

The CANOL HERITAGE TRAIL

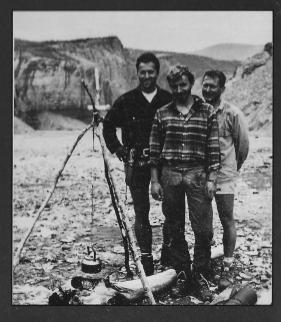












THE CANOL HERITAGE TRAIL

by

TIM HAWKINGS

for

THE SAHTU TOURISM ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 1994

NOTICE

The advice given in this glude will help experienced hikers plan and enjoy a hike on the CANOL Trail. The judgements are mine, and may not apply to all parties attempting the Trail

The information provided was accurate as of August 1993, But hikers should realize that, conditions in the mountains and on the Trait change from season to season, and year to year.

The Trail is remote and long. There are three difficult river crossings, one of which, the Twitya, puts hikers in considerable danger. There are no emergency services on the Trail.

For these reasons the CANOL Trail is one of the toughest hikes in Canada

It should only be attempted by experienced, strong and well organized parties, capable of helping themselves if something goes wrong.

A number of people made suggestions that improved this guide. I would like to thank. Warren Schmitke and Lois Hill particularly.

Tim Hawkings. February 1994.

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THE CANOL HERITAGE TRAIL

Introduction.

50 years ago, during World War II the American Army Corps of Engineers supervised the building of a road and pipeline from an oil field at Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories, to a refinery at Whitehorse in the Yukon. At the end of the war the pipeline was shut down. The steel pipe and much of the equipment was taken away, but today in the most remote and rugged area of the mountains, parts of the road, remains of some of the buildings and the hulks of many of the vehicles remain.

This is the CANOL HeritageTrail, a 355 kilometer route that winds through the heart of the Mackenzie Mountains, from the Mackenzie River at Norman Wells, to Macmillan Pass on the Northwest Territories/Yukon border. It follows the hunting trails of the Mountain Dene, across fast flowing rivers, through lonely mountain passes and over barren windswept plateau. Magnificent scenery, abundant plants, northern animals and birds, and historical artifacts make the CANOL Trail one of the most spectacular and interesting hikes in Canada.

It is also one of the most challenging hikes in Canada.

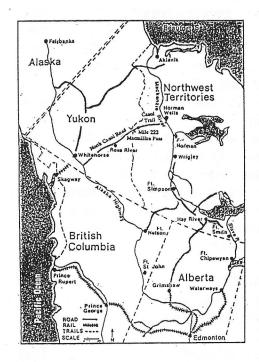
It is remote and long and there are no services on the Trail. Only strong, experienced hikers should attempt the CANOL Trail, for once you are on the Trail, you are on your own.

But for those who are experienced, who have organized their food caches, and who are prepared for the river crossings, hiking the CANOL Trail is a magnificent and rewarding experience.

CANOL MILEPOSTS.

When the CANOL Road was built distances were marked by Mileposts, (1 mile = 1.6 kilometers), and the camps, pump stations and river crossings were designated according to their distance from Mile 0 at Norman Wells. This guide will continue to use the milepost designations to describe places on the Trail.

All distances will be described in miles and kilometers.



The eastern end of the Trail can be reached by crossing the Mackenzie River by boat, helicopter or charter plane at Norman Wells.

boat, helicopter or charter plane at Norman Wells. Norman Wells is serviced by Canadian Airlines daily jet service from Edmonton. (There is no road to Norman Wells in the summer time.) The western end of the Trail is a small unmaintained airstrip at Mile 222, 7 miles east of Macmillan Pass (NWT/Yukon border). The Government the of Northwest **Territories** operates a game check station here. It has a radio telephone, but no other facilities.

