

# **An Introduction to First Nations Heritage Along the Yukon River**

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# Introduction to this Manual

First Nations people in Yukon have been a part of this land since the world was created. They have traveled every corner of this territory gathering resources, visiting friends and family, and trading with neighbours. Over time people have adapted to changing environments, new people and ways of life, and new technology. Through it all First Nations have shown a remarkable ability to adjust and thrive in new situations.

As guides you are essentially a cultural broker – helping to bridge the gap between guests and hosts. This means that you will need to understand First Nations culture and history. People are eager to share their way of life and this must be done with accuracy and respect. This manual will give you an introduction to First Nations culture and history and will allow you to inform your guests with confidence.

The content in this manual is an introduction to the heritage of First Nations people in Yukon. The culture and history of First Nations people is complex and would require

volumes and volumes of information to express and understand it in any depth. These volumes simply provide a basic overview of life in Yukon before newcomers arrived, during times of change, and today. The manual includes a reference section titled Where to Find More Information. We encourage you to take some time exploring these other materials. In addition you may want to contact the government offices of Yukon's First Nations. They can provide you with other resources and point you in the direction of individuals who may have information to share.

In *Oral Traditions – Traditional Knowledge*, found in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Helene Dobrowolsky notes "the memories of the elders were the libraries of the people". You may choose to seek knowledge from elders. This is a valuable experience and one that is encouraged. There are some things that you should be aware of when working with elders. These are included below. In many communities it is proper that you contact the local First Nation before initiating contact with elders or other citizens when it is related to your employment as a guide.

In *Oral Traditions – Traditional Knowledge*, found in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Helene Dobrowolsky notes "the memories of the elders were the libraries of the people". You may choose to seek knowledge from elders. This is a valuable experience and one that is encouraged. There are some things that you should be aware of when working with elders. These are included below. In many communities it is proper that you contact the local First Nation before initiating contact with elders or other citizens when it is related to your employment as a guide.

In Part One, ***Who are the First Nations of Yukon?***, you will find basic information about the culture of Yukon's first people. Section one, *Heritage*, provides an overview of what heritage is and how our understanding of culture impacts communication. Section two, *Yukon First Nations Heritage*, is the most important section of this manual. It provides information on Yukon's First Nations communities as well as a deeper look at who First Nations people are, their traditions, and culture. Section three, *Boundaries*, discusses the borders that we, as humans, use to categorize ourselves into unique groups. Section four, *Land Claims*, provides a review of the land claims process in



Georgette McLeod paddles a traditional Hän canoe on the Yukon River.

Yukon. Section five, *The Yukon River*, will give you information about the Yukon River in general as well as First Nations perspectives on this important resource. Section six, *Language*, provides information on First Nations languages. Here you will find some words and

phrases that you can teach to your guests. Section seven, *People of Note*, profiles a few individuals who have made a big impact over time. Section eight, *Personal Accounts*, includes excerpts from oral histories that will give you insight into life on the river. Section nine, *Glossary*, defines a number of terms and concepts found throughout the manual.

In Part Two, ***A Journey Back in Time: First Nations Perspectives and Experiences along the Yukon River***, you will find historical information about a number of events that occurred from the time of the Klondike Gold Rush to the mid-20th Century. The journey starts in Whitehorse. As you move downriver to Dawson City you also move back in time. Each section provides information from the perspectives of First Nations people. Section one, *The Yukon River Highway*, provides information on sternwheelers, wood camps, and freight. Section two, *Homesteading in Yukon*, provides information on gardening, farming fur, and the 'flu epidemic. Section three, *Fort Selkirk: Trade and Com-*

*merce*, provides information on the history of trade and commerce. Section four, *Wilderness Outposts*, provides information on market hunting, trapping, and new technology. Section five, *The Klondike Gold Rush*, provides information on the discovery of gold in Dawson City and the impacts this event had on First Nations people. Section six, *Reference*, is where you can find the bibliography and links to additional information.

Ronald Bill in *Back to the River: Celebrating Our Culture*, Kwanlin Dun First Nation

*merce*, provides information on the history of trade and commerce. Section four, *Wilderness Outposts*, provides information on market hunting, trapping, and new technology. Section five, *The Klondike Gold Rush*, provides information on the discovery of gold in Dawson City and the impacts this event had on First Nations people. Section six, *Reference*, is where you can find the bibliography and links to additional information.

## Traveling in First Nations Territories

The remaining information in this introduction will give you a few tips for working in First Nations country. As with all things in these manuals, this information is generic. Each community will have its own customs, protocols, and expectations. Remember – it is ok to ask questions of your hosts as you travel along the river.

## Working with Elders

In Yukon Elders are typically regarded with fondness and respect. They are recognized as the keepers of culture and history. It can be deeply rewarding to work with Elders to learn more about culture and history. This is not always straightforward, however. You are dealing with a different culture and different ways of looking at the world.

*Old people have lots to tell ... but they have to think about things. Maybe it takes two hours. But you have to be patient. Lots of young people don't know, and think they are finished, and leave too soon.*

George Smith, from *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan



Annie Henry fleshes a hide.

Being aware of a few things beforehand can make the experience much more meaningful. For example:

- Don't be impatient or interrupt. Elders need time to think about what they are going to say.
- Be ready for surprises. Elders won't always respond to what you ask but instead may tell you what they think you should know.
- Be aware of health issues. Older people may have difficulties hearing you – speak clearly and loudly if this is the case. They may also tire easily – be watchful for signs that it is time to take a rest.
- Be aware of language barriers. Elders may have a difficult time discerning what people from other parts of the world are saying because of their accent. This may be the case for guests as well because some Elders also have strong accents.
- Elders are responsible for so many valuable things – not the least of which is guiding and educating their community. Be aware that, although they enjoy sharing their stories and time with you, they also have many demands on their time.
- Be aware of context and personal history. Many Elders have lived long and eventful lives. Everything that they share will be based within their own personal context. As well, sharing personal experiences may trigger bad memories for them from darker days. Listen carefully and seek assistance if necessary.
- Above all show respectful behaviour. It's no crime to be ignorant if you are willing to learn.

[Yukon First Nations History, Culture, Agreements,

and Self-Government, LegendSeekers; Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Research Protocol Manual, Helene Dobrowolsky]

### Remember the **TEN SECOND RULE!**

If an Elder pauses in conversation with you, give them time to think about what they want to say. Don't feel uncomfortable with silence. Be quiet, wait, and listen.

### Use Your Manners

When traveling in First Nations territories it is important to establish a positive rapport with the people who are welcoming you to their lands. Be respectful, courteous, and kind. Recognize that you are traveling in the homelands of people with different cultures and world views. Listen to what they have to say. Also it is customary to thank people for welcoming you to their lands and for their hospitality. People, especially Elders, are pleased when you give thanks in their language. Give it a try.

#### Thank You:

**Kwänächish!** – Kwanlin Dün

**Shāw Níthän!** – Ta'an Kwäch'än

**Musi!** – Selkirk First Nation

**Mähsi!** – Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in

### Traveling on the Land

First Nations people have great respect for the land. It has sustained them for generations. Respect for, and stewardship of, the land is expected of all people who travel in the traditional territories. We are all a part of the land and must treat it properly. You can do your part by acting in a respectful and careful manner when traveling along the Yukon River.

- Respect our heritage. It is illegal to disrupt graves and cultural sites.
- Respect our land. Do not litter and do your best to leave no trace.
- Respect people's camps. Treat them as you would your own home.
- Take photographs to ensure that future visitors can experience the beauty of our home.
- Watch yourself and your fellow travelers. The physical environment can be a dangerous place.
- Ask for help when you need it.

### Traditional Ways

People in First Nations communities practice traditional ways. Some include ceremonial dances and traditional songs which are performed at community events and celebrations. Traditional clothing is usually worn. These events must be treated with respect. Although guests are usually welcome to attend it is important to ask before participating or taking photographs.

[Yukon First Nations History, Culture, Agreements, and Self-Government, LegendSeekers]

### Photo Protocol

Your guests will have many opportunities to take photographs while on their journey. If they wish to photograph people remind them to take a moment and ask permission first. Remember – their photographs are for their own enjoyment. If they intend to profit in any way from their pictures they must gain permission from the First Nations governments. Most have forms that need to be filled out. It is best to arrange this well ahead of time.

A study of these manuals will prepare you for interpreting First Nations heritage along the Yukon River. Remember – this is only an introduction to the rich and diverse traditional lives of First Nations people in Yukon. Over time it is hoped that additional materials will be added to these guides.

### Production of the Manual

*An Introduction to Yukon First Nations Heritage* was prepared with funding from the Yukon Government, Department of Tourism and Culture. The project was administered by the First Nations Investment Corporation comprised of Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Selkirk First Nation.

The project was initiated when the Great River Journey requested information to be used by guides to educate their guests. The copyright for these manuals is held by the First Nations Investment Corporation???Yukon Government??? Information from specific First Nations or First Nations individuals is the intellectual property of that First Nation or individual. Use outside of the context of interpretation of the Yukon River requires permissions from the copyright holder and/or the First Nations.

The manual was developed and designed by Jody Beaumont and Michael Edwards with Cirque Consulting + Communications, Dawson City.



Allison Anderson fleshes a caribou hide.

### Great River Journey

Great River Journey is incorporated in the Yukon Territory. The partners include the Yukon First Nations' FNIC Development Corporation and privately held Great Northern Journeys Inc. FNIC Development Corporation is a consortium of four Yukon First Nations: Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Selkirk First Nation. The Great River Journey effort has been supported through grants from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Yukon Ministry of Economic Development.

# Frequently Asked Questions

Some of the most frequently-asked questions by visitors about Canadian Aboriginal peoples:

## Are all Aboriginal people in Canada the same?

Not at all! There are three “officially-recognized” aboriginal peoples in Canada: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. (The term Métis originally referred to the French- and Cree-speaking descendants of the Red River Métis in Manitoba. Métis has come to mean anyone of mixed native and other ancestry. The legal definition of Métis is not yet fully developed in Canada, though the Supreme Court has outlined broad factors to identify Métis rights-holders.)

## How can I tell the different Aboriginal peoples apart?

To be able to recognize which group a person might belong to, you would need to become familiar with Aboriginal cultures, languages and where the different groups can be found in Canada.

## How can I tell where an Aboriginal person is from?

Their name can often give you a good idea, or knowing what native language they speak, but the best way is just to ask them!

## Do First Nations people all speak the same language?

No way! There are actually 53 indigenous languages spoken in Canada, which are grouped into 11 language families. Of these families, the Na-Dene and Algonquian are largest in terms of number of languages and number of speakers. In the Yukon there are eight distinct (not dialects of one common language) First Nations languages, all belonging to the Na-Dene family (also known as Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit).

## Can First Nations people from different groups in Canada understand one another?

Some of the 53 languages have common roots, so speakers of these languages can communicate fairly well. Other languages are completely, totally different. For instance, Haida and Mi'kmaq speakers would certainly have to speak English to understand one another. In the Yukon most languages are part of the Na-Dene family, but a speaker of Tlingit would not be able to understand a Gwich'in speaker. There are also a number of distinct regional dialects within the eight Yukon languages.

## Do all First Nations people live on reserves or in First Nations communities?

No. Slightly more than half of all First Nations people in Canada live off-reserve in regular towns and cities.

[From <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ach/lr/ks/faq-eng.asp>]

## Canadian Fast Facts

### Who are the First Nations people of Canada?

First Nations people are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for many thousands of years before explorers arrived from Europe.

First Nations people of Canada are the people who used to be called “Indians,” but this term is now considered incorrect by some. Early explorers thought they were in India when they landed in North America, so they called the original inhabitants “Indians.” Many people who were misnamed “Indians” now prefer to be called First Nations. First Nations people identify themselves as Mohawk, Cree, Tagish, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and so on, according to the specific language community to which they belong.

“Aboriginal” is a term you will often hear. This term includes First Nations; Inuit, who were formerly called “Eskimos”; and the Métis, who are descendants of European fur traders and settlers who married First Nations women in the early days of our rich Canadian history. When the census was taken in 2001, 1,319,890 people in Canada reported having Aboriginal ancestry, which is 4.5 percent of the Canadian population.

### How many First Nations people are there in Canada?

There are 704,851 First Nations people in Canada. Most First Nations people – 403,369 (57%) – live in First Nations communities which are also called “reserves.” The other 301,514 (43%) live mainly in the larger cities.

### Why are Elders considered to be so special?

Elders are greatly respected for their patience and understanding, their life experiences, and their knowledge of traditional culture and language.



Ronald Johnson and Georgette McLeod welcome visitors to the Moosehide Gathering, 2008.

### Is the word “reserve” still used for where First Nations people live?

The word reserve is not typically used in the Yukon. The reserve system was not established here as it was in southern Canada. In the Yukon, most First Nations people live in fully integrated communities. The word is still used in much of Canada, where it describes land set aside by the federal government for Band use.

### What kind of houses do Aboriginal people live in? Do they still live in tipis and igloos?

First Nations and Inuit stopped living in traditional dwellings such as tipis, longhouses (First Nations) and igloos (Inuit) many, many years ago. Today, Aboriginal people live in the same kind of houses as everyone else in whatever part of Canada they live in.

### Do people still use dog sleds?

Yes and no. Throughout much of the North, the use of dog sleds was discontinued decades ago in favour of snowmobiles. In Yukon many Native and non-Native people still mush dogs, but mostly for recreation or sport.

### Do First Nations people still hunt animals for food? What do Aboriginal people eat?

Yukon First Nations people still hunt for traditional game, especially moose and caribou. Almost all Yukon First Nations people eat traditional foods as a significant part of their diet. Yukon River salmon is a basic food for many communities. People harvest berries and other wild foods. However, factors such as human encroachment, urban development, over-hunting, over-trapping and over-fishing by regional, national and international bodies have dwindled food sources that aboriginal people once relied on. First Nations people also shop at the local grocery store and eat most of the same foods as you.

[<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ach/lr/ks/cr/pubs/fnpc-eng.asp>]

### How did Aboriginal people get through the really cold winters in Canada many years ago?

Aboriginal people prepared for the harsh winter season by storing much food and supplies and moving their camps to more sheltered places. They also wore many layers of warmer clothing, a technique now widely used as the most efficient way to keep both warm and dry in cold weather.

### Why are some First Nations called “bands” and others are called “tribes”?

In Canada, First Nations are sometimes referred to as “bands”, which is a technical term under the *Indian Act*; in the United States they are often called “tribes”. Many bands today prefer to be called First Nations, such as those in Yukon who have land claim agreements that supercede the *Indian Act*.



Young Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Citizens enjoying Moosehide.

# FYI: Yukon First Nations

## Key Messages

First Nations people in Yukon have been a part of this land since the world was created. They have traveled every corner of this territory gathering resources, visiting friends and family, and trading with neighbours.

Over time people have adapted to changing environments, new people and ways of life, and new technology. Through it all First Nations have shown a remarkable ability to adjust and thrive in new situations.

In Yukon today there are 14 distinct First Nations – each with their own traditional territories, cultures, and political organization.

To date 11 First Nations have signed land claim agreements with Canada and Yukon and are now self-governing.

Part One of this manual will provide you with information on the heritage of Yukon's First Nations. Familiarity with the information will allow you to share interesting elements of culture and answer the questions your guests will have about the identity of First Nations people.

Part Two of this manual provides information about a variety of historic events from the perspective of Yukon's First Nations.

Throughout the manual you will find a variety of "FYI" tabs which include key messages, suggestions for interpretation, and study questions.

## Telling the Story

At the beginning of the journey be sure to provide information from the Introduction of this manual as well as basic information about Yukon's First Nations today.

Keep the following tips in mind throughout the journey:

Take time to learn the materials in this manual – it will enrich the experience of your guests;

Be sure that the information you share is accurate;

If you do not know the answer to a guest's question tell them that you will try to find the correct answer – it's very important to only pass on correct information;

Be respectful of the territories that you travel through;

Be respectful and mindful of First Nations' values and perspectives.

## Study Questions

What should you keep in mind when working with Elders?

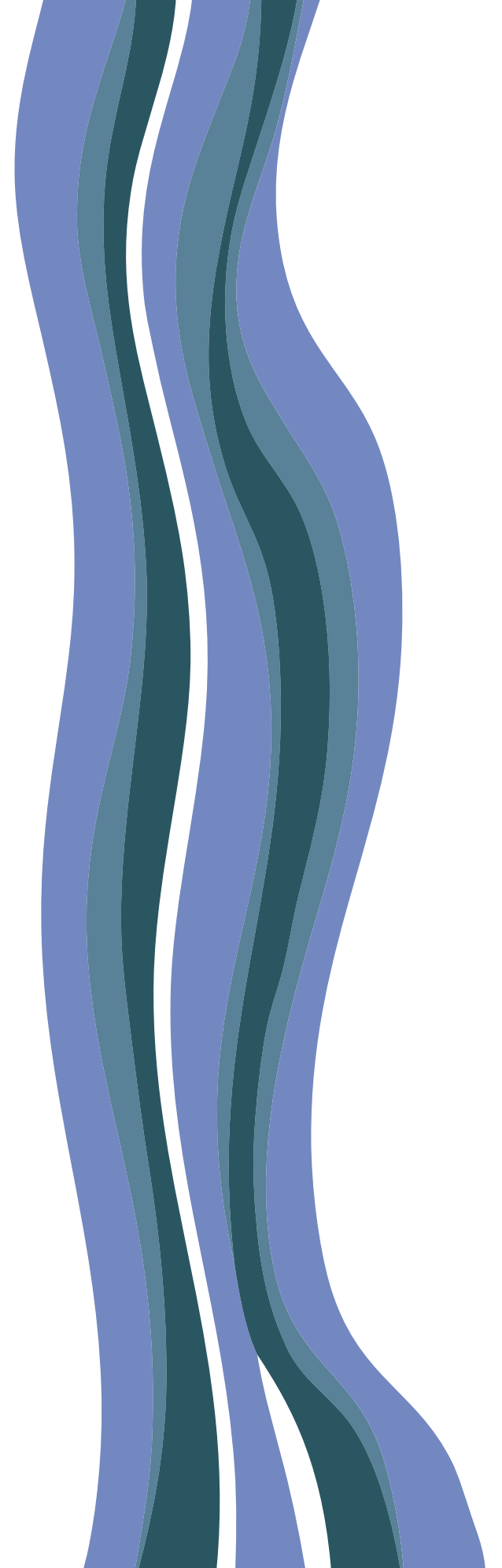
What should you keep in mind when traveling on the land?

What do guests need to know about taking photographs?

What is heritage? How is it different from history?

Name some ways that our personal heritage can impact our communications with others.

**Who are the  
First Nations  
of Yukon?**



## What is Heritage?

*Heritage is all that we gain from our ancestors, it is our cultural identity. Our cultural identity is made up of many things, language, creation stories, associations with place, and the connection we make with our ancestors by accepting their gifts to us. Heritage is those values and attitudes that our families try to instil in us as children so that we can grow up to be decent and respectful members of our community.*

David Neufeld



Debbie Nagano prepares to barbecue fresh Yukon River salmon.



John Flynn with a harvested moose on the Yukon River.

## Heritage: Our Identity

Heritage is all about your identity as a person, a community, or any other group of people that you relate to. It is also all about communication and relationships.

As guides you are responsible for communicating information about Yukon's First Nations people. It is imperative that you understand the basic concepts associated with heritage and are familiar with Yukon's diverse and rich cultures.

Heritage can be difficult to define because it is simply who you are – it is something that we often take for granted because it is deeply instilled in us and is wrapped up in our daily lives. There is a general understanding that all people need to understand their roots to appreciate and value who they are. It also follows that if those values are understood and respected, they provide a framework for life. In Yukon, Elders consistently express the desire to maintain a “living culture” and emphasize the connection to identity. The underlying guiding principle this reflects is “use it or lose it” which links past, present and future. In effect this says it is simply not enough to respect and value one's own culture; the challenge is to keep it alive and relevant. It also implies a duty to pass it on to others. Elders express this in terms of a gift entrusted to one's care to be passed on in the fullness of time in an appropriate and respectful manner. Culture is perceived as a rare gift to be treasured, and this heritage should be passed on in as authentic a manner as possible from one generation to another, because it is the heart of your identity.

Your responsibility as a guide involves educating people about Yukon heritage. Elders are trusting that you will do this in an authentic and respectful manner. Increasing awareness about who First Nations people are will instil pride in communities and will help to keep heritage alive and well.

### What does Heritage do?

The function of heritage is to give us an all-encompassing pattern for living. It provides us with the guidelines and rules for our membership in humanity.

Its role is to solidify our sense of community and to define who we are as a group and further to ensure the continuation of our group by laying out a set of guidelines for future generations. A healthy heritage strengthens a community by bringing people together with a common identity and pride.

## Heritage and Cross-Cultural Communication

As individuals we all have different perspectives and viewpoints and this will be true of anyone who we work with. Our personal heritage (or worldview, perspective, values, etc) impacts how we communicate with others. This is important to keep in mind because our work as guides is all about communicating with others and if we are aware of how our heritage can impact our communication we will be much more successful in sharing knowledge with other people.

### Symbols

A symbol is anything that we can perceive with our senses and that stands for something else. Symbols can be words, objects, representations of objects, or certain gestures. Symbols simplify the task of communication. They make it possible to communicate the immense variety of human experience, whether past or present, tangible or intangible, good or bad. The meanings implicit in symbols are culturally grounded and therefore vary from culture to culture.

### Stereotyping

Stereotyping usually refers to a process of attributing cultural traits of an individual or group to other individuals or groups on the basis of some perceived similarity, ie making generalizations from specific information. Stereotyping can be a barrier to the communication process by creating false assumptions in at least one of the participants.

### Perception

Perception is the process that allows us to perceive the world around us. Information received by our sensory organs passes through a two-stage sequence. The first stage is recognition and identification. The second involves recognition and interpretation. This process is learned. It is based on all of our previous experiences and thus is strongly influenced by culture.

### World Views

World view can be defined as a culture's orientation toward spiritual beings, humanity, nature, questions of existence, the universe, the cosmos, life, death, sickness, and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world. World view is the core of a culture. In the communication process aspects of one's world view would necessarily be present.

### Culture

Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called “the way of life for an entire society.” As such, it includes codes of manner, dress, language, religion, rituals, games, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the arts.

*Wikipedia*

### Tradition

Beliefs or customs taught by one generation to the next, often orally. A set of customs or practices.

*Wikipedia*

### Values

Principles or standards of behaviour. Types of values include ethical/moral values, doctrinal/ideological (political, religious) values, social values, and aesthetic values.

*Wikipedia*

### Custom

A way of acting common to many; a method of doing or living; long-established practice, considered as unwritten law, and resting for authority on long consent.

*Wiktionary*



## Beliefs and Values

Beliefs are at the core of our thoughts and actions and may be described as our conviction in the truth of something. Value systems may be described as a learned organization of rules for making choices and for resolving conflicts. These rules and guideposts are normative and teach us what is useful, good, right, wrong, what to strive for, how to live our life, and even what to die for. Individual beliefs and values are often culturally grounded and thus influence our communications processes.

## Language Differences

Language is a system of cultural knowledge used to generate and interpret speech. Languages are made up of symbols (words) and rules for using them. The use of language and culture are inseparable: while culture shapes perception and meaning, language both reflects and defines experience. Differences in language may bring differences in all of these aspects. Simple translation or fluency in a second language is not always a guarantee of mutual understanding or accuracy of meaning.

## Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is “the view of things in which one’s own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.” Any culture that is functioning adequately regards itself as the best. While this perspective is a healthy attitude, when taken to extremes, it can effectively shut others out and lead to a breakdown of communication.

## Communication Styles

Communication styles vary from culture to culture. These styles have to do with learned cultural information and traditional practices. Styles may be formal or informal, or may rely on verbal or non-verbal communication in varying degrees.

## Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is an important aspect of, and occurs in conjunction with, the communication process. It too is grounded in culture. Categories of non-verbal communication have to do with those produced by the body and those having to do with the setting.

From *Yukon First Nations, History, Culture, Agreements and Self-Government* compiled by LegendSeekers

## Yukon First Nations

In Yukon today there are 14 distinct First Nations – each with their own traditional territories, cultures, and political organization. To date 11 First Nations have signed land claim agreements with Canada and Yukon and are now

self-governing. This map illustrates the territories of each First Nation as well as the community from which each is based. For more information on each of these communities please visit Yukon Community Profiles at <http://www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca>.



# YUKON RIVER COMMUNITY PROFILES

## Whitehorse to Dawson City

YUKON FIRST NATIONS	Community
CARCROSS-TAGISH FIRST NATION	Carcross and Tagish
CHAMPAGNE AND AISIHIK FIRST NATIONS	Haines Junction
KLUANE FIRST NATION	Burwash Landing & Destruction Bay
KWANLIN DÜN	Whitehorse
LIARD FIRST NATION	Watson Lake
LITTLE SALMON/CARMACKS FIRST NATION	Carmacks
FIRST NATION OF NACHO NYAK DUN	Mayo
ROSS RIVER DENA COUNCIL	Ross River and Faro
SELKIRK FIRST NATION	Pelly Crossing
TA'AN KWÄCH'ÄN COUNCIL	Whitehorse
TESLIN TLINGIT COUNCIL	Teslin
TR'ONDĚK HWĚCH'IN	Dawson City
VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION	Old Crow
WHITE RIVER FIRST NATION	Beaver Creek

As you travel downriver from Whitehorse to Dawson City you will pass through the traditional territories of five First Nations: Kwanlin Dün, Ta'an Kwäch'än, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Selkirk First Nation, and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. Information on these First Nations is located in the following section.

### TA'AN KWÄCH'ÄN and KWANLIN DÜN • Whitehorse

Set in the wide valley of the Yukon River, Whitehorse is the capital of the Yukon and by far its largest community. Close to 70% of the total Yukon population lives in the community of Whitehorse; this includes the City of Whitehorse, Mount Lorne, Ibex Valley, Marsh Lake and surrounding areas. The city lies within the shared traditional territory of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (TKC) and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN).

Historically, First Nations used the area around Whitehorse for food gathering and as a meeting place. The settlement of Whitehorse developed during the Klondike Gold Rush as a transportation hub; Whitehorse was the head of navigable waters on the Yukon River and an important stop on the journey to the gold fields. Once the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway linked Whitehorse with the Alaskan port of Skagway, Whitehorse became the centre of transportation into and out of the Territory. Since the Klondike Gold Rush era, Whitehorse has experienced a series of population booms and busts, mainly linked to mining and highway construction. In 1953 the Yukon government moved the capital to Whitehorse from Dawson City.

Whitehorse is now a contemporary city and the government and business centre for the Yukon. The Yukon government headquarters and several federal government offices are located there. The Council of Yukon First Nations also has its headquarters in Whitehorse. Most major Yukon businesses, utility companies and services operate out of the city.

Government activity provides considerable economic stability to the Whitehorse area. Tourism has become a major source of economic growth for the city. Tourists often visit as they pass through, either along the Alaska Highway or by flying into the Whitehorse airport.

The First Nations people of the Whitehorse region enjoyed a seasonal way of life and traveled extensively throughout the area to seasonal hunting, fishing, and trapping areas where they knew that animals and fish could be found at certain times of the year. Archaeological evidence at Canyon City shows that First Nation people have occupied that area for thousands of years. Many Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nations people worked for the steamboats that navigated the Yukon River up to Dawson City.

Some were woodcutters, and others worked on board. Frank Slim, from the Ta'an Kwäch'än, was a captain of one of the steamers.

The two First Nations in the area of what is now Whitehorse were initially recognized as separate bands by the Department of Indian Affairs, but in 1956 the Laberge Indian Band was illegally amalgamated with the Whitehorse Indian Band by the Department. The Whitehorse Indian Band, which was originally located in the Industrial area of Whitehorse, later moved to the McIntyre subdivision and became known as the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. The people who had comprised the Laberge Indian Band later separated from the Kwanlin Dün and became the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.



*Kwanlin Dün citizens.*

For Generations the people of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation have lived and thrived along the Chu Nínkwän, today's Yukon River (also known as Tágà Shäw, meaning "Big River"). The name Kwanlin itself means "water running through canyon" and refers to the length of the river from Miles Canyon to the Whitehorse rapids. The Traditional Territory of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation was originally occupied by the Tagish Kwan people, and is shared with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Yukon Government; Kwanlin Dün acknowledges and respects all who share this territory.

Kwanlin Dün First Nation is unique in that the citizens that make up its Nation are not from one tribe or one region, but rather Kwanlin Dün has welcomed people from other First Nations from as far

as Atlin and Tagish to the southeast, Old Crow to the North, Little Salmon to the Northwest, and the Kluane area to the west. Because of the diversity of people, Kwanlin Dün is made up of several languages and dialects, however, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, Tagish and Tlingit are the most common. Kwanlin Dün people follow a matriarchal clan system of Wolf or Crow; and due to the diversity and varying traditions Kwanlin Dün has many art, craft and beading styles, as well as many stories and traditions passed down from elders.

On April 1, 2005, after decades of negotiation, Kwanlin Dün signed their Final and Self-Governing Agreements, thus gaining treaty protection under Canada's constitution and becoming the 10th self-governing First Nation in the Yukon. The Kwanlin Dün Government is comprised of Chief and Council, the Elder's Council, the Youth Council and the Judicial Council. Kwanlin Dün today strives towards unification as a prerequisite to progress in other areas. They face unique issues stemming from their presence in an urban centre rather than a smaller community. Kwanlin Dün First Nation plays a vital role in traditional justice systems adapted to modern ways, such as circle sentencing. The First Nation embraces cultural events for all members of Kwanlin Dün as Elders are teaching them about ways of the past, how to survive on the land and give caring recommendations on how to walk together in a modern world.

In the recent past, Kwanlin Dün peoples living in present-day Whitehorse were continually relocated and moved further and further downriver from the emerging and growing city; in the early 1980s Kwanlin Dün village was once again moved to its current location in the McIntyre subdivision, which also houses the Government's offices. During Kwanlin Dün's land claim agreements, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation became the first Aboriginal Nation in Canada to select and receive land within a designated city border, which in many respects has reconnected the Kwanlin Dün people to the Yukon River.

The proposed Kwanlin Dün Cultural Center will not only be situated on one of the many parcels within the City of Whitehorse, but will be a vital link in reconnecting the Kwanlin Dün people to the river. The Cultural Center will be a gathering place not only for today's Kwanlin Dün First Nation citizens, but also a source of information to the many visitors who travel through Whitehorse. The Kwanlin

Dün First Nation citizens upkeep their tradition of diversity and welcome visitors to experience, respect and enjoy the Chu Nínkwän and the many territories that it crosses.

The Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, who separated from the Kwanlin Dün First Nation in September of 1998, is affiliated with the Southern Tutchone Tribal Council and has members of Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Tlingit ancestry. Ta'an Kwäch'än means "People of Lake Laberge," which is called "Tàa'an Män" in Southern Tutchone. The lake is the heart of their traditional territory. The Ta'an Kwäch'än Council signed their land claims and self-government agreements on January 13, 2002. The agreements came into effect in April 2002.

Chief Jim Boss was the traditional chief of Ta'an Kwäch'än (also known by his Tlingit name, Kashxóot). He recognized shortly after the Gold Rush that his people needed protection for their land and culture and the animals and fish upon which they depended. In 1900 he requested that the Commissioner of the Yukon grant a reserve for his people at Lake Laberge, which he had already surveyed. The Commissioner granted some land, albeit one-fifth of the amount requested. Not satisfied, Chief Jim Boss had his lawyer write to the Indian Commissioner in Ottawa in 1902, demanding that the Government of Canada control hunting by non-aboriginal newcomers to the Yukon, and compensate the aboriginal people for the damage done to game populations. The government responded that only the North-West Mounted Police would protect Native peoples' interests.

Today the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council is striving to preserve their culture and language and also pursue activities that assist in this process. The Ta'an Kwäch'än Council has established the Mundessa Development Corporation and 12028 Yukon Inc., which is responsible for the commercial activities of the First Nation. In the past the Ta'an Kwäch'än were governed by a hereditary male leader from the Wolf moiety. The First Nation has changed to a democratic voting system and elected its first chief, a woman, in 2004.

From Yukon Community Profiles  
<http://www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca>

## **LITTLE SALMON / CARMACKS FIRST NATION • Carmacks**

Carmacks has served many functions over the years, including campsite, trading post and coal-mining community. Today it is a highway service centre and the home of the Little Salmon/ Carmacks First Nation. Carmacks is located at the confluence of the Yukon and Nordenskiöld rivers. It lies 180 kilometres north of Whitehorse on the

Klondike Highway, near its junction with the Robert Campbell Highway.

Originally, the Carmacks area was part of the hunting and fishing territory of the Northern Tutchone people. The site of Carmacks was an important trading stop on the river trade routes of the Coastal Tlingit and the Northern and Interior Athapaskan. The modern community is named for George Carmack, one of the discoverers of gold in the Klondike. In 1893, three years before the gold discovery, Carmack found a seam of coal at Tantalus Butte, at the mouth of the Nordenskiöld. He built a cabin that grew into a trading post - Carmack's Post.

During the Klondike Gold Rush, the site became a stop on the way to Dawson; later, it was a stop on the Overland Trail between Dawson and Whitehorse. When the first leg of the Klondike Highway was completed in 1950, Carmacks became a major service centre. At that time the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation people were forced to take up permanent residence on the north bank of the Yukon River, where most still live. The business section of Carmacks is on the south bank.

The Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation is affiliated with the Northern Tutchone Council. As of April 2004, the registered population as reported by the Little Salmon/ Carmacks First Nation was 621, almost half of whom live outside the community.

The Little Salmon/Carmacks people are Northern Tutchone, part of the Athapaskan language grouping. They were and remain people who are very much reliant on the Yukon River and its rich salmon resources.

The Northern Tutchone people of this area are closely related to the Northern Tutchone groups of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun and the Selkirk First Nation. They are also closely related to the Southern Tutchone people of nearby Champagne, Klukshu, and Aishihik, with whom they traded and often intermarried. A system of land and water routes connected all of these adjacent areas.

Carmacks was an important stopover on the Yukon River for people travelling to the Dawson goldfields during the gold rush of 1898. Later it became an important refueling place for the riverboats that traveled between Whitehorse and Dawson City. Many First Nations people worked in wood-camps during the sternwheeler era.

The Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation completed their land claims negotiations, and signed their land claims and self-government agreements in July 1997. Their Final Agreement follows the structure of the Umbrella Final Agreement but contains provisions unique to them. An example of a specific provision is the Nordenskiöld Wetland Special Management Area. The Little Salmon/Car-

macks traditional territory is rich in renewable and non-renewable resources, and the First Nation is establishing and building co-management regimes with other levels of government. The First Nation is committed to teaching their young people about traditional law and traditional knowledge and to developing employment opportunities that reflect the old ways and values of life on the land.

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<http://www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca>

## **SELKIRK FIRST NATION • Pelly Crossing**

Originally, Pelly Crossing was used by Selkirk people as a campsite along the way to Ta'Tla Mun. In the early 1900s, Ira and Eliza Van Bibber established a homestead at the mouth of Mica Creek, where they raised their family. The surrounding area started developing as a ferry crossing over the Pelly River and a construction camp for workers building the Klondike highway. The people of the



*Mariah Van Bibber at Fort Selkirk*

First Nation had settled near the traditional site of Fort Selkirk on the Yukon River. The construction of the highway meant the end of many river communities like Fort Selkirk, and the town site was virtually abandoned. The Selkirk First Nation was relocated to Pelly Crossing to centralize services and make administration easier. The community of Pelly Crossing is located along the Klondike Highway and on the bank of the Pelly River, 282 kilometres northwest of Whitehorse and 254 km southeast of Dawson City.

Pelly Crossing is the home of the Selkirk First Na-

tion, part of the Northern Tutchone cultural and language group and a participant in the Northern Tutchone Council. Northern Tutchone is a member of the Athapaskan language family. Calculations generated by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in 2004 for their internal purposes estimated the registered population of the Selkirk First Nation at 495, many of whom live in other communities. First Nations' calculations of their population numbers may differ from Government of Canada figures and may include registered beneficiaries, non-beneficiary citizens and others. The Council handles administration of community affairs. Pelly Crossing became the more permanent home of the Selkirk First Nation after the construction of the Klondike Highway in the 1950s. Previously, the Northern Tutchone people headquartered at Fort Selkirk and Minto for parts of the year while hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering in the yearly round throughout their traditional areas. With the completion of the highway, the Fort Selkirk people moved to Minto and later to Pelly Crossing. As Minto was abandoned, some people moved to Pelly, some to Mayo, some to Carmacks, some to Dawson and some to Whitehorse. The Selkirk First Nation people are closely affiliated with the Northern Tutchone groups of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun and the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation. Some members trace their ancestry to the Southern Tutchone people of adjoining areas. The Selkirk First Nation people practice the traditional moiety structure of Wolf and Crow, an integral part of which is the potlatch system.

Fort Selkirk is the location of a fur-trading fort established by Hudson's Bay Company explorer Robert Campbell in the 1840s. The fort was later burned by the Coastal Tlingits, and was rebuilt at the present site in 1850. Today, Fort Selkirk is an important heritage site and is co-managed by the Selkirk First Nation and the Government of Yukon. Many Selkirk First Nation members are employed on an annual basis, working on restoration and maintenance of the grounds and buildings at the site and interpreting the history of the site and of the Selkirk people.

In recent years, the Selkirk First Nation has been working toward community healing and revival of their traditional culture and history to deal with the effects of mission school and the associated problems. A healing camp has been constructed and a cultural museum has been established. Traditional activities such as summer fish camps

and winter camping are supported through First Nations programs. Selkirk First Nation people are actively involved with other First Nations in the Yukon in the revival of stick-gambling, traditional songs and dances, and storytelling.

The Selkirk First Nation signed their land claims and self-government agreements in the summer of 1997 at a ceremony held at Minto. The agreements are being implemented. The First Nation will participate in development projects in their traditional territory, and in management of fish and wildlife. Ta'Tla Mun, Llutsaw Wetland and Ddhaw Ghro were identified as Special Management Areas in the Final Agreement, and will be designated as Habitat Protection Areas. The Fort Selkirk site is jointly owned, planned, and managed by the Selkirk First Nation and the Yukon government. The Fort Selkirk Historic Site Management Plan, which came into effect in 2000, guides management, interpretation and preservation at the site. The First Nation is also spearheading the Dooli Traditional Law project.

From Yukon Community Profiles  
<http://www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca>

## TR'ONDEK HWECH'IN • Dawson City

A century ago, Dawson City was a gold rush boomtown. Today the community of Dawson City is still a gold mining centre. Another economic activity is tourism, based on the community's colourful past and historical importance. Dawson is also well known as the home of a growing arts community. Dawson is located about 536 kilometres northwest of Whitehorse, at the end of the Klondike Highway.

The town of Dawson City lies within the traditional lands of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The site, located across the Klondike River from Dawson City, is called "Tr'ochëk" and is used as a seasonal fishing camp.

The discovery of gold in the Klondike valley in 1896 led to the establishment of a tiny community where the Klondike River flows into the Yukon. By the summer of 1898, Dawson City was the largest city in Canada west of Winnipeg, with a population of 40,000 in the immediate area. Within months, Dawson boasted telephones, running water, steam heat, steamboat services, and a wide range of elaborate hotels, theatres and dance halls.

A year later the gold rush was over; 8,000 people left town in a single summer. By 1902 Dawson City's population had dropped to 5,000, declining further in the early part of the 20th century.

In the early 1960s Dawson City was declared a National

Historic Site. Preservation of buildings and historic areas, an assortment of activities related to the Klondike Gold Rush, and other tourism initiatives draw some 60,000 visitors each year.

The First Nations people of the Dawson City area are known as the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are part of a larger Hän Nation that extends to Eagle, Alaska. The Hän language they speak is one of the Athapaskan languages.



L-R Victor Henry, Peggy Kormendy, Angie Joseph-Rear and JJ Van Bibber.

For generations, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in relied heavily on the salmon runs of the Yukon River, and had fish camps along its shores. They also hunted big game, moving to different areas of their land according to the seasons.

At the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in were relocated to Moosehide Village, which became their permanent home until the 1950s. Moosehide is five km downriver from Dawson City.

During a period of tremendous change, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in continued to keep close ties to their land and people. Chief Isaac, the leader of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in during the Gold Rush, guided his people through the tremendous upheaval caused by the influx of newcomers. The impact of cultural loss continued when many youth were sent to residential school. In 1957, changes in government practices at Moosehide caused the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to move into Dawson City, where they have become an important and integral part of the community.

Today, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are actively involved in relearning their heritage, language, songs, and dances and passing them on to the children. The Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre, on the shore of the Yukon River in Dawson City, serves as a focal point for the people's cultural revival, as does their biennial gathering at Moosehide.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in signed their land claim and self-government agreements in 1998, following the structure set out in the Umbrella Final Agreement. Since then they have been implementing their settlements through many new initiatives. The Heritage Department has flourished and is working on a five-year heritage strategic plan. The First Nation is working on a number of heritage developments, such as restoration of the Forty Mile, Fort Constantine, and Fort Cudahy Historic Site; management planning for Tr'ochëk Heritage Site; and heritage work at Black City on the Dempster Highway.

As of April 2004, the registered population reported by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in was 964, about 420 of whom live elsewhere in the Yukon and in other parts of Canada.

[From Yukon Community Profiles  
<http://www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca>]

# A YUKON CHRONOLOGY

## Long Ago

Crow creates the world. (See the next section, Creation Stories.)

## 200,000,000 BP

None of what is now Alaska or southwestern Yukon existed. Since then, dozens of terranes (pieces of the earth's crust) have "docked" against the main body of North America to form the present land.

## 25,000 - 12,000 BP

Lower sea levels caused by the Ice Age create a land bridge between Asia and North America. Animals, plants, and humans migrated back and forth across this bridge, thriving in the ice-free area now known as Beringia.

## 24,000 BP

Scientists believe that the first humans may have arrived from Asia though this is still very much a subject of controversy. According to First Nations legends, Crow created the world and First Nations people have always been here.

## 12,000 - 9,000 BP

About 40 species of animals become extinct in North America, including the woolly mammoth, mastodons and giant beavers. Two hypotheses for this wave of extinction are human overhunting and climate change, but nobody is certain of its cause.

## 8,000 BP

Forests reappear in the Yukon, as the tree line moves north during glacial melt and warming.

## 1,900 BP - 1,150 BP

Two major eruptions of Mt. Churchill (in Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park) deposit ash from Alaska, through much of the Yukon, to Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories.

The first eruption, about 1900 years ago, produced the ash deposit that is now known as the northern lobe. The second, about 1150 years ago, produced the eastern lobe.

The ash from these eruptions forced both the

animals and people that survived to flee the southern Yukon for generations. The ash layer now provides archaeologists with a convenient, accurate dating layer. The ash layer is clearly visible in many of the banks along the Yukon River.

## 1700s - early 1800s

Russian traders enter Alaska. European trade goods begin to make their way inland to Yukon First Nations groups.

## 1825

Great Britain and Russia agree that the 141st meridian shall be the boundary between the interior sections of their territories. This agreement was honoured when Alaska and the Yukon were formed.

## 1826

The Franklin Expedition reaches Herschel Island, off Yukon's north coast. They are the first Europeans to see the Yukon.

## 1848

The Hudson's Bay Company builds Fort Selkirk, at the confluence of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers.

## 1852

Fort Selkirk is destroyed by a group of Tlingits who objected to the Hudson's Bay Company trying to break the Tlingit monopoly on trade with the interior tribes.

## 1883

Lieutenant Frederick A. Swatka conducts the first survey of the entire length of the Yukon River.

## 1886

The discovery of rich gold deposits on the upper reaches of the Fortymile River prompts the first large rush into the interior.

## 1894

A resolution of the Privy Council authorizes the North-West Mounted Police into the Yukon "in the interests of peace and good government, in the interests also of the public revenue." By June 26, Inspector Charles Constantine and Staff-Sergeant Charles Brown were at Juneau, heading for the goldfields of the British Yukon.

## 1896

Gold is discovered on Rabbit Creek near Dawson City by a

party consisting of George Carmack, his wife Kate, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charlie and Patsy Henderson.

## 1898

The Klondike Gold Rush turns Dawson into the largest city north of San Francisco and west of Winnipeg. Construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route railway from Skagway to Whitehorse begins. The 112 miles were completed on July 29, 1900. In May the ice breaks on Lake Bennett; within the next few weeks, 7,080 boats carrying 28,000 people pass the NWMP post at Tagish.

On June 13, the Yukon Territory is officially created.

## 1918

The coastal steamer Princess Sophia sinks near Juneau, killing 463 people, about 10% of the Yukon's white population.

## 1919

The Yukon finally allows non-aboriginal women to vote in Territorial elections.

## 1942

The Alaska Highway opened at Contact Creek, 305 miles north of Fort Nelson, B.C. During this peak year of construction, about 15,900 people are employed by the project. Road construction changes the annual cycle and settlement patterns for many First Nations people. Many families abandon their subsistence lifestyle.

## 1946

Alaska Highway turned over to Canada, in a ceremony at Whitehorse.

## 1947

Alaska Highway opened to civilian traffic.

## 1951

After three years of rumours, the federal government approves moving the capital of the Yukon from Dawson City to Whitehorse. A new Federal Building was constructed in 1952, and the Territorial Council chambers were moved the following year, with the first meeting held in Whitehorse in April.

## 1955

The sternwheeler era comes to an end with the construction of an all-weather road from Whitehorse to Dawson City. This hastens the decline or abandonment of several First Nations communities along the Yukon River, such as Fort Selkirk.

## 1962

Skookum Jim Memorial Hall is opened in Whitehorse. The hall would serve as a gathering place from which the first Yukon First Nations political movements began.

## 1968

The Yukon Native Brotherhood (YNB) is formed to represent Status Indians as defined by the *Indian Act*.

## 1971

The Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians (YANSI) is formed to represent the interests of Native people who had lost their status in the *Indian Act* (if their mothers had married non-Native men.)

## 1973

The YNB presents *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*, a document that led to land claims negotiations in Yukon, to the federal government. YNB and YANSI amalgamate to form the Council for Yukon Indians (CYI, today called the Council of Yukon First Nations). CYI was charged with negotiating a land claims settlement on behalf of all Yukon First Nations people.

## 1979

The Dempster Highway is completed. Joe Henry of Dawson City leads the survey crews that mapped the route from Dawson to Inuvik.

## 1984

After years of negotiations, the first attempt at a comprehensive land claim agreement (called the Agreement in Principle, or AIP) was rejected by CYI in a special general assembly in Tagish, with Prime Minister John Turner in attendance. Reasons for the rejection included lack of self-governing powers, no specialized hunting rights, and extinguishment of aboriginal title.

## 1993

The Umbrella Final Agreement is signed by representatives of the Council for Yukon Indians and the Yukon and federal governments, establishing the basic format for all 14 Yukon First Nations land claims agreements.

# Long Ago: Our Stories

## Our Stories

Oral history gives people a reference to their place in the universe, the knowledge of their rights to the land, and their family histories. According to Yukon First Nations oral tradition, in the beginning the world was in chaos and was “cleaned-up” by Crow and Beaver Man (also known as “Smart Man” or Äsunya in Southern Tutchone and Soh Zhee in Northern Tutchone). The balance of the world was set in motion at that time and continues today. Some important life questions such as who are we, where we come from, and what we do are answered through oral history. The tradition of

passing knowledge, like place names and the stories of those locations, would ensure that people knew of hunting and fishing grounds, and where the best berries and medicines were grown, even if they had never been to that place before. Also, knowing how people in different families were related would ensure that marriage among blood relatives did not occur. The passing down of knowledge through generations would ensure that “teachings” were adhered to, life lessons were being carried out and the language, culture and traditions of Yukon First Nations would remain unbroken throughout the generations.

## Creation Stories

There are two primary conceptions about the origins of First Nations people: creation stories and the scientific view. The scientific view will be covered in the section titled Prehistoric Times.

Most First Nations people have stories which explain how the world came to be and how people came to inhabit this world. These stories are passed from generation to generation through storytelling.

These stories tell us that First Nations people have lived on this land for millennia. They believed that the universe contained many different worlds – the world of the animals, the world of humans, the world of souls, etc. These worlds were always changing. Long ago, before the world was as it is now, humans and animals interacted with each other. They could speak to one another and could sometimes take on each other’s forms.

Many of the old stories focus on Crow and how he made the world a suitable place for humans to live. Sometimes Crow looked and acted like a bird while at other times he looked and acted like a human. Jessie Joe, a Southern Tutchone Elder, explains that Crow restored the order of the world following a great flood. During the flood Crow flew around until he found a woman with a baby. He took her baby and as she stood he saw that she was sitting on land. He wanted her to get him some land as



Ravens (*Corvus corax*) are found throughout Yukon. Many First Nations people call them crows.

well. He would not give back her baby until she gave him some land. She did by going under the water and bringing him some land. He returned the baby.

*And him, Crow there, he walks around that ground there. And he made the ground flat, just like a pancake [of] mud. He’s doing that and doing that. He makes it bigger and bigger. He made the world that’s here. He made the world. Crow made the world. That’s what everybody says anyway.*

Jessie Joe as quoted in *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan, pg 254.

In other versions of the story the being who dives for earth is an animal – sometimes a beaver or a muskrat – or both. This version comes from Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in territory:

*Long time ago the water flowed all over the world. There was one family and they made a big raft. They got all kinds of animals on the raft. There was no land, but all water, and they wanted to make a world. The man of the family tied a rope around a beaver and sent him down to find the bottom, but the beaver didn’t reach bottom; he got only half way and drowned. The man then tied a string around a muskrat and sent him down; he reached the bottom and got a little mud on his hands, but he drowned. The man took the mud out of the muskrat’s hands into his palm and let it dry, then crumbled it to dust. This he blew out all over the waters and it made the world.*

From *The Hän Indians: A Compilation of Ethnographic and Historical Data on the Alaska-Yukon Boundary Area*, by Cornelius Osgood



Dwarf fireweed.

# Prehistoric Times

## Palaeontology and Archaeology in Yukon

Old stories tell us that First Nations people have always lived in Yukon. Many scientists, on the other hand, believe that people migrated here from Asia as long as 30 000 years ago over the Bering land bridge. At that time much of the Yukon was referred to as Beringia. Palaeontologists and archaeologists use science to study this time period.

Many changes in climate and environment have occurred in the past 30 000 years. At times it was colder than now and at others it was warmer. For at least half of this time period the land was grassy tundra surrounded by glaciers, and with very few trees. Many of the animals were unlike those that are here today.

**PALAEONTOLOGY** is the study of ancient or prehistoric life on earth. Its main goal is to investigate the evolution of plant and animal species as well as the earth's ancient ecosystems and climate as a whole. **ARCHAEOLOGY** is the scientific study of past cultures and the way people lived based on the things they left behind.

## The Ice Age

Scientists divide the history of the earth into eras which are further subdivided into ages. The most recent era is the Cenozoic. The last two ages of the Cenozoic are the Pleistocene and the Holocene. These are the ages that will be discussed further.

The Pleistocene is often referred to as the Ice Age. It began about 3 million years ago and lasted until 12 000 to 10 000 years ago. During this time there were at least four extremely cold periods of time when the northern part of the earth was largely covered with sheets of ice. These periods are referred to as glacials. Between the cold periods the climate would warm up for a few thousand years. These periods are known as interglacials.

In North America the last glacial period is called the Wisconsin. It lasted from 50 000 years ago to 10 000 years ago. Scientists believe that people

began to populate North America during this time. There are several theories about how this may have happened. We will likely never know for certain. Scientists do generally agree that Siberia and Alaska were joined during this time by a land bridge that formed as a result of lower sea levels due to the water being frozen into great ice sheets. Theoretically people could walk from Siberia to Alaska and Yukon at this time.

At the end of the Wisconsin temperatures began to rise and the ice sheets melted causing sea levels to rise. The land bridge, commonly known as Beringia, has been flooded ever since.

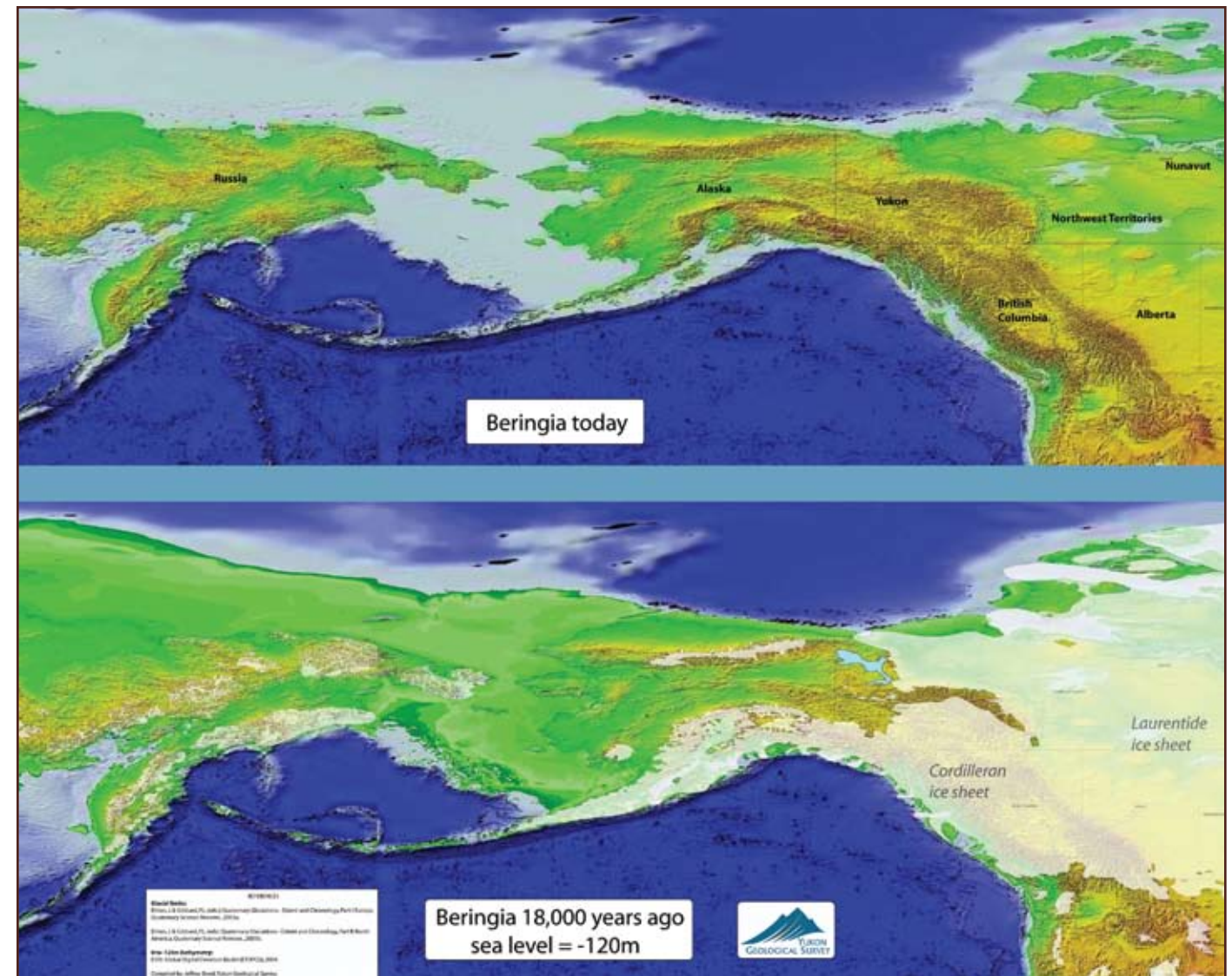
## Introducing Beringia

Scientists refer to the land bridge, and neighbouring ice free areas, as Beringia. We can learn about this place and the lives of people from this time period through archaeology. It is important to note that archaeology, like all sciences, can never give us a fool proof picture of what has occurred on this planet. New theories and ideas emerge all of the time to explain our world. When we couple archaeology with other sciences like geology and palaeontology and, perhaps more importantly, with traditional knowledge and the myths and legends of Yukon First Nations people we can begin to get an idea of what it was like to live in Beringia.

Beringia was a vast tundra with no trees. It was covered with low birches and willows, lichens, mosses, and grasses – all great food for a variety of species including mammoths, mastodons, bison, musk ox, caribou, horses, camels, and other Ice Age animals. These animals were all great food for Ice Age hunters.

Archaeological sites from this time period include the remains of tools as well as bones from a variety of Ice Age animals. We can surmise that people at this time moved about the ice free areas hunting animals and using their resources for shelter and clothing as well. As in the recent past we can assume that people, in relatively small groups, were constantly on the move following the animals and harvesting them as species made themselves available. It can be expected that hunters used a variety of methods for harvesting food. These likely included communal hunting, especially for larger animals like mammoth, as well as the use of spears, snares, and other traps. It is likely that people harvested a variety of plants as well.

At the end of the Ice Age many animals began to die out. Scientists believe that this occurred for a couple of primary reasons. As the climate warmed up vegetation in



the area changed and food sources became scarce. Added pressure from hunters would have resulted in fewer animals as well. These changes in climate, environment, and resources meant that humans would need to develop new survival strategies.

## The Holocene Period

The period following the Ice Age is known as the Holocene. Although many animal species had gone extinct, there still remained a variety of harvestable resources including bison and caribou. New technologies appear in the archaeological record as we move from the beginning of the Holocene to the present. Two of these include microblades (10 000 to 4 500 years ago) and notched points (4 500 to 100 years ago).

Microblades are tiny, rectangular shaped stone flakes with straight sharp edges – similar to a razor blade. They would be mounted into grooves carved into a variety of “handles” made of bone, antler, and wood. They were used for

a variety of tasks including cutting babiche and clothing materials, fine carving, and hunting.

As time went on the climate and environment continued to change. At first hunters continued to harvest bison and caribou on the open tundra. Soon however forests began to emerge and people had to learn how to hunt new species including sheep, moose, and smaller mammals.

Notched points appear in the archaeological record approximately 4 500 years ago. These points look like a spear point but have two notches carved into the base. They could easily be attached to a wooden shaft making a spear. Some were also used as knives. Other new tools appear during this time as well including chopping tools and sinkers for fish nets.

From this time to the present many changes occurred and people continued to adapt to them by

creating new technologies or merging old technologies with the tools of new groups arriving in their territories.

## What does the Archaeological Record tell us about Yukon First Nations people?

Although there will always be a lot of uncertainties surrounding dates, patterns of movement, and the origins of Yukon's first people we can be sure that these people successfully adapted to a challenging series of climates and environments.

*The story is about a remarkable achievement. No matter what the changes in the climate and landscape over a very long period of time, small groups of people were always smart enough to figure out ways of making a living from the land and the water in what is now the modern Yukon.* [Catherine McClellan, *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, pg 62.]

## Animals of Beringia

Beringia was populated by a variety of animals known as mega-fauna. These animals are related to modern day species but were large and adapted to a cold, dry climate. Some include:

### Giant Beaver

The giant beaver is one of the largest rodents ever known. It could grow to be 2.5 metres long and weigh 218 kg. It was probably a distant cousin of our modern beaver. The giant beaver became extinct about 10,000 years ago. Some fossils have been found that are over 70,000 years old.

### Jefferson's Ground Sloth

Jefferson's Ground Sloth is one of the most unusual of North American Ice Age mammals. It was named to honour U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, who was one of North America's first palaeontologists. This sloth is known from Yukon and Alaska fossils dating 150,000 to 130,000 years old. Jefferson's Ground Sloth was a longhaired, ox-sized mammal that weighed more than a tonne. Giant sloths were plant-eaters. In the Yukon, giant sloth fossils have been found at Old Crow. They became extinct about 9,400 years ago.

### Short-Faced Bear

The short-faced bear was a mammal that lived in Beringia. It was probably a predator (a meat-eater) that may have attacked bison, deer, muskoxen, caribou, ground sloths and horses. The largest bears were nearly 1.5 metres tall when walking on four legs, and about 3.4 metres when on

their hind legs.

The short-faced bear has been extinct for more than 10,000 years.

### Western Camel

Most people do not know that camels originated in North America. The western camel lived in North America from 10,000 to 600,000 years ago. Scientists think that some western camels traveled into Asia when the land bridge was open during the Ice Ages. The western camel looked like a dromedary (with one hump) but its legs and head were much longer. It stood about 3.5 metres tall, and was probably covered with long hair to keep it warm. Pieces of bones from western camels have been found at Paleo-Indian village sites. It was probably hunted for food, skins and bones.

### Woolly Mammoth

Woolly mammoths lived in the northern parts of Europe, Asia and North America. They have been extinct for about 11,000 years. We know a lot about them because whole bodies have been found frozen in Siberia and Alaska. They had long shaggy coats of brown or black hair over fine, short underhair. They had dark gray skin and thick layers of fat that kept them warm. They ate grasses and shrubs. They had long curly tusks that were probably used for protection and to dig grasses from under ice and snow. Mammoths were hunted by people. Their meat was eaten, the skins were used, and their bones and tusks were used to build houses and to make tools and jewellery.

