

# OGILVIE AND PEEL RIVERS

## Length of Trip

17 days from Ogilvie River bridge to Fort McPherson on the Peel River  
22 days from Ogilvie River bridge to Inuvik

## Total Distance

516 kilometres (322.5 miles) from Ogilvie River bridge to Fort McPherson on the Peel River  
688 kilometres (430 miles) from Ogilvie River bridge to Inuvik

## Start

Canoeists may start this trip at the Ogilvie River Bridge, at mile 123 (kilometre 197) on the Dempster Highway

## Finish

At Fort McPherson on the Peel River  
Inuvik in the MacKenzie River Delta

## Accessibility

Access to the Ogilvie River is at Mile 123 (kilometre 197) on the Dempster Highway, where a bridge spans the river. The Dempster Highway parallels the river for 56 km (35 miles) before turning north.

Fort McPherson, the first possible point of egress, is accessible by road from Inuvik (NWT) or Dawson City (Yukon), via the Dempster Highway.

Inuvik, another point of egress, is serviced by scheduled airline flights from Edmonton, Yellowknife and Norman Wells via Canadian Airlines International, and from Whitehorse via Alcan Air. The Dempster Highway also reaches Inuvik.

## Map Required

1:250,000

Ogilvie River	116G & 116F
Hart River	116H
Wind River	106E
Trail River	106L
Martin House	106K
Fort McPherson	106M
Aklavik	107B

## Geography

The Ogilvie and Blackstone rivers rise in the Ogilvie Mountains north of Dawson City to converge on the Porcupine Plateau where they form the Peel River. The Peel River drains the eastern slopes of the Richardson Mountains and the northern slopes of the Ogilvie and

Wernecke Mountains north of the Stewart River drainage basin. It cuts a deeper valley through the Porcupine and Peel Plateau until the banks attain a maximum height of 300 metres (980 ft). The Peel enters the MacKenzie River Delta below Fort McPherson at an elevation of 15 metres (50 ft) above sea level. 160 km (100 miles) south of the Arctic Ocean.

## **Flora**

Major Tree species of the region are black spruce, white spruce, balsam poplar, aspen poplar, larch, alder, willow and many small shrubs. Hummocks and muskeg are common to open areas, especially toward the mouth of the Peel.

## **Fauna**

Wildlife indigenous to the Ogilvie and Peel Rivers includes moose, black bear, grizzly bear, wolf, beaver, muskrat, and a wide assortment of small animals and birds. Caribou and sheep may be seen in the Ogilvie Mountains.

## **River Notes**

### **Ogilvie River Bridge to Blackstone River**

All locations are described in terms of their kilometre (and mile) distance downstream. The Ogilvie River, below the Ogilvie River Bridge, flows in a single channel 39 metres (42 yards) wide, confined by the 30 degrees to 40 degree talus slopes of the Ogilvie Mountains. The Ogilvie Mountains are left behind at Kilometre 32 (mile 20) and the exit from the mountains on to the Porcupine Plateau is marked by ledge rapids between Kilometres 24 and 32 (mile 15 and 20). The rapids at Kilometre 24 (mile 15) may be navigated at high water levels. If they cannot be run, a small chute along the left can be lined. Immediately after this ledge the canoeist should move to the right bank and land to scout the small chute 90 m (100 yd) ahead. This chute between a bar and the shoreline is navigable. The left and largest channel flows over a ledge with a drop of one metre (3 ft).

A few navigable rapids are encountered below Kilometre 24 (mile 15), and at Kilometre 32 (mile 20) the rapid should be approached along the right bank. Scouting is required and the canoeist should be prepared to line most of the rapid and take a 15 m portage at the end. Islands are numerous and in many places the river becomes multi-channelled. Sweepers and gravel bars are common, but can be easily avoided by staying in mid-stream. The Ogilvie again forms a single channel before it joins the Blackstone River, 106 km (66 miles) downstream from the Ogilvie River Bridge.

