

Gates of the Arctic Recreation Visitor Study

Phase I

Appendix B: Interview Summaries

Brian Glaspell



Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute
790 E. Beckwith Ave. - P.O. Box 8089
Missoula, Montana 59807-8089
(406) 542-4190 FAX (406) 542-4196

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PREFACE

This appendix contains narrative summaries of 32 interviews conducted with visitors to Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve during the summer of 2001. Each summary is identified by an 8-character alphanumeric code, and the names (all pseudonyms) of the interview participants. The code shows the date of the interview, the place where it was conducted, and the interview number (numbered sequentially 1-33, with #25 missing). The location abbreviations are the same as used by local air carriers: BTT—Bettles; AKP—Anaktuvuk Pass; CFX—Coldfoot. Each summary represents the researcher's interpretation of the significant themes within an interview. All the summaries contain quotations and references to data excerpts that provided the basis for the summary interpretation. The excerpts can be found in a companion document, Appendix C: Data Excerpts.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

622BTT01 Jerry and Joe

Jerry and Joe spent 5 days floating the North Fork of the Koyukuk River with their wives. They had originally planned to float the John River, but high winds on Hunt Fork Lake and ice on Moss Lake prevented them from accessing that river. As a result, they changed plans while still in the air and decided on a North Fork trip (excerpt 1¹). Both Jerry and Joe report being a little disappointed at the change of plans, although Jerry emphasizes that they, “just wanted to be out” (excerpt 2). They originally selected the John River based on the time they had available for a trip and its location in the Brooks Range (excerpts 3-4). Their attraction to the Brooks Range was based on Jerry’s personal history relative to the area and Joe’s interest in seeing the place he had heard about from Jerry (excerpts 4, 15).

Jerry lives in Fairbanks now, but he homesteaded south of the current park boundary, near the Ambler River, in the 1970s. He spent several years living full-time in the area, and several more years living there seasonally. Joe lives in Colorado and had never been to Gates of the Arctic or anywhere in arctic Alaska prior to this trip. As a result of their different histories relative to the setting, this trip had a slightly different meaning for both Jerry and Joe. Jerry describes it as, “coming home” (excerpt 6). In contrast, Joe says, “For me it was...a first time experience, which was marvelous” (excerpt 7). For Joe, many features of the trip were pleasant because they were highly novel or unexpected. For instance, he particularly enjoyed hiking on the tundra and viewing moose and wolves from the river (excerpts 9-12, 32, 35). In addition, he was more concerned about bears and bear safety than Jerry, although he became less concerned as the trip progressed (excerpts 28-29).

Seeing wildlife and signs of wildlife was a major theme of the trip for these two visitors. The early-season timing of their trip meant that the riverbanks were only recently free of ice, and as a result they were like blank canvases for wildlife tracks (excerpt 27). Jerry and Joe seemed to particularly enjoy viewing tracks and imagining the activities of the animals that left them (excerpts 25-26). Although they expected to see more wildlife than they did, each day of the trip yielded more sightings (excerpt 24). Seeing a lone female wolf on the last full day of the trip was clearly the most significant wildlife interaction. After describing the sighting in detail, both Jerry and Joe make repeated references to it and to wolves in general as indicators of wildness or setting quality (excerpts 32, 34, 73-74).

Although wildlife was significant, the focus of this trip for Jerry and Joe was on further rekindling their old friendship. When asked if viewing wildlife was the best part of the trip, they indicated that the trip was really about the two of them getting back together (excerpt 13). After maintaining a close friendship through college, Jerry and Joe drifted apart for a while (excerpt 15). Now at similar stages in their careers and family lives, they have been working to re-establish their friendship by meeting for a trip, two or three times a year (excerpt 14). Compared to many of their past experiences, their trip on the North Fork was easy, slow-paced, and safe. They chose their equipment and travel route with comfort as a

¹ The excerpt numbers refer to sections of raw interview text that have been re-organized into thematic categories and numbered sequentially for each individual interview. The excerpts are the data that support each interview summary. They can be found in a separate document titled *Appendix C: Data Excerpts*.

priority (excerpts 17, 22). Pleasant, sunny weather made camping simple (excerpts 20-21). And, the last-minute change from the John to the shorter Koyukuk River route left them with more time than they needed to make it back to Bettles. As a result, they enjoyed unhurried paddling and short days on the river (excerpts 18-19).

Despite Jerry's personal history in the Brooks Range and the exciting novelty of the setting for Joe, they seem to feel that being together was more important to their trip than the place or activity they participated in (excerpts 13-16). However, they do hold strong feelings for Gates of the Arctic, and related strong opinions about how the Park should be managed. For Jerry and Joe, one of the most significant qualities of Gates of the Arctic is that it has little evidence of human use. Although they did not actually encounter any other people on their trip, they did see a set of old footprints and a trail that may have formally been used by miners (excerpts 37-38). While Jerry says that the footprints did not bother him, he worries that the North Fork will feel less wild to future visitors because of the tracks that he and Joe left behind (excerpts 36, 40). Jerry and Joe highly value the opportunity to feel like, "...you were the first person ever there", a feeling that is only possible when there is no obvious evidence of other's passing (excerpts 38-39).

For Jerry, the quality of wildness is easily ruined. Not only do footprints diminish it, but mere familiarity does as well (excerpts 42-43). In fact, Jerry suggests that wildness can only ever (and inevitably) be diminished (excerpts 42-43). Although he seems to suggest that population growth and increasing visitor use is one of the primary threats to wildness, he also feels that people should visit Gates of the Arctic as soon as they can, before the wildness is gone (excerpt 43).

Jerry at first claims that wildness and wilderness are synonymous, but then he and Joe make a distinction between the terms (excerpts 46-50). When familiarity, and subsequent naming, bounding, and managing, diminish the wildness of a place, it becomes wilderness—a place that is managed to maintain the illusion of wildness. Wilderness, therefore, is mostly free of other people and full of wildlife, but not truly wild (excerpts 49-50). Although Jerry says that he and Joe had "an A+ wilderness experience" (excerpt 50), it was slightly tarnished by his memories of an earlier, wilder place. He says, "I can't recapture what I felt when I was 20 years old in this country when there were no rules and no boundaries and no parks, no limits, no seasons, and no anything" (excerpt 49).

Jerry and Joe's opinions about managing Gates of the Arctic are tied to their ideas about wildness and wilderness, and also to their personal histories relative to the National Park Service. Joe's father was a regional director for the Park Service in the northwest, and Jerry worked several seasons as a ranger in Denali National Park (excerpt 51). Like many other visitors, Jerry and Joe valued the friendly interaction they had with park staff at Gates of the Arctic—the superintendent in their case—and the general low-key presence of the Park Service (excerpts 52-54). However, they feel that such an approach is only possible because the expense and difficulty of visiting the Park has so far limited use (excerpts 55-57). They feel that growth of the visitor population and subsequent growth in management activities is inevitable (excerpts 58-63). Joe envisions a near future in which visitors will have to carry fire pans and get permits to float rivers like the Noatak (excerpt 59).

Visitor use regulations seem counter to Jerry and Joe's ideas about wildness. However, given their feelings about the inevitability of increased use, it is not surprising that they favor steps to limit access and manage visitors at Gates of the Arctic. They claim that they would not object to entrance fees, limited permits, or a requirement to carry bear-proof

food containers, as long as they knew about those regulations in advance (excerpts 64-67). They view preserving the illusion of wildness as the primary purpose of management at places like Denali and Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 43, 45, 68).

Based on his experience at Denali, Jerry thinks that limiting visitor access is an effective way to preserve the illusion of wildness (excerpt 68). He says that he would personally be willing to forgo access for two years to preserve wild conditions at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 69-70). Joe's support for limiting visitor access is based more on maintaining ecological integrity. Both he and Jerry feel that the arctic is an especially fragile place and therefore requires careful attention by managers (excerpts 71-72). Joe cites his experience managing a ski area to suggest that a limited permit system should be implemented at Gates "sooner than later" (excerpt 73). Both he and Jerry imply that wildlife, such as the wolf that they saw, can serve as indicators of the condition of an area (excerpts 73-74).

Finally, Jerry and Joe think that implementing use limits at Gates of the Arctic might be easier than at other locations because almost all access is by air. They suggest that the Park Service use outfitters to help control (limit) visitor access (excerpt 75).

626BTT02 Carl

Carl and a friend planned a 41-day traverse from the Noatak River area to Anaktuvuk Pass, but their trip ended after only 6 days. There were several factors involved in the decision to end the trip. Carl ultimately made the decision, even though his friend wanted to continue on (excerpt 4). Although he does not say so directly, it appears that his friend was quite upset, and he chose not to be part of this interview.

The troubles began immediately for Carl and his friend, when their pilot mistakenly dropped them off at the wrong lake. A last-minute change of plans left the pilot unprepared to navigate to the spot where they had chosen to begin (excerpt 1). However, it was not until the second day of the trip, after they had hiked 5 or 6 difficult miles with heavy packs, that Carl discovered the mistake (excerpts 2-3). He insists that he does not blame the pilot as he was new to the area and they all shared fault for the last-minute change of plans. In fact, he suggests that had they landed at their first-choice spot, abandoning the trip would have been a much more serious undertaking (excerpt 4). The navigation error might have been a minor event, but Carl also began experiencing knee pain from hiking with a very heavy pack over difficult terrain (excerpts 5-6, 14-15). He suggests that poor planning with respect to the weight of food in his pack, combined with poor preparation caused by a hectic schedule prior to beginning the trip, were the primary causes of his "downfall" (excerpts 13-14).

Neither the knee pain nor the navigational error were sufficient reasons to abandon the trip, but they forced Carl to reflect on the scale and commitment of the route he had planned. Although he had prior experience with off-trail hiking in Alaska, he admits that the details of tundra travel had "gone into [his] faded memory bank" (excerpt 16). Furthermore, although remoteness was one of the things that attracted him to Gates of the Arctic, he was not expecting the degree of remoteness that he actually experienced (excerpts 10-11). He says candidly, "It's a little different when you're sitting at home planning than when you're actually in it" (excerpt 11). Finally, and perhaps most significant relative to the decision to abandon the trip, Carl was overwhelmed by the commitment of a one-way traverse like he had planned. He says, "It's not just an in and out, you know, we got to go somewhere; that

kind of changed things right there” (excerpt 7). After his recent experience, he says that he would not recommend a traverse to anyone planning a visit, and he intends to plan his next trip(s) around a single drop-off/pick-up spot (excerpts 8-9).

Carl and his friend saw two other parties during their shortened 6-day trip, and they contacted both of them in an attempt to notify their pilot of their change of plans. Carl saw the first party after searching with binoculars, and he gave them a note to take back to Bettles at the end of their trip (excerpt 19). Then, after waiting a few days, he encountered a second party with a satellite phone, which he used to contact an air taxi service and arrange a pickup for the next day. Carl says that prior to the trip he might have said that he preferred not to see other people in the backcountry, but after his recent experience, he feels that seeing others is not so bad (excerpt 20). After successfully arranging their pickup, a long wait for the airplane to arrive made Carl and his friend fully aware of their dependence on air taxi services. Carl says simply, “You’re out there until the plane comes” (excerpt 21).

Carl first heard about Gates of the Arctic in the mid-1980s when he was a college student in San Diego. A professor of his lectured about the idea of no-rescue wilderness and proposed that Gates of the Arctic could be managed as such a place, where, as Carl explains, a person could, “...experience the wilderness in its true form, you know, not with cell phones or with satellite phones and aviation radios and planes dropping you off and things like that” (excerpt 27). Given this introduction to Gates of the Arctic, Carl’s comments following his experience there have added significance. Despite the prevalence of aircraft and communications equipment, he feels that the Park is a “borderline no-rescue wilderness”, especially for people attempting a traverse that takes them away from popular access points (excerpt 28). Carl says that he would recommend taking a satellite phone to prospective visitors, and he plans to take one himself in the future (excerpts 9, 11). He acknowledges that having instant communication capability would reduce the feeling of remoteness and says that, for him, such a reduction would be a positive impact (excerpt 12). Carl is not opposed to the idea of no-rescue wilderness, but he would not visit Gates of the Arctic again if it were a no-rescue area (excerpts 28-29). Carl feels that the primary quality that makes Gates of the Arctic a wilderness is simply open space (excerpts 22-23). He does not feel that seeing other people negatively impacts the wilderness character of the Park, saying that other people have the same rights he does to visit the area (excerpt 26). For Carl, one specific quality that sets the Park apart from other places is “sheer size” (excerpt 24).

Carl’s opinions about the management of Gates of the Arctic National Park reflect his college experience as a recreation major, his past history as a National Park Service employee, and his current job as an inner-city school teacher in California. Although he sympathizes with their situation, he is critical of the staff at the Park Service ranger station in Bettles. When he visited the station, the only rangers on duty were brand-new to the area, and they were unable to answer many of Carl’s questions. Carl also feels that the rangers should have asked for more information from he and his friend—such as the color of their tent—which he says is “a pretty basic question on a backcountry permit” (excerpt 31). [Visitors are encouraged but not required to register at the ranger station and there are no permits issued or required for private visitors to the Park].

Carl identifies himself as a “National Park Service enthusiast” (excerpt 30). He supports a variety of environmental causes by writing letters to Congress and giving money to organizations that protect wilderness (excerpts 33, 38). To prove his sincerity he showed his Wilderness Society membership card and Sierra Club visa card to the interviewer after

the interview was finished. Carl feels that ecological protection is an important purpose of park management (excerpts 32-35). Although he says that “he wouldn’t want to see it get too crowded out there”, and that “overuse is going to be the downfall of a lot of national parks”, his comments seem tied to concerns about ecological rather than experiential impacts (excerpts 32-33). Carl acknowledges that regulations aimed at preventing ecological damage might impose on his freedom. However, he says: “But if I took a moment to think a rational person, I think I could see [them] as important” (excerpt 35). Furthermore, he says that he would have no problem receiving a list of regulations upon his arrival at Gates of the Arctic because he has received such lists at other parks, and he has handed out such lists as a park employee (excerpt 36).

Although Carl supports regulations to prevent ecological damage, he does not seem to support limiting access to Gates of the Arctic for the same purpose (excerpt 39). He feels that the expense and planning required to visit the park already limit access. In fact, based on his inner-city work experience, he feels that the cost of visiting national parks in general deters many potential visitors. Not surprisingly, he objects to charging a fee for permits (excerpt 38). Carl also worries that permits could limit visitors’ freedom to change plans. He suggests that permits could be offered primarily on a first-come, first-serve basis, with a small proportion available for reservation (excerpt 40). Finally, Carl is uncomfortable with the idea of personally being denied access because of a limited permit system. He suggests that “more open spaces” are needed to prevent lengthy waiting lists like the one at Grand Canyon (excerpt 41).

626BTT03 Mark

Mark is a newly hired guide for Sourdough Outfitters in Bettles. He arrived in Bettles in early winter, and had never been on a summer trip into the Park prior to the one described here. Because he is a guide and a recently settled local resident, he was more interested in talking about the significance of the Park, wilderness, and the role of Park Service management, than in discussing his recently completed trip.

Mark guided a single female client on an 11-day trip that combined 3 days of floating the Alatna River with 8 days of hiking in the Arrigetch Mountains (excerpt 1). He says that, despite concerns by his co-workers prior to the trip, he and his client (Jan) got along great (excerpt 2). In fact, they enjoyed “talking philosophy” and shared many of the same views (excerpt 3). One notable event occurred early in the trip when Mark and Jan accidentally flipped their canoe while struggling to negotiate a narrow, winding river channel with low overhanging branches (excerpt 4). Other than a brief struggle to rescue themselves and their gear from the current, they suffered no ill-effects from the spill (excerpt 5). For Mark, the highlight of the trip was enjoying a view of the Arrigetch Peaks after two difficult days of hiking (excerpt 6). Mark and Jan encountered little wildlife and just two other parties during their trip, but they saw additional evidence of both animals and people (excerpts 7-9). Although Mark later makes it clear that he feels people and evidence of people—such as trails—can negatively impact wilderness character (excerpts 12-13), he seems indifferent when describing the encounter he had while hiking with Jan (excerpt 8). Even finding an impacted campsite complete with an old pair of socks was not especially noteworthy for Mark; he says, “it was neither here nor there” (excerpt 9).

Mark's descriptions of Gates of the Arctic and the surrounding area are influenced by his recent trip in the Alatna region and also by his experiences from the past winter. During his recent trip, he found that the upper and lower portions of the Alatna River are dramatically different. He describes the upper portion as narrow, with many braided channels, while the lower portion is "this big, huge river" (excerpt 11). Flying over the Arrigetch Peaks on the way to the Alatna allowed Mark to view the tremendous scale of the Park (excerpt 10). He feels that lack of other people and scale are qualities of the Gates of the Arctic region that set it apart from other places he has recreated in, such as Rocky Mountain National Park (excerpt 12). More than mere physical characteristics, scale, lack of people and related developments like trails, and rugged terrain, are qualities that demand respect. Compared to Colorado, "where everyone's just kind of blasting anywhere", travel in Gates of the Arctic is a much more serious undertaking (excerpt 13). For Mark, respect for the area translates into a focus on safety and careful, methodical actions to prevent accidents (excerpt 13). As evidence that Gates of the Arctic is deserving of the respect it generates, Mark tells a story about a "huge epic snowfall" that nearly stranded he and his fellow guides and clients while on a dog-sledding trip (excerpt 14). Only through the use of snowmobiles were they able to safely and quickly break trail back to Bettles (excerpt 15). While snowmobiles would seem to reduce the seriousness of travel in the area—by bringing even the remotest regions of the Park to within a long-days' ride from Bettles—Mark sees the necessity of their use as proof that the Park deserves respect (excerpt 14).

In addition to respect, a second term that Mark uses to describe the Gates of the Arctic region is *wild*. For him, wildness is the essential quality of being unpredictable or unexpected (excerpts 16, 18). Mark feels that wildness is a kind of metaphor for his life, and experiencing wildness is good practice for facing and dealing with unpredictable daily events (excerpt 16).

Closely related to the notion of wildness, is the idea of wilderness. Although Mark suggests that wilderness is a subjective term, and that he could probably find wilderness in the center of town (Bettles), he says that he would describe Gates of the Arctic as "actual (genuine) wilderness" (as opposed to other areas that are called wilderness but lack some important quality) (excerpts 17-19). What makes it genuine wilderness is unpredictability—wildness—which forces or at least encourages an ethic of personal responsibility (excerpts 20-21).

Although Mark sees wilderness as an important site for learning or practicing personal responsibility, he also suggests that wilderness can conflict with something else he values—personal freedom (excerpts 22-23). Wilderness designation does not change the meaning of the land for Mark. He says clearly, "Those particular borders around the park don't bother me really; the land on both sides is the same to me" (excerpt 23). However, he does note that wilderness designation prevents him from doing things he might otherwise like to do (excerpt 23). On the one hand, he values wilderness and related restrictions, and fears what would become of the land without the protection of wilderness designation (excerpt 27). He even supports specific practices like encouraging people to pack food in bear barrels to protect both themselves and bears (excerpt 29). On the other hand, Mark generally objects to the idea of formal regulations that direct or constrain his activities (excerpt 29). While he feels that it is vitally important to maintain and protect lands that have been set aside, he also feels that incremental regulatory additions have the cumulative effect of increasing the size of government, which is a step in the wrong direction (excerpts 27, 30). Mark's description

of an undeveloped trail that he encountered on his recent trip provides a specific example of the larger philosophical issues discussed above (excerpt 28). He suggests that the trail is poorly located and beginning to erode. "It's kind of a controversy", he says, "because you want to have a place that you don't even touch at all...but then if you don't do anything, you can really have a mass of mud on your hands" (excerpt 28).

With respect to current management practices at Gates of the Arctic, Mark thinks that the current level of Park Service presence and intervention is generally appropriate (excerpts 25, 29, 31). However, he feels that most visitors have very little interaction with Park staff because they do not register. And, because few people register and the Park is difficult to patrol, Park staff are poorly informed about their visitors (excerpt 31). Mark also suggests that there is the potential for conflict between park managers and commercial outfitters like the one he works for (excerpt 26). He does not clearly explain why he thinks so. However, it is well-known that the use of snowmobiles in the park is controversial, and Mark's earlier story regarding the necessity of snowmobiles demonstrates one clear basis for conflict.

628BTT04 Mandy and Jack

Mandy and Jack are a husband and wife couple from New Mexico who spent 5 days in late June fishing and hiking around Amiloyak Lake. They originally intended to visit either Cascade or Karupa lakes, but changed plans when they saw that they were still frozen over (excerpts 5-6). Jack selected Karupa Lake as his first-choice destination after reading a book about fishing in Alaska, and he ultimately settled on Amiloyak following a recommendation from the owner of the air taxi service that he hired (excerpts 2, 6). Mandy and Jack identify the primary reason for their trip as fishing (excerpt 3), although only Jack actually participated in fishing activities (excerpts 8-10, 16, 18).

This trip was the first part of a multi-leg visit to Alaska that would also include travel to Glacier Bay National Park. According to Mandy, Gates of the Arctic was Jack's end of the trip, while Glacier Bay would be hers (excerpt 8). One purpose of the larger trip was to visit contrasting locations within Alaska (excerpt 4). On two previous trips to Alaska, the couple visited the Kenai Peninsula, Denali National Park, and the Nigu River at the northwest border of Gates of the Arctic. Their 1997 trip on the Nigu was a 10-day, guided visit (excerpts 21-22). In contrast to their recent visit, Mandy and Jack describe the Nigu trip as more demanding, with constant travel that allowed little time for relaxation or even taking pictures. They intentionally designed their most recent trip around a single base camp so that it would be "a little more relaxing" (excerpt 23).

Although fishing is described as the primary purpose of the trip, bad weather proved to be a dominant theme in Mandy and Jack's description of their experience. On the first day of their trip, they enjoyed cloudless, sunny skies. Mandy describes seeing "all the vistas" during the flight into the Park as one of the better parts of the trip (excerpt 7). During the rest of their visit, however, they experienced rain, high winds, and cool temperatures (excerpts 12-13). The weather significantly limited their activities and certainly cut into their overall enjoyment of the trip. They canceled a planned day-hike because of rain (excerpt 13). Mandy spent a significant portion of the trip trying to stay warm in their tent, and even skipped meals in order to avoid having to go outside to cook (excerpts 13-15, 17). For Jack, one of the best parts of the trip was finally getting out for a hike when the weather temporarily improved (excerpt 16). Mandy feels that unpredictable weather is an acceptable

risk when camping (excerpts 18, 24), and, although both she and Jack describe the weather as the worst part of their experience (excerpt 17, 20), they seem philosophical about it. As Jack explains, they were still able to do all the things they wanted, just “not quite in the quantity that [they] wanted to” (excerpt 19).

In addition to weather, bears are also a major theme in Mandy and Jack’s description of their experience. Although they did not encounter any bears, and they have never had a threatening bear encounter (excerpt 34), Mandy confirms that bears were a significant concern during their visit to Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 30) and Jack explains that, “...bears weigh very heavily in our minds when we go on trips like this” (excerpt 31). There appear to be several factors that motivate their feelings about bears. On one or more previous national park visits, Mandy and Jack were subjected to a bear “horror story” as part of their backcountry orientation (excerpt 35). In addition, Mandy attributes some of their fear of bears to television shows such as “When Animals Attack” (excerpt 32). During their trip on the Nigu River, they camped near some feeding bears, then later found that park officials at Denali “actually shut down a section of the park due to an issue just like that” (excerpt 30). For Mandy, animal remains near their camp at Amiloyak Lake suggested past bear activities (excerpt 28). And finally, although they carried bear (pepper) spray as a deterrent, Mandy worried that windy conditions would render it useless (excerpt 33).

Despite the fact that animal remains seemed to add to or confirm Mandy’s concerns about bears, she and Jack clearly enjoyed finding bones and other evidence of wildlife such as game trails (excerpts 27, 29). Mandy feels that the presence of animal skeletons is a unique feature of the park, and Jack describes inspecting bones, “to see what animal died here and try[ing] to imagine how long ago and how it met its end...” (excerpt 29).

A third significant issue that the couple addresses in this interview is the high cost of visiting Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 24-25, 50, 52-54). In response to a question about how she would describe the Park to someone thinking of visiting, Mandy focuses on the expense of visiting Gates compared to other locations like Denali. She says, “It’s not the affordable way to see Alaska” (excerpt 54). Partially as a result of the bad weather that restricted their activities, Mandy and Jack found themselves conducting a sort of cost-benefit analysis during their trip (excerpts 24-25). Jack says, “You want to be outside your tent, you know, for that kind of expenditure” (excerpt 25). For this couple, the expense of the trip seemed to create a kind of pressure to have a good experience.

Despite their comments, Mandy and Jack clearly feel that the cost of visiting Gates of the Arctic is justified by the unique features of the Park setting. They describe one of those unique features as lack of other people. In contrast to their experiences at other national parks, they did not encounter any other visitors during their recent trip to Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 36). While they enjoyed “having the lake to themselves”, avoiding encounters and signs of people altogether does not seem to be a focus of this or other trips they have taken (excerpts 37-42). They are more concerned with camping privacy than seeing others passing through. Mandy explains that, “It’s fun to see people on their way, [b]ut I don’t want them to camp right next to me or anything like that” (excerpt 38). Similarly, evidence of past visitors in the area did not significantly detract from their experience. Jack seems unconcerned when he suggests that their campsite probably attracted lots of people in the past (excerpt 42). Mandy describes seeing litter in the area as “pretty irritating” but agrees with Jack who suggests that “one beer can in 10 square miles” is a relatively insignificant amount of litter (excerpts 39-41). Furthermore, for Mandy litter is disturbing because of the type of person

she associates with it (“a really gross guy with a cigarette and junk”), not because it is evidence of previous visitors (excerpt 41).

In addition to few other people, some other setting features that the couple enjoyed were the large scale and open terrain of the park, remoteness, and the mystique they associate generally with Alaska (excerpts 43-47, 51). Remoteness in particular is described as an important quality that is difficult to find in the lower-48 states. For Mandy and Jack, these features combined with lack of trails or signs and the feeling that “your really on your own out there” make Gates of the Arctic an “obvious” wilderness (excerpt 50). It is interesting to note that they did not use the term wilderness until prompted by the interviewer, but afterwards they suggested that the notion that the park is a wilderness is a basic presumption (excerpts 48-50).

While planning their trip, Mandy and Jack corresponded exclusively with outfitters and air taxi services rather than National Park Service Staff. Jack explains that, “...frankly, it never really occurred to me that we needed to do any sort of checking in with the Park Service on this” (excerpt 55). Only because they decided to take advantage of the free bear barrels available from the Park did the couple register and receive a backcountry orientation. Jack describes their orientation as “very appropriate” because the ranger carefully gauged their experience and awareness rather than “shoving a bunch of stuff down [their] throats” (excerpts 56-57). Both Mandy and Jack were enthusiastic about the free bear barrel program and happy to carry the barrels on their trip (excerpts 58-59).

