

Yukon-Charley Rivers

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Barren mountains scored by scree slopes typify park uplands. On Nimrod Peak, you look down the Tatouk River to its Yukon confluence.

Winter's Yukon River flows beneath some 6 feet of ice that freezes up in mid-October and remains frozen until mid-May.

Only experienced river runners should attempt the wilderness conditions posed by the Charley and other Yukon tributaries.

Salmon drying on riverside racks symbolize subsistence lifestyles enduring in this region, which is wilder now than it was 80 years ago.

Tributaries can be explored by lining small craft upstream from the Yukon or by having a bush pilot fly you into the headwaters so that you

can float out. Once you leave the Yukon corridor you are completely on your own in this seldom-penetrated wilderness.

Bags of gold dust bought admission to Circle's opera house in the days of instant wealth by placer mining that writers Jack London and Robert Ser-

vice rendered legendary. Dormant on Coal Creek at the Yukon, this gold dredge tells of later, capital-intensive mining.

Hawk-like and flying by day low to the ground, the hawk owl inhabits boreal forests. Its chattering voice sounds similar to the falcon's.

Timeless Rivers of Interior Alaska

In the deep Interior of Alaska the great Yukon River strikes through bluffs and mountains of an ancient landscape to unmask rocks whose histories reach back a billion years to life's beginnings on Earth. Axis of the region, the silt-laden Yukon here flows constricted and swift through a great geologic fault. Side-streams tumble from the hinterlands—further passageways long inviting human traffic. Chief among these crystal rivers are the Charley, the Kandik, and the Nation. Flowing first through upland valley, then through stream-cut valley, and finally onto mature floodplain, the Charley offers spectacular unspoiled wilderness scenery.

Arising at some 4,000 feet elevation, it empties into the Yukon only 700 feet above sea level, for an average gradient of 31 feet per mile and average current of 4 to 6 miles per hour. Side-streams have worn away old heights, softening the shapes of all but a few alpine peaks. The 2.5-million-acre Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve includes all 106 river miles of the Charley and encompasses its entire 1.1-million-acre watershed. Eons have passed here without catastrophic change. Today

the Yukon-Charley persists as a haven largely untouched by glaciation and mostly free of human imprint. Here are prime breeding grounds of the endangered peregrine falcon, calving grounds of the Fortymile caribou herd, choice paleontological sites, superb recreational waters, and the timeless presence of the mighty and historic Yukon River. The preserve lies between the communities of Eagle and Circle, Alaska. New Jersey with its 7.5 million residents would fit between these towns, but there are only 30 year-round residents here. Truly isolated, the preserve is wilder and less populated now than it was 50 or 80 years ago. The late-1800s Klondike and Nome gold rushes turned Circle—1980 population 81—into the "Paris of the North," boasting an opera house. Pokes of gold were legal tender. This was the stuff of Jack London's stories and Robert Service's poetry. Eagle's population—about 200 today—soared to 800. Fort Egbert boasted electric lights and hot-and-cold running water. Circle and Eagle were south-bank trade centers on the great Yukon River thoroughfare that bisects Alaska east to west for 1,250 river miles and stretches for 1,979 river miles from its headwaters near

Whitehorse, in Canada's Yukon Territory, to its mouth at the Bering Sea. When not choked with stupendous, lethal spring and fall ice floes, the Yukon serves as summer waterway or frozen winter highway. Ancient hunters had traveled through the unglaciated Yukon corridor. Those who stayed probed the uplands for game via the stream-carved valleys. Forays upland took them first through thickets of willow and alder, through stands of white spruce and cottonwood screening the rivers, then across boggy flats punctuated by stunted black spruce. Mixed white spruce, birch, and aspen gave way to brush as the hunters climbed toward dry tundra on the ridges. Above them loomed always the barren mountains scored by scree slopes and topped by granite pinnacles.

What scientists think may be remnant Ice Age vegetation occurs as patches of arctic steppe on sun-drenched benches and bluffs. Now, winter's darkness and cold conspire to congeal this land abutting the Arctic Circle. Animals go to ground or migrate, or, like the mountain sheep, stand hunched against arctic winds. Rivers and streams freeze

over. Deprived of silt from these frozen sources, the winter Yukon runs clear under as much as 6 feet of ice. But the sun returns. The rivers break. Bird calls herald spring. Old cliff eyries of peregrine falcons are refurbished and the swift flight and stoop of these winged hunters take their toll of migrating birds. Salmon begin their runs, first the big kings and then the dog salmon. Here, 1,200 miles from the sea but with many miles left to swim, the powerful fish are still firm of flesh. And as they have for centuries, people gather at fish camps along the Yukon. The people who stayed after the glory days of gold faded—Han Indians already home and recent arrivals who had found a home—settled back to a slower pace, trapping, hunting, fishing, gardening. With easily exploited placer deposits of gold exhausted, mining, too, changed from a rush to long toil. Even today along the Yukon a fish camp may lie just around the bend—fishwheel or net in the water, fish drying on streamside racks. Hunters track moose and caribou, and miners match their mettle against the grudging rock. Life, in all its flintiness, persists here as it has for ages, and a few hardy souls still pit their fortunes against a true frontier wilderness.

