

KOLYMA HIGHWAY: YAKUTSK – MAGADAN

The Federal Automobile Highway 'Kolyma'
known also as the Road of Bones

Distance: - 2032 km (through Ust-Nera)
- 1197 km (through the Pole of Cold)

Roads are sandy *gravel*.

The part Kyubyume – Tomtor – Kadykchan is mostly earth.

Time to drive: 2-3 days.

Best periods to travel:

The last week of July – the first week of September
December – March.

The worst period to drive:

April – May	That's the time of ice cover melting and ice floating in rivers, floods in nearby areas, ferries closed;
June – early July	Floods reported due to melting snow on mountains in Tomponsky and Oymyakonsky uluses. Nevertheless, ferries start working in the beginning of June. When high waters or floods, especially on Aldan and Elga rivers, ferryboats might stop running for security reasons.
2 nd half of October – 1 st half of November	The period when rivers start getting frozen. Ferries don't work.

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Settlements and places to pass:

- Yakutsk (*Якутск*), on the western bank of the Lena River

Megino-Kangalassky ulus

- Nizhnyj Bestyakh (*Нижний Бестях*), on the eastern bank of the river
- Tumul (*Тумул*)
- Tyungyulyu (*Тюнгюлю*)
- Nuoragana (*Нуорагана*)

Churapchinsky ulus

- Maralajy (*Маралайы*)
- Mugudai (*Муғудай*)
- Churapcha (*Чурапча*)
- Kharbala 1st (*Харбала 1-я*)
- Kharbala 2nd (*Харбала 2-я*)

Tattinsky ulus

- Kyzy (*Кыйы*)
- Cherkekh (*Чёркёх*)
- Boroboul (*Боробул*)
- Ytyk Kyuel (*Ытык-Кюэль*)
- Uolba (*Уолба*)

Tomponsky ulus

- Megino-Aldan (*Мегино-Алдан*)
- Keskil (*Кескил*)
- Khandyga (*Хандыга*)
- Teplyj Klyuch (*Тёплый Ключ*),
- Turn to Topolinoe
- Razvilka (a fork) on the mountain pass

Oymyakonsky ulus

- A Wolf French Movie Expedition Camp. *Promised to be open in summer 2009 as a campsite with rest trailers and a road café.*

- Kyubyume (*Кюбеме*), uninhabited

- New roadway from Kyubyume (to the north)

- Vyjttakh (*Быйыттах*), uninhabited
- Ust Nera (*Усть-Нера*)
- Gousinyj (*Гусиный*)
- Burustakh (*Бурустах*)
- Artyk (*Артык*)
- Delyankir (*Делянкир*)
- The road leads to Ust Khakchan, Magadan Oblast.

- Old roadway from Kyubyume (to the east)

- Agayakan (*Агаякан*)
- Ychyugeti (*Ючюгей*)
- Tomtor (*Томтор*)
 - Way north to Oymyakon (Оймякон) from Tomtor and Ychyugeti.
- Kujdusun (*Куйдусун*)
- Kuranakh Sala (*Куранах-Сала*)
- The road then leads to Kadykchan, Magadan Oblast.

CAUTIONS!!!

For security reasons, be aware on the following parts of the roadway:

- In a cafe close to the border of Megino-Aldansky and Churapchinsky uluses. Personal stuff thefts were reported.
- In mountain area, in Tomponsky and Oymyakonsky uluses, brown bears attacks were reported. Try to spend nights inside cars or surround a camp with bonfires. In summer bear-cubs get very curious, may enter the camp area to learn new things they've never tried. Don't do anything with them, because she-bears might be nearby.
- On the part Kyubyume and Ust-Nera. Robberies by poor strangers, especially by released prisoners, were reported.

Practical things to remember:

ROAD CONDITIONS

In summer

The *gravel* part is Nizhnyj Bestyakh – Churapcha – Ytyk Kyuel – Khandyga – Kyubyume – Ust Nera – Artyk – Ust Khakchan. It is useable for the whole period of summer. However, it is hard partly to travel on days of long heavy showers. If the latter is the case, some parts might be destroyed and traffic might be just halt for a few days.

