Copper River Float

Chitina to Million Dollar Bridge

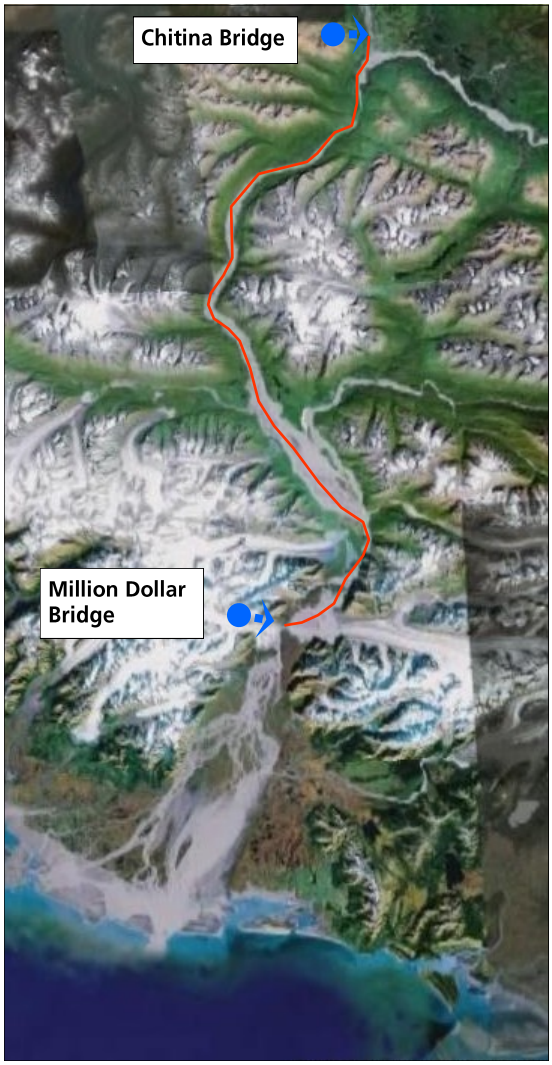
Wrangell-St.Elias National Park and Preserve

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior

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

Maps: USGS Quadrangle Maps: Valdez C2, B2, B3, A3 – Cordova, D3, D2, C2

Distance/Time: Approximately 85 miles, 4-6 days
From the Chitina Bridge to Million Dollar Bridge is approximately 85 miles, and can take anywhere from 15-30+ hours of actual floating time. Depending on the level of the water, times can very rather drastically, so one 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.



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 the constant presence of sweepers and other obstacles along the bank. Traveling with a guide or guiding company is recommended, however, it is do-able with an independent group.

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

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, which rafters should be aware of. 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.

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.

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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 river with constant change, and as a result the scenery, camping locations, and river channels change continually from month to month. Please use caution when rafting, as many channels appear large, however, they often braid out and become impassable to a raft or boat.