### American Mastodon

Mastodons were also large elephant-like animals that are often confused with the woolly mammoth. They have been extinct for about 9,000 years. Their remains have been found all over North America. They were shorter in height but longer and heavier than the mammoth. They had straighter tusks and did not have a hump on their heads like the mammoth. Unlike mammoths who usually lived in open areas, mastodons seem to have liked being in forested and swampy areas. They ate leaves, twigs, cones, grasses, swamp plants and mosses. The remains of one mastodon had nearly 250 liters of plant material in its stomach.

### Steppe Bison

The Steppe Bison lived during the Pleistocene Period (about 2 million to 10,000 years ago). It was one of the most common species from Eastern

Beringia (unglaciated parts of Alaska, Yukon and Northwest Territories). Preserved carcasses have also been found. Perhaps the most famous is "Blue Babe", a nearly complete 8-9 year old male carcass, found at Pearl Creek, near Fairbanks, Alaska in 1979. The specimen was carbon dated to about 36,000 years ago. Blue Babe's weight was estimated to be 700 - 800 kg. It was a rich, dark brown colour. Partial carcasses of other Steppe Bison have been found in the Yukon, Alaska and Siberia. Among the best preserved specimens are from bones found in the Old Crow Basin.

### Ice Age Horse

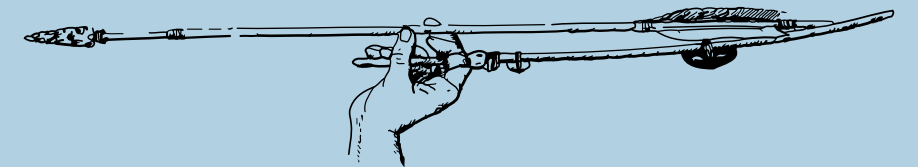
*Equus lambei* was a small horse about the size of a modern pony. It had a long, flowing, blondish mane. During the last Ice Age, it roamed in large numbers in the area now known as the Yukon and Alaska. It shared its habitat with the woolly mammoth, the scimitar cat, short-faced bears, the steppe bison and the camel. The Ice Age Horse crossed the Bering Land Bridge into Asia. The changing conditions brought about by the last glaciation may have caused the extinction of the horse in North America more than 10,000 years ago. The domesticated horse found in the Old World was reintroduced into the New World by European explorers.



*Lions flee in advance of a herd of mammoth in this painting of a Beringian landscape.*

## The Atlatl: A Prehistoric Hunting Tool

The Atlatl was a powerful, accurate weapon. It was used long before the bow and arrow; in fact it is believed that the Atlatl was in use for more than 30,000 years. It is used to throw a long, lightweight spear or dart. The Atlatl throwing board consists of a stick about 2 feet long, with a handgrip at one end and a "spur" at the other end. The spur is fit into a notch at the back of a dart. The dart is held parallel to the throwing board with the tips of the fingers and is thrown in a sweeping motion, much like a tennis serve. Atlatl is an Aztec word meaning "spear thrower". In Australia it is called "Woomera" by the Aboriginal people. The Atlatl originated in Europe and was brought to North America about 12,000 years ago by hunters of the last Ice Age. It was used to kill ancient bison and mammoth. In the hands of an expert, the dart can hit a target up to 100 yards away. Here in the Yukon, parts of an Atlatl were found in the Kusawa Lake area in 1997. More discoveries continue to be made each summer as the non-glacial ice patches slowly melt in parts of the Yukon.



[All info from:  
*Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan  
*People of the Earth*, Brian Fagan  
<http://www.beringia.com/>]



# FYI: Long Ago

## Key Messages

According to Yukon First Nations oral tradition, in the beginning the world was in chaos and was cleaned-up by Crow and Beaver Man (also known as “Smart Man” or Äsunya in Southern Tutchone and Soh Zhee in Northern Tutchone). The balance of the world was set in motion at that time and continues today.

Old stories tell us that First Nations people have always lived in Yukon. Many scientists, on the other hand, believe that people migrated here from Asia as long as 30 000 years ago over the Bering land bridge.

Scientists refer to the land bridge, and neighbouring ice free areas, as Beringia. Beringia was a vast tundra with no trees. It was an ideal environment for a variety of species including mammoths, mastodons, bison, musk ox, caribou, horses, camels, and other Ice Age animals.

People at this time moved about the ice free areas hunting animals and using their resources for shelter and clothing as well. Hunters used a variety of methods for harvesting food including communal hunting, as well as the use of spears, snares, and other traps.

At the end of the Ice Age many animals began to die out. Changes in climate, environment, and resources meant that humans needed to develop new survival strategies.

## Telling the Story

Share creation stories around the campfire. Stories are available through the First Nations and in many publications including works by Julie Cruikshank.

Show a map of Beringia and discuss its environment and animals. Illustrations of ice age mammals are widely available.

Discuss prehistoric hunting technology and share photographs of artifacts available through the Yukon Heritage Branch.

## Study Questions

According to First Nations people in Yukon, how was the world created?

How do scientists explain how people came to be in North America?

Describe the plants and animals of Beringia. How would this be a hospitable environment for people?

What did people do when the ice age animals went extinct?

What is an atlatl and how does it work?

# World View and Spirituality

To fully understand Yukon First Nations people it is essential that you know about their worldview. Catharine McClellan's *Part of the Land, Part of the Water* provides excellent background information which will provide you with a basic understanding of this complex concept. This overview will set the stage for all the materials in this section which discuss who Yukon First Nations people are.

## World View

How did the old people think their world was put together? What did they say about the existence and nature of other worlds? Where did they think power came from? What beings did they value and admire, and what kinds of human behavior did they cherish? What did they fear or despise?

A people's worldview means the picture or vision they have, not just of their immediate surroundings, but of the universe and everything in it – the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains and rivers, plants and animals, spirits, humans, other creatures and other worlds. Worldview means a people's understanding of how the many things that exist are related to one another. It also means a people's system of values – that is, their beliefs about what is good and what is bad. So it includes their beliefs about how they should act toward one another, toward other beings, and toward themselves.

A worldview is something a person builds up slowly over a lifetime. It is hard to talk directly about such important matters, and most people express their worldview indirectly, by the way they act, by the choices they make and by the stories they tell. But a people's worldview is the very heart of their culture, because it gives order and meaning to life. It guides what people do and shapes their emotions. It is their worldview that the elders try to pass on to the young.

Each society has a unique worldview, but as times change, worldviews may also change. Historical events sometimes even bring in new ideas so fast that for some individuals the whole world seems to lose its meaning and they themselves lose their direction. In such times, the old and young find that they no longer share the same ideas about the nature of the universe and how to behave in it. Their values may differ sharply. Some people become very unhappy during such times. Some grow angry or discouraged when they see the old ways changing. Others find pleasure and excitement in trying to fit together whatever seems best of both the old and the new ideas.

So far, Yukon [First Nations] have been quite successful in fitting their old and new experiences together into an organized pattern of thinking and living.

The traditional worldview is a very complex system of ideas – much larger and more sophisticated than can be explained here. It is also one that nobody will ever know completely. Though [First Nations people] all over the Yukon shared a good many ideas and values, each local group gave certain ideas special emphasis and flavour, and each group had some ideas unique to its own members. This was true of individuals also.

In the old days people rarely told all that they knew in public. They understood that their knowledge was their wealth, and they felt that it had to be taken care of, not just scattered about for nothing. Some knowledge had to be kept in family lines. Other knowledge could be sold or bought by anybody.

People thought that there were many spirit powers in the universe. It was believed that the spirit powers could give luck to humans and help them in different ways. People had to behave in the right way in order to get the spirit power's help.

*When a fire made a crackling noise, this was thought to mean that its spirit was foretelling bad luck or starvation, or to mean that the spirit of a dead person would like to be fed. So somebody would put a small piece of food or tobacco in the fire or pour a little tea in the ashes.*

People believed that if they had good thoughts about animals and treated them properly while hunting the animals' spirit powers would willingly allow themselves to be harvested. If people respected animals they would always have enough to eat.

*One way people showed respect to animals was to make sure that they only harvested what was needed and offered a prayer, tobacco, or something else of value as thanks to that animal. Most First Nations people do not believe in catch and release fishing as this is believed to be disrespectful and will impact the success of your fishing trip.*

First Nations people also have rules for acceptable human behaviour focusing primarily on moderation and balance. People also valued living in harmony with the land and

animals. Individuals should be helpful, generous, and respectful to each other and need to share resources.

The values of sharing and cooperation were coupled with the principle of self-reliance. People "had to know how to cooperate, how to give and accept help in a friendly fashion, without being bossy, and also how to cope on [their] own."

[*Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan]

*Keep your land clean, keep your animal, that's your friend. You look after them, they look after you. You look after your water, land, trees, you look after it, respect it. That's our spirituality.*  
Percy Henry, 1993

## World View

World view can be defined as a culture's orientation toward spiritual beings, humanity, nature, questions of existence, the universe, the cosmos, life, death, sickness, and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world. World view is the core of a culture. World view is taught through oral history and storytelling.

## Spirituality

Spirituality is an important part of Yukon First Nations culture. Generally people believe in a being who was responsible for the creation of the world. Communication with this being – often referred to as the Creator – occurred through prayers and song.

When missionaries arrived many first nations people quickly adapted to the new religion because of the many shared traits in the two belief systems. New beliefs were generally added on to the existing belief system rather than replacing them.

In the past and today prayers are offered in return for harvested goods and to open and close gatherings, meetings, and events.

[*Yukon First Nations, History, Culture, Agreements and Self-Government* by LegendSeekers]

# Traditional Knowledge

While traditional knowledge is a term used to describe the body of knowledge belonging to an Aboriginal community or culture, it actually applies to every group of people worldwide. This includes a great diversity of material such as: mythic stories of the days when animals could talk; genealogical information, detailed knowledge of the land and its resources; and practical information about hunting areas, trapping techniques, building shelters, food preparation, medicinal properties of plants, etc.

It can also include “lessons” on morality and values, traditional justice, and other important teachings on how best to live in the world. Much of this knowledge is drawn from the accumulated experience and the wisdom of several generations.

Traditional knowledge can be passed on in a number of ways: by writings, storytelling and demonstrations, or by a combination of telling and showing. In pre-literate societies (the time before peoples developed writing systems), the spoken word or oral tradition was the main method of imparting knowledge from person to person and across generations. Language and speaking skills were regarded as important accomplishments.

The memories of the elders were the libraries of the people. First Nations people relied on the wisdom and knowledge of their elders to learn their place in the world and the best ways to live. Usually the elders communicated by telling stories.

Today, the documentation of traditional knowledge by oral history is more important than ever. For two generations, young people have been increasingly divorced from the teachings of their elders due to factors such as family breakdown due to the influence of residential schools, the loss of language, and the many changes that came from new economies and the predominance of the non-native culture. Over the last few decades, First Nation members have collected recordings and transcripts from other sources and initiated extensive oral history projects with their elders. This invaluable body of material is being incorporated into education programs and other ways of teaching children about heritage.

Increasingly, scientists are working with local communities to incorporate traditional knowledge (TK) or TEK (traditional environmental knowledge) into

their understanding of the environment and changes over time. For example, archaeologists have learned that their work is greatly enriched when they work with elders to locate significant sites. Elders can also describe the most likely time of year that people would have been there, activities that took place, and identify artifacts and how they were used. Local knowledge of animal ranges and movement, climate change and other occurrences over a long time period have greatly assisted scientists in predicting what may happen in the future. Traditional knowledge has left the realm of old stories and become a valuable modern land management tool.

The legitimacy of traditional knowledge and oral history has been recognized in court cases and by government legislation such the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act.

[From *Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Interpretive Manual, Oral Traditions – Traditional Knowledge*, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## Traditional Knowledge

*Traditional knowledge ... refers to knowledge systems, creations, innovations and cultural expressions which:*

- *have generally been transmitted from generation to generation;*
- *are generally regarded as pertaining to a particular people or its territory; and,*
- *are constantly evolving in response to a changing environment.*

*Categories of traditional knowledge could include agricultural knowledge, scientific knowledge, technical knowledge, ecological knowledge, medicinal knowledge, biodiversity-related knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions ... in the form of music, dance, song, handicrafts, designs, stories and artwork, elements of languages, such as names, geographical indications and symbols, and movable cultural properties.*

[World Intellectual Property Organization, 1998/99]

# Place Names

As you travel along the river you will be passing through areas and by landmarks, mountains, creeks, and other markers on the land. All of these places have traditional Yukon First Nation names. Place names reflect connections to the land and can be considered the landmarks of First Nations history.

The intimate relationship between Yukon First Nations people and the land is reflected in place names. There is a name for every trail, hill, lake, river, and mountain. Names are often descriptive and evoke legends, stories of people who spent time at that place, and memories of things that have happened there. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank has suggested that First Nations people use places instead of dates as a way to organize and focus their memories of the past.



*The Yukon River above Whitehorse.*

Geographical place names are an essential part of Yukon First Nations heritage. They preserve a record of a rich history and culture, giving the landscape power and meaning.

Many Yukon place names, however, reflect the choices of eighteenth and nineteenth-century explorers, fur traders and prospectors.

Some early visitors to the territory, such as geologist George Dawson and surveyor William Ogilvie, did record many native names during their years in the Yukon, including the Yusezyu and Tatchun Rivers in central Yukon, and the well-known “Tron-diuck” River, which eventually

*For any country, its names are a part of its history. From the beginning they have been a necessity; they are the means by which inhabitants tell others where they have been and what they have seen. Indeed, without names, maps, records and books would be unintelligible. When we see names in books or on maps we often take these for granted, thoughtless of asking ourselves whence they came or whether there is a meaningful story in their origin, but if we are curious where do we find out?*

*Yukon Places and Names, R. C. Coutts*

became known as the Klondike.

During land claims research in the 1970s and 1980s, First Nations people began mapping their traditional territories. Elders worked with researchers to document the traditional trails, fish camps, hunting areas, etc. as well as the traditional place names. About 1975, the Northern Native Language Centre (now the Yukon Native Language Centre) began working with Yukon First Nations people to put their languages into written form. An important part of this work was recording place names.

In 1995 the Geographical Place Names Board was formally established via the Yukon Umbrella Final Land Claim Agreement. The Board’s job is to consider applications for naming or renaming of places or features within the Yukon, and to make recommendations about such names based on thorough research. The Board’s recommendations are made to the Minister of Tourism and Culture, who makes the final decisions.

The Board cannot rename features within municipal boundaries such as roads, buildings, or bridges. There is a detailed process in place for considering and approving new names, including the establishment in some cases of alternate names, a procedure that helps preserve First Nation place names, and is unique in Canada.

In considering applications for unnamed features – those for which no local names exist – the Board follows the principle of giving preference to names from First Nation languages, names that describe the feature, or names associated with historical events or with people who have made an important contribution to the area being named.

# Customs and Protocols

Yukon First Nations people, in the past and present, have a set of rules of social behaviour that guide them in different social situations. There are also protocols for people to follow when engaging First Nations people. These customs are often complex. It can take years to gain even a basic understanding of how to work within a First Nation's culture. We will only touch on a few customs here to give you an idea of some of the social practices that exist in First Nations society. Many more social customs are described in the following section Rites of Passage.

## Traditional Law

Traditional law is common to most cultures throughout the world. In many western cultures it is referred to as customary or common law. Generally speaking traditional law is based on a culture's spiritual beliefs that were laid down before man, in the Creation time. It is a set of rules which guide the people in all aspects of their life. These rules are learned from ritual, ceremonies and Elders. Holders of sacred knowledge have the most respect and the most say in the control of the society. They are the interpreters and guardians of the Law and dealings with the law are usually secret and sacred.

When laws are broken, punishment is premeditated, swift and an acceptable part of traditional Indigenous life. Breaking prohibitions about sacred things, offending relatives and not fulfilling obligations are some ways the law can be broken. Reciprocity or 'pay-back' occurs in traditional society between individuals or groups when a harm is done. Revenge equals the original injury.

In Yukon, storytelling gave Elders the opportunity to teach and pass on to the children the significance of their beliefs and laws. An understanding of correct behaviour and the consequences of wrong behaviour were built into daily life. When newcomers arrived in Yukon elements of traditional law and justice changed. Julie Cruikshank explains,

"... there were clear rules for handling conflict. If, for example, someone from the Crow [clan] harmed a person from the Wolf side, all Crow people would have been responsible for arranging compensation. The terms of that compensation would be negotiated between the two sides but the offender's side was responsible for starting the discussions. Because such questions were not asked, and because of assumptions about Native peoples made by newcomers, First Nations were forcibly subjected to Canadian laws, and customary ways of managing conflict were marginalized."

With self-government, First Nations are now able to bring back traditional practices in a way that best meets the needs of their communities.

[<http://pals.dia.wa.gov.au/traditionalLaws.aspx>]

In some Yukon First Nations traditional law is embedded in a system referred to as Dooli law (Northern Tutchone), Ädulj (Southern Tutchone) or Dä'òle law (Hän). It is a system of behaviour. There is no real English equivalent of this word and the sense of 'taboo', which is often employed, does it an injustice. Dooli, Ädulj or Dä'òle is a 'system' of respectful behaviour to all life. It is often subdivided into behaviour towards plants and animals and behaviour towards humans. Most communities considered this law to be sacred and Elders prefer not to speak of it outside of their own communities at this time.

## Subsistence Customs

Most people rely on the land for subsistence to a certain degree – even when they are employed by others. Participation in some form of traditional pursuit is common. Traditional practices are followed in the treatment of animals, fish, plants, and the land. At the core of these practices is a respect for the land and all living things. Respect determines how one harvests and treats resources once they have been hunted or gathered. Often a prayer, tobacco, or small gift is offered. Sharing your resources is also very important. Additional information on subsistence customs is covered in the "Subsistence" section of this manual.

[*Yukon First Nations History, Culture, Agreements, and Self-Government, LegendSeekers*]

## Potlatches

Most First Nations people in Yukon participate in potlatches to mark various events and rites of passage. In Yukon the word potlatch refers to a feast or party of some type. However it originated among the Chinook speakers of the north-western United States and actually means "to give". This makes sense as potlatches provide an opportunity for sharing and the redistribution of wealth.

Potlatches are typically held to celebrate a variety of events including births, marriages, and deaths. The most

common type of potlatch practiced today is a memorial potlatch. This usually occurs following the death of an individual and happens no earlier than one year after their passing.

If a member of the Crow clan passes away other Crows host a memorial potlatch. It is the clan's responsibility to organize and fund the feast. This usually includes gathering gifts and distributing them to members of the opposite clan.

Each First Nation will have different customs and protocols to be followed when attending a potlatch. For instance some communities will have dancing and singing while others are more somber and quiet affairs. Some communities do not have their children attend while some do.

When attending a potlatch for the first time in a community it is worthwhile to go with someone who is familiar with local practices.

[*Yukon First Nations History, Culture, Agreements, and Self-Government, LegendSeekers*]

## Offerings

Yukon First Nations people typically make an offering of some sort when harvesting, asking for guidance or knowledge, and at the opening and closing of events and celebrations. A simple prayer of thanks is often given in return for knowledge or other sorts of gifts. When harvesting, people would offer a prayer and often also leave a gift of value. In contemporary times this gift is often a sprinkling of tobacco or matches.

When asking an Elder to share knowledge with you it is customary in most communities to bring them a small gift or honoraria for their time and wisdom. In older times children would gather firewood and bring water for Elders in return for stories.



Martha Kates makes an offering to the ceremonial fire at Moosehide Gathering.

# FYI: Traditional Knowledge

## Key Messages

Worldview means a people's understanding of how the many things that exist are related to one another. It also means a people's system of values – that is, their beliefs about what is good and what is bad.

First Nations people valued living in harmony with the land and animals. Individuals should be helpful, generous, and respectful to each other and need to share resources.

Traditional knowledge includes a great diversity of material such as: customs and laws, legends, place names, detailed knowledge of the land and its resources, and practical information about hunting areas and harvesting techniques.

There are first nations place names for every trail, hill, lake, river, and mountain in Yukon. Names are often descriptive and evoke legends, stories of people who spent time at that place, and memories of things that have happened there.

First Nations people in Yukon participate in potlatches to mark various events and rites of passage. In Yukon the word potlatch refers to a feast or party of some type. The most common type of potlatch practiced today is a memorial potlatch. This usually occurs following the death of an individual and happens no earlier than one year after their passing.

Yukon First Nations typically make an offering of some sort when harvesting, asking for guidance or knowledge, and at the opening and closing of events and celebrations. A simple prayer of thanks is often given in return for knowledge or other sorts of gifts. When harvesting, people would offer a prayer and often also leave a gift of value. In contemporary times this gift is often a sprinkling of tobacco or matches.

## Telling the Story

When possible invite Elders to speak about what traditional knowledge means to them.

Using the map in this manual point out sites, as you travel along the river, with commonly known place names. Share the name and story with your guests.

Discuss offerings at the beginning of the journey and offer a prayer for safe travels.

Carry some tobacco with you and have guests make an offering if you harvest any foods along the way (for example, berries).

## Study Questions

Explain the term “world view”.

Why do people sometimes say “my knowledge is my wealth”?

What does the word “potlatch” mean? When do people hold potlatches?

Name some elements of culture that we can call traditional knowledge.

Why are place names important to First Nations people?

In older times what might happen if a person broke a traditional law?

# Rites of Passage

Exploring traditional life cycles offers valuable insight on a number of social customs. From the time people were born and throughout childhood they were immersed in their culture. Participation in daily life taught them how to act within their society. They learned proper behaviour as well as the skills they would need to survive. In the old days boys and girls were raised somewhat differently as each required a different set of skills to ensure the success of the group. Today boys and girls usually learn the same skills. Generally most Yukon First Nations people followed similar patterns in the traditional life cycle.

## Birth and Early Childhood

Babies were usually born in specially prepared bush shelters or tents. Women of the opposite clan helped the mother and in some cases a medicine man might be required – though difficulties were rare.

*Women used to drop baby rabbits or porcupines or arrows or bullets down their young daughters dresses and perform other ritual acts, hoping that when the time came, their daughters would give birth as easily as the rabbits or porcupines, or as quickly as an arrow or bullet.*

Husbands stayed outside but were told to behave in ways to make the baby come quickly. For example they would undo any tight strings or buttons on their clothes.

### Yukon's First Environmentally Friendly Disposable Diapers

Diapers were made of moss or abandoned squirrel's nests that had been rubbed until they were soft. Nests would be smoked to make sure there were no fleas in them. When used, mothers could simply throw the diapers away.

Babies were wrapped in soft rabbit or gopher skins and carried with baby belts or in baby carriers made of birchbark and hides. Mothers carried their babies and toddlers everywhere. In the winter they would be carried under the mother's warm winter clothing. If they became tired or were busy they could hang up the carrier or place the baby in a hammock. A string attached to the hammock could be pulled to rock the baby.

*In southern Yukon, the mother sewed a little skin*

*bag which she decorated with quills or beads. She put the baby's dried umbilical cord in this and tied it onto the baby carrier, sometimes with a miniature bow and arrow, if she wanted her son to be a good hunter, ... Later, the mother or father would leave the cord in a symbolic place, such as a gopher hole, in the hope that their daughter would grow up to be good at snaring gophers ...*

Babies were breastfed. As they grew they were given broth, rabbit brains, and other foods. Young children were watched over by everyone in the camp. At times they were scolded but were never hit. Adults might tell children who misbehaved that a large owl would take them away if they did not act properly.

Young children imitated adults in their games – much the same way children do today. They would play house, pretend to hunt and prepare game, and even hold make believe potlatches. Children had miniature versions of tools and implements that they used for play and for training. When children turned ten or eleven they began to prepare for their transition into adulthood. They were expected to spend time watching the adults and in this way started to learn the many skills they would need to survive.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Boys' Training

A boy's most important teachers were his father, his mother's brothers, and his paternal grandfather. They learned through observation, practice, and listening to hunters tell stories about their experiences. A boy's maternal uncle usually gave him the strictest training because they were in the same clan. At times a boy would move in with his uncle and travel with him.

To prepare for life as a hunter boys would do "toughening up" exercises. In the early morning they would jump into cold water – even if they had to break the ice to do so. Following this their uncle would beat them with willow branches or beaver tails. This was meant to make the boys strong.

In their older teen years boys would continually travel and



*Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elder Jack Semple teaches Waylin Nagano about caribou hunting.*

hunt, even in bad weather. They performed rituals that would help them gain spiritual power and luck. They were also careful about the foods they ate.

*... if they ate young caribou, their legs would be wobbly like those of a caribou calf and they would not be good runners.*

When a boy killed his first large animal he presented it to another hunter usually from the opposite clan. This hunter would distribute the meat to everyone in the camp. His father would then give gifts to everyone in the clan opposite from his son and wife (his own clan). This would honor his son and wife. The boy would then wear a special sinew garter marking him as a successful hunter.

At this point the boy's most intensive training began. Everyone in camp would keep him busy. He also might begin to acquire animal spirit-helpers. He would travel with Elders and assist them with trading. This gave him the opportunity to meet new people and perhaps his future wife.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Girls' Training

When girls were ten or eleven they too began to learn the skills they would need as adults. They spent more time looking after younger children and helped their mother, aunts, and grandmothers. They learned to prepare food, tan skins, and sew.

A very important event in a girl's life was when she began to menstruate. Her behaviour at this time would affect the rest of her life and perhaps even the luck of her camp.

When this time came a girl's father would build her a shelter away from the camp where she would stay for a few weeks. She lived here alone and only her mother, other women, and young children could visit her. A girl was believed to be in a dangerous state at this time in her life.

## Childhood & Education

Children had many teachers. Fathers, uncles and grandfathers taught young boys the skills they needed to be good trackers and hunters. Mothers and aunts taught girls how to prepare and preserve food, sew and help make the many things needed to travel and live on the land. Children were expected to learn by carefully watching then trying to do things on their own.

*Young kids must watch other people and then try to [do it] themselves. Just watch everyone and then try it out. You might even try a better way of doing something.*  
Taylor McGundy

Elders also taught children everything from how to set snares to the best berry picking patches. Often children did chores for elders in return for stories. From these stories, they learned about First Nations legends, history and lessons of how to live. Children were encouraged to learn and eventually retell these stories themselves.

*[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Women and Children, Helene Dobrowolsky]*



*Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Citizen Sandra Roberts teaches her daughter how to bead.*

She had to learn about her new power and how to handle it.

While in seclusion girls wore a large hood or bonnet so that no one could see her face. Long ago hoods were made of hide and decorated with fur, beads, quills, and red ochre. A black crow feather might be tied to it so that the girl would always have black hair. She was allowed to have a small fire in front of her shelter but was not allowed to cut wood. It was thought that if she did she might cut her lifeline or that of members of her clan.

Girls were expected to keep busy all of the time. While in seclusion this usually meant sewing.

*If a girl ran out of sewing, she picked the needles off a spruce bough. The important thing was to keep busy, in the belief that, if she did so, she would be a hard worker throughout her life.*

From this time on girls were not to speak directly to or look directly at any of their blood brothers or any of the men in their clan. They were to act shy as a show of respect.

When her family decided that she could rejoin the camp her mother or another woman from her clan would go to the shelter and remove her hood. This would be given to her father's clan as a way of thanking them for their help and support. Her father would usually host a party upon her return signifying that she was ready to marry.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Marriage

Marriage was important and expected. It meant the sharing of skills and labour and allied house-

holds and clans together. Long ago, in Yukon, nobody could live alone for very long. Marriages were generally arranged by Elders and parents and had to be agreed upon by the two clans.

When young people are ready to marry the boy's family sends skins, furs, beads, and other valuables to the girl's family, showing that he would be a good provider for the girl. It was up to the girl's mother to accept or reject these gifts. She would seek advice from her husband and from the Elders. If accepted the marriage would go ahead.

Once all of the parents involved agreed to the marriage the boy would live with the girl's parents. During this time he would prove that he was a good hunter and provider.

There was no formal marriage ceremony though parents might mark the occasion with a feast or party. Throughout their marriage the new couple were always responsible for the girl's parents – ensuring that they were well fed and cared for. The girl's parents would often come and live with the couple as they aged, helping to raise their grandchildren.

Husbands and wives were expected to treat each other with respect. The wife would often accompany her husband on hunting trips until their first child arrived. She would then stay in camp to raise their baby.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Old Age

As people aged they began to depend on their relatives for care. People respected Elders even when they could no longer contribute to hunting or camp work. They would go to great lengths to ensure that Elders were comfortable – even pulling them in toboggans while traveling. They would bring them special treats including tender bits of game and warm robes.

*Why were old people so important? It was because they were wise and experienced that they were most valued. They were the ones who knew the history of their people, and who could tell the most stories of earlier times and get them right. They knew most about the land, the weather, the humans, the animals, and the other spirit powers of the universe.*

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Death

When death occurred people felt sad that a loved one had passed away. They also believed that if they did not act properly the spirit of the dead person would not rest. When possible people tried to ensure that a person did not die in a family home. They would build a special

shelter. If someone did die in the home the body would be removed through a hole in the wall or through a window – never the main door because it was thought that the spirits of the living might follow the spirit of the dead person to the other world.

Mourning songs were sung and memorial speeches were given. Members of the opposite clan would be fed though they would only eat symbolically. The deceased's favourite foods would be fed to their spirit either by setting the food nearby or throwing it into the fire.

In southern Yukon most bodies were cremated. Members of the opposite clan would prepare the body. Goods that were useful to a person and would be handy in the spirit world were placed with the body. The fire was lit by a member of the opposite clan. Once it was out the ashes were collected in a bag or box and placed high in a tree near where the death occurred. In other parts of Yukon bodies were placed on a platform or in a tree. At times they were wrapped in skins and placed on the ground and then covered with logs.

*While the members of the opposite clan were carrying out the funeral duties, the close relatives of the dead person mourned. They blackened their faces, and had their hair cut short by someone from the opposite clan.*

With the arrival of missionaries people began to bury their dead though this often did not occur in cemeteries. People were buried where they died. A fence was often constructed around a grave and in some communities spirit houses were built.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*



*Spirit Houses at Little Salmon Village.*

## Marriage Customs

There were many customs surrounding marriage that may be foreign to us today.

- Men could inherit a wife. He was expected to marry his mother's brother's widow.
- If a man's wife died he would expect to marry her blood or clan sister.
- A widow would expect to marry her dead husband's blood or clan brother.
- Some men had several wives at the same time.
- A woman could be married to several brothers or to two first cousins at the same time.

