

## About the Yukon River

The Yukon River was called Kweek-puk (Great River) by the Alaskan Inupiat, and Kwitchook by the exploring Russians. In the Yukon Territory it is Takambo (Wide Open Waters Place) to the Kwanlin Dun at Whitehorse and Tago Cho Ge to the Selkirk people at Pelly Crossing/Fort Selkirk. Robert Campbell, a trader for the Hudson's Bay Company (H.B.Co.), travelled to what he called the "Lewes" River in 1843 via the Liard and Pelly rivers. John Bell, also of the H.B.Co., first saw the "Youcon" River in 1845 when he explored the western Mackenzie drainage and travelled down the Porcupine River. In 1862 Campbell confirmed that his "Lewes" and Bell's "Youcon" were the same river. At various times the source of the Yukon was thought to be the Teslin, the Lewes or the Pelly rivers. After the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98, the riverboat pilots distinguished parts of the river by name, such as the Fiftymile from Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge, and the Thirtymile from Lake Laberge to the Teslin. In 1964 "Yukon River" was applied to the entire watercourse from Marsh Lake in the Yukon Territory to the Bering Sea at the Alaska coast. By whatever name, the Yukon has been a major transportation route and a bountiful source of food since the last Ice Age. – from the Yukon Territorial Government sign at the Yukon River bridge on the Alaska Highway, near where the river begins at Marsh Lake

## History of the Yukon River Quest 'The race to the midnight sun'

By JEFF BRADY  
YRQ Media

The Yukon River Quest had its beginnings during the Klondike Gold Rush Centennial years. Here's our history with some highlights from each YRQ race year.

### How it all began...

#### Dyea to Dawson Centennial Race to the Klondike, 1997-1998

The Yukon River Quest had its birth in the Dyea to Dawson Centennial Race to the Klondike.

In 1997 and 1998, up to 50 two-person teams hiked over the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail from Dyea, Alaska to Lake Bennett, and then got in their canoes and paddled 100 miles of headwater lakes to the beginning of the Yukon River in Whitehorse, where they continued on for another 460 miles to Dawson City.

The event was a tremendous success, drawing adventure athletes from around the world, but the best teams were always the best paddlers. The 1997 event was won by the Fairbanks, Alaska team of Jim Lokken and Art Ward, and the 1998 event was won by the international team of Solomon Carriere of Cumberland House, Sask. and Steve Landick of Marquette, Mich.

The event was held only during those Klondike Gold Rush centennial years because its length made it a two-week event and difficult logistically to manage year after year, but there was tremendous interest among racers in continuing part of the event.

Dyea to Dawson organizers Jeff Brady and Buckwheat Donahue of Skagway, Alaska turned over their race notes to John Firth of Whitehorse, a participant in both races, and he solicited help from the Yukon Quest International dog sled race organization to promote a new summer event.

## 1999 - Inaugural Yukon River Quest Carriere-Lokken win first event.

Firth solicited the help of a core group of volunteers who had helped with the Dyea to Dawson events, and the first Yukon River Quest began with a running LeMans-style start at noon on June 9th, 1999.

Sixteen teams of two ran to their canoes on the shore near Rotary Park in Whitehorse and started the 460-mile journey to Dawson.

Aside from an eight hour layover at Minto, teams carried on nonstop to Dawson.

First in at a time of 56 hours, nine minutes (48:09 elapsed) was the elite pair of Solomon Carriere and Jim Lokken, a combined team of Dyea to Dawson winners. Mark Bayard and John Roberts of British Columbia and Alberta were three hours behind, and the Yukon team of Mike Onesi and Jason Murphy took third.

The first women's team was Laura Cabott and Danusia Kanachowski of Whitehorse in 71 hours, 20 minutes (63:20 elapsed) and the top mixed team was Roger Hanberg of Dawson City and Pauline Frost of Old Crow in 75:56 (67:56 elapsed). There were four scratches and the last team in was Jeff and Dorothy Brady, in 106 hours (98 elapsed), prompting race officials to set time limits for future races.

## 2000 - Year Two Carriere breaks own record with Solie.

The event moved to the last week in June to take advantage of more daylight, more water in the river, and to give teachers a chance to enter after school let out. After much debate and even doubt that solo kayaks could make the trip to Dawson, they were added as a category. Three entered along with 14 canoes. A two-hour layover was added at Carmacks, and the Minto layover was reduced to six hours. Carriere returned to break his own record, this time with a different Fairbanks paddler, Daniel Solie. They finished in 53 hours, 35 minutes (45:35 elapsed), an hour ahead of the Wenatchee, Wash. team of Tom Feil and Jeff Mettler. Solo kayaker Yannick Bedard, 18, of Dawson City was the first Yukoner to reach the finish in 61 hours, 15 minutes (53:15 elapsed), a full day faster than the next kayak paddled by Ingrid Wilcox of Whitehorse in 89:37 (81:37 elapsed). Heather Birchard and Tara Waddle were the top women's team at a time of 82:13 (74:13 elapsed), and the fastest mixed team was Bob Vincent and Gwyn Hayman of London, Ont. in a time of 60:57 (52:37 elapsed), Alaskans Greg and Jane Tibbetts were the first double kayak in a time of 79:40 (71:40 elapsed).

Several Wenonah Jensen 181 canoes were purchased for the Yukon River Quest and sold by the Yukon Quest International as a fund-raiser. This guaranteed a fleet of fast recreation canoes for visitors to use in future races.

