

Gates of the Arctic Recreation Visitor Study

Phase I

Appendix C: Data Excerpts

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PREFACE

This appendix contains excerpts of raw interview text which are organized for each interview into thematic categories. The interviews are identified by an 8-character alphanumeric code which shows the date of the interview, the place where it was conducted, and the interview number. Thematic headings are arranged hierarchically. The ones in all capital letters represent the most general levels, and subsequent headings represent more specific thematic categories. For instance, a general theme might have a heading such as THE TRIP, followed by sub-headings such as Itinerary, Weather, and Group Dynamics. The thematic headings were developed independently for each interview, however, general themes and first level sub-themes are common across most of the interviews. Text excerpts are numbered sequentially within each interview. These excerpts are the data that support the narrative summaries in Appendix B, and the results presented in the summary project report for Phase I.

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622BTT01

Jerry (JE) and Joe (JO)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Changing Plans

[1: 23 to 37] JO: Yes, we changed planes. We got into the Beaver. The Beaver was cool. Then we flew up to the John River. A great trip up the John. We saw a moose on the way up. We could not land at "what was the name of the lake?" JE: Hunt Fork Lake. We had too much wind from the north. JO: So we went on up to Moss Lake. JE: Yes. JO: We couldn't land because of the ice still in the lake. It was frozen. JE: Yup. JO: So, we decided we would just swing over and get on the North Fork. JE: Yes, we abandoned the John River.

[2: 39 to 43] B: Were you disappointed? JE: No, we just wanted to be out. I think we were a little disappointed. JO: I was a little disappointed.

Reasons for Visiting

[3: 473 to 477] JE: First, I just looked on a map for something that looked like about the right length for the time we had. We both have a lot of responsibilities and businesses and a bunch of kids, who are fortunately growing up. JO: Just about gone. JE: I wanted to go back to the Brooks Range. That's where I grew up.

[4:497] JE: Oh, it wasn't hard to sell. He had known of the life I had up here 30 years ago and what I was doing. I think he was kind of fascinated with it. He wanted to get a chance to see what it was like.

Novel/Familiar Experience

[5: 479 to 481] B: This was your (to Joe) first Brooks Range trip, but you (to Jerry) have quite a bit of experience here. JE: I lived here for years a long time ago.

[6: 289] JE: For me, it was coming home. It was really nice. It's been a long, long time.

[7: 287] JO: It was beautiful. For me, it was, again, a first time experience, which was marvelous. Beautiful. Gorgeous walking. Beautiful scenery.

[8: 505] JO: I hadn't a clue what I was getting into. I mean, honestly. I had no idea what I was getting into. I was totally blown away, step by step by step. The hike... I'm accustomed to walking around in the woods and in the mountains, but walking around in the backcountry here is totally unique. It's just a totally different experience.

[see also excerpts 28-29]

Hiking

[9: 263] JO: We went for a great hike. We went up this mountain and got on the ridge. There was Ruby Creek drainage. Oh yeah, and we'd gone up the Ruby Creek drainage

in our kayaks and that was pretty cool. That was kind of a highlight. That was pretty neat.

[10: 291] JO: We probably hiked up 2000 to 3000 vertical feet up this ridge. We went up the stream-bed and went up the ridge. Got way high up one side of the peak. Hung out. We saw a few birds. Saw a nesting bird.

[11: 51] JO: I saw these other lakes right next to Moss Lake. I thought we will just go over there and land, but I didn't know about tussocks. I now know about tussocks.

[12: 509] JO: It's just like walking around on this vegetative sponge. I mean it's soft. It's lush. It's full of hundreds of different species of life. It's just awesome. I was pretty taken by it. You go from ridge top to side of the hill to the creek bed. It was cool. Moss on the side of the hill.

Focus on Friendship

[13: 387 to 391] B: So, I hear you bringing up wildlife a lot, every day. That's wildlife tracks and wildlife viewing. Was that the best part of the trip? JE: No, the best part of the trip was being with old friends and being out in the country. JO: Yeah, this was all about Jerry and I getting back together in the country.

[14: 431 to 443] JO: Oh, yeah, we are just great friends. JE: Oh yes, the four of us are great friends. It was cool. JO: We spend at least two times together a year, probably three. JE: Yes, we do. JO: Jerry comes to Colorado and skies with us. We come up here to Alaska. Last year I came up here. We went to Prince William Sound. JE: We went to Prince William Sound with my oldest son and John's oldest daughter. JO: Our kids are a similar age, so we have an exchange kind of thing going on.

[15: 487 to 491] JO: It was fun for me because this is where Jerry has a homestead on the Ambler River, so it was great for me to come up and see a part of the life that he's lived that I haven't seen. We didn't tell you this. We grew up together. We went to grade school, high school, and college together. And then we split up, had our families, and now in the last, what, three years I guess, we've.... JE: Ten years, because you came to my wedding. JO: That's right, in the last ten years we started touching base again. But the last three years we really started getting back together.

[16: 453 to 469] JE: I mean, just a different environment. If you had a choice next year of going back to the ocean, going to Kodiak or somewhere, or coming up here in the Interior in the North, in the Brooks Range, we wouldn't care. JO: I wouldn't care. JE: It's all fun. JO: As long as it's a new place. JO: We'd look for a new place and the same companionship. JE: Yeah, we'll do it next year. JO: Yeah. We've got a laundry list of adventures, an adventure list, right? JE: That's right. JO: We just keeping adding them up. Just keep adding to the list. Checking them off.

Easy Trip

[17: 85] JE: But it was fine. We had a lot of stuff. We were not going light. We were going for comfort. Not speed.

[18: 135 to 137] JO: Then we spent 2 or 3 hours on the river, maybe 4. JE: Something like that. Just putzing along. Easy water. Very, very easy water.

[19: 225 to 227] JE: Yeah, we did. But this was a short trip. We had intended to be way further up on the John. We had five days. This was a short trip. So, we knew we had lots of time. We kind of diddled around. JO: Yes, which was great. We just wanted to be out.

[20: 401] JE: It was kind of one of those trips that... generally an Alaskan trip has some kind of adventure aspect to it, where you kind of are gripping a little bit. This was just mellow. It was beautiful weather. The temperatures were in the 70s and 80s. No rain. Everything is dry. Everything is clean.

[21: 407 to 415] B: So how did this one compare to other trips that you've been on? JE: We always have fun together. JO: This was pretty good. This one lacked an epic except for the portage. The portage was a little epic. JE: But it was not much of an epic. JO: This was a pretty smooth trip.

[22: 417 to 421] JE: We spent many, many years together doing many dangerous things. This was not dangerous by any stretch of the imagination. JO: This was just a great trip for us. JE: And we were taking our wives, so we wanted it to be comfortable. We didn't want it to be a real gripper sort of a trip. We wanted them to have fun, so we could do this again next year, which we will do, absolutely.

Air Traffic

[23: 627 to 633] JE: I hoped it wouldn't happen. I had hoped that it still had a certain wildness to it. Years ago, there were no planes unless they were coming in to see us. We were even off the paths of any high-flying jets. There were no planes at all. Totally silent. B: So you said you were surprised at the airplane traffic. JO: Yeah, I was amazed at the number of planes and then they were fairly high. JE: There was a regular Herc that must have been flying to the Nuiqsut or Sparrow Bay or Bear Island or somewhere.

Wildlife

Expecting to see more

[24: 269 to 273] JE: We were surprised that upriver there was very little bird activity. That was kind of interesting. The country looked really hungry. As we came down, it got richer and richer. B: It's been a very late spring up north in the whole park. JE: That's what it acted like.

Signs

[25: 193] JE: We saw a lot other sign. It was really great. We saw wolf and wolf pups. There must have been a den nearby. Fairly fresh sign. Interestingly enough, we saw a bear, kind of a mid-size grizzly, with a wolverine following him.

[26: 279 to 285] JO: We had a great hike. Again, lots of signs. JE: Oh, yeah, bears tearing things up. He was eating ants all over the place. JO: Yes, bear sign, moose sign, everything. JE: Lots of caribou. It looked like they'd been up there over the winter. A fair number.

[27: 366] JO: I think it was nice for us because we were there as runoff. It looked like runoff was on the way down. So, all of the beaches and all the gravel bars and sand bars were just fresh. So we could see all the wildlife tracks. Every time you'd stop you could see wildlife signs. It was pretty spectacular.

Bears-safety

[28: 165 to 173] JE: The campsite was at the confluence of a creek, coming into the North Fork. So, there was some bear activity there, but it was old. Old tracks. Grizzly, not black. B: Were you concerned about that at all? The bear activity? JE: Not really. B: Joe says "oh yea" and you say "not really." JO: You know, it's funny, for me this is all new and Jerry's experienced. So, this was a pretty new scene for me. But I wasn't overly concerned. We were prepared for bear. We had all the stuff.

[29: 179 to 185] B: Did you have your food in bear barrels? JE: We actually had our food in dry bags, tied up tight. We hung them in trees where we could. After that, there weren't trees right near where we were, so we put them where we could see them and just sealed them really tight. JO: We sealed them tight. We put them in a good food bag, a good dry bag, seal them up tight, put a bell on them so that we could hear if anything got into them. We were very careful, I think. We were very careful about our food. Very careful about how we dealt with the bears. I became more comfortable as we went along. JE: I've had a lot of bear experiences over 30-some years, so it was just no problem.

Sightings

[30: 63] JO: We saw some Dall sheep along the way, two different bands of Dall sheep, beautiful. That was gorgeous. There were many highlights of the trip. The pilot was great. The flight was great. We flew over and landed at Red Star.

[31: 161 to 163] JE: No. Oh, yes, we did. We saw a moose with two very young calves, maybe just 2 or 3 days old. Really nice, out along the side of the bank. JO: All three of them were looking over at us. That was pretty cool.

[32: 305 to 313] JE: As we got back down, the country got richer and then the big highlight was seeing a wolf yesterday. JO: Yes, we saw a wolf yesterday. B: Just a lone wolf. JE: A lone wolf. It was gray and in moult. She was dropping her fur. She was looking kind of mangy, but we kind of startled her on a bank. She was sort of caught there. As we came around she couldn't really get away. So she was going back and forth doing a nervous little deal. As soon as we got by, she was able to get up and out. I say "she" but it could have been a male. JO: It was pretty special. I had never seen one before, so that was really neat. That was pretty cool.

[33: 321] JO: A couple of hawks. Lots of raptors. A couple of eagles. Golden eagle. But the wolf was pretty, for me it was, really cool.

[34: 393] JE: But the wildlife was certainly a highlight. It was great. Seeing a wolf was a real blessing. I mean that was really cool. That doesn't happen every day.

[35: 525 to 527] JO: And being on a river...I've been on a river, but I've never been on a river where you can see a moose with her two calves or a wolf. Man, that's pretty cool. JE: And those grizzly bears. Take care of those grizzly bears. We need them around, tearing things up.

WILDNESS/WILDERNESS

Evidence of Other People

[36: 352 to 356] JE: Then we threw it all away. We cleaned up everything. We made a lot of tracks, though. The next guys are not going to feel so wild. JO: Yeah, we left a lot of tracks in the sand bars. JE: We were wandering all over the place checking things out.

[37: 358 to 364] B: You didn't see a lot of other people tracks? JE: Only one other set of people. It looked like somebody just stopped briefly and was sort of looking. Maybe somebody this spring. Maybe bear hunting or something. They were old tracks. That was our 2nd night at that one creek. They were old tracks. B: Was it disappointing to see the tracks? Did it bother you? JE: Not really. Didn't bother me.

[38: 705 to 711] JO: The hike we went on was great. The hike of a lifetime. We simply did not hike on a human trail. From what we could tell. We questioned this one trail along the river bed. JE: Maybe some of the miners from Wiseman had worked that in there some years ago. JO: Years ago. We crossed this trail. After that, there was no question. Every trail we were walking on was a game trail. You could tell. With all the sign, all the scat. JE: You had the illusion, which is the most wonderful thing. The feeling that you were the first person ever there.

[39: 713 to 715] JO: In fact we made that comment when we were up on the ridge. JE: Yeah, maybe nobody had climbed that mountain before. And they may not have. And maybe they have. Just the illusion that perhaps they hadn't ever been there was great.

[40: 743 to 747] JE: And the fires, for God's sake. Fire pits, and that kind of thing. People have to behave as if the next guy coming along will never have an idea that they were there. I was guilty, with all the tracks that we left, in a way. I was hoping a rain or a wind or high water would come and blow the tracks away so that nobody would see them. When they stop at our 2nd campsite where we spent 2 days and see how much walking around we did, they are going to think a whole herd of human beings was there. B: So that was on your mind during the trip? JE: Yes, I don't want to see tracks.

Loss of Wildness

[41: 581] JE: When I lived in the Brooks Range, I knew who lived 400 miles in either direction. There was nobody. There were so few people. We knew who at Walker Lake. We knew who was Wild Lake. We knew who was to the east of us. We knew who was to the west of us. There were not many people.

[42: 529 to 535] B: So, if you were describing this place to somebody who wasn't your long-time childhood friend, how would you describe it? JE: You know, my perspective is so tainted because of what I've been through up here. But I would say "see it as quickly as you can because this wildness will only go away more as the years go by." B: What will make it go away? JE: The familiarity, I think. You know, the first time you're there will be the sweetest time because the wildness will be more poignant. But "do it" because it will never be any wilder than it is right now. A generation from now, it won't even be close to how it is today.

[43: 539] JE: I mean it's a park now. I grieved the day that this became a park. It had to. It was part of what had to happen. But I grieved it because I knew the wildness would go. It had a boundary. It had a name. I loved it when this country had no name. You had to ask an Eskimo elder what the name of this place was. Maps were bad. You didn't even know where you were. But I was lucky. I was fortunate to experience that. That doesn't mean that now people shouldn't come to see it as it is because it will only become less wild as time goes by. You can pretend that Yellowstone is wild and the NPS has done a wonderful job with what they've had to do. The fact is that the earth is filling up. In Alaska, in the Brooks Range in particular, it is the last place. It's just barely wild still.

[44: 597] JE: Wild has a lot to do with freedom.

[see also excerpt 23]

Relationship Between Wildness and Wilderness

[45: 585] JE: But look at Denali....My niece, now, is a backcountry ranger at Denali, with the back country management plan that I helped put together. When she has gone hiking in Denali, and she's lived in the Bush, she knows Alaska, she is amazed at the quality of the experience. I hated what I was putting together there then in the early 70s. I hated it. I hated the rules. Because wilderness doesn't mean rules. Wilderness means the country is so damn big that you can go out there and you can hack yourself a cabin out of the woods, and shoot yourself something to eat, and cover yourself in furs, and when it starts feeling crowded, you move again. There's nowhere else to go now. There's nowhere else to go. This was it. This is the last place. So, you have to manage it so that you have the illusion that it's still wild. But it's not wild. The moon is wild. Alaska was wild some years ago. North America was wild 200 years ago.

[46: 587 to 589] B: Are wild and wilderness synonymous? You use wild a lot. JE: Yes. I just get tired of the word wilderness because it is contrived.

[47: 591 to 593] B: So, would you describe this place as wilderness? JE: Yes, this is wilderness. It's managed as a wilderness.

[48: 595] JO: But wilderness is a step down from wild. I would differentiate that. I think you do too when I listen to what you say because once you begin to manage something as wilderness, it becomes managed. And it's a step down from a wild environment.

[49: 679 to 691] B: So you use the word freedom earlier, which made my ears perk up. Was the experience that you had this time free? JE: It was a great experience. JO: Totally. JE: But, it wasn't wild. But it was a great experience. B: It wasn't wild because it was familiar? JO: Yeah. It was a good wilderness experience. JE: It was a good wilderness experience. There you go. That's a good word. We didn't see other people. We saw one set of human footprints which were old and probably related to bear hunters in the spring. We saw a wolf. I mean we saw wolverine tracks. We saw bear. We saw wolf and wolf cub tracks. It was a great experience. My perspective is distorted. 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.

[50: 739] JE: The world isn't big enough anymore for me, unfortunately, but I was blessed enough when I was a kid to experience that. Now, it's got to be....what we went through. It was great. It was just fine. It was an A+ wilderness experience. The country felt big. We didn't feel like it was full of people. It was still full of wildlife. It was still a wilderness experience. It was great. Even though it had a boundary around it and names.

MANAGEMENT

Personal History Relative to Park Management

[51: 513 to 519] JO: Oh, and I gave him a hard time about it because we both are from a Park Service background. My dad worked for the Park Service and I grew up in the parks. JE: His dad was regional director of the NPS for the northwest. He had Alaska and all the north. He was a NPS boy. He grew up in the NPS. JO: My dad was the regional director when they set these parks up. Jerry worked for the NPS. JE: I was the first backcountry ranger at Denali Park.

Low-Key Presence

[52: 545 to 547] JO: It was pretty low-key. In fact, I had to ask Jerry where the park boundary was as we were flying in to the John. I had to say "when do we get to the park boundary?" And you couldn't look down and say "yeah, okay, that's where the logging stops and this is where the park starts." JE: You see, we grew up at Rainier together. You know where the park boundary is because when you fly over, you see the logging right up to the park boundary.

[53: 541] JO: I had no idea that he superintendent of the park met you at the landing field. I didn't know who the guy was. He just rode up alone on a bike. He asked us how we were doing and if we wanted a bear barrel or whatever it was.

[54: 605 to 613] JE: None of that. This superintendent here was absolutely delightful. JO: I didn't even know he was a superintendent. JE: He's just a guy. JO: We thought he was a [inaudible]. JE: Unfortunately, I know him but I couldn't remember his name. He came up to us and said "well, you guys know what you're doing, just get out of here."

Park is Self-Limiting

[55: 575] JE: It's expensive, it's remote, it's hard to get to, it requires a lot of logistics. It's an exclusive group that can come here.

[56: 701 to 703] B: How is that experience different from what you get here? JE: Right now? It was bigger country here. It's less controlled. The isolation and the expense to get here, unfortunately, makes for a better quality experience.

[57: 653] JE: You know when this country is going to be wild.... the most wild is in the winter. It still is going to be so frickin' cold that it's just not going to be

Inevitable Growth and Change

[58: 599 to 601] JO: What I was interested in is the park has no rules. There are no trails. There is no sign-in or sign-out, which I assume is coming. JE: It has to, unfortunately. Don't push it.

[59: 651] JO: You're going to have to clean the place up. In running rivers in Colorado where you have fire pens, you have permits, you have user days on each river that only allows so many people to go down the river. I was telling Jerry on this trip we need to go run the Noatak quick because my guess is that in the next ten years you're going to limit the number of people here with permits. Right now, you can go run the Noatak whenever you want. My guess is that in the next ten years, you'll have to get a permit.

[60: 583] JO: My guess is your numbers will grow. It may be flat for a while, but I have to believe that people will start coming out here.

[61: 577] JO: But talking to the young guy who took us back from the launch, he said the Japanese are coming in here. They are getting dog sleds. They are coming in big numbers in the winter to go up and see the northern lights, the aurora borealis, that whole scene.

[62: 655] JO: I was fascinated by the fact that the Japanese are coming in here riding on the dog sleds and they come in and they give you your own dog sled. You can come in here and rent a dog sled. Here you are, you got these dogs and I have no clue what this is like, Jerry knows what this is like-- and a musher with you, and you can go mushing. You don't think that's attractive? People have expendable income and they are going to show up. They're going to go mushing all over the place.

[63: 717 to 719] B: Do you see that opportunity coming head to head with the issues of freedom and access that you've brought up already? JE: You know, it's inevitable. I

would say avoid as much control as long as you can. But don't let it get to the point that this gets destroyed.

Support for Rules and Regulations

[64: 641] JE: I was so glad to come back. And that's not screwed up. I'm coming back again. I want to drink as much of it as I can before it's gone. You guys have to manage it. I would not have been irritated or bothered if we would have had to fill out a permit or pay a fee. I'm a believer in fees. I'm a believer in backcountry rules and regulations. I'm a believer that you don't want to send anybody back there.

[65: 617 to 625] B: What would have happened if he had said you need to have a bear barrel? JE: And a permit. JO: And a permit? JE: Just one more step. JO: We would have done it. It's fine. I don't think it would have been a horrible issue. I think we would have expected it. We were from that environment.

[66: 643] JO: If somebody would have said you have to take a bear barrel or you have to have some means of making sure that any bear contact that you have is a negative experience for the bear. I would not have had a problem if somebody would have sat down and asked us if we had our act together.

[67: 673] JO: To go back to the issue that you raised, I wouldn't have a problem if the park had rules and regs but I would want to know about them in advance. I would want to be prepared for them. I wouldn't want to show up here and all of a sudden have somebody change the rules and not allow access. I want access clearly defined and well understood. Since Jerry set the trip up, I assume that he would. We flew in here with an outfitter. I would want the outfitter to know what's going on. If we had cruised in here and the superintendent had rolled in and said, "wait a minute, we need money, we need you to sign this, we need you to take this, we need you to do that," I think we would have been a little taken aback.

[see also excerpt 45]

Preserving the Illusion of Wildness

[68: 699] JE: We'd love to talk to you about how we figured out the Denali plan. It was so arbitrary. But it was to create the illusion that you were the first one there. We didn't want trails formed. We didn't want people running into another party. And it worked. It's still working.

[see also excerpts 43, 45]

Support for Limits on Access

[69: 677] JE: I would rather wait one to two years to get in and get in there and not see other parties.

[70: 693 to 695] B: I'd like to restate what you said earlier. "I'd rather wait two years..." JE: I'd rather wait two years to have this kind of wilderness experience than to see this destroyed, personally.

Ecological basis for limits

[71: 741] JO: Yeah. In this kind of environment, you've got to define the requirements of the biosphere. You've got to define what the wildlife and what the wild shed needs. Then you have to say okay how many people can we allow to pass through here? And still keep that whole? It is so delicate.

[72: 751] JE: Oh yeah, we wouldn't walk on their tracks. You guys have your hands full making sure that you don't overdo it. And the Arctic up here is so delicate and so lean. We don't know how lean this country is. Imagine what Ohio was like 300 years ago. Talk about full-up, abundant country that was. This is the edge of the earth here. You have to watch it carefully.

Wildlife as an indicator/basis for limits

[73: 721] JO: No, you have to start the permit process sooner than later. You really do. You have to take it drainage by drainage. You're talking to a guy that runs a ski area on Forest Service land. I'll tell you, I know about carrying capacity because I've seen how far you can push the needle. I think you have to look at it every season, every day. You've got to understand the carrying capacity of these watersheds. I have never seen a wolf in my life, but we saw wolf sign, wolf tracks, fairly fresh, and we saw a wolf! How many people can you send up this river drainage that we were in and still keep the wildlife reasonably comfortable with the human activity?

[74: 723] JE: Well, it's worked at Denali. People see wolves. They don't see wolverine. We saw wolverine tracks, fresh, following the bear. So, this experience was better.

Method of limiting access

[75: 753 to 757] JO: You have an advantage. All access is through these guys that fly these planes. B: Right, right. JO: There's nobody schlepping their stuff in here. They're not. So, you've got an advantage. You have a control point. I think you should take advantage of it and say "who's bringing who in, when, etc." You can track the parties of people. I would think that you could use these outfitters to help you control access. It's not like a whole hoard of people are going to show up here and just wander in.

626BTT02

Carl (C)

Interviewer (B)

ABANDONING THE EXPEDITION

Navigation Error

[1: 11 to 15] C: We flew out of Bettles on Tuesday, the 19th, in the morning. We landed on the upper Noatak River on a lake, actually we landed on a lake. We don't know the name because it wasn't the lake we thought we were landing on. It turned out to be a

different lake. B: Was that an accident? C: That was an accident. The pilot was the first time into that area and he didn't have the GPS coordinates for that because he changed lakes the last second and that was the beginning of the downfall. No GPS machines. We didn't GPS it. We just started counting drainages and looking at the maps and trying to figure out where we were.

[2: 15] C: Then the next day we got up and moved toward the drainage that we thought we were going to take over, a little portage that we thought we were going to take over, it turned out we were walking away from it. We were on it and we were walking away from it.

[3: 15] C: And then it all came into focus "wait a second, we weren't dropped where we thought we were dropped." It looks like we were dropped here and in fact we were sitting right where we were supposed to be. Instead, we had walked 5 or 6 miles away from where we were supposed to be, quite a trek.

[4: 127 to 131] C: I could have pushed on. He wanted to even after we passed, you know, went away from our spot where we were supposed to actually be, you know. I don't really blame the pilot for landing on the wrong lake. It's the first time he's flown up there, too, you know. And we did change lakes at the last minute. He didn't have the GPS coordinates at the time. He hadn't really been briefed on a different lake. B: Hmmm.....C: So, if we had stuck to the original lake, things would have worked out a lot different I think. I'd be getting a helicopter ride off the Alatna somewhere. Instead of hanging out [in Bettles].

Injury

[5: 15] C: So then we made camp and hung out, hiked around for the day and that's when my knee started hurting. Then we ate dinner and went to sleep late. We got up the next day and did another day hike, trying to eat up some of that food we had. And my knee was still bothering me.

[6: 15] C: So then I started figuring it was my knee and I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue on. This area is where they pick people up and drop people off and that maybe we should stay in this area right here.

Uncertainty/Commitment

[7: 47] C: And then when my knee acted up and the 86 pounds and the idea that we have to get somewhere to meet them, you know. It's not just an in and an out, you know. We got to go somewhere. That kind of changed things right there.

[8: 59 to 63] C: Also, the planning of the trip, going in on a lake and then coming back out on the same lake, with a pick up and a drop off instead of a drop off over here and traversing over 100 miles over to here. That's a little more epic. So....definitely changing the trip a little also changes that, you know. I mean, the idea of knowing that, okay, in 14 days someone is going to land on this lake and pick me up. That, instead of saying I

got to get somewhere. B: Right. C: I could stay right there if I want. It's kind of like car camping, only it's airplane camping.

[9: 113 to 115] B: Hmmm.....So, how would you, in its current state, how would you describe this place to somebody who was thinking about visiting? C: I would say it's spectacular. I would say "go for it." I would say to plan well. I'd get one of those satellite phones and go for it, definitely. I would tell them to either do a raft trip, float trip, or to do a fly-in and a fly-out. Not a traverse. I would not recommend a traverse.

Remoteness

[10: 45 to 47] B: So, it was different that what you were expecting? C: Ummm.....no it wasn't different than what I was expecting, except for the remoteness. The feeling of the remoteness, you know. Once we were dropped off, we were like "wow" this is you know, okay, a little different than what I've done before. You know, I've done a lot of backpacking before and this is a little different now.

[11: 49 to 51] B: So, what do you mean by remoteness? C: Lack of communication with the outside world, exactly what it is. You know. And that's one of the reasons why I came up here, too. But it's a little different once you're here. It's different when you're sitting at home planning it than when you're actually in it. I think about what I'd do differently. I definitely would get one of those satellite phones. When we're going back out, I'm bringing one of their radios. They have these aviation radios they rent. And they pick up aviation radio.

[12: 53 to 59] B: So, is that going to impact or reduce the remoteness? C: No. Yes, it'll impact the remoteness, definitely. It'll bring it a little closer. It'll take it away. It'll bring the outside world.... B: It's a positive impact. C: For me, it is, yes. Definitely.

Poor preparation

[13: 119] C: My downfall was in preparing for 41 days in the back country and carrying 21 days' worth of food at one shot. And working a full time job before I came. And taking Masters classes at the same time. And then ending all that and in two days being here. You know. That was a little much. So, I eat a little crow, though, I don't mind.

Too Much Weight

[14: 69 to 71] B: So, what I've heard you say is that if you had a little more, when we started the conversation before the tape was running, you had maybe more weight than you were planning or it felt awfully heavy on your back? C: More weight than I could handle, yeah. If we would have done this trip differently, I mean, now in hind sight, we would have paid for more air drops and carried lighter packs. And maybe only one bear container instead of two bear containers and a pack. Then when you pack those bear containers, they can weigh a lot. They were over 25 pounds each, probably. So, yeah, we would have done more air drops and then carried lighter packs. And that would have worked out a little better, I think.

[15: 75] C: The weight and the terrain, a combination of both. Definitely, with no trails. Definitely. You know, when you're on a trail..... it's like you're on a highway after you hike out here.

Past Experience Hiking in Alaska

[16: 119] C: Not.... no. It was exactly what I expected. Because of my experience backpacking in Alaska. I spent 3 summers in Alaska. And so the tussocks and all that.... actually it had been since 1985 since I'd been here, so yeah, it gone into the faded memory bank. So as soon as we were out there and started walking, it was like "oh yeah" it all started coming back to me. Oh yeah, the wetness, the moisture, and the soggy ground and the grass that you think is good to walk on, but really it's water underneath. It all just came right back to me. I used to know a lot of the plants and slowly but surely they start coming from the recesses....So....But no, it was exactly what I'd expected.

Other People

[17: 15] C: Then we ran into another party and they happened to have a satellite phone, so I called up Jay and Judy and they said "sure, come on." They were getting a drop of some boats, inflatable canoes, and stuff. So he dropped all their gear and picked us up and flew us out yesterday.

[18: 17 to 23] B: Did you see any other people besides those two parties? C: No. We didn't see any other people besides those two parties. And only a few flights over. In six days, I think we saw three maybe four flights during the whole six days. B: What would you have done if you hadn't seen anybody? C: Stayed out at that lake, knowing that sooner or later someone was going to come to the upper Noatak in a raft.

[19: 25 to 27] B: Given that they were kind of your salvation, were you glad to see the first group? C: Oh yeah, definitely. I'd scoped them out in binoculars. It wasn't like they were right next to me. I scoped out tents in binoculars and then moved on down towards them. They were like gearing up real slow. They were very nice and they said "sure, we'll take a note." They were like "oh, Brooks Range Aviation that's who we're using, we'll tell them when we get out, if you guys are still here." They were very reassuring. They were like "oh, this lake and Twelve-Mile Slough, someone is going to be dropped here sooner or later." They go "the weekend's coming and planes are going to be flying.... someone is going to take this river trip." So that's why I decided not to move off the river, to walk away from those lakes knowing that that's where the planes do come sooner or later.

[20: 29 to 44] B: If you hadn't been having knee trouble and you guys were planning on going ahead with the trip as planned, would you have been disappointed to see those people? C: Ummm...50/50. Not really. Not really. B: Not really, okay. C: 50/50. You know. Tenting out of range, you know. If you don't see the tents and stuff, maybe, but I didn't mind knowing that they were over there. B: So you....C: Ask me three weeks ago? Four weeks ago? I might have minded it. B: Yeah? C: But now after the experience, you know, not so bad.

Dependence on Air Taxi

[21: 151] C: You're dropped off. You're out there until the plane comes. That could be, well we waited all day yesterday from noon on. He didn't land until about 5:30 or 6:00. We were waiting since noon. That's a long wait. We realized that when they say afternoon they mean AFTER noon. Not 12:30.

WILDERNESS

Openness

[22: 133 to 139] B: Yeah. So, do you think of this place as wilderness? Is that a fair description? C: Oh yeah, definitely. This is wilderness right here. B: What makes it wilderness? C: Open space. Open space.

[23: 85 to 87] B: So, you had some maybe disappointing things, the heavy packs, your knee, and changing plans. Was there a high point, an especially good part? C: Of this trip for six days? Just getting out there and hanging out and seeing it, in the open space. I like that open space. It's like, very nice. Very rewarding.

Scale

[24: 149 to 151] B: Are there other things that make this place different than other places you've backpacked? C: Sheer size. Sheer size. It's huge. In a lot of my backpacking, you pull your car up, you get your gear out, you hike off, and you get back you hike right back to your car. You just don't do that here.

Scenic Beauty

[25: 87 to 91] C: And the flight in and out was spectacular. Spectacular. B: I've heard that from some other people, that the flight is one of the highlights. C: You go over the Arrigetch Peaks. They go right through them. It's like [inaudible] definitely.

Other People

[26: 141 to 143] B: Did seeing those people out there impact the wilderness character? C: No, not at all. You know, that would be selfish of me to think that having those people out there..... they have every right as well as I do.

No Rescue

[27: 97 to 98] C: God, that goes back a long time ago, back when I was in school in the 80s. I was a recreation major. And one of the courses I took, the professor had written a proposal to make Gates of the Arctic National Park.....first of all, ANILCA had just passed in 1980. I was in school in about '83-'84-'85. So, that was real big in recreation, ANILCA in Alaska. So, we had a class on ANILCA, you know part of the course was learning about ANILCA. Then this professor had proposed Gates of the Arctic National Park to become a no-rescue wilderness area where people could go the way John Muir or even Bob Marshall went and 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. But just really going out there and experiencing it. He had

this proposal to make Gates of the Arctic National Park a no-rescue wilderness area. So that was my first experience of learning about Gates of the Arctic and Bob Marshall.

[28: 104 to 107] B: So, given your experience just now, what do you think about no-rescue wilderness? C: Uhh...that's interesting. It is a philosophical thing. I think in some ways it is already borderline no-rescue wilderness, especially if you're doing a traverse. You're leaving the area where there are people. Because I see that the Noatak River is a spot where a lot of people come in and raft that river. And I see that and I think that maybe things like groovers, toilets, others should be required to bring toilets. I think it should just be a part of their gear. And in fact, I think that's for all [inaudible]. I think if they want to have it, go right ahead. I would not vote against it. If I was asked "do you want to have a no-rescue wilderness, if people want to do that, then go right ahead. I'm not against it.

[29: 109 to 111] B: Would you visit again if it was no-rescue? C: Uhhhhh..... I don't think so. Not personally. I have too much to lose.

MANAGEMENT

Personal History Relative to Park Management

[30: 98] C: And then being a recreation major, I worked for the National Park Service. I'm a National Park Service enthusiast. And I've done a lot of looking around the National Park web pages and just really enjoying the national parks.

Lack of Knowledgeable Staff

[31: 153 to 156] B: So, what did you notice about the management of the park? C: None. None. First of all, there was nobody in the ranger station that knew anything at all when we were there. And I don't blame them. They were brand new rangers that were here for their first summer. And I think the building needed to be staffed a little differently. I've worked for the Park Service so I can go off on them now. I think they were a little worried about Gail Norton coming than their visitors. And there was no permanent ranger in their at all that knew anything about Gates of the Arctic besides the little training that they had had for three weeks. I don't blame those guys at all. I've been there before. I've been there for the three weeks, just got done with my training, and was excited and ready to go, ready to give the best information I could. And they were helpful as they could be. But you know....they barely took any information from us, even on the little permits. They never even asked the color of our tent, which is a pretty basic question on a backcountry permit. What color is your tent, you know. But they're "newbies", as we say. One guy had worked for the Park Service before. The other guy was brand, brand new. But both of them were brand new to the Gates of the Arctic.

Need for Ecological Protection

[32: 143] C: wouldn't want to see it get too crowded out there, though. I think there is a limit for the capacity, especially along those rivers where people are, you know. I think the things that can go into a management plan would be that you can only stay in a campsite area for only so long because it gets trampled so easily and to move your site somewhere else, and give that tundra time to repair itself, which is bad. You know,

you're in big boots marching around and if you stay 4 days in one spot, it's a lot you know. You go to your same water hole. Your feet stomp down in that area every time you get water. It's definitely a fragile area.

[33: 168] C: I'm not out here just to see the environment. I want to see what I'm protecting too. I give a lot of money to a lot of organizations that protect wilderness. I want to see where my money is going. You know. I want to see where my tax dollars are going and I want to make sure this is here. I'm a real proponent of the National Park Service. I want to make sure it's here for future generations. I think overuse is going to be the downfall of a lot of national parks.

Rules and Regulations

[34: 158 to 164] B: So, just a moment ago, you suggested maybe having some kind of a regulatory requirement or maybe just a suggestion that people don't camp in the same place too many days. C: Yeah, yeah. B: How would that kind of thing impact your experience out there? C: It would enhance it.

[35: 170 to 172] B: And you wouldn't feel that that imposed on you or your freedom out there? C: I think, um, personally, I think it would in some aspect. You know, I hate regulations and rules and stuff. But in a lot of ways it would be "you gotta do this" you know. But if I took a moment to think as a rational person, I think I could see that as important. I heard someone mention it. One of the gentleman I met when I used their satellite telephone, he was saying you know we're going to move camp. We've been here for 2 days and tramping down this area. We got 4 people. We're going to move to another spot. I really took that to heart and I thought it's a good idea.

[36: 185 to 187] B: So, imagine the scenario a couple of years from now...you come to the Park and drop into the ranger station just like you did but we give you a list of things you can and cannot do. C: I don't have a problem with that because I've been to many national parks and I've handed out the same list to many people.

Use Limits

Park is self-limiting

[37: 147] C: You aren't going to come to the Gates of the Arctic in the off season. If there is a on season, it's not cheap to get here, that's going to limit it right there. It's not cheap to fly, those fly ins and outs are not cheap. It took dedication and planning.

Objection to fees

[38: 187] C: What I want is don't charge me for my permit. You know, you charge me every April 15. I can't help if your budget's not big enough. I write my letters to Congress plenty, but don't charge me for a permit. I've worked in Canyonlands National Park and it's actually cheaper staying at campgrounds than it is to go into the backcountry.

Concerns related to equity

[39: 178 to 179] B: So there are other ways that you might mitigate impact out there, for instance they could restrict the total number of visitors. C: Yeah, yeah. I'm not sure about that because I see the national parks as already an elite group. I live in the city and I work in an intercity school and I see a few people going to the national parks. It's expensive. No matter what people say, you know, they take their kids to McDonald's. You know it's different...to plan a trip, to get your family together, to get all the gear. You actually need to get to that national park and get those reservations to camp. It's not cheap, it really isn't. To take your family to dinner on a night when you got some money in your pocket is a lot different than forking over \$500 at a time or \$1000, to come up with a lump sum is a lot different than coming up with \$10 for dinner. So, I think that it's very limiting on the majority of people in the United States and the world. I'm very fortunate.

Concerns about administration of permits

[40: 193 to 199] B: What if the permits were free but limited? C: I don't want to know. As long as it's a first-come, first-serve basis. B: First-come, first-serve basis, okay. C: First-come, first-serve. Somebody fly by the seat of their pants, so at least limit some to a reservation system, but then first-come, first-serve. So the people that do all of a sudden say "hey, lets' go, let's do that" have an opportunity to do that. But if it's strictly permit, then it really limits the freedom of people to change plans. Like I'm doing, changing our plans. If we had had permits, then maybe I wouldn't be able to turn around and go back somewhere else. We've picked a spot where not many people go to, you know, and the lake just opens up, so we're lucky. We're kind of early in the season to have been there, too.

Concerns about denial of access

[41: 201 to 205] B: What if the permit system meant that you, yourself, couldn't visit this year? C: You know what? I'd be angry especially, you know, it depends. Like I started researching this months and months ago. Now if the permit system starts getting crazy like the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon, with a 12-year wait. Yeah, now I'm going to get a little angry about that. But I think we need more open spaces so that doesn't happen.

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Mark (M)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 481] M: Okay. Um... Well, the itinerary for my trip was we were to leave on the 15th of June and come back the 26th, today. That was the original itinerary. We ended up flying out the next morning just because Dirk, our pilot, was pretty busy. We were supposed to spend 3 days floating down the upper Alatna then 8 days backpacking near Arrigetch Creek. Um. And everything went pretty smoothly on the itinerary. We were at where we were supposed to be when we were supposed to be there.

Group Dynamics

[2: 11 to 15] M: The group dynamics between me and this woman were an issue and they turned out to be real good. B: They were an issue just because... M: No, I didn't think it was going to be an issue, but before I left, everyone was like "well, you're going out with one woman, you know, she's a lesbian too, and I knew that long before, you know so it's not....." But we got along great.

[3: 212] M: I know. I like exploring ideas. That's what Jan and I did through the whole trip. We talked.... I mean we talked philosophy and all kinds of shit the whole time. We were pretty on par. You know, a few disagreements on issues but it wasn't a big deal. It was just different ideas. So it was interesting.

Accident

[4: 59] M: What happened to us when we flipped, it was one of these 90 degree turns right against a rock wall. It was this huge turn and if you ride right in the current you can just do it perfect, but it's ... You know you're right next to all this shit. It was a blind corner and when I came around we were right in that current with a tree right in front of me. I just plowed the tree and flipped over. But it was pretty untamed, though, cuz there were multiple trees blocking the whole river. We had to kind of portage out and it was interesting. And she had never really done any whitewater paddling. It's was like....just go for it. It was funny.

[5: 63 to 71] M: Ummm... I don't even really call it a low point... I guess it's a low point. I was hoping not to flip the boat over and we flipped the boat over. B: But you got a good story out of it. M: We got a good story out of it. Yeah. We learned that it was harder to get out of that current. You know. In those 90s... B: You didn't lose any gear or anything? M: No. Almost lost a paddle, but didn't. We had three of them with us.

Hiking

[6: 47] M: You can either...well, Circle Lake is kind of halfway in between two rivers, two creeks opposite the Alatna. And one route is straight up over the ridge, like straight up this long ridge up to a 4700-ft peak, which is just standing right over the Arrigetch and the other is this slog all the way around and up, which is just like tussocks here and water and mud and you can't really see anything you know. So we went up that way. We climbed the mountain. I was... I guess the first two days where we went, blasted up that hill and had that overlook over the Arrigetch. That was definitely the high point.

Wildlife

[7: 29 to 31] B: Yeah, yeah. How about wildlife? M: I guess the first wildlife we saw, actually I saw, she missed it by a blink of an eye, but there were two caribou on the Alatna on the [inaudible] Creek, just above that on a gravel bar. They just scurried off into the brush and we never saw them again. But, we didn't see moose. We saw moose sign, you know, you can tell where one has been walking around. It's so soft up there right now. There are a lot of tracks. Yeah, actually there were a lot more caribou tracks up there than moose tracks. You can kind of tell where they came through and tore up a lot of land, came through in a herd.

Encountering Others

[8: 25 to 27] B: Were you disappointed or was she disappointed that you saw other people? M: No, not at all. Um...I don't know, it was hard for her to I mean...it didn't seem like she was disappointed at all. She was so overjoyed with everything that we were doing, it was like just a chance encounter. I took their picture. They kind of stood...there was like this huge tower right at the end of the valley. They stood there and I took their picture. You know, with the perfect tower in the background. And they went off on their walk. I asked them a few questions about fishing. He said he was going to try to fish a couple of the upper lakes. I told him that when he comes out, I'd like to hear a report on how he did.

Evidence of Others

[9: 23] M: Uhh... it was funny because Jan and I were sitting on a log drinking our morning coffee and these two hikers that came off the trail and we met them at the fork in Main Arrigetch Creek, which is kind of a....it was really surprising because the trail...I'd never been up this branch. I came up last Fall, so I haven't been up to the Arrigetch. I hadn't done this trip before. So it was all new country for me, you know, except for in my imagination, off the topographical map. Um. The trail that goes up Main Arrigetch Creek is pretty established and the campground at the fork where we were sitting, you can definitely tell that that is where everybody camps. There is no trash there; actually there was trash there. I found a pair of socks. But, it was neither here nor there.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Physical Characteristics

[10: 75] M: Oh it was beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful. Um... When we flew in there with Dirk, you had to kind of cut the corner. He didn't go along the mountains and up the valley. He kind of just blasted right over the top of it all. Just going up there on a clear day is just like "wow!" Because you can look all over the place. We were looking at the drainage when we were on a dogsled trips and stuff. It's great flying over that area because it's so vast. So vast.

[11: 59] M: The upper Alatna is totally different from the lower Alatna and the lower Alatna is this big, huge river and we were going back and forth down the river, but the upper Alatna is probably half the water maybe even a little less and it's all braided with these little channels, white water, and it's pretty interesting.

[see also excerpts 4, 13]

Few Other People

[12: 89 to 91] B: So is there anything about the Arrigetch or the Park or the Brooks Range or however you want to characterize it, that is different from Colorado--you said you came up from Colorado. M: Yeah, most of where I really got kind of into mountains was in Colorado. I was living in Fort Collins. The mountains there are great. Rocky Mountain National Park. We'd go up in the Park all the time. Skiing and climbing. All

that stuff. That country, it's pretty good in terms of no development you know right around the Park. You can really get away. But there, in the lower valleys, there are trails everywhere. In the summer there are RVs filling the Park. I don't know, it's kind of an eyesore and a nuisance having other people around. I think the world is vastly overpopulated. So now we're getting into, you know, moral issues...

[see also excerpt 13]

Demands Respect

[13: 93 to 99] B: So it's lack of people that makes it different? M: Yeah. It's the lack of people and it's also so vast and it's still rugged. It's such a big place. Just by what it is it kind of has a lot of respect I think. It gets a lot of respect, this land out here. It's just how people go about moving... It's not like Colorado. You know. Everyone's just kind of blasting anywhere. It's a major undertaking to go places up here. B: Does it deserve that respect? Or is it over-hyped? M: Um... I think it deserves that respect. Um. It's really very easy to get yourself into a bad situation up here. Um.... You know you're on a 12-day trip with no communication and you get a bad problem on day 2 and you know it's a bad problem. You know. So it's like safety is really of the utmost concern. Like I found myself trying to be very methodical about everything.

Snowmobile Story

[14: 99 to 103] M: We were on a dogsled trip... me, Rachel, and Fred, who is a 71-year-old man, we were guiding this 8-day trip of two 60-year-old woman and a 30-year-old woman and it was we got a huge epic snowfall at our farthest point out, where there is no more trail and you need a trail to run the dogs. You need snowmachines to break a trail. It was interesting trying to do trail maintenance on like 80 miles of trail. You know... it was interesting. B: So....M: But that was potentially a bad situation. We were way out there.

[15: 103] M: but in snowy situations, evacuation situations, the snowmachines are just key. It is the biggest tool we have out there, you know, it hauls all the weight. If we have someone who falls off the sled and hits their head on a tree, I can have them back in Bettles from our farthest point maybe in 15 hours or something, maybe 12 hours. It's pretty fast, considering there's no communication out there. You know, you go through anything, you blast out of there. It's pretty important with the weather out there, the way it could be, and injuries...

WILDNESS/WILDERNESS

Wildness—Unpredictable

[16: 129 to 131] B: The term "wild" comes up a lot and some people mean different things by "wild" so if you could elaborate on "wild" that'd be great. M: Um... Yeah, it's funny. Most of my experiences that really stick out in my mind from this winter and everything since I got up here is...there's always something happening that I haven't anticipated or expected. It really gives me a chance to practice dealing with situations as they come up. I see so much of what happens out in the wilderness as really metaphorical to all the shit that happens in my whole life, you know, situations change

and, you know, I have fear about situations and dealing with that.....conflicts and easy parts and all this. Whenever I go on a trip, it really feels like a true life..... [pause] I don't know....

[see also excerpt 18]

Wilderness

[17: 109 to 111] B: So, if you were going to describe this area to somebody who hadn't been here, maybe the friend you're trying to coax up. How would you describe it? M: Um...[pause].I'd just describe it as a wilderness area. I try not to say too much about shit like this. My good friend, Art, who I went to high school with, we came up here together last Fall. We floated down the Koyukuk into town. He has been here. We're trying to get another, a third, friend of ours from high school, a guy who just wants to go fishing and he, I don't know, I don't know how you explain it. I'd just explain it as what it is. It's actually wilderness.

[18: 113 to 115] B: Why is it actually wilderness? M: I don't know. It's wild. You never know what's going to happen up here.

[19: 133 to 135] B: So you said just a little bit earlier that this is actually a wilderness and so maybe other areas that we call wilderness aren't. Is that what you're implying? M: Yes, I think it is in ways that others aren't. Wilderness is really a subjective term now if you try to analyze it. What does it mean to anybody? I could probably find wilderness between, you know, here and Sourdough, which is a building 100 yards away through the center of town. So, it's kinda hard to nail it down.

Personal Responsibility

[20: 137 to 139] B: When you say that other areas that we call wilderness aren't, what is it that they're missing? M: Um.[long pause].I don't know. I hear these situations recently about people bailing out of their backpacking trips with cell phones. Um... and stuff like that. And really people not having the same respect for the land and they don't take on the entire responsibility of dealing with the land. Um...which is pretty indicative of most things that are going on right now in terms of personal responsibility.

[21: 145 to 151] B: What you just said is that true wilderness sort of forces this kind of personal responsibility? M: Uh huh.....B: So, do we have that here in town? It's "wild", but does it force that kind of personal responsibility? M: Um... in some ways, it does, yes. But I think in other ways it really kind of this salvation from personal responsibility, you know, living in today's society is kind of like this "lala land" where you don't have to....you know... you can really detach. I don't know. You know what I'm talking about?

Personal Freedom

[22: 181 to 183] B: So, what is significant or important about that ability to be able to just walk out into the woods? M: Um.....as a human being, I feel the need to be able to walk the earth without any impedance.....you know I'm kind of against borders of all kinds. It's part of a bigger problem.

[23: 185 to 187] B: So there are some maybe sort of invisible but nevertheless real borders that exist already in the Park. We've drawn a border around it. It's formally designated wilderness. We've drawn a border around that. Do those things affect you? M: Hm....[pause] Not really. Those particular borders around the Park don't bother me really. The land on both sides is the same to me. There are some fishing regulations which differ probably across that line, but I have yet to run a trapline. I might just try a trapline this winter and might potentially....I don't know the regulations. In that case a border would, you know. But not yet. Not really. I don't know. Yeah, I'd like to build a cabin somewhere, too, and this is another issue. And I can't build a cabin in the Park. You could 20 years ago, you could walk up there and could claim land and you know lay a foundation for your cabin. Maybe they really stopped something that would just have been out of control by now. Kind of ruined this wilderness area which I speak about at this point. Plus freedom.... is interesting, when there are so many people....it really infringes on the resources. I don't know.

MANAGEMENT

Interactions with Park Service

[24: 157 to 159] B: Can you describe your experience with the Park presence or Park management? M: Um... in the Park, no, I didn't experience...I haven't experienced any, none.

[25: 165 to 167] B: So, imagine for a moment that you don't work for Sourdough and that you're just an individual visiting the Park. What would you say about Park presence and Park management? M: Um...I don't think they really get to see..... In Gates of the Arctic I don't think they really get to see a lot of what's going on, you know, in the Park life. You get off the plane here and "bang" they get like a half hour spiel from the Park, which I guess is pretty good exposure. But other than that, I think the majority of people don't deal with rangers in the field or anything like that, so if they have come and gotten the orientation which, you know, probably half the people don't, you know [that is the only exposure they get].

Potential for Conflict with Outfitters

[26: 161 to 163] B: So you say in the Park, there is none [NPS presence]. M: Yeah, in the Park there is none. But outside of the Park, there is a definite presence. You know there's articles in the paper that potentially affect us. There's media involved. You know, potentially there's a conflict, I think between us and the Park, which is not really that great. That's not really what I'm after at all.

[see also excerpts 14-15]

Role/Responsibility of Management

[27: 206 to 208] B: So, one more thing.....I'll go back to something you said about freedom and sort of a balance there between.....you said maybe if people were to pour in, then this would be a different place without some of the restrictions. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? M: Um....I think that the human species by nature is just kind of

spreads over an area. At least [that is] our current mindset. ...spreading. There have been civilizations in the past that didn't spread out and gulp resources like it does today. But without sectioning off certain areas, certain resources, and saying this is a resource we're not going to use, they will be used, you know, without doing that. And at the rate we're going now, the resources will be gone. So...I don't know. I'm sympathetic to many sides of this issue. Because I think that we should set aside places that are untouched, you know. So I also have this glaring freedom thing that, you know, we should be able to walk the earth. It's kind of a mixed idea in my head. What do you do? I don't know. At least don't turn anything.....don't open anything up further. You've got it blocked off--the resources we're are not supposed to use. You should not use it. It kind of seems like we make pacts like that, you know, going far back as the Constitution. They were written like that for a purpose. They're supposed to be timeless. When you start applying certain ideas from another time to these documents. You just kind of throw them out the windows because they don't fit into whatever, it's kind of... I think it's pretty poor to think our Constitution doesn't apply to today. You know, like the gun issue. The right to bear arms, bang. America, bang. America is saying that's it. I think the legislature is on overload, making too many laws as it is to.....some of them are good. I don't know. I have so many mixed ideas about this. You know what I mean?

[see also excerpt 23]

Balancing hands-off approach and need for active management

[28: 35 to 39] M: It is more of a trail that just kind of "came to be" a few people pawing through the brush, you know. It's not like strategically placed in a lot of places. In a lot of places it is running down these hillsides, so it's gorgeous [sarcastically], just turning into like a drainage. It's starting to channel out in places, which is not bad now, but that shit just gets worse. B: So... M: But it's kind of a controversy because you want to have a place that you don't even touch at all, you don't want to do trail work, you know, in these areas because they're such....that trail there is kind of pretty unique. Even the traffic on Circle lake, I don't think it's this bad in other places, but you don't want to do anything up there, but then if you don't do anything, you can really have a mass of mud on your hands.

Rules and Regulations

[29: 173 to 179] B: So right now the Park encourages people to sign in. M: Yes, encourages, but not requires. B: They encourage people to take bear barrels and they encourage people to keep their group size under certain limits. What do you think of those? M: I think they're all.....um.....all legit. I think the Park does it just fine. I think they do it the way that they should be doing it. There are definitely good....I mean... you should have a bear barrel out there, you know, you don't want a bear in your food at night eating all of your food and causing potential scenes further down the road, with that bear, kind of spoiling them on food. You know, you should have a bear barrel or be able to get your food up high enough to where it's not going to be a problem. So, there are a lot of good things. As long as it's not required. I don't get that government feeling about it, you know. I can just walk out into the woods.....as long as I can just walk out into the woods, it's no problem.

Cumulative effect of regulations

[30: 169 to 171] B: So what if there was a mandatory sign-in? Would that change your experience? M: Not about my experience, but probably my feelings... I'm always kind of a little "grrrrrr" towards the government, so anything that I've got to do for them, you know, it's just kind of a perpetuation of the thing that I think that's really kind of a step in the wrong direction. Government..... if you're taking all these little steps that are significant along the way, but they're kind of snowballing into this largest thing. I think it's kind of growing at an exponential rate, you know, because of the amount of people, and just everything is just kind of cranking forward. So, I don't.....anything to slow it down I'm all for. Anything to lessen it or cut back, I'm all for.

Visitor Registration

[31: 167] M: Most people don't register in the Park. They just get off the plane and essentially walk out into the woods, you know. The Park doesn't know about half the people that go up there. Um...it's such a vast land, how are you going to patrol it? Even want to patrol it? It's like do you want to keep track of everybody that's going in there? It's nice that you don't. I mean I think it's really nice that you don't have a mandatory sign-in. I mean, I signed in. I kind of have a big responsibility you know guiding somebody out there. It's a responsibility; I register. That's why I'm over there.

628BTT04

Mandy (M) and Jack (J)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 377 to 393] B: So, how did you find out about this area to begin with? M: We read books about it, nothing else. J: Yeah, books for sure. I'm trying to think if there was anything else. M: I don't know what got you tacked onto the river thing other than...B: The river thing meaning the guided trip on the Nigu? M: Yeah. I mean my aunt had given us a book called "Something Far North" or...B: "Two in the Far North"? M: Yeah. J: Yeah.

[2: 397] J: Oh, you know, I'm trying to remember this. Somehow, we originally got the idea to come to Alaska and then I think I probably just wrote to the National Park Service and got a list of licensed guides and outfitters or licensed operators in the Park, whatever, in the Gates of the Arctic. And Sourdough I think was on that list. And we got information about that and different people. I remember this now. I actually corresponded with at least a couple of guide services to try to get a feel for who was doing what and sort of comparison shop before we zeroed in on Sourdough. And I was just really intrigued with the variety of trips that they offered and all that. We just kind of dug into it deeper from there. On this latest trip, my choice of places to go was largely dictated by reading about fishing locations. There was a book that, I'm not sure I can remember the authors, but I think Peterson or something like that was one of them, Gunnar Peterson or something like that, where he talks about a lot of bodies of water in

Alaska and the types of fishing you can expect in all of them. That is how I picked out the Kurupa and Cascade originally and then Amiloyak and Agiak were kind of 3rd and 4th choices on the list that was based almost entirely on that one book.

[3: 25] M: Yeah. The whole purpose of the trip was to do hiking and fishing, stuff like that. So that was the point of getting to a remote arctic lake. John wanted to fish for trout, ideally.

[4: 407 to 409] J: We're hitting very different parts of the state. M: Yeah. Well, we've never been there before. We've done the Kenai and Denali and all that kind of stuff, so we'll do Glacier Bay because we probably won't be back to Alaska for a while.

Change of Plans

[5: 11 to 23] J: Do you want to start? M: We went out on June 23? J: We went out on the 24th, I think, on Monday. M: Oh, we flew out on June 24th to....we were going to go to a lake called Lake Cascade? J: Cascade, yeah, or Kurupa. M: Yeah, but they were all frozen over. So the pilot took us down to Amiloyak Lake and landed there.

[6: 63 to 69] J: I'm not sure. I didn't do as much research on that lake because that was sort of third on my list of destinations after Kurupa and Cascade, those were both frozen. M: Yeah, Jay of Brooks Range Aviation, said we needed a plan B and he recommended Amiloyak over Agiak. I guess it's supposed to go Cascade, Kurupa, then Amiloyak or Agiak. J: Yeah. M: And it became a moot point. We got there, they were iced over, then we landed on Amiloyak because that's where Jay recommended

Air Taxi

[7: 435 to 439] M: It's cool to go out on the plane, to get dumped off, it's fun to do that. It's great to see all the vistas and landscape as you fly back and forth. That's really a lot of fun. To me, that's one of the fun parts of the trip, is getting on the float plane and to be dumped off. But, like I say, it's pricey. J: I really enjoy the flying through the mountains and getting the good views. M: Yeah.

Fishing

[8: 399 to 405] B: Okay. M: It was more of a fishing vacation for us. B: A fishing vacation. M: Yeah. We're going to go down to Glacier Bay in a couple of days. That's my end of it. Then his end of it was this part.

[9: 25 to 39] M: Then we went out the next day. We had good weather in the morning. I went hiking and you went fishing. J: I went fishing. M: Yeah, did you go out on the lake on the boat? J: No, I didn't because I didn't get the boat inflated until that morning or right after noon I think. M: We rented kind of a soft-sided inflatable canoe. But you did catch grayling. J: Caught grayling, right, from the shore. M: Yeah. There was also a little stream that fed into the lake that you fished from, too, right? J: Uh.....I tried fishing a little bit there, but didn't catch anything immediately. I was getting strikes on the lake, so I just continued to fish on the lake and never really went back to the stream.

[10: 55 to 61] J: The northern half had ice on it. So, we set up camp near the south end of the lake and then after the storm blew in, the wind was really strong from the north and it blew all the ice down to the south end where we were. But it was open enough so that I could get the boat out into the middle of the lake. I was fishing around the edges of the ice, trying to find some trout out there somewhere. I never did find any lake trout or char out there in the middle of the lake.

[see also excerpts 2-3, 16, 18]

Hiking

[11: 295] M: I liked hiking up on the bluffs. That was cool. I almost got to the top, but it's all that scree, you know, all the loose rock and I was getting hungry because I hadn't had breakfast yet because I'd skipped it because the weather was so bad (laughs). But that was fun. I really wanted to go over that afternoon, go hike over there some more, but that's like if you get way up high and you can see down and get good pictures of Agiak Lake from there. You can find a good vantage point to take a picture of the lake we were on. Had we been there all day today; it was a really good day.... because it was just perfect, no wind, sun, we could have gotten a good hike in. It would have been fun to hike over to the other lake. But it was good hiking. I mean I was kind of surprised because hiking in Alaska can be kind of a drag.... it's like all the water and the muskeg and stuff but it wasn't that bad. I mean you still got your boots all wet, but nothing like.... we went hiking up in around the Nigu area four years ago and John fell into I don't know, we were just all walking and our guide said "be careful it seems a little swampy here." John takes one step and goes right up to his knees. I fell into a swamp.

Weather

[12: 41 to 45] M: So, the next day, the morning was good, right? Our weather deteriorated that afternoon, right, didn't it? J: Yeah, that afternoon, we got clouds, rain, wind, cold, everything started blowing in from the north. M: Yeah, so you know I just read. I don't mind reading. So I sat in the tent reading.

[13: 69 to 87] M: Then, God, the next day.....miserable weather. He had to pry me out of the tent. You know, because it was like "I'm not going out there." But actually it wasn't too bad. It wasn't as cold as it was and it wasn't raining, so I went out hiking....J: Wait a minute, what's the next day? Monday was when the weather turned, yeah. Tuesday it was raining for a good part of the day. M: That was in the afternoon, so we got something good in on the morning. I know we did because I was.....J: Yeah, that's right, that's right. M: Because what we were going to do is he was going to go hiking with me again in the afternoon, over to those bluffs because he wanted to see those. So we were going to hike up those again. But the weather J: The weather turned on us again. M: At lunch, it started to rain, so I said "I don't want to go hiking in the rain." Neither did he, so.....Then, Wednesday, God it was miserable weather that day. Just windy. J: Wind, yeah. Wednesday morning it was very cold and windy. I don't think we..... we really didn't get out of the tent until.....well, I was out before you were, but.....M: Yeah, he J: It was pretty late in the morning anyway.

[14: 127] M: It was actually great. It didn't seem like we were out there 5...4 days. There's enough stuff to do I think and stuff like that. It was just the weather you know. It could have been a little better. But other than that....[inaudible]. It was more just eating because you can't eat in your tent with all the bears around like you can in like Colorado or something, so it was to the point it's not worth eating. You know. He goes "Come on, you haven't eaten all day!" It was like freezing cold. "You haven't eaten since yesterday." "I don't care." I mean by the time I got warmed up again it's just not worth it. It takes like 12 hours to get the chill off. That was the only really hassle. I thought we had a good time.

[15: 129] J: I had to twist her arm pretty heavily on Wednesday to get her out of the tent.

[16: 289 to 293] B: Was there a best part of your experience? M: Um....what would you say? You caught fish. J: You know? Catching fish was definitely a highlight. The other was just.... was actually yesterday when the weather was really kind of bad, at least the day started out bad, and I finally just decided to get out of the tent and get out. And the weather improved a little bit, but still kind of windy and cold. I got out and hiked out there completely by myself, Missy wasn't along. And walking up the shore to that lake without... That was a real high point actually. Because the weather had been sort of depressing for a long time. Then finally getting out and seeing the rest of the lake, getting a little better view of the area that we were in and

[17: 303 to 309] B: So how about a worst part, was there a bad part of your experience? M: The weather. B: The weather? J: Yeah, it's just being trapped in the tent for long periods of time and you know we brought a lot of reading material, so it's not like we didn't have anything to do, it's just... reading in the tent and the wind really whipping the tent around us and the rain coming down for, you know, hours at a time, was kind of depressing.

[18: 147] M: But....we got all our good weather on that trip. But you know it's camping, what are you going to expect? He caught fish, which is the important thing and we could still go out camping and hiking. We didn't get snowed on.

[19: 333 to 335] J: And the first night we were there, the weather was also very good, but we were just dead tired because we'd been flying and had almost no sleep the night before getting everything ready to go. So you know, unfortunately, we didn't get to enjoy a lot of that time. The weather really cut into the trip, but we still had....we still did everything we wanted to do. Not quite in the quantity that we wanted to do it. M: Yeah. That was probably just about it.

[20: 349] M: If it hadn't been for the weather, it would have been, you know, and it may be just the cold, and, I guess, the temperature wasn't that bad it was just the wind. It would have been really really fun.

Contrast to Previous Trips

[21: 131 to 145] B: How many years ago did you come up? M: Like four years ago. I came up in '97. J: It was warm. B: Did you go to a different place in the Park? M: We went to the Nigu, right? J: Yeah, we weren't even in the Park. We went to the headwaters of the Nigu River and then floated down the Nigu and Itivllik. If I remember, the Itivllik was the....M: ...the confluence of those two rivers. J: The Nigu is a tributary of the Itivllik. I don't think we made it quite to the Colville.

[22: 147] M: I don't even think we were close. We were supposed to go that far and the guide said--that's where his dad had set up the trip for us--and my dad is crazy and we'd have to paddle like 10-12 hours a day to get there, which I don't think is really much of a vacation, so he cut it back to picking us up at this little lake. I don't think we were even close to the Colville. That's where we let out, from what the guide was saying... We had a great time. It was a 10-day trip. Camping out on sandbars along the way and gravel bars.

[23: 337 to 347] B: So how did this trip differ from the previous one that you took on the Nigu? J: Well, the Nigu was a guided trip, first of all. I was aiming for something that would be a little more relaxing. Going down a river here, making and breaking camp every day and.....we did have a guide with us on that one. M: He did all the cooking. J: He certainly did the lion's share of the work, but even so, we were always in a state of transition and there wasn't much time to just kind of sit back and enjoy things. M: We got almost no pictures on that trip and I said "what was that?" Because we were just too tired because you paddle 5 to 7 hours a day. Usually closer to 7. And then you got to make camp up and break it down. And we were just beat by the time we got done. And you really can't take pictures while you're paddling because it was, at some points, kind of whitewaterish. But, yeah, it was good, that was a really fun trip. We had great weather. We had a great guide. But...J: This one was just designed to be a little more relaxing.

Cost-Benefit Evaluation

[24: 311 to 315] M: Yeah, it was like a cost benefit thing, too, you know, it costs a lot to get up there and you can't help but do that because this is costing you \$300 a day or whatever, I don't know what the amount was....J: More than that. M: Oh, more than that (laughs). We kind of go "you know." You start to do your economics. I go "man," but it's just a crap shoot when you do the camping thing. You just hope the weather is going to play out good.

[25: 317 to 329] B: That's interesting, so you felt like you sort of needed to maximize your time out there because it was limited and costly? M: Oh yeah. J: Oh yeah. M: You know, I don't know how much the flight was, about \$2000 or something like that, because [inaudible] on that. J: Yeah, it was not quite that much, but M: Yeah, and then just getting to Alaska. And then we had to get gear from Fairbanks. So....oh yeah. You definitely want a good experience. J: You want to be outside your tent, you know, for that kind of expenditure. And all the planning that went into it and everything else.

Wildlife

[26: 95 to 99] J: There were some sort of geese I think. I don't know my birds that well, but they were almost entirely white. I think there was a little bit of black on their head or beak or something like that. And, let's see, what other wildlife.....we saw a bald eagle. M: Yeah, I never knew they were that far north. I J: Yeah, just sitting on a rock or something right at the edge of the lake.

[27: 105] M: Yeah, no mammals, though. We didn't see any caribou, but they told us that we probably wouldn't. We were here in August and saw gobs of them, but we didn't see any of them there. You could tell they were around. You could see all the game trails and stuff No bears, which is good. I don't know what kind of wildlife you normally see out there. We found an upper bridge of an animal that I thought was a rabbit. But the pilot said that he didn't think it was a rabbit.

[28: 89 to 93]M: He goes "Come on, it's not that cold out." So, I got out and I went hiking down to the other lake, Agiak. I got pretty close to that. We saw lots of dead animal bones and we were kind of freaking out, and I said "okay, I don't know how this animal died..." John said natural causes. I was kind of like "Oh, okay....." J: We'll assume. M: Yeah. I mean you see a lot of the shed antlers, but when they are attached to the skull, you know, that was not a shed!!.

[29: 453 to 457] J: I think the other thing I would, again, just going back to this whole issue of the scale of things and how wide open at least the places we've been on the North Slope appear to be and then just the sort of the adventure of wandering around and finding you know animal skeletons and things like that. That's....M: Yeah, I've never seen that. That's unique to the Park. J: Being able to sort of spot a bone in the distance and hiking over towards it and taking a look to see what animal died here and try to imagine how long ago and how it met its end and all that.

Bear Safety

[30: 147 to 163] M: We didn't see bears. We saw bears on the last trip, so we were glad we didn't see bears this trip. B: So were bears a pretty big concern then? M: Yeah. Yeah. J: Oh yeah. M: Because we saw one on the last trip we went on. We actually ran across one that had just killed a caribou, him and his buddy. He had a little brother with him. Oddly enough, they were still traveling together which our guide said is a little unusual..... why did we think they were brothers? J: I don't know. M: I have no idea why he was calling them brother bears. But anyway.....him and his buddy were munching down on a caribou and we just set up camp and it was like "do we really want to break it down again." And unwisely so, we were camping 200 yards from where these bears were munching on a caribou carcass. M: Yeah, it was crazy. Yeah and then we go down to Denali to go hiking on that same trip, but they'd actually shut down a section of the park due to an issue just like that.

[31: 165] J: I would say that bears weigh very heavily in our minds when we go on trips like this, you know, anywhere that they are around, our consciousness of bears has been raised to a level where, you know, we are generally very cautious and aware.

[32: 167] M: I think we've seen too many of those real live things on Discovery, you know, when animals attack and yeah.....it's up to kind of a, not a panic level, but... I don't know.

[33: 169 to 171] J: We were prepared for bears. M: But it was so windy. We had that bear spray, but you know what's the point? You're just going to spray it in your eyes. It would just like come on back to your eyes. We had a gun, too, so that was.....I didn't tell you this, but the pilot said he had the exact same gun that he uses down in Valdez. I said is that effective? And he goes "oh, yeah."

[34: 185 to 203] B: So you've never, yourself, had a bad experience with a bear though? M: No...B: It's just a general concern that you might? M: I've never.....J: Never had a direct encounter where, you know, we were seriously threatened. I mean we've.....M: ...run across them. J: We've run into bears.... we ran into them on the Nigu trip. And even on our other camping and hiking stuff. We were hiking in New Mexico, camping and hiking, in New Mexico one time and ran into a small black bear...M: Wasn't it a cub? J: It ran right across the trail in front of us. M: And we immediately go "where's mom?"

[35: 207 to 213] M: I think generally before they send you out into any of these National Parks, they give you like this one you know horror story. They did it in Denali. "Here's what happens..."B: Did you get a horror story here? M: No, I don't think they did, oddly enough. J: No. There was no horror story here. I think it wasn't Denali, it was in Glacier or the Tetons, one of those, where we had to watch a film and, you know, sign something saying we understand the bear risk and all that kind of stuff.

NATURE OF PLACE

Other People

[36: 351 to 361] B: How about compared to other backpacking trips that you've been on? How'd this compare? M: I thought it was cool. We've gone on lots of backpacking trips. But, God, you're carrying your pack for four or five days. J: Yeah. It certainly is nice not to be physically exhausted and then just the uniqueness of your surroundings up here. You know, something that you don't typically find on backpacking trips in Colorado or New Mexico. M: Because you will see people....J: Montana, or any place else. M: And in any of the other National Parks, you will see people. No matter where you go. We've been through Tetons and Glacier. You really don't shake off the crowds until you're out like two or three days. And even then, you still see people. But you really have to go in like 20 miles on foot and you still see people.

[37: 265 to 279] B: You said earlier that you didn't see any other people other than flying overhead? M: No. Yeah. J: That's right. M: Zero folk. B: Was that a positive feature of the experience? M: Yeah, I would have been disappointed had there been someone like right across the lake from us. J: Yeah. It's nice to have the lake all to yourself, for sure. M: In fact, I think I would have gone to the other lake had there been someone right across the lake because it's wide open. The one nice thing is you've kind of like got it all to yourself. So....

[38: 281 to 287] B: What if they'd been just hiking through? M: Oh, that's fine, I mean, yeah. J: That wouldn't bother me. M: Yeah. Because we had that when we went on the other trip. We saw people that were....some people had been up there a long time, hiking through and stuff like that. That's fine. It's fun to see people on their way. But I don't want them to camp right next me or anything like that.

[see also excerpt 62]

Evidence of Other People

[39: 223 to 233] M: I don't know how well-traveled that lake is, but each of us found beer cans. B: Really? M: Yeah. I found one on the way to Agiak and you found one around Amiloyak. And a cigarette butt. J: But it was, you know, there was pretty minimal evidence of human activity around there. M: Yeah. We saw toilet paper, though. J: There was a little bit of trash, but not bad.

[40: 235 to 241] B: How did you feel about finding the beer cans and the other trash? M: Pretty irritated. I said "come on, all the way out here and you can't pick it up?" J: I guess I don't get quite as irritated as some people might. I mean in some way, it's kind of an insult, but on the other hand, you know, it's one beer can in 10 square miles probably. M: Yeah, in New Mexico it's like a real problem. I think a lot of the people who go in the backcountry they do tend to litter quite a bit, so....

[41: 249 to 253] M: But in New Mexico, I think the people tend to be a little cavalier with just tossing their crap out. They're kind of and it's true that the beer can.....just I just figure...I just picture this really gross guy with a cigarette and junk ..., smoking cigarettes. You know. They're just throwing their beer cans aside. Say "come on, pick it up." It's not that big a deal. But, John's probably right, in the scheme of things. Yeah. J: It's just how you feel about it. M: Well, you go to all the trouble to go someplace where no one really goes and see a beer can. It's kind of "well, geez." That was kind of my feeling.

[42: 255] J: I think where we were camping appeared to be the spot to camp on at least that side of the lake because, you know, it was kind of level ground and not very highly vegetated, compared to the rest of the lake. It was a little bit higher up off the terrain, so I'm not too surprised. I'm sure there have been a lot of people camping there before, so.... some sort of evidence that people have been there.

Scale/Openness

[43: 367] J: So that one of things I really liked about this, just the magnitude, the scale of things, is really different than what we normally see in our backpacking trips. Things are wide open. You can see great distances, which you normally.....when we are backpacking, we're normally in forests. And a lot of times, you are in places where you can't really get any sense of your surrounding terrain. Here, because, you know, at least on the North Slope because of the lack of trees, you can really see a lot. It's difficult to quite comprehend. The scale of things when you're doing this.

[44: 363 to 365] J: One of the things I really liked about camping here was it was just so amazing to me that when you're flying into these lakes, they don't look very big. And then you set down on them and you realize just how big they really are. But then you still don't realize how big they are because, for example, Missy hiked around to the other side of the lake, and the scale is just kind of staggering. She is so much smaller over there than you'd imagine. M: I couldn't even see the tent when I got up on the bluffs. I go "where is it?" It's amazing. It looks so close, but it's like clouds. They look close, like you could touch them.

Remote

[45: 369 to 371] B: So there's the lack of people, size or scale and that sort of wide open nature. Are there other things that make it unique or different from the other places you've visited? M: It's harder to get to, but other than that....yeah, you have to make an effort to get here.

[46: 441 to 443] J: And just kind of that initial feeling when you know the plane drops you off and just the fact that you're out there 100 or 125 miles from anything like a town is just unique. Really hard to replicate anywhere else. M: Certainly not in the continental U.S.

[47: 433] J: Yeah, I think that's a popular place to go. I think this part of Alaska I typically think of as just being, I mean in general, very remote. And that's sort of the key feature, that everything is very far from civilization and really pretty untouched.

[see also excerpt 3]

Wilderness

[48: 463 to 467] B: Do you think of this place as wilderness? M: Oh yeah. J: Sure.

[49: 471 to 477] J: Oh yeah, I mean, that's sort of the presumption here, I think, that it's untouched and it's nature operating in the absence of man, I guess. B: Is that what you mean by untouched? Nature operating in the absence of man? J: Yeah, I think so. M: Yeah, I mean there's not designated trail systems and stuff like that and a sign saying "5 miles to Visitor Center" or something like that. That's when you feel you're really on your own out there.

[50: 479 to 483] B: So is your feeling that it's so obviously wilderness, it's not worth mentioning? M: Yeah, I'd say because of the fact you have to hop into a Bush plane and get dropped off, it's not easily accessible to anyone, I mean to the public in general. There's economic barriers to that and physical barriers to getting to the place. So...but that's just my take on it. J: I guess it's obvious to me once you've seen it. I don't know how else I can describe it.

Mystique

[51: 373] J: There's also just kind of a mystique about it, I think. Alaska is, to me, it's just kind of a unique thing. Just a unique place to go to. It's something that's really out of the ordinary.

Self-Limiting—Expense

[52: 411 to 421] B: Why won't you be back for a while? M: It's expensive. B: Yeah. M: Yeah. J: I've been here three times in the last five years and it's not that I'm tired of coming here or anything, but we probably need to start looking at other vacation possibilities I guess. And it's expensive M: Yeah.

[53: 423 to 431] B: So how would you describe this place to somebody who's thinking about visiting? J: Oh gosh. M: Well, have a few thousand dollars (laughter) I think a lot of people I've talked to would really like to do this kind of vacation. It's mainly the expense that prohibits them. Because it is....to get the Bush plane out, the float plane out there is expensive. To get to Alaska...you can probably get a \$500 ticket from Albuquerque, but to get that Bush plane and the plane between here and Bettles and Fairbanks. J: It's not cheap. M: Yeah. But it's mainly airfare that really racks up. Because once you get out there, it's free to stay out there. But you do need about \$3000 set aside for all the little float planes and stuff like that. And I know that's prohibitively expensive for a lot of people. Most people I know that come to Alaska to go fishing, they stick to the Kenai because they fly into Anchorage and then go down there. And you can get a fairly cheap ticket in Anchorage and then, yeah.... In fact I'd say 99% of the people I've ever spoken to, in fact all the people I've ever spoken to that come to Alaska, they go fishing down on the Kenai.

[54: 445 to 451] B: So this is how you would describe it to somebody else, it's expensive, remote....M: Yeah, and you really do have a good time, but it's not....you need to save up to do it. It's not the affordable way to see Alaska. If you got a limited budget, generally you stick to Denali or down on the Kenai because those are pretty cheap. B: On the road system. M: Yeah. Everyone just flies....I say, "yeah, and it's very expensive." That's what I tell everybody. It's very expensive to go by Bush plane. Everyone, like 9 out of 10 people up there have their pilot's license, and I know maybe it's not that many, have their pilot's license. But man, it isn't cheap.

[see also excerpt 50]

MANAGEMENT

Interaction with Management

Did not think of contacting NPS

[55: 485 to 487] B: I'd like to change tacks a little bit here. You mentioned earlier the fact that you have to get permits and that kind of thing at some of the other Parks you've visited. Can you describe the management of this Park? J: Um... to be honest, I was a little surprised when we were checking in with the Brooks Range Aviation people that I hadn't even thought about the fact that we should be checking in with the Park Service and that's probably because I haven't been looking at any of the Park Service literature in planning this trip. I mean I knew where we wanted to go. I'd been talking to people to

rent equipment and arrange for a flight there and so forth, but it never really.....and I'd looked at the map and I saw that one of the lakes we were....of the pair Cascade and Kurupa, Kurupa is inside the Park and Cascade was out...but frankly it never really occurred to me that we needed to be doing any sort of checking in with the Park Service on this. Then when we went over to get the bear containers, I thought, gee this is pretty obvious, we should have been doing this anyway.

Appropriate orientation

[56: 221] J: I actually thought the briefing here was pretty good because it wasn't sort of the, how can I say this, I didn't feel like we were going through a classroom exercise or something. The fellow that we talked to, I've forgotten his name, but he seemed to be sort of carefully asking questions to gauge our level of awareness of the dangers in the Park and our experience, and so forth. It seemed very appropriate to me.

[57: 487] J: I thought the experience was real smooth. Again, I didn't feel like we were having a bunch of stuff shoved down our throat or anything. The conversation we had with the guy.....it seemed to me he was just trying to make sure that we weren't going to go out there and kill ourselves and that we knew what we were getting into and kind of gently reminding us of the ways to not make a mess of things out there. I thought it was fine. No complaints.

Bear barrels

[58: 552 to 554] J: No. We were happy to have the bear barrels. I was very glad they were available. And obviously, the group size was not an issue. M: Thank gosh we didn't have to buy them. Because we know there are bears up there. There aren't any tress to hang you food from.....so it's limited.

[59: 550 to 552] B: So, right now, there are just a few things that the Park sort of asks for in a gentle sort of way, carrying the bear barrels and limiting group size, which wasn't an issue for you guys. Did you feel like those kind of things weighed on you or restricted your experience in any way? J: No. We were happy to have the bear barrels. I was very glad they were available. And obviously, the group size was not an issue.

Use Limits

Limits at other parks

[60: 241 to 249] M: We don't really have any national parks, right? Just Park Service areas and national forest areas....J: Where? M: In New Mexico. J: Yeah. M: They're not regulated that much as opposed to I think like the National Parks they tend to be a lot cleaner. They watch the number of people that go into the back country. They don't let too many people horse around there at a time. At least that's the way it is up in Glacier and the Tetons and stuff like that where you're not going see a lot of people back there at any given time. Because you have to get permits, which is nice because you're not just tripping over people when you're up there

Permits as part of NPS setting

[61: 519 to 521] B: Would it ever be appropriate to have that kind of system at Gates of the Arctic? M: To me, that's just kind of what they do at all the National Parks. They all have that permit system with limitations on how many people can be back there and they.....it's generally no more than 24 hours in advance can you get your permit. They're all like that.

[62: 526 to 532] B: So I'm going to press the point a little bit. You said that's just pretty much what they do at all the National Parks. M: Yeah. B: But not here. M: Yeah, this place is not like any experience like I've had in the really big ones that have a gazillion visitors that come in. I don't know what the, how many people come through here every year. But Glacier has a throngs of them coming through. The Tetons are the same way. So is Rocky Mountain.

Ecological basis for limited permits

[63: 534 to 536] B: So, your feeling is that the permits there are primarily tied to the fact that there is heavy visitor pressure? M: Yeah, that they have to put something in place because the number of visitors coming through would destroy... I mean they were going to....there were a few popular areas they were all going to. But, to spread people out they had to put limitations on people go where and then the Park Service people would lead people and say "You can't go here, but this is just as nice" and sort of spread out the population density across the Park to have the least amount of impact on the vegetation and wildlife.

Other purposes of permits

[64: 489 to 491] B: And, we're getting into the hypothetical realm here, which I try and stay away from, but what if it was closer to your experience at Glacier and you had to get a permit and that kind of thing? Would that have changed your experience significantly? M: No. I mean it's no big deal that they know where we're at. I think that's one of the reasons they had you get a permit, is so they know where you're at. And then, in the other Parks, it's to limit the number of people out there. So, that's probably not an issue here.

Concerns related to administration of limited permits

[65: 507 to 517] B: So how would it affect your experience if they were to issue limited permits here in this Park? M: I don't think you would feel it because there's so few people that make it up here right now. But I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. J: We don't know that, really. M: Yeah, that's true. These guided trips that go through the Park, who knows? J: Yeah, I think it would be dictated by the level of difficulty in getting the permits and how limited you would be in when and where you could go. Um...you know, if we were told that....M: One of the big things when you go to these National Parks is that you can't get your permits more than like 24 hours before you head out. That would be a problem if you're getting air service to places. You really do probably need to get that permit months in advance and stuff like that. In the Tetons and Glacier, it is extremely limited on how far in advance you can get your permit.

[66: 524] J: Yeah, I would hate to have to fly all the way up here to then finally be issued a permit to camp at Kurupa for four days or whatever, with the possibility that we might get here and then find out that, oops, somebody else is already camping there, has the permit for those four days and how would you like to go to a different lake? I would hate that. I mean I guess....if we had gone there, if we'd flown there, and found that there were already people camping there, then maybe that's just as bad, I don't know. But, I would feel really overly constrained to have to be uncertain about whether or not we would be issued a permit until we got here. If you can do it far enough in advance, do it over the Internet or over the phone or whatever and arrange to get your permit in advance that way, I think that's probably still a little bit of a hindrance, but it's not nearly as bad as having to actually show up in person before you get it.

[67: 493 to 495] J: I was going to say getting a permit would not be a problem as long as we could get a permit. But, in some of the more heavily-visited Parks that we've been in, we have to kind of rush there the day before to get a permit to camp in a particular place because you know they sell out, they issue the permits early and you have to be first in line to get your choice of camp sites and hiking routes and all that. M: Denali was a zoo. I remember that.

[68: 505] M: Yeah, but definitely in Glacier and the Tetons we were....it's a chore almost if you're out multiple days. Then you have to find multiple sites that haven't exceeded their limit. So, it can be a hassle. I know in Glacier, we didn't end up going where I wanted to go because where I wanted to go was all booked up. Denali was the same way.

Concerns related to personal freedom/choice

[69: 538 to 540] B: In those cases, you feel like a permit system is appropriate? M: It's a hassle. But I mean I don't know what else they're going to do. But that's different because you're just going usually backpacking and hiking and you know you can be a little more flexible, but when you've planned....when you have to get dropped off in a Bush plane and tell the pilot a destination and do quite a bit of research into maximizing the utility of your dollar, like here's a good place to go camping and fishing and hiking. You don't want to be "Oh, well you can't camp at this place, but we can take you to this one that's surrounded by marshland

[70: 497] J: Yeah. So, you know getting a permit I don't think is.....it doesn't bother me at all. In fact, having to pay money to get into the Park would not have been any hindrance because you're spending so much money to get here anyway, but you know another \$50 or whatever to spend a few days out there is almost insignificant. But what I objected to in Glacier and the Tetons, was just that you didn't have a lot of choice in the places you could go and your itinerary. It was dictated by management as to the numbers of people that were going through the Park. And that I did not like.

[71: 499 to 503] B: Did you feel like you had a lot of choice here? M: Oh yeah. I didn't feel that I was limited at all. J: Yeah, I didn't feel at all constrained.

[72: 546 to 548] B: So, your feeling is that it's mainly the uncertainty that it might be associated with the permit system that makes it objectionable? J: Yeah, I think in my mind, that's a major part of it. I don't mind paying. I don't like.....the permit system, also, in some cases dictates exactly where you can camp and things like that. I don't like that. But, having to be someplace, you know, far enough in advance so you're sure you're first in line to get a permit to go where you want to go and those sorts of things, I find really undesirable.

628BTT05

Brad (B) and Tim (T)
Interviewer (BG)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 116 to 120] B: This trip started in essence, what, 2 years ago? T: Mm.....hm.....B: We started talking about coming to Alaska. It's a big place, but to Alaska two years ago, and it was about probably 8 months ago that I started talking about coming up here. Somewhere in that range. And the primary reason was, I thought about Denali, and I thought about all these other places, but as I looked at the amounts of people that were in those places, we were going to see people, we were going to definitely know that people were there before us. I, personally, just wanted something that was as wild as possible. And this definitely was as close as I've ever come to that type of wilderness.

[2: 300] B: The only Park that I knew of in Alaska prior to planning this trip was Denali. I knew there were some other ones, but I had no idea where they were or what they were. So...And Denali is just so famous and so popular that, going back to the "wild" topic, it just didn't seem like the place to go to get away from everything.

