



I'm going to talk about my float trip last year to the Kanektok River in Alaska. The interesting thing about this trip was our approach. We wanted to get an experience which is significantly different from an outfitter organized trip. The kind of trip that would appeal to a Do It Yourselfer.

Kanektok River

- ▶ ~100 river miles starting from Pegati Lake
- ▶ Trip staged from Bethel, AK which is an hour flight from Anchorage
- ▶ Float Plan into lake and wheeled plan pickup from Quinhagak to Bethel
- ▶ 12 day float allowed for a couple of leisurely days
 - Could be done in as little as 7 days



The Kanektok River is located in western Alaska. We staged out of Bethel, although there are other location that would also work. The float is about ~100 miles long, starting with a float plane trip, and ending with a pickup with a wheeled plane. We did the trip in 12 days, so most days were leisurely, and were able to stay in a couple of spots for 2 nights. Although, we did have a couple of days of hard rowing because river miles don't equal line of site miles.

River Description

- ▶ Upper River
 - Scenic small river thru rolling hills, boulders
- ▶ Middle Section
 - Lots of braids, a few sweepers
- ▶ Lower Section
 - Slow Wide water

- ▶ Very Remote
 - Didn't anyone else for the first 6 days



Upper River



Lower River

The upper river is more like a mountain river. It's clear and cold coming out of the lake. There are boulder fields and gravelly bottoms. The middle section of the river start to have lots of channel braids that were great places for trying to get a rainbow on a mouse. The lower river is a wide twisting flow with less interesting structure. As you get into the lower river, the river become accessible from below by boat, so that's where you will start seeing people. We didn't see anyone for the first 6 days.

River Description

- No major hazards



The river is an easy float. One of our party had no experience rowing on a river (although lots of experience rowing pontoon boats on lakes). He was able to navigate with no problem, and quickly got the hang of finding the right current seam to get the most speed without hitting the trees.

Our River Transport

- ▶ Floated using Water Master inflatable's
 - Allowed us to access water where you couldn't get a larger raft
 - Gave a much "closer to nature" feel to the entire trip
 - Limited gear to the essentials
 - More limited by volume than weight
 - Open Bottom allows easy stopping and wading



We did the trip in Watermaster inflatable rafts. The trip organizer, Jim had two rafts, and was able to borrow another for us. This was actually his second leg of two back to back trips (26 day total). I loved the watermaster. It was easy to handle, and could carry a bunch of gear. Even loaded up, the rafts had no problem. That is a full size dual marine ice chest on the back of the middle boat. We were able to go place a bigger raft couldn't have accessed. The open floor was great for this type of trip. To stop, you could just stand up. Being low to the water, and small, you really got the feel of being close to the river.

Did you say Bears???

- ▶ We saw a few, but had no problems
 - Keep a clean camp
 - Store food well away from camp
- ▶ Carried Bear Spray, and had 1 44mag handgun



Yep, we saw a few bears and lots of tracks and sign. We didn't have any problems, although when we came around a corner and came along the two juveniles fishing, they seemed to be hesitant to leave the river. We slowly worked to the far bank, and came closer. When we did the went to the bank and watched us go by. All of the other bears we saw took off as soon as they saw us. One guy had a handgun, and the other two carried bear spray. The statistics say that you are safer with bear spray than a gun, but it didn't always feel that way

The Fishing

- ▶ In Late August
 - Silvers
 - Rainbows
 - Dolly Varden
 - Sunfish of the North
 - Grayling



In the time we were there, we got silvers, rainbows, dolly Varden/Artic Char and Grayling. We actually did pick up one sockeye at the lake, but it was in a sorry state. The Char in this river were amazing, kind of like sunfish of the north. You could catch 30-40 fish without moving your feet. And there were a few big ones. Our biggest was 27"

Rods / Lines / Flies

- ▶ **Rods**
 - 8wt w/ floating and T300 line
 - 5wt nymph rig
 - 5wt floating
- ▶ **Top Flies**
 - Beads for char and rainbows
 - Egg Sucking leach for rainbows and Silvers
 - Pink Foam Pollywog Popper for Silvers on top
 - Mouse Patterns for Rainbows in Braids
- ▶ **1 x-2x leaders and tippet**
 - Not really leader shy



We were using 5 and 8 wt rods. 8's for silvers, and 5s for everything else. The top underwater flies were the egg sucking leach and beads. Whenever we saw a stretch of slack water, we would pull out the pink wog and try to get silvers on the topwater. We generally had good success. And there is nothing like having a big rainbow come out from under a log to inhale you mouse!

The Catching



Here you can see one of the mouse pattern we were using, and a couple of fish shots

The Scenery



Picking Blueberries for pancakes, yum!!

As you would guess, the scenery was spectacular. We did take some time to pick some blueberries for breakfast

Camping

- ▶ Lots of spots to camp
- ▶ Think Light
 - Backpacking equipment is best
 - Tent, Sleeping bag (+5deg), Pad
- ▶ Bug Tent a must!
 - Place to get out of the rain and bug
 - Don't forget folding chairs



Because we were in little boats, our gear more closely resembled what you would find on a backpacking trip. We did each have a tent, so we could dry out our stuff, but kept the big items to a minimum. The coolers you see were actually for dry storage rather than for keeping things cold. The bug tent was our hang out area to avoid the bugs and the rain.

Food

- ▶ Light and compact
 - Combined fresh fish with Freeze-dried



Freeze dried had come a long way!!
And easy cleanup too

In keeping with the minimalist theme, we did a mix of fresh fish and freeze dried meals. I hadn't had any freeze dried food for about 20 years, and I must say they have come along way. The lasagna was actually quite good! Breakfast was pancakes or oatmeal, and sandwiches for lunch. We went for food that would have easy prep and clean up to maximize fishing time!

Weather

- ▶ In a word, WET
 - Be prepared for daily rain.
- ▶ Pack to keep wet and dry items separate
 - Inside dry bag keep sleeping bag/pad in separate plastic bag, compactor bags work best



We had rain every day, including a couple of days where it rained continuously morning to night. Under these conditions it's hard to not have everything get wet. Careful packing is important to keep those things that you really want to keep dry (like a sleeping bag) from those things that will be wet (like a rain fly). From when the hi-laker guy was here giving a talk, I got the tip to use trash compactor bags instead of regular garbage bags, because they are thicker and will stand up better.

Equipment

- ▶ Raft, Oars, Life vest, Tie off rope
- ▶ Tent, Sleeping bag, Sleeping pad, Pillow - (Dry bags)
- ▶ Bug Tent
- ▶ Cook Kit, Backpacking Gas Stove Don't forget bug net
- ▶ Folding table, chair
- ▶ Waders/belt, Boots, Rain Jacket (2)
- ▶ Fleece, gloves, camp shoes
- ▶ Three fly rods - 1 dry 5wt and 1 nymph rig 5wt, 8wt, Flies, Vest, Leader material,
- ▶ Floatant, Strike indicator
- ▶ Clothes - NO COTTON-Pack sets of clothes
- ▶ Water filter, water bottle
- ▶ GPS with river miles programmed in

The equipment list is pretty much as you'd expect. One big point was that your clothes should include no cotton. At least, when it does get wet, you will still be able to stay warm, and it will dry in less than a month. Another good tip is to have a GPS with river miles programmed in. With all of the twists and turns in the lower river, our progress really slowed. If we would have known the river miles left, we could have made some different decisions about where we camped

Don't forget bug net



As the bugs can be a problem. REI has a great bug head net. You can even eat with it on!

Getting There

- ▶ Left SEA at 3:00pm, arrived in Bethel at 8:00pm local time
 - Start float next day
- ▶ Return after last float day
 - Depart Bethel 8:30pm, Arrive SEA 3:00am
- ▶ Make sure you have a good plan in Quinhagak for transport to Airport



Waiting room at Quinhagak
Just enough log space for two

The flight arrangements from SEA are easy, but you will have to spend at least on night in Bethel.

The Costs

- ▶ Airfare to Bethel
- ▶ Drop-off/Pickup
- ▶ Shipping Gear
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Night in Bethel
- ▶ License

Great Place to use Frequent Flyer Miles

\$1000

\$350

\$150

\$100

\$80



▶ Total ~\$1700

- ▶ Boat Rental can be found for \$35 per day or \$210 per week

Overall the cost of this trip is quite reasonable when compared to a full service outfitter. Even with boat rental, you are looking at about \$2000/person

Outfitters and Websites

- ▶ Outfitters
 - Papa Bear Adventures
 - <http://www.pbadventures.com/>
 - Tikchik Adventures
 - <http://tikchikadventures.com/>
- ▶ Additional River Info
 - Dave Duncan & Sons
 - <http://www.kanektokrivers.com/>

Here's a list of some spots for more info

Questions???

