



**CANADIAN RIVER
EXPEDITIONS**

WILDERNESS AND NATURE EXPEDITIONS IN ALASKA, YUKON AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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NAHANNI RIVER EXPEDITION

JULY 2 – 15, 2012

Guides:

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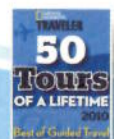
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One of National Geographic Adventure Magazine's "Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth". One of National Geographic Traveller Magazine's "50 tours of a lifetime".



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12D 04 2012

Days 0 & 1 Sunday July 1 & Monday July 2

This is a Vancouver group, with one man from Amsterdam and one lady from Sunderland. Most of us belong to the GAHC. Some call the club the Garbald Ambler's Hiking Club, but historically it is the Golden Ages Hiking Club. Which is to say that most of us have a great deal of life experience, up to four score and one years. But old does not mean non-active or non-fit. All of us are well travelled, many to Tibet, Nepal, India, Ellesmere Island, Port Simpson (teaching), Aigasalch, Hoe (Ghana), South Africa, Greenland, you get the idea!

8 of us drove from Vancouver, 2200 km. And the 4 more timid ones took advantage of Air Canada. The drivers arrive in Fort Simpson about 4pm after spending the previous night in Fort Liard, the birthplace of Charles Camell, a long time northern explorer and later the Head Geologist for Canada.

Never to refuse an offer of hospitality, we all converged at the Papal Grounds in Fort Simpson on the evening of Canada Day and enjoyed a "feest" put on by the local residents. Many had a musical bent, and entertained us with fiddle music and dancing. Then a leisurely walk along the riverside back to the Nahanni Inn.

SD OF 2015

Day 1 Monday July 2

None of us got up when the sun rose, because that was about 4am. After a breakfast of muesli in a coffee cup, we went along to the visitor centre and saw several videos including Fairlie's trip up the Nahanni River to search for gold. Then we went to the general store to buy buy screen clothing which turned out to be well used in the trip.

Then we gathered at the departure point at South Nahanni Airways to enjoy our first "camp" lunch and wait our turn for the twin otter. We were told to hurry up and wait, and we were scheduled to leave at 4-5 pm. Then wait some more, then hurry as they reversed the schedule and we left first at 3.

And what a flight it was, flying over lakes, boreal forest and seismic lines. The pilot figured rightly that none of us had seen Virginia Falls, so he approached from below, just missed the ^{point} rock in the middle of the falls, and skinned up the ^{Skinie Bay} rapids above the falls. Wow!

Then we set up our tents the wrong way after a detailed set of instructions and trapped a few unlucky mosquitoes inside. Supper followed by a talk from the Dene ranger and a 2 km excursion to see the falls close up. The ranger helped us wish for a good journey by throwing a pinch of tobacco over the falls.

Tuesday July 3

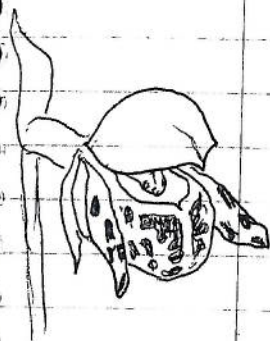
A few of us were up ~~early~~ to see the sun rise early - very early - through an already bright sky. It was a windless morning with mist rising on the river. After breakfast, several canoe shuttles across the ~~the~~ river, and then an ascent to the summit of Sunbloss Mt. Originally we were scheduled to go to a viewpoint a bit below the summit. As spectacular as that was, it wasn't spectacular enough for about half of us. The views were magnificent ~~on~~ on the way up and from the summit itself. The climb was moderately strenuous: about 900 metres.

July 5

After the usual great breakfast we broke camp and set off down the trail to the portage. I had noticed at the kiosk that the beautiful northern reindeer lichen was dependent on the spray from the falls so I made sure to take some more pictures of it before leaving, and a drawing of the ~~sparrow~~ sparrow's egg orchid in camp. The amazing moss and lichen floor of the falls gradually became less lush but we found the Mackenzies orchid in a swampy bit halfway where I could sit and paint it. There were many more on the last downhill in the cool spray zone, along with the Labrador azalea and yellow saxifrage. I missed the spectacular ground cone Sylvia saw. Luckily I was late down to the cold spray beach then we ate lunch and left.

