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Field set for 16th annual Yukon River Quest

Pre-race tally has 66 teams from 13 countries entered in “Race to the Midnight Sun”

By YRQ MEDIA

The race roster is set for the 16th annual Yukon River Quest, which will begin on Wednesday, June 25 in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. This year’s field will feature 66 teams with 153 paddlers from all over the world. It is the largest international field in the race’s history.

Thirteen countries are represented: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, French Polynesia, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States.

The number of teams is one shy of last year’s count at this time, though 62 actually started the race and 49 finished in 2013.

Except for two mandatory rest stops totaling 10 hours, paddlers race non-stop over approximately 715 kilometers (444 miles) to Dawson City. Held annually in the north during the last week of June (around the summer solstice), it is a true “Race to the Midnight Sun” where many of the world’s best paddlers gather.

Following the race is a lot of fun, whether you are watching from alongside the river or sitting at home. All teams are required to have activated SPOT devices, which will greatly aid those following the race on their computers or mobile devices. Just follow the Results link at www.yukonriverquest.com and also watch for updates and photos on the race’s Facebook page. You can even replay the race when it’s all over.

The total possible 2014 race purse will be about \$22,500 (CAD) based on a final registration of 66 teams as of May 15. There are overall cash prizes for each class – tandem canoe, tandem kayak, solos, and voyageur canoes – as well as prizes for the top three in each division. There also are cash prizes for the top all-Yukon canoe and kayak teams, and the top First Nations team. Several special awards are also donated by Yukon and Alaska sponsors. But most of the paddlers are just aiming to get to Dawson and be awarded a coveted YRQ Finisher Pin.

Who to Watch on the River

There are very few returning champions in this year’s race, which means most classes are up for grabs. This is another year where any number of different craft could emerge as the overall winner. Here’s a breakdown by class:

- Solo canoe (C1): 5 teams – The favorites have to be two Ontario paddlers:

Gaetan Plourde, the record holder in this class, and last year's C1 winner, Jeff Brainard. But Robert LaFontaine from Manitoba has been in a lot of races and could be a threat.

- Solo kayak (K1): 15 teams (12 men, 3 women)- On the men's side, watch out for The Black Sheep, Darran Williams, from the United Kingdom, who improved his time by several hours last year, and Slackjack, David Williams, of South Carolina, who has experience in several races in the Lower 48. And then there's race ironman Heinz Rodinger of Austria; even at 73, the former Olympian is always a threat. On the women's side, watch out for Team Buzz, Therese Powell, an Australian with lots of racing experience, Kelley Watson of Washington state, and Yukon Girl on Top Denise Norman.

- Tandem canoe (C2): 24 teams (11 men's teams, 3 women's, 10 mixed) - The largest class in the race is the most diverse and appears to be wide open. The women's race could be the most interesting with a pair of experienced Yukon teams, 50/50 (Noreen Schaefer and Shelley Gellatly) and No Turning Back (Pat McKenna and Elizabeth Bosely, going up against Yu-kon Du-et, a young team from Alberta. The mixed team of Av It from the United Kingdom is back for another go at the YRQ and has race experience in the UK. The Waterloo, Ontario men's team Zen Force 1 with Graham Roe and Christoph Kesting raced the tough Muskoka River 100 last year, and watch out for the father-son team Puha no Huahine (Phillipe and Nicholas Esteva) from French Polynesia, and the brothers Vogelsmeier on the Missouri team Show Me Drifters.

- Tandem kayak (K2): 14 teams (9 men's teams, 2 women's, 3 mixed) - The K2 class features a couple of strong teams from the UK, Two Numbnuts Shaun Thrower and Steve King, and Buff Canyon with Tom Hughes and Peter Liggins. Also watch out for the Guatemalan team Generacion A, Alvaro and Alejandro Aguirre. In mixed kayak is the father-daughter team Barefoot Paddlers with former YRQ president Carl Rumscheidt and Mary Obstfeld. Sausalito Sisters a California-Yukon team of experienced racers Priscilla McKenney and Ali Morham looks tough in women's K2.

- Voyageur canoe (VC): 8 teams (2 women's, and 6 mixed teams). With no open class men's team in the hunt this year, the women will lead the way, whether in a mixed boat or an all-female canoe. In women's, Paddlers Abreast and Team Whoa will continue their friendly rivalry in the YRQ. On the mixed side, some race veterans are at the helm of a few teams. Yukoners Jim and Pam Boyde will lead Team Ts'alvit (Otter) with other experienced racers; HA55 will have iron woman Ingrid Wilcox of Whitehorse aboard; and The Skagnicent Six will be led by long-time race media guy Jeff Brady and a mostly Skagway, Alaska crew with guest paddler Nadia White, the great granddaughter of gold rush journalist Stroller White who is retracing the route of her great grandmother Josie. Two teams from the Netherlands and Team Sunrise from Japan round out the crew boats.

Bios for every team in the race, are at: <http://www.yukonriverquest.com/yrq/app/14yrq/teams.php>

The Start & Race Route

The race organization invites spectators to gather in Rotary Peace Park and along the waterfront on the morning of Wednesday, June 25 to witness the spectacular start and cheer this outstanding international field. The racers line

up for introductions at 11:30 a.m. with the historic SS Klondike looming in the background. Then the horn blows at 12 noon and the participants run a short distance to their boats. Watching all the colorful boats leaving Whitehorse is truly one of the most spectacular sights in the north. Then it's a long paddle on Lake Laberge, through the waning light of the midnight sun on the Thirtymile heritage section, and then on to Carmacks and the first rest stop of 7 hours on Thursday. After some sleep, they head down Five Finger Rapid, past historic Fort Selkirk, and on to the final rest stop at Kirkman Creek for 3 hours. That gives them energy for the last 100 miles to Dawson City. Teams will finish sometime between the afternoon of Friday, June 27 and Saturday, June 28 just before midnight, the official finish time for the race. An awards banquet will be held at Robert Service School on June 29.

More Volunteers, Sponsors Welcome

Like many great Yukon events, the River Quest could not happen without a tremendous volunteer effort from those in our river communities. Volunteers are needed to help in Whitehorse, Carmacks, and Dawson and a few remote checkpoints along the river. There are still spots available, so if you are interested in volunteering, please call the race office at 867-333-5628 or email yrvolunteers@gmail.com. Check the Volunteer tab on the website to see where you could help.

Complete team bios and a race schedule are online at www.yukonriverquest.com and will appear in a special Whitehorse Star race supplement on June 23.

The race is organized by the Yukon River Marathon Paddling Association, based in Whitehorse. Major logo-level sponsors on board for 2014 include the Whitehorse Star, Kanoë People, Air North, yukoninfo.com, Northland Beverages-Aquafina, City of Whitehorse, Up North Adventures, Superior Roofing and Renovation, and Gold Trail Jewellers.

Many small businesses also support the race by sponsoring bibs worn by paddlers. A complete sponsor list appears on the race website along with a link to a sponsor package.

NEED MORE INFO:

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