

# Important Information About the Alaska River Logs

These narratives about trips on Alaska rivers are valuable even decades after they were written. However, we recommend that you to keep the following in mind as you read.

**First, a word of warning:** use these river logs as one source of information that you will supplement with more. Alaska rivers can be very dangerous because of their remoteness, the climate, their sources, and other factors. Bring adequate and proper clothing, equipment, and food. File a "float plan" with someone who can call for help if you do not return on time. Take a satellite phone or other communications tool if at all possible (but not usually a cell phone because of their limited coverage in Alaska). You should plan carefully for a safe and pleasant trip.

**Second, note also that land status information contained in these documents may no longer be accurate.** These logs were compiled long before massive land transfers of unreserved public land to restrictive public ownership or private ownership. River users should be careful to follow federal or state regulations where appropriate, and to avoid trespassing on private land. [Here is some additional information Alaska native landowners.](#) You can obtain information about access on public lands from the [Alaska Public Lands Information Center.](#)

**Third, be sure to also check current fishing or hunting regulations, as what was legal decades ago may not be legal today.** You can obtain information about state fishing and hunting regulations from the [Alaska Department of Fish and Game website.](#) More restrictive federal regulations may apply on certain federal lands.

**Finally, there may be errors.** We are working to make as much of this material as possible searchable by adding a text layer to the original image-only PDF files using a text capture process. This process is ongoing. Where possible, we have also converted these to HTML files. Please note that while we have corrected obvious errors generated during these processes, errors may still remain. There may also be errors in the original material.

# Memorandum

TO : Files

DATE: SEP 15 1976

FROM : Pat Pourchot

SUBJECT: Field Inspection of Mulchatna River, July 8-14, 1976

As part of BOR's technical assistance to the National Park Service in evaluating river-related resources within proposed NPS areas, an interagency field inspection of the Mulchatna River was made. The headwater lake, Turquoise Lake, and the first 14 miles of the river are currently proposed for inclusion in the Lake Clark National Park; the upper 95 miles to the Chilikadrotna confluence are included in the NPS Lake Clark "Area of Ecological Concern," although most of the upper Mulchatna is classified as lands where state selections are pending. Most of the middle and lower Mulchatna is included in state patented lands or where state selections have been tentatively approved for patent.

Participating in the inspection were:

Rich Gordon - NPS, Alaska Task Force (Anchorage)  
Bob Baker - BLM , Anchorage District Office  
Richard Russell - ADF&G, King Salmon  
Pat Pourchot - BOR, Anchorage

Two 12-foot Avon Redshank rafts were used for the river inspection.

## July 8

Morning clear, sunny. After light shower in afternoon, again clear in evening with very light breeze. Seven-twenty p.m., air 67oF; river water 56oF.

Although I had originally intended to float from Turquoise Lake, on an earlier overflight we had found the 22 miles of water above the Bonanza Hills to be too shallow and rocky to descend without undue time, energy, and raft patching expenditure. The rapids in the narrow canyon through the Bonanza Hills looked rocky and tight, but runnable by raft.



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However, there is no suitable put-in in this area. Therefore, for float-plane access there remained a small lake located about 1/2 mile north of the river about seven miles below the Bonanza Hills Canyon or two lakes with outlets entering the Mulchatna about 13 miles below the first lake or about 42 miles below Turquoise Lake.

Because the uppermost lake would mean a 1/2 mile long brushy portage, because the 13 miles of river below this lake looked slow, meandering and uninteresting, and because we were somewhat constrained by time, I decided to put-in on the unnamed lake in section 29 of T. 9 N., R. 31 W., and float down the 1/2 mile long outlet to the Mulchatna. However, as Rick Gordon, Bob Baker and I flew in that morning, we observed two moose feeding in the lake-one standing leg deep in the middle. Although a single-engine float plane might be able to land there, our OAS goose could not. We therefore landed in the larger adjacent lake in Section 28 near its outlet.

After dropping us off the pilot went back down the Mulchatna to pick up the rest of the party which had just floated the Chilikadrotna (where I had just been), take them to Iliamna, pick up Rich Russell and bring him back to our put-in.

