

# Memorandum

Copper

: Files

DATE: SEP 28 1972

FROM : Noel P. Granzow

SUBJECT: Log of Copper River float trip, August 22-25, 1972

On Tuesday morning, August 22, the six-man Copper River interagency field task force assembled in Gakona on the banks of the Copper River in preparation for a four-day river evaluation float trip. The participants on the trip are listed on the last page of this report.

The put in point was on the east bank of the Gakona River just above the Glenn Highway Bridge, approximately 1/2 mile upstream from the confluence of the Gakona and Copper Rivers. We began the trip at 7:30 on the 22nd. The river is quick and braided for the first 13 miles, trees screen the countryside, and a canoeist couldn't see beyond the banks, a narrow corridor would protect this segment of the Copper from visual intrusions. From about one mile below the confluence with Dry Creek to approximately three miles below the confluence of the Klutina River the Copper is in well defined banks and moving swiftly. Opposite the Klutina River confluence we broke a propeller on one of the motors. Fortunately, a river boat was on the Klutina, saw us and towed us across to the west bank where we beached and carried our damaged motor to Copper Center Lodge. We called the BLM station in Glenallen and had them bring us a spare motor and then continued downstream. We camped at the mouth of the Dadina River on the left bank of the Copper approximately 43 miles from our put in point. The first day's run could have been done in an open canoe if the canoeists were careful. There were stretches which might have required lining but for the most part it is canoeable by one man; two men in a heavily laden canoe would swamp in several places.

Just opposite the campsite was a high clay bank about 500 feet high. Hector Ewan of the Copper River Native Association told us that this campsite was located near an old Indian village of 70 years ago. We went back into the brush but could not find a trace. We should check this out at a later date. There was evidence of moose, bear, buffalo and wolf in the area although we saw no animals. We did see several bald eagles over the river. Peregrine falcons were also seen.

*John P. Granzow*



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Along this first day's run evidence of man was often seen, a swamp buggy overturned and grounded on an island in the river, trash on the banks and buildings near the shoreline above Copper Center. The highway is also visible from the river in several places. I did not have the feeling of being remote at any time during the first day's float. This reach is not outstandingly remarkable compared to other Alaskan Rivers. The river itself is silt laden (as are all glacial streams) and the countryside is screened by the forest on the banks. The first 40 miles of the study segment provides an enjoyable but not an outstanding experience for the river user.

Wednesday morning, August 23, the team started on down the Copper. The river has more islands and gravel bars and the channel is sometimes not readily defined. There are segments where an open canoe would swamp quite often. We were glad we were in rubber rafts with motors for control. A raft with only paddles for power would be at the mercy of the current and the winds in this segment of the Copper.

On the gravel bars fresh water was found in pools. While the Copper itself is glacial and full of silt, the pools in the sand and gravel bars are often clean and provide a source of drinking water for the river user. There is a danger of sinking in the sand on some of the bars as there is an upwelling of water in places which transforms the solid packed sand into a colloidal solution practically. The river user should be careful when jumping out of his craft onto a sand bar; it is best to probe with a paddle first.

Approximately 58 miles below Gakona the Chesnina River flows into the Copper from the east. At this point the team beached the rafts and walked into the forest to examine a trespass cabin which had previously been spotted by Lec Adler (BLM) from the air. The cabin was in good condition and not locked. We then continued downstream to our take out point at Fox-O'Brien Creek below the village of Chitina, approximately 80 miles below our starting point.

The second day's reach was more braided, with more rough water than the first. Also, the river user is able to see out of the river valley in places to the mountains in the distance. A boundary would have to extend somewhat further in this second segment than in the first; however, the distant mountains are so distant that they would fall outside any realistic control boundary. This segment

of the river was considerably more natural in appearance and evidence of man's activity was not visible from the river.

We camped at O'Brien Creek and shipped the rafts to the Glenallen BLM station via BLM truck. On Thursday morning, the 24th, we resumed our journey in two river boats furnished by the Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game. At this time, Hector Ewan (AFN) left the team and was replaced by Mike Smith (AFG). Our first stop was at Taral Creek to look at the remains of the community of Taral. The area is overgrown with underbrush and the buildings have collapsed. A cable crossing is located just below Taral Creek. Continuing downstream, the river user is aware of the abandoned railroad paralleling the right bank of the Copper. Several trestles are still standing in various stages of disrepair.

The river flows through the Wood Canyon and numerous waterfalls are visible as tributary streams descend the steep left bank. Spirit Mountain rises abruptly from the river's edge and dominates the scene as one travels through Wood Canyon. We stopped at Haley Creek, a clear water stream emptying into the Copper from the west. The creek was full of salmon but the falls appeared to be steep for them to go further up Haley Creek. This would make a good campsite with fresh water and sufficient level land at the foot of the mountain.

Just below Haley Creek a sharp spur of land juts into the Copper from the right bank. The rapids past this point of land are rough and the large whirlpool presents a serious hazard to a canoeist and must be avoided. Passing through the Canyon, the steep walls, many ribbon waterfalls and view of Spirit Mountain combine to make this one of the most scenic reaches of the Copper River.

At noon we beached at the confluence of the Uranatina River (actually not much more than a creek) and prepared a meal. It was just as we finished lunch that we heard a commotion in the brush and saw a black bear cub rush up a tree. Immediately, accompanied by much thrashing and cracking of branches, a sow burst into view, sending the intrepid party in the opposite direction at great speed. Fortunately, the bear was just checking on the safety of her cub and came no further. The field team decided they had had enough lunch and proceeded downriver.

The railroad cut is often visible from the river in the reach from Uranatina River to Cleave Creek. It is thickly

overgrown and would probably have to be cleared somewhat before it could be used as a hiking trail. At high water the trail would possibly be inundated as there is evidence that the water level had recently reached that elevation. We stopped to explore a short tunnel. There had been a cave-in at the south end of the tunnel, possibly as a result of the earthquake, but one can climb over the rubble and walk through the tunnel. There are no obstructions on the north end of the tunnel which is located approximately one mile above the confluence of the Tiekel River.

Below the Tiekel River confluence the Copper widens to over one mile whereas from the upper reaches of the study segment to well below Copper Center it is only 200-500 feet wide and then it broadens only to 1500-2000 feet in width. The river is full of islands and at times the channel is difficult to follow in the reach below the Tiekel.

For 10 miles before their confluence, the Copper and the Bremner Rivers parallel each other as they flow in a southeasterly direction, separated by a vast expanse of gravel averaging three miles in width. Below the confluence with the Bremner, the river narrows to approximately 1/2 mile before reaching Baird Canyon where it is confined to a 500 foot wide channel. Our camp was located just inside the canyon in the left bank after passing through the first narrows. At this camp we found fresh grizzly tracks and across the river we sighted a black bear on a steep slope picking berries. This campsite was approximately 146 miles below our starting point at Gakona.

We broke camp early in the morning of the 25th, passed through the narrows of Baird Canyon to where the river broadens to over a mile and a quarter before squeezing through a 400 foot wide cut; Abercrombie Rapids. We hove-to above the rapids and scouted them on foot.

After selecting the best route through, one of the boats began on the run while the other stayed behind as a safety precaution. We were able to take photographs of the boats going through, some from behind and others from below. This rapid is fast and furious, not suitable for an open canoe.

Below the rapid the river flows into Miles Lake. It was in this segment of the river that we first sighted seals. We spent quite a bit of time in the lake taking photographs

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of Miles Glacier on the left and Childs Glacier on the right bank. We stopped for lunch just below Million Dollar Bridge, walked out on the span and got some more photographs of both glaciers. There is a trail on the left bank, up the bluff and over to the cliff facing Childs Glacier where we can watch the calving process. While we were there no large sections of ice broke off the glacier but we did see several small areas fall into the river. One of the boatmen told us that, when large segments of the face of the glacier break loose they send a wall of water 10 feet high across the river. This can be quite serious if a boat happens to be in the river when it occurs. They always pass the face of the glacier in mid-channel, too close to the glacier is dangerous for obvious reasons and hugging the left bank also has its problems. Should the glacier calve, the wall of water would slam the boat against the 20 foot high rock wall of the left bank.

We continued downstream and entered the Copper River Delta, a maze of channels. Here we saw many more seals, one group of over twenty stayed off our port beam for several hundred yards then disappeared. Stopping on one of the flats below Goodwin Glacier we sighted sheep on the mountainsides. We were nearing the end of the trip and pressed on through the rain to Flag Point where the highway bridge crosses the river. We were met by Wally Wallace of the Forest Service who drove us to Cordova at 5:00 PM, August 25, 1972.

Participants on the Copper River evaluation float trip:

|                |   |      |              |   |                                 |
|----------------|---|------|--------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Lee Adler      | - | BLM  | Doug Clark   | - | U.C. Santa Cruz                 |
| Greg Streveler | - | NPS  |              |   | (Environmental Studies Program) |
| *Hector Ewan   | - | AFN* | Mike Smith   | - | Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game     |
|                |   |      | Mike Wright  | - | BOR                             |
|                |   |      | Noel Granzow | - | BOR                             |
|                |   |      | Bob Zorich   |   | (boatman)                       |
|                |   |      | Ken Roberson |   | (boatman)                       |

\*Gakona to Chitina

\*\*Chitina to Cordova

Equipment: 3 Avon Redshank rubber rafts with 4HP outboard motors as well as paddles - borrowed from BLM.  
Gakona to Chitina  
2 Fish & Game wooden river boats with 40HP outboards. Supplied by Alaska Fish & Game Dept.  
Chitina to Cordova.