The part Kyubyume – Tomtor / Oymyakon – Kujdusun is less gravel, but mostly *earth/dirt road*. Between Kujdusun and the border of Magadan Oblast there is no road, just the slight resemblance of a country-track. A lot of puddles and brooks to come across and overpass on the way.

In winter

As locals say, in winter the highway is just perfect. Smooth and no dust and small stones to feel **by every beat of your heart**.

CROSSING RIVERS

In summer

1. There are three rivers to cross over by *ferryboats**:

- the Lena River (from Yakutsk to the eastern bank)

It is possible to do in places of **Kangalass** (the settlement north from Yakutsk), **Darkylakh** (the northern part of Yakutsk), **Pokrovsk** (the town 74 km south from Yakutsk). Locals prefer Darkylakh, if they are heading for northern or eastern parts of Yakutia. Ferry crossing open from the late May till the early October. Ferries go every two hour in a daytime. The way takes approx. 20-30 minutes. Ferriage is changed annually**. In 2008 fees were 30 rubles per person, 400 rubles per off-road vehicle.

- the Aldan River (from Megino-Aldan to Keskil)

Ferry crossing open from the late May till the early October. A ferry goes one or two times a day from 9 am till 7 pm. The way takes 1h 40 min (from the west bank, against the current) and 40 min (from the east bank, with stream). In 2008 a pass ticket cost 30 rubles for a person, 1000 rubles for a small car. 1300 rubles for an off-road vehicle.

- the Elga River (from Kyubyume to Ust Nera, new roadway)

A road construction company "AmurStroi" promised to finish the construction of the bridge over the Elga River in the beginning of summer 2009. If the bridge was not constructed in summer, one private ferry will work as in the last year. Fees depend on ferry owners' greed. In 2008 they were a little bit higher than ones on the Aldan River. Works daily, from 9 am till 7 pm. If there is a little demand for cars transfer service, the ferry crosses the river once a day. The Elga has very strong stream. In case of high waters, the ferry may not work at all. The best period to cross is August.

*A ferryboat doesn't look in the way international travelers get accustomed. This is a small boat for 3-7 cars to transfer. It just lands to a bank of a river at any or certain place.

**Ferry pass rates tend to rise annually. Usually difference is approx. 15-20 %. Ferriage information will be update in June 2009.

2. Rivers on the old roadway from Kyubyume to Oymyakon.

No bridges available. Locals wade in shallow places. To cross rivers in such a way is possible only when waters are low. The best period is August. This month is usually free from flooding and rains. To secure river crossing, drivers tend to ask truck drivers for support, namely pulling their off-road cars or motorcycles.

3. Rivers in other parts of the Kolyma Highway.

Bridges are available. Remember, if the old roadway of the Kolyma Highway is impossible to drive through at the moment of travel, drivers are recommended to go by the new way via Ust-Nera, that has good conditions within the whole period of summer.

In winter

Ice roads across rivers available. It's much convenient. No need to pay ferryboat owners for crossing rivers. However, there is one minus. *The day of official ice roads opening depends on the condition of ice cover.* Its thickness must be at least 70 sm / 2.29 ft. That's enough for all types of transports, even 5-tonnes trucks, to drive ice roads securely.

In 2008 the winter roadway across the Lena River was open in the beginning of December. In previous years it happened *in the second half of November*. Nevertheless, locals take the risk of trying solidity of ice road in the late October. But international travelers are not recommended to follow local's examples. At this period we receive reports of sunken cars with casualties a few times a week.

Ice roads are usually closed in **the first half of April**. Again everything depends on ice cover conditions. Lately changes happen. The reason might be the influence of global warming.

Crossing mountains

Recommended to pass the Verkhoyansky range in dark time so to spot approaching cars timely and be able to pass one another in narrow parts of the mountain roadways. If going in daytime, keep slow speed before the narrowest parts and watch far forward for any cars to distinguish.