



*Big Salmon Village,
Yukon River*

Highlights from the 1997 Yukon River Survey



Thirty Mile, Yukon River

The **Yukon River Survey** collected information from 2,125 river travellers about their travel on the Yukon, Teslin and Big Salmon Rivers between June 13 and September 15, 1997.



Teslin River



Big Salmon River

Yukon
Government

Why was the survey done?

Wilderness and garbage

From the survey results it appears that travellers on the Yukon, Teslin and Big Salmon rivers generally viewed their trips as excellent wilderness experiences with few serious problems.

However, nearly 42% of travellers on the Yukon River felt that litter and garbage were a moderate to serious problem. This feeling was strongest among European travellers. Canadian and American travellers were generally unconcerned about garbage.

Almost every summer Yukon residents as well as visitors express concerns about the impacts of recreational travel on the Yukon River. Visitors sometimes speak about the garbage they see along the river and its heavily used tributaries. Residents sometimes tell of encounters with inexperienced travellers who have mistreated the land, hunted or fished without a licence or put themselves in jeopardy.

Although many stories have been told about what is happening on Yukon rivers, there has been a lack of hard information about the origins, attitudes and behaviours of river travellers themselves. The 1997 Yukon River Survey was designed to fill this information gap and help define the concerns.

How did the survey work?

A checkpoint was set up near Big Salmon Village at the confluence of the Yukon and Big Salmon rivers. All travellers coming down the Yukon, Teslin and Big Salmon rivers would pass this point on their way to Carmacks and Dawson.

The checkpoint was operated by a Conservation Officer from the Department of Renewable Resources. The Officer conducted river patrols, enforced hunting and fishing laws, kept a daily count of travellers and helped them complete the questionnaires. Questionnaires were available in English, French, German and Japanese.

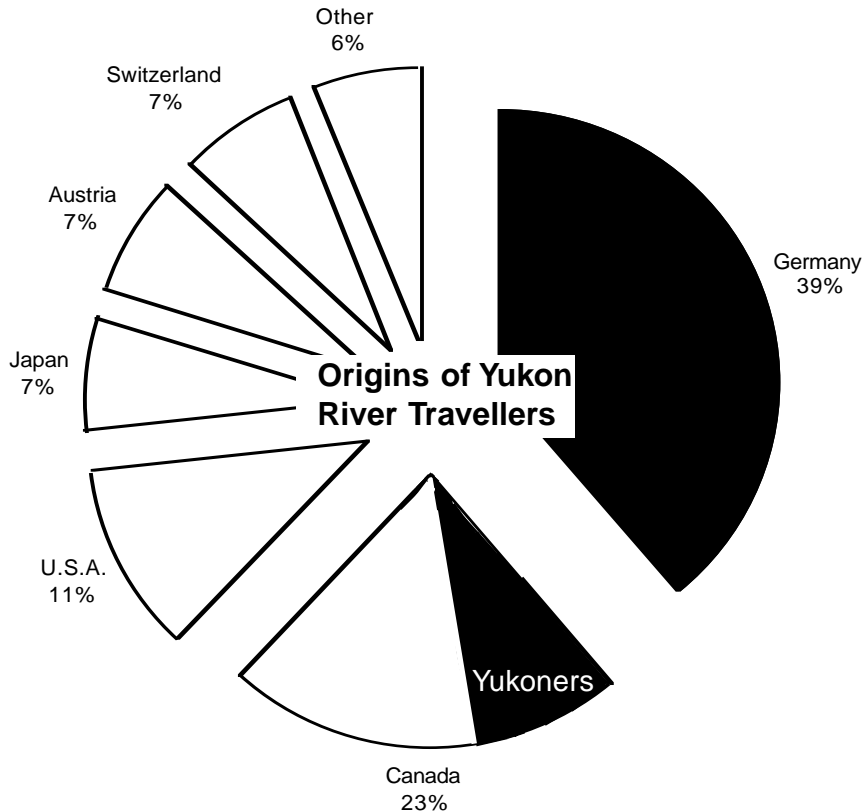
Three separate questionnaires were used:

1. An **INDIVIDUAL** questionnaire was used to collect information from every river traveller. People were asked to provide information about themselves, their trip, their experiences on the river and their knowledge and awareness of wilderness travel, no-trace camping and bear safety.
2. A **GROUP** questionnaire was used to collect information from group leaders and solo travellers. The questionnaire asked about the trip route and duration, method of travel, camp selection, waste disposal and wilderness safety.
3. A **Conservation Officer** questionnaire collected information on group numbers, hunting and fishing equipment and licenses, bear spray and lifejackets.

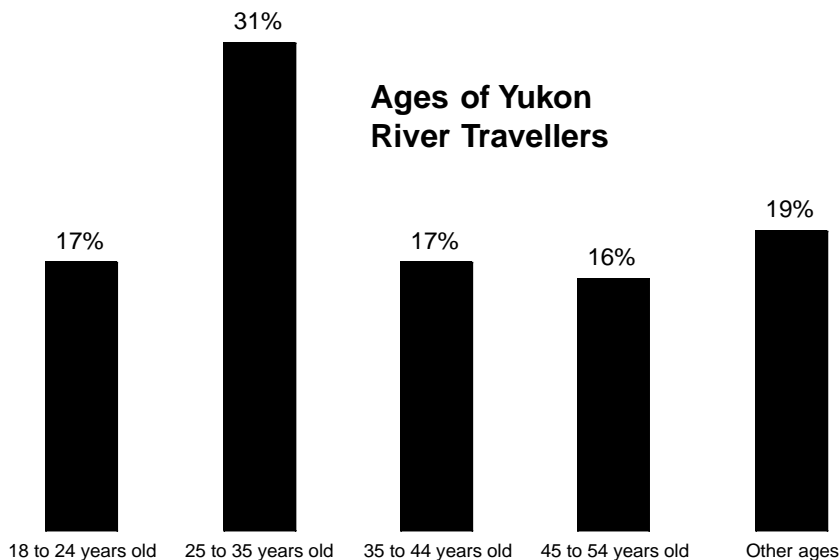
The questionnaires were designed and the results were analyzed by the Statistics Bureau of the Executive Council Office.

Who was on the river?

Over 650 groups accounting for an estimated 2,125 travellers used the upper Yukon River system between June 13 and September 15, 1997.



- Germany was the most common country of origin for river travellers (**39%**).
- Canada was the next most common country of origin (**23%**) with over a third of Canadians being Yukoners (Yukoners accounted for approximately 8% of all travellers).
- Travellers from the U.S.A. accounted for **11%** of all travellers.
- Japan, Austria and Switzerland each accounted for **7%** of all travellers.
- Male river travellers outnumbered female travellers by almost three to one.



- The most common age group was travellers between 25 and 35 years of age (**31%**). River travellers 18 to 24 years of age and 35 to 44 years of age were next at **17%** each, followed closely by 45 to 54 year olds at **16%**.

