

1983

1983 ROUND ISLAND FIELD SEASON REPORT

BY:

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Visitor use of Round Island increased dramatically during 1983. Fifty three parties consisting of 247 people visited the island from april through August . All of these people were either Alaskans or Bristol Bay fishermen with the exception of 3 out-of-state parties.

Twenty five parties (139 fishermen) came ashore during a two day period of good weather that coincided with a closure in the herring season. More than half of the total number of visitors who came to Round Island in 4 1/2 months were ashore during these two days. Mark Chihuly (out of the Anchorage office) was stationed on the island during this fiasco. He made similar statements after this experience to those we have made in past years. Such large numbers of people on the island at a time benefit no one. The fishermen do not enjoy the "wilderness" experience of 75 people on the island and the noise of fishing boats and skiffs constantly coming and going is very disruptive to the walruses. Such heavy visitation conflicts with the primary objective of the sanctuary, i.e., to provide an undisturbed hauling ground for walruses. The only solution to this resource conflict is to impose a limitation on the number of people allowed ashore during one day. When there are two ADF&G personnel on the island during the herring season, one person needs to put all of their attention into watching for illegal boats and violators during good weather. Most violators sneak onto the west side of Round Island from Crooked Island and cannot be seen except from the top of Round Island. Thus, one person needs to be stationed on top of the island with a hand held VHF, or on the west side with a zodiac. This leaves only one person to lead visitors to the walruses. Therefore, we suggest a limit of 10 people per day, who all have to arrive on the island simultaneously and stay in one group.

A major problem during the April herring season is the typically heavy snow pack on Round Island. Walruses are hauled out primarily on the spit at this time of year. Viewing these walruses involves a 1000 foot elevation climb and a 1/2 mile traverse across a 45° slope. The heavy snow pack on this slope makes the hike very difficult and potentially dangerous. The ADF&G personnel must have snow climbing experience and must closely supervise all hikers across this face. Steps need to be cut in the packed snow and fixed lines should traverse the 2 deep gulleys. Hikers should clip onto these fixed lines with caribeaners while crossing the gulleys. This year, since Mark was on the island alone, he sensibly allowed no fishermen to hike the snow packed face to get to the walruses. Under the circumstances of more than 65 people per day, there was no other choice. However, as a result none of the fishermen were able to view walruses, which was presumably their reason for visiting the island. Thus, all these fishermen did was "stretch their legs" and unnecessarily impact the fragile tundra vegetation. They could easily have accomplished this goal on any of the other islands or in the mainland. The net result of this years fiasco was that fishermen were upset that they were not allowed to view walruses up close, and the inability to protect the island was advertised. Permit holders were able to illegially beachcomb ivory without getting caught and this news rapidly spread through the fishing fleet.

Excluding the herring fishermen, 108 additional people visited Round Island (25 parties). Twelve parties (36 people) camped on the island during May through July. During a two week period, there were 3 parties camped on the island simultaneously. Members of these parties all commented on how "crowded" the island seemed to be. Due to the steep terrain, campers spend most of their time at Round Island on the 1/4 mile flat strip of land around the camp area. The tundra vegetation and lack of any trees or shrubbs results in absolutely no privacy for camping parties. Thus, we suggest the limit of 10 people per day be enforced for campers also, or a minimum of 3 parties simultaneously.

Boat transportation was used by 42 out of 50 parties. All of the parties that arrived by widgeon were campers. Four of the camping parties flew to Togiak and arranged for villagers to transfer them to the island via boat. This worked extremaly well: it seemed to improve Togiaker's attitude toward Round Island and it provided the villagers with substantial income. Boats are able ro approach Round Island in a manner that causes no disturbance to the walruses. We recommend visitors be strongly encouraged to fly to Togiak and arrange for boat transportation rather than fly to Round Island. Float plane landings are very disruptive to hauled out walruses. If float planes are to continue flying to Round Island, the access corridor landing should be strictly enforced and planes allowed no closer than the stated 1/4 mile offshore. If conditions are not good enough for the regulations to be enforced, the planes should turn around rather than land directly into the main herd of walruses on the spit, as has been done in past years. ADF&G would have a difficult time defending the position that increased visitation was unrelated to the decrease in the number of walruses using Round Island this year. Due to the decline in the maximum number of walruses hauled out from 14,000 to 6,000 this year, regulations should be tightened up and strictly enforced. Not only do plane landings disturb walruses, but visitors complain about the disruption. It is diffucult to tell visitors thay cannot approach walruses so close that they are disturbed when plane landings cause major stampedes. Several visitors complained about the excessive air traffic in this so called "protected zone". This is bad PR and it is also hypocritical to have plane landings causing stampedes while visitors are not allowed on the beaches.

The potential for a dramatic increase in the number of people wanting to visit Round Island is apparent. Two film crews visited the island this summer - one for national T.V. and one for a BBC specioal. Additional visitors would have come to Round Island this year if the silver fishery had not shut down in early August. (All processors and buyers left the Togiak district after the red salmon season and consequently the fishermen left the bay.) In past summers, the number of silver salmon fishermen who visit Round Island has been steadily increasing each year. Visitor use of Round Island will undoubtely continue to increase. The precedent of strictly enforcing the regulations should be set in order that visitation does not conflict with the objective of providing a resting ground for walruses.

1983 VISITOR USE OF ROUND ISLAND

Date	# visitors per party	Length of stay -Days-	# unplanned weathered In -Days-	# people Days	# Camp Days	Transp.	Home base
5/7/83	61	1	0	61	0	14 boats	Bristol Bay
5/8/83	78	1	0	78	0	11 boats	B.B.
5/11/83	3	1	0	3	0	Walstad boat	B.B.
5/14/83	2	1	0	2	0	boat	B.B.
5/14-26	1	13	0	13	12	boat	Anch.
5/20/83	3	1	0	3	0	boat	Kodiak
5/18/83	8	1	0	8	0	2 boats	B.B.
5/17/83	3	1	0	3	0	boat	B.B.
5/6/83	3	1	0	3	0	boat	B.B.
5/22-26	4	5	0	20	26	Out plane In boat	Anch.
5/26/83	9	1	0	9	0	boat	B.B.
6/7-10	5	4	2	20	15	boat- Togiak	DLG.
6/10-15	5	6	2	30	25	widgeon	DLG.
6/17-26	2	10	8	20	18	boat- Togiak	Utah
6/26-30	3	5	7	15	12	plane	Anch.
7/5-9	2	5	3	10	8	plane	Calif.
7/9-25	3	17	4	43	40	plane	Juneau
7/10-17	3	8	4	24	21	plane	Anch.
7/17-22	5	6	10	30	25	plane	DLG.
7/17-8/3	1	18	5	18	17	In plane Out boat	Cooper Landing
8/2/83	4	1	0	4	0	boat	B.B.
7/31/93	20	1	0	20	0	boat	Togiak- Cannery
8/9/83	7	1	0	7	0	boat	DLG.

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8/15/83	4	1	0	4	0	Beaver	East- Coast
8/15-17	2	3	0	6	4	Zodiak	Dutch- Harbor
8/17/83	3	1	0	3	0	boat	B.B.
8/18/83	3	1	0	3	0	boat	B.B.
8/27/83	4	1	0	4	0	zodiak	Togiak- Cannery
8/28-29	2	2	0	4	0	boat	B.B.
TOTALS:	253	118		468	213		

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