

# 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

TO : Files

DATE:

FROM :

SUBJECT: Nowitna River Inspection May 29 to June 6, 1972

On Tuesday, May 29, 1972, I flew via chartered beaver with two canoes and field equipment to 13 miles above Pilot Creek on the Nowitna River. We landed on a straight stretch of the river, off loaded the equipment and the plane flew back to Anchorage to pick up the field team. By 4:00p.m., the team from Anchorage arrived, consisting of Vern Clapp, USFS, Clay Hardy, BSWF, Mitch Henning, a temporary for AGS, and Pete Shepperd, ADF&G (McGrath). The plane then flew to Ruby and picked up Roger Bolstad, BLM (Fbks) and Sullivan Wright, a Native from Ruby. By 6:00p.m., the entire field team was assembled on the Upper Nowitna River.

The team was equipped with a 19'SS, 17'DE, both Grumman canoes, a 16' fiberglass SS and a Klepper Arias foldboat. As we were scheduled for 8 people, we planned four canoes; however, the morning of May 29, after I had already left for the river, the representative of Doyon cancelled out. The field team numbered seven men the fiberglass 16'SS was used single.

At 6:30p.m., we began the float, being 13 miles into State selected land we pushed on to a campsite just above Pilot Creek, the beginning of our study segment. Camp was set up at 10:00p.m.

We arose at 7:30a.m., on Wednesday, May 30, ate breakfast.

At 10:00p.m., we began the float. The river meanders and moves along at about 2 mph. Hills border the river in the upper reaches with bluffs rising from the rivers edge in places. The water is tea-colored, not really clear. It began raining and the wind rose. We stopped to get out of the wind at noon, ate lunch and, after the wind abated, continued downriver. At 2:30p.m., we sighted a black bear on the left bank. This was approximately 8 miles below Pilot Creek in the "d-2" segment. In this area the hills pull back away from the river as it meanders through low, marshy ground. Gravelbars suitable for camping may be found inside many of the bends of the Novi (local name for the Nowitna) in the upper reaches. Solifluction resulting from ice lenses is evident along this segment.



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At about 10 miles below Pilot Creek a trapper's cabin was located, well screened from the river although it was not far from the bank. These cabins and caches are unobtrusive and add to the primitive character of the river setting. (Our conceptual plan recommends these existing cabins remain and be protected from vandalism by river users). At 1910 we stopped and set up camp, having covered 28 1/2 miles this day.

In the upper segment of the Novi the lateral boundary for the river corridor would not need to exceed 100' from the riverbank in most locations. The tree growth effectively screens the river.

During this days run, we sighted three black bears, one sow moose, 23 species of birds including the "threatened" peregrine falcon. The evening was clear as the rain subsided in mid-afternoon.

May 31, dawned fair. The team was up at 6:30a.m., and during breakfast at 7:45a.m., a moose came out of the timber bordering the river south of camp and walked into the river before sighting us and fleeing back into the woods.

I ran through the **BLM** evaluation sheets for this campsite and primitive values rates A, while scenery rates B. We packed the canoes and began the days journey, the air temperature was 56oF and the water 48oF. There was no clouds on the horizon. We were about **32** miles above the Sulukna River.

On every gravelbar at which we stopped we were able to find agates of various sizes and colors. We stopped at several bars to enable the **ACS** representatives to take geo-chem samples.

At 11:37a.m., we passed a moose on a gravelbar on the right bank and within a quarter mile a bear on the left bank. Four miles below this bear we saw evidence of heavy ice damage on the riverbanks where ice had cut and pushed over trees.

During the lunch stop about 15 miles above the Sulukna, I again rated scenery and primitive values, the former rated B while the latter A. After lunch, we preceeded downstream. Cumulus cloud cover began building and by late afternoon the sky was practiccally completely overcast. There was no wind nor rain. The current was slow and the river continued to meander, requiring much effort to cover a linear mile. At 5:00p.m., we camped approximately one mile above the mouth of the Sulukna River. This day was entirely within "**d-1**" land. We sighted four black bear and four moose and 36

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species of birds.

June 1, arrived and we were up at 7:30a.m., under an overcast sky promising rain. The rating value for scenery was B while the rating for primitive values was A at this camp site. The current was still moving slowly as we proceeded downstream.

At the mouth of the Sulukna River there was once a big spring camp according to Sullivan Wright, Our Native participant. Sullivan told us that, as recently as 1930 (recently ???) this area was quite active during the summer. There were five permanent cabins near the mouth, none of which remain.

Below the Sulukna River the Novi crosses into "d-2" corridor. Above the Sulukna the river flows through "d-1" lands which had been Native regional deficiency until December 14, 1972, consequently, when changed to "d-1", there was no "d-2" corridor along the river. As we moved further north relief changes, hills began to show above the screen of trees on the river's edge. At 12:15 p.m., we stopped on a gravelbar on the left bank less than 10 miles above Mastadon Creek. At this point the primitive value and scenery both rated B.

Continuing downriver the bluffs closed in on the Novi. Bank swallows honeycombed one cliff face completely. About one mile above Mastadon Creek we stopped at a slough on which Sullivan Wright had a cabin. Upon approaching the cabin from the rear, a black bear left by the front door, crossed a slough and lumbered into the woods. The cabin had been practically destroyed. The door had been torn off, the stove pipe ripped out of the sod roof, the inside was a shambles and most of Sullivan's gear was strewn about the floor or in the woods nearby.

We found his sleeping bag back in the brush about 50 feet away, his food tins chewed open and scattered and his new snowmachine had its upholstery shredded.

We spent a few hours repairing the cabin, fashioning a door and putting things in order. We finally put the snowmachine inside the cabin (.six of us) at Sullivan's request. We wonder how he alone will get it out.

A mile below the slough on which the cabin was located we came to the mouth of Mastadon Creek and set up camp on a gravelbar opposite. At 8:00p.m., rain began which lasted all night.

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June 2, was a miserable, wet day. Rain and wind lashed the tents all day long. We sat it out. Primitive value for the site rated A while scenery again rated B.

The next morning, Sunday, June 3, dawned gray and cold, but without rain. We loaded the canoes after breakfast and continued our descent of the river towards the canyon. We were followed by a curious bear for a short distance. He ambled along the bank watching us glide silently down the river until we slowly out distanced him. Within a mile we passed a cow moose with a calf going upriver on the same side as the bear who was coming downstream.

After passing the moose we entered the canyon. This is not a canyon in the true sense of the word; hills come down to the river's edge but there are no steep cliffs. The river straightened but the velocity did not pick up appreciably. It was cooler in the canyon than it was above it, in fact there were still large pieces of ice on the banks from breakup. We stopped for lunch on an island in the canyon. The island would be suitable for a campsite as well.

After lunch we moved on to the mouth of the Titna River. The Titna is a good sized river, 80 feet wide, upon which there are mining claims, outside the study area. Just below the Titna is an abandoned cabin. While at the Titna a cub overflowed us and landed on an island four miles down the Novi. This plane brought fuel for the canoes (which was necessary for the motors to go through the excessive meanders in the lower reach). Going on downstream we passed another cabin and cache on a large island a mile above Big Mud River. Below Big Mud, natural bank erosion was evident with some sweepers in the river. Here we passed from a "d-2" corrdior to a block of "d-2".

A moose with twin calves was passed at 7:45p.m., and just below the moose we came upon another large island on which we camped.

The next morning, June 4, was cold and overcast. By 10:00a.m., the rain began as we left the canyon and entered the flats. The banks below the canyon are high, 3 to 6 feet. Gravelbars were replaced by mud and silt bars which are much less favorable for campsites.

During the morning we passed an abandoned BSW tent camp, the frame of which was still standing. Rain continued throughout the morning. At 2:00p.m., we stopped for lunch. Shortly after lunch we came upon an LCM which had a log

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jammed in its propeller. This barge was carrying fuel up the Novi to the Titna and then up the Titna to a mining claim. This is graphic evidence that the Nowitna River is a transportation corridor. We have several slides of the LCM (Landing craft medium - Navy barge).

Two miles above little Mud River we stopped to talk to four campers who had come from Fairbanks. They told us they were from Ft. Wainwright and had borrowed a riverboat, trailered it to Manley Hot Springs, then boated down the Yukon to the Novi and up the Novi. They said they planned to hunt bear. Six miles further downstream we camped. Both scenery and primitive values rated as B.

June 5, we arose at 7:45a.m., to a clear day. We were in the lower reach of the river and found that, since the maps had been made, the river had cut new channels, sloughs had opened up and become "short cuts" across necks of ox bows.

Stands of white spruce on the banks are used by residents of Ruby for house logs. The river undercutting the banks, drops trees into the river each year. Selective cutting rather than loosing the timber to the river should be permitted to continue. Campsites are not readily available in this boggy terrain. For miles in the lower reaches the Ray Mountains north of the Yukon are visible. At 7:45p.m., we arrived at the mouth of the Novi and proceeded down the Yukon to Ruby.

We spent the night of June 5 in Ruby trying to drum up business for a meeting.

On June 6 we were able to get a group of 20 people together for a two-hour meeting. The chief concerns of the Natives were subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping, and cutting of white spruce for house logs, and the use of the Novas a transportation corridor. Once they learned that these activities could continue they were not as hostile. (Previously the Village of Ruby had signed a petition against the Wild and Scenic River Study). Those in attendance were quite relieved to learn the facts of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

After the meeting we flew to Galena to hold another meeting. Unfortunately Jim Huntington was out fishing along with most of the residents and we were unable to set up a meeting. I left word that I was there and also wrote a letter to Jim Huntington and advised him that, if he was interested, we would come to Galena this fall and discuss the Nowitna Study.

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As a result of the poor showing at Galena we went back to Anchorage rather than into Tanana Village at that time of day (8p.m.). On June 11, we flew to Tanana and held a meeting where the people raised the same questions as those asked at Ruby. Those in Tanana were also quite happy to learn that our proposal would not preclude their traditional uses.

I recommend the Nowitna be designated a Scenic river for the entire 204 mile reach.