### **Blackstone River to Hart River**

The Peel River is formed at the junction of the Ogilvie and Blackstone Rivers. The volume of the Peel River is twice that of the Ogilvie and its velocity is 6.5 km/h (4 mph to 5 mph). It is incised up to six metres (20 ft) into the Porcupine Plateau with a gravel and cobble shoreline. The river is characterized by boils and surges flowing through a braided stream. The main channel is not difficult to follow. Less than 16 km (10 miles) upstream from the Hart River, the valley begins to narrow and the river becomes a single channel. At several locations the river has formed 60 to 100 m high cutbanks on river left. Often ledges occur here.

The first major ledge is at Kilometre 146. Another ledge is found at Kilometre 148, and may be run through a small chute located to the right of mid-channel. More ledge rapids occur at Kilometre 155 immediately upstream of a 60 m rock wall. A small but runnable chute is located directly along the left bank.

1.5 km before the mouth of the Hart River, the Peel bends west. At this bend the water is

forced up on the rock face on the left side and small haystacks occur in mid-stream as the current of the river is met by the water moving back of the wall. This is the last set of rapids before the mouth of the Hart River.

### **Hart River to Bonnet Plume River**

A series of rapids occurs 5 to 6.5 km below the mouth of the Hart. At this point the river is 200 m wide, with the rapids extending across the entire channel and stretching downstream for nearly 150 m. There are three or four ledges that extend across the river, with major turbulence in the right half of the river. The water is shallow as it flows over the ledges, and strong back eddies and turbulence occur beyond each ledge. The rapids may be run and lined along the left limit which consists of bedrock dipping into the water. To survey the rapid, canoeists should land upstream along the right and climb the vertical bank that borders the white water.

Ten kilometres (six miles) below the Hart River, sections of white water occur for 2.5 km. These are a result of ledges and the funnel effect of the narrower channel. The medium-high water during the period of this survey caused waves 2 to 2.5 metres high in the middle of this set of rapids. The rapids may be approached along the left and the canoeist should be prepared to paddle, line and portage through this area. Below this section the water is turbulent and boiling prior to a left turn.

The river widens to 200 m as more rapids, one kilometre in length, and full river width are encountered. These are easily navigable. Below these last rapids the river flows in a wide valley, incised 3 to 10 m. Three kilometres downstream a stream enters from the north. Eight kilometres below the stream a final set of rapids will be encountered before the upper Peel Canyon and Aberdeen Falls. This rapid consists of a series of ledges and should be scouted to determine a proper course through several chutes. If portaging is necessary the gently sloping left limit is advised. Downstream from this rapid the river is incised to a depth of 60 m between shale walls. By following the right limit very closely the white water above Aberdeen Falls may be avoided. It will be necessary to drop over a ledge to reach a low beach beyond the vertical walls.

Below this ledge, portaging may be required at low water levels to reach the excellent campsite on the low beaches ahead. Beyond this beach, the rapids continue to the head of Aberdeen Falls and may be lined and run along the right. The river channel constricts considerably to form Aberdeen Falls, a torrent of white water 15 to 50 m wide. The gradient is fairly constant, creating more of a rapid than a fall, with the torrent continuing for about five kilometres. The river has formed a gorge 50 m deep into rock strata, and a portage of 6.5 to 10 km is required. The best portage route, involving a climb through poplar growth to the flat land above, is along the right. Hummocks muskeg and scrubby black spruce dominate the landscape above the water. Walking over this area is difficult since there is no well-defined trail and 1.5 km before the end of the portage the terrain becomes hilly. The end of the portage is marked by a hill downstream along the right limit of the river. It may be seen from the beginning of the portage above the water and is the only hill in sight. The river winds through a valley making a 90 degree turn at the base of this hill and then turns to the right a few hundred metres farther on.

The portage ends on the inside bend of the right turn at the base of a hill. The base of this hill is the first area along the portage that is accessible to the water from above. A portage along the left is more difficult. At low water levels, the portage above the falls may be lengthened, due to more exposed ledges.

The Peel continues for 6.5 km through 60 m vertical shale walls. 6.5 km below the end of the gorge, the canyon widens to 450 m giving a view of low, rounded hills covered by spruce and poplar. 1.5 km below here the Peel enters another canyon.

Some easy rapids will be encountered as the valley of the Wind River enters the Peel Canyon from the south. 1.5 km below the Wind the canyon gives way abruptly to a flat low basin. To the south is a level, wooded plain that eventually reaches the Wernecke Mountains, while to the north the basin continues up to the Richardson Mountains.