## 2001 - Year Three

### Landick returns to set new record

For the third straight year, records were broken, this year by two teams. Steve Landick and Mark Churchill of Michigan, using the same Landick-designed canoe that won the 1998 Dyea to Dawson race, won the River Quest in a total time of 52 hours, nine minutes (elapsed time 44:09). Not far behind were Feil and Mettler in 53:08 (45:08 elapsed). Protests were filed about the Landick canoe, because of its odd bend in the middle, and the Washington canoe, which had a hydration system. The race marshals concluded that for this race, the boats would be allowed and both records would stand, but that rules would be tightened up for future races to allow no modifications to any stock canoes or kayaks.

In third place, setting a mixed record, was the Manitoba team of Clifford Grieves and Leslie Baker in 57:52 (49:52 elapsed). Veteran Yukon canoeist Yvonne Harris and Sue DeForest of Whitehorse were the top women's canoe team at 71:16 (63:16 elapsed).

Michael Rodinger led an Austrian contingent and won the solo kayak race in a record 60:30 (52:30 elapsed). The fastest tandem kayak team in 68:31 (60:31 elapsed) was Travis Holmes and Christopher Read of Alberta. Linda Bourassa of Whitehorse was the top woman solo kayaker in 85:40 (77:40 elapsed) and was third kayak overall.

Twenty-four teams entered the race, including the first voyageur team, Paddlers Abreast, a team of Yukon breast cancer survivors, which finished in just under 86 hours.

## 2002 - Year Four

### "The Old Guys" lead the way

A record 36 teams entered the event, and for the first half of the race, it appeared that a tandem kayak would win for the first time. But a broken rudder at the Minto checkpoint slowed down the team of Brandon Nelson and John Weed of Lotus, Calif. They were passed by "The Old Guys", Bob Vincent of Dorchester, Ont. and Bob Bradford of Lapeer, Mich., two veteran marathon paddlers in their 60s. The image of these two paddling into the midnight sunset near Minto has been a fixture on race posters and brochures, and they won the event in 55:22 (47:22 elapsed). Nelson and Weed set the tandem kayak record in 56:23 (48:23 elapsed), and in third place was the Yukon canoe team of Marcus Waterreus and Jonathan Kerr in 60:13 (52:13 elapsed), followed 30 seconds later by Yukoners Tim Hodgson and Paul Pageau. In fifth was the top mixed team of Hank Timm of Tok, Alaska and Colleen Raney of Whitehorse in 60:59 (52:59 elapsed).

Other records were broken. The women's canoe record was blitzed by Yvonne Harris and Pat McKenna, finishing in 67:14 (59:15 elapsed), and Whitehorse's Ingrid Wilcox set the women's solo kayak record in 72:29 (64:29 elapsed). Top male solo kayaker was Rick Amschler of Spruce Grove, Alberta in 65:40. A fun group of Voyageurs from Quesnel,

B.C., “Cariboo to the Klondike”, challenged the “Paddlers Abreast” but finished just a minute behind the Yukon women, who broke their previous record in 79:26. The field also included England’s Debra Veal, who won international acclaim for rowing solo across the Atlantic Ocean, and a BBC documentary team followed her and teammate Bruce Parry of London in the Yukon River Quest.

After the 2002 race, the event was taken over from the sled dog organization by a group of Yukon and Alaska paddlers, who formed the Yukon River Marathon Paddlers Association.

## 2003 - Year Five

### Vincent couple wins River Quest

Setting a new mixed record was the winning team of Mike and Fiona Vincent in 55 hours, two minutes (47:02 elapsed). Mike is the son of Bob Vincent, and his wife Fiona had competed with him on a winning Texas Water Safari team in 2002. The Regina, Sask. couple came north in 2003 and kept it in the family.

Tied for second place in 56:54 were new solo kayak record holder Jerome Truran, and the canoe team of Ken Stanick and Dave Ross, all of N. Vancouver, B.C. The Yukon-Ontario team of Tim Hodgson and Paul Pageau took fourth, followed by the “Maine Yahoos to the Yukon,” setting a rowdy voyageur record in 64:13 (56:13 elapsed).

A mixed tandem kayak record of 65:01 (57:01 elapsed) also was set by Jeff Raymond and Katja Rademacher of Vancouver. Ingrid Wilcox was the top female solo kayaker again in 76:09. Jessica Reynolds and David Nash won the red lantern with a time of 93:36

Thirty-three teams competed in the event, which featured the largest international field yet with participants from England, Austria, Germany, Scotland, the Guernsey Channel Islands, and Guam. Because of limited facilities in Minto for the growing race, the race’s mid-river checkpoint was moved to the Coal Mine Campground at Carmacks.

## 2004 - Year Six

### Record field of 51 sees new checkpoints, prize structure, 30° temps, high water, and forest fires as Landick-Barton, others break six records

Many racers had requested a second rest stop later in the race, so for the 2004 event, the Carmacks layover was reduced to seven hours, and a three-hour layover was added at Kirkman Creek. With the race going to 10 hours of layovers, all official times in the future shifted to elapsed time on the river, and the records have been changed to reflect this.

