

the Dempster Highway Experience

highlights

The Dempster Highway has an international reputation as one of the last wilderness highways in North America and the only all-season Canadian highway to cross the Arctic Circle. It offers spectacular wilderness vistas, opportunities to see and experience tundra landscapes with arctic, glacial and permafrost features. It's truly a trip of a lifetime.

This well-maintained gravel road spans 734.3 km from the junction with the North Klondike Highway to the Arctic service centre of Inuvik, Northwest Territories. The Arctic Circle crossing at km 402 provides interpretation and is a popular stop.

First Nations and Inuit people have lived in the Dempster region for generations. The mountains, rivers, and important sites in Yukon and the Northwest Territories all have original First Nations names and these names have stories attached to them that include important information about the land and its people.

This is the only place in Canada where people can study and view arctic vegetation from a highway.



- > Dawson City, Yukon to Inuvik, NWT
- > The Only Highway in Canada to Cross the Arctic Circle

DISTANCE: 735 km northeast to Inuvik

MINIMUM TIME RECOMMENDED: 5 day Return Trip

itinerary

Mileages given from the Junction or "J"

Note – One hour time zone change at the Yukon and the Northwest Territories border

DAY 1 Dawson City to Eagle Plains: 536 km

In Dawson City, visit Yukon Visitor Information Centre or Dempster Delta Northwest Territories Visitor Centre for information prior to departure.

40 km east of Dawson City via the Klondike Highway to the Dempster Highway Junction.

J 0.2 km Dempster Highway interpretive sign with information panels
(Note: Next services available at km 370 – Eagle Plains Hotel and RV campground)

J 50.5 km Marks the boundary of Tombstone Territorial Park encompassing over 2,113 km of subarctic wilderness. The Dempster runs through the park offering spectacular views and the tundra environment is like nowhere else in Canada.

J 72 km Tombstone Mountain Campground and Dempster Highway Interpretive Centre. Displays and staff at the Dempster Interpretive Centre can provide information and suggested itineraries and there's a short interpretive trail near the campground. Note: Just south of the campground, a new "Tombstone Centre" is planned and scheduled to open in 2008.

J 75 km Tombstone Mountain viewpoint – look west to the prominent 2,193 metre peak of Tombstone Mountain. Tombstone Mountain was a landmark for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and trappers. Today is it still a convenient reference for aircraft and hikers.

J 77 km North Fork Pass – begins the land of near-continuous permafrost and tundra. Tundra is derived from the Finnish word "tunturi" meaning treeless plain.

J 82 km North Fork Pass summit and Watershed Divide – highest point on the Dempster highway at 1300 metres above sea level. All waters along the highway to the north of this location flow into the Beaufort Sea via the Mackenzie River system. Streams to the south are part of the Yukon River watershed that empties in the Bering Sea far to the west.

J 84 km Angelcomb Peak – watch for Dall sheep on these mountain slopes.

J 87 – 132 km Blackstone Uplands stretch from North Fork pass to Chapman Lake and beyond. Probably the richest area for birdlife on the Dempster.

J 103.6 km Two Moose Lake – turnout with information panels and viewing platform. Moose are sometimes seen feeding in this small lake.

J 116 km View over Chapman Lake, the largest lake on the Dempster highway named for Ernest Chapman – a trader, trapper, and prospector.

J 123 km Leaving the north boundary of Tombstone Park.

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The Dempster provides superior wildlife viewing and interpretation opportunities. The Porcupine Caribou herd migrates annually through the Dempster region.

Eagle Plains Hotel at km 370 is the only visitor facility between Dawson City and Fort McPherson – providing all-season lodging, meals and vehicle service.

One of the most appealing aspects of the Dempster is the diversity of natural zones or “ecozones”. Of the more than 1,300 species of plants found in the Yukon, nearly 1,000 can be found along or near this highway.

2004 marked the 25th Anniversary of the opening of the Dempster Highway named after Sergeant W.J.D. Dempster of the Northwest Mounted Police, who in the winter of 1910-11 was sent to search for the “Lost Patrol”.

Visitor services are available in Dawson City, at the Klondike River Lodge (junction of Klondike Highway and Dempster Highway), at Eagle Plains Hotel located about the halfway point on the Dempster Highway, and Fort McPherson, and Inuvik, Northwest Territories.

