

Information

The Fortymile River offers trips for many different skill levels. All travelers should have detailed maps of the specific area they are floating. The USGS inch-to-the-mile maps (1:63,360) recommended for each trip are:

Joseph to Fortymile Bridge:
Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5


South Fork Bridge to Fortymile Bridge:
Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2

Fortymile Bridge to Eagle:
American: Eagle C-1, C-2;
Canadian: Fortymile 116C/7, Cassiar 116C/8,
Shell Creek 116C/9,
Mount Gladman 116C/10

Mosquito Fork Bridge to South Fork Bridge:
Eagle A-2

West Fork Campground to South Fork Bridge:
Eagle A-2, Tanacross D-2, D-3

Walker Fork Campground to Fortymile Bridge:
Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2



For more information:
Bureau of Land Management
Fairbanks District Office
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709
907-474-2251
1-800-437-7021

Chicken Field Station
Mile 68.2 Taylor Highway
(June-Sept. only)

Alaska Public Lands Information Center
P.O. Box 359
Tok, Alaska 99780
(907) 883-5667

Alaska Public Lands Information Center
250 Cushman, Suite 1A
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 456-0527

Weather and Safety

It is easy to become disoriented in the rugged Fortymile country where the river winds through the Tanana uplands. Take along a compass and inch-to-the-mile maps of your route. Keep track of your position as you float since many river bends look similar. Rapids and portages are not marked. Carry maps of the surrounding area in case an accident forces you to walk out cross-country.

- **Water Temperature:** The Fortymile River is cold! Wear a life jacket. A wetsuit is recommended for kayakers and canoeists planning to run the bigger rapids. Know how to recognize, prevent and treat hypothermia.

- **Water Level:** The water level can change drastically overnight in the Fortymile River drainage, so always tie your boats well above the high water mark. Good weather in your particular location does not guarantee stable water levels. Rain in the headwaters can lead to significant fluctuations far downstream and change the characteristics of rapids.

- **Bears:** Although there have been few problem bears on the Fortymile, there are bears in the area. Prudent campers cook and store food well away from tents and boats. Don't bury cans or garbage; bears will find them and make a mess. *Pack it in, pack it out.*

- **Giardia:** All water should be treated to prevent giardiasis. This intestinal parasite can leave you feeling miserable for weeks. Boiling water for at least five minutes is the best way to kill the organism.



Floating the lower portion of the Kink, after portaging the rapids.

Fortymile

National Wild and Scenic River



Running the river

Early prospectors poled their boats from the Yukon River in Canada to the Fortymile River and up its tributaries and creeks. Most of the early boats were made by hand, using available materials. Quality depended on individual skills in whipsawing and carpentry. River users usually portaged even the mildest rapids rather than risk losing a whole year's grubstake.

Rapids on the Fortymile can be hazardous. The degree of hazard depends on your conditioning, experience and equipment, as well as the flow rate of the water. The Fortymile River is a rain-dominated system. In a dry June there may be no rapids at all, but after heavy August rains the rapids may be class III.

The Fortymile River runs through a remote area of Interior Alaska. Rapids often should be portaged to prevent injury or loss of provisions far from help. Hard and fast rules for running the river are impractical because every trip is run under different conditions. You will need to maneuver around rocks or waves in nearly every bend of the river, and sweepers and snags are common. There is no substitute for good judgment and attentiveness. The following guidelines cover the significant rapids.

Bald Eagle Rapids, on the Middle Fork just above the confluence of the Middle and North forks, is hazardous for canoes at high water levels. It generally can be run on either side of the large rock in the center of the stream.

Along the riverbank of the Middle Fork, watch for remnants of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System. The WAMCATS line, completed in 1902, provided a communications link between Fort Egbert in Eagle and Fort Liscum near Valdez to Washington, D.C., and the rest of the United States via Seattle.

The Chute is about a half-mile below the confluence of the Middle and North forks, where the river straightens from a turn to the right as you face downstream. Canoes generally should portage this class III water, using either bank.

