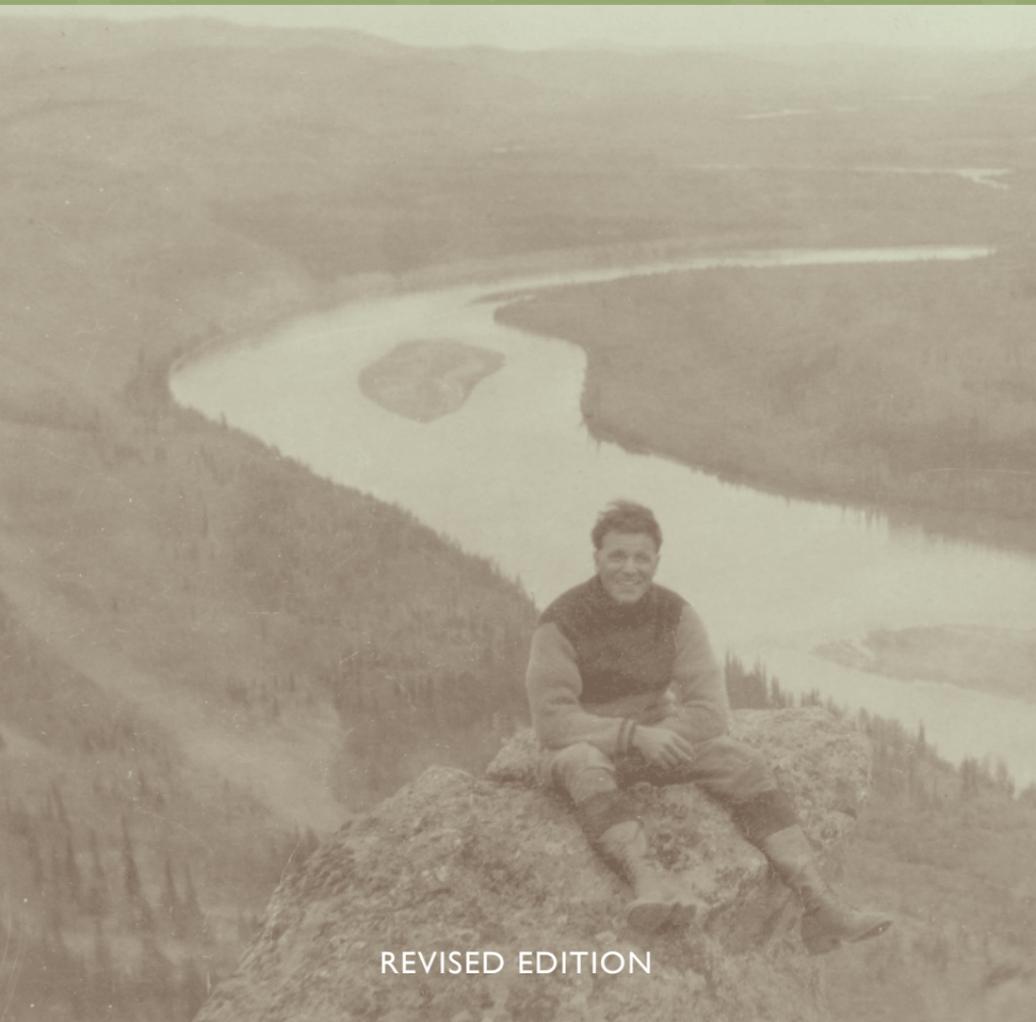




Yukon River Heritage

An illustrated introduction
for river travellers



REVISED EDITION

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Front cover, top: Men and dog in a boat, ca. 1900.

University of Washington Libraries #11633

Front cover, bottom: Mountie Arthur Thornthwaite on Tantalus Butte/*Gum Tibi*, ca. 1920.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7714

Back cover, top: Chief Isaac (left) and two other Hän men, ca. 1900.

YA, AHL collection, #4232

Back cover, background: Gold rush boats on their way to Dawson at the mouth of the Stewart River, 1898.

YA, Greenbank collection, 89/19 #14

Back cover, bottom: The Dawson waterfront, 1917.

YA, Emil Forrest fonds, 80/60 #590

Please go to www.travel yukon.com for information about planning river trips.



Drift Into History

An introduction to the heritage of the Yukon River



The wheelhouse of the *S.S. Bailey*.

YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #5202

are books, maps, charts and guides that provide detailed histories or planning and route information. Enjoy your journey.

The Yukon River

The Yukon River is the fifth longest river in North America. It drains almost 900,000 square kilometres (km), about half of which are in Canada and half in the United States. It flows from the headwater lakes, at the foot of the Coastal Range in British Columbia, and travels to St. Michael, Alaska, on the Bering Sea. Its route takes it nearly 3,000 km and crosses the Arctic Circle. The first non-aboriginals to travel on the river were Russian explorers in the 1830s. They journeyed upstream



MacBride Museum #1989-9-46

This publication offers a glimpse of some of the heritage sites along the Yukon River. It is intended to give you an idea of the timeless heritage and beauty of one of the world's great rivers. The booklet is not a comprehensive history and should not be used for navigation purposes. There



YA, Eric Hegg fonds, #2783

from the river's mouth. Hudson's Bay Company trader, John Bell, reached the river from the east ten years later. He named it *Yukon*, the same word used by the Gwich'in people in the Fort Yukon area.



S.S. Bailey on the Fiftymile River, ca. 1899. YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #5201

The Yukon's headwater lakes are mostly glacial fed and reach their high-water levels late in the summer. Some of the river's major tributaries are fed by melting snow; their levels rise quickly in May and June and then drop. This helps to keep the Yukon River at a fairly consistent level.

The section of river from Marsh Lake to Dawson was known as the upper Yukon; the Yukon below Dawson was called the lower river. In the late 19th century, with the establishment of a land link from the coast — first via the Chilkoot Pass, and then the White Pass & Yukon Route railway — the upper Yukon River became the main access route into the interior of the territory.

First Nations

The human history of the territory extends back more than 13,000 years. The Yukon River flows through the traditional territories of the Inland Tlingit, Tagish, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone and Hän-speaking people. For generations they have travelled throughout the Yukon River drainage, harvesting its fish and hunting and trapping in the mountains and valleys.



Chief Isaac at Moosehide, ca. 1920s. YA, Anglican Church of Canada collection, 89/41 #746



First Nation woman smoking a hide. YA, Emil Forrest collection, 80/60 #559

Gold rush

Gold was discovered in the Klondike in 1896, setting off a stampede into the area. Tens of thousands of people from all over the world travelled over the Chilkoot Pass or White Pass during the winter of 1897 and through 1898. They wintered at Bennett or



The Dawson waterfront, ca. 1898.

YA, VPL collection, #2289

Lindeman, at the foot of the mountain passes, and built boats for the trip to Dawson. In 1898, more than 7,000 boats travelled down this route on their way to the Klondike. Many left Bennett at the end of May, as soon as the ice went out

on Bennett Lake. North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) Inspector Samuel Steele counted 800 boats under sail on one stretch of water.

White Pass & Yukon Route

By July 1900 Whitehorse was connected to the coast via the 190-km White Pass & Yukon Route railway. A new transportation system developed, with freight and passengers travelling by rail to Whitehorse and then farther inland by means of sternwheel riverboats. The British Yukon Navigation Company (BYN), the river transportation division of White Pass, ran sternwheelers on the Yukon River for more than 50 years. Two riverboats have been restored and can be visited: the *S.S. Klondike* in Whitehorse and the *S.S. Keno* in Dawson.

Salmon

Every year, salmon travel up the Yukon River for thousands of kilometres to reach their spawning grounds. The largest and first to spawn is the King, Spring or Chinook Salmon (*Onchorhynchus tshawytscha*).

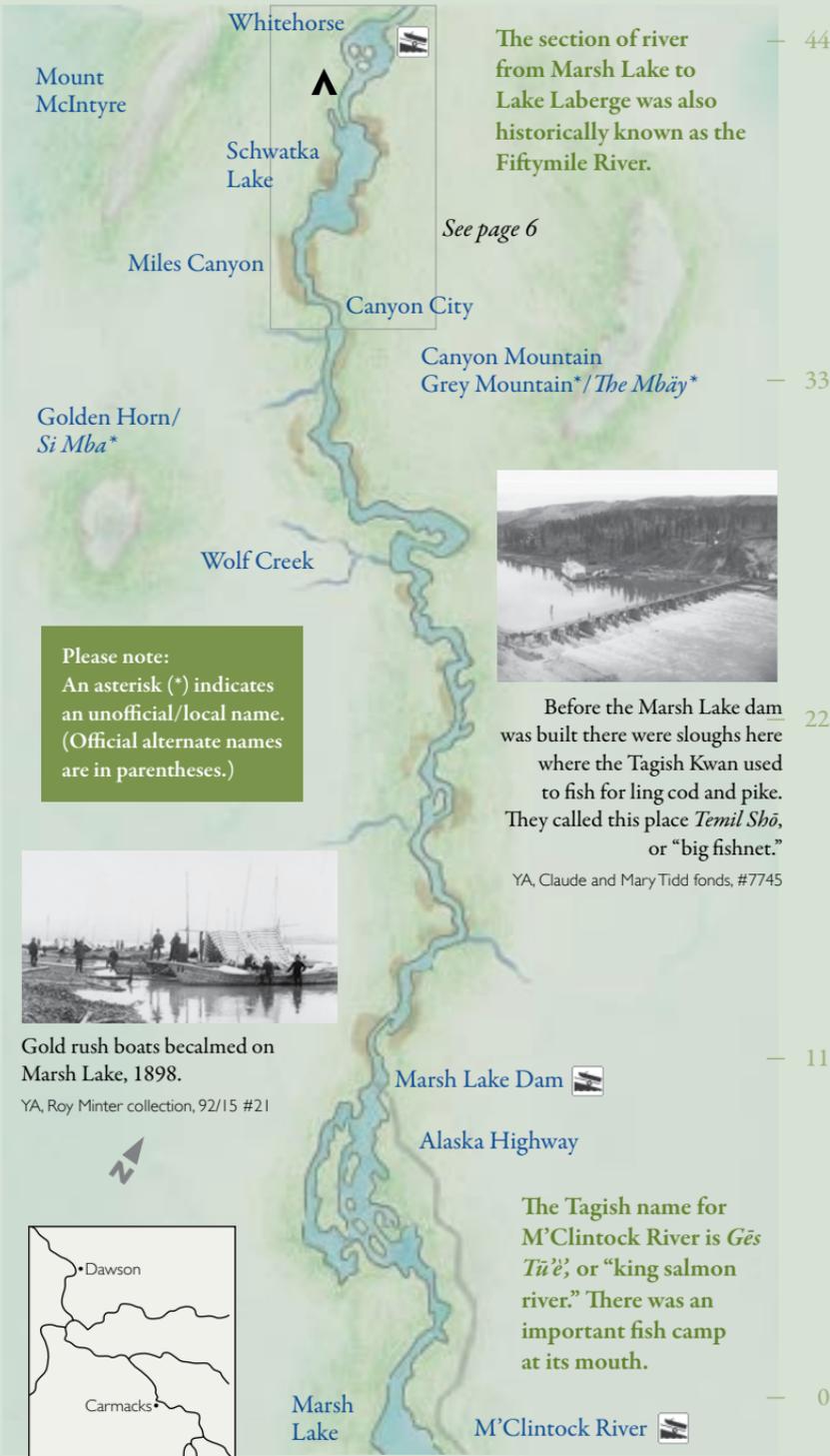
Next is the Red or Sockeye Salmon

(*O. nerka*); the Humpback or Pink (*O. gorbuscha*); the Coho or Silver (*O. kisutch*); and the Chum or Dog Salmon (*O. keta*). Only the King Salmon travel the full length of the river.



Pete Anderson with a salmon near Forty Mile, 1930.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #8301



The section of river from Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge was also historically known as the Fifty-mile River.

See page 6

Canyon Mountain
Grey Mountain*/*The Mbäy**



Before the Marsh Lake dam was built there were sloughs here where the Tagish Kwan used to fish for ling cod and pike. They called this place *Temil Shō*, or "big fishnet."

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7745

Please note:
An asterisk (*) indicates an unofficial/local name. (Official alternate names are in parentheses.)



Gold rush boats becalmed on Marsh Lake, 1898.

YA, Roy Minter collection, 92/15 #21

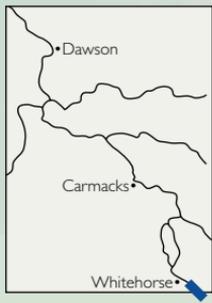
Marsh Lake Dam

Alaska Highway

The Tagish name for M'Clintock River is *Gēs Tū'ē*, or "king salmon river." There was an important fish camp at its mouth.

Marsh Lake

M'Clintock River





Map I km 0–46

Marsh Lake to Whitehorse

Yukon River: When Hudson’s Bay Company explorer Robert Campbell reached the Yukon River in 1843, he named it the Lewes after the company’s chief factor. He didn’t realize it was the same river that his fellow trader John Bell had called *Youcon*.

Bell, hundreds of miles north of Campbell, had reached the river at about the same time. For the next hundred years, the upper river was often referred to as the Lewes.



Breaking through the ice on Marsh Lake, June 1898. Glenbow Archives S-227-43

Marsh Lake Dam: The dam was designed by White Pass engineer Herb Wheeler as part of his “ongoing feud with the Yukon River.” In order to lengthen the navigation season, the dam was closed late in

summer at high water, and was progressively opened in early May. The additional flow raised the level of Lake Laberge, 84 km downstream, and helped break up the ice along its shores. The lake would otherwise stay frozen as long as a month after the rest of the river.



The S.S. *Bailey* closes in on another boat in a race on the Fiftymile, 1899.

YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #5200

The Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, located on the banks of the Yukon River in downtown Whitehorse, was built by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation as a gathering place for people of all cultures. The vision of the centre is to revive, preserve and demonstrate the language, practices, values and traditional ways of life of the people of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

KDCC photo



As you approach Whitehorse you will see the restored *S.S. Klondike*. The canoe landing is on the left past the bridge.

Whitehorse 



A boat navigates the Whitehorse Rapids.

YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #463

Site of the White Horse Rapid. The Southern Tutchone name for the rapid is *Kwanlin*, meaning “narrow passage.” A traditional fish camp was located below the swift water.

Whitehorse Rapids dam

See page 43 for information on the portage.

Schwatka Lake

“Rowing out from the shore we were sucked immediately into the gorge, and went dashing through at a rate which I thought could not be less than twenty miles an hour.”

Edward Spurr,
USGS, 1898

Miles Canyon

Canyon City*



The *Gleaner*, *Australian* and *Nora* at Canyon City, 1898. Archaeological work at Canyon City has revealed that before the gold rush the site was used as a seasonal fish camp by Yukon First Nations peoples.

YA, Eric Hegg fonds, #2695





Map 2 km 40–45

Miles Canyon



Raft in Miles Canyon, ca. 1898. YA,VPL collection, #2174

In 1883, U.S. Army explorer Fredrick Schwatka named the canyon after his sponsor, Brigadier General Nelson A. Miles. The dangers of Miles Canyon and the rapids below became well known. During the gold rush hundreds of boats

met their end in the rough water and as many as 300 people drowned. The NWMP intervened in 1898, ruling that only skilled pilots could take boats through and discouraging women and children from making the trip.

Canyon City had a short life at the upper end of the canyon. It was the head of a horse-drawn tram line eight km long that was built in 1898. The line followed the route of a First Nation portage that bypassed the canyon and rapids. Stampeders unpacked their cargo at Canyon City, transferred it to the tram cars, and then repacked their goods at the foot of the rapids. The small community included a police post, roadhouse and tramway office, along with a scattering of tents and mountains of freight.

The Whitehorse Rapids dam, built in 1958, raised the level of the river and subdued the rough water to a considerable extent. Caution should still be exercised.

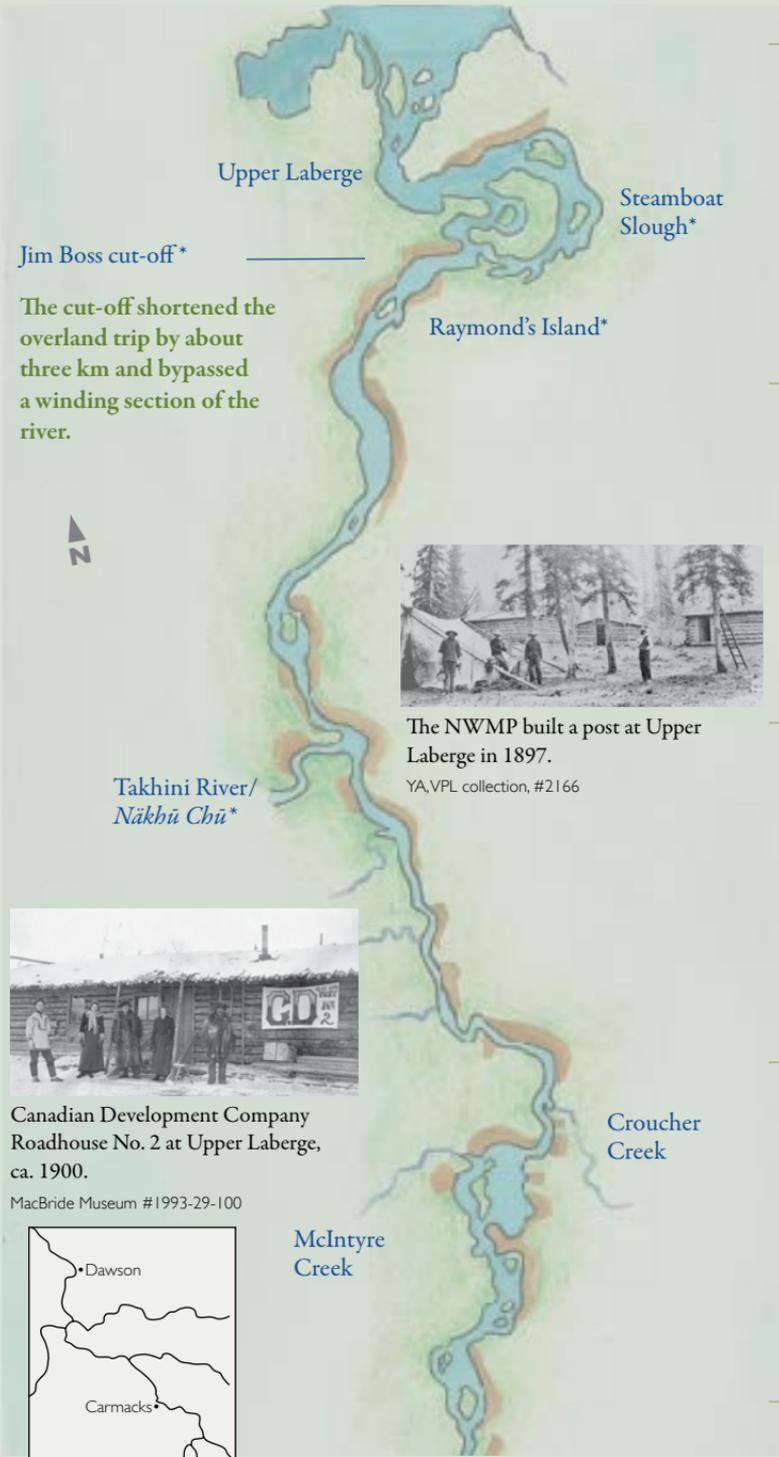
"Oh Kodak, Kodak, what have we done that even in these far-away Northern solitudes one cannot escape thy demon eye!"

Julius Price, 1897

A "Kodak picnic" group poses in Miles Canyon, ca. 1900.

MacBride Museum # 1989-4-115





Jim Boss cut-off*

The cut-off shortened the overland trip by about three km and bypassed a winding section of the river.



The NWMP built a post at Upper Laberge in 1897.

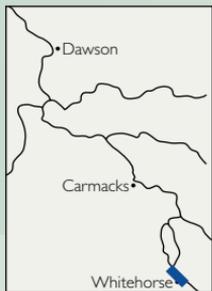
YA, VPL collection, #2166

Takhini River/
*Nákhū Chū**



Canadian Development Company Roadhouse No. 2 at Upper Laberge, ca. 1900.

MacBride Museum #1993-29-100



McIntyre
Creek

Croucher
Creek

82
73
64
55
46



Map 3 km 46–84

McIntyre Creek to Upper Laberge

Here the river makes its way through the shared traditional territories of the Ta'an Kwäch'än and Tagish Kwan.

Jim Boss Cut-off: Jim Boss (Kashxóot) was leader of the Southern Tutchone Ta'an Kwäch'än

from the turn of the 20th century until he died in 1950. In 1900, after watching thousands of people flood into the area en route to the Klondike, he lobbied the federal government to set aside a reserve for his people. This was the first land claim in the territory.



l-r: Gold Commissioner George Mackenzie, Jim Boss, Skookum Jim and Rev. W.G. Blackwell, ca. 1911–16.

YA, Blackwell collection, 91/38 #2



Fred Boss, George Dawson, Ned Boss (front) and others at potlatch for Kashxóot, 1950.

YA, Boss collection, 95/67 #1

Takhini River: Takhini is one of the many Tlingit place names in the territory. The Southern Tutchone name for Takhini River is *Nákhy chù* or “crossing with raft.” This is a reference to crossing Kusawa Lake, the headwaters of the Takhini.

Upper Laberge: The entrance into Lake Laberge is filled with shifting sandbars. The lines of posts are part of rock-filled dykes, now broken, that contained the main channel for the sternwheelers.

A dredge working to clear a channel at the entrance to Lake Laberge, 1901. The pilings can still be seen today. YA, John Scott fonds, 89/31 #245



Caution: wind and large waves can come up suddenly. Keep to the east shore while navigating the shallow areas at the north end.

— 132

▲ Lower Laberge

Goddard Point



The first scow downriver in 1899 leaves Lake Laberge.

YA, Emil Forrest fonds, 80/60 #8

Ptarmigan Point



Telegraph operator at Lower Laberge, 1915. This building is still standing.

Glenbow Archives NA-1663-46

The Southern Tutchone name for Richthofen Island is *Njü Shäw* or Big Island.

— 108

Deep Creek* ▲ 

Laurier Creek

Richthofen Island/*Njü Shäw**

At the head of the lake, small boats should go through the piers to the right and follow the east shore.

— 96

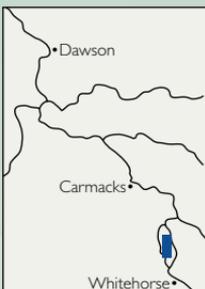
Livingstone Trail

Jackfish Bay

Joe Creek

— 84

Laberge Creek





Map 4 km 84–134

Lake Laberge

Lake Laberge lies within the traditional territory of the Ta'an Kwäch'än, or "Head of the Lake People." The Southern Tutchone name for the lake is *Taa'an Män*. Shallow Bay/*Män Tl'at* was the main fall camp for Ta'an Kwäch'än people; they gathered there for the annual whitefish spawn.

Lake Laberge stays frozen long after the rest of the river has thawed in the spring. Various schemes were tried to deal with this problem.

