DOWN THE YUKON FOR ELEPHANTS ©

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(Posthumously)
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Contents

Introduction (Rondo)

The subtitle for this part of Volume 7 - "Down the Yukon for Elephants" - is dad's title for the draft he prepared many years before his death describing our 3 week odyssey from Nenana on the Tanana River to Holy Cross on the Yukon. He had hoped to have part of his manuscript published by National Geographic magazine. I was not aware that he submitted anything to the magazine for review at the time he did it which would have been in the late 1950's or early 1960's, but years later I heard him indicate, in passing during a conversation with another adult, that he had tried to get his story published. He explained its rejection as the result of there having been a recent article on the same topic. I found no manuscript in his papers so can't confirm or deny that memory but National Geographic was the ultimate magazine for dad and publishing in it is something I easily imagine him wanting to do.

Dad chose this title, "Down the Yukon for Elephants", because it captures one of his primary motives in taking the trip: looking for frozen mammoths in the constantly sloughing Palisades portion of the Yukon. He was a fossil hunter his entire life and this trip offered him an opportunity that few have to go up close to the unstable sand cliffs and look. The faint smell was that of rotting flesh, and greeted us before we arrived, and followed us after we left.

I scanned his manuscript and use it as the basic text for the final portion of the Seward volume. He wrote it many years ago, and he remembered more than I do now, though the trip does remain a vivid memory. Over the years I have remembered a string of village names: Nenana, Minto, Manley Hot Springs, Tolovana Slough, Tanana, Ruby, Galena, Kaltag, Koyokuk, Nulato, Anvik and Holy Cross. That is likely due to the fact that mom bought us a souvenir in each town where they were available: tee shirts screen-printed with the name of the town on the front. We wore them for years so had constant reminders of those particular towns. I even remembered them in their approximate order we entered them as we descended the river.

650 -I heard him say 750 so I don't actually know how many it was- miles down one of the great rivers of the world in three weeks in an 18 foot canoe was one of the highlights of my life. Here's a simple outline of this expedition: Dad accepted a job at Harvard University on the condition that he be able to take this trip before flying back to start work. They allowed him that privilege. We

winnowed our belongings down to what we could fit into a large box built over the bed of a half-ton Chevrolet Pickup. A hardy woman friend of ours drove it out to Great Falls, Montana while we took our river trip. We spent a few days in Anchorage finishing preparations, then took the Alaska Railroad up to Nenana on the Tanana River, a small town south and west of Fairbanks situated at the confluence of the Nenana River and the Tanana River. At Nenana we loaded the canoe with our gear and started the trip. We followed the Tanana down to the Yukon and then followed the Yukon down to Holy Cross. At Holy Cross, we sold the canoe in a few moments to a trader, boarded a pontoon plane a few hours later, and flew away from the Yukon for ever. The only comparable experience I've had since then was a 350 mile two-week trip thirteen years later, alone down one of the tributaries of the Amazon river when I was in Peace Corps.

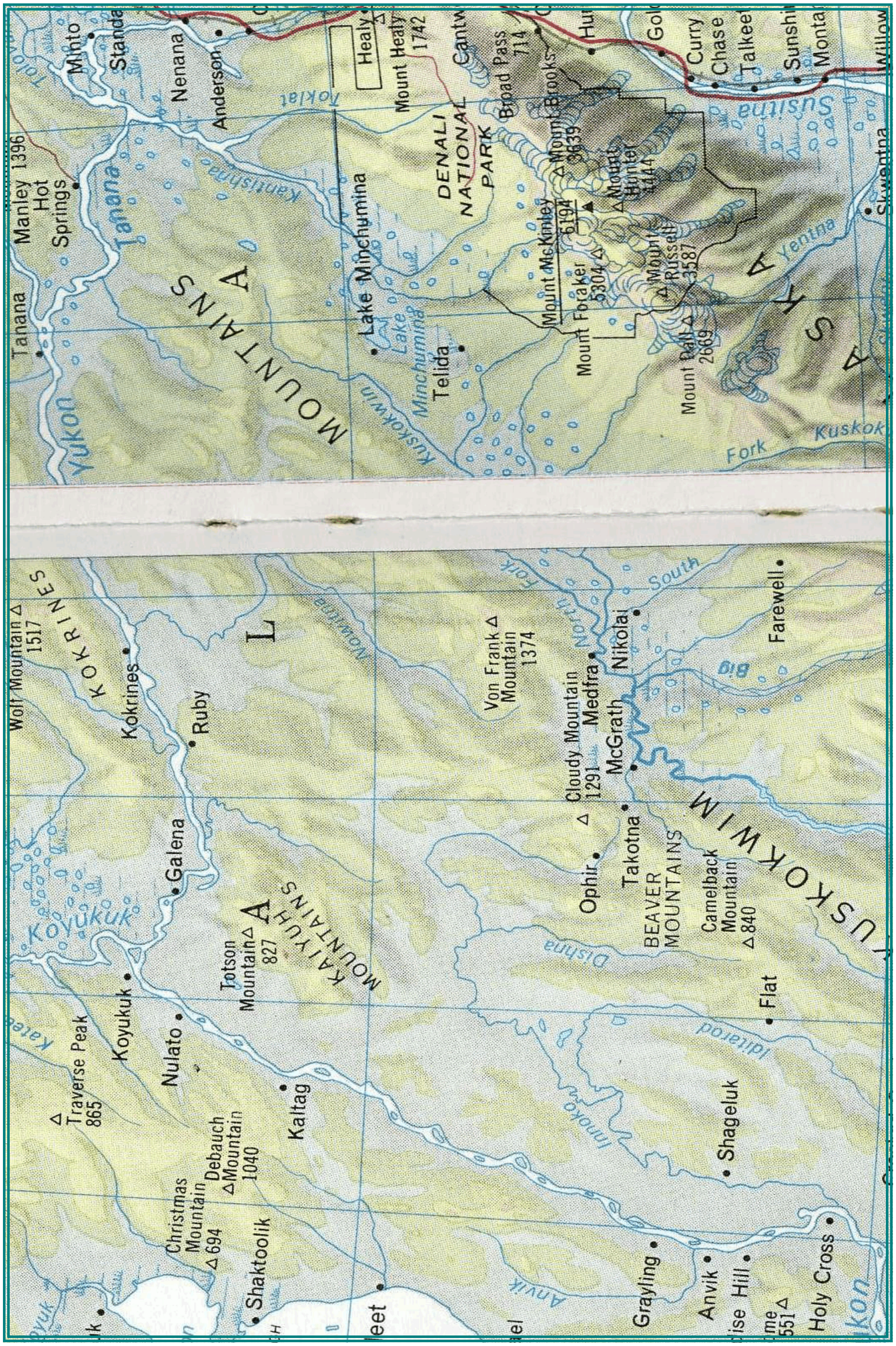
In this volume I will follow the convention I used in Volume 2 -Leamington. To help you keep yourselves oriented, Dad's writings will be preceded by **(Alvin)** and my own will be preceded by **(Rondo)**. Otherwise, we sound the same.

The photos are the ones he took with his new Exakta Varex IIA that he used for the first time on that trip. He bought it in Anchorage on our way to Nenana. Many of them are referred to specifically in his text so I put them there, but most of them are not specifically referred to. They should be included to complete the picture of what we experienced on the trip, so I open a "photo gallery" at the end of each locale and include all of the photos for that village or location.

Map of the Expedition

I need to locate our route geographically for you so that the story will have a physical context. The official maps of the expedition were lost in Boston. In a burst of generosity, Dad loaned them to Mrs. Romer for some event in Boston at which she lost them, much to his eternal chagrin. They were special air force maps that were sort of boot-legged for us by the air force captain at Elmendorf who flew reconnaissance and watched over us as we progressed. Dad cut and taped them together to cover the entire route. Because the scale of the maps was so large, he had to roll the final product into a tube that he unrolled sort of like a scroll as we progressed down the river, dropping the thing into the river more than once in the process.

The map on the following page is a snippet from the Britannica map 180 I've used elsewhere. The starting and stopping places for the trip both show on this small map. Nenana is located in the top right corner, and Holy Cross is in the lower left corner. Downstream from Nenana you see Minto and then Manley Hot Springs, and then Tanana. That is the confluence of the Tanana and the Yukon Rivers. We then floated on down the Yukon to Holy Cross, the four of us in an 18 foot canoe.


Minto
Nenana
Anderson
Healy
Mount Healy
1742
Broad Pass
714
Mount Brooks
3639
Curry
Chase
Talkeetna
Susitna
Manley Hot Springs
1396
Tanana
Kantishna
Toklat
Lake Minchumina
DENALI
NATIONAL
PARK
Mount McKinley
6194
Mount Hunter
4444
Mount Russell
3587
Mount Foraker
5304
Mount Dall
2669
Yentna
Skwentna
Telida
Kuskokwim
Minchumina
Tanana
Yukon
MOUNTAINS
A
A S K A
Fork
Kuskok
Wolf Mountain
1517
KOKRINES
Kokrines
Ruby
L
Nowitna
Von Frank Mountain
1374
Medfra
Nikolai
North Fork
South
Big
Farewell
Cloudy Mountain
1291
McGrath
Takotna
Ophir
BEAVER MOUNTAINS
Camelback Mountain
840
KUSKOKWIM
Galena
Koyukuk
A
Totson Mountain
827
KAIYUH MOUNTAINS
Dishna
Flat
Iditarod
Traverse Peak
865
Nulato
Kaltag
Debauch Mountain
1040
Christmas Mountain
694
Shaktoolik
Innoko
Shageluk
Grayling
Anvik
Holy Cross

Seward

Alvin's Prologue

As soon as I arrived in Alaska in 1940 I came under its spell. I left during World War II and spent a year in the Hawaiian Islands yet in spite of their great tropical beauty I dreamed about Alaska every night. I had to go back, for once cast upon you the spell of Alaska and the Yukon is never broken. Ask any old Alaskan. It is now over forty years since I last left Alaska and I still dream about it. But there is a story to be told here about hunting elephants during a trip down the Yukon.

I had always been fascinated by that mighty river and the part it played in the early settling and development of Alaska. Rivers are a new country's natural highways and the Yukon, with its main tributaries the Tanana and Koyokuk, runs more or less across the middle of Alaska. Up and down this system traveled the prospectors, traders, speculators, settlers, villains, "girls" and gold of a wild frontier. In 1898 there was a fleet of about thirty-four large stern-wheelers plying upper and lower Yukon waters carrying thousands of passengers and hundreds of thousands of tons of freight annually. This commerce lasted barely fifty years then waned and disappeared with the advent of World War II. What is left of this wooden fleet is rotting away along the river front in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. Only one steamer, the Alaska Railroad's "Nenana," survives in Alaska.

Two years after the last steamer tied up on the lower Yukon I appeared on the scene eager to find out about the river, its commerce and its natives. I became obsessed with the idea of going down-river in a canoe to see the natives in their villages and get more subjects for the pictures I was painting.

Twelve years after Pearl Harbor found me planning that trip with my wife Marie, and two sons, Dick 13, and Rondo 14.

The colorful stern-wheelers were gone forever but I believed there was much history to seek out and breath taking adventures to be had in a small boat. I wanted to see how much of the old romantic atmosphere still drifted over the dwindling native villages and lonesome fish camps. I wanted to discover old gold rush cabins, or see if they had all fallen to decay. I wanted to seek out legends and the invisible suggestions, ghost like, of the throbbing flood of humanity that once surged up river and into the interior.

We were living in Seward where a interesting old sourdough, Hank Pallage, teased my imagination with fact and fantasy. He had lived in Alaska many years and his supply of stories and interest in telling them never diminished. "The Yukon", he often said gravely, "is not to be fooled with". Then with a faraway look in his eyes and lowered voice he would usually add, "You'll see things you'll never forget". He warned me many times not to take my family with me--"go it alone but don't take your family. It isn't safe for them. The natives will steal you blind. They are treacherous and undependable", and thus he played a game of trying to see if he could discourage me from carrying out my plan but he only served to whet my interest.

With the help of a retired river Pilot, Dick Lynch, and a veteran Alaska Guide, "Whitey" Lehto I collected ideas and information about the Yukon and the country through which it ran. Dick gave me valuable information about river currents, flood time, ice passage in the spring, mosquitoes, natives and a list of all the villages and stops he made as a river pilot. He listed 42 villages. We were to find only 17.

"Whitey" suggested I re-finish an old freight canoe I had and use it. It had a four and a half foot beam and was seventeen and a half feet long with a two foot wide square

Figure 4 Canoe on Nenana River in Nenana

stern for an outboard motor. I had a seven and a half horse motor which would be ideal. Just enough to push us along faster than the current giving us the ability to steer. Whitey said you can't steer a floating boat. It will drift into sweepers, snags and cutbanks. His good advice was based on experience.

The canoe was of a cedar strip lattice construction with two bilge keels. These would make the canoe difficult to manage in river currents but were ideal for marine navigation. I removed them also peeling off a thick coat of canvas and paint, replacing this with a heavy layer of ruby red fiberglass. This color was planned for visibility from the air.

Through a friend I managed to be designated an official Air Force Mission of the 71st Air Rescue Squadron at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage. I was then furnished with restricted, but the latest, maps to guide us on our way. My mission was to check all marked shelters, deleting those missing and adding new ones to the map for possible use by downed airmen in the future. The Air Force checked on our progress when they happened to overfly the river and later reported us at various points along our route. The little outboard motor was usually running so we never heard planes far overhead. We were once logged as being spotted halfway down the "Boneyard",a fossil elephant graveyard, which experience was of special significance to me for at the end of the trip we would leave Alaska for a new chapter of adventure in the field of paleontology at Harvard University. However, the trip had a purpose beyond adventure. I had been painting Alaska natives and wanted to get more information and material to work with by seeing babies and old people, neither of which had ever left their village. We would see Athapascan Indians. Eskimos traditionally lived around Alaska's coastline with Indians being found along interior waterways

It was my plan to ship the canoe and equipment from Seward to Nenana where we could put it in the Tanana river, go down it to the Tanana slough, through it to the Tolovana river, down it and back into the Tanana and on down it to the village of Tanana at the confluence of the Tanana with the Yukon, then down the Yukon past the "boneyard" and on to its confluence with the Koyokuk, then on to the Catholic mission at Holy Cross where we could catch a mail plane over the mountains to Bethel on the Kuskokwim river, and from there fly by DC3 back to Anchorage, passing near Mount McKinley along the way; but back to the beginning.

Where's the canoe?

Out in our backyard in Seward, all but six inches of a four foot picket fence was still buried in snow, even though it was the last of April. Over in a far corner of the yard I fancied I could see a low ridge on the crusted snow. No, I thought, it's still too deep. Another week passed.

"Now?" asked my two sons, speaking in unison, "Now?"

"Okay", I said, "Now". It was April 15, 1956.

Out the back door they flew in their shirt sleeves. The low ridge surrendered easily before their onslaught. In a short time with their two shovels and an old broom they had flailed their way almost down out of sight. It was breakfast time and as I finished my sourdough hot cakes covered with wild blueberry syrup the boys bubbled back into the house.

"We found it! We found it!", they shouted with glee. "Lets get it out now!".

"Hold on", I said, "after all we do have more than a month to get it ready". I pointed out

that although they had found the old canoe the three and a half feet of snow must be given a fair chance to get itself out of the yard and down into the bay. We needed bare ground to work on.

After the snow melted we began work by stripping off the old canvas and paint. Our next door neighbor, Dave Fleming became interested in our project and offered his basement garage for us to use in applying the fiberglass. It proved to be a very good arrangement. With my elbows and knees sore from working over the canoe I sailed many a delicious, imaginary mile down the river, drenched in the sweet essence of anticipation. But there were practical things to be attended to. At the Alaska Native Service Tuberculosis sanatorium we talked with every Indian who had relatives along our proposed route. We wanted to carry messages to them facilitating our acceptance into every native village. We wanted to go as visitors, not as curious tourists. This turned out to be a wise plan. We had many pleasant and happy experiences as welcome visitors.

Preparations for our departure began to accelerate to a feverish pitch. We checked and rechecked lists, alternately glorying in some friends envy while rebuffing negative remarks from others. Finally the equipment was ready. The boys and I had spent nearly a month in Dave's basement putting on the fiberglass covering. It looked good. I hope it works well. I made hoops and put sockets along the gunwale for "wagon bows". Marie tailored a water proof nylon cover to fit which can be pulled over the hoops and secured down along the edges of the canoe providing a snug, dry interior for us and our supplies during rainstorms.

Now we must clear out the house which has been our happy home for five years. We must discard, give away, ship, or load into a 3/4 ton Chevrolet truck, everything we have collected in those busy years. It will be a difficult job. One isn't easily parted from his treasures, and I, especially, have many stowed away in

the basement. As soon as we return from our conquest of the rivers we must grab our few remaining treasures and begin the long trip out of Alaska over the Alcan Highway to Massachusetts.

The day for shipping the canoe finally arrived. The boys and I dragged it out of Dave's basement and secured it on a skid. We dragged it slowly down to the dock behind the truck and helped the longshoremen load it on an Alaska Railroad flat car. It will go to the town of Nenana and wait there until we arrive and call for it a week later. A large orange steel tank was also on the flat car. We were to see it later in several places.

Refinishing the Canoe **(Rondo)**

We got the canoe over into Dave's basement where we refinished it. His "basement" was actually the ground floor of a two-story house. He lived on the top floor that was called the "first floor", as if the "basement" was in the ground. It wasn't. Dave drove his car straight from the road into his garage - when our canoe wasn't sitting there.

We hoisted the canoe upside down onto two sturdy sawhorses where he normally parked his car. Then we peeled the layers of green-painted canvas off the frame. The canvas was tougher than I would have expected because the paint did in fact protect it from damage. We tore off in strips with the sound of a zipper being pulled, creating a dust of fine particles that irritated our noses.

After we had all of the canvas layers removed, we saw the bare carcass of the canoe, three criss-crossed layers of cedar lath that had been carefully shaped, probably with steam, into the configuration it had. It looked frail and untrustworthy to do what we had done with it over the years we owned it. No tough, thick boards to protect the hull, just layers of heavy, painted canvas nailed tightly over woven layers of lath. But we knew it was tough and durable when assembled because we had used it for 5 years on the bay and had experienced its durability and quality in different settings in rivers, in storms, and on trips down the bay.

We sanded the outer layer of lath with coarse sandpaper to smooth off irregularities so that the new coat would fit snugly and pulled any staples or brads. After we had smoothed the outer layer of lath, dad then began to cover it with this magical stuff called "fiberglass." He had purchased a bolt of this new stuff.

It was smooth with wide threads both directions and felt unlike any other fabric I had felt in mom's sewing. He laid the fabric over the hull and drew lines of the sheet of fabric de-marking where he needed to make cuts. The idea in putting fiberglass on was to provide a tougher skin.

Then he used regular scissors to cut this mysterious fabric. It cut as easily as if it were cotton but dad said to not breathe the dust created when he cut it. Then he laid the piece over the hull and examined how it fit to be sure it was large enough. To hold it in place he used small tacks temporarily until he could apply resin to the cloth that would hold it in place. After covering a substantial segment of the hull with this layer of cloth, he mixed two chemicals, a resin and an accelerator in a basin that he knew he was going to throw away. The two chemicals had potent odors that were almost painful to breathe in that enclosed garage where it was too cold outside to open the door and allow a flow of fresh air.

Then he used a wide paint brush to apply this stuff that had the consistency of Karo syrup onto the fiberglass fabric. It soaked into the fabric and caused it to smooth out and lie flat. He applied two layers over the entire hull to be sure that he had enough fiberglass to protect it against being punctured by stray rocks or logs. The second coat was like the first with one major difference: he added a brilliant red dye to the resin. This scarlet syrup was applied as before to the outer layer of fiberglass fabric. The smells were overwhelming but we stayed to watch the magic of red covering the hull.

The net effect of these two substantial coats of fiberglass and resin was the reconstruction of the original shape, except that this time it was a gorgeous red color. After finishing the application of the red resin over the second layer of fiberglass fabric, dad then started to carefully finish off the red skin. He had to figure out how to join the fiberglass resin with the gunwale in such a way that the two surfaces remained visually distinct but such that there was a tight seal between them such that water couldn't leak through. After finishing off the edge of the fiberglass coat, dad then painted the gunwale with bright yellow paint.

