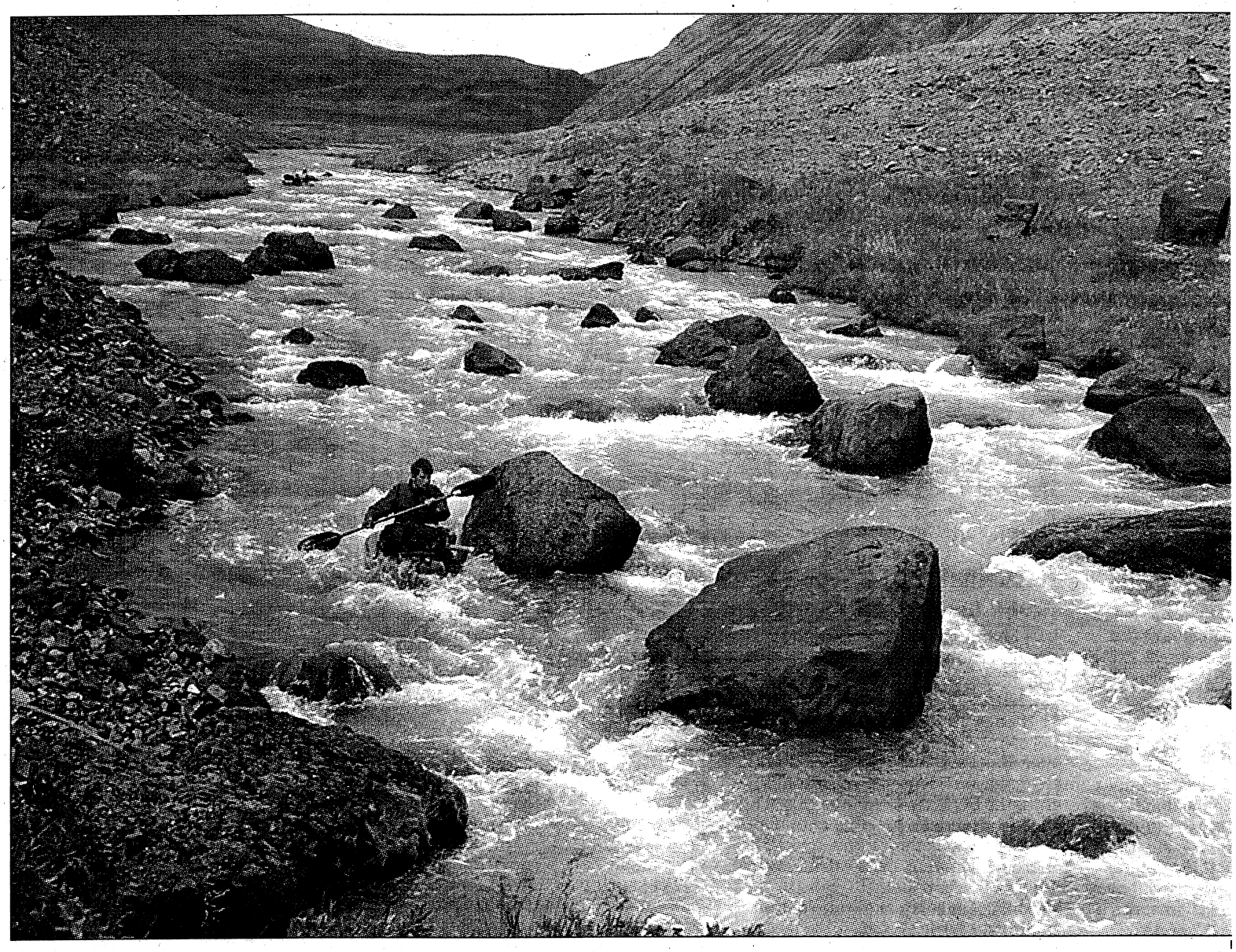
CELEBS GALORE

Miami's South Beach draws the famous and not so famous

Travel, Page F-4

OUTDOOR

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS • www.adn.com



Thor Tingey paddles the first section of the Aniakchak National Wild and Scenic River. There is a rapid just below the Aniakchak Caldera that is rated river quickly settles into splashy Class II and III with only one more big rapid.

