

## Ep #315: Epic Solo Running Adventures with Coach Elle Dee



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jill Angie**

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey runners, I have a really special treat for you this week. Coach Elle Dee from the Run Your Best Life program is here to talk about her summer Alaskan adventure. And I know we talk about Alaska a lot on this podcast because I'm obsessed with it, but Elle Dee has taken it to the next level.

She went on our retreat this past summer but she turned it into like a two month US adventure. And she's told me some of the stories and I just thought, oh my God, we need to get on the podcast and really dive into the amazingness of this trip and also what it's like to travel by yourself for that many weeks into strange lands.

So, Elle Dee, thank you so much for joining me today.

Elle Dee: Thank you, Jill. This is quite fun to talk to you about this. And I'll try to throw in some of the things that I've learned about this and some of the lessons I've learned about running too.

Jill: Oh, good. I can not wait. Okay, because we shared about six days of your trip together when we were down in Seward together for a little while. But you were – Actually, let me backup. Can you kind of walk us through the whole trip? Like give us sort of the highlights of where went from beginning to end, because you came from Alabama.

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Elle Dee: Right. Yeah, I drove from Alabama to Alaska and back. But, obviously, I stopped in some places in the United States. Interestingly I didn't stop that much on the way to Alaska.

I stopped for about a week in Bend, Oregon. And it was, of course, beautiful. It was the first time I had gotten a chance to go snowshoeing. I am absolutely terrible at it. And one thing I have absolutely learned is that if I ever have to do any hiking or running on a snowy slope again I will absolutely get some MaxTrax or some kind of microspikes to make sure that I – I had some on and I was still slipping and rolling down the mountain. It was hysterical.

And I got to see Two Sisters Mountain in Oregon. And I went on a hike on Misery Ridge, which should have alerted me. Its name should have alerted me. And some of the people in the group actually stayed back, that should have alerted me too to what was going to be happening. But I made it, it was a moment.

Yeah, Bend was beautiful. That was the only real substantial stop I had before I went up into Canada. And it's funny because I sent Jill a picture of my preparations, the materials I was setting out to prepare. And you thought it was a little intense. But you have not read all the stories about bear maulings in Alaska, so I forgave you for that.

Jill: Yes.

Elle Dee: I had a giant can of bear spray and Jill was like, "Are you going to need that?"

Jill: I was like, "Where are you going, girl?" But yeah.

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Elle Dee: Bears are out there. They're out there. So the point of the trip is to visit Alaska's eight national parks. And I made it to all but two. I didn't make it to the last two because of the weather and because sadly, or interestingly, the pilots who take you out to the national parks at Lake Clark and out there in those ones, they said the salmon are late this year and the bears are not showing up.

And one of the national parks that was the big deal, was the bears come and do their thing. But they said the bears have not shown up because the salmon is not here yet. They seemed to have a thought that the weather and the climate had something to do with that. So that means I have to go back for the other two.

Jill: All right. 2024, let's do it.

Elle Dee: That's right. That's right.

Jill: Okay, so you drove from Alabama to Oregon and then you zipped up through, like I don't know how many days it took to go from Oregon through Canada to Alaska, but what was that like? Because that part of Canada is pretty sparse as far as humans.

Elle Dee: You are so right. I mean it's very unlike having a gas station or a rest stop or whatever at every exit. In fact, at one point I thought I should call this the tour of North America's pit toilets because that was pretty much the thing I saw the most.

But yes it was quite, some of those places were really remote. I mean you really had to make sure you had your gas filled up all the way and anything that you needed because it was just a moment in Canada. But I've got to say one of the things that stands out probably in any trip is really not what you see in the towns.

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I mean, yeah, they had all kinds of interesting stuff. A lot of native art. A lot of things in Canada are still named the native names and indigenous names, so that was really interesting. But really, it's the people that you meet along the way. And I think every trip like this is like that.

I mean, this wasn't an epic pilgrimage like the Pacific Crest Trail, or Camino De Santiago, it wasn't that. But you still met a lot of incredible people. I've got to say people were, by and large, incredibly nice. Even in the times when I thought they can't tell I'm a tourist, I'm just a person that just showed up here.

So they weren't putting on the tourist thing. It was just, you know, you're here with us. And I wonder if that is because there are so few people and it is a rugged area that you've got to stick together because you've got nature. You've got the weather. You've got animals, and y'all have to band together and try to work through all that.

Jill: Yeah, I think you're right because that's something that I personally noticed in Alaska. Not that I ever had an emergency in Alaska, but you'd hear stories about how somebody got stuck in the mud flats or whatever and just the whole town would come out to make sure that that person got out.

