

Western Arctic Trip – 2009



Background: Lori and I signed up for this trip in the fall of 2008. As set forth in the advertising brochure, the main goal of the trip was to see and “experience the beauty of one of the most remote corners of North America”, a part of the world that we had not seen before – Alaska’s Western Arctic. It is one of the few places on the planet that is essentially untouched by man - millions of acres of land that is still a pristine wilderness, still uninhabited. The trip brochure from the outfitter, “Mountain Travel/Sobek”, promised a “major Caribou herd and the largest concentration of nesting birds in North America” at Lake Tashekpuuk. It was to be a guided canoe trip down the Coleville River, interspersed by day hikes in the tundra bordering the river and, later, hiking around the lake. The group was to be led by an experienced river/canoe guide and assisted by a naturalist/guide from the Audubon Society. The canoes would be a foldable type, as mfd. by the Scandinavian firm, “Ally”, and they would be flown with us in their folded condition on our put-in flight by amphibious bush plane.

The outfitter, MTS’s subsidiary, “Alaska Discovery”, was conducting the trip. It was their responsibility to take charge and guide it - to take charge of all logistics, supply the canoes, tents, all provisions, any special personal gear required, and to prepare all meals. A big feature, of course, would be the insights and guidance of the Audubon guide with regard to the bird and animal wildlife. To get to all of the places that we were scheduled to see would require a series of bush plane rides, requiring amphibious landings for the put-ins and take-outs in the river and lake portions of the trip.

It all sounded good, just the type of “managed adventure” trip that we liked, but we had reservations about the trip in one area. The trip advertised Class I and II rapids on the river. Lori and I have had previous training and successful experience in the canoeing of such waters but it had been many years ago – we are both now in our 70’s. We’d be alright in flat waters but we had some definite concerns about managing the class II waters. I called our contact, Miranda, at “Alaska Discovery” and informed her of these concerns. She put me in touch with the person in her organization in charge of such matters. He was familiar with the Coleville River in the area that we would be floating. He assured me that the river in this area was quite benign, swift currents but flat water, and that only minimal white

water skills would be required, if at all. Further, he said that the class II sections were small and could be easily portaged, if necessary. Based on these assurances, we booked the trip – excited at the prospect of seeing this remote, pristine area with all of its wildlife sightings’ promises.

June 14, Arrival in Fairbanks:



Our Hotel in Fairbanks

A hand written note was waiting for us at the reception desk of the Bridgewater. It was from Dave N., our soon to be guide for the trip. Dave N. was not the originally scheduled guide for the trip - he had been appointed to replace the originally assigned guide after we made the original arrangements with the outfitter and we had not been so advised. We had neither met nor known anything about him up to this point.

The note said “..... It’s still winter on Tashekpuk Lake – snow and ice! (also, cold up on the river!)”. This was kind of alarming since we had been told to prepare for weather that might, occasionally, get down into the 30’s. I called his hotel and got him. I asked him what he had meant as being cold. He said that we should be prepared for weather that dipped down into the upper 30’s.

We would be alright. We had come well prepared for that kind of weather.

The Group: We met the group in the lobby of the Bridgewater at the appointed time. The Group members were, as follows:

-David N.- A kayaker, New Guinea adventure trip leader, and a river guide, he was to be the Chief Guide for the trip. He was in responsible charge of all of the associated logistics, including the kitchen, for the entire group. It was his job to get us all there, lead us in experiencing our agenda, and to get us all back, safely. This would be his first time leading this particular trip.

-Matt K. – The Audubon guide who was also to serve as an assistant guide to Dave N. As it turned out he proved to be an exceptional asset to the trip. He was a hard worker, always in a good, cooperative mood, always willing to help out (usually without being asked), an excellent and expert teacher on birdlife and wildlife, and, as things transpired, he proved to be a real hero – rescuing Lori from a very bad situation.

-Lori and I – We were both retired. I'm a retired Mechanical/Automation Engineer. For most of my career I operated my own, private consulting engineering firm. For many of those years, Lori ran my office until she retired from her position as the Controller of the firm. Both in our 70's, we were the oldest members of the group but, if I must say so, myself, we were among its most enthusiastic members and, as it turned out, we held up our end of the journey quite well despite some trying conditions.

-Kathy and David R. – A retired couple from Canada. Experienced recreational canoers: he was a retired CFO from "Ernst and Young" and CEO of "Air Canada". She was a retired corporate attorney and a very talented, ardent wildlife photographer. Both were ardent bird watchers and gardeners. They operated, as a retirement hobby, a small 20 acre farm that they called home, northeast of Toronto. As it turned out they proved to be very caring and generous friends who willingly, and generously, helped out Lori and me when we needed it most.

-Dave (Doc) and Travis P. – Father and son, Doc, the father, was a long time veterinarian from Whidbey Island, WA. Reminiscent of a "James Herriot" type of veterinary doctor, he had some great stories to tell us, emanating from his life long medical practice, that we all enjoyed during the trip. His son, Travis, 30 years old, a budding landscaper entrepreneur, was recently married and expecting his first child. They were both great birders and they, also, turned out to be kind and sharing friends to Lori and me when we needed some help. They both proved to be unselfish and hard working "workhorses" during the many unplanned for and arduous portages across the unforgiving tundra. They always carried more than their share of the cumulative total of the one ton of equipment that had to be moved on each portage.

During this initial meeting of the group, Dave N. and Matt passed out personal, company supplied gear to each member, as follows:

-A personal mug: We had to write our name on the one that would be "ours" - Each mug would be held in the camp kitchen, for each person's personal use during meals, etc.

-A pair of rubber boots – (They proved to be invaluable in the wet tundra)

-A large, red, "dry bag" – to hold all of the personal gear that we would bring along during the trip. Excluding our sleeping gear, plus the gear they provided, our personal gear allowance was limited to 35 lbs. Everything, in conglomerate, had to fit in the "dry bag".

-A life preserver

-Rubberized Rain Gear – Top and bottom set

-For Lori and me: Sleeping bags and Thermarest pads (We chose to rent instead of bringing our own)

Dave N. went over the planned agenda of the trip, safety precautions, the canoes, “bear proofing” measures, etc. We all went to a nearby Italian restaurant for dinner and, then, went to bed for an early morning wakeup. The bush plane was scheduled for an early morning takeoff. Before going to bed, both Lori and I left some of our important documents, a spare credit card, and most of our cash in the hotel safe. I also left some dirty laundry – all to be picked up on our way back after the trip.

June 15, The Adventure Begins: After breakfasting at the hotel buffet we (the entire group, with our gear) left the hotel, arriving at the Wright Air Terminal at the airport at, about, 9:30 AM. There was a long, and fussy, weighing in procedure, the net result of which determined that we could not fit all of us with all of our gear on the same scheduled flight. All of the canoes and much of the kitchen gear would have to follow on a later flight. We took off in a small, eight passenger bush plane with the allowed gear.

The weather was fine and the flight was good. It was an interesting and scenic flight, a flight in which signs of civilization began to quickly disappear. Not that there was much in the way of population around Fairbanks to begin with, but the landscape grew increasingly more remote as we progressed, ever further Northward. The most prominent (essentially, the only) visible manmade feature was the Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, Alaskan pipeline. We kept criss-cross following the pipeline and its attendant service road for much of the way. As we progressed north the trees and forests began to get sparser and shorter in height. Open, green land areas became increasingly more prominent. We were not flying high, probably no higher than 5,000 feet, or so, but we were unable to spot any signs of moving wildlife despite the fact that we were all on the lookout for it. After an hour and a quarter, or so, we arrived at our destination, the airport at Bettels, Alaska, north of the Arctic Circle.



First
Landing at Bettels - Lori

First Landing at Bettels Airport



Bettels Airport Terminal

Bettels Airport Terminal

Bettels Airport is the home base for Brooks Range Air (BRA). Bettels Airport is kind of a nondescript place. It consists of a hodgepodge of out buildings, a trailer, and some larger “shed” types of structures, all clustered at one end of the airstrip. The “Terminal” was in a wooden frame, tin roofed building. The bathroom was an outhouse (It was clean and it didn’t smell.). However, the overall looks of the place proved to be somewhat deceiving. While the buildings might not have been pretty they proved to be

functionally adequate and the personnel we interacted with, again very casually dressed in jeans and work shirts did their jobs well. We were beginning to realize that a lot of Alaska was like this. What is lacking in elegance and formality is well made up for by the people's personal independence and good work ethics combined with the simple, rugged functionality of their equipment and associated logistics.



Bettels - Pretty Privy

Bettels – Pretty Privy



Travis, Bob, Lori, Matt, Dave N, Doc
Kathy, Dave R

Back: Travis, Bob, Matt, Dave R, Doc

Front: Kathy, Lori, Dave N

BRA was the “bush plane” airline who had contracted to fly us into the Coleville River drop-in point, pick us up at the small river settlement of Umiat when we arrived there with our canoes, fly us to Lake Tashekpuk, and when we finished there, fly us back to Bettels. At least that was the plan. However, it did not take long for this plan to start to unravel.

Upon arriving at Bettels, Dave N., our guide, went into a private conference with the pilot in the terminal office. When he came out he announced that our plans had changed and that instead of putting in directly on the Coleville River as originally planned, we would instead, be putting in on a smaller tributary that feeds into the Coleville, the Killik River. The put-in landing would be at Lake Udrivick, about 45 miles south of the point where it meets the Coleville (at Killick Bend, the spot where we were originally scheduled to put in).

When I asked Dave N. why we were doing this he said that the pilot had informed him that the Coleville was running fast and that we would be reaching Umiat too quickly for our schedule. The Killick addition was designed to make up that time; hence, we would stay on schedule. We looked at the map of the Killik together. It would be about a 45 mile trip to its confluence with the Coleville.

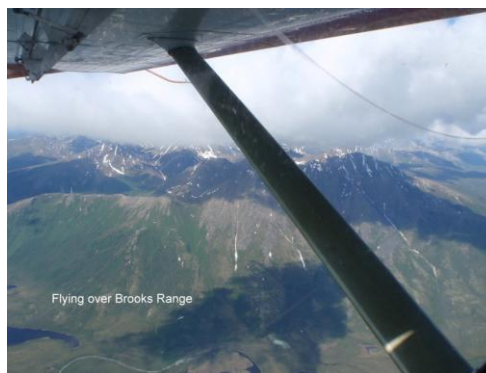
The Killik showed on the map as a smaller river than the Coleville for the entire way we were to traverse it. Except for a short stretch of wider water just adjacent to Lake Udrivik, it showed as a narrow, winding river with a lot of sharp bends for its entire remaining length, all the way to its confluence with the Coleville. Ominously, about 5 miles south of the lake, a section of the river was denoted as “Sunday Rapids”. In addition, the final 15 miles, or so, showed up on the map as a “winding braided river” (Such

ivers are a phenomenon in the north that feature many intertwining channels such that it is often difficult on approach to choose which is the main channel, or worse, which channel is deep enough for navigation. Such river sections are usually composed of gravel and large rocks, both in the channel beds and on the islands that the channels “braid” through.). If the water proved to be running too swiftly it would be hard to choose the correct channels entrances before passing them. Either way, whether the correct channel mouths were passed or if we wrongly chose a channel that ended up too shallow or dead ended, the potential for a plurality of portages over rough gravel was great.

I asked Dave N. if he had experience on the Killik. He said he had none, indeed, had not ever heard of the Killik before this trip! He did ask the pilot about the rapids and navigation features of the Killik. The pilot responded that they were not regarded as anything too demanding in skill, “just ordinary rapids”. We decided that we would fly over the entire length of the Killik to scout it out before putting in on Lake Udrivik. With that as our plan, all of our gear except that which was still coming from Fairbanks, was stowed into a single engine “Otter” plane equipped with pontoons. We all entered the plane and, subsequently, took off from the small lagoon about ¼ mile from the main airport landing strip, where the amphibious planes of BRA were docked. At last, the “real adventure” had begun.



Lori – En-route to Lake Udrivik



Flying over the Brooks Range

The plane trip over the Brooks Range of mountains (and through its passes) was nothing less than spectacular. The peaks were of rugged stone, still snow covered, and there were a lot of them. As it turned out, these peaks would serve as a backdrop to all of our activities for the next several days. After passing the peaks the land below showed as continuous, undulating green plains interspersed in many places by bodies of blue water, running creeks, and small rivers. There were no trees, anywhere – just endless miles of bare, green tundra, interspersed with the blue water lakes and streams.

The First Campsite – Lake Udrivik: The overall flight took about an hour and a half to get to Lake Udrivik. I was surprised. We landed on the lake without scouting the Killik as planned. Dave N. said that the pilot told him that he didn’t have time to do the flyover; hence, from here on in, until we reached the Coleville, we would be canoeing completely unfamiliar (to us) waters, waters that we knew contained running rapids and who knew what surprises in the braids!

By this time it was mid-afternoon. The plane taxied to shore and everyone pitched in to unload all of the gear (there was almost a ton of gear and the canoes were still coming in a next plane load). With the gear all piled up on the shore, the pilot took off in the plane and disappeared south, towards the mountains. We were on our own!

The spot where he left us was on the western shore of Lake Udrivik. The Killik River was about 300 yards to the west across a tundra swamp that was interspersed with low growing willows. To the north, say, about another 300 yards, there was a low lying bluff that, later, when we actually reached it, proved to be 40 to 50 feet high. Dave set out across the swamp by himself to reconnoiter the area leaving us to rest with the gear until he returned.



Landing at Lake Udrivik



We're on our Own!

It was an idyllic spot on the shore of the lake and the weather was fine – about 65 degrees F, sunny, with a few white clouds. Everyone seemed to keep busy enough, taking pictures and exploring the near lake edges. Dave N. soon returned. He announced that we would set up our tents on top of the bluff and that the kitchen would be set up on the edge of the swamp on a dry spot that was about 100 yards east of the river and about 50 yards south of the base of the bluff.

This was a strategy we would follow throughout the trip, setting up the tents on high ground, separated from the kitchen area both by distance and by elevation. In addition, no food or “smelly stuff” (lotions, soaps, toothpaste, etc.) would be allowed at the tent sites. They had to be stored in the kitchen area. This was bear country and there were no trees in which we could hang the food and smelly items to keep them away from a potential bear intrusion. The best we could do would be to isolate those items that would attract bears from the area where we were sleeping.