Macmillan Pass can be reached by charter plane from Norman Wells, Ross River or Whitehorse, or by driving from Whitehorse and the Alaska Highway, to Ross River, and then driving up the North CANOL Road. This is a long, rough road. There is limited maintenance, in the summer only, and even so low clearance vehicles may have trouble crossing some of the streams where the bridges have washed out. There are no public transportation services on the 250 miles (400 Kilometers) of the North CANOL Road, between the Alaska Highway and Macmillan Pass. From McMillan Pass to Mile 222, the road is just a track across the Barrens. Two tributaries of the Tischu River may have to be forded where bridges may be washed out.

Whitehorse is serviced by Canadian Airlines, from Edmonton or Vancouver.

For those who wish to start their hike on a particular part of the Trail, or who wish to visit only part of the route, there are a number of landing strips and lakes that can be reached by small plane. Helicopters which can provide access to almost any part of the Trail, are available in Norman Wells.

TRAIL CONDITIONS.

50 years ago it was possible to drive a vehicle along the CANOL Road, from the Mackenzie River near Norman Wells to Whitehorse in the Yukon. Today, only the western section of the CANOL Road, from Macmillan Pass, at the NWT Yukon border, to Johnsons Crossing on the Alaska Highway, is maintained as a single lane gravel road. The eastern section of the original CANOL Road, from the Mackenzie River to Camp 222, near Macmillan Pass, (222 miles, 355 kilometers) is the part that is now called the CANOL Heritage Trail.

In some parts of the Trail the roadbed remains, but for the most part the Trail is a narrow track that follows boulder strewn river beds and steep mountain sides. All the original bridges were either removed at the end of the project or have been destroyed by the fast flowing rivers of the Mackenzie Mountains.

Today it is not possible to drive a car or truck along the CANOL Heritage Trail.

DISTANCES

Some groups hike the entire length of the CANOL Trail. Others access it from one of the lakes or airstrips, and hike just a part of it.

The many river crossings, the rough conditions of the Trial and the fact that most hikers are carrying a relatively heavy load, make for fairly slow hiking. From Mile 0 to Mile 135, 10-12.5 miles per day (16-20 kilometers), is a good average for strong hikers. From Mile 135 – Mile 222, the trail is in better condition and strong hikers can average 12.5-15 miles per day. (20-24 kilometers)

But why hurry? You made a big effort to get to the CANOL. An overall average of 10 miles per day (16 kilometers) will allow you to enjoy the beauty of the Mackenzie Mountains, will give you time for emergencies and bad weather, and will give you the chance to sleep in once or twice.

THE ROAD BED.

From the Mackenzie River (Mile 5), to the Twitya River (Mile 135), the road has been washed out in several river valleys and in other places. Mountain biking is not recommended on this part of the Trail – those who have tried it have had to carry their bikes for long distances over boulders the size of refrigerators, and across steep cut banks and wash outs. For the same reasons, travel by off road vehicle on this part of the Trail, is difficult and dangerous, and is not recommended.

ELEVATIONS

The CANOL road builders had engines to carry their loads up and down the steep grades of the Mackenzie Mountains. Hikers have only their legs.

At the Mackenzie River the elevation of the Trail is 200 feet (65 meters) above sea level. For the next 80 miles, (128 kilometers) there are many elevation changes as the Trail rises on the mountain sides and falls in the river valleys. It reaches 5437 feet (1754 meters) on the Plains of Abraham (Mile 84).

From here the Trail continues with significant elevation changes, falling to 2050 feet (660 meters) at the Twitya crossing. It then rises gradually to 3600 feet (1160 meters) at Godlin Lakes and from Godlin the Trail maintains a steady elevation of 4000 – 4750 feet (1300 –1550 meters) along the valley of the Equi River and over the Mackenzie Barrens to Mile 222.

RIVER CROSSINGS.

The river crossing are the real challenge on the CANOL Trail. There are three particularly difficult ones, the Carcajou (Mile 25), the Little Keele (Mile 50) and the Twitya (Mile 135). Short span bridges were used on the CANOL, and so the Trail crosses some rivers at their narrowest, deepest and fastest flowing part. This is not the best place for hikers and at two rivers particularly, the Twitya and the Little Keele it is best to cross on gravel bars upstream of the Trail crossing, where the river is shallower.