A new adventur

Aniakchak National Monument's overlooked pack-and-float option l

By CRAIG MEDRED
Anchorage Daily News

OUTDOORS & Travel

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS • www.adn.com SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2005

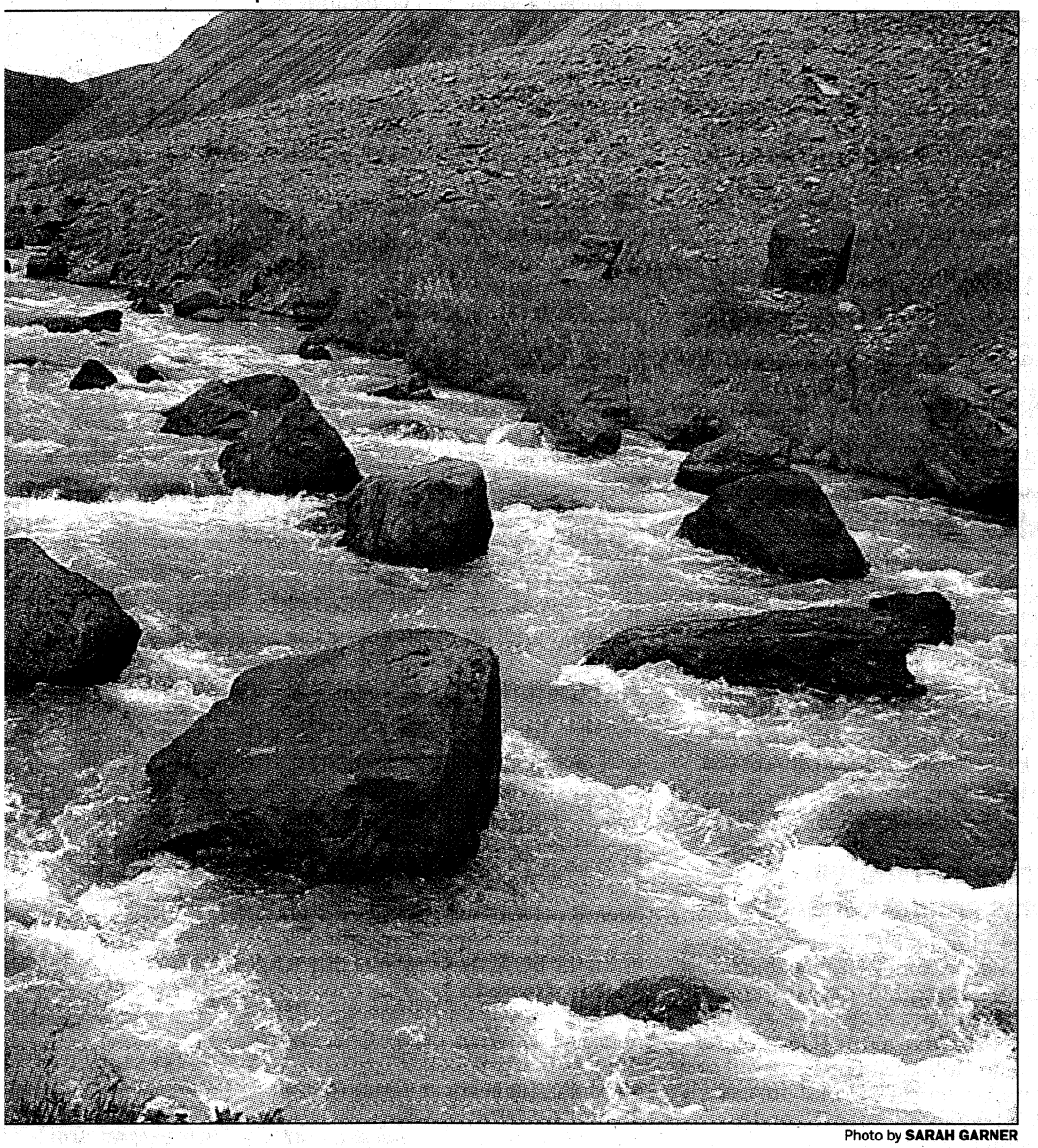


Photo by SARAH GARNER

Wild and Scenic River. There is a rapid just below the Aniakchak Caldera that is rated Class IV, but the ore big rapid.