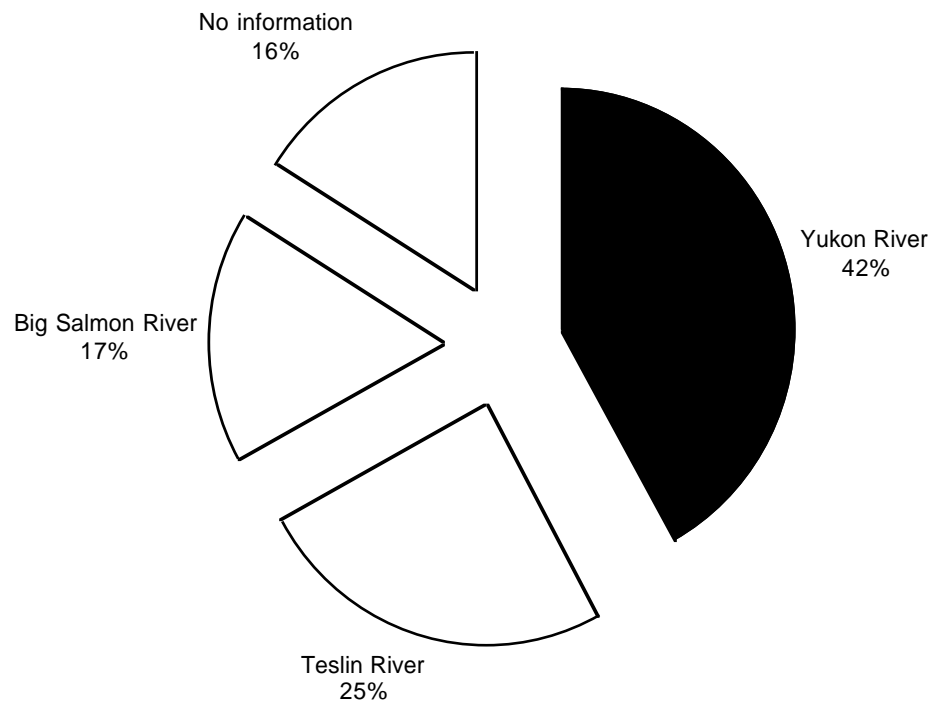
Fishing rods: *Slightly less than 3/4's of the groups surveyed carried fishing rods on-board. Of these groups, approximately 87% had at least one fishing license.*

Where did they “put in”?

In response to the question “Where did your group put in at the start of this trip?”

- 42% of the groups reported starting their trip on the Yukon River;
- 25% started on the Teslin River;
- 17% started on the Big Salmon River; and
- 16% did not indicate a starting point.

Lifejackets: Almost 90% of the groups surveyed carried a lifejacket for each member of the group.

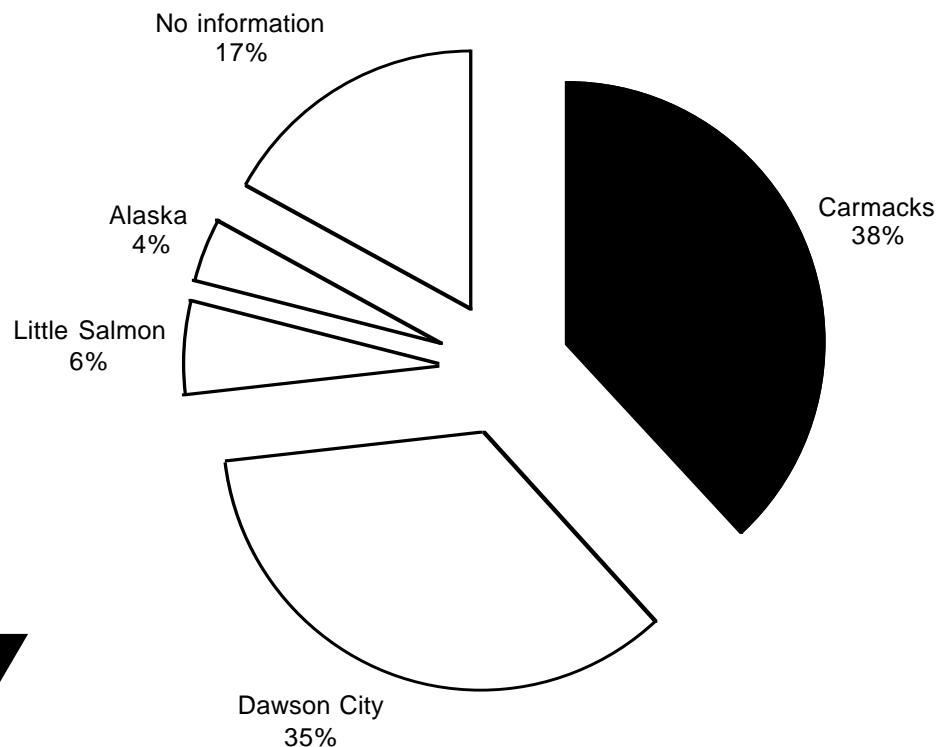


Where did they “take out”?

