



YUKON RIVER QUEST

Racer Information

The Yukon River Quest has a rich heritage dating back to the centennials of the 1897-1899 Klondike Gold Rush. Known as “The Race to the Midnight Sun,” it is run at a time of year when the northern sky does not get dark, allowing paddlers the unique experience of being on the river 24 hours a day. The journey takes paddlers through the traditional territories of five Yukon First Nations, who used the river for thousands of years before the gold rush stampedeers came into the country and changed the land forever. The river, however, is much the same as it was when traditional First Nation canoes and later sternwheelers plied it in previous centuries.

The Yukon River Quest is a long, grueling race down a big, remote river in the far north. Having the right preparation, equipment, and expectations are important to your success.

First, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the rules. ~~the rules~~ the rules as modified to account for covid restrictions

Race Preparation

The first thing you need to do is realize that this race is 715km. You will be making the same repetitive paddle motion 300,000 plus times. You will also be sitting or standing in a very similar position for potentially 19 to 30 hours at a time (if you never pull over). All racers will be sore, numb, tired for most of this race.

Although the foot race at the beginning (if you choose to run) may get your heart rate pumping, this should be the most anaerobic part of the race. Afterwards, your heart rate should level out to a lower aerobic style rate. When getting ready physically for the race band/cord work is recommended, stretching, aerobic activities (skiing, swimming, running, paddling etc.). More or less, get physically fit. Obviously, learn the marathon paddling stroke for your discipline and practice – whether that be on the water, or even on a chair – for those in the colder climates.

Set a reasonable goal for the race (to finish, go under 55 hours, win your class etc.), and if you are not solo, discuss your goal to get on the same page. It is not unusual to have teams dropout due to infighting, even if they were friends before the race.

Do your research for map routes; if you can, talk to past racers; and know what and how you are going to eat and drink. For more guidance on food, look at Food for the Long Haul to Dawson (updated after 2019 race) — read this fantastic article by Pat McKenna as she shares some of her professional knowledge and experience. Also see her What's For Dinner on the River.

Support Crew. It can not be overstated how important a good support crew is. They provide far more than just moral support. They can help at Whitehorse getting your boat ready and help with the launch, they are expected, almost required, to help wrangle your boat and gear at Carmacks where they will also be able to feed and pamper you, and they can help after you get to Dawson. In Dawson you may be in no fit state to look after yourselves so support there is important. And it is fun for your support crew, especially if they get well involved with the race: they can volunteer here.

Tracking. All boats must be tracked using either a Spot or inReach. These need to be set up and to verify that the data feed to the race is working. The race tracker is available for testing from November until race day.

The Race

The race goes down the Yukon River. In Whitehorse the river is “only” about 100 metres wide. That is a big river. And it is moving at about 5kph. Before you get to Dawson you will go through sections where it is 1km wide, and you will encounter (if you are lucky) places where the water is moving along at 15kph. Most of the water is flat. There are riffles, quite a few in the section from Lower Laberge to Hootalinqua. There are gravel bars on which you can get stuck and have to walk. And the water is cold. And there is the interminable Lake Laberge that at best is too long, and worst is downright nasty.

If you look at the maps of the river you will see all sorts of place names. That does not imply that there are places. Other than Carmacks, you pass no habitations. And it bends to and fro in places so your GPS will tell you that you are 5km from your next waypoint for an unconscionable length of time. And to new eyes, the bends all look the same, so the feeling of not making progress is strong.

You must carry a map such as the Roarke Map which is available from the fireweed book shop in Whitehorse at <https://www.yukonbooks.com/shop/customer/product.php?productid=2818&cat=48&page=1>, but not on Amazon.

You are very strongly encouraged to laminate the maps or copy them onto quality waterproof paper such as iGage paper. You should also have a GPS, with waypoints defined. The ones the River Quest use make the most sense as you can use them to communicate with race officials, and they are arranged so there is one on each page of the Roarke map so you at least know what page you are on (answer: you are not as far downstream as you thought). The waypoints are available for download in a number of formats that you might find useful to load directly into a GPS: KML format for Google Earth (Google Earth Pro can communicate with many type of GPS); GPX format used by various GPSs, and if all else fails, as a comma separated value file.

There are various ways people arrange their maps and GPS in the boat. You want your map tied on, waterproof, easy to turn pages, but not such that the wind turns pages. You want your GPS to hand to see how fast you are going and where you are.

~~The first required race event is registration on the Tuesday before the race. Before that there are some informal events. Check the Race Schedule for details.~~

~~On the Tuesday you will check in, have your gear and other requirements checked, and get your race shirt and bib. If you are not in a rental boat you must bring your boat to registration so it can be measured. If you~~

~~are in any doubt as to whether your boat is race legal, check the rules and look at How to Measure your Canoe or Kayak.~~



The first required activity is registration in Whitehorse which is available from the Saturday before the race to the Tuesday before the race. Before that there may be some informal events. Check the Race Schedule for details when it becomes available.

During registration will check in, have your gear and other requirements checked, and get your race shirt and bib. If you are not in a rental boat you must bring your boat to registration so it can be measured. If you are in any doubt as to whether your boat is race legal, check the rules and look at How to Measure your Canoe or Kayak.

The required equipment list is given in an appendix to the rules. One of the requirements that will be checked at registration is your medical insurance. If you are not a Yukon resident you are required to have adequate medical insurance. Details can be found here.

One requirement that you are supposed to fulfil well ahead of the race is that you must have a tracking device, a Spot or an inReach, and have it set up and tested. See SPOT device information and set-up for how to set up your Spot. See For inReaches see How to set up an inReach MapShare. You will be able to see if your tracking is working in the race tracker page. This page is active from just after registration opens in November. Tracking will be checked at registration.

