



The Bear Hunter

Having lived most of my life on the southern border, I've managed to pick up a little Spanish along the way. It's been a handy tool, both in my work life as a law officer and in my off-duty life. I've been places around the country where I never dreamed I'd have the opportunity to use Spanish, but Alaska was surely the last place I figured "Como le va?" would be recognized.

Just over four years ago I first ventured to the land of the midnight sun, and it was a glorious trip. I'd made the trek with my gunmaker friend John Gallagher, head honcho of Gallagher Firearms. I'd been invited up on a brown bear hunt, hosted by "The Bear Hunter," Jose Polanco (Dept. GA, P.O. Box 240711, Anchorage, AK 99524; 907/337-0432). I'd not previously met Jose, but I'd heard about him (it had all been good). I was to discover that Jose was interesting and competent, plus I could practice my Spanish with him. John had been on several successful hunts with Jose.

We arrived in Haines, Alaska, north of Juneau. We were to be traveling and staying on Jose's sailboat, haunting the fjords of Southeastern Alaska. Jose had staked out a decent spot or two, and the first

plenty of flying opportunities and plenty of hunting and fishing. His first glimpse of Alaska convinced him that he'd found that place. A short time later he moved his young family from the Caribbean to Anchorage, where he quickly landed a job flying bush planes.

Jose connected with several guides and outfitters and soon became an assistant guide, taking hunters and fishermen on guided trips in conjunction with other outfitters. In 1988 he obtained his Alaska guide license. An expert seaman, he figured an excellent and comfortable way to take hunters and fishermen out would be by sailboat.

During slack times, Jose sails the coastal and island regions of southeast Alaska on his sailboat, *The Bear Hunter*, in search of perfect hunting and fishing locations. Working closely with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Jose stakes out remote locations ideal for bear and mountain goat hunting, along with salmon and halibut fishing, then later brings clients, family and friends out to enjoy fantastic scenery and wildlife in the comfort of his fine boat.

When not outfitting or guiding, Jose works for Alaska's PenAir, flying passengers and cargo out of Dutch Harbor, Alaska, in the grand old Grumman Goose G21-A seaplane. He is currently contemplating obtaining a small floatplane of his own to explore the wildlife-rich lake areas he's been unable to reach thus far.

My first trip with Jose was a tremendous success. I bagged a beautiful brown bear, a nine-foot boar.

John and I recently returned to Alaska to hunt with Jose, this time accompanied by Ruger's Kurt Vogel. The hunt was again a success, both Kurt and John taking fine black bear on Prince of Wales Island. We had a fine time, in fine company. Jose's stories about Alaska and the wildlife there are enchanting, as is his extensive knowledge of firearms. Jose's everyday carry gun is a Ruger single action worked over by our friend Gallagher. The revolver is a 4-inch job in .500 Magnum. I can't shoot it well, but believe me, Jose can.

During my all-too-short stays in Alaska, I found that its terrains tends to put things in perspective for me. It's a gigantic, stunning, hazardous place.

There's nobody I'd rather have guide me into it than Jose Polanco.

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day found us sailing from the Haines harbor, northeast toward Skagway. Sailing is something quite outlandish to desert rats like me, especially the cold, deep waters near Haines. But the more I learned about our host and guide, the more comfortable I became.

Turns out Jose had been in Alaska for 25 years or so at the time (close to 30 now). Born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the son of a physician, Jose learned about the sea and sailing at an early age. He was fascinated with navigation and also yearned to become a pilot. During his initial college days he bussed tables and worked as a waiter to earn money for flying lessons, finally earning his private pilot's license. His dad wanted him to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor, though Jose had plans to continue his flight instruction. Jose enrolled in flight school in Miami, where he earned a commercial rating and aviation mechanics certificates.

After completing the arduous flight training, Jose landed a job flying mail through the Caribbean, enabling him to build hundreds of hours of flight time. He had always been an avid shooter, hunter and fisherman. The islands were limited when

it came to hunting, so Jose began looking for someplace with water,