We portaged the gear from the landing spot to the foot of the bluff. We had a good group. There were no slackers, neither among the clients nor among the guides. Some carried greater loads than others but that was only because they were physically more able to do so. The important thing was that everyone carried as much as he/she could manage. Again, this was a practice that would continue

throughout the trip, everyone pitching in, unasked and unreservedly, to get whatever job done that was necessary.

To get to the kitchen site it was necessary to closely follow the shoreline of the lake. There was a narrow, dry pathway along the shoreline that abutted the edge of the tussock swamp. A small drainage creek from the lake crossed this pathway, which, in turn, we had to cross while carrying our loads. It was just about as deep as the height of our boots; hence, we had some “fun” each time we crossed it. The water was cold when it overflowed the boots and several of us experienced it. At several points the dry pathway disappeared, forcing us to carry over portions of the swamp.

This was our first introduction into the tussock swamps that make up a great portion of the landscape of the northern tundra. The tussocks are small, conical mounds of soil, usually no higher than 10 to 15 inches. They have as their top surface a “head” of overhanging tufted grass that can be anywhere from 10 to 15 inches in diameter. Typically, the surrounding spaces between tussocks are small water filled moats wherein the water is, again, typically, 3 to 10 inches deep. The tussock swamps proved very difficult to walk through. It was almost impossible to step directly on top of a tussock without slipping off into the surrounding water filled moat. If one tried to step directly into the moats, avoiding the tussock tops, walking became extremely burdensome (especially, when carrying 50 lbs., or so, of gear). Forced high steps and ragged, irregular paths were required in order to plant one’s feet correctly. The bottoms of trouser legs quickly became soaked and any common hiking shoe quickly filled with water because of the water depth. Now we all understood why we were issued the calf high rubber boots. I soon changed into mine and the boots were the only foot-ware that I wore for the rest of the trip.

Hence, this first portage of the gear to the chosen site was a bit on the tough side but the distance of 250 Yards, or so, was not too long and, after a series of multiple carries, we soon had carried all of the gear to the kitchen site at the base of the bluff. From there, we each carried our own personal gear and the tents to the top of the bluff.

It was dry up there and the ground was relatively firm. We had some fun setting up the first tent. Dave N. was demonstrating. The tents were a “Mountain Hardware”, two person design, complete with an overall fly and an extended, covered outer foyer at each end. They were a bit complicated to set up at first with a plurality of color coded, foldable tent poles that, when we finally got them put together in the correct pattern, created a flexible, ribbed, ellipsoidal structure that proved to be very functional and comfortable for two people with their gear. We all soon got good at putting them up – and taking them down. Throughout the rest of the trip, the tents proved to be very serviceable and were no problem.



Kathy R – at Work



Camp at Lake Udrivik

After the bluff camp was established we had a sandwich/cold cut lunch back down at the kitchen area and Matt announced a bird watching hike. He soon left with Kathy, Dave R., Doc, and Travis, complete with their telescopic and camera gear. Lori and I stayed in camp. She went back up to the tent to organize her gear. I stayed at the kitchen area to help Dave N. set up that area, in so far as we could. It wasn't too long before we heard the engine of an approaching plane. It was the second flight bringing the canoes and the major portion of the kitchen gear.

The plane, the same, pontoon equipped Otter model, landed on the lake and Dave N. and I went down to meet it. There was a different pilot in it and he had brought along two additional young men to help unload. This time I got smart and asked the pilot bring the plane into the mouth of the creek. He did; hence, we were able to unload the gear on the camp side of the creek and did not have to cross it in the portage of this remaining gear.

With the help of the two young men we were able to unload the plane quickly. They took off immediately and, this time, we had definitely cut our ties to civilization. Except for Umiat with its population of 5 people (about 85 air miles away) there was not another town, a road, or even a person, for more than a hundred miles in any direction. Indeed, we did not see any sign of human presence, not so much as a footprint or a man made article of any kind, during the entire rest of the time of our trip.

The creek flowing into the swamp was just wide enough and deep enough to manually line a canoe through or to, possibly, carry one man, at least at its beginning point on the lake where we were. I suggested to Dave N. that, possibly, we could assemble the canoes right at the spot where we were and, then, line them through the swamp to the river. Thus, we would avoid a lot of portaging. Dave N. did not like this idea. He said that, while he hadn't followed the creek all the way through the swamp, it most likely petered out and we would most likely encounter water over our boots if we tried to explore it.

With that, Dave N. and I portaged all of the gear except three canoes to the kitchen site. The canoes were unassembled, packed in rectangular packs that measured, roughly, 18 inches square by 3 feet

long. We decided to set up the kitchen first before returning for the canoes. We set about doing that. After a while the group returned from the hike. They made short work of portaging the rest of the canoes to the kitchen site.

By that time Dave was cooking supper. We ate a good supper of fresh frozen Cod fillets, complete with a fresh, green and tomato salad and fresh bread. After supper, Kathy and Dave R. brought out some wine that they shared with the group. We decided to set up the canoes in the morning. It was a very congenial time and, after a while, we departed for the tents and a night's rest (at least we called it night, since, it never did get dark). I managed to sleep well in spite of the light and so did, I think, everyone else. It had been a good, productive day and a promising start to the trip.

June 16, First Morning in Camp: It was a glorious morning – bright sunshine and the temperature in the 60's. I awoke early. From our tent site on the bluff we overlooked the blue waters of Lake Udrivik to the south and southeast with the background behind the lake of the continuous line of the snow covered peaks of the Brooks Range. To the west, at the bottom of the bluff, flowing north was the Killik River. We could hear birds singing and a variety of small birds appeared and disappeared. We immediately started to break down the upper campsite and had all tents and gear packed out by 8:00 AM.

From the bluff we could smell the bacon cooking below. Dave N. had been down there early and, by the time we got down to the kitchen site, breakfast was ready (coffee, bacon, eggs, fruit juice, oatmeal, cold cereal, wheat bread, peanut butter, jam). Matt was already starting to assemble the first canoe. And, after breakfast we all pitched in to either help clean and pack up the kitchen, help assemble the canoes, and/or to portage the, now, total of one ton of gear to the launching site at the river, a distance of, about, 150 yards. Just prior to reaching the river we encountered a good running creek coming out of the swamp and running parallel with our trail to the river. The creek was wide enough and deep enough for canoeing. I'll never know whether that creek was continuous back to the lake such that we could have used it to portage the canoes. It would have saved us some work if it was and if we had used it.

One event was really nice that morning. Just as we were finishing breakfast, before starting our chores, a fox appeared between us and the lake. It was only about 100 feet away. It was still mostly white with its winter coat and it had what appeared to be a small vole in its mouth. It was just as curious about us as we were about it. It stared at us, unafraid, and even took a few steps toward us. After a bit it turned around and left, in no hurry to get away. It finally disappeared over a small rise along the lake shore. We all got pictures, of course. It was a nice way to start the day.



Fox – Lake Udrivik



Preparing Canoes – Lake Udrivik

The canoes were canvas affairs as mfd. by the Scandinavian firm, “Ally”. The main element in the canoe construction was the outer “skin”. This skin was a one piece, sewn canvas “jacket”, approx. 15 feet long, that defined the entire outer surface and shape of the canoe. There were 8 internal struts made from approx. $\frac{3}{4}$ inch aluminum tubing, designed to fit lengthwise, evenly separated into the interior of the canoe. Also, there were a plurality of shorter straight strut sections (thwarts) and “u-shaped” sections of the same aluminum tubing, all designed to be placed cross-wise, strategically distributed along the interior length of the canoe. The thwarts and U-shaped ribs were to be assembled and clipped to the longitudinal struts, after all were internally inserted into the canoe. Fully assembled, all of these aluminum elements together proved to be a tight fit within the canoe interior, stretching the canvas skin to a high degree. Thus, with the strut elements at their proper spacing and clipped together with the plastic clips, the tension imparted by the outer canvas skin upon the assembled aluminum tubing skeleton was the sole force serving to hold the entire structure together. The entire canoe’s structural integrity and shape was defined strictly by the interacting forces of tension by the outer skin combined with the friction fits of the snap fit plastic clips.

Sitting on the ground, at least, the exterior shape of the assembled canoe looked like any other standard canoe of conventional design. We were able to lift it, portage it, and float it in the water, to all appearances like an ordinary canoe. To my mind: however, while this structural design appeared adequate for calm, unobstructed waters, I had some doubts about its abilities to withstand the hard bumping against rocks and general knocking around that a canoe is likely to experience in rough, white water situations. To me, it did not look like the friction clips were sufficient to hold the shape of the frame together in the event of a direct, hard knock. Unfortunately, as events transpired, this early trepidation would prove to be true.



Kathy Portaging



Lori Portaging



Travis and Doc



1st Launch – Leaving Lake Udrivik

First Day on the Killik: We portaged everything to the river and, finally, got started on our canoe trip at, about, 10:30 AM. The water was calm and flat with a mild current flowing downstream. It was comparatively wide, varying approx. 100 to 250 yards wide as we progressed downriver. It proved to be the widest and smoothest section of river we would encounter for the entire trip. The weather remained good. Matt and Dave N. were in the lead canoe, followed by Doc and Tristan in the second canoe, and Kathy and Dave R. in the third. All were good canoers. Lori and I proved to be the slowest canoe of the group but we were not that slow. Together, as a group, we made good speed down the river, stopping, or slowing, to look whenever a bird was spotted.

Sporadically, we would stop as a group in an eddy and Matt would give us some good information about some natural phenomenon or birdlife. Dave N. had put together a well provisioned “snack bag”. In it were Snickers bars, M&M’s, granola bars, etc, and lots of them. We periodically passed the bag around to replenish the “excess energy” we all were using up.

It was a good morning and Lori and I began to coordinate more and more as a team. It had been many years since we had paddled a canoe together but the techniques and teamwork necessary for good canoeing were rapidly coming back. We proceeded downriver in this fashion, pleasantly and somewhat

leisurely, for the next two to three hours, with Lori and me getting better with our canoeing techniques as the hours passed. Eventually, we came to a severe bend in the river where the whole complexion of the river, and the rest of our trip, changed.

We Find the First Rapids: The river became narrower, the current became much swifter, with many spots of standing white water indicating rocks, strewn throughout the entire channel ahead of us, until the channel disappeared around a bend, about 2 – 300 yards ahead. Dave N. immediately signaled a halt and we all came into shore on the left bank of the river. Dave N. immediately left to reconnoiter down river and around the bend. Shortly thereafter, Dave R., Doc, and I followed.

It was really tough walking. The terrain was all tussocks and standing water. We walked the river bank. It was high above the stream, 10 ft., or so. Around the bend, the rough water continued. The bend turned out to be almost a full “C” peninsular shape, bending the river around almost a full 180 degrees, before doubling back and straightening out again. Dave N. was quite a bit ahead of us at a point on the far side of the peninsula, directly across from the canoes. He had made the full sweep of the bend to the other side in the time it took me to get to the point. Dave R. and Doc were a bit ahead of me. I saw him heading back to the canoes so I headed back, also, as did we all.

We all met at the canoes. Dave N. had decided that the only safe way to get past the rapids would be to portage everything directly across the peninsula to a spot on the other side, just past the worst section of rapids, where we could put in again. He said that he had found a good campsite there.

It was a tough portage. Carrying loads in the range of 40 to 60 lbs. we had to climb up an approx. 10 ft. high bank, then, walk/carry across approx. 300 - 400 yards of very tough tussock swamp to the other side of the peninsula. Upon reaching there, there was an almost vertical 15 – 20 ft high bank that had to be downward negotiated before reaching the level of the river. Each of us had to make this trip several times, each carrying the amount that he/she was able to (in the order of 30 – 60 lbs.). It was hard work. We carried everything over but the canoes.

At the base of the bank was an old, dried up creek bed. We set up camp on this creek bed. The chosen site was still about 100 yards from the river. Still to be portaged to reach the river from the campsite would be a short section of swamp and through a low cottonwood thicket. By this time Dave N. announced that we would get the canoes in the morning, since, we still had to set up camp, prepare, and finish supper. We set up the tents and after supper it didn't take long before we retired for the “night” (At this time of year it never did get dark at the latitude we were at.). It had been a tough afternoon and everyone was tired.



Second Night's Campsite



Mosquitoes on Doc's Back

At this point I should mention the mosquitoes. Starting at the time, and continuously, since, we had put in from the plane at Lake Udrivik; there had been mosquitoes – lots of mosquitoes! Sometimes they came in hordes, surrounding each person; sometimes they came singly, or in pairs, whatever, mosquitoes were always present, ready to attack, continuously buzzing around heads or landing on skin and/or clothes. They were worse, particularly attracted to persons wearing dark or black clothes. One time I counted over 20 mosquitoes simultaneously on Doc's back. He was wearing a black felt shirt. The mosquitoes were particularly bad at this dry creek campsite, hence, another good reason for retiring early. The only time or place offering relief from them would be times when we were paddling on the river and/or if there was a good wind blowing.

I'm happy to say, though, that neither Lori nor I were particularly bothered by the mosquitoes! They buzzed around us pretty intensely but they only landed infrequently. When they did land they quickly flew off again without inflicting any damage. In preparation for this trip I had done at least one thing exactly right. As part of our joint Christmas presents I had invested heavily in "Buzz Off" clothing from "Ex Officio" for both Lori and me. The "Buzz Off" line of clothing is impregnated with a mosquito repellent that "Ex Officio" reputed to last through some 70 washings. I probably won't be able to verify the 70 washing life span for some time but I can certainly attest to the fact that these clothes worked extremely well for the entire length of this trip, even after being completely soaked through with water.

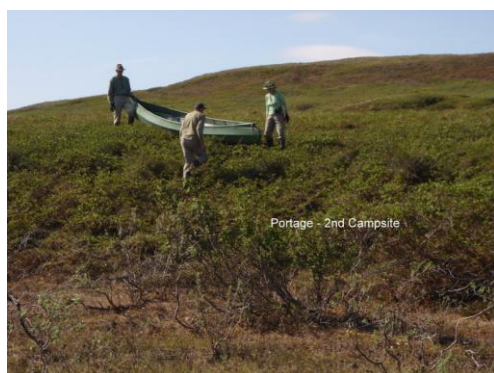
We were completely decked out in these clothes – pants, shirt, socks, a "bucket" hat with pull down brim, bandana, pullover sweater when needed, and, in addition, I usually had on a fishing vest – all light, fast drying, polyester, "Buzz Off" clothing. The time, at the creek camp, when I was standing right next to Doc with his dark shirt and the 20 odd mosquitoes on it, I did not have one on me, wearing these clothes. I know I looked funny because I put the bandana over my head, neck, and ears and, then, pulled the bucket hat down over the bandana, covering my ears. Everyone else used liberal applications of stinky and oily Deet to repel the critters but Lori and I did not have to. I hate the smell of Deet and its oily feel!

