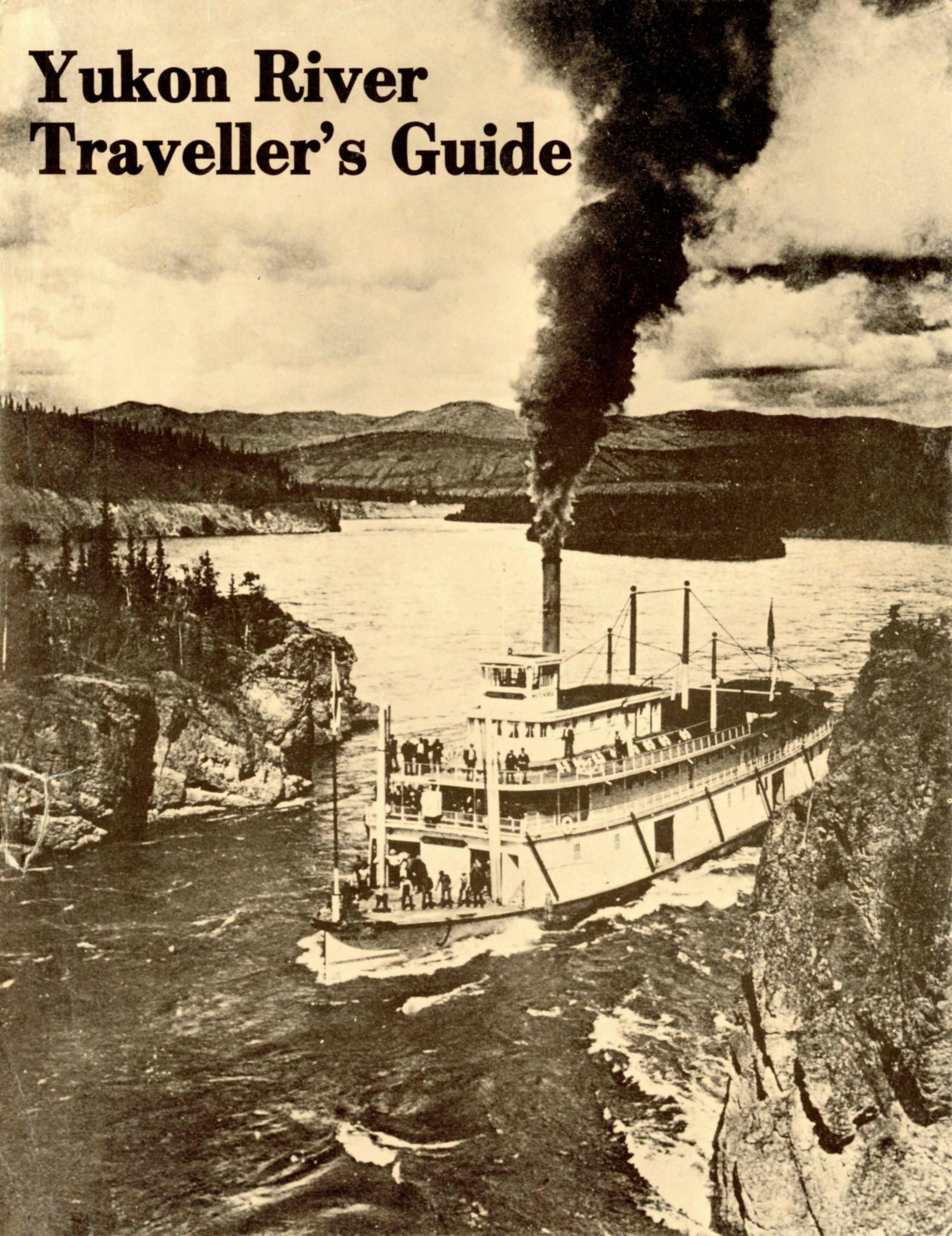


Yukon River Traveller's Guide



The cover photograph shows the Sternwheeler "Whitehorse" with passengers and crew on deck, passing through the Five Finger Rapids in 1904. The "Rapids" about 224 river miles downstream from Whitehorse, are in the shape of an outstretched hand pointing towards the goldfields and Dawson City. During and after the goldrush, Sternwheelers had to be winched upstream through these rapids.