One method involved sending a "caravan" of three steamers down the length of the frozen lake. Each boat pushed an iron-sheathed barge in front; the weight of the barges cracked the ice and created a channel. It was effective but slow; it took



Sternwheelers *Selkirk* and *Whitehorse* on Lake Laberge.

YA,VPL collection, #2251

three days for the boats to travel the length of the lake.

in 1865 when he was persuaded to come north instead and work for the overland telegraph then being built across Alaska and Siberia.

Scientist William Dall of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, who worked with Laberge, named the lake after him.

"... a delightful companion en route or by the camp fire ... in short — a capital voyageur of the best type."

William H. Dall



The *A.J. Goddard* sank in Lake Laberge in 1901. The wreck was found in 2008.

Alaska State Library, Charles Horton Metcalf Photograph collection, P34-009

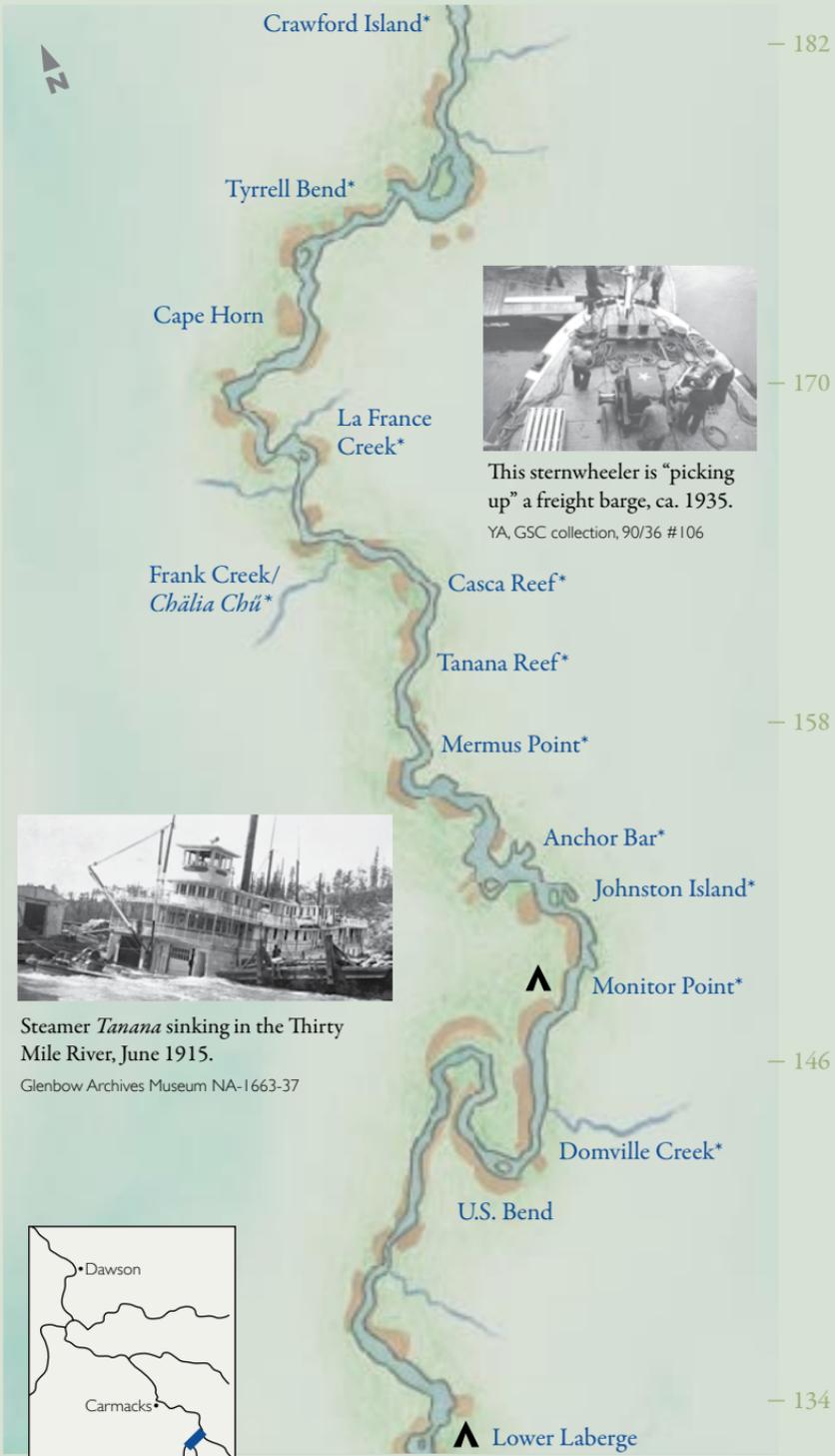
The lake is named for Michael Laberge,

who was on his way to California



Traders at Lake Laberge with the Ta'an Kwäch'än, 1895.

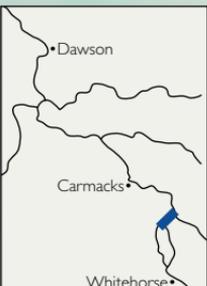
V.Wilson, *Glimpses of Alaska, Klondike and Goldfields*



This sternwheeler is "picking up" a freight barge, ca. 1935.
 YA, GSC collection, 90/36 #106



Steamer *Tanana* sinking in the Thirty Mile River, June 1915.
 Glenbow Archives Museum NA-1663-37





Map 5 km 134–182

The Thirty Mile River

Sternwheelers: The steamboats that appeared on the upper Yukon River during the gold rush were designed to freight heavy loads in the shallow water of the Yukon River.



YA, Pepper collection, 89/59 #34

The boats and their barges had shallow drafts and wide hulls. A sternwheeler's rear paddle could manoeuvre it quickly in swift narrow rivers. An upstream trip, from Dawson to Whitehorse, took four to six days; the downstream journey took one and a half days.

The Thirty Mile: The section of river from the foot of Lake

Laberge to the Teslin River is known as the Thirty Mile. Riverboat pilots exercised “that happy balance between risk and caution” when coping with its sinuous windings and hidden rocks. Some of the places along the route, such as La France Creek, got their names from boats that came to grief there.

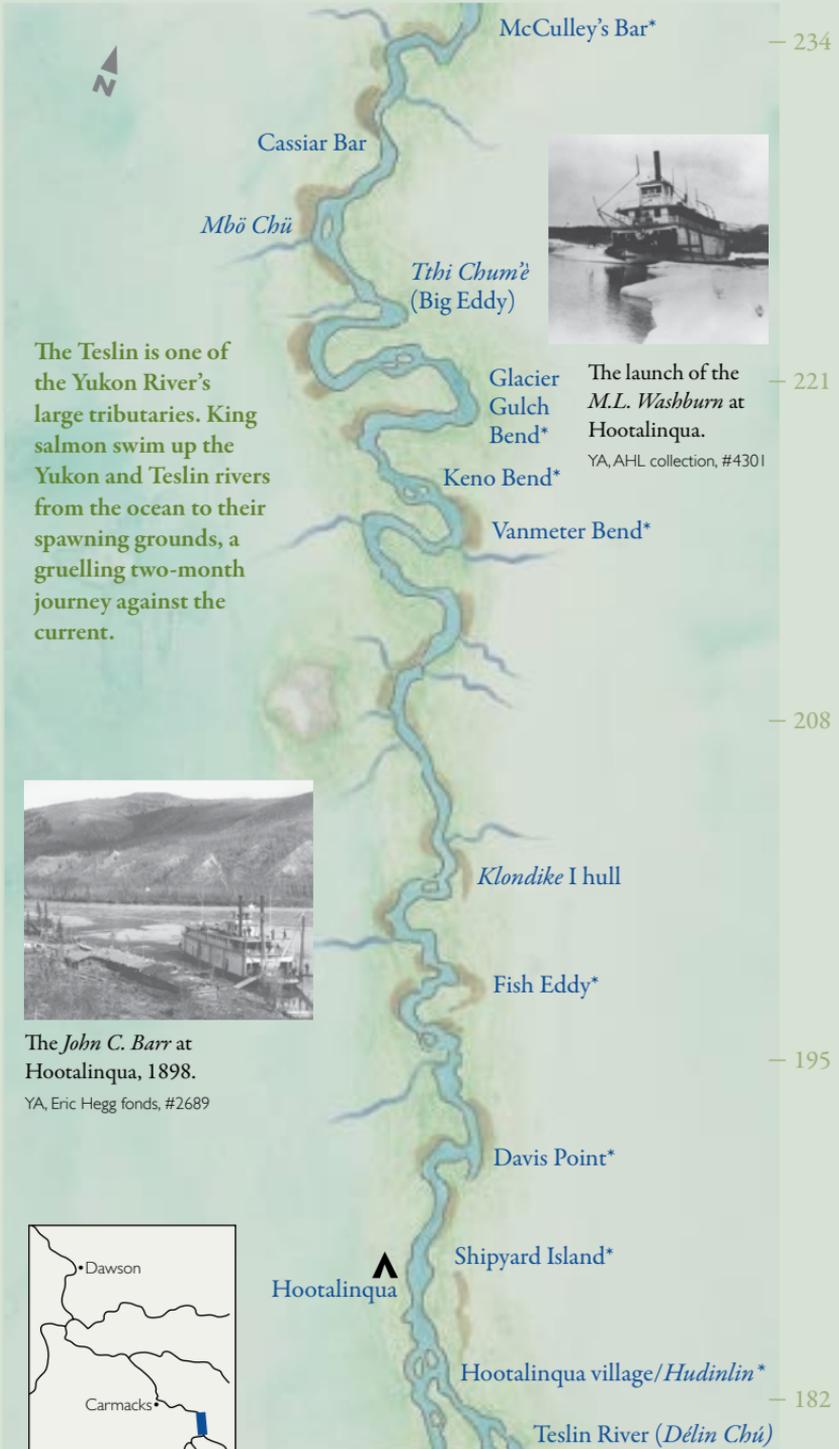
In 1906, while racing to the scene of an accident, “... the Dawson ran the Thirty Mile, with its crooks and bends and treacherous rocks, at full speed and without a single ‘slow bell,’ a feat unprecedented in Yukon history.”

William MacBride



Steamer *Domville* wrecked in the Thirty Mile in spring 1899. YA, Gillis collection, #4541

In 1991 the Thirty Mile was designated as one of Canada's Heritage Rivers, in recognition of its rich heritage. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System designates rivers for their natural, cultural and historic values.



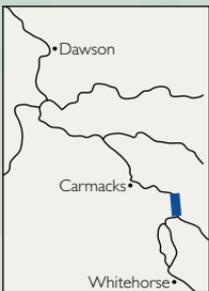
The Teslin is one of the Yukon River's large tributaries. King salmon swim up the Yukon and Teslin rivers from the ocean to their spawning grounds, a gruelling two-month journey against the current.



The launch of the *M.L. Wasburn* at Hootalinqua.
YA, AHL collection, #4301



The *John C. Barr* at Hootalinqua, 1898.
YA, Eric Hegg fonds, #2689





Map 6 km 182–235

Hootalinqua to Cassiar Bar

Here the river flows through the traditional territory of the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation. Their lands extend from Lower



Hootalinqua in 1898.

MacBride Museum #1989-33-16

Laberge to Minto and include the abandoned site of Big Salmon, the seasonal community of Little Salmon and the village of Carmacks.

Teslin River: The Teslin River has been known by several

names, reflecting its importance as a travel route. The Northern Tutchone people call the river *Délin Chú*. *Tes-s'l-been-a*, a Tlingit

name, was recorded in the 1850s, although in 1882, German explorer Aurel Krause stated that the river's name was *Tis-lin-hin*.



The *Klondike 1* sank in June 1936.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #8502

George Mercer Dawson travelled through here in

1887 as head of the territory's first geological exploration. He reported that the river was "known as the *Hootalinkwa*" to the local miners.