Cover photo of the Charley River by Stephen J. Krasemann/DRK Photo; peregrine falcon illustration by John Dawson

Map Warning

Do not use this folder map for backpacking or navigation purposes. U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps for Eagle, Circle, Charley River, and Big Delta cover the national preserve at a scale of 1:250,000 and are available at preserve headquarters or by mail from the nonprofit Alaska Natural History Association at the park address. This scale is the *minimum* practical for on-the-ground use. Maps at larger scales are available from U.S.G.S. outlets.

Note: Areas of private land exist within the preserve boundary. Respect private land owners' rights. Contact preserve headquarters for details on private land ownership.

Logistics

Scheduled air taxis serve Eagle and Circle year round. The Taylor and Steese highways, maintained gravel roads, connect Eagle and Circle with the Alcan Highway (161 miles) and Fairbanks (160 miles), respectively.

Taylor Highway is usually closed by snow from October 15 to April 15. There are no roads, maintained trails, or maintained public airstrips in the national preserve.

Accommodations and services. There are no facilities in the preserve.



In summer Eagle and Circle offer food service; basic groceries and supplies, including gasoline; limited lodgings; campgrounds; public boat landings; and charter boat and air services. Near Circle, Central and Circle Hot Springs offer lodgings, food service, stores, and gasoline. Circle Hot Springs Resort offers baths and a large swimming pool. Authorized commercial guides provide hunting, camping,

fishing, rafting, and kayaking guide services. Write to the preserve for a list.

Special note. Local residents carry on subsistence activities in the

preserve with camps, fish nets, and other equipment. Respect their property and privacy.

Information. For more information about the preserve write to: Superintendent, P.O. Box 64, Eagle, AK 99738. Maps and other publications are sold by mail by the nonprofit Alaska Natural History Association at the same address.

Weather

Extreme cold holds sway from late November to mid-March as temperatures sometimes plunge to -70°F. Snow accumulates except where winds scour the land. Breakup in mid-May and freezeup in mid-October may maroon travelers.

Summer brings extremes, too; freezing nights may follow daytime temperatures of 90°F. Thunderheads breed cloudbursts, and high winds produce squalls and whitecaps on the Yukon and wild fluctuations in water levels on smaller rivers. Head for shore if equipment problems or foul weather come up. Do not overload your craft.

Clothing, Food, and Gear

Self-sufficiency in all respects must be your guiding rule for wilderness travel here. Schedules will probably go awry because of weather or equipment failures in some remote place. Bring emergency food stocks—more than your scheduled time requires. If aircraft will pick you up at a remote location, prepare for being weathered in by bringing food for a couple of extra days. Quality clothing (plenty of wool) that can be layered for changing conditions, sturdy camping and rain gear, and good insect repellent are essentials. Tents should have rain flies and insect netting and be designed to withstand strong winds.

What to See and Do

Deep Interior Alaska lies locked in ice, cold, and darkness most of the year. Winter visitors to Yukon-Charley must be expedition-equipped for survival. Yet, when the rivers freeze and the black-spruce bogs congeal, the land is open to cross-country travel. Returning light and moderating temperatures in March and early April invite experienced winter travelers to explore where human tracks are rare or absent.

Breakup in May flushes the ice from streams and reestablishes the watery regime of wetlands and insects. Summer travel in the Interior depends mainly on the rivers. Most popular is the float trip down the Yukon, with side explorations up major tributary rivers—Nation, Kan-

dik, Charley—and day hikes in bordering highlands. Rafts and canoes, with or without motors, allow the greatest flexibility during the average 5- to 10-day float between Eagle and Circle (see map). Floaters camp on open beaches and river bars, where winds keep down the insects.

Motorized boats may start from Circle and go upriver against the stiff Yukon current. A few people fly with bush pilots to the headwaters of the Charley or other tributary streams and float down to the Yukon and out of the area. Others line their boats up the side-streams. Good upland hiking is available in the mountainous regions. Exposed geological features, historic relics, expansive scenery,

magnificent summer skylines, and, in the less frequented canyons and uplands, abundant wildlife fill your days with treasured experiences.

As a national preserve Yukon-Charley is open to both sport fishing and hunting under state and federal laws.

Eagle and Circle are historic places whose style of life and weathered buildings recall Athapascan Indian history gold rush days, the riverboat era, and the frontier spirit. Eagle offers tours of its historic district and Fort Egbert in summer.

Precautions

Harsh weather, high winds, and rain buffet the preserve. Guard against hypothermia. River water temperatures are cold and mid-channel spills can be lethal. Once you leave the well-traveled Yukon River corridor in this vast country you are completely on your own. Boil drinking water at least one minute to prevent Giardiasis problems. Know and test your gear before you arrive. **You must possess good backpacking skills for wilderness survival.** Leave your itinerary with someone and notify that person when you complete your trip.

Bears and moose. Respect all wild animals. Moose and bears, especially, should always be considered dangerous. Get and read a free bear

pamphlet before you set out; write to the preserve address for a copy. This information about handling wildlife encounters could save your life. Be sure to keep food supplies separate from your campsite and equipment and make noise while hiking so that you do not startle bears or moose.