Photo: Courtesy Yukon Archives

Prepared by

Parks & Historic Resources Branch
Department of Renewable Resources
Yukon Territorial Government

With the
Cooperation of

Parks Canada
DIAND
ARC Branch
National Parks Branch

YUKON RIVER ETIQUETTE

We hope that your trip will be enjoyable and that the channel chart which is attached will be of assistance to you. Please remember, however, to use our chart with caution since the Yukon River changes constantly and thus the chart we have provided may not be completely accurate.

Our brochure has been divided into the following sections for convenience:

1. Basic Equipment List
2. First Aid
3. Hypothermia
4. Boat Handling
 - (a) Overloading
 - (b) Rules of the Road
 - (c) Suggestions for Safety
 - (d) Life Preservers
 - (e) Fuel Handling
5. Fires
6. Smoking
7. Waste Disposal
8. Sanitation
9. Historic Sites
10. General suggestions

Our brochure is intended to provide you with useful information to make your trip more safe and enjoyable while making our jobs easier by reducing garbage accumulation, preventing forest fires and reducing searches for missing persons.

As an aid to boaters using the Yukon river, the Parks and Historic Resources Branch of the Department of Renewable Resources and Parks Canada has six experienced river patrol men working the river between Whitehorse and Dawson City. They are there to provide advice and emergency assistance to river travelers.

Their radio-equipped boats are clearly marked and they are willing to lend a hand in the event of difficulties. They will also be seeking information about traffic on the river so please cooperate with them for the safety and enjoyment of everyone.

1. Basic Equipment List

This list is included as a guide only and should be modified to suit each party's individual requirements. You should be careful not to overburden your party with gear, a common mistake made by river travelers. Be careful, however, to take enough food. A trip to Dawson from Whitehorse will likely take from one to four weeks depending upon your boat, how many hours you travel each day, how many side trips you make and the weather.

Clothing

2 shirts } preferably
2 pr. pants } wool
1 medium weight sweater }
1 hat (sun & rain protection)
1 pr. gloves (for working in water or with fuel) cotton best
1 pr. leather gloves (warmth & camp use)
1 pr. rubber boots
1 hooded rain jacket & pants
1 pr. boots (hiking)
1 pr. soft shoes (boating)
4 pr. socks (2 thick)
1 warm jacket
2 sets underwear

Kitchen

1 knife, fork spoon, plate, cup, bowl (per person)
2 pots } heavy duty
1 fry pan }
2 burner stove (coleman type)
white gas or appropriate fuel
sturdy fuel containers
funnel with filter
eye dropper to prime stove
disposable lighter
waterproofed matches in container
spare plastic bags

Outboard

spare spark plugs
extra starting cord
spark plug wrench
extra propeller
1 box shear pins (if used in motor)
1 pr. pliers
1 screwdriver
1 roll wire
1 funnel with screen
extra fuel tanks or fuel barrels
gear lubricant

Boat

1 life jacket per person
bailer, large sponge
extra paddle or oars
suitable boat patching kit
binoculars (to spot hazards)
tarpaulin cover (for boat to use in case of rain or for dew protection at night)

Camping Gear

tent with fly and mosquito net
tent poles and pegs
form pad or air mattress/person
mattress patch kit (if needed)
sleeping bag (to 25 F) or below
flashlight, spare batteries
and bulb
candle lantern and candles
space blanket (emergency shelter)
toilet paper
toilet trowel or shovel
mirror and comb
needles and thread
ripstop tape (for mending)
1 pr. medium scissors
1 roll nylon cord
toothbrush and dentifrice
waterproof covers for sleeping
bag & spare clothing

2. First Aid

Plaster Dressing Strip (Band Aid)
Surgical Tape 1"
Moleskin

Bandage 3" Tensor
Bandage Triangular
Safety Pins

Gauze Squares 4"
Paraffin Gauze
Wound Dressing

Soap
Antiseptic

Scalpel Blade
Tweezers
Thermometer

Aspirin/Codeine Tabs.
Pentazocine/meperidine Tabs.
Strong pain killer
Diazepam

General

first aid kit
notebook, pencils
reading material
emergency fishing tackle
1 pr. sunglasses/person
map or chart
compass
insect repellent
calamine lotion or baking
soda (for treatment of
insect bites)
suntan lotion
lip salve
signalling mirror and whistle
long handled axe
swede saw