Hootalinqua: Hootalinqua was a river stop and a supply point for miners and travelers on the Teslin River and Teslin Lake. Before the gold rush it was a First Nations fish camp and meeting place.



Lewes Dredge being transported to Stewart River, ca. 1905, by the *Wilbur Crimmon*. LAC PA-102058

Cassiar Bar: The first Yukon gold dredge worked on Cassiar Bar. Gold was found here in 1884 in the gravel bars of the river and mining continued for several years. The paystreak was eventually worked out and the dredge was moved to Bonanza Creek in the Klondike gold fields.



Deck hands used hand trucks, which held approximately one third of a cord, to load wood.

YA, GSC collection, 90/36 #84638

Wood-cutting for the stern-wheelers cleared much of the forest along the river valley. You can also see evidence of the extensive forest fire that burned through here in 1995. The fire destroyed the historic NWMP post near Big Salmon.

Little Salmon River (Tāninsté Chú) — 291
5 Mile Bend*

Hogan's Rock*

Selkirk Rock*



Loading wood on steamer *Keno* using hand carts, 1940.
YA, J.P. Kirk collection, 89/83 #51

Emery Bar*

— 263

Byer's camp

There are historic building remains at Big Salmon village. Please respect Yukon's heritage, including cemeteries.

Hendricksen Slough*

Freeman's Rock*

Cyr's dredge

— 249

Dutch Bluff*

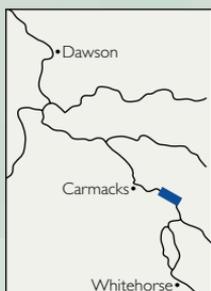
4th of July Bend*

Gold Point*

Walsh Creek (Tb'ān Chúa)

Big Salmon Village (Gyò Cho Chú Dachäk) — 235

Big Salmon River (Gyò Cho Chú)





Map 7 km 235–293

Big Salmon to Little Salmon River



YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #4923

Most of the sternwheelers that plied the river burned wood. Byer's was one of the many wood camps that supplied the boats. Boats usually took on 10 or 20 cords at a time, a process that took about an hour. BYN, which operated most of the boats, employed a wood agent to let contracts and check on progress.

Two young women, Anna and Marion

Horsfall, cut 25 cords of wood near Five Finger Rapid for "pocket money." In 1916, BYN steamers burned 8,000 cords of wood, at a cost of about \$46,000.

"All these wood stations were simply hot-beds of mosquitoes, which immediately took possession of the entire ship, and held it while we were alongside the bank."

Julius Price, 1898

Big Salmon: In the early winter of 1897, James M. Walsh, the territory's first Commissioner, was forced to winter near Big Salmon with few supplies when river ice prevented him from reaching Dawson. As a result of his experience, Walsh ordered NWMP Inspector Z.T. Wood to turn back anyone not bringing with them a year of supplies. This supply — three pounds of food per day per person, plus equipment and tools — added up to the famous "ton of goods" that stampedees had to haul over the Chilkoot Pass.



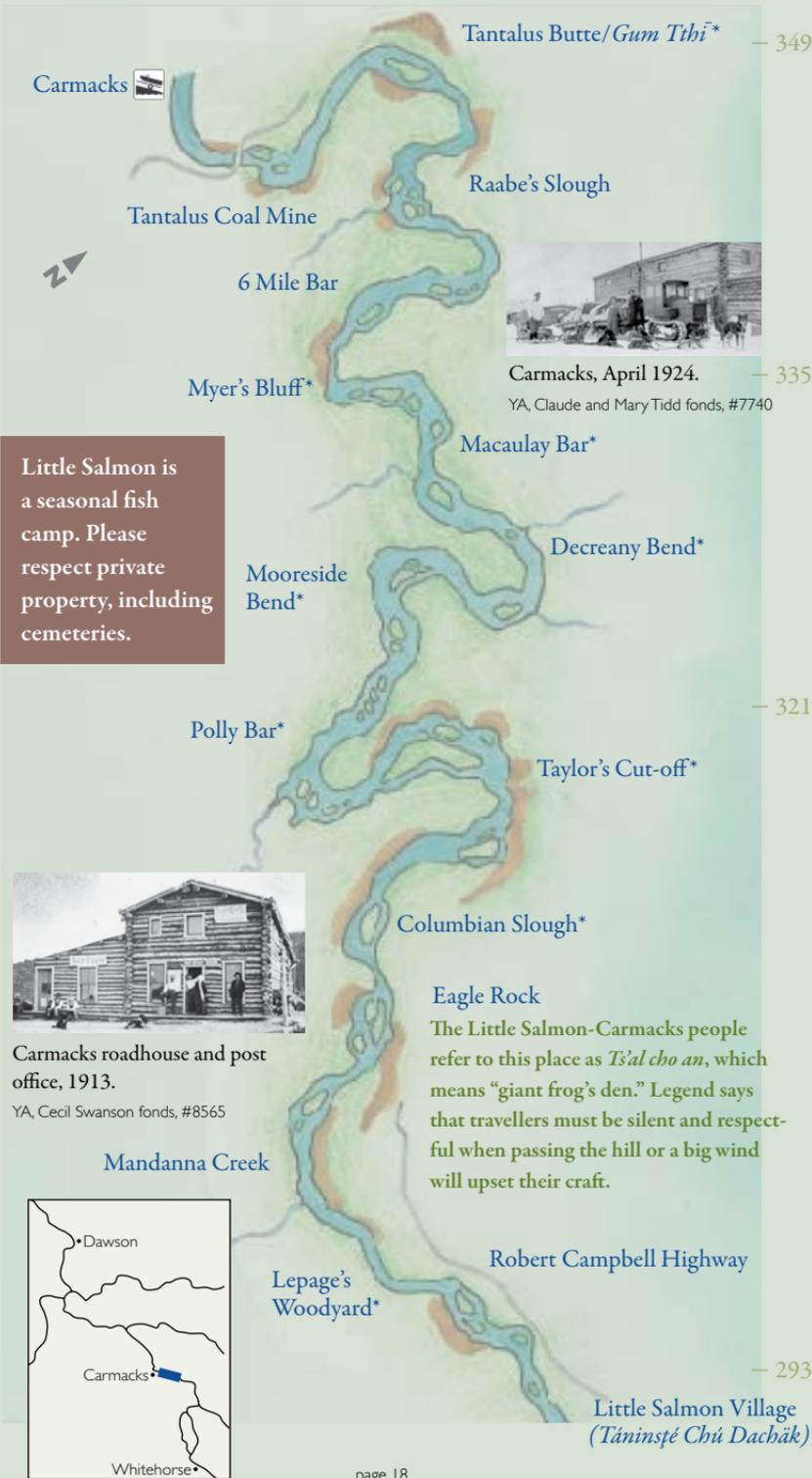
NWMP post at Big Salmon, 1898.

YA, Parks Canada collection, 82/269 #12



Many First Nation people cut wood or worked on the steamboats.

MacBride Museum #1989-29-027



Tantalus Butte/*Gum Tthi** — 349

Carmacks 

Raabe's Slough

Tantalus Coal Mine

6 Mile Bar



Carmacks, April 1924. — 335
YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7740

Myer's Bluff*

Macaulay Bar*

Little Salmon is a seasonal fish camp. Please respect private property, including cemeteries.

Moore's Bend*

Decreany Bend*

— 321

Polly Bar*

Taylor's Cut-off*



Carmacks roadhouse and post office, 1913.
YA, Cecil Swanson fonds, #8565

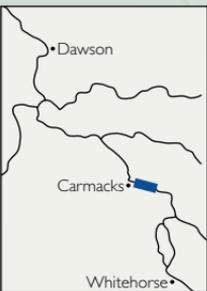
Columbian Slough*

Eagle Rock

The Little Salmon-Carmacks people refer to this place as *T'sal'cho an*, which means "giant frog's den." Legend says that travellers must be silent and respectful when passing the hill or a big wind will upset their craft.

Mandanna Creek

Robert Campbell Highway



Lepage's Woodyard*

— 293

Little Salmon Village (*Táninshtë Chú Dachäk*)



Map 8 km 293–350

Little Salmon Village to Carmacks

The Northern Tutchone people of this area are the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The present-day First Nation is made up of groups who fished and hunted along the Little Salmon River (*Tánintsé Chú*), the Nordenskiöld River (*Tsawnjik Chú*) and Tatchun Creek/*Tachän Chú*.



Kutin (Harry) Silverfox, *Demozella* (Jim Shorty) and Pelly Jim at Little Salmon.

YA, Cecil Swanson collection, #8572

On September 25, 1906, the sternwheeler *Columbian* was en route to Dawson. The steamer had three tonnes of blasting powder aboard,



The NWMP post at Tantalus, 1898.

YA, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce collection, #6586

destined for the coal mine at Tantalus. Just as the boat reached Eagle Rock, a gun fired accidentally and the powder ignited. In the ensuing explosion, several people were blown overboard and the vessel burned to the water's edge.

Despite the heroic efforts of the captain and surviving crew members, five men and 21 head of cattle were killed. Help didn't arrive until the following day, when the *Columbian's* sister ship, the *Victorian* — “wasting no steam on whistling” — raced to the site.

the captain and surviving crew

*“Then the captain said: ‘That will do with the engines, Mr. Mavis,’ and the *Columbian's* great sternwheel ceased to revolve. She had made her last landing.”*

Samuel Graves,
On the White Pass Payroll



The burned wreck of the *Columbian*, 1906.

YA, Percy F. Scharschmidt collection, #5644

Yukon Crossing

Sam McGee's Ashes*

400

Casca wreck

Rink Rapid

Note: stay to the right in Rink Rapid.



Slabs of river ice during a flood at Yukon Crossing.

YA, John Scott fonds, 89/31 #78

388

Five Finger Rapid
See page 22

Tatchun Creek/
*Tachän Chü**

Tatchun Creek leads to Frenchman Lake (*Lúth'I Män*) and Tatchun Lake (*Tachän Män*). In the early 19th century the Tatchun people camped at the mouth to prepare for a battle with the coastal peoples.

Kellyville*

Five Fingers
Coal Mine

Happy Lepage wood camp

Myer's Roadhouse*

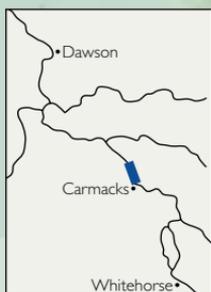
9 Mile Bend*

364



The winter stage on the river.

YA, A.K. Schellinger collection, #5917



Shirtwaist Bend

352

Nordenskiöld River (*Tswanjik Chü*)



Map 9 km 352–401

Nordenskiold River to Yukon Crossing

Yukon Crossing: The present-day highway crosses the Yukon River at Carmacks, but the old Whitehorse-Dawson winter road crossed the river at this point. The overland trail, cut through the wilderness in 1902, was used after the close of river navigation. In the fall and spring, when the river ice was unsafe, passengers and freight travelled in wheeled coaches and transferred to canoes for the crossing. As soon as there was enough snow, horse-



Frank Slim with a load of mail at Yukon Crossing, 1937. YA, Louis Irvine fonds, #1900



Frank Harbottle and Mr. Kostner, Yukon Crossing, ca. 1920. YA, Harbottle family collection, #6212

drawn sleighs were used, which crossed on the ice. In 1914–15 a cable ferry was installed. Cable ferries are driven by the current and guided by a steel cable that is anchored to a tower on either side of the river.

Rink Rapid: Rink Rapid is formed by a reef located at an angle to the current, a difficulty compounded by a bend in the river. The rapid is not difficult to navigate in a small boat, but required skill on the part of the sternwheeler pilots.

