At this time last year our daughter Kaasan was beginning to fly helicopters. She's very determined and took lessons all winter and got her rotor wing pilot's license in June. That is our most momentous family news of the year, otherwise I'm happy to report the rest of us are fine and “chugging” along at our various endeavors, which late in the year included “chicken farming”. From what I've observed over the years people sometimes start out chicken farming – maybe as a kid learning life's basics – but eventually grow out of it. Naturally I end up doing things ass-backwards and get sucked into this chicken vortex thing by other family members at age 61. Oh well, enough about chickens, lets go hunting.

In April my first bear hunter, and new client, Ed “Iron-man” Strauss came up from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to hunt Kodiak bear. He brought along his 66 year old father-in-law Barry “The Marathon Man”Sales to help pack. Ed runs, swims and bikes in triathlete competitions, and when Barry was younger he once ran the Boston Marathon in 2:22! Hence their nicknames.

We hunted our way up to Ten Mile on the Zachar seeing several bears along the way and passing on a very stalk-able 9 footer. The spring started out as another late one and few bears were out of hibernation early. At Ten Mile we had to chop 4-5 inches of ice off our camp site with chisel shaped rocks pulled from the river to get our camp set. It was grueling labor and made us feel a little like cave men.

On day seven we got our break when two big boars showed on the mountain south of camp. We were on a glassing knob several ridges east of these bears and it was decided that Barry would head down to camp while Ed and I plowed through several feet of snow and a mile of thick alders to get up to them. Both bears had great hides and were of similar size so I took some photos of the one, and, minutes later, Ed killed the other with two solid chest hits from his 338 Winchester rested on our stacked back packs at about 250 yards. It was a nice clean kill, and little did we know then that Ed had set the tone for the entire year.

Ed's bear was a beautiful blondish color and the culmination of a child hood dream. The bear looked to be in the 12 to 15 year old range and squared out at 9 feet 10 inches. He “stretch” squared – the way some guides do it – at 10 ½ feet. The skull went 26 ½ inches. It is useful to note that younger bears, say up to 15 or so, stretch proportionally greater than older ones who's hides lack elasticity. I've never included stretch measurements of hides in my newsletter before but decided to do so this year as a basis of comparison – a perspective if you will – on all the “big” hides you hear about where even female bears square 9 foot and better. My photo sheet will still reflect “un-stretched” measurements.

Ed, Barry and I had a great time together, and when we got back to our cabin at the bay my son Kiche was there after guiding his friend Darryl Leskanic who had drawn a bear permit for Spiridon Bay which lies to the north and adjacent to Zachar.

They had only hunted three days before Darryl knocked down an old, gnarly 9 foot 10 inch boar with a 27 14/16's inch skull. An interesting anomaly with this bear were the up to two inch long worms that kept popping out of the flesh side of the hide while Kiche was fleshing it. We have never seen that before. The hide was a beautiful reddish color - and prime - so apparently they caused no harm.

For May we welcomed new clients Todd Meyer of Elk River, Minnesota and Fred Lobdell from Northborough, Massachusetts. We didn't know it then, but it wouldn't rain for the next fifteen days. Kiche and Andy took Todd up Little Zachar while Fred and I hunted mainly out of the cabin using our Achilles boat

On the second night Fred and I stalked to within 228 yards of a very solid looking 9 footer on the beach. I hesitated telling Fred to shoot, and the bear disappeared into the alders. It was only the second day. We hauled a spike camp with us on day five and camped out near Carlson Point.

On the sixth day I spotted two big boars – one following the other – on the steep mountain side of Zachar Peninsula. Fred wasn't entirely sure he could get up the mountain to them, but, he did fine. In fact, I made him climb much higher than he needed to, as I couldn't initially find the land marks I was looking for, or recognize them from our position.

When I finally zeroed in on the bear's original location I was distracted by my search for a particular rock outcrop for final confirmation when I heard Fred say, “There he is.”

The bear had gotten up from his nap and traveled several hundred yards further west where Fred luckily noticed him just before he disappeared behind a brushy wall. We were higher, an advantage, so we hurried across staying well above his line. Wind was in our face as Fred put his all into it. “You've got to leave everything on the mountain,” I urged as we labored up to a rock outcrop that revealed new country behind it. Were we quick enough?