Speaking of records, six category records were broken in the 2004 event, which saw a huge increase in the number of participants and a new prize structure that rewarded several categories. A record 51 teams started on a hot 30° C day in downtown Whitehorse. Two-time winner Steve Landick returned with Bruce Barton as partner and led from start to finish. They were on pace to set a new overall record, but were slowed

down by smoky conditions for the last third of the race. The hot, dry summer resulted in the costliest fire season ever in the Yukon, and our racers passed several fires along the river. The new YRQ Buffs given to racers came in handy for both cooling off and protecting faces from smoke. The river was high and Team Michigan's winning time of 44:27 still set the stock canoe record. The best photo finish came a few hours later as the Yukon-Manitoba team of Tim Hodgson and Chris Gerwing dueled with solo kayaker Steve Mooney of Whitehorse. The canoe won bragging rights by five seconds, but Mooney shattered the men's solo kayak record with his time of 47:58. The BBC Challenge mixed kayak team of Jason Merron and Charmian Gradwell came in eighth overall in a record time of 51:13. All women's records were shattered: Ingrid Wilcox broke her own women's solo kayak record in 56:46, Yvonne Harris and Pat McKenna broke their women's canoe record in 57:22, and Amy Byers and Denise Kimball broke the women's tandem kayak record in 67:04.

Once again the Paddlers Abreast voyageur team raised money for breast cancer research, and their RCMP counterparts raised money to battle diabetes, getting a rousing welcome and \$1,000 check from the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation of Dawson City. Teams from England and Scotland also raised money for children's charities in their homelands. Finally, not content with completing the longest paddling race in the world, the Australian team of Terry Bolland and Edgar Vaneer continued on to the Bering Sea.

## 2005 – Year Seven

### Records shattered as two kayaks share spotlight

The YRMPA announced a new partnership with Kanoe People/Clipper Canoes which enabled the purchase of seven Clipper Jensens to replace the aging Wenonah rental fleet. The 2005 event saw more high water from an early snowmelt. A record field of 66 teams started the race on a cool, drizzly afternoon. Fifty teams finished and eight records were broken. Less than two minutes separated the three leading teams after 20 straight hours of paddling as they arrived into Carmacks. Two tandem kayak teams paddled by Yukoners Stephen Mooney and Greg McHale and American marathon racers Chris Swan and Sean Brennan of California and New Jersey worked hard to stay ahead of a canoe paddled by defending YRQ champion Steve Landick of Michigan and Texas Water Safari multi-champ Fred Mynar of Texas. As they approached the finish line, the two kayaks rafted together for a winning time of 42 hours and 51 minutes, shattering the course record. Landick also broke his own open canoe record in 43:10, and there were new records set for solo kayak by David Kelly in 45:22, women's canoe by Tunde Fulop and Danielle Boisvert in 55:18, Mixed Tandem Kayak by Heather and Brandon Nelson in 45:22, Women's Tandem Kayak by Danise Kimball / Amy Byers in 59:31, and Voyageur Canoe by RCMP Scarlet Fever in 55:50. After the race, the YRMPA board decided to change the prize structure to reward all classes and divisions equally, as a way of promoting more competition within classes.

## 2006 – Year Eight

### Course record shattered again by kayak 'super team'

Heavy rains at the start made for cool temperatures but a fast river, and the elite teams took advantage of it. First overall with a new course record of 40:37:05 was the tandem kayak “super team” of David Kelly and Brandon Nelson from California and Washington. The voyageur class continued to grow. As a continuation of its partnership with Kanoe People/Clipper, the YRMPA jointly purchased a new Clipper Langley Voyageur Canoe to be reserved for rental by teams coming in from outside the Yukon. During the first year, it was paddled by the False Creek Women of Vancouver, British Columbia. Five other voyageur teams entered the 2006 race, including the Yukon’s Paddlers Abreast team, which was being filmed for the National Film Board production, “River of Life”, and Kissynew from Saskatchewan which shattered the old dragon boat record and finished second overall in 42:56:13. The men’s and women’s solo kayak records also were broken by Carter Johnson and Heather Nelson respectively, and Yukoner Pauline Frost-Hanberg and Viki Cirkvencic broke the women’s canoe record (see records page). Veteran Steve Landick and Gregg Nelson of Michigan took the men’s canoe division, and Veronica Wisniewski and Edoh Amiran of Washington won in mixed canoe. Seventy-three teams started the event, thanks in part to a dozen entries from Great Britain, including two kayak teams from the British Army finished strong behind Kelly and Nelson. Racers were able to benefit from a new travel deal reached by the YRMPA with Yukon carrier Air North. However, the rainy and cool conditions kept safety boats busy early in the race, as 13 teams scratched before even reaching Carmacks. After the race, officials decided to add more items to the mandatory gear list for 2007, so teams are better prepared if they have to stop for a while and warm up. The YRMPA board also opened up the canoe division to allow standard class canoes, as well as solo canoes for 2007.

## 2007 – Year Nine

### Voyageurs take top four spots as race grows to 85 teams, “River of Life” inspires thousands

This was the year the voyageurs broke through to the top, and where one team’s quest inspired everyone associated with the YRQ. Ten of the big boats were on the starting line for the event, and five landed in the top 10 overall. Coureur des Bayou, a team of mostly Texas Water Safari veterans, built a Kevlar voyageur for the Yukon and sparred early on for the lead with Team Kissynew in another canoe built especially for the YRQ. The Texas team finished first in 41:15, about an hour ahead of Team Kissynew which settled for second for the second straight year. A second Kissynew Skookum Asphalt team with Yukon and Saskatchewan paddlers took third, followed by the Saint Lawrence Valley Paddlers from New York. The top K2 team in the event, Evil Geezers Philippe Blouin and Richard Steppe, finished fifth overall in 47:23. They were followed by the top solo kayak, Andrew Jillings of New York in 47:37. Next in were three Australian kayak teams, and rounding out the top 10 was voyageur team Pipe It Up from Prince Rupert, BC.