June 17, Lori and I Start with a Personal Portage: We were up early the next morning – finished breakfast and had the tents taken down, and all personal gear packed in dry bags by 8:30/ 9:00 AM. Dave N. came over to me and said that he wanted Lori and me to stay in camp and that they would be responsible for bringing over the canoes without us. I protested, since, I knew that that meant that two people would have to make an extra trip across the tundra.

He insisted. Apparently he had done his homework on the medical reports. Both Lori and I were in our 70's and we both had a history of coronary problems. However, we both exercise regularly and we were certainly in good enough shape for the trip. We had both taken complete physical exams before the trip, shared the trip's itinerary with our doctors, and we each had obtained our doctors' approval to participate in it. However, apparently, Dave N. was beginning to worry. The trip, with its white water and tough portaging demands was turning out to be considerably more physically challenging than advertised – and he had solely made the revised itinerary decision that caused the change. I told him not to worry and that Lori and I would straighten up around the camp when they were gone.

After they left Lori and I began to portage the camp gear to the river launching site, about 150 yards away. We worked continuously, carrying many loads through the short swamp and the cottonwoods. Most of the loads were 50 lbs., or less, for me and, probably, 20 - 30 lbs. for Lori. By the time that the group started arriving back with the canoes, Lori and I had carried virtually the entire camp's gear, including the kitchen gear, to the launching site – a cumulative load in the order of something close to one ton!

I still had enough energy in me to help to get the canoes down the embankment, since, they were up on top and I was down the bottom. Both Matt and Doc came over, afterwards, at different times to thank Lori and me for moving the gear to the launch site. Apparently they were surprised that we had been able to do it. But I didn't think it was any big deal and neither did Lori. We had carried the weights that we could and moved at the speeds that we could and, after all, isn't that what everyone else did?



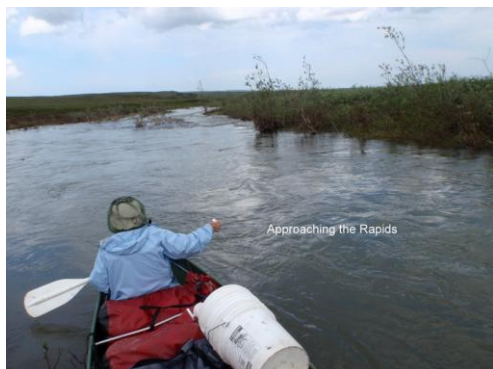
Canoe Portage to Second Campsite



Bob and Lori's Portage – 2nd Campsite

Learning How to Run the Killik River: We finally got on the river around 11:00 AM. To me it turned out to be a pretty good day, even though it was not the kind of benign water that we had been expecting. In fact, there were several times that I found myself having a lot of fun tracking and guiding the canoe through the many times rapid and tricky waters. I'm not sure that Lori completely agreed with me but, despite her protestations to the contrary, I could see that she was really getting into it at times and her canoeing techniques were getting better all of the time. I got the feeling that she was getting pretty smug and self satisfied with her obvious progress but she probably never will admit that - to me, at least.

We started on the river in some fast but clean currents, not too many spots with standing water indicating rocks but some spots with turbulence indicating shallower water. However, such canoe able waters did not last long before we came to a spot with a lot of obvious white water ahead. Dave N. called a halt and we all pulled into shore to reconnoiter. We decided to line the canoes (pull them ahead by ropes while we walked along the shore) to pass the worse part of the rapids. We lined the canoes until we came to the next stretch of stiller waters and, then, put them in and paddled downriver again. We continued, thusly, for the rest of the day – alternately canoeing the stiller waters and taking out and lining or portaging around the bad parts.



Approaching the Rapids



Fording the River – Day 3

Wildlife – A Grizzly, Moose Tracks, Birdlife: We had some good experiences that day. Once when we were lining the canoes, walking in the shallow waters next to a 5 to 6 ft. high bank, we spotted a large, brown Grizzly Bear about 50 yards away in the tundra inland from the shore. He spotted us about the same time we spotted him. For an instant we looked back and forth at each other, nobody moving. He decided that he did not want anything to do with us, turned around, and started running away – humping up and down over the tundra. He made good time and soon disappeared over a rise in the tundra. He was a big guy and it was a pleasure to see him!

All through the sojourn that day each of the canoes would periodically stop in some convenient eddy, or another, to observe and photo the bird life along the river. Doc and Travis, Kathy and Dave R., and, especially, Matt, were really in their element doing this. Matt had a special software program on his I-

Phone that contained practically every birdcall known to man. Many times when a bird was spotted he would not only identify the bird but, also, he would play that bird's song for the group.



Fresh Moose Track – Day 3

I was having a good time executing some of the canoeing maneuvers that proved necessary during our transit down the river. Sometimes these were necessary to extricate us from potential bad situations and, other times, they were needed just to get us around some obstacle that had the potential of impeding our progress.

One time we came to a set of rapids where we had to stop and reconnoiter. The only way that we saw possible to get past the trouble spot would be to line the canoes along the opposite shore, since, the underbrush on the near shore where we were parked in an eddy was too densely covered with underbrush to portage and the water along the shore was too swift (probably too deep), and too rocky to line the canoes. The mid channel current between us and the far shore was extremely fast and there was not a whole lot of distance between us and the rocky white water downstream. To make it across in time before entering the rapids Lori and I would have to paddle powerfully and correctly, as a team, and there was not much room for error.

To get started, while still in the eddy, we pointed the canoe on a vector of 45 degrees, headed upstream. I was in the rear and Lori was in the front position. We both then began paddling on the downstream side of the canoe with full power, quickly repetitive, sweep strokes. The object was to keep the canoe's nose pointed upstream for the entire transit across the river, thus, preventing the nose to point in the direction of the current and pulling us downstream too rapidly to make it to the shore. Lori really worked hard in the front position, as she had to, and the results showed it. The canoe never turned into the current and we made it across in good time. We had plenty of room to spare before the rapids. Our team canoemanship was getting better!

A Big Eddy: Later, we came around a large 90 degree bend to the left in the river and, immediately, coming out of that bend, the river made another large 90 degree bend, this time to the right. The current was extremely fast going into the bends. As one would suspect from this configuration, a large, counter clockwise flowing eddy was formed, starting at the tangent point of the two adjoining bends.

There was still water adjacent to the shore just above the eddy at the tangent point. All of the group canoes pulled into the still waters to rest and confab.

When we pulled out of the still water, Dave N. and Matt went first as the lead canoe. Lori and I had the second canoe and we waited to start until we saw how the leaders were doing. They were having a really hard time getting downstream, out of the eddy. The water was actually running upstream, against them, with a good velocity induced by the CCW flow direction of the eddy. Finally, after about 100 yards, they emerged from the eddy into normal, downstream flowing waters but they had to work really hard to do it – and they were our strongest paddling team.

Lori and I were next and we entered the eddy, paddling as strongly as we could. We got about half way through but then we could make no further forward progress. Paddling as hard as we could, the best we could accomplish was to stand still, making no headway, in that rapid, backward current and we were quickly tiring. Looking to my right I saw, at the other side of the eddy that the CCW current was flowing downstream, in line with the normal river flow on that side. I set the canoe on a 45 degree vector in that direction and by continuing our strong paddling we worked our way across the eddy. It proved to be a good maneuver. By getting into the CCW flow on the other side of the eddy, the current brought us around to a point just below Dave and Matt's canoe which was sitting in a still eddy just above the CCW eddy. We were easily able paddle across to them and sit and wait for the rest of the group. I guess the moral of that event was to “always let the river do the work for you, whenever you can”.

The day was filled with much tough portaging and lining of the canoes, since, the river continually presented sections of fast water flowing through standing waves caused by exposed rocks. Finally, towards the end of the day we came to a point where the river met with another major tributary. The confluence of these two fast moving currents was filled with standing “haystacks” and exposed “white water” rocks. We decided to call it a day and set up camp just above the confluence of the two streams.

The day had been long and tiring and despite our best efforts we hadn't made much progress down the Killik. Checking with Dave N.'s GPS showed that we were only, approx. 7 ½ miles from where we started at Lake Udrivik! These were “as the crow flies” miles and we had paddled considerably more miles due to the many twists and turns of the river but, still, it was becoming painfully obvious that we were not any where near on schedule to meet the plane at Umiat at the scheduled time.

This trip was turning out to be nothing like the benign river trip that we had been told to expect! The Killik was turning out to consist of continual, intermittent stretches of class 2 to class 3 waters, with swiftly running currents all the way, and containing many bends, rocks, and low water areas. Many of the portages were lengthy and over tough to walk on, swampy, tussock tundra. With these factors combined, the trip, so far, was hard work – requiring much more effort than the “moderate” physical activity level that the trip had been advertised at. To add to the disappointment, there had been very little in the way of wildlife sightings –the exceptions being the single sightings of the white fox and the

grizzly bear. We saw some tracks and the scat of other game but we never did spot any, not even a single caribou or moose.



Mosquitoes – Travis, Day 3

The third night's campsite was the buggiest, yet. It was filled with mosquitoes. Lori and I were still, essentially, unscathed from the onslaught of these critters due to our "Buzz Off" protective clothing but the rest of the group had definite problems with the hordes of them; especially, those who were wearing dark clothing. We set up the tents as far from the river as possible to escape the worst infestation of the mosquitoes (they tended to be worse near the water). We then finished supper and its attendant chores as quickly as possible, and everyone retired for the "night".

June 18, The Misadventures Begin!: This day proved to be long and eventful – and not in a positive way!

To begin with, on this day we lost the fine, clear and warm weather that we had been experiencing from the start of the trip. I had been comfortable in shirt sleeves and fishing vest for those, earlier days. The weather was cloudy and cool and, as the day progressed, we experienced periods of fine, misty rain. A cold wind was blowing in from the north. It would be in our faces all day as we progressed down the river. It was the first time on the trip that I brought out and wore my "Gore Tex" jacket and "kayaking" gloves. Both were necessary in the cool (Cold? Lori thought so!) weather. The only good news was that the wind got rid of the mosquitoes.

Getting the canoes going downriver was not a straightforward job that morning. From our campsite we had to get the canoes down to the confluence point with the tributary. It was not possible to either portage or line the canoes on the campsite side of the river because of the thick bushes on land and the extremely rocky whitewater along the shoreline. We had to cross the canoes over to the other side of the river. The current was very fast but the way was clear. By starting out with canoe's nose vectored upriver and with both paddlers using full powered sweep strokes on the downstream side of the canoe, as in previous crossings, we all successfully made the crossing with no major problems. We walked in the shallow water along the shoreline pulling the canoes on ropes to the confluence point.

At the confluence point our hard work was not done yet. The shoreline downstream on the side of the river that we were on was too overgrown with dense bushes and rocky white water to allow either

portaging or lining the canoes past the downstream rapids. There was only one option that appeared open to us. There was one clear channel through the rapids downriver, about 30 to 40 feet out. The current in the channel was fast and the way led through a line of standing “haystacks” but it appeared to be very do-able once we got the canoes into the channel. The problem was that there was a line of large rocks standing in the river that blocked the way into the channel from the point that we were on.

To get a clear shot into the channel we would have to cross back over the river to the other side and, then, launch the canoes from a point that was a short ways upstream on the near shore of the conjoining tributary. Fortunately the river had widened and become shallower at this point – a kind of rocky delta had formed. Consequently, we were able to ford the river and pull the canoes on ropes to the opposite riverbank. From there it was easy work to line the canoes along the tributary’s shoreline to the point that we wanted to launch from.

We launched the canoes from there into the swift running channel, now open to us from this new vantage point. We shot past the line of rocks that had blocked us from the previous point and, soon, entered directly into the downstream line of “haystacks”.

Anyone who is not familiar with canoeing might not understand the term, “haystacks”. “Haystacks” are a phenomenon that occurs when two swiftly running currents of water collide laterally. The continuous collision of waters that occurs when this happens forces the abutting waters to rise in a vertical direction, thus, causing a series of standing waves of water (hence, haystacks) along the collision line. These standing waves are full of kinetic energy and, when one rides on the line of these waves, this energy is transferred to the vessel, in this case, the canoe, producing a fast, furious, and bumpy ride. It’s about the most fun you can have in a canoe, somewhat akin to riding a roller coaster, and it’s not as dangerous as it looks. The “secret” is to steer the canoe exactly down the centerline of the haystacks and to keep as low a center of gravity as possible within the canoe. The water does all the work. Anyway, Lori and I rode the haystacks and it was a fun ride. It was really a pretty good way to start the day. Unfortunately, as things turned out, it proved to be the high point event of the day.

We continued down the river pretty much as we had the day before, alternating between riding the canoes in the calm stretches and lining or portaging them around the sections where there were rapids. The difference was that on this day the weather wasn’t cooperating. It was cloudy, a cold wind was blowing into our faces, and there were occasional bouts of fine rain and mist. In addition, my brand new, rubberized kayaking gloves turned out to be duds. Both of them split at the seams and, consequently, when they got wet, they let the cold river water in, mostly around my fingers. My fingers remained cold, all that day.

Our Canoe Overturms: After several hours we approached a stretch of water downstream that looked tenuous. The guides in the lead canoe pulled into a convenient eddy along the right riverbank to reconnoiter and we all followed, lined up in the eddy behind them, awaiting the decision on how to proceed.

Going downstream there was an open channel in the middle of the river flowing between parallel, intermittent stretches of water that contained many exposed rocks, along both riverbanks. The current was flowing fast in the mid channel but the way looked clear, containing no apparent rocks or standing water. The plan we finalized on was for the guides to go first to establish a safe line through the channel. We could see a spit of land protruding into the river some 200 to 250 yards downstream just before the river turned to the right and disappeared around a bend. The goal was for the guides to reach that spit of land and wait with their canoe there. We were to follow, one canoe at a time, with each canoe waiting for the one before it to safely land at the spit before launching.