Summer driving conditions vary depending on the weather but the days are long in the Land of the Midnight Sun!



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J 152.8 km Windy Pass Summit – This alpine tundra environment has probably changed very little over the past 100,000 years. The first humans would have viewed this landscape as they roamed eastward from Asia across the Bering land bridge.

J 195.7 km The 110 metre Jeckell Bridge spans the Ogilvie River. The Ogilvie River and Ogilvie Mountains were named in honour of William Ogilvie, a prominent Canadian land surveyor and commissioner of the newly created Yukon Territory in 1898 during the Klondike Gold Rush.

J 244 km Highway climbs from the Ogilvie River following a high ridge to the Eagle Plains plateau – one of the few unglaciated areas in Canada. Landscape shaped by wind and water erosion rather than ice.

J 259 km Ogilvie-Peel viewpoint provides one of the best panoramas of the northern fringe of the Ogilvie Mountains. It was the oil and gas found deep in the bedrock of the Eagle Plains that prompted the building of the Dempster highway. Road travels across the Eagle Plains from here to the Yukon – Northwest Territories border in the Richardson Mountains. To the north, the plateau stretches 300 km to the British Mountains and the coastal plain off the Beaufort Sea.

J 347 km To the northeast lie the Richardson Mountains, a more subtle range of mountains than the Ogilvies.

J 369 km Eagle Plains Hotel and RV campground – about the halfway point on the Dempster highway. The hotel, built in 1978 just prior to completion of the highway is open year-round.

Overnight Eagle Plains

DAY 2 Eagle Plains to Inuvik, NWT: 365 km

J 378 km Eagle River. Canoeists depart here bound for Alaska via the Porcupine and Yukon rivers.

J 385.3 km View of the unglaciated Richardson Mountains (elevation 1,200 metres). Named for Sir John Richardson, surgeon and naturalist on both of Sir John Franklin's overland expeditions to the Arctic Ocean.

J 405.5 km Large double-ended turnout at the Arctic Circle Crossing. Interpretive signage and picnic tables. At this point on June 21, the sun never dips below the horizon over the entire 24 hour day.

J 465 km Yukon/Northwest Territories border. The Continental Divide in the Richardson Mountains. West of here, water flows to the Pacific ocean; East of here, water flows to the Arctic Ocean.

J 488.7 Wright Pass Summit – The Dempster Highway descends 853 metres to the Peel River Crossing.

J 530 km Tetlit Gwinjik (Peel River) Park and Peel River Plateau viewpoint. Views of Richardson Mountains, Mackenzie Delta, Peel River Valley and Fort McPherson.

J 539 km Peel River Crossing – Free Government cable ferry generally operates early June to mid-October.

J 550 km Side road on left to Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories.

Fort McPherson is located about 30 metres above the Peel River. Fort McPherson was named in 1848 for Murdoch McPherson, chief trader of the Hudson's Bay Co. Visitor Information located in a restored log house.

J 608. km Mackenzie River Crossing. Free Government ferry generally open early June to mid-October. The double-ended ferry travels between landings on either side of the Mackenzie River and provides access to Tsiigehtchic formerly Arctic Red River.

J 712 km Nitainl'aii Territorial Park – Gwich'in cultural interpretive displays at the Visitor Centre.

J 734.3 km Turn northbound to Inuvik, the end of the Dempster highway. Visit Western Arctic Regional Visitors Centre in Inuvik for a complete list of activities. Note: The Great Northern Arts Festival takes place annually mid-July.

Overnight Inuvik

DAY 3 Inuvik

Explore the area. There are day tours available to Tuktoyaktuk and Aklavik, Northwest Territories as well as Herschel Island, Yukon Territory. Herschel Island Qikiqtaruk Park protects a unique combination of natural and human heritage. The island became the Yukon's first territorial park in July, 1987. The waters around Herschel Island are a haven for fish and marine mammals. The Mackenzie River flows into the Beaufort Sea southeast of the island. From mid-June to mid-September, Herschel Island Qikiqtaruk Park is accessible by boat and aircraft on a charter basis. Charter aircraft out of Inuvik, and boat charters operate out of various Mackenzie Delta communities.

Overnight Inuvik

DAY 4 & 5 Inuvik, NWT to Dawson City: 735 km

Return to Dawson City.