



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.

[Return to Alaska outdoors areas](#) for more information about boating, fishing and hunting areas.

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United States Department of the Interior

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AUG 23 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

From: JoAnne Dunec

Subject: Field Inspection of Portions of the Black and Porcupine Rivers, June 26 - July 10, 1979

A field inspection of portions of the Black and Porcupine Rivers was conducted June 26 to July 10, 1979 by representatives from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The purpose of the trip was to evaluate river related resources in the newly created Yukon Flats National Monument. The majority of the Black River, and portions of the Porcupine River lie within the monument. Aside from federal land, there are several Native Allotments along the river, as well as lands owned by Chalkyitsik and Doyon Native Corporations.

Participating in the inspection were:

Lewis Swensen, FWS, Anchorage
Roger Kaye, FWS, Fairbanks
Jack Mosby, HCRS, Anchorage
JoAnne Dunec, HCRS, Anchorage

Various transportation modes were used for the trip. Lou, Jack, and I flew via commercial scheduled airlines from Anchorage to Fairbanks to meet Roger. All of us continued to Ft. Yukon via scheduled airlines. Our watercraft, two 17' aluminum canoes, as well as some of our gear were shipped via air cargo from Anchorage to Ft. Yukon. From there we chartered a Cessna 206 (Arctic Circle Air Service) and a Cessna 185 (Air North), both on floats, to fly us, our canoes, and gear to a small lake (Short Portage Lake, sec. 34, T.18N, R.24E.) adjacent to the Black River, upstream from the Salmon Fork. The flight was approximately 50 minutes one way. The length of the portage was approximately 150 feet. We paddled and drifted approximately 210 river miles on the Black and a portion of the Porcupine River. The take-out point was the mouth of the Sucker River on the Porcupine, near Ft. Yukon. As pre-arranged, a Bureau of Land Management pick-up truck took us, canoes and gear the short distance to Ft. Yukon where commercial airlines were again utilized.

The portion of the Black River floated by the Inspection team can be described in three distinct segments; from Short Portage Lake to the Salmon Fork, from the Salmon Fork to the village of Chalkyitsik, and lastly, the section below the village to the mouth of the Black River on the Porcupine.

Short Portage Lake to Salmon Fork

Approximate time: 3 - 5 days by canoe.

Though the Black River is a flatwater, meandering stream, this segment is relatively rapid with a 2-3 mph current. The water is tea colored and cold. The river passes through forested lowlands of willow, with birch and white spruce on high banks of well-drained soil. (There are virtually no gravel bars.) The view is limited to the river corridor due to the high banks and riparian vegetation. Fires have not recently occurred in the area. Wildlife is abundant, especially beaver and Arctic Loon. Moose, Lynx, and Canadian and White-Fronted Geese were also sighted. Both Northern Pike and Grayling were caught. There are not obvious signs of people which lends a feeling of wilderness. (Of course, the flight to the put-in point revealed thousands of acres of shimmering wet green expanse broken only by tree-lined corridors.)

Salmon Fork to Chalkyitsik

Approximate time: 4-6 days by canoe.

Within a day's float from the confluence of the Salmon Fork the river widens and the current slows to approximately 2 mph. The water remains tea colored, however the water temperature increased to the 60°F. range (warm enough to swim and bathe). Banks average ten feet in height interspersed with high bluffs. Gravel bars and islands become more abundant. Riparian vegetation consists of willow thickets (teeming with mosquitoes) with taller spruce and birch set back from the banks. Numerous trees attain house-log size as evidenced by the existence of several cabins and other structures. As signs of people increase, wildlife viewing diminishes; less beaver and geese were sighted, however Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles were seen along certain bluffs. Both Arctic Tern and Arctic Loons became more abundant.

An interesting stop was the Old Salmon Village located on a slough which will soon become an oxbow lake. The village consisted of about ten log structures, miscellaneous logs and pits, and five fenced graves atop a bluff overlooking the village. (The exposed slope of the bluff was covered with a plant that smelled like sagebrush.) All the structures were covered with weeds and were in various states of disrepair and collapse. The village was abandoned in the 1940's when a barge carrying the building supplies for a school could go no further upstream than the present day Chalkyitsik. The school was built at that site, and everyone moved downstream, leaving a deserted Salmon Village. (Deserted except for mosquitoes which were as thick as ever.)

Chalkyitsik is an interesting stop as well. As the largest community in the area, the Athabaskan village boasts about 100 residents. Many residents speak only Gwtichin, an Athabaskan dialect. Chalkyitsik, an Indian name, means "to fish with a hook at the mouth of the creek".

The most noteworthy resident is Belle Herbert who was soon to celebrate her 126th birthday after the inspection team visited the village (July 4, 1979). Born in Canada, Belle has lived and traveled throughout the Yukon Flats in both Canada and Alaska. In 1980, Governor Jay Hammond traveled to Chalkyitsik to present her with an official State scroll declaring her "Alaska's and America's most distinguished citizen."

Chalkyitsik to Ft. Yukon

Approximate time: 6-8 days by canoe.

Below Chalkyitsik, the current slows to 1-2 mph and meanders increase in size. During this portion of the trip the inspection team encountered a strong cold wind blowing upstream. Both lining the canoes along frequent gravel bars and lashing the canoes together became methods for gaining progress in spite of the wind and slow current. The water remained tea colored until the confluence of the Porcupine, which was turbid and murky. The riparian vegetation consists of mainly willow and alder thickets. Relatively recent fires in the area have cleared taller vegetation. Wildlife sightings along this segment include Black Bear, Sandhill Crane, Arctic Tern, large owls with fledglings, Arctic Loon, and various gulls, plovers, geese, ducks and hawks. Signs of both moose and beaver were evident as well. Fishing dropped from fair to poor, although a Sheefish was caught in addition to Grayling and Northern Pike.

The inspection team reached the Porcupine River via the Black River Slough. Approximately two and a half miles long, the water flows one way when the Black River is higher than the Porcupine and the other way when the situation is reversed. It was an interesting route; the slough resembled a canal with straight grassy banks, sluggish current and silty water.

The Porcupine is much larger and has a faster current than the Black. The river cut through higher, tree covered banks and formed several channels. Forested islands were common. Only two days were spent on the Porcupine from the Black River Slough to the Take-out point at the Sucker River (near Ft. Yukon).

General Information

USGS Maps (1:63,360): Black River A-3; B-3,4;C-4,5,6; Ft. Yukon C-1,2,3.

The majority of land is public and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, however there are several Native Allotments with private cabins along the Black River as well as land owned by the Native Village and Regional Corporations.

For interesting descriptions of the area and its people read: Born on Snowshoes by Evelyn (Bergland) Shore, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1954, and Hunters of the Northern Forest: Designs for Survival Among The Alaskan Kutchin by Richard K. Nelson, University of Chicago Press, 1973.