These customs are no longer practiced in the Yukon.

## First Hunt

Each year Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in hosts a First Hunt camp where elders teach young people hunting traditions and to treat animals with respect. The youth also learn such things as firearms safety, map-reading and winter survival. After the hunt, the youth share the meat with their community at a feast to celebrate the young hunters and a successful hunt.

*[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Gatherings, Helene Dobrowolsky]*

# Kinship



## Are You Wolf or Crow?

First Nations people have strong ties with relatives throughout Yukon and the world. A kinship group is different from a political or social group in that people feel closely related whether they are close to each other geographically or not. When First Nations people meet other First Nations people for the first time they often ask “who are you from” rather than “where are you from”. This allows people to place others within a family group as opposed to a geographically defined group. This comes in handy when people traditionally moved about frequently.

Traditionally people traced their ancestry through their mother’s family line. This is called matrilineal descent. Though there are some distinctions among groups regarding tracing kinship this generalization reflects the most common practice in Yukon.

## Clans and Moieties

All First Nations people in Yukon traditionally followed the *moiety* system (from the French word for “half”) in which everyone belongs to one of two groups – Wolf and Crow. It is often called a *clan* system, although clans technically refer to smaller subgroups within the two moieties, which are used by the Tlingit people. If your mother was a Wolf you would be a Wolf. If your mother was a Crow you would be a Crow. As you will see later, your father would be a member of the opposite clan.

Members of clans, although not necessarily closely related to each other, traditionally acted as members of one big matrilineal descent group – the people in your clan were considered your mother’s

people. They showed this by addressing each other with kin terms. For example, two women in the same clan, though only very distantly related by blood, may refer to each other as sister. This would happen even if these two women did not know each other at all – perhaps they had never seen the other before – as long as they knew that they belonged to the same clan. This meant that no matter where one traveled they always had “kin” nearby – people who could help out when in need.

Members of your clan had obligations to you. For example, in many groups, a young boy was taught how to hunt by his mother’s brother – a member of his own clan. It was felt that, since only a member of your clan could discipline you, your maternal uncle would be tough enough to ensure that you became a good hunter.

Members of the opposite clan would be referred to as your father’s people. They too had certain obligations to you. They were expected to help you through life. In many groups you simply could not be born, grow up, marry, or pass on without your father’s people because they had obligations to you and your clan at various rites of passage including birth, marriage, and death. Among some groups, when a person passed on, members of the opposite clan were responsible for preparing the body for the funeral.

Long ago people strictly followed a number of clan rules. For example, a Wolf could only marry a Crow and vice versa. In this system a person’s “in-laws” were always members of the opposite clan and thus had responsibilities, as mentioned above, throughout that person’s life.

Most people today know which clan they are a member of although they may or may not follow the associated protocols as formally as was done in the past. People today commonly use their clan symbol in a variety of ways including wearing clothing with either a Wolf or Crow on it.



# FYI: Rites of Passage

## Key Messages

From the time people were born and throughout childhood they were immersed in their culture. Participation in daily life taught them how to act within their society. They learned proper behaviour as well as the skills they would need to survive.

Children had many teachers. Adults taught them the skills they needed to survive. Children were expected to learn by carefully watching then trying to do things on their own.

Marriage was important and expected. It meant the sharing of skills and labour and allied households and clans together. Long ago, in Yukon, nobody could live alone for very long. Marriages were generally arranged by Elders and parents and had to be agreed upon by the two clans.

People respected Elders even when they could no longer contribute to hunting or camp work because they were wise and experienced. They were the ones who knew the history of their people, and who could tell the most stories of earlier times and get them right. They knew most about the land, the weather, the humans, the animals, and the other spirit powers of the universe.

When death occurred people felt sad that a loved one had passed away. They also believed that if they did not act properly the spirit of the dead person would not rest. Mourning songs were sung and memorial speeches were given.

All First Nations people in Yukon traditionally followed the moiety system (from the French word for “half”) in which everyone belongs to one of two groups – Wolf and Crow. Today it is often referred to as a clan system.

## Telling the Story

When looking at beadwork and other First Nations arts explain how girls would spend their time in puberty isolation perfecting their skills.

At dinner time explain to people that Elders are highly respected in First Nations communities. It is customary for Elders to be served food by younger people before anyone else serves themselves. Have the younger members of the group guess who their Elders are and serve them dinner.

While visiting Fort Selkirk walk to the cemetery and discuss some of the customs surrounding death and burial.

If you are a First Nations person let people know what clan you are from and explain the system.



## Study Questions

Name some customs that people followed surrounding the birth of babies.

How were boys trained to be good hunters?

Explain some of the customs practiced when girls were in puberty seclusion.

Why were Elders so important?

How did people mourn the loss of loved ones?

Explain the moiety or clan system in Yukon. Name some obligations that clan members have to each other.

## Subsistence

Long ago First Nations people depended exclusively on the land for survival. A variety of methods and a tremendous wealth of knowledge were used to harvest animals, fish, plants, and other resources from the environment. Groups also traded with one another for resources not available locally.

When newcomers arrived in the territory new economic opportunities presented themselves and First Nations people became involved in a number of new activities – often involving skills and knowledge that were centuries old.

Today people actively participate in the Territory's economy in all sectors including private and government. Many also maintain a number of traditional pursuits including harvesting wild foods and trapping. Most First Nation governments have economic development corporations running a variety of businesses.

### Living on the Land

The land provided everything that First Nations needed for food, clothing, shelter, weapons, transportation and tools. People moved about seasonally as they harvested animals, fish, plants, and other resources. Although technology has changed harvesting methods, today's First Nations people continue to gather foods from the land following much the same patterns as those from long ago.



*Waylin Nagano with a caribou at First Hunt.*

### The Seasonal Round

People traveled throughout their territories harvesting available resources – usually in accordance with the seasons. Although there were some local variations most people throughout the Yukon followed the same general sequence of activities.

In early summer people would harvest grayling from lakes and rivers. A variety of root vegetables were also avail-

able. In some areas they would also hunt sheep, moose or caribou. In later summer the salmon would arrive and people would gather in larger groups to harvest this very important resource. Berries of all sorts would be picked at this time. In fall people began to move about in smaller groups hunting moose and preparing

for the caribou. Throughout these times people would continue to harvest smaller species including rabbits, beaver, muskrat, and gophers. In later fall northern groups would hunt the caribou as they migrated south for the winter months. During the coldest times smaller groups would stay with other small groups and survive on the prepared and cached food. As the days began to get longer and the temperatures warmed up a bit people would once again move about in small groups hunting animals as they were available. Trapping fur-bearers during late winter resulted in prime furs for clothing and later, for sale. Spring was the most difficult time of year as supplies ran low. It was important for people to travel to good hunting or fishing camps before the snow crusted and travel became difficult and dangerous. Ice fishing and snaring beavers and muskrats was important in spring.



*Madeline deRepentigny with harvested blueberries.*

## Hunting

Successful hunting depended on extensive knowledge and the proper tools. People knew the best times and locations and had several methods, used either independently or communally, to harvest animals. They also used a variety of weapons and traps to procure animals. People followed a set of rules and protocols to ensure that each hunt was successful. These will be discussed below.

*If we were out of moose meat all we had to do just go out in the bush and get whatever we wanted. There were a lot of grouse, a lot of rabbits, a lot of gophers. People up here eat gophers, because they're different type of gopher up here . . . They are not like prairie gophers at all. These are edible up here. They're a real delicacy to a lot of people. There's a lot of small game we could go out and get. A lot of us fished. We didn't have a butcher shop to run to all the time.*

Annie Geddes, Ta'an Kwach'an Elder

## Caribou

Caribou are important animals because they provide food as well as skins and sinews for clothing and shelter, and bones and antler for tool making. They also migrated in large herds annually. People could intercept them at known locations in numbers that could support large groups. Late fall is an especially important time to harvest caribou. It is at this time that the large herds move south for the winter. As well their hides are thick and warm at this time providing materials for winter clothing.



Most caribou hunting was done communally by building caribou fences. Groups worked together to build these large corrals – some of which can still be seen today. Leaders would choose a location, often across a valley or on a mountain side. People would pile brush approximately

1.5 metres high. In tundra areas people would bring brush from forested areas to build a fence. Spaces were left throughout the fences for the placement of snares. When the caribou arrived people would drive them into the corrals and the hunters would harvest the animals. Men and women would work together to process the meat and dry it for winter.

People also hunted caribou on their own – often in the spring and summer – when the animals would be driven into lakes or rivers and speared from canoes.

Today many people hunt caribou individually using rifles and skidoos. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in hold an annual First Hunt for youth where young people learn about caribou hunting from the Elders.

## Moose

Moose are in the best condition in the late summer and early fall. They generally move about independently and cannot be hunted in large numbers. A small family group is most effective when hunting moose.



In older times people used a variety of methods to harvest moose. Snares were often set along trails where hunters found moose signs. Hunters would also hide behind blinds near salt licks where moose tend to congregate – especially in early summer. During the fall moose can be “called” by mimicking the sounds made by moose. A very skilled hunter could also run down a moose in late winter when the snow has a thick crust. The moose is too heavy for the crust and tires easily. The hunter, on snowshoes, follows behind to harvest the animal.

Moose meat can be dried and stored for use at a later time. In winter the meat would freeze and be used as needed.

Today moose are hunted in late August and in September. People use rifles, trucks, and 4-wheelers. Hunters still call in moose in much the same way as hunters from long ago did – by rubbing the shoulder blade of a previously harvested moose on willow and brush to imitate the sounds of another moose moving through the bush or by making a moose call out of birch bark and imitating the call of a cow moose.

## Sheep

Sheep can be hunted year round but late summer is the best time as the meat is in good condition at this time. The fleece could be used for blankets and clothing. Horns would be steamed and shaped into bowls and ladles.

Snares were often used to harvest sheep. As well, hunters would build blinds above sheep areas as sheep retreat to higher ground when threatened. Spears and bows and arrows would have been used in the older days. Today hunters use rifles.

Sheep hunting can be a very dangerous undertaking. In the older days people believed that the women – although in camp – could impact the outcome of the hunt. If the women moved about too much or ate hot food or boiled water it was thought that this could cause the snow and ice to shift and melt leading to accidents for the hunters. Sheep meat was dried and cached for storage.

## Beaver

Beaver is harvested for their meat and their fur during the spring and fall. The tail is considered a delicacy.



Beaver would be speared or netted under the ice. Holes would be chopped in the ice around a beaver lodge and fresh poplar would be laid out as bait. The hunter would wait for the beaver to surface and feed on the poplar. He would spear it and pull it from the water. If necessary a club was used to kill the beaver. Nets made from babiche were also set near the doors to the lodges. Hollowed out moose hooves were hung on the net and acted as an alarm to alert the hunter that a beaver had been trapped.

In more recent times the beaver was trapped for its fur. Hunters made cash by selling these furs to traders. Some people continue to trap and sell beaver fur today.

## Muskrat

In some parts of Yukon muskrat hunting, or ratching, was practiced. They were often used as a food source when bigger game was scarce. Their pelts were not used often by First Nations people or traders. Occasionally their meat would be dried and stored for later use.

Men and women would both hunt muskrat by shooting them with bows and arrows and later guns, or by setting snares.

## Gophers

Gophers were harvested for food and for their skins. Women would sew several of their furs into gopher blankets and robes.

They were generally harvested by setting a series of snares around the camp. Women have been known to set up to 100 snares at a time. Because gophers rot quickly the snares had to be checked regularly.

People in southern Yukon continue to snare gophers today.

## Rabbits

Rabbits (actually Arctic Hares) were hunted frequently and were a good source of food when other resources were scarce – especially during the winter months. Rabbit skins were loosely woven into blankets and parka liners. The loose knit insulated the air next to the body while worn under outer garments. Their fur was also used inside mitts and footwear.

Rabbits were commonly harvested by setting snares.

## Bears

First Nations people believe that bears have great spiritual powers. As a result they were not often hunted and when they were it was considered a brave undertaking. Many would not eat their meat as it was considered too powerful. They were not generally hunted for their skins until the newcomers, who valued the furs, arrived.

Bears were hunted with spears or crushed in dead-fall traps.

When a bear was killed its body had to be handled in very special ways to honour its spirit. Grizzlies were “treated almost as though they were guests at a potlatch”.



## Birds

People would hunt grouse and ptarmigan throughout the year – often with snares. Waterfowl were also harvested using bows and arrows and snares.

[All previous, from *Subsistence* on, from *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan]

## Caches

First Nations people were highly mobile, moving throughout their territory harvesting various resources. Traveling primarily on foot or by watercraft it was difficult to carry too many supplies. After the fall and summer hunts people would store food, supplies, and equipment at caches throughout the territory. Several types of caches would be used including subterranean “cellars” covered with stone or, more commonly, high caches – a type of platform built high enough above ground to deter animals from helping themselves. Often these caches looked like small cabin-like tree-houses. In later years the supporting trees would have tin wrapped around them to keep climbing animals

from reaching the food supplies. A single log would be notched and used as a ladder. Remains of caches can be found throughout Yukon.

## Fishing

Fish were an important food source throughout Yukon for much of the year. During the summer months salmon migrated along the Yukon River and its tributaries -- from the ocean further inland -- in great numbers. Larger groups of people would gather at fishing spots to harvest salmon which is an excellent source of nutrition. This was often seen as a time for celebration.

*There was a big event around the arrival of the king salmon. Every year, June and July, there was always big celebrations when the first salmon were spotted coming up the Yukon River. The event would be celebrated by dancing, singing and feasting because it was bringing life back to the community.*

Gerald Isaac, Moosehide Oral History Project, 1994

People used several different methods to harvest salmon including fish traps, fences or weirs, gill nets and dip nets. In more recent times some First Nations began to use fishwheels to harvest salmon. Hundreds of fish could be taken in a single day. The community worked together to process and dry the fish for winter.

*And salmon was running so heavy back then that there was times he would have to shut the wheel down because he couldn't keep up with the cutting, he would just have to shut it down, there was too much salmon... we had ah holding um bins at either side of the wheel and they'd just be filled, filled right up with salmon, and so we would have to, he'd just close the wheel down.* John Flynn, 2003

Grayling and other species of whitefish were also harvested throughout the year. In winter many people tried to stay near good fish lakes where they could ice fish for added food. The grayling run in early spring is often a time of celebration in many communities.

Today many people still rely heavily on fish and continue to harvest a variety of species. Salmon stocks are declin-



ing at this time. This could be due to a variety of factors including over fishing in Alaska, climate change, and improper use of the River. Communities are working with scientists to protect this important resource.

## Gathering

People rounded out the vitamins and minerals required for good health by gathering a number of plant foods.

In late summer several species of berries were gathered including high and low bush cranberries, blueberries, salmonberries, raspberries, mossberries, soapberries, and others.

*... we used to pick berries eh, towards fish and town eh, there was a lot of cranberries, they were just full, we used to fill up a gunnysack, make tea on top of the hill there, we sit down and have a bannock and tea and all that, cooked lunch there eh, picked berries most of all day that and we get enough for winter, all along the hill, raspberries we picked, low bush, high bush you call it. So we get all that ready for the winter like we put away in the, in the cellar.*

Frank Blanchard, 1999

Throughout the spring and summer people would harvest several types of roots. One of the favourites was bear root – often called Indian sweet potatoes. People also gathered wild onions, rhubarb, mushrooms, and the sweet inner bark of spruce and pine.

## Food Preparation and Storage

*To store food, you can put dry fish, dry meat and dryberries up high in cache. Fresh meat and berries can be put in a hole in the ground, like cellar. You put moss cover inside cellar and it keeps things good. At Eight Mile we put cheesecloth around meat, then moss. This cellar is cold storage in summer, freezer in winter.* – Mary McLeod, 1974

*The Indian people don't throw anything away – they even dry fish eggs. The people dried fish, so the fish do not spoil, or get rotten in the summer. The Indians made birch pots and picked berries in them. They had another birch bark to make lids. They sewed around the lids with tree roots to close it tightly. Then they dug a hole in the ground and left the berries there till fall time. In the fall they dug out the berries and it was like fresh picked berries.*

Stanley Roberts, 1987

The main cooking methods were roasting and boiling. Meat and fish were set in the fire and roasted on hot rocks or coals. Pieces of meat or small animals were grilled on willow sticks turned over the fire. First Nations women



were skilled at cooking stews and soups in a variety of containers made of birch bark, rawhide, animal stomachs and woven spruce roots. The containers were filled with meat and water or snow. Rocks that had been heated in the fire were dropped into the containers of raw food bringing the liquid to a boil and cooking the meat. This stone-boiling method was also used to render grease from animal fat. The grease was stored in containers or mixed with berries and meat to make a type of pemmican that was an ideal trail food.

Don't forget that in the early days people were much more active that we are today. They needed every calorie they could get to keep warm while travelling and working in a cold climate. Many elders remember eating grease or fat as a special treat.

Most foods were preserved for later use by either drying or freezing. Salmon was cut up and hung on multi-layered drying racks over smoky fires. As the fish gradually dried, the pieces were moved to higher levels on the rack. During the annual fall caribou hunt, women cut up the meat then dried and stored it near the site of the kill, often in high caches to protect it from animals. As winter approached, meat could be frozen.

[Helene Dobrowolsky, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Healthy Foods]

## Nutrition

Food gathered during the seasonal round provided people with everything they needed to live healthy lives. Essential nutrients were gained by eating all parts of harvested animals. For example, people would eat the organ meats of many animals which are high in nutrients that cannot be obtained in the north by humans. People also ate a variety of plants and berries which offered important vitamins.

*The Indian people try to tell the white people, don't eat just meat, you got to eat everything with it. Gristle, marrow, bone ... a lot of white people die of scurvy because they didn't do what we told them. ... Eat the caribou, eat all the plants from mother earth and eat what's good for us. So we eat everything in there, that's where we get our vitamins, medicine and stuff.*

Percy Henry, 1993

After newcomers came to the Territory people

incorporated foods like sugar and flour into their diets. They also learned how to garden and grew a variety of new vegetables.

In recent years some people eat less and less traditional foods opting instead for convenient items available at grocery stores. Many spend less time on the land. These changes are thought to contribute greatly to an increase in several health problems including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. First Nations are working with people to encourage them to eat healthier diets and spend more time on the land. Some communities hold communal hunts and gathering days that help individuals to have access to these healthy foods and to remain active.

*Live your traditional way and look after yourself, it's the best thing I can do you know.*

Frank Blanchard, 1999

[Helene Dobrowolsky, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Healthy Foods*]

## Traditional Medicines

People have used traditional medicines for generations. Many of these medicines are strong – both medicinally and spiritually – and the knowledge surrounding them is not to be shared lightly. Certain medicines and their teachings are only shared among women or among men or among Elders. Some medicines are not discussed outside of the community – especially among newcomers – due to the value of the knowledge. In addition healers are concerned that shared information might be used improperly which could lead to further harm for someone who does not know how to handle medicines.

*When you take this medicine, you have to replace something in place of it. Sometime if you got matches you put matches there. If you got tobacco, you put tobacco there. Then you cover it up again otherwise it's bad weather.*

Annie Henry, 1990

This list notes some commonly known medicines and their uses. Still, people are strongly cautioned not to use medicines without guidance from someone who truly knows how to use them

- juniper berries and needles were used to make a drink to ease colds and sore throats
- rhubarb roots were boiled and used for arthritis
- clear pitch from spruce trees was put on sores. Pitch was also used for blood poisoning

- soapberry roots were boiled and the cooled liquid used for stomach problems

- tea made from Labrador Tea leaves and flowers was used for colds.

[List from Helene Dobrowolsky, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Healthy Foods*]

## Respecting the Land

First Nations people follow a set of traditional laws when using the land and harvesting resources. There are many laws, some specific to certain activities and some that are general in nature. Most laws were practiced to maintain harmony and balance on the land and among the spiritual world. Following these laws would bring luck to people and ensure successful hunting and gathering.

The following list includes a few of the basic rules for life on the land. This list is in no way comprehensive but will give you an idea of good ways to live on the land. It was provided by Edward Roberts, John Semple and Sis Van Bibber.

- Everything has a spirit and needs to be treated with respect.
- Disturb the ground as little as possible, everything has a purpose.
- Clear your mind of negative thoughts when out hunting; the animals know what you are thinking. Think about the meat that you can provide for your family and community.
- Women who are in their “moon-time” are not to be involved in hunting. They are not to touch the guns, hunter's clothes or the animals when they are brought back to camp. They can learn through observing and working at the camp while others are out hunting. This is a very powerful time for women and touching anything to do with the hunt can bring bad luck.
- After harvesting an animal pull out the organs, keep the liver, if it doesn't have white spots on it, and the heart. Leave the rest of the organs as an offering to other animals.
- When processing an animal remove the head and face it away from the body, the spirit can still be around for several days. Close or puncture the eyes.
- After hunting be respectful of the blood, keep it in a controlled area where it will not be walked through.
- Use everything from the animal. Horns can be used for carvings, tools and spoons. The hide can be used for shelters, drums and clothes, the leg bones can be used to make scraping tools.
- When you harvest from the land, present tobacco, a

prayer, or something else of value to the resource and give thanks to Mother Earth and the food for giving itself to you and your community.

- Take what you need from the land and use everything, do not take more than you would use. Do not kill small animals such as squirrels unless you intend on eating them.
- The land is Mother Earth, she is to be treated with respect like a mother. Do not spit or litter on Mother Earth.

## Clothing

{*Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan*}

Women were very skilled at making clothing from hides and furs gathered from animals. Tanning was done using a variety of methods but the basics were the same throughout Yukon. Skins had to be cleaned of all flesh and hair. The skin was then thoroughly washed and draped over a pole to dry. The skin would then be soaked again in a mixture of water and rotten caribou or moose brains or rotten wood to soften the hide. After each soaking the skin would be wrung out and stretched on a frame. Women would then scrape the hide. This would occur several times. The skin would then be smoked.



*She would cut the hair off and then flesh it, take all the fat and other stuff that's not needed. Then she would ... soak it in water [and] caribou brains to make it soft and just over and over again soaking, scraping, soaking, scraping until it gets really soft and pretty well white. Then we go and look for those rotten brown wood and make a smoke house, literally a smoke house, that's all you get out of it is smoke. You put the skin over, she made the house out of willows, a round house, ... she'd sew the skin together and then she would tie it one the side and have the smoke under it to get it brown colour ... That's a lot of work.*

Phyllis Vittrewka, 1999

## What is the land?

People in Yukon often refer to “the land”. It is important to note that when people use this term they are speaking of the natural environment in which they live. This includes the ground as well as the mountains, hills, waterways, forests and tundra, plants, animals, fish, birds, and other resources that make life possible.

[From Helene Dobrowolsky, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Nothing Wasted – Traditional Uses of Caribou*]

Women would then sew a variety of garments for their families including pants, pullover shirts or tunics, and winter “parkas”. Warm mitts were made from hide and fur as well. Clothing was often decorated with natural dyes, porcupine quills, and later, beads. People would wear their best clothing when visiting other camps and attending special events and gatherings.

*They make clothes with parky skin ... They make sleeping robe with skin, and they make Skidoo suit for little kids. They look like Skidoo suit so I call it Skidoo suit, because I had one myself. It was one you don't need underclothes under. You just slip it on and we go. You never get cold with that one.*  
Annie Henry, 1992

[From Helene Dobrowolsky, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Nothing Wasted – Traditional Uses of Caribou*]

When trade goods began to arrive in Yukon people adopted some of the new clothing materials and styles. They rarely adopted new footwear though, as traditional footwear did the job best.

Many women today continue to work hides and create beautiful beaded garments. Often people will make or buy traditional-style clothing commonly known as regalia. These garments are worn during special events and celebrations, and when groups perform for visitors.

## Shelter

{*Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan, except for quotes.}

People had to develop ways to shelter themselves in the extreme environment of Yukon. The use of several different housing styles can be found throughout Yukon. People were often on the move. As a result many types of housing were temporary, portable or easily built in any location with the resources at hand. Some shelters were made for a few families while others were meant to house just a handful of people.

In the summer months, especially in fish camps where larger groups of people would be living together, a lean-to style of housing was common. This involved a large frame built from poles and covered with brush, moss, bark, or hide. The floor was covered in spruce boughs. Other fair-weather



*A dome hut in winter.*

houses were circular and involved a frame created by leaning poles against a tree in a circular pattern.

In colder months many people lived in dome shaped shelters. A hole the same dimensions of the shelter would be dug into the ground. A frame made of poles would be erected above the hole and covered in brush, moss, and, most often, skins. A fire would be kept burning in the centre of the structure.

When traveling people would often make small temporary shelters out of brush and bark.

When newcomers arrived many groups adopted the use of canvas wall tents and in some places began to build more permanent structures out of logs. Wood stoves became common as well and can be found in or near the remains of caches throughout the Yukon as families would leave stoves at frequently used hunting camps.

## Transportation

Before the development of roads in Yukon people used an extensive trail system and the many waterways to travel throughout their territories. The main form of travel was by foot. In winter people would use snowshoes and later dog teams to move around. In summer several types of watercraft were used.

[Helene Dobrowolsky, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Transportation and Travel*]

People walked vast distances up creek valleys, over hills and through mountain passes, their routes covering hundreds of kilometres. They travelled lightly — living off the land — carrying their few belongings with help from pack dogs.

In winter, people wore snowshoes made from babiche and sinew netted onto birch frames. Large hunting snowshoes were used to break trail through deep snow; smaller trail shoes were worn on broken trails. The women and dogs

hauled the group's gear on sleds. The toboggan and dog teams were adopted in later years.

In summer, people used a variety of watercraft to travel on rivers and lakes. These ranged from simple rafts, to more sophisticated boats of various sizes. Rafts were built of logs tied together with willow. One end was pointed to act as a prow. Moose skin boats were made by stitching the raw hides over a wooden frame. A small one-person boat might be made from one or two skins.

*That boat is just like a little battleship, it's so big. Some-time they get fourteen moose skin boat. That's one boat.*  
Joe Henry, 1990



*Georgette McLeod with a traditional Hän canoe on the Yukon River.*

In some areas people made birchbark canoes that were lightweight and impressive to early visitors. The canoes, up to ten metres long, had frames of spruce or birch wood covered by birchbark. Women stitched the bark onto the frame using split spruce roots. All seams and cracks were caulked with spruce pitch that had first been softened by chewing. Canoes were steered using either paddles for deep water or two poles to travel upstream in shallow water. Sometimes dogs were used to tow canoes upstream. In other areas people made dugout canoes.

People today continue to use a number of old trails when on the land. Several of these routes have been designated as heritage trails in individual land claim Final Agreements. The rivers are still used extensively for travel in summer and in winter.

## Trade

### Long Ago

For thousands of years, Yukon First Nations people traded with each other, meeting seasonally at established trading points to exchange goods.

Archaeological excavations in the Dawson area have

uncovered obsidian (found in southwest Yukon), copper (found in the Northwest Territories) and dentalium (found along the Alaskan coast) from the prehistoric period.

### 1833

Russians establish posts at St. Michael in 1833 and Nulato in 1839. The Nulato post remained the farthest inland and farthest north throughout the Russian period.

### 1839-51

HBC traders John Bell and Robert Campbell complete much of a map of the Yukon interior. Under their direction posts were opened at Peel's River, Lapierre's House, Fort Yukon, Frances Lake, Pelly Banks, and Fort Selkirk,

### 1847

HBC establishes Fort Yukon at the mouth of the Porcupine River. Fort operates until 1869, when American surveyors prove that the site is in US territory.

### 1848

Robert Campbell establishes Fort Selkirk for the HBC at the mouth of the Pelly River.

### 1852

Campbell moves Fort Selkirk across the Yukon River to its present location. Chilkat traders attack and loot the post later that year, and force Campbell to leave the Yukon.

### 1868

Francis Xavier Mercier voyages to St. Michael, then ascends the Yukon to found Nuklukayet (later Fort Adams) 15 miles below the Tanana River. He becomes the general agent for entire Yukon/Alaska interior for the company that would soon become the Alaska Commercial Company.

### 1873

Arthur Harper prospects throughout the interior, finding gold at the Stewart River, Fortymile, and Sixtymile. Meets L. N. McQueston, who later became a business partner.

McQueston and Mercier bring much-needed supplies to Fort Yukon.

### 1874

Leroy N. McQueston and Alfred Mayo are sent by F.X. Mercier to build Fort Reliance some 30 miles within Canadian territory and six miles downstream of the mouth of the Klondike River. Neither think the area holds much promise to traders. Mercier called the region “so sad, so rigorous, and so unpro-

ductive, populated by three or four small uncivilized villages, separated from each other by hundreds of miles, living off the products of their hunting and fishing.”

#### 1877

McQueston winters at Sixtymile:

*I went over to Sixty Mile that fall prospecting. I found Gold on all the bars in small quantities—I found some places where a man could make \$6.00 to \$8.00 per day but not extensive enough to put on a string of sluices. There was nothing happened during the winter of any note. We always had plenty of meat in store, and done very well in the fur line. In March I fell out of the loft of my store—I struck on a nest of Camp Kettles on my back. I broke one of my short ribs. It was two weeks before I could move and I was in great pain unless I was in a certain position. There were three bands of Indians within days travel, Davids, Charley and the Tronduk—they would send in a messenger every day to hear how I was getting along and the Shoman were making medicines for me to get well and still they were twenty miles away. They thought if I should die that they might be blamed for killing me as there was no other white man in this part of the country.*

#### 1880

Mercier establishes post at Belle Isle, near present-day Eagle.

#### 1882

An increasing number of outsiders arrive in the Yukon. Ladue and others arrive at Fort Reliance. In September, McQueston, Ladue and others find further gold deposits on the Sixtymile. McQueston continues to provide important supplies at Reliance.

#### 1883

US Lt. Frederick Schwatka leads an expedition to chart the Yukon River from its source to its mouth. Negotiates with Chilkats for packers, crosses pass, builds raft on Lake Lindemann and begins voyage downriver. Meets Joe Ladue on the way – who would later become a founding father of Dawson City.

#### 1886

Jack McQueston, Alfred Mayo and Arthur Harper of the Alaska Commercial Company (ACCo) established at the mouth of the Fortymile River after a major gold discovery.

#### 1889

Arthur Harper and his First Nation wife set up a new post near the abandoned Hudson’s Bay site at Fort Selkirk. In the years that followed, the Klondike Gold Rush and increased riverboat traffic between Whitehorse and Dawson City resulted in much prosperity coming to Fort Selkirk. The town became a well-established trade and supply centre for a large area stretching up and down the Yukon River. Many shops, hotels and bars came to Fort Selkirk. By the mid 1930s the Hudson’s Bay Company had re-established a post at Fort Selkirk.

