

The Talkeetna Traverse: Ritt Grant 2024

Skyler Williams, Zinnia Voss, Maya Mossanen, Kupai Marx, Nathaniel Cutler

Itemized Budget (the amount you received and the amount you spent – provide as much detail as possible. We recommend saving all receipts to make this part easier)

RECEIVED: \$10,527

SPENT:

Kupai flights: \$750

Zinnia flights: \$1220

Nathaniel Flight: \$410

Roadtrip (gas, food, camping): \$2605.55

Gear rental CC: \$599.95

Bear spray and gas cans: \$214.78

Costco food: \$2569

Fred Meyers Food: \$480

Walmart Food: \$344.60

Lost Life Jacket: \$57

Resupply plane: \$2100

TOTAL: \$11,250.88

• **Food and rationing** (what did you eat, not enough, enough, or too much, what would you change, etc.) • Equipment (what did you end up not using, what did you wish you had brought, etc.)

FOOD:

Overall, we brought a large quantity of food. Having five of us made it easier to spread out the rationing. We lead with a more-than-less mindset, trying to imagine how everyone's needs differ and wanting there to be enough. Since we started with a paddling section it felt easier to bring a heavy load, and we figured we would lighten up quite a bit by the time it made it onto our backs. For the most part we think this ended up being true, and that nothing was monumentally miscalculated.

We were heavy on snacks, we had two bars per person per day, lots of beef jerky, dessert snacks, fruit leathers, beef sticks, yogurt balls, etc. If we wanted to be more considerate of weight and space we could have probably made it fine without some of the supplemental snacks. We also had lots of toppings for our oatmeal, wraps, and various dinners (sun dried tomatoes, pine nuts, coconut flakes, protein powder, olives). In hindsight we could have gone without the sun-dried tomatoes and olives; they became a hassle and we could have had less bone broth and pine nuts. If we had more we could have eaten more peanut butter powder, milk powder, and jerky (though we already started with an entire bear barrel of just meat...). We tried savory oats for some breakfasts which none of us ended up being super jazzed about, sometimes it's better to stick with the basics.

Overall, we feel good about having had more food than not enough and the diversity of meals and snacks made it a fun experience. There is nothing that we wish we had.

We chose to proportion out our dinners into individual 5 person gallon ziplock bags so that when it was time to cook, one or two of us could just grab one of those ziplocks and start dinner while the others set up camp. This eliminated a lot of unnecessary faff looking for ingredients and kept everything more organized on the expedition. This was definitely worth the work on the front end. We made some really yummy curries with pre-seasoned and dehydrated lentils, which we highly recommend!!!

GEAR:

We did a pretty good job with gear, Zinnia brought a lot more layers but runs much colder etc. It was a very personal experience to pack gear based on individual needs.

It was good to have a pair of day long underwear and sleep long underwear. Hiking in rain pants became a regular occasion. You can never have too many socks...

It worked well to have 2 pots and stove systems between the 5 of us.

We could have used another sawyer squeeze or 2 but made it work with iodine and one squeeze filter. Having a gravity filter for camp would have been great.

Three of us had 85L backpacks and it would have been nice to all have 100L but there weren't enough available.

Zinnia ended up with the one yellow and black packraft, all having the same whitewater packraft would have been nice as well. The blue expedition packrafts were higher performing and the yellow packraft leaks when inflating it.

Maya brought crocks, we all wish we had done the same. We often had wet camp shoes between our paddling booties and hikers.

More blister tape would have been handy considering how often our feet were wet.

We had one 2P tent and one 3P tent which worked well.

None of us used our art supplies or cards as much as we had wanted to but I don't think we would've changed that we brought them.