The guides launched their canoe and successfully maneuvered into the mid-channel. They made their way, unscathed, down the open channel to the targeted spit very quickly and beached their canoe. The current was very swift. With the guides watching on from downstream and the other two canoes remaining standing in the eddy, Lori and I were the next to launch.

We were not as successful as the guides had been. We were not strong enough paddlers to vector the nose of our canoe on a sharp enough angle soon enough to escape the stronger current near the shore. As we attempted to turn the canoe in the direction of midstream the current, instead, caught the edge of the rear of the canoe and started to turn it in the opposite direction of where we wanted to go. The nose of the canoe kept vectoring towards the shore. We could not paddle strongly enough, both of us using full sweep strokes on the right hand side to turn the canoe in the correct direction, hence; try as we might, we were rushing downstream, sideways directly towards the whitewater along the downstream riverbank. There is one thing you never want to do in river canoeing. Never, under any circumstance, enter a section of rapids with the canoe going sideways.

I made a quick decision. I began paddling with forward sweeps on the rear left side and asked Lori to stop paddling completely. The unrestrained force of the current combined with my sweeping paddle strokes quickly drove the nose of the canoe directly into the riverbank which, fortunately, at the point of impact, was composed of a comparatively soft, low cottonwood overhang. With the nose of the canoe stopped by the cottonwoods, the force of the current continued turning the rear of the canoe in the downstream direction. As it turned more fully, the canoe broke free of the bank and the result was that we were now riding free in the water, in line with the current, but the canoe was now going downstream, backwards.

I immediately switched sides and began to vigorously paddle from the rear right side with strong backward sweep strokes. With Lori in the front, simultaneously sweeping on the front left hand side, we were able to vector the nose of the canoe around, towards midstream but still pointed upstream. I, again, switched sides to the right side and kept paddling with forward, alternating "J" and power strokes, as required to control the turning steerage. The result was, as before, the force of the river current kept progressively turning the nose of the canoe in the downstream direction with very little added effort from us but, this time, the force of the current was helping us. With both of us paddling

with the forward strokes, we were, simultaneously, making progress toward our mid stream goal. The force of the current kept the canoe turning until we were correctly aligned, heading straight down stream in line with the current. From this condition we were able to attain full steerage control of the canoe and we headed it forward, as straight down the river as we chose to go.

We were just parallel to the outer edge of the rocky water section and there were still a couple of standing rocks ahead, close to our path. They proved to be no problem as I was able to simply stroke away from them towards mid-stream, thus, avoiding them. We quickly made our way into the middle of the open channel and I could see the way clear, apparently free of any more surface obstructions, all the way to the spit of land downstream where Dave N. and Matt were waiting in their beached canoe.

We headed the canoe straight down the middle of the channel, on as close to the line that the guides had taken as I could estimate. It was open water, with no sign of above water obstructions that we could see, all the way to the spit of land with the awaiting guides. I set the course and it shouldn't take us long to get there.

I felt good, inwardly kind of self satisfied about the good teamwork and judgment that Lori and I had displayed to successfully get us to this point in mid channel. Once again, we had overcome our 70+ year old paddling deficiencies by harnessing the forces inherent in the strength of the river's current to do the hard work of maneuvering the canoe when we couldn't do it on our own. However, such self congratulatory thoughts turned out to be very premature. In a very short time, probably no more than 20 to 30 seconds, the unthinkable happened – a disastrous event that, once again, would change the whole character of the trip!

All of a sudden there was a hard bump on the right that severely jarred the canoe. The canoe immediately started to high side, with the right side of the canoe rising progressively, and alarmingly quickly, above the water as the canoe continued its rapid forward motion downstream. I reacted instinctively by throwing my body to the highside, trying to bring it back to level with my body weight. It was to no avail. The tipping motion forced the left side of the canoe down, into the stream and we began to rapidly take on water. It didn't take long, almost instantly, and the canoe overturned, still moving rapidly forward in the fast downstream current. I was thrown upward and out to land belly first in the fast flowing water, just before the top of the canoe reached vertical, prior to overturning completely,

It was only a fleeting instant but, as I was being thrown overboard, I saw the rock that was causing the accident. It was a large rounded rock, about the size of a basketball. The top of the rock was submerged, perhaps 3 to 5 inches below the surface of the water. The rock had been completely hidden. I had seen no sign of it, or of a standing wave announcing its presence, before we hit it. In the fleeting instant that I watched, the hull of the canoe was sliding against it, causing an accelerating, peeling action against the hull's curvature, thus, progressively raising the canoe out of the water as the current pushed it past the rock.

It all happened very fast and the exact sequence of the events that happened during and immediately after the overturning of the canoe is blurry but fleeting, “snapshot” glimpses of events that happened in those brief seconds are still very vivid in my mind. When I surfaced the first time I caught a glimpse of Lori lying on her back in the water, floating in her life jacket, and hanging onto the overturned canoe with her right hand. There was a very determined look on her face and, incongruously, her hat was still on her head and she was clutching her canoe paddle in her left hand but - my worst fear – she and the canoe were moving away from me too rapidly for me to catch up. I was unable to help her in anyway! It was a very sinking feeling on my part.

Almost instantly; however, I had my own problems to deal with. The force of the current, almost immediately, pushed me face down into the water and I did a complete somersault underwater. It was about 2 ½ feet deep with a very rocky bottom. Try as I might I couldn't retain my footing. The current was too fast. I repeated the same performance 3 or 4 times. I'd lose my footing, tumble in the water, and arise, trying again to get my footing. Each time, before tumbling again, I'd catch a quick glimpse of the overturned canoe receding, ever further, down the middle of the river. Between my own problems of trying to right myself in the fast current, combined with watching/worrying about Lori disappearing down the river, it was a very trying time for me.

During one of my latter tumbles I saw Matt running/swimming out from the land spit to try to intercept the overturned canoe. On the next tumble I saw nothing – the canoe, Lori, Matt - they had all disappeared around the bend in the river, downstream from the spit of land.

At one point in my tumbles I rolled over, on purpose, and tried floating down the river, feet first, on my back. It worked and I started floating downriver. However, I found that I could not steer where I was going. The current took me wherever, it wanted to. I decided to go back to trying to get my footing.

During all this time tumbling in the river, incongruously, just as Lori had done, I was still holding onto my paddle and, my hat was still in place on my head. I had been trying to use the paddle as a brace against the current by jamming it into the rocks on the river bottom; however, the force of the current against the face of the paddle kept forcing it up into the downstream flow and I was unable to set it. Finally, however, after who knows how many tumbles in the water, I had the good sense to turn the paddle so that its face was in line with the current flow. It worked! With the lessened resistance against its face, I was able to jam the paddle into some rocks on the bottom and, using the paddle as a brace, I was finally able to attain my footing and stand up in the water without tumbling.

The shoreline was about 100 feet away and using the paddle as a brace/crutch I was able to work my way to it, stumbling over the rocky bottom and, at the same time, trying to step carefully, so as not to get a foot wedged between the rocks. When I got to the shoreline it was a bank about 1 to 2 feet high that was thickly covered with low cottonwood brush. Getting up on it would have been a very hard job and, once up on it, it would have been very difficult to walk the remaining 100 yards, or so, through it down to the spit of land where the guides' canoe was. The water along the shoreline was about boot

high and certain to overflow the tops of the boots in many spots as I progressed along the riverbank but I was soaking wet already. A little more water over my boot tops wouldn't mean anything. I walked in the water, clutching cottonwood branches for balance with one hand and still using the paddle as a crutch, with the other, and with water periodically overflowing my boots, I successfully made my way downriver, all the way to the spit of land.

When I got there, Dave N. and Matt's canoe was beached on the shore but it was empty. No one was there. I briefly considered taking the canoe downriver to see what was going on but I ditched that idea almost as soon as I had it. It didn't make sense to move it, paddling by myself, without knowing what was around the bend. I might be asking for more than I could handle. I looked upstream and saw the other canoes rapidly approaching - Kathy and Dave R. in front, followed by Doc and Travis. They had been waiting at the original spot in the eddy until they saw the right time to leave and help most effectively.

Kathy and Dave put in at the spit where I was standing, soaking wet. It was a bit tricky getting into the spit from the fast moving current but they were a good paddling team and they succeeded in landing with some efficient maneuvering and, no mishaps. Doc and Travis went whizzing by to see if they could help downstream. Later, Travis told someone in the group that they, too, had an incident striking a submerged rock. They did not overturn but, as it was told to me, they had a good scare.

Very shortly, Matt, with Lori in tow, appeared from the downstream bushes. Both were soaking wet and bedraggled looking but I was so happy to see Lori and, to see her unharmed, I don't when I had ever seen her looking better.



Lori & Bob – Soaking Wet after Canoe Tipping

They related what had happened. Matt was standing on the land spit waiting for us to come down. When he saw the canoe overturn, with Lori still clutching on, he immediately jumped into the river. The downstream current was very strong. He ran, stumbled, swam the 100 feet, or so to the canoe's path at midstream, just in time to grab onto it as it was passing. After getting there and hanging on, it took a moment for him to stabilize and get himself under control. In that time, with both he and Lori still hanging onto the upturned canoe, they were swept around the river bend, out of sight of the rest of the group. Matt took Lori's hand and asked her to let go of the canoe. At first, she did not want to. Not

because she was frightened but, rather, because the canoe contained all of our possessions (they were securely tied to the canoe in our “dry” bags) and she did not want to lose them. There was no other way unless she wanted to end up at some unknown place downriver. She reluctantly released her grip on the canoe and the current immediately separated them, with the canoe continuing its headlong rush downriver.

Matt held Lori by the back of her lifejacket and, with Lori floating on her back; he pulled her stumblingly to the shore. By this time they were quite a ways downriver. It was a difficult walk through the underbrush but they managed to make their way back upriver to the spit of land with no further untoward incidences. Matt, even though he was still soaking wet, was anxious to leave as soon as he was sure that Lori was safely in our hands. He disappeared back into the underbrush, heading downstream. He said that he wanted to see if he could track the overturned canoe.

For her part Lori said that she was fine and, basically, unhurt. She did say, though, at one point when she was being dragged by the canoe, the water became shallow and, consequently, her back was bumped continually against the rocks on the bottom of the riverbed. Her back still hurt from the rough contact but, at least, in the excitement of the moment, the pain was bearable.

So there we were, standing on the spit of land, both of us completely soaked to the skin and, strangely enough, we were still each holding our canoe paddle in one hand and each of us still had our hats on our heads. In addition to being soaked, the weather was chilly, the river water was cold, and there was a cold breeze blowing. Despite all of that I was not cold and, further, I had not been aware of being cold all through the whole experience, including the time that I spent immersed in the water. Later, Lori told me that she, also, had not been aware of the cold all through her experiences immersed in the river and, later, walking through the brush in her wet clothing. I guess it had to do with the adrenalin flowing through our bodies, caused by the excitement of the moment.

Now, however, with the excitement over, Lori began to shiver from the cold. It was at that point that Kathy and Dave R. took over. They both took their dry bags out of their canoe and started to pull out dry clothing. Kathy ordered Lori to strip and she, somewhat reluctantly did, right there on the river bank. She pulled her boots off first and they were full of water which she unceremoniously dumped out. It didn't take long and Kathy had Lori completely redressed in the clothes that she had taken from her dry bag. Lori was still cold, so Dave contributed a quilted vest and some men's rain gear. This appeared to do the trick and Lori began to slowly become more animated and lively.



Kathy and Dave R Sharing their Clothing



Lori in Borrowed Men's Clothing

At first, I was in a little better shape than Lori. I still was not feeling cold. However, when I took off my boots and emptied the water from them and put them back on, I began to feel the cold. Dave was very kind. He offered me much dry clothing from his bag. I was a bit bashful to take it, and in truth, I didn't need a lot of it. The "Ex Officio" clothing that I was wearing, in addition to being bug proof, also, was advertised as being quick drying as was my "Gore Tex" jacket. They were true to their advertising. My shirt, undershirt and jacket were almost dry. I took them off and laid them out on some bushes to continue drying. My pants were even drier so I left them on. Dave gave me a fleece sweater/shirt and I put that on. It worked. I started to warm up immediately. Also, he gave me a brand new pair of thick hiking socks. I took off my boots again and put them on. They also worked. Finally, I completed the outfit with a dry baseball cap from him. In less than an hour I was able to put the shirt and jacket back on over the fleece sweater and I became completely comfortable.



Bob - Drying Out



Drying Clothes on the River Bank

It was really nice, and completely unselfish, of Kathy and Dave to do this. The clothing they offered and we took, were the "clean clothes" that they would need, themselves, before the completion of the trip,

yet, they gave them to us without hesitation, literally, forced them on us. Kathy and Dave were the first to treat us so kindly and we did end up taking the most from them but, before this day was over, Lori and I would find that everyone else in the group, without exception, would makes similar gestures with offers of kindness and willingness to share their gear with us - gear that we needed, since, we had lost ours in the overturned canoe.

Dave N. returned and immediately started to set up the kitchen. Luckily, almost the entire kitchen gear and food supplies had been dispersed between the remaining three canoes and had not been lost. The only kitchen items stowed in our canoe had been the drinking cups and the snack bag (including the Snickers bars). It wasn't long before Dave N. made hot drinks (which we drank from bowls) and had started lunch. Matt, Doc, and Travis returned. They had hooked up with each other. Doc and Travis had climbed a high ridge that overlooked the river's path as it progressed to the other side of the ridge, 180 degrees around the downstream bend. They said they were in time to see the upturned canoe floating midstream in the current, with the tied on gear attached, pass around a further downstream bend in the river and disappear. We ate lunch and Dave N. announced that we would set up camp where we were.

Actually, it turned out to be a pretty good camp site. The spit of land projected out from a larger beach area that paralleled the river. This would be our kitchen area. Adjoining the beach, on the inland side, was a vertical bank, overgrown with vegetation, about 6 feet high. The bank bordered a basically level tussock swamp that went inland approx. 100 yards to the base of the lower of two ridges. This was the only bad feature. The tussocks were a tough walk, a walk that would have to be made each time we traveled back or forth between the kitchen and the tent areas.



Camp on the Ridge

The first ridge was about 35 to 40 feet higher than the river, projecting up from the tussock swamp. The ground extending back from the top of this first ridge was firm, green, "hilly flat", and mostly clear. It was interspersed, sporadically, with medium high cottonwood bushes. This firmer ground led further back, about another 150 yards, or so, gaining altitude slowly, but steadily, to the foot of the second ridge. The second ridge was much higher; probably about 250 feet above the river and the climb to its

top from the first ridge level was steep. Our campsite would be set up on the firm ground between the two ridges.

