Indian and Northern Affairs
Parks Canada

Wild Rivers:
Yukon Territory
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Wild Rivers: Yukon Territory

Wild Rivers Survey,
Planning Division,
Parks Canada,
Ottawa, 1976


Bennett Lake, one of the many lakes that make up the headwaters of the Yukon River.
"It is difficult to find in life any event which so effectually condenses intense nervous sensation into the shortest possible space of time as does the work of shooting, or running an immense rapid. There is no toil, no heart breaking labour about it, but as much coolness, dexterity, and skill as man can throw into the work of hand, eye and head; knowledge of when to strike and how to do it; knowledge of water and rock, and of the one hundred combinations which rock and water can assume — for these two things, rock and water, taken in the abstract, fail as completely to convey any idea of their fierce embraces in the throes of a rapid as the fire burning quietly in a drawing-room fireplace fails to convey the idea of a house wrapped and sheeted in flames."

Sir William Francis Butler (1872)
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- The James Bay/Hudson Bay Region
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- Ontario
- Labrador and Newfoundland
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Wild rivers are a priceless part of our natural heritage. Untouched by the march of man's technological progress, these waterways are the arteries of our land, and one of the main elements in its growth to nationhood.

Long before Europeans laid eyes on them, these rivers served the native peoples as sources of food and means of transportation. Later, the rivers were to carry the Europeans on voyages of exploration and exploitation throughout the vast interior of the continent. The settlers who followed travelled the same routes. The waterways were the mainstay of the fur trade; they were the highways to the gold rushes. They did much to provide the economic nourishment through which Canada grew to its present stature.
With the advent of modern technology, some of our rivers were harnessed to serve our newfound needs. But thousands of miles of waterways, and the land they pass through, remain essentially untouched.

Today, Canadians are gradually rediscovering these fascinating wild rivers. They are recreating the adventures of the explorers; struggling over the same portages as the heavily-burdened "coureurs de bois"; running rapids which once hurtled "voyageurs" and their precious cargoes toward the markets of Montreal; gently floating down majestic rivers which once carried thousands of anxious prospectors toward the promise of gold.

Parks Canada is promoting these challenging voyages of discovery, which embrace both the past and the present.

However, a good deal of down-to-earth information about the rivers and their habits is needed before anyone attempts to navigate them. It is for this reason that Parks Canada decided to carry out surveys of wild rivers all across the country. The result is this series of booklets, designed to provide a practical guide for the modern "voyageur".

Although "wild" is used to describe rivers not yet harnessed to industry, it is an apt adjective, for many of the rivers should be challenged only by experienced and well-equipped canoeists.
It was the gold that first attracted men to the Yukon. Fifty thousand came, most of whom had never experienced the wilderness. Hundreds lost their lives. The Yukon became a testing ground for character. It was not for gold that most strove and suffered. To reach the Klondike became a matter of personal honour, a test of one’s character.

Although modern canoes, detailed maps and freeze-dried foods have taken out much of the hardship wilderness travel remains a challenge. The rivers of the Yukon vary from white water torrents to smooth but swift-flowing rivers. Most of the major tributaries are of the latter type. They are not difficult to navigate and can be recommended for canoeists with little experience.

Whatever river one chooses, it will be endowed with a rich history from the era of the fur trade and the days of ’98. By travelling the same rivers and visiting the same places, one gains an insight into the character of those who searched for, and perhaps found, the pot of gold at the end of their personal rainbow.
Weather in mountainous regions is unpredictable and water levels fluctuate. Long periods of heavy rain will rapidly raise river levels. Generally, water levels become low towards the end of August with flood peaks occurring in early summer as a result of snow-melt and early summer rainfall. Temperatures during the latter half of August range from night-time lows a few degrees below 0° Celsius to daytime temperatures around +11° Celsius. Low clouds may cover the valley floors in the mountains and fog is common to the Arctic Coastal Plain and the first few kilometres of the front mountain ranges.

In planning a canoe trip, allow 25 to 35 kilometres per day paddling. Always allow extra time and food for such unforeseen events as being windbound or delayed by rain. If egress is to be by plane make sure arrangements are taken care of before the trip begins. Be sure to check out with some responsible agency, such as the RCMP, giving them a route and expected time of arrival. Don't forget to check in with them at the end of the trip.

Permits for fires and fishing may be required. Extreme caution should be exercised in the use of fire. Campfires should be built only on rock or sand and extinguished completely. All garbage should be packed out with you.

A sturdy canoe, capable of handling well in rapids, and equipment for its repair, are essential. Aluminium canoes were used throughout the surveys and proved most practical. Since lining and hauling are often necessary, several pairs of running shoes or other sturdy footwear which can take the abuse of
rocks and constant wetness are needed. In the more isolated regions an emergency survival kit is advisable. The kit should contain high-energy food rations, waterproofed matches, fishhooks and line, and emergency rescue flares for signalling aircraft. These items should be well waterproofed; if the kit is small it could be worn on your belt. Firearms are never necessary.

The National Topographic Series of maps is available from:
Canada Map Office, 130 Bentley Ave., Ottawa, Ontario K2E 6T9.
1 Yukon River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yukon River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Marsh Lake to the Yukon/Alaska boundary | Marsh Lake, the starting point of this trip is accessible from the Alaska Highway. Alternative points of access are Whitehorse, Carmacks and Minto. The latter two towns can be reached by the Keno Road. The trip can end at Dawson, Clinton Creek on the Forty Mile River or at Eagle, a few kilometres beyond the border into Alaska. Dawson has public campgrounds and a commercial airport. | (N.T.S. 1:250,000)  
105 D Whitehorse  
105 E Laberge  
105 L Glenlyon  
115 I Carmacks  
115 J Snag  
115 O Stewart River  
116 B,C Dawson |
About the river

**Geography**
Geologically, the central feature of the Yukon Territory is the Yukon Plateau, bounded on the east by the Mackenzie Range and on the west by the St. Elias Mountains. Draining the plateau is the vast network of the Yukon River system. From the long fiord-like lakes that form its headwaters, only 24 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean, the Yukon begins its 4 000-kilometre descent to the Bering Sea. The river is navigable from Whitehorse to Norton Sound — a distance of 3 520 kilometres.

In the northwestern Yukon the plateau is unglaciated and the main process of erosion has been fluvial. This process has created a topography characterised by narrow V-shaped valleys with sides diminishing in steepness nearing the flat summit. In places, castle-like outcrops rise out of the hilltops. Landscape of this nature is prominent in the area near Dawson.

In contrast, the remainder of the Yukon has been extensively glaciated. The individual mountain groups that rise abruptly from the plateau have been rounded and valleys broadened by the Pleistocene ice that spread from the surrounding rim of mountains onto the plateau. This variety of geological processes has added scenic diversity to the Yukon Territory.

**Flora**
The vegetation of the Yukon is mainly coniferous, and the predominant tree species are white spruce, lodgepole pine, alpine fir, balsam and aspen poplar.

In the drier areas are patches of grassland and transitional poplar forest. Vegetation has the appearance of suffering from drought and the dryness has increased the incidence of forest fires. The purple hue of fireweed now covers the vast areas of burned timber.

Other plants common to the Yukon are wild rose (often found growing on the sites of abandoned cabins), purple lupine, violets, labrador tea, wild onion, creeping snowberry, blueberry and raspberry.

**Fauna**
Fauna commonly sighted along the Yukon River are black- and, occasionally, grizzly-bears, moose, lynx, wolf, porcupine, beaver, muskrat, ducks, geese, falcons, eagles and song birds, particularly bank swallows. Grayling, whitefish and northern pike are abundant in the Yukon River and its side streams.
**History**

In 1840, Robert Campbell of the Hudson's Bay Company entered what is now the Yukon Territory via the Francis and Pelly Rivers. Eight years later Fort Selkirk was established at the junction of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers allowing the Hudson's Bay Company to expand its fur-trading industry into this previously unexplored territory. The fur trade was short lived, for in 1852 Fort Selkirk was looted by Chilcoot Indians. Thereafter the Company abandoned all its establishments in the Yukon and over the next 20 years, trade and prospecting were suspended. Then, in 1886, the discovery of gold on the Forty Mile River and, 10 years later, the Klondike discovery of 1896, brought a stampede of prospectors to the Yukon. Dawson was the centre of activity and at one time, during the peak of the gold rush, it was the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg, dwarfing both Vancouver and Victoria. Fires destroyed many of the buildings of those climactic days, and for a number of years Dawson was little more than a ghost town. Today, however, it has become a part of the Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park, a co-operative undertaking between Canada and the United States. A major project has begun to restore the city to its Gold Rush appearance. The famous Palace Grand Theatre is again open to the public, as is the Robert Service Cabin. A number of other buildings are going to be restored. The two riverboats, the S.S. *Keno* and the S.S. *Klondike* have also been brought back to life.

Roads and airplanes have replaced the Yukon as a transportation artery of the North, leaving the banks of the river relatively uninhabited, and undisturbed over the greater part of its length.
Yukon (Lewes) River from Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge

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

In its first 11 kilometres the river passes through an area of flat shoreline with large areas of grass 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, 11 kilometres below Marsh Lake. Canoes can be guided past this dam through a set of locks found on the right. When coming out of the locks, it is advisable to keep to the left in order to avoid the strong back eddies.