And just like literally just drop everything, they're like, oh, neighbor needs help, got to go help them and rescue them because there's not a lot of people and it's a pretty rugged, unforgiving landscape. Even Alaska, as much as it's been sort of tamed and populated in some places like Anchorage, they have a Target and all that. But you get out of that area and it's like, it's totally different. Totally different.

Elle Dee: I think one of the things that made me the most nervous coming through British Columbia, the Yukon and that side of Alaska, is for much of

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that there's absolutely no cell service. No way to call anybody, no cell service whatsoever. That's why everybody there has satellite phones, I think, because all the officers have those orange satellite phones.

And I almost bought one. In fact, I did buy one. I ended up returning it because I was able to get a phone that the new iPhones have a satellite SOS function so that you could call emergency services if you really got into trouble.

Now, there were a couple spots where there wasn't even any satellite. It was just you and your car. And knock on wood, I've got to give my car a big ups because that car made it through all the things that I went through and didn't break down, no trouble at all. So I've got to tip my hat to my car because that was crucial to the whole trip.

Jill: Yeah. So how many miles did you travel from beginning to end? Did you keep track of that?

Elle Dee: 10,000.

Jill: 10,000 miles.

Elle Dee: And the reason I know that is because when I got back, my car guy was very irritated with me. He was like, do you normally drive 10,000 miles without an oil change? He was very irritated. And I said hey, I tried to get an oil change in Alaska but because the summer months really for Alaskans is a time when they get to do everything, right?

You see them working really hard. They're gardening, they're doing all the things because they know we're getting ready to face months where we can go outside, but we're not going to be doing much outside some parts of the winter. So they were like, oh no, we're backed up.

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I got that a lot from everywhere. When I ended up having to go to the dentist, everywhere you went was like, oh no, we're backed up. I mean everybody is flowing in trying to get services. So that was the thing there.

One of the things people always asked me when they heard I'm doing this drive, is basically why? Why are you going to Alaska? So there were two reactions. Either people reacted like, oh, I've always wanted to go to Alaska, or why would you want to go to Alaska? And, obviously, some of it was because you made it easy by having a retreat up there. So that gave me structure to structure all my other things around.

But another thing was one of the books, I think one of the books that we read in the book club in Run Your Best Life was Out And Back, is that right? Did we read it Out And Back? So it's a runner's story of survival against all odds.

Jill: Did we read that? I don't think we did. Maybe we talked about it. Yeah, anyway, yeah.

Elle Dee: We must have talked about it. Somewhere I got that recommendation and I think it was either some discussion we had in Run Your Best Life, it could have been that. But basically, it's a story of Hillary Allen, who is an ultra runner and what we call a sky runner. She runs mountain races. And she fell down a mountain during a race and it was about her months of recovery.

And one of the things that she said in the book that kind of stuck with me, was that time is our most valuable currency. And I had been feeling like I wasn't spending my time in the ways that I wanted to. In other words, I had some feelings in those last three years, two of the years of the pandemic and the year afterwards. I was sort of feeling like, am I living life or am I just tolerating it?

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And I felt like I had been chained to a desk for three years. I felt exhausted, I think a lot of us did. And it was sort of, as one book describes, my time away from the world, right? I sort of thought of it as kind of breaking up the scar tissue of all the things that had happened. I'd had some, like many people I'd had some family losses. And it's just kind of a way to break that up a little bit.

Jill: I love that so much. Yeah. I mean, can we just take a moment and recognize that I think a lot of people are like, am I living my life or am I tolerating it? And they're just like, I'm going to go on a beach vacation. And nothing against beach vacations, I love those.

But I just am kind of in awe of you, like, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to take two months and I'm going to go out and just immerse myself in my life, without bringing Netflix with me, without all of that stuff. To just be like, I'm just going to go experience.

And from when you started to when you ended, do you feel like you changed as a person? Do you feel any different now? Like, what was your experience like, as far as did you accomplish what you set out to do?

Elle Dee: I think so. And I do feel different and I'm still figuring out every day how that manifests. But I definitely do feel calmer about the big things. Like as I went on in the trip, you know, when things happened that were not great, and you alluded to two of them, which is I lost a bike and a tooth. It was like, okay, this thing is happening and we're going to keep rolling and try to handle it as we can.

So I was in Canada, and it was very funny, because I was telling you, at the border the Canadian police, I mean, the Canadian border patrol, they questioned me closely about how much cash did I have? How much money



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was on my credit cards? What were my credit card limits? And do you know anyone in Canada? And how long are you going to be here?

Jill: Wow. And this is when you were crossing from Washington State into Canada?

Elle Dee: Yes, that's right.

Jill: Okay.

Elle Dee: And I think it was all aimed at we don't want you to tax our resources. We've got a great thing going on up here, we don't want Americans coming up here taking our stuff. I mean not in an ugly way, but just kind of, hey, are you getting ready to –

Jill: Like are we going to have to rescue you? Did they ask you when was your last oil change?