While we were waiting for Rich we inflated rafts and lined and dragged them down the first 300 yards of the small outlet stream. The stream was 4-8' wide and several inches deep with small rocks. We cleared several logs out of the channel and were able to bring both rafts down to "navigable" water in about 45 minutes.

Rich arrived at 1:30 p.m., and after lunch, we started down the outlet stream @ 2:15 p.m. After going through several connected marsh ponds, another small stream joins the outlet stream and becomes a very nice intimate creek, a lot like a small Swanson River - five yards wide, 18" deep, very slow moving, with alder, grass banks. With steady, moderate paddling we descended the 2 1/2 mile stream in about 1 1/2 hours, arriving at the Mulchatna at 3:45 p.m.

The outlet stream was an excellent place to see wildlife and we slipped around corners twice to see cow moose standing in the middle of the creek - luckily they moved. The other raft also saw a cow and calf moose. Along outlet we saw pintail and three young, female mallard and young, flycatcher, lesser yellowlegs, snipe, loon, red-poll, white-crowned sparrow, fox sparrow, thrushes, robin, peewee and other birds.

Just above the Mulchatna, Rich G. and I hiked up a small knoll and looked around-beautiful views of surrounding lowlands. Forest broken by many grassy marshes and by recent fire around our put-in lake.

We camped across from the outlet stream confluence about 4:30 pm. Rich R. saw porcupine, two beaver, and red squirrel, and caribou tracks on gravel bar while fishing around camp. Fishing very slow with only one grayling caught in over hour of fishing - saw two king salmon roll in Mulchatna. In outlet stream we saw small pike, grayling, round whitefish.

Mulchatna in front of camp 20 yards wide, **2-4'** deep, three mph current, visibility 3-3 1/2' deep, jade green coloration.

Bugs thick at camp. Open spruce forest back from river with large moss-lichey hummocks and labrador tea and dwarf birch. Very few poplar along river, mostly white spruce, alder, and willow and tall grasses. Larger spruce along river **36"**, **46"**, and **49"** circumference at breast height. Spruce back from river much small (**4-8"** diameter), could be black spruce.

Three white wall tents pitched along western edge of put-in lake - looked like guide camp.

### July 9

Beautiful day. Sunny, light breeze. Seven-twenty a.m., air 60°F, water 49° 3:45 p.m., air 74°, water 56°, 9:15 pm., air 63°, water 59°

Left camp 9:30 a.m., arrived lunch 12:30 p.m., and took hike, arrived new camp 5:20 p.m. Traveled about 10 miles in about 3 1/2-4 hours on water; easy to moderate paddling.

From lunch stop at northern most point from first camp we hiked up adjacent hill to about 2000-foot level (from 1150 at river). Trip about one hour up, 1/2 hour at top, 45 minutes down, roundtrip 2 1/2 miles. After skirting a small low lying marshy area near river and a short section of woods at base of hill, all easy alpine tundra hiking. Beautiful view from top—could see put-in lake, Half-cabin Lake, Mulchatna river up to Bonanza Hills, south end of Whitefish Lake and Alaska Range to northeast. On top, found couple of grassy, soft patches on ridge tops - probably old raptor nests.

River slow, meandering, peaceful. Easy Class I. 20-25 yards wide, average 4' deep with many deeper holes over 6'. Visibility around 3 1/2 feet. Overnight rose 2" but looks like recently dropped about one foot. Two-three mph current. Bottom gravelly and silty.

Saw female harlequin, merganser traveling together, 10 adult and 17 young white-fronted geese, red-throated loon, and mink. We got very close to young cow moose along river; also observed two different pair osprey and active nests in spruce tree tops adjacent river. Also saw rough-legged hawk, red-tailed hawk. Bear tracks and lots of beaver sign around new camp.

Smaller birds observed included northern shrike, yellowlegs, myrtle warbler, spotted sandpiper, ruby-crowned kinglet, red-poll, and water thrush (see attached bird list by Rich Gordon).

Rich R. had no luck fishing at new camp with flies.

Still mostly white spruce and alder along river. Occasional open black spruce-tundra. On hike saw Kenai paper birch and aspen on hillside. On hike lots of prickly rose, cloud berries, bearberries, labrador tea, dwarf birch, harebell, bunch berries.

