**Christmas Letter 2013**

In late November 2012 I was contacted by a film company that was looking to shoot a reality TV show for the History Channel called “The Grizzly Men”. They wanted to follow around some bear guides and show their lives, their trials and tribulations, their danger and so on.

Kiche, Kaasan and I finally met with them in February 2013 to talk and feel one another out. Along the way I told them that I'm not into fake things like manufactured drama; I'm not an actor, and that if they wanted to showcase the Kodiak bear – perhaps afford it equal billing - I might be interested as I consider these bears to be the stars.

They said all the right things, “We love your web site and your writing, we love the angle that you are a family business and your daughter is a part of it, we like the fact that you do backpack hunts, and we wouldn't ask you to do anything you were not comfortable with” etc, etc. It was hard for me to pre-judge what a show like this would mean in all of its' layers and intricacies. It's no secret that booking bear hunts hasn't been what it used to be; being on TV might help that? If the History Channel liked the pilots and gave the show a green light there would be money. What could go wrong?

So in April I headed to Kodiak with two packers, daughter Kaasan and family friend Ian Erie. We met up with our client John Vukas and the film man Ben in town and flew out to Zachar Bay. Ben had so many heavy batteries for his video camera we needed the extra packer just to be viable as a back pack operation.

Overall it was about the coldest spring hunt I've ever done. Cold temperatures on Kodiak in April are not unusual, but they don't normally go on and on. We had numerous early morning readings Between 4 and 7 degrees. It would warm up during the day into the mid to upper 30's, but the bears were more interested in sleeping. On the second day we did see two single bears walking ridge lines 2000 feet above us on our trip up to Six Mile which I took as a positive sign. And the next day Kaasan spotted a ten foot class bear down low across from us. He ended up laying down in thick brush and we spent three more days trying to get him. The next day John spotted him working in the brush near where I'd seen him lay down, but he kept moving up into a jungle mix of alders and cottonwoods with hidden draws that could carry him away without a trace. He was big and beautifully furred and just the kind of bear John was looking for, but the last two days we didn't see him.

So, we headed on up to Ten Mile. After several more cold, snowy days an Easterly blew in with rain that caused flooding around our tent. The ground was so frozen the water had no where to go and ran around pooling up in low spots forcing us to do some trenching to keep it “mostly” out of our tent. One evening after I'd poured boiling water into Ian's Mountain House meal he'd set it on his sleeping pad where it tipped and the hot water ran onto one of his feet which was wrapped in three layers of socks that we couldn't rip off fast enough to keep his skin from peeling. Ian was hopping all over the place in pain. There was plenty of ice around so I loaded a zip lock and laid it on the six inch long burn that extended out onto the top of his big toe. Later I applied burn gel which is effective at healing burns. It was during this time that John, who had been “really sick” before his hunt, (which his doctor did not want him going on) mentioned that he had a reoccurring pain in his lower abdomen along with a knot he thought might be a hernia, or at the least - a pulled groin. Surprisingly, perhaps, despite the injuries and concerns, our group remained positive and full of good cheer.

On the tenth day we spotted a big looking bear that we followed with our binoculars and spotting scope for hours as he motored across a nearby mountain doing bear things that culminated in a pole dance with a black birch. He was into scratching and stopped numerous times to stand up against cottonwoods where he did deep knee bends scrubbing his back against the tree's rough bark. I wasn't sure I'd ever seen the deep knee bend scratch before. His final move before disappearing was to stand up against a black birch that kept bending away, and reach over his shoulder with his right front paw to pull a limb against his back where he did this wiggly, twisting rub which kind of resembled a pole dancer's moves. He had everyone laughing. John named the bear Frank because, well because he said, guys named Frank were usually sure and strong.

