



CCS/WREAF 2013

Northern Rim of the Boreal Forest Part II

Text and photos by Rob Mullen

Noatak River – Kobuk River via Angiaak Pass and the Reed River

July 25 – August 24, 2013

An expedition of the Center for Circumpolar Studies' WREAF program

Crew:

1. Rob Mullen

Goals:

1. Recon the Kobuk River for main artist crew in 2014 in support of proposed Alaskan exhibition for the Anchorage Museum.
2. Complete the circumnavigation of the western Brooks Range started with the Noatak River expedition in 2012 or at least the most difficult part; the mountain crossing between the Noatak and Kobuk rivers through Angiaak Pass and the Reed River.

Spring 2013

This expedition was originally intended to follow the 2012 Noatak River expedition and complete the circumnavigation of the western Brooks Range in Arctic Alaska to Kotzebue, AK with a similar two-part crew for the mountain section and the river section. Following the completion of the Noatak expedition, however, a kaleidoscope of changes altered the span and purpose of this second expedition and rendered it the penultimate rather than the final journey.

Principle among the changes was the incorporation of WREAF into the Center for Circumpolar Studies (CCS) and the suggestion in May of an adjunct exhibition to our main Boreal Forest exhibit focusing on these Alaskan expeditions. Wanting more artists and lacking time and funding to add any, we decided to put the main expedition off until 2014. However, it seemed wise to continue with a smaller scale expedition to recon the Kobuk and also to complete the most challenging aspect of the circumnavigation ahead of leading a large group on it. I intended to go with a small crew. Through June and July, the small crew kept getting smaller.

Summer 2013

June 30 the CCS/WREAF Kickstarter campaign successfully funded bush plane and shipping costs - and prospective crewmembers continued to drop out. Having been over the ground as far as the southern end of Angiaak Pass in 2012, with detailed information on the Kobuk, aerial photos of all but a few miles of the upper Reed River and with extensive experience in remote solo travel, I decided to forge ahead despite the possible lack of company.

My intended route was to start at the exact same spot as the 2012 expedition, Lucky Six Creek on the upper Noatak and to ascend Angiaak Pass via Tupik Creek (reconned in its entirety during the 2012 expedition), then descend Angiaak along the Reed River until it became navigable and continue to the Kobuk and then 345 more miles to Kotzebue and Bibber's B&B, where we had stayed after last year's expedition. That would complete the circumnavigation of the western Brooks Range envisioned during the November 2011 Boreal Forest exhibition planning conference at the NMNH in Washington DC. As fallbacks I had the option to pull out at any of the Inupiaq villages along the Kobuk since they all have airstrips and Post Offices. To lessen my load in crossing the mountains, I sent two weeks food and some warmer gear to Ambler, AK about 225 miles into the journey. I also received an invitation to stay at the Kobuk River Lodge in Ambler (www.kobukriverlodge.com) in order to familiarize myself with options for basing some of our trip next year there and to recharge my batteries (literally and figuratively).

Key equipment included:

- **1 prototype 14 foot folding solo Pakcanoe** on loan from Pakboats owner Alv Elvestad. New regulations ban carrying both passengers and external loads at the same time on float planes in Alaska, so for economic reasons folding or inflatable craft are virtually essential. I far prefer folding canoes to any inflatable; more durable and far better performance and handling. We used Pakcanoes on the Noatak River in 2012 for the first time and they were superb.
- **1Whisperlite MSR white gas camp stove:** given the paucity of wood on much of the trip, the environmental impact of campfires and the simple fact that they take far more work to build and use than a modern camping stove, this was a nearly essential piece of equipment.
- **1 LittlBug Stove;** a high efficiency folding "Hobo stove" for wood and alcohol (six ounces): camp stoves do require liquid fuel and that has to be carried, which on a solo trip as long as this one was problematic. While suitable firewood was scarce for much of the trip (and I anticipated it would be), the LittlBug burns so efficiently that it can use very poor quality wood and not much of it. It restricts the fire to a small area that is easily cleaned afterward and has brackets to support a cook pot making this an ideal backup for the gas stove – I used it exclusively after running out of fuel for the last 75 miles of the journey – it boils water far easier and faster than a traditional campfire.
- **I SPOT satellite tracker** and signalling device: reliable and essential. This relatively inexpensive satellite based tracker can literally save a trip (it did this one) or your life.
- **Gabel trekking poles:** absolutely essential for this trip. The footing even on seemingly level tundra benches was uneven and often unstable; the footing on scree slopes was flat out dangerous and fording ice-cold glacial torrents would be impossible without solid bracing. Moreover they can be used to set up a shelter with a tarp, support a camera for a shot or to lean on while catching your breath.



- **Two lightweight tarps:** I've read cautions against such open shelters in Grizzly country, but I love their lightweight versatility. I figured that with all the guy lines I had out, I would have as much warning of a Grizzly at night as some unfortunate whose first indication is the tent collapsing in a disorienting tangle. They were multi-purpose, serving as tent and floor, gear covers during rain and the orange one was a great for making camp visible to aircraft.
- **Canon 30-D camera** with 70-300 mm and 18 – 70 mm zoom lenses
- **Marlin .45-70 caliber 1895GBL “Guide Gun”** with 10 rounds of ammunition. The Guide Gun is a big bore, rapid firing yet lightweight carbine. With a very loud report it is an effective deterrent and at nearly 2,000 fps, its 375 grain .45 caliber bullet has enormous stopping power.
- **Pepper Spray (not):** Funny (and instructive) story – pepper spray cannot be carried on major airlines; even in checked baggage. I had no time to buy any in Anchorage or Fairbanks, however, Danielle at Coyote Air assured me they loan pepper spray to clients and I could pick it up before flying into the bush. However, Danielle was out when I arrived and in the rush to depart, no one remembered it. I remembered too late. More on this later.

The Expedition

9:30 am July 25, 2013

After 31 hours of travel on Air Canada, Alaska Air and Arctic Air (taxi from main terminal to Arctic Air was \$18.50), I finally reached Coldfoot, Alaska, home of Coyote Air Service run by Dirk Nickisch and his wife Danielle Tirrell. Most of my gear had been shipped ahead and after a hurried sorting and loading, Dirk and I took off in his DeHavilland Beaver; exactly like we had last year except that this time I was the only passenger.

The weather was beautiful and Mt. Igikpak was in its full glory as we reached the valley of the Noatak and Dirk expertly set the Beaver down smoothly on the exact same gravel bar as in 2012. I had been traveling non-stop for nearly 36 hours and was exhausted. Talking it over briefly with Dirk, I decided to camp right where he dropped me despite it only being noon so that I could relax, sort and organize my gear and get some sleep. As Dirk took off and as his plane got smaller and the engine faded, the vast silence filled back in. I activated my SPOT satellite messenger, set up the GPS, loaded my rifle, set camp and assembled the Pakcanoe for its few miles paddling on the Noatak in the morning. <http://youtu.be/UCcWyVzlr0>

July 26

The river was quite low and a tandem canoe would have had trouble, but the weather was grand and traveling by canoe a joy, so it was with a mixed sense of disappointment and excitement that I reached the point from which I figured it best to start the ascent and pulled out on the left bank at about 12:30 pm; it seemed a shame to leave a perfectly good river to start hiking over mountains with a canoe.

I had packed light and the Pakcanoe was only 45 lbs, but with the associated gear, my painting supplies and photography equipment not to mention the required bear barrels for food, I had probably 160 lbs to carry. I had also been unable to do as much of my accustomed conditioning prior to departure.

Traveling alone it is important to stay well within your limits, so to avoid awkward and difficult 80 lbs loads I regretfully opted to do the ascent in three carries instead of two. I disassembled the canoe and reconfiguring it into a sensible pack that fit in the Wilderness Systems barrel harness I had brought for that purpose and set off



for the first of many “pushes”. I reached the top of the rise (300 vertical feet) to the site of our 2012 Camp 2 just ahead of some rain and then started a painting exactly where Bill and I had last year.

July 27 – August 1

My routine settled in quickly; three loaded trips up and two returns down, keeping the distance of each “push” short (generally about a quarter mile). I only had one pack aside from the harness the canoe was tied into, so had to unload the pack and return with it for the third load. I kept everything covered with one of my two tarps when not being carried, to protect against rain (frequent, but usually of short duration) and make it more visible. The more frequent repacking that resulted from the short carries was weighed against the risk of getting off course on a return or having bears investigate a pack in my absence. Unlike last year I had not been able to do much of my accustomed conditioning prior to the expedition and the weather was fairly hot, which I have never fared well in. Not wanting to push too hard, especially alone and early into the expedition, I took a rest day on



the 28th which yielded a nice pair of plein air paintings and beautiful reference for studio work. It was slow going, but I was certain that climbing Angiaak Pass would be the hardest part of the entire expedition and that once on top, my progress would speed up significantly, not only from simply going downhill, but from better conditioning, lighter food barrels and being able to double pack rather than triple, which alone would increase my overall speed by 66%.



On July 30 I was at the bottom of the final steep ascent to Angiaak Pass. The 31st was cool and clear, my legs felt great and I was on top of the big steep climb (90% of the



remaining elevation) by 1:00 pm. August 1st I reached the top of the pass, shot some celebratory photos and continued, reaching the

point where Dustin and I had finished the recon last year; the brink of the southern end of Angiaak, where the newly born Reed River starts its steep descent to the Kobuk. I had hoped to set camp a mile further down where Mt. Igikpak would be visible in good weather. Painting Igikpak was the principal reason I had brought painting supplies on this first half of the journey instead of shipping them ahead to Ambler, which would have saved carting them over the mountains. However, despite the hot clear weather all day, a sudden storm was rapidly approaching so I made camp. I was behind schedule, however, I was sure the hard part was over.

August 2 – August 7

The storm ushered in a long period of unstable weather. The 2nd was mostly rain and I decided to stay put, though I got some artwork done. On the 3rd, it was still raining in the morning, but it wasn't steady so I packed. I was anxious to get down the valley and see new country and to get into position to paint the mountains if the sky cleared. I was also becoming a bit concerned about time to paint and my diminishing food supplies.

As soon as I had descended the first steep pitch it started to rain again, hard. I sheltered under one of my two tarps until it eased. For the rest of the day, I moved packs down the braided channels and along the rough banks of the upper Reed, occasionally sheltering from rain and in the process discovered that my hiking boots – that had passed two months of testing – leaked, and badly. I switched to my waterproof canoe boots; my Chota Mukluks. After the second to last load, I was again sheltering from a hard rain squall when suddenly I felt sunshine and was treated to a stunning sight. The solid ceiling of drab drizzling gray had been dramatically replaced with soaring peaks amidst torn fragments of clouds. I was excited at the prospect of spending a day

painting since I was in position from which I judged from the maps, I would see Igikpak. It was not late, but exhausted, soaked and looking forward to possibly getting some painting done I made camp.

I was awakened shortly after midnight by the roar of hard rain on the tarps. When I awoke at 7 am, in addition to the continuing drum of rain, there was the ominous muted roar of the river in full flood. I had fortunately camped well above it (partly with that possibility in mind), but for the time being it made any progress problematic. Painting mountains was also obviously out and my morale eroded in the downpour. The rain lessened through the day and the river dropped rapidly, but it was still raining lightly well into the evening so I lost another day to rain with no artwork done. This was the first point in my logbook that I mentioned the possibility of using the fallback plans of ending the expedition at Ambler or Kiana. I was facing the possibility of running on little or no food for a day or so before getting to the first Inupiaq village of Kobuk where I could resupply at the store. That wasn't a major concern, but running short of time and having to rush would erode the main purpose of the journey and being alone, create additional risk.

The morning of the 5th brought heavy fog and continuing scattered rain. The fog was particularly troublesome as I was headed for a very steep descent and with the slippery and soggy conditions that could be risky. However, by noon I was impatient to do something and the conditions were marginally better, so I packed and set out. Luck was with me and the day improved markedly with the mountains again making a dramatic

Canoe in the mountains



Igikpak



appearance and this time including the elusive peak of Mt. Igikpak. I stopped to photograph it and make some fast perspective sketches before reluctantly continuing. Moving over difficult terrain down the steep descent, early that evening I ended up in a V between the Reed on my right and a major tributary (actually the larger of the two) flowing from

the glaciers on the western flank of Igikpak. The glacial stream was ice cold and flowing very strongly whereas the Reed had reduced its flow dramatically since the flooding. It was late when I got all my gear there, but another flood could trap me, so I scouted out a ford and got all my gear river right of the Reed, making camp at about 10:30 pm. After a very intense storm, the sky cleared and Igikpak came out again at 1 am.

The next morning, taking advantage of empty space in the bear barrels, I adjusted my kit so that I could move with only two pack loads. I took off and was very encouraged when my first mile only took 1:45. This was more like it and with less than ten miles to Reed River Hot Springs, I imagined being on the water within a couple of days. Sadly, my relief and enthusiasm were short-lived. On my third "push" of the day, I came to the outlying copses of a heart-sinking wall of green; an ominous barrier of densely interlaced, tough and springy 10 ft shrubs, from high up the mountain slopes down to, and overhanging, the surging river. It was Green Alder; what I came to call "Alder Hell".

Realizing I faced a major hurdle, I cached the gear and set out to scout a route. I searched high and low. The low route was an impenetrably dense tangle and extended unbroken as far I could see from above. I tried walking the river edge and then finding a ford across to river left. No luck. While searching high, I found an outcrop three hundred vertical feet above the river where I could at least see downstream. There was another rocky outcrop about a mile and a half down and some hard-bench tundra leading toward it that started less than half a mile away, though broken itself by other swaths of alder. I couldn't see much past the outcrop, except the

upper slopes beyond, and they didn't look good; the Boreal Forest was starting, but open canopy with a dense alder understory. However, it was the only way forward I could see so I scanned for a way to it. I thought I could see a difficult route at about my level that required crossing gullied ground, several talus slopes and narrower alder thickets and also a high route that looked to avoid the alders altogether, but would require extensive climbing. The slopes were steep and the climb a challenge, but climbing was just work and work I could do; if that was all there was to it.

Once all the gear was carried up level with the outcrop and one load about 100 feet higher, because of the difficulty of the route I decided to do a light load recon. By 5pm I had realized that the high route was insanely dangerous with a pack and dispiritedly returned as it started to rain. I took the advance load back down – a big waste of time and effort – and the rain started in earnest. I hurriedly put up the tarp with the trekking poles, got everything under it, and cooked dinner. My spirits were strained to say the least; a situation not improved by being alone. With no way that I could see to proceed and now really getting low on food, I first considered pushing the HELP button on SPOT. I decided it was a decision better made (and done if necessary) early in the morning; to minimize stress at home and maximize efficacy of the response, so I made myself comfortable and went to sleep.

August 7th: Nothing but blue sky. Nonetheless, I figured that even if I fought my way to navigable water with no more delays (unlikely), I was now facing days of paddling without any food before reaching the first Inupiaq village. One or two days were one thing; more than that was beyond my experience and not something I wanted to risk alone. Hoping it would underscore that I was physically alright, I sent an OK message on SPOT and followed it up with a HELP message and placed the canoe on a prominent rock at the high point of the outcrop wrapped in the orange tarp as a location signal.

That evening I heard a distant engine that soon grew into a small speck in the vast space of the valley below me. It was Dirk and Danielle of Coyote Air. Making a low slow pass, a small red package dropped out of the plane and landed very nearly at my feet. It was a ground to air radio. I explained my situation; that I was OK, but physically and emotionally spent trying to figure a way through the alders and that I was down to about 3 days of food. Dirk flew back down the valley and came back with a report. The worst was right in front of me, it was “better around the corner” and there were better game trails river-left (the other side). Confirming that I was physically OK and not wanting to declare an emergency, Dirk made another low slow pass and another red pack dropped out of the plane. Again, with uncanny precision it landed almost at my feet and contained better than a week's provisions. Due to my much slower than expected progress, Dirk and Danielle (who received my SPOT location updates) had figured I might be short of food. Resupplied and encouraged that there was an end to the Alder Hell, I told Dirk that I would probably end the expedition at Ambler and they departed, leaving me alone again, but fortified with fresh supplies and a new confidence.

I field stripped the new supplies and loaded them into the bear barrels. Then I had two dinners, relaxing in the conviction that, come what may, there had to be a way and that I would find it in the morning. Even so, my first totally blue sky day in nearly a week had been spent in camp and the fine weather was at an end.

August 8 – August 13: Alder Hell

In the morning, scanning the alders below for how to proceed in a “Scottish Mist”, I discovered I was no longer alone. For the two weeks up to that point, the only animal life I had seen were birds, but now on the far side of the river was a bear. It was a Black Bear and unaware of me so I turned to other matters. I settled on the previously discounted middle route. It looked very difficult, made more so by the rain, but my best remaining option apart from retreating upstream and looking for a place to ford the already powerful and very cold river.

Given the difficulty and the replenished supplies, I decided to go back to a modified three pack carry. First I went with a light load as a scouting run and I was surprised and encouraged that I was able to forge across several scree slopes and alder thickets in less than half an hour and could then see a relatively clear route to the hard bench tundra below. A hard rain drove me to cover, but after it quit I left the red day pack (the one Dirk had packed the food in) on top of a rock as a visual reference and with mounting enthusiasm returned for the big

packs. It is amazing how badly I underestimated the difficulty of covering that terrain with large and awkward packs; renewed hope and enthusiasm had momentarily overruled experience and common sense.

Including the final stretch to the hard tundra, it took over eight hours of the most difficult and sometimes dangerous “hiking” I’ve ever done to cover 600 yards. I learned quickly to avoid stepping below large rocks let alone boulders on the scree slopes, since the rocks below them would sometimes shift and even collapse under my weight bringing anything above crashing down. They were all slippery and I narrowly avoided several bad falls, any one of which could have ended the trip. My mantra became “One step at a time”. In the alder thickets I could sometimes find seams and “go with the grain” to angle in the direction I wanted, but often simply had to break my way through. I much regretted not bringing my “panga” or machete (I had purposely left it behind since I would be in National Park and it is against the rules to cut green wood; an obviously misplaced concern), but made do with my heavy sheath knife and hands. Through all of this my feet were soaked. The terrain was far too rocky for my light Chota boots, so I had to put the hiking boots back on.

It was 8:30pm by the time I had the camping gear all down to open ground. The canoe and day pack were still a couple of hundred yards up the last boulder slope and a heavy rain was fast approaching, so I set camp and just in time. The rain settled in and so did I. There was no water source nearby so I collected rain off the tarp for dinner (I had more than I could use) and cooked under my lean-to. I was through “the worst of it” as Dirk had characterized this stretch and I decided to get the rest of the gear in the morning. I was too tired to be exuberant about it, but I had a double dinner and a double shot of rum and went to sleep.

August 9: Slept like a sack of rocks. The morning was dry but overcast with feel of rain, so I collected the canoe and day pack and packed up everything but the green tarp lean-to. I had reconfigured my load back to two packs and decided to go with the canoe first in case the weather turned so that I could leave the lean-to set up.

Descending the slope to the flats below, it started raining almost on cue. I got the canoe up to a knoll where it was clearly visible about a half mile down and set it under the orange tarp. I was already wet so I went ahead to the next alder wall to see if I could determine a route through. It bordered a large tributary coming in from the right, so I hoped it might have some thin spots and/or game trails through it. There were game trails, but no matter how heavy they started out, they all dissipated to nothing in the alders. The tributary was large, but fordable though it had cut a deep ravine. The Reed looked like there might be a place to ford, though the alders river-left had looked to be much worse than river-right for the next mile from higher up back at camp. I returned to camp for the rest of the gear, but the rain had become steady and I was soaked, so I changed into dry clothes and decided to wait for a break in the weather. I didn’t get one. I put my wet clothes on over my raingear and wore them dry under the lean-to. I collected rain off the tarp for dinner again and lost another day.

Photos of the coming terrain taken from up high were very handy when reviewed on the camera back down low, since once at the alders visibility was limited.

August 10: 3:30 am – hard rain. 7:00 am cloudy with fog. 8:20 am blue sky. 8:45 am clouded over. 10:40 am mostly packed and ready to drop the lean-to and go - rain. Frustrated, I finished packing and headed down toward the canoe anyway. Reaching the canoe, as I scanned ahead trying to keep track of the landmarks I had worked out from above for the possible routes through the alders, I saw the bear again. He was feeding on blueberries (as I frequently did) and seemed unaware of me. I knew a finger of tundra bench extended toward the far side of the alders near the confluence of this next side stream and the Reed, so I headed for the confluence, figuring I would have the option of finding a ford across the Reed (which I needed to do sooner or later according to Dirk) or push through to the bench and get some easier walking to the next outcrop down on river-right and hope for a ford somewhere near there. It looked like there was a gorge or falls in that area so I hoped the river might braid up on the relatively flatter section prior to the steep plunge, dividing the current and allowing a crossing (*it does, but I crossed before reaching the outcrops*).

Leading with the main pack, I moved down to the confluence of the tributary and the Reed. The rain started again as I reached the alders so I sat on the pack and pulled the green tarp up. Hitching it over my trekking poles I had lunch and dozed off with the rifle across my lap. A disconcerting chuffing noise close by my right ear brought me out of it. Hoping it was my hat scuffing against the tarp, I moved my head slightly. Not the hat. I pulled back the right edge of the tarp - and stared straight into the beady-eyed face of the Black Bear. I oddly

noticed that it was soaking wet. It was too close to risk standing, so as it took a step toward me I levered a round into the rifle and let fly into the far hills. The bear jumped back and retreated, but not far. If that wasn't disquieting enough, to my considerable surprise, the noise seemed to actually attract a second bear; a brown phase that was even bolder. The two were on very friendly terms and apparently agreeing that I was not much fun, proceeded to playfully wrestle and chase each other between me and the canoe pack for half an hour. When they moved off a bit I returned to the canoe, my heart sinking when I saw the orange tarp flapping raggedly in the breeze. I assessed the damage as the two reprobates nonchalantly fed on blueberries a short distance away. The tarp was wrecked and a knee pad had been chewed on, but that seemed to be it. With relief I started putting everything back together. That is when I discovered that my right Chota boot was gone. I rushed at the bears yelling and doing a wild-n-crazy dance. The brown one spared me a quizzical glance and turned back to the blueberries.



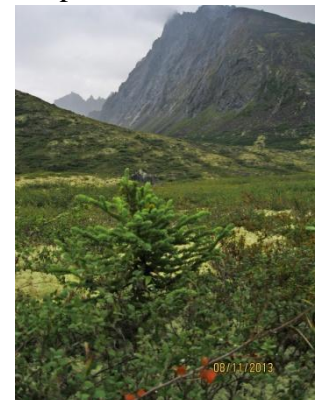
My progress had been glacial, but at this point, in continuing rain and facing either a difficult plunge into Alder Hell or a hazardous crossing (and possible plunge) into the



Reed River late in the day I knew my wise course was to camp where I was. Stopping at Ambler relieved the time pressure and the resupply had eased the food issues, so there was really no reason to push. And pushing was something I had promised I would not do, since it is risky, particularly when traveling alone. I was not comfortable camping right where the bears had made their close inspection of me, but could not imagine that whatever small distance I could manage to move would make a difference, so I set up to cook dinner. It was then I realized that I had committed a major camping sin. In my frustrated haste packing earlier, I had consolidated gear into the empty space in one of the bear barrels. Standard bear barrel tactic to reduce volume, but I had done it with the camp stove. I even recalled a small voice making a feeble complaint about the risk of food and fuel in the same container. I had sloughed it off with the rationale that the barrel would prevent compression or crushing issues and no harm would result. Wrong. Apparently, one of the barrel locking tabs must have hit the fuel valve lever. In short, I lost about a cup of fuel, four dinners, all my remaining peanuts, jerky, granola bars and M&Ms. The fuel wasn't a worry; I was about to re-enter the Boreal Forest and there would be plenty of firewood for the Little Bug, but the food loss could be problematic depending on how long it took to bust through the next few miles and I had inconveniently lost everything that didn't need boiling water. I cut my recriminations short, took the lessons to heart and moved along. Despite the bear worries I slept well.

August 11: Rain. I decided to stay put and went out to scout for a ford across the Reed, figuring that it might be best to cross at the earliest opportunity and just deal with the alders river-left until I reached better ground. While out, I decided to look for my boot again and found the most northerly baby Black Spruce on the Reed River. Worked in the sketch book and tried to relax. Very frustrated, but the walkabout helped.

August 12: 6 am, raining, but I was determined to move anyway and excited by the prospect of getting to the other side and pushing through to easier walking. Away at 9 am. Brought all the gear down to the river at a braided section and changed into my stream shoes. Shouldered the canoe pack and confidently struck out for the other side. I got to within 10 feet of the far bank with only a narrow four foot channel separating me from the shallows and boulders of the shore; eased into the channel, so close, yet so far. The water was already up to mid thigh and powerfully fast. The moment I advanced deeper, my left leg was swept. I reflexively shot out



with my left pole and stabbed. Happily I hit something solid and the plant held, but there I was; stuck. I didn't feel I could move without being swept downstream into the rapids below. The water was at the top of my thighs with the upstream current mounting up higher still and ice cold. In an oddly calm manner I reflected on my predicament: stable, but only if I didn't move. But if I didn't move I would freeze and be swept downstream anyway and in worse condition to do anything about it. There was no one to help. Fortunately it turned out that my initial assessment was slightly in error. I could move, but only incrementally. I literally wriggled my feet back to the right until I got my right one into slightly slower water. The pressure eased almost immediately and I recovered. I was still determined to cross and so scouted for an hour or more upstream, succeeding in falling and seriously bruising and cutting my left knee, but not in finding a safe ford across the river. Soaked and in some pain, I returned to camp at noon. OK, so into Alder Hell then.

At 12:30 I forded the much tamer tributary and made a beachhead on the other side where my packs could sit. I discovered that I had destroyed my Canon point-n-shoot camera in my attempt to ford the Reed. I had my waterproof Panasonic as a backup but it was a famous battery eater. Anyway, with no way to further gauge where it was best to attack the alders, I simply plunged in with the main pack. It had a more compact profile since the canoe pack had the paddles sticking up from it, so I cleared a path as best I could on the way through with the main pack and on my return. It was as brutally hard as I'd feared, but also shorter than I'd even hoped before I broke out to the hard bench tundra; I had by luck and good guesswork, exactly hit the narrowest part of the alder thickets bordering the tributary. The next alder thicket was thinner still and I found a game trail that easily traversed it onto the main bench that now led to the outcrop that had been my target for several days. The sky even cleared and the sun came out. Things were looking up.

However, along with the relatively clear route to the outcrops and even some beyond as I could see, there was a finger of clear ground immediately in front of me headed to the river and exactly as I had thought might happen above the outcrops, there seemed to be some significant braiding. Regardless of the near-term prospect of easy walking river-right, Dirk had made it clear that the better going beyond the bend was on river-left. If this was a way across I might be wise to take it. The river continued to drop at 100 feet per mile for several more miles, so fords might be few and far between. It looked like it would cost me some hard walking though as the alders river-left at this point were very thick. It was indeed a braided section and I found a ford across the main channel. It was difficult, but I did it with just the rifle and figured that I could manage it with the load split again into three. I returned and despite the temptation of the easy walking extending out of sight river-right, I carried all my gear down to the ford. It took over an hour to cross five more times with my three loads. I had to stop to warm my feet after four. I used my boots since they offered superior protection from the rocks and better grip against the powerful current and my wool socks helped with the cold, but I also discovered that they had not gotten quite as wet before as they were capable of getting.

Such uncertainties were a bedeviling aspect of the entire descent of the upper Reed that slowed me significantly, but are just a part of truly trackless and untraveled wilderness

After wringing my socks out and getting some blood back into my feet, I pushed my way through the thickets close to shore and came out on a short section of tundra bench high above the river. It was only 7 pm but scouting ahead I discovered that within a short distance I had to plunge back into the alders and it was late for that, so I found a reasonable camp and set up. I was very excited to have safely made it across the river, the evening was beautiful and I worked on a sketch and wrote in my logbook, "This is more like it! Kind of what I fantasized about...If the weather holds, I can possibly make lineable water in two days."

August 13: A beautiful sunny day. I scouted low at first and found a route that bought me a half mile. Then I hit a wall of truly impenetrable alders; heavy mature plants densely interwoven that gave way to a sheer bank falling down to the river bottom and a horrific looking sea of more alders. I hated alders. Scouting uphill I thought they were getting a bit lighter, so I brought my gear up. I continued to probe for a weak point, but finally despaired and plunged in. I decided to go with my light scouting load first like I had on the 8th and throwing all regard for rules to the wind, I broke limbs, cut branches and blazed my course, both on the way in and on the way back, just to make it the easier to follow with the big packs. I made a GPS waypoint of where I dropped the lead scouting loads just in case, but there was little chance of missing my way; I was doing it "Old

School”. After getting both big packs to the second drop point mid afternoon, I was exhausted and the enormity of what might be in front of me hit. I was deep within the bowels of Alder Hell. I could not see where I was going and had no idea of how far it extended. I felt like Bilbo in Mirkwood except I had no path, enchanted or otherwise. I could be in here for a day or a week. However, there was nothing for it but to keep going. I took comfort recalling an admonition my friend John Pitcher (a Vietnam combat vet) gave a complaining teenager we met on the first of these art expeditions, “At least no one is shooting at you”. I set off for the fifth push of the day, the third in this level of Alder Hell.

Braced as I was for a long brutal slog, I was slow to dare acknowledge a seeming lightening ahead as I chopped and busted my twisting course through the cool green jungle. Finally, while taking a short breather, I could definitely see more light slightly uphill and ahead than I could further down to my right. Ten minutes later I broke through to a large expanse of open ground. Beyond, at the next line of alders, I could already see the break of a caribou trail in the wall; a caribou trail that I was standing on. I had made it through.

I made a beautiful camp that night a half mile further on overlooking the gorge below the outcrops on river-right that I had been yearning to reach for days. It was a half mile made easy by a clear trail to follow, even though it traversed more alders and a swamp. Spruce trees were visible outlined against the mountains south of me; I was about to enter the Boreal Forest on the Caribou Road.

August 14 – August 16: Caribou Road

In the morning the good weather continued and I was on the trail early and off to a fast start, covering more than a mile by mid morning that included my first significantly forested sections. Even caribou have to deal with alders and progress slowed some at times, however, alder thickets were easier, especially psychologically, with a route to follow and the trail frequently traveled beautiful open canopy forests of Black Spruce with the forest floor carpeted in caribou moss (a lichen actually) that I dubbed Lichen Glades. Several times I worried I would lose the trail or that it would veer off into the river bottom, but I soon adopted another mantra, “Trust the Caribou”.

By early evening, I reached a small stream in a sylvan glade a short distance from a tributary I would have to ford. I had been short of water for much of the day so stopped to rest and drink my fill. I scouted ahead to see how much of a job getting across the tributary might be. The tributary itself was not a major obstacle, but would take some time and there was a dense tangle of alder on the far side. It did present a challenge so late in the day and the glade I was stopped at was an ideal campsite, so I decided to halt for the day. For the first time on the trip I actually slung my hammock between two trees like a hammock is supposed to be and slept in supreme comfort.

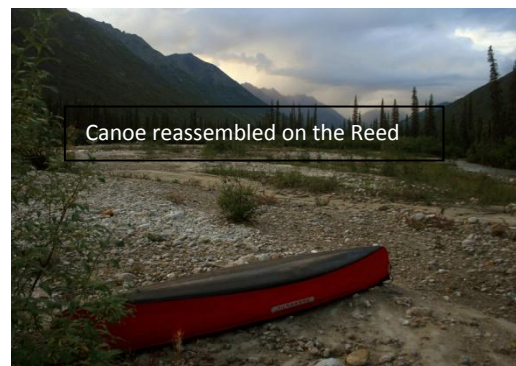
August 15: Rain in the morning delayed my departure until about noon. I generally wasn’t in any rush to be out at the crack of dawn since it was cool to cold early and it was still light until nearly midnight, so a full day could be put in even with a late start. I crossed the tributary in a light rain. The alders on the far side were very thick, apparently even giving the caribou trouble as they seemed to disagree about the best route. It took some work to get all my gear across and reunited and then I sheltered under a large spruce tree where it was still dry to change back into my hiking boots. While there the rain started coming down hard. It still wasn’t getting through the grand spruce, but I put up my tarp as a precaution and settled in. The rain eased around 3 pm. The ground and brush was soaked of course, but the sun came out and after clearing the alders, the trail was straight and clear through spruce and open glades. I had thought to push until 9 pm due to the rain delay, but after a couple relatively fast miles, at 7 pm I came to the end of a lovely glade with a braid of the Reed River next to it. Alders started a few yards away and it was feeling like rain again, so I decided to call it a day and slung the hammock and set up the tarp as a lean-to nearby. As I cooked dinner the rain hit, making me glad I was under cover and about to eat instead of struggling through an alder thicket in the wet.

August 16: The Caribou Road continued clearly for the first mile and a half with heavy Moose traffic, but then started to fragment. Finally as it skirted a heavily forested section at the edge of a swamp I decided I was working hard enough to stay on it to make it worthwhile to check on the river which I could now hear a short

distance to my right. Working through the trees, I was overjoyed to see a clear channel of crystal water that was clearly navigable. The shallows downstream would require lining, but below them two braids came together and the rapids below looked fine. I scouted out an assembly site and a launch site and hurried back for the long suffering canoe, strapped up in a barrel harness for three weeks.

I had all of the pieces, nothing was damaged - and I remembered how to assemble it (quite easy really, but it did occur to me that I didn't have instructions) - and by 8 pm it was ready for launch. I wanted to be on the water, even if for just a short way, so carefully policing the area lest I leave something in my excitement, I launched. I only had one waterproof Chota boot and was again low on food, but I was on the river. <http://youtu.be/73rJjiywhfU>

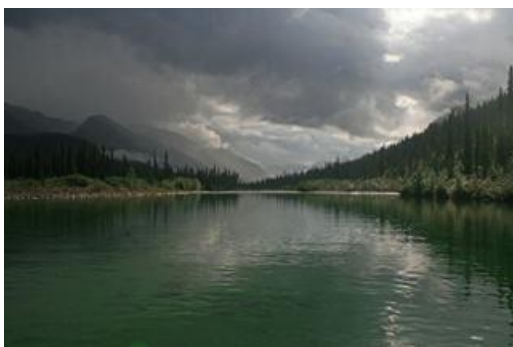
The shallows below were the only lining I had to do. From there onward, the entire river was passable for a solo canoe (a tandem might have been walking some shoals). A mile and a half downstream, I eddied into shore at a gravel bar and pitched camp.



August 17: The Reed River

I thought the Reed would require at least two days to paddle, but originally hoped to spend longer as it looked to be a beautiful river. The beautiful part was true, however, it did not take two days let alone longer. In fact as it turned out, I developed a compulsion to race down the Reed as fast as I could.

Shortly after I set out in the morning, I could see heavy rain further up the valley and it was soon hitting my campsite from the night before and headed my way. For two weeks I had watched rain storms billow up the valley to



soak me. Now they were rolling down. Happily it was pleasantly warm and when it hit, the hard rain was short-lived. Afterward, the otherwise scattered storms made for dramatic lighting over the mountains, so the rain did nothing to dampen my spirits as I paddled on the rippling current between forested banks and soaring mountains while gliding over crystal pools full of Grayling, Char and Dog Salmon. I kept an eye out for bear sign on the gravel bars, but had seen none. The first bear sign came ironically and dramatically a few moments after I had made a note to myself that I was surprised at not seeing any due to the numbers of fish. I had also just finished sending an "I'm OK" signal on SPOT. I stayed "OK", but only because I had kept my rifle handy.

Following the current around the outside of a right-hand bend I had just left the cut bank and was skirting the shoal that extended out from it as the turn transitioned when I heard a rough grunt and crash. Looking back over my left shoulder I was stunned to see a Grizzly plunging down the bank. With no pause, he leapt into the river and charged straight at me along the shoal. I responded with dumb shock and frantic denial. As my world descended into surreal slow-motion, a strange steely calm arose, brushed aside my stubborn disbelief and crushed my spasms of ballooning panic. The canoe spun to the left and the next thing I knew I was intently focused on pulling the carbine clear without the sight hood catching on the pack grab loom. Levering a round into the chamber as I came up on target I was absolutely certain I had time for two rounds and that one round from the .45-70 would stop him if necessary (*both conclusions could have been wrong, but I was supremely certain of them at the time*) so that I could risk a warning shot, but I also seemed to know that it was important for him to feel it; that a loud noise alone would be insufficient to stop this attack. I shifted my aim a fraction to the right and fired just past his left ear. With the heavy recoil I levered in the second round and was back on center mass and squeezing the non-warning shot when I could see him frantically stopping. I held fire and we

glared at each other for a second or two before he jumped back a few feet and I continued to drift downstream on the current. He had come to within 20 to 25 feet of the bow before jumping back and as the current opened up more breathing room, I gambled again, set the rifle down, pulled out my point-n-shoot video camera and filmed his retreat (<http://youtu.be/2otTBEtkWpg>). Hopefully he now has a lifelong fear of people, or at least red canoes. As the adrenaline rush subsided, I felt a sudden alarm about where my paddle had gone in all the fuss. Looking anxiously about I was almost instantly relieved (and surprised) to see it neatly stowed with the blade under the thwart and against the bilge as it should always be; I had no recollection of doing so.

Not ten minutes later as I was clearing another cut bank, I heard loud chuffing and stomping and turning in disbelief that it could be happening again, saw a sow with two large cubs looking down on me from the bank. All three were in a highly agitated and aggressive state. They didn't seem about to charge, but I wanted to leave



them with distaste for investigating further, so I fired another round into the bank well away from them. They retreated in alarm. Grizzlies are generally solitary animals, so this had to be due to the salmon run. Sure enough, a few minutes later there was another one. This time, however, being highly vigilant, I saw him first; a large male on the right bank. I was mid-stream so not hidden at all, but he gave no indication of interest in me as he crossed the river. I was relieved enough to focus on photographing him, but having seen five bears in maybe 20 minutes, not to mention the trauma of the charge, had me in quite a state. Suddenly I found I could not appreciate the Reed's beauty the way I should and it

took some effort to keep my composure when current and shoals forced me close to shore. This was where I most regretted being alone as without the comfort of company I had to work to control my fear. I found myself consumed with the idea of getting to the Kobuk, where the bears would presumably be familiar with people and better behaved (the Reed, especially as high up as I was, is rarely if ever paddled in any number of years). From Reed Hot Springs above which I had started that morning, to the Kobuk was 55 miles. The current was good and I had started early; I could do it.

I saw one more Grizzly on the Reed about 25 miles farther downstream. By bizarre chance he was in a video I was shooting for my fiancée Bonnie; he is visible in the video before I was aware of him and am still babbling



away to Bonnie. He ran away from me which settled my mind considerably. Nonetheless, I paddled another ten miles and made camp on a wide sand and gravel bar far from any brush just a few miles short of the confluence with the Kobuk. I had paddled 48.2 miles and only gone to shore once, also on a wide gravel bar.

However, my usually relaxed wilderness demeanor was returning. I spent some time photographing a beautiful

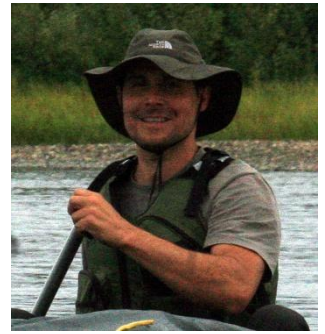


moonrise, cooked and enjoyed my dinner and much to my surprise, slept soundly.

August 18 – August 23: The Kobuk River

I awoke at 7 am to pea soup fog and went back to sleep. I awoke again at 9 am to brilliant sunshine and just basked in it for a couple of hours, letting gear dry (especially my constantly wet hiking boots) and luxuriating over coffee and cocoa. I didn't get underway until noon, but reached the confluence of the Reed and Kobuk after only an hour of paddling. The village of Kobuk was about 85 miles away and I had three days' of thin rations left. I felt confident I could get there in two days, but it would unfortunately require pushing hard down what was looking to be a beautiful river.

I focused on making notes and GPS waypoints of good campsites and scenic areas for next year. The channel was highly braided, but as had been true on the Noatak last year, the main channel was always easy to determine from the current. At 3 pm as I was rounding a bend, I saw something standing on the shore. My first thought was of course, bear. However, there was something wrong with this bear and a second later a beached canoe came into view. Of all the things I didn't expect, after 25 days alone, it was another solo paddler; Hendrick Luckey from Germany. Hendrick was on a fishing trip and after hearing of my situation, invited me to stay with him and share his provisions for a couple of days.



Hendrick was great company, an intrepid traveler and generous to a fault. We adopted his rate of travel for the next two days so only covered a total of 25 miles, but since he wouldn't let me use any of my meager provisions, it solved both my concerns regarding food and having to race down the river. We saw two more Grizzlies, one of which seemed like it wanted to be a bit troublesome, but with company it was an entirely different experience; there is truly courage in numbers, even if it is only one other. Hendrick also had a satellite tracking device like my SPOT, but his had text capability, so he used it to confirm that I could fly from Ambler to Kotzebue on Bering Air through his father in Germany and then contacted Bonnie in Montreal who was able to confirm me as a passenger from Ambler to Kotzebue for Sunday August 25.



I still had at least 110 miles to Ambler and so was thinking of continuing on my way August 20th when Hendrick made his usually early camp. However, he had not found a campsite to his liking and had continued paddling until 7 pm, camping just past the confluence with the Selby River, so I decided to stay one more night and continue in the morning; my birthday. About 10 pm, Hendrick heard a bear in the brush on

the other side (he has amazing hearing) and sure enough, a large Grizzly came to the shore. He apparently was full because after giving us a look he sat down like Buddha and was content to comically watch salmon swim past. At 11:30 pm, again, Hendrick heard voices and a short while later a raft came into view with a father and son aboard. They stopped by briefly, but stating that the village of Kobuk was "just around the corner", they declined our invitation to come ashore despite the fact that it was getting dark and quite cold and we had a nice fire going. By no usual definition was Kobuk "just around the corner", but Hendrick and I declined to press the point. Just after the official start of my birthday the Northern Lights came out.



August 21: The weather was glorious and the river perfect. Abundant campsites with mountain views abound downstream of the Selby River and I saw my first schools of Sheefish which were astounding. I came across the father and son who were ashore with their raft. Checked in on them to make sure all was fine. It had been a map reading error which they realized almost as soon as they had left us the night before. I had better maps and a GPS, so we went over them briefly and I continued. As I neared Kobuk there were several fish camps along the river; all but two of them unoccupied. I made camp, truly "just around the corner" from Kobuk, about 5 miles from the village after a wonderful but tiring 43 mile day. Certain of at least some



The canoe was not just transportation

resupply in the morning, I was contemplating a second dinner at 9:30 pm when I heard voices and then saw the raft round the upstream bend. This time they happily joined me on the beach and invited me to have dinner with them. They were ending their trip at Kobuk and were polishing off fresh steaks. I accepted happily, telling them that it happened to be my birthday. Introductions all around; Rick and Ilya Van Nieuwenhuyse, Rick is a geologist with a mining company and Ilya is an aspiring 15 year old videographer/documentarian. It was a stupendous birthday dinner.

August 22: Kobuk is very small, but with a Post Office, an airstrip and two stores. I was only in one, the reportedly better stocked one. It had no white gas for camp stoves (I was about out, but there is plenty of wood, especially for my LittlBug stove) and no waterproof boots, but it did have some dehydrated meals, mostly rice side dishes. I had developed a hankering for Pringles, but the store didn't have any so I loaded up on some cookies and crackers too. And they take plastic! Everyone was friendly and I had a following of young boys who thought I was "very brave" to have been in the mountains all alone. I made my visit short since I still had possibly 75 miles to Ambler and wanted to do it in two days.

I saw a young Black Bear swimming the river just below the village, but he and some Sandhill Cranes were the only wildlife I saw downstream of the fish camps above Kobuk. I had heard from various sources that the Kobuk would lose its current at various places upstream. It had not, however, the large Kogaluktuk River joined the Kobuk shortly before the village and from about that point on the river does noticeably change character. The surrounding topography flattens out and the mountains draw further away as the river starts to meander drunkenly with good current becoming infrequent and the slow pools becoming larger and more frequent; good for fish, bad for paddlers. Paddling became arduous, especially the next day when a strong NW wind made progress very difficult at times, however, it was just work and soon enough accomplished. Not wanting to drag into town late, at 8 pm I camped on a beach in the lee of the wind just five miles from Ambler. My campsite was crisscrossed by huge moose tracks bear tracks and wolf tracks, so there would seem to be plenty of wildlife around, but apparently all quite shy of people unlike further upstream.



August 24: I was up early to beat the wind and made it to Ambler the next morning. There had been a hard frost and it was not melting off, so I fired up the LittlBug, not for breakfast (which I anticipated at the restaurant at Kobuk River Lodge), but to warm my hands while packing. I was away by 9 am and in Ambler at 10:20.

August 24 – August 27: Ambler and Kotzebue

Kobuk River Lodge in Ambler is run by Shirley, Gardiner and Loren Gentemann. I had been in email contact with Loren prior to the expedition, but didn't meet him as he had to be in Fairbanks when I finally arrived. KRL is an ideal logistical center for next year's expedition. The Gentemann's generosity and hospitality are unstinting, their knowledge of the area and the river (they are full time 30 year residents of Ambler) is encyclopedic and they have the capability to transport the crew to and from various points on the river such as Onion Portage and the Dunes. Owning the store and restaurant in addition to the lodge, they are pillars in the community and would be an ideal base for Nancy Howe's culturally based art.

I spent the night at the lodge with delicious home-made meals cooked by Shirley. Accommodations are comfortable with a spacious common area, excellent shower, laundry, phone and internet access.

Bering Air has daily flights to Kotzebue for \$280 plus \$1/lbs over 50 lbs.

I arrived in Kotzebue the afternoon of the 25th; right on schedule, except I came in by Cessna Caravan rather than my canoe. I called Jean Bibber who picked me up and brought me back to Bibber's B&B; the best all-round accommodations in Kotzebue. Jean had hosted our entire crew last year and is now a good friend. Accommodations are very comfortable, with spacious common rooms, Wi-Fi, excellent bath and showers, full kitchen facilities stocked with breakfast supplies and convenient to the airport, Post Office, restaurants, bank, Park Visitors Center and Headquarters, hardware store etc. Kotzebue is a sizeable town with twice daily flights on Alaska Air to Anchorage (Airbus jet aircraft). This is a great place to unwind after an expedition (much easier to deal with than Fairbanks, which has very limited flights to anywhere else except Anchorage anyway), get your gear sorted and shipped and talk with Jean. I shipped everything I could from the Post Office on the 26th so that I would have no checked baggage home. I flew out to Anchorage the morning of the 27th and continued on to Vancouver and Montreal.



Cow and calf moose on the lower Reed

Clouds breaking below Angiaak Pass on the upper Reed



Conclusions

1. While only half the potential distance was completed, the expedition did follow a predetermined back up plan despite considerable difficulties and the primary goals of the expedition were met:
 - a. The most difficult part of the circumnavigation – crossing the Brooks Range with a canoe and accessing the Kobuk via the Reed River - was completed. The remaining 195 miles from Ambler to Kotzebue are not challenging apart from potential weather related issues especially headwinds and can be completed after the main expedition next year.
 - b. The recon of the Kobuk was a complete success. A suitable river section, campsites and resources were identified that led to a proposed itinerary that will maximize the chances for a productive expedition for the main crew in 2014.

2. The **SPOT satellite** device worked flawlessly as usual, however, it was only due to the forethought and experience of Dirk Nickisch and Danielle Tirrell of Coyote Air that a second flight was not necessary at even greater expense. With a satellite phone or text capable SPOT or Delorme InTouch device, the information of what help was needed could have been communicated before the assistance flight departed, removing concern and uncertainty. Such a device should be mandatory on any future CCS/WREAF expeditions.
3. The folding **Pakcanoe** was even more essential for this part of the circumnavigation than last year. If you have the extra several thousand dollars for shipping and the additional flights (new regulations in AK ban passengers on flights with external loads on float planes), you can go down the Noatak and Kobuk with hard hulled canoes. However, carrying across the Brooks Range with a hard hulled canoe would have been incredibly difficult to the point of impossible for all but the toughest Courier du Bois.
4. The **Marlin .45-70** caliber rifle was the ideal weapon for the attack I had to deal with. However, for much of the rest of the expedition, from crawling through heavy alder thickets to simply sitting in camp, the rifle was frequently out of reach or would be difficult to bring to bear (so to speak). I would suggest in addition to bear spray, that with proper and extensive training, a large caliber revolver in a shoulder holster would be a wise addition to the defensive arsenal.
5. Pepper Spray: the debate between bear spray and firearms seems to me to miss the mark on both sides. First of all it is not an either/or choice. Secondly, now with first-hand insight, I think the determinative factor is familiarity; bear spray never entered my head during the crisis. On the other hand, I grew up with firearms and have long experience in their safe and effective use. My reactions were reflexive. Unfamiliarity with the weapon could have been disastrous and for someone uncomfortable or unskilled with firearms, pepper spray does offer possibly the best defense. I would have preferred pepper spray to deal with the Black Bears, so obviously having both (if properly trained) is ideal.
6. The bears on the Kobuk were indeed better behaved than the ones on the Reed and it is quite likely that it is due to familiarity with people. However, if there is one thing I learned *viscerally* on this trip, it was a deep respect and caution regarding Grizzlies. Guns may seem melodramatic overkill (I actually contemplated not bringing a weapon this year after last year's tame experiences with Grizzlies) ... until you are being charged. We will go "loaded for bear" and probably as usual have no problems, but we will be prepared as the consequences of not being so if there is a problem can be horrific.
7. Bring fishing tackle!
8. From an artistic and canoeing perspective, above Kobuk, the river is crystal clear with good current, abundant camping, scenic vistas and the fishing is INSANE!!! The Kobuk becomes less attractive below the Kogaluktuk a short distance upstream of the first Inupiaq village of Kobuk. The topography flattens out significantly, the current becomes frequently sluggish and the river meanders, reducing the potential for landscape painting and increasing the potential for being wind-bound. Wildlife sightings were also much reduced (nearly eliminated) once in the vicinity of the villages.
9. All of the villages (Kobuk, Shungnak, Ambler, Kiana and Noorvik) have Post Offices and airstrips with daily service available to other villages and Kotzebue via Bering Air.
10. A major archaeological site, Onion Portage and the Kobuk Sand Dunes are downstream of Ambler.
11. Kobuk River Lodge is in Ambler, with home-cooking, comfortable accommodations and motorboat tours between Kobuk and Kiana (including Onion Portage and the Dunes).
12. Brooks Range Aviation can fly a large crew to Lake Minakokos which joins the Kobuk via Beaver Creek just a couple miles downstream of the Reed River, avoiding all rapids of the gorges below Walker Lake (the other common put in for the Kobuk).
13. Dirk Nickisch can fly into a bar about 45 miles up the Reed
14. I will to finish the circumnavigation, but will not do it alone (written promise to my loved ones).
15. There is a great B&B in Kotzebue: Bibber's B&B, excellent base of operations prior to leaving for home and possibly for Nancy going in since Bering Air serves all of the villages and operates out of Kotzebue

Based on the information gained on this expedition, this is a proposed itinerary for 2014:

- Entire crew (up to 10) to Lake Minakokos via Brooks Range Aviation mid-late August. Still thinking about possible adjunct visit to Angiaak/upper Reed for painting, but not sure how logistics could tie together yet.
- Ten days on the upper Kobuk to Kobuk village (about 75 miles of gorgeous river).
- Entire crew fly Bering Air to Ambler and the Kobuk River Lodge (or have KRL pick us up at Kobuk via boat; or a split depending on equipment shipping, costs etc).
- Two days R&R at KRL.
- Boat to Onion Portage and/or Dunes, dropped off for 3 - 5 days of painting/exploring.
- Boat pick up back to Ambler.
- Nancy Howe based at KRL and Bibber's B&B
- Fly Bering Air to Kotzebue and Bibber's B&B - except any who would like to accompany me to Kotzebue via canoe.
 - All return Anchorage (Alaska Air) and home.

Reed River August 16

Sphagnum moss "dry dock"

5:30 pm

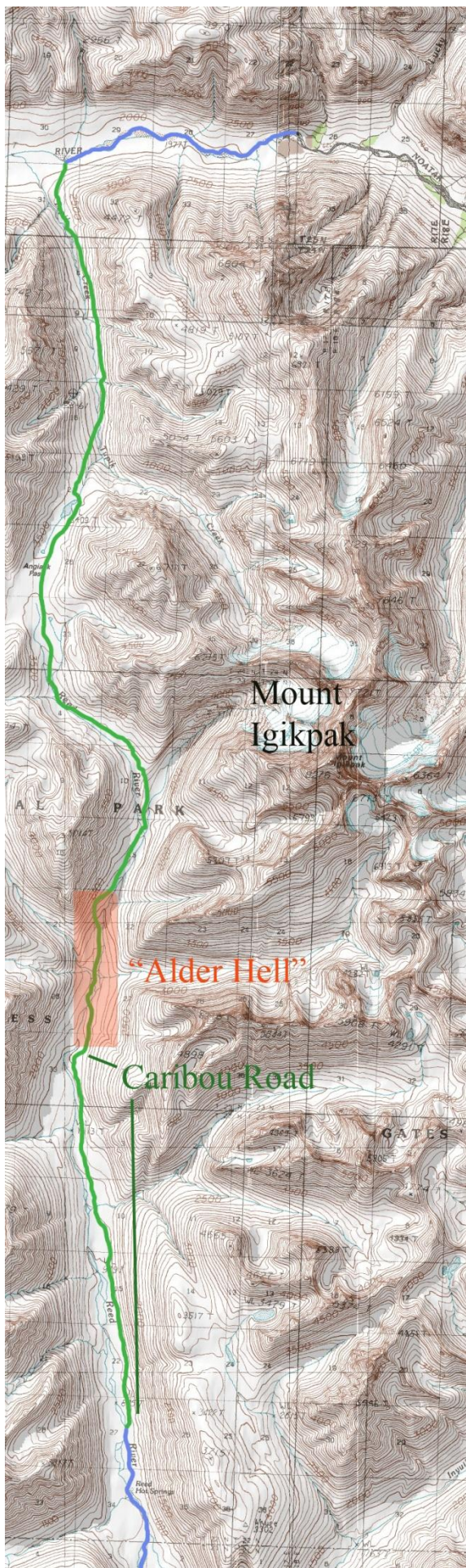


6:00 pm



7:00 pm





Blue line: River Travel

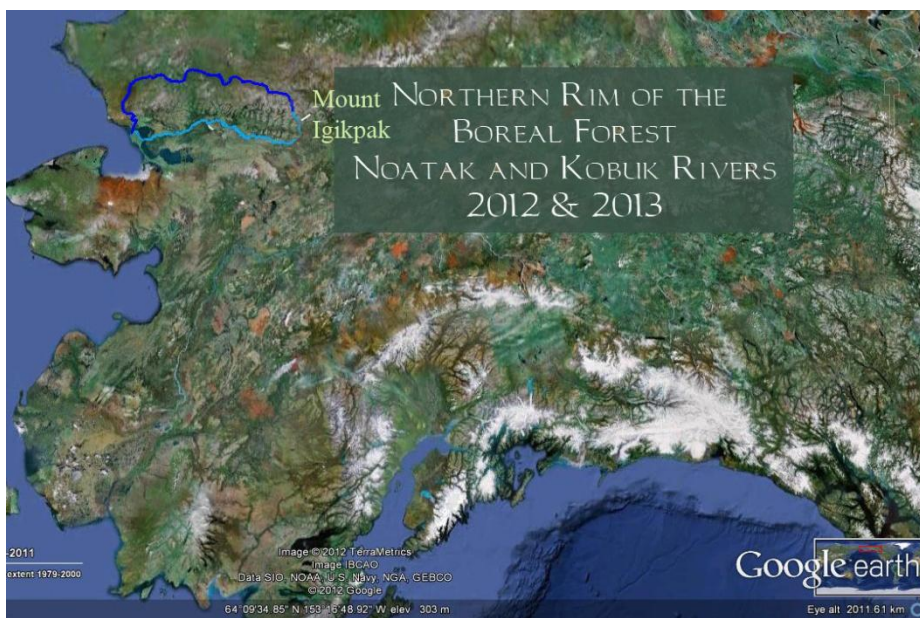
Green line: Foot Travel

The route along the Kobuk is very well documented and once afloat on the Reed River, my route was obvious as well, so I have not included maps for those sections of the journey, though I do have full GPS documentation for them.

The ascent up Tupik is best done river right (east side). The descent along the Reed was very difficult and there are possible improvements on my route that I could suggest. Again, detailed GPS data is available, but not included here since as of this date (2013-09-13), I have not yet had a chance to go download it.

For detailed information contact:

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- Jean Bibber, owner Bibber's B&B, Kotzebue, AK (907) 442-2693
- Shirley, Gardiner and Loren Gentemann, owners Kobuk River Lodge, Ambler, AK www.kobukriverlodge.com

Field Paintings



Ascending Tupik Creek – (from camera back on rain day)

Valley of the Noatak, passing storm – July 28 – above

South end of Angiaak Pass and beginning of Reed R. - Aug 2 - left

Mons Innominatum – July 28 - below