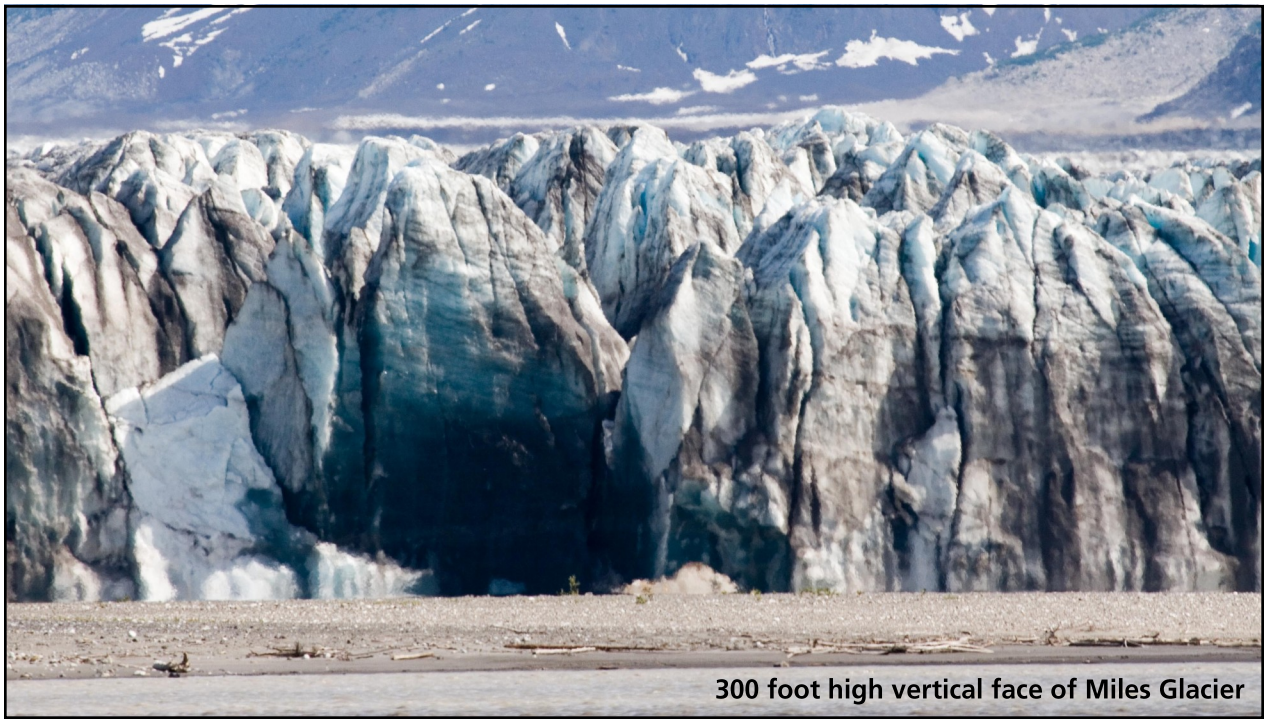
The corridor along the Copper River contains few modern traces of man, so please be responsible and practice Leave No Trace back-country ethics. At many locations along the river, portions of the old Copper River Railroad can be seen. Please use caution around these sections, as old trestles and sections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

Please Note:

Due to various features of the topography, and the presence of large glaciers along the coast, severe winds develop along the Copper River particularly occurring 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.

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, one should plan on passing this landmark by early afternoon if possible.



