

# COPPERMINE RIVER

## FOLLOWING FRANKLIN'S FOOTSTEPS TO THE 'POLAR SEA'



National Geographic Adventure  
2009 Best Adventure Travel  
Companies On Earth



CAPTION ROBERT PURNEY PHOTO

### TRIP DETAILS

Big Bend to Kugluktuk:  
Approximately 215km (135 miles)  
with an elevation drop of 280m  
(900 feet).

### SKILL LEVEL

**Raft** – Beginner  
**Canoe** – Class III Whitewater

### RENDEZVOUS POINT

Explorer Hotel, Yellowknife,  
Northwest Territories

### DURATION

17 Days

### TRIP TYPE

Raft/Canoe

*\*Please note that for canoeists, a  
wetsuit or dry suit is mandatory.  
Wetsuits are included.*

## ITINERARY

### DAY 0

Your journey north from your home  
will be a refreshing departure. You  
will fly over the largest expanse  
of wilderness in the world with  
stunning views on cloudless days.

Passing through quieter and  
friendlier airports, you will meet  
friendlier and welcoming service  
personnel and generally begin to  
immerse yourself in the wilderness  
experience that is about to unfold.

You should plan to arrive in  
Yellowknife, NWT for our  
pre-trip orientation meeting which  
will be held in the Explorer Hotel at  
8pm.

*Please note: that hotel costs and meals  
while in Yellowknife are not included in  
the trip fee.*

### DAY 1 (L/D) — TUNDRA FLIGHT

8am: meet in the hotel lobby after  
breakfast (not included). Weather  
permitting we will board a chartered  
aircraft for the flight north over the  
tundra to Great Bear Lake.



Landing on the airstrip of Plummer's Great Bear Lake Lodge we will prepare to make our final float plane flight to the Coppermine River.

While awaiting the flight we will have the opportunity to explore the shores of this vast northern lake. We will be hosted and accommodated at the lodge if we require an overnight before flying.

## DAY 2 (B/L/D) — GREAT BEAR LAKE

We will take an early morning flight into the river. After setting up camp and lunch, there will be plenty of time for our first hike in the surrounding hills to look at the wildflowers and the wildlife of the area.

## DAY 3 & 4 (B/L/D) — BIG BEND

We inflate and rig the rafts and canoes and start downstream. This is moose country and we keep a watch on the shore for these magnificent

mammals. Tundra swans and many shorebirds and ducks can be seen in this section. As we approach "Big Bend" the river narrows in width and speeds up. We pass the Hook River and an old portage to Great Bear Lake.

It was here that Franklin had arranged with the local First Nation to be resupplied on his 1821 expedition down the river. The absence of these supplies created his desperate bid for survival later that fall. At the end of the day you will cosy up in your tent in the comforts that are the hallmark of our journeys!

## DAY 5 & 6 (B/L/D) — ROCKY DEFILE

We get back into the rafts to Rocky Defile Rapids. This rapid runs through a 500-metre (1,640 ft) long and 60-metre (197 ft) high canyon. We stop here for the day. This is the start of some of the finest Arctic char fishing found anywhere.

## DAY 7 (B/L/D) — SEPTEMBER MOUNTAINS

Back on the river, we drift down past the Kendall River where the Coppermine widens into several boulder flats and islands. This area is locally known as "the Splits." From here, we get our first glance at the Coppermine and September Mountains. Our destination for the night is Stoney Creek where we sometimes find the remains of winter overflow ice.

## DAY 8 (B/L/D) — SEEKING COPPER

The culinary delights for which we are famous are, once more, whipped up by our talented gudies. Fresh fruit and produce is available every day! This is the day to look for copper in the Coppermine Mountains on a hike that will follow the footsteps of Franklin's party. You may decide to stay closer to camp to photograph and enjoy some of the many patches of abundant wildflowers.



CAPTION, PHOTOGRAPHER



## DAY 9 & 10 (B/L/D) — MUSKOX RAPIDS

We start a long section that is sandwiched between the terraced hillsides of the Coppermine Mountains on one side and the barren sloping banks of the September Mountains on the other.

At the Melville River, the Coppermine makes its final turn northward. It is here that the river makes its greatest drop, falling 152 metres (460 ft) in 72 kilometres (50 miles) over 30 sets of rapids.

The thin cover of spruce that has been following the river finally dwindles away to be replaced by tundra vegetation.

Steep cliffs and rock dominate the region making excellent breeding grounds for hawks, falcons and eagles. We drift down through Muskox and Sandstone Rapids.

## DAY 11 & 12 (B/L/D) — BLOODY FALLS

We drift downstream to Escape Rapids. Here the river flows through a high winding 50-metre (150 ft) gorge. The next 16 kilometres (10 miles) to Bloody Falls takes us through both marked and unmarked rapids on a fast river run to the boulder fan above the falls. Bloody Falls was named for the massacre of an Inuit camp by the First Nations that were guiding Samuel Hearne in 1771.

A hiking day will be spent around the falls and the portage will begin. You will get a chance for close up pictures of the golden eagles that nest here as well as hike to a local peak for our first look at the “Polar Sea.”

## DAY 13 (B/L/D) — KUGLUKTUK

Only 16 kilometres (10 miles) of the Coppermine remain until it reaches the ocean. After finishing the portage around the falls, we will complete this remaining section of the river.

We reach the town of Kugluktuk in the late afternoon and the rest of the day is yours to explore the town. In the evening we will fly back to Great Bear Lake.

## DAY 14 (B/L/D) — GREAT BEAR LAKE

The comfort of Great Bear Lake Lodge will be a welcome chance to wind down and enjoy hot showers and the surrounding lake environment.

This day also gives us a buffer to ensure we have made the hop from Kugluktuk in time for our southbound flight back to Yellowknife on Saturday.

## DAY 15 & 16 (B/L/D) — HOMEWARD BOUND

The charter aircraft will return us to Yellowknife by mid-afternoon.

Because of the challenges of northern bush flying, we highly recommend you plan to overnight in Yellowknife



and book your flights home for the following morning.

Clothing Note: While following our checklist in The Details package, please note the specific considerations for the tundra rivers.

All tundra trips require good quality foul weather gear. Rubber boots make excellent footwear. Mosquitoes are abundant on the tundra.

We have found that a bug shirt works very well to manage these pests and are an absolute requirement for venturing out onto the tundra. Dressing in light colours is also preferable as dark clothing seems to attract mosquitoes more readily.

## SUGGESTED READING

*Your guides will carry a small reference library that includes field reference books. Following are some books for winter reading:*

**Narrative of a journey to the shores of the Polar Sea in the years 1819, '20, '21 & '22** by Sir John Franklin, M.G. Hurtig

**Narrative of a second expedition to the shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1825, 1826 & 1827** by Sir John Franklin, M.G. Hurtig

**Summer North of Sixty: by Paddle and Portage Across the Barren Lands** by James Raffan

**Caribou of the Barren Lands** by George Calef

**The Incredible Eskimo by DeCoccoa & King The Muskox of Polar Bear Pass** by David R

**Barrenland Beauties: Showy Plants of the Arctic Coast** by Page Burt

**A Naturalist's Guide to the Arctic** by E.C. Chris Pielou

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BEN PALTIEL AND MICHAEL GOURLEY TRYING TO  
CATCH ANOTHER BIG FISH.  
PHOTO: CRE ARCHIVES.