



Milestones

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Daily Tribune

LIFESTYLES



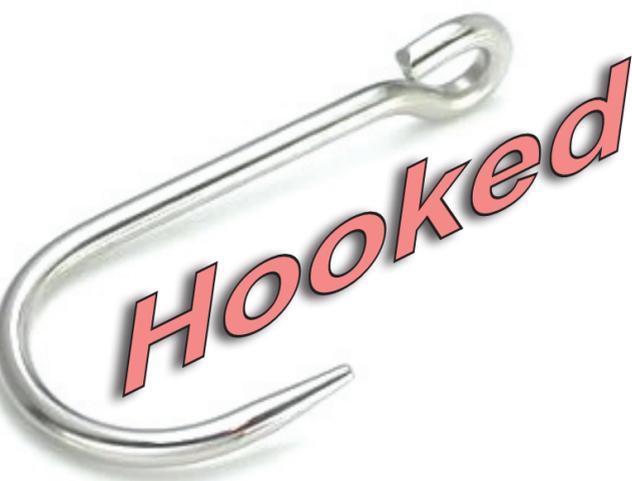
Schools

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on the Alaskan wilderness

By **MARCIA DAVIS-SEALE**
Tribune Staff Writer

"Gone fishin'" for Tim and Laverne Eickman might mean throwing a minnow-baited line off their dock on Lake Bob Sandlin that catches them crappie or catfish, or crisscrossing the chilly salt waters of Prince William Sound off the coast of Valdez, Alaska, stringing great wads of squid on giant hooks curved for snagging 100-pound halibut that, nose to tail, measure almost as tall as the fishermen.

"We're hooked on Alaska!" says Laverne. "It's truly the last frontier, full of such unmarked beauty - and we love it!"

The Eickman's have heard the call of the wild, and answered with unfettered enthusiasm.

Living summers in Alaska and the rest of the year in East Texas, Laverne says, "It's the best of both worlds."

Alaskan summer for the Eickmans means working Bear Creek Cabins and RV Park, out of Valdez, which they own as part of an 18-acre spread that includes four acres of untouched wilderness. Against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains, Laverne stays busy cleaning the log cabins, checking in on the guests, and keeping the park area in tip-top shape.

Husband Tim - make that Cap'n [Captain] Tim- spends the summer running Alaskan Fishing Adventure day trips with his 26-foot cabined WeldCraft named "Lone Star."

He's on the boat and at the helm heading out to sea by 6 a.m. "On my tours, we catch fish. I have my coordinates, my GPS, and fish finders, and I know where to go."

Carrying as many as six wide-eyed passengers at a time, he cruises, sometimes at speeds of 30 knots (almost 35 miles an hour), across the choppy waters along the sound as far as 85 miles out. The waters over which he glides range from 150 to 300 feet deep, he says, and average a water temperature of 40-45 degrees, in the summer. The boat occasionally meets up with random icebergs floating in the dark blue waters, and, at times, the passengers brace against the icy breath of the Columbia Glacier that spins the ice floats down through the white-capped waters.

Tim holds a 50-ton Master U.S. Merchant Marine license, earned in U. S. Coast Guard training, that allows him to run a watercraft of 50 gross tons through the inland waters, not more than 100 miles offshore.

Sea lion and sea otter skip along the rock-lined shore of the sound. Tim says the stream that runs across their land, in early summer, turns pink and literally shakes with the swell of salmon that crowd its water, swimming upstream. And a few more weeks into the season, the water takes on a silver sheen as the silver salmon peak the interest and appetites of the Alaskan brown and black bears that dip their massive paws into the pristine streams for their supper. Across these wild lands, the American bald eagles take regular flight.



TRIBUNE photo by Marcia Davis-Seale

A wall in the Eickmans' East Texas boathouse reflects their love for the call of the wild in Alaska.

"I call it sheer beauty, astounding beauty," Laverne says. "The snow caps hold the mountains, year-round, and botanical gardens grow in the wilds."

"And across the land, you don't see fences. There are no cows, so no one fences their properties."

Tim's fishing tours and the couple's camping and cabin facilities draw the seasoned and novice camper- and fisher-folks, from the four corners of the country, including a loyal following from East Texas. "Last year they came from New Zealand, Israel, Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Germany, Japan, and Hungary," Laverne said.

"And there was a film crew from National Geographic that stayed in the cabins. None of them spoke English. They were filming some kind of documentary," Tim said.

"We have a lot who come up on motorcycles. They like camping out and traveling around the countryside on their bikes," Laverne said.

"We have lots of military, who come from all over. The military, based in Valdez, don't have much time for fishing," Tim said, but a lot of the U.S. military visit there on leave and before or after deploying to the Middle East. "Last summer we had helicopter pilots. They were fearless!"

Tim said lots of folks find them from their website (<http://www.fishingalaskawithtim.com/>), but most hear about them through word of mouth, and then come back for repeated stays and fishing tours.

"We get all kinds of dialects, and languages and accents. Texas accents are a hit with us any time!" Laverne said.

Off season, some folks, who've stayed in the park, even find their way to East Texas to stop over and reconnect with the Eickmans.

In Valdez, the summertime temperatures reach up into the 70s. "The nights are cool and dry, averaging in the 60s," Laverne says. The winters can get 50-60 degrees below zero, she said, so they head out, back to the 'lower 48,' which is what Alaskans refer to the rest of the United States, "before the snow flies...In Alaska, the weather's a corn flip," Laverne says. It can be unpredictable and often brutal. She's never been there past March.

"This week," Tim said, "we had to have the park dug out of four and five-foot snow banks, and we had to get a tunnel dug through the hard-packed snow to get the campers to the bathrooms."

"Now they are having about five hours of darkness," Laverne said. But on June 21,

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