

Kobuk Dunes: General Information from 2019 Alaska Native Plant Society Field Trip

Arrival by Cessna 206, in late afternoon just as a storm was approaching. After a very brief look for suitable campsite, tents went up quickly. For a three day stay it turned out to be an excellent location, close to water and very few bugs due to a little distance from the spruce forest. Fortunately, we did not have any strong winds during our stay, these are active dunes.



The Kobuk Dunes are remnants of sparsely vegetated sand and silt between the Baird and Warring Mountains in NW Alaska. Glaciers in the last ice age created fine particles from abrasion to bedrock, and these particles were exposed as glaciers retreated. Strong winds shaped dunes, which are mostly vegetated now, just 10% of the original, but they are an active remnant with unique flora. In this photo Baird Mountains, part of the Brooks Range, are about 10 miles to the north.



Many parts of the Kobuk Dunes are sparsely vegetated, and winds continue to keep it that way. Arctic Brome (*Bromopsis pumPELLIANA* ssp. *pumPELLIANA*) is one of the prominent dune-tolerant species.



Ahnewetut Creek flows through the Great Sand Dunes. It seemed to be a wildlife corridor, active with bear prints.





Boreal Sage (*Artemisia borealis* ssp *borealis*) was a common dune plant.



Camphor Tans (*Tanacetum bipinnatum*) is often found on sandy soils in Alaska. It was a showy shoreline forb along Ahnewetut Creek.



Jakutsk Snowparsley (*Cnidium cnidiifolium*) was frequent in wet dune faces near snow melt and permafrost.



Northern Pink (*Dianthus repens*) was a showy dune plant in the area.



Thoroughwax (*Bupleurum americanum*).



Central parts of the dunes were active zones of sand movement, low nutrients, and very little vegetation.



Dune faces too steep to ascend were fun.



Warm days north of the Arctic Circle made barefoot walking a great option in Ahnewetut Creek, to get back to camp after a long day.





Carex glacialis was one of many unique sedges found on sandy soils near the dune edges.



Ogotoruk Packera (*Packera ogotorukensis*) was a showy forb, common in the dunes.



July 17 and Wilson's Snipe were nesting in wet brushy vegetation on the N. facing slopes of Warring Mountains.



Showy alpine forget-me-not (*Eritrichium splendens*) was fairly common in the dunes.



Kobuk locoweed (*Oxytropis kobukensis*) is a rare plant (rated S2 / G2) found only in the Kobuk Valley.



Photo 1 of 4 in a sequence: 12:30 AM, July 17, near sunset on our last night at the dunes several got up early for a sunset set / sunrise hike into higher parts of the dunes.



Photo 2 of 4 (1:50AM) of a sequence started at 12:30AM for sunset / sunrise viewing from higher parts of the dunes. This photo of Ted & Ginny with Baird Mountains to the NE showing sunrise soon.

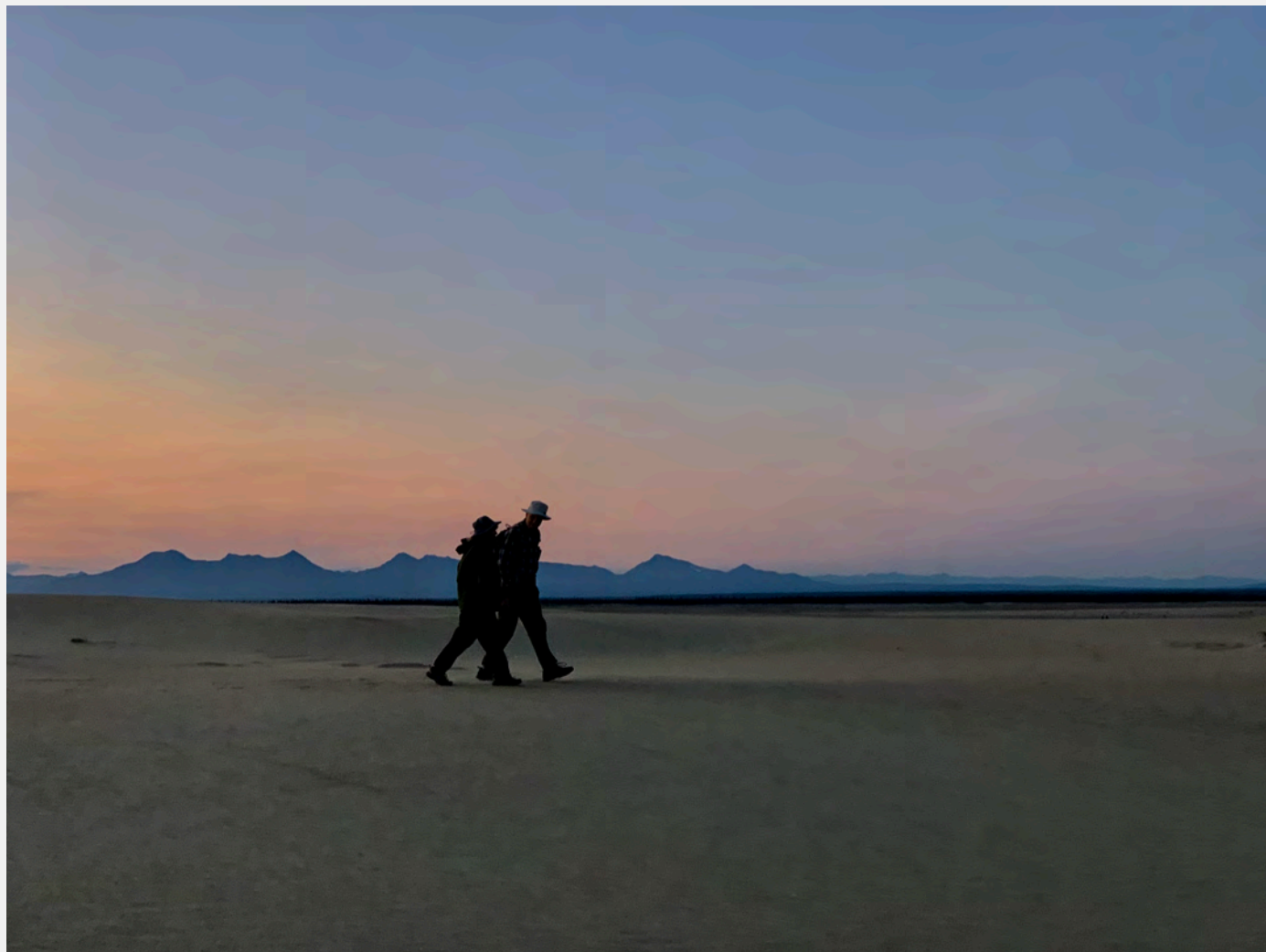


Photo 3 of 4 (5AM) of a hiking sequence started at 12:30AM for a sunset / sunrise hike into the dunes. By 5AM the hike had continued into a dense bush-wack of alder & willow on the wet N. facing slopes of the Warring Mountains, bug insanity requires strong chemicals or head nets as we passed snow fields toward the low summits.



Photo 4 of 4 (5:30AM) of a hiking sequence started at 12:30AM for a sunset / sunrise hike into the dunes. This photo is Beth Baker enjoying sunrise from the Warring Mountains South of Kobuk Dunes. Patches of interesting ridge line vegetation, panorama, and a breeze to help deter bugs made it all better.

