

Copper River Float

Chitina to Million Dollar Bridge (Cordova)

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve



(With Tazlina to Chitina variation included.)

Access: Put-in is at the Copper River Bridge near Chitina, AK. Take-out is near the Million Dollar Bridge in Cordova, AK.

Distance: Approximately 85 miles

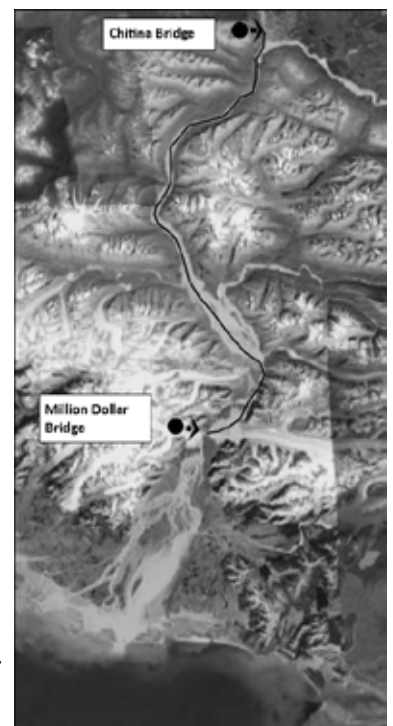
Time: 4-6 days. From the Chitina Bridge to the Million Dollar Bridge, it can take anywhere from 15-30+ hours of actual floating time. Depending on the water level, trip times can vary drastically. Rafters should allot plenty of time when floating the Copper. Elevation near Chitina is approximately 500' and Miles Lake is approximately 170', for a total descent of roughly 4 feet per mile.

Maps: USGS Quadrangle Maps Gulkana (A-3), Valdez (D-4), (D-3), (C-3), (C-2), (B-3), (B-2), (A-3) and Cordova (D-2), (C-2). 1:250,000 Gulkana, Valdez and Cordova

Difficulty: Easy to moderately difficult, depending on season. Knowledge of Alaskan rivers is required, as extensive braiding in channels can be tricky to navigate. The Copper contains several short sections of rapids, and there is the constant presence of sweepers and other obstacles along the bank. Traveling with a guide is recommended, however it is do-able as an independent group.

Highlights: A quiet and relaxing float through pristine wilderness, little human presence along most stretches of the river, and the possibility for excellent wildlife viewing. Stunning mountain and glacier scenery can be seen, as well as unique geology for virtually the entire trip.

Hazards/Safety Precautions: Many bears and other wildlife are present along the Copper River, and caution should be given to help avoid encounters. Choose a camp location carefully, and if there is recent sign of bears, go elsewhere to reduce possibility of contact. Keep sleeping areas separate from cooking areas, and use a bear resistant food container for storing food and other scented items.



Since the Copper River originates from a glacier, you will be presented with challenges you may not have encountered elsewhere. Glacial rivers are braided and carry an extremely high level of silt that create navigational challenges. Spring run-off, heavy rain, or even hot temperatures can cause dramatic daily fluctuations in water levels. These rivers are extremely cold and hypothermia is a danger even after a brief submersion regardless of ambient air temperature. In addition to the dangers presented by glacial waters, you must be prepared for other, more commonly encountered river hazards. Sweepers (trees that bend low over the water) or strainers (trees that have fallen completely across a waterway) are found on many rivers, as are logjams that are deposited by spring floods and other high water events.

Always wear an approved, well-fitting personal flotation device while boating or fishing on any body of water and wear a helmet and wet or dry suit when appropriate. Dress warmly in layers of wool or synthetic materials that will keep you warm when wet. Pack your gear in waterproof bags and take at least one complete change of clothes and plenty of waterproof matches. Always tie your boat down when not in use to prevent rising water or the wind from taking it down the river without you.

Route/Description: There are many possibilities when rafting the Copper River. The information in this publication is simply based on one float trip between the Copper River bridge at Chitina, and the Million Dollar Bridge at the end of Miles Lake near Cordova. Please be aware that there are other put-in and pull-out locations, as well as many possibilities for campsites. Ten possible camp sites are shown on the following maps.

The Copper River is a large, constantly changing river, and as a result the scenery, camping locations, and river channels differ from month to month. Please use caution when rafting, as many channels appear large, however, they often braid out and become impassable by raft or boat.

The corridor along the Copper River contains few modern traces of man, so please be responsible and practice Leave No Trace back-country ethics. At many locations along the river, portions of the old Copper River Railroad can be seen. Please use caution around these sections, as old trestles and sections of rail may still be standing.