Beyond the dam, the river meanders for 10 kilometres between densely vegetated, undercut and slumping banks. Old logs embedded in the ground mark the site of Canyon City, located on the east shore about 1.5 kilometres before Miles Canyon. In 1898 the Klondike stampeders stopped here either to have their equipment taken around Miles Canyon or to scout the rapids before attempting to run them. Miles Canyon is a narrow rock-walled gorge about 1.5 kilometres in length. Within the 25-metre vertical rock walls the water is turbulent but easily runnable.

Half way down the Canyon, a footbridge crosses the river.

Below Miles Canyon the river opens up at Schwatka Lake, formed by the large power dam located at Whitehorse Rapids. The lake, besides serving as a reservoir, is also the float plane base for the city of Whitehorse, located 2.5 kilometres away. In this section of the Lewes River, from Marsh Lake to (and including) Schwatka Lake, the water is of excellent quality; there are however few areas suitable for campsites.

The Lewes River takes on a different character below Whitehorse. The river averages 200 metres in width, contains scattered islands and is frequently confined by 50-metre clay banks.
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 50 kilometres in length and is aligned in an almost north-south direction.

The water of this lake is of questionable potability. Raw sewage from Whitehorse is deposited in the Yukon River some 32 kilometres upstream. A water pump is located at the government-operated campground located opposite Richtofen Island. Other suitable campsites may be found on the island or along the shore where open beaches alternate with rock outcrops. Upon leaving Lake Laberge at its northern end sand and gravel bars will be encountered, since the lake becomes very shallow. These may be treacherous for powered craft and caution should be exercised. The middle channel and the channel on the left limit are the two navigable ones of the three which exist.

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 there are no head winds.

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

The Thirty Mile
This section is perhaps the most 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 15 to 100 metres in height.

There are no rapids in this section, but there are a few areas of riffles.

At Lower Laberge, a small abandoned community exists. A telegraph station is marked as an historic site and is protected by the Territorial Government. The remains of an old steamer, Casca I, are also to be seen on the shore. An abandoned telegraph
Lake Laberge from Richtofen Island
line follows the river along the right limit, and can occasionally be glimpsed from the river.

Twenty-seven kilometres down from Lower Laberge there is a log cabin which was at one time a refuelling station for steamers.

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 from the nearby hills.
Hootalinqua to Little Salmon

This 110-kilometre section of the Yukon River begins at the mouth of the Teslin River.

Hootalinqua - an Indian word for “where two big waters meet” - is the site of a former North-West Mounted Police roadhouse, now protected by the Yukon Territorial Government. The site, located on the left limit directly across from the mouth of the Teslin River, consists of a few cabins, one of which is habitable. One and a half kilometres downstream is the paddle-wheeled steamer Evelyn, in drydock.

With the additional water entering from the Teslin, the Yukon suddenly becomes grey-brown in colour. The river also becomes wider and deeper, with a velocity of around eight kilometres per hour.

High bluffs occur less frequently than on the Thirty Mile River. Large-scale slumping and undercutting is prevalent.

Big Salmon Village, at the mouth of the Big Salmon River, was once 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 kilometres below Big Salmon. Some of the cabins are habitable. It is located on a high cutbank and may therefore be difficult to find. Drinking water may be taken from a slough at the back of the river, if the silty water of the Yukon is found undesirable.

A few of the hills that line the banks of the Yukon offer magnificent views of the Yukon River valley. One such hill is Glassy Mountain. A climb to the top of this 600-metre mountain offers a panoramic view of the Yukon valley and distant mountains.

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

In the next 67 kilometres down the Yukon River, some of the wilderness atmosphere of the river is lost, due to the proximity of a road and power lines. More islands appear in this section than on the previous parts of the river. The river averages 6.5 kilometres per hour until Columbia Slough is reached where the velocity decreases to three kilometres per hour. The main channel is not difficult to follow through this slough. Exposed sand and gravel bars are common, as well as low, banked islands which are covered with thick, brushy vegetation.

Little Salmon village is located at the mouth of the Little Salmon River. In this village there are an old mission and a cabin in good condition. Upstream 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 provides an interesting side trip of several kilometres along an attractive brook that offers good grayling fishing in its clear, swift waters.

Eagle Bluff is spectacular. Located on the right limit, a few kilometres above Carmacks, this sedimentary rock knob rises 200 metres above the river. The Robert Campbell Highway and power lines can also be seen.

In the areas near the mouth of the Little Salmon River, Eagle Bluff, and the approach to Carmacks, there appear other hills, even more ruggedly steep and barren, that rise about 500 metres above the river. Three kilometres before Carmacks there is a coal mine on the right limit.

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, RCMP and Yukon Forest Service posts. Carmacks is the last opportunity to purchase gas or other supplies before Dawson, which is another 413 kilometres downstream.
Campsites may be found on gravel bars, islands, cabin sites and on the left limit below the bridge at Carmacks. There is usually a light breeze on the gravel bars which offers some protection from insects. Columbia Slough is not recommended as a camping area. The highways and secondary roads that lead to the river’s edge provide easy access to the river.

**Carmacks to Rink Rapids**

Canyon-type topography and Five Finger Rapids are the highlights of the next 50 kilometres.

Shorelines are mostly rock slopes, with some sand and gravel bluffs just below Carmacks. At Five Finger coal mine, located about a half-kilometre above Five Finger Rapids, weathered sandstone has produced hoodoos. Hillsides, with some rock outcrops, are barren and rise 150 metres above the river. The mine, now caved in, once produced coal used to power the steam-driven sternwheelers.

The rapids are the outstanding attraction of this section, since they are the only obstacle to river navigation over the entire length of river from Whitehorse to the Bering Sea. 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 are best run through the right-hand channel. 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. The winch was used to pull the sternwheelers by cable up through the fast water.

On the right limit of Five Finger Rapids, the Klondike Highway parallels the river.
Rink Rapids to Fort Selkirk
This 85-kilometre stretch of river has some of the lowest topography of the area between Whitehorse and the Alaska Boundary.

Rink Rapids, the second and last rapid, will be encountered just below Five Finger Rapids. Rough water is evident, but may be avoided by closely following the right limit.

Below Rink Rapids there is a large area of white volcanic ash 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.

At Yukon Crossing, stage-coaches between Dawson and Whitehorse were once 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 bluebells grow in profusion in the clearing, as they do in most formerly settled areas along the Yukon River.

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.

The settlement of Minto, abandoned by the natives in 1954 after a series of unsolved murders, has an old church, a number of shacks and a North-West Mounted Police post. An emergency airstrip is located behind the townsite. Access and egress may be gained at Minto, as the Klondike Highway passes within 1.5 kilometres of the river, and is also possible at Pelly Crossings on the Pelly River. Dawson City is the next point of egress.

As Fort Selkirk is approached, basalt outcroppings appear along the right limit. 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. There are 15 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 one kilometre along the river and offers an excellent 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’s Bay Company store, a Taylor and Drury Department store, and a North-West Mounted Police post. A one-room school house remains 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. Much farther into the forest there are said to be clearings where some early farms were attempted.

**Fort Selkirk to White River**

In this 152-kilometre-reach the sand bluffs evident in previous sections of the river have now disappeared. 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 black basalt rising 140 metres to a flat-topped poplar-covered plateau.

The river banks are severely eroded and undercut, and rise two metres above the water. Throughout the river channel numerous well-treed islands are present. Fiord-type features characterize the portion of the Yukon River below Twin Falls. There are few islands along this reach and campsites are limited to the shorelines.

Historic sites are common along this section of the Yukon River. At Isaac Creek, which was once a placer mine and wood camp, floor boards of buildings still remain. At Britannia Creek, an old road leads 37 kilometres to the abandoned placer mine site. A similar road at Ballerat Creek extends for 22 kilometres up the creek to the site of a placer gold mine. At Coffee Creek, the remnants of cabins and a trading post are difficult to see from the river. Kirkman Creek is now privately owned. A few buildings, including an old post office, are located on this site. Mining also took place here. Thistle Creek is set back 275 metres from the river. A semi-modern cabin, an old truck, and an abandoned river barge, as well as a two-storey log roadhouse that serviced the old stage road, are located at this site.
White River to Dawson City

The Yukon River changes colour below the mouth of the White River. It becomes an off-white, greyish shade as a result of the glacial silts carried by the White River, which has its source in the Kluane Mountain Range.

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 as high as in 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. Travellers should collect drinking water from side streams.

At the mouth of the Stewart River, 16 kilometres below the White River or 110 kilometres upstream from Dawson, is Stewart River settlement. One family now lives there. They operate a general store that offers a limited variety of goods to river travellers. Stewart River originally 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 steamed up the Stewart River carrying supplies to the settlement of Mayo. A small museum contains artifacts of the days when the Yukon and Stewart rivers were the main thoroughfares of the Yukon Territory.

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

The Sixty Mile River offers a pleasant diversion into a small-volume, clear-water stream. There is excellent fishing at its mouth where the pure waters of the Sixty Mile meet the murky waters of the Yukon. Excellent campsites may be found a half-kilometre up the Sixty Mile River.

