

Above the Arctic Circle: Packrafting the Alatna

Post-Trip Report

Jack Griffith, Lia Kelly, Sam Asher, and Maren Greene

August 7 - 28 2024

Itemized Budget:

As a group of four we received a total of \$10,000 from the Ritt Kellogg Memorial Fund. Our goal was to try and stay within the \$10,000 we received but planning an expedition to Alaska is pricey. The bush flight and resupply cost was over half of grant money that received alone (\$5,194). We rented expensive items like drysuits and packraft kits to save money but there were a few things we opted to buy instead of rent for better comfort and usability (more notes in gear section about why we opted to buy over rent certain gear). Another great way to save food was to dehydrate our own food rather than buying pre-dehydrated meals but it took a lot more time than it would to just simply buy pre-made dehydrated meals. Another large cost we did not anticipate beforehand was shipping/checked baggage fees. There was a large volume and weight of gear and food which led to more expensive shipping costs. And each of us needed to check at least 2 bags both ways and a third cost \$150. Looking back, we were happy with how we were able to mail food ahead so that we didn't need to carry it around Fairbanks and then shuttle it to Coldfoot ourselves. We ended up being nearly \$4,000 over the grant money we received since transportation alone was nearly 75% of the grant money. We had anticipated that it would be an expensive trip and it was challenging to cut down the budget in a way that would keep the expedition safe and comfortable.

Transportation	Cost
Seattle/Denver to Fairbanks roundtrip (x4)	\$1,456.00
Allakaket to Fairbanks (x4)	\$680.00
Fairbanks to Coldfoot Shuttle (x4)	\$624.00
Coyote Air (Bush Flight from Coldfoot & Resupply drop) (x4)	\$5,194.00
Cabs in Fairbanks	\$110.00
Checked Bags	\$406.00
Group Gear	
Spatula	\$6.99
Lighters (x6)	\$6.00
MSR Pan	\$40.00
Stove repair kit	\$19.99
20 oz fuel bottles (x2)	\$49.90

Printing and laminating maps	\$58.00
Garmin Inreach Mini Subscription (For 2 Garmins)	\$199.80
SAR Insurance (For 4 people through Garmin)	\$159.80
Dr. Bronner's Soap (x2)	\$7.70
Trowel	\$6.00
Black Diamond MegaMid	\$180.00
5 Bear Sprays	\$100.00
Aquamira (x4)	\$60.00
Repair kit (Aquaseal, Gear Aid patches, Gear aid tape, 10 yards 5 mm cord, extra lubricant)	\$22.00
Bear Horn	\$15.95
UDAP No-Fed-Bear Canisters (x4)	\$283.88
Food Storage & Boxes for Shipping	\$23.00
Duct Tape	\$6.59
Personal Gear	
Mosquito head net (x2)	\$28.00
Permethrin Treatment	\$17.50
Dry bags	\$155.98
Dry suit rental (x4)	\$1,300.00
PFD (x2)	\$299.95
Food	
Costco	\$745.58
Safeway	\$148.24
Walmart	\$101.62
Safeway	\$56.29

Safeway	\$53.53
Fred Meyer	\$140.67
Food shipment (Seattle to Fairbanks)	\$745.09
Food shipment (Fairbanks to Coldfoot)	\$65.66
Lodging	
Hotel leaving Seattle	\$190.00
Hostel in Fairbanks	\$86.40

BUDGET TOTAL

Transportation	\$8,470.00
Group Gear	\$1,245.60
Personal Gear	\$1,801.43
Food	\$2,056.68
Lodging	\$276.40
TOTAL	\$13,850.11

Food and Rationing:

Since we were limited to one resupply that could not have any perishables and we were going to need at least 2,500 cal/person a day we decided that dehydrated meals would be the best route. After looking at pre-made dehydrated meals we decided that it would be best for our budget and calorie goal to dehydrate our own meals. Under each section (menu, rations, and recipes) we go into further detail about our thought process, what we would change, and what went well.

MENU

We wanted to create a menu that had variety and would be appetizing to us while in the backcountry. We figured that creating a rotating breakfast/lunch/dinner/dessert menu would allow us to eat different meals everyday and only eat the same meals 4-5 times throughout a 3-week trip. Our group had many members who didn't enjoy oatmeal so it was challenging to create breakfast options that would get enough calories and wouldn't take too long to cook in the backcountry. Lunch we decided would be on the river or trail and would mainly consist of

snacks so that it was quick and easy. Having dessert daily allowed for easy extra calorie intake and having chocolate boosted morale at the end of a long, cold, and wet day.

Date	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Dessert
August 7, 8, 13, 16, 23 TOTAL CAL: 2,900	Dehydrated Breakfast Skillet (750 cal)	LUNCH 1: 1 bar, trail mix 1, dried mango, (cheese and salami) (1,220 cal)	Dehydrated Mac n Cheese (680 cal)	Candy Bar (250 cal)
August 15, 19, 24, 27 TOTAL CAL: 3,355	Protein Powder Pancakes (710 cal)	LUNCH 2: 1 bar, trail mix 2, gardettos, tortilla, tortilla (PB&J) (1,695 cal)	Dehydrated Pesto and Chicken Pasta (700 cal)	Peanut M&Ms (250 cal)
August 9, 14, 17, 25 TOTAL CAL: 3,090	Dehydrated Breakfast Scramble (902 cal)	LUNCH 3: 1 bar, beef jerky, peanut butter pretzels, tortilla (hummus + cheese) (830 cal)	Yellow Curry with Chicken and Rice (1,020 cal)	Milk Chocolate Almonds (338 cal)
August 11, 18, 21, 26 TOTAL CAL: 3,080	Grits (690 cal)	LUNCH 4: 1 bar, trail mix 1, gardettos, tortilla (tuna + cheese) (1,050 cal)	Dinner Burrito (1,090 cal)	Candy Bar (250 cal)
August 10, 12, 20, 22 TOTAL CAL: 3,311	Breakfast Burrito (1,026 cal)	LUNCH 5: 1 bar, trail mix 2, peanut butter pretzels, tortilla (PB&J) (1,285 cal)	Loaded Ramen (830 cal)	Milk Chocolate Raisins (380 cal)