In response to the question “Where does your group plan to take out at the end of this trip?”

- 38% of the groups said Carmacks;
- 35% said Dawson City;
- 6% said Little Salmon;
- less than 5% said Alaska; and
- 17% did not indicate a take out point.

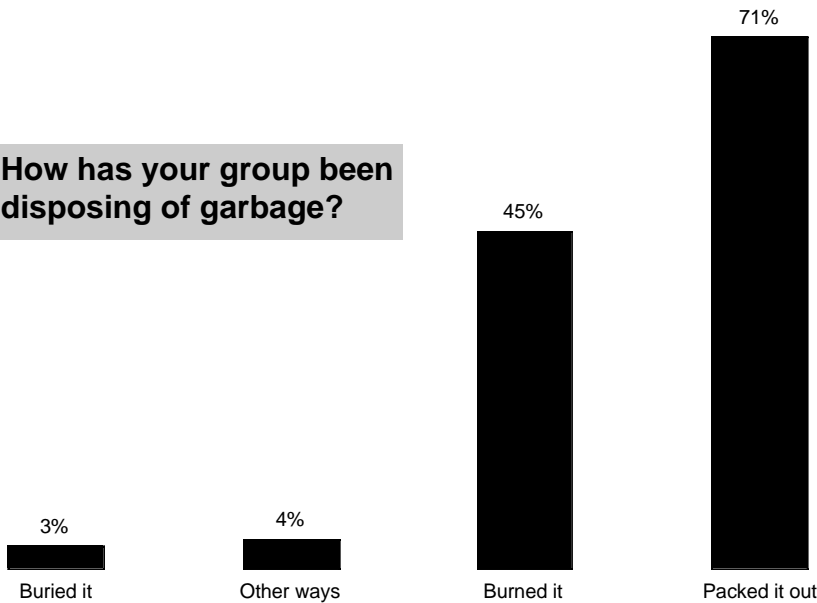
Bear spray: About 45% of all the groups surveyed had at least one member carrying bear spray.



Are river travellers using “leave no trace” camping methods?

One of the main objectives of the Yukon River Survey was to determine whether river travellers were aware of “leave no trace” practices and were carrying them out. The charts below highlight the findings of the survey.

How has your group been disposing of garbage?

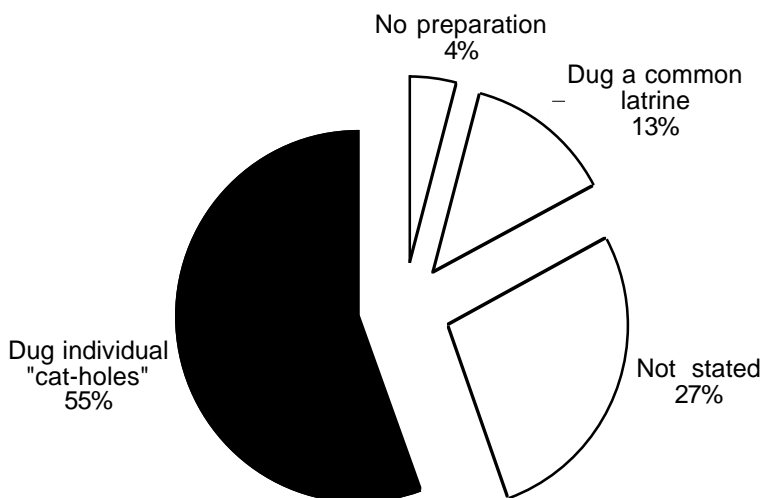


In response to the question: “How has your group been disposing of garbage?”

- 71% of the groups said they packed out their garbage;
- 45% of the groups said they burned their garbage;
- 3% of the groups said they buried their garbage; and
- 4% of the groups said they used another method of disposing of their garbage.

(The percentages do not add up to 100% since each group could use more than 1 way of disposing of their garbage)

How has your group been disposing of human waste?