Survival Kit

Compass
Whistle
Penknife

Matcher/Lighter
Candle
Fire Starter
Flint and steel

Flare Gun and Flares
Signal Mirror
Ground-Air Code
Wax Pencil and Paper

Tape
Needle and Thread
String/Cord
Snare Wire

Wire Saw
Tin Opener

Co-trimoxazole (Septra)
Antibiotic
Chloromphenicol Eye Ointment

Food (Concentrated)
Fish Line and Hook
Fish Net 2"

Salt Tablets
Foot Powder

Polybag
6'x 6' Sheet Poly

Paper and Pencil
First Aid Book
Safety Pins

3. Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the temperature of the central core of the body falls below about 35°C. It can be brought about by any one or a combination of things: wind, dampness and cold. Exhaustion and low morale can aggravate it. Symptoms of hypothermia are changes in a person's manner. He may be apathetic, uncoordinated, irritable or suffer from uncontrolled shivering, thickness of speech, intense thirst, disorientation, decrease in heart beat and breathing rate, blueness of skin.

When you notice any of these symptoms in someone or yourself, stop and find shelter. It is imperative that the person's body heat is brought back up as quickly as possible. Be sure he has dry clothes on and get him into a sheltered place in a sleeping bag. In severe cases, direct bodily contact with the victim--transferring your body heat to his--is the fastest way of raising the temperature. Massaging of the body and limbs also encourages circulation.

Hot drinks and a nip of alcohol can assist him once he is rested and rewarmed. Do not over-do the alcohol as too much will work against the heating process.

A warm bath should be given when you return to base camp or get home.

In the Yukon, rivers and lakes are cold even in the summer. The water temperatures vary from the low 40's (5°C) in June to a peak at the end of July in the mid-50's (10°C - 15°C). Wool is warmer than cotton and retains considerable insulating properties, even when wet. Also, a calm person uses less energy and body heat than a nervous person. Much also depends on the size of a person and how much body fat he has.

REMEMBER: Hypothermia can cause death if it is not arrested.

NOTE: For information on treatment of hypothermia and other medical problems while in the outdoors, The Mountaineering First Aid booklet by the mountaineers of Seattle and "Medical Care for Mountain Climbers" by Dr. Peter Steele of Whitehorse are excellent reference material.

4. Boat Handling

This topic is such a long one that we have subdivided it into several subsections and included many comments in the "general" section.

(a) Overloading

On a river trip such as you are planning, the tendency is always to take too much gear. Overloading is dangerous. How much weight can be safely carried depends upon many factors including the type of boat, the weight distribution, the weather, etc.. Your own common sense is the best guide. The Ministry of Transport does issue a rough guide, as follows:

<u>Lenght of Boat</u>	<u>Number of Persons</u>	<u>Max. Weight Load</u>
3 m (10')	2	184.5 kg (410 lbs)
3.7 m (12')	3	258.75 kg (575 lbs)
4 m (14')	4	333 kg (740 lbs)
5 m (14')	5	438.75 kg (975 lbs)

This guide is intended for use for boats on relatively calm water and for boats with a fairly broad beam (like rowboats). You should make sure you have allowed adequate freeboard (hull height above water level) because rapids and foul weather conditions, particularly if the wind blows against the current, can arrive unexpectedly and quickly swamp your boat. You should make a short test run with all of your gear and passengers aboard. Trim your load to a safe level before attempting to run the Yukon River. Freeboard is particularly important for small boats attempting to run Five Finger Rapids below Carmacks.

Not only weight but weight distribution is important. You should balance the load both fore and aft as well as port to starboard (left to right) if you want your boat to ride well in the water.

(b) Rules of the Road

Occasionally, your party will meet others coming in the opposite direction. In order to prevent mishaps, certain "rules of the road" much like those used on highways, have evolved.

Boats meeting on a head on or reciprocal course; both swing to starboard (right). When another boat is approaching you, maintain your direction and speed. Do not make any last-minute, sudden maneuvers unless it is to avoid a collision.

Remember that power boats, because of their greater speed and manoeuvrability give right of way to paddle, oar or sail-powered craft. Also, motor-driven boats often cause waves sufficient to distress if not capsize small boats; slow down when approaching small boats and avoid them by a wide margin if you can.

(c) A few Suggestions Regarding Boating Are in Order

1. Carry life jackets for all passengers. Children should wear them at all times and adults whenever the water gets rough, any amount of manoeuvring is planned or a hazard (like Five Finger Rapids) is expected.
2. Weather conditions in the Yukon can change quickly and drastically. If the weather starts deteriorating, slow down and stop at the first convenient spot unless your boat is capable of handling large waves.