Thirteen kilometres below the upper canyon, Mountain Creek enters from the north. It was used as an overland route by Indians to avoid the swift waters and the lower canyon. This overland route joins the Peel again at the mouth of the Trail River, where the current begins to slow considerably.

### **Bonnet Plume River to Snake River**

From this point to 56 km above Fort McPherson the river flows through the Peel Plateau, cutting a deeper valley northward. The banks attain a maximum height of 300 m below the mouth of the Snake River. Approaching the lower canyon, there are large swells in mid-stream and a large, powerful back eddy is formed on the right by a ledge. The river moves into the canyon through a narrow portion, 50 m wide. Although it cannot be seen from the entrance, rapid water is encountered for 90 m in the three kilometre canyon. A ledge protruding from the left causes standing waves 1.25 m high, with back eddies located on either side of the white water. Within the surging and boiling back eddies, small whirlpools with 1 to 1.5 m diameters are present. These rapids should be approached with care. The walls of the canyon are composed of vertical black slates rising 60 to 150 m. Beyond the constriction, the canyon widens to 150 m and gravel beaches are more common.

Three kilometres below the entrance of the canyon the valley widens to form a large basin, 6.5 km long and two kilometres wide. The river is multi-channelled, but the main channel is 300 m wide. The river contracts below the basin and flows in a valley one kilometre wide from Kilometre 258 to Kilometre 299, where the Snake River enters from the right. It is confined by 150 m vertical cutbanks of soft shales or limestone. The river is generally a single channel, but where islands or bars have formed, turbulence can be expected. Where the river bends, strong back eddies are frequent and should be avoided by staying in the rough water that bypasses them.

Below the second canyon the river is navigable without hazards to its mouth.

### **Snake River to Fort McPherson**

Immediately below the Snake River, islands and bars appear and the river winds between them. From Caribou Creek to the mouth of the Trail River, the current of the Peel becomes noticeably slower and the number of islands begins to decrease. Abandoned oil camps, fishing camps and trappers' cabins become numerous toward Fort McPherson. The river widens, the current slows and islands occur less frequently below the mouth of the Trail River. High winds may be expected in the Satah River area.

The buildings of Fort McPherson will be seen along the right side about a kilometre before the settlement is reached. The settlement is located 25 m above the river on a cutbank, the only significant height of land in the area. It is supplied by a barge that plies the MacKenzie River receiving supplies from the south and from Inuvik. Float planes land on the Peel River which has a current of 1.5 kph at this point.

### **Fort McPherson to Inuvik**

The MacKenzie River is 42 km (26 miles) below Fort McPherson. The only hazards to navigation are the high winds that can result in two metre waves. Along the MacKenzie, the land is flat and the river has a width of up to five kilometres. The water, besides being sluggish, has a very high silt content. Drinking water can be brought from the Peel.

## Ogilvie and Peel Rivers - Cumulative Distance

Location	Kilometres	miles
Ogilvie River bridge	0	0
Blackstone River	106.0	66.0
Hart River	214.0	97.5
Wind River junction	236.0	133.0
Bonnet Plume River	147.5	147.5
Snake River	299.0	187.0
Fort McPherson on the Peel River	516.0	322.5
Inuvik	688.0	430.0

The east channel of the MacKenzie Delta leads to Inuvik. To reach this channel, the Delta must be crossed. A small channel is present 1.5 km up the MacKenzie from the mouth of the Peel. This channel cuts through the maze of islands that are directly across from the mouth of the Peel. It will lead to the Main channel, eight kilometres south of the east channel. From here, it is a matter of crossing the MacKenzie River to reach the entrance of the East Channel. Another alternative is to paddle 24 km upstream on the MacKenzie, cross the river at Point Separation, follow the right limit to the East Channel and then to Inuvik. Five days should be allowed for travelling the 192 km between Fort McPherson and Inuvik. Two or three extra days may be necessary, if the wind is high.

### Source Information

The report was reprinted with a few changes from Wild Rivers: The Northwest Mountains. Wild Rivers Survey, Parks Canada, ARC Branch Planning Division, Ottawa, 1980, with permission from Parks Canada.