BACKCOUNTRY REPORT
September 16-23, 1984

Rangers: Jody Carter, Park Technician
Michael Jones, NPS VIP

Purpose: To close Baked Mountain Cabin and to evaluate impact on high use areas.

Note: Original patrol was scheduled for September 16-20, 1984, at which time both positions were scheduled to be terminated, so we added a few days on the end to allow time to attempt to climb the Katmai caldera.

Route: Ukak trail, across the Ukak River above the falls, along the moraine, along the base of Mt. Juhle and Mt. Griggs, then around the east side of Broken Mountain to Novarupta and the south side of Baked Mountain to the cabins. Return was via six-mile camp and the Lottie back to the Three Forks Cabin.

Remarks:

Water: Clear water is a problem along Mt. Juhle. Two drainages were found to have water but both were very silty.
- The drainage between Mt. Juhle and Mt. Griggs had fairly clear water.
- Most of the Knife Creek Drainage contains silt laden water through thorough exploration resulted in the discovery of a few small clear water streams that drained from under the rocks.
- Novarupta crater contained no water though a small explosion crater outside and southwest of Novarupta contained clear water and appeared never to have been dry this summer.
- The area around Baked Mountain is devoid of water at this time of year. We used emergency water.

Weather: We encountered almost every kind of weather possible during this trip. The first day out was sunny and warm, as was the beginning of the second. By evening of the 17th, we were enveloped in misty clouds and encountered penetrating drizzle. The 18th rained off and on with short periods of sun in the afternoon. The 19th dawned sunny and clear with a few clouds on the western horizon. But by noon it was snowing and by late afternoon after a short period of clearing it again snowed enough to cover everything that we could see. The 20th was sunny and warm. However, high clouds in the afternoon moving in from the southeast warned us of an impending change of weather. All through the 21st high clouds continued to form as a storm brewed over the gulf, seen through the pass. By late evening a strong southeasterly storm hit and blew all night and all day of the 22nd. We encountered high winds, driving rain and generally very low visibility.

During this trip squalls from the west seemed to move in and pass through very quickly while the storm from the southeast was a long time in forming and a long time in blowing itself out.

The Route: There is very little protection from southeast winds along the base of Mt. Juhle and Mt. Griggs. However this route offers a spectacular different perspective of the valley from the route taken by most people. Crossing of the drainages was no problem.

If time is taken, places can be found to actually step or jump across the two major drainages of the Knife Creek Drainage. We found such spots near their junction.

The hike to Novarupta around the northeastern side of Broken Mountain is a long trudge. There are numerous gullies along that side of Broken Mountain, several of them quite deep and though not really difficult to cross, definitely frustrating. This area also seems like it would be very "mucky" in the spring or after a heavy rain.

The best way to Baked Mountain Cabins from Novarupta seems to be along the
southern base of Baked Mountain. Any other way requires a great deal of traversing in loose pumice and/or shale.

Wildlife: At the drainage just west of the drainage between Mt. Juhle and Mt. Griggs, we saw lots of old bear tracks, plus wolf and fox tracks. This appears to be a popular area for wildlife in the valley.

We camped back away from the drainage, tucked up against the base of the mountain. It would not be advisable to camp down in the drainage despite some good flat sandy spots due to poor visibility.

At about dusk we saw a big dark lone bear heading across the valley from approximately the middle of the moraine directly towards us. He was walking at a steady, apparently determined pace and direction. At approximately 100 yards from our camp he came across our tracks, stopped, sniffed and followed them for a short distance. We had retreated up the hill somewhat and were debating when to let the bear know of our presence. He seemed to have lost interest in our tracks because he turned and crossed the drainage and continued on down the valley along the base of Mr. Griggs. The next day we followed his tracks to and across the drainage that flows between Juhle and Griggs. Then immediately the tracks headed towards Katmai Pass. He seemed to know where he was going. He must have had a hankering for clams!

Other Wildlife:

- Moraine at the west end of the valley
- fresh fox tracks
- fresh bear tracks

First camp, Base of Mt. Juhle

- snipe
- bear
- bear tracks
- fox tracks
- wolf tracks

Base of the Knife Creek Glaciers

- snow buntings in flocks of from 10-40
- peregrine falcon
- rough-legged hawk
- ravens
- lapland longspurs

- Novarupta
- snowshoe hare

- Buttress Range
- Rock ptarmigan, approximately 50

Closing of the Baked Mountain Cabins:

- took inventory of what was at the cabin which might be considered unnecessary
- did some erosion control around the outhouse
- put lime in the outhouse
- dug away some of the sand from the front of the cabins
- swept, straightened and picked up the garbage in the cabins
- emptied the water from the plastic containers to ensure them against breaking
- water was left in several of the pans in the small bunkhouse
- retrieved the Baked Mountain Log
- securely boarded up the bunk cabins
- retrieved the hand crank and several oil filters for the diesel generator that was removed from the shed earlier this summer
Suggestions:

The Baked Mountain Cabins offer excellent emergency protection to backpackers against inclement weather. However, the cabins are old and will soon reach a state of disrepair where they will be a hazard to backpackers rather than a protection unless some effort is taken to maintain them. The roofs definitely need to be tar-papered, particularly the roof of the larger bunk cabin. To prolong the usefulness of the cabins, tar-papering the sides should also be considered.

One of the management plans has been to remove the excess "junk" from around the cabins. For this purpose, inventory was taken of the items at the cabins that might be considered unnecessary (see the included list). The removal of all of these items, including the storage sheds which now tempt backpackers to leave trash, would greatly enhance the aesthetic setting of the cabins. But the cabins are exposed to great winds and it would be very prudent to consider how this "junk" acts now as a windbreak. The storage shed protects the cabins from ferocious west winds and several of the 55-gallon drums protect the back and sides from strong east and southeast winds. For this reason, possibly it might be worthwhile to leave the shed and to leave several of the drums up close to the back and sides of the cabins for protection.

Another suggestion would be to make a simple system to channel rainwater from the roof into a 55-gallon drum for the purpose of collecting water. Water is very scarce in this area during the summer months and this would help to alleviate the problem.

This summer we frequently discouraged backpackers from going to the cabins except for protection from bad weather. This helped to reduce the heavy impact on this isolated area of the valley. It seems wise to continue this practice.

Backpackers were also discouraged from camping inside the Novarupta crater because of the fragile growth of new vegetation. When we were at Novarupta impact from a summer of use seemed to be minimal, and revegetation is progressing well. It seems wise to continue to discourage camping inside the crater itself.

An old abandoned camp, probably from the Geophysical Institute, was found in the area of the confluence of the Knife Creek Drainage (see map). The remains of the camp consisted of several AV-Can boxes strewn about, many old and rusty tin cans of survival rations, old batteries still in casings, and several bottles, some of which still contained medications or chemicals. The abandoned camp is rather unsightly and is a disappointment to come across. Perhaps, bit by bit, during various patrols it could be removed.

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