In response to the question: “How has your group been disposing of human waste?”

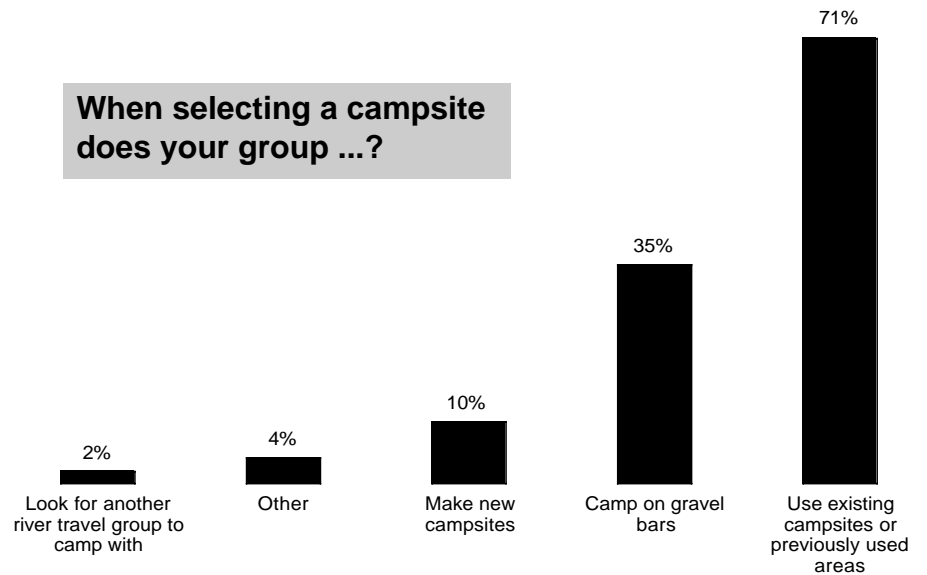
- 55% of the groups said they dug individual “cat-holes”;
- 27% of the groups did not say;
- 13% of the groups said they dug a common latrine;
- 4% of the groups said they had “no preparation”; and
- less than 1% of the groups took it out in a “port-a-potty” or used another method.

Camping sites

The survey asked: “When selecting a campsite on this trip, does your group ...

- look for another river travel group to camp with?”
- use existing campsites or previously used areas?”
- camp on gravel bars?”
- make new campsites?”
- other?”

When selecting a campsite does your group ...?



Bear Safety

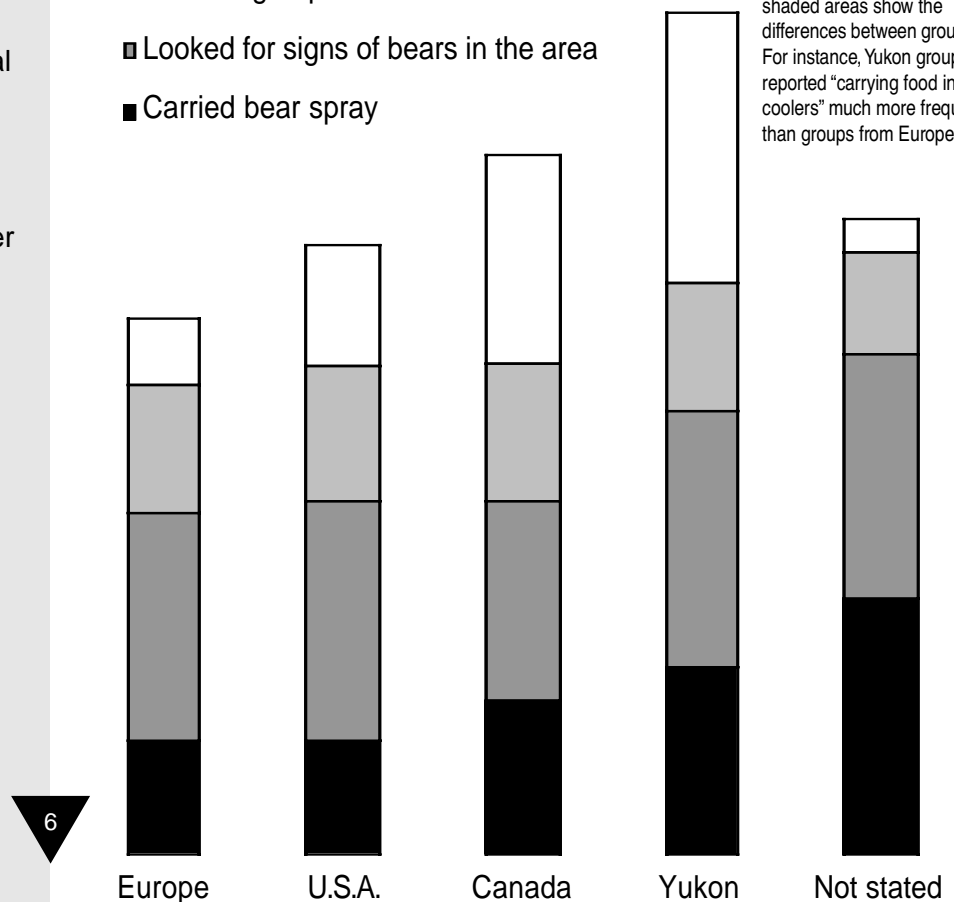
The survey results explored the level of bear awareness among river travellers by asking about bear encounters, about bear books and pamphlets read by the travellers and about general awareness of bear safety practices.

