

019693

105 K

A Report
on the
Pelly River
Yukon Territory
(unedited)

Ian Donaldson,
National Parks Service - Planning
National and Historic Parks Branch
Department of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
The Pelly River	3
Above Ross River	3
Ross River to Faro Bridge	3
Faro Bridge to Pelly Crossing	4
Pelly Crossing to Fort Selkirk	6
Appendix	9

INTRODUCTION

The Pelly River was one of fifteen rivers surveyed during the summer of 1971 in the Yukon Territory. This Wild Rivers Survey was conducted under the auspices of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, National and Historic Parks Branch, Planning Division.

Rivers surveyed during the same period are as follows:

1. Yukon River
2. Nisutlin River
3. Teslin River
4. Lake Bennett, Tagish Lake
Atlin Lake, Atlin River and Marsh Lake
5. MacMillan River Yukon River Drainage
6. Ross River
7. Bell River
8. Porcupine River
9. White River
10. Sixty Mile River
11. Klondike River
12. Big Salmon River
13. Stewart River MacKenzie River Drainage
14. Ogilvie and Peel Rivers

A four man crew in two seventeen foot canoes took 8 days to travel from Ross River settlement to Fort Selkirk on the Yukon River, a distance of 249 miles. Each man carried personal gear and equipment required for a canoe trip.

The historical significance of the Pelly River pre-dates the Gold Rush days of 1897-98. In 1840 Robert Campbell travelled up the Liard River, Francis

River, Francis Lake, Finlayson River and Finlayson Lake, over the height of land to Campbell Creek at the Pelly River. This was to become the site of Fort Pelly Banks. He then travelled down the Pelly to the Yukon River. In 1892, Warburton Pike travelled up the West Arm of Francis Lake, up the Yusezyu River to Narchilla Creek, then over the height of land, down Ptarmigan Creek to the Pelly Lakes and eventually down the Pelly River. In 1898, George Dawson followed Campbell's route for the Geologic Survey of Canada.

Today, much of the river is still untouched by civilization. As a result, a canoeist may experience the satisfactions of wilderness and recreation by travelling an historic route. However, effects of civilization are too often visible and available for the river to be considered "wild" in its entirety. Roads, sounds of trucks and airplanes, abandoned exploration camps and bridges are never more than a day or two apart. Much of the Pelly River region has also been struck by extensive forest fires in the past five years, leaving vast expanses of unattractive landscapes. Nevertheless, there are still enough large areas of magnificent wild countryside to make the voyage a very satisfying wilderness canoe trip.

The mean annual rainfall of the Pelly River area is less than 10 inches, with less than 5 inches falling during the summer months of June, July and August. The mean daily temperature for January and July is -10° and 55° respectively.

Lying in the Boreal Forest Region the dominant tree species of the Pelly River Region is black spruce (*Picea mariana*) white spruce (*Picea glauca*) and balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*). Shrubs such as willow (*Salix L.*) and alder (*Alnus*) grow along the river banks. Wildlife is abundant throughout the Pelly River area.

The Pelly River is accessible by car at the town of Ross River, from the Robert Campbell Highway upstream on the Pelly and from the Faro bridge crossing and by air into the Pelly or Fortin Lakes. Depending on the point of access, egress may take place at Ross River, Faro bridge crossing, Pelly Crossing, or Dawson City on the Yukon.

THE PELLY RIVER

I. Above Ross River:

This section of the Pelly River above Ross River was not surveyed. Access to the area is from the Robert Campbell Highway. Geological Survey Reports by Dawson, Keele and Warburton Pike provide excellent descriptions of this section of the Pelly River.

II. Ross River to Faro Bridge Crossing:

Navigation along this section is no problem. Camping sites are readily available on the many gravel bars and the water is potable.

This forty-three mile section is characterized by sand and clay terraces rising one hundred and twenty-five feet to two hundred feet on the north bank, while to the south, the Pelly Range is visible in the distance. The water in mid-July is silty but will clear towards the latter part of August. Meanders are long, with gravel bars on the slip-off slopes and constantly eroding cutbanks. Trees that have been derooted and carried away during high water lie in shallows but pose no hazard to navigation. Channels and islands become numerous above Faro, but the main channel is easy to follow.

Approximately three miles above Faro bridge crossing, the charred remains of a recent forest fire detract from an otherwise attractive landscape. The Robert Campbell Highway makes its presence known

audibly but is not visible along this section. The area around the Faro bridge crossing is unattractive from a wilderness recreationist's point of view, as is the town of Faro. The latter is a company town servicing Anvil Mine 10 miles north of the Pelly River near Anvil Creek. It is located about one half mile from the river, surrounded by burned out forest. Limited supplies may be purchased there.

III. Faro to Pelly Crossing:

This 163 mile stretch of River is the most exciting and untouched section of the Pelly River.

Below Faro, the river parallels high alpine-type mountains. Rose Mountain (elev. 5900') dominates the view of the north shore for approximately fifteen miles. Beyond this, Tay Mountain (elev. 6900') to the north and Mount Hodder (elev. 7100') to the south provide spectacular alpine scenery. Thirty miles above the mouth of the MacMillan River, the Kalzas and MacMillan Ranges can be seen to the north. Fishhook Rapids and Granite Canyon provide some enclosed scenery. Most of the surrounding landscape can be considered hilly or mountainous except for an area ten miles below Granite Canyon.

The Channel pattern of the Pelly River varies throughout its length. The river between Anvil Creek and Earn Creek is a single channel with few islands, while above the mouth of the MacMillan it is meandering and multi-channelled. Below the MacMillan it is straight-running with few islands.

Recent burns dominate much of the scenery but are most obvious above Harvey Creek, in the Granite Canyon area for several miles on either

side of Pelly Crossing

Between Faro and Pelly crossing there are three sets of rapids. Big Fishhook Rapids, Little Fishhook Rapids and the rapids in Granite Canyon pose no problem for the moderately skilled canoeist at low and intermediate water levels. High standing waves and strong back eddies may pose problems to small canoes during high water in June and early July.

Little Fishhook Rapid is in a S-shaped bend in the channel located two miles above Glenlyon River. When running these rapids the canoeist should keep to the left hand channel. The rapid is short, wide, and shallow with boulders breaking the surface of the water. It is a Grade II rapid.

At Big Fishhook Rapids the channel flows into a rock face which forms the right limit as the river takes a 90° turn to the left. A strong back eddy is created along the left limit of the land. The rapid is Grade I at low water and II at intermediate and high levels. Granite Canyon is thirteen miles below the Macfillan River, four miles long and confined by two hundred foot to two hundred and fifty foot cliffs. Three sets of rapid water are present in the Canyon. The first set at the head of the Canyon is Graded I. Two miles into the Canyon a second set of rapids featuring some relatively high standing waves is encountered. A channel has to be picked while running the rapid since rocks and waves are scattered. Wave direction and motion vary, resembling "dancing horses" or haystacks. This towering rock protrudes from mid-stream, dividing the river into two channels. The most navigable channel is along the right limit. There are many

excellent campsites and abandoned sections of the river. Above Rose Mountain there is a cabin along the right limit with a trail that leads to Rose Mountain. Fish Camp, several cabins and a cache are located at Joe Ladue's just below Anvil Creek on the right limit. An old trading post is located at Tummel River on the left limit. Four miles below the MacMillan River there is a trail on the right limit leading to a small trapper's cabin. At the mouth of Needlerock Creek, there is an excellent campsite and a hiking trail that leads up the creek valley.

Among the relatively few people who still live along the rivers of the Yukon and earn their living by the traditional means of trapping and occasional guiding, is the Wilkinson family. Their cabins are located along the right limit about twelve miles above Pelly Crossing. They are for the most part, self-sufficient, obtaining their meat by hunting and fishing and growing their vegetables in greenhouses and gardens. Meeting such people along the rivers of the Yukon Territory is an integral part of the recreational experience.

The Klondike Highway Road crosses the Pelly River at Pelly Crossing. This is the last exit from the river to a highway before Dawson City. There is a daily bus service at the village as well as a store, a post office, a gas station and a tavern.

IV. Pelly Crossing to Fort Selkirk:

This forty-three mile section varies in relief and topography. It is relatively flat for several miles below Pelly Crossing in comparison to the hilly topography of Bradens Canyon area. About three miles above the Yukon River, a black basalt wall appears above the old river

terraces on the right hand side of the valley. This distinctive feature borders the end of the Pelly at the Yukon River. At Cull Rock, four miles above Bradens Canyon, the river is divided into three separate channels by two twenty foot high rocks. The right channel is the most navigable. Strong back eddies are present in Bradens Canyon but they pose no problems to navigation. The current is steady and the channel fairly straight with few islands. There are a number of excellent campsites in Bradens Canyon.

Six miles above the confluence of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers along the right limit is the Pelly Ranch. It has been operated by Hugh and Dick Bradley since 1954, but the farm itself is more than 60 years old. At one time it supplied feed for the horses of the stage coach road joining Dawson to Whitehorse. It is presently one of a few operating farms in the Yukon Territory. The Bradleys raise cattle, oats, barley, rye, wheat, garden vegetables, and also operate a weather station.