[3: 294 to 298] BG: And how about Gates of the Arctic, in particular, were you familiar with Gates before you started doing your research? B: No. T: But I found a real good web page when he gave me....when I knew that we were coming here, I started looking on there. I thought that was put together real well. I was impressed by that, a lot of good information, a lot of links.

[4: 284] B: Well, that was primarily my decision. I had thought for quite awhile I'd wanted to come to Alaska and I'd also thought for quite awhile that it would be really cool sometime to be north of the Arctic Circle and see the midnight sun. Well, when we decided on the date that our trip was going to be, it fell right into this time. So, it made some sense to get north of the Arctic Circle somehow. And in looking for transportation to get into a Park or a Preserve, we considered trying to go and do ANWR or some of the others...there's a couple of other ones...I don't remember the smaller ones that are up north of the Arctic Circle. But we considered trying to do those and Gates of the Arctic was the only one that I was able to easily find air service into. And so it just made it easy and convenient just to pick Gates of the Arctic and come here and get in somewhere. And as far as going to the Arrigetch Peaks area, it seemed to be the most spectacular sites that we would have the opportunity to see.

Itinerary

[5: 12 to 14] B: Well, it was an 11-day, 10-night backpacking trip through the Arrigetch Peaks area. We were dropped off on the 18th at Circle Lake. We made our way up Arrigetch Creek, over a pass, back down Takahula River to Lake Takahula. T: After the first Pass, we came down a river that doesn't have a name on the map, anyway. Then we went up again to a 2nd Pass to get away from mosquito hell. And then down to the Takahula River and then out.

Contrast to Other Trips

[6: 160 to 170] BG: So, how about.... in other aspects, how does this trip differ from other backpacking trips you guys have done? B: Well, it's the longest backpacking trip that I guess either of us has done, un.....un..... I thought you said that you hadn't done any that were un.....T: Only had one resupply. B: Unresupplied, yes. That's what I'm....T: Okay, we'll go with that. B: Um... but it was, personally, it was the longest backpacking trip that I've done in terms of days and it was definitely a lot more wild than anywhere else that I'd been.

Mosquitoes

[7: 244 to 256] BG: How about a "worst" part? Was there a bad part? T: Yeah....BG: Mosquitoes? T: Oh yeah. B: Other.... I mean, they came and they went, but pretty much that would be about it. T: They drove me nuts. B: Yeah.

[8: 262] B: Michigan, where we're both from, has a lot of mosquitoes in some ways of describing it. And so we're both used to mosquitoes. This was, to me, almost unreal. The amount of them. We had at one of the sites where we were sitting, they were covering our legs and I just swatted once with my hand and had 22 of them dead with one hit. It was just amazing to have that density of mosquitoes. They're just all over in the air and you couldn't do anything without inhaling one

[9: 272] T: The last meal that we cooked, Brad wouldn't look any more, but I was noticing them forming. We felt pretty stupid, we cooked a supper. They were attracted to the heat right away, so anytime you open the thing up, they're just dive-bombing..."oh, heat, let's go there." I'd blow on the food a little bit to try to cool it off. That was dumb because Bernoulli's principle, they'd get pulled in and land on the fork that I'm trying to cool off. So I decided not to do that, but I did notice them still diving in. At the time I actually got eating, every single forkful had at least two mosquitoes in it. At least two. It looked like real coarsely-ground pepper in the noodles. Except it didn't have any flavor. But...I had to get past that mental block of dealing with that.

[10: 280] T: Eating became this little ritual of wipe your face, take a bite, wipe any of them that are biting through your wool glove that you have on only because you're trying to keep them off, wipe them off your neck and ears, go back to the face, take a bite again, just keep this process going over and over. If we had room, we'd have been walking around in a circle. But we had to just pace basically, thinking that we were going to lose them somehow by pacing back and forth. It didn't work.

[11: 310] B: Other than that, yeah, I'd....the biggest thing that I was unprepared for would be the bugs. I knew they were going to be here, but I had no idea on the quantity.

Evidence of Wildlife

[12: 30 to 40] B: On the other hand, we did find caribou skulls and a caribou leg....T: Rabbits feet...B: Three bird kills that, all that was left were feathers. T: More than that, I found more. B: Oh, you found.....well, when we were hiking, we found at least those three. T: Found bones and plenty of signs. That was neat to find bones.

[13: 90 to 92] B: We definitely.....there were definitely animals out there and a lot of it was fresh. We did find some shed antlers that had been gnawed obviously through the course of the winter. T: And one of them they were 5 meters away from each other. One was a couple of years old and the other one was from this last winter, judging on how aged they looked.

Bears

[14: 54 to 62] BG: No bears? B: Nope. T: We were chasing one. B: Not intentionally. T: Unwittingly. Um...we found some real fresh prints. We didn't realize how fresh they were until the next day when we compared, just how much they degraded overnight told us that we were chasing it the day before. It was a grizzly with a cub. We found some real fresh wet scat also from them. We attributed the wetness to it being right in a real wet spot on the trail, but I don't think that's what it was anymore. [pause] That was an interesting feeling. Knowing that you're sharing the place with something that powerful.

Other People

[15: 104 to 110] BG: So, how'd you feel about that encounter? T: We didn't really know how to treat them. B: Yeah. T: We kept away from them until today....we got there yesterday and we could see that they were there, but we wanted to give them their privacy. I just didn't want to ruin somebody else's trip, like "Hi, we're the neighbors....." So, one time I just wandered down and came kind of close, like halfway between our two tents, and I figured if they saw me and wanted to talk, they'd come out and meet me. But it looked like they were headed the other way to go cook or something. So.....I just backed off.

[16: 112 to 116] BG: So, how'd you feel about not seeing any other people there? T: I liked that. B: Yeah, we liked that a lot.

[17: 232 to 234] BG: So, you've gone over a couple of things that I want to reiterate that made this trip different from other ones you've been on. The wildness, and you described that in various ways. The trailless character and no designated campsites. And then the difficulty of finding a campsite even with wide-open terrain. Is there anything else? T: [pause] Again, I just liked that we didn't have to worry about running into other people. When we did stay at that knoll, I would have been very disappointed if there was another group of people that were there or on the next knoll down. I liked feeling that we

were all alone in the wild, dependent on ourselves. I liked that. I knew that it wasn't completely true, but it was a nice feeling.

Evidence of Other People

[18: 220 to 222] B: Yeah, the knoll that he was talking about earlier, that's what, a mile up Arrigetch Creek? T: Yeah. It's not very far out. I can show it right to you on the map. In fact there's two knolls right in a row. They were telling us about that one earlier, how there used to be a lot of lichen growing on that rock and it's been pretty well beaten down. We were there and we got into camp shoes quickly and watched where we walked, trying not to, when loose stuff was coming up, trying not to step on it. But you can see that it was hammered. I didn't like staying there for that reason, but boy it was a gorgeous spot and we were dead. We weren't going any further. So, we used it.

[19: 126 to 142] T: That's always kind of depressing. I don't know how, but I always found the garbage. I found two insoles or....what are those things called? B: Yeah, insoles from boots. T: I found two of those at that one knoll just above the Arrigetch Creek where they told us it was heavily hit. It was gorgeous. I think a lot of people use it. I found those there. I found...I saw some toilet paper on the 2nd to the last day just sitting up on top because people didn't know how to take care of it the right way. I found some shell casings from what kind of gun? B: A .270 Remington, high-powered rifle. T: I found a mylar balloon that had exploded. BG: Wow. T: I found some mole skin that had been used. And, oh, and the back of a hat, a little clasp...B: Yeah, the band. T: From a baseball hat.

[20: 144 to 156] BG: So, how did that affect the wildness? T: It ticks me off. B: He was finding it all so, I wasn't seeing most of it until he had it in his hand, so....I was wondering why he brought it. T: I don't want to find it in a place like that. Even the Park that I visit a lot Isle Royal--is not.....I don't really like it, then I get upset whenever I find that there. I find that a lot more than I expect to. I thought that on this trip I wouldn't see anything along those lines. There's a lot of it. There's a lot more than I thought there'd be. B: In terms of the areas we covered, in relative terms from other backpacking trips that I've done, there wasn't as much. It wasn't as noticeable. But definitely it was there. BG: You're talking about the litter? B: Yeah.

Being Careful/No Rescue

[21: 308] T: Describe it as way out there... way far north. Gorgeous land. Be ready to deal with mosquitoes if you hit the wrong season or the right season, depending on how you look at it. Know your stuff. Know your....have somebody along that is medically qualified because if something were to go wrong, I've felt very comfortable knowing that I had had enough medical training to get through most anything that we'd see. And I would not have been real comfortable not having that. I'd have been really nervous during a lot of the stuff we were doing. Little things like crossing the creek that you don't think about, normally. Out here, they can.....hm.....[I was thinking] "okay, if something stupid happens here, you can't just quick hobble home and sit on the couch for two days. We're stuck here. Let's do this carefully now."

[22: 322 to 324] BG: So, when you said that you found yourself being real careful on those creek crossings, more so than on other trips? Were you extra careful? T: I was.... I thought about what I was doing a whole lot more. Like if I'm just out for a day hike in the area, I just hop, boom, boom, boom, not really worrying about too much....if I wipe out, oh well... I might have to hobble back, but I'm not too worried about it. On this one this far out we really thought about it.

[23: 330] B: Yeah, we could have gone with a little bit less food, but if somebody had gotten hurt, especially as we were farther in, short of a helicopter coming in and possibly landing, and there was only one or two spots where that was even possible, we would have had to have gotten back out to Circle Lake or down to Takahula, which.....anything more serious than a sprained ankle or something could have been really tough to do. So, it was definitely more of a consideration. "Okay, I'm crossing this..... okay I got my pole. That pole goes there. This pole goes there. Is that solid? Is that firm? Okay, that's firm. Okay, now take one step then make sure that's solid and firm before anything else moves." Just so that you always had a three-point stance and any time we were doing anything like river crossings or crossing a boulder field or any of that type of stuff.

[see also excerpt 24]

NATURE OF PLACE

Wildness/Wilderness

[24: 172 to 174] BG: Again, I don't mean to press the point, but I'm interested in that word "wild." You said earlier that "wild" is primarily no evidence of people. What else makes it wild?

B: In this case, we were 70 or 75 miles from the nearest civilization, being Bettles or being Anaktuvuk Pass or being Allakaket and no way to really get any help if we needed it or anything other than possibly an airplane flying overhead, which actually on a couple of days got annoying, some of the airplanes flying overhead.

[25: 338 to 340] BG: What makes it a wilderness? B: Um... in part the lack of defined trails. The lack of defined camp sites. Most places going back to Isle Royale, you know where the camp sites are that you're supposed to be using and you can plan, okay, that camp site is 5-10 miles, whatever it is, away from where I am right now, okay, I can do that in a day. And I know I can get there and I know I can so you can plan your entire trip very specifically. In an area like this, we'd like to get about this point and when we get there, we'll see if we can find a camp site. And if we can't, we keep going until we find one. Um....Again, the lack of seeing people. The lack of actually having to deal with other people. I've been backpacking a couple of times and set up my tent on one side of a river and in the middle of the night all of a sudden I hear "Aaaaarrrrrggggghhhhh." Somebody fires up a generator on the other side. And it just kills the whole atmosphere. Why even go out if you're going to be hearing that type of stuff? Up here, it wasn't a problem.

[26: 122 to 124] BG: When you say "as wild as possible" what do you mean by that? B: Kind of the old adventure spirit of "no one has ever been there before" kind of concept.

Um...Not finding toilet paper as it's sticking out of the ground and not finding stuff like that.

[27: 206 to 214] T: One to two every day, yeah. But that "wild" factor, I know you're probably looking for trails and campsites and I liked that there weren't marked trails and that there were not marked campsites, although we frequently found sites that looked like that they had been used by other people just because this is a real convenient spot. You can tell that there is impact. A lot of the trails that we were on I know most of them were game trails, but a lot of the other people are out there following them too. Because caribou know how to make some pretty nice paths. BG: Mm....hm. T: Pretty nice paths. Getting through the scrub brush, they've got....they know the way around. BG: Right. T: So we might as well follow their lead. And I like that, being able to just you know, "let's find out where this trail leads" and "let's find out where this little game trail leads" and "let's cut off into the wild here and see where it takes us."

[28: 344 to 348] BG: So, it sounds like "wild" and "wilderness" are nearly synonymous? Is that fair to say? T: Yeah, I'd say so. B: Uh huh....

[see also excerpts 20, 23]

Limited Camping

[29: 230] B: And that's the interesting thing about this area, or at least the Arrigetch Peaks area, there are not a lot of places where you have even the option of setting up a tent. We were trying to plan ahead and look at it. We had topo maps with us and we were trying to find what looked like would be flat areas and tried to plan where we could get to those flat areas. We got to one of the flat areas and it was essentially a quagmire there. There were basically tussocks that were about "this tall" with water down below. And it was just a wide open flat area, just a marsh. But there was obviously no way you could put a tent there because the tussock was "this" big around and then there was a gap and there was _____. And so it was somewhat difficult to plan where we were going to put the tent ahead of time just because of the terrain, which also then leads to you find a spot that works for a tent and that's where it goes.

[See also excerpt 18]

Scenic Beauty

[30: 236 to 240] BG: Okay. Was there a best part of the trip, a highlight? B: Hard to say. There were a lot of gorgeous sites, a lot of really cool things to see. I don't know really of anything, in my mind, that stands out as "the best." T: A lot of _____ to me that if I had to pick any "best" it was probably.....one of the nights we decided that it was too hot during the "day" for hiking. So, we thought that we'd do some midnight hiking and why not? We experienced that, too. And it happened as we were hiking up through one of the passes. So, it was nice and cool hiking. And it was as we were leaving Arrigetch Creek and I was really worried that, man I love the Arrigetch, looking up into the canyon. We'd initially planned on going up into there, and we ended up changing our plan. And I thought "oh, man, we're going to leave that area, the Arrigetch Creek, and

everything else is going to be ugly and gross.” And we came up over the Pass and we could see everything else that was coming up and it was right at solar midnight. It was lit beautifully. It was gorgeous. I just caught my breath right there when I saw that. And that was neat. I liked that a lot. Oh, that was pretty.

Wet/Boggy

[31: 22] B: Um... it was both of our first experiences in any type of terrain that we were in that first day. Kind of marshy, boggy, tussock-type areas with some heavy underbrush that we had to get through. We did approximately 3 miles that day?

[32: 362 to 370] T: I was just amazed at how wet everything was. B: Yeah. T: We would up to the top of a mountain pass, in this tiny area. We say at the top of a pass, but it was almost the top of a mountain... there's some standing pools of water. Gosh, where were all the mosquitoes coming from? B: We were at basically 1000 meters and there were still pools of water. T: With nothing above us but rock, really. That really boggles my mind. That there could be that much water. I suppose it's just that everything is still thawing...

MANAGEMENT

Minimal Presence

[33: 378 to 380] B: Other than that, again, in an area like this, it's kind of, in my mind, it's hard to tell what the presence of the Park Service is actually doing because.... T: I kind of took it as the presence was to let it be. To back off and let things happen natural-like.

[see also excerpt 34]

Positive/Informative Interaction with NPS Staff

[34: 350 to 352] BG: Okay. What did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? B: They were informative when we were talking about where our final destination was going to be or debating between landing at North Forks and hiking across Anaktuvuk Pass or going to the Arrigetch Peaks. They gave us an idea of what the terrain was and what types of situations we would probably encounter. At the Arrigetch Peaks area, they did let us know about some of the areas that have been impacted by campers, such as the knolls that we were talking about. They mentioned where they were and asked if it was possible for us to pass them by, to do so. But if we couldn't, then go ahead and camp there. But ...ummm..... other than that, I didn't really see much from what I saw in terms of management going on.

[35: 378] B: Well, prior to coming, I did contact the Park Service in this area. I had contemplated bringing a .44 Magnum handgun for possible defense against an attacking grizzly or black bear or any other encounter that we might run into that pepper spray just wasn't enough. They responded very quickly and gave me a lot of good information. They indicated what their thoughts were on, as far as carrying a hand gun. They indicated what all of the.... what they required if you did happen to shoot something. You better be able to prove that it was attacking you and they just gave me their thoughts on

would that hand gun be large enough to be able to stop an attacking grizzly. So, they did provide some good information up front in trying to plan the trip and trying to figure out what safety precautions we would want and need to bring with.

[36: 384] T: I was really glad that we ran into the sup [superintendent].... because he had first-hand knowledge of a lot of this stuff. We got a lot of information from him. When we were in earlier, there were two guys that were very helpful, but neither of them had ever been there, so they couldn't give us anything first-hand. That was a little bit frustrating. It's nice when there's somebody who actually knows where it is that you're talking about going and they can speak first-hand.

Inconvenience/Misconception Regarding Bear Barrels

[37: 420 to 426] BG: And how about carrying the bear barrels? They probably suggested that you carry them? T: They're required. B: They're required. I thought. T: They had better have been required! I was glad to have them, but I got thinking halfway through the trip that we were overusing them or overreacting a little bit. Because other places I've been where we have to worry about grizzlies, we don't have the barrels.

[38: 432] B: It was.... they were very inconvenient, compared to what we're used to, in terms of carrying food.

[39: 436 to 438] BG: If you hadn't felt that they were required, would you have taken the barrels? B: Probably, at least one or two of them. I think because then at least even if the bear does attack and we didn't have anyplace to hang food, we'd at least have some food.

Need for More Information

[40: 354] T: I would have liked they had lots of pictures there, but I wanted to have a better idea of what the terrain was going to be like that we were covering. I even talked about getting in there and shooting a bunch of pictures for them in the different terrain than we had seen because we did not have a good idea of what it would be like until we actually got there. What are tussocks? What are they like to walk on? What do they even look like? We didn't have good pictures of them. Just to give us an idea. That would have been nice.

[41: 386 to 388] BG: So, you feel like it would have enhanced or improved your experience if you'd had more information going into the area? B: Had we had a little bit better idea of what the various terrains were, I think it would've been helpful to some extent. Just..... originally when we talked about coming here, we're used to talking that a five-mile day is a pretty short day, in terms of distance. I don't think we went over three miles or much over three miles on any of the days we were out there.

[42: 396 to 404] B: Yeah, and the pack, but not knowing what that terrain was, it was really hard to plan how far you can go. And we'd been told 3-6 miles is probably all the farther you want to plan on. But it's really hard to know without knowing that you're going to be bushwhacking through head-high willow stands and that there are certain

hills that you're not going to be able to up because the willows are growing horizontally out the side of the hill and then curling up, so it's basically like going into a fortress in terms of trying to fight your way through them. BG: Yup....B: So, just knowing that information, I think would be helpful, partly to prevent doing damage to the Park. Because as you're going through those areas, you're going to be breaking branches. You're going to be doing whatever damage..... If you have an idea of areas that are very hard to pass through vs. areas that are easier to pass through, it might make T: Then it can end up concentrating all the use in one area. B: I know, I was going to get to that. So, it would be helpful to at least have an idea of the various terrains, is what it all boils down to.

Visitor Registration

Safety

[43: 406 to 410] BG: So, I saw that you did fill out the little registration sheet in the office there. How did you feel about being asked to fill out that form? B: That was fine by me. I would rather, especially going into an area like this, I would rather be filling something like that out saying "this is what we're planning on doing and if we don't show up, at least you know somehow to backtrack where we may have been going." T: Pick up our carcasses here.

[44: 412] B: Yeah. Whereas if we weren't filling anything like that out, it's possible, had we gotten attacked by a grizzly, had we slipped and fallen off of a precipice or whatever, they would have no idea where to start to look for us, and there's an awful lot of land out there. And if we....whatever had happened to us.....and both of us got injured to the point that we couldn't get out, we couldn't signal for help, we couldn't do anything, the time in looking for us over the entire Arrigetch Peaks area vs. "well, they said they were going to go this way, let's follow that route and see if we can come across them that way first." That could be the difference between life and death. So, I didn't have any problem filling something like that out.

Other Functions

[45: 414 to 418] BG: So, is that your impression, that that is the primary function of that registration, for potential search and rescue? T: I took it that they were probably gathering information on use, where people are, what part gets used. Which parts get used the most. B: For the purposes of the Park, I would imagine, personally, that that would be the primary function. From my standpoint, as I said, I'd rather they know where we were going or where we were planning on going.

628BTT06

Harold (H), Reba (R), Jesse (J)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 12] R: We started in Anaktuvuk and we hiked up the Koyukuk River up the Ernie Pass, and then down the north fork of the Koyukuk and then we had boats flown in and floated the river down to Bettles.

Gradual immersion

[2: 21 1] J: And the trip to come here is very is very gradual. You have to take time to get to Fairbanks, which is already kind of the outback for some of us. And then you get to Anaktuvuk and then you get to hiking on this ATV trail, so it's, you know, and then once you get off the ATV trail, then you really feel like you're on.... I didn't realize how much the ATV trail had affected me until we left it. And once we left it, I really felt like "now I'm here." But it didn't really occur to me until after we got off it how much it was affecting how I was seeing things. But, again, it's a gradual process going into the Interior and it's a gradual process coming out. Um..... so you know, there's really only a couple of days when you're really feeling like, you know, it's a lot of work and a lot of planning to get to these couple of days when you can really feel like you're in the wilderness. And that's....that's okay, I think.

[see also excerpt 7]

Weather

[3: 74] R: Yeah, the weather was beautiful. We kept calling it the arctic Riviera. We were there and it was sunny and warm.

[4: 347 to 349] H: I was also real happy with the weather. I was told we were extremely lucky in having the nice weather we had. R: Yeah, it was really amazing weather. It was hot and sunny almost the whole time. We got our token rain yesterday.

Hiking

[5: 38] J: And we were hiking up along.....the first couple of days.....we were hiking up an ATV trail. It was very easy hiking. But those that had been up here before were sloshing through the mushy tundra and the ATV trail made it pretty fast hiking. We were covering like 2 miles in a day. Or 8 miles in a day. But generally you are lucky to cover 3 to 5 in the Brooks Range.

[6: 221 to 225] R: I know it's not all easy on the ATV trail. There was a lot of marshy stuff on the ATV trail. H: That's true. R: It was easy in that you're not finding your own route, which was nice. What I didn't like about the ATV trail is that you almost still stuck to the trail. I mean, we're conditioned to follow a trail, so we followed the trail.

[7: 219] H: When I said that it was nice to have easy hiking, it kind of goes along with what she was saying earlier about it's all kind of a process of working up to it, is that I wouldn't have minded being thrown right away into a trailless area, but it just made the....it made it a little bit easier to kind of work my way in and build up my strength for when there was no trail, I was a little bit more ready.

[8: 104] H: Either the 4th or 5th day, I'm not sure which, but the group that was ahead came up on a large field of tussocks, which was by far the hardest hiking. And me, being fairly new at the whole group backpacking bit, decided to try to get through it as fast as possible, and I made the mistake of getting far ahead of my group going through the tussocks, which had been, pretty much, never really did end. And that was probably the hardest hiking that we did. It was uh....go through tussocks 'til you get to a little creek when you go down through some brush and back up through the brush and be back in the tussocks. The speed of that was probably about 1/2 to 1/3 of what we were originally encountering.

Wildlife

Evidence

[9: 138] H: Also, this is my first time up here and there were quite a few prints from caribou and bear and wolves in the first half. From what I understood from the other members, it was also the most that they had ever seen. Once we got closer to the river, the bear, wolf, and caribou prints still continued, but we also picked up more moose and lynx tracks.

[10: 164] J: Yeah, the tracking I mean there were tracks everywhere. At every sand bar we stopped there were wolf tracks. There were bear tracks. I have never seen so many tracks.

[11: 172 to 180] J: When we were following the ATV trail, we could see this one lone wolf, which was actually also on the ATV trail and then we came up on this part where you could tell that all of a sudden the tracks.....there were like a lot of wolf tracks and they were all in a big circle. You could tell this one lone wolf had come up on this big pack. Then we had.....we camped like 100 yards down from that. R: You saw that on the ATV trail? J: Yeah. Yeah. It's really cool to see their behavior. I mean such a simple silly thing, but just to take their tracks and watch and follow them and see where they crossed the river and where they disappear into the woods. R: It was thrilling. J: So silly, but so thrilling.

[12: 377] H: This is kind of a strange highlight, but....a friend of mine's parents.... A friend of mine died a bit ago and his parents wanted me to bring a small amount of his ashes up here with me. And on one of our day hikes I was able to get away from the rest of the group and I climbed up near the top of some of these falls, and it was probably one of the most heavily-used areas, the most tracks I'd seen on the whole trip at that point. And I was able to spread his ashes over that area. I just felt so good to be able to bring him somewhere so beautiful. We'd always talked about going here together, but never had the chance to. So that was a really special time for me. So....yeah.

[see also excerpt 45]

Sightings

[13: 38] J: Then our second day out, we were setting up our camp and we heard a bark. And then another bark. It sounded just like um..., you know, domestic dogs. And they

were wolves. One of our members started to howl and they started to howl back. And they were way across the valley and way up this mountain. We walked across the valley and we sat out there for the longest time and we could hear them, but we couldn't see them. We had ten-power binoculars. Then finally we were just skimming across the rim and there was this big black wolf there. A little further on there was a gray wolf. It was sooooo exciting. To hear them. And then to see them. Then we sat there for the longest time and watched them.

[14: 361] J: And mine was seeing the wolves. Seeing the wolves was just a highlight, but seeing all the wildlife was amazing. Seeing all the creatures in their habitat. There's something really reassuring about that; that they're still out there.

[15: 58] J: Yeah. But that second night at our camp we had a grizzly. We were camped close to the river and then [inaudible] valley and the mountains. He was kind of at the base of the mountain. How far? Maybe three, four hundred yards away. He came through the willows and he was just grubbing around there. It looked like he looked at us a number of times. He should have been able to see us. We sat there for an hour or more looking at him grubbing around in the brush. And then he went away. He went back into the willows and there were some waterfalls up there and one of our members had gone up toward the waterfalls. He was hiking to the waterfalls and then the bear came back. He didn't see the bear. We saw the bear back at camp. I was watching the bear. The bear almost immediately you know, in wind... The bear picked up his scent immediately. Then it turned and bolted. It just ran right into the willows.

[16: 68] J: So, we knew that the bear was behaving appropriately. It was just kind of ironic to see him bolting away from one of us. He was really quite an amazing thing. See him catch the wind, and become alert, stand up and just take off. So that was that night.

[17: 355 to 359] R: I think the highlight was seeing that bear catch Dan's sent and take off. There was something really, I don't know, ironic about that. Ironic but really amazing. Not really scary. I was a little scared because, you know, I was watching him to see what the bear was going to do and see if we needed to warn Dan or anything like that and the bear very quickly responded properly. So I knew the bear was no threat. But just seeing him respond that way. I mean it's obviously a hunted area. The bear has a sense of humans. Maybe it was just seeing the sense that the bear had.

Overflights

[18: 317 to 323] B: How about aircraft traffic? Did you see much of that? R: Yeah. H: Not really until towards the end, though, wouldn't you say? R: We'd see [inaudible]. We started seeing them when we were camping and patching the boat, which was like between Pyramid Creek and Kashwana Creek. I know there are two major landing strips in that area. We could hear.....we heard a plane come in to Kashwana probably three or four times that night. Maybe dropping off that other group off. So that was kind of the first. And then the last week, at least the last three days, there were quite a few planes flying over. We saw at least one a day.

[19: 325 to 337] B: How'd you feel about seeing those? R: They're a bummer. B: They're a bummer? R: Yeah. You know. H: But at the same time it was like, while I had not enjoyed seeing them, we had to use them ourselves, so it's kind of a...R: That's how people like ourselves access the area. H: Yeah.. But at the same time, the reason you access these areas, is usually to try to, at least for me. [inaudible] just trying to get away from the rest. You can't really be too hard on the others because they're doing the same thing that you are.

Other People

[20: 186 to 190] B: Did you see anybody else using the trail? J: Hm...mm.....H: Nope. Only once we got to the river did we see one group of tents, but no people. Other than that, it was only garbage we saw.

Prefer not to see others

[21: 200 to 205] R: I think one of the things I really love about coming up here is the opportunity not to see other people. So, I mean I wasn't really disappointed to see them, but it definitely....it detracted from feeling like you're really out in the wilderness. But then, that's not seeing the people. J: Yeah. R: It's just the evidence. Seeing the people themselves would have been more of a detraction.

Evidence of others

[22: 196 to 198] B: And how did you feel about seeing the group of tents? H: It didn't bother me at all. Up to that point, I kind of enjoyed not seeing anybody, which is part of the reason why I came up here. To kind of get a little escape, get away. But.. you know...as long as they were taking care of their area, I had no problem with them being there. Everyone has a right to be I guess.

[23: 453] R: And you don't get a feeling that it is well-traveled other than the ATVs. We did see....actually there was some...well coming from the confluence we kept coming on the same trail that someone else had taken. We saw the boot tracks. but you didn't get a feeling that it was as well-traveled as we had been lead to believe. So that was really nice. I don't know, maybe it is a well-traveled area. Maybe later in the season you get more of a feel for other people being around. I think we were one of the first groups to go through there this year.

[24: 136] J: Hiking along the ATV trails, there were places where there was a lot of garbage...which was kind of disappointing to see.

[see also excerpt 44]

Perceptions of local people

[25: 182 to 184] B: To go back just a little bit to something you said earlier. You said the trash along the trail was pretty disappointing. What do you mean by disappointing? J: Well, you go out to an area like this and you expect it's not going to be trash. You know, it's a national park. I mean it's also....I understand it in a way. I don't necessarily

approve of it, but I understand the local people that use the trail a lot, and they have a different concept of what to do with their garbage.

[26: 207 to 209] B: How about the fact that you were, for awhile, hiking on an ATV trail? How did you feel about that? H: Well, I appreciated the easy hiking. I thought she said.....I understand that they view this area.....to them this is their home, I'm assuming. And for us, it's more of a getaway, so they're going about their daily lives while we're taking a break from ours, so I understand, you know, they're doing what they're doing, but, you know, with an area like that, I just don't understand the littering. It just does not make any sense to me, you know. It's one thing to litter in the city or in your town, but in an area like that, it's so pure or whatever you call it, it's kind of disheartening.

[27: 465 to 467] B: So is the fact that the ATV trail is evidence of other people, is that what detracts from the wilderness aspect? R: Well, it does a little bit, but you also realize that that is evidence of an indigenous culture there even though they may be modern. They're still an indigenous culture. They're somehow utilizing their native lands for whatever purposes they use them for now. So I mean that's I guess there's still that; being okay and appropriate for the area.

Group Dynamics

[28: 405] H: Well, for me, this was my first time being in an organized group. It was always just me and a couple of friends throwing ourselves into an area, fairly unprepared, and kind of figuring it out as we'd go along. This time it was a larger group. Everyone was a complete stranger to me.

[29: 429 to 431] B: Can you describe how the other people on the trip influenced your experience? H: Well, like I said earlier, it was usually just me and a group of friends and we figured out as we went along. But this time I had people teaching me different things, which I did enjoy. They went about it pretty well. It wasn't so much them telling me as it was them showing me, which was good. So, me learning, that I liked a lot. Um...It was also kind of interesting because usually when you meet someone you get to know them.... like you meet them and you first figure out what they present themselves as and then the longer you get to know them, you kind of get to know what they are really like. But we didn't have time for that. We just had this one dinner where everyone met each other and then we were thrown together and you didn't really have time or there wasn't much point in hiding a whole lot. So it was fairly interesting just to see how everyone acted like that. It was kind of intense, too, because there were many different personalities, which in the long run worked pretty well together. But, intense would definitely describe a lot of the experiences, personal issues and such.

[30: 439] J: Um... I thought sometimes the other people on the trip enriched it and sometimes it distracted. What I was thinking about enriching, we took this day hike up a canyon and at the top of the canyon was a lake and there were seven of us... five of the....I think they were all guys....four guys and Terry...took off their clothes and went into this lake. It was freezing cold, really cold. It was really beautiful. You know, it was half covered with ice. And it was just a blast watching these guys jump in the water and

hoop and holler and jump out and.....I mean it totally enriched that whole experience. And then sometimes I would, you know..... it would just be really beautiful and there would be a lot of chattering going on. And I would find that kind of distracting. But it's like in any....it's like that in a couple, you know. I come with the group because I love being in a group. And so part of that is you get the good with the bad.

Accident

[31: 229 to 237] B: So, tell me about the transition from the hiking part to moving onto the river? J: [She laughs loudly] R: [She laughs.] H: It was pretty exciting. J: It was pretty exciting. There's a story.

[32: 241] R: Well, the river was high and that first stretch of the river from.....we started below Ernie Creek, you're immediately maneuvering around or in between a lot of snags and strainers and the river was maybe like that for .8 miles..... or .5 miles, because, you know, we had .3 of the map... But as the crow flies. As the crow flies with the GPS. We hit a nice big snag and put a pretty good gash in the boat.

[33: 245 to 247] R: Yeah, in the raft; in the front half. I mean there just wasn't any time at all to get the raft.....the paddle raft through. Or even the canoe really....for them to even just get a feel for being on the river for you know commands for paddling. J: There wasn't any time..... you were immediately in the stuff. It was like giving somebody with a learner's permit, putting them on the Indie 500, and saying "okay get on out there!! Figure it out!"

[34: 259] J: We had a huge, huge L-shaped tear in it that, I know, everybody looked at that and said "Oh, man, how are we going to get to Bettles?" [She laughs.] And that was, you know, we'd been on the river for 20 minutes. So, we had to stay and make this incredibly meticulous patching job.

[35: 261 to 265] H: We got lucky that a couple of people in the group had been fairly experienced rafters and also they'd experienced patching rafts. It took them about 5 hours? J: Yeah, I think his real talent there was just he was a very meticulous man. He just had infinite patience for making this patch a work of art, which is kind of what it needed to be at that point. R: We weren't lucky. I mean, the trip was planned with repairs in mind and the knowledge to make the repairs. I mean, we didn't go out there unprepared.

[36: 277 to 279] B: So, what was the feeling after that? You had this accident, you patched the boat...J: Well, yeah. There were a lot of feelings in between there. I mean, you know, we got out of the boat, and they were five hours patching this boat. We were setting up camp and there were all of us, you know, we're setting up camp together. We were saying "What are we going to do? Is this going to work?" You know, you go back and you're looking at them operate on the boat and it does look like a very serious operation on an exotic animal and it's like the last one left in the world and if this one dies, then that's it, they're all extinct. That's kind of the feeling that was there. Um...So, yeah, but then we were thinking is this patch going to hold? We knew right away we

were going to have wait 8 hours, so we'd been on the river for 20 minutes. We were all so psyched to get on the river. We had to stop, camp, and not go until the next day. I think we were all....I don't know, I was really nervous about getting back into the raft. I had pretty good confidence that it was all going to work out okay, but just that initial getting in the raft and getting over that hump was definitely a little scary. But we were in the raft for like a minute, and it was all smooth and fine and we were in control. We just had really bad luck hitting that snag. I mean the river was still running fast. There were still a lot of snags. Um...But we just didn't have as bad of luck this time. Yeah, when I think....we retold that story.....I believe every night. We've made some allusion to that. It was kind of like we needed to debrief. Everybody telling their own part.

[37: 391] R: I don't even think the hole in the boat.... I mean that was a shocking moment and it was more disturbing for some people than for others. Some knew that that was part of the rafting experience, you patch it and you continue on. It's not like we were doomed and never going to get past.....the rest of the river was going to be just like that and we were never going to get through it. Um....but it's, you know, it was really interesting to see them talking about it later after we did get through it. And how it turned to humor and those types of adventures were part of the adventure-- central to the adventure-- it's what you make of it. [inaudible] different ways. For some it's more struggle making it a positive thing, but they were all pretty successful.

[38: 393] J: Yeah, I would definitely not call the hole in the boat a lowlight. I think it was a challenge, but then...you know, there.....there just wasn't a low point. You knew one way or another you were going to get back to Bettles. We all have to pay the mortgage next month. You weren't going to be stuck on that gravel bar for the rest of your life. I know.

Remoteness/Isolation

[39: 427] J: Um... it was less remote. It was kind of....I thought it was ironic because it was less remote and I saw more wildlife on this trip than I saw in more remote areas. Um... so it was different....it was a really different experience. I couldn't clearly qualify one as better than the other. I really....when I was really remote, I really enjoyed that. And....valued that for what it was. But in the not-so-remote, it was still, I mean, such a spectacularly beautiful place. Seeing all the wildlife....

[40: 407] R: I didn't feel as remote as I have on other trips in other areas. Um....you know being on the ATV trail, just following a trail, a trail made by machines. It's not like we were....things were....or help or anything was readily accessible, but it was more accessible than other places I have been. So you didn't feel quite as remote. But then in a way, I didn't really think about that. It was not a prominent thought during the trip. It felt like I was just in nature, in a beautiful area.

[41: 441 to 443] B: How would you describe this place to somebody who was thinking about visiting? H: I don't think it's that easy because I think a lot of people I describe it to, they would be totally confused as to why I would pay a large sum of money to come somewhere so I could sleep on rocks and hike 8 miles a day with a 50-pound pack just

to get to a spot on the river where I get to paddle all day just to be eaten by mosquitoes. So to a lot of people, that would not make any sense, but someone with a somewhat similar understanding, they would just be the....I know both of them kind of said that they felt a little bit less remote than on other trips, but I still felt I was able to get away from a lot of my daily pressures and stuff. Just being in this beautiful wilderness with all these animals. People who felt a similar way, I would describe it as a good relaxed feeling, I guess.

[see also excerpts 48-50, 60]

Safety

[42: 395 to 399] B: So, you didn't have that feeling at all that you were just lost out here...."nobody is going to come and get us." R: Well then, there's the bit...you know the first look at that hole there's a sense of that, a very brief sense of that, like "okay, now what?" But J: I've been in other situations out here where I have had that feeling, but we were too well supported and we were in too high of a travel area to really feel that. I've been in places on top of a glacier and the wind is blowing and you're five days hiked in and if anything happened at that point, all you had was a line-of-sight radio, then you definitely feel like it's on you right now. It's your trip. You know, you have to really pay attention to what you're doing. But in the situation we were in there, there was too much traffic overhead and too much intervention already in our hike, you know, we already had a plane come in. We just couldn't feel that remote enough to really feel like you're stuck out here. Not on this trip.

[43: 401] R: Then we had a sat phone. We had a satellite phone. We always had the phone number of coyote air. So, yeah.

[see also excerpt 40]

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Wilderness

[44: 461 to 463] B: All three of you have used the term "wilderness" once or twice in this conversation in reference to this place you've traveled through. What is it that makes it a "wilderness?" R: Well, the ATV trail makes it feel like less of a wilderness. Once you get past that, I think wilderness is a place that's really only accessible by foot, boat, or [inaudible]. It's a place that's untouched and doesn't have human trails....even though the animal trails are as distinct or more than human trails can be. That there is as little human impact as possible. When you feel like, when you have the sense of being the only ones or being one of the few in the area. But just little human impact.

[45: 469 to 471] B: How about comments from the other two of you, what makes it a "wilderness?" J: Um, you know, you can almost guess this from me, but it is a place where, you know, it's a big chunk of land where animals can still do their thing. They still have the mass migrations. They still have wolves. We have enough land that they can do what they need to do. You need a lot of land for maintaining their packs. Um....a place where grizzlies are the first priority.

[46: 473] H: Part of it is the feeling of being able to get away because even though there's lots of different small parks and such in areas where I live, I don't ever feel like I've actually escaped out of anything. This is just kind of added to my definition, but I feel like when I'm truly in a wilderness area, I am away from the majority of human culture, I guess. And I put myself more at the mercy of nature than more of the...man-made rules.

[47: 479] J: And it's more, to me, it's just one of the last places left on earth where we still have this big hunk of land that doesn't have any infrastructure or it only has that one horrible haul road. Other than that, there's no infrastructure up here, it's so.....piecemeal.

[see also excerpt 27]

Access

[48: 475 to 477] B: Okay. So, there are other places in Alaska, other places in the nation that we call "wilderness." Is this "wilderness" different from that other "wilderness?" R: It's more difficult to get to. It takes a lot of effort to get to. And there's a lot of...well I'm from Utah and we have wilderness there but you can drive to the edge of it. pack in and pack out in a few days. So it's definitely more difficult to access

[49: 487] R: Yeah, it is positive thing. The more difficult it is to access the less it's gonna be used and abused. I mean there's land all over Utah that's far too accessible and it's absolutely abused, because they are right there.

[50: 483 to 487] J: Well, it gives it even a more stronger sense of wilderness. B: The difficult access. J: Yeah. That you're just a whole lot more remote. I mean on this trip, even though we felt a little less remote, you're still a whole lot more remote than other wilderness areas like in the Lower 48.

No rescue

[51: 537 to 539] R: I was surprised that there were no permits. I mean for us there was, but you wouldn't need one if you were a private group. H: Why were you surprised? R: Because all the other parks have them. It seems like that's the way the Park Service keeps track of who's in there and knows when people who show up and don't show up. So, in a way, it's kind of nice that you really are left to your own resources. And that you don't, I mean Park Service rescues are in the news all over the place. Especially now with cell phones. So, we 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. And the Park Service really encouraged....they talked about that. They wanted to know that that was our expectation and I appreciated that.

MANAGEMENT

Little NPS Presence

[52: 491 to 493] B: What did you notice about the Park presence or Park management? R: I was the only one that had any contact with them. So there, I mean, there was no presence there. Even in Anaktuvuk. The group didn't..... I met the ranger in Anaktuvuk. So we...there was really no presence.

[53: 509 to 519] R: So I don't know, I think in an area like this, I think there was enough park presence. B: Did you have the sense that you were in a National Park? R: Not like you do down in the Lower 48, in a national parking lot. H: I didn't have a ranger checking up on me every night to make sure I paid or anything like that. I [inaudible]. R: But we new we were in a park, a national park. J: I think any sort of real physical presence that it was Park would have detracted from feeling like we were in a remote area or in a wilderness.

Bear Barrels

[54: 503] J: We all had contact with them in terms of the beer barrels....the bear barrels. They were confusing to us because we didn't have enough to put all our food in, so every night we had this discussion, what are we protecting, are we protecting our food, so we'll have food for our trip? or are we protecting the bears so they don't get habituated to humans? I would say that through the bear barrels, the Park presence was kind of half....was disjointed....it didn't make sense to be strongly recommending it and really wanting us to have them.....there needs to be some sort of a way to put all of our food in them.

[55: 495 to 497] B: But you went ahead and opted for them even though they're optional. R: Yeah, although the first ranger I talked to, I think he was the head ranger... I talked to him on the phone. He didn't really make it sound optional. He didn't say we had to, but he encouraged them. Even though it's optional he really pushed for it.

Group Size

[56: 16 to 22] H: We started out in Anaktuvuk that day. We flew up in two different groups. A fast group and a slow group, which did not work out as planned. Neither group was faster than the other. J: So, we kept kind of....we weren't allowed to be within sight of each other to dependent on each other so we kept having to allow....I was in the slow group.....having to allow the fast group to get ahead. H: There were nine of us? J: Yeah. That eventually sorted itself out later on in the trip. We stayed for a layover and then they managed to get [inaudible].

[57: 24 to 26] B: When you say you weren't allowed to be together....J: Well we....the group in the Park....for hiking you're allowed 7 in a group and 10 on the river. And so we made the trip with over 10 thinking we'd split up for the hiking part, and then we'd be together for the... We felt that 10 was better for the river trip.

[58: 409 to 411] B: How about being in the larger group. Did that impact the feeling of remoteness? R: I don't think so. If it had been any larger then maybe. I do think that you know even in the back country portion of the trip where we did cross paths more than the rangers wanted us to. We really [inaudible] we did cross paths [inaudible]. And

um.... because we knew each other and, in a sense, we really were together. It didn't really interfere with it. But I also wouldn't do it that way again. I would just keep it to seven on the river and for hiking. It just doesn't work well.

[59: 413 to 415] B: How do you feel about that policy? R: Well, it's kind of bizarre that it's 7 for hiking and 10 for the river. And maybe most people don't. And I can't even remember why I made the decision to go with 10. I can't remember why I thought having 10 was better for the river. It may have had something to do with pricing. Um...So, I think the policy... yeah, you definitely have to limit the size of the group. It should be a small size. If it were any smaller, it would basically be cost prohibitive for us to do it. It would be a more expensive trip and we wouldn't attract many people to it. And I think the impact... 7 is basically a good size for low impact.

Limits on Use

[60: 531] H: I think it is necessary to keep this land from getting overused. So, if that's what is necessary, even though I wouldn't enjoy it, that's what eventually will need to happen. Like we were saying, there are so many spots where we live where you can drive right up to it and you walk through it and you run into people constantly. There are many trampled trails. You lose that feeling of isolation and such, which is fairly important. At the same time, I don't want to be one of those people who is kept out of it because I don't have a permit. So, it kind of goes both ways.

Permits

[see excerpt 51]

629BTT07

Randy (R) and Missy (M)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 18] R: We started out at Circle Lake and hiked up towards Arrigetch Peaks. Then we went up the creek drainage, which turned out to be not the route I would suggest. [laughs] We got stopped in there in the brush, basically, the first night after making that much distance. We camped down by the creek.

[2: 26] R: But we made it up reasonably high, past....up into the higher country. We camped again on a creek. And then the third day we made it in a couple of hours up to the, I guess what, it'd be the Batza (?) Valley right below the Peaks area. And we camped there. We set up more of a base camp along the creek there, out where it had flattened out by that time. And then we did some day hikes up into the Peaks, up into a couple of those valleys. And that was neat. That was a lot of fun. And then, route-wise, we came, I don't know if the Pass has a name, but over a Pass and then down into, I guess, Hot Springs Creek drainage. Then we followed that out through....down to Takahula Lake. We camped on the Pass. There's like three tarns or ponds up there. And then we camped again somewhere on Hot Springs Creek about midway down. That one

we stayed high, mostly higher in elevation, up off the creek, up on the ridges. We made it almost all the way to the lake on the ridges, but then we were eventually forced down pretty near the lake. We ended up getting forced down to the Alatna River because there were cliffs on the ridges, so we couldn't get through. Route-wise, that's what we did, in brief.

[3: 218 to 222] B: How long was your trip, total? R: Eight days, eight nights. M: Yeah.

Reasons for Visiting

[4: 322 to 326] B: How did you decide to come to this place? R: I don't know, I've wanted to come here. It is sort of the last.....one of the last remote mountain ranges in the United States. We've been to a bunch of other places. M: Mm...hm... Yeah. We fell in love with Alaska. This is my third time, the third year here. We just came across it. It seemed very intriguing. It just seemed like a challenge and, like he said, almost a virgin mountain range. So...yeah.

[5: 338 to 350] B: How did you decide to go to the Arrigetch Peaks area? R: The lakes weren't frozen. [laughs] M: Yeah, that was one thing. We were pretty certain that we wouldn't have a problem at this time of year getting in there. We heard it was beautiful. Yeah, we just kind of ended up here because we originally had planned to be on the North Slope and had wanted to, but the late thaw kind of dashed those plans. B: So was it sort of a last minute decision to go to the Arrigetch? R: Yeah. M: Sort of, yeah. R: I don't think we finalized this for Arrigetch until three or four weeks ago. Right 'til the end of the school year. I teach, so....when we wrapped that up. Yeah.

[6: 352 to 356] M: Yeah. Um... also it was one of the cheaper destinations.....B: Cheaper within the Park? M: Yeah, right.

Finding information

[7: 328 to 336] B: How did you find about Gates of the Arctic? R: Well, we knew it was a Park. And we knew it was a National Park and had been looking at it for a while. It's hard to find a lot of specific information, but the Internet helped. M: Yeah...R: a little bit. It was surprising how little information there is available about trying to put together stuff up here. M: But yeah, I'd say mainly through the Internet we got it started.

[8: 358 to 362] R: And you could easily get information about it, too, and that was the other the other places it was.....they looked interesting on a map, but there just was no.....M: No one could tell you anything. R: No one could tell you anything about it. And there wasn't anything written about anything in any of those places. I'm sure they're nice, but hard to it seemed difficult to make a plan of going there without being able to get any information about it.

[see also excerpts 40-41]

Other People

[9: 56 to 58] R: We saw one other group up in the Peaks area. They were camped on Arrigetch Creek, up a little higher than we were, right where the three forks come together and two forks come together, right at the very....right before you actually start climbing rather than hiking. That was the only other two people.....M: Yeah, we saw them for about ten minutes, and that was it.

[10: 70 to 74] B: How did you feel about seeing the people that you did see? R: I wasn't particularly disappointed. It was kind of....it was alright that there were other people up in the area. We've hiked some pretty remote spots before and so.... we certainly....I'm sure we could have found somewhere in the Park where we weren't going to find people at all, ever. But we didn't really....we knew that there'd be people up here. Not that we were looking for them, but.....M: They didn't have a negative impact. They were....wanted the same thing we were. Solitude was easy to find. You just move a half-mile away and you wouldn't even know they were there, really.

[11: 80] R: Yeah. I wouldn't have wanted to see a ton of people up there, but it was okay, you know, it was fine to see another group.

[12: 224 to 236] B: So at the end of your trip, you ended up returning with the other couple on the same flight. Did you see them around the lake on that final evening? R: We did. We knew they were there. Yeah. It looked like they were staying inside. M: We saw them but we didn't have any contact with them until the last day a few hours before the plane picked us up. B: How did you feel about seeing them or camping close to them? M: I was indifferent. I guess. R: Yeah. M: We had enough space that it wasn't an intrusion. We didn't see them or hear them even though they weren't that far away.

Locals

[13: 132 to 140] B: Was there a single high point or a best part of the trip? R: I liked the fishing. I liked getting to Takahula Lake. It turned out really nicely. There was good fishing and we talked to a couple that lives up there. And they loaned us a canoe and we paddled around and looked for some wildlife. That was relaxing.

[14: 162 to 178] B: You mentioned previously that you ran into or had some contact with a couple that lived out there [at Takahula Lake]? R: Mm.....hm....B: How did that come about? R: We just inadvertently ended up camping near their cabin. So then.....M: We didn't even know it was there. It was on the other side of the hill. R: And then they were paddling by in the morning. We ended up talking to them and going over to their cabin for a while. M: Yeah, they invited us over to borrow their canoe and we had tea and zucchini bread. That was wonderful. That was one of the highlights. R: Yeah. M: Yeah, they were just very friendly and hospitable, interesting people.

[15: 184 to 194] B: Were you surprised to find folks living out there? R: Yeah. M: Yeah, we were. Let alone for 18 years. B: But it sounds like it was a positive surprise? M: Definitely. Yeah. R: Yeah.

[16: 208 to 216] B: What made it such a positive encounter? R: They were just neat people. M: And the fact that they told us that the beach is on the other side and they lent us a canoe to go over to camp on the beaches and where you could sit easily and it was breezy and you didn't even have to wear DEET, so....yeah. R: Yeah. M: It was a real pleasant side to be on and they gave us suggestions on where to hike up this ridge and look down on moose flats and look for wildlife, which we, you know, that was the first time we actually saw a moose in the whole trip.

Evidence

[17: 60 to 68] R: We saw signs of people who'd been using the game trails to hike on. M: Footprints here and there. R: And we saw, you know, a couple of places where people had camped. B: Did you camp in those same places? R: We didn't really. One...the first one we did, although it didn't look like it was a popular site, we were down on the.....the very first night, down on the creek, that looked like somebody had camped there. But we just kind of but the obvious one up on those bald hill spots.....we didn't camp there. But it looked like people had.....lots of people had been. And then, I don't know, people probably had been camping where we camped up on top, on the river, but it didn't look too impacted.

Overflights

[18: 82 to 90] B: How about aircraft traffic. Did you see a lot of that? R: On and off. At the end, they were flying this group of youngsters around in circles over us, but....M: Yeah, that one day we had that.....R: But other than that it wasn't too bad. Maybe one or two planes a day. M: Yeah.

[19: 94 to 100] M: A little noisy, but on the other hand, for me it was a little comforting. I don't know. B: What do you mean, comforting? M: I mean just to have some sort of possibility of contacting someone if something would go wrong. That's for me, personally, I don't know about for you. R: It's fine with me, too.

[20: 116 to 126] B: So when you saw the, I think you said youngsters, in the planes, did you know that that was a flightseeing trip at the time? M: No, we kind of guessed something was going on like that. R: No, we....yeah. We bumped into....we were told afterwards. B: Did you feel any differently about seeing the planes circling around in the Arrigetch than the other traffic that seemed to be going somewhere? R: No, I didn't. M: Obviously we didn't hang onto it or think too much about it up to the Pass.

Not focused on solitude

[21: 102 to 114] B: So, in that sense, the air traffic was sort of positive. M: In that sense. I mean it was negative in being noisy, you know. R: I mean, I've kind of already done this. We've already....I've already done the thing where the goal was to get as far away from seeing anything at all, so....that doesn't....I guess it wasn't too bothersome to see people around. It was alright. B: So, you're saying that on this trip you weren't really looking for that extreme kind of solitude? R: Not the extreme kind, where if you broke your ass, nobody would ever find you. I guess. Kind of thing, which I've done before

and don't need to do again. M: We just sort of wanted to be on the edge of that, but....not over the edge. R: Yeah.

[see also excerpt 37]

Hiking

Hard work

[22: 268 to 278] B: How did this trip differ from other backpacking trips that you've been on? R: This one was more extreme, I think. M: The most physically challenging, ever. R: It was....B: Is that what you mean by extreme? R: Yeah. I thought that I felt like I was....that we probably both pushed pretty close to our ability levels in terms of endurance and, in some places, skill.

[see also excerpts 25, 33]

Route-finding

[23: 290 to 292] B: When you say that your skills were pushed, what skills? R: I think stamina and endurance and in some places like route finding a little bit and.....mostly that, yeah.

Day-hiking

[24: 134 to 140] R: We had hoped to more set up a situation where we'd be day hiking out of a base camp. It didn't quite turn out that way with this trip. So, then the end part was more like that. We were just kind of settled and you know did a little fishing, hiked up to a ridge and looked at some wildlife and did some other things. It was sort of a little bit more relaxing in that sense, rather than trying to cover a lot of ground. M: But I enjoyed the day hiking we did, a lot just in the Arrigetch area. It's just really beautiful....R: Yeah. M: It's just a world I've never seen before in those Peaks. Not having the pack on your back, you just see things in a whole different light.

[25: 148 to 158] M: I would agree with him, though, about the end of our stay at Takahula Lake. Ideally, just to have the leisure combined with the hiking. It would have been nice to have a little bit more on the leisure side, but....R: We had kind of hoped to have more days up on top. We kind of were thinking it would maybe take us a day and a half to get up there, instead of two and a half. B: So was it the difficult hiking that changed your plans while you were out there? M: Yes. R: Yeah. We got slowed down in the creek bottom and we'd go up a different route next time, I think, you could probably make it in a day and a little bit if you did it right. But not the way we went. M: The distance you see on the map is completely irrelevant, to how much time it takes.

Mosquitoes

[26: 280 to 288] M: And the bugs just added a new...you know, a different element to the whole.....R: Yeah, the bugs...M: It was humorous in a lot of ways. More.....I mean we just had to laugh sometimes at how bad they were instead of lose it. Sometimes we lost it. R: Yeah. I guess there were places where there were definitely times when they were worse than I expected. M: So, the bug aspect was different from other trips.

Wildlife

Expected to see more

[27: 28 to 30] B: Okay. Any noteworthy events? R: Uh..no, we didn't have any, I mean, we didn't have any big wildlife encounters other than a marmot chewed on the cork handle of my fly rod. But other than that, we actually saw no wildlife, which was sort of noteworthy, in and of itself, until we got down to Takahula Lake. Then we saw a moose with a scope, but even there we didn't see much. We saw lots of tracks. And there were pretty good signs that there was a black bear around Takahula Lake, sort of in residence.

[28: 44] M: But we found it interesting, not even on, you know, the slopes in the distance or anything, we didn't see. We just thought it was odd, I guess.

[29: 46 to 48] B: Were you disappointed? M: No, it wasn't disappointing. Just a little curious. We just...I guess we didn't think.....they probably lay low during the day when it's hot and that's when we're out hiking. They are probably more active when we're sleeping. That's what we guessed. But we don't know.

[30: 32 to 38] M: And there was lots of signs of bear and moose....R: All over the place. M: Migration all over the place. Yeah. Um...you know obviously one of the reasons we think we didn't see wildlife is we were making a lot of noise when we were hiking in the brush. R: We didn't want to see a bear up close and personal.

Bear safety

[31: 296] M: Um... yeah. We had camped in grizzly country before, but I think this was just different because we felt this was the most remote Park we've ever been in, so, for me, it was just always a little bit more in the back of my mind, that sort of fear of grizzlies.

[32: 304 to 316] M: We just didn't know how familiar or used-to-people bears would be. Or how they would react if we did surprise them or if they saw us. R: Yeah, that was hard, not..... going through some of that brush, you just couldn't see five feet in front of you. That was nerve-wracking. B: Did you do anything differently or change your behaviors because of your concern about the bears? R: A little bit. M: Yeah. R: Well, the same stuff we do in other places where we're concerned about bears. M: But we just made a lot of noise, which can take away from the experience, of course. You know, being serene. But make sure and camp well off the bear trail we'd just been walking on and just always kind of have a view of where you're at. If you stop and eat, I sit in one direction and he sits in the other direction. Getting up every now and then, you know, to scan the area.

[see also excerpt 30]

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Uniqueness

[33: 376 to 384] B: How would you describe the place to somebody thinking about visiting? R: It's like nothing in the Lower 48, that's for sure. M: It's just awesome, but be prepared for the physical and psychological challenges that it poses. B: Why is it like nothing in the Lower 48? R: The mountains are really.....they seem really like a young mountain range. It's really vertical everything is really vertical. The slate peaks and the narrow valleys and the remoteness and the lack of trails and the lack of people and all that. Yeah.

[34: 386 to 394] M: Yup, and the constant sunlight. B: Is this your first trip to the Arctic? M: Mm....hm...R: Yeah. We've been to Denali before a couple of times. Yeah, below the Arctic Circle. M: It's neat.

Remoteness

[35: 298 to 300] B: When you say remote, what makes it remote? M: Um... well, having been flown in, for one. Um...just a lot less human usage in the Park in general.

Wildness

[36: 396 to 404] B: How did this trip or this area differ from the Denali trips? R: Wilder, a lot more remote, less wildlife, interestingly enough. B: So there is less wildlife, but you say it's wilder. What does that mean? M: Yeah. R: The country is more remote, I think, up here. It's less disturbed, even in Arrigetch, which is probably the most used area in the Park, it seems. You had the feeling that that wasn't really.....that there weren't that you were separated from the rest of society or from other people.

[37: 408 to 410] B: And seeing the people on the trail and the folks at the cabin and the air traffic, those things didn't influence that feeling of wildness? R: I guess not too much, interestingly. I guess you kind of knew there were places where there were no people at all close by. Um.....that was part of it.

Wilderness

[38: 412 to 418] B: Is it fair to call this place a wilderness? R: Yeah. M: Yes, absolutely. R: Yeah.

[39: 420 to 422] B: And are the same qualities that you were just describing, wildness and remoteness, are those things what make it a wilderness? Or are there other attributes? M: [long pause] I don't know, it's a tough question. There was just this vegetation that I've never seen before in my life, too. I don't know. It was almost like feeling like you were on another planet sometimes.

MANAGEMENT

Difficulty Getting Information

[40: 428 to 440] B: What did you notice about the Park Service management? R: I think it's managed well. On the one hand, I think planning your own trip and your own route is part of the experience here, but we kind of felt like nobody was going to give us a definitive answer about anything when we tried to get information about whether to carry a gun or not or what area might be what we were looking for. M: What was a

better area than another....or, yeah. R: Things like that. But that was a little bit that was a little bit challenging; too, as I'm sure it is hard to give answers about such a big Park to people that you don't know, so I don't think he was really was trying to be deceitful, but just.....M: No, they just wanted to remain unbiased. R: Yeah. M: Let us find out for ourselves.

[41: 508 to 510] B: Is there anything that you'd like to add, perhaps a question that I didn't ask that you sort of wish I did? R: No. Maybe.....the only thing that I think would have been maybe helpful would have been a way to get suggestions for other places to go because Arrigetch was the only place where we could get much information on. So then, maybe that had the opposite affect of what the Park Service wanted. Once our original plans of flying into some of the North Slope lakes kind of fell apart. We were scrambling for a route and this seems the easiest one to get to. If there had been other descriptions out there, that might have helped.

[see also excerpts 7-8]

Bear Barrels

[42: 456 to 470] B: And did you carry the bear-proof canisters? M: Yeah, we had two of them. R: Yeah. B: How did you feel about carrying those? R: I think they're great. I mean I think those had great effects in Denali. I think they should probably start using them in some other places like Glacier and in Montana maybe. B: So, you had prior experience with them in Denali? M: Yeah. We're glad to use them. R: You can train the bears that they can't get into them and presumably the bears just start leaving them alone, and that makes everybody happy.

[43: 476 to 486] B: Did you get the impression that they were required here? or did that not matter because you would have carried them anyway? M: No, it did not matter. R: We would have used them anyway. We didn't expect to find any trees to hang food from, so...M: Yeah. R: And we didn't find any trees you could hang food from, easily, so.....M: No, it didn't enter our minds at all to risk losing our entire food supply to animals. Yeah.

[see also excerpt 45]

Perceived Safety Function of Registration

[44: 442 to 452] B: So when you first arrived here in Bettles and checked in over at the Park Service Headquarters there, how did you feel about the check-in process and voluntary registration forms and that kind of thing? R: That part went smoothly. Yeah. That was fine, I thought. B: How did you feel about being asked to register? R: It doesn't bother me. I mean I leave my route information with other people anyway, but. M: No, I'm glad to let people know where we're going. R: I think it makes sense.

Rules and Regulations

[45: 500 to 504] B: Would it ever be appropriate to increase the Park Service management in that way to make them mandatory or to have a mandatory registration or

permit system? R: It doesn't seem like.....I don't know. I guess it depends on what/how things pan out. I could see a time where, if there was an area that was starting to get too much use, like a permitting system, but most of the area here I don't think that would affect at all. Because there is still little enough use, although it might affect Arrigetch. I suppose if the bears started becoming pests, then.....you'd probably want to do something before they become pests, though. M: I wouldn't be opposed to it becoming mandatory, I guess, because it's really for everyone's protection, not just the individuals, but for everyone else who is hiking in there, too. bear get to their food and they didn't have canisters. Then we're all in trouble.

[46: 506] R: I think the parks that have good wilderness regulations are some of the most pleasant, like Denali and Boundary Waters canoe area in Minnesota and a couple of others. As long as it's sensible.

629BTT08

Albert (A), Dirk (D), Eddy (E)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 12] E, It was two-week Sierra Club trip that started in Anaktuvuk Pass. We backpacked for a week up over Ernie Pass down past the confluence of the North Fork of the Koyukuk and Ernie Creek and then had boats flown in and floated for a week down here to Bettles on the North Fork.

Reasons for Visiting

[2: 236] A, Oh. How did I find out about the trip? Yeah, probably every year the Sierra Club evidently has a number of adventure travel trips. This was one. And last year, I had made a sea kayaking adventure trip in Glacier Bay. And I thought I'd like to see more of Alaska, only instead of the coast, the Interior. And this looked like the type of trip that would interest me because it had both hiking and rafting. And I thought I'd get to really sample a small portion of the Arctic. That's why I took it.

[3: 238] D, Um.....I think I found out about the Park about four years ago. I kind of looked at a state of Alaska map and realized it was up there and it looked alluring because it was so far away from everything. And also I've always been a pretty big Robert Marshall fan, so that was pretty exciting knowing that he was at the same place that I was going to be and that I was at. Those two elements.

[4: 240] E, I found out about it through, geez, you know, I mean, I don't know when I first heard about it. I came up here last year and hiked from the haul road out to Anaktuvuk and so that was my first real experience with it. I guess I'd say that was how I really came to know it was on that trip.

[5: 246] A, I did not read his [Bob Marshall's] description of this area, but the name Gates of the Arctic intrigued me and I'd heard of Anaktuvuk Pass from a son before

when I was in Alaska in '66 to work at Clear Air Force Base. I just heard of Anaktuvuk Pass and that sounded like the--ultimate thule is a word... is where.....the farthest place I'd ever heard of, away from everything--so that stuck in my mind, too, yeah.

Weather

[6: 276 to 292] D, Yeah, and the weather was unbelievable. Every day. E, Yeah. We kept calling.....D, Blue skies.....E,.....the Arctic Riviera. Getting suntanned and stuff. A, Yeah. B, Yeah, it's definitely hot here. D, Yeah. A, Right. D, It was hot on some days.

[see also excerpt 22]

Hiking

[7: 16] D, Yeah, we took a couple of side hikes along the way, one that....we split into two groups and the group that I was with, we took a side hike to a waterfall up as side canyon and went to an amphitheater and a leader and I had the privilege to see an avalanche on one of the mountain bases. It was quite a thrill. Then we also hiked up to Boreal Mountain, one of the Gates of the Arctic and we went swimming in an ice-cold lake. That was fun. And I hiked up another mountain on the other side and was able to see to the west of the Gates, off to the western parkland. We saw a lot of snow-capped peaks, which was really nice, so.....The group that we were in did about two side hikes and I did about three. So that was nice.

[8: 142] D, I really enjoyed hiking up to the lake at Boreal Mountain, so nice. Walking down the ridge line, looking at the valley of Ernie Creek. That was my highlight.

[9: 18] A, The slower group would call themselves the "velocity challenged" group. We made it up one side hike where we went up to a peak.....it was a clear day and we were able to see the whole spread of the up north and down south as far as you could see on the Brooks Range, which was a pretty interesting hike.

ATV trail

[10: 42 to 46] B, How was the hiking part on the trail? E, Pleasantly easy. D, Yeah, I expected it to be hard, except when we were hiking through tussocks, which are unbearable, it was mostly pretty simple, just kind of level terrain.

[11: 58 to 60] B, How'd you feel about the fact that you were hiking on an ATV trail? Did that matter? E, Well, I guess, intellectually, it's, you know kind of a bummer that there's this trail going through the wilderness, but um....you know, it's also pretty nice just to not have to stumble along through the tussocks. It's kind of a mixed bag. I mean I guess you know if ideally it would be nice if it was allowed to go back you know to it's natural state, but it's as far as hiking goes, it's makes hiking a lot easier.

Hard work

[12: 206 to 210] A, This is my 7th adventure trip, and it required the most exertion. I thought it was pretty good in that respect. Most of the ones I've been on have been catered. There have been porters or something else, and the group leaders did all the

cooking! But, this was....the most.....took the most physical the most drive to complete it. I liked it for that reason. It was called a moderate trip in the Sierra Club jargon, but I thought it was pretty damn demanding, at my age, I guess. B, Physically demanding, you're talking about? A, Yes, yeah, right. It was demanding.....we were carrying 55- to-60 pound packs through the tundra and stuff, so that was.....over the hummocks, and that was a demanding chore, for me anyhow.

Wildlife

[13: 140] A, I liked the wolves. I had never seen wolves in the wild or even heard them. You know, that was kind of my high point. We saw one bear in the distance, that was another one, for me.

Hoping to see more

[14: 332] D, I was hoping that I would have seen more wildlife, especially..... the avoidance of bears was kind of alarming for me. I saw tons of bear tracks and we did see one far away, but you had to look through the binoculars and it was still very small. So I was hoping to see more wildlife.

[15: 334 to 336] A, Well, it seems to be tough to do. When I went to Denali, we saw a lot of animals, but we were traveling on a bus, 62 miles. As I said, you look.....both sides of the bus you can see 4 square miles for every mile you travel, but here you're hiking, so you don't see as many animals. You see.....I saw 7 bears in 62 miles in Denali, but we saw one bear in less than 50. There are some numbers again. But anyhow, I don't think you see many because you don't cover all of the ground that they cover. E, And plus you're intentionally trying to scare them away.....so.....

Group Dynamics

[16: 184] A, I thought the group dynamics were okay. It was a good audience for wisecracks and joking around. I thought we had a little bit of joking around, some laughs, on the trip.

[17: 182] D, Huh.....I enjoyed our group. Um.....there were many different ages and different personalities. There was some tension. I got in trouble for going up the peak. I didn't come back at the right time. But that was okay. And I was, like, we talked about it, [Eddy] and I, he's one of the leaders. He told me that he had a lot of responsibility and he wanted me back at a certain time. I didn't come back at that time, so we had a conversation about it. It was respectful and I felt that it was justified, so....I thought the leadership was good.

[18: 198 to 200] B, Did you feel that the group dynamic or the group interaction, dominated the trip? Did it override some of the other features? D, For me, I had a hard time with one group leader who isn't here right now. We got along great in the first part of the trip, and I suppose she perceived me differently on the second one. I wouldn't say she attacked me, but the way that she presented how she felt, I felt was inappropriate. I hope to mend or talk to her before we leave and try to figure out...and conclude it. Try

to get back together and talk again, but, it was disappointing to see that happen. To see a friendship go sour like that.

[19: 202] A, The only thing that would bother me is we had to hold back because of people, but I think we accomplished all our objectives. I mean, there weren't any hikes cancelled or anything cancelled because of peoples' inabilities or lack of desire. I feel that we did everything we could have on this trip. We took the side trips and made the hike, made the schedule. I don't see that.....that would have bothered me had we had to cancel, you know, certain things because of one person's or some lack of desire or lack of ability or something, but we worked that out, I think, anyhow.

Age differences

[20: 188] E, Yeah, I mean, there are always those challenges, you know. Different personalities. On this trip, we had a really wide range of ages, you know. We had one kid who was 19 and Al, who was 65, you know, and every age in between. Um....so that right there, I think is a challenge just in terms of some people who hike are a lot stronger than other people, they hike faster, you know. So, the people out in front are getting frustrated because they are waiting. The people in back get frustrated because they feel like they're having to push harder than they can and so you always have to have a balance in between. We tried to, for the hiking portion of the trip, you know, we had two different groups and we tried to split it up fast and slow, but Al, especially, I think, you know, would have liked being in the faster group, so that was frustrating for him because he had to wait a lot. But, you know, those are just kind of things that happen on trips.

[21: 182] D, Um....there were two members in the group, the older members, except for Al, that I didn't really communicate with. I didn't feel like.....I just didn't really like them that much. I felt kind of indifferent towards them. I guess it was clashing personalities. So.....I didn't speak to them much at all.

Easy trip

[22: 220] E, We had fantastic weather. The weather was unbelievable. And everything went really, really well, except for the one deflation of the boat. Um....so, and in a way sometimes it feels like.....sometimes I almost felt like the good weather was both a blessing and a curse just because I find that usually on a trip when you encounter hard conditions, often it sort of brings out the best in people. And sometimes when people aren't challenged as much as they could be, they, you know, it kind of um.....I think there's less of a cohesion that happens in a group, you know. So, it's kind of an ironic thing, I mean. But, I think, you know, when you have that many different.....such a wide range of ages and abilities and stuff, you know, I'd say things went pretty darn well.

Accident

[23: 160 to 162] D, Yeah, we hit a snag which created quite a large hole in one of the rafts and the people on the front were floating down river, some were quite terrified by it. A, You're not going to tell that to sourdough, I hope. I was the one that fell into the river, hanging on to the raft with one hand. I had two choices, either hang on or let go.

That was a bit of a cheap thrill. But that was, of the rafting trip, that was probably that first part of the river was narrow and any mistake meant that you were into one of these snags. Into a snag meant an 8-hour overnight repair job because it took that long for the cement to set up. So it was really kind of a.....two snags could have blown the trip practically. That would have been two days layover up there.

[24: 164 to 170] B, So do you all feel that that was a low point? D, No, I don't think so. A, No, it wasn't exactly a low point, but E, Well, there were very different reactions. One person on the trip actually had a quote of saying "I went into a state of shock and you went into a state of euphoria." So for some people it was bad and for other people it was good.

Other People

[25: 90] A, The only.....we didn't experience, our group, the only other person we saw was the pilot of the plane, right? Nobody else, the pilot of the plane who brought our boats was the only other outsider we saw on the whole trip.

[26: 92 to 100] B, Was that a positive feature of the experience? Or a negative one, perhaps? E, Positive for me. A, I didn't even want to see them. I wanted solitude, so I'm glad to not see people in the outback. B, You wanted solitude, but you're with a group of A, I realize the contradiction there. Just kidding. No, I like to go out....my personal preference is solitude because you don't get much of that where we live. So, not seeing people, to me, was a positive aspect.

Evidence of others

[27: 102 to 120] E, We saw a ghost camp, just some tents-- on the side of the river one of the days that we were.....D, Yeah. E, ...were rafting down the North Fork of the Koyukuk. D, Big tents, huge tents. E, They were quite impressive. They had like porches....they were somewhere off traipsing through the wilderness. B, How many tents? E, Three, I believe. D, Mm...hm.....E, There was one big huge one that looked almost like a mess hall or something. And then some smaller tents. I don't know what the camp was for. D, There should be limits on sizes of the tents [laughs].

Perceptions of local people

[28: 24 to 38] B, So I understand the first day or two you were hiking along the ATV trail out at Anaktuvuk Pass. D, Yes. B, How was that? D, Amazing. Disappointed by numerous garbage pieces, a lot of litter scattered throughout the Park near Anaktuvuk Pass, which was a bummer. B, Why was it a bummer? D, Um....there's not a lot, but 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. E, Yeah, I mean it's just a pristine wilderness and you keep running upon Pepsi cans and whatnot, you know, out there in the middle of the wilderness. It's kind of a drag. A, Yeah, there was even an abandoned vehicle out there, kind of small, either it was a sled that was towed behind an ATV or an ATV, but it was small, and a tire, things like that. They were abandoned along the trail.

[29: 62] D, I think as long as the ATVs are confined near the village of Anaktuvuk Pass, it wouldn't bother me much. We just need to respect their rights and what they ask and what they're able to do in the Park. I don't think we should take that away from them. As long as they can stay within a few miles of their village.

[30: 68 to 76] D, We had an interesting.....we kind of separated at first.....and the faster group was going in front and we could see the slow group behind us. And Reba, our leader, said "hello" to some of the tribal peoples, the locals, and they kind of ran to their house really fast, which was strange. So....E, Oh, right at the beginning? D, Yeah. E, Oh. D, Yeah, it was teenager, probably someone in their 20s, and a young boy. Neither of them returned the hello, they just kind of walked to the side of the road and turned their heads....

[31: 78 to 84] B, How'd you feel about that? D, I was like "oh." I guess I kind of expected it because I'd been hearing.....I'm sure that they're not very happy with the National Park Service telling them how they should run their lives. How they should live. It's an understandable rejection, I suppose. B, So, you felt it was a rejection? D, I see the justification for it. They were young, too, overall, so a little more impressionable, maybe.

GAAR visitors are unique

[32: 250] D, One of the things I like about traveling is not really bragging about what you have done because if you brag a lot, maybe don't really see what I see..... when you see something like this, you really don't want other people to come up here, at least not a lot of people. You want people who are willing to see it in its pure beauty and pristine, unparalleled wilderness. So, I would only really describe it in detail to those who were my closest friends and family. People who have just found out about it by standards of acquaintances, I wouldn't dumb it down at all, but I would keep the conversation much more terse, maybe a little more illusive just to keep the mysterious character of the Park.

[33: 254] A, I'd probably try to describe it as I saw it because nobody I know would come up here. They're not the type that would do this type of adventure. So, it wouldn't influence my description. I usually try to write up a little summation of what the trip was because some people get their kicks out of my adventuring. I'm the virtual adventurer in my family. But I don't know, I'd try to describe what I saw as best as I could.

[34: 266] E, Um.....man, I guess, you know, I guess I would just sort of describe what it was like, you know, the beautiful things we saw and all that kind of stuff. And I guess I wouldn't worry too much about getting people to come up here because I kind of had the same experience as Al, in so far as the vast majority of people that I know would never come up here. Um.....And you know as soon as they hear about the mosquitoes and that kind of thing, usually there's also bad weather to describe. On this trip, that's not the case. But, uh.....so.....I don't know. You know, I think I'd try to convey the beauty of the place because I think a lot of people in the Lower 48, especially, just don't

understand, I think [Dirk] is a very unusual, especially for somebody his age, to have the amount of knowledge that he has of places like this, you know.

[see also excerpt 52]

Overflights

[35: 124 to 130] E, Yeah, and as we got further down the river, too, we started hearing more and more planes, which was too bad. B, So, you felt like the air traffic definitely detracted from your experience? E, I don't know, it's not a huge deal, but it you know....when you're out there, it's nice not to have it. D, Maybe cut down on the number of people who are just allowed to.....like the aircraft as far as them just flying over. 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. Maybe the tourism... not as many flights as Anaktuvuk, just day flights and stuff.

[36: 122] A, I..... along this line of inquiry, I wondered if there is any attempt to control the number of flights over the Park, like in the Grand Canyon, because of getting so much air traffic, there's an effort to cut down on you know overflights on the Canyon. I wondered if there's anything like that up here. There seemed to be an awful lot of air traffic, I don't know what you can do about it, especially to Anaktuvuk Pass, there seemed to be quite a busy airport.

Escape

[37: 174] A, Yeah. I felt good to, coming out. It's kind of hard to describe, the purification, I don't know what you call it. It's just the fact that no news, you don't care about.....we hadn't heard anything. Heck I still don't know who won the U.S. Open, for God's sakes [laughs]. But, getting out of touch like that makes.....is good for the nerves, at least for me.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Scenic Beauty

[38: 144 to 148] E, I think for me it was getting up to the top of Limestone Mountain. B, Why? E, It was just an incredibly beautiful day, absolutely clear, very little wind. No mosquitoes. We just had this very casual stroll up to the top of this spectacular mountain. I don't know if you are familiar with Limestone Mountain, but it has a sheer face on the northwest side that is probably about I don't know 1500 feet or 2000 feet straight down. And just to stand on the top of that and look out over untold miles of pristine wilderness and dramatic peaks for as far as you could see because it was such a clear day was pretty spectacular.

[see also excerpts 7-9, 34]

Uniqueness

[39: 274] E, Yeah, the same thing. Um....the only....I guess we saw some foot prints of people from outside or party a couple of times, but for the most part, the only foot prints we saw were from people from within our own group and that's always a special

feeling. For me, you know, as being part of the Alaska subcommittee for the Sierra Club, I know a lot of people, you know, who talk about going to very remote places. And Gates of the Arctic within that spectrum of people who go to these far-off exotic places is actually a fairly well-traveled place, you know. But, uh..... for me, this was my second time going through it, and in a way I was almost kind of disappointed at first because this summer when I was thinking I'm going to go back to someplace I've already been instead of exploring somewhere new, but the experience of going through a second time was, especially since it was a different time of the year and all that kind of thing, was just very.....I can't really think of the right word, but it was just fantastic, you know. Just to see the landscape again and to see it in a different state. It was pretty much Fall when I went through it before, so it was Fall colors and this time it was.....the flowers were out and everything. So, I don't know. I guess just the.....it's such a special place that regardless of how many times you see it, there's always something new to see. So,.....

Wilderness

[40: 268 to 270] B, So, I think at this point, all three of you have used the word wilderness and have referred to this place as pristine and/or wilderness at least once. What is it that makes it a wilderness? A, Well, for me, compared to the other hiking I've done, say in the Sierras and the Rockies and stuff, there are maintained trails, there are.....the camp sites are obvious, you always seem to meet hikers all the time coming and going every day you pass somebody even in the wilderness areas down there. And, to me, as I said, was that the only other outsider we met was the pilot and that was the top test of a wilderness, to me. No trace of camp sites. No ashes. None of that stuff, except for the trash coming out. The trash on the ATV trail. That was the only.....but once you got up Ernie Pass, it was, to me, it was this so-called pristine wilderness.

[41: 272] D, Yeah, I would agree with Al's description. The lack of any type of human traces and organizations of the Park as far as trails and campsites, etc.

Spiritual aspects

[42: 172] D, I was able to hike up to a pretty high mountain. It looked like about the same elevation as Frigid Crags and look out westward to all the peaks and the vistas. That was humbling, which is probably my most favorite element of the Park, is the humility that you get from wilderness. Of that immense size and stature.

[43: 264] D, I would have talked more about the experience of just being there, just the void of nothing when you're out there. And at the same time everything.....it's kind of a haunting affect. Akin to inertia almost. So, some might call it Nirvana, but I won't go quite that far. It was just knowing that you're monumentally important and insignificant at the same time in the whole scheme of life. It enhances and strengthens both sides of the equation.

Remote/Exotic

[see excerpts 3-5, 39]

MANAGEMENT

No Presence

[44: 294 to 296] B, You may not, as guests on this trip, have had any interaction with the Park, but what did you notice about the Park management or Park presence? A, There wasn't any. Except for the bear cans, we wouldn't even, you know, it was the bear cans, that was it. As far as I was concerned. I never saw any Park people until I got here, down here, at the Visitor Center.

Positive Interaction With NPS

[45: 304 to 308] E, Um.....and you know I have to say my interactions I had virtually no interactions with the Park Service this time because Reba, my co-leader, she was the one who came here and dealt with getting the boats and all that kind of stuff and....but last year, when I did the same hike, we ended up in Anaktuvuk and we spent several hours just talking to the ranger up there in Anaktuvuk. I've forgotten his name. B, Mike. E, Mike, yeah. And it was great. He was just real down-to-earth and a lot of the time when I deal with rangers they tend to be very sort of bureaucratic and just not really sort of relating to you on a human level. But, I just felt like the way he dealt with regulations and you know food storage issues, all these other things, was just very down-to-earth and you know he talked to us in a way that it was clear that he understood the issues you face, especially like bear cans. Obviously, everybody wants to be able to store their food in a way that doesn't endanger the bears. But, it's also tough to carry those bear cans. So, I felt like he just really understood both sides of issues like that. So, I'd say my interaction with him, at least, was very, very positive.

Support for NPS

[46: 318] A, Well, I contribute to the National Parks and the Conservation Society, I guess, and I believe that even the Park policies for the most part..... I believe that they have a very difficult mission. There's a lot of contradictory forces acting on them. I believe in the preservation. I believe that it's better than drilling oil wells. And I believe that they.....I don't find it an imposition unless they.....in one park I went into, they had signs at every camp site, "do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that." We didn't have that here. That was a bit of scolding, but otherwise, I sympathize with their motives and their mission. They've got to deal with the animals and the ecology and the people. They've got all kinds of conflicting pressures on them, I'm sure.

Protect Natural Qualities

Inevitable need for more regulation

[47: 322] D, If there was more wear and tear on the Park just by walking I felt kind of destructive because the landscape is so fragile. So, I'm sure as each year.....and as ecotourism keeps getting more popular and popular, the Park is going to receive more visitation, so a byproduct of that will be more regulation to try and keep the Park from being spoiled, which I think will be a significant challenge in the future, especially for Gates of the Arctic.

[48: 324 to 326] B, But you feel that more regulation is the appropriate response? D, Yeah, I think so. I don't really know of any other options other than sealing off areas of

the Park. You can't really tell people "you cannot come into the Park" I suppose. So, it would be an imposition to their liberty, but maybe try to cut down on the number of people that go to such well-traveled areas such as the Arrigetch Peaks, I believe is how that's pronounced. I'm glad we didn't go there because I've heard that that area is quite worn, so I think maybe people need to stay away from areas like that, that are receiving heavy use, to let it heal until they return. Then they can return later, and maybe in not as large numbers.

[49: 328] A, I imagine the quota system like they have in other parks. I don't know where they have it here. In certain areas you have a certain number of permits.....backcountry permits. I don't know whether they have that in this Park. They evidently had it in Denali, I guess if people get used to that system, I think that's probably what's going to happen if it becomes.....the pressure builds up to have more people in..... Otherwise, you'll have to build trails.

[see also excerpt 46]

Group Size

[50: 310 to 316] B, Did you feel like the presence of the Park was an imposition on your freedom in any way? E, Well, we had to split up into two groups because the maximum hiking group size is 7 people. B, Mm...hm.....E, Um.....And so in a sense that was an imposition, but I think it was an imposition that we all agreed was a good one, you know. I mean I think I would have liked for us to be able to hike in one group, but I also think it's great that the Park is insisting that groups are kept to a maximum size of 7 people, you know, to preserve the landscape.

Access/development

[51: 302] D, Keep the Visitor facilities far away from the Park. It might promote a little more accessibility if there was a larger Visitor Center in Anaktuvuk Pass or here. If it was a little more well known. Because a lot of the average tourists just like to go for little day hikes near visitor centers. So, that would definitely create some well-worn paths.

[52: 304] E, Yeah, I mean, the Park I guess has been criticized for being sort of an elitist Park where only people you know who have the skills and motivation and whatnot and physical abilities can go experience it. But obviously, you know, we are that demographic, you know, that's exactly the kind of place we're seeking out, so for us it's ideal.

[53: 318] A, And I don't think it's elitist to be able to walk and row a boat. I think it's just something all people ought to do. It's elitist to fly and to use ATVs and stuff, in my opinion.

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Dorothy (D) and Shannon (S)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 460 to 484] S. Yeah. Why...we picked this.....actually you guys picked the river for us. We talked about the Firth, the Noatak because those were rivers we'd seen and read about. And I think we expressed an interest in seeing the tundra and Harry and Dorothy picked the river, so.....D, And I'm not as interested in the really big volume tundra rivers. They're fine, but they're in the trees and it's.....I can do that at home. In fact, we're going back and we are going to put in way high in a glacier, and boat the Chitina. S, Yeah, we're not.....D, It's full length from the glacier to the Copper River. B, That's real big volume. S, Yeah. D, That's real big volume. S, That'll be different, yeah. So, we'll see glaciers, we're going to see different territory, but.....D, Yeah, I like the little swift-moving rivers. S, So, I'd say we picked it for the scenery, basically. D, Yeah, the scenery and the.....S, The experience. The remoteness. D, The remoteness because you'll see more people on the Noatak.

Comfort/Relaxation

[2: 288 to 296] B, Was there a highlight or a single best part of the trip? S, Good question. D, The most comfortable and the least comfortable in a lot of ways were some of the best moments. That last day on Udrivik Lake was just beautiful. It was a sunny day. We were paddling around in the canoe. It was real peaceful. S, The ice was melting on the lake. The terns were picking buds off at surface level, so you could see them up close. D, We thought we were going to be picked up at 8:00 p.m., so we knew we had a whole day and we didn't want to take the boats down immediately and do all our chores immediately and then sit around with nothing to do. So we were fishing and, you know, cleaning ourselves up and relaxing and reading and that was really pleasant and relaxing.

