

3 Rivers Fly-In

Early in the morning we will rendezvous at St. Elias Alpine Guide's Headquarters in McCarthy, for the short ride to the western edge of the Kennicott River (transportation from Kennecott is provided for clients staying at the Kennicott Glacier Lodge). Once at the river's edge, the rock covered terminus of the Kennicott Glacier lies less than 500 yards from our group, and is a wonderful reminder of the origins of the chocolate colored water rushing past and floating our loaded rafts. The Kennicott River is a beautiful example of glacial rivers, its thick color and extreme cold making it a formidable barrier to navigation.

We will gather around the rafts, and discuss many aspects of the wilderness adventure we are about to embark on. First we'll talk about the operation of the raft, how the oarsman controls the boat, and the various commands he might bellow out in the heat of the rapids; "hold on, bail, high side." We'll talk about what to do if you fall out of the raft, the position to float down river in, the way to grab a safety line, and how to get back into the boat. We'll talk about the use of the throw line, and how to get the spare oar. And throughout the trip we'll talk about the dynamics of the river; how to read rapids, how to steer the raft and what types of hazards to avoid.

Within minutes after launching we'll careen through Class III standing waves down river from the footbridge and the sounds of civilization will be replaced by the noise of the river carving its history from the gravel banks.

For 45 minutes the whitewater will keep the adrenaline pumping. Between rapids the view up river will take your breath away. The 7000-foot Stairway Icefall cascades from pristine snowfields high in the Wrangells, the brilliant white mellowed by the lush green of Bonanza Ridge and Donoho Peak. The small red buildings of Kennecott can be picked out just above the edge of the immense glacier sweeping down from 16,390-foot Mt. Blackburn.

At the junction of the Kennicott and Nizina Rivers, we are carried west, floating quietly in this huge braided glacial valley. We'll find a large river bar, spread tarps and lay out a great lunch spread. There will be plenty of time for short walks along the river, stories of the mining days, past rafting adventures, or the more recent history of McCarthy. Once back on the river, the bluffs begin to rise on both sides and as we accelerate into the Nizina Canyon, the high rock walls leave only a narrow strip of sky visible.

Within the Canyon, the river is now captured by rock walls, forcing it to twist and fall back on itself like a coiled snake. Huge whirlpools form in the tight "S" turns, and logjams must be avoided. For an hour, the oarsman will pull as hard as she can to maneuver the raft through this wondrous maze, and rest stops will be made on narrow sand bars and hidden beaches.

An old cabin and cable across the Nizina River announces the junction with the mighty Chitina River. Flowing from east to west, the Chitina springs from the snows on North America's second highest peak, 19,850 foot Mt. Logan. From the snout of the Chitina Glacier to the confluence of the Copper River at Chitina, the river covers 125 miles. By the time we join, we're more than half way down its length and it is truly an immense glacial flow.

There lies a large flat gravel bar at the junction of these mighty rivers, and here we will rendezvous with the bush plane for the flight back to McCarthy. Once airborne you will have a wonderful view of the river terrain that you silently floated, and looking slightly up, there lies mountain upon mountain to the horizon.

Upon arrival back in McCarthy, you will be transported to either Kennicott Glacier Lodge or downtown McCarthy.