You will be expected to pay a rescue deposit of \$500. This takes the form of a hold being placed on a credit card for that amount. If you finish the race or at least get off the river under your own power this deposit will be refunded. Teams that have rented boats from us will also have to pay in a similar way a damage deposit for their boat. These deposits can be paid any time in the week leading up to the race. Links to the payment pages for these deposits can be found on the user page.

Once all aspects of your registration have been completed, you will be given your race stickers (including any extra you ordered) and an alcohol swab. Clean the hull of your boat where you are going to put the stickers before sticking them on. They go at the bow. On canoes it is obvious where to put them. On kayaks try to put them somewhere where they can be read by someone trying to identify you from shore. SUPS... put them somewhere. Put the numbers on your boat as soon as possible: at registration if you have your boat with you, before bringing it to the start if possible.

~~After registration there are a series of racer and support crew briefings. These are not optional.~~

There will be briefings for racers and their support crews available online. You are expected to take advantage of them, preferably before registration. If you have any questions arising from these briefings, ask them at registration. The volunteers doing registration may or may not know all the answers, but they can get someone to contact you with an answer.

As well as reading the rules and this document you should read the FAQ and other documents linked from this document. They contain good information.

The Yukon is a young river, cutting into the sediments laid down in a massive glacial lake at the end of the last ice age. And it looks in many places like it cut into that silt just last year. The high cut banks can look to the unfamiliar eyes raw, almost man-made like a quarry. They aren't. They are natural and have their own stark beauty. But they are even less conducive to a rest stop than the dense spruce forest and its blood-thirsty denizens: mosquitoes.

The River: Whitehorse to Carmacks

The Start

The start of the race is crowded with lots of vehicles and boats arriving. Note what arrival time you have (by class or boat number). Gear will be checked again, as will tracking. Proper distancing must be maintained, and masks must be worn.

~~Half an hour or so before the race start, the racers assemble at the actual start line some distance from the river, have a little talk from dignitaries and so on, then run (or walk) to their boats and go. Without the run to spread people out the start would be a shambles of collisions: the run separates the teams. See what it looks like here (that shows the start from six years ago when there was fewer than half as many boats. Even with the foot race, the start is congested and collisions happen. Be careful~~



Boats will be arranged by decade on the beach or gravel bar at Rotary Park. Voyageurs (and C4s) will be arranged in their own group in two sequences.

Voyageur numbers will be assigned so they are evenly distributed through the fleet. Thus, if there are 50 teams of which 6 are voyageurs, the voyageurs will be given the numbers 1,10, 19, 28, 37, 46, and will be arranged on the beach 1, 19, 37, 10, 28, 46. The other boats will be arranged 11, 21,31,41,2,12,22,32,42,3,13,23,33,43,... ,9, 29,39,49,20,30,40,50. This (strange) arrangement means that teams have 100 seconds to get in their boat and leave before there is anyone at the boat next to them on the beach.

Teams will line up in numeric order at the start line, which will be at the start of the footpath leading upstream. Teams must at this point be masked and distanced from each other. At noon, team one will be released. Ten seconds later team 2, and so on. Teams who have not got themselves into position will be released after other teams. The delay in start time will be adjusted for by reducing their required rest time so, for instance, team 30, who has to wait for 30×10 seconds (5 minutes) will only have to stop at Carmacks and Minto for a total of 9:55. Each team may have a member of their support crew with them in line who may run with them and help hold, load, launch their boat.

Whitehorse to Policeman's point

You are barely out of Whitehorse. This section is less than 40km long and takes people between 2:30 and 4 hours. There are no real challenges. At about the halfway mark the Takhini River comes in from the left and changes the water from crystal clear to silty. That happens a lot as you go down river. The river is pretty sensible heading almost directly to Policeman's Point until about 2km out then it gets lost and starts going around in circles. Get used to that phenomenon too. There is a cutoff time at policeman's point at 4 hours. Policeman's Point has "road access". The road is suitable only for intrepid drivers, and parking space is limited at the river.

At Policeman's Point you are at the start of the river delta as it starts to unload its silt content as it slows for the lake. The main flow goes right until you are into the lake proper. There is a line of old pilings that used to direct the current to keep a deep channel for the old paddle steamers. The river had other ideas and the main current goes through the gap in the pilings and goes right. Take that channel.



Lake Laberge

It takes between 4:30 to 7:30 for teams to paddle the length of Lake Laberge. The lake can be anything from a mirror-flat mill-pond to an angry sea, and can go from one to the other very fast. Stay reasonably close to the right bank. The rules say no more than 200 metres out every 500 metres. Funny phrasing: what it means is that you can paddle "point to point", but the points have to be only 500 metres apart. You can not pick a point 6km up the lake and paddle way out in the lake.

It is not unusual to have 1 metre waves on the lake, and there can be 2 metre waves. Usually you will be in 10 to 30cm waves. The prevailing winds in the Yukon

in the summer are from the south west, but no one seems to have told the lake that. Being a long thin lake, the wind is generally up the lake or down the lake except where there are side valleys (SUPS beware: you can get blown out to sea at these points). Generally, the wind will be from the south, but north winds do happen and that is not what you want.

Pay attention to the clouds. They give you advance warning of what is going on. The summer weather can be quite thundery. You can see the thunderstorms forming and they are associated with rain, hail, and wind. When the thunder cell is forming, it is sucking in air from all round at ground level, so the wind is towards the storm cell. When it starts to collapse as a rainstorm, these winds reverse. If the wind is away from the storm cell it either is raining or will rain and you should dress accordingly. The winds coming out of the storm are stronger than those that went in. As you feel the wind direction change prepare for a sea change and rough water. This happens all down the river but is of particular importance on the lake and on the wider sections way down river where there is sometimes considerable fetch.

Anything falling out of one of these storm clouds was ice when it was in the cloud. It will fall as hail, sleet, or cold cold rain. Be prepared.