RATIONS

We split our food into two rations so that we could carry it all in our backpacks with the packrafting gear. The specific meals were split into ration 1 and 2 based on calories, fresh cheese, and variety. We figured that we would start the trip aiming to hit 2,500 cal/person a day and then eventually work our way up to 3,500 cal/person a day as we were working harder and adjusting to the cold. We brought 4 blocks of fresh cheese and figured that it would primarily get

used during the first ration or get moldy by the second ration so we opted to have meals that would be best with fresh cheese in the first ration. We also still wanted variety so tried our best to split the meals evenly between ration 1 and 2.

RATION 1 (7-18)	RATION 2 (19-28)
Dehydrated breakfast skillet (12 servings)	Dehydrated breakfast skillet (4 servings)
Dehydrated Mac n Cheese (12 servings)	Dehydrated Mac n Cheese (4 servings)
Lunch 1 (12 servings)	Lunch 1 (4 servings)
Dehydrated Breakfast Scramble (12 servings)	Dehydrated Breakfast Scramble (4 servings)
Lunch 3 (12 servings)	Lunch 3 (4 servings)
Yellow Curry with Chicken and Rice (12 servings)	Yellow Curry with Chicken and Rice (4 servings)
Grits (8 servings)	Grits (8 servings)
Lunch 4 (8 servings)	Lunch 4 (8 servings)
Dinner burrito (8 servings)	Dinner burrito (8 servings)
Breakfast burrito (8 servings)	Breakfast burrito (8 servings)
Lunch 5 (8 servings)	Lunch 5 (8 servings)
Loaded Ramen (8 servings)	Loaded Ramen (8 servings)
Protein Pancakes (4 servings)	Protein Pancakes (12 servings)
Lunch 2 (4 servings)	Lunch 3 (12 servings)
Dehydrated pesto and chicken (4 servings)	Dehydrated pesto and chicken (12 servings)
ALL desert (split even)	ALL desert (split even)

RECIPES

After a general idea of a menu was created we did a ton of research on dehydrating meals at home. The best place was YouTube and watching videos of people who have thru-hiked and saw what they made. There were two main options: making the entire meal at home and then throwing it in the dehydrator or dehydrating ingredients individually. We chose to dehydrate all the ingredients separately and then assemble them in the backcountry. This meant that we couldn't just add water and boom the meal was ready - it often meant we needed to boil water to cook pasta, rice, ramen, or powdered eggs. It still took under 15 minutes to cook a hot breakfast or dinner and meant that our meals were better since they were 100% dehydrated mush. Some essentials we brought that enhanced our meals were a spice kit, butter, and cooking oil. We learned with homemade dehydrated meals that they needed as much time as possible to dehydrate. We learned that the best method was to rehydrate dinner after breakfast was made and

to dehydrate breakfast overnight. We had a pot that had a secured lid to it that we used to rehydrate our food but an extra Nalgene water bottle would work too. We found that we had nearly the perfect amount of food for a group of four. Items we could have brought less of: powdered eggs, peanut butter & jelly, trail mix, and tuna/chicken/salmon packets. Everything needed to be sealed in waterproof containers because the bear canisters and Ursacks were not very waterproof.

Breakfast	Lunch + Snacks	Dinner	
Dehydrated Breakfast Skillet (750 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	1 bar, trail mix 1, dried mango, tortilla (PB&J)	Dehydrated Mac n Cheese (680 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	
3 serving powdered eggs (189 cal)	1 bar (200 cal)	1/2 cup uncooked elbow noodles (200 cal)	Trail Mix 2: Almonds (1/8 cup) Peanuts (1/8 cup) Dried Banana Chips (1/8 cup) Peanut butter chips (1 tbsp) Chocolate chips (2 tbsp)
1/2 cup dehydrated potatoes (150 cal)	1/2 cup trail mix 1 (320 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated broccoli (30 cal)	
1/2 cup dehydrated breakfast sausage (240 cal)	8 pieces dried mango (280 cal)	1/2 cup dehydrated ground beef (190 cal)	
1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal) -Peppers -Onion -Spinach	2 tbsp peanut butter (180 cal)	Cheese sauce (1 tbsp cheese powder, 1 tbsp p-milk, 1/2 tsp cornstarch) (150 cal)	
	2 tbsp jelly (100 cal)	1 oz fresh cheddar cheese (110 cal)	
Protein Pancakes (710 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	1 tortilla (140 cal)		
1 cup protein pancake mix		Dinner Burrito (1,090 cal: SINGLE	

