



***Monitoring Stream Channel Improvements
And Arctic Char Population In Kuuqutiga
Creek***

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SUMMARY

In the summer of 1991, channels were constructed in the streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek in order to improve conditions for migrations of Arctic char. Improvements consisted of channeling the stream in three areas to increase water depths and construction of rock diversion walls to improve flow in constructed channels. The present study was performed 15 June to 4 July 1992 to determine if 1) spring floods or ice movement damaged channel improvements and 2) to obtain information on the present population of sea-run Arctic char in Kuuqutiga Creek.

It was found that the streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek is dry throughout the winter; therefore, there is no ice scour of the streambed. The spring flood waters were observed in late June and early July. Although flow was considerable, no damage was observed in channel improvement areas. Wide streambeds in these areas permit flood waters to spread over a considerable distance. This in turn maintains relatively low water flow through the channels during periods of high water.

The sea-run Arctic char population in Kuuqutiga Creek is very small. The downstream run was composed of only 464 mature fish, six of which were identified as post-spawners. The number of smolts (char migrating downstream for the first time in their lives) was estimated to be about 142. Most of the mature fish were quite thin. Nearly all large mature fish moved downstream between 22 to 25 June. Nearly all smolts moved downstream on 1-2 July.

Counts of the numbers of sea-run char in Kuuqutiga Creek should be performed in future years. Ideally, counts should be performed in 1993 and perhaps 1994 to provide three years of information on present conditions. If stream channel improvements are affecting the population, the number of smolts should increase 5-6 years after the channel improvements were performed. Therefore, increases in the population are not expected until about 1996.

Kuuqutiga Creek is an ideal drainage to oonduct pilot studies on the effects of habitat Improvements on Arctic char populations because habitat improvements are permanent and the stream is relatively small so that accurate counts of migrating ohar are easily obtained.

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INTRODUCTION

In the late summer of 1991, the stream channel of Kuuqutiga Creek was improved in order to facilitate sea-run Arctic char migrations. Improvements consisted of channeling the stream in three areas to increase water depths and construction of rock diversion walls to improve flow in constructed channels. Details of this test project were reported by Sekerak (1991).

Because habitat improvement programs for Arctic char have never been formally attempted in the N. W. T., there is a great need for monitoring programs after improvements have been made to determine if:

1. the physical modifications are relatively permanent; and
2. if the habitat modifications have affected fish populations in the expected manner.

The present study was performed with the following specific objectives:

1. to determine the effects of ice scour and spring floods on the channel improvements that were constructed in summer 1991; and
2. to obtain baseline counts of the sea-run population of Arctic char in Kuuqutiga Creek.

The following material provides the above information in the form of a brief data report. Rationale and further details about the ongoing program to improve sea-run Arctic char populations in the Clyde River area are found in Sekerak et al. (1991), Sekerak (1990, 1991) and Sekerak and Qillaq (1992).

RESULTS

Stream Channel Improvements

Lake Levels and Stream Flow

Stream levels in Kuuqutiga Creek were monitored from 15 June to 4 July 1992. Upon arrival in the study area on 15 June, the stream bed of Kuuqutiga Creek was completely dry near the outlet of Kuuqutiga Lake (Plate 1) and only a small flow (visually estimated at considerably less than 0.1 m³/sec) was observed at the mouth of the stream (Plate 2). The latter flow was the result of snowmelt between Kuuqutiga Lake and the estuary of Kuuqutiga Creek. It was apparent that the streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek is dry throughout the winter.

On 16 June, the level of Kuuqutiga Lake was considerably below the surface of the streambed (Plate 3). As shown in Table 1, surface stream flow began on 21 June. Thereafter, lake levels rose rapidly and on 2 July reached a high of 60 cm above the winter low water mark. Monitoring ceased on 4 July. It is assumed that the recorded high on 2 July was the highest level for the season, because air temperatures in early July remained relatively 0001 and most of the snow at low and moderate elevations had melted in late June.

Integrity of Stream Channels

Upon arrival in the study area, all of the stream channels and diversion walls constructed in the summer of 1991 were visually inspected (Plate 4). All channels were dry or covered with snowdrifts and there was no sign of movement or slumping of any of the streambed improvements. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that flow in Kuuqutiga Creek ceases in the fall shortly after freeze-up and there is no build-up of ice in or near areas of channel improvement.