• **Travel logistics** (how did you end up getting to/from the experience, what should others know)

Kupai and Skyler arrived 6 days before launch by car. The drive up for them was quite smooth heading north from Colorado and taking the Alaskan Highway most of the way through Canada and Alaska. Border crossings went smoothly and there is ample camping along the Alaskan Highway and in most parts of Canada. Gas expenses were slightly higher than anticipated in the remotest parts of the Highway. It is important to be aware of gas on this stretch as many gas stations are spaced far apart. Additionally, service is limited along most of the northern stretch through Northern Territories and the Yukon so gps and camping information is difficult to research while on the road. However, camping is not hard to find on this stretch.

Zinnia and Nathaniel flew into Anchorage airport. Both of their flights were pretty smooth but required layovers. However, Nathaniel in search of the cheapest flight took a redeye and spent part of the night in Anchorage airport before pick up in the morning. The drive from Talkeetna to Anchorage airport is about 2 hours. Our group had the two fliers that arrived on different days so it is important to take the gas prices of that drive into consideration for budget. Ideally, the fliers would have had flights arriving closer together where a single pick up could happen but this was not possible for us. Though, because of limited access in Talkeetna the airport pick ups doubled as last minute supply runs which were helpful

Maya was already in Talkeetna with her family. Having Maya live there and her family as a base camp and support system was an incredible advantage for many of the logistics of this trip. Our team was able to arrive and stay in a small house on their property where we were also able to stage and prep for the trip. We are incredibly grateful to the Mossanens for all their support.

To get to our launch point Maya's boyfriend Aiden drove us along the Denali highway to the MaClaren River Lodge put in. He drove the Mossanen's 8 seater van which had ample room for us and all of our gear. The Denali highway is a pretty rough dirt road so driving time along it takes a little longer than what google maps estimates.

Maya's dad and Aiden picked us up from our takeout in downtown Talkeetna in the same van. Rafts and gear was deconstructed, organized, and loaded into the van. We were driven about 20 minutes back to Maya's house. A few days were spent packing, cleaning, and organizing our gear. Zinnia's and Kupai's flights were on the same day making those logistics simpler than arrival. Nathaniel and Skyler left Talkeetna at the same time as Maya to drop off Zinnia and Kupai. Flights went smoothly.

The drive back was uneventful and the route was much the same as the way up. Nathaniel and Skyler did pass a wildfire so it might be valuable to check wildfire activity before departure in the future but luckily the fire posed minimal hazard and we passed without trouble. Everything was smooth and all members made it home safe and sound.

• **Leadership and group dynamics** (how did your team operate, any challenges, etc.)

Group dynamics went well. All members are adequately prepared and experienced. We all brought a variety of skill sets and knowledge to the group which was helpful. We were a well balanced crew with preferences in camp tasks that worked well. Kupai cooked many of the meals as he preferred it and Nathaniel, Zinnia, and Maya preferred setting up tents. Skyler liked to get water and cook. In terms of decision making our group did a good job of trying to take everyones opinions into consideration and did our best to make sure no one was slighted. However, with 5 people this does make the decision making process much longer when trying to honor everyone. There were disagreements as will happen but no arguments or issues came from them. Issues were well resolved and effectively communicated. We all did a great job of communicating our thoughts and opinions which truly made group dynamics more fluid.

• **Safety and risk management concerns** (how did you manage risk in the field, did anything unexpected come up, etc.)

We consistently and effectively communicated and mitigated risk to the best of our ability. Expeditions like these are inherently full of risk but we made it as safe as possible with our circumstances. Overall, we did a great job of choosing and discussing the safest option throughout our trip. As with any expedition planning can only go so far. Once you are out there everything becomes dynamic and we certainly felt that. Countless decisions were made in risk mitigation from river crossings, and portages, personal health and wellness all the way to drastic route changes. One example of simpler mitigation was on our Watana Canyon portage where we had to adjust our expected route and add about a mile onto our portage as the nearer access to the river was too steep for us to safely and effectively get out boats back in the water. Small stream and river crossings were common during our hiking section all of which required

ample decision making to find the safest and easiest places to cross. In terms of health we had one member of our group fall ill the morning of our 6th day. We discussed many things relating to their wellness and ability to move forward. We were not in a spot that would have been easily evacuated so with our downed group member we decided to push forward late in the day in the hopes of them either feeling better and continuing or getting us closer to a potential evacuation point. These were certainly important and consistent concerns throughout our trip but we did well to manage them. However, we had a major moment of decision making and risk mitigation on our 8th day.