Just before dark a day later we spotted Frank climbing up high and disappearing into a small alder patch that we didn't see him come out of. At first light the next morning we began our three plus hour stalk. It was tough going once we got into the snow, at first post holing to our crotch, and then reaching a rock hard steeply pitched slope where you had to repeatedly kick a grove for your boot to secure a purchase. It was a little nerve wracking. One slip and you'd be gone, and while Ben did his best to video, he had his hands full just trying to stay on the mountain himself, so an opportunity was lost to actually show a difficult climb with a taste of danger. Instead the idea was to manufacture an easier to capture fake situation that I was expected to hype up, like crossing the “always dangerous” Zachar River, which happened to be more like a creek this year due to the cold weather. I couldn't do it.

We got above where we expected the bear to be and made just enough noise that he heard us and came running out. I pulled out my deer call and when I blew it he turned towards us and rushed up the mountain to within 20 yards. I told John he wasn't as big as I'd thought. “A mature boar....blocky head....but likely between 9 and 9 ½ feet rather than 9 ½ to 10'. John had told me when he booked the hunt that he'd likely hold out for a really large bear. Not many guys would have held off after the climb we'd just made, and amazingly none of our injuries got in the way of it. Ben was pleased to get all the close footage of a big bear coming in; the rest of us were just exited by the close encounter, and in reality, kind of glad that “Frank” escaped. Frank went all the way to the bottom of the hanging valley below us and then climbed up and over the mountain on the other side. Quite a feat. Bears have terrific endurance.

We were starting to see a lot more bear sign, in the form of tracks in the snow, but were running out of time. I decided to break camp and head back down to Six Mile and try to find the bear we'd seen on the way up.

We didn't find him, but we saw several new bears, one of which was a big guy with a thick, blunt nose I thought might indicate a B&C sized skull. He was a little rubbed, but still looked okay. It was our 14th day. Kaasan gave us hand signals from across the valley as the rest of us attacked. But, before we could get there, our sleeping bear got up and walked down valley into an area of solid trees and brush never to be seen again.

John didn't get a bear, but he went out of his way to tell us how much he had enjoyed the hunt. We had all gotten along really well, and Ben had been the good professional he was, even if I couldn't always accommodate his desired drama. And John gave us the ultimate compliment by booking another Kodiak bear hunt for next year in Dog Salmon.

For May we had hunters John and Sally Kloosterman. John has hunted with me many times mostly looking for a giant sized Kodiak bear. We determined a long time ago that brown bears weren't John's lucky animal. He's gotten a couple of nice ones with me 9' 4” and 9' 6” but is still looking for 10' or bigger. This was Sally's first hunt with us.

It was a crazy spring in different ways. I've already mentioned the cold, but whenever we had a clear night it still dropped into the upper 20's past the middle of May. Where we'd seen a measly 16 bears in April we only saw 27 on the May hunt. To put that in perspective, we've had years we saw 22 bears in “one day”. In 45 years hunting Kodiak I've watched boars following sows many times, but the first half of May is early for serious mating activity. I'd personally never witnessed a sow accepting copulation. Whenever I had seen a boar attempt to mount a sow she had run out from underneath and then kept the boar at bay for awhile with blows delivered via her front paws. So imagine my surprise – on such a late, cold year - when we witnessed three different males copulating repeatedly with two female bears. In the most dramatic scene a sow that had been following a 9 ½ foot rubbed boar we called “Pants” mated 9 times in a row with another 9 ½ footer Sally named “Stud Muffin”. After 7 trips to the mat Stud Muffin just stood there on the beach (resting, I was thinking) when the “Hussey”, as Sally called her, began rubbing her face into his neck and cheeks which eventually elicited two more mountings. After that he walked into the ocean and lay down on his belly. I think we might have seen some steam rising. Soon the Hussey was back with Pants and for several more days they continued on as before.

