BACKCOUNTRY REPORT

American Creek

Rangers Paul Chalfant & Paul Ewers

Dates: depart Brooks Camp 8/3/84; return Brooks 8/7/84

Route of Travel: used the green jet boat (NPS 9) for this patrol from Brooks-Iliuk Arm-Savonoski River-Grosvenor River-Grosvenor Lake-Lake Coville-American River

Camp Sites: 2 - NPS cabin on Lake Coville and the knoll one mile up river on American Creek. One of the three cabins on Lake Coville (SE end of the lake) is in good condition with 2 bunks (no mattresses) and a oil heater which was functional in the fall of 1982. There is no fuel in the barrel. The knoll of American Creek is a good location - near aircraft drop-off area for guides and away from highest bear concentrations.

Visitor Contacts:

Grosvenor Camp - all 4 employees and 6 guests (2 times) on American Creek and at Grosvenor Camp

Enchanted Lake Lodge - 1 guide/pilot (Dale) and 3 guests on American Creek

Cussacks King Salmon Lodge - 2 pilots, 3 guides, and 8 guests on American Creek

Ron Hayes Rainbow Lodge - 1 pilot (R. Hayes), 1 guide, and 2 guests on American Creek

KatmaiAir flew in w/Kulik guests - no contact

USGS Researchers - 2 on Grosvenor Lake

Visitor Information Dispensed:

2 USGS personnel informed about food storeage policies and dog on leash policy in the Katmai backcountry.

Visitors on American Creek were informed of Park Service policies concerning fishing, camps, and bear/human interactions. General Park information was provided upon request.

Water Sources:

Plenty of water available but strongly recommend boiling or treatment of all drinking water.
Backcountry Report - American Creek continued

Special Hazards, etc.:

American Creek is bear country and we took all appropriate safety precautions while camping and hiking.

Travel across lakes in NPS 9 could be hazardous in high winds.

American Creek presents navigational problems (see comments section at the end).

Work Tasks Completed:

Investigated and photographed dead bear on American Creek. Obtained all and any information from fishing guides and pilots concerning the bear.

Contacted guides and clients using American Creek. Recorded and determined ownership of boats cached along American Creek (see separate attachment).

Determined workability of NPS 9 on Savonoski River, American Creek and lakes along the way, especially after the boat had not been used for four to five years.

Documented cabin sites at Monsen's Cove, American Creek, and Research Bay.

Contacted USGS researchers working on Grosvenor Lake.

Wildlife Sightings:

1 dead bear within one mile of the mouth of American Creek. A sow w/2 cubs was observed up the river and a single bear was observed at the mouth. Guides and anglers reported seeing other bears up the river.

Large numbers of spawning red salmon

Large numbers of char and many rainbow trout (angling success was high). Some male char starting to show spawning colors. Observed one black, blind rainbow trout.

Trip Log:

0/3 - Spent morning preparing food, gear, maps and 30 gallon fuel cache for Coville Lake cabins
1215 - depart with 76 gallons of gas on board
1315 - arrive at mouth of Savonoski River
1400 - investigate Old Savonoski site (45 min.)
1700 - arrive head of Grosvenor River (boat still cached on E bank)
1815 - arrive at Coville Lake cabins
1915 - visit Grosvenor Camp to get information about navigating the American (markers put in by them—keep right of markers going in, left coming out)
4 - 0715 - visit Grosvenor Camp to get info on dead bear
0740 - depart for American Creek
0855 - arrive at knoll and set up camp on N end of knoll and check out parked boats
1015 - investigate dead bear
1100 - begin slow patrol upriver, learning channels
1500 - contact Enchanted Lake guide, Dale, for 15 minutes
1600 - reach large rock knoll on westside (only landmark all day)
1615 - return down river
1700 - arrive at knoll

8/5 - 0850 to 1045 - contact guides and clients
Grosvenor Camp, Cussacks King Salmon Lodge, Alaska Rainbow Lodge (Ron Hayes)
Ron Hayes offers to look at dead bear, which we do
1045 - patrol up river
1330 - arrive at slackwater slough, turn off to Trapper Jack's (Fure's #3)
cabin (2 minutes N of large rock outcropping). Hike up stream to
cabin. Bear sign everywhere.
1400 - arrive at cabin, photograph it, fishing excellent nearby
1700 - depart to knoll

8/6 - 0845 - contact Grosvenor Camp as they relay guests. Cussacks fly in
raft, 2 guides, 6 guests (2 Beaver loads). Contact Cussacks
pilot Gary Lemmage (? spelling) about kayakers camping on American
on 7/29, close encounters as boats shuttle folks up the river.
1100 - fast run up the Creek, 11 minutes to slackwater slough to Fure's 3.
Hike up river and contact Grosvenor & Cussacks. Find limit of
canoe boating tree across right fork and shallow left fork.
Prime char and trout fishing. Note blind, black rainbow.
1600 - Assist Grosvenor Camp with dead battery - loan ours for 1/2 hour
1800 - Clean up former site of Ed Siler's boat. Checked on abandoned
boat 200 yards N of knoll.
1900 - break camp
1926 - depart knoll
2000 - arrive Coville Lake cabins

8/7 - visit with Grosvenor Camp (thick fog)
0930 - depart Grosvenor Camp
1000 - visit USGS camp on N shore (15 minutes) and radio into Brooks about
the food items out in the open.
1040 - contact USGS personnel in boat on S shore and talk about the camp
1140 - arrive at head of Grosvenor River
1147 - mouth of Grosvenor River
1233 - arrive Monsen's Cove and document cabin site
1322 - depart Monsen's Cove
1350 - arrive Research Bay and document cabin site
1405 - depart Research Bay
1430 - arrive Brooks, clean boat and gear
Boats & Guides on American Creek

**Grosvenor Camp** - relies heavily on the American for the bulk of their fishing. They store their boat at Grosvenor Camp and commute each day with their guests. They have marked the channel leading into the mouth which was a big help to us.

**Boat** - aluminum flat bottom skiff inboard 200hp w/jet propulsion

1. **Enchanted Lake Lodge, pilot/guide—Dale**
   - Beaver - white w/orange striping
   - boat - silver 17' w/50hp mercury outboard jet unit
   - cached 5 avgas cans of gas

2. **Kulik Lodge, pilots vary**
   - plane - Katmailand Cessna 206's
   - boat - Starcraft, silver inside, worn white paint outside w/55hp Johnson Workhorse w/jet unit
   - cached 2-6 gal. fuel tanks

3. **No See Um, Jack Holman owner/pilot**
   - plane - no contact while we were there
   - boat - Lund 15' green inside, blue/silver outside w/35hp Evinrude w/jet unit
   - cached ammo box tool kit marked "O"

4. **Iliacka Lodge, Ted Corkin owner/pilot**
   - plane - no contact while we were there
   - boat - Rhyan-Craft, green w/35hp Evinrude w/jet unit
   - cached 7-5 gal. avgas cans of mixed gas and 10 ft. away 1-6 gal gas tank, 4 float pads, and 2 oars

5. **Valhalla Lodge**
   - plane - no contact while we were there
   - boat - blue aluminum w/jackass lift, no motor, spare prop inside

6. **Alaska Rainbow Lodge, Ron Hayco pilot, Barry guide**
   - plane - dark blue w/red & white stripes, N1704R
   - boat - Klamath Alaskan, silver inside w/blue exterior w/50hp Evinrude w/jet unit
   - cached 2 empty 5 gal. cans, 1-6 gal. gas tank, ammo box marked "R. Hayes", and a tool box marked "Barry"

7. **Cussacks King Salmon Lodge, Gary Lemmage pilot (Beaver), Randy Yeager pilot (206)**
   - Brian O'Keefe, Tod, and Tony - guides
   - planes - Cessna 206 white w/light & dark blue striping
   - Beaver white w/orange striping
   - boat - Traveler by Sea Nymph, green 16' w/40hp Suzuki w/jet unit
   - cached 2-6 gal. gas tanks

8. **Boat 8, according to Kurt Rowe, has not been used in 4 or 5 years.**
   - It is aluminum boat in poor but floatable condition. No motor, oars, supplies in or near the boat.
NPS 9 - green jet boat w/twin 50hp Mercury jets

NPS 9 performed mechanically without a problem, which is especially noteworthy considering that it sat outside unused for four to five years. A few stats on the boat during this trip:

- miles traveled - 150 to 200
- fuel used - 100 gallons
- rate of fuel consumption - 2 miles/gal. on lakes, less in rivers
- estimated top speed - 20 mph

The boat has some obvious shortcomings. The fuel consumption rate is too high to be practical for everyday use where jets are not needed. The boat does not handle rough sea conditions well although we encountered no problems (but had great weather). For American Creek it is just a bit too large especially in a low water year which Kurt Rowe says 1984 has been.

On the positive side NPS 9 is the only boat with any small stream/shallow water capabilities that we possess. It proved very durable on this trip and we did not baby the boat. We strongly recommend that the motors on NPS 9 NOT be converted to props until such time as we have a replacement craft. Ideally we should get an outfit similar to the one Cussucks Lodge uses on the American (see separate sheet on boats). We feel it is important that the Park have a boat with shallow water capabilities not only for the Savonoski and American but also for use in other situations that might arise (up Headwaters Creek during moose season, through the Rapids Camp area early and late in the season, etc.). A jet boat provides a needed capability to the Katmai operation. NPS 9 isn't perfect but it's currently the only game in town.

Navigation of American Creek

The American presented many navigational challenges. A thanks to Grosvenor Camp for marking the entrance to the creek. The channel into the mouth meanders (understatement) and without the buoys we would have been hours getting into the river, most of our time spent pulling weeds out of the jet units. Weeds are a problem only near the mouth and not in the river. Navigating American Creek successfully requires experience gained by trial and error. One "given" is that the boat needs to be run "on step", meaning near full speed. On step the boat draws the least amount of water and is the only way to get through many sections. Of course, high speed, while a necessity, amplifies mistakes (like choosing the wrong channel). The boat and engines proved to be tough; when we missed the channel (as we did during our first tries up the river), we just pulled up the motors, pried the gravel out of the grates, and kept on truckin'. It may be time and money well spent to hire Kurt or Mike at Grosvenor Camp to give first time patrollers on American Creek an orientation ride up the creek.
General Comments

Kurt Rowe (Grosvenor Camp) commented that at one time he would be "bummed out" if Grosvenor and Kulik had people on the American on the same day; it didn't happen often. There are now eight boats on the American with no end in sight. A low point for Kurt was the day in the summer of 1983 when Cussack's Lodge helicoptered Bob Hope and party into American Creek, all with the blessing (he assumed) of the NPS. Biologically (based on comments by Lou Gwartney) the fish populations in the American are very healthy and could easily withstand increased angling pressure. Most of the anglers we observed were near 100% catch and release and I think we can assume that other lodges that will begin to use the American will have the same catch and release orientation.

Boating safety is a concern on the river where (necessary) high speed and narrow channels have caused a number of near misses. We will have to rely on the good judgement of the guides in this matter. One guide (who has only recently started using the river) complained that Grosvenor's boat was too big for the river and that the Park Service should set a size limit on boats. This is hardly fair to Grosvenor not only because they were there first but also because they use the boat to get across Coville Lake in lieu of flying in their guests. All guides we talked to felt that there should be a limit put on the number of guides using the river. Predictably, most (especially the most recent users) felt that current levels were about maximum. The current limiting factor is the fact that a jet boat is needed and there are logistical problems involved with getting a boat there. This may slow but won't stop the numbers on-the-numbers of guides that will use the river in years to come. As we have witnessed at Brooks, a decrease in the aesthetic value of an area does not mean that people will stop coming to that area, if there are fish to be caught.

Recommendations

This fall (before the season ends and while the season is fresh in everyone's mind) solicit comments/suggestions/recommendations/complaints from the lodges/guides using American Creek. Gather all available biological data (call Lou Gwartney). Use this information along with the Park staff's input to propose some management alternatives for the American. I personally feel strongly against quota systems or specific scheduling of use dates. I don't feel that these are currently justified, but some type of plan needs to be considered now so that we are prepared to deal with future changes on American Creek.

NPS 9 could be stored at the Coville Lake Cabins so as to be available for future patrols to American Creek. Two or three patrols should be made in 1985, scheduled randomly with NPS personnel overnighting on the river.
USGS Camp on Grosvenor Lake

While patrolling down Grosvenor Lake (8/7) we stopped at a camp on the N shore approximately half way down lake. It consisted of a plane white w/red and yellow striped, N2634Z, a tan & orange North Face VE-24 tent, a light blue quonset tent with red piping, and a plastic tarp over an alder frame between the tents. Food and equipment were stored in the quonset in cardboard boxes & under the tarp was the kitchen (coleman stove, butter, honey, peanut butter, etc.) on a table. And pots & pans were hanging from the frame. There was a small amount of moist dog food in a bowl on the beach in front of the camp.

No one was in camp so we left a note advising the occupants to store their food, including dog food, away from bears and that the dog must be on a leash at all times. After we departed we located the occupants on the south shore of the lake in a Zodiac. The two researchers (along with one dog) were collecting data and rock samples to map the shoreline. They stated that they were working with Jim Reihle, USGS, out of Anchorage. We notified them of our food storage policy and told them that their camp was unsatisfactory. They seemed reluctant to comply, stating that they had too many canned goods to sling into a tree. We again urged them to store items in trees and perhaps put the cans into the plane. We informed them that a ranger would be paying them another visit sometime during the week. They indicated that their stay was short and due to end soon.
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