The first stretch was the roughest we can expect with 5 ft standing waves - quite exciting - and in front quite wet - I'll have to wear my more serious raingear tomorrow. The first walls were ochre-yellow in the shifting sun and shade - I used some of my limited film supply for my old waterproof camera but found it really hard to photograph the big waves without getting sky or raft! We rafted down the (unlogged!) river past Dryas Island to Jamaica Beach to camp in baking heat - good for drying out, doing laundry, and basking in the sun after dinner. New moon visible at 4 AM and a warmer night than above the falls!

Oh yes and we saw Nahanni Falls at the bottom!



July 6

Where is my mug? Who has my mug? I left it on the table. Please find the mug.

Then there is the shovel relay. Judy is first, Dagmar is 2nd + Anne is 3rd. This team won the relay!

We drifted down the Nahanni + camped at the Gate. We had lunch at Mary River.

The evening meal was steak followed by a musical evening.

July 7, 2012 Saturday

after a popular breakfast of wonderful porridge & French toast and the great as always coffee from Whitehouse, we cast off and sped through the canyon of "The Gate" - cliffs rising straight above us. Then there was a leisurely trip down the river & around the BIG BENDS. Next stop, a walk up to PAINTED ROCKS CANYON led by Rich. The creek bed had been rearranged by the Spring high water. We saw fossils in the rocks and walked in the clear cold water. Some of us headed back to be passed by Jean on the run. Joe an insulin-dependent diabetic needed some sugary food. Next another guide rushed the Sweet Snacks to him and after stabilizing, Joe walked back to the rafts. Next stop SCOW CREEK for a hike & possibly a camp, but alas, not place to camp so we headed off down the river to Morton's Knob. We camped on the back water behind an island led by Jean & Rich.

Some of us hiked up Morton's Knob, first bush-whacking through river-side bush, birch, & white pine to emerge onto shrubby/shale/hummocky lumps of moss & dryas. Rocky ledges zig-zagged up & across & we gradually gained elevation. The next prominence would surely be the top. But there was always another rocky bluff above us. Finally we stopped for lunch & noticed a big thunderhead up-river - time to start down. We descended quite quickly again into the shrubs & trees to the river. A huge wind hit and it started to rain.

We raced down the backwater to camp, remembering all the flops we had left open. Luckily our rafting buddies had secured our tents. Two tents had blown to the water's edge & were rescued. One blew into the water & guide Dylan had to paddle after it. Next we worked to peg down our tents which were contorting in all directions under the force of the huge wind gusts. Dinner was on hold until the rain & wind died down. A rain cover was erected us to protect us during the worst deluge. Then - two rainbows & chocolate for dessert. n

July 8, 2012 Sunday.

Following yesterday's mini human this morning's weather was still eerily the wind was still howling and the sky was grey. The Nahanni rushed by behind our island.

After a delicious breakfast we set about clearing up our tents and packing up our bags. The scene reminded me of Lawrence of Arabia only the sand was black. Our tents and equipment was full of the stuff. As we packed up our tents making sure, at the same time, to hang on to them; otherwise they would fly away like stage kites.

Off down the river to meet the main Nahanni and attempt to cross to the other side where Dead Man's Creek met. Dylan had a hard time of it as his raft was quite full of water due to a leak. We attempted to bushwhack down the creek but after about 20 minutes gave up as the bush was too thick.

Another lazy paddle down the river and we were at our next camp Prairie Creek. Our tents of up old ship shape right opposite the Ranger's cabin. Several lines were crossing down into the river on our journey and the logs continue to cruise down the River. Man it's hot out here!

Henry

A Lazy afternoon was had by
all as well as cooking off in the
River and Gek.

Dinner was amazing! Arctic Char
Rice Casserole, Greek salad and a delicious
Cobler for dessert.

