

15 BUCKET-LIST ADVENTURES



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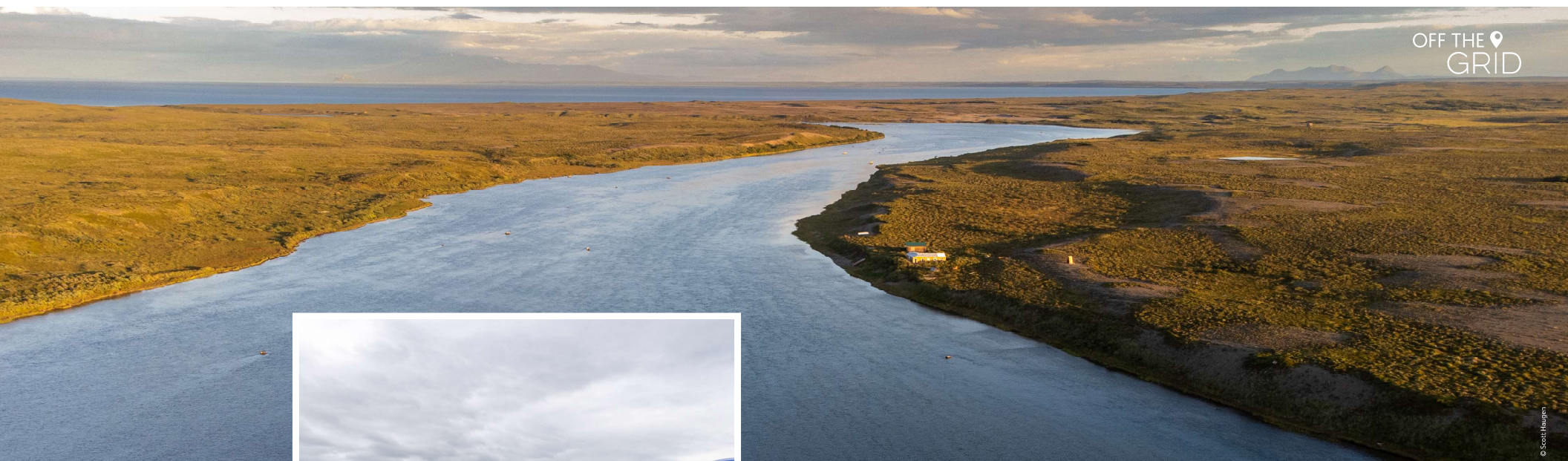
STEP AWAY FROM THE NOISE:

UNPLUG IN THE ALASKAN TUNDRA

BY TRACY BEARD



It takes a concerted effort to “get away from it all.” In this fast-paced world of constant information overload, a barrage of emails, incessant cell phone calls and non-stop texts, it was a welcome relief to leave it all behind. I retreated to Becharof Lodge, located 25 miles southeast of Egegik, Alaska, and discovered raw Alaska at its most authentic. While there, I indulged in uninterrupted conversations, witnessed active wildlife, fished for red sockeye and coho salmon, dined on delicious comfort food and disconnected from the craziness of the everyday world.



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ESCAPE

Most clients venturing to Becharof Lodge fly into King Salmon, Alaska, on commercial flights and then transfer onto one of Trygg Air Alaska's seaplanes or floatplanes. These aircraft land on the Egegik River or a sand bar farther upstream where guests are picked up by boat and transported to the lodge. It sounds easy enough, but the weather in Alaska is unpredictable and can cause delays and trip cancellations.

I arrived in King Salmon and my ride to Trygg Air was waiting for me. Craig, the pilot for that day, loaded me and my gear into the plane. The panoramic views were breathtaking. The Alaskan tundra receives little rain and is considered a cold desert. Snow and ice cover the relatively treeless expanse in the winter, and wildflowers blanket the area in summer. The landscape is a mix of big and small lakes, alder bushes, green marsh, and



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waterways that snake throughout the countryside.

Craig said the flight would take 23 minutes, but he had to keep changing course as visibility worsened. The gray cloud cover made it difficult for him to see the recommended three-mile distance, and after several redirects Craig determined that we would not make it out that day. We headed back and I spent the night in King Salmon.



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SLEEP

Becharof Lodge opened as a hunting and fishing camp around 2007. The original owner built a kitchen and cabin and shipped in tents for visiting

clients. In 2018, Mark Korpi and George Joy purchased the lodge. They began making improvements and in 2019, constructed four new accommodation buildings named Haugen, Frisby, Sauna and Matlock. Although rustic, these rooms are far more comfortable than tents. The lodge has flush toilets, hot showers and rooms with comfortable mattresses. Windows reveal vast views of the Alaskan tundra or the Egegik River.



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DISCONNECT

There is no internet, TV or phone service at the Lodge. However, inReach satellite phones with texting capabilities are available for emergencies. With no outside interference, Becharof has a relaxed vibe. Guests spend time fishing,

reading, chatting or listening to George's exciting hunting and fishing stories. Conversations often begin with "the one that got away" but quickly turn to more personal subjects typically reserved for hairdressers and bartenders. Many guests return year after year.

Coastal brown bears, wolves, caribou and moose are often spotted eating on the tundra or running along the riverbank, and most days visitors can catch a glimpse of the lodge's "mascot," a plump overfed ground squirrel that is quite the pancake aficionado.

DINE

Clients wake to the smell of hot coffee and sizzling bacon. After breakfast, Goni, the lodge cook, prepares food for the rest of the day. Soups with freshly baked bread are the standard lunch, and the smell of cookies baking permeates the air for the remainder of the afternoon. Hearty, comforting dinners range from pulled pork on homemade rolls with baked beans and potato salad to the weekly steak night and the delicious fried seafood dinner featuring calamari, shrimp, cod, coleslaw and homemade tartar sauce.

ACTION

Fishing begins in mid-July and extends until the first week of September. The lodge guides and their assistants take guests out to selected fishing holes several times each day. The guides bait hooks, give instructions when asked, unhook fish and then filet and freeze the fish for guests to take home. Fishing in this river should really be called "catching." I reeled in eight fish in the first hour and kept the five largest coho salmon.

Excursions are available for purchase. I visited Brooks Falls, one of the top places in the world to photograph bears fishing in the waterfall. Other options include boat trips to various sights or flyouts in search of wildlife or other nearby rivers.

Although a trip to Becharof may seem complicated and the conditions harsh, a temporary escape from today's cultural noise is worth the effort.

Book your stay at Becharof Lodge at becharoflodgefishing.com. Plan your Alaska travels at travelalaska.com.



BUSINESS OFF THE GRID

Off-the-grid businesses face enormous challenges.

If something breaks down, parts are difficult to find and often need to be boated or flown in. The costs can be enormous. It is essential that a "MacGyver-type" person be onsite, someone that can jury-rig anything with basically a toothpick and tape to keep it going

until new parts arrive. Relationships are crucial, and it is imperative to help neighbors, adventurers and visitors in emergencies. Winters are treacherous and often wreak havoc on equipment. Bears and other wildlife break in and destroy structures, buildings, food supplies and equipment during the long winters.