

Dreams on the Yukon

2009 Yukon River & Bering Sea Expedition

The folklore of the Yukon region and river is overflowing with stories of interesting people and adventures. Some of these tales are way too preposterous to believe and others elevate the participants to super human. All are fascinating in their detail and I suspect that even the most preposterous have some degree of truthfulness.

I hope to add to this body of Yukon folklore as I ply the cold waters of the Yukon River and Bering Sea this summer. In June I will begin a 2000 mile solo odyssey in a pristine and remote watery wilderness. Starting in Eagle, Alaska I will hopefully end my journey 55 brutal days later in Nome, Alaska. The challenges will be interesting, difficult, dangerous and sometimes complex to survive. The pleasurable times and adventure will be worth the physical and emotional pain.

My adventure on the Yukon will be exceptional physical, sometimes brutal and physically continuous. I will have my fair share of sporty conditions on the river, camping along its shores and on the cold Bering Sea. A multitude of brown bears will also challenge my ability to breath at times. Barren ground brown bears are quite a bit more unpredictable and aggressive than their coastal brethren. I will mostly see these inland bears. Some of these bears will see me as a curiosity and some will see me as dinner. It is always a test to understand these bears. A special concern is sleeping in bear country and being alone. I have developed protocol that address's these issues and have been effective in my past solo arctic expeditions. I will also see moose, otters, wolves, fox and caribou, plus eagles and many other water and predatory birds. My Canon cameras will be busy on this trip as will be my adventurous spirit.

The river has many hazards, turbulent water, swift currents, underwater obstructions and snags and of course the very cold water. The river seldom warms above 40 degrees. Waves from storms can make the river very choppy and dangerous. The Yukon is a silt laden river and this brings a fascinating phenomenon. If you get dunked the silt settles on and within your clothing and has a tendency to weight you down more so than in clear water. Even strong swimmers drowned more easily when weighted. So my job is to center my boat and attack for the coast. Each day brings new water and new challenges. I hope to average 50 miles a day or so. This will give me time to relax and explore the shorelines and photographically record this adventure and this remote wilderness. I am also planning to paddle for a personal record of 100 miles in a day. I will GPS my positions in the morning and when I come ashore at the end of this long day. I believe that I can do this in a 16 to 18 hour day. This should be fun!

Logistically the expedition will mostly be self supporting and resupplied through two food drops. My launch point in Eagle will see my supply load at 30 days of food plus all my safety and survival gear. Galena is 780 miles down river and will be my first resupply point. Here I will refit for the second and tougher section of the expedition, the Bering Sea. Unalakleet, on the Norton Sound coastline, will serve as my second and final resupply point. Again I will refit for the final push to Nome. Along the river and Bering Sea coast are small villages and fish camps.. I will occasionally stop, photograph and learn about the local customs and people. Meeting the local inhabitants is always a major enjoyment on these expeditions. I have many friends from Canada that I made while kayaking in the Hudson Bay region.

When I leave the river I will be paddling on the Bering Sea. This is a very wild and cold body of water. Storms are treacherous and violent. My job is to survive these conditions for almost 500 miles. Bering Sea water temperatures will be 40 degrees at the warmest. Fog and stormy weather will be common. Tides of 3 to 4 meters are expected and deadly tidal shoals have to be attacked when I come to them. The larger tidal shoals when encountered will stop the expedition until a plan of attack is devised and then that plan has to be executed within the tide and weather parameters. This will be one of the more difficult challenges on the Bering Sea. Another challenge is procurement of fresh water supplies. I believe, in talking with my advisors, that this will not be as a severe problem as it was on James Bay. I will carry a couple of gallons as a reserve and this should see me through sections of salt water intrusion. I have also been warned that polar bears inhabit the coastline in the northern sections of the expedition. I am sure that if any are encountered we will have pleasant photography shoots. If not I sure hope that my counter measures work really well. I believe that they will. I am the only person to survive kayaking the west coast of James Bay. Those conditions were severe and I believe that these will be as harsh. I look forward to the challenge and working on the Bering Sea.

This is a tough, long and fairly dangerous expedition. It will wear you down and trash you if you allow this to happen. I plan on being a stronger and smarter kayaker when I finish in Nome.