You can also get cooked out on the lake. It can be hot and sunny. 30°C and sun for 18 hours will fry your brain. If it is hot take the time to dunk your hat in the water to cool your head. And people from down south get surprised when they get sun burned up here. Our sun may not be as intense as yours, but the sunlight goes on and on, and it comes at you sideways. Your left hand and the left side of your face will catch the sun. Prepare for that.

The lake bends gently round to the right and the exit is at the top right corner. That means that there is no point in being out in the middle of the lake. It also means that your progress up the lake is marked by a succession of disappointments as you go round a point and yet another 10 km of lake is revealed. Get used to that too. It is a long lake and a long race. Just keep paddling.

Lower Laberge is a checkpoint at the end of the lake. Some people stop here to recover. It is a good point to change for the night. You are moving from the open (perhaps sunny) lake to the shaded valley of the river. Night is coming. Your metabolism is slowing down, and you are tired. Anticipate this and put clothes on. Also reset your Spot so it keeps tracking (applies to older Spots and cheaper plans).



Lower Laberge to Hootalinqua

This is a beautiful section of river. Too bad you are too tired to appreciate it. Teams take between 3:00 and 4:45 to paddle this section. It is marked by a succession of riffles and a nice current. Half the skill in this race comes in making the river do its share of the work. It is pointless to chase the current all over the river. The river is too big for that. Just make sure you are in a good current most of the time.

There are also gravel bars in this section that can catch the unwary. This applies more to the big boats, but going aground is not a race winning strategy, and who wants to get their feet cold and wet anyway.

Most of the people who are going to quit on the river do so between Lower Laberge and Big Salmon. To help we have a monitoring camp on the 30 mile river that is called variously 30 mile monitoring point or 20 mile camp. It is at 20 Mile (that's its name) and it is on the 30 Mile River (that's what we call it). Don't get confused. If it is a cold miserable year lots of people stop to enjoy a nice warm fire at 20/30 Mile and again at Big Salmon.



Hootalinqua is the confluence with the Teslin. Actually, the Yukon flows into the Teslin. The Teslin is the bigger river. It is also silt laden and mucks up the crystal-clear waters of the Yukon.

Hootalinqua to Carmacks

The water is smoother and faster than it was on earlier sections of the river. To the novice, this section consists of about three hundred big bends that all look the same and you never get to Carmacks. About half of these big bends are in the last 10 km before Carmacks. I exaggerate slightly. Once you have done this section a dozen times you will recognise each of the bends and you can feel the progress. Local advantage, I suppose.

There are two monitoring points dividing this section into three almost equal sections. Big Salmon monitoring point is just before the Big Salmon confluence, and Little Salmon Monitoring point is in Little Salmon Village just past the confluence with the Little Salmon River. There is road access at Little Salmon. These sections take about 4 hours each:

2018 Times	Min Race time	Max Race time
Hootalinqua to Big Salmon	2:55	5:30
Big Salmon to Little Salmon	3:10	5:10
Little Salmon to Carmacks	3:05	5:00

There are few challenges on this section, but careful navigation can save you a lot of paddling.

Note that there is road access at Little Salmon. That it the first road access point after Policeman's Point.