After the meal, Lori and I tarried at the kitchen site to regroup, drying some of our clothes, and helping Dave N. clean up from lunch. The rest of the group went up to the top of the first ridge, carrying the tents and gear across the tussock swamp to get there. Dave N. told us that he didn't think it would be possible to continue the trip in the canoes. The continuing river conditions were proving to be too dangerous; a condition which would be worsened by the fact that we would have to double up in the three remaining canoes.

Dave had checked his GPS and determined that we still had about 35 downstream miles to go to get to Killik Bend! That is at the confluence point between the Killik and the Colville rivers. There are waters at Killik Bend that are accessible by a float plane; in fact, these waters had been our originally designated put-in spot before the plans were changed to start on the upper Killik River, instead. From his GPS he had also estimated that we were only 10 miles from Lake Udrivik, the place where we had actually put in to begin the journey. These were the only two open water spots near enough to us to accommodate a float plane landing; hence, our only realistic choices as contact destinations with the outside world.

Dave N. said that he was thinking of leading us back to Lake Udrivik for a pick up by float plane. He had a SAT phone for communications. The plan would be to walk back to the lake carrying only the minimal gear we would need to survive the 10 mile journey. We would leave the rest of the gear, the canoes, etc. at this spot for pick up later by some, as yet, unknown means.

I immediately did not like this idea, for a variety of reasons. I looked at Lori and, while, she did not say anything, I knew she agreed with me; in fact, I could tell that she was appalled by the idea. To begin with, all of our gear was somewhere downriver in the overturned canoe, in all likelihood, soaking wet. If it stayed that way too long, everything would probably be ruined beyond repair. We wanted, at least, to make some effort to find it. The way back would be largely through continual tussock swamps where the walking, under best conditions, would be very tough. Both of us had lost our hiking shoes with the overturned canoe and we only had rubber boots to walk in. The boots were not designed for extended walking. Lori already had a blister on one foot from wearing hers. She also had a sore back from bumping in the river. All of our hiking clothes were also gone with the canoe. We were in Grizzly Bear country and, while the chance of an encounter might be remote, the chance of meeting one away from the river was not an attractive proposition. Strenuous hiking through tough, swampy terrain, in the middle of Grizzly country and with only limited supplies were definitely not on the agenda of the kind of trip we had signed on for! If there were a real emergency and we had to do it to survive would be one thing but there were viable alternatives – alternatives that were a lot more practical and possible.

Lori and I had done several successful whitewater rafting trips in the past. While we certainly were not any kind of experts on whitewater rafting, we both knew from actual whitewater experience on both the Colorado and the American Rivers that this river would be a comparatively tame challenge to

competent river guides in suitable rubber rafts. I immediately proposed to Dave that such rafts be flown in and that we continue the journey downriver in them, carrying the canoes in them in folded conditions. I could see that Lori liked the prospects of rafting the river. Dave N.; however, was very cool to the idea. He stated that he had no rafting experience and that he would not feel competent in taking us downriver in one. Anyway, he said he wanted to talk the situation over with the rest of the group before he made up his mind. We, then, all left for the camping area.

Camp No. 4 – on the Ridge: When Lori and I got to the campsite I discovered that our tent had already been put up for us by the group. Not only that but when I looked inside I discovered that Doc and Travis had left me some warm fleece long underwear, some warm socks and a fleece sweater. A little later Matt came over with a sleeping bag and inflatable mattress and gave them to Lori. He said they were extra, for just such an emergency (our sleeping gear had been packed in the lost canoe). Still later, Dave N. came over with an additional sleeping bag and a pad. He, also, said that they were extra, just for such an emergency. Lori and I used the bags that night and we rested comfortably. It wasn't until later, the next morning that I discovered that both men had lied when they said the bags were extra. The two of them did the best they could, lying on life preservers all night without sleeping bags and, I know, not sleeping very well, if at all. I felt bad. It was really generous of them, as were the kind gestures by everyone else.

It was still late afternoon. The rest of the group, including the guides, decided to hike to the top of the second ridge where, hopefully, they could see downriver, around the bend. Lori and I stayed in camp to regroup but, after about 1/2 hour I got restless and decided to follow them up the higher ridge. The way was steep but not overly long.

The Ptarmigan: About halfway up I was startled by a whirring sound, similar to a grouse taking off from cover. A big white bird about the size of a large duck flew out of a shrub to my right. He had prominent black tail feathers and he sounded continuous, gruff, protesting quacks as he flew away up the hill and around another bush. When I got to that bush I flushed him again. This time he was really squawking when he came out and he continued flying, squawking all the way, until he disappeared over the top of the ridge. Later, I described him to Matt who quickly identified him as a Ptarmigan. To prove it he called up a Ptarmigan call from his I-Phone software and it was, indeed, the same gruff, quacking call.

I met up with the group at a high point at the end of the ridge that overlooked the whole 180 degree bend in the river. We could see far down the river to the next bend where it disappeared again. The overturned canoe was no where in sight. It was the same bend that Doc and Travis had seen the canoe disappear around, previously.

The group was discussing our options for getting out. Kathy and Dave R. had already ruled out the idea of walking out. Just as for Lori and I, extended walking through the tussock swamps was not a viable option for them, either. Helicopters had been discussed and, in truth, the top of the ridge on which we were standing would have been ideal for a helicopter to land on. However, since, there was no real

emergency – no one was hurt and we had full provisions – insurance would not cover the costs of evacuation. It would have cost thousands of dollars per person to evacuate by helicopter.

Decision Time: I had previously mentioned the idea of rafting to Matt and he, also, thought it would be the best way. As it turned out, just before I arrived, Dave N. had SAT phoned to the Alaska Discovery home office and their first suggestion had been to drop in rafts. That was what the group was discussing when I arrived. We had quite a long discussion but, to make a long story short, our final consensus was to call back and request that two rafts, with two experienced river guides, be dropped in at Lake Udrivik and paddle downriver to pick us up.

To me this was good news/bad news! The good news was that we would be getting the rafts and this would probably mean that we would find and rescue the lost canoe with all of our gear. It also meant a much safer and faster trip downriver. The bad news was that Dave N. was also talking about a takeout at Killik Bend, hence, the end of our trip! Despite our previous bad luck, I was in no mood to quit the trip. We had not seen, or now, never would see, the Colville River or Lake Tashekpuk with all of their promises of large Caribou herds and large populations of bird and wildlife. That had been the whole purpose of the trip. The way I saw it we still had enough time (4 days) and provisions to make it down the Colville to Umiat. We originally had a scheduled air pickup there, anyway. The rafts would make for a safe journey with plenty of time and provide a good platform for taking photos. Hopefully, the wildlife would be as promised.

I made my pitch to the group. Doc and Travis seemed to be interested and Kathy and Dave R. were non-committal. I'm sure Matt would have happily gone along with it, but it didn't matter. Dave N. had made up his mind. It would be a takeout at Killik Bend. Dave N. made the call back to the home office and they agreed. The guides with rafts and extra sleeping bags would be flown in next day.

The plan was in motion and we all returned down the hill to our tents. It had been a really full, eventful day. Tomorrow would prove to be just as eventful and, more on the positive side.

June 19, The Rescue Begins: The weather was cooler and grayer the next morning with a cold wind blowing upstream from the north. I would guess that the temperature was in the low 50's but it felt colder at times when the wind blew a little harder. In some ways it was a good time. We had little to do while we waited for the plane and rafts to arrive. It was really the first day that we had no fixed schedule or necessary work to do around the camp or to be portaging our gear. Matt had scheduled a bird viewing trip for later in the day but, other than that, we had no schedule. It gave us a greater chance to socialize and intermingle with each other in a relaxed atmosphere than we had yet had on the trip up to that point.

As a group, we started to swap stories of past experiences. Doc was pre-eminent in these regards. He was a good story teller and told some great "ghost stories", stories that he had told his kids when they were young. He was at his best; however, when he related a series of stories from incidences that

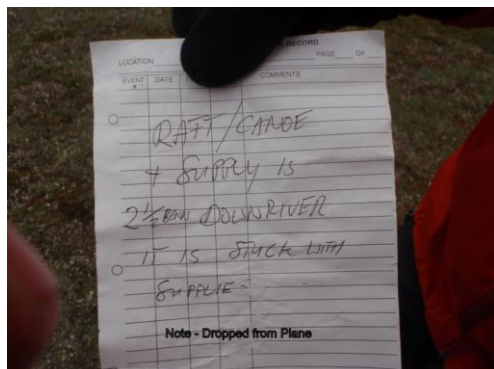
occurred during his many years of veterinary practice. There were stories about strange and/or neurotic pet owners; one in particular where he was persuaded into euthanizing a terminally ill dog in front of a group of a woman's female friends in order that they could "pay their last respects". As the process progressed, however, the group engaged in many strange rituals. They forced Doc to stretch out and time his euthanizing efforts to the pace of the rituals. It turned out that the group was a coven of practicing witches! In other stories the actions of the pets might be as strange as those of their owner.

Doc's style of storytelling, as well as, the stories he told, were very reminiscent of those written and told by the late James Herriot, the well known and popular Scottish Veterinarian/Animal Stories author. I'm a Herriot fan and have read most of his work. His longtime assistant was a young man named Tristan. Doc's trip mate's (his son) name is Travis. Mixed up in my mind, because of this close resemblance of Doc to Herriot, I found myself inadvertently calling Travis – Tristan. After several times calling him that I explained why to Travis. He didn't seem to mind and we laughed about it.

Message from Unknown Airplanes: We spent a good bit of the morning passing time, socializing in this manner, when we heard an airplane approaching from downstream – the opposite direction that "our" plane was expected from. It turned out to be two planes, one following the other. They were both smaller planes (they both could have been Beavers, I was not familiar enough with their design to know) and both were equipped with large "tundra landing wheels" instead of water landing pontoons. They spotted us and circled us a few times and, then, flew off, back downriver. They definitely were not the rescue planes we were expecting (to this day, I do not know who they were or how they knew enough to look for us where we were).

Shortly, one of the planes came back. We were all standing together at the kitchen site on the shore of the river except for Kathy and Dave R. They were up at the campsite on the first ridge. The plane circled low over the tents, dropped a small package, and, then, flew off downriver. That was the last we were to see of those planes. Dave R. retrieved the package and we all scrambled back, up and over the tundra swamp, to see what it was.

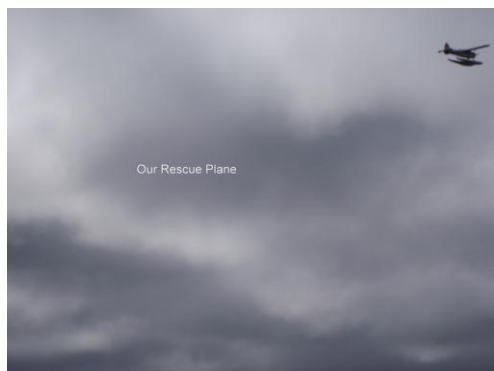
The package turned out to be a handwritten note tied around a small candy box to give it weight. By the time we reached him, Dave R. had read and digested the contents of the note. He looked crestfallen, sadly shaking his head, when we reached him. The note said, "RAFT/CANOE + SUPPLY IS 2 ½ BENDS DOWNRIVER – IT IS STUCK WITH SUPPLIES". We were all downcast after our first reading of the note.



Note Dropped from Airplane

However, after thinking about it, it didn't add up. Our rescue raft should have been coming from upriver, not downriver. There was no practical way that a raft could be manually rowed upriver in the fast currents of the Killik. Beyond that, there was no spot close enough downriver for the raft to have been landed and get to where it was in such a short amount of time. The nearest place downriver, practical for landing, was Killik Bend, the spot where we were heading, and that was about 35 miles away. We quickly figured out that the planes had actually spotted our lost canoe stuck downriver, not the rescue raft! All of the gear the canoe contained was packed inside the large, red "dry bags" we were using for that purpose. The bags were all tied inside but they could have been dislodged by the overturning action and be hanging outside the canoe, still tied on but floating along side, in the water. The bags could have easily been mistaken for "supplies". Hence, the note was really good news! Now we knew there was an excellent chance that we would be able to find the lost canoe and rescue our gear.

The Right Plane (With Guides) Arrives: About an hour, or so, later, our suppositions were confirmed when we heard the sound of another plane, this time coming from the correct direction, upstream. It turned out to be a larger, Otter model plane equipped with pontoons for water landing. It spotted us and circled a couple of times before turning back and disappearing upriver. We could see that there were at least two more people in the plane in addition to the pilot, all waving at us. There could be no doubt. It was our rescue plane.



Our Rescue Plane

Now it was just a waiting game. Eventually, we made and ate a meal of macaroni and cheese. Right after we finished the meal, a red rubber raft appeared from around the bend, upriver, with two occupants – one rowing in the center and, one in back, ruddering. Surprisingly, it was only about 5 ½ hours after we had seen the float plane disappear upriver that the raft made its appearance. They made their way downriver to the spit of land and, with a bit of exciting maneuvering caused by the swift current, they brought the raft in for a successful landing. The 10 mile trip downriver that had taken us a laborious 2 ½ days to complete had been successfully completed by the rafters in only about 5 hours on-river time! In addition, as it turned out, they did not have to do any portaging or lining of their craft. As Lori and I had correctly surmised, it was a river ideally made for rafting – not canoeing.



Chicago and Aaron Arrive

The two occupants that emerged from the raft proved to be very interesting people in addition to being very competent and professional, river guides. The “rower’s” name was Aaron. The man’s name in the back who was ruddering was known by his river nickname, “Chicago”. Both men were tall, strong and rugged looking and both looked to be in excellent physical shape. Aaron had a full black beard while Chicago was clean shaven. Each man looked, every inch, to be a river guide. They were both correctly, safely attired for white water guiding, in full body, red and black “dry suits”, and similarly colored, streamlined life jackets. Their suits and jackets were decked with the instruments of their trade (a hanging whistle, a sheathed knife, a pair of hanging rubber gloves, sun glasses, etc., all strategically and firmly attached in positions on the suits and jackets where they could be efficiently removed when needed.

