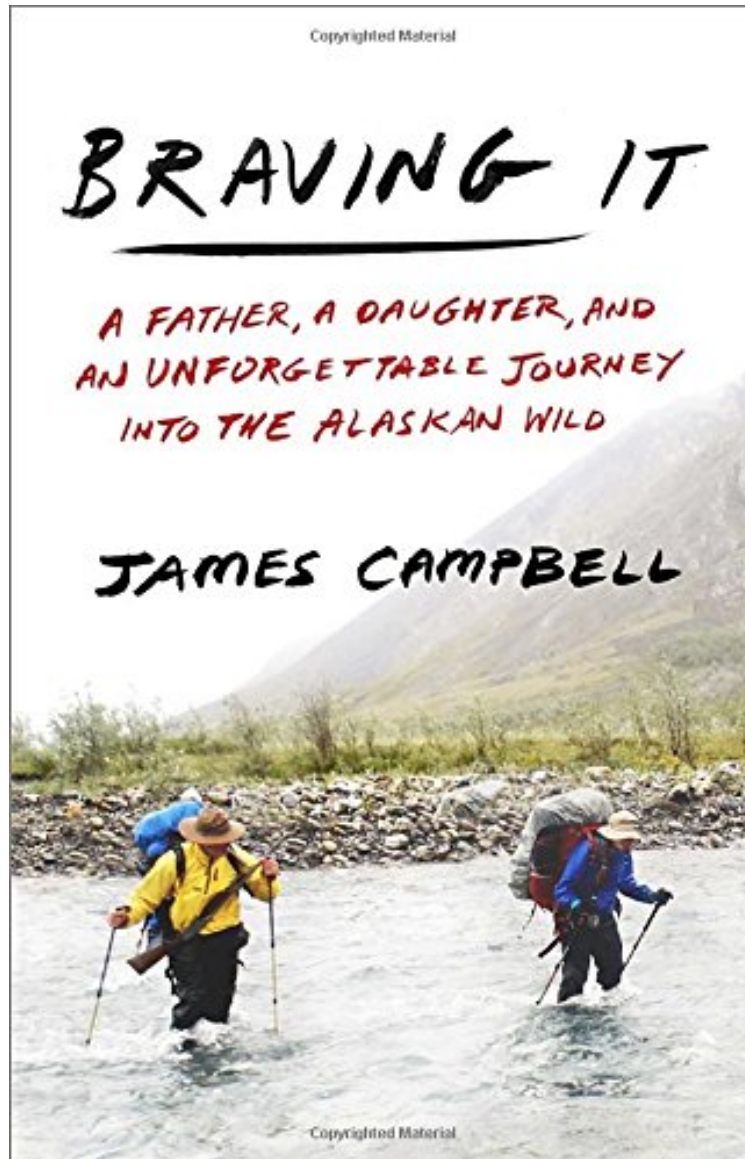


Braving It: A Father, a Daughter, and an Unforgettable Journey into the Alaskan Wild

James Campbell

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James Campbell : Braving It: A Father, a Daughter, and an Unforgettable Journey into the Alaskan Wild before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Braving It: A Father, a Daughter, and an Unforgettable Journey into the Alaskan Wild:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This was one of my favorite books I have read this year!By Jeff WatsonI absolutely loved this book! I love reading outdoor survival books. This was one the best books not only because of what they did but the Dad taking his 15/16 year old daughter on three big outdoor survival trips in the middle of nowhere in Alaska was priceless! I loved his style and the subject matter I could hardly put the book down. You probably won't see many survival books that a young female teenager is featured in the book and how she and her Dad's relationship worked in this book. I hope this books sells well because it is a total classic read.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyed this bookBy Bonnie SteinriedeBeing from Alaska, I truly enjoyed this book. The author did a very good job in accurately describing the incredible beauty of Alaska and the hardship that folks living in the Bush face. It was a bit difficult reading the graphic depiction of snaring animals in traps as I am not a fan of this practice. Overall I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in traveling the backcountry of Alaska as the author did a very good job of communicating the necessity of being prepared. Conditions in Alaska are not like any other state and people die here every year because they are not prepared for the harsh environment.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great readBy Robert G. KennedyGreat read, but I love the Alaskan wilderness. The growth of the teenage daughter/father relationship was particularly enjoyable for me, so even if you don't like "that awe", give this book a try.