Minutes ticked by, and then there he was swaying slowly up a brushy gully 125 yards below us. Fred had a deadly, high position as he leaned over the rocky point and flattened the bear with two 300 grain noslers out of his 375 H&H. Man, what a beautiful animal. His hide was perfect, his claws ivory colored. For Fred - just like it had been for Ed - it was the culmination of a childhood dream.

As we were photographing the bear I noticed that the wind had switched about 180 degrees from twenty minutes earlier. Wind plays cruel tricks on bear hunters, and there is no kind of hunting where it's more important. We crunch considerable brain power trying to decode and cipher the ways of the wind.

Fred's bear also appeared to be about 14 years old. He squared at 9 feet 8 inches, and stretch squared at 10 foot 4 inches. The skull measured 26 ¾ inches.

Meanwhile Kiche, Andy and Todd were having some bad stalking luck on bears. They had stalked two big ones without success and watched a huge, over 10 foot bear mosey his way out of our area and into Spiridon River. After nine days they needed some new bears and new country to look at.

In the morning we all headed out the bay in the boat to Black Rock to glass the Zachar Peninsula. Just before dark Kiche spotted a real big looking bear about two miles further west of where Fred had gotten his. I figured him for 10 foot class. At first he followed a smaller bear that he'd frightened out of the alders in front of him, but soon lost interest and began feeding through some especially thick growth where a stalk was impossible.

The next day we were back at it in the same area. Andy spotted him in the morning, but the brush was too thick for a stalk, then about 5 O'clock he showed again feeding just above the beach. All day the wind had been steady at 20 to 25 out of the northwest, yet when we idled near to the beach it seemed to stall altogether, and then backwash in the opposite direction. We hesitated. When the wind came back up from the west I dropped Todd and Andy on the beach. They were 300 yards behind the bear but couldn't close before he got into a thick mountain side of brush. I pulled them back off and we went back across to the point to lick our wounds. Just before dark Kiche spotted him again only 300 yards beyond where Andy and Todd had turned around , but again there was too much brush for a stalk.

The next day we decided to hunt up near the head of the bay for a change in scenery. We saw a number of bears including a dark, very slow walker on the mountain above us. Both Andy and I thought this bear could go 9 ½ foot. It had a blocky head and blunt nose with a good proportion of length to height. The only thing this bear didn't show was what we call “slop” in it's walking movements. This bear moved so slowly it was easy to ignore the lack of slop. We were able to bed this bear down in a cliff face some 1600 feet above the bay as it was getting dark.

We headed over at first light the next morning and Kiche, Andy and Todd made the stalk while I watched from below in case he moved. They got to within 175 yards and when the bear stood up Todd fired “two shots” with his 300 Remington Ultra Mag rolling the bear out of the rocks and tumbling it down the mountain side.

We were all surprised to find that Todd had killed a very old female that was the skinniest bear any of us had ever seen. Despite her macabre condition she had a beautiful hide and if Todd mounts her life sized she could be the cornerstone to a Kodiak bear diorama, as at this time of the year bears are beginning to breed. This bear's cub bearing days were long past so I don't mind taking it. An old female can fool you into thinking it's a boar because of her mature shape and body proportions. It was kind of embarrassing for our bear judging skills, so we came up with a new motto, “No shot if you can't confirm slop”.

The last time we killed a bear like this one was down on the Dog Salmon River and she aged out at 30.4 years old so we are pretty interested to learn this one's age. She squared out at 8 feet 5 inches; we didn't try a “stretch” measurement, but I doubt her hide had much “rubber” left in it. Her skull went 23 10/16's inches.

Summer squirted by with it's normal flash – over before it hardly got started - we consider August the beginning of fall. A few of you know the ugly story of my buying an 8 wheeled Argo from Kentuckiana Yacht Sales in Indiana. I want to *stress* that Kentuckiana performed in an exemplary fashion, going out of their way in an attempt to get the Argo shipped. They met the shipper late at night, hours after closing time, and perhaps most importantly, they took photos of the truck and license plate number that later proved invaluable.