The purpose of the bright colors, red and yellow, was to make the canoe more visible from the air. Dad had arranged with someone he knew at Elmendorf Air Force Base in anchorage to track us on his routine reconnaissance flights over the region as we went down the rivers. This captain flew a Grumman Albatross regularly over that part of the territory and promised to watch for us on his trips to be sure that we were safe. He and dad agreed on some signals that we would use in the event that we needed his assistance. The Grumman Albatross was a pontoon plane that could land on the river if necessary. As dad noted above, we didn't see the plane many times but I do remember seeing it a couple of times. The plane flew fairly low over us and as he went above us, he rocked his wings back and forth in greeting.

Figure 9
http://www.steele-family.org.uk/Airshow/aircraft/28Jun38.jpg

We were proud of the transformation of the canoe from a dull gray-green color into the brilliant, ruby red and yellow for the trip. The only problem we had was that we didn't have a way to test the shell to see if it leaked. We left that problem to be solved after we had shipped the canoe to Nenana. We didn't have a specific plan to find and repair any pin holes that remained but were confident that we would be able to successfully address the problem when we got there. We were.

Loading the 3/4 Chevy Pickup

Taking this trip down the Tanana and Yukon rivers was a condition that dad set when offered the job with Harvard. He told Arnie Lewis, his friend who arranged the job, that he refused to take the job unless he was given enough time to do the trip, which was to be three weeks. Arnie arranged with Dr. Alfred Sherwood Romer, a man who was dad's mentor until his death, to allow dad to do the trip with his own condition, namely, that dad would not spend any more time and would fly straight out to Harvard as soon as he set foot in Utah because

the expedition he was to start on would already be in Nova Scotia. They mutually agreed so the deal was done.

This introduced a major, unanticipated wrinkle. We now had to do those things that were necessary to permanently vacate Seward. It was exciting to think that we were going to move to Boston. We had already made various moves in my young life so I was accustomed to the idea of moves. But at the same time, the idea of moving from Seward to Boston was unsettling. I was 14 years old and had lived in Naples, Vernal and then Seward in my short entire life. They were all tiny, rural towns. Boston was a behemoth, a metropolis, filled with foreign, intimidating things I had never encountered. Dad was going to work for Harvard University. I scarcely understood the notion of "university", but I was vaguely familiar with the prestigious name "Harvard" and was a bit unsettled. Boston and Harvard were sort of mysterious, distant places and dad was apparently going to work there. That was fine as far as he was concerned but I was uneasy about how things would work out for me.

The concept itself of leaving Seward wasn't new. Mom and dad said that they were going to make this move because us boys needed to be able to go to better schools than were available in Seward. What was new was the timing. They had not expected to have to undertake to leave Seward forever at the same time they were prepping for a 3 week expedition on the rivers. I see today that they were right regarding the school situation. Seward's offering was pretty meager, of necessity. The town had few teachers and less money. Twelve grades were crowded into one building that had become too small, so Dick and I spent several years attending school in the rented basement of churches and the Oddfellows Hall. A new high school was being built to take the older kids out of the two story William H. Seward School that I attended, but that only relieved congestion. It didn't increase quality.

I was actually oblivious to the notion of "quality" of education. All I personally experienced was how teachers treated me and how I was graded and how other kids treated me and how cold it was and how wet it was and how much snow there was and so on. Nothing earth-shaking that had any bearing on my future. The concept of 'future' was incomprehensible. All I understood was that Mom and dad thought the school was inadequate. Who was I to disagree. So the offer of a job at Harvard automatically killed two birds with one stone, first, it put us kids in a position to attend good schools, and second, it gave dad a job to make

the move possible. when they decided that we were going to Boston so we had better schools, that was it. I had no say in the matter.

But I had feelings. I was nervous and unsettled by the idea. Age 14 is a terrible age to move kids. I understand that now better than I did at the time. Don't you ever move your kids when they are 14. It is too late. They are settled into the society and culture of their town at the instant they are in the middle of a tempestuous identity crisis called puberty. They need stability and familiarity and predictability. It is not a good time to uproot them and start over. I understood that finally when I sat in Burger King with Nate when he was about 13 to talk to him about my own possibility. I was offered a risk manager job in Houston, Texas in a 650 bed hospital with a salary of $75,000. I had made two trips to Chicago to meet with the headhunter who was charged with filling the risk manager position. I was ready to go and took Nate out for a hamburger to prepare him for the change. That was more gracious than how my parents did it.

In an instant I understood I was making a major mistake. Major. I understood it because my own inner child was painfully, powerfully moved by Nate's response. Understand, please, that Nate was the obedient, cooperative child. When it was his turn to speak, he said, with enormous tears but enormous self-control, "It's OK dad. I'll be fine. I understand that you need to do it. I'll be fine."

Well, in that short interchange, I knew. I knew that there was no way in you-know-what that I was going to uproot him. In his pain, I unexpectedly got a clearer glimpse of my own pain at the same age when I had no chance to even express my feelings. I knew I was not going to do it. I took a lot of flak from the headhunter who had worked out this position for me. He felt I had lied to him and perhaps I did, but it was a greater good to preserve my son from the horror I experienced. So I didn't inflict on him what was inflicted on me.

Anyway, after the decision was made that dad was going to work at Harvard, the over-riding consideration was how to get rid of most of our things so that we could make the move. The choices were difficult. The process for me turned into making decisions about what was less valuable to me, less personal, less desirable. All we were able to take with us on this transcontinental move was what we could fit into a half-ton pick up. That was all. There it is in this photo. A small white box.

Figure 10 Water stop in Montana

Do you have any idea how little that is? No couches, no beds, no chairs, no tables, no food, few books, no toys, no model airplanes, no fishing poles, and so on. Hardly anything. So we were forced as kids to give away or throw away virtually of our most cherished belongings. It was a difficult process under the best of circumstances, but under mom's and dad's hand it was a cruel callous process. Neither of them was sympathetic to our clinging to things, neither wanted to hear us plead to take something. To them it was just pointless whining because the decision to make the move was made and we had so little room to take things that they got to take what they wanted, not us. I do understand that today from the point of view of the adult who had to make the thing work but I understood none of that then.

I wanted badly to be allowed to keep my carefully accumulated collection of bullets and cartridges. This collection fit into a small wooden box about 14 inches

long, 10 inches wide and inches thick. That's all, yet I was forced to give it away. To Darrell Schaefermeyer, a young kid who was our neighbor. I resented that mightily. Among the prizes were a grenade, some 50 mm shells, and an 80 mm shell. I loved them because I had collected them with great expense, yet my wishes were not acknowledged. My wishes created anger in mom who just wanted to reduce the amount of stuff to what we could fit into the truck. Oddly enough, her decisions somehow favored what she wanted to take, not what I wanted to take. I understood that might makes right so gave up externally, yet I resented being forced to give up every single toy I loved without any sympathy or understanding from mom or dad. It was as if the fact that I was standing on the divide of puberty, between childhood and teenagehood, was being taken advantage of as justification for discarding the toys on my childhood, some of which I had brought from Vernal. If I complained about having to leave everything behind, all I got was anger or lectures about growing up and about how duty is difficult and so on.

I see today how extraordinary our preparations were for moving to Boston. We reduced our worldly belongings from a small house-full to what would fit into that white box. You see that box in the preceding photo, the white box on the back of the half-ton pickup. Can you imagine making a move 7,500 miles with only what you could carry in that small space? No beds, no tables, no couch, no chairs, no stove, no refrigerator, few dishes, some bedding, and so on. Hardly anything to start a new life with after arrival. We took only what fitted into that truck so our new beginning in Boston was sparse. We finished this gruesome reduction process as the school year was ending and as we prepared for the expedition on the rivers. The latter made the former bearable.

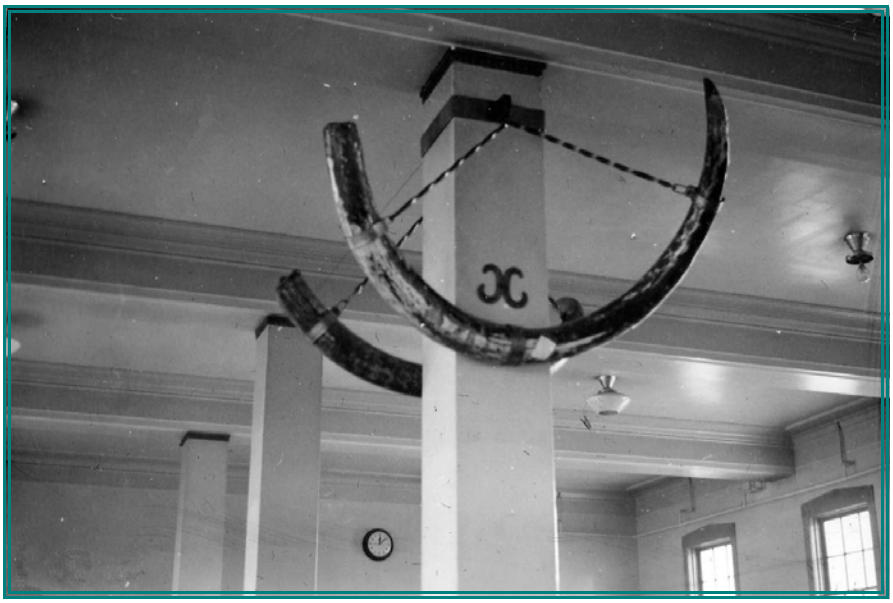
Anchorage

We left Seward and went to Anchorage where we left our 1953 four-door Chevrolet that we'd drive to the Lower 48 after finishing the trip. The hardy woman had already started the trek alone with our pickup over the 4,000 mile Alcan road -dirt, unpaved except with rocks. We could only carry what the car would hold with a rack on the top. That was what we had to look forward to when we finished the river trip, monumental things. In Anchorage, Dad had to meet with the air force captain at Elmendorf to arrange his oversight of us, the emergency signals we'd use if we got in trouble. Dad also had to buy his new

camera, one of his typical extravagances. I don't know if he had already picked out the Exakta but that was what he bought. It was a single lense reflex, a kind he had never used before. He chose it because it was a top-of-the-line camera, something he loved immensely as shown by his being president of the camera club in his high school. When he let me look through the viewfinder, I couldn't see anything. All I could see was black so I was impressed that he dared buy it. He obviously understood how to use it as shown by all of the slides included in this volume. Except for images from the internet, all of these images are his.

Alaska Railroad ride to Nenana

After business was finished, we bought tickets on the Alaska Railroad to take us up to Nenana. The Anchorage Railroad station was not a large building in reality but compared to Seward's station it was large. The most interesting feature inside were the mammoth tusks. They were enormous. I had no memory of seeing modern elephants but based on photographs I could tell that their tusks were tiny compared to these. They were stained with copper and iron chemicals and were impressive. Even the ones that were broken off were impressive. They represented one of the things that dad was going to hunt for on the Yukon so had special meaning as we looked at them. One of his major wishes for this trip was to find tusks like these, though he didn't really articulate the wish that specifically. His description below of going through the Palisades makes it clear how he felt about it.

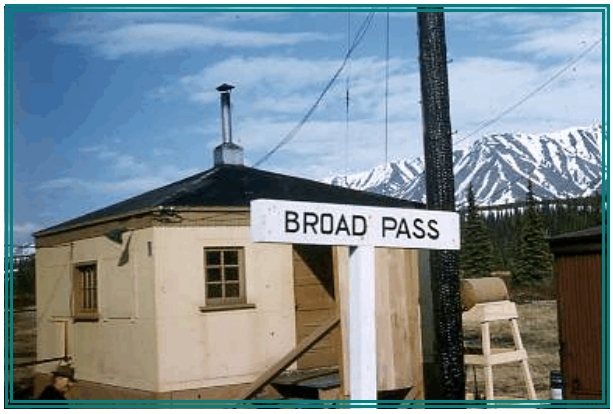


The distance from Anchorage to Nenana was approximately 300 miles. If I remember correctly, it took all of one day and part of another. We stopped in Healy or some place that had a hotel. The trip was pretty boring to kids because the terrain wasn't all that interesting to a kid. I believe the locomotive was diesel. This fragment of Britannica Map 180 shows that some of the stops we passed through were gone by the time this map was compiled. For example, "Garner" is not on this map but there is a photo below of that stop. Progress, I suppose.

After leaving Anchorage, we encountered tiny towns or whistle stops. Dad tried to get a photo of the sign for each stop that follow on the next page, some out of focus. They are not in order because there is no way to tell now what the order was of the ones that are no longer on the map.


HEALY


GARNER


BROAD PASS


HONOLULU


SUNSHINE


CHULITNA


MCKINLEY PARK


FERRY


HURRICANE


CASWELL


CURRY HOTEL

Mom took sandwiches and apples and crackers for us to eat so we wouldn't need to spend money for food on the train. That was OK, though I would have liked to eat in the dining cars. The idea of eating in a car while it was moving was appealing but I didn't get to do it. The trip took a long time but I don't remember staying overnight anywhere. The Curry Hotel was a sort of half-way stop between Anchorage and Nenana so perhaps we stayed there, but I have a clear memory of it.

Tanana River

Nenana **(Alvin)**

When we arrived in Nenana we got a room at the Tortella (named after the local Indian tribe) Lodge and did some sightseeing. The last survivor of the Alaska Railroad's fleet of stern-wheelers, the "Nenana", lay on boom anchor in the mouth of the Nenana river near where it empties into the Tanana river. The boat appeared to be in excellent condition. It was retired the previous year to be replaced by tunnel bottomed diesel tugs which would push barges. (We were to encounter several tugs along our way). Fortunately the Nenana was later acquired by the city of Fairbanks as a tourist attraction to again enjoy the romantic interest of wandering feet, this time as a river-boat museum.

The warm air of an interior Alaskan spring was charged with expectancy. The last grip of winter was passing. As eager as children from school the ice had already shoved its way down the rivers and into the Bering Sea. The sun was remaining long hours as if reluctant to miss a moment of the great vibrating swell of re-awakening life that is spring in the great Alaskan interior.

The village of Nenana, wedged between the confluence of the Tanana and Nenana rivers, was also awake to the promise ahead. The river dock on the Tanana was pulsating with long hours of activity. All available space was stacked with freight awaiting the break-up of the ice and the first barges down river.

Now that the ice was gone, crane booms were busily swinging back and forth off the dock feeding the hungry barges tied up for their first meal of the season. Down-river, depleted trading post inventories were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the years first provisions. The waiting cargo included: heavy equipment and construction material for military bases along the Yukon; supplies for a mission school; mail-order goods for many an isolated, patient family. But Nenana is famous throughout Alaska for something other than river freight. It is the home of the famous annual Nenana Ice Pool.

In mid-winter a tripod is set on the ice in the middle of the Tanana river with a wire connecting it to a clock in a building on the bank. In the spring when the ice moves a short distance the wire stops a clock marking the "official" time of the ice breakup. Alaskans (no outsiders) all over the territory have wagered their money, a dollar a guess, on the time they think the breakup will occur. The day, hour, minute, and second are guessed on each ticket. Alaskans can buy as many guesses as they wish, or can belong to a pool of guessers. Often the pot of money is split among many winners. We took pictures in front of the

Ice Pool building, having guessed our dollars worth earlier.

The ice pool building is near the dock where considerable interest was shown in a strange blood-red canoe waiting beside a yellow tank. Someone said the canoe had been shipped from Seward and was awaiting "will call". Everyone was curious to see what kind of nut was invading shovel-nosed boat country with a flimsy sharp nosed canoe. Great was their surprise and greater still was their concern when a man with his wife and two kids showed up and announced a down-river trip all the way to Holy Cross.

When I stepped up to the window to claim the canoe the freight agent was aghast, "you're going down-river in that? Why don't you sell it and buy yourself a real boat. In fact, I'll gladly give you a real boat to make it safe for your family".

I assured him I would feel much safer in a boat I had traveled in for five years than I would in boat with unknown characteristics. However had never been on a river before so was innocently unaware of just how much I had to learn about handling the canoe in river currents. His parting warning was, "Git completely out of the river whenever ya meet a tug and barge, ya hear?"

The next morning the crew of one of the cranes obligingly picked the canoe off the dock and sat it down over the edge of the dock into the swift muddy water. With a handline we worked it up-river past the tug and barges, past the upper end of the dock to a firm mudbank used by the natives. I was dismayed to find a hatful of water in the bottom of the canoe. It had a small leak somewhere. I neglected to test it in Seward. The boys and I turned it upside down and I dug out my fiber-glass patching kit and went to work. The best way to tell if a hole was actually a leak was to put your mouth over it and suck.

Occasionally a stray dog sniff-checked us and wandered off again. A few small Indian boys and girls collected out of curiosity. They were very shy and given to girlish giggles. Marie sat forlornly on top of our monstrous pile of equipment and supplies.

Now that we had everything finally assembled on the river bank it was indeed a formidable amount to stow into the comparatively small canoe. The pile included Marie, four large kapok life preservers, two six foot paddles, one 7 ½ H.P. outboard motor, 30 gallons of gasoline, four pair of boots, one tent, four sleeping bags, one two burner gasoline stove, one 22 caliber rifle, three good sized boxes of groceries, several cameras and a lot of film, one pair of 7X50 binoculars, the tailored nylon tarp cover, six metal conduit bows to hold the cover, a large duffel bag of clothing, eight quarts of oil, a bucket of tools, several heavy coats, a one gallon cooking kit, plus several miscellaneous items. Now add to that the two boys and me and you have what certainly looked like a near impossible stowing job.

I fully expected we would have to shove off leaving part of the pile on shore but when the patching was complete I very carefully stowed it all. The bottom of the canoe was almost invisible. The gasoline and food we would gradually use but most of the remainder would go with us, either over or under us, to Holy Cross our final destination.

Eventually it was time to leave the security of the mud bank and find out what the river was all about. Could we, unaided and inexperienced, cope with all the unexpected emergencies, navigate wisely and arrive at our planned destination safely? We would have almost continuous daylight and so could travel without a schedule. We would be completely out of contact with the busy world almost the entire trip. I therefore forbad the use of the tiresome question, "How soon----". We would travel as we were moved by our needs and interest.

I had planned to go down along the face of the dock and tie up by a recessed stairway in order to take on a water supply for the first few days. Rondo, was in the bow with a paddle and I was in the stern with the other. I wasn't sure this was the best arrangement but we had to begin somewhere.

After launching the canoe from the mudbank we were soon frantically trying to learn just what one did to gain control of it. At first the muddy water pulled us gently then began to push and shove vigorously as we came alongside the dock. Dick had been instructed to heave a line up to 95 pound Marie waiting anxiously on the dock above. The water was about ten feet below the edge of the dock. The canoe gained speed with no effort from me. Nothing like this had happened to us in salt water--which went up and down while the canoe stayed, more or less, in one place. I felt a surge of panic as the bow headed for a wicked looking rusty bolt sticking out of a piling in front of the canoe. Rondo managed to fend us off with his paddle and

we headed for another bolt in the next piling. As this was happening we continued to gain speed. I shoved my long hickory paddle into the swirling silty water and gave it a quick heave against the outside edge of the canoe in a move calculated to kick the bow away from the rusty bolt. It did, but at the same time it kicked the stern in toward the bolt as the canoe swept along. The river was a wild, eager thing pushing us relentlessly forward in spite of our uncertain efforts to end the process at the right place. I heaved on my paddle again to miss another bolt only to have the canoe end up with a sickening thud against a piling.

"Throw the line up! throw it up", I yelled at Dick. He was frantically fumbling around in a pile of life preservers, rubber boots and rope trying to get something free to throw up to Marie. He finally got a line up to her along with someone's sweater and she threw a couple of loops around a cleat. When the bow was secured the stern swung around and came up with a great jolt against a downstream piling a couple of inches below a ragged rusty bolt. We had just learned our first, and most important, lesson about landing a craft in river water:

NEVER LAND WITH THE CURRENT; ALWAYS SWING AROUND AND LAND WHILE PULLING UPSTREAM AGAINST THE CURRENT. That way you can gradually ease into the bank. Our first landing almost ended in disaster. One of the bolts could have ripped the canoe wide open.