Table 1. Temperatures and lake levels in Kuuqutiga Lake, 15 June to 4 July 1992.

Date	Time	Air Temp (°C)	Lake Water Temp (°C)	Relative Lake Level (cm)	Comments
June					
15				0	
16	18:00	6.0	3.0	0	
17	18:00	8.0	3.0	1.0	
18	18:00	8.0	3.5	2.0	
19	18:00	7.0	4.0	5.0	Subsurface flow evident
20	18:00	8.0	5.0	10.0	
21	18:00	8.0	5.0	14.0	Surface flow evident
22	18:00	10.0	4.0	19.0	Adult char migration begins
23	18:00	9.5	4.5	26.5	
24	18:00	9.0	4.5	32.0	
25	18:00	10.0	6.0	34.5	
26	18:30	5.0	5.0	40.0	
27	13:45	8.0	5.0	42.0	
28	18:00	6.0	4.5	46.0	
29	18:00	8.0	5.0	46.0	
30	18:00	10.0	5.0	49.0	
July					
1	18:00	7.5	4.5	55.0	Smolt migration begins
2	18:00	11.5	5.0	60.0	
3	10:00	8.5	4.5	59.0	
3	12:00	9.0	4.5	56.0	

The streambed upstream of the channel improvements is generally shallow and wide. Some shallow ponds are present which do not go dry during winter, but freeze to the bottom. These areas are the only portions of the streambed that contain ice, which could theoretically drift downstream and obliterate stream channel improvements. However, ice in such areas is firmly frozen into the streambed and was observed to melt in situ (Plate 5). Hence, ice rafting and scouring of the streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek do not occur.

The spring freshet of 1992 in Kuuqutiga Creek had little, if any, effect on constructed channels and diversion walls (Plates 6 to 10). The drainage area of Kuuqutiga

Creek is relatively small and Kuuqutiga Lake undoubtedly dampens peak flows. In addition to these factors, channel improvements are in areas where streambed widths are extreme (see Sekerak 1991); therefore, flood waters are dispersed laterally and water velocities in channelized areas remain relatively low (Plates 9 and 10). It should also be noted that care was taken in construction of channels and diversions so that the walls of structures were stable and slumping would not occur.

Fish Abundance and Movements

Information on numbers of Arctic char migrating downstream in Kuuqutiga Creek was obtained by installation of a fish trap in the main channel, complemented by rock weirs which extended across the entire channel. The main trap was constructed with 2" X 4" frames covered with 1/4-inch hardware cloth. Wings to lead fish into the trap were also 2" X 4" frames covered with hardware cloth. Wings, in turn, extended to the rock weirs. It is believed that the trap was virtually 100% effective for fish larger than 150-200 mm fork length. Rock weirs contained numerous small openings which smaller fish undoubtedly used to move downstream to summer feeding areas. The fish trap was tended at least twice daily when all fish were enumerated, measured for length and released (Plates 11 and 12). A small number of fish were killed in order to obtain information on sex, maturity and age (Plates 13 and 14). Due to the very small size of the sea-run populations of Arctic char in Kuuqutiga Creek, numbers of fish killed was minimized.

Fish Abundance and Size

The downstream run of Arctic char in Kuuqutiga Creek, as documented by the fish trap, consisted of approximately 765 fish in two distinct size groups (Figure 1). The first consisted of 464 large fish between 520 and 779 mm in fork length, with a modal length between 580 and 599 mm.

