

Yukon · Charley

YUKON-CHARLEY RIVERS
NATIONAL PRESERVE
ALASKA

In the uplands of Interior Alaska the Yukon and Charley Rivers bring together natural and human history in this 687,800-hectare (1.7-million-acre) national preserve. The rivers have cut into Earth's foundations to reveal its geologic and biologic evolution. The mighty Yukon provided a migration and transport route

used by people from earliest times. Artifacts of the romantic era of Gold Rush stam-peders still haunt the river corridor. The Charley basin, by contrast, was marginal mining country. Its occasional hunters and trappers left few traces in this rarest of places—an entire river drainage where nature still

sets its own rhythms. Diverse landscapes, ranging from al-pine mountains to low-lying wetland and the spacious Yukon corridor, offer a floral and faunal cross-section of Alaska's sub-arctic Interior. High bluffs along the sculp-tured river courses protect nesting sites of endangered peregrine falcons.



WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Deep Interior Alaska lies locked in ice, cold, and darkness most of the year. Few will visit Yukon-Charley in winter, and these must be expedition-equipped for comfort and 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 the experienced winter traveler to explore silent places where human tracks are rare or absent, where struggles of predator and prey can be read in the snow.

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,

Kandik, 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, at the preserve's up-river end, and Circle, at its lower end. The length of the float depends on one's mood and the side trips. Floaters camp on open beaches and river bars where winds keep down the insects.

Motorized boaters may start from Circle and go upriver, against the stiff Yukon current. A few people fly with bush pilots into the Charley or other tributary headwaters and float down to the Yukon and out of the area. Others line their boats up the side streams. It depends on your time, energy, and experience. Good upland hiking is available in the mountainous regions. Exposed geology, historic relics, expansive sce-

nery, magnificent summer skies, and in the less frequented channels and uplands, abundant wildlife make each hour and day a unique experience.

As a national preserve, Yukon-Charley is open to both sport fishing and hunting under State and Federal laws. Local residents use the area for subsistence hunting and fishing. Their nets and fish camps are seen along the Yukon.

The communities of Eagle and Circle, bordering the preserve, are historic places in their own right. Their styles of life and weathered buildings recall Athapascan Indian history, Gold Rush days, the riverboat era, and the frontier spirit of an earlier America. In summer, Eagle provides tours of its historic district and turn-of-the-century military post, Fort Egbert.

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ACCESS

Scheduled air taxis serve Eagle and Circle year round. From about May 1 to October 1 the Taylor and Steese highways, maintained gravel roads, connect Eagle and Circle with the Alcan Highway and Fairbanks, respectively. There are no roads or maintained trails within the national preserve itself.

Because of Alaska's vastness, traditions, and lack of ground transportation, the National Park Service has adopted relaxed rules of aircraft, snowmobile, and motorboat use within Alaska parklands. In Yukon-Charley, aircraft, snowmobiles, and dogteams are used in winter. Floatplanes are useful in the very few places where moun-

tain lakes or open stretches of smaller rivers allow landing. Precise water levels and other conditions are required for any airplane landing away from the Yukon River. There are no maintained public airstrips within the preserve. For most people, floating or boating via the Yukon and its tributaries will be the natural means of access.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

In summer both Eagle and Circle offer food service; basic groceries and supplies, including gas; and very limited lodging facilities. These communities also have campgrounds and public boat landings. Local boat operators offer charter trips into the preserve. A charter air service, both fixed wing and helicopter, is available in Circle. Near Circle, the communities of Central and Circle Hot Springs provide lodging, food service, stores, and gasoline. The Circle Hot Springs resort offers baths and a large swimming pool. Guided hunting and fishing trips can be arranged in the local communities.

WEATHER

Arctic influences dominate winter weather in this deep Interior region. Extreme cold, sometimes plunging to minus 56°C (-70°F), is the norm from late November to mid-March. Though the upper Yukon area is semiarid, snow, lacking thaw or evaporation, usually accumulates all winter. It is deep and fluffy except where winds scour and drift it. Breakup in May and freeze-

up in late October may maroon the traveler.

Summer, too, is extreme in the continental climate. Daytime temperatures as high as 32°C (90°F) may be followed by freezing nights. Thunderheads bring cloudbursts and high winds producing squalls and whitecaps on the Yukon and wildly fluctuating water levels on smaller rivers. Frontal storms may cause day after day of rain. Visitors in any season must be prepared for weather extremes.

CLOTHING, FOOD, & GEAR

Self-sufficiency in all respects must be the guiding rule. Schedules will probably go awry because of weather or equipment failure, in some remote place. So bring emergency food stocks beyond your scheduled time. 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 be designed for strong winds.

PRECAUTIONS AND COURTESIES
Yukon-Charley is a vast and

sometimes hostile environment with no parkland facilities. The small staff can provide only minimal patrol or rescue services. You must assume that you are completely on your own once you leave the well-traveled Yukon corridor. The animals are wild. Do not surprise them, crowd them, or camp on their trails. River water temperatures are uniformly cold; a mid-channel spill can be lethal. Head for shore if you have any equipment problems or the weather kicks up. Don't overload your boat or canoe.

Be at ease with your equipment and possess the backcountry skills needed for both comfort and survival in the wilderness. For your safety, we suggest that you leave your itinerary with a friend, and contact that person when you complete your trip.

Local residents carry on their subsistence way of life within the national preserve. Their camps, fishnets, and other equipment are critical to their well being. Please observe the usual courtesies respecting their property and privacy.

For further information write:
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National Preserve
Box 64
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