



spend the night anchored to a gravel bar in the middle of the river. While we waited for the crackle of flames we finished dinner, played some bridge, and at midnight, when the situation had not deteriorated, repitched our tents and tried to sleep.

The next day we arose in a smoke-filled valley. We headed downstream because it seemed more interesting to paddle through a forest fire than to struggle back upstream. Stopping on a gravel bar for lunch, we watched the white smoke in the sky turn black. The thunder started and gale-force winds blew sand storms. We hastily packed up and sought protection from the hail and rain under the trees. Then it cleared, taking the smoke and leaving a beautiful evening. We never did find the fire that the smoke came from. In the newly cleared air we had freshly caught grayling for dinner and watched a grizzly bear make its rounds on the high slope across the river. It was to bed early to catch up on some sleep.

After a cloudy night with a smattering of rain we awoke to a perfect clear day. A cool breeze was blowing so we broke out the hammocks and decided to stay put at our creek mouth campsite.

On day 10 we broke camp early, eleven o'clock, and headed downstream to the last rapid and portage. Some five kilometres before Koshe Creek there is a river-wide ledge. It may be runnable but it is followed by a 200-m class 2 rock garden that disappears over a fall. Rudy and Kathy lined the ledge and paddled to the top of the fall. Ross and Nancy portaged on river left from the ledge to the bottom of the fall.

After the fall there is a canyon with class 2 rapids and big waves that continue for a couple of kilometres. Casualness, and an ambiguity in *The Rivers Of The Yukon* book, led us not to expect these rapids. After the portage we had not put on our spray skirts or tied in our gear, and we were lamenting the end of the rapids when suddenly we ended up in a tight S-bend with big waves. Rudy and Kathy took water, but Ross and Nancy went one better by filling up, grounding out, and tipping in the current. Rudy and Kathy performed feats above and beyond the call of duty and rescued everything but the next section of map, two pots, and, ironically, the splash cover. That night we dried out at the junction with Koshe Creek.

On day 11 we started out to hike up the ridge on the other side of the river from Koshe Creek. Half way to the top we stopped to enjoy the view and saw a grizzly bear leave the woods directly below us and cross a dry channel to an island across the river from our camp. The next two hours were

spent watching the bear forage, and waiting to see whether we would have a camp left when we descended. Eventually, old man grizz wandered back onto the hillside and disappeared. Bunched closely together and talking loudly we made our way back to camp only to find one of our canoes missing. Apparently a gust of wind had rolled the canoe into the river where it ended right side up and merrily headed off for the Arctic Ocean. After a frantic paddle we found it calmly eddying out about three kilometres downstream. Some lining, poling, and the longest portage on the trip took us back to camp, a good supper, and a game of bridge.

The next two days were easy paddling on a fast, braided river. The mountains had a few more trees at their base but quickly turned into alpine slopes topped with multicolored cliffs and peaks. We drifted by many excellent hiking opportunities.

The evening of day 14 found us at an outfitter's cabin near the mouth of Fairchild Creek. When we arrived, a half dozen "hombres" from an Italian western were just heading out with 29 fully loaded pack horses. They were the outfitting guides for that area, on their eighth day of a trip into their main camp. As they headed off into the setting sun they invited us to use their cabin. It had four walls, a door, no latch, was marginally waterproof in at least one corner, and had an eclectic collection of supplies and equipment. We decided to camp at the creek mouth.

The next day we began an overnight hike into Fairchild Lake. A good trail that started from behind the corral was clear and easy to follow except at stream crossings and in swamps. The weather steadily deteriorated as we walked in; the wind became stronger and colder. For the first time a large bank of low-lying clouds obscured the horizon. The trail came to the south end of a gorgeous lake, surrounded by high mountains with beautiful valleys heading off from each end. Unfortunately, the shores of the lake were very steep except for a small swampy margin. We found tent sites that had been cleared by the outfitters, but they were littered with garbage. Across the lake was an old mining survey camp where a dump of 50 oil drums was slowly leaching their contents into the lake.

After a couple of hours of searching and deliberation we abandoned our overnight intentions and headed back. By the time we reached our river camp the wind had become worse and it had started to rain. At last, a chance to use our cooking tarp. Obliging, it rained through dinner and cleared up at 10 p.m.