“We also blasted some more rocks out of the Rink Rapids, making that place safer to negotiate during low water.”

White Pass Annual Report, 1917



The Dawson was wrecked in Rink Rapid in October 1926. YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7035



The Five Finger Rapid detachment
of the NWMP, 1901.

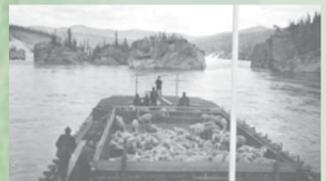
Glenbow Archives NA-2595-2

*See page 20 for large
map of area.*

*“... we turn our prow
squarely for the
middle of the cleft; a
few quarts of water
over the sides, and we
are shot through into
the fast current...”*

Tappen Adney, 1898

**Caution: consult
river charts before
navigating Five
Finger Rapid. Keep
to the right shore
when approaching
the rapid and use
the right channel.**



A barge loaded with sheep approaches
Five Finger Rapid, 1914.

YA, Emil Forrester fonds, 80/60 #317



Map 10 km 385 (detail)

Five Finger Rapid

In Northern Tutchone mythology, Crow (Raven) is the creator and trickster. Five Finger Rapid, according to legend, is one of the places where Crow built a fish trap. The traditional name for Five Finger Rapid is *Tthi Cho Nédézhe*, which means “rocks [standing up] across the river.”

During the gold rush, the inexperienced stampedeers in their heavily loaded home-made boats faced a real challenge when navigating the rapid. As one contemporary



A raft approaches the rapid, ca. 1900.

YA, Chris and Grace Bartsch fonds, #2400



The *Yukoner* in Five Finger Rapid.

MacBride Museum #4062

succinctly noted: “Only one of these channels is navigable. Many did not know this.” In 1899, the NWMP detachment at Five Finger Rapid — comprising four men and nine dogs — reported that seven men had drowned in the rapid that year.

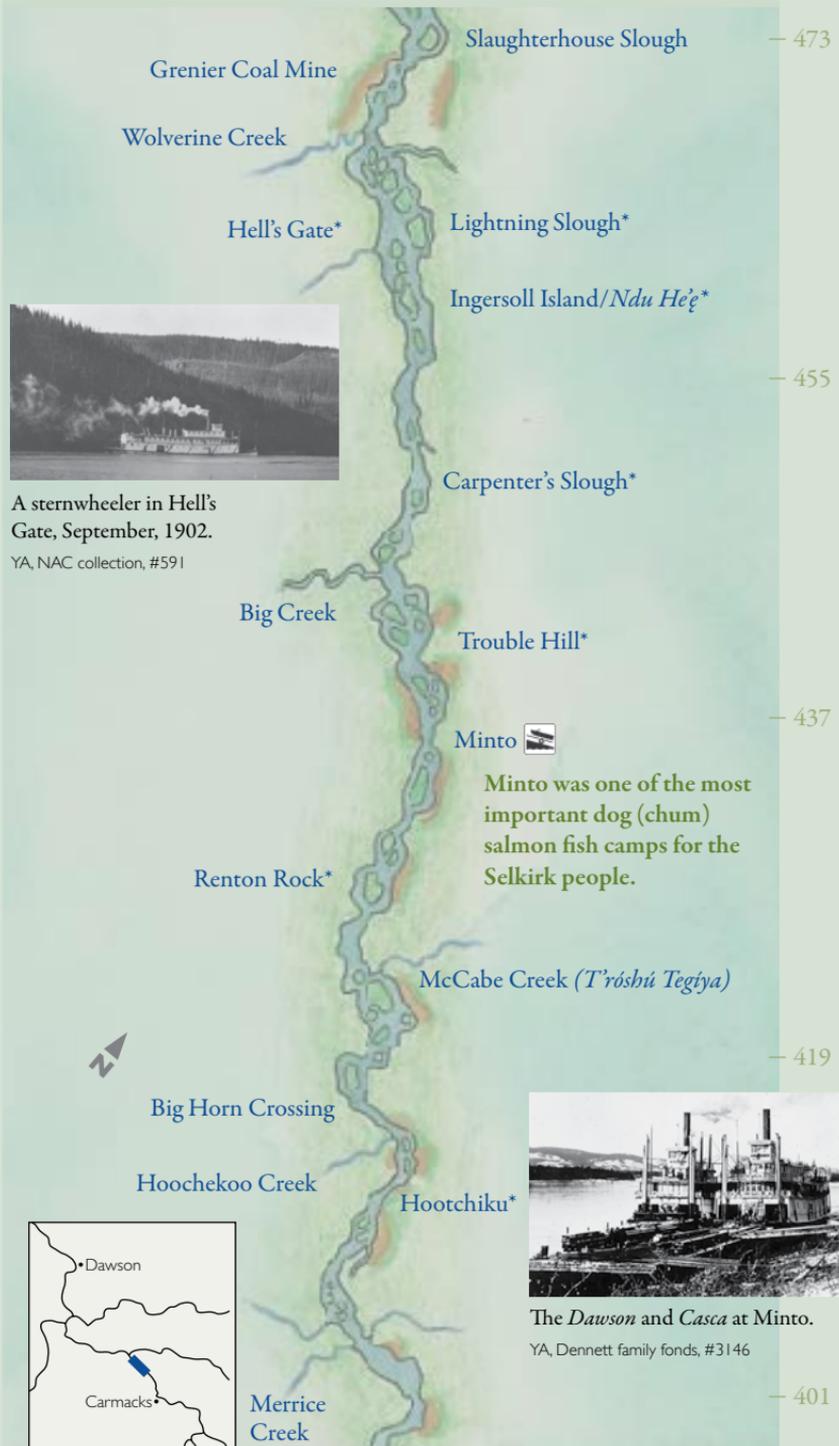
Sternwheeler pilots had to use all their dexterity when navigating Five Finger Rapid. Rocks were blasted out of the rapid because too many boats were scraping their sides going through. Going downstream, the steamers had to dodge sharply into the middle to miss some shallows and an island below the channel. Going upstream, a shore-anchored cable was wound around a steam-powered capstan, and the boat essentially pulled itself up through the channel.

“The performance takes nearly half an hour, a period of time which compares curiously with the half minute required for the same passage on the downstream trip.”

Harry Graham, 1900

A sternwheeler travelling upstream through Five Finger Rapid. YA, GSC collection 90/36 #124



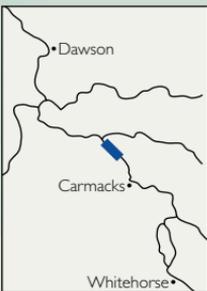


A sternwheeler in Hell's Gate, September, 1902.
YA, NAC collection, #591

Minto was one of the most important dog (chum) salmon fish camps for the Selkirk people.



The Dawson and Casca at Minto.
YA, Dennett family fonds, #3146





Map 11 km 401–475

Merrice Creek to Hell's Gate

"...during the rush, the North-West Mounted Police, distributed at intervals along the Yukon River, took the names and destinations of all people passing in boats, summoning them to the shore if necessary, and kept a fairly good record of all who were travelling in the country."

Charles Sheldon, *Wilderness of the Upper Yukon*

Hootchiku: In 1897, in order to effectively police their enormous jurisdiction, the North-West Mounted Police set out to establish a chain of posts from the Chilkoot Pass to the Klondike. They got as far as Hootalinqua before winter set in; by 1898 there were posts all the way to



YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #4921

Trouble Hill: For much of the 19th century, the Northern Tutchone of the interior and the Tlingit from the Pacific Coast conducted regular trade. Although relations were usually friendly, there were occasional wars and conflicts. Trouble Hill, just downstream from Minto was the site of a skirmish between the Fort Selkirk and Chilkat people.

Dawson, including one at Hootchiku.

The NWMP not only policed the young territory, they collected customs, guarded gold shipments, delivered the mail, acted as coroners and collected gold royalties.



Right: Findlay Beaton, Martha and Richard Silas and Mary Sam at Minto, ca. 1935.

YA, Martha Silas collection, 87/39 #73



View of Trouble Hill on the left bank of the Yukon River below Minto.

Government of Yukon

Selkirk people take their aboriginal name — *Ttbi Ts'ech'an Huch'an* — from the name for Victoria Rock, which was an important site for gaffing salmon.



Fort Selkirk telegraph office, 1899.
British Columbia Public Archives F-03358

— 529

Fish Hook Bend*

Pilot Island*

Holbrook Creek*

— 516

Push Button Bend*

Shallow stretches of the river with lots of small islands are favourite salmon spawning areas. First Nation people set basket traps in the smaller channels.

Three Way Channel*

— 503



The Anglican church at Fort Selkirk, ca. 1910–30.

YA, Robert Ward fonds, 77/46 #81

Twin Falls*

— 490

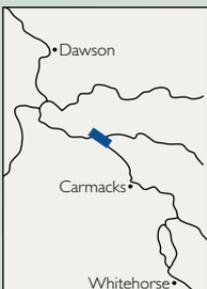
Black Creek



Ttbi ts'ech'an
(Victoria Rock)

Horsfall homestead

Basalt cliffs



Fort Selkirk



Pelly River/*Ts'eki Netú**

— 477



Map 12 km 477–530

Fort Selkirk to Selwyn

Beringia: Approaching Fort Selkirk, the river traveller may notice a change in the landscape, with the appearance of more rounded hills and subdued terrain. This is the southern edge of Beringia, the unglaciated region of northwest North America. During the ice age, this region remained ice free, unlike the rest of Canada. It was home to Woolly mammoth, horse, bison, American lion and short-faced bear.



David Silas, ca. 1935.

YA, Martha Silas collection, 87/39 #107

Fort Selkirk lies in the heart of the Selkirk First Nation's traditional territory. It has been the site of a number of important events in Yukon history. In the mid-19th

century Robert Campbell established one of the first H.B.Co. posts in Yukon at Fort Selkirk. The Euro-Canadian fur trade came into direct competition with the lucrative trade between the Coastal Tlingit and the interior Yukon peoples, which had its northernmost terminus at Fort Selkirk. After less than a decade, the H.B.Co. was forced to withdraw from the region and Fort Selkirk once again became a meeting place for Northern Tutchone, Tlingit, Hän and Mountain Dene people.



Carved object, approximately 200 years old, found at Fort Selkirk.