Strange Coincidences: Later, we were all standing around in a group talking and getting to know each other. I mentioned, to no one in particular, that my 25 year old grandson, Cyrus, was also a river guide and that he would have enjoyed being there with us. At that, Aaron’s ears perked up and he asked me, “Do you mean Cyrus Luciano? He’s my best friend!” He was, indeed, Cyrus’s best friend. The two of them had river guided together on the American River for the previous two summers. Lori and I had actually, briefly met Aaron two years before at Cyrus’s college graduation and, also one summer when we had taken a family rafting tour down the American with Cyrus guiding. The thing that threw us off from recognizing Aaron immediately was his new (to us) black beard. As can be imagined we had quite

a few pleasing conversations with Aaron over the next few days about he and Cyrus and the many escapades that they had shared together over the years.

The coincidences that we shared with these young men did not stop there. Chicago approached me and said that he understood that Lori and I were from New Jersey. He asked me if I knew where the town of Oldwick, NJ, was. His wife had been brought up there. Oldwick is a village in the center of Tewksbury Township, NJ. Lori and I live in Tewksbury Township! It has been our home for the past 35 years. It turned out that, while we did not know his wife, who is many years younger than us, and even much younger than our children, we did know the family. Her aunt and uncle are members of Lamington Presbyterian Church, the church that we attend. Lori and her aunt had served on some of the same committees together and they had actually once been mates on a church retreat together, sharing many common moments!

We were in a place in the world that was a complete wilderness. There were no people, no towns, no roads, in fact, no signs of civilization, at all, for scores of miles in every direction. We were in America's outback and, for the 6 days that we would be there, we were destined to not any sign of mankind, whatsoever – not a dwelling, or a footprint, or a cigarette butt, or garbage, or anything – nothing! Yet, the first people we meet in this vast wilderness turn out to be these two young men, both of whom have meaningful ties to the lives of Lori and me! It can be a strange world, indeed. Chicago claimed that it was a pre-ordained fate that we should meet this way. I can't argue with him and that supposition.

Aaron and Chicago finished up the macaroni and cheese from supper (It was quite good. Dave N. had done a good job cooking it.). The guides made everything secure at the river site and we all moved to the campsite on the ridge. Chicago and Aaron set up their tent, Lori and I had the new sleeping bags that they had brought, and Matt and Dave N. had their own sleeping bags back. We all retired for the night.

June 20, A Long Day on the River: We were all up early the next morning. While we broke camp and packed the tents and personal gear, Dave N. was cooking breakfast, and Matt and the two new guides were breaking down and packing the canoes. After breakfast everyone pitched in and helped to feed the gear to the rafts. Aaron and Chicago did the actual stowing of everything into the canoes. While they were doing this they were simultaneously examining each item for its "seaworthiness" for the journey. Several times some of the gear had to be repacked by them, or under their watchful eyes, before it could be stowed in the rafts.

It was no mean feat to load all of the gear (including three folded down canoes) into the rafts and still leave room for the people. The rafts were only about 15 feet long, each, and we had about a ton of gear and there were 10 people. Aaron and Chicago did a good job. With all of the gear finally, highly stacked and tied down in the middle, each raft was finally ready for launching. Literally, they had provided a "hole" between the stowed gear for each person. While these spaces were minimal, they would prove

to be adequate, if not completely comfortable, and everyone managed to survive the ensuing journey without too much inconvenience.



The Loaded Rafts



Aaron's 10 Hour Row

Before entering the rafts Aaron gathered the group and gave a short presentation on what to expect and what would be required to safely react and comport ourselves during the journey. He, also, inspected each one of the group to make sure our lifejackets were on properly and tight enough, redoing and re-buckling them as proved necessary.

Aaron would be rowing the “oar raft”. He would sit in the middle of the raft on an attached seat and row and steer the vessel from that position. There were four passengers with him. Kathy and Dave R, each in one of the two front corners positions, were sitting on the outer inflated body of the raft, itself. While it was tight, Kathy managed to set up her camera with its long, extended lens and she took photos continually, throughout the journey. Lori and I sat in the rear, each on one of the outer two rear corners of the raft body. There was not much room and we were, each, somewhat uncomfortable in our ‘holes’ between the stowed gear but we managed to finish the journey with no lasting after effects. After all, we all did have a good view of the river and its shorelines and Aaron was doing all of the work.

The other raft, while similar in size and shape, was set up differently – as a “paddle raft”. There were four paddlers – two on each side - sitting on each of the sides of the outer raft body. Doc, Travis, Matt, and Dave N. were the side paddlers. Chicago was in the back with a paddle, serving as the rudder man. He also was the coxswain, in charge of steering the boat by commanding and coordinating the paddlers’ strokes. Typical commands from him might be: “right side - two forward strokes”, or, “all forward - four strokes”, etc. He would aid by ruddering or paddling in the proper direction, as might be required to set the desired direction or to miss some obstacle in the river.

We were in a fast current that was usually moving the rafts forward at a good rate so that most of the efforts of the oarsman and the paddlers were to steer the rafts not, necessarily, to give them forward momentum. However, there were many twists, turns, and obstacles, such as rocks, in the river and to maneuver properly among them in the fast currents could, many times, be very hard work, indeed.

We launched the rafts and headed downriver at about 9:30 AM. As we progressed downstream, the character of the river began to change. More and more side channels began progressively to appear as we moved downriver. Sometimes when we approached these channels it was not clear which was the main stream channel: hence, which one should we choose to enter. Since the current was flowing so swiftly there was very little time to make the choice of which was the proper channel to enter before the current would sweep us past the opening. A wrong choice and we could end up far downstream on a dead end channel with the only choices being a possible long portage or a towed, upstream “raft lining” situation.

We were beginning to enter the “braided river” section of the Killik – named this because the alternate channels “braid” back and forth among themselves as the river progresses downstream. According to the map there were some 35 miles of such braided channels that we would have to navigate, between us and our final destination at Killik Bend! In particular, the intensity of the braided “choices of channel openings” would increase dramatically in the final 10 miles before Killik Bend.

In the beginning the choices of channel openings that we approached were not too frequent. This was fortunate because we were still searching for our lost canoe. At one point Aaron passed a large side channel opening. He beached the raft, got out, and ran across the peninsula to a point on the other side where he could look down that channel. He came back and said that, as far as he could see there was no canoe in that channel.

We Find the lost Canoe: We went on in this fashion for a while and then, it happened. We sighted the lost canoe beached on a rocky shore on the left side of the river. When we got there we were able to beach next to the canoe. Somehow, or another, it had managed to right itself and it was sitting in about 6 inches of water. It was full of water. All of the gear appeared to be there, tied to the canoe. Most of the gear was lying in the water next to the canoe but some of it was still in the canoe, itself. The only large item that was missing was Lori’s back pack. That was the only piece that I had not tied in personally. Later we would also find the backpack about a quarter mile down river, caught on some rocks by the left shore. A few small items, such as the trowels we used to dig the latrines and a small water bottle of mine, were not tied in and we lost them. Essentially, however, we had recovered all of our lost possessions!



Lost Canoe – Found with Gear Attached

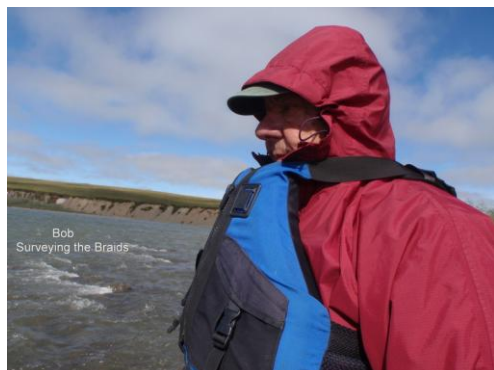
The canoe, itself, was not in good shape. A couple of the “u shaped cross-section ribs” were bent inward and the lengthwise aluminum tubing had popped out of position on the same side as the bent cross-sections. Many of the plastic clips had either popped open or been moved out of position. We probably could have patched and used her in a pinch but it would have been tenuous. I was glad we would not have to ride her home. Clearly, these foldable canoes, while serviceable for flat water, do not have the structural integrity for usage in white water.

Dave N. and Aaron immediately began the process of disassembling and packing up the canoe. With some others in the group I began untying the gear and taking it to the rafts. Chicago started to stow and tie the gear into the rafts in a way that we could get everything aboard and still accommodate the people – no mean feat; especially, since we had to carry more gear plus one more folded canoe.

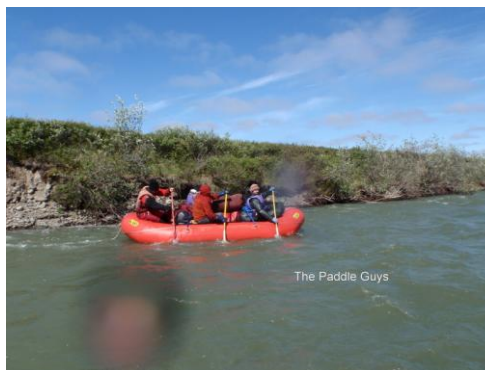
Everything was soaked. Our “dry bags” were ominously heavy, Lori’s much more so than mine. They both, obviously, were full of river water. I had a hard time lifting Lori’s because it was so heavy with retained water. We were naturally concerned about what was going on inside the bags but this was neither the time nor the place to open them and find out.

A Gravel Landscape: It didn’t take too long and everything was stowed into the rafts. It wasn’t pretty the way everything was packed, piled high and pieces hanging on, but the stowage was serviceable. Somehow Chicago had managed to get everything aboard and still provide enough room for the passengers. We proceeded down the river, continually approaching new channel opening choices as the braiding became more intense. The river bed became completely composed of “gravel” – except that this gravel was like none that I had ever seen before. When one thinks of gravel one pictures masses of tiny stones. These stones were not tiny. They averaged anywhere from 3 inches to 12 inches across and the larger sizes predominated. It was a complete, rugged gravel landscape. The river was interspersed with many islands, large and small, all composed of gravel. There were a few green bushes interspersed on the islands, and in the river bed, itself, but not many. It became increasingly more difficult to pick the right channels between the islands. Aaron told me a few of his “tricks” to find the deeper channels, such as, finding the channels close into vertical bluffs that line the river. Such channels tend to be

deeper. Mostly, however, I think that he just had good instincts, emanating from his years of experience that enabled him to make the invariably correct choices that he did.



Bob – Surveying the Braids

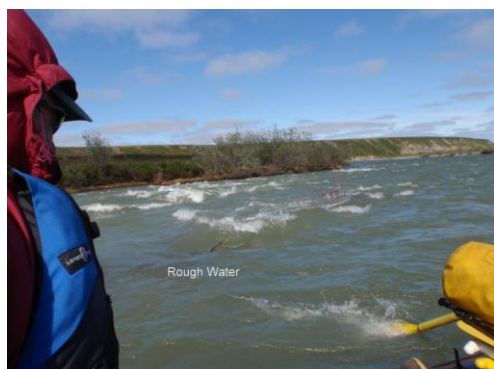


The Paddle guys – Chicago as Coxswain

As we approached many of the channel openings Aaron would stand up on his seat to get a good view and then, if there was enough time, he would communicate with Chicago in the other raft. They would sometimes speak to each other to communicate but, many times, they just used a system of hand signals. They made a good team, we were fortunate to have gotten them.

The on-river journey that day took 10 hours. During that time we encountered more channel opening choices than we could count but Aaron was so good at it that he never made a bad choice – a choice bad enough wherein everyone would have had to get out of the raft to drag it over an obstacle or shallow spot. A couple of times Aaron, himself, got out to drag the raft but never the whole group. We never came to a dead end, never came to a situation wherein we had to portage or line the rafts. Aaron did a wonderful job!

The scenery along the river was interesting but not spectacular. We had come on this journey for wildlife viewing that was supposed to be spectacular – herds of caribou, moose, grizzlies, wolves, flocks of nesting birds, etc. The truth is that the only animal sightings that we had happened in the first two days of the trip – one fox and one grizzly. From then on, including this long day, we never saw another wild animal except for some far off specs, once in a while, on some distant hillside.



Rough Water



Cliff – Rough Legged Hawk Sightings

Bird Sightings: We did see a good amount of birdlife and Mat was able to compile an impressive list of birds spotted along the way. However, the birdlife was not rampant. We probably have as many different types of birds back in my neck of the woods, in New Jersey – not the same species of birds but the variety and intensity of sightings is similar. We did run along the face of one bluff that had a good amount of birds flying along it. Matt identified them as “Rough Legged Hawks” and later we listened to their call on his I-Phone software.

Probably the viewing on the Coleville River and at Lake Tashekpuk would have been as extraordinary as advertised but we never did get to those places so we’ll never know. Certainly, the Killik turned out to be a big disappointment in these regards. One thing, Kathy took a lot of pictures through her long lens on this river journey and she was bound to have seen a lot more than me. I’ll have to check with her to get her impressions.



Spring Flowers on Gravel

Our Final Campsite: The time got to be after 7:00 PM. Aaron had been rowing for 10 hours. It was time to stop and make camp. We pulled in and made the camp on a site abutting the river. Because of the predominance of purely gravel landscapes it was hard to find a suitable campsite. The site we finally found was a small, bushy “field” that actually had grass and a few spring flowers growing in dirt, not pure gravel. The site was really not big enough for much separation of the kitchen and the tents but it

would have to do. There were not many choices. We were near Kikakpak Bluff, still in the middle of the most heavily braided section of the Killik, about 10 miles from our goal.

Dave N. and Matt setup the kitchen and began to prepare dinner. Lori started unpacking and drying out our recovered, wet gear. Everyone else, including me, started setting up their tents. After they finished with their own tents, Doc and Dave R. came over and helped me with my mine. After all of the tents were set up, I, along with Lori, continued to dry out our recovered wet gear. Dave R. set up a clothes line between two of the larger bushes for us. Soon the clothes line, along with all of the bushes surrounding our tents, was filled with spread out clothing and other wet personal gear for drying.

Soaked Gear: We had “double bagged” into smaller dry bags or “Zip Lock” plastic bags, many of the items that were, subsequently, packed into the larger dry bags supplied by the outfitter - the filled dry bags that we had recovered from the swamped canoe. Principally, the items not double bagged were: hiking shoes backpacks, sleeping bags and mattresses, and our wet gear over-clothing. These items were the wettest and they were hung out to dry first. The sleeping bags, in particular, were sopping wet and very heavy with soaked in river water.

