



Left: Susan Sommer, at left, with friends on a hike up Eagle River Valley on an early-April day. With her (l to r) are Dana Deedy, Sheryl Mauseth, and Diane Switalski. Despite lingering snow, they carried bear spray, as bruins begin emerging from winter dens in March and April.

APRIL FOOLS

SHAPE UP OR SHIP OUT



I'VE RIDDEN MY
gravel bike on a just-melted bike trail in late March but also snowshoed in mid-April at not much higher elevation.

NEARLY ALL OF MY outdoor recreation gear revolves, in some way or another, around water in its various forms. For snow, I have Nordic skis, traction spikes for insulated hiking boots, snowshoes, gaiters that come to my knees, a brimmed fleece hat to keep falling snow out of my eyes, and snow baskets for my trekking poles. For walking on icy trails, I wear the spikes. For sea or lake water, I have a sea kayak and all the accoutrements—roof rack, paddles, paddle float, pfd, waterproof pants and jacket with neck and wrist gaskets, neoprene booties, neoprene gloves, pump, sponge, and dry bags. For rain, I have rain pants and coats, waterproof overmitts, waterproof gloves, waterproof hiking boots, a waterproof cover for my backpack, and a tent with a good rain fly. I've used all but that last item in past Aprils, as it's a finicky month here in Southcentral.

I've written before about how much water Alaska has, the ways in which we interact with it; its destructive power; and its importance to the state's industries, flora and fauna, and our own subsistence. We are truly lucky to have so much in a world where sources

are ever shrinking.

And without all this water, this April issue wouldn't exist, for it contains articles, essays, and photos about fishing, conservation, political ambition, cruises, seafood, wilderness skiing and camping, and more—all associated with water, ice, or snow.

Springtime weather in southcentral Alaska typically brings an array of "seasons"—I've ridden my gravel bike on a just-melted bike trail in late March but also snowshoed in mid-April at not much higher elevation. Snow on hiking trails becomes punchy and unusable. Trail managers tear out their hair in April and May trying to convince users to avoid dirt tracks until they dry out enough to prevent summer-long ruts and holes. That scenario plays out in different climates at different times across the rest of the state from the rainforests of Southeast to the tundra of the North Slope.

Me? I keep one more piece of "gear" at the ready for April: a plane ticket to somewhere else that's reliably warmer and sunny for a week of backpacking before I must return and finish waiting out the cruelest month.

p.s. If you're waiting for April to shape up too, head over to alaskamagazine.com and enter our 2024 photo contest.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Sommer".

Susan Sommer, Editor

editor@alaskamagazine.com