Dawson City, the history of which has already been briefly described, lies at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers, and is one of the highlights of a trip down the Yukon. You can explore its old buildings or enjoy the summer programs that describe the Klondike's colourful past. There
are side-trips to the dredge tailings of the Klondike valley and up to the Midnight Dome, overlooking the city, as well as tours of the paddlewheelers S.S. Keno and S.S. Klondike. You can also visit the large and fascinating museum for a vivid glimpse of the past of this historic city.

Navigational hazards along this stretch of water are limited to sweepers and shallow waters. Floating vegetation, such as 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 downstream from islands, indicate shallows that are to be avoided if outboard motors are used.

**Dawson City to the Alaska Boundary**

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 half-kilometre in the area between the Fifteen Mile and Forty Mile Rivers, to 2.5 kilometres in the Dozen Islands area preceding 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 60 metres. The banks are characterized by steep, wooded hills and cliffs, with 20° to 35° slopes.

Below Fifteen Mile River, the valley becomes almost fiord-like in character. Hillsides steepen, and at times become nearly vertical, dipping directly into the water. Shorelines, if present, are very narrow and rugged.

The valley widens to several kilometres in the vicinity of the Forty Mile River and continues as such almost to the Alaska Boundary. Mountains rising 1 085 to 1 395 metres are evident in the distance. Rounded hills, that rise 300 to 500 metres above the river, front these razor-edge mountains. Even though the valley is wide, the panorama of hills and the snow-capped Ogilvie Mountains are spectacular and unique to the lower Yukon.

The valley once again becomes confined near the United States – Canada border. The boundary is a 10-metre cut
through the bush and is indicated by a brass marker on the left limit.

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

At such historic sites as Fort Reliance, De Wolfe’s Halfway House and Silver City, at the base of Galena Mountains, little remains 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, a North-West Mounted Police station, a general store, warehouse, and several cabins, of which many are in fair condition.

Old Man Rock is the single most outstanding natural feature below Dawson City. It is a solitary bastion of yellowish rock rising from the flat Yukon valley.

The river should not present any difficulty to small craft navigation. 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. Forty Mile River is clear, but it is advisable to boil its water even though the community of Clinton Creek treats its sewage before discharging it into the river.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Nisutlin River</strong></th>
<th><strong>Access and egress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Maps required</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mile 42 on the Canol Road to Nisutlin Bay</td>
<td>Access to the river may be gained via the Canol Road at Mile 42 or further upstream where the Canol Road skirts the eastern edge of Quiet Lake. Egress may be gained at Teslin, located at the mouth of Nisutlin Bay, or at Johnson's Crossing on the Alaska Highway at the mouth of Teslin Lake.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 105 F Quiet Lake 105 C Teslin</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
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<td>9 days/176 kilometres no portages</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Date of survey</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>July 1971</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The Nisutlin River provides an exceptionally scenic, quiet trip for the wilderness canoeist, offering views of the snow-patched Big Salmon Range, rolling vegetated hills, high clay cutbanks, a low marshy section with placid marsh lakes and sand bars, and islands which afford numerous campsites. The river’s velocity averages five kilometres per hour with a gradient of approximately a half-metre per kilometre. There are no rapids, although some riffles occur immediately below the mouth of the Wolf River.

Fauna
Wildlife along the river consists of great numbers of Canada geese, a variety of ducks, moose in the marsh areas, and beaver. Grizzly and black bears are common along the river banks when the salmon run in the late summer. Twenty-nine kilometres downstream from the starting point is a nesting area for bald eagles. Grayling are common along the Nisutlin and in its side streams.

History
While the gold rush of 1897-99 has left its mark on many rivers and streams of the Yukon, the Nisutlin River remains in a relatively untouched state since it was not gold-bearing. The land was inhabited by the ancient tribe of the Inland Tlingit Indians. Today the Nisutlin River is primarily used by the Indian residents of the town of Teslin who trap and hunt in the valley. Their cabins can occasionally be seen along the river.

Flora
Lying in the Boreal Forest Region, the Nisutlin River Valley supports willow, alder, aspen and small shrubs along its banks. White spruce are located in the valley and on the hillsides, while on the hilltops lodgepole pine grows up to 20 metres tall.
The canoe trip

Mile 42 of the Canol Road to Thirty Mile Creek

The campsite at Mile 42 offers a flat dry area with abundant firewood. The scenery is dominated by the distant mountains of the Big Salmon Range, which lie to the west.

The first 32 kilometres of the river offer diverse and often spectacular scenery. The banks are 1.75 to two metres high and are covered with large white spruce or lodgepole pine. The river is shallow at first but gradually becomes quite deep in places. Sand and gravel cutbanks along this first section of the river range from 25 to 30 metres high and are usually topped with lodgepole pine. One of these cutbanks, locally referred to as “Roaring Bull”, is especially noteworthy and is located about 16 kilometres downstream from the campsite. It features a U-shaped bend and high banks. The water swirls around the bend in boils and surges at high water, but is merely swift at low water.

Twenty-four kilometres below the access point, the valley width increases from three to eight kilometres. The gravel cutbanks that marked the meanders in the river end here, and the shores become lower. Slumping is evident, with trees sliding and tilting into the river. The river is 60 metres wide, so sweepers pose no threat to the canoeist. With the widening and deepening of the stream, the pool and riffle characteristics give way to a smooth, easy-flowing and meandering type of river. The current slows to about five kilometres per hour. Large piles of wood have accumulated where the river divides to go around islands and in some cases this wood blocks off the channel completely, causing the river to alter its course and widen another channel.

Nineteen kilometres above Thirty Mile Creek, the valley narrows slightly to about three kilometres and continues as such for 11 kilometres. The banks become extremely muddy, which makes landing difficult.
Thirty Mile Creek to Nisutlin Bay

Past Thirty Mile Creek the valley narrows a little then widens to eight kilometres where it empties into Nisutlin Bay. The stretch of river from Thirty Mile Creek to the mouth of the Wolf River is marshy with a width of 100 metres. The Dawson Peaks (elevation 1,980 metres) in British Columbia can be seen 50 kilometres away. The snowy peaks of the Big Salmon Range are visible 10 kilometres in the distance. The only rapids in the Nisutlin River are found just below the mouth of the Wolf River. They run for 2.5 kilometres and present no navigational
difficulties. Here the river narrows to about 40 metres and the velocity is 10 kilometres per hour.

Towards Nisutlin Bay, cleared areas and log piles close to the water’s edge give evidence of logging operations. The Nisutlin River enters Nisutlin Bay in delta form, with many channels divided by brush and grass-covered islands. The vegetation is very dense and consists mainly of willow and poplar. The delta area is apparently a nesting ground for Canada geese. From the bay, distant views can be seen of the Dawson Peaks, which lie ahead and the Englishman Range which lies be-
hind. The right shore of the bay is steep, densely vegetated and strewn with logs and driftwood. There do not appear to be any good campsites. The bay is about 13 kilometres long from the mouth of the Nisutlin River to the town of Teslin, the egress point at the edge of Teslin Lake. Teslin is located on the Alaska Highway.
3 Teslin River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teslin River</strong></th>
<th><strong>Access and egress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Maps required</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teslin Lake to Carmacks</td>
<td>Access to Teslin Lake and the river may be gained at both the town of Teslin (Mile 804 of the Alaska Highway) and at Johnsons Crossing (Mile 837 of the Alaska Highway), five kilometres down from Teslin Lake on the Teslin River. Access is also possible at Mile 794 at Morley Bay; however, no facilities or services are available at this location. Once below Johnsons Crossing, egress may take place at Carmacks (Mile 102 of the Klondike Highway) on the Yukon River, 160 kilometres below the mouth of the Teslin River. The towns of Teslin, Johnsons Crossing and Carmacks have campsites and services.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 105 C Teslin 105 D Whitehorse 105 E Laberge 105 L Glenlyon 115 I Carmacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>12 to 14 days/416 kilometres no portages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of survey</strong></td>
<td>July 1971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The major body of water supplying Teslin River is Teslin Lake which straddles the Yukon Territory and British Columbia border. The Teslin River empties the northern end of Teslin Lake and flows in a northwesterly direction eventually joining the Yukon River at Hootalinqua, 50 kilometres below Lake Laberge.

Flora
The shoreline of the Teslin is overgrown in places by willow and alder. Behind the beaches is a growth of poplar and spruce, while on the slopes black spruce and white spruce predominate with lodgepole pine topping the ridges. Wild rice grows at some river mouths and fireweed covers areas recently burnt.

Fauna
Grayling and lake trout fishing is excellent along the sand beaches of the west shore of Teslin Lake as well as the shorelines of the Teslin River. Moose, sheep, beaver, and a wide variety of ducks and small birds can frequently be seen.

History
This system was a natural route during the Gold Rush for the trek to the Klondike gold streams. The route was 256 kilometres up the Stikine River by sternwheeler from Wrangell, Alaska to Telegraph Creek, then overland to the head of navigation at Teslin Lake and finally down the Teslin River to the Yukon River. At the head of Teslin Lake a small community developed and at this town the sternwheeler Anglian was built in 1899. It operated successfully down the Teslin system for three years. The locations of Teslin, Johnsons Crossing, Mason Landing and Hootalinqua served as roadhouses for the trek. The Yukon gold prompted the building of a telegraph line between Telegraph Creek and Hootalinqua to link with the wire down the Yukon River. After the vigour of the Gold Rush declined, some of the settlements along the Teslin continued to thrive. Mason Landing serviced the Livingstone Creek Mine some 22 kilometres inland from the river. Teslin Crossing was a terminus of the Teslin Trail between the river and Lake Laberge.
Today all the settlements are abandoned except the towns of Teslin and Johnsons Crossing, which became permanent as a result of the completion of the Alaska Highway. Before the massive intrusion into the Teslin River valley during the gold rush, the valley was inhabited by the Inland Tlingit Indians.

