

potential recreation/tourism features & activities

The mountain ranges surrounding Duo Lakes provide excellent hiking opportunities. [CA]



The Peel River watershed, with its spectacular mountain river tributaries, is known in the Yukon, across Canada, and in many parts of the world as a premiere destination for a wide range of wilderness recreation and backcountry tourism activities. The watershed remains one of the largest regions in the Yukon that has very large expanses of intact wilderness, with no roads or other development. This asset is increasingly rare in North America and elsewhere in the world. The mountain and river scenery in the Peel watershed is second to none in Canada, and has some of the Yukon's most stunning vistas and special features. The Peel watershed has very important values for wilderness, recreation, tourism, subsistence, wildlife, education and research, and the broad range of economic development potential and local entrepreneurial opportunity related to these values. Recreation and tourism values are a key part of land use planning.

The main recreation and tourism activity and potential in the region centres on the 6 tributaries as well as the main stem of the Peel River, remote mountain wilderness, wildlife, scenery and special features, and the cultural history and on-going traditions of two First Nations.

In terms of numbers of travelers, the main recreational activities taking place in the Peel

watershed today revolve around canoeing and rafting. Activities such as fishing, wildlife viewing, bird watching, photography and hiking in alpine areas are often done in association with these canoe and raft trips. As outlined in the Outfitting section, hunting is another recreation and tourism activity of long-standing importance in the region. The map shows just some of the horse pack trails that have been used by guide outfitters in the past. In recent years, activities such as "writers retreats" and artist's expeditions have also taken place. Regardless of the activity, it is the wilderness setting that attracts all these people.

The Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume drainages have been more extensively used for recreation than the three drainages to the west, the Ogilvie, Blackstone and Hart Rivers. In part this may be because most recreational activities involve river travel and the three western tributaries all join the Peel River main stem upstream of Aberdeen Canyon. Aberdeen Canyon is not navigable and has a strenuous 10 km portage so is generally avoided by most recreationists. The upper sections of the Blackstone River are used regularly, while use of the Hart has also increased in recent years.

The following descriptions for the Snake, Bonnet Plume and Wind Rivers are adapted from The Wind, the Snake and the Bonnet Plume: Three

Wild Northern Rivers (Yukon Wildlands Project, 1998). The section on the Hart River is based on information provided by Blaine and Mary Walden of Walden's Guiding & Outfitting as well as Canoeing the Hart of the Yukon (Bryngelson, 2001). The information for the Blackstone and Ogilvie Rivers and Peel River main stem is taken from Paddling in the Yukon: A Guide to the Rivers (Madsen, 1996).

Snake River

The Snake River country is known for a combination of great river paddling, hiking and wildlife viewing. Access to the alpine is sometimes easier than on the Wind or Bonnet Plume, and there are many day-hikes as well as multi-day routes. The landscape is spectacularly varied. The colourful mountains of the upper river give way to rugged glaciated peaks in the Mt. MacDonald area and then stark gray pyramids above the Peel Plateau.

The Snake River is accessed by float planes that land at Duo Lakes. There is a portage of about 2 kilometres to the river.

The upper Snake River is swift and shallow. An old rock slide that extends to the river from the mountains to the west makes an enjoyable day hike. There are many Class II rapids in the

section down to Reptile Creek. Most of the rapids are shallow rock gardens, but there is also whitewater and very tight corners in small canyons. A trilobite fossil is nestled in a rock shelf at the bottom of one section of rapids.

The mouth of Reptile Creek is a popular campsite and the hike to "Painted Mountain" on the east side of the river is one of the best alpine hikes in the North. There are several ridges that give access to hikes of different lengths.

The whitewater eases below Reptile Creek, but the Snake continues with a steady current. Paddlers can pick and choose hiking opportunities, including routes into the valleys in the Mt. MacDonald area. Mt. MacDonald and nearby alpine meadows rival the great peaks of the Rocky Mountains, and the U-shaped approach valleys are among the most striking in the Yukon. Dall sheep and caribou are commonly seen in the alpine and at mineral licks along the river.

The first of the Snake's big rapids is just after the "s-bend" in the river. The river plunges into a short canyon with intimidating whitewater (Class III, depending upon the water level). The second big rapid is about 12 kilometres before the Snake leaves the mountains. There is a creek just upstream of the rapids that cascades through a series of waterfalls, offering a pleasant day hike.

North of the mountains the river flows through a



Wildlife viewing on the Snake River. [CA]

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series of canyons. The Snake River flows through the plateau country for considerably longer than either the Wind or the Bonnet Plume Rivers. Attractive canyon walls, Peregrine Falcon, and mammal sightings are features along this section.

Bonnet Plume River

The Bonnet Plume River is one of Canada's premiere wilderness and whitewater rivers. It has spectacular mountain scenery, challenging whitewater and important wildlife habitat. It is best suited to paddlers who are experienced in both whitewater and wilderness travel. The river is usually traveled by canoe, although it has also been paddled in rafts and whitewater kayaks.

There are plenty of scenic hiking possibilities in the mountainous terrain of the Bonnet Plume, including excellent opportunities for multi-day hikes away from the river. Some of the best hiking is in the headwaters region of Bonnet Plume Lake, river canyons, Corn Creek area, Pinguicula Lake, and a host of other areas too numerous to mention.

River trips generally start at Bonnet Plume Lake at an elevation of 1,100 metres. Fishing for grayling and lake trout is a popular activity here. There are good hiking opportunities on the alpine ridges above the lake. The alpine area to the north end of the lake offers a spectacular view of the Bonnet

Plume River as it flows northward into Rock Slide Canyon.

The first serious whitewater is in "Rock Slide Canyon". This canyon is the result of a massive landslide that occurred centuries ago. The river gradually carved through the debris and created the canyon seen today. Hiking the huge boulders of the landslide is easy and there are several lakes nestled in the northern part of the slide. The slide is home to marmots, pikas, ground squirrels and the lichens and successional plants that have colonized the rocky terrain.

Below "Rock Slide Canyon" the river braids. The whitewater picks up again after about 20 kilometres. The rapids begin as Class II sets, some flanked by small rock walls. This is followed by a Class III rapid and in quick succession a Class V rapid that is a mandatory portage for canoeists. The portage trail wanders into the forest along a gallery of water-sculpted boulders.

From these rapids down to Goz Creek, the Bonnet Plume flows through wildflower gardens and past colourful canyon walls. This section of the river contains some whitewater, including two Class III rapids. A few kilometers above Kohse Creek rapids and a long canyon appear, with a Class V cascade mid-way through. This is the final required portage. Most of the canyon is navigable.

Corn Creek marks the end of the whitewater. There are enjoyable day or multi-day hikes to ridges on both the east and west side of the river here. Further downstream, at Pinguicula Creek, there is a great campsite and a canyon to

explore. In cooler summers thick ice-sheets flow from the canyon to the river.

There is an outfitter's camp on the river near Fairchild Lake. A 4 kilometre trail leads from the camp to the scenic lake.

The last of many superb alpine hiking opportunities on the Bonnet Plume River is just before the river leaves the mountains. A low ridge on the left gives a great view of Margaret Lake, the mountain panorama and the Peel River Plateau.

The rest of the Bonnet Plume is braided and swift all the way to its confluence with the Peel. There are interesting lakes and important wetlands along the way. Ospreys, Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles can be seen nesting along the river.

Wind River

The Wind River is known for its clear water. The mountain section of the river is shorter than that of the Bonnet Plume and Snake, but there are still plenty of opportunities for alpine hiking.

The rapids on the Wind aren't as difficult as those on the Bonnet Plume or the Snake Rivers. Despite that, paddlers should be experienced in both whitewater and wilderness travel. There are long sections of tricky paddling on the Wind that are impractical to portage.

The Wind River is accessed via float plane to McClusky Lake. Most people then portage to a small creek and line their canoes down for 2

kilometres to the Wind River. There are several good hiking possibilities in the alpine areas that flank the creek.

The upper river is small with some tight corners and boils. Sweepers are common along the entire river. After the initial swift current, the Wind meanders through a valley with broad meadows on each side. The current is sluggish at times, speeding up when the river braids and flows over shallow rock bands. There are wonderful day hikes through the meadows to knolls overlooking the river. The meadows are dotted with rhododendron patches, small wetlands and lakes. There are also unusual sand dunes along this section of the river. The gray, stark mountains have spires and towers, and are similar to the peaks along the Blackstone and Hart watersheds to the west.

Below the confluence of the Bear River, the current speeds up and remains steady to the end of the mountains. The northern limit of the main mountain chain is spectacular with some great hiking routes, and good wildlife viewing opportunities

The steady current continues as the Wind River flows through the Peel Plateau. The river braids frequently, and although there are no big rapids there is some tricky paddling due to sweepers. There are standing waves and eddy lines at corners and where braids converge.

Unlike the Snake and Bonnet Plume, the Wind River then passes through "islands" of mountains in the forested Peel Plateau. Several of these pockets of alpine present good hiking potential, particularly the Iltyd Range. Mt.

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Deception is one of these excellent hiking spots.

The Wind River flows through a wonderful orange-coloured canyon just above its confluence with the Peel. The following section on the Peel River main stem flows through fabulous canyon country as well.

Hart River

The Hart River is not nearly as well traveled as the Wind, Snake and Bonnet Plume Rivers. There is however, at least one tourism operator who guides river travelers down the Hart River and several private groups have made the trip as well.

The tourism operator flies clients in to Elliott Lake, one of two headwater lakes that feed the Hart River. Clients are then portaged by helicopter to the place where the Hart River has enough water to be navigable by canoe. Upstream of this spot water levels are low and in places the river flows underground.

The mountain scenery along this river is spectacular, with some mountains coming right down to the banks of the Hart River. Hiking and fishing for grayling are common activities. The Hart River alternates between being a braided and fast river with tight corners and sweepers to a friendly, meandering river. It passes through dramatic canyons with distinct rock layers and cliffs. Peregrine Falcons, sheep and moose can all be observed from the river. There are some rapids on the river, including a Class III ledge drop that isn't marked on maps. The Hart River is considered easier than the Bonnet Plume River but

more difficult than the Wind and Snake Rivers.

Once the Hart River joins the Peel River paddlers generally have to line their canoes down for a full day to get to the mouth of Canyon Creek. Here the Peel River is very wide and a floatplane is able to land to pick up paddlers. This allows paddlers to avoid some of the most challenging rapids on the Peel, in particular the Class V-VI rapids at Aberdeen Canyon that require a 10 kilometre portage.

Blackstone River

The Blackstone River is accessible from the Dempster Highway. The main part of the Blackstone River is not a technically difficult river to paddle, however, after it joins the Ogilvie River to form the Peel River it becomes a very difficult river with Class III-IV rapids and will require a portage around Aberdeen canyon (see Peel River main stem section below).

The highway parallels the river for a long stretch before the river starts heading northeast. Due to the proximity of the highway it is not considered a wilderness route here. Once the river flows away from the highway it is surrounded by stark mountains with ridges that have eroded into numerous interesting shapes.

Hiking opportunities are very good along the upper sections of the river, while it still flows through the mountains. Alpine areas are easily accessible directly from the river, without requiring much bushwhacking. Once the river enters the Peel River valley these hiking opportunities disappear.

The whitewater on the Blackstone River consists of rocky Class II shallows. In places the water levels are so low that paddlers have to get out and drag their canoes across gravel bars.

Ogilvie River

The Dempster Highway crosses the Ogilvie River at km 195. Like the Blackstone River, the Ogilvie River parallels the highway for about 50 kilometres in the upper section and is not considered a wilderness river. The route is scenic and has some interesting whitewater, mainly in the form of Class II-III rapids formed by bedrock ledges.

Hiking is best done from the ridges near the Dempster Highway because once the river enters the Peel River valley it is too far from the mountains to offer accessible hiking opportunities.

Peel River main stem

The Peel River officially starts at the confluence of the Ogilvie and Blackstone Rivers. Here the river flows through dramatic mountain views, although it is not possible to reach alpine areas by foot from the river. There are a few Class II rapids in the section before the Hart River joins the Peel. After the Hart River the Peel's famous canyon country begins. In this stretch there are numerous rapids, including challenging class III and IV rapids, culminating in the feared rapids of Aberdeen Canyon. Canoes have been lost and people have drowned in these rapids that start of as Class II and work their way up to Class VI. The portage around is long and arduous.

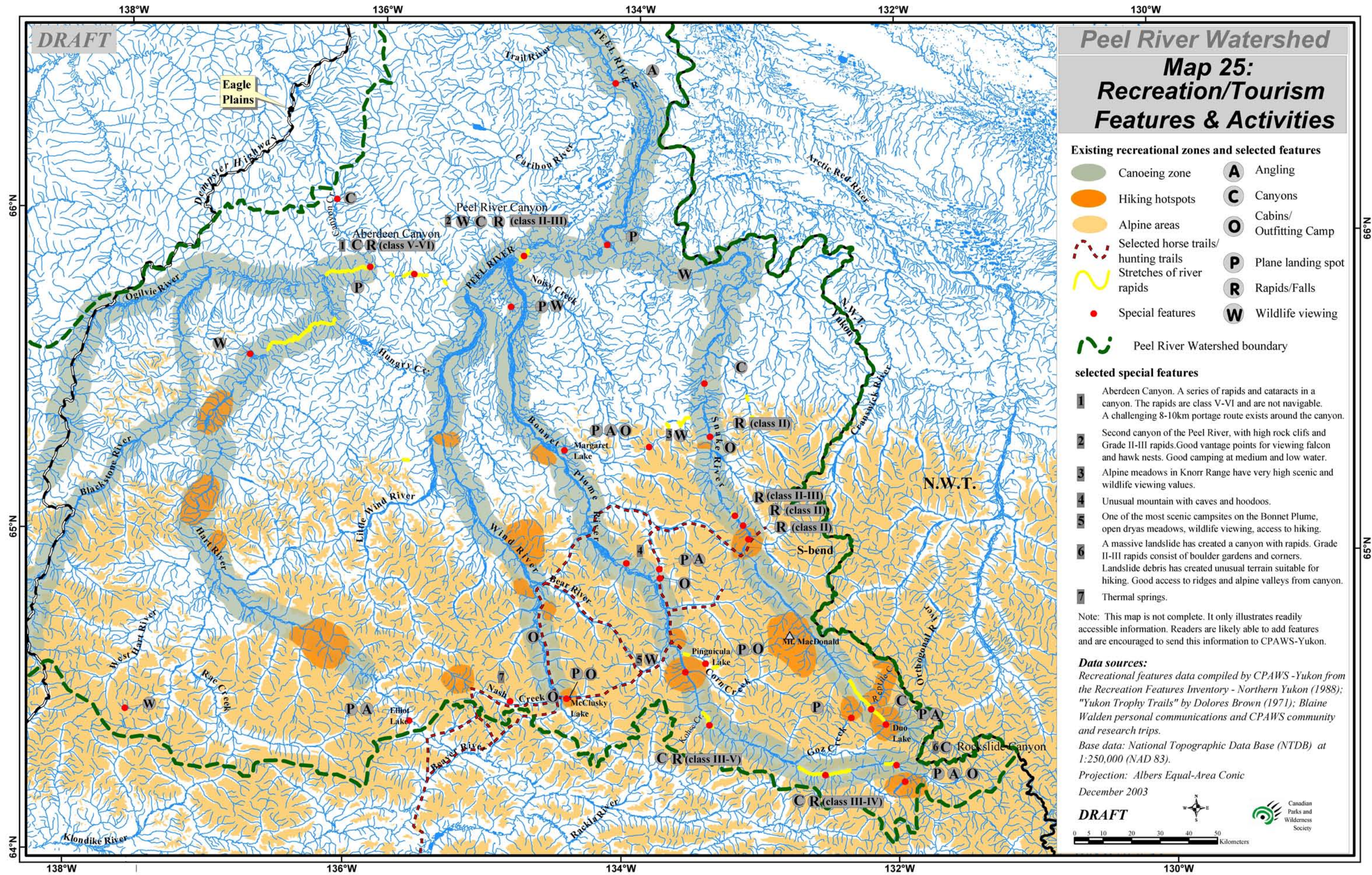


After Aberdeen Canyon the Peel flows between canyon walls for about 25 kilometres. The last whitewater on the Peel is in Peel Canyon, where at high water levels the standing waves can be significant.

The Peel River, from the Wind River confluence, past the Snake River, and to the Trail River is very scenic, with high rock and gravel canyon walls, stands of balsam poplar and spruce, wildlife viewing opportunities in the back channels, and excellent campsites. Downstream of the Caribou River, the Peel landscape enters the Fort McPherson lowlands, with many people perceiving this section of river to be characteristic of the "true north" – big colourful skies, black spruce plateau, wetlands and moose!

A gravel bar by the mouth of the Snake River, called Taco Bar, is the usual take-out spot for paddlers who have come down the Wind, Snake or Bonnet Plume Rivers, as well as anyone who has made it down the Peel River from further upstream. A float plane is able to land here. This is also where the colorful rock walls of the canyons along the Peel River end.

Further downstream, at the mouths of the Caribou River and Trail River, pick-up by motorboat from Fort McPherson can also be arranged.



Peel River Watershed

Map 25: Recreation/Tourism Features & Activities

- Existing recreational zones and selected features**
- Canoing zone
 - Hiking hotspots
 - Alpine areas
 - Selected horse trails/
hunting trails
 - Stretches of river
rapids
 - Special features
 - Peel River Watershed boundary
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A Angling | C Canyons |
| O Cabins/
Outfitting Camp | P Plane landing spot |
| R Rapids/Falls | W Wildlife viewing |

- selected special features**
- 1** Aberdeen Canyon. A series of rapids and cataracts in a canyon. The rapids are class V-VI and are not navigable. A challenging 8-10km portage route exists around the canyon.
 - 2** Second canyon of the Peel River, with high rock cliffs and Grade II-III rapids. Good vantage points for viewing falcon and hawk nests. Good camping at medium and low water.
 - 3** Alpine meadows in Knorr Range have very high scenic and wildlife viewing values.
 - 4** Unusual mountain with caves and hoodoos.
 - 5** One of the most scenic campsites on the Bonnet Plume, open dryas meadows, wildlife viewing, access to hiking.
 - 6** A massive landslide has created a canyon with rapids. Grade II-III rapids consist of boulder gardens and corners. Landslide debris has created unusual terrain suitable for hiking. Good access to ridges and alpine valleys from canyon.
 - 7** Thermal springs.

Note: This map is not complete. It only illustrates readily accessible information. Readers are likely able to add features and are encouraged to send this information to CPAWS-Yukon.

Data sources:
 Recreational features data compiled by CPAWS -Yukon from the Recreation Features Inventory - Northern Yukon (1988); "Yukon Trophy Trails" by Dolores Brown (1971); Blaine Walden personal communications and CPAWS community and research trips.

Base data: National Topographic Data Base (NTDB) at 1:250,000 (NAD 83).

Projection: Albers Equal-Area Conic
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DRAFT