#### 1892

The newly-formed North American Transportation and Trading Company (NAT&T) entered the Yukon field with its first river steamboat and bases at St. Michael and Fortymile. John Healy supervises the operation at Fortymile—or Fort Cudahy, as he named his post.

Harper continues to trade in the Pelly river area. George Carmack begins trading at Salmon River, and Joe Ladue works the Sixtymile area.

### Cash Economy

First Nations people have always been flexible and able to adapt to changes in their environment and various other circumstances. When newcomers arrived in the Territory people were able to take advantage of a number of new economic opportunities.

When outsiders first arrived there was already an extensive trade system in place and the First Nations people continued to actively trade with people in their territories. They also acted as guides and assisted foreign traders and new people moving into the country. During the Klondike Gold Rush many northern First Nations people hunted and sold meat in great quantities to the gold seekers. Trapping also became a way to make money as opposed to a method for harvesting food and furs for home use. When steamboats began to run the Yukon River several people worked on the boats or in wood camps used to fuel the boats. These activities are discussed in greater detail in Part Two: A Journey Back in Time.

Employment in the cash economy meant that some people could not travel about as frequently as they had in the past. Resources that would have been gathered during the seasonal round were replaced by money and a need to purchase some goods. Most were still able to practice some level of traditional subsistence due to the seasonality of many of these jobs.

### Bannock

Bannock is a simple bread, generally leavened with baking powder rather than yeast. It can be baked, fried in a pan or cooked over a fire.

Many people believe that bannock is a traditional First Nations food that was adapted by European fur traders. In fact, it’s the other way around. In many parts of North America, First Nations people had no access to flour prior to the arrival of European traders.

Bannock actually has its culinary roots in Scotland. Because bannock could be quickly prepared from readily available ingredients, and because these ingredients lasted a long time without spoiling, bannock became a staple of the European fur traders and subsequently, the First Nations people also.



# FYI: Subsistence

## Key Messages

People traveled throughout their territories harvesting available resources – usually in accordance with the seasons. Many families continue to follow this same pattern of harvesting today.

Successful hunting depended on extensive knowledge and the proper tools. People followed a set of rules and protocols to ensure that each hunt was successful.

People used several different methods to harvest salmon including fish traps, fences or weirs, gill nets and dip nets. In more recent times some First Nations began to use fishwheels to harvest salmon. Grayling and other species of whitefish were also harvested throughout the year.

People rounded out the vitamins and minerals required for good health by gathering a number of plant foods including roots and berries. Several plants were also used for medicines.

Food gathered during the seasonal round provided people with everything they needed to live healthy lives. Essential nutrients were gained by eating all parts of harvested animals.

Hides from animals were used to sew clothing and shelters. Other resources including bone, stone, and wood were used to make tools and other implements like snowshoes and canoes.

First Nations people have a long history of trade – first among each other and later with newcomers to the Territory.

## Telling the Story

Use wildlife and plant sightings as opportunities to explain how people harvested a variety of species.

Invite Elders and local people to share how they harvest resources today.

When at the dinner table discuss how some of the foods were harvested, prepared, and stored.

Take your guests berry picking.

Show your guests some spruce gum and explain the many uses of the spruce tree.

When possible show photographs or examples of traditional clothing.

Take guests fishing and discuss traditional fishing practices.

## Study Questions

Explain the seasonal round. What did people harvest throughout the year?

List some hunting techniques for caribou and moose.

How did people prepare and store food?

How did people meet all of their nutritional needs long ago? How has the introduction of processed foods impacted people today?

List some traditional harvesting laws and customs.

How did people travel before roads were built?

# Political Organization

In older times groups of First Nations people were not as formally organized as they are today. People moved about in small family groups and occasionally gathered in larger numbers to take advantage of certain resources. There were no settled areas nor were there elected Chiefs or councils. There were individuals who took on a leadership role as required. When newcomers arrived and First Nations people became more settled different systems of political organization began to take shape.

## Leaders of Long Ago

In the old days people had several different kinds of leaders. One was the headman of a local group. This individual was almost always a good hunter, a wise man, and a smart trader. Headmen were usually good speakers. The headman would lead by example and work hard to ensure that his group had enough food to eat. At times a temporary headman would be chosen to lead a specific hunt if he had special knowledge of a certain area or species.

Headmen generally did not rule outright nor did they have control over larger groups or nations. They also depended on all of the people in their group for advice and guidance. The headman needed the respect of his people to lead successfully. This was gained by demonstrating his abilities.

People needed to be self-reliant. Leaders gave opinions and advice but were not “bossy”. Adults could not be forced to act against their wishes. People could, and had to, decide for themselves what was the best thing to do in a given situation.

Headmen often sought advice from Elders. Older women in particular were allowed to speak freely when decisions needed to be made. The headman would listen to the members of the group before making any decisions.

[*Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan]

Headmen often handled trade transactions, settled disputes and handled local justice. They also played an important role at potlatches and other ceremonies. While the role of headman could be hereditary, this was not necessarily a given. The new

leader was chosen according to his merits at the funeral potlatch of the late headman.

As the fur trade grew and non-native traders and missionaries came into the country, leaders had to acquire new skills to understand and deal with these outsiders.

Their abilities to bargain and trade stood them in good stead. When they were faced with a great influx of outsiders setting up a new social order with a very different set of rules, they had to quickly learn about different concepts of owning and managing land and resources. As the resources of the land diminished, the headman spent more time negotiating with the newcomers to protect the interests of his people and access to the land.

By the 1950s most First Nations had elected Chiefs and Councils operating under the Department of Indian Affairs. In the later 20th century this would all change as Yukon First Nations began negotiating land claim agreements with Canada and Yukon. Land claims and self-government are discussed in more detail in following sections.

[*Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Interpretive Manual, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Leadership*, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## Self-Government

Since the settlement of land claims, there is a new level of government in the Yukon Territory: every Yukon First Nation that has signed a final agreement has also signed a self-government agreement meaning that the federal and territorial governments have agreed with the First Nation on a division of powers. (*Yukon First Nations Self-Government Act, 1994, c. 35, An Act respecting self-government for first nations in the Yukon Territory.*)

Now First Nations can form governing and administrative bodies to make laws and regulations governing their peo-

ple and activities on Settlement Lands. They also have the right to collect taxes and fees for the use of their lands, to borrow money and to enter into agreements with other governments.

[*Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Interpretive Manual, Introduction*, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## In older times ...

When the Department of Indian Affairs imposed the system of elected officials on people they also tried to impose a system of authority. This was a difficult adjustment for people. As Hazel Peter of Ross River explained “they’re our own people. We don’t want to boss them around. They know what they’re doing.”

[*Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Catharine McClellan]

## Politics

*Politics is the process by which a community’s decisions are made, rules for group behaviour are established, competition for positions of leadership is regulated, and the disruptive effects of disputes are minimized.*

<http://www.webref.org/anthropology/p/politics.htm>





# Cultural Expression

Cultural expression is the articulation or representation of beliefs, practices or attitudes pertaining to a particular culture through singing and drumming, dance, art, storytelling, and more.

First Nations people in Yukon have culturally expressed themselves in a variety of ways and continue to do so today. Many of these art forms keep traditions alive. Songs, dances, decoration, and stories are all holders of knowledge and have their own stories to tell.



## Singing, Drumming & Dance

Songs and dances were composed and performed throughout the Territory. There was always singing and dancing at potlatches and other celebrations. Songs were made up to mark special events, to tell stories from long ago, or to express feelings. Songs were also holders of history. In some groups certain songs belonged to certain clans and could only be sung by that clan. Singing was often accompanied by drumming. People most commonly used skin drums made of caribou or moose hide which was stretched over a circular wooden frame.

[Part of the Land, Part of the Water; Singing and Drumming and Dance, Catharine McClellan]

There were also several kinds of dances – many that imitated animals or celebrated a special

event. In many groups the leader used a dance stick or pole called a gunho or gänhäk. The Gunho or Gänhäk is a powerful ceremonial object. It is a large flat board that narrows at one end forming a handle. It is often decorated with dots, circles, beads, ribbons, feathers, and pieces of cut tin that will make a rattling noise.

[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## Tr'ondek Hwëch'in Songs and Dances

*And that stick there is a real fancy ...they make it that way and it's supposed to head everything like a potlatch ceremony and burial. Everything they do, the stick go first and then the drummer and then the dancer next. So this gänhäk here ... plays a very important role in [First Nations] tradition.*

Percy Henry 1993

First Nation elders and the chief were the keepers of culture. In their memories, they kept alive the stories, songs and dances of the Tr'ondek Hwëch'in. During the Klondike Gold Rush Chief Isaac foresaw that his people would lose much of their traditional culture as they came increasingly under the influence of the missionaries and non-native society. A famous story told by many Hän and Tanana elders tells of how Chief Isaac entrusted many of the Tr'ondek Hwëch'in songs and dances to the Alaskan people for safekeeping.

*Hän people with the gänhäk in Dawson City.*



*At that time Chief Isaac made a speech you know. They have these handcraft, "gänhäk" you know, the Dawson native people build that, use them for dance, and last night they dance. Gee that time the people talk about it, they really been proud of the Dawson people for dancing, and singing the song, and the Dawson Chief Isaac, they*

*make a speech. He said the "gänhäk", we going to leave it here, we not going to take it back home. We gave it to the village. Some young man, some young somebody have to take care of that "gänhäk", don't just lay it around anyplace. After you use it, bundle it up and put it away in a cache and use it till you wear it out.*

Oscar Isaac, Mansfield Lake, Alaska

Today, as an important part of cultural renewal, members of the Tr'ondek Hwëch'in are relearning these songs and dances from their Alaskan neighbours.

[Hammerstones; Tr'ondek Hwëch'in Songs and Dances, Dobrowolsky]

Today most First Nations continue to perform traditional songs and dances. Many have organized groups that perform at a variety of special events and ceremonies in and out of the Territory. A couple of groups include the Selkirk Spirit Dancers, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Dancers, and the Tr'ondek Hwëch'in Singers. They have also embraced fiddle music and jigging. Contemporary artists including Juno award winning Jerry Alfred, of the Selkirk First Nation, use music to express traditional culture.

## Jerry Alfred

Singer/Songwriter

The traditional sounds of northern Canada's Native Americans is given a modern sensibility by guitarist, vocalist and



songwriter Jerry Alfred. Together with his group, the Medicine Beat, Alfred projects a hard-driving, dance-inspiring energy to his songs. Although he sings in his native Tutchone, the language of the Selkirk First Nation

tribe, he brings an unprecedented intensity to his performances. The recipient of a Juno award for Best Aboriginal Recording of 1995, Alfred has continued to transcend geographical borders with his music.

The son of a shaman, Alfred was designated a "Keeper of Songs" at birth. Although he spent his first five years living a traditional Aboriginal life and speaking his native language, he gained an understanding of the modern world while attending residential schools in the southern Yukon. Blessed with a strong singing voice, he sang throughout the Yukon with a school choir. Acquiring his first guitar as a present from his parents, at the age of seven, Alfred became enchanted by the music of Bob Dylan. As a teenager, he began combining modern guitar techniques with traditional Aboriginal music.

For much of Alfred's early life, however, music remained a side interest. During the late 1970s and 1980s, much of his attention was devoted to working on land claim negotiations between the Selkirk people and the governments of Canada and the Yukon. During the summer of 1995, his work paid off when an agreement was finally signed. Alfred increased his involvement with music shortly after his father, prior to his death, requested that he keep the songs of his ancestors alive. Alfred's debut album, Etsi Shon ("Grandfather's Song"), initially released in 1994, was re-issued in 1996. His second album, Nendaa: Go Back, was released the following year, trailed in 1999 by Kehlonn.

Alfred formed the Medicine Beat with Bob Hamilton, a British Columbia-born electric guitarist and producer that he met at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival in 1991. The band also includes keyboards and accordion player Andrea McColeman, percussionist Marc Paradis and background vocalist Marie Gogo.

## Michelle Olson

Dancer

Michelle Olson, a Tr'ondek Hwëch'in Citizen, is a dancer, a choreographer and the artistic director of Raven Spirit Dance, a contemporary dance company that sources its work from aboriginal traditions and contemporary aboriginal realities. She has created two works in Tr'ondek Hwëch'in territory, Songs of Shär Cho (Songs of Big Bear) and Łuk Täga Näche (Salmon Girl Dreaming).



*Michelle Olson of Raven Spirit Dance performs in Łuk Täga Näche (Salmon Girl Dreaming).*

Näche (Salmon Girl Dreaming). Songs of Shär Cho is a multi-media contemporary dance performance inspired by the land and the culture of the Tr'ondek Hwëch'in people of the Yukon. It is a tribute to the Porcupine caribou herd and their long journey back to the calving grounds.

## Visual Arts

*In old days women did a lot of beadwork. Used Hudson's Bay beads, porcupine quills, dyes from plants like blueberries, cranberries.*

Mary McLeod 1974

First Nations people are gifted artists. Long ago visual arts were most often expressed in a utilitarian manner. People were constantly on the move and could not afford to pack around many belongings that were not required for survival. As a result art was expressed through the form and decoration of functional items. Women decorated clothing with natural dyes, feathers, shells and quillwork. Later, when trade goods arrived they used beads as well. Tools and other implements were also decorated.

*In many ways, our life was our art and the land our inspiration. There is compelling beauty as well as function in the organic shapes and designs of dome shelters, birch bark canoes, snowshoes, fish traps, spruce root weavings and the hide and fur clothing decorated with quill work, beading, ochre and fringes.* [Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Research Protocol Manual, Helene Dobrowolsky]

Today culture is expressed in a variety of mediums including, but not limited to, beadwork, carving, weaving, painting, and film making. The works of First Nations artists and artisans are highly regarded for their exquisite craftsmanship and remarkable insight into the natural and spiritual worlds. Many of the territory's renowned artisans have pushed the traditional handicrafts of knitting, quilting, weaving, carving and beading into the realm of art. Beaded moccasins and mukluks can be found in galleries and shops. More exotic native carvings, masks and jewellery are carved from antlers, wood, bone, horn and even mastodon ivory. People today have embraced new technologies and are expressing themselves through digital technology including illustration, photography, and film.

## Beading

When trade goods arrived in Yukon people began to use

European made beads to adorn clothing. The vibrant colours and varied shapes



and sizes were used to create designs that reflected the natural world. Flowers were a common motif found on moccasins, mitts, baby belts, and other garments.

Beadwork is an art practiced by many people in Yukon today. Beaders have their own styles and certain designs are common to certain areas. Artists can often tell who created a beaded item simply by looking at the design and sewing style.

Today sewers continue to create beaded garments. In addition you can find beaded cell phone cases, ID holders, jewellery, lighter cases, coasters, and many more contemporary items.

## Eugene Alfred

Carver

Eugene Alfred is a Northern Tutchone artist and is a member of the Selkirk First Nation in Pelly Crossing.



Recognized as a master carver, Eugene studied with noted artists Dempsey Bob and Ken Mowatt. He studied and subsequently instructed at the Kitanmax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art near Hazelton, BC. He works full-time as an artist, though he occasionally teaches. Through his artwork, Eugene has traveled around North America, including several trips to Europe. He lives in Pelly Crossing, where he is raising his son.

[From <http://www.syana.ca>]

## Jared Kane

Carver

Jared Kane is an emerging Ta'an Kwäch'an artist who resides in Whitehorse and has taken part in the Sundog Carving Program. Jared's grandfather, Harvey Kane, a quadriplegic, inspired him from a young age by creating First Nations designs using a wooden stick and a computer. This persistence and talent in the face of adversity has fueled Jared's work on paper, wood and antler and his

new role as an instructor for younger students. Jared creates paddles, plaques and masks. His Crow Clan heritage has made bird imagery significant in his artwork.

[From <http://www.syana.ca>]

## Ann Smith

Ravenstail Weaver

Former chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and lifetime resident of the Yukon Territory, Ann Smith has been weaving Ravenstail blankets and regalia for the past ten years. "I do this because of my pride in my Indian culture. When I am weaving, I feel a sense of peace. There is a lot of growth in that. And it teaches me how to be patient," she laughs. Ann's Ravenstail ceremonial robes are hand woven using the ancient twining techniques developed in what is now British Columbia and Southeast Alaska. It takes more than eight months of full-time work to complete a typical robe. The art of Ravenstail weaving is hundreds of years old, but it verged on extinction before a revival movement began during the 1980's. Ann Smith is an integral part of this revival, and makes teaching others part of her mission to keep this piece of her people's culture alive. "Just doing the weaving is a full-time job, but I try to make time to teach and pass the knowledge on to people." This mission has led Smith to travel throughout Canada, doing public demonstrations and artist residencies.

[From <http://alaskanativearts.net/ann/>]

## The Oral Tradition and Storytelling

*Some of the stories I tell may be hundred years old but it passed on to elder, so he heard it when he was kid. And he told it when he got old, so that kid heard it, when he got old he pass it on. So that's how Indian story go. The Indian story is something never been written on a paper or nothing, it's just memory.*

Percy Henry, 1993

Storytelling and speechmaking were one of the most important arts for First Nations people.

*Hunter-gatherers ... depend on the spoken word for almost all forms of history, spirituality and practical knowledge. For this reason, their storytelling is of great importance; all adults are expected to be able to speak well. Among the people of the North Pacific Coast, this is a skill that is inseparable from public status: chiefs have to be orators at potlatches in order to affirm prestige as well as land rights. They are relied upon to set out in public—and, if necessary,*

*in full—the histories of both territories and families.* Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden*, p. 191

The memories of the elders were the libraries of the people. First Nations relied on the wisdom and knowledge of their elders to learn their place in the world and the best ways to live. Usually the elders communicated by telling stories. They also provided the entertainment in the time before television and other mass media. [Young people] used to do chores for older people in return for stories. With repeated telling, and hearings, the listeners gained more from the stories as their own experience and understanding increased. Elders told the same stories over and over, and expected the listeners to eventually be able to repeat the story word for word.

[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Oral Traditions – Traditional Knowledge, Helene Dobrowolsky]



Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elder Percy Henry.

Winter was the best time for storytelling as people spent more time inside due to the cold weather and darkness. The highest ranking older people would begin. People would take turns telling stories. At times even children would participate. Stories could be told all night long. In some cases certain stories would take days to complete.

Good storytellers were highly respected and even gained fame throughout the country. Well known orators would make speeches at potlatches and other important events. When traveling and trading young men would pay particular attention to storytellers. They could then bring back new stories to their people. Leaders gained some of their power from their ability to speak well.

*A person who could use words to persuade others to act wisely, who could calm those who were angry and raise the spirits of those who were sad, was of great value. One who could entertain people with a good story or song, and add to the fun with a good*

joke, was well liked.

[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]

Joking and teasing were a big part of First Nations culture. Teasing remains a big part of the social life of people in Yukon. For outsiders being teased and joked with by First Nations people, particularly Elders, means that you are a part of the community.

Today storytelling is an integral part of First Nations communities. Elders continue to pass on their knowledge through spoken word.

## Sharon Shorty & Duane Aucoin

aka Gramma Susie & Cash Creek Charlie



Gramma Susie and Cash Creek Charlie reflect the old time elders that they grew up with: feisty, opinionated and funny. Whether sharing traditional stories or songs or talking about current events, Susie and Charlie are able to make crowds of all ages laugh. They make 'big shot' Indians dance and tell stories about meeting the Queen, Prince Charles and Colonel Sanders. Their main goal is to teach First Nations language and culture through humour and laughter. They also comment and make observations on current issues and enlighten everyone with their take on things.

Sharon and Duane have performed together at a cultural theatre called *Raven's Tale* in Whitehorse. They have performed around the Yukon and across Canada, and have appeared on APTN. Sharon has performed from Switzerland to New Zealand to Alaska. She is Artistic Director for SYANA (The Society of Yukon Artists of Native Ancestry). Recently, she appeared as a special guest with Shelagh Rogers on CBC Radio.

Duane works for Teslin Tlingit Council, and is the

song and dance leader for a traditional Tlingit dance group, the Deslin Khwan Dancers. He has also received First Nations theatre training taught by Carol Grey-Eyes and has performed in various theatrical productions. He won 'Best of the Fest' Award for Out On Screen Film Festival in Vancouver for his intra-disciplinary show: "Children of the Rainbow".

[From <http://www.sharonshorty.com>]

## Rachel Tom Tom

Storyteller

Elder Rachel Tom Tom was born at Tom Burn Lake up the Pelly River on May 23rd, 1925. Rachel's parents were the late Jimmy and Annie Silverfox. Her mother passed away when she was a child. She was raised by her grandparents Liza & Isaac Isaac. Rachel attended the Residential School at Carcross for nine years.

Rachel held different jobs throughout her younger years. She was a dishwasher, cook's helper, camp cook, remedial tutor, kindergarten teacher, and Native Language teacher at the Eliza VanBibber School. Rachel also compiled the Selkirk First Nation Northern Tutchone Language Dictionary and accompanying audio tapes.

Elder Rachel married her late husband, David TomTom, in 1956. Together they raised three children. Rachel now enjoys spending time with her grandchildren and great grandson. She continues to provide her assistance to the Selkirk First Nation and also supports the community with her skills and knowledge.

## Johnson Edwards

Storyteller

Johnson Edwards (pictured below with Whitehorse Mayor Bev Buckway) was born on the east banks of the Pelly River. His parents were the late Jessie and Tom Edwards. His grandparents were Sarah and Old Johnnie. He was raised with 12 other siblings in the McMillan River area.

Formal schooling was not a part of Johnson's life. He was



raised in the Northern Tutchone traditional way by learning the stories from his elders. He shares these stories and traditions with young Selkirk First Nations citizens and the rest of the community

Johnson Edwards held a variety of jobs throughout his younger years. He was employed by the White Pass Railroad, worked on the steamboats and for outfitters in different parts of the Yukon. For many years he logged with Cal Lindstrom at Stewart Crossing.

Johnson is very dedicated to his Selkirk First Nation's culture and history. Language is important to him. Teaching is Johnson's legacy. He is still very active with the First Nation, and is a role model for our future generations.

## Franklin Roberts

Storyteller

Franklin Roberts was born March 3, 1941 to Maggie and Luke Roberts. He was born at Fort Selkirk and is a member of the Wolf Clan. Franklin attended the Baptist Mission Residential School in Whitehorse. He felt that he received adequate schooling and was glad to learn how to read and write English. He also knows the Northern Tutchone language, history and culture.

Franklin became the Chief of the Selkirk First Nation from 1985-88. He was involved with the land claims negotiations for the Selkirk First Nation. He still works casually doing different jobs. Franklin enjoys teaching the young people, preserving foods for the winter, and singing and playing instruments. He is the First Nation's number one stickgambler and is also interested in different sports. He is a skilled boat pilot, with extensive knowledge of the area's waterways.

Today Franklin teaches Northern Tutchone history and culture and is a very patient elder. He is a role model for the community.

*Oral tradition is more than a body of stories to be recorded and stored away, and it is not always passed on in the form of complete narratives. Anyone who has spent time talking with elders about their understanding of the past knows that oral accounts are discussed and debated, and that oral tradition itself is a lively, continuous, ongoing process, a way of understanding the past as well as the present.*

Julie Cruikshank, Reading Voices, p. 141

## Yukon International Storytelling Festival

Angela Sidney, one of the last speakers of the Tagish language, had to travel all the way to Toronto in order to tell her stories to a large audience. This prompted two Yukoners to organize the first storytelling festival in the Yukon in 1988. For the first Festival, storytellers came from six countries on four continents and joined Yukon native elders to tell and sing stories in 23 different languages, 16 Native languages, Dutch, French, Danish, English, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Ukrainian. All storytellers were encouraged to tell in their first language, with a summary or full translation in English.

Within two years, it had become an annual international festival, focusing on, but not restricted to, countries from the circumpolar world. Throughout the years, performers have come to join our Yukoners from Chuckotka, Magadan, Sakhalin, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Zimbabwe, Greenland, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Japan, China, Australia, Bolivia, Alaska, and the Southern United States as well as every province and territory in Canada. Each year sees more and more storytellers gathering in Whitehorse to celebrate the North's rich storytelling tradition under the midnight sun. Incorporating costume, dance, theatre, drums, mime, and music, the festival transports visitors across miles of land, years of history, and lifetimes of experiences.

[From <http://www.storytelling.yk.net>]



A mask by Kwanlin Dün citizen Duran Henry.

# Leisure

## Fun and Games

Long ago people did not spend all of their waking hours working. When people got together they had a lot of fun joking, telling stories, and playing games. Games were essential, not only for entertainment, but for education as well. Many of the games were competitive and included foot races, tugs of war, and target shooting. Some groups played a game similar to volleyball using a ball made of tanned hide and stuffed with animal hair. The goal of the game was to keep it in the air. Other games tested individual skills.

*“One was the ring and pin game. Five caribou toe bones were strung on a cord with a piece of caribou skin full of holes on one end and a bone needle on the other. The player tried to pin the bones or piece of skin with the needle. Players kept score with little sticks.”*

Gambling was also very popular. People would bet on any of the competitive games. People would gamble for shells, beads, skins, and anything else of value.

[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]

With the huge influx of people during the first part of the 20th century, new customs and celebrations from all over the world were introduced to the Yukon. People found new ways to enjoy their lives. Both native and non-native people organized team sports like hockey and baseball. Curling and tennis were popular. Indoors, people played cards, held dances, played charades and organized fancy dress parties.

They skated; they skied; they snow-shoed. They went on picnics and organized excursions. They swam; they stick-gambled; they played golf. Sometimes traditional activities, like dog-sledding or fishing, evolved into sports or hobbies.

People continue to join together and celebrate important events, or even unimportant ones. Cards, dice, and Bingo are an important part of the lives of First Nations people today.

[From <http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/archives/athomein-theyukon>]

## Gatherings

During the seasonal round, people travelled over an immense area. Much of the year, the limited food supply made it necessary for people to travel in small family groups. Gatherings were opportunities to get together with extended family, the larger group and people from other First Nations. While people might meet shortly after spring break-up, these gatherings usually coincided with times of plenty such as the summer salmon harvest.

They were occasions to socialize, trade, marry and resolve disputes. Traditionally, trading, political and family ties linked different First Nations groups in Yukon. These connections were maintained in the post-contact period despite the changes in lifestyle and demographics. Increasingly, gatherings took place at trading posts and settlements during church festivals such as Christmas and Easter, as well as at traditional times such as during the salmon run.

Gatherings were times to dance, sing, renew relationships and celebrate culture.

*Yes! The people put up big party. They made a big pot of soup, meat and tea. Lots of different tribes and Indian dance. When I was a kid, I used to dance the Indian dance. I had lots of fun. The people put feathers on their hair and put on skin clothes. These clothes were fancy.*

– Stanley Roberts, 1987

Today many communities continue to host Gatherings throughout the year.

[Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Interpretive Manual, Gatherings, Helene Dobrowsky]

## Stick Gambling (aka Hand Games)

In the old days, the hand games were an important part of the festivities, which occurred when different groups met on the trail. Elijah Andrews describes that, at Martin house, he encountered groups of Teetl’it, Gwichya and Slavey people. Hand games were in progress, and lasted for several days.

The hand game was and is one of the most competitive of all the traditional games. Matches, shot, powder or tobacco – which were of course hard to come by in the old days – were often staked.

In the old days only men took part in the hand game and played the drums; young boys played and practiced among themselves. Women and girls did not play. But now young and old, men and women, are able to play.



Johnson Edwards teaches hand games to visitors at Fort Selkirk.

Objective of the Stick Gambling Game:

Two teams of equal numbers knelt on the ground facing each other in pairs. Hiding their hands between their thighs or underneath the blanket, each player on the one side of the ‘playing’ team, shuffled a token from fist to fist. They were supported by a number of drummers who lined up behind them, drumming and singing gambling songs. Upon a handclap from the leader, the ‘captain’, of the opposing team, they stopped their movements and showed their fists; the drumming ceased. The captain used a hand signal to guess the position of the token relative to body side, against all players on the other side at once. A correct guess by the captain eliminated a player from that round of play. For each wrong guess, the captain gave a counting stick to the other team. When all opposing players had been eliminated, the right to hide the tokens passed to the other side. The team holding all of the sticks won the round.

# FYI: Cultural Expression

## Key Messages

Art keeps traditions alive. Songs, dances, decoration, and stories are all holders of knowledge and have their own stories to tell.

Songs were made up to mark special events, to tell stories from long ago, or to express feelings. Songs were also holders of history.

There were several kinds of dances – many that imitated animals or celebrated a special event.

Long ago visual arts were most often expressed in a utilitarian manner. People were constantly on the move and could not afford to pack around many belongings that were not required for survival. As a result art was expressed through the form and decoration of functional items.

Today culture is expressed in a variety of mediums including, but not limited to, beadwork, carving, weaving, painting, and film making.

Storytelling and speechmaking were one of the most important arts for First Nations people. The memories of the elders were the libraries of the people. First Nations relied on the wisdom and knowledge of their elders to learn their place in the world and the best ways to live.

Good storytellers were highly respected and even gained fame throughout the country. Well known orators would make speeches at potlatches and other important events.

When people get together they have a lot of fun joking, telling stories, and playing games. Long ago, games were essential, not only for entertainment, but for education as well.

Gatherings are opportunities to get together with other people. They were occasions to socialize, trade, marry and resolve disputes.

## Telling the Story

Show photographs or examples of the many different art forms found among First Nations communities.

Invite an Elder to give a beading or carving demonstration.

Provide beading supplies and have guests try it out.

When passing Tr'ochëk share the story of Chief Isaac and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in songs, dances, and gänhäk.

Contact the First Nations for copies of some stories that can be shared. Several publications also have stories that can be told.

Explain stickgambling to your guests and give it a try.

## Study Questions

Explain the role of singing and dancing in First Nations communities.

What is the gänhäk or gunho?

What did people use to decorate clothing before trade beads arrived in Yukon?

Name some of the functions of storytelling in First Nations culture.

Explain how stickgambling works.

# Cultural Boundaries & Traditional Territories

Long ago people did not think of the land in the same way as most Canadians think of it today. The land was not something that was owned – it was something to be cared for and respected because it was essential for survival. At the same time certain groups of people had certain rights to use areas for resources. This was done in accordance with traditional law and social custom.

Today there are 14 distinct First Nations in Yukon. These groups are defined by culture and language. In recent years groups have been defined politically either through the Department of Indian Affairs or through land claims and the resulting final and self-government agreements. These agreements lay out politically bound areas of land referred to as traditional territories.