Teslin Lake to Johnsons Crossing

Teslin Lake, north of the town of Teslin, is about 50 kilometres long with the Alaska Highway bordering the eastern shore. The western shoreline consists mainly of sand and gravel beaches. The Dawson Peaks (elevation 1 950 metres) can be seen to the south at the boundary of the Yukon and British Columbia. Hayes Peak, toward the western end of the lake, rises 1 880 metres. Five kilometres before Johnsons Crossing the lake narrows from three kilometres to a half kilometre at the beginning of Teslin River. The water begins to flow at one kilometre per hour here. A bridge on the Alaska Highway at Mile 837 crosses the Teslin at Johnsons Crossing. A store, post office and telephone are located here along with other services. A public campsite is located on the west bank beneath the bridge. Johnsons Crossing is an excellent access point.

Johnsons Crossing to the Yukon River

Five kilometres below Johnsons Crossing the canoeist is confronted with a sharp bend to the right and a 50-metre clay cutbank. Water velocity increases to 6.5 kilometres per hour with light rapids. After passing another bend to the left, the river opens up and flows through a wide area of sloughs, with high wooded banks set about one kilometre from the shore on both sides. A 100-metre high clay cutbank is evident on the west side above Squanga Creek, a narrow stream entering the Teslin about 13 kilometres below Johnsons Crossing. Wild rice grows in abundance at the mouth of the creek. Squanga Creek marks the narrowing of the Teslin River and the beginning of a frequent occurrence of high clay and silt.
banks which in some places rise 150 metres above the river. In the distance, the rounded foothills of the Big Salmon Range are visible. Swift River has a good camping site at its mouth.

The Teslin River valley widens below the Swift River and begins to meander slightly. Mud slides fill the river with silt. Several poplar and grass-covered islands can be found in the 38-kilometre stretch below Swift River. The Teslin maintains a constant width of about 250 metres. Twenty-four kilometres below the Swift River the river narrows to 120 metres and the surrounding land becomes low, with fewer hills and mountains visible. The current increases in the vicinity of Sheldon Lake, reaching a velocity of 10 kilometres per hour near Boswell Creek. Rapids, riffles and surges are present but can be easily
navigated to the right of mid-stream. Downstream from this point, Mount Boswell dominates the landscape. A few kilometres below, a horseshoe bend to the right with a very high, steep cutbank marks the location of Roaring Bull Rapids. The water is very swift with swells and white water. These rapids are free of obstructions and are easily navigable. There is an island before the highbanks of Roaring Bull Rapids to the right of which most of the fast water can be avoided. After Roaring Bull Rapids there is a stretch of water, 15 kilometres long, where the river is very wide with many islands and small channels to the east and west. One area of interest is a spectacular 150-metre clay cutbank at a horseshoe bend a few kilometres below the site of Teslin Crossing. Numerous bald eagles have been sighted in this area. Eight kilometres below Teslin Crossing, the river widens around a number of islands and reveals excellent views of the Semenof Hills which parallel the river to the east. Below Mason Landing the river widens around some islands, then narrows once again to maintain a width of 150 metres to the Yukon River. The water colour becomes turquoise as the clear water of the Thirty Mile section of the Yukon meets the Teslin River. After the junction an easy paddle down the Yukon River brings the canoeist to Carmacks on the Alaska Highway.
4 Big Salmon River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Big Salmon River</strong></th>
<th><strong>Access and egress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Maps required</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiet Lake to confluence with Yukon River (to Carmacks)</td>
<td>The Big Salmon can be entered from Quiet Lake. A government campground is located on Quiet Lake at Mile 46 on the Canol Road, which runs from Johnsons Crossing on the Alaska Highway. The other form of access would be by float plane into Quiet Lake. The terminating point would be Carmacks on the Yukon River.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 105 F Quiet Lake 105 E Laberge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The Big Salmon River begins its course at Quiet Lake (133°5' W latitude, 61°N longitude). The elevation of Quiet Lake is 777 metres above sea level and the surrounding mountains rise 1,212 metres. From Quiet Lake the river flows 150 kilometres to meet the Yukon River at the abandoned Indian village of Big Salmon. The "V"-shaped valley through which the river flows varies in width from two to 10 kilometres. Adjacent isolated peaks rise to over 2,121 metres.

Flora
The Big Salmon River lies in the boreal forest region. The valley bottom contains stands of black spruce, balsam poplar, birch, alder and white spruce, with the banks of the river commonly crowded with willow. There is a gradation from thick forest cover in the valley to sparse alpine tundra on the upper mountain slopes.

Fauna
Wildlife inhabiting the area include moose, deer, black- and grizzly-bear, wolf, fox, beaver, fisher, wolverine, Dall sheep, squirrel, porcupine and a number of smaller animals. The river is a nesting area for several species of ducks and Canada geese. Birdlife is varied, with bald eagles and hawks frequently seen. Grayling abound in the river, trout are found in Quiet Lake, and pike and whitefish in the Yukon River.

The canoe trip

Quiet Lake is 30 kilometres long with a maximum width of four kilometres. It is bordered on the west by high mountains and on the east by a rolling plain that extends to the Nisutlin River. The short stream flowing from the northern end of Quiet Lake into Sandy Lake is about one metre deep. The velocity of this stream varies between three and 10 kilometres per hour. Willows line the banks, making landings difficult.

Sandy Lake is three kilometres long and 1.25 kilometres wide and is bordered by high, wooded hills. A stream flowing north connects this lake to Big Salmon Lake, where the Big Salmon River begins its northwesterly course to the Yukon River. The Big Salmon River flows through a range of mountains 1,200 to 1,500 metres above sea level with isolated peaks well over 1,800 metres. The valley at times has a width of less than half kilo-
metre and is confined by steep-sided mountains. Seventy-two kilometres above its mouth, the river enters a wide, wooded valley bordered by rounded hills. Terraces 60 to 120 metres high are found along the entire length of the river.

Log jams in the upper reaches make lining or portaging necessary on occasion. Other than cold water and the winds on Quiet Lake, no hazards are present. The upper reaches of the Big Salmon have limited campsite potential, although campsites can be found on the many gravel bars and islands along the rest of its length. Islands, if not too damp, provide excellent sites. Insects can be expected in the bush, therefore open areas are recommended. Firewood is readily available in the form of driftwood. Drinking water may be obtained from the Big Salmon River. The water, though potable, increases in turbidity downstream and an alternative source of drinking water can be found in the numerous small streams entering the river.

The river banks often slump and are characterized by sweepers. Twenty-five-metre cutbanks appear towards the mouth of the Big Salmon. The swiftest water occurs on the outside of bends with back eddies located on the downstream side of slip-off slopes. Sweepers are also present along these cutbanks, and care must be taken to avoid them.

In general, rapids on the Big Salmon are quite short, but account for a substantial percentage of the river, while the remaining portion is smooth with an easy current. The length of the rapids varies from 30 to 300 metres and there is adequate warning of their presence. They may usually be scouted from the canoe and there is no difficulty in aligning for runs. Boulders are present but are usually widely spaced, although some difficulty may occur in running rapids at low water level, due to the presence of boulders and bars. Portaging, if deemed necessary, would take place through relatively dense brush and trees lining the river bank, as no portage trails exist. Boils and surges appear rather infrequently along the river as a whole, but may occur where tributaries such as the North and South Big Salmon rivers enter the main stream.
5 Ross River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ross River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| John Lake to Ross River Settlement | Access to the area is either by the Canol Road or by aircraft. The Canol Road may be used as access to the southwest corner of Sheldon Lake. John Lake may be reached by float plane. The trip can end at Ross River Settlement, the Faro Bridge Crossing, Pelly Crossing on the Pelly River or Dawson City on the Yukon River. | (N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)  
105 J Sheldon Lake  
105 K Tay River  
105 F Quiet Lake |
### About the river

#### Geography
The Ross River rises in a chain of lakes just south of Christie Pass in the Selwyn Mountains. It flows in a south-west direction emptying into the Pelly River one kilometre upstream from Ross River Settlement. The latter part of the trip cuts through the Yukon Plateau.

#### Flora
The Ross River area lies in the boreal forest region. Large stands of mature black spruce and white spruce are common in this region. On the upper reaches of the Ross River, alpine meadows are evident on the mountain slopes. Willow and alder are found along the banks of the river.

#### Fauna
Wildlife along the banks of the Ross River is similar to that found along other rivers in the region.

### The canoe trip

Wilson and Itsi lakes were not included in this survey. Air reconnaissance left the impression of an irregular and confused drainage pattern - a string of long, shallow lakes joined by swift, equally shallow streams, sometimes with canyon topography. The Itsi Range to the north and the Selwyn Mountains to the west provide a magnificent backdrop for these alpine lakes.

