



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.

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Memorandum for the Record

From: Jim Morris

Subject: Log of Field Inspection of Karluk River, June 24-26, 1980

The purpose for the field inspection was to gather, update, and verify resource information and witness and discuss the problems, conflicts, and opportunities associated with the use and management of the river so that a management analysis for the river corridor may be prepared.

Participants:

Bob Delaney, Refuge Manager, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge,
Kodiak

Mike Rearden, Native Liaison, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge,
Kodiak

Doug _____, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, Kodiak

Dave Patterson, Fish and Wildlife Service, Area Office, Anchorage

Dr. Alan Jubenville, University of Alaska, School of Agriculture
and Land Resources Management, Fairbanks

Dr. Bill Workman, University of Alaska, School of Agriculture and
and Land Resources Management, Fairbanks

Bill Welch, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Anchorage

Jim Morris, Trip Leader, Heritage and Conservation and Recreation
Service, Anchorage

June 24th

After spending the night at the Refuge Field Station on Camp Island people and gear were ferried by aircraft and motor boat down to the outlet of Karluk Lake. At the outlet is a four bunk recreation cabin provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Four people who were preparing to float the river were camped here. Since the lake provides a convenient access point to the river, there are frequently people gathered at this point during the king salmon run. In addition to the cabin the site provides suitable tent sites and good fishing for dolly vardens and red salmon in the lake, particularly near the mouths of creeks. The weather on this day was rather typical with a steady rain fall.

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After inflating the boats and loading the gear, we started down the river. We used two 13 foot Avon Adventurers. Scenic, snow-capped mountains and foothills with their slopes reaching the waters edge surround the lake. These slopes are generally covered with lush vegetation, including trees and tall shrubbery. The river immediately leaves this mountain topography behind and enters a relatively flat, tussock covered and wet lowland area.

We floated down river a distance of about nine river miles and camped in a grassy area on the east bank, about one-half mile below the public recreation cabin at Portage. The river was higher than normal. Upstream of Portage the river is primarily a single channel, mostly about 12 inches deep, with frequent "holes" two to three feet deep. The river bottom is mostly gravel, sand or a mixture of the two. Siltation is rather minimal. Some bank erosion is occurring but is not excessive. Between the outlet of Karluk Lake and Portage Cabin there are no significant natural impediments to float boating, or challenges, although at a lower or normal water flow there are a few places where people would need to drag their boats over shallow areas. We had to maneuver around a temporary fish wier in the river about two miles below Karluk Lake Outlet. Camping sites are quite limited because of the predominance of moist tussock covered ground unsuitable for tent camping and total lack of exposed gravel bars or beaches.

Portage is commonly a place for concentration of human activity on the river during the King Salmon run and during the time of our trip was no exception. The reason is this straight stretch of river offers the only river access for float planes (in addition to Karluk Lake and Karluk Lagoon). Some visitors to the river either start their float trip here rather than Karluk Lake or fly in to here and are picked up here without floating the river. An optional possibility is flying or boating into Larson Bay and hiking about 2 1/2 miles to Portage. A public recreation cabin with 10 bunks is located here as well as a very small Fish and Wildlife Service administrative cabin. Compared with the rest of the river corridor camping sites are more easily found in the Portage vicinity. We saw about a half dozen separate groups of tent campers in the Portage area. We tried some fishing with very poor results. The constant rain and cold wind discouraged much fishing and the high water apparently reduced the normally outstanding potential for catching King Salmon.

June 25th

All day long we again encountered rain and wind. We floated about 13 river miles to the upper part of Karluk Lagoon, where landing a float plane is possible. We camped on a grassy incline on the north bank of the river. In the first 6 or 7 miles below Portage the river passes through country similar to that seen during the first days float - relatively flat topography and low hills or ridges. The river braids in places as it splits around numerous small islands. An occasional tent camping site might be found. Then the river enters a scenic canyon

which it continues through until reaching the lagoon. In the canyon the river picks up a little speed and a few Class I rapids are created among numerous rocks in the river. We encountered no problems at high water but at normal water level a floatboater would need to walk his boat through many shallow, rocky stretches. Suitable camping sites are extremely limited in the canyon. We saw several bald eagles while floating through the canyon. Upstream a short distance from where the river enters the lagoon is located a fish wier maintained by Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This structure crosses the entire width of the river and is a complete navigation obstruction. The best portage (only a few yards) is on the south bank. There is even a gate which can be removed to line a small boat through (it was too narrow and too low for our Avon Adventurer rafts).

Although we were due to fly out the afternoon of the 25th, the weather prevented any flying until the afternoon of the 26th. Such delays are typical in this region.

Summary

The primary recreation attraction of the Karluk River has been and will likely continue to be sport fishing, primarily for King Salmon during mid-June to mid-July. The float boater will encounter a few easy Class I rapids and during low water may have to walk his boat through a lot of shallow places, particularly in the canyon. Except to a limited extent during high water periods around Portage the use of small outboard motors is not possible. The river velocity is about 2 to 3 mph.

Access to the river is very good with the alternatives being to land a float plane on Karluk Lake; to land a float plane on the river at Portage or to walk into Portage from Larsen Bay; or to land a float plane in Karluk Lagoon or to travel across Karluk Lagoon by motor boat and walk up the river bank to fish the lower segment. There is an air strip now at Karluk Village which can only accomodate very small wheel planes such as a Super Cub, but plans are underway to upgrade the strip to accomodate larger planes in the future.

In addition to the excellent King Salmon and other fishing possibilities, the principle recreation attributes of the Karluk River include the opportunity to view bald eagles; to enjoy pretty scenery; and to experience this in a somewhat primitive setting. The highest concentration of eagles to view on the river is in the canyon where we saw perhaps a dozen. The best scenery includes that of the clear water lake ringed with snow-capped mountains and the six or seven mile long canyon on the lower river. Although not primitive in comparison to many of Alaska's rivers, the Karluk does offer a much better opportunity to escape the crowds than many of Alaska's accessible rivers with good salmon fishing.

The entire river corrdior, including that portion within the former boundaries of Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge is privately owned by the Native Village Corporation of Karluk and Nu-Nachk-Pit, Inc. (Larson Bay) •

Jim