All problems arose with the low bid shipper Stites Transport based in Georgia, who took four other Alaskans for a ride at the same time. I've never heard so many bald lies. After Stites picked up the Argo at Kentuckiana they stalled out in Minnesota. It turned out that Stites had two rented Penske trucks in Minnesota, both of them reported *stolen* by Penske. Soon one of them was found parked on a street and impounded. My wife Donna, who was tireless in tracking this fiasco and connecting up all the dots, (while I was guiding a sheep hunt I had hoped to use the Argo on) found out that the Argo was on the still “free” truck, and contacted my good friend and client Butch MacDonald of Hackensach, Minnesota. Butch managed to meet up with the wayward driver at a Home Depot where he unloaded the machine into his possession. A good thing; a day later the driver (the husband of the shipper) was arrested and the truck impounded. I've only skimmed the surface here, but the only thing lacking were dead bodies.

Through a one day ad on Craig's List I managed to connect up with Steven Schwister of Forest Lake, Minnesota who was headed to Alaska pulling an empty trailer to pick up an airplane in pieces. After filling Steve in on the plot I warned him to be wary of bandits while traveling through Canada. I finally took possession in early September, just before my moose hunt, and actually got to use it to haul a moose! Many thanks to everyone who helped out!

In August we did two backpack sheep hunts. Kiche guided Doug Peoble of San Manuel, Arizona who brought friend Brian Messing to help pack. Kaasan and I guided Chance Whitney on his second sheep hunt with us.

Kiche hunted our most trusted and reliable spot and while they saw fifteen rams and no other hunters they couldn't make a full curl. Several were close, but slightly short.

Chance, Kaasan and I hunted numerous locations over fifteen days, seeing many hunters, and close to 300 sheep, but we could not find a full curl. It was disheartening. In the past we've killed many fine sheep in these areas, and I do not have an easy answer as to why? I would say there are multiple factors, but the bottom line is, I'm not trying to book any back pack sheep hunts for next year. I don't book hunts where I'm not confident of being successful. There are always going to be hunts that you are unsuccessful on, but when you don't see a “legal” animal after great effort - that is something different. I would add that the State of Alaska is in the planning stages of implementing exclusive guide use areas similar to what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does on Refuges. They hope to implement it in the next year or two. We' ll see. It could provide for better sheep hunting.

In September Kiche took his girlfriend Lauren moose hunting out at Kelly Lake in the Alphabet Hills. The day after their arrival Lauren killed a fine 51” four brow tine bull with “two shots” out of Kiche's 270 Winchester. She was shooting 140 grain fail-safe bullets with which she was deadly accurate on targets. The bull had come out of the lake onto solid ground, but ran back into the water when she fired. Her second lung shot dropped him in the lake. It was her first big game animal and she is mighty proud of him. She suffers from quite a few allergies and wild game is one food she can eat all she wants of.

When my moose hunter – and long time client – Jeff Lange arrived on September 11th I was looking forward to trying out our new Argo that had arrived three days earlier. After the disappointments associated with my sheep hunts, and the Argo shipping fiasco, I was looking forward to the moose hunt as I have great confidence in my moose hunting spot.

After leaving the Argo Jeff and I were hunting our way up the mountain to establish our spike camp. We were carrying hefty loads, and it's all uphill, so we took long breaks where I was scraping my moose scapula to sound like a bull racking his antlers in the brush, or banging it against trees to simulate a battle between two bulls. We had only covered about half the climb up to camp when we got into some moose.

First we caught glimpses of about a 40” bull still in velvet, then I looked behind us to see a large bull watching us from about 70 yards away. Man, he looked wide. Wheels were turning in my head. We were four hours into a ten day hunt and psychologically I'm not ready to kill a moose. But, I'm thinking, he's got to be over 60 inches. Jeff and I were sitting on the ground and twisted around like snakes when I suddenly hissed, “Shoot him!”