A fair number of bears earned a name on this hunt. In addition to the above we had “Super Dink” and “Mega Dink”. Then there was “Blackie”, a really big bear that Kiche and John saw while Sally and I were stalking a 9 ½ footer. It got confusing. We could see them giving us the wave off for a blown stalk, but we could still see bears in the spot we were stalking? Turns out they wanted us to come back so they could go after Blackie who they'd spotted half a mile further down the peninsula, and we had the boat. I wasn't going to give up when I could see bears. Later Sally and I would see Blackie as we idled along half a mile off shore. He heard or saw us and stood up looking out to sea. Then he calmly walked into the brush. Despite a huge effort on our part over the next ten days we never saw him again. He was the only monster we saw on this hunt. Kiche and John cried bitterly over the fact we'd ignored their signal, but I told them to look at it from our perspective. I said, “You do realize the spotters are always going to have way more information than the stalkers?”

Sally got to do a lot of hunting on this trip. We were after one particular no name boar that was with a small no name sow. We had watched them mate numerous times and stalked them 4 times over four days before catching up. We had to climb up a really steep and thick mountain side that forced us to our hands and knees numerous times trying to get into position. Finding a window through the alders and salmon berry was near impossible. A sizable creek plunged down a ravine where the two bears were feeding and its crashing masked the noise we made trying to find a way through. Without the creek's noise we couldn't have done it.

Finally we were in position a little over 100 yards away. I got down on my hands and knees one more time and Sally rested her 7mm Weatherby on my back. Her 160 grain nosler knocked the bear down with a loud growl. I thought she'd killed him outright, but minutes later I saw alders moving on our side of the creek. The alders were so thick we had to get within yards to see and the bear startled us when it suddenly broke through 15 yards above us going to our right. Three thumping shots got him down for keeps. This bear was just a super animal. He had a few minor rubs but overall had a beautiful hide. We were all happy for Sally as she had worked as hard as anyone, with nary a complaint, and enjoyed every minute of it. The bear squared 9 ½ feet and the skull went 26 4/16's.

We had a lot of fun hunting together even if we couldn't catch John a monster. Some other highlights were seeing orcas (killer whales), sea lions close up (Christmas card), and on the last day we were watching a bear with three yearling cubs climbing a mountain when she suddenly turned in a flash back down hill and came up with a snowshoe hare in her mouth. Cool.

Once back from Kodiak I was thinking a lot about “The Grizzly Men” and the fact that they were looking forward to my fall hunt and hoped to incorporate my style into the show. Other things bothered me - besides the manufactured drama: We'd be making a perfect blueprint for resident hunters on how to hunt my area, or video guy spooks 10½ footer at end of stalk trying to do his job, and we would be divulging company secrets - the tricks we use - to get bears. Now I'm perfectly willing to help out an individual bear hunter, but I have great admiration for the bears we hunt, and it bothered me that the general public would have access to all our hard earned knowledge. I thought all this information could ultimately hurt my business.

Believe it or not, I had never watched a Reality TV show of any kind, so when I saw the “Mountain Men” being advertised I decided I'd better watch it. That was the clincher. Too fake. This show is also a History Channel production. It brought into focus all the little things Ben had wanted us to do to spice things up, and I just can't do that. I understand why people might like the show as it's somewhere between reality and acting. I'm sure hunters will like it. I might even tune in to it and mine my peers tricks and perhaps get some good laughs. Anyway, I told them I was not interested as presently configured. They thanked me for helping sell the show to the History Channel (this spring's hunt), and said they understood my feelings and concerns. Perhaps not a smart move from a $$ dollars point of view, but right from a hunting one. Ben's LED lit tent up at Ten mile on the Zachar made the Christmas card for obvious reasons.

After our usual busy summer – but one of the worst ever mosquito wise - fall came around, and with it, sheep hunting. One of my clients who entered last winter's sheep drawing drew DS265 in the Chugach Mountains. We flew into a high bowl above the Hallet River on the 7th of August in two super cubs. They had to first ferry our packs in from a larger nearby strip on the Hallet, and then us as it was a tight landing area. Kiche was co-guiding on the hunt and was still nursing a severly sprained “football” ankle from the summer. DR. George (Chip) Stark who hunted moose with us last year was the lucky hunter. Chip has some metal rods implanted in his back in addition to an artificial hip so flying into a high bowl made our work a little easier.

It was beautiful country. We had sheep in sight from camp every day, in fact, we were a little too close to one another as you had to be under constant guard when you came out of the tent that you weren't spooking sheep. We also saw mountain goats most days. Right off we spotted 13 rams up in a short side valley a mile downstream of camp. There were two rams right at full curl and two heavy 7/8's plus rams that were actually bigger, mass wise, than the full curls. Over the course of the first five days we were able to determine that both 7/8's rams were at least 8 years old and therefore legal. One of these favored his left fore leg, so without much imagination we named him “Limper”. The only problem was, all the bigger rams hung out along a band of rimrock that was a tad steep for our climbing skills – think ropes, pitons, carabiners.

So, the stage was set. Mostly it entailed a lot of hanging around and waiting. Chip is a guy who likes to get out into the country and actively hunt an area, and here he was being asked not to do anything but wait, and, by the way, “Don't let the sheep see you or our troubles will be multiplied tenfold”. After days of lounging, telling stories and twiddling thumbs I proffered a motif for this hunt by stealing the title of a B.B. King Blues song “Never Make Your Move Too Soon”.

One early morning we snuck into the little valley in the dark carrying a spike camp in our packs with enough food to last three days. As the light came up that morning nine rams were scattered above us though we could only see 2 or 3 at any one time due to the rugged terrain. There were two legal rams in the nine. We ranged them at 423 yards. Now Chip is a rifleman, meaning that he takes shooting very seriously and his equipment and knowledge are first rate, but still, despite what you are always hearing these days, 423 yards is a very long ways. There were other problems: There was a fair chance we'd only get one good shot due to the terrain, and a miss would likely mean not seeing these rams again. And underneath the green the rams were on was a sizable cliff which a dead ram would likely plunge off of and explode on impact below. We were all looking forward to eating sheep meat and the fall could compromise meat quality by driving stomach contents through the tissues. It's also hard on capes. Decisions?

We opted to, “Not make our move too soon”. That afternoon as the rams moved further and further away, and ultimately, over the mountain top out of sight, there might have been some second guessing of that decision. The next morning we were all by ourselves except for a few mountain goats. So, we decided to leave too. In the afternoon we climbed to the top of a high saddle at the head of our valley where we could look down Kiana Creek to the north. There were over 30 sheep scattered across the distance but nothing large. But it was a nice day, and we thoroughly enjoyed making a vigorous climb and seeing some different country.

At this point we knew our fortunes rested on one of the legal rams coming back into our valley. We packed up another spike camp and hiked down until we were looking up the same little valley the bigger rams had been in and where I thought there was a good chance we'd see them again. In late afternoon a lone 7/8's curl (8 years legal) showed on top of the headwall. From that point on I knew we'd be waiting for nightfall to sneak into the valley.

But then, an hour or two later, another ram showed at the top of a tall, ragged peak across the valley from us. When I put the spotting scope on him it was “Limper”. We'd discussed all the rams seen on this hunt earlier and had agreed that Limper was our first choice since he was as big, or bigger, than any and might not make it through another winter. I could barely contain my excitement at seeing him again even if he was up in the stratosphere so to speak. He was alone, and while he was feeding he was also dropping altitude continuously until Kiche said, “I think he's going to cross the valley.” Limper kept dropping, moving fast; we'd already seen a small ram cross this valley two hours earlier from our side to the other; in fact he was still over there at the foot of the mountain in a lush green meadow. Chip said, “Maybe we should be heading down there to cut him off?”

“No,” I said, “He'd see us so fast...Besides, I think he's going to cross and basically come right up here. Remember our theme...or motto for this trip, 'Never Make your move too soon'”

He kept coming, and before we knew he was climbing our side; at 265 yards Chip laid him down with one perfect shot from his custom 6.5 X 284. A heck of a nice 10 year old ram. He measured 37 3/4” X 14 3/8” and green scored 162 ½”. The bones in his limp side fore foot were twice as big as the ones in his other feet. He was missing a front tooth and his molars showed pretty good wear so maybe we did a favor.

After Chip's hunt Kaasan, Ian and I had a big adventure planned. We had two weeks. We were going to drive north of Fairbanks onto the Steese Highway to Birch Creek and float/power our way over a 110 miles to a takeout near Circle, Alaska. We had caribou permits and planned to ascend the South Fork of Birch Creek just before it exits the mountains and backpack into a small, isolated population of dall sheep that rarely sees a hunter or so our information indicated. It turned into a kind of “Hell Boy” trip.

The first day we blew a return fuel line on my 17 year old diesel truck on our way into Fairbanks. The truck still ran, but leaked copious diesel everywhere we went. Bad news was, nobody fixes diesel trucks in Fairbanks on the weekend so we had to wait until Monday to get it fixed at an “exorbitant” price. We spent the first night in The Gold Nugget Inn – nice outside, seedy inside – at $156.00 for a room where the blankets had holes in them, and here I'm talking holes up to “3 inches across” As we were moving into this dive management was kicking two inebriated individuals out in a loud threatening scud of action. It was night, and we were really tired, so we just shrugged our shoulders. Half and hour later the phone rings, “Is Isabell there?” The next night we spent in a city campground where we determined that Fairbanks was the capitol of all night extremely loud exhaust sounds. At 4:30 in the morning a train came through hammering it's whistle; two hours later two cars crashed on the nearest street. Who needs sleep.

We couldn't get out of town fast enough. We hit the wild, quiet country of the Steese and were almost to Birch Creek when I engaged my exhaust brake on a steep grade but then it wouldn't come back off at the bottom?#?$?&? Once I figured out how to disable it we were moving again and soon arrived at the Birch Creek put in.

All the information we had indicated we'd be dragging our boat a lot more than floating in it the first 10 miles. The difficulty depended on water level. It being our first trip we had nothing to compare to, but she shore did look skinny. There were short runs of floating water and long runs of dragging over rocks water, as in, “Okay...on three, one, two, three - pull! One, two, and three!” It was hard on the boat and hard on us. After going about 6 miles we ripped a four inch slice in the bottom of the boat. We considered patching it but knew we had about 4 more dragging miles before a large tributary added enough flow to where we'd float. I was pretty sure we'd tear it again as the glue requires warm temperatures for a decent patch, and we'd be further away from the road. Soooo, with heavy hearts we took the Achilles apart and stashed it in a thick stand of spruce trees. This winter I'll have to retrieve it with my snowmachine and sled.

When we got home Kiche was packing for his Wrangell Mountains sheep hunt with his buddy Daryl and Daryl's girlfriend Heather. Kaasan quickly joined their expedition and a few days later killed her third ram. More sheep meat is always good.

On Sept. 12th I started hunting with my moose hunters Jim and Josh Moore. I'd guided Jim to a 9 ½ foot brown bear 30 odd years ago and it was great to see him again after so many years. Jim's son Josh was the designated hunter although they both had a license and tag. We started off in the rain and poked into an area on Castle Mountain adjacent to some country I normally hunt. There was a lot of moose sign and we saw a small bull, but it was also very thick and the next day we climbed up to my normal spot.

The hunting was slow. There was fresh sign everywhere we went but the moose were ghosts. I could not spot a single moose in the semi open alpine country underneath Castle's cliffs, a place I've seen 4 or 5 moose a day on other years. By the 6th day of the hunt we'd only seen two bulls and four cows; to put that in perspective, we've often seen 8 to 12 moose in “one” day hunting the exact same place. One year we counted 22 on the first day. Six total moose seen going into the 6th day was unprecedented.

Some conditions that impacted this year are warm winds from the east and a full moon. For several days we had strong, warm winds from the east which took our ears away and always makes the deer family skittish about moving around. The moon dominated our nights as there were few clouds, but it was ridiculously warm for that time of year – 50° at daylight, 50° at midnight - with an open sky.