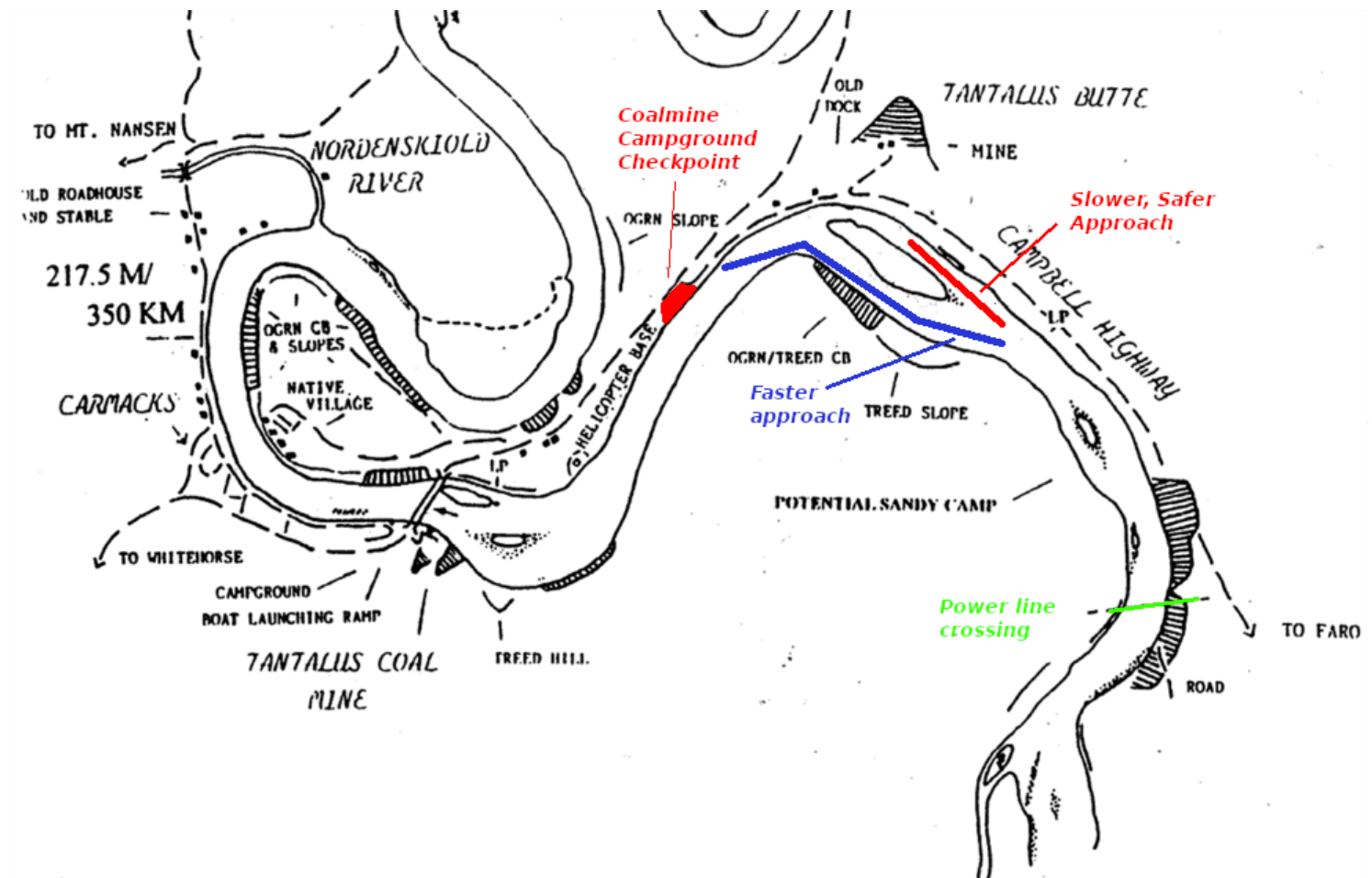
Carmacks Checkpoint

The river in the 10 kilometres before and after Carmacks goes rounds in circles and seems like it is not making progress. Hence its old name Tantalus.

You will know that you are approaching Carmacks when you see power lines cross the river about 2 kilometres out. After this there is a big bend to the left preceded by large island in mid channel. The check point is on the right just after the bend, and the river is quite fast at this point. Going right puts you on the right side of the river for the approach to the campground, but the water back there is slow. Going left puts you in fast water but on the

wrong side to of the river. The current crosses from left to right so does help take you across. But if you are just limping along at this point you probably want the right channel.

There has been a change in the rules about rest stops. Now you have to take 10 hours of rest at either Carmacks, Minto, or some combination of the two. You must stop at both checkpoints, but you can just stop-and-go if you have taken your ten hours at Carmacks already or are planning on stopping for ten hours at Minto. The purpose of the stop-and-go is to reduce the advantage of not stopping: you can not just bomb past in the fast water the other side of the river. You are expected to tell us how long you expect to stop at Carmacks ahead of the race, but you can change you mind. It will help us if you stick close to your plan or tell us your revised plan as it evolves. What actually matters for timing purposes is when you actually leave.



The water is deep close into the bank at the checkpoint and is moving quite quickly. The docks are another 2 metres out from the bank, so you are docking in moving water. We often have incidents with boats having issues here. It is tempting to do a “eddy out” manoeuvre and turn mid channel and come in facing upstream, but there isn’t an eddy for you to use to help the turn, so don’t try. By far the best approach is to approach the dock from upstream paddling close to the bank. The time mark is about 50 metres before the docks, so you can come in fast to the timing mark then slow down for the docks. Have bow and stern lines ready to throw so you can be pulled in if you get it wrong. Using the stern line is best as that way you can be pulled back in without turning and the associated risk of capsize. SUPS should approach and leave the dock in a kneeling position.

There are two docks, the upstream one intended for inbound boats, the downstream one for outbound. From time to time both may be used for inbound or outbound depending on traffic. Sometimes Voyageurs leave from their berth at the bank.

Once you are at the dock and your boat is secure, you need to get out. ~~Volunteers may need to help you. Your support crew can also help you, but they must be wearing PFDs to be allowed on the dock.~~ With Covid restrictions in place, volunteers can not help you. Your support crew may help you, but they must be wearing PFDs to be

allowed on the dock. You may be a bit unstable until you get your land-legs back. Gear stays in the boat at this point. There is limited capacity on the dock, so some people have to move onto land before the entire crew of a voyageur can disembark.

Voyageurs get lined back upstream and moored along the bank. Small boats have to be taken up to the staging area. C4s almost always are treated like voyageurs and get moored along the bank. There will be a half decent non-slip ramp, some boat wheels, and some carrying straps to help move boats. It is expected that competitors and their support crews move their own boats>, but at times of congestions help will be available. Do not expect volunteers to help with boats that are absurdly heavy or insalubrious With Covid restrictions volunteers can not help with boats: it is up to you and your support crew to move your boat to the staging area. If you can not do so in a timely manner you will be told to continue downstream 2km to the boat launch on river left just past the bridge..

Your boat will be labeled with your anticipated stop time time you are allowed out. If you change your mind and tell us, a new out time label will get printed for your boat. It is not our responsibility to wake you up or remind you. Be self sufficient.

Older Spot devices and Spots with cheap plans may need to be restarted in Carmacks. In fact, you may as well turn the things off once your boat is in the staging area and turn it back on once you start getting prepared for departure. If nothing else the gear checker will tell you to verify that it is on and tracking.

A volunteer will advise you when to move your boat down to the dock for departure. At congested times, things will be hectic. Voyageurs depart from their mooring position: they do not use the dock for departure.

Masks must be worn by everyone while at Carmacks unless they are eating, drinking or in a private space such as a tent or bathroom. As teams arrive at Carmacks they are expected to put on masks before they dock, and to be waering them until they are clear of teh dock on departure. All support crew must wear masks, and all volunteers will be too.

You should also read the Carmacks Briefing Notes and if you do not have your own support crew, you should read the Carmacks Support document and contact Coalmine campground directly to arrange for paid support.

The River: Carmacks to Minto

You leave Carmacks feeling refreshed or otherwise after your rest or stop-and-go. You must leave Carmacks by 06:00 on Friday morning even if that is less than 10 hours rest: some of the volunteers will be working Dawson too, and they need to get there well ahead of the first boats. In river miles you are less than half way to Dawson. In Paddling hours you are still less than half way, but much closer. No more lakes!