Jeff had to turn into a kneeling position while jacking a shell into his 300 Remington ultra mag, and before he could finish his move the bull spun and bolted down the mountain side. The way he took off I knew it was hopeless to follow, so we swung our attention back to in front of us where we suddenly heard a bull grunting off to the right of where we'd seen the 40” bull. I was sitting there wondering if the 40 inch-er had somehow moved that far in the short interim of time our attention was diverted when suddenly I see a massive looking white bone antler flashing through the trees coming right to us. You could only see one antler at a time due to trees and brush and as he came on twisting and slicing through the branches I whispered, “Jeff, he looks pretty big... heavy... thicker antlers than that other one. I think you better take him.”

That first big bull had primed us, kind of like you prime a flintlock; now we were ready, and when the bull turned sideways at 25 yards Jeff rose up and tagged him. I saw the bullet impact behind the shoulder as he ran. Jeff's second, high shoulder shot knocked him down.

We were ecstatic! Four hours into the hunt and we had a heavy 59” bull down. After butchering him we loaded the back-straps, inside loins, and heart into our packs and headed down to the Argo where we camped that night. The next day Kiche came up and helped us pack the moose about half a mile down to the Argo. We did it in two trips, the last of which was ridiculously heavy: Jeff's pack went 116 pounds, mine 170, and Kiche's 204.

On October 4th Kaasan and I headed down to Kodiak on the Ferry to do a goat hunt with long tome client Todd Muehleip of Galena, Illinois. As we were flying into Zachar we counted 54 goats on one mountain side in Little Zachar valley so that's where we headed a few days later. Unfortunately by the time we got up there all but eight goats had disappeared around the corner into Spiridon Bay where we couldn't follow. There was one other loose knit group of seven nannies and kids down by the bay but no mature billies. The following day was washed out in a big storm that caused substantial flooding around the island. The day after the storm the last of “our” eight goats disappeared over the top into Spiridon. That was discouraging.

We decided to break camp and climb up into Pallansch Creek. On the rugged north face of the first mountain we found two billies hanging out. The problem was, how to get one without it self destructing on the trip down through the rocks?

We tried various attacks from the top and the bottom. These billies would move around but seemed to always know where to be in order to thwart our aims. One beautiful afternoon found us on top of the mountain staring 200 yards down it's north face at one of these billies. It was tempting. But, it was a long, rocky fall, and would he even go all the way down? Maybe, he would hang up.

While the weather was generally good during this hunt we were pestered by morning fog nearly every day. Some days you couldn't see the goat cliffs until afternoon. On the 17th, the tenth day of the hunt, we got up to find plenty of fog covering all the goat country. We were hanging out and telling stories to pass the time when Todd noticed a white object under the fog line. Mountain goat! One of the billies we'd been trying to get was way down low and on the move. Given his line of travel I interpreted that he planned to cross over Pallansch Creek and Little Zachar to the mountain side the 54 had been on two weeks ago.

All we had to do was keep pace with him on our side of the creek to see when and where he might try to cross. After we'd paced him for about 3/4's of a mile the billy turned towards us and came down through the alders. Before he could get down into Pallansch Creek Canyon where we might lose track of him we decided it would be safer to take a cross canyon shot at 200 yards. Todd took a sitting position with his rifle rested across his pack and fired “two shots” out of his 300WSM which took Mr. Goat down in the nicest terrain I've ever skinned a goat on. Yee Ha! We had a hard earned animal that at the end might have sounded easy, but wasn't when you considered the previous nine days. The billy went 9 ¼ inches long by 5 ½ inches on the bases and the next day we made it back to the cabin.

On November 27th my brown bear hunter Mike Gleason of Berlin, Massachusetts and my son Kiche flew in for the final hunt of the year. Mike is a bear hunter, it's what he likes to do, and he was doing his third Kodiak trip with us. Rolan of SeaHawk Air put us down in Lake 629 and then we backpacked into an area we hadn't hunted for two years.

It was a typical fall/early winter hunt with short, cool days that had us watching the river for “fishers” and the mountains for “diggers”. This time of year bears in my area are either looking for silver salmon, digging for the roots of Eskimo potato and wild sweet pea or down at the bay cleaning up deer kills. On the upper river they seem to be about evenly divided between digging and fishing on any given day.