The Twitya is the deepest and most dangerous of the CANOL rivers. You will need to swim or float across, using either an inner tube, inflatable boat or some other kind of raft.

The Little Keele and the Carcajou are also fast flowing but they may be waded. A strong stick, linked arms and/or a rope make for a safer crossing. All of the CANOL Trail Rivers, like mountain rivers everywhere, are cold fast flowing and unpredictable. They rise quickly during a heavy rain and then take several days to subside. Swollen rivers are deep, fast and dangerous, and hikers would be wise to wait for them to go down before trying to cross.

WEATHER.

The CANOL Trail passes through the Mackenzie Mountains close to the Arctic Circle. Winters are long and summers are short in this part of the world – from October to June the mountains are locked in by snow. Early on in the summer the rivers are high, fast flowing and cold as the snow is still melting. This is not a good time for hikers to be trying to cross them. Toward to end of the summer, starting in mid August, hikers can expect some cold weather and snow in the mountains.

Therefore the best time to hike the CANOL Trail is from mid July to mid August. This is the period of lowest rainfall, and warmest temperatures. Remember though that weather in the mountains is always unpredictable. Rain and storms will bring near freezing temperatures even in the middle of summer. A warm sweater, jacket and waterproof outer layer is essential.

But the most important item of clothing on the CANOL Trail is boots – and they will be wet from the very beginning to the very end of the hike. Modern Gore–Tex boots with a good insole, are much better under these conditions than leather. Also a pair of Gore– Tex socks which you can put on at the end of the day to keep your feet dry in wet boots, will significantly reduce the chance of blisters. A pair of runners are good for crossing rivers, and comfortable at the end of the day.

LOGISTICS.

Because of the length of the CANOL Trail the only way to hike it is by establishing food drops. These can best be put in by a small plane wherever there is an airstrip and buildings – at Mile 222, 170, 108, and 80. The cost of chartering a small plane ranges from \$1.70 – \$3.50 per mile, depending on the size, and you have to pay for the round trip. So laying in the food caches is expensive.

Food, fuel and basic camping supplies can be purchased at Norman Wells. However most hikers on the CANOL Trail will want to use their own specialised lightweight equipment, and it is best not only to bring this with you but to have tried it out many times. You can't get spare parts on the CANOL Trail.

There is water everywhere on the Trail, however it should be purified before drinking. There is wood for fires in many places, but don't rely on it, and don't tear down parts of buildings. Bring a stove and adequate fuel.

There are no organized camp sites on the CANOL Trail, but you can camp just about anywhere beside it. Buildings at Mile 208, 108, 80, 75, 50 and 36 can provide some shelter.

BEARS

There are grizzly and black bear in the area of the CANOL Trail, so hikers should use common sense to avoid them and take the usual precautions with food and garbage, including the use of bear proof food containers, where possible. Noise makers such as bear bells and air horns should be carried, and a canister of pepper spray can be taken to use as a last resort.

MOSQUITOS

On a windy day high in the Mackenzie Mountains, the hiker will not notice mosquitos. On a quiet day deep in a damp valley, they will be unpleasant. These are the two extremes and on a trip along the CANOL Trail hikers will experience both. So bring repellant and they will leave you alone. And since a head net is cheap and weighs very little you may want to bring one of those as well.

EMERGENCIES

There are no organized emergency or rescue services on the CANOL Trail. Oldsquaw Lodge (Mile 212) and the hunting lodge at Godlin Lakes, (Mile 170) will help hikers in an extreme emergency. However their guests reserve many months ahead, and the lodges are not set up to support casual visitors. Any help received must be paid for.

Except for the extreme western end, the CANOL Trail is out of the range of the VHF (line of sight) radio telephone system that exists in other parts of Northern Canada. And cellular phones don't work in this part of the North.

You might be able to attract the attention of the pilots of the small planes that are carrying hunters and fishermen throughout the Mackenzie Mountains. This can be done by radio. Most pilots monitor 126.6 MHz (general communications), the VHF 121.5 MHz (emergency transmissions) and also the 444.1 (the general SSB frequency). The VHF airband emergency radios weigh 1.5 pounds (675 g). The SSB radios are heavy, approx. 11 pounds (5 kilos) so most hikers will chose not to carry them.

There is also another way. Pilots provided they are flying low enough, will respond to emergency (red) flares, a mirror or other emergency signals. Most of the time they won't be able to land, so all they can do is call for a helicopter from Norman Wells. Helicopters cost in the order of \$900 per hour, and hikers will have to pay for their own rescue. So the lesson for the CANOL Trail is: **BE PREPARED** and **BE CAREFUL**

REGISTRATION

For all hikers not using an outfitting or guiding service, it is important to report your intentions and schedule to the RCMP in either Ross River or Norman Wells, along with your intended date of completion of the Trail. Don't forget to check in with the RCMP at your destination otherwise they will come looking for you.

FIREARMS AND FISHING LICENCES

Sport fishing licences and regulations can be obtained from Renewable Resources, Government of the NWT offices and from some licence vendors. For further specific information contact Renewable Resources, Norman Wells.

Tel: (403) 587-2310 or 587-2422 and Fax: (403) 587-2204.

Firearms Acquisition Certificate is required to purchase or acquire a firearm anywhere in Canada. Hikers are permitted to carry non-restricted firearms, including common hunting rifles and shotguns. During transportation they must be unloaded, inoperable or securely locked and separate from ammunition. Non-restricted firearms may be brought into Canada upon declaration to customs.

Restricted firearms are not permitted. These include handguns, fully automatic firearms and semi-automatic rifles and shotguns with a barrel length less than 18½ inches (470mm).

MAPS

For experienced hikers, route finding on the CANOL Trail is relatively easy, since for the most part, the Trail follows valleys and rivers. But as for any hike through mountains in remote areas, it is absolutely essential to know where you are at all times. Topographical maps should be used, and they can be acquired through Canada Map Office, Department of Energy Mines and Resources, or other map dealers, in major cities in Canada.

1:250,000 scale, (4 miles to the inch, 5 kilometers to 1.875 cm approx.) maps are adequate, and the correct set of maps is 96D, 96E, 106A, 105Q and 105P. The scale is a little small for hiking, but they are extremely accurate, and you only need five.

1:50,000 maps will give you a really clear idea of where you are. However they are expensive and bulky.

Allow time to obtain the maps, some may need to be ordered.

The Sahtu Tourism Office in Norman Wells has a limited supply of 1:250,000 topographic maps of the CANOL Trail area available at a cost of \$10 each. But hikers should not rely on all the maps being available, and should bring their own set.

SERVICES

Norman Wells is the closest town to the Canol Trail. Services include shops, hotels, restuarants, airlines and air charter businesses. It is a logical place from which to start a CANOL journey

THE NORMAN WELLS HISTORICAL CENTER.

If you are starting a CANOL Trail hike in Norman Wells you might wish to visit the Historical Center. This small but very interesting museum has a number of Canol vehicles and in a section dedicated to the CANOL, a series of maps, photographs, artifacts and stories which will prepare you for what you will see on the Trail. It has a Video Theatre with an extensive library of World War and CANOL films that are available for viewing.

Address, PO Box 56, Norman Wells, NWT. XOE 0V0.

Canada.

Tel: 587-2415, fax 587-2469.

P.S. If you finish your hike in Norman Wells, drop in there on your way home. You will see some of the things you missed and it will increase your overall appreciation of the tremendous effort that it took to build the CANOL Pipeline..

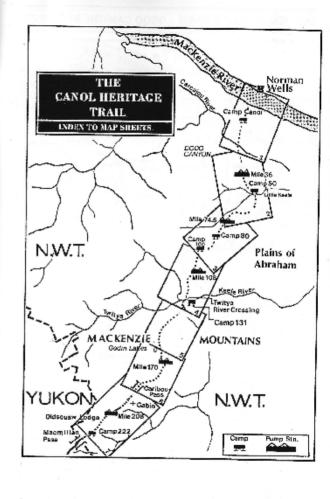
FURTHER INFORMATION.

