological digs in the southwest and Be'er Sheva, Israel, and then found a job creating computer based instruction at the university.

And then Dan was born. When Dan was ten months old, I received my degree and David accepted a professional job which moved us to Coronado, California, where Sam was born, Goodyear, Arizona, Ogden, Utah, and Reston, Virginia, where Mary and Ben were born. By mid 1985 we were expecting baby five in December. We had settled into a busy suburban life, volunteering at the kids' elementary and preschools, piano lessons, cub scouts, and youth league sports. Our children were bright, beautiful, and happy. We had good friends and neighbors. It was a good life.

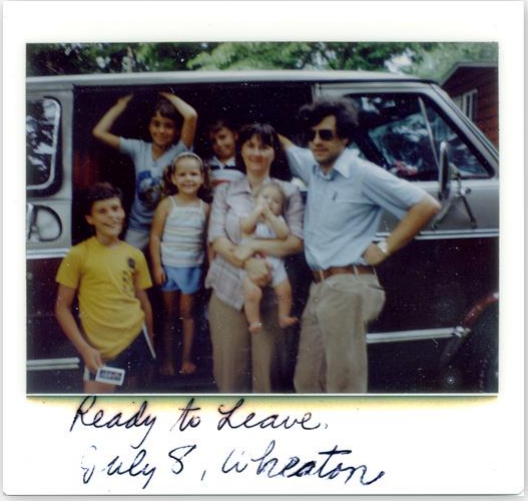
However, one bright summer day, as I was driving our Ford Escort station wagon loaded with the two younger children and bundles of local newspapers that I delivered to the carriers every Tuesday afternoon, I was struck, as if by lightning, that if we waited until our kids were grown to take our Alaskan odyssey to fulfill David's dreams of seeing both the northern lights and the settings of his favorite Jack London books… we would be forced to go on a senior citizen cruise! I was appalled, horrified, dismayed. We needed a plan to escape this disheartening postponement of our dreams.

And so, we began planning. Well, I began planning, and talking, and before long David bought into the idea. Our first discovery was that we really liked the idea of going as a family. We wanted our children to share in the adventure and learn that there are many beautiful alternatives to the life we had in Fairfax County, Virginia. We could visit friends and family that we didn't see often along our journey. We would be freed from the tender grip of overscheduled individual enrichment activities that came at the expense of shared experiences. It would be educational. It would be fun.

In the subsequent months, we told everyone that we were planning to take the kids on a year-long trip to Alaska, purposely to make it harder for us to back out. We began arranging places to visit along the way. David negotiated a year's leave of absence from his job. We serendipitously found an eight year old, full-

size Chevy van for sale by a volunteer fireman who had maintained it in reliable running order. We added a fold-down middle seat and a rear sleeping platform with underneath storage, zippered side and rear screen doors (we'd been in heavy mosquito country before), a rear-mounted spare tire to make more room in the cabin, and wire baskets over the headlights to protect them from flying gravel on the road north. The children each received a small duffel in their chosen color to hold two changes of clothes, toiletries, books, and a few small toys. We cleared and rented our townhouse, gave away most of our belongings, and stashed the remainder in a five-by-eight commercial storage unit. We also had our fifth child on Christmas eve, six months before our departure from grandma's house in Wheaton, Maryland, on July 8, 1986.

Financially, we estimated we had enough money to last two months, in which time we would find full-time work. We never did. We made it anyway, through the rural Alaskan winter, living like the locals, working odd jobs such as substitute teaching and construction, self-publishing and peddling 1000 copies of *Too Far North*, our book of cartoons about life in Alaska, and duct-taping the kids' shoes when necessary.



July 8, 1986, leaving Grandma Mudrick's house in Wheaton, Maryland, scanned from a Polaroid picture. We returned home a year later, almost to the day.

Memories of Alaska from Our Children

Our Daughter, Mary Mudrick Ostraff – May 14, 2013, Provo, Utah

Mush, you huskies; hush, you muskies.

While this is not a specific occurrence, I still vividly remember the smell of the forest bottom/ground in Alaska. While my words will not do the smell justice, I will make an attempt. The smell's ingredients are something like pine, moss, and decaying plant matter. Mix the ingredients, let them settle, and then breathe them in through the nostrils with some cool, fresh air. When I think of that smell, I also have a visual in my mind of low bush berries. Bright red.

