

Currents

Rental cars go smoke-free

Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group has a new smoke-free policy for its Dollar and Thrifty rental cars at all US corporate stores and participating franchise locations. (The 219 privately owned Dollar and Thrifty branches don't have to follow the policy, so it's best to ask when you book.) Renters who break the rules may be charged up to \$250 to cover special cleaning services to remove tobacco residue and odor from the vehicle. 800-800-3665, www.dollar.com; 800-847-4389, www.thrifty.com

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KARI BODNARCHUK

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Destinations

NIGHT LIFE

Who says winter is dark and quiet?

FEB. 17-27 MONTREAL
Montreal High Lights Festival: One of the best reasons to travel to a colder climate in February, the festival this year celebrates women. This culinary and arts spectacular shows off some of Quebec's top chefs and performers. Highlights include 80-year-old Buena Vista Social Club spitfire Omara Portuondo singing for a crowd of over 1,000 on her birthday; Gallic electropop chanteuse Emilie Simon performing songs from her latest English language album, "The Big Machine," Melissa Etheridge, and iconic French pop star Vanessa Paradis (Mrs. Johnny Depp's partner). In addition to dozens of indoor ticketed concerts, the festival includes dance, theater, circus performances, and free outdoor shows. It also marks the return of Nuit Blanche, an all-night party on Feb. 27 that offers 175 (mostly) free activities around the city. www.montrealenlumiere.com

MARCH 10-12 BROOMFIELD, Colo.
The String Cheese Incident Winter Carnival: The seminal 1990s jam band returns to its home state with a slate of diverse musical acts opening on each of three nights. On March 10, the band is joined by British electro act Ott. On March 11, J.D. Crowe & the New South opens for the band, and on March 12, New Orleans funk band Ivan Neville's Dumpstaphunk opens the show. The band is giving free posters to fans who bring nonperishable food items, which will benefit the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Tickets for each night are \$55. 1stBank Center, 11450 Broomfield Lane, www.stringcheeseincident.com

FEB. 11 REYKJAVÍK, Iceland
Museum Night: To tempt residents (and tourists) out of hibernation and into the



JEAN-FRANCOIS LEBLANC/FESTIVAL MONTREAL/FILE/2009

The Montreal High Lights Festival's 12th edition will focus on women — and the usual food-music-theater-fun menu.

chilly night, all of the city's museums are open past midnight. There are also street performances, multimedia displays, and special programs happening around the capital. All the events are easily accessible by the free Museum Night bus that will take you to all participating venues, and keep your toes from frostbite. www.visitreykjavik.is

FEB. 12 SYDNEY
Good Vibrations: Given our wintry weather, it's easy to forget it's summer below the equator. Australians will celebrate their warm season with a massive music festival that hits several large cities

on the continent throughout the month. Good Vibrations kicks off in Sydney with music from Faithless, Phoenix, Sasha, the Ting Tings, Miike Snow, Friendly Fires, Kelis, and Janelle Monae. The music starts at noon; tickets for the 10-hour festival are \$147. Centennial Park, www.goodvibrationsfestival.com.au.

PLAN AHEAD

APRIL 28-MAY 1 BERGEN, Norway
Bergenfest: The rainy seaside city of Bergen, which has produced a shocking amount of good music over the past dec-

ade, displays its most talented acts and hosts musicians from around the world at this annual festival. The shows are scattered among 15 venues throughout Bergen and sport the kind of musical diversity that most festivals shy away from. The list of performers includes everyone from Los Lobos to Swedish cult favorite Hakan Hellström. Other acts include folksinger Loudon Wainwright III, Joe Bonamassa, and the Stranglers. www.bergenfest.no

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

Events can be canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; check online. Christopher Muther can be reached at muther@globe.com.

Shrinking glaciers, bold grizzlies, thrilling rapids

► **ALASKA**
Continued from Page M1

ate place to begin the trip. It served as a base for the 1956 Sheenjek Expedition (named for the 200-mile-long river), which provided much of the scientific evidence used in the designation of ANWR in 1960.

While my husband, Andy, and I searched the lake's shore for remnants of the historical expedition, friends Heather and Moe climbed the pyramidal peak behind camp and spotted five Northern hawk owls. The stress of days of travel and logistics to reach this place was falling away.

Much of the attraction of our route was its diversity of ecosystems and our first few days hiking up the Sheenjek were no exception. Within half a day we had gained enough latitude to leave tree line and forests of black spruce behind.

Whenever possible we would walk on exposed sections of the Sheenjek's cobbled riverbed. When the river forced us back on shore, we slopped our way through muskies (a kind of bog or swamp) pocked with tussocks, grassy mounds the size and shape of a human head and difficult to stand on. When we tired of this, we moved onto dry, higher ground carpeted with tundra.

From a distance the tundra can appear boring. But like much of the Arctic, its complexity is de-

ceiving. It takes patience and close examination to appreciate the sophistication of its intricate patchwork of plants and lichens.