On the sixth morning the wind was down along with the temperature to 38°. Still warmer than usual, but it really felt chilly after the warmer days. We went up to the Muskeg Flat at daylight with plans of still hunting into some known moose thickets if there was nothing happening there. That seemed like the case and we were getting ready to move when I spotted a bull feeding in the willows on the far side of the opening. He looked to have enough spread to be at least 50 inches. As I was evaluating him Josh said he could hear a bull grunting to the East of us. As we listened we followed his progress closer and closer while our heartbeats built anticipation – what's he going to be? Well, in this case, a dink 36 incher.

We made a short stalk down our lookout ridge towards the 50+ bull. There are bigger ones in this area, but Josh had a tighter schedule than his dad due to work obligations, and considering how slow things had been we didn't feel picky. Josh used his 30/06 and one 180 grain nosler partition to bring down the moose. Man, we were ecstatic! I had told them I thought the bull would go 55” the way his antlers laid out so I was a little embarrassed when I put the tape on him and got 51 1/4”. I can say I've never had two hunters any happier, and the fact is, any moose that spreads 50 or more inches is an impressive animal by most standards. And he's excellent eating. A couple days later I got my packing crew up there which this year included Kaasan and boyfriend Justin Cross, Ian Erie, and great nephew Jordan Crandall and me. With the five of us we got him down in two trips.

Jim plans to come back next year and do his own moose hunt up on the big mountain. Incidentally, as a follow up to last year's newsletter on coal mining Castle Mountain, the Australian Company did preliminary drilling all this past summer along the already established Mine road and word in the woods is they were disappointed with the results. They haven't relinquished these leases but made a public statement that they planned to concentrate on other coal leases in Alberta and that they were put off by the Chickaloon communities' overall opposition to coal mining. So, in the short term at least, Castle Mountain lives, and so does its' moose.

In October Kaasan, Justin and I headed for Zachar Bay to hunt mountain goats. Just before we left came the U.S. Government shutdown. I was informed by the Kodiak Refuge that guides could not contract hunts during the shutdown nor could we go goat hunting ourselves on Refuge lands. Luckily I didn't have any goat hunters booked.

Before we left a weird flu like disease had gone through my family and I thought I had escaped, but no, it chased me down in Kodiak. You never felt terrible, but it had a cruel cough that you grew to hate, and you felt tired all the time, and not like going goat hunting (once business resumed) so I caught up on my reading. One of the books being “Beyond The Bear” by Dan Bigley and Debra Mckinney about love, grit, and survival after having your face – both eyes and your nose - bitten off by a grizzly right down to your brain. A compelling story about overcoming a terrific injury. Perhaps not the ideal read just before a Kodiak bear hunt. Kiche's girlfriend works with Dan and occasionally baby sits his two children or drives him someplace connected with work.

My last hunt of the year was with a recently retired Army Colonel Jeff Bedey, who had been with the Army Corps of Engineers before his retirement. When the Government's Hurricane Katrina clean up in and around New Orleans kind of stagnated the U.S. Army sent Jeff down there in charge of getting some organization and useful continuity implemented. He described a chaotic situation exacerbated by his having to deal with the News Media on a daily basis.

It's notable too that Jeff was my first client who, after finding my web site without being referred, and not knowing me from Adam, liked what he saw and read, called me a few times, and booked a hunt. A first! A validation of all my wife's work. Since then two more bear hunters have done the same thing. The web page works.

Jeff had also spent a year in Pakistan as a lone U.S. Army Officer working with the Pakistani Military. He told us most of the people he met there really liked Americans, something you would never guess reading the newspaper. While over there he bought numerous wool, Persian tribal rugs which are heavy, and when rolled up made a perfect ballast weight that he lashed to his pack to get in shape for his hunt. I've heard of clients scrounging all sorts of heavy objects to weight their packs with - from hay bales to water jugs - but a Persian rug is way exotic and unique.

