

ARCTIC ADVENTURES IN CHURCHILL



By Angela Johnson,
Keeper II
Front row, third from right



On Sunday October 4, 2009 I traveled to Winnipeg, Canada along with sixteen other zookeepers from the U.S., Canada and Denmark. None of us had ever met before this day and we did not have any idea what to expect on our journey. We traveled there to be a part of the first Arctic Ambassador Keeper Leadership Camp sponsored and presented by Polar Bears International (PBI). The following morning we all boarded a small airplane and made our way to Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, the polar bear capital of the world.

After arriving in Churchill we took a tour of the small town of about 850 people. We met local trappers and learned about their livelihoods. These individuals live off the land and have the utmost respect for the native wildlife.

We then traveled to D20, a holding facility for problem

bears that wander into the town. Polar bears will gather in the Churchill area in the fall and wait for the ice on the Hudson Bay to freeze. Once the ice freezes, the bears walk out onto the ice to hunt ringed seals for several months. An average-size polar bear needs 50 seals a year to survive! The bears are released from D20 once the ice is frozen to assure they will not return to the town.

After touring Churchill most of the day, we went to the Tundra Buggy Lodge (pictured above) which we would call home over the next six days. Later that evening each zookeeper gave a presentation about each of our zoos.

During the days that followed, we enjoyed various guest speakers and listened to several presentations from the eight facilitators brought together by PBI.

On our second day, we



searched for and spotted our first polar bear. Over the course of six days we saw five polar bears. It was great to see these magnificent animals in their natural habitat. I have worked with polar bears at the Louisville Zoo and they are wonderful, interesting animals. Seeing them in the wild was so inspiring. Polar bears in zoos are ambassadors for their relatives in the wild. If we can get people to appreciate bears when seeing them in a zoo, perhaps they will care enough to learn more about how to save these animals and their arctic habitat.

For those of us at the PBI Leadership Camp, seeing the bears encouraged us to try to do whatever we can to save their habitat and to assure that they will survive for future generations.

Our group of motivated zookeepers worked together all week and created Acres for the Atmosphere (AFTA). AFTA focuses on saving old growth forest or any mature trees in a particular area. We also focus on planting trees. Our goal is to "green" at least one acre for each zoo that was represented at camp by October 2010. Trees absorb carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which can have the potential to slow the Arctic ice melt. To learn more about AFTA, visit acresfortheatmosphere.org



Photos courtesy of Kara Bussabarger, Marcelle Gianelloni and Shutterstock

PROJECT POLAR BEAR

Through hard work and dedication, Louisville Zoo teen volunteers Emily Goldstein and Brandie Farkas were named the winners of Project Polar Bear 2009, an international contest hosted by Polar Bears International (PBI). The contest challenged teens to find ways to reduce carbon emissions in their home communities.

Through the teens' website, www.louisvillezoo.org/projectpolarbear, they gathered pledges from more than 800 people (in 30 states and overseas) as well as businesses and organizations that committed to saving nearly 16 million pounds of carbon a year!

Their grand prize was an all-expense paid 6-day, 5-night trip to Churchill, Manitoba, Canada—the polar bear capital of the world—in October to see polar bears in the wild, go dog sledding and explore the town. PBI asked Louisville Zoo staff members Marcelle Gianelloni (Education Curator) and Kara Bussabarger (Public Relations Manager) to accompany the teens on the trip.

Here's what the experience meant to them:



EMILY GOLDSTEIN: "Being able to return to Churchill was so amazing, because even though I attended the leadership camp in 2007, this trip was a totally different experience. I learned so many new things that I have now brought back to help educate Louisville about climate change and how it's affecting polar bears."

BRANDIE FARKAS: "The trip to Churchill was awe inspiring and magnificent. My favorite experience (besides seeing polar bears) was dog sledding. I loved learning about what the dogs eat and the training that they go through to get on the team."



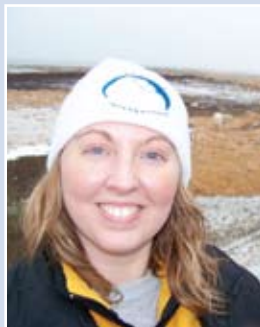
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IN CHURCHILL**

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MARCELLE GIANELLONI: "Having the privilege to visit sub-Arctic Canada on the shores of the Hudson Bay reminded me of the diversity of our planet. I discovered that the tundra is a vibrant habitat with subtle colors and dramatic formations. When you see polar bears walking across this wind-blown habitat, you are totally focused on this graceful animal that is so well-adapted for sub-zero temperatures. But then, you start to concentrate on the colorful rocks, lichen, sedges, grasses and dried wildflowers—textures and colors like a complicated quilt."

KARA BUSSABARGER: "Feeling the frigid wind whip against me as I stared across the Hudson Bay was like a new breath into my soul. The town of Churchill will always be imprinted on my heart. I went to observe the majestic polar bear maneuver through its harsh, unrelenting environment, but ended up witnessing so much more, including the precious locals of the isolated town and learning how they endure."



CHOOSE YOUR EXOTIC DESTINATION

Are you ready to get out of Louisville?

Are you ready to travel the world seeing nature's most beautiful and exotic wildlife?

If the answers are yes to either of these questions, then your Zoo may have the trip for you!

One of the world's most fascinating wildlife events occurs each fall in Churchill, when polar bears gather along the shores of the Hudson Bay. While the bears wait for the bay to freeze and their annual hunt to begin, we'll be there with the exclusive opportunity to be "nose-to-nose" with the polar bears.

If you're not one for cold weather, maybe an African Safari would be more your style. Join us for a trip to Africa in the summer of 2011. While the actual destination is yet to be determined, we can guarantee lots of exotic wildlife, beautiful scenery and memories that will last a lifetime.

- **CHURCHILL: OCTOBER 23-28, 2010**
- **AFRICA INFORMATION TO COME ON A 2011 TRIP!**

To learn more about the Zoo's Exotic Travel Program, please call (502) 238-5615!

