



Snowmachines, ANILCA, and the Harding Icefield

In the spring of 1970, The Fish House News advertised round trip tickets from Seward to the Harding Ice Cap for \$15.00 per person. Jackie and Joe Stanton, owners of Harbor Air, and Jim Arness of Nikiski, partnered to provide this unique sightseeing experience. Ten Ski-Doos and three Ski-Boose awaited visitors on top of the ice field, where they could be rented for \$7.00 an hour. Mr. Stanton estimated he served nearly 200-300 people during the 1970 season.



Snowmachine operation on the Harding Icefield in 1970.



Remnants of the snowmachine operation on the Harding Icefield in 2009.

The camp consisted of a small warming hut constructed of corrugated plastic and mounted on skis, and an outhouse. The camp operator and mechanic, Arland Zimmerman, remained on site during much of the summer and welcomed visitors with winter boots as they stepped off the plane. Visitors typically spent two hours on site where activities included snow machining, skiing and snowshoeing.

An operational setback occurred when it was realized the camp was set up on BLM land, and a Special Use Permit was required. Additionally, the Harding Icefield was affected by the 1966 land freeze order which removed the Icefield from public entry.

Consequently the BLM filed a trespass injunction against the operation. Arness was ordered to vacate by November 1970. Possibly due to inclement weather, the partners were unable to remove the warming hut and other camp equipment. The two year business ceased the fall of 1970.

The idea of snowmachines on the Harding Icefield however, did not end. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation

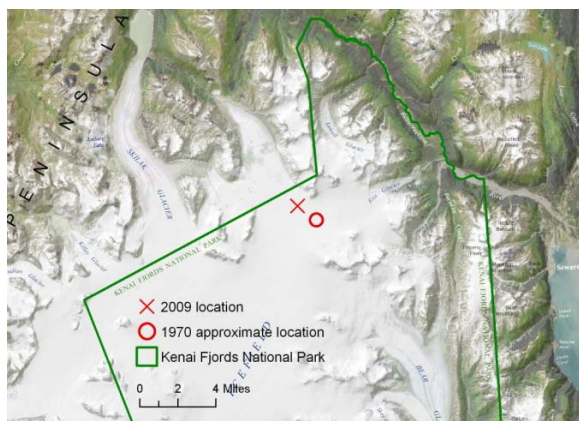
Act (ANILCA) of 1980, which established Kenai Fjords National Park, states that the Secretary of the Interior may authorize use of mechanized equipment on the icefield.

Although the camp had not been seen in nearly 30 years, it too did not go away. In 2009, seasonal melt revealed the remains of this snow machine rental camp. A visit to the site revealed the camp to be a pile of twisted lumber, plastic siding, equipment, barrels and miscellaneous debris on a footprint measuring approximately 50' x 23'. The area was photographed and location data was gathered. The site is currently located less than a mile from the Kenai Fjords National Park – Kenai National Wildlife Refuge boundary.



Ski-doo pennants in 2009.

Site map.



S. Kovac & F. Klasner. 2009. Kenai Fjords National Park

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