



ALASKA RIVER LOGS

INTRODUCTION

These river logs consist primarily of trip reports filed by the now-defunct Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which surveyed Alaska's rivers for possible inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River system in the early 1970's. They are supplemented by reports from the Bureau of Land Management, the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, and the National Park Service.

The Alaska Public Lands Information Center believes that, although the reports are quite old, the river information they contain is still useful and the detailed river descriptions provided are unavailable anywhere else in a public format.

The logs have also been supplemented with more recent federal and state agency brochures, agency handouts, news articles, and new logs developed by our staff.

A WORD OF CAUTION: As you read these logs, bear in mind that river conditions in Alaska can change drastically from year to year depending on weather and erosional processes. Rivers in Alaska are often given a higher classification on the International Scale of Difficulty than they would in a more temperate climate for two very important reasons: 1) most are very remote and help is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in a short period of time, and 2) Alaskan rivers are extremely cold, as low as 35 F for glacial rivers, and 40 F to 50 F for clear rivers. During periods of high water, as after spring break-up or prolonged rains, rivers should be upgraded by at least one class, because the current will be much faster and more forceful, and erosion will create more hazards such as floating logs, overhanging trees ("sweepers"), and log jams. Also, most topographic maps of Alaska have not been revised since the late 1970's or early 1980's. Most braided Alaskan rivers change channels every year or even several times in one year, so maps may not reflect current conditions: you must have good river-reading skills in addition to map reading skills.

For more detailed information, please ask for a copy of our handout "Planning a River Trip in Alaska".

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

D2436 Alaska
(W&SRS)

TO : Files

FROM : Patrick Pourchot

SUBJECT: Tinayguk - North Fork Koyukuk, field inspection log.

DATE: January 11, 1974

The following is a day-by-day account of a field inspection of the Tinayguk River and North Fork of the Koyukuk River conducted July 11-20, 1973, by the following personnel:

Don Fortenbery	F-SLUPC Resource Planning Team
Dave Williams	BLM (Fairbanks)
John Kauffmann	NPS
Pat Pourchot	BOR

July 11. Don, Dave and myself flew commercial to Bettles arriving about 11:00 a.m. That afternoon the 3 of us made an overflight with Paul Shanahan in his Beaver. We went up the Koyukuk to the N.F. then up the N.F. to the Tinayguk and up the T. to its headwaters and then back to Bettles following the Wild River drainage. We landed on North Lake off the N.F. below the Tinayguk confluence.

The rivers appeared at lower water levels and free of obstructions. It looked like the Savioyok Ck. confluence area on the Tinayguk was the uppermost put-in point for our open 19' canoes. Above this area the river is a small mountain stream with shallow water, many rocks and steep gradient. The only significant rapids downstream from Savioyok Ck. appeared to be around the Wolf Ck. confluence and Squaw Rapids on the North Fork.

The weather was bad with blowing rainstorms during the overflight a black bear was seen along the lower N.F.

July 12. Dave and I left Bettles at 9:00 a.m. via FH1100 chopper and arrived in headwaters of Tinayguk about 10:15 a.m. Don and John (who arrived from Killik River trip) flew to Anaktuvuk Pass via Beaver and were then picked up by the chopper and returned to headwater put-in site which was approximately 20 miles over the divide from Anaktuvuk Pass.

Our put-in was about 1/2 mile above the Savioyok Ck. confluence



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(which is further upstream than shown on 1956 1/250,000 USGS map) at the "bend" ^{at} Gray Mountain or about 2 and 1/2 miles downstream from the intersection where 2 tributaries converge with the Tinayguk from opposite sides of the valley.

We set up camp and spent the whole day hiking around camp. The air temperatures were 40-42 most of day and 38° at 10:00 p.m. The water was 43° at 2:00 p.m. Winds were 10-20 mph from the NW and was sunny in mid-day with some high cloudiness later in day. No bugs!

The river at the put-in was 10-15 yds wide, 1-2 feet deep, 6-8 mph current and very clear. It is generally braided with many old and new channels present. The river is generally Class II with much small whitewater caused by swift waters and many basketball sized rocks in the channel. The bars and river bottom are very cobbly with baseball and football sized rocks.

Up river from camp the river is much steeper, more rocky although probably runnable by open canoe from the intersection of the two opposing tribs. Above this the river is just too small to float a boat without considerable scraping and bumping.

Scenery is outstanding with high relief, multi-colored mountains all around, patches of spruce, tall willows, balsam poplar along the valley floor contrasting with the sweeping tundra on the slopes and bare rock on the mountain peaks.