[3: 18 to 22] D, And then the next day we went down the river not very far because we couldn't make miles. Otherwise, we'd run out of river. S, We were on a leisurely pace. D, The whole point was to be able to take side hikes.

[4: 442 to 446] D, Um... last year, we went on the John River. Well, first let me answer....let me put in one answer to the previous question, why this trip was different. This was the easiest trip we've done in a long time. The least grueling. S, Yeah. D, Because last year when we did the John, we.....it was three of us, Harry, Jay and myself. And we portaged half a day and lined another whole day because in those foldable boats, you can't do class III water and we will just not be ones to appear in the morning ranger's report. You know, we can't take that chance. So, we.....last year, we worked really hard portaging. And the paddling was hard. I was in a solo kayak keeping up with two guys in a canoe, so I paddled really hard for five days. And this trip was just so flat out plum easy because we had so much time and so much leisure time and so much time on the river where we could just float and take it easy.

[5: 316 to 338] D, But I do think, for me, some of the most memorable.....S, Not having a bear raid camp was good. D, ...moments were like the best....the extremes. You know, gorgeous warm big open lake where you can see and.....S, Ice melting...D, Watch

birds and stuff and fish. S, Ice melting and watch it dripping. D, And then the windy night that we were, we had.....S, We were all hunkered down. D,..... the kitchen tarp up and we were in the sand eddy and no matter what we did, you just really couldn't get out of eating grit. That was okay. S, Yeah, that's true, you know. That's something that could be ugly for other people who don't eat grit, but it kind of.....it's one of those memories that is going to go down.....D, We just laughed. We laughed a lot that night. S, Yeah, good company.

Bear Safety

[6: 156 to 188] S, Yeah, safety I guess is an issue and that's probably something...and the rangers were really good about it....you guys already knew that, but he did go through the bear talk, checked us for pepper spray, checked us for the guns and....B, The pilot did this? S, No, D, No. S, The ranger here did this. D, Right, and Dave [Mills] gave us a S, And then when we hit the ground in camp one, the people who brought the shot gun and the pepper gas also went through a training session with us amateurs who hadn't been through that before, so we were very aware of bear safety whenever we were walking near willows or.....D, Even to the point of dry firing the shotgun. S, Yeah. We did. D, Everybody knew where the shotgun was. We always went.....there was always this.....whenever we walked there was a shot gun with us. S, Always pepper spray. D, And there was always a.....S, With the wind, it wasn't going to work, yeah. We never, yeah. The kitchen was always cleaned up. We were a very aware group. D, Yeah, we always packed everything up at night, you know, the stove, the pot, everything went back into.....S, Went into bear cans. D, ... into bear cans and dry bags. We had all our food canned. S, Yeah.

[7: 458] D, You know, we would have had a very, very different trip if we were there in August. The water would've have been low. There would be bear and caribou everywhere. The whole ease of camping would have changed. You know, we went through every drill, the shotgun was in the tent, we knew where everything was. But when you're not seeing any bear tracks from this year, you just raise that.....you just lower that level of discomfort. And that makes a trip easier. It makes a little less wild, you know. It's a little.....it's just easier. You know, you sleep better. You don't keep waking up looking out.

Evidence of Other People

[8: 138 to 144] B, And you didn't see any other parties on the ground or in the back country at all? S, No. D, No, and we saw....we heard one aircraft come and go up the valley on our, I think, 2nd day or so, the 2nd or 3rd day. And then the next aircraft was our take-out aircraft. S, Right and we didn't see, you know, we saw no other people. We heard no other people and actually before we went in, we asked if anybody else was going to be on the river and were told there wasn't. So, that was a very nice thing. We recognized that's not necessarily always the way it is, but that was nice.

[9: 108 to 130] S, We're pretty sensitive about that stuff, too, being with the people who we were with, so our camp sites got put back exactly as found, in theory. Walk away from it and don't leave evidence.....D, We didn't find any trash until.....S, We did not.

D, ...the take-out. I think I saw one foot print that overwintered in the mud at our.....S, ...last camp site. D, ...5th night, yeah, the sand dune camp site. S, Sand dune, right. The Udruvik [lake] had trash. The Udruvik had human trash. D, Yeah, microtrash. S, Microtrash, you know, rubber bands.....D, Fishing lines. S, ...fishing lines. D, And you could tell that that was the only place that you could tell clearly it had been camped on repeatedly and recently. Even the put-in camp wasn't used recently because the vegetation didn't look like it had been worked over last year, you know, maybe one camp or two, but not more than that.

[10: 132 to 134] S, So, yeah, the experience was that you were where other people hadn't been recently. You were by yourself. It was remote. You were seeing nature as nature was meant to be seen. D, We were clearly the first group of the year. There were no human foot prints, except for perhaps that one that wintered over. It was several foot-sized depressions in the mud, but that was the only sign.

Historical evidence

[11: 84 to 98] S, We camped at.....That was the.....was that the night we camped up on the high ridge? D, The landing zone, yeah. S, The landing zone, yeah. D, There was a high ridge that was cobbled, you know, just like desert cobble, the stones were tightly fit together and had been there forever undisturbed. And there were two lines of stones and it wasn't a place.....it wasn't something that you would do for a helicopter because for a helicopter you'd make an "H" or you'd make a circle. But you wouldn't make two lines. And it was too narrow and too short for a Cub landing strip, although you could use the entire area, I think. S, We should probably note, [Dorothy], that one of the people on our trip was very disturbed by the fact that somebody, and she thought it was maybe some of the people doing the arc site visits, had left it. It was obviously a recent lining up of these, you know, 12 feet.... And she was very disturbed by it. She wanted them to have taken it apart and she had even mentioned it to a ranger when she got back. D, It was.....it's clearly within the last 20 years.....S, It affected her experience, yeah. D, ...within the life of the Park. We know that a lot of what we do gets assimilated into Park history, which is fine, but it is not an artifact of prior civilization. It's an artifact of Park management.

[12: 18] D, And we found an arc (archaeological) site. We knew it was there by prior information, but it was very obvious. We did not move anything, although we took photographs and wrote a few notes.

[13: 40 to 46] S, Yeah. We stopped at Hungry Fox and looked at the arc site. D, No, that was the next day. S, Oh, okay I'm a day off. It doesn't matter. It was cool. D, Yeah. So arc, archeological sites were kind of important because we were, you know, it was a feature to look for and.....but we also know the rules and protocol to just get the GPS coordinates and take some notes, take some photographs and leave everything.

Group Dynamics

[14: 344 to 364] B, Let's go down the path you just opened up there. Good company. Can you describe, in some more detail, the influence that the other people on the trip had

on your experience? S, Well, if [Dorothy] would leave the room.....no [laughs].....Um.....there were six of us on this trip. Three couples. Two, well.....D, We're the ones who know everybody. S, Two know everybody. And then two didn't meet before the trip. But it was a very compatible group. Similar interests, similar.....so easy conversation. People were very alert to the fact that sometimes you had to be by yourself in a wilderness experience and other times you gathered around the cook pot and you were company. And I think that's probably why it worked because everybody had the opportunity for solitude and everybody had the opportunity to be around people to have the philosophical discussions, the nature discussions, the political discussions.....D, Tell stories. S, Tell stories. We covered a lot of.....yeah. D, Right. And there.....both couples, [Harry] and I were certain.....the anchor, the middle of the group, and both couples were.....we consider some of our oldest.....closest.....not oldest/closest, but friends who are very valuable to our lives, people who we've done some of the best things with. S, We play well with others. D, Yeah. But we've known [Dorothy] and [Jack] for 20 years and then [Shannon] and [Calvin] we boated with in California extensively, weekend after weekend and took week-long kayak trips, camping out.....S, For six years.....D, ...and bumming around California for six years. So, for us it was a very intentional thing, the people we put together. We thought about this. These are compatible people.

[15: 374 to 386] S, And I have to say from my.....this.....it won't affect these guys because they work in this field, but I had my own naturalist with me. I had my own archeologist with me. I had my own geologist with me. You know, there was.....D, I'm a little weak on geology, but.....S, You guys faked it well. D, Yeah, we fake it. S, So, you know, we.....there's nothing that we didn't see or couldn't, you know, look at and say "what is that?" and get the quick history lesson or geology lesson or archeology lesson. Like I was saying, we found spear points and scrapers and they knew enough about the Athabaskans and the Eskimos that I got natural history, so I was also getting the.....D, And I know most of the tundra plants. S, Yeah, we'd all read, like we said, we'd read the McPhee books, we'd read most of the books or parts of books that affect this area. So there was always conversation about this area, so it was an educational, cultural experience at the same time.

[16: 398 to 408] S, Right. And that tends to be a common thread through a lot of our backcountry experiences. If we're at the other end of the continent, we're talking about where we are. I think that is important to the experience, that you know.....D, I think that's true. S, ...where you're going. 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 because when you see the caribou pass and you know what the migration is, it has a lot more impact than if you just say "yeah, caribou go that way." D, Well, we were walking up a creek and we were trying to find a nice little path, a game trail.....S, We were walking up a creek without a paddle, per se! D, ... through the willows and every trail crossed it. And we finally realized, "well, this is because the caribou migrate up and down the creek" and we were.....they migrate up and down the river, and we were walking perpendicular to the migration path. So that was the kind of conversations that we would have. We were always aware of our surroundings and the natural history of the area.

Remoteness

[17: 512 to 526] B, Remoteness is a term that comes up a lot in my discussions with people, but everybody has a slightly different take on what that means. What does it mean to you? What's it mean when you used it just then? D, Um.... you know, a lot of problems in the backcountry are solved, 90% of back country problems are solved in some parks by other visitors. Like, in Yosemite when you have a problem in the wilderness, wait long enough and an ER doc is going to come down the trail. So, to me remoteness is the proximity to help, the proximity to.....how far you have to go to get away from those foot prints, from those signs of humans.....S, The rails and the port-a-potties and.....D, Yeah, and from the toilet paper, you know, from the.....S, The toilet paper under the rocks. D, Toilet paper under the rocks and the social trailing and the hardened camp sites. S, Right. D, So, I guess remoteness is the distance from, one, the impacts of people and two, the ability to be rescued, the need for you to solve your own problems.

[18: 528] S, I guess.....because I live in California where you don't get remote easily without walking.... I mean obviously you don't get remote here easily, either. You have to travel. But there's the weekend wilderness that you're willing to tolerate being on trails with more people. You didn't work as hard, but if you're going to do a two-week vacation and make all the plans and everything, it is nice to be able to get somewhere where you don't feel like you have to excuse yourself and bump into somebody else's camp site or hide a few trees away. That's something on weekends, yeah, I'll see another tent and just tolerate it. That's the way it is. I'm still in the wilderness, but I know I'm not way out there. I'm not in the solitude part of it. So there's times when that is perfectly acceptable and that's good and there's times when you really do want to work a little harder and get a little farther. And going a little farther, the benefit is you don't have to be there with everybody else and their fluorescent yellow tents.

[19: 530 to 572] B, Did traveling to the Killik in an airplane make it more or less remote? S, I don't think that weighed in. It weighed in the expenses certainly, yeah, there's the people who aren't going to be able to afford to do that....D, Right. S, We're lucky in the stages of our career that that was a convenience that you could get here by paying a little bit extra and flying in. And certainly we wouldn't have had the trip that we had if we couldn't have afforded to fly a float plane in. D, Yeah, it does make it more remote because it weeds people out. But in my mind, it doesn't make it more S, No, it doesn't because there's places that are very remote that we go that we just walk five miles off the trail and it's remote because you walked five miles up.....D, In the wrong direction.....S, Yeah, you walked away from the traffic. Well, you worked a little harder to get there and I think that's true. Working does make it....D, Yeah, I'm so used to flying everywhere, but just getting in the plane doesn't make it remote. But the fact that we had to pay several thousand dollars to fly there weeds out a lot of people. And that.....but it doesn't.....it's not the thought that makes it remote, do you know what I mean? B, Yes. D, Okay. It doesn't S, Working harder to get there did limit the number of people that are there. D, Yeah, but it doesn't add to the mystique of it because.....S, And that's not a bad thing. Yeah. I don't want to be a social snob or

anything, but, yeah, I don't want to be surrounded by people because I work with them every day of my life! And I love them all [laughs]. B, Okay, to sum that up, flying didn't in itself influence remoteness at all. S, No. I don't think so. D, No. B, Okay. S, Indirectly, not directly. D, Indirectly, right, exactly. Yeah, exactly. Indirectly it does because of how many people can go there, but directly to the way we feel....S, It didn't. D, No, it's just another mode of transportation.

Novel Experience

[20: 298 to 302] S, I don't know that I had a very best moment. It's sort of the minute we hit the.....I'd never been to the tundra, so I sucked up every inch of it. D, Yeah. S, This was a totally new experience for me. So I didn't have an absolute, there was a best. The whole damn thing was good.

[21: 608 to 612] S, See, and I think to the people that I know.....Arctic, the visual you have to pick is the North Pole covered with snow. You know, the stereotypic top of the world. So describing the Arctic is a very different thing, talking about the tundra. I mean to me I didn't....I had no concept that walking on the tundra was like walking on beach balls. That was a whole new experience for me. And no matter how many people that probably talked about tussocks and hummocks and stuff, I didn't I've read about it, but I didn't get it. So, I probably would emphasize things like that, the fact that there.....we did not see a flippin' tree for six days. I had no concept of that because I come from California and the redwood forest, so...the visuals are going to stick really....it's big sky, big wide expanses....D, Yeah, that was one thing that we could all commented on, that we all really liked open spaces and that the open space had a big impact on us. S, Yeah.

[22: 614 to 616] D, One of the funny things, you know, in the last e-mails we were honing down the gear list and I said "Oh, and by the way, you really don't need a flashlight." S, So, what did the Californians do? We packed two head lamps because she had to be wrong, there could not be 24 hours of light.

Wilderness Experience

[23: 218 to 228] B, So, what makes it or what made it a real wilderness experience for you? S, For me, what the wilderness experience was, probably just the fact that I was surrounded as far as I could see by nature. There wasn't man-made.....I wasn't in Yosemite where there was a, sorry [Dorothy], a rail keeping me on the trail. I wasn't surrounded by signs that said "don't step in the tundra pits." There was nothing that said "please use the latrines to the left of the trail." D, There's no human waste. S, There was no human waste. There were no little rocks with toilet paper piled under them. D, No toilet paper. And I have to say....S, That's a wilderness experience.

[24: 230 to 240] D, That is a wilderness experience because I cannot remember a trip, except for maybe some river trips in my Park [Wrangell-St. Elias], that I've seen absolutely no toilet paper. S, Yeah, other than Patagonia, I don't know that I've ever been to a place where there hasn't been obvious foot trails, where people have packed so much that you can actually see the human trail. I mean we're on caribou trails and

obviously people must have, in the past, walked them, but you didn't see the extreme of..... toilet paper under rocks are my pet peeve. D, Yeah. S, You didn't see where somebody had broken trees or.....there were no fire rings, the things that would say you're camping where somebody else camped. And obviously we picked the best camp sites and so everybody else probably picked the same sites, but people were very sensitive to take down fire rings if they put them up, to leave the camp sites with the rocks scattered and stuff, piling, you know, the piles that they put up.....D, Yeah, we had to use rocks to anchor our tents because we got some pretty stiff winds. S, Yeah, so the rock piles got redistributed and that to me is the wilderness experience, not seeing the obvious [signs of others].

[25: 244] S, Yeah, I love Joshua Tree, but I will never go there and think that I'm having a wilderness experience because you're always surrounded by trails, signs, markers, protected areas.

[26: 248 to 268] S, The backcountry, even in the backcountry of Yosemite, you're on the trails. D, Well, even the big "W." There's a difference between backcountry and wilderness. S, Uh..oh....you're getting this? D, But the wilderness....S, The interviewee's beginning argument. D, No, but, even the wilderness in Yosemite, it doesn't matter where you go, you can go miles off the trail, you always.....you may not see anybody. We used to do that all the time, but you always see.....S, Signs of bodies. D, ...human foot prints, microtrash, toilet paper, broken limbs, you know. S, Yeah. D, But there was....until the take-out there was no sign of current people. S, Yeah, you know on this one, if you flush a ptarmigan, you feel kind of guilty because everything was quiet and you're looking at it, really taking it in, and then you realize you're disturbing the ptarmigan. You don't always get that experience in a lot of the other parks because there is so much movement that you never really see a lot of the natural things that are there.

No-Rescue/Safety

[27: 146 to 152] D, You know, but I also felt like it was a pretty protected wilderness experience because there was a pilot coming for us. He knew our route. Someone was going to look for us and we would be easy to find. It would be very different if we were going [pause] hiking across the Brooks Range, which I know people do. I have a hard time with that concept because I can't stand hiking the tundra anymore than I really need to get out and see. Um....I don't find it very enjoyable hiking, but I know people hike across the Brooks Range and I think that would be the real wilderness experience. For me, it was, you know, it was a great trip, fantastic trip, but I didn't feel like it was just a really wild experience. S, I think, see I think differently. I think we had a wilderness experience, but it wasn't a survival....., you know, you do that sometimes....D, Yeah, I feel like there was a lot of buffer built in. S, Yeah, we had a lot of safety.

[28: 190 to 200] B, You used a couple of terms earlier that I'd like to go back to. You indicated that hiking across the Brooks Range would be a real wilderness experience, whereas the one that you had was somewhat protected. D, Yeah. B, Can you explain that in a little more detail? D, Yeah, because if you were hiking it would be a lot harder to

find you in the hills and even if you told a bush pilot “okay, I’m going to be hiking from the John River to the Killik River. I think it’s going to take me ten days. Pick me up at such and such a length of the Killik River” and you weren’t there, they’d have a hard time finding you. If you.....even if you were trying to be seen it would be hard, but if you were hunkered down, sick, it could be really hard to find someone in that country even as open as it is. There’s just so much of it. B, So, is it the opportunity for rescue that determines a real wilderness experience? D, I think it affects it in my mind, you know, I’ve realized that I’m biased, but when you know that there’s no one who can fix your problem.....

[29: 202 to 206] S, See, and I would..... I think I had a real wilderness experience, but I would describe that as a survival for the extremist who really wants to feel like they’re self-sustaining, a subsistence thing, they wanted to go out and prove they could do it with absolutely nobody else’s help. D, Right. S, 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. I didn’t feel like I had to prove..... by walking from Bettles to the take-out. I had a wilderness experience.

[30: 208 to 216] D, Yeah, part of my definition of wilderness is there isn’t a guardian angel watching over me. And it’s fine with me if there is, but it does, yeah....S, Yours is more of a survival....D, It’s not survival, no it’s not a survival thing. It’s just that if you get in trouble, someone is going to help you out some way or other. You know there’s help. You don’t.....you try your best to solve your problems, but you’re not necessarily.....S, You’re independent. D, Yeah.

Need for wilderness skills

[31: 634 to 636] D, And you know I think we did a good enough job that everybody had good gear. You know, when it got cold, no one was really cold. Um.....we really did not.....we didn’t have a lot of extra stuff, but we didn’t S, This is a group that has some experience under it, so we were prepared and so it was very comfortable. I could see where somebody came out and tried this as their first time out with an outfitter and didn’t understand the concept of the wool socks and the rubber boots and layering clothes. It could have been a very uncomfortable experience.

[32: 652 to 658] S, I don’t think this Park would be somebody’s first experience necessarily. Because it is sort of a little more extreme. The wind blows the sunshine. It’s not.....if you’re going out from your first day hike to your first backpacking trip, this would not probably do it. So, it’s out there. It’s one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever been by a long shot, without question. D, You definitely need good skills. You need to use skills in planning. You need some experience to know what to bring and how to stay safe and how to avoid accidents. S, Yeah, and if you’re comfortable, then you can stare at the flowers and pick up the rocks and.....D, Right, but if you’re always worried about making it to the take out or, you know, “where am I? “Am I lost Do I know where I am? What’s going on?”.....

Wild vs. wilderness

[33: 270 to 280] B, Okay, one more term I’d like to explore. Both of you used “wild” a couple of times. Is “wild” any different from “wilderness?” Does it have a slightly different connotation? What, specifically, do you mean by “wild?” S, For me, wild does have a difference from wilderness. I would take it.....it’s one step further. On the scale of 1 to 10, wild is out as far as you can get. That might be the person who backpacks across the tundra, totally self-sustaining. You can have wilderness that is controlled and managed and behind the scenes kept looking pristine while still moving people through. How about you? D, [long pause] To me, they’re not synonymous. Um.....to me, they don’t describe the same things. Wilderness, in my mind, is a condition of human use and activities [a noise briefly interrupts the discussion] I don’t know. I really don’t know. I haven’t really, to be honest, I haven’t thought much about wilderness vs. wild.

MANAGEMENT

Positive Interaction with Management

[34: 688 to 694] B, What did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? S, It’s going to be hard for you because they’re friends. D, Yeah, I can’t even answer that. S, You know, for me, I didn’t know any of the people here and I thought it was really cool that they came out and greeted the plane. I don’t know if that was unusual because these guys were on it, but they brought us in here. They did the ranger talk, even those these were rangers, they still did the ranger talk, which to me had a lot of impact. I think it’s pretty meaningful that they take their job that seriously. And I think it’s pretty obvious that they love what they do here. Or they fake it very well. You know, everybody here seems to be happy to be here. And we spent last evening with one of the rangers, I guess you don’t want to put his name in there. He invited us to his house, chitchat about what we saw, what we did, I mean these guys traded old stories and stuff, but that leaves a pretty good impression on you that there’s good management. That the Park Service is putting people out there that really care about the parks, what they do.

Wilderness Focus

[35: 696] D, I think they take wilderness management very seriously. It’s the primary thing, you don’t walk into rooms where you don’t see bear barrels and, you know, I do think the Park management here is focused on wilderness and protecting it.

[36: 704] D, This Park needs to focus on wilderness. It’s um.....in Wrangell, for example, we need to focus on other things. We have that we have Kennicott mine site, which is where 80% of our visitors go. You know, hunting is a really big thing in our preserve and that, you know, takes a lot of our time managing that and managing subsistence. But I think wilderness and subsistence use and community relationships are probably the main chunks of work on these folks’ plate. I think they do a really good job of it. And for a little visitor center in the middle of nowhere, that’s.....they do a good job.

Visitor Registration and Permitting Purpose of permits

[37: 718 to 730] B, Would it ever be appropriate to increase the Park Service presence, the regulatory presence, the influence that they had on your experience, any of those things? D, Such as? B, Such as instituting a mandatory permit system instead of the voluntary registration that they have here at the Visitor Center? S, I think them knowing who and how many people are in the Park is not a bad thing. I understand that some Alaskans feel that there must be an ulterior motive for that sort of thing. I think that's not true. I think a mandatory permit system would not hurt anything and would help the Service probably manage impacts. B, It wouldn't impinge on your experience? S, It wouldn't have impinged on my experience or my freedom, no. D, That was such a good answer, I'll ditto that.

[38: 740] S, And, you know, I asked everybody how many people come into this Park every year and nobody could answer that. Although I've been reading in the common literature because of the politics of the oil drilling and stuff here. Everybody else has an opinion, but the Park Service doesn't know and I think it would be a good thing for the Park Service to know whose in there and how long they're in there and how much impact they're having, by extrapolating those numbers.

Support for limits

[39: 770 to 780] B, Okay. So, here at Gates of the Arctic, would a limited permit system ever be appropriate? S, Yeah, I think it would. D, I think if it were justified by research, you know, management would have to make that decision based on something. S, Would I tolerate it and deal with it? Yes. D, And if it was a management-based decision on some good science, social science and wilderness science, whatever you call it, yeah. S, If it guaranteed me all the things we talked about, the intangibles of not wanting to see somebody else's tent and I understood that this is a permit system that allows.....pick like the middle fork of the Salmon in Idaho.....it allows one group to launch a day, so that assures you that you're not going to see the other people, although there are constantly other people in that river corridor. Yeah, I abide by that because now I know I took my lottery, I got my permit, and I'm guaranteed not to see other people. I'd much rather have that impinge on my personal freedom than arrive free to do whatever I want on July 4th and spend it with 400 other people launching at the same time. So, yeah, it's one of the things.....and I'm one of the people who hasn't gotten my Grand Canyon permit even though I've been on the waiting list for 9 years, but I understand that when I get it, I'm going to have the experience that I want. But maybe that's a public relations tool the Park needs to work on, why the permits benefit you. And they probably haven't done that very well.

[40: 754 to 768] D, So, I think we may have to do that and it wouldn't, you know, it wouldn't infringe on the experience until you couldn't get a permit. Like you decided that you're not going to backpack in Denali because you couldn't figure out how many places you're going to get a back country permit for. S, You know, there's a good thing, yeah. Because the permit system is so convoluted and confusing we're actually not going to backpack in Denali just because we don't want to spend two or three days when we only have three weeks in Alaska figuring out the permit system. So, yeah, that did impact my experience there. D, So, if it's free permits that are not limited, it's a lot

easier than a reservation system. S, But at the same time, I understand the permit system in Denali because I wouldn't want to go in and have every other person at the Polychrome Pass on the same day that I was there. So I understand the need for the permits. And I think they're probably a good thing because they do limit and control. D, Yup. S, But, at the same time, might it personally affect me? Yeah, it did because I'm a very non-patient person and I didn't want to spend two days.....D, Waiting in line...S, If I can't figure out if I have to get on the bus and go stand in line, yeah. When there's an entire Alaska out here to see, so.....it did impact me, but it doesn't bother me. I made that decision myself, not to deal with it.

[41: 782 to 784] B, What you brought up there is precisely the kind of thing that I'm interested in. That is, the balance between other people impinging on your freedom or the Park doing it? S, ...or the Park impinging on your freedom.....yeah. And I think everybody wants to blame it on the Park. It's very easy to say "I should be able to climb Denali if I want" or "I should be able to go down the middle fork of the Salmon if I want" or "I should be able to float the Grand Canyon if I want," but you also have to be able to say "Can I boat the Grand Canyon and not be on it with 7 commercial trips and sharing my beach with 4 other privates?" And that is something I'm willing to tip the balance in the favor of having the experience but limiting.....maybe I can't do it every time I want or whenever I want, but when I want it, I'm going to get the experience. And there's places where the permit system.....you can't limit the number of people that are going to Yellowstone to the main corridor, but maybe you can limit the number that are willing to go out to some other part. Yeah, I'm a very big advocate of controlling it so that you get the experience you're looking for as long as you know what that experience is and the Park has made it very clear it's somewhat of a guarantee.

Provide spectrum of opportunities

[42: 788 to 792] S, Not to say that there aren't some parks where you should just allow mayhem. B, But this isn't one of them? S, I....there might be certain parts, okay. Maybe there's some parts of the Park where mayhem should be allowed where everybody has access all the time, you know, a visitor center, an overlook, a something, but I think there needs to also be parts of the Park that allow that experience, that protected.....keeping in mind that I come from the bias that I also think there's places that none of us belong. So, yeah.

630BTT10

Liz (L) and Jed (J)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 14] L, Well, we've been out for a week. We started at Circle Lake and hiked across to Takahula. We were picked up this morning at Takahula. We reckon it took about, of those six days of actual.....that we were out, it took about 3-1/2 to walk it and the other 2-1/2 we were able to walk up on ridges or climb a mountain or do something like that.

Hiking Hard Work

[2: 38] L, And then the next day started out.....we had basically an 11-hour day. We weren't hiking all the time. We took some time off at lunch and rest, but we didn't get to the lake. We figured it must be about 10 hours of hiking to the lake.

[3: 256] L, You never know you have to go over the ridge or go round the bottom of it or to go high and hope you can get that way. So, I'd say we were....it was a tough day yesterday. Because we'd been to the top and then we came down and....so last night, I just slept. Just went out and slept all night really well.

[4: 340 to 344] B, So, other than that kind of route-finding challenge, how did this trip differ from others that you've taken in the past? L, That's a tough trip. I mean, that was....J, I think physically, it was really demanding, much more demanding than I predicted.

[see also excerpt 8]

River Hazard

[5: 184 to 190] L, Yeah, and then we had to get across that....J, River. L, Hot Springs Creek, which, I mean it wasn't we had to look a lot of places to get across. It was get lower....but there's a lot of water in that. But we did actually find a really good place. We didn't need our rope or anything. We were there's no..... But we were able to get up a bar that was right out and then it was real wide J, There was a wide spot in the bar [inaudible] a 30-degree angle and the water was coming over and it started to rain.

[6: 200] L, But, we had looked a couple of places before on the river, you know, we kept saying "we've got to get across it." "We've got to get across it." And so then we go across it and that was fine.

Navigating/Route-finding Obstructed views

[7: 294] J, You can't see very high anywhere. I mean you can see....pick out lakes and things like that. But there's just not much.... I mean something that's 100 feet away, you can't see it.

[8: 350 to 356] B, The one up north was the trip you did from the Haul Road? L, Uh..huh... That was the part on the first day when we were low on it and we got high. It was, you know, easier going and walking was easier. J, And you had a lot more...you could see a lot further. I mean you....L, You could see where you were going to find your route easier because there weren't trees. On this trip, you have to be in the trees some of the time. You can't get across at least as far as we could see, you couldn't get across staying above the tree line. You know, you had to come down to get across valleys. As long as you came down, you were in that sort of thick brush. So, um....So I mean it was only four days hiking, so in that sense, it wasn't as hard as you know a long,

long three-week trip or something, but those four days, well a week, is very physically demanding, I mean, for old people like us!

[9: 92 to 98] J, Well, no we were high enough so you couldn't see down into the lake. So we actually had to scout along those ridges for quite a while....L, Yeah, we did....J, to find them....L, And the problem with coming straight up there, we weren't absolutely sure where on the ridge we were when we hit the ridge. And then we thought we knew where we were because of that col, but then we couldn't see the lake at all. And that's really actually quite hidden.

Tools

[10: 40 to 48] J, We had one other little snafu that made it more challenging. We had two maps and one of them.....we didn't look at it closely enough, although we looked at one the contours were at 20 meters and the other the contours said 20 feet. L, No, one was in feet and one was in meters. The geological survey maps. J, So, we only looked at the one that was in feet, so we kept thinking "boy, is this hard going" because it was the contours were 20.....L, We thought we were going up like about 1000 feet and I think we went up about 2400 or 3000. J, It was later that we it wasn't making sense, so.....it never dawned on me that the two maps were different contour levels.

[11: 312 to 318] J, I think if I were going to do that again, I would take the GPS. L, But we've never used the GPS, but it certainly would be useful. J, You just can't see far enough and there's so many and it's really is very difficult.....L, I mean, you can probably rent them.

[12: 330 to 338] L, But he kept saying "Oh, GPS would be so handy." J, Just which valley you were in and which, you know....L, I mean, all those little tiny ridges. I don't know how good they are, but... The guide down there in Fairbanks said you can get them within 20 feet of where you are. J, But I mean, we... in the past when we used map and compass, it was easier. It was further north so there weren't as many trees. There weren't as many valleys. You could actually keep track of yourself more easily than we could on this one. L, We could always in terms of major big valleys, you know, but just how many little tiny ones were in between you and where you want to get to. It's harder to see because you can't really see with the trees. And it's deceptive, too. Sometimes you'd think "well, that looks miles away" and it wasn't so far. And other times something would look near, but was really far away.

[13: 276] L, And then this morning, we just thought "oh, it'll be a few minutes down to the lake." And of course it was about 20 or something instead of a few down to the lake.

Bear Safety

[14: 140 to 146] L, And they were right along that ridge. It looked really beautiful, so that's what we did the next day. We stayed beside the lake for 2 nights. We just did a day hike up onto that ridge, it was, what 5-1/2 hours? Sort of go right to the end of it back to the...at least it took us that long. We don't go very fast. But we didn't take like a stove or anything like that. We left them back down at the lake. And that's the

disadvantage of not having bear things is more when you go on day hikes. B, From not having bear barrels? L, Bear barrels, you know, because you're...there.....that was the one place...other places we were able to hang it in trees, which, I don't know, protects a little bit, but.....there we were just able to put in on a big rock. So a bear could definitely come up J, ...wouldn't hopefully ruin our camp.

[15: 318 to 330] L, This is the first time we've carried mace also. B, For bears. L, For bears. Bear mace, yeah. J, It worked. We never saw any bears [laughs]. L, And you know, I don't think.....I would have been probably very reluctant to use it, but it gave us some kind of confidence. You kind of J, We didn't go many places without it. L, Yeah. I mean we always had it with us. So, I think I would do that again. I don't how well it would've worked, because we'd heard conflicting reports about that, it might get the bear angrier, but I mean it would only be as a last resort you'd be using it anyway. But it just sort of gave you some...Well, I would probably do that again.

Mosquitoes

[16: 358 to 360] J, Well, it was.....we have to mention one of the greatest pleasures of the trip was getting in your tent and killing off all the mosquitoes and then taking your clothes off and taunting them. [laughter] To get even. L, Or just lying in there and watching them all buzz outside. It was really nice.

Scenic Beauty

[17: 150 to 158] J, But when we were up on those ridges, the view was just spectacular. Just incredible. We were looking.....L, Right....J, ...both sides back into the mountains. L, Yeah. Those Arrigetch peaks, those big ones--incredible. J, Yeah.

[18: 224 to 246] L, Yeah, that was Thursday night. And then yesterday, Friday, we went right up to the top of Takahula with day packs. And that was absolutely incredible. That was spectacular. It was just.....a beautiful ridge. J, ... sun, a ridge. There were a couple of places it was maybe two feet wide. L, It was neat. J, And it was falling off on both sides. L, But it was good rock. J, Most places it was good rock. L, Good rock. J, ...and it was really wide....L, And beautiful views from the top. J, You're looking right up right down the Alatna Valley and then you could look right up the other way. You were really just L, That was well worth it. J, ...incredible.

[19: 256] So then we got down and we camped on that little small lake right above Takahula, a little tiny lake. And that was really nice up there. And it was still and the reflection of spruce trees was on the water and it was really nice.

Other People

[20: 86] L, We went to the top first, and then instead of following it, we kind of headed towards the col and we were staying on the contour quite high up and then looked down and we saw them arrive, the other party, arrive onto that col. And we had binoculars and we thought it might be them because there were 3 people. But we didn't know. And they had come up the other way and got there.

[21: 100 to 102] J, And when we found it initially, there was actually another tent there. L, Yes. There was a tent there we could see from the top and we thought "oh, we'll be down there" like you always do, you think "oh we'll be down there in a half hour", right? But it took us about an hour and a half to get down and they were gone by then. I think they went on up that valley. We didn't actually see them.

[22: 112 to 124] B, So you actually saw the party on the move later? J, Just as they were leaving. L, The tent disappeared. I saw the tent was gone. I mean I saw the tent clearly. We had binoculars, so we were able to you know look and see....J, There were 2 people...L, There were 2 people in a blue tent and I think they were the people that came out of Takahula yesterday because that couple this morning said that the people there yesterday had a blue tent. B, Did you see any other people? L, No. No, only those 2 people. And these 3 here that turned out to be that was them [another party that shared their return flight].

[23: 136] L, And then Monday afternoon we did a kind of a just a hike up into that valley, a day hike, up on that side. And as we were up there, we caught sight of two people up on the ridge opposite us. And we watched them go right along and it turned out to be these two guys here. We thought it might be because it was just the 2 of them and we thought it might be.

[24: 286 to 292] B, Did you see this other party of three? On the lake? L, Today? No. J, No, they went back to Circle. L, They went back to Circle, so we had no clue. We thought they were coming to Takahula. So we kept wondering where they were all week. When we were up on that mountain yesterday, we thought "gosh, they must be somewhere, maybe they're coming in that other valley."

[25: 276] L, And then we walked....we knew....we just walked on around and wondered if we should go up and speak to the cabin people. We came on around and we were just sort of thinking about "should we go up and see if there's anybody there?" when the guy came out and says "come on up!" And we got there about 9:30 or so and they came and picked us up about 10:30. So, we had about an hour with those people, Steve and Kay. They were such nice people. I'd love to write them a letter. If I wrote a letter to the Bettles Lodge or something, do you think somebody would deliver it?

[26: 296] L, And then we heard the plane go by this morning and he tried to.....Steve had a radio, and he tried to contact the plane. "Oh, it's a Beaver." And I think I said we're expecting a little one, a 185, to pick us up. And it went away and then about an hour....that was just after we arrived, wasn't it? Not long after we got there. And then it was going up to pick them up at Circle. So when it landed, it came back and he said...he radioed again....it was really funny. He said "Have you got our people?" We said "yeah...." So, then it landed and the three of them were on. So, that was the first time that we saw them again. So we shared our experiences. It was really nice.

[27: 298 to 306] B, So, did seeing the other people early in the trip, the tent, or the people at the end, did that influence your experience in any way? J, I was reassured. I

mean you always know roughly where you are, but when you can't see things, then....L, We were far enough away where we camped, but we have to admit we were...there was a little kind of feeling of "oh, my God..." A little feeling while we were on the plane.... Oh, now, they're going to do the same as us, you know, kind of thing. J, But that was in the beginning. L, That was in the beginning, you know. Because I thought we'd see them every day. And we didn't really want that. We wanted to be really away. But we didn't. And so it was kind of nice to see them at the beginning and then feel like we knew them at the end.

Solitude

[28: 374] J, But that feeling of actually being in the mountains and being there, you know, being the only thing there. I've never had any experience like that. Never on any of the mountains we've been in, I've never had any experiences like that.

630BTT11

Sue (S), Daniel (D), Ray (R)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 242 to 248] B, How'd you find out about Gates of the Arctic? S, Dan. R, Dan. D, I had read about it. I've read a couple of different books, the David Cooperman one, I think, and I forget some others, but then I've also been trying to go visit different parts of Alaska. And I wanted to come up above the Arctic Circle and go to the Brooks Range. And somewhere along the way, I came upon the Arrigetch Peaks. I can't even remember, it's been 3 or 4 years ago. But since then, I knew we should come and see it.

[2: 250] S, I actually heard about the Brooks Range about 10 years ago. I read Joe McGinnis' book "Going to Extremes." He has that last chapter all about the Brooks Range, and I got intrigued. But I didn't know about Gates of the Arctic or Arrigetch until we started planning this trip.

Hot Weather

[3: 168 to 180] S, The first day, I think there was a little bit, on my part, of dehydration and we were slogging up through that brush and it was just horrible. It was hot. D, It was about 6:00 at night and we walked right into the sun. It was...S, Yeah, the heat was bad. D, It was pretty unpleasant. S, Yeah. That was unexpected because we're from Phoenix and we wanted to come here to be cold. But that....then it was okay. I think that we were all a little dehydrated. We were tired. And it just was very hard going. So, for me, anyway, that was the low point, the first....D, Yeah, that was pretty it for me, too. R, Yeah.

Difficult Hiking

[4: 218 to 226] D, I also describe it as very difficult, you know. Most people are used to hiking....if you're in decent shape, you can hike probably at least 10 to 15 miles in a day...S, Oh, yeah, that was the biggest shock for me because I thought I was a really

good hiker and I can go out and hike good trail land up to 18 miles a day. And here....it's lucky if, what was the most we ever did in a day? That one when we went 7 miles round trip? D, Probably. And half of that was without packs, right? R, Probably, yeah. S, Yeah. So just the difficulty of it...

Remoteness

[5: 184 to 190] B, How did this trip differ from other backpacking trips you may have taken? D, A lot more remote. R, Yeah. S, Yeah.

[6: 192 to 194] B, When you say remote, what do you mean? D, Uh...just, you know, not seeing anybody back in there, you know, you hear a couple of planes, but you know, you aren't in contact with them in any way, shape, or form. Just knowing that you have to be very careful because, you know, you are being picked up in a week and until that week's up, you have very little access to any sort of assistance if you should need it.

Navigating/Route-finding

[7: 198 to 202] S, For me, the biggest difference was no trails. Most of the backpacking and hiking I've done there have been trails. R, Yeah. S, Having to find your own route through there. Dan found it for us.

Pressure to make the pick-up

[8: 204] R, I think, for me, it would be just...that you really do have one pickup place that you have to go back to get out and there aren't many other options for.....I've done hiking in the Cascades and other places and I've had some of that same, you know, bushwhacking and remote feeling where you're, you know, a couple of days away from being able to get out and not likely that anybody's going to come across you or anything, but knowing that you have to get back to one spot at one certain time, that was probably the big difference for me.

Overflights

[9: 72 to 86] S, There was a lot of air traffic. A lot of planes...R, Yeah. D, Yup. S, Just about daily. R, Yeah, pretty much every day. D, Yeah. S, ...a couple of times a day there was planes, but it really didn't detract too much. D, About half the time we saw them and the other half we just heard them.

[10: 90 to 100] B, You said that it didn't detract too much? S, Not too much. D, No. S, You know, it...um...we're from Arizona and the Grand Canyon has continuous aircraft over it and we're used to that, so compared to that, this wasn't a thing. D, Yup. S, And that does detract there in the Grand Canyon, but I think it was okay.

Wildlife

[11: 28 to 32] R, We camped on the Alatna at a little confluence about midway between the Arrigetch inlet and Circle Lake. And saw a bunch of great animal tracks and hoped to see some big animals, but nothing walked by. D, Didn't see anything. Nothing! S, They had been walking by at some point. We saw the evidence of it, but not while we were there.

[12: 102 to 124] B, You said you didn't see any wildlife. D, Big game. We saw probably, what 8 to 10 ptarmigan? R, Yeah, ptarmigan, and we saw a couple of Canadian geese. We saw some ground squirrels. D, Yeah, a couple of little ground squirrels. R, We saw some very delicate birds. They looked more like shore birds. S, Like sand pipers. R, Sand pipers, kind of...D, Sand pipers, kind of like that. R, We saw a bunch of those. D, Ravens. We saw a couple. R, We heard ravens and saw them, I guess, a couple of times out in the Alatna Valley, not up in the Arrigetch. What else did we see? S, We saw antlers. We saw parts of animals.

[13: 136 to 150] B, Did not seeing any live big game detract from your experience? R, It was unexpected, I think. S, It did for Dan, I think. R, I mean I think it's.... you know knowing that they're there, that's really cool. It would have been...I mean it's a pretty dramatic thing to see, a grizzly bear or something, so it would have been a neat little addition to the trip, but I think.... we also.....we were.....there was a lot of time where we were going through brush and we were shouting "hey, bear" every, you know, 20 or 30 seconds, probably, so we shouldn't have expected probably to see a bear in those kind of conditions. We kept our eye out when we were above the brush line, you know, for bears. Because we had pretty good, you know, viewing those areas, but we just didn't see anything. D, We had mosquito netting on a lot of the time, too, and you can't see far in that, so....R, Yeah. D, So, I think there could have been stuff pretty close by at certain times that I would've missed. R, Yeah, that's absolutely true.

Other People

[14: 40 to 46] B, Did you see any other people? D, Uh, we saw John and Elizabeth the first night. S, I think that was their camp you guys saw out there.....D, Yeah, pretty sure.

[15: 52 to 62] B, So, you saw only the tents and not any actual people? S, No one was there. D, Well, the first day that we were...R, Sunday night, we saw them...D, Yeah. R, ...you know, crossing the pass. We were camped a little ways from the pass, but that was all we saw. We didn't see anybody else. Nobody on the river. No nothing.

[16: 66 to 72] B, How did you feel about not seeing any people? D, It was great. R, It was great. S, It was wonderful.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Dramatic Scenery

[17: 154 to 158] B, What was the best part of your trip? D, I think probably the ridge walks. We had just some....there was some just incredible views of the peaks the first couple of days we were in there. It was just absolutely clear and we just had some wonderful views of the peaks. S, Probably mine, too, the ones that I went on.

[18: 236] S, But then even in the small area that we were in, it was just incredibly spectacular. The peaks, you know, I haven't been that many places in the world, but of

all the mountain places I've been, I've never seen anything as spectacular as that.

[19: 206 to 216] B, If you were going to describe this place to somebody who hasn't visited before, how would you describe it? S, Just extraordinary. Um...different from any.....B, How is it different? S, It's just....it's....it's....um....well, I think Dan commented that, for instance, the Arrigetch Peaks, any one of them, if you took it and put it somewhere, it would be, you know....an....D, Like the most impressive mountain....S, Impressive attraction. It's just so vast. It goes on and on. And so dramatic. I don't know. It's hard to describe it to somebody.

Scale

[20: 236] D, Yeah, I think if I was describing it, I'd it's spectacular both in its overall immenseness... It's seems such a huge, huge....like... we.....there were so many places where we were going you could see for a very long distance, and there was no clear-cutting or anything like that. Just, you know, wilderness as far as you can see it.

MANAGEMENT

Maintain Size of Park

[21: 254 to 256] R, The only thing I can say, is just, I mean, you know, if any of this, you know, counts for public sentiment about I think it's wonderful, you know, to have a Park that's so big. I hope that we're able to keep the wilderness areas that are here in Alaska in the state that they're in. And whatever steps the Park Service can do and citizens can do to help keep them that way would be great. D, Yup, because it's an incredible experience. It's something that most people will never get. And you certainly don't get it in the Lower 48 anywhere.

[22: 258] S, No. And that's just it, the vastness of it. I'd hate to see them say "oh, well, let's just take this little Arrigetch Peak area and make that the National Park." Cut the rest out. I mean the whole....the entirety of it is part of the "thing" you know, not just the mountains. It's just how huge it is.

Use is Likely to Increase

[23: 278] S, But I can see how it's.....as word gets out about how gorgeous it is up here, I can see....I know it's more remote than the Grand Canyon and it's great deal of time and preparation and expense more so to come up here, but still I could see it getting kind of overrun. It's just too beautiful.

Support for Limited Permit System

Experience with permits in other parks

[24: 266 to 270] B, Given what you said just a moment ago, would it ever be appropriate to limit the number of people who can come here? R, I think so. I mean I went to Denali where they have a permit system for spaces and there I suspect that that is an important part in having it really feel like wilderness. You get in there, and there'd be zones where they only let a couple of people in to camp overnight. And I think, although, we didn't get to go to the zone that we were originally wanting to go to because of the system, we

got to go to other zones, and they were completely spectacular. It was great to have them be isolated. So I would say if the choice.....if I was the one voting and my choice was either just let how ever many people want to go in go in and do whatever they want and wherever they want or have some kind of permit system or something like that, I would pick the permit system. S, So would I.

[25: 280 to 282] B, At Denali, how did the permit system influence your experience? D, Um..... well, like I said, we didn't get to go to our first choice. We were going to go up to the Anderson, no not Anderson Pass, I forget some pass. We were going to ford the McKinley River. We were going to go up to this pass on the Alaska Range and we didn't get to do that, so we ended up having to kind of spur of the moment pick some other things, but they ended up being incredible trips in and of themselves. And I think it was better to have it be something where when we went into the zones we didn't see other people. And that was.... it made a more wilderness.....whereas I think if they had let anybody who wanted to go in and backpack because it is maybe a little more accessible than this Park, I think it would have been pretty crowded. And it wouldn't have felt....had that same feel. So it really felt like the end of the work pretty much in Denali, just like it did here. I think the permit system is part of that feeling. I'd say it was a positive thing.

[26: 272] D, Yeah, well, and we've been to the Grand Canyon. It's like that. The backcountry of the Grand Canyon is permitted and it makes it much more of a wilderness experience than if its open. The same thing we went and climbed Mt. Whitney a couple of years ago. The same thing there. And if it wasn't permitted, it would not be the same experience. So, I would much rather see them do that and keep it that way even if I was unable to go.

630BTT12

Jeff (J)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 45] J, And I had always wanted to come and do the Noatak. It just sounded like a killer place to go. It was always on the list of "things to do" ...

[2: 47] J, So, ummm.... I spent most of my Brooks Range time in the Arctic Refuge because I know it's more remote. But given the political situation and all the hubbub over the opening of the Arctic Refuge as part of [president] Bush's so-called energy plan, I knew that interest in the Refuge was at a high and that they were having like a 60 or 70% increase in visitation. And all my friends who were guides up there, they were full in October. And I went "huh, everybody's going to the Refuge, this might be the summer to do the Noatak." Because the pressure is off. And that was literally the reason why we picked the Noatak this year was because of the Arctic Refuge, all the activity focused up there, recognizing that there's probably a finite number of people who want

this kind of really remote, camping in bear country, really removed from the safety line kind of outdoor adventure. So, it was kind of calculated from that perspective.

[3: 159] J, But the last two weeks in June are really a good time to travel up here because the birds are out, ... And they're all singing. They're all high on their perches. They're all in their full breeding plumage. They're making a lot of noise. So, the birding is really good. The wildflowers are fresh out. The bugs aren't as bad as they're going to be like right now. I mean we definitely saw a difference in bugs just in the 2 weeks we were there. And you start getting into July. I don't like coming to the Brooks Range in July. There are too many bugs. The last 2 weeks in June are... Any earlier than that and you can run into water problems, particularly further north.

Itinerary

[4: 17] J, Well, we flew to Twelve-Mile Slough with Brooks Range Aviation. There were six of us in the group. The plan was to head in there, which we knew was a place where people put in to float down the river and we decided that what we wanted to do was go up the river to try and see part of the Noatak drainage that most people didn't see. So we had all of our river gear and we had all of our hiking gear.

[5: 41] J, And our whole strategy was we only did 50 miles of the river in 13 days. We spent the first 3 days hiking upriver and coming back down. So we had like 9-10 days on the river and we were not going very far every day. It was a very lethargic trip. We did a lot of hikes. We just kind of checked out little side canyons or climbed up on the side of the hills.

Relaxation/time

[6: 25] J, We set up our mid [tent] and put basically ten days' worth of food and everything in the mid and just left it there on the tundra and said "hope there aren't any bears around." And up valley we went. And I don't know about 3-1/2 miles, I think, we found this killer perch above the river with like a 270-degree view of the river and we just sat there for 2 days. And we did little day hikes out, but basically, you know, we were like....like I said, get your heart rate down. Get your stress level down. Kind of getting into the rhythm of what was going on.

[7: 153] J, The best part of the trip was not being at work. Um.....The best part of the trip was um.....boy, that's a tough question. Great company. Great wildlife. Great scenery. No problems. I mean the worst thing that happened is one guy stuck a fish hook in his finger. We had to do minor surgery. We had to split his finger open in order to get it out because he forgot to pinch the barb. The butter melted. I mean that was, like, the worst thing that happened. I mean it was an event... in terms of any kind of problems. It was an event-free trip.

[8: 19] J, You know, because the first day or two out in the woods on a trip like this, a lot of times all you want to do is just, like, chill. Not go anywhere. Not do anything. You know, just try and get your heart rate down. Get your stress level down. Kind of get into

the rhythm of, you know, up at noon, lunch at 8, dinner at midnight. Kind of getting on the animal cycle.

[9: 41] J, And we really got into the routine of up at 2, breakfast about 4, lunch at 9, dinner at 2 in the morning. And it took us.....it didn't take us very long to make that shift to Arctic time.

[10: 91] J, I'm very much of a shift to Arctic time, take.....not in any rush, take my watch off. I don't wear a watch anyway, but I have a pocket watch. But, you know, I take it off. I harass people the first couple of days that don't take their watches off on my trips. After that, I leave them alone. But at that point, they realize I don't want to know what time it is. Because people are very.....and this was an interesting group because 3 of them wore their watch the whole time. And they were.....and I really worked on them to try and disconnect from the watch. I mean.... I remember the first or second night, somebody said "Oh, it's 8 o'clock, shouldn't we be eating?" And I said "If you're hungry, we will eat. But if you're not hungry, then what the hell does 8 o'clock have to do with it?" "Well, I'm hungry." "Okay." Then we stopped and had lunch. So that's part of the wilderness experience also, is breaking the connection to the clock. You sleep when you're tired. You eat when you're hungry.

Weather

[11: 149] J, And had a great trip. It was hotter than hell up there. It was like sitting on a beach in Baja. There were a couple of days we absolutely....we couldn't move until 8:00 at night. It was too damn hot to do anything. So we sat around and watched birds and read, fished a little.

[12: 155] J, Virtually no rain. It rained one night. It had sprinkled maybe two other times. It was bloody cold a couple of days, where, you know, you're sitting around....of course, you know, we were up at 3 in the morning or 4 in the morning. But towards the.... a couple of days ago, we weren't going to bed until 5 or 6. And that's the coldest part of the night. But at that point, you've got on, you know, a lot of layers because it's cold out. But, I mean, you're prepared to deal with the rain. It's just more fun if it doesn't. I don't mind clouds. I don't mind, you know, showers. But that just torrential.....where the system moves in and just sits there and just pours.....that didn't happen to us. So that was pretty cool.

Wildlife

[13: 27] J, And the wildlife was just stellar. There were wolverine, wolves, grizzly bears. It was just.....and you know of course we're all birders, so we were catching whatever birds were around. But.....and you're high up off the river. So, you could watch all this activity down below you kind of like it was on a stage. And of course the best time to watch wildlife is between about 11 and 3. So, you know, you're just sitting around at midnight having dinner and just kind of watching the wildlife show.

[14: 41] J, We got 34 birds. We were pretty happy about that. So, a lot of birding, a lot of wildlife viewing.

[15: 155] J, We saw great wildlife. Wolverine. Two wolves. Half a dozen foxes. Four bears. Ten caribou. Dozens and dozens of sheep. 34 birds.

Safety

[16: 29] J, We got up the next day and put the boats together and, you know, started to get ready for the river trip. And these guys came stumbling into our camp. It was some guy who had screwed up his knee. It was weird. The first thing he said was "Got a satellite phone?" It was like "Satellite phone? Why in the hell would you carry a satellite phone out here?"

[17: 69 to 73] J, Now, if I ever got in trouble, um.....I started....actually this was the first trip that I started carrying a little aviation radio. Because I figured after 20 years, my luck is B, Your number might be coming up. J, Just when I've.....I don't know, maybe it's an age thing. You start to assume that you're not immortal. You know, when you're 25, you're immortal. When you're 45, you're going "God, if something fucks up, I'd sure like to be able to at least have some kind of an opportunity to talk to somebody and bring some help in."

[18: 93 to 95] J, Um.....And to me that's you know one of the fundamental characteristics of a wilderness experience is being able to travel off the clock, to be worried about wildlife. I mean not worried in a negative way. Maybe worried is the wrong word. Cautious of, aware of, you know camping in bear country is not for everybody. And we saw 4 bears on this trip. All of them at safe distances. We made a lot of noise when we went through the willows. We were aware of the guy that got killed on the Kougorak a couple of years ago. So that's a fundamental part of the wilderness experience is knowing that if you are not on your game the whole time, you could fuck up really bad. And maybe that's why I started carrying a radio with me.

[19: 97] J, So that's when I started thinking about the radio thing. Um...which I'd never had before because that's that's a concession almost. Um.... because part of being out in the wilderness is being self-reliant to the point if, like, something happens, you gotta deal with it. Um... and maybe that's the age thing beginning to creep in, where you realize that "Well, you know, something could happen and you know we're pretty self-reliant; however, if something really ugly happened, it sure would be nice to get on a radio and within like 24 hours get some help in." Um....but that edge of you know camping where....you got to be on your toes. You know, it's the wildlife. If you're hiking it's the stream crossings. That's actually the most scared I've been, is on the stream crossings. It's not been wildlife. Um.....that and to not see other people. To me, that's what's makes a good wilderness experience, is that you're on the you're on some kind of a solar biological clock. You gotta be self-reliant, deal with an illness, and you don't see other people.

Airplanes

[20: 35] J, So far we had.....at this point in time we had planes the first three days.....we saw three planes the first day, two planes the second. It was interesting, the third day some people didn't hear any and some people heard three, differing audio experiences. Um.....And then it was great. Then we went about 4 days without a plane at all. And then what coincided with what we figured was the weekend, there was a little plane activity. And then we went with no planes and then we had four planes. Actually it was probably two planes, one coming and going, but there were four times. And then we had planes for a couple of more days. So, when you counted it all up, we didn't have planes half the days we were out there. And that was a pleasant surprise. Because I had been told that the Noatak you're just going to get hammered by airplanes. Every day, there's airplanes overhead, you know, moving people around.

[21: 37] J, And you know, an airplane a day doesn't really bother me. It didn't really bother anybody because if you're going to be out in the Bush in Alaska, it's great when you have a day without an airplane. And it's really great when you have 2 or 3 or 4 days in a row. And the only place that I've gone, you know, for like a week or more with no airplanes was in the Arctic Refuge. And you can get off of the main airstrips on the Aichillik or the Hulahula then you've got to, you know, head up into the mountains. You get jets there, way high, but you don't get any bush planes.

Significance of type of plane

[22: 39] J, It was interesting here, you got Beavers, but there were no jets. Because the Noatak's not on that over-the-Pole route. And so in that regard, that was nice because when you're looking up and you're seeing a jet, you're kind of going "boy, there's civilization up there." I mean that's like you know major league technology, you know, 35,000 feet leaving a vapor trail. Um..... but it was a pleasant surprise that we didn't get that we didn't see that many airplanes.

[23: 61 to 69] B, You seem to imply that there's a difference between seeing a Beaver and a jet. And that maybe seeing a Beaver is preferable to seeing a jet? J, I would say neither are preferable. B, Okay. J, I mean I would like to see no airplanes, but having done bush travel in Alaska for 20 years and the access that I use is Beavers or 185s on floats or wheels. And they're kind of part of the fabric. It's how you get around. And after you do it for a while, you know the pilots. You know, like this group that came down, that knew a couple of people in our party, you know, well where you'd in, where'd you start? He says "We went up to Coldfoot and flew with Coyote Air." "Oh, you flew in with Dirk?" I know Dirk. I mean I don't know Dirk, but I've flown with Dirk, you know, in the Arctic Refuge. So, there's that kind of connection because you know who the pilots are. And it's part of the fabric because that's how you get out there. I wouldn't like to be someplace where there were like dozens of flights of Beavers and small planes going over, but you know an occasional plane over and back, it's like "Well, you know, somebody's either getting dropped off or picked up." I mean that's kind of how you get around out there. So, the fact that a plane like that appears isn't devastating to the experience. Now the day that there was four, that was a lot. "Oh, my God, not another fucking airplane." But you know, one goes by "zoooooom" and they're gone. And maybe 7 or 8 hours, another one goes the other direction. That kind of level,

you know, it's.....I'd rather not have any at all, but that's not intrusive. But to me, a jet going overhead, I mean that is filled with.... I mean that's much more of a connection to the industrialized world than a guy flying a bush plane. A guy flying a bush plane is flying people like me around. You know, people who....they're out.....they're either hunting or fishing or watching wildlife, you know, just hanging out and grooving on the wilderness. Just doing their thing. And a jet is like that's tied into the whole industrial megacommercial complex of the world. So, it is different.

[24: 73] J, So.....but.....we saw one jet on this trip. And that was like kind of way it was on one of those bluebird days when somebody says "look, wow, there's a jet way over there. " But in the Arctic [Refuge], it's right under a major polar route and we'd see jets every day. And at least to me there's a difference. Bush planes kind of belong there, it's kind of how you get around as long as there aren't too many of them. And jets are what I'm taking a vacation from.

Other People Encounters

[25: 33] J, You know, it was weird because that was the first thing they asked was "you got a satellite phone?" I was like "uh.....nooooo..... I have a little 5-watt aviation radio, but I didn't tell them I had that." It was kind of point of sight... But they told us that some guy had screwed his knee up and they wanted to....they were going to go hang out at Twelve-Mile Slough and just wait for a plane to land and try and, you know, get out or whatever. I guess they both got on. But in case none of that came about, they gave us a message, which we carried out today, on the 30th. And then they left and they came back an hour later and they'd given us the wrong date. They said "come pick us up August 1." That was what they wrote in the note. Of course, we knew they meant July 1. And then they came back and said "Uhh.....you know, we really meant July 1." "Yeah we kind of figured it out." And the guy wanted to chat. We didn't want to be rude. But it was like we just kept doing our thing and he finally kind of faded away.

[26: 23] J, And the weird thing was, it was..... being contacted by the Park Service folks wasn't as intrusive as the three guys that came in the night before. Because we talked about it a little bit, You know, as a group. We're kind of going "well, the Park Service, you know, this is a National Park, and you know you got to have rangers and they are doing their thing and they're informative and then they were gone and they were doing their thing." And somehow it was different than the three guys that flew in the night before, who we didn't make contact with. But we knew they were over there, so we didn't have the place to ourselves.

[27: 43] J, And we just made our way around down the river. And there was I think only one camp site where we saw other footprints. And we didn't see.....after we left the guy with the fucked up knee, who if his knee hadn't been screwed up, we'd have just seen their tent in the distance and then they would've been like gone, out of sight. But the fact that he was injured and he sought us out for taking a message out, you know, we didn't see anybody else for a week. One time.....it was day 5.....there were 2 tents at Portage Creek, but they were way off in the distance, a blue tent and a yellow tent. And

obviously hikers. They were way up on the side of the hill. We caught a little glimpse of them and then we went on by. But on the river, we didn't see any other floaters. Nobody lapped us. We didn't lap anybody until yesterday. And then this group of 5 came down. It turns out they knew 2 in our party, so it was like "Oh, hi, Fran, hi Bob!" you know that kind of chit chat. And then they took off. Then when we got on the river, then we lapped 4 people in 2 inflatable kayaks. So it was nice if you're going to see people, cluster them all together, so it happens within a day or two.

[see also excerpt 36]

Expectations

[28: 141] J, We knew we were going to see people because the Noatak gets a lot of use. And so, you know, it wasn't a big bummer or anything. Actually we saw fewer people than we thought we were going to see. And we saw fewer airplanes than we thought we were going to see. So in that regard we were pleasantly surprised. But in terms of a preference for a back country trip or a wilderness experience, it was crowded.

[29: 35] J, Um.....so, at this point, you know, I was going "You know, this place is crowded." There was somebody the first night that flew in. The Park Service people. We got these guys who we saw and then they made contact with us. Um.....so we were kind of going "well, this kind of fits what I figured Gates of the Arctic and the Noatak was about, which is crowded, you're going to see people.

[30: 51] J, I've always wanted to go, you know, it's definitely on the life list of places to check out. And having been there, Jesus Christ, I know why, the place is stunning. It's beautiful. But it's a National Park. It's got the big stamp on it. And I saw more people here than I would have expected to have seen on a two-week trip in the Arctic Refuge, for example. We saw the green tent guys, the people at Portage Creek, and then two floating groups, so we saw four groups in two weeks. And that was more than I typically see on a Brooks Range trip. Of the trips that I've done in the Arctic Refuge, you see groups at the airstrip, you know, where you put in and take out, but once you leave there, pffhfff.....I never see anybody. And that's....that's one of the reasons I like the Brooks Range is because you can get off the beaten track and you can spend two weeks at a shot and not see another soul. But we came in to the Noatak with the expectation of seeing people. We saw less than we thought.

Effect of National Park designation

[31: 129 to 135] B, Okay. You said earlier "It's a National Park, it's got a big stamp on it." J, Yup. B, What do you mean by that? J, Um... if this was if the Noatak River was just a river in the Brooks Range, um.....there would be a certain group of people that knew about it. And it would get use, but the fact that it's a National Park, it's like it shines a spotlight on it. It says Congress has decided this place is really cool and really groovy and this is a place that has been nationally recognized and set aside so if you're looking for a backcountry wilderness experience in Alaska and you live in Illinois, you're going to go to a National Park. Because if you live in Illinois, you don't know about all the cool spots that Alaskans know about.

[32: 139] J, But, you know, it's a big spotlight, it's a big deal. So, yeah, I think.....I'm glad it's a national park. I'm glad that they can't go in there and monkey with it. But it does draw attention to the place. And that's why.....I've never backpacked in Denali National Park, for the same reason. Because a lot of people go there. It's a killer place to go. Good Heavens.....but I want to go someplace more remote. And if I see a little less wildlife or the geology and the mountains aren't quite as groovy, it's okay with me. I'd rather not see any people.

Focus on number of other people

[33: 79 to 89] B, Also you used the phrase of "wilderness experience" and it seemed to me you were linking that directly to the number of other people you encounter. J, Oh, clearly. B, Is that fundamentally what determines a wilderness experience? J, No, it's one of several factors. B, Okay. J, But it definitely has.....I mean it definitely has an influence on what I think is a good wilderness experience, is how many other people you see. The fewer people the better. I just as soon not see anybody, except the group that I have decided that I want to go out in the woods with.

[34: 127] J, And I don't know if that's elitism or....I don't know. I guess it's what you want to spend your money on. Because these trips aren't cheap. So if you're going to invest the money, you know, in the gear and the air taxi and the food and the whole thing, you do start getting pretty particular about where you go and how many other people you're going to see if that's important. And to us, that was important. The number of people you see is important.

[35: 125] J, Of course, I think that my wilderness experience is probably different than a lot of people, particularly people who come from here. When they come up from the Lower 48 and then drive down Turnagain Arm out of Anchorage is a wilderness experience to many of them. And so it's all relative. So, if you come from a kind of a you know a Northern Rockies or Cascade....Oregon and Washington Cascade Mountains kind of backpacker wilderness where you go in any of those wilderness areas, you're going to see a ton of people. And then you come to the Noatak and you see somebody on the average every other day or every 3rd day, I'm sure that they think that this is just an awesome resource. It's so remote, nobody's there, and so relative to where they came from, I mean, this can provide an incredible wilderness experience beyond any of their wildest expectations. And then there are other people who think....like us, we never wanted to go to the Noatak because it was too damn crowded. And we selected to come this year because we figured the pressure was off because everybody was going to the Arctic Refuge.

Remoteness

[36: 99 to 109] B, How about this quality of remoteness. You've used that word a couple of times. And you said that you prefer Arctic Refuge because it's more remote. What makes a place remote? J, Less people. B, We're back into people. J, Yeah, it's the number of people you see. B, Okay. J, Yeah, I mean, if the terrain, the wildlife, everything about the Noatak....it was an awesome place, but you know we saw 4 groups

of people in 2 weeks. Actually we saw 5. There were the 3 guys the first night...Three guys the first night, the green tent guys with the broken knee, the yellow and blue tents, and then the 2 groups we saw yesterday. So we saw 5 groups....5 other groups. Ummm.....and that that was I mean that was way different than most trips we've done. Seeing that number of folks. And then, you know, and then when you see planes going by, you know that somebody's getting dropped off or picked up. If you don't see them, you know, they're not there. They don't exist. The airplanes, like I said earlier, they're not really part of the terrain, but at least to me, they're an acceptable participant in the terrain as long as there aren't a lot of them. But when you actually see a tent or see a body or a boat goes by, you know, and all of a sudden, you're looking at the color of their hair, what kind of clothes they're wearing, what kind of boat are they in, are they buffoons, where are they from.....are you going to be able to joke about them later?...."God, did you see those guys, wearing head nets on the river?" I mean why in the hell you wearing a head net on the river? The bugs aren't that bad, you know. You have that interaction with another person and it does change the experience. So the remoteness is directly linked to the number of people.....the wilderness experience is connected to other things more natural, natural things.

[37: 111 to 113] B, So, remoteness is, if there's a distance quality to it, it's distance from other people rather than, say, distance from roads or something of that nature? J, Uh..... yeah. And it isn't even necessary that you distance from other people. It's about seeing them.

[38: 117] J, There's a river that I was on in Montana a couple of years ago, the Smith River, that sees a lot of visitation. There's like 4 groups or 5 groups a day put in every day. But once you're on the river, you have to pick your camp site ahead of time and if you're kind of the last one on, you can see where other people are camping and you can actually set your trip up so that you don't see anybody else. And it's kind of like out of sight, out of mind. And you might like sit down and intellectually say "Well, there's 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.

MANAGEMENT

Little NPS Presence

[39: 165 to 175] B, What did you notice about the Park Service management in this place? J, When I was out there? B, Either, or. J, I saw no management when I was out there. And that was fine with me. B, You did have the ranger contact. J, We had the ranger contact. Um...but I mean there was no visible.....you couldn't tell there was anything going on out there. It's just.....it's the Brooks Range. It's wilderness. You know, there's no ranger station. There's no food caches or permitted toilets or any of that kind of stuff that get put in places.

Bear Barrels

[40: 183 to 187] J, Umm.....I had never taken depth charges [bear barrels] with us before to store food in and I know the Park Service is really keen on getting people to

take these things out. B, How would you feel if that became a requirement? J, I think it would be pain in the ass. We couldn't do it. I mean, two weeks' worth of food in those things? We'd probably have to have 24 of them. We took two. We put our smelly foods, you know cheese, meat sticks, butter, and olive oil and stuff that really had odors. But if I had to put all of my pasta and rice and oatmeal and all that stuff in these things, it'd be ridiculous. You couldn't do it. We eat pretty well. I mean that's part of..... you know, we don't buy Mountain House and zip open the aluminum foil and pour in the hot water and zip it back up and wait 5 minutes. No, we dry our own food. We eat pretty damn well out there. We laughed about it. We said "Jesus, man, what if we had to put all of this in those things?" It wouldn't happen. It wouldn't have worked. We wouldn't have had room for it. So, I mean everything's double and triple wrapped in plastic and in stuff sacks and we've never had any problem. No, I'd hate to see that as requirement. I think it's a good idea for certain things.

Registration

[41: 197 to 199] B, So is the registration at the front desk. What if that became a requirement? J, Um...it's a National Park, I don't think that'd be a problem. I mean part of my answers here may not be consistent, because I am in public lands management as a professional. And public managers always like to know what their use levels are. And the only way you can really..... well, in these remote areas, it's pretty easy to get use levels if you have cooperative air taxi operators. And if you've got a good rapport with the people that are doing the drop-offs and pick-ups, then at the end of the season, you at least have some sense of the number of people that are going in and out.

Use Limits

Inevitable increased use

[42: 227] J, But I think the Park Service needs to be aware that, at some point in the future, they may need to do some management to provide for the less visitor contact wilderness experience should the use....well, when the use levels come up. Because they will. I mean Alaska has got more wilderness than the rest of America combined. Wilderness is a finite, scarce commodity that every year gets more and more attention from people who are looking for places to go. Econ 101: scarce resources, increased demand, you know, it's going to happen. More and more people are going to come to the same set number of acres that we've set aside for these kinds of things. And the use levels are going to increase at some point, and it may not be prime for 30 years. I don't know how long it's going to take, but at some point, you know, as outfitters and guides begin to pioneer new areas.....because I have friends that guide that don't go places where they were 10 years ago because they're too damn crowded now. So it's kind of the ripple effect. As I move out.....as I get displaced from where I go because of people, I move out to something a bit more remote. Well, there's already somebody in the place that I've now discovered and I have now made that place to crowded for that person and then they move further out and then they displace the person who is way out there and then those people move even further out. And that ripple effect is going to continue to happen, as....I mean....people are breeding like crazy. There's more and more people. There's more and more money. And the world is shrinking. And wilderness is a hot

commodity. And places like Gates of the Arctic people are going to.... I mean, they're coming now. And they're going to continue to come.

General support for limits

[43: 201 to 203] B, What if the registration was used as a method to limit visitation? J, It'd be fine with me. That'd be fine, yeah, I mentioned it earlier that if the Park Service said, you know, one of the things we want to do in at least part of the Gates of the Arctic is to manage for what I would say is a more of a premier wilderness experience, and if that meant that I had to contact the Park Service and put in for.....if I want to do a 2-week trip...I want to leave on this day and get back on this day, and they wrote back and said, "Well, we've already got somebody starting that day, but if you start the next day, there won't be anybody else starting that day." That'd be fine with me.

[44: 123] J, So when it comes down to managing for a wilderness experience in Gates of the Arctic, if it ever comes to the point of the Noatak is getting loved to death, to the point of where the experience for people is being diminished, if the Park Service were to step up and say, "Well, what we're going to do is we're only going to let one hiking group and one floating group a day go in to the system and you've got to get a permit....." And you know, all those.....that'd be okay with me. Because then I would know what the rules were. And know that at least when I went in there, I wouldn't land at Twelve-Mile Slough and 3 hours later have another group land on top of me. And the next day have another group hike up and....you know what I mean.

[45: 229] J, So, the Park Service just needs to be aware that at some point in the future they may need to think about managing for a more remote experience. I don't think they need to do it now. I don't know why I think that. I've only been on the Alatna and the Noatak.

Provide range of experience opportunities

[46: 203 to 207] J, I don't think the whole Park should be that way. B, Why not? J, Because I think that there are people in America, people in the Lower 48, who are not as impacted by seeing other people in the woods. It doesn't impact their wilderness experience because they come from a completely different reference point in terms of how many people they typically see when they go out in the wilderness. And so, I mean, part of me says "yeah, let's make the whole thing, if we have to, if the whole Park went to permit, if it was really restricted, that'd be great. But I think that's impractical and I think that there are places that you can have that.....and if everybody knows where these places exist, that if you go there, you're probably going to see other people because it's not controlled. And then as a recreator, you can pick and choose, which is what we did this year.

[47: 213] J, And I think providing for that range of recreational experience in a Park like Gates of the Arctic is perfectly reasonable. Um...that's why I would encourage the Park Service to begin looking at managing some places for less use. But at the same time recognize that there's gonna be....you have to have places where just everybody just kind of go and people that don't get bummed out by running into a couple other parties a

day, can just go and have a great time. And to them, they're going to go home to like Peoria or wherever they're from and they're going to have slide shows and they're going to tell their friends about this great wilderness experience they had in Alaska and they're going to have the same kind of experience that we would have when we go someplace and don't see anybody, in terms of what it does to their refreshing their mental view of the world and rejuvenation and all those cool things you get out of wilderness.

730BTT13

Fred (F), Joan (Jo), William (W), Jill (Ji)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 513 to 543] B, So this was everybody's first visit to the Park, is that correct? F, Yes. B, How about to the Brooks Range? W, I have not been there. Ji, Pretty much a first for me. Jo, Only on work. B, Only on work? Jo, Well....Ji, Other than driving the Haul Road. Jo, Flying in and out of the village. Not in the wilderness. B, Not in the backcountry? F, No, we've Ji, Right We've driven the Haul Road and that's about it. F, ...been up the Haul Road and done a little camping.....Ji, Fall tour trip. F, ...off the Haul Road, but it's our first visit.

[2: 467 to 477] B, How did you decide to go to where you did? W, It was the John River or the Koyukuk. We knew we wanted to do a river trip.....F, In Gates of the Arctic. W, ...above the Circle, and around the Bettles area. So our choices were Jo, Well, we'd said....W, ... two or three...

[3: 479 to 495] Jo, Yeah. A few years ago, when we were first in the Interior, I'd flown back from Anaktuvuk, I was up there on work and they flew real low off the John River mostly to get under the ceiling, and come into Bettles and I thought "Man, that would be a nice river to canoe on." So, I had that bug in my ear for a while but then we started talking about doing something up this direction and I don't know we just checked the John and W, The Wild Lake River was an option. Jo, The fact that you could pull out of Bettles was one.....Ji, ...one of the nice things. Jo, Yeah, we....I liked the idea of not having to be picked up, you know, that you set your own time frame..... that you pull out when you want to. F, Yeah. To be self-reliant right to the end. Jo, Well, and gee, you really.....you like to say "I went to through the Gates of the Arctic." Ji, ...through the Gates of the Arctic. Jo, You know, there's just some other thing that strikes you as being kind of neat to be able to say to yourself.

[4: 497 to 511] B, So, it was important then that you were in Gates of the Arctic National Park? Was that a factor? W, No, not to me. B, Not to you. Jo, But it wouldn't....F, It was for me, I admit. Jo, It wasn't what made me want to come up here, it was the scenery and the remoteness. But that was just an added plus after we were looking at things, saying "Hey, that'll be neat to know that we'd seen that area, or a little bit of it." Ji, Yeah. W, Actually, 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.

Itinerary

[5: 792 to 794] B, When you started your trip, did you begin here in Bettles for your flight north? W, No, we started in Fairbanks, flew to Bettles, and then we got shuttled from Bettles to the Gates.

[6: 19 to 27] Jo, We started at the Gates. We flew into the Gates, we put in there and we took our time. We took six days to come down. F, We camped on the gravel bars and W, We put about 5 hours a day on the water, wouldn't you say? Jo, Easy 5.

Weather

[7: 13] W, We had perfect weather. We had 3 days of really nice warm weather and it turned cool, but we were never forced off the river for the weather. We had rain one day on the water for about an hour. I think that was about it. It was super.

[8: 15] F, Part of the beauty of it was that the weather was, the first couple of days, much like you'd anticipate in the Lower 48 on the 4th of July, just really hot, it was almost.....here we are north of the Arctic Circle and mother nature just gave us a little taste.....don't get too complacent. I can thump you in a minute and we picked up some wind and some cold weather and it was great. Nice variation.

Easy Trip

[9: 573] Jo, It was considerably easier to do than I thought. Not.....just before coming up, I wasn't feeling like "Oh, that would be tough to do." But in my mind, over the years it's a whole lot easier to do than I would have conceived.

[10: 183] Jo, Because we've done our share of camping and stuff, but it's just nice and a lot easier than I would have thought, I think, to get out there and do it. I'm sure there's rivers with more, you know, where you need more experience, with more capacity, but it's not out of the reach of most people who have some wilderness camping and canoeing experience. That makes it nice.

[11: 363 to 371] Jo, Well, and the feeling.....we are so darn civilized and if you can ever go anywhere where if you have to rely on yourself a little bit... and for people that are not 25-year-old guys that are going to, you know, hike out and go across the Brooks or something, we can do that. W, Or do the whole stretch in two days. Jo, Yeah, but I mean we can do that and still have that experience whether you're an athlete or you're an average person. W, Or an older person. Jo, Yeah.

[12: 623 to 629] W, Well, I would invite anybody to come up here. This is really nice. Jo, Yeah, I think it's a good river experience. Like I said earlier, it doesn't take somebody who is highly skilled in canoeing or wilderness camping or something to..... I mean you sure wouldn't want to go as a novice, but if you....W, All you have to do is be able to steer a canoe. Jo, Yeah, if you can handle a canoe on a river and use good common sense, you're not putting yourself at any major risk.

River Characteristics

[13: 39 to 43] Jo, It's a nice river to do if you've had some canoeing experience, but we never felt threatened. I mean, even though you know you're a distance from something. You know, you don't want to dump, you don't want to do those things, but none of it was so challenging that it was a threatening feeling, other than you may get wet in the rapids a bit, but....Ji, But there were some thrills. Jo, Yeah, a lot of fun variety. We said that over and over again, that the river offered lots of variety and scenery and twists and turns and different little sweepers and rocks and rock gardens, enough variety that it kept it interesting.

[14: 185] W, The one nice thing about it, the river that I appreciate, it's.....the current is moving right along, not really slow...but it keeps you moving even if you quit paddling and you're just kind of floating side by side whatever, you're still making the time. It wasn't a grueling experience. We were just in a good paddle. Nothing too strenuous.

[15: 85 to 89] Jo, If somebody else was doing that river, the one thing..... I guess we knew it anyway, but if you want to hike, you kind of want to do it in that first couple of days, or that first third of the ways or so. After that, the hiking gets slim pickings. Ji, Right. Jo, But, up in the first about 1/3 of the way down, there would be good hiking.

[16: 103] Jo, But with those gravel bars, you just it's great.....in terms of camping. We were..... on the Yukon last year finding a good camp site was a premium, its just, you know, anywhere you can stop there.

Relaxation/Time

[17: 445 to 447] Jo, I don't know about anybody else, but I was not anxious to have it done. There was...I mean we've done some trips or some things we've done that I've enjoyed, but I thought "Boy, I'm ready to call this.... " you know, this is fatiguing or whatever. I don't think we've gone this long in this kind of setting. That was the longer trip than we've done, and it was certainly not too long. Ji, Yeah, it went fast.

[18: 325] Ji, The interesting thing is that it took me about three days to really get into that total serenity, that complete peaceful "Oh, I don't have to get somewhere, I don't have to have an ambition or a goal." An "Oh, I've arrived" kind of feeling.

Maps

[19: 27] W, Yeah, we never pushed it. That's where the map came in handy because we had benchmarks, you know, if we go so far today, and we go so far tomorrow, we don't have a hard pull at the end to get here in time.

[20: 31 to 35] F, We wanted to make maximum use out of our time. The map enabled us to do this, but I was also..... I had mixed feelings about a map. I just as soon not have a map out there, but when you have contemporary pressures like.....Ji, Getting back to work. F, ...getting back Monday. It was helpful.

[see also excerpt 39]

Group Dynamics

[21: 413 to 423] F, In terms of.....that's a good question about how the dynamics and how we influence one another and how things my experience was that the surroundings, the wilderness itself, provides a milieu for people to....you focus more on each other and what each other is saying. You listen to stories, at least my experience is, I listen to stories more carefully. I'm not distracted by television sets or radios or pressures or you know other extraneous thoughts that are going through my mind that W, I think conversation comes more easily.....F, It really does. W, ...when you're.....Ji, It's more important. W, ...in a little group and there's, like you say, no distractions. Just having a good time.

[22: 449 to 459] F, Well, the notion, too, of relying on each other. I think that's heightening in that when you know you're 100 miles out there, ...Jo, You go into it with a certain trust. I mean I wouldn't go up there with somebody that I thought was a yahoo about or a respect for the area. F, Right. Jo, You know I think that's pretty important that you're not going up there with other people that don't respect the fact that it's a wilderness and you want you value it....Ji, ...trash it....Jo, Right.

Air Taxi

[23: 401 to 411] W, I shouldn't say this, but one of the highlights not related...well, it's related to the trip, but was our flight in. It was raining. The pilot made two passes.....Jo, Oh, that was cool. W, ...and he put it down on a short strip and he did a wonderful job. Jo, It was pretty exciting, yeah. Pretty exciting. W, He really knew his beans. Jo, Yeah.

Contrast to Other Trips

[24: 297 to 315] B, Let's change tacks just a little bit here. How was this trip different than other backpacking or floating trips that you've taken in the past? W, Last year we did the Yukon. B, Right. Jo, Between....W, That was more commercialized you might say. Jo, There were some pretty remote stretches, but there wasn't a day went by that you didn't see other people. Ji, Other canoers or....Jo, ... the Yukon Queen....W, You were never by yourself. Jo, Right.

[25: 323] F, We also hiked the Chilkoot last year, which is a totally different experience. A wonderful experience, but wonderful in a different way, I guess. More of a communing with other people than a communing with nature. This was almost a, for me, it was kind of a spiritual thing.....it was so quiet. You slipped your paddle into the water very carefully.....there's very few places on earth where you get that kind of serenity and.....

[26: 327 to 353] F, For example, on the Chilkoot, comparing them, the Chilkoot is highly structured.....when you started to hike.....I don't even know if the National Park Service has anything to do with the Chilkoot or not, but, yeah, you do. B, Mm.....hm.. F, It's structured. You have to be at a certain camp site at a certain night. You have reservations at that camp site. It's a lot more like the work-a-day world. W, It's rigid. F, Yeah, it's rigid. Ji, A little bit. F, And you're playing to.....Ji, ...the masses. F, Rules. Ji,

Because of so many people, that's exactly why. F, Yeah. Ji, There's so many people doing it that they have to structure it that way. F, And that's okay, but....Ji, That takes the wildness out of it.

[27: 17] Ji, And for [Fred] and I, this was our first really out in the wilderness, well we did the Yukon River last year, but I mean this is the furthest out in the wilderness that we've been in. We saw not another soul except for a few airplanes for five out of the six days. That was very special. Not seeing any civilization whatsoever. Totally wild.

Self-Reliance/No-rescue

[28: 357 to 361] Jo, We haven't really done something similar, in my mind, because when you say backpacking or canoeing that once you're there, your way out is either the canoe or your feet sort of a thing. Whereas we've either flown in ourselves somewhere and camped or we've done some hiking or biking or that kind of thing, but always there was another option getting out. I like that sense that if you're going to get out, it's going to be under your own volition to do it. Ji, The self-reliant piece of it. F, Right.

[see also excerpts 3, 22, 39, 47-49]

Wildlife

[29: 105 to 113] B, How about wildlife? See any wildlife? Ji, Lynx was the most exciting thing, spotting a lynx. Jo, But we didn't see....you saw a bear upriver. F, Kind of an unconfirmed sighting. I saw a bear and I know it was a bear, but I didn't get any confirmation on it, so. I'd have liked to have some other....Jo, Lots of tracks.

[30: 117 to 133] Jo, Lots of beaver and when we got into the flats, we heard lots of loons. We saw some loons on the river, as well. W, We saw an eagle. Jo, Eagles. Ji, Yeah. W, Cranes. Jo, Sandhill cranes, yeah. F, Quite a few owls. Ji, Canadian goose with all her little chicks. Ji, Lots of tracks. Saw a wolf and moose track.

[31: 135 to 141] W, Not an abundance of wildlife. You know, considering the distance we covered. Jo, We were pretty quite, you know, so W, You'd think that you'd see more of....Jo, But the one thing we were saying is we were pretty slow, so had we been traveling at night or maybe earlier in the morning, but a lot of times, we kicked around in the morning and just kind of.....by the time we were out, the..... although even after it got cool and overcast, we didn't see anything during the days.

[32: 143 to 145] B, Were you disappointed not to see much? Jo, Oh, a little bit. But we've seen bear, we've seen moose, you know, we've lived up here a while. But, you just kind of think you might. I think if somebody came from out of state and thought this was going to be but you don't know if you go to Denali Park if you're going to see any wildlife.

[33: 147 to 155] W, We saw a lot of sign of bear.....Jo, And wolves. W, ... at some of our camp sites. Jo, A lot of wolf tracks on most of those sand bars. W, So that was

interesting. They're there, but 95% of the time you'll never see one if they don't want you to.

Other People

[34: 692] Jo, But I've never been anywhere else I don't think where you'd have 6 days of not seeing other travelers. Even in the Boundary Waters.

[35: 47 to 61] Jo, And we didn't see any.....other than foot tracks in one or two places, a fairly cleaned up fire area, but other than that, we didn't see any indication of other campers. There....Ji, No trash whatsoever. Jo, ...no trash. People evidently taking their refuse out pretty good. No toilet paper. W, We found a tripod. B, A camera tripod? W, A camera.....a little collapsible.....Ji, We did see a wrecked boat. A boat that was....Jo, Yeah, about day 1 or 2 there was a boat up on the bank.

[see also excerpts 27-40]

GAAR visitors are unique

[36: 279 to 285] Jo, Another plus whether it fits with the wild thing, but is that you think you're one of few people that get that opportunity. W, There's a lot of wannabes, I'm sure. But I think the people that actually do it are a slim minority. F, That's unfortunate, I mean....Ji, It's unfortunate, but it's okay, too.