Long ago the idea of a fixed political boundary was foreign to First Nations people. Groups were determined culturally. This largely followed linguistic lines though these lines were fluid and flexible with people trading and intermarrying with other groups. These relationships helped to promote positive interactions between groups as people had friends and relatives living throughout the Territory.

Today individuals are enrolled as citizens, members, or beneficiaries of one specific First Nation although many people can trace their ancestry to a number of cultural and language groups. This reflects the on-going fluid nature of membership with one group as people continue to travel about and intermarry with other groups.

Although land was not owned in the way it is today certain groups and people had rights and responsibilities with respect to harvest sites. A headman and his group had the first right of refusal to use local resources. They were also obligated to care for these resources. The headman had to ensure that people did not over-harvest areas while at the same time ensuring that his group had enough to eat. People could not buy or sell land although at certain times and to show great respect to another group or to settle a dispute a group might transfer the stewardship of an area to the care of another group.

On a day-to-day basis people had the right to hunt, fish, and gather wherever they wished. Groups of people were part of a larger network of relatives



*The Yukon River at midnight on the summer solstice.*

and clans and as a result could ask other groups to harvest in their local areas. Sharing is one of the most important values practiced by First Nations people and it would be rare for a group to reject such a request.

Everyone had “firm concepts of stewardship for the country. This feeling of responsibility for proper treatment of the land and water, and this openness in sharing it with relatives and friends, were important parts of the Yukon Indian’s way of life. This combination of rootedness and mobility helped them to survive. When times were hard, people often traveled widely. If they were starving in their own country, they looked for their friends and relatives wherever there was likely to be the most food, always hoping to find other people who were having better luck than they were.”

Through the land claims process individual First Nations have negotiated communal ownership of parcels of land within their traditional territories. These parcels are referred to as settlement lands. This will be discussed in greater detail in the Land Claims section.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Land Ownership, Catharine McClellan]*

## Maintaining Peace

In the old days there were times when groups or clans would fight each other or plan raids. This was not common though as no group could afford to lose many adults. When fighting occurred it was often to avenge a murder, kidnap women, or for reasons of honour and jealousy.

*The land was not privately owned in the old days, so the Indians did not often fight to conquer territory. Moreover, the clan system ... meant that everybody had relatives almost everywhere. This helped to prevent wars ...*

Peace was made through formal ceremonies.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Political Boundaries

When newcomers first arrived in Yukon life continued in much the same way as it had for generations. As outsiders began to settle the Yukon they began to impose European notions of ownership on First Nations groups.

*The Yukon Elders say that when white people first came into the Yukon, the Indians treated them just like other Indians who had come from far away. They often helped them like friends. This is why some old people do not understand why the whites who began to govern Canada set up rules and boundaries that seemed to separate Yukon Indians from their friends and relations in other places.*

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Land Ownership, Catharine McClellan]*

Many First Nations people did not understand the concept of a political boundary and thought that this would cut families and groups off from each other. In more recent times new laws requiring government issued picture identification to cross the border into the United States caused challenges for some First Nations people. Many Elders did not have photo id. Fortunately most First Nations in Yukon are self-governing and could issue the proper identification for their Citizens. Now people travel back and forth frequently to visit relatives and attend gatherings.

## The Establishment of the Alaska-Yukon Border

In 1887-88 William Ogilvie surveyed the Alaska-Yukon border. This split groups of people up who had traditionally moved regularly between Alaska and Yukon. They now had to choose which country to belong to. This was an alien concept for First Nations people. Many thought that this would be a permanent separation.

*The last dance they had in Dawson City was when the Alaska Border went across, cut off two people there. Hän*

*people – one is in Eagle, Alaska, another one is in Dawson City. They used to be like one people. They talk the same language. When the boundary come across they heard about it so they called a big meeting in Dawson. All the Indian gather there and they were going for quite awhile. While the meeting going, they dance til the last man stand up, that’s how long it take. They drop off but they keep going til the last man stand up. And that fire is going for a week, it could take week, it could take four days, three days and that’s the way they do their ceremony because they figure they never going to see one another again. And that’s a real sorrow dance, really sorrow. And even they hair was burned off, because they stick their head in the fire once in a while. All their hair is scorched off and so I guess it was pretty sad. They didn’t know that, they thought they never going to see one another again.” Percy Henry, 1993*

## Traditional Territories

Land claims negotiations in Yukon established 14 traditional territories in which First Nations have certain rights and responsibilities. These territories reflect cultural groupings as they existed at the time of the negotiations. In some cases these boundaries are similar to those that show language groupings. It is important to note that in some cases these territories cover more extensive areas than the language groups themselves. This is a reflection of the fluid membership within contemporary First Nations. For instance the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in traditional territory is much more extensive than the Hän language area. This reflects the contemporary citizenship of Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in today. The current population includes people who trace their ancestry – both culturally and linguistically – to Hän speakers as well as to Gwich’in and Tutchone speakers.

Most territories overlap with the territories of other First Nations. For administrative purposes First Nations must negotiate new boundaries. These decisions are made with the guidance and input of the Elders – though in many cases the idea of a firm boundary remains an alien concept to older people.

See the Traditional Territories map on page 17.

# FYI: Boundaries

## Key Messages

Long ago people did not think of the land in the same way as most Canadians think of it today. The land was not something that was owned – it was something to be cared for and respected because it was essential for survival.

Long ago the idea of a fixed political boundary was foreign to First Nations people. Groups were determined culturally. This largely followed linguistic lines though these lines were fluid and flexible with people trading and intermarrying with other groups.

Today individuals are enrolled as citizens, members, or beneficiaries of one specific First Nation although many people can trace their ancestry to a number of cultural and language groups.

Although land was not owned in the way it is today certain groups and people had rights and responsibilities with respect to harvest sites.

Everyone had firm concepts of stewardship for the country. This feeling of responsibility for proper treatment of the land and water, and this openness in sharing it with relatives and friends, were important parts of the First Nations' way of life.

Land claims negotiations in Yukon established 14 traditional territories in which First Nations have certain rights and responsibilities.

Through the land claims process individual First Nations have negotiated communal ownership of parcels of land within their traditional territories. These parcels are referred to as settlement lands.

## Telling the Story

Show guests the Yukon First Nations Language map to illustrate the cultural groups.

Show guests a map of the traditional territories. Make note of the overlaps.

As you travel along the river let guests know whose traditional territory they are in.

## Study Questions

Explain the difference between linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries.

How did First Nations people view the concept of political boundaries?

How did people ensure that the land was not over-harvested? How did they ensure that their neighbours did not starve?

How did people maintain peace?

How did people react when the government imposed new boundaries on them?

# Land Claims

The land claims process is an important and integral part of Yukon history. It is one of the unique qualities that make up the Yukon reality today. It brought changes not only for First Nations people but for everyone residing in Yukon. One result of the land claims process has been the changes in the ways that people relate to each other in business, government, and within the communities.

Several events in Canadian history were determining factors in the land claims process:

## Royal Proclamation of 1763

In 1763 Britain signed the Royal Proclamation which set out a number of principles relating to First Nations people. It recognizes First Nations prior rights to land and provides for the administration and disposition of those lands and asserts that there is nothing in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms to diminish the rights and freedoms that are recognized as those of aboriginal peoples.

## Indian Act 1868

The Indian Act was established in 1868 and guided the work of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA). The most significant mandate of DIA was to civilize the First Nations people of Canada. They wanted to assimilate people so that they were like other Canadians – with the same values and way of life. One strategy to accomplish this task was the establishment of the mission, or residential, school system. Another was the imposition of a DIA system of governance on First Nations people.

DIA began its work in Yukon in the early 1900s by completing a census. Many people were missed in this census due to the seasonal nature of travel on the land. These people later had to negotiate with DIA to be included as status Indians.

## Order of Canada 1870

The Order of Canada was passed in 1870 and Yukon became part of Canada. The Order included a promise by Parliament to deal with First Nations claims in an equitable manner. In 1871 Canada began the treaty process in many areas of Canada. This never occurred in Yukon. Instead, and much later on, Yukon became the subject of comprehensive land claims based on aboriginal title.

## First Nations Organizations 1960s

During the 1960s there was a focus on human rights in North America. The circumstances of life for First Nations people in Canada moved to the forefront of related issues. At this time the American Indian Movement (AIM) was established in both the United States and Canada. Members of AIM were instrumental in helping Yukon First Nations organize politically. In 1969 the White Paper on Indian Policy was presented. It advocated the removal of special status for First Nations people and the surrender of all claims that set them apart in Canadian society. Reaction to the White Paper was immediate and strong and led to collective First Nations voice in Canada.

[*Land Claims History* from <http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/land-claims>]

In 1902, Jim Boss, hereditary chief of the Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nation, saw the impact the Gold Rush was having on his people and wrote urgently to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. "Tell the King very hard, we want something for our Indians because they take our land and game."

One hundred years later, the Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nation signed its Final and Self-Government agreements.

The long road of negotiations was complex and challenging but is starting to yield benefits for not only First Nation citizens, but also other Yukon residents.

## Land Claims Chronology

**1973:** The modern process begins when the Yukon Native Brotherhood, formed by the 12 Yukon First Nation bands in place at the time and led by Chief Elijah Smith, presented Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. This presentation was the beginning of the negotiation process between the Government of Canada and Yukon First Nations. Later that year, the Yukon Native Brotherhood and the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians created the Council for Yukon Indians (CYI) to negotiate land claims on behalf of Yukon First Nations.

**1974 - 1979:** Sporadic negotiations between the Government of Canada's Office of Native Claims and CYI.

**1979:** Yukon joins negotiations

**1984:** An Agreement in Principle (AIP) was reached by negotiators for the parties and submitted to CYI for approval. The AIP, which provided for a complete extinguishment of aboriginal rights, was unable to gain sufficient support from Yukon First Nations. Negotiations were subsequently suspended until 1985 when Government of Canada was able to take a more flexible position on the issue of extinguishment and the Government of Yukon took a more active role at the negotiation table. It was determined that the negotiation process would result in one template agreement to be called the Umbrella Final Agreement. Its provisions were to be incorporated in each Yukon First Nation Final Agreement. The parties to the UFA were Canada, Yukon and Yukon First Nations as represented by CYI (now known as the Council of Yukon First Nations).

**1993:** Government leaders sign the UFA, which recognizes fourteen Yukon First Nations.

*The signing ceremony is a significant event in the history of the First Nations of the Yukon. Our agreements will dramatically affect the rest of our lives and our children tomorrow, . . . we look forward to new partnerships and cooperation between all parties to successfully implement these historic agreements.*

Judy Gingell, Chair of the Council of Yukon First Nations, at the signing of the Umbrella Final Agreement, 1993

**1993:** The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Teslin Tlingit Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, respectively, were the first four Yukon First Nations to sign Final Agreements with Canada and Yukon.

**1997:** The Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation Final Agreement and the Selkirk First Nation Final Agreement are brought into effect in October.

**1998:** The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement comes into effect in September.

**2002:** The Ta'an Kwäch'än Council Final Agreement comes into effect in April. Four of the remaining First Nations with outstanding Agreements signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in March 2002 with Canada and Yukon. The MOU signified that substantive negotiations had been concluded and the parties were committed to beginning the ratification process, one of the final stages of concluding a claim, by March 2003. These First Nations were the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, White River First Nation, Kluane First Nation and Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

**2003:** Kluane First Nation signs its Final and Self-Govern-

ment agreements in October. These agreements came into effect February 2, 2004, making Kluane the ninth self-governing Yukon First Nation.

**2004:** Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) ratifies their agreements and their signing ceremony is held February 19, 2005. The agreements came into effect on April 1, 2005, making KDFN the 10th self-governing First Nation in the Yukon.

**2005:** Carcross-Tagish First Nation (C/TFN) ratifies their agreements in 2005, which were signed in a ceremony held October 22, 2005. The C/TFN agreements came into effect on January 9, 2006, making it the 11th self-governing First Nation in the Yukon. White River First Nation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in March 2002 with the governments of Canada and Yukon to signal the substantial completion of their negotiations, which was to be followed by technical drafting and ratification. These steps have yet to be taken. The Liard First Nation and Ross River Dena Council have not entered into a MOU to conclude their land claims.

**Today:** White River First Nation, Liard First Nation and Ross River Dena Council remain bands under the federal Indian Act.

## The Umbrella Final Agreement, First Nation Final Agreements and Treaty Rights

The Umbrella Final Agreement is a political or policy document between the Government of Canada, Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations as represented by the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN). This agreement is a common template for negotiating First Nation Final Agreements. It is important to note that the Umbrella Final Agreement, on its own, is not a legally enforceable document. Because all of its provisions are contained in each First Nation Final Agreement, those provisions have lawful effect.

Each First Nation Final Agreement is a treaty recognized in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and therefore takes precedence over other laws.

Below are the 11 Yukon First Nations that have Final and Self-Government Agreements in effect. The dates within the parentheses indicate the year in which each First Nation's agreement came into effect:

- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (1995)



- Teslin Tlingit Council (1995)
- First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun (1995)
- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (1995)
- Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation (1997)
- Selkirk First Nation (1997)
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in (1998)
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (2002)
- Kluane First Nation (2004)
- Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2005)
- Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2006)

There are three First Nations that have not settled land claims and remain Indian Bands under the federal Indian Act: Liard First Nation, Ross River Dena Council and White River First Nation.

Yukon First Nation Final Agreements represent an exchange of undefined aboriginal rights for defined treaty rights. In other words, a Yukon First Nation Final Agreement, which is a modern-day treaty, sets out specific rights for the particular First Nation and its citizens.

The exception is that aboriginal rights continue on Settlement Land. However, if an aboriginal right is inconsistent with a negotiated treaty right, then the treaty right prevails.

## What's In a Final Agreement?

Each First Nation Final Agreement is lengthy and complex. Here are some highlights:

### Financial Compensation

Each First Nation Final Agreement sets out that First Nation's share of financial compensation, its part of a total \$242,673,000 (in 1989 dollars) from the Government of Canada. The agreement also sets out the repayment of each First Nation's share of funds borrowed for negotiation costs, which is roughly 25% of their total compensation. The payments are made over a 15 year period after the Final Agreement comes into effect.

### Land

In total, the 14 First Nations receive 41,595 square kilometers [16,060 sq miles] of Settlement Land in the Yukon, which is divided amongst the 14 First Nations.

Each First Nation is the legal owner of its Settlement Land.

- 25,899 sq. km. [10,000 sq miles] of Category A Settlement land – which the First Nations fully

owns, including both surface and sub-surface (mines and minerals).

- 15,539 sq. km. [6,000 sq miles] of Category B Settlement land – on which the First Nation has rights to the surface. Mines and mineral rights are retained by the Yukon government.

Location of Settlement Land is negotiated by the three parties: the individual First Nation and the governments of Canada and Yukon. Settlement Parcels are one of three types:

- R = Rural lands
- C = Community Lands
- S = Site Specifics

Provisions allowing for access, taxation, development assessment, surface rights and many more aspects of land use are also set out in either the individual Final Agreement or the companion Self-Government Agreement.

### Land Use Planning

Each First Nation Final Agreement provides for establishment of a Regional Land Use Planning Commission to recommend a plan for both Settlement and Non-Settlement Land. The Yukon Land Use Planning Council was established through the agreements to deal with land use planning for all areas covered by Final Agreements.

### Special Management Areas

Final Agreements provide for the establishment of Special Management Areas or SMAs. These are areas which all parties to the negotiations agreed should be protected or managed differently than ordinary public or Settlement Land. Some examples include: Tombstone Territorial Park, Vuntut National Park, Kusawa Territorial Park and Ddhaw Ghro Habitat Protection Area, and Lewes Marsh Habitat Protection Area.

### Involvement in Government Institutions

Final Agreements establish several boards or committees with significant responsibilities. All of the boards and committees have guaranteed First Nation representation, usually 50% of the membership.

For example, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board is the primary instrument for fish and wildlife management in the Yukon. A Renewable Resource Council is the primary instrument for fish and wildlife management within a Traditional Territory.

Other institutions are the Heritage Resources Board, the Surface Rights Board, and the Land Use Planning Council.

### Harvesting

Conservation and sharing are the guiding principles of Chapter 16 of the Final Agreements which deal with Fish

and Wildlife. Yukon Indian People have the right to harvest any number of all species, in all seasons, for subsistence reasons within their Traditional Territory.

Each First Nation administers and manages the rights of Yukon Indian People harvesting within its Traditional Territory. Consequently, a First Nation member also has the right to harvest in another First Nation's Traditional Territory when given permission by that First Nation. The Government of Yukon can limit a First Nation's ability to harvest, but only for very specific reasons and after meeting strict consultation requirements of the Final Agreement. Those reasons include public safety, public health and conservation. Final Agreements also speak to trapping, access to land for harvesting and commercial harvesting.

Other matters addressed in Final Agreements include Forestry, Water, Non-Renewable Resources, and Heritage Resources.

## Self-Government Agreements and Lawmaking Powers

### Self-Government Agreements

First Nation Final Agreements provide for the negotiation of Self-Government Agreements between the various First Nations and the governments of Canada and Yukon. As companion documents to the Final Agreements, the Self-Government Agreements are not treaties.

A Self-Government Agreement establishes the First Nation government as a "legal person," and ensures that the First Nation has a Constitution which sets out its governmental structure – so the First Nation has the capacity to act and govern itself.

Upon achieving self-government, the Indian Act no longer applies. The Indian Act band does not exist anymore and the First Nation government stands in its place.

### Lawmaking powers

Each First Nation with a Self-Government Agreement has exclusive lawmaking powers over its internal affairs and over the management of its citizens' Final Agreement rights. The First Nation has the power to make citizen-based laws which apply to their citizens no matter where they live in the Yukon. Examples include child welfare, health care, language, culture and education. The First Nation also has the authority to make laws in relation to its Settlement Land, and these laws are applicable to anyone on Settlement Land. Examples include land use and zoning, lands and natural resources such as forestry and wildlife, and business activity.

Yukon laws are displaced by First Nation Citizen and Settle-

ment Land based laws.

Generally, Yukon laws apply until a First Nation makes a law on the same subject; the Yukon law will cease to apply to the extent a First Nation law deals with the same matter.

### Taxation

A First Nation can make laws regarding property taxation on Settlement Land. A First Nation can also make laws for other direct taxes such as income or sales tax. Some Yukon First Nations have negotiated sharing agreements with the governments of Yukon and Canada for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and income tax.

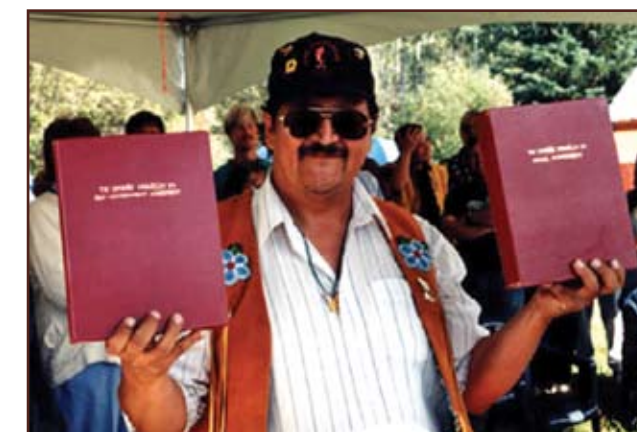
### Financing

Each First Nation receives most of their government funding through a negotiated Financial Transfer Agreement (FTA) with the Government of Canada. Negotiations take into account matters such as population, own source revenues, economies of scale, and prevailing fiscal policies.

### Programs and Services

Each First Nation can negotiate, with the governments of Canada and/or the Yukon, to assume responsibility for programs and services for their people.

The First Nation can negotiate for anything within the scope of their law-making powers, whether or not the First Nation has made a law related to the matter.



Steve Taylor (then Chief) with the newly signed Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement.

# FYI: Land Claims

## Key Messages

The land claims process is an important and integral part of Yukon history. It is one of the unique qualities that make up the Yukon reality today. It brought changes not only for First Nations people but for everyone residing in Yukon.

In 1902, Jim Boss, hereditary chief of the Ta'an Kwäch'än, saw the impact the Gold Rush was having on his people and wrote urgently to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. "Tell the King very hard, we want something for our Indians because they take our land and game." This is considered to be the first active move toward land claims in Yukon.

In 1973 the modern process begins when the Yukon Native Brotherhood, formed by the 12 Yukon First Nation bands in place at the time and led by Chief Elijah Smith, presented Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. This presentation was the beginning of the negotiation process between the Government of Canada and Yukon First Nations.

In 1993 Government leaders sign the Umbrella Final Agreement, which recognizes fourteen Yukon First Nations. This agreement is a common template for negotiating First Nation Final Agreements. It is important to note that the Umbrella Final Agreement, on its own, is not a legally enforceable document. Because all of its provisions are contained in each First Nation Final Agreement, those provisions have lawful effect.

Each First Nation Final Agreement is a treaty recognized in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and therefore takes precedence over other laws. As of May 2009, 11 Yukon First Nations have Final and Self-Government Agreements in effect.

Each First Nation with a Self-Government Agreement has exclusive lawmaking powers over its internal affairs and over the management of its citizens' Final Agreement rights.

## Telling the Story

When at Lake Laberge tell the story of Chief Jim Boss and the letter he sent to Ottawa in 1902.

When traveling along the river you may run into people hunting and fishing. Use this opportunity to explain First Nations inherent rights to harvest for subsistence.

## Study Questions

Explain some events in Canadian history that led to the Yukon Land Claims process.

Which Chief started land claims long ago? Who moved it forward in more recent times?

What is the Umbrella Final Agreement?

Which First Nations have signed their Final and Self-Government Agreements?

What is the difference between a Final Agreement and a Self-Government Agreement?

Name some areas of governance which self-governing First Nations now control.

# The Yukon River

*The river was all things. If you look at it in a traditional sense, it's hard to separate the spirit, mind, body, all those things, 'cause they're all the same. I think that the water had a sense of connectedness that was important.*

Phil Gatensby in *Back to the River: Celebrating Our Culture*

The Yukon River is the third-longest river in North America, flowing northwest from the Coastal Range of northern British Columbia, through the Yukon Territory and Alaska to the Bering Sea. Its overall length is 3185 kilometers (km), with 1149 km within the Yukon. It is the 20th longest river in the world.

The river mouth was known to Russian fur traders by 1831. The upper reaches were explored by HBC trader Robert Campbell, who explored the Pelly River and established a post at Fort Selkirk on the Yukon in 1848. John Bell of the HBC reached the river via the Porcupine River in 1846.

The Lewes River is the former name of the upper course of the Yukon, from Marsh Lake to the confluence of the Pelly River at Fort Selkirk.

The origin of the word "Yukon" is known, though the meaning is unclear. John Bell of the HBC claimed that the Gwich'in people used a term like *Yughoo*, meaning "Great River." This morphed into *Youcon* and later Yukon. However, this name does not correspond with known place names used by Gwich'in speakers, and does not clearly translate as "Great River." Since he was not a linguist or a Gwich'in speaker, it's possible that Bell made an error in recording the name.

[Coutt's *Yukon Places and Names*; John Ritter, personal comments.]

The Yukon River proper begins at the north end of Marsh Lake, just south of Whitehorse. Just above Whitehorse it flows through Miles Canyon, a narrow stretch of water that moves quickly between basalt walls. During the gold rush the canyon's famous Whitehorse Rapids were the most treacherous part of the journey to Dawson. These rapids were drowned with the construction in 1958 of the power dam in Whitehorse, which created Schwatka Lake.

The Whitehorse dam changed much about the river, and in turn changed how the aboriginal people utilized the river and its resources. The dam effectively cut off the spawning trail of salmon, a vital food source to many



aboriginal people. And although much has been done to restore and manage salmon populations the effects of the dam were catastrophic. A Kwanlin Dün Elder named Charlie recounts the year after the dam was constructed:

*"When they built that dam at first, they didn't have no way for the salmon to pass by [the dam]. The first year after the dam was there, the shore by Robert Service Campground was red with salmon, you could almost walk across the river on their backs if you wanted to. But the salmon had no place to go, they just grouped up there beneath the dam. And after the spawn the shore all the way past Whitehorse was littered with their carcasses. [Their population never fully recovered] because once they lose that spawning trail they can never get it back. There's no Salmon in McIntock any more, or Carcross."*

Lake Laberge lies about 40 km downstream from Whitehorse. The abandoned First Nations village of Upper Laberge lies along its southeast shore. The lake is famous for being the last resting place of the fictional Sam Magee in Robert Service's famous poem. It's also known for its treacherous winds and large waves.

The Thirty Mile, a section of the Yukon River between Lake Laberge and the Teslin River, is a rich hunting and fishing area for its original inhabitants,

the Ta'an Kwäch'an. For the captains of the riverboats who plied the Yukon, the Thirty Mile's swift waters and shifting sand bars were a constant challenge. The Thirty Mile was designated as a Canadian Heritage River, based largely on its connection with the Klondike Gold Rush.

Both it and Lower Laberge took on great importance during and after the gold-rush. At Lower Laberge, there was a telegraph station, a North West Mounted Police post, supply depots, and later a roadhouse for travelers. At Hootalinqua (where the Teslin River joins the Yukon and nearly doubles its size) there was a telegraph station and police post, and later, on nearby Shipyard Island, slipways and a winter storage yard for sternwheelers. Located between the two was 17-Mile Wood Camp, one of many along the river which supplied the boilers of the riverboats.

Big Salmon is a former native settlement at the mouth of the Big Salmon River. Further downstream at Little Salmon a First Nations graveyard is all that remains of a once-large village. Each grave is surrounded by a brightly painted fence and has a small spirit house containing articles such as dishes or personal belongings of the deceased. Today, Little Salmon/Carmacks people continue to occupy traditional summer fish camps here.

At Five Finger Rapids large basalt columns divide the river into five channels of fast water. Only the right hand one was considered safe for the steamboats which had to be winched upstream.

Fort Selkirk was established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1848 at the mouth of the Pelly River, one of the Yukon's major tributaries. Strategically located on the river and the old Dawson stage road, this was a thriving community until the 1950s. Today, the Yukon Government and the Selkirk First Nation are in the process of restoring it as a heritage site.

The White River flows into the Yukon from the Kluane region to the southwest. Here, the river changes colour due to the large amount of glacial silt and the current noticeably picks up speed.

The mouth of the Stewart River was the site of a traditional Nacho Nyak Dun fish camp. Fred Harper set up a trading post here in 1886 to supply miners in the area. The settlement boomed when the Klond-

ike rush began, with a major wood camp to provide fuel for steamboats, a NWMP post, and a hotel. In more recent years the Burian family ran a post here which included overnight cabins, a store, and a museum.

## Early History

The valley of the Yukon is believed by some anthropologists to have been the main immigration route for North America's first human inhabitants. According to the Beringia theory, the ancestors of today's aboriginal peoples arrived across a now-submerged land bridge joining present-day Alaska and Siberia. Some First Nations people dispute this theory, and believe in their own traditional teachings that their ancestors originated in North America.

## Course

The generally accepted source of the Yukon River is the Llewellyn Glacier at the southern end of Atlin Lake in British Columbia. The Yukon River proper starts at the northern end of Marsh Lake, just south of Whitehorse.

The river's major tributaries in the Yukon include the Takhini, Big Salmon, Little Salmon, Nordenskiöld, Teslin, Pelly, Stewart, White, Sixtymile, Indian, Klondike, and Fortymile rivers.

## Salmon

Every year, the Yukon River hosts the longest upstream migration of Pacific salmon stocks in the world. The people of the Yukon River drainage have been utilizing these returning salmon for over 10,000 years. Chinook and chum salmon return to spawn in tributary creeks



along the river's entire length. The Whitehorse Fishway is, at 366 meters (m) in length, the longest wooden fish ladder in the world. It was built beside the dam at Whitehorse to provide a channel for the salmon as they migrate upstream.

## A Healthy River

The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, a cooperative effort of 64 First Nations and tribes in Alaska and Canada, has the goal of making the river and its tributaries safe to drink from again by supplementing and scrutinizing Government data.

The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council is an Indigenous grassroots organization, consisting of 66 First Nations and Tribes, dedicated to the protection and preservation of the Yukon River Watershed. The YRITWC accomplishes this by providing Yukon First Nations and Alaska Tribes in the Yukon Watershed with technical assistance, such as facilitating the development and exchange of information, coordinating efforts between First Nations and Tribes, undertaking research, and providing training, education and awareness programs to promote the health of the Watershed and its Indigenous peoples.

*Our Mission: We, the Indigenous Tribes/First Nations from the headwaters to the mouth of the Yukon River, having been placed here by our Creator, do hereby agree to initiate and continue the clean up and preservation of the Yukon River for the protection of our own and future generations of our Tribes/First Nations and for the continuation of our traditional Native way of life.*

*Our vision, put simply, is "to be able to drink water directly from the Yukon River".*

From the YRIWC website: <http://www.yritwc.org/AboutUs/AboutUs/tabid/56/Default.aspx>

## The River is a Highway

From prehistoric times until the late 1950s when all-weather roads were first built and air travel became common, the Yukon River was the region's highway for settlement and development.

For millennia, the Yukon was a principal travel route for First Nations peoples.

For about four months of the year the Yukon is navigable from its mouth to Whitehorse, some 2860 km. Ice starts to build in the Yukon in October, and by late November much of it is frozen solid (with the exception of open leads at river mouths, fast currents, and near springs). The Yukon is used extensively for travel in the winter.

Paddle-wheel steamers began travelling the river in the 1860s. During the Klondike Gold Rush the Yukon River was

the principal means of transportation, and there were as many as 100 riverboats in service in 1900. Boats continued to ply the river until the 1950s, when the Klondike Highway was completed.

During the gold rush, First Nations people along the river sold meat and fish or traded other things with sternwheeler crews and passengers. They worked as deckhands on the riverboats, and cut firewood to fuel them. They also worked as river pilots, boat mechanics, and towed boats upriver by trackline.

## Bridges

Despite its length, there are only four vehicle-carrying bridges across the river:

- the Lewes Bridge, north of Marsh Lake on the Alaska Highway
- the Robert Campbell Bridge, which connects the Whitehorse suburb of Riverdale to the downtown area,
- the Yukon River Bridge in Carmacks, on the Klondike Highway
- the E. L. Patton Yukon River Bridge, north of Fairbanks Alaska

A car ferry crosses the river at Dawson City in the summer; it is replaced by an ice bridge over the frozen river during the winter. There are also two pedestrian-only bridges in Whitehorse, as well as a dam across the river and a hydroelectric generating station. The construction of the dam flooded the White Horse Rapids, which gave the city its name, and created Schwatka Lake.