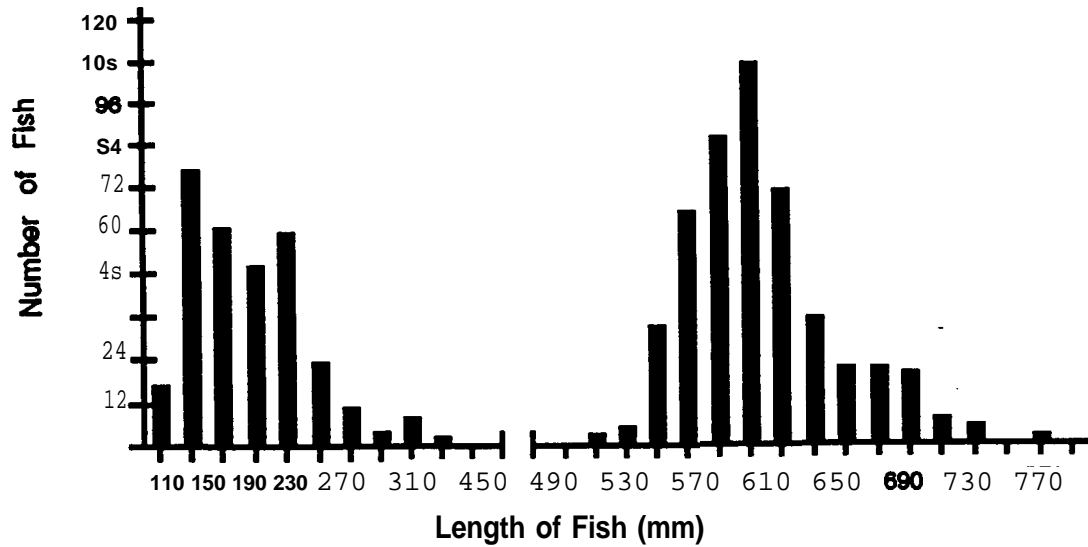


Figure 1. Length frequency of downstream migrating Arctic char, 21 June to 4 July 1992.

The second group was composed of small fish between 100 and 300 mm fork length. Within this group of 301 fish, two length modes were evident; the larger between 180 and 199 mm, the smaller between 120 and 139 mm (Figure 1).

Timing of Movements

Downstream migration of char in Kuuqutiga Creek was rapid (Figures 2 and 3). Nearly 100% of all large mature fish moved downstream within an eight-day period from 22 to 29 June. Movement of mature fish was most intense from 22 to 25 June; 87% of all mature fish moved downstream within this 4-day period.

Downstream movement of immature fish was equally rapid and intense (Figures 2 and 3). The main period of movement was 5-8 days after the major movement of adult fish. Over 96% of all immature fish migrated downstream over a two-day period—1 to 2 July. The downstream migration terminated on 4 July as abruptly as it commenced.

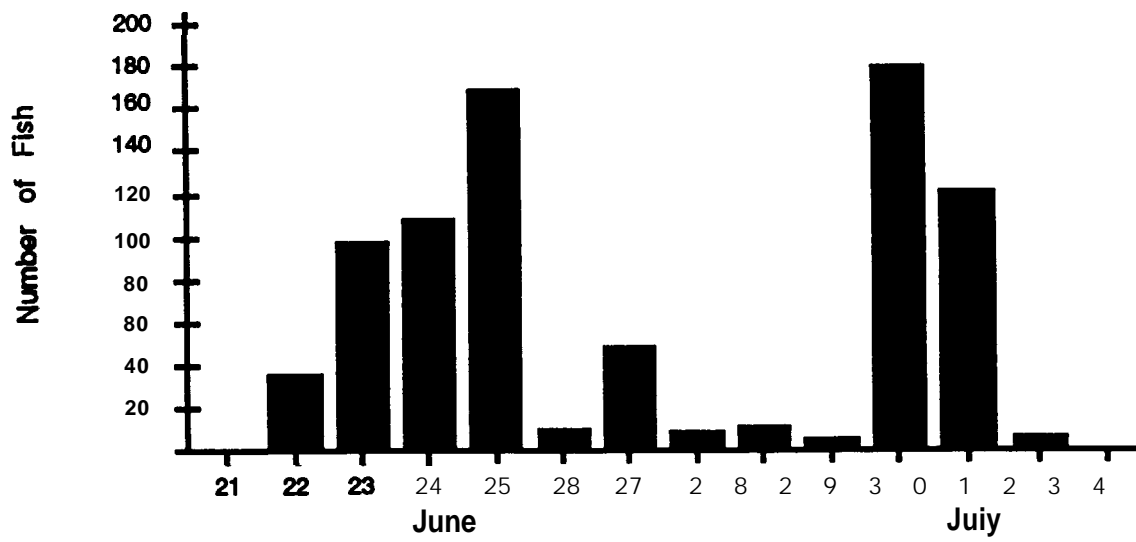


Figure 2. Timing of downstream char movements in Kuuqutiga Creek, 21 June to 4 July 1992.