In regards to mandatory permits and other visitor use regulations, Mandy feels that they are a standard feature of national parks (excerpt 59). She describes national parks as “more regulated” than national forest areas, and feels that they are cleaner and less crowded as a result (excerpt 60). These first statements from Mandy about permits have added significance because they came unprompted in the middle of the interview. Later in the interview, after prompting, Mandy describes what she perceives as the two purposes of permits: to track visitors and to “limit the number of people out there” (excerpt 64). At first, she suggests that there are so few visitors at Gates of the Arctic, that a limited permit system would have little effect on people like herself, but after a discussion with Jack she seems less sure (excerpt 65). Both she and Jack have had negative experiences trying to secure permits at Glacier, Grand Teton, and Denali National Parks in the past (excerpts 65, 68). They are particularly concerned with how permits are administered and opportunities to secure them well in advance of a trip (excerpts 66-68). Aside from the issue of administration, Jack claims that having to get a permit would not bother him at all. He would even be willing to pay a fee for one. However, he says, “What I objected to at Glacier and the Tetons, was just that you didn’t have a lot of choice in the places you could go and your itinerary...and that I did not like” (excerpt 70). Jack is not concerned about the symbolic meaning or appropriateness of permits or fees in wilderness, but he is highly concerned about practical restrictions on his freedom to visit when and where he chooses. In contrast to their experiences at those other parks, Mandy and Jack felt that they were “not at all constrained” under the current system at Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 71).

628BTT05 Brad and Tim

These two friends from Michigan took an 11-day hiking trip in the Arrigetch Peaks area. After leaving from Bettles, they began their trip at Circle Lake, and then traveled up

Arrigetch Creek and down the Takahula River, before flying out of Takahula Lake (excerpt 5). Their trip really began about two years earlier, as a general interest in visiting Alaska (excerpt 1). At that point, says Brad, the only park he knew of in Alaska was Denali (excerpt 2). Brad and Tim wanted to visit somewhere “as wild as possible” and they felt that Denali was not likely to meet that requirement because they would surely see other people and evidence of previous visitors (excerpt 1). As Brad explains, Denali “just didn’t seem like the place to get away from everything” (excerpt 2). They ultimately chose to visit Gates of the Arctic because of its location north of the Arctic Circle and because other northern protected areas, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, were more difficult to access (excerpt 4).

Brad and Tim are both experienced backpackers. Compared to previous trips they have been on, they describe their visit to Gates of the Arctic as longer and the setting as “a lot more wild than anyplace else [they] had been” (excerpt 6). Also, compared to their previous experiences in Michigan, they found the mosquitoes were much thicker on this trip. Even though they had been warned about them, they were shocked by the density and aggressiveness of the swarms they encountered in the Arrigetch Peaks area (excerpt 11). They describe inhaling them, struggling to eat without ingesting them, and pacing in their campsites in a vain attempt to avoid them (excerpts 8-10). Brad and Tim agree that mosquitoes were the worst part of their trip (excerpt 7). The terrain was also different than anything they had previously experienced. They describe struggling through tussocks and being “amazed at how wet everything was” (excerpts 32-32). Tussocks and wet ground also made finding campsites more difficult than they expected. As Tim explains, a flat area on their topographic maps often turned out to be a quagmire (excerpt 29).

Although they did not see any large wildlife in the Park, they saw a variety of bones, caribou antler sheds, and scat (excerpts 12-13). For Brad and Tim, these signs conveyed a powerful feeling that animals were all around and close by. Describing his thoughts after finding some fresh bear scat, Tim says, “That was an interesting feeling, knowing that you’re sharing the place with something that powerful” (excerpt 14).

In addition to signs of wildlife, Brad and Tim also found signs of previous human visitors. Tim found a significant amount of litter while hiking and also in the various places they camped (excerpt 19). Brad says that while there was a lot more litter than he expected, there was less than he would normally find in the places he backpacks (excerpt 20). He and Tim also encountered a highly impacted campsite that they had been warned about in advance by rangers in Bettles. They were reluctant to further impact the site, but they camped there anyway because it was scenic and they were exhausted at the end of a long day (excerpt 18).

Brad and Tim saw only one other party in the backcountry, at their pick-up spot on Lake Takahula. They were aware of the other party nearby on the final night of their trip, but avoided contact with them until just before leaving (excerpt 15). They were happy not to see any other people during the rest of the trip and, despite finding litter and impacted campsites, they felt that the setting they experienced was more wild than any they had previously known (excerpts 6, 27). Tim says, “I liked feeling that we were all alone in the wild, dependent on ourselves...I knew that it wasn’t completely true, but it was a nice feeling” (excerpt 17).

The feelings of aloneness and self-sufficiency that Tim describes in the statement above had a significant influence on the experience that he and Brad shared. They describe being very conscious of the consequences of an accident or injury. Tim was comforted by

his knowledge of emergency medical procedures (excerpt 21). Even so, he and Brad were extra careful when crossing rivers or boulder fields (excerpts 22-23). They also identify being far from help as one of the things that makes Gates of the Arctic wild—a term that they repeatedly use to describe the park setting (excerpt 24). For them, wildness and wilderness are basically synonymous (excerpt 28). In addition to the related qualities of being far from help and seeing few other people, Brad and Tim suggest that the opportunity for exploration and discovery is also important in wilderness (excerpts 26-27). During their visit to the Arrigetch Peaks area, they were unable to completely escape signs that other people had been there before them. However, they did enjoy finding and following game trails just to discover where they led.

Although they suggest that there was no single best part of their trip, both Brad and Tim refer to grand vistas and scenic beauty as highlights. Tim describes one scene in particular, viewed from the top of a pass at midnight, as his most likely pick for a “best” moment (excerpt 30).

Brad and Tim admit to being a little unsure about the purpose and activities of the National Park Service at Gates of the Arctic, but they make generally positive comments about their interactions with park staff. Brad found the staff in Bettles to be helpful both for preliminary planning and for selecting a final destination and travel route, especially the park superintendent who was able to give him first-hand information about the areas he and Tim were considering (unlike the rangers that Tim first encountered, whom he found to be helpful but inexperienced) (excerpts 34-36).

During their backcountry orientation in Bettles, Brad and Tim were led to believe that bears are a significant problem in the park and that the use of bear barrels is a requirement (excerpt 38). They found the barrels to be very inconvenient and questioned the necessity of their use because, on their previous trips in bear habitat, they did not use them and had no problems (excerpts 38-39). However, Brad does say that they likely would have used bear barrels even if they did not think they were required (excerpt 39).

Although they describe their interactions with NPS staff as informative, both Brad and Tim feel that the Park Service should provide more specific information about the nature of the terrain that visitors will encounter in the Park (excerpts 40-41). They suggest that such information would not only enhance visitors’ experiences, but protect park resources as well (excerpt 42).

Brad and Tim were happy to complete a visitor registration form because, in their view, it might serve an important safety function (excerpts 43-45). They think it is valuable for the Park Service to know their travel route so that they might be quickly found by potential rescuers in case of an accident. When asked directly if they think the primary function of registration is to aid search and rescue, Brad and Tim indicate that, while managers may use registration simply to monitor use, they primarily value its safety function (excerpt 45).

628BTT06 Harold, Reba, Jesse

These three respondents were members of a 9-person Sierra Club outing. They spent 5 days hiking from Anaktuvuk Pass to the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, then an additional 5 days floating to Bettles (excerpt 1). Reba and Jesse both served as group

leaders, while Harold was a paying client. Both leaders had visited Alaska previously, but neither of them had been to Gates of the Arctic. This was Harold's first trip to Alaska.

The trip was characterized by gradual immersion into a remote wilderness setting, followed by a gradual return to town. As Jesse explains, the group met in Fairbanks, "which is already the outback for some of us", then progressed to Anaktuvuk Pass, then to a trail, and finally to hiking cross-country in a remote backcountry setting where "you can really feel like you're in the wilderness" (excerpt 2). Leaving from Anaktuvuk, the group was able to acclimate to the rigors of backcountry travel by following an established ATV trail for several days. Although the trail was wet and muddy, it offered easy hiking compared to what the group would later encounter, and it eliminated the need for continuous route-finding (excerpts 5-6, 8). Harold feels that the process of gradual immersion and acclimation afforded by the trail prepared him well for the difficult terrain that he eventually faced (excerpt 7). In addition to relatively easy hiking, the group also enjoyed sunny, warm weather and an absence of mosquitoes for most of their trip.

Wildlife played an important role in the experiences of these three group members. In addition to abundant animal tracks along the ATV trail and on nearly every sand bar they came across, they heard and sighted several wolves, and watched a bear near their camp for more than an hour (excerpts 9-11, 13, 15). Jesse comments that the mere presence of "all the creatures in their habitat" is "really reassuring" (excerpt 14). Seeing animal behaviors first-hand was the highlight of the trip for both Reba and Jesse (excerpts 14, 17). Wildlife also featured in a very significant trip episode for Harold. He chose a site with "the most tracks [he had] seen on the whole trip..." to spread the ashes of a late friend (excerpt 12).

Despite their different roles (client and trip leader), Harold and Jesse describe similar feelings regarding the influence of the group on their individual experiences. This trip was Harold's first experience as a member of an organized group (excerpt 28). He enjoyed learning from the more experienced group members, but he also implies that personality differences within the group occasionally caused some tension: "Intense would definitely describe a lot of the experiences, personal issues and such" (excerpt 29). Similarly, Jesse describes the group's influence as both enriching and distracting. In reference to group travel she says, "...you get the good with the bad" (excerpt 30).

Like many other visitors, these respondents express mixed feelings about seeing airplanes during their trip. They saw "quite a few" planes while floating on the Koyukuk River (excerpt 18). Reba says the planes were "a bummer", but Harold notes that he too accessed the area by airplane (excerpt 19). He suggests, "You can't really be too hard on the others because they're doing the same thing you are."

Harold and the others saw a group of tents halfway through their hike, but they did not actually encounter any other people (excerpt 20). Reba and Jesse specifically mention that they value the opportunity not to see other people during their backcountry trips in Alaska, and they indicate that they were disappointed to see the tents (although they note that seeing tents is still preferable to seeing actual people) (excerpt 21). Harold, however, was not particularly concerned with the tents. He says seeing them, "[D]id not bother me at all"; and, "Everyone has a right to be [out there], I guess" (excerpt 22).

In contrast to the tents, which were only briefly visible, the ATV trail was a constant reminder of the presence of other people. Comments about the trail itself, and trash along the trail, provide some insights into these respondent's values and their images of the local Native people who use the trail. Jesse says that garbage along the trail was

“disappointing”(excerpt 24), but then she explains: “I understand it in a way; I don’t necessarily approve of it, but I understand [that] the local people...use the trail a lot and they have a different concept of what to do with their garbage” (excerpt 25). Harold seems slightly less sympathetic regarding litter along the trail. While he acknowledges that locals have a different orientation toward the Park than he does, he still feels that there is a clear distinction between littering in a city and littering in what he calls a “pure” area (excerpt 26). Reba says that the trail made her feel “less remote”, although it appeared to be less traveled than she was expecting (excerpts 40, 23). While she clearly feels that the trail had a negative impact on the wilderness character of the area (excerpts 27, 40, 44), she also says that, “as evidence of an indigenous culture...even though they may be modern...the trail may be ok and appropriate for the area” (excerpt 27).

The ATV trail, air traffic, and size of the travel group seemingly all combined during this trip to limit the feelings of remoteness that Jesse and Reba had experienced on previous trips in Alaska. However, experiencing remoteness was not a significant focus of this trip for either of them. Comparing her recent trip to her previous, more remote experience(s), Jessie says, “I couldn’t clearly qualify one as better than the other” (excerpt 39). She further notes that being less remote did not impact the quantity of wildlife or the scenic beauty that she witnessed. Reba too, says that on this trip remoteness was not “a prominent thought”, and she still felt, “...like I was just in nature, in a beautiful area” (excerpt 40). In contrast to the trip leaders, Harold implies that he did feel quite remote. He suggests that most people would not want to suffer the hardships he endured in the backcountry, and that by doing so he was able to escape his daily pressures and enjoy a relaxed feeling in a beautiful environment (excerpt 41). For Harold, remoteness may have more to do with distance from his normal daily life than with absolute distance from people or services.

While wildlife and the ATV trail were major themes from the hiking portion of the trip, the floating segment was dominated by an accident that occurred during the group’s first moments on the river. High, fast moving water at the put-in gave them little time to practice maneuvering their boats (excerpts 32-33). After less than 30 minutes on the river, the group had torn a large hole in one of their rafts. The punctured tube deflated and dumped two members of the raft party into the river before the people at the back of the boat realized what was happening. After a struggle to get the raft to shore, the group was forced to make camp on the spot and spend hours making repairs (excerpt 34). Harold suggests that they were lucky to have some experienced rafters in the group who were able to repair the boat, but Reba quickly corrects him, saying, “We weren’t lucky; I mean, the trip was planned with repairs in mind and the knowledge to make repairs, we didn’t go out there unprepared” (excerpt 35). Although the accident stalled the momentum of the trip and caused some worry and uncertainty amongst the group members, it resulted in several positive outcomes (excerpts 36-38). Jesse and Reba explain that their uncertainty was tempered by the knowledge that they were in a well-traveled area and were carrying a satellite phone (excerpts 42-43). Jesse says, “You new one way or another you were going to get back to Bettles” (excerpt 38). After the raft was repaired, retelling the story of the accident became a nightly event. Reba notes that the nightly stories eventually turned to humor, and she suggests that the accident was ultimately a central part of their adventure (excerpt 37).

Despite the limited remoteness and relative safety that she felt during the trip, Reba and the others repeatedly refer to the area they traveled through as wilderness. For Reba, a wilderness is “a place that’s untouched and doesn’t have human trails”, where there is “as

little human impact as possible”, and you “have the sense of being the only ones or being one of the few in the area” (excerpt 44). Jesse describes wilderness as, “[A] big chunk of land where animals can still do their thing”, and where there is little human infrastructure (excerpts 45, 47). Harold describes wilderness in terms of his feelings rather than tangible qualities. He says wilderness is a place where he can feel like he has truly escaped “the majority of human culture”, and where he is at “the mercy of nature [rather than] man-made rules” (excerpt 46). For these respondents, a distinctive quality of the Gates of the Arctic wilderness is difficult access (excerpts 48-50). Reba suggests that difficult access limits “use and abuse” of the Park, and Jesse says that it enhances the feeling of wilderness. Reba also suggests that the experience of wilderness is enhanced by the Park Service’s emphasis on self-reliance. She says, “[W]e really do have to come up here and know that you are depending on your own resources and there are not readily available rescues here; I think that’s really key to a true wilderness experience” (excerpt 51).

Consistent with her feelings about the importance of self-reliance in wilderness, Reba—along with Jesse and Harold—were pleased not to encounter any NPS personnel in the backcountry (excerpts 52-53). Jesse says clearly that any sort of physical NPS presence in the Park would have reduced the wilderness feeling of the area (excerpt 53).

All of the group members met with a park ranger prior to heading into the backcountry in order to obtain bear barrels. Comments in excerpts 54 and 55 indicate that there is a fair amount of confusion and ambivalence regarding the use of the barrels. Reba says that the optional bear barrels did not sound optional at all when she first spoke to a ranger about them on the phone (excerpt 55). Furthermore, Jesse indicates that the group as a whole was not clear on the purpose of the barrels, and she suggests that the park message regarding their use was “disjointed” (excerpt 54).

Reba and Jesse initially planned to travel in two separate groups (in order to comply with the NPS recommendation that hiking groups be no larger than 7). However, during the first few days of the trip, they found it difficult to keep their groups apart (excerpts 58-59). Reba acknowledges that there are social and ecological impacts associated with larger groups, and she supports having a group-size limit—although she suggests that a limit of less than 7 would make the trip unfeasible as a commercial venture (excerpt 61). She says that she would plan for a smaller total group size in the future, because traveling in separate groups “just doesn’t work well” (excerpt 60).

One last issue relative to NPS management and presence at Gates of the Arctic has to do with the possibility of implementing a permit system. When asked if permits would ever be appropriate at Gates of the Arctic, Harold suggests that permits are inevitable and necessary, although he notes: “I don’t want to be one of those people who is kept out because I don’t have a permit” (excerpt 60). Without further prompting, he interpreted the question of permits to be one about limiting visitor use. In contrast, Reba responded by saying she was surprised that private visitors are not required to obtain a permit (excerpt 51). She suggests that most other parks use permits to track visitors for safety purposes. Reba’s response suggests that mandatory permits would negatively impact her experience, but not due to any restrictions on her ability to access the park. Rather, from her perspective, permits would limit the opportunity to practice self-reliance in a no-rescue type setting.

629BTT07 Randy and Missy

This couple spent 8 days hiking in the Arrigetch Peaks area. They were flown into Circle Lake and picked up at Takahula Lake (excerpts 1-3). Their trip overlapped in time and place with two other groups that were interviewed, although it is not clear whether or not they encountered any of those other people.

Randy and Missy are experienced backcountry hikers from Wisconsin who have been to Alaska twice before (visiting Denali National Park on both occasions). They explain that they “fell in love with Alaska” on their previous visits and were attracted to Gates of the Arctic because it is “one of the last remote mountain ranges in the United States” (excerpt 4). They originally planned to visit somewhere in the northern portion of the Park, but had to change their plans when they heard that lakes in the north were still frozen (excerpt 5). The Arrigetch Peaks were essentially a default destination because Randy and Missy were unable to find sufficient information on other possible sites (excerpts 7-8, 40-41). In addition, the Arrigetch area was one of the cheaper places to fly to within Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 6).

Like other interviewed parties who visited the Arrigetch Peaks, Randy and Missy describe their experience as very physically demanding. In fact, Missy feels it was their most physically challenging trip ever, and Randy says, “...we probably both pushed pretty close to our ability levels in terms of endurance and in some places, skill” (excerpt 22). The trip tested not only their stamina, but also their route-finding abilities (excerpt 23). It may be that the trip seemed even more difficult for this couple because they were hoping to establish a base-camp and enjoy several relaxing days of fishing and pack-free hiking. Instead, they spent a full day longer than planned just reaching their first intended base-camp site (excerpt 25). As a contrast to traveling with full-weight packs, Randy and Missy particularly enjoyed their day-hiking experiences. “Not having the pack on your back, you just see things in a whole different light” (excerpt 24).

Other unexpected elements that this couple faced were an abundance of mosquitoes and a relative lack of wildlife. Regarding the mosquitoes, Missy says, “...we just had to laugh sometimes at how bad they were...”; and Randy notes, “...there were definitely times...when they were worse than I expected” (excerpt 26). In an opposite manner, the couple was also surprised to encounter very few animals, especially given that there was abundant evidence of bears and moose in the area (excerpts 27-30). They suggest that the animals may have been bedded down during the hot parts of the days, when they themselves were hiking. They also note that the bear-safety protocol of making noise while hiking probably scared away any nearby animals. Bear safety was a significant concern for Randy and Missy. Although they used the same safety procedures that they would normally use in bear habitat, Missy explains that the remoteness of the Park made the threat of bears seem more significant (excerpts 31-32).

Given the images that attracted them to Gates of the Arctic—“the last remote mountain range”; “almost a virgin mountain range”—Randy and Missy’s comments regarding other people and solitude are especially interesting. The couple encountered one other party while they were hiking, two local residents at Takahula Lake, and a third group on the final night of their trip (excerpts 9, 12, 14). Randy says he “wasn’t particularly disappointed” to see the other party while hiking (excerpt 10). He further explains that he and Missy were comforted by the knowledge that they “could have found somewhere in the Park where they weren’t going to find people at all, ever” (excerpt 10). However, he and Missy were not looking for that kind of solitude experience on this trip. In fact, Randy says

he has experienced the “extreme kind [of solitude]...where...nobody would ever find you” and he does not need to do it again (excerpt 21). Missy agrees with Randy, saying “We wanted to be on the edge of that [extreme solitude], but not over the edge.”

When they reached their final destination at Takahula Lake, Randy and Missy met local residents Steve and Kay. They describe their encounter with that couple as a highly positive experience. The Takahula residents shared tea and zucchini bread, loaned Randy and Missy their canoe, and gave them advice on where to camp and where to spot wildlife (excerpts 14, 16). Although Randy and Missy were surprised to find people living at remote Takahula Lake, they were not at all disappointed (excerpt 15).

On the final night of their trip, they camped near a third couple, who they ultimately shared their return flight with. They describe feeling “indifferent” regarding the presence of others nearby. Missy explains, “We had enough space that it wasn’t an intrusion; [w]e didn’t see them or hear them even though they weren’t that far away” (excerpt 12). In addition to encountering three other parties, Randy and Missy also saw evidence of other users in the form of campsite impacts, and they witnessed daily overflights, including a group of flightseers who circled them repeatedly (excerpts 17-19). Although they were put-off by the noise of the aircraft, the couple was also comforted by the knowledge that they could easily contact an airplane if they ran into trouble (excerpt 19). Recognizing the safety value of daily overflights seems consistent with their desire to be right “on, but not over” the edge of absolute solitude.

Randy and Missy describe the Gates of the Arctic setting as highly unique, remote, and wild (excerpts 33-37). The qualities they list that make it unique include vertical topography, long-daylight hours, and lack of trails or people (excerpts 33-34). For Missy, the feeling of remoteness was enhanced by having to fly into the Park. She also describes, “having a lot less human usage [compared to Denali]” as a dimension of remoteness (excerpt 35). It is interesting to note that none of their encounters nor other evidence of human use and presence seemed to disturb Randy and Missy or challenge their image of the Park as a wild, remote place (excerpts 36-37). Randy suggests that simply knowing there were places nearby with no people at all was enough to sustain the feeling of wildness (excerpt 37). Randy and Missy agree that the Park is a wilderness, but they struggled to identify the specific qualities that make it one (excerpts 38-39). Rather than focusing on wild or natural attributes, Missy suggests that Gates of the Arctic has a particular exotic quality: “There was just this vegetation that I’ve never seen before in my life...It was almost like feeling like you were on another planet sometimes” (excerpt 39).

The couple’s only real concern regarding management at Gates of the Arctic is related to the difficulty they had getting information about opportunities in the Park (excerpts 7-8, 40-41). Missy interprets the Park staff’s reluctance to provide definitive answers as a purposeful attempt to “remain unbiased” and “let us find out for ourselves” (excerpt 40). However, Randy suggests that such a practice may have unintended consequences (excerpt 41). When information is hard to find, people visit well-known locations—like the Arrigetch Peaks—by default. As a result, visitation is concentrated in those places.

Randy and Missy were happy to register at the ranger station in Bettles. Although they do not say so directly, it seems that they perceive a safety function in registration (excerpt 44). They were also happy to carry bear barrels, both for their personal safety and out of a sense of responsibility to other visitors (excerpts 42-43, 45). This sense of responsibility underlies their comments about potential regulations as well. Missy explains

that she would not be opposed to making bear barrels mandatory because “it’s really for everyone’s protection, not just the individuals, but everyone else who is hiking in there too...” (excerpt 45). Missy and Randy are clearly not opposed to regulations in wilderness on any kind of symbolic or philosophical grounds. Their main criterion for evaluating the appropriateness of regulations is that they be “sensible” (excerpt 46).

629BTT08 Albert, Dirk, Eddy

These three interview participants were members of a 9-person Sierra Club outing (Harold, Reba, and Jesse from interview #6 were members of the same group). They spent one week hiking from Anaktuvuk Pass to the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, and then spent a second week floating to Bettles (excerpt 1). Albert and Dirk were paying clients, while Eddy served as a guide and trip leader. Eddy had visited Gates of the Arctic once before, but Albert and Dirk were new to the Park.

Albert lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At 65, he was one of the oldest members of the full, 9-person group. He participates annually in “adventure travel trips”—a term he uses to describe his visit to Gates of the Arctic. In 1966, he visited Alaska to work at Clear Air Force Base (south of Fairbanks), where the seeds of his future visits were planted. It was there that he first heard of Anaktuvuk Pass, which he says sounded like, “...the farthest place I’d ever heard of, away from everything” (excerpt 5). One year prior to this trip, he went sea kayaking at Glacier Bay National Park, where his interest in seeing more of interior Alaska was renewed (excerpt 2). He ultimately signed on for the Sierra Club trip because it combined hiking and rafting, and would allow him to “really sample a small portion of the arctic” (excerpt 2).

Dan is from California. Like Albert, he was attracted to Gates of the Arctic because “it was so far away from everything” (excerpt 3). In addition, he describes himself as a Bob Marshall fan, who was thrilled to visit the same places that Marshall wrote about. Eddy lives in Alaska and is active in the Alaska chapter of the Sierra Club. He can’t remember when he first heard about the Park, but one year ago he hiked from the Dalton Highway to Anaktuvuk Pass, where he says he “really came to know” the area (excerpt 4).

Like the respondents in interview #6, who were also members of this trip, Dirk and the others describe the weather they experienced as “unbelievable” (excerpts 6, 22). The warm temperatures encouraged a swim in an ice-cold lake near Boreal Mountain (excerpt 7). In addition, clear skies made it possible to see great distances from various peaks that the group members scaled (excerpts 7-9). For Eddy and Dirk, mountaintop views inspired near-spiritual feelings (excerpts 38, 42-43). Compared to warm weather and scenic beauty, wildlife was a less-significant influence on these group member’s experiences. Although Albert says that hearing and seeing wolves was one of the highlights of the trip (excerpt 13), Dirk seems disappointed that he did not see more animals (excerpt 14). Albert and Eddy discuss reasons for seeing few animals (excerpt 15), but after that the group members have little to say about wildlife.

Dirk and Eddy describe hiking on the ATV trail from Anaktuvuk Pass as relatively easy (excerpts 10-11). Eddy has mixed feelings about the presence of the trail; he says, “...[I]ntellectually, it’s...kind of a bummer that there’s this trail going through the wilderness...but...it’s also pretty nice not to have to stumble along through the tussocks” (excerpt 11). In contrast to the others, Albert found that the trip as a whole was “pretty damn

demanding” (excerpt 12). Albert clearly enjoyed the physical difficulties of the trip, but his comments hint at one of the internal challenges that he and the rest of his party faced: reconciling the large age differences within their group.

Dirk and Albert claim that, despite a few conflicts, they generally enjoyed being members of their group (excerpts 16-19). However, Eddy, who may have a different perspective because he was a group leader, notes that it was a struggle to balance the needs and abilities of a group of hikers whose ages spanned from 19 to 65 (excerpt 20). In addition, Dirk says flatly that there were older members of the group that he just did not like (excerpt 21). Interestingly, Eddy suggests that great weather during the trip may have prevented deeper group bonding because the members were never forced together by adversity (excerpt 22).

One event that might have been a catalyst for group bonding was a rafting accident that resulted in a large tear in the raft that Albert was traveling on. The accident put Albert in the river and stalled the group for a day while they repaired the boat (excerpt 23). However, according to Eddy, various group members responded much differently to the accident: “...[F]or some people it was bad and for other people it was good” (excerpt 24). Eddy seems to imply that the accident may have pulled the group members apart rather than bringing them together. [This account differs from the one provided by group leaders Reba and Jesse in interview #6.]

Even though these group members do not seem especially close to one another, they clearly perceive themselves as a cohesive group of relatively like-minded people. Albert comments that the only “outsider” that they saw during their trip was the pilot who delivered their boats (excerpt 25). He says that he was glad not to see other people because he was seeking solitude on this trip. He acknowledges the apparent irony of seeking solitude as a member of a 9-person group (excerpt 26), but his focus on “outsiders” is consistent with findings of other studies of people seeking solitude. All three respondents suggest that they and other visitors to the Park share values that most people do not hold. Dirk says that he would only describe details of the park to his closest friends and family—people who “are willing to see [the Park] in its pure beauty and pristine, unparalleled wilderness” (excerpt 32). Albert and Eddy feel that there is little need to restrict information about the Park because “the vast majority” of people would not want to visit.

Aside from the occasionally “intense” group dynamics, there were a few things that seemed to have a negative impact on these respondent’s experiences. Seeing several large tents near the Koyukuk River was visually jarring, but did not seem to have any lasting impact (excerpt 27). However, all three group-members comment on the amount of airplane traffic they witnessed (excerpts 35-36). Albert draws a comparison to Grand Canyon and wonders if similar restrictions on air traffic have been considered at Gates of the Arctic. Dirk distinguishes between local and tourist air traffic. He suggests limiting tourist flights but says, “I don’t really mind the locals doing their everyday business; I don’t want to take away from their life and how they live up here” (excerpt 35).

In contrast to his sympathetic view of local air traffic, Dirk strongly objects to what he regards as disrespectful treatment of the land by local Anaktuvuk Pass residents (excerpt 28). Along with Albert and Eddy, he describes being shocked and disappointed by trash along the ATV trail leading from the village. For Dirk, seeing trash in the otherwise “pristine wilderness” was doubly disappointing because it challenged his romantic view of Alaska Native people. He says, “...I always thought that Natives had deep respect for the

environment and for wilderness and it was a shock for me to see differently, that some don't respect the land, that some are falling away from that culture" (excerpt 28). Dirk's romantic view of Native culture and values is apparent in several other comments that he makes (excerpts 28-31, 35). He expresses concern about impinging on Native rights with aircraft or ATV restrictions, and he is sympathetic to what he perceives as the local's dislike for the Park Service. At the same time, he does not seem to see any contradiction between managing Gates of the Arctic as a wilderness and maintaining Native rights and autonomy.

Although the presence of the ATV trail and associated trash impacted the wilderness character of the area around Anaktuvuk Pass, these group members describe the Park in general as "pristine wilderness." For Albert and Dirk, the primary qualities that make it wilderness are lack of infrastructure like trails and developed campsites, few other people, and few signs of other people (excerpts 40-41). Dirk also describes size or scale as an important quality of wilderness and as his favorite element of the Park (excerpt 42). For him, the "immense size and stature" of the Park inspired a feeling of humility and the knowledge "that you're monumentally important and insignificant at the same time in the whole scheme of life" (excerpt 43). While Dirk seems focused on spiritual feelings and classical ideals of wilderness, Eddy describes Gates of the Arctic in terms of tangible elements and specific detail. He explains that he was initially disappointed to be returning to an area that he had visited before, but visiting in a different season proved to be a much different, and highly rewarding experience. One other element of the Gates of the Arctic setting that these respondents identify is remoteness, or the quality of being exotic (excerpts 3-5). Dirk and Albert were attracted to the Park specifically because it seemed to be on the edge of the Earth. For Eddy, who "knows a lot of people...who talk about going to very remote places" the Park is considerably less remote and exotic (excerpt 39).

None of these group members had any significant interaction with NPS personnel other than a brief encounter when they picked up their bear-barrels (excerpts 45-46). However, Eddy enjoyed a very positive encounter with the Ranger in Anaktuvuk Pass on his previous visit, and therefore has a favorable opinion of the NPS staff (or of that ranger at least). Albert identifies himself as a supporter of the National Park Service and he is sympathetic to what he calls the Service's challenging mission (excerpt 46). All three respondents seem to feel that the fundamental challenge for park managers at Gates of the Arctic is protecting the Park's natural qualities in the face of increasing use. With that in mind, they are supportive of regulations—even additional regulations—as needed to prevent ecological damage (excerpts 47-50). Albert imagines a "quota system like they have in other parks" to manage visitor use (excerpt 49). Dirk is unsure whether the Park Service can actually prevent people from visiting; he suggests redistributing use away from damaged areas instead (excerpt 48). He also suggests keeping facilities like visitor centers far from the Park to prevent the creation of "well-worn paths" (excerpt 51). Dirk's comments about visitor facilities inspired a brief discussion concerning the notion that Gates of the Arctic is an "elitist" park (excerpts 52-53). Albert contends that walking and rowing a boat is not elitist compared to flying or using an ATV. Finally, with respect to the group size limit that forced them to split their hiking group in two, Eddy feels that having a size limit was a bit of an imposition but, "...it was an imposition that we all agreed was a good one...to preserve the landscape" (excerpt 50).

630BTT09 Dorothy and Shannon

Dorothy and Shannon were members of a 6-person group that floated the Killik River, from Tulilik Lake to Udrivik Lake. All the group members except Shannon were National Park Service employees from other parks in Alaska. Shannon is from California. They considered visiting the Firth and Noatak Rivers, but ultimately selected the Killik because it flows through treeless tundra terrain, and it is more remote than the Noatak (and therefore receives fewer visitors) (excerpt 1).

In contrast to her demanding trip on the John River one year ago, Dorothy describes the Killik River trip as “flat out plum easy” (excerpt 4). She and the others planned their trip to cover a relatively short distance, so that there would be time for hiking and relaxing in camp (excerpts 3-4). For Dorothy and Shannon, the best parts of the trip occurred during periods of undirected leisure time, when they could enjoy the placid beauty of their surroundings, or revel in windy weather conditions (excerpts 2, 5).

Bear safety was a major concern for the group early in their trip. After their backcountry orientation in Bettles, they spent additional time in the field familiarizing themselves with their safety equipment. They were careful to keep shotguns and pepper spray close at hand, and they were vigilant about keeping a clean camp and kitchen (excerpt 6). However, Dorothy suggests that their concerns waned after not seeing any evidence of bears in the area. She notes that the trip would have been much different had it occurred in August, when caribou and associated bears are abundant in the Killik area (excerpt 7).

Dorothy and her group did not encounter any other people during their trip. In addition, they heard only one airplane other than the one that came to pick them up, and they saw limited evidence of other recreational visitors except at Udrivik Lake (excerpts 8-9). There they found some “microtrash”—rubber bands and fishing line—and some campsite impacts. Based on the conditions they encountered, Dorothy estimates that they were the first group to visit the Killik River this year (excerpt 10). Seeing little evidence of others was clearly a positive feature of the experience. Shannon says, “...the experience was that you were where other people hadn’t been recently... You were seeing nature as nature was meant to be seen” (excerpt 10).

Shannon’s comment in the preceding paragraph highlights an important issue: the age and historical context of human evidence determines whether it is viewed in a positive or negative light. While Dorothy enjoyed finding and investigating archaeological sites, she was disturbed by a large arrangement of rocks that she believed was made by more recent visitors—perhaps even Park employees (excerpts 11-13). For her, the rock arrangement had a negative impact because it was “an artifact of park management” rather than “an artifact of prior civilization” (excerpt 11).

Awareness of archaeological sites was one of several benefits that Dorothy and Shannon derived from their travel group. All the group members were close, longtime friends who enjoyed each other’s company and could share a joke even under adverse conditions (excerpts 5, 14). For Shannon, the only non-Park Service employee of the group, traveling with the others was an “educational and cultural experience.” She notes, “There was nothing...we couldn’t look at and get the quick history lesson or geology lesson...” (excerpt 15). For both Shannon and Dorothy, knowledge about the Park added to their experience of it. “You feel more in touch with it if you know a little bit about the culture and the people and the migration patterns of the caribou” (Shannon, excerpt 16).

Shannon and Dorothy list remoteness as an important dimension of their experience and an important quality of the Killik River region. For Shannon, remoteness is determined by the effort required to get somewhere. She feels that the effort required to visit a remote place is usually rewarded by seeing few other people. In less-remote places, she is more tolerant of other people and their impacts (excerpt 18). For Dorothy, remoteness is determined by distance from human impacts, and proximity to help or rescue (excerpt 17). Both Shannon and Dorothy feel that having to fly to the Killik River makes it feel more remote. However, it is not the experience of flying itself that enhances remoteness, but rather the expense and hassle of flying, which has the effect of limiting visitation (excerpt 19).

Although Dorothy enjoyed flying into the Park, she describes travel in bush planes as “just another mode of transportation” (excerpt 19). In fact, many elements of the trip and the setting were familiar to her. For Shannon, however, the trip was highly novel (excerpt 20). She describes the strange sensation of hiking on tundra and viewing a treeless landscape (excerpt 21). Furthermore, the notion of 24-hour sunlight seemed so outlandish to her that she and her partner brought headlamps, despite Dorothy’s advice to leave them behind.

Dorothy and Shannon’s different impressions of the setting are further revealed by their discussion of wilderness experiences. They both agree that an important component of a wilderness experience is not seeing evidence of other people or elements of management infrastructure (excerpts 23-24). Shannon explains that in Joshua Tree (California) she cannot have a wilderness experience “because you’re always surrounded by trails, signs, markers, protected areas” (excerpt 25). Dorothy contrasts the Gates of the Arctic setting with designated Wilderness in Yosemite National Park, where “...you always see human footprints, microtrash, toilet paper, broken limbs...” (excerpt 26). They differ, however, in their views on the importance of rescue opportunities and self-reliance. For Dorothy, the Killik River trip was “protected” and “not really wild” because there was little danger of not being found in case of an accident and little need to be totally self-reliant. As a result, she seems to feel that the trip was less of a wilderness experience (excerpts 27-28, 30). Shannon, on the other hand, feels that natural surroundings are the most important determinant of a wilderness experience; “I don’t care that I had a float-plane and that I had a nice pack and that I had all the gear, I still had a wilderness experience because of what was around me” (excerpt 29). Dorothy and Shannon seem to agree that having good equipment, in addition to good skills, is important for a trip in Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 31-32). They also agree that the meanings of “wild” and “wilderness” differ, but they struggle a bit to explain the difference. Shannon suggests that wild is more extreme than wilderness, and that wilderness can be “controlled and managed behind the scenes” (excerpt 33).

Shannon enjoyed a series of highly positive interactions with the staff at the Park, both before and after her backcountry trip. She notes that the Park employees “take their job[s] seriously” and “love what they do” (excerpt 34). Commenting as a park professional, Dorothy notes that management is “focused on wilderness”, which she feels is appropriate given the context at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 35-36).

Both women support the idea of a mandatory visitor registration or permit system in the Park (excerpt 37). Shannon acknowledges that “some Alaskans feel that there must be an ulterior motive for that sort of thing”, but she believes that the main purposes of permits are to monitor visitor numbers and “manage impacts” (excerpt 38). Dorothy and Shannon would support limiting visitor use at Gates of the Arctic if limits were “based on some good science”, and if they assured a low-density experience (excerpt 39). Dorothy suggests that

limited permits would only impact people's experiences if they could not get a permit (excerpt 40). In other words, she does not feel that the symbolic meaning of limited permits would impact or constrain hers or others' experiences. Both she and Shannon seem primarily concerned with the complexity of administering limited permits (rather than the notion of denying access). Shannon chose not to visit Denali Park because the permit system there was "convoluted and confusing" (excerpt 40). She has been on the waiting list for a Grand Canyon permit for 9 years, but she supports that system because when she finally gets a permit, she "will have the experience that [she] wants" (excerpt 39). Shannon would rather have the opportunity to experience places mostly free of other people, than the freedom to experience those same places whenever she chooses (excerpt 41). However, she feels that some parks, perhaps even some places within Gates of the Arctic, should maintain unlimited access (excerpt 42).

630BTT10 Liz and Jed

Liz and Jed are a husband and wife couple from Maine. They were enthusiastic about participating in this interview even though they only had a short amount of time before their return flight to Fairbanks. As a result, the interview was slightly abbreviated. The couple only had time to recall some details of their hiking experience and travel route; they made no comments about management at Gates of the Arctic.

Liz and Jed had visited Gates of the Arctic once previously. On that trip they hiked in the eastern portion of the Park, near the Dalton Highway. On their latest trip, they spent six days hiking in the Arrigetch Peaks area, beginning at Circle Lake and finishing at Lake Takahula (excerpt 1). Although Liz and Jed are fit, experienced hikers, they were somewhat surprised by the severity of the challenges they faced during their trip. Rugged terrain, dense vegetation, and limited campsite options made for long hiking days (excerpts 2-3, 8). Liz summarizes the physical nature of their trip by saying, "That's a tough trip"; and Jed agrees, saying, "I think physically, it was really demanding, much more demanding than I predicted" (excerpt 4). While they found the overall hiking more challenging than expected, crossing a small river in the middle of their trip turned out to be easier than they anticipated (excerpts 5-6).

Not only did the terrain in the Arrigetch Peaks-area make hiking difficult, it also made daily route-finding extremely challenging. Liz and Jed had trouble orienting themselves because dense vegetation and high peaks often obscured their view (excerpts 7-9). They were frequently unsure of their exact location, and they repeatedly underestimated the time it would take to reach distant landmarks (excerpt 13). Their navigation difficulties were compounded by maps with inconsistent scales—some were in metric and others were in English units. Liz explains, "One [map] was in feet and one was in meters... We thought we were going up like about 1000 feet and I think we went up about 2400 or 3000" (excerpt 10). Although they have never used a GPS unit in the past, Jed suggests that he would take one if he were to do the trip again (excerpts 11-12).

For this couple, one additional item that added to the challenge of the trip was the ever-present threat of bears (excerpts 14-15). Liz and Jed did not bring bear barrels to store their food in, relying instead on hanging their food in trees where they were available. As a result, they worried that a bear would discover their food while they were day-hiking away

from camp. They did bring pepper spray, which Jed says, "...gave [them] some kind of confidence", although Liz seems uncertain about the effectiveness of the spray.

Despite their navigation difficulties and concerns regarding bears, Liz and Jed describe their trip in enthusiastic and highly positive terms. They are especially enthusiastic about the scenic beauty they witnessed in the park. Their comments focus on the spectacular nature of the Arrigetch Peaks (excerpts 17-18), but they also refer to the smaller scale beauty of trees reflected in a lake (excerpt 19).

At the beginning of their trip, Liz and Jed shared their flight from Fairbanks to Bettles with another party that was also planning to visit the Arrigetch Peaks area. In fact, the other party was planning an almost identical itinerary. Liz and Jed were initially concerned that they would see the others every day. Liz explains, "[W]e really didn't want that; we wanted to be really away [from others]" (excerpt 27). Ultimately, they saw the other party only once, far in the distance. In addition, they briefly glimpsed the tent of a third party, and they spent an hour with Lake Takahula residents Steve and Kay while waiting for their bush-plane pickup (excerpts 23-25). When their plane arrived, Liz and Jed once again found themselves sharing a ride with the party they met while traveling from Fairbanks [the other party had been picked up earlier the same morning at a different lake] (excerpt 26).

Liz and her husband were thrilled to encounter Steve and Kay. Liz even indicates that she plans to write them a letter when she returns home. When asked how they felt about seeing and then encountering the other hiking party during their trip, Jed says he felt reassured, and Liz says, "...[I]t was kind of nice to see them at the beginning and then feel like we knew them at the end" (excerpt 27). Near the end of the interview, Jed comments on the profound feeling that he enjoyed during the trip, of "...being in the mountains and...being the only thing there" (excerpt 28). While frequent encounters would likely have detracted from their experience, it seems that knowing they shared the area with at least two other parties as well as two local residents did not diminish the feeling of "being away" that Liz and Jed were seeking on their trip.

630BTT11 Sue, Daniel, Ray

These three friends spent 6 days hiking in the Arrigetch Peaks area, beginning and ending at Circle Lake. They shared their return flight from Circle Lake to Bettles with Liz and Jed from interview #10. Like that couple, they were enthusiastic about participating in an interview, even though time was short (they were scheduled for the same return flight to Fairbanks). As a result, this interview was also somewhat abbreviated.

Dan was the prime motivator and organizer for the trip. He read about Gates of the Arctic in several different sources and had been interested in visiting the Park for three or four years (excerpt 1). Sue had heard of the Brooks Range, but had never heard of Gates of the Arctic until Dan suggested that she and Ray plan a visit (excerpt 2).

Like Liz and Jed, Sue and her friends describe their trip as very physically demanding. Rugged, trailless terrain combined with hot weather made for difficult hiking (excerpts 3-4, 7). In fact, these respondents describe struggling in warm weather on their first day of hiking as the low point of the entire trip (excerpt 3). For Sue, hiking in trailless terrain was a new experience (excerpt 7). For Ray, who has previous experience hiking off-trail, the pressure of having to make it to a pre-determined pick-up point made this trip different from his past experiences (excerpt 8). All three group-members agree that their

hike was “a lot more remote” than anything they had experienced previously (excerpt 5). For Dan, the feeling of remoteness translated into a focus on safety. He says, [remoteness means]...knowing you have to be very careful because...you have very little access to any sort of assistance if you should need it” (excerpt 6). Seeing what Sue describes as “a lot of air traffic” (excerpt 9) did not seem to reduce the feeling of remoteness or mitigate the need to be careful because, as Dan explains, “you aren’t in contact with them [the airplanes] in any way, shape, or form” (excerpt 6). Sue and her friends are familiar with high volume air traffic at the Grand Canyon, which they visit frequently. Although they witnessed daily overflights during their visit to Gates of the Arctic, they did not feel that it detracted from their experience because there were still far fewer airplanes than what they are used to (excerpts 9-10).

Although the group members saw abundant evidence of wildlife during their trip, they did not see any large mammals. They were somewhat disappointed not to see any “big game”; however, they acknowledge that making noise for purposes of bear safety and wearing mosquito head-nets probably reduced their chances of sighting animals (excerpts 11-13). Aside from briefly spotting one other party (Liz and Jed) that they knew was in the area, Sue and her friends did not encounter any other people during their trip (excerpts 15-16).

These respondent’s descriptions of the area they visited focus on the spectacular appearance and scale of the Arrigetch Peaks (excerpts 17-20). Sue suggests that any one of the peaks they viewed would be a stand-alone attraction in another place (excerpt 19). More than the individual peaks, the group members describe the extent of apparently undisturbed country that they saw. Dan says, “...there were so many places...you could see for a very long distance, and there was no clear-cutting or anything like that; just...wilderness as far as you can see it” (excerpt 20).

The group member’s comments regarding management of Gates of the Arctic reflect their appreciation for the unique scale of the Park. Ray says, “I think it’s wonderful...to have a park that’s so big”; and Sue suggests that the “vastness” of the Park is one of its essential qualities (excerpts 21-22). They both emphasize the need to maintain the integrity of the whole park, rather than focusing on a specific area or single attraction. They feel that, despite natural limitations on access, visitation at Gates of the Arctic is sure to increase “once word gets out about how gorgeous it is” (excerpt 23). These group members voice strong support for visitor use limits to maintain current conditions in the Park (excerpts 24-26). Ray and Dan describe positive experiences with limited permit systems at Denali and Grand Canyon National Parks. At Denali, despite being denied access to their first choice destination, Ray and Dan report that they enjoyed the permit system because it assured that they did not see other visitors in the backcountry. Dan says that despite easier access at Denali, it “really felt like the end of the world” precisely because they did not encounter other visitors (excerpt 25). For Ray and Dan, the nature of an ideal wilderness experience seems closely tied to not seeing other visitors. They feel that permits are essential to maintaining the wilderness feel of certain places, and Dan, at least, indicates that he supports limited permits in principle, even if he is personally denied access because of them (excerpt 26).

630BTT12 Jeff

Jeff was a member of a 6-person group that spent two weeks floating and hiking along the Noatak River. Jeff is a long time Alaska resident, an experienced backcountry traveler, and he is professionally involved in public land management. He has visited the Brooks Range many times in the past, but he prefers to go to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge rather than Gates of the Arctic because the Refuge is more remote (excerpt 2). Although he has had a long-term interest in floating the Noatak River, this trip was his first visit to the area (excerpt 1). He chose to visit specifically because he anticipated that controversy over oil development in the Arctic Refuge would attract a greater proportion of arctic visitors than normal (excerpt 2). He and his friends planned their trip for late June to coincide with the best times for viewing birds and avoiding mosquitoes (excerpt 3).

Jeff spent the first few days of his trip relaxing and taking short day hikes. His main goal for the beginning of the trip was to “get his heart rate down” and make the shift to “arctic time” (excerpts 6, 8-10). Arctic time means taking advantage of 24-hour daylight and the best hours for viewing wildlife: “up at 2, breakfast about 4, lunch at 9, dinner at 2 in the morning” (excerpts 8-9). “Breaking the connection to the clock” is described as a vital part of a good experience, and Jeff says that he strongly encourages his traveling companions to remove their watches and lose track of time (excerpt 10).

The first few days spent relaxing by the river set the tone for the rest of the trip, which was characterized by good weather, abundant wildlife, and an easy pace (excerpts 7, 11-15). Jeff describes himself as a birder and he lists the number of bird species his group saw, as well as the numbers of other animal species they encountered: “wolverine, two wolves, half a dozen foxes, four bears, ten caribou, dozens of sheep, 34 birds” (excerpt 15).

On the first day of their trip, Jeff’s party encountered two backpackers who asked if they had a satellite phone. Jeff indicates that he was appalled at the thought of bringing a satellite phone onto the Noatak, however, he was secretly carrying an aviation radio himself (excerpts 16-17, 25). Jeff had never before carried a radio into the backcountry. Furthermore, he suggests that being self-reliant and embracing the risks associated with backcountry travel are fundamental aspects of a wilderness experience (excerpts 18-19). He sites the risks associated with bears as justification for carrying a radio while simultaneously acknowledging that the radio compromises his ideal of self-reliance (excerpt 19).

Jeff suggests that his decision to carry an aviation radio was a concession to his advancing age (excerpts 17, 19). His decision may also have been based in part on the expectation that he would encounter heavy airplane traffic along the Noatak (and thus have easy access to help in case of an emergency). However, Jeff and his party paid close attention to the number of aircraft they saw and heard, and they did not encounter any planes on half the days of their trip. Jeff says, “...that was a pleasant surprise, because I had been told that [on] the Noatak you’re just going to get hammered by airplanes” (excerpt 20). Jeff notes that there are very few places in Alaska where a person can escape airplane traffic (excerpt 21). He also makes an important distinction between bush planes and jets (excerpts 22-23). Bush planes are part of the setting in rural Alaska. They are flown by identifiable pilots that Jeff may even know; and they are filled with people who are likely to share his values. In contrast, jets are anonymous pieces of “major league technology”, flying at 35,000 feet and leaving a vapor trail. They represent a connection to “the whole industrial megacommercial complex of the world.” Although Jeff would prefer to see no airplanes at all, he feels that bush planes “kind of belong there” and he does not feel bothered by low-

volume bush plane traffic. He does, however, feel that there is a relatively low threshold for bush plane traffic, above which it significantly detracts from his experience.

For Jeff, the most important single determinant of a good experience is seeing few other people. He avoided visiting the Noatak for years because of the area's reputation for crowding, and he finally chose to visit only because he anticipated a dip in visitor numbers (excerpt 35). Although he is glad that Gates of the Arctic has national park status and protection, he feels that national park designation inevitably leads to higher visitation (excerpts 31-32). Even in a year with fewer than normal visitors, Jeff was expecting the Noatak to be crowded (excerpts 28-30). Although he encountered more people than he would elsewhere in the Brooks Range, he was pleasantly surprised to see fewer people than he anticipated. Jeff contends that the number of people encountered has a strong influence on the quality of a wilderness experience; "The fewer people, the better" (excerpt 33). On an ideal trip he would not see any people outside of his carefully chosen group. He acknowledges that his idea of how many encounters are appropriate for a wilderness experience may differ considerably from other people's ideas (excerpt 35). However, he feels that the expense of fly-in arctic wilderness trips warrants his being "pretty particular" about seeing other people (excerpt 34).

Throughout the interview, Jeff refers to the quality of remoteness, but his conception of remoteness is not tied to distance from people, settlements, or services. Instead, he feels that remoteness is directly tied to numbers of people seen (excerpts 36-38). Jeff explains that seeing, rather than hearing other people or simply knowing they are nearby, is the most important determinant of remoteness. "You might sit down and intellectually say there are a lot of people on this river, but if you don't see them they don't exist; and you can have a more remote experience even though there might be somebody a mile away around the corner" (excerpt 38).

In addition to sheer numbers, Jeff is also concerned with the type and behavior of visitors that he encounters. As mentioned previously, Jeff and his party were contacted by two backpackers on the first day of their trip. Jeff was clearly bothered by their apparent ineptitude and their efforts to engage in conversation (excerpt 25). Similarly, Jeff refers to the negative impact of a hypothetical encounter with river floaters who are "buffoons" because they are wearing mosquito head-nets unnecessarily (excerpt 36). In contrast, he felt that encountering two park rangers who were "just doing their jobs" was much less intrusive (excerpt 26). Jeff also preferred to encounter several groups over a short period of time, rather than seeing the same number of people spaced out over the full duration of his trip (excerpt 27).

Jeff's comments regarding management at Gates of the Arctic reflect his professional experience and training in public land management, and also his personal experience in the Alaskan backcountry. Like many other visitors to the Park, he was pleased to see little Park Service presence during his trip. Although he saw and spoke with two NPS rangers, he does not seem to feel that they constituted a significant management presence in the backcountry (excerpt 39). Jeff would not support making the use of bear barrels mandatory in the Park. He suggests that it is unrealistic to require parties on lengthy trips to put all their food in barrels (excerpt 40). He would support making visitor registration mandatory. He feels that registration is a valuable tool that managers can use to monitor visitor use-levels (excerpt 41).

Jeff feels that visitor use at Gates of the Arctic will inevitably grow: “There’s more and more people [in the world]; there’s more and more money; [and] wilderness is a hot commodity” (excerpt 42). Although he does not think that visitor use limits are needed at present, he supports limits as a means to provide “more of a premier wilderness experience” (excerpts 43-45). However, Jeff does not feel that use limits should be implemented throughout the whole Park. He suggests instead that a range of different opportunities be provided, in order to accommodate people with different encounter tolerances and preferences (excerpts 46-47).

706BTT13 Fred, Joan, William, Jill

These two couples from Fairbanks spent 6 days floating the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, from the Gates of the Arctic to Bettles. Although all four group-members are long-time Alaskans, they had never visited the Park before (excerpt 1). Several factors influenced their decision to float the Koyukuk River. On a flight between Anaktuvk Pass and Bettles a few years ago, Joan got a good look at the John River and decided she would like to float a river in the area (excerpt 3). The other group members were generally interested in remoteness, scenery, and being north of the Arctic Circle (excerpts 2-3). They ultimately chose the Koyukuk because it allowed them to “be self-reliant right to the end” by floating directly to Bettles (excerpt 3). In addition, they were intrigued by the idea of floating through “the Gates of the Arctic” (excerpt 3). For all of the group members except Fred, being in a national park was just a secondary bonus, rather than a reason for visiting the area. In fact, William says, “... I didn’t even know it was park-land until we were almost out of it; to me it was just a beautiful wild river” (excerpt 4).

The trip was characterized by leisurely days, good weather, and mild paddling conditions. The group members spent “an easy 5 [hours]” per day on the water, and enjoyed temperatures “much like you’d anticipate in the Lower 48 on the 4th of July” (excerpts 5-8). Overall, they found the trip to be considerably easier than they expected (excerpts 9-10). In contrast to other visitors who describe the Park setting as demanding and highly selective, these group members describe the Koyukuk River as “not out of the reach of most people who have some wilderness camping and canoeing experience” (excerpt 10). They feel that the relatively gentle characteristics of the river provide the opportunity for older or less experienced visitors to enjoy the Brooks Range (excerpts 11-14). They also note that, while campsites are plentiful along the length of the river, good hiking conditions can only be found along its upper reaches (excerpts 15-16). Although the group members enjoyed a relaxed, unhurried pace, they were not able to completely escape feeling pressed for time on their relatively short, 6-day trip. Jill notes that it took her three days to mentally “arrive” in the peaceful river setting, and Joan suggests that the trip was not long enough (excerpts 17-18). The group members somewhat reluctantly used a map to chart their progress down the river and assure that they arrived on time in Bettles (excerpts 19, 20, 39). Fred says, “I’d just as soon not have a map, but when you have contemporary pressures like...getting back [to work] on Monday, it was helpful” (excerpt 20). While the group members primarily describe the trip with words like “quiet”, “serene”, and “peaceful”, William notes almost sheepishly that one of the trip highlights for him was the exciting flight to the river put-in, complete with a skillful landing by the pilot (excerpt 23).

During their trip, the group members encountered numerous animal tracks, a variety of birds, and a lynx (excerpts 29-20). For William, the tracks were an indication that animals were nearby, but they chose not to be seen (excerpt 33). The group members were “a little disappointed” and surprised not to see more wildlife, but viewing animals was not an important focus of their trip (excerpts 31-32). However, Joan suggests that a visitor from outside of Alaska might have been considerably more disappointed (excerpt 32).

In addition to little wildlife, the group saw little evidence of human use, and no other visitors at all (excerpts 34-35, 27, 40). Perhaps more than any other single element, the lack of other people was the distinctive feature of their trip. On a Yukon River trip one year ago, these same group members encountered other people every day (excerpt 24). In contrast to the Yukon, the lack of people on the Koyukuk made the river feel like it was “really out in the wilderness” (excerpt 27). The group members also contrast their recent trip with a previous trip on the Chilkoot Trail. Fred describes that experience as “More of a communing with other people than a communing with nature” (excerpt 25). In addition, the Chilkoot trail was a highly-structured experience, requiring a permit and a detailed, pre-determined trip itinerary (excerpt 26). The group members feel that the regulated atmosphere of the Chilkoot trail was necessary given the high visitor use in the area (excerpt 26). They also feel that Gates of the Arctic is not likely to ever receive as much use, because the kind of people who visit the Park are a small minority within the general population (excerpts 36-37). Although images and symbols of wilderness are increasingly popular, most people are “wilderness wannabes” rather than active visitors (excerpts 37-38). One additional difference between the Koyukuk trip and the other backcountry trips that these group members have participated in, was the feeling of self-reliance that they experienced; “...the sense that if you’re going to get out, it’s going to be under your own volition to do it” (excerpt 28).

These elements—lack of other people, little regulatory structure, and a sense of self-reliance—are all described as important qualities of wildness and wilderness (which seem to be more-or-less synonymous terms) (excerpts 39-43, 54-55). Other qualities of wildness/wilderness include a sense of risk, opportunities for discovery, lack of infrastructure, and clear evidence of “nature managing itself.” Once again, the most significant quality of a wilderness experience seems to be the absence of people. In contrasting Gates of the Arctic with the Chilkoot Trail, Fred says: “The Chilkoot Trail is not a wilderness experience. It never has been. The whole history...has been one of many, many people...” (excerpt 54). Furthermore, some of the things that diminish wilderness character (visitor regulations, management infrastructure) are directly linked to higher visitor use.

As mentioned previously, these group members were not attracted to the Gates-region because of its national park status. They were surprised to encounter the visitor center in Bettles, and William did not even realize he was in a national park until he was near the end of his trip (excerpts 44-45). When they realized there was a Park facility in Bettles, the group members sought out the opportunity to register. They describe at least three benefits that might be used to justify a mandatory registration program. First, registration may serve a safety function (excerpts 47-48). Although the group members feel that visitors to Gates of the Arctic should “not assume they have the right to be rescued” they do feel that registration might be used to track visitors for potential search and rescue. They also think that registration serves an educational function (excerpts 49-50). Visitors who register are exposed to messages about leave-no-trace camping and the importance of self-reliance. A

third important function of registration is documenting visitor use (excerpts 51-52). These group members feel that the future of the Park depends on maintaining a sufficient base of support, and part of that support depends on documenting visitor use.

The group members express mixed feelings about regulating visitor use of the Park. Joan recalls dealing with a limited permit system at the Boundary Waters Wilderness, and she suggests that a similar system might be appropriate at Gates of the Arctic “if things start to get busier” (excerpt 53). Fred feels that “regulation and regimentation” is “precisely the antithesis of what you’re coming to Alaska or a national park wilderness area for” (excerpt 55). However, he also highly values the opportunity to experience solitude in the Park. Although he feels that solitude is not an appropriate management goal for all areas, he would accept a limited permit system to ensure it at Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 54). William points out, however, that it will likely be a long time before any sort of limits are needed on the Koyukuk River (excerpt 57). In excerpt 56, Joan implies that limits might be implemented without replicating the highly structured experience that she and the others had on the Chilkoot Trail: “I think you can put some structure around it without making it Disney World.” Aside from impacting visitor experiences, Fred is concerned that use limits could reduce political support for the park by potential visitors who are excluded (excerpt 58). However, Joan notes that the visitor population is very low, and there may be more efficient ways to build and maintain support for the Park (excerpt 59). She feels that the main purpose of visitor regulations is preventing overuse (rather than building or maintaining support). One regulation that all the group members would support is a restriction on group size. They agree that encountering a large group would be a “real bummer” (excerpt 61).

While they may have mixed feelings about actively limiting visitor use, the group members clearly do not feel that access to the Park should be improved (excerpts 58, 62-63). They suggest that charges of elitism are misplaced, because anybody who really wants to visit the Park can find a way to do so. For these group members, visiting Gates of the Arctic is a strong personal values statement. “Would you rather have your cell phone and your European loafers, or do you want to spend your money on something else?” (Joan, excerpt 63).

Finally, Joan and the others suggest that the most important thing managers can do at Gates of the Arctic is practice good stewardship. More important than any specific practice or use-regulation, is knowing that the Park is “being protected and well cared for by smart people that have passions” (excerpt 64).

719BTT14 Robert and Margaret

Robert and his wife Margaret are from Kentucky. They were members of a 5-person group that spent 6 days floating the John River, from Hunt Fork Lake to Old Bettles (excerpt 1). They planned a full week for the float but actually finished a day early because the river was faster than they expected (excerpts 1-2). Robert and Margaret have had a long-standing interest in visiting Alaska, but they put-off visiting because they were overwhelmed by the variety of possible destinations and things to do within the State (excerpt 3). When a friend of theirs was looking for a few extra people to accompany him on the John River, they saw their chance to visit Alaska and jumped at the opportunity to join his group. Robert and Margaret had never heard of the John River or Gates of the Arctic National Park until just prior to their visit (excerpt 4). Their friend made all the arrangements for the trip, and they

“just kind of went along with the flow” (excerpt 5). They visited the John River because it was one of a general class of Alaskan places, rather than a place with unique or attractive features of its own. Robert says, “...one river was just like any other as far as we were concerned” (excerpt 5). After completing their trip on the John, they are now interested in visiting other rivers or other parts of Alaska (excerpt 6). Also, they enjoyed getting to know the other members of their group, and are interested in taking additional trips with them in the future (excerpt 7).

Robert and the others expected the river to be slower and gentler than it was. In addition to delivering them to Bettles one day earlier than planned, the faster-than-expected river caused some difficulties for two members of the group who were in inflatable kayaks (excerpt 8). Mosquitoes and uncertainty about the exact time it would take to complete their trip caused the group members to forgo the day-hikes they had planned. Several days into the trip, when they realized they were ahead of schedule, they had already descended from the hi-country and the terrain was no longer conducive to hiking (excerpts 10-11). Robert and Margaret also expected to find better fishing than they did. “...We had heard all about Alaska fishing and we beat the water to a froth and never caught anything” (Margaret, excerpt 9). Although they were disappointed about the fishing conditions, they were happy to find that campsites along the river were plentiful (excerpt 12). The group members were careful to use leave-no-trace techniques at each of their campsites (excerpt 14). Margaret, in particular, feels that it is important that visitors to the area be made aware of LNT ethics and techniques (excerpt 13).

Whereas poor fishing was only a minor issue, mosquitoes and absent wildlife each had a significant negative influence on the trip. Robert and Margaret were expecting mosquitoes, but they proved to be worse than anticipated (excerpt 17). The couple was also expecting to see more wildlife, especially moose and bears (excerpts 15-16). Robert concedes that he was disappointed not to see any large animals and, after initially nominating mosquitoes as the worst part of his trip, he concludes that “the worst part was we did not see the animals that we thought we would” (excerpt 16).

Robert and the others encountered one other party during their float. After leapfrogging with them for two days, they did not see them or anyone else until reaching Bettles (excerpt 18). Although Margaret’s initial reaction to seeing the other party was, “Get off our river!”, both she and Robert explain that merely seeing others occasionally on the water was not a problem (excerpt 19). They are much more concerned about competing for campsites than seeing others in passing (excerpts 18-19).

The relative absence of other people, or signs of other people, was the distinguishing feature of the trip. Margaret suggests that mosquitoes and lack of visitor facilities limit the number of potential visitors to the area (excerpt 20). She and Robert feel that adding visitor facilities “would spoil the pristine nature of the wilderness” (excerpt 20). In addition to having no facilities, they describe wilderness as “pristine”, “clean”, and lacking evidence of significant visitation or human use or habitation (excerpts 21-23). Margaret contrasts the John River with the New River in West Virginia. Although parts of the New River are “unsettled”, they are not wilderness because “there’s just so many other people there” (excerpt 21).

Because their friend made all the trip arrangements, Robert and Margaret did not have any contact with Gates of the Arctic park personnel. They did not register or receive a backcountry orientation in Bettles, and they did not encounter any evidence of park

management activities in the backcountry (excerpts 24-25). Robert comments: "There wasn't any special permits [required] to go in or anything like that, so I guess I really didn't notice any management" (excerpt 24). Without any prompting, Margaret recalls a visit to the Quetico area, where a limited permit system was used to restrict visitor access. She suggests that limited permits were a positive feature of the area and notes that they made it feel more "managed" (excerpt 26). For Margaret, seeing overt signs of management is a good thing. She says, "...I think it's real positive that an area that could be overrun with people is managed just to prevent the destruction of the area and the destruction of it being a wilderness" (excerpt 26). She and Robert clearly support the general idea of limiting visitor access to preserve the wilderness character of places. In the specific case of Gates of the Arctic, Margaret feels that limited permits would be appropriate if visitation increases to the point where there is clear evidence of user impacts, or it becomes difficult to find a campsite (excerpts 27-28).

719BTT15 Gary and Mandy

Gary and Mandy are a newlywed couple that spent 9 days floating the North Fork of the Koyukuk River (excerpt 1). Although they both live in Arizona now, Mandy has lived most of her life in Colorado and Gary has been spending summers in Alaska for 30 years. Gary has visited Gates of the Arctic several times in the past, but he had never previously been on the Koyukuk River. His favorite place in Alaska is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but he chose to visit Gates of the Arctic for this trip because it is comparatively easy to access (excerpt 2). He describes his experience on the Koyukuk River as "the perfect wilderness trip."

Two elements that contributed to the "perfect wilderness" quality of the trip were opportunities to feel self-reliant, and seeing little evidence of other people. Gary contrasts Gates of the Arctic with other parks, where, more often than not, "...there's a road or there's a trail or there's a sign" (excerpt 3). He enjoyed feeling like he was "on his own" while floating the Koyukuk and he feels that Gates is (and should be) a park strictly for people who "want that kind of experience." For Gary, the opportunity to creatively address unpredictable challenges is what wilderness is all about (excerpt 5). Mandy too, enjoyed feeling self-reliant. In fact, she says, "I liked it a lot more than anything I've done" (excerpt 4). However, she acknowledges that she "would have had a lot more worries" if she had not been traveling with Gary, who has vast experience in the Alaskan backcountry.

Gary suggests that the opportunity for genuine self-reliance in Gates of the Arctic may be diminished by air traffic and national park status. Air traffic provides the potential for rescue, and national park status suggests to some visitors that the Park Service is watching out for them (excerpt 7). Gary feels that air traffic in the Park has increased dramatically over the last 30 years. However, he has become accustomed to small airplane traffic in Alaska, so that overflights no longer bother him. He feels that aircraft are "part of the culture" in Alaska, and it would be "a real negative" for the Park Service to try and manage them at Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 7). Mandy, on the other hand, is not accustomed to Alaskan air traffic, and she feels that aircraft did detract from her experience on the Koyukuk. Both she and Gary agree that seeing a large military helicopter flying low over the river was "really disturbing" (excerpt 8). They feel that the helicopter should not have been in the Park at all, unless it was performing a rescue.

Seeing little evidence of other people on the Koyukuk added to Gary's feeling of self-reliance. He and Mandy did not encounter any other parties on the river, and they saw only a few signs of previous visitors. Although he feels that opportunities for genuine self-reliance in the Park are diminished by increased airplane activity, he enjoys the "illusion of being alone" that is afforded by seeing little evidence of other people (excerpt 9). Seeing little evidence of others made Gary and Mandy feel confident that they were not likely to encounter other visitors. More than simply not seeing other visitors, they enjoyed *knowing* that they would not see others (excerpts 10-11). "For me, that was the great part about this trip, is I knew or I believed I wasn't going to see anybody else" (Mandy, excerpt 10). For Mandy, part of that confidence in not seeing others stems from her perception that the Koyukuk is relatively inaccessible compared to the Rocky Mountain recreation areas she is familiar with (excerpt 15). Similar to some other interviewed visitors, Mandy and Gary seem to feel that the type of people who visit Gates of the Arctic is also important to the character of the area (excerpts 16-17). When asked how she would describe the Park to other people, Mandy indicates that she would "probably try to scare off" potential visitors who do not share her orientation toward the place (excerpt 17).

Consistent with their desire to see little evidence of other visitors, Gary and Mandy were careful to leave no trace of their own. Gary avoided building fires during the trip and even worried about leaving footprints on the riverbank. He feels that it is important to "be attentive to other people's experiences" and to "leave [others] what you'd want for yourself" (excerpts 13-14). In addition to litter and campsite impacts, Gary and Mandy suggest that the behavior of wildlife may be an indicator of how much visitor use an area receives (excerpts 9, 19-22). For instance, they interpreted the behavior of a lynx that they encountered as clear evidence that it had never seen people before. Among the important qualities of wilderness, Gary lists "wildlife that's not entirely habituated [to people]" (excerpt 22).

The couple did not see as much wildlife as they expected to. In fact, Gary says they saw fewer animals than he has ever seen on a Brooks Range trip. However, the both contend that they did not have well-defined goals—such as seeing wildlife—for their trip. Mandy says, "We didn't see that many critters, but it certainly didn't detract from the experience for me...I think that this experience is a lot more holistic" (excerpt 21). Similarly, Gary says that he is "not particularly goal-oriented" on his backcountry trips. Instead, he enjoys the general feeling of escape afforded by wilderness travel (excerpt 18).

Mandy and Gary advocate maintaining a low-key Park Service presence and a minimalist management approach at Gates of the Arctic. They feel that one of the unique values of the Park is that "You don't feel like you're in a park" (Gary, excerpt 24). For Mandy, lack of visitor infrastructure facilitated a feeling of self-reliance. While visitors may expect to be rescued in other parks, it was clear to Mandy that she was on her own in Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 23). Mandy feels that trails and signs that are perfectly appropriate in other park settings are not appropriate in Gates (excerpt 24). A second unique feature that contributes to the "non-park" feeling at Gates is that it is surrounded by undeveloped land. "What makes it good as opposed to Yellowstone or Glacier...it [that] it's buffeted by the same kind of country all around it..." (Gary, excerpt 25).

Gary intentionally did not register at the Park office in Bettles. He perceives a safety or rescue function to registration that he wished to avoid (excerpts 26-27). For Gary, the opportunity to escape the "culture of safety obsession" that is prevalent in other parks is an important value of Gates of the Arctic. He does, however, acknowledge that registration may

become an important method for tracking visitor use, if and when the level of use becomes an issue of concern.

Gary and Mandy's preferences for minimal management reflect a general lack of faith in "management" as well as their perception that Gates of the Arctic is unique within the National Park system. Gary feels that the idea of managing wild lands is "arrogant", and Mandy says, "It seems like the more we try to manage things....the more we just bury ourselves" (excerpts 30-31). They feel that low visitor use at Gates makes a minimalist approach to management feasible (excerpts 29, 32). More than just a minimalist approach, they suggest that a whole different management paradigm is warranted. Gary says, "...if the Park Service starts to think of it [Gates] as...just another park, it's gone in my mind" (excerpt 33).

Gary suggests that the best way to manage visitor use is to maintain the current system of fly-in access. In cases of heavy user pressure, Gary thinks that limited permits are an acceptable and effective way to maintain "the illusion of wildness" (excerpts 34-35). However, in contrast to many other interviewed visitors, Gary does not feel that substantial use increases are inevitable at Gates. As long as there is no direct road access to the Park, he feels that the number of private visitors "is not ever going to be a big issue" (excerpt 34). Gary views commercial guides and tour operators as the number-one threat the low-density character of the Park. He thinks that any substantial use increases are likely to come from the ranks of commercial operators, and he feels that limits on their activities should be put in place (excerpts 34, 36).

Near the end of the interview, Mandy and Gary spontaneously debate the controversial suggestion that Gates of the Arctic is "elitist" (excerpts 37-39). Mandy sold her car to finance her visit, but she considers herself "privileged to know that [visiting] was a possibility" (excerpt 39). Gary feels strongly that Gates of the Arctic is not a place "set up for an elite few." He contends that he has "been all over" Alaska even though he has never been a wealthy person. Gary believes that anybody with the desire to visit the Park can find a way to get there. For him, the act of visiting arctic Alaska is an important expression of personal values; "The people that show up here and do these trips have made it a priority...and they've sacrificed maybe something else to do that; to me, it's a simple equation" (excerpt 38).

720BTT16 Dan, Linda, Brad, Rick, Jenny, Sandy

This group of interview participants represents nearly half of a 13-person group of friends and family members that floated both the Nigu and Noatak Rivers in a single, 22-day trip (excerpts 1-2). Dan and Linda are mother and father to Rick and Jenny. Brad and Sandy are family friends. Rick, Jenny, and Sandy were primarily listeners during the interview, although they did make a few sporadic comments.

Dan and Linda were responsible for organizing the trip. Along with Brad, they are long-time Alaska residents and have a wealth of experience on Alaskan rivers. They indicate that the Noatak had been "on their list" of rivers to visit for a long time. They had also been interested in visiting the Nigu for some time, but were put-off by the cost of traveling so far for a brief one-week float. Since the two rivers are relatively close together, this group was able to cut costs by linking them into a single trip with a short charter flight (excerpt 4). They spent two weeks on the Noatak, followed by an additional 6 days on the Nigu.

Both river segments began with grueling portages from the drop-off point to the river channel. The portages proved to be more difficult than Dan and Linda expected. Dan suggests that because the charter pilots do not walk the portages themselves, they are prone to making them sound easier than they are (excerpt 10). While they suffered through the portages, the group members enjoyed other hiking opportunities afforded by the open and easily accessible terrain along the rivers (excerpts 11-12).

On both rivers the group members found more mosquitoes and fewer animals than they expected. Although they saw an assortment of wildlife including bears, caribou, moose, a wolf, and a wolverine, they were expecting to see greater numbers of caribou and bear (excerpts 5-7). As for the mosquitoes, Dan notes that, "...they were as thick as we've ever found them; and Linda says, "Of all the adversities, that would be the one I would choose to do without" (excerpts 8-9).

Compared to other river trips that Dan, Linda, and their kids have done, the Noatak-Nigu trip was longer in duration but shorter in miles, and it presented fewer technical paddling challenges (excerpts 13, 16-17). In addition, shallow water along the upper-Nigu required the group members to drag their boats for lengthy stretches. Linda notes that this recent trip would not rank as her personal favorite because of the mosquitoes and the boat dragging (excerpt 14). However, Dan seems to defend the trip when he says, "We purposely chose the upper sections of these rivers to get away from any motorboat traffic...if it's low water, it's our fault for choosing to go that high" (excerpt 15).

Although their comments about mosquitoes, wildlife, and low-water might seem to indicate dissatisfaction with their trip, it is clear that Dan and Linda would have been disappointed had they *not* faced a substantial amount of adversity. They highly value the opportunities for personal growth afforded by lengthy outdoor trips (excerpts 19-20). Dan says, "I think it's good with the kids to be out that long; [t]hey get more and more distant and remote from the things they take for granted..."; and Linda follows his comments by saying, "The virtue of these trips for us is teaching ourselves and our kids to deal with adversity and how to take care of themselves in the wild" (excerpt 20). Dealing with adversity—particularly mosquitoes—also inspired Dan and his family to imagine the difficult lives of the early inhabitants of the area. He says, "[I]t's fun to think that we're here in the year 2001, but somebody was here about 2000 years ago" (excerpt 22). In addition to teaching his kids to deal with adversity, Dan also uses river trips, including the one described here, to teach inexperienced campers about minimum impact camping ethics and practices (excerpts 23-24).

This group encountered a total of 3 other parties on the Noatak River, and they did not encounter anyone at all on the Nigu (excerpts 25-26). Although Dan and Linda clearly prefer not to see or hear others on their river trips, they did not mind the few encounters that they had on the Noatak (excerpts 26-30). Linda explains that she does not mind brief encounters on the water, but she would not want to share a campsite or hear noise from another party camped nearby (excerpt 29).

Consistent with their personal ethics, Dan and Linda seem much more concerned with encountering evidence of other people than with encountering people themselves. Linda and the others saw few campsite impacts along the rivers, which Linda enjoyed because, "You felt like you were the first ones there" (excerpt 31). Brad did encounter some campsite evidence and a small amount of litter, although he agrees with Linda that it was nice to see minimal evidence of other people (excerpts 32-33). There are two issues related to these

group members' distaste for litter and other human evidence. First, campsite impacts and trash are irrefutable evidence that other people have visited the area previously. Referring to a camera case that Jenny found, Brad says, "About the time you think you're the first one there, you look down and find something like that, so it just kind of evaporates it pretty quick" (excerpt 39). However, previous comments by Brad and Dan make it clear that they recognize the Noatak-Nigu area has been inhabited and visited for many years (excerpts 22, 33, 36). It seems that Brad (at least) can seek and enjoy moments of feeling like a first visitor, while simultaneously acknowledging the human history of the area.

A second issue related to human evidence has to do with the "story" that goes with a particular piece of litter. Dan explains that some kinds of litter—rock chips from stone tools, an old 30-caliber rifle shell, an entire rifle that probably bounced off the back of a hunter's snowmobile—are ok, while others—like pampers thrown on the river bank—are not (excerpts 35-37). This seems consistent with the values of self-reliance, mental fortitude, and minimum-impact camping that he and Linda express elsewhere in the interview. Linda summarizes her feelings about litter in excerpts 38 and 39. She explains that "things that have a story" are ok, but "things of human negligence" are not.

In describing the Gates of the Arctic setting, Dan, Linda, and Brad contrast the Noatak area with other Alaskan rivers and with their idealized images of wildness and wilderness. Dan and Linda suggest that the Park is self-limiting, both because access is difficult and expensive, and because river travel requires technical skills that not everyone has (excerpts 40-42). Dan considers Gates of the Arctic to be a wilderness, and he contrasts it with the Gulkana River, which is not a wilderness because it is road-accessible and has "gas stations and motorboat traffic" (excerpt 45). Brad uses stricter criteria for defining the Gates of the Arctic setting. He focuses on the quality of wildness, and describes a truly wild area as one that is unmapped, and "unfettered with roads and trails and where the mark of man is slim to none" (excerpt 43). According to Brad, a wild area does not have to be designated wilderness. In fact, wilderness designation may actually reduce the wild quality of a place (excerpts 44, 48-49, 75). For both Brad and Dan, opportunities for discovery and exploration are essential qualities of wild places and formal wilderness. However, Dan feels that, compared to other places, Gates of the Arctic is relatively unexplored, while Brad says, "As long as you can pick up a...topo map that shows you the other side of the hill...there's no true wilderness" (excerpts 46-49). Ultimately, Brad seems reluctant to call Gates of the Arctic a wilderness and settles instead for describing it as a roadless area (excerpt 49).

Dan and Linda's substantial river experience and strong opinions show through in their comments about Park Service management practices at Gates of the Arctic. They did not have any contact with NPS personnel before or during their trip. However, Sandy and Rick received a thorough backcountry orientation from Fish and Wildlife Service staff at the shared ranger station in Bettles (excerpts 50-51). Linda feels that it is important for people to get "the message about how to take care of the environment" from the Park Service (excerpt 51). She says that most people probably need to receive that message, but she suggests that NPS staff gauge visitor's knowledge before subjecting them to "an hour-long spiel" (excerpt 53).

Dan and the rest of his group were not aware of the NPS recommendation that river groups should have no more than 10 people. Their previous experience with group size limits was on the Tatshenshini River where the maximum size was 15 people (excerpt 54). They suggest that a limit of 10 is arbitrary because certain kinds of groups (party crowds)

have more impact than others, and because it is not always clear how to determine group size (does a 7-month-old baby count as a person?) (excerpts 54-55). However, Dan acknowledges that a party of 13 cannot “have zero impact”, and he says, “The party size is a good recommendation, I guess” (excerpts 55-56).

These group members seem deeply offended by the idea of the NPS requiring the use of bear barrels. Linda says flatly, “I’d be against that” (excerpt 58); and Dan says, “People contemplating those regulations need a reality check” (excerpt 60). They cite their previous experiences in bear country as proof that barrels are not necessary (excerpts 57-58, 60). Brad, a professional wildlife biologist, suggests that clean, temporary camps do not attract bears (excerpt 59). Dan and Linda feel that bear safety is best achieved through proper food storage and handling, which is not guaranteed by the use of bear barrels (excerpts 61-62). The group member’s objections to potential party-size and bear barrel regulations stem from their suspicion that such regulations would be arbitrary and ineffective. Linda says that the regulations would be acceptable only if they were clearly linked to a genuine problem (excerpt 63).

Like many other visitors, Dan and Linda feel that the best way to prevent degradation of the Park setting is to maintain the current system of difficult access (excerpts 65, 67-68). However, they suggest that the main function of difficult access is not so much to limit the absolute number of visitors, but rather the type of people who visit (excerpts 67-68, 70). Linda says, “...when people grow lazy and can get there without much effort, they bring along with them the attitudes that don’t preserve that area (excerpt 67). Linda and her family do express some concern over the fairness of limiting access to those who can afford it (excerpts 69-74). However, they recount the story of meeting three young visitors on the Noatak who had bartered for a charter flight into the Park as proof that, “...if there’s a will, there’s a way” (excerpt 72).

These group members claim that they would support formal limits on visitor use if visitor numbers were clearly causing what they call “camper blight” (excerpts 64-66). However, they feel that regulations of any kind reduce the quality of wildness that they treasure (excerpts 75-77). They also indicate that mandatory permits would reduce the freedom and spontaneity of their trips (excerpts 78-80). Dan explains that, “...the drawback [of permits] to us is that you’re not perfectly free to do what you want” (excerpt 78). Dan and Linda indicate that they would “go somewhere else” if the Noatak became a permitted river (excerpt 81). However, it is not the idea of permits or restrictions on personal freedom that would displace the couple. They view permits as an indication that significant impacts have already occurred in an area. They would choose not to visit a permitted river because, to them, permits are an indicator of other undesirable setting qualities (excerpt 81). It is worth noting that Dan and Linda have visited the Tatshenshini River (a permitted area) at least twice (excerpt 65), and Brad has visited the Salmon River (which he acknowledges is highly regulated in parts) on several occasions (excerpt 68). It seems that, while these respondents object to the idea of a new permit system on the Noatak, they are willing to accept other systems that are already in place.

721BTT17 Sven and Tom

This father and son pair suffered an accident during the very first moments of their float trip down the North Fork of the Koyukuk, and it shaped the remainder of their

experience. A low-hanging branch that extended all the way across the river channel overturned their canoe, causing them to lose several pieces of equipment—including their paddles—and soaking the rest of their gear (excerpts 6-7). After an extended effort, Sven and Tom were able to rescue their slightly damaged canoe and move their gear to a nearby gravel bar, where they built a fire and dried out. However, without their paddles, they were helpless to continue.

Several factors contributed to the accident and its aftermath. The pilot who flew Sven and Tom to their pre-arranged put-in point dropped them off even after seeing the river conditions and making the comment that he would not bring anybody else that high on the river because it was too dangerous (excerpt 7). Although he has considerable canoeing experience, Sven admits that he and Tom had little experience with the kind of canoe they were using, and little experience canoeing on rivers in general (excerpt 8). Once the boat turned over, Tom found that his hip-waders filled with water, making it impossible to hold onto the canoe or drag himself anywhere (excerpt 9). In contrast, Sven's knee-high boots allowed him to stay mobile (excerpt 10). The method that Sven and Tom used to tie their gear into the canoe made it difficult to retrieve anything once it had turned over, and threatened to drown Tom when his foot became entangled in the rope (excerpt 11). Perhaps most significantly, their food and equipment was not stored in sufficiently watertight containers (excerpt 12). As a result, the radio which they might have used to contact aircraft passing overhead was soaked and useless (excerpts 13-14).

Given their predicament, Sven and Tom's feelings about seeing other people were significantly different than they might have been otherwise. Throughout the interview, they make comments that suggest they would normally prefer to see few other parties during their outdoor trips (excerpts 21, 35, 37-38). However, following their accident, they were thrilled to encounter another party camping nearby. In fact, Sven suggests that seeing the other party was one of the best moments of the trip (excerpt 17).

Even prior to seeing the other party, Sven and Tom knew that their pilot would be returning in 8 days with a new group of visitors. Although they felt confident they would be rescued eventually, they were concerned about missing the airplane and felt reluctant to leave the immediate area (excerpt 18). After several days and a series of contacts with two-different aircraft, they were finally assured of a rescue. At that point, Sven explains, "the pressure kind of dropped" and they were able to relax, go fishing, and enjoy the setting (excerpts 19-20).

Sven has been visiting Alaska for 13 years and he has participated in several outdoor trips during that time (excerpts 1, 21, 23). He first visited Gates of the Arctic one year ago when a friend from Fairbanks flew him into Walker Lake (excerpt 3). The trip to Walker Lake inspired him to invite Tom for a return visit (excerpt 3). Tom had never been to Alaska prior to this summer, but he visited Kenai Fjords and Denali National Parks before coming to Gates of the Arctic. He explains that he had difficulty getting information about trips and outfitters in the Park (excerpt 5). He eventually chose a trip on the North Fork primarily because it required only a one-way charter flight. The one-way flight was attractive because it freed them from the constraint of meeting a pick-up deadline, and it was cheaper as well (excerpt 4).

For both Sven and Tom, the number one characteristic that differentiates Gates of the Arctic from other places they have visited is remoteness. Sven gives a detailed description of a previous outdoor adventure in Alaska, but seems to discount it near the end, saying, "But

that's...that was more populated; this was more remote" (excerpt 21). Because Sven and Tom were initially unable to make contact with any aircraft, overflights in their area actually accentuated the feeling of remoteness on the ground (excerpt 22).

Remoteness is also described as an important characteristic of wilderness and wilderness experiences (excerpt 23). For Sven and Tom, one less-tangible quality of wilderness seems related to the context or mode of experiencing a setting. When Tom visited Denali National Park prior to his trip with Sven, he was surrounded by beautiful mountain scenery and wildlife, but he says he "didn't see too much wilderness there" because he viewed the setting from a bus (excerpt 24). In contrast, wildlife is described as a significant feature of the setting and the feel of the place at Gates of the Arctic, even though Sven and Tom saw very few animals directly. Wolves, in particular, are important. Sven says, "I like to be out in a place where you can hear the wolves. That meant a lot to me, hearing the wolves yipping" (excerpt 29). And Tom constructs an elaborate hypothetical scenario to link howling wolves, a bellowing moose, and ravens circling overhead (excerpts 26-27). In Gates of the Arctic, mere evidence of wildlife is described as an important feature of the setting, whereas in Denali actually seeing animals was far less significant.

Sven and Tom do not feel that the Park Service or their pilot was responsible for their accident. In fact, Sven says that the Park Service told them everything they needed to know, including warning them about low-hanging branches on the river (excerpt 30). They do suggest that the Park Service is over-cautious when it comes to bears (excerpt 30). Although they didn't mind carrying bear barrels for their food, the barrels proved to be a serious liability when they were forced to carry their gear over land (excerpts 32-33).

Sven and Tom feel that the Park Service can avoid many problems associated with visitor use if they continue to keep roads and motorized vehicles—except for airplanes—away from the Park. They are strongly supportive of the idea of a limited permit system to prevent what they feel is inevitable crowding at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 35-38). In fact, Sven seems to suggest that a limited permit system could even improve current conditions in the Park (excerpt 35). Their support is based on positive experiences with permits at Boundary Waters, and negative experiences with crowding at several southwestern national parks (excerpts 37-38). In addition, they do not think that permits would be much of a burden on visitors because, in contrast to other national parks, visitors to Gates of the Arctic are not day-trippers or "weekenders" and they must plan their trips well in advance (excerpt 36). Their only obvious concern with limited permits is also linked to advance planning; they feel that it is important for permits to be made available to visitors well before they arrive (excerpt 39).

Given the accident that colored their whole experience, it is not surprising that Sven and Tom are strongly in favor of having visitors register with the Park Service (excerpts 40-41). Tom feels that registering is an important safety step, "like filing a flight plan, [I]f you don't show up, somebody is going to be looking for you" (excerpt 40).

722BTT18 Dick, Dave, Edward, Ray

These four friends from New York took an eight-day float trip on the John River. They began at Hunt's Fork on August 11th and finished at the confluence of the John and Koyukuk rivers on the 18th. Dick had visited Gates of the Arctic four times previously, but this was the first trip to Alaska for the rest of the group (excerpt 6). Dick and his friends

have been taking an annual vacation, aiming to visit a different location each time, for the last 22 years (excerpts 5, 18). They chose to visit Gates of the Arctic based on Dick's recommendation and because they were interested in "getting somewhere remote" (excerpt 2). Other than remoteness, there was no particular quality that attracted the group members to Gates of the Arctic for this trip (excerpt 1). Instead, they seem to view the Park merely as a novel setting for their annual excursion. In response to a question about how this trip differed from others he or the group had taken in the past, Dick says, "Well, we've been on these kind of trip before. We've done kayak trips, bicycle trips. We were in the Everglades last year" (excerpt 3). He then goes on to explain that he did not feel the same sense of anticipation for this trip as for others in the past because he is now familiar with the "outdoor experience" (excerpt 4). Dick seems to view this trip as one of a class of events—"the annual trip"—rather than a singularly memorable or significant experience. His lack of anticipation is most likely related to his four previous visits to Gates of the Arctic. However, other comments made by he and his friends seem to indicate that their rather lukewarm response to the trip is due to the easy, even boring conditions that they faced. For instance, Ray says that floating the river was so easy that he fell asleep a few times, and Dick jokes that they had to tie themselves into the boats to keep from falling out [while sleeping] (excerpt 7). Edward says, "I wouldn't worry about my grandchildren riding in a raft down the John" (excerpt 9). The lack of any objective challenges during the trip seems to have left this group slightly uninspired. One specific drawback to the easy nature of the trip is described by Dick. He suggests that experiencing such mild river and weather conditions as they did could lead to dangerous misconceptions about the nature of arctic weather and subsequent poor preparation on future trips (excerpts 11-12).

Despite the unchallenging nature of the trip, the members of this group share a "take it as it comes" philosophy that leads them to view the trip as a whole in a positive light (excerpts 13-15). Ray explains that, "the wilderness doesn't have any negatives"; and Dave concludes, "...if something happens, that's just part of the trip" (excerpts 14 and 15).

When asked about other people they saw during their trip, the group expressed mixed reactions. A visit with two area residents—Bill and Lill at Crevice Creek—was clearly positive in nature. Ray describes the meeting as "entertaining" and later he mentions the couple while discussing remoteness and the "grit" that would be required to live in the Park area year-round (excerpts 20, 22). In contrast, the group seems slightly bothered by a party of seven that they encountered repeatedly during the first two days of the trip. Edward explains that seeing no other parties was not their highest priority for the trip, so they were not upset by the encounters (excerpt 18). However, the group members clearly explain that they do prefer not to see others (excerpts 18-19, 41). In addition, Dick notes that the other party seemed to impact wildlife viewing, and Edward admits that he and his friends would not have been happy to maintain contact with the other party for all eight days of their trip (excerpts 17-18).

Seeing wildlife is an important theme in this group's story, which reveals some underlying meanings that the members hold for Gates of the Arctic. In excerpts 23-27, the group members discuss their pre-trip expectations for wildlife viewing. In general, they expected to see abundant wildlife, but they actually saw relatively little. However, seeing less wildlife than they expected enhanced their opinion of the place. Dick suggests that television portrayals of wildlife in places like Denali depict situations that "just aren't in the wild" (excerpt 28). In contrast, wildlife that is genuinely "wild" behaves more like the wolf

described in excerpt 29—curious but extremely wary of people. Ray suggests that the behavior of animals is an indicator of wildness (excerpt 30). In places like Denali, animals are accustomed to people so “they come out and they’re not bothered by them”, but in wild places such as Gates of the Arctic or the Bob Marshall Wilderness, “they avoid us like the plague and that’s why we don’t see them.” Therefore, according to the group, having a few wildlife sightings in a truly wild context is more meaningful than having numerous sightings in a setting like that at Denali, where wildlife is abundant but less wild and typically viewed through the window of a bus (excerpt 31).

In addition to wildness, the group describes other unique and important qualities of Gates of the Arctic including remoteness, little evidence of other people, 24-hour daylight, scale, and quiet (excerpts 32-39). Remoteness and scale are qualities that can be viewed on a map, but also experienced first-hand while traveling. Remoteness is both enhanced and reduced by the small airplanes used to access the Park. On one hand, aircraft make rivers in the Park easily accessible (excerpt 33). On the other hand, travel by aircraft allows visitors to view the scale of the Park and distance between settlements, a view which would otherwise be limited when traveling in mountain valleys (excerpt 38). Experiencing little evidence of other people, such as noise, trash, and private-property signage is described as an important feature of a wilderness experience and, by implication, an important quality of wilderness (excerpt 34). Excerpt 34 is significant because, in response to a question about what makes a wilderness *experience*, the group members list setting features. It seems that, for them, a wilderness experience is any experience that takes place in a wilderness setting.

The group member’s responses to questions about the management of Gates of the Arctic reveal a complex set of issues and underlying values that they readily admit are contradictory. While Edward and Ray describe their interaction with Rangers in Bettles as friendly and helpful (excerpt 40), they are clear that they do not want to see any rangers in the backcountry (excerpt 41). At first they imply that it is not rangers that they specifically object to, but rather seeing any other people at all. However, their comments about the relative insignificance of seeing others earlier in the interview seem to contradict these later statements. A more significant issue may be the feeling that rangers in the backcountry are there to observe and police. As Dick says, “you don’t want to go camping where you’ve got somebody looking over your shoulders” (excerpt 41).

The group members characterize the Park Service as an adversary with an inclination to “shut down” park areas nationwide (excerpts 44-48). While acknowledging that some parks, such as Yellowstone, have too many visitors and need controlled access, they fear that the Park Service will exert more and more unnecessary controls on park access in the future. Dave, in particular, feels that access to many parks will soon be limited and that the threat of “shutdowns” makes the Park Service an intimidating force (excerpts 45-47). The group members suggest that controls on access will have a multiplicative effect because they will drive up visitation costs which will further restrict access to only those who can afford it (excerpts 49-52). In addition, they are concerned that use-limits will lead to waiting lists, and given their ages, a lengthy wait could prevent access altogether (excerpt 53). This group’s perception of the Park Service as an adversary may be partially based on their uncertainty about what exactly park managers do. Dick asks repeatedly about what managers at Gates of the Arctic do, and later he suggests that the Park Service could gain better public support through an educational effort to explain its purpose (excerpts 56-59).

Although they fear the imposition of use-limits, the group members suggest that many problems could be mitigated by preemptive management actions. Dick suggest that early establishment of use limits is better than waiting until use-levels get too high and then denying access to current visitors (excerpts 54-55). In the specific case of Gates of the Arctic, the group members feel that maintaining self-limiting features of the Park such as no road access may prevent the need for visitor use limits (excerpts 42-43).

The discussions of wildlife, use-limits, and particularly the self-limiting qualities of Gates of the Arctic indicate that this group perceives a spectrum of different Park places and respective opportunities. Regarding wildlife, they note that Denali and Gates of the Arctic provide opportunities for viewing animals in significantly different contexts (except 31). Also, they note that Yellowstone will always have more people because it is easily accessible, and they insist that access at Gates should not be improved for handicapped visitors because there are plenty of other accessible parks. Dave even suggests that Gates of the Arctic might serve as a sort of overflow sight for parks with set limits on visitation (excerpt 60). This insight is significant in light of the emerging movement to consider use limits in a regional context rather than on a park-by-park basis.

Finally, with regard to the existing voluntary visitor registration system at Gates of the Arctic, this group perceives two primary functions. First, they feel that registration serves a safety function by tracking where visitors go. Second, they feel that registering provides the opportunity for visitors to receive information about the Park and the free bear-barrel program (excerpts 61-62).

724CFX19 Eric and Kelly

Eric and Kelly are newlyweds from New York. They flew one-way from Coldfoot to near Pyramid Creek on July 11th, then hiked for 9 days to the Dalton Highway where they hitchhiked back to their starting point. The trip was part of a five-week honeymoon in Alaska. They chose to visit Alaska, and Gates of the Arctic in particular, for several reasons. They wanted to “do something big” to celebrate their honeymoon and Kelly’s last summer off before finishing medical school (excerpt 2). In addition, they wanted to see a range of different Alaskan places, and to participate in both sea-kayaking and backpacking (excerpts 2, 7). Finally, they wanted to avoid main tourist areas, particularly places with cruise-ship package tourists (excerpt 3). They visited Glacier Bay National Park before going to Gates of the Arctic. While their visit to Glacier Bay was well-planned, they had difficulty finding information about parks in interior Alaska. In fact, they chose not to visit Denali in part because of uncertainty about what they “had to do for reservations” (excerpt 7). Because they had difficulty finding information on Gates of the Arctic in New York, they planned to travel to Fairbanks and make further arrangements there. In Fairbanks they met a man who lived south of the Park at Wild Lake, and he helped them plan their trip. Cost and uncertainty were the two primary factors that led them to select a trip near Dalton Highway (excerpts 4-6). By planning their hiking route to finish at the highway, they only had to pay for a one-way charter flight. A seemingly more important factor than cost, however, was the uncertainty associated with planning a fixed-date, remote bush-plane pickup. With no experience in the area, Eric and Kelly were not sure how far they could hike in their allotted time and they were concerned that bad weather could hold up their flight for days. As Kelly explains, [by choosing to finish at the highway] “We don’t have to worry about being in a

certain place for the plane to pick us up, we don't have to worry about weather holding the plane up, and we don't have to pay for it" (excerpt 4).

Eric and Kelly are experienced backpackers, but they are most familiar with eastern natural areas—especially the Adirondack Mountains and the Appalachian Trail, which they make several references to. One of the primary differences between this trip and their past experiences was the lack of other people. Eric says that not seeing others was an important goal of his (excerpt 8). Although he met this goal, he is a little disappointed that they did see evidence of other people, including footprints, some litter, and some air traffic (excerpts 8-10). Eric explains that evidence of others prevented him from feeling like he was the first visitor to the area, and as a result, Gates of the Arctic "was not ultimate wilderness like [he and Kelly] were hoping for" (excerpt 10). However, Eric later says that, although it may not have been ultimate wilderness, "It's the most wilderness we've ever been in" (excerpt 40). In addition, although Kelly says that daily overflights would have been bothersome, Eric notes that they can be comforting because they might serve a safety function in case of an accident (excerpts 14-15). Kelly is clearly less disturbed by evidence of others. She says that, "the footprints didn't bother me at all" and compares their experience to hiking on trails in the east, where encounters are frequent (excerpt 11).

Lack of trails had a significant influence on Eric and Kelly's experience. Eric feels that ecological impacts are often concentrated around trails and the open tundra terrain in Gates of the Arctic allows hikers to spread out and practice true minimum impact techniques. In addition, with no trails to follow, he and Kelly faced the enjoyable daily challenge of route-finding (excerpt 37). The open terrain offered a stark contrast to the heavily-treed areas and obstructed views that Eric and Kelly are more familiar with (excerpts 31-32). In fact, Kelly admits that she "missed the trees" and Eric suggests they might have spent more time in the treed portions of the park had they known there would be so few of them (excerpt 30). For Kelly, hiking on tundra was a novel experience that was extra special because it is specifically disallowed in the Adirondack Mountains that she is familiar with (excerpt 38). Kelly also enjoyed learning to hike on the tundra and to identify which plants are good indicators of easy or difficult hiking conditions (excerpts 16-17, 28).

In addition to the tundra, another novel feature of this trip for Eric and Kelly was the perceived threat of grizzly bears. They were careful to keep cooking smells away from their sleeping area, even occasionally hiking a distance after dinner before setting up camp (excerpt 24). Kelly describes making a lot of noise while hiking to prevent an unwanted bear encounter, which may have prevented them from seeing other wildlife as well (excerpt 23). Eric explains that he was willing to trade wildlife sightings to avoid a bear encounter, but Kelly says she was "bummed" not to see more wildlife (excerpt 22). Partially as a result of seeing little wildlife, Kelly focused more of her attention on the diverse and hardy plants in the Park (excerpt 27).

One less-tangible difference between this trip and others that Eric and Kelly have taken in the past is that this time they were not focused on "making miles" or reaching a certain destination (excerpt 21). For most of the trip they were able to relax and enjoy the setting. Eric makes a distinction between their "toughest" day which involved facing and overcoming a challenge, and their "worst" day, which was comparatively unrewarding (excerpts 19-20). During their last two days in the Park, Eric and Kelly became focused on reaching the highway and endured what they identified as the worst part of their trip. They

attribute this worst part to hurrying: "If you're not in a hurry you'll have a good trip. And the last day we were in a hurry because we wanted to get some burgers" (excerpt 18).

In addition to tundra, traillessness, open terrain, and bears, Eric and Kelly mention several other significant characteristics of the setting that they experienced. Closely related to the openness of the terrain is the quality of scale. For Kelly in particular, awareness of the scale of the park is a "happy thought", although in her view such size almost necessitates relying on airplane access (excerpts 33-35). Eric describes seeing the aftermath of a large landslide as one of the best parts of the trip (excerpt 26). Twenty-four hour daylight made it difficult to sleep for both Eric and Kelly, and they admit they are looking forward to "going back home and having nighttime" (excerpt 29). Rapidly changing weather made dressing for the conditions a constant challenge (excerpt 35). One quality that is attributed more to the region than the Park itself is isolation. Isolation differs from remoteness in that it implies being far from goods and services rather than simply distant or hard to get to. For Eric, isolation heightens the need for self-sufficiency because even in town (Coldfoot) there are few goods available (excerpt 36).

As noted previously, despite being slightly disappointed at seeing evidence of other people, Eric and Kelly feel that Gates of the Arctic is the closest thing to "ultimate wilderness" that they have experienced. They list the primary qualities that make it a wilderness as lack of other people, lack of man-made structures (including trails), and remoteness (excerpts 39-40, 42). Kelly also explains that seeing abundant signs of wildlife, especially caribou antlers and bones, was important to the wilderness feel of the area. For Eric, the key feature distinguishing Gates of the Arctic from other wilderness areas is the lack of what he calls "forced concentrations of impact" (management infrastructure such as trails and campsites) (excerpt 43). Eric seems to say that, while management infrastructure is necessary in many places, it has a negative effect on wilderness character. The thing that makes Gates of the Arctic near to being "ultimate wilderness" is its lack of infrastructure.

Eric feels that little management action or infrastructure is needed at Gates because it has many self-limiting qualities. From his perspective, difficult access and terrain, and lack of trails limits both the number and types of users who visit the park (excerpt 44, 46-47). Not being able to rely on the Park Service to initiate search and rescue operations is also described as a limiting factor (excerpt 45). Eric feels that visitor use limits are effective in preserving scenic beauty at Baxter State Park (excerpt 49), and badly needed at Smokey Mountains National Park (excerpt 47). However, he feels that at Gates of the Arctic, encouraging responsible use by visitors and developing regional opportunities for visitors who might prefer a front-country setting, are better options than strict use limits (excerpts 48-49).

Eric and Kelly are supportive of visitor registration systems and they sought out the opportunity to register at both Glacier Bay and Gates of the Arctic. Kelly explains that they are accustomed to registering at recreation areas in the east, and while in Alaska they registered out of habit (50-52). There is more than habit at work, however, because it is clear that Eric and Kelly believe visitor registration serves an important safety function (excerpts 58-59). Kelly also feels that registration can serve a needed educational function, and she would support having a mandatory registration program for that reason. Eric, on the other hand, feels that most visitors to Gates of the Arctic will either have all the information they need or they will seek it out without being forced to by a regulation (excerpt 56). He also

suggests that the kind of visitors attracted to Gates may be particularly averse to a mandatory registration program (excerpt 57).

726CFX20 Paul, Gwen, Donna, Scott, Ron

This group of friends from Anchorage and Fairbanks spent 12 days floating the Noatak River, from Twelve-Mile Slough to Lake Kavachurak. They began their trip by flying from Prospect Camp on the Dalton Highway to Bettles, and then on to the river. (Excerpts 1-3). They chose to begin their trip from Prospect Camp because they thought it would be cheaper than flying from Fairbanks, and because they wanted to enjoy the scenic drive on the Dalton Highway. In fact, they planned from the beginning to spend an additional day driving further north on the highway at the conclusion of their float trip, to see Wiseman, “some of the Bob Marshall kinds of things”, and a few other sites along the way (excerpts 9-10).

All of the group members are long-time Alaska residents with experience canoeing on various backcountry rivers. Scott and his wife (who did not participate in the interview) had not been north of the Arctic Circle prior to this trip, but the other two couples had considerable previous experience in and around the Gates of the Arctic area. Ron and Donna, from Fairbanks, have been on the Kobuk and Alatna Rivers, and visited Iniakuk Lodge, near the border of the Park (excerpts 4, 12). Paul and Gwen, who moved to Alaska in the early 1970s, are former private pilots who have traveled extensively in arctic Alaska. Their first visit to Bettles was in 1974, well before establishment of Gates of the Arctic National Park (excerpts 11, 13).

Ron explains that their main reason for choosing to visit the Noatak River was the ability to hike above tree level and see the country. He says that on many other rivers, it is impossible to hike or see very far because of dense willows and trees. In contrast, the tundra terrain along the Noatak allows for easy hiking and access to surrounding hills. According to Ron, “...the most interesting thing about the Noatak...[is that] you’re out in the country and not just passing through it on a stream” (excerpt 8). The group specifically designed their trip to allow for a day of hiking after each day of paddling (excerpts 5, 7). Although a mutual appreciation for canoeing brought this group together (excerpt 4), Paul says that canoeing was not the focus of this trip, but instead it was “a way to get into some spectacular country you can’t get into otherwise” (excerpt 6).

Despite their past canoeing experiences, the group was surprised by the difficulty of the portage from Twelve-Mile Slough to the river. In fact, they identified it as the worst part of their trip (excerpts 14-15). Donna explains that it might not have been so bad had they known what to expect, but a casual comment by their pilot led the group to believe that the portage would be much easier than it was (excerpt 15). In an opposite fashion, the group members were pleasantly surprised to find that there were fewer people on the river than they expected. In Bettles, an NPS ranger told them that the Noatak is the most heavily used and impacted river in the Park (excerpt 24). Following a short period when they leapfrogged with a raft party, the group went nearly a week without seeing any other visitors. Paul says that after that first week, the group was thinking, “Wow! If this is the Noatak loaded with people, this isn’t very many” (excerpt 24). Following that quiet first week, however, they encountered a group of 8 and two solo travelers. The group members express mixed feelings about those encounters. Gwen narrowly missed being caught bathing by the group of eight

(excerpt 18). Paul says it was “almost a little disappointing” to see so many others after a week during which they only encountered one other party. However, he enjoyed hearing enthusiastic yells from another group as they canoed over some falls, and, although he would have “preferred less folks” near the end of the trip, he also says that seeing a person or two “out in the wilderness” can be “kind of reassuring in a way” (excerpt 22). At Lake Kavachurak, their final destination, the group members found themselves camped near 10 other people. Gwen says: “...16 people within eyesight, [t]hat was crowded, the most crowded I felt” (excerpt 22). In regards to impacts or evidence of other visitors, Ron says that Lake Kavachurak was the only place where they could tell that people had camped before (excerpt 23).

While the group was pleased to see fewer people than they expected, they seemed slightly disappointed to see fewer bears and other animals than they expected (excerpts 24-26). They did see one bear, as well as two musk oxen, foxes, sheep, and a variety of birds (excerpt 27). However, their attention was more often focused on flowers. Scott says, “...probably the things we saw 9 times out of 10 were the flowers, the things we were pointing out were the flowers” (excerpt 26).

In regards to the nature of the Noatak River area, the group members describe it as somewhat self-limiting because it is remote, difficult to access, and dangerous. Scott says, “I think you could die in their easy, [y]ou got to know what you’re doing” (excerpt 30). And Ron, citing bears and limited opportunities for rescue, says, “That puts an edge on your enjoyment, knowing that there is danger there” (excerpt 31). Although they identify other people and evidence of people, like campsite impacts and airplanes, as the most significant negative impacts on wildness, the group feels that the Noatak area is a relatively wild place (excerpts 32, 33, 49). Scott, in particular feels that limited signs of human use lent a feeling of wildness to the river, even if the presence of others meant that the area was “not totally wild” (excerpts 32-33).

Both at the beginning and at the end of their trip, the group members enjoyed positive interactions with NPS staff in Bettles. Gwen felt that the backcountry orientation was laid-back, as it should be because, “...the kind of people that come up and fly in for a wilderness trip are not ones that want to be led around by the nose” (excerpt 37). She also enjoyed identifying tracks and plants with a ranger after returning to Bettles (excerpt 38). Likewise, Ron enjoyed interacting with staff people who were knowledgeable about the area, and Scott appreciated the free bear barrel program (excerpt 40).

All of the group members feel that increased visitor use, particular on the Noatak River, is inevitable. Paul suggests that the Noatak, along with the North Fork of the Koyukuk, are two of the prime attractions in the Brooks Range (excerpt 42). Early in the interview, he predicts—without prompting—that the Noatak will be the first river in the area to have a limited permit system (excerpt 43). He feels that increased visitation at Gates of the Arctic is at least partially due to attention attracted solely as a result of the area becoming a national park. He points to a similar situation at the nearby Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where he has heard that visitation has skyrocketed because of the national debate regarding oil development. According to Paul, making the area a national park not only increased visitation, it also changed the composition of the visitor population from mainly local-area hunters and fisherman, to tourists (excerpt 44). Paul compares the Noatak River to the Yosemite National Park that he new in the 1960s. He remembers uncrowded and

unrestricted visits to that park, laments the changes, and predicts that similar changes are in store for the Noatak River (excerpt 45).

Despite Paul's nostalgia for the days of unrestricted access, the group as a whole clearly supports the idea of limited permit systems in general and in the specific context of Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 46-51). Although they value "open access" they are willing to sacrifice it to protect both the land and the "experience they came for" (excerpts 47-48). Scott describes visiting a different permitted area as a "fantastic experience" that is worth the hassle of signing up and planning in advance because the alternative might be finding "...everything all trashed and overrun and crowded..." (excerpt 51). Gwen feels that limiting access is warranted to protect the essence of wilderness, which she identifies as "wild country" with nothing and no one there (excerpt 49). Furthermore, she suggests that obtaining a permit would not place an undue burden on visitors to the Noatak because they must plan and prepare for their trips well in advance (excerpt 50).

The group also expresses support for a mandatory registration and orientation program. They do not feel that being required to check in with the Park Service would have a negative impact on their experience (excerpt 52). Scott feels that a mandatory orientation could provide opportunities to educate visitors about minimizing their impacts and, "...make it easy for people to do the right thing on their trip" (excerpts 54-55).

At two different points in the interview, the group members suggest making visitors aware of other locations in and around Gates of the Arctic in order to disperse use and reduce impacts. Scott suggests promoting different sections of the Noatak River so that all visitors do not congregate in the same places (excerpt 56). Later in the interview, Ron seems to independently develop a similar idea. He says, "Spreading the use out helps too...[t]here are lots of interesting rivers that are remote in Alaska...[t]here are enough places to go for people who want a wilderness experience" (excerpt 57).

728CFX21 Sue, Jaime, William, Bert, Ben

These respondents represent half of a 10-person group that spent 5 days hiking near the eastern border of Gates of the Arctic. The group members are all friends who met in graduate school in the New England area, but now live in different locations around the country. Two of the members live in Fairbanks, and they were primarily responsible for planning the trip. The other half of this group did not participate in the interview because they were rushing back to Fairbanks to catch return flights home.

The group members began their trip by driving north from Fairbanks on the Dalton Highway. At Trembley Creek they hiked two days into the Park and then set up a base camp (excerpt 3). They chose to access the Park from the highway because it was cheaper than flying (excerpt 1), and they chose to hike up Trembley Creek because they wanted to view Mount Doonerak (excerpt 2). They originally planned to split into two travel groups and hike two different routes, but changed their plans once the trip began (excerpts 14, 15). On the first day of the trip, the group's progress was slowed by heavy packs and difficult route-finding (excerpt 4). After traveling only half as far as planned, the group members found themselves all together and they opted to set up a base-camp rather than attempt to split up and complete loop routes as they originally envisioned. Although they were aware of the Park recommendation that hiking groups be no larger than 6 people, and they found that traveling in a large group was cumbersome (excerpt 14), the group members agree that

changing their plans was a good decision. Jaime was originally against establishing a base camp, but she found that being free from their heavy packs allowed the group members to explore and enjoy the park in ways they would not have otherwise (excerpt 5). William says, "It was much easier to experience [the Park] when you're not busy experiencing your pack" (excerpt 5), and Sue agrees, saying that the group was able to play on the day-hikes, as opposed to "trudge, trudge, trudge" (excerpt 6). One specific day-hike, when the group spontaneously decided to climb a nearby peak, was clearly the highlight of the trip (excerpts 16-17). Standing at the top of the peak, the group members were able to see beyond the narrow valley they had been in and appreciate the tremendous scale of the park (excerpt 18). The experience of getting down the peak, however, was more significant than the view from the top. When describing their descent, all of the group members became animated and boisterous. Jaime enthusiastically recalls the different types of scree on the mountainside and the experience of slipping, sliding, and running down it (excerpt 19). William describes the descent as, "The best scree running [he has] ever done." For him, the scree running experience was especially significant because it is banned (due to the impacts it causes) in the other parks he has visited (excerpt 20).

In addition to the scree running, this group's trip was characterized by other novel experiences and a high degree of uncertainty. Many elements of the trip were new to the group members because they had never been to Gates of the Arctic before. Long daylight hours caused the group to shift and extend their daily schedule. Sue recalls looking at her watch to find that they had just eaten lunch at 6:00 p.m. (excerpts 32-33)! While planning for their trip, the group was unsure if routes that looked passable on the map would actually be passable on the ground (excerpt 10). They were even uncertain that they would be able to access the Park at all, because access by foot requires wading the Dietrich River (excerpts 10, 24). The group members found that their maps were almost useless for picking specific hiking routes because details like small cliffs and waterfalls were not shown (excerpts 8-9, 11). Game trails, also not shown on maps, proved to be the easiest travel routes. After taking two days to reach their base-camp area, the group members who had flights to catch in Fairbanks immediately following the trip became concerned about time (excerpt 34). However, finding a game trail on their return hike allowed them to cover the same distance in a matter of hours (excerpts 11-12).

In general, the group members feel that the uncertainty they faced was a positive feature of their trip. In contrast to their previous experiences in New England, where trails and detailed guidebooks are common, the group found that the relatively uncharted terrain in Gates of the Arctic offered ample opportunities to explore and discover (excerpts 25-27, 29-31). Also, establishing a base camp relatively close to the highway meant that, despite their uncertainties, they were never too far from safety (excerpt 22).

Wildlife does not feature very prominently in these group members' reconstructions of their experiences (excerpts 35-39). Although they did see a bear while hiking, and numerous signs of other animals, most of the wildlife they saw was sighted from the road, before or after their backcountry trip began. They were, however, concerned about bears and bear safety. They were very happy to borrow bear barrels from the Coldfoot Visitor Center, and they went to extra trouble to secure them when they realized they would be arriving after-hours in Coldfoot (excerpts 58-60).

In addition to the qualities of openness (excerpts 41-43, 52), and large-scale (excerpts 18, 44) which were mentioned previously, the group members describe the Park environment

as extremely fragile. Many of the group members are trained biologists and they quickly recognized the delicate nature of the ground cover in the areas they traveled (excerpts 46-47). Although they made efforts to camp and travel on durable surfaces, they chose not to camp on river gravel bars because of fears about rising water (excerpt 7).

This group did not encounter any other people in the Park, and only a very few signs of others (excerpts 48-50). Interestingly, they did encounter a couple of tethered llamas that were likely being used as pack animals—a clearly incongruous presence in the Park that none of the group commented further on. Whereas the lack of people often features prominently in others' descriptions of the Park setting, this group was not focused on that particular quality. They agree that the Park is a wilderness, but rather than lack of people, they suggest that the qualities that make it wilderness are difficult access and roadlessness (excerpts 45, 51-53). Another quality of wilderness that they mention is freedom. Sue suggests that, next to typical national parks like Yellowstone, Olympic, and Denali, she prefers BLM and Forest Service lands because they are less restricted (excerpt 70). For her, at least, having fewer restrictions makes a place "more of a wilderness" (excerpt 68, 70). However, she and Jaime note that with that freedom comes some added responsibility for one's personal safety (excerpt 71). Sue and Bert have been displaced from Denali (or at least prevented from visiting) by complex regulations, and Sue particularly values the opportunity to visit an area where the Park Service issues recommendations rather than regulations (excerpts 66, 69). However, she suggests that Gates of the Arctic will need to be more strictly regulated if it ever becomes a "hot spot" (excerpt 66). Jaime also suggests that the need for regulations is tied to the amount of visitation (excerpt 67).

William reports that he had difficulty getting information over the phone from NPS staff (excerpts 55-56). He feels that "in the spirit of keeping Gates of the Arctic a wilderness", the NPS is purposely reluctant to give out information. William seems to think that this is an acceptable practice, but he feels that the NPS should be more up front about their intentions, rather than "sort of skirting around" the issue.

It was not until they called the Fairbanks park headquarters, after making preliminary plans for their trip, that this group became aware of the Park Service's group-size recommendation (excerpts 61-65). Afterwards, they read about the size-limit on the Park website. They also called the Coldfoot Visitor Center and ended up registering by phone, but it is not clear if they were reminded a third time of the size recommendation (excerpt 56). These respondents were clearly concerned about the impact they might cause as a large group, and they certainly seem supportive of the idea of traveling in smaller groups (excerpts 62-63). However, a strict group-size regulation might have displaced them altogether (excerpt 65). On the one hand, they had already committed to having a group of at least 8 people, so a strict regulation limiting group size to 6 people would have displaced them on practical grounds. There also appears to be an important symbolic issue to consider. Near the end of the interview, when Sue acknowledges that, "it would have been nicer to have a smaller group," Jaime responds by saying, "But it would have been a shame not to be *allowed* to go with the group we had." [her emphasis (excerpt 65)]. Given this group's comments regarding freedom and regulations, a group size regulation may have had a negative impact on the nature of their experience, even if it did not result in physical displacement from the Park.

730CFX22 Peter

Peter spent 10 days on a solo hiking trip near the Tinayguk River in the eastern portion of Gates of the Arctic. He is a very experienced hiker who has been traveling and backpacking in various national parks almost continuously for 3 years, but this was his first trip in Alaska. Peter first became interested in visiting Gates of the Arctic two years ago, but he did not make any concrete plans for his trip until one week before it began. In contrast to other Park visitors who have to make trip arrangements well in advance, Peter's "non-stop backpacking" lifestyle allows him to make and change plans at the last minute (excerpt 1). He began his trip by driving the Dalton Highway from Fairbanks to Coldfoot, and then flying from there into the park. Cost was the primary factor in his decision to fly from Coldfoot. In addition, he was interested in seeing the Alaska Pipeline, which he regards as a landmark in the same class as the St. Louis Arch (excerpt 2).

Peter was attracted to Gates of the Arctic by the promise of unique scenery and terrain, long daylight hours north of the Arctic Circle, and remoteness (excerpt 3). He lists several qualities that made the Park seem particularly remote prior to his arrival. First of all, it is located in Alaska. To Peter and his family living in Michigan, Alaska was "the Last Frontier" (excerpt 23). In addition to being in Alaska, the Park is north of the Arctic Circle, and it is relatively unknown within Alaska, compared to other destinations like Denali (excerpt 23). During his trip Peter did manage to view the spectacular treeless terrain that he had imagined (excerpt 31). He also enjoyed the flexible schedule that long daylight hours allowed (excerpt 32). However, he was disappointed to find that the area he had selected to visit was not nearly as remote as he had hoped.

Peter hiked in an area with an old cabin and heavy airplane traffic. Although he knew about the cabin in advance, and he viewed it as a "nice safeguard", he feels that it detracted from the feeling of absolute remoteness he was seeking (excerpt 29). The airplane traffic, however, had a much more significant effect than the cabin. Although he did not encounter any other people, Peter saw several airplane flights everyday of his trip, and a helicopter on the final day. He feels that airplanes are more acceptable in Gates of the Arctic than in other parks because they are "the main way to travel" (excerpt 28). Therefore, the planes alone might not have had a significant impact on his feeling of remoteness. For Peter, the real issue was the realization that most of the air traffic was associated with the nearby village of Anaktuvuk Pass (excerpts 24, 29). Although he had initially justified the cost of his trip on the basis of "how remote he was going to get", the realization that he was only 20 miles from a village made him question his investment (excerpt 29). In addition to the cabin, the air traffic, and the nearby village, Peter was carrying an aviation radio that also detracted from his feelings of remoteness and self-reliance (excerpt 27). In anticipation of being in an extremely remote place, he opted to bring a radio even though he normally would not consider carrying one (excerpt 26). As a final blow, after returning to Coldfoot he found that the radio batteries were dead; so the thing that had diminished his feeling of remoteness and self-reliance during the trip might not have been useable anyway (excerpt 26). Peter feels that not achieving the remoteness he sought was "a bit of a letdown." In hindsight, he says that he should have picked a different location to visit within the Park, away from major air routes (excerpt 25).

Despite his comments about remoteness, Peter does feel that Gates of the Arctic is a wilderness—due in part to his many wildlife encounters (excerpt 30). On the first full-day of his trip, he enjoyed a lengthy interaction with a grizzly bear. After three years of non-stop

backpacking, he had never seen a grizzly, so the encounter had special significance (excerpts 7-8). On the afternoon of the same day, he saw a second bear, and several days later he returned from a day-hike to find a third bear sleeping in his campsite (excerpts 9-10)! The grizzly bears were the unchallenged highlight of Peter's trip (excerpt 11-12). For him, being close to so many "majestic creatures" was a meaningful experience, one that most people have never had (excerpt 12). In addition to the bears, Peter also encountered several playful weasels, a rare wolverine, and a bull-moose (excerpts 4-6).

Weather was an important factor throughout Peter's experience. After two days of sun and warm temperatures, it was rainy, windy, and cold for the duration of his trip (excerpts 13-16). On one occasion, the weather confined him to his tent for a full day (excerpt 15). However, Peter notes that the rain always seemed to break at opportune moments: "It would always give me just the exact amount of window I needed to do what I had to do and then when I was prepared for the rain, it would start just like that" (excerpt 16). Rather than becoming demoralized by the rain, Peter gained a sense of satisfaction from staying safe and comfortable under adverse conditions (excerpt 17). On the final day of his trip, high winds delayed Peter's air taxi. Because he was uncertain when the plane would arrive, he spent the day just waiting, and thus missed out on some "perfect hiking weather" (excerpt 18).

Peter found hiking off-trail in tussock terrain to be very difficult. He even changed his plans slightly after his first encounter with tussocks (excerpts 19-20). In addition to the difficult terrain, he encountered swarms of mosquitoes that "were just incredible" (excerpt 21). Despite these challenges, Peter says that his trip, "...wasn't that much different than any other hike as far as difficulty." In fact, he claims to have "had a lot of hikes that were more physically challenging than this one" (excerpt 3). Peter feels that the main difference between the hiking he experienced on this trip and his past experiences was the distance he covered and the lack of trails (excerpt 22).

Peter's comments regarding management at Gates of the Arctic reflect his considerable experience in other national parks and his numerous bear encounters. Compared to other parks where bear barrels are mandatory or very strongly encouraged, he found it "odd" that they were just "kind of recommended" at Gates (excerpt 33). He also comments that the mere fact that firearms are allowed in the park made him think that perhaps he should carry one (excerpt 34).

Peter is in favor of making visitor registration a mandatory practice at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 35-36). He was surprised that he was not required to register or get a permit because, "...pretty much all the national parks require a permit, that is, it's not an option" (excerpt 35). He sees two main purposes for mandatory permits. One is to provide information on visitor use for making management decisions, and the second is to direct or limit visitor use to prevent "overuse" (excerpts 35-37). Peter feels that a permit system should be implemented immediately, "...so that you can start realizing ahead of time that there's potential problems developing..." (excerpt 37).

The "problems" that Peter refers to are primarily ecological impacts associated with camping and hiking (excerpts 38-40). He is in favor of use limits to prevent ecological damage, although he admits that he enjoys backpacking in places that "have the least amount of restrictions" (excerpt 40). He feels that the Park Service faces a difficult challenge in trying to balance the need for visitors to "experience wilderness and be a part of it", and the need to prevent overuse (excerpt 35). However, he is confident in the ability of park managers to

meet this challenge: “I usually put a lot of faith in park management...I don’t think you can always make a 100% right decision all of the time, but...most of the time, I see the parks do a good job of managing the property” (excerpt 41).

809BTT23 Ted, Sheila, Amy, Jenna

These four people were members of a 9-person guided group that spent 9 days floating and hiking along the Alatna River (excerpts 1-2). Ted, Sheila, and Amy were guests on the trip and Jenna was a guide. Ted and Sheila had visited Alaska previously, but this trip was their first to Gates of the Arctic. Amy had never been to Alaska or to the Park. Ted and Amy are high-school students and they visited the Park primarily to take pictures for their photography class (excerpt 3).

This group’s trip seemed to be a generally pleasant experience, without any dramatic or notable events. The group members saw a variety of birds, as well as antlers and animal tracks, but they did not “see very many mammals” (excerpt 4). Amy indicates that she was disappointed not to see more wildlife, but Jenna (the guide) says that she is content just to see tracks and know that animals are present. Jenna does acknowledge, however, that she may have a different perspective because she spends more time in the backcountry and gets to see wildlife more often than her guests (excerpt 5).

All four respondents feel that being members of the group was a positive feature of their experiences (excerpts 6-7). Sheila in particular enjoyed the diversity of ages, experience, and knowledge within the group, and the opportunity to learn from the other members. The group members were expecting to encounter harsh weather, but they enjoyed surprisingly good conditions until the final day of their trip, when it rained heavily (excerpts 14-15). In discussing the potential for bad weather, Jenna describes “type II fun” (excerpt 15). She explains that type II fun is the kind that is best remembered and re-told rather than being experienced firsthand. Inclement weather and other adverse conditions thus provide opportunities for having type II fun.

Although the group did not encounter any particularly adverse conditions, Sheila describes the Alatna area as “harsh” and challenging. She feels that the potential for bad weather and the consequences of a mistake or accident clearly make the place a wilderness (excerpts 13, 16). Amy agrees, saying that inaccessibility and “the high stakes of not having a road within 100 miles” are qualities that make the Alatna area a wilderness. Jenna further supports the notion that risk and self-reliance are important elements of wilderness. She says, “We don’t bring a GPS...an iridium phone, or anything like that to make it more of a wilderness experience than it otherwise can be” (excerpt 17). In addition to risk and self-reliance, Ted suggests that “no roads” and “open space” are also qualities that make the Alatna a wilderness (excerpt 18). Despite their comments about risk and self-reliance, the group members generally do not feel that being members of a guided group diminished their wilderness experiences. In fact, Sheila and Amy indicate that they would not do the trip without a guide, at least in part because of fear of bears (excerpt 17).

Ted and the others encountered several other people during their trip, including two park rangers, a NOLS group, and Lake Takahula residents Steve and Kay (excerpt 8). Seeing the park rangers was a generally positive experience. Sheila and Jenna both suggest that it was good to see rangers “out on patrol” and “doing their job” (excerpt 9). Jenna had seen an established fire ring just prior to encountering the rangers and she was glad to be able to tell

them about it. The group members do not comment on their feeling about seeing Steve and Kay or the NOLS group. Despite seeing the other people, as well as some human footprints and some trash, Amy describes the Alatna area as “more pristine than anything [she has] ever seen” (excerpt 10). She and the others mostly discount the trash they saw as the result of accident or oversight rather than intentional littering (excerpts 11-12). Sheila explains: “Most folks going up there aren’t going to leave their trash; you don’t make all the effort to get up there to do that.”

Other than some confusion regarding what they believed to be a BLM marker encountered while hiking, the group members have generally positive things to say about management at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 19-21). Sheila feels that receiving the visitor registration at the Park Service office in Bettles was helpful, and Jenna suggests that the orientation helps to validate the advice that she and other guides give to their clients. Although Jenna did pack the group’s food in bear barrels, she indicates that she has generally not done so in the past (excerpt 21). She feels that the barrels are cumbersome and impractical for longer trips, and she is not convinced that they are really necessary. Jenna suggests that the Park Service “needs to find a compromise between being bear safe and...just making the trip logistically impossible.” Jenna supports having a group size limit of 10 for river trips, noting that, “even 9 feels big” (excerpt 22). Finally, Jenna strongly supports the idea of limiting visitor use in the Park. In fact, she implies that in certain places (like the Arrigetch Peaks), limits should be implemented now rather than sometime in the future (excerpt 23).

810BTT24 Rick and Tim

Rick and Tim are a father and son couple from Anchorage. They spent 9 days traveling on Lake Minakokosa, Beaver Creek, and the Kobuk River. Most of their trip was in the preserve portion of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Rick had been interested in visiting the Kobuk River for a long time, and he was finally motivated to make arrangements for a trip after hearing a detailed description of fishing opportunities on the river from a friend. Rick’s primary reason for visiting the Kobuk was the opportunity to catch sheefish, which can only be found in a few select rivers (excerpts 1-3).

Although sheefish were the primary reason for their trip, Rick and Tim did not catch a single one until their final day on the river (excerpt 4). On that last day, when they had finally begun to catch sheefish, Rick and Tim were whisked away somewhat unexpectedly by their pilot (excerpt 24). Rather than fish, weather, wildlife, and solitude were the dominant themes of their trip. Ultimately, Rick describes wildlife and solitude as the highlights of his experience, while Tim seems happy that he was finally able to catch a sheefish (excerpts 4, 12-18). Windy weather made the trip harder than expected (excerpts 6-11). After an arduous day of rowing across Minakokosa Lake, they found that they often had to row to make progress down the river as well. On several occasions, they had to walk and line their raft down the river because the wind was so strong. The stress of battling the wind occasionally caused some friction between Rick and Tim: “The father and son bonding trip...turned into a couple of shouting matches there occasionally” (excerpt 9). In addition to the wind, they encountered rainy conditions that were exacerbated by inferior equipment.

While the weather was clearly the worst part of the trip, wildlife provided one of the trip highlights (excerpts 12-15). One evening early in their trip, Rick and Tim watched and

listened to several wolves feeding on a moose carcass across the river from their camp. After falling asleep, they were awakened by a black bear that was feeding on the moose after it had apparently run the wolves off of the carcass. Rick felt privileged to witness a spectacle usually reserved for “those guys with all the money and cameras on National Geographic” (excerpt 13). He also enjoyed knowing that bears were present and seeing a bear in its natural habitat: “...[T]o see one in the wild chewing on a moose...that’s the real thing” (excerpt 15).

Rick and Tim encountered just one other party during their trip, and little evidence of other visitors until reaching their last campsite (excerpts 18-19). In contrast to their past fishing trips in Minnesota, Canada, and on the Kenai Peninsula, they describe the Kobuk as “just total[ly] peaceful” (excerpts 16-17). “...6.1 billion people in the world and there were the two of us on that river, alone; that was pretty nice” (excerpt 17). Encountering the other party was a positive event because Rick and Tim were essentially lost at the time (excerpts 20-21). They had no maps and no real ability to navigate, and they had inadvertently stopped at the wrong spot to await their airplane pick-up (excerpts 22-23). In addition to not having maps, they were somewhat confused by the meandering, braided character of the Kobuk River (excerpts 21, 26). A member of the other party had a GPS unit and was able to show them where they were on the river. “That was a little prayer answered when that guy came floating down the river there” (Rick, excerpt 21).

Rick and Tim consider the features of the Kobuk River and the surrounding land to be characteristic of Alaska (excerpts 26, 29). They describe the Kobuk area as wild and fragile. One reason it is wild is that it lacks any sign of civilization, including cabins (excerpt 27). Seeing wildlife up-close, dealing with adverse weather, and facing an angry seagull also made the place feel wild (excerpt 28). It is not clear whether Rick feels that it’s the general character of the area or its biological elements that are fragile. However, he does suggest that the pristine nature of the Kobuk area is easily disturbed (excerpt 30).

Rick and Tim did not register or visit park office in Bettles because they were rushed through town by their air-taxi service (excerpt 31). They feel that they might have benefited from a visit to the office, especially the opportunity to borrow a bear-barrel (excerpts 31-32). Although Rick claims that it was “very cool” not to encounter any Park staff during his trip, both he and Tim express general support for the Park Service and support for increased management presence in the backcountry if visitor use should substantially increase (excerpts 33-34). Referring to the Park Service, Rick says, “...they’re the environmentalists for the most part; we’re environmentalists [too]...I think they’re the good guys” (excerpt 34).

Rick supports the idea of limiting visitor use at Gates of the Arctic, and he and Tim support enforcement of leave-no-trace principles to mitigate the effects of increased use (excerpts 35-43). (It is interesting to note that Rick and Tim are themselves unsure about the best minimum impact practices, see excerpts 41-43). Although Rick suggests that the Park could absorb “a few thousand extra people” if visitors were educated and conscientious about practicing minimum impact techniques, he still feels that visitor use has an inevitable cumulative impact, and that limits will eventually be necessary. Rick and Tim acknowledge that they were lucky to encounter a visitor who could help them get oriented, but they contend that their experience would have been even better if they had not encountered anyone at all (excerpt 39). They indicate that they would support use limits even if they themselves were prevented from visiting the Park (excerpt 40). Rick, however, makes it clear that he does not think current use levels warrant implementing limits: “I don’t think it’s

overloaded right now; obviously we're out there 8 days and don't see anyone" (excerpt 36).

811BTT26 Randall and Ellen

Randall and Ellen are a husband and wife couple from Idaho. They spent 12 days floating the Killik River from Tulilik Lake to the confluence of the Colville River (excerpt 1). They are experienced whitewater rafters who have been on several (at least) wild river trips in Idaho and Canada. Randall first learned about the Killik River from a book that he read 5 or 6 years ago. He was attracted by accounts of challenging river conditions and abundant wildlife. He has had plans to visit the river "on the back burner" since first learning of it, and he was finally motivated to go ahead with them by fears that the Killik would soon lose its wild character. "Some of those commercial operators [are] looking for other areas and they've definitely moved into the Killik; I thought, geez, we better get down there before the dang thing gets anymore...while it's still a little more wilder" (excerpt 2).

Randall and Ellen planned very carefully for their visit. They were especially concerned about the weight of their gear, because "the jump [in cost] between a 185 and a Beaver...would have barred [them] from doing the trip" (excerpt 3). In addition, they were conscious of the need to be completely self-reliant because they were traveling alone (excerpt 3). Although they were hoping not to see any other visitors, they really were not sure what to expect because they were unable to find any detailed information about the river (excerpt 4). They ultimately encountered a guide at Tulilik Lake who gave them "a couple of tips" (excerpt 4). The guide was the only other person that Randall and Ellen encountered during their trip (excerpt 14). In addition, they saw no evidence of other visitors or impacts from commercial operators. On their previous river trips in Idaho and Canada, they saw significant impacts from large guided groups. They were impressed to see that commercial operators on the Killik left no evidence of their passing (excerpt 16). Ellen suggests that visitors to the Killik-area share a strong ethic for minimum impact travel. "If they were somebody who didn't enjoy being in the wilderness and respect it, they wouldn't have spent the money to be here in the first place" (excerpt 15).

Seeing no people or significant signs of other people is a dominant theme in the couple's description of their experience. Because they saw no other people, they were acutely aware of safety and their distance from help or rescue in the case of an accident. Although they are experienced whitewater paddlers, they were nervous about a relatively easy section of rapids on the Killik: "When we're at home on a river where the people are all there...you feel a little more relaxed about the rapids" (Ellen, excerpt 5). Seeing the Park from the air also contributed to the couple's feeling that they were far from help during their trip (excerpts 24-26). From the air they were able to witness the tremendous scale of the Park as well as the lack of any development or settlements outside the Park boundaries. A third element that contributed to the feeling of remoteness and being far from help was the presence and behavior of wildlife. Randall was first attracted to the Killik by reports of abundant wildlife, and he was not disappointed by what he saw. He and Ellen encountered "14 to 15 bears", numerous caribou, and a wolverine, among other animals and birds (excerpts 17-18). They interpreted the abundance and behavior of bears in particular as clear evidence that the Killik River receives very few human visitors (excerpts 19, 27). "I think the wildlife speaks to the fact that it's remote and unaltered by man or they just wouldn't be

there” (excerpt 25). The degree of remoteness indicated by lack of people, park scale, and wildlife led Randall and Ellen to reconsider their standard approach to river trips. Randall clearly indicates that satellite phones and other communication devices would diminish his experience of wilderness. However, both he and Ellen suggest that such devices might be appropriate in the extremely remote setting of Gates of the Arctic [although they did not take any such communication devices on this trip (excerpts 6-7)].

In addition to remoteness, two other qualities of the Park setting that the couple describe are scenic beauty and harsh weather. Traveling north on the river allowed them to view the transition from mountainous terrain to the wide-open north slope of the Brooks Range: “[It was]...cool coming through the Brooks Range...Looking up at them [mountains] all the time, but then still get a taste of the north slope” (excerpts 20-21). Randall and Ellen also enjoyed viewing late-summer ice, treeless terrain, and unique colors of light and sky (excerpts 22-23).

Along with not seeing other people, harsh, unpredictable weather was a dominant feature of their experience (excerpts 8-9). From the very first moment after stepping out of the plane, Randall and Ellen were battered by strong winds, cool temperatures, and intermittent rain. On at least one occasion, the wind prevented them from traveling down river at all. They found themselves traveling at every available opportunity because they were uncertain when the weather would pin them down next. They chose to forgo their planned layover days and hikes because of the “severe [financial] penalty” for failing to arrive at their takeout point on time (excerpts 10-13). After experiencing the harsh northern weather, Randall suggests that, “a 40 mile trip here may be equal to a 100 mile trip down south” (excerpt 9).

Randall and Ellen feel that few visitors, little evidence of human use or impact, and abundant wildlife are qualities that make the Killik-area a wilderness (excerpts 27-28). Significantly, they note that historical inhabitants of the area probably did not regard it as wilderness: “...you know for years and years there’ve been people who lived and traveled through there...it’s probably not wilderness to everybody, but certainly a wild place” (Randall, excerpt 29). The couple does not feel that historical occupation makes the area any less of a wilderness. Instead, they are intrigued by the question of how the past inhabitants survived in such a harsh environment.

Randall and Ellen visited the Park office in Bettles in order to borrow some bear barrels. They were happy to fill out the voluntary registration form as well as a second optional form for search and rescue purposes. Regarding the search and rescue form, Randall says, “...it doesn’t hurt to fill out a couple more of those” (excerpt 31). He also suggests that he would not object to a mandatory registration program, noting that he “would stand in line” in order to fill out that form (excerpt 32). Randall interprets the lack of mandatory registration as a sign that Gates of the Arctic currently receives very little use (excerpt 30). He and Ellen suggest that it might be beneficial to make visitor backcountry orientations mandatory (excerpt 33). They also suggest that the Park Service provide more detailed information about appropriate minimum impact practices in the arctic environment. Although they are well-versed in basic techniques, they were unsure about the best methods for dealing with dishwater and waste outside of the Rocky mountain environment they are accustomed to (excerpts 33-34).

The couple feels that visitor use limits are an acceptable way to prevent ecological damage and overcrowding (excerpts 35, 37). Although they do not seem to think that limits

are warranted at present use levels, they do indicate that limits will be appropriate if “all of the things you went there for in the first place were negated because of the number of people” (excerpt 37). They feel that limits should first be directed at commercial operators. In particular, they recommend that a group size limit be imposed on commercial trips (excerpt 39). Although they claim that being required to get a permit would not affect their experience, Randall and Ellen indicate that they would likely go somewhere else if permits were required to float the Killik River (excerpt 38). For Randall, permits are an indication that, “...there’s more people here, [because] they’ve already had to limit the numbers.” He does not object to permits, but rather the heavy visitor pressure that they imply. In addition, he perceives a multitude of similar arctic rivers “running in the coastal plain through some big mountains” that could substitute for the Killik.

812BTT27 Harvey

Harvey was a member of a guided group that spent two weeks in the Park. He and 4 other people hiked from Summit Lake to the Gates of the Arctic, where they met with boats and 5 more people before floating the North Fork of the Koyukuk River to Bettles (excerpts 1-2). Harvey is from Fairbanks. Although he had taken some past trips near the Dalton Highway, this was his first visit to Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 6). He was attracted to the North Fork-area by the writings of Bob Marshall, and by the opportunity to combine hiking and floating in a single trip (excerpt 3). In addition, floating the North Fork was relatively inexpensive compared to other opportunities in the Park because it required only a one-way charter flight. Harvey chose to visit as a member of a guided group because he was unfamiliar with travel in the Park. “I think coming in here cold without having done a guided trip [first] or having been in this kind of remote park setting...would have been a mistake” (excerpt 4). For Harvey, taking a guided trip was an opportunity to receive a safe introduction to the Park before planning a trip of his own (excerpts 4-5).

Weather had a major influence on Harvey’s experience. When asked to describe his trip, he responded by first describing the volatile weather conditions that he encountered (excerpt 7). He recommends that potential visitors be well-prepared for any kind of weather. He spent time testing the performance of his outdoor clothing before the trip and he suggests that other visitors should do the same. Harvey feels that being warm and dry “has a lot to do with [his] overall enjoyment” (excerpt 8).

In general, the hiking portion of the trip provided more challenges and rewards than the floating portion (excerpts 9-12, 20). In contrast to “fairly mundane” hours of paddling through similar scenery along the river, hiking in the mountains was more dynamic and “alive” (excerpt 20). Although the guide(s) were primarily responsible for route-finding, Harvey and others all had to face dense alders and bushes, constantly wet feet, and long days. They were rewarded, however, by good views of mountain scenery and wildlife—including two grizzly bears (excerpts 9, 13). Harvey feels that the primary difference between hiking in Gates of the Arctic and in other wilderness places is the lack of trails. Other than that, he says, “The actual backpacking experience was pretty similar” (excerpt 12).

Harvey describes the two guides on his trip as “very professional” (excerpt 15). They were primarily responsible for setting up camp, cooking meals, and carrying safety equipment including first-aid items, firearms, and an aviation radio. Aside from the guides,

the other members of Harvey's group seemed to have little influence on his experience at all (excerpt 14).

Harvey saw one other party in the distance while hiking, but he did not encounter any people outside of his group while on the river. He did see a wrecked boat on the river, but aside from that there were no signs of previous visitors (excerpts 16-17). He claims that seeing more people during his trip "would not have bothered [him] at all" (excerpt 18). However, he does acknowledge being disturbed by pack-trains on past wilderness trips. The type of other people encountered is clearly a significant issue for Harvey. Referring to Gates of the Arctic, where large pack-trains are unlikely, he says, "You might run into another backpacking party, but so what? They're doing the same thing you are...I mean we're sharing basically" (excerpt 19).

For Harvey, the most significant quality of the Gates of the Arctic setting is remoteness (excerpts 20-23). He describes remoteness as both a tangible setting quality, and as a dimension of his experience. The Park is remote because it lacks trails and signs and it is far from emergency medical facilities. For Harvey, remoteness demands extra trip preparation and caution while traveling. Remoteness also enhances the wilderness character of the Park. Harvey describes remoteness as, "...a background feeling you have of how far you are away from the secure trappings of civilization..." (excerpt 23).

Harvey did not encounter any evidence of Park Service presence or management activities during his trip. He did not register in Bettles, and he admits that, "the thought never crossed my mind that there was any registration required" (excerpt 24). However, he does not feel that it would have changed his experience if registration had been required (excerpt 25). Like many other interviewed visitors, Harvey suggests that registration might serve a valuable safety function, "Like filing a flight plan" (excerpt 25).

Harvey contends that some national parks are "too regulated." He does not object to the general idea of regulations in a wilderness or national park setting (excerpt 27). However, he does object to regulations that are not clearly justified and enforceable (excerpts 26-28). An important issue is the cumulative effect of all the regulations encountered in daily life (excerpt 26). "It seems there are only so many regulations a person can handle." Harvey contends that "there are regulations everywhere", so that encountering any regulation that appears senseless or irrelevant is "frustrating." He feels that the level of regulation in a park or wilderness should reflect the level of use (excerpts 27-28). High-use areas are justified in regulating visitors in order to prevent damage to the environment, while low-use areas that are difficult to access should be comparatively less regulated.

815BTT28 Glenn and Justin

Glenn and Justin are a father and son couple from Fairbanks. They were part of a 7-person (5 clients and 2 guides) guided group that spent 11 days on the Nigu River. They began at the river headwaters and floated a few miles past Etivluk Lake (excerpt 3). Glenn first heard about the Nigu and other Brooks Range rivers from his wife, who was a guide in the area several years ago. He chose to participate in this particular trip because he was familiar with the guides who would be leading it, and it fit his vacation schedule. Although he and Justin have lived in Fairbanks for about 7 years, this was their first trip north of the Arctic Circle (excerpts 1-2).

This trip was characterized by a variety of unexpected conditions and events. Glenn and the other group members originally planned to float much farther downriver, but low water conditions forced them to drag their boats for most of the first 4 days of the trip (excerpts 4-5). Because the guides were not familiar with the Nigu River, they made the decision to spend two days in camp near the end of the trip, and then found that they were less than an hour away from where they had arranged to be picked up. When the group reached their take-out point, bad weather moved in and they were forced to wait two days longer than planned before conditions improved enough for a plane to take them out (excerpts 5-6).

Despite having to drag the boats and then wait two extra days to be picked up, Glenn describes his experience in glowing terms. The effort of dragging the boats was mitigated by beautiful surroundings and plentiful wildlife; "...even though we had to drag a lot, it was nice being in the mountains" (Glenn, excerpt 4). Glenn describes the novelty of being in completely treeless country, and interacting with wild animals. He particularly enjoyed several bear encounters, which "showed that as long as you're sensible and wary about bears, you can coexist with them well" (excerpts 19-20). After witnessing the behavior of several bears, Glenn became confident that they were not a significant threat. He says, "I felt safer there than any place I've ever been, to tell the truth" (excerpt 21).

In addition to wildlife and scenic beauty, Glenn enjoyed interacting with his fellow group members (excerpts 8-11). He notes that, "[P]art of the fun of the trip was sitting around...just talking about whatever with the other people there" (excerpt 9). The two trip guides had a significant influence on the trip. They set the tone and pace for each day, did the cooking, and provided most of the horsepower for dragging the boats. In addition, they acted as trip naturalists, providing the other group members with information about local flora and fauna as they traveled (excerpt 11).

Although Glenn and Justin enjoyed the experience of flying to the Nigu in two Beaver airplanes, they blame their air taxi service for one significant disappointment of their trip. After guaranteeing that they would be the only visitors at the Nigu headwaters, the air taxi operator delivered three planes full of people to the Nigu, just one day after delivering Glenn's group (excerpt 13). When he spoke with the newcomers, Glenn found that they had planned their trip months previously. Rather than being disappointed to see other people, Glenn was primarily disappointed by the air taxi operator's display of "business ethics" (excerpt 15). Glenn's group encountered the same party several times during the first half of their trip, but they saw no additional people. They did, however, hear gunshots from hunters outside of the national park boundary. Glenn is not a hunter himself. He says, "I grew up in the suburbs; the only thing I ever hunted for was a parking space" (excerpt 18). Furthermore, he and Justin are staunch vegetarians, and along with the other group members they favor "protecting the wilderness rather than slaughter[ing] it" (excerpt 16). For them, hearing gunshots had more of a negative impact than actually encountering other recreational visitors (excerpt 17).

Glenn describes wilderness in terms of his feelings rather than tangible qualities of a place. When asked if he would describe the Nigu area as wilderness, he says, "Oh yeah...especially those two days waiting to get picked up, I felt like we were in the middle of nowhere" (excerpt 24). For Glenn, feeling "isolated" is an important quality of wilderness. Knowing that there were other people nearby did not impact his ability to feel isolated, but seeing human developments, artifacts, or campsite impacts would have (excerpt 25).

Glenn contrasts his experience on the Nigu River with past visits to other places in Alaska. Compared to a family trip on the Forty-Mile River, which he describes as “an industrial river” complete with active gold mining, his experience on the Nigu was “an extended, isolated float trip” (excerpt 7). Compared to visiting Denali National Park, where he viewed wildlife and mountain scenery in the company of “hundreds or thousands of people”, Glenn felt “like a new explorer” during his Nigu trip (excerpt 29). Glenn’s comments in excerpts 22-23 suggest that he feels the Nigu area has a pure, authentic quality that is lacking in other settings. He was amazed to learn that he could “just drink the water right out of the river”, and he describes the Nigu as “feeling real”, in contrast to Bettles or Fairbanks which embody “fake, funny stuff.” It is important to note that Glenn mostly describes his experience on the Nigu River as different than, rather than superior to, his previous experiences. For instance, he says, “I love going down to Denali Park, we go down there all the time; but that’s a different kind of experience” (excerpt 29).

Glenn did not visit the park office in Bettles or register because after arriving in town he was “quick hustled over to the float plane to fly out” (excerpt 26). He did not encounter any evidence of Park service management during his trip and, consistent with his comments about wilderness and isolation, he prefers not to encounter any management presence in the backcountry (excerpt 27). However, he suggests that managers “will have to be a little more active in making sure people behave themselves” as use levels increase (excerpt 27). Glenn would not object to a mandatory visitor registration and orientation program (excerpt 28). Finally, he strongly supports the idea of use limits to maintain opportunities for low-density experiences, even if limits would mean that he was personally prevented from visiting (excerpts 29-30).

815BTT29 Keith, Matt, Rich

This group consisting of a father, his son, and their guide, began its trip with 5 days of hiking near Boreal Mountain, then spent 5 days floating the North Fork of the Koyukuk River down to Bettles (excerpt 1). The guide (Rich) was present for most of the interview, although he participated only a little at the beginning and again at the end. Keith explains that he chose to visit Gates of the Arctic because not many people go there, it represented a unique ecosystem that he had not seen before, and he was able to find a guide service (Mountains and Rivers) that met his needs (excerpt 2).

Keith and his adult son Matt often take outdoor trips together, but on past trips they have always been part of larger guided groups, or they have traveled independently; this was their first experience involving just the two of them and a guide (excerpt 3). Keith says that having Rich along was really just like having “another guy on the trip” who happened to have some local-area knowledge (excerpt 4). However, Matt feels that the trip would have been much harder without a guide, and Keith acknowledges that visiting Gates of the Arctic without a guide would have involved more risk than he was looking for on this trip (excerpt 5). In addition to reducing some of the uncertainty and risk of their trip, Rich may also have influenced Keith and Matt’s experience in more subtle ways. For instance, Keith and Matt make several comments that suggest they were disappointed to see relatively little wildlife during their trip (excerpts 7, 17-19, 21). At the very beginning of the interview, Rich summarizes the trip by saying that it was great except for the absence of wildlife (excerpt 6). Later, he recalls a previous trip on the Noatak River where he saw abundant wildlife (excerpt

7). It seems that Rich's expectations for wildlife viewing significantly influenced his clients' own expectations. In addition, near the end of the interview, Rich explains that he and other guides coordinate their trips so that their clients will not see others in the backcountry, thus maintaining the sense of aloneness that he sees as one of the primary draws of the area (excerpt 8). In this way, Rich purposefully shapes the nature of his clients' experiences, although the clients themselves may not be aware of his influence.

Although Matt and Keith have considerable past experience hiking and camping in wildland areas (including in Alaska), their trip in Gates of the Arctic was characterized by new and, for them, highly novel experiences. Their trip began with a bush-plane landing on a gravel bar, which Keith describes with an ironic tone as, "pretty interesting" (excerpt 9). Hiking off-trail through dense vegetation was also a new experience for Matt and Keith (excerpts 13-14). Even finding and setting up a campsite was different and more challenging than what they were used to. In upland areas, they had trouble finding water and a flat spot for their tent (excerpt 14), and near the river, they had to watch that rising water did not swamp their site in the night (excerpt 16). Despite the fact that his group carried a satellite phone and an emergency locator beacon, Matt felt that he was far-removed from his normal "electronic communicative lifestyle" (excerpt 11). For him, the absence of park infrastructure was especially striking (excerpts 37-39). In fact, he says that most people he knows could not even imagine the setting he encountered because they are so used to developed recreation areas (excerpt 39). While other visitors often describe the Park setting as remote, Matt describes it as "isolated" instead (excerpt 40). In order to explain what he means by isolated, he says, "There were no motors, [t]here was no sounds, no music, no other people." Whereas remoteness is the quality of being far away or hard to get to, isolated seems to mean insulation or separation from people and signs of civilization. Matt suggests that the feeling he had of being alone and self-reliant in the Park is one that is hard to replicate anywhere else. Keith too, enjoyed being far from trails and other similar points of reference. For him, the challenge of hiking and navigating cross-country was "almost a definitive part of the experience" (excerpts 10, 12).

Keith and Matt briefly encountered one other party during their trip, and they saw little evidence of other visitors (excerpts 24, 26-30). More than the absence of trails or other infrastructure, they feel it was this absence of other people or signs of people that truly set this trip apart from the past experiences that they have shared (excerpt 25). Keith compares his experience in Gates of the Arctic with his previous experiences in the Eastern Sierra Mountains. He explains that, while it is possible to travel off-trail in the Sierra, "...it's still a known route that's navigated by lots of people..." (excerpt 41). In contrast, he feels that his trip in Gates of the Arctic was more of a "total wilderness kind of experience." Keith suggests that airplane overflights and campsite impacts may dilute the wilderness experience (excerpts 22, 43). Although he and Matt encountered both of these items, Keith says that, "...the impact was so minimal that [it was] easily dismissed", and Matt agrees, saying, "[I] didn't see anything that sacrificed it...[I]t was pristine and perfect" (excerpt 43).

Beyond the numbers or impacts of other visitors, Keith and Matt are concerned with the *type* of people who visit the Park. Regarding the impact of airplane overflights, Matt says, "It was kind of nice knowing that the few planes that did go over were more people such as ourselves." If, on the other hand, those planes had been full of flightseers, Matt suggests that, "It would have taken away from the whole experience" (excerpt 31). Likewise, Matt and Keith presume that visitors who make the effort to hike in Gates of the

Arctic are conscientious campers like themselves (excerpts 32-35). In contrast to easily accessible national parks where the average visitor stays for minutes, visitors to Gates of the Arctic stay for weeks (excerpt 36). This type of highly-committed visitor, suggests Matt, are much-less likely to cause impacts than day-users and “more careless types” (excerpt 33).

Keith feels that maintaining natural conditions in the face of increasing population pressure is an extremely challenging task for the Park Service (excerpt 50). When Matt begins to suggest that the role of the NPS is to “make the wilderness experience more accessible to more people”, Keith cuts him off, saying, “No, sometimes they make it less accessible” (excerpt 51). Keith and Matt favorably contrast their backcountry orientation at Gates of the Arctic with the one they received at Denali (excerpts 44-45), and Keith is clearly sympathetic to the Park Service as a whole (excerpt 50). However, Keith has mixed feelings about increasing the NPS presence at Gates of the Arctic. While Matt feels that an “occasional ranger inspection” in the backcountry wouldn’t be bad, Keith strongly objects to any additional ranger presence. He says, “[The] last thing I want to see is the government in there, I’d rather see another hiker” (excerpt 47), and later he emphatically states that rangers conducting enforcement activities “absolutely destroy” his experience (excerpt 49). Similarly, while Matt suggests that visitor registration and backcountry orientation should be mandatory, Keith objects to that idea as well (excerpt 64). He acknowledges that requiring visitors to receive an orientation may serve important screening, education, and safety functions (excerpt 66). He also acknowledges that mandatory orientation is appropriate at high use areas such as those he is familiar with in California (excerpt 65). However, he feels that low use and the unique visitor population at Gates of the Arctic, make it a very different place, one where visitor orientation is useful, but *mandatory* orientation is clearly not warranted (excerpts 66-67).

Keith also points to differences between Gates of the Arctic and other parks when discussing visitor use limits. He thinks that naturally difficult access at Gates of the Arctic makes it a much different park than Denali, which he refers to as “the Los Padres of Alaska” (excerpts 52, 56). However, he worries that places inevitably become more accessible, and he agrees with Rich who implies that some type of additional regulation will eventually be necessary to prevent “overuse.” (excerpts 53-54, 56). Keith and Matt think that limiting group sizes is necessary and appropriate, and Keith implies that groups should number less than 9 (excerpts 57-58). Along with Rich, they also suggest that specific use-limits be targeted at commercial operators and their clients (excerpts 59-63). Keith says that, philosophically, he objects to limiting private users, and Rich seems doubtful that limits on private users are even legal (excerpts 60, 63). However, they agree that anyone “making money off of the Park” can and should be subject to limits.

815AKP30 Tammy, Lana, Cal, Steve, Dylan, Joe

This group of six friends from California were members of a seven-person group that spent two weeks hiking from the community of Nolan, on the Dalton Highway, to Anaktuvk Pass. It is unclear why the seventh member of the group chose not to participate in the interview. Steve, the only group member with previous experience in Gates of the Arctic National Park, selected the basic travel route with low-cost as his principle concern (excerpt 1). By finishing in Anaktuvuk, the group was able to travel far from the highway corridor

while only paying for a one-way, regularly scheduled (as opposed to chartered) flight from Anaktuvuk Pass back to Fairbanks.

This group's experience was strongly influenced by the daily challenge of finding a safe route through the Park's rugged terrain and successfully navigating toward their destination (excerpts 2-8). Meeting this challenge was clearly a major source of satisfaction for them. They describe numerous, complex episodes of route-selection (excerpts 2-6), and proudly report their final, "triple-digit" hiking mileage (excerpt 8). They were well-prepared to navigate, traveling with both a handheld GPS and an altimeter (excerpts 6-7), although they only brought two maps—which they suggest was a potentially costly planning oversight (excerpt 8).

The intellectual challenge of route-finding was greatly compounded by the physical challenge of hiking with heavy packs in difficult terrain. At the very beginning of the interview Cal says, "Fourteen feet from where we started I realized that I brought way too much stuff, that the tussocks were going to be some rough terrain to walk, and I was unsure that I was going to make our final destination" (excerpt 10). Dylan too, comments on his initial doubts about being able to carry his pack the full-distance of the trip (excerpt 11). As a result of experiencing the nearly-debilitating weight of their packs, the group members offer several insights regarding appropriate equipment. They recommend "trekking poles" to distribute weight and aid balance, quick-dry clothing to avoid accumulating water weight, and the elimination of absolutely all non-essential or duplicated items from amongst the group as a whole (excerpts 31-35). Tussocks—precarious lumps of accumulated tundra vegetation—caused numerous falls and moments of frustration (excerpts 12-13, 16). In some cases, the group members chose to repeatedly cross a river or hike in "mid-shin" mud in order to avoid them (excerpts 14, 18). River-crossings, rain, and general wet conditions kept the group's feet wet for the duration of their trip (excerpt 19-20). Continuous rainfall also caused river levels to rise, making river crossings uncertain and forcing the group to carefully select campsites to avoid being flooded-out in the night (excerpts 21-26). Not surprisingly given the conditions, the group members found that they had very little time to relax and recuperate during their trip, and on at least one occasion they were exhausted to the point of "having difficulty thinking straight" (excerpts 29-30).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the extremely challenging nature of the weather and terrain, the group members describe their trip as a powerful and highly positive experience. Even the cold, cloudy, wet weather had several positive effects. For instance, cold sometimes motivated them to hike further than they otherwise would have (excerpt 44). One potentially dangerous occasion when clouds obscured the view of a nearby drop-off is described by Joe as "exciting" (excerpt 46). In addition, cloudy, windy weather provided constantly changing views as mountains were revealed and then hidden away (excerpts 45, 48). Recalling a moment when the clouds lifted to reveal a particularly striking view, Steve says, "...[W]e were really blessed...It was really special" (excerpt 47). Rather than bemoan the poor weather they experienced, Joe feels his group was lucky that even heavier rains did not make rivers un-crossable, and that no one suffered a serious injury (excerpt 53). Tammy seconds his opinion, saying, "Yeah, I think we were very, very, lucky..." (excerpt 54).

The group members are all close friends with past experience hiking and camping together (excerpt 39). Lana and Dylan note that their trip might have been much different (worse) with a group of 7 people that were not already good friends (excerpt 38). However, one consequence of traveling as a group of 7 was that decision-making had added complexity

and daily chores took longer to complete (excerpts 40-42). Steve and Tammy suggest that there is an inverse relationship between the size of a group and the speed with which things get done (excerpt 40).

Despite the group member's previous experiences together, this recent trip appears to have fostered a very close bond amongst them that is evident both in their joking, jovial manner (excerpts 35-36), and in the specific content of their responses. Cal describes the team-mentality that the group developed during their trip, and Dylan suggests that the trip was "the true test of all of [their] previous experiences [together]" (excerpt 39).

Steve confirms the "true-test" nature of the trip when describing his deep sense of accomplishment; he says, "I thought the best thing about the trip was that we successfully accomplished something that pushed us all to our limits, [w]e all experienced something we will remember for the rest of our lives" (excerpt 50). Closely related to this sense of accomplishment is the feeling among the group members that few people have the skills or proper attitude to handle the demanding nature of a trip in Gates of the Arctic. Tammy sums up this feeling when she says, "...the vast majority of people shouldn't probably ever attempt to come in [to the Park]" (excerpt 57).

Rather than accomplishment, Dylan feels that the best part of the trip was escaping the sounds and other stimulants prevalent in other settings (excerpt 49). In fact, Dylan and the rest of the group became so accustomed to the quiet, un-peopled park setting that they were a bit shocked and confused when they finally arrived in busy Anaktuvuk Pass (excerpt 51). In addition to being quiet, the scale of the Park setting also had a significant influence on the group's experience. Cal explains that tremendous scale made it hard to judge the size of mountains or estimate distance to landmarks (excerpt 55).

Although they saw only one wolf and one bear, both at a distance, wildlife had a significant influence on the group member's experiences and on the meanings that they attribute to the park setting (excerpts 58-64). The group feels that noise from their bear-bells as well as the inevitable noise caused by 7 people hiking probably kept them from seeing many animals (excerpt 62). They cite the fact that they never had any problems with animals getting into their food or trash as proof that being noisy kept wildlife away (excerpt 64). However, abundant signs, including tracks, scat, and bones provided clear evidence that animals were all around (excerpts 60-62). Signs and behavior of wildlife are presented as indicators of the wildness of the area. Joe says that seeing bear scat "kind of adds to the wildness because it's just this evidence everywhere" (excerpt 61). And Lana interprets the skittish behavior of a lynx she saw as proof that local animals are not used to humans (excerpt 60). In fact, the overall absence of visible wildlife juxtaposed against clear evidence that animals were present is interpreted as proof that Gates of the Arctic is a genuine wilderness (excerpts 60-65).

In addition to wildlife, a second important quality of wilderness at Gates of the Arctic is little evidence of other people. The group did not encounter any other people on their trip, and they saw only one tent in the distance (although they debate whether it was actually a tent) and a limited amount of air traffic (excerpts 66-69). They enjoyed feeling like they were the first people in the area, and were disappointed to see evidence (footprints) that in fact someone had been there before (excerpt 78). They do feel that Gates of the Arctic is largely pristine and has not changed much since the 1930s when Bob Marshall wrote about the area (excerpts 65, 78). One result of the pristine nature of the Park is that the slightest amount of human use creates a noticeable impact. In excerpts 70 and 71, Cal and Joe discuss

becoming aware of how easily a pristine area becomes impacted, and their comments imply a sort of guilt associated with changing the wilderness character of an area as well as an ethic based on leaving minimal evidence of one's passing.

With respect to wilderness, one final quality of Gates of the Arctic discussed by the group is the feeling of being far from help or rescue (excerpts 72-73). Tammy feels that, "there's no help if you need it." A person traveling in the Park is wholly responsible for their own safety, to the point that, as Tammy further explains, "If somebody had got seriously hurt, you would either have walked yourself out, or you'd have died, that's that."

The group members feel that the Park Service pursues an intentionally hands-off management style, which they appreciate (excerpt 74). Cal, for one, feels that there is really not much management of the Park that needs to be done (excerpt 75). However, they have slightly mixed feelings about the information that the Park staff provides to visitors. Steve feels that he was misinformed about the time it would take to complete the route he planned, and he was frustrated in his attempts to get any specific information about the nature of the terrain he planned to cross (excerpt 78). However, having little information "added to the adventure of the trip" (Joe) and allowed Dylan to feel "like a pioneer at some points" (excerpt 78). With the hindsight available after completing their trip, the group members seem to be in favor of maintaining opportunities for discovery.

The group did stop and register at the interagency visitor center in Coldfoot. They see at least two purposes for registration, one related to education and one related to safety. With respect to education, they feel that encouraging—even requiring—visitors to register and receive an orientation is a good idea because it may prevent ecological impacts in the Park (excerpts 80-81). Dylan and Joe explain that even though experienced backcountry travelers like themselves would be burdened by such a requirement, it would be worth it if it "helps the cause" (Joe, excerpt 81). With respect to safety, Joe expresses concern that, without a registration and orientation requirement, inexperienced and naïve visitors could get into serious trouble in the Park (excerpt 82). Tammy describes a different function of registration relative to safety. She views registration as an opportunity to file plans with someone, so that a search could be initiated if a party failed to come back from their trip (excerpt 83).

Throughout the interview, the group members make comments indicating their concern for ecological impacts. It is not surprising then that Tammy expresses clear support for limiting the number of visitors allowed into the Park if it is necessary to prevent ecological damage (excerpt 84). The other group members do not challenge her comments, but they seem to suggest that a focus on the type of users allowed in the Park, rather than the number of users, could achieve the same goal. They suggest that quick and easy access by airplane allows visitors who are less concerned about their impacts to visit the park (excerpt 85). In contrast, people who "pack their crap in for 14 days" are more likely to be careful and ethical campers (excerpt 86).

817BTT31 Troy, Wayne, Curt, Ken

This group is comprised of four friends from California. They spent 12 days floating from Tulilik Lake on the Killik River, to the Colville River, to their take-out point at Umiat. Their trip began on August 6th, and this interview was conducted immediately following their return to Bettles on August 17th (excerpt 6).

Although none of the group members had visited Gates of the Arctic (or Alaska) in the past, they had well-developed expectations regarding the nature of the place. These expectations were developed in part from a slide show on the Noatak and Tatshenshini Rivers that they attended in California (excerpt 1). Troy indicates that, while the Tatshenshini “has some interest”, his friends do not have the necessary whitewater skills for a trip on that river (excerpt 1). The group members list several qualities that they were looking for when planning their trip, including: far-north location, remoteness, wildlife, and wildness (excerpts 2-4). They chose to visit Gates of the Arctic because, as Troy says, “...it is the most remote, most wild, most natural place we could get to” (excerpt 4). He explains that, although the Noatak shares these qualities with the Killik and presents fewer logistical challenges, it is comparatively “well-known and well-traveled” (excerpt 5). The group ultimately chose to visit the Killik based on the advice of a local outfitter. One additional motivating factor for the trip was Troy’s feeling that, “...the election of George Bush means you may not have as much opportunity to do this kind of trip in the future as you’d like” (excerpt 1).

The first portion of the trip on the Killik River was characterized by some challenging whitewater sections that provided the opportunity to get used to handling the boats (excerpts 7-9). Although the whitewater sections were a focus of pre-trip planning and preparation (excerpt 27), wet and stormy weather proved to be the primary challenge of the trip. In fact, dealing with various challenges presented by the weather was the primary theme in this group’s reconstruction of their experience as a whole (excerpts 13-20). The timing of their trip coincided with a period of record rainfall and minor regional flooding. In addition to heavy daily rainfall, the group also experienced high winds (excerpt 14) and even a snow squall (excerpt 18). As Ken explains in excerpt 13, he and his friends were well prepared for almost any eventuality, but they were not expecting a flood!

One effect of the heavy rainfall was that most gravel-bar campsites were inundated by the rising Colville River (excerpt 16). Continuously rising river levels required the group members to carefully choose campsites and get up at regular intervals during the night to monitor the river’s rate of rise (excerpts 16, 25). In addition, flooding of the Colville River valley made precise navigation nearly impossible (excerpt 19) and fouled the drinking water supply—a problem the group addressed by using coffee filters to separate sediment from the water before boiling it (excerpt 20). All four members of this group have shared numerous outdoor experiences in the past (excerpt 22). They anticipated that their trip in Gates of the Arctic would be a highly committing, “fairly serious undertaking”, and they carefully limited their group’s membership to include only individuals with the necessary skills and proper mental outlook (excerpts 24, 27-28, 30-31). Although Troy describes the weather as the worst part of their trip (excerpt 18), it clearly led to some positive outcomes in that it justified his careful selection of group members, and it provided numerous opportunities for the group to confirm their skills and creatively address unique challenges. Ken confirms these positive outcomes of the weather with his simple statement in excerpt 26: “And we went through a flood without any problem.” In comparison, another party on the river at the same time was reduced to using duct tape to hold together their boat (excerpt 29).

The weather did not seem to have any negative effects on wildlife viewing opportunities. Curt describes the “power and attraction” of daily sightings of bear, wolf, eagles, and caribou, and everyone but Wayne identifies wildlife as the single best part of the trip.

After the weather and the wildlife, a third element that made this trip different from past trips the group members had been on was the wide-open quality of the tundra landscape, punctuated by a variety of berries and flowers (excerpts 34-37). Although the group members agree that the landscape they visited can rightfully be called a wilderness, they disagree somewhat on whether it is unique compared to other wilderness areas (excerpts 38-40). Curt says that, in terms of the basic things that define wilderness for him—roadlessness, no signs of humanity, and intact ecosystems—there is no difference between Gates of the Arctic and other wilderness areas he has been in. Troy, however, feels that the enormous size and lack of recreational infrastructure such as signs, trails, and campsites make Gates of the Arctic different. He prefers not to see signs and established trails because they are evidence of human presence and they eliminate the opportunity to feel that “you may be the first one that’s been there” (excerpt 45).

The desire to experience an “unimproved” landscape and to see little or no evidence of human presence is an important theme underlying the group members’ opinions about encountering other visitors, and management actions relative to Gates of the Arctic. In excerpts 44 through 46 they explain that seeing ecological impacts caused by visitors bothers them more than seeing the visitors themselves. In fact, Curt claims that, “seeing [other] parties doesn’t bother us in the least” (excerpt 45). Although various group members indicate that they enjoyed not encountering a lot of people (excerpts 33, 43), Curt’s statements in excerpt 46 imply that the notion of “too many” other visitors is tied to potential for ecological impacts rather than opportunities for solitude. This perspective may be partially based on an ethic of restraint. In excerpt 47, Curt explains that he does not object to people in wilderness, but he feels that, “we don’t need to put our footprint permanently on everything.” Another reason for this group’s high tolerance for encountering other parties may be that they have become accustomed to high-density experiences in the California wilderness areas they frequent (excerpt 42).

Although the group does not object to encountering other visitors, Curt, Wayne and Ken clearly value having minimal management presence or infrastructure in the Park. Troy, however, is torn between wanting minimal presence and seeing that the park is “well-enough watched over” (excerpt 50). For him, the lack of management presence may suggest poor park stewardship.

The group members seem to be strongly in favor of visitor use limits to prevent or mitigate ecological impacts. However, some contradictory comments by Curt are a bit confusing. At one point he says that limited permits “have never been acceptable” to him (excerpt 51), but later he says that he would applaud a measure to restrict access in order to keep damage caused by visitors below maximum tolerance levels (excerpt 52). It’s difficult to reconcile these statements other than by suggesting that excerpt 51 is an incomplete statement that was interrupted by the next speaker (a careful review of the tape-recording of this interview seems to support this idea). In excerpt 52, Curt and the others clearly indicate their beliefs that a limited permit entry system is warranted if it is based on science and the threat of un-recoverable ecological damage. Their primary concern regarding use-limits is not with the idea of limits themselves, but with the process of administering them. They want to be sure that visitors are warned well in advance of the need for a permit (excerpt 53), that there are opportunities for securing a permit off-site (excerpt 54), and, most importantly, that access to permits is not unfairly weighted toward commercial operators (excerpts 55-56). Troy suggests that the potential uncertainty of securing a permit is not a significant issue at

Gates of the Arctic because groups like his tend to make their plans up to a year in advance (excerpt 57).

Based on their experience while in Bettles at the start of their trip, the group members express some concerns about how a potential mandatory visitor registration system might work. Troy feels that there is, “not necessarily a good working relationship between the outfitters and the Park Service” (excerpt 59). As a result, their outfitter did not provide any useful information about what was required or available from the Park Service, and their pilot’s time schedule prevented them from visiting the park office (excerpts 59, 61-62). Troy suggests that tight schedules and the variety of other tasks that groups need to accomplish in Bettles make the additional step of registering at the park office a burden (excerpt 60). Finally, Troy suggests that the park office extend its hours to cover more of the time-range of arriving flights (excerpt 63).

817BTT32 Tracy, Linda, Paul, Rob, Abe, Geoff, Hank

This group of friends from Chicago, Illinois participated in a two-week independent trip that combined hiking and floating in the Arrigetch Peaks-Alatna River area. They began their trip on August 4th at the Headwaters of the Alatna, and used an air taxi to link this first part of their trip with hiking in the Arrigetch Peaks. They then floated the Alatna from Kutuk Lake to Just above Malamute Fork, finishing their trip on the 17th (excerpt 2). Rob, the only group member with previous experience in Gates of the Arctic, was the person primarily responsible for selecting and planning the trip. As he describes it, selection of the route for their trip was based three goals: 1) seeing caribou; 2) doing some backpacking, and; 3) having a “decent” float trip (excerpt 1).

Planning for the trip was a major endeavor that began more than two years in advance (excerpt 3). Most of the group members had shared outdoor experiences in the past, but it is not clear whether any of them (other than Rob) had previously participated in lengthy wilderness trips of the kind described here (excerpt 3). Rob spent a month floating the Noatak River exactly 20 years ago. Among the others, Abe, for one, specifically mentions that he had not been on any extended outdoors trips prior to visiting Gates of the Arctic (excerpt 25).

The group presents safety as a major concern. Gates of the Arctic is described as a place where one is far from help should something go wrong (excerpts 5-6). Cabins, which might otherwise be perceived as unwanted signs of human influence, are described in a somewhat positive light in part because they represent islands of safety and evidence that others have safely traversed the area in the past (excerpts 45, 7).

Proper planning, both in terms of mental preparation and bringing the right equipment, is presented as an important prerequisite for successfully dealing with the inevitable dangers and difficulties of wilderness travel. Rob describes how difficulties such as broken equipment and bad weather had no effect on the positive nature of the trip because the group was mentally prepared and shared a common philosophy: “We knew basically what we were in for, so we were ready and willing to take whatever was going to come our way” (excerpt 4). One thing that the group apparently was not prepared for was the amount of air traffic over the area they traveled in. While acknowledging that they too had had relied on air travel to access the park, they say that accelerated air traffic near the end of their trip detracted a bit from their experience (Excerpts 26-27).

Being well-prepared and successfully dealing with difficulties is a significant source of satisfaction for the group. Having the right equipment is clear evidence that the trip was “well thought out”, and working together to overcome problems is described by Rob as “probably the best part [of the trip], all in all” (excerpts 10-11). While planning and completing a difficult trip is mostly described in positive terms, the complex trip itinerary also made the group members keenly aware of time and the need to “get up and move” in order to achieve all they had planned (excerpts 8-9). Consequently, Hank describes the trip as, “a lot more work than I thought it would be...we were busy 90% of the time” (excerpt 13). It was not until the final two days of the trip, when only an easy float to the final take-out point remained, that the group was able to genuinely relax (excerpt 18). However, Abe positively contrasts daily activities in the backcountry with those he typically has to face in the city: “...It wasn’t like having to rush around to catch the bus at a certain time...it was a different kind of need during the day. I thought that was nice” (excerpt 25). The contrast between life in the outdoors and life in the city is a significant theme in this interview. Rob describes letting concerns about personal hygiene, mosquitoes, and bears fade away as he adjusted to outdoor living during the first week of the trip (excerpts 19-20). In fact, the group became so familiar with living outdoors that they felt “a little claustrophobic” when they moved indoors immediately following their trip (excerpt 29).

A second significant theme is social interaction, both within the group and with other people encountered during the trip. As previously noted, Rob feels that working successfully as a group was the best part of the trip. Paul, too, enjoyed the way that individual group members would feed off each other and variously step up to fill motivational roles (excerpt 11). While Hank seems to think that the group size added to the daily workload (excerpt 13), the others clearly feel that they were stronger as a group, and that strength was integral to the success of the trip. During one particularly telling moment in the interview, Geoff was talking about personal hygiene in the backcountry when he spontaneously broke into verse, reciting lines from a Robert Service poem. The other group members then chimed in, reciting lines of their own (excerpts 14-15). This event demonstrated the friendly, positive dynamic amongst the group members and their general “team” approach. Geoff explains that Robert Service poems were part of the entertainment that group members prepared in advance of the trip. Each member of the group had taken pains to prepare some kind of similar diversion (poems, short stories, etc.), and each night they took time for “community entertainment” (excerpt 17). Geoff even used preludes to the evening’s entertainment to motivate group members during difficult hiking sections (excerpt 16). These entertainment activities highlight the social nature of the trip, which seems to be a primary focus of group member’s experiences. Even though seeing caribou was given as one of the primary motivations for the trip, descriptions of actual episodes of seeing caribou, or other wildlife, seem less significant than interactions between the group members and between the group and other people (excerpts 21-23). One exception may be an encounter with a female grizzly and two cubs on the last day of the trip (excerpt 24).

This focus on social interactions and “community” is readily apparent in the group members’ interpretations of their encounters with other people during the trip. All of the actual encounters that they had are described in positive terms, whether those encounters were with other visitors or residents of the surrounding area (excerpts 30-37). For Hank, meeting local residents Steve and Kay was the highlight of the trip (excerpt 35). One reason for the overwhelmingly positive nature of these encounters was the contrast they offered to

social interactions in other environments (excerpts 40-44). According to Paul and Geoff, human encounters during their trip were characterized by “an exchange of caring”, while city encounters would more commonly be characterized by distrust (excerpts 40-41). Tracy suggests that similar exchanges of caring would not be possible even in other national parks, although the reason is not altogether clear (excerpt 42). Interactions with residents Steve and Kay and with a group of 4 subsistence hunters may have been especially positive because these “locals” represent romantic ideas about living in the arctic or in a wildland setting. Hank says that living in a hand-built log cabin far from civilization—as Steve and Kay do—is something he has always dreamed of doing (excerpt 34). For Hank, Steve and Kay were tangible proof that his dream is possible. Likewise, the subsistence hunters may be seen as proof of the authenticity of the place, although the meaning of this encounter is slightly problematic because three of the hunters were Alaska Natives while the other one was white. Federal law allows for subsistence hunting by any rural resident in Alaska—Native or white—but Rob and Tracy seem unsure of how to address the presence of a non-Native hunter. Tracy doesn’t mention the white hunter at all, referring only to encountering “the Natives” (excerpt 36). Rob at first mentions only “the Eskimo and his two sons” then amends his story of the encounter to include the white group member. He describes inviting the Eskimo and his sons to dinner, but not the fourth member of their group, and ends his story by restating, “...that was a nice experience, running into the Eskimo and his two sons” (excerpt 37). It seems plausible to conclude that the presence of Native hunters fit or enhanced Rob’s image of the place, while the white hunter did not fit so neatly.

In contrast to the positive nature of most of the actual encounters, one instance of seeing but not contacting another group and all discussions of hypothetical encounters are described in decidedly negative terms. At one point, the group describes being upset by another group camping within sight of their camp on a river sand bar. Interestingly, although Tracy says the encounter “was definitely to some degree detracting [from her experience]”, no one in the group even remembered the encounter until something prompted Rob’s memory near the end of the interview (excerpt 39). Similarly, the group also forgot to mention twice encountering two Park Service rangers when they were first asked about seeing other people during their trip. Rob explains that there were so many other things to see during the trip that encountering the rangers was an insignificant event in comparison (excerpts 47-48).

Other than seeing the rangers, the group had no interaction at all with Park service management or managers. Rob suggests that not seeing any evidence of the Park Service is ideal, and says that it’s important that rangers are not obtrusive (excerpts 49, 51-52). However, when asked about limiting visitor use in the Park, Rob and the others voice strong support. There appear to be at least two underlying reasons for this support. First, Rob and the others feel that growth of the visitor population and subsequent changes in experience opportunities are inevitable without specific measures to stop the growth. Rob points to the increase in visitors to Gates of the Arctic since his first visit 20 years ago, and also to changes he has seen at Boundary Waters [Canoe Area Wilderness] as proof of this inevitability (excerpts 54, 56-57). The second reason for supporting use limits is tied to the notion of uniqueness. Both Rob and Geoff suggest that Gates of the Arctic is unique as one of a very few remaining genuine wilderness areas, and it should therefore be preserved (excerpts 58-59). They view visitor use as the primary threat to the uniqueness of the area (excerpts 59-60). Linda and Abe suggest that really interested potential visitors will learn to

be flexible and make whatever efforts are necessary to secure a visit. However, the group members are clearly concerned with fairness (excerpts 61-62). They seem to see the primary question regarding use limits as one of who chooses rather than how to determine the number of visitors to allow. Geoff's comments about establishing a different policy in excerpt 59 imply that he sees the use-limits issue as one of policy change (political will) rather than science.

At several points in the interview, Rob comments on how seeing other people detracts from the wilderness experience (excerpts 38, 56-57). Given the group's focus on social interaction and the positive nature of their encounters with other people during their trip, it is hard to understand this negative focus on encounters and associated support for use limits to prevent them. A closer look at Rob's comments suggests two possible explanations. In excerpt 57 he says, "...if we had seen many more campers, boaters, hikers like ourselves, I think that would have detracted from what we've experienced in the last two weeks." This statement implies a perceived threshold; the encounters they did have were ok, but *many more* and they would have reached a tipping point where seeing any others detracted from the experience. Rob's comments in excerpt 38, however, challenge this interpretation and suggest a deeper issue. He acknowledges that their encounters were positive but he emphasizes "that's not the point." In this excerpt, Rob is speaking of his interpretation of the ideal wilderness experience—one that is full of wildlife and natural wonders and free of other people. This image of ideal wilderness remains unchanged even though his most recent experience seems to challenge it. It appears to be this ideal image that motivates Rob's and the others' objections to hypothetical encounters and support for use limits. In other words, the experience of a wilderness place and the meaning of the wilderness idea exist somewhat independently for this group. They see Gates of the Arctic as a place where the ideal wilderness image should be fostered and preserved.

818BTT33 Rodney, Grady, Cole, and Bert

These four friends were members of a 10-person guided group led by Northstar Outfitters. They were clearly friends before the trip, having participated in other trips together in the past (excerpts 13-15), but their relationship to the other group members is not clear. They spent 12 days on the Noatak River, beginning at Portage Creek on August 6th, and taking-out at Lake Kavachurak on the 17th (excerpt 5). Although this was primarily a river trip, the group spent two nights at each of their first three campsites to allow time for day-hiking (excerpts 6-8). The trip was conceived of by another member of the group who solicited guide services via the internet. An individual from Northstar responded with a trip proposal and worked with this group member to develop an itinerary. The other members of the trip "signed on at various different times" (excerpts 1-4).

Rodney acted as the de facto spokesperson for the group during this interview. He usually took the lead in answering questions, and he often spoke at length, while the others tended to give brief responses. Rodney is an experienced backcountry traveler. He has been on other trips lasting two weeks or more, he has traveled in remote regions of Nepal, and he takes frequent trips into the mountains of Montana where he lives (excerpts 13, 14). Grady is from Ohio and has been to the arctic twice before—once in Canada and once in Greenland (excerpts 15, 16). Cole takes frequent short trips near his home in Massachusetts, and has floated the Grand Canyon and traveled in Nepal with Rodney (excerpt 15). Bert, also from

Ohio, identifies himself as the least experienced wilderness traveler of the four (excerpt 15). This was the first trip to Alaska for all four individuals. As a group, they present themselves as confident, knowledgeable wilderness travelers who value the opportunity to practice self-reliance and test themselves against the environment (excerpts 10, 11, 17, 18). Although they were members of a guided group, they view themselves as being better prepared and, perhaps, more skilled than other guided visitors (excerpt 45).

Seeing few other people and experiencing a unique, wild environment were the primary dimensions of their trip as they described it. Rodney and his friends leapfrogged with another party during the first few days of their trip, but they estimate that they encountered three different parties “at the most” while on the river (excerpt 43). They all agreed that passing a camping party once a day was not intrusive, but having another party establish a camp near to theirs would be intrusive (excerpt 44). Rodney references The Wilderness Act in identifying “outstanding opportunities for solitude” as the best part of the trip (excerpt 19). However, he feels that seeing evidence of other people, particularly trash, would have more of a negative effect on his experience than encountering the people themselves (excerpts 24, 47). Although Rodney emphasizes the “pristine” (excerpt 23) and “untrammelled” (excerpt 25) nature of the Noatak area, he enjoys imagining the thoughts and feelings of “the first inhabitants” in the region. In fact, he feels connected to those first inhabitants through his own experience of discovery and the “pull of the country” (excerpt 41). Bert expresses a similar view regarding other users of the area. He prefers not to see other users because it disrupts the “illusion” that his group is the only one in the Park. Like Rodney, he recognizes that the untouched, unvisited appearance of the area is indeed largely an illusion, but this does not diminish his enjoyment of it (excerpt 46).

The group members describe several unique features of the Noatak area that were significant to their experiences. Bert and Rodney particularly enjoyed the diversity and novelty of the local geology and plant life (excerpts 33, 36). The far-north location of the Noatak and proximity to the Arctic Ocean lent an exotic aura to the area that was made tangible by the quality of the light, the feel of the wind, and contrasting colors in the landscape (excerpts 37, 38). This unique feel is accentuated by sheer distance from any developed areas and relatively difficult access by float-plane (excerpts 34, 35). Another important feature of the landscape was the wide-open terrain that facilitated experience of the tremendous scale of the Park. All the group members agree that viewing expansive mountain vistas and knowing that the terrain extended beyond their vision was important to their experience (excerpts 28-31). For Bert, one particular view that allowed him to “revel in the glory of all the mountains” represents the high point of the whole trip (excerpt 32). The open terrain also facilitated viewing distinctive northern wildlife including musk ox, grizzly bears, caribou, and Dall sheep (excerpts 9-12).

The remote location of the Park, absence of other people, and presence of wildlife are described as dimensions of the quality of wildness (excerpts 22, 23). Wildness and wilderness are presented as similar concepts; the Noatak area is described as both “the wildest place you’ll ever go” (excerpt 23) and as a prime example of wilderness (excerpt 25). Cole suggests that one additional important quality of wilderness is scale, “It can’t be wilderness if it’s [only] 100 square miles” (excerpt 27).

The group had no contact or interaction with the Park Service before or during their trip (excerpt 50). In fact, they received the standard backcountry orientation from their guide rather than a ranger and were not even aware that the Park Service provides that service

(excerpts 48, 52). They explain that signage or other management infrastructure is unnecessary in the backcountry and would diminish the wilderness character of the area as well as their opportunity to practice self-reliance (excerpt 18). They describe the current management approach as “perfect” and “exactly appropriate” (excerpt 51).

Rodney and the others see the potential need to limit the number of river users in order to maintain opportunities for low or no-encounter experiences as the primary management challenge facing the Park Service (excerpts 49, 54). Rodney implies that weather or other difficulties associated with travel may make the area self-limiting (excerpts 39, 40, 49). Nevertheless, he suggests that, “there may be a time in the near future when you need to limit the number of parties-per-day putting in” (excerpt 49). All the group members agree that future use-limits may be appropriate (excerpt 53). However, they imply that use-limits are not yet necessary because they “saw very few people as it was” (excerpt 55). Rodney suggests that use limits will be appropriate when exit interviews reveal that the subjective visitor experience is being impacted by too many people (excerpt 56).

Throughout the interview, Rodney and the others make it clear that they are well-versed in classical wilderness language and philosophy. Rodney twice quotes from The Wilderness Act (excerpts 19, 25), and his discussion of the subtle difference between managing for a national park experience versus a wilderness experience demonstrates that he has a sophisticated knowledge of wilderness management ideas. Even Bert, who has limited first-hand wilderness experience [revealed both by his self-description and by his comments about imagining wilderness as “like the jungle, [where] you have to hack your way” (excerpts 15, 26)] demonstrates a level of sophistication with his previously-mentioned comments that images of empty, people-less wilderness are largely illusion. Given their thoughtfulness and understanding of wilderness complexities, it is interesting to consider the following two issues. First, despite the group’s self-image as skillful and knowledgeable backcountry recreationists (especially shown by their casual comments about various bear sightings and the other group that was apparently frightened by a bear encounter although they themselves were not—excerpts 10-12, 45), and the value they place on self-reliance, they chose to visit the Park as members of a guided group. Second, they express no obvious concern about use-limits impacting theirs or others freedom to visit and experience the park as they choose. It seems plausible that both of these issues are related to a general lack of importance placed on freedom as a dimension of wilderness experience.