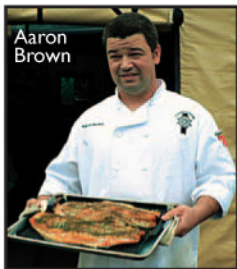


# LOVE THE OUTDOORS?

## Why Not Try an Externship in Alaska?

By Michael Durham, AM-C-05



In 1995, Austin resident Rus Schwausch embarked on an unguided wilderness float trip in Alaska with several buddies and started a chain of events that eventually led to an externship for Aaron Brown, a July 2005 graduate of Texas Culinary Academy. Though not for everyone, there is a great demand for seasonal culinary professionals, externs or veteran cooks, in the wilderness of Alaska.

The well-heeled sportsmen who can afford a safari-style fishing trip have high expectations where cuisine is concerned, and a remote location does nothing to

change that. Indeed, the physical exertion of fishing the Alaska Peninsula serves only to increase one's appetite. Schwausch's Epic Angling Adventure is located in the 3.7 million-acre Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge near the town of King Salmon, and draws clients from all over the U.S. as well as such far-flung places as Australia, the United Kingdom, and Italy.

Schwausch cautioned that prospective employees should not come expecting "the great Alaska vacation." The hours are long and the work physically demanding, but the pay is above-average for an externship, with Brown revealing that he, as well as guides and other employees, averaged about \$500 a week in tips, in addition to his salary. With everyone living in close proximity and cut off from civilization, a friendly demeanor and positive attitude is absolutely essential. Epic has a tent camp, but there are many camps with more conventional lodge-type structures available. Even in this tent camp, though, he has a large, commercial-grade, stainless steel kitchen for the cook to showcase his or her skills.

Brown described a typical day for the Bleuprint. One wakes up at around 5:30 a.m. and heads to the cook tent to prepare a hearty breakfast for the guests—after turning off the bear monitor, turning up the radio, and talking loudly to warn any lingering bears of his presence. Yes, encounters with wildlife are a distinct possibility, but the loud talking works because we are even less welcome to the bears (or any other wildlife) than they are to us. After breakfast, Aaron cleans the kitchen and dining area and relaxes for an hour or so before beginning preparations for dinner. He is generally done for the day by around 8:00 p.m. and in bed by 10:00. When not in the cook tent, his senses are bombarded by some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet.

Rus Schwausch has become an enthusiastic supporter of the TCA program. An opportunity to hire a seasonal employee at the Spring 2005 Job Fair resulted in what Rus calls "incredible cuisine...without a doubt the best we've ever had!" It's interesting to note that Aaron's prior restaurant experience was limited, so the praiseworthy cuisine was primarily a result of his training in the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts program. If you love the outdoors and have a sense of adventure and an outgoing personality, along with a strong work ethic and self-reliance, an externship in Alaska might be just what you're looking for.