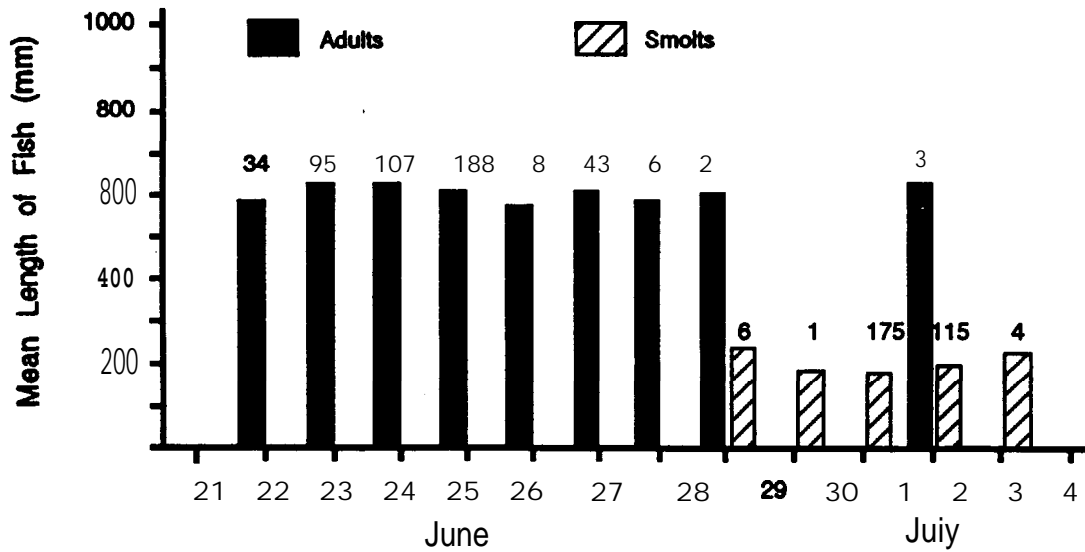


Figure 3. Mean length of Arctic char migrating down Kuuqutiga Creek over time, 21 June to 4 July 1992. Total number of char per day is shown at the top of each bar.

Numbers of Smelts

It is difficult to determine the exact number of smelts in Kuuqutlga Creek because many of the smaller fish that participated in the run were undoubtedly moving downstream to use Kuuqutiga Creek as a summer feeding area. (Observations in the summer of 1991 indicated that large numbers of juvenile char are found in the 2-3 large ponds directly below Kuuqutiga Lake, and that they are relatively abundant throughout the upper portions of the stream.) Johnson (1980) reported that smolts descending from Nauyuk Lake were very compact in size distribution, being from 180 to 240 mm in length with a modal value of 220 mm. It is suspected that the modal value of smelts in Kuuqutiga Creek was 180-199 mm (see Figure 1). Forty-two specimens were larger than the modal size. If an equal number of smolts are estimated to be smaller than the modal size, then about 142 smelts were present in the downstream run.

Numbers of Post-Spawners

Only six specimens were identified as post-spawners-fish that had spawned in the fall of 1991. These fish were all females and were identified externally by their thinness and internally by 1) presence of numerous fresh retained eggs, 2) the small size of newly developing ovaries and 3) the small size (<0.1 mm diameter) of eggs in the ovaries. The condition factors, K ($K = W \times 100/L^3$; where W = weight in grams and L = length in centimetres) of these fish were:

<u>Length (mm)</u>	<u>Weight (g)</u>	<u>Condition Factor</u>
549	1100	0.6647
572	1000	0.6280
563	700	0.3922
577	1100	0.5726
610	1300	0.5726
548	1100	0.6684

The specimen with the very low condition factor of 0.3922 was extremely emaciated and possibly near death.