The Kink is big water, with several drops over three feet and recirculating hydraulics. It is rarely runnable and should be portaged on the right bank. To recognize the approach to the Kink, note that two significant streams enter the river on the right after passing the Chute. The second of these, Hutchinson Creek, is about 10 miles below the Chute. Keep your eyes and ears open after passing Hutchinson Creek, staying close to the right bank when the river bends to the left. Before the river turns back to the right, stop and scout ahead. Walk downstream to determine just how far you can safely bring your boat before starting the portage. The portage generally is made over the shelving bedrock on the right bank. If the water is high, use the trail on the higher bench.

The Kink was formed in 1898 when a group of Danish prospectors blasted away a 100-foot rock ridge to drain a 2.8 mile-long meander. The dry river bed was worked for gold, but proved to be poor ground and was abandoned by 1905. Draining the meander might be an easy task using

today's technology, but creation of the Kink was a major engineering feat in that day and time. It was accomplished in a relatively uncharted wilderness without benefit of developed transportation or communication systems. The area is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Falls is a class II to III rapids about two miles above the Fortymile Bridge. Notice a large eddy that has taken a bite out of the cliffs of the left bank. It shows up clearly on the inch-to-the-mile (1:63,360) map. Generally you will run The Falls on the right at high water and on the left at low water. It can be portaged on the right bank.

Deadman's Riffle is on the main stem of the Fortymile about 15 miles below the Fortymile Bridge. It is class III at some water levels and can be portaged on the right.

Canyon Rapids is in Canada, below the mouth of Bruin Creek. At extremely high water it is very dangerous. It is difficult to line or portage due to the steep canyon walls. At lesser flows it is class II to III water and can be lined or portaged on the right.

BLM personnel float the Fortymile River system regularly, so contact BLM's Fairbanks District Office at (907) 474-2200 for up-to-date information on river conditions. Begin planning your trip early enough to receive the necessary information to make a safe and enjoyable trip.

In the past

The Fortymile country was not always as accessible as it is today. In the past, summer travelers walked overland with packhorses or poled up the river. In the winter they traveled overland or along the river by dog team. But summer or winter, the Fortymile River was always a reliable thoroughfare for travelers.

Prospectors gave the Fortymile River its name about 1886, because the mouth of the stream is about 40 miles below the former Hudson's Bay post of Fort Reliance.

Today's travelers on the Fortymile can find relaxation, adventure or a touch the past. Many signs of mining activity, both past and present, are visible along the river. Watch for remains of old bucket and line dredges, turn-of-the-century trapper cabins, and old townsites, such as Franklin, Steele Creek and Fortymile.

As you float the river, you will probably encounter small suction dredge operations. You can also see some evidence of the large "cat" (caterpillar) mines with large sluice boxes, heavy machinery and rustic log cabins.

Early foot travelers, freighters and mail carriers followed an overland trail connecting all the communities in the Fortymile country. The trail ran south from Eagle to Liberty, over to Dome Creek, then followed O'Brien Creek to the Fortymile River and downstream to the roadhouse at the mouth of Steele Creek. From there the trail wound up Steele Creek, over the ridge to Gilliland Creek, and down to Jack Wade. It then headed



Portaging the Kink

west to Franklin and south again until it reached Chicken. The trip would take from 3 to 4 days by dog team or horse-drawn wagon.

The river is a peaceful and refreshing alternative to road travel. You can select a half-day float on the Mosquito Fork or a week-long float to Eagle—or anything in between—by consulting the chart on the opposite page.

Whatever your choice, the river will bring you closer to past prospectors and settlers who faced seemingly insurmountable odds as they tamed the Fortymile gold country.

Fortymile is gold country. At the turn of the century, when gold brought \$17 an ounce, an average \$225,000 (\$4.5 million in today's value) worth of gold bullion was taken each year. Today the abandoned and forgotten dredges remind us of the excitement of those years.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Fairbanks District Office
Fairbanks, Alaska



Access Points

A boater contemplating a trip on the Fortymile River has many options. The longest trip may start with an air taxi ride to the Joseph Airstrip in the Middle Fork drainage, followed by an 8- to 12-day float trip to Eagle. Or an afternoon outing can take you from the Mosquito Fork Bridge to the South Fork Bridge. Here are the most popular access points with floating times for different stream segments at varying water levels.