The powerful and affirming story of a father's journey with his teenage daughter to the far reaches of Alaska Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, home to only a handful of people, is a harsh and lonely place. So when James Campbell's cousin Heimo Korth asked him to spend a summer building a cabin in the rugged Interior, Campbell hesitated about inviting his fifteen-year-old daughter, Aidan, to join him: Would she be able to withstand clouds of mosquitoes, the threat of grizzlies, bathing in an ice-cold river, and hours of grueling labor peeling and hauling logs? But once there, Aidan embraced the wild. She even agreed to return a few months later to help the Korths work their traplines and hunt for caribou and moose. Despite windchills of 50 degrees below zero, father and daughter ventured out daily to track, hunt, and trap. Under the supervision of Edna, Heimo's Yupik Eskimo wife, Aidan grew more confident in the woods. Campbell knew that in traditional Eskimo cultures, some daughters earned a rite of passage usually reserved for young men. So he decided to take Aidan back to Alaska one final time before she left home. It would be their third and most ambitious trip, backpacking over Alaska's Brooks Range to the headwaters of the mighty Hulahula River, where they would assemble a folding canoe and paddle to the Arctic Ocean. The journey would test them, and their relationship, in one of the planet's most remote places: a land of wolves, musk oxen, Dall sheep, golden eagles, and polar bears. At turns poignant and humorous, *Braving It* is an ode to America's disappearing wilderness and a profound meditation on what it means for a child to grow up—and a parent to finally, fully let go.

Finalist for the Banff Mountain Book Competition — Adventure Travel"One of the reasons we read books like *Braving It* [is] to experience what we may never have the particular courage to and share the terror and thrills of those who do....And Aidan is exceptional, choosing to ditch friends and devices in order to rough it. It is invigorating to meet a young woman hellbent on self-sufficiency, to watch her twist the head off a just-shot caribou and bop around the campsite, bear bells jingling around her neck....Mr. Campbell has set his daughter on the hero's journey and offered her the inviolable obligation of the parent: to show his child that she needs to save her own life and that she can."—The Wall Street Journal"Campbell's prose captures both the difficulties and pleasures on offer in the extreme wild... Parents who enjoy Campbell's adventures vicariously might find themselves contemplating their own family outing." —Richmond Times Dispatch"James Campbell describes ... trips to Alaska, where father and daughter faced off with grizzlies, battled clouds of mosquitos, capsized in a freezing river—and pushed the bond between them to its limits."—National Geographic"*Braving It* is a detailed portrayal of terrain so harsh it would give any seasoned outdoorsman pause, complete with grizzlies, brushes with hypothermia, and a growing bond that is honest, hard-earned, and touching."—Men's Journal"Campbell, through his descriptions and thoughtful reflection, brings to life the Arctic's great beauty, expanse and values as a wilderness and testing ground — a 'final frontier' for a certain kind of seeker... *Braving It* is a smart, insightful book that should be read by fathers and daughters everywhere — and by anyone who looks to wild country as 'part of the geography of hope.'"—Alaska Dispatch News"A touching and riveting true story of hope and adventure."—Alaska Beyond"[Campbell's] daughter, Aidan, [is] worthy of a book-length tribute....*Braving It* [is] as much about parenting as it is about adventure, though in Campbell's book the two concepts are often inseparable." —Isthmus"With humor and honesty, Campbell brings readers along for the adventure, which is full of swarms of hungry mosquitoes, the fear of grizzly bears, and the push-pull relationship between a teenage girl and her father... Campbell expertly blends facts on the flora, fauna, and general life in the Alaskan bush with his reflections on being middle-aged, with many adventurous years behind him, as opposed to his daughter, whose quest for adventure has only just begun. Informative, humorous, and full of a love of nature."—Kirkus s"A delightful and sometimes harrowing tale of the Alaskan bush."—Shelf Awareness"Some parents will doubtless think the adventure James Campbell took his daughter on was irresponsibly dangerous or just plain crazy. But as a father myself, I'm in envious awe of the bold decision he made and the clarity with which he made it. As *Braving It*