After a couple of days watching from up on a mountain we got the perfect wind to hunt what we call Big Bend. With a northwesterly we can get down just off the bulge of the bend and not worry about our scent getting to bears downriver or upriver of our position. That is very important, as once a bear smells you - or your tracks - you will not see him again.

The next three days we staked out Big Bend. The first two days two bears came by each day. The first of these was a very solid looking 9 ½ footer. The others were around 9 foot. On the third day of the stakeout, and 5th of the hunt, at 3 O'clock in the afternoon Kiche saw a bear come out of the cottonwoods on the far side of Big Bend. I couldn't see the bear from my position due to a wad of trees and brush, but I heard Kiche say, “There's a bear...and I think this one is big enough”.

And sure enough he was a tall, long bodied animal that rocked from side to side with slop as he came through the water and up our side. He was the kind of bear that normally lives in the shadows; he walked very slowly and I found myself mesmerized by his movements.

It broke my reverie as we shucked off our down coats and closed the distance to the river. Thick willows screened us but also prevented a clean bullet path. The river bank was twenty feet above the water here and I told Mike, “Start crawling...and don't stop until your barrel is free.”

In the minutes it took Mike to wriggle through to the other side the bear closed to within 60-70 yards. He was shooting the same 30/06 and same 180 grain nosler partitions that he had killed his other two Kodiak's with and when he let go that first round the bear went down hard, seemingly pinned to the rocks by the impact. He couldn't get back up, though he fought to, and Mike fired a second round to end his mighty struggles. He was the king bear of the year; big, old, scarred and beautiful. Three of his canine teeth were broken off and his molars were worn down, and he wasn't the fattest bear on the river. He squared out at 10 foot 1 inch un-stretched, 10 feet 7 ½ inches stretched. Fish and Game measured his skull at 28 7/16's inches.

While we were hunting Lake 629 had frozen over as usual, but then, with perfect timing, a big southeaster blew in with heavy rain and unfroze it saving us about three days of hard hiking on a now flooding river. Back at the cabin we dried everything out and spent the next two rainy days packing up for a short deer hunt up Little Zachar. And it was short. The same afternoon we got up there Mike killed a heck of a nice 3 point sitka blacktail with eye guards that scored 102 B&C points with what else – “two shots”. So we finished the year with a flourish. I want to thank all my clients for their accurate shooting. Great job!

My Kodiak bear hunts are booked through 2011. I have two goat hunters booked for 2010. Goat hunting in my area no longer requires a drawing permit, it's now a registration permit hunt, and these permits can be obtained over the internet. We have lots of goats, and the best brown bear hunting – anywhere.

I've been doing one moose hunt each year and they are booked through 2011. However, I'm seriously thinking of doing two moose hunts next year. My son Kiche would be guiding one hunter in the area I've been hunting in recent years, while I'd take the second client into new territory a couple of miles further back in, which is an area that doesn't get hunted. I would have to use my horses to pack a moose out of there, an activity my clients couldn't be involved with due to liability. Basically, we'd back pack in several miles from where we can drive, then once a moose was down I'd come out to get the horses to pack it out. All of my moose hunts require a person to be in fairly good shape as we are hunting steep mountain country, and the client is expected to help pack the moose. In one area this means helping your guide pack the moose to where our argo, tractor or jeep can reach it. In the proposed area it might mean the same commitment on the near end, or it might mean having to pack the moose a short distance to where the horses can reach it. Any moose taken on these hunts would be split right down the middle – meat wise – half to the hunter, half to the guide. We would accept any part of your half of the meat that you didn't want of course, but when we do these guided hunts we don't get time to get our own moose. In September Jeff left us his whole moose, so thank you Jeff.

The Christmas card photo was taken by Kiche in Zachar Bay this spring. We believe it's a humpback whale, but we' re not experts. That's some pretty good air for an animal that big.

We hope all our friends are doing well and looking forward to Christmas and the New Year. We are! Shoot a straight barrel and in the sentiments of the old time mountain man, keep your powder dry.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR