

# The WALRUS EXPERIENCE

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #262 —

The Marine Mammals Protection Act of 1972 put the Walrus off-limits to hunting; but it did allow for the collection of the tusks from animals that died of natural causes. Bush pilots flying the Aleutian chain regularly come across these animals that have died and washed up on the beach. If they're interested and have the time, they land their small aircraft at low tide and collect the tusks.

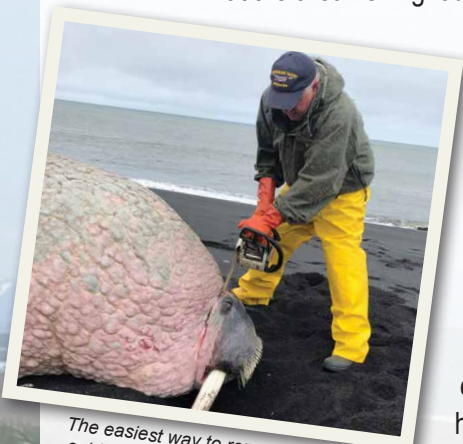
We were on our annual salmon fishing trip, way out on the Alaska Peninsula, when Matt Owen, the lead pilot, told me they had spotted a dead walrus on the beach not far from the lodge. Was I interested in collecting it? Of course! The following day, after everyone else had gone to fish for King Salmon, we headed that way. There wasn't much activity at the area fishing lodges this year, because

of the coronavirus, so no one else had beaten us there.

We circled it once to ensure that it was still intact, then landed and went to work.

The hide was very thick and very tough; even the chain saw had trouble with it. But, we had brought along a sharp machete, and quickly cut the skin to give

the saw access to the head. Hard as a granite rock is a pretty good way to describe the density of the head bone; cutting through the bone was about ten times more difficult than sawing an old, dry hedge tree. We were on the ground for more than an hour, to complete the job. Apparently, this walrus wasn't dead long, as it hadn't begun to smell, and the "ever-present" bears were yet to open him up.



*The easiest way to remove the tusks is to cut the head in half, just behind the eyes. The bone is really, really dense, and a chain saw is the best way to cut it.*



*Just back from Cold Bay, to visit U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, with Walrus tusks in hand.*

Back at the lodge, Matt rigged up a boiling pot to help remove the meat and skin. First, the tusks loosened, and he pulled them out. A day later the head was clean and ready for bleaching; and on the fourth day, we flew to Cold Bay, Alaska

— about 45 minutes away, to have U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service record the tusks

and apply seals to document that they had been legally collected and properly recorded.

Alaska is a great place, no matter what your interest. I've had many neat experiences there; caught lots of fish, harvested a sheep, a moose, goat and a few bears. But, I certainly never gave a thought to having this experience with a walrus.

**"Was I interested in collecting it? Of course!"**

**USA**  
**Midway**

Larry Potterfield

Bear Lake Lodge  
Port Moller, Alaska  
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*We estimated the length at 12 feet, and simply guessed the weight at possibly a ton or two. Matt's 1955 Cessna 180 in the background.*