Another hazardous area is Lake Laberge. That lake is thirty-two miles long and can quickly develop four-foot waves. We suggest you run that body of water along one side, preferably the west shore which is often the lee (sheltered) shore and also lies next to the Klondike Highway so that you can quickly get off the lake in case a storm develops. The north end is particularly difficult due to the presence of dangerous shallows and the fact that the lake exit to the north east is often difficult to locate quickly.

3. Do not stand up to change seats in a small boat. Preferably you should stop on shore to carry out such manoeuvres, or, if that is inconvenient, crouch low and change place slowly and carefully, keeping the weight over the boat centreline as much as possible.
4. The waving of a piece of light colored material or a light in a vertical circular motion is a distress signal. Help is often a long distance off, so be prepared to help others you may find in trouble.
5. Standing up to start an outboard motor in a small boat is dangerous because one can very easily overbalance and fall.
6. River conditions can change quickly. Do not leave a boat's steering gear unattended for long.

7. Open-topped rubber boots are difficult to swim in.
Avoid wearing them in a boat.

(d) Life Preservers

The Canadian Ministry of Transport has laboratory tested the materials and components that make up various life jackets, then tested the jackets themselves. The following comments are the result of those tests:

1. Try out the life jacket. Put it on and familiarize yourself with the tie tape arrangements. Your jacket should suit your body type and size and the activity you plan to use it for.
2. Jackets are generally reversible but if you are using the keyhold style, you should make sure that the waist straps are tied around the body and not around the life jacket. This allows the jacket to pivot away from the body and give the desired, inclined backward, floating position.
3. In order to familiarize yourself with the jacket's capabilities in the water, you should wade out into water about chest deep and by bending your knees, let buoyancy of the jacket support you. The life jacket should incline you in a backward position with your mouth clear of the water. Some will tend to float you in a face down position, making them hazardous for use by someone in a dazed or unconscious condition. Use of the latter type is not recommended.
4. If you have to swim while wearing a life jacket, use a back or side stroke.
5. The responsibility for maintaining your jacket in good condition rests with you and the following points should be noted:
 - (a) Do not abuse a jacket by using it for any other purpose such as a seat cushion, boat fender or kneeling pad.
 - (b) When dry, store the jacket in a well ventilated cool area.
 - (c) If wet, hang up jackets to dry in the open air or in a well ventilated area; do not dry them in front of a fire or other source of direct heat. Follow manufacturer's servicing instructions.

- (d) Do not use harsh detergents or cleaning fluids to clean dirty life jackets. Never dry clean them.

Kapok life jackets are easily damaged by rough treatment. If the vinyl inserts containing the kapok are split or torn, water will soak into the kapok and the fibers can become water-logged and matted and lose their buoyant properties.

If a jacket feels heavy and damp, discard it.

Life jackets made from unicellular foam are more durable. However, even this type will break down if treated roughly. Also, foam tends to shrink with age and excessive exposure to heat, including sunlight.

Children should be made to wear their life jackets at all times when boating. They should be taught how to put them on and be allowed to try them out in the water. It is important that children feel comfortable in a life jacket and know what the device is for and how it will keep them afloat. Parents should note, however, that life jackets do not take the place of adult supervision.

Children are difficult subjects to float in a safe position because of their body weight distribution and because a child tends to panic when finding itself suddenly in an environment to which it is not accustomed. The violent movement of a child's arms and legs, in an attempt to "climb out" of the water, tends to nullify the stability of their life jackets. Approved life jackets will keep them afloat but not always in a face up position.

(e) Fuel Handling

Fueling for your boat's motor (if it has one) and other accessories will normally be available only at Whitehorse, Carmacks and Dawson. You will therefore likely experience a need to store and transfer fuel. Fuels, particularly those used to power motors and stoves, are generally volatile (give off fumes and have a low ignition temperature or flash point) and thus ignite and burn easily. When refueling a boat, we suggest the following system be instituted to reduce this hazard to a minimum:

1. Carry out refueling on shore if you have portable tanks (as with an outboard).
2. Once you have opened your fuel container, do not smoke or create any spark as may occur if electrical appliances (like electric starters) are used.
3. Close hatches and doors if your boat has them to keep fumes out of enclosed spaces (if refueling is to be accomplished on board ship).