Around camp there were several large stands of white spruce with some trees more than a foot thick. Spruce were located up the valley 3 or 4 miles above camp - mostly on several south-facing pediment fans.

An airplane flew over high in the p.m. A crude "airstrip" had been cleared on a cobble bar downstream from camp and marked with several stakes with red ribbons. It was only 100-150 yds long and apparently used only by a super cub with large wheels. (It was assumed this was one of the places where Dan Rhody, a registered guide using this area, takes bear and sheep hunters.). Upstream of camp there were several old spruce stumps 10-15" in diameter which had been cut by man but no old structure could be found.

Two moose were seen and bear, wolf, moose, and caribou signs and trails were common along the river. Coming in we saw several Dall sheep on hilltop west of the Wolf Ck. confluence area. Saw mew gull, scoters, sparrows, robins, sandpipers and other small birds.

We caught and saw many grayling around camp mostly 10-12" long.

Also a couple arctic char about the same length.

We hiked up the river about 3 miles; fairly good hiking along river because of many game trails. However, trails on south side were very marshy and muddy and avoiding muck meant going through some thick small willow thickets.

July 13. Spent all day at put-in camp and hiked more. I climbed to near top of first ridge of Gray Mt. above camp. The 2000+ vertical climb was extremely steep and slow going with lots of loose, rotten rock and no natural traverse routes. View up the valley was tremendous from top. Hiking up valley and up the slopes at the bases of the surrounding mountains much easier and good views over and up valley possible.

Weather was partly cloudy, high about 58°, light wind from South, mosquitoes out at mid-day but subdued by wind. Water temperature 43° at 10:00 p.m., 45° at 4:00 p.m.

The river dropped several inches overnight and still dropping most of day.

On Gray Mt. climb found shallow cave ledges where Dall sheep had stayed for long periods of time; droppings several inches deep.

July 14. We broke camp in morning and started down river. River had dropped several more inches overnight and canoeing marginal to Saviyok Ck. Current also reduced 1-2 mph. At Saviyok Ck. water volume increased by 1/4 to 1/3 but much braiding downstream from there for about 8 miles made water in any one channel of marginal canoeability. We got out and dragged over shallows and pushed through logs and piles frequently. One S-turn channel through thick trees and brush was so narrow and tight that we had to swing the canoe end for end to pass through. The other canoe was not so lucky and swamped when both ends wedged on opposite banks.

About 8 miles downstream of put-in was large section of auf-eis which was about 1/2 mile wide and extended more than a mile downstream. Above the ice was over a mile of flat gravel, full of vegetation which appeared to be also subject to auf eis in the winter. The river was extremely braided in this section and lots of dragging was encountered.

Although it looked from the air that one of the "main" channels through the auf eis was free of ice jams, from the ground it was not clear where this channel was. We, therefore, skirted the ice

patch in the farthest west channel which did not seem to have any more or any less water than the other thin channels which branched out upstream of the ice and went through, around, or under the ice in several locations. The ice was 5-8 feet high with characteristic blue streaks of color.

Downstream from the ice field the river was confined to a single channel and was incised in a small canyon with 30-100 foot high banks. At the head of this canyon we stopped to inspect a large pingo which was located along the river. Shortly downstream we unexpectedly met two men from California who were backpacking across the Tinayguk valley from the John R. to the North Fork on a circle trip to Anaktavuk Pass.

In the small canyon the water was almost all Class II with shallow rocky rapids. Too shallow to be of any real danger and when no good channels or chutes were present, you could get out and lift or drag canoe over or around.

We camped about 6 miles below auf eis in canyon. At camp, river 20 yds wide, 1 foot deep, 6-7 mph current, very clear and 43°F. We covered 15-16 miles between 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., with several long stops and frequent short ones.

After rain squall in each a.m. rest of day partly cloudy with light wind from South, high in upper 50's, 10:00 p.m. temp. 48°.

Scenery was excellent with sweeping vistas from river to adjacent mountains and up and down valley (2-4 miles wide). View in canyon confined to adjacent banks but many exposed schist rock banks.

Sign of man included 2 old cabins (one cabin is marked on map) which we miraculously stumbled upon having just picked an arbitrary spot from which to start walking off one of the many channels snaking through willow thickets and dense spruce-poplar groves. The cabins are about 1/2 mile from the "main" channel and are not easily seen even when standing in the small clearing where they are located. They are both very old with the roofs caved in. They are dug into the ground and stand only about waist high. A very few old cans are the only materials found around, although any implements would probably be under the foot or more of sod and soil covering the cabin floors. It is not clear who built the cabins or what their purpose was, but our guess would be they were built by Native people from the Anaktuvuk area and used for winter trapping and hunting. Ernie Johnson (à la Robert Marshall) is also reported to have built a cabin up on the Tinayguk but why he would have built two is not clear.

From a bluff above camp, a moose with possibly a calf was seen crossing the river downstream. No other game was seen. A lot of moose sign was seen around the Pingo and the salty water pool at the top appeared to be used as a "lick". A common scoter, gray jay, ravens, snipe, snowy owl, ^{sk}parula squirrel, were identified.

Beyond the auf eis the vegetation was mostly moist or alpine tundra above the river with only scattered spruce and poplar immediately along the river.

Mosquitoes again were surprisingly light most of the day.

July 15. Weather mostly cloudy, high in upper 50's, 48° at 10:00 a.m., winds up to 25 mph, no bugs. Left camp No. 2, 11:00 a.m., arrived camp No. 3 at 5:30 p.m., a distance of about 18 miles. Lots of time out of canoe.

First 10 miles from camp almost continuous Class II whitewater, small, rocky rapids. Some dragging, bumping with one large stretch of shoving, carrying over exposed rock garden below Wolf Ck. confluence. Last 8 miles, pool, riffle, pool, riffle. Some high Class II bends with many large boulders around Wolf Ck. but mostly shallow and rocky.

In front of camp No. 3, river 20 yds wide, 2' deep, 7-8 mph current in riffles, 4-5 mph in pools. Mostly entrenched in small canyon, 30-50 foot banks. Valley floor 2 mile wide much of day (less than in upper area).

Vegetation mostly spruce with lots of black spruce also willow and poplar along banks. Black spruce on hillsides gives somewhat stark appearance to landscape. Large mountains continuous on both sides of valley.

We saw one young moose, owls (short-eared), red-breasted merganser with brood of 10. No fishing attempted although looked good for grayling.

We saw 55-gal. oil drum near Wolf Creek lodged along river. The same airplane has passed over and back since the first day at the same times; must be a regular route to somewhere on North Slope.

In the evening we hiked up the ridge above camp to the divide between the Tinayguk and the Wild River. Hiking was fairly good although tussocks slowed progress. From divide we looked down a series of 4 lakes which drain into Flat Creek but could not see

down valley. Good views of Tobin Mt. and Sun^{ry} Mt. This pass is reported by Marshall in his travels to be used by some of the early miners going between Wiseman and Wild Lake. Taking our time and stopping frequently, we hiked about 4 miles in 4 hours.

July 16. Left camp about 11:45 a.m., arrived at the confluence with N.F. at about 4:30 p.m. and arrived camp No. 4 at Bonay^{az} Ck. at 6:30 p.m. About 4 and 1/2 hours were spent on the water and about 24 miles traveled.

Weather cloudy, drippy, light wind, high in low 50's, 48° at 10:00 a.m., few bugs; water temp. 45° at confluence, same as N.F.

River was pool-riffle, pool-riffle, to confluence. Near mouth 20 yds wide, 3 feet deep, 10 foot deep pools, 4-5 mph current. Some braiding in lower area, mostly Class I, some Class II riffles. Tinayguk only 1/10 to 1/15 of volume of N.F. which was 30-50 yds wide, 6-10 deep milk colored, with much more extensive gravel bars (indicating larger fluctuations in ~~water~~^w levels) and gentler sweeping curves. The Tinayguk had showed evidence of high water earlier in the year, 4-5 feet above present levels.

Sign of man included a landing area on a gravel bar on the N.F. just down from the T. confluence. Plastic strip on pole for windsock. Note indicating bear hunting activities (no luck). Footprints seen on bar near camp No. 4 (probably hunters who had landed on bar).

We saw cow and calf along river just down from T. confluence. Also red throated loon, arctic terns, owl, porcupine and beaver. A couple grayling caught in lower Tinayguk.

Vegetation mostly black and white spruce and poplar in lower Tinayguk. Some white spruce up to 60' tall, 15" in diameter near confluence. On ridge near confluence saw first small birch trees growing in old black spruce burn. Some alder on steep river banks. From ridge could see Gates of Arctic although low cloud cover obstructed some of view.

July 17. Left camp about 11:00 a.m. and arrived camp No. 5 at Ruby Creek at 4:30 p.m. We hiked back to North Lake taking about 3 hrs. and traveled about 18-20 miles in about 3 and 1/2 hrs. on the water.

