

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RAPTOR/
SMALL MAMMAL SURVEY
KOBUK RIVER
BACKCOUNTRY TRIP REPORT**

GROUP MEMBERS: Shelli Swanson, Biological Technician
Ken Faber, Resource Management Specialist
Kate Swift, Biological Technician
Dave Schmitz, Park Ranger
Betsy Rossini, Administrative Officer
Julie Burwell, A.P.L.I.C. Information Specialist

STUDY AREA: Kobuk River drainage; Walker Lake to Pah River confluence

LOGISTICS:

Departure: 7/9/91 - 9:00 am - Shelli, Ken, Julie and Betsy leave BTT the Brooks Range Aviation Beaver for Walker Lake. 7/9/91 - 2:30pm Dave and I leave BTT for Walker Lake on GAAR Cessna 185 #N725; arrive 3:30 pm.

Pick-up: 7/18/91 - 4:00 pm Beaver and GAAR Cessna 185 #N725 leave Kobuk River and Pah River confluence for BTT loaded with us and all our gear; arrive BTT 5:30pm.

Aircraft Used: Departure: BRA Beaver & GAAR Cessna 185 #N725
Pick-up: " " " " " "

Method of Travel: Raft (Redshank), 2 Person Klepper, and Metzeler

Mileage: 65 miles

Maps: Survey Pass A-3, Hughes D-3, D-4, D-5, C-5, D-6 and Shungnak D-1

CABINS SURVEYED:

1. Located an eskimo gravesite of 2 long body length houses with roofs outside of the Preserve on a small hill (Dave Schmitz has since found out the story on these graves) in the Pah/Kobuk Rivers confluence.
2. Ida Ross allotment - cabin 10 X 12; 5 old batteries

IMPACTS OBSERVED:

1. 10 spruce trees, edge of river, cut by chainsaw within last several years
2. 17 Birch trees, about 1/2 mile up from Reed River mouth on north side - bark has been cut off for baskets
3. Dave and Shelli located Art Mortvedt's winter camp with tentpoles, elevated cache, stack of firewood and trail; very neat and tidy
4. 13 Birch trees, near Pah River mouth by old cabin ruins - bark has been stripped off for baskets

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS:

1. Raptor Survey; 2 page summary attached
 - a. Peregrine Falcon sighting in Lower Kobuk Canyon
 - b. Inactive Bald Eagle Nest located outside Gates of the Arctic National Preserve boundary
2. Small Mammal Trapping Survey; 4 page summary attached
 - a. Yellow-Cheeked voles caught further north than their noted northern limit of their range
3. Many active and inactive beaver lodge, cache and use areas noted.

TRAVEL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE TRIPS:

1. A small Avon Redshank raft, Metezeler canoe and a 2 person Klepper kayak were a good combination for this number of people and the amount of gear needed for the survey and trapping.
2. Next trip, I would suggest seeking BETTER WEATHER; this trip endured rain ever day on & off and some days continuously all day. This affected both the raptor survey and small mammal trapping project; rain may be why trapping success was low. Little wind kept the trip running efficiently.
3. Check Klepper bags; seats and the small bow and stern pieces were mixed up between the boats, we ended up with 4 seats and no bow and stern pieces.
4. If floating the Walker Lake outlet to the Kobuk, fly to the outlet rather than the cabin on Walker Lake; we made a decision error and ended up doing a harrowing motorboat transport of us and all our gear in large waves across Walker Lake to the mouth of the creek.
5. Try to avoid floating this river with a fire burning around it. Betsy and I, while waiting for the Klepper pieces, watched the entire west bank of the outlet across from our campsite go up in flames; smoke

obscured our view of the cabin on the lake and sometimes the bank across the outlet. While portaging around the top rapid, there were still smokes and small flames alongside the portage trail.

6. WHITEWATER! - The top rapid of this outlet, about a mile downstream of the lake, is unrunnable at this level; it would do some hefty damage if not wrap boats if ran at this level or lower. The rapid is around a blind corner with a large rock on the left in the river above the rapid as a warning to pull over. Experienced whitewater people may be able to run this at higher water levels in rafts and whitewater kayaks, but it should always be scouted. Further down river on the main Kobuk, no rapids existed in the Upper Kobuk Canyon, but the lower end of the Lower Kobuk Canyon had a series of 3 drops; the first 2 were runnable easily and enjoyably (Level II+) by the raft and Metezeler, but kayaks should have their spray skirts on (this is especially directed to Dave Schmitz). The last drop was a narrow channel that ran close to the south side of the river with parts of it blocked from view while scouting it on the north side of the river. We ran the raft through observing that the channel was clear and then ran the other 2 boats through. Remember, always scout. There were no more rapids after this point.

7. Avoid modelling your trip after ours; we nicknamed ours the 'COMEDY OF ERRORS'.

VISITOR CONTACTS

Date	Time	Location	Names	Address	Remarks
no visitors seen except a campsite south of us at the Pah River confluence outside of the Preserve; no contact made					

AIRCRAFT/WATERCRAFT OBSERVATIONS

Date	Time	Location	Type	N#	Direction/Comments
7/9/91	1052	Walker Lake	C-206-207/white w/	dark blue	East, 3500 ft.
7/10/91	1100	Walker Lake	BLM Helicopter		to W.L. cabin
7/10/91	1130	Walker Lake	BLM Helicopter		to Bettles
7/10/91	1230	Walker Lake	BLM spotter plane		
7/10/91	1545	Walker Lake	? plane		3,000 ft. south
7/10/91	1552	Walker Lake	185/flts/ white w/red stripe		2,000 ft. west
7/11/91	1030	Kobuk River	BLM helicopter		
7/11/91	1158	Walker Lake	185/flts/GAAR #N725		lands to drop boat parts to us
7/11/91	1543	Kobuk River	Beaver/flts		4,000 ft., west
7/11/91	1550	Kobuk River	Large 4E		Heard only, west
7/12/91	1200	Kobuk River	185/flts; GAAR #N725		5,000 ft., west
7/13/91	1030	Kobuk River	Ketchum Air Beaver		1,000 ft., SW
7/13/91	1158	Kobuk River	Navahoe 2E		southeast

7/13/91	1245	Kobuk River 4E Freighter	heard only
7/13/91	2040	Kobuk River BLM Spotting Plane	over fires
7/14/91	1100	Beaver Creek 5 C-170s flying together	2,000,SW
7/14/91	1300	Beaver Creek Markair Twin Otter	W,SW
7/14/91	1424	Beaver Creek NPS Super Cub	landed gravel bar
7/14/91	1600	Beaver Creek Mark Air Twin Otter	W
7/14/91	1758	Beaver Creek 2 E Aero Commander/white w/red trim,	no gear down, heading East
7/15/91	0945	Apelik Creek C-207	east
7/15/91	1340	Apelik Creek plane	heard only
7/15/91	1556	Apelik Creek "	heard only, east
7/15/91	1845	Apelik Creek 2 E plane	7,000 ft., east
7/16/91	0943	Selby River C-207	1,000 ft., west
7/16/91	1021	Selby River 2 E Navahoe;commuting plane/	1,000,west
7/16/91	1027	Selby River SE Cherokee or Lance	700 ft., east
7/16/91	1028	Selby River C-207	800 ft., west
7/16/91	1125	Selby River C-207 white w/red trim	500 ft.,east
7/17/91	1436	Pah River C-46 freight plane	1500 ft., west
7/18/91	0950	Pah River small plane on wheels, white w/red trim	500 ft., west
7/18/91	1010	Pah River Navahoe ?	500 ft.,east
7/18/91	1035	Pah River	heard 2 planes; turned to the south or around
7/18/91	1400	Pah River C-207	500 ft., east
7/18/91	1600	Pah River C-185 and Beaver	for our pickup

NATURAL RESOURCES SURVEY

Ecological zones traversed: 100% boreal

MAMMALS:

1. Moose - 7 total observed; 3 bulls, 2 sets of 1 cow and calf
2. Red Fox - 2 observed at the Pah/Kobuk confluence
3. Wolverine - 1 observed by Dave & Shelli briefly
4. Beaver - 2 observed but activity in the form of active caches and lodges were observed all along the river
5. Caribou - 1 solo bull observed running along bank slightly limping; another solo bull observed feeding along river

Wolf, bear, moose, caribou, fox and marten tracks and sign were observed on gravel bars and near creeks.

BIRDS except for raptors:

Common Raven - common
Belted Kingfisher - uncommon
Long Tailed Jaeger - uncommon
Pacific Loon - common
Red Throated Loon - uncommon
Canada Goose - uncommon
Northern Pintail - common
Red Breasted Merganser - common
Scaup Sp. - common
American Widgeon - common
Mallard - common
American Golden Plover - uncommon
Semi Palmated Plover - common
Semi Palmated Sandpiper - rare (Dave Schmitz sighting)
Lesser Yellowlegs - common
Spotted Sandpiper - common
Arctic Tern - common
Mew Gull - common
Glaucous Winged Gull - common
Bonapartes Gull - uncommon
Bohemian Waxwing - common
Rusty Blackbird - common
Northern Shrike - uncommon
Yellow Warbler - uncommon
Dark Eyed Junco - uncommon
White Crowned Sparrow - common
American Robin - common
Tree Swallow - uncommon
Bank Swallow - common
Cliff Swallow - uncommon (Shelli Swanson & Dave Schmitz sighting)

FISH:

Grayling, lake trout, norhtern pike and arctic char were observed, especially around creek mouths. Grayling in all life ages were observed in the clear Kobuk River.

FLORA:

Trees:

Picea mariana - black spruce
Picea glauca - white spruce; in patches
Betula papyrifera - Alaska paper birch
Populus tremuloides - quaking aspen

Shrubs:

Salix spp. - willows in shrub and vegetative form

Betula nana - dwarf birch
Alnus crispa - mountian alder
Ledum palustris - labrador tea

Primary Vegetation:

Dryas spp. - avens
Cassiope spp. - heathers
Eriophorum sp. - cottongrass
other Carex spp. - other sedges

Other Identifications:

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi & rubra - bearberry
Vaccinium spp. - blueberry & cranberry
Epilobium latifolium - dwarf fireweed
Parnassia palustra - grass of parnassus
Zygadenus elegans - death camas
Allium schoenoprasum - wild chives
Aster sibiricus - siberian aster
Potentilla fruticosa - tundra rose
Drosera anglica - sundew
Aconitum delphinifolium - monkshood
Campanula rotundifolia - bluebells of scotland

Not every identification was noted since the primary intent of the trip was raptor/small mammal surveys and due to the constant inclement weather.

DAILY ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS AND CONDITIONS

7/9/91 - 9:00 am - Shelli, Ken, Julie and Betsy are shuttled to Walker Lake in the BRA Beaver. Dave & I stand by and fly in with Buster in the GAAR 185 arriving at 3:30 pm. The south end of Walker Lake and along the outlet of the Kobuk River is engulfed in a forest fire that appears to be spreading, however the fire is dyeing along the outlet so travel appears to be safe there. 8 smokejumpers were dropped at the cabin to protect it and feel it would have burned had they not been there. Towards 5pm we decide to shuttle our gear and bodies by the park motorboat to the head of the outlet creek; the first shuttle was a harrowing one with large waves at the end of the lake not seen from the cabin. When Kurt returns, we eat tacos then head over hoping for evening's calmer waves. The USGS person and Kurt shuttle over the rest of us and our gear through the same large waves. We set up camp for the night. Notice that the HISI sites have all been burned over except for the human and game trails that seemed to act as a fire line.

7/10/91 - We arise to assemble and blow up boats; I unpack the Klepper and realize there are no bow and stern pieces, but there are 4 seats. This is my fault as I made a last minute change of kleppers in hopes this one was in better shape. Shelli decides that Betsy and I will remain at Walker Lake, attempt radio contact and have the parts sent

out that we need. At 11am, I miraculously make radio contact with Buster as he shuttles people from the Noatak. At noon, the rest of the group heads down the river. Betsy and I stand by all day enjoying a magnificent view of the forest fire directly across the outlet from us. Smoke hampers our view of the cabin and sometimes the opposite bank making breathing difficult at times. The rest of the group camps near the confluence of the outlet creek and Kobuk River.

7/11/91 - 12 noon - Ed flies in with the Klepper parts apologizing for being late; he thought Buster was kidding when he said "Kate needs the bow and stern for the Klepper." Ed shouldn't be apologizing; we were just lucky we were on Walker Lake, Ed was coming out here anyway and I was able to make radio contact with Buster. By 1pm, we have the boat assembled and by 3pm we head down the outlet. The portage is less than a mile down the river marked by a large rock in the river on the left. This rapid may be runnable at higher water levels by experienced whitewater people, but at this level and lower it would damage and possibly wrap boats. We portage in an impressive 2 1/2 trips, then paddle on to our campsite 7 miles from our starting point. On the way we observe nest #1, an active Osprey nest on the top of a snag on an island with 2 adults and ? #eggs/young. The rest of the group paddled on to a campsite 5 miles downstream from us and set up 50 Sherman live traps; they caught 3 voles on their first check at 9 pm.

7/12/91 - 10am - Betsy and I break camp and finally meet up with the rest of the group at 12:30pm. Just beyond their campsite, we observe Nest #2 in a live spruce tree, an active osprey nest with 2 adults and ? #eggs/young. They caught 4 more voles in the Sherman traps that morning. Pass a defensive Harlan's Hawk then nest #3, another active Osprey nest w/2 adults and ? #eggs/young. Camp in cottonwood grove just 1/4 mile downstream of a spot in the river that moose fed in; observe a large bull feeding there that evening and a cow and calf in the morning. Betsy and I paddled 15 miles today; the rest of the group paddled 10.

7/13/91 - Arise and on the river by 10:30am; Pass Inactive nest #4; perhaps a Great Horned Owl. Start down the Lower Kobuk Canyon; on the right is an active osprey nest at the top of a precariously leaning snag w/2 adults and ? #eggs/young. Then lower part of the Lower Kobuk Canyon is a series of 3 drops that are a level II+ on the whitewater scale; enjoyable for raft, metezeler and kayak but should be scouted. Just before the last drop, we observed a peregrine falcon flying then landed on the inactive nest #6, the only cliff nest we observed on the trip; the nest was falling apart with sticks falling down the cliffside. The peregrine falcon headed down the canyon disappearing against the charcoal grey cliffsides. The canyon opens up and we observe nest #7, an active osprey nest in a live spruce tree w/1 adult and ? #eggs/young. Just beyond that, observe a rough legged hawk in defensive behavoir on an island; nest was never spotted. Camp at the confluence of the Reed River. Travelled 13 miles today. Shelli and I lay out 50 Sherman live traps; 25 on a slough with heavy brush and 25 on a spruce, lichen and moss forest.

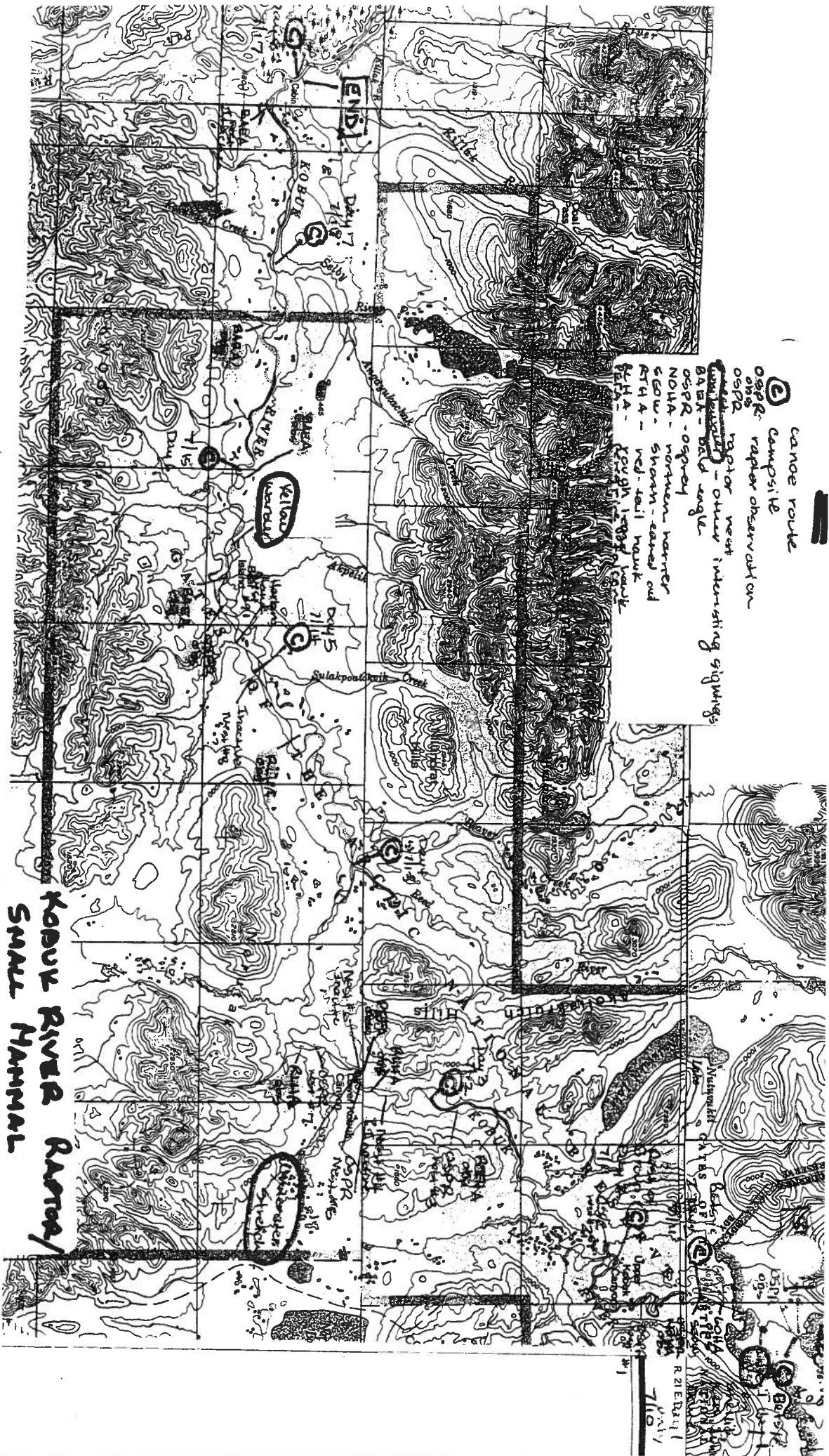
7/14/91 - Arise and check traps; capture 2 golden cheeked voles and 2 red backed voles; one golden cheeked was dead and is now a museum skin. On the river by 10:30am; pass a small inactive nest (nest #8) in a live spruce just before our campsite. Travelled 10 miles. Set up 25 trap trapline in wet grasses/alder environment.

7/15/91 - 25 traps empty the next morning. This incessant rain and wetness has affected the trapping success, Shelli thinks. Leave camp by noon and observe nest #9, an active Harlan's Hawk nest in a live spruce w/2 adults defending by flying and vocalizing w/1 nestling in the nest. Estimate this nestling to be 30-35 days old, almost ready to fledge. Sighted 2 Bald Eagles today with some tramping around in search of their nest with no success. Observe a yellow warbler today. Reach camp and set up a 50 trap trapline in spruce, moss, lichen and low shrub areas. Travelled 10 miles today.

7/16/91 - Arise and check traps; have caught 1 red-backed vole. This day was our rainiest day yet. Arise to rain, boated the whole day in the rain, sometimes pouring and ate and went to bed in the rain. Observe another bald eagle along the way. Travelled 9 miles and camped on gravel island.

7/17/91 - Leave camp at 11:15am. Observe the inactive bald eagle nest Dave Schmitz had seen previously; nest hasn't been seen for at least a season and is located outside of the Preserve boundary. Stopped at the 2 eskimo burial houses Dave Schmitz had found earlier on top of a small hill in the area of the Pah and Kobuk River confluences; observe the plant Sundew (I haven't observed this anywhere else in the Park and Preserve and surrounding areas.) and multitudes of blueberries in this area. Also explored a well used camp area (see Dave Schmitz for location and ownership; camp is located outside of the Preserve) with an old sod house, newer log cabin, fish drying racks and tent frame. Observe first long tailed jaeger on trip. Camp at Pah/Kobuk confluence with river strip appropriate for float plane pickup. Set up 50 trap trapline in alder/willow shrub. Travelled 6 miles.

7/18/91 - Pickup day. Observe 2 red fox and 1 cow moose while checking traps; traps empty in the morning. Weather low; planes arrive at 4:00 to pick us up.



canoe route
campsite

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Kobuk River Rafting/
Small Haman

Survey 7/9/91-7/10/91

