

**Post Trip Report:
Paddling the Snake and Peel Rivers in the Yukon**

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Food and Rationing

In our opinion, we ate a healthy and balanced diet on this expedition, with just about the right amount of food. We brought oatmeal, powdered eggs, cheese, nuts and dried fruits, dehydrated peanut butter, and a few other fixings for a savory and a sweet breakfast option each day. For lunches, we brought several bags of tortillas and had PB&J fixings or summer sausage, hummus, and cheese wraps. We allotted ourselves 2 bars each day, which worked out very equitably in our group – as the trip progressed, certain members who were less hungry left their bars for other members with larger appetites. It was great to be in touch with our own needs and divide food accordingly. We had several dinner options, often including dehydrated vegetables, canned salmon, pastas, rice dishes, and others. Having a dehydrator allowed us to bring more nourishing ingredients into the backcountry and have a semblance of fresh produce while on expedition – I'd highly recommend this trick. We also brought several snacks to round things out. Overall, I'd say we handled our food very well.

Equipment

With the exception of a few small hiccups, our gear worked well for the trip we were on. Our biggest hang-up was on the issue of nesting canoes, which we did not have, but should've for our flight in. Upon reaching the float plane base, we learned that it's typical to use nesting canoes for float plane-accessed trips in order to reduce drag on the plane and avoid higher fuel costs and potential logistical changes. We sorted it out, but would recommend that future trips are prepared with nesting canoes.

Beyond this, the main piece of gear we wondered whether we should've brought was a spray deck for each of our canoes, as we noticed we were the only party on the river not to have them. Water did come into our boats occasionally, especially going through rapids, but in our opinion, the time and effort spent bailing water was not enough to justify the cost of outfitting with a spray deck. With that said, the river was flowing higher than usual for its time of year, and maybe in lower water conditions, the rapids would've turned out a bit more exposed and splashier. Who's to say?

We were well layered with typical base, mid, and outer layers, packing according to personal experience and preference. There were some cold days when our warmest layers were put to use and did the trick, but we never needed more than we had. On cold days, I would've preferred a dry suit, but those of us in wet suits were ultimately fine. One interesting consideration is that there is little fluctuation in temperature between night and day in the arctic because the sun stays up.

We observed that we were traveling the lightest of any party on the river, and we certainly had more room in our canoes, however we weren't sure what else we would've liked to bring, and we were able to avoid paying more for the flight in by bringing a light load.

An essential piece of gear on the trip was mosquito head nets, and if you wanted to get fancy, you could bring a mosquito tent for your kitchen, which we sometimes wished for. Most of the time a campfire was enough to keep the bugs manageable.

What worked, what didn't, and why

An aspect of our trip that worked particularly well was our planning – most of the group members had taken part in a RKMF grant before and knew how to plan effectively, so everything went smoothly when it came time to act out the plan.

Our communication was effective, and our recognition of each individual's respective abilities led to effective leadership. We treated each other as equals and empowered each other while in the field.

The main thing that did not go smoothly was some of our communication with Alkan Air. Several of our group members were in contact with several of their employees separately and without coordination between them, which led to some mix ups. To make this go more smoothly in the future, we'd try to keep our communication to one person/email chain so that it's easier to track what was said to who, no information gets lost, and we don't end up with conflicting answers to the same question.

Travel Logistics

We opted to drive our shuttle between Mayo, YT, and Fort McPherson, NWT instead of flying out on the tail end of our trip, which allowed us to spend a lot less money. Fort McPherson is several hours down the Dempster Highway, and requires a couple days on either end of the trip to access. The road is not paved, but was quite well maintained for how remote it is. There is a rest area about halfway down the road with gas, basic mechanic services, and a restaurant. Be prepared for an extremely remote road without services for hundreds of miles at a time, but also know that during the summer months, the road is well traveled with other drivers eager to offer help to those in need. We left our car with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Fort McPherson so we could trust it would be well looked-after for the 3 weeks we were away.

Back in Mayo, Alkan Air, the main operator for flights into the Peel Watershed, offers a fantastic base camp on the way in and out. There's room to camp, shower, organize gear, wash dishes, and close access to a grocery store in town. They also have a good area to leave your car. Flying

is the only way to access the Snake River. Be conscious of the weight limit on the planes, and you shouldn't run into problems. Again, bring nesting canoes.

Once on the river, the guidebook Wild Rivers of the Yukon's Peel Watershed provided great advice for routes to take, places to camp, and excursions to take along the river.

Permitting/Government Relations

There is no required permitting to paddle or camp in the Peel Watershed, but be aware of steep prices at Territory campgrounds while shuttling! Being US travelers in Canada was a breeze, and we did not run into any problems.

Leadership and Group Dynamics

Our group dynamics went smoothly. We all brought different strengths and skills to the table and allowed each other to exercise them. One of our strengths was working through any disagreement with respect and understanding, so that everyone involved could be happy with the outcome. We did this by creating an openness to express our needs and hearing those of others with an open mind. All had an equal voice.

Safety and Risk Management Concerns

We were bear-aware at all times, cooking and storing our food faraway and downwind of camp, as well as traveling in groups, making noise, and carrying bear spray. On the river, we scouted any rapids that could've posed a risk after thoroughly reading about them in the guidebook. Only once we were sure of our abilities in the specific time and conditions would we decide to run a rapid. We listened to all members of our group and provided ample space for concerns to be raised and for any member to decide not to engage in an activity, or to alter it to their own needs and skill level.

