

VENTURING MAGAZINE

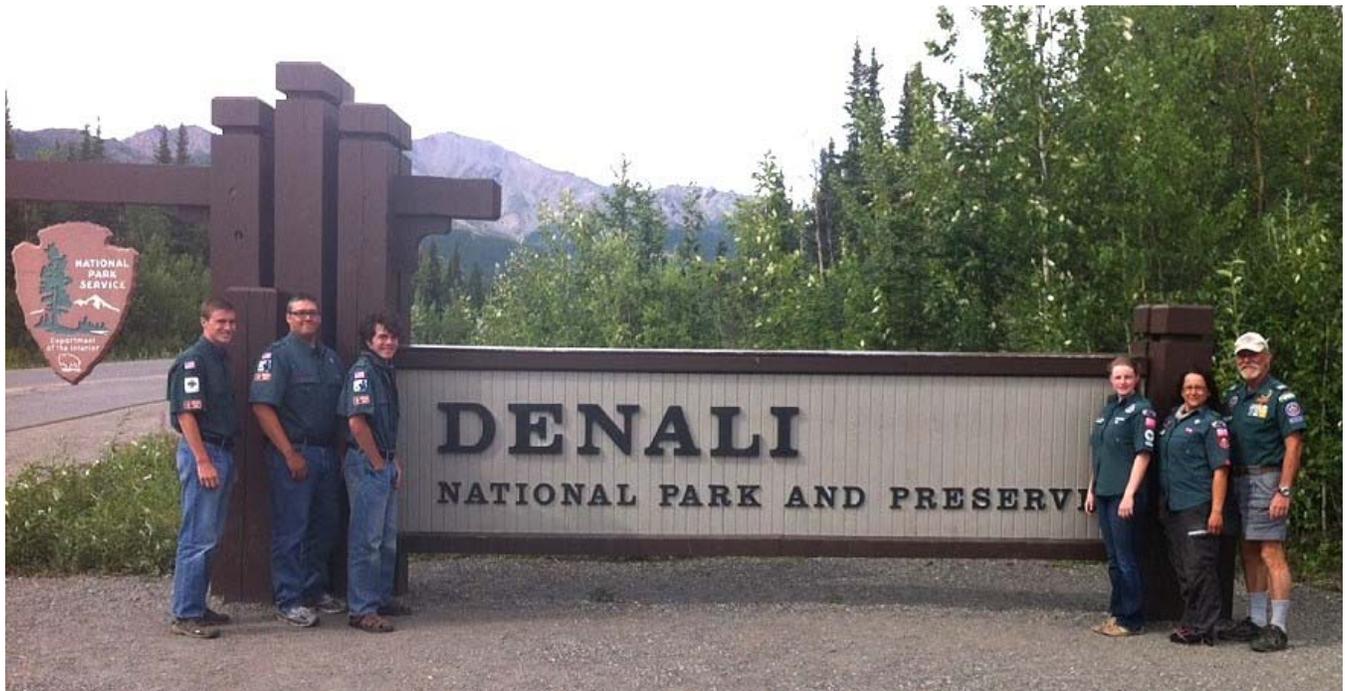
High Adventure in Alaska by Leslie Shannon

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When you become president of a Venturing Crew one of your major responsibilities is the super activity of the year. Take it from me; anyone can plan a once in a lifetime trip whether you have experience or not. This year Crew 505 had a 17-day trip to Alaska. Since I am one of original founders of the crew and first crew president, I wanted our super activity to be especially memorable. Ever since driving my younger brother to his scout meetings and hearing about some of his amazing outdoor experiences, I wanted to be in a crew and have my own amazing adventures. When I became president I hadn't done anything more than one night of car camping. I never would have believed that I could do a four-day backpacking trip and a six-day canoeing trip in the uninhabited wilderness of Alaska.

When planning a super activity you must fully utilize all the resources at your disposal, especially advisors and associate advisors. They can be one of your best assets because they may have reliable connections all over the world. One very reliable resource for our trip was the Midnight Sun Council located in Fairbanks, AK. Their high adventure program takes troops and crews on guided trips all around the state of Alaska and also provides their facilities and equipment as well as their expertise of the area.



The start of our journey in Alaska was to take the Denali Star train from anchorage to Denali National Park where we were met by some of the guides who work summers at the Midnight Sun Council. The next day we drove to the trailhead of Kesugi ridge in the Denali State Park and backpacked the 2,000ft. climb up to the ridgeline. Although soaked in sweat, we made it to the top by lunchtime to be rewarded with a



breathtaking vista of the tallest mountain in North America...Mt. McKinley (or as the locals call it, Denali ["The High One"]). With no shortage of daylight, we continued on until we were ready to set up camp for the evening. We chose a spot with plushy tundra just off the trail near a trickling mountain stream. Later that night, three of us decided to go on an evening hike up to the tallest peak that overlooked our campsite. The view was amazing and made the difficult hike totally worth it. The next day we did a long hike so then we could set up a base camp from where we went on multiple hikes the following day. No outdoor adventure would be complete without a little rain. Though we were soaked, our spirits were high with thoughts of soon returning to the front country and being able to change out of our wet clothes and eat the foods we had been craving while backpacking.



Once in front country we entered into Denali National Park for a daylong bus tour through the park. This gave us the opportunity to see animals, which usually run away from humans but are not afraid of the park buses. Once we returned to the entrance of the park we traveled to Fairbanks, where the Midnight Sun Council office is located. We explored Fairbanks the next day and went to multiple tourist sites as well as some familiar places like Wal-Mart to pick up some forgotten essentials.

After touring around Fairbanks we drove to Eagle, AK where we put the canoes on the Yukon river. The Yukon River is massive! About the size of the Mississippi, it's silty water flows North at around six miles an hour and cuts through the heart of Alaska. We paddled for a couple hours after



the long van ride before setting up our camp site for the night on the bank of the river. Then it was paddle, paddle, and paddle. On the third day of paddling we reached the Henry's homestead just off the banks of the Yukon River. The Henry's are a family who live "off the grid" and are self-supporting, only going into civilization once a year to restock on necessary supplies. We stopped to deliver them some fruit as well as candy, and to see what it takes to survive the wilds of Alaska. We also helped clear the field where their garden is located about a mile off the bank of the river. This work is done by hand with simple tools and can be extremely difficult (especially for a family of three). Having an extra seven pairs of hands to help uproot tree stumps was a great relief to the trio. They only have about four months to gather and store all their yearly supplies before the winter months start setting in. They sent us off with full stomachs after an amazing thank you lunch of fresh greens, king salmon, and a homemade carrot cake.



For the next two nights we were rewarded with cabins to sleep in after long days of paddling. First was Coal Creek Cabin (one of several public use cabins on the Yukon) and next was Slaven's Roadhouse. As an extra bonus, Slaven's Roadhouse was located about a mile from a gold dredge. The ranger at the roadhouse provided us with a guided tour at the dredge and told us about a six mile hike which some of us did that night by oil lantern. In the morning, it was back to paddling. For our last night on the Yukon we set up camp early at a gravel bar and played in the mud holes made by the silt which deposits from the glaciers upriver. This was a



beautiful last night on the river with an everlasting sunset casting shadows among our camp. The next day we woke early to finish the last 17 miles of the 150 mile trip on the Yukon, to Circle, AK. We were greeted by the Midnight Sun Council staff with watermelon and a van to take us back to Fairbanks as our trip started to wind down. We then spent the last day relaxing the aches and pains away in the Chena Hot Springs Resort which obtains its sulfur-smelling water directly from a natural hot spring followed by a phenomenal Salmon Bake. For our last big adventure of the trip we headed up to the arctic circle to have lunch. We then started our return trip to anchorage the following day to do some last minute souvenir shopping before our long voyage back home to North Carolina.



The 17-day trip was a complete success because of the meticulous planning that went into it. I couldn't have done it without the guidance of my crew advisor, associate advisors, or the resources and expertise provided by the Midnight Sun Council. All were imperative for this trip to happen. Also I'd like to give a special thank you to the Chipka Family for their overwhelming support towards making this dream a reality. Without the help from others I never would have been able to plan and execute such an amazing super activity! It truly was the trip of a lifetime!!