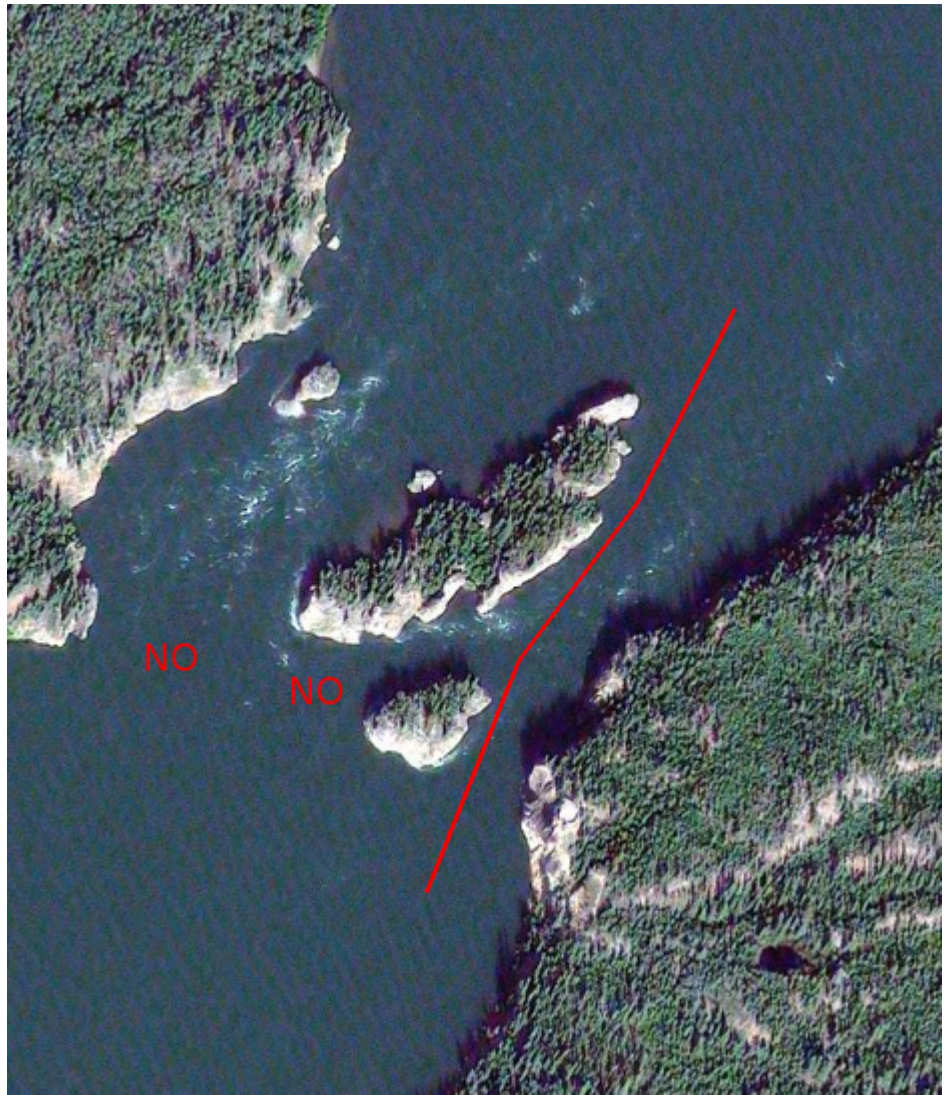
Carmacks to Five Finger Rapids

The section of river is straightforward if anything but straight. It takes between and 2:15 and 3:30 hours to paddle this section. Pay attention as you approach Five Fingers. The river makes a big sweeping 180° bend to the right and a 60° left immediately before the rapids themselves. This means you can not see the rapids until you are nearly on top of them.

Five Finger Rapids

You want to be on river right as you approach the rapids as the channels on river left and centre contain challenging rocks and holes. The path through on the right is almost textbook: follow the V then exit on the shoulder waves to the left. By doing so you follow a path that neatly threads between the rough water in the middle channel and the haystacks at the end of the right channel. Exiting on the left shoulder waves avoids a potentially nasty back eddy on that side and sets you up nicely for the path past the next island where there can also be some standing waves.

There will be a power boat on station to help if necessary. You can watch some boats going through the rapids here. Note that all these boats are too far to the right and are going through the haystacks. They would have done better to be where the photographer was.



Five Fingers to Minto

This is a beautiful section of river. Shame you are racing and can't really appreciate it. It takes racers between 5:30 and 8:00 to paddle this section

8 Km after Five Fingers is Rinks Rapids. This forms a line across the river which contains rocks and, it is said, bits of metal work from old paddle steamers. In any case, it is worth avoiding. The River is bending imperceptibly to the right, so you can not see the clean water on river right. Have faith, it is there. The water is slack on the right. At the extreme right it is going upstream. You want to pick a path in flowing but not exciting water.

After Rinks Rapids is Yukon Crossing. There are many channels through the islands here, and they have all be used by racers. Many channels work well.

Minto

40 km later is Minto. The checkpoint is at Minto Resort which is behind an island. The head of the island will have a big arrow on it telling you to go right, and there will be lights for this when it is dark (or at least gloomy).

The channel behind the island leading to the checkpoint is fairly slow moving. All the action is behind the small island at the downstream end of the channel. You can see in the picture that there are some rocks and willows on a peninsular. just past that is a boat ramp leading up to some cabins. Ignore that. Then there is a high shingle cliff just like at Fort Selkirk. Behind that is Minto Resort. Towards the end of this cliff, just as the bank bends is the boat ramp we will be using. If you miss the channel and are out int he main channel, you *can* cut through between the



islands but it is shallow on the upstream side, and a current the wrong way on the downstream side. You could also come in past the little island. It would be an energetic ferry across, but perfectly doable.