Campsites plentiful on bars at bends but dried silt rather than sand on top of gravel. Spaded up with canoe paddle makes good bed.

Bugs again thick at camp although moderate on river.

July 10

Sunny, beautiful day - high in 70's; **8:20** a.m., air 57°F, -water 53°; 7:15 p.m., air 70°, water 62°.

Left camp 10:00 a.m., arrived new camp 5:30 pm. Traveled 17 miles in about five hours on water; easy to moderate paddling.

First eight miles from camp slow, meandering, glassy water, 2 mph current, deep 5-6' and over. Then one mile of Class I rapids beginning as river is flanked by small bluffs in section 13 T. 8 N., R. 33 W. Constricted channel with glacial erratics and bedrock ledges - easily navigated. One mile into the rapids the river swings southward after a large bend in Section 13, cuts through a ridge with a 2-3' drop in the river. Bedrock is exposed here in several small rocky ledge drops stretching across most of the river. On the west side is one large chute obstructed on one side by a huge boulder. The only real passage is through one side of the chute-Class III Both rafts got through the one fairly small, safe slot on edge of huge haystack below boulder obstruction. One raft took on several gallons of water.

Below this major rapid is another mile of swifter, Class I whitewater with easily avoided rocks in channel. Below whitewater, river somewhat swifter than before but otherwise very similar to above. At new camp 25-30 yards wide, 3-4' deep, 3-4 mph current. Through and below rapids bottom quite different with baseball sized rocks and more gravel as opposed to silts.

Several nice views of hills to north and west today. Rapids area with 50' bluffs and ridges lining river very scenic.

In rapids section some birch,, couple balsam poplar. Below bluff area more willow along banks but still mostly alder, spruce. Also wild iris, siberian asters, jacobls ladder, wild geranium, dwarf fireweed, shrubby cinquefoil.

In rapids area saw rare race of white great horned owls, Wapacuthu horned owls. Also today saw cliff swallows, loon, mergansers, three beaver. Heard two moose in brush. Saw otter, wolf, bear, moose tracks along river.

Four king salmon seen. One 15" grayling caught at new camp after hour of fishing. Bugs bad at camp. Lots of campsites on bars, but bars 1 to 2 miles apart.

### July 11

Rain during night. Partly cloudy all day, light upriver wind, high near 70". Nine p.m., air 61°F, water 60°.

Left camp 9:30 a.m., arrived new camp 5:30 p.m., about two miles above Chilikadrotna. Traveled 21 miles in roughly 5 1/2 hours on water, easy to moderate paddling.

River consisted of long 2-3 mph pools broken by shorter 3-4 mph riffles. Pools 5-6 + feet deep, riffles 1-3" deep. Thirty yards wide, fewer gravel bars. Bottom and bars mostly baseball to softball sized rocks. Visibility 3-4 feet. Big Bonanza Creek confluence just a slough with no noticeable current.

Saw couple birch along river, more willow than previously, still mostly alder and spruce (black and white). Lots of marshy, grassy areas adjacent river. Campsites not plentiful but no problem.

In morning saw pair of red-tailed (or harlan) hawks and nest with at least one young - nest in top boughs of trees, not on tip-top like osprey. Just downstream saw another similar nest though inactive. Saw lone osprey, single red-tailed and possibly nest, young mottled bald eagle. At new camp another red-tailed hawk and active nest. Also red-throated loons and widgeon.

Bull moose came out on river bar at new camp. Saw mink along river, lots of beaver lodges. Saw several chum salmon, also whitefish, grayling in back channel. At new camp Rich R. caught three rainbow trout, 15", 11", and 18". Fifteen incher had young bird, & sculpin in stomach (which in turn had a smaller sculpin in its stomach which, in turn, had a stone fly in it).

Bugs bad before breeze came up in evening. Some views of mountains to west from river. Wolf, bear, moose, lynx tracks on bars.

In Big Bonanza Creek area saw white pole, small willow shelter probably Native allotment.

### July 12

Rained hard all night. Partly sunny, moderate upriver wind in afternoon. Seven fifteen p.m., air 55°, water 57°. Left camp 9:30 a.m., arrived new camp 4:30 p.m. Traveled nine miles in about 2 1/2 hours on water, mostly floating.