We had just survived the most clumsy, awkward landing ever devised by four people. Looking back beyond the upper end of the dock to the mud bank from which we recently embarked I wondered if we were to have seven hundred and fifty miles of this level of excitement. I also wondered if the locals were not justified in their misgivings about us and our canoe.

We filled our water cans and finally cast off for whatever adventures, of fun or dangerous excitement, that may develop down-river. It was 5:40 PM, June 3rd. Our first native village would be Minto, about 35 miles downstream, which we should reach that afternoon. Minto was to provide one of the most enjoyable social experiences of our trip. We made good time, adding the little motor's push to the swift river current we soon passed the first fish wheel, I should say, wreck of a fish wheel. It was up on the bank away from winters ice and would need a good bit of reconstruction to get it back in the river ready to scoop up salmon.

Natives along the river use fish wheels to provide themselves and their dogs with the main staple of their winter diet, dried fish for the dogs and smoked fish (squaw candy) for the humans. The "wheel" is mounted on a log raft and held in place in the current by pole booms extending from the bank and anchor cables secured upstream. The wheel is approximately 16 feet in diameter, is mounted on wooden hubs and is turned by the current. Two fish baskets are mounted opposite each other, 180 degrees apart, with two pusher panels in between. As the current pushes on the paddles a fish basket swinging downstream scoops up the salmon which swim upstream into it. When the basket reaches the top of the wheel the fish slide out the bottom of the basket into a trough beside the wheel. Fish wheels are very effective devices but didn't originate in Alaska. They were borrowed from the Mississippi River. The owners of the disassembled wheels we saw were not yet thinking about them. The salmon they will fish are barely entering the broad Yukon delta more than a thousand miles downstream.

When we had been underway for an hour and a half we sighted a Yutana Barge Line tug coming upstream pushing two barges. River tugs never pull barges, they always push them. We later learned we had met the tug in the narrowest stretch of the river so the wake fanning out below the tug was enormous. When it reached us I swung the canoe around and rode directly across the wave. I was very pleased by the canoes performance, remembering the freight agent's warning to get out of the river.

We began learning how to follow ourselves on the chart although every island wasn't mapped but I hadn't learned anything about reading the water. We soon found ourselves hung up on a » sandbar. We had to pole ourselves back upstream with the paddles far enough to get the motor back in the water to push us upstream another quarter or a mile after which I swung over into the main channel.

Major lesson No 2: "Read" the water to see where the shallows and deep channels are. With experience you can tell by the little waves and ripples, or lack of the same, where the best channel is. We also learned that the worst part of a tug and barge wake is not the outsweep but the back sweep where it returns from bouncing off the bank and collides in midstream with the backsweep from the other side. This produces a wicked looking, high, jagged-peaked, spume of water five of six feet high, certainly something to be avoided at all costs.

Nenana Photo Album

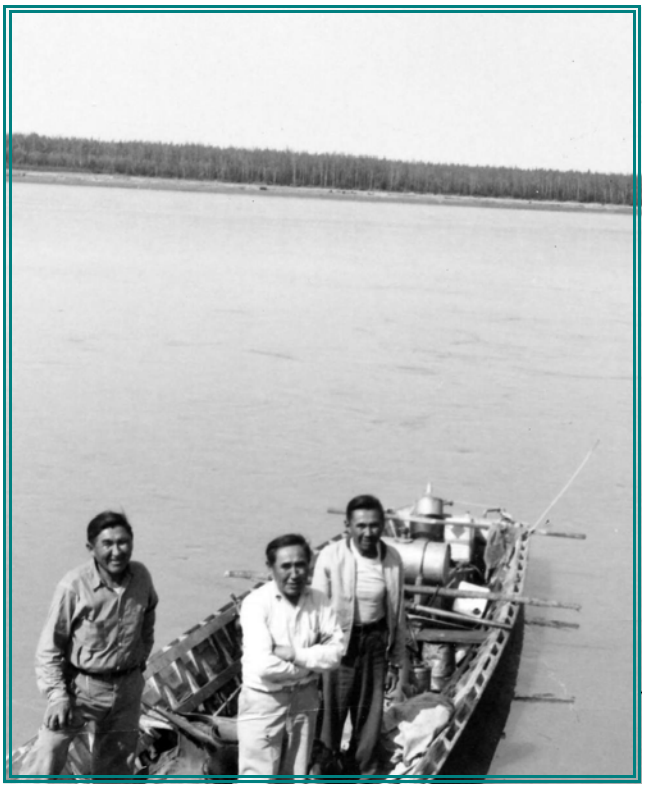
Dad's photos of Nenana and the environs follow.

Minto

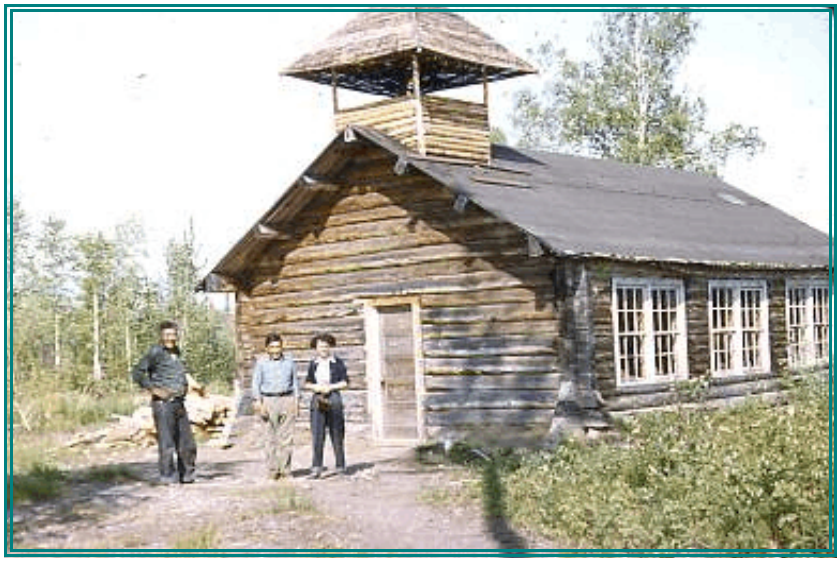
We arrived Minto at 9:10 p.m., making the run from Nenana in three and a half hours. We were greeted by all the children, and many adults from the village. I was surprised to see all the children in what appeared to be their Sunday best. I later realized our arrival, already announced by the mysterious grape-vine, was a special event. They knew we were a family, which made us a very welcome happening.

Everyone stood quietly by while we made a "proper" landing (only recently learned at Nenana) and tied up alongside the village boats. I then stepped ashore and walking up to the foremost man announced myself as, "I'm Jim Jensen, we've just come down from Nenana" (they already knew that, of course). "Is Charlie John here? We bring greetings for him from his brother in the Seward Sanatorium". This delighted everyone. Someone said he was across the river and they would go get him. Everyone then split up into three groups, as they were to do at every village we visited. The men stayed with me, the women grouped around Marie and the children romped in a large patch of fireweed with Rondo and Dick, who had belonged to an all native scout troop in Seward and felt perfectly at home. Everyone did a lot of talking and laughing. It was a first class social event. We finally got to bed at midnight in our tent pitched on the river bank above the canoe. Rondo and Dick each had a mosquito bar canopy pitched over their sleeping bags.

June 4, Monday:



We awoke about five AM when the village chief arrived home from down river at Tolovana. We dozed and awoke again about 7:30 nearly smothered by the heat inside our rubberized tent. After breakfast we met the chief, Leo Titus and his three brothers. Two of them had been chief and the youngest would follow Leo in two years. We then began a tour of the village starting at the cabin of 87 year old Titus, John. (he was once in a hospital and that was the way they wrote his name so Titus, John he became). He is the father of Leo and once was chief. However he was upriver in his little canoe checking his fish net but we met and photographed his wife as she sat outside on a mat making birch bark baskets. She was excellent picture material. We bought a tray and a wooden dipper ($1) which was in use. At first she declined to sell the dipper as it had small crack but I wanted it because it had seen a great deal of use.



Next we visited the home of Rev. & Mrs Olsen, Assembly of God Church. They were white and so didn't interest us much. Next we visited the neat,

well kept Alaska Native Service, Minto school house and met the teachers wife. He was at a convention in Juneau. We gave her credit for displaying an active interest in the school and the village. We then went back to the cabin of Titus, John as we saw him return.

He was a wonderful old patriarch. He had a kindly, weathered face with a ready smile. His ears were very narrow and long, pointed at the lobe. We talked about early village life. Just like our old timers he liked to tell how it was done in the old days before the coming of metal traps and guns. Pleasant children followed us wherever we went. He instructed a great grandchild to climb up in his cache and get his bow and arrows.

The Tortella Indians have a unique bow and an unusual quiver position among primitive people. The bow has a four inch, flat, wooden finger coming out toward the archer, mounted just above the hand, for the purpose of catching the string before it hits the wrist. No other primitive people have this clever device. Their quiver position is also unique. It is slung over the back, behind the left shoulder, allowing the archer much easier access to the next arrow than from a quiver carried in front of the body. The archer simply reaches back over the left shoulder, with his right hand, and in one sweeping motion whips the arrow out, up, and down into position in the bow.

I asked the old chief to pose as if shooting a moose for me. I was delighted with the look of intense happiness that flooded over his face as he pulled an arrow—full length—aiming at an imaginary moose as I snapped his picture. He was typical of most of the villagers. They were very pleasant and friendly. Many of them willingly posed for me with an unaffected child-like grace. Titus, John understood my great interest in old things and brought out a number of artifacts.

I usually refrained from trying to buy objects of value which were still in use (except the dipper I got from Mrs. Titus) but was interested in buying old things which, like old things we have in our homes, are no longer in use or of great value. He sold me an quaint old knife ($5) made long ago from a Russian file. The file teeth are still faintly showing in the hammered out blade. I saw several knives of this unique origin and design on the trip. Mrs. Titus invited us into her cabin. Once inside there were no chairs or benches to sit on so we just stood awkwardly feeling like we had surplus hands, not knowing what to do with them. I guess they sat on the floor. It was a one room cabin but I didn't notice a regular bed. I don't know what they slept on.

There was excellent picture material all over the village, in their belongings, caches, dog sleds, the old people and the children--just as I had hoped, and they didn't mind me taking pictures of everything. In fact they were pleased that as a "visitor" I liked everything.

The day was warm and sunny and all the old folks came out of their cabins to sit on the grass, sun themselves and talk as we came along. I think they all understood that their village was on display and they didn't mind showing it to a family. Someone said, "You first family to come down river in small boat".

Our little tour group consisting mostly of happy children and a few adults, who came and went. We moved along like a floating island. We met old Henry Albert who took me aside and asked for my help. He didn't clearly understand who we were. We weren't ANS (Alaska Native Service) people, nor school teachers, nor postmaster people, or health officials but he decided we were somehow connected with the government. He said his "tension" was too small, $55 a month and he wanted me to see what I could do with the government to get it raised to $85 by next Christmas. He kept talking about his "tension" until finally a small boy disgustedly said he means his "pension". I assured him I would do everything I could, which, of course is nothing. We also met Koschacket Charlie. He had long narrow ears with pointed lobes like Titus, John. Another interesting

couple was Mr. and Mrs. Peter Solomon. They invited me into their cabin. The cabins are built so low that I must duck to go under the eves when entering. Though the people are clean and their clothing of good quality their cabins are poorly furnished, that is, they have almost no furniture inside.

Almost every cabin had a cache out behind. An Alaskan cache is a small building eight or ten feet square, standing eight or ten feet high on poles to keep bears and wolverines away from equipment and supplies. It has a pole with steps cut out of it or a ladder for access.

We passed a cabin identified as "grandmas". It had no windows of any kind, which was explained by the fact that grandma didn't need them; she is blind. There are three blind women in the village, one so ancient noone knows her age. There are about 150 souls presently in the village. Others are away working in Nenana or Fairbanks. We were told there are no fish in the river this year but I didn't know what they meant as it was too early for the salmon to arrive. I saw no evidence that any of the villagers used fish wheels but Titus, John had a gill net set upriver.

An curious event happened to the boys. The village children taught them how to make a bull roarer and each boy made one. This consists of a flat piece of wood, roughly teardrop shaped tied to the end of a long string. When swung around in a fast circle the wood spins making a roaring noise. The boys were down near the river having fun when a village elder came down and made them stop because he said if they didn't it would rain. I had only one tense experience and that was with Leo Titus, the chief.

I had looked at a dentalium shell trimmed scabbard for a Russian file knife

and asked the owner if he would sell it. He emphatically said no, and that he wouldn't sell it for $50. I was talking to the chief later and recounted the event but he misunderstood me . He thought I had offered the man $50 and he wouldn't take it. The chief asked me to wait in front of his cabin and he soon came out with another similar scabbard, but of lesser quality. He then set about trying to sell me the item for $50. Children stood around, forever curious, but he chased them away. He was so intent he began so perspire. Unfortunately I hadn't caught on to his misunderstanding and stubbornly refused to pay him the $50. He became very agitated before I finally managed to terminate the encounter. It wasn't a good one but was the only event marring our village experience. Otherwise everyone had a ready smile and were willing to cooperate with us on pictures and information.

I asked some men about the next stretch of river and about a white man reported living on the Tolovana River with his Eskimo wife. They said his name was Dick Pritchard and he was peculiar. The Helmricks had reported on him in their book, "We Live In Alaska" (1944) and I wanted to see if he was still there. I was told I would have to enter the Tanana Slough about four miles below Minto and follow the current through a vast area of shallow lakes and devious sloughs to reach the Tolovana River. They said, "Don't use motor. Sit still, no use paddle. Water take you there. It know where to go." We decided to leave Minto that afternoon.

As we were breaking camp, with children around us, a couple of them had a hilarious time. When we opened the valve on our air mattresses two of them lay on the mattress as it deflated shrieking with delight as they felt the air escape through the nozzle. Apparently they had never seen an air mattress. We finally cast off with the entire

village waving goodby.

Our experience with them challenged what I was told by the old sourdough in Seward, Hank Pallage—that "they were undependable and would steal you blind". When I tied the canoe alongside the village boats I made no attempt to cover up or otherwise secure any of our belongings. I simply left them all in view, as the villagers did in their boats. We had many things of great value to the village such as, life preservers, hickory paddles, a .22 calibre rifle, a tent, cans of gas and oil and other things. We trusted them and they were worthy of our trust.

I once saw two small boys examining the side of the canoe where the sunlight came through the latticework and red fiberglass. They had never seen any canoe covering but canvas and were fascinated by the red glow. Their examination was cut short when a mother saw them and yelled in their native tongue something like—Hey, you kids, get away from that canoe. They promptly dispersed. Also disputing the Helmricks report about sullen natives, the villagers were friendly and cooperative. We loved them. We had had considerable experience with natives in the Seward Sanatorium and felt at ease with them. We respected them, contrary to the usual treatment they received from tourists. We were not tourists, we were a visiting family who knew some of their people in Seward so we enjoyed a privileged role. The sun was already high in the sky but a cool breeze fluttered up the river.

Minto Photo Album

The bulk of dad's other photos of Minto follow with short comments to explain their meaning or content.








Minto Photo Album








Minto Photo Album








Minto Photo Album








Minto Photo Album

Minto Photo Album

Tolovana Slough and the Pritchards

In due time we entered the Tanana Slough. Along the river any flow of water, not the main channel is called a "slough" even though it may be a half mile wide. In about an hour I had an accident and lost the gas cap off the motor. When I unscrewed it I was distracted and held it loosely. I pulled it out too far and the safety chain jerked it out of my hand, at the same time the chain parted from the cap and ploop it went into the slough. I was furious with myself but finally realized I must act like a gas cap never existed and somehow get by without it. A cap is very necessary to keep dirt from getting in the tank and fouling up the carburetor. In our first experience of forced improvisation. Marie rolled up a wad of aluminum foil and I screwed it into the gas tank opening.

The high slough banks diminished into flat marshy country full of small lakes and swamps, as I had been informed. So, as instructed, I shut the motor off, laid the paddles aside and began to enjoy the teeming wildlife on all sides. Waterfowl of all kinds were nesting. The air was filled with their noisy declarations. We could almost look into nearby nests as we floated by. We then realized how much we missed with the motor running all the time. Mosquitos were present in dark clouds making headnets imperative. We seemed to be drifting aimlessly at one or two miles an hour but I trusted the Minto people and let the current take us where it would. Later Dick Pritchard was to recount how a man was once lost in the lakes and swamps and spent a month wandering around in them. He finally found himself separated from the Tanana by a low ridge so he took his boat apart and rebuilt it in the river and got away. It was a good story anyway. I finally realized we were entering a more defined channel and in a half hour we were in the Tolovana River. Thanks Minto. Thereafter I made it a habit of consulting with the natives of each village about the nature of the river below them and it was an excellent source of good information despite the Helmricks report of sullen

natives. Ha! The Helmricks were tourists. They never even learned Dicks last name although they spent several days with him.

About five miles down the river we found ourselves at the Pritchard landing at 10:00 PM. We saw a large, well kept cabin, neat garden, and two large caches, the largest we had ever seen. Several dog sleds stored under them. We tied up and were about to walk to the cabin when we were met by Mary, Dicks wife. She was a tiny hunchback Eskimo and carried a fluffy black lap dog. It had a red ribbon around its neck. She later explained she knew she was going to have visitors so she gave the dog a bath. In answer to my question of how she knew, she just gave me that shy female Eskimo smile and giggled. She said Dick was away but might come home because he would have heard our motor as we came down the river.

We followed Mary up to the cabin where, aglow with hospitality, she sat us down to an well made table, gave us plates and spoons and dished us up a big serving of porcupine stew. While her back was turned dishing it up I kicked the kids under the table and said in a stage whisper, "you better eat it!" It was excellent if you didn't mind picking out an occasional long porcupine hair. We were to have other experiences later which made porcupine hairs in the stew insignificant. We finished the stew just as Dick arrived and a strange situation emerged.

He had a woman with him. He introduced her and said they had been camping (camping ??) and that she was a newspaper writer who was doing a story on him, which explanation left Marie and me in serious doubts as to her character. Just who was she, coming from the outside into Dicks isolated world when he was almost violently antisocial? We learned little else as we talked with him various times during an overnight stay. Marie and I thought the woman looked like a "floosie", rather than a newspaper woman. One of the reasons it didn't add up is that Dick was very upset by the Helmricks book. They spent a few days with him and wrote their visit up in "We Live In Alaska". Some things they said infuriated him. Reading their account now I can see how he would be disturbed by their description of the

miserable condition of his dogs. They also published a picture of him, Mary, and her teen-aged son, which also may have disturbed him.

That evening he said we were welcome to stay as long as we wished and to take pictures of everything--but not of him. I promised him I wouldn't but was tempted when I saw him—in his sixties—shoulder a yoke and carry two five gallon cans of water up from the river. We later learned from the postmaster at Tolovana that people up and down the river considered him crazy and there had been some talk about having him "committed". Dick venomously referred to the outside world as "bean peddlers", and seemed to feel, probably not without some justification, they were all out to get him. Nevertheless we found him an interesting person and certainly one who had carved a place for himself and Mary out of a true wilderness. We were impressed by the quality of his cabin and caches. I was particularly interested in the excellent workmanship in several sleds stored under his big cache. The large yard, more like a meadow, around his cabin and caches was well kept. There was evidence everywhere of much hard work as well as excellent workmanship.

He said he had 75 miles of traplines which he ran with his dog sled. We didn't get a good look at his dogs, which were chained up in a wooded area behind his cabin. Particularly when we arrived, the dogs seemed to go crazy, judging from their howls and barking. Dick was very emphatic about us keeping the boys where the dogs couldn't see them as he said they may get too excited and break loose. He left a possible resulting encounter up to our imaginations. He said we could pitch our tent wherever we wished. We chose a grassy area in a slope below his big cache and turned in at 12:30. The sun was still up.