The chart shows the relative sizes of the percentages of river travellers practicing selected bear safety techniques.

Government of Yukon publications: About 17% of river travellers indicated that they had read the publication “No Trace Checklist”; 20% of river travellers reported that they had read the publication “Into the Yukon Wilderness”.

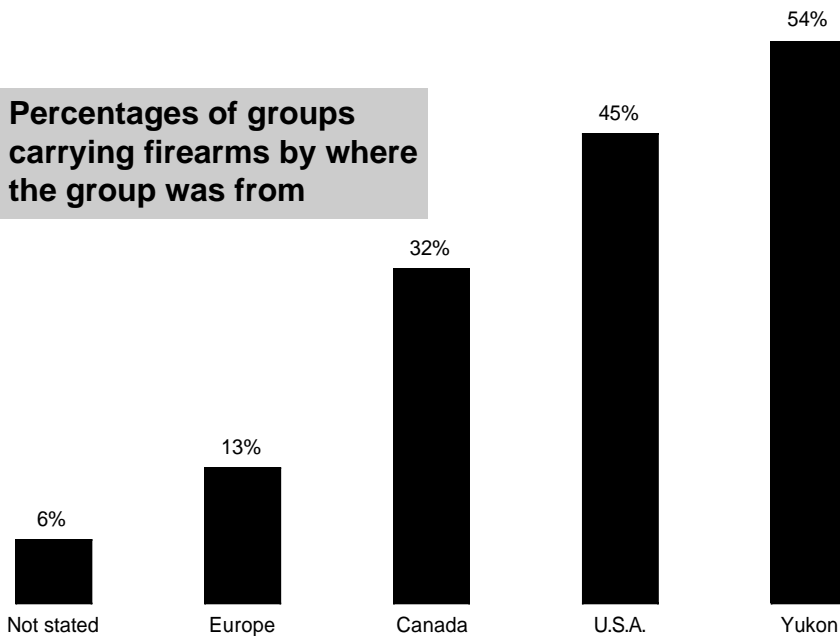
- ▣ Carried food in coolers
- ▣ Hiked in groups
- ▣ Looked for signs of bears in the area
- Carried bear spray

Note: A scale for this chart is not appropriate as travellers were able to mark as many “practices” as they wished. The relative sizes of the various shaded areas show the differences between groups. For instance, Yukon groups reported “carrying food in coolers” much more frequently than groups from Europe.



