

Some ABCs

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In education

Editor's Note: Should you have any questions or suggestions regarding this or future "ABCs" articles, please contact the author at the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks 99701, or call (907) 479-7185.

Summertime is oftentimes vacation time for Alaskan families. Whether for three day weekends or longer periods of time, your family may wish to organize this summer's outings around themes in Alaska history.

Using the books, maps, and references of your local library or your personal bookshelf, you can begin designing a trip. Certain fictional or documentary books may provide a focal point for your trip. For example, a trip to the Cordova or Chitina-Kennecott areas may be enhanced with readings from Lone E. Jansen's *The Copper Spike* relating the intrigue and adventure associated with the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad's transport of ore from the Wrangells to tidewater at Katella.

Gold is a popular topic of conversation and is reflected in Juneau's special centennial celebration of its founding. The Perseverance Theater in Douglas, across the Gastineau channel from Juneau, is again presenting the widely acclaimed "Pure Gold" theater based upon the oral history of the old-timers' early days in the Juneau-Douglas area. The migration of gold seekers from Southeast to the Yukon can be enjoyed in Pierre Berton's *Klondike*, and the continuation of the gold search into the Alaskan Forty-Mile, Interior, and Seward Peninsula areas is chronicled in William Hunt's *North of 53°*. Retracing these routes by ferry, railroad, boat, air or car can be interesting and provides a greater understanding of the vast distances those early gold seekers traveled pursuing the elusive wealth.

The historic Fairbanks to Valdez route from tidewater to the Interior is now the Richardson Highway. As a major transportation route, the road had numerous roadhouses serving the early travelers who ventured forth on horses, dog sleds, and even bicycles before our automobiles became the predominant transportation form. Many of the historic roadhouses are still in operation and a visit to each is a must. Those roadhouses are listed in a publication entitled *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, printed in 1974 by the Alaska State Office of History and Archaeology, and authored by Michael E. Smith.

While traveling you may notice that many communities have local museums, usually voluntarily maintained for visitors by the local historical society. The people who manage such displays are usually very knowledgeable about the local area and are eager to talk with visitors. While the displays may not be as "slick" as those found in city museums, the people who keep those displays open to visitors are unique. The storytelling and character of the people in the places you visit are the *real* way to learn about the local area.

Special places to find interesting publications and momentos are the gift counters of the Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum and the University of Alaska, Fairbanks Geist Museum. The selection of materials is varied and unique. While planning or while on your vacation, plan to visit those museums and their gift counters for special treasures.

If you are traveling with youngsters, it may be advisable to include games for them and to plan activities utilizing the numerous Alaska wildlife guides and lists for identifying flowers, berries, and birds during your travels. Photography combined with a written daily journal could become next fall's "show and tell" at school. Youngsters can collect rock samples, labeled with mineral type and location, or tumble small samples for use as jewelry with a vacation history. Others can sketch pictures on their travels while others collect stories about the foundings of the communities through which you travel.

Summertime is a great time to visit other parts of the state, and using a historic theme may be an interesting way to organize your travel and to create a sense of adventure.