



Time for Nature



Rafting down the Alsek River

A whitewater adventure in Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada

Neil Hartling has hiked up Goatherd Mountain more times than he can remember. And every time, it's a thrill. Goatherd is in the heart of Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada – a land of towering peaks and massive glaciers.

From the mountain, the panoramic view is truly majestic. Kluane's peaks are among the highest in North America, and the icefields seem to stretch to the horizon. Neil, who has guided trips along the north's great rivers since the 1980s, describes the view of the massive "Lowell Glacier stretching down from the valley into the lake." On one lucky occasion, he spotted a small herd of goats grazing nearby on the mountain and a grizzly wandering along the shore of the lake. Imagine, he says, seeing "all of these marvels at the same time, from the same spot."



Lowell Glacier is part of the majestic scenery along the Alsek River. © Parks Canada, McCloskey, P., 1977.

Glaciers, grizzlies, goats ... and a wild ride!

Goatherd Mountain is just one of the "high points" of a Kluane adventure. Much of the excitement is on the Alsek River, one of Canada's premier whitewater rivers. The Alsek snakes and tumbles 90 km through the park reserve. Hartling's company guides rafting trips along its big waters.

To the big water

If you travel with Neil and Nahanni River Adventures, your raft will put in at Haines Junction on the Dezadeash River, the headwaters of the Alsek. The Dezadeash meanders through a broad, glacially carved valley. Soon, it joins the swift-flowing Kaskawulsh River to form the Alsek.

The Alsek begins as a braided, multi-channelled river. Rafters pick their way among the many islands. Then the river channels merge into one, the mountains close in, the Alsek picks up speed and the real excitement begins! The Alsek takes the rafters on a 74 km tour of big water rapids, canyons, glaciers and floating icebergs.



The Alsek River snakes and tumbles 90 km through the park reserve. © Parks Canada, Lynch, W., 1989.



And amongst the rocks and ice, you will surely spot wildlife – perhaps grizzly and black bears, Dall’s sheep and mountain goats, and certainly some of the birds. Kluane has more than 170 species.

Keeping the Alsek pristine

Parks Canada manages the Alsek for maximum protection of grizzly bears, their habitat and the many rare and fragile plant species found along the river. And guides like Neil Hartling fulfill an important role. They helped devise a river use strategy that protects the environment while providing recreation opportunities.



Rafters must carry their waste out from the wilderness, use fire pans, and camp at designated sites within the grizzly bear preservation area. Trip departures are scheduled every second day to ease pressure on the ecosystem and to provide a world-class wilderness experience.

The Alsek offers rafters a rare opportunity to travel among glaciers and ice floes. © Parks Canada, Lynch, W., 1989.

“It’s a rare place where humans can softly travel amongst wild and rare species to share the landscape without conflict and pass without an impact,” says Neil. “People will protect what they love.”

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/kluane