After our first day of some really tough hiking we woke up the next morning to new information about Clear Creek, one of the primary rivers we were running on our expedition. Maya's parents contacted us through our inReach letting us know they had received information from a family friend saying the river was too high and filled with life threatening log jams. We also understood over the course of the time between where we were and Clear Creek we would be getting even more rain. It was clear to us that continuing on our current route was going to be too dangerous and we needed to change route. We only had a few options of how to progress and with much deliberation and consultation with Maya's parents through the inReach we came to a decision on a new hiking route. Although, this route was not entirely known to us we received information and coordinates for the best way through this new section. We examined our maps and made the call we knew was safest. However, this was not the last time we would make a big decision about the trip.

After deciding on our new route and setting we made our way through the Talkeetna Mountains with relative ease. More decisions were made about route finding and river crossings but all went by with relative ease and by day 12 we made it to Stephan Lake. Where we awaited our resupply to be delivered by float plane. The next day we were expecting a resupply but due to rain and low cloud all day no planes could fly. Already with the new route we were going to have a harder and longer trek ahead and being delayed a day was not setting us up well for a timely completion. The next day was also forecasted to be rainy and cloudy. The next day was as forecasted and we could not get a plane until maybe the evening. Being 2 days behind with still a ton of ground to cover we decided to fly out of Stephan Lake. With incoming colder and wetter weather we decided it would not be safe or wise to push ourselves through unfamiliar terrain over long days.

Despite having to make a lot of difficult and complicated decisions over the course of our trip we never questioned our ability to choose the safest option. We consistently honored, listened to each other, and worked together to mitigate risk and stay safe to the best of our ability. We made sure that every member of our group was heard and not overlooked and only moved forward once we were all in agreement. Our group dynamic and ability to communicate over the course of our expedition was certainly a strength in this group. The necessity of good risk management and decision making can truly not be understated when it comes to backcountry travel and this shined true for our expedition.

• **Specific route descriptions & concerns** (did you have to make in-field changes, did anything unexpected come up, etc.)

The first days on the river were mostly what we expected. The MacClaren and the Susitna were quite large rivers with ample flat water. There was one section on the MacClaren that boasted modest class I+ maybe class II in higher water rapids. The sides of the rivers on this section were mostly steep with thoroughly vegetated banks. The first ~20 miles of the MacClaren was unforested and populated with waist to shoulder-high willows. As we dropped in elevation the riversides became more forested with trees becoming abundant along the banks. Our campsites stuck to high sand and rock bars near the river banks. These were fairly abundant and easy to find through this section. Our second day on the Susitna had some fairly decent rapids. From our research we did expect some class II around the S turns on the Su but what we did not quite realize was that there was a 15 mile stretch of just S turns where we had consistent class I to class II leading up to our portage around Watana Canyon. These rapids were nothing we couldn't handle. They went very smoothly and were a ton of fun.

Our first portage around Watana Canyon was perhaps a little tougher than we expected with shoulder to head high willows on the eastern side. These were tough to navigate and push through with our heavy packs. The western side of the portage proved to be quite wet and marshy. There were many parts where our boots were sinking well into the mud. It was not an easy hike but we made it happen without any problems or dangers. We did plan on only walking a mile but there was no option to camp this close so we ended up walking an extra mile down river.

