



Where the heck is Donlin?

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(This journey was undertaken by Bjorn Olson and Kim McNett, with the support of Ground Truth Trekking in Winter and Spring 2011. See [the movie page](#) for the status of the documentary)

Status

Completed in June 2011, with a documentary still to come. Read blog posts on the journey here:

PRESS RELEASE: [The Adventure Continues \(March 2012\)](#)

[The Donlin bikers reach McGrath](#)

[The journey begins again](#)

[Free turkeys and the challenges of a filmmaker](#)

[Final paddle into Bethel](#)

[Film Project](#)

Overview

Bikes, packrafts, and a gold mine...

This unprecedented expedition will take us ([Bjorn and Kim](#)) roughly 850 miles from the historic start of the Iditarod trail to the town of Bethel, entirely by human power, following the Iditarod and the Kuskokwim River. The first section of the journey is behind us, and we're gearing up for the second leg in summer 2011. Between Knik and McGrath, we flew down the Iditarod on fat-tire bikes, enjoying the same glorious conditions that led to a record finish in the Iditarod this year. Along the way, we interviewed people about the proposed Donlin Mine gas pipeline down the Iditarod trail, and stumbled across an [ice road from another mine prospect](#) we didn't even know existed. The trail was great, but Kim's knee wasn't, and we were forced to rethink the initial expedition plans.

The second half of the journey was completed in packrafts, journeying down the Kuskokwim through the villages along the way, and ending up in Bethel.

<http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Journeys/Donlin.html>

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Bjorn and Kim



Staying warm

Donlin Creek Mine prospect

The mission of this journey is to explore the issues surrounding the **proposed Donlin Creek gold mine**. This mine is located above a tributary that leads into the Kuskokwim River near the village of Crooked Creek. If it is built, this large mine would transform the entire route of our journey. A natural gas pipeline along the Iditarod trail may power the mine and would transform the face and flavor of the trail. A large mine on the Kuskokwim drainage would bring both economic opportunities and environmental consequences to this remote region. Our journey follows the potential pipeline route to the mine, and follows the downstream watershed from there to Bethel.

While other mine proposals such as the **Pebble prospect** have received a lot of attention, most people know little about Donlin, and the opinions of people in the region are rarely heard. We want to see the land, learn from people in villages along the way, and hear what hopes and concerns they may have about a mine of this scale being built in their back yard. We also hope to promote the **Donlin creek working group web site** as a tool to connect the voices of those that may be affected by the mine

The projected economic impacts of Donlin are widely viewed as positive in the region. However, there are potential environmental impacts from **mercury** and **acid-generating tailings**. These negative impacts may be able to be mitigated by careful mine engineering, but current plans call for **perpetual waste storage** which presents issues that are very difficult to resolve. Energy supply to the mine via a gas pipeline from Cook Inlet could be a great boon to local communities, but **some worry** that where the pipeline runs along the Iditarod trail it might change the character of the trail.

Fatbiking on snow



Easy riding

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