Anyone seriously interested in hiking the Trail, should correspond with the Sahtu Tourism Office who will provide current trail reports and advise on conditions.

Sahtu Tourism Association PO Box 115, Norman Wells, Northwest Territories. XOE 0V0. Canada.

Tel. (403) 587-2054 Fax (403) 587-2935

Planning Notes.	
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Mile 5 - Mile 30

Mackenzie Plains. - S Bank of Mackenzie River to Dodo Canyon (Distances measured from Norman Wells on north bank of River.

Mile 5 - Mile 25

Road is in generally good Most of Camp CANOL was condition through ponds, spruce bulldozed to the ground in 1977. bogs, willow and aspen poplar A few derelict quonset huts woods. Easy but wet hiking, remain. The old post office, that many mosquitos, hot and has been used recently for tedious in summer, make sure stabling horses, still stands. Two you drink enough water.

Mile 25. Carcajou River.

Wide, fast flowing river, can be deep and difficult to cross in The Government flood Look for shallow braided emergency tent stream portion for crossing. May Twentyfive Mile Creek, need to link arms or use a rope. bears and weather have opened

River - Dodo Canyon

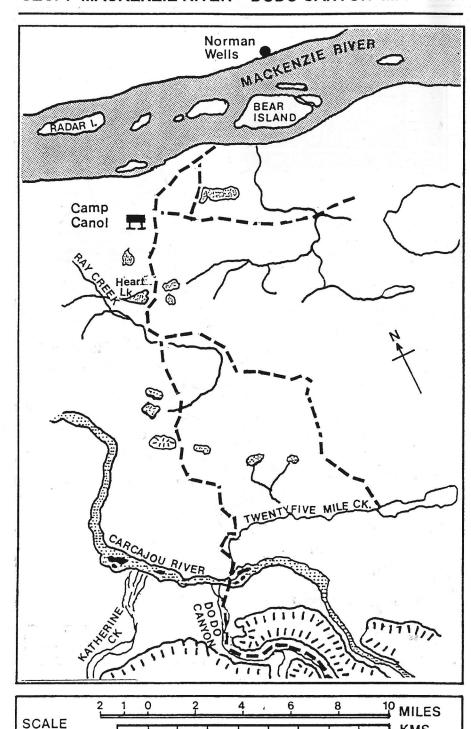
Route runs along the wide flood plain of Dodo Creek. Trail washed out. Very difficult, slow going over boulder beds.

Camp CANOL - Mile 8

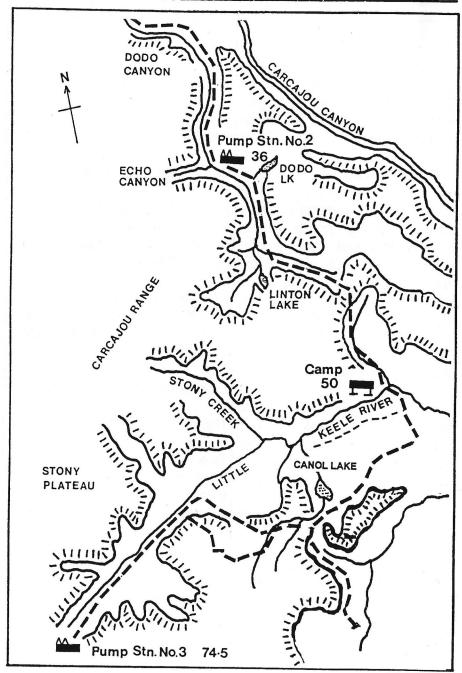
wooden aircraft hangers, (nosehangers) are worth making a side trip to see.

Emergency Shelter - Mile 22

built shelter at it to the 4 winds, and its Mile 25 - Mile 30. Carcajou condition cannot be guaranteed.