We had a lot of time for stories on Jeff's hunt due to weather, and wind directions that didn't favor our hunting. It was wet and warm. We ended up trapped on the wrong side of the Zachar River by deep water due to persistent rain. The other side has steep slopes rising close to the river enabling hunters to get a good view of the river and its' bears. The side we were trapped on has the majority of bear bedding areas but no good place to see them from. This results in many spooked bears. Everywhere you walk you leave sign and once a big male smells you out he's going to disappear for good relative to your hunt. It was frustrating. There were big, fresh tracks all along the way, but for a long time we weren't able to hook up with any of their makers. There were days we had to stay totally off the river due to bad and erratic wind directions that threatened to blow out the bears for miles around. It's a delicate balance trying to be effective as hunters without spooking them off. With all our tribulations we went a 9 day stretch only seeing “1 bear”. I've never come close to doing that before.

Finally, on the 11th day of the hunt we pushed further up river with a favorable wind. We were on a cottonwood ridge and could see bits and pieces of the river and bars in the distance screened through thousands of branches. We saw 4 bears. The first one didn't impress. The second one we only glimpsed. The third one looked huge but was a long way off and walking away. Kiche spotted the fourth bear, and it was closer, and said, “There's a big one.” He disappeared before Jeff and I could see him.

We decided to have lunch. Kiche was handing Jeff a sandwich that forced Jeff to half stand up to reach and then see, “Bear! coming right down the river!”

Oh yeah, he was big and wide, probably the same one seen 20 minutes earlier. Jeff dropped his sandwich with one bite taken out of it and we took off for the river. We hit a bear trail and flew through the trees. Within minutes we were looking down through a screen of alders at the bear 75 yards away. I said, “Find a hole through the branches and take him.”

“Boom! Whop!” The bear cut a thunderous roar of displeasure and started back into a tangle of stumps and logs. Jeff's 338 Winchester cut loose again and the bear rolled back off the stumps growling, thrashing, and fighting everything within reach. A third round didn't do too much but by then the first two had done their work. What a magnificent animal! There's just nothing the equal of a big Kodiak bear. All the work, the patience, the suffering and doubts - worth it.

While we saw several nice bucks while bear hunting we weren't able to get one after securing the bear. For those interested, Jeff used his own 225 grain barnes triple shock hand load pushed by 72 grains of Hodgdon 4350 powder. We retrieved one of them from under the skin - a perfect mushroom. The bear squared 9' 10”. The skull went 26 6/16. For Jeff it was the culmination of a dream that for most of his life he never expected to actually experience. Kiche and I really enjoyed his patience, stories and companionship.

Interest in bear hunting has really picked up in the last 6 months. My brown bear hunts are now booked up through 2015. For 2016 the cost is $17,950.00. I'm still looking for a goat hunter or two for next year. I'm sending a few contracts to people who have expressed an interest in the sheep drawing hunts in the Chugach. The deadline is Dec. 17th. You probably won't receive this mailing before the deadline. You have to be thinking a year ahead if you are interested in the sheep drawing and must sign a contract with me dated the day of application or before.

Last March I did something “some people” thought I'd never do - left the borders of Alaska for the lower 48. Donna's brother lives in Flagstaff, Arizona and she talked me into going. I have to say I loved it, loved the big country and ruggedness, and was enchanted by the Grand Canyon which I have always wanted to see. On a whim I hiked three miles down into it on the Angel Trail. I also bought several Grand Canyon books, one of which details all the 700 odd known deaths of people in the canyon. Interesting read. The canyon is a perfect trap for hikers. Easy going down; the further down you go the hotter it gets; not much water, and a long, hard climb back up. We are going back down to Arizona this coming March and we have a camping reservation in the bottom of the canyon for the 19th. I have a compulsion to hike to the Colorado River and back to the top. No big deal; people do it all the time, just something I want to do.

I would love someday to visit every State - every corner and crevice of our great Nation. Living all my life in Alaska I've been too much sheltered and have taken for granted the diversity of geography, biology and culture, and while pictures are nice, it's just not even close to the same as being someplace. We have the greatest country in the World and my New Year's wish to all is that as a people we learn to leave our cruel shoes at the door. Merry Christmas everybody! We love you! The Braendels