My gear was in better shape than Lori's. All of my clothing had been sealed into smaller dry bags that I had purchased and packed in preparation for the trip. The seals on these bags had held and all of my clothing that had been packed into them was dry. Conversely, of the gear that had been double bagged and sealed solely into “Zip Lock” plastic bags, about ½ of these bags had leaked and the stuff inside such badly sealed bags was soaking wet. I lost some good stuff this way (my I-phone, my binoculars, a small hand crank flashlight, some novels, my book of Sudoku puzzles, and some writing materials). A good lesson – don't trust the seals on Zip Lock bags for anything important.

Lori hadn't been as fortunate as me. Virtually everything she owned was soaking wet. The seals on all of her inner dry bags had leaked. Hence, virtually every single item that she had brought on the trip had to be isolated and spread out to dry – right down to the money and cards in her wallet. One mattress was devoted, almost entirely, to drying the spread out monetary bills and cards. For these, and many other items, we had to wait until one side dried out and, then, turn everything over to let the other side dry. It's a good thing there wasn't a wind strong enough to blow these things about. The weather was damp, not ideal for drying; hence, we had to stay up late. She lost many personal items that had been ruined by the water. At this writing she is still making up a listing of them.



Bob's Backpack – Ruined Gear



Drying out Wet Gear

Everyone in camp went to bed long before us. We did not get into bed until 2:00 AM with all of the wet gear still spread out around the tent – on the ground and on the surrounding bushes. One good thing came out of it. Even though my new Olympus “Tough” camera had been soaked during my tumbling in the water it had lived up to its claim of being waterproof and it still worked fine. At midnight the date changed to June 21 – the day that summer officially begins – the summer solstice. I was able to take a photo, at the stroke of midnight, of the broad daylight conditions that prevailed with the sun just hiding behind a distant hill. You will never see that happen in New Jersey!

June 21- A Day full of Significant Happenings: Dave N. had told us that he wanted to get an early start; hence, he had said that wakeup would be at 6:30 AM. At 5:45 AM, however, he came to our tent and awoke us, 45 minutes earlier than everyone else. He said that he wanted Lori and me up early so that we could pack all the items outside the tent in order to not hold up the group departure. We did get up and begin to pack up. The problem was that most of the stuff was still damp to wet. It needed another 2 hours, or so, of daylight sun before it would be dry. Lori was upset. She had a lot of good items spread out and she is very fussy with her stuff. Most of it was too wet to pack correctly without taking a chance that it would be ruined. She's a trooper, though, and she started right in to comply.

I didn't have as much of a problem since most of my stuff was already packed into the smaller dry bags and it did not take me too long to pack them into a larger dry bag. I set about doing the common work: taking down and packing the tent, rolling up the mattresses, rolling up the still damp, recovered sleeping bags, rolling up the extra sleeping bags that we had actually slept in, packing everything into the larger dry bags, etc. The rest of the camp got up at the originally scheduled, later time and proceeded, similarly, to pack up. We all took a break and ate breakfast.

After breakfast everyone had nearly completed packing up, everyone, that is, except Lori. She had had a lot more to do than everyone else and, in addition, it was taking longer for her to do it because of the large amount of randomly spread out items that she, first had to organize and spend time smoothing/folding, before they could be packed. – and, of course, most of the items were still damp to wet.

A Little Tiff: Dave N. got a little impatient with her efforts and he came over to “help” her. He did not have a good way about him and much of his “help” was accompanied by a lecture about how the group was being held up by her “disorganization” and not being ready. I could see that Lori was becoming very upset so I went over and took Dave N. aside before she said anything.

He and I had some “words” to the effect that I wanted to know why he was rushing so much – so much so that he had upset my wife. After all, the trip still had another 4 to 5 scheduled days before it was supposed to be over. He said that we had to meet the planes at 12 noon. Apparently he had made this decision on timing quite unilaterally, without even considering the dilemma that Lori and I would be in about the premature packing of our soaked gear. There was absolutely no reason that the scheduled pickup could not have been arranged for 2:00 PM, or even for 3 or 4 days later, at Umiat, for that matter. It had been another completely arbitrary decision on Dave N.’s part – another decision made with not enough consideration for either the needs or the capabilities of his group or, for that matter, the original objectives of the trip.

Certainly, no one would have been hurt by delaying the pickup another 2 to 3 hours. I told him that and, probably not as nicely as I should have. He replied that, “..... once “an extraction” is arranged, it is very difficult to change things.” That was it! He walked away. We returned to the routine of preparing for departure and, soon, we were back on normal terms with each other. We didn’t mention the subject again.

Matt came over and started to help Lori while this was going on. He had a much better way about him with people than Dave N. and he and Lori shortly became a better team. Matt was a real help and I pitched in. The packing process was completed in a short time. The problem was, though, that many of the garments had to be packed while they were still wet. When we finally got back to the hotel in Fairbanks and were able to unpack them, many of them were in “not such good condition”. With a little more forethought the problem could have been largely avoided.



Lori's Wet Money



Matt and Lori – Preparing for the River

The Final River Run: We were on the river at 9:30 AM with about 8 – 10 miles to go to the pickup point at Killik Bend. This time, with a little more time available to do it, Aaron and Chicago did a really masterful job of loading the gear into the rafts. While there still wasn't a lot of room for each person among the vertically stacked gear, there was more than before for each person. For instance, they were able to accommodate Kathy's need for enough room to enable her photography with access for her long lens equipment. Later, Aaron confided to me that he had to sacrifice some of the room he would have ordinarily taken to row and steer the raft. However, he did it willingly and did not complain about it in anyway. Neither, did he complain about it later, when he confided it to me. It was just part of his job.

The day proceeded in the same manner as the day before. We were still traveling downstream between the graveled braids and the same needs for choosing the proper channel kept reoccurring as we approached the many channel entrances in our progress down the river. The day was clear and sunny and, if the wind were not blowing, the temperature would have probably been somewhere in the mid to high 50's; however, there was a cold north wind blowing in our faces, almost constantly as we proceeded downstream. It felt more like it was in the 40's.

Fortunately, I had recovered a pair of felt "hunting mittens" from our lost gear and they were working just fine as a replacement for the defective "kayaking" gloves to keep my hands warm. My hands had been really cold without them. Little did I know at that time that these mittens were destined to play an important role in a near life saving situation before this trip was over.

It was a pretty good trip down the river that day. Dave N.'s goody bag was still holding up well. We were still periodically passing it around between us and back and forth between the rafts. The Snickers bars were still holding out and so were the M&M's. Aaron and Chicago were doing a good job of picking our way through the Braids and every once in a while different species of birds were spotted along the way. For me, however, the highpoint of the day occurred when we were about halfway to the takeout point.

A Small Taste of what Could (Should) Have Been: We stopped for a "pee break" at a point along the river that bordered a level gravel field. The gravel extended about 100 feet back from the shore. Backing from there was a tundra field, heavily dotted with bushes that extended far inland toward the bluffs in the far background. The tundra field was the interesting part. The areas between the bushes were generously covered with bright, multi-colored wildflowers. There were blues, yellows, reds, oranges, violets, etc. The bushes were just becoming green. The grass was sparse and it too was just beginning to green but, altogether, there was enough green to provide a good backdrop for the multi-colors of the flowers. The overall effect was very striking – nature at her prettiest! To me, the proliferation and lushness of the growth was surprising this far north of the Arctic Circle. It was springtime in the North!



Spring Flowers on the Killik



Aaron – River Guide Extraordinaire!

We did not see the animals but they had been there - many wild animals. There were lots of animal scat and tracks in the semi- dry, muddy ground of the field – sharp, fresh tracks, most of which couldn't have been more than 24 hours old. The tracks were easily identifiable – moose (very large), caribou, wolves (more than one), bear (again, very large), and some smaller paws (possibly a mink or an otter).

Altogether, it was a beautiful, special place and I would have liked to have stayed longer, with the intentions of hiking and exploring inland. It was the type of place that I had been expecting the Colville River and Lake Tashekpuk to be. As it was, we were very close to the Colville at this point and most certainly within its environs. This place was almost certainly a good precursor of the conditions which actually existed along the Colville. We had missed a lot by not sticking to our original itinerary! The hasty, not well thought out decision to put in on the Killik instead of the Colville was proving to be a costly one – in more ways than one.

The Takeout Point – The Mis-adventures Continue: We arrived at the takeout point at 11:30 AM. It was a half hour until the scheduled time for the planes to arrive. Aaron and Chicago led us to the point where they understood that the planes were to land. It was a long lagoon, about 100 yards wide, nestled between two long gravel bars just off the main channel of the river. The water in the lagoon was flat, with no riffles, but there was still a brisk flowing current that ran the length of the lagoon. To get to the point that the guides understood the planes would be taking off from it would be necessary to do some upstream paddling across the current from the point where we could gain access to the Lagoon.



Lori at Killik Bend– Stretching her River Beaten Back!

Chicago and the paddle raft went first. They, including Chicago, had five people paddling and, with a lot of effort, were able to successfully make their way across to the appointed spot. We, in the oar raft, were next. As soon as we got into the current, Aaron was in trouble. As hard as he could row, the raft would do no more than stand still in the current. Aaron said that everyone in raft would have to paddle to help him.

The paddles were stowed in front of me in one large bundle. The bundle was securely taped together with a generous amount of duct tape. I had a very difficult time in separating them. Finally I was able to extricate two of them and I passed them forward to Kathy and Dave R. who immediately began to paddle, helping Aaron. It was still not enough. I began to laboriously peel the tape apart. Aaron, still rowing furiously all this time, saw my dilemma. He stopped rowing, unsheathed his knife, handed it to me, and immediately went back to rowing. The knife made short work of separating the paddles and Lori and I were soon paddling with the rest of our group.

With all of us pitching in we finally were able to make the forward progress that was needed. After a lot of hard work, we were able to join Chicago and his group at the designated point. After everyone was present, Dave N. checked his GPS for the bearings for the point that we were at. He called Aaron and Chicago aside and, probably, they had a joint conference over the SAT phone with the approaching pilot(s) to synchronize GPS co-ordinates. Shortly after, they came back together and announced that we were in the wrong spot for the pickup. Dave N. was doing all of the GPS readings and he pointed in the direction across the lagoon that we had just come from. "It's over there", he announced.

The Wrong Side: We all got back into the rafts and, with everyone paddling/rowing, we made the strenuous journey back across the swift current of the lagoon. When we got to the other side of the lagoon, on the opposite bar of gravel, the trio of guides walked off together to reconnoiter and locate the exact point where the planes would be landing. They soon came back and announced that the plane would be landing in the waters that bordered the other side of the bar that we had just landed on.



Doc – Arrival at Killik Bend



Arrival and Lunch at Killik Bend

We would have to portage all of the gear, plus the rafts, across the bar to that side. The bar was about 100 yards wide and the gravel was heavily laden with larger stones – in the order of 6 to 8 inches in diameter. It was hard walking through the stones, laden with gear, but everyone pitched in to make the necessary, multiple carries to transfer everything across, to the newly designated spot. Although it was tiring, with everyone pitching in the portage was accomplished in good time. Fortunately, there was a narrow “ditch” of water that crossed the gravel bar in the direction we were going. Aaron and Chicago half floated half carried the empty rafts across, utilizing this ditch. It saved a lot of heavy lifting. They were just about ready to start deflating the rafts when we heard the planes approaching from the south.

The planes, two of them, equipped with pontoons, came over and circled us, twice. They then lined up and landed – in the original lagoon that we had just left! They, then, proceeded to turn and taxi back and, shortly, beached themselves on the far side of the lagoon – in the exact spot that we had originally landed the rafts but recently vacated! Talk about being dismayed. We certainly were. All of that hard work and, now, we would have to do it all over again. Was this trip ever going to end on a positive note?

There was nothing to do but to again make the strenuous, multiple load portage of all of the gear back across the gravel bar to the shore of the original lagoon. After we had everything there, the job of intricately repacking everything back into the rafts in a manner that would, also, accommodate all of the humans, had to be done all over again. We all got into the rafts and did the hard paddling/rowing to get back across the swift waters of the lagoon, to the other side, where we had originally had started from!

The Plane Journey Home: When we got there we soon started to unload the gear from the rafts and to, subsequently, load it into the planes. One plane was smaller, a Beaver. It could only take four passengers with their personal gear and, of course, the pilot. The other plane was larger, an Otter. Although it would be tightly packed, it was big enough to take everyone else plus all of the remaining gear, including the deflated rafts. It was decided that Lori and I and Kathy and Dave R. would go in the Beaver. The rest would go in the Otter.



Killik Bend – 2nd Portage



Killik Bend – Bob, Lori, and Aaron

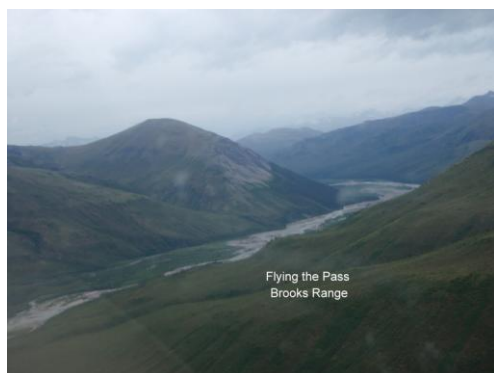
We formed a human chain to load the Otter. When we got done we moved over to start loading the Beaver. I noticed that Kathy and Dave R. were sitting on the bank above the areas where the planes were being loaded. I had not noticed them participating in the loading of the Otter nor, were they making any move to assist in loading the Beaver, even though half of that load was to be their personal gear. It was unusual. They had always been among the first to cheerfully pitch in. I didn't think much of it at the time – charging it up to their being tired. I knew I was tired from all the packing, repacking, hard paddling, and back and forth portaging of the gear. I felt real relief when the last bag was finally loaded into the Beaver.

Our pilot of the Beaver introduced himself. His name was Dean. He was a clean-shaven, young to middle aged, and pleasant looking man. He was informally dressed in jeans and an open collared shirt and he had an imperturbable, confident manner about him. Later, he told me that he had been making his living as a commercial pilot for the past 30 years and, in addition, that most of his time at present was spent piloting commercial jet aircraft. He asked who was the heaviest in our group. Obviously, I was. For this dubious attribute I was assigned the co-pilot seat, next to him. Lori, Kathy, and Dave R. sat three abreast in the seat behind us. We all settled into the airplane and, before taking off, he handed me a set of earphones which I put on so that he and I could converse during the flight.