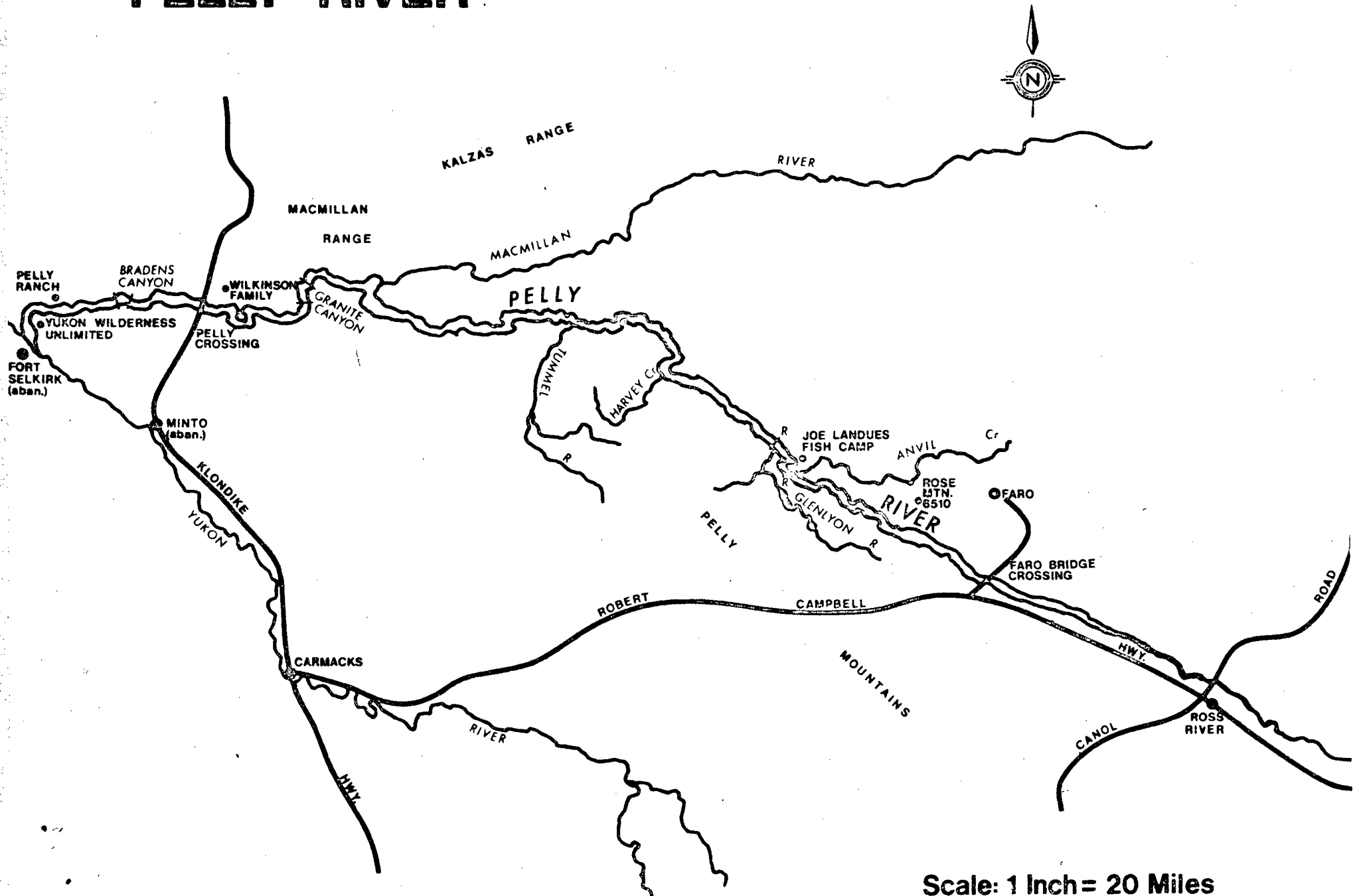
Near the mouth of the Pelly on the left limit is John Lammer's "Yukon Wilderness Unlimited", a wilderness retreat. There is accommodation here but usually only on a reserved basis.

Fort Selkirk is on the left limit of the Yukon River at the mouth of the Pelly. This point makes the beginning of the 178 mile journey to Dawson. Approximately 4-5 days should be allowed for the trip down the Yukon River to Dawson.

	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Length of Travel</u>	<u>Most Difficult Rapid</u>
Ross R. to Faro	43	2 days	N/A
Faro to Pelly Crossing	163	6 days	II
Pelly Crossing to Ft. Selkirk	<u>43</u>	<u>2 days</u>	<u>N/A</u>
TOTAL	249	10 days	

average velocity of Pelly River: 3-4 m.p.h.

PELLY RIVER



APPENDIX

TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP COVERAGE:

1:250,000 MAP SERIES, N.T.S.

NAME

SHEET NUMBER

QUIET LAKE
TAY RIVER
GLENLYON
CARIBACKS

105 F
105 K
105 L
115 I