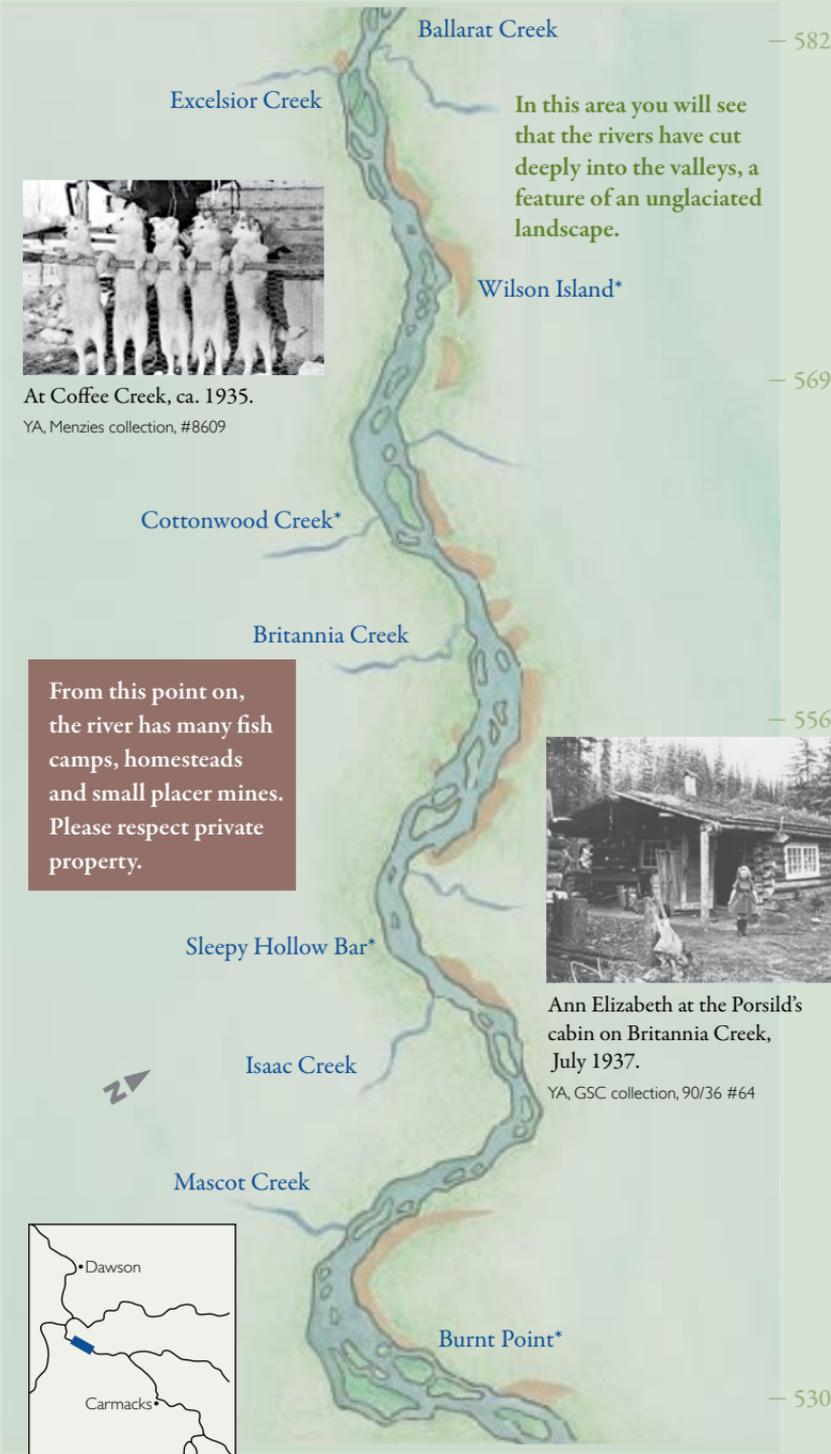
CMC

Fort Selkirk Historic Site is a living cultural heritage site. It is a place of spiritual and cultural renewal for First Nations and also provides visitors with interpretation on the history of early trade and settlement in the north. Fort Selkirk is co-owned and co-managed by Selkirk First Nation and Government of Yukon.



Joyce and Austin Menzies on their father's woodpile at Selwyn, ca. 1935.

YA, Menzies collection, #8671



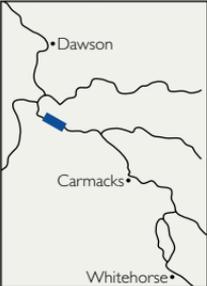
At Coffee Creek, ca. 1935.
YA, Menzies collection, #8609

In this area you will see that the rivers have cut deeply into the valleys, a feature of an unglaciated landscape.

From this point on, the river has many fish camps, homesteads and small placer mines. Please respect private property.



Ann Elizabeth at the Porsild's cabin on Britannia Creek, July 1937.
YA, GSC collection, 90/36 #64





Map 13 km 530–583

Burnt Point to Ballarat Creek

Fishing: Salmon have been a mainstay for people living along the Yukon River for thousands of years. The traditional method of fishing involved driving a series of stakes across a small stream, slough or channel and placing poles and brush between them to form a weir. Basket traps were placed in openings in the weir. When the salmon reached the weir they swam along it and through the openings into the traps.



Fish drying in front of Big Jonathan house, Fort Selkirk.

YA, Martha Silas coll., 87/39 #9

Fish camps: Some fish are eaten fresh and some are dried for use later. The



Eddie Jonathan at Britannia Creek, 1941.

YA, Martha Silas coll., 87/39 #115

salmon are cut in strips and hung on racks to dry. A skilled person can cut and clean 25 to 50 fish in an hour. The fish have to get just the right amount of sunlight and be protected from rain, flies and wasps by a brush roof and/or a smudge fire. Fish are usually turned every day and are dry in about a week. A decrease in the number of migrating salmon has caused a decline in commercial salmon fishing and the traditional harvest.

Isaac Creek was named for Chief Isaac of the Aishihik people. People from Aishihik used to travel to Carmacks in the fall to trade for tobacco.



Chief Isaac's grandson, Chief Albert Isaac, is shown here (left) at Burwash with Laughing George John (centre) and Bill Jimmie (right), 1948.

North to the Yukon Territory Via The Alcan Highway In 1948: Field Notes of The Andover-Harvard Expedition, p. 92

White River

— 627

Listen for the sound of suspended sediment and silt against your boat as the waters of the White River flow in from the south to join the Yukon River.



River ice near Thistle Creek, n.d.

YA, M.L. Black fonds, #3321

O'Neill's Landing*

— 616

Los Angeles Creek

Thistle Creek

Carlisle Creek

Kirkman's Crossing*

— 605

Independence Creek

Kirkman Creek

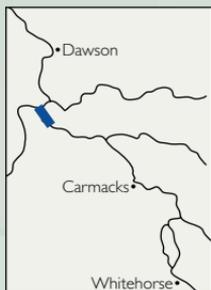


Roadhouse keeper at Kirkman Creek, April 1920.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7787

Halfway Creek

— 594



Coffee Creek

"All the downstream boats had been having what the superintendent called 'the usual troubles' and leaving more or less splinters behind them on the gravelly bottom at Kirkman's."

Samuel Graves,
On the White Pass Payroll

— 583



Map 14 km 583-630

Coffee Creek to White River

Suspended ash and glacial silt give the White River its colour. Throughout much of the south and central Yukon a white layer lies just below the surface of the ground in exposed slopes and cut banks. It is volcanic ash from two eruptions that occurred about 1,200 and 1,900 years ago near the headwaters of the White River. The

“Eyó yi hùkhyá (it snowed with ashes).”

Tagayme, Big Salmon River elder, d. 1939

ash layer covers more than 540,000 sq. km; in some places it remains undisturbed even on steep slopes. The thick

ash deposits affected plants and animals and displaced animals and people.



Man from White River, August 27, 1898.

YA, J.B. Tyrrell fonds, 82/15 #163

The headwaters of the White River are a major source area for native copper. With the development of simple metallurgy in indigenous technologies in the past 1,000–1,500 years, copper became a highly prized item, traded widely throughout Yukon and down to the coast. It is likely that the volcanic activity which produced the ash fall also exposed the native copper to the surface.

Kirkman’s Crossing: Sternwheelers had difficulty navigating the shallow bend at Kirkman’s Crossing. Downstream boats generally carried heavier loads, and their pilots had to be especially careful. Kirkman’s Crossing was more problematic than usual in October 1903. Ice was starting to run in the Yukon, and the tributaries had started to

freeze, making the level in the river — already low that year — even worse. A succession of steamers became stuck, some while trying to assist others. One vessel, the *Canadian*, spent the entire winter at Kirkman’s.



The *Prospector* was the last boat in to Dawson in the 1903 season. YA, VPL collection, #2249

Sixty Mile River/
*Khel Dèk**



Arthur Harper's post at Sixtymile, 1900.

YA, H.C. Barley fonds, #4913

Rosebute Creek

"The Stewart was always known as the grubstake river; prospectors would never get rich from it, but could always find enough gold to finance another season."

Hugh Bostock

Excelsior Creek

Chris Creek

Henderson Creek

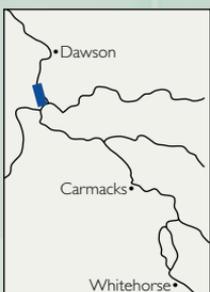


Bennett Lake & Klondike Navigation Co. Ltd. Hotel, Stewart Island, April 1899. YA, NAC collection, #593

Stewart Island*

Stewart River

Shamrock Creek





Map 15 km 630–683

Shamrock Creek to Sixty Mile River

Stewart River: The mouth of the river was the site of Hän and Na-Cho Nyäk Dun fish camps. Prospectors began to look for gold on the Stewart in 1883 and a trading post was opened at the mouth of the river three years later. The post, established

by Leroy McQuesten and Arthur Harper, was the site of the first miners' meeting in the territory. This was frontier type of justice where everyone was entitled to one vote and the majority vote held. The system worked reasonably well until the NWMP arrived in the territory in 1894. The original post lasted only a short time but a



Gold rush boats on their way to Dawson at the mouth of the Stewart River, 1898.

YA, Jacqueline Greenbank collection, 89/19 #14

small community sprang up in 1898 and from the early 1920s to 1935 Stewart Island was an important transfer point for the Keno area silver mines, 250 km up the Stewart River.

Ogilvie Island (see p. 34): Arthur Harper and Joseph Ladue established a post at Ogilvie in

1892 and it became a busy post and productive market garden until 1898. The NWMP and the telegraph office shared a building here during the gold rush. A grain farm and market garden started in the early 1900s continued to produce food for Dawson's stores until the 1950s.



The *Canadian* with 600 tonnes of silver ore at the Mayo waterfront, 1923.

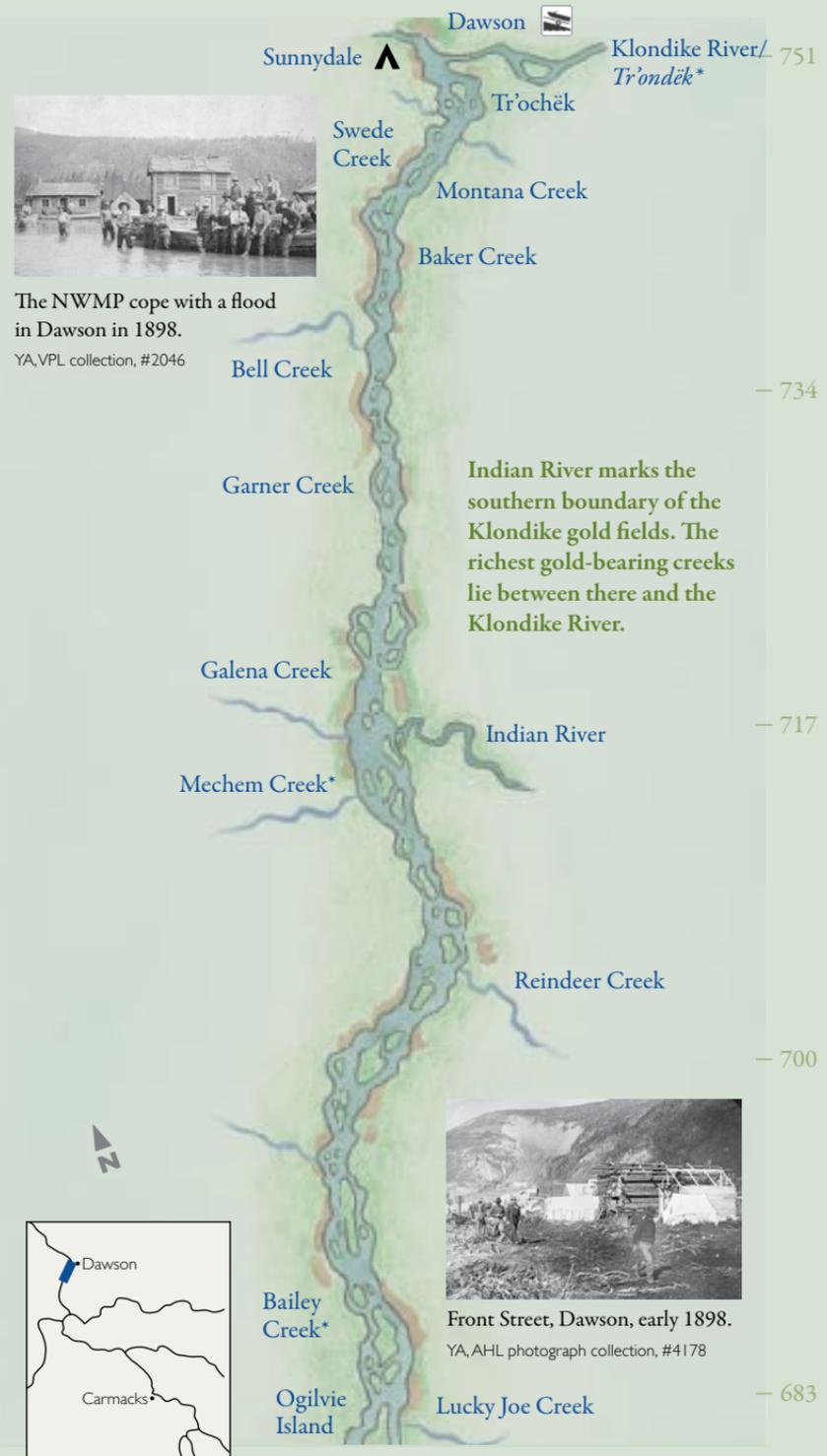
YA, Bill Hare fonds, #6642

Sixty Mile River: The Sixty Mile River was named for its distance up the Yukon River from Fort Reliance, a trading post just downstream from what is now Dawson. Gold was first found on the watershed in 1875 and rich deposits were located and mined starting in the 1890s.



