

itors who have no interest in fishing, Wilderness Enterprises offers scenic floats. And the next day, with the help of Alaska Outdoor Rentals and Guides, I explored 6½ miles of the lower Chena through the center of Fairbanks in a kayak. It's a calm and enjoyable introductory float for novices.

But I was on a piscatorial mission, so I set out for Chena Lakes Recreation Area, 17 miles southeast of Fairbanks along the Richardson. This pretty and well-maintained facility delivers two distinct parks in one, the River Park and the Lake Park, the first spreading out along 4 miles of the Chena River, the second serving up 260 acres of fish-stocked lake. I strapped on a personal flotation device, then paddled a rental canoe across the placid water.

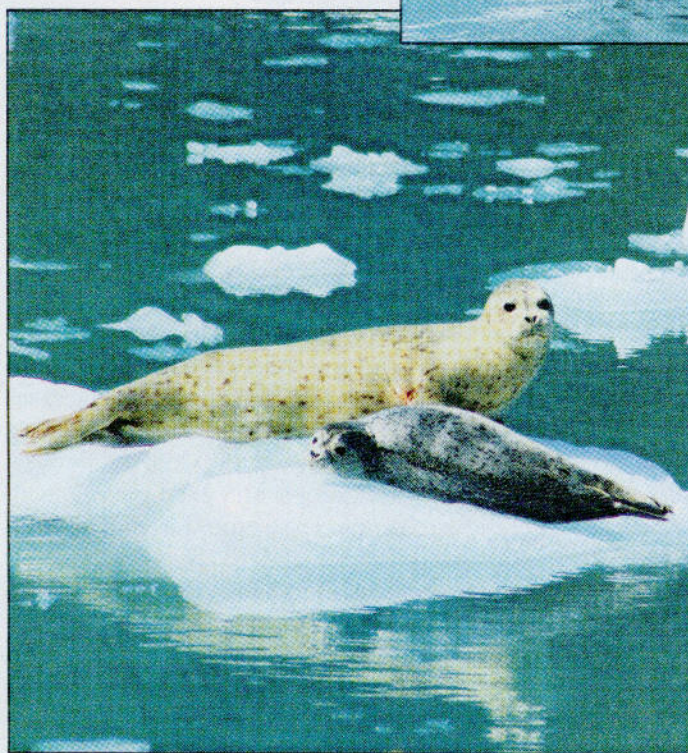
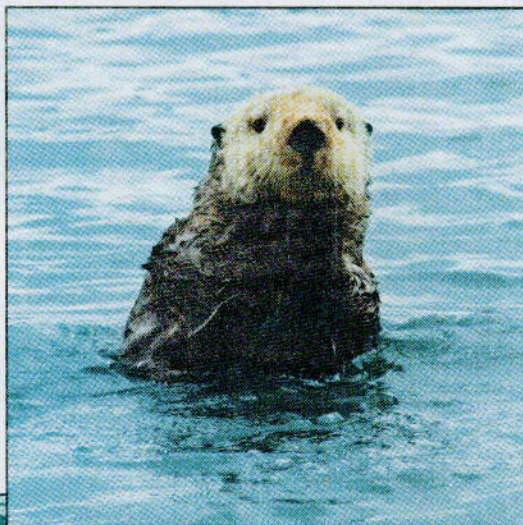
Sitting at a desk, apparently, doesn't build paddling muscles; my shoulders were threatening mutiny by the time I finally reached the channel that hugs the west side of the islands in the northern section of the lake. Risking paralysis was worth it, however, since I boated and released eight rainbow trout in an hour using a spinning reel and a rainbow-patterned spoon. The 20-plus-inch silver salmon that fought bitterly before spitting the hook granted me an oh-

so-close taste of the excitement to come.

And come it did, in the form of scenery. I drove to Delta Junction and took in views of the powerful, muddy Tanana River and endless swaths of stubby black spruce, but the truly breathtaking vistas proliferate south of Delta, where the Richardson Highway changes from Alaska Route 2 to Alaska Route 4. The Alaska Range insinuates itself nearly everywhere, with 11,000- to 13,000-foot peaks to the west and glaciated areas on both sides of the highway. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which I'd seen close up on the outskirts of Fairbanks, materializes, disappears, sneaks up, then slinks into the distance time and again as the mileposts tick by through Copper Basin.

I drove though rain, and the views were still inspiring.

Fielding Lake and Summit Lake were nearing ice-out as I passed in early June, and the early light on enormous Paxson Lake convinced me that I'd have to return to fish for the famous lake trout under that eerie gray-green sky. I spent the night in the rustic BLM campground. I didn't have a boat with me, and since an angler disembarking from his own craft told me I'd have no chance at the lakes while fishing from shore, I continued south toward one of the most striking



Glacier and Wildlife Cruise

Because I was having so much fun watching wildlife and scenery while fishing for halibut in Valdez, I almost skipped a trip with Stan Stephens Glacier and Wildlife Cruises. What a mistake that would have been. The 82-foot reinforced-hull catamaran *Valdez Spirit* negotiated the waters of Prince William Sound and various inlets for nine hours, and the namesake captain himself imparted information about the pipeline, the refinery and the various species we encountered, including harbor seals (left), sea lions, Dall porpoises, bald eagles, humpback whales and countless sea otters (above). Yet the boat's ability to maneuver around the icebergs then inch close to the giant Columbia Glacier and even closer to the Meares Glacier, where guests can watch the frozen behemoth calve, catapults this tour far ahead of glacier and nature viewings I've taken from various cruise ships. Visitors to Valdez should not skip this attraction. **Stan Stephens Glacier and Wildlife Cruises, 866-867-1297, www.stanstephenscruises.com.**