

Alaska Adventure

Jake Mays and his dad spent two weeks visiting Alaska. They flew to Anchorage and then took a train south to a lodge in Seward, a small harbor town surrounded by the Kenai mountain range. From there they took day trips around the area to see and experience the sights. Jake found it all so enticing that he never wanted to leave.

Every day brought a new adventure. They traveled by ferry and sailboat on the marine highways through straits and inlets. They paddled sea kayaks up narrow fjords lined with ice cliffs. They saw whales, otters, puffins, sea lions, and eagles. They spent a day on a fishing schooner catching salmon for dinner. Jake snapped pictures of every new vista.

“Mom is not going to believe how awesome the scenery is!” he said. “Next time, we have to coordinate the schedule so that she can come with us.”

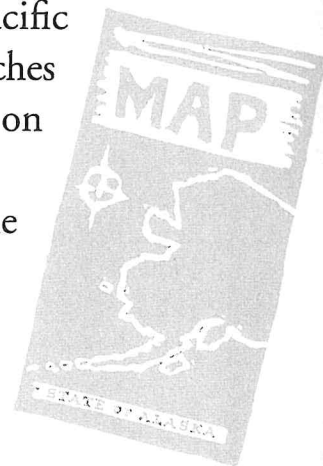
On the flight home, they pored over the map, already planning the return trip. Jake thought it would be exciting to do some backpacking on Mount McKinley, the tallest peak in North America.

“Wouldn’t it be fun to explore the state’s interior? We could travel north from Anchorage to visit Denali National Park. I heard that the fishing is first class, and there is plenty of wildlife to see.”

“That’s true,” said Dad. “Still, it is hard to resist the idea of retracing the route we just traveled. Now that we’re expert kayakers, we should paddle around the capes and coves and lagoons of the Alaska Peninsula.” Dad pointed at the chain of volcanic islands separating the Pacific Ocean from the Bering Sea. “The Aleutian archipelago stretches for more than a thousand miles. We could spend a lifetime on the water just exploring this part of the Ring of Fire.”

“Well, that settles it,” said Jake. “We just need to come back and stay longer.”

“You’ve got that right,” said Dad.



The GREENHOUSE Effect

The greenhouse effect is the rise in temperature that Earth experiences because certain gases in the atmosphere trap energy from the sun that is reflected off Earth—energy that would otherwise escape back into outer space. Scientists now believe that the greenhouse effect is making Earth warmer, enough to drastically change the climate. An increase in global temperature of just one degree can impact rainfall patterns and sea levels. The rise in temperature can cause problems for plants, wildlife, and humans.

Water vapor, carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), ozone (O_3), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are the “greenhouse gases” in our atmosphere. These types of gases behave much like the glass panes of a greenhouse. The glass lets in light but prevents heat from escaping, causing the greenhouse to heat up, much like the inside of a car parked in the sun on a hot day.

People are contributing to Earth’s warming by increasing the CO_2 in the atmosphere. Trees, like all living things, are made mostly of carbon. When people burn forests, the carbon in trees is transformed into CO_2 . Trees, like other plants, use photosynthesis to absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. When people cut down forests, less carbon dioxide is converted into oxygen. People also increase CO_2 in the air by burning “fossil fuels.” These fuels include gasoline used in cars, SUVs, and trucks and fuels like coal and natural gas used by power plants to create electricity. Whenever fossil fuels are burned, CO_2 is released into the air.