Towards the southern end of the trip, some very unique geology becomes visible—from the immense sand dunes along the Bremner Peninsula, to the layered sediments stacked along the river, to Abercrombie Rapids at the mouth of Miles Lake, to the gigantic glaciers flowing towards the river—all make the trip increasingly unique as one progresses southward.

Be aware that due to the huge amount of sand and other fine sediments along the Copper River, severe winds can reduce visibility to several hundred yards, and make down-river travel extremely difficult. It is generally best to plan on being on the river early in the morning, and make camp by mid-afternoon. The Bremner Peninsula is particularly famous for its nearly five miles of sand dunes. However, rafters should plan on passing this landmark by early afternoon if possible.

Notes: Be aware that there is privately owned land on the east side of the river for several miles. There are also several access and camp easements along the Chugach National Forest boundary. The campsites on the following maps are only recommended sites and due to the changing nature of the river, they may or may not be usable.

Due to various features of the topography, and the presence of large glaciers along the coast, severe winds develop along the Copper River particularly on warm sunny days. During the summer months, these winds can blow incredibly strong up-river. Generally starting around mid-day, these winds often blow until the surroundings cool off around sundown.

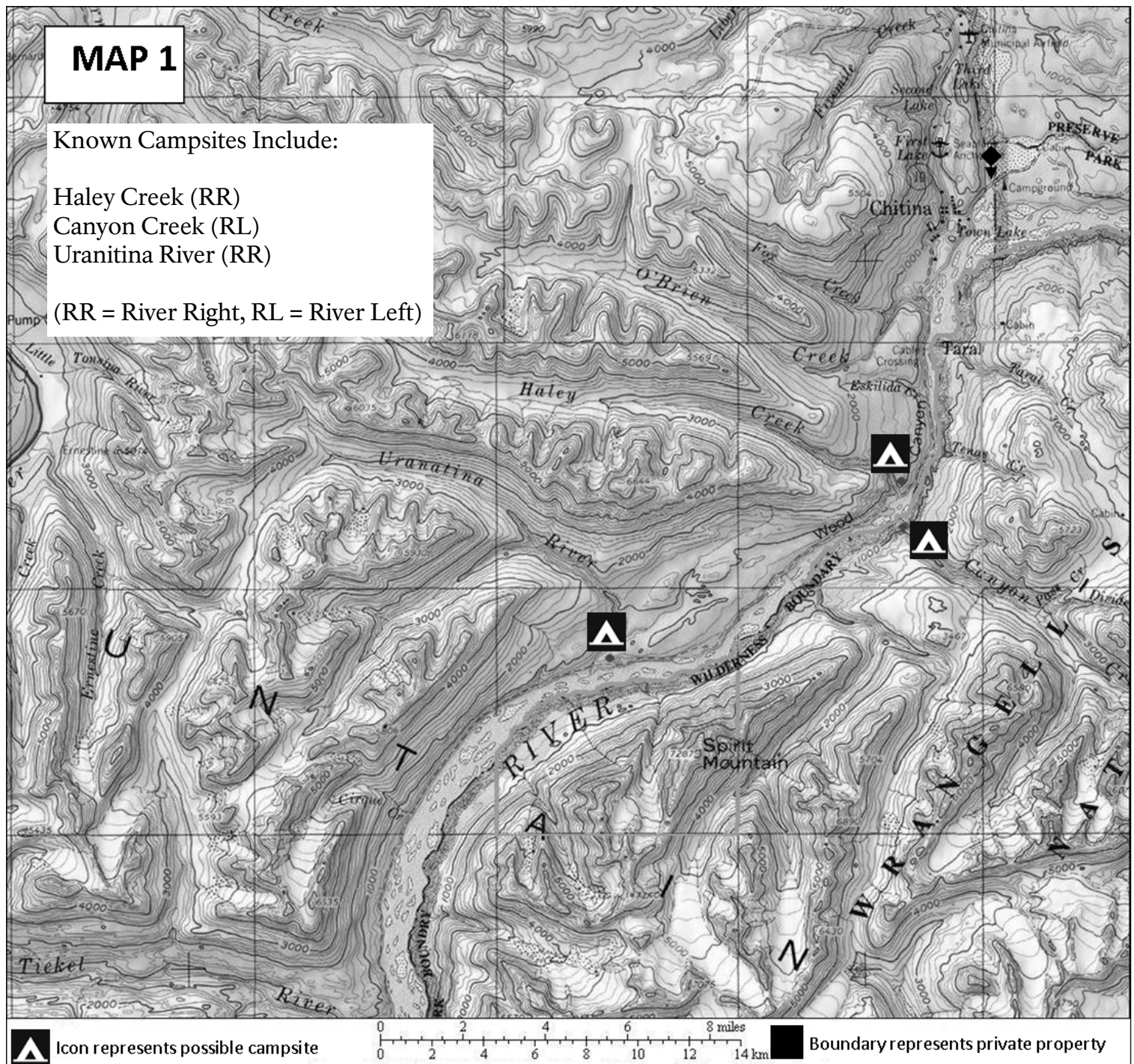
TAZLINA TO CHITINA VARIATION:

This adds an additional 55 miles and up to 4 more days to the trip.

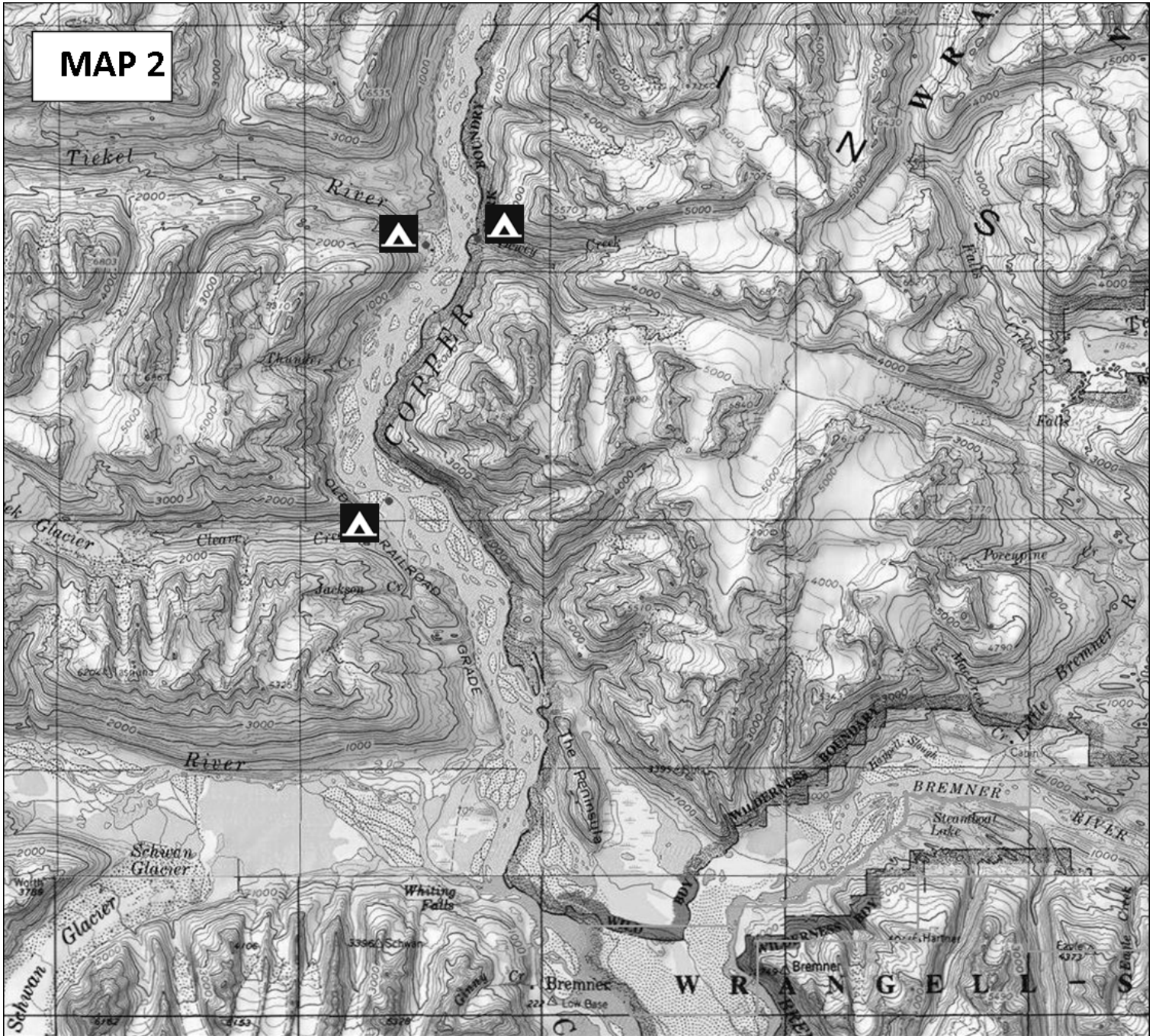
Access: Road access via the Richardson Highway to the Tazlina River rest area at Mile 110.6. Alternate put-in is the Klutina River confluence at Copper Center.

