

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.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

D4225 Alaska
W&SRS

TO Porcupine River File

DATE: September 10, 1973

FROM M.S. Wright

SUBJECT: Field inspection log.

The following constitutes a summary log of the July 7-14, 1973, field inspection of the Porcupine River.

Official Party:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representating</u>
Mike Wright	B.O.R.
Kaye Netcalf	USFS
Elaine Rhode	BSF&W
Jean Ernest	Ak. Dept. Fish & Game
Jim Kowalsky	Friends of Earth
Suzanne Munchoff	Fairbanks Envir. Center

July 7. After a two day's delay we finally boarded a BLM GC-3 in Fort Yukon at 5:00 p.m. and flew to Old Crow, Yukon Territory, Canada. We arrived at Old Crow at 6:00 p.m. After checking through customs we assembled our gear and got on the river about 8:00 p.m. We made camp an hour later on a large sand bar about 4 miles downstream. The Porcupine scours its channel clean of most driftwood so we had to hike back into the brush to get firewood. Mosquitoes were the worst I have ever seen. We all went to bed right after supper to get away from them.

July 8. Beautiful day, bright sun and a slight breeze greeted us for breakfast: The mosquitoes were still very bad. We broke camp and started floating about 9:00 a.m. In this part of the river the scenery is bland, only distant hills and mountains break the monotony. The river is wide (150-200 yards) and flows between steep cut banks up to 20 feet high. Stream side vegetation is a mixture of spruce, cottonwood and willow in fairly dense stands interrupted at intervals by old overflow channels clothed in grass or willow. Early in the afternoon we encountered a large cliff with two nesting Peregrine falcons. We watched these birds for some time as they put on a magnificent aerial display. We made camp that evening about 26 miles downstream from the previous night's camp.



Red Gate it required 45 minutes to make 500 yards and at times we were actually blown upstream while paddling downstream. Camp that evening was approximately 1-1/2 miles below Red Gate. We traveled a total of 22 miles this day.

July 12. We awoke to a gray day with a light rain falling. After a quick breakfast we left camp about 8:30 a.m. From Red Gate, the canyon widens to a broad flood plain with high 30-40 foot cut banks but no real canyon-like cliffs such as we had been in for the past several days. Vegetation is heavy stands of spruce with a thick willow border along the tops of the cut banks. By 9:30 we had reached Canyon Village. Canyon Village was last inhabited in 1971 but is now-abandoned. There are 9 cabins or major storage buildings in the village. Many of the buildings would be habitable with only minor amounts of work. We left Canyon Village about 10:30 a.m. and entered a large bend in the river called Fishhook Bend. We encountered a tail wind and made good progress to the top of the bend where we had lunch. Our tail wind disappeared after lunch and we had hard paddling the rest of the afternoon. Below the lunch stop, the country continued to flatten and the cut-banks became lower, averaging 15-20 feet with occasional cliffs or bluffs of 100-200 feet. At 6:00 p.m. we made camp at the mouth of the Coleen River. There were two other canoers at the mouth of the Coleen River. They had left Old Crow six weeks previously and were taking their time and exploring all the rivers along the way. The Coleen was running cold and clear and there are several large sand and gravel bars for camping near the mouth of the river. That evening we were hit by a sudden wind storm that caused a severe sand storm on our bar. We traveled approximately 24 miles this day.

July 13. The morning dawned bleak and gray with a light rain and wind. We broke camp at 8:15 a.m. Five miles below the Coleen we came to an abandoned cabin at a site called Burnt Paw. Below Burnt Paw we again entered steep-walled canyon country. This is the area known as the "Lower Ramparts." Although not as high as the Upper Ramparts, this area is still very beautiful. Rock colors and formations are exceptional, however, the canyon walls often have thick coverings of vegetation, usually stands of mixed spruce and cottonwood. Winds on this last day reversed their normal trend and blew downriver almost all day. This provided a welcome relief after the previous days of hard paddling. Approximately 3:00 p.m. we reached John Herberts Village the end-of our trip. John Herberts Village is just a couple of abandoned cabins on a high (40 feet) cut-bank. We paddled down from John

July 9. Broke camp at 8:15 a.m. and reached the entrance to the Canadian Ramparts by 10:00 a.m. Ramparts are spectacular. Towering cliffs with many weathered spires and balanced rock type formations. Cliff colors vary from black to gold with almost every conceivable color in between. Cliffs vary from 100' to 600' in height. River is placid but swift. Cliff walls are bare but occasional breaks in the canyon walls or the mouths of streams are clothed with spruce and cottonwood. At 11:00a.m. we reached a Canadian fisheries camp but no-one was in camp. Proceeding downstream we reached New Rampart at the U.S.-Canada border about 1:30 p.m. We spent several hours viewing and photographing New Rampart. We floated 4 miles below the border and camped on a large sand and gravel bar opposite the mouth of Fred Creek.