poignantly demonstrates, there is no better teacher than deep wilderness. Here is the essence of good writing—and good parenting, too.” —Hampton Sides, author of *In the Kingdom of Ice* “Braving It, the book, is a metaphor for the wilderness—the call of the wild—that James Campbell evokes in this masterfully told story. Every time I set the book down, I pondered the lessons learned, and couldn’t wait for my next sojourn into its pages. When it ended, I longed for the adventure to continue and pined for the beauty of Alaska. So I picked it up and read it again, savoring every page.” —Eric Blehm, author of *The Last Season, Fearless, and Legend* “Braving It—tender, wise, translucent—is not just an Alaskan classic, but a parenting classic. I read it with great fondness, hunger, and a deep satisfaction.” —Rick Bass, author of *The Lives of Rocks and Why I Came West* “This is a guide book for the heart, step-by-step instructions on how to fall in love with Alaska—the hard work and fear, the thrilling adventure and awe. Along the way, we are given an honest and touching portrait of a middle-aged man coming to terms with his own limitations even as he learns to set his adolescent daughter free from the confines of childhood. A wonderful book for any mental traveler who has yearned to experience Alaska.” —Eowyn Ivey, author of *The Snow Child* “Any of us who’ve watched daughters grow up to be strong and capable in the backcountry will delight in this book—it’s a wonderful new world in many ways!” —Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature and Wandering Home* “In this wonderful book, James Campbell and his teenage daughter set off on a great adventure to one of the most beautiful, and often perilous, places on earth—the Arctic wilderness of Alaska. They face many challenges—whitewater rapids, grizzly bears, bone-numbing cold—but none as daunting for Campbell as guiding his daughter across the great divide between childhood and maturity. Set against a primal landscape of mountains and fast-flowing rivers, *Braving It* is as simple and powerful as any fairy tale.” —John Hildebrand, author of *Reading the River and The Heart of Things* “As a father of daughters and lover of adventure, I found *Braving It* to be spot on—riveting, profound, open-eyed, and deeply touching. Campbell’s struggle to understand and measure up to the stark and stunning Alaskan wilderness and, more importantly, to his teenage daughter—to find his place in the lives of both—becomes our struggle, too. A must-read for every striving parent and every teen striving to understand his or her parents.” —Dean King, author of *Skeletons on the Zahara and The Feud* “*Braving It* is a beautiful and original book, an antidote to the screenification of modern life. As a father enters the country of middle age, and a daughter edges toward adulthood, they share an epic Alaskan adventure. Among the dangers they encounter is an unexpected one: fleeting time. Countering this is the gift the father gives the daughter and the writer gives the reader: the gift of the elemental now, of moments of wind, fire, water, snow, beauty. And of equally primal moments of human love and connection.” —David Gessner, author of *All the Wild that Remains: Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner and the American West* “If your idea of a good time is hordes of mosquitoes and wind chills of 50 below, you are not your average dad. And if you invite your teenage daughter to enjoy these with you and she says yes, she may not be your average daughter. This is a great story of what it means to love, trust and test your kids.” —Lenore Skenazy, author of *Free-Range Kids* “*Braving It* is a book full of hope. At a time when we are concerned with ravages upon the environment, this story explores the wonder and unspoiled beauty of the Alaskan wild. And at a time when our youth are consumed with technology, social media, and a sense of entitlement, we read about a teenage girl who not only chooses to venture into the wilderness, but relishes the experience. This book gives me hope for our landscape and our youth.” —Larry Beck, San Diego State University professor and author of *Moving Beyond Treeline* “Rarely has a book captured so well the unknown wilderness of parenting, of what it is to be a teenager and what it is for a father to learn to trust. *Braving It* is also a kind of guide to stepping outside one’s comfort zone. A must-read for anyone trying to understand the father-daughter bond and anyone who loves wildness.” —Melissa Arnot, mountaineer “*Braving It* is part call to adventure, part coming of age story, and part celebration of family. A thoroughly engaging and thought-provoking read.” —Daniel L. Dustin, Professor of Outdoor Recreation, University of Utah