adventure

nt's overlooked pack-and-float option beckons

FIELD NOTES

KIDS

Educational programs offered at Alaska Zoo

The Alaska Zoo Education Department is now offering Zoo Camp programs for children ages 6 through 14. Camps will include behind-the-scenes tours, animal-enrichment projects and encounters with education animals. Participants will learn about conservation and animal care. Programs include a special two-day spring break camp for ages 13 and 14. Registration is now open, with programs beginning Feb. 20, and registration forms are available at www.alaskazoo.org or at the zoo's admissions building. For more information, call 346-2858 or e-mail klarson@alaskazoo.org.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Outdoor Adventure series starts with snowshoe talk

The University of Alaska Anchorage Student Activities and Student Union is sponsoring a Tuesday night Outdoor Adventure series featuring some of the state's most skilled outdoor enthusiasts. The programs begin at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Student Union. This week's guest is Julie Udchachon, who will speak on Snowshoeing Alaska. Udchachon is the 2004 U.S. Snowshoe Association racing champion, Alaska Snowshoe Club founder and winner of the 2004 Crow Pass Crossing. Upcoming guests include extreme adventurer Roman Dial on Feb. 15, Iditarod and Yukon Quest dog musher Aliy Zirkle on March 1 and mountaineer Richard Baranow on March 15. A grand finale will be April 1. The programs are free. Call 786-1204 for more information.

Unravel the mysteries of Alaska's weather

Learn about Alaska's weather and climate at 2 p.m. next Sunday at the Eagle River Nature Center. Peter Olsson, Alaska State climatologist, will lead a fireside discussion on the elements that make up Alaska's weather

A new adventur

Aniakchak National Monument's overlooked pack-and-float option be

By CRAIG MEDRED
Anchorage Daily News

Almost by accident, Eagle River adventurer Sheri Tingey discovered the affordable route into the national park unit almost no one in America ever visits.

The secret was revealed by a rafting guide trying to sidestep his own problems in gaining access to Surprise Lake in the remote Aniakchak National Monument.

Surprise Lake nestles in the Aniakchak Caldera at the head of the Aniakchak River, a federally designated National Wild and Scenic River near the middle of the Alaska Peninsula. The lake is the starting point for a world-class float to the sea. But getting to the lake has traditionally been almost as much of an adventure as floating the river.

Charter flights are often turned back by the foggy, cloudy weather that brews around the remains of the dormant volcano. Some groups trying to reach the lake have been forced to make repeated forays, each of them expensive, out of the King Salmon airport.

Marko Yurachek of Dragonfly Wilderness Journeys was one of those people, so he approached Tingey to inquire about the one-person Alpacka Rafts she designed and has begun producing for wilderness travelers. Yurachek thought it possible to hike into the caldera from the village of Port Heiden on the south shore of Bristol Bay, then float out on the river.

A pack-raft trip, he knew, would sidestep the weather-related access problems that have kept Aniakchak almost inaccessible. National Park Service numbers say everything about how difficult it has proven to reach this monument.

Only 154 recreational visits were made to the Aniakchak in all of 2003, the last year for which complete statistics are available, according to the National Park Service. That was down from a five-year average of about 246 visitors, which is a miniscule number.

Yellowstone National Park, for instance, sees almost twice as many visitors per minute in the month of June alone. But then, Yellowstone is road accessible.