I was four years old in Alaska. Seventeen years later, as I was walking through some woods in Finland, I experienced that same smell. Instantly, my mind was transported back to my childhood experiences in Alaska. That smell took me to a place inside where I felt happiness, family, and love. That simple smell of the forest at a similar latitude brought me a needed shot of comfort, peace, and perspective.

I remember playing in the cabin while the older boys were at school. I have a memory of playing Cinderella. I used a dry washcloth and wiped the ladder to the loft. Then I climbed up the ladder and sat in the corner, pretending that this was Cinderella's/my little bedroom where all of the birds and mice lived. I remember listening to a radio show while I was up there. A line that sticks with me is, "Mush, you Huskies!"

I also remember that I had one Barbie doll in Alaska, Miko. I would brush her hair over and over and over. Now my daughters play with that same Barbie.

Our Son, Ben Mudrick – May 15, 2013, Rochester, New York

Because we didn't have TV, we had to find other ways to entertain ourselves inside the house when it was cold and dark outside. One of my favorite memories is when we would listen to and act out our favorite songs. We often acted out "Sierra Peaks" by Ian Tyson, with all of its cussing, heavy drinking, and animal cruelty. We would always fight about who got to be Buster Jigs because, from what I remember, in the Ian Tyson version he got more action attributed to him than he should have. I also remember dressing up in a bathing suit and sandals with a yellow towel on my head (a "bushy, bushy blond hair-do," if you will) and acting out the Beach Boys' "Surfin' U.S.A." Of course, my favorite musical memory is the many times when we would just sit around or drive in the van and sing together as a family. "Pack up all my cares and woe. Here I go, singing low." "Oh give me land, lots of land under starry skies above." "Da-doo-ba-doo!" With iPads and DVD players and all the technology we have now, that is something I have not done as much as I would like with my family, but it is something that I need to start doing... maybe starting on our road trip tomorrow.

Our Son, Sam Mudrick – May 15, 2013, Vienna, Virginia

Alaska was cold, but most of my memories occurred outside of our two-bedroom cabin. I remember going outside in jeans and T-shirts when the temperature finally hit zero in the "spring." The nostalgia and depth of these outdoor memories only grow with each day I sit working in my office. One particularly fond memory took place on a warm fall day in 1986. My brother Ben and I attended school at Gakona Elementary, a one-room school house with 32 total students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Ben and I would return home a bit earlier than our older brother, Dan, and usually spent the time waiting for Dan to arrive by exploring the woods surrounding our cabin. On this day, Ben and I pushed a bit deeper into the woods than we ever had and came across a bed of moss the size of a twin bed. There was lots of moss in these parts of the Alaskan woods, but usually it was thin and patchy. This moss was at least eight inches deep and looked just like a plush, fuzzy-green mattress. I recall lying side-by-side with Ben on the soft, cool moss bed. We talked, watched clouds, and just enjoyed each other's company. Mostly, I remember being filled with a feeling of contentment. My time in Alaska helped me gain an appreciation for nature and the peace it can bring.

Our Son, Dan Mudrick – May 16, 2013, Columbus, Ohio

It's hard to decide which memory... this one is sort of random, but here goes...

When we lived in Alaska, I joined the seventh-grade wrestling team during the winter sports season. By the time practice was over every evening, it was very dark. (That far north, the winter sun only made a perfunctory appearance during mid-day and set well before dinner time.) My parents would drive our Chevy van the 16 miles from our cabin to pick me up each night. One night as we were driving home on icy roads, mom suddenly slammed on the brakes as a moose lumbered onto the road. We skidded to a stop just in time to avoid hitting the moose broadside. The huge animal, lit eerily by our headlights and standing as tall as our van at the shoulder, turned nonchalantly to stare in through our windshield, frosting the glass with its breath. For a moment, as the adrenaline and fear peaked and began to subside, I made eye contact with the animal and felt an overwhelming sense of the strange power, beauty, and majesty of the moose and of the place we were lucky enough to experience. Then the moose turned and lumbered down the grade and into the shadows between the scraggly black spruce, as we caught our breaths and resumed the drive home.

