

Northern Youth Leadership

Ayalik Keele-River Expedition, 2018

Project Description

Northern Youth Leadership's Mission:

"... to facilitate the development of leadership skills, inspire confidence, and help youth develop the inner and outer resources needed to overcome challenges, reach their full potential, and create positive change in their communities."

Ayalik Fund Mandate:

"The Ayalik Fund gives Inuit youth who would otherwise not have such opportunities a chance to build self-esteem and confidence, through challenging outdoor adventure, meeting other young Canadians, and social-cultural exploration."

These shared goals naturally bring the two organizations together, to serve the youth of NWT and Nunavut.



The 2018 Keele-River Expedition is a joint project designed to provide a unique, challenging, life-changing river experience for 12 youths from NWT and Nunavut.

Background

[Northern Youth Leadership](#) and the [Ayalik Fund](#) have been co-operating for the past two years, since NYL invited youth from Nunavut to participate in its already well-established programs. The two organizations also share a vision; this new venture is an opportunity to move to a new level of joint-planning for youth adventure and challenge.

Northern Youth Leadership's vision is to transform and inspire a generation of courageous, young northern leaders. The NYL camps have provided transformational experiences for over 330 youth from across the Northwest Territories; and, they have been an industry leader in operating remote leadership camps for the past ten years. NYL camps directly address the lack of culturally relevant, leadership-based opportunities for youth. NYL camps inspire confidence, support youth to challenge self-imposed limitations, cultivate independence, develop leadership skills, and instil healthy relationship, and lifestyle behaviours. What makes NYL camps unique is that they bring together youth from across Northern Canada to facilitate connections, to create networks of support, and to provide a first-hand opportunity for youth to learn about the land, culture and traditions through on-the-land programming with Elders.

Northern Youth Leadership is a project on Tides Canada's shared platform. The shared platform provides governance, human resources, financial, and grant management for leading social projects across Canada, allowing these projects to more effectively achieve their missions. This allows NYL staff to dedicate their efforts to developing and running innovative programming for youth.



The Ayalik Fund was established in memory of Eric Ayalik Okalitana Pelly, from Cambridge Bay, NU, to enable Inuit youth from Nunavut who would otherwise not have such opportunity to participate in challenging programs which help young people to believe in themselves. Eric himself benefited from participation in several different youth programs of this sort, which developed his self-confidence and self-esteem. He grew up to be a fine young man.

Tragically, Eric died in his sleep in 2014, at age 19½, of sudden cardiac arrhythmia. The Ayalik Fund and all of its participant youths honour Eric's legacy, by following his lead. (Ayalik Fund is a registered charity, operating under the aegis of Tides Canada.)

The *Keele-River Expedition 2018* offers all participants an opportunity to celebrate the short life of a youth who, like them, faced his challenges and grew as a result. This in itself is a life-lesson, as evidenced by the 34 youths who have already received Ayalik Fund support.

The Outfitter

[Canoe North Adventures](#) is one of the premier, licensed guiding companies in the North, based in Norman Wells, NWT. They have offered guided canoe expeditions in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut for more than 25 years. Canoe North has a reputation for “offering safe and logistically sound expeditions that take canoe trippers to the edge of their comfort zone, leaving them with a significant and profound wilderness encounter that reaches deep into their souls.”

Inspired by the story, Canoe North Adventures wrote to the Ayalik Fund some time ago, saying: “*we would like to contribute our resources to support your program... [perhaps with] the possibility of launching a canoe expedition... we enjoy finding creative ways of making things happen.*” This project is the result.

Canoe North has offered to provide the local knowledge, river guide expertise, and logistical support (all of the expedition’s equipment: food, canoes, packs, tents, etc.), under contract to NYL.

Long-Term Objective

In addition to the immediate benefits to each and every participant, in terms of character and confidence building, one of the longer-term objectives of this project is to have some youths segue into Canoe North’s “guide-in-training” program – starting in 2019. This is further illustration of Canoe North’s “investment” in the endeavour. It is expected that participation in the guide-in-training program will lead to acquiring new qualifications, to employment opportunities with Canoe North, and possibly to career opportunities elsewhere.

Keele River

This river, which descends from the Mackenzie Mountains in the Sahtu, NWT, was carefully selected by Canoe North because “although fast and boisterous, the Keele River provides lots of options for safe travel... bringing a full range of personal enjoyment, inner peace and the satisfaction of individual and group accomplishment.”

