

Profile

Unalakleet River Lodge

Over 2,000 years ago the Inupiat and Yup'ik Eskimos inhabited Norton Sound on the Bering Sea. This area abounded with food from the sea and the land. Not far inland the Athabascan Indians harvested from this region's many bounties. Settlements emerged along the streams and rivers filled with salmon and other resident fish such as dolly varden, Arctic char and grayling. These nomadic communities came and went based on dependable food and water as well as other resources necessary to survive.

Dialect and differences in customs between these cultural groups led to the establishment of a natural border. This border came to be alongside the scenic and bountiful Unalakleet River. The river remains a historical landmark signifying a regional boundary between distinct cultures.

The village of Unalakleet is located at the mouth of this river. The name's translation means "where the east wind blows." Unalakleet has become a thriving community where traditional values and customs are still evident.

The Unalakleet Native Corp. (UNC), the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act village corporation for Unalakleet, has maintained itself as a highly successful and professional corporation. Its most recent acquisition is the former Silvertip Lodge, now renamed the Unalakleet River Lodge. The relationship between the lodge, its new owners and the community has added a new dimension to this unique Alaskan outdoor experience.

Norton Sound, on which Unalakleet is located, enjoys warm, moderate summers, a pleasant surprise for visitors. The area also enjoys an abundance of wildlife, with moose, reindeer, caribou and waterfowl being the most prominent. It has also become renowned for the frequency of bear sightings.

The main lodge is situated on a hill overlooking the river. It is nearly 100 feet long and constructed from hand hewn logs. The main dining area is a favorite gathering place, the enjoyment deriving from what the lodge managers boast is the "finest table in the Alaskan bush." Outdoor expeditions, sightseeing, hiking, bird watching, ***continued on page 8...***



Overlooking a scenic river valley, the Unalakleet River lodge provides access to hundreds of miles of fishing waters.

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and fly fishing along a sandbar are all enhanced with elaborate shore lunches that refresh after non-stop daily activities.

The Unalakleet River Lodge offers guided fishing tours with two clients per boat. The lodge can accommodate about 20 clients on a weekly basis, but the owners strive to limit their numbers to 16 clients per week for greater comfort. They provide individual cabins, boats, guides and hot meals. Fishing tackle will also be provided as needed.

The visitors to the lodge come from all over the nation and even from foreign countries. Their learning experiences will help to dispel the notion that Eskimos live in a barren and frozen wasteland.

The lodge offers classes on fly-fishing and encourages catch and release. The guides and instructors demonstrate removal of the fish hook barb to prevent harm to the fish. Clients wishing to take fish home may do so, but quantities are kept at a reasonable and manageable level. The lodge will assist with the packaging and storing of caught fish, readying it for transport.

The lodge also sells Eskimo arts and crafts items that come from Unalakleet and the neighboring villages. Popular items include ivory carvings and sculpture from Diomedes, baskets from Stebbins, and parkas and skin sewn moccasins and mukluks. The UNC keeps the local general store open late one evening

a week so that visitors can come to town to do some shopping after a day on the river.

As with many new business acquisitions, the least favorable aspect is the associated risk. UNC acknowledges this risk and is particularly attentive to the need for the lodge to develop on its own, to reach its maturity. The lodge operation has met revenue expectations, but earnings were affected somewhat by the uncertainty of the pending sale. Now that the sale has been finalized and a new management team is in place, bookings have shown an increase.

There is now the opportunity for local people to enter the profession of fish and wildlife guiding. If viewed as a career and not just a summer job, some enterprising, hard-working individuals will attain the skills and training necessary to earn one of the fishing guide jobs at the lodge. As skilled professionals, these guides would then be able to compete for jobs anywhere within the region. In time, opportunities may arise for lodge assistants to work in food preparation, housekeeping and maintenance.

Ron and Tiffany Hyde manage the lodge. Ron comes to Unalakleet from Goodnews Bay and brings a wealth of knowledge of wildlife and fisheries. As a team, the Hydies have been well accepted in the community as personable and competent managers. Their friendly na-

ture is particularly appealing because it melds so well with the character of the local people.

Other operations of the UNC include an apartment complex, as well as fuel sales and services, and joint venture construction activities. UNC also owns and manages a healthy investment portfolio.

One of Unalakleet's best kept secrets is the abundance of its fisheries resources. Beyond its scenery, local Native culture, and exceptional hospitality, a visitor will be astonished at the quality of the fishing in this western Alaska town. The lodge provides access to hundreds of miles of fishing waters. Fly-outs for fishing Northern Pike are among the most sought after activities.

The salmon fishery is one of the finest in the world. Slow, deep bends and small tides provide for a river configuration that enjoys massive numbers of king salmon running upwards to 50 pounds, but more common at 25 pounds. Chum salmon, famous for their relentless fight and aggressiveness are visitor favorites. Its the silver salmon, though, who put on the best acrobatic displays and make the experience unforgettable.

Book your lodge reservations early by calling Ron and Tiffany Hyde at 624-3031 during the winter and 624-3030 in the summer months. ■