[37: 647 to 657] B, So, you all sounded like you would encourage other visitors, yet you mentioned previously how important it was to your experience that you didn't see anybody else. Jo, I think my safety in saying that is the fact that I think there's a minimal number of people that are going to do it, no matter....W, ...what you say....Jo, ...how nice you say it is. I just Ji, A lot of folks just don't get it. Jo, Right. Either wouldn't have the interest, wouldn't have the experience, or you know. So I think it's restricted to a smaller percentage of the population that's ever going to take advantage of it.

[38: 1026 to 1038] Ji, Yeah, and I imagine this is huge because if you turn on the T.V. everybody wants the wilderness experience. I mean this is huge. The clothing, all the trappings for having a wilderness experience, is.....F, The SUVs, the L.L. Beans, the Ji, The kayaks tied to every roof, the... you know, everybody is a wilderness wannabe. Or it seems to be. Whether they really....they're just driving around in their cities....W, Most of them stay in town. Ji, Yeah, whether they stay in town or....F, Kind of get that rugged feeling when they put on their plaid shirt on the weekends. Ji, Get out their chain saw and clear their yard.

Wildness/Wilderness

[39: 205 to 211] B, I would like to go back to a couple of things that you brought up earlier. I can't remember...one of you threw out the word "wild." It was really "wild." What do you mean by wild? What makes a place wild? Ji, There's absolutely no signs of civilization. You know you're, you know.....there's a sense of risk, too. That you are 100 miles or a long way from any possible rescue, you know, that there's a sense of

danger, that you're just living with all the elements. I guess risk would be a piece of it. F, Untrammelled. Um... absolutely no signs of there's no boat launches, you know, and no signs that are warning you of rapids coming up or telling you where you can camp and where you can't camp. Ji, [Fred] talked about the mixed feelings about having a map along. That's a good.....on the positive, we were able to sort of measure our trip and make it not get there too soon or not too late. But on the other hand, it would be nice to just have total unexpected....you have no idea where those squaw rapids are or even that there is a squaw rapid, or.....

[40: 217 to 221] Jo, I was going to say along [Fred]'s line about wild to me is that I don't get my kicks necessarily like some people might with climbing Denali or something... you know, the thrill of it isn't to me..... it's getting away from people and things being subtle, the noise, the confusion, the store, the car, the.....to me, that's the ultimate if I can get away from that. So, that's one of the few places....W, We've done a good job of that on this trip. Jo, Yeah, I mean in your mind, part of it is in your mind if you just went somewhere down the road to be alone, that's different, but when you get there you know you're not going to deal with other people because you're you might pass another canoer possibly, but you can go somewhere and be one of the few people that's in the area at all. And that to me is a real plus.

[41: 223 to 245] B, So would it be fair to say that seeing either signs or some kind of development or additional people, any of those factors, would diminish that wildness? Jo, Absolutely. As a matter of fact, we saw one tiny little sign the whole trip. W, Yeah, ...Jo, And we all noticed it. What is that sign? I wonder if it says "Private Property Keep Out"? What does that sign say? F, I think it may...you might be able to help us with that. It was right after the north fork joins the Koyukuk and it turns sharply north. I think we were bordering the Park....the sign may have been....W, It was like a little 6 x 6, yellow sign....Jo, That's interesting. W, It wasn't very big, but it was enough to say....F, Marking the boundary? W, ... not good. B, Generally, they don't have any boundary signs, so I'd be surprised if that was a Park sign, but I really don't know. F, Anyway, everybody remarked it was quite a surprise to see a sign there.

[42: 756 to 772] B, All of you now have used the word "wilderness" in a couple of different contexts and it sounds to me, according to what you said, like the things that impact wilderness are other people, just the presence of other people, and development like paved walkways and port-a-potties. Are there other things that make a wilderness or un-make a wilderness? F, The natural forces at work. Ji, Proceed at your own risk. You rely on yourself. Nobody is there to take care of you. F, A river meandering wherever it wants to. Ji, Weather happening when weather happens. W, Yeah, and nobody's channeling the river. Jo, Yeah....F, Right. Jo, ...that's what I was thinking about. There's no evidence of somebody trying to control nature.

[43: 790] F, Wilderness is, for me, nature managing itself.

[see also excerpts 26-27, 54-55]

MANAGEMENT

Not Aware of NPS Presence

[44: 846 to 850] Jo, And I guess I didn't realize it was here. I had only been in Bettles once before, but I didn't remember that building. We didn't say "Well, we'll check with Park Service when we get to Bettles." We have been aware of it in other states, we've used...W, We'd walked over there when we flew in here at one time, but you know, we just looked in the window. Jo, We've gone to the Park Service in some places for information about the Park we're in and things, but I didn't think of it up here, as being available.

[45: 852 to 862] B, That's interesting that you say that. What else did you notice about the Park Service management in Gates? F, Oh boy, nothing. B, Nothing? W, Yeah. Jo, Yeah. In terms of being out there. There wasn't any tollbooths or anything. W, I never put two and two and together with the Park Service and that being a Park. I didn't think that was a Park at all until we were just about out of there.

Visitor Registration/Orientation

[46: 830 to 836] B, Did you feel that it was in any way an imposition on your experience to go over there and...[register]? Jo, We sought it out. F, Not at all. Ji, No, we went over there....

Safety function

[47: 864 to 892] B, How would you feel if going over and checking in and filling out a voluntary registration form and taking the bear barrels, like you all did, was mandatory rather than a voluntary thing? Jo, I could deal without that. Ji, That's not a huge imposition. F, Yeah. Jo, I think there could be some wisdom in that. W, Yeah, at least they would know who is in the Park and they could say "so and so has been in there too long, we better send a helicopter or whatever up the river and...Jo, I wouldn't like that. W, ...take a look. F, No, particularly if Ji, Well, there actually was another form that was a voluntary form that you could fill out from, it was the State Troopers wasn't it? F, Mm...hm....Ji, That I didn't fill out. F, It was like a flight plan or something. Jo, I can see knowing you didn't come out, but I wouldn't want to W, You wouldn't want them to come and get you.

[48: 894] Jo, I'd like it for me, but I wouldn't like it as.... the same thing I say about Denali, I can't see....if you're going to go do it, you better be prepared then for what's going to happen, not assume that you have the right to be rescued. And I think you put yourself at any risk, then you take that risk. You don't go do something and then says "Whoops! Now I need some help." Now if it was me or you, I'd you know.....kind of like to get rescued...

Education function

[49: 796 to 812] B, And did you check in or register at the Park Service building there? Ji, We did. F, We did. Ji, And we borrowed some of their bear barrels. Got a little information...F, Got a little briefing from the ranger, which was good. B, Why was it good? W, It was informative. Jo, Reminders about "show no trace." Some of the things

that I think we're conscious of, but good reminders. F, And also I appreciated his candor on self-reliance. I thought that was important. "Remember, you're out there and you're pretty much on your own. If you have an emergency, it may be a long time before somebody knows of that emergency to come help you and then whether or not we can help you kind of depends on where you are and what your predicament is."

[50: 1016] F, The other advantage I guess..... here I am going all ways, kind of shooting off like a shotgun, but I hadn't really thought about it too much, but the other advantage to some sort of a registration system is an opportunity for an orientation and during that orientation a little proselytizing. But an opportunity for the Park Service, too, to sensitize people to the issues that are constantly.....the pressures that are constantly being applied to wilderness areas.

Documenting use

[51: 914 to 920] F, I don't know if the....I think I'm with everybody else on that. I wouldn't mind registering. It's [not] an imposition. I don't think it really impacts the quality of the experience, and if in some way my registering helped the Park Service demonstrate the value by just being able to keep numbers as to how many people visited this place....Ji, Well, and the education piece is okay. F, The little education piece was fine. Ji, I think that we are very good stewards. I really do. But I know there are a lot of people that are not.

[52: 1008 to 1012] F, That's right. Well, and the other point is that I think without some documentation, like anything else in government, without the documentation to prove that this is an important resource for the citizens of this country.....Ji, and the political climate. F, ...and the people of the world, and it's a very important resource, you've got to be able to document utilization.

Visitor Use Regulations

Use Limits

[53: 894 to 898] I remember the Boundary Waters being that way a few years back, but you did have to register. You did have to have a permit to go in because they limited the traffic. And I think especially there was a lot of traffic to the.....the Quetico side not so much, but....W, That's probably why they had you register. Jo, Yeah, it was.....you had to have a permit. And I think if things start to get busier, that is a way to find that happy medium between how much traffic there is in a place.

[54: 940 to 942] B, [Fred], earlier you said that the Chilkoot Trail experience was regulated and structured. And that your experience here most definitely was not. So, if indeed, there was a permit system or other types of regulations put in place here, it sounds like it would affect the experience in the same way that the Chilkoot structure did? F, Well, it kind of depends on what your expectations are. If your expectations are wilderness and there are so many people using this area that you're not going to realize those expectations without some sort of a regulatory permitting system, then I say we gotta do it. Because that's why people come to wilderness areas. The Chilkoot is not a wilderness experience. It never has been. The whole history of the Chilkoot has been

one of many, many people on the trail at the same time helping one another, communing at the various camps along the trail whether you were a Klondike Gold Rusher at the turn of the century, or a centennial celebrant, a person celebrating the 100th year of the Trail, you expect that social experience. Whereas up here, I wanted the solitude. If I knew that the only way to have that solitude ensured was to keep track of the number of people going in to the Park or utilizing a certain area of the Park, and issuing permits, I could accept that as a necessary evil of a growing population of outdoor users.

[55: 946 to 948] B, [Fred], I'm really intrigued by what you said, so I'm going to take you back to it a little bit. You said "a necessary evil." What's evil about permitting or other regulations? F, It's the regimentation. It's precisely the antithesis of what you're coming to..... Alaska or coming to a National Park wilderness area....for. It's the last thing you expect to have to deal with, which is regulation, regimentation, here's where you need to be on the river on this certain date because there are other people following you on the river and they expect to be able to use the same area and you lose the whole wilderness quality.

[56: 954] Jo, But I think you can put some structure around it without making it Disney World.

[57: 944] W, Boy, I think this is for everybody, but not...like we said earlier, very, very few people take advantage of it. I think it will be a long time before it gets to a point where you have to regulate it, as far as people, you know, the number of people on the river.

[see also excerpt 26]

Building and maintaining political support

[58: 287 to 295] F, Yeah, you want people to value places like this because if they don't, the political will is not there to ensure that these places are protected and stay protected, so it's a tough call...Jo, And I would think....F, The more accessible you make it, the more you diminish the experience for those who are reporting the solitude and the wilderness value of the place. But then you also don't build that political support, perhaps, that you need to protect a place like this. Jo, Well, you know it's got to be the minority of the people that whether it's here or other places that take advantage or have the wherewithal to go physically or whatever to go and experience some of it, so you don't have a big voice out there in terms of maintaining it. F, Right. Yeah.

[59: 1024] Jo, It seemed like there were two issues, though, when we talked about..... if you put regs in place for use, one is to preserve it from overuse. And the other is to build support for allowing it to be.....I think there might be more efficient ways to develop support to keeping it what it is than permits and that sort of thing. Because the few folks that come through the front door to use it are not going to be high numbers. I think you could build support for it in a lot of other ways, which already happened. But to me if you're going to regulations around use, it would be more in line with saying not to overuse an area.

[60: 974 to 978] B, What I hear you all saying is that no regulations are good, but not as good as not seeing a lot of people. Ji, If your choice were that encroachment vs. yeah, I'd rather have some regulation that would keep it the way it is. Jo, Yeah, and the other piece of it is that you know having those people the educational part, you don't want bears to become habituated, so.....providing bear barrels is a good idea for the wildlife. Those kinds of things are part of the regulations.

Group Size

[61: 966 to 972] Ji, I can see that there would be positives to the regulations. F, There are some positives. Yeah, I sure wouldn't want to see a group of 30 people come pouring in and....Ji, You know, some big huge Boy Scout group yipping and hollering down the river would be a bummer. F, It sure would.

Response to Charges of Elitism

[62: 708 to 710] F, Lots of times people who protect areas like this are accused of being elitists because not everyone can do this. They're not handicapped accessible. They're not user friendly in many respects. They're wilderness areas that are very challenging and lots of folks say for what? A few elitists to get out there with their kayaks and eco-challenges and nobody else gets to use it, why should we pay those big bucks? W, But they can use it. It does cost some money. It costs a little to experience it. It's available to anybody that wants to use it.

[63: 728 to 752] B, So when somebody says to you that this place is elitist, how do you respond? Is it, indeed, elitist? W, No. Ji, Not in my book. F, No. W, I wouldn't think so. Jo, Well you're kept out by your physical ability, but then we're not children, you know, and we can do it. You're kept out to some degree by the cost of doing it, but we are not.....W, Rich. Jo, We're certainly not rich and we can do it, so, it's your sense of priorities, I think. W, If you want.....Jo, And your interest level. W, I would say anybody that really wanted to, could, if they really wanted to. It would be not a problem at all. Ji, Yeah, we're pretty good proof because we're not athletes. We're not rich and we're not young. We did it very nicely. Gourmet meals. Jo, And it's reverse snobbery, always, on my part, but it's.....would you rather have your cell phone and your European loafers or do you want to spend your money on something else?

Need for Good Stewardship

[64: 1044 to 1050] Jo, Well, only that I think we have all reiterated a few times how much....how valuable we think it is to us, for me at least, from a very selfish standpoint that it's something very important to me, so whatever the Park Service research efforts are focused on, I would hope that that's the basis or the foundation to what would be done, would be to keep something that's, in my mind, very valuable. Ji, Right, that's a heart and soul kind of thing. If I never get out in it again in my life, if I know it is being protected and well cared for by smart people that have passions..... this is just like a spiritual thing to me. Very important that it's well cared for and protected. F, I couldn't have said it better. W, Well, I go along with what they say, it's just a beautiful place and it behooves us all to keep it that way.

719BTT14

Robert (R) and Margaret (M)

Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 12] R, We did a float trip up on the John River. We started at Hunt Fork Lake and floated down to Old Bettles. We were scheduled, we left last Friday, and we were scheduled to take a week to get back, but we actually ended up coming back a day early because we had plenty of water and the flow was real good, so we didn't have any trouble getting back early. So we made it without paddling hard. We did not paddle hard. We did not drive ourselves. It's just with the flow of the river, we were able to make it back early.

[2: 36 to 46] B, And how many days were you out? R, We left on Friday and we got down to Old Bettles....well we got down to the confluence....M, Yesterday. R, Yesterday evening, yeah, which was Wednesday. We got back to the confluence Wednesday evening, so they picked us up this morning. M, Six days. R, Yeah.

Reasons for Visiting

[3: 128] M, We heard about a guy that we know had said that he was going to go to Alaska. We basically said we'd love to go to Alaska, we've never been before, but we've always talked about it. And so he said "Well, why don't you come with us? We need a couple of more people. We don't want to take a big group, but a couple of more would fill the group out nicely." And so it turned out that we said "Yeah!" We had talked about going to Alaska for probably 10 years and we didn't know how to see Alaska because it's so big. So we decided that.....we just kind of put off making any kind of decision as far as what we would do to see Alaska. We knew eventually we'd get to see Alaska. But we didn't know how we were going to do that, so we kind of put off coming because there were so many different options. Then when this came up, and we were kind of invited to go as part of a group, we said "Yeah! We want to do that." So, and it's worked out great. We're going to head down, when we leave here, we're going to head down to Denali for a few days and do some stuff around there. Hopefully see a moose and a grizzly and some Dall sheep and the things that we didn't get to see when we were on the river.

[4: 130 to 136] B, So is it fair to say that you came to visit Alaska rather than Gates of the Arctic National Park? R, Yeah, I'd say yeah, that would be true, for us. I can't say for sure.....the guy that originally set it up, I don't know whether that's....he had been up.....I know he had paddled the Yukon before, so he had been to this area, so I don't know about him. But for us, personally, we came because it was Alaska. B, And you found out about Gates of the Arctic primarily through this friend. R, Yeah, we found out about Gates of the Arctic once I looked on a map and he said "Okay, we're going to do the John River, we're going to do this and that." I opened up a map and said "Oh, we're

going to be in the Gates of the Arctic Park." To be very honest, I'd never heard of Gates of the Arctic Park.

[5: 138 to 140] M, But Tom set things up. He made the reservations. He did a lot of the footwork for us. He decided it was the John River that we're going to do and some.....we just kind of went along with the flow. We were like "Okay," I mean we're ignorant. We don't know any better. R, No, Alaska was.....one river was just like any other, as far as we were concerned. We didn't know any rivers in Alaska. All I knew about Alaska is that it was north

[6: 281 to 283] B, Would you do that one again? R, I don't know if we'd do that again or we'd do something different just because, like I said, Alaska is a big place. We've seen that one little part of it, so we'd probably do something a little different, I don't know how much different, but we'd do something a little different, maybe another stretch of a different river or something. I don't know whether it'd be Brooks Range or Gates of the Arctic or another part of Alaska. I don't know, I haven't thought that far ahead yet. But if we stumbled on a trip like we did just now, with this one, where somebody says "Hey, we're doing a float trip on the John River, do you want to go along?" We'd probably go along.

Group Dynamics

[7: 120] M, Part of the positiveness is the group dynamics. And the group that we were with, that were acquaintances, but not so much friends, they weren't close friends, it was good to get to know them. It ended up that the group worked out very well together. The dynamics were very good and very positive. So, we decided we wanted to do another trip together, the same group. And we might be able to add on.....Tom didn't bring his wife, so we might let her go along with us, too, but....We want to try to keep the same core group, which I thought was a very positive outcome of it that we did mesh so well together because you don't know when you just go on a trip with acquaintances, you don't know how well.....you don't know the other people well enough to say "okay, well, this person is going to do this, and this person is going to do that." And it worked out real well together. So that was another positive part of it. And with other people, it may not have worked out as well.

River Characteristics

[8: 60] M, Lets' see, we were real surprised that there was as much current as there was on the John River. In fact, we thought it was going to be more of a float trip and it ended up you had to know a little bit about white water in order to navigate the first part, especially, in order to navigate that safely. And so we ran into a little bit of trouble early on with the trip. We had a couple of folks with the folding kayaks and they weren't real sure how to use them and how to maneuver them, especially with them loaded. So, it was very interesting the first couple of days trying to set up and get them set up so that they could get to their right spots, the spots that they needed to be. Because we estimated the current was, what about 7 or 8 knots per hour those first few days that we were on it.

[see also excerpt 1]

Fishing

[9: 84] M, We were kind of disappointed in the fishing. Because Robert and I do fishing trips regularly and we had heard all about Alaska and fishing and we beat the water to a froth and never caught anything. We had a couple of grayling interested and they followed our lure twice and that was it. So,.....it was disappointing.

Hiking

[10: 84] M, We also had thought that we or kind of tentatively planned on doing some type of day hike, but the places we could hike where you could maneuver on land safely, they were so thick with mosquitoes or else they were so sheer that the with the people in our group, we decided not to do those, not to do any day hikes.

[11: 86] R, Kind of with the day hike....we heard that there's some good hiking up in the upper part of the John, but we weren't really sure where to go. And I think by the time.....we weren't real sure what kind of time we were going to make either, so we were scared to take a day off early and hike and then find out that the John was going to be slower than we thought. So, we paddled the first few days and then we realized we were ahead of schedule, but then we were down in areas that were, like I said, were so marshy that the mosquitoes were so bad there was no way we wanted to hike any of that, so we don't know where the hiking areas are. So, ... on a future trip, I don't know whether we could find out ahead of time or something like that, just what kind of places there are to hike, specific areas.

Camping

[12: 84] R, It was very easy finding places to camp, comfortable places to camp. We were just talking a little bit ago how we were very fortunate in that there are so many natural camp sites along the river where you've got some sandy areas and we had a big mosquito, I guess dining area, a mosquito screen dining area, that we wanted to set up and we needed some logs and stuff for that, so when we looked for a camp site, we looked for one with some logs on it and some sand and some gravel and away from the mosquitoes, and we had no trouble finding those when we were ready to stop. So, it worked out real well.

LNT practices

[13: 249] M, Mm...hm....I think we bought a tour guide, just a book, that kind of told us some about the John River and about Alaska and everything. And we borrowed a couple others. One of the things that each of these emphasized is to leave no trace. Pick up your trash, take out the trash, make sure that you're leaving no trace of you having been there. Leave things the way you found them. If you have to do a campfire, make sure when you're finished that it's scattered enough or whatever, so that you don't you can't tell that somebody obviously has built a campfire in this particular area. So, that's one thing, too, is if you can get the tour books working with you and if people are using those and as much as you can publicize "try not to leave any trace" and tell people

how they can not leave a trace, then the people that you get coming up here are going to be a lot more aware of that. Personally, I think that's very important.

[14: 251 to 271] B, Would you say as a group you did those things? Leave no trace things? M, Oh yeah. R, Yeah. M, And then we packed out our trash. We never....we used a stove. We never had a campfire. R, We never had a fire. We used a stove. M, When we we.....R, We didn't put all the rocks back where we found them.....M, But when we built a tripod, we tore it down afterwards.....R, Yeah. M,.....to hang wet clothes and stuff on, we tore it down afterwards. No, we didn't put the rocks back where they were, but I don't think we really left a trace of having been humans come through there. R, If a good rain comes along, you won't know we've been there, to cover our footprints.

[see also excerpt 28]

Wildlife

[15: 48 to 58] B, What did you see out there? R, Uh....mountains. Mountains was the main thing. We, I mean we went up there..... we thought about all the wildlife we would probably see, but we saw surprisingly little. I was real....I don't know whether disappointed....yeah, I was disappointed. I thought we'd see moose, maybe even bear, I didn't know about caribou and that sort of thing, but we didn't see we didn't see any of the big animals like that. We did see some peregrine falcons. We saw a couple of nests of peregrine falcons. We saw some eagles. We saw some beaver. We saw some porcupines. M, River otter. R, Saw a river otter, but that was about it, spread out over the course of six days. So we didn't see a whole lot of wildlife. M, Most of the wildlife we saw was in the last couple of days. Once we came down out of the mountains and into the foothills and the more swampy areas. So,.....R, Saw a lot of tracks. Every place we stopped has tracks. From all those big animals, but we never saw the animals themselves.

[16: 106 to 110] R, That and that we didn't see the wildlife that we were the worst part, I guess, if I had to pick a worst part, the worst part was we did not see the moose or the wolves or the caribou or the bears.....M, Or dall sheep or....R, ...that we thought would all be up there. So I guess probably the worst part of the trip was we did not see the animals that we thought we would.

Mosquitoes

[17: 98 to 102] B, What was the worst part of the trip? R, The mosquitoes. Just the mosquitoes whenever you got off the we stayed on nice flat beaches where there'd be gravel out 30-40 yards before the bushes and if you stayed out on the end of the gravel, you seemed to be like.....you were fine, but boy when you went up to the bushes, the mosquitoes were just so thick. So I'd say probably that's it. We expected them, but still they were there, so.....M, I agree, the mosquitoes were probably the worst part of the trip.

Other People

[18: 62 to 64] B, How about other people. Did you see any other people? R, When we first put on, there was a group that put on right after us, as in hours, behind us, and we played leap frog with them for about the first two days or so and then we didn't see them again. They were in a raft and....one of those deals where we were a little slow getting started in the morning and so in the morning while we were still wandering around breaking down camp, they'd float by us and then we'd float by them while they were stopped for lunch and then they'd float by us while we stopped for lunch. That happened the first couple of days and then we passed them and then never saw them again. So, but that was the only other group we saw. They were the only other people we saw all week.

[19: 66 to 80] B, How did you feel about seeing that group? M, Get off our river! R, We didn't expect to see anybody. But I mean it I didn't have a problem with it. If it would have been 3 or 4 groups, if we'd have constantly been competing for camp sites, it might have been a problem, but that....it wasn't that big a deal. They seemed like friendly enough folks. M, We just waved every time they passed by and...B, So you never talked with them? R, Not, no, not more than "Hi, how're you doing, how's it going?" And move on....M, Is the fishing any good? R, Yeah, as we floated by, I think every time we saw them, either they were on land or we were on land, so we just went on by. We never did float together or anything like that.

[19: 164] R, Yeah, it's like you mentioned a minute ago, when you said did those other people bother us? No, that one other group up there didn't bother us. But now had there been a constant flow of people up there and we'd have been let's camp here pretty soon, woops, that one's taken, that one's taken, that one's taken. That wouldn't have been the same. The fact that we were up there essentially by ourselves made the trip. I think we found when we got to Crevice Creek and we saw a sign that said Crevice Creek. That was one of our first indications that there'd ever been anybody else up there. We saw the moose prints and the bear prints and the wolf prints, but we didn't see any people footprints on any of the beaches we were on, so that was neat.

Wilderness

[20: 150 to 162] M, We had this beautiful scenery and just a really good.....it was a good trip, but it's not going to be for everybody. There's a lot of people that I know who would hate a trip like this. B, Why is that? M, Um....if they don't want to camp, if they don't want to.....a lot of people don't want to sleep on the ground. They don't want to bother with the mosquitoes. It's not worth it to them, but I figure if you're going to see this kind of wilderness, you've got to go with it. You've got to camp, you've got to....R, You know, there's not a Holiday Inn up there, in other words. M, Yeah, thank goodness! B, Why thank goodness? M, Oh, it would ruin it. It would spoil the pristine nature of the wilderness.

[21: 166 to 172] B, So, Margaret, you used the term "wilderness" a couple of times there. What makes this place a wilderness? M, Because you don't see a lot of other people there. You don't see indications that people have been there time after time and

after time....R, There's no development. M,..... that, yeah, it's not developed. You don't get your McDonald's on the corner. Bob and I got on the New River in West Virginia, which, again, it's in the mountains. It's a class V river, so we're there, but it's not wilderness as much because you've got the rafters and you've got group after group after group of people going down the river and you see lots of people any day that you're out there on the river. Even though it's not settled around that area, I don't consider it a wilderness because there's just so many other people there. So, that's what I like about this, it's pristine. It's clean. There's no trash. There's no....you don't see many other people, if any. There's no indications of people living there. And that's one thing that I really enjoyed. That there weren't other people up there.

[22: 178] R, To me, just the lack of development. That pretty much makes it a wilderness. The lack of development and the isolation, I guess, makes it a wilderness, to me.

[23: 184] M, There were no fences, you know. Any time you'd go along.....if we canoe the Blue River in Indiana and the Elkhorn Creek in Kentucky every once in a while and you'll see fences and you'll see cows sometimes grazing in the areas and stuff. And it all points to people being there. You didn't see that here. So that, too, makes it more of a wilderness.

MANAGEMENT

No Noticeable Presence

[24: 186 to 192] B, So [Robert] you said you didn't even realize it was a National Park until you were almost here. R, Right. B, What did you notice about the management of the National Park? R, The closest I came....I knew about management was the fact that there's an office over here, but I didn't.....up there I didn't I didn't notice anything about the management other than the standpoint there was no park rangers or anything like that up there...or anything. So I guess as far as management is concerned, I didn't really notice any. There wasn't any special permits to go in or anything like that, so I guess I really didn't notice any management.

Visitor Registration/Orientation

[25: 204 to 214] B, Did you fill out the voluntary registration over at the Park building when you arrived? M, We didn't even get to the R, No, we haven't even been to the Park building, so no. B, Okay. M, Now, other people in our group probably did. I know they got here a day earlier than we did and I know they got over to the Park building and talked to some folks over there. But when we got here, they said basically "We've been over there, that's over there...." And we said "Do we need to go?" And they said "No, unless you want to get a free bear barrel." You know, to use while we're there. And we already had one, so we didn't get another one. R, So, no we didn't.

Support for Regulations and Limits

[26: 194 to 202] M, I know when we've been to the Quetico, you have to apply for permits to go in. They limit the number of people in the area at any one time. And that I think, too, is positive because you don't want it to be overgrown with people. You want

to keep that wilderness there also. But you get the idea that's it managed more because you do have to have the permits and you do see rangers and they do have an obvious ranger station there. R, They have campsites. M, Right. B, So when you say you get the idea that it's managed more, is that a negative thing, management? M, No. No. Not at all. Um.....Only that 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 because it's set up so that you limit the number of people in there. I think that's a positive thing. So, even if I apply for a camping permit for a particular week in July and they say "No, we've already maxed out on that." That's okay because you know it's something that I understand why they're saying "no." Why they're saying "We've got a limit on the number of people who can go in."

[27: 220 to 222] B, Would they [limited permits] ever be appropriate here at Gates of the Arctic? M, If it gets to the point that there's so many people using the land here, so many people doing the John River or the other rivers in the area that it's going to be a problem finding a campsite, that you're going to get litter around, that you're just going to get overrun with people. I would rather see it on a permit basis than see it overrun with people. I mean it's something that is very special. It's a special place.

[28: 237] M, I would hate to see the John River area with major impact areas that you could notice, where you go through and see where people have left a mark. I would not want to see that.

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Gary (G) and Mandy (M)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP Itinerary

[1: 15 to 25] M, Um...we flew in to just below the Gates of the Arctic on the north fork of the Koyukuk about, I think, was it 8 days ago? G, On the 11th. M, On the 11th. And lined upriver a day and camped. And then floated down and...G, Five days. M, Yeah, five days. G, So it was a 9-day trip. Easy trip. A few rapids. Pretty good weather. Mixed a little bit, but never bad weather. Few bugs. Perfect wilderness trip.

Reasons for Visiting

[2: 241 to 247] B, So how did you decide to come to Gates of the Arctic for this trip? G, Uh.....well, ironically, it's easy. It's easy access. Bettles, you know, is like you can go from here anywhere you want to. To go to the Refuge, which is my favorite place, or western Alaska, but the Refuge in terms of kind of a popular destination, it's tougher to get in there. It's more expensive. Pilots are.....there's fewer pilots who are overworked. This place is just how many air services are here? You can go out any day you want.....M, Except Thursday. G, Uh....you've got a choice of airplanes. You got a helio. You got the Beaver. You got something on floats. Basically you can get whatever you want. And we're on a honeymoon, so it was like well, I know how we can put together a nice, easy trip, quick. And we're it'll be a good trip. Just kind of guarantee.

Self-Reliance

[3: 51] G, You know,[in other parks] there's a road or there's a trail or there's a sign. I love coming down that river and there's no signs. You're on your own. You don't, you gotta be able to read a map. You don't have to.....nobody's telling you where you are. And it's for people who want that kind of experience. It's not....I don't think it should ever be a Park that's made for convenience or the what I would call the sightseeing public, you know, that likes easy access.

[4: 263 to 265] B, And for you, [to Mandy] how did this compare to other river trips or back country trips that you've been on in the past? M, Mmmmm..... [long pause] oh, um.....I liked it a lot more than anything I've done. And I think it still goes back to that sense of being really remote. Um....of just being out there and dealing with what comes up. And of course being with Gary and he's really experienced, was a great comfort. I think somebody like me probably would have had a lot more worries if I hadn't been with somebody who'd been on who was so experienced in this country. It was just great.

[5: 179] G, You know, it's like to me you go that's the idea of wilderness, you go because you know you could be uncomfortable, you can not be uncomfortable, you can have a hair-raising experience, you can have a boring time. But it's not so controlled, like our daily lives in Prescott or Fairbanks or wherever. There's an unknown there's a creativity to it, there's a routine that you develop that you create comfort for yourselves within the perimeters of your gear.

[6: 93 to 95] B, You did. You said that when you had visited here in the past things were different. One of the things that was different was this sort of no rescue quality. You feels that's changed? There's a better opportunity to be rescued now? G, Oh, I think I couldn't answer that, but I have the sense just because there's so much more air traffic, you know. I mean if you got a ground-air radio or a mirror even, chances are you can signal somebody. Whereas you could be in here the whole summer and never see an airplane 30 years ago. But I think there's an attitude among the public that if you're on Park Service land, Park Service is going to take care of you. You know. I don't know if that's true in this Park, but if you're overdue, you know that Brooks Range Aviation will probably come out and look for us and things like that. I don't know if I can really answer that. I don't know....the country is so different.

[see also excerpt 23]

Overflights

[7: 267 to 287] G, It's probably one of the less-used rivers I would think up here. B, Of the name rivers. G, Of the names, yeah. M, Although there....there was a lot of air traffic. G, Well, I think going over to Anaktuvuk.....M, Yeah, going to Anaktuvuk....anyway, it was that sense of just being out there. B, How did you feel about that air traffic? M, That was a negative. G, Well, it's Alaska. I guess it....you can't go....I mean the only place I've ever been where there's no air traffic is way out in western

Alaska, off the west side of [inaudible]. Just there's nothing nobody's going anywhere. But it's..... I don't know, I just kind of gotten where I M, Yeah, that's a different I mean we have a different concept of that. Because I'm not from Alaska and in Alaska, air traffic doesn't mean that there's necessarily more access happening like where you are. It's just that's so much more a means of travel from point to point. And in between the point, you could be just as remote. But of course in the Lower 48, when you're on a flight path, you're usually when planes are flying that low, you're right around the corner from an airport. So, I think there's a difference....I think we just have a real different reaction to it. G, I think it'd be a real negative for the Park to try to manage kind of overflights and stuff.....like they're doing in Arizona now in places. I think..... it's like that's such a part of the culture here and part of.....it's kind of the economics that pilots might... I don't know how you would manage it. I mean there's just so many airplanes. They're all going someplace. People think whatever they're doing is important. It doesn't bother me. It kind of used to, but it doesn't anymore so much.

[8: 189 to 213] I[remembers] one bad.....the Army helicopter that came in.....M, Oh yeah, that's true. G, ...like it was.....M, We were at the confluence....G, you know, Vietnam. M, ...of the Clear River and the Koyukuk, the north fork.....G, No, not the Clear. The one coming in from the west there, the Tekya...Tekpuk or whatever....M, No, it was the Clear River, wasn't it? Oh, okay. Where you went..... yeah. G, Yeah. We walked up the river. M, Yeah, and this Army helicopter came over the hill. So that's pretty important. At first, we thought "Oh maybe it's a rescue." But it was a huge.....G, Enclosed double-rotor deals. M, It was bigger than the one that just landed today, right. G, That was huge. M, Yeah. You know, that was really disturbing. As a matter of fact, we were going to contact the Park Service and say "What are they doing in the Park?" They shouldn't be in the Park. Unless they were on a rescue.

[see also excerpt 6]

Other People

[9: 49 to 51] B, I'd like to go back to a couple of the words you used there and explore them a little bit. "Perfect wilderness trip" that was your summation of it. Why was it perfect and what made it a wilderness trip? G, Well, for me, you know, I told you earlier I've been here 30 years and I've done radical, radical trips and trips up in this country before it was easy to even get up here, you know, I mean, where there was one or two people flying out of the strip here in Bettles and you go off somewhere and you knew you were entirely remote and if things went wrong, you weren't going to be rescued. Nobody was going to know where you were, really, if the pilot went down or whatever. And it's changed.....the country's changed a lot. But I guess what I look for in a "wilderness trip" is the sense, maybe it's an illusion, but I appreciate the illusion, of you're basically alone. You're not going to run into people, other people. There won't be a lot of parties on a river. You're not going to see trash. You're not going to stop on a sand bar and run into somebody else's poop hole or whatever. There's just a pristine quality,...that the animals aren't habituated. And I realize that you really can't.....it's

really difficult to manage for those kinds of things because it's a question of at some point you reach a number of people where those kind of qualities are lost.

[10: 109 to 119] G, And I don't feel that and I've done a lot of wilderness trips in the Lower 48, it's a whole different thing because you're just completely managed there. There's this trail and there's this....M, And you generally see other people. G, You always see other people. M, Always see other packers or hikers or G, Horse packers.... M, Climbers or whatever. There's....usually you'll see somebody. For me, that was the great part about this trip, is I knew or believed I wasn't going to see anybody else, as far as people, humans. I liked that a lot.

[11: 135] M, So, I think that was a huge part of it for me and it was really that was great.....that was really.....I realize that I was watching for other people at first. I just expected somebody else to come down the river. That's always been my experience. You know maybe you get a couple of days where you don't see somebody, but and we weren't even out that long, 9 days, but then I kind of gave up and didn't expect to see anybody and that was pretty high quality experience for me.

[12: 95] G, But I'll say one thing about the Park relative to how this country was, oh let's say late 60s/early 70s, is there's a sense that it's less there's less going on in this Park than there used to be. Because there was more guys prospecting. There was more often guides working in the Park in this area. There's fewer mineral companies exploring. It's just basically a recreational region now.

[see also excerpt 22]

Evidence of others

[13: 365 to 395] G, Is there a policy that you're not supposed to build fires anywhere in the Park? B, Um,.....there are general "leave no trace" principles in place that they encourage people to follow, which include, "limit your use of fires", but it's not a formal policy or regulation. G, The north fork is such a "leave no trace." I mean the evidence of it there. I mean we really saw nothing other than footprints. M, We saw two different sets of human footprints, right? G, Well, over and over again. M, Right, the same two parties. But no other trace. G, No evidence of fires, no M, Well, I did actually see one at G, At the strip. M, Near bear. G, Really? M, Yeah, there was some charcoal from a fire. G, Well, it could have been from a forest fire or something. M, Uh...uh.....it was a little ring. Yeah. B, Did you have any fires yourself? M, No, and I brought it up. I said "Yeah, let's have a fire." And Gary says, "there may be a policy of no fires" and besides, we want to not leave any trace of us being here. It's a good point.

[14: 397] G, I even hate making footprints in mudbanks and stuff. It's like the next people who come down the because I've had so many experiences here where you just get the sense nobody else has ever been here. Maybe I'm just a wilderness snob where I like that feeling and it's not really a possible thing in this world anymore. But I think you can be attentive to other people's experience. I think it's important for me to try to leave them what you'd want for yourself.

Inaccessibility

[15: 39 to 45] M, It was a great trip. I think, you know, my sense.....it was the first wilderness trip that I've done in Alaska, the first fly-in trip. I've never done a trip that's this remote. And like I was saying earlier, I really had the sense that I was in an area that was very minimally impacted by visitors. And I think a lot of that just came from the knowledge that a lot of the country was inaccessible. And I really liked that about the trip. The river corridor was accessible. Um....but I liked that a lot about the trip that not very many people are going to go through black spruce bog for several miles in order to climb some of the mountains up there. So I really liked that. We started up one, but didn't go all the way. But....So I think that's very different growing up in the Rocky Mountains, everything seems so incredibly accessible to me now down there, compared to this. B, Because you can drive to it? M, You can walk to it. G, Drive or walk. There's trails.

Focus on type of people

[16: 187] G, What would be bad is if I came down the Koyukuk River and I saw some yahoos on jet skis or somebody who is up above there.

[17: 297 to 313] B, So now that you've completed this trip..... and this might be a question better directed to you [to Mandy], how would you describe this place to somebody else thinking of visiting? G, Horribly buggy and rainy, dark and tragic. You wouldn't want to visit. M, Right. What he said. G, No, no, I'm sorry. M, Um.....Boy, that would really depend on who I was talking to. I mean, I don't mean to be tongue and cheek, but I think that that's kind of a that's a hard question because I think you do start to in today's world, you do start to be a little circumspect about your favorite places. And who you talk to about them. Because you can kind of judge how people are going to be on the land to a certain extent, I mean, certainly you can't know everything, but if I had if we had some great friends who were very experienced back country people and would go in there in the same fashion that we went in there, I would describe it glowingly. I would describe it as you know a place of beautiful mountains and these incredible dynamic drainages which again is very different from the Lower 48, with all of our managed rivers. You know, you see these the flood events. You see what happens. I mean it's just such a dynamic fluvial geomorphology going on here. It's amazing. Um.....so I would.....that was the big impression and you know all range of conditions. And just a great experience. If you don't mind bugs. We didn't even have that many bugs. But, if I were talking to Marge and Bud, who wanted to go....G, Jet boating...M, I don't know, I'd like to imagine that for a minute, you know, somebody who I don't know, somebody who maybe was really coming as a as kind of a burly adventure thing. You know, let's go do the river in Alaska. Run the rapids. See the bears. And all that kind of thing. I think I'd be a lot more I think I'd probably try to scare them off. I think I'd probably try to say "Oh, you don't want to go there, it's bugs all over and you don't see that many critters and...."G, The conquering quotient. M, The conquering, yeah.

Escape

[18: 105 to 109] B, What was the best part of the trip? M, I'm thinking. G, For me, it was just being out there. It's like....I've done dozens and dozens of these kind of trips and I never get tired of them. And there's certain aspects there's certain kind of just that for lack of a better word just kind of a spiritual ease that comes with getting away from, you know, [points to guy working nearby] weed whackers. And being with my favorite person in the world and just being quiet. And coming down a river and even when you don't you know I don't....I'm not particularly goal oriented in terms of well, we gotta see wildlife and that, it's just that composite of this geology and that plant and this bird and just kind of being in the country and allowing oneself to slow down. It's real simple for me.

Wildlife

[19: 27 to 37] M, Yeah. Not a lot of wildlife that we actually encountered, but we saw a lot of tracks. A lot of tracks! G, Wolves. M, A lot of wolves. G, We saw wolves, though. M, We did see wolves. G, Wolves, lynx, moose. No bears. We had one bear come into camp, but we didn't see it.

[20: 249 to 261] B, I believe you said earlier that you've never done this particular one, never been on the North Fork, is that correct? G, Never been on the North Fork, yeah. B, How did it compare to other river trips you've done in this Park? or in the Brooks Range? G, Uh....how did it compare? That's a good question. It was just a nice trip. You know. I would say it compares favorably with any other trip I've done. Less wildlife, probably than I've ever seen on a Brooks Range trip. But that's just luck of the draw. Just the days work out that way. M, But certainly a lot of evidence of wildlife. G, Oh yeah. M, A lot of tracks.

[21: 315] G, Like Gary was telling me about a trip that he guided years ago. He was supposed to take some people in and show them wildlife on the north side of the Brooks Range, right? And they just saw like nothing for two weeks. They didn't see any critters at all. And everybody was really pissed off. And we didn't see that many critters, but it certainly didn't detract from the experience for me. At all. And I think there's that mentality of kind of like entertainment mentality. We want to come and see wildlife, charismatic megafauna, you know. Or we want to run big water or we want to climb mountains or we want to do those things. I think that this experience is a lot more holistic.

Indicator of wildness

[22: 151 to 161] B, What are the qualities [of wilderness] that you're referring to, other than not seeing people? G, The space. The well, to me, that's the key. Not seeing people. I mean that's like the definitive symbol of a place that's managed for wilderness or not. I think wildlife that's not entirely habituated. I mean we saw wolves... I would say those two wolves that we saw were used to humans. Not they were aware of humans. That lynx we saw had never seen a human before. M, No, I wouldn't say it had. G, He was just like "wow!" You know, what are these strange things? M, He came up to watch us, too. G, And that's the experience I used to have in the Arctic Refuge where the animals just had never seen anybody. You know wolves would walk right up to you

and look at you like “holy cow, that’s an odd-looking whatever its.” And these wolves and I guided one year on the north side over around Chandalar Lake further west and the bears over there have clearly gotten used to humans. They were....they had seen enough back packers that they knew. But I wouldn’t call them habituated in the same way that bears were habituated in Yellowstone, let’s say. They were comfortable around humans, but they weren’t like garbage bears. There was that that still had a little bit of respect. They weren’t fearful but they had respect. I don’t know, those are qualities that I would look for.

[see also excerpt 9]

MANAGEMENT

Minimal NPS Presence

[23: 333 to 341] M, Yeah, I’d like to say something about that. That sort of Park Service thing. I never really had the sense that I was in a Park. G, Yeah, that’s a good point. M, And I like that. B, That was my next question. M, I liked that, but I also think that I also I would go into an experience like this not expecting rescue. And I think there are people who do say “okay, it’s a Park, so it’s safer to go there because if something goes wrong, I’ll get rescued.” And I’ve never had that perception.

[24: 343 to 345] G, Yeah, that’s a good point. You don’t feel like you’re in a Park. M, No interpretive signs. And no trails. Not to say that interpretive signs and trails aren’t appropriate for a lot of parks. I’m a great supporter of them in a lot of parks. But not in this Park.

Contrast to Other Parks

[25: 51] G, But I think just the nature of this place and the fact that it has been essentially managed either intentionally or unintentionally as a wilderness park, still makes it a reasonable.... I mean, we were pointing out yesterday....you leave the Park and you’re still in the same wilderness, it’s just an arbitrary boundary that somebody, a bureaucrat created somewhere because there’s some resource value that maybe they didn’t want to include in the Park and they wanted access to it for commercial reasons. But it’s a Park and what makes it good as opposed to Yellowstone or Glacier and any of the parks, it’s buffeted by the same kind of country all around it, whereas Yellowstone, you leave Yellowstone and you’re in something completely different, something that’s ranches or developed or managed for some other purpose.

Visitor Registration

[26: 317 to 323] B, Okay. Did you guys register at the Park Service building when you came in at the beginning of your trip? G, I forgot to [with a smile]. B, Do you have any feelings one way or another about doing that? G, Uh... I’d like to continue to forget to. Yeah. But I guess I would understand if the population pressure just gets to the point where you got to know where people are and what they’re doing, then okay, I’m going to reluctantly go along with that, but I don’t think it’s to that point yet. And that’s part of the experience to me is that you can go out there, you’re responsible for yourself.

Nobody else is other than the pilot who takes you out, knows where you are. That’s your experience.

[27: 325 to 331] B, So you implied two things there. One that the permits or registration would be used to keep track of people in the Park. And the other one that they’d be used for sort of rescue or safety purposes. G, Yeah, I would say...I would think so. I’d hate to see the Park get into the rescue business. Like they do Outside. They spend in Denali....M, In Denali....it’s....G, Where they rescue climbers all the time. They’re supposed to pay and climbers blow them off. To me, it’s like we’ve gotten to be this culture of just safety obsession. Where we take the zest of life out of things because we want to be guaranteed that it’s not going to be too dangerous or too much wilderness or all that. God, don’t let it happen to this Park. Let people go out there and fry if they need to. It’s just to me it’s and there’s... I think there’s a reasonable point where the government agency can be responsible for people and I’m not sure what that is, but I think it really needs to be thought about. And I think it needs to always err on the side of people are responsible for themselves. Because I just think we’ve gotten we’re first of all we’re so afraid of litigation in this culture and all those things that come up. And I don’t know if the government plays into that, but part of the wilderness I mean when I think about the early explorers who went to the North Pole or wherever they were going, they didn’t have any Park Service ready to take care of them.

Disperse Use

[28: 71] G, Well, I think there should be a balance, I mean, like if you want access to the Koyukuk, the pilot should sit down with the Park Service and say “We want....we need to drop people in the Koyukuk, in the north fork of the Koyukuk.” Because to me, what’ll happen then is all the people will go where there’s a strip. If there’s a lake on the John River, then everybody hammers the John River. To me, there’s enough country up here that you can spread people out. If you lose a strip on the north fork, I think there should be you know some kind of a meeting to say, “Okay, where can we put a strip in there?” Not a developed strip, but a two-wheel landing area, and you come to an agreement and that’s the one you use for access in that drainage. You know. I see drainages all over up here that I’d like to come down. And yet I don’t think you can get into them. I know you can’t get into them by airplane. Tough. I think there are certain corridors that should be dedicated kind of to floaters.

Minimize “Management”

[29: 137 to 143] B, Now you were saying earlier that in other wilderness areas the experience is “managed.” So, how are those experiences managed and the one you had here not managed? M, Campsites. Like in Glacier, you know, you go in the backcountry in Glacier and it’s like “please camp where everybody else has camped.” Some of those areas are really pretty hammered. They’re not a desirable place to camp and furthermore, you know if there’s any bears that like to come in and have milk chocolate candy bars, you know they’re going to be coming to those areas. And it just is a whole weird kind of thing. It’s like “stay here.” And I understand it because the impacts are so high, there are so many people, but that was a big deal in this Park. It was like “okay”

you know you camp where, basically where you want to and where your expertise judges is a good place to camp. A good safe place to camp.

[30: 99] G, I don't know, I'm getting more into the philosophical kind of notions of management, which I think is kind of an arrogant idea anyway that we can manage anything

[31: 463 to 465] M, You know, here's a paradigm for the park system. They don't have one for this type of park. But I know that Gary and I share a lot of similar feelings about management. And it just seems like the more we manage, the more complicated....the more we just bury ourselves. So, this could be a paradigm of how little can you manage. G, I just call it nurturing as opposed to managing.

[32: 359 to 363] M, Not really managing... it seems to be like there could be like a threshold number where until that number of visitors is reached, the management or non-management continues as it is since it appears to be working well, although I certainly don't know that for a fact. I mean, I don't know....G, Well you have a small sample space. M, I have a small sample space. I don't know what kind of wildlife studies are going on. I don't know if there's pressure happening. But let's just say it is. Um... a threshold number, and then after that number is reached, then some kind of system... something has to change. Like people have to register and there's only a certain amount of people let in there, but it seems like it's a question of threshold.

[33: 51] G, So, to me, I.....to keep that quality in this Park, I think that should be to me it's a simple management goal, just keep it wild. If that means first permitting the commercial operators that come in here, I think it's the crown jewel of all the Parks in this country. It's better than Wrangell-St Elias because that Park is mostly ice and snow. This Park has got you know it's just got unlimited country. For me, in some ways it's better than the Arctic Refuge National..... you know the Wildlife Refuge.... because it's got the potential for a greater certainly greater level of protection as a wilderness Park. The Arctic Refuge is a better area, in terms of wildlife and aesthetically and all that. I think it's superior to this Park, but.....I've walked all over that place, but I don't think it's got nearly the potential to be protected that this place does. But if this....if the Park Service starts a management plan where they start to think of it as another Park, just another Park, it's gone, in my mind.

Maintain Limited Access

[34: 145] G, Well, the best comparison in Alaska is with Denali, which to me is just tragedy, where you line up at the back country desk and you draw....you wait for a permit to go into a little corridor that you can walk in and you stay in that corridor and if you stray out of it, you're in trouble and you have to attend the bear seminar, you know, and it's just it's the illusion of wildness and it's managed for that illusion and to me it's I mean I don't pretend to judge what they've had to do there because it's like it's THE Park in Alaska where everybody goes. But the key element that's hammered Denali is the road. It's an easy road. And you can get there and everybody's going to go there. Every Winnebago and every, you know, young college student who wants to do a

back packing trip is going to end up at Denali. Whereas if there's ever a road built here, kiss it good-bye. It's just not going to be the same Park. It's going to be another you know huge management scenario. How many people can we run through here in a day with minimum impact? And to me right now you have the perfect situation. Keep it a fly-in Park. Park Service should resist any possibility of ever putting a road in here. And allow this thing to be what it is. And I don't think it's I think it's kind of a moot point. I don't think it's every going to be a big issue, about numbers of people. It's going to be one of those places that's yeah, you'll have to think about where people are going to go and what they're going to do if they come in greater numbers. I don't think they'll come in a lot greater numbers. Particularly if commercial operators they're the key because they can move so many people in volume and if they're really controlled, I don't think you got to worry about the private parties like us. You know, on our own initiative figure out the trip we want to do and call the right people and go there and do it. I don't think they're the problem.

Support for Limits

[35: 121] G, I would say if they ever go to a permit system, that's a quality they should maintain because it's such a rare quality in this world, I mean with 6.5 billion people, is that if you're going to go if they ever have to go to a permit system here, permit it so... like they do the Grand Canyon. You have the illusion of having it to yourself. I don't think it will come to that.

[36: 51] G, So, I think the greatest threat to this Park is the commercial operator who is going to want more and more. There's going to be.....and already I know there's commercial operators that want it easier for their clientele. I think that's.....that will be the ultimate downfall. I think there should be one Park left in the system that's managed strictly as a wilderness place.

Response to Charges of Elitism

[37: 399 to 405] M, Yeah. This is really interesting. And you probably get into this in your studies. But something that comes up for me, which I think is a big question, is and I don't know where the Park Service is on this, but basically by saying "we think this Park should stay as it is and only fly-in access," it's really an elite member of the population..... members it's only a small amount of people who are going to be able to enjoy it. And because of it being public money, I don't know what kind of mandate the Park Service has to make places more accessible. G, See, I don't agree with that. I think it's.....M, No, no, no, it's a question. G, Oh, I see.

[38: 407 to 419] M, I just all I'm saying is there is a philosophical I could see that there is a question here. There's a....I'm not saying that it's right just that everybody should be let in just because everybody has the right. I don't agree with that either. But I'm just saying I could see some push/pull here and I don't know where what does the Park Service.....?B, I can't claim to represent the Park Service here, so...M, Sure, no, but I mean do you know of like B, It's certainly been an issue since day 1 in the early debates about ANILCA. There were conversations about "locking up" this big portion of Alaska for an elite few who would ever be able to afford.....M, Afford to fly in, yeah. B,

Right. G, That's bullshit, though, it's not a matter of afford, it's a matter of priority. Because I have been all over this state and I've never been wealthy person or had a lot of money. And I've made it my priority, this is what I want to do. And anybody in the Lower 48 can choose between payments on their SUV or a trip to Alaska. And access here... You're talking about \$2000-\$3000 to do this. That's within 90% of the population's means. So, it's....I'm struck over and over and over again by people's perception that Alaska is "God! the trip of a lifetime!" I mean I come to Alaska every year now. It's not the trip of a lifetime. It's just you create a priority. This is what I want to do. I'm going to do it. And anybody can do it. Anybody can come to this Park. If you're a ghetto resident, you might not be able to, or maybe you can get a grant for I don't know. But you can do it. And it's like..... the people that show up here and do these trips have made it a priority. And they're not all upper middle class, arm-chair environmentalists. They're people who have made a decision, this is what I want to do. And they've sacrificed maybe something else to do that. To me, it's a simple equation. And that's of course the argument that the detractors of public wilderness always use, you know, set up for an elite few.

[39: 425 to 433] M, But I can see the.....I mean that certainly is something that comes up about Alaska. People talk about that Alaska is accessible to only those who have the money to fly in to places. You know. G, Well, but you know we hear all the time "God, I've always wanted to go to Alaska!" M, Well, that's true. G, There's an airport. It's 370 bucks. M, Yeah, so I sold my new Toyota truck and I drive a really old car now, so that I would have the money to come to Alaska. But I also have the privilege of knowing that's a possibility. And that's a function of my education.

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Dan (D), Linda (L), Brad (BR), Rick (R), Jenny (J), Sandy (S)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 12] D, Well, we did a two-week trip on the Noatak River. We came out of Fairbanks. We put in at a little place called Twelve Mile Slough and had a longer portage than we expected over to the river. We did the trip with two other families and their kids. It was, what did we have? Four, four, five.....13.....six adults and seven kids. And our trip was around 90 miles long. And what we did was travel every other day, so we laid over at every campsite.

[2: 124 to 128] B, So you were out 2 weeks plus 6 days? D, Yeah 22 days. BR, Right, 22 days.

[3: 416 to 422] B, When you started your trip did you begin here in Bettles? Charter a flight from here? D, Fairbanks. B, Fairbanks. D, Yeah.

Reasons for Visiting

[4: 228 to 234] B, How did you decide to come to Gates of the Arctic? D, It was just on our list. L, Talking to people. D, We talked to people about rivers and good trips and that's our passion, river trips. We've done a sequence of rivers and some we've done twice, but a lot we just do one time. The Noatak is one that's been on our list a long time to do. The Nigu, we were interested in doing, but it's kind of short and it's a one-week trip and it's so expensive we didn't want to do it by itself just because we couldn't afford to. But since we were doing the Noatak, we decided just to hop over and do the Nigu River at the same time. So, the bush plane cost would be less. It's pretty darn pricey.

Wildlife

[5: 16 to 22] D, There wasn't a lot of wildlife. We did see one bear. One musk ox. R, Three fox. D, One caribou. A few fox. Eagle. R, No fish.

[6: 206 to 220] BR, We saw a smattering on the Nigu. We saw 3 bears, a wolverine, 2 caribou, a cow moose with 2 calves, we heard the wolves howling one night. R, We saw a wolf on the way out. L, Yeah, we saw a wolf on the way out. And we saw...BR, Yeah, we saw 2 bears. L, We saw a musk ox on the Noatak. Never seen a musk ox in the wild. B, You'd seen wolves before, though? D, We had them right in camp. Right in camp on Beaver Creek. L, But I'd been in Alaska for 9 years before I ever saw one, so it's a neat experience.

[7: 198 to 204] B, You mentioned a little bit earlier about some of the wildlife you saw. How did that compare to what you expected to see? D, We expected to see the caribou and they weren't....L, That we'd see a lot more wildlife. We thought we'd see more bears on the Nigu. We hardly saw anything. D, Yeah, the report was.....that we'd gotten ahead of time.....was the Nigu would be have a lot more wildlife. I think we just missed it by being in mid-July we just missed it.

Mosquitoes

[8: 108 to 116] B, So other than the weather and the portage, what kind of adversities did you face? L, Bugs. D, Bugs. R, Bad ones. L, Of all the adversities, that would be the one I would choose to do without.

[9: 118] D, I mean, they were as thick as we've ever found them. And we've done a lot of rivers in Alaska, but after the first couple of days, either your immune system or something kicks in so that a bug bite you know, the first day you get 40 bug bites and they itch for they bother you for a while. On the last day of the trip, you get a bug bite and you just brush it off and it's gone. There's something about you build up an immunity or something to the venom or whatever it is. By the end, you're just kind of like as long as you're not inhaling them and as long as there's less than a dozen in your spoonful of food, it's really not a problem.

Portaging

[10: 72 to 74] D, It's a half mile. I think the pilots....the air services that fly you in don't really walk these portages, so when you call them up in January and say we'd like to do

a trip on such and such a river, can you recommend a segment of river to us, they say "Oh, yeah, there's a put in here and a take out there." And you picture in your mind something that's different than what you actually find, which is a long slog through the bog. L, Had I known where the portages were, we'd have packed differently.

Hiking

[11: 92 to 94] L, The hiking was good. D, Good hiking.

[12: 148 to 170] L, Better hiking than rivers usually have. B, How was it better? L, More accessible. D, What's that? L, You're not going through trees and a bunch of alders, you know, you just start out on the tundra and you just head up a mountain. Don't you think the hiking was more accessible than other rivers we've done? D, Yeah. Easy walking. L, You're not going through any trees. D, Yeah. J, You didn't have to bushwhack. D, You didn't have to bushwhack. You know, some of those southern rivers they have Devil's club and L, Alders. D....big, thick alders... Free and open.

Contrast to Other Trips

[13: 130 to 132] B, You said you've done a lot of other trips on Alaskan rivers, how did this one compare to those other trips? D, Uh...easier as far as the water the technical aspects of the water goes.

[14: 134] L, It wouldn't be my personal favorite just because of the bug situation. I mean you can deal with it, but I mean other rivers are more enjoyable due to better fishing or scenery or faster water. There was a lot of dragging on these rivers and the portages were long, but I mean the scenery was....

[15: 136] D, We purposely chose the upper sections of these rivers just to get away from any motor boat traffic. That's not a problem on the Nigu, but the lower aspects of rivers are going to have boat traffic, so we always try to go in as high as we can, so.....if it's low water, it's our fault for choosing to go in that high.

[16: 138 to 146] B, Anything else that made this trip different than those others? R, The length. D, What? R, The length, it was a lot shorter than the Copper River or the Tatshenshini. D, The lengths? Yeah, these were shorter trips. We've done long trips. Our longest trip was 225 miles on the Chitina-Copper. The Tatshenshini-Alsek was 170. So, it was shorter.

[17: 172 to 174] B, When you say this trip was shorter, we're talking distance. How about in terms of the time? D, Um....we haven't done three weeks at a stretch before. We've done most of our trips are 2 weeks

Personal Growth

[18: 80 to 86] B, So what was the best part of the trip? L, Family time. D, Yeah, just the interaction with the people in our group. L, Time away from the rest of the world.

[19: 98 to 106] D, Yeah. Being exposed was nice. B, What do you mean by "exposed?" D, To weather, it's the temperature, the wind, the rain, the dust storms, the L, Adversity. D, ...hot sun.

[20: 178 to 182] D, I think it's good with the kids to be out that long. They get more and more distant and remote from the things that they take for granted, like electricity and a roof and a bed and friends and a phone and computer...L, The virtue of these trips for us is teaching ourselves and kids to deal with adversity and how to take care of themselves in the wild. How to start a fire, how to put up a tent and you know in the wind and rain and stay dry and things like that. D, To get up on a morning when it's rainy and buggy and see the kids just shrug it off is that doesn't happen the first day. That happens on the 15th or 16th or 17th day.

[21: 184] L, We're building attitude and character. They do the work and they don't complain.

Connection to Past Users

[22: 280] D, And it's kind of a border between, you know, historically where the Interior natives went up these rivers kind of into the Gates and then the Eskimo or coastal natives came up into the Gates into the Haida land. It's kind of as far as they both went hunting caribou. That's kind of neat to think about the history up there. How those people existed. My family mentioned the flies. How did those people deal with that? All the gear we had, what did they carry? The food we had. What did they eat? We were talking the other day about if we had....if we didn't have bug dope. If you didn't have a tent with a good screen. On the Noatak trip, one of the tent's zippers broke, the kids' tent. There was nothing to do, they spent a couple of nights....they duct taped the door shut and it was still miserable and horrible. They all ended up in one tent with their parents. It was just because of a broken zipper. They were thinking about these native women out there... or going out and going to the bathroom. How fast can you do it? So you don't get your bottom bit. We were talking just last night, can you imagine having a baby out there? How exposed you are and how bug bitten you'd get. You and the baby. It must have been just incredible. So, it's fun to be there and think that we're here in the year 2001, but somebody was here about 2000 years ago.

Leave-No-Trace Practices

[23: 482 to 484] D, ... We, on a lot of our trips, will teach.....if it's a family that hasn't camped before, or camped up here in a sensitive area like this, we should teach them to dig a cat hole to go to the bathroom. We're going to haul out all our trash. And we're going to burn the cans and smash them and bring them out. And if you go tinkle in the bushes, bring your paper back and we'll burn it. The fire, use a fire pan, or we'll pick out every little bit of tin foil after the fire's done and we'll toss the ashes in the river or bury it and cover up the site. Just try to leave it so that after the next heavy rain, it would be pretty difficult for someone to tell that we'd been there. We do use rocks to anchor the tent. When we're done, we kind of toss the rocks around in a random way, so you can't really see the ring. BR, And we did that to any rings that we found that were left, that were recent rings.

[24: 486] D, Again, after the fire, usually on the gravel bar, if we did happen to have a fire up where there's vegetation or moss at the take out, we dug this big.....buried it, just flipped over this big mass of carpet tundra down to the gravel, did our fire there and then when we were done, shovel the stuff up and got rid of that, and then just flopped it back, you couldn't even tell. So, you can't, like doing a portage, you can't have 13 people walking back and forth six trips across tussocks and not leave some impact. It's pretty minimal.

Other People

Prefer seeing/hearing few others

[25: 24 to 38] D, It was good. Just way out. It seemed like we were way out there. We did see 2 or 3 other parties. One was European and the other 2 I guess were American. L, In kayaks. D, They were all going light. We went pretty heavy. We had big rafts. B, Did you see them on the river, or in camp? D, No. L, On the river, they passed us. D, We had one lunch stop where they stopped when we were eating lunch. Three kids from Oregon. L, Other times we were camped and they floated by.

[26: 670] D, For us, on the Nigu, we saw nobody except for flying out that was crossing the pass in the headwaters of the Alatna. There was a herd of people in there. I was very thankful that we chose the Nigu, but at the same time, just seeing that group just kind of evaporated the whole experience of flying over. You had this big backpacking group. You had a river crew. I was like "Oh, man, back to reality already."

[27: 402] L, Yeah. A desirable place for me is where you can go up to sort of a secluded place on a gravel bar where you can stand there in the buff and take a bath and you don't think anybody is going to float past you. I mean, that to me is a desirable place to be.

[28: 40 to 46] B, How did you feel about seeing those other folks out there? D, Fine. Fine. L, Always feel like it's always nice not to see people, but they were certainly pleasant. D, But we went to the Smoky Mountains one time, so we know what it's like to see crowds and lines and this was great, no problem. I didn't mind seeing them.

[29: 404] D, I don't mind other people being on the river. I just don't want to have people land and expect to share your camp site or hear music at night from some other camp site or find their litter.

[30: 408] D, People just being loud. I don't mind people going by chit chatting, every other day or so, that's fine.

Evidence of others

[31: 48 to 54] L, And everywhere we stopped, it was very well taken care of. You felt like you were the first ones there. Rarely did we ever see the sign of another camp site. D, Did we see any fire rings or....I think we might have seen a tent ring....L, But not.....rare, maybe two. D, We didn't see any litter or any impact at all.

[32: 376] BR, It's nice, like [Linda] said, being able to step on the next gravel bar and not see human, immediate footprints, you might find an old fire ring, but the tracks that are there are the animals in the landscape, so that's nice. That really is.

[33: 346 to 350] BR, I did pick up an RC Cola can in the river. L, That's right. BR, So, there's other people before us.

[34: 356] L, You step on a gravel bar, and you see footprints of wolves and moose and bear, but you don't see human footprints. I like that.

[35: 358 to 364] R, We found a few arrow points. D, Chips. R, Chips, yeah. D, That's litter. It's just very old litter.

[36: 368] BR, An old cache and an old tent ring. I found a 30-caliber shell that had been out there a long time. You can tell man's touched it for many thousands of years.

Story behind litter is important

[37: 370] D, But you know when you pick up a old corroded 30-cal shell on the Nigu and think "Well, how'd this get here?" There's a better story that goes with that than finding a Pampers thrown up on the bank of the Gulkana. We floated the, where'd we find that rifle? Keyes Rock? or the Klukluk? Was it Keyes or [inaudible]? We found an old rusted rifle in a high water slough. It was a dry slough, but it had water in it in the winter time. Ice. And we figured it bounced off the back of a snowmachine probably. Still loaded. The scope was full of water. They were..... the natives out of Bethel probably or Aniak could have been up there. Probably a fun story too.

[38: 374 to 378] B, So, it's almost like there's some kind of litter or trash that's okay and there's some kinds that aren't? D, Yeah. L, Yeah, things that have a story like a shell or something like that, but RC Cola cans and old tents washed up on the shore and toilet paper left, those things are not okay.

[39: 386 to 392] L, Things of human negligence, those things are not okay. J, We found a camera case on the Noatak. D, Yeah. That's right. BR, About the time you think you're the first one there, you look down and find something like that, so.....just kind of evaporates it pretty quick.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Self-limiting

[40: 266 to 268] B, How would you describe Gates of the Arctic or the Noatak to somebody thinking about visiting? D, Well, if they had no idea what it was about, we'd just tell them it's a very remote river that's north of the timberline. It flows northwest out of Gates of the Arctic, which is a big national park that's inaccessible except by air.

[41: 286 to 288] B, So, when you said, right after I asked that question, you said it's very remote. What makes it remote? D, Accessibility. The difficulty in accessing that spot. You need to either hike or boat a heck of a long ways. You got to write the bush

pilots a big check to get there. And that really weeds out who can go there. It's not a kid from Cincinnati just isn't going to end up there, even if he wanted to, if he wanted to unless he had some kind of resource to get that far.

[42: 278] L, It's Alaska in its rawest beauty. It's not for the faint-hearted, like some of my family talked about coming up here. And the more I thought about it, the elements, I thought it wouldn't be a good trip for them. It wouldn't have been. The boats would have overwhelmed every aspect of the beauty that they would have seen. So, it's not for everybody.

Wildness/Wilderness

[43: 648 to 650] B, That's the first time that term has come up, "wildness." What's wildness? BR, Well, it's I guess it's an area, in my mind, the ideal wildness would be an area that was unmapped, but.....since it isn't, it's an area that unfettered with roads and trails and where the mark of man is slim to none.

[44: 652 to 654] B, So is that any different than a wilderness? Are wildness and wilderness more or less synonymous? BR, Um....it doesn't have to be a designated wilderness area to have wildness. That doesn't have to equate. It's an area where you can get on a peak and look out upon it like the Nigu is an ideal....you have a 360 degree radius and see for miles. And it's you really get a feel for, me personally, I could get a feel for what it....it reminded me of eastern Idaho, that Birch Creek Lemhi country where you're looking out at massive expanses, like in the spring when it's greened up, the sage brush country. Only there, unfortunately, it's littered with roads or power lines. Slim to none compared to a lot of the United States, but here you can look out and not have that detractor from the view. You had a real sense of what the landscape looked like in the West before it was in the last 100 years...

[45: 300 to 314] B, So you just referred to the Gulkana area as wilderness. Is this also wilderness here in Gates? D, Is the Gates a wilderness area? B, Yeah, would you call it a wilderness? D, Yeah. B, How does it differ from the Gulkana? D, I wouldn't call the Gulkana a wilderness area. B, Oh, you wouldn't. D, No, it's on the road system. So it's got... gas stations and motorboat traffic and you can drive there in a day. You can go there, be on the river and fish and be back in Fairbanks in 1 day. You don't even have to spend the night down there. So, that's not wilderness, in my mind.

[see also excerpts 75-77]

Opportunities for discovery

[46: 272 to 276] D, ...Um....and describe the Gates as being an area that was one of the last places explored in the U.S. Um.... what's his name went in there. Uh....what was his name? B, Bob Marshall? D, Yeah, Bob Marshall went in and did a whole lot exploring up the Alutna and John and several other rivers and named a lot of the peaks and climbed a lot of the peaks. He went in by mule and boat and dog team.

[47: 394] D, Well, on the drainages we know we're not the first ones on the rivers. But you can certainly look out there on peaks that have never been climbed. And the contours are on the topo map, but you look at a topo map from Maine and this thing's been walked over and checked and field checked and there's points out there when U.S.G.S. made the map they walked all over the area, put in bench marks and these maps say all the disclaimers you read on the bottom of the map, all those things. "Unconfirmed." "No field tests have been made."

[48: 316 to 320] BR, I guess I have a different take. It is, administratively, a wilderness area, but D, The Gulkana? BR, No, I'm talking about just where we were at, on the Nigu or the Noatak or any of those areas. As long as you can pick up a 1:63,360 topo map that shows you the other side of the hill, the unknown element, in my mind, there's no true wilderness. It's not a name on a mountain, it's just the fact that you can pick up any map of any area now and you can see what's there. You don't have to set foot there. You know what's there. In my mind, the true wilderness.....Maybe under the ocean.

[49:340 to 342] B, So, you wouldn't call Gates of the Arctic a wilderness? BR, It is a roadless area. It is an area that's set aside to maintain certain values, but in my mind, because I can pick up that map and see on the other side of the hill, it's not an unknown....it's not a wilderness in my mind.

MANAGEMENT

Minimal Interaction with NPS

[50: 424 to 430] B, So did you visit the Park Service office there in Fairbanks or have any contact with the Park there in town? D, None. No. B, And how about when you were out in the field, did you notice anything about the Park Service management? D, No,

Backcountry Orientation

[51: 456 to 464] D, I think one of our party was contacted by somebody from the Park before we went on the Noatak. L, They like to give everybody in a group or somebody in the group the message about how to take care of the environment. S, We did that here with Fish and Wildlife. [Brad] works at Fish and Wildlife. So they went into the office and did the whole spiel. D, I see. S, They did a lot with [Rick], you know, just take... you know.....where to go to the bathroom, where to build a fire, what to do after the fire, you know classic rules, ethics sorts of things.

[52: 466 to 468] B, How do you feel about that presence, or going over there to get that spiel? Is that a good thing? L, For most people, it's probably maybe necessary. I mean even people in our group that would walk down the gravel bar and..... the girls just went through paper products like crazy, and I'd find paper towels where they'd gone to the bathroom. I didn't say to their folks.....you just don't want that to happen, so maybe everybody needs to hear that spiel even though there normally, you know, cognizant of that....

[53: 480] L, But they can ask you a few questions and if you know the information, I don't think you have to sit there and go through an hour-long spiel, but the message to get across that we are trying to protect this environment and you have a part in doing that, and.....

Group Size

[54: 498 to 506] B, So the Park requests that people don't travel in groups larger than 10. You guys had 13. What do you think about that? D, We didn't know there was a limit. B, And it's not a formal limit. D, Oh. L, Well, we've been down the Tatshenshini before and the limit's 15. I think that's reasonable. I don't have any problem with 15.

[55: 508] D, We feel that we're on our own recognizance and we've got kids, and we're teaching them and we think that we're low impact, we're not a party crowd, we're not big consumers. And we feel as long as we can leave it looking like it was when we got there. The party size is a good recommendation, I guess, but we were comfortable with 13. We've done a river trip with 7-month-old. Do they count as a person? I don't know.

[56: 482 to 484] D, I don't think it's possible.....you know, we were a party of 13, I don't think it's possible for a party of 13 to have "zero" impact. But they certainly can have minimal impact.

[see also excerpt 24]

Bear Barrels

[57: 510 to 524] B, Did you have bear proof containers of some kind with you? L, Only once have we ever done that. D, When was that? L, The Stanley River. D, Yeah. L, Where there's umteen bears, but....R, Averaged a bear an hour the first four hours. L, But no, that's the only time we ever did.

[58: 526 to 536] B, What if it was a requirement that you carry bear proof food containers. L, I'd be against that. B, Why is that? D, Because they cost 70 bucks for one thing. The little ones 70 dollars, it's a ripoff. J, But we didn't even see any bears. L, Because it hasn't been an issue for us.

[59: 538 to 540] BR, With these rafting parties, especially on isolated rivers like the Nigu or the Noatak, I don't know, the Nigu anyway would our camps are transitory. And where I have seen, anyway, you start having problems with large animals, bears, is...comes in a place that's more of a resident camp or a prolonged camp where the bears start identifying that as a food source with people...L, [If you] keep your food contained, [and] you're careful about how you deal with your food, then I think things, codes and regulations, make it really difficult for other people that don't really serve a good purpose in this environment.

[60: 544 to 550] D, Yeah, I think it's about reality. People contemplating those regulations need a reality check. This is a big hunting state, we hunt. Not in the Park of course but we're carrying meat and here's big hunks of red meat that we're traveling

with and camping with every night. The incidence of bears coming and taking that is.....small. L, It'd be an intrusion unless it's true in that particular area it is a problem.

[61: 556] D, You need to it's I don't know. It may become necessary to make some kind of regulation as a fix that's not the best fix because you can't educate everybody. If you educate everybody to a few of the basics you'd never need bear proof containers...

[62: 564] D, But that's something that you can't regulate. You can't regulate "bring reasonable food and act reasonably." All you can do is regulate so you got to have these containers. That's not going to work, people are still going to have food out of the containers and make a mess.

Justification for bear barrels and group size

[63: 552 to 554] B, So is it fair to say that regulations like the group size limit or potentially having to carry bear proof food containers are okay provided there's a good reason? L, If it's been shown to be an absolute problem, like say Denali National Park where you've got huge numbers of people going through in Teklanika, you know all these people are camped, yeah. Then you need to share containers or something, but And party size, just because of the impact I think no more than 15 is reasonable but

Limits on Visitor Use

Basis for permits

[64: 566 to 568] B, Would it ever be appropriate to limit the number of people that could access the Park? D, I think it would if you were starting to get, blight, start to get camp site blight

[65: 584 to 586]D, I think there's only one permit river in Alaska and that's the Tatshenshini-Alsek system. We've done that a couple of times. That's worked out but it's kind of a pain to be on the waiting list and trying to get your take out date and that also is regulated in that they require some means of bringing out your human waste, some kind of portable toilet to bring out, which is a pain, but that's fine. L, That's necessary because of the higher use. And the accessibility of that river.

[66: 656 to 658] B, So just to go back and restate your answer to that last question; you said permits would be appropriate if there was camper blight. D, The area is going to be damaged. You need to put it there.

Alternatives to permits—type of visitor matters

[67: 676] L, How many times it has been proven, make it accessible and then here comes the blight. Because when people grow lazy and can get there without much effort, also they bring along with them the attitudes that don't preserve that area.

[68: 570 to 578] L, The best way to regulate is to make sure you don't have any roads to it because normally the people who want to go there are going to spend the money or go

to the extreme....D, Then only the rich people can go there. That's not right for public land. L, Um.... I don't know about that. Those kids that came up from Arizona, they weren't rich....L, You make it hard for people to get there. Only the people who really want to go and usually are educated to that environment are going to go there.

[see also excerpt 70]

Concerns related to Equity

[69: 290 to 296] B, How do you feel about that fact, that it's a very limited opportunity, as you said, not everybody can get there. L, I like it. B, You like it. L, Yeah, I mean the world's overpopulated. I like being able to go somewhere where there's nobody else.

[70: 298] D, Well I mean the point I guess that you're getting at is that here's federal land that the government maintains and public funds run this place and yet it's very limited on who can go there, for economic reasons or whatever. Is that fair or not? I don't know. I guess on one hand you can say you wish everybody could go see it, but on the other hand, you're kind of glad they don't because it would get trashed. We've been to other national parks that....we call it camper blight. We've seen bad camper blight in places. There's a river in southern southcentral Alaska, the Gulkana River, which is bad camper blight. We won't go there. The reason it has bad blight is because it has a road....it has road access at multiple points. So everybody who wants to can go there pretty cheaply. So, whether it's it's probably a combination of people just overused but also people go there that don't care or don't know how to take care of the wilderness. So it's trashed. The camp sites are [inaudible]. We're glad to see everybody go there. That means they aren't coming up here. But that's a selfish way of looking at it.

[71: 576 to 580] D, Actually we did run into these kids, there were three kids on the Noatak....D, These were kids in their early 20s, two guys and a girl. They were there in two inflatable kayaks. And they were floating the Noatak, maybe you ran into them. We got to talk to them. They were from Oregon. I think they're going back through Kotzebue. They probably won't be back here. But we were talking to them about the river and the expense and access, some of the kind of things you were talking about. They said "Yeah, you know those bush plane flights are really expensive." I said "Yeah." They said "In fact, we bought these inflatable kayaks and we couldn't afford our air taxi. They are actually giving one of their inflatable kayaks to the Jespersens [Brooks Range Air] in exchange for one of their flights. It's about the same cost. So they have to give one of their boats back just to pay for the ride in. That will limit access.

[72: 582] R, But if there's a will, there's a way. If you want to do it bad enough, save your money or do like the kids do and barter their way in. If you want it bad enough, you can do it.

[73: 672] L, I think keeping things inaccessible. You talk about equality and only the rich people can afford it and that kind of thing, but I think everything....you don't have to have wheelchair accessibility to the top of Mt. McKinley or in Mt. Everest. I think

inaccessibility is going to preserve that area. And people are still going to get to it. I mean all the people who are flying in the Lower 48 are choosing to spend their money going to Las Vegas or having three T.V.s in their home or whatever. They can get there if they want to get there. But to keep it like it should be, keep it inaccessible.

[74: 674] D, Yeah, we don't own a second home and we don't have our own airplane. We don't have a motor boat. We don't have any of that. We do take our river trips.

[see also excerpt 41]

Rules and Regulations

Impacts on wildness

[75: 664] D, It seems like the more it's regulated, the less wild it is even though nothing else gets changed. If you look on the map, I think it's the Nowitna, the upper Nowitna River, tributary to the Yukon, just off the Tanana, has a section on the map that says "wild and scenic river." There's another drainage to the west of that, just a river with a name on it, and you look at those two and say "Oh, there's a national wild and scenic river" and you look at the other one and you say "Boy, I bet that's even wilder" because it's not designated. Just the fact that they designated means someone has embraced it and decided to regulate it or at least identify it as needing oversight of some sort. And that takes some of the wildness out of it.

[76: 610 to 620] D, [Brad] has done a lot of trips on the Salmon River and drainage and that sounds very highly regulated compared to anything up here. BR, Parts of it. D, Or we have a lot of friends do the Grand Canyon and it's very highly regulated there. L, Five year waiting list. D, It obviously has to be, more than...BR, Wish it was only five...

[77: 642 to 646] BR, And that does take away from the wilderness experience in my mind. I mean it's L, It does. BR, If it's very regulated. Just really takes away from that free, that wildness I guess.

Impacts on freedom/spontaneity

[78: 590 to 592] B, So is it primarily that hassle of getting a hold of a permit that is the drawback to having that kind of system? D, I think the drawback in my mind....I don't mind doing the permit and doing the work.....the drawback to us is that you're not perfectly free to do what you want. That's just something that maybe it has to do with being Alaskan or why people move to Alaska or why we're out here in the first place. We're just trying to get away from all that. Have to call up and ask permission. Have a list of rules to go by.

[79: 594 to 602] BR, On the Nigu float, we didn't even know our take out point until the pilot dropped us off and we just kind of said "Well, let's go here." D, Yeah, we just laid down on the gravel there...BR, We didn't know until the very last second... B, And you feel that's a positive thing? D, Sure.

[80: 604] BR, Like [Dan] said, you can temper your trip around your needs as opposed to some mandated administrative need of one launch a day and no more than one layover or whatever. It does make it you kind of if you have to lay up a day because of whatever reason or the weather or whatever, you kind of accommodate all the variables that you're going to run into on a trip.

Displacement

[81: 624 to 640] L, Well, people are going to push the issue and it's going to change, but we'll just keep searching for the most remote rivers to maintain our freedom as long as we can. B, So do you feel like if this became a permitted system, you'd go somewhere else? L, Yeah. B, For that reason? D, Not because it was permitted. If it's permitted, it means it is getting high impact or L, Higher use. D, ...higher use. L, More people. D, Therefore, we'll go somewhere else.

[82: 662] BR, And if it comes to that point, that there will be some drainages that somebody will have to hike five miles across a pass to get into and if there's a will, there's a way. Hopefully not in my lifetime will that change. Hopefully, for my lifetime, my active lifetime, there will be places where I can go.

721BTT17

Sven (S) and Tom (T)
Interviewer (b)

PLANNING THE TRIP

Other Experiences in Alaska

[1: 299 to 309] B, How long have you been visiting Alaska? S, I think this is my 13th time. B, 13th? S, Yeah, came up first in '87 with 30 boy scouts for 30 days. Then I came back in '91 with 30 boy scouts for 30 days. Then I came back in '93 with my wife. We were up here like 6 weeks. Then I got involved with the summer arts festival down in Fairbanks. I don't know if you ever heard of that or not. B, Yup. S, And so they invite me back every year for that. So I come up every year for that.

[2: 309 to 313] S, This year....Tom has never been to Alaska. He's been everywhere else, but never been to Alaska. So I says "well, take some time off and we'll go camping before the festival." So what did you do before you met me? T, I went down to Kenai Fjords and then to Denali and then to Fairbanks and then we came up here. S, Staying with some friends of mine in Fairbanks.

Reasons for Choosing Trip

[3: 315 to 317] B, Had you visited the Brooks Range or Gates of the Arctic before? S, Yes, I was up here that's why we came up this time. I was up here last year with a friend of mine down in Fairbanks, Winston Furbank, who flew me into Walker Lake. I just loved it. I told Tom about it. So I said let's try something up there.

[4: 317] T, Most of the trips were fly in, raft, fly out. But they were all pretty expensive. Then what's her name, Susan, said well we could do the north fork of the Koyukuk. She

had it on the web site, so I looked at it. I says "Well, that's great, we fly in, float out, we don't have any deadline for airplanes or anything." It didn't work out that way.

Difficulty Finding Information

[5: 317] T, So I finally got hold of these folks here. I had a hard time finding the outfitters. They're not well-known up here, I tell ya. Even the Fairbanks people. I said "give me some names up at the airport" and nobody could give me any names. So I finally got on the Internet through the Park Service and got numbers from them. I got that from the from the National Forest up at the Boundary Waters. I had the thing for the Boundary Waters and it says all the camping and I worked my way to get into here, this web site. I talked to a couple of gals here and they faxed me a list of the outfitters and I started talking to some of them.

THE ACCIDENT

Swamping the Canoe

[6: 16] T, Yeah, well we got flown in to just right above the Gates of the Arctic on the north fork of the Koyukuk and we put in and went about a mile down stream. Basically, we took a channel we thought was a good channel to go down, but it had a corner on it and we went around it was a swift channel.....we went around the corner and right around the corner was a sweeper, basically that extended all the way across the river. So we ran into that, got sideways to that, and we got pulled under actually and our....we both got thrown out of the canoe. And the canoe got stuck underneath the sweeper.

Factors Involved in the Accident

River conditions

[7: 253 to 257] S, But that river is treacherous. There were a lot of sweepers there. Boy. And the pilot when he took us in, said "Well, I'm not dropping any more people off up here, it's too dangerous." And he advised us, he says "don't camp here tonight." T, Yeah, there was a bunch of sweepers that go all the way across the river. S, Yeah, and he said "go down today, get below the Gates today and the rest of the river is nice and calm and quiet." But we didn't get very far -- 1.1 miles. By GPS.

Equipment

[8: 289] S, [We are] Originally from Minnesota. Tom did Tom and I did a lot of canoeing when we were when he was.....when I was younger and he was real young. But we did Filmont Scout Ranch up there a couple of times. Well, I did it 8 times, He did it once. We did some 10-11 day trips in the Boundary Waters, didn't we? That one was 11. So, we've done some canoeing. Mostly lake. And mostly with a hard shell canoe. That was the other thing. I had no feel on this thing. It just floats around. You got hardly any control at all. Especially in the current. So I should have probably gotten checked out in that canoe better than we were before. There's no keel.

[9: 36] T, Yeah, I got a hold of that but I couldn't because I was wearing these waders, which is a bad idea actually. Between the waders and this rain coat, I had so much drag on me that I couldn't pull myself anywhere. So eventually I just let go.

[10: 38] S, Yeah, I got in front of I didn't have waders on. I had just below the knee boots on, rubber boots, they seemed to work alright. They didn't hold me down.

[11: 277] S, I guess I would say to anybody that does those ...that type of trip, make sure you got your gear securely tied with separate ropes. Don't use the string method that I do and [Tom] has done. A lot of lake canoeing in northern Minnesota and Quetico Park in Ontario. And of course, that's lake canoeing, quite different from this. But there you just run a stringer through all of the stuff and let it go at that. But if you cut one rope, then it all goes. But you don't dare do that like [Tom] says, he got his foot caught in one of the ropes because it went from a pack behind him alongside him to a pack in front. And that shouldn't be done. You should not do that. You should use smaller ropes and have them so you can't get caught if you turn over. Very definitely.

[12: 117] S, So, as he grabbed it, it came loose. Otherwise, we'd have lost that darn thing. So actually all we lost was our two hats, three paddles, and a water bottle. So when we got all the stuff in, then we found out that some of our bags.....not only we had big waterproof outside bags, but like in the food barrel, which did not hold water, some of the food in there got wet. Because some of those bags didn't hold. Because the stuff was under water. What did we figure, 3 or 4 hours?

Getting Help

Ruined radio

[13: 121] S, Yeah. So some of that stuff leaked. And some of our clothes got wet. So we started drying things out and we saw a couple of airplanes fly over. We had an air-to-ground radio, which was not waterproof sufficiently enough. It got wet and didn't work. We had a gun. We didn't even try that because there was no point. It was okay, I mean. So we set up camp and started drying things out.

[14: 247 to 253] B, Did you see any other people other than that first party that...?S, Just those two parties, yeah. Just...T, Yeah, and a bunch of airplanes. S, A bunch of airplanes, yeah. If I had the radio.....had been working it would have been easy. We could have just radioed in for paddles and had them dropped the same day or the next morning and we would have been okay. But the radio, unfortunately, I didn't waterproof it enough. So I goofed that up.

Other People

[15: 125] S, We were hoping to get out sooner. We had enough food. There was no problem there. But we were hoping that we could get out sooner. Then we went hiked back up the river we just came down, to the drop off point. And we got up there and [Tom] says "Look! a tent!" Man, I was happy.

[16: 141 to 143] S, But anyway, they were dropped off at that lake and they were camped right where we had our drop off. And they were continuing on down. They were going to hike down below the Gates, there's another drop off point down there. On a sand bar, which is where we should have been. Because it's a quieter river down there. And so we told them our predicament, got their names, they got our names, told them

that they were getting picked getting re-supplied on Thursday. This was Tuesday we saw them. They were getting re-supplied on Thursday. So we gave them all the information and told them to get a hold of Sourdough and tell them to have, what was his name [Tom]? Derek? T. Dirk.

[17: 259 to 261] B, Given everything that happened, what was the best part of the trip? S, I don't know, the camping afterwards, I guess. I certainly didn't enjoy getting....going under the tree and under the canoe. That was no fun. I guess the best part was seeing those guys in the meadow or at the landing strip. Because then we knew we had a way out. For sure, and didn't have to wait 8 days.

Uncertainty/Worry

[18: 125] S, And then that was that night. The next day, we decided.... we knew.... the pilot had told us he had to pick up in 8 days on that same sand bar that he dropped us off, so we knew we could get out in 8 days for sure. But we were hoping that we wouldn't miss our airplane, or his airplane.

[19: 213 to 221] S, Ernie? Yeah, okay. Anyway, then they saw that there was a landing strip where we were. Evidently the pilot didn't know that. And so then they flew over and said "no, stay where you are, we'll send an airplane to pick you up later on." That was Thursday. Well, they didn't come back. Then ranger Bill, the new ranger here, came up in his little scout, flew around, and asked if we were the Swanson-Olson party and we signaled "yes" and then he dropped us a note that the plane that was going to pick us up was in maintenance and wouldn't be out until late Friday or early Saturday. And was that okay with us? And of course, it didn't make any difference to us. So then what happened [Tom]? T, Then we... after that we went fishing. S, Yeah. Well, then we knew we could leave the immediate area. So we went fishing. Tom caught his first grayling. I caught a little one. We walked around, fought the mosquitoes. T, Yup. S, Enjoyed the view.

[20: 381 to 385] S, But once we started getting these little steps accomplished, and we got our gear portaged back up to the landing strip, then we felt pretty good about that because we knew there was an airplane coming in eventually. And we'd get out of there, so then the pressure kind of dropped. T, Yeah. S, Then we just sat back and enjoyed the scenery and fought the mosquitoes!

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Remote

[21: 325 to 329] S, Yeah. It's a beautiful area. There's no doubt about that. And Resurrection Pass was nice, but again, there you see other people there. The same with the Girdwood to Eagle trail, was that....Crow? something Pass? and Glacier? B, Crow Pass. S, Crow Pass? Yeah. That one fooled me there. I thought I'd done my homework. I got all the topo maps, looked at the elevations, 3800 feet, no problem. Some snow. When we got up on top of the glacier, the wind was like 40 miles an hour and the temperature was about 40 and we were cold. We had to walk a mile across the glacier then we got down to the other side we had to ford the Eagle River. And we had....there

was 12 of us. And that current was just unbelievable. It was only maybe, it was below you knee, so it wasn't too deep. But it was 100 yards wide there. And that was I roped everybody together. We got across. We were cold! And then it was only supposed to be like what was it 28 miles or something like that? So we started at noon one day down there and we camped. Right when we got into camp, somebody spotted a bear. So we had to go on a couple of more miles and then we were supposed to come out the next afternoon about 3 or 4 o'clock and we had a meet set up at the trail head with some people. And there was no way we were going to make that, so I sent two runners ahead and they called the people and said we wouldn't be in 'til 8-or 9. Then they came down at 8 or 9 and met us. But that's that was more populated. This was more remote. It's beautiful up here.

[22: 363 to 369] B, So, did the air traffic along the north fork affect the feeling of remoteness that you had? T, Uh.... a little bit. Although when we were trying to signal them, it wasn't helping us. I mean there wasn't....S, It felt real remote then. T, It felt more lonely than I guess not getting ...not having any contact at all.

[23: 319 to 321] B, How did the place that you visited on this trip compare to other places that you've been in the past? S, Well, they're all different, really. Um....the rafting part down in Valdez was a lot harder. I mean there was lot rougher water. But safer because you got a big raft and no sweepers. But it wasn't as remote, you know, you got the highway going right alongside it. So, there wasn't the wilderness experience. I like the wilderness experience.

Wilderness

[24: 331 to 343] B, So, earlier you mentioned wilderness experience. And you've said that it was remote... S, Yup. B, ...And that there weren't very many people. What else makes a wilderness experience? S, I think....what do you think [Tom]? Scenery? T, Yeah, I mean the scenery is scenery. I went to Denali and I was basically asked the same question by a ranger there in our camp fire show, what does a wilderness experience to you? She read a bunch of poetry like that and I was pretty [inaudible]. At Denali I really, I mean I went there to look at animals and look at the mountains, but I didn't see too much wilderness there. On a bus driving on a road. S, Yeah. T, That's not very wilderness-like.

Wolves and Bears

[25: 223 to 225] T, Looked at the really big bear tracks. S, Oh, Geez, there was some big ones there. Bigger than the palm of my hand. I mean... We took some extension, yeah. We didn't see any bear. Didn't see any moose. We saw a huge arctic hare. The thing looked like it was a foot and a half high. I couldn't believe it. I've never seen a rabbit that big. Porcupine we saw. Marmot.

[26: 229] S, Wolves, yeah. We didn't see the wolves. We heard them. We thought we heard a moose bellowing earlier in the day on this west slope from where we were. Then that night we heard some wolves in that same exact area. Yipping and having a good time.

[27: 235 to 245] T, Yeah, no that evening we saw a bunch of ravens circling over our heads. S, Where we thought we'd heard the moose call. So we figured out...or Tom figured out later on that the moose probably had a calf and the wolves got the calf maybe. T, That would be my guess. S, Then the ravens were probably going in for the cleanup. But we heard those wolves 4 or 5 times, didn't we? T, Yeah. Pretty regularly. S, Yeah, yipping and hollering. That really was pretty. That was great.

[28: 403 to 421] T, But we didn't see any bears. But we did see ... we certainly heard the wolves. And they were not that far away. S, I would guess they were within a couple of blocks on the other side of the river. Of course wolves are not a big problem. I don't think there's ever been a T, No, that's not true actually. S, Well, ...T, In Denali, they closed the campground because of a wolf den nearby. And the wolf started coming into camp and they had to close the campground. S, It's like in Minnesota, they've never had a wolf kill. A wolf has never killed anybody yet. Neither has a bear, as far as that goes. There have been a few injuries. T, Not so much that they're killing. It's that the wolves start figuring out....S, Right. T, And they're smarter than bears. S, Oh yeah.

[29: 345] S, But I like to be out in a place where you can hear the wolves. That meant a lot to me. Hearing the wolves yipping.

MANAGEMENT

Informative

[30: 387 to 389] B, So continuing on that line, what did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? S, Well, they basically told us everything we needed to know on the way up. They could have...they told us to watch the sweepers. So did the pilot. Um.... I guess if I were to brief somebody going in there, I'd say "tie your stuff separately, keep ropes away from your feet, so you don't get tangled and make sure you got dry....that your gear is waterproof." That's a big thing. Because some of ours leaked.

Bear Safety

[31: 391 to 403] T, They're really paranoid about bears here, but I don't S, I don't think that's a real big problem. T, Yeah. S, We didn't see any. We saw a lot of tracks, but ...T, Well, I could see what the point is. I mean they want to make you paranoid so that bears don't get the association between humans and food. S, Humans and food, right, yeah. T. Then you get real problems.

[32: 423 to 431] B, So how did you feel about carrying the bear proof food containers? S, Didn't bother me at all. We were way over stocked. That was my fault. T, The little one was.... I mean the little one is, like, that's fine. The big one obviously was not meant to be carried by hand, particularly cross-country. S, Yeah, and normally you wouldn't carry it by hand. That's it, but we ended up where we had to carry it a mile across...T, I mean, carrying it.....I have a bruise here from on the side of my arm..... from holding it and banging that thing against my arm.

[33: 181 to 189] S, Poor Tom had to carry the five-gallon drum full of food. T, Those big bear barrels are tough to S, ...manage. T, ...carry. S, They're nice in the canoe, but they're no good anywhere else. That's the problem with us, was we were packed for a canoe trip with all the water stuff and all of a sudden we're on a hiking/camping trip.

Use Limits

Management by design/self-limiting

[34: 467 to 469] T, What's most important I suppose is not to have any roads anywhere near this place. S, That's the big thing. Keep out motorized vehicles, except the airplanes. You got to have them. And keep out the snowmobiles. That's a controversial thing there. But like in the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota, no motors, and that's fine with me.

General support for limits

[35: 471 to 477] B, How would it affect your experience if there was a limited permit system here? S, Not at all, it'd be a lot better probably. T, Yeah, ...it wouldn't bother me at all. S, It wouldn't be populated.

[36: 487] T, I mean, you already have to do so much advance planning to get in here that a permit is hardly anything.

Support for limits based on experiences elsewhere

[37: 459 to 465] B, Would it ever be appropriate to have a permit system here in Gates of the Arctic? S, Oh, I think so. I fought it in the Boundary Waters. I didn't think it was a good idea up there and this will get that way some day, too, unfortunately. They have so many people going in that you have to have some sort of permit system to limit the number of people going in. T, Right. S, Otherwise, you're going to have people every mile on that river, when people start catching on and finding out what a good deal this is up here.

[38: 489 to 503] S, ...And you aren't going to get the weekenders up here like you do in Minnesota. The three-four dayers. T, Or in many of the other national parks. S, Yeah, right. That's right, the Yellowstone....yeah. T, Since I've lived in southern California, I've gotten around S, Joshua Tree and some of them. T, Joshua Tree is kind of empty, but S, Death Valley. T, ...if you go to all the parks like Grand Canyon and Zion and Bryce and all the southern Utah parks, there....it's all so crowded. Yosemite in particular is a problem. But you know Yosemite is like extremely beautiful, but crowded. Quite crowded.

Concerns related to administration of permits

[39: 479 to 485] T, The thing is if you have permits, you better make sure you can get them in advance because it takes a lot of advance planning to get here. S, Right. T, If you had to take your chance on getting a permit when you showed up here, that would be really bad. S, Yeah, especially like [Tom] said down at and I know this for a fact because when we brought our scouts up in '87 and '91 we had to stand in line to get on the buses to go out to Denali. Well, that wasn't a wilderness experience, but the problem

was we couldn't plan ahead of time. We couldn't ride up here, get a permit for 30 people to go on a bus, and go on out there. The same thing with now [Tom] could get a permit and do that down there. So the permit system is fine. You know ahead of time you got it, you can make the plans. It limits the number of people going in. So, I am all for it.

Perceived Safety Function of Visitor Registration

[40: 435 to 441] B, How did you feel about going into the Park Service building here and filling out the voluntary registration? S, Oh, I'm all for that. T, Yup. S, Yup, absolutely recommend it. In fact, these other two guys that told them where we were, they hadn't done that. They said "Oh, I wish we had done that." I said, "Well, we'll tell them you're up here." Because they hadn't filed I guess it's like filing a flight plan. If you don't show up, somebody is going to be looking for you.

[41: 455 to 457] B, So your feeling is that the registration serves a safety function? S, Oh, absolutely. Definitely. No doubt about it.

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Dick (K), Dave (V), Edward (E), Ray (R)
Interviewer (B)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 383 to 389] B, So you've done all these other trips in the past, how did you decide on this place this year? V, Bob suggested it and that was it. E, Yeah. V, No, nothing other than he'd been here and it was something to do.

[2: 481 to 483] K, ...we wanted to come to Alaska and I had been to the Brooks Range so I said let's go...R, to get some place that we felt at least in our minds was remote. Now, technically, looking at all of Alaska, maybe this wasn't terribly remote, I don't know that. You have to ask somebody that's up here all the time I guess. To me, it was quite remote and that was a priority.

Just another trip

[3: 277 to 279] B, What was this trip like compared to other trips that you've taken together or individually, for that matter V, Well, we've been on these kind of trips before. We've done bicycle trips, kayak trips. We were in the Everglades last year. Spent 10 days in the Everglades.

[4: 285,] V, For me, the anticipation wasn't there of our earlier trips, you know. Because this whole thing wasn't new to us. We're used to this outdoors experience, so I don't have the anticipation of our early trips like in the Canyonlands.

One-time visit

[5: 811 to 819] V, We don't go to the same place twice usually. R, No, there's too many places to go. K, We don't. V, Too many other places. That doesn't reflect on what we did or saw here. E, Right, because we just do something different each time.

Past Experience

[6: 393 to 401] B, Dick, how many times have you been here in the past? K, This would make it I think 5 times for me. B, And the first time for everybody else? E, Yeah. R, Never been anywhere in the state.

Easy Trip

[7: 15 to 31] E, Moderate, it was not at all a rough trip. V, No rough water. E, A lot of camp sites. You could camp anywhere. K, We started at Hunts Fork, came down to the confluence of the John River and the Koyukuk. R, We did it in 8 days, we figured we could do it 7, but 8 was just a comfortable...paddle. V, We just floated we didn't paddle. R, We didn't work hard to do ...E, Fertilizing. Fell asleep a few times. K, We had to tie ourselves in because you'd fall over if you weren't careful.

[8: 283] R, Very moderate, as far as conditions. I mean I wouldn't think they were at all adverse at all. We had no struggling getting up on the shores or the water wasn't a problem by any means.

[9: 117 to 135] B, What did you think about the river conditions? In terms of paddling? R, Mild. K, Class I, class II. E, Nothing threatening at all. I guess I wouldn't worry about my grandchildren riding in a raft down the John...K, And paddling wouldn't be any problem. E, There's no snags in the river. I mean there's really V, Lots of routes, so you...K, Got shallow in some places if you weren't paying attention. But other than that,.....V, You probably wouldn't want to come any later than this because there probably wouldn't be the water. I mean we were right down to where...K, Some places were pretty shallow.

[10: 537] E, You know, I wouldn't hesitate recommending it to anybody. I guess before I came, I would have got a little uptight say if my daughters were coming up here with their husbands doing this, but now it wouldn't I wouldn't hesitate now in saying and there are some other rivers, some other places of course that would probably get pretty hairy, but here, there wasn't anything about this we might do it again three weeks from now and have some real hairy experiences, but

Potential for misconceptions

[11: 539 to 543] K, Because the climate is what it is here, I mean, we.... my other trips now, comparing it to this here, we were very fortunate in the weather. I mean you can have a terrible situation. The weather is very changeable here. And so you have to have all kinds of clothing with you to be prepared for that. I think, what we ran into here, is that we've had a very pleasant weather experience. R, Mmm... hm.. K, And it could be directly opposite within 24 hours here. And we didn't run into that. I, like I told you, the one trip I was on up in the north, we were 5-1/2 days beyond the time we were supposed to be there. We ran out of food and everything else because nobody could come pick us

up. So I mean we didn't have that kind of experience, but it is possible here to have that. So sometimes when you have a good experience like this, you could be lulled into a sense of false security and having been here before, I know that you need to be very careful when you're out there. And know what you're getting into and have the right kinds of things with you and be prepared to stay extra if you have to and so things can happen. It's ...you're 20 minutes to die and days to the hospital. So you got to be...you got to watch what's going on.

[12: 551 to 561] K, So I think people can be...have a misconception in terms of what they could run into because of.... R, Having a good trip like we had, yeah. K, ...having a good trip like we've had. Yes. R, I hadn't thought of that. V, But we were prepared for it. K, Yeah, I mean I've ... I was up here another time and we had a blizzard. The wind blew the canoes away. It's not a cake walk.

No Negatives

[13: 229 to 235] E, We look on the bright side of everything. I mean coming down through everything is an experience, it's not a ... very few negatives. Even the bad weather... V, Even the clouds were pretty up here. E, Yeah, a variety of clouds. V, Everything's positive. I mean if we have a little mishap, it becomes a joke. We make the most of it.

[14: 241 to 245] B, So even though everything was positive, was there a worst part of the experience? E, I don't think so, no. I mean we come out here for just that reason. I mean we're not looking for negative, so if there was a negative, we probably missed it. You know, somewhere along the line. I wake up with my glass half full in the morning. So,....not half empty, I start thinking R, We don't look for any negatives. There's none there. I mean the wilderness doesn't have negatives.

[15: 251] V, Yeah, right, if something happens, that's just part of the trip. If you fall down and break your leg, it's part of the trip. I mean we don't do those kind of things, of course, but I mean it would be just part of the trip.

Other People

Prefer not to see others

[16: 155 to 173] B, Did you see any other people? K, One group. V, Only the first day. We leap-frogged with another group.. E, Canoeing. K, Two days ...they had canoes and kayaks. E, Canoes and kayaks, so they were going....after that we saw no one. B, How many were in that group? K, Seven. E, Seven, yeah. V, A tandem kayak, a solo kayak, and two canoes. Two each.

[17: 175 to 179] K, I don't know if it had anything to do with it, but the two days that they were going back and forth, we didn't see much of anything. B, You mean wildlife? K, Yeah. And then after that, we did.

[18: 191 to 193] B, So other than potentially affecting the wildlife, how did you feel about seeing that other group? E, Well, we've done a lot of this for 22 years and quite

honestly, we like to go places where we hope we won't see anybody. That's kind of a it's not the highest priority, but it's in our line of priorities, certainly. And I don't....we weren't upset with it. I think we were pleased when we discovered that after a couple of days we had lost each other, that they had gone on. If we had leap-frogged for 8 days with them, we would not have been all that happy. I wouldn't have been.

[19: 197] E, So, it's certainly nice to go into a place where you think not many people are. But that's not always possible.

[See also excerpt 41]

Positive encounter

[20: 81 to 97] R, We stopped and had dessert with Bill and Lill's. That was entertaining. V, Yeah, anybody that runs the John ought to stop at the airstrip and visit Lill and Bill. K, Get a piece of rhubarb pie. V, Real treat. B, That's at Crevice Creek? V, Yeah. K, Yes it is. V, They're very interesting people to talk to. K, She's quite willing to have you visit. I think. That's well worth the stop.

[22: 327 to 329] R, And I think here again with the remoteness part of it, one week up in there not only just talking to Bill and Lill, but just to sit back anywhere and think "what would it take in you as an individual to stay here year around?" I mean it...you got to have some grit to be up here year around, particularly....V, Particularly after the summer.

Wildlife

Expectations for viewing wildlife

[23: 45 to 47] K, But every...I wouldn't say there was a single piece of land that we were on for lunches or camping or anything that didn't have black bear tracks, but the only one that was seen was way up on the mountain. V, Right.

[24: 33 to 43] E, Let's see, what was the wildlife that we saw? We saw...V, Moose. E, Three moose. V, Three moose, bear, black bear. K, The black bear, however, was way up high on a mountain with binoculars. R, Right.

[25: 511 to 516] R, Uh...nonthreatening. Again, I had this preconception that around every corner there would lurk a bear...E, Bear. R, It just isn't true. [inaudible] than other places we've been. Not that they're not there. But not as threatening as I had envisioned.

[26: 99] E, I'd been up here before, but mainly in the plains area north of the Brooks Range. And the time of year that I've been here several times, it was in August. And they're of course it was in the middle of the caribou migration, so we saw a lot of caribou and a lot of wildlife at the same time following the herds. So, that might have been some of the reason, but it didn't look to me like where we were going through it was much of a caribou activity there in the first place.

[27: 181 to 183] E, Very few birds. I was surprised there wasn't any birds. V, Yeah, I was surprised that we didn't see any eagles. The only eagles....we saw one eagle down

in Whittier, you know, below Anchorage. We saw no eagles, which surprised me. I assumed that eagles were just everywhere in Alaska, but that's a misconception on my part.

Meaning of wildlife sightings—indicator of wildness

[28: 97] K, The surprises to me were not seeing more wildlife, but on the other hand, I think you know you watch television down-state you see Denali-type situations that just aren't in the wild. This was more wild than that. They know you're around and they're not going to show themselves I guess. But we saw enough to be pleased, but not as much as I had pictured we would see.

[29: 51 to 58] K, Pair of wolves. The wolf experience was interesting. I think it was a young one. It didn't seem all that big, but it's....we were rafting and it came out on a bar and just cocked its head and looked at us and said "What in the work is this that we're seeing?" It was quite inquisitive. And not at all shy. Really. E, It followed us for 4 or 5....K, It went in the bush and then came back out again another time. We came back around to try to get up a little closer and got out but it was very curious. It wasn't at all shy. You know, I'm sure we had gotten any closer, it would've....V, Well, as soon as Gary got out of the boat and onto the beach then the wolf disappeared into the brush. E, We were hoping they'd get a close picture of it. K, But as long as we were in the boat, it was quite curious as to what was going on.

[30: 403 to 405] B, Okay. I'd like to go back to something you said just a little bit earlier, that this place is more wild than Denali. You were talking about the wildlife and that....R, I was, in my own mind, I was critical first about not seeing as much wildlife as I had envisioned there would be and then I'm saying to myself but this is what we call it wildlife and they're probably here all the time but they're so sensitive to not seeing people, whoever these objects are that they're looking at, that they disappear into the brush. They don't want to have contact with us at all, so maybe in places like Denali where there's a lot of people, I don't know the system there because I've not been there, but maybe they're more familiar with people so they come out and they're not bothered by them. But up here we're so rare, that they avoid us like the plague and that's why we don't see them. I mean even in Bob Marshall Wilderness, which is supposed to be one of the biggest concentration areas of grizzlies in the Lower states, we didn't see any there either. I mean, they avoid us. They don't want to have contact with us any more than we do with them. It's just a preconception I think based on television more than anything else that I would see more wildlife.

[31: 407 to 425] K, Denali is more of a big zoo, you know. R, I wonder. Yeah. K, I mean you're bussed in there and you're bussed out. It's like going to the zoo. That's no fun. So I'd rather see less animals but get a few sightings and then it begins to mean something. But if they're all over the place, and you see them out of a window, R, It's not the same...E, We can do that at home in the Sonic Park Zoo. K, Yeah. B, So the context that you see the wildlife in is really important? K, Yeah. I would...E, The setting. K, Yeah, the setting. It should be a natural setting, not I mean Denali's natural, but the way you have to see it is not natural.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Remoteness/Isolation

[32: 313 to 315] R, Well, to know. If you've looked at maps or thought anything about it, just to know that you're not close to anything. I mean you know other places, even in Montana, you don't have to go forever to find a community. But here, you got to go quite a ways to find anything.

[33: 113 to 115] E, The river was accessible by plane. I mean those guys had no trouble getting us in and out. I mean it was just no work at all for them. So the whole Park would be accessible I think to anybody who wanted to go in, it's easily you can get in there. They seem to be pretty neat with those planes. K, Well, yes and no. I mean, they....it's accessible because they would drop you off in a spot on a river and then the rivers themselves would allow you accessibility, but I don't think they just land anywhere in the Park.

[See also excerpts 2, 22]

Wilderness

No Evidence of Others

[34: 297 to 311] B, When you say it's more of a wilderness experience, why is that, what makes it a wilderness experience? K, Well, I think because you're seeing an absence of V, There's no evidence of humans. Noise. Beer cans. E, Keep off this land, it's private property. You don't see any of that. There's no signs of people all the way down except for Bill and Lill's. That's the only sign we saw. V, Well, at this end we, you know, we, what did we see, a couple of huts across the along the river. And I think we saw a can of some sort.... a container up in the brush there E, That was the only...K, One in over 100 miles. V, So, there's no real evidence of humans.

Contrast to Other Wilderness Places

[35: 335] R, The challenge, the personal challenge for me I think would be far greater in this wilderness than some of the others.

24-hour daylight

[36: 289 to 293] E, The biggest single difference certainly would be the daylight. I mean as far as other places we've been, that would be the only major difference. V, You don't know what time of day it is. You really don't. I could see myself getting really confused up here. K, But that's great.

Scale/Openness

[37: 213] K, The vastness of it. Size. The sheer size.

[38: 345 to 359] B, You said earlier if you've looked at maps and that kind of thing, you get a sense of how vast it is. R, Yeah. B, It is fair to say that that's mostly a result of looking at the maps and not something you felt on the ground or did you really sense that while you were out there, also? R, Oh, I sense it while I'm out there, the map....E, I

think that...V, To me, I couldn't see the vastness because of course we're in that John River Valley. You don't see beyond the mountains. When we were in Montana, we were up in the mountains and higher up and you could really look out and see vast distances. K, Except your flight in, you could see that. V, The flight of course. But from the ground level, from our level, you couldn't see out beyond the Valley and the mountains. If we could get up on the mountain, ...that would have been different.

Quiet

[39: 199 to 209] B, What was the best part of the trip? If there was a best part? V, Just being here. E, Mountain scenery. K, The quietness of it. V, Yeah, very quiet. R, Total quiet.

MANAGEMENT

Positive Interaction with Staff

[40: 563 to 569] B, Okay. I'd like to change tacks here a little bit. What did you notice about the Park Service management in this place? E, Friendly. R, Yeah, friendly. E, When we came back, they helped us identify some wildlife that we'd seen, particularly birds. Helpful when we first came in, we certainly got a briefing on bears and, uh, what all did we get briefings on? A number of different things. I think testing us to see if we knew what we were getting into to feel comfortable in having us go out I guess.

Prefer Minimal Management Presence

[41: 597 to 617] B, So do you feel that not seeing a lot of Park presence was a positive thing...[or] K, Yes. B, ... a negative thing? R, We don't want to see ... E, We don't want to see people. I don't care whether they have a uniform on or not. V, Uniform don't mean anything, it's just another person. R, We prefer not to see people. E, We figure, well, we're not doing anything wrong, so we don't R, It's neat to think you're the only ones there. K, But you don't want to go camping where you've got somebody looking over your shoulders. E, A lot of camping experiences have a ranger looking over you all the time.

Maintain Self-Limiting Features

[42: 729 to 739] E, If you come here, you got to be willing and go out, you've got to be willing to live in a tent. Don't perch some cabin some place. K, Except you're going to hear from the people there that, what about the handicapped? They need to see something too. E, Well, I-guess..V, They can go to Yellowstone. E, They can go to Yellowstone and Denali. R, Make them go to Denali.

[43: 713 to 721] K, The only reason I say that it's not necessary here yet is because you're not getting that influx of people yet. And that's because of the remoteness of where it is. V, But that's the answer to me, is don't build your roads in. Make people work for what they're going to see in the wilderness. K, Once they put that in there, then they...V, If they can't or aren't willing to, then let them go to the zoo somewhere I guess. Don't put the road systems in here that allow a lot of people to come. E, Leave it the way it is.

Fear of Park Service “Shutdown”

[44: 643] K, I think there’s a lot of fear on the part of wilderness travelers of the Park Service shutting down wilderness areas and controlling it to such a degree that very few people will be able to enter the areas.

[45: 672 to 675] B, Did you experience any kind of Park Service controls or is it mainly the limited road access that you’re talking about? V, Road access is not a problem. I mean we planned on coming by plane, but the Park Services are shutting down a lot of areas because they say it’s overpopulated but I’m not sure why they’re shutting them down. I mean we have to have access to our land.

[46: 677 to 687] B, So when you say shutting down, you’re talking specifically about limiting access for visitors? K, Yeah. And as I said, I don’t know the answer because I know I’ve been to Yellowstone and some of these other places and there’s so many people there. There’s too many. And those are parks that are all much more accessible to people than the Gates of the Arctic is. How you control the amount of people that come in there without overcontrolling everything’s that going on, I’m not sure. But it seems to me that the Park Service is tilted into less access
V, We’re fearful ten years from now... K, ...less access. V, ...we won’t be able to get in here because maybe you’ll shut it down. K, Right.

[47: 689] V, In some respects. I mean I have that in the back of my mind. If I don’t go now, I might not be able to go. It should be there. You shouldn’t intimidate me that way.

[48: 647] K, I don’t have the answer to this thing. But you keep reading every day about more and more controls and I know we need controls, but it has to be done in such a way, I think, that people have access and in order to get access, it shouldn’t cost a bundle of money....they’re on our payroll and it’s our land.

Concerns related to increasing costs

[49: 649 to 655] B, Would it ever be appropriate to have more controls here at Gates of the Arctic? V, Well see, your controls are costing us a lot of money. Because that makes it more that guy out there flying a plane can demand more money. E, Yeah. V, Because of your controls.

[50: 657 to 667] K, I think here you got it, because you.... to come here and to go there out into the Gates of the Arctic, it costs you a fair amount of money. I think that in itself...E, Is a control. K, Is a control ...V, Well it’s a deterrent to a lot of people. Like us that maybe can’t afford to go out and it would really be to everybody’s benefit that they did. A lot of people are missing this....K, This is pretty remote. V, A lot of people are missing this because the cost. Maybe the costs are driven up by controls. And the person who’s going to come out here is not going to leave.....smoke cigarettes and put out the cigarette on the rock and leave the bear cans.

[51: 773 to 787] B, And just one more time, to go back to what we were just previously discussing. How would it affect your experience if visitation was limited here? If there

were some of those controls that you were talking about? E, I suppose they’d have to drive up the cost, which would limit my access to coming more I guess, the cost factor.

[52: 789 to 799] B, When you say that it would drive up the cost, why would it affect the cost? V, Limitations effect costs. R, Well, it seems....E, As soon as I hear limitations, you know the car is going to be more expensive. V, If it’s a limited edition, it’s going to be more expensive. K, If the Park Service needs money, they’re not going to get enough from Congress, so when they limit the access, they’re limiting their income. The individuals that can come they’re going to charge more for.

Concerns related to age

[53: 775] K, Yeah, I guess the part , you know, if you talk about the Grand Canyon, where you got to get in on a five-year waiting list to go in there. If that were the problem here... R, The place would just [inaudible]. E, Well, not only that, we’d be 70 years old and we might not be interested in doing this when we were 70, I don’t know. K, I mean that’s the problem with the controls, I think. And yet you need some ... E, Yeah, you’ll be 100, when I’m 70, you’ll be 100. R, That’s true, almost.

Support for Preemptive Use Limits

[54: 699] K, I think the problem is that they let it get too bad before they do something about it. So like Yellowstone’s probably the best example. There’s so many people going there and only now are they talking about limiting the number of people that go in there. But on the other hand, look at the stuff that’s in Yellowstone that people ought to be able to come and see. Do you tell everybody now they can’t go there anymore? Only 50 people a year go there and those that do have to pay \$1000 a piece?

[55: 703 to 707] B, So I hear some contradiction within the group here saying don’t shut it down, but at Yellowstone they messed up because they didn’t shut it down early enough. V, There’s no right answer. K, I don’t know what the answer is. It seems to me that there should be some control factor as to numbers of people and they need to set that early on before the numbers of people are coming in there on a regular basis and then they deny them access.

Not Sure What Management Does

[56: 571] K, We didn’t ask this question, but one of the things that comes to my mind about them is this is a big complex here. And so it seems to me other than the educational piece that happens to people going in and out of here, what comes to my mind is, what in the devil do they do?

[57: 577] K, I wouldn’t expect to see them on every river and trail. I’m just saying I wonder what they do here.

Poor Publicity/Public Relations by NPS

[58: 639] K, I think it would be helpful to the Park Service.. I say that not in a critical sense.....that we didn’t..... I don’t know what they’re doing, but it seems to me that they

may not do a very good job in publicizing what it is they do so that they got more public support.

[59: 825] K, That's what I say, there might need to be an educational thing as far as the Park, you know, what do they do here?

GAAR as an Overflow Park

[60: 709 to 711] B, And would that kind of process be appropriate here at Gates of the Arctic? V, Well, maybe this should be opened up to more people, to relieve some of the controls down there. I don't know. It's all a contradiction. I mean we're going to talk here in contradictions.

Perceived Purpose of Visitor Registration Safety

[61: 755 to 766] B, Okay. How did you feel about completing that voluntary visitor registration form? K, No problem. V, I feel good about it. They know where you are. They know when they expect you out. It gives you some safety net. I think that's good. R, If somebody needed us really bad, I think somebody would probably come out and warn us or tell us. B, So that's your feeling that it serves a safety function? V, Oh, yeah, exactly. E, Beyond that I see no reason...

Education

[62: 769] K, Well, there's an educational piece if you hadn't been here before and you needed to know and, although we didn't need to use them, I mean, they now have that program of bear containers. That's a good situation. We didn't need them, but so I think that's another reason...

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Eric and Kelly
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 21] e, We were surprised when we hiked two miles and then got to Pyramid Creek, when he said he was dropping us off at Pyramid Creek, but it was over gravel bars a lot, so...And then we hiked northeast up the North Fork, went over Summit Lake and then around to the Itkillik and then hiked eastward to the headwaters of the Itkillik and went through Oolah Pass and came out on the highway yesterday. It was about 9 days and, I think, 47 miles.

Reasons for Visiting

[2: 479 to 483] k, This is our honeymoon. We wanted to go to Alaska. I'm in medical school and this is my last summer off. So, screw it, we're this is our honeymoon, we're going to do something big, right? So, we decided on five weeks in Alaska and we were like, okay five weeks in Alaska, wait we can't do all of Alaska in five weeks.

There's no way you can do all of Alaska, so what do we do? Gates of the Arctic was our first trip. We did a kayaking trip there for 8 days. e, No, Glacier Bay. k, Oh, that's what I meant to say, the "G" word. Um... Glacier Bay was our first trip. That was great. A lot of fun.

[3: 485 to 487] e, Well, when we started planning for Alaska, we had to start with areas we're not going to go because we had to limit what we could do in 5 weeks. And one of our goals was to avoid the main tourist areas, so we knew that there's a lot of activity in Glacier Bay, but you can also just rent the boats and go yourself and have a wilderness experience, so that one was acceptable, but we didn't go out onto the archipelago at all because of cruise ships and you know touristy flights and stuff. We wanted to avoid the people who are getting off the cruise ship and taking the group bus and snapping some pictures and going back to the cruise ship. k, No, that's not our style.

Reasons for choosing Dalton Highway access

[4: 159] k, It's basically the reason Well, there were two reasons we came out to the highway. One is because of cost, that way we didn't have to pay for a pickup for the plane. And second, it was more reliable for us because we didn't know how fast we'd hike through the tundra. We heard all these horror stories about how horrible it was and how slow you're going to go. You think you're going to go fast. So, because we had so much time and we had variable conditions, we figured if we were heading to the road, there's a couple of passes we could head to. Kind of pick our own pace. We don't have to worry about being 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. So, we planned on the hitching, and it worked out okay. Um...It was a good plan.

[5: 365 to 373] b, Would you do that part again, the hitch? k, Um... e, Yeah. k, Yeah, probably. We're just....e. Unless we were comfortable with using a radio and being able to communicate to a pilot or organize a pickup, but I mean waiting at the road for 3 hours even though it was rainy and buggy is still better than waiting, you know, in the middle of a remote area for 3 days for the weather to clear for your ride to come.

[6: 377] e, And talking to the pilot a little bit, he said that there had been a lot of people who are just off. They're in the wrong place for the pickup. And then the pilot has to decide whether to try and land at that place that they may not be able to land it safely or take off with the extra weight.....

Difficulty finding information

[7: 489 to 495] e, Yeah. And we ended up not doing Denali because a lot of people just drive into the Park and we didn't know what we had to do for reservations. It was hard to find information outside of Alaska. So we just kind of scratched that. And we just kept... I kept looking farther north because I'm interested in areas around the Arctic Circle and how people live up there. So we saw this huge national park up there and we said okay let's see what we can plan with that. We knew from the start we wanted to do some backpacking, so k, Yeah. Basically when he asked me what I wanted to do in Alaska, I said I wanted to do sea kayaking and I want to do backpacking. We were thinking

about a canoeing trip, too. The timing didn't work out. So, what we did is we actually planned the beginning of the trip, the kayaking part, and then Gates of the Arctic was very hard to find information on, especially in New York, and we said, "Well, we'll just go to Fairbanks and we'll figure it out." So we got to Fairbanks and it was still kind of hard. But we ended up, through strange strokes of fortune, we ended up staying at a bed and breakfast with a guy who lived a little bit south of the Park....e, Wild Lake. k, Yeah, in Wild Lake. He lived off the land for 5 years. So he had some information for us. And he knew a guide, so we talked to him and then after much debating over which place to go in the Park because it's so huge, that was all we needed to do.

Evidence of Others

[8: 139 to 153] e, b, Lets' go back to some of the general statements you made. You didn't see any people. k, Nope. b, How did you feel about that? That's what we wanted. Actually, when we were originally planning it, we were thinking of going over towards Mount Igikpak because it's farther away from the highway even. Because we wanted to be away from people altogether. And, so, it was nice to be in such a large vast wilderness, but like we did see footprints and we saw the Cessna and up at Summit Lake, we found some rusty cans near where we camped, so it wasn't....k, We found a wrapper or two, I think, too. e, Yeah, we picked up some plastic. k, Yeah, that was kind of a bummer. e, So, it wasn't as much wilderness as we...it wasn't ultimate wilderness like we were hoping for. But we looked at the bush cost to get dropped off on the western side of the Park and it was just astronomical.

[9: 91 to 97] k, Didn't end up seeing anybody the whole trip. Just footprints. e, Of relatively close timelines. k, Yeah, we think. e, They were headed the opposite way when we were going up the North Fork. These footprints were headed down and they looked like less than a week, but certainly more than two days. And then when we finally got around to the Itkillik, we saw more that might have been earlier that day.

[10: 161 to 171] b, Did you feel like the air traffic and the footprint evidence of other people is what made it not an ultimate wilderness? e, Well, it just wasn't....k, I don't know. e, It didn't make me think no one's ever stepped here before. Because it was obvious someone had. It was still very enjoyable. I mean, we spent over....we did a trip of over 1,000 miles on the Appalachian Trail and ... I mean that was plenty enjoyable to be in the woods and we went through a lot of wilderness areas. So I mean we like that kind of stuff. We were just thinking that I guess "we" weren't thinking, I was thinking k, yeah, you talk for yourself. e, Yeah. It gets a lot less traffic here. And that was evident. Because we didn't see any people, which was ideal.

[11: 173] k, Yeah, it was actually the footprints didn't bother me at all. I was like, this is not seeing anybody. There's nobody here. Um... Like because the Appalachian Trail or most of the trails out East, you're going to see somebody either passing you or you're passing them or you're going in the opposite way. Because you're on a trail. So it's very kind of more of a focused travel. And there's a lot more people.

[12: 175 to 183] e, It was so nice not to see trails, too. k, Yeah. e, Because you get a muddy stretch and everyone walks around it and it keeps getting wider and wider and deeper and deeper. And it was I was thinking a lot as we were walking, especially when I walked behind her, that you know minimum impact techniques are kind of lost out East because there's so much impact already that it's about just containing it in certain areas and making those areas really bad, so the rest is really good. But here in the Park, I mean minimum impact, footprints is really all you leave. k, Right. e, I mean walking through the tundra, you know, it's... even the wet tundra where it's spongy, it springs back after a step. You know, so if you're not if you don't have a bunch of people walking the same line, the evidence disappears.

Overflights

[13: 101] e, So we saw the Cessna the second day and then that evening a helicopter went up the North Fork towards Summit Lake and then back again, so maybe it was dropping people off. Then after that helicopter, we didn't see any planes except for jets.

[14: 187 to 197] b, So you said that the footprints didn't bother you. How about the air traffic? k, Um....it would've if it would've been like every day, but we only saw it a couple of days. I felt like "hey, wow, there's nobody around." e, Well the other thing, too, is that there's only certain places that they can land. k, Right. e, So, I mean as far as minimizing, it's minimized already. You know. It's limited to where they can operate. k, Yeah.

[15: 199 to 205] e, Um....So that wasn't bad. In fact, towards the end of the trip, we were hoping k, Yeah, you were especially e, Not hoping to see them, but it'd be nice to know that planes do go by, so if we did have a problem.....we could signal somebody. k, Yeah. Because before we started, we were like "Oh, if we got a problem, we'll just have to whole up and nurse a sprained ankle and set up some kind of signal fire or something." And like "Hey, wait a minute, nobody's going to see your signal fire." Until they start coming looking for us in a couple of days.

Learning

[16: 27] k, And we hadn't done a whole lot of bushwhacking together before. We've done a lot of hiking mostly on trails, so it was nice. The first couple of days it was a learning experience as far as which ground to choose to go hiking through. So, the first day we hiked through some forest, then we tried up on some tundra and that was very buggy and harder going than it looked, which we knew it was going to be, but you know the experience is different than the word of mouth.

[17: 431 to 437] k, Yeah. We had pretty fast going after that, though, after we put our boots on that day. We just happened to hit drier slopes. It was just luck. We tried to learn what flowers meant hummocks, which we learned a little bit. Stay away from those white fluffy ones. If you can. b, The cotton-looking ones? k, Yeah, yeah. e, Yeah. Usually where we saw purple flowers, it was a little tougher. And the brighter the moss, the sogger it is.

Hard Versus Bad Days

[18: 279] k, The last 2 days of the trip, not the last 2 days, the last day of the trip was the worst because we were just trying to do miles. And if you try to do this is... one of the guides that we talked to beforehand told us that to have a good trip you just don't.... 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. So that was shitty hiking. It ended up being shitty hiking. But, um.....We did 8 miles the last 2 days.

[19: 291 to 293] b, Would you say that trying to make miles on the last day was the worst part of the trip? e, Worst maybe, but not the toughest.

[20: 327 to 333] b, So, you made a distinction between worst and toughest. k, Yeah. b, What's the difference? e, Well, the worst day isn't really... you don't feel rewarded afterwards. It was just a nasty day. The toughest day is like, okay, there was a challenge and we overcame it, you know, and that's part of backcountry travel.

Not focused on making miles

[21: 279] k, Yeah, that might be the best. I don't know. Um... I'm trying to think. I don't know. There were a couple of times where it was....there was a nice stream. It was good weather. The bugs weren't bad, which we were not expecting. Um... I got to like, you know, wash up, which I never really used to do, especially hiking the AT because hiking the AT, we just would try and do miles because it was kind of like get from point A to point B was the goal. And here we just like chilled out and hung out and played in the water. It was nice.

Wildlife

Expectations

[22: 243 to 247] b, Were you expecting to see more wildlife than you did? e, I wouldn't say expecting, I was thinking the whole I remember thinking on the trip that if the cost of not having a bear encounter is that you don't see the other mammals, that's okay by me. You know because the landscape is terrific enough. k, I was bummed. I wanted to see some caribou or a moose or something. But, that was me. It's, you know, hit or miss. You, whatever.....that's the way it is, it's wildlife. You don't tell them where to go.

Bear safety

[23: 31] k, Yup. We made a lot of noise through the woods and stuff, talking to each other and such for bear reasons. Saw plenty of animal signs that day, like bear scat and whatever, but no bears and no animals.

[24: 67 to 71] k, Yup. And when we made camp, we sometimes we would have dinner and then hike farther and then camp. That day we didn't. We just camped and cooked and had our food in relatively the same area, about 100 yards apart, for regulations or whatever. The goodly advice. We used "ursacks", I don't know if you've heard of them. But we didn't use bear canisters. We used ursacks and they worked....b, Is it a kind of Kevlar bag? k, Yup. We had no trouble. Nothing tried to ever get into our bags. We don't know how good they are. But it's different than out East because there's

nothing to tie them to. There's no trees. There's nothing to hang stuff off of, so we just put them in a pile and put a can of pepper spray on top of them.

[25: 73] k, Yeah, we were talking to a guide in Fairbanks and he says "Well, you know, if you have an extra can, just put it on top and maybe if the bear goes for the food, he'll bite that first." We thought whatever. But most of the nights we were able to put it in between some big rocks so it would be very hard to paw at. But like you said we didn't have any issue with it, so we can't tell you if they're a good thing or not.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Unique Setting Features

Terrain

[26: 249 to 275] b, What was the best part of your trip? k, Oh....e, There was a k, That's a good question. e, ...a section on the Itkillik that had a landslide.....k, Oh, yeah! e, ... recently, I'd say like within a year. And it left these huge pilings of rock that were 20 feet high sometimes and almost 30 feet in diameter cones, almost. k, It looked like a giant had gone around and like built little piles of rock. Like all along the....I don't know if it was any.....it looked like it was within a year. I mean it's hard to tell if rock ages, but the rock was all sharp and in little piles and it was fun to walk through. And it had dammed up the river a bit. So it was definitely within since the map was drawn. e, Well, there was ground turned over and some of it that things hadn't grown in yet. k, Yeah. e, But you could look up on the mountain side and this huge chunk, it looked like almost had gotten blasted down. k, Yeah, it was weird. e, Because it was cut in a little bit then all the way down across the river and it created a lagoon on the upstream side. k, Yeah, it was pretty. It was weird.

Vegetation/Tundra

[27: 439] k, It was one of the best parts for me is the flowers growing up in the middle of gravel. There's like all this gravel and all of a sudden you see a tuft of bright purple flowers. That was so cool. I'm like "wow, hardy little suckers!" I think that's awesome. But that's.... I guess because there's no wildlife, I was real excited about the plant life. Because it was different.

[28: 519] k, And it's I don't know, how would I describe tundra? I don't know. It's different. Telling them there's different kinds of tundras. I don't know. I can't think of the right word. Unpredictable. I guess. Because you can look at it and it all looks kind of the same from a distance, but you don't know what you're going to be walking over. It could be really great ground to walk over. It could be shitty. It could be very bumpy or smooth or squishy or hard or all kinds of stuff. Um....

24-Hour Light

[29: 409 to 416] e, And then the other biggest difference was the light, the 24 hours k, Oh, yeah! e, ...of light. k, I couldn't sleep! e, We'd finish up hiking at normal times because our feet were pounded, so weren't exactly tired, but we don't want to hike anymore, so you know 7, 8 o'clock, we've already eaten dinner, we tried crawling in the

tent and we wouldn't be able to fall asleep until after midnight. k, Yeah, that was weird. I'm looking forward to going back home and having nighttime. e, Yeah, nighttime and forests.

Treeless/Openness

[30: 417 to 421] k, Yeah. I missed trees. Yeah. e, It was weird because the first day down near Porcupine, um, Pyramid Creek, I don't know why I keep thinking Porcupine, um... there's a lot of forest and it was actually a little bit varied. So we hiked through it, but pretty quickly because we wanted to see what it was like in the open meadow areas. And had we known that that was the last we'd see of trees the entire trip, we might have spent more time in them.

[31: 279] k, It was also nice, too, because the tundra, there's no trees blocking your view, so all the time, you have this great impressive view of the mountains. We're used to hiking a little trail through the woods and you got to earn the view by getting to the top. That was fun to not have to do that and just to it was almost like you had to remind yourself, "Hey, wait a minute, look around me, this is great." It was nice.

[32: 519] k, Um... and to tell people it's very open, especially when I talk to people out East who are used to hiking on trails through the woods. It's very open, you can have this gorgeous incredible view all around you all the time. Unless the cloud cover is really low.

Scale

[33: 519] k, Yeah, that was unusual for us, too. So, I don't know. Um...I would tell people to describe this experience to somebody whose never been here. I would say it's really awesomely big. It was really cool to like go as far as we did, not see anybody and to realize we only touched a small part of the Park. That was really cool. And it is a very comforting thought to know that there's that much wilderness out there. Like this is just a piece of what is out here. That's a happy thought.

[34: 523] k, Um.... let's see what else. I don't know, I guess I would talk about how the Park is so big and there's no roads or trails into it. So if you want to do the kind of trip that we did, you really kind of need to get a plane ride in. You could probably hike from the road in and then out again, but you just don't get as far. You could do it, I guess, if you wanted. We didn't want to do that. We wanted to see more of the Park. That's why we did it the way we did it.

Changeable Weather

[35: 353] e, Um.. the weather got really strange because it was very windy and sunny at the top and we had a little break. Then we started walking down and we had to stop for water because we hadn't been drinking enough because we were so hot on the climb because we were in the sun. So we had just taken a break after taking a break. And then not 40 feet later, we have to put on the bug nets because the bugs are going crazy. And then another 40 feet later, it starts raining so we take off the bug nets and get out the

pack covers. And then it was buggy and raining and we were like "What's going on?" So it was very frustrating for that reason, too.

Isolation

[36: 521] e, You hear a lot that you need to be self-sufficient because it's wilderness, but never did we hear that you know you have to have everything you could possibly need before you head up because there's no way to get things here, which we did anyway, but that'd be something I'd tell people. Once you leave Fairbanks, I mean, you have 270 miles to get there [to Coldfoot], but in that space, you can't get something if you need it. It was funny because we were here the day before and this guy with an RV and his family were cashing out for his meal and he needed film for his camera. And they had one roll. You know, it's like an Advantix. "Is your camera an Advantix?" He was like "yeah." But that's 200 and He said "Well, this is what we have." He was like "You don't have any other film?" And I'm thinking to myself, "What are you crazy, there's like one truck a week that comes up here with supplies, you're lucky to have anything." And here he is infuriated because he has to buy a roll of 200 film.

Unique opportunities related to the setting

[37: 393 to 409] b, So, you've touched on this in several ways already, but how did this trip differ from other backpacking trips you've taken in the past? k, Um.....e, It was trailless. That's the biggest difference, I guess. k, Yeah. e, You're constantly route finding, which made it fun, but it certainly dropped the mileage down.

[38: 185] k, Yeah. It was weird, too, because um.... one of my favorite places where I kind of like learned how to backpack is Adirondack Mountains. And when you get high enough, you have a little bit of arctic alpine vegetation, just a little bit on certain peaks and it's very it's like a big deal out there. And you can't walk on it and they have people like up in the mountains trying to keep people from walking on it because so much has been destroyed because there are so many people. And it was really odd to walk through this stuff and like "I'm not supposed to be walking here!" You know because I've been.... you know like schooled in that thought. And it was, I don't know, it was weird. It's going to be neat to go back and be like "I was walking through like fields of that stuff." And there's a little bit over there and you can only look at it from over here. It was neat. Yeah, but....I don't know. It's different.

Wilderness

[39: 539 to 545] b, So you threw out a couple of things there that make a wilderness, not seeing other people, remoteness...k, Mm....hm....b, What other characteristics make wilderness? k, There's no man-made structures, like not even trails. There's no.... like even in the areas in the Adirondacks, for example, designated wilderness areas, there's like there's a lot of bridges over streams, there's a lot of and some of the highest peaks that are trailless, they really have pretty much trails that are used by a lot of people, they're just not marked and maintained. They'll have canisters on the top so that the people who like to keep track of how many peaks they've climbed can put their name in them. There's outpost stations in the middle of the wilderness area.

[40: 525 to 537] b, So, from what you've said so far, perhaps this is not ultimate wilderness because of some of the signs of people. Is it fair to say that it's still a wilderness area? Would you call it wilderness? e, Oh, yeah. k, Oh, definitely. e, It's the most wilderness we've ever been in. k, Yeah. We've never been on a trip and not seen a single other person. So, yeah, it's definitely the most remote area that we've ever been in. I felt very much out in the Bush. e, Yeah, maybe I misspoke. I mean we felt like we were out in the wilderness, but it wasn't when I meant ultimate, it wasn't like down to the letter. Because there were signs of other people. k, Yeah, it was like we didn't feel like we were exploring the territory or anything, you know. But it was definitely a wilderness. Yeah.

[41: 553] k, Right. Yeah. You don't go around in the East and see deer antlers laying around. Because either they're in places where you're not supposed to walk because they want you to keep to the trails, or people have picked them up and taken them home. Here, they do what they're supposed to do, they go back into the earth and they're reabsorbed and you know so the calcium can be recycled. And that was cool. Seeing stuff like that all around, seeing bones of animals laying around. That was very "wildernessy" to me. That was something new. Signs of animals everywhere, even though we didn't see them. That was good. Eerie sometimes, but it was good. That was very much a part of the wilderness part of it.

[42: 615] k, One thought I did want to add, I remember thinking while we were in there, what would happen if we came back 50 years from now to see the Park, what would it be like? Do you think civilization will have encroached this far up north. I think you said "No! But there might be trails and lean-tos." So I think that would be definitely less wilderness if there were trails and lean-tos in the Park. There. That's my thought.

[43: 547 to 551] e, Well I think that most wilderness is just like void of man-made influence. You know, it's just nature. But the difference out here from our other wilderness experiences is that there isn't evidence of trying to limit of overuse or you know forced concentrations of impact to leave the rest of it, which you can find in other wilderness areas, but definitely takes away from the wilderness, but it helps to preserve it. So it's a big you know k. Balance. e, Dichotomy. That was what I was searching for. But out here, the wilderness was so much more intense because there was absolutely nothing.

MANAGEMENT

The Park is Self-Limiting

[44: 557] e, I didn't notice any management, which is fine. I mean, I think that um.... because it is so rugged and as long as there aren't any roads into it and aren't established trails, I think it's going to that in itself is going to limit the traffic, to just the self sufficient explorers. And usually those people are intelligent enough or at least practiced enough not to do any damage themselves. So I think that's the greatest thing that the Park has going for it, is its ruggedness.

[45: 585] e, I mean I knew that worst case scenario, a search would start. It would just take longer. But I didn't mind that they don't start a search. It was just different. I think that that, too, would help keep people out.

[46: 565] e, Oh, I was just going to say I'm not against, you know, management of areas when they are highly used. It's a tough cycle because the more use it gets, the more people are aware of preserving it, but then the more you have to do to preserve it. It's tough. But I think that the best managing feature is its remoteness.

[47: 609] e, I mean, the Smokies have they're trying to limit, but they don't have any real system installed for registering. They say you have to have a back country permit, but there's no way of checking. And there's a lot of accesses to go around a ranger station either on purpose or by accident. And there's no fees no matter what activity you do. The Park is just getting torn up on the trails. Between people and horses. And it's really sad when you see it because all the trail signs are broken and molded and illegible and inaccurate sometimes because the trail has moved, but they didn't change the signs. And you can see that there's a real fundage problem and an overuse problem. And it's going to be really hard in a place like that to work backwards to try and install something when you haven't had it before. Because then they say "Well, we're already tapped out with funds." Then you say, "Okay, we can procure this little more, but we have to cut this section out..." Rather than just saying like with the Gates, "Okay, where do we start?" So I mean if you're looking at that as where it can be, then yeah, some enforcements have to be made, but I think that the location of that Park vs. the location of this Park is the difference.

Use Limits

Regional opportunities

[48: 617]. e, Yeah, there's a lot of land up here, too, besides the Park that's worthy of traveling to. So, you know, maybe on the other side of the highway if you have an area of a couple of different sized looped trails with some sort of shelter system or at least established camp sites, so that people who are driving up on a cross country tour who want to get out camping and have a little privy site nearby, can do that without trying to encroach on the wilderness area.

Need for balance

[49: 605] e, You know, one of the parks that I like the best is Baxter State Park. Their motto is "forever wild." And they drastically limit the number of people who go. I mean, the Park is gorgeous. But it's tough. I mean because then you have people who are angry because they're on vacation and they can't see the Park. And then they're going to say "Well, why should I give extra money to the Park Service when I can't use the parks?" So you need to have people able to experience it in order to get their support for it. Because even if the percentage of the population that goes on backpacking trips stays the same, you're still going to have more and more people every year coming to the parks. There's no way to avoid that growth. So encouraging people to come and enjoy it but do so responsibly is the best way.

Visitor Registration

Accustomed to registering

[50: 573 to 581] b, You did register on the voluntary registration form at the Visitor Center. k, Yeah. b, How did you decide to do that? k, Habit.

[51: 583] k, Yeah, it was, I don't know, it was weird because out East there's trails, so at the beginning of the trail, there's a little box and you write down your name and where you're going and you put it back in the box. It's just everywhere, so it's like a big habit. We're like "Okay, where do we register?" You know. It was ingrained.

[52: 587] k, It was something that we sought out. It wasn't something that people said, "Oh, you better register." Definitely not. It was something that we had sought out because we're used to it.

Support/opposition related to mandatory visitor registration

[53: 589 to 593] b, Would it ever be appropriate to make that registration a requirement then? k, Yeah, definitely. e, No.

[54: 597 to 599] b, Important that there's a mandatory kind of registration? k, Yeah, I don't know, I really liked how I have a lot of friends who deal with this kind of thing in like the Adirondack Park because they work out there at various jobs, my friend is an assistant ranger. And they have a lot of problems with educating the public. The system they had at Glacier Bay I thought was so cool, just to like say "Okay, if you want to go there, you have to have a permit, you got to learn this, you have to like at least be exposed to this information." And there you go. The best you can do.

[55: 595] k, Well, the thing that I liked about Glacier Bay and I know they did this because they have a lot more people, is they had bear canisters that you could take out for free so people who aren't used to dealing with grizzly bears will deal with them appropriately. It's higher use so you need to, because the bears are a little bit more aware of the food. Um... and it was also cool because in order....you had to register and then in order to be allowed to get a permit, which was free too, but in order to get one you had to watch a video about low impact and leave no trace camping and how to protect yourself against a bear encounter. And I thought that was very good because as much hiking as we've done, we've never dealt with grizzly bears. Out here, I wanted....when we went to a little.....I was specifically looking for how to what's the least impact camping we can do because I've never dealt with tundra and all I know about arctic alpine vegetation is that it's fragile. And it takes a long time to grow, so I wanted to know like what was the stuff you should stay away from. If we hadn't sought that out, we would have camped on little lichens for like 3 days and not know any better. Um... so that's why I think it's a good idea. And that's maybe if it's not maybe a big deal now because it's not very highly used, but if it ever becomes highly used, I think it's important.

[56: 601] e, I think it's back to accessibility. I mean the reason that those programs are important out East is because people can just drive up from New York City and go

camping. And trying to get the information to them is the tough part. But out here, you can't get to the Park unless you're searching out information. And I think that requiring people to,... like at Glacier Bay to sit down and you know see a video that you're trying to keep it short so that people with attention span problems can focus on it and then you're only touching on each topic so it doesn't sound so important. And you can't really make it sound important to everyone.

[57: 601] e, And the kind of people who come out here in the remoteness, too, are usually not into mandatory things. So you might find a negative reaction from some people. Because they're coming here to get away from bureaucracies and requirements. And they just want to be out there in the woods. And I think that most people who come here know what to do.

Safety function of registration

[58: 581] e, Well, yeah. We were going to do it anyway, no matter whether it was Bettles, here or Anaktuvuk. We'd register in a log somewhere. Um... I thought it was really strange that even though we registered, they're not going to look at it. I found that really strange. But at least it was on record so that we told our parents when we or my stepfather when we were going to be out of the woods, so if that times passes, that maybe they should get in contact with these people and start a search, but....

[59: 585] e, But, yeah, most of what we've done, it didn't matter about starting a search because you run into other people over a long enough time period. In Glacier Bay, we registered at three different spots and the people who operated the boat shuttle to get us in would be the ones to start the search, even though there was the ranger log and the rental people had a log of where we were going to be. So that was a very secure feeling. And it was just ... it was different here.

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Paul (p), Gwen (g), Donna (d), Scott (s), Ron (r)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Personal Histories

[1: 16] p, Well, there were six of us, three couples. Two couples from Anchorage. Two from Fairbanks. We've all lived in Alaska since the.....two from Anchorage.....two couples from Anchorage. One couple from Fairbanks. We've all lived in Alaska since the mid-70s and know each other professionally, I guess would be the best way to put it.

Itinerary

[2: 16 to 20] p, And so we came up here, flew in to Bettles and out to the headwaters of the Noatak. Landed at Twelve-Mile Lake, the little ox-bow lake there on the Twelve-Mile Creek for people tell us the Twelve-Mile Creek coming in to the Noatak makes it then navigable enough so you can float a raft. We went down to Kavachurak Lake and that's where we took out. We had foldable canoes all pack boat design canoes. Three of them and we went down the river. We put on Sunday, came out Thursday, a week and a

half later, Sunday, whatever it was. Came out the 26th. Today's the 26th. What was the date we went in on? Someone who can subtract. Oh, it was the... s, The 14th. p, Yeah, the 14th, Friday the 13th. So it was the 15th. So Sunday the 15th we came out to Thursday the 26th.

[3: 294 to 300] b, I'd like to go back to how you started your trip. You drove to Coldfoot and flew from here, is that correct? p, Prospect Camp. b, Okay. s, Prospect to Bettles by wheel plane and then to Bettles to Twelve-Mile Slough by float plane.

Reasons for Visiting Canoeing

[4: 16] p, And we cooked up a trip down the Noatak River. We all enjoy canoeing. We wanted to find some river to go canoeing on. And we talked about coming up into this part of the country. One of the couples from Fairbanks had gone on several rivers, the Kobuk and the Alatna River and I don't know where else they've been. Then the rest of us, the Anchorage folks have been more down south. So we chose the Noatak on the recommendations of some of the Fairbanks friends.

Seeing the country

[5: 184 to 188] b, So continuing on that same line of thought, what else was different about this trip than other floats or backpacking trips that you've done in the past? d, Well, I think the other river trips we've done every day we paddled. And this, we made very certain that we would have a day to paddle, a day to do whatever we wanted, so it was just that it wasn't just a paddling trip, it was a combination of paddle and see the country. g, Appreciate the country.

[6: 198 to 202] p, This was a then there's some where you just go down and just drift and look around or you fish or things like that, but this is one a way to get into some spectacular country you can't get into otherwise. And the canoeing is not the main focus of the trip. The canoeing is the way to get into the country. But we had 10 miles of some class II water that was spectacular as one of the couples has ever done. It was a little mild for the others, but so we had some real nice canoeing, but the canoeing was mainly to get into the country and do these other things. Get up north of the Arctic Circle.

[7: 36] p, On the off days when we weren't canoeing, we were doing a lot of hiking. We got up over 4000 feet. One member of the group or more got over 4000 feet on two occasions hiking. We did a lot of canoeing. Then we did a lot of lowland hiking, not getting much above a couple thousand feet. We were hiking up 1000 feet or 2000 feet.

[8: 178] R, Well, for us the overwhelming reason for coming up to this area was the ability to hike above tree level. So many other rivers you cannot hike because you're just on sand bars and willows or forest on either side. You're on the river, but you can't get up to see the country. And this river is just so different because you can see the country. I just learned so much when you can hike up 1000 feet and look down on what you've done and see animal tracks, and see flowers, and see trails... game trails and see

the lay of the land and you can't learn much sitting on a sand bar. I can't. When I get out there and see... what the north face is like, the south face is like, what the tundra looks like. What animals might be there. Could be animals all around you sitting on the sand bar and you wouldn't see a damn thing because of up above you, you can't have access to that country. So the single most interesting thing about the Noatak in my opinion... my big reason for wanting to come here was to enjoy the hiking away from the river up in the hills around and see the... you're out in the country and not just pass through it on a stream.

Driving the road

[9: 300 to 304] b, And why did you choose to do it that way? The more traditional route is to fly straight in from Fairbanks to Bettles and out from there. s, Because we thought it would be cheaper if we drove up this far and with our heavy gear we thought it was going to be expensive to send to Bettles.

[10: 310 to 314] p, Yeah. You could have probably gotten it there, but the road this is one couple's 3rd, now 4th trip up the road. We just love it. So we highly encouraged everyone to drive up here because it's such a pretty, scenic g, See the road as well. I mean that's another p, In fact, we're talking to you tonight because we've decided to stay overnight here and then tomorrow we're all going to drive, we'll get into one vehicle instead of two, and go up over Atigun Pass, Galbraith Lake, and then come back down. We're going to Wiseman, some of the Bob Marshall kinds of things and...so we'll probably stay in Marion Creek tomorrow night and then Saturday morning get up and drive back to Fairbanks.

Previous Experiences

[11: 228] p, We all have a fair amount of wilderness experience, hiking, backpacking, I've been on the North Slope for a week sheep hunting, out there with one other guy, and we've all been on different rivers. We've been out in the middle of wilderness for long periods of time. So things like the maybe people might complain about the rain, we're always prepared for the rain.

[12: 338 to 344] b, So you said that you've all done a number of trips or several of you have done a number of trips up north here. How about in Gates of the Arctic? Have you been in the Park before? d, We've been to Iniakuk Lodge a number of times, which I believe is right at the edge of the park. b, But first visit to the Park? s, It's my first time above the Arctic Circle.

[13: 346 to 350] p, We.... our first night above the Arctic Circle staying overnight was in the spring of 1974 at Bettles Lodge. It was then called Wien Lodge. And been into Bettles probably.... g, We flew our own plane into....p, Flew our own plane at that time. That was when before it even became a Park, working on all that stuff. Then several times we've driven the road many times as the corridor, it's not actually Gates of the Arctic. I've flown on to Igikpak in a plane down the Noatak, down the Kobuk. Lois Crisler wrote the book..... I've been up there where the April and Easter....I can't remember.... the Itkillik may be the other one. There are four little rivers.....flown over

those areas where that was. We've been up to Prudhoe Bay several times. Been to Chandalar Lake. Flown and landed at Chandalar Lake. Been to Wiseman many times. Been on the North Slope on the Coville River, spring branch of the Coville River sheep hunting in the past. Flown around the coast. So, to a certain extent, you know, sort of vaguely in the Park.

Portaging

[14: 204 to 210] b, So what was the worst part of the trip? d, The portaging. p, I would think so. d, It was mucky, they sort of dumped us on this banana-shaped lake and said, "Well, the river's just there." Well, it was through this marsh and it was late at night and it was very buggy and we had all this heavy gear and we couldn't see the river. We didn't know where it was. It was rather unpleasant getting all of the stuff over to the river.

[15: 214 to 226] d, It was certainly worth it, but I guess maybe, again, it was the expectations. If we had known what we were in for, it would have been okay, but they just said "just go over there." s, It doesn't look far from the plane, does it? p, Yeah. b, That was the very first thing you did on the trip. d, The very first thing. p, The very first thing. It was almost a killer. d, It was a difficult initiation. But after that, it was nothing but up.

Other People

Encounters

[16: 78 to 98] b, How about other people. Did you see other people? p, Initially, there was a couple with a raft camped at Twelve-Mile Lake. They camped there a night or two then went down. We saw them one or two other times. We crisscrossed them and then we did not see them again. We think they came out from Matchurak Lake today. Then after we'd been about halfway into the trip, a....we saw a group of alley packs. There were alley packs....g, No, four. p, Four alley packs. g, With 8 people. p, With 8 people. s, The raft....p, And we think there may have.....yeah, there was an inflatable canoe. s, The guy with the hard kayak. p, And then ...g, One single kayak.

[17: 100] p, The guy with the single kayak. Um.... was oriental. And we think a couple of the alley pack folks were German. They spoke English and a couple of....maybe a guide, who spoke very excellent English. The others said "hi" and sounded very English, but you could hear a bit of an accent. Several of us have been to Germany and know German, so we kind of picked up probably some German, we're not sure.

[18: 156] g, We almost felt like the river was our own. We were out bathing in a puddle just off the river and barely, five minutes or so after we were decent again, these 4 alley packs went by. [Laughter]. It was a close call. ...northern exposure, again.

[19: 104] p, The first half of the trip was very nice. We just saw this one raft and that was just intermittent. After that, I guess it was almost a little disappointing to see so many people, yet it was kind of fun to be there going through some of these falls. We went over this ledge down there in our canoes and terrified one of the couples and got

the attention of the other two couples and shortly thereafter we were heading on down and we heard these guys in a canoe going over just yelling "yeah, oooha!" They sounded like there were having a ball.

[20: 112] p, Then at Kavachurak Lake, the alley pack crowd, we called them the alley pack crowd. The oriental we called K2 that was going by himself out there, we thought he was kind of kamikaze going back to the oriental aspect..... And the K stood for either kayak or crazy, depending upon how you looked at it. And they were there camped at Kavachurak Lake and that was the biggest concentration of people, but they were down away from us from where we were and we had the beach all to ourselves.

[21: 114 to 120] b, So you never actually spoke with them? p, Oh, we spoke to them on the river. They'd come by....s, Said "hi." p, "Hi, good-bye." Never camped with them.

[22: 122 to 132] b, So you said it was almost a little disappointing to see those people....p, Towards the end, for me to see so many people. b, ...[do any of the rest of you] share that opinion or have different opinion? g, No, they didn't bother me. I mean they were nice. They smiled, but they....we weren't interacting with them, but they p, I would certainly not use the word spoil the trip in any sense. Being out there in the wilderness and.... you see a person now, or two, kind of reassuring in a way, but then the last days, to me, to have all the folks there gathered around.... I'd have preferred less folks. g, The ten people down there and the six of us. That was 16 within eyesight. That was crowded...the most crowded I felt.

Evidence

[23: 248] r, At every camp we had, we were there two days and you could see we'd made trails through the brush and the grass would be matted down and you could see that we'd camped there. But no place where we selected those camps actually looked that way to begin with, except on Kavachurak Lake was the only place where you got off the boat and you saw that "oh, people have camped here before."

Expectations

[24: 144 to 154] g, The ranger in Bettles said that the Noatak is the most highly used area and most impacted, and from what she said I definitely expected to see people. s, And lots of effects of people, but we didn't. g, Yeah, we saw very little....p, Very little effects. g, Campsites. Every we came to several campsites that had been used by other people and the only way we knew was footprints, I mean there was no trash, there was no toilet evidence, it was just....p, Very nice. Yeah, very nice. I guess from my view we expected a lot of people since this is the busiest. ..And we were warned about the bears. There'd be lots of bears. This is a heavily beared area kind of thing. So when we got out there and we found, gee, here's this one lone....one lone raft and we didn't see anyone else for a week, basically, except for that raft a couple of times, we thought "wow!" If this is the Noatak loaded with people, this isn't very many.

Wildlife

[25: 154] But the opposite was we saw one bear and expected to see several more. We've had other friends who've gone down and they've seen 6 or 8.

[26: 190] s, Like you mentioned what did you see....and the norm is to list just animals, but probably the things we saw 9 times out of 10, the things we were pointing out were the flowers. We only occasionally saw the animals, but you couldn't go 10 feet without seeing flowers.

[27: 36 to 76] p, And we saw a bear. We saw two musk ox. We saw several foxes. We saw tracks of wolves but didn't actually see any wolves. Birds, we saw an arctic-type loon that was not a common loon.. s, Red-throated....p, Was that a red-throated? s, I think so. g, It was dark...p, It was dark. s, They were gray on the neck and they have a red ...I saw a picture out here that looked like it. p, Okay, yeah. We're told there's three basic ...basically three loons. There's a common, red-throated, and there's a common Arctic loon and maybe a yellow-billed loon. Not sure we saw that. And we saw a bald eagle. We've seen s, Falcons there...p, Saw a couple of falcons. g, Plovers. p, Plovers, we believe they were plovers. s, Dall sheep. p, Dall sheep. Saw a fair number of them. g, Arctic tern. p, Arctic terns. g, Swallows. p, Swallows, yeah. We loved the one camp, the swallows ate all the mosquitoes right where we were....we were camped right next to them. They'd fly over and buzz us around. Eating mosquitoes. What else did we see in the way of critters or things? g, Ground squirrels. d, Ground squirrels. p, Ground squirrels. We had a bit of an argument whether we'd seen a marmot or not. I guess the majority of the group vote would be it wasn't a marmot. But we have to defer to the minority of the group that thinks it was a marmot because it may have been. We don't know.

Positive Evaluation

[28: 528 to 530] d, You know, I think the main thing that you'd want to ask people is "Did you get out of this what you wanted to? Did you get out what you planned? Were you happy." And I would say yes. g, Thrilled. Extremely thrilled.

NATURE OF PLACE

Openness

[see excerpt 8]

Self-Limiting

[29: 498] g, I mean, if you built an aerial tram or roadway or something to just dump people in and they could just go out on the weekend it just wouldn't be the same. It's got to be remote and inaccessible. There's got to be places like that.

[30: 482] s, Fairly severe. You've got to kind of be prepared to get in there. There's a few bugs, wind, rain, you know, far away. If you've flipped your boat and you didn't have dry clothes, you'd be hurting. I think you could die in there easy. You got to know what you're doing. I wouldn't send my ... inexperienced cheechako friend in there.

[31: 494] r, You have a little scary part of the wilderness. You have to watch out for bears and think about it and watch out for tipping over because the rescue is difficult and the water is cold. That puts an edge on your enjoyment, knowing that there is a danger there.

Wildness/Wilderness

Evidence of others

[32: 428 to 438] d, Yeah, when we thought we had the river to ourselves. But we didn't. s, Well, even with the people going down....d, Yeah, but it's not that bad. s,... it's not totally wild. It's not wild, but you had the feeling, everything you looked at, I mean, how often did we see the people? We saw g, Well, we were...s, Very rarely.

[33: 426] s, This is definitely the wildest trip I've the wildest place I've been to since....19.....whenever I went on a couple of rivers in eastern Canada, you know, that were sort of unknown rivers at the time back in 1965 or so. And ever since then, you know, everywhere I've been there were signs that it was either a trip that people did regularly, there were campsites, there were signs of usage. Even in Alaska, you know, so this really had that flavor that you talk about. And I really like that.

[see also excerpt 49]

Overflights

[34: 454 to 470] b, You've all suggested that numbers of people and impacts, in terms of campsite impacts, and that kind of thing, diminish the wildness of the place. Is it mostly just people that diminish wildness? Are there other things that make it wild or not wild? d, Structures diminished wildness. Roads, I mean they're all connected with people. That's already...s, And planes flying overhead. g, Planes flying overhead. s, We saw very few. One day, I think, was it Friday or Saturday we heard a couple of planes and then we didn't hear a plane for 5 to 10 days. p, Yeah. s, That was g, And we were waiting anxiously for the one this morning. s, We hardly even saw any jet contrails. I mean it's really pretty wild out there.

MANAGEMENT

Positive Interaction With NPS

[35: 278 to 280] b, What else did you notice about the Park Service management of the Gates? g, Um, well not much because there wasn't a presence there that we could see, which was nice.

[36: 264] d, I thought that the Park Service people were very helpful.

[37: 272] g, But they....their attitude was really nice. It was really nice and laid back. They said "you know, this is bear country and how are you going to protect yourselves? Do you have firearms?" We said "No." "Do you have bear cans?" They said "You might want to look at the display. If you don't know about bear safety, take a look." I thought that she covered the bases, but if we had been "yeah, yeah, whatever". I mean we didn't

have to listen or do anything... I think 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.

[38: 280 to 290] g, Then when we came back, we had a little extra time, Cathy and I in Bettles, and the lady said "oh, did you see any new plants that you want to look up?" I said, "gee, there was this track and we didn't know what it was." And she pulled out the book right away and they just seemed like they were as excited about our trip as we were. Um.. but they were also doing their work. They were....s, It was nice to have someone at ...g, ...let us sit down and relax. d, I just felt like I sort of....g, Friendly. d, ... plopped in someone's living room.

[39: 292] r, It's nice to have people who are knowledgeable about the area. I've gone down to Denali sometimes and the person who had been there 3 weeks from her island and the audience was all from Alaska who knew more than she did. So it's nice to have someone who can add something to what you know because they have enough residence in the area to be knowledgeable.

[40: 266] s, They gave us free bear cans, which we found to be more useful than we expected. They were very useful for us. I was happy to get that bear can for nothing.

Noatak is a Popular Attraction

[41: 352 to 354] b, Right. You suggested earlier that the Noatak might be the first river in this area to become a permitted river. Is it your perception that use there is really increasing significantly? p, I've not been on the river before. But we have multiple friends. You ask them if they've been in the Brooks Range doing any rivers, and the Noatak seems to be one of the rivers that pops up an awful lot. And then there's some others.

[42: 358] p, I would think the north fork of the Koyukuk would be extremely popular. The Gates are there. The Bob Marshall... I mean, we've read the books, and most people want to go there. We have friends who really want to go on the north fork of the Koyukuk and just missed doing a trip with them last year and this year, also, actually. So that would probably be another one that would be right up there, I would think.

Inevitability of Limited Permit System

[43: 236] p, It's clearly going to heavy usage and it's going to get impact. I foresee, I don't know, in the next decade or two where it'll be like the Grand Canyon. It'll be a permit system, so many will be allowed on it. I would guess, just because I don't know how much it can tolerate. I mean how many people going down canoes and rafts and groups.... before it gets to the point where it does have a significant impact and start having a permit system, I'd anticipate. It'll probably be the first one up here to have a permit system on it.

[44: 360 to 362] b, So, compared to your early travels up here in the mid-70s do you feel that use in the general area of the Park has really increased? p, My general perception would be most definitely yes, thought not because I've been on the ground observing....

observing the people. We used to fly up into Bettles with our little airplane, we'd land and not much going on. It was mainly people going up hunting. That seemed to be what most people were doing. You'd have the hunters, they'd go out. We had friends who had their favorite little lake they'd go and land on. And they'd hunt and fish and that kind of stuff. I think.... I don't want to bias, but I think I mean all sorts of statistics will show that as soon as you call something a national park, that the tourism factor escalates dramatically, that there's equally beautiful areas all over the U.S. that I've been in ... in the Cascades of Oregon, for example, hiking around very, very beautiful areas that have no particular designation and infrequent use. Then as soon as you name something "national park" it all of a sudden hits the radar screen of everyone. And we were told this year, for example, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that...by friends who have run all the rivers, who have state positions, told us "Do not go in there this year because all the talk and the debate on ANWR that the services to put people in to there are just being overwhelmed by the people who want to go into that area." So I think there is very definitely, partly because of more people doing this kind of tourism and I think just naming it a national park, attracts people's attention. Yeah, I think there's a lot more activity here, a different kind of activity.

[45: 408 to 412] p, Yeah. I agree. As I indicated, they'll probably have to go to a permit system, but I remember the days we used to drive in to Yosemite in a moment's notice. We'd drive into the Park, park the car, wander around, not a whole lot of people. Then you'd get back on the road. There'd be some cars driving around. Back in the late 60s. And now it's strictly regulated. It's just mushroomed and there'd be a traffic jam going clear around the loop that we used to casually go around. We'd go there for basically a weekend. If we'd have a weekend, it looked like a sunny weekend, we'd go up there. Now, you can't do that. The higher Yosemite, we used to hike up in there all the time. Now, it's strictly limited permit system, and I don't know what it would take to get a permit if you wanted to do something I mean how far in advance you'd have to permit. Cabins here in Alaska back in the 70s, almost any cabin you wanted, you'd give a few weeks' notice or you think about it and say "Gee, this weekend, why don't we go out to a cabin or something." I wonder which one is open. And usually if you had three cabins, one of them or two of them would be available. Now, I mean, it's virtually 180 days in advance....s, For Forest Service cabins. p, I mean if you don't have these things figured out in advance, it makes it a little bit of a....sort of the good 'ol days, you know, you look back at the good 'ol days when you didn't have to do that. And the Noatak would be the same way. "Gee, we could just come up and do the Noatak."

Support for Limits

[46: 506 to 510] p, I am reminded of a July day in 1973 when I drove across the border from the Yukon Territory into Alaska and having some thoughts go through my mind as we settled down and people, several weeks later and over the next several years, made the same comment and said "I bet you have this kind of feeling when you drove across that border and saw Alaska for the first time and experienced your first couple of weeks and decided this was your place." And said "I bet you thought ... the though went through your mind, gee, you wish they... as soon as you'd driven across the border, they'd closed off the border and said, no more folks.... we are limiting the size of Alaska

to this number of folks. g, Selfishly. p, And I must say those kinds of thoughts go through my mind when I go to the Noatak.

[47: 384 to 394] s, I think if it got to the stage where the people are impacting the land that much then it should be done. r, Or impacting the experience. s, Yeah. If it's no longer the kind of experience you came for....p, The only thing's that not....s, ...if you had to fight for campsites. you wouldn't want to r, You wouldn't want to have 20 people in each campsite.

[48: 414 to 418] s, I said open access but if open access were to destroy the experience you were looking for, you're willing to sacrifice some of the open access....p, Exactly. s, ... because you have to.

[49: 424] g, Okay, but here the thing that you're coming for is the wilderness. And wilderness, by definition, has to be wild. And so if it isn't wild, it isn't wilderness. I guess that's kind of why you can't just develop it or why you have to limit access. If you don't, then you destroy the thing that it's named for. It's main attraction. It's wild country. There's nothing there. There's no one there.

[50: 398 to 406] g, Well, and for a trip like this, I mean, you don't decide...s, The weekend before. g, You don't just call us up and say "Hey, let's go up to the Noatak." I mean, you have to plan six months ahead and people coming from outside Alaska I would think they would have to plan even longer, so the idea of getting a permit s, Shouldn't be a big deal. g, ... I don't think it's ever a big deal.

[51: 396] s, I've been to [inaudible] in the last couple of years and it's a fantastic experience. I got to sign up four months in advance, but it's worth it because I'd rather sign up four months in advance and have to plan ahead rather than get there and find everything all trashed and overrun and crowded and not have the experience that you can have if you plan ahead.

Support for Mandatory Registration/Orientation

[52: 258 to 262] b, So how would it have affected your personal experiences if that check in had been mandatory? s, Yeah, that would've been fine. g, That would've been great.

[53: 238] s, We didn't see much impact, but I would be happy to have, you know, a mandatory check in at the Park Service headquarters in Bettles where they said "Pack out your toilet paper, pack out this."

[54: 246] s, Like you had to sign in and... you're expected to do these six things if you're going to use this river so the next person who comes will have an enjoyable trip, too. These are the six whether it's pack out your toilet paper, do this, so on.

[55: 270] s, And doing things like that that make it easy to do the right thing. Whether it's giving them containers to take out their toilet paper, or containers to store their bear,

protection stuff in, or I think that's a good thing the Park Service can do to help make it easy for people to do the right thing on their trip.

Promote Other Locations in the Region

[56: 230 to 234] s, One of the things I think would be worth someone promoting is...It's an interesting river and there are other interesting parts of it. That aren't as easy to access. So we did the easy thing. We flew in to Bettles, took a short hop to the beginning of the river and went to an easy take out spot. But there's places that are supposed to be very nice like the Grand Canyon of the Noatak, in the middle that doesn't have good access and I'm not sure what the put in and take out points are. p, Cutler River and the Noatak is....s, It would spread the usage around depending on how the other parts could be promoted. About what an easy trip it is from Cutler River to Grand Canyon, or from the Grand Canyon to some other slot, so you could spread the usage of an interesting river so everyone doesn't congregate at the headwaters. Some might congregate in other parts of the territory.

[57: 452] r, Spreading the use out helps too. If you can have people...the Noatak.... there's lots of other interesting rivers that are remote in Alaska. That helps to keep the impact down. There are enough places to go for people to go who want a wilderness experience.

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Sue (s), Jaime (j), William (w), Bert (t), Ben (n)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Route Selection

[1: 431 to 445] b, So how did you select your route and portion of the Park that you were going to visit? w, We finally decided we were going to drive. j, Yeah we had a w, And then we tried...j, Drive, fly in, back and forth depending on how much money people had and...s, So I didn't have enough [money] to fly. b, So it was cost that led you to pick a route off the highway? s, Yeah, absolutely.

[2: 449] w, People wanted to have the chance of hiking in towards Doonerak and the best chance was up Trembley Creek. We did that.

Itinerary

[3: 13] s, It was a 5-day hiking trip and we went in at Trembley Creek. We were thinking about doing a route from Trembley Creek coming up Big Jim, but instead after two days getting to the junction of Trembley Creek and the pass that would lead to Big Jim, we decided that we'd rather just spend make camp there and spend 2 days there day-tripping and then come back out the final day, back out Trembley Creek.

Hiking/Camping

[4: 31] w, And the next day we crossed the Dietrich and we had pretty heavy packs, I would say, a lot of food, a lot of gas, a lot of water. And we didn't make very good

progress. A lot of people hadn't been backpacking in a while and we didn't find the game trails very easily. So we made... we got about halfway up to Trembley Creek I guess in one day. We were hoping to get the whole way up.

[5: 507 to 519] b, Okay. Let's go back and talk about the trip part a little bit more. What was the best part of the experience? w, The day hikes. t, Yeah. j, Yeah. t, You could see a lot more when you're not carrying...w, Yeah, it's much easier to experience when you're not busy experiencing a pack. j, And if we had done our loops, we wouldn't have dropped our packs and done that [explored] anywhere. So, I mean I was one of the people who really still wanted to do the loop when we were sitting there at lunch the 2nd day trying to decide what we were doing and there was a movement for a big camp and day hike and a movement for doing the loops, and I don't like backtracking, you know, I like seeing new stuff and I thought the loop was doable and why not just do it. But I think that we went up things that we never would have. I mean obviously we wouldn't have done it with our packs. I don't think we would have dropped our packs and run up them either.

[6: 525] s, It was the first time our group started playing a little bit [on the day hikes]. As opposed to trudge, trudge, trudge.

Camping

[7: 653 to 659] t, And at least I was nervous about actually camping on the bars, just from previous experience in the White Mountains. s, The gravel bars. b, Because of the water coming up? n, yeah.

Navigating/Route-Finding

[8: 319] t, Oh, and the topo maps are not.... they're good on the large detail, but on the slopes of where there's a cliff and stuff, the topo maps are not good. There was one topo map where it shows a nice gentle decline, a valley, and it's a sheer cliff.

[9: 335 to 337] w, The maps are best for counting river valleys. You can say "Okay, we've passed one, two, three side streams and we can see two more up there, therefore we are right here. j, And you could tell from them what would be good routes, generally. I mean we could tell from the map, we could pick out, "oh, this is a good valley to go up" and that was right, but as far as like "oh, there's a cliff here that we need to bypass and maybe we should head up now." Forget it.

[10: 421] s, That was probably the hardest thing in planning this trip. Was to figure out where to go. And once we found a route that looked interesting, who do we talk to about trying to see if this was a reasonable thing to do because you don't know if these things are really passable or not. And then also trying to find out about the Dietrich River. So, we want to prepare ahead of time and buy the topo maps there at the Geophysical Institute [Fairbanks] and then to ... it all hinges on whether we can even get across the Dietrich River, so....

[11: 33] t, Well, and we, in an attempt to get out of the river valley, we climbed up and we managed to cross the game trail, there's a very prominent game trail which we used on the way out that runs along that side. We got way too high and then ran into a gully, which would have been tough going all the way back down to the river. Mind you, this is coming back we did this whole segment in about 2 hours [laughter] because we knew where the game trail was.

[12: 305 to 313] n, And the other thing was coming back, we took I would say 1/3 of the time. j, Oh easily. s, Day 5. Just.... the morning we were packed up, ready to go, we're out of there...n, We knew there was that game trail...j, We knew where the cliffs and waterfalls were that we couldn't get past that we needed to go high and we knew where it was easier to stay on the river.

Group Dynamics

[13: 463 to 467] b, Okay, let's go back to your group. There were 10 of you. How'd you get together? w, Friends. s, Yeah.

[14: 469 to 481] b, All friends, and why did you elect initially to try and travel in 2 groups instead of 1 large one? w, Some of us hike quickly. j, We're not supposed to be a group larger than 6 for a hiking group in the Park. s, Yeah, we.... s, We definitely were thinking about that, not wanting to be a huge group. And then just functionally, 10, as we found, is way too much. Way too much for a group activity. j, One person stops, adjust their boots and 30 minutes later everyone gets going again. And 10 is really a big frustrating size for that.

[15: 301 to 303] w, The original plan wasn't to be in such a big group. One group would go faster and further and the other group would dally. It really didn't work out like that after the first day. It became clear that we were sort of all together. j, Yeah, we had two loops planned. One bigger loop and one smaller loop. So there was a slow group and a fast group. But what happened basically is that we really kind of did a little splitting during the day, but we didn't end up doing two different loops.

Trip "High Point"

[16: 173 to 183] s, I think that was.... so that was the afternoon that really made the trip, is we got to this beautiful pass, had lunch, put on our windbreakers, we're looking around, and said "Well, how far can we get up that thing?" And it was the whatever the peak is to the j, North of the s. On the north side of the ...j, Pass...s. And you could easily see that there was a, you know, one bump you could get to going up this ridge. And then it turned more into scree and then it ended up on a cliffy top. We just started out... it was going to be there were ten of us at that point and three of us were going to go on our own and then somebody else said, "No, let's all go." j, "Let's all just go up to the first bump."

[17: 199 to 207] j, But one guy at a time just kept going and we just kept going and s. He called back and said some encouraging words. w, We finally made a decision not to

climb to the top when we were at the top. j, Right. w, So we got all the way up there. Yeah. That was pretty cool. It was really precipitous on the other side.

[18: 211 to 213] s, You saw where.....the whole hike had been somewhat in this valley, so you couldn't really see too far in any direction cuz you had something steep on either side. So to get up to the top and then to see you know three ridges over that way and six ridges over that way, was really impressive. You just realized how big the place was. j, That's the fun thing about going into a new valley anyway. You go into a new valley and see all new peaks and you sit there at lunch trying to figure out which one is which, but then when you go to the top of something, you see so much more than

Scree

[19: 229] j, And then on the way down that, we took a couple of different routes depending on how we felt about scree, but the interesting thing about that is that ... and we kind of found this throughout, that there were three ... I would say three different types of scree slopes. One was really blocky and then one was kind of shaley, which is pretty nice, and one was slatey, which is really, really nice to get down. So it kind of alternated in different parts. And you can see a mountain that would be almost entirely one and almost entirely another one. The one that we climbed had definite regions that were different.

[20: 235 to 239] w, Well, it was a little dangerous at the top. There was some big lumps in that scree. And it can catch up with you and hit you on the ankle. We were gingerly going down at the top and then as we were going down the side, you eventually get into [inaudible]. It was the best scree running I've ever done. I don't know if scree running is allowed in the park, but...s, We never did any. [laughter] w, In all the parks I've been to it's banned, because the scree winds up at the bottom. But it was fantastic.

Safety

[21: 245] s, Yeah, we definitely aware of the danger involved in different things, like with the scree and bumping something loose and a rock going down on somebody. So we sent one person down, waited until they were all the way out of the way, and the next person go down.

[22: 673 to 677] t, Well, it's nice to know that even if we lost all our food in a flood anywhere in our entire loop, that if we just said "screw it" we could be out in a day and a half. s, I bet we could, yeah. n, Five hours.

River Crossing

[23: 381] s, So we came out.... and river crossings were it was pretty interesting because the group had different philosophies about river crossings. About going over singly, going over holding hands.

[24: 399 to 405] s, That was probably one of our biggest concerns coming up here, that's what we were focusing on, was crossing the Dietrich River. t, Well, and had the water been running a little bit higher, it would have been a lot less fun. n, And it was a little bit

higher on the way out. j, On the way out, yeah. And there were some places, I mean well I am 5, 3 and I weigh about 120 and even with a pack on, there are places where I was glad to have someone to hold onto because at the deepest parts when the current was really strong. It's easy for someone my weight to lose footing when moving a foot, you feel like you're about to pop in, so...Um... but it did keep raining a lot off and on when we were up there, so on the way out it was a little bit higher. But it could have been, I mean, it didn't change very much.

Contrast to Other Experiences

[25: 527 to 531] j, A lot of us in this group have done a lot of hiking. We all know each other from living in New England and going to grad school there. And we did a lot of hiking in New England in different, you know, combos. And it's almost all, I mean we never did something like a base camp there. And part of it is you're on trails there and you plan a loop, but we really almost never w, We never had more than a weekend. s, Right.

[26: 533] j, But it was very counter to the kind of hiking that I was used to doing in New England to think "oh, we'll make a big camp and have lots of interesting things to see and lots of different directions to go," but up here made a lot of sense.

[27: 545 to 547] t, And also in New England you have the AMC guide. You say "how do I get there?" n, Yes, they're full of useful advice. "This trail exists. It is unpleasant. This trail is nice..."

Uncertainty/opportunities for discovery

[28: 497 to 505] b, So was this everybody's first trip to Gates of the Arctic? s, Yeah. j, Yes. b, The whole ten? j, All ten, yeah.

[29: 557] s, Right, that was a new experience being off trail for most of us. I mean not being able to ... if you're on the tundra, and you're going over peaks, you can or mountains, nothing that steep, you can just say "okay, we're going there." And you can do it, but here we're going up this valley and we don't know what's ahead and so we sit there for an hour, 10 people, discussing, "well, should be go up the creek to shall we go around the creek?"

[30: 549 to 553] b, What else was different about this hiking experience compared to other ones that you've had in the past? n, Well, no trails. I mean that's j, And certainly [Bert's] point about information. I mean, we set it.... but even once you get up there and you think "oh, I'll go up this valley." You have no idea what it will be like. So when we were talking about whether to do that loop or not, it was like "well, Big Jim might be harder, but we're not really sure." And we were trying to tell from the map but we've already decided those contour lines are not particularly helpful but someone said it might be harder and that's very... I mean you feel much more like you're exploring here than you ever do there. You always see other people. You always have something that tells you "ten steps ahead, there's a big boulder that you have to scramble over" and

[31: 559] s, So that certainly getting used to how to choose a trail, how to make your way. And that was pretty cool.

Daily Schedule/Time

[32: 29] s, But endless daylight, so you really can ... your schedule just isn't restricted by the daylight, which is nice.

[33: 137] s, So that night we got to bed earlier and got back onto a more sane schedule cuz we had just.... because of the daylight, we had kept this going to bed at 2:00 a.m., get up at 11:00 in the morning the next day. So we had a full day, but it was just way shifted, so it was a shock to.... every once in a while somebody would look at their watch and say "We just had lunch at 6:00 p.m., ha!" So on day 3 we got onto ... an earlier start.

[34: 287 to 297] s, Right. We made it back to camp and then people were very concerned about getting out because it took us two days to get to that point so we were worried about getting out to the car. j, We kept saying, "Well, at least we know where we're going. s, It was, what, 5 miles in or so. j, Yeah. s, So we got up to our....t, The folks who aren't here were in a hurry to get back with the car that gets flats and have a plane to catch this evening.

Wildlife and Flowers

[35: 563 to 569] w, Except that the wildlife, I think got wind of us long before we ever got around the bend. h, Yeah. b, You didn't see anything? n, No large mammals, I guess.

[36: 571 to 585] t, Well, we saw foxes. j, From the road. t, Well, and on our first camp by the Dietrich River. Clearly had been trained for camps and were checking us out for food. s, Yeah. j, Yeah, clearly. t, We saw a wolf when we drove up to Atigun Pass off the road. That was cool. It was just loping along the pipeline. w, Saw a moose in Coldfoot... on the way up. j, [Bert] remembers all the wildlife we saw from the car!

[37: 129 to 135] w, It was up there that I saw the one wheatear of the trip. There weren't very many birds at all up there, I was surprised. I... maybe if you sit around quietly for a couple of hours.....t, Well, the second pass there were a fair number of birds. w, ... without moving. j, Yeah, that's true.

[38: 105 to 111] j, So in that meadow there, right at that junction where we camped, we made a food camp down at the river, actually, and then we were up high on a little plateau meadow. Up there, we found... or in that general region we found a lot of we saw a lot of moose and caribou antlers. Um.... and what else? t, One horn. n, Where did we find those horns? t, The horn was up river.

[39: 83 to 87] w, There were lots of flowers. Lots of bear scat and moose scat and...j, Yup. w, ... and golden eagles flying overhead fairly regularly one or two a day. Saw a wheatear one day. Blueberries, cranberries. Saw a bear lower down.

[40: 161 to 165] s. The flowers in bloom. Something like a fireweed, but smaller. j, Yeah, there was something like a fireweed and we saw, I would say maybe 10 species of flowers that were blooming. w, Oh, there was more than that.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Contrast to Other Settings

[41: 535 to 543] t, The other thing, is in New England, you can't just sort of sit in the valley and say "I could go there." Because if you sit in the valley, you can only see trees. s, Yeah. b, So just having a view of the terrain made it different? j, It really does. s, Yeah.

Openness

[42: 697] j, Um, but really breathtaking and free. I mean some of us, for various reasons, have been pretty stressed out at work and stuff lately, and it was just the perfect place to go. And feel like you don't have to see another soul and everywhere you look, you know, it's beautiful scenery and things that make you think, "Well, maybe I could go there"

[43: 707 to 713] b, Okay. When you said that it was really free, what do you mean by "free?" j, It was inviting and open and big. s, You're up there. j, Yeah.

[see also excerpts 41, 52]

Scale

[44: 249] j, And it was huge. I mean Gwyneth said she got to one point where she was really in the middle and she couldn't see anyone at the top or the bottom and she was just in this big bowl. She started looking around and she said she started to panic. She had to go "Okay, I'm okay." But she had... you know, she'd never like I don't think she had done anything like that before. It was this huge... I mean I was amazed.

[see also excerpt 18]

Self-Limiting

[45: 743] j, Yeah. I mean it's certainly the first thing you do to get there if you come up the Haul Road is get across the river, which is harder to cross in some places than others and it's I mean you want to be ready for it. No one's going to pop out of a car and decide to go cross up there and camp for the night if they weren't planning to.

Fragile

[46: 625 to 627] t, But the other thing which really struck me about that terrain is how fragile the vegetation is and how if there were very many more people than just us the hillsides would start getting wrecked. Now, the game trail is clearly been trodden on a lot, but.... the rest of it. Like our campsite, if you used that more than once, say three or four times a season, it would....j, It would get trashed.

[47: 631 to 635] j, And part of the problem I think with ripping places up is that, for example, all of our sites.... obviously we have a food camp and then we have a camp for our tents and they're pretty spaced out and you never end up having those on the same altitude. So you're going up and down in between them. And often it's you know it's a slope that's....t, Moss on scree. j, ... rocky stuff with very fairy moss on top of it. And that can really start to pull off and slide off easily. And so we were... I would say we were very optimistically I would say we were as conscientious as any group that would end up in there at a camp like that at trying to take different routes and trying to really curve around the part of the slope that seemed fragile to get back and forth between the camps. I mean we're not ... obviously we're not perfect, but we have a lot of biologists in our group and have spent a lot of time out and we're pretty careful. And I can see how other groups using the same place in a season would really tear it up.

Evidence of Other People

[48: 361 to 367] t, ... We sighted a couple of llamas. b, Really?? j, Oh yeah, we saw some llamas. Yeah, they were tied up. w, They were the only big animals we saw.

[49: 601 to 609] b, Did you see any other people? j, No, we only saw one..... n, No. t, The tethered llamas were real suspicious. j, ... footprint and yeah we saw llamas tied up with bridles.

[50: 611] n, Yeah, near the mouth of Trembley Creek, the junction of Trembley Creek to the Dietrich River there were some footprints and llamas.

Wilderness

[51: 715 to 721] b, Is it, this may sound like a ridiculous question, but is it fair to call it a wilderness? t, Yes. j, Yeah. s, Yeah.

[52: 723 to 729] b, And is it those same qualities, the openness, etc., that make it a wilderness or are there other attributes that make it a wilderness? t, Well, the openness is also part of the land. I mean...j, Yeah. t, A wilderness in Massachusetts isn't open, it's sort of murkwood.

[53: 731 to 735] s, Wilderness [is an area] without roads going through it. From different areas of you know hiking. Having no more access roads than the Haul Road or being flown in. j, Right. s, For me, [that] makes it a wilderness.

[54: 737 to 741] n, Well, wilderness is a legal term, too. b, Well, it's both and I'm not asking you to stick to one or the other. n, It's subjective, yeah.

MANAGEMENT

Interaction with NPS

Difficulty getting information

[55: 449 to 453] w,...In the spirit of keeping in Gates of the Arctic wilderness, it's really difficult to get good information about it. No one's going to say "oh, this is a good route." They're going to say I'm going here, what's it like? Then people associated with

the Park will sort of grudgingly tell you. b, And how do you all feel about that? s, I would appreciate it if they just said right off the bat, "look, this is what we're trying to do, so look at the map first then come back with questions." As opposed to sort of skirting around and saying "Well, yeah, you could go somewhere, sure, and here's some maps."

[56: 783] w, They were big on safety. I think every time we called. It takes a while in the conversation to get past that. And get to the information that you actually want...if you're going to get it [at all].

Registration

[57: 785 to 787] b, When you drove north, did you register here? Or in Fairbanks ? Or anywhere else? s, We were going to stop here because we were picking up the bear barrels. And we would have stopped here anyhow, I think. But we, because of the delays with the flat tire, we drove by here at midnight, so we actually called from Livengood [to] up here [Coldfoot] to see if there was any way to get the bear barrels and while we were on the phone, she said "Well, could I take down some information?" So we essentially registered over the phone.

Bear Barrels

[58: 21 to 23] w, [We] picked up a couple of bear cans, which you've left out for us at the Marion Creek campsite. s, Which was really nice because it's hard to get a hold of bear cans. So, to have some available was just excellent.

[59: 777 to 781] b, When you initially contacted the Park, did they ask you or tell you to carry bear barrels, as well? w, No. Um.. but we were always going to anyway. It was ... they might have s, They probably did and we probably just didn't register it because we were planning on it because we know there's no trees to hang things off of and that your only protection is really the bear barrels.

[60: 799] j, The bear barrels... having mandatory bear barrels..... um... wouldn't have bothered us because we were planning on it anyway, but being able to borrow two from here, was really nice because they are about \$70 and we did buy one or two, but um... it's not ... most of us..... only two of them live up here. And most of us aren't really hiking in places very much where we would use them. So no one really wanted to cough up the money to buy one. But we felt much better having two more from here.

Group Size

[61: 747 to 753] b, Okay, I'd like to change tacks for the final part here. You mentioned earlier that you were aware that your group was on the large size for what the preferred. How'd you find out about that? w, We were told. b, When you visited the Park office in Fairbanks? w, When we called, they told us, the rangers asked us "how many of you are going?"

[62: 759 to 761] b, And how'd you feel about that? w, Um.... I don't know. I don't suppose we ten of us were going to go. If we were in two groups, I guess we might have made a little less impact in one place. I'm not quite sure how you decide a limit.

[63: 763] j, Well, we were pretty high impact. ...for, I mean 10 of us, for the kind of places we were camping, and particularly for doing something like setting up a base camp. Um... or where we tramped through the woods when we weren't on a trail. You know, if we were all together.

[64: 765 to 775] s, I think if it had come down to somehow it could be enforced, that only five people could go in a group or six people can go in a group, I'm not sure what we would have done. w, We also got the impression ... I also got the impression that the Gates of the Arctic people weren't at all sure whether you wanted to enforce that rule or not. b, And it's not actually a formal regulation. It's a... preference. w, ... if we were going to the Arrigetch Peaks, then they would really like it to be a smaller group because there are essentially foot paths there now. So many people do it... Perhaps if you were going to Mt. Doonerak... So it seems to be a very fuzzy thing.

[65: 821 to 847] b, Along those same lines as you were just discussing, how would it have affected your experience if access was limited by the Park Service? n, Depends how it's limited. s, How do you mean? b, Say, by a mandatory permit system. s, Access in where you enter the Park or on the days that you enter the Park ... b, No, number of people. s, ... or the number of people? w, It would have been difficult. We may have done a different trip altogether. We may not have gone into the Park. j, We planned a fair amount in advance, but two of us weren't sure if we could come until pretty late, so depending on how rigorous that system was, I think we could've done fine getting permits for 8 way ahead of time, but. ... s, We also sent out the invitations, we were planning the trip before we had heard about the number of people in the Park. We had already ... people were already buying tickets and planning things and then we heard "Oh, you know, we really should only have...." I think it was you [to William] came from a Web site, had found out that s, Okay, and then it was "now, what do we do? I don't know." We decided just to go for it. It would have been nicer to have a smaller group, functioning within the Park. Certainly the impact j, But it would have been a shame to not be allowed to go with the group we had. s, Yup.

Support and Opposition to Rules and Regulations

[66: 789 to 791] b, How would it have influenced your experience if group size regulation, bear barrels, and registering were all mandatory things as opposed to recommendations? s, I would have felt more restricted. We've been through Denali, tried to go actually we didn't get in to Denali because of that kind of restriction. And the Park Service, I feel, can really cinch down too tightly sometimes. And so it's nice to have an area where it's not where's it's recommendations, that it's isolated enough that you just don't get a lot of traffic. Although I could see if this becomes a hot spot, then, yes, there would be... it's such a fragile area that certainly things would need to be more stringently regulated.

[67: 793] j, If that had been the case [mandatory registration/orientation], we would have left a large part of the day. Because we were delayed because of our car troubles on the way up here, on the Haul Road, and we would have been pushed back. We would have had to stay the night here and then you open at 10:00 and so we would have gone in much later the first day and so that being the case, I probably would have been pretty unhappy about it if we'd gone in and not seen another soul or really any evidence of people, but lost time. Does that make sense? I mean it would make a lot of sense if it were a high traffic area, but if that had been our experience and we hadn't even really seen evidence of other people, much less people, that might have been harder.

[68: 803 to 807] b, Going back just a little bit, when you said "It's nice to be in an area with less restrictions" as compared to Denali, aside from the time factor, what exactly is "nice", about having less restrictions? s, Yeah. w, It's nice to feel that you're not inside a set of rules when you're out there. It's more of a wilderness for that reason.

[69: 809] t, Not having to go to the backcountry simulator, with its like, fad fashions from the 1970s... The reason we couldn't get into Denali we had registered the campsite, but due to some bureaucratic oversight, which they weren't ... which surprised them as well, um.... they gave us the registration for the campsite but they ran out of transportation to get us there. So we would have only been able to be there from about 11:30 p.m. of the day we'd registered to the next morning some time. Because they hadn't quite figured out how to get enough transport to all the trailheads. And it was sort of frustrating to have to sit through a mandatory safety lecture and do all the registration only to discover that someone had FUBAR'd the transport.

[70: 811 to 813] s, Having been in Yellowstone and Olympic National Park, Denali, and then going into the Forest Service area or BLM land you breathe this big sigh of relief and I think it is, you're not living inside of a set of rules. You haven't filled out day 1 I'm going here, day 2 I'm going to be camping here. We were able to change. We were able to change our plans. We didn't have to have a permit hanging off the back of our pack saying that we were a registered user of this area. And I think that's true. It's ... you're in a wilderness vs. in a very highly regulated j, Yes, having choice is nice.

[71: 815 to 817] s, It feels more like a wilderness that way, but it's up to you. You have to make the decisions here. There's not somebody you're going to sue because they didn't put up a guardrail on this cliff. j, Right. Yeah, you're freer, but you have responsibilities, too.

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Peter (p)

Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Trip Planning

[1: 137] p, Yeah, originally had planned on getting up here 2 years ago. And so the information that I had gotten from the Park I got 2 years ago. I wrote and just said "what

information you got? I want to fly into the Park. Send me some stuff. Who have you got to contact to charter a plane?" Blah, blah, blah. Sent me a whole list of things. So I've been looking at that for 2 years. And I'd been traveling in other areas and I have to stop and work and make money to get up here. And then what I do is as I travel around the U.S., I have certain places I want to hit for sure. And the other ones, I just kind of go and you know I hear about a spot and I go to check it out as I go. Well, with coming up here, the plan was to get as I got closer to Fairbanks, I would start looking into chartering a plane. And I actually had the Milepost, you're probably familiar with the book, and in there it listed Coyote Air being out of Coldfoot. So then I started considering about, "well, shoot, if I drive 250 miles north of Fairbanks, it's got to be cheaper to fly out of Coldfoot than it would out of Fairbanks." So when I first got in to Alaska, crossed over from the Yukon, I called Coldfoot, or sorry, Coyote Air, and started inquiring about prices and their availability to fly me out and so forth. And everything sounded right to me, so I made the decision to come up here. Then I just kind of "well, how's it look for I could be up here in a few days, how's it look for the availability? You think you can get me in?" So I kind of made... I didn't like most people are on a little bit more of a time constraint. They got two weeks off on vacation. They got to plan everything out ahead of time. With me, I'm on the road till my money runs out. I've been for 3-1/2 months now, traveling nonstop backpacking. I got another three months to go if I choose. So I kind of just get there and plan it out and make it happen when I get to a place. So that way, I'm not actually tied into schedules and stuff. So you know, kind of 2 years in the planning, but not really. Kind of made it up as I went, you know. So I originally contacted Coyote Air only probably about a week before I actually flew out.

[2: 109 to 111] b, Why did you choose to access the Park from Coldfoot as opposed to some of the other gateways? p, Um... cost. um... there was also a lure of driving the Dalton Highway. Um... Seeing the Alaskan pipeline. Not that I necessarily it's weird. It's like I didn't really want to necessarily see as far as the wilderness aspect, I didn't want to see a pipeline running through the middle of the wilderness, but the Alaskan pipeline, looking at it from a ... I don't know, you go see the gateway, you know St. Louis Arch, it's, you know, something everyone knows about and you see and go up and see I drove up along the road along next to the pipeline. That aspect of it was kind of neat seeing the pipeline. Um..... but yeah the whole reason out of Coldfoot was cost, that Coyote Air was here, it cost me cheaper to fly from here than to fly out of Fairbanks and--like to Bettles--and then fly from Bettles to somewhere, so it Coldfoot allowed me to get into the Park other than by foot, get it allowed me to get deeper into the Park with my with staying within \$800.

Reasons for visiting

[3: 95] p, Um... the landscape, of course, was much different. I do a lot of mountain stuff everywhere. I try to do a lot of summits when I can. And but the fact that there was almost no trees except for just along the Tinayguk River made for definitely different scenery. I mean it was spectacular. And that was one of the things I was so looking forward to coming up here to the Gates of the Arctic was both the remoteness and the type of the scenery.... basically the treeless mountains and being in the tundra. And there was just a draw, too, to the fact that I was in the Arctic Circle, you know, because I

had never been this far north before. The first time in Alaska and everyone thought I was crazy for doing it. But it really wasn't that much different than any other hike as far as like difficulty. Actually, to tell you the truth, I've had a lot of hikes that were more physically challenging than this one.

[see also excerpt 23]

Wildlife

[4: 23] p, Then on the way back to... it was getting a little bit dusk. I ran into four weasels that seemed to be quite curious also. I think they had a competition to see who could get the closest to me. It was pretty interesting.

[5: 31] p, Prior to doing the river crossing, when I was going through one of the quite dense brush areas where the brush was over my head, I was making a lot of noise going through just in case you know grizzly bears in that area, I didn't want to surprise anyone. And I flushed out a bull moose that was pretty close to me. Huge rack on him. And it was just awesome. He was trotting away from me just you could just hear the power just his mass trompling through the brush and across the ground. So that was the closest I've ever been to... I actually..... I don't think I ever saw a bull moose. I've seen cows in the wild, but , so that was neat. And then not too far away were two cows out there, too, with him. So I got some pictures of the cows. I couldn't get my camera out fast enough for the bull moose.

[6: 35] p, So I went up the right fork and then right near that fork, I saw a wolverine. The wolverine was kind of curious but at the same time wanting to get away from me. So he'd run a little bit, stop, look back and kind of stand up as high as he could on his front legs, take a look at me, run a little bit more, stop, and he did that about 3 or 4 times until he got up over the river bank and I couldn't see him any longer. So that was the first time I had ever seen a wolverine out on a trail. That was neat.

Bear encounters

[7: 19] p, And um... starting off with that hike, I probably only got a half mile, three-quarters a mile up the river and I encountered a grizzly bear, which was actually my first grizzly I've seen in the wild. I've been pretty much, with only stopping to earn some more money, then backpacking quite extensively for the past three years pretty much nonstop. And I had yet to see a grizzly bear, so that was quite exciting for me.

[8: 19] p, He was about 70 feet away. Then,... so I was a little nervous during the time that he was coming over to me because I wasn't sure of his intentions. Um... but by this point, I realized he was just curious and he just wanted to check me out. So I stood there and watched him. Then he stood there and watched me. Then he sat down on his butt and started scratching himself. I knew he was, you know, there was no threat any longer. We sat there for about 15 minutes and watched each other. Then he crossed the stream over and picked up where he was grazing and started heading downstream and then I went upstream.

[9: 21] p, Then so I got about two more miles upstream, going up this tributary, and still thinking about the whole encounter, and watching my footings hiking up the rock with the elevation gain, and wasn't paying attention to my surroundings, which I should have been while I was hiking. I guess I was still kind of thinking about the whole past encounter. And all of sudden I hear this "phhhhh" kind of a sound similar to that and I look up and there's another grizzly. And so I was like "whoa!" He caught me off guard because I ... this one I hadn't seen ahead of time and he was about 65 feet away or so.

[10: 53] p, I didn't see any wildlife along that whole trip, but when I returned back to my camp, there was a grizzly bear taking a nap about 100 yards away from my tent. And when I came back, he awoke, he had heard me return. But then he went right back and started taking his nap again. But I was ready for dinner. I had had a full day of hiking in. So I wanted him to leave because I wasn't going to start cooking with him being right there. So I'm banging rocks together and I'm yelling at him and stuff and trying to wake him up so he would take off and every once in a while he'd kind of look at me like "what do you want?" And go right back over and scratch himself and go right back to sleep. So I mean that went on for quite a while.

[11: 81 to 83] b, So it sounds like an amazing trip. What was the best part if you could single one out? p, Um....the grizzly encounters, for sure. Either the ... probably the 1st one. I don't know, the first one or the one by my tent. I would probably have to say the 1st one because after the 1st one, especially the 2nd one, because the 1st two grizzly encounters were the same day, I had that much more of a comfort level come over, being around them.

[12: 87] I was very, very satisfied with the amount of grizzly encounters I had, that they were all nonthreatening and that all the techniques that I chose to do and everything that I've been taught, worked. And it was awesome. It was incredible to be able to see them. I even wrote in one of my letters or actually two of my letters I wrote that I felt very fortunate to have been that close to this many majestic creatures and never be in a be in a non-threatening situation and be able to see them in the wild. Very few people get to. I mean people that I know. I mean like my family and stuff, they don't backpack or nothing. I mean they've never seen a grizzly bear out in the wild and never had one sleeping by their tent or whatever, you know. So that would have... I would have to definitely say the bears were the highlight. But I'd never seen a wolverine before. I 'd seen a couple of them you know stuffed. But I've never seen a wolverine, that was neat! Caribou, I don't... I think that was my first caribou I saw. Um... shoot, you know, this whole ... I mean, shit, none of my backpacks I've done in 3 years, I've never seen this much wildlife on. I mean, big wildlife, you know. Um... grizzly bears were the first time. The wolverine was a first time. I might have seen a porcupine or something when I was a kid, but the two porcupines I saw, I was like 5 feet from them. So that was neat. Never seen a porcupine that big. The caribou. So, yeah, the wildlife was amazing.

Weather

[13: 33] p, Um.... and then I got up to an area that was probably 300-400 feet above the river level and found a nice flat grassy area and set up my tent while a storm was coming

in. So that was quite strong winds setting it up and just barely beat the rain. And then I actually had eaten my dinner with like almost near-horizontal rain. It was rather interesting. It was quite a storm coming in. So that was fun. So from there, the rest of the trip it pretty much decided to rain.

[14: 39] p, And Wednesday, that'd be the 25th, I have in my notes that that night it rained all night long. But it seemed to then get into a pattern there for a few days where it would rain all night, have morning showers. During the day, it would be overcast with just maybe some small showers, and then be good and give me just enough time to get back to camp and then it would start raining again. So it was actually... I mean the weather, even though it rained a lot... I mean I got a lot of good hiking in where it wasn't too bad.

[15: 57] p, So Saturday the 28th came and it rained the entire day. It was just nasty. It rained and rained and rained. And I'm like "man" tearing down the tent while it was raining. And it means all my gear gets wet or gets somewhat wet. I was just like "I got just enough food, I can make it another day." So I just stayed in the tent, got out to cook my meals and to eat it in the rain and wrote some letters to some people and basically laid in the tent the day and that was it.

[16: 59] p, Then Sunday the 29th, I got up and it had stopped raining! My tent was dry! And I was happy! The sky was overcast. Wanting to rain any minute. But it held out long enough for me to pack my tent up dry and get everything in my backpack and my backpack cover on, and then it started raining. So it was perfect timing. Like I said, I mean, everything worked out well with the weather, even though I had not the most favorable. It, like everything 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." I mean it was like clockwork. It was scary. It was weird.

Overcoming adversity

[17: 89] p, Then ... but I guess this part of it, I get out of other trips, too, but you know the weather kind of turned bad a few times. I never was it was never real critical. It was never bad, but it's always satisfying being out there in bad weather and being able to be completely comfortable and feel safe and feel confident. So that was a neat thing that there was a couple of times ... one night setting up the tent in the really strong wind with horizontal rain and stuff was ... I was sitting out and eating my dinner just smiling. You know sitting out in the rain going "Oh, this ain't too bad!" It was like "I'm glad to be here."

Air Taxi

[18: 63] p, And the plan was that Coyote Air was actually supposed to pick me up in the morning, but apparently...that didn't happen. It actually warmed up a little bit. I had a high of about 52 today while I was out there. But it was windy all day. Not too bad. And so the day was pretty uneventful. It would have been... it was actually perfect hiking weather. Ideal with the temperature in both overcast and I was kind of disappointed I

wasn't able to hike because I didn't know when exactly I'd be picked up.

Hiking

Difficult terrain

[19: 23 to 27] p, Then Monday the 23rd I moved my base camp 5 miles upstream, 5 miles up the Tinayguk River. Um... and that was quite a tough hike because it was all tundra and brush along that area. I'm sure you're familiar hiking across tundra with the ... I forget the name of the plant that keeps on growing and gets the big balls b, Tussocks. p, Yeah, tussocks... hiking across tons of tussocks and then through whatever there were... small, little tiny streams running across the land. There was thick brush and then I also had a ... I actually did a river crossing of the Tinayguk River.

[20: 57] p, So then Saturday the 28th I had planned on moving my base camp back to near the landing area. That gave me a two-day window to get five miles down stream, which is not very far, but once again this was pretty rough hiking. And I was running out of food. I had the rest of my food stashed at the cabin. I didn't take out as much with me as what I had wished because I didn't realize how bad I thought, well, if I need food I'll just run 5 miles back and get it and come back, it's no big deal, 5 miles is nothing one way. But going through all that, I was like I'm not hiking.... if I'm hiking back to the cabin, I'm hiking back and staying in that area.

Mosquitoes

[21: 33] p, Um, going through that section, five miles across that tundra, the mosquitoes were just incredible. Um... fortunately, I ... there really wasn't any gear I wish I had had or there wasn't any gear that I didn't bring. I seemed to pack exactly right for this trip. One of them being a head net. So that was... I was very thankful for that because I literally had 100s on me at times... of mosquitoes.

Contrast to other trips

[22: 91 to 93] b, So other than the length being a little longer and seeing a lot of wildlife, how did this trip differ from other ones that you've taken in the past? p, Well, one is this is the first time I've ever flown anywhere to get to a location. Everything else I do is I drive my car and then I hike. I usually do loops. And most of my hikes I usually pound down miles, where I'll go out and do, depending on the terrain, I'll do probably 6-12 miles a day and with this one here, I took you know 2 days off, not even hiking. And these were all just hiking up a tributary and coming back. So most of... well, a lot of my hikes I do are on trails, but I also try to combine a lot of ones that were a hike in a national park like partially on trail and maybe have a 5-mile off trail to another trail and then back on. This one was all off trail.

[see also excerpt 3]

Remoteness

[23: 97 to 99] b, When you say that it was remote and that was part of the attraction, what makes it remote? p, Uh... one is the fact that it's in Alaska, which is just because I grew up in the Lower 48 states in Michigan, so Alaska is a long ways away. So

everyone I know and my upbringing in the midwest, Alaska is the Last Frontier. So just the fact that it was in Alaska made it one thing. Then you got like everyone knows about Denali. Um... and Denali, I have... actually that's my next stop after re-supplying in Fairbanks. But Denali is another one of those parks that I kind of look at are the little tourists' national parks, like Yellowstone and Yosemite and stuff that I expect to see I've heard there's a big.....hotels and stuff near the entrance or I don't know, along the road, or what. I'm not sure, you know. And you know there's none of that here. This is ... you don't get your.... you don't get the family coming up here after getting off from Disney World and driving through the tour bus on the park and there's not even a road that runs into Gates of the Arctic National Park. And the fact that there is no road... it's difficult to get into the Park, um... you know, the fact that it's above the Arctic Circle, all contributes to the fact of remoteness. And it's not a Park you hear a lot about.

[24: 101] p, Um... and that was my main lure, or one of the main lures to coming up here is to get out and away from it. Because you know like I said, if you took away that cabin and took away the planes, it would have been the perfect remoteness that I had been looking for, for three years. Unfortunately, I didn't quite find it. I came close....but once I realized that town... that little village was up there, I was like "Shoot, I could do that in a day." It was actually from the landing strip at that point, it was 21 miles, I figured out today. But I could, you know, with this much daylight, I could put down 21 miles ... I mean that was ... wouldn't be too difficult. So that you know that kind of took away, too. It was like ... I mean it's good to have that option there, but I was like, you know, I wanted to be somewhere where there was like 300 miles to get to anything.

[25: 107] p, So you know but it was definitely a disappointment realizing that I wasn't as remote as what I had come up here for. Um... if I would've known that at the time, I might have picked a different spot in the Park because I think in other locations I could have got a little bit more remote. Being... like I said I kind of think I was just underneath a kind of a main flight pattern for supplies and people traveling to and from the village. Um.... and then my financial situation restricting me to how far away I could fly from Coldfoot.

[26: 111 to 115] p, So, I mean, it was \$810 with the radio rental. Today, I turned it on, this morning, just to make sure it worked, and somehow it had switched on while I was backpacking so the battery was dead. So.... I paid \$50 really for nothing. b, Peace of mind, maybe. p, Yeah. But you know, the thing was is I built everything up so much ahead of time because I was going to be in such a remote spot that I was sure that the smartest thing was to have the radio, which I'm sure it still was, but after day 1 out there, I didn't feel any different than any other hikes that I didn't feel the need to have that radio.

[27: 115] p, So it was like I took an extra precaution on this hike that I don't do in the same scenario with all my other ones. But it was just because I was going to such a remote spot that I had to have that one extra precaution. Like I said, it wasn't a bad thing. But that, you know, in a way almost took away from it, too, that I had that radio.

It's kind of like part of that challenge of going out in such a remote spot by yourself and making it through on just your own ability.

Overflights

[28: 71 to 75] p, So the whole time I was out, I never saw any people. But because of the location I was at, every day I saw several planes going to Anaktuvuk Pass. Then actually today, too, there was a helicopter that came in quite low down the river valley and upstream until I couldn't see him for a while. Then about 20 minutes later, he came back the other way. b, So how did you feel about seeing the planes and helicopter? p, Well, as a whole, like....I'm you know, I'm an avid backpacker, mountaineer. I've spent a lot of time the last 3 years going out. And I visited a lot of national parks. This has got to be at least my 50th national park and monument in the last 3 years. And in all my other locations, I really... I don't favor it. I don't like seeing the airplanes and seeing everything. But I think I had a little bit more acceptability to it up here because of that's the main way to travel. Um.... I guess like what bothers me sometimes ... but I'm not necessarily dead set against it, but I don't really like it, is a lot of times just sightseeing flying out around different areas.

[29: 75 to 79] p, It cost me over just over 800 dollars to fly out round trip. And so it was a rather expensive trip for me, but it was worth it because of how remote I was going to get. Well, I realized once I was out there I wasn't quite as remote as I thought I was. In other words, I was you're going to have to help me again with the name of the village....uh...b, Anaktuvuk Pass. p, Anaktuvuk Pass.. I didn't realize that I was going to be that close to it. And I didn't realize I was going to be over the main ... one of the main flight patterns for everyone flying in and to from there. I'm assuming that's where most of the planes were going. That's the direction a lot of them were heading. And then I'm pretty sure a couple of the planes that came through were just sightseeing planes also. So you know that was a little bit of a disappointment for me. Even the fact that that cabin was there was....nice as a safeguard and there was a food cache there and some supplies so that if I needed it, I'm sure I would have been very thankful, very, very thankful for the cabin being there and the supplies being there. But that also took away from the remoteness. You know part of the goal of this trip was, "okay, I'm going to spend this extra money to get out so remote that it's just going to be 100% me in the wilderness." And it almost was, but the cabin and the planes were the part that took it away from that. So that was a little bit of a letdown. But I got there by plane, too. So you know, what are you going to do? Some of those planes might have been other people flying into other areas of the park.

Wilderness

[30: 127 to 129] b, So would you describe it as wilderness? p, Oh, yeah. I mean it was ... even though like I said, I've kind of hit quite a bit... a little bit on disappointed in not being as remote as I would have liked or would have thought I was coming into. This still ... I would say... I mean this was wilderness. I mean it was, you know, with the wildlife I saw and the..... so little signs of man, no trails made by man, other than the cabin,

Scenic Beauty

[31: 117 to 119] b, So how would you describe the place to somebody thinking about visiting? p, Um..... well, I mean, you know I would definitely explain the landscape. Um... that's one of the draws here, is a lot of the other mountains you're in, you're hiking through trees and you know you get good spots throughout the hike where you get great views, you do a summit, you can see great views and stuff. It's like every foot of the way I could see just beautiful areas all around. And the mountains and rugged and so the treeless part of it was ... is a big part of explaining the terrain.

[see also excerpt 3]

24-Hour Light/Time

[32: 121] p, Also, the factor of the midnight sun up here. Throws a whole spin on it, too. Everywhere else you know you plan your day you got ... you want to get back to camp before dark. This is the first backpack I think I've ever not taken some sort of a flashlight with me, a headlamp or whatever. Um... and not being on such a time constraint as far as my daily activities. The first full day I was out, I was quite pokey at getting up, and getting stuff together, and stuff. It was like 4:00 in the afternoon before I started to leave for the hike. And most other situations to go the distance I went, it was only 10 miles, but it was some steep like 3300 foot gain, that I wouldn't probably try to go the entire distance and come back in one day, leaving at 4:00 pm, I would have definitely left earlier. But it was like "so what if I get back at midnight?" I mean, you can still see. So that... the whole sun thing was spectacular. Because I had, once again, never been in Alaska, never been this far north. That was... that's something I left out, too, that was a draw of coming to the Park, too, was the cycle of the sun. To experience that much daylight.

MANAGEMENT

Bear Safety

[33: 139 to 141] b, So what did you notice about the Park Service here and the management of the Park, perhaps, compared to some of the many other national parks that you've been to? p, Mmm.... you know one thing that I got that I thought was kind of odd, and I it didn't seem like the people here at the visitor center were very persistent on people using bear canisters. They suggested them, but as I'm finding... especially in the last year or two, more and more of the national parks that have bears are like dead set on or either dead set as in it is mandatory or very strongly requiring bear canisters. Um... here, it was more kind of recommended, but no really pushed.

[34: 83] p, And you know in the Lower 48 states, you can't carry firearms in the national parks. But up in Alaska, some of the parks, they allow it only for bear protection. So being the fact that the park systems allow it, gave me a reason to believe that maybe there's a possibility there's a reason for me to carry them.

Visitor Use Regulations

Registration/permitting

[35: 149] p, Um.. most of the national..... I do most of my backpacking in the national parks. Sometimes national forests or BLM land or whatever, but it's mainly the national parks that I hike in. And pretty much all the national parks require a permit, that is, it's not an option. Um... and I'm ... I try to be completely as 100% as I can leave no trace, minimum impact, and also I'm totally in favor of trying to manage the Park, you know, in both the Park's best interest and then also to meet the needs of people who come out, too, because...I mean you got to regulate it. You don't want to get you know too much use in a certain area. But at the same time, you don't want to completely say everything's off limits. Here's a national park, but no one can come visit it. If people can't get out and experience the wilderness and be a part of it then they're not going to make much effort to keep it there. So you got to let people kind of get in and use it a little bit, but you got to manage it. So for me it was a no-brainer, say "hey, you want some feedback on the Park that's going to help you manage it better? I'd be more than happy to be a part of that, to help give that information

[36: 151 to 153] b, So you said earlier that at other parks they usually require you to register. Did it change your experience any here, the fact that it was voluntary? p, Um..... you know I kind of, I don't know, it just ... I'm trying to think of how I felt about that at first. Um..... I don't know, you know I guess I'm used to that it's a mandatory thing that it's a little bit surprising. I don't know, I don't think this is the first park I went to that was ... it wasn't mandatory. But I kind of think it should be. So that, once again, you can just kind of keep track of the use and the areas that are being used and how it's being used. So that you have information that if you want to make management decisions for it, it's accessible. You start getting in where you're banning people and stuff, well then that's good if there's a good reason behind it. And I'm all for that. There's like a lot of the parks they limit how many people go into a certain zone a day, how many people are on a certain trail, how many permits they give out a day, and stuff. And I'm fine with that. Because that's a part of managing the park. That's keeping it without overuse in certain areas.

[37: 155 to 157] b, So your feeling is that the kind of limited access that you see in other parks might be appropriate here? p, Uh, yeah, I mean, it might come to that. In other words, I think the permits should be managed... there should be a mandatory permit system so that you can start realizing ahead of time that there's potential problems developing before..... instead of going, "Oh, shoot, we have problems now." Um... I think it's a lot easier to do preventive maintenance than try to do repair. So I think having a mandatory permit system just to get information on what people are doing I think is a good way to get that information.

Focus on protecting natural qualities

[38: 165] p, Where if you go to some of the other parks and you have designated sites where you plan out your entire route ahead of time, the exact trails you're going on, the exact spot you're camping every night, then you're held to an itinerary. Um..... and that kind of limits on how you enjoy your trip or what you do. You have to plan everything out before you even step foot in the park. I'm going to do exactly this many miles today and you just might not feel like hiking that far or you feel good and you want to put on

another 10 miles that day. So you get into a park that doesn't have the restrictions, you're able to do what you want. The only thing is like I felt a little bit bad on my second base camp, I stayed a few more nights than what would have been most favorable. Because if you stay in one spot, especially if you have your tent in one spot, you start to impact the terrain right in that area and I can start see just some real mild signs of wear there.

[39: 159 to 161] b, You said earlier that limiting use, in other places anyway, is appropriate if there's overuse. What's overuse? p, Uh.... you know, too many people in one area, what happens is people are out on an overnight backpacking, they have to put up their tents somewhere and some of the parks have restrictions as to how far off the trail and away from streams to set up. Other than that, you can choose wherever you want. Other ones have designated sites along the way that you have to register to camp in the certain area. You have to plan all that ahead of time. Um.. and that's all part of managing the use. If you get too many people in one spot, you know the landscape starts to suffer. The vegetation gets to be torn up.

[40: 163 to 165] b, If it came to that here in this Park, and there was limited access and perhaps designated camp sites and that kind of thing, how would that change your experience here? p, Well, see it's kind of a catch-22. In other words, I'm in favor of management of the Park to not ... for overuse in certain areas and stuff. But I have to honestly say I enjoy hiking and backpacking in the areas that are the least amount of restrictions. I like to be able to set up my camp where I want to within as long as I feel I'm doing it in a good way for the environment and the wildlife.

Support for NPS

[41: 167 to 169] b, Okay, that's the end of my formal questions. Is there anything you'd like to add at the end? p, Um..... you know, yeah, I mean one thing is I'm glad that I've been able to come up and do this experience. This is definitely one of the, the highlights of this summer, being out on the Park. And it's one of those things where it's like you wish you could just say "No one else can go hike in the park." And that way it stays that much more remote, but... only but I can go. I can go out and do that stuff, so.. But that's what you're here for, to manage that, to figure out that plan of where we let people go and how many we let go and so... I mean I usually put a lot of faith in the park management in whatever park I'm at. I don't always I don't think you can always make a 100% of the time right decision all the time, but I think for most of the time, I see the parks do a good job of managing the property.

809BTT23

Ted (t), Sheila (s), Amy, (a), Jenna (j)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 11 to 23] b, To start with, can you just describe the trip that you just completed? s, Rafting, kayak, camping, hiking trip. t, Yeah, it was rafting down the Alatna for how

many days? s, 7.t, 7 days. s, 6 days. t, 6 days. Down the Alatna with day hikes and layover days.

[2: 79 to 125] t, Yeah, we got dropped at Circle Lake and then we portaged over to the Alatna and then what did we do then? j, We camped that night. t, Right there? All right. I don't remember. j, Yeah, we camped that night and then we moved the next day a few miles, probably 6 miles, down river. And we made a camp, had a layover day the following day. t, A day hike. j, Day hike up to that little peak, some of us. And um... moved the next day another 5 or 6 miles. t, Yup. j, Had another layover day. s, Another hike. No, we didn't lay over that day, but we did that night hike. j, We had a night hike. s, Mm...hm...j, Some of us had an overnight hike. t, And.....then we moved on. j, Yeah, we moved on like two miles downriver and we were basically at the mud bank where we started our second portage. s, Mm...hm...a, Yup. t, And we portaged to Takahula.....j, Takahula. t, Takahula Lake. j, Uh...huh...t, And paddled across the lake. j, Right, and....t, Camped two nights. j, Yup, yesterday was our last layover day.

Reasons for Visiting

[3: 331 to 339] b, So this was more or less your first trip? How did you pick this one? t, Uh... it was kind of picked for us. a, The two of us are doing a...t, Long story....a, ... photography thing through our school and we have our teachers actually and he was the one who picked the expedition for us. So, we're up here to take pictures.

Wildlife

[4: 149 to 185] b, So you saw a grizzly bear yesterday? Did you see any other wildlife? j, You know, we didn't really see very much wildlife. t, We saw frogs. a, Loons. t, A falcon. j, You guys saw a gyrfalcon. t, Yeah. a, Saw a loon. j, Yeah. t, Loons. j, Scoters. a, Someone saw a black bear. t, Oh yeah. j, Peggy did. a, What was the bird that we saw up on the mountain that night? j, Gray jay. Yup, camp robber. a, A lot of ravens. t, Yeah, ravens. j, But that's basically it. Not very many mammals.

[5: 193 to 221] b, How did you feel about not seeing that many mammals, as you put it? s, It would have been nice to have a few more. a, Yeah. t, Yeah. s, Lots of tracks. j, Yeah, the tracks t, Tracks and antlers. a, But I wish we could have seen more...j, I, myself, am content with the tracks and just to be in the country and to know they're out there. I don't really need to see them myself. Um... but that's just from my perspective because I get to see them probably more than you guys do, so, but it's just neat to know they're out there. s, Mm...hm...j, And neat to know that you could always see them. You could always come around a bend in the boat and there can be a grizzly bear or black bear on the river bank or.... we did see a beaver. s, Oh, that's right. a, Uh...huh.. t, Yup, beaver's a mammal....j, Yeah.

Group Dynamics

[6: 349 to 353] s, I guess they [past experiences] were all different because you get different people on. So this one we've had ... it was an older group for the most part. The previous ones that I've had they've sort of been sort of the 20s, 30s and this was a very

mixed group, between students and older lawyer, and microbiology teacher/photographer, another older woman whose vast knowledge on botany and a lot of other things.... it was a very.....j, ...good group. You liked to...s, They're a good group, but also very we learned a lot more than I would have thought on most trips, just because of the knowledge base.

[7: 355 to 359] b, So you think the people that were with you on the trip were a positive influence on the experience? s, Oh, yeah. a, I agree.

Other People

[8: 223 to 249] b, How about other people? Did you see any other people? t, Not early on. s, Funny that you should mention that. a, We didn't see anybody until the day we portaged, the second to last day. We saw two park rangers s, Right. t, Yeah. a, ... who had just been dropped off and were heading up to Arrigetch and the hot springs and then today t, And we saw the cabin. a, ...we saw an NOLS group and j, Yeah, and Kay and Steve...t, Kay and Steve....people. b, Kay and Steve are the two that live in the cabin at Takahula? t, Yeah. s, Yeah.

[9: 253 to 271] b, How'd you feel about seeing the park rangers out there? s, They're doing their job. a, Yeah. j, I didn't mind it at all, you know, it's good that they're on patrol. It is a national park. I didn't mind seeing them at all, but I just...t, And they knew about the weather and j, Right, exactly, they're a good source of information. t, And other groups in the area. b, So you talked to them for a while. t, Yeah. j, Mm...hm...and told them we encountered a fire ring on one gravel bar and Bill, the other guide and I.... yeah, they got the Gaedeke's cabin there, that one little cabin. And Bill and I didn't really know.... typically you don't like to see that stuff, and you just try to remove the evidence of it, but we didn't know if it belonged to the Gaedeke's, and they're kind of grandfathered into things. And I didn't want to disturb it if it was theirs. So, had a chance to ask those two women, the Park rangers, about it. They didn't know about it. So at least now they know and that's kind of in the process, whatever the process is. So it'll go away if it should go away. It'll stay if it belongs to the Gaedeke's, I would presume. Yeah.

[10: 387 to 391] a, It's the quietest place I've ever been. The most peaceful. I'd describe it as that. Completely untouched by humans for the most part. Um... more pristine than anything I've ever seen. More beautiful than most places I've seen. b, You say completely untouched, for the most part. a, Well, obviously you're going to have footprints from previous campsites and stuff when you're on the campsite itself. But otherwise, it's untouched.

[11: 393 to 421] j, Did you see footprints when we were in some of the different camps? a, Well, when we were... that night when we were walking around and we saw the footprints on the hike overnight. j, Yeah, a, That's it j, When we were looking for the trail? a, Right, but that's it. t, ...sure it wasn't you guys? j, Trash. t, Oh, yeah, we found j, A little bit of evidence. a, At the portage site, there was somebody who had been

walking around barefoot and it wasn't any of us. A couple of places. j, Mm... hm.. t, But, not much. j, Not lots. t, No.

[12: 423 to 439] b, What was your response to the trash? How'd you feel about seeing that? j, Pooh! t, Jenna screamed "pooh!" and j, I hate finding trash. s, When something blows out of a pocket. Most folks aren't going up there just to leave their trash. You don't make all that effort to get up there to do that. t, Drinking your Minute Maid juice boxes. s, Yeah, to leave the trash, so it's just something that was an oversight, fell out of a pocket, fell out of a bag, wind blowing hard and caught it. Who knows, maybe they'd been camped somewhere a couple of miles away and it got blown there? So.....b, So, it was just an accident, not something intentional. a, I have to think it was an accident. I just can't see going to the effort of getting there and still having a mind-set that you leave your trash. They just don't.

Challenge/Safety

[13: 441 to 451] b, So what else would you say about the place? I heard it's quiet...almost untouched, pristine, beautiful...s, Harshness. There's a beauty in the harshness. You know, if you make a mistake, you could be in a lot of trouble. a, Yeah. s, And a challenge. b, What's challenging about it? s, If you make a mistake, you'd be in a lot of trouble [laughter].

[14: 455 to 465] s, You've also got the weather as a variable. A very real variable. j, Yeah, we got off easy on this trip, really. s, Yeah, except for today. j, Weather-wise. t, Yeah, it was pretty nice. s, Awesome weather.

[15: 469 to 503] b, You say that you got off easy on this trip, but it was the first trip here for most of you, so were you expecting worse weather or more difficult conditions? s, I had done an August trip in the Inner Passage area, the Prince William Sound area a number of years back, and it was raining the whole time. So...t, Our plane? a, It was beautiful the whole time. [some small talk about their arriving flight takes place here] a, Yeah, I did expect a lot harsher weather. t, Yeah, if there was like this more of the time, it would be worse. a, ... takes a lot of the fun out of it. j, It turns into type II fun at that point. a, Yeah. j, Because we may decide.....challenge...b, What's type II fun? j, Type II fun is the kind of fun when you get home, it's more fun to retell the story and remember being there than it actually was at the time when you were there. s, Yup. b, So, is that a phrase you guys came up with on this trip? j, I've just heard it from, yeah, just from other people and just kind of taken out of context, like when things are just going to hell, somebody will say "this is turning into type II fun here!" It's not that fun right now, but boy let me tell you, when we get home, it's going to be good to have survived it.

[see also excerpts 16-17]

Wilderness

[16: 539 to 561] b, So would you describe the place as wilderness? t, Yes. a, Mm... hm...s, Definitely meets and exceeds the requirements for wilderness. b, How so? a, You've been there, right? b, Yes. a, Just you step out of the plane and look around and

it's wilderness. b, So, it's the scenery that makes it wilderness? a, It's what [Sheila] was saying, it's the high stakes of not having a road within 100 miles. Of you not being able to get out unless there's a plane. Having to make arrangements beforehand. Like they were talking about Kay and Steve have to make arrangements now to be taken out in October or something like that. Isolation. s, Mm... hm...j, And we inflict a little bit of that upon ourselves because we choose not to bring means of communication. Like for some people who come up here and they bring iridium phones or whatever. And they can kind of call ahead and have a pizza waiting for them in Fairbanks. But we don't go with that. We don't bring a GPS. We don't bring an iridium phone or anything like that to make it more of a wilderness experience than it can otherwise be.

[17: 569 to 607] b, Given that you were with a couple of guides on a commercial trip, did that take away from it feeling like a wilderness? s, Hmm.... mm.. a, No. b, Did you feel like you could put your trust in the guides and not have to worry about yourself as much? s, Mm... hm....a, I think so. b, Yes? t, Yeah. b, And would you say that was a positive feature of your experience? s, I wouldn't do it by myself. a, No, definitely not. b, Why not? s, Too many variables. Too many things to take into account. It'd be spooky, too... Oh, my gosh, what do I do now? Get up in the middle of the night to take care of business, and it's like... I'm not going out there! b, Because of wildlife? s, Hm...mm... bears. Most of the places where we camped, there were a lot of bear and wolf tracks. a, There actually was a bear at the last campsite. s, Well, yeah. b, So, you felt safer as a member of a group? s, Yes. t, Yeah.

[18: 563 to 567] b, Other comments from the rest of you? What makes it a wilderness? j, No roads. t, Yeah, no roads...Just big forests and open space.

MANAGEMENT

Interaction with NPS

[19: 641 to 673] b, Okay, so you ran into some Park rangers on your almost last day out there. j, Mm...hm... t, Yup. b, What else did you notice about the Park Service management or presence? t, Well, we noticed the Bureau of Land Management, but I don't know, that's probably something different. s, Chopping trees and putting [inaudible] in them before they put their survey maps out. j, Did you guys see that? a, Yeah. t, Yeah... j, Where? t, On top of that ridge, we were looking at the bear, at the last campsite. a, At the top of the ridge. Bill pointed it out two logs sitting there that had been BLM..... and then a little survey stake. j, What about it said BLM on it? t, In the logs. s, They carved it into the logs. j, BLM? But I thought USGS did the surveying for up here? s, They were there with BLM, either that or it was somebody else who happens to have the initials BLM.

Visitor registration/orientation

[20: 677 to 689] b, What else did you notice about Park Service presence or management? t, Didn't notice too much. j, What about when we went through that orientation? When we were first coming here? t, Oh, so like still in Bettles? j, Yeah. a, It was helpful just kind of went over things. Didn't really explain anything that I didn't know, well a little bit, yeah, but ... it was just helpful to know exactly what the

guidelines are going to be. j, That's part of the presence, a good part, a positive thing, I think, for people to get that kind of education. A little brief before they go out there. We try to do everything we can, but it's nice for them to hear it from somebody else, so they don't think that we're just making up these bizarre..... you know you have to dig a hole before you go to the bathroom kind of rules

Bear Barrels

[21: 695 to 705] b, Was there anything negative about your experience of beginning the trip, going over there and getting the backcountry orientation? j, No negatives. We did carry our food in bear barrels this time, which is apparently something that Roger Semler is asking outfitters to do. We've never really done it much in my experience before, although I think in years past, this company has. And they're a little bit cumbersome, they're definitely cumbersome. And they ... I don't know if they're totally necessary up there. Or very practical for all situations. Something maybe that people would want to strive for if they can bring their food in bear barrels, either on a backpack or on a river trip, but it seems like making people do it... and I don't know that he is making people do it... just... yeah, but he's trying to encourage it. I don't know if making people do it necessarily the most practical thing for all situations. b, The most practical thing, what do you mean by that? j, I mean, you can't, if it's a long trip, and you have... we were only out for a week and we had nine people. That maxed out three barrels. t, We were fed well. j, But if we were out for a longer trip, you know, if we chose to come out for 11 or 12 days, we couldn't fit all of our food practically into a barrel and still load the boats with everybody else's gear. It's just like ... it's not going to happen. So.....yeah, and that's just something you need to find ... not you, but one needs to find a compromise or a balance between being bear safe and taking preventive measures and being extreme and putting everything in barrels and just making a trip...well, impossible, logistically impossible.

Group Size

[22: 723 to 737] j, Well, we definitely try to stay under ... at or under the party size limit for any group we send wherever we are. Yeah. So it wasn't by accident that we were 9. And not 12. We wouldn't go over the limit. a, It would make it fun. It was just a good size. There was enough personal attention from the guides. j, Otherwise, too, you have to. t, You have to strap people to the gear pile. j, And it's just too hard on the places, you know, it's too hard on the camps. And too hard on the portage trails and everything else to have that many more people. I mean, even 9 feels big to me. t, Mm... hm... s, Mm... hm.. a, Yeah.

Support for Use Limits

[23: 755 to 761] b, So you say that the Park does not have much influence over how many people are out there. j, Well, I don't think, I mean, in the permitting, you give us a permit to operate and we pretty much can do whatever we want from there. You know we can run as many trips as we want. There are no criteria that we need to fall under as far as I know. b, Would it ever be appropriate for the Park to try and limit the number of people that can go out there? j, Oh, definitely! Definitely! If it's going to save the place, you know, from getting totally beat out, I think absolutely, especially according to Bill,

who was on the backpack up in the Arrigetch, which is cruddy, you know, no places to camp and the places that there are, there's shit all over it and just no good. So, ... yeah, I think it would be appropriate for a cap to be instituted. I wouldn't object to it.

810BTT24

Rick (r) and Tim (t)

Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 185 to 189] b, So, how did you find about the Kobuk River? r, I've known about the Kobuk for a long time. We've lived in Alaska 17 years. And it's always like "we want to go there, we want to go there." Just never had the opportunity. t, Then we jumped on the Internet and found this place.

[2: 191 to 197] r, Everybody in Alaska is pretty much sports crazy, sports orientated. The doctors, everybody that moves up here is either fishing or hunting or hiking crazy, you know. So, you just start talking to people. Then people... it's funny how you'll mention a bend on a river somewhere and somebody'll say "yeah, and you remember that tree that goes right underneath that other one there?" You know, it's like unbelievable that other people have been to that exact spot. So...t, And what really got us hyped about this trip is we knew a guy that had some friends that came up here last year and got some really good fishing in, so that got us interested in ...r, ... in fishing. t, Yeah, got us interested in this river.

[3: 199 to 203] b, So was fishing the main reason that you chose that spot? t, Yeah. r, Yup. And I cannot tell a lie, I guess the sheefish are indigenous only to that river and possibly one or two other smaller rivers in Alaska. So if you want sheefish, that's where you have to go.

Fishing

[4: 93 to 95] r, Then we started catching... he caught the first sheefish this morning. And we were catching them all morning. It was a lot of fun. And the biggest one was about 14 pounds or so. t, The chum, there were some chum in there, and grayling.

[5: 129 to 133] r, So we had the... the solitude was really nice. It was real nice. In fact, even if the fishing wasn't good, that part of it with the wolves, that's what we had in mind was that even with the wolf experience and stuff, it was a great vacation. But then when we got the good fishing...t, Yeah, which was today, which is the last day. So...r, We were happy dogs. I guess, that's about it. All's well that end's well.

[see also excerpt 15]

Weather

[6: 17 to 23] r, The wind came up, it was real bad when we left Sunday. t, We had to row across one ... the side we were camped on all the way to the other side to get to the

Fragile

[30: 211] r, And again I'll put in a plug here, this developing for oil and gas, and screwing that all up, would be a major mistake, which we knew a long time ago, but all you have to do is go up there and see how fragile everything is. You just can't bring in oil wells and build roads and haul trucks and have spills and say it's pristine because it'll never be pristine. They'll never put it back to what it was. That's our little commercial. Keeping it all the same because this is fragile. It's great.

MANAGEMENT

Visitor Registration/Orientation

[31: 309 to 317] b, When you first arrived in town here, in Bettles, to start your trip, did you check in or visit the Park Service office over there [pointing]? t, No. r, No, because we didn't have any time. They run kind of a tight ship here. t, We got off the plane and onto the other plane. r, Yeah, we were off the plane from Fairbanks and I think we were on the float plane 1/2 hour later on our way. We probably would have. I think it would have been good.

Bear Barrels

[32: 325 to 337] t, What.. uh... King Salmon, we went on a trip there, on the Alaknak. We floated the Alaknak and we went and visited the ranger station there and we got a bear-proof container for our trip. b, Did you have a bear-proof container on this trip? t, No, we didn't. b, Did you wish you did? r, Probably, yeah. t, It would've been better. r, Yeah, because we always put our food way away from the tent and stuff and we... I'm telling you, on every single sand bar was these big 'ol paw prints in there.

NPS Presence

[33: 345 to 355] b, So did you have any contact or interaction with the Park or Park management? r, No. t, No. r, Not that I can think of. b, How did you feel about that? r, That was cool. It was very cool. We had our licenses, that's all we'd be worried about. Because they obviously want to know about your fishing license.

Support for increased presence

[34: 363 to 365] t, Right, if ... I was thinking that if there's more people, you know a lot more people allowed on that river at one time, there should be someone out there making sure things are going relatively smooth and people aren't just like eating something as they're floating down the river and tossing it over or something. r, I wouldn't most of the Park rangers in the context of the National Park Service and stuff, they're the environmentalists for the most part. We're environmentalists. We'd like to keep it wild and all that kind of stuff. I think they do, too, so I think they're the good guys. And I'm not just saying that, really. They are. Because that's... they're concerned about those kinds of things. Somebody has to be... stewardship, is it? That wouldn't bother me one bit if I saw somebody who says "you're in the wrong spot." Wouldn't mind that at all.

Support for Use Limits in the Future

[35: 251 to 267] b, So, would it ever be appropriate to limit the number of users here? r, I think so. t, Definitely. I would agree. It's going to get you know just like the first town in Alaska was. There was a couple of people and then there's 100 people and now there's close to 300,000 people in Anchorage. So, this is a place that, I don't know, people I'm glad I got to see it, but I would say that if everybody wanted to come and see it, it would turn into something that it wasn't originally, which was r, Maybe some kind of lottery system and some kind of..... a set of standard rules, you know, of garbage... taking garbage in and bringing garbage out. t, And enforcing that. Like have people on the river where people are, so if they see r, Yeah, if you start putting people out there....t, I mean, you know one person.. I mean ... r, You mean like a check station you know with a big red sign? And all that? t, Yeah, just make sure there's no garbage.

[36: 373] r, And I hope they can keep it as wild and as natural as possible. I think eventually, in years to come, they're going to have to limit the number of people that go in there, somehow, I don't know how you can do that with private planes and everything else. But certainly through central points like this you can. I don't think it's overloaded right now. Obviously we're out there 8 days and we don't see anyone.

[37: 269 to 273] r, I foresee that [area] being limited. It's not that big of an area when you think about it. It is big.... t, It is big, but... r, But there's only certain parts you can get to. You fly over that and it's big, yeah, but you can't go over the ground or anything like that. It's the rivers that are the ways to get around. If you start putting 100s of people on that river at one time, I think it would make a big difference.

[38: 277 to 285] r, I don't think we'd feel quite as special if somebody... if we came around a corner and somebody asked us the Cubs score. t, And their trash is blowing into the river or something. r, I mean, I don't know if you've been down on the Kenai in Alaska, but it's a pretty hot place for fishing. All the tourists and stuff....t, Combat fishing. It's horrible. r, And at the end of the season, in September, some good Samaritans will go out there and will fill 50 trash bags with stuff from just along the river and stuff, you know, that people have brought in. So, eventually if you bring in more numbers like that, you're going to have those kinds of things. And occasionally I can't you're cutting a piece of line and you got a little piece of line in your mouth and you're doing something and it blows out of your mouth and there's a piece of monofilament.... that's going to stay for a long, long time. If you just add that up, you know, the effect... the cumulative effect, I think would make a difference.

[39: 287 to 299] b, How would it affect your experience if the Park were to limit the number of users out there? r, It'd be fine with me as long as I got on the list [laughs]. In fact, that's what we want to do in Alaska, close it down right now. We're here. So close it. Oregon tried that one time. One person leaves, one person comes in, but then the Supreme Court said you couldn't do that. So, ...I think if you did that, it would degradate, is that the correct word? It would take away from the experience, certainly. In fact, we were very happy to see that guy from Texas, but t, It was only because we were kind of lost. r, Right. If we wouldn't have saw anyone, I think it would have been

even better and more...heightened. There's a little bit of tension being out there by yourself. You really have to know what you're doing and be a little bit lucky with some stuff. If somebody gets hurt out there or something, five, six days, you know, without help, medical help, kind of kiss your butt good-bye. b, So when you say that it would have "degraded" the experience, did you mean if there were more people out there, or if access was restricted? r, No, if there were more people out there. The access restricted doesn't bother me too bad. t, That wouldn't bother me because I mean, yeah, a lot of people aren't going to get to go out there and do whatever they want to do out there, but then again you won't have all of those people making the mess and have the trash out there and just ruining it, really.

[40: 301 to 307] b, So what if you weren't on the list, as you said earlier. What if you didn't get to go? r, We were just kidding. That would be okay. We already went, though. t, We'd go somewhere else we'd be able to get to. r, My definition of pristine is untouched by man. You certainly are not going to do that anywhere in the world, but if you start letting in hoards of people, it's going to change it. It's just going to change things.

Promote LNT practices

[41: 249] r, They even like you take your fire after you put it out, the thing is to break everything up so that there's... you know, people won't come and use the same site over and over. And then start taking all the wood and everything. So, that's a good idea. But eventually, you know, seeing how busy this place is, they're going to have to manage that, too. With the number of people that go up. I rafted the Grand Canyon about 4 years ago and I guess they limit that to 10,000 people a summer now in the Grand Canyon. And that's a major problem with all those people going through there, as far as the damage that it does because they camp pretty much in the same areas and all that kind of stuff. And human waste has to be carried out, which is..... that's a good deal.

[42: 389 to 395] r, Yeah, we were brushing our teeth with it. That's another thing, too, is people brushing their teeth and washing and all that kind of stuff, every little bit, I guess, that cumulative effect of doing all that. Washing your dishes. t, I didn't really think about that. We spit the toothpaste right into the river, so.....I mean we didn't leave any trash there, but....r, I wish you wouldn't have said that. [laughter] Probably been better off spitting on the ground and burying it. I don't know. t, Who knows? But we spit in the river.

[43: 401] r, Those are things that I think even.... they probably could get away with having more people in there if they were very strict about those kinds of rules. The hygiene rules and things like that. Soap and toothpaste and all those kinds of things that wind up in the water. If they were real strict about that, it might help the situation. We could have a few 1000 extra people if not everyone was brushing their teeth and spitting in the river. So I don't know. God only knows, that stuff is strong. It takes all the crud off your teeth and turns them white. I can imagine what it does to the water,

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Randall (r) and Ellen (e)

Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 13] r, Yeah, we took a paddle boat just the two of us and floated the 92 miles from Tulilik Lake down to the confluence of the Colville River. Gone a total of 12 days.

Reasons for Visiting

[2: 185 to 187] b, How did you find out about the Killik River? r, Really, it was ... I picked up this book quite a few years ago. He and his wife took a double Klepper down there alone. He thought it was on the edge of, well not insanity, but he was planning on not doing ... or scouting the Sunday rapids and he actually got through okay, but it scared the heck out of him. And it looked like it would be pretty rough in a Klepper. There's some pretty good currents. Then when they come together, there's pretty good eddies. Pretty turbulent. Rocks. You know those things have pretty thin hide. I read his account of it, and I'm a big wildlife guy. I'm no real hunter or anything, but I just love seeing it. And he had a ... he was seeing stuff all the time. I thought "wow!" that's what I'd like to do. And then I put it on the back burner for years. I knew where it was. I'd go find it on the map and see "oh, here it is there." And then put it on the back burner for a long time and then, oh with the advent, I guess, of the Internet and stuff, I started seeing the commercial guides were starting to do it. In his book he kind of acted like hardly anybody was doing it in the early 90s, really. Seemed like nobody. And now I know people, oh, just even talking to these people who said now the Noatak is now getting so... a lot more traffic, so some of those commercial operators, you know, 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 any more... while it's still a little more wilder. So, it was that book. I wish I knew the title of it, but it was short stories in there about experiences in Alaska, several different ones. This was just a chapter in there by this guy that wrote about the Killik and then I just had it on the back burner for, oh, 5 or 6 years.

Trip Planning

[3: 153 to 155] b, So other than being more careful, did you find yourselves doing other things differently on this trip? r, Uh... probably with planning food. I'm just trying to figure out how much that plays into the fact that we were alone, but.....made sure we had all the essentials. I think it's kind of like... every pound counts, every ounce you look over because you're flying in. The jump between a 185 and a Beaver is huge and would have barred us from doing the trip, actually. So you look at everything, but then you don't want miss anything that's critical. And you know it's not like at home if you spaced.....oh, heck we got to the middle fork trip here, but I forgot my socks. So I suppose that you're with other people and they go "Hey, I got socks." Or maybe not socks or like your parka or jacket or something. Somebody might have an extra or something to get you by. Well, since we're alone.... so I probably put more of my effort into that with preparation stage just making sure we really couldn't forget some basic

necessities there. No one would be there to lend you it. And also everything had to be functional.

Finding information

[4: 121 to 123] b, You said at the beginning that you didn't see any people except for the one guide. Was that what you expected? r, Hoping.... you know you always hope for the best. I didn't really have much on this thing, but an account in this book of a guy that ran it about '91. And he didn't see any people. Oh, I guess he did see a couple of guys in a Klepper down there at the Colville. So, that's about all I had to go on. There wasn't a lot of information I could really pull up on the river. I searched on the Internet, but usually what you'll hit is the guided trips and they'll give a little blurb about this and that, but....there is no guide book that I...I don't believe there's a guide book. So then we kind of talked to people, at the flight service, although it seems like most of them really haven't been down it, you know. So we just did it and then... actually running into the guide, the one commercial operator up there waiting for the 2nd party to come in. He was nice to us. Gave us a couple of tips.

Safety/Rescue

[5: 129 to 135] e, But you know, when we're at home on a river where the people are all there [inaudible]. You feel a little more relaxed about the rapids...r, Yeah. e, Up here, I felt like class II could be pretty serious. r, Well, we were all alone...

[6: 293 to 313] r, On the one hand, you like to be free. It's like [Ellen] says, we didn't really... I didn't really realize those satellite phones were down to this level now that a guy could pack one. I didn't know what the hell the deal was with them. This guy had one out there. She's.... well, maybe it's just the two of us, maybe we should have one. Oh hell then you're checking your e-mail or something... you're checking your recorder, you know. e, But you wouldn't... r, Yeah. You know all of a sudden you got this thing that can just keep you in contact you know with your message box... e-mail... or your message machine and stuff. So I think all that kind of takes away. So I guess your deal was sometimes maybe some guy would say "I don't want to... I'm just going, this is the way I want it. I don't want anybody to...." It doesn't hurt for search and rescue things. e, Then in Canada we know that there are some places that offer little something that you take with you that if there's an emergency....r, Yeah. e, That it's a satellite emergency signal and then some... r, You can rent e, You know you have to pay for your rescue if...r, You can even rent that down in Anchorage if you were down there. e, I don't know. There's nothing wrong with being a little conservative. r, Yeah, it's just how far do you want to go with modern technology to assure that that somebody can come and find you?

[7: 315 to 327] b, You sound like maybe you have a little difference of opinion on this. r, Yeah. e, You know, I do...just like to... God, if something happened to him and I was in there by myself. You can't run a paddleboat by yourself. You know just the... and then the bears are kind of a scary thing. So I just think the remoteness and the chance of maybe something happening. It'd be nice to be able to get a hold of somebody to let them know you needed some help. Or if you fell and punctured your lung, you know,

you need a medivac, you know, if you're really hurt, two weeks can be a long time to suffer through a broken femur or something like that. But that's the chance that you take when you go into the wilderness. So, I guess you can't have it all. Now that I'm home, safe and sound, then I'm not all that worried about it. r, We talk all big and bad. e, But those are some of my r, Yeah. r, But it's the same everywhere. You make those choices.

Weather

[8: 13] r, Quite a few days at the... let's see, we got wind one day, totally where we couldn't travel at all. And so we just hunkered down on actually an island on the leeward side of it. Put the boat there to stay out of the wind. And spent the entire day there. We had a couple of other pretty good wind days, but we were able to travel and make pretty good miles... a bit of a struggle. That little paddle raft, I'd say somewhere approximating much more than 20 miles an hour [of] head wind, we couldn't move. We did get a good tail wind one day that got us down there, but the ones we feared the most were the northwest winds that were head winds, on the Killik River drainage anyway. And that pretty well wiped out. And light showers in there, didn't have any heavy rain, but I think the thing that actually struck me the most on the weather was how it changed. It just seemed like those 12 days, I'd almost say within 12 hours there'd be something new coming, almost. I'd never seen weather like that that you could almost say well.... I mean everybody says the weather changes, you know, wherever you're at. But there it was definitely... within 12 hours it would be totally different. It could be sunny and blowing hard with high pressure somewhere or then go back in this Maritime-type weather pattern or showery or drizzly. And then the winds almost on every third day, pretty good winds. I think [inaudible] traveled that. It was just the two of us, like I say, unguided trip, so probably my advice would be to travel almost every good day you get, fearing that you'll be held up by winds and just kind of use those as maybe a layover day, unless you have a tremendous amount of time. I think the thing I learned from that one, too, was even though a lot of people run the short little 40 mile version down the Killik, uh.... oh what the heck was the lake down there? Udrivik, yeah. And I thought that was a little short, but I kind of see why they do it because it's so unpredictable there, weather wise, and if you get hit with the winds, you know you're hanging it out a little bit more unless you got the time

[9: 161] r, But like I say, up here, actually a shorter one, somebody said 40 miles, well, you figure, "you're going to go all the way up there and just do 40 miles?" Like on the [inaudible] river I run 40 or so and it's just two nights... But it's different up here because of the harshness of the climate. This river didn't have much current. You might want to do some hiking and the fact that you might be held down by wind, I say well, a 40-mile trip here may be equal to 100-mile trip down south. So that'd be different, I think. If someone told me 40 miles, I'd go "I'm not going all the way up there to do 40 miles." But now I'd say "Well, I don't know. Check out the scenery."

Getting out on time

[10: 65 to 67] b, When you said you were too busy, were you traveling every day? r, Yeah, I think it was that. You know, we got out of the ... we got there at Tulilik and we

got right out of the Beaver and it was had been a pretty good storm had just come through. It was a nice day, but it was 38 degrees at about 11:30 in the morning and there was up to about a 30, real consistent, not gusty, 30 mile-an-hour wind and that went for about 12 hours. So we got a pretty good taste right then. It doesn't take a genius to figure out "wow!" it's a magical place, but a harsh climate. And when we got out of that plane and hit the ground with the wind and cold, of course you're higher up there, about 1700 feet, but we thought "wow!" we better... I mean we couldn't paddle on it. It was lucky that was our plan to lay... I mean we had just got there, so we weren't really moving or anything, so it was a planned layover day, haul your stuff over to the... but we decided then that we better move. We had all these layover days planned, but then up there up on the top, you know, we thought we better just use those. Because the water, too, is pooled up there. I didn't know that, either, that it's the current ... until you get past Udrivik... It's quite slow, almost... I mean there is a current there, but it's quite slow and then once you get past Udrivik, it's nice all the way down to the Colville. You're moving all the time. Nice, good current...so that was a kind of a wakeup call for us, when we got hit with that wind and cold right there off the bat. We decided that it's ... I mean you'd be in big trouble if you missed your plane. They come and you have to pay them that again to come again, you know. Because they won't land in the Killik. They won't do water landing in there. So you got to ... it's a severe penalty if you're not at your pickup.

[11: 69 to 71] b, So were you feeling some pressure to have to make it out...r, [interrupts] Yeah, until we got down that braided section, I mean, you look at that on a map and you go "Good, God! What's this going to be like down here?" I mean, 1/2 mile the map shows as being pretty braided. After we started to deal with that for a couple of days, we realized just read the water and you can make a couple of mistakes, but the deeper water is on the outside of the turn. Tried to do the wise thing and realized that we weren't going to be like dragging boats, say, on the braided.... I think after that, when we kind of got a little closer to the end of the trip, we realized "oh, yeah, we're going to be able to make it." So, we actually did end up there a whole ... we spent two nights at the takeout, so we actually arrived at it like a day early.

[12: 79] r, Yeah, and we didn't get good hikes... you know the big... some of that hiking up early that they mentioned. We didn't get it just because we were thinking we well the problem there is kind of a you know ironic because you're at the top where some of the best hiking is, but then you also know such little about the river and getting out on time, so we... technically we could have spent one more day up there.

[13: 103] r, We would've hiked more if we would have had more time. That urge to get down there, once again....

Other People

[14: 15 to 21] e, And we didn't see anybody for the whole trip really. r, Other than at the put in, there was a commercial outfit there that was getting ready for their clients to come in. But...e, One guy. r, So that was pretty neat. Can rarely do that. Didn't see any sign of human habitation. That's pretty interesting. I'm used to always seeing some kind

of in-holding on rivers, you know, whether it was an old private..., but we didn't see any of that. And complete silence.

[15: 365 to 372] e, Most people that you see out there are also, if they weren't somebody who didn't enjoy being in ...r, Yeah, generally.. e, ... being in the wilderness and respect it, they wouldn't have spent the money to be here in the first place. So running into people that ... it's a pretty interesting place to be....r. You know you hear some horror stories about some guys, but you know the... that... I think all in all they're pretty good, I don't know. Foreigners, I hope they treat it pretty good.

[see also excerpt 29]

Evidence

[16: 23 to 25] e, No microtrash. r, Yeah. And the outfitters, I thought, that were using it, these people were doing good. I've floated rivers in Canada and the Nahani and stuff. Even though that's a park, they just let him build up these huge fire pits. They'll go up to almost 2 feet high. I've always wondered about that. Middle fork Salmon and stuff you know you have to have a fire pan, carry out your ashes. But this was real good that way. We didn't really see any fire rings. We built one fire. We didn't have a fire pan. One small fire, totally obliterated it. Real clean.

[see also excerpt 28]

Wildlife

[17: 25 to 33] r, Then of course the wildlife was, as far as what I expected, it was probably more so than.... I mean we saw a wolverine, which is pretty rare, and came real close to get a picture of him, but we just needed a few more seconds. Like we mentioned, 14 -15 bears. [Ellen], I don't know, you said...e, Five bears the first day. Five the 2nd day. Sow with a yearling. r, Sow and yearling [inaudible] probably what happened [inaudible] just float by on the bank. We got within roughly 120 to 150 feet. She either heard us or smelled us and then reared up and stood up. That was pretty amazing to be that close as we were floating by. Then she kind of went to the cub and then took off. So I think I like that ability to be able to see the bears because they do stick out. Especially because it's so flat and open...unless you were in some of the willows, you could have some encounters. That's the way they always happen. And then that blonde color, the bleached-blond look on most of them, although we did see a couple of [inaudible]. Then the most concentration up high, I think maybe they're getting berries, I'm not sure. But then once you get past Udrivik, we really only saw but one way down, and he was walking a braided river. We were really getting hit with wind there and got stuck. He didn't really see us. He was walking parallel to us. About 200 to 250 yards away, but walking down stream and we got stuck on a rock. Then we'd get going again and we think we'd lose him and around lunch, there he is again just walking all over those boulders down stream again. And we thought oh, we're finally done with him, and then around the evening, we saw him again, still walking. He was a traveling bear. And birdlife. I'm a big birder. I thought it was great. The red-necked loons. We saw a yellow-billed loon yesterday with chicks. Um... saw a yellow [inaudible], the... e,

Lots of peregrine falcons. r, Yeah, lots of peregrine falcons. That's what neat about the lower section is almost every rock outcropping down there would have a raptor of some kind, usually a peregrine. There are not that many cliffs around from what I could see, but when you do come down around one, boy they're on them and they act like you know they're...unseen people or whatever.

[18: 39 to 45] e, We were excited to see the caribou. r, Yeah, that was e, Not huge concentrations, but maybe ... r, 80 I think I counted at one time in a herd. And just barely missed from going in front. We saw some small groups go crashing in front of the river, 2, 3 swimming it, but the commercial outfit that was there just..., boy, I think they saw 1000 on a hillside. Lots of tracks, you know. And we'd see lots of wolf tracks and bear tracks on that upper.... impressions all the time.

Behavior

[19: 339 to 345] e, I kind of think also I feel a little bit better even though it was really remote after I saw all these bears just do...stand up, you know, get a look at us, smell us, and then take off. It made me think "now, that bear doesn't associate me with food." And the more people on a river that are messy campers or have allowed bears to get into their food, then I'm more frightened of those bears than I am of the really wild bears. So I felt I would, compared to maybe the Noatak, where I know a lot of people are going down, there, maybe not being as careful, I'd feel better about being around bears...r, That's a good point. e, ... here on the Killik.. r, Yeah, all our bears seemed to act just like you'd want a bear to do, they might show a little bit of curiosity trying to figure out what this creature is. I had that one that took a couple of steps towards us a ways away, that was walking on that river bank, but it was more or less like he was trying to figure out what we were and stood up, saw it, and takes off. And every one of them seemed to be good, wild bears.

[see also excerpts 25, 27]

NATURE OF PLACE

Scenic Beauty

[20: 111] I thought one other neat thing was, you know, you leave the mountains and you look back and see them get smaller and smaller. That was neat. Usually you're in a canyon and the mountains are always around you. Here you can see them slowly fade away in the distance as you get out there on the North Slope and going down to the Colville. So that was neat.

[21: 161] r, And that's cool coming through the Brooks Range, those mountains, it was real neat to travel that section down to Udrivik. Looking up at them all the time. But then still get a taste of the North Slope from the next essentially 45 miles or something.

[22: 205 to 211] b, So now that you've floated the Killik, how would you describe it to some other people who are maybe thinking about this trip? r, I think in a short phrase, is I would say it's a real magical, beautiful land. Things you'll never see... wildlife you'll never see, but tempered with the fact that it's a harsh environment. The weather is

constantly changing. And a lot of wind. We probably were up here maybe in the more rainy season. Maybe think of going a little earlier in July or something, but then I think the bugs possibly are a little bit more prevalent. And the caribou really isn't moving, from what I understand. So harsh, magical land that.... I thought it was....e, Huge! r, Huge....Uh....the fact that you can just see forever and forever up there and you can see animals, all add to the sense of interest. And every day I'm ... I just get up there and what do you.... my eyes are constantly glued and moving all the time looking. You know, looking, looking, looking. Um... and you can't... you know it's like nothing you'll ever see. The flight in and out are incredible. They're worth the ... you know half the price just what you see... endless ranges, you know, of going over the Brooks. It's amazing... God! that's a lot of wilderness there. And stuff we never see, though, I forgot what they call it... the ice that stays there all summer. You see that up some of the valleys. Odd things like that. The overflow ice, I'm speaking of, or whatever it is.

[23: 159 to 161] b, How else was this trip different from other float trips you've taken? r, Well, I think we already went over the remoteness, the topography, the.... weren't not used to seeing we're in a land of big conifers and pines up there in Idaho and it's all above treeline on the North Slope. All that's different. The shades of color. The sun itself, actually, up here was up all the time. And then still some strange, I don't know how to explain them, but some blues and stuff you see in the sky. I don't know exactly what causes them. And then sunbeams even seem somewhat different, they're coming down and then...just light conditions I guess.

Remoteness

[24: 163 to 167] b, Let's go back to that remoteness. What specifically made it remote? e, No people. r, No people. It's hard as heck, very expensive, it's a big burden to get here. It's expensive to get there, so that stops ... there's a hurdle to get over. And then the I think one thing that just gives you the sense of remoteness is flying over it. As you go in, it kind of sets the tone, especially as you come out. That made me feel good. I thought "Geez, here's an area with wildlife..." It looks to me like... I mean there's not going to be any suburb being built here within the next... in my lifetime. I like that feeling, knowing that it is so big. It's just huge. Even when you float sometimes you look at stuff and you think "Oh, we'll be there real soon." And it turns out it takes a lot longer than you thought. The scale without your usual land marks of trees and oh I'm not sure, you know, ridge lines that are coming down with cliffs on it that you can observe. This is all a little more... so open. The scale is different. And I guess the whole thing for us was it's just a heck of a long way out there. It takes a lot of energy, motivation to get there.

[25: 173 to 175] r, Another thing about remoteness is sometimes on some rivers you know you could pretty much walk out and get help. But there's no walking any... you know...r, Like I mentioned, there's no in-holdings in there. The other thing was there is very little air traffic. We, oh on the middle fork.. I keep going back to the middle fork of the Salmon because I've run that a lot. But there's planes going in and out of there to the ranches and then as the season goes on, it gets low, so they have to fly floaters in there. But here really we, geez, I think there was one float plane went in, I think it was going

in down there to Udrivik. We did see that fly over us, but especially down below, nothing. Nobody coming in on aircraft that we could see. I mean I know they do... they're taking people in there, but boy we didn't have any problem with them. Then below Udrivik, there didn't seem to be any reason for anybody to be down there in a plane there. Because I don't know how many people float that section, but I think the majority are up between Tulilik and Udrivik, so.... um.. that kind of help set the tone for being in a remote place. You don't see people, airplanes, or signs of old cabins, you know, maybe there's some in there, but we didn't see them. So and then the wildlife you see, all of that kind of comes together to say that this thing [inaudible] wildlife you know like I say the bear and all the indicator species you see those in there and everything else just kind of follows. So if you got bears and you go "wow!" This is good enough habitat for the bears, then we're probably going to be seeing other things. And sure enough, you do. So, I think the wildlife speaks to the fact that it's remote and unaltered by man or they just wouldn't be there. You know, we don't see that stuff down home. So when I see bears and wolverine.....caribou, I know I'm in a pretty remote spot. It's not being heavily impacted by man. Bears don't tolerate that.

[26: 183] r, I guess, along those lines, but I know, heck down to the... I'm not sure just where that Park boundary ends, but it's down there part of the way. Then after that, of course, there is I don't know classified National Petroleum Reserve or whatever. Is it BLM land? I'm not sure what it is, but we didn't see any..... I guess my point is.... down in the states you usually see four-wheeler tracks, ORV, or something if you're outside the Park. If they can get it, they'd be there. Here, they can get at it, but ... or I mean it's open to them evidently, but they can't get at it because it's just so remote, so wild, I mean what's the guy going to do, fly in his helicopter with a little four-wheeler? It is nearly impossible for him. Just saying that this country something's keeping that type of activity off of it. I think it's probably just the remoteness, the distance away from any kind of activity like that. They just can't do it. That was kind of neat.

Wilderness

[27: 213 to 215] b, So you just used the term "wilderness." Do you think of the Killik River area as wilderness? r, I sure do, yeah. It's very wild country without much impacted by man and the wildlife that normally would leave areas where man well, I guess up here, you know, you got so damn much wilderness that I mean I guess one thing..... there are not that many human beings up here, so it's to be expected I guess. That this wildlife would be here. But back home, boy, when you start getting more people. Some of the first things to flee are some of these more sensitive species. Up here, they're real prevalent. So they just go hand in hand to me, with wild country. It's the greatest.

[28: 217 to 219] b. Other than having few people and certain kinds of wildlife, what other things make it a wilderness? r, Lack of any kind of permanent habitation that I could ever see. No air strips. No dude ranches. Things of those nature. The private in-holdings that we really see a lot of down home. Um....the purity of the water. At least that one..... I don't have to do a silt, but this one was real crystal clear. There's no leeching from old mines that I could ever find up there. I'm sure a guy could dang near

drink right out of it. We pumped it, but then the um... [Ellen] what else, brings the?... we mentioned the wildlife and the birds and stuff. That's a key thing to me. Just the lack of human evidence there. Everything from old camp fire rings to you know the signs that a lot of campers have been there. Just makes me think that it's not done very much. It's in a pretty much of a...the same state it's been in all ... since whenever. Unaltered.

[29: 221 to 237] e, We always try to read books about where we're going or you know there's not a lot written about that actual Killik area, but there is about the Koyukuk and the Kobuk and all ... it just makes you curious. It's wilderness, but then again you know for years and years there've been people who lived there and traveled through there...r, And it wasn't wilderness to them. e, I would say it's definitely a wild place, but it's their home so it's probably not wilderness to everybody, but certainly a wild place. b, Does knowing that people lived there for an extended period of time make it any less of a wilderness? e, No, If you sit back and think how....r, How did they do it? e, How did they do it and [inaudible] knowledge... have to travel and hard to make a living r, Hard to walk over and navigate through. e, It makes me admire those people and wonder.... or I'd like to know more about it.

MANAGEMENT

Visitor Registration

[30: 283 to 293] e, And we didn't even know the only reason we came over here was to get the boxes (bear barrels). We didn't know that anybody even needed to know that we were going in the Park to do a trip. You know most rivers or...r, It's a voluntary thing [here].e, Yeah, on backpacking trips, you have to check in so they know what kind of traffic the area is getting. b, How'd you feel about that? The fact that you could just go out there without telling anybody about it? e, Well it made me think that well obviously this place isn't getting used that much or that wouldn't be happening. r, Yeah, that was probably my first reaction, too. Lighter use. The use isn't that high. They're not seeing the degradation that you'd see from heavier uses.

Safety Function

[31: 239 to 241] b, Well you weren't in the national park for the whole of your trip, but given that, how would you describe the Park Service management in the area? r, Uh... we've already talked about the bear barrels and stuff. Those are some things they ... that we rented here in Bettles. And all of the administrative part was great. Filling out a form. There was an optional form you could fill out that would notify search and rescue if you didn't show up, so that.... those are all... the more of those the better, if we don't get out. I mean we got the pilot and hopefully they know, you know. They're going to get you, but.... if something happened to them, some slip up, you know. I'm not too worried about that, but it doesn't hurt to fill out a couple of more of those. Those were fine. We didn't have a whole lot of Park influence other than that. I would like to look more here at the site and all of the.... they've got some nice displays here, which is great, but of course there's nobody in there to ... that we ran into from the Service, so all of our interaction was right here.

[32: 261 to 263] b, So, you filled out the voluntary registration form? Would it ever be appropriate to have that be mandatory, be a regulation that you needed to fill out that form? e, I wouldn't see why somebody wouldn't want to fill it out. I'd stand in line to fill it out.

Need for Visitor Education

[33: 265] r, I don't... you know the only thing mandatory would be is if they had a kind of a deal to read about we never really got any of that in the Park Service about how to be a sensitive camper and all. They we did ask and the gall was real nice, about bear problems in the area. She alerted us to the fact that last year, I think, there was a big... I think they called him a rogue bear or something, or a big male that was there by Tulilik Lake that seemed to hang around and show aggression. There was, I think, an archaeological outfit that was up there doing some work that had to stay there and he the bear was intimidating. So she warned us about that, that he could be back. So possibly a deal for people to read about how to keep a clean camp, you know. I don't know. We always run into this problem. I don't know how to solve it, but like the middle fork or something like that, your gray water stuff. We always screen it and actually throw that out with our garbage. Afraid here, you know, I'll admit that because we're so worried about bears that that stuff, we our dishes and everything, we like nearly lick them clean. That's the best thing. Plan your food so you don't have an excess. The more you do it, the better you get at that. So we didn't end up throwing anything away, but we would...like the gray water, throw it in the river. We probably shouldn't, but I thought, okay, we could throw it back behind here. If somebody smells it..... yeah, if he smells it and attracts him to there, then you got this problem and that and this. So I don't know what the easy solution to that is. Sometimes I wonder how we're affecting the river, but things like that. If there was maybe somebody that had done any kind of studies or what the latest knowledge that was just pooled together and saying "well, in light of this and that, we do things that...." It might be the dilution factor is big enough in the river or something and it isn't such a big deal with these numbers and go ahead and do this type of thing. Kind of a clean camping protocol sheet or something, or just what to do in there.

[34: 271 to 277] e, We didn't know even, like some rivers, they want you to urinate in the river. r, Yeah, like the Middle Fork. e, Those questions of...this is such a different type of climate and the sensitive tundra area...so we didn't even know quite what to do with some of those kind of things. Maybe....r. Used our best knowledge of what we'd done before and try to minimize our impact.

Reasons for Implementing Limits

[35: 349 to 351] b, You suggested earlier that it would be appropriate to limit use if it impacted people's enjoyment of the area. For you, personally, what would impact your enjoyment of the area, at what level would there be too many people? r, Um... I think the ... probably when I first got there seeing quite a few people putting in, just... not what would be a mob, but several parties either getting ready to go or putting in or a large number of people that you see. The concentration of people. And then the... with that large a concentration up in that sensitive area, you can't help but see the impact on the

land. If they do camp on the gravel bars and stuff, that's pretty minimal there, truly, but well this commercial guide actually camps one up on the tundra. Boy, you can see what it does to the vegetation when they move up like that by... well he's got a camp up there by Udrivik up higher. And fire rings, like we saw in some of the Canadian rivers that are built up year after year. These big ... then they build another one next to it, then there's another one 5 feet from it. That type of stuff, you know, and you just kind of frown on that, and go "Geez, I want to go somewhere else that I don't see all this evidence of human beings." Probably also I mean I don't know how your human waste degrades up there, not that great, but you know signs like that. And trash, microlitter, all that would have an impact on us. And then just seeing people.

Support for Regulations and Limits in the Future

[36: 243 to 255] e, If there were more people that were visiting the Park, then more things would come into play as far as doing the trip, like using r, Fire pans. e, Or like on the Tatshenshini, you know use the port-a-potty. Carry all human waste out, fire pans, all of the things that go along with r, That may happen, too, you know. e, If there's an area that's sensitive and getting traveled more, then the Park Service has to step in and make more [regulations] r, That may... you could see that happening if the use goes up and people start complaining. e, And we're all for that.

[37: 329 to 331] b, Going back to the Park Service management of this place, would it ever be appropriate to limit the number of people that could access the Killik or other areas in the Park? r, I think it probably would if it got to those levels that it was impacting everybody's enjoyment of the river. Maybe some of the camps down there you couldn't get because of ... they are so few and far between, especially down below Udrivik because they're hard to find down there with all that braiding going on. If it got to the point where other people were in the camps. Just... if all of the things you went there in the first place for were negated because of the number of people, then it definitely would be worth a lottery or whatever it takes. Or some kind of first-come, first-serve basis.

Implications of limits

[38: 333 to 337] b, How would it affect your experience if that happened? e, If we had to get a permit, it wouldn't. We've done lots of other rivers, you know, close to home and in Canada and Alaska where we had to find out what the deal was with the permit and get a date and follow through. So we would still do it. r, I'd probably look for others up here that maybe didn't have it. There's a lot of rivers, like I mentioned, in ANWR, and stuff. And if they didn't have it, I might be thinking "wow!" let's just go there. Because it would kind of be... right off the bat, thinking there's more people here, they've already got..... they've had to limit the numbers. And then I'm thinking "Well, there's these others out there that haven't." And I might be looking over there at those. But if the I think if the magic's there to begin with, then that might just like we did the Nahani, you know Virginia Falls, South Nahani and stuff ... I mean.... even though it's not a real kind of waiting list... oh, you got to actually get on a ... you've got to tell them when you want to be at Virginia Falls because they don't like...you can only be there for a couple of days. So anyway but the draw is so great there to see this the falls is bigger than

Niagara. Actually twice the size of Niagara. And so if the draw was that big in the Killik, I'd still go no matter what. But given that there are all kind of these rivers that are running in the Coastal Plain through some big mountains and different kinds of mountains, but, I 'd probably say "well, these guys haven't limited the Hulahula or this or that..." I'd probably try to go there, although this is cheaper. You know they got this set up from Bettles so that it's ... the logistics are still tough, but it seems to me like ANWR is harder. It's just harder to do. I don't know, talking around... these guys aren't flying there. So, given that they were equally easy to get to and one of them had limited it through some kind of a waiting list thing, I'd probably go to the ones that don't. Just figuring that there are just not that many people there yet. So it's going to be more wild. Waiting list kind of means that boy they've had to do something. I'm glad they did it and it still would be worth doing. But it's just what you got to do when the numbers get too big. We're faced with the same things down there in Idaho.

Focus on commercial users

[39: 374 to 382] e, And then I guess that as far as outfitters and permits for the outfitters, if you came upon a group of 15 people, you know, then that would be something I would be in favor of the permit system...r, Small river.. e... for outfitters to just have small groups. r, This guy had,... I thought he just did a great job from what I could see. He had I think 5 or 6 guests and there were just the two of them. I couldn't find any of his camp. I saw.. he had a fire pan.. I think he was doing a pretty good job. But like [Ellen] says, on a little river like that, boy all of a sudden, I mean some guy might have 15 guests or something. So that would diminish the whole thing for everybody, too. e, So a permit system can be good for the public, as far as regulating what the outfitters can and cannot do.

812BTT27

Harvey (h)

Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 13] h, Yeah, well two weeks ago we flew into Summit Lake on the Continental Divide, the headwaters of the North Fork and from there backpacked five days to the Gates of the Arctic, Frigid Crags and Boreal Mountain, where we met up with boats. And floated the remaining portion of the river to Bettles, two weeks in total.

[2: 15 to 21] b, This was a guided trip, correct? h, Correct. Uh...huh....b, And how many people total were on the trip? h, On the backpack, there were 5 of us. Then on the float there were 10. One fella just did the backpack and flew out when we met up with the boats. So he didn't get to do the easy part. Easy being a relative term.

Reasons for Visiting

[3: 87 to 93] b, So how did you decide to visit Gates of the Arctic? h, Um.... part of it was price. Part of it was that it was a combination backpack and a float. And I'm familiar with some of the writings of Bob Marshall and his descriptions of some of these

areas. I thought it was an opportunity to go check them out. b, When you say price, do you mean that it was economical compared to other things that you might have done? h, Yeah, price-wise, you know, the price of a guided trip was pretty economical because it was only a one way charter to the put in. And then float out to Bettles where you can commercial fly out back into Fairbanks. And, too, noticing some of the other trips that involve more chartering, prices tend to go up. Expectedly.

[4: 71 to 77] b, When you do this kind of thing, do you usually go with a guided group? h, I did in this circumstance, yeah, just not having been in this type of park before. And it seemed like it was a sensible thing to do to learn some basics of some of the transportation and the chartering, what to expect, how to prepare. You know, rely on some of their experiences first, gain some of your own experiences and knowledge, and then perhaps in the future try and do an unguided trip. I think would be the way to approach it. At least for me, anyways. I think coming in here cold without having done a guided trip or having been in this kind of a remote park setting, I think would be a mistake for someone to come in just out of the blue. b, Why would it be a mistake? h, Well, lack of knowledge. You can get into some trouble. Route-finding. The guides related a couple of stories of folks that came in, didn't even have the proper maps. They split up. Two fellas were together apparently and one guy had equipment failure and decided to go back to the put-in where they floated in and the other guy continued on to where they were supposed to get taken out of. Both guys got lost going back to those ... one guy back to the original destination, the other guy going out to where he was supposed to get picked up. Both guys got lost. The one guy that went back to the original put-in was found by another group, and they confirmed for him that, yes, this was this lake and this is where you were put in. So, yeah, you should stay here until somebody comes to get you. Um... the other guy was out still wandering around completely in a totally different drainage. At least the story was related to me that these folks had never been in that kind of circumstance and didn't know that it was bushwhacking. It's remote. There are no trails. There are no signs. There are no amenities that you might normally expect in a national park. So they were lost. It could have turned out a lot worse than it did. So just for me, personally, I think that I'd feel much more comfortable now doing a trip on my own after having done this one.

[5: 83 to 85] b, How did you find out about the area that you visited? h, Oh, one of the guides is a personal friend. He has been doing it for 7 years now. So, it's about time I take him up on one of these trips. So, yeah, it was ... I plan to come back next June on another one somewhere. Do more of it.

Other relevant experiences

[6: 95 to 105] b, So this was your first visit to the Park, correct? h, Mmm.... hm....b, Was it your first visit to the Brooks Range? h, No. No. Um....the other visits were basically off of the Haul Road. And a float down the Atigun River and the Sagg River. That was more in the northern side, of course. A little bit different terrain. A lot different land cover, as far as forest and tundra and that sort of thing. But that was like, I say, a road accessible kind of visit, which is limited. b, What do you mean limited? h, Well, just off of the Haul Road, there's only so far you can get to. On foot.

Weather

[7: 25] h, Well, the weather was always a highlight. Watching how it moved and changed rapidly. As I said, we flew into the lake on a floatplane and got off on the side and hiked, geez, maybe a mile and a half to two miles that Sunday as the weather started to change for the worst. It started snowing, so we had to set up camp rather quickly and hastily in a sheltered little gully or draw. It wasn't the best level spot for a tent, but it was out of the wind. Just went about the routine of setting up camp, having dinner, hot drinks, went to bed. Continued to snow all night long. And the next morning, there were about two inches of fresh snow. And again went through the routine of breaking camp and heading south. It was all downhill from there. So the lower we got in elevation the snow disappeared and the sun broke through. By that second day, in the afternoon, it was we were finding sunshine.

[8: 113 to 117] h, The experience, you know, I would tell folks to be prepared for the worst and hope for the best. Really. b, The worst of what? h, Anything, weather, terrain, um.... specifically weather, I think. To prepare for snow and rain and wet. And be ready. Field test your gear, you know. Go out and float a couple of trips in the rain, pouring rain before you come up here and make sure your gear is waterproof and that it is quick-drying and that it is warm. If it's not, then you should change it. Make sure that it is. Because your comfort level determines, I think, a lot to do with your overall enjoyment of the experience and the place that you're in. As long as you feel comfortable, you'll have a much better time. No matter what the conditions. That was kind of my attitude toward the whole thing was to ... I went out in the middle of downpours and tested my raingear, floated the canoe on the Chena River a couple of times. Was satisfied that I'd be dry and warm. That didn't come completely off, but I wasn't completely warm and dry the whole time. But I'd say 90% of the time I was. And that was a large... that has a lot to do with the overall enjoyment. For sure.

Hiking/Floating

[9: 25] h, Rested up, dried out as best we could. And took off the next day for Pyramid Creek, where we had to leave the river travel and go up on the side of the river into the bushwhacking, tussock hiking, alder-scrambbling whatever you want to call it. It wasn't too bad on the upper portion there. It's kind of a tradeoff. You get good scenery and good views if you leave the river bottom, but the hiking is a little bit different. I wouldn't say it's harder, it's just different. You don't get as wet feet. It's a little different hiking through gullies and alders and bushwhacking. Um.... that was a pretty rough day going into Pyramid Creek. I think we did 7 miles that day.

[10: 27 to 29] b, What role did the guide play in route finding? h, Oh, a major role. He was the lead guy. We basically put our heads down and followed wherever he went, basically. A few spots that opened up enough to where we could walk abreast of each other, but through the alder and the bushes, it was pretty much single file. And we'd stop and take breaks. Eat some blueberries. And try to find a sheltered spot for lunch breaks.

[11: 29] h, The next morning, the boats and 6 people were flown in and enough food and gear and etcetera for another 5 day float. And then one of our backpack fellas flew out. He just did the front part. So we set up the boats, loaded them up, and floated, gosh, just a couple of hours that first day. Made camp somewhere down along the river. From there, things became much more relaxed, you know, the schedules were not quite as rigid. Seemed to be on river time vs. backpack time. Of course you could float a lot further on the river, make better distance than you could on foot backpacking.

[12: 79 to 81] b, So how did this trip differ from other backpacking or floating trips you've taken in the past? h, Well, mostly the difference was in the backpacking. Having gone through designated wilderness areas before, in several different states and locations, they were you know much more formal in the sense of maps, trail locations, mileages, starting point, ending point, road accessible. Those kinds of things. The actual backpacking experience was pretty similar. You go into a designated wilderness. That's where you are. You're not going to hear a chain saw fire up or a helicopter flying overhead or those kind of things. You still practice the same etiquette as far as keeping a clean camp and waste disposal, packing out what you pack in, all that sort of thing. So that's pretty standard.

[see also excerpt 20]

Wildlife

[13: 25] h, That's when we observed the 1st of 2 grizzly bears across the other side of the drainage along a hillside. Just being a grizzly bear. It appeared to be just digging for grubs. Looking for ground squirrels. Hard to say, it kind of stood in just one little spot and was moving around one spot. We watched him during our lunch break, so it was a good hour, hour and a half of watching him. We followed game trails down the valley, still way above treeline so it was pretty easy walking. A lot of caribou antlers all over the place. Um....our 2nd night destination was Alignment Creek, where we came off of the ... out of the valley and had one steep descent down to the North Fork with its confluence with Alignment Creek is where we made camp the 2nd night. Again, a fairly typical routine of setting up, breaking up. The next morning we crossed Alignment Creek and then crossed the North Fork. We were taking a break there, draining our boots, and that's where we saw the 2nd grizzly up against the hillside. Same kind of thing. He wasn't really moving around a lot. Just staying in the same general vicinity on a open grassy spot. Um.... really nice looking bear. Nice blonde colored, blonde-gold-colored top with a dark underbelly. Dark legs.

Group Dynamics

[14: 55 to 61] b, How did the other members of your traveling group influence the experience? h, You mean, the overall experience? b, Mm... hm...h, Well, you know, they're individuals as well so they were there for whatever reasons. They have their perspectives. One lady was from Germany, a young couple from Taiwan. So they were experiencing something new and different. But they didn't really share in what that experience was. It just was there. So they had to endure everything you did as far as the weather conditions or whatever it was that you were dealing with.

[15: 63 to 69] b, And how about the guide? How did the guide influence the experience? h, Well, they were great, you know, they were ... took to setting up camp and cooking the meals and were very professional. Very responsible. b, You say "they." How many were there? h, Two. Two individuals, yeah. So they ... it was obvious to me that they were experienced and, like I said, professional and responsible and knew exactly what was going on and what to do. They carried first aid, carried fire-arms. Had a ground-to-air radio. So they were...I think very professional.

Other People

[16: 31 to 33] b, Other than the pilot flying the people in, did you see any other people that weren't members of your group? h, Um.. back on the backpack trip part of it, we saw some backpackers heading north up Ernie Creek. They were not part of our group. They were across the valley. But we could see the color of the orange packs and etc. Watched them for a brief time. But no, beyond that, we saw of course planes coming and going pretty frequently, but we didn't see any other floaters.

[17: 35 to 45] b, Seeing the hikers on the distant slope, did that have any influence on your experience? h, Not mine, no. Not at all. Kind of a conversation piece. Wonder where they're going or how long they've been out. Oh, they're this people. Oh, they're that group, you know. Didn't seem to be any ... have any influence. b, And on the float, you didn't see anyone? h, Right. b, How did you feel about that? h, Well, that was to be expected, I guess. I didn't expect to see anyone. We did see a damaged boat upriver at some location. We floated by a John boat that had been driven upriver a fair distance and obviously damaged. That was tied up on the side of the bank, so we were curious what that was all about. But it was obvious that folks knew about it because it was secured to the bank with some flagging. It looked obvious that it was going to be taken care of or gotten rid of or taken out of there, which I learned this morning, actually took place yesterday. The folks came in. Um... but beyond that, we didn't see anything, other floaters, other trash, no litter. No campsites. No fire rings to speak of. Just basic wolf and bear tracks.

[18: 47 to 49] b, How would it have influenced your experience if you had seen more people out there? h, It wouldn't have bothered me at all, personally, I mean it's a public park. It's a national park. You know they're just out enjoying it, as well. It wouldn't have bothered me. It might have been a bit weird if we were camped in close proximity to each other, but passing their camp or having them pass us, I don't think would have bothered me in the slightest.

[19: 131 to 137] b, Was there anything, any element to your experience that took away from the wilderness character or quality of the place? h, No, not that I can think of off hand. No, not really. No. It was different. Because it was kind of like a ... other previous wilderness areas I'd been in, of course like I mentioned, had the trail maps and the trail designations and the trail crews. I mean I've worked on wilderness trail crews before. You go with power... or hand saws to clear the blowdown, etc. Keep the trails open for I would say in those contexts, there were experiences that detracted from the

wilderness experience, mostly from pack animals. Having a mule train go by, you know. Packing in this big, heavy load of stuff for their clients. You're not going to see that up here. Anywhere. You might run into another backpacking party, but so what? They're doing the same thing you are. b, So because they're doing the same thing you are, they have less of an impact on your experience? h, Right. Yeah, I mean we're sharing, basically. So I can't say that they're taking away from me.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Remoteness

[20: 113] h, Well, I guess I'd describe the place as remote, worthy of a Park designation. I don't know how else to say it, you know, in as objective terms as possible. It certainly ... if someone has a stereotypical image of a Park, a National Park, this would probably meet it. It should meet it. The lower stretches of the float became fairly mundane and as far as landscape goes. From the river, the river got wider and slower and it was kind of put your head down and paddle. Just paddle, paddle, paddle. Five or six hours and call it good. So, in that sense, the Park experience was much more alive on the backpacking portions because you were higher up. Starting at the headwaters of the river, of course, was interesting to start there and work your way down.

[21: 119 to 121] b, When you said that the place conformed to a stereotypical Park image, are you referring to the scenery? h, Yeah, yeah. The scenery, the remoteness. Um....just knowing that you're out there a long ways from anything. A road or if you should get hurt or have some kind of illness or sickness. It could be challenging. More so than if you were, say, at the Savage River Campground in Denali. There you're pretty close in as far as emergency services or any kind of healthcare related things. So, you know, that I think brings an extra caution to it that you have to be aware and be sensible in your choices and your route findings and not to take risks ... trust your judgment. Um....because you are out there and it could be a day or two before someone could come get you if you were to injure yourself or some member of your party were injured. You know in that sense is another reason why I'd recommend taking a guided trip first. To learn what that means, you know, to be prepared. That's the biggest thing, I think... element you could probably bring into a management plan is user preparedness. Field-test your gear. To understand you are remote. You are out there in the middle of nowhere.

[22: 123 to 125] b, So when you were describing that remote quality, you sort of contrasted to what you might find at Denali. So would you say the remoteness is something that's different about this Park? h, Yes. Different from a lot of parks that I've visited. It's no less beautiful or more beautiful in terms of the scenery. But there's that element of remoteness to it that you know you can't find in a wilderness area, a wilderness area with a trail map with trail markers, defined trails. So that to me is less remote than something that doesn't have those elements. Trail markers. Trail maps. Defined trails. Etc.

[see also excerpt 4]

Wilderness

[23: 127 to 129] b, You've used the term "designated wilderness" a couple of times. Aside from the formal legal designation, what makes this place a wilderness? h, Its remoteness. You're a visitor. You come to these places to experience complete silence if you want to. You don't hear anything. I didn't bring a timepiece, a watch. No need to. Um...wilderness has a lot of different qualities to it. I guess the one that always stood out in my experience of it has been the just that background knowledge or that background feeling you have of how far away you are from the secure trappings of civilization, be it your vehicle at the trail head or be it, you know a place like Bettles, where there's the air strip. You know, you're connections to the outside world. It gets pretty philosophical in trying to describe the wilderness concept.

MANAGEMENT

Visitor Registration

[24: 139 to 149] b, At the beginning of your trip, did you come in and fill out a registration form or have any other kind of contact with the Park staff here? h, No, b, And you didn't encounter any Park staff or infrastructure during the trip? h, No, b, How'd you feel about that? h, Indifferent. I mean I didn't miss it. I didn't feel like I needed to or I mean I didn't..... I knew it was a National Park, but that was about it. It was ... some National Parks you go into and they seem to be regulated to the hilt. I mean, too much. But they're also highly used. They have a lot of visitors, so there's a need for it. Um... I didn't the thought never crossed my mind here that there was any registration required.

[25: 151 to 153] b, How would it influence your experience if there was a required registration? h, Well, I don't know that it would bother it at all, you know. It's good to know it's public lands managed with public funds. And you know the registration, if it's just kept simple to basically knowing how many for how long and where, that could be basic safety information. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Just knowing that folks are out there. Like a pilot filing a flight plan. They're much the same in my book.

Cumulative Effect of Regulations

[26: 155 to 161] b, When you say that some other parks are highly regulated, even too regulated, what constitutes being "too regulated?" h, Well, some of the regulations seem, what, um....irrelevant. What's their purpose? You know there's obviously a backcountry etiquette that all users should practice, but all users don't, unfortunately. So, I don't know, where do you step in with the management rules and regulations and all.....to try and enforce this etiquette? That's the other part of it, too. Some of the rules seem so anal, it's hard to figure out anyone trying to enforce such a crazy rule. There, again, it's maybe part of the Park Service, what, philosophy? Mission? I don't know. b, Regulations you mean? h, Well, yeah, to a degree. I can see the need for them. Sometimes they go too far. It seems to me like there's only so much regulations that a person can handle. Whether it be in their town, their community, or their city vs. a state park, public land, hunting rules, regulations, vehicle registration, licensing requirements,

boating requirements, drinking requirements, speed limits, stop signs, there's regulations everywhere. A lot of them we accept just as a matter of life. So when you go into a context into a wilderness or some back country experience, and you're faced with yet more regulations that you find irrelevant, that can be frustrating. I didn't find that here, no. Don't get me wrong. I didn't find that here at all. But I have elsewhere. But those are parks that are more frequently visited, too. They have more visitation.

Regulations Should Reflect Level of Use

[27: 163 to 173] b, So help me with what you're saying a little bit here. Are you suggesting that a park or wilderness should be more or less regulated than another environment? h, I don't think you can say that. It depends on the context of the park. If you're on the road system, like Denali, vs. this one, where you're not on the road system, and you're basically way more remote, I think your management plans and regulations have to reflect that to a degree. b, By being less restricted? h, Right. b, And why is that? h, Because you don't get the use.

[28: 183 to 185] b, Is there anything else other than accessibility and numbers of people that you feel should play into evaluation...how you choose to regulate? h, Well, those seem to be the big ones. Because from that comes your impact. And potential for damage to the environment. So, those are the two big ones, I think.

815BTT28

Glenn (g) and Justin (j)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 135 to 141] b, So how did you find out about the Nigu or Gates of the Arctic? g, Oh, my wife, who accompanied my son and I. She had actually worked for the...as an assisted guide.... an assistant guide for another company several years ago. So she was familiar with the rivers up here and doing these things. b, And how did you decide on that particular river to visit? g, Uh... time frame. We wanted these particular guides and this was the time that fit our schedule.

[2: 147 to 149] b, So was this your first trip to the Arctic? g, Yeah. My first trip above the Arctic Circle, absolutely. Yeah. I've been living in Fairbanks for 7-1/2 years, but think the only ... as far as I'd been before was Circle. So, this was fun.

Itinerary

[3: 13] g, Our trip was a guided trip with 7 people total, 5 clients and 2 guides. We started at the headwaters of the Nigu, which is a real pretty lake, and floated down to 3 or 4 miles downstream from Etivluk Lake.

Unexpected Conditions

[4: 39 to 41] b, Once you moved away from the lake where you put in, you were saying that you had to drag...g, Oh, that we dragged ... we always got late starts. We dragged

the boats fully loaded for three hours and then we gave up and set up camp. And then the next day we portaged our stuff about a mile and then dragged the empty boats for the day. And then the next day after that, we kind of floated, dragged, floated, dragged, floated, dragged for the whole day. So, by the 4th day on the river, we could finally float a little bit. Which is an experience, but our original plan was to get much, much farther down the river. It was fun the 2nd day... or the 3rd night, the 2nd campsite. It was on a little lake. There were loons there, which was real entertaining. Of course, lots of caribou, still. So that was fun. [long pause] The mountains were gorgeous, too. That was the good part about doing it even though we had to drag a lot, it was nice being in the mountains. But it was also very strange for us, being above the treeline the whole time.

[5: 47 to 57] b, So, by day 5, you were g, Finally floating, yeah. b, And how many days did you actually float? g, Let's see [reading from notes], we floated day 5. We floated on day 6. The hills were really good and lots of caribou and lakes. Day 7 I kind of lost somehow. Oh yeah, we slept on a gravel bar on day 7. By day 8, we saw much more bears again. j, On day 8, that was the day we stayed in camp...g, By the creek, yeah. Day 9 it rained the entire day. We just kind of sat in the tent. Day 10 was really cold and windy. Yeah, days 8 and 9 we stayed at one place and then it turned...out our guide had never done the river before, so it turned out the place that we actually took out from was only another 50-minute float from where we camped, so we camped two days 50 minutes away from we took out and then camped two nights at the place we were taking out. Like I said before, we were supposed to be picked up on Sunday, but they didn't pick us up until Tuesday.

[6: 115 to 121] b, At the end of the trip, when you didn't get picked up on time, was there some concern? g, No, he had 2 or 3 days' worth of extra food. I'm supposed to be working today, so my whole day is cancelled. Fine with me. Oh, no. By the last day, when we got picked up, it was just getting kind of wet. You know things were getting kind of damp and sticky and but there was no concern that we would never get out or that we'd starve or anything. No, we just enjoyed it. b, And it was clear to you that it was the weather that was preventing them from coming? g, Oh, for sure, yeah.

Contrast to Other Trips

[7: 123 to 127] b, How did this trip differ from other floating or backpacking trips.... ? g, Well, the only other floating trip we've ever taken was just our own family on the Forty Mile, which is you know an industrial river. If you consider the gold miners with their scuba gear right in the middle of it as we floated past them. Which is fun, but this is the first time I've been in the Brooks Range, much less on an extended, isolated float trip like this, so I thought it was wonderful. What'd you think? j, Mmmmm.

Group Dynamics

[8: 69] g, And that was about it. It was an excellent guide that took us. A nice group that we traveled with.

[9: 99 to 101] b, You made a comment earlier that you had some notes about other people in the group. How did other people in your group influence your experience? g,

Oh, it was positive. One person was kind of on his own personal solo vision quest, so he kind of took to himself, but part of the fun of the trip was sitting around in the cook tents just talking about whatever with the other people there. That was very nice.

Influence of guides

[10: 103 to 113] b, You also made the comment that, before the interview began, that the guide made the difficult decisions so you didn't have to. g, Right. b, What other influence did the guide have on your experience? g, Oh, everything was positive. He kept everything going the way it should be. Kind of set the rhythm. Nice and low key. Provided the meals, which were excellent. You know just a real personable easygoing guy. Also you could tell he knew what he was doing. I mean he had to pull the darn rafts for two days. We helped lift on the sides, but he was in the front poling like in African Queen. Luckily, there were no leaches. b, Would you have been capable of completing that trip without the guide? g, Uh.... no. Maybe now since I know something, but no, probably not. Not in the same level of enjoyment. That's for sure.

[11: 157] g, Our guides knew a lot about the flora and the fauna, so they educated us a lot, too, so that made it more fun.

Air Taxi

[12: 25 to 29] g, Let's see... we flew in on two Beavers, which is a first for us. Never having gone up in Beavers. b, What did you think of that? g, Oh, it was fun! It was great fun. I'm a private pilot, but the only thing I've ever flown is a Cessna-150, so it was fun being in a Beaver.

Other People

[13: 37] g, The only thing that was a little disappointing is that we were originally going to do the Etivluk River down to the Colville and Jay, the air taxi guy, talked Jim into doing the Nigu. He told them we'd be the only ones there. And the next day, he dropped in three airplanes full of other people on the same lake that we were camped on. And he specifically told Jim that no one else was scheduled to come, and these people had been scheduled since June to come. And then when these new people came in, they saw the tents down there, they asked "who are those people?" And the pilot said "Oh, we don't know." So that was ... of the whole week, that was probably the only disappointing thing. Because you know you come to the Brooks Range you figure there's enough room for everybody.

[14: 71 to 77] b, So, after seeing the people put in at the very beginning of your trip, did you see anybody else after that? g, Yeah, our 3rd night at our 2nd campsite, those first people were hiking around us! And then did we see anybody after that? No. j, well on the fourth day, when we were portaging, those hikers came back...g, Oh, yeah, that's right, so three days in a row, yeah. Because they were scouting up the river because they knew what problems we were having, so they were hiking way down to see us. And then we heard a couple of gunshots from a Etivluk Lake. From the hunters. We didn't see anybody else, though.

[15: 79 to 85] b, Did you talk with that group the first day when they put in? g, Oh yeah, for sure. b, How was that encounter? g, It was real nice. It wasn't their fault. Oh no, that was real friendly and all. That didn't really take away from the experience. It's just the business ethics that was more bothersome than the actual problem in the wilderness.

Contrasting values

[16: 87 to 89] b, How about hearing the gunshots of the hunters? g, Well, that would have been better without that since we don't eat meat. We're not big hunters. But actually we got on the plane yesterday..... we had to stop at Etivluk Lake to pick up some hunters and some of their meat on our way back before they ferried us back here to Bettles. And we heard that..... everybody's kind of environmentally conscious--to protect the wilderness rather than to slaughter it in our group. And we heard that the bears had eaten most of the meat that they had gotten. Everybody cheered. Then the pilot gave us this weird look.

[17: 91 to 97] b, Did you know in advance that there would be some hunters....?g, Hunters? Yeah. Not in advance of the trip, but once we were on the trip, our guide told us that hunting season opened Thursday or something. Which is another thing.....b, Were you disappointed to hear that? g, Oh yeah. Yeah, which is another thing, because even if hunting season opened up on Thursday, they flew a lot of hunters in on Sunday. So, I don't know what kind of conclusion to draw from that.

[18: 129 to 133] g, We're a couple of city boys, we had a good time. b, What city are you from? g, Oh, we live in Fairbanks now. But I grew up in the suburbs. The only thing I ever hunted for was a parking place.

Wildlife

[19: 25] g, Well, the first 2 days we camped at the lake, which is the headwaters of the Nigu. It was gorgeous there. We saw a lot of wildlife. The first day we saw a cow moose with calves, a bull moose.... Did we see a bear the first day? The first day, too? Up on the hill? I think we saw four or five bears throughout the 12 days out there. So that was quite interesting. It was a real nice place to camp, up kind of on the bluff, overlooking the lake. Saw lots of caribou. Every single day we saw lots of caribou, and that was real nice. Lots of caribou antlers and lots of caribou bones laying around, too, which was real good.

[20: 41] g, And we had some good bear experiences. Also experiences that showed that as long as you're sensible and wary about the bears, that you can coexist with them well. I mean the bears that we saw, once they spotted us, they kind of figured out who we were for a little while, and then took off as fast as they could away from us. They ended up wanting nothing to do with us. So that was nice to we had bear spray, but I don't think anybody took it out of their bag after the 1st day.

[21: 45] g, Oh, yeah, the potential thing with Jim because our guide was out scouting for camping sites kind of off at one corner of the triangle and we were all waiting for him. On the other corner of the triangle was a bear. It was kind of just wandering towards us

while Jim was coming back towards us. So, we just kind of notified him that the bear was there, so their paths didn't intersect. But, yeah, we didn't even have a gun on the whole thing. So the respect and the ...with a little knowledge that you can coexist perfectly safe with the bears was real nice. I felt safer there than I do anyplace I've ever been, to tell the truth. It was real interesting.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Scenic Beauty

[see excerpts 4, 19]

Contrast to Other Places

[22: 33] g, I was shocked because we could drink the water. We just drank the water right out of the lake and/or the river the entire time. Our guide has been doing this for over 20 years, and he says all the time in the Brooks Range he never filters his water.

[23: 151 to 157] b, How would you describe the place to somebody who's thinking about visiting? g, Oh, all those cliché words that they hear and then they just roll their eyes and don't want to hear about it. It was kind of magical. You know. It was to the point where this is what felt real. I mean, when you're out there, it feels like it's real. And you come to Bettles or Fairbanks and this is all the fake, funny stuff. I felt really at home there. It felt real comfortable. Real... like it was a gift that I got to visit. So that was nice. b, What are some of those other "cliché words" that?g, Oh, gift. You know. The thing being a gift. It was kind of majestic, part of it. Part was just intriguing, you know. I've never seen this kind of landscape before or these kind of encounters with the animals before.

[see also excerpt 29]

Wilderness

[24: 159 to 165] b, Would you describe it as a wilderness? g, Oh, yeah, for sure. I felt like, especially those two days waiting to get picked up, we felt like we were in the middle of nowhere. Absolutely. b, So, what things make it a wilderness? g, Uh, the lack of any man-made artifacts at any place along the line. You know. No electric lines or roads or the encounters with the ... I think that's it;.... and the feeling of isolation. The feeling of isolation was nice. Even though we really knew that there was people, you know, 5 to 10 miles away. That didn't matter. We felt like we were there all alone and there was hundreds of miles around us with nobody. So I think the feel of isolation made it seem like a wilderness. After doing a trip like this, it would be hard to go to another national park and set up my tent, you know 10 feet away from somebody else's tent, who have their tent 10 feet away. Because we..... with a little trailer we had camped at Denali Park many times. At their campground. And after doing something like this, it will be harder to do that.

[25: 167 to 173] b, So, other than having people close to you, what things take away from the wilderness? g, What would? If we had found... also as far as wilderness goes, you know, places we camped there was no signs of anybody else there ever camped

there ever before. Kind of the sense of new discovery. It was fun. b, Was there anything during your trip that took away from the wilderness feeling? g, The gunshots maybe. And there was a big... at the takeoff lake, there was a big old iron pot that somebody had left there. But that's about it. Yeah. Most of the trip I think was in the was actually in the Park, and it was all very nice.

MANAGEMENT

NPS Presence

[26: 175 to 185] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management of the area? g, Nothing. Nothing. b, At the start of you trip did you come in and visit with any of the staff? g, No, we didn't have time. We got off the plane and they quick hustled us over to the float plane to fly out. b, Did you feel like you missed anything by not getting to come over here? g, Oh, yeah. We always enjoy these kind of places. But no I don't think it detracted from our experience any, no.

[27: 187 to 189] b, So you say you didn't notice anything about the Park Service management. How do you feel about that? g, That's good! Yeah. I didn't want a sign on our campsites saying whatever it is that the signs say. But I guess it'll change. I guess as years go on, more and more people will come here and they'll have to be a little more active in making sure people behave themselves. But the group... the guides that we went with are very much into no impact camping, too. So...hopefully if other people who come in the future continue like that, then the Park Service will be able to stay invisible.

Visitor registration

[28: 191 to 201] b, How would it influence your experience if the Park Service was more visible? g, That depends on what "more visible" means. But probably not much at all. b, What if, for instance, it was required that you come over and fill out a registration form at the beginning of your trip? g, Oh, that wouldn't hurt any, no that would be fine. If there was time, they could even make us take a little watch a little video tape or something. b, And that would be okay? g, That would be okay, yeah. But our guide did a real thorough introduction as to what to do and what not to do, how to act, how not to act. So that might be able to do that in lieu of if you're with a big guided group, you might be able to do that in lieu of coming over here.

Support for Use Limits

[29: 203 to 209] b, Would it ever be appropriate to limit the number of people that go into the Park? g, Absolutely. b, Why do you say absolutely? g, Because one of the reasons we came on this whole kind of trip was, like I said before, to have that feeling of isolation, having it feel that you're a new explorer in an area. And I love going down to Denali Park. We go down there all the time. But that's a different kind of experience. That's more the natural beauty and it's the animals, too. Just the mountains are wonderful. But there's always hundreds or thousands of people around. That's a different kind of experience than you get up here. So that's one of the reasons I came here. I had never had that kind of experience before. Obviously, as you can tell, I liked it. But, you know, I grew up in big cities and suburbs and stuff. The idea that's there

nobody within tens of miles of you, not only that, but you're hundreds of miles away from the electricity. That was a real appealing part of the whole experience. And if you get too many people up there, if it's a traffic jam on the Nigu, then it would definitely detract from the experience.

[30: 211 to 213] b, What if limiting that access meant that you, yourself, didn't get to visit when you wanted to? g, That's okay, then there's someplace else to go. I mean these are things that you plan ahead of time, too.

815BTT29

Keith (k), Matt (m), Rich (r)

Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Itinerary

[1: 15] r, Our trip was a ten-day excursion up on the north fork of the Koyukuk. We flew in just above Fishless Creek with the idea in mind to do Boreal Mountain, kind of get up high there. We were going to do that for five days and then we were going to come back to our landing strip and pick up boats, which we had a resupply come in, and float to Bettles. And that was our trip.

Reasons for Visiting

[2: 603 to 605] b, Why'd you decide to come here? k, Because not many people come here. And because it's a unique ecosystem I hadn't seen before. And because I found a good guide service that, you know, was willing to cater to what I wanted to do and do a two-person group like this. And do the things that I wanted to do. That mountain-rivers combination is an excellent idea. Good way to do the area.

Influence of Guide

[3: 275 to 279] b, So, other than not having trails that you described earlier and not seeing very many people, how did this trip differ from other ones you've done in the past? m, How did they differ? Well, this is the first time we've gone out, just the two of us with a guide. Before we've always gone with larger groups. k, Or just us.

[4: 345 to 347] b, So how did this trip differ, given that it was guided, and that it was just the two of you. k, Uh... you know, with [Rich], it's just like he's another guy on the trip that knows more stuff than we do. And has the map. Um... so you know it really didn't differ, except I knew there was somebody along who knew sort of the protocols for this area and knew something about the topography and would, for example, be good at finding convenient water and that sort of thing because he's used to the terrain up here. So that's extremely comforting. That's why we did it with a guide.

[5: 349 to 351] m, Doing it alone would have been a lot harder. It would have been a different experience. k, Well, you've got to have local knowledge. If you don't have local knowledge, then anytime you jump into something you haven't done before,

you're taking something of a risk. And I was up here to relax and enjoy it and not do much risk taking.

[6: 19] r, Yes. Had a good time. We saw really only saw two other people. They were at the landing strip when we were leaving the landing strip the day of the float. Other than that, it was peaceful. Nobody was around. It was great. Could have used a little wildlife though.

[7: 67 to 71] b, So you were hoping to see more wildlife than that. k, Well, yeah, one always hopes. r, I've been up on the Noatak when I've seen, you know, musk ox, 4 or 5 grizzly bears, countless caribous, you don't count that high. Um....Lots of eagles. Golden eagles.

[8: 449 to 453] r, As for guide services, we all get together.....kind of.... if we see another group going out in the same area and we set our schedules so that we never see each other because that's the whole draw, I think, to the area, is not seeing anybody else. m, Absolutely. r, You want to go out and have a great wilderness experience kind of just out in the woods and you want to feel like you're the only people out there.

Airplane Ride

[9: 77 to 83] m, Landing on the sand bar was quite an experience. k, Yeah, landing on the sand bar, that was pretty interesting. b, In the plane. k, Yeah. That itself was interesting.

Self-Reliance

[10: 295 to 299] k, But you're on your own for navigation. And you're.....m, You're on your own for everything. k, ... and that's nice. Yeah, the fact that you don't have any immediate relief. There's nobody going by saying "Hey, we need a little of this..." or.... you're quite self-reliant back in there.

[11: 337 to 339] m, For a minute, knowing you're at the mercy of nature. I mean I lead a very electronic communicative lifestyle. To be up here where you're just on your own and all you have is what you brought. There's no way to have something flown in. There's no way to have something sent in. There's nobody to call for help or ask for help. Essentially, no way. That was part of the whole thing. You can't get that down in California where we are. You can't go anywhere short of going off the coast on a boat. But even then, you can't get away from other boats. k, It's getting harder and harder to do, anyway.

Navigating/Route-Finding

[12: 283 to 287] k, And the absence of any points of reference other than the relief that you could spot on your map is interesting. Like in most places we go there's at least a trail system or well-known routes. Up here, there are no well-known routes. Once you get up in those hills, you're just going. r, That's the nice thing about it. k, Yeah, that's ... that is, to me, almost a definitive part of the experience.

[see also excerpts 10, 37]

Hiking and Camping

[13: 75] k, We knew what the terrain was like from book reading but not from personal experience. So, with 80+-pound packs, you know, busting through the alders and the spruce and going over the tussocks, that turned out to be kind of tough traveling. Not the kind of stuff we're used to in the Lower 48.

[14: 111] k, Then we moved on up the mountain toward Boreal. Did some river fording. And that was a fairly tough day of gaining altitude, as well. 'Cuz you're up to "here" in alders. You're crashing through them 'til you get some altitude. And fighting that uphill is a little bit of work. And finding an ideal spot where we can get enough altitude for the objective that we had picked and find some water and find some level spots was a long day's work. What were we, about 7 hours that day? Something like that.

[15: 167 to 173] m, We stayed at camp two that same night we summited. k, Yup. m, Then the next day, moved back down to camp one again. Stayed there for two more nights. k, Yup, yup, we stayed there just for an extra day just because it was so pretty and we thought we'd rest and we had an extra day, so....hung out.

[16: 203 to 209] m, And then we came down the river...and found nice spots each night. Camped one night. We thought we were going to have to move 'cuz the river came up so high. k, Water was coming up every night. m, Shouldn't have camped there, but we were tired and didn't want to continue, so we did anyway. k, We had markers out, so we were tracking the rate of rise. Didn't have any problem with it.

Wildlife

[17: 21 to 33] m, Pretty succinct. More wildlife would have been nice, yeah. b, More wildlife....k, You got to do something about the popup wildlife out there along the river. b, What did you see? k, One griz and, what, about 4 moose? r, 4 or 5 moose, yeah. k, A couple of Dall sheep. A couple of golden eagles. A couple of bald eagles. A bunch of ducks.

[18: 229 to 235] k, So all the wildlife we spotted was on the river. It was all catching 'em coming around bends. And m, Saw a wounded moose. k, Yeah, a wounded moose. m, Moose with a bad hind leg. What did you guys think it was, an abscess or something you thought?

[19: 177 to 185] k, No wildlife to speak of. m, None up there. k, Golden eagles, that's when we spotted a couple of golden eagles in there somewhere on that neck of it. m, Yeah. k, But.....no other wildlife at all. Sign, plenty of sign, but nothing in the flesh.

[20: 51 to 55] m, Saw lots of wolf tracks. r, Lots of wolf tracks. k, Yeah, wolf tracks. A couple came through our camp one night, that was cool.

[21: 379 to 395] k, No, there was no bad part of the trip. b, Was there a best part? k, Well, seeing that grizzly bear was pretty cool. m, We were 20 feet away from him. r, That was pretty sweet. k, And then the wolf tracks through camp. I m, That was ... k, I'm partial to wolves and I thought that was kind of interesting. I just wish I'd seen them. m, Yeah. That would have been nice.

[see also excerpts 6-7]

Overflights

[22: 311 to 317] k, I must say, however, and there's no solution to that, because I mean that's the pass you got to fly through, is that having a plane sort of diluted the wilderness experience a little bit. m, It did, but at least they were infrequent. k, Yeah, I mean, it's not like Grand Canyon or something like that, which is ridiculous. I mean...r, Well, like up on the Sheenjek where there's those hunting camps there. The plane flies every day spotting, so it's like annoying, not fun at all.

[see also excerpt 31]

Re-entry

[23: 363 to 377] b, Would you call that the worst part of the trip? Heavy packs? k, There is no worst part of the trip. There was no bad part of the trip. b, There was no bad part? m, Today's the worst part of the trip, sitting here waiting for the flight back. k, Yeah. m, That's the worst part. k, That's not even bad. m, Well, it's just bad knowing you got to go back. And the excitement, adventure...

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Few Other People

[24: 259 to 267] m, The only other people we saw the whole time was father and son that landed on the same gravel bar that we landed on, saw them the day we had a resupply plane come in. They were just going to cruise down the river, too. k, Well, there was a ... there was that group ahead of us. m, Oh, yeah, that group that came in the same day we did. k, Yeah. r, They jumped right on the river, so we didn't actually see them. We just saw them flying in.

[25: 91 to 95] k, Absolutely spectacular view. Beautiful site. Nobody around. r, There wasn't anybody else there [with emphasis]. We were it. k, Yeah, the sense of isolation, that you're not swamped with other people on a busy trail and on a not-so-busy trail was really nice. Because it was [not the] kind of typical camping we're used to in southern California and northern California, eastern Sierras, just about anywhere anymore, you know there's lots of folks. It's one big party back there in the summer. And getting away from that was real nice.

[see also excerpts 6, 8]

Little evidence of others

[26: 247 to 249] b, So you saw no people, but you saw signs of people? k, We saw what I call minor people signs. I mean footprints and a few fire ashes and I saw a couple of badly-tended, well one badly-tended latrine up on the mountain. Where somebody just stacked some rocks. Obviously, somebody had been up there fairly close before we were in there, or it all would have been disintegrated by the rain. So, somebody was in there ahead of us.

[27: 293] m, That's one of the things that drew us here was just the lack of any influence. It's just all natural and just the way it has always been, with a few humble signs of people we saw ahead of us. But just the natural aspect of the whole area.

[28: 403 to 407] m, The lack of people, the lack of people influence, the lack of trails, the lack of trash, the lack of badly-kept campsites, was the highlight. I mean just being in nature without any disturbances, any prior disturbances. k, Didn't look like a national park.

[29: 191 to 193] m, On the boats, we seemed to see some sign of other people had camped. We picked the same spots that other people had picked before. k, You could see some fire ashes and basically that was all you saw. And...that and footprints. Found some footprints. Found some bare footprints, which struck me as a little unusual.

[30: 147] m, And, again, what set it aside is that there were no previously traveled trails. It's all just unwalked hill and mountain. Which is what made it so exquisite.

[see also excerpt 43]

Focus on type of visitor

[31: 319 to 327] m, Well, it was kind of nice knowing that the few planes that did go over were more people such as ourselves. It wasn't just day tours, people paying to go fly in a plane and go look. It wasn't just sightseeing. It was people mainly doing the same thing we were doing. b, So, you would have felt differently about them if it had been flightseers? m, Yeah, that's annoying. k, Yeah. No question. m, It would have taken away from the whole experience.

[32: 421 to 427] k, There are places where people shouldn't go unless they work for it. It's easy enough to get, you know, helicopters in here and just drop the day sightseers up and down the river and ... that just ... m, That's what I was saying...k, ... takes a lot away from it. m, ... That's what I was saying, it would be annoying. Everybody coming in was going to go to the effort and extent that we went to. Anybody that's going to spend that much money and that much effort doing it is probably going to maintain it properly and do a nice job at it. Not going to leave badly-managed campsites and trash behind.

[33: 511 to 513] m, It's just accessible enough up there that the people that want to bad enough, like us, can get up there. And if it was any more accessible, we'd have a lot

more, I think, the day use and the more careless type going up. r, Well, that'll never be a problem. Unless they build a road all the way to Bettles. Never going to be days.

[34: 533 to 537] m, Again, the only people that actually get to get in there that could make an impact for the most part are the type of people that are going to spend the effort to not make the impact. k, Yeah, that's my point about people that are going in there have worked to get in there.

[35: 157 to 161] k, No traces of people, I mean, you know, people have been up that same route before, but you know most of the people... I saw a few traces of people who'd been up there. r, I saw no trace of people on the mountain... on the backpack. k, I saw some sign in there. People had been careless, but...mostly none. So people seem fairly responsible to go the trouble to get up that far in. And so we grabbed our altitude, came back

[36: 415 to 417] m, One of the things that really struck when we were talking to the Park ranger before we left when he was giving us his little spiel, was you know the average people that visit a national park are there for 13 minutes or something.. the average duration of a visit to this national park is 17 days. k, Tells you what you need to know about that.

No Development or Park Infrastructure Novelty/contrast to other settings

[37: 97] m, One of the most striking parts for me when we first landed is... I've been to a lot of national parks and there's always paved trails, concrete trails, rocks leading on the trail, and you get up here and it was just...you go. No trails, there was no nothing. Just any which way you can go, you go. And that was set is apart from anywhere else I've been.

[38: 105 to 107] m, Up here, there was nobody. It was make your own trail. It was go wherever you wanted to go. That's what set it most aside. k, About the only place, you know, our part of it was where we go like that would be out in the desert. Then you get away from some of that.

[39: 613 to 619] m, We had this crazy little satellite phone up there. Because it was the only way my mom, his wife, would let us come. She didn't want to not hear from us for 10 days again. And I caught myself trying to describe to my girlfriend where we were. You know, we cruised down the river for 19 miles... "you went 9 miles down the river?" "No, 19 miles down the river." "Oh my God!" "Then we pulled over and found a camp spot and set up camp and here we are." But I know she's back home picturing camp site, trails, barbeque pits, steel barbeques, because those are the only place you can have a fire in. k, Chemical toilet down the road, you know. m, And I'm trying to explain to her. "well, the campsites need somewhere level enough to throw a tent. There's nothing here besides that." And I don't think I could adequately describe that to anybody I know because everybody I know thinks of campgrounds, campsites, as well-defined campsites. I've never seen anything like what I just saw in the last ten days. I mean even

up on Denali, there were just because there were only so many good spots to camp, there was base camp and another camp set up. It wasn't just tread your way through the hills until you find a spot big enough to put a tent. And I don't know how you describe that to somebody without showing them a picture. And even a picture wouldn't do it justice. k, You tell them it's wilderness. One of the last left.

Remoteness/Isolation

[40: 301 to 307] m, The isolation of it all. k, Yeah. b, When you say isolation, what do you mean? m, Isolation, I mean, for other than the first day when we saw another group land on the same gravel bar that we did, up until today, there were no cars. There were no planes. There was no nothing. I mean, an occasional plane would fly over, real high. That was it. There were no motors. There was no sounds, no music, no other people.

Wilderness

[41: 329 to 333] k, Um... contrast it with like say the eastern Sierra, which probably is the most common place that we've gone over the years. And you can get off the trail system in the eastern Sierra, but it's still a known route that's navigated by lots of people that are going to the same mountains that you're going to do the same thing that you're doing there. And that's fine. That has its place, too. But that's not a total wilderness kind of experience, like this sort of is. Despite the fact that you had a satellite telephone and an emergency locator beacon. But m, Well, we must take certain precautions. k, Work never stops. But....yeah. I mean it's basically that wilderness kind of isolation alone with nature, alone in the mountains, sort of thing that is the big appeal of that walk, for sure.

[42: 621 to 627] b, So you just used that term "wilderness" to describe where you were. What makes or unmakes a wilderness? k, Lack of people, resources...m, Lack of communication, lack of people. Back to just going where nobody else has been, to the best of your knowledge. k, Seeing it the way it was.

[43: 629 to 633] b, Did you encounter anything during your experience that reduced the wilderness aspect of it? k, Only a tiny bit. When you find somebody's fire that was there before you, you may take a little of the edge off of that, but really not much. I mean you recognize that other people have been up and down that route, so.... and the impact was so minimal that easily dismissed. So I would basically say "no." m, I'd agree. Didn't see anything that sacrificed it. It was just perfect. It was pristine and perfect.

[see also excerpt 39]

MANAGEMENT

Positive Orientation Experience

[44: 429 to 437] b, What else did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? k, Had a real nice briefing going in. Covered all the salient points. He recognized we had a guide with us, so you know he didn't get into it more than was obviously necessary. Uh....I thought it was about what I would expect. It was kind of like the briefing going into Denali, except even briefer and that's okay. r, That briefing going

into Denali was long, man, we were in there for an hour. m, Yeah, it was long. k, Yeah, it was a long briefing. Um.....no I mean I thought it was appropriate to the decor and sort of the tenor of the area. Anybody going in here doesn't need a lecture.

[45: 439 to 441] m, The ranger that did give the spiel seemed to be very succinct and told us what we needed to know. k, Yeah, he was quite good. Just letting you know. I mean, let you know what you already knew. That this is no-trace camping. We knew that. And there's bears. Yeah, knew that. Here's a little card with your emergency signal, in case your ELB doesn't work.

Objections to Ranger Presence in the Backcountry

[46: 541 to 553] b, So earlier you said that the Park Service management and presence was appropriate to the tenor of the place. k, I thought so. b, How would it influence your experience if they increased their presence? m, Depends on what you mean by increase their presence. k, Yeah, it depends. I don't want to see anybody around in there. b, Not even rangers? k, I don't want to see anybody.

[47: 557] k, Last thing I want to see is the government in there. I'd rather see another hiker.

[48: 559] r, I did, last year when I was on the Noatak, I did ... it was ... I took two people, as well. And we floated from Twelve Mile to Kavacharak. And as we came around the Kavacharak corner, there was a Park Service tent and they were doing a survey similar [to this], to the use of the Park. And after we politely filled out the surveys, my two clients really told me that was the biggest bummer of the entire trip coming around that corner and seeing a Park Service tent set up to see how they liked the Park.

[49: 561 to 565] k, Yeah I see somebody in there counting wildlife or tagging animals or something like that, that's okay, that's ... you expect to see that kind of thing once in a while. But ...m, Even an occasional ranger inspection walking around in the bush seeing what things are doing wouldn't be bad. I mean if we were to round a corner and seen a ranger station ... k, No, I don't agree. No I don't agree at all. I don't want to see ... like I say if I see a research party in there doing a research project or something, I can understand that. That's sort of fair use. But if I see somebody in there just snooping to see what's going on or are these people obeying the rules or any of that kind of enforcement type stuff, that just kills the whole thing. It absolutely destroys the experience. I don't go places where I'm likely to run into that kind of presence anymore.

Role/Challenge of Management

[50: 409 to 413] k, And I don't mean that insultingly. I have the highest regard for the Park Service. They got a miserable job to do on no budget. m, Oh, absolutely. k, Let's face it, the population pressure down south, especially in California, just renders any kind of natural setting moot after no time at all.

[51: 525 to 531] m, On one hand it's the job, it's one of the jobs of the Park Service to make the wilderness and the experience more accessible to more people. k, No, sometimes they make it less accessible. They've been doing that in the eastern Sierra over the years, too. They keep backing that damn parking lot up in Big Pine Lakes, for example, further and further and further back so you have to hike further to get in there.

Use Limits

Difficult access limits visitation

[52: 521 to 527] b, What's your response to that, is it an elitist park? k, De facto, because the logistics are difficult. The logistics are expensive. On the other hand, I've seen a lot of parks which were, for many years, very pristine, very pretty, and in Los Padres and in San Gabriel Mountains, places like that, over the years I've grown up in southern California, that now I wouldn't go to them on a bet because they've just been completely wrecked. Is that elitist? I don't know. But I know those places are wrecked and I don't go there anymore. And if you want to go for anything remotely like a nature experience, let alone a wilderness experience, then forget it. You know it's like partying down in east L.A. on a Saturday night. And that's because it was made so accessible and so easy to get there that ...k, It may as well have been a city park.

[see also excerpts 32-35, 56]

Overuse

[53: 635 to 637] b, Okay. One last question. Would it be appropriate to limit the number of people that can go out there, beyond the difficult access? k, Tough one. Raises a number of questions, some of them philosophical and political and others practical, but one could stay with the practical. And geez if you didn't limit the people, you've got the question of overuse and taking the edge off the wilderness experience plus you guys are going to have more infrastructure in there to control it, regulate it. And I told you what I thought of what's happened in the San Gabriels. And Los Padres and places like that.

[54: 491] r, I think the main draw to the park is to get out into the wilderness and hopefully, you know, see lots of animals and see very little people and use of the park, which is probably the best way for the Park, you know. I mean regulating such a large park is hard. But if you're going to ... if we get too much overuse of the park, you know, people start not using proper camping skills or something like that, that it'll just ruin the park. And definitely overuse is a main issue. Once you start overusing it, that's when you're going to see signs of trails and campsites along, especially like the tundra walking because if you're walking on tundra, you're going to obviously change it, especially if 20 people walk the same exact trail, going into a trail. Instead of just walking on the open tundra.

Concerns about timely access

[55: 647] m, It's like you said, it raised a lot of questions. I remember when I drove up to Alaska years ago and wanted to go to Denali Park. We called ahead upon somebody's advice and realized well we can't get in there for six days. Because they only let so

many people in there. We'd have to go sit there for six days before you can be allowed into the park. But we don't have six days. We just drove here.

Regional/System view

[56: 649] k, But that's well-known. That's well advertised. And all you got to do is go to the web site and they'll tell you, you know, that's a limit. And, again, that's the Los Padres of Alaska, is Denali, because you got all the tourists going there. Um.... you know I think as long as the accessibility up here is like this, it's not going to be a problem. But geez, you know, places never become less accessible as a rule, they only become more accessible. I don't know.

[see also excerpt 65]

Group size

[57: 493 to 501] k, Yeah, I'd be concerned about big parties in there. Can't do no-trace stuff with big parties in there. You can get by with 3-4, you know, a handful of people. r, I think they have a limit of 9. m, Really. k, Nine's big. r, That's including guides, is 9 is the total amount of people you can take out.

[58: 639 to 641] m, One of the thoughts, what [Rich] said, he said guide services are only allowed to take a maximum of 9 people per group back there. k, I definitely feel that party sizes should be limited. There's no question about that. And that's appropriate.

Focus limits on commercial operators

[59: 661] k, I think you're justified in controlling the pros. No question.

[60: 667 to 675] b, You say we're justified in limiting the pros. Maybe not the private visitors? k, I think so, yeah. r, You can't really limit the private visitors. k, I think philosophically you shouldn't limit the private visitors. I think that should be self-limiting. But ...m, And that is self-limiting. You don't see many people going out there.

[61: 645] k, For professional guide services. Now, you know, if people just want to come in here and go in there, then you get into the philosophical aspect of well, you know, it's our park and I and ten of my best friends want to go up there and have a wilderness experience without a professional guide service, that's a tougher regulation question.

[62: 677] k, People making a profit off the enterprise certainly can be regulated. Um.... because that's a different issue. It's the people in the Park, the people have the right to go into the Park. But that doesn't necessarily mean anybody's got the right to make money off the Park. That's subject to regulation. That doesn't trouble me too much.

[63: 651] r, You can limit by, you know, going such as like Denali is on the concession for guide services. They're only allowed 6 or 7 permits out there. And those are the only people allowed to guide Denali for money. Um... you can't limit the use of just everyday

anybody coming up here, to say "okay, I'm going up to the Brooks Range", you know, if I'm not with a guided service, I can go up anywhere probably because it is a national park, you know. There shouldn't be any limit to the number of people that come in that way. But you could limit the number of guide services coming in, which you know you pick your guide services, however you pick them, you know, hopefully you pick the best ones which use minimal impact camping or try to do no-trace camping, not try... do, do no-trace camping.

Visitor Registration and Orientation

[64: 567 to 575] m, That's why we went to the effort to come up here. b, How about here at the start of your trip, when you went over to the Park Service office there, that was voluntary. What if it was mandatory? k, Well...m, It should be. k, No, I don't agree with that either. I don't like anything being mandatory. God damn government.

[65: 589 to 595] m, I'd have to agree with that. I like the idea knowing that anybody that was go in to do anything near what we did sat there for 10 minutes and listened to his little spiel. But, should it be mandatory? k, But if you didn't know that going in, then you had no business being up here...Um.... I'd contrast that with say the eastern and western Sierra where part of that function is you're trying to reduce people's impact when they do go in. And you do have a lot of yahoos going in there. And the fact is if you don't try and educate those people a little bit, it wrecks it for everybody, including sort of the diehard backwoods types. So, the line is a little finer there just because it's such a high population and a high use area. And what can you do? It's one of those compromises you have to make. So, do I mind seeing a ranger when I'm back in the eastern Sierra? No. Not so much because there are also are just a lot of strange people back in there because it's high population, high use. This is different. And that's what makes this so interesting. That's what makes this a different place.

[66: 585 to 587] b, How would it influence your experience if it was mandatory? k, Um... obviously it wouldn't change the experience once I'm in country 'cuz no difference in there, right, it's all the same. But the idea that the government requires me to do something before I can go into my public land just annoys me tremendously. Now, yeah I know, you got a fine line there you got to cut because you got a bunch of yahoos in there who don't know what they're doing. You've got a screening function and you've got an educational function and you got a safety function. And I grant you all of that. But the nice thing about being up here is that this is such a low use area that anybody that's in there damn well better be knowing what they're doing or the gene pool gets cleaned out a little bit and that's part of the experience, too.

[67: 577 to 583] m, I think anybody going back in to do what we just did should spend the ten minute little trip with the ranger in the ranger station.... k, I agree...m, They're just pointing out the necessities. k, I agree, you should. I don't agree mandatory.

815AKP30

Tammy (t), Lana (l), Cal (c), Steve (s), Dylan (d), Joe (j)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 633 to 635] b, So how did you find out about Gates of the Arctic and the route that you chose to do? s, This was all my... I was up here 8 years ago. In the village (Anaktuvuk Pass). And was up on the Dalton Highway at the same time and realized that you could do this trek basically you could go from the road to Anaktuvuk Pass and fly back, and do it cheaply. And the single biggest factor in planning this trip was the economics because the group couldn't afford to pay to charter a plane to drop us off deep enough and to do a trek like this. This was the only real option with the exception of doing a loop out and back to the highway, which would have kept us in the highway corridor, which I wanted to avoid.

Route-finding/Navigating

[2: 23] s, Over Pasco Pass; Up Glacier River; Over Chimney Pass; Up Clear River for 2 miles; Over Holmes Pass; Down Pyramid Creek; Up the north fork of the Koyukuk; Up Ernie Creek; Over Ernie Pass; Down Greylime; Down the Anaktuvuk, to here.

[3: 167 to 171] s, Then going up Holmes Pass, from that camp at the confluence it was pretty straightforward to get up to the Pass. Like you could actually either continue up Holmes Creek itself. It looked like a pretty narrow canyon, but it turned out to be the easiest route. It was just a hike along the bottom of the canyon. Or half of us banked up on the tundra. And then contoured around into the Pass. We had a.... I, It definitely would have been easier to like I hiked up the creek most of the way and then it started ... the canyon walls started getting pretty steep, so I bailed out and walked above it, but definitely, like Eric walked along the river the whole time. That was definitely easiest. Like it ... coming up right after the pass, it was just a nice gradual gravel path leading right up to the top of the pass. That would definitely would have been easier than hiking along the the tundra was real steep on the banks above, so.....j, Yeah, definitely if the water level is low, go up the creek.

[4: 185 to 189] t, The first mile out from the Pass was pretty nice. Nice little creek you just following it along...s, It's like there's... yeah... it's like 3 miles from the Pass to the confluence of the two major forks of Pyramid Creek. Then the first 1-1/2 to 2 miles, it just gradually gets steeper, and the boulders get bigger, and the river is getting rougher. Then the mile above the confluence was either going through knee to thigh deep swift water in box canyons against the walls or trying to get around on incredibly steep tundra with drops, big holes, big soggy holes in the tundra. c, And lots of little feeder streams.

[5: 251 to 255] s, The confluence was just kind of deceptive because Shushuluk Creek comes in right there, as well. So looking from the river, it looks like a tributary coming in. It's not a major fork. It's just a smaller tributary coming out of the mountains. t, Yeah, Ernie Creek really comes in like a sharp right angle. s, Yeah, so it's an easy one to miss.

[6: 307] s, Yeah, so like after the rocks, the rocks petered out and then there was like 5 miles of real easy going along Ernie Creek, like great gravel bars, even though the river was high, it was no problem to travel on the river banks. Then you hit the triple confluence for Grizzly, Konunga, and Ernie where they all come together. And we had rain all day that day. Then going into Ernie Pass, either you go up, straight up the canyon, which was unknown in terms of how accessible it was to get in and out of, and there's lots of rain and lots of water, so we contoured up the west side of it to ... we had an altimeter, and we hiked up 800 feet to the height of the pass, ...contoured around in white-out conditions. And there's two major gullies that are only crossable at that elevation.

[7: 493] s, We had a GPS with us. We put each camp in and the total distance, route distance from camp to camp to camp to camp was 74, exactly. We were trying to figure in the average deviation from straight line progression. We figured about 20 to 25%. So we figured we did like 90 to 100 miles, all told. Triple digit .

[8: 565] d, One other thing that I think is extremely important that we did not do is everybody should have a map. We only had one, two maps. And one was like the small... or the large scale topo and one was the small scale topo. I would love to have a copy of the maps so that when I'm 100 yards ahead of somebody and it's raining and I don't want to stop and wait for them to catch up and start freezing because you know you're hiking with all your stuff on, you stop, you just immediately start freezing. I'd like to be able to look at the contours and say "okay, there's that peak, this is the direction I need to go." Rather than hiking half a mile past the confluence and having to go all the way back. Or even if somebody just gets... you know, you're behind the group 20 yards and they go over a rise and you fall and hurt yourself. It's going to be a while before they come back and figure out where you are.

Daily Schedule

[9: 225 to 231] d, We had a very late schedule. We'd get a late start, anywhere from noon to three. We started our hiking and then ... t, Go 'til like 10.d, Anywhere between 8 and j, Going into the Koyukuk was our longest night. I think I went bed at like 1:00.

Physical Challenges of Hiking and Camping

Too much weight

[10: 31 to 35] c, 14 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. j, Backpacks were heavy with two weeks worth of food, were borderline..., I mean we were pushing it. .. we have physical ailments because our packs were so heavy. c, Lots of 'em.

[11: 533] d, The intensity and the terrain were just like nothing I've ever encountered before. I mean I was in Boy Scouts. I did 50 hikes at least. From day hikes to week-long backpacking trips, 50 miles or whatnot. But the amount of weight that first day, I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't tell myself that I was going to hike 80 miles with that

much weight on my back and be all right. It didn't seem fathomable. It didn't seem possible.

Tussocks

[12: 45 to 49] t, The first day we counted a lot, a lot of tussocks right off, but we found this winter trail. It was actually on the map. We followed that for a good part of that day. j, Unfortunately, it didn't go over Pasco Pass. That's where we really like had our first, like real introduction to tussocks. You looked from a distance and it looks like you can just easily go right over that pass. And then when you get there, that last 200 yards takes 45 minutes. And you're just sweating and everything hurts and you just want to be there. d, Stumbling around, falling in between tussocks.

[13: 53 to 61] s, There's a good game trail going up Pasco Pass. The last 200 yards were really nasty tussocks. And going down was chill, but as soon as we got to the bottom, it was like the worse tussocks of the entire trip. t, Yeah. s, At first, was in the mile between the edge of that hill and where we found that winter trail again. People were falling over and unable to get themselves out and requiring assistance from other people just to get back up. t, I've fallen and I can't get up! s, And then people trying to help other people and falling over themselves. And so there's two people down. And screaming, waving their trekking poles in the air.

[14: 103 to 105] t, Glacier River we just kept crossing back.... we must have crossed it literally like over a hundred times, just back and forth, back and forth and to gravel bar to gravel bar. c, That was easier going than going through tussocks.

[15: 67] d, Yeah, the tussocks weren't nearly as bad close to the water they were in, like up on the hillside.

[16: 107] d, The tussocks actually got easier the further north we got, though. They got smaller and less depth in between each one. I found at first I was rolling my ankles a lot. You know you try to step on the top one and it just rolled down into the mud and stuff.

[17: 441] s, And then we hiked in here yesterday. The last, in general, I thought the going all along the north side was pretty good, like generally hard tundra. The tussocks that were there weren't nearly as bad as we'd experienced. There is a lot of good walking.

[18: 449 to 457] c, The ATV trails, part of them were... a lot more difficult to maneuver through than down on the tundra. j, Yeah. t, We really didn't hit any decent ATV trails 'til right..... leading into the village, here. Like you could see every now and then some tracks where an individual ATV had gone by, but it wasn't until we actually left the river, about you know 4 miles from here to turn inland that we actually hit a real trail. We saw one or two on the opposite side of the river, but very few trails. And the one that we followed in here, the last like 4 miles or so, it had been raining for days, so it was absolute mud. s, The bog slog. t, Yeah, it was definitely better than the tussocks leading in here, but you know you're up to your mid-shin in mud for most of it.

Wetness

[19: 111], Yeah, pretty much from day 4 on, everybody just hiked in soaking-wet boots for the rest of the trip.

[20: 281 to 291] s, Then we went up and then from the confluence into the Valley of Precipices is like every possible kind of terrain, river gravel, we had some bad tussocks, we had some great game trails, we had to bash through some alders, we had and then it ended, there's a rise ... just about 2 miles of just these big piles of rocks. t, Really cool, like all moss and lichen covered. j, But incredibly slippery. Like the only full fall I took with the pack was on the rocks just because they were so slippery. And really dangerous. And it was all wet because of the rain. t, It was much better walking than the tussocks. d, We got real heavy rain. We got like a little shower. That was real tough that day because everyone was just so tired. And you end up "where should we camp now?" and it's slippery as hell everywhere. c, So we renamed it the Valley of Precipitation.

River hazards

[21: 135] c, Steve had warned us, ... in the Bob Marshall books he talks about camping on sand bars and being like aware of water levels rising, that was like the first time we were like, okay, we're not going to camp on the sandbar right here because there's no where to go.

[22: 191 to 193] s, Yeah, lots of feeder streams. And really difficult access back down to the river. A bunch of us went up above and were able to drop back again in one of the only spots to do it, and that was mildly precarious getting down there. t, And I walked in the river and that was really sketchy, like in knee to thigh-deep water with like no gravel bars, just like sheer wall, water, sheer wall. Sort of wondering if I probably shouldn't really be in here.

[23: 233 to 235] t, Yeah, we didn't even arrive until like almost midnight at the Koyukuk. s, Yeah. At night. And we crossed it immediately because the rain was coming up and we could cross it, and it was knee to thigh deep, not too bad. And then got across, set up camp, started to get some rain.

[24: 257 to 261] j, That's when we started to see the water level, like... Once we got across the Koyukuk, people started to be concerned about crossing rivers. Like before Glacier and Clear, everyone was going through these big drainages. But this is like when we started to stay on one side of the and we weren't crossing over much... it was getting kind of sketchy to stay on one side. l, We also set up camp that night and then had to set it up again because the river was rising and, yeah, we could just watch the water rise. We had to move back up hill. s, We got our first really heavy rains that night. The next morning the river had gone cloudy. Had risen to the point where it couldn't be crossed. In the spots we saw.

[25: 419 to 427] s, Yeah, we camped on a sand bar that we estimated was about 3 feet above the height of the river. But it rained all night, really hard. l, The river rose like

crazy overnight. j, [inaudible] we were below the confluence of that tributary.... so ...l, Yeah. s, So, 8 in the morning we had small rivulets coming in between our tents. And the river was still rising. It was still raining.

[26: 519 to 523] c, Yeah, even if we hadn't been to the Koyukuk in time before it started rising.... if it was not clear and we hadn't been able to see the bottom, I don't think I would have crossed it. At the end of that day. l, Yeah, at the end of that day, no way. t, Yeah, there were a lot of rivers we could have gotten stuck at for a while, yeah.

Exhaustion

[27: 509] s, I thought Pyramid, Pyramid was by far the most challenging. Because of the terrain, because by the end of it, crossing the Koyukuk, we were all so physically exhausted, people were having difficulty thinking straight, dealing with stuff, and it was raining and it was cold.

Unexpected Elements

Mosquitoes

[28: 37] j, Like we..., the first part of the trip, we were like greatly surprised that there were no mosquitoes. Absolutely none. Compared to where like the Kenai Peninsula and other places we've been in British Columbia. Even by California standards.... there were no mosquitoes. We didn't use bug dope for the first, like we used bug dope once on the actual trip. And it was sunny. We had sun. We hadn't seen the sun in the last three weeks down on the Kenai, but we ... we were in shorts with no mosquitoes. We were carrying a mosquito net that we thought we were going to need.

[29: 817 to 825] d, Do you know if mosquitoes are generally not that bad this time of the year? Or is this just a strange.....?b, Usually they're the least bad in August. That's why the most visitation occurs in the month of August. That and that the wildlife is up and moving around. j, I was amazed that we didn't have mosquitoes. I just heard horror stories about....[inaudible group banter] s, It's tough. It definitely was tough having the screen house for no bugs, deciding to bring it, but then if the, yeah, had we been here in July, we would have been blessing every ounce of that house.

No down-time

[30: 537] d, Yeah. And it seemed like "oh, we'll have plenty of time to get there." We'll even have a rest day or two. We can stretch it out here if we want to, to make up a little bit, be able to have a little more time to relax and whatnot, but we were pretty much hiking long... whenever we were hiking, it was long days. There was only one day that we only did a couple of miles. And one rest day. So, the amount of time that it took was more than I expected.

Equipment

[31: 63] j, Trekking poles are a must. I was the only one who didn't have them. I ended up using our poles from our screen tent. We were like four-legged creatures humped over by the weight of our packs.

[32: 99] s, Three days going up Glacier River to Chimney Pass. We wished..... the equipment we didn't have was neoprene socks and some type of water shoe or something with more arch support. We hiked in sandals for 2 days with nearly full packs. It was really hard on our feet. Really hard.

[33: 515] c, Yeah. I'd say the hardest part for me anyway was carrying a bunch of wet cotton around. I had like 15 pounds of wet clothes at one point. After we had gotten rid of like half of our food. So it was pretty much like I was carrying the same weight that I started out with again. So, wet clothing I think was probably the worst.... it wouldn't dry.

[34: 525 to 529] j, Seriousness, the gravity of what we just did was like ... I look back on it now. If I was going to do it again, I'd want to know what every person is carrying. Because what the bottom line comes down to, I might have to carry that person or that person's gear. Everyone... everything.... like I just didn't... I looked at it like we all just packed like we were going on another trip, but this wasn't if shit had gone down, we'd have really been put to the test. And I don't know how we got through with not we had no issues. Our biggest issue was like "when should we start hiking?" We'd have long debates about if we should get up early and hike or if we should sleep in and fish before we hiked. It was ridiculous. b, You sounded right there like you were going to say that "we packed like this was just another trip, but it wasn't." j, Yeah, like I don't think it was. If something had gone wrong or we had an issue, like we would be really pressed. Like we have some.....some of the gear we brought was kind of like.....a mosquito net would have been nice if the mosquitoes were bad. But in all honesty that was weight we shouldn't have been carrying. I know I had stuff in my gear that I shouldn't have been carrying. I brought a three-weight fly rod and an eight-weight fly rod and you don't need an eight-weight fly rod for a little 8-inch grayling. And that's probably like 4 pounds.

[35: 553 to 561] d, I just brought a lot of extraneous stuff that I didn't ever use. On top of the Walkman and all those tapes. I bought this little wooden wolf at the Ranger Station, not realizing that I was going on a 14-day hiking trip. I don't know what I was thinking. He became our little buddy. t, He was our mascot. d, When the going got tough, I'd have a little chat with him. l, Blame everything on Wolfie. Wolfie gnawing on our knees, Wolfie gnawing on our toes. On our backs. c, Everything that went wrong was Wolfie's fault.

Group Dynamics

Positive elements

[36: 597 to 603] b, So it sounds like you all still like each other after this trip. Can you describe the influence that the other people in the group had on your individual experiences? c Well, that guy.....no. l, Well, notice there's only six of us. t, We ate the other one. [laughter]

[37: 605] c, It helped that we each had our different bad days and good days. And they weren't all on the same day. So if someone was having a good day and carried a little bit

more weight, or do a little more of the work, um... if a person was feeling down or injured or just sick and tired of hiking, they could take a little break. And that was nice that our group worked like that.

[38: 713 to 715] l, No, I definitely feel like there was that ... I feel like we had a lot of just team mentality. Like I mean like what you said, [Joe], about people getting hurt and stuff. Because there were some minor injuries with knees and ankles and stuff. And people were willing to take more and that kind of stuff. If we if there were just two of us, it'd be way harder. But with 7, it's like "okay, this person's hurting today, lets do something about it." d, Or even if we had been a group of 7 that didn't know each other that well, had never really been together in a group before, because then you're kind of like well, I brought this stuff, I'm not going to pawn it off on someone else that I don't really know that well. I'm not really comfortable with asking them to carry my extra weight, since my ankle hurts today. It's more like everybody was like "oh, your ankle hurts? Give me some of your weight."

[39: 607] d, Definitely. I think we've also had, most of us have had a lot of experience together before, in hiking and camping and whatnot. Hanging out with each other, so there was a lot of good prep time for that for the most part. I think this is the true test of all of our previous experiences.

[see also excerpt 35]

Difficulties associated with group size

[40: 609 to 613] s, I was struck by the differences between hiking with a group of 7 and hiking with a group of 3 or 4 and the dynamics and decision-making and getting everybody motivated and the speed at which the group can travel. There's definitely strong correlations between the size of the group and the speed at which all that can be done. t, Inverse. s, Inverse, yeah.

[41: 615 to 619] b, Are you saying that 7 was too many? t, 7 is just a lot slower than 3. s, Just a lot slower than I would hike individually or 3 people could hike together.

[42: 621] j, I was just thinking, it's only slower in the part setting up camp and getting stuff done. It's just because it's just like there's ... you don't need all 7 people to cook, so there's this whole kind of little like social loafing.

Weather

[43: 205 to 215] l, It started raining. j, And it started to rain. d, It started raining. That was the first day we got real rain. t, Cold and wet...j, That was the first day we got real rain. d, We were feeling very broken at that point.

[44: 335 to 351] j, It was frigid. I've never been that cold. l, Yeah. We had to hike to be warm. t, People were wet and cold. s, Yeah, it was low to mid 40s with probably average 20 mile an hour winds and raining hard. j, Yeah, it rained. I was like pack up, get on and get out of here. Because you can't hang out here unless you're in your

sleeping bag. If your environment was wet, like mine was, I had to be the motivator that morning... without popping in with one of you guys. Everyone was nice and warm. I was like "everyone get up, let's go!" s, That day we did more miles that day than any other day. It was amazing. l, Because we were so cold. s, Weather...c, The rain and the cool really got us going.

[45: 293 to 299] t, It pretty much rained from that point on throughout the trip, so that'll become a theme. s, Yeah, that was the start of the sort of incessant rain and regular rain. We had.... but we had a great site, amazing views. Amazing place. t, Yeah, right by Black Face Mountain. d, Even though it was cloudy in there, like sometimes the ceiling would lift enough so that we could see the walls of the canyons in there. It was really cool. And then when we got up to the top of the valley, there, we hiked up along the side of Ernie Creek was in kind of a steep box canyon again, so we went up alongside of the hill. And looking back down the canyon after we had gotten up into the fog a little bit, was really cool, too, because every once in a while it would break up and you'd be able to see Black Face Mountain.

[46: 317] j, It was pretty exciting though. Making... going up the ridge line. It was pretty exciting because we were hiking up into the clouds. You couldn't see very well. You're very conscious of trying to keep the group together and make sure everyone was, you know, that we weren't going to lose someone in the fog. It was steep. We weren't that far from a pretty good drop-off to the right.