Joseph Ladue's house at Ogilvie Island, 1895.

YA, LAC collection, #568



The NWMP cope with a flood in Dawson in 1898.

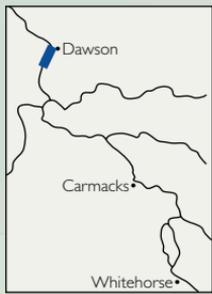
YA, VPL collection, #2046

Indian River marks the southern boundary of the Klondike gold fields. The richest gold-bearing creeks lie between there and the Klondike River.



Front Street, Dawson, early 1898.

YA, AHL photograph collection, #4178





Map 16 km 683–752

Ogilvie Island to Dawson

Here the Yukon River flows through the traditional territory of the Hän, which extends into Alaska. Hän territory includes the present-day communities of Dawson, Moosehide and Eagle, Alaska, early trading posts Fort Reliance and Belle Isle and Forty Mile, Fort Cudahy and Fort Constantine Historic Site. The Hän people in the Dawson area are citizens of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The Hän word “*Tr'ondëk*” was the source of the English word “Klondike.”



Hän fish-drying racks at Moosehide, 1898. YA, Tappan Adney fonds, 81/9 #45



NWMP post at Ogilvie Island, ca. 1898.
Glenbow Archives S-227-109

goes out on the Yukon River. The ice usually starts to break up in early May and in a matter of days the river is open. Break-up is always a cause for celebration, with friendly wagers on the exact date and time that the ice will start to move.

“...I never saw any place more quickly emptied than was the Auditorium Theatre when the ice moved at 8:15 p.m. on May 8, 1901.”

Stroller White

Freeze-up: The Yukon River closes to navigation in about mid-October. Navigation is difficult in the fall; ice starts to run in the river and water levels drop as the tributaries begin to freeze.

Break-up: Spring break-up is the time when the ice



A dredge in the Klondike River valley, 1915.
YA, A.K. Schellinger fonds, #5947



Cassiar Creek

Halfmoon Bar*

— 812



Thomas O'Brien, Jack McQuesten and Al Mayo, 1890.

Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

Fish wheels, powered by the river current, were commonly used in this part of the river to harvest salmon. You might see these wire and wood rafts parked on the shore near Dawson and elsewhere along the lower river.

Halfway Island*

— 797

Fifteenmile River

Fresno Creek

Fort Reliance was established by Jack McQuesten in 1874 and was used for twelve years during the winter fur-trading season until Al Mayo established a post at the mouth of the Stewart River.

Chandindu
(Twelvemile River)

— 782

Sixteen Mile Creek*



Skating at Moosehide, ca. 1950. 2008.240.8 Grace Haldenby Coll., Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Archives

— 767



No Name Creek

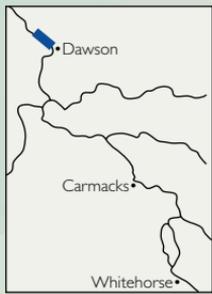
Fort Reliance (abandoned)

Fourth Creek

— 752

Dog Island

Moosehide





Map 17 km 752–812

Moosehide to Cassiar Creek

Moosehide: This is an important settlement for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Hän people; there is evidence of caribou hunters camping at Moosehide 8,000 years ago. Before the gold rush, the Hän fished for salmon at the mouth of the Klondike River and across the Yukon River from Fort Reliance. The Klondike Gold Rush drew First Nation people from nearby areas and they and the Klondike and Fortymile-area Hän moved to Moosehide. By the 1960s the Yukon's Hän and some Northern



Hän women making a boat at Moosehide, 1899. Sheets of bark were stitched to frames made of birch or spruce.

Washington State Historical Society #46141



Workers build the Twelvemile flume in 1906.

Yukon Gold Corporation collection

Tutchone and Na-Cho Nyäk Dun as well as Gwich'in-speaking people were living in Dawson and Klondike City.

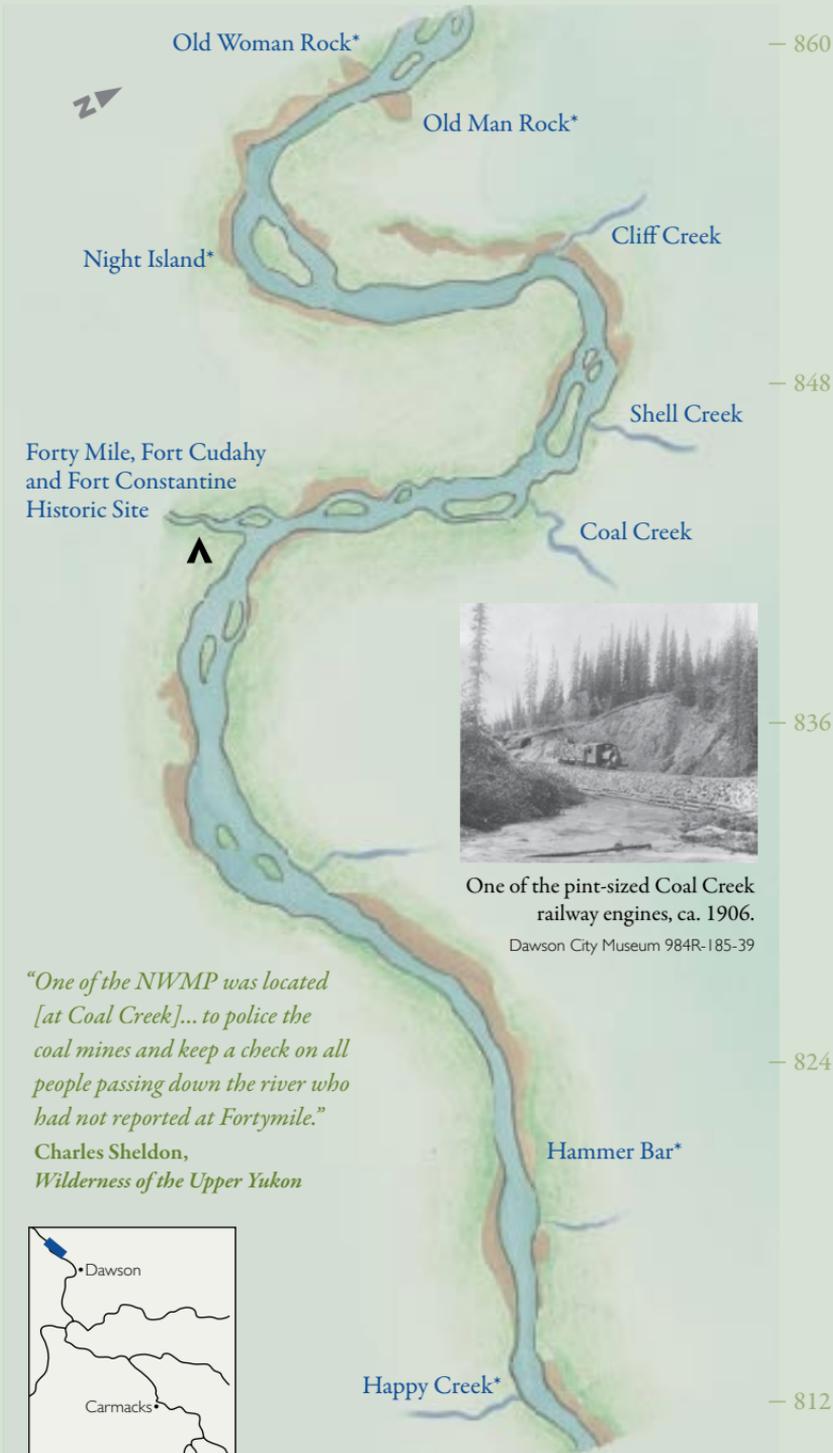
Fort Reliance: Fort Reliance was the first trading post established inside Hän traditional territory. Jack McQuesten did so at the request of Tr'ondëk chief Catsah, who visited the fur traders at Fort Yukon in 1873.

Twelvemile: The official name for this river is *Chandindu*, but it is also known as the Twelvemile because of its distance from Fort Reliance. In 1908 the Yukon Gold Company built a wagon road up the Twelvemile River to their power plant on a tributary in the Ogilvie Mountains. This plant powered the Klondike gold dredges.



Looking north on the trail to Moosehide.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7198



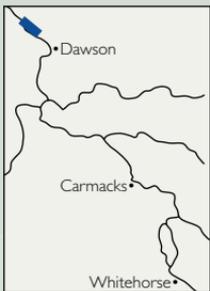
Fortymile, Fort Cudahy
and Fort Constantine
Historic Site



One of the pint-sized Coal Creek
railway engines, ca. 1906.
Dawson City Museum 984R-185-39

*“One of the NWMP was located
[at Coal Creek]... to police the
coal mines and keep a check on all
people passing down the river who
had not reported at Fortymile.”*

Charles Sheldon,
Wilderness of the Upper Yukon





Map 18 km 812–860

Happy Creek to Old Man/Old Woman rocks



A family at Forty Mile, ca. 1898.

YA, University of Washington coll., #2563

Forty Mile, Fort Cudahy and Fort Constantine Historic Site: The first gold nuggets found in Yukon Territory were located on the Fortymile River in 1886; within a year, 300 men were operating out of a supply centre at the mouth of the river. Forty Mile was Yukon's first gold rush town. In 1887

traders McQuesten and Harper moved their post from Stewart Island to the mouth of the Fortymile. Archaeological evidence has dated aboriginal occupation of Fortymile to approximately 2,000 years ago.

Coal Creek: A coal mine on Coal Creek operated between 1900 and 1916. Coal was shipped to a steam-powered light and power company in Dawson. In 1909 a power station was built here to supply power to the Klondike dredges and operated until 1910–1911.



The mouth of Coal Creek, ca. 1918.
Glenbow Archives NA 2114-39

Cliff Creek: The North American Transportation & Trading Co. shipped coal to Dawson between 1899 and 1904. The mine produced about 4,000 tonnes of coal per year. A 2.8-km railway connected the mine with the Yukon River sternwheelers.