Weather overcast, drippy, windy (gusts up to 40 mps), ^{mostly headwinds blowing off} high in mid 50's. River 30 yds wide, 4-6 feet deep, 3-4 mph current, no real whitewater. N.F. carrying much more sediment than Tinayguk, visibility only about 1-2 feet.

Cabin along river near North Lake was structurally sound although windows and doors are out. The log cabin has 2 rooms. Old sled, kayak-type boat skeletons outside, also half cabin, tent frame.

North Lake is 20 minute walk from river. Many nice hiking smooth typed morraines around lake offering picturesque views across lake. Caught small pike in lake (18" long, 1 and 1/2 lbs.).

Among common birds sited were king fishers, bank swallows.

July 18. Left camp 9:00 a.m. and arrived new camp just below Florence Creek at 5:30 p.m. We stopped for more than an hour for lunch and again to hike up Florence Creek in addition to several shorter stops and traveled about 34 miles. Although we "floated" much of the Tinayguk, we paddled moderately on much of the North Fork.

Weather improved with partly cloudy skies, windy, high 60°. The river was 40-50 yds wide, 4-6 feet deep, 4-6 mph current, 45° F, Class I except Squaw Rapids which was Class II. The rapids are not very challenging from a whitewater boating standpoint. The current increases and there are some large rocks in the river but easy to navigate around. This stretch is about a mile long. River continues to be cloudy with suspended sediment.

Old cabin at creek above Horse Ck, roof collapsed, some old implements lying around.

Mountains far from river, very wide valley, leave mountains upstream of Florence Ck. confluence. Couldn't find Florence Lake outlet but went up Florence Creek (past the outlet) instead. Went up it with canoes about 1/4 mile and then hiked up another 1/2 mile. Very clear, pretty creek, lots of mosquitoes. Saw a few small grayling in creek. From ridge above Creek we still couldn't see Florence Lake and we were never sure of bearings.

Saw a lot of beaver sign along river, one beaver, a few ducks, and a clutch of young geese.

July 19. Traveled about 25 miles in 5 hours on water to camp No.7 about 3 miles downstream of Pope Creek on the Koyukuk.

Weather mostly cloudy and windy with some sprinkles. Temps. in 50's. Mosquitoes generally light.

Middle Fork much clearer than North Fork, about 1/4 to 1/3 of N.F. volume. Koyukuk 75-100 yds wide, 3-8 feet deep, 3-4 mph current, very cloudy, no rapids.

Upstream of Middle Fork confluence raptor nesting cliffs; couldn't identify birds although several eagles sighted in area.

Old mail route cabin upstream from Middle Fork confluence. Fresh boughs inside from last spring overnighiter. Trail visible in back of cabin.

July 20. Ar. Bettles 3:00 p.m. after 4-5 hours on river, covered 20 miles. Stopped for lunch at Wild River confluence. Fairly small river in comparison to Koyukuk, water much clearer than Koyukuk, but not as clear as Tinayguk or Middle Fork. Met boys from Evansville who were cutting firewood near Wild River confluence.

Terrain generally rolling with several distinctive ridges along river, heavy spruce-hardwood forest.

Saw a moose near camp No. 7.

After returning canoes to ELM fire station, we hopped a ride with a Fairbanks Air DC-3 back to Fairbanks and returned to Anchorage that night.

General. A true wilderness experience was obtained virtually to the outskirts of Bettles; we encountered only 2 other people in 9 days and we considered this meeting a rare fluke. Except for some evidence of fly-in hunters, no signs of man are present.

From a canoeing standpoint, the Tinayguk at lower water levels is somewhat small and "boney" for an ideal whitewater experience although there are many sections of good small whitewater. Another limitation is, of course, access as only fold-type boats could be brought into the river area without a helicopter; no lakes exist along the river which we saw which could accommodate a floatplane. Also, shallow water precludes a put-in much beyond the Savioyok Ck. confluence above which is found some of the most scenic areas.

The North Fork beyond the Tinayguk is a good family-type boating river although the fairly uniform topography and vegetation of the wide valley floor makes traveling by boat somewhat monotonous after several days.

One of the most impressive features about this area was the spectacular alpine scenery and mixed tundra-spruce vegetation of the upper areas. More evidence of large animals was also observed there. A backpacking trip would probably be the best mode of seeing these upper areas for longer periods of time.

Total distance traveled was about 150-160 miles in 7 days on water.