

Couple sails from Lake Laberge to Bering Sea

By RHIANNON RUSSELL
Star Reporter

For 64 days, Mario and Ramona Goldstein lived on the Yukon River.

They carved a tally of the days with a knife into their wooden raft, shading in the grooves with charcoal from their campfires.

Ramona spent the time reading, painting, collecting stones and building Inukshuks, while Mario's duties were navigating and operating the engine.

A solar panel on the raft's roof allowed them to use cell phones and cameras.

They ate fish from local fishermen, made their own bread over the fire, and tried moose and bear in Dawson City. (They're both vegetarians, but made some exceptions during this trip.)

It wasn't a thrilling diet: "Potatoes, pasta, potatoes, beans, potatoes," Ramona said with a smile.

When they finally reached their destination, the Bering Sea, they were just about out of alcohol with which to celebrate.

"I kept one beer for the Bering Sea," Mario said. "I drank that when we arrived."

They tethered the raft, as they'd done every night previously, and spent the night playing guitar and sitting around a campfire under clear skies.

"That for me was a celebration," he said. "You realize what you just did."

The German couple came a long way to do it. They flew from their home country to Canada's east coast, with their truck, a massive grey box Goldstein bought off the German police, on a cargo vessel. Then they drove from Halifax to the Yukon.

They made the same drive last year, but decided this year they wanted to make it as far west as they could on this continent – by raft.



Photos courtesy MARIO AND RAMONA GOLDSTEIN

SPECTACULAR BACKDROP – Mario Goldstein, his wife, Ramona, their friend Patrick Schilbach (left to right), and their dog Sunny, travelled the Yukon River from Lake Laberge to the Bering Sea this summer.

Last week, sitting at the kitchen table in their truck, parked in Whitehorse's Walmart parking lot, with sunlight streaming through the window, the couple reminisced about their river journey.

It started in June. Using two rubber tubes and wood, they constructed a raft

on Lake Laberge in two weeks.

It was impressively built – solid and reliable, with two beds and a roof over their heads.

They departed July 1 with a cameraman friend and their dog, sailing down the river to Dawson City without the need of their motor.

Things got more challenging when they reached the Yukon Flats in Alaska. "That was tricky," Mario said. "It's a big area that's difficult to navigate."

The winds would pick up, causing six-foot swells that rocked the raft back and forth.

Mario just hoped the rubber tubes

stayed tied in place.

"It's something you think about: your tube goes away, then you say, 'OK, thank you very much,'" he said with a smile. "But it never happened, thankfully."

Once they reached the end of the river, they found someone with a more powerful engine who could tow them back to Emmonak, Alaska.

There, they sold the raft's engine, gave away the wood and deflated the tubes, and flew to Anchorage.

To be in a city surrounded by people after two months in remote wilderness was a shock to Ramona.

"For me, it was terrible," she said. "I was very sad. It was too much for me."

Mario, though, was happy the trip was over.

"Not because I didn't like it, but because I'm an adventurer," he said.

"I do extraordinary things because I like to face the challenge and realize it and live it, but then when it's done, it's time for something new."

A friend picked them up and drove them back to the Yukon.

They spent a night camping at Lake Laberge under the super moon. That's where they'd left their truck.

Looking back on the last few months, both said they're pleased with the accomplishment.

"It was a big challenge," Mario said.

"We had everything perfect to make it. We had enough luck. You need a bit of everything: you have to know what you're doing, you have to have equipment and you have to have luck. If one of those isn't there, you fail."

They are driving back to Nova Scotia in their truck, and will then head home to Germany, where Ramona works as a nurse and her spouse as an author-photographer-presenter.



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED – Mario and Ramona Goldstein sit on the roof of the raft they built in two weeks on Lake Laberge. They sailed on it down the Yukon River to the Bering Sea.