July 10. Got started about noon as we spent the morning re-enacting camp scenes for a photographer who met us at New Rampart and spent the night with us. Scenery below the border is very similar to that in the Canadian Ramparts. Beautiful high cliffs with occasional fingers of vegetation dominated the scenery. The river is placid but swift (3-4 mph). Upstream winds made paddling necessary. In late afternoon the winds pick up to about 15-20 mph and swells of 1-2 feet are common. We camped at the mouth of the Rapid River, a small clearwater stream 21 miles below the border. Despite the late start we still managed to float 17 miles today.

July 11. Broke camp at 8:15 a.m. Weather was warm and sunny. Scenery continues to be spectacular. A mile below the Rapid River we came to Half-Way Pillar, an 80 foot high rock pillar at the water's edge. At noon we reached the abandoned Hudson's Bay Post - Village of Old Rampart. Old Rampart has numerous old cabins and historical artifacts. After lunch we paddled across the river to the abandoned settlement of Old Camp at the mouth of the Salmon-Trout River. There is an old cabin and a shed at Old Camp. We then paddled about a half a mile up the Salmon-Trout River. The Salmon-Trout was crystal clear, a nice change from the muddy Porcupine. We left the Salmon-Trout in mid-afternoon and battled strong upstream winds to Howling Dog Rock. At Howling Dog Rock we encountered 40 mph winds. The wind had whipped the normally placid Porcupine into a fury with 3-3-1/2 waves. Our progress of 2-1/2 miles from Howling Dog Rock through a constricted canyon called Red Gate took about 3 hours of hard steady paddling. At one point' in the middle of

Herbert Village for two miles to a large gravel bar for that evening's camp. In all we traveled 25 miles this day.

July 14. We shuttled to Fort Yukon by FH-1100 helicopter today. The first of three trips began at 8:00 a.m. and the last trip reached Fort Yukon at 12:00 noon.

General. The Porcupine River is an exceptionally scenic river. The steep-walled, multi-colored canyon walls make this river ideal for canoe touring. Good access is available to Old Crow in Canada or float planes could land anywhere in the river. River water temperature was a constant 62° F. An area of special concern on this river is the reported rapidity with which the river can rise. We did not experience any perceptible water level changes but previous travelers recorded a 12 foot water rise in 36 hours in 1967 due to summer rains. Because of this flooding danger, camps should always be on fairly high ground. The river has generally scoured the area below high water of firewood and it is often necessary to go above high water into the brush to find firewood. Mosquitoes are very bad in Canada and anywhere along the river where vegetation is encountered. There are, however, plenty of large gravel bars to camp on where one can stay relatively free of mosquitoes.



United States Department of the Interior

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE
ALASKA AREA OFFICE

1011 E. Tudor, Suite 297 Anchorage, Alaska 99503
Tele. (907) 277-1666

IN REPLY REFER TO:

A800
1102-02b RP

September 30, 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM: David Dapkus *(Handwritten signature)*

SUBJECT: Field Inspection of the (Upper) Porcupine River
July 12 - 23, 1980

A field inspection of the (upper) Porcupine River was conducted July 12-23, 1980, by an interagency team as part of river coordination work between Canadian and Alaskan agencies, and to identify river management problems. The Porcupine River is approximately 460 miles long and about equally divided between the Yukon Territory and Alaska. The Fish and Wildlife Service has management responsibility for the portion in Alaska except for that portion under Native ownership.

Due to various job commitments of team members and to extremely slow water currents, only the upper half of the river downstream to Old Crow was floated. The team plans to float the lower half, downstream to Ft. Yukon, early in the summer of 1981.

Participating in the (upper) Porcupine River inspection were:

Duke Connelly, Yukon Territory Parks and Historic Resources
Judy Liedberg, Fish and Wildlife Service, Fairbanks
Chet Buchanan, Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage
Joaqlin Estus, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Anchorage
David Dapkus, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Anchorage

Three Grumman canoes were used for the inspection.

July 12

Chet, Joaqlin, and I left Anchorage in the p.m. in a GSA van with Larry Wright, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), accompanying us to serve as return driver. The van was loaded with the group gear, including two canoes, and personal gear. Drove to Fairbanks where we spent the night.

July 13

Arose early in the a.m. , picked up Judy and the third canoe, then drove to the Canadian border on the Taylor Highway. We did not get to the

border before it closed so were forced to camp until it opened the next morning.