Elle Dee: They did not. They did not seem to care about that. Although one of them at one point asked something about the car, like how's your car or whatever. But I might have told you, the two questions I was asked repeatedly was do I have any firearms? They were very interested in what I had brought up there. I told them about the bear spray, but they were like, oh.

Jill: Everybody's got that.

Elle Dee: Bear spray for them is like sunscreen, everybody has it. You've got to have that on you.

Jill: That is the quote of this episode, bear spray for them is like sunscreen. I love it.

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Elle Dee: So one of the few hotels that I went to, and I was largely doing the kind of off-license stuff or camping or whatever, campgrounds or whatever. But I decided to go to a hotel in Prince George. And unfortunately, two of my bikes were stolen and so I had to encounter –

Jill: Wait, let's back up.

Elle Dee: Yeah.

Jill: How many bikes did you bring with you?

Elle Dee: Two.

Jill: Okay, so both, like all of your bikes were stolen.

Elle Dee: Yes. One of the bikes had an air tag in it and the thieves apparently didn't realize that. So I met the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the bike was moving around the city. And so I was texting them. First of all, they gave me a text number, so I'm texting with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer. So I would drive to the address, they'd be there.

Jill: Oh my God.

Elle Dee: But there was a little delay, I realized, in the report of the addresses. So sometimes we'd go to the address and it would not be there anymore and it would be on the move.

Eventually I had to leave Prince George and they said, well, keep sending us the addresses and we'll keep looking for it. And I thought okay, that's nice. But this is a major city in Canada, medium size anyway. I didn't really think, oh, they're going to keep on this because it's a bike as opposed to a car or all the other things they've got to deal with.

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And they texted me when I was in the Yukon and said, oh yeah, we got your bike and we're going to hold it here in Prince George until you come back from Alaska. And that's exactly what they did. So that was amazing.

Jill: See, this is why Canada is so awesome. They could have just been like, oh well, she left, free bike, right? And instead they were like, no, we're going to do the right thing. I love Canada. That's awesome.

Elle Dee: I was telling somebody that the only experience I'd had with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was cartoons.

Jill: Did they have the hats?

Elle Dee: They don't wear the hats anymore, they just look like police.

Jill: Are they mounted on horses, or do they have cars now?

Elle Dee: They've got cars now.

Jill: They've got cars now.

Elle Dee: I mean I'm sure when they dress it out, they put on the red uniform and the black hat, but they didn't do that there.

I was still traveling through when my tooth got inflamed, and I mean really inflamed. When I ultimately saw the images that they took of the tooth I was like, oh, okay, I get it. But I was using Tylenol, but one day I woke up and it looked like I had been in a bar fight. My face just swelled up suddenly.

And I didn't have an appointment, I'm in Canada, I don't have national health insurance. They don't even know how to charge me because they're just like, what? They don't encounter people that don't have national health

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insurance. So they were all puzzled, they had to think about it for a while. It was exactly what the border patrol probably were worried about, these people just showing up here.

But they finally figured out how to charge me. And by the way the prices that I was charged in Canada to have things looked at or whatever, now I see the difference between the US and the healthcare system there. It was easily a fourth, I think, of what I would have been charged in the United States, easily a fourth. It was just incredible.

But at any rate, while I was traveling to try to get to one of the major cities, which is Whitehorse in the Yukon, it was getting bad, right? It was getting bad to the point where when I would go in a gas station or whatever people were like, what happened?

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Elle Dee: So I saw a sign for a rural health center. So I pulled over there, talked to a couple of nurses and they were so sweet. One of them said I feel so bad for you, I've got some antibiotics at home. I could go home and get them and bring them back and give them to you. I was like, no, no, no, don't do that. But they really helped me out and they were just incredibly sweet folks. I can't reveal their names.

Jill: No, yeah.

Elle Dee: But they gave me some help there, they gave me an ice pack. I was able to get through the Yukon, I mean I got to Whitehorse finally so people could look at my tooth. And basically the endodontist said I'm booked all the way through the summer months because, again, winter, but I'm going to work you in because you look horrible.

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Jill: Oh my gosh.

Elle Dee: So yeah, finally it was decided I couldn't save it. And so when I got to Anchorage I had to have the tooth pulled and I was a little sad because they kind of interrupted some of the trails that I wanted to do in between because I had to just drive right on into Anchorage and take a week off to get the extraction and all the things.

I'm just thrilled that I was able to do it, to make it happen. Because I did not want to take the chance and it would ruin the retreat, which I was there for.

Jill: But I just love that you're traveling through Canada and, of course, the worst nightmare comes through, a medical emergency. And they're like, yeah, we got you, no problem. Like no questions asked, we're just going to help you out. And I feel like that's – That's like when I think of Canada, that's what I think of. They're like, yeah, no, we got you. It's all good, right?