[47: 323] s, Yeah, we had a great view..... we were really blessed. The cloud lifted as the.... the mile and a half from the confluence of Ernie and the North Fork of the Koyukuk. It's some of the best views on the entire trip. You can see all the high peaks. And we were fortunate that the cloud lifted enough to see virtually all of the summits. It was really special.

[48: 335] j, Sometimes you'd see the mountains on the sides of a pass and go "Whoa, look, there is a mountain over there!" It was just really neat kind of to have it always changing, but then it rained hard that night and the wind.

Escape

[49: 571 to 573] b, What was the best part of the trip? d, Getting away from everything. And not hearing a single thing. Like this is the first trip that I've ever heard complete silence. Like not even birds chirping. Most camping trips in California, there's always a bird chirping some place. Or some kind of noise going on or a jet flying overhead. Or whatever. Complete silence. No wind in the trees. When we stayed at Smokey Lake there was no sound. It was completely quiet. It was so nice to just have some free time away from everything. No outside stimulants at all.

Challenge/Accomplishment

[50: 583] s, I thought the best thing about the trip was that we successfully accomplished something that pushed us all to our limits. We all experienced something that we will remember for the rest of our lives. And found our limits, I would say, and approached

them and pushed ourselves a little beyond it. And the deep personal satisfaction in doing that in the most remote, pristine wilderness out there, is something I don't anybody is going to forget any time soon.

Re-entry

[51: 463 to 469] s, Then we arrived in the gravel quarry.

t, Like "there's heavy construction going on!" c, We were all scared, like, we shouldn't go there, there's heavy machinery. Can we enter there. Are they going to be mad at us? We didn't know what to do. Just walk around in there and ...t, People! What's going on?

[52: 483 to 491] c, Yeah, we were super stoked with the washeria,... washeteria, whatever they call it. l, Sauna. s, Sauna. c, Sauna, showers. d, If I had only known that there was a sauna waiting for me here....all those rough times...

Luck

[53: 517] j, Yeah, we were blessed, really, by the weather, that we could cross the rivers and we were also lucky that we didn't have any major injuries. Like everyone was able to carry a load. Everyone was able to make ground. We covered some distances, even though we started at 12 o'clock or 2 or 3 o'clock sometimes, we'd actually cover some serious ground in a day. Like looking back in retrospect, now, and wouldn't have taken much for us not to be here today or for the next week. You know that's what just blows my mind.

[54: 563] t, Yeah, I think we were very, very lucky, though, all in all.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLACE

Scale

[55: 647 to 649] c. Pristine and bigger than you could ever imagine. You're standing in an river valley, the river's right next to you so you have perspective on that, there's a giant wall over here and a giant wall over here and you really have no idea how tall the mountain is. You know, it could be a little hill in perspective to all the stuff around it. Or it could be 5,000 feet. It's really hard to gauge, I guess, distance. I was having a hard time for a while. t, On the clear days, you'd look at a mountain and would figure it out, looking at the maps and stuff, that it was like 40 miles away.

Demanding/Self-limiting

[56: 641 to 645]b, This is always a fun question. How would you describe the area you visited to somebody thinking about visiting? d, It's so hard to put it into words. t, I'd tell my mom not to come. She could never hack it.

[57: 657 to 669] s, But...challenging, you have to know how to read a topographic map extremely well. I spent like most challenging terrain you can imagine, every variety. And expect to be wet. t, Just hiking in wet boots,...but most people really probable shouldn't... the vast majority of people shouldn't probably ever attempt to come in. b, Because of the physical difficulty? t, Just because you need to be able to carry a really, really heavy pack and you need to know how to deal with emergency situations, you

need to know a lot of survival skills, you need to just be able to you know prevent hypothermia, be able to dress properly, be able to dry yourself, be able to cook for like d, Be able to push yourself when you don't think you're capable of pushing yourself. t, Yeah, be able to like walk another 40 miles when you're injured. And I think it's probably beyond what most people are probably willing to do. l, Most people wouldn't consider it a vacation.

Wildlife

Sightings

[58: 163 to 165] j, Didn't you have a wolf sighting on Glacier? c, Yeah, we were, I think, further north. I looked up. I was walking away from the group and, we were starting out, we'd just had a break, and I looked up at about a 15 foot bank, and I saw a little dog-like creature. I think it was a wolf, but I'm not sure. Right as I looked up it ran away.

[59: 159 to 161] s, Yeah, so our only bear sighting was going up towards Chimney Pass on the small creek. We saw a grizzly from like 75 yards on the embankment overlooking the river. We saw it. l, Well, we were on sort of in the middle of the river and it was on the bank up above, maybe 20 feet above us. Just sort of looking at us. Then I was like "Look at the bear!" My bear bell starting ringing and it was like "vwppppp!" Kind of stood up and it took off running away.

Behavior

[60: 685 to 689] b. So, you mentioned a couple of sort of attributes of a wilderness. You said "animals migrating," "no people." What other things made it a wilderness? s, No evidence of man. l, Alarming animals. Like we saw this lynx on the river. And I was just like "oh, my....!" getting so excited. And the lynx like froze and then we saw it leap like 5 feet horizontal, just like back into the bushes. It was like that thing was so freaked out. But then it was kind of funny because we saw this porcupine. The porcupines are just waddling around like they don't know what's going on. They just have huge quills. So we chased it down so we could get a better look at it. It was really cool though because, it's a porcupine you know. So much stuff out there. Tons of rabbits. We saw so many legs of animals like the first day we saw this like lucky rabbit foot. Just like little did we know that we'd come across just tons of rabbit feet. They just get macked by everything it seems. They're little guys. Yeah, we just saw tons of caribou skulls and antlers and carcasses. Huge vertebrae. Just like went down with the river current. Stuff is picked clean. It's amazing. Like they don't leave anything around. California, they just have stuff you know the turkey vultures finish the carcasses off. Here, there's nothing like that. I was amazed.

Evidence

[61: 697 to 701] j, There was scat everywhere. d, There you go, [Joe].j, Like that was something that, along with the footprints, there's scat everywhere. Sometimes you didn't even realize it, but you'd look over and there's a big ol' bear dropping right near you. Oh, are we cooking our food right next to that and no one realized it? It's like ... that kind of adds to the wildness because it's just this evidence everywhere. Even though we

were scaring them off, there's just.... you know they're there. You know they're sitting there watching you go "what the hell are these?"

[62: 575 to 581] j, I liked when you're hiking along you'd see footprints and be like, "I should go that way"; then all of a sudden, you look and it's not a footprint it's a bear-print. And it's like, "Yeah, if a bear went this way it must be a good way to go". It was so cool to just be standing around and to see like the wolf prints. They're just typical dog prints, but it's like four times the typical dog. And it's four times as deep as the typical dog. You know it was just like so cool to see evidence of the wildlife out there. Tough we didn't get to see them, as much as we ... it wasn't like Marty Stouffer's "Wild America" all around us, but... It was cool to see the evidence that it is like that. And that we're just too loud and whatever it was. A lot of time we had the wind at our back, so our smell was going out ahead of us, so d, Even without bear bells we were still noisy. l, It was great this great racket. t, Most of us had bear bells. I mean it was definitely good from a safety standpoint in that it gave the animals plenty of warning. Like bears weren't bothering us.

Safety

[63: 73] l, Yeah. Saw tons of wolf and grizzly tracks. So that was exciting. Made us worry about our food.

[64: 627 to 629] d, One thing I was really surprised was that we never had any issues with animals getting into our food. I mean we did do a pretty good job of trying to toss it up in trees when we could. Even though most of the time it got to about just the reach of a grizzly bear's arms. He could've sliced it down with one blow, but at the end we had a pretty big sack of pretty smelly trash. We'd just throw it with the bear canisters and hope for the best. Nothing ever touched it. t, That's where being loud was good.

[see also excerpt 62]

WILDERNESS

[65: 671 to 677] b, Would you describe the area you traveled through as a wilderness? s, Absolutely. j, Some of the most pristine...l, I'd say beyond, that's what was always so shocking to me, it's just so wild and to think of animals migrating and people being nowhere. It's so awesome.

Evidence of Other People

[66: 365 to 381] j, I think we saw another person. We think we saw another tent. I'm pretty sure because that orange dot wasn't there...l, From the pass. t, Mike, the ranger, said there was somebody hiking up that way. Around that time, so probably was. j, That was the only person we saw. b, On the whole trip, that was the only person? c, Yeah. s, Mm..hm.. l, Well, we just saw a tent in the distance. s, That was like 3 or 5 miles away.

[67: 75 to 81] c, Yeah, and more on this trip than human footprints. That was pretty cool. j, There were no human footprints for the first like 3-4 days. s, Yeah, in Glacier River. j, There was no sign of like I did see some trash along the winter trail, found a

couple of pieces of garbage, but for the most part, there was no real sign that people had been there.

[68: 241 to 247] j, Then I found this nice fleece laying out in the wilderness [a fleece jacket that he is wearing]. And it was just muddy. It had moss growing on it. There were some roots going through it. I scrubbed it, cleaned it up, washed it, brand new. Got some history to it, like it looks like...d, Bullet hole....j, There's some patchwork and stuff. t, You can't even imagine what that thing looked like. It was like sort of trampled on by all these moose prints. He pulls up he was like "look what I found!" It was like completely covered with mud and moss and it looks really good now.

[see also excerpt 78]

Wildlife as Indicator of Wildness

[see excerpts 60-61]

Overflights

[69: 387 to 407] b. How about aircraft? Were there a lot of overflights? l, We saw the most....t, On the Koyukuk. l, Yeah, the most air traffic on the Koyukuk. d, That morning on the Koyukuk we saw three different planes. s, Within the space of like two hours. d, Yeah, l, And in stormy conditions. d, We saw planes when we were in Glacier. We saw like two or three planes in Glacier, as well. That was over a three-day period. s, Yeah, so we saw....t, Actually, maybe three days total out of 13 out there we saw planes. Otherwise, nothing.

Ethics

[70: 679] c, It made me really conscious of we were kind of having a discussion at the beginning.... of super low impact camping, the best ways to deal with all the things you have to do while you're camping. It just made me really conscious of all the serious impact that we do every time we go out. Even if we're not like leaving our trash all over the place and that kind of thing. It's just like if you leave an established campsite, it's not natural anymore. It's not the pristine wilderness anymore. And walking into places and never, you know, we'd see it was obvious where people had camped before because of a couple of rocks where they had staked out their tent or something like that. And it became really easy to pick out because for tons and tons of miles we saw no human impact at all. It just made me really conscious of, you know, how much impact our normal standards of camping really do to the environment. Of course in California, it recovers a lot quicker. It's a little bit warmer and stuff breaks down a little better. But ...

[71: 681 to 683] j, You actually see what your impact is, because this place is pristine, whereas when you're in California or any,...someone else has been there before you. We're not the first anywhere. I know we're not the first out here, but like going up to Glacier, it felt like we were the first maybe to see them because there were no footprints. There was nothing there in Glacier. It was so awesome. It was something to have that footprint next to the bear print. d, Yeah, we camped on the sand bar ... was that two

nights ago? Anyway, we camped out on the sand bar when the river came up and we had to move in the morning. And within 20 minutes of getting there, I just noticed how much impact there was on the ground just by all the footprints around our tents. We hiked for 80 miles not seeing a single footprint or maybe one or two. And then to get into camp and there's like 50 right around your tent. It's such a different feeling you know. People have been here.

[see also excerpt 85]

No-Rescue

[72: 585 to 591] j, Like you go backpacking in the Sierras and you get a serious injury and it's never more than 15 miles in most..... you can get lost, but in most places it's not that far between some sort of cabin and civilization or d, Highway...c, Or something, you know. But...t, Like if somebody had... if something had happened out there, it would have been literally at least a week. And you would have had to hike yourself out. Like if somebody got seriously hurt, you either would have walked yourself out or you'd have died. That's that.

[73: 703 to 707] c, I think the idea that you're so inaccessible and it's so hard to get in and so hard to get out is a wilderness to me. You're out there. d, You got yourself out there and you have to get yourself out of there. t, Yeah, no one's coming to get you. There's no help if you need it. You're just on your own. If you mess up, it's just all on you.

MANAGEMENT

Prefer Minimal Presence

[74: 759] l, The Park Service seems pretty intentionally hands off. In a place like this...this is the land, pretty much keep whatever, you know, hunting or development activities out of it. And you're sort of on your own, which is what we were looking for.

[75: 777 to 785] b, So you described the management as sort of hands off. Is that something the rest of you would agree with? d, Yeah, I didn't see any visible.... it didn't seem like there was anything that they had been doing obviously... Just let it go. Let it be. b, And how do you feel about that approach? d, I think that's the way it should be done. c, There's really nothing to do.

Misinformation

[76: 743 to 757] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management in this place? t, I was amazed that [Steve] was telling us that the rangers were saying that people do the trip in 10 days? 8 days? s, 10 days. That was one of the t, Because there's no way we were pushing ourselves. We had basically one full day of rest. But if that river had been....d, You could do it if you had a food drop. t.... a little bit higher. If you had a food drop and the water was low, but I think.....c, And we're all marathon runners. [laughter] t, Yeah, maybe on the moose highway.

[77: 761] s, Yeah, I thought the, in my experience talking with the Park, they're all very friendly and very willing to talk and... other than that piece of misinformation I would almost call it, about the 10 days, which was a big part in sort of my factoring into the length of time and planning because given that piece of information and given sort of what I worked out, I had seen that we'd have two to three rest days. And it didn't work out that way.

Limited Information/Opportunity for Discovery

[78: 803 to 813] s, It was challenging trying to find route information. That was the one.... I guess that's just part of the nature of the Park, but I spent... I was unable to track down anybody who could describe the stretch from Chimney Pass to north fork of the Koyukuk going over Holmes Pass. Like that was completely unknown to this group because nobody had been there that I could find. But I guess that's just....j, That added, though, to the adventure of the trip. d, Yeah, definitely. j, I remember we all kind of talked about that, we all had a kind of little smug like we're kind of exploring. And then when we saw a footprint, it was like "oohhh we're not the first!" t, Yeah, it kind of goes both ways. Like on the one hand, you want to kind of gather all the information you can before you start and you know what you're dealing with and be able to kind of plan, but that's also sort of the nature of the park that you're sort of playing explorer. Yeah, I was bummed when I saw footprints, too. I was like "damn!" d, I definitely felt like a pioneer at some points. I mean I can see how the land hasn't changed very much. There's big Alaskan wilderness or whatever, that's in the 30s I guess and a lot of the same ... it doesn't sound like it's changed very much.

Registration/Orientation

Education function

[79: 789] c, I think it was Lee, I think she was the lady ranger there at the other place, she wanted us to read the... because we had talked out there about our impact and like how to deal with things. Like how to deal with our feces. You know, like what to do with that. We still have different philosophies on how to deal with that. Maybe even more education on that. That's like a good thing, that could be like a requirement as you enter the Park. You do want to keep it pristine. I thought that was good, but maybe you could even go further. I mean still we went through that little flip board thing and we still had a debate on that how we should deal with that issue.

[80: 791 to 795] d, But for the most part, I think our group had already discussed and talked about a lot of those things that they had on the board there. And I wouldn't expect a group planning a trip like this would not be educated about bears and how to deal with that, or what to do, pack it in and pack it out. And like I didn't know all those animal tracks, but that was good to know because... if there's something right in the area there and there's a carcass laying around, you don't want to camp right there. That's good information. c, I think the education about it is good. But, yeah, I would almost say if you're going to have a group going in, especially a large group going in, they should definitely all have gone through that. And maybe even sign something that says they went through it. l, Need to make sure they have a little education.

[81: 797 to 801] b, So how would it have influenced your experience if it was a requirement that you go through a back country orientation and fill out a registration form? d, I would've been kind of like "this is kind of stupid." Like I already know all this stuff, but then I'd think about it and say, well everybody has to do that. And it's better that the guy that comes in here and thinks he's gonna hike 80 miles and doesn't know a thing about any of this, has at least seen it once before he goes and attempts it. Then it'd make it worth it to sit there through the little lecture or whatnot. j, Yeah, it would kind of suck. You'd be like why did I I know what I'm doing, that's why I'm here, but if it helps the cause ...what's 15 minutes to go through that thing and initial a paper, sign a paper? Sign a log book. That you're going to do your best to limit your impact.

Safety function

[82: 843] j, Safety is the only other point I bring up. Like I mentioned, like there's a lot of people that might consider themselves experienced hikers or backpackers who would get destroyed trying to do hikes out there. It's sort of like the key thing, the safety factor. I don't know how the Park can make a difference, but it seems like there's a lot of margin for overconfidence and error by Lower 48 hikers.

[83: 839] t, And I think it's definitely a good idea to have everybody register, I mean especially if you're going to go out for 14 days like we did. Like you're kind of an idiot to not let somebody know you're going. Because if you don't come in, like, it's nice for somebody to know.

Use Limits

Support—ecological basis

[84: 827 to 829] b, Would it ever be appropriate for the Park Service to take a more hands on approach to managing this area? Like you suggested earlier, requiring people to register and go through an orientation or even, in some cases, limiting use in some portions of the Park? t, I think if use started to rise, I mean like I definitely felt like we were really super conscious about trying to leave no trace. No matter how hard you try, you're going to leave some little trace and this environment regenerates so, so, so slowly, that I think... I assume they kind of keep some track of numbers there, but if the usage rises above a certain point, I think you'd start to really see some permanent effects, negative effects, on the environment. And I think it's better to limit the number of people going into an area than let it get destroyed.

Focus on type of user

[85: 761 to 769] s, But in general I found that it's pretty pristine. I wonder about the airplane access and if there's parts of the park that should be put off limit to the flight paths. If that is something the Park has ever considered. Like if there were certain areas that can only be accessed by foot. Like people can't just fly in, like how committed is the Park to maintaining as a complete and total wilderness in that way and not have people flying in. t, What part would you want to keep off limits? c, It'd just be like if you could fly in there, like you could just fly in to Chimney Lake, party for a weekend, and get flown back out. d, Yeah, we found whiskey bottles and garbage and stuff. c, And

when you go on a trip like that you're a lot less concerned about your impact. You're just there for a short time. There's no [inaudible] that place.

[86: 773] j, It's kind of like if you have to hike in there, if you have to work to get in there, then naturally the people that are lazy aren't going to pack there crap in for 14 days... the average person is not going to take that challenge. That's a good way to limit the impact we have on this place. But, hey, I'd be down to fly back in there [inaudible]. It's kind of like, "As long as I can fly in there..."

817BTT31

Troy, Wayne, Curt, Ken
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Reasons for Visiting

[1: 457] t, Actually this all started a number of years ago as we happened to see... two of us happened to see a slide show down in the San Francisco Bay area on the Noatak. And actually the guy talked about the Noatak and the Tatshenshini. And the Tatshenshini is a white water river and, while it has some interest, the kind of people I wanted to spend two weeks with weren't going to have that skill level. Whereas the Noatak is much more straightforward. And having always wanted to come to Alaska anyway, I kind of sort of started focusing the effort. And truth be known, 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. So...

[2: 463 to 471] w, Well, the selection of the river was also done based on required skill level, length of trip, we didn't want to be done in 5 days. We wanted to be done in 10 to 12. Um.... and to some degree location in the state. t, Remote. w, We were interested in the Far North. t, Right. w, Because we had never been to the Far North.

[3: 303 to 307] t, And you know... that was the experience we were going for, it's very expensive... it's very logistically challenging to do a trip up here. You take away those advantages and, heck, we can do that in Minnesota or we can do it in you know southern Canada, which is much cheaper, much easier to visit. If you take away the wildlife, the remoteness, the wildness.

[4: 267] t, There was a reason we were here. There's a reason we came up here. And you know that was the ... the resource of having the wildlife, not running into people, and you know being able to experience the ... not only the Gates of the Arctic, but the tundra and the whole wild experience was all part of it. k, We could have gone some place else. t, Oh yeah, oh yeah, we came up here because it is the most remote, most wild, most natural place we could get to.

[5: 481] t, As well as wildlife and remoteness. We could have done the Noatak very straightforward, but you know the Noatak is very well-known, it's very well-traveled, and had a lot of groups on it. So, we chose... we actually chose not to do it for that

reason. And the Killik was one that was on our list and the local outfitter also recommended it, so that made it very straightforward.

River Floating

[6: 13 to 27] t, Well, we put in at the Tulilik Lake on the Killik. Paddled down Eagle Creek to w, Easter Creek...t, Easter Creek to the Killik. Floated down the Killik all the way to the Colville. Went from the Colville to Umiat and flew back out of Umiat. w, Took approximately 12 days? t, Yeah. w, Three layover days. t, Three and a half, a little bit more, I think. w, Yeah, three and a half.

[7: 45 to 49] k, Yeah, we didn't go very far down the Killik the first day. Just a couple of miles and then we camped. t, Our objective was to get used to the boats and get used to having our equipment packed in there and know what we're doing and not do a lot of miles the first day. Just...w, Easter Creek was actually pretty good at that because it gave us some class II rapids immediately, we weren't expecting that but we got used to the boats, at least the steerage and how they handled.

[8: 123 to 129] k, We had a good time at the Sunday rapids area. We were able to run most of it. t, We actually ran everything. k, We lined it...t, Figured there were a lot of gravel bars in places. You ended up getting stuck up on occasion. You had to walk. This time of the year, the river was down a little bit.

[9: 279] t, It was a very different and unique experience. The other thing that Geoff pointed out during the trip was you know where else can, for two solid days, can you run class II water like this in this kind of setting? It is you know a unique opportunity that you know only exists in a very few places in the world.

Wildlife

[10: 263] t, And the other thing I would add of course is the... for us almost the brotherhood statement, which is you know the wildlife we saw was excellent. It was superb.

[11: 337] c, To me, it was that listing of bear, wolf, eagle, caribou, that you might see one of someplace else, but not on a daily basis as you floated the countryside. Those are the major animals in Indian lore and you know it's just they've got a power and attraction there that you wouldn't see in any other location

[12: 395 to 405] b, How about the best part of the trip? w, Oh, for me it was the scenery. t, I think for me it was probably the wildlife. w, Scenery and the wildlife. k, Wildlife. c, Wildlife would be number one.

Weather

[13: 251 to 257] k, And that was one thing that wasn't on our radar screen, so... when we planned this trip, we were standing in the rain one day kind of kidding about it because we thought about the bears, we thought about the cold weather, we thought about this,

we thought about that, we didn't think about a flood. t, Flood. k, And we had a flood. w, Ten to twelve inches of annual rainfall and we had that in two weeks of rain.

[14: 65 to 71] t, Extremely high winds. We had... ended up getting up in the middle of the night, beginning of the morning to stake the tents down. k, And stake the boats down. t, And make sure the boats were okay, yeah. w, 40-50 mile an hour gusts, just on personal opinion basis... it required help standing up.

[15: 135 to 143] k, The day before we got to the Colville it started to rain during the day instead of just at night. w, Right. k, It rained all day for the next three days. w, The next three days. k, All night. The river level just kept coming up and up and up!

[16: 161 to 165] t, Yeah, we were planning on staying over a day and finally got up. It was more like brunch time. Cooked breakfast and decided to go look back on the tents and the water was a hand span away from the tents. So we had to move camp a little higher. We'd already moved the boats once. And uh... then the next night we ... the river was still coming up something like 2 inches in an hour and we set a stick in the sand, got up at 1 and then we got up at 4 or something. And at 4 o'clock the river had hit our stick that said it was beyond our comfort level and we packed camp and left. And from there on out, the problem was that the river was so high you ... the only place you can camp is on the gravel bars, but as we found out in Umiat, the river had come up about 8 feet and w, At Umiat they said 8 feet. t, ... you bring up the water level that high and most of the gravel bars are covered.

[17: 173 to 177] t, We kept hoping the weather would break so we could you know, we'd been on the river for ten or 11 days at this point in time and the first day was acceptable, but after that, the wind came up and it was overcast and either rainy or misty every day. Not all day, but most ... big parts... big portions of the day. So we'd been actually hoping for some nice weather. So we kept waiting and waiting and finally k, We got it today. t, Finally, yeah, when we flew here. Flew back south of the Brooks Range, the weather finally got good again.

[18: 347 to 371] b, What was the worst part of the trip? t, You guys didn't plan your weather any better. w, We can't... rain. t, We ... if you look into the literature on the area, it says you know something like 4 to 7 inches a rain a year. And ... or 7 to 10. w, 7 to 10. k, Umiat gets 5.1, but that's at Umiat. t, Yeah. And yet the Colville rose 8 feet and we had almost c, A good three inches. t, Of our 11 days on the river, it probably rained every one of them. And it rained hard 3 or 4?w, 3 or 4 days in a row. k, Yeah. t, Or 3 days in a row and we had one early in the trip where it rained hard in the middle of the night. So we got a lot more water than we were anticipating. k, The only day that it didn't rain on us, it followed up the next morning with a snow squall.

Challenges associated with the weather

[19: 166 to 171] t, In fact, you know, you... going down the "valley" the Colville is in, you know the map was absolutely useless as far as where you were on the river because the river just covered much of the valley. w, It was like half to three quarters of a mile

wide. Huge...the Colville. t, Enormous. And so you could pick out on the ridge lines where you were when the clouds weren't there, but other than that, you know, you weren't navigating ... you weren't trying to figure out which curve you were on the river, you were trying to figure out in general terms where you were. k, Which bank you were up against.

[20: 185 to 196] t, The water quality on the Colville was an issue for us because you know there ... the only... everything was all silted up because of the weather. And there was just no other source of water. And so we had no choice but to deal with the silted water out of the Colville for 2 or 3 days. w, It was an issue in two different ways. We all had fishing gear and for two weeks we didn't get a bite... not one bite. And then the second is we drank a lot of dirty water. Sterile, but dirty. t, It was all boiled. w, You can't do anything about dirt. T, Yeah...coffee filter took out a few bigger chunks.

Past Experiences

[21: 381 to 383] t, We've been surprised the same way on other trips by the way. We've gone on trips in areas where we know what the weather is. So we choose the time of year to match the right thing. And every once in a while you get beat by the weather being off normal. And... w, We chipped ice off of the truck in the Mojave one time.

[22: 407 to 411] b. So it sounds like you've all done trips together in the past, is that correct? k, Three of us have been to Boundary Waters and Quetico and Minnesota and Ontario. And uh.... two of us have done a lot of trips together. t, I've actually done a number of trips with all three of these guys over the years. Um... this is ... three of us have done numerous two-week trips before. But other than that, most of the trips were much shorter. This was you know much more of a major commitment of time, as well as money and resources.

[23: 33] t, But um... we flew in on a Sunday and landed at Tulilik Lake. I had never been to Alaska before, so it was fantastic flight in. We got to see a lot of country on the way in.

Wilderness Skills

[24: 497] c, Most people I know I would say "no, you don't need to go. Look at pictures." Because everybody and anybody is not going out on that river.

[25: 247 to 251] k, Yes, it's also true that at that camp ... we knew we didn't have a lot of height to go on the river when we picked the place. w, Speculate...k, Carefully, and watch the river level again every three or four hours. We measured the rate of rise, crudely, to be sure, but well enough. And uh.... we were not about to get caught by a rise.

[26: 259] k, And we went through a flood without any problem. It was a couple of nights of not enough sleep. But...

[27: 439 to 443] c, These are people with wilderness survival skills here. And that limited the... k, You know and there's only a certain number of people who you'd want to take or be a partner with in the boat in class II and III rapids, too, you know, it's like you can't just say "Hey, come on, let's go, you know." c, We trained... at least us three trained and then Leon and his brother trained together on boats just before we came here because we wanted to make sure we knew how we worked together in class II and possibly class III rapids.

[28: 499] w, One can seriously recommend it only to people that, you know, you think are going to go through it okay. It's a serious undertaking. I guess I view any two-week trip without any communication as a fairly serious undertaking. I felt if there was somebody I thought was at our skill level was looking for something to do here, I'd tell them about the trip. I'd tell them the good parts and bad parts. Make sure they understood. And what all was involved.

[29: 225 to 231] w, Got to hear stories about the...at Umiat about the two who canoed passed us. They had used up all their patches...t, Oh, their patches for their foldable ... they had a pack boat or something. w, They were using duct tape. c, They were using duct tape to keep it together.

Group Dynamics

[30: 431] t, Clearly any big trip which is a major expense both of resources, as well as, you know, valued vacation time classifies, which I classify, therefore, as expedition, you have to be very careful who you go with. You listen to any of the major expeditions, you hear that, you know, it all comes down to how well the people got along, as far as how their impressions of the trip went. So we were very careful to try to pick people for the trip with more targeted to what we wanted to do. And where people would get along together well. Because you can come up here and have a trip where you have two weeks of rain. So we came in with our eyes open on that to try to pick the right kind of people to come up here. You know there were other people we could have invited to come along and they weren't invited.

[31: 435] t, Because it's different going out with somebody for a weekend than it is for 2 weeks.

Other People

[32: 91 to 103] t, We saw a huge group of 8, saw a huge group of 8 right about the time transitioning out of Gates of the Arctic right before or right after, 8 people. w, 8 people, right. t, Yeah, before that, we saw you know k, 8 people in 8 single boats. t, Yeah. w, In one of the big tents that you can rent that, I mean there was 4 or 5 tents there, but there was one large one which was obviously a base camp type of thing. t, They had almost the appearance of putting in just outside the Park. Of putting in a big camp and then floating down a ways and then getting taken out. But we can't say that for sure.

[33: 671] w, Some of the white water runs in California, you basically get in line and go through the rapids and there's somebody right ahead of you and somebody right behind

you. That's not a lot of fun. Other than the few seconds that you're in the rapids. Otherwise it's a parade. It was nice not to have a parade.

NATURE OF THE PLACE

Physical Features

[34: 487] t, It's very.... it's a river that has a lot of different zones to it. You know. You start out in the mountains. And it opens up a lot. Then at the end, you're really almost in the plains. So, it has a lot of different areas. You get to see a bunch of things.

[35: 487] t, But one of the things that's very important for most people to realize is it is the tundra, so it's very, very open. It's something that when I first came to California it was very shocking and new to me. So I think of it, when I see a place like that, is something I need to point out to people. It's like you know if you're used to living in the trees and having lots of ... not having the rare vista. It's not like that. It's very open. You can see a long ways. There's a lot to see. But it's very easy for some people to pass over without actually seeing the details. And the beauty is in the details.

[36: 339] w, We've done a lot of trips in forests. And the tundra was new to us. I think we all kind of liked the tundra. It was very different. I'd certainly come back and do it again.

[37: 273 to 275] c, The other thing I liked that we did that was unexpected to me is we found blueberries. We found currents. We found raspberries. We found lots of different roots and stuff on the ground. So... just add besides the wildlife the flowers and the [inaudible] flowers and the plants.
t, Yeah, the flowers were spectacular too.

Wilderness Qualities

[38: 505 to 521] b, And what it is that makes it a wilderness? w, There's c, I've been in Iceberg Wilderness, there's 20 designated wildernesses around California. You go in there.... w, There's nothing... c, ... and there's no roads. There's no way to get in except to walk in. And there's no sign of humanity when you get there. If the people who went ahead of you did it right. w, Well, the wildlife and the ecology are intact. The predators are all there. Have some degree of balance. More or less un-upset by bulldozers or....c, Shotguns. w, Shotguns. t, Oil wells.

[39: 523 to 525] b, So is there anything that was different about this wilderness as compared, say, to the 20 different ones you've been in, in California? c, Tundra vs. trees. I mean .. there's lots. But in terms of those basic things that I thought define the wilderness, no.

[40: 527] t, I disagree a little bit. I think there was a few things. One is the great extent. It was enormous. Two is that even in the wilderness areas that you've been in, it was fairly clear that while you were in a "wilderness area" it is a developed wilderness. There are established trails. Established signs. Established campsites.

Evidence of Others

[41: 281 to 301] w, In California there's maybe three rapids together and then you got a lot of dead water. [inaudible] t, And there's houses on the side. There's trash along the side of the river. You know and the places... other places you go where there... even the trash... or the houses aren't there, you know, there's like this big, huge spot where, "well, that's where everybody camps." You know, and it detracts from the whole experience. The thing is every place we were at here, I would have said other than the place the helicopter flew over on the Colville, um... as far as we could tell, we were the first ones to camp there. k, There was a trace of a campfire at the...w, Yeah. t, Oh there was a trace of a campfire...k, ... sand bar where we got sandblasted. w, Right. t, There was a trace of a campfire there. k, But that's the only trace other than footprints of other people that we saw. t, Yeah, right. k, And we did, you know, every now and then, you'd see a footprint but... not much evidence of other people.

[42: 531] t, And there are, you know, you can tell where people have camped. You see a little bit of trash here or there. And they have to ... if they have enough visitors they have to limit, or should be limiting, the access because you can easily overload the area. Alaska has the advantage that it's very difficult to get here in the first place. And that to get out that far is even more difficult and requires a different set of skills. And as a consequence, you don't have the heavy load of people that you get in the wilderness areas we're used to. And that's very noticeable down there, that while it is a wilderness area, you know, it's a barely sustainable definition in some ways, because there are so many people that want to use it.

[43: 309 to 319] b, When you say "wild" what precisely do you mean by "wild?" c, Untouched. Whatever nature [inaudible] not what man [inaudible].w, Probably unimproved. t, Unimproved. Unchanged by man. Not a lot of k, No access. t, Not a lot of ... not enough visitors that they have had an impact. Not seeing a lot of people.

[44: 329] t, And I've been places where you know there's not a lot of people, but you know you still ... you either see the pavement or the established trail. And that's very different than the wild. You know it's really feeling like you're the only one there. That you're getting a special experience. You may be the first one that's been here. You might not have been, but it feels like it. You can't tell you're not. That's kind of sort of what wild is.

[45: 641 to 663] b, So when you're talking about places getting trashed and not recovering, you all are referring primarily to ecological impacts, is that correct? w, Yes. t, Rather than b, Rather than impacts to your experience. w, Well, I think any ecological impact is an impact to our experience. c, Yeah. t, yeah. b, How does seeing an ecological impact out there compare to simply seeing another party out there? c, Seeing another party usually doesn't bother me in the least. Seeing ecological impact is ... I don't want to come down here anymore. t, Given the choice between the two, it's very simple. Straightforward. c, Yeah. [inaudible] right. t, You know... we knew that we would likely see somebody. But we were hoping to see absolutely no ecological damage.

[46: 669] c, It's a narrow balance because you also want to be going floating down there and pass up sand bars because there was a campsite in each one of them? No, we didn't want that either. But ultimately, that's going to cause the ecological impact. So... seeing parties doesn't bother us in the least. Seeing too many of them always will because that leads back to damage. If this is too heavily fished, trampled on, worked over, it's not really a wilderness anymore.

Ethics

[47: 537]

c, No, there should be places that are wild. We don't need to put our footprint permanently on everything. I don't consider that antisocial. I just consider it responsible.

MANAGEMENT

Minimal Presence

[48: 539 to 549] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? c, We didn't. w, That's what we expected. k, We read the descriptions, it was described totally as unimproved and... t, I don't know...k, ...essentially no presence. That's what we were hoping for.

[49: 269 to 271] k, A totally unimproved park is wonderful. w, There's nothing there, that's what ought to be there.

Poor Stewardship

[50: 551] t, I actually, you know, most of the places we've ended up going I've noticed the Park Service at least keeps track of how many people go in or out as a minimum. And I would... and the way I approve of what they the method I approve of the most, they kind of track of you know how many people so they kind of keep the impacts down. Um.... on a no-fee basis. Um.... because I think they are providing a service. The ... that was not apparent here. We asked about permits. We asked to make sure we had everything we needed. It was unclear to me whether it was well enough watched over. I mean you don't want it to be intrusive. You don't want it to be invasive. I don't think it should cost money, either, but um...to individual people.

Use Limits

Objection to limits

[51: 553] c, To say this wilderness can only accept 1,000 people a year and we're going to... you got to have a pass before you can go in, and we're going to count, has never been acceptable to me.

Basis for limits

[52: 623 to 639] b, Going back just a minute you said in some ways you would applaud such a measure, a measure to restrict access to the Park. c, Right. b, Why is that? c, Hopefully there is a metric that says "Here's what wilderness is and to keep it wilderness, we can't let 4,000 people go through or 8,000." And you ...k, Minimize the damage. c, There's a metric that keeps it wilderness. t, Clearly, there's a certain amount

of damage...c, Hopefully the Park Service has measured that, makes estimates of that, and if they've done it responsibly, scientifically, then that's what I expect them to...t, Clearly, any one area can only support so many people going through without incurring a longer lasting damage that they can't recover from. And in my opinion, that's part of what the permitting process is for, is to keep us below that threshold. And that's what it's there for is to make sure that you're not putting "Oh, the Noatak, it's a great river." Everybody's heard about the river, so everybody comes up and does the Noatak but then it gets absolutely trashed because nobody goes anywhere else and you're putting too many people on the Noatak. At every campsite. Well, there's campsite 3, yup, we've had 863,000 people through here this year. You know. And it shows. And the river the area can never recover from that.

Concerns regarding administration of limited permits

[53: 587 to 599] b, So let's take it a step further. What if it wasn't just a piece of paper, but registration was a first step towards limiting access to the Park? c, To some extent, then that means we would have called up and they'd have said "we're full." Access is full, you can't go out, and then we wouldn't have come up. w, I tell you if we got here...c, And that were the case...w, Yeah, and then somebody came in and said you gotta fill out a permit and you can't....t, That's a big problem. w, Then there'd been letters to Congressmen.

[54: 613] k, You can't operate a permitting basis here the way they do in some of California, which is first-come, first-serve because getting here costs a fortune and it's not like driving 3 hours from your house to the park ranger and finding out that you can't go in that trailhead today. It's a day's fly.

[55: 555] t, Yeah, on the other hand, I've also seen that abused in another fashion. The greatest example is that of rivers. You can try to get on the ... try to get a permit for the Grand Canyon or for the Rogue River or for numerous of the wild rivers in Idaho. It's almost impossible, one, And two, the commercial outfitters dominate the permitting system. And that is just not the way it should be set up. I understand why it works that way. And that is the very bad side of permitting systems, especially on rivers. Um... you can ... I know people who have been on the list to do the Grand Canyon, now, for close to ten years. They're still waiting for their lottery number to come up to do the trip they want to do. On the other hand, if they wanted to go this year, they'd pay a commercial outfitter, and away they go. You know. But they want to do a private trip, and they can't do it. It's absolutely not a good balance.

[56: 619 to 621] t, Well, that's true, too, true enough. But you also don't want to find out that you can't do this trip, but if you take our guide we can get you on that trip. You know. Because they have reserved all of these permits for their guide for these random trips and they just.... okay, just pay our guide and we'll get you on a trip. k, In the permitting situation the commercial outfitters should not dominate the permits. The private trip has got to survive.

[57: 611] t, When we go to the Boundary Waters, we end up calling you know three, four, five months in advance saying this is where we want to go. Get us a permit. And they do. And you know it's the same here when we dealt with the outfitter, we figured out a few months in advance where we wanted to go. We knew almost a year in advance roughly what our dates were. And we were juggling who could go, when probably it was going to work, what our skill sets were, what river we're going to do for a while, but we actually had a very clear idea. We had maps. We looked over the maps. We looked at what we were going to do and what we needed to know well in advance. And if you had the permit at that point in time, you know, you're in like Flynn.

Visitor Registration Process

[58: 571 to 575] b, How would it have influenced your experience if registering at the Park Service station here was mandatory? k, As long as it didn't change what happened after we filled out the form. t, Well, you know, I don't know that it matters. On the other hand, when we go to Boundary Waters or Quetico, what you do is you go to the outfitter and he registers you. And it's mandatory. And it all gets taken care of there. And it serves the same function.

[59: 569] t, Yup, I asked the outfitter if we had all the permits and everything we needed. And he said "yes." And we kind of sort of knew this was here, so we were kind of curious what the protocol was and what I would say is that there was not necessarily a good working relationship between the outfitters and the either the Park Service or with the Forest Service here, for whatever reason. And they definitely aren't working together. Good, bad, or indifferent.

[60: 579] t, But you don't have to make that extra trip, you know, to ... I mean, here, yeah, you are centrally located. But it's one more thing on your list. You know. We came up here with two weeks' of gear, flew in, so you had to have all your gear packed for airplanes. Then you immediately have to take all that stuff out, reorganize it to pack it for a float plane trip onto a boat. And you're in a totally new place trying to work out all the details. And so...

[61: 557 to 567] b, Did you fill out the voluntary registration form at the beginning of your trip? w, No. b, Why did you choose not to fill that out? c, We didn't, to some extent, make that choice. I walked over here about 15 minutes before we were going to go. And k, On our own, I mean, no one suggested that we should come over here. c, I just walked over and was going to say "we're going and do you have any information for us?" And they said "oh, we'd like to have everybody over here for you know 15 minutes." I said I think I can do that, but then when I walked back over there, they said "lets' go." Pilots are waiting. So....

[62: 585] k, Or if the outfitter said, well, you know, Park Service wants you to go to their building, fill out a form, whatever, okay, we could go over there for ten minutes. No big deal. But just the way it happened when, you know, we just came over here on our own accord and then went back. And they said well, the pilots are waiting. We don't have time to do that. So, you know, in that respect, our hands were tied at this point. But

it was kind of like well, we paid for the pilot and the pilots are waiting for us, so we're ready to go.

[63: 601] k, Then on the 2nd point, you know, we got here in the evening. We walked around and we came over here. The Park Service is 8 to 5, whatever. You know, it's kind of like, if they want ... if the Park Service wants people to come in, they know there's flights coming in all the time over there. Perhaps they should maybe make a more sensible, I mean, if that's a concern that way...

817BTT32

Tracy, Linda, Paul, Rob, Abe, Geoff, Hank
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Selection

[1: 371] r, Well, I had floated the Noatak about 20 years ago. And I knew I wanted to come back to the Brooks Range. So I just started looking into what other rivers were in the Brooks Range. This started out two years ago.... as just basically a float trip. We were just going to do a long float trip. And as I started to research the trip, and talk to different outfitters up here in Bettles, we started to learn about different rivers. We were going to do the North Fork of the Koyukuk originally. But we understood that we probably would not see caribou in that portion of the Park; and we had a couple of goals in mind. We wanted to definitely see caribou. We wanted to have some aspect of the trip which involved backpacking. And we wanted to have a decent float trip. So, through research and talking to people up here, the Park Service folks, Chris I think was the gentleman that I spoke to up here. Talking to the outfitters and just doing research on the published materials, we came up with the trip that we have.

Itinerary

[2: 19] r, Our trip was broken down into three phases. We started on August 4 and we took a flight up into the headwaters of the Alatna River. And we spent 3 or 4 days in the headwaters doing day hikes where we were fortunate enough to see several bands of caribou moving through. Then we were air taxied from Gaedeke Lake down to Kutuk Lake and we portaged our equipment over to the Alatna and then backpacked up into the Arrigetch Peaks and spent 4 days up in the Arrigetch Peaks. And that was a tough part of the trip. We were under heavy load, but the reward was truly awesome. We had clear weather, so we got a great view of the peaks and then our last day out they were semi-shrouded in the clouds, so we got to see them in their full splendor, as well as in that semi-shrouded appearance. And the final portion of our trip we came back down to the Alatna and we floated from Kutuk Lake to just above Malamute Fork.

Planning

[3: 13] p, Well, we had been planning this trip for at least two years. Uh...most of us in this group of 7 have known each other for quite some time. And most of us, in one fashion or another, camped or had other outdoor experiences together. And so there was

a lot of planning involved with this. Rod was our coordinator, our trip planner, because he had prior experience here 20 years ago on, the Noatak River, where he spent a month.

Planning-psychological

[4: 255] r, And we had a philosophy that we kept saying to each other, “what we got, we got and what we don’t have, we don’t have.” So when the beer ran out, that’s it. You know, we enjoyed it and that’s it. And if we had some bad weather or something broke down, well, we got what we got. We’ll get around it. I broke a shot-corded tent pole and fixed it up with some you know some tape. We broke a few pumps. We had some problems along the way and we just got by because we knew we were going to stick it out, so we did okay in that respect. So, nothing could have really, unless someone was injured, could have really dampened... we were even prepared for wet weather. I had kind of a problem with a leaky tent. And that was okay. But short of an injury, nothing could have really ruined the experience. Because we were all prepared for it. We knew basically what we were in for. So we were ready and willing to take whatever was going to come our way.

Safety

[5: 427] g, And they have to be, yeah, if they were just up for some sightseeing and an afternoon at a lake fishing for lunch and being flown back, that’s no problem. But if they’re going to be here for an extended period of time, they really have to know what they’re doing and they have to really be researched. Because there could be problems up here. It’s really rugged wilderness. It’s nothing like in the Lower 48 that I’ve seen. And most of us have done a fair amount of camping. And you’re always within a short hike or a long hike to a highway or something, a town. And up here, it’s totally... it’s like a different world. a, A bad twist of ankle up here could... g, Could kill you. a, ... be a major, major problem. h, You can’t go back to your car or camp site. g, So, it’s serious camping. It’s serious it’s a serious trip.

[6: 447 to 449] b, Somebody also used the term “wild.” What does that mean? What’s wild? h, Wild to me is wild. There’s nothing to save you. It’s ... there’s nothing else there.

[7: 505 to 513] p, So, you’re traveling along and seeing nothing but these natural surroundings and then from time to time to see a well-placed, well-built, well-structured cabin as opposed to an aluminum shack or something like that, really didn’t seem out of place. It seemed... h, No, it gave it more flavor. 1, It makes me feel safe, actually. p, Especially they had a map that pointed them out. We knew we were there. If something...t, Reassures you that humans have been there in the past and have probable survived.

Desire to Maximize

[8: 303] a, But I think in the same sense we only had such a short period of time even though it was 14 days, we only had 14 days. You know what I mean? So it was like get up and move it if you wanted to see the headwaters, the Arrigetch Peaks, then the canoeing, the three phases you were talking about. So, there was that motivation to

succeed in all three phases, as well, so you kind of had to wake up early, you know what I mean? Start the fire, get the food on the

[9: 307] a, But you understand what I’m saying, there was that drive, you know, in the sense of even though we said “Okay, we’ll all be up and we’ll leave this river at 10 o’clock in the morning.” You know 10:30, 11 o’clock rolls around we finally got all of our quote “shit” together. But you know it was ... there was that motivation to try to set a time and push forward to achieve that time in the same sense.

Self Reliance

[10: 199] r, I think the best part for me was I think assuming you’re going into a wilderness area and you’re by yourself, although it was a large group of 7, that we had to kind of rely on ourselves and fix things. And we were out in the weather and we had backup stuff. We had an emergency phone. We had a satellite phone. And we had first aid equipment. It was well thought of as far as materials that we brought. But it was still, we had to kind of hang together and work out problems and yet we enjoyed the outdoors and, that, I think probably was the best part, all in all.

Group Influence

[11: 265] p, There were multiple challenges on the trip. And there were always ups and downs and ... as a group, it seemed to me like there would be different people that would step into a motivational role and kind of bring the group up again. You know. You’re getting rain, you’re getting wet. You’re fording the stream, your feet are wet. You’re working up a tough hill with a heavy load on your back. Different people at different points would chime in and bring on a better sense of morale and so it just kept working around in a circle as a group and we’d feed off of each other. As a team, really, we were able to look at the whole experience and handle the challenges as a team and succeed as a result of that.

[12: 255] r, Good weather, good food and people that got along with one another for this two weeks’ time. Um... so we you know we kind of lucked out on that in that regard.

[13: 277] h, It was a lot more work than I thought it would be. I mean, you usually look at the camping experiences, you sit around the campfire and tell stories, but we were busy 90% of the time. We were, each person doing something different all the time. And I didn’t picture it that way, but as it went on it was like, “boy, am I going to get a chance to sit down and relax?” By the time it was time to sit down and relax, you were too tired and wanted to go to bed. So I thought it was a lot more work than what I would think a camping trip would have been. But then again when you have a bigger group of 7 people, it’s more like you do everything for yourself instead of as a group there’s a lot more work. I’m like ... if I go out, I’m thinking about going out on my own by myself and not with 6 other people. So it tended to be a lot more work than I thought it would be. That’s for myself.

Entertainment

[14: 331 to 341] g, Yeah, and you don't really mind it. I could see these old timers that came out of the you know out of the Yukon after a couple of months sluicing for gold.... h, In the same clothes? g, Yeah! You know they went into town and they got for two bits they got a bed. p, ... whooping it up at the Malamute Saloon. g, Malamute Saloon. The kid that handles the music box was hitting a jag time tune. Back of the bar in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew.....And watching his luck was his light o' love. t, The lady that's known as Lou...

[15: 347 to 353] r, [Geoff] was our talent. He was our talent. And he took great pains and efforts to memorize two of the poems by Robert Service and one of them was the g, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." r, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." g, And "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

[16: 355] r, ... Sam McGee. And [Geoff]..., the trail would get tough... we're hiking up to the Arrigetch Peaks and the trail would get slippery and tough and rocky and [Geoff] would chime in and give us a verse or two of one of these poems and it would peak everyone's interest and he'd say "you'll have to wait until tonight for the rest."

[17: 361 to 365] g, But each time we had something different. I mean we had some sort of ... [Linda] had a couple of poems handy. We brought up short stories. We were concerned with volume and weight. So the people xeroxed things on pieces of paper. Kept it short. There were a few books that came up. We read the House of Usher, which is a huge 30-page short story of words I've never heard of before. a, Lots of big words. g, And we went around the camp... so each night we had something, if it wasn't drinking Yukon Jack or Bushnell Scotch, we did something as a community and, of course, the extended daylight helped because, like [Abe] said, we had a lot of work to do. I mean, just boiling water for our needs and washing dishes. Everything was out in the open. We had to find all this stuff, but we maintained a little time at night for community entertainment. And that was nice.

Relaxation

[18: 19] r, We had, what we term, our "Takahula Holiday." Just a low key day and a half where we didn't have much to do and we took a little hike into we camped on Alatna and hiked over to Takahula, met with the two inhabitants there, Steve and Kay. Spent an afternoon with them finding out about what they do, how they spend their time. Queen Takahula, [Linda], she got that title from bagging the most lake trout from Lake Takahula. That provided us with a delicious dinner that night. And then we just spent the rest of our time floating down the remainder of the Alatna and were taken out on today, August, what?

Adaptation

[19: 309] g, Plus, I think, for me it's like you let yourself go at a gradual sort of a way that you can't really ... you're not aware of it actually happening. Like the first day you're out there and you're slamming all the mosquitoes. You want to kill them all. They're buzzing around your face. Even though they were a little benign, they weren't that aggressive. But you're swatting them and you're carrying your bear spray around at

all times and you're careful with food management and containment. And then ... and you want to wash your face and your hands every morning and brush your teeth. For me, anyway, by that 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th day, you don't care about the mosquitoes, they can have their meal. The bear spray stays wherever it is, you don't know where it is. You're dirty, you're grimy, and if you just get to wash your hands after taking a poop you're doing fine. And you know, your hair just....

[20: 311 to 319] g, ... I still haven't brushed my teeth for a couple of days [laughter], so I figure if I'm washing my hands, I'm doing okay. And it's just a gradual decline into slothy conditions. But you're out there, you know, and this... p, That's not a decline, Geoff, it's an adjustment. g, An adjustment. It is an adjustment. It's an adaptation, but...p, Acclimation... g, You get used to sleeping in the stink. At least what I did every night, I put on a different like a night shirt like a polypro warmer shirt and that's what I wore to bed every night, but I slept in the stink every night in that same shirt. And then during the day, I'd go back to my day stinky shirt. You know. So at least I changed my clothes.

Wildlife

[21: 13] p, We saw a lot of wildlife. We could have seen more, but all in all it was a very successful trip.

[22: 23 to 55] r, 17th. All in all, we saw multiple bands of caribou. We saw moose. We saw a nice grizzly bear up on Lake Takahula. p, The squirrel in the Arrigetch Peaks. r, Yeah, ground squirrel. t, Porcupines. r, Porcupines. a, Likes macadamia nuts. r, That's right. Paul swears that he saw a golden eagle. I couldn't tell you whether or not we did. l, Saw a wolf on the way in. a, A wolf on the... p, Saw a wolf on the way in. r, Yeah we saw a wolf. These guys saw a wolf on the way in. g, Deer [Caribou]. b, From the airplane? t, Yeah. r, From the airplane. g, Daily mosquitoes. a, Many mosquitoes. Big ones.

[23: 57] r, We took some plaster casts of black bears, grizzly bears, wolves, moose, caribou... [Abe] has a bag full of caribou droppings that he's taking home.

Bears

[24: 63 to 107] p, And we saw a grizzly bear and 2 cubs on the way out today. b, Again, from the airplane? p, No, that was r, Up close and in person while we were waiting for the airplane to pick us up. b, So the bears came into your camp while you were waiting? r, Well, we were... h, On the sand bar. r, We were on the sand bar waiting for the airplane to pick us up and they just wandered out of the woods onto the sand bar and relatively promptly wandered back into the woods. a, [Linda] had spotted him first. The three of us were facing the river. He was sawing down the trees with his snoring. g, I was just resting my eyes. a, Resting his eyes. And [Linda] kind of gave one of these "Uh...uh...uh...look!" And then we're all "Huh?" And we're going "oh, shit!" It was a bear and a couple of cubs. b, And did you do anything to make them leave or they just left of their own accord? a, Well, we just you know we stood up and p, They smiled and they ran. a, We stood up, we got together, and moved towards the river and said "Go

on bears, you need to go ahead, go, go, go,” and they looked around. The mom was standing up on going “Wpphhhh....wphhhh.” I, We are human! We do not...h, And then John is like “We’re human beings....”g, We don’t taste good. h, And the mom just got down and she just sauntered off with her cubs and it really, it wasn’t all that big of a deal. It was amazing, it was awesome, but r, We didn’t have any firearm protection at all at that point, either. We had been carrying firearms, two firearms the whole time. But at that point, the firearms had left on the plane. g, Careful. r, With the group of people before us. So we had no firearms. g, Probably worked out for the better because had we had the shotgun, you know, we might have done something stupid or relied on that and in this case, we just kind of ... it was not natural... it was very unnatural, but yet we maintained some calmness to it. And we got behind as a group with some.... we had stowed all our gear in one pile for our pickup for the flight back, so we were just lounging around. We had nothing to do. And we just kind of, en masse, got behind this pile of gear and then started to act as a group, you know, kind of extending our arms, saying “no, you don’t want to come over here! You want to go back, we’re humans! We don’t taste good!” I think she got up and I don’t know, she looked like.. the bear looked like she was as tall as the Sears Tower to me, but you know made a few movements and maybe got our scent or whatever, and then kind of turned and the thing was, I guess, the cubs... we weren’t between the cubs... they were as a group and they kind of came out of the forested area, so that’s probably why it was such a benign event.

Contrast to City

[25: 269] a, Definitely, it was just different. I’ve traveled the cities and that, but I’ve never been out in the outdoors for long periods of time for, what, 14 days? It was just nice ... it seemed like there were things that had to get done in the day. But it was like making sure the fire was there. Having your tent up. But it wasn’t like you know having to rush around to catch the bus at a certain time or to make sure you’re at work at a certain time. It was a different kind of need during the day. I thought that that was nice. Just different. I’d like to have more outdoor experiences from having such a good outdoor experience, in the future.

Air Taxis

[26: 167] p, The one thing that was kind of annoying for me anyway, we seemed to be, on the Alutna, a thoroughfare or highway for the airplanes. And one day, I think we had 10 or 11 or 12 flights going overhead and I think in a sense that kind of detracted a little bit, at least for me.

[27: 187 to 191] r, Multiple, 5, 6, a half a dozen air shuttles up into Lake Gaedeke, the cabin up there. And that definitely seemed to detract. Here one day the 7 of us are hunkered down in this meadow watching these groups of caribou cross within 20 feet of us, right in front of us, just amazing and then the next day, you know, you hear this constant buzz of aircraft and that’s a, Like taxis in the city. r, Somehow we had to get there. We had to get there by an aircraft, but to have 6, 7 flights coming on a single day, that was a little bit detracting. We all reached a consensus, we’re glad we’re out of here at this point. We’re not sure if that air traffic were hunters starting to come in for the hunting season or just wilderness tours like us.

Re-entry

[28: 271 to 275] I, We actually felt a little claustrophobic coming back in today, when we were all showered and sitting in the lodge, we felt strange having a surrounding roof... h, No wind to blow in. You know there’s no wind in this room. And it was like “Whoa! There’s no wind... there’s no more wind!” a, No wind, so it was like, “Whoa!”.

OTHER PEOPLE

Visitors

[29: 121 to 131] And there was, earlier in the trip, there was a group from, right before our Arrigetch experience, there was a group that met us on the river, a couple, a man and a wife, who were on kind of a second honeymoon from New Hampshire. And they were spending a month wasn’t it? p, Yeah, they were crossing at the headwaters and had lined their canoes down from the headwaters. h, Dragged their canoes. a, Dragged their canoes down, I’d say 15 miles or 20 miles? h, Yeah, 15 to 20 miles dragged them. g, But as a smaller group, they were very quiet. I think they had done this before. They looked like they had all the gear for it and they were kind of working as a unit. And they were quieter than we were. We had a larger group and they literally had bear and moose walking literally right by.

[30: 153 to 165] b, So that was it, those are all the people that you saw? r, Mm.. hm... h, Take that back, we saw one rafter that we had no.... we just waved and actually saw one other guy in a boat, I don’t know if you guys saw him. He was going up river. We just waved. t, Oh, yeah. I, Yeah. a, Right. h, You know what I’m saying? He looked he was transporting gear, one way or the other. That was it.

[31: 139 to 145] b, So how did you feel about running into those people out there? t, I guess surprised, at first. r, Actually, for me personally, running into the couple p, That was nice.

Residents

[32: 147 to 151] r, Running into Steve and Kay, that can’t be described as anything but a more than pleasant experience. They’re very interesting people, they can tell you a lot about the surrounding area. They’ve been up there for many years, I think. h, Nine. r, Yeah, nine or ten years, something like that. And it seems like about half of that time they spent the entire year up there. So they’re a wealth of knowledge and just very interesting people to talk to.

[33: 205 to 209] h, I mean to be the only two people, I think he said within 8 million acres. His closest neighbor was within 8 million acres. There was no one there. g, Sounds good to me. h, And they had this whole beautiful lake to themselves, basically. The small hand-built log cabin, which was just awesome, and the way they utilize the space was just... just to talk to them and see how they actually lived out there was just a ... I thought it was simply amazing. Something that I would.... I’ve always dreamt of doing. To live out there. But I don’t think I’m the person who could maintain it. Maybe

a year, maybe two years, but I somehow would have to get back to civilization. They seemed to I asked them how did he adapt to it. And he said it grew on him. So, it got easier as it went on. It wasn't like he wanted to get back to the city at all. He said after the first few months, he took it another month, and it just grew on him. He didn't want to get back at all. He wasn't anxious to get back at all.

[34: 201] h, The highlight for me was seeing Steve and Kay at Lake Takahula, just talking with them, seeing their cabin, how they lived, was just I thought was just amazing.

[35: 109 to 121] b, You mentioned that you met Steve and Kay at the lake there. Did you see any other people during your trip? t, Um... we saw 2 a, Canoers. l, The couple from New Hampshire? t, Oh, yeah. I meant the Natives...they were out hunting. a, We met them at Steve and Kay's.... h, They were trying to do some subsistence hunting, but they were looking for caribou, but it looks like they were a little bit ahead of the movement.

[36: 147] r, It was okay, you know, it wasn't like "Oh, God, this is ruining my wilderness experience" Vice versa, if I was a couple running into a group of 7, I might have thought "Aaaahhhh, this is not what I expected." Now running into the Eskimo and his two sons, that was actually for me a nice experience. He was also actually with a Caucasian gentleman and it wasn't clear to me the relationship, whether they were friends, hired, or whatever it was, but we had invited the Eskimo gentleman and his two sons to dinner. And they seemed very interested in that. Then I was thought it would have been great to just have a little cultural exchange. But the white gentleman that was with them didn't really seem interested. He wanted to get down the river, so that was a nice experience, running into the Eskimo and his two sons.

Encounters, negative

[37: 581] g, You know you come up this part of the world, you want the wilderness experience. The ideal situation here is that you are dropped off, you see nobody else, you see a ton of animals, and you get out safely. That's the ideal experience. So every time you see another human being who is not in your group, to some degree, that detracts a little bit from your experience. Generally, they are nice encounters. It was wonderful to see Steve and Kay. It was nice to see the rangers. They're all nice people. That's not the point. But in the perfect world, you wouldn't see anybody else for the duration of your trip. You'd see wildlife around every corner and you'd just be surrounded by natural wonders. That's the perfect world. We were pretty close to that.

[38: 649 to 663] r, You don't want to share... you know actually, here, we did see another ... one other group of people. And that just prompted my memory. We were camped on the Alatna just below Takahula Lake and another group of rafters, canoeists, pulled up and they were sharing the same sand bar as us. They were maybe a quarter mile down the sand bar, but their tents were visible. Now this was the only other time during the two weeks we were there where we could actually see another group of campers. And there was some conversation around our campfire that night about

maiming them, killing them, that sort of thing.... t, "Get off our sand bar, we were here first!" r, What the hell are they doing on our sand bar? We were here first. h, And we were there first! We were there first! a, ...just kidding about that. r, It was... t, That was definitely an intrusion in one way. r, It was.. in a minor way. But we weren't terribly distraught about it, but it was kind of like "wow, we've had this whole Park to ourselves all this time, why do we have to share this gravel bar with these people?" It was definitely to some degree detracting.

Encounters, Contrast to City

[39: 619] p, And the human encounters were actually in one sense very much more pleasant and personable and even intimate than you would have an encounter with a stranger in the city. In that since you are in the wilderness and you have people that you haven't seen for a while, you know they're not going to see people for a while, you haven't seen people for a while, you know that first couple that wandered into our camp, I mean, Steve brought down a bottle of cognac. They took a couple of pulls on it. And they were having trouble with their boat. Steve offered if they needed some help. They said no. There's an exchange of caring to a total stranger.

[40: 623] g, So there was an exchange, a human exchange, of strangers, conversations with strangers that, by far, is more intimate than what you can have like in a city because you're so distrustful in the city. Out here, the few experiences we had with other people, there's kind of like a caring aspect to it. Like, are you doing okay? Do you need anything clean or dry?

[41: 625 to 629] t, In the city or in another national park, I don't think we would have that same exchange... a, No, you wouldn't. t,... as with people when you see them on the same hiking trail as you. It was much different.

[42: 631] a, I also felt like they were a little communal group. We were a little communal group. And in the sense it was like reciprocity. You know we'll give you some cheese and squash since they were willing to let us use their canoes. It was kind of almost like barter.

[43: 635] h, And it was I don't know to me it felt like it was reciprocity. We'll give you a little something since you're being very nice and willing to let us use your canoes. I mean, it was kind of like.... it was nice instead of, you know, here's 5 dollars give me my bag of chips and Coca-Cola. You know what I'm saying? It was like you give me something, I give you something. And it was a very good feeling on both sides. That's just how I felt about it. I like that whole idea.

Evidence

[44: 461 to 469] r, No doubt about it, total wilderness. a, Unhuman. That's the best part I like. r, In the entire length of area that we covered, there were only three structures that we saw. One was on Lake Gaedeke up in the head lakes.. in the head waters. And that was a cabin, a hunter's cabin owned by Mrs. Gaedeke, from what I've been told, Dorothy Gaedeke, and at the further down the Alatna, slightly below the Arrigetch

Creek were two other cabins, side by side. Those are the only t, Steve and Kay's cabin. r, ... and Steve and Kay's cabin, yeah, so those were the only three human structures that we could see.

[45: 515] h, It was great not to see one not one piece of litter in all 14 days. I did not see one piece of litter anywhere.

MANAGEMENT

Interaction With

[46: 545 to 561] p, We saw two rangers. They were very nice. r, In the Arrigetch Peaks, we were packing up our gear. We were on our way out. We're packing up our gear and we're at the base of the Arrigetch Peaks, and all of a sudden over this knoll come these two female rangers. Very nice. One was of Russian origin. What was her name? g, Katja...Katja, something. h, Very nice ladies. r, And their comment was "Oh, geez, we thought we were going to have the Arrigetch to ourselves." Because they hadn't seen anybody else, but they caught up with the "Arctic 7", as we're known, amongst circles..... mostly bad circles.... p, Yes, bad circles. r, And we... very engaging conversation about the Arrigetch and the Park Service and their life, their duties. They went their way and we went our way. We happened to run into them on Lake Takahula..... a, They dropped in unexpectedly on us. r, So we got the impression that we were being spied on by the National Park Service, but...[laughter] p, We won't say that to Big Brother or anything like that.

[47: 583 to 630] b, So when I asked earlier about people that you met, you didn't mention the rangers. a, That was a normal thing you would.... r, It was a 5-minute encounter... a 10-minute encounter. a, Right. h, Very brief. p, Right, but also you know you kind of,... you're in a national park, you might expect to see rangers... it'd be a normal thing to see them occasionally. So.. r, I guess really the reason we don't mention them is there... p, They fit in. r, ... so many other things that are just so wonderful to see that it really wasn't anywhere near a highlight of the trip where it would kind of stick in your mind unless you were prompted to remember that. b, So it just didn't stand out? r, They blended in. h, They blended in. r, They were wearing green.[laughter] a, They were hard to spot. r, which is good, I think that's the way it should be. h, Right.

Visibility

[48: 537 to 539] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? r, None, that was the best part about it.

[49: 565] r, No, so to answer your question, in terms of management by the Park Service, um.... I'm not sure exactly what the rangers are managing.

[50: 573 to 577] r, But at the same time, you didn't run into a park ranger every 3rd day, which to me would have been p, Depressing? r, Yeah, detracting from the trip.

[51: 631] r, They should be out there on patrol doing their job, making sure that people are following low impact camping and following the basic rules and regulations. But not be to a point where they are obtrusive.

Use Limits

Support

[52: 663] r, Should you put limits on it? In my opinion, personally, yes. There should be.

Support-inevitable change

[53: 385 to 389] h, Ever since the publishing in National Geographic. r, Ever since I took my trip. g, It was published in National Geographic, and now it's been a lot more popular.

[54: 715 to 721] p, The people that are in Chicago Chicago went from, what, let's say 5 million ten years ago. Now it's at 7.6 million? Okay. Well, if those people want to go someplace where they can be alone, too. r, That's exactly why we should put limits on it. There's got to be some place so it's a lottery if you want to. a, That works for me. r, It's got to be a control where this is preserved the way it is.

[55: 673 to 677] r, It's first come, first serve, just like they do in the Boundary Waters. The Minnesota-Canadian border. You've got... they only allow a certain number of people in. And you get your reservation in early. Fine. You're going to be there. Let me extrapolate for a minute. I've been going to the Boundary Waters since I was 11 years old. I'm now 41 years old, so I've been going to the Boundary Waters for 30 years. When I went to the Boundary Waters when I was 11 years old, I wouldn't see another single soul for a week's time. Now, when I go to the Boundary Waters, I'll see four, five, six groups of canoeists go through the same lake, go through the same lake, that I was on 30 years ago and wouldn't see a soul for a week. And that, to some degree, detracts from my experience up there. And I personally would not like to see the same thing happen up here.

[56: 735 to 739] b, What if access was limited now? Would your experience have been any different? a, No. r, No, probably not. But what I personally fear for is that what will happen up here with time is the same thing that I've seen happen in the Boundary Waters. Where 30 years ago, the Boundary Waters was pristine remote wilderness. Now, it's still a wilderness, but much more densely visited. And that detracts from the wilderness experience. If we had seen on this trip that we took over the last 2 weeks... 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.

Support-uniqueness

[57: 673 to 675] r, This is the last place in the United States, if not, in close to the entire world, where there is true isolated wilderness. There are no roads in this park. There are no towns, with the exception of that one Eskimo village up in the northeast side, Anaktuvuk Pass, there are no established settlements. There is nothing but mountains, streams, hills and forests and tundra and wild animals. There has to be some bastion that

is preserved like this. And if it means putting a limit on the number of people that come through here at any given time, I'm all for it. g, Here, here! a, Here, here!

[58: 723] g, Well, they have national park policy, I don't know whether it's uniform or consistent. I know over the Grand Canyon, they've limited air flights over the Grand Canyon, to preserve that wilderness experience for people that hike down. This is federal land, national parks are federal land, and I don't know if their policies are uniform, but because of this area up here, they should preserve it as such because national parks in the Lower 48 have been inundated with visitors and they've had to adjust their policies to counter the effects of all these folks that come in during the summer. And if this is the last wilderness or a very remote, certainly remote, wilderness national park, then they should...they should maybe try establishing a different policy up here.

[59: 743] r, So, keeping things at the level they're at now or even less than what we experienced now, I think would help maintain that as a true unique wilderness.

Fairness

[60: 639 to 649] b, Now earlier you said that in an ideal situation, you come out here, you don't see anyone, you see lots of wildlife, and that would be the perfect trip. Would it ever be appropriate to limit access to the park so that you were virtually guaranteed that kind of experience? r, Um... that's a tough question to ask. a, Very difficult. r, Or a tough question to answer. I think there should be some limits on what happens. Um...[long pause] t, You don't want to be denied either. r, You would like as many people as possible to have the same wonderful experience we had. On the other hand, you don't want to come around every other river bend and see another group of canoers or see another group of backpackers.

[61: 665 to 669] p, The problem with limits on that, though, is unfortunately... r, Who chooses first of all....p, The rivers Who chooses first of all.

Adjustment

[62: 745 to 748] l, I think people would be flexible with those... with certain regulations. Like if they wouldn't allow a group of 7, then we would just learn to adjust to those rules. g, If you really wanted to go, if all 7 of us really wanted to go, we would go in smaller groups and wait our lottery turn and plan three, five years in advance. If people really want to go, they'll.. I think they would put up with something like... a, They would make the efforts to visit. Definitely.

818BTT33

Rodney (r), Grady (g), Cole, (c), Bert (t)
Interviewer (b)

THE TRIP

Trip Selection

[1: 177 to 181] b, Okay. How did you find out about Gates of the Arctic National Park? Or the Noatak River? r, Um...our guide just said "go into the Noatak" and.... c, One of our parties just e-mailed around looking for a trip in this area and he pretty much knew what we wanted. And this guy responded with a proposal for the Noatak.

[2: 183 to 185] b, How did you select this guide service, then? Was it his proposal based on your solicitation? r, Yeah. Yeah. And a good personality match. We got the right guy.

[3: 197 to 205] b, And all ten of you were part of that original proposal/solicitation? r, Actually one person just took the lead on putting that together and arranging all the details and then ... t, I think we signed on at various different times. We signed-on relatively late. r, Yeah. c, We pretty much delegated all the decision making to one guy.

[4: 187 to 195] b, So there were, I believe you said, 13 people total? Is that correct? g, How many people? r, Ten. Including the guide. b, Okay. r, Yeah. Northstar is the outfitter.

Itinerary

[5: 13 to 17] r, We were in the Park from Monday the, what the, about the 6th? ? Yup. r, Through the we flew out Friday the 17th. So we were in the Park for 12 days on the Noatak, putting at Portage Creek, Lake Nelson-Walker, and taking out at Lake Kavachurak

[6: 21] r, Okay. Um... first day we floated down to the mouth of the Kugurak River. And we made camp there for two days and did a side hike up the canyon of the Kugurak the next day just up to a spot on the river where there were some cottonwoods and a little artesian spring up there. It was a nice ... it was about a 5-mile each way hike.

[7: 35] r, Of the Igning, yeah, and the Nigikpolugurivrak Creek. Another two-night camp. The first 3 camps we had were two nights each, so we could do a day hike. We climbed ... we climbed the mountain up behind Nigikpolugurivrak Creek.

[8: 67] r, So that's pretty much the itinerary. I think there were 7 campsites, 6 campsites?

Wildlife

[9: 384] g, Yeah, we saw that, what was it a trout on the way back in the river? ? Salmon. r, There was ... yeah, dog salmon in the river. Um....and red-tail.... we caught some grayling there. Um... I can't remember any other specific animals.... c, Saw a musk ox there. r, Oh, that's right, a musk ox the next morning. Uh then we moved downriver to um.....was that the mouth of the....?

[10: 41 to 45] b, Now was that the same one you were describing to me earlier? g, Yeah, he was just probably an adolescent. r, Yeah. Yeah. He was alone. So you know not just a cub, but it wasn't a big bear.

[11: 21] r, ...Saw one grizzly just out working the flats out there, digging roots. And he never apparently caught sight or scent of us. We just stayed, moved upwind of him and just kept moving upstream.

[12: 35 to 39] r, ...And saw a grizzly up there. g, Yup. r, He came... actually up on that hillside, we saw quite a number of caribou, some Dall sheep, and a grizzly down below in the distance and he came right up the mountain at us. And honest to God I don't know whether he saw us or not. So I don't know whether it was a bluff charge or whether he was charging up the mountain and stopped cold when he finally saw us at the ridge line. But then he just peeled off and headed right down the mountain. That was pretty cool.

Other Experiences

[13: 149] r, Yeah, I'm trying to think of other ways in which it's different. We've been out for 2 and 3 weeks at a time before in remote areas, so that experience wasn't new, but um...

[14: 155 to 157] b, Where are some of those other places that you've gone on long relatively remote trips before? r, Nepal. In the ... way back behind in Nepal. And Montana. I live in Montana, so we tend to get out in the mountains whenever we can.

[15: 159 to 165] b, And how about for the rest of you, have you been on extended trips of this kind before? g, Yeah, I've been in a couple of trips in the Arctic before. But never around ... never a landscape like this, it's been more where there's just a lot of ice and glaciers and things. But to really be out on the tundra like this for a long time, that's something different. c, Yeah, I live in the northeast so I can't get too far away unless I travel. ...I've been on a lot of short trips in the northeast, down the Grand Canyon a couple of times. Nepal with [Rodney]. t, I'm the least experienced of all, so....not really anything as extensive as this before in the wilderness.

[16: 207 to 221] b, Had any of you been to Gates of the Arctic before? g, No. r, Never even close. b, How about to Alaska? g, Nope. r, Nope. b, So you were in the Canadian Arctic? g, Yeah, once in the Canadian Arctic and once in Greenland.

Skills/self-reliance

[17: 153] r, And the complete necessity on being self-contained and self-sustaining in case the weather deteriorated and we got weathered in for a few extra days at the end of the trip, too. The knowledge that you had to be self-sufficient out there within certain limits. I mean, sooner or later they're going to get a plane out, but you got to be ready mentally for an extended stay. And that's an adjustment over your usual backpacking trip where you walk out to the trailhead, put your key in the car and drive away.

[18: 299 to 313] c, I mean, that's in a good sense. We wouldn't really have wanted to see outposts or anything. r, Yeah. b, And why not? g, Um... you know... I guess.... I think that would've interfered again with these things that we've talked about, the sense of remoteness and solitude. Um.... because I don't think they would be necessary for any

reason. t, Yeah. Well, also testing ourselves against the environment. You know if you come to a little point that's improved that's you know here's a communications point of the Park Service, if you got in trouble, you're not in the wilderness anymore. r, Mm... hm... t, It's an escape hatch. Whereas we were there we had to test ourselves against what we could do with the equipment that we brought and the knowledge that we had. r, Yeah, if someone hangs a "RAPIDS AHEAD. KEEP RIGHT" sign out there, it's not going to last. You just need to be able to handle it.

Solitude

[19: 133 to 135] b, What was the best part of the trip? r, Uh.... well I can quote directly from the Wilderness Act on that one. The outstanding opportunities for solitude. I mean just.... even though we were a group, there was still plenty of opportunities with the day hikes or just in the evening wander away from camp and just stand out on a spot and soak it up all by your lonesome.

Hard Work

[20: 171] t, I'd say there were times when it was a real grind against the wind and the boats when you had to go for an extended period of just gutting it out to move along. It was cold and a little on the wet side. But that was about the only time that it was all that uncomfortable.

Evaluation

[21: 407] r, Um... boy, if you can just hone the management to replicate the experience we had for other visitors, that would be just about ideal management because we had a great experience.

NATURE OF PLACE

Wild

[22: 227 to 229] b, How would you describe the place you visited to somebody thinking about visiting? r, I wouldn't tell a soul. Um..... we actually.... I've got some friends who were up here in June, by pure coincidence. People who I'd traveled with before. I've gone winter skiing and camping with them in Yellowstone before. And good traveling companions. And they were up here in June. And they came back and said "It's the wildest place you'll ever go." And I just have to say that's ... that pretty well covers it.

[23: 67] r, ...But that's the quantitative view of the trip. The qualitative, man, it's just ... the two words that occur to me, that go over and over again were "wild" and "remote." You're just way out there. b, What made it "wild?" r, Uh.... I think the food chain thing. Um... the fact that it's largely ...not just largely... almost entirely unaffected by man. And it really is the critters' Park. It's not our Park. It's the critters' Park. To me, anyway. t, Yeah, no signs of human habitation anywhere. Everything pristine. So you know you look at lichen, no development on the shores, nothing like that.

[24: 77] r, ...And it's just so wild and dissected and there's just trackless wilderness and that's the experience we came for. Um... and the other nice thing on the subject of wild

was even though we would see occasional other parties out there, I never really saw evidence of other campsites. Never saw any remains of campsites. No fire rings. No nothing.

Wilderness

[25: 241 to 251] b, Would you describe the Noatak area as wilderness? g, I can't think of any other way to describe it. t, Yeah. r, Prime example. b, Prime example. Why is that? r, Um.... untrammelled by man. Outstanding opportunities for solitude. Uh.... all the classic definitions of wilderness. It pretty much is an exemplar.

[26: 261] t, I think one thing for me different from my expectations, you know, I might have thought of wilderness as being something that's difficult to get through, like the jungle, you have to hack your way, there are no easy paths. And this you can go anywhere you want to. Um... you know as long as you had rain boots on to walk through the swampy areas, so in that sense it was a little different from what I expected from wilderness. Just being completely wide open. That's probably because I didn't reflect about it at all before I came on the trip.

[27: 263] c, When I think of it sitting here, I think scale is essential to call something wilderness. It can't be wilderness if it's 100 square miles.

Scale/Openness

[28: 137] c, There's something about knowing that that country goes on for literally hundreds of miles that adds to the experience.

[29: 235 to 237] c, Someone that was, I think what I'd describe to them is how spectacular it was to be in country that wide open. You go up and see these vast vistas wherever you look. t, And see mountain after mountain after mountain. It's extraordinary.

[30: 253 to 259] g, Well, I think the vastness aspect.... r, That's true. g, It's no little island of nature surrounded by development. It's the real thing.

[31: 67] r, Yeah. Which was by Lake Kavachurak, Kavachurak Creek, and climbed up the mountain there that afternoon. More caribou. Got pretty close on those guys. They were pretty curious guys. Lots of young of the year. And gorgeous views. The weather had cleared. You could see, it looked like all the way down to the Chukchi Sea. It was gorgeous. Big and windswept.

[32: 141] t, I think, for me, the high point was our final peak that we went up because the view was so expansive in all directions. And the weather was better. We had a clear view. So, for me, it was just being able to revel in the glory of all of the mountains that we could see in that one spot.

Diversity

[33: 73] t, ...So, and to see all the different geographic formations, diversity. Um.. I was awestruck just by how diverse it was. All the plant life. And the just walking along the tundra over the hillocks and the swampy areas and all the little tiny things that could grow. Seeing how much could survive there was really fascinating.

Remote

[34: 75 to 77] b, And the other word you used was "remote."

r, Yeah. Well, that's pretty much implicit. The float plane trip in, you cross so much country with nothing in it.

[35: 279 to 285] c, I also like the fact that it was just hard enough to get to. It wasn't real hard to get to, but..... The fact that you can't get on a plane in Fairbanks and just land on Noatak strip. r, Yeah. g, A little bit of effort required. r, Yeah. When the access is part of the adventure, that's a plus.

Unique/novel

[36: 143] r, And it's always a huge pleasure for me to experience an entirely new ecosystem. You know this is completely unlike any place I've been and so the opportunity to just, especially to have 12 days in it, on the river, and doing the side hikes, to really get in up to my knees in a completely different ecosystem.

[37: 271 to 273] g, Plus also what adds to whole lure is knowing where it is, knowing that a few hundred miles over the mountains to the north you've got the Arctic Ocean up there. It's so exotic from that standpoint. r, Yeah, and you can certainly feel that, both in the light, the quality of the light, and the quality of the wind when it swings around to the north.

[38: 277] t, You know one thing we didn't mention, too, is how muted the colors all are, browns, and the occasional red flower and yellow flower and stuff that make it, with the lighting, it's, as [Grady] said, exotic.

Weather

[39: 67] r, ...We had the entire range of weather, except warm. Um.... mosquitoes were tapering off. They were never horrid. You were swapping either wind or mosquitoes, obviously.

[40: 397] r, And the fact that we had two-day camps early in the trip and then the weather closed in.... closed out the other flights. Pretty much flushed the river out below us. After a few days, we didn't see anyone else. So.... um.... and the weather's going to help limit that access, as well.

OTHER PEOPLE

Historical

[41: 239] r, The other... another part of it, for me, I really enjoyed standing in certain places and I could just feel exactly, or at least what I felt, how the first inhabitants would have felt coming up the Noatak. You know it's... I understand the translation of

"Noatak" is "river into the interior... river within..... or whatever." Um... And I could just feel some of these other side canyons just saying "Come on.....Come up here. Take a look." And in my head, I could just imagine 10,000 years ago standing there and saying "Yeah, let's go take a look." Um... and so there's kind of an atavistic connection to the first peoples up here just ... it's probably very similar to what they saw and experienced. I can just feel the pull of the country.

Encounters

[42: 145 to 151] b, How else did this trip differ from other backpacking or floating trips that you've taken in the past? g, Yeah, really I suppose probably the lack of any human contact. I mean sometimes or even maybe in a country that has villages along the shore or something. Here there were just no people at all. r, Yeah, I'm trying to think of other ways in which it's different. We've been out for 2 and 3 weeks at a time before in remote areas, so that experience wasn't new, but um... c, Oh, I mean compared to like the Grand Canyon where there's jockeying for campsites. People going by all the time, you know, that was different. I don't think there's anywhere in the lower 48 where you can get far away from other people.

[43: 91 to 95] b, So how many parties did you see? r, Probably three other? g, Three at the most. There was one that the first couple of days we passed jumping camps, but with so many camps that was never an issue.

[44:107 to 113] c, Going by a party that camped once a day is hardly intrusive. r, Yeah, that's acceptable. t, It was never intrusive at all. g, It's when you're camped and another party comes in 100 yards downstream that it's intrusive.

[45: 115 to 127] b, Did you ever talk with those other parties? r, Briefly. g, Yeah, they got real friendly when the bear came charging in. r, Yeah, that's right. g, I don't think they were as prepared as we were. r, We all happened to be on the same ridge at the same mountain at the same time. But the bear wanted to be there. That was, yeah, there was some bonding that went on pretty quickly. c, They were guided, so they ... I don't think they were sure of what to do.

[46: 89] t, Yeah, I found one little piece of string. But I agree. Also when you see other people out there, for me, it was kind of like "Oh, I don't want to see anybody." I want to have the illusion that I'm the only person... that our group is the only people in the Park. And that it's all for us. But, you know, of course it's unrealistic. But still, I kind of like that.

Evidence

[47: 83 to 85] b, So are you saying then that seeing evidence of people would have been worse than seeing the parties themselves? r, About equivalent, yeah. Yeah, actually I'd much rather just see the other humans themselves than see their trash.

[See also excerpt 24]

MANAGEMENT

Needs

[48: 323] t, Yup, the other thing I would say you might do is provide some standard information about cleanup, you know, packing out trash and how to handle the bathroom issues and things like that. We had excellent advice about that from our guide. And we were, I think, quite scrupulous in making sure that we had someone who combed the campsites after everybody packed up. And we found little ... you know any little tiny thing. There may be people who are not aware of that. Probably most people who come here are, but you could provide some standard information, perhaps, about what is acceptable behavior in the Park that could be useful.

[49: 321] r, I... there might be a time in the near future when you need to limit the number of parties per day putting in. Or manage that in some way. Uh... it may be self-limiting just because there's not enough people going out there, but um... to maintain that quality of experience, of seeing few other parties, and not seeing their evidence, I could certainly see the question arising in the near future of how do we manage trip permits on the rivers, in particular. You know the backpackers I can't imagine the backpackers running into each other out there. But on the rivers there might be a need to look at that.

Experience with

[50: 287 to 297] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management of this place? r, Did we notice any Park Service? g, Absolutely nothing. b, Absolutely nothing? g, Yeah. t, Yeah, I mean I can't say I was aware of the Park Service at all.

[51: 315 to 319] b, So, how would you describe, then, the Park Service management of this place? r, Perfect. g, Exactly appropriate.

[52: 325 to 341] b, Now, that's often provided as part of the back country orientation that people receive when they come visit the office here before their trips. g, Uh....huh.... t, Mm... hm.... b, You guys didn't do that. r, No. t, We didn't do that, but we got that from our guide, so.... r, Yeah, and our guide's been here several times before, so he's.... c, I'm sure if I were unguided, I would walk in here before I went out. r, Yeah.

[See also excerpts 18, 21]

Use-limits

[53: 343 to 347] b, So, I saw some of you nodding your heads when he suggested that at some point in the future it might be appropriate to limit use. Can I interpret that as meaning that you all agree? g, Yeah, I think so. c, Yeah.

[54: 389] t, I mean I think part of it has to do with expectations, too. We all expect it to be as wild as it was. But if we came in here expecting that we were going to be seeing a lot more parties, then maybe that would have been acceptable. You know, but I think we would've perhaps felt that that was a diminished experience compared to the ultimate that we could have, so... you have to make a balance there. If you have that many people

desiring to go in, some people may have to reduce their expectations a little bit. But you know that's I wouldn't know where to draw the line.

[55: 391 to 395] b, How would it have influenced your experience out there if access was limited or restricted? r, Um... assuming we got our permits..... t, Yeah, I'm not sure it would change things for us. Because as we say, we saw very few people as it was.

[56: 381 to 383] b, Let me rephrase the question. At what point would it be appropriate to limit use? When would that be called for? r, Probably when your exit interviews like this start picking up comments saying there are too many people. It's hard to just say empirically "X" number of parties per day is too many. But when you start getting consistent comments that the wilderness experience was diminished. I would assume that the wilderness experience is what you want to measure in wilderness. Although I guess it's actually a National Park rather than a wilderness, so that changes the management a little bit. But I would think the visitor experience is, the subjective experience, is what you want to measure.