After Watana the rest of the Su was straightforward and fun. Our pull-out spot was at Kosina Creek which was easily identifiable. We did not see any wildlife but there were ample signs of wildlife of all kinds. We would recommend being especially careful with food and cooking areas when near tributary creeks. They are full of salmon and provide a lot of resources to bears and other wildlife. The first hike up to Watana Lake was only 5 miles but proved to be incredibly difficult. The lower section was hiking through heavily forested landscape but as we climbed the trees got shorter and the vegetation got denser. Hiking through the alder belt between the higher alpine tundra and the lower forested section is very difficult, slow moving, and technical. Once breaking through the alders the willows begin to dominate the landscape. This section was quite difficult pushing through shoulder to above the head dense willows as well as multiple sections of deep marsh. In total it took us nearly 8 hours to go the 5 miles to Watana Lake.

The next morning was when we received the information that Clear Creek was going to be too dangerous to run. We spent quite a few hours that morning deciding on next steps. We essentially had 3 options. Our first was to continue on our current route, cross Clear Creek by wading and hike over another few ridges to get to the Su and paddle out. We decided this was not the best due to already high water on Clear Creek making it possibly too dangerous to cross. We did not want to get all the way there and realize the river was impassable. Our second option was to return to the Su paddle the 40 or so miles along the river and portage around the Devils Canyon (Class V whitewater) and get back to the Su. We did consider this option but since we had no information on the quality of the river on this section we worried about encountering unexpected whitewater that we might not be able to handle. Additionally, we were a little unsure where exactly Devil's Canyon began. Our third option was to reroute and

hike to Stephan Lake, cross the lake, have more hiking and get back on the Su on the other side. We decided this would be the best option as topo lines on the map looked forgiving and doable and Stephan Lake would be a good location for resupply. We also were communicating with Maya's family and one of their family friends who had been on the hiking route and recommended it as our best way forward.

The hiking for the next 3 days were not bad and we covered some good distance. Much of it was high on the Tundra with either waist high willows, ankle high grass, or rocky surface with abundant moss. This section was relatively smooth; the only technical parts came when having to cross small rivers and streams when going between two sides of the valley. Our boots and feet stayed wet for most of the hiking section so be sure to dry out your feet whenever possible. We spotted a lot of caribou along this route.

Things did become much more technical on our last 2 days getting to Stephan Lake. The day before our arrival was a rude awakening back into lower elevation hiking willows, grass, and marshes became much more frequent. We tried to stay high on the side of a mountain but this proved fruitless as it quickly became too steep and we needed to drop down through an alder belt. Lower in elevation there were a lot of little ups and downs where we crossed small drainage creeks with dense vegetation above proving to be very tedious. Our last descent to Stephan lake was perhaps the most technical and difficult part of the trip the willows were high, the alder belt was very dense and felt sometimes impossible to weave through, and marshes were common. We were exhausted by the time we reached the lake.

We were hoping to get the resupply the next day but rain came down all day and no planes could fly in those conditions. We began to worry about our timing as we still had 35 miles on foot to cover in the next 4 days. When examining topo lines we also knew we were not going to be getting up to our easy walking elevations around 4000 feet very quickly and it would be marshland and alder heaven which is a perfect recipe for incredibly slow walking. We were also checking weather conditions on our garmins which showed a lot of rain over the next few days and colder air which slow us down even more. We didn't think we were going to have the time to make it out if we couldn't get our resupply by the next morning. The next morning conditions for flying were still not good and weren't improving quickly. Nervous that we were going to be stuck at Stephan another night and delayed further we made the call to get pulled from the field. At first the flight service could not tell us when the next clear time would be for flying but they contacted us later that afternoon saying they would be able to fly that evening. So, we were picked up from Stephan on float planes and dropped back in Talkeetna where Maya's Dad picked us up. We were quite devastated by this result and the shock of coming back to the world was overwhelming.