1 Joseph Airstrip

This unmaintained bush airstrip is rough and narrow, but it's the easiest way into the Middle Fork and North Fork areas. A gully cuts across the runway near the middle. Landing here requires experienced pilots and capable aircraft. A 50-yard trail at the eastern end of the runway leads to the river. Many people wonder about the origin of the shack near the trailhead. It was apparently built illegally around 1974 by a trapper for his winter trapping operations.

2 Fortymile Bridge Wayside

This boat landing at milepost 112 Taylor Highway is heavily used by miners and recreationists. A steep access road that often requires four-wheel drive leads to the river on the east side of the highway. It is difficult but not impossible to use boat trailers here. Leave your vehicle at the parking lot on the west side of the highway instead of on the ramp. Outhouses are available.

3 Walker Fork Campground

Walker Fork, at milepost 82, is floatable only at high water in the spring. The easiest access is at the end of the road loop in the campground. This campground has outhouses and 19 campsites.

4 South Fork Bridge Wayside

This boat landing at milepost 75 Taylor Highway has a parking lot, outhouse and boat ramp. The boat ramp is exposed to the river current and is not easy to use; four-wheel drive is generally necessary. There is a parking lot for long-term parking, but overnight camping is not allowed at the South Fork Bridge Wayside.

5 Mosquito Fork Bridge Wayside

The Mosquito fork is too shallow to float except during periods of high water. This float trip starts at the Mosquito Fork Bridge, milepost 64 on the Taylor Highway. The easiest way to get equipment to the river is to turn east off the highway just south of the bridge and drive about 100 yards to the point where a steep ramp has been installed to the water's edge. This ramp is not suited for boat trailers, but it provides a good route to carry rafts or canoes. Chicken residents use this access point to get drinking water, so please keep the area clean. Park your vehicle at the parking lot on the north side of the bridge.

6 West Fork Bridge

During periods of high water, especially during spring runoff, the West Fork of the Dennison Fork becomes deep enough to float. Most of the year there is not enough water for pleasant canoeing or rafting. Put in at the West Fork Bridge, milepost 49 Taylor Highway. Boats must be carried about 20 yards to the water. The West Fork Campground, a quarter-mile from the bridge, has outhouses and 25 campsites. A long-term parking area lies south of the bridge.

Note: If you are planning a trip on the lower Fortymile to either Clinton Creek or down the Yukon to Eagle, you must check in with both Canada and U.S. Customs.

7 Clinton Creek Bridge

An old parking lot and camping area is available above the bridge on river left, just below the mouth of Clinton Creek. The old settlement of Clinton Creek was inhabited from 1967 to 1979, though little remains there today. To reach by vehicle, drive from the U.S./Canada border about 28 miles down the Top of the World Highway to the Clinton Creek turnoff and follow the unmaintained road 25 miles. No facilities or services are available.

8 Eagle

Boaters who float down the Fortymile to the Yukon River will find their first opportunity to take out at Eagle, which has three boat landings. The first is a private landing for the sightseeing boat *Yukon Queen II*. Vehicles can be driven to the water's edge at the second, just downriver. The third landing requires a 20-foot climb up a steep stairway to reach downtown Eagle. Be sure to check in with U.S. Customs on arrival.