Firearms

Percentages of groups carrying firearms by where the group was from



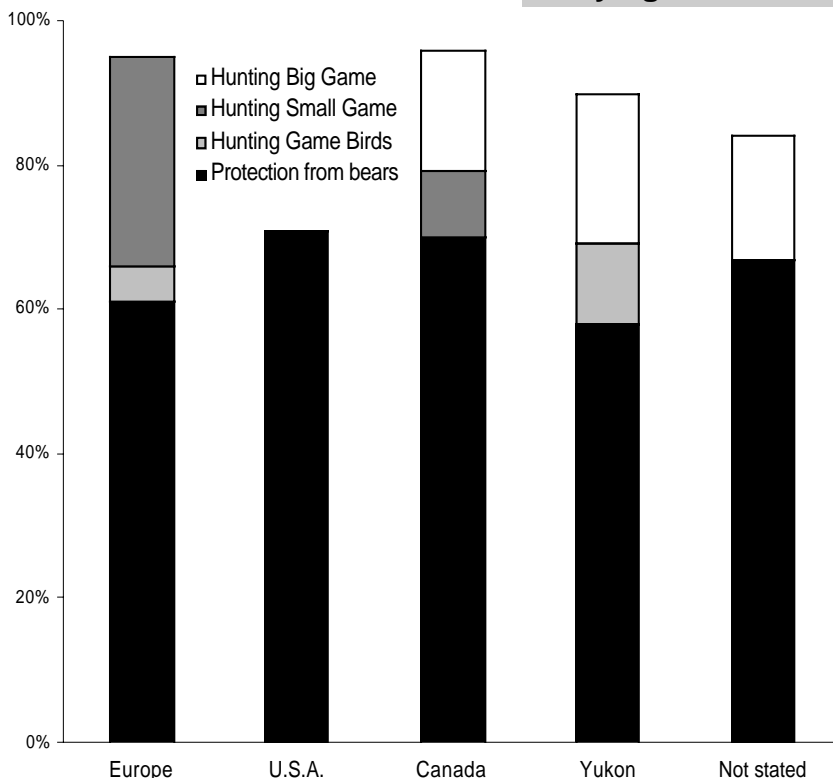
Note: "Canada" refers to all those groups from somewhere in Canada other than the Yukon.

Groups were interviewed by a conservation officer who asked:

"Does anyone in the group have firearms?"

The chart opposite shows how the groups responded based on where they came from. Thirteen percent of the groups from Europe carried firearms compared to just over half (54%) of the groups from the Yukon.

The purpose(s) for carrying a firearm



Note: Some of the stated "purposes" for carrying a firearm were not mentioned by some categories of traveller (Europe, U.S.A., etc.).

If the group carried firearms the Conservation Officer asked "What is the purpose of carrying the firearm?"

- protection from bears
- hunting game birds
- hunting small game
- hunting big game

The chart opposite shows how the groups responded based on where they came from.

No matter where the group was from, the most frequently mentioned purpose for carrying a firearm was "protection from bears". The next most frequently mentioned purpose was "hunting big game".

Problems on your trip

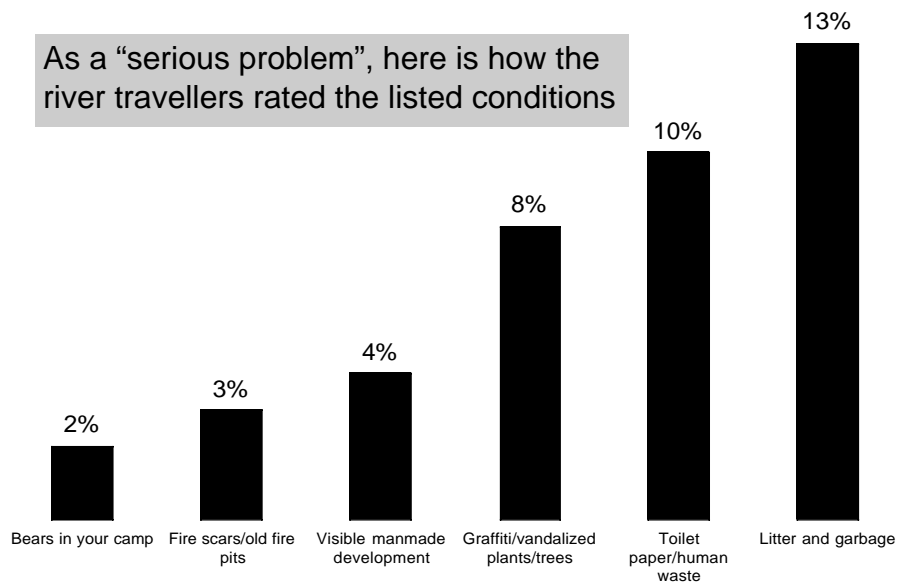
The survey asked river travellers which of the following conditions they had encountered on their trip and how much of a problem, if any, it was to them.