KMS



MILES SCALE

Mile 30 - Mile 40

Road mostly washed out in the Pump Stn #2 valley of Dodo Creek, Slow, wet Pump house in good condition, going as you have to cross the N end has room with stove, stream several times.

Mile 40 - Mile 44.

3/4 mile of good road as the Trail leaves Dodo Creek, then Mile 42 Trail missing on the S side of Partially submerged caboose in the tributary coming into Dodo creek bed. Creek. Heavy going up the boulder bed to the pass.

Mile 44 - Mile 50.

the side of the mountain, down on the road. to Camp 50.

Mile 50 - Little Keele.

Deep, fast flowing river, difficult One small shack preserved, to cross. Look for the braided with 3 cots, table and stove. stream portion upstream of the Other trail crossing.

Mile 50 - Mile 60

Good trail through balsam parkland to limestone plateau From the Trail in this area there west of Carcajou Falls, and past is a potential side trip to Canol Lake.

Mountain.

generally good except where to look for them. washed out. Even though the climb is strenuous, take the high Mile 74.5 (southerly) road, not the braided Pump Stn #3 stream of the L Keele. Coming Many derelict buildings and to find.

M69 - Pump Stn. M -74.5 Tough going over boulder beds. stove.

Mile 36

kitchen and 4 cots. Many other buildings, mostly derelict.

Mile 43

Good road switchbacking on 2 cabooses and a trailer in line,

Camp 50.

buildings poor condition.

Carcajou Falls. But the present Mile 60 - Mile 69. Blue location of the Falls on the topo. maps is wrong, and hikers High exposed road on the side should confirm their exact of the Mountain. The road is location with a pilot before going

from the other direction (SW) abandoned vehicles. Oil tanks, the road up the mountain is hard generator shack and privvy in good condition. One quonset preserved, with cots, table and

Pump Stn. No.3 STONY PLATEAU White the standard of the stan PLAINS 4 OF Camp **ABRAHAM** Caboose 4 CANYON RANGES **Camp 100** HIMITITIA

SCALE	2	1	ọ	2			4 6		8 .		10 MILES	
		2	1	ò	2	4.	6	8	10	12	14 KMS	

Mile 74.5 - Mile 80

Continuous washouts and heavy An interesting side trip, 6.5 going from Mile 74.5 to Mile 77. miles (10.4 km), up the Little Then good trail up ravine to Keele River, W.S.W. of Pump Camp 80 on top of Plains of Station #3. Good fishing. Abraham

Mile 80 - Mile 85.

Good trail on top of Plains of A ruined road camp high on the Abraham, a lonely desolate Plains of Abraham. One building place. Windswept and exposed, has a tarpaulin over the roof, spectacular views. Water scarce and even though it leaks, it but present. You have to look provides good shelter with 3 for it.

Watch out for telephone line interesting equipment, including that has fallen across the Trail a stove dump, snow blower and at face height, at about mile other vehicles. Airstrip. 88

Mile 85 - Mile 90 Switchbacks down to Camp 90 2/3 ruined at Mile 84.5, at start and the Carcajou River. Good of descent to the Carcajou road, but you can also follow the River. telephone line to cut off some of the switchbacks.

Mile 90 - Camp 100 descend to the valley of the rubbish outside. Carcajou. Good road up the valley of the Carcajou, to Camp Camp 100. 100. Few washouts.

Carcajou Lake.

Camp 80.

cots, a table and stove. Other buildings including a large garage are ruined. Lots of

Overturned caboose at Mile 83.5, and another upright, but

Camp 90.

All that is left is a ruined Climb on a good road, then caboose with no roof, and lots of

A large red roofed building that looks inviting, but isn't. The south end is dry with two bunks and a huge stove. The northern 2/3 has no walls and is open to the 3 winds.

KMS

Mile 100 - Mile 108 Bolstead Creek. Generally good condition, some washouts

Mile 108 - Mile 115 Devils Pass. from 108 to Devils Pass, then condition with stove, table, 6 - 8 descend to Trout Creek.