The tandem canoe class was led by VT Express, Veronica Wisniewski and Thom Prichard, in 50:13. Desnedhe Dene, Norbert Wolverine and Lionel Campbell were the top men’s canoe, and Yukon Water Women Two, Patricia McKenna and Elizabeth Bosely,

were the top women's team. The top solo kayak woman was The Girl from Oz, Liz Winn of Australia. Rounding out the entire field with the first entry in a new solo canoe class, was Team Bumbazer, Joe Evans, in a "record" time of 77:23.

A crowning moment during this year's event was premiere of the film "River of Life" about the Paddlers Abreast team of breast cancer survivors. The film played for racers before the start in Whitehorse and again after the finish in Dawson City. The film would play several festivals throughout the year and inspire thousands.

## 2008 – Year Ten

### Kisseynew wins duel with Texans, sets new course record

The 10th anniversary race of the YRQ produced many special moments. For starters, registrations actually hit the maximum 100 teams at one point, and a record 89 teams from a dozen countries started the race. This included 15 voyageur teams. The event started on a beautiful day in Whitehorse, and the weather remained calm for paddlers all the way across Lake Laberge. This set the stage for some record-setting performances. The battle for first again was between Team Kisseynew and the Texans. Amazingly they jostled for much of the first half of the race and came into Carmacks just one second apart after 200 miles. Having Yukoner Tim Hodgson in the boat gave the Canadian team some local river knowledge this year, and that may have been the difference as they stretched out a wider lead over the second half of the race. Kisseynew became the first team to break the 40-hour mark with a new course record of 39:32:43. The third time was the charm for Kisseynew team captain and boat builder Martin Bernardin. The Texans finished second in 40:05:00, beating their winning time from the previous year. Third went to a First Nations voyageur team from Hatchet Lake, Saskatchewan, who were serenaded with drum beats. Fourth overall and breaking the long-standing mixed canoe record were Gloria Wesley and Gary Aprea from upstate New York and Massachusetts in 44:13, just a minute ahead of the new solo kayak record holder, Brad Pennington of Houston, Texas who won his own duel with past K1 champion Steven Mooney of Whitehorse. Others in the top 10 overall were the Adirondack Voyageurs from New York, the mixed canoe team of Yukoner Jane Vincent and Bodo Lenitschek of Australia, K2 men's champ Robert Cassin and Carl Clinton from the Channel Islands of Great Britain, and men's canoe champ Steve Wallick and Jim Bates from Kelowna, B.C. . Breaking the solo canoe record was Kevin Mellis in 53:03. The women's kayak record also fell as the Incredigirls team of Lisa McGee of Alberta and Kim Petherick of Australia finished in 53:55 Other champions were the Yukon Water Women (Liz Bosely and Pat McKenna) in women's canoe, Ingrid Wilcox of Whitehorse in women's solo kayak, and the Danish team of Peter Mygil and Vibe Sandberg in mixed kayak.

## 2009– Year Eleven

### Texans recover from spill with Team Dene's help, carry on to reclaim top prize; women's C2 and K2 records fall

The 11<sup>th</sup> annual Yukon River Quest saw the kind of sportsmanship that the race has become famous for – and this time involved the two most competitive teams in the event.

After 10 years of starting on Main Street, the starting line was moved to Rotary Peace Park to relieve congestion in the downtown area and give paddlers a straight run down to their boats. It worked magnificently, as 73 teams started the event on a glorious day, with the SS Klondike looming behind them. Like the previous year, there was a very close race between the top two voyageur teams, as the Texans and Team Dene from Saskatchewan battled for first place on a calm Lake Laberge. The Texans led by a minute when the two teams reached Carmacks, and were holding on until “the mother of all boils” swamped their boat just before Minto. The team managed to get their boat and everyone to shore, said Texas captain Richard Ameen, and then Team Dene stopped and remained for several minutes to make sure the Texas paddlers were all right. This act of sportsmanship earned Team Dene captain Charlie Tssessaze and crew the Spirit of the Yukon Award. The Texans eventually caught back up with Saskatchewan team and they jostled for the lead all the way to Kirkman Creek, arriving at the same time. But the Texans got a jump when Team Dene got a late start out of Kirkman, and widened their lead all the way to Dawson. The Texans’ winning time was 40 hours, 52 minutes, for their second overall title in three years. Team Dene arrived 50 minutes later to loud drumbeats from their wonderful community of supporters. In third place overall was veteran solo kayak champ Carter Johnson of California in 44:52. Next in was K1 runner-up Shaun Thrower of Great Britain in 47 hours, and then the top tandem canoe teams: the mixed Yukon team of Jane Vincent and Tim Hodgson in 47:22; the top men’s canoe with Gaetan Plourde of Ontario and Aaron Hachey of Whitehorse in 47:32; and the top women’s canoe with Veronica Wisiniewski of Washington and Whitehorse’s Liz Bosely, breaking a new record in 48:53. The women’s tandem kayak record also was broken by “Oxford Hopefuls” Lou Maurice and Hilary Greaves of the UK in 51:29. Other champions were: Yukoner-Albertan Kevin Mellis for the second straight year in solo canoe; Darrell Wiebe and Jennifer Allen of Calgary in mixed K2; Peter Budden and Dave Townsend of the UK in men’s K2; and “Yukon Wildflower” Ingrid Wilcox in women’s K1. Some of the best racers in the field were bested by various ailments and a rain storm in the middle of the race, but 56 teams finished. The YRQ field was smaller, probably due to the world’s economic woes, but it was still the third largest field on record. The race drew several media from Australia and all over North America, and was featured on NBC-TV’s Jeep World of Adventure.