About the Author JAMES CAMPBELL is the author of *The Final Frontiersman* and *The Ghost Mountain Boys*. He has written for *Outside* magazine, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Men’s Journal*, *Audubon*, and many other publications. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Prologue MY DAUGHTER AIDAN HADN’T YET entered kindergarten when I made a series of trips to the Alaskan Arctic while researching and writing my first book. She loved my stories, and as she listened, she said that when she was a “big girl” she hoped to join me in Alaska. I told her that, yes, one day we would go together. She accepted this answer until her freshman year in high school, when she began to remind me of my promise on what seemed like a weekly basis. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like the right time to take her on an Alaskan adventure, or perhaps a series of adventures. In traditional Eskimo cultures, although gender roles were well defined, adolescent girls would sometimes accompany their fathers on extensive hunting and trapping trips while boys stayed behind in the village. The idea was that it was important for boys and girls to switch roles in order to acquire the others’ life skills. Boys would learn to sew, tan, weave, and cook, and girls would learn how to hunt, survive in the wilderness, and make tools and weapons. I believed that, at fifteen, Aidan was ready for a similar experience. She would be old enough to appreciate it and responsible enough to carry her own weight. Perhaps, too, her encounter with wilderness would evoke the same feelings of wonder it had in me. From John Muir and Aldo Leopold (fellow Wisconsinites) to Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, and Wendell Berry, literature teems with musings on the power of nature. Leopold memorably called it “meat from God.” Edward Abbey called wilderness a “necessity of the human

spirit.” Henry David Thoreau’s saying “In Wildness is the preservation of the World” makes the bold claim not that we must save wildness but that wildness has the potential to save us. In preparation for our adventure I asked Aidan to read Wallace Stegner’s “Wilderness Letter.” In it Stegner writes about wild country as “a part of the geography of hope.” I’d always loved that line—“the geography of hope.” But in rereading the letter before passing it on to Aidan, I was drawn to another phrase: “the birth of awe.” Yes, I thought, in Alaska, Aidan might truly feel awe. Short of that, I wanted her to learn concrete life lessons in common sense, self-sufficiency, confidence, and competence. By February 2013, after deciding to do a self-guided, three-week paddling trip somewhere in Arctic Alaska, we were auditioning rivers, running them in our imaginations. There was the Firth, a mighty river of steep canyons that straddles the border between northeastern Alaska and Canada; the Hulahula, a scenic, hundred-mile-long stretch of water that tumbles from the Romanzof Mountains of the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean; the Canning, which parallels the Hulahula and runs along the western border of the 19.5-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; xvthe Sheenjek, which in 1956 motivated environmentalists Olaus and Mardy Murie to develop the idea of a wilderness preserve in the Arctic; and, finally, the Porcupine, a six-hundred-mile historic trade route that winds through dense boreal forest en route from Dawson City in Canada’s Yukon Territory to the Gwich’in Athabaskan community of Old Crow, also in the Yukon Territory, and then southwest into Alaska. All are wild and beautiful rivers with the ability to inspire and terrify. That is the thing about awe: beauty and fear are inseparable. The Inupiat, of Alaska’s harsh Arctic coast, have a word to express the duality: uniari, “nervous awe.” The Tununirmiut of Baffin Bay call it ilira, and distinguish between it and the raw fear—kappia—that one might feel if he or she were thrown from a canoe into an icy Arctic river. In April we pored over maps and began to assemble our gear. Then, in May, I got a call. Heimo and Edna Korth, my cousin and his wife, about whom I’d written *The Final Frontiersman*, had just left the bush for the village of Fort Yukon, on the Yukon River, where they traditionally spend the summer months. For the rest of the year the Korths live 120 miles to the north, deep in the foothills of the Brooks Range, where they raised three daughters. Heimo and Edna are some of the last hunter-trapper-gatherers living in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Heimo wanted to know if I’d be willing to come up in July and August to help him build a new cabin on the Coleen River. Earlier that month, during spring breakup, as the river ice thawed and melted, the Coleen River had rerouted itself, spilling into a side channel; the Korths’ current cabin, which sat along the banks of that channel, was in jeopardy of being washed away. Heimo explained that he had already done some of the preliminary work. He’d picked out the new site upriver, cleared some of the trees, and sketched the outline of the cabin with an axe and a shovel. His only caveat was that we’d have a lot of work and we’d have to do it fast to get most of the cabin built before the cold came. I was tempted by the