Monday 9 July '12

Prairie Creek Camp

Nighthawks noisy last night

Wan over the hill 6:30-6:40-ish. Every biting bug in camp is waiting at the biffy but I am prepared this time. Our tents survived overnight wind gusts. Views got hazy yesterday & continue that way today - must be a fine smog here after Saturday's thunder storms. The odd tree floats by down the river. We saw a lot of eroded banks yesterday & I am narrowly missed being clobbered by a sweeper and, soon after that, a falling tree by the eroded river bank as we floated by.

Breakfast - porridge, coffee tea etc & then scrambled eggs with Caribou ~~sausage~~ sausage & freshly baked bannock - yum! Even our hardy guides are wearing bug jackets now.

Lyn: "There is no coffee"

Joe: (Having just made a modoc in Anne's mug which was forfeited when she showed up & having then just successfully completed a major mug search)

"That is not very good"

Much laughter...

Wind gets up after breakfast, and a little so views get clearer. Some high cloud appears which makes picnic lunch preparations very pleasant & bug-free. We start a hike up the Prairie Creek Delta at about 9:40 am. Sunny with a nice wind so no bugs. A two hour wander with three creek crossings en route. Acres of meadows of fluffy dryas seed-heads interspersed with gravel or small sandy areas. Saw moose tracks & later sheep tracks too. Heard a cicada closer to the canyon. After third creek crossing we get onto a very well used sleep trail which climbs on to forest above the canyon on our side (river left). We can only go a little further on the rubbly river side bank but get into nice cool shade for our picnic with wonderful canyon views of

Mon 9 July contd...

Pravie Camp

ever taller walls, yellow & grey. A few bugs & then breeze arrives. Much road throating ensues after lunch. Two ravens fly upstream as we leave. In the canyon Lesley finds mountain monkshood & death camas growing together on a shady cliff.

Plants seen by L on the way up: Dryas, potentilla, asters, one paint brush (pink), golden rod, same composita as seen at falls & on Sunblood, creeping juniper, northern bed straw.

See raven playing in the wind on the way back & L finds a new plant growing on some eroded dirt by the creek. Later we look it up after a piece has been collected & find it under "Other Families" in the plant book - Strawberry Blite (*Chenopodium capitatum*). Still windy but getting hot - we all make a beeline for the shade tarp in camp - bug free for a change. We all sit there facing up stream into the wind. Tents are discussed - especially Sylvia's & Joe's. ^{more} ^{caught} Eventually people disburse for a nap or a dip in the river. Dillon's guitar music floats down to the shade tarp. Jean says it is 27-28C in the shade under the tarp so we think it was well over 30C yesterday. (Later after my dip Ellen is playing the green within - ballads; Ashokan Farewell & Road to Lhasa down (wash) - gongor's). Finally head out for a complete submersion in a branch of Pravie Creek - wonderful. Dry in the sun very quickly even though it is after 5 pm. Wind drops & it gets very hot again, more lazily by the tarp or on the rafts - marginally cooler there if a small breeze comes. Repeat this after stuffing ourselves with hamburgers & all the trimmings & chocolate cake. Still very hot so feet are into the river & a wet shirt put on. Marginally cooler by 10 pm when the last of us head for the bug biffy & tents. Sun still well up.

Adrian

Tuesday 10th July - although truth be told I'm writing on the 12th.

Tuesday July 10th was a day filled with excitement + adventure.

A very minor excitement was our departure from the beautiful dryas meadows of Prairie Creek which were host to whining, persistent, annoying mosquitoes. Oh what joy to be on the rafts, and mosquito jackets no longer necessary, the breeze fresh, and Dillon our entertainment. His joy of being back on the raft even if we weren't happy ourselves (which we were) is contagious.

We looked back at the golden face of Prairie Creek Canyon and into the shadowed Dry Creek Canyon and then forward to Georges Riffle. We watched the other 2 rafts bounce their passage through the riffle and then it was our turn - the crests of the waves approaching then disappearing underneath us with a crash, the raft maneuvered to miss the upstanding rocks in the river, first to the left then to the right - and then calm water again, calm but swift - the Nahanni flowing swiftly, the Nahanni imperceptibly following its course through the canyon it has carved.

And then the awe as we came into First Canyon, its massive walls upthrust against a sky so blue it was hard to remember we had left Prairie Creek under grey skies + heavy

actually rafted in rain. (See how short an inaccurate log keepers memory can be - I had forgotten the rain and the rain jackets & pants so hastily donned over my jackets).

Ah. The awe of First Canyon admired as we followed our established routine of emptying the rafts, admired as the first winds sprang up & help was needed to erect the tents, pegged down with rocks the size of boulders.

The wind dropped after a late lunch served deftly behind the tables erected as barriers from the wind. A decision was taken to walk up the beach in the direction we'd come from, the ~~north~~^{east} wall of the canyon rising immense on the other side of the river and the south immense and cut in two as background to the rafts.

We wandered individually & in small groups with some chatter & lots of contemplation - The days of our adventure winding down and then, one after the other, we turned to return.

Suddenly the return was assailed by gusts so strong it was almost impossible to remain standing - then a pause - then another gust - a shorter pause and then a constant wind that raised great swirls of sand & even the small pebbles, stinging the back, the neck, the ears.

Ahead I saw a raft lift and where the tents had been dejected, collapsed mounds of orange ^{flaps} flapping in the wind, trying to escape the rocks

That held them down

It was one of the laker ones to return. I saw one orange tent & one blue still standing. I saw my back pack blowing so hard I thought it would fly & it contained this precious journal. Kate will never forgive me if it blows away - so I grabbed at it & literally fell to my knees in a hollow to withstand the battering of the sand. Then with Rich's help I found 4 of the others in one of the standing tents while Rich & Klana completed their head count - all back - & Dillon with a bandaged hand from rope burn & tales to tell of rescued rafts.

So it has continued all night with occasional taunting calm spells when you can hear the hum of the tower which the wind otherwise obliterates.

Some tents were re-erected, but not all, those who could doubled up. Dinner was produced with great ingenuity & we had water and yes - the tuff-up the woods was still standing & insult upon insult - frequented by mosquitoes.

I had imagined I would take my pen to-day - Wednesday - on a calm morning, contemplative & inspired by the magnificent campfire & recount the adventures of yesterday. Not so. I am in the tent of a co-traveller, the sides pulsing with the wind which seems now to be coming from above & not behind. I hear the occasional voice it is after all, after 7:00, I've been out to see a clear blue sky with the

canyon rising in all its majesty,
What will be our plan for the day?
Certainly ~~not~~ what Rich had anticipated

As is so often the case we are at the
mercy — or not — of Nature. With all
our ingenuity & resourcefulness we'll
have to wait & see. This is much better
than a white-out — we can see the
beauty we came in search of — and
we're not too worried — yet!

Something I must add — our faces
yesterday (and no doubt they will be to-day)
were grimy with sand, caught in our
stumbles, the eyes, around the nose,
everything we saw is filled with sand —
and our hair — don't scratch it, don't
brush — it scatters sand. Oh and
don't forget the nails — jagged —
rimmed with black. By the sound
of the continuing wind we'll be grimmer
yet

Wednesday July 11, 2012

Lafferty Creek
Camp

Strong gusty wind continued through the whole night at Colloseum camp. There were five rafters and guides tenting by the river and the remaining 7 set up their tents in the protection of forest and bushes. All tents held strong during the night while winds continued at speed 100 - 120 km.

The breakfast of porridge was prepared behind metal tables standing on their side. We enjoyed it huddled in the wind and flying pellets of black stones and sand.

The rafts which "flew" and overturned just last night were ready for departure at 10¹⁵ AM. The river took us ^{on} peaceful journey through high almost vertical walls of First Canyon. Sky was deep blue with white puffy clouds and warming moon. Wind went with us, but seemed less strong and carried no sand. It kept pushing rafts towards canyon's walls making navigation harder for the guides.