### Sources:

Wikipedia

*Paddling The Yukon – A River Trip Through History*

By Donna Griffin-Smith

*Yukon River Hydrology, TH Interpretive Manual,*

Helene Dobrowolsky

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System website,

[http://www.chrs.ca/Main\\_e.htm](http://www.chrs.ca/Main_e.htm)

*A CKRW Yukon Nugget* by Les McLaughlin, the Hou-

gen website, [http://www.hougens.com/yukonHistory/nuggets\\_year/2000s.aspx?nugget=1884](http://www.hougens.com/yukonHistory/nuggets_year/2000s.aspx?nugget=1884)

## The Beaver-Man Story

This is a story by Martha Taylor. It is found in a book entitled *The Yukon*, by Richard Mathews. Mathews apparently traveled this area and had the pleasure of visiting with Mrs. Taylor "one bright summer morning". It was on this morning that she recounted the following tale:

*One time long ago, Beaver-Man he's traveling around, a-traveling and a-traveling. The sun he was real hot, and Beaver-Man he get thirsty, you know, real thirsty like when you don't got even spit to swallow. He need something to drink real bad. One man he's a-traveling with, he fall down dead he so thirsty.*

*Beaver-Man pretty soon he say to himself, "What I going to do?" and he start thinking, and pretty soon he say to people he's a-traveling with, "I going to make you some water so you better get ready to drink."*

*Then Wolverine say, "There's no water. How you going to make some?" And they all get mad at him, think he's crazy, just want to make big show. Especially Wolverine, he's real mad.*

*Beaver-Man he take and cut willow stick and he tie willow stick to his walking stick with a piece of...how you say in English?...that string you make from caribou. Then he go down in a little valley, at the top end of it, and he say again, "I going to make you some water, so you better get ready to drink."*

*Then he stick willow stick into ground. Pretty soon lot of water coming out. Lot of, lot of water from good clean spring. All these people with Beaver-Man, even Wolverine, they so happy they put their whole head right in the water.*

*After that each time Beaver-Man and his people they get thirsty, he go up to top of little valley, stick in willow stick, and water come out. Lot of water. He done this many times. Each spring it make a stream, and after long, long time these streams so many they big enough to make Yukon.*

*All that, it happens long time ago. That's the end of the story.*



The Northern Tutchone name for Victoria Rock, located just below Fort Selkirk, is T'thi Ts'et 'yan or T'thi Ts'ach'an. According to one story, the rock is the figure of a young woman in a puberty hood who didn't follow the proper rituals and turned to stone. Another story, told by Harry Baum and Johnson Edwards, says that Victoria Rock is the figure of a Hän woman from the Eagle River who could turn herself into animals. This was one of the places where she rested. [<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/FortSelkirk/english/nth/nthpnap.html>]



*The confluence of the Yukon and White rivers.*



## Which way did the Yukon River run?

In 1996, Alejandra Duk-Rodkin (a research scientist with the Geological Survey of Canada) was investigating a terrace above the confluence of the Yukon and Indian Rivers.

Soon after arriving, Duk-Rodkin discovered the evidence for which she had come looking; small pieces of argillite, a form of shale, were scattered over the surface of the churned-up soil.

She had just found proof that three million years ago the Yukon River used to flow south, instead of north and west as it does today.

The source of the argillite was in the sedimentary mountains to the north, on the other side of the Tintina Trench. A paleo-Yukon River had once carried this rock south and had also formed series of high terraces, such as the one where the geologist was working.

The Fifteen Mile River northwest of Dawson City formed the headwaters of this ancient river until sometime between 2.9 and 2.6 million years ago when the Cordilleran ice sheet blocked its flow to the south and east, and the river changed its course.

The Yukon eventually cut a new channel, flowing northwest to the Bering Sea. Its headwaters are now far to the south among the glaciers of the coastal mountains in northwestern BC.

In bluffs along the Tintina Trench, she found unusual soils that helped to determine the age of the ice sheet that once blocked the flow of the ancient Yukon River.

The soil profiles showed that the Tintina Trench had been filled with ice many times. Duk-Rodkin concluded that ice flowing north and west from the Cordilleran ice sheets joined with local valley glaciers flowing south out of the Ogilvie Mountains. When the ice intermingled, it filled the Tintina Trench.

“The most incredible thing is that the Yukon River is incised in the northern part of the Dawson Range. The river didn’t follow the Trench, which was lower and softer, because it was filled with ice,” says Duk-Rodkin.

[From the Northern Research Institute at Yukon College with financial support from Environment Yukon and Yukon College.

<http://www.taiga.net/yourYukon/index.html>]

## First Nations Place Names

### Southern Tutchone

Yukon River: Tágà Shāw

Whitehorse: Kwanlin

Grey Mountain: The May

Takhini River: Nakhų Chù

Lake Laberge: Tàa’an Mān

Shallow Bay: Mān Tl’at

Lower Leberge: Titl’at

Thirty Mile River: Tágà Shāw Jädälj

### Northern Tutchone:

Yukon River: Tàgé Cho, “big river”

Pelly River: Sè ké nek, “poling boat all the time”; also given Ts’éki’ Netú

Victoria Rock: Tthi Ts’et ‘yan or T’thi Ts’ach’an

Big Salmon River Gyò Cho Chù

Basalt wall across from Fort Selkirk: Melú

Hill visible from Fort Selkirk to the northeast: Eté cho, “oldest people”

Three-way Channel (traditional fishing site about 39 km downriver of Fort Selkirk: Nju Yen Tlek meaning “it (the river) cuts through here”

Willow Creek: Sedzuan Tagé

McGregor Creek: Hed dá nek, “muddy water”

### Hän:

River: Hän

Klondike River: derived from the Hän word Tr’ondëk

Danny Roberts at Fort Selkirk.



Bridge at Carmacks.



# FYI: The Yukon River

## Key Messages

The Yukon River is the third-longest river in North America, flowing northwest from the Coastal Range of northern British Columbia, through the Yukon Territory and Alaska to the Bering Sea.

The generally accepted source of the Yukon River is the Llewellyn Glacier at the southern end of Atlin Lake in British Columbia. The Yukon River proper starts at the northern end of Marsh Lake, just south of Whitehorse.

The river's major tributaries in the Yukon include the Takhini, Big Salmon, Little Salmon, Nordenskiold, Teslin, Pelly, Stewart, White, Sixtymile, Indian, Klondike, and Fortymile rivers.

Every year, the Yukon River hosts the longest upstream migration of Pacific salmon stocks in the world. The people of the Yukon River drainage have been utilizing these returning salmon for over 10,000 years.

From prehistoric times until the late 1950s when all-weather roads were first built and air travel became common, the Yukon River was the region's highway for settlement and development. For millennia, the Yukon was a principal travel route for First Nations peoples.

Despite its length, there are only four vehicle-carrying bridges across the river.

Three million years ago the Yukon River used to flow south, instead of north and west as it does today.

During the Klondike Gold Rush there were as many as 100 riverboats in service.

First Nations people along the river sold meat and fish or traded other things with sternwheeler crews and passengers. They worked as deckhands on the riverboats, and cut firewood to fuel them. They also worked as river pilots and boat mechanics.

## Telling the Story

Use the map at the end of the manual to orient guests with the river, its tributaries, and place names along the way.

While traveling through the Thirtymile section of the river discuss the steamboats and paddlewheelers.

Ask guests to imagine what it would have been like to travel in Yukon before the highways were constructed.

Explain how the river is used during the winter months as a travel corridor.

## Study Questions

How long is the Yukon River? How many kilometres are in Yukon?

Explain the impacts of the Whitehorse Dam on First Nations use of the river and its resources.

At which tributary does the river change colour? Why?

Who composes the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council? What do they do?

According to Elder Martha Taylor, Beaver-Man created the Yukon River. How did he do it?

How did Alejandra Duk-Rodkin determine that the river used to flow in the other direction?

# Language

There are nine aboriginal languages used in Yukon, eight of them belonging to the large Na-Dene language family. Seven are from the Athapaskan sub-family, which spreads from central Alaska through northwestern Canada to Hudson Bay. These are Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Upper Tanana (Tahltan is spoken only in northern British Columbia). Tlingit, which is distantly related to the Athapaskan sub-family, is spoken in parts of British Columbia and southern Yukon. Inuit, which is from a separate language family, is spoken along the Yukon's north coast.

[From the Yukon Native Language Centre [www.ynlc.ca](http://www.ynlc.ca)]

The language map (at right) shows the areas traditionally occupied by speakers of Yukon Native Languages. In reality the boundaries are not clearly defined, and there is overlap of languages into neighbouring regions. The Athapaskan languages are distantly related to Tlingit, but not related to the Inuit language (shown here in blue).

## Language Boundaries

It is important to understand a number of things about language when discussing their boundaries – as reflected on the map. First, language maps refer to language groups and do not represent political or territorial groups.

*Boundaries between language groups are only approximate. The lines are never as firm or as clear as they appear on maps. ... No map made at the present time can be completely accurate for earlier periods.*

Second, these language groups refer to distinct languages – not dialects of one common language. They are as different from each other as English and French.

*For a long time many outsiders had the incorrect idea that all Yukon First Nations spoke one language. This led to serious communication problems as well as errors on maps. A map of Native Peoples of Canada, widely circulated [by the Federal government] gave one term – 'Kutchin' – for the Yukon, as though all Native peoples in the Territory spoke one language. The word 'Kutchin' is an attempt to write the name of the language spoken in Old Crow (now written Gwich'in). ... In the Tutchone language, 'Kutchin' sounds like an entirely different word ... meaning 'cloud people' – the word Tutchone speakers use for 'white man'. [Rachel Dawson] used to comment wryly, 'White men come here and take our land. Isn't that enough? Then they use our language to write 'white man' on the Yukon map!'*

Third, linguistic terms were devised by outsiders. Newcomers wrote them down over 100 years ago by asking people where they came from and writing down what they heard. This is not a useful question for a highly mobile group of people.

*... elders [do not] consider their place of birth a particularly meaningful way to refer to themselves. Asked where he was born, Johnny Johns always used to smile and say, 'I was born under a tree.' People travelled [continually] so speakers of any one language might move, marry, or travel to other parts of what is now Yukon.*

People were more likely to identify with their relatives or clan rather than with a territorial group.

[Reading Voices, Julie Cruikshank]

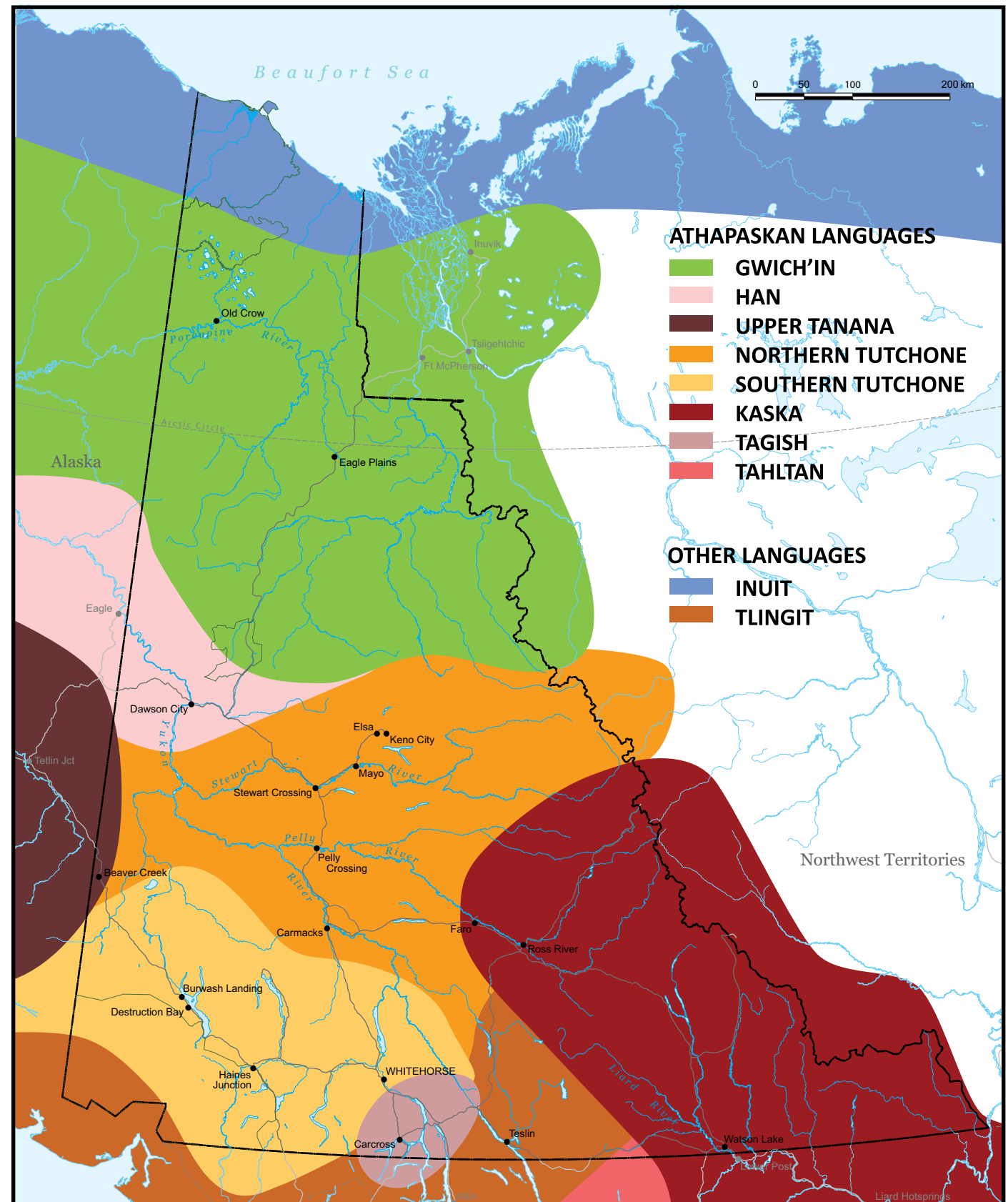
## When Should People Speak?

Language and speech have rules of behaviour associated with them. It can take years of living within a culture to truly understand these rules. In every culture around the world people have ideas about what defines polite speech. For example there are usually rules that guide who speaks first when two people meet and there are rules for judging a good speaker.

Long ago there were rules about when people should not speak. Certain relatives – a man and his mother-in-law, grown up brothers and sisters – were either forbidden to speak to each other or were only to speak to each other when it was a matter of survival. This was a sign of respect. Newcomers assumed that people who did not speak to each other were angry. On the other hand many First Nations people felt that white people spoke too much, were bossy, and talked about taboo topics.

[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]

# YUKON NATIVE LANGUAGES



## Languages along the Yukon: Whitehorse to Dawson City Southern Tutchone

Southern Tutchone, one of seven Athapaskan languages in the Yukon, is spoken in the south-western part of the territory. Their traditional areas ranged from the Teslin River in the east to the White River in the west, and from the lower Tatshenshini in the south to the Nisling River in the north. Today there are settlements at Aishihik, Burwash Landing, Champagne, Haines Junction, Kloo Lake, Klukshu, Lake Laberge and Whitehorse.

### Documentation and Literacy

The first systematic notation of the language was by Daniel Tlen, a Burwash native. He returned to his home community in the 1970's after studying linguistics at the University of Victoria and began recording relatives and friends. Assisted by Jessie Joe, Mary Jacquot, Copper Lilly Johnson and Lena Johnson, he compiled language lessons, a basic noun dictionary, and a collection of stories and songs in Southern Tutchone.

### School Programs

There are or have been seven Southern Tutchone elementary school programs in the Yukon, at Kluane Lake School in Destruction Bay, at St Elias School in Haines Junction, and in Whitehorse at Elijah Smith, Takhini, Hidden Valley, Selkirk and Whitehorse Elementary schools. There is a secondary school Southern Tutchone program in Haines Junction, and Southern Tutchone language and culture courses are given in Whitehorse at Porter Creek and FH Collins.

[Yukon Native Language Centre, [www.ynlc.ca](http://www.ynlc.ca)]

## Northern Tutchone

Northern Tutchone is spoken in the Yukon communities of Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Stewart Crossing, Carmacks, and Beaver Creek. The traditional harvesting areas of the Northern Tutchone people included the McQuesten and Stewart Rivers in the north, the White river in the east, the Big Salmon drainage in the south and the Selwyn Mountains to the east.

### Research and Documentation

Early documentation of the Northern Tutchone language was carried out in the 1890's by Arch-

## Yukon Native Language Centre

People are working actively to teach, document, and enhance their languages. The Yukon Native Language Centre was established by the Council for Yukon Indians in 1977, and over the years it has developed writing systems for the languages and trained people to read, write, and teach languages. The Centre also sponsors adult literacy classes and works cooperatively with schools and First Nations in developing language teaching curricula. It publishes dictionaries and compiles collections of stories and place names. At Yukon College in Whitehorse, the Centre offers Certificate and Diploma programs for Native Language Instructors, both developed in response to the growing need for teachers and instructional programs and materials.

[Yukon Native Language Centre [www.ynlc.ca](http://www.ynlc.ca)]

deacon Thomas Canham, a Church of England missionary who was based for several years at Fort Selkirk. Canham published a short Wood Indian Dictionary in 1898, but the bulk of his translations and linguistic notes remain in manuscript form. Literacy Workshops for Northern Tutchone have been held since 1984.

### School Programs

There have been Northern Tutchone school programs in Mayo, Pelly Crossing and Carmacks for more than a dozen years. The Beaver Creek school program began in 1998. There is also a preschool program in Carmacks.

## Hän

The Hän language is spoken in two communities: Dawson City, Yukon and Eagle, Alaska. The speakers of the language are called Hän Hwëch'in which means, "people who live along the (Yukon) River." Hän is closely related to the Gwich'in and Upper Tanana languages. Some older Hän speakers can read the Gwich'in orthography of Robert McDonald and use his Tukudh Bible and prayer book.

In Dawson City a handful of fluent speakers remain. The rapid decline of the language in this region is due in large part to the dramatic changes brought by the flood of outsiders with the Gold Rush of 1898. There are more speakers in Eagle and Fairbanks, Alaska, but probably fewer than fifteen. Recently, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in have been working actively to bring back the language and traditional

songs. In these efforts they rely on their own elders as well as residents of Eagle, Fairbanks and other Alaskan communities.

The Hän Language program has been in operation since 1991 at Robert Service School in Dawson City. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government sponsors an adult language class.

### Jënezhu k'è hënihe?

#### Do you speak Hän?

Good morning. - K'amänt hozo.

Good afternoon. - Drin tätl'ät dähozo.

Good evening. - Khäwts'ä' hozo.

Good night. - Tät hozo.

How are you? - Nänjit dähonch'e?

I am fine. - Shänjit hozo.

Take care of yourself. - Hozo k'anàcha.

I will see you again. - Näntëne in.

Thanks. - Mähsi.

Big thanks. - Mähsi cho.

### Dän k'í huninjia?

#### Do you speak Northern Tutchone?

Good morning. - K'ámbé' sothän.

Good afternoon. - Dzyan tétl'ät sothän.

Good evening. - Inyā tondru dochi.

Good night. - Tondru sothän.

How are you? - Inyā dochi?

I am fine. - E-yan sothän.

Take care of yourself. - Sothän in-ya inganota.

I will see you again. - In-ya nōnōchí.

Thanks. - Musi.

Big thanks. - Musi cho.

### Dän k'e kwinjea?

#### Do you speak Southern Tutchone?

Good morning. - Intl-eyù shäkwathän.

Good day. - Dzenų shäkwathän.

Good evening. - Jadakhel shäkwathän.

How are you? - Dännch'a?

I am well. - Shäw itj.

Take good care of yourself. - Shäwthän däk'anntà.

See you later. - Nānenüch'i shj.

Thanks. - Shäw nithän.



# FYI: Language

## Key Messages

There are nine aboriginal languages used in Yukon, eight of them belonging to the large Na-Dene language family. Seven are from the Athapaskan sub-family, which spreads from central Alaska through northwestern Canada to Hudson Bay. These are Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Upper Tanana. Tlingit, which is distantly related to the Athapaskan sub-family, is spoken in parts of British Columbia and southern Yukon. Inuit, which is from a separate language family, is spoken along the Yukon's north coast.

Language maps refer to language groups and do not represent political or territorial groups.

Language groups refer to distinct languages – not dialects of one common language. They are as different from each other as English and French.

Language and speech have rules of behaviour associated with them. It can take years of living within a culture to truly understand these rules.

Long ago there were rules about when people should not speak. Certain relatives – a man and his mother-in-law, grown up brothers and sisters – were either forbidden to speak to each other or were only to speak to each other when it was a matter of survival. This was a sign of respect.

## Telling the Story

Use the language map in this manual to show the language groups and explain the different families. Note which language each First Nation speaks.

Use First Nations place names when traveling along the river.

Teach guests how to greet people and say thank you in various languages. Encourage them to use these words while traveling the river.

## Study Questions

How many aboriginal languages are spoken in Yukon? What are they?

Why is it so difficult to place boundaries on language groups?

What are some traditional rules for speaking?

How do you say “good afternoon/day” in Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, and Hän?

How do you say “thank you” in Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, and Hän?

## People of Note: Whitehorse to Dawson City

Long ago there were special people in each First Nation group including leaders, elders, “Indian Doctors”, midwives, healers, and traders. Each of these people performed special duties for the group. Information from the recent past about a few of these individuals gives us a glimpse into the lives of the people who live along the Yukon River. The following highlights a few of these people, though there were and are many more who have left their mark on the story of the Yukon.

### Chief Jim Boss, Kashxoot Ta'an Kwäch'än



Chief Jim Boss, or Kashxóot, is one of the best known Ta'an Kwäch'än chiefs. He was a member of the Wolf clan and was son of Mundessa (chief at Lake Laberge at the outset of the Gold Rush) and his wife

Łande (a woman of the Dakl'aweidí Clan from the Tagish area). Jim Boss married Kathleen Kitty. They had one son named Fred. Jim Boss married again and had four children with his second wife, Maude. These children are Alice, David, Lena, and Ned. He was married a third time to Annie. They had two children, Agnes and Sam.

Chief Jim Boss was the first Yukon leader to initiate talks with Government to protect First Nations lands. In 1900 he petitioned Canada to establish a reserve at a traditional village site near Horse Creek. The reserve was locally known as Russian Town and Jim Boss Town.

In 1902, Chief Boss, with the assistance of a lawyer, wrote to the Canadian government seeking compensation for the hardships his people had suffered as a result of the influx of strangers into their country.

*Tell the King very hard that we want something for our Indians because they take our land and our game.*

#### Chief Jim Boss

Chief Jim Boss was one of the most outspoken Yukon leaders of his time. His letter to Canada is considered the first of many actions which eventually led to First Nations self-government in Yukon. Chief Jim Boss passed away in 1950.

[Ta'an Kwäch'än: People of the Lake]

### People of National Historic Significance

In 2008 Chief Jim Boss was designated as a Person of National Historic Significance by the Government of Canada. The following press release discusses this historic day.

LAKE LABERGE, YUKON, August 23, 2008 -- On behalf of Canada's Environment Minister John Baird, Parks Canada and Chief Ruth Massie, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, today unveiled a Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque to commemorate the national historical significance of hereditary Chief Jim Boss of the Ta'an Kwäch'än. The ceremony took place at Helen's fish camp, to honour Chief Jim Boss as part of the historic fabric of the Canadian North.

“Our government is proud to honour a man who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of his people and preserve First Nation land and culture through changing times,” said Minister Baird. “With today's commemoration, we take another step in bringing the national historic significance of Chief Jim Boss to all Canadians.”

Hereditary Chief Jim Boss, of the Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nation, was one of the first Yukon Aboriginal leaders to recognize the importance of preserving the land and its resources for his people. He is remembered for having initiated the first Yukon land claim in the year 1902. His leadership allowed the First Nations, from the southern region of the Yukon, to make the transition from a traditional way of life to a Euro-Canadian economy. Throughout his lifetime, Chief Jim Boss was an influential and outspoken leader whose insight helped guide the Yukon First Nations.

“It has always been important to our people that Chief Jim Boss be recognized and commemorated for his foresight to look after his people in our homelands forever. Chief Jim Boss was a visionary leader,” said Chief Massie.

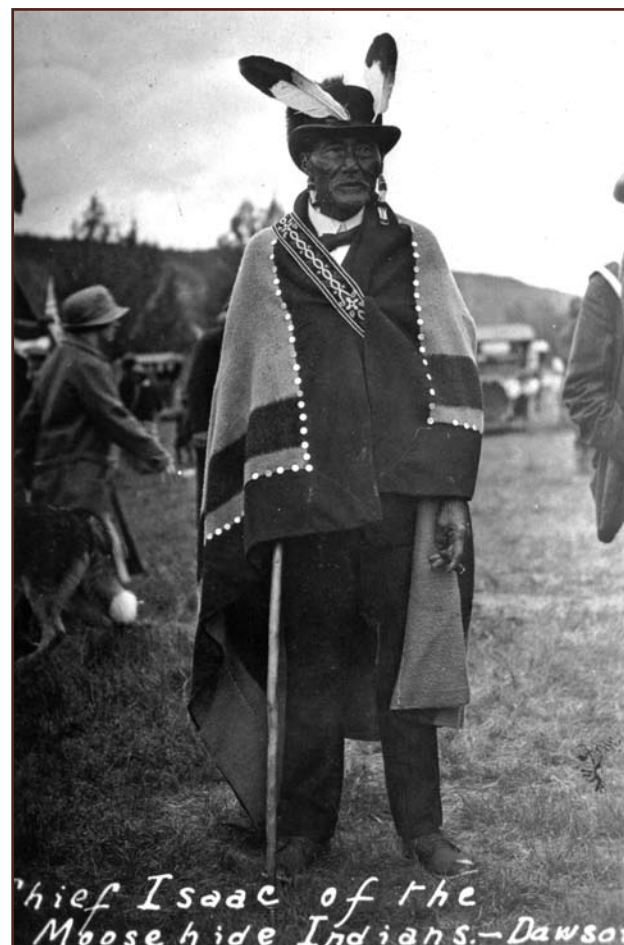
[From <http://nationtalk.ca>]

### Chief Isaac, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in

The most influential leader of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in was Chief Isaac. He led the Hän people from some time before the gold rush until his death in 1932. In many ways, he was a bridge between the old ways and the new. He acted as a go-between for his people and the newcomers, and later between the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Canadian government.

He was skilled in the traditions of his people, but was also very interested in the different ways and technologies introduced by the newcomers. It was with his consent and cooperation that the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in moved to Moosehide. It has been suggested that one reason Chief Isaac was appointed at this critical time was because of his command of English and ability to negotiate with the newcomers.

Elders agree that he came from the “Alaska side” although there is no clear consensus of exactly where. Suggestions include the Upper Tanana area, Ketchumstock, Tanacross and Chena. He married



his wife Eliza and joined the people at the mouth of the Klondike River. The couple had 13 children, only four of whom survived to adulthood. They were Patricia Lindgren, Angela Lopaschuck, Charlie Isaac and Fred Isaac.

*Tall, slender, sinewy and muscular, he was of superior physical proportions, and time also proved him as well endowed mentally. His friendliness to the whites, dating back to the days of the Russian occupation of the Yukon and Alaska, and his influence with other Indians, went far toward smoothing the way for prospectors, traders, trappers, missionaries and others who pioneered the Northland. Those who knew Chief Isaac well agree that, had he been a white man with opportunities for education, combined with his natural ability and personality, he would have proved to be an extraordinary figure in most any walk of life.*

*The Alaska Weekly, 15 April 1932*

Chief Isaac was respected by Dawson residents who named him an honorary member of the Yukon Order of Pioneers. A skilled orator, he frequently spoke at Dawson celebrations such as Discovery Day and Victoria Day as well as at the festivities of his own people. Two themes recurred during these addresses. While Isaac welcomed the newcomers, he never failed to remind them that they prospered at the expense of the original inhabitants by driving away their game and taking over their land. He also had a very firm view of appropriate spheres of activity for both the newcomers and the First Nations people. One oft-repeated statement was that since the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in refrained from doing white men's jobs like mining; the white people should likewise refrain from activities such as hunting and fishing that deprived the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in of their livelihood.

Chief Isaac died of influenza on April 9th, 1932 at age 73. Two white horses pulled the wagon bearing his coffin over the river ice to Moosehide.

[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Interpretive Manual, Chief Isaac, Helene Dobrowolsky]

### Frank Slim, Kwanlin Dün

Born in 1898 at Marsh Lake, Frank Slim was the only Yukon First Nations person to earn captain's papers; to do so required some sacrifice. At that time, according to the discriminatory provisions of Canada's Indian Act, people had to give up rights that came with official Indian status in order to vote, own a big game guiding business or, as in this case, become a captain. For over 30 years, Slim guided steamboats up and down the major rivers of B.C., Alaska and the Yukon. In 1960, he had the honour of piloting the Keno on its last voyage from Whitehorse to Dawson. Frank Slim and his many accomplishments have been honoured

in the Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame at the Yukon Transportation Museum. Captain Frank Slim passed away in 1973.

*Kwanlin Dün elders still recall the excitement and pride they felt, as children, whenever they spotted Captain Frank Slim piloting a boat.*

*Back to the River, Kwanlin Dün*

The building in Shipyards Park in Whitehorse that houses the Yukon Made Store and Fireweed Market Kitchen has been named the Frank Slim Building.

## Big Jonathan

Historic records and personal accounts from the 19th century note that the Selkirk people had two chiefs at a time. Elders claim that this reflected the large amount of work they had to do. This may have been unique to the Selkirk First Nation although today some First Nations have an elected chief and a hereditary chief.

In 1984, Elder Tommy McGinty described how chiefs were chosen.

The camp divides into Crow and Wolf people and they form two lines facing one another. Everyone takes a turn and says who he wants for chief. They take a vote with sticks and the two men who win the most sticks are elected. The group then goes up and shakes hands with and then stands behind the one they want for first chief. The man with the lesser support becomes second chief. McGinty says the chief position was to some extent hereditary in

that the old chief chose the candidates for new chief from among his relatives.

In the early 1900s one of Selkirk's chiefs was Big Jonathan. Big Jonathan was born on the Yukon River just across from Big Creek around 1858. There was a First Nation camp there long before contact and it was called Et so ah tut meaning "lots of things happen there". Big Jonathan was from the Crow clan. Big Jonathan married Susan in 1901. She was wolf clan and her name was Ne in ja meaning "girl". Big Jonathan and Susan had seven children: Sam (born 1902), Selina (died young), Jackson (born 1910), Margaret, Elijah (died young), Martha and Stan.

