

I Love It When A Plan Comes Together????

Cast & Blast Alaska

What started out be--- a fishing trip to check out Sliver (coho) salmon fishing at Cordova, Alaska as a place to take my family – there are women and young grandkids in my family who are not hard core campers, river floaters or adventurous. Their idea of camping is the ____ you fill in the blank-- chain hotel. Prior experience has taught me I need to check it out and “learn the ropes” for this to be successful.

Turn into ---- I take one of my Small Munsterlanders along on the airlines, fly out on a river delta duck hunt, hunt ptarmigan along the Denali Highway, and fish Silver Salmon out of Cordova. It is amazing how things can just come together!

On Sept. 16th I flew out of Sioux Falls, South Dakota with Kody my 3 year old Munsterlander. Greg Holt, who lives in Anchorage, had contacted me during the summer to discuss purchasing a SM. We were not able to arrange a time to see my dogs when he was visiting his Mother, who lives just 70 miles northeast of me. But I told him I would have a SM along when I landed in Anchorage in mid-September and would be happy to show him. As we worked out the details he asked if I would be interested in duck hunting when I was in Anchorage. My response was an enthusiastic yes! I did not ask details and never envisioned it would involve-- taking off in a Cessna from a runway in the pilot’s backyard and landing on a narrow gravel road next to a duck cabin, “The Shack,” on the delta of a major Alaska river.

The afternoon of the hunt we met in John Henry’s backyard. All the houses in this development in Anchorage have a plane parked next to their back doors.



Your plane and runway is right out the back door

We loaded up and took off. Kody was with me in the back and as the plane took off she crawled up in my lap. She was looking out the window, but definitely nervous.



John getting Kody loaded



Waterfowl heaven just out the window

She was calmer by the time we landed. We loaded up the pickup John and his friend keep there and headed for the area John wanted to hunt.



The Shack, home away from home

The plan--- Spread out in a long row and walk through the knee to waist high grass --- water that was ankle to knee deep --- and jump shoot ducks. It reminded me of hunting pheasants, in a group, in a South Dakota CRP field.



Instead of for pheasants the drive was for ducks



Kody making a retrieve



Greg and Kody

It worked and we shot ducks, sometimes coming out of the grass and sometimes flying overhead. Most of the ducks were local young mallards whose head had not yet turned green. We did not shoot a duck over a point but the possibility truly excited for that to happen. It was a blast!



Not bad for a couple hours on a nice sunny day

Kody had not had much experience retrieving ducks and it was a great experience for her. By the time the afternoon was over she had gained a ton of experience. After cleaning the ducks we flew back to Anchorage and ate grilled duck breast, talked flying and hunting at John Henry's late into the evening.

At 4:00 a.m. the next morning Kody and I left Anchorage to catch the ferry out of Valdez for Cordova. At about 7:00 a.m., still dark, 70 miles west of Glenallen I heard this loud "BANG" and see the upper right-hand corner of front the windshield was shattered. Looking in the rear view mirror I saw a cow moose in the middle of the road. Her back end was just starting to buckle. By that time I was rounding the curve and could not see her. I turned around and went back but she had wandered off into the woods.



Cow moose's muzzle just caught the corner of my windshield



Still drivable and no leaks

Her snout had just caught the upper corner of my windshield. The window was not broken all the way through and did not leak so we continued on to Valdez. I said a pray of thanks ----that could have ended up very badly!!

Kody and I spent several days exploring and fishing out of Cordova. Gary McDowell at the Rose Lodge was very helpful and showed us the ropes. It had rained for 2 weeks straight prior to our arrival and fishing was slow --- even the locals were complaining. But I learned if we hiked up one of the rivers far enough we could get into good fishing ---a Silver on about every third cast. I caught my limit of 10 to 12 pounders, filleted them and loaded them into my



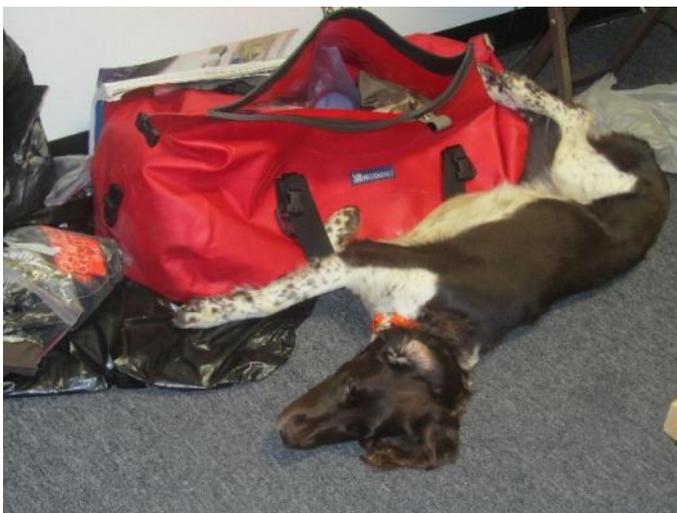
Kody and dry bag on my frame pack



Kody and 2 nice Silver (coho) salmon

backpack for the 3 mile hike back to my vehicle.

One morning Kody and I were hunting for spruce grouse along a narrow 2 track a few miles from Cordova. As we rounded a curve a black bear ran across the road about 30 yard in front of us. Kody took off behind it. I called her and she stopped looked at me, then looked in the direction the bear went and then back at me and then came back to me. I always carry some shotgun slugs along when bird hunting where there could be bears. We did not find any spruce grouse but on the way back to my vehicle I began to think---versatile dog, they hunt boars in Germany with them, I wonder if Kody had treed that black bear and I had a license, if I could have shot it? Overall the weather was decent. Occasional light rain most days, Cordova is located in a rain forest, except for the last day. The wind blew steadily thirty to forty mph with gusts to 65 mph and the rain was horizontal. That kept Kody and I indoors. Neither the ferry nor the airlines operated that day.



