

This year, travel with The Planetary Society as we explore:

ALASKA

Aurora Borealis

Come see the Greatest Light Show on Earth!

March 15-21, 2012

Dear Friends:

We invite you to join us in 2012, as we explore the great beauty of Alaska in winter, and see the famed Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights, the greatest light show on Earth!

We will gather in **Anchorage, Alaska**, to begin our adventure, situated at the head of the Cook Strait and at the foot of the Chugach Mountains, whose peaks define the coast of Alaska. After our welcome in Anchorage, we will drive through spectacular mountains to **Seward**, near Kenai Fjords National Park. Here we'll visit the Alaska Sea Life Center to see sea otters, seabirds, and a profusion of Alaska marine life. We will look at Alaska's major land mammals including grizzlies, moose, and muskox.

The following day we will travel on the classic train journey from Anchorage to **Fairbanks**, passing North America's tallest and most awesome mountain, **20,320-foot Mt. McKinley** en route.

We will arrive in Fairbanks to enjoy the annual winter **World of Ice Art Festival** and learn about the Aurora Borealis at a scientific institute as we discover the delights of Fairbanks and the night skies.

Our visits will include the **Geophysical Institute** at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, which was established to study the Aurora and its effects. These studies have continued from the International Geophysical Year in 1957-58 to the present time and are conducted in both polar



areas. They have added greatly to understanding the unique interactions between the Sun and Earth in the polar regions.

In Fairbanks we will go to the very best locations in the evening to look at the Aurora Borealis: **Mt. Aurora**, **Creamer's Field**, and the Aurora-viewing facility at **Alpencrest Observatory**. In these remote locations, we will continue to learn about the Aurora and enjoy hospitality in rustic lodges while viewing the Aurora.

You will have afternoons to discover other delights of this snowy wonderland. We will see sled dogs and learn about the art of mushing, and the local Curling

Club will demonstrate this popular winter sport. We will also visit the **Poker Flat Research Range** which launches rockets to study the Aurora Borealis.

Leading this expedition will be popular Betchart naturalist **Bob Nansen**. Joining him will be a representative of The Planetary Society.

We invite travelers with an appetite for adventure and discovery to explore the day and night winter wonderland of our 49th state this winter!

Sincerely,

Bill Nye, The Science Guy®
Executive Director



ITINERARY

Day 1 Home to Anchorage

Expedition members fly from their nearest gateway city to Anchorage, Alaska. Transfer on your own to the *Hilton Hotel* (2 nights). Afternoon at leisure, or visit the Anchorage Museum of History and Art for a fascinating introduction to the people and wildlife of Alaska.

Welcome social, orientation, and dinner. (D)

Day 2 Seward & Resurrection Bay

Today we will travel south through the Chugach National Forest to the fishing village of Seward adjacent to Kenai Fjords National Park. Seward is named for U.S. Secretary of State, William Seward, who convinced Congress to buy Alaska from Russia in 1867 for less than 2 cents per acre. Here, we will explore the excellent Alaska Sea Life Center. We will see much of the marine life of the North Pacific including seabirds, sea lions, bald eagles, and more! Afternoon return to Anchorage via the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center. (B)

Day 3 Anchorage to

Fairbanks by Train

After breakfast we will board the famous Alaska Railroad for a scenic journey from Anchorage, along the Cook Inlet and inland to Fairbanks, situated in the interior of this vast state. The rail trip will take about twelve hours, with stops along the way to allow locals to get to and from their homes when snow blocks many of the smaller roads. In winter, the views of Mt. McKinley, at 20,320 feet, can be outstanding with clear skies. The train has a dining car for meals. Arrive in Fairbanks and transfer to *Sophie Station Hotel* (4 nights). (B)



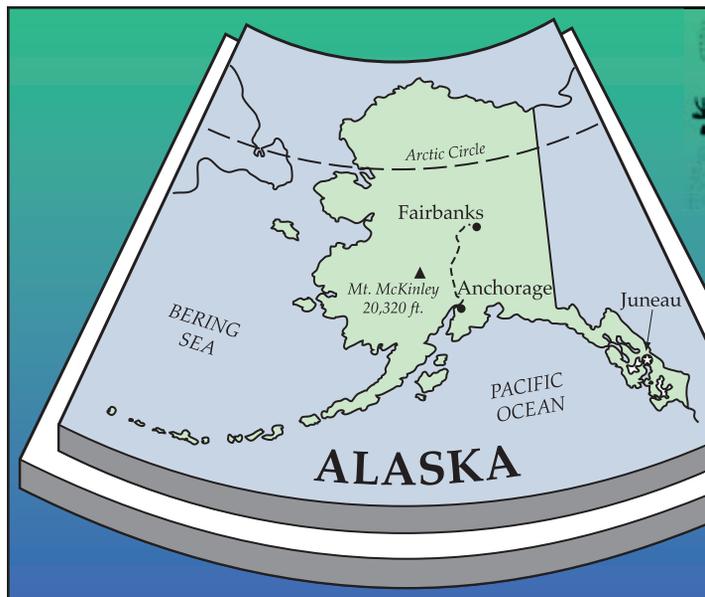
OVERVIEW OF THE AURORA BOREALIS

The colorful Aurora Borealis is produced by a combination of solar winds and excited gases surrounding the Earth's magnetic field. The Earth has polarity with magnetic field lines radiating outward and connecting back on themselves.