Last Word: A Winter Daytrip to Valdez and a Final Note

One bright sunny winter day after a snowstorm, we all loaded into the van, put in a Beach Boys tape, and, to the tune of "Surfin' U.S.A," headed south to Valdez, 125 miles away on the Richardson. Above Valdez, the road winds through Thompson Pass, where typical annual snowfall levels reach 50 feet and the signs warn you to avoid loud noises that might trigger an avalanche. We took these pictures there.

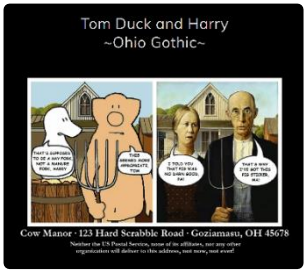
For this family shot, I set my camera on a rock, started the timer, and ran uphill into the picture. I'm still surprised it's not of a group laughing at the figure planted face down in the snow in front of them.

Here, Mary, right, may be packing a snowball meant for Sam, Dan, or Ben if she catches up.

Once in Valdez, we drove through the snow-canyon streets, where the level was up to the second story of the houses and truckloads of plowed snow were blown into road-side mountains following the EPA's ban on dumping it in the harbor. We visited a heated indoor swimming pool and drove back that night through Thompson Pass, now brightly illuminated by a rising full moon. The kids got some sleep on the fold-out bed and sleeping platform before we reached home.

Final Note, March 28, 2022: As I close this writing, heavy snowfalls are continuing in Southcentral Alaska, burying roads and collapsing roofs. There have been widespread avalanche warnings, with a large slide in Eagle River, outside Anchorage. Crews in Valdez are working around the clock to clear the snow from 14 massive oil storage tanks, where damage to valves has allowed harmful vapors to escape. So, with snow still piling up 8 days after the official start of spring, this is a good time to end a book subtitled "Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska." By the way, the Alaska State Troopers have issued a shoot-on-sight order for the groundhog.

Contact Information and Relevant Links



For information or to comment, email me through the **"Contact Us!"** link in my website ***Tom Duck and Harry: Ohio Gothic,*** www.tomduckandharry.com. The site contains two sections related to Alaska and a link to this book in pdf.

The Copper River Country Journal, www.countryjournal2020.com, where my cartoons appear, is Linda and Jeremy Weld's online news and information resource for the people of the Copper River Basin. Get the flavor of life, today, in that huge remote valley, plus accounts of the history and geography of the region.

Bearfoot, Alaska's Travel Magazine
www.bearfootguides.com

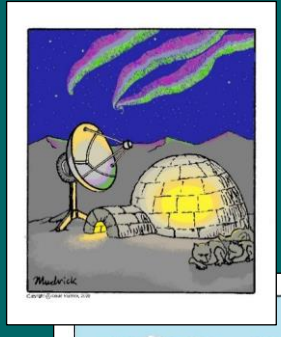
Bearfoot Travel: The Welds produce two free comprehensive travel guides covering the Alaska Road System, online and in print, available throughout roadside Alaska.

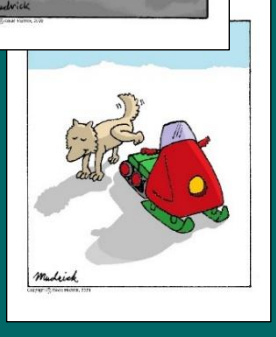
The Denali Summer Times
www.denalisummertimes.com

Living Too Far North

Drawing Humor from a Winter in Alaska

by David Mudrick





A wry commentary in word and cartoon on rural Alaska, covering humorous, important, and quirky aspects of life on and off the road, *Living Too Far North* is the companion to *Too Far North: A Northern Cartoon Odessey,* about which the critics in 1987 raved/shrugged…

"One of the best collections of cartoons about Alaska ever produced" – the author

"That's real Alaskan humor!" – a reader in Tok

"The drawings are not polished, but some of the gags are really funny." – Ann Chandonnet, *The Anchorage Times*

"Though Mudrick's not likely to give sleepless nights to Charles Schultz, Jim Davis or Gary Larson, his enjoyable books should offer a few good chuckles to Alaskans." – Jean Anderson, *The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*