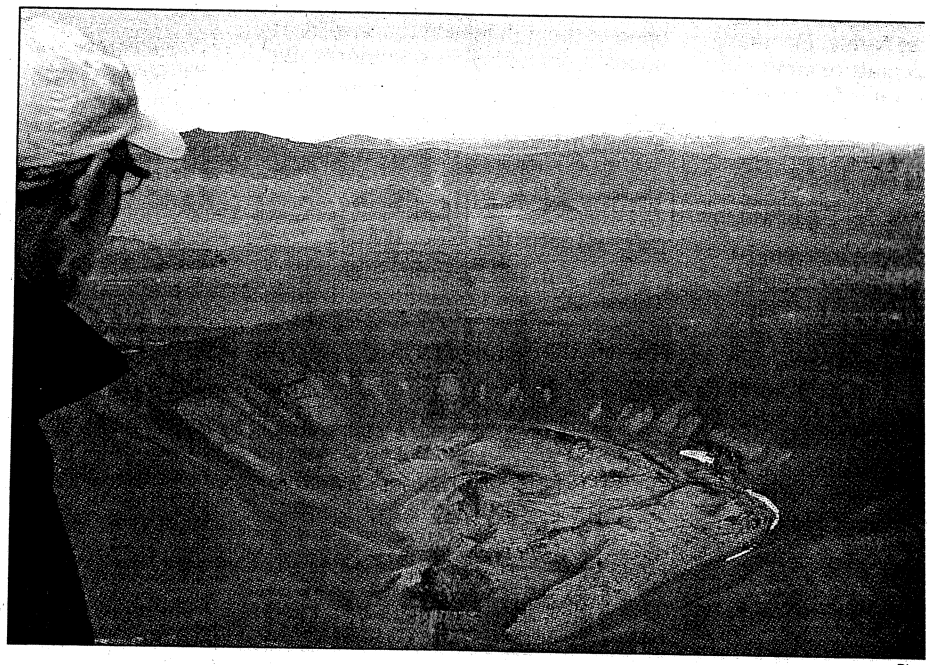
REDUCE COSTS WITH AIRLINE MILES

Getting to Aniakchak requires airplane flights, and that quickly begins to drive up the costs. That's part of the reason a guided trip to Aniakchak from King Salmon costs about $3,000 per person.

So how did Tingey; her husband, Ralph; son, Thor; and friends Sarah Garner, Richard Hewitt and Lee Hewitt do it for as little as $250 a head?

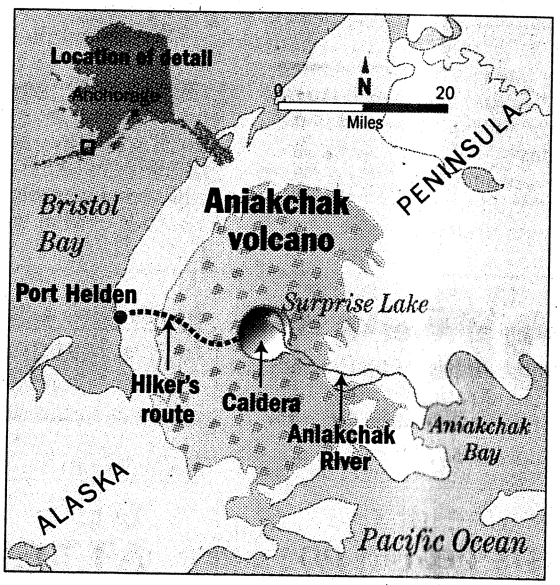
Well, you start with Alaska Airlines miles, which can be

See Page F-3, **ANIAKCHAK**



Phot

On a perfect day for hiking in Southwest Alaska, packrafter Richard Hewitt pauses to adm into the Aniakchak caldera.



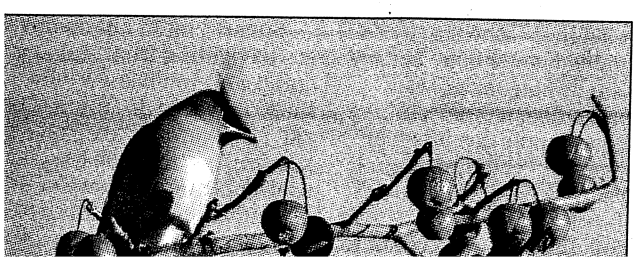
RON ENGSTROM / Anchorage Daily News

2004 Alaska National visitor numbers

1. Klondike Gold Rush	
2. Denali	
3. Glacier Bay	
4. Sitka	
5. Kenai Fjords	
6. Wrangell-St. Elias	
7. Katmai	
8. Gates of the Arctic	
9. Noatak	
10. Lake Clark	
11. Kobuk Valley	
12. Yukon-Charley Rivers	
13. Cape Krusenstern	
14. Bering Land Bridge	
15. Aniakchak	
Total	**2,**

Source: National Park Service preliminary data

Flight of the waxwings an urban myste



Long before learning that a record 11,414 Bohemian waxwings were sighted during Anchorage's 2004 Christmas Bird Count, I had decided that this winter, finally, I would track down a large flock of the birds and spend some unhurried moments enjoying their frenzied company.

Most years since the early 1980s, thousands of these attractive "gypsy birds" have settled into Anchorage for weeks on end to feast on mountain ash berries, elderberries, chokecherries and crab apples. Roaming the city in large flocks, they swoop and dive in synchronized flight and



ANIAKCHAK: *National monument provides ex*

Continued from F-1

redeemed for a round-trip ticket to Port Heiden via King Salmon, Tingey said. Then, you arrange for a DeHavilland Beaver to pick up six people with minimal gear on the beach at Aniakchak Bay.

The cost of chartering the Beaver is $1,400. Split six ways, that cost drops to about $235 per person.

"It's a great deal, if you've got airline miles," Tingey said. "For people who didn't have airline miles, it broke out to about $800 each to do this trip."

Still not bad, she added, for a trip "that people never take because it's supposed to be so phenomenally expensive."

Of course, to do the trip the way the Tingey group did it, one does need certain skills and equipment:

- You must be fit enough to make the 22-mile hike from Port Heiden to the rim of the caldera.
- You must have the navigational and map-reading skills necessary to find the ramp down into the caldera, given that route-stopping cliffs abound.
- You must have a packable raft and the skill, or at least the confidence, to paddle it in white water. The two biggest rapids are easily portaged, but between them there is still a lot of fast, splashy Class II and Class III.
- You must know how to deal with grizzly bears.

"You don't want to be in there after the 15th of August," Tingey added, "because the bears are in the lake."

> *"There are only two ways down into the caldera. If you don't find the right spot, you're going to spend a long time hiking around."*
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SORTING THE FINER POINTS

Grizzly bears, large numbers of grizzly bears, follow a strong salmon run to the lake. Thor Tingey had first-hand experience with the bears as a seasonal fisheries biologist working in the area over the course of several summers.

The summers there also enabled him to scope out the river and the surrounding terrain.

"We had lots of good prior knowledge," Sheri Tingey said.

Back in 2001, she noted, Thor Tingey and biologist Troy Hammond spent a month in the caldera conducting fish studies.

"He and Tory hiked up to the top a couple times," she said.

Thus, the Tingeys knew it was possible to hike into and out of the caldera. On top of that, Sheri Tingey had an e-mail from Yurachek reporting that he had done the hike and the float, and that both had gone perfectly. That was all they needed to persuade them to give it a go.

Arriving at the Port Heiden airport, she said, there remained only a couple of concerns. Would there be water available along the route to the caldera, and would they be able to find the route down.

"There are only two ways down into the caldera," she said. "If you don't find the right spot, you're going to spend a long time hiking around."

As it turned out, however, the entry point to the caldera between the headwaters of Birthday and Barbara creeks was easy to find.

"It's almost a straight shot from Port Heiden," Tingey said. "That's what made it such a joke. We dropped right down this perfect ramp (into the caldera).

"We had a couple people say there's no way you can get down into that caldera, but that's not true. There's just this marvelous ramp.

"The only thing that's tricky about (it) ... if you get one of those big storms, you're not going to want to go over the top. There's a reason there's nothing living up there. The winds must be incredible," she said.

MAKING THE OVERLAND TREK

With the winds down and the sky clear, on the other hand, there is a jump of only a couple of miles from the last suitable tundra campsite across a moonscape to the rim of the caldera.

If the weather is sketchy, she added, it would be preferable to camp near the last available source of freshwater about two miles from the rim and wait for a break. Or sit out the storm in Port Heiden and then make the entire, 22-mile push to the rim in a day.

"That's certainly doable," she said. "It's not a killer hike in any way, shape or form."

