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PERESTROIKA COMES TO PADDLING

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The fisherman's words drifted out from shore. "Hey, Slava, who are you paddling with?"

"Americans," our Russian friend replied.

"You gotta be crazy! We don't let Americans in here," came the astonished retort.

That night, within the soft glow of a Siberian hearth somewhere near the upper Katun River, I'm sure our bank-side observer had a wild story to tell: Americans paddling our turbulent Katun . . . no less in Soviet catamarans . . . all this *glasnost-perestroika* talk from Moscow really is changing things . . .

You've got it, Mr. Siberia. In the 20 years before our breakthrough I had tried to gain entry time after time. At every rebuff I consoled myself with another canoe trip in Canada's Northwest Territories, but always casting a glance

toward the "other side." By early 1987 I didn't expect much more from my latest efforts, though support from the National Geographic Society and our retiring Maryland Senator, Charles "Mac" Mathias, was not harming the cause.

An overcast March morning at my Washington desk was fast forgotten when I took the call from a friend at the U.S. Information Agency announcing arrival of a cable from our Moscow Embassy. Its key words: "Sovintersport (an arm of the U.S.S.R. State Committee on Sports and Physical Culture) offers a trip on the Katun River . . . an exception made." Great day—sun was out! Those months before our mid-July departure shot by on fast forward: recruiting a competent, multi-faceted crew; meetings to sort out a yellow pad full of "must-does"; and local tune-up trips. Just hours