## 2010– Year Twelve

### Johnson rides behind Texans to new solo kayak record; solo canoe record also falls despite wet and windy start

The 12<sup>th</sup> annual Yukon River Quest began with the wettest and windiest start on record, ultimately causing a record number of scratches by the time teams reached Carmacks. Leading the teams through the breakers on Lake Laberge were the Texans, followed by solo kayaker Carter Johnson, who managed to ride the voyageur’s wake all the way to Dawson City. The Texans won their third overall title in a time of 42 hours, 48 minutes. Johnson was a second behind setting a new men’s solo kayak record of 42:49. The third team in was the voyageur Breaking Wind from Great Britain. The solo canoe record also fell with Gaetan Plourde’s winning time of 52:35. The women’s solo kayak title went to



Robyn Benincasa in 51:43. The top tandem kayak belonged to Colin and Nicholas Burden in 49:59. And the mixed team of Mary Houck and John Ders posted the best tandem canoe time, 50:42. Of the 78 teams that started the race, a record 24 did not finish. Weather was better during the second half of the race but except for the solo records, overall times were relatively slow. Paddlers Abreast won the women's voyageur title and were joined this year by a lively team of Australian breast cancer survivors, Yukon Buddies.

## 2011– Year Thirteen

**Texans hold off Yukon mixed team for third straight overall win;  
Sausages & Mussels propel to new mixed voyageur record;  
Plourde beats own solo canoe record**

Weather cooperated for the most part during the 13th annual YRQ. Of the 72 teams that started the race, 55 teams finished, which is about average. Lake Laberge threw its usual amount of wind at everyone but there were also some calm stretches mid-lake to give teams a break. From then on, it was easy paddling down to the first layover at Carmacks and beyond to Dawson City. The river was at its highest level of the summer, but not as high as in past years. There was very little rain, and other than a cool first night on the Thirtymile section, temperatures were warm from start to finish. The Texans repeated as overall champions in 42 hours, 17 minutes, and were challenged for a time by the top mixed voyageur team from the Yukon, Sausages & Mussels, who set a new mixed record in 44:37. The only other new category record was set in solo canoe by Gaetan Plourde of Ontario in 48:28, knocking two hours off last year's time. The top kayak in the race was paddled by Chris Spoor of British Columbian in 47:37. The top women's finisher was solo kayaker Sharon Colley of Great Britain in 49:05. Leading the tandem canoes were men's champ Andy and Kurt Toms of Great Britain in 50:48 and mixed champ Larry Seethaler and Brenda Forsythe from Alaska in 53:20. Larry is the iron man of the race, having competed in every YRQ and both Dyea to Dawson events. For its tenth anniversary, women's voyageur team Paddler's Abreast clocked a best-ever time of 51:56 to win its category.

## 2012– Year Fourteen

**Despite two swims, Australian “Down Under Dogs” paddle past Californians for top spot; Two women's records shattered.**

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual YRQ saw some of the best weather the race has ever seen. Sixty-eight teams started and 54 finished. A summer shower blew through just prior to the start, but racers soon found a flat calm Lake Laberge and fast water after the major confluences. The early leaders were the open voyageur teams Down Under Dogs from Australia and Such A Blast from California, but a fleet women's team, Skirting Disaster, was also in the hunt, as well as a men's tandem canoe team, Round Side Down. The Australians took two unplanned swims, first after hitting a boil near Big Salmon, and then in Five Finger Rapids. In both cases they were passed by one of the two other leading voyageur teams

and then took back the lead. It was an incredible feat for a team of seasoned outrigger paddlers who were in a Canadian voyageur for the first time. The Dogs finished in 41 hours, 51 minutes, while the Blast took second in 42:45, just ahead of the Skirts at 42:50. Skirting Disaster set a new women's tandem record. Next in were Round Side Down, made up of experienced canoers Tim Lynch of Faro, Yukon and Dave Lewis of Nova Scotia. They missed the C2 record by just eight minutes. In solo, Passing Wind, Chris Spoor of B.C., repeated as the top K1 male in 45:06., and the top woman was Powered By Chocolate, Janice Mason, also of BC, in 52:57. In K2, the South African team Beats Working, Reuhl Iombard / Bertus Rinke, won with a strong 46:54, but even more impressive was the Yukon women's K2 team The Fascinators, Ali Morham and Martha Taylor, who set a new record of 47:04. Top solo canoe was Mark Fletcher of Haines Junction in 57:41. Women's C2 was won by Atlantic Express, sisters Abby Lewis and Bev Lewis of BC and NS, in 50:19. The Maine mixed canoe team of Terry Wescott and Ander Thebaud won in 49:24, while the Latvian team Black Berta, Ilze Plakane / Ugis Gutmanis, took K2 mixed in 47:22. The top mixed voyageur was Skaha ha ha ha of BC in 46:34. The YRQ is used to seeing teams raise money for worthy causes, following in the wake of the Yukon's own Paddlers Abreast. This year, however, saw an unprecedented amount raised, nearly a quarter million dollars by Interserve London Irish I and II, for Help for Heroes, a charity that assists wounded veterans in Britain's current conflicts. And they were planning a return to the Yukon with two more teams in 2013.

