One of the most appealing aspects of the trip up the Dempster is the contrast between the natural regions encountered. Mountains, valleys, plateaux and plains and the tundra are all to be discovered along the way. We have identified the five principal natural regions or ‘ecozones’ by colour on the map for you.

**The Boreal Cordillera** – mountain ranges with numerous high peaks and extensive plateaus, separated by wide valleys and lowlands. The lower elevations are covered with dense mixed forest, the higher with alpine tundra.

**The Taiga Cordillera** – the northernmost extent of the Rocky Mountains, with some of Canada’s largest waterfalls, deepest canyons and wildest rivers. It remains a very sparsely populated wilderness, the home of Dall’s sheep, mountain goat, woodland and barren ground caribou, moose, wolf, bear, pika, marmot and wolverine.

**The Southern Cordillera** – high mountains and valleys of the Brooks Range, with tundra and glacier fields on higher ground.

**The Taiga Plains** – tundra, a Russian word, refers to the northern edge of the great boreal forest and describes much of the Mackenzie and Beaufort watersheds. Canada’s largest. The river valleys acts as a migratory corridor for thousands of thousands of waterfowl that breed along the arctic coast in summer. Typical animals found include moose, wolf, black bear, marten and lynx. The barren ground caribou that migrate onto the tundra to the north in the summer months, return to the taiga forest to over-winter.

**The Southern Arctic** – labelled as the ‘Barren Lands’ by early European visitors, because of the lack of trees. Trees do in fact grow here, but are reduced to stunted shrubs – dwarf birch and arctic willow, with scattered spruce in protected places. The surface of the last ice age can be seen everywhere – exposed bedrock scoured clean of all topsoil, vast plains of glacial deposits of rock and sand strewn with thousands of shallow lakes and wetlands.

**The Northern Arctic** – often referred to as a polar desert, with as little as 100 mm annual precipitation. Snow may persist on the ground for up to 10 months of the year and permafrost in the ground may be several hundred metres deep, with only a few centimetres at the surface thawing for the brief few weeks of summer.

**The Dempster Highway**... Northwest Territories... and Beyond

To the Western Arctic...

The highway can be dusty in summer – to minimize dust inside your vehicle keep your windows closed and use your fan, set to defrost with the heat off. You can avoid skidding or sliding on loose road surface by eliminating sudden braking or steering. Although the region is on the whole dry, there remains the possibility of the road being washed out in the mountains from time to time. Carefully observe any highway control signs and markers at such times.

Conditions along the Dempster and on the Beaufort Coast can change quickly at any time of the year, with cold winds and perhaps snow in the mountains even in summer. A warm jacket, good boots, hat and gloves are useful items to bring along. We suggest you bring clothing that can be layered. Summer travellers should be aware that mosquitoes and black flies can be quite plentiful at certain times and places. Consider equipping yourself with insect repellents and protective clothing.

Vehicle rentals are available in Whitehorse or Dawson City, Yukon or Anchorage, Alaska. Don’t forget to bring along all the documentation necessary to get you on your way!

Recommended Reading

The Milpeost is considered the ‘Bible’ of northern highway travel, with detailed descriptions of all highways in the NWT, Yukon and Alaska. Available retail, or from Vernon Publications, phone toll free 1-800-726-4707, or visit www.alaskainfo.com.
Inuvik's Happy Valley Territorial Campground offers 27 sites, twenty sites offer sheltered protection within a steep gorge, the Tent and Canvas workshop, open 9 to 5 weekdays, and offering a full range of services and facilities. The Western Gateway Interpretive Display at the junction of the Dempster Highway with Yukon Route 5, 40 km (25 miles) – Arctic Circle rises at the winter solstice, December 21.

The Peel River ferry is free and operates from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily, June to mid-October. Cross by ice bridge from the end of November to April 30. A view of the Mackenzie Delta and Peel River valley.

A Klondike Highway Maintenance Camp.

Fort McPherson offers a good range of basic services, a visitor information centre, open June 1 to September 1, the Tent and Canvas workshop, open 9 to 5 weekdays, and a self-guided tour of the community. The Peel River ferry is free and operates from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily, June to mid-October. Cross by ice bridge from the end of November to April 30. A view of the Mackenzie Delta and Peel River valley.

25 km (mile 16) – Ogilvie-Peel Viewpoint

The highest elevation on the Dempster, at 1,289 metres (4,229 feet), first crossing of the Continental Divide.

731 km (mile 454) – Jak Park Campsite

Just outside the community of Inuvik, Jak Park Campsite offers 36 sites, with a fee for overnight or day use, and 24-hour security.