Route: From the Put-in at Tazlina, it is 1/2 mile to the confluence with the Copper River. Watch for shallow spots and rocks along the Tazlina. The Copper River is a large glacial river with mostly Class I and II water. From the Tazlina River to the confluence with the Chitina River, the Copper meanders through a valley sided with forested bluffs. The river is braided for the most part and navigating the main channel is necessary to keep from running aground on gravel bars. Waves and holes along various stretches make for exciting travel.

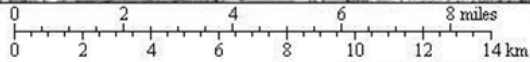
Chitina to Million Dollar Bridge (Cordova) MAPS:



MAP 2



Icon represents possible campsite



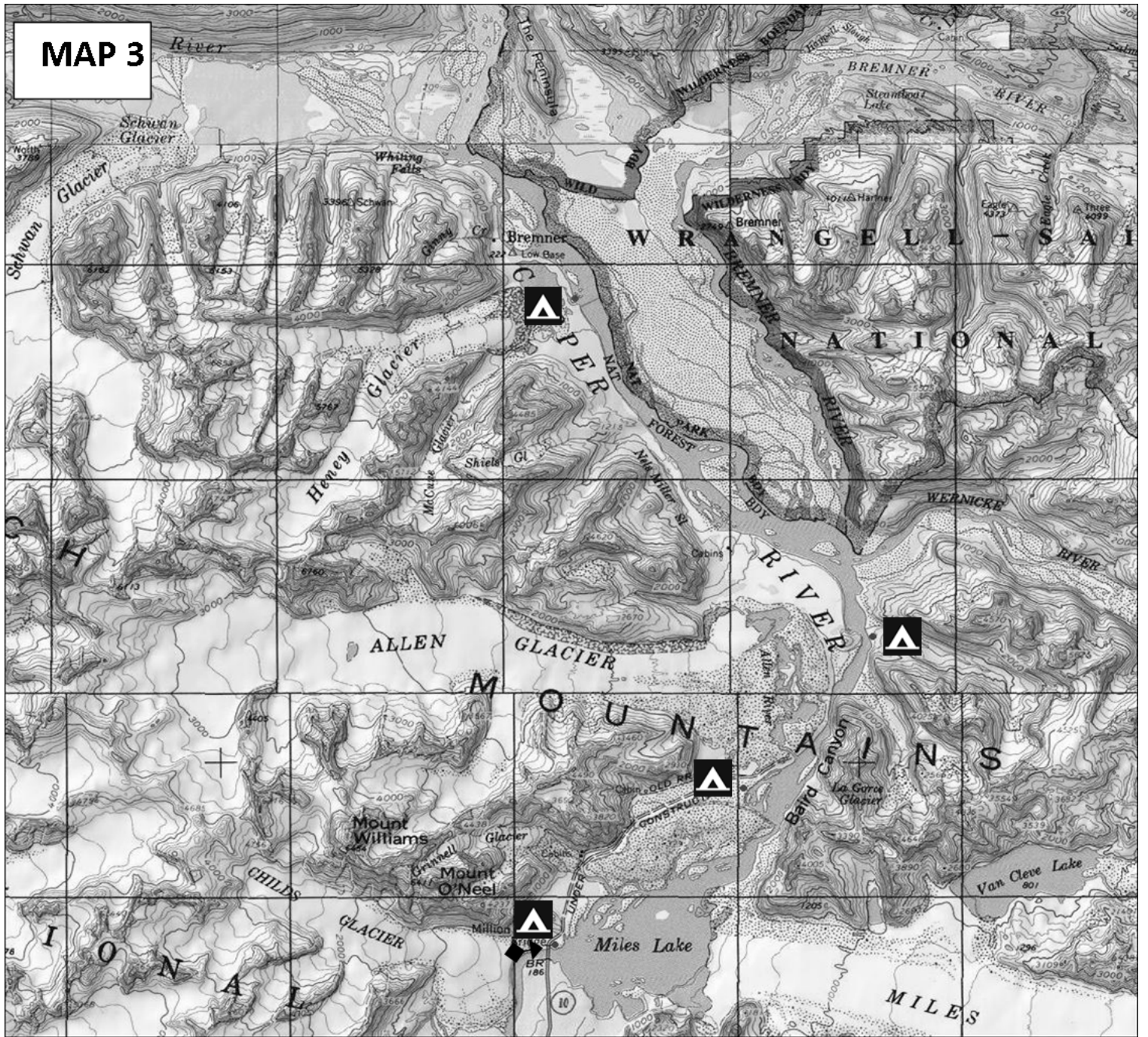
Boundary represents private property


Known Campsites Include:


