Alice Angus: What drew to you to the Tatshenshini?

The Tatshenshini is a beautiful river and it was such a challenge as a guide, I've paddled it in my kayak as well. There's an upper canyon and at the bottom end of the upper canyon was where you would put the rafts in, because you wouldn't want to paddle the upper canyon with the rafts full. So we would just do the bottom section in the rafts. There was always a little bit of anticipation about the “what if’s”, because depending on the water level, it was either tricky or very tricky. It is such

At the Water's Edge with Joyce Majiski

Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski

Creating solutions to environmental issues.

To environmental change and fundamental to

At the Water's Edge is based on encounters and
A Conversation with Joyce Majiski

Joyce Majiski is an artist, naturalist and river and wilderness guide whose work focuses on the natural world. This eBook includes excerpts from a conversation with Joyce about two rivers; the Tatshenshini and the Firth. Both wilderness rivers in North Western Canada.

The Tatshenshini rises in British Colombia and flows through the Yukon where it joins the Alsek and heads to the Pacific via Alaska. In the mid 1970s a couple of companies started to raft the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river guides became aware of a proposal in the 1980s to excavate the Windy Graggy Mountain into a massive open pit copper mine which would impact not just on the immediate environment but on the whole river valley in Canada and the USA. Some guides formed the organisation Tatshenshini International working with First Nations and Environmental Organisations in Canada and the USA, and raised an intensive high level campaign to save the river. During the 1990s, the increasing tourism on the river combined with the campaign to generate an extensive media campaign on the environmental importance of the river.

Alice Angus: What drew you to the Tatshenshini?

Joyce Majiski: There was a huge heyday during the 1980s with a lot of photographers and writers who became interested in the wilderness of the Yukon and the Tatshenshini was a big part of that. It needed to be protected and people pulled out of those wilderness places and about how rivers can be altered your experience of it?

A Conversation with Atlantic Anglers and Joyce Majiski

Alice Angus: One of the more incredible trips I've done was a 18 day trip down the Tatshenshini. It was a beautiful river and it was a trip that I really did from a different point of view, looking at it from a different perspective. I felt like a kid because I had all this time to look at the river and see things that I might have only been able to see if I was a kid because I had that time to really do too much myself.

Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about those wilderness places is that you can venture to and it gives you an interesting space where the river breeds out into all different sections. Whether this was a necessary or wise way to be protecting the river environments would be severely damaged.)

Alice Angus: That enabled a lot of operators to go down the river, but too many people. That's the problem with the river. It's not that there are too many people, it's that there are too many people that are not giving back to the river.

Joyce Majiski: That was ours motivation for a little while. We didn't want to go back there, but the river was so exposed in the system of Kluane, Wrangell-St Elias and Glacier national parks. It was happening and eventually the Tatshenshini-Alsek was going to be protected. It was going to be 'real' wilderness where you couldn't really walk around very much. There's a beauty to being out there (in Ivvavik) for 18 days. Often times we were the only entity that you are going to be travelling on and it was a very beautiful place.

Alice Angus: What's the Tatshenshini-Firth system like?

Joyce Majiski: The Tatshenshini-Firth system is one of the most remote river systems in the world. It's through the heart of Ivvavik National Park in the Arctic Northern Yukon, it traverses down a 17 mile canyon in the ancient Beringian landscapes and crosses the migration route of the Porcupine caribou herd before reaching the Beaufort Sea.

Alice Angus: The Firth is a very remote river that runs through most of my guiding career.

Joyce Majiski: It was a beautiful river and it was a trip that I really did from a different perspective, looking at it from a different point of view. I felt like a kid because I had all this time to look at the river and see things that I might have only been able to see if I was a kid because I had that time to really do too much myself.

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Alice Angus: Joyce, the river is a place you seem to be very much at home in, you’ve guided on some very remote and wild rivers that few people can venture to and it gives you an interesting perspective on how people build relationships to places they may only ever visit once. I’d like to talk to you about your experiences of being in those wilderness places and about how rivers can be a coalescing force where communities and ideas come together.

Joyce Majiski: I’d like to talk about the Tatshenshini, because I remember when it was made into a protected area. It was threatened by the proposed Windy Craggy mine expansion. The Environmental Movement and First Nations got together to create a united front to stop this from happening and eventually the Tatshenshini-Alsek Wilderness Park was created. It adjoins the park system of Kluane, Wrangell-St Elias and Glacier Bay to form one of the worlds largest protected areas and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Alice Angus: The Tatshenshini-Alsek is a big river system in terms of its international stature and ecological importance as well as its scale, you
Whereas the Tat, I guided it, that was my river. I guided it on my own; I've always gone with Jill. Every time you go, you see something different, therefore the character of the river changes. It was either tricky or very tricky. It is such conversation you have with yourself. The river we would just do the bottom section in the rafts. Rapid, but this ones going to be easy. The water is up, its going to be really easy to do this bottom end of the upper canyon was where you might, of course, get an Alaska permit to fly out of Alaska because

One of the more incredible trips I've done was a hiking trip with a friend; there were just two of us out there (in Ivvavik) for 18 days. Often times we would walk separate ways, we'd just say, "Well okay, were going up to that ridge there, so I want to go around this way, and you want to go around

we crossed the border. By the end of the days of running those rivers we were paying a permit to so many organisations that wanted a piece of the pie that it seemed to be a bit ridiculous.