Tuesday June 5, 1956

We awoke at 8:30 to find the sun streaming in through the mosquito strainer on our tent. The air vibrated with the songs of many birds, most of which I could not identify. A gentle breeze rustled the poplars along the river. After breakfast we again talked with Dick. Over 60 years old, he at first glance appeared to be in his forties. In fact, with his shirt off he still appeared to be in his forties. He was a strange person who, though violently anti-social was nonetheless very hospitable.

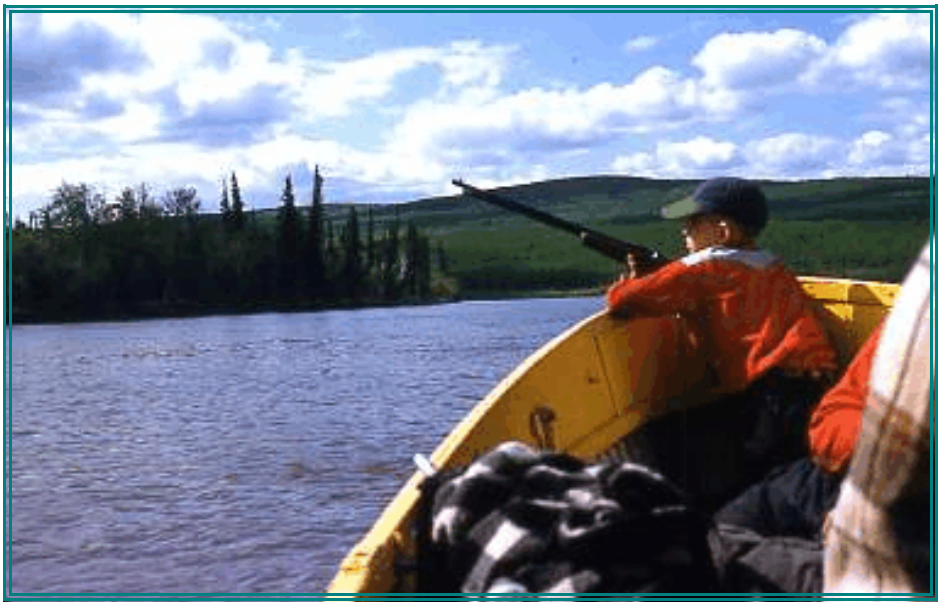
In one conversation he casually mentioned that when he was digging the pit for his smoke house he dug up some three-toed, fossil horse bones. I had seen scientific books in his cabin so he was probably correct in his identification. The region is underlain by permafrost and to make any excavation one must dig down by degrees, letting the surface thaw between digs. Natural refrigerators are very common, even in Indian villages. Once excavated deep enough and roofed over with moss insulation the interior freezes again and keeps perishables very well. I was not yet into paleontology so was not well enough impressed by his discovery to ask to see the specimens. Now I say, "what a pity I didn't ask".

We finally decided it was time to be on our way and down at the boat landing we found the wet ground covered with a mass of yellow swallow-tail butterflies. I don't know if they were after water or minerals, though I suspect the latter.

That morning the boys caught a small frog (rana cantabrigana) which was later declared by Dr. Williams at Harvard to be much too far north of its reported range. But there it was. I photographed it in Marie's hand. It was about one and a

half inches long.

Warm goodbys were said and we set off down the Tolovana River at 11:25 AM leaving them alone in their isolated world. Thirty eight years have passed at this writing and I cannot help but wonder what became of them and the fortress Dick had built in the wilderness against the outside world; is it occupied now?



The Tolovana was a beautiful, meandering little river which being narrow found us always near a bank. On the Tanana the main channel is always some distance away from a bank so we were never afforded a close look at the resident wildlife.

Though narrow the Tolovana was deep so we could travel relaxed with no fear of sandbars or snags. We soon saw a large bull moose with its horns sprouting in the velvet. He was at the waters edge drinking. It was the first moose we saw. Waterfowl were everywhere as they nested in many places, even at the waters edge. I stopped and cut a curved willow limb to extend the outboard motor steering arm. I was to be very glad of this later on. While in the woods I saw a birch bark chimney, or so it appeared. The tree had died and rotted completely away leaving its tough bark standing four feet high like an empty stovepipe.

The durability of birch bark is amazing. The natives use it for a number of vessels including cooking pots. They heat rocks in a fire then dump them into a bark basket with meat and water and boil the meat. We were nearing the mouth of the Tolovana River and the end of a most delightful excursion, which began when we entered the Tanana Slough. It was one of the most pleasant stretches of river travel on our expedition.

When we reached the Tanana I swung out into its swift current, making a left hand turn to go a quarter of a mile upstream to the Tolovana trading post. The Tanana was fast so our headway was slow then we unexpectedly ran out of gas. I

refueled quickly while we were being swept another quarter of a mile downstream past the mouth of the Tolovana. I then had to fight the current for a half mile to reach the trading post landing. We finally tied up to the Lawson's boat at their landing.

Mr and Mrs. Lawson are the only inhabitants of Tolovana. There is no village. He is both trader and postmaster. Minto people come down here to shop, not having a trading post of their own. We visited and wrote a few postcards and bought some supplies. Soda pop was two for .35; cheaper than in Seward. Mr. Lawson, seeing my ragged appearance, let me shave with his flashlight battery operated Norelco, the razor with the three funny little wheels that go round and round to erode off your beard. I was grateful, but not much better looking. We mailed our cards and left Tolovana at 5:35 PM. We made good time as the Tanana is much faster than the Tolovana. We soon reached the mouth of the Kantishina River, which flows out from the Mount McKinley area. I wanted to go up it for some distance and camp but the black spruce lining the banks were so dark and foreboding that I felt uncomfortable and headed back down and out into the Tanana.

About 9:30 we were running directly into the sun, which stays near the horizon for a long time before it sets. I couldn't read the water and mistakenly ran down onto a shoal. Before we fetched up on the bottom we saw a big bull moose. He came down on the gravel bar near shore to see what was carrying on. We had to work ourselves back upstream and lost a half hour traveling time. After running onto shoals a couple more times we finally tied up at Baker Creek at 11:45 PM. We were about 100 yards below a group of buildings belonging to a sawmill company. Noone was around. We made camp in a delightful spot and watched a long beautiful sunset. There were very few mosquitoes.

Wednesday, June 6

Awoke at 6:30 nearly smothered in the tent, that is Marie and I. The boys always pitched mosquito bars over their sleeping bags and slept in the open. The sun shone brightly and the woods rang with the song of many birds. We had breakfast by the side of the canoe tied up to the river bank and after making everything shipshape shoved off for Manley Hot Springs, where we hoped to surprise some friends. Chuck and Mary Clements. She played the "Wedding March" on her accordion at our wedding in Seward 16 years before.

We had a wild time getting over the shoals lying off Baker Creek, but were finally free to split the breeze. We ran along with high expectations at full throttle, keeping a sharp eye out for bobbers and sandbars.

"Bobbers" are submerged trees which have their roots anchored to the bottom, the tops are usually broken off and they point downstream. They are held underwater by the current. That is, the current passing over them holds them down until an occasional eddy reduces the pressure allowing the broken end to suddenly bob up out of the water in front of you. It scares the hell out of you. It looks like a huge black sea serpent rearing out of the water to strike you down. In a moment the current takes control again and the serpent is pushed back into the deep. Having seen a number of these you are left to wonder what if one came up directly under the canoe?

Another, even more dangerous hazard along the Tanana are the "sweepers". When the bank is undercut the trees along its edge fall over almost into the water, but are still tied to the bank by their roots. They hang horizontally, a foot or two above the water, sweeping its surface. Goodby to any small boat caught under them. It is capsized and rolled from one sweeper to the next by the relentless force of the current. Hit by sweepers you are lost. That is why we always stayed well out in the channel.

Tolovana Photo Album








Tolovana Photo Album








Tolovana Photo Album

Tolovana Photo Album

Manley Hot Springs and the Clements

One of the boys shouted, "Something is following us!" It turned out to be a boat, larger and faster than us and it soon passed us. It was scouting channel for a small tug pushing a gasoline barge which soon came along behind. They were the first craft to pass us downstream since we left Nenana. We were some distance behind them when they tied up at the Manley Hot Springs landing. We ran beyond the landing as I wanted to go up the Manley slough which Mr. Lawson at Tolovana told us to look for. It would take us in to the village, saving a long walk.

We finally found the mouth of the slough and left the milky water behind. The slough had a slow, brown current against us and we bucked a strong headwind. It took us one and half hours to run up to the town. The first people we saw were Chuck Clements and his son in a boat. They were towing some logs up the slough to their new cabin site on the side of the hill at the edge of town. They were naturally very surprised to see us[1]. Chuck said, "but wait, just wait until Mary sees you. She'll be more than speechless". They didn't know we were even in Alaska. We left when the war broke out. We followed them on up to town and found a very charming little settlement. It was one of two white settlements we would visit on our trip.

It is an old town being a year older then Fairbanks and contained many old cabins built in the gold rush days. The Clements were temporarily living in one of them up on the side of a hill. We tied up in the rushes at the sloughs edge and climbed the little hill ahead of Chuck and his son. He wanted us to go first. I knocked. Mary came to the door and her mouth dropped open as she stood several

[1] There are the same Clements who attended mom's and dad's wedding in 1941.

long moments before she got words into her mouth. Then she held out her arms saying, "You're,—you're—Jim and Marie".

They made us very welcome and insisted we stay for the "night", even though their cabin was small. We gladly accepted but first they took us for a swim in the hot springs where a simple building covered part of the springs. It seemed to be a community affair although the Helmricks reported it as privately owned. There was an enclosed greenhouse with a good crop of full grown tomatoes and cucumbers. After the swim we visited around town and saw many quaint things. The people were marvelous. They were some of the most hospitable whites we have ever met. During the spring breakup the town had been flooded.

Ice backed up in the river and sent over six feet of water into the town. Mr. Benson, the postmaster, showed us the five foot high-water mark inside the postoffice. A number of log buildings were dislodged and set akilter at odd angles. People were still cleaning up after the water.

Mr. Benson was very helpful with information and materials and had one of the old Russian knives in a beautiful scabbard covered with dentalium shells. It is the best specimen I've seen. He wouldn't even talk about selling it. All I could do was covet it.

Back at the cabin We visited a long time with our old friends before we went to bed very late.

Rondo:

Chuck and Mary had a very different view of things compared to my folks'. This is where I was introduced to nudity. First time. Please don't be offended by this section. I was 14 and was experiencing the confusion and startling awareness that pubescent kids have of things that had been around them but which didn't mean anything. Until puberty. Blammo. This was part of the experience of my life. To be introduced up on the Tanana river in the house of mom's and dad's friend. Marilyn Monroe herself, the most famous pose of all 1956, was there, hanging in large, vivid color on a calendar on the wall of the living room for all of dad's friend's family to see. Innocent actually. Not sexy in any vulgar sense. A young girl enjoying being seen. And making a heck of a lot of money in the bargain you can be sure. That's all I could think about.

Figure 67 http://www.marilynfineart.com/pose1a.html

The hot springs looked like this. We took clean clothes, soap and towels and bathed in them. The water was almost too hot and sulphurous smelling but felt good after not having a warm bath for more than a week. Mom naturally made sure we washed behind our ears and put on clean underwear.

(Alvin)

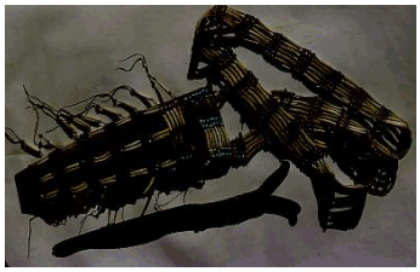
Thursday, June 7

Awoke to a beautiful sunshiny day with the air full of birdsongs and little breezes blowing. After Mary's delicious breakfast I lugged the outboard motor up the hill and over-hauled it. With the help of Chuck, the Alaska Road Commission (for which he worked) and Mr. Hubbard of the Roadhouse, I got enough tools and materials together to make some needed repairs. At the road shed in a box of miscellaneous items I came across a large bolt the right diameter with fine threads which matched those in the mouth of the gas tank (practically a miracle). I sawed the bolt off to a suitable length and with the help of some birch bark for a gasket made a very good replacement for the stopper I dropped in the Tanana Slough a few days ago. The canoe continues to travel without leaks since I patched it on the mud bank at Nenana. After more visiting and saying, 'we hope to see you again' we were eager to be on our way and shoved off down the slough at 7:45 PM knowing we would never see them again.

Manley Hot Springs Photo Album








Manley Hot Springs Photo Album

Manley Hot Springs Photo Album

The motor works much better now. Some of the sediment screens were partially clogged after the loss of the gas cap in the Tolovana Slough. At the mouth of the Manley slough we looked across the Tanana and saw an inhabited Indian fish camp but did not fight our way across the river current to see it. We hoped to make the village of Cosna and camp there for the night. Our course lay directly down the right side of the Tanana parallel to Bean Ridge. For a change, the river ahead ran almost perfectly straight for many miles, its natural tendency to wander held in check by the resistance of rocky Bean Ridge. The channel was deep and "bobber" and "sweeper" free so we made good time but we never found Cosna nor even a village ruin which might be Cosna. It may be hiding in another channel. I pulled across the channel we were in, and entered a slough where we had spotted a fish camp. It was deserted but a rather inviting place so we made camp at 11:45. My trip log comments, "All is well".

Friday, June 8

I Awoke at 8:30 (by which time there had already been over six hours of sunlight) to the songs of many birds. Shoved off and ate breakfast as we sailed merrily along, (at this point the color of ink in my trip log changes with this comment: "I ran out of ink and put river water in my pen but it was thick and sort of muddy and didn't write too well so this is being written with a weak ball point pen I bought in Nenana") From our map we finally discovered Cosna was behind an island. That's why we missed it. A pity, as we are not finding all the villages Dick Lynch counted for me. I want to see every village we can find.

The river was good along this stretch with a channel as easy to follow as a freeway but I'll admit I'm quite uneasy about the Tanana from here on down to the Yukon. According to detailed instructions I got from Indians a Manley Hot Springs the Tanana is supposed to be rough, windy, full of sandbars, and flats from here on down. Lately I've noticed at times the water itself looks sinister and treacherous. We meet large circular eddies in which the water twists and squirms like a soul in torture.

Occasionally big boils erupt directly in our path, bringing up little sticks and mud from the bottom. These boils appear to be domes of water higher than the surrounding water and they churn and twist like demons determined to get their claws into our fragile hull. But the canoe rides them out in a very reassuring way even though it takes constant work on the tiller to maintain a course.

The river now swung around a high bluff to the right as we passed the end

of Bean Ridge. We were now in flat country again and are heading into a stretch leading to a feature on the map called "Harpers Bend". The Manly Indians were right as we were constantly running—almost hopelessly—aground. If we get caught and can't move on a bar it is a loose thing which would not support my weight should I get out of the canoe to push us off. I might sink into it like quicksand. All we could is paddle and shove. I could tell by the sound of the motor when we were coming up on a bar so I'd snap off the kicker (motor), jerk it up and yell, "paddle in the bow, right side", and someone, usually Rondo, would grab a paddle and paddle like mad. I would try and read an escape channel off the bar by following ripples, swells and boils. We always managed to get free. We passed the mouth of the Chitanana River, which has no upstream highlands to feed it gravel to dump in the river, forming hard bars for us to beat our way over.

I began to learn something about the anatomy of a sandbar: a common type slopes gradually up—going downstream, then tops out in less than a foot of water. If you can keep moving downstream (sometimes a quarter of a mile) you can beat your way along the bar to its end where it suddenly drops off into deep water.

Marie and I are both reading the map but she always seems to have a better idea of where we are than I do. I was still trying to get around Harpers Bend when I sighted the large village of Tanana across the Yukon. She knew where we were all the time but didn't want to argue with me. I was always emotionally wound up over the prospect of getting high centered and was short tempered.

We still had to go around Squaw Point, a place everyone upriver warned me about. One good thing about "Crossing the Bar" on the Tanana is that we never encountered any gravel; all sand. Mentally looking back up the river I saw either a sandbar bank or a cutbank with the dreaded sweepers reaching out to clutch you to their watery bosom. After kicking, poling, paddling, shoving, and rowing we finally ran out of the grey silt-loaded Tanana and into the brown waters of the Yukon at 2:30 PM, Friday, June 8. Boy, oh boy what a relief. Man was I ever glad. The broad, brown, slowly flowing Yukon really looked good to me. We had escaped the sand bars, bobbers, and sweepers of the Tanana, and though I was aware that the Yukon would have its own hazards, whatever they are I will gladly trade the Tanana suspense for them. We'll see.

Yukon River

The Tanana River enters the Yukon, a totally different looking river. The Yukon was wide and slow and more established banks than the Tanana. At that point, we turned west and headed down-stream on the Yukon toward Holy Cross where we planned to get out of the river and head for Boston.

Christian Indian Cemetery and Yukon

The Tanana River empties into the Yukon through three channels surrounding two islands. By good luck we followed the right *(north-west)* channel to give us a view of an Indian graveyard on a bluff directly across the Yukon. We swung upstream, crossing above the first island hoping to get far enough upstream so the Yukon current wouldn't carry us too far downstream as we crossed headed for the graveyard.

Figure 71
View from that Indian cemetery. Tanana is in center background, islands in the middle of the Yukon.

We finally pulled up on the beach below the graveyard to make a landing on gravel, the first solid ground of our trip. We climbed the bluff to the graveyard and found it to be a Christian burying ground; no spirit houses, only elaborate wooden crosses in many styles. There were no recent burials. In fact, from the weathering of the most recent looking cross I judged no burial had been made for ten or 15 years.

Abandoned "Mission of Our Saviour"

We took some pictures and shoved off again to land a half mile downstream at a large building half hidden in young birch and spruce trees. It appeared to be abandoned.

We tied up and climbed up through tall green grass choked with masses of bluebells to a good sized church, with a central steeple. Near this building I made an interesting find among the grass and small trees; an ancient bathtub. It had the general shape of a modern tub but had a wide wooden rim around the upper edge. It had ornate legs which were nearly hidden in the grass. Part of the wooden rim had fallen off but I felt around in the grass and found it. There were a number of small birch trees growing inside, which was about three fourths full of soil. The central section was ornate cast iron, the front and rear ends were formed from sheet iron. It certainly was a grand affair in its youth when it probably came down the Tanana and was laboriously lugged up the bluff to soak up some important persons hide. But that was long ago. It

appeared to be much older than the building. I cleared away a lot of grass so I could get a good picture then decided to come back later when the sun was in a better position. Alas, I forgot to return. We were too enchanted by the chapel and other buildings we found higher on the hill.

Birch and spruce trees crowded around the chapel, which presented an exterior appearance of being in good condition. We of course had no idea of how long it had been abandoned but decided the graveyard we visited belonged to it for the burials had been church supervised, they were not Indian burials.

The chapel's architectural design was more elaborate than the Episcopal church in Seward and certainly must have filled its role with dignity and beauty. Inside we found a different condition. Rot and decay were well advanced on the main chapel floor. Crossing it with some difficulty we stepped across holes and loose boards. In an office we found many interesting artifacts. One was a letter addressed to "The Mission of Our Savior" dated 1910, indicating it was in service at least by that early date. I got the impression that it was an Episcopal Mission though Hudson Stuck (1925) said the area was dominated by the Catholics.

We found a five by six foot oil painting of "Christ In

The Garden", which I took outside, photographed, and returned.

In what appeared to be the library we found books around 100 years old also an ancient lantern slide projector. How I coveted it but I had made a hard ruling that we could not collect any Caucasian artifacts, due to a very limited space in the canoe and a small-plane trip on the end of our journey.

There were several brass lamps, the hanging type and some old hospital odds and ends. The place would be a mint for antique collectors. Obviously none of the stuff was of any value to the Indians for it had lain there for many years. We could only guess when the mission had been abandoned. The Helmricks had visited it as an active mission in 1943 when a Mr. Files was the priest ("We Live In Alaska". 1943).They gave an account of a lively evening spent with four other guests when the talk was mainly about the problem Indians face in the modern world. Constance Helmricks made a prophetic statement in her book (1943): "Churches and Missions in Alaska still flourish but seem to be going out as the government agencies come in with their more standardized services".

The death knell had already been sounded for the Mission for at that time an Alaska Native Service school and hospital had already been established in the village of Tanana three miles downstream which duplicated services, except religious, provided for many years by the Mission. The Church must have abandoned the Mission very soon after the Helmricks were there for all the destruction and decay we saw had to take place in the no more than fourteen years since that time.

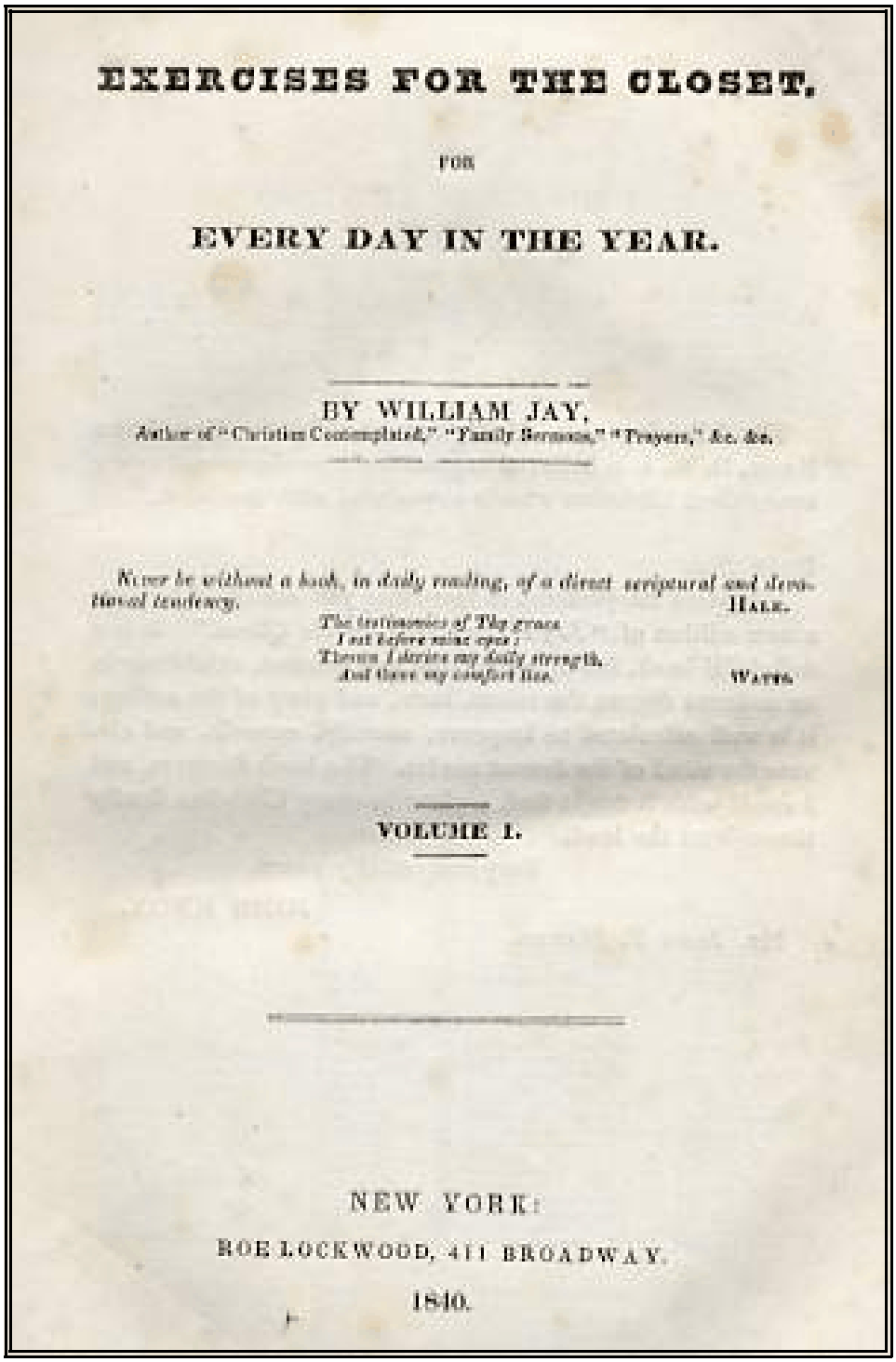
We climbed up the birch and flower covered slope to the main quarters of the mission. There was one large log building which had been an impressive one before it was razed by scavengers. All the windows and doors were gone and the roof had been torn off. About all that was left were the log walls. We

visited a number of other buildings in the area and found old things in most of them.

Apparently, when the mission was abandoned departing officials took little of the trivia of everyday living with them, and left the lantern slide projector and a dozen books as well.

(RONDO)

Those books caused him to ignore his "No Caucasian items" rule, the only time he did that on the trip. He carefully selected one book to take with him, sort of memento of this historical setting. It was "Exercises for the Closet", a name that pleased him. He gave it to me many years in a rare fit of generosity. I don't remember the occasion but should have, given its rarity. I have to say that he did do nice things occasionally but so rarely that my general memory of him is how niggardly he was. Which suggests the rare moment of generosity should have been emblazoned in my memory. But it wasn't.



EXERCISES FOR THE CLOSET,

FOR

EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY WILLIAM JAY,

Author of "Christian Contemplated," "Family Sermons," "Prayers," &c. &c.

Never be without a book, in daily reading, of a direct scriptural and devotional tendency. HALE.

The testimonies of Thy grace
I set before mine eyes:
Therein I derive my daily strength,
And there my comfort lies. WATTS.

VOLUME I.

NEW YORK:

ROE LOCKWOOD, 411 BROADWAY.

1840.

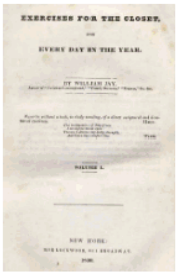
(ALVIN)

I shall never forget that lovely old chapel. What a pity for such a good building to be left to rot. Had it been in the town of Tanana it no doubt would have been put to some use. As it was the trees will continue to grow up around and eventually in it. It must have provided spiritual comfort, guidance, and funerals for many natives over the years. The Helmricks reported that nine funerals, due to measles, had occurred the week they were there.

Mission Photo Album






EXERCISES FOR THE CLOSET,
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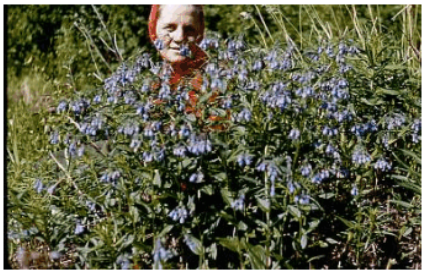
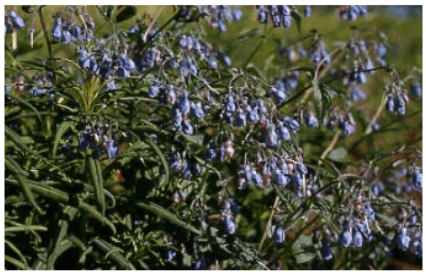
VOLUME I.
NEW YORK:


Tanana Photo Album






Tanana Photo Album

Tanana Photo Album

Tanana Town

After several hours of nostalgia we shoved off for Tanana. The town had been a native settlement for centuries when the Army established Fort Gibbons there in 1900. The Yukon is calm and much cleaner than the Tanana which is fast flowing in a relatively flat country sloping gradually down to the Yukon.

We saw no operating fish wheels on the Tanana but as we neared Tanana Town we saw one lazily looping the loop in the sun. It was new and as we drew near we could see it was well made.

We landed on the Tanana shore and tied up at 5 PM. I asked a small Indian boy if he could direct us to the home of Philip Kennedy. He obligingly led us there. We knew Philip's father in the Seward Sanatarium. We found Philip's wife who

said her husband was in Fairbanks. She was relieved to learn that her father-in-law was in good condition. We chatted a little about him. She was very interesting and friendly to talk to.

When she learned I was interested in Indian artifacts she brought out a beautiful stone adz of unusual design saying; "We not superstitious but some people say when you find one of these is bad luck, unless you give to somebody who wants it", so she could not give it to her fellow Indians (again I began to covet).

The adz was twelve inches long, doubly tapered from each end to a deep hafting groove in the middle on one side. This groove, going across the length, has a ridge on both sides. The adz is perfectly symmetrical. When placed with the groove up, it rocks on its curved backside. The sides curve from both ends to the middle. It has a finely pecked finish but both ends are ground sharp for a distance of one to one and a half inches back from the edge. It is made from a granular, dark green stone, weighs five pounds, and by any comparison is a magnificent artifact! She

could see I was drooling for it so she gave it to us (Marie stoutly maintains it was given to her).

Immediately upon my arrival at Harvard I made a cast of it and sent it to the University of Alaska for identification and recording in their records. They replied that nothing like it had ever been found in Alaska, making it very rare indeed. Mrs Kennedy, in answer to where her family found it, pointed out in the river saying, "Out there". I offered to pay her for it but she drew back in alarm saying: "No". Apparently the thing must be given away, not sold. We were more than delighted to oblige.

The discovery location has long been eroded away by the river as it gradually cuts the bank away so it is impossible to examine the site for material that might help in its identification. The University of Alaska had absolutely no idea of its ethnic origin. It is not from any known primitive native Alaskan culture but how did it get to Tanana? Hudson Stuck mentions a stone adz being found along the river but does not describe it (1925) or in what institution it was deposited.

Potlatch

Mrs. Kennedy said she and her small children were just about to go to a potlatch and invited us to go. We gladly accepted. She gave each of us a plate and a spoon then led us to the council house explaining the deceased, in whose honor the potlatch was being given, was a distant relative of hers so we would sit in a prominent place at the front of the hall.

The floor was covered with old and new tarps, cloths of all descriptions and about 180 Indians of various ages and sizes. I saw many marvelous faces but had discretely left my camera in the canoe.

We squatted down and sat our plate on the floor in front of us waiting to be served. Though called a potlatch it was more of an informal memorial feast than being like the "potlatch" of the north Pacific Coast Indians where excessive gift giving of valuable articles was customary. I soon noticed two large Indian men dragging a rectangular tank around the hall ladling out "Indian Stew", saltless moose meat and vegetables, into each plate.

The servers arrived in front of us. One swarthy, sweating man ladled the stew into our plates and as he did so he was sweating so profusely it ran in a tiny stream off the end of his nose into the stew (and it still wasn't salty enough). The tank was made of copper. He used a native wooden ladle. One man followed the tank and slammed down several pieces of bread on the floor in front of each plate; another followed him and slammed down several rounds of pilot bread; another

followed and slapped on a chunk of oleo. Then followed gum, candy, and cigarettes followed by a tub containing big chunks of boiled meat, which was quite tasty. I'm sure it was moose.

The potlatch commemorated the burial of a village man whose body had just been brought up from Ruby. He was lost last October in a plane crash in the river and his body was found at Ruby and brought home for burial. We were introduced to his widow, Pauline, a common woman's name in this area. I noticed they gave Marie more bread and biscuits than they did me. But Mrs. Kennedy was prepared. She pulled a paper sack from her pocket and we gladly gave her our extra bread to stuff in it.

Near the end of the feasting a man arose, called for the attention of everyone and read off a long list of the food and by whom it was furnished. This was the only ceremony, unless something transpired before we arrived. There could have been a speech for the serving began as soon as we arrived. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and for once knew I was completely out of my own culture. When it was all over we went home with Mrs. Kennedy, whose name we learned was Mary.

(RONDO)

The potlatch was an interesting event for me. Note, however, that I had no issue with being a Caucasian in an Indian setting. It was natural. My entire life I had been exposed to Indians and stories about Indians. They were part of my universe. Both of my parents admired and respected them, which contrasted with their views of "Negroes" for whom they had no laudatory words. Indeed, I picked up hints of prejudice: they "smell funny", they like loose shoes because they have funny-shaped feet with heels that stick out, they wear ugly color combinations, and so on. But there was no derogation of Indians.

I told you in Volume 3 of grandma Merrell's and mom's stories of Indians. Dad obviously admired and was fascinated with Indian culture. Those parental attitudes affected my own which was further developed by being a member of Troop 620 at the Jesse Lee Orphanage. This troop consisted almost entirely of orphaned Indian and Eskimo children, approximately 45 in number, with whom I met weekly for 3 years and with whom I went on hikes and campouts. I didn't see the color of these kids, I didn't regard them as something I somehow had to 'get along" with, had to learn to like, had to not insult with words or ideas and so on. They were my friends.

Indeed, one of them adopted me as his brother and actually became a pest.

"Andy". He loved me for some reason and drove me crazy by wanting to be with me all the time, to put his sleeping bag by mine, to go everywhere with me, to tease me, to steal my axe so I'd have to pay attention to him and so on. He was a small Indian kid and I really did like him but he made me tired with his attention and teasing. Anyway, the Potlatch was a big party with familiar kinds of people and I was interested because I understood that it was a "native ceremony" that few whites got to experience. It was an honor to be included.

What was interesting was the setting and the gifting. The 150 or so people sat inside of a single large structure. I don't recall precisely how it was constructed but the memory is clear that it was fairly dark inside, the only light be daylight that came in through doors and some spaces in the ceiling. We sat randomly around this large space in groups of familiars, waiting for things to develop.

The gifting we received was food, and lots of it. I believe there were other gifts for the principals but not for non-family members. The one thing I did not like was observing that the man who handed me a huge chunk of moose meat from the boiler was sweating - into the boiler. I don't think it actually made any difference, but I decided I didn't want to eat it. Part of the reason I didn't eat it was the fact that it was boiled, without any spices. Chunks of moose cut randomly into portions the size of small roasts, dropped into large wash kettles and boiled over wood fires until cooked. I don't remember what I did with the meat and suspect I gave it to the Kennedys. But that wasn't because I was being generous. It was because I knew I 'd get in trouble if I just threw the thing away.

The pilot bread they handed out was memorable. Men walked in circles around the lodge with large packages of pilot bread. They didn't seem to really pay a great deal of attention who they were giving the crackers to. They just stopped at each person and handed them one piece or two. By the time they had finished distributing the pilot bread that had been contributed I had five or six pieces in the pile in front of me. I knew pilot bread from Seward as very hard, giant crackers that sailors packed for long voyages as their "bread" substitute. But I hadn't been given half a dozen of these huge hard things. These were circles that were about 6 inches in diameter, and 3/4 inch to an inch thick and hard as rock. Obviously, these things were softened by being dunked in some liquid to soften it because you'd break you teeth trying to bite and chew the stuff. The other remarkable feature of this pilot bread was its taste: cardboard. It had no flavor. It was obviously leavened because there were air pockets in the things but the flavor was no flavor at all.

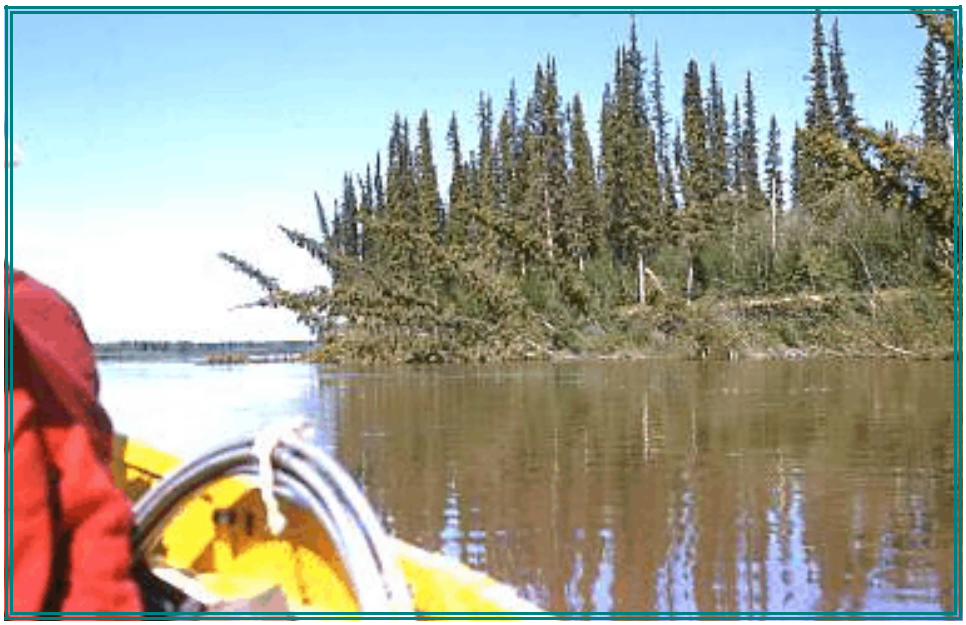
(ALVIN)

Later we visited around the village and took pictures. One delightful subject was an attractive teenage girl " Flora", and equally delightful was her old uncle. His was one of the most interesting faces I photographed on our trip. *(Ed. I don't know what happened to the photos of Tanana. There are only 3.)* The Indians are all rather poor along the rivers. They fish in the summer, trap in the winter and rat (muskrat) in their little canoes in the spring. They wear quite decent clothes but their homes, but by our standards are rather pitifully furnished.

We went to the Northern Commercial Company store and bought a few things. Gasoline cost $20 for twenty gallons. My trip log comments: "Boy, does the N.C. company rob these people. Imagine sixty eight cents a gallon freight on a gallon of gas from Nenana when it comes on a big river barge. We also found oranges expensive. However we bought a dozen and gave them to the Kennedy family". It was very little to give for all they gave us.

Several Indian men wandered down where we were getting ready to leave. I spread my map out on the back of an overturned boat and they all gathered around as I asked about river conditions ahead. They gave me some good advice, though as it turned out I didn't follow all of it. We finally loaded up and shoved off at 9:45 PM, June 8.

Fish Camp below Tanana



We found the Yukon very different from the Tanana. It is deep and wide with little danger from bobbers, snags and cutbanks. We made fairly good time and ran until 11:30 PM when we

pulled in at an unoccupied fish camp, threw up the bars and tent and retired at midnight.

(Ed. The sloping trees here eventually lie flat, just below the surface of the water, and would capsize us if we got trapped in them.)

The standard fish camp seems to consist of a rather large building, about twelve by twenty feet, covered with sheet iron or bark, where salmon on racks is smoked for humans, and a series of outdoor racks for drying salmon for dog fold, and sometimes a shack for camping.

(Ed. Note the blocks of bank that have sloughed off, ready to fall into the river when it undercuts them enough.)

Grant Creek & Harry Mudge

SATURDAY JUNE 9

Awoke at 9:30 to the song of many birds but an overcast sky. It is the first we have been without sun on our trip. It remained overcast all day giving me a mild sunburn. We pulled in at the mouth of Grant Creek where an old white man stood on a large pile of driftwood at the mouth of the creek waiting for us. He had heard our little outboard motor coming down the river.

His name was Harry Mudge and was very interesting. We soon sat us down to a meal of whitefish and homemade bread. It was not sourdough, but made without shortening. Marie admitted it was about the best bread she had ever eaten. I found the whitefish the best fish I have eaten in Alaska.

We looked around Harry's little settlement of several cabins. He told us about some mines four miles back in the mountains. The Helmricks hiked to them when they went through, but they

identified an old white man at Harry's place as "Old Jim". He gave Marie an old birch bark basket she saw in front of one of the cabins. *(Ed. It's still at 2821 N. In 2003.)* His cabin was a comfortable place and his two dogs were staked out behind it.

The coloration and build of one dog looked a lot like an African cape hunting dog to me. It's probably a direct descendent from the original Indian dogs of the interior. They are quite different in appearance from Eskimo dogs. I had noticed an Indian dog at Tolovana. It had short black ears and a dark smokey muzzle and a short frame, much the same as Harry's dog. After a pleasant stay we cast off and left Harry Mudge standing on the driftwood at the mouth of Grant Creek were we first saw him. He wore his wool sox pulled up over the outside of his pants, making a picture easy to recall. We now headed for the village of Kallands.

(RONDO)

His place was interesting because it was populated with devices that revealed how he lived and what his environment was like. The vertical yellow flare shows that dad's hand brushed the

exposed shutter gear on the Exakta for an instant.
Mr. Mudge's bean pot sits on a round and was obviously used often. Silver 5 gallon cans lie around everywhere. That was the way gasoline was transported on the river. When we needed to buy more gas for the outboard, we'd buy another 5 gallon can at the next village that had them. On the two cans by my legs, you can see the red, hard-plastic lids screwed onto soft, flexible, white plastic spouts. They were depressed into the can until you pulled them out, at which point they became spouts. When you poured, the gas did not dribble down the can.

Behind the bean pot is a horizontal log resting on stout legs created from smaller diameter logs. Two shorter "lets" stick up on the top near the each end. This device held his logs while he sawed rounds off with a heavy saw. Above and to the left of my head you see an odd shape of two whitish curves with a vertical thing between. Those are the toes of his snowshoes stored for the summer. The vertical thing is a stick that maintains the high curve in the tip of his snowshoes. They were what we termed "Yukon" style, a specialized variety developed to break trail in deep snow when carrying a burden that caused the wearer to sink 5 or 6 inches. The upturn kept the tips above the snow so they didn't "catch" when he walked.

In the background on the left is a 55 gallon barrel sitting upright. It's placed underneath a gutter along his roof to catch rainwater for culinary purposes since the river water was cloudy and dirty. I don't know if he'd drink it straight out of the barrel but it was clear and obviously safer. Behind me is an elevated floor so things stored there would escape rain runoff. The roof is extended beyond the wall of the house to provide overhead protection from rain so he had a more or less dry storage space. I can't tell what he had hanging from the rafters but he doubled his dry storage space by hanging a layer of things overhead. That roof area also served the function of a cache, elevating skins and things that animals would otherwise get at them.

Grant Creek Photo Album

(ALVIN)

Kallands & Rhubarb

The village was completely deserted but many of the cabins had interesting things in them. I was sorely tempted but we took nothing. However Marie found an old garden with a healthy stand of rhubarb and picked a big mess. Some of the interesting things we saw included a moustache cup, an old birch wood tray, an old Eskimo basket, an old set of Indian beadwork, a set of chime bells, and some Indian moosehide leggings. Our next point of interest would be the home of the elephants; I would finally get to hunt for elephants. I felt a growing sense of excitement.

(RONDO)

Mom weighed about 100 pounds but was as hardy as any of us. Notice the shape of her back. She and I both had polio in Seward. Her residual problem was her lower thoracic -lumbar region. I don't know exactly what was wrong with her back, but Dr. Phillips prescribed a special corset for her to wear when she was not in bed. It was made of a heavy-duty canvas-like fabric that had was fitted with two surgical steel stays. The tops of those stays show here, making the contour of her back look like that of a frog. The thing was supposed to immobilize her back but she disregarded it when she wanted to do things like this. She didn't complain about the things and wore the darn thing for many years.

See the water barrel under the roof in the back of the photo? It was a standard feature along the river.

(ALVIN)

Palisades or Elephants on the Yukon

Several miles below Kallands we arrived at the Palisades, or "The BoneYard". The Yukon makes a five mile bend against high frozen, glacial-muck cliffs. The river ran straight for several miles as we approached allowing us a long view of this wondrous place. *(Ed. The cliffs appear here in the distance as gray cliffs on the left side of the Yukon, an ominous place.)*

House-sized blocks of frozen silt slough off and tumble away from these unstable cliffs during the long sunlit summer days. Released by thawing, gravity plucks the blocks from the cliffs and slams them down into the river casting up high, turbulent, cross-current peaks. These column-like crests shoot up like water cannons exploding out of the wild, heaving water. All river craft expose themselves to this hazard at great risk.

A summer night in this latitude is a fleeting affair, more imaginary than real. The sun slips below the horizon for an hour and a half to freshen her face; sliding back up into the northern sky to resume her mission of forcing plant-life to continue growth and frozen muck to thaw and calve into the Yukon.

The shallow root-fans of swamp spruce overhung the 250 foot high cliffs of this bizarre graveyard as death of millennia past is revealed in the massive gray blocks which suddenly split and topple into the river, occasionally swamping large boats to kill the over-curious.

Four of us approached this awesome display from upriver in our 18 foot canoe, even though the Tanana natives had urgently, and repeatedly, warned us; "don't go to boneyard; stay on other side of island". This warning was useless. My lifelong interest in fossils overwhelmed my responsibility for my family's safety.

We went in close, not fatally but foolishly. I had been told the thermal erosion of this ancient mud-tomb reveals the rotting carcases of mastodons, giant ice age Alaskan bison and smaller animals.

Our small canoe was in great danger as I apprehensively angled in toward the

strangest shoreline I have ever seen: strange partly because it is the only shore I have ever approached that, given a reasonable foothold, wasn't safe to land; and strange because of the presence of the hide, flesh and bones of long extinct animals.

I had been deeply interested in fossils most of my life and here was a chance to see big ice-age animals emerging with their flesh more of less intact. I couldn't resist, I had to move in as near as I dared, to see if I could spot the elbow of a mastodon sticking out, or the guts of a giant bison hanging down the cliff—in spite of the risk to my family.

We had a tiny seven and a half horse outboard Elgin outboard motor on the canoe, which could only, with great buzzing, encourage the canoe to move contrary to the rivers strong will. I instructed Rondo to stay in the stern at the throttle and if I yelled he was to swing the canoe directly away from the cliffs at full throttle, though we would never be able to outrun a crash from the cliffs. *(Ed. He didn't tell me that part.)*

It was only a feeble gesture of preparedness as our puny motor would have no chance against the herculean forces generated by a one or two thousand ton block of frozen muck tumbling into the river. A ten ton boat, forty feet long had once been swamped by devastating cross-current turbulence with a loss of 13 people. We were only a cockle 18 feet long weighing several hundred pounds. Only good luck would get us through if an emergency occurred.

The other three faces in the canoe were grim and silent. I don't know what they were thinking, or if they even knew the extent of the potential danger. *(Ed. I did.)* My face was excited and glassy eyed as I strained to see something I could identify. But it wasn't our eyes that were affected, it was our

noses. We didn't see any rotting carcases but the air was heavy with the stench of rotting flesh, a fossil stink, to be exact, so I knew there was ancient flesh and bones somewhere in that tumbled mass of melting blocks and slabs. I supposed we were witnessing the only disintegration presently occurring in the permafrost of central Alaska. We drifted for nearly an hour along the great river bend then the river straightened out and we watched the great frozen cliffs diminish in the distance; we saws no elephants, but will always remember the fossil stench.

Palisades Photo Album








Palisades Photo Album

Palisades Photo Album

Birches and Bill Sauerwine

After an hour's running we tied up at the Civil Aeronautics Administration station at Birches. There, various metal towers were enclosed in a metal fence. The station is part of a network supporting airline traffic in central Alaska. We didn't stay long but saw the lone white man on duty, a Bill Sauerwine. He was naturally very friendly as he lived a very lonely life. We cast off for Kokrines with Rondo at the tiller. He has taken to it well and seems to thoroughly enjoy it.

Kokrines and Grandma Bob

After a time I took the tiller and the boys settled down for a nap. After about an hour I happened to glance over to a gravel bar and there stood a nine foot tall Alaskan brown bear! He had heard us coming and had probably come out on the bar to see what was going on. I was very surprised to see him but realized we were parallel to a range of mountains with probably little muskeg in between. For the most part bears stay away from swampy country. He probably came from the mountains.

I cut the motor off and yelled at the boys to wake up. They must have been dead to the world for it was sometime before Marie could raise them. The old brownie finally got down on all fours and after ambling along parallel to us turned and disappeared into thick willows. The boys did get to see him. Rondo even got his binoculars on him.

We were all very pleased, especially Marie as I had told her we would see no big game along the river. We have now seen black bear, moose, fox, ducks and geese, beaver, brown bear and mountain sheep on the trip.

The Yukon is vast with comparatively stable banks, not like the wild Tanana. There are devious sloughs which I try to avoid but once we got hung up on gravel shoals and ended steaming up the Tozitna river. As soon as I realized we were headed against a current I swung back down to find the main channel again. I can now tell by reflected sound from the motor exhaust against the bottom when we are coming up on a shoal and quickly leave it for deeper water. The Tanana was all sand, the Yukon seems to have a lot of gravel bottom.

The river was straight again and at 10 PM we sighted Kokrines in the distance. I mentioned we ought to camp instead of going on down and the boys suggested it would be a good idea to camp on an island (the old brownie still in their minds?) and I agreed. We pulled in to a good looking bank on a long island and made camp. The boys are now skilled at putting in four stakes and stringing up their mosquito bars but we had few mosquitoes at this place. It was an excellent camp and we all had a good night's rest.

(RONDO)

Each time we landed for the night, we had to secure the canoe. Whoever was in the bow was the one who jumped out first to start the process. Dad always tried to get the canoe up close to the

bank so we didn't have to get in the water, but that wasn't always successful. The first one out took the bow line and tied it securely to a tree trunk or stump during which time that stern was pulled to the shore by the stern line. That accomplished two things: (1) it secured the canoe so it wouldn't break loose and float away in response to heavy wind or the large wake of the occasional tug-barge combos that passed; (2) the interior of the entire canoe became accessible for hauling our gear out. We still had to wade a bit but it was easier than trying to haul everything over the narrow bow.

The first order of business after securing the canoe for the night was to off-load gear. This included the tent for mom and dad, their air mattresses, our mosquito nets, sleeping bags for everyone, the cooking gear, stove and grub. Discipline was always a high priority of those parents so us kids knew better than to jump out and start exploring. As painful as it was to have to wait to get started exploring the fish camp or whatever was there, it was considerably less painful that what happened when we forgot our chores. So we did our duty, not because we wanted to rather to avoid punishment, but turns out that's a good thing to learn to do.

Dick and I could set up out mosquito bars and be exploring before dad got the tent set up, though we usually got roped into helping him. This image shows the method we devised. Note how close the nets are to the tent. We weren't afraid nor were we foolish. We stayed close to home "just in case", though neither of us expressed it that way.

Our method was simple. Take the axe and find some dried branches or skinny trees and cur them off about 4 feet in length. They had to be fairly straight to do the job. Six sticks, two sleeping bags and two mosquito bars. After collecting the

sticks and stuff, we'd locate the area we were going to sleep on and carefully police it for debris, rocks, sticks, etc. We'd stretch the mosquito nets out on that area to get their footprint, side by side, and take the sticks, and the axe and prepare the framework to hang the mosquito nets on. Using the butt of the axe, we'd hammer the sticks six inches into the ground - had to be at least that far we discovered, else we woke up at some point with mosquitos chewing on us through the net that lay on our face after the uprights tipped over. Then we'd hang the nets up on the bars by tying the corners at a height that stretched the sides fully. The nets were constructed so that there was plenty of room for an adult man to sit up in, with four foot-long flaps on the bottom to turn into the middle. The sleeping bag was laid on top of those flaps so the interior was sealed from bugs.

The problem was that we usually ended up with some mosquitos inside of the net because we had to lift the sides when we put the sleeping bags and stuff inside, or climbed inside. So the last act for the night was the take the bug bomb and spray the entire space inside the net to kill any remaining mosquitos. We'd carefully raise a flap and quickly pass the can to each other, after which we'd settle down for the night. We didn't undress until we were inside the thing with the bug killing completed. At that point it was safe enough to take our clothes off and pile them at our feet so we didn't sleep on anything lumpy. We didn't use air mattresses. We'd just push the rocks and chunks of wood and sticks away from our chosen space and sleep which bugged dad because it took him 5 minutes to get his air mattress filled.

(ALVIN)

June 10 Sunday

We awoke to the songs of many birds and sunshine. It was a beautiful day and the scenery enchanting. It was even more delightful than I had anticipated. Most of the way we have had mountains in the background and good photogenic skies. The sunsets were marvelous and last for over three hours. We stopped just above Kokrines at their graveyard. It was the second Indian burial style we have seen on our trip. We had also seen such graveyards along the Alaska highway in 1953.

Some of the grave houses are rather elaborate. We could look inside glassed windows and see valuable things placed there for the use of the dead. One child's grave had a complete set of miniature furniture with a table cloth, rug, and a tiny dolls.

We went on down to Kokrines and found only four people there. The rest of the village was off in their summer fish camps. We met an old krone, Pauline Bob, and her lovely granddaughter Dolly Titus. Grandma looked to be at least 80 years old and couldn't speak English but Dolly shyly translated for her.

We talked about old things and grandma had Dolly fetch something I had never seen before, a one piece wooden snowshovel made out of a cottonwood log. We bought it from her as well as a wooden dipper.

After small talk we moved the canoe to the upper edge of the village where a sparkling stream tumbled out of a little creek. We filled our five gallon can with ice cold water and shoved off with grandma and Dolly waving goodby. Dolly said her parents were further down the river at a fish camp. We promised to stop and see them. We could always tell when we were approaching a village by ringed birch trees where the bark had been peeled off for baskets. We stopped at two fish camps.

Kokrines Photo Album

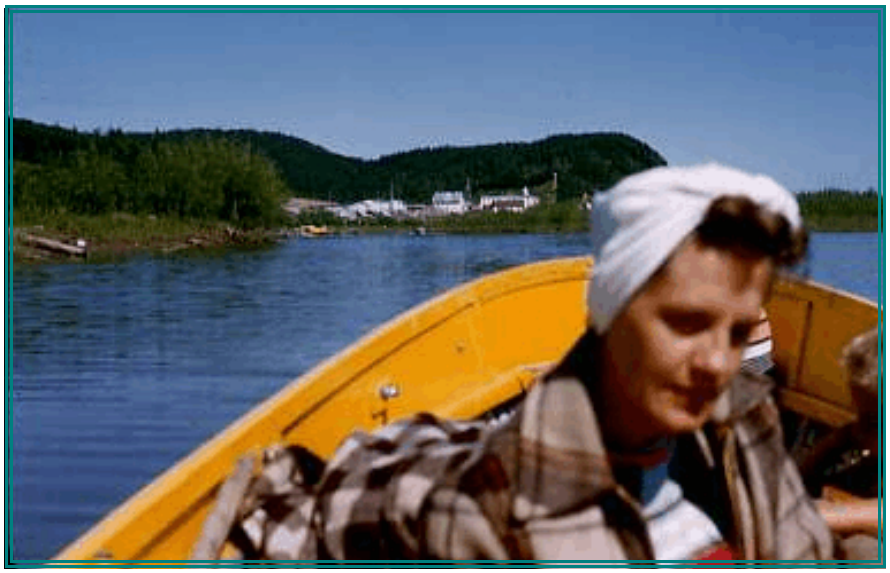
Gladys Pika and the "Drunking Spree"

At the first we met Gladys Pika who was the only sober person there. She said many people along the river were related, which is easy to understand. She apologized saying all the rest of her camp was on a "drunking spree", passed out in their tent—this because we were only fourteen miles above the town of Ruby where the natives could buy liquor. At the second fish camp we found Dolly's parents and three girls. All were sober and more industrious than poor Gladys and her people. I was well impressed with Henry Titus. He had just finished anchoring a good looking fish wheel which was operating but had not yet caught any salmon.

They were very friendly, even though they had no relatives in the Seward Sanatarium. As usual I steered the conversation to old things. Mrs. Titus gave Marie a moose-horn handled awl for sewing skins. The oldest girl gave Marie a miniature pair of beaded slippers she had made. *(Ed. I don't know which set it is but mom had 2 sets of beaded moccasins. The blue ones are one inch long.)*

Henry offered to give me a dentalium shell necklace which was back up in Kokrines. I graciously accepted and gave him my address and a dollar to mail it to me (it never came). He said with the fishwheel operating he was going home for a short stay tomorrow. Our visit with the Titus family was a very pleasant one and we finally shoved of for Ruby arriving there at 7:00 PM.

Ruby and "Scotty"



This image was taken as we approached Ruby which was on the south bank, the only village on the south bank. The willows and flat country were typical along the river, though there were low mountains in some places. For the most part it's flat, probably planed off by glaciers.

We tied up at the Ruby village dock where there was an interesting variety of boats. These were not the simple shovel nose Indian boats but were more marine in appearance. One reason is that Ruby is an old mining town and the population is still largely Caucasian. It originated in 1910.

The mines, some distance away in the mountains, have been mostly worked out but Ruby is still a picturesque village. It is the home of a number of interesting characters and one we met was "Scotty". Presumably a Scotsman his fish wheel bore this out because instead of having two fish baskets his had three baskets and three paddle panels. He claimed the best way to succeed is to have several squaws to work a good fish wheel. He also had a good sized boat with a cabin on it and offered to let the boys sleep on it—which they did. First, we did some sightseeing around the village but found no natives to talk to. It was the least interesting town of our trip.

Marie wanted to wash her hair so we engaged a room at a road house and spent the most miserable night of our trip battling mosquitoes. *(Ed. It is the two story building on the right of this Main -and only- Street here.)* It had no bath, no toilet, no hot water—just big juicy mosquitoes. On the canoe we could put up the cover and spray bug killer inside and spend a reasonably comfortable night. Not in the Ruby Road House.

The management furnished mosquito incense to burn and though we kept a heavy fog of it going it did little good. In the morning ("morning" here is a figure of speech as it is light all the time) we stumbled over the carcases of hordes of dead mosquitoes and hurried down to the canoe where we found the boys stretching after a comfortable night. We should have stayed on Scotty's boat with them. It was one morning we did not awaken to the sound of many birdsongs but instead to the hum of rapacious mosquitoes. During the night a tug and barge arrived from Nenana. On the barge was the bright orange steel tank that traveled on a flat car with the canoe from Seward. We shoved off at 10:30 PM,

Monday, June 11.

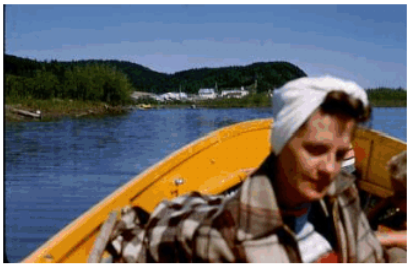
I have one brilliant mental picture seen as we were leaving Ruby: Below the village is a huge rocky cliff; Scotty's three basket fish wheel looping the loop in the bright sun is silhouetted against the black cliff and in my minds eye continues to turn eternally, and as already noted it has six

arms instead of the traditional four. A good sized river, the Melozitna joins the Yukon from the northwest and its broad mouth is seen from the village.

Ruby Photo Album





Ruby Photos

Ruby Photos

Melozie and Paul Peters

At 11:30 we stopped at the village of Melozie and talked to Paul Peters who has a very good fish wheel site. He sent his greetings down to Andrew Johnson at Nulato. With the addition of the Melozitna the Yukon is now getting to be a very large river. From the village of Melozie it runs a comparatively straight course to Louden. We made good time as the river current is around 6 MPH. The charts which were so difficult to keep track of our course on the Tanana are now very easy due to the size and straightness of the Yukon. We have lately had almost constant sunshine and as a result all of our noses are peeling. On our right are beautiful bluffs with occasional streamlets cascading over them. Every few miles we see old fish camps. Very few are occupied at this time of year.

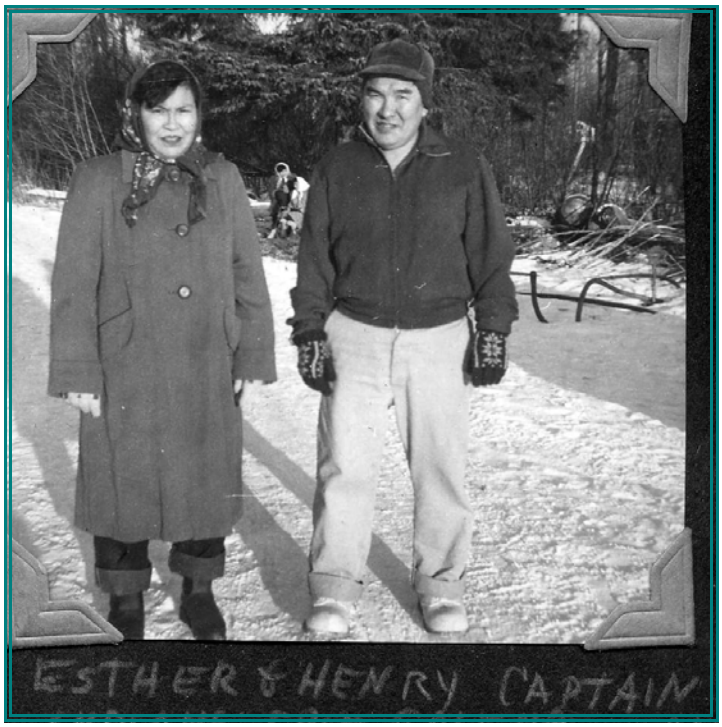
Louden Graveyard

We stopped at the Louden graveyard. It had several tall flag poles flying American flags. Judging from their weathered appearance some of the grave houses are very old. While we were ashore three Indian shovel-nosed boats skimmed by going downstream, obviously with good sized kickers to zip them along. Our 7 ½ horse kicker is small but we are always headed downstream and not in a hurry so we are quite happy with it.