We were the first to take off, immediately followed by the Otter with the rest of our group. The flight to Bettels Airport would take, roughly, an hour and a half. Just as the flight in had been, this flight was also spectacular. We headed immediately, over a flat, green tundra landscape, towards the Brooks Range of mountains to the south. I was able to watch our altimeter and, to my surprise, we were only flying at altitudes of 3,000 to 4,000 feet. We would maintain these altitudes throughout the trip even though there were peaks in the Brooks Range that exceeded it. As it turned out we actually flew through the mountain range rather than over it. We flew through the range within a mountain pass wherein, sometimes, the peaks to our sides were higher than we were.

As we approached closer to the range, the landscape below began to become progressively more dotted with darker green trees. We followed a river through the pass and the scenery below, and to each side

of us was magnificent. Below us, the contrasting greens of the forest and the tundra were interspersed with the blue waters of the river and, periodically, some adjacent lakes. To our sides the mountains were a dark green up to the tree line. Above them they were a craggy series of grey rock formations and peaks. Many of the mountains were snow capped with white, glacial fingers flowing down through the vertical clefts in their rocky sides. I have been to many of the world's greatest mountain ranges – the Himalayas, the Alps, the Rockies, etc., and while all of them are higher and grander than the Brooks Range, none of them are more rugged looking, or more scenic. The unending, continuous line of snow capped peaks and high rock formations of the Brooks Range provide a panorama of rugged beauty that is unique to its self. In its own unique way, it matches the majesty of any of the mountain ranges mentioned above.



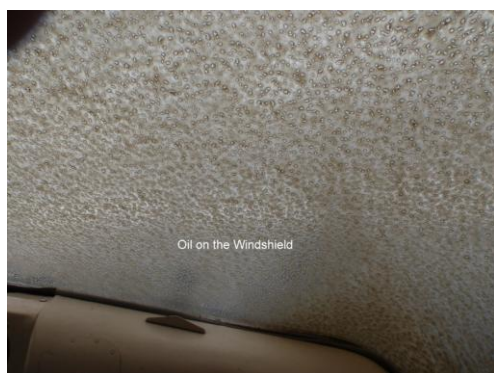
Flying through the Brooks Range Pass

Engine Failure – Flying Blind! We had been in the air an hour and fifteen minutes, or so, when Dean banked the plane to the left and he leaned over and said to me, “At last, we’re on the home stretch.” It was eerie! No sooner had he said that when a warning buzzer sounded and the motor started to cough and miss. Orange spots of liquid began to splatter on the windshield at an increasing rate. Soon there was an impenetrable coating of yellow/orange colored oil that covered the entire windshield. We could not see a thing! In addition, the motor was sputtering so much that it was providing little lift, if any, to the airplane. The plane was essentially gliding and we couldn’t see where we were going!

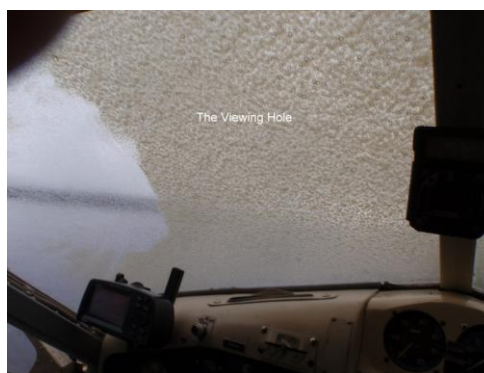
My immediate thoughts were of utter disbelief. This couldn’t be happening; especially, on top of all the adverse things that had happened on the trip, already. However, there wasn’t much time for stray thoughts of any kind. Dean was trying desperately to find a way to see where he was going. He wasn’t excited and his demeanor was very much under control but he was, at least momentarily, in a quandary.

He opened the door on his side of the plane and reached around to the windshield in front of him with his left hand, simultaneously flying the plane with his right, to try to wipe it clean with his bare hand. I saw him do that so I emulated him, opening my door and reaching around with my hand to wipe the windshield in front of me. These efforts were to no avail. All that happened was that our hands came back covered with oil and the windshield visibility remained impenetrable.

Lori had been watching from the back seat and she had been wearing a balaclava. She had the immediate presence of mind to take it off and pass it up to me to give to Dean as a fabric to wipe the windshield. I looked at it and saw that it was made from a somewhat slick, nonabsorbent polyester cloth and probably would only smear the oil, just as our hands had done. However, it gave me the idea of what to do. I still had the felt mittens in my jacket pockets. I took one out and handed it to Dean. He grabbed it, immediately put it on his left hand, and reached out the door and around to wipe the windshield with it. It worked! With one hand continuously wiping he managed to wipe clean and maintain a “hole” in the oil film that was clear enough to see through.



Oil Coating on the Windshield



The viewing Hole – Wiped with the Glove

It was really timely that he was able to regain his vision when he did. Simultaneously, wiping with one hand, flying the airplane with the other, and peering through the hole in the oil film to see his way, Dean managed to set and maintain the correct glide path for a landing at the Bettels lagoon. He set the plane down smoothly in the middle of the lagoon and we were safe, all still in good health!

Commentary: It was fortunate that our troubles hadn't begun until we were nearing the landing target – the amphibious plane lagoon at Bettels Airport. Still, it would be a forced glide in, under no power. If we missed there would be no way to power up and try again! There was only one shot at it and, if Dean had not regained his vision capabilities when he did, we might well have missed the correct path - under or over shooting the lagoon and crash landing the airplane.

Lori probably had the most practical reaction to the situation as it was actually happening. She was taking a video of the scenery and narrating into the camera about what she was seeing when the warning buzzer sounded. She immediately heard the engine begin to sputter and smelt the odor of the burning oil. Then the oil started to cover the windshield. It was obvious that we were in trouble and that there was a real danger of crashing. It had to be scarier for her than it was for me. I, at least, knew that we were beginning our final approach when it started and that our landing area was close. She didn't. For all she knew, we were miles from our destination and that a crash landing into the river below might be necessary. Yet, she didn't panic. She just kept on recording into the camera giving, in effect, a last will and testament to our family. She calmly described her love for me and her family and

that she had had a good, happy life. She then went on to describe where our important papers were stored and gave detailed instructions of where her jewelry was hidden in the house. The event that caused her to stop the narrative was when she saw Dean trying to wipe the windshield with his hand. She immediately thought of her balaclava, took it off, and handed it to me. After that she was just absorbed in the flow of events that, ultimately, wended up with our safe landing. I was very proud of her. At no time did she panic.

My reactions were quite different. At no time during the entire sequence did the thought enter my mind that we might crash. I quickly became absorbed in Dean's efforts to take charge of the situation and to clean the windshield so that he could see to land. I knew we were on our final approach and that our destination was near. I became totally absorbed in his every action and, despite the fact that I do not know anything about flying an airplane, I found myself viewing his performance as a coach would - critiquing and approving his actions as they occurred as being just the right moves. His on the spot adaptations in cleaning the windshield, the dexterity he displayed in lining up the plane and maintaining the glide path, all one handed, his overall cool and measured demeanor - these were all things that I was consciously thinking about and measuring as they were happening. And, I was pleased that I was able to help in some small way by providing the mitten that played such an important part in the successful landing. After it was all over, I felt a real sense of exhilaration. We had made it and no was hurt! Even though I didn't do much, I felt that I had helped. It had proved to be a capital adventure!

Getting to Shore: Our troubles were not quite over, yet. We were stranded in the middle of the lagoon with no power to taxi anywhere. As soon as we landed Dean opened his door and the plane immediately filled up with noxious, burning oil smoke. He said, with authority, "Open your doors, take off your seat belts, and, if you see fire, jump in the water!" Fortunately, no fire developed but we were still stranded, sitting in the stalled Beaver in the middle of the lagoon. As it turned out, we were forced to sit there in the middle of the lagoon for a short while before the plane could be towed into the dock.

There was a small metal dinghy at the dock with an outboard motor. The people at the dock were trying to utilize it to come out and tow us in but they couldn't get the motor started. The Otter had landed just behind us. Aaron and Chicago disembarked and they saw what was happening. They each grabbed a paddle from the gear packed in the Otter and ran over to the dinghy. They paddled out in the dinghy and succeeded in towing us to the dock.



Aaron and Chicago – To the Rescue



The Oil Covered Plane

When we reached the dock we still could not disembark immediately. The ladder steps leading down from the plane were completely covered with a coating of black, slippery oil, as was the entire side of the airplane. People came with rags and wiped the way clear for us to disembark. We (Lori, Kathy, Dave R., and me) ended up safely on the dock and the people continued to wipe the plane clean enough to allow safe access for unloading the gear.



Wiping the Plane Clean of Oil

I started to move forward to help with the unloading but Dave R. put a restraining hand on my shoulder and said, “Let them do it, its part of their job - it isn’t necessary that people of our age do it”. I was a little perplexed by this but I complied and did not move to assist with the unloading. There were enough people helping and, indeed, it did not take long before the plane was unloaded.

I walked to the front of the plane. Dean was there with another man (Whom I assumed was a mechanic.). There was a good sized dent protruding out from the sheet metal of the engine cowling cover on the co-pilot side of the airplane. A cylinder top had blown off the engine and into the cowling. I heard the mechanic tell Dean that the engine had been recently rebuilt and that only 25 hours of service had been recorded since the rebuilding.

At the landing strip a plane was waiting to take us back to Fairbanks. The plane had been especially chartered for us by the outfitter, Alaska Discovery. There was only one problem, the plane was only capable of taking 9 passengers and we were 10. Matt volunteered to stay. The plan was for him to take the regularly scheduled flight to Fairbanks the next day and he was to re-meet with us then. All of the gear was packed into the plane, this time by airport personnel. I stopped in the terminal to purchase a map of the Killik. We all boarded the plane and took off for Fairbanks.



Safely back in Fairbanks



Fresh Laundry at the Hotel

The river adventure was over!

The Beginning Days of the Trip:

Getting There: We flew into Anchorage on June 12, 2009, stayed overnight at the Copper Whale Inn, had a good breakfast there, and boarded the train, the Denali Star, for Fairbanks the next morning, June 13. The most remarkable thing about our first night in Alaska was that it didn't get dark at night (It didn't get dark for the entire time we were in Alaska, until July 1)! We were only one week away from the summer solstice, an event that we were looking forward to during our trip's sojourn north of the Arctic Circle.

We rode in the "Gold Star" car (upper level with panoramic viewing) on the train for the 12 hour ride. The ride was expensive and long but it was worth it. The dining car was in the car ahead of us and the food they served was good. I had the pot roast lunch and it was excellent. There was also a refreshment bar in our car that was continuously open during the entire trip, complete with porter service, and we had cold or hot drinks, either alcoholic or non alcoholic, all the way, served per our desires.

This section of Alaska is big, very green at this time of year, very sparsely populated, and very scenic for the entire way. The mountain scenery around Denali, in particular, is spectacular and the observation car proved to be a good way to see it. Although we did not personally see all of them, during the

journey, seven different moose, one bear, some trumpeter swans, and a variety of lesser birds and wildlife were spotted by various people on the train. We arrived in Fairbanks about 8:30 PM, tired from the long, 12 hour journey but glad we had done it. We transferred to our hotel, the Bridgewater Inn, scheduled to meet the group the next day, June 14.

Fairbanks: During the morning and afternoon of the 14th, after a good, hot buffet breakfast at the Bridgewater, Lori and I did a walking exploration of the downtown area of Fairbanks that surrounds the hotel. Fairbanks is the second largest city in Alaska; yet, it has a population of only about 80,000 people. Despite its small size it's a nice city, complete with the "expected amenities" of a city that is a major hub for its large surrounding area. It is a clean city – not much graffiti and very little litter in the streets.

The city is unique in several ways. It sits on the Chena River and its original claim to fame and reason for being is that it was a gold rush city during the late 1800's. This mining background permeates most of the major attractions in the downtown area. There is a nice riverfront park along the Chena River that has a series of engraved metal signs and pictorials denoting that mining past, there is a good mining museum just around the corner from the hotel, many of the dining establishments and businesses have mining inspired names, a great many of the souvenirs in the shops depict a mining motif, etc.

The other two aspects, that I think, make the city unique and different from other U.S. cities are, first, the many references and establishments in the city pertaining to its Native American population and, second, the large amount of attention and exhibits devoted to the sled dog sport of "mushing". All throughout the downtown area these two cultural influences can be seen.

Native people could be seen throughout the city and there were many native run establishments. Culturally, the city appeared to be well integrated with, and proud to show off, these indigenous people and their traditional ways of living. The Native Americans were a people who were very much in tune with nature and, in particular, to the cycles of nature – indeed, their whole history is one of dependence on the successful hunting/fishing of wildlife for their very subsistence. There were many exhibits, statues, engraved nameplates, etc., spotted around the city memorializing these ways. We were impressed by the excellent carvings and crafts of these people that were on display in many venues around the city. We also met some of the artisans. The ones that we met were clean, neat, and well spoken people. Without an exception, they were fiercely proud of their native background.

Unfortunately, in counterpoint to these positive images of the Indian culture, there were also some negative ones. As we walked around the city that afternoon we encountered, several times, groups of people, obviously Native Americans, standing idle together, passing around and taking swigs from bottles in brown paper bags. As we walked through the different neighborhoods, the places where we saw Native Americans in the yards tended to be poorer and not as well kept, many times with a lot of junk in the yard. This is not meant as a put down of these people in any way but a definite ambivalence does exist. The race relationships in the city still have a ways to go but, from what I could tell in my brief

visit, the city is working on it. In any event, in my estimation, the positive attributes that we saw and experienced far outweighed the negative ones – but, the negative aspects do exist.

There was a live mushing exhibit going on at the Riverfront Park. We talked with the young male musher who “starred” in this exhibit. He was anxious to relate his often grueling experiences in the very arduous Yukon Quest Race across central Alaska – 1,000 miles, from the sea to the Yukon. There is one section of the race that is 200 miles long, over rough country, that must be traversed at sub zero temperatures, without a rest stop. This race is reputed to be much more arduous and demanding than the more famous Iditarod Race. There was, also, a live sled dog with her pups at the exhibit. They were cute, still nursing, and Lori got a big kick out of holding them.

We walked to a local sporting goods store named “Big Ray’s” and bought our Alaskan fishing licenses along with some last minute small gear for the trip and, then, had a good lunch at the local Marriott Hotel dining room. We then returned to the hotel to meet the rest of our group at 6:00 PM.