We made it back to Maya's and decided on next steps. Out of a desire to finish our trip by floating our way down into Talkeetna. We decided to take the Alaskan Railroad up to Gold Creek and float our way back to town. This was an awesome end to the trip and it certainly helped calm the overwhelming feeling that flying back to town had given us. We put in at a bridge near gold creek. The water after multiple days of heavy rain was running high and made the paddling go by quick. The riverside on this section was at a lower elevation and the forest

was new to us for our expedition. This whole section was flat water but fun floating. On our last day the sun finally came out and we were greeted with our first view of Denali towering in the distance as we floated into downtown Talkeetna. It couldn't have been a better end to such an incredible adventure.

• **A detailed daily course log** (we encourage you to keep a daily log while you are in the field to make this part easier to include daily starting and ending locations, what you did, anything significant to note, etc.)

July 28: Launch on MacClaren



Launch day was cold and rainy. The drive up was half on paved road and half on the dirt road Denali Highway. MacClaren River Lodge greeted us with a friendly manner and wished us luck on our adventure. The packing was slow moving but expected for our first time packing the boats. We geared up and said goodbye to our trusty shuttle driver, Aiden who waved until we were out of sight. Stoke was high as we hit the river. It was all flatwater with beautiful expansive scenery all around us. We only paddled for 4 hours that day and found a nice gravel bar near the river bank to camp at. The rain had begun to calm and camp set up was a little slower than it

would become as we were all still warming up our backcountry skills. We talked as a group about our strengths and weaknesses and went to bed tired, warm, and dry.

July 29: MacClaren



Another day of mild mannered river floating treated us well. The sun came out for a little while and we basked in its glory. The river this day was heavily braided and choosing the right path through was really important. There were a few moments of scraping bottoms that required exiting and walking our boats through shallow sections. The landscape and river side foliage began to change as we made our way south and dropped in elevation.

July 30: MacClaren

We got our first taste of whitewater on this day with some mild class I, maybe class II stretch right in the beginning. We were all stoked to get this little section and certainly boosted our paddling confidence. After this little bout of whitewater the river meandered its way to the confluence with the Susitna. Coming out onto the Susitna was incredible. The sun began to shine and we were all jaw dropped by the sheer size of this river. In the distance behind us we got to see some pretty beautifully jagged mountains. We spent another night camped on a gravel sand bar with trees and quite a few bear tracks but luckily no bears.

July 31: Susitna

The next morning we woke up to beautiful blue skies and our own private aviation show. Military fighter jets were doing all sorts of maneuvers over our heads and the loud booms of a broken sound barrier echoed overhead. We got a late start this day but we didn't have a whole

lot of ground to cover so we had plenty of time. The river again was beautiful and meandering. We caught a few sections of very mellow, maybe class I whitewater. We took a long snack and lunch break before heading on down the river. We camped on a small beach on river right. Lots of floating and sunbathing took up this day.

August 1: Susitna



Another late start occurred today but because nearly 20 hours of daylight we were never too worried about timing as long as we were getting enough sleep. This day was definitely when things were getting exciting. The river narrowed and the walls became steeper creating a nearly 15 mile stretch of consistent class I and II whitewater. It was all relatively untechnical, just huge wave trains down the middle of the river. Rapids would appear slightly less on either side but was shallower and rockier so sticking the center was our game plan. It went well with no mishaps; we mostly pointed straight and kept paddling. This day was also our first and only portage on the Su. We eddied out a lot as we neared the Canyon to make sure we weren't going to miss our takeout point. This probably was not too necessary as massive granite walls tower on both sides of the river to mark the entrance. It was a stunning section of river all throughout.

We parked our boats on river right, ate some lunch and began packing our gear. Packing was a slow and tedious process especially given we had not packed up our packrafts before and had a lot of food to stuff into our packs. The hike was mildly harder than anticipated with

some dense willow thickets on the way up. We passed what appeared to be some old prospectors cache with a ton of rusted barrels strewn about in the woods. There was no trail so we relied on game trails as much as possible. The way down proved to have its own challenges. It was riddled with marshy and muddy sections the majority of the time. Our boots were sinking ankle deep into the mud and there were few sections of relief. We also ended up needing to hike an additional mile to find a suitable campsite and launch spot. Eventually though with aching muscles we found a lovely spot near a rock bar on the side of the river. The view of Watana from the other side was stunning and the sunset was gorgeous. We slept well being so exhausted.

