

2006
ANNUAL
TRAVEL ISSUE

Alaska

Exploring Life on the Last Frontier

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Unhappy with February AV

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Rock Collectors Find Mother Lode on Kenai Peninsula

A beachcomber's paradise has sprung up along the shores of Cook Inlet on the Kenai Peninsula, thanks to a fish-camp owner and his relentless pursuit of some unique rocks.

Scott Carlson owns the Otter Creek Fish Camp north of Captain Cook State Park, where over the past few years the low tides of Cook Inlet have revealed a bounty of surreal-looking smooth stones that geologists term concretions, or rocks that form in layers around some object, like a grain of sand.

Carlson told the *Peninsula Clarion* he first saw one of the stones near his cabin. He and other family members began working the beaches at low tide, finding a handful of the rocks before Carlson found a football field-sized area with hundreds of the stones. The finds have led to a self-published book.

"Now we have given rocks and books out to almost everybody who comes down the beach," Carlson told the newspaper. He added that even the locals are starting their own collections.

"What I found is people didn't believe me," he said. "I'd show them rocks and they'd say 'I have been here all my life and I



M.SCOTT MOON/PENINSULA CLARION

This stony formation is one of the unusual rocks known as concretions found on the beaches of Cook Inlet near Captain Cook State Park. haven't seen them."

"But they had not been past Captain Cook State Park and at low, low tide. I showed people where to get them."

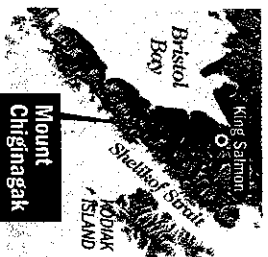
Additional information and photographs of concretions are available at www.cookinletconcretions.com. Carlson's book "What Do You See?" is available at www.authorhouse.com or by calling (888) 280-7715.

Leaking Volcano Disrupts River's Habitat

Salmon and game biologists are hoping the King Salmon River and its tributaries on the Alaska Peninsula will be fully recovered for this year's salmon runs, as well as returning to support other animal habitat, after an active volcano in the area spilled a foul slurry of sediment into the watershed.

According to the *Anchorage Daily News*, volcanologists who returned in September from examining the 7,005-foot Mount Chiginagak reported a new 1,300-foot-wide crater lake near the mountain's summit had spilled volcanic sediment that basically shut down the salmon-based food chain of the King Salmon River drainage.

The highly acidic, red sludge worked its way through Indecision Creek, into Mother Goose Lake and finally into the King Salmon



River, where the tainted water probably killed any fish there at the time and created unrecognizable scents for salmon seeking their natal streams.

"No bears, no birds, no fish. It's like someone dropped a bomb on the place," Painter Creek Lodge owner and fishing guide Jon Kent told the *Daily News*. "The whole river was starting to turn orange." All five species of salmon as well as other fish swim up the King Salmon drainage. This year's runs were nonexistent, and most fish probably detoured to other rivers, according to biologists.

Kent told the newspaper that a former homesteader on the river reported the same thing happened in the 1970s and the river recovered. He said he hopes the river "flushes itself out" and returns to normal soon.

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river would be far costlier. According to state officials, no plans are in the works to extend the mile-long gravel road that greets motorists on the north side of the bridge. Built in the early 1900s to carry trainloads of copper ore from the Kennicott mine to Cordova, the steel bridge was converted to handle motor vehicle traffic in 1958 before the 1964 earthquake dumped four of its spans into the river. A rudimentary system of cables, I-beams and planks had allowed traffic to cross before the reconstruction project began last year.

50 Years Ago In Alaska magazine
February 1956

Alaska Sportsman



>> The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ended its annual sealing operation for 1955 last July 31, with a net of 65,638 fur seal skins taken on the Pribilof Islands. In 1910, when the United States government took over the management and protection of the fur seal herd, it numbered about 132,000. It is now estimated to be over 1,500,000. Since 1910, the government has netted some \$17,000,000—more than twice the purchase price of the entire Territory of Alaska—from the sale of fur seal skins.

—Alaska magazine archives

From Ketchikan to Barrow is edited by STEVEN MERRITT

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Volcanic overflow ruins salmon return on Alaska river

By DOUG O'HARRA
Anchorage Daily News

September 14, 2005
Wednesday

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Fly-fishing guide Jon Kent first wondered what had gone wrong with King Salmon River on the Alaska Peninsula when no lunkers showed up in June.

"We've had slow runs before," said Kent, who's worked the Bristol Bay stream for 21 seasons and runs Painter Creek Lodge with his wife, Patty. "Anybody who has ever fished wild salmon knows that sometimes they're late."

But no salmon returned in July either, at least not on the river's upper section, which drains the flank of the icy Mount Chiginagak volcano and part of a national wildlife refuge about 350 miles southwest of Anchorage.

Then things got really nasty.

"The whole river was starting to turn orange," Kent said. "There was this weird reddish foam and scum starting to come down the river."

So Kent took a boat upstream to the headwaters and discovered a natural catastrophe in progress: red gunk flushing from Volcano Creek into Mother Goose Lake and, further upstream on Indecision Creek, dead plants and a sulfuric stench. Gulls were missing from an island, fish from the lake. Even the brown bears were gone.

He notified state biologists and scientists at the Alaska Volcano Observatory, who were already scheduled to visit the area to study at Chiginagak's hazards and geologic history.

"No bears, no birds, no fish," is how the 56-year-old Kent put it. "It's like someone dropped a bomb on the place."

Something had poisoned the river and shut down the valley's salmon-based food chain. It also eliminated the lodge's summer season, canceling trips for up to 60 sport fishermen and putting six people out of work.

Blame Chiginagak's leaky plumbing, say volcanologists who returned from the scene last week.

A new 1,300-foot-wide crater lake near the 7,005-foot summit gushed through its glacial rim earlier this summer and spilled a foul slurry of volcanic sediment, water and ice, said volcanologist Janet Schaeffer. In addition to damaging the upper King Salmon system, the water also leaked into an unnamed drainage on Chiginagak Bay in Shelikof Strait, on the Cook Inlet side of the peninsula.

"For some reason there was increased heat activity in the summit region and it melted that ice cap," Schaeffer said. "It seems that this may be some kind of cyclical event. . . . We do see evidence that this has happened before."

The big flow deposited ash and rock on the mountain's south glacier and flooded Indecision Creek up to 6 feet deep before spreading downstream. It left part of the now-polluted river with a reddish "bathtub ring" and an acidic pH level of 3, according to volcanologists who conducted a hazards assessment in late August and early September.

The water remains so acidic that it would kill fish and be unrecognizable to salmon looking for home, said state commercial fishing biologist Paul Salomone, with the Department of Fish and Game.

"I think if there were fish in there when the event happened, they got toasted," he said.

Chiginagak is a little-known volcano with no recent history of blowing its top or spewing lava. It's not one of the 28 volcanoes, like Mount Spurr 80 miles west of Anchorage, Alaska, actively monitored by the observatory. But Chiginagak isn't dead.

Sulfurous smoke steams from its north flank, and Kent said he saw a big plume rise a few years ago. There's no evidence that the volcano is about to erupt, but Schaeffer and the other scientists left behind a portable seismic station to find out if it's stirring. They won't have data for several weeks.

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Crater lake at summit of Chiginagak Volcano, August 20, 2005.

Picture Date: August 20, 2005

Image Creator: Schaefer, Janet

Image courtesy of the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys.
Please cite the photographer and the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys when using this image.

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Eruption: 1998

*Global Volcanism Program — Department of Mineral Sciences — National Museum of Natural History
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