#### John Lake to Prevost Canyon
The survey began at John Lake, which lies 50 kilometres above Sheldon Lake. The first 19 kilometres below John Lake drop at the rate of six metres per kilometre. The river, which is shallow with many rocks and shelves, is 12 to 15 metres wide. Lining and hauling are necessary for the first 13 kilometres, although this is made difficult by the rugged shoreline. In travelling the first 19 kilometres below John Lake, 70 per cent of the trip was lined, 25 per cent paddled, and five per cent portaged.

An impassable canyon is located above Sheldon Lake, 1.5 kilometres past Ross River's hairpin turn to the west. A portage trail of two kilometres
follows the right limit of the river. It begins at a moderate rapid before the canyon itself becomes visible. If this rapid is run it will be necessary to haul canoes and equipment up a steep 10-metre embankment to reach the portage trail, which is in good condition. The 29-kilometre section below the canyon is dominated by the view of Mount Sheldon to the south. The river winds through flat marsh lands. Beyond this section many excellent campsites are found on pebble bars and among mature black spruce groves. Campsites below Sheldon Lake are located on bars and slip-off slopes.

*Headwaters of the Ross River, with the Itsi Mountains in the background.*
Prevost Canyon to Ross River Settlement
Prevost Canyon is a series of narrows with walls 25 to 40 metres high. Shelves and rocks lie directly in the current and, at one point, the current flows directly into a rock wall. This canyon has been navigated, although a portage trail is more generally used. The trail is on the right limit and is 1.25 kilometres long, marked by fallen saplings lying across the mossy path.

Not far below Prevost Canyon there are some rapids. A 275-metre stretch of rapid water located 2.5 kilometres above Otter Creek is difficult. Immediately above Otter Creek there is a stretch of white water a half-kilometre long which is even more difficult. It is known as Skookum Rapids. The left limit appears to be the easier route.
for portaging and may have a portage trail. The most difficult portion of the rapid can be lined along the right limit and the remainder can be run. At high water there would be little or no shoreline from which to line. Ten to 13 kilometres below Otter Creek the river bed widens, resulting in extended shallows and frequently exposed rocks and shelves. These are easy to avoid, however, as the current is not strong.

A 32-kilometre section of fast water, dropping two to three metres per kilometre, extends from Lewis Lake to 13 kilometres below Otter Creek. The rapids are generally short and easy with some shelves that require lining. Five kilometres below Prevost River there is a rapid that requires careful manoeuvring in a strong current, followed by a short rapid flowing through a small canyon.

Undercut banks, mud slides, pebble bars and slow meandering water are characteristic of the next 110 kilometres. Ten kilometres above its entrance into the Pelly, the Ross flows through what appear to be old river terraces rising 150 to 250 metres above the river. The entire landscape in this area is more barren and arid than the upper reaches of the Ross. The river drops quite noticeably through this canyon and there are some rapids. The gradient is four metres per kilometre.

At the mouth of the Ross River, on the right limit, are an old Indian Village and an abandoned trading post once known as "Nahanni House". The present settlement of Ross River is about one kilometre downstream from the mouth of the Ross on the Pelly River. A ferry and an old pipeline bridge cross the river at this point. The ferry cable, which stretches across the river at a height of 30 centimetres above the water, forces the canoeist to duck under it. Float planes can land on a small lake nearby.
6 Pelly River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pelly River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross River Settlement to Fort Selkirk</td>
<td>The Pelly River is accessible by road at the town of Ross River, from the Robert Campbell Highway upstream on the Pelly and from the Faro bridge crossing, as well as by air into the Pelly or Fortin lakes. Depending on the point of access, egress may take place at Ross River, Faro bridge crossing, Pelly Crossing or Dawson City on the Yukon. There is no road to Fort Selkirk, the termination point of this report.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 105 F Quiet Lake 105 K Tay River 105 L Glenlyon 115 I Carmacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>7 to 10 days/398 kilometres</td>
<td>no portages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of survey</strong></td>
<td>July 1971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
Today, much of the Pelly River is still untouched by civilization. As a result one may experience the satisfaction of a wilderness experience, as well as the pleasure of travelling an historic route. However, the effects of civilization are too often visible and audible for the river to be considered "wild" in its entirety. Roads, trucks and planes, abandoned exploration camps and bridges, are never more than a day or two apart. Much of the Pelly River region has also been ravaged by extensive forest fires in the past five years, leaving vast expanses of unattractive landscape. Nevertheless, there are still enough large areas of magnificent wild countryside to make the voyage a very satisfying wilderness canoe trip.

Flora
The Pelly River lies within the boreal forest region. The dominant tree species are black spruce, white spruce and balsam poplar. Shrubs such as willow and alder grow along the river banks.

Fauna
The abundant wildlife here is much the same as that in other rivers of the area.

History
The historical significance of the Pelly River pre-dates the gold rush days. In 1840, Robert Campbell travelled up the Liard River, Francis River, and Finlayson River, over the height of land to Campbell Creek at the Pelly River. This was to become the site of Fort Pelly Banks. He then travelled down the Pelly to the Yukon River. In 1892, Warburton Pike travelled from Francis Lake, up Yusezyu River to the height of land, down Ptarmigan Creek to the Pelly Lakes and eventually down to the Pelly itself.
The canoe trip

Geological Survey Reports by Dawson, Keele and Warburton Pike provide excellent descriptions of the section of the Pelly River above Ross River.

Ross River to Faro Bridge Crossing
Navigation along this 69-kilometre section is not difficult. It is characterized by sand and clay terraces, rising 40 to 60 metres on the north bank, while to the south the Pelly Range is visible in the distance. The water in mid-July is silty, but clears towards the end of August. Meanders are long, with gravel bars on the slip-off slopes and constantly eroding cutbanks. Channels and islands become numerous above Faro, but the main channel is easy to follow. The Robert Campbell Highway is visible along this section. Limited supplies may be purchased at the town of Faro, a company town servicing the Anvil Mine, 16 kilometres north of the Pelly River.

The Wilkinson's cabin looks out on the Pelly River.
Faro to Pelly Crossing
This 261-kilometre stretch of river is the most exciting and untouched section of the Pelly River. Below Faro, the river parallels 2140-metre-high alpine-type mountains. The channel pattern of the Pelly River varies throughout its length. The river between Anvil Creek and Earn Creek is a single channel with few islands, while above the mouth of the MacMillan it is meandering and multi-channeled. Below the MacMillan it is straight-running with few islands.

Little Fishhook Rapids, in an S-shaped bend in the channel, is located three kilometres above Glenlyon River. It is best to run the left channel. The rapid is short, wide and shallow with boulders breaking the surface of the water.

At Big Fishhook Rapids the channel flows into a rock face which forms the right limit as the river takes a 90-degree turn to the left. A strong back eddy is created along the left limit. This rapid poses no problem at low water level. Granite Canyon is 21 kilometres below the MacMillan River, 6.5 kilometres long and confined by 60-metre cliffs. There are three sets of rapid water in the canyon. The first, at the head of the canyon, is easy. Three kilometres into the canyon, a second set with high standing waves is encountered. Careful manoeuvring is required through these “dancing horses” or “haystacks”. A towering rock at mid-stream divides the river into two channels, of which the right is the more navigable. There are many excellent campsites and abandoned cabins along this section of the river. The Klondike Highway crosses the Pelly River at Pelly Crossing. This is the last point of egress before Dawson City. There is a daily bus service at the village as well as other services.
Pelly Crossing to Fort Selkirk
This 69-kilometre section is relatively flat for several kilometres below Pelly Crossing. About five kilometres above the Yukon River a black basalt wall appears above the old river terraces on the right hand side of the valley. This distinctive feature borders the end of the Pelly at the Yukon River. At Gull Rock, 6.5 kilometres above Bradens Canyon, the river is divided into three separate channels by two six-metre high rocks. The right channel is the most easily navigated. Strong back eddies are present in Bradens Canyon, but they pose no threat to navigation.

The current is steady and the channel fairly straight with few islands. There are a number of excellent campsites in Bradens Canyon. Fort Selkirk is on the left shore of the Yukon River at the mouth of the Pelly. This point marks the beginning of the 285-kilometre journey to Dawson. Four or five days should be allowed for the trip down the Yukon to Dawson.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MacMillan River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Russell Creek to the Pelly River</td>
<td>Access to the Russell Creek area can be achieved by upstream travel from Pelly Crossing on the Pelly River (a distance of over 256 kilometres) or by aircraft. Travel upstream would require a shallow-draught boat with a short-shaft motor. It is difficult to land a float plane in the Russell Creek because, due to silt content, the water is hard to read for shallows. The only road into the area is the Canol Road, which crosses the upper reaches of the South MacMillan River. The trip can end at Pelly Crossing, where the Whitehorse-Dawson Road passes through, and daily bus service to Whitehorse is available. The alternative is to continue down the river to the Yukon River, proceeding from there to Dawson City.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 105 K Tay River 105 N Lansing 105 M Mayo 105 L Glenlyon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The valley of the MacMillan River ranges from 1.5 to eight kilometres in width. The river is incised and has cut its way through silts, sands, gravels and boulder clay. Its depth in this drift plain is 60 metres, with a width of 1.5 to three kilometres. The drift plain borders the river on both sides. It is bounded by ranges of hills and mountains that rise 600 to 1 500 metres above the valley floor. The geographical features of the trip alternate between valley flats and snow-capped mountain peaks. The MacMillan Range, Kalzas Range, Clarke Peak and Lone Mountain add variety to the scenery of the swampy, flat river valley. The mountain peaks, ranges and broken uplands are the remains of an extensive highland, destroyed by denudation and erosion. The overall impression of the country is mountainous, although the ranges are isolated by wide valleys and depressions.