Trout Creek. Road washed out N of Mile 118. unmaintained airstrip. Look for game trails on east side, or walk up stream bed. Many crossings, creek is fast and cold. This is one of worst parts of the Trail.

Mile 118 – 121.

Mile 115 - Mile 118

Trout Creek. generally good condition, some open. Good place to camp. washouts and steep cut banks.

Mile 121 - 131. Trout Creek to Twitya River.

Mile 131.

Twitya River Crossing.

at Decca Creek.

River is narrow, fast deep and Mile 131. Twitya River Camp. section 2 miles to Bushwacking required through alder woods.

Camp 100 (See previous page).

Pump Station # 4. Mile 108. Many buildings and vehicle Good condition. Steady climb remains. One quonset in good cots.

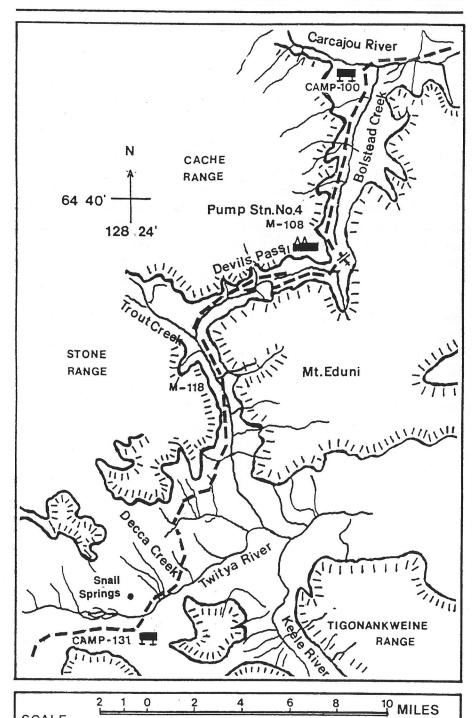
> The road at camp 108 is used a short. narrow. as

Mile 118. Trout Creek crossing. Ruined caboose, floor only Road on west side of creek, remaining. Stove and 2 cots in

Lymnia (Snail) Springs.

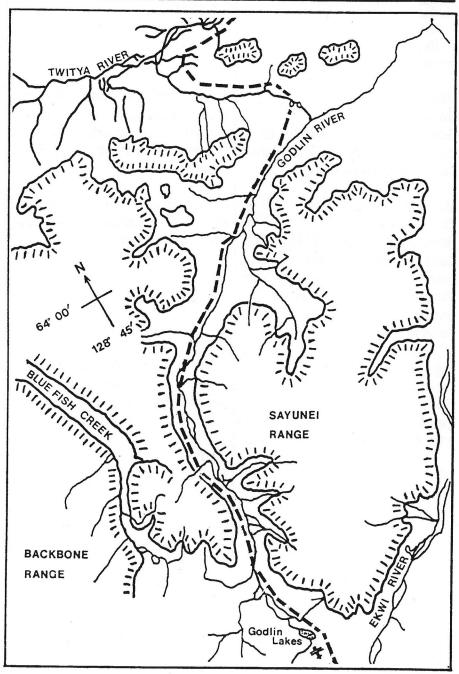
The topo. map shows Snail Springs, 1 mile N.W. of the Steady descent to valley of Twitya River Crossing. They Twitya River. Road in good provide a welcome soak for condition. Extensive alluvial fan hikers, but they are hard to find on the ground as there is no obvious path through the alder woods.

dangerous at Trail crossing. Many derelict buildings. No River is shallower at braided shelter on either side of the west. river.



SCALE

SEC. 5. TWITYA RIVER - GODLIN LAKES MI 135 - MI 170



SCALE	2	1	ọ		?	4		Ģ	8		10 MILES	
		2	1	Ö	2	4	6	8	10	12	14 KMS	

Mile 133- Mile 143

Twitya to the Godlin River.

Road moderately good, thick underbrush, overgrown and wet underfoot. Swampy at Mile 141 just before the Godlin River.

Mile 143 - Mile 170 Godlin River.

Good road in the valley of the trips. No facilities for hikers, but Godlin River, except for the Stan and Debbie have a radio washouts. At mile 147, stay high and will provide help in real on the north west side, dont emergencies. cross the river.

Mile 142 Ruined caboose

Mile 169

Ramhead Outfitters

Hunting Lodge, owned by Stan and Debbie Simpson. From July to October offers guided hunting

Airstrip and lake for float planes.

Mile 170

Pump Station #5

Pumphouse, quonsets, tanks and vehicle hulks.

One building partially preserved, roof OK but doors and windows gone.

Mile 170 - Mile 183

Valley of the Ekwi River.

Road in poor-good condition, boulder beds, some washouts and many wet and overgrown areas. The road crosses the Ekwi and its tributaries several times. The river can respond to heavy rain with flood like increases in depth, and the crossings may be difficult.

From M-185 - Mile 192 the road dissapears into the bed of the Ekwi River. Look for the game trail which takes to the higher ground.

Then climb up to Caribou Pass through a narrow rocky valley.

M - 193 Caribou Pass.

Caribou Pass leads to the valley of the Intga River and to the Mackenzie Barrens, a high austere beautiful alpine area.

There are no significant buildings on this part of the Trail. There is one cabin, used by Oldsquaw Lodge, at about Mile 192, near Caribou Pass.



TRAIL CONDITION

Valley of the Intga River washouts, overgrown in places.

At the crossing of the Intga at and stove. mile 205 the road starts the Here there are also vehicle, and climb past Pump station #6 to barrel dumps, and equipment the Mackenzie Barrens.

Mile 208 - Mile 222

The track across the Barrens, is generally good. It may be damp Mile 212 underfoot, and it is lonely and Oldsquaw Lodge remote but the river crossings A private wilderness lodge, are small and manageable.

Mile 222

for the CANOL. From here a September. four wheel drive vehicle can follow the track to the gravel Mile 217 road at Macmillan Pass that is Road camp with ruined shacks maintained in summer.

Mile 208

Pump Station #6

Pumphouse, generator shack, Road in good condition, few ruined quonsets, a corral and one cookhouse, maintained by Stan Simpson, with a cot, table

> scattered around, cabooses on their sides all paraphernalia of a CANOL pumpstation.

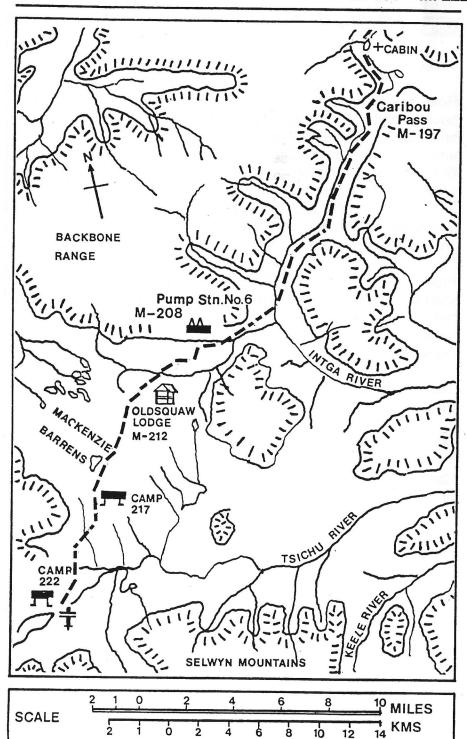
providing one week stays to registered guests wishing to study the animal, plant and bird life of the Barrens. The Lodge is This is the western trail head open from late June to early

and abandoned vehicles. This is where the North and South sections of the road met on December 31 1943.

Camp 222

Few buildings remaining from the CANOL camp.

Small unmaintained airstrip and Game Check station. maintained by the Department Renewable Resources. GNWT. Radio phone. No other facilities.



Trail Notes.					
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Tim Hawkings Lois Hill Warren Schmitke Richard Popko Frank Pope Fiona Meszes

