



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 ifs", because depending on the water level, it was either tricky or very tricky. It is such

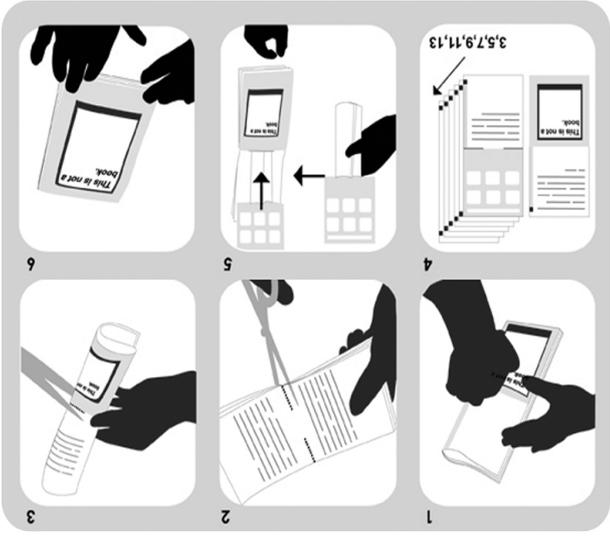
a major environmental campaign that went on for about 10 years. They were very astute business people as well as conservationists. It's a time that's gone, it definitely felt different than it does now. The whole guiding industry has changed. I trained as a raft guide with a company that took big rafting trips with about five boats. There were six of us guiding, there were a lot of people, lots of food cooking, and we had to carry toilets. You can imagine 25 people walking on the same path to the bathroom, even for a day, it creates a trench. You create an impact. It made me wonder whether this was a necessary or wise way to be an environmentalist. I mean it's great to take people into the wilderness, but too many people at once might be damaging. I struggled with that through most of my guiding career. Is this a good thing to do or not a good thing to do?



At the Water's Edge is based on encounters and conversations exploring different perspectives of water and the human creativity, spirituality and inventiveness in everyday life that is both witness to environmental change and fundamental to creating solutions to environmental issues.

# At the Water's Edge with Joyce Majiski

Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski



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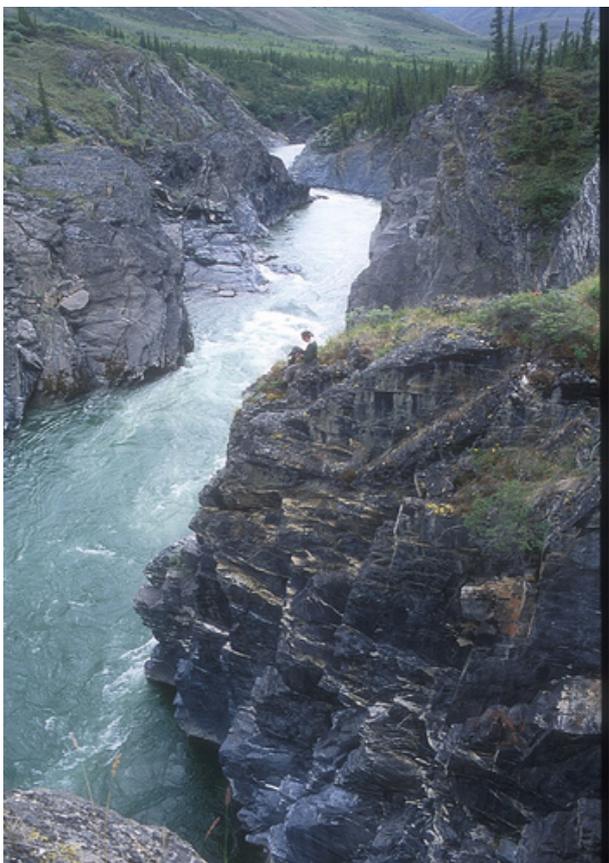
**A Conversation with Joyce Majiski**

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 Columbia 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



The Firth is a very remote river that runs through the heart of Ivvavik National Park in the Arctic Northern Yukon, it thunders down a 17 mile canyon in the ancient Beringian Landscape and crosses the migration route of the Porcupine Caribou herd before reaching the Beaufort Sea.



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*



that way, so I'll meet you at the top for lunch," and you'd strike off by yourself, in tune with the place because there was no one to talk to, and there was nothing to distract your mind. Its magical and it doesnt happen for me unless I have that time on trips with small groups and friends where I'm not looking after them. I think those have been the times that have been most precious to me. We very rarely have time to just sit and draw and think, because were always on the move. In the midst of my guiding career came this time where I found someone I could hike with that I knew could take care of themselves or me and it gave me freedom to just be.