Old Man/Old Woman rocks/Nänidhät: A Hän legend recounts that the two rocks are ancient ancestors. Formerly joined, the two were separated by dissent. This caused the Yukon River to change its course and flow between them.



Fortymile area, ca. 1937.

YA, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, #7494

 Eagle

— 920



Grace Story at Eagle, ca. 1935.
YA, Louise Paul collection, 77/41 #5

Eagle Village

Eagle Creek

— 905

UNITED STATES
CANADA

Boundary Creek

River travellers
continuing on
into Alaska
must report to
U.S. Customs
at Eagle.

Red Creek*

— 890



William Ogilvie's survey
party, 1887.
YA, LAC collection, 88/138 #74919

Nester Creek*

— 875

Harper Island*

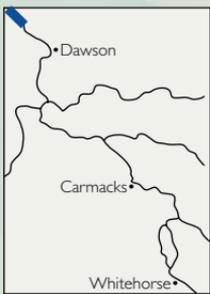


Dozen Islands*

Fanning Creek*

— 860

Sharp Cape*



Roger's Bank*



Map 19 km 860–920

Roger's Bank to Eagle, Alaska



A boundary marker, Sept. 25, 1928; Corp. Thornthwaite, RCMP, is on right.

YA, Finnie family fonds, 81/21 #170

“... without the spirit of cooperation which existed between the Americans and the Canadians, the boundary would not have been completed for some seasons yet.”

J. Craig, 1913

strikes the bluff.” Johnny’s Village was just upstream from the current village. Moses Mercier established the short-lived Belle Isle Alaska Commercial Co. trading post here in 1873 and the site became an important supply centre for the Fortymile gold fields in the early 1900s.

Potlatch at Eagle, Alaska, 1907.

YA, Martha and Brian Kates collection, #5781

Boundary: The exact location of the international boundary between Alaska and Canada was first discussed in 1825, when Alaska was still a Russian possession. Talks between Russia and Britain — negotiating on behalf of Canada — dragged on for some time. One of the issues to be settled was which degree of longitude would form Alaska’s eastern boundary. Although the Russians wanted the 139th meridian to form the boarder, they eventually agreed to the 141st, in return for concessions along the panhandle. As a result, the Klondike gold fields ended up on the Canadian side of the border.

Eagle: The Hän name for this place is *The T’äwdlin* — “where the current



Suzie and John Paul, ca. 1914, Eagle.

YA, Louise Paul collection, 77/41 #10



General information

Navigation: Although the Yukon River is relatively easy to navigate, it has a strong current and is very cold. There is a danger of hypothermia if you get wet. Northern weather is unpredictable and can be severe even in summer. Boaters must wear PFDs at all times and should be cautious when navigating rapids. Extreme care should also be taken on Lake Laberge, where strong winds and high waves come up quickly. The speed of the current increases below Minto; since the current varies, travelling time will probably not be consistent throughout your trip. River traffic, including commercial traffic and motorized boats, increases closer to Dawson.

Camping: Practise no-trace camping and leave the wilderness as beautiful as you found it. This means carrying out your garbage; staying on existing trails when hiking or walking; burning leftover food in a hot fire; and using deadfall for campfires instead of cutting live trees. Please camp at established camping areas (look for the ▲ symbol on the maps) wherever possible; there are several campgrounds with road and river access.

Health: Boil drinking water for 20 minutes or use water purification tablets as there is significant risk of giardia in northern rivers. Boaters should have a first aid kit.

Fires: Wherever possible use well-established fire circles and pits instead of creating new ones. Fire permits must be obtained. No permits are issued when there is a high risk of forest fires so carry a camp stove with you. Be sure that fires are completely out before you leave a site.

Bears: Bears will be near the water during fish migrations. Move out of the area if you see a bear. Do not store food or toothpaste in your tent. Carrying bear spray is a good idea, but buy it locally as it is not allowed on commercial flights.

Contact the Department of Environment for multi-language pamphlets on no-trace camping and being bear-aware.



Weapons: Do not expect to be able to live off the land. You cannot acquire a weapon — either through purchase, loan or gift — without passing a course in firearm safety and obtaining a Possession and Acquisition Licence. There are stringent laws in Canada about transporting weapons. For more information, contact the Canadian Firearms Program at 1-800-731-4000.

Hunting and fishing: You must have a valid licence to hunt and fish in Yukon. Non-residents cannot hunt big game without a guide or outfitter. They must also pay trophy fees on any big game animals killed. Fishing licences can be purchased at most sporting good stores and at the Department of Environment.

Historic sites: Built heritage, archaeological remains and fossils are protected by the *Yukon Historic Resources Act*, Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulations, and land claim agreements. It is not permitted to disturb sites or remove any objects. Respect our heritage: do not camp or light fires near historic structures.

Private property: Homesteads, fish camps and placer claims are all private property. Please respect people's privacy and property and do not disturb fish nets, fish racks, caches or structures, even if they seem to be unattended. It could mean someone else's livelihood or even life. Please show respect for local traditions and customs, which may be different than your own.

Schwatka Lake: Keep to the right shore and watch for float planes landing on the lake. The log boom at the north end warns of strong currents near the power plant take-out. There is a boat launch partway down Schwatka Lake and another near the dam. For more information call Yukon Energy at 867-393-5300.

The Whitehorse Rapids hydro-electric dam: There is a portage around the Whitehorse dam that is about one km long, depending on where you take out. Boats can put in about 150 metres past the foot of the fish ladder, just beyond the rough water. Be very careful boating around the dam and don't allow your dog in the water. The water can rise without warning. See map, page 6.

Services: Public road access (look for the  symbol) is available at M'Clintock, Marsh Lake Dam, Whitehorse, Lake Laberge Campground, Carmacks, Minto, Dawson and Forty Mile in Yukon and Eagle in Alaska. Some of the river communities shown on topographical maps are abandoned. Whitehorse, Carmacks, Dawson and Eagle are the only places along the river where supplies and emergency services are available.

Guidebooks: River travellers should have topographic maps and a comprehensive guidebook. Guidebooks, maps, books and information about the Yukon River and its history are in the public libraries, the Yukon Archives and local bookstores.

The Department of Environment has extensive information available about hunting, fishing and camping. You can drop by their office at 10 Burns Road in Whitehorse. Phone 667-5221 or toll-free at 1-800-661-0408, extension 5221.

For information about heritage sites, please contact the Yukon Historic Sites Unit at 667-5386 or toll free at 1-800-661-0408, extension 5386.

Please note: An asterisk (*) indicates an unofficial/local name. (Official alternate names are in parentheses.)

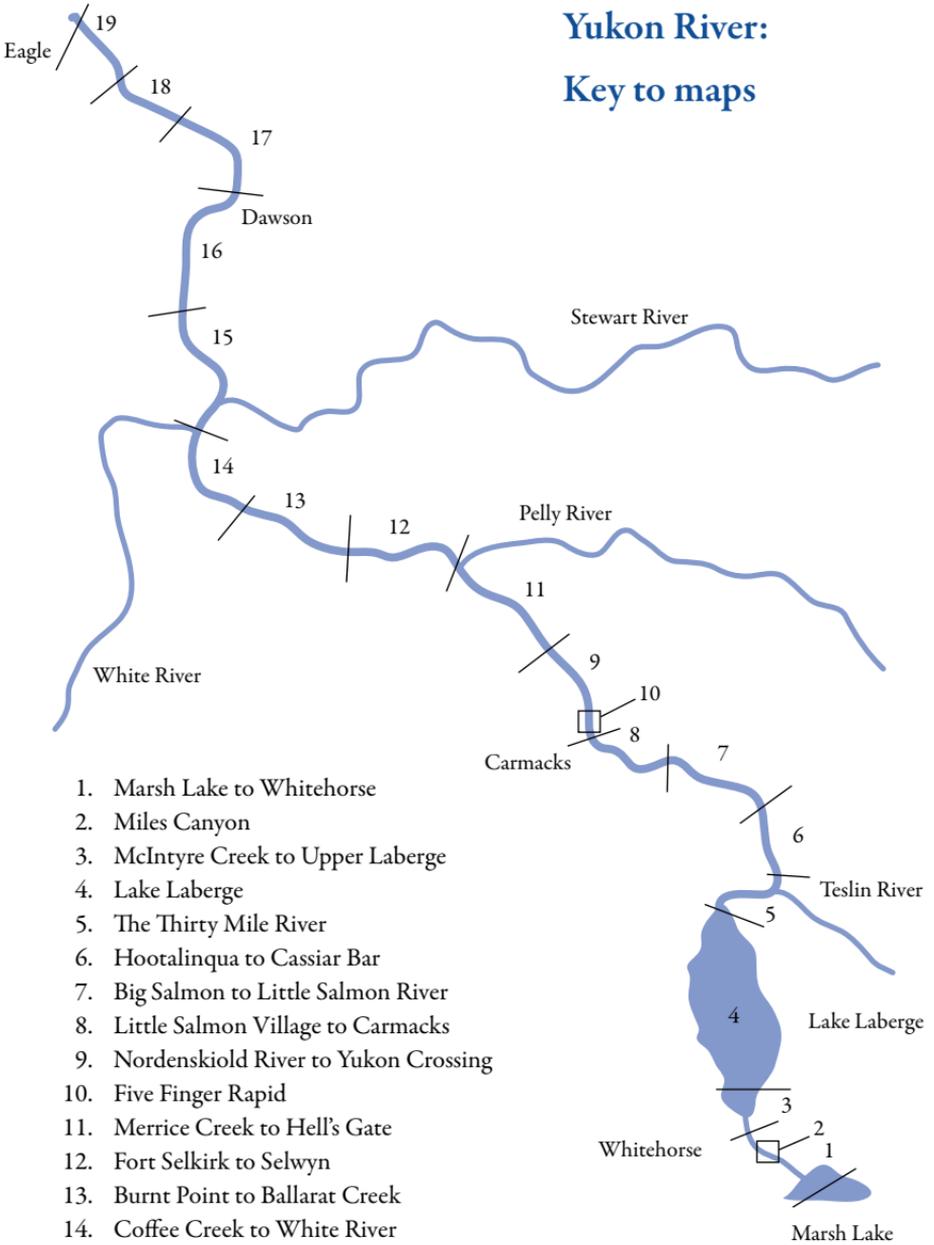
Please go to www.travelyukon.com for information about planning river trips.

Acronyms

AHL	Alaska Historical Library
CMC	Canadian Museum of Civilization
GSC	Geological Survey of Canada
H.B.Co.	Hudson's Bay Company
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
NAC	National Archives of Canada
USGS	United States Geological Survey
VPL	Vancouver Public Library
YA	Yukon Archives

Read *Edge of the River, Heart of the City* for more information about the history of the Whitehorse waterfront.

Yukon River: Key to maps



1. Marsh Lake to Whitehorse
2. Miles Canyon
3. McIntyre Creek to Upper Laberge
4. Lake Laberge
5. The Thirty Mile River
6. Hootalinqua to Cassiar Bar
7. Big Salmon to Little Salmon River
8. Little Salmon Village to Carmacks
9. Nordenskiold River to Yukon Crossing
10. Five Finger Rapid
11. Merrice Creek to Hell's Gate
12. Fort Selkirk to Selwyn
13. Burnt Point to Ballarat Creek
14. Coffee Creek to White River
15. Shamrock Creek to Sixty Mile River
16. Ogilvie Island to Dawson
17. Moosehide to Cassiar Creek
18. Happy Creek to Old Man/Old Woman rocks
19. Roger's Bank to Eagle, Alaska



This is a glimpse of the era of the sternwheelers; the natural beauty, interesting people and hazards of the river; the rich cultural history of Yukon's First Nations; and the dramatic events of the Klondike Gold Rush.

