

Seeks Escape—Sometimes— Chicken Coop Leads To Babe's Captivity



ALASKALAND'S "BABE"

FAIRBANKS—Last August a hungry little Alaskan native wandered into Alaskaland, an entertainment park, and staked out a coop of chickens.

Children camped there spotted the bear cub as she climbed the coop and called park superintendent, Lee Meerfield.

Since that time the bear has been eating regularly, but not chickens. And there must be days when she wishes she had not plotted the theft.

When Meerfield arrived at the scene the bear panicked, and tried to scramble up a neighboring tin roof. She slipped, landed at the superintendent's feet and ran into an empty cage that had once housed an ocelot. Meerfield, naturally, closed the door and Alaskaland had a resident bear.

She wasn't very big then and Meerfield wondered if she'd survive.

"She started burrowing, slowed down her eating. Finally she pushed straw into both ends of her cage and sacked out," he recalls. "We didn't see how she could get through that winter. Then in March we were clearing the roofs and one of the workmen said we had a dead bear. I peeked in and didn't see anything but black. Then she peeked back."

They named her Babe, put her on a balanced diet and built her a roomy pen in the trees with a little stream and a double row of diamond fencing. Today

she weighs over 275 pounds, is still gaining, and she has become a favorite with park visitors.

Through most of the summer she prowled beneath a sign reading, "Danger High Voltage" and that's what the tourists called her. Finally the park installed a sign explaining her name was "Babe."

The high voltage refers to a hot wire that tops her cage which she occasionally grapples with when plotting escape.

She does have her bad days, Meerfield admits. When it's hot she sits in her stream waiting for salmon that never appear or sulks in a deep hole she's excavated under her little log house.

But on good days she's a delight; wrestling with four automobile tires in her pen, playing tug-of-war on a branch with Meerfield or clowning for cotton candy which tourists aren't supposed to feed her.

And she enjoys her neighbors which include two reindeer and two moose. "The other night I came out and she and one of the reindeer were nose to nose with all the other animals lying in close," Meerfield reports. "Kind of makes you wonder what was going on."

Well, Babe isn't telling. She's busy gaining weight for another long winter's nap and, unless someone leaves her door open or she hurtles the "Danger High Voltage" she's likely to spend another season at Alaskaland... sans chickens.



"BABE'S" NEIGHBORS

Endowment on the Arts Grants State Council on the Arts

WASHINGTON, D. C.—Congressman Nick Begich announced today that the National Endowment for the Arts is making a \$101,320 grant to the Alaska

State Council on the Arts.

The money will be used to assist the State Arts Agency in the development of its programs.

Mrs. Mary Hale is Chairman of the Alaska State Council on the Arts in Alaska. Grants to organizations are made on a 50-50 matching basis.

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