4. Passengers should go ashore prior to refueling (if refueling is to be done on board).
5. Keep spillage to a minimum and wipe all of it up (if refueling on board).
6. Ventilate the boat following refueling. Your nose is a good indicator of fumes.
7. If refueling was done on board, test start your engine(s) before allowing the passengers back aboard.

Other fuels besides gasoline are dangerous including propane, butane and the unleaded fuel used in many stoves and lanterns. Propane and butane are heavier than air and will "pool" at the lowest parts of the boat from which removal is difficult. Gasoline fumes can also accumulate in a boat due to fuel tank or fuel line leaks.

Gasoline lanterns, stoves and heaters must also be handled carefully. Place them on a cleared area on the ground, let them cool, then carefully fill. Move the stove or lantern before lighting. Make sure the unit has adequate ventilation if it is to be used in a tent or other enclosed space.

Fuels you purchase may contain contaminants or the containers you store them in may release contaminants into the fuel. Thus filtering or straining of the fuel should be done every time you transfer fuel from one container to another. Otherwise your boat motor, stove, lamp may clog up and cease to operate.

We suggest that if your outboard requires mixed fuel (oil and gas) that you do not store that fuel for more than a day in any container. Otherwise the oil will tend to separate from the gasoline and, if used without remixing in your outboard, cause engine damage due to lack of lubrication or engine failure due to excess oil. We suggest you mix your gasoline with oil in the outboard's fuel tank immediately prior to use and shake the fuel tank vigorously prior to refilling your tank.

5. Fires

Fires can be safely lit on rock, sand or gravel, in a sheltered location away from trees, surface vegetation and litter. If such a spot is not conveniently located, dig a fire pit to below the organic layer. Make sure the pit is large enough to contain the fire you plan to light. Cut off any roots, branches, etc., which project into your pit. If possible cover the organic material in the walls of the pit with sand or gravel. Don't build your fire next to a tree, particularly a spruce or pine tree. Your fire may kill the tree due to the heat produced. The tree branches may catch and take the flames into the tree crown, from which they can spread into a major forest fire. Another hazard, one which is

often overlooked, is the ability of tree roots and organic litter on and in the soil to act as a "fuse" to carry fire into other fuels. Such fires can smoulder for weeks before surfacing.

Before leaving your campfire, either for the night or to move to another location, please make sure that your fire is completely out. A pot or pail is worth taking with you just for carrying water to douse the fire. A small spade trowel or folding shovel is also a valuable tool for digging fire trenches or stirring up the ashes to assure that your fire is out. Check the area around the fire for spot fires started by flying embers and the ground for smouldering roots and other debris.

If for some reason water is not available, use sand or other material which does not contain organic (woody) material. Mix the sand with the fire embers until those embers are completely out. Just burying the fire will not necessarily put it out.

Careful disposal of dish water and other liquid waste from the kitchen around the ashes at the edge of your fire when camping will help prevent roots etc., from carrying fire underground and sanitarily dispose of the waste liquids.

The Yukon Lands and Forest Service is responsible for forest fire suppression in this Territory. Legislation requires that you obtain a campfire permit from a Forestry or RCMP officer before lighting any fire during the summer. Officers of the YL & FS also request that you report any forest fires you see as soon as possible so that action can be taken to extinguish such fires quickly.

6. Smoking

Smokers of cigarettes and other substances have long been a prime cause of forest fires. PLEASE make sure your matches are out before you discard them. Grind out your butts, cigar or pipe tobacco on a rock or in gravel or sand, never in organic soil, grass or on a stump or log.

7. Waste Disposal

Littering has been a problem and nothing spoils the appeal of a river bank or a campsite more than a miscellaneous collection of refuse.

We therefore ask your cooperation in keeping the Yukon River as clean as possible by burning all of your garbage, flattening the cans, etc., placing the refuse in bags and transporting the garbage to locations where garbage pickup by truck is possible. These locations are at Carcross, Whitehorse, Carmacks, Minto and Dawson and will be marked by signs.

Probably the only wildlife in the Yukon which may prove to be a hazard to you are bears. If you or your predecessor at your campsite have not looked after food properly, a bear may decide to visit your camp. Avoid possible bear problems by storing your food in a container somewhat removed from the camp and pulled up into a tree on a rope. Empty cans, food bags, etc., should be burned out to remove all food scents then crushed to reduce their volume. If a bear does approach your camp, make plenty of noise (say by yelling and banging pots together) but don't run either toward or away from him nor make any rapid moves which may startle him. If a bear cannot be scared away easily with noise, move camp and report the bear's behavior, description and location to the RCMP so that other travellers can be warned to avoid that location. Do not get close to cubs nor between cubs and their mother. When all else fails, play dead and the bear will likely ignore you. We all like to see bears in the wild but not too close.