They for sure could have been like, sorry, you don't have insurance, you don't have this, you're just going to have to keep going. And instead, they hooked you up. So that was kind of like an auspicious start, I think, to the trip of like, okay, I had these emergencies. Two different emergencies in Canada, and Canada came through and made sure that I got out of the country and got to Alaska. I mean, that's just really awesome.

So let's talk about some of your Alaskan adventures.

Elle Dee: Yes.

Jill: So once you got to Alaska you had your tooth removed. And I remember because when I caught up to you, you still had the ice pack on your jaw, but it looked like the swelling had gone down somewhat because you were able to talk.

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So when you met up with us for the retreat, you were still kind of recovering. You hadn't done anything in Alaska yet. That was right at kind of like the beginning of your time there.

Elle Dee: Yeah, it was. I had just done nothing. And so the retreat started, one of the things that you said right at the beginning of the retreat is think about what it is that you want out of this experience. And one of the questions you asked, you asked us a series of questions. And so one of the things that you asked us, are you here to connect with other people? Or are you trying to push yourself out of your comfort zone?

And I really think during that retreat a lot of us, obviously, we'd met each other. And it was a great group, by the way.

Jill: It really was, yeah.

Elle Dee: I think there was a lot of pushing out of the comfort zone, for us and for the guides, right? Because the guides often, it's Alaska, right? Any plan you have for Alaska, you better be flexible because Alaska determines what you're going to do in Alaska.

When I was in Alaska I was going to national parks and I kept seeing the same people in the park. So there was a group of four people, I kept seeing them. And there was a guy doing the same thing I was, by himself. And I always recognized him because he was reading Oppenheimer. So it's a huge book, right? So it took him a while to read it. So when I'd get to the park I would say, hey, it's you.

So the reason I mentioned that is because these fellow travelers, at one point one of them said to me, "Hey, we're in Alaska, we're here to get fucked. So anything that happens, we have to deal with it."

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Jill: Exactly, exactly.

Elle Dee: So we signed up for this, in other words. So, I mean, in terms of pushing us out of our comfort zone, it wasn't a thing where somebody asked us to ski down a glacier naked or anything like that. I mean nothing crazy. We'd planned to go to a particular trail and there was some event, they opened the salmon season early, that's what it was.

Jill: Yes.

Elle Dee: They opened the salmon season early and the backup, I think, I can't remember it was a Russian River, which one was it?

Jill: It was the Russian River, yeah.

Elle Dee: And it was like, I don't know, we're going to pivot to some other trail because there's way too much going on here.

Jill: There are too many people fishing, yeah.

Elle Dee: The line into the park was on the road, right? It was on the highway, it was backed out to the highway almost. And so the guides were able to adjust and pivot, and I think we were challenged on the things. I mean, they were all, everything we did was doable but it wasn't just like, oh, we're just going to be strolling here.

Jill: Yeah, yeah.

Elle Dee: It was eye opening.

Jill: Yeah. Well, I think even that very first – No, not the first trial. The first trial we hiked out to that glacier. The second trail where we went down that

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super steep slope. It was like switchbacks and then we got to that beautiful beach. Yeah, that was, I think that was out of most people's comfort zone. But then you get to the beach and you're like, oh, I get it, right? It's like it makes it all worth it. And I feel like Alaska makes you work for it a little bit, right?

Elle Dee: Yeah.

Jill: She's like, I'm beautiful but it's going to cost you.

Elle Dee: And when you talk about beauty, the amazing thing about Alaska that you don't realize until you get there is that you can be in somewhere that looks like a desert one moment and the next moment you can be on a beach. And then when we left the beach, it was almost like a little rainforest in the back there. Or it looked rainforest-y in the back there, or forest-y in the back there.

Jill: Oh, it's totally rainforest in that area.

Elle Dee: okay.

Jill: What do they call it, a temperate rainforest or something?

Elle Dee: Yeah, I don't know. I don't know.

Jill: Yeah, because we were down close to Kenai Fjords National Park and that is a temperate rainforest. It's fascinating.

Elle Dee: Yeah, so Alaska has got it all for you.



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Jill: Yeah, it does. It does. So we had a ton of fun on the retreat and there were lots of people to be around. And then what was it like leaving the group and then heading out on your own for more adventures?

Elle Dee: I mean, it was fun. One of the things that I particularly wanted to mention about the retreat is that there were a lot of activities that I would have never done on my own, I would never have picked to do, that I can say now I've had that experience, right? And so that's one of the things I sort of like about those types of experiences, is that the things I would choose for myself often don't give me a new picture of things. But the retreats, you get to see and do things.