Condition

Condition of the other 15 mature specimens that were killed for biological information is shown in Table 2. Condition factors of all fish were relatively low, indicating a generally light body to length ratio. Condition factors of non-reproductives (fish that would not spawn in 1992) ranged from 0.6993 to 0.8189. Johnson (1989) reported that the condition of non-reproductives in spring in Nauyuk Lake was 0.89 and that of post-spawners was 0.71. Both of these values are substantially above those of char from Kuuqutiga Lake. Residents of Ciyde River have repeatedly said that char in Kuuqutiga Creek are thin. This is firmly documented by the above data.

Table 2. Condition (K) of individual mature char in Kuuqutiga Creek. All were female except as indicated. N = non-reproductive; R = reproductive

Length Interval mm	K		
500-509			
510-519	0.8100	N	
520-529			
530-539	0.7793	N	
540-549			
550-559	0.7213	N	0.8189 N
560-569			
570-579	0.7890	N	0.7728 N
580-589	0.6993	N	
590-599	0.7673	N	
600-609	0.7261	N	0.9436 R
610-619			0.9740 R
620-629			
630-639			
640-649	0.7754	N	
650-659			
660-669			
670-679	0.8057	N	
680-689			
690-699	0.7906	N	Maie

Age

Otoliths were collected from sacrificed fish for age determination. Ages are being determined by Department of Fisheries and Oceans personnel and are not available at the present time.

CONCLUSIONS

Habitat Improvements

All evidence suggests that the habitat improvements constructed in the streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek in 1991 will remain undamaged from ice scour or flood waters for the foreseeable future. The drainage is an ideal system to test the effectiveness of habitat modifications because of its substrate, geomorphology and hydraulic characteristics.

Char Population

Data obtained in spring 1992 document that the char population in Kuuqutiga Creek is extremely small. The downstream run was composed of only 464 mature fish, six of which were identified as post-spawners. The number of smelts moving downstream was estimated to be about 142.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Monitoring char populations in Kuuqutiga Creek should continue. Clyde River residents have indicated a willingness to contribute labour if support can be found for travel, living and professional advice. Ideally, monitoring should continue in 1993 and 1994 to provide at least three data points to describe baseline conditions.

Effects of stream habitat improvements will take a number of years to begin to affect the population of char in Kuuqutiga Creek. Effects will first be felt in numbers of smelts. If population level effects are produced, the number of smelts may be increased in perhaps 5-6 years after stream improvements. Therefore, monitoring for effectiveness of habitat improvements should begin in 1996.

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PLATEs

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Platel. Dry streambed of Kuuqutiga Creek immediately below Kuuqutiga Lake (15 June 1992). The stream channel constructed in 1991 is in the foreground.

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Plate 2. Stream flow near the mouth of Kuuqutiga Creek, 15 June 1992.

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Plate 3. Kuuqutiga Lake, 15 June 1992. The dry stream and lake bed is in the foreground.

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Plate 4. Inspecting the stream channels constructed in 1991.

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Plate 5. Ice melting in a small pool of Kuuqutiga Creek.

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Plate 6. Beginning of surface flow in Kuuqutiga Creek, 21-22 June 1992.

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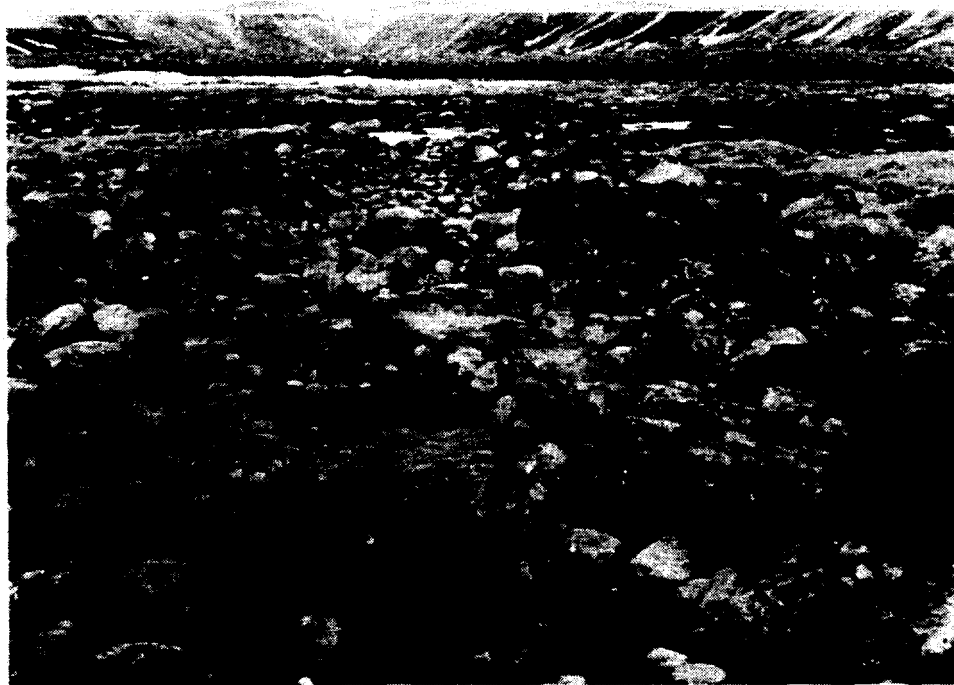