August 2: Susitna

The next morning was a little grimmer however, one of our group members had woken up vomiting and feeling very ill. They continued to vomit and have diarrhea the rest of the morning. For most of the day, they couldn't keep down any food. We had them slowly sip on bone broth and drink some electrolytes. They rested most of the day. The rest of the group hung out and used it as a near-o (near zero) rest day. Fortunately, later in the afternoon they began to feel a little better and we decided to press on. We thought even if their condition continued to worsen our best move was to continue on to Watana Lake and try to evac from there. We hit the river pretty late around 7:00 pm but we did not have far to go. We made it to Kosina Creek around 9pm. We set up camp quickly and fell asleep at 11pm.

August 3: Hike to Watana Lake

We woke up later than we wanted after the previous day's late start at Kosina Creek. We packed up and started our first major hiking section. This section was quite a bit harder than expected and took a lot longer. We climbed nearly 2000 feet over the course of the day. It was wet and rainy the whole time which made breaks very short. The whole day we were essentially yanking and dragging ourselves through some thick foliage and sinking in deep marsh. It was a ton of fun. We were absolutely soaking wet and exhausted by the time we got to our camp for the night. It was dark and we set up on the east side of Watana Lake.

August 4: Watana Reroute

We talked to Mayas dad and a close friend of his had been to Clear Creek, relaying that the water was unusually high that there were life threatening log jams. Due to this news we had to reroute in the field. (see route change section of report)

Hiked to a creek 6 miles SW of Watana

This morning we received information that required a reroute. We spent much of the morning figuring out and planning our next move. Once we eventually decided and felt secure in the decision we moved forward. By this point the sun had come out and we finally got a taste of the beautiful alaskan tundra. The beginning of our hiking had a cross a thoroughly willowed run off from Watana lake that did require getting wet up to our waists. We made it on to some much nicer territory after the crossing of rocky, mossy, and short willows. We made it roughly 6 miles

and camped next to a beautiful mountain brook streaming down from Watana Mountain. It was an absolutely wonderful second night of hiking.

August 5: Hike to Tsitsi Lakes



This morning was really smooth and we finally got our sleep schedule back on track after some weirdness the previous few nights. We left camp around 9. We walked along the sides of mountains trying our best to stay high for easier walking most of this day was only short grass beneath our feet. We had two big river/stream crossings one of which was easy enough to cross on a secure beaver dam and a second where we sank only up to our waist. Down nearer the creeks there was some difficult brush to push through but other than that the walking was very easy. The hiking was absolutely gorgeous with some mind blowing scenery. It was definitely my favorite day out there (this is Skyler writing, btw). If I could relive it over and over I would. Anyway, after 9 miles of tough but super rewarding hiking we were overjoyed to finally reach what was probably the most beautiful campsite we had out there. We camped next to a stunning lake nestled in the Alaskan tundra. We got a chance to take our first comfortable dip in the water on a warm(ish) evening. We made a fire next to the lake and really enjoyed relaxing with some great weather, good scenery, and even better friends.

August 6: Hiked to Butte overlooking river



This morning, our bodies were aching but the sun was shining and Tsitsi Lake was a wonderful sight to wake up to. Nathaniel was the first to poke his head out of the tent and we all quickly joined him as a herd of wild caribou passed by our camp. We were sad to leave the beautiful lake but we knew we needed to push forward. Another day of awesome jaw dropping hiking ensued with a few more river crossings and mountainside walking. We ended our hike on an amazing butte overlooking a small river.