## 2013– Year Fifteen

**Return of tandem canoe to the top of the leaderboard; Yukon/Nova Scotia team “Round Side Down” leads pack to Dawson in hot, smoky race. Volunteer recognized for “Spirit of the Yukon”**

In a rare repeat, the weather for the 15<sup>th</sup> annual YRQ was just as nice as in 2012, almost too nice. Lake Laberge was calm again and the river was high, but these conditions did not result in faster times. Sixty-two teams started and 49 finished the 2013 race with no major incidents on the river, save a couple of dumps in the rapids. No records were broken for the first time in many years. The heat this year (plus-30 on Thursday and Friday) slowed all teams, as did thunder and lightning on all parts of the river, and smoke from forest fires. Racers watched one strike a hillside just before the rapids on Thursday night, and others watched fire bombers put it out. Another fire was reported by teams before they arrived at Kirkman Creek. Many teams also encountered rain on Saturday. But through it all emerged some fast tandem canoe teams, with the overall winner going to Round Side Down's Tim Lynch of Faro, YT and Dave Lewis of Nova Scotia in 45 hours, 2 minutes. It was the first C2 overall winner since 2004. Second overall was another canoe, paddled by two previous strong finishers in the C1 class: Gaetan Plourde and Ian Mockett of Ontario in 45 hours, 16 minutes. The Australian K2 team On the Way to Maine with Tom Simmat and Urs Mader clocked in at 45:26. Whitehorse's Stephen Mooney was back to co-win the K1 class in 49:14 alongside Gus Oliveira of B.C. The top C1 boat belonged to Wun-Num-Nut's Jeff Brainard of Ontario in 49:36. Leading the way in the mixed canoe division was Currently Confused Still, Steve and Karla Ramsay of Manitoba in 50:42. Top female K1 paddler was Super Maryo, Mary Obstfeld of Alberta,

who came in about the same time as the top women's C2 team, Sisu, Melissa Vaja and Tammy Stoneman of Teslin, Yukon in just over 64 hours. They just beat the UK team of Sarah Wallis and Esther Wheeler by two minutes. The voyageur class was competitive in all classes with Your Worst Nightmare Dream Team, a mixed crew from the USA leading the way in 45:28 over mixed runner-up Passing Through from New York at 46:25. In third was the men's team Interserve H4H2 from the United Kingdom in 49:28, one of two teams raising money for Help For Heroes. They were followed by women's champion, Currently Available from the Yukon in 50:07. This year's Spirit of the Yukon award went to a very deserving volunteer, Al Foster. Seeing a need for more assistance at the Carmacks dock, he stepped up to help several years ago and now leads the crew there and walks us through the procedures at the briefings. His kind approach to working with teams and other volunteers makes him most deserving of this award.

## 2014– Year Sixteen

**Tandem kayak from Great Britain is first team to Dawson City.  
Stormy lake, low water in river account for slower times.**

The 16th annual Yukon River Quest was memorable for its rocky start with all teams battling breakers that blew up from the south as they were getting on Lake Laberge. But after persevering through those very tough conditions (including some dramatic rescues), most teams carried on and had good weather all the way to Dawson City. The river was lower than usual, resulting in slower times overall. First team in on Friday night was the British tandem kayak Two Numbnuts paddled by Shaun Thrower and Steve King in 45 hours, 30 minutes, 32 seconds, followed by solo kayaker Dave Hutchinson of the United States in 46:25:52, the Yukon mixed voyageur team Ts'alvit (Gwich'in for Arctic Loon) in 48:43:26, and the top tandem canoe Puha no Huanie (Esteva Phillippe from French Polynesia and Esteva Nicholas from France) in 49:54:10. They were the only teams to break the 50 hour barrier this year. Other class winners were Gaetan Plourde in open solo canoe (49:48:57), Brandon Johnston and Shona Barbour in mixed C2 (52:16:37), Pat McKenna and Elizabeth Boseley in women's C2 (55:17:07), Kelly Watson in women's K1 (57:24:29), Mary Obstfeld and Carl Rumscheidt in mixed K2 (59:19:04), Anjie Lees and Meg Thornton in women's K2 (63:13:24), and Team WHOA in women's voyageur (57:37:39). Overall, 48 teams finished of the 66 that were registered; there were 18 scratches.