		SERVING)	
2 tbsp peanut butter	1 bar, trail mix 2, gardettos, tortilla (cheese and salami)	1/2 pouch Instant Rice (180 cal)	
2 tbsp chocolate chips	1 bar (200 cal)	1/2 cup dehydrated refried beans (140 cal)	
	1 serving trail mix 2 (405 cal)		
Breakfast Scramble (902 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	1 cup gardetto's (300 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)	
1/4 cup dehydrated red beans (105 cal)	100 g salami (250 cal)	1/2 cup dehydrated ground beef (240 cal)	
3 servings powdered eggs (189 cal)	100 g cheddar cheese (400 cal)	2" cube Cheddar cheese (220 cal)	
1/2 cup dehydrated hash browns (158 cal)	1 tortilla (140 cal)	1 Tortilla (140 cal)	
2 tbsp bacon bits (60 cal)			
1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)	1 bar, beef jerky, peanut butter pretzels, tortilla (hummus + cheese) (830 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	Dehydrated Chicken Curry (cal: SINGLE SERVING)	
2" cube Cheddar cheese (220 cal)	1 bar (200 cal)	1/2 Cup Minute rice (170 cal)	
	2 oz jerky (160 cal)	1/2 cup dehydrated chicken (110 cal)	
Grits (690 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	1 cup peanut butter pretzels (260 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)	
1 packet instant grits (100 cal)	1 tbsp hummus powder (70 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated chickpeas (60 cal)	
2" cube Cheddar cheese (220 cal)	100 g cheddar cheese (400 cal)	1 tbsp curry powder (20 cal)	
1/4 cup dehydrated	1 tortilla (140 cal)	1 tbsp powdered milk	

veggies (170 cal)		(40 cal)	
1 tbsp powdered milk (40 cal)			
2 tbsp bacon bits (60 cal)	1 bar, trail mix 1, gardettos, tortilla (tuna + cheese) (1,050 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	Dehydrated Risotto (700 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	
1 tbsp butter (100 cal)	1 bar (200 cal)	1/2 cup uncooked risotto (320 cal)	
	1/2 cup trail mix 1 (320 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)	
Breakfast burrito (1,026 cal: SINGLE SERVING)			
	1 cup gardetto's (300 cal)	1 chicken pouch (80 cal)	
3 servings powdered eggs (189 cal)	1 tuna pouch (90 cal)	1 tbsp parm cheese (30 cal)	
1/4 cup dehydrated black beans (97 cal)	1 tortilla (140 cal)	1 tbsp butter (100 cal)	
1/2 cup dehydrated potatoes (150 cal)		2 tbsp pesto (110 cal)	
2 tbsp bacon bits (60 cal)			
	1 bar, trail mix 2, peanut butter pretzels, tortilla (PB&J)	Loaded Ramen (830 cal: SINGLE SERVING)	
1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)			
2" cube Cheddar cheese (220 cal)	1 bar (200 cal)	1 packet indomie ramen (400 cal)	
1 Tortilla (140 cal)	1 serving trail mix 2 (405 cal)	1 Salmon Packet (70 cal)	
	1 cup peanut butter pretzels (260 cal)	1/4 cup dehydrated veggies (170 cal)	
	2 tbsp peanut butter (180 cal)	2 tbsp peanut butter (180 cal)	
	2 tbsp jelly (100 cal)	1 tbsp soy sauce (10 cal)	

	1 tortilla (140 cal)		
--	----------------------	--	--

Equipment:

This is an itemized list of each piece of gear that we brought to Alaska with us. If we bought, owned, borrowed or rented the item. And in the comments section it's about why we made that choice, what we would do differently, and maybe why we opted to buy that item instead of renting it from outdoor ed.

KITCHEN	Bought/Owned/Rented	Comments
2 Whisperlites	Owned/Borrowed	We owned one of these and borrowed one from a friend. We likely could have just brought one stove but Whisperlites tend to break. It also meant that we could have two independent groups within our group of four in case of separation.
2 Pots + Lids	Owned	Similar reasoning as for the Whisperlites. One pot was used to rehydrate and the other was used to cook/reheat meals. *Having a pot that could fit a meal for 4 people was essential
1 Pan	Bought (could have rented from OE)	Having a pan allowed us to make pancakes, fry up rehydrated meals like breakfast skilletts, and fry our burritos for the best taste. We chose to buy this instead of rent because one group member wanted to keep it after the trip.
1 Spatula	Owned	We had a small mini spatula that we ended up using for every meal because it was big enough to stir all the food and flip pancakes.
6 Lighters	Bought	2 for each stove bag and 2 spares. Many of them got wet during the trip so it was nice to have backups.
1 Whisperlite Repair Kit	Bought (could have rented from OE)	Didn't end up using it but is essential to have for backup. Opted to buy instead of rent from OE because it was significantly smaller.
4 20 oz MSR Fuel Bottles	Owned/Bought	We followed the NOLS guidelines for fuel and brought 4 medium sized bottles for ration 1 & 2. We brought more fuel than necessary

		but were glad to have it.
1 11 oz MSR Fuel Bottle	Owned	We brought one small fuel bottle as emergency back up.
4 Knives	Owned	Every member owned a knife and decided to bring it. It was not necessary for every member to bring one but it was nice to have a knife in many different places (stove bag, repair kit, backpack, etc)
1 Leatherman	Owned	This was a crucial piece of gear that we brought. We used it to open bear canisters, fix zippers, and repair gear.
NAVIGATION		
2 Compasses	Owned	Never used either because we relied primarily on GAIA GPS on the phone. In the future we would just bring one.
1 Set of laminated maps (with emergency plans and emergency contacts)	Bought	We never used the physical map set since we primarily used GAIA GPS on the phone. In the future we would still bring a set of physical maps in case the phone fails.
2 Garmin Inreach mini	Owned	We used one everyday to send a pin to family members with our location when we got to camp. And borrowed one from a friend to have as a backup.
Downloaded Maps on cell phone (Gaia Pro account)	Owned	We used this everyday. It allowed us to pre-save pins, search coordinates, and create routes to see how many miles each day would be. We would recommend

		to all groups to invest in GAIA GPS Pro and pre-download all the map areas of where you'll be.
1 backup battery pack/person	Owned	These were used to charge phones, Garmin's, kindles, cameras, and Steripens. We would recommend bringing one per person.
1 Solar charger	Owned	We had a solar charger as backup to charge any electronics. We didn't end up needing this.
1 flare	Owned	This was never used but was for emergencies. We would still bring one in the future.
OTHER:		
1 large bottle of Dr. Bronners soap	Bought	This was used everyday for washing hands.
1 trowel	Bought (could have rented from OE)	We used this everyday to dig cat holes. We opted to buy this since it was cheap and we had a small folding one that was durable.
2 two person tents + stakes	Owned	It was easier to have two person tents than a 4 person. We brought 8 stakes per tent and used them all. We would consider bringing more stakes in case a few break which is likely.
8 Ur Sacks	Rented from OE	We used these everyday to store our food. Before leaving it was essential that we measured how much food fit into each.
4 UDAP No-Fed-Bear Canisters	Bought (could have rented from OE)	After doing research, we decided to bring bear canisters because they were highly recommended for travel in Alaska with grizzlies near. We opted to buy these instead of rent them because

		research shows that bears can open blue bear cans that twist on and off, which is what outdoor ed provides.
1 Bear Horn	Bought	We used this everyday while at camp and walking through brush to make noise to alert bears we were coming.
5 bear sprays	Bought in Fairbanks (cannot fly with bear spray)	We never needed to use one but it is essential to have at least 1/person and an extra for emergencies.
4 AquaMira bottles	Bought	We used these everyday to treat our water - 1/person was enough for a 3-week trip.
10 yards 5mm cord	Owned	We ended up using this for gear repair quite often and would recommend bringing some.
Patch kit (for personal gear and tent)	Bought	We used this to fix sleeping pads and inflatable pillows. We would bring this again in case a tent, jacket, or other piece of gear ripped.
First Aid Kit (see below)	Owned/Bought (could have rented from OE)	Between two group members we had a full expedition first-aid kit. We opted to bring our own so we could pack it how we wanted and could add extra items that were specific to our group.
1 Dromedary	Owned	We ended up using this a lot during our backpacking section. It was nice to have it but was not necessary.
Playing Cards	Owned	We used these whenever we had downtime but in the future we would bring something to waterproof them.
Duct tape	Bought	We had one roll in our repair kit

		and we used it occasionally. An entire roll wasn't necessary.
Deet	Bought	We brought 3 mini bottles and used it whenever the bugs were bad. But they weren't too bad during our trip.
1 Black Diamond MegaMid	Bought	This was a large tarp that we brought in addition to our tents. This was the best piece of gear that we brought, we used it to cook in when it was raining, hang out as a group when it was raining, and store some of our gear. We would recommend that every group bring this if they're going to a rainy place. We bought ours on Facebook Marketplace.
PACKRAFT SPECIFIC GEAR: All group members will have 1 of each item on this list		
1 Packraft Kit (Cushion, 4 piece paddle, skirt, pvc whitewater deck rim, bow bag, inflation bag, inflation pump and repair kit)	Rented from OE	We used this everyday and it was free to rent from OE since we received grant funding. We recommend watching the Alpaca Packraft repair videos prior to leaving and in-depthly testing each packraft kit. We had trouble with the zippers and getting small holes in the packrafts.
4 throw ropes	Owned/Could have rented from OE	We ended up buying these because we needed them for our Swiftwater course and were able to buy compact ones instead of the large ones OE provides.

1 pin-kit/rescue kit (locking carabiners, 2 pulleys, 2 prusik loops, 1 piece of webbing for anchor)	Owned/Bought	We never needed to use this but it was essential to have for river safety.
PERSONAL GEAR:		
1 Backpack	Owned	Used everyday to transport gear. For a long trip that includes extra packraft gear we recommend a backpack that has at least 80 L capacity.
1 Drysuit	Rented from third party	We were so glad to have these, it allowed us to stay dry on and off the river. We recommend renting or buying these for anyone doing a river trip in Alaska.
1 pair neoprene booties	Rented from third party	We wore these every day on the river.
1 pair neoprene gloves	Bought	We recommend bringing these to prevent blisters while paddling and to keep warm.
1 whitewater helmet	Rented from OE	Used everyday and free to rent from OE.
1 PFD Type III +whistle	Bought (could have rented from OE)	We opted to buy our own because they were significantly more comfortable than the OE ones.
1 River Knife	Owned/Bought	These weren't used often but necessary since we brought throw ropes.
1 Sleeping bag (5-20° F)	Owned	Used everyday.
1 Sleeping pad	Owned	Used everyday.
Trekking poles (optional)	Owned	One group member brought them for the hiking section and found them to be very useful.
Rain gear (jacket and pants)	Owned	Used everyday and we suggest treating them before leaving.

1 Puffy Jacket	Owned	It got to be very cold at night so we recommend bringing a puffy jacket.
1 Fleece	Owned	We each wore a fleece everyday under our drysuits on the river and in camp.
Hiking boots	Owned	We each opted to bring trail runners since our backpacking section was so short. This was a good choice for each of us.
Camp shoes	Owned	We brought crocs and chacos. We recommend bringing something easy to slide on and that is somewhat waterproof to keep feet dry.
3-5 Underwears	Owned	3 of our members are female and brought more pairs than this and were happy with that.
4 Pairs of socks	Owned	Having at least a few pairs of socks was nice, especially to have dry socks at night.
2 hiking shirt	Owned	We each had a pair of long underwear and a thermal top. We found that t-shirts weren't really necessary.
1 buff	Owned	We ended up using these to protect our ears on the river.
Hiking pants	Owned	We each wore these under our drysuits or while hiking.
Long underwear	Owned	These were used everyday for sleeping in dry and warm pants.
Sunglasses	Owned	Although it was mainly cloudy it was bright and we found these to be useful.
1 Sun hat	Owned	We wore these everyday on the river and while backpacking.

1 bowl	Owned	We suggest bringing one with a lid on it.
1 spoon	Owned	We used this everyday.
Water bottles (2L carrying capacity)	Owned	We used this everyday.
Personal toiletries	Owned	We used these everyday.
Watch	Owned	We used this to keep track of the time and for alarms.
Bug Net	Bought	We used these whenever it got really buggy which was just a few times. But worth bringing since they're so small and light.

Travel logistics:

Transportation	Date	Comments
(Seattle/Denver) to Fairbanks Flight	August 5 2024	We booked via Alaska Airlines & United Airlines. There were many options to and from Fairbanks and this was the last piece of transportation that we booked.
Fairbanks to Coldfoot Shuttle	August 6 2024	We booked via the Dalton Highway Express from Fairbanks. This shuttle only runs Northbound on Tuesday and Saturday. It was a long shuttle ride on a very bumpy road and left at 6 am from Fairbanks.
Coldfoot to Gaedeke Lake Bush Flight	August 7 2024	We booked via Coyote Air out of Coldfoot. We were in communication with them prior and they have tons of information and advice. The bush flights go out when there is availability and if the weather is good, so book

		this immediately.
Allakaket to Fairbanks Flight	August 27 2024	We booked via Wright Air, they fly in and out of Allakaket twice a day.
Fairbanks to (Seattle/Denver) Flight	August 28 2024	We booked via Alaska Airlines & United Airlines. There were many options to and from Fairbanks and this was the last piece of transportation that we booked.

Permitting/Government Relations:

Permits were not required when traveling in Gates of the Arctic National Park. We did check in at the ranger station in Coldfoot prior to entering the backcountry. We had to watch a 30-minute orientation video and provide information about our route and group.

Leadership and group dynamics:

Our team of backcountry operators performed flawlessly as a unit and had few issues with group dynamics or leadership. All meaningful decisions were “vetted” by the group before coming to a consensus which allowed for utmost clarity and comfort when approaching obstacles in Gates of the Arctic. This leaderless attempt at backcountry navigation proved effective to the auditing of all group members' concerns and opinions regarding remote travel and as such we had no issues.

Safety and risk management concerns:

The biggest consistent obstacles that we encountered were rapidly changing river conditions on both our paddling and hiking segments. During the initial few days of paddling we were met with nearly constant class I/I+ riffles with lining sections. This “top section” as I will hereby refer to it was packed with sweepers and gravel bars and made getting out of boats difficult. The swiftwater compounded with our need to line boats through shallow sections made navigating downstream difficult but by paddling without skirts and thigh braces allowed for rapid boat evacuation in the case of some unwanted obstacle. The top section was handled well and we frequently checked in on one another’s comfort level to determine whether or not we should pack up boats and hike to where the current relaxed. We never elected to roll our boats and merely operated on the lining/paddling combination to make it downstream.

The hiking leg of our trip was where we encountered the greatest objective risk. On our ascent to the cirque below Arrigetch Peaks we crossed two creeks with no issue. Upon camping at our spur’s terminus, we were struck by a 24 hr. Rainstorm that threw a wrench in our plans to make

the two crossings again. In order to facilitate the safest crossings we did a number of things. At the first crossing we elected to scout upstream and downstream to find a safer and less tumultuous crossing. This proved difficult as the creek (Arrigetch) had swollen by at least 200%. We eventually encountered a deep but calm pool that seemed feasible and after depth checking, made the call to give it an attempt. Jack had no issues crossing (tall fella') and the women used a tripod - line creek crossing method to ensure stability for one another. The crossing was uneventful, if not wet and cold. The second crossing occurred at the confluence between Arrigetch creek and a side drainage. We could not see a feasible option so we elected to hike up the basin of this side drainage to a flatter spot where the creek channelized would have more flatwater for crossing. This was a 3-4 mile detour that was **absolutely necessary** to safely cross the second time. This creek crossing was sketchy only because we were unsure of whether or not we would be able to cross it at all. We briefly considered waiting until the creek volume decreased before crossing (and camping another night in the basin) but found a spot that was crossable shortly thereafter. No other substantial risks or risk management decisions were made beyond this while we were hiking.

The "lower section" of our trip below the hiking segment was marked by swollen flows (again, likely upwards of 200%) and slow water. This section was super mellow and our greatest risk stemmed from our knowledge, or lack thereof, of the drainage upstream. During this segment we were careful to camp above the highwater driftwood line every night to ensure that our camp and equipment didn't float away with rising river flows. Visual monitoring of river conditions indicated nearly daily fluctuations from Arrigetch Creek to Allakaket and so this strategy was implemented until the end of the trip.

Specific route descriptions & concerns:

No significant route concerns other than changing environmental conditions listed above. WE did have to detour, as previously mentioned, on our descent from the Arrigetch Creek to facilitate another stream crossing but otherwise we encountered no issues making our daily mileage and establishing camps at marked CalTopo spots (or adjacent).

A detailed daily course log:

August 5:

Start: Seattle, WA & Denver, CO

End: Fairbanks, AK

Lia, Jack, and Sam flew early at 7 am from Seattle, WA to Fairbanks, AK. We made our way to Sven's Basecamp Hostel and organized our gear. We walked to Safeway and bought our last



groceries and then hung out at the hostel as we waited for Maren's arrival. Maren landed in Fairbanks around 11 pm and then met us at Sven's Basecamp Hostel and we did a final distribution of gear. We sorted what we were going to bring and what we were going to leave behind. We left one duffel at Sven's to store while we were out in the field. We went to bed late and set alarms for 5 am to depart on the Dalton Highway.

Photo caption: Jack and Lia preparing to head out to the airport with 5 bags!

August 6:

Start: Fairbanks, AK

End: Coldfoot, AK

All four of us piled into a taxi at 5:30 am and drove to the office of the Dalton Highway Express. We loaded up the van and boarded the shuttle along with 4 other passengers and a driver, Avery.

Every 90 minutes to 2 hours we took a bathroom/food/stretch break. We stopped at different camps that had little stores where we could buy snacks and food or use the bathroom. Eventually around 3 pm we arrived in Coldfoot and unloaded the van with all our gear. We set it aside and asked where we could set up camp, we set up camp a couple hundred yards away by a pond. Then we walked over to the airport and checked in with Coyote Air. We went over drop off, resupply, and weight allotment information. After we heard all of the information and asked questions we returned to our camp, made some dinner and headed to bed.



Photo caption: Maren, Lia, and Sam in the back of the van of the Dalton Highway Express.

August 7:

Start: Coldfoot, AK

End: Gadeke Lakes (67.89727, -155.08031)

We woke up at around 6:45 am and walked to the airport with our heavy packs. Fortunately, it was only a 15 minute walk. We got our packs weighed up and sat in the office waiting for when our bush plane would take off. Danielle, one of our pilots, told us that we might not be able to



make it out and would have to wait for the weather to clear. Due to weight limits we needed to take two flights. Jack and Lia loaded up at around 10 am and Danielle thought there might be a window. They took off and returned about 45-minutes later since there was no clear window. We sat around for another 90 minutes and played board games. At around 1 pm they took off again and made it all the way to Gadeke Lakes. Danielle seemed unsure that the other flight would take off but they made it in just an hour later with another pilot, Dirk.

Photo caption: Jack and Lia getting prepped for their flight to Gadeke Lakes.

August 8:

Start: Gadeke Lakes (67.89727, -155.08031)

End: Gravel Bar (67.83308, -155.11179)



Photo caption: Our campsite at Gadeke Lakes

There was another group at Gadeke Lakes and they had heard information that the river was pretty shallow at the top and that it was best to hike along the base of nearby foothills. They had already done a few trips with their gear and we had scouted that way the day before and it was extremely tough terrain. We decided that we would inflate the boats but keep our bags packed and paddle down Gadeke Lake into the river as

far as we could. Towards the end of the lake it began to get very shallow and rocky. We got out of our boats and stashed them near some bushes. We walked down the river by foot with our backpacks for about 2 miles and it looked like it began to get deeper. We stopped for a lunch break, warmed up, and stashed our backpacks. We headed back up the river and grabbed our boats. We felt comfortable lining them attached to leashes until we returned to our backpacks. Once we were back at our backpacks we put them on top of our inflated boats and lined them

another mile or two down the river where there was a confluence with another creek. There was a gravel bar at the confluence and we pulled over to stop for the day. We decided that tomorrow we could start to paddle and might have to hop out and line them at points.

August 9:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.83308, -155.11179)

End: Gravel Bar (67.74346, -155.01475)

We woke up to cold rain and decided to make some warm grits with cheese. It was our first time packing the rafts with our gear inside. There was some trouble with Sam's packraft zipper and we called over our neighbors for some help after working on it for about 45 minutes with no luck. After another 45 minutes of trying we were able to successfully zip her boat unloaded and



were on the river 15 minutes later. We were able to paddle a mile or two until the river became shallow again. We had to line our boats until the water was consistently deep enough to paddle again. We stopped for many water and snack breaks and we slowly made our way down the river getting used to the boats and what it felt like to have weight in them.

Photo caption: The view from one of our breaks along the river.

August 10:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.74346, -155.01475)

End: Gravel Bar (67.65782, -154.44802)



Photo caption: Jack taking in the view during one of our many breaks this day.

This was the first day we had consistent swiftwater and deep enough water that we could paddle the entire day. The river was moving fast and we were moving about 5 miles an hour. The water was crystal clear and the weather was clear nearly the entire day. Since we were moving so fast and only had about 15 miles to make we could

take long breaks and enjoy the views. We easily made our miles and were at camp by 4 pm. We found a nice campsite on a gravel bar and were able to hangout, dry off, and get warm.

August 11:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.65782, -154.44802)

End: Arrigetch Bar (67.49949, -153.89317)

Since our resupply was now being dropped at Circle Lake instead of Arrigetch Bar and the river was moving faster than anticipated we decided to go ahead of our schedule and push all the way towards Arrigetch Bar where the Alatna River meets with Arrigetch Creek. The beginning of the day was cold but we were making miles fast. The second half of the day was spent trying to find Arrigetch Creek so that we knew where we needed to start our backpacking section. But it



wasn't clear where the creek met with the river. We followed the river closely to the right and stopped anytime we thought there might be a creek nearby and checked the map. Eventually we realized that the creek was a little further back and there wasn't a clear point where it met with the Alatna. The creek side was extremely buggy and we decided to camp on a gravel bar across the river.

Photo caption: 11 pm and the sun begins to "set" from our campsite.

August 12:

Start: Arrigetch Bar (67.49949, -153.89317)

End: Circle Lake (67.48655, -153.84803)

After deliberating a group we decided that didn't have enough food to safely support ourselves on the backpacking section and needed to go to our resupply before backpacking. We needed to paddle near Circle Lake to receive our resupply which was only about 1.5 miles away. So we slept in this morning and had a slow morning making pancakes. At around noon we paddled towards Circle Lake. We checked the map often looking for where we should pull off the river. We found a flat sandy beach that was just big enough to pull our boats over and look for a social trail. We hopped on what we thought was a good social trail to Circle Lake but it quickly ended and we were in deep brush surrounded by deep swamp. It was going to be nearly impossible to

walk around the swamp in the deep brush so we decided to inflate our packrafts and paddle across the lake to receive our resupply. We came back across to make a plan on how to embark on our backpacking section and camped by the river.

Photo caption: The view from Circle Lake, paddling to get our resupply.



August 13:

Start: Circle Lake (67.48655, -153.84803)

End: Near Arrigetch Creek (67.47156, -154.00593)

Our first day of backpacking started by paddling back across Circle Lake and to begin hiking from the far side since the brush was so thick. We found a great social trail on the other side of Circle Lake and followed it for about a mile until it ended. Then we

had dense bushwacking for about 2 miles which took nearly 4 hours. We stopped many times to take snack and water breaks throughout the tough walk. Eventually we found Arrigetch Creek and a clear trail right to the left of the creek. We walked on the trail until about 5 pm and were a quarter of the way to the base of the Arrigetch Peaks and we felt that we could complete the rest the next day. We were pretty cold and tired after a long day on our feet and found a camptime to set up camp. We made ramen and went to bed



around 7:45 pm to get a good rest before a big day the next day.

Photo caption: The group figuring out how to best navigate the brush off trail.

August 14:

Start: Near Arrigetch Creek (67.47156, -154.00593)

End: Base of Arrigetch Peaks (67.41492, -154.17814)

The second day of backpacking was beautiful and challenging. It was cold and beginning to rain consistently. We had about 2,000 feet of elevation to gain over the course of 6 miles. We had 3 drainage crossings that were shallow and easy to rock hop on. About 3 miles in we could start to see the base and the direction that we would be going in. It was nice to have a view in sight that

we had to walk to, a good visual goal. By 11 am we were more than halfway to the top. We stopped for a very brief lunch break because it was getting chilly and we still needed to cross the creek. We kept moving along the creek and eventually found a calm crossing where we could rock hop. We finally had reached the base of the Arrigetch peaks and set up camp. We spent the afternoon looking at what we could see of the peaks and playing cards in the mid. Quickly after we set up camp it began to rain even more consistently and we hunkered down in our tents. We

had another early night and decided to wake up early since there was more rain coming.



Photo caption: The view from our lunch break nearing the base of the Arrigetch Peaks.

August 15:

Start: Base of Arrigetch Peaks (67.41492, -154.17814)

End: Near Arrigetch Creek (67.46965, -154.00942)



Photo caption: The view from our campsite the morning we headed back to the Alatna.

After a night of long rain we woke up and the creek had nearly tripled in size. We decided to quickly pack up our soaking wet gear, eat a cold breakfast, and then head down as quickly and safely as possible. We were challenged first by the creek crossing since the water had risen so much. We couldn't cross in the same area and had to continue further downstream until the water was moving

slower. We safely and calmly crossed the creek but were freezing once we were out due to the cold rain. We had to keep moving in order to keep our feet and bodies warm. Eventually we were back on trail walking downhill towards the river. But when we got to the first drainage crossing we decided that we couldn't cross there. We walked up that drainage until we found a place to cross and it added an extra 3-4 miles onto our day. But we safely crossed and had to start moving faster to get far enough down the trail. We kept going another 2 hours and were near the same spot we had camped earlier. But we couldn't cross the creek to get to the same place so we had to improvise a campsite. The rain had cleared and we were able to dry out some of our clothes. None of us were looking forward to the next day when we had more bushwacking ahead of us.

August 16:

Start: Near Arrigetch Creek (67.46965, -154.00942)

End: Circle Lake (67.48626, -153.88514)

We set out early to get back to Circle Lake and knew we had a long day ahead of us. We spent 3 miles on the trail heading downhill and eventually hopped off trail to begin bushwacking. After about 2 hours we started to bushwack but were moving much faster than the first time we had done it. We were moving 1 mile an hour and made it to camp by 3 pm. We had a nice afternoon at a beautiful campsite near Circle Lake. We hung out and read in the afternoon, had an early curry dinner, and went to bed early. Everyone was feeling pretty energized about getting back to the river.

August 17:

Start: Circle Lake (67.48626, -153.88514)

End: Gravel Bar past Takahula Lake (67.30992, -153.58785)



Photo caption: Jack and Lia on the water after a tough backpacking section. A moment when the rain was not sprinkling on us.

We woke up early and paddled back across Circle Lake to retrieve our resupply. We had to repair some boats and cover some small holes that we had been putting off. As we waited for the Aquaseal to dry we sat under the mid organizing our resupply and strategizing how to pack our boats. There were a lot of mosquitoes flying around us as we organized and the rain

began to come down. Our plan was to make it 15 miles to Takahula Lake where most groups get picked up. The current was moving fast due to the amount of rain that had come in the 24 hours prior. Once the patches were secured and dry we quickly packed our boats and hopped on the river around 1:30 pm. Since the current was moving so fast we were able to make miles quickly reaching Takahula Lake by 5 pm. But there was a large group camped on the gravel bar and we decided to keep going. But since the water had risen so much there weren't any gravel bars left. We pulled over to make a hot dinner and then decided to keep paddling until we found a campsite that was high above the water.

August 18:

Start: Layover day (67.30992, -153.58785)

End: Layover day



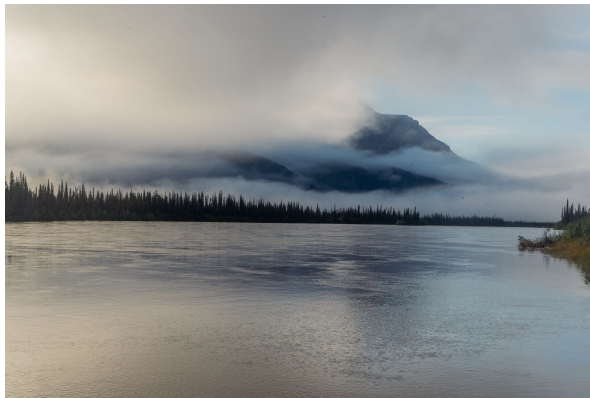
After getting into camp late the night before we decided to have a layover day. We slept in and relaxed during the morning and eventually made our way to the mid and made pancakes. Besides the small beach we were on, the surrounding area was extremely dense and so we couldn't explore much. We spent most of the day sleeping, reading, eating, and planning for the last third of our trip. We had to strategize where we would potentially plan to camp now that we had learned that the river was much higher than anticipated, leaving us with little to no gravel bars.