539 km (mile 335) – Peel River Ferry

The Peel River ferry is free and operates from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily, June to mid-October. Cross by ice bridge from the end of November to April 30. A view of the Mackenzie Delta and Peel River valley.

405 km (mile 252) – Arctic Circle

Catch a photo of yourself crossing the Arctic Circle, taking a moment to see the displays that explain the Arctic Circle and the northern lights. From this latitude northwards the sun never sets at the summer solstice, June 21, and never rises at the winter solstice, December 21.

72 km (mile 45) – Tombstone Mountain Campground

Tombstone Mountain Campground, with 22 sites, offers nature walks and campfire talks, in July and August, and a staffed interpretive centre. It is a base for hikes into the Tombstone range.

66 km (mile 41) – Kluane Highway Maintenance Camp.

Take in the Gateway interpretive display at the junction of the Dempster Highway with Yukon Route 5, 40 km (25 miles) east of Dawson City, after fueling up at Kluane River Lodge, Ph (867) 993-6892, full service garage, which offers gas, propane, diesel, towing, car wash, RV park and storage. It’s 365 kms (223 miles) to the next service point at Eagle Plains.

7 km (mile 5) – Dawson City

Before you start your journey up the Dempster, be sure to stop in at the Dempster Delta Visitor Information Centre on Front Street in Dawson City, Yukon. See the excellent displays and meet our friendly travel counsellors, who can help you plan your trip. Open May 15 to September 15.

719 km (mile 446) – Nitinat Day Use Area (Campbell Creek)

714 km (mile 443) – Ehjuu Nijik Wayside Park (Cabin Creek)

705 km (mile 438) – Gwich’in Territorial Campground

Fifteen non-powered RV sites and four tent sites.

703 km (mile 437) – Tlithegeh Chi Vitai Lookout

It is a short walk from the road to the edge of the cliffs that overlook Campbell Lake, which is an example of a reversing Delta. The cliffs are home to raptors such as Peregrine Falcons.

692 km (mile 430) – Vudzaat Van Tshik Campground (Caribou Creek)

Vudzaat Van Tshik Campground has 11 sites.

608 km (mile 378) – Tsiigehtchic

Tsiigehtchic is a traditional Gwich’in community, where a more relaxed pace of life may still be found.

608 km (mile 378) – Mackenzie River and Arctic Red River Ferry

The Mackenzie River and Arctic Red River ferry is free and operates 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily, June to mid-October. Cross by ice bridge in the winter from the end of November until April 30. The flow of the Mackenzie River, draining one fifth of Canada, over 1,800,000 sq. km. (700,000 sq. miles), is exceeded in the western hemisphere only by the Mississippi and the Amazon. The Mackenzie Delta is the largest in Canada and the tenth largest in the world.

536 km (mile 333) – Tettit Gwijnik Wayside Park

A view of the Mackenzie Delta and Peel River valley.

465 km (mile 289) – Yukon/NWT Border

Note the time zone change at the Yukon/NWT border crossing – set watches one hour ahead when travelling north, back when going south. There is an interpretive display here worth seeing that describes the local wildlife and landscapes.

326 km (mile 204) – Pullout

259 km (mile 161) – Ogilvie-Peel Viewpoint

196 km (mile 123) – Ogilvie Highway Maintenance Camp.

194 km (mile 120) – Ogilvie-Peel Viewpoint

259 km (mile 161) – Ogilvie-Peel Viewpoint

196 km (mile 123) – Ogilvie Highway Maintenance Camp.

194 km (mile 120) – Engineer Creek Campground

Located at the foot of Sapper Hill, a sharply eroded limestone ridge with fascinating rock ‘forests’. Eight sites and good fishing.

107 km (mile 67) – Pullout

82 km (mile 51) – North Fork Pass

The highest elevation on the Dempster, at 1,289 metres (4,229 feet), first crossing of the Continental Divide.

75 km (mile 47) – Tombstone Mountain

Tumbled in the panoramic view west to Tombstone Mountain, some 40 km (25 miles) away.

17 km (mile 10) – Dempster Delta Visitor Information Centre

Pre-historic looking musk-oxen roam nearly all communities.

111 km (mile 69) – Dempster Delta Visitor Information Centre

Canada’s Western Arctic

Anyone wishing to hunt or carry firearms in Canada must obtain the required licence. Revolvers, pistols and automatic weapons are prohibited entry into Canada.

Non-residents wishing to hunt big game require the services of an outfitter who will provide a licensed guide.

If you are between the ages of 16 and 65, and fish here, you must carry an NWT fishing licence, available from most hardware and sporting goods stores in nearly all communities.