invitation. I’d always wanted to build a cabin in the woods, nursing dreams of heading to Canada or Alaska and living off the land, but as a young man I instead went to an eastern city for college. It was a good place, but hardly an appropriate training ground for a mountain man. After college I got sidetracked, following the beaten professional path to Chicago and New York, and eventually left the path for the mountains of Colorado. Then, a decade and a half later, a deep homing instinct led me to return to rural Wisconsin. In each place I lived I found joy. In Colorado I went to graduate school, which I paid for by working construction and landscaping, and sometimes helping out an old rancher whose sons had left for the city. In return the rancher gave me some first-edition Zane Grey novels from his book collection. But I had never followed the needle pull of the compass north as Heimo had. I mulled Heimo’s offer over for a few days before approaching my wife, Elizabeth, with an idea: what if Aidan and I were to go up together to help him? Elizabeth had never been a supporter of our Alaskan river trip idea and viewed this new plan with equal skepticism. Aidan was not new to the wilderness, but she still had lots to learn, and Elizabeth thought we should start out with something less risky—the Boundary Waters, for instance. The Boundary Waters is a 1.3-million-acre wilderness, with twelve hundred miles of canoe routes, that straddles the border between Minnesota and Ontario. It’s remote country—by Lower 48 standards—but it is not Alaska. Elizabeth’s biggest worry: bears. Like many other Lower 48ers, my wife believes that nearly every Alaskan thicket hides an angry, frothing-at-the-mouth grizzly. She’s no city gal, either. She’s done her time in the woods. But the thought of her oldest daughter wandering around in bear country scared her. She’d read that a grizzly kills in a gruesome fashion, delivering a deadly blow to the head with a force akin to a twelve-pound splitting maul swung by an NFL linebacker, before seizing the back of its prey’s neck and severing its spine. Grizzlies have a bite force of over 8 million pascals, a metric unit of pressure, powerful enough to crush a bowling ball. Elizabeth wondered why I would want to risk taking Aidan to Alaska, especially when she could learn the kinds of life skills I was talking about right here at home. By that, Elizabeth meant that we have land where we keep bees and tend a garden, pick cherries, apples, mulberries, and plums for jam. There is no shortage of work. We were getting chickens, so there was a chicken coop and run to build, wood to cut and split, and perhaps one day maple trees to tap and sheep’s milk cheese to make. Nevertheless, I could tell that Elizabeth was wavering. When she made me promise that wherever Aidan went I would be beside her with a shotgun, loaded with lead slugs, I knew that she had decided to let Aidan join me. Now I had to hope that Heimo and Edna would, too. Heimo didn’t know Aidan—his second cousin once removed—from Adam, and when I called to broach the possibility of her coming, he proved leery of taking on a teenage girl. He was full of questions that boiled down to just one: could she hack it? I made a modest pitch. I am one of my daughter’s biggest fans, and occasionally one of her toughest critics, but I didn’t want to raise expectations. I

told Heimo she might prove herself useful. After thinking it over for a couple weeks, he called back: he and Edna were willing to give Aidan a chance. I still had to sell Aidan—and perhaps myself—on the experience. We'd be swapping a river trip for a three-and-a-half-week stint of cabin building. Would there be opportunity for Stegner's "birth of awe"? I was straight with her about the experience; I didn't sugarcoat it. It would be hard, sweaty, and dirty work. We would get blistered, scratched, and scraped limbing trees and lugging them out of the woods. There would be bugs—clouds of them. We would be wearing the same pair of work clothes day in and day out, and after a while the animal smell of our own bodies would offend us. We would encounter Nature with a capital N, including the possibility of running across a grizzly, *Ursus arctos horribilis*, or a cow moose protecting her calf. For tools, we would be using axes, drawknives, pickaxes, and saws. If one of us got cut badly, we'd have to make an emergency call by satellite phone and hope that someone could come and airlift us out. Because the nearest hospital is two hundred and fifty miles away, in Fairbanks, we would be a minimum of twelve to twenty-four hours from medical help. The remoteness of where we would be, and what that meant in case of emergency, could not be overemphasized. In 2012, two scientists from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks' Geophysical Institute identified the Coleen River as the most isolated spot in mainland Alaska. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is roughly the size of South Carolina or the country of Austria, and combined with the adjacent Ivvavik and Vuntut National Parks in Canada, it is part of one of the largest protected ecosystems in the world. Aidan had lots of questions, many more than when we were planning the river trip. She is a curious, inquiring girl, a committed student of the Socratic method: ask and you will be enlightened. When she's nervous or uncomfortable, the questions multiply. Heimo's invitation somehow made Alaska real for her, and her questions came in a torrent, like a spring cloudburst. How dangerous would it be? Would we have a first aid kit? What would we eat? What would we do about the bugs, the bears? Would a grizzly maul you? Kill you? How would we protect ourselves? Where would we get our drinking water? What if we got giardia? Would she be able to use the satellite phone to call home? Would there be a generator to charge her Kindle? Though she knew some of the answers, she asked the questions anyway. But then one day, after nearly two weeks of her hounding me, the barrage ended. She had reached a saturation point. A week later she announced with little ceremony, "Dad, I want to go." She sounded so confident that I began to worry. Aidan, you see, is firstborn and eager to please. As a little girl she'd ask me, "Daddy, do you wish that I had been a boy? Is that why you gave me a boy's name?" Perhaps she heard the teasing from my buddies. It's a Gaelic name—Aidan—meaning "little fire," and is used mostly for males. My friends insisted that I wanted a son so bad I gave her a boy's name. By the time Aidan was two, I knew that was a lot of bunk. She was my sidekick. She was a tomboy, but still a girl who loved dolls, tea parties, and feather boas. In answer to her question about whether or not I wished I'd had a son, I chose to be honest with her. I told her that I'd dreamed of having a boy, but not long after she came into the world, I knew I could never love a son more than I loved her. Despite my reassurances, in school she made sure she could throw a football as well as the boys, field the highest punts, and run the fastest and longest. With a BB gun, and later a .22 rifle, she was determined to be a deadeye. When I brought home ducks, geese, or pheasants I'd shot, she'd get right in there and watch up close while I cleaned them. I'd offer her a brief biology lesson as she held the still-warm heart in her hands. When she was seven I gave her the nickname Cap. Two years earlier, I'd started reading books to her in bed before school—everything from Kate DiCamillo and Mark Twain to J. R. R. Tolkien and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Her favorite of Wilder's books was *The Long Winter*, set in South Dakota during the brutal winter of 1880–81. When the train stops delivering food to the Ingallses' town, Pa Ingalls and the townspeople worry that they will starve until two young men, Cap Garland and Almanzo Wilder, make a dangerous trip across the prairie to bargain with a farmer for a supply of wheat. They return with enough to last the town through the winter. I told Aidan that she was my Cap Garland. At the time, I didn't realize the dynamic I was setting up: Aidan trying to fill the character's brave and determined shoes. But she never showed any signs of crumbling under the weight of her nickname. Actually, I think she was proud. She felt that I saw her as she wanted to be seen. As a teenager, she's no different than she was in grade school. She still puts 100 percent into everything she does, so much so that occasionally she can be blindly driven, believing there's a straight line between commitment and success. Being goal-oriented and ambitious doesn't equip one to deal with the reality that sometimes, despite one's efforts, things don't work out as planned. I felt that a wilderness experience would teach Aidan about adaptability. In rural Alaska, Murphy's law is a near constant, a state of uncertainty that many kids these days are ill-equipped to handle. Between organized sports and school, their lives are planned, and managed, to a T. Someone always seems to be hovering, ready to dispense advice, problem-solving instructions, and directions. Decisions are made for them by principals, teachers, coaches, instructors, and us, their parents. Being in the woods, by contrast, is all about improvising. My greatest hope for Aidan was that her encounter with a new world, most especially a wild one, would be one of the defining moments of her life—that the Alaskan Arctic would knee her out of her comfort zone and, simultaneously, throw her for a joyful loop. In reality, I had no idea what obstacles we would face, nor did I know how Aidan would react to them. Would we be taking on too much? Was I being unrealistic, irresponsible even, in thinking that I could take my teenage daughter to the remote wilds of the Alaskan Arctic?