- litter and garbage
- bears in your camp
- toilet paper/human waste
- graffiti/vandalized plants and trees
- fire scars/old fire pits
- visible manmade development

In response to the question "What has been the worst part of your trip so far?"

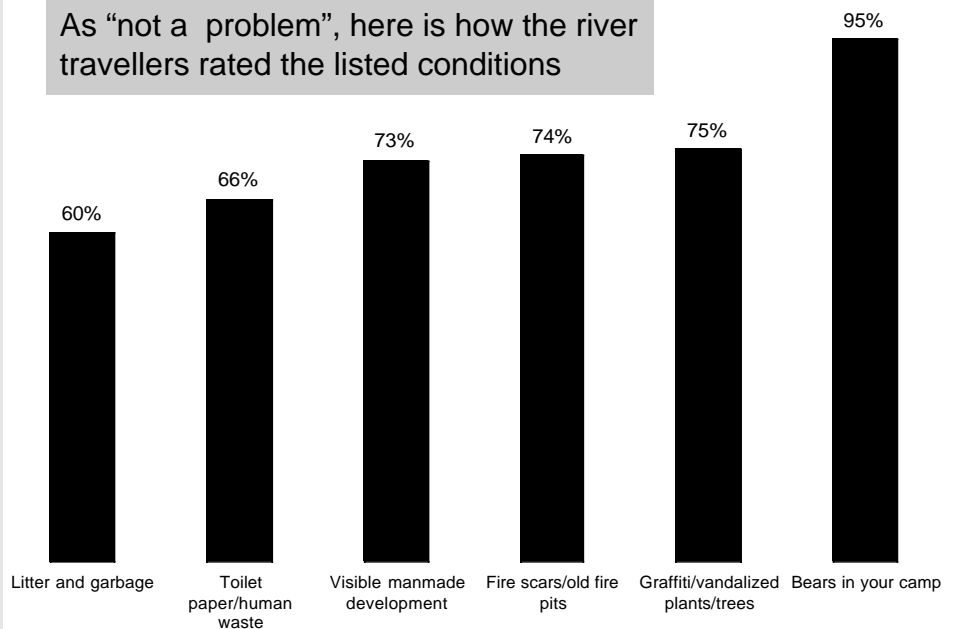
- 26% of the groups said the weather;
- 13% said paddling Lake Laberge;
- 12% said the mosquitoes;
- 6% said general river conditions;
- 5% said personal gripes;
- 3% said litter and garbage; and
- 19% could not report any worst part of their trip so far.

As a "serious problem", here is how the river travellers rated the listed conditions



Note: The chart shows that 13% of river travellers reported that "litter and garbage" was a "serious problem" for them. This is the most frequently mentioned "serious" problem. As a comparison, the problem of "bears in your camp" was reported as a "serious problem" by 2% of river travellers.

As "not a problem", here is how the river travellers rated the listed conditions



Note: The chart shows that 95% of river travellers reported that "bears in your camp" was "not a serious problem" for them. This is the most frequently mentioned condition rated by river travellers as "not a serious problem". As a comparison, the problem of "garbage and litter" was reported as a "not a serious problem" by 60% of river travellers.

Additional Information:

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