Joyce Majiski: I trained as a raft guide on it. The Tatshenshini flows into the Alsek which takes you into Alaska. There are two ways to go down the river; you can go down the upper Alsek to the lower or follow the Tatshenshini to where it joins the Alsek below the biggest rapids and the Turnback Canyon. There's a series of really big rapids, and then you hit the canyon which is unraftable, so you get a helicopter to come in and lift you around that part of the canyon, then you continue on down to where you hit the confluence to the two rivers. So you can start from two different places, and end up at Dry Bay (Alaska). That enabled a lot of operators to go down the rivers. We would meet every year and work out a system of who's going to have permits, and who's going to go down on what dates. We organised different departure dates, so that we would have different end dates. These meetings would be in Alaska one time, Canada the next, and we were required to get permits from more than one organisation which might mean going to Alaska to get an Alaska permit to fly out of Alaska because

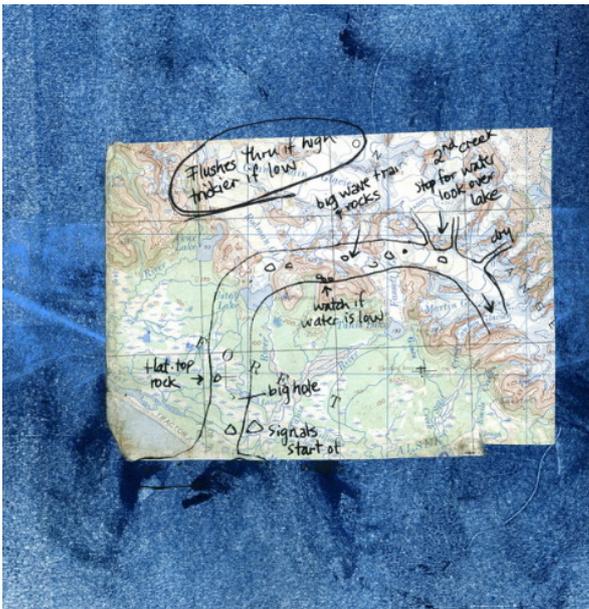
have guided on it many times what does it mean to you?

went there the first time (with Artists in the Park), I felt like a kid because I had all this time to actually look at it from a different point of view, and that was such a treat.



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: There was a huge heyday during that time and there were a couple of different rafting companies that would regularly run five boat trips. Now a five boat trip means about 20 clients and five guides. Every three days there was another start group, there might be a private group in the middle of that as well, and there's a couple of bottle neck spots where you invariably would bump into another group. One of those was the Walker Glacier, (everybody wants to walk on the Walker Glacier) its an opportunity of a lifetime for people to actually get up onto the glacier. I've been there when there have been three groups like tent cities on the side of the river, and just a little way down the river is as huge landscape as you can imagine but were all camping in the same place. It was an interesting jungle sometimes, depending your clients' idea of what they were going to see on this wilderness journey. Whether it was going to be 'real' wilderness where you would never see anybody else... At the same time there was growing a huge kind of infrastructure trying to save the river and some rafting companies got involved early taking riders and photographers on their trips to talk about the river.



Alice Angus: *Apart from guiding on the Firth you have had the chance to experience it from a slower pace as organiser of the Artist in the Parks Project (which brings together artists from different cultures to work together in Ivvavik National Park, Northern Yukon), how has that altered your experience of it?*

Joyce Majiski: The thing that's been great about starting up the Artists in the Park project is that I've been able to go back to one of my favourite spots which is the Firth canyon and explore it to see parts that in the past I've only been able to look at quickly because we don't stay long. I've never had time to do that before. So when we

clear water looking at the stones underneath. Its 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.

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?*

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

I feel like I've lived on the river so long; my whole life I've been close to water and on moving water. When I find when I'm not near that, when I don't have access to that, it feels like part of me is gone, part of me is missing. I love the way, when you get on a fast the river like some of the northern rivers which are so clear, the Firth or the Snake, you're zooming along the top on crystal,

a different feeling river from any of the others. The valley is quite steep sided and tree lined, you can't really walk around very much. There's a couple of places that you could go hiking, and one of those was at a place called Sediments Creek. It would be a full day hike, you'd go up through steep sided beautiful forests and then along, like walking up an edge. There are goats up there, any many, times when I've walked up there, there's been huge big snow patches. So its quite fun; you can boot ski on the way down. But you'd be up there with the goats and could get a really good sense of where the land lay. Further downstream is the confluence of the Alsek, the valley becomes immense, kilometres wide, a huge space where the river breeds out into all different sections...

Joyce Majiski: Rick Careless (then Executive Director of the Wilderness Tourism Council) was really instrumental (he was taken down the river by Johnny Mikes owner of Canadian River Expeditions who was growing concerned that the river environments would be severely damaged) my friend the photographer Ken Madson and a bunch of young paddlers that were committed to protecting the area. They teamed up and created

Alice Angus: *Who was behind the campaign?*



that area and about how precious the place was.