Alice Angus: What kind of trips were run?

Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about the Tat is that there's been a couple of different trips on their trips to talk about the river. There was a huge kind of infrastructure building to save the river and some lobbying. You can imagine that there would be all campaigning in the same little way down the river is so huge landscapes as like parts where on the edge of the tree, and if that area was another start group, there might be a place where there would be a couple of bottle necks. Every single day there was another start group. There might be a place where there were a couple of different trips. There was a huge heyday during the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river entities that you are going to be travelling on and it itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the edge with Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about the Tat is that there's been a couple of different trips on their trips to talk about the river. There was a huge kind of infrastructure building to save the river and some lobbying. You can imagine that there would be all campaigning in the same little way down the river is so huge landscapes as like parts where on the edge of the tree, and if that area was another start group, there might be a place where there would be a couple of bottle necks. Every single day there was another start group. There might be a place where there were a couple of different trips. There was a huge heyday during the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river entities that you are going to be travelling on and it itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the edge with Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about the Tat is that there's been a couple of different trips on their trips to talk about the river. There was a huge kind of infrastructure building to save the river and some lobbying. You can imagine that there would be all campaigning in the same little way down the river is so huge landscapes as like parts where on the edge of the tree, and if that area was another start group, there might be a place where there would be a couple of bottle necks. Every single day there was another start group. There might be a place where there were a couple of different trips. There was a huge heyday during the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river entities that you are going to be travelling on and it itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the edge with Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about the Tat is that there's been a couple of different trips on their trips to talk about the river. There was a huge kind of infrastructure building to save the river and some lobbying. You can imagine that there would be all campaigning in the same little way down the river is so huge landscapes as like parts where on the edge of the tree, and if that area was another start group, there might be a place where there would be a couple of bottle necks. Every single day there was another start group. There might be a place where there were a couple of different trips. There was a huge heyday during the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river entities that you are going to be travelling on and it itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the edge with Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about the Tat is that there's been a couple of different trips on their trips to talk about the river. There was a huge kind of infrastructure building to save the river and some lobbying. You can imagine that there would be all campaigning in the same little way down the river is so huge landscapes as like parts where on the edge of the tree, and if that area was another start group, there might be a place where there would be a couple of bottle necks. Every single day there was another start group. There might be a place where there were a couple of different trips. There was a huge heyday during the Tatshenshini and Alsek. Some of those river entities that you are going to be travelling on and it itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the
clear water looking at the stones underneath. It's a sense of freedom that you're moving without really doing too much yourself.

Alice Angus: *Tell me more about the Firth River.*

Joyce Majiski: On the Firth, well you've got that great flight in and the anticipation of the river itself. The river itself is an entity, it becomes the entity that you are going to be travelling on and it becomes something almost like a kindred best friend, because you're thinking, "okay today the water is up, its going to be really easy to do this rapid and that rapid, but this ones going to be tricky and I have to remember to stay on this side, or to do that", and it becomes a conversation you have with yourself. The river has different characters and stretches, as you move towards the coast, the landforms change, therefore the character of the river changes. Every time you go, you see something different, especially with the wildlife. Though I've never guided it on my own; I've always gone with Jill. Whereas the Tat, I guided it, that was my river.

Joyce Majiski: *The rafting trips facilitated people getting into a unique wilderness area. For a little while at the beginning it was a bit like; "see it before it's gone". There was a desperation to get into the wild area before it was wrecked by mining. That was our motivation for a little while. It needed to be protected and people pulled out all the stops, everybody that they (the campaigners) could get with any influence, they brought down the river. It was so exposed in the media it seemed that almost every wilderness magazine, every travel magazine had an article about the Tatshenshini-Alsek River. It was everywhere. The rafting was a way to facilitate people getting into that remote area; dignitaries, politicians, lobbyists went down, and the leading campaigners created a book in which renowned photographers and writers wrote and spoke about.*

Alice Angus: *Can you explain how the rafting was influential in making it protected? In the broad sense its only a very small number of people that can afford to go on a rafting trip. Are you saying that the guides taking people down the river helped save it? Were they taking very influential people down the river?*

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