300 foot high vertical face of Miles Glacier

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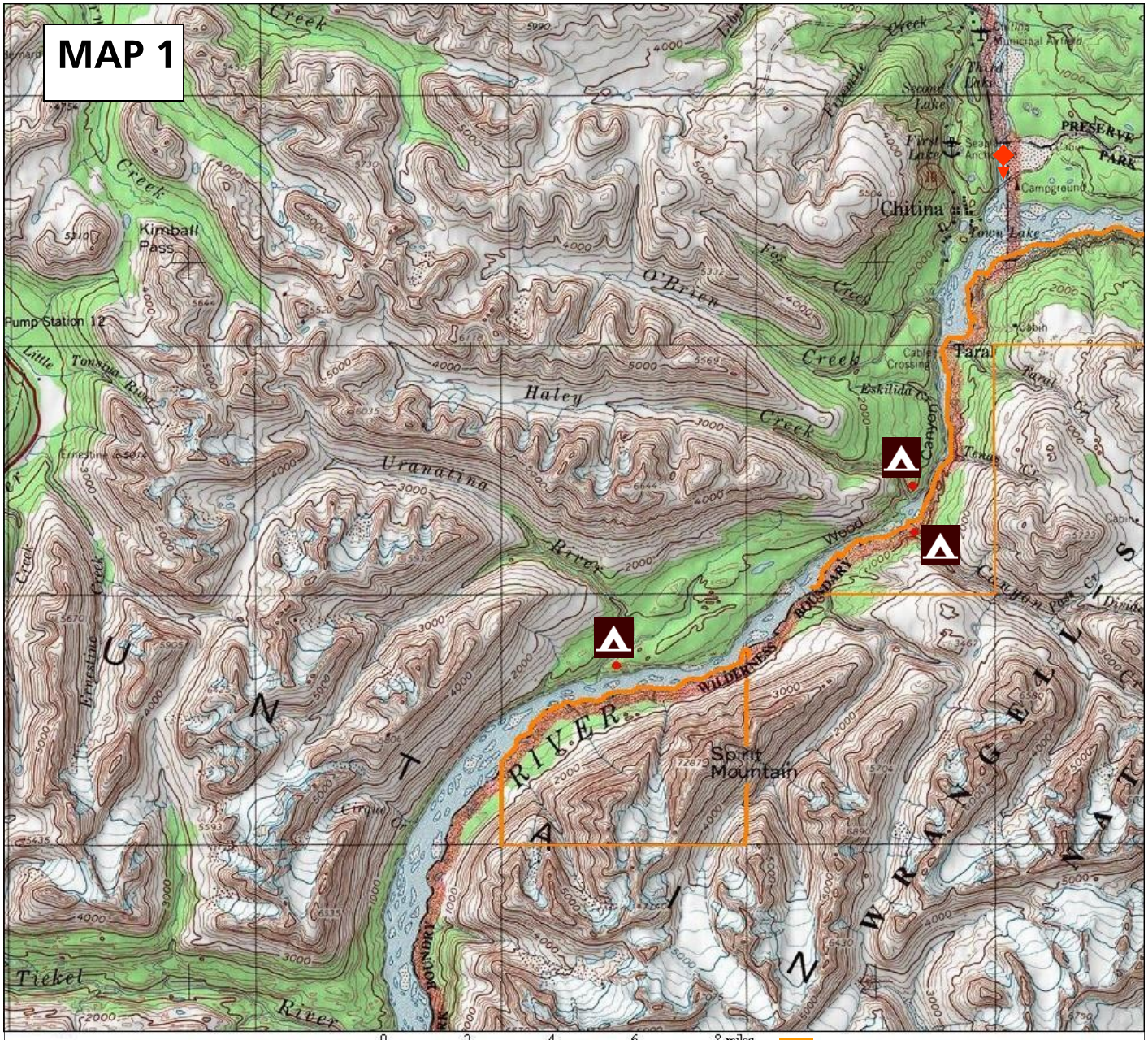
Known campsites include:

Haley Creek (RR)
Canyon Creek (RL)
Uranitina River (RR)

(RR= River Right, RL = River Left)