For example, I would have never sat around reading a book about whales, but here we are.

Jill: Yeah, right? Oh my gosh, because we were on that beautiful private cruise out into the Gulf of Alaska.

Elle Dee: That's right.

Jill: And we saw orcas, we saw humpbacks. And then they had this whale book and we were all just like, oh my God. The coolest part was they knew, like every single orca was identified by their fin shape and stuff. And so they had a book with the family trees. And they're like, oh, that one is Eduardo. And we're just like, how do you know? Oh, look at the fin. And then we'd look at the picture and be like, yeah, that's him.

Elle Dee: I mean, they know the pods, they all know the grandmothers. I mean, it was like they knew a lot about these whales.

Jill: Yeah, and the amount of time and care and detail and attention, I think, that it takes to make those observations and to put all those facts together

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into like, okay, this is this whale's family or whatever. Good grief, I don't know if I have the attention span to do that. And I think when you're in Alaska and you don't have cell service half the time, there you go, that's it. You actually get to use your brain to do probably more interesting things, like figure out whale families and stuff. So yeah, it was fascinating.

Elle Dee: So going back out there, probably, like I said, the most arduous part of the trip was to the Gates of the Arctic, which is the most furthestmost, northernmost national park that Alaska has. It's probably our most northern national park period. And one of the larger ones, but very, very remote. And so you've got to deal with what you got.

And you had to fly there because there is a road, but the road doesn't let you into the areas where the park is. And if you try to hike into the park, you are exposing yourself to the bears, right? Because you're in a less developed part of the park, that's where the bears live and if a bear sees you, it's you and them and, you know.

Jill: And there's polar bears up there, too, right? It's not just like the grizzlies.

Elle Dee: Yeah, now the part where I went, I just went to the grizzly and black bear parts. The polar bear parts, I didn't go up that far into the area of Alaska where they are. By the way, guys, polar bears are incredibly aggressive, I have learned. They are not like other bears. If you see a polar bear coming at you, they're not coming because they're – It's not Yogi.

Jill: Yeah.

Elle Dee: It's on.

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Jill: It's on. Are they more aggressive than grizzly bears? Because even the grizzly bears are supposed to be pretty aggressive.

Elle Dee: Yeah, apparently grizzlies are aggressive if you get a mother and her cubs or if they have been disturbed in some way. I'm trying to remember, there's a whole bear, what they eat and what they're interested in. But largely the natives, I mean, the Alaskans said largely grizzlies won't mess with you unless something has happened to them, they feel threatened, or if you've got cubs around. And that's when they come after people.

And they said the bear maulings that they've observed have been in those situations. That there haven't been a lot of bears that are coming to eat humans, it's more so what humans have or what threat they think humans are posing to them. But it's hard, you can't talk to them so you can't tell them, oh, I'm not a threat to you.

Jill: There's no negotiation with a bear.

Elle Dee: Yeah. There were a lot, I saw a lot of grizzlies on the road side in Canada, or a lot of grizzly cubs I should say. They looked like cubs or smaller grizzlies. And I think the parents know we're not going over there to the road. But you know children, they will just do whatever they want. And so I saw just all kinds of bears on the roadside. I think they were curious.

I think also, unlike some parts of the United States where they mow everything, Alaska and Canada do not mow stuff on the side of the road. Because, A, we've got to conserve everything that we've got up here. And, B, what's the point? And so the animals are more likely to come out because there are flowers and food out there.

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Jill: So tell us more about the polar bears. So it's like the grizzly bears, they'll come at you if they're challenged or threatened. But you said the polar bears are just like – If you see a polar bear, what do you do?

Elle Dee: Well, I don't know because I don't know if there is anything to do. Bears are incredibly fast. They look large, but they can roll. In fact, I think I read somewhere 30 miles or something. I mean, I don't know what you do if a polar bear is coming at you, other than trying to get somewhere where it can't get you.

Yeah, I didn't see any polar bears. Not even in the museum. We went to a museum, a rescue, it had a rescue area for the animals. But I don't think any polar bears were there. And it was too warm where we were for the polar bears. At least I think so.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, there was a wildlife refuge near Girdwood, I think, and they had grizzlies, but they did not have polar bears. So yeah.

Elle Dee: After I left you, it was like going on to the other national parks. And those are the ones you've got to fly into, there's no road. And I've got to say, when they say mosquitoes are Alaska's state bird, they are not kidding. I have a picture of myself with some of the mosquitoes. And when I show it to people, they're like, those are mosquitoes? Because they are huge.

Some of them almost look as large as dragonflies. I mean, they are just massive up there because they're untamed. There's no pesticides or anything trying to stop them. And you've got to be a little big there to eat, right, to get your thing. And they were telling me those mosquitoes are so serious that they have been known to take down caribou if a good swarm of them get on them.

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Jill: Oh my God.

Elle Dee: Yeah, I mean, they are not to be played with.

Jill: Wow.

Elle Dee: I also realized that no matter how much mosquito repellent you put on yourself, you're going to get hit up there.

Jill: Yeah, wow. So basically, the farther north in Alaska you go, the bigger the mosquitoes get. Because there were big mosquitoes down where we were, they were just larger than normal, but not like dragonfly size.

Elle Dee: And they seemed, I mean, they seemed to be moving in swarms.

Jill: Oh my goodness.

Elle Dee: They may have seemed large because there were so many of them and they were all together.

Now, the people of Alaska are hardy, right? So at some point it just seemed like the people that lived there, they were hardly putting on any repellent. They were just like, whatever.

Jill: Yeah.

Elle Dee: I don't know if you get used to it. I don't know. But when they bite you, you're going to know it.

Jill: Yeah, well, and one of the trails we were on, they were biting us through, because I was wearing long, full-length tights and I still had

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mosquito bites on my legs. I'm like, what kind of mosquito bites me through a pair of thick running tights? An Alaskan mosquito.

Elle Dee: If they're taking down caribou, then they are used to getting through stuff.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, good point. Good point. Talk about when you went to the Gates of the Arctic National Park, because there's an interesting story about the visitor center there.

Elle Dee: Oh yeah. So we get there and there's a visitor center there but it's closed because they can't get anybody to work there anymore. When I say it's remote, the town that the visitor center is in, there's 38 people. Four of them are kids. And so when tourists come, it doubles the population of the town.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Elle Dee: And these people live there year round. So you talk about people having to learn to work together, you really do have to deal with each other if there's only 38 of you.

Jill: Yeah.

Elle Dee: So it's unmanned. But me and some other tourists were like, oh, we want a memento of our time here at Gates of the Arctic and we want our stamp.

Jill: You've got to get that passport stamp, the national park passport stamp.

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Elle Dee: So we get up there, nothing is happening. And the bear canister area is open, right? So you can just pull it open because every national park or at least the national parks I went to in Alaska have bear canister stations, right? So if you're going to go deep into the backcountry of the park, or maybe not even that deep in the backcountry, you've got to hide your food in this bear canister otherwise bears will come for you.

And so the bear canister thing is open but nothing else. And so one of the guys started trying the doors all around the station and found one of them that was open. So we break into a national park rangers station.

Jill: I love that they just left one door unlocked, I mean, come on.

Elle Dee: I think they just gave up and just said, if you steal something, where are you going to go with it? Everybody in town is going to know it, where are you going? You can't drive off or anything.

So the door was open and people went in there and bought stuff, just left the money there.

Jill: I love that. I love that so much.

Elle Dee: It's got to be hard. And that was one of the things I heard consistently throughout Alaska, is can't find anybody to work. We really need more employees. We just need more people up here. Normally you would not hear a town, I mean people saying we want more people. But there was a lot of that.

I was looking at that too because I was thinking, hey, what would it be like to be a national park ranger? Maybe they need people.

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Jill: I think you'd be an excellent National Park Ranger. I'd love this for you, it would be great.

Elle Dee: I mean it's funny that you say that because I do not think of myself as outdoorsy.

Jill: What? Wait, stop. You are so outdoorsy. Oh, that's fascinating.

Elle Dee: Well I've become outdoorsy since Run Your Best Life, but before that I was a person that I was like, oh, I don't like nature. I don't like to be outside. I got air conditioning for a reason.

Jill: Yeah. Well, yeah, I do like good air conditioning, too. But yeah, it's funny because I think we just get so, oh, it's scary, it's the unknown, right? It's easier to just stay in an air conditioned bus and tour the outside from there or watch it on TV or whatever. But so this is interesting. I did not realize that you didn't consider yourself an outdoorsy person. But do you consider yourself outdoorsy now?

Elle Dee: I go outdoors, and I have plans to go outdoors even more. So I guess, I don't know.

Jill: I mean, you camped a lot on your way up.

Elle Dee: Yes.

Jill: So you slept outside.

Elle Dee: Yeah, and some of that was by necessity because it's hard to get an Airbnb in some of these parts of Canada and Alaska. They don't have anything for you. They keep it moving. So campgrounds, they've got



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campgrounds everywhere. Or pullovers, they've got pullovers and camp areas everywhere. So that's one thing.

But yes, it was an amazing experience to meet the people of Alaska. I mean, you met people who have been real estate brokers and accountants and plumbers, who all decided, oh, you know what? I'd rather run a rafting business. Or I'd rather do something else. I'd rather run a business where I'm taking people to remote islands.

I just met all kinds of people like that, who had kind of given up their city life in the lower 48 to go to Alaska and just do amazing things. Very interesting people.

