

Canada's wild rivers

Canada is a land of wild rivers which, in early days, served as trading and transportation routes for both natives and Europeans. Today, these same wild rivers are being rediscovered by growing numbers of canoeists and wilderness lovers.

Parks Canada has surveyed wild rivers across the country so that modern explorers can be made aware of the rewards and hazards of wilderness water voyages. Rivers untamed by dams and unsullied by industrial pollution were chosen for their historical significance and scenic beauty.



abundance of wildlife in the region.

It includes wolf, black and grizzly-bear, moose, deer, caribou, Dall sheep, and smaller animals. River deltas are nesting areas for bald eagles, Canada geese, hawks, several species of duck and ever-present bank swallows. Arctic grayling, whitefish and northern pike abound in most rivers, and king and dog salmon also run in the Nisutlin and Macmillan rivers.

Ancient glacial migrations and constant erosion by rivers and streams account for a landscape characterized by narrow V-shaped valleys, towering bluffs and fjord-like lakes. Mountain groups rise 3,650 m to 6,050 m in stark relief above the Yukon Plateau. The northernmost limits of the Yukon border the Arctic Ocean where the barrenlands extend to the gravel beaches.

There is a continual transition from coniferous to boreal forest, interspersed with stretches of grassland, alpine tundra and finally the Arctic barrenlands.

The floral emblem of the Yukon, the purple fireweed, is much in evidence around burned-off areas and abandoned sites. Blueberries, raspberries, Labrador tea and wild rose-hips are late summer delights that can be savoured as well as visually enjoyed.

Access routes

Visitors may travel to the Yukon by car on the Alaska Highway, fly to Whitehorse or take the three-day boat voyage from Vancouver, British Columbia to Skagway,

Alaska. The boat trip along the Inside Passage and the 176-kilometre train ride on the White Pass-Yukon Railway from Skagway to Whitehorse is an incredible scenic experience.

Arrangements can be made in Whitehorse for parties to be taken in and out of wild river areas by float plane. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended for some of the access roads to rivers. Although the Alaska Highway is well-maintained, unpredictable rainfall and snow-melt in the mountainous regions can change road conditions quite drastically.

The most favourable months to plan canoe trips are June, July and August. Be prepared for night-time temperatures below 0° Celsius in the latter half of August. Travelling in the Yukon during the early summer months also means being ready to do battle with mosquitoes of legendary size and viciousness.

The Yukon River system has 3,520 kilometres of water and is readily accessible at several places including Whitehorse, Carmacks, Marsh Lake and the abandoned town-site of Minto.

The navigational hazards of the Yukon River are not so formidable as to deter the ever-increasing number of travellers from canoeing, boating or floating down this historic transportation route. Roads and airplanes are now the major travelways of the Yukon, so happily for the adventurous with an eye for the unspoiled, the river banks are mainly uninhabited and undisturbed.

Beauty and challenge beckon the adventurous to the Yukon Territory where the wildlife is plentiful, the rivers rich in history.

The survey crews monitored points of entry and exit, water level variations, river flow, portages and good campsites. They also documented sites of historic interest and the flora and fauna along the routes.

It is dangerous to assume that Canada's wild rivers are suitable for every adventure-seeking soul. Even the expertise and endurance of the most experienced river canoeist will be pushed to the limit on these powerful rivers.

Glory of the Yukon

A particularly enticing wild river region to those interested in history is the Yukon Territory. Many vestiges of the mid-nineteenth century fur trade and the heady gold rush days still remain. Those interested in nature will thrill to the

