



photos courtesy of Canoe North Adventures/Northern Youth Leadership

One of the campsites youth from around the North made along the Keele River.

# Leadership on the Keele

Northern youth hone their skills on paddling trip

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Twelve youth from around the North took to the water at the end of June to spend 11 days learning about paddling and leadership.

The Keele River expedition was outfitted by Canoe North Adventures and put together by the Ayalik Fund and Northern Youth Leadership, which is a project of Tides Canada.

Rachel Cluderay, a guide with Canoe North Adventures, says the trip was a great experience – even though it rained pretty much the whole time.

"I think some of my highlights from the trips was just seeing the kids' resilience," she says. "There were things like homesickness or the weather getting people down or being cold and just like seeing them push through that and really come together as a team and support each other was just so awesome to see."

She says that at the beginning, some of the youth were nervous and quiet, "but then, as they realized other people were nervous too, they started really caring about the other people in the group and everyone was just being so supportive and helpful of each other."

Six of the youth were from Nunavut and six were from the NWT.

Inuvik's Mackenzie Grainger, 17, was one of the youth on the trip. The rain didn't get her down at all.

"I found it a lot of fun," says Grainger. "I've never paddled a river like that before, so I really enjoyed it."

Grainger says she was in the stern the whole time, which was a "fun challenge."

"What I liked was it gave you a chance to be somewhat more independent, like being away from home and having daily tasks to do and just always having to help out and stuff," says Grainger.



**Mackenzie Grainger, in the stern** and Andrew Anavilok paddle down the Keele River earlier this summer as part of a trip organized by Canoe North Adventures, Northern Youth Leadership and the Ayalik Fund.

The Keele is a deep, swift river with some navigable rapids. It flows down from the Mackenzie Mountains to the Mackenzie River. The trip ended in Tulita and Cluderay says the youth broke a Canoe North record, paddling the final 120 kilometres to the community in one go to avoid some bad weather.

"The thing about a canoe trip is that there is nowhere to hide, so when you have a bad day or you mess up the food or you make any kind of mistake, everyone in the group sees that," says Cluderay. "The best part of the trip was seeing the kids come together to support each other when others were feeling vulnerable."