Jill: I mean it's kind of like they had a similar experience or thought process to you of like time is my most precious resource. How do I really want to be spending it? How do I really want to live my life?

Elle Dee: Yeah. Yeah.

Jill: I love that. Yeah, because I do feel like most of the people, even that one lodge that we stayed at in Moose Pass and we were talking to the owners, and it was a man and his wife who, I think they had it for maybe 30 years by that point. But in the 80s or 90s they were like, what do we want to do? We have this dream. They lived in the lower 48 and they wanted to move to Alaska and open a lodge, and so they did.

And I feel like most of Alaska, it's maybe 50/50, right? 50% people who have lived there all their lives and generations. And then 50% of people who were like peace out on the rat race down below and said I'm going to go up to this beautiful place and make a living up there. It's so cool.

So what were some of your favorite places to go running?

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Elle Dee: I've got to say overall I really loved Oregon. And I'd always seen on YouTube people running the Cascades, people running through the rain forests in Oregon. I always wanted to do that. So I made it to the Cascades on the way back. I made it to Olympic, there's a National Forest, I mean, national rain forest and the Olympic National Park and I made it there.

And it's funny, all the national parks have different little mascots. And one of the national parks had the banana slug as a mascot, which you normally – They had big pictures of the banana slug.

Jill: Aw.

Elle Dee: They had little toy banana slugs that one could purchase.

Jill: That's adorable.

Elle Dee: It was. So normally you'd see a banana slug and you'd be like ew. But then you learn about them and you're like, okay.

Jill: All you need is a good PR campaign.

Elle Dee: That's right. And Oregon also had a lot of waterfalls. Silver Falls, Multnomah, so those were beautiful to hike through. It was incredible because one of the areas, I can't remember which one, I think it was Multnomah. Everywhere you turned, every switch back, when you got to the end of it was another fall.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Elle Dee: It was just gorgeous. And the weather was great, too, in Oregon as well. I just got lucky because right now it is very warm in Oregon, but it was in the 60s when I was there.

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Jill: Oh, that's perfect.

Elle Dee: 60s Fahrenheit. And I got to see Crater Lake. I was just amazed at the wildlife I got to see and the people I got to meet. I just have so much gratitude for how well it went. Nothing went wrong with the car. I was able to do everything that I wanted to do. I didn't break a leg or foot or anything like that. It was just amazing.

I mean, yeah, the roads were incredibly rough because it's Alaska and Canada. And as a matter of fact, they're always working on the roads, I think, in the summer there because the weather is so extreme that they've got to take that time to try to do what they can for the roads. So the roads are rough, but you just deal with it and keep rolling.

Jill: Yeah, exactly. For anybody who's considering doing a similar type of adventure, whether it's flying to Oregon and driving up to Alaska or actually driving across the whole country, what are some tips that you have for people?

Elle Dee: Yeah, you've got a lot of choices. So you can fly. You can drive to Washington and take the ferry into Alaska. And I think there's also a car ferry. You can take a car ferry if you want to take your car. If you don't, you can fly. And we saw a ton of RVs that I think were rented.

I think all those Alaskan adventure RVs, I think people were renting those. There were just too many on the road for everyone to have bought the same kind. Maybe they did, I don't know, but I think that they were renting those. So you could rent an RV and travel around Alaska, if you wish.

And they have a robust tourist industry. So if you just want to go and go to nice places and fly, they've got you covered. And yes, normal cities in Alaska like Anchorage and Fairbanks and Sitka to some extent, they pretty

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much look like normal American cities. But it does not take long for you to get out of those cities for you to see Alaska. You don't have to go to the most remote parts of Alaska to start feeling Alaska.

Jill: Yeah, you could be 10 minutes out of Anchorage and it's like a postcard. It's just stunningly beautiful and everything. Did you do any, I mean, obviously, you did some solo running while you were there. Do you have any tips for people who might want to go kind of adventuring by themselves on the trails and so forth?

Elle Dee: Yeah, luckily Alaska has a robust state park system. And I'd say start there. I mean start there with the trails. Like the trails we went on, Russian River, I can't remember the names of different ones, they are escaping me. But they've got a lot of well maintained trails with levels of difficulty of your choice. And so they've got them laid out on their pages in terms of level of difficulty, elevation, how long it's estimated that it will take you to get to there, whether they're single track or not.

And so I would just say Alaska is pretty good about trying to tell you about the different places that it has. Largely because, again, you don't want to get effed, so they're trying to help you not do that. I would say pick your adventure. If you like to see kind of old Alaska, then maybe Sitka. If you want more of a kind of closer urban experience, obviously Anchorage and Juneau are the places to be.

If you like water, then you want to go to one of the water areas. Although it's almost impossible to avoid water in Alaska. I mean there's water stuff everywhere. So it really is about what you want to see and do.