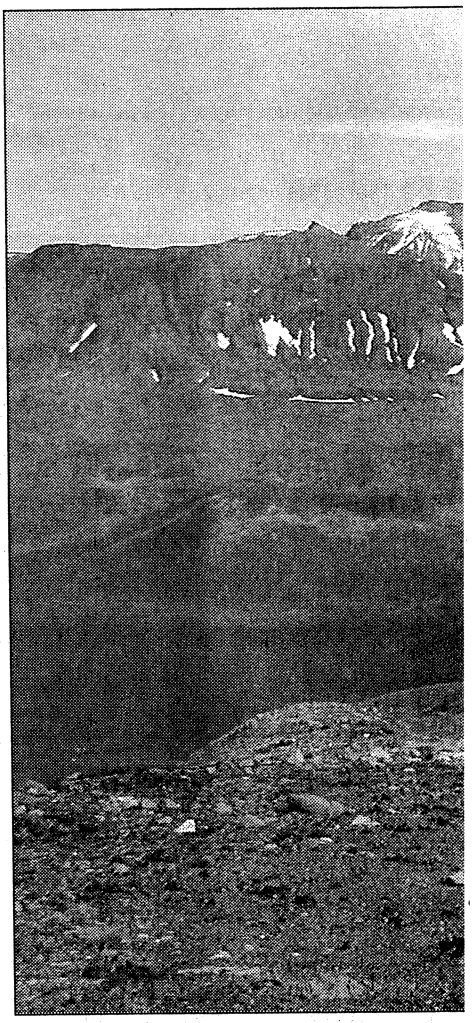
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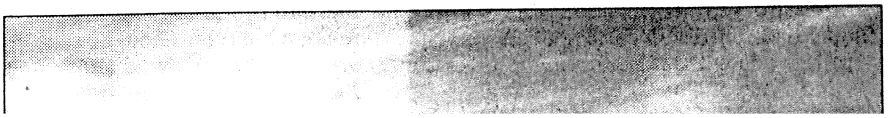
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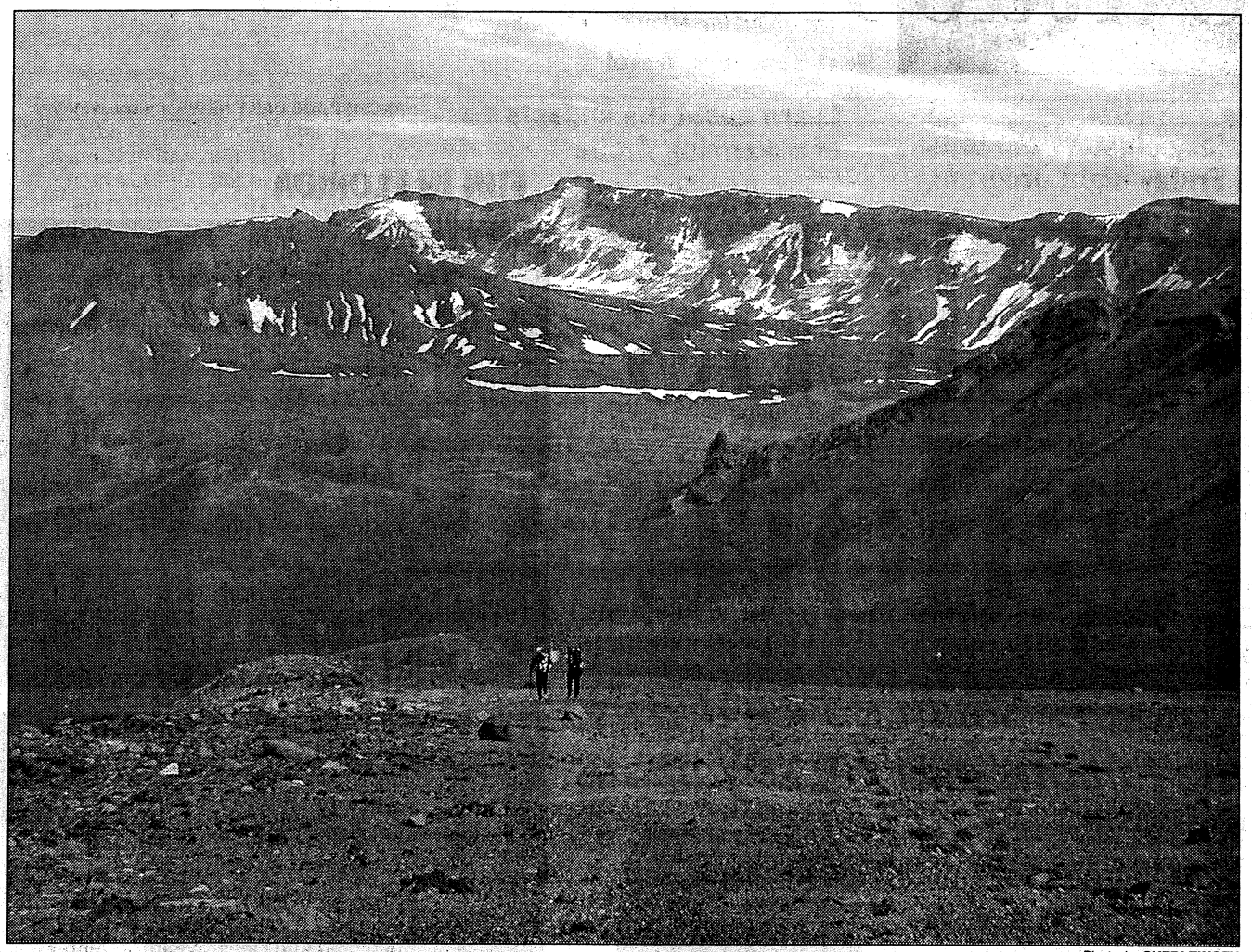


Photo by SHERI TINGEY

Thor Tingey and Sarah Garner head down the ramp into the Aniakchak Caldera. Finding the ramp on the west side of the caldera is key to gaining access to Surprise Lake at the head of the Aniakchak Wild River in the Aniakchak National Monument. Cliff bands in many places block access to the floor of the caldera.

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The Gates are the 1,500-foot-tall gash in the caldera wall through which the Aniakchak River flows. The caldera itself is the result of a series of eruptions, the last dating to 1931. The geologically curious could entertain themselves there for days exploring old lava flows, cinder cones and explosion pits.

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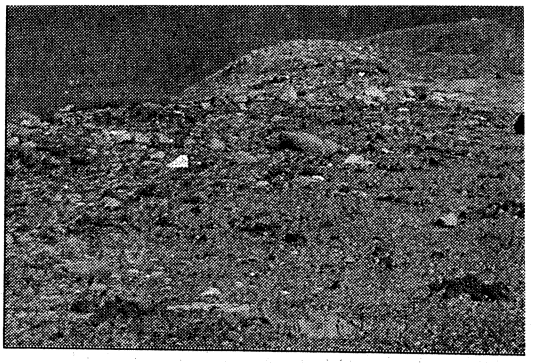
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Thor Tingey, she said, paddled significant parts of it backward, so as to be in a better position to offer paddling advice to an inexperienced Lee Hewitt.

WATCH OUT FOR THE BEARS

"The only other thing that's a little different is that when you hit the lower part of the river, there aren't many campsites," Tingey said. "Most of it is really prime bear habitat. It's really tall grass, and the bank drops right down to the river, and the bears are every-



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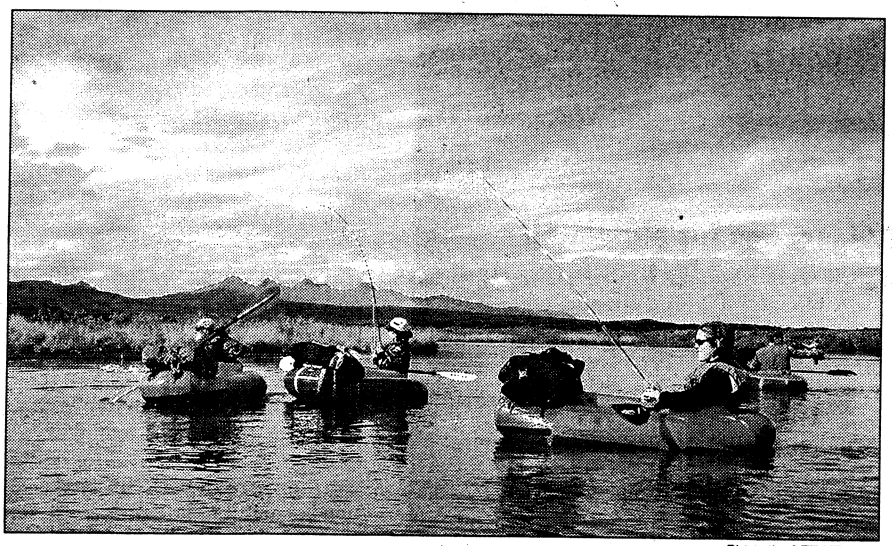


Photo by LEE HEWITT

On the mellow lower stretches of the Aniakchak Wild River, packrafters partake of some of fine fishing for arctic char. Left to right are Richard Hewitt; Sheri Tingey, playing a fish; Sarah Garner and Thor Tingey.