Photo caption: Our packrafts at the side of the river.

August 19:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.11589, -153.42014)

End: Gravel Bar (67.30992, -153.58985)



We decided that we wanted to get to Allakaket a day earlier than planned since the campsites we were seeing weren't optimal, the river was moving extremely fast, and it was getting really cold and wet. We hoped when we got to Allakaket that we would be able to actually camp on flat ground with access to better water. We mapped it out and if we were able to go 20 miles a day that we could make it to Allakaket a day earlier. We set out from our layover site and it

was freezing and raining consistently. The first 30 minutes we just sat on the river warming up our hands. About 2.5 hours later we pulled over for a lunch break and were just so miserable since it was so cold. But we realized we had maybe an hour left of paddling until we hit 20 miles. Finding out we were much farther down river than we expected boosted morale very quickly. We were able to find a good enough campsite on an island in the river. We set up camp and spent a lot of time getting warm and dry.

August 20:

Start: Layover day, Gravel Bar (67.30992, -153.58985)

End: Layover day, Gravel Bar (67.30992, -153.58985)



Since we realized that we were making nearly 20 miles in just a few hours we decided to take another layover day to relax. It was cold and rainy and our morale was down. So we decided to stay cozy in our tents and spend the day reading. This was the view from the river near our campsite from the day before.

August 21:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.11589, -153.42014)

End: Gravel Bar (67.00730, -153.36822)



We got on the water ready to conquer the 20 miles ahead of us to another island. It was raining the entire time and we were able to enjoy the views and the paddling more. We played a few trail games while paddling through the flat water. We stopped for lunch and everyone was still a bit cold even though it wasn't actively raining. We quickly got back on our boats and the rain started. About an hour after lunch we found the island and made camp.

August 22:

Start: Gravel Bar (67.00730, -153.36822)

End: Gravel Bar (66.83946, -153.60207)



We woke up to cold temperatures and a lot of rain. The morale was already feeling low and the group was getting ready to end the trip. We put on our wet clothes, made a hot breakfast, and packed up quickly. We all began counting our paddle strokes to pass the time. We skipped lunch since we were just two miles short of where we anticipated to camp.

Photo caption: The typical view of the river towards the end of our trip while flat water paddling.

August 23:

Start: Gravel Bar (66.83946, -153.60207)

End: Gravel Bar (66.71769, -153.28311)



After a lot of cold weather with constant rain had the group morale down. But eventually as we started paddling the sun came out and we all felt much better. The sun warmed up our hands, made the 20 miles go by much faster, and actually allowed us to take breaks. We were feeling confident since we were moving so fast and found another huge island with flat gravel areas. It appeared that the river was going down and there were better areas to camp.

August 24:

Start: Gravel Bar (66.71769, -153.28311)

End: Gravel Bar near Black Jack's Cabin (66.65663, -152.82494)

We knew there was a cabin down the river and thought there might be a good campsite if there was no one camped there. We got spots of sun throughout the entire day which quickly boosted



morale. The current was moving fast and we were able to reach a good camp by 3 pm. There was no cabin that we could see from the river so we decided to camp on an island nearby.

August 25:

Start: Gravel Bar near Black Jack's Cabin (66.65663, -152.82494)

End: Allakaket, AK



We had less than 20 miles left until we reached Allakaket. We woke up to a sunny morning and were finally able to enjoy paddling. About 12 miles in we ran into a motor boat with a local man from Alatna who was heading to his cabin. Once we arrived in Alatna we walked around looking for the airport figuring out where we could camp. We left our items by the river as we explored. We decided that the airport was the best place to camp so we returned to the river to get our gear. We were able to get a ride from locals to the airport which saved

us a huge hassle. Then we enjoyed the sun and took advantage of it while drying out our clothes.

August 26:

Start: Layover day, Allakaket, AK

End: Layover day, Allakaket, AK



We had an entire full day in Allakaket. We spent our time exploring the town and meeting some locals. We went to visit the tribal office and learned more about Allakaket and their history. To fill time we traded books, continued to dry out our gear, and cook long meals.

Photo caption: Lia and Jack making pancakes at the airport

August 27:

Start: Allakaket, AK

End: Fairbanks, AK



We were hanging out in Allakaket near the airport for the second day waiting for our flight that was supposed to take off at 3:30 pm. We watched a few flights come and go while we sat nearby making pancakes. We watched the locals come grab cargo or passengers and take them home or into town. A pilot approached us and said that he had an empty load and could take us to Fairbanks early. We quickly packed up and rode an hour to Fairbanks from Allakaket.

Photo caption: The group sitting on our Wright Air flight from Allakaket to Fairbanks.

August 28:

Start: Fairbanks, AK

End: Seattle, WA & Denver, CO



Jack, Lia, and Sam had an early flight out to Seattle. We woke up and said goodbye to Maren and hopped into a taxi and headed to the Fairbanks Airport. It was extremely calm at the airport and we hung out for a while waiting to board our flight. Maren flew out later in the day and we all returned home safe with many stories to share.

Photo Caption: Lia in front of Sven's Basecamp Hostel calling a taxi.

Feedback for RKMFC Committee

- Give post-trip report information beforehand - it will allow for better documentation during the planning and preparing.
- If groups are packrafting, have them watch the Allapacka repair videos. We did not feel super prepared to deal with taking care of the zippers and some patches.
- Have a quicker turnaround time to distribute money after applications are due. Planning trips to Alaska is extremely hard because bush flights fill up quickly.