Flora
The MacMillan River is in the boreal forest region. White spruce is the dominant tree species, reaching heights of up to 25 metres. It flourishes in valley bottoms and on hillsides 870 metres above the river. Other major species include black spruce, trembling aspen, balsam poplar, balsam fir, black pine and white birch, although white birch trees here are small and not abundant. Black pine may be found on beaches along the lower part of the MacMillan Valley. Balsam fir grows mainly on the mountain slopes. Along the banks of the MacMillan grow moss, equisetum, and tall brome grass.

Fauna
Wildlife indigenous to the area includes beaver, grizzly bear, black bear, mountain sheep, wolf, lynx, and moose. Peregrine falcons, eagles, ravens, kingfishers, Canada jays, swallows, and white swans were noted. Canada geese and their young, along with a wide variety of ducks, are present throughout the summer. Fish found in the river include grayling, whitefish, northern pike, king and dog salmon, and lake trout. Salmon have been known to run as far upstream as Russell Creek.

History
Compared to many other rivers of the Yukon Territory, the MacMillan River has very little historical background and has been left in a relatively undisturbed state. Russell Creek is the only area in which gold was found. An abandoned settlement at the mouth of Russell Creek served as a trading post in the early 1900s.
The canoe trip

The MacMillan River from Russell Creek to its mouth at the Pelly River is 232 kilometres in length. Russell Creek is located 6.5 kilometres below the confluence of the North and South MacMillan Rivers. Moose River empties into the MacMillan midway between the fork and its mouth. The Kalzas River meets the MacMillan River 43 kilometres above its mouth. This river drains Kalzas Lake which lies north of the Kalzas Range. The MacMillan River has a characteristic meander pattern, with islands and driftwood-covered slip-off slopes throughout its length. Though braided for the first 65 kilometres below Russell Creek, the main channel of the river is well defined. The river is 100 to 150 metres wide, and shallow at times, though still navigable by canoe. The river bed consists of gravel and cobbles. The current averages five to 6.5 kilometres per hour in the upper sections, becoming slower below Lone Mountain. The swiftest sections of water occur where the river has cut through the necks of ox-bow bends. Towards the mouth of the MacMillan, log jams and gravel bars become less frequent and are replaced by large stretches of open water, interrupted periodically by islands and sloughs. Potential campsites may be found almost anywhere, as gravel bars occur frequently. Here there are few insects, ample driftwood for fires and excellent shorelines for landing. Drinking water may be taken from the river. However, if silt content makes the water undesirable, the numerous small clear streams entering the MacMillan can be used.
8 White River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>White River</strong></th>
<th><strong>Access and egress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Maps required</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snag to Dawson City</td>
<td>As alternatives to upstream travel from the Yukon River, access to the area may be gained via the Alaska Highway, or by float plane. The Alaska Highway crosses the White River 416 kilometres northwest of Whitehorse. A road leading to Snag leaves the Alaska Highway 21 kilometres farther along, and has direct access to the river. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended for travel on this 27-kilometre-long road. Aircraft may land on one of the numerous small lakes in the Snag region. A portage to the river through muskeg and black spruce growth is necessary. The trip can end at Dawson City.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 115 J, K Snag 115 O, N Stewart River</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The White River is one of the principal western tributaries of the Yukon River. It rises in the St. Elias Mountains, draining their northeastern slopes along with its major tributaries, the Donjek, Kluane and Generk rivers. Flowing roughly parallel to the 140° W. meridian, it empties into the Yukon River 130 kilometres south of Dawson City.

Flora
The White River valley is in the boreal forest region, with the exception of a small section above Snag, which is tundra. Small islands support carex, equisetum, alder and willow. Towards the mouth of the White River, the islands not submerged when the river is in flood have balsam poplar intermingled with spruce. Black spruce is the major species on the lower reaches of the hillsides with white spruce and balsam poplar evident on the upper slopes.

Fauna
During the survey the only evidence of wildlife was beaver, moose, geese and ducks, although a much wider variety of animals, including grizzly bears, is known to inhabit the area.

History
The White River was used by many people en route to the gold rush at Chisana, Alaska in 1913. The poling of rafts and small craft, and travel by small steamer were perhaps the most common means of travel in the summer. Dog teams were used in the winter and a pack train operated from Coffee Creek to the Chisana district.
The canoe trip

The White River is extremely high in sediment content and is not potable. It is a highly braided, broad and flat river with an average width of 2.5 kilometres. High rock walls line both limits along some sections, but the local scene consists mainly of driftwood randomly strewn over silty sand bars that occupy the valley width. The only variation to the unchanging characteristics of fast water, wide valley and bars, is that islands becomes larger towards the mouth, in contrast to the more numerous yet smaller bars in the Snag area.

The main channel is swift with an average velocity of eight kilometres per hour. Large swells and standing waves frequently occur in narrow sections but may be avoided. Turbulence and choppy waters often appear when several channels converge at one point on the main channel. Back eddies are common on the downstream side of bars and islands. Side channels, which break through thick brush from the main stream for 11 or 12 kilometres, afford a change of scenery from the open river. The current is slower in these channels and logs and sweepers may be encountered, necessitating some manoeuvring.

Due to the heavy sediment load and swift current, considerable undercutting and slumping are evident, especially where the river swings up against the valley sides. Sweepers occur along these stretches of water and at times over a metre of permafrost is exposed.

Campsites may be found on the silty bars which rise close to a metre above the present water level, but may be covered at a higher water level. A container should be carried for getting drinking water from side streams. These streams are often blocked by side channels that are at times impassable.

On the upper reaches of the White River the snow-capped Kluane Range can be seen upstream. This view adds variety to the rather desolate scene of the wide, flat White River Valley. Oil drums scattered along the banks are the only signs of human use and detract from the wilderness quality of the river. Dawson, the point of egress, is located 130 kilometres down the Yukon River from its confluence with the White River.
9 Stewart River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stewart River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Beaver River to Dawson City | Access to the area may be gained via the Klondike Highway that crosses the Stewart River at Stewart Crossing. A road leads from here to Mayo, 50 kilometres away. To gain access to the river upstream of Mayo an aircraft is necessary. Depending on the point of access, egress may take place at Mayo, Stewart Crossing, or Dawson City located on the Yukon River. The Mayo Road parallels the river from Mayo to a few kilometres past Stewart Crossing. | (N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)  
106 C Nadaleen  
105 N Lansing  
105 M Mayo  
115 P McQuesten  
115 O Stewart River |
About the river

Geography
The Stewart River rises in the Selwyn Mountains, part of the Pacific-Arctic Watershed Ranges. The river's source is 800 metres above sea level and it cuts its way through the Stewart Plateau and various mountain ranges, with elevations as high as 2100 metres above sea level.

Flora
Black spruce, white spruce, aspen poplar, balsam poplar, white birch, alder and willow are found in abundance throughout the Stewart River area. This is part of the boreal forest region. Forests in good condition are usually found in valleys and depressions due to altitude and latitude combined.

Fauna
Animals indigenous to the area include bear, wolf, fox, lynx, moose, rabbit, beaver, wolverine, squirrel, geese and a wide assortment of ducks and birds. Grayling, pike and whitefish may be caught along the river.

History
Mayo emerged as a communications and distribution centre for the gold rush of 1898-1903. Previously the area was the homeland of the Mountain Loucheux Indians.

Beaver River to Seven Mile Canyon
One and a half kilometres below the mouth of the Beaver River, the Stewart River is 80 metres wide, flowing at five kilometres per hour over a cobble bed. Small surges and boils are present in the brown-green water. No navigational hazards are present. Peaks may be seen upstream in the distance. The hillsides on the right are covered with poplar and scrubby spruce intermingled on an old burn area. This growth eventually gives way to dense stands of spruce and poplar towards the Keno-Ladue valley area. The shorelines are lined with willow, alder and a wide assortment of bush growth, such as juniper, wild rose and Labrador tea.
The right limit gives way to the Keno-Ladue River valley. The terrain becomes low and undulating, eventually rising to the Ladue range, 10 kilometres to the west. This snow-patched range dominates the view as it appears with each bend in the river. Small chutes are common where the water funnels between an island and the shoreline. Small rapid areas, which can be avoided, are encountered a few kilometres above Seven Mile Canyon where bedrock ledges jut into the river.

Seven Mile Canyon to Lansing
At the entrance to Seven Mile Canyon the islands disappear as the river once again becomes a single channel. Rock walls up to 50 metres high line the canyon. Towards the mouth these are interspersed with high sand and gravel slopes. A set of rapids encountered at the entrance to the canyon could be run along the left limit. A rock ledge juts into the river from the right limit. Boils, surges and small whirlpools that are common in Seven Mile Canyon should pose no hazard to navigation. Back eddies that can be used for resting or landing occur frequently along the shore. Upon leaving Seven Mile Canyon a more subdued rolling landscape is met. The Lansing River and abandoned Lansing Settlement are found on the left.

Lansing to Five Mile Rapids
Lansing Settlement, at the mouth of the Lansing River, was at one time a trading post. Today, all that remains of the settlement are a few buildings, of which only one is habitable. An excellent campsite may be found on a gravel bar at the mouth of the Lansing River. Sweepers are common along the cutbanks but may be easily avoided. This section of the river is characterized by long, straight, open stretches alternating with island-studded, meandering patterns. The Hess River enters the Stewart from the left. An excellent campsite is located at its mouth on a wide gravel bar. For a few kilometres below Lansing, Mount Joy may be seen upstream, but in general the view is confined by the rolling topography and isolated hills.
Five Mile Rapids to Fraser Falls

Five Mile Rapids is the first major obstruction to navigation. The rapid may be heard when rounding the corner across from Horseshoe Slough, as it is a half-kilometre downstream from this point. Landing should take place well above the rapid on a sand and gravel bar along the right limit. From here a trail leads around the rapid which may be scouted from a rock outcrop at the edge of the rapids.

Two portage routes exist. One route follows the right limit through deadfalls and along an animal trail that runs along the side of a hill. A portage along the left would be over flat bedrock. The 2.5-kilometre stretch below Five Mile Rapids flows at a tranquil five kilometres per hour as it approaches Three Mile Rapids.

Three Mile Rapids are difficult. The rapid should be approached along the right. Above the rapid, the water backs up and flows in a circular motion upstream along the right shoreline. The right limit should be followed until the direction of the shoreline and the flow of water are towards the head of the rapid. The canoeist may land in this bay to scout the rapids. The portage around the rapid is on the right limit but back from the water. It is over large rock slabs and dense brush and terminates just below the roughest section of the water, on a sandy beach.

The left limit should be followed while approaching Fraser Falls. The river velocity increases in mid-stream and eventually becomes very rapid at the head of the falls. An old coach road leaves the river just above the falls and is an excellent portage. The trail leads away from the water and terminates at the abandoned settlement of Fraser Falls. Only one building remains. One may view the falls by paddling across the mouth and hiking back up the right side of the river.
Fraser Falls to Mayo
A trail leads from Gordon Landing five kilometres back to Janet Lake. This clear, cold lake is an excellent side trip for the river-weary traveller. It is an easy one or one-half day trip. This section of the Stewart is much quieter than the upper sections. The river increases its volume and load and moves through a relatively flat river valley. Head winds may slow the canoeist in this wide and long reach of slow water. At Mayo, the canoeist can replenish supplies.

Mayo to McQuesten Airstrip
Past Mayo, the water acquires an oily film that adheres to anything placed in it. Algae is noticeable on rocks along the shoreline and silt content increases considerably. The water may be potable but alternative sources of drinking water are the small clear streams that enter the Stewart. Sand and gravel cutbanks, wide flood plains, plateau relief and rolling topography are characteristic of this stretch of water. The highway that connects Mayo to Dawson follows the river closely until a few kilometres below Stewart Crossing where it turns north toward Dawson. A bridge spans the river at Stewart Crossing where a café and telephone are located. McQuesten airstrip is for emergency purposes only. There are no facilities except those provided for water bombers. The strip can be seen from the water.

McQuesten Airstrip to the Mouth of the Stewart River
The number of islands and bars increases, resulting in several areas of riffles. From Pigue Creek to below Independence Creek the river valley narrows to half a kilometre.

Towards the mouth of the Stewart River islands and gravel banks become numerous. Small shallow channels leading to the Yukon may be navigable if the water level is high. Old cabins are all that remain of the settlement of Stewart River.

The distance to Dawson from the mouth of the Stewart River is 110 kilometres. There is a good campsite at the mouth of the Sixty Mile River, 32 kilometres below Stewart River. The remainder of the trip is an enjoyable day’s paddle to Dawson.
10 Sixty Mile River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sixty Mile River</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glacier Creek to the Yukon River</td>
<td>Access to the Sixty Mile River is by a side road leading from the highway that connects Dawson to the Alaska Highway. This side road leaves the highway 32 kilometres west of Swede Dome and leads to the abandoned settlement of Sixtymile on Glacier Creek. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended for travel on this road.</td>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale) 116 B, C Dawson 115 N, O Stewart River</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
The river crosses the 64°N latitude line and lies between 140°W and 141°W longitude. It rises in Alaska and flows in an easterly direction through a portion of the Yukon Plateau and empties into the Yukon River 80 kilometres upstream from Dawson. The river valley is generally flat, with the width ranging from a few hundred metres to 1.5 kilometres. The sides of the river are usually terraced, and at intervals the river has cut a secondary rock-walled channel.

The upland area is part of the Yukon Plateau. This highland area has no well-defined mountain ranges but is composed mainly of low rounded hills. Mount Tyrrell rises 1472 metres above sea level, 992 metres above the river valley. Elsewhere, the topography is more moderate.

Flora
The Sixty Mile River is located in the boreal forest region. The dominant tree species are white and black spruce. Willow, alder, equisetum and moss are found along the river banks.

Fauna
Wildlife of the area included bear, wolf, moose, and an assortment of waterfowl and small birds. Grayling are found at the mouths of tributaries, while northern pike and whitefish are abundant at the mouth of the Sixty Mile River.

History
The historical significance of the Sixty Mile River lies in its gold-producing past. Although yielding much less gold than the Klondike Valley, the upper reaches of the Sixty Mile River made a few people wealthy. Placer mining methods were used at the turn of the century, with dredges eventually replacing the pick and shovel.
From the Alaska boundary to the mouth of the river, the valley length is 110 kilometres. Taking the bends of the river into consideration, the river length is 200 kilometres. The water drops on the average 2.5 metres per kilometre, a total drop of 442 metres. The average grade of the valley is six metres per kilometre.

At the International Boundary, the river is a rapid, winding stream less than 15 metres wide, with cobble bars lying just below the surface of the water. In mid-August, the upper portion of the river from the boundary to California Creek can hardly be considered navigable. The 16- or 19-kilometre section preceding California Creek has shallow water with cobbles and boulders protruding above the surface, making paddling impossible, and requiring travellers to line and haul canoes.

Below California Creek, the river takes on a pool and riffle pattern with depth varying from 1.5 metres in the pools to less than 33 centimetres in the riffles. Lining and hauling is still necessary in this area. The volume of water increases slightly and the descent is less difficult, although bars and rapids will continue almost to the mouth. In these upper reaches, sweepers, as well as bars and boulders are a hazard to navigation. The former lie across the width of the river, necessitating hauling or a short portage. In other instances, sweepers may be situated in the main current on sharp turns and caution must be taken to avoid contact. Bars and boulders are scattered throughout the river. The river widens to over 25 metres below Fifty Mile Creek and the only hazard to navigation is again the occasional sweeper.

Matson Creek, like Fifty Mile Creek, is rapid and clear. Excellent campsites may be found at the mouths of such tributaries on sand and gravel bars which are numerous throughout the length of the river. These open bars offer an excellent supply of firewood in the form of driftwood. Drinking water may be taken from the Sixty Mile River and its clear, cold tributaries.

Twenty-four kilometres from the mouth, the river widens to 50 metres. The cutbanks and valley walls are more subdued than those areas above California Creek. In August, water levels often are so low that care must be taken not to damage canoes on the rocky river bed. Lining, hauling and portaging are frequently necessary. At high water this river may either turn into a torrent or flow smoothly over its bed of boulders, cobbles and pebbles.
11 Klondike River
### Klondike River

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access and egress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen kilometres from the mouth of the North Klondike River to Dawson City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 days/68 kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 portage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of survey</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to the area is via the Klondike Highway from Dawson to the Dempster Highway. Eleven kilometres along the Dempster Highway there is an old road with access to the North Klondike River. It is recommended that a four-wheel-drive vehicle be used on this road. Upon reaching the Klondike River, the Klondike Highway follows the river all the way to Dawson City. The only settlement of the region is Dawson City, the point of egress, at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers. From here roads lead to Whitehorse or Alaska. An airport services the town and there is daily bus service to Whitehorse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maps required</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116 B, C Dawson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the river

Geography
Both the Klondike and the North Klondike rivers rise in the Ogilvie Mountains, the divide north of Dawson City. The North Klondike joins the Klondike at 138° 45’W longitude just south of 64°N latitude. The junction of the two rivers is 51 kilometres upstream from Dawson.

Flora
The section surveyed lies in the boreal forest region with tundra immediately to the north, in the Ogilvie Mountains. The banks of the North Klondike River have a thick cover of willow and alder. The river banks for the last 13 kilometres above Dawson support no plant life because of earlier gold-dredging operations that have left huge piles of tailings.

Fauna
Little wildlife was seen at the time of the survey; however, the region supports wolf, bear, fox, moose, beaver, ducks and other wildlife. Grayling are found in both rivers with northern pike, whitefish and salmon at the mouth of the Klondike River.

