

# What I did on my summer vacation

Dear Folks:

We are back in Bethel. Came back Friday evening. We had a nice float trip in Bill Bivin's Maule from Bethel to McGrath. Unfortunately, when we got to McGrath, we found out the gas hose on the river was out of service, so we filled four 5 gallon tanks with av gas and poured it into the tanks. Bill's landing was "like butter" as Max said.

Tom Sheets and his partner Barry were very accommodating at Tukusko Lodge, getting gas/tanks for Bill, picking us up on the river and letting us use an old GMC truck to place our kayaks on from NAC to the river. A man from California, Mr. Merry, helped Mac and I place the kayaks in the river.

The river seemed to be moving faster than in Bethel. I asked Mac to give it a "test run" for me. He said "It's balanced, get in." So I got in and once on the water, the current didn't seem so fast. The guy from California gave Mac a look like (you're kayaking to Bethel with this woman?).

We camped not that far from McGrath the first night. The second night we were on another sandbar with lots of wood. we passed Deacon's landing. Helen Evan, Dorothy Norback and a few other women said, "come up for coffee."

So at 11:30 p.m. we had a nice pot of coffee and they filled our thermos with the rest. Helen said, "I'd portage at Devil's Elbow if I were you." Dolly said, "Watch out for bears, there's grizzly tracks all over the place."

We got back in the kayaks and found a sandbar with some good wood. The next night there was another nice sandbar. In the middle of the night we heard splashing, not your typical beaver splash (so it seemed). Mac shot a couple of rounds in the air and after rubbing our eyes, we saw two V's on both sides of our sandbar in the river. (Beaver after all.)

We went through Devil's Elbow a day or so later. I asked Mac which way I should go. He said, "downriver." The current made up my mind for me. I took the left branch and paddled hard not to get stuck on the rocks. Mac got stuck and had to get out of the kayak and push off again. I thought the kayak would get away from him, but it didn't. His kayak was heavier.

The Tanana Chief barge was anchored just below Devil's Elbow (the second or third time we had seen it). The man said they were waiting to help another barge through there. He asked us where we were going, said "Have a nice trip. Watch out for bears." That didn't set too well with me that the rivermen would say that, too.

Before Devil's Elbow and right after, the river was so peaceful and beautiful. We continued to look for a sandbar with adequate wood supply (no less than 300 pieces of wood would do. Of course, we didn't find anything suitable and we kept going. Before

you knew it, we were at Swift River.

It was 2 a.m. in the morning and we could hardly see. But I saw enough to realize there were big plates of water swirling around us. I kept "on the rudders" so to speak to keep the kayak from moving too much from side to side. Mac was closer to the Swift River confluence and his kayak was moving left/right more noticeably.

We wanted to beach somewhere but being dark we didn't want to beach just anywhere. We ended up just above Stony River around 5:30 a.m. and camped at a wonderful place for two days. At the village of Stony River we got gas, water and the usual pop, candy and cigs. The store, like most, is family run. The Gustys were very helpful.

Mr. Gusty said, don't scream and bears don't like smoke and said smoky gloves and a stick on fire would keep the bears away. We kept that advice in mind.

From there we went to Sleetmute (actually just below Mellick's Lodge and just above the village) and camped on a point with, of course, lots of wood. It rained and rained and after two nights we were packing up and ready for Red Devil.

Just before we began folding our tent, a lady motored up in her boat very skillfully and said, "How come you didn't stop by, everyone stops by." She invited us over to the lodge for coffee. Getting in her 20 hp boat was like "moving" compared to our drifting. We met Nick Mellick, Mary's brother and sister-in-law.

Marge fixed baked salmon, rice and fresh salad with homemade bread. For dessert we had moose tallow aqutak. Marge asked me if I knew Laura Beltz. I said she was my cousin and Marge said she went to school with her at Edgcombe and remembers her cheerleading (Small world).

Finally, Mac and I headed back to our kayaks and pitched our tent back up. The next day we went to Red Devil about 18 miles downriver.

On the left bank quite a ways away, we spotted our first black bear. It was walking along the bank of the river. When it finally saw us, it picked up speed and we started paddling faster. Then it started galloping along the bank and then jumped in the water and was swimming toward us. All we could see was a big black head and ears. We paddled, battling a headwind and chops and one and a half days after leaving Sleetmute, we were in Red Devil ... civilization, generators, four wheelers ... and stayed there for two days.

The Red Devil store is owned by Dan and Elvina Herman. It's a cute little old-fashioned store down to the old rootbeer candy cane sticks. The coffee pot was always on and who should we see there but Mary Mellick from Mellick's Lodge buying groceries and visiting. The next day

there was a potluck for one of the residents who had just passed away. We saw Mary walking toward our tent and she said go up and get a bite to eat.

We went up and there was ham, corn on-the-cob, potato salad, cake, pies and Jell-o like Thanksgiving. Mary said she's going to start calling me "Barbara Black Bear."

After two wonderful days in Red Devil, Mac and I headed downriver to Georgetown. As we paddled, we saw a black bear and her cub on the right bank this time. Mac whistled, banged on his kayak to scare the bear away. He didn't want it to jump in the water after us like the last one did. No success, the bear just stayed there sitting on its rear watching us paddle by. Mac got out the pistol and shot up in the air and the bear headed up the hill (a little ways a way, anyway, and hid behind a bush).

In Georgetown, Mrs. Vanderpool (Ann) was on the

bank and invited us up for coffee. Her house was laced with crocheted dollies, plants and wonderful nick knacks and crocheted blankets. She said the generator was out and her husband Bob was flying back from Anchorage with a part(s) for it. She said if we spent the night, she'd fix up caribou steaks.

Of course, we said yes. She had Mac get a huge cucumber from the garden to add to the salad. Made homemade biscuits, had baked potatoes and we had a wonderful meal. Her son Richard was working on a super cub. We met him in Red Devil the day before when he was on a three wheeler pulling logs and he had his ankle in a brace.

Was surprised to see him landing in Red Devil a day later flying a super cub. He kept saying to stop at Georgetown because his parents like company. We expected coffee, but we didn't expect such hospitality. The next morning we had fresh coffee

(endless supply) and Ann's fried bread (delicious!).

From Georgetown we went to Crooked Creek and went to Bernice Zaukar's store. We went to her house to use the phone and she invited us in for moose stew (Delicious!).

From Crooked went downriver to Napiamute and spent the night on the shore near Hook M Up Tours (they said come up for coffee and saw bear paws painted on their floor). Had a nice dinner with them while the men steamed and I steamed later and had a shower. Some Frenchmen were there and they left a live fish in the water not too far from our tent. I thought I heard something walk in the night near our tent.

From Napiamute we went to Aniak and Mr. Gibson flagged us down on the river and said we could camp in their yard. We paddled back to their place. It took us 15-20 minutes, didn't realize how helpful the current was

# Rolling , rolling down the river

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(//from page three)

until we tried to go back up river. The next day went to Aniak to look for Mac's hamburgers. We went to the lodge (with our dirty clothes) had hamburgers and took a \$20.00 cab ride to the laundry which wasn't open.

We met Fran and Pete Brown on the beach in Aniak and Fran said we could do our laundry at her place and that she would pick us up from our campsite "just around the corner" from downtown Aniak. We went further then we should have and she still found us. Ended up spending two nights at their home and even went up the Aniak river with them.

From Aniak went to Kalskag and met Mr. & Mrs. Fred Holmberg, Sr. We went to her house to see if she would open the store and she said sit down for coffee. We had coffee, aqutuk, fresh pike, bread (Wonderful.)

From Kalskag we went to Tuluksak (the sandbar anyway). We got stuck on the little trickle of the Kusko that enters the Tuluksak River and I was afraid the tide would get us so we didn't put up the tent. My emergency blanket kept Mac up all night. We

portaged to the Tuluksak River the next day and made it to Akiak.

Tuluksak to Akiak got into some winds, waves and relieved to finally beach. Went to the store, met Martin Ivan's wife, Helen and she invited us in for coffee, berries, strips and bread. We kayaked a bit out of town. These kids followed us along the bank of the river and ran up to us when we stopped. They said the tide got pretty high.

They helped us drag the kayaks up near the willows (tied the kayaks for the first time). The next morning they were high and dry. Little Nathan Williams brought his mother, Kathy back to get his "kayak ride" and she drove me back to town. We got a four wheeler and Peter Ivan and Frank Kawagly used her rope to drag them back into deeper water.

We took the Kwethluk slough toward Bethel and spent our last night on the Church slough sandbar where we could see up and down the Kuskokwim and had a beautiful sunset. Another couple arrived there just before us. We kept them up boring them about our kayak trip till after 2 a.m. adjusting their campfire all the

while. Arrived in Bethel Friday around 6:00-6:30 p.m. and Donna Chris let us use her car to get Mac's truck back. She was a great welcome reception for us.

Along the way, the people asked us if we saw *big foot* prints? When we finally beached above Stony, we saw big prints, but I knew they weren't moose or bear, so I wasn't worried, we were so tired anyway. But looking back, there were several sandbars we were at with the *big foot* prints and once I thought, oh, a little child was here, but maybe they were *little foot* prints. Mac thinks possibly they're grizzly prints, that got rained on and made bigger (who knows).

Well that about sums up our trip. Mac said Woody from "Hook M Up" charters just called to see if we made it back to Bethel all right. He said the day after we left, five black bears were down at our campsite. Probably looking for that salmon that was splashing near there.

With love always,  
**Barbara & "Mac"**  
Bethel