

BEAR LAKE LODGE

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #117 —

Of all the places I've had the opportunity to visit, this one stands out as one worth going back to. It's remote and rustic, but very comfortable; and never seems to change. The food is excellent and the views can be breathtaking; the staff are warm and friendly and work long, hard hours to ensure their guests have a pleasant experience. But the primary reason I go back is the outstanding hunting and fishing.

Just getting there is a relatively big deal, as there are no roads. It's located 550 air miles southwest of Anchorage, near the far end of the Alaska Peninsula. Most planes take three hours or so to get there and land on the 3500 foot gravel runway at Port Moller, which is 20 feet above sea level and just off the Bering Sea — with no fuel and no services. After that, bush pilots in an

assortment of one and three passenger planes fly the guests and gear twelve miles inland to the Lodge, landing on a shorter gravel strip called Johnson's Landing. The

Lodge sits at the north end of Bear Lake, where Bear Creek begins its short, winding trip to the Bering Sea.

Bear Lake Lodge gets its name from Bear Lake, but Johnson's Landing is named after Don Johnson, who landed his Super Cub there in the summer of 1956, as heavy fog rolled in off the Bering Sea. He spent the night in his plane and woke up to clear skies the next morning. As a hunter and guide, Don instinctively knew he had



The Lodge is near the center of this picture, overlooking Bear Lake. Johnson's Landing is the dirt strip above the buildings. (Picture by Lori Rhoades)

discovered a sportsman's paradise. Shortly thereafter he built a cabin, applied for his homesteader claim and began hunting and guiding other hunters there in 1960. The main part of the lodge dates back to 1972.

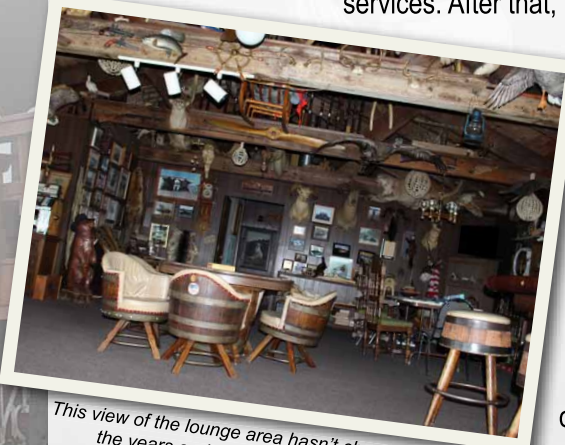
One of the most noteworthy memories of a week in Alaska, especially at Bear Lake, is the weather. High winds and poor visibility sometimes keep planes on the ground, delaying one's arrival or departure. No one can change the weather and you can't hurry it; so a man just has to be patient and enjoy the indoors, until things get better.

"It's remote and rustic..."

Brenda and I have hunted brown bear there a couple of times, once in the spring and once in the fall; and we've fished there on several occasions for king and sockeye salmon. Bear Lake Lodge is a place we both enjoy going back to.



Larry Potterfield
Bear Lake Lodge
Port Moller, Alaska
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This view of the lounge area hasn't changed much through the years and it's always intriguing. Here games are played and tales are swapped. (Picture by Lori Rhoades)



(L-R) Bert Klineburger, Warren Johnson (son of Don Johnson), Brenda and I on the front deck of the Lodge, on a rare, clear evening. Bert shot a record book bear in this area - in 1961, with Warren's dad as his guide. (Picture by Lori Rhoades)