Plate 7. Stream flow in constructed channels in late August 1991 (see Plate 8).

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Plate 8. Stream flow in the same channel during spring freshet in early July 1992
(see Plate 7)

ᐱᑦ 8. ᐱᑦᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸ ᐸᐸ ᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸ ᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸ 1992 ᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸᐸ
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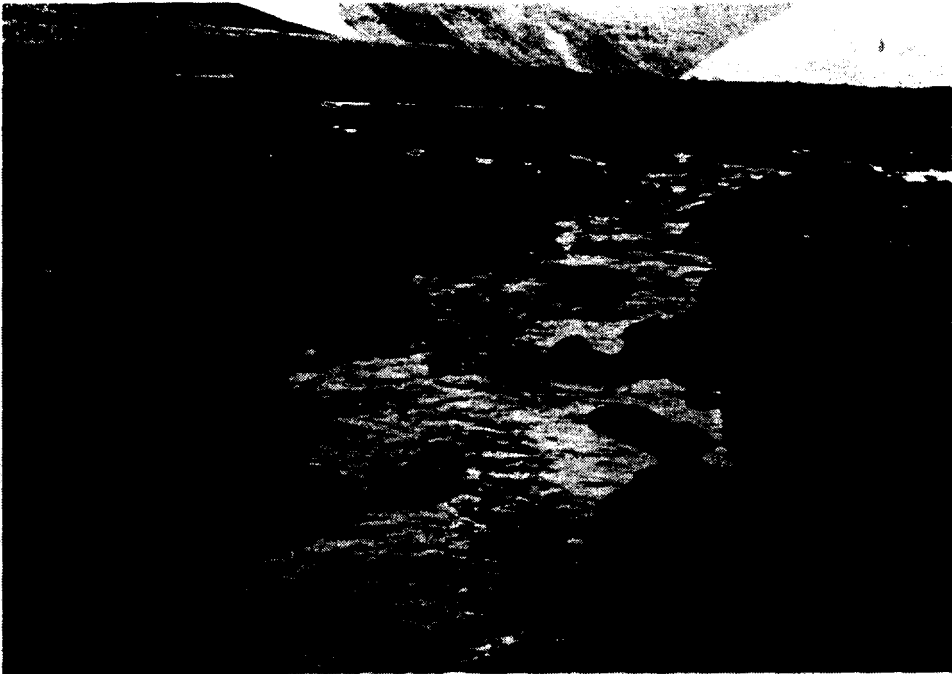


Plate 9. Stream flow in constructed channel, 30 June 1992 (see Plate 10).

ᐅᑦᑦ 9. ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦ, ᑦᑦ 30, 1992 (ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᐅᑦᑦ 10).

Plate 10. Stream flow in same channel during peak flow, 2 July 1992 (see Plate 9).

ᐅᑦᑦ 10. ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ, ᑦᑦᑦ 2 1992
(ᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ ᐅᑦᑦ 9).



Plate 11. Counting Arctic char moving down Kuuqutiga Creek, spring 1992.

ᐱᓕᓕ 11 . ᑕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᐃᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᐃᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ , ᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ 1992 .

Plate 12. Releasing Arctic char after measurements, spring 1992.

ᐱᓕᓕ 12 . ᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᑕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᐃᓕᓕᓕᓕ ᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ , ᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕᓕ 1992 .