Voyageurs will be moored upstream of the ramp. There is a shingle beach, but at high water it is very narrow and steep. There will be a fixed line staked to the cliff to attach your mooring lines to. Do not trip over it, mind the stakes holding it in place. The boat ramp is similar to, but somewhat less rough than, the one at Carmacks. There will be boat dollies to help you and your support crew move your boat.

The timing crew by the docking area should be able to tell you how long you have to stay at Minto, and a label will be printed and stuck on your boat with that time. Boats will be staged on the flat grassy area upstream of the top of the boat ramp. Camping and facilities are at the resort proper a couple of hundred metres up stream. As in Carmacks, you and your support crew are responsible to moving your own boat and for getting you up in time to have your gear inspected and your boat back in the water.

Minto Resort is a new checkpoint for the race, but details are emerging. It is still a work in progress and there will



be more facilities in 2022. For 2021 there will be a bathroom block with running water. Outside that there is a tap. We are waiting for test results on the water to see if it is potable. There is a gazebo that is about twice the size of the one in Carmacks. There will be electricity there for charging inreaches, GPSs, etc.

Minto has the last road access before Dawson. From here on you are committed, if you weren't before.

The River: Minto to Thistle Creek

This last leg of the race, Minto to Dawson, is long. It typically takes less time than the Whitehorse to Carmacks leg, not least because there isn't Lake Laberge to do again, but you are more tired and all but the fastest teams will take over 20 hours. You do not do well in this race by pushing your body too hard. It may be in your interest to pull over and rest somewhere. If you do so, beware of getting cold: if you stop, put on an extra layer.

Just downstream of Minto Resort is Minto Landing, less than 2 km. Here may be a barge crossing here for the copper mine barely visible on the left a bit downstream.

From here right through to the confluence with the White the river has well defined channels with numerous islands. There are good and better paths down river. You want the better ones.

Fort Selkirk is on the left bank of the river just after the confluence with the Pelly River. If you are approaching on River left, you won't see the Pelly. Fort Selkirk is a monitoring point, so they will want to see or hear your number as you go past. It is an opportunity to stop and warm up, but it is a race.

Fort Selkirk to Thistle Creek

This section takes between 6:30 and 10 hours. Note that huge time spread. The back of the pack is moving quite slowly now. From Fort Selkirk on, you see a gradual change in the banks: fewer soft cliffs of paleo lake silt, more rock cliffs.

The pattern of the river continues the same: mostly big islands with choices of channels.

Thistle Creek (63.08654°N, 139.4804°W) is on the right side of the river behind an island. You pass Kirkman Creek, which is a fairly obvious homestead, about 6 km before Thistle Creek on river right. There is a placer mine up the Thistle Creek, and a barge landing area just downstream of the creek itself. However, that is all behind an island. The checkpoint will be on one of the islands in that area.

Thistle Creek

The Thistle Creek Checkpoint is just a verbal checkpoint like Lower Laberge. You can stop if you want, but you probably just want to keep going to get to Dawson.

The River: Thistle Creek to Dawson

Thistle Creek to 60 Mile River

Teams take between 6 and 9 hours to paddle this section. The first part of this, Thistle Creek to the confluence with the White River (all of 8km!) is the same as what you have got used to by now. But the River is going to change. If you are drinking the river water you want to stock up on water before the White comes in.

The White River is smaller than it used to be: there was a change in the configuration of the glaciers and there was a classic case of “river capture”, and one of the major tributaries, the Slims River, is now dry. But what does come down is so silt laden it is almost mud. This not a case of a tributary mucking up the crystal-clear Yukon as the Yukon is fairly silt laden at this point, but you most certainly will see the difference. It takes several kilometers for the rivers to mix, so you still see the difference in the water as you paddle.

After the White comes in there is a complex of shallow islands and lots of shallow back channels. Conventional wisdom has you stay river right for about 8km after the White, then crossing in the main channel aiming for an obvious triangular cliff on the left side, then staying left for a bit.

Then you are into the Stewart River confluence. The Stewart does not have a delta like the White, but it comes in in several separate channels. And the Yukon here is a shifting mess of channels and sandbars.

After the Stewart, the river has a number of big and small islands and good, indifferent, and poor channels. Navigation is important. And the river changes from year to year.

The 60 Mile monitoring point, if it is manned, will be on the right side of the upstream end of the little island just by where the 60 Mile river comes in. You want to be on the right side of this island even if you took a back channel through or behind the big island that is almost a peninsula which is a couple of kilometres upstream of 60 Mile on the left side of the river.

60 Mile to Dawson

The last section of the race takes between 4:30 and 6:00. From 60 Mile to about 10 Km past Indian River the river is almost braided. There are Islands and channels and they shift. In the 5 Km before Indian River, there are sand bars that may or may not be exposed in mid channel dividing the river, possibly invisibly, into two or three channels. And the river is wide, well over 1 km wide. An intimidating section of river that is a fore taste of what the Yukon does well down stream of Dawson in what are called the Flats.

The 5 or so kilometres around where Indian River comes in there is another complex of islands that slowly change. And peter out into sand bars. You are probably best off staying towards the left side of the river

After that the river gets a grip on itself and reverts to the big channels and big islands pattern you had before Thistle Creek. Watch out for the welcome sight and sound of Dawson. You can catch tantalising glimpses of the Moosehide Slide above town from some distance upstream. It takes real skill and dedication to miss Dawson, but it has been done. It will not be dark here whatever time you come in.