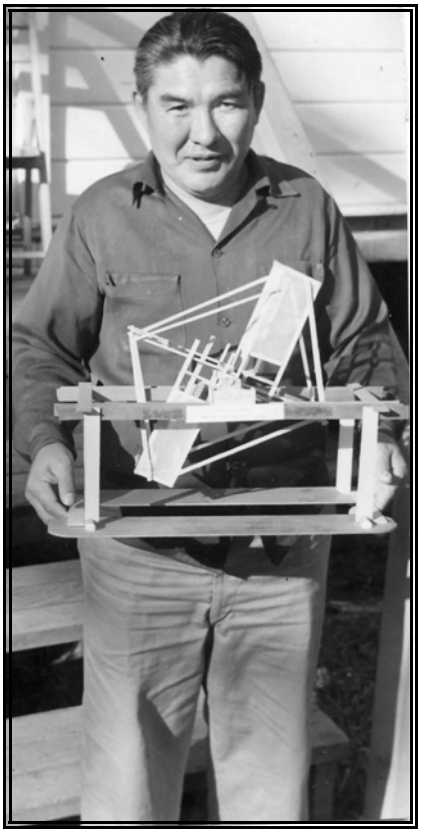
Galena and Henry Captain

Arrived at Galena at 5:PM, Monday June 11. Galena is the busiest place we were to see. The village has been taken over by the military which has generated a terrible environmental mess. Most of the men there work for the Army and Air force, both of which have something going on there, what that was I doubted if anyone really knows. They are busy tearing up the environment and leaving monstrous mechanical junk piles all over the place. The river is undercutting the old village. The Army and Air force are dug in further back and have been at work there for at least fifteen years.

We looked up friends we had known at the Seward Sanatarium; Henry Captain and his wife Esther and son Patrick. *(Ed. This photo was taken while they were at the TB San in Seward.)*



They are not well off. Henry asked me to see George V. Beck in Anchorage and give him a message. The Indians in this area no longer practice any handicrafts and have long ago lost what they had so we left there empty-handed. It was a most dismal experience. No liquor is sold in Galena but I am not sure the prohibition extends to the military PX. Certainly the Army and Air force would not stand for a lack of life-giving booze. (Ed. This photo of Henry holding the Fish Wheel was also taken at the TB San. The wheel is at 2821 N in 2003.)



There was a tug and barge at dock unloading construction materials, some of which we saw being loaded when we were in Nenana. The tug was a small paddle wheeler.

(Ed: Leaving Galena:)

Bishop Mountain

We are now headed for Koyukuk with warnings from Henry ringing in our ears, "be very careful at Bishop Mountain. Many boats lost there in big whirlpool. Stay on left side". We left Galena at 7:40 headed for Koyokuk at the mouth of the Koyokuk river. There is a trader there Dominick Venetti, whose freight I had handled many times while working on the Seward dock. It will be interesting now to meet him and see what his trading post is like.

We could tell when we were nearing the whirlpool, for Bishop Mountain comes into the river at a right angle. When we arrived it was a chilling site indeed. A resistant formation of very hard rock crosses the river which has cut a narrow channel through the barrier.

(Ed. I'm not sure this photo is Bishop Mountain. It gives a sense of what it looked like, with the difference that there was indeed a slowly turning whirl pool that made me very nervous.) As it rushed through this opening it looked no larger than the Tanana river but before the water rams its way between the two cliffs it is spun around in a huge whirlpool. I judged it to be about one eighth of a mile in diameter. Large whirlpools are always depressed in the middle and this one looked like a huge saucer. There were sticks and other debris slowly swirling around in it. Henry had told me; "If boat get in middle, can't get out. Many boats go down, never come up".

Seeing it, I needed no warning to keep out of the middle. It looked like a monstrous thing out of Jason and The Golden Fleece, lying in wait to swallow us up. I could see now why Henry told me to stay on left side because that was the downstream side; the other side ran upstream.

Looking across this whirlpool was seeing half the river sloping down from you and running one way, and the other half sloping up and running the opposite

direction. It was a giant merry-go-round and over the centuries the water rotating clockwise had bored itself a huge bowl waiting to crowd itself through the narrow gateway. My stomach was a knot as I entered the outer edge of the maelstrom. It was now or never.

My log reads: "I crowded the left bank so hard I believe I got green leaves in the propeller". In passage the water carried the canoe swiftly along, the only trick remaining was to be able to swing out of the whirling water when we were far enough around to pass through the portal. I used a lot of body English and made it. Imagine the entire Yukon river spinning around in one tremendous whirlpool. It was an extremely impressive sight which I hadn't heard about until Henry told me. I will never forget it with its center appearing to be depressed several feet below the outer rim. Once through we all breathed a sigh of relief.

Koyokuk and Dominic Vernetti

At 11:PM we rounded the lower end of a large island and saw Koyukuk across the Koyukuk river. The point looked like a good place to camp; it was not too high, it was flat, and not too many willows, and gave an excellent view in all directions. At once, you could look up both the Koyukuk and Yukon rivers. We decided to camp there for the night and go over to the village in the morning. We swung back around and pulled into the point on the Yukon side and as soon as I shut off the kicker we could hear the mournful chorus of the village dogs. Any arrival in all river villages stimulates this song of the wild. There was also another I chorus much nearer which impelled us to grab our headnets and build a smudge fire.

We no sooner got the smudge going than we heard a kicker start up over in the village and we saw a long boat head out upstream. We wondered if they might be coming over to investigate our presence. We then heard another kicker start up and a second boat head upstream. They ran so far up the Koyukuk we began to wonder if they were coming over to see us.

When the first boat was about a mile upstream they cut over and soon arrived at our camp. They landed and we introduced ourselves. They were two young couples and said they had been playing marbles (Chinese checkers) and saw us arrive. They thought we might be in trouble so came over to help. By this time the second boat arrived with a lone man in it making the number of our would-be rescuers five. We felt privileged, indeed.

While we were visiting we heard a large boat coming down the Yukon. When it came into view they said is was their trader's *(Dominic Vernetti)* boat back from Galena. It was obvious they had great respect akin to affection for him, which was verified by our experiences in the village the next day. Close behind him came the big tug and oil barge we had seen pumping out oil at Ruby.

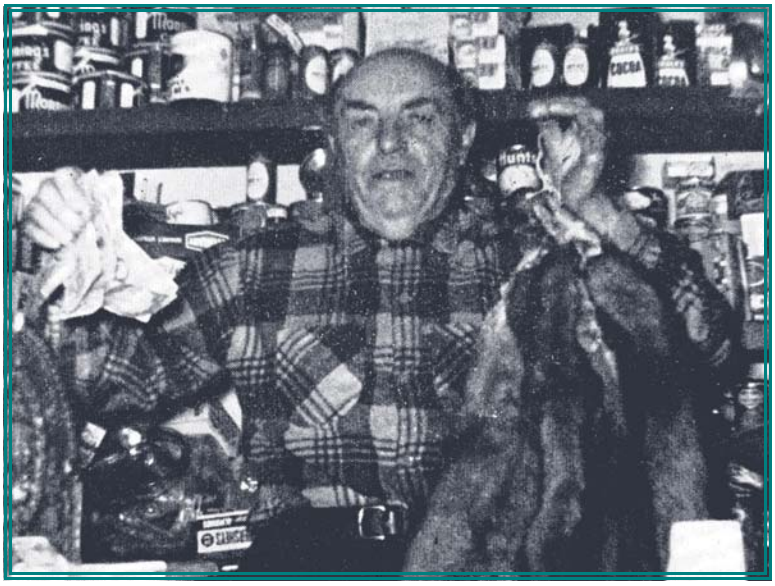
Being agitated by the arrival of their trader's boat the two couples climbed back in their boat and roared off up the Koyukuk. The lone man in the other boat couldn't start his kicker and soon began to drift down river. He worked furiously, I watched hopefully, without the desired result. It seemed the man was headed for the Bering Sea which would leave his family in a most melancholy mood. I finally untied the canoe and set off after him—to rescue the rescuer. When I caught him I took his line and swung around to head upstream. About all I could do with his large boat in tow was barely maintain our position in relation to things on the bank. It took more than a quarter of an hour for him to start his kicker, after which he roared on up the river leaving me to whip my little seven and a half horse kicker into a frenzy to hopefully regain the company of my loved ones—which I finally did after about a half hour. I was running against the combined power of the Koyukuk and the Yukon. When I regained the point where my loved ones were huddled, with no food and fatherless, it was 1:AM and dawn was breaking. It was never dark, it was just that the sun was sneaking around a distant mountain range getting ready to rise again.

Tuesday, June12

Awoke at 8:30 AM to a bright sun and the songs of many birds. Sounds of laughter and dogs drifted to us from the village across the river. They were pleasant sounds indicating children and happiness which may be why my log records

the point as being one of the best camps so far. Looking up the Koyukuk from our point we could see a high mountain bluff sloping from the back country up to about a thousand feet high at the rivers edge. Between this high bluff and the village was their graveyard perched on a hill overlooking the river; a typical setting. Between our point and the village landing was an enormous sand bar. This is what the two boats had to get above before crossing over to us last night.

We struck camp and headed up the Koyukuk far enough to cross above the sand bar then turned down to the village landing. We found many children, happy as usual, and many dogs, also very interested. We went to the trading post and met Dominick Venetti behind the counter ready for business. In a business-like manner we stepped up to the counter and bought two small items, enough to qualify as "business", after which Mr. Venetti took off his apron, came out from behind the counter and gave us a warm, hearty welcome. He introduced us to his half-breed wife Ellen, a handsome woman of 50. *(This image is from an Alaska Sportsman magazine of the 1950's)* He had sent her outside (the states) to college so she was well educated, a charming and most hospitable person. He took justifiable pride in showing us all around his buildings and garden. Mrs. Venetti said she was going to pick her net she had set across the river. I asked if I could go along to get some pictures. She enthusiastically welcomed me.



I put my kicker on her boat and off we went with several small children. I have never been in a more photogenic setting, the boat and Indian children, Mrs. Venetti and then the net. As she pulled it in up came a huge whitefish, then three sheefish, then two more whitefish. They were flopping around much to the delight of the energetic children. What a marvelous opportunity to get pictures of a native woman at work! I took many pictures. It was my first chance to see these two marvelous fish types. The shoe is also known as the arctic char. Our trip back up to the village was rather slow as we were crossing most of the flow from the Koyukuk and the Yukon combined.

Koyokuk Rabbit Chokers Club

Mrs. Vernetti is the only woman along the rivers who is genuinely concerned about the opportunities and development of Indian women. She has organized a women's club, "The Koyukuk Rabbit Chokers Club" which makes handicrafts for sale. We bought an Indian doll which was dressed, from the skin out, just as they dress. They have built a clubhouse and put on an arts festival. She teaches sewing for the mothers and ballet for their little girls. She would like to start some kind of manufacturing to aid the village economy. One can only imagine the tremendous obstacles she has had to face in accomplishing what she has done, in an all male society, among materially poor people, and against the long standing tradition of man the hunter and woman the homemaker. She is truly a heroine among her people. *(This doll is at 2821 N.)*

Mr. Vernetti baked some excellent hot, raised biscuits and prepared lunch for us, including lettuce salad from his garden. Afterward we had a long warm visit with them. They are wonderful people. Later Marie wandered around in the village taking pictures. I have a new Exakta camera, the best money can buy, and am very pleased with the many rolls of film I am exposing on our trip, especially here in Koyukuk. Marie seems to be able to get shy people to loosen up much better than I so she takes the camera and wanders around in a village by herself. She now took it and visited the village boat maker. I watched as she photographed him. He continually ran his hands over the boat, upside down, as he felt every joint and sliver in it. I also noticed he never looked at a measuring stick or tape—he is blind. He can go to work any time of the day or night. He works alone. What marvelous pictures she got of him. I look forward to painting pictures of him, from Marie's

slides, when we return to the states. Now we had some excitement with some small children.

The Vernetti's grandson and another boy, both about three years old were playing in a boat when it slipped its moorings and began to drift downstream. They began to whimper and other children began to shout about it. I cranked up my kicker and Mrs. Vernetti and I were off to the rescue. We caught them about a quarter of a mile downstream. They thought it was great sport when we arrived to take them in tow. One little boy went to the stern of their boat and gave an imaginary starter rope a long jerk and the other little boy started up with the kicker noise.

When we returned the boat to its moorings and made it very fast the second boys mother was waiting for him. She tried to get him out of the boat but he cried, "But I'm the kicker". I bought a ten gallon can of gas for $6.41, much cheaper than it was in Nenana and certainly far cheaper than it was in Ruby at $1.00 a gallon. We finally bid the Vernettis a fond farewell and with some regrets left Koyukuk, the most wonderful village of our trip so far. We set out for Nulato at 5:30 PM, June 12.

Along some high bluffs on the right side of the river we experienced strong winds and very choppy water. A stiff wind blowing against a strong current produced a turbulence I've never seen before. Now that the Yukon is constantly getting wider the far shore is little more than a low line of green and as we go further downstream we can expect to face some rougher water than we have had to deal with up until now.

Nulato and Andrew Johnson

We eventually rounded a high bluff at 8:00 PM and came upon Nulato. What a sight it was. It is without doubt the cleanest, largest and most industrious appearing native village thus far.

Historically Nulato is the most

important point on the Yukon River. It is the site of the first settlement made on the river by white men. In 1838 the Russian half-breed Malakoff ascended the river and built a fort and trading post. This was twice destroyed by the Indians and vacant until 1841 when Derabin, another agent of the Russian Fur Company established the place permanently and remained in charge until he was killed in the notorious Nulato massacre of 1851 (Hudson Stuck 1925) .

About forty years ago some government agency, concerned with communications built a 300 foot steel tower back of town. It is a most imposing structure but useless. One native said it was no good: can't eat 'em, can't burn 'em, cant make fish wheels out of 'em. We didn't look for the trading post but the Helmricks gave a very dismal report of general relations between people in town, inferring discrimination and feuding.

Today for about a quarter of a mile the shore next to town was a bustle of furious activity on six or seven fish wheels in the final stages of construction. They would soon be towed to the owners' site up, or down stream.

We looked up Andrew Johnson, visited his home and gave him the message from Paul Peters at Melozie. Andrew's wife was very hostile toward us, though I have no idea why. A good sized mission is present in Nulato but we failed to learn of its sponsor. We did visit the graveyard on a high bluff, however.

I took very few pictures and we left Nulato at 10:00 PM and camped on the lower end of a small island a few miles below the mouth of the Nulato river, getting to bed before midnight.

June 13, Wednesday

Awoke to the sound of wind, no birds on our small island. This is only the second time on our trip we haven't been awakened by the songs of many birds in the woods. The water looked too choppy to set out so we decided to wait the wind out.

Heard a kicker coming down the river at 12:15 PM. It turned out to be Andrew Johnson and some of his children. We happened to be camped at his fish camp. Marie cooked up a big pot of soup for his starved children. One little girl was wearing men's shoepacs. Andrew loaded up some lumber and headed back for Nulato. The children were all sadfaced. Noone said thanks for the soup. I guess they are so used to handouts they rather expect them and so have lost their ability to feel gratitude—if they ever had one.

(RONDO)

I have a clear memory of that meal. Mom counted heads silently, put her biggest pot on the Coleman stove and threw in a large share of what we were going to use for ourselves, just to care for their needs in that instant. I felt ill at ease, however, in spite of mom's graciousness, like there was somehow something inappropriate about what was happening. In my heart, I knew that my mom and my dad were sharing freely of our limited goods with others that they perceived to be in need. But something was wrong. I sensed it acutely.

There was no preaching, no churchiness, no simpering "Oh, look everyone at how good I'm being", just a simple, "Come on, we'll give you some of what we got." without being asked. I don't really know how mom knew to do it. She was always the stoic, acting according to her beliefs and when these people showed up, she naturally went about doing her deal.

It makes me think today of the graciousness of her own mom many years before on the Ouray Indian Reservation when braves who spoke no English appeared at her door while fuller was freighting with teams to Price, who pantomimed hunger. She took them in straightaway, set them at the kitchen table and rustled up some grub. And kept at it till they were filled to satiety at which time they left. Recall, please, that there were still Indian troubles in the state, so this was no nonchalant simple-minded act of courtesy. It required steel nerves to have a passel of innocent, at-risk kids out there in the yard, to leave them to their own devices, exposed to threat -real or imagined, it didn't matter- while she attended to their hunger. My own mom did it again. Wonderful pattern.

But I knew that something was wrong about the event so Dick and I wandered away from the camp a short distance and played in a small creek to keep ourselves away from the heavy-duty happenings. Mom and dad said little so they didn't elaborate on whatever their feelings were about the lack of courtesy, the unwarranted demand for food, or whatever the negative things were. But I knew it was a complex experience.

(ALVIN)

At 4:00 PM we heard another kicker coming down from Nulato. They pulled into shore as soon as they saw us. I suppose they had heard about us in Nulato. They turned out to be a missionary couple from Kaltag, Ed Smogge and his wife and four adopted children. We chatted for awhile and they invited us to stay with them in Kaltag. We gladly accepted so they soon shoved off with our two boys in their boat. Our boys were immensely pleased over the prospect of going in a larger boat with other children. My log comments; "Marie and I then opened a half can of beans, ate them, struck camp, and made off after the others."

Kaltag and the Pentecostal Smogges

Kaltag is located on a high bank on the outside of a lazy left turn in the river. It has a Catholic church with a steeple high enough to be seen for miles upriver and has a half and half cemetery: half Christian and half pagan. There was a good sized group of natives, and the Smogge children, on hand to welcome us when we tied up so we chatted awhile with some of them and then followed the energetic Smogge children up to their home.

It was a modest, but attractive log cabin with a washing machine outside. Marie's eyes opened wide when she

saw it. Mrs. Smogge had a delicious hot supper waiting for us. It was nice to eat from a table instead of an old log, our knee, or the ground.

The Smogges are Pentecostal missionaries and though they have to compete with the well established Catholic Church and its chapel they feel they have been sent to Kaltag as their cross to bear and are intensely dedicated to their mission. Their adopted children include an Indian boy, an Indian girl, an Eskimo girl, an Aleut boy, all ranging from about 10 to 15 years in age. They have a dog team and make their living fishing and trapping like the Indians, in addition to their proselyting. They have to hold meetings in their home, when they can get Indians to meet with them. The visiting Catholic priest is hostile toward them, which only makes their burden sweeter to bear.

We slept with them overnight and the next day Marie did all of our washing in their gasoline powered machine. In the morning after breakfast we joined them in scripture reading from the bible—the same one we use. We had no bible with us so they gave us a copy. They couldn't imagine us as good Christians being on the river without a bible. I hadn't really thought about it before but felt reassured that someone cared about us and our spiritual needs. They are wonderful people and we loved them.

(RONDO)

This scripture reading turned out to be embarrassing after all, but not because it was about religion. I didn't mind reading the Bible since it was a central part of the discipline in our home, but the chapter we read one morning was excruciatingly painful. We all sat around the table, four adults and five kids, solemnly taking turns reading half a dozen verses each in order. When it was my turn one morning,

my verses just happened to have several occurrences of a word that might as well have been a four letter Anglo-Saxon word starting with "F". I was fourteen and had was becoming acutely aware of sexuality and was confused about what was proper and what wasn't, what words meant, and so on. You probably could have fried an egg on my forehead when I had to say out loud several times the word "Whoredoms." Tsk, tsk. Such a word to have to read in that genteel company of righteous people. Turns out the Old Testament is actually filled with some pretty racy stuff - read the Song of Solomon and be honest about what it conjures up. Pretty darn sassy stuff that would be judged R-rated, or nearly X-rated if it were in a current magazine. Anyway, we had to buy our meals that way and there was, indeed, a cost on some occasions. The noon and evening meals were free.

The Smogge boys were part of the small scout troop that continued to meet during the summer, which we didn't do in Seward. We attended a meeting with there, half a dozen Indian boys playing roughly. The meeting was in the school house, a tidy building with locked doors and windows. I actually remember that the kids were too rough for me, that I was hurt in their boisterous display and affection for visitors, but didn't show it. That would have been ungracious and I sensed that their hurtfulness was unintentional and innocent.

(ALVIN)

The Smogges told us the white school teacher would like very much to see us. We visited with her and while we were there two Indian women slipped silently into the room and sat down on a bench. I could see they were concealing something behind their backs. Apparently word had gotten around that some crazy white man was buying any old thing he could get. Not all the things this brought out could be called legitimate artifacts and we had to selectively and graciously decline several offerings.

The Smogges Eskimo and Indian girls brought two puppies for me to photograph. Their giggling smiles make a marvelous picture as they held their puppies up so I could see their pink toes. The pup's mother was in a den made from an over turned boat cut in half. As I crept up to it the puppies came out to see what was going on and I got some excellent pictures.

We stayed a second night with the Smogges and the next morning when I was down to the canoe for something I saw a grayling jump for a fly. I dug out the boys old, beat up steel flyrod and in a few minutes had a beautiful grayling in the canoe. This created great excitement in our boys back at the Smogge home and in no time they were down at the canoe pulling in grayling. Catching a fish was as easy as going to market for a quart of milk.

Old Kaltag Village site

We visited in the village and managed to buy a number of artifacts. We were told that we were in the "new" Kaltag. The old village was a lowland further down the river which was always being flooded in the spring so the village moved (many years ago). They also told us we should stop at the old village as there were many interesting things still there. We assured them we most certainly would.

We bid the Smogges a fond farewell and cast off about noon for a visit to the old Kaltag village site. We found nothing and later learned that a man from Switzerland had cleaned it out the year before for a Swiss museum.

Kaltag Photo Album

Kaltag Photos

Kaltag Photos

CAA Station No. 2 and the Bakers

Further down the river we stopped at a Civil Aeronautics Administration station, part of the system we saw at Birches. The station was on a high hill and the station master, Mr. Baker, reached it by a small trolley that climbed the hill inside a long, sloping, wooden shed. He took us all up to meet his wife and there I saw for the first time, integrated popcorn, salt and butter in one aluminum foil container. When the unit is placed on heat the corn pops, mingling with the salt and butter. As it pops the top of the container splits open spilling out the popped corn. I was amazed to see this clever innovation in such an isolated place. Of course now it is common in Timbuctu.

The Bakers have a regular wild visitor from the woods. A red fox comes to their doorstep every day to be fed. We had a nice visit with them and swooped back down the tunnel on the little trolley to shove off for Anvik 130 miles down river at 3:00 PM.

Trapper's Cabins

We stopped at a couple of trappers cabins but found nothing of interest except that at the second one we had a choking experience; mosquitoes. The problem with mosquitoes is not so much that they sting you as it is that you can't breath because they are so thick. Mosquitos apparently hatch about the same time everywhere in interior Alaska. When we began our trip at Nenana the mosquitos were tiny, energetic creatures. Now a couple of weeks later they are fully mature, large and slow flying. When we went ashore to look in one cabin we landed at the edge of a patch of grass. As soon as we started through the grass a million mosquitos rose up like a brown cloud and enveloped us. We couldn't breathe as we had unwisely left our headnets in the canoe. We were a short step away from sheer panic, the frantic horror of choking to death. It is impossible to brush and swat them away from your face as they are as thick as a cloud of smoke. We managed to get back in the canoe and immediately pulled out into the channel where there was some breeze, and got out headnets back on, after which the panic gradually subsided.

I once heard an old timer describe the loss of a horse in the interior where the mosquitos were thick. He brought the horse into his camp in the middle of the day when the bugs were not too bad. Near evening mosquitoes covered the horse in a thick blanket and by ten o'clock the horse fell over. The mosquitoes had sucked all its blood out. It was empty. I know how that horse must have felt.

Eagle Slide and Leo Demoski

10:30 PM.

Arrived at Leo Demoski's at Eagle Slide for a short visit. I was worried as the motor had begun to complain about its job so we didn't stay long there but shoved off again. The motor trouble increased and at 12:30 I decided we should stop.

Blackburn and the Thurston Brother

There wasn't time to find a proper camping place on the tip of an island as the river was too big so I simple pulled into the right bank about 15 miles above Blackburn and tied up. We would have to sleep in the canoe so we unloaded most of our baggage (all in head nets) on the bank and I put up the hoops and we stretched the cover and unrolled our sleeping bags. The canoe has a four and a half foot beam so in two sets we could easily sleep side by side. When we were all in our bags and heads covered, I laid down a thick fog of insect killer (can't remember the brand) filling the space inside the cover with a deadly dose. It worked. We slept as well as might be expected and when we awoke later on, to bird songs, I had slat marks all over me from the bottom of the canoe. I hadn't blown up my air mattress. Noone else complained. Our bags were all covered with a thick layer of dead mosquitoes. We cradled our bags to concentrate them so they could be dumped over board.

We made short work of reloading our baggage and got out of there as fast as possible, to eat later. Ah, sweet breeze back in the middle of the channel. The natives have been telling us the mosquitoes are extra bad this year, which we readily agree with. I was very worried about the motor. It sounded very bad when we pulled into camp last night. I began to work on it. I took it apart and put it back together five times in as many hours and still it wouldn't run. All during my work we drifted peacefully along. We startled another big moose with its horns well developed in the velvet. We saw many things and heard much more that we miss when the kicker is running. We finally arrived at Blackburn and two Thurston brothers helped me fix the kicker. Left Blackburn at 4:00 PM with the kicker running fine.

Holikachuk Villagers at a Fishing Camp

We passed an operating fish wheel and pulled in at an occupied fish camp. There were three tents and a number of people. They are from the village of Holikachuck up the Innoko river. It doesn't have a large enough salmon run to support them so yearly they come down to fish the Yukon. One old couple turned out to be Nick Nicholas and his wife, parents of Gregory Nicholas who we know so well.

Another old man, Peter Rock, had such an interesting face that I asked him if I could take his picture which precipitated a rush all over camp to get everyone, even waking some people up, to get them in the picture. They all considered it a high compliment for me to want to take their pictures. I was delighted. They are about the most friendly Indians we have met so far (I keep saying this).

Rapids and Johnny King

We visited several more fish camps and finally tied up at Rapids. Here we met a white missionary and his wife and kids. They are in service at Holikachuk and are down here fishing for salmon to feed their dogs. They are living temporarily on a natives house boat until they finish a summer cabin they are building. They seemed like very nice people (even as nice as Indians). I met and visited with Johnny King, the oldest man from the village. I had once planned to go up the Innoko river to see the people at Holikachuk but they are all down here on the Yukon so that plan was abandoned.

The missionary couple brought their dogs with them, which were tied up in typical fashion on the river bank. The din from their welcome was deafening. We pitched out tent near them (the only flat place available) and spent a restless night. Marie later said she was terrified all night long, as were the boys. I subjected them to more fear then they usually use up in a years time.

(RONDO)

The fish on the far end of these drying racks were a mixture of salmon and white fish as it evident in this photo. The slicing of the flesh is to expose more surface area so that drying is faster and

more through than otherwise. Sticks hold the fillets flat to dry better.

(ALVIN)

June 17, Sunday

Fishwheel and King Salmon

Awoke to sunshine and the chorus of Indian nightingales (dogs). Without waiting to see what our missionary family might be doing for Sunday we loaded up and took off. In a few miles we came to a working fishwheel and stopped to have a look at it. The fish wheel is part of a log raft. We tied up to the raft and climbed aboard.

While we were watching the wheel turn a big salmon came up in one of the baskets and according to plan ended up in the box where it flopped around. The boys decided to get hold of it but it was a king and a big one so they had a hard time subduing it.

I took pictures of them and finally of the fish being held by a grinning Marie on one of the raft logs. We heaved it into the canoe and paddled ashore to have our first salmon feast. It is an unwritten law that a traveler can help himself to a fish from any fish wheel. We invoked it with no feeling of guilt and later when the owner of the wheel came down to have a look we waved greetings to each other as he turned back upriver empty handed. I'm sure he could see what we were doing—cooking his only fish of the morning but it certainly didn't bother him. There will be many fish in his wheel later on. It is too early to catch many salmon but they do catch shoe, whitefish and gooneys (I never found out what they were).

The fish was delicious and certainly fresh. We washed and I shaved after we ate. It was a beautiful day with the fresh green trees, the colorful bluffs, the marvelous clouds in the sky, what a trip! (my log exults). We stopped at another deserted fish camp and again nearly choked on mosquitoes. We hurried and got back in the canoe and out in the river. We sprayed and swatted, beat and thrashed around and finally got rid of the wretched things.

(RONDO)

At each fish wheel that had salmon in the bin, we saw something that bothered us. Large black ravens would fly down and sit on the fish. They first peck out the eyes which wasn't a real problem, but they'd end up attacking the flesh of the back as well. We thought that was a problem.

Dad, thinking he was enlightening these people to a chronic problem that they had obviously lived with forever, suggested in one of the villages that this problem could be remedied. He explained how a cover could be constructed over the bins that would allow the fish to fall but keep the ravens out. Sounded reasonable to me.

Well, the idea didn't go over too hot. The explanation wasn't easy to understand but when it was understood, we were glad that we hadn't taken pot shots at the birds. The reason the Indians did not take steps to prevent the ravens from eating the salmon was that they believed that the ravens were reincarnations of their ancestors. After we understood that, we didn't make the suggestion again.

Rapids Photo Album





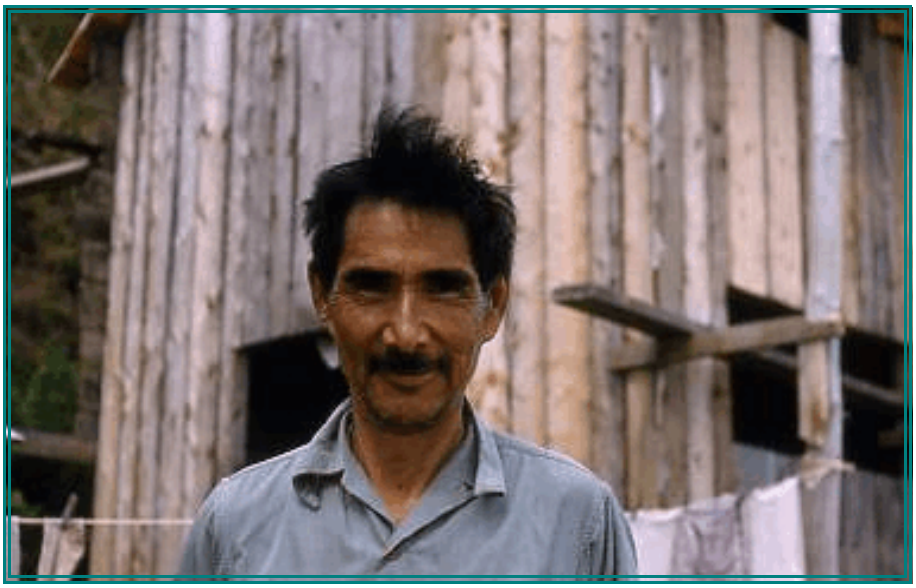



Rapids Photos

Rapids Photos

Johnny Deacon's Sawmill

Late in the afternoon we pulled in at the operations of the most unusual Indian we met on our entire trip. Johnny Deacon's fish camp and sawmill. Johnny is an enterprising man. He is living in a log cabin but has a two story house all framed in, made from lumber produced by his sawmill. I asked him if I could take pictures and in return he asked if he could take a picture of us. I was dumbfounded when he came out of his cabin with a Polaroid camera, one of the first I've seen.



His wife does the best willow root weaving we've seen along the rivers. Unfortunately she had none finished ready for sale but I photographed her holding a nearly completed one to show her style in design. (*Ed. We bought it and it's in my house.)*

We left Johnny Deacon's enterprise with a new respect for the cleverness and ingenuity of one very isolated Indian. How and where does he get his logs to saw, and who helps him? All we saw was Johnny and his wife and some children. How did he raise

enough money to buy sawmill equipment when fishing along the river provides little more than a livelihood for other Indians? He is certainly endowed with an inner fire of ambition and ability not common in his fellow tribesmen. And by what means did he get a Polaroid camera? He is a most amazing human. We visited awhile then shoved off for Anvik. With the exception of Ruby, all villages are on the right bank of the river. This is explained by Hudson Stuck (1925) as being due to the rotation of the earth, though I doubt this explanation is a scientific one.

Johnny Deacon Photo Album







Johnny Deacon photos

Anvik and Billy Williams

Some of the first people we met at Anvik were two whites: Dr. Osgood, an ethnologist from Yale University, and his daughter. I showed him the adz we got in Tanana but it only mystified him. He could give us no information about it. I told him and his daughter we were interested in buying native crafts.

She went with me to meet Billy Williams, the man who made the model fish trap we have. *(Ed. It's in my house)* He had a collection of models of various things he had made and was intent on selling them to me. I was used to the quality of items made by natives at the Seward Sanatarium and found his models too crude for my taste. He was so determined to sell and I equally determined not to buy that the Osgood girl became embarrassed and left. I later bought some old artifacts from other people. Nothing else was of any particular interest to us so we shoved off at 7:00 PM for our final destination. Holy Cross.

Anvik Photo Album

Dad photos of the drying fish were the finest he took on the river..




Anvik photos

Paradise

A tantalizing spot on the map, lying on the far right bank of the river was "Paradise". The river was now like a broad sea with only thin green lines defining each bank. Paradise was so far away and Holy Cross so near I couldn't divert our course at this late stage. We were like an arrow falling to earth. Our course was ordained; Paradise would have to wait.

Holy Cross

When Holy Cross came in sight I pulled over to the right bank and stirred everyone out of the canoe for an "end of the expedition" picture. Judging from the expression on the face of one of the crew it was a most unnecessary chore. We tied up at the Holy Cross landing at the head of a short slough at 12:00 midnight and camped there.

My first errand after breakfast was to find out when the mail plane would come in on its tri-weekly schedule. I learned it would be at noon, next plane in two days. This precipitated a near panic as we stumbled around trying to dispose of almost everything and be on the float by noon.

I went to the trader, a Mr. Turner, and simply said, "I'm Jim Jensen, my family and I just. came down from Nenana in a freight canoe."

"How much do you want?" Mr. Turner said without waiting for my recitation of statistics on the canoe, equipment and motor.

"$175.", I said and he counted it out.

"Just leave it at the landing in the slough", he said, and that was it. No, "How big is the canoe, what is it made of, what kind of shape is it in, what kind and

size of motor and how old is it, what kind of gear--oars, life jackets, gas tank, etc.", not a single question. He knew that if we came down from Nenana, that whatever it was we came in was worth at least $175. I could have gotten twice that amount but I wanted to dispose of it as quick as possible, no haggling. $175.00 did the trick. Now it was back to the landing on a trot.

Marie knew a girl from a Holy Cross family. She looked them up and donated various foul weather gear items—slickers, jackets, etc, to them. We took our sleeping bags. a .22 rifle, and a small two burner Coleman stove with us, leaving all else for Mr. Turner in the canoe. It was now 11:30 and time to make a run for the plane float. We didn't even kiss the good old canoe goodby.

The plane was on time, a Grumman Goose float plane.

(RONDO)

No, I don't think it was a Grumman Goose. The Grumman Goose has two engines. My memory is that it was a Norseman. But comparing the shape of the tail and horizontal stabilizer of the preceding plane with that of this Norseman, I am not sure they are the same. In any event, it was a pontoon plane. I'd never been in one. When the thing took off and landed, the pontoon created high hard rooster tails of water that beat loudly on the fuselage. It was like being inside of a bass drum while someone was trying to pound in the heads.

Holy Cross Photo Album








Holy Cross Photos

(ALVIN)

McGrath and the Forest Fire

Holy Cross was soon tilting away into oblivion as we headed for McGrath on the Kuskokwim River.

Our route took us over a forest fire in the muskeg. The air was like a downhill ski course full of bumps and dips. I soon asked Marie for the Dramamine and gulped down two. The flight was rather long and I went to sleep before it ended.

(RONDO)

I was terrified on that ride. We took off in Holy Cross and went back to Anvik where we landed, going through that frightening drum-beat on the tin fuselage, fearing it would rupture. Then we took off in Anvik and flew over that forest fire that was on a low mountain range. As we flew directly over the fire that covered a wide expanse, there were thermals and down drafts that scared the crap out of me. We'd suddenly plunge what seemed like a mile before the plane stabilized and resumed level flight. Then we'd as suddenly rise quickly upward another mile, finally stabilizing. Actually, the changes in altitude were probably something more like 500 feet but they felt like eternity. And I was terrified. This happened for a long time, making me sick. But the fear was a greater problem than the airsickness. Dramamine didn't take it away. I couldn't wait to land in McGrath, even though it included another nerve-wracking thundering stop.

(ALVIN)

Marie woke me up to get a picture of the braided stream channels of the Kuskokwim, shrouded in smoke from the forest fire. I ran out of film and, groggy as I was, I reloaded the camera. We finally landed down on a slough at McGrath, next to the DC 3 landing strip. We had a two hour layover waiting for a DC 3 to take us to Anchorage so we wandered around the main drag.

It wasn't much but there was a log cabin library (closed) so the village wasn't without all conveniences of civilization. Mom's holding her share of the only belongings we salvaged from the ol' canoe before heading out of Alaska for good.

Figure 159

The DC 3 taxied up and we climbed on with several other passengers, including three sled dogs. The DC 3 was reassuringly more stable than the Grumman Goose *(sic)*. We'd carrying on board all we possesed at that point, the stuff we were going to live with on our trip out to Montana.

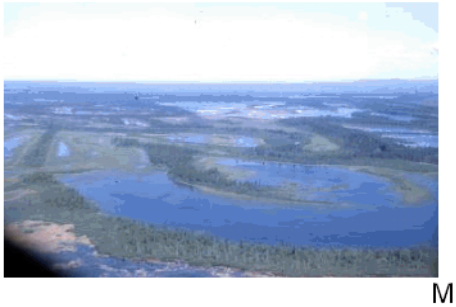
The pilot said Mt McKinley was cloud free—the first time for two weeks so he flew off course nearer to it. I kept my camera going getting some excellent shots of the peaks and glaciers thirty and forty miles long. It certainly was a chance of a lifetime. I would never see the mountain again. As it faded in the distance I realized I had taken about forty slides. Apprehensively I took another shot and watched the spool monitor. It didn't turn.

I opened the camera back and the film had been improperly installed when I was groggy with Dramamine. It wasn't passing through to the take-up reel. I had nothing. I was numb with disappointment. Few people have the chance I missed. I felt like someone who had ten pounds of gold tossed to them only to let it slip through their hands into the river.

McGrath Photo Album






McGrath Photos

Benediction

(The following paragraph was originally placed at the end of the Anvik section. But the beauty of his language and images, and the poignant emotions reveal that it was Dad's carefully-constructed benediction on our Tanana-Yukon River trip. He just didn't know where to put it.)

The five hour run from Anvik down to Holy Cross was a memorable one. I don't think it was much of an emotional experience for the rest of my crew but I was enthralled. The sun shone from the northeast and looking back as I sat at the tiller, the ripples in our vee-shaped wake were like corrugated liquid copper which we seemed to be dragging down river.

My great adventure was near its end. It had been an experience of a lifetime, one I would not be able to repeat. The canoe and the ages of its occupants are locked into a fleeting time frame of memory as the miles of liquid copper will forever follow us in memory. No matter how exciting the prospects for the future, nothing is as sweet as memory.