History
The Klondike River Valley was the centre of the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98. Great quantities of gold were discovered in the Klondike and in such creeks as Bonanza, Hunker, Discovery, Eldorado, Last Chance, Gold River and Gold Bottom. The discovery of gold in this area led to the growth of Dawson City as well as the construction of the Yukon-White Pass Railway. Today, all that remains of the gold rush are the hulks of dredges, the many square kilometres of tailings and an assortment of equipment used in the extraction of gold.
The canoe trip

North Klondike River
At the point of access, the North Klondike River has a width of eight metres with 50 centimetres to one metre of water flowing over a cobblestone bed. The water is characterized by shallow riffles and numerous sweepers. The current is swift, with sweepers common along the one-metre-high cut-banks. The water in August is at the low to intermediate stage and therefore shallow enough for wading when lining is necessary. The breached North Fork power dam, located eight kilometres above the mouth of the North Klondike, is the only portage necessary. A lightly loaded canoe may be able to run this section during higher water. The view along the North Klondike is limited by the tall trees that line either side of the river. Campsites are difficult to find. The open areas are mostly composed of cobbles. The river is recommended for the expert canoeist only, both at low and high water levels.

Klondike River
The North Klondike enters the Klondike River by three channels. The width averages 30 metres and no sweepers or shallow water are encountered, although numerous riffles occur until the braided section begins 24 kilometres above Dawson. The rapids which occur at intervals in this area were originally caused by past dredging operations which altered the river’s course. The view is less confined on the Klondike River, with the foothills of the Ogilvie Mountains in sight from almost any point on the water. The river passes through high hills, wide valley sections and the mounds of tailings. The Klondike Highway detracts from the surrounding landscape as it follows the river’s course to Dawson. Good campsites are available if the need arises; however, the distance from the mouth of the North Klondike River to Dawson may be completed in one day.
12 Bell and Porcupine rivers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bell and Porcupine rivers</th>
<th>Access and egress</th>
<th>Maps required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Summit Lake to Fort Yukon (See map, page 10) | Access to Summit Lake may be gained by float plane or by canoe. The canoe route is very difficult, going from the Mackenzie Delta, up the Rat River into MacDougall Pass. Egress may take place at Old Crow or at Fort Yukon, Alaska, where air services connect to other northern centres. | (N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)  
116 P Bell River  
116 O Old Crow  
116 N Old Crow  
U.S. Army Map Service series Q501  
1:250,000 scale  
NQ7 8-1 Coleen, Alaska  
NQ7 8-5 Black River, Alaska  
NQ5 6-8 Fort Yukon, Alaska |

**Length**  
18 days/188 kilometres  
no portages  

**Date of survey**  
July 1971  

Note: Water levels in August are sufficiently low to make travel by canoe difficult in the upper reaches of the Bell and Little Bell rivers. The best water levels are encountered from the middle of June through July. Water levels may also vary one to two metres overnight, depending on rainfall in the mountains.
About the river

Geography
The entire route is north of the Arctic Circle, skirting the northern treeline. This river system rises in the Richardson Mountains at Summit Lake in the MacDougall Pass and empties into the Yukon River 813 kilometres to the west in Alaska. The terrain changes from the Richardson Mountains to lowlands and tundra in the Eagle River and Porcupine River areas.

Flora
The route lies in the transition zone between the tundra and boreal forest region. Tree growth is limited to the river banks, with tundra vegetation beyond the banks. Black spruce, willow, poplar, birch and the occasional larch line the banks, while scrubby black spruce and tundra lie beyond.

Fauna
In the more southerly Yukon Flats area, the timber and wildlife are more abundant. In late summer and fall migrating caribou cross the Bell and Porcupine rivers on their way south to their wintering grounds. Moose, ducks, and geese are abundant.

History
Before the surge of Klondikers over the Pass in 1898-99, the Bell-Porcupine route was part of a major Hudson’s Bay Company route. This route was used to connect Fort Simpson with the more remote outposts of Lapierre House on the Bell River, Rampart House on the Porcupine River, and Fort “Youcon” on the Yukon River.

The canoe trip

Summit Lake and Creek to the Little Bell River
Summit Lake is surrounded by mountains that can be easily hiked and provide excellent views of the Rat River Valley, the entire MacDougall Pass, the Little Bell River Valley, and the Richardson Mountains. Mount Russel is one of the best viewpoints. The Pass seems to be an east-west air-route as several fuel caches can be found along the shore of Summit Lake. The moss banks of the lake provide excellent campsites; however firewood may be scarce.

A creek drains the western end of Summit Lake, running into the Little Bell River. When there is water in it, the width varies from 33 centimetres to 1 metre. It is incised three metres below the valley floor and is heavily overgrown with willow and alder.

A portage from Summit Lake to the Little Bell is the alternative to dragging and cutting a route through the creek.
Little Bell River
The 21-kilometre portion of the Little Bell River is twisting, with undercut banks, snags, sweepers and incised with mud banks six metres high. Small rapids located at the mouth of the river flow over sharp rocks. These may be run at high water and lined during low water. Because of the steepness of the banks, campsites are difficult to locate. A view of the surrounding Richardson Mountains can be seen if the canoeist climbs out of the incised river valley.
Bell River
The Bell River is relatively wide with a slow, steady current and endless meanders. No problems of navigation are present at moderate and high water levels. Lapierre House, an old Hudson’s Bay Company trading post, is located on the Bell River. Two run-down cabins and a cache are all that remain. A few kilometres from the mouth of the Eagle River the famous manhunt for the “Mad Trapper of the Rat River” came to an end.

Porcupine River to Old Crow Settlement
From the mouth of the Bell to the mouth of the Driftwood River, the Porcupine flows slowly and often opens in long, straight stretches that resemble lakes. There are no major navigational hazards and the current increases through narrows when approaching the Driftwood River area. The surrounding countryside is flat with broad expanses of moss and stunted spruce growth. The shorelines are treed with alder and willow, and the occasional groves of large spruce provide the best campsites. Below the Driftwood River the terrain shows more relief, timber becomes larger and the current increases its speed. Below Lord Creek, the Old Crow Range and Mount Shaeffer become visible in the northwest. Old Crow itself is a charming Indian community which is presently undergoing changes in its social and economic structure. Supplies may be purchased here, and there are airline connections to Dawson, Inuvik and Whitehorse.
Old Crow to Fort Yukon

From Old Crow to Caribou Bar Creek the river meanders and winds between high bluffs, with the Old Crow Range still dominating the view to the north. An excellent cabin and campsite exist on the left limit about 56 kilometres below Old Crow. At Caribou Bar Creek, the river valley narrows and runs through a canyon between 150-metre walls. This marks the beginning of the Upper Ramparts. The Ramparts are the most scenic part of a trip down the Porcupine. The current becomes swift and a few chutes are encountered. This section lasts for 80 kilometres. Excellent campsites are found throughout.

New Rampart House is exceptionally scenic. The buildings, although collapsing and uninhabitable, are very interesting. Sumaghan Creek enters from a picturesque valley in the north. The mouth of this creek marks the

New Rampart House on the banks of the Porcupine. The creek on the right marks the Yukon-Alaska border.
Yukon-Alaska border. At Salmon Trout River is Old Ramparts. Excellent grayling fishing in a 120-metre-high canyon can be found 1.5 kilometres up from the mouth of this small river. At Red Gate the Upper Ramparts end. From here the surrounding landscape is flat for 12 kilometres with more frequent islands. Canyon Village, eight kilometres below Red Gate, is a fairly recent, but abandoned, native community.

The Lower Ramparts are far less spectacular than the upper section. The current here is slow and the canyon walls are about 100 metres high. This marks the last immediate relief before entering the flats.

The Porcupine, below Lower Ramparts, enters the flats which are part of the more extensive Yukon River Flats. This section extends for roughly 190 kilometres and is characterized by meanders, sloughs, gravel bars and severely eroded cutbanks. At high-water levels short-cuts through sloughs may save kilometres of paddling.

Fort Yukon lies three kilometres above the junction of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers. The current in the Yukon is too strong to paddle against and therefore a "backdoor" to Fort Yukon is recommended. Here is an excerpt from a previous report on this route.

"Fort Yukon sits on Hospital Lake, a U-shaped slough, once an outlet for the Porcupine and still overflowed by the Porcupine in particularly high spring floods. An old portage trail 300 yards long leads from the N.E. tip of Hospital Lake to the Porcupine River. The trick is to find the start of this portage on the Porcupine side. Near the upper end of Homebrew Island (from which one can look across at the radar installations of Fort Yukon) is a long gravel beach. Here also is an excellent campsite. Standing near the upper end of the gravel bar and looking across at the south bank of the river one sees three breaks in the spruce, the lowest and by far the widest of which marks the head of the trail. Willows in this spruce gap and a lowering in the height of the cutbank mark the obvious spot where the Porcupine sometimes spills over. The trail starts in the spruce just above the willows. Piles of drift wood along it indicate where the water has overflowed, and lead one to the marshy N.E. end of Hospital Lake. Canoes and gear can be left at a dock beside the airstrip whence a truck can take them into town".

– Eric W. Morse, "The Rat-Bell-McDougall Canoe Trip", Arctic Circular, 1968
Further reading

Bennett, J. *Five Hundred Miles on Canadian Wilderness Waters*. Typescript in Yukon Regional Library, Whitehorse, Y.T. 5 leaves.


Areas covered by reports in the Wild Rivers series are outlined on the map. Shaded area is covered by this report.

Now available in the series:
Alberta
Saskatchewan
Quebec North Shore

Soon to be available:
Central British Columbia
Northwest Mountains
The Barrenlands
The James Bay / Hudson Bay Region
Southwestern Quebec and Eastern Ontario
Labrador and Newfoundland