Passing through Wood Canyon



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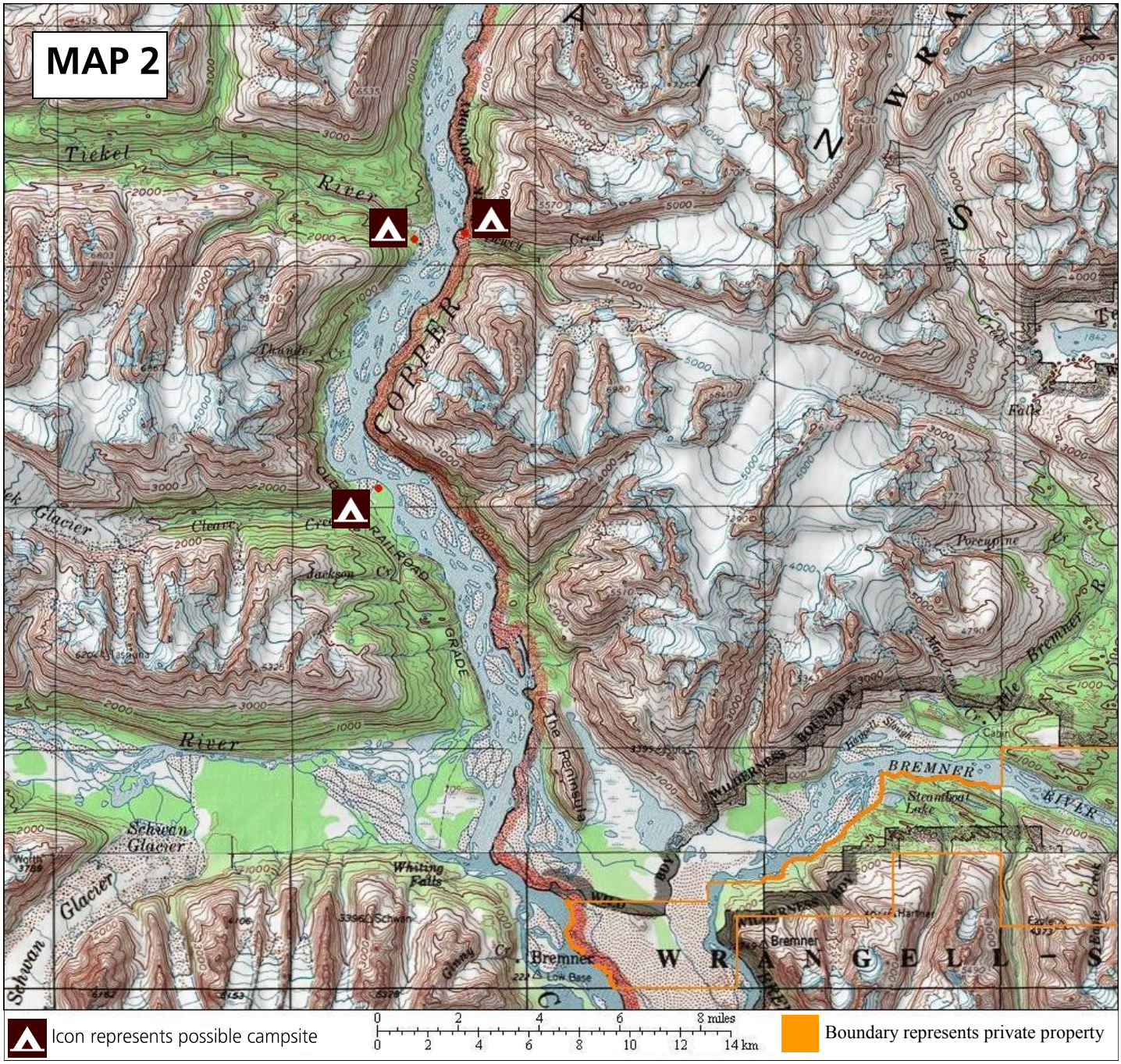
Known campsites include:

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

Section of railroad 80+ years old



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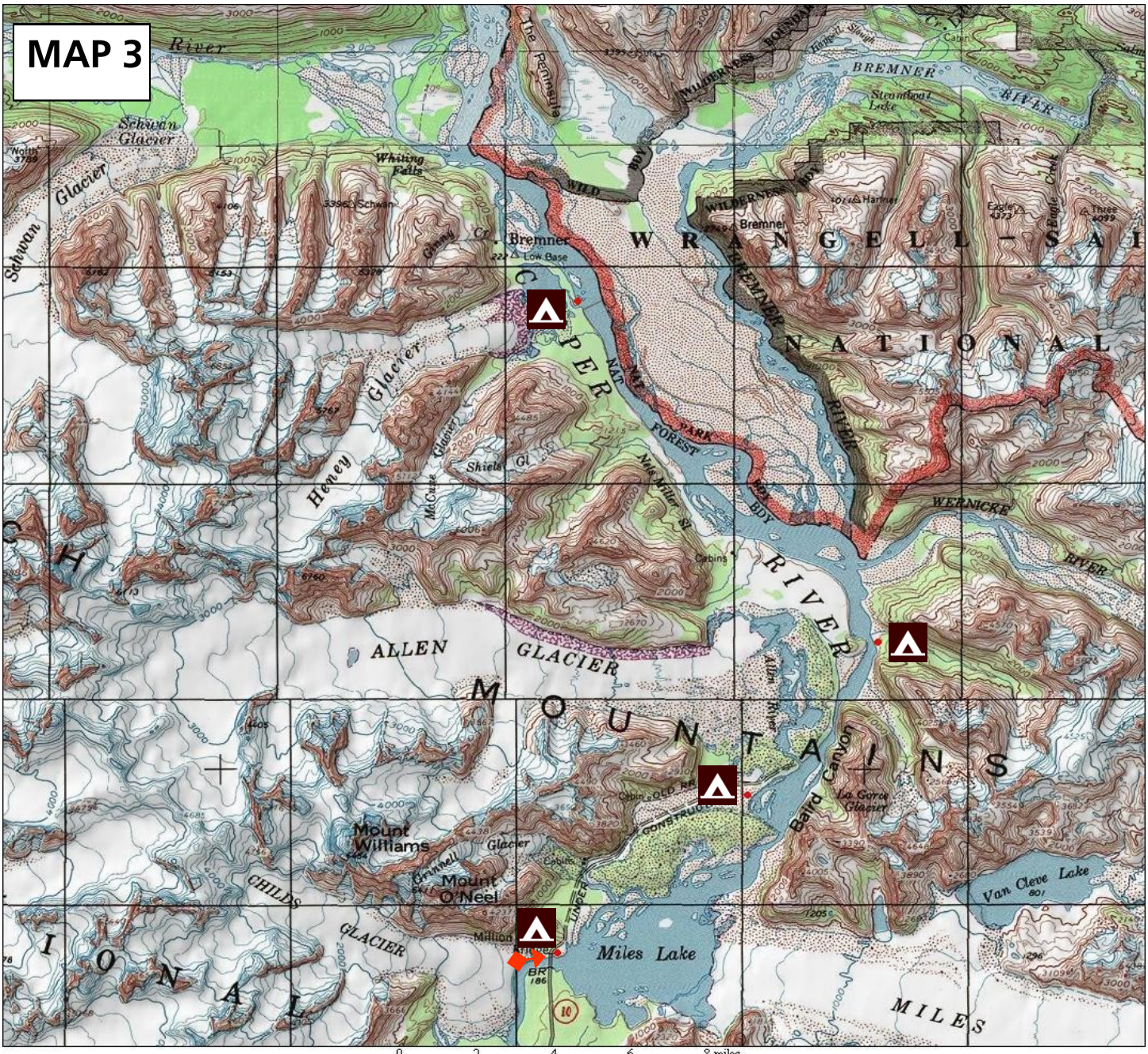
Known campsites include:

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



Icon represents possible campsite

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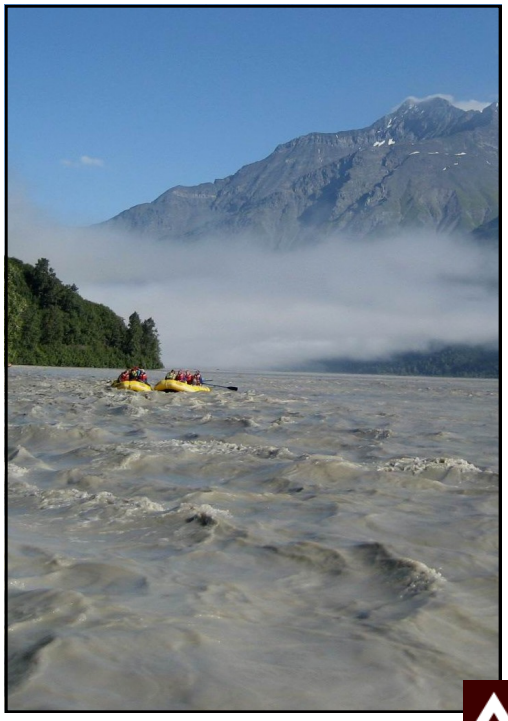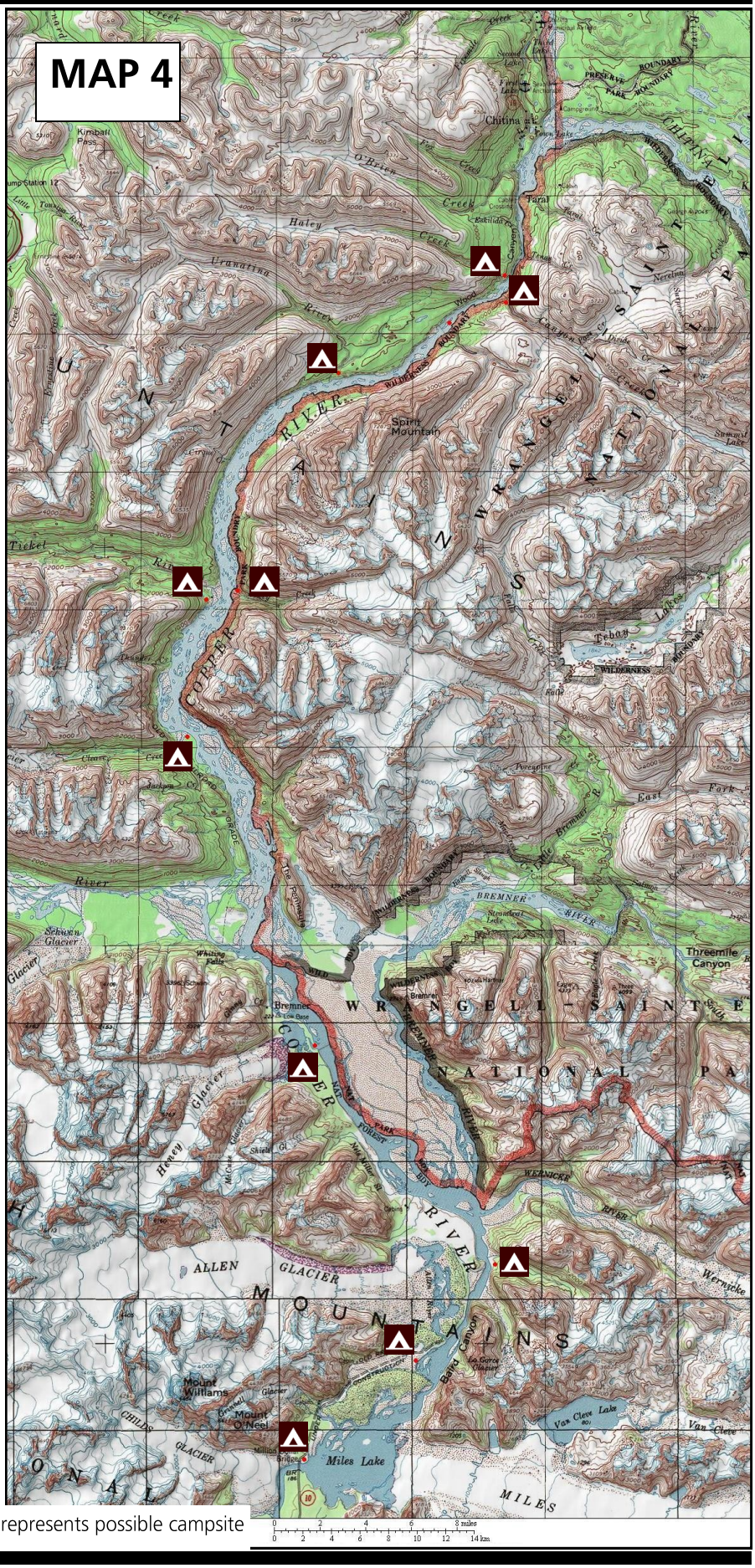
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