As the solar wind blows against and across the field lines it produces electricity, like a generator. The electricity, mostly electrons, flows most easily along the magnetic field lines. As the electrons collide with upper atmospheric atoms and molecules, they become "excited", and emit light that is a characteristic of each atom or molecule, thus producing the light we see as the Aurora. The Aurora colors can range from white to green to yellow, and red, with many shades in between.

The solar wind is the energy behind the Aurora. When the solar winds increase during a solar sun cycle or with an intense explosion, a solar flare, or increased amounts of energy, collides with the earth's magnetic field. During the increased interaction the Auroras are more intensely colored and can fill the night sky with color from horizon to horizon.

In 1963, scientists discovered that Auroras form a band encircling each polar region, the Aurora Oval. The oval band width varies between 200 and 800 miles in a single day and can move hundreds of miles in latitude. The Aurora Oval is fixed in relation to the Sun as the Earth rotates under the oval each day, making it a very dynamic phenomenon. Many Aurora Oval photos have been taken from space which have allowed scientists to better measure the daily movements of the Aurora.



Day 4 Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska

This morning we will enjoy an introduction to the Aurora Borealis at the Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska, Fairbanks. The Institute has a long history of Aurora research that continues today. We will learn about the different types of Auroras, the colors, movements, and current research. Sound at different wavelengths is also emitted by Auroras, but whether a human can hear the sounds has long been debated.

Later in the day, we will visit the Fairbanks famed World of Ice Art Festival. Here, tantalizing images of moose, swans, and other fanciful works of imagination have been carved from massive blocks of ice and illuminated by colored lights to enhance the effects of size and realism.

Following dinner on your own, we will drive to the wildlife refuge, Creamer's Field, to be joined by local star gazers to view the night sky, and the Aurora Borealis. (B)

Day 5 Poker Flat & Mt. Aurora

This morning we will have a late breakfast and then enjoy a late morning lecture. After lunch we will visit the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the 800-mile-long pipe that carries crude oil from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez for shipment by enormous oil tankers to the "lower 48." We will continue northeast of Fairbanks through rounded, snow-covered schist hills which were a focus of gold mining at the turn of the century. Millions of ounces of gold were taken from this region over a period of 60 years.

We then visit the Poker Flat Research Range. Poker Flat is the world's only university-owned and operated rocket range. The range has been in operation since 1968 and fires rockets to study the Aurora Borealis and do other





THE PLANETARY SOCIETY TRAVELS

BETCHART EXPEDITIONS Inc.

For Members & Friends of AAAS, Sigma Xi, ACS & Planetary Society
17050 Montebello Road, Cupertino, CA 95014-5435



FIRST CLASS



See the Greatest Light Show on Earth...
ALASKA Aurora Borealis!
March 15-21, 2012

COSTS & CONDITIONS

Expedition Fee: \$2,795 per person twin share for 7 days (plus airfare to Anchorage, Alaska, with return from Fairbanks).

Singles: We encourage singles to register on a "twin share" basis. Should you desire single accommodations, the single supplement is \$595. If you do not have a roommate and we cannot assign one, you must pay the single supplement.

What to Expect: This expedition is for the travel enthusiast who would enjoy seeing the great beauty of Alaska in winter, including "the greatest light show on Earth"—the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. Visit Resurrection Bay for the winter wildlife and great scenery. Travel on the classic train journey from Anchorage to Fairbanks, passing North America's greatest mountain, Mt. McKinley, en route. See ice sculptures in Fairbanks, and learn about the Aurora Borealis at a scientific institute. Also visit the Museum of the North and musk ox research facility. Evenings view the Aurora at Mt. Aurora, Creamer's Field, and Alpencrest Observatory.

The Aurora is normally seen on 90% of the clear nights in March and an active Aurora on 4 out of 10 nights in March. There may be some nights when no Aurora is seen, or there could be bad weather (we hope not, but be prepared for this possibility).

Typically, it will be from 15° to 35°F during the days; with temperatures dropping to 10° to -30°F at night. If you have any questions, please consult your physician before you register.



This expedition will be a tremendous experience for travelers with an appetite for adventure and discovery who would like to explore the day and night winter wonderland of our 49th state with an excellent leader. (No smoking in vehicles, during lectures, or meals, please.)

Expedition Fee Includes: Land transport by coach, train, or vans; six nights accommodations in first-class hotels, twin share with bath; six breakfasts, one lunch, and three dinners; group entrance fees; baggage handling; leadership, administration.

Expedition Fee Does Not Include: Airfare to Anchorage with return from Fairbanks; arrival transfers in Anchorage; five lunches, three dinners; independent airport transfers; optional activities; personal items such as alcoholic beverages, laundry, phone calls, bottled water, soda, snacks, or personal insurance.

Airfares & Airline Ticketing: Please make flight arrangements directly with the airlines to arrive in Anchorage by 4:00 p.m. March 15, and to depart from Fairbanks late morning March 21.

Reservations, Deposits & Payments: Please mail the completed reservation form with a deposit check for \$500 per person to:

**Alaska Aurora Borealis 2012
Betchart Expeditions Inc.
17050 Montebello Road
Cupertino, CA 95014-5435**

Final payment is due January 15, 2012.

Cancellations & Refunds: The initial deposit for this expedition is refundable up to 60 days before departure less a handling fee of \$100 per person. There will be no refund for any cancellation after the 60-day period unless your place can be resold, then only the handling fee of \$100 is withheld. There are no refunds for unused meals, accommodations, or other expedition features. Trip cancellation insurance will be offered; it will cover pre-existing medical conditions if purchased within 15 days of the date on your confirmation letter and full trip payment.

Questions?

Please call **Taunya DeYoung,**
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