Many people associate ANWR with the massive migration of the Porcupine caribou herd (also named for a river) as it moves off one calving ground on the Coastal Plain, seeking refuge in the mountains from bloodthirsty mosquitoes. We were too late for that, but it was strange that even after several days we had yet to see any wildlife. ANWR is home, also, to moose, grizzly bears, wolves, Dall sheep, wolverines, porcupines, and many others. We had all commented on their absence, even of signs such as scat, tracks, or fur. But finally it seemed our luck was turning.

"It's a moose!" shouted Heather, waving her trekking pole at a flash of brown fur crashing through the willows.

Except it wasn't a moose. The animal doubled back toward us at a gallop. It was a grizzly. It stopped 15 feet away, snarling. Instinct pushed us back but logic kicked in. We scrambled to face it, yelling for all we were worth. Finally, it turned and ran into the willows. We pushed out to the riverbed, grateful we were a foursome.

Eventually, we started up an unnamed drainage that would take us to the Continental Divide and over the crest of the Brooks Range. It had been over a week since we had heard a plane or the sound of any other humans.

Higher and higher we hiked, gradually leaving behind the verdant river valley and moving into the high alpine, then the rock and ice zone where smears of ice clung to impossibly steep slopes. The contrast between the topographical maps indicating where glaciers ran and the reality was striking. Most of the glaciers were anorexic images of their former selves, a stark reminder that the Arctic is warming at a rate double the global average.

Finally we made it to the pass where we stepped from one side of the Continental Divide to the other. At the toe of the glacier below, the initial ribbons of the Jago River were visible — our watery trail out to the Beaufort Sea. We made our way down the exposed glacier's ice and through the moonscape of the moraine. If all went according to plan we would be floating in our packrafts the next day.

After a day of hiking downstream we arrived at a wide valley where the Jago fingers out, and another tributary joins its flow. The water was raging. After



MOE WITSCHARD (ABOVE) AND ANDY TYSON, BOTH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The author and her husband, Andy, left, cross a creek in the Sheenjek River valley. Below, she inflates her packraft with a nylon bag, readying for launch into the Jago River.



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a few attempts at crossing we decided to wait until morning for the water to go down. But it rained all night and morning brought more of the same:

"Slow," I shouted to Andy. Dark muddy water pushed against my thighs. My feet skated over the river bottom.

"Go back," I yelled to Andy, who was at the head of our river-crossing conga line. "There's too much water."

Friends who know the area had cautioned that an August trip might leave us high and dry for packrafting and we would have to hike more than we hoped. But the Brooks Range had received unprecedented amounts of precipitation in July and the continuous rain since we had crossed the Continental Divide two days earlier wasn't helping. The Jago had turned into a fast and furious churn of Class IV rapids, alive with the clatter of

boulders. We packed up our rafts and kept walking.

We quickly spotted more animals on the Jago than during our entire time on the Sheenjek. We watched as a caribou calf, buoyed by her hollow hair, swam right across the same river that had stymied us. Later we sat mesmerized by a pack of five wolves. Another day it was a grizzly scratching his back on a rock, then a pair of wolves stalking caribou.

The Coastal Plain's soupy fog felt a long way from the sunny shores of Last Lake. As Andy cooked spaghetti over a small fire, I watched five caribou grazing. We were camped at Area 1002's boundary line, a 1.5 million-acre region on ANWR's Coastal Plain that was established in 1980 through the Alaskan National Interest Land Conservation Act. Not only is Area 1002 one of the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd, which Gwich'in and Inupiat natives rely on for subsistence, it is also home to an estimated 10.4 billion barrels of oil, which could be accessed by an act of Con-

If you go . . .

How to get there

Most people fly from the Lower 48 to Fairbanks, then take a regularly scheduled **small plane** to a **village** on either Wright Air (907-474-0502, www.wrightair.net) or Era (800-866-8394, www.flyera.com).

If your destination is **inside** the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (rather than starting from a village), take a **chartered flight** with one of the numerous bush plane operators **listed on the US Fish and Wildlife Service** website <http://arctic.fws.gov/airtaxi.htm>. Prices vary depending on departure point and destination and the size of your party.

What to do

The USFWS website <http://arctic.fws.gov/recguide.htm> provides a list of **approved guiding companies** permitted to operate in ANWR.

gress. As a result, Area 1002 has become ground zero for the Arctic drilling debate.

At a small butte called Bitty, the Jago's gradient at last mellowed. We inflated our boats and launched in the muddied water.

The thrill of bouncing over rapids with a 50-pound pack tied to the boat's bow was a delightful change of pace. Try as I might, a significant amount of hiking time is always spent looking down. I welcomed the opportunity paddling provided to scan the surroundings.

Slowly, the Jago began morphing into a braided delta, the pulse of its current growing fainter. The sea was getting closer and each night we pitched our tents closer together, mindful of the possibility of polar bears.

Our final day was spent crossing the Beaufort Sea to the Inupiat village of Kaktovik. After eight days of nearly continuous rain, temperatures in the 30s, and howling wind, we were blessed with sunshine.

It had not taken us long to learn that without the downpours the Arctic's brightest moments — spotting an Arctic tern returning to Antarctica or double rainbows in a midnight sky — would not have been as bright.

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