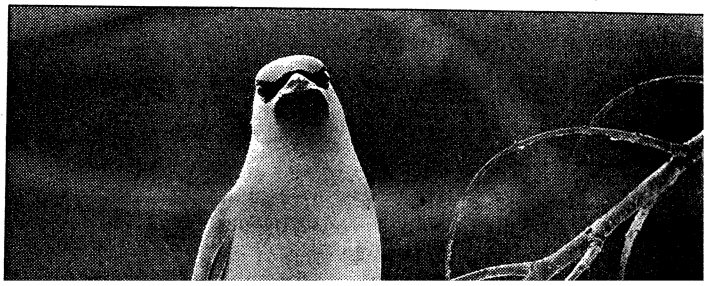
SHERWONIT: *Thousands of waxwings flock to A*

Continued from F-1

1993, waxwings have become symbols of the wondrously diverse life forms with whom we share the world, yet somehow overlook. How, I wonder, did I miss them before? What else beckons that I haven't yet noticed?

I've seen groups of waxwings many times during the past dec-

at least 50 waxwings again invaded my neighborhood, followed a few days later by a group of more than 100. Perched upon my backyard's spruce and birch trees, they trilled on and on in their delightfully soothing manner. Their reappearance was curious enough to prompt this notation in my home journal: "What are they doing here?



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The angling for arctic char is superb, she said, "and then you get out to the coast, and the coast is great. It's beautiful. It's worth a day or two there just to hike the beaches.

"There's this great Park Service cabin," she said. "It's an old (commercial) fishing place. You could get stuck for a few weeks at that cabin and not complain. I think people don't know how great the coastline is there."

River otters frolic along the shoreline, she said. Seals play in the bay. The bears roam the sands, and the occasional whale swims past.

"They've got old log (books) in the cabin, and it's clear this is a rain-shadow area," Tingey added. "The caldera gets some of the worst weather in the world, but as soon as you leave The Gates, it's all different."

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Spectacular is the best word to explain much of the monument. Tingey admitted she can hardly wait to go back.

"The (Park Service) Web site on Aniakchak makes it sound like you're going to the end of the Earth," she said, but for the people with the right skills, access to the monument is unbelievably easy and attractive.

In a week there, Tingey said, "we did not see or hear an airplane. It was remarkably quiet and isolated. There's a fair number of caribou down there. I just thought it was an absolutely charming river in a charming place.

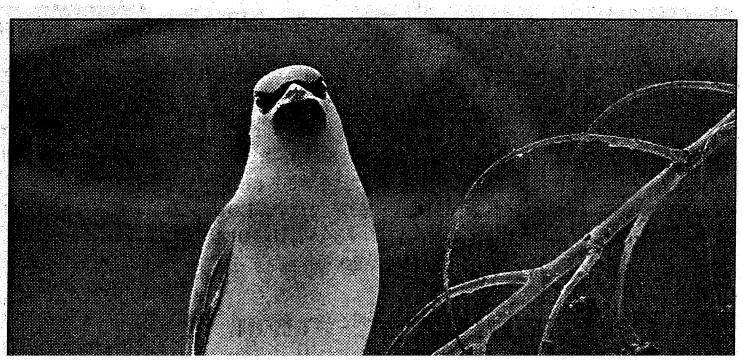
"It's magical."

And more affordable than you might ever have guessed.

■ Daily News outdoor editor Craig Medred can be reached at cmedred@adn.com or 257-4588.

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No one really knows where the waxwings go after leaving the big city; they may disperse into smaller groups, but likely remain in flocks until breeding season.

turned off the engine. I knew my quest had ended. I'd entered waxwing heaven.

At every corner, trees were where people have planted fruit trees, offering abundance in a time of scarcity. No one really knows where the waxwings