August 7: Hiked ~7 mi towards Stephan Lake

This morning we were excited to get moving again expecting more easy hiking like the previous 2 days. This was not the case though. We very quickly realized it was not going to be another easy day on the tundra. We lost elevation quickly reentering marshland and willow heaven. After some deliberation trying to find what we believed would be the easiest route we crossed another small river and climbed up a mountain. We hoped that we would be able to traverse along its side staying higher above the dense vegetation. However, once we made it over and around we realized the easy walking was too high and too steep to be a passable route. With a little wind out of our sails we descended into a dense thicket of alder. Eventually, passing below the alders we entered a section of meandering hills with squishy mossy bottoms and low lying willows. We went up and down, up and down. The low points had a small stream surrounded by dense foliage that proved to be quite a pain to get through. At around 8:30 pm not having covered as much ground as our ambitious morning brains had wanted we called it a day on a nice mossy open patch.

August 8: Stephan Lake

The morning was easy going with more up and down hiking. We crossed one river where a minor disaster struck where 2 members of our crew fell into the muck of the river and got a little damp (suuuuper wet). However, with swift skills they both quickly recovered and clawed their way out of the mud. We summited a small ridge line with head high brush. As we crested the ridge we spied Stephan Lake for the first time off in the distance and felt a bit of excitement which certainly aided our steps. Though we quickly deflated again when we realized just how difficult our descent was going to be. We were swiftly met with the densest alders yet seen on our trip. There were multiple moments where it felt truly impossible to cross to push any further forward through the brush. The forest below was incredibly wet with many marsh crossings. We also had a much harder time navigating through the thickness of the forest. Eventually we made it to the lake and could not have been happier as bodies were aching and our stomachs were rumbling. We slept easily and deeply that night.

August 9: Layover

We were hoping to get our resupply on this day but due to constant rain all day we had no luck. We did our best to keep spirits high through the rainy conditions. We picked blueberries, read, our books, swam in the lake, took inventory of our food and gear. We fell asleep early and easily that night.

August 10: Evening evac due to too little time



We woke up in the morning desperately hoping for sunny skies but had no such luck. We packed our things and awaited our resupply. However, the day grew longer and more and more time was draining away from us. We needed the resupply early and to get going on our way. This was not going to happen and we realized we needed to leave the field or we weren't going to finish in time. We took a float plane out that evening. We were all sad to be leaving the field so abruptly and so much earlier than planned but we made the call we thought was best. The float plane ride out was magnificent though. We got to see all the river and land we had covered. Maya's Dad picked us up and drove us back to their house where we crashed that night.

August 11: Regroup at Mayas

We spent a day recouping from the abrupt ending and deciding how we would continue. We did not want that to be the end of the trip. We sat around unpacking and organizing gear for most of the day. We decided we were going to take the Alaskan railroad up to Gold Creek and float the last 60 miles of the Susitna.

August 12: Took railroad up to Gold Creek

We packed that morning and took the train in early afternoon. The train ride was only about 45 mins before we were dropped off into a dripping wet forest on the side of the railroad track. We made our way through the pouring rain, loaded our boats and got underway. We got a

late start but because of all the rain the river was rip roaring its way down. We made quick progress on the river and found a reasonable spot to camp.

August 13: Paddled Susitna

We passed the next two days on the river much the same with lovely relaxed (if a tad rainy) floating and beautiful camping along the river. We sang and laughed and played in our boats. We ate good food and slept dry and well.

August 14: Paddled Susitna

Our last day on the river we were treated to the departure of the clouds that had blocked any possible views of Denali our whole trip. We sat in our boats in the sun looking up at mountains on a hardly conceivable scale. This was our backdrop as we paddled into town to end our trip. Standing on the banks of the susitna loading our gear back into the van was a bittersweet moment reflecting on the lessons of the river and tundra as well as the bonds we strengthened and the memories we made.

August 15: Took off

We began our travels home with Maya driving Kupai and Zinnia to the airport before returning home and Skyler and Nathaniel beginning their long drive south.

