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*listen to the land*  
*aliannaktuk*  
*en osmose avec la terre*

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The Coppermine also figured prominently in the exploration history of the arctic. In 1771, Samuel Hearne and his party of Chipewyans traveled the last 60 kilometres of the river in search of its rich copper deposits, and likely became the first outsiders to see this river. Their journey to the Coppermine, and the massacre they witnessed at what is now Bloody Falls (and **Kugluk/Bloody Falls Territorial Park**), is well documented. In 1820, the first Franklin expedition descended the Coppermine and mapped the arctic coast from the mouth of the river east to Point Turnagain. In 1825, John Richardson's crew, part of the second Franklin expedition, mapped the coast from the Mackenzie delta to the Coppermine and ascended the river to travel overland to their wintering site on Great Bear Lake.

#### **DIVERSE LANDSCAPE**

Because there has been so little change since then, today's river paddlers experience the land much as Hearne, Franklin, and the Inuit and Dene did almost two centuries ago. A paddling trip flows through gorgeous wilderness, and crosses the Arctic Circle on its way to the Arctic Ocean. On the upper reaches of the Coppermine, many small rivers and streams flow into the main river

through hills thinly covered with stunted spruce and dwarf birch. Downstream, the hills are covered with tundra, while the boreal forest is limited to the lush river valley, and still farther downstream, the river flows through arctic tundra with wetlands at places along the river.

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The landscape changes drastically as paddlers travel through several sets of rapids along the river. Intense whitewater swirls around Rocky Defile, a memorial at the top a grim reminder of the dangers inherent in river travel. Beyond the rapids, boreal forest gives way to scrubby dwarf spruce as paddlers enter the arctic landscape at Kendall Creek. Red sandstone cliffs form a canyon, providing an excellent location for hiking or sport fishing. Paddlers pass the flat-topped September and Coppermine Mountains, which dominate the landscape for miles. Spectacular views are possible in all directions over the seemingly endless rolling tundra plateaus. The red sandstone cliffs change to white sandstone and rolling white marine sediments closer to the coast.

In the distance, the red cliffs of Sandstone Rapids are in view, but to reach them you must negotiate Muskox Rapids, a series of large standing waves. From Sandstone Rapids, you emerge from the sandstone cliff banks into smaller sets of rapids and islands, paddling through them en route to Escape Rapids. For over 40 kilometres, there is a

great deal of whitewater, and at one point you are faced with at least five kilometres of relentless whitewater.

Just before Escape Rapids, the wild river opens into a calm and wide channel before turning sharply to the left and crashing between canyon walls. A long, thin waterfall

drops 80 to 100 metres into the gorge near the entrance, and sheer cliffs rise straight up from the river, marked by patches of wildflowers tenaciously clinging to cracks in the rocks.

Below **Kugluk/Bloody Falls Territorial Park**, the river flows through the cross-bedded sediments of an earlier delta until it passes the rocky outcropping just south of the community of Kugluktuk, and past sandy beaches into the Coronation Gulf.

Wildlife viewing along the Coppermine is usually excellent. Caribou are frequently seen, sometimes crossing the river in long lines. Sightings of moose are not unusual, as the river brings a tongue of boreal forest and this large member of the deer family all the way to the arctic coast. Red and arctic foxes, tundra wolves and wolverines den in the river banks or in eskers or sandy hills, and hunt along the floodplain of the river. Tundra swans, white-fronted, and Canada geese nest in the wetlands, and raptors such as peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, rough-legged hawks, golden and bald eagles nest on ledges on the cliffs above the river. The

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fishing is excellent, for lake trout, arctic grayling, and, in the lower reaches of the river, for arctic char.

### HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Due to its historical and cultural importance, its value to wildlife, and its incredible recreational experiences, the Coppermine River has been nominated as a Canadian Heritage River. Nunavut Parks and Kugluktummiut are developing a river management plan, a requirement of the CHRS program, and are working towards full Canadian Heritage River designation, expected in 2008.

The Coppermine River is without a doubt one of the premiere arctic rivers for the advanced novice paddler, or for those adventure seekers who want a guided river trip with good scenery, wildlife, signs of past cultures, and want to learn more about

the river's important place in history. River trips usually start with chartered floatplane out of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and there are several good starting points for river trips of different lengths (from one to three weeks). The length of your trip will determine how much flat water, smooth steady flows, and challenging whitewater you will experience. It is, however, an arctic river, and needs to be taken seriously due to the remoteness of most of its length.

A number of commercial operators offer canoe, raft, and kayak trips on the Coppermine River. It is a convenient river to paddle due to the fact that it ends in Kugluktuk, where boats and paddlers can be flown out on commercial flights rather than requiring chartered aircraft for pickups. For more information, check the Nunavut Parks website at [www.nunavutparks.com](http://www.nunavutparks.com), or call



Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■

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