July 14

Arose again early in the a.m., went across the border and drove to the historic gold rush town of Dawson, Yukon Territory (Y.T.) where we met Duke. Continued north on the Dempster Highway to the Eagle Plains rest stop the only one before Fort McPherson. We spent the night at the new motel there. The motel has a restaurant; a gas station and small airstrip are nearby.

July 15

Put in on the Eagle River in the a.m.. The Eagle is a tributary to the Bell which is a tributary to the Porcupine. The Eagle River crosses the Dempster just 1 mile north of Eagle Plains motel.

Larry helped us unload; then started on his return trip to Anchorage. Under normal conditions the Eagle, lower Bell, and Porcupine (to Old Crow) are all Class I waters (International White Water Scale). The Eagle is a low volume, sweeper lined narrow, twisting creek. The Bell is about twice as large, also sweeper lined. The Porcupine is wide (usually 100 yards or more) river and has few sweepers. We found all three to be very low in volume. They were almost entirely flat water rivers. The Eagle was a series of short riffles and deeper pools with no discernable flow. The Bell had only a little flow (1mph). The Porcupine generally flowed about 1 mph with short (1/4 - 1/2 mile long) shallower stretches with 2-4 mph current. We travelled approximately 100 miles on the Eagle, 20 miles on the Bell, and 100 miles on the Porcupine.

We spent much of the day getting our feet wet while dragging the canoes across the riffles. Saw a lot of fresh moose sign, some bear and some wolf sign. Campsites were numerous (every 1/2 mile) on small gravel bars with firewood plentiful. Enjoyed sunshine all day.

July 16-17-18

Each day was similar - riffles and pools with the riffles getting deeper each mile, much large animal sign but no sightings, numerous good campsites, views limited to the distant Richardson Mountains, heavy birch and spruce vegetation along the creek banks. Long days of steady hard paddling - average about 11 hours per day of paddling. Sunshine each day.

July 19

Saw one moose on the Eagle just before it joined the Bell. One three mile stretch of the Bell just below the Eagle provided the only "fast" water of the two rivers - a 4 mph current (Class I). Paddled down the Bell to its confluence with the Porcupine.

July 20-21

Saw one black bear, one grizzly, and two cow moose on the river banks. Good pike fishing can be enjoyed along the river. Met a party of four men who had followed the old Hudson Bay route across the Richardson Mountains - down the Ogilvie River then down the Peel to the Rat river, then up the Rat, portage across the divide to Summit Lake and then down the Little Bell, the Bell, and finally the Porcupine River, they had been "out" for 45 days.

We found campsites available everywhere on the long gravel bars. Many of the gravel bars were level and of sufficient length to land small wheel planes - Cessana 185, Cessana 206, Beaver. Low bluffs and ridges line a large portion of the Porcupine. Dense spruce stands cover the ridges creating a pleasant scene for the river traveler.

July 22

Stopped at Ken Newcomb's cabin about 20 miles above Old Crow. Mr. Newcomb is a pleasant friendly man of sixty plus years. Met two other men at Mr. Newcomb's who had also traveled the old Hudson Bay route. Floated on downstream to a children's summer camp about 5 miles above Old Crow. Met Stephan Frost, from Old Crow, a friend of Dukes', there. Stephan and another man took us on downstream to Old Crow in their riverboats. Stephen and his family asked us to be their guests for the night. Very hospitable people, we enjoyed our stay there.

Telephoned Air North charter service in Ft. Yukon Alaska and asked them to pick us up the following day. There is scheduled air service to Fairbanks via Whitehorse, Y. T. , but it is more expensive than chartering to Ft. Yukon, then using the scheduled service from there.

July 23

Made arrangements with Officer Don Pettendreigh of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to store part of our gear. Spent much of the day visiting people in Old Crow, everyone was very friendly. It was a fine sunny day with temperatures in the 90°F range as was the previous day.

Charter arrived at 4:30 p.m., flew to Ft. Yukon, then took Air North's scheduled 18 passenger twin engine plane into Fairbanks, and then Wein jet to Anchorage.

General

We traversed the Eagle, Bell, and Porcupine to Old Crow in eight extremely long and arduous days. If done in June just after breakup, the Eagle has much more water resulting in a 2-3 mph current. The Bell likewise has more current then. For most of the summer both rivers are low and slow. The Eagle is generally not appealing compared with other

4.

rivers. The Porcupine River is large, always has some current, is clear, and flows through landscapes pleasing to the eye. We observed peregrine falcon along all three rivers.

Access is via the Dempster Highway (put-in) and (take-out) via airplane from Old Crow. Canoes are the recommended water craft. Ten days are probably sufficient to float these rivers if floating at higher water levels; fourteen days are needed during the low water levels that predominant most of the summer (14 days of 6-7 hours paddling each day).