## 2015– Year Seventeen

**US-Canada tandem kayak wins overall race; calm lake and mostly good weather account for zero incidents and few scratches.**

For the second straight year, a tandem kayak had the fastest time in the race. Past solo champion David Hutchison of Montana teamed up with Bob Ross of Ontario for team "Time to Go" to post a winning time of 45 hours, 51 minute, seven seconds. Except for some showers and head winds on the last day, the weather was great. The lake was flat calm for the 57 teams that started the race, and 44 of them finished. Just 12 teams

scratched and one team finished after the cutoff time in Dawson. There were no rescues, even at Five Finger Rapids, for the first time in race history. It was another low water year, with only five teams breaking the 50-hour barrier. In second place overall was the top canoe “Perfect Storm” (Gaetan Plourde and Jeff Brainard) from Ontario in 45:33:46, followed by another kayak “Bald and Sexy” (Gus Oliveira and Chris Spoor) from British Columbia in 46:40:51, the top voyageur “Team 3-2-1 Go” (a fleet team of women from Canada and the US) in 49:29:17, and the top solo kayak “Northshore Paddler” (Martin Rother) from BC in 49:29:30. Concern about the drop in overall numbers below 60 teams prompted the YRMPA board to consider opening up the race to Stand Up Paddleboards. A motion to allow a limited number of SUP teams in the next year’s race as an experimental class passed at the 2015 AGM in November.

## 2016 – Year Eighteen

**Largest field in YRQ history: 93 teams start race, led by canoe ‘Perfect Storm’ paddled by Ontario veterans Gaetan Plourde and Jeff Brainard. Experimental SUP class proves worthy of inclusion in future races.**

“Perfect Storm” finally made it to the top this year. The Ontario team of Gaetan Plourde and Jeff Brainard was the first team to Dawson City with a time of 46:14:56. They distanced themselves from the rest of the 2016 field. Second overall was K1 winner “Time to Go” (Dave Hutchison) from Montana in 47:17:30. K2 winner “Team Jester” (Geeb Smith and Derek Chart) from Australia was third overall. Again, low water levels on the Yukon River affected times, but the good weather allowed a record 77 teams to finish, including all but two of the 11 Stand Up Paddleboards that participated as an experimental class. They were led by Bart de Zwart from Hawaii with a time of 54:41:14. The SUPs were subsequently added as an official class for the 2017 race, and the YRMPA also announced that it would include C4 canoes in the voyageur class.

## 2017 – Year Nineteen

**Voyageur canoe “Yukon Wide Adventures” dominates field of 88 teams that includes SUP and C4 canoes. K2 vs. C2 sprint to finish for second. Big celebration planned for 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2018.**

A fleet voyageur team “Yukon Wide Adventures” made a solid run at the course record, which they possibly could have broken if not for another low-water year. Still, the weather was great and times overall were faster than the previous two years. Thomas de Jager of Whitehorse put together a solid crew that included fellow top solo paddlers Dave Hutchison, Stephen Mooney, Gus Oliviera, and Wayne Anderson from past races and local paddler Pat McLellan. They finished in 42 hours, 47 minutes. Second overall was past champion “2 Numbnuts” Shaun Thrower and Steve King from the UK in 44:38, besting C2 team “Gorge Downwind Champs” Carter Johnson and Dave Jensen of California in a sprint to the finish by just 4 seconds! The voyageur class included the 4-

person C4 canoes for the first time, and mixed team “Saranac” from New York finished fourth overall in 45:48. After the race, the board decided to make C4s their own class in future races. New as an official class were the SUPs, led again by Bart de Zwart. K1 “Arm Wriggler” Graham Henry of Toronto was the fastest solo in 46:33. The YRMPA announced a big celebration for its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary race in 2018 and unveiled a new logo.

## 2018 – Year Twenty

20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary YRQ celebrated from Whitehorse to Dawson. Voyageur canoe “Yukon Wide Adventures” repeats as champion in record field. Mixed K2 record broken by The Kiwis from New Zealand. Unveiling of “Great River Club” of 5,000 and 10,000 kms finishers.

The YRQ dominated the Canada Day parade with more than 300 paddlers, support crew members and volunteers marching behind a 20th Anniversary banner that thanked the community of Dawson City. This was the culmination of a week of events organized by our 20th Anniversary Committee that began with a grand Meet & Greet at the SS Klondike in Whitehorse, moved on to a Volunteer Party at Carmacks before racers arrived, and concluded with a huge Race Gallery Tent and the parade in Dawson. Thanks to Yukon Government Community Development Fund for helping us make this celebration happen!

A record 103 teams started the race and 76 teams finished. Twenty-seven teams (26.2%) scratched. Most of those were in Carmacks. Yukon Wide Adventures, a men’s voyageur team with paddlers from the Yukon, NWT and BC, repeated as overall champion (with a few new paddlers switched in) in a time of 44 hours, 21 minutes, 53 seconds, beating the VC team Paddlesports Mongrels from the United Kingdom by about 23 minutes. A new record was set in Mixed Tandem Kayak by Team 28 The Kiwis, paddled by Ian Huntsman and Wendy Riach of Christchurch, New Zealand. They finished third overall and their time of 44:57:56 beat the 2005 K2 mixed record of 45:22:09 by Brandon and Heather Nelson of Bellingham, Washington, USA. Teams were beset with several challenges this year: another low river year, especially in the first 350 kilometres; head winds on the first half of Lake Laberge; and thunderstorms with lightning in spots from Coffee Creek to Dawson City, including powerful head winds that forced the leaders to shore at one point. As a result, most winning times in various classes were slower this year. At this year’s Awards Banquet, the YRQ introduced the GREAT RIVER CLUB of 5,000 and 10,000 kilometre paddlers. See updated list on the website led by Larry Seethaler of Anchorage, Alaska and Ingrid Wilcox of Whitehorse, Yukon.