The Keele River offers an iconic wilderness canoeing experience from high in the divide between the Yukon and NWT through towering mountain scenery and broad valleys with inviting vistas around every bend. Paddling is challenging but not technically difficult.

The float-plane charter from Norman Wells lands just below the confluence of the Natla and Keele Rivers between the Delthore and Stelfox ranges in the Mackenzie Mountains. Campsites are generally located on broad gravel bars chosen for their incredible views.

The Keele is wide & deep with continuous swifts and rapids, as it glides down a steady gradient drop towards the Mackenzie River winding through spectacular mountain scenery. There can be sightings of caribou, moose, grizzly or black bears, eagles and assuredly Dahl sheep. Great fishing for both arctic grayling and trout means we will be treated to fresh fish dinner!

The trip ends at Tulita, a small Dene village on the east bank of the Mackenzie River, near the point where both the Keele and the Great Bear Rivers enter the Mackenzie. A short 20-minute charter flight from Tulita back to Norman Wells completes the circuit.

It will be a safe, deep-wilderness experience – 400 km downriver – with ample challenge. In the end, the river is the teacher.



Trip Details

Dates: June 24 -- July 9, 2018 (16 days in total, including travel – 11 days on river)

Youths: 12 youths in total, a mix of boys and girls, ages 14-17, half from NWT, half from Nunavut.

Staff: one NYL program-facilitation staff plus three Canoe North qualified river guides (two of whom also have youth programming backgrounds and will participate pro bono). The NYL staff person will be responsible for design and implementation of personal development activities using the unique NYL Leadership Model, assisted (with direction) as required by all other staff – the NYL staff person will also be a competent sternsman in the canoe. All staff must have a minimum of Emergency First Aid Level C certification and must be experienced whitewater canoeists. The trip has a low staff to youth ratio to ensure that youth receive individualized attention and that the trip proceeds safely in the remote environment.

Total Expedition: 16 people in eight canoes.



Detailed Schedule

June 24: fly from home communities to Yellowknife, overnight with NYL supervision

June 25: Arrive Norman Wells, orientation, introductory flatwater paddle, gear-prep, barbecue, NYL Introduction Program

June 26: Charter to Keele River, canoe safety and skills training at first campsite

June 27: Trip begins, training continues

July 6: Arrive Tulita late morning, Community Feast mid-day/early afternoon, celebration & bonfire, trip-end ceremony; 5 p.m. charter flight to Norman Wells; team BBQ at Canoe North lodge

July 7: relaxed morning, trip clean-up, brunch, depart for YK

July 8: flights to home communities

Program

The daily program will be flexible but structured. With the exception of two planned lay-over days (for resting and hiking), the group will move downriver every day, breaking and making camp. As a matter of daily routine, time will be allotted both during the travel-day and at camp in the evening for the NYL staff person to conduct the NYL program elements – this is a high priority for the expedition.

NYL uses a unique model that combines implicit and explicit activities for the development of self-confidence, leadership and bush skills. Bush survival skills are taught by involving youth in camp responsibilities including set-up, clean-up, cooking, fire starting, fishing, and no-trace camping. By working together to maintain camp, youth gain an understanding of personal responsibility, accountability, and the importance of contributing to your family and community. Each day, two youth take on the role of Leader of the Day. In this role they assist with camp morale, group decision-making, ensure everyone is included, and get to lead an activity or game. NYL also does daily 15–20 minute activities that address issues and challenges youth are facing. Sample topics include: self-esteem, trust, support systems, coping mechanisms, leadership, consent, and healthy relationships. NYL camps are developed around a goal that participants work together to achieve. In this case it will be paddling the Keele River. Youth may attend the trip unsure of their ability to achieve the goal, but will achieve success at learning, and realize their abilities exceed what they originally thought. By intervening at a young age and focusing on skill development, the experience will provide a foundation for youth to overcome the barriers and challenges of the future. Our organizers and staff recognize that much of the learning on an expedition of this sort is organic and implicit.

Finally, while personal development and overcoming individual challenges is the central tenet of this expedition, there is also significant cross-cultural value implicit to the joint NYL—Ayalik leadership of the project. Dene and Inuit youth from NWT and Nunavut will learn from each other and forge new friendships, with a sense of shared accomplishment, across the territorial and cultural boundaries.



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Ayalik Keele-River Expedition 2018



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