Dawson



As you approach Dawson the first thing you see is the Moosehide Slide on the hillside behind the town. Once you are round the final big bend you still have to pass the mouth of the Klondike River then another 750 metres and you pass the timing line. In the spring the Klondike dumps a load of silt into the Yukon, so the Yukon is shallow and slow on the right side but at race time, for a change, the river feeding in is pure and bright and clean and it is the Yukon that is the silt laden turbid river. If you are racing hard at this point, you might want to be on the left side of the river until the finish line before working back across to the dock. The Current mid river is fairly strong and if you are there you won't have to work nearly as hard to get to the dock. A lot of boats limp into Dawson coming along the right shore. There is no current there. In fact, it might be going backwards.

The dock is about 250 metres downstream of the timing line on the right side of the river. You have to go past the jetty where there may be a tour boat tied up. You turn in downstream of this jetty and come in to the beach where you will be congratulated by your adoring fans and will have one last gear inspection. ~~Help will be available to get you out of your boat and your boat out of the water.~~ With Covid restriction only your support crew can help you out

of your boat and help you get your boat out of the water. If you do not want to clean and take your boat away immediately you can somewhere out of the way after gear inspection. There is limited space and you may find that out of the way spaces are in very short supply.

Masks must be worn by everyone while at Dawson Dock area or Dawson Finish Line area unless they are eating or drinking. As teams arrive at Dawson they are expected to put on masks before they dock. All support crew must wear masks, and all volunteers will be too.

Note that there are rubbish bins and recycling bins at the dock. Do not leave rubbish lying around. Do not leave bags of rubbish anywhere, even by the bins, not even black garbage sacks. The ravens will tear them open and scatter the contents.

At some point you need to pack up and take your stuff away. If you were in your own boat, do what you want with it.

If it is one of the River Quest's rental boats, clean it and ask the volunteers for specific instructions. Your boat needs to be inspected and signed off and the spray deck returned to us otherwise you will not get your damage deposit back.

If it is a boat belonging to one of the outfitters, follow whatever instructions they gave you.

There is lots of activity down at the dock. Feel free to hang around and help, or come up to the timing area where there will be an arrivals board showing when boats are due in.

Then enjoy Dawson.

On Sunday morning there will be the awards ceremony. Last year it was at the school at Queen Street and Fourth Ave and starting at 10am.

Mandatory and Suggested Gear

The mandatory gear is listed in the rules, section 16. This section takes you over some of the required items and explains what they are for and what we are looking for.

Towlines

You need tow lines/throw bags. Lots of boats find themselves mucking up the approach to the dock at Carmacks and having to be reeled in like a fish. You should have your throw bag/throwable long tow line to hand for the purpose.

If you stop anywhere along the river you should immediately tie off. It is all too easy to have your boat head off down river without you. You should tie off both ends of the boat in case you chose a poor stump to tie one end to (I've seen it done). And you are likely to need all 40' of line to get to a secure mooring point.

PDF.

These rules are nasty, but not our fault. International treaties determine what is a legal PFD, and it amounts to whatever is legal in the jurisdiction you are in or whatever jurisdiction you came from. The rules are designed for crews of big ships. What this means is that Europeans, South Africans, Australians etc can use the nice smaller 50N buoyancy PDFs, Americans and Canadians must use the bigger North American standard PDFs. Sorry. It is the Law.

Stuff in the pockets of the PFD

If you fall out of your boat and it heads off to Dawson without you, you will be stuck with just what is in your pockets. This needs to be a bare minimum for fire, shelter, and food. The rules also specify a whistle to attract attention of passing boats.

The bivysack is intended just to be a aluminized plastic sheet but in the form of a bag. I've seen unconscious racers at the side of the river "sheltering" under a flat space blanket with the rain coming in and making them cold and miserable. Do not get a big bivvy: it will be a pain to attach to your PFD.

The firestarter kit needs to be serious. If you need to make fire it is because you are cold and it is raining sideways in a strong wind. You are wet, your kit is wet, and the wood is wet. A flint and steel is nearly useless in such conditions. A simple lighter useless in anything more then a gentle puff of wind. A windproof lighter, or stormproof matches (what used to be called Bengal Matches half a century ago when I was a scout) will serve you better. But that only gets you so far. I suggest also carrying "fire starting sticks": these are the wax-and-sawdust sticks you can buy at any outdoor store.

I suggest also having in your PFD (for any trip): some cash and a credit card in case you are rescued, and some waterproof id to identify the body in case you aren't.

Food. There are articles on this subject. Simple advice is to take anything you think will stay down.

Sleeping Bag

We specify a -5°C sleeping bag. In Europe sleeping bags have 3 ratings, something like survival, something, and comfort. The North American ratings are a bit optimistic being for in a tent wearing nice thick PJs, so you can use the lowest number on the European ratings. But Do Not Skimp in the sleeping bag. You will be using it at least at Carmack or Minto, and if things go wrong, some random place along the river. Assume that when you are using the bag you are shivering from cold, you are wet, you have lost your tent, and it is sleeting sideways in a strong wind. You want a good bag. Synthetic: down is wonderful unless wet when it is useless.

Tent

This is more safety gear. If you are cast up on some random spot along the river, you may be camping somewhere where the nearest thing to a tree is a one-year-old willow. You need a tent that stands up by itself. Little Bivy sacks will do, but they must have poles. The gear inspectors are told: if it doesn't have poles it isn't a tent.

Warm Clothes

We can have a race where it is cold and wet. Then the sun comes out and people change into dry clothes, then it rains and they get wet, repeat several times. You may think you are special and can paddle so hard and fast that you won't get cold. We have had people think that who had to be helicoptered out because they were dangerously cold. It's not like an extra fleece top and bottom weigh enough to make a difference.

Rain Gear

The problem with rain gear it you sweat inside it and your clothes get wet anyway. But it keeps the wind out and means that the torrential cold rain from a thunderstorm doesn't freeze you. There is no fancy solution. You are working hard, you are sweating beyond the capability of any Goretex or whatever to help. You are better off admitting that you are going to drown in your own sweat. This in one case where the cheaper stuff may be better than the fancy stuff.

