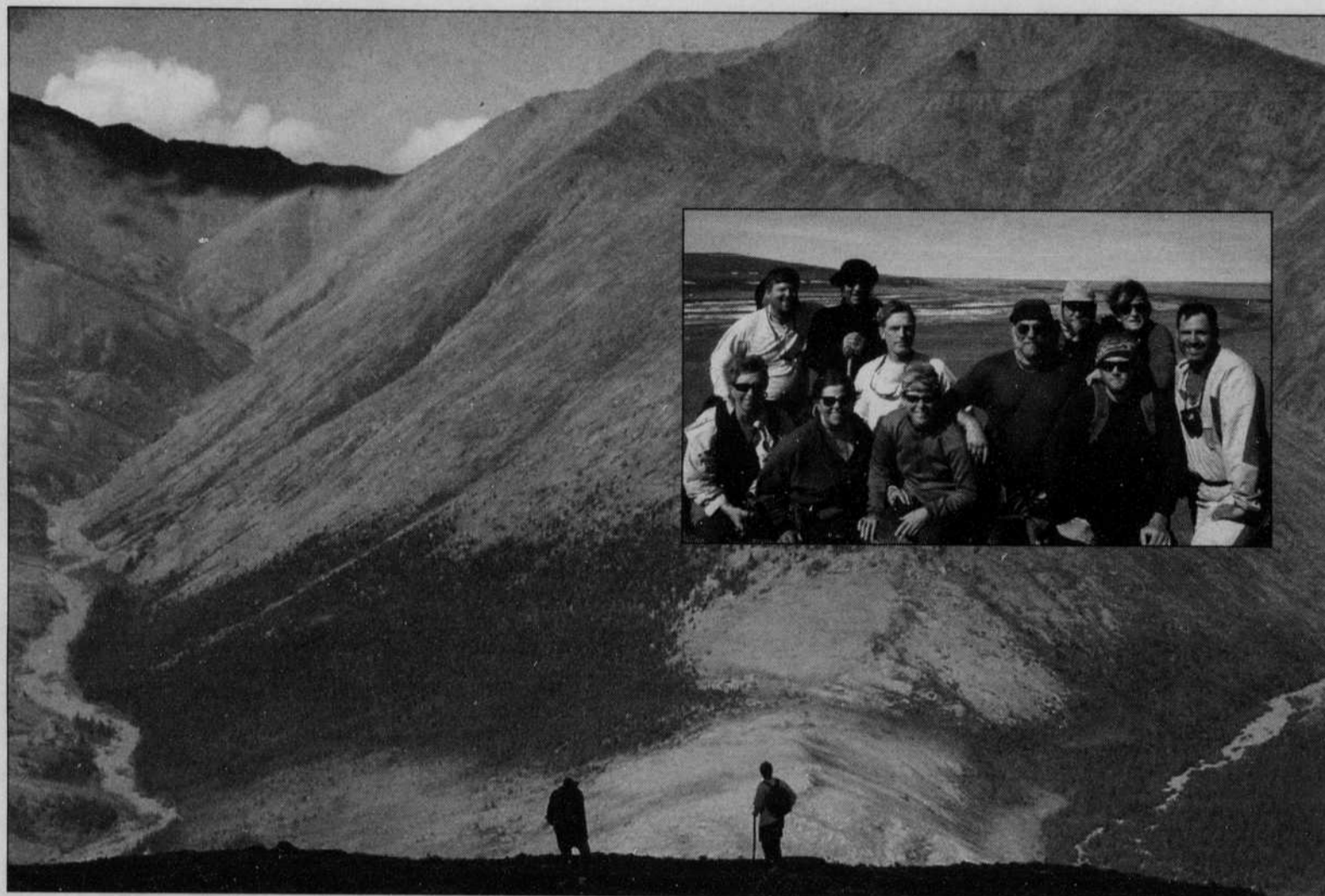


Arctic Dreams on the Firth River:

The OP visits the far north



On the morning of the summer solstice, 11 Outdoor Program participants were dropped off by bush plane on the banks of the Firth River in Ivvavik National Park in extreme northern Yukon Territory, Canada.

After four days of travel with 2500 lbs of rafting gear, we felt amazed, humbled and alone in the huge arctic wilderness; and glad all our gear and people made it. We stood well above the arctic circle, in the land of the midnight sun, on the verge an adventure none of us would ever forget.

We came to float the 80 mile pristine Firth River as it flows majestically through the British Mountains, across the coastal plains and out to the Beauford Sea. The area is host to the Porcupine Caribou herd, 135,000 strong, as they migrate from their "nursery" in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) in Alaska. Their migration is one of the greatest remaining wildlife migrations on earth. In addition to the caribou, Ivvavik is home to a fantastic array of wildlife, including musk oxen, wolves, Dall's sheep, golden and bald eagles, gyrfalcons, tundra swans, and myriad species of ducks. It is also one of the few places in the world where one can see black and polar bears as well as grizzlies in one location. Over the next eleven adventure filled days, only the polar bear did not make an appearance to the group. After seeing such an abundance of wild animals in such a fragile environment, it is very difficult to accept the Bush Administration's efforts to allow drilling in the neighboring ANWR coastal plains, calving ground of the caribou herd.

In addition to seeing the wildlife, the river corridor provided a unique cultural opportunity. The drainage has been occupied for the last 10,000 years by the Dorset, Thule, Eskimo, and Inuvialuit people. The area was not glaciated during the last ice ages; therefore the Firth is considered one of the oldest rivers in the arctic region. The cold and remoteness of the area means there is still evidence of ancient dwellings and lookouts scattered across the tundra. One interesting feature is the "caribou fence." Its age is unknown, but it is thought to have been used to herd caribou to places where they could be more easily hunted by Stone Age people. Another cultural site is called

Engigstciak, an old hill at the edge of the delta zone used by many ancient people to survey the open ground for game. A hike to the top, looking over that pristine land and spotting a herd of musk ox in the far distance, left us feeling a rare connection with those that have stood there over the millennium.

The river descends through four separate "reaches" over the 130 kilometers, providing different views sheds every few hours. The first reach, called Aufeis, extends for 35 km and is characterized by large sheets of ice formed by spring water flowing over existing river ice. The river is fairly flat and the banks consisted of rocky shores and weathered limestone mountains. The next reach, Mountain Reach, is characterized by steep mountain sides coming to the river's edge and forming a narrow winding valley. The spectacular canyon reach is 45 km long of continuous walls up to 50 meters high. This stretch also includes several exciting class III and IV rapids. Finally, the river enters the Delta Reach across the coastal plain where it is braided and complex to navigate. The delta is 15 km long and 6 km wide and filled with wildlife.

There are no roads or even trails in the park. In eleven days we saw no other person at all until the bush pilots arrived to fly us off the gravel spit. If you love wild rivers, put the Firth on your to do list of big adventures.

Dan Geiger, Outdoor Program Coordinator, was a co-initiator for the Firth Expedition. Dan will show a slide presentation of the Firth Trip on November 6th- check out the 2003 Events (p.4) for details.



Two things you **MUST DO** if you're an Outdoor Enthusiast:

1. Check Out the OP Gear Rental Program

The OP Gear Rental program has over 70 categories of rental equipment available. We have equipment that can't be rented anywhere else in town, like: sleeping bags, tents, sleeping pads, backpacks, fleece jackets and more! We also have all sorts of water craft: rafts, kayaks, and canoes! For more information on how to rent gear for your next private trip, check out our website: <http://outdoor-program.uoregon.edu> or call us at 346-4371.

2. Sign up for the Event E-mail List

The Outdoor Program has a popular e-mail list for those who want to know what trips and events are coming up each week. It's easy to sign-up, just fill out the submission form under "Event email signup" on our website: <http://outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu>