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YUKON RIVER REPORT

Wild Rivers Survey - 1971  
Yukon Territory

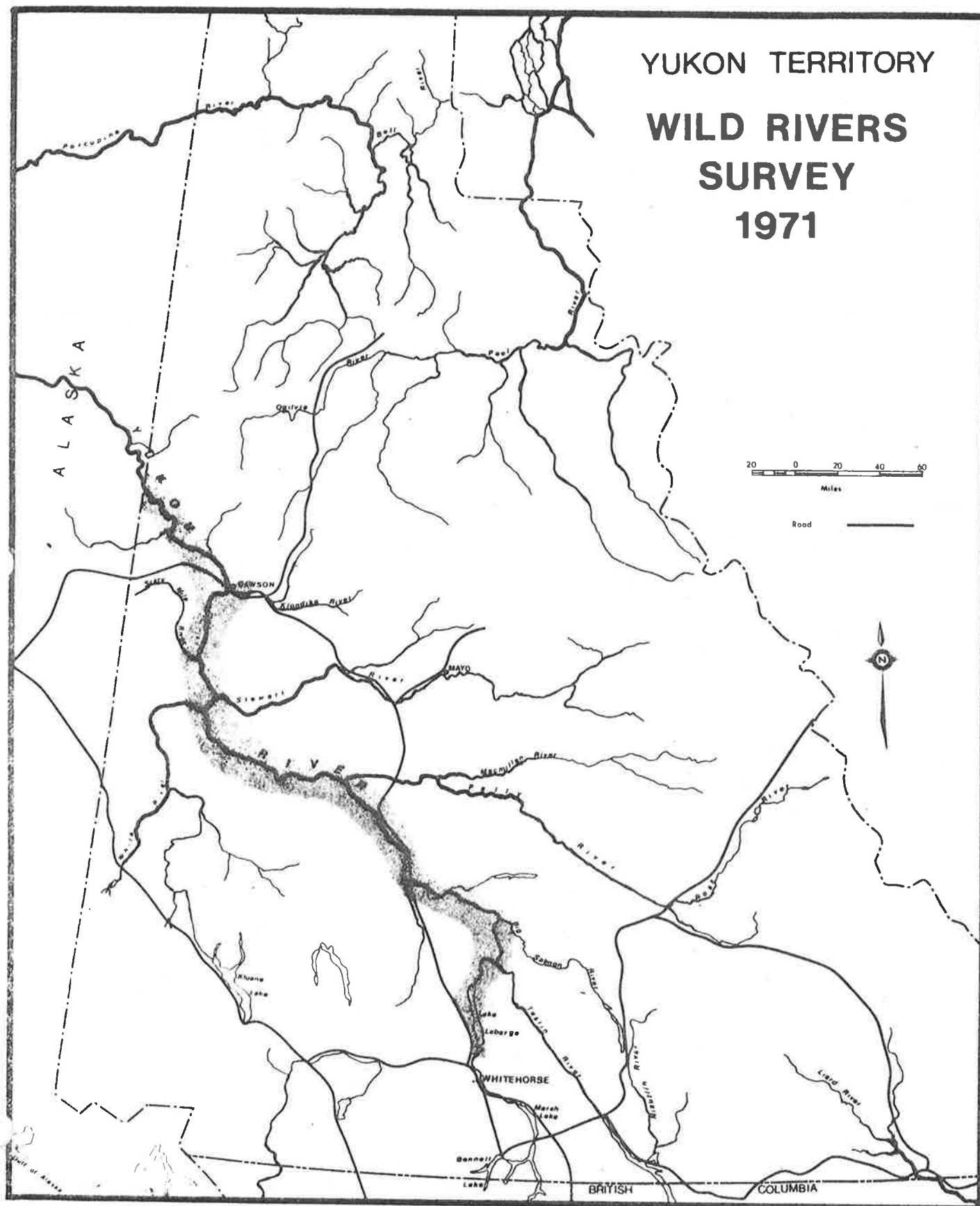
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YUKON TERRITORY  
WILD RIVERS  
SURVEY  
1971



## INTRODUCTION

Until the completion of the Alaska Highway, the main thoroughfare of commercial traffic for the white man in the Yukon Territory was the Yukon River. The peak volume of this traffic occurred immediately after the discovery of gold on Klondike and Bonanza Creeks. This initial surge of travel was followed by the period of steam-powered stern wheelers carrying passengers and goods to various destinations along the Yukon River.

Although a few people still live along the river and use it for personal and commercial transportation, the importance of the river as a commercially viable thoroughfare has diminished. However, an increasing number of people are using the Yukon River for recreational travel. With the exception of a dam below Miles Canyon near Whitehorse, the river is still free flowing, without major obstructions, and ideal for recreational, small craft navigation.

The Yukon River and its shores offer two categories of interest to the recreational traveller: cultural-historical and natural.

As an historic route, the importance of the Yukon River dates before the Klondike days to the explorations in the 1850's by Robert Campbell of the Hudson's Bay Company. Fort Selkirk is a remnant of this era. Remains of native settlements and cemeteries are also found along the shores of the river. Dawson City is a remnant of the Yukon's most colourful era, the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98.

Although the banks of the Yukon show evidence of a more populous era, today its shores are relatively uninhabited. Hence the Yukon River can provide, to some travellers, a "wilderness experience" because of its present natural and undisturbed state along the majority of its length. There are still sections

where access is only by water, wildlife and fauna are abundant, and the influence of man is minimal. There are also sections where the river has carved canyons and bluffs, producing splendid scenery.

The following report is a brief description of these historic and scenic features along the Yukon River. The river has been divided into several 'reaches' or sections based on relief and accessibility.

#### LEWES RIVER

The length of the Yukon River from the mouth of Marsh Lake to the point at which the river crosses the Yukon and Alaska boundary is approximately five hundred and thirty miles.

The Lewes River drains Marsh Lake at its northern limit, flowing in a north-westerly direction past Whitehorse and emptying into Lake Laberge.

In its first seven miles the river passes through an area of very flat shorelines with large areas of grassy and scrub brush marshes. Behind these marshes the low banks are covered with mixtures of spruce, poplar and pine.

A dam is located where the Alaska Highway crosses the river approximately seven miles below Marsh Lake. Approaching the bridge a marked change in the physical characteristics of the river environment can be seen, as the river heads into an enclosed area of high clay cut banks broken periodically by lower vegetated shores of poplar. This characteristic is prevalent for about seven to eight miles beyond the dam. The river traveller is able to see high river terraces back from the river that are vegetated with grass and a sparse scattering of small bushes and poplar trees.

The low dam at the beginning of this section has a set of locks on the right

(east) end through which canoes can be guided. Below the dam, the water velocity increases to about 5 m.p.h. There are riffles, whirlpools and a back eddy along the east wall. When coming out of the locks, it is advisable to paddle to the left into the main current to avoid the back eddy. The presence of the dam, the bridge, the highway and a Water Resources cable a few hundred feet below the dam detract considerably from the aesthetic qualities of the beginning of this enclosed section.

After passing through this section of noticeably frequent clay cut banks, the river gently meanders for about six miles through a densely vegetated area with low undercut and slumping banks on either side. The river is narrower and a feeling of the closeness of the river, together with the dense vegetation, makes this area a very scenic and peaceful part of the Lewes River.

The river has a few more large cut banks at the end of the meandering stretch, and then again, reverts to a fairly narrow section between densely vegetated shores of spruce. In this five mile straight section of the river before Miles Canyon, there are some areas where the river terraces are closer to the east shore, particularly just prior to the site of Canyon City. Because of the proximity of the Alaska Highway on the west shore there are a few cottages and a hydro development along the shoreline.

Canyon City, established in 1898 and located on the east shore about a mile before Miles Canyon, was the site where the Klondike stampedeers stopped either to have their equipment taken around Miles Canyon or to scout the rapids before attempting to run them. Today little remains of this site except some old logs embedded in the ground.

Below Canyon City the river turns sharply right into a narrow rock walled gorge

of about a mile in length. The water boils and surges through this gorge at about 7 m.p.h. with several large whirlpools. The rock walls drop vertically into the water and are about seventy-five feet high with hill terraces sloping back from the top of the canyon walls. The basalt walls are distinctive in their hexagonal jointing. In the middle of Miles Canyon, a footbridge extends above the water across the canyon. There seems to be little chance of swamping in Miles Canyon but there can be a considerable amount of difficulty in keeping the canoe straight because of the riffles and the whirlpools.

At the bottom of Miles Canyon the river opens up to form Schwatka Lake, a man-made lake caused by the large power dam that is located at Whitehorse rapids. This reservoir also provides drinking water for the city of Whitehorse which is about one and a half miles to the north. The lake is fairly small but is quite scenic with a high cut bank on the west side followed by a road along the shore down to the dam. The east shore is lower and flatter than the west shore. The lake, besides being a reservoir, is also the float plane "airport" for the city of Whitehorse.

This entire section of the Lewes River from lower Marsh Lake to, and including, Schwatka Lake, has few areas for potential campsites. Two exceptions are at the site of Canyon City and on a point on the east bank of Schwatka Lake, a short distance from the mouth of the Canyon.

The water quality from Marsh Lake is excellent and its emerald green colour adds to the scenic pleasure of this section of the Lewes River. Grayling fishing is also excellent along this stretch of water.

Whitehorse, located twelve miles south of Lake Laberge and a few miles below the power dam on Schwatka Lake, is the capital of the Yukon Territory. It has

a population of approximately 11,000 and is the transportation hub of the Yukon, the terminus of the White Pass and Yukon Route Railway, the head of continuous navigation down the Yukon River, the major air centre of the Territory and is located on the Alaska Highway.

The Lewes River takes on different characteristics below Whitehorse. Three miles below Whitehorse the river averages six hundred feet in width with scattered islands and twenty foot gravel east banks. The west bank is low but gradually rises until one hundred and fifty foot clay cut banks are evident. Below this three mile section, the river narrows and becomes enclosed between clay banks until approximately four to five miles below the junction of the Takhini River and the Lewes River. Here the river widens to about seven hundred feet. The river valley is very wide, and characterized by marshy segments. These characteristics continue until just a few miles before Lake Laberge where the banks become progressively lower and the river gradually widens to about a half mile at its mouth.

The larger vegetation of this section consists generally of poplar and white spruce along the shores with large areas of lodgepole pine on the terraces above the river. Along the lower portion of the river, past Takhini River where the shorelines become fairly low, an immense burned area on the west shore can be seen that covers the entire valley. This stark evidence is a constant reminder to the residents of Whitehorse of the 1954 fire that at one time posed a grave threat to the city. Now, the area is covered with the purple hue of fireweed.

The water quality of this stretch of river is very similar to the water quality of other rivers in the country that flow past or through cities - polluted. The conditions here are not so bad that the damage cannot be reversed. Raw sewage from Whitehorse is dumped into the river. The city dump is located three miles



below Whitehorse on the west bank. Brown foam is noticeable on eddies below the city. Drinking water should be acquired from the few sidestreams that enter the Yukon (Lewes) River.

Despite the poor water quality and garbage dump, the Lewes River from Whitehorse to Lake Laberge is very pleasant and is especially scenic where the valley opens up from about 8 miles above Lake Laberge. The surrounding mountains and hills are striking when seen down the lake and to the east and west across the valley floor. The rest of this stretch is not diverse scenically, but pleasant as it meanders between banks and tree-covered shores.

There are several locations for campsites along this section of the Lewes River; two being on a multi-channelled meander bend about four miles before Lake Laberge, and on the east bank just around a left hand bend below the garbage dump. Other locations are plainly visible where the high cut banks disappear and low grass-topped banks are present.

#### Lake Laberge to Alaska Boundary

The Yukon River from Lake Laberge to the Alaska boundary is approximately five hundred miles long. The velocity of the river averages 3-7 m.p.h., as the flow is characterized by surges and boils.

The colour of the water varies from clear to very silty. Clear water can occur on Lake Laberge and in the Thirty Mile section as early as June. During the early summer from Hootalinga (the mouth of the Teslin River) downstream, the water becomes progressively more silty due to the addition of the silt-laden waters of the major tributaries. By early August the Yukon River clears of silt as far downstream as the mouth of the White River.

Erosion is taking place throughout the length of the Yukon River. Cut banks

over three hundred feet high and islands are continually being eroded. Stream bed material may vary from clay to boulder, as will the islands and bars vary from sand to cobble. Only two sets of rapids will be encountered on the Yukon River and these are below Carmacks. Five Finger Rapids, with the passable channel on the right limit has waves two feet high with strong back eddies on either side of the white water. If the right limit is followed upon reaching Rink Rapids no white water will be encountered. Debris, mainly in the form of logs or wood, can be found floating during the high run-off waters in early June.

The water is potable down to the White River. Below the mouth of the White River drinking water should be acquired from side streams due to the silt-laden White River discharging its murky load into the Yukon. The only evidence of pollution is the untreated sewage from Whitehorse, Carmacks, and Dawson. Clinton Creek sewage is treated before being discharged into the Forty Mile River, however, it is advisable to boil water taken from the Forty Mile River.

Shoreline characteristics varied from low relief of a few feet to high relief of approximately eight hundred feet. Cut banks are a common occurrence as are hills rising directly from the water's edge. The shoreline dips into the water anywhere from  $50^{\circ}$  to  $90^{\circ}$  slopes. Vegetation associated with the shoreline, depending upon the area, was black spruce, willow, alder, poplar, and a few water plants.

Hillside vegetation consists of black spruce, poplar, white birch and alder. Sparsely vegetated areas and rock outcrops are also common. Mountains can be seen in the distance as the Alaska Boundary is approached below the abandoned Forty-Mile Village.

Fauna along the river consists of moose, bear, lynx, fox, wolf, porcupine,

beaver, muskrat, ducks, geese, hawks, falcons, eagles and an assortment of small birds. Grayling, whitefish and northern pike are abundant in the Yukon River and the side streams, once the Yukon becomes silty.

Potential campsites are numerous along the river. Slip-off slopes, open beaches, sand or gravel bars and habitable cabins are recommended as campsites. The few hazards such as difficulty of landing, drinking water, firewood, and insects should be considered while choosing a site. If located on bars, campsites may have to be supplied with drinking water and firewood from elsewhere. Usually firewood is available in the form of driftwood and a water container should be carried.

#### Lake Laberge

Lake Laberge, made famous by poet Robert Service in his poem, "The Cremation of Sam McGee", is located in a long valley surrounded by hilly and mountainous country. The lake is some thirty-one miles in length and is aligned in an almost north-south direction. The shoreline is quite irregular.

The upper reaches of the Lake north of Jack Fish Bay are three and one half miles wide. Approaching Richtofen Island the Lake widens to five miles, then narrows just north of Richtofen Island to one and one half miles. Through these narrows, the width remains constant at approximately two and one half miles.

The water has a greenish tint to it and is of questionable potability. Raw sewage from Whitehorse that is deposited in the Yukon River twenty miles south, may possibly have a detrimental affect on the water. According to residents of the area, fish are not as plentiful as in the past, although grayling, whitefish, northern pike and lake trout may be caught.

Bear, moose, wolf, fox, lynx, eagles, hawks, geese, ducks and a wide assortment of small game and birds inhabit the area.

The elongated, rocky and tree-covered Richtofen Island is approximately 2,100 feet above mean sea level, with grassy hilltops and wooded slopes. The Island is mainly inhabited by bird life. Flora consists of purple lupine, twin flower, ground cedar, northern bedstraw, fireweed, violets, creeping snowberry, labrador tea, mosses, memophilas, wild onion, wild rose, aspen, balsam, willow and poplar.

Travelling north down the Lake, rocky hills and cliffs line either limit, covered on their tops by spruce and poplar growth. Snow-capped mountains can be seen to the west as well as in a southeasterly direction. As the Lake narrows north of Richtofen Island, the rock walls gradually give way to low, rolling, well-vegetated hills.

Drinking water is available from the lake or from the small creeks flowing into it. Laurier Creek on the right limit and Pilot Creek on the left limit are two such streams. A water pump is located at the government operated campground, approximately thirty miles outside of Whitehorse to which access can be gained from the Klondike Highway.

Campground locations are numerous. The government campground is located on the west shore of the Lake, opposite Richtofen Island. Other sites may be found on the Island or along the shore where open beaches alternate with the rock faces of the south end of the Lake. The northern portion of the Lake offers excellent campsite potential.

Upon leaving Lake Laberge at its northern end, sand and gravel bars will be encountered as the Lake becomes very shallow. These may be treacherous for

powered craft and caution should be exercised. The middle channel or the channel on the left limit are the two navigable channels of the three channels present. A current is noticeable about one half mile from the head of the Yukon River and this increases to 3-4 m.p.h. as the river is entered.

Squalls are common on Lake Laberge and care must be taken when crossing the open stretch of water in a canoe. It is advisable to follow the shoreline. The trip can be completed in two days of easy travel if head winds are not present.

A trip that is to originate at Whitehorse or Lake Laberge will depend on ice conditions. The ice can move out anywhere from the end of May to the 10th of June.

#### The Thirty Mile

This section is perhaps the most unique and spectacular area of the Yukon River. The river runs from the wide open vistas of Lower Laberge into a narrow winding channel enclosed by almost perpendicular sand and gravel bluffs, ranging from fifty to three hundred feet in height.

Throughout most of this section, the river is usually not more than sixty to seventy-five feet wide. The current is estimated at 3-5 m.p.h., but the illusion of speed is heightened due to the proximity of the towering bluffs. Pale blue and turquoise in colour, the water is clear and clean, as it flows over a rock and cobble bed. No rapids are encountered in this section, but there are a few areas of riffles.

Much of the upper Yukon River is bordered by high sand and gravel cut banks located on the outside perimeters of the river bends. The upper clay layers of the banks are dotted with swallows nests. The tops of the banks are covered

with willows and poplars, mixed with black spruce, the former two being the dominant species on most areas of backshore. The Thirty Mile section is perhaps the best example of this particular characteristic of the river, as the valley width is narrow and accentuates the height of the bluffs.

Occasionally the immediate valley widens, to give a view of hills and mountains in the distance. However, most of the view is generally confined to the immediate river environs. Another outstanding feature of this section is the abundance and variety of wildlife. Nowhere else on the Yukon River are there as many geese, swallows, and varieties of ducks (canvasback, wood, black, mallard). If the traveller avoids using motorized boats, moose, bear and wolves can also be seen on the shores. The most significant wildlife feature of the area is the eagle. Bald and Golden Eagles are frequently seen soaring over the valley.

At Lower Laberge, a small abandoned community exists. A telegraph station is marked as a historic site and is protected by the Territorial Government. Many of the cabins need repair if they are to remain standing, and litter is scattered throughout the bush as well as along the shoreline. The remains of an old steamer "Casca I" are also found on the shore. An abandoned telegraph line follows the river along the right limit, and can occasionally be seen from the river.

Seventeen miles down from Lower Laberge there is a log cabin which was at one time a refuelling station for steamers.

The single most outstanding site along this section is the area called U.S. bend. The clear blue water bores through the channel in a severe S curve, which is bounded by towering bluffs on the outsides of the curves.

The Thirty Mile poses no problems to the experienced navigator. Care must be taken occasionally to take the outside of the sharp bends in the river. Landing can be tricky at times, especially with propeller-driven craft.

Good campsites are found along most of the Thirty Mile. No problems with firewood and water should be encountered. There are good opportunities for hiking and beautiful panoramic vistas may be seen if one makes the effort to climb the nearby hills.

Access to the Thirty Mile section is only by boat from Lake Laberge, and it is recommended not to use motor-powered craft so that maximum benefits from this section as a truly "wild" river may be gained.

#### Hootalinqua to Little Salmon

This seventy-mile section of the Yukon River begins at the mouth of the Teslin River.

At this time of year the most obvious change from the Thirty Mile section is the colour of the water. With the additional water entrance from the Teslin, the Yukon suddenly turns into a grey-brown colour. The river also becomes wider and deeper with a velocity of around 5 m.p.h.

High bluffs occur less frequently than on the Thirty Mile River. Due to the wide river width the heights of these bluffs do not stand out. Large scale slumping and undercutting is prevalent. The shoreline averages three to ten feet high with small brush and spruce immediately behind.

Except for areas that are severely eroded or those that have high cut banks, this section of the Yukon River has a relatively wide valley bordered by hills or mountains up to 2,000 feet above the river surface (Glassy Mountain). Excep-

tions to this are at the mouths of the Big Salmon and Little Salmon Rivers, where the river valley is extremely flat and wide, with little relief in the vicinity.

Hootalinqua (an Indian word for "where two big waters meet") is the site of a former Northwest Mounted Police roadhouse and is presently protected by the Yukon Territorial Government. A few cabins in poor condition are situated here as well as a cabin that is habitable. Hootalinqua is located on the left limit directly across from the mouth of the Teslin River.

A mile downstream is the steamer Evelyln in drydock. A little further, near Scow Bay, is the hulk of the steamer Klondike which was wrecked in the Thirty Mile River and has drifted to its present location.

Big Salmon Village, at the mouth of the Big Salmon River, was at one time, a trading post. The buildings on this site are in reasonable condition and are protected by the Territorial Government.

Erickson's (or Byer's) Wood camp is an abandoned camp located on the right limit a few miles below Big Salmon. Some of the cabins are habitable. It is located on a high cut bank and therefore may be difficult to find. Drinking water may be acquired in a slough across the river if the silty water of the Yukon is undesirable.

A few of the hills that line the banks of the Yukon offer magnificent views of the Yukon River valley if the time is taken to climb them. One such hill is Glassy Mountain. It is a 1,500 foot to 2,000 foot climb. The side of the mountain is relatively clear of trees and therefore relatively easy to ascend.

Campsites may be located on islands, the shoreline, or on the abandoned cabin sites found along the banks. Most cabins can provide shelter for four to six



people.

Access to the area is by river. This would be from Lake Laberge down the Thirty Mile, or via the Teslin or Big Salmon Rivers.

In early June, the Yukon has a high silt content though the water is still potable. If clear water is desired, it may be acquired from small side streams since the main tributaries also have heavy silt content. The Yukon will clear towards the end of July as well as the tributaries.

This section of river offers excellent historical attractions as well as a wilderness and recreational experience.

Little Salmon to Carmacks:

The next forty-two miles on the Yukon River are unique, due to the proximity of a road and power lines.

More islands appear than on the previous sections of the River. Floating vegetation, a result of spring runoff, has increased. The river averages 4 m.p.h. until Columbia Slough is reached where the velocity decreases to 2 m.p.h. The main channel is not difficult to follow through this slough. Exposed sand and gravel bars are common to the slough, as well as low banked islands which are covered with thick, brushy vegetation. The colour of the water continues to be brownish as it will throughout the trip.

The high sand and gravel bluffs that were characteristic of the upper reaches of the river continue here. The bluffs are not as high and the river has widened considerably. Three to six foot gently sloping banks are common, and cause no landing difficulties. Behind the shoreline is thick, alder brush mixed with black spruce and a few birch.

The forested hills of the Columbia Slough are gently sloping. However, in the areas near the mouth of the Little Salmon River, Eagle Bluff, and the approach to Carmacks, more rugged, steeper and barren hills, rising about 1,500 feet above the river, appear. There are often jagged sedimentary and metamorphic rock outcrops. Two miles before Carmacks a coal mine is present on the right limit.

Eagle Bluff is outstanding. Located on the right limit, a few miles above Carmacks, this sedimentary rock knob rises 700 feet above the river. Besides Eagle Bluff, the Robert Campbell Highway with its associated traffic and power lines is noted. This detracts from the visual effects of the river.

Little Salmon Village is located at the mouth of the Little Salmon River. In this village, an old mission and cabin in good condition can be viewed. Upstream from this site are some Indian cemeteries with traditional spirit houses.

Lakeview has four abandoned buildings in good condition that show signs of periodic use. A trail from Lakeview offers an interesting side trip of several miles along an attractive brook that shows an abundance of grayling in its clear swift waters.

Campsites may be found on gravel bars, islands, cabin sites and in the left limit below the bridge at Carmacks. Bars provide a light breeze and thus protection from insects that inhabit the more sheltered bush areas. Columbia Slough is not recommended as a camping area.

Carmacks, located at the intersection of the Klondike and Robert Campbell Highways, has a population of under two hundred. It is a service centre offering a store, post office, gas station, hotels, taverns, R.C.M.P. and Yukon Forest Service posts. It is the last chance to purchase gas or other supplies

before Dawson, another 258 miles downstream.

Due to the presence of the highways and secondary roads that lead to the river's edge, easy access or egress to or from the river is provided.

#### Carmacks to Rink Rapids

Canyon type topography and Five Finger Rapids dominate the next thirty miles. The water flows at five to seven miles per hour with surges, boils and the odd pool and riffle characteristics occurring.

Shorelines are mostly rock slopes with some sand and gravel bluffs just below Carmacks. Near Five Fingers coal mine the river valley and river bed coincide with a steep hillside above the river. At Five Fingers coal mine, weathered sandstone has produced hoodoos. The valley is narrowly confined by the surrounding hills and bluffs being only four hundred to six hundred feet in width. Hillsides, with some rock outcrops, are barren, and rise five hundred feet above the river.

Five Fingers Rapids, one mile below the old coal mine, are the first set of rapids to be encountered below Whitehorse and are navigable at all water levels. The rock palisades or "flower pot islands" at the rapids are unique to the Yukon River and result in a multi-channelled course. The rapids may be run through the right hand channel, through two foot waves that are bordered on both sides by strong back eddies. The water is deflected from the right hand bank and results in a cross current moving from right to left as the rapid is entered. Aligning for the run through the rapids should take place at the old winch house which is located on the right limit, just upstream from the rapids. Five Fingers Rapids are more subdued at lower levels of water.

Five Fingers Coal Mine, approximately one mile above Five Fingers Rapids, is

an excellent example of early mining. However, the mine has mostly caved in. There is the odd sign of early settlement at Kellyville but that is all. A winch house, located just above the rapids on the right limit, was used to pull steamers up through the rapids during the days of the stern wheelers.

This section of the Yukon provides excellent and exciting recreational experiences. The rapids are the outstanding attraction, although care should be taken when passing through them. If time permits, the canoeist will notice when passing through the right hand channel that the rock walls are dotted with mud swallows nests.

Access may be gained to the River from Carmacks. Egress naturally should take place at Dawson City. On the right limit of Five Fingers Rapids, the Klondike Highway parallels the River, approximately five hundred feet above the water.

#### Rink Rapids to Fort Selkirk

This fifty-three miles of river has some of the lowest topography between Whitehorse and the Alaska Boundary.

The current decreases to approximately 3 m.p.h. as the river's course becomes filled with islands between Minto and Fort Selkirk.

Rink Rapids, the second and last rapid, will be encountered just below Five Fingers Rapids. Rough water is evident but may be avoided by closely following the right limit. At one time rocks hindered navigation through these rapids and consequently they were blown up. The white water is navigable but there is no need to run it.

The high sand and gravel banks give way to cut banks seventy-five feet high.

Below Rinks Rapids is a large area of white volcanic ash along the right limit and legend tells us that these areas are Sam McGee's ashes. As Fort Selkirk is approached, basalt outcroppings are frequently noted along the right limit. In the Yukon Crossing area above Fort Selkirk, high peaks surround the wide river valley. Below Yukon Crossing, the relief is more subdued. The valley becomes wide and low, with rolling topography.

The abandoned townsite of Minto marks the beginning of higher banks and higher land, but at the same time the number of islands, sloughs and marshes increases. This characteristic continues to the mouth of the Pelly River and Fort Selkirk. At Fort Selkirk a high basalt wall marks the right limit of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers.

At Yukon Crossing, now abandoned, stage coaches between Dawson and Whitehorse were ferried across the River. Two buildings in poor condition and the odd piece of equipment are all that remain of this site. Wild roses and blue bells grow in profusion in the clearing, as they do in most formerly settled areas along the Yukon River.

The settlement of Minto, abandoned in 1954 by the natives after a series of unsolved murders, has an old church, a number of shacks and a Northwest Mounted Police post. The area is scattered with litter but the buildings are in excellent condition. An emergency airstrip is located just behind the townsite.

Fort Selkirk was established as a Hudson's Bay Company outpost by explorer Robert Campbell in 1848. The site is abandoned except for an Indian caretaker, Mr. Danny Roberts and his wife. There are approximately fifteen buildings, most of which are in fair to excellent condition. Fort Selkirk is located on a high bank on the left limit, directly across from the mouth of the Pelly River.

The townsite extends about half a mile along the river and offers a tremendous view of the basalt wall on the opposite shore. Fort Selkirk originally had a mission and a trading post, with later additions of a Hudson Bay Company store, a Taylor and Drury Department store, and a Northwest Mounted Police post. There still exists a one room school house, with many of the old educational aids and equipment still in place. White and Indian cemeteries and a Catholic church are located back in the woods. There are said to be some clearings much further back in the forest where some early farms were attempted.

Access and egress may take place at Minto, as the Klondike Highway passes within one mile of the River. Access is also possible at Pelly Crossings on the Pelly River. Dawson City is the next point of egress. There are no navigational problems in this section of river and landing procedures should make use of the many back eddies along the shore.

#### Fort Selkirk to White River

This ninety-five mile reach of water can be divided into three subdivisions based on changes in local topography. Sand bluffs evident in previous sections of the river have now disappeared completely.

##### a) Fort Selkirk - Twin Falls

The basalt wall opposite Fort Selkirk is the dominant feature as it parallels the right limit from the mouth of the Pelly River to Twin Falls. It is a sheer cliff of columnar basalt, black in colour and rising 450 feet to a flat-topped poplar-covered plateau.

The river banks are severely eroded and undercut, and rise five to six vertical feet above the water. Throughout the river channel numerous well-treed islands are present.

b) Twin Falls - ten miles above White River

Fiord type features characterize this portion of the Yukon River with mountains rising steeply from both limits, enclosing the river completely. Outcrops show among the sparse grass cover on the slopes of the right limit. The left limit does not appear as high nor as steep and the slopes are covered with stands of black spruce and poplar. Salix and cornus grow along the water's edge. Campsites are limited to the shorelines with the best sites occurring at the mouths of small creeks that are usually infested with insects.

c) Ten miles above White River to White River

The steep left limit gives way to wet, flat, swampy terrain. The right limit has almost no shoreline as the mountains dip to the water's edge.

The heavily silt-laden, glacial-fed, White River, enters from the left limit. Silt has been deposited at the mouth, leaving low, wet, grey islands with dead trees that have been carried downstream stranded on them. The water has a grey-white tint and is definitely not potable.

Historic sites are prevalent along this section of the Yukon River. Isaac Creek, at one time a placer mine and wood camp, still has floor boards of buildings as remnants of the past. Brittania Creek has an old road that leads twenty-three miles to the old placer mine site. Machinery in this area was removed in 1970. Ballerat Creek has cabins which are now privately owned. A road leads for fourteen miles up the creek to the site of an old placer mine that was at one time quite rich in gold. Coffee Creek has cabins and an old trading post remaining. A trail leads from the Yukon River into the back country and was a route used to the Chisana Gold Rush of 1913 in Alaska. It passes through an old ranch that supplied the pack trains used during this gold rush. The trail

is very difficult to locate and since it has not been used in recent years, it disappears a little ways back of the Yukon River. Kirkman Creek is now privately owned. A few buildings, one being an old post office, are located at this site. Mining also took place here. Thistle Creek is set back 300 yards from the river and is difficult to see. It is being restored by a private concern from Whitehorse. A semi-modern cabin, an old truck, and an abandoned river barge, along with a two-storey log roadhouse that serviced the old stage road, are located at this site.

These sites are usually overgrown with wild roses and some are still used during the winters by trappers. The number of historical sites, together with the scenery, make this stretch of water one of the most interesting of the trip.

Large game as well as water fowl and a wide assortment of small birds are numerous. Campsites may be found on the open bars that extend from islands. Once below the White River, drinking water will have to be acquired from side streams.

#### White River to Dawson City

The Yukon River changes colour below the mouth of the White River. This off-white, greyish colour is a result of the glacial silts that are added by the White River, which originates in the Kluane Mountain Range.

Due to the increase in silt content as well as volume of water, the Yukon River has become one to one and a half miles wide. Islands, shallow sandbars and floating debris are common to the stretch of river immediately below the White River.

Shorelines are continually being undercut. Surrounding hills are still as high



as the previous section but do not confine the view of the wide river valley. Good campsites may be found on any of the numerous islands. Drinking water should be acquired from side streams, thus necessitating the use of a water container.

At the mouth of the Stewart River, ten miles below the White River or seventy miles south of Dawson, is Stewart River settlement. One family now lives here. They operate a general store that offers a limited variety of goods to river travellers. Originally Stewart River consisted of a post office, telegraph station, trappers' cabins and a trading post operated by the Alaska Commercial Company. The settlement also serviced barges that plied the Stewart River carrying supplies for Mayo. A small museum with artifacts collected from the Yukon and Stewart Rivers is also located here. Today the cabins are slowly falling into the River as the island on which they are located is continually being eroded.

The first post office in the Yukon Territory is located on Ogilvie Island directly opposite the mouth of the Sixty Mile River.

Dawson City, at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers, is one of the main highlights of a trip down the Yukon River. Its history, dating back to the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98, can still be seen in the old buildings that line the streets and the summer programs that tell of the past history of the Klondike. Side trips through the dredge tailings in the Klondike valley and up to Midnight Dome, give an idea of the environment in which Dawson is located. It is advisable to read a few of the many accounts of this city so a better insight into Dawson may be gained when it is visited.

Navigational hazards along this stretch of water are limited to sweepers and shallow waters. Floating vegetation like sweepers is a result of the continual

undercutting of the shorelines by the powerful and fast-flowing Yukon River. Rough or choppy waters usually found around islands indicate shallows and should be avoided if power craft are being used.

Many islands are composed of fine sands or silt. These should be avoided as campsites since rain will turn the dusty islands to mud.

The Sixty Mile River offers a pleasant diversion into clear water. There is excellent fishing at its mouth where the clear waters of the Sixty Mile meet the murky waters of the Yukon. Excellent campsites may be found a quarter mile up the Sixty Mile River.

#### Dawson City to the Alaska Boundary

In Canada, the remainder of the Yukon River (from Dawson to the Alaska Boundary), is approximately ninety miles long. Egress may take place at Clinton Creek on the Forty Mile River or one hundred and seventy-five miles beyond the international boundary at Circle, Alaska.

Even though the clear waters of the Klondike River enter at Dawson, the Yukon River continues to be silty. Its velocity decreases slightly as its width varies from a quarter mile in the area between the Fifteen Mile and Forty Mile Rivers, to one and a half miles in the Dozen Islands area preceeding the Alaska Boundary. Sand bars, islands, and occasional shallows are evident.

Along the river from Dawson to the Fifteen Mile River the shoreline rises approximately 200 feet. The banks are characterized by steep wooded hills and cliffs, with 20° to 35° slopes.

Below Fifteen Mile River, the valley sides become vertical and confined, dipping directly into the water. Shorelines, if present, are very narrow and

rugged. This reach is fiord-like in character. The rock walls are horizontally layered and show evidence of folding. Vertical and horizontal intrusions of quartz are common.

The valley widens to several miles in the vicinity of the Forty Mile River and continues this way almost to the Alaska Boundary. Mountains rising 3500 to 4500 feet are evident in the distance. Rounded hills that rise 1000 to 1500 feet above the river front these razor-edge mountains. Even though the valley is wide, the panorama of hills and, often, of snow-capped mountains is spectacular and unique to the lower Yukon.

The valley once again becomes confined near the U.S.A. - Canada border. The boundary is a thirty-foot cut through the bush and is also marked by a brass marker on the left limit.

Moosehide, an old Indian village, is on the right limit three miles below Dawson. It is a townsite in relatively good condition and may be reached by walking along the right limit from Dawson.

Old historic sites such as Fort Reliance, De Wolfe's Halfway house, and Silver City at the base of Galena Mountains have little remaining to tell of their past.

The abandoned settlement of Forty Mile, at the mouth of the Forty Mile River, was the first townsite in the Yukon Territory. It has an Anglican Church, Northwest Mounted Police station, a general store, warehouse, and several cabins, of which many are in fair condition. The area is accessible by foot from the highway that crosses the Forty Mile River to Clinton Creek, the mining community of Cassiar Asbestos.

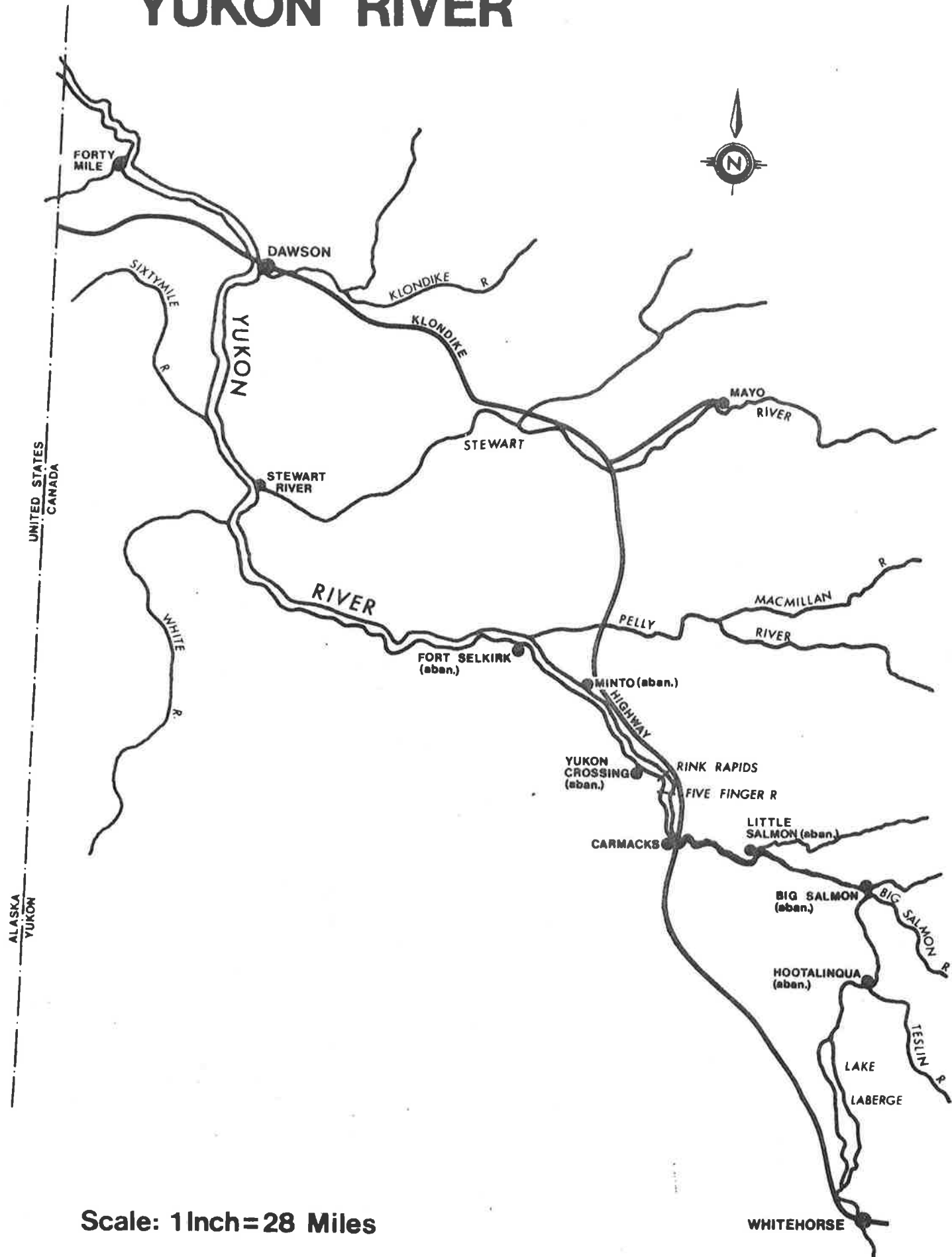
Old Man Rock is the single most outstanding feature below Dawson City. It is a

solitary bastion of yellowish rock, rising some 200 feet from the shore and standing 150 feet high by 300 feet long. The sides are vertical, with spruce growing on top. Standing above the flat river valley and backed by the mountains in the distance, Old Man Rock is outstanding.

The river should not present any difficulty to small craft navigation. The centre channel through the Dozen Islands region should be used if motorized craft are used. Substantial headwinds can be expected in this wide river valley.

Campsites are numerous on islands and bars except in the Cassiar and Harry Creeks area. Here they are limited by the steep and rugged shorelines that dip directly into the river. Drinking water may be obtained from side streams. Forty Mile River is clear but it is advisable to boil the water even though the community of Clinton Creek treats its sewage before discharging it into the Forty Mile River.

# YUKON RIVER



APPENDIX

TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP COVERAGE:

1:250,000 MAP SERIES, N.T.S.

NAME

SHEET NUMBER

Whitehorse

105 D

Laberge

105 E

Glenlyon

105 L

Carmacks

115 I

Snag

115 J

Stewart River

115 O

Dawson

116 B, C