

Yukon Room

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YUKON RIVER FLOTILLA

1967-12

C'mon pardner ... Yes I'm coming. That's the beckoning call to cheechakos in the United States and Canada to forget the mad rush of city life and join the Yukon River Flotilla. The flotilla, a joint Yukon Alaska centennial adventure begins August 7th in Whitehorse and ends August 16th in historic Dawson City. During the 10 days of the flotilla, boats will travel 460 miles down the Yukon River, the same route taken by the gold rushers of 1898, to arrive in Dawson City in time for Discovery Day, the day set aside to celebrate the discovery of gold in the Klondike. The organizers of this centennial event, The Yukon Fish and Game association, have set no limit on the number of boats that can come along and at this moment they are hoping for what they call a modest number of 200 hundred craft and 500 hundred people. Before you decide you'd like to give up city life for this adventurous journey let me tell you something of the water way you'll be floating on and the organizational work that's already gone into the venture. With the flotilla starting at Whitehorse, the boats by-pass the historic Miles Canyon, the area of the Yukon where many were lost during the 1898 rush. The rest of the river is comparatively placid with only one small rapid to run and one large lake to cross. The current in the river varies from three and one half to six miles an hour, just fast enough to carry you leisurely along at a trolling pace. Boats are required however to be powered with what is termed an adequate engine ... from 5 to 10 horsepower. Camp sites are being set up along the

length of the river ... varying from 35 to 70 miles apart ... a three to four hour boat ride. It's at the campsites in the wilderness that the real significance of pioneering togetherness will be evident, with music-making around a glowing campfire, the distant howl of untamed animals and the comradeship of a night under the stars. In order to insure the safety of all flotilla members the organizers have enlisted the support of the RCMP who will send along three boats ... one to lead, one in the middle of the group and one bringing up the rear. All will be equipped with radio phones and will conduct nightly checks at each stopping place ... and if that precaution isn't enough an RCMP float plane will over fly the flotilla everyday, and will be able to pick up sick or injured flotilla members. Only the RCMP members will be allowed to carry firearms. One organizer told me that these are normal precautions and are not being taken because the journey is at all dangerous but rather to give peace of mind to those who've never experienced the wilderness, and to fathers who'd like to bring along the whole family. Yes, father you're invited to do just that ... mother and children are guaranteed the time of their lives. Of the many questions you might ask, one is likely, what's the weather in August in the Yukon. Let's take last year's Discovery Day weekend as a comparison. Mid day temperature ranged from 65 to 75 above with a cooling off period in the evening to about 50 to 55. Still you are advised to bring a fairly heavy coat just to be on the safe side.

As a matter of fact, the flotilla's technical committee, directed by Yukon outdoorsman Alan Innes Taylor, will provide would-be travellers with a complete list of supplies necessary including everything from yarn and thread to the kind of mosquito lotion that best combats our own Yukon bugs, to candles and patches. Of course, at this fairly early date, there are many problems to be ironed out. For example, a method must be found to get vehicles, cars and campers from Whitehorse to Dawson City so that the boaters will be able to land at Dawson, pick up their cars, and continue to Alaska. Oh it's possible to drive from Whitehorse to Dawson all right, but not while one is floating leisurely down the Yukon River. Then too, there's the problem of facilities in Dawson City itself ... hotel rooms are scarce at the best of times, but on August 17th, "no vacancy" signs are in full bloom. Also, advance parties will have to travel down river to make the over night camping spots suitable for habitation by 500 or more campers. There is time though and by August 6th the problems will be overcome ... all that will remain for boaters to do is to enjoy themselves in the company of Yukon's Mother Nature. Speaking of campsites, the flotilla will stop on the marge of Lake Laberge, where Sam McGee was cremated, then push on the following morning to Big Salmon and from there to Carmacks, the community named after one of the discoverers of gold. At Selkirk, some 270 miles from Whitehorse, an interfaith church service is scheduled to be held in an old Anglican Church, now abandoned, but

still complete with pews and an organ that actually works. Then eight or nine days later, depending on weather conditions, the flotilla will pull into Dawson City, or to be more exact, Lousetown, situated about a mile from Dawson across the Klondike river. Sounds exciting, different, interesting ... the Yukon River Flotilla for Centennial should be all this and more. C'mon pardner ... Yes I'm coming

Les McLaughlin in Whitehorse for Agenda 67.