Other

Bug hood seriously recommended for probably for whatever bug-infested backwater you end up lost in.

Thermos of soup is a very good idea. We have racers drop out each year from some combination of hypothermia and either dehydration or hyponatremia. Hot cheap salty chicken broth helps all three. You may be astonished how effective it is at converting a dysfunctional discouraged paddler back into a human.

Suggestions on Race Strategy

Nutrition

You must eat during this race. You cannot get enough energy by simply adding calories in your drinking water. Racers find that small amounts consumed continuously work best so have a plan. Also during long efforts your tastes can change. What tastes good at 4 hours may not be palatable at 30hrs. For the closing stages of the race it has been suggested that you take what you think you might still be able to eat on your death-bed, because you will be feeling that good.

Hydration

You must drink continuously. Drinking plain water is not a good idea as you are losing electrolytes all the time. Experiment with different sports drinks on your practice runs and pick one that will still taste OK after 50 hours. Racers have found that many electrolyte drinks work better at half strength or weaker on this race.

Pace

Go too fast and you will burn out, too slow and you won't make the cutoffs or collapse from sleep deprivation. For first timers start conservatively (ie slowly) and if you feel great at Carmacks you can increase your effort and finish strong.

Navigation

Keep track of where you are on the map. This helps all sorts of ways. Turning a page becomes a major event and feels like progress: on some sections of the river it is the only thing that feels like progress. It also enables you to track your pace so you can gauge whether you are going too fast or too slow. It also takes the nagging guess work out of questions like 'where are we? how far till the next checkpoint or break?' And it means you won't be on the wrong side of the river approaching Carmacks or Minto (which can be embarrassing) or Five Fingers or Rinks Rapids (which could be exceedingly embarrassing). It could also be helpful in an emergency. It gives you a little feeling of control, and helps you gauge how much of a problem you are in.

It's a huge river especially after Thistle Creek. During the last 3rd of the race when you are sleep deprived you can be faced with confusing braided channels and often the best channel is not obvious. Make sure your gps and map skills are up to snuff. If you're relying on gps make sure you bring twice as many batteries as you think you need. A blank screen is not helpful in choosing the right channel. The last 3rd is not simply a down hill run. If you are new to this river do not underestimate this part.

A GPS can also help you find the fast moving water. Half the race is making sure the river is doing its share of the work. If your GPS suddenly tells you your speed has dropped from 15kph to 10kph you should be asking the river why that happened.

Why Teams Fail to Complete the Race

The people who fail in this race do so for a variety of reasons but the majority of them come down to

- Exhaustion
- Hypothermia

- Injury
- Discouragement

Exhaustion is self explanatory. The race is physically challenging and the sections of the race are long enough that simple sleep deprivation plays a part. The first leg of the race takes between 19 and 34 hours. You have to be a strong paddler, physically fit, and mentally fit to do this race. If you have a hidden sleep deficit – where you are getting barely adequate sleep on a regular basis – that will affect your race.

Hypothermia is also self explanatory. It can get cold. If there is precipitation it will either be cold rain or hail or sleet. Most likely cold rain. If there is a thunder shower, that air temperature can drop 15 C° in a couple of minutes. It will be single digits °C over night, and the first night after and exhausting day on the lake gets people every year. Exhaustion is a contributing factor, as is the physical exertion. Your body will not be giving you the signals you expect. **Put clothes on before you get cold, take clothes off before you get hot, eat before you are hungry, drink before you are thirsty.** You have to think for your body.

Hyperthermia is not uncommon on the lake. It can be 30°C out there. Or it can be 5°C.

Dehydration affects some paddlers. No excuse for that: you are surrounded by fairly clean fresh water. Which can be drunk straight if all else fails. Not recommended as a plan, you can get giardia from it, but that takes about 5 days to affect you, so you will be off the river before it affects you. **Plan your water supply or purification system.**

Hyponatremia is related to dehydration. This happens when you take on too much water and not enough electrolytes. This is where sports drinks are actually useful. Choose one that contains electrolytes and complex carbs rather than the jumped-up sugar drinks sometimes sold as sports drinks.

Injury is also obvious. The common ones are hands being blistered and macerated to the point of bleeding and pain. Ditto lower back (in kayakers), and the bum. You will be sitting for a long time. Make sure your seat is comfortable and fits: these injuries can be very painful and quite serious. Then arms and shoulders. Obviously you are stressing these. The most common failures here are repetitive strain (well that's obvious) and pulled muscles, and the most common way that happens is doing correction strokes. Make sure that when you are training you practice correction strokes rather than just putting in hours of simple paddling.

Discouragement takes out more paddlers than anything else. It is complicated by exhaustion, hypothermia, and who knows what else. But out there in the half light of the early morning on that second day, on a huge river where every bend looks like the last one and you are alone and the banks look as gloomy and threatening as any Grimm forest, it is easy to get discouraged. The solution here is to get your expectations right. That is easier said than done. How do you know how fast you should do on this race if it is your first time? But if it is your aim simply to finish, then planning a sleep stop on the Whitehorse to Carmacks leg is a much better strategy than arriving at Carmacks more dead than alive, or collapsing in a heap somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

Last Words

Prepare for the race. Practice lots and work out and test your food and water strategies. Figure out what clothes you will need. Do not bring too little or too much. Test all your gear during practice. Race day is never a good time to try a new piece of gear or try a new food or drink.

Set your expectations right. Going too fast early on can be a mistake, but this is a harder race taken slowly than fast. Know yourself. Stay even (keeled?) and remain positive. Don't get elated or discouraged just keep going. Things will go wrong. Don't give up. Think it through. Solve the problem and then carry on. This race is not defined by one event. Its process that takes even the best teams almost 2 days of paddling.

Luck. Weather, current, all sorts are a matter of luck. May the best of it be with you.