Both grizzly and black bears may be seen along the Yukon River. The two can be distinguished by the distinctive "bump" on the grizzly's shoulders behind his neck. Both are unpredictable, but the grizzly tends to be more extreme in his behavior, usually very shy and secretive but sometimes very aggressive.

8. Sanitation

Disposal of body wastes can be simple. Large parties should always dig latrine holes as part of the first step in setting up camp and carry lime or a similar disinfectant that will counteract odour, keep flies away and hasten decomposition. Small parties of three or less, or larger parties making brief stops, should carry a trowel to scratch out shallow (4-6 inch) holes for a latrine.

Dish water, excess grease, etc., should also be buried.

One of the most distressing problems of wilderness travellers is diarrhoea. Frequently this condition results from poor washing and rinsing of dishes. Impure (such as one finds issuing from swamps or between Whitehorse and Lake Laberge) or heavily mineralized water can also cause distress. We suggest you boil river water before drinking it or at least treat the water with purification tablets as directed by the manufacturer.

9. Historic Sites

The Yukon has a colorful history thanks to the '98 Gold Rush. The people of the Yukon and indeed people across Canada, are becoming increasingly concerned about protecting this existing evidence of our history for the benefit and enjoyment of Yukoners and for visitors like yourselves. We request your cooperation in

assisting us by not destroying, dismantling, removing, or defacing any historic sites, burial grounds or artifacts you may see during your trip. Look at them, take all the pictures you want.

Please note: It is an offense under the Yukon Archaeological Site Regulations to excavate or investigate an archaeological site in the Territory or remove from the Territory or collect any archaeological specimen or artifact unless a permit has been obtained to do so. Every person who violates a provision of these regulations is guilty of an offense and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, or both.

10. Other Suggestions For Your Boating and Camping Safety and Pleasure

Carry an extra set of glasses for anyone who requires prescription glasses. An extra set of Sunglasses is also a wise addition in case one person in your party loses theirs. The glare from the water can be very tiring to unprotected eyes.

To see more wildlife, drift down quietly without talking (sound carries a long way over water) or keep your motor at a constant noise level (sound changes scare animals).

Travel close to river banks can be a more interesting place to travel but is also a more dangerous one, especially during high water periods. Debris (fallen logs, trees, etc.) lurk underwater and can easily upset your boat. Also beware of log jams on channels next to islands. A responsible person in the bow with a sharp eye forward at all times can save you a lot of grief and possibly your life.

If the day is warm and you're drifting or even under power, the tendency is often for everyone to fall asleep. Make sure at least one person remains awake or your party could get into serious trouble (bars, rapids, sweepers, storms, log jams).

Operate your outboard at 3/4 throttle - this will give your boat almost the same speed as full throttle but you will save gas and the motor will run more quietly.

A canvas bucket makes a good sea anchor and is also useful around camp. As an anchor, simply point your boat into the waves, fasten the bucket with a rope to the bow and place or throw the bucket ahead of the boat. If your motor quits due to lack of gas or mechanical troubles, the sea anchor will pull the bow into the waves.

"Outriggers" consisting of logs can be lashed to the sides (thwarts) of boat to provide more stability and floatation.

Oarlocks and two oars are a good addition to any freighter canoe, allowing one to manoeuver in case of engine failure or to move through shallow water. An extra paddle should be carried by canoeists.

Wool is a recommended type of clothing - it holds heat even if wet.

Disposable lighters are recommended as superior to matches as they have adjustable flame, are cheap and work when wet.

Keep your gas tank "topped" up.

Always land your boat with bow facing the current. Otherwise the water will tend to turn your boat around as soon as forward speed is lost.

You should also be careful of how you moor your boat overnight. Waves or high water can come up overnight and remove or seriously damage your boat. Canoes should be completely removed from the water each time you stop and placed well above high water level at night.

All of us who live in the Yukon do so because we enjoy the relatively untouched wilderness available within a short distance of our homes. We hope that you enjoy the Yukon also. Please endeavor for our sake and for those who may follow you to leave this Territory in as attractive or a more attractive condition than you found it. "Take only pictures and memories and leave only tracks" is the motto we hope you'll adopt.

Thank you.