Just as we reached Chilikadrotna confluence, Barry and Lona Santana reached Mulchatna from the Chilikadrotna. They had left Twin Lakes two days before, and despite a couple separate incidents with faulty rowing frame and a sweeper which left Barry with shorter front teeth and a bump on his nose, had had good time. They reported catching lake trout in lower Twin Lake and seeing several caribou along river. They flew in with Dennis Harms from Iliamna and will fly out at Koktuli River confluence.

About four miles below Chilikadrotna we climbed small hill 1/2 mile north of river - elevation 1170. Very scenic, round, tundra-covered knob with great views up and down Mulchatna. At the top we saw and stalked a large bull moose with velvet antlers to within good camera range. Also saw cow and calf at old camp in morning and another moose just below Chilikadrotna.

First big poplar below Chilikadrotna. Fishing again slow - Rich R. fished 1 1/2 hours with flies in evening and caught one 11" rainbow trout. Saw two bald eagles and one juvenile.

Mulchatna below Chilikadrotna much different character: swifter (5-6 mph), twice as big, more braided, many more log pile-ups, snags, and sweepers (no problem avoiding because of river size).

### July 13

Rain last night. Overcast most of day, clearing in evening, light to moderate upriver wind, in 50's.

Left camp 9:30 a.m., arrived take-out camp at 3:30 p.m. Traveled 18 miles in about four hours of light to no paddling.

Saw nesting pair of osprey and nesting pair of bald eagles. Two porcupines came down bank across from take-out camp in evening. Beaver active in slough next to take-out camp after we went to bed. Bear crossed slough during night. (On a trip down Chilikadrotna August 20 we saw beaver and bull caribou here).

Fishing again very slow with only one 15" grayling caught. (On later Chilikadrotna trip fishing in this section of Mulchatna much better with large rainbow (18"), Dolly varden (18-21"), grayling, and spawning red salmon caught.)

Saw barrel stove and some tent frame poles along river. Also flagging on bar adjacent long straight stretch of river about 10 miles above take-out apparently used as float plane landing area. (We found cut later used by Dennis Harms in super cub - but that a few sweepers over channel made landings by larger planes unsafe according to Glen VanValin, Lake Clark). Also saw Native allotment tag on tree during day.

Take-out camp on gravel bar on upstream north side of long slightly curved stretch of river in Section 34, R. 4 N., R., 38 W., flanked all along the south bank by a large ridge/bluff. It's 1/2 north of lake marked elevation 690 and two miles north of 2979 mountain marked "Overlook."

### July 14

Beautiful, sunny morning. Glen Van Valin from Lake Clark picked Rich R. and I up with his Cessna 185 on floats around 10:00 a.m., and flew us to Iliamna. No trouble getting off river with fairly light load (one raft, tent, backpack). Rich flew back to King Salmon and I called OAS to check on aircraft which was to meet us at Iliamna. Meanwhile Glen ferried Bob and Rich G. and gear to Port Allsworth in two trips. After some airplane arrangement snafus, I chartered up to Port Allsworth and Glen flew the three of us back to Anchorage, arriving at about 5:00 p.m. A couple days later we were able to fly the gear back on an empty NPS charter flight

General

Over the course of five full days on the Mulchatna we traveled 25 miles (plus 2 1/2 miles down lake outlet stream) averaging about four-hours per day on water with easy paddling. With the exception of one 10-yard, Class III drop in the river, all easy Class I water. Very nice float trip.

Wildlife observation, especially birds (including raptors) was excellent. Fishing was poor to fair, although fishing during a later trip in August was fair to good. (See attached fish, mammal, and bird observation lists).

Scenery was not outstanding but varied and pleasing with many views of adjacent hills and ridges from river. Several easy hikes from river with tremendous views from hilltops. Throughout the trip we saw very little evidence of man and had a true wilderness feeling.

Because we were limited by time, we took-out at the uppermost suitable landing site. For a longer trip one could go 15 miles further to the edge of the hills near Keefer Creek or 55 miles to the Koktuli River or 100 miles to the Nushagak River or 195 miles to Dillingham where the Nushagak enters Bristol Bay (tidal influence goes much higher up Nushagak than Dillingham).



Pat