

# Backfill

## Building in the Alaskan Bush

by Dave Northup

“Okay, do we have everything?” Every contractor asks this question, but last summer it took on new meaning when I was hired to build a log cabin in the Alaskan bush. The road nearest to the job site was three hours away by boat, 45 minutes by plane. You can bet I checked the materials list more than once.

Projects like this one may be rare in the Lower 48, but they are no big thing around here. The job began when a truck showed up at my local harbor with a cabin kit from a supplier located 200 miles away. After a nearby lumberyard delivered the rest of the supplies, all 50,000 pounds of material were loaded onto a barge (1) to be towed up the coast and grounded on a beach near the job site.

The crew had to be on hand to meet the barge when it arrived, so we went to the local landing strip and,



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while dodging lumber trucks making deliveries, loaded tools and last-minute supplies into a bush plane (2). The pilot flew us to the beach.

When the barge arrived, we unloaded it with a tracked forklift that had been brought along for that purpose (3). Then we reloaded the forklift and waited for the tide to refloat the barge so it could be towed away. From that point on, anything that came in would arrive by plane at \$335 per trip.

We used muscle power and an ATV to haul material the rest of the way to the building site (4). Modern conveniences were scarce; we lived in tents and relied on solar panels and a generator for power. Occasionally I'd fly home for a few days and come back with any parts and supplies we needed.

Since the site was near a productive salmon stream, we fished in our spare time — and watched the brown bears fish, too. See that little wire fence (5) around the cabin? Electrified, it was there to keep the bears away while we worked.

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*Dave Northup is a contractor in Homer, Alaska.*



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