Specific Route Descriptions & Concerns

Traveling down river was very straightforward most of the time, with the route mostly determined for us and no need to route find. The main place where the route differed from the guidebook's description was in the upper canyon of the Snake River, which is encountered on the first day. A storm had brought

down a large rock into the left side of the river, changing the nature of the class III rapid at the “S bend”. The rock creates a decent pillow coming up to it. The rapid is still certainly runnable at our ability level, but it did become slightly more technical.

On another note, the guidebook states that the low canyon of the snake river has no rapids, but we encountered several class I and II rapids while floating it. We are curious as to whether these rapids only became notable because of the high water conditions, or if they are always present in the canyon.

Daily Course Log

Day 1:

- Departed Mayo for Duo Lakes via float plane
- Spent day tuning up paddling skills on the lake
- Met other parties on the river, conversed, shared info about river
- Camped Duo Lakes

Day 2:

- Portaged canoes to put-in
- Hiked on nearby ridge
- Camped Duo Lakes

Day 3:

- Departed Duo Lakes and began paddling
- Paddled upper canyon, class II-III rapids
- Camped Reptile Creek

Day 4:

- Began natural dye work
- Ferried canoes across river for day hike up side canyon
- Camped Reptile Creek

Day 5:

- Morning hike near camp
- Paddling day, minor rapids
- Camped at gravel bar near Rainbow Mountain

Day 6:

- Departed gravel bar
- Paddled first half of day, minor rapids

- Arrived at Mt. McDonald access valley, stored boats
- Hiked ~2-3 mi up valley
- Camped at base of Mt. McDonald

Day 7:

- Day hiked up nearby ridge for views of Mt. McDonald and the Backbone Range
- Returned to camp at base of Mt. McDonald

Day 8:

- Morning hike near camp exploring valleys
- Departed camp
- Hiked back to boats
- Short paddle to Milk Creek
- Camped at Milk Creek

Day 9:

- Layover day at Milk Creek
- Reorganized food and gear
- Intentional day of rest and enjoyment

Day 10:

- Departed Milk Creek
- Long paddling day to the S-Bend
- Camped at gravel bar on other side of S-Bend

Day 11:

- Departed S-Bend gravel bar
- Paddled the “main canyon” of the Snake, largest class III rapid
- Camped at “Lightshow Camp”

Day 12:

- Departed Campsite and began bigger mile days for rest of trip
- Paddled into lower Snake, out of the mountains
- Camped on unnamed gravel bar

Days 13/14

- Paddled long days through poplars and beaver country, lots of evidence of floods
- Camped on gravel bars, some islands with lots of drift wood

- Departed from rapids and entered wide slow channels necessitating long days on the water, we began to shift our schedule getting up earlier and being more efficient

Day 15 :

- Paddled through the confluence of the Peel and realized the massive body we would paddle for the rest of the trip
- Arrived at Taco Bar and received our re-ration with some cookies and chips!

Day 16:

- We saw that we had a promising weather window of 70s and 80s and tail winds for 2 days (so rare!!) so we began early and powered out as many miles as we could. Kind of a slog on flat water but we felt like using the wind at our backs (literally) considering that stretch is known for gnarly winds from the arctic ocean.
- Paddled 48 miles from Taco Bar and camped on a sandbar

Day 17:

- Continued our streak of good weather so we got up early and paddled another ~50 mile day, following the large oxbows in the river. We began to see lots of bird wildlife; owls, hawks, falcons, eagles and more circled above.
- Camped on a long sandbar 25 miles from Fort McPherson

Day 18:

- We woke up to incredibly strong winds covering everything in sand, making us grateful for the ease we had encountered for the previous 100 miles of the Peel. Buckling up for the ride, we paddled our last push of 25 grueling miles into whipping arctic winds. Two+ foot swells from the gales approached our bows splashing over.

We ended up arriving in Fort McPherson earlier than expected due to our advantageous weather window and subsequent mileage push. In hindsight we definitely sacrificed some presence on the Peel but after experiencing the wind we did the last day we feel confident in our decision to quicken that leg. The wind is hard to describe without experiencing it but is definitely a serious consideration in the far north, it is good to have wiggle room. If we had had wind that strong for the entirety of the Peel we would have moved at 1/10 of the speed.

Itemized Budget:

There were some changes in the ways our budget shaped out in the end. We didn't end up booking a shuttle company which saved money overall, and instead ran the shuttle ourselves which increased the cost of gas pretty significantly as we drove two cars all the way down the

Dempster Highway. Additionally, due to the ruggedness of the road multiple car repairs were needed (tire patches and new tires, oil changes, etc.). We also decided to do food prep in Whitehorse, YK with 3 out of 4 of our group members which meant we bought an AirBnB for 2 nights. Though, this did reduce food prices as food in Canada is quite a bit cheaper than in the states. We also drastically underestimated food expenses for the road trip. It took Nathaniel and Skyler longer than expected to do the drive which increased food expenditure. The multiday shuttle also increased our food costs as food in the far north is quite expensive.

Float Plane: \$ 3,216

Food (exped): \$1,253

Food (travel and pretrip): \$1437

Zinnia Flights: \$915

Travel (e.g. Gas): 1444.85

Campsites: \$128

Gear Rental: \$412.24

AirBnB (pretrip planning and food prep): \$302

Misc Spending (Bear Spray, last minute equipment, maps, etc.): \$512.43

Total: \$9,620.09

Pictures!