## 2019 – Year Twenty-one

Another record year with 117 teams and 86 finishers. Canoe takes top trophy in another slow year on the water; two C4 records set.

A record 117 teams started the 21st annual YRQ on Wednesday, June 26, and 86 teams finished. A total of 31 teams (26.5%) scratched during the race (an additional team withdrew just before the start). Most of the scratches were in Carmacks, as several teams were fatigued and/or unable to make the cutoff time there on Thursday evening. Only 3 teams scratched past Carmacks. Thirteen countries were represented: Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands, Norway (new), United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, Papua New Guinea (new), France, Austria, and Ireland. Team #wepaddletogogether, Mike Vincent and Ivan English of Saskatchewan, led the leaders into Dawson City in their C2, followed by defending 2-time overall champ Yukon Wide Adventures, a men's voyageur team with paddlers from the Yukon, BC and Alberta, and the C4 Alpha Super Awesome Strokes of Genius Wolf Squadron with paddlers from the Yukon and Ontario. They set a new record for the C4 class, and a new record in the C4 women's division was also established by the Yukon team Dinjii Njuu'til Ka't. Teams were beset with several challenges this year: the river was low for the third straight year (in fact it was the lowest we have seen in 21 years); strong northwest head winds generated by a squall on Lake Laberge flipped one team (all were helped to shore and then carried on) and forced other teams to pull over and bail their boats; more head winds downriver of Fort Selkirk all the way to Dawson City; and some smoke from forest fires in the Stewart-Dawson area. As a result, winning times in the various classes were quite a bit slower this year. Only 9 teams finished on Friday evening in under 50 hours. All other teams in the race did make the cutoff time in Dawson City Saturday night.

## 2020 – No Race due to COVID-19

Race cancelled in April due to travel restrictions and public health concerns; a virtual YRQ and half-YRQ race was held all summer.

Registration for the 2020 race filled in just over two hours, and the YRMPA board worked on a strategic plan all winter to get ready for the next few years of races. Then, the Yukon was hit with the news of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, and by April it was apparent the race could not be held due to travel restrictions and public health concerns. All registered teams were given the option for a refund or to defer to 2021 (more than 115 deferred), and a Virtual YRQ and half quest were set up on our website to keep people paddling over the summer.

## 2021 – Race cancelled hours before start due to flooding

A modified YRQ was all set to start with a limited field of Canadian teams, but was cancelled due to flooding downriver.

With COVID-19 still dominating lives in 2021, the YRQ worked with government health authorities on a plan to have a modified race with Canadian teams in June 2021. International visitors were not allowed into Canada until later that summer. Several restrictions applied, such as teams and support crews having to stay in their own bubbles, with no volunteer contact. We had 48 teams registered, but less than 24 hours before the start of the race, an unexpected problem intervened. There was near-record flooding

downriver at our Carmacks and new Minto Resort checkpoint and other sites, making safety along the river a huge concern. The Race Marshal made the responsible decision to cancel the race, though it was a great disappointment for all. Many of the racers deferred their registrations again, to 2022, when we hoped to be back to having a normal YRQ with an international field. Seeing a need to grow the race, the YRMPA board expanded the field to 150 teams for 2022 and hired a new Race Director, veteran paddler and volunteer Mia Lee. One sad note, the YRQ community lost veteran paddler and board member Ingrid Wilcox, and it was announced the next race would be dedicated to her.

**2022 – YRQ returns with epic race in very high water. Course record broken after 14 years; many other class records set, but conditions were scary at times.**

The YRQ was better prepared for a very high and fast river and saw the course record smashed by the Canadian C4 team “Something Else Entirely” (Eric Braul, Robert Spinks, Mike De Abreu, Sebastian Courville) in 39 hours, 18 minutes, 12 seconds. Several other class records were broken despite head winds on the lake, several swims in the river (rapids were approaching Class 4), and a variety of wind and rain storms. For a complete look at all 25 records set in 2022, see the Race Records link under Archives. Of the 105 teams that started the race, 62 teams finished, and five teams completed the new Half Quest to Carmacks. Our safety boat crews on the river and volunteers on shore worked overtime to make sure everyone survived (there were some close calls), along with the valuable help of paddlers out there and their support teams. After the race, due to several factors, the board decided to move the start of the 2023 race to the first week of July, managed by new Race Coordinator Cynthia Onions and a host of volunteers.

**2023 – YRQ sees fewer racers with July start in low water year; mixed canoe ‘Golden Lake Crew’ first to finish; 2024 race moves back to late June.**

Of the 54 teams that started the 2023 race, 44 teams finished the full YRQ in Dawson City, and one finished the YRQ 300 in Carmacks. Nine teams scratched, and the scratch rate of 16.6% was low compared to the average of closer to one-third. Teams encountered irregular waves from the west on the lake, but most powered through it fine. On the second day, conditions turned very hot on the river with day-time high temperatures around 30C. Teams did their best to stay hydrated all the way to Dawson City. The youngest paddler in the event was Prezley Jobin (15) in Cap Warriors, while the oldest was Jim Boyde (80) in Team Ts’alvit. The river was considered at a low to normal level for early July, and no course records were broken this year. Not long after the race ended, the YRMPA announced it would return to a start on the last Wednesday in June 2025, citing input from racers, volunteers, and Dawson City, which missed us on the long weekend.