When we went out to the glacier, almost one of the first ones that we did, if you want a full experience that's a great one, right? Because you can get

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that then you can get the beach and then you can get the rain forest. I mean, it was a combo there.

Jill: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That was amazing. So, okay, well, can I tell you what we're planning for next year's retreat?

Elle Dee: What are you doing?

Jill: It's going to be fun. First of all, we're including a race. I can't remember if it's a 5k or a five miler, but it's on a musk ox farm. And so you get to run amongst the musk ox. It's up in Palmer, Alaska. The musk ox are behind fences, you're not like in the field with the musk ox. But that one's really cool. They have that, it's going to be in August 2024. They have that race every year.

We are going to be actually climbing and hiking on top of a glacier. The Matanuska Glacier. And we're trying to figure out some sort of helicopter experience. And so we're going to spend, basically we're going to spend a few days in Palmer and then we're going to spend a few days in Girdwood, which is a little bit south of Anchorage and it's right on the Turnagain Arm body of water. And there are some beautiful trails.

And there's also like, it's not a zipline because you're walking. It's like a big air bridge or something that you could walk across. It's new, they just opened it, so we're going to see if we can get in on that. And then we've just got running. And so we're doing different adventures, but I am particularly excited about climbing around on top of a glacier because that's fun. That is super, super cool.

So if there's anybody who's like, hey, maybe I want to come to the retreat next year, and then maybe add on some adventures like Elle Dee, that's what we've got going on for 2024.

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Is there anything else, anything that we have not talked about? I'm looking at my notes. Is there anything that we have not covered that you wanted to talk about?

Elle Dee: No, other than thank you, Kim, who was our travel guide and organizer. That was an incredible amount of stuff that she organized for us. And that is not easy. And it particularly is not easy in Alaska because again, some of these places are only open for parts of the year.

So it's not like you could say, okay, well, I'll just call them anytime I want to. I mean, one of the challenges of all of Alaska is actually getting in touch with people. Once you get in touch with them, they're fine.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, it is crazy. It's hard, you can't just go on a website and book stuff. I mean with some places you can, like the Marriott in Anchorage. But other places it doesn't work that easily.

Elle Dee: You're going to have to call them and actually have that, and they are doing that. And when I was in Bend, the organizer of one of the running events I went to is an adventure group called Adventurous Women. She gave me a temporary tattoo.

Jill: Oh, I love that.

Elle Dee: It was one of those little paste-on ones, and it said "little by little, one travels far." And so that was the message that I kind of carried this whole way is, if I drove 100 miles or I had driven 10 hours, either way, every step was getting me farther and I was getting closer to what I wanted. So I really like that.

Jill: I love that so much, yeah. Little by little, one travels far.

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Elle Dee: Yeah.

Jill: That's so cool. Well, thank you so much for sharing your adventure with us. It was like, first of all, it was really fun to be in Alaska together for a week and hang out and do fun stuff together. But also I was so excited to know that you were going to be, that you had been doing some adventuring and that you had more adventures planned.

Because I think we, as women, very often we're like, oh, I can't do that by myself or I need to wait until I have people with me. And I think we miss out on a lot, waiting for the right opportunity and the right moment. And I just love that you're like, no, this is how I want to live my life and I'm just going to go and do it. And creating just literally epic memories and stories for a lifetime.

And I'm excited to see what your adventures are for next summer, afterwards. I mean, do you think you'll go back to Alaska? Do you think you will do something different? Because, I mean, because you're a professor. So you kind of have a little flexibility there over the summer to really go and do, yeah.

Elle Dee: Yes I do, and I am trying to think of what is next. Yes, I will go back to Alaska, one way or another. But I'm also thinking about, I didn't really get to see – I saw Oregon, but I really didn't get to see Washington, so I may. It's a great part of the country to be in during the summer. I mean, it's a great part of the country anytime.

The summer is particularly inviting for me because as a person that lives in the southeastern United States it is almost unbearably hot during July and August. June, July and August are really hot out here. Yesterday it was 100. And for those in the southwest, that's nothing, right? Because you guys are out there experiencing 120 and 130. But it's just not great for

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getting outside and running, you can do other stuff. But it was beautiful out there during the summer.

Jill: I love that. Maybe like Idaho and Montana and just like that whole top edge of the country. And I think there's some beautiful national parks up there.

Elle Dee: Yeah, I mean, obviously, Yellowstone.

Jill: Yeah. Yes, yeah, so much to see up there. All right, so let's make a date. This time next year we'll do another podcast and we'll talk about your next epic tour of the US. So fun. All right, well, thank you.

Elle Dee: Thank you so much.

Jill: Thank you so much.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode, you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com) to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.