- Dewey Creek (RL)
- Tiekel River (RR)
- Cleave Creek (RR)

(RR = River Right, RL = River Left)

MAP 3



 Icon represents possible campsite

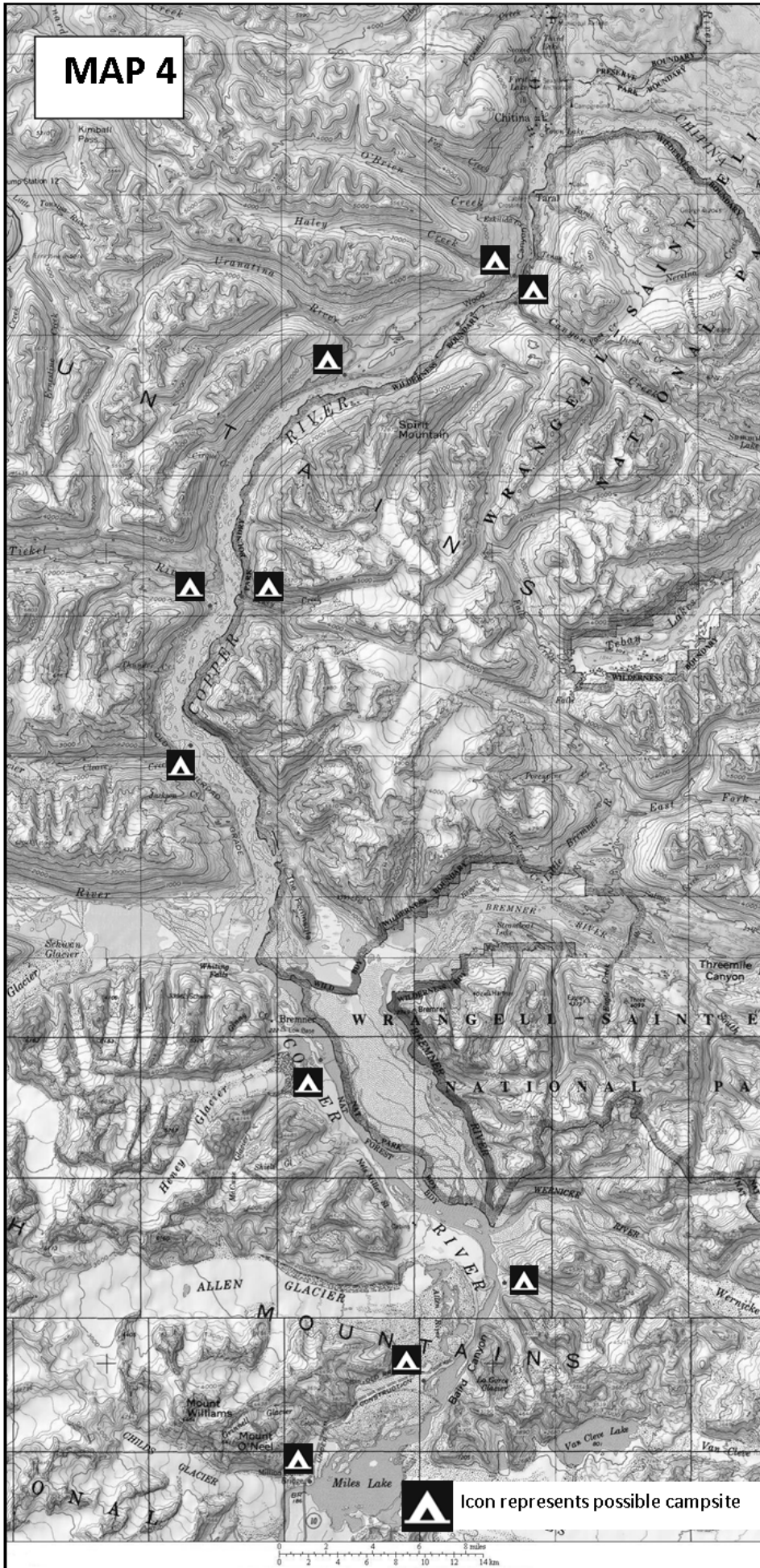
 Boundary represents private property


Known Campsites Include:

- Heney Glacier River - north side (RR)
- Allen Glacier area (RL)
- Baird Canyon area (RR)
- Million Dollar Bridge pull-out area (RR)

(RR = River Right, RL = River Left)

MAP 4



 Icon represents possible campsite