Many of the powerful Northern Tutchone chiefs were also great doctors and their knowledge of medicine and spiritual matters enhanced their status and influence as chief. Big Jonathan was a powerful doctor.

Big Jonathan took over one of the Field Force buildings at Fort Selkirk in 1902. The Big Jonathan House Cultural Centre in Pelly is a reproduction. The original building still stands at Fort Selkirk and Elders tell stories of the big celebrations and potlatches held there in older times.

Big Jonathan died on August 14, 1958 at the Mayo hospital. His grave is located on a hill overlooking Minto and can be seen from the highway.

[From interviews with Margaret Simon, Martha Silas, Stan Jonathan and Harry Baum at Pelly Crossing in 1987; and from Ruth M. Gotthardt, *Selkirk Indian Band: Culture and Land Use Study*. Final Report. October 28, 1987.



## FYI: People

### Key Messages

Long ago there were special people in each First Nation group including leaders, elders, "Indian Doctors", midwives, healers, and traders. Each of these people performed special duties for the group.

Chief Jim Boss, or Kashxóot, is one of the best known Ta'an Kwäch'än chiefs. Chief Jim Boss was the first Yukon leader to initiate talks with Government to protect First Nations lands.

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Frank Slim was the only Yukon First Nations person to earn captain's papers. For over 30 years, Slim guided steamboats up and down the major rivers of B.C., Alaska and the Yukon. In 1960, he had the honour of piloting the Keno on its last voyage from Whitehorse to Dawson. Frank Slim and his many accomplishments have been honoured in the Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame at the Yukon Transportation Museum.

Big Jonathan was the Chief of the Selkirk First Nation in the early 1900s. Many of the Northern Tutchone chiefs were great doctors and their knowledge of medicine and spiritual matters enhanced their status and influence as chief. Big Jonathan was a powerful doctor.

### Telling the Story

When at Lake Laberge share the story of Chief Jim Boss. Explain his role in the future land claims process.

As you travel toward Dawson City explain Chief Isaac's role during the Gold Rush. Make note of how Chief Isaac spoke out for the hunting rights of his people.

As you pass abandoned sternwheelers speak about Frank Slim and the sacrifices he made to become a captain.

While at Fort Selkirk be sure to visit Big Jonathan House.

## Study Questions

Why do people consider Chief Jim Boss as the first leader to initiate land claims in Yukon?

Why was Chief Isaac a good choice as leader of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in during the Gold Rush?

What did Frank Slim sacrifice to become a sternwheeler captain?

Where is the Frank Slim building located?

How were Chiefs chosen in the Fort Selkirk area long ago?

## Personal Accounts

### Life on the Yukon River: Whitehorse to Dawson City

Countless people have made their lives on the Yukon River. Their stories give us a first-hand view of what that life would have been like in the past as well as a snapshot of what life on the river is like today. This section includes quotes and excerpts from a variety of First Nations people from the older days to the present. It is not organized according to theme, time, or community. Rather it is a random selection of words and conversations focusing on the Yukon River and on the experiences of First Nations people. Some selections are short. Some selections are long. They all provide insight into the lives of the people of the river.

Additional accounts and/or full oral histories have not been included here due to space requirements. See *Where to Find More Information* at the end of this section for further research.

Imagine you are fortunate enough to be sitting around a campfire with a group of Yukon First Nations people – young and old. Everyone has settled down after a delicious meal of salmon, moose, bannock, and berries. The younger people have prepared tea and served it to the elders – and to you as their honoured guest. You are new to this country and people are excited to share information about their lives with you.

*I'm going to tell you another story ...* Phyllis Vittrekwa

#### Quotes excerpted from *Back to the River: Celebrating Our Culture, Kwanlin Dün First Nation*

*We used to go fishing at M'Clintock, lots of fish and make big party at Marsh Lake. [In Whitehorse] there was not much houses, lots of tents. There was just three stores, Taylor and Drury, Jack Sewell's and I forget the other one. They sell groceries, anything, clothes. There used to be not many people that time, white people. My brother, Frank Slim, he worked on the boats. He carry freight.*

Lily Kane

*My parents told me a long time ago, in the gold rush days, you'd have to go a long way to hunt. They cleared all the game around towns and where the routes people took to Dawson. No way you could find your own meat. Wasn't canned goods in those days. Had to live off the land.*

Ronald Bill

*I listened to Dad and Mom. It is good to have a mother that tells you lots. My dad was pretty good. Raised me good... Miles Canyon there. It is beautiful. Indian people had trails everywhere. Salmon close to shore. I worked by the river and used to see salmon right close. Before that dam, on Whitehorse side there was an Indian camp by railroad tracks.*

Louie Smith

*That old chief of Lake Laberge would get salmon before Whitehorse. Set fish trap there by island, some small place, a fish wheel – an Indian fish trap. He'd get tourists to take pictures of fish heads being cooked right there in front of him. Tourists would pay \$50. That was really good money then. He did that for about two, five years. Every year in July he would do it. He died there and they buried him on the hill my dad told me.*

Louie Smith

*People came from Carmacks, Big Salmon and set up camps by shipyards. In the summer, lots of Indian people around. In the fall they'd go back. That's what we used to do. The Yukon River meant a lot to Indian people.*

Louie Smith

*We used to be able to just pick up, or Dad would anyways pick up his gun, and go for a walk down the tracks, towards Sleepy Hollow, around the pond where Wal-Mart is now. He would hunt beaver, ducks, and if we saw gopher we would get them too. And Mom would come with us and she would be picking mushrooms as we walked. It was just out your back door really.*

Barbara Fred

*We lived out in the bush at an early age. People had a lot to eat. It was depression days, but it didn't really affect the First Nations because they lived in the bush. They just buy sugar, tea, rice, things like that. When people killed moose, they shared a lot of stuff.*

Ronald Bill

*I don't recall anybody drowning. We were taught to have a lot of respect for the river. We skipped rocks, met people, and swam in the river.*

Pat Joe

*Us kids used to play down at the riverbank. There was an old, old steamboat, just the skeleton left on the shores there. First Nations people tell us not to go down there because the water made the boards slippery. But we'd go there when no one was watching and there was little tiny fish, I'd say not even an inch long. And us kids used to steal Momma's hair net and we used to go down there and pretend we were fishing and we'd catch those little fish in Mom's hair net.*

Evalena Beisser

*It's when we didn't have anything we were happy. When we could go out in the bush, hunt or whatever. We didn't have lots of money. We didn't know what beef steak was or pork chops or boiled potatoes. We were happy.*

Leonard Gordon Sr

*For a kid at that age it was kind of a magical place. There was tons to explore and adventures to have. The riverboats used to go up and along there and we used to go and find old bottles along the shore and just pieces of stuff. They were like treasures to us at the time... We did all kinds of things, we swam down there in them days against our parents' warnings. We used to go up there by where 20/20 used to be and jump off in the water, let the current take us down, we'd ride the currents... At that time it was a really tight community. Everybody knew each other, everybody took care of each other.*

Phil Gatensby

*For First Nations people, living by the water is very spiritual because it gives us a lot. If I'm feeling down I go to the water and I sit for awhile and collect all my thoughts. I pray near the water. This is what really draws us to the water. We are part of the water. We get our food from the water. We quench our thirst from the water. We are born into the world from water. We receive our life by water.*

Emma Shorty

*I have to row my boat across every day to get to work. It made me strong. Me and Daisy Hall, we fold sheets and stuff, pillowcases for the boats. There was lots of Indian people who work there. I worked there 'til the boat finished; after that I got a job in a restaurant.*

Margaret Peterson

*I really miss it, wish it was long time ago again. Lot of moose, lot of fish. Everything. I never see anything like that again. Lot of dry meat. My grandmother dry meat, dry salmon, everything. Gee I'm hungry now. We help each other out lots. Some kill moose, invite everybody go up and*

*everybody get meat.*

Kitty Smith

A real important thing is our life here now for many thousands of years. The waterfront is real important to Indians. The water comes from the mountain clean down to ocean. Salmon come up. That's the reason when you go down to Carmacks with your boats, you see trails come down like that, for the fish. Used to load salmon up, I don't know how many tons. Pile them right up. Salmon were running there. That's where they used to dry salmon for everybody who traveled distances.

Johnnie Smith

*I know the stories about the way we used to live along the Yukon River. Right from the top of the mountain where the water comes down, right to the ocean. Indians got rights to the river to fish. It is where we catch our salmon. That's why waterfront is real important to us. To our people, our history, grandma, grandpa. We're part of the river.*

Johnnie Smith

### Quotes from Tr'ondek Hwech'in Archives

*I bet you ten layers of salmon going up drying, and part of my job when I was kid was to flip the salmon on the rack, the, just so they would dry the other side, and these salmon would be used for dog food so they weren't too worried about you know putting the smoke under it to keep it, flies off of it and stuff. (Laughter) One the memories was I used to start at the bottom, start flipping the salmon over and by that time it was the hot sun and the blow fly and the maggots would be on it and I could remember them dripping down on me while I was turning the salmon when I was a kid, I hated that job (laughter). But it was like a lookout too cause I remember climbing up there when I was a kid and I loved to climb right to the top and I would watch for boats coming down or um watch for moose up at the islands cause I know when we spotted a moose, we would roar off to go and hunt it. Back then, there're probably seasons but we just hunted when we needed meat, we didn't really think about anything else, when we needed moose we went out and got a moose basically cause that's what we ate, salmon and moose.*

John Flynn

*And salmon was running so heavy back then that there was times he would have to shut the wheel down because he couldn't keep up with the cutting, he would just have to shut it down, there was too*

*much salmon, buckets being . . . , we had ah holding um bins at either side of the wheel and they'd just be filled, filled right up with salmon, and so we would have to, he'd just close the wheel down.*

John Flynn

*I think it's part of our heritage, I mean that was a fish camp, and it was very important to my family, and to everybody that kinda related that lived there, I mean, it was a ah, gathering point, I think it's a symbol of healthier times, I mean times are better now, but we went through a period when it was very unhealthy and Twelve Mile was always like, you know, just some place to go and get away from everything.*

John Flynn

*And, my younger days, there was, never hear such a thing as Indian Affairs or welfare – I never heard of those things. Because our welfare is the land.*

Percy Henry

*What my old man told me was that the people had fish traps at the mouth of the Klondike River, way before the white people came to this country. They used spears and it was a long skinny stick. They put a sharp bone on the end of the stick. When the salmon comes up, the people speared it. They threw them, the salmon to shore. The women were busy carrying fish and everybody shared.*

Stanley Roberts

*Well when I was young, I started hustling around for something to eat so I make my own dipping net. In the spring after the river goes out I build a little campfire down on the beach, boy I could see the fish ripples and then dip fish net all night and catch humpback, white fish, shee fish, sucker, grayling but when I catch a white [ling?] cod, I'd throw it back in the river and then later on sometime I dip fish, I mean king salmon... when the dog salmon come, we call it dog salmon, one time me and my brother ... take turns dipping dog salmon, well we got forty in two hours with a dip net.*

Tim Malcolm

*Our family would move across the river to go fishing... So we would go and live there for the rest of the summer. For me it was just play time, but to them it is work, like, preparing the winter. To get enough provisions, start gathering and smoking fish. Setting up camp first, getting established across the river there. We start fixing up their tables, and start fixing up their fish racks where they would smoke their fish. And also I remember that he [Uncle Jimmy Wood] always got chicken wire.*

*He spread that across the posts. That is how he dried his fish eggs. The eggs that come in the female fish, he would dry them on the rack by the sun. ...And then we would build some smokehouse for drying fish. We would just slap together tin roof with a screen around it so that they could start smoking fish. They not only smoke fish, they also tan skin there too.*

Martha Kates

*One time... my uncle and myself, and my brother Herbie, and I got a younger brother named Freddie, we got on the boat with my uncle. About five o'clock in the morning I guess. We went to check his fish wheel. So he would take us in a boat. We just covered ourselves up in canvas. You know how the water splash over the boat? We had no life jackets, nothing... Sometimes we would have motor on his boat, sometime just use the oars to go to his fish wheel... So we travelled from our fish camp, go past the boats, those big steamboats, go past there and way past Sister Island to that Dog Island. Between Dog Island and that mountain in the back. In there, that's where he had his fish wheel. In the currents there. This one time, like I say, the three of us was with him, and he's got big fish box on the side of the fish wheel there. There is a box there, and when that wheel turns, the fish would go into that box. So he got us to help him take all of the fish out. Let's see, we would be about, oh God, about six maybe. My brother would be four. My other brother would be eight or nine probably... He asked us to help him to unload the fish from the box, and put it in the, they got tubs, tubs of water. I don't know where he gets that ice, ... they pick up snow or something. There is ice in the tubs anyway. That is where he would put all of the fish. So somewhere, at about that time, we took pictures. Don't know where those pictures are now, but he took pictures of the three of us helping him with the fish. Fish are sometimes bigger than we are!*

Martha Kates

*Anyway, those little fish [suckers], he would take it to camp so that could practice cutting fish...So what he does, he got big table, a couple of big table together. And it has got tablecloth, something clean all the time. The thing was always spick and span. And how many tubs he has beside him, and they really clean their fish. Anyway, he would bring all of this fish in, after we were done at the fish wheel. We would travel back up the river. All of these fish, our boat was pretty low. There were four or five tubs he has taken. And bring it back up to the fish camp. And my mother and my sisters, and my aunties and whoever is available there, would help unload all of the fish, and they would start cutting the fish. So us little kids, you know how they get into things. So with that sucker, they would teach us how to cut, like watch them cutting the salmon, we would do the same with that sucker. So what we do is*

cut off the head first, and slice it right down from the belly to the neck or the neck to the belly. Then we would cut off this part (rectum). Yes, they cut that part off, and then we have to put our hand in there and pull out all of the fish guts and all that stuff... We used to take the stomach from the salmon and blow it up like a balloon. We'd fill it up with water and throw it at each other. But we were taught then not to play with our food, so get right back doing more fish. Like I say, we clear the guts out, and then after we clean the guts, everything cleaned up. Then we had to fillet it. That was hard when you are a little kid too. Try to concentrate and yet you want to play. We had to fillet it, and it was sometimes slippery and you couldn't hold it because your five-year-old hands are tiny. Otherwise, if you don't do it, they do it. Show us how, they cut the backbone out. And the back bone, they usually keep it for dog food, or they use it to eat. Not one part of the fish is wasted, except for on the gills...They use the fish head, everything. After we finish we cutting that little fish, like I say, they show us how to cut the fish in slits and then hole in the middle. The reason they put that hole in the middle is so that the grease from the fish would run out... Salmon, they say, is quite rich in fat, I guess. In order to get rid of that salmon oil, they cut the slits. I think they cut it horizontal first, then they make the hole down in between... so all the oil would run out. And they don't cut the tail off. I remember they left the tail on, and they put it over the drying rack. And then from there they start smoking. This is not two or three fishes ... we used to get an abundance of fish... Sometimes they get fifty, sometimes a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty. It depends, and not one fish go to waste. ... the head also they clean it, and they eat the head too. But they dry it. They dry the head and the backbone. Sometimes they use that for dog feed in the winter, if they don't have enough food for the dogs, they use that in the winter. ... After finish cleaning all the fish, like I say, some go in the drying rack, some goes, whatever they got left, they take it into town to the hospital. They provide hospital with fresh king salmon. Provide the cafes with salmon, and provide...the individuals who live in town. They share, they share quite a bit of what they get.

Martha Kates

...it is one of the happiest times. Life after our work is done, we live not too far from the creek too, eh. After we are done, you know, playing around trying to cut fish and stuff, there was a little pond not too far. When it rained, there was a pond there. We used to go in there and be full of mud, trying to learn how to swim, dirty and everything. And there's that creek running by our place, our tent, behind. We had to walk to that creek to clean up. That's the part we don't like. But getting all muddy and dirty, our hair

looked... Imagine long hair with mud...Mud babies. But we used to enjoy ourselves, all of the kids that went across. The Henrys used to go, and the Josephs, us and the Semples. We used to have fun. And at nights, my brother and my sister used to play guitar. So after work, you know how kids are a hard time to be put to bed, eh? Sometimes we have to go to sleep six-thirty every night, but sometimes we get to stay up and my sister Sara, my brother Edward, and my cousin Daniel Simon, we used to sit around. While they're smoking fish, you know those little strips they cut off the belly? We used to roast that over the fire, same time as the potatoes are baking and they would sing. Sing all the time.

Martha Kates

In the old days steamers ran every day down the river. Really expensive. They had to pay wood, captain, cook, deckhands. Steamers all used wood. The woodman got people to cut wood. Then they haul that wood up to town of Dawson and load on steamers. Lots of wood camps, up rivers, up creeks. Little Dave told my husband to look after woodcamp at Eight Mile Creek, below Moosehide. It was maybe 1940s. We were there nine years. Lots of good berries there – blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, highbush berries, black currants. We have fish trap just up creek from wood camp. Lots of moose, caribou near there.

Mary McLeod

I used to scrape skin too when I was a kid. When I growing up, I work like heck, help my mother all the time, she working like heck all the time. . . I get her all the wood anyways, that she want, water. All the chores there for me, it's no wonder I run around all over the darn bush, everytime I go in the bush I just like it. Go anywhere when I was young, any place I want to go, I just go.

Edward Roberts

## **A Journey Back in Time: First Nations Perspectives and Experiences along the Yukon River**

# The Yukon River Highway

*The arrival of newcomers and the building of the White Pass railway and Alaska Highway all caused great changes to the way our people lived. Some families continued to follow the seasons, hunting and trapping. Often their travels took them back through the Whitehorse waterfront. Here they were welcomed into homes by family and old friends. No matter how difficult the changes, First Nations people continued to come together to help and support each other.*

Back to the River, Kwanlin Dün First Nation

For generations First Nations people used the Yukon River and its tributaries as a highway system allowing them to move about seasonally, by watercraft in the summer months and by foot with snowshoes and pack dogs – later dog teams – in the winter. Newcomers also used the Yukon River to travel and move freight around the Territory. Goods moving north would arrive in Whitehorse via the White Pass and Yukon Route (WP&YR) company railway. Supplies and passengers would board the steamboats, or sternwheelers, operating on the Yukon River and head down (or north) to communities along the way. During the gold rush there were up to 100 vessels operating in Yukon. In the early years some entrepreneurs hauled machinery required for sternwheelers over the Chilkoot Pass. They would set up lumber mills and build boats on the headwater lakes.

In 1900 the WP&YR was completed. This development was largely responsible for the establishment and growth of Whitehorse. The town became the “head of navigation” for all freight and passengers en route to the gold fields and all stops in between.

*This rail and river transport system allowed for large-scale industrial mining and freighting materials to construct a modern town.*

[*The Sternwheeler Era*, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## White Pass & Yukon Route Company

In the early 1900s The White Pass and Yukon Route (WPYR) company purchased most of the land which eventually became the City of Whitehorse’s downtown core and waterfront area. As a result, First Nations people living on the property were moved to a small settlement on the east bank of the Yukon River, immediately north of the present Whitehorse General Hospital site. Many First Nations people living there were employed with the White Pass and Yukon Route Company.

In 1912 the WPYR company relocated the First Nation settlement to the west bank of the Yukon River on the flat land area now known as the Robert Service Campground. The move was to eliminate the need for White Pass and Yukon Route to shuttle labour and goods between the two banks. As the First Nation population increased, small communities sprouted along the west bank of the Yukon River from the present-day Robert Service Campground to Kishwoot Island. These communities became known by such colourful names as Whiskey Flats, Moccasin Flats, and Sleepy Hollow.

*People lived there, we go and visit. In summertime they go out hunting. They call it Shakat, Indian way. They kill moose, get gophers and things like that, caribou, sheep, they dry ‘em up. They keep long time. Even fish they dry and keep in gunny sack. They build a cache and store the food in it.* Ronald Bill

## Move from the Waterfront

Throughout the mid-20th century the Kwanlin Dün, who lived in Whiskey Flats, Moccasin Flats, and Sleepy Hollow, were relocated continually as the WP&YR found uses for the land. In the 1960s the federal government chose to locate the SS Klondike in South Whiskey Flats and the City of Whitehorse cleared North Whiskey Flats to create Rotary Park.

*They pulled up with a bulldozer and the rest of the people were packing up ... They parked the bulldozer there and said, ‘Well, we’re going to take this land whether you move or not. So you better take what you got and move on.’ Not knowing where we’re going to go, not knowing what we’re going to do. But my mother knew of a cabin years back, out in McCrae. I watched our house got bulldozed, I watched all the other people, their house bulldozed into swamp.*

*I never forget the people that did it because I didn’t understand. Put hatred in their hearts, not knowing. I didn’t know what to do. Whose land, we never thought. I don’t think anybody knew what was happening to them. They kept moving and moving and moving.*

*When you’re about 13 years old and you put up a garden for your mother, you put up a bird nest on your house, you make the place look nice and you’re a young feller. But when you see a bulldozer, bulldozing things over and you don’t realize nothing, can you say you’re happy or can you say you’ll never forget?* Leonard Gordon Sr.

## Sternwheelers, Steamships, and Riverboats

Many First Nations people took seasonal work in the shipping industry. They worked as deckhands, loading firewood and sacks of silver-lead on the boats; as longshoremen, handling freight on the docks; and as woodcutters, cutting fuel for the ships’ insatiable steam boilers. These seasonal jobs still allowed them to spend much of the year in traditional pursuits, such as fishing, trapping and hunting.

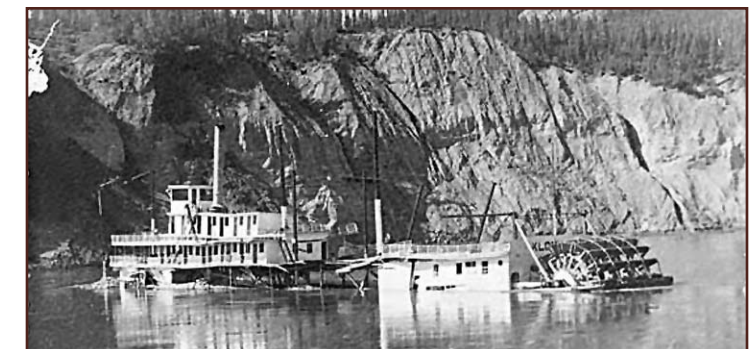
### Captains, Pilots and Deckhands

Most First Nations people who worked on the steamships held labourer positions. They were employed as deckhands and in some cases as pilots. Frank Slim was the only First Nations person to earn his Captain’s papers. See *People of Note* for details on Frank Slim.

Deckhands generally packed wood and loaded and unloaded freight. During World War II Percy Henry and the late Archie Roberts, both Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in citizens, worked as deckhands. They would work 12 hour shifts, loading wood into the boiler or packing wood from the banks of the river to the freight deck during fueling stops. These fueling stops took place at the many woodcamps along the Yukon River.

Percy and Archie recall the early 1940s as a very hectic time to work on the boats. Construction of the Alaskan Highway meant that the boats were delivering men, equipment, and supplies throughout the Yukon. The sternwheelers would even transport tractors and trucks.

*They could load as many as 16 cords in 40 minutes which I think is one of the records. Chuck Beaumont, 1978 from *The Era of Sternwheelers*, Helene Dobrowolsky*



*The wreck of the S. S. Klondike in the Yukon River below Hootalinqua.*

The channels of the Yukon River changed dramatically throughout the season. Captains and pilots had to know how to read the river. First Nations people of course grew up on the Yukon and learned from an early age how to read water. First Nations men would often accompany the captains and pilots in the wheelhouse.

... they helped the pilots. They worked up in the wheelhouse and said 'well, you go down this side and you go down the other side', they showed these Cheechakos where to go. Cheechako is a greenhorn as you know.

Chuck Beaumont, 1978 from *The Era of Sternwheelers*, Helene Dobrowolsky

The most dangerous obstacle on the Yukon River was Five Finger Rapids, located 30 km downriver from Carmacks. The channels were actually widened with explosives, and large winches were installed on shore to guide the huge boats through.

The worst accident of the steamboat era occurred near Ts'äl Cho An (Eagle Rock) in 1906. The steamboat *Columbian* was carrying three tons of blasting powder for Tantalus Mine. Two deck hands were admiring a rifle when it went off and ignited the powder. Several men died, many more were badly injured, and the ship was abandoned to burn.

## SS Klondike - Training Ground for JJ Van Bibber

JJ Van Bibber recounted some of the stories of his early years working on the *SS Klondike* to the Yukon News, October 7, 2005.

*Van Bibber remembers working for Captain Marion ... "He could read water ..." and Marion needed this skill. The SS Klondike ran day and night, using a buoy system to mark turns in the river between Whitehorse and Dawson in the midnight hours. Floodlights on the boat would illuminate the buoys at night. But after Dawson, there were no more buoys. The crew was on its own to navigate the windy Yukon River. "From here to Circle, it's 500 miles. There were no markers, you had to know what you were doing. They used the steamer Klondike. I steered that one, I'm very proud to say." Captain Marion entrusted Van Bibber to steer the boat enough that he'd hand the wheel over to the 21-year old and take a nap in his chair. "I had a heck of a time. That old bugger would fall asleep and we'd come into a jackknife or turn. The barges on the end of the Klondike were pretty long. He'd be*

*sleeping away and I'd be shaking him, trying to wake him up." Marion would calmly wake up, survey the situation and blow the whistle, which would tell the first mate which way to steer the vessel. "He would yawn and look around, 'you're doing alright,' he'd say. It wouldn't bother him at all and I'd be shaking and nervous. At 21 or 22 years old, you're not ready."*

## Wood Camps

Many First Nations people worked along the waterways. Families cut wood to fuel steamboats. At that time, the going rate was two dollars a cord. Others hauled freight for Taylor and Drury or worked to load barges.

Back to the River, Kwanlin Dün First Nation



Woodcutters at C.D. Co. Post No. 8 between Chico and Selkirk, 1900.

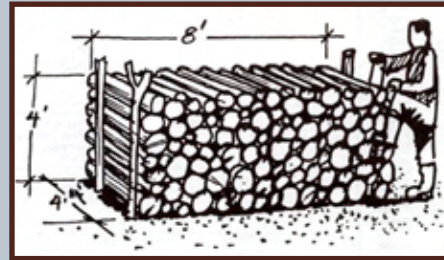
Yukon sternwheelers consumed immense quantities of wood. In 1915, the British Yukon Navigation Company fleet alone burned 8,000 cords of firewood. Every year, First Nations families would move out to work in the wood camps. In the 1930s woodcutters were paid anywhere from \$2 to \$8 per cord, all cut with handsaws. Elder Gertie Tom remembers that "after we cut wood, we got food in exchange. We only worked for food; we didn't ever see any money to speak of. My dad worked really hard to get food for his children".

Many cut wood during the winter which allowed them to live on the land for much of the year. Some cut wood in the summer months, which supplemented their trapping income.

Early in the 20th Century, most of the timber in the Dawson area had been used for mining, building or fuel. An important industry on the Upper Yukon and Pelly Rivers was cutting logs, and then floating them to Dawson City in immense cordwood rafts. Each raft held approximately 100 cords of wood. The trip took about three days and it required great skill to pilot the large awkward structures and avoid getting stranded on gravel bars.

*I brought lots of wood down in my day to Dawson City.*

**A cord** is a stack of four-foot-long logs piled four feet high by eight feet long.



*I sold wood. I cut it in the winter and rafted it down in the summertime. For twelve years I worked for myself... I made a lot of money. I cut sixty cords of dry wood and rafted down to Dawson. Lots of people in Whitehorse and Dawson at that time. They had no oil stoves. We took wood by big rafts, seven sections long. Four men worked altogether on the raft. I took maybe two or three rafts every summer to Dawson. I had a boat with a six-cylinder motor. I beat the steamboat up all the time. I passed it all the time.*

Johnny Tom Tom in *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*

The late Dave Roberts, a Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elder, claimed that the hardest part of the trip was landing in the eddy at the mouth of the Klondike River. Small boats would come out to assist the crew. The pilot had a 15cm margin to catch the eddy. Otherwise the raft would be swept downstream.

Sternwheelers continued to supply a network of communities and trading posts along the Yukon River and its tributaries until the early 1950s when the Klondike Highway was constructed. Large amounts of supplies could now be easily transported by road in all seasons, so the large, expensive riverboats were no longer needed. The end of the sternwheeler era meant the end of the woodcamp era as well. As a result many river settlements were abandoned and this way of life ended for First Nations people.

From :

*The Sternwheeler Era*, Helene Dobrowolsky

*Nothing Is As Certain As Change*, Yukon Archives online exhibit

*Back to the River: Celebrating Our Culture*, Kwanlin Dün First Nation

And:

<http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/archives/sternwheelers>

<http://www.yukonheritage.com>

<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca>

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca>





# **FYI:**

## **The Yukon River Highway**

### **Key Messages**

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Yukon sternwheelers consumed immense quantities of wood. Every year, First Nations families would move out to work in the wood camps

Sternwheelers continued to supply a network of communities and trading posts along the Yukon River and its tributaries until the early 1950s when the Klondike Highway was constructed.

### **Telling the Story**

Before leaving Whitehorse point out the old sites of Whiskey Flats, Moccasin Flats, and Sleepy Hollow. Explain the many relocations that occurred.

Make a stop just downriver from the White River. The remains of wood camps can be seen today. Ensure that guests respect heritage resources and leave them where they are today.

As you pass abandoned camps and homesteads explain how the construction of the highway impacted river life.

### **Study Questions**

How were goods transported throughout the Territory before the construction of the highway?

How were First Nations people impacted by the purchase of the Whitehorse waterfront by the WP&YR Company?

What did deckhands do on the steamships?

Describe the worst accident of the steamboat era?

How many cords of wood did the British Navigation Company use in 1915?

How did people move wood downriver to Dawson City?

# Homesteading

Once newcomers began to arrive in the Territory in greater numbers the changes in traditional lifestyles were numerous. People began to take part in new economic activities which led to a change in subsistence patterns. Families moved around less. An increase in settlement occurred though most First Nations families continued to move about seasonally to a degree. More settled lifestyles allowed people to try their hands at activities that required them to stay put ... for awhile at least. An increased reliance on the cash economy also compelled people to stay in one place for longer periods of time. It was one of the only ways to bring in cash.

## Farming Fur

In the 1910s fox farming became popular throughout the Territory. Several First Nations people also made a good income by live-trapping foxes and selling them. Between 1913 and 1915 there are accounts of fox furs selling for \$400 to \$3000 each.

Like other peoples, Yukon First Nations associated the red fox with mischief and mishap. Called "