Seasonal Information

9 BLM Chicken Field Station

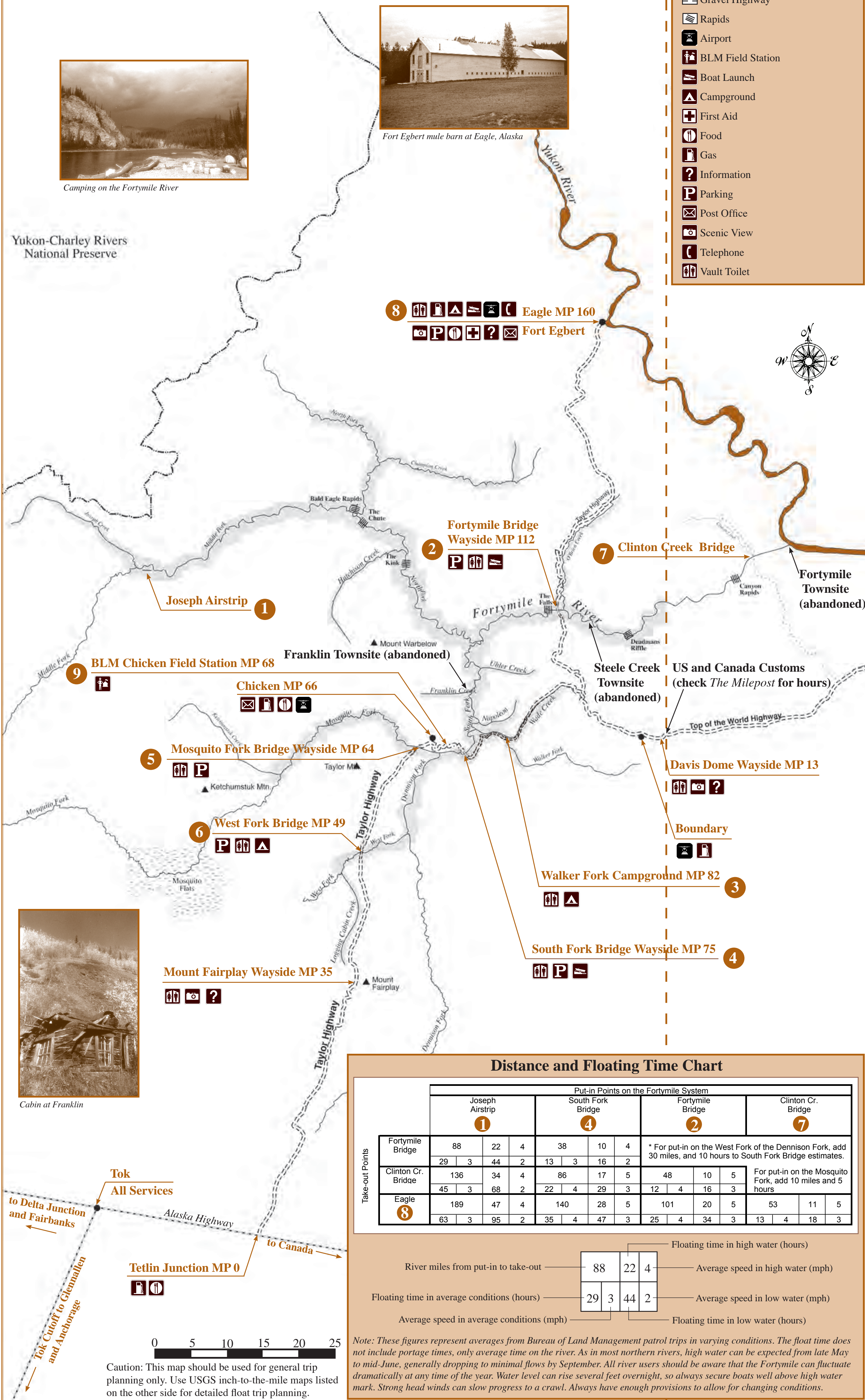
BLM personnel try to float segments of the Fortymile River system on a nearly weekly basis. Contact the BLM office in Fairbanks (address and telephone number on the other side of this brochure) for up-to-date information on river conditions. Plan your trip early enough to get the necessary information to make a safe and enjoyable trip. The Chicken Field Station at milepost 68 is intermittently staffed.

Other Brochures

The following brochures are available at BLM and APLIC offices listed on the back page:

- Taylor Highway—Fortymile Gold Country: Tetlin Junction to Boundary
- The Eagle—Valdez Trail
- Early Miners of the Fortymile

Fortymile Wild and Scenic River

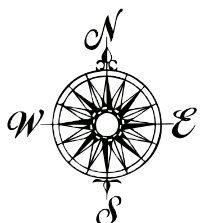


Camping on the Fortymile River



Fort Egbert mule barn at Eagle, Alaska

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve



Cabin at Franklin