At White Spray Springs ~~we~~ we collected fresh water coming directly from the inside of the mountain. Grotte Valerie with its multiple caves was towering on our left side shortly before arriving to Lafferty Creek camp. It is frequently visited camp side at the end of First Canyon.

John

Brunch at 3⁰⁰ PM with delicious
pancakes and fresh (previously dried) fruit
was followed by relaxing exploration
of dried out large delta of Lafferty
Creek. Small ponds could be found
there and enjoyed for washing away
the dust collected on our bodies.

Vegetarian lasagna baked on the fire
helped us to close another great
day on Nahanni River.

Thursday July 12

Lafferty Creek Camp
Day 2

Allen

Today was the day of the much anticipated Chasm of Chills. Dylan, our young guide, had painted a very exciting picture in our minds ^{over} of the last few days. We had spent much time discussing our wearing apparel &, of course, we debated the weather & the bugs.

After another great breakfast & a couple of cups of coffee we were on our way. The skies were clear & it promised to be a warm day.

We hiked up the dry creek bed, occasionally coming across small pools of water... some even with fish! Jean knew his rocks & minerals and patiently answered all our questions. We crossed some rock worn smooth with the passage of time & swift moving water. Then we were changing our clothes & putting on water shoes. The Chasm of Chills was just ahead of us!

Who knew that Ann would take the lead & then intrepid Lesley followed by Sylvia? Quickly the cold creels deepened & the chasm narrowed. Gasping with the cold we plunged on over our chests until the final icy swim around the corner & into Alana's helping hand as we negotiated the final smooth rock leading us out into the sun.

Allen

Friday July 13

Upper Splits (Bug city)

An early start and off to Kraus Hot Springs, (34°C)
Glorious warm bath with some mud treatments too. ^{And} ^{visiting} ^{music.}
Biggest challenge was getting dressed before being
totally consumed by mosquitoes. Investigated the Kraus
house and paddles. Back in the rafts for a few
hours and an excellent beach lunch. We left the
Rafts and camped at Upper Splits amidst many vicious
mosquitoes. Guides pitched a gazebo for us
where we could enjoy peace.

We are camped opposite the tail of Armadillo Mountain
formerly known as Alligator Mountain.

Saturday, 14 July, Finale
Joe: Comment on the group
(we) are too nice, (we) need move evil.
- Leslie perhaps.
- Sylvia, maybe
- Muriel, doubt it
- The others: are angels.

Joe: Never tell the truth, get you into trouble

Sylvia: "Only the good men die young!"

Ann: "Searching for nirvana on the
Nahana"

Jean: "A 30 sec handstand a day,
keeps the doctor away!"
those ~~rod~~ mosquitoes with a red
tail, is that a different species?

Ellen: "Wash your hands!"

Muriel: "Peppermint tea bag to wash your face!"

Kate: At Nahanni Butte "Hurry up & wait..."

Sue: Never settle for less than your best
The road to success is almost
always under construction

Ritch: Sylvia is my inspiration!
Next week or, never complaining.

Saturday, 14 July, Finale (cont.)

An early wake-up call, at 6 AM, by a sweet violinist, Alana. Never got up so gently.

Deadline 7 AM leaving! At 6 AM the guides were almost ready! All of us, including Ian managed to be ready at 6.55 AM. We beat the bugs, they were --- delicate creatures, pollinators, without them no beautiful flowers!

A breakfast on the raft, a Dylan special, coffee, tea, muffin with granola crust. For the rest, "let gravity do the work".

At 8 AM the boat hooked up and took us to Nahanni Butt.

Pretty village, good location, but half deserted by the flood of several weeks earlier.

Initially bugs were bad, the heat as well, and plane schedule unclear. Blackfeather group of six would go first.

Wind came up later, group was relaxed.

At 5 PM the plane arrived, a quick pick up, no tie-on but one engine running controlling the landing, 5 minutes loading and off we went, plus a few 100 mosquitoes as extra load.

Tonight a joint dinner and --- the end of a wonderful/unique trip!

A summary will appear on "www.treks.org"