Kody waiting for the rain and wind storm to end

The next morning we caught the ferry to Valdez and headed north to Paxson. Paxson is a Road House at the intersection of the Richardson and Denali Highways.

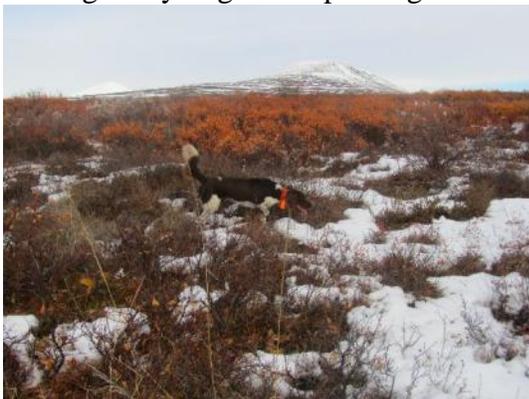


Paxson, Alaska

Denali Highway, which is a misnomer, is tar for the first 21 miles and gravel for the next 110 miles. It used to be the main road to Denali Park --- home of Mt. McKinley. Areas along Denali Highway are at elevations above tree line. Ptarmigan migrate the area as the snow pushes them out of the higher mountain elevations. John Sarvis, a friend and SM owner who lives in Anchorage, had suggested a couple areas to try.



Getting ready to go after ptarmigan



Kody in typical cover

At the second spot he suggested Kody and I walked up to a willow choked draw --- as we walked up to it I thought to myself "if there are any ptarmigan in this area, they ought to be

here” --- Kody slams on point at the edge of the willows. This looked like a bird point, versus the mouse point she had been doing earlier in the morning. I got ready and as I walked up 50 plus ptarmigan erupted. I knocked down 2. They flew a short distance and landed. The second time we got them up I scored a triple. We worked singles and harvested 2 more (the daily limit is 10). I was out of shells! I had just thrown a couple handfuls in my jacket pocket when we left the road, not expecting to go very far. But, the cover just kept looking better and better and drew us far from the road --- in the end it was a good thing we had to go back to the road. There is limited cell service and when Kody and I got back to the road I had a message from Chuck Stielstra. Chuck lives in Anchorage and had purchased a pup from me a year earlier. He was in Delta Junction about 50 miles north of us trying to find some sharptail grouse to get his pup on. A short conversation later and he was on his way to meet Kody and I to see if we could get Reka on some ptarmigan.



Typical gear and clothes I used for ptarmigan hunting

When he got there it took me a little while to locate the spot again --- it is amazing how everything can look the same in that big country! But we did find them. Reka gained a bunch of experience on multiple birds. You could just see her advance (these were the first wild birds she had even been on). In fact she found several ptarmigan Chuck would not have found without her. White ptarmigan in the snow do not show up very well.



Chuck and Reka

As we were walking toward the road Chuck shot at a ptarmigan that he thought he missed. He watched it go over the ridge where it looked like it landed. We headed in that direction hoping to get a second chance at it. Nothing happened when we got to the area we expected it to be. Then we looked behind us and Reka had found it --- dead.



Chuck and Reka---success!

Chuck had hit it and it had died just over the ridge. Chuck and I were both very happy with the progress Reka made that day. "I love it when a plan comes together?????" Chuck head for Glenallen where he had moose to butcher and Kody and I headed down the Denali Highway to Maclaren River Lodge.

I hunted out to Maclaren River Lodge for two days. The first day was uneventful. Cloudy, cold 35-40 degrees, 40 mph winds, and no ptarmigan. Kody and I both got chilled and called it a day about mid-afternoon.



Kody crossing river while ptarmigan hunting

The third day was one to remember, the kind I hope to get a least one of during any hunting or fishing excursion. We got into ptarmigan right off in the morning. Although it started out cloudy by mid-morning the sun was out. There was just a slight breeze, enough for good scenting conditions and we kept getting into birds on a regular basis. By mid-afternoon I was a couple short of my daily limit and the wind was starting to pick-up. I figured I better take advantage of the sun and take some pictures and am I glad we did.



Kody and ptarmigan



Beautiful country to hunt in



Not a bad day



End of a great day!

By the time I started back for the lodge wind gusts violently shook my vehicle when I stopped to look at a herd of caribou --- their migration passes through this area---and the temperature was dropping fast.

All in all the bird hunting was great ---- the fishing was adequate (I was quite late in the season and I knew it) and I would feel very comfortable taking my family to Cordova and fishing the Silver Salmon run.

Before I left Anchorage for home I scheduled a date with Greg Holt and his daughter Summer to hunt pheasants on my place when they visited his Mother later that fall. We enjoyed two good days of hunting together.



Greg, Summer, Muda & Oz hunting @ Julson's



Successful day of pheasant hunting at the Julson's

The last afternoon, while we were cleaning birds Greg asked if I knew of any upcoming litters. It just so happened a breeder friend of mine from Iowa, who was planning a spring litter, was hunting pheasants in South Dakota just a few miles from Greg's Mother's home. Greg and Summer met them the next morning, saw the male and female and will soon be owners of a male SM from this litter. "I love it when a plan comes together????"

P.S. As I put the final touches on this article I received a text from Ben: "Sarah, out of the blue, just told me she wants to go fishing in Alaska." I love it when a plan comes together????"