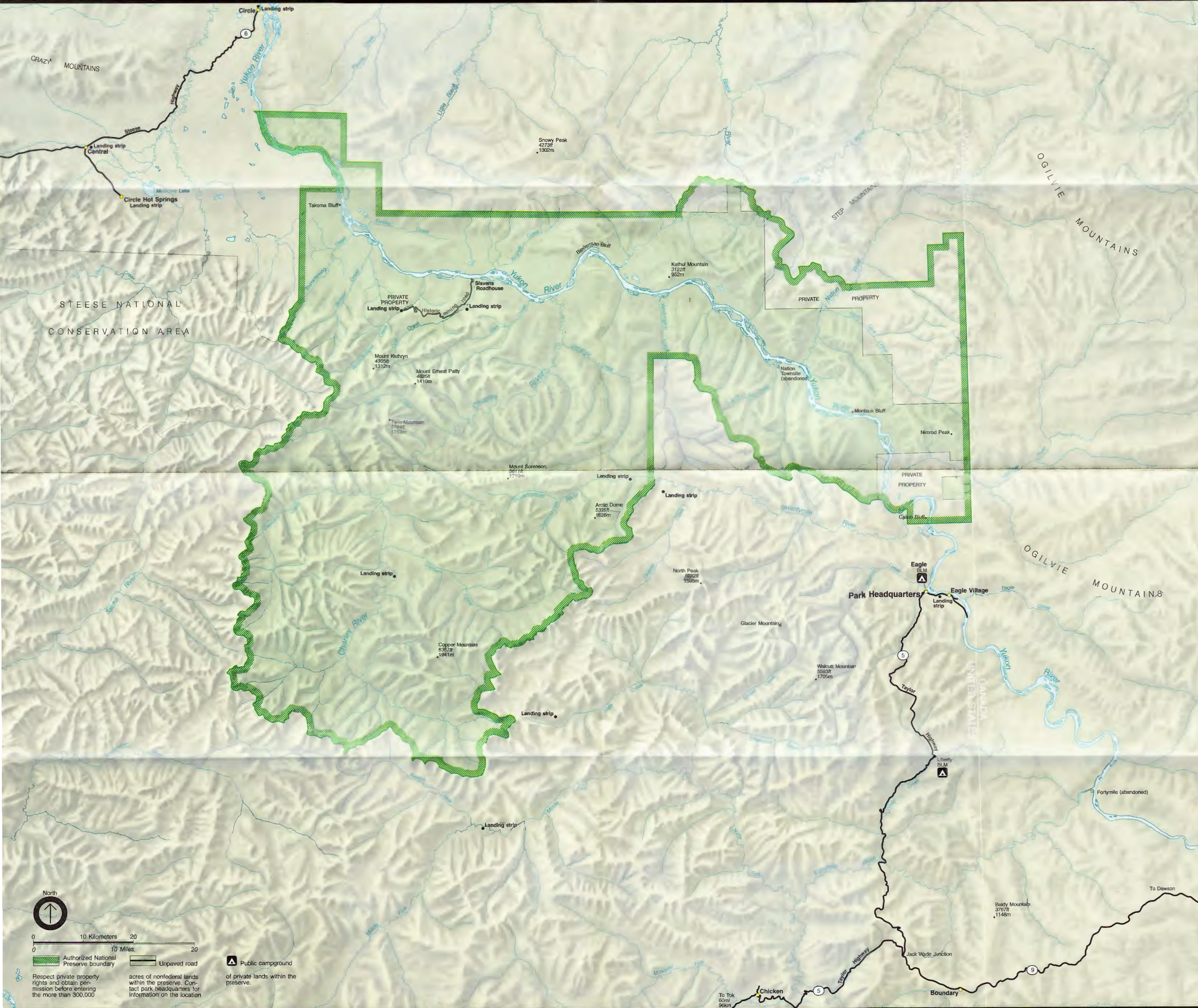
Winter travel is recommended only to those experienced in cold weather camping and survival techniques.

Boating Safety

Novice boaters have no business confronting rapids and the hazards of sweepers—trees that have fallen into a stream and lodged perpendicular to its current—on these wilderness rivers. Know your boat or other watercraft and its operation before you launch. All federal and state boating regulations apply. Carry signal equipment and a personal survival kit, including temporary shelter, warm clothing, and extra food. File a float plan with a responsible person and notify that person when you complete your trip. River water temperatures are cold; mid-channel spills can be lethal. Head for shore if you have equipment problems or the weather worsens. Do not overload your craft.

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Alaska



CRAZY MOUNTAINS

STEP MOUNTAINS

OGILVIE MOUNTAINS

STEESE NATIONAL
CONSERVATION AREA

OGILVIE MOUNTAINS



0 10 Kilometers 20
0 10 Miles 20

Authorized National Preserve boundary
 Unpaved road
 Public campground

Respect private property rights and obtain permission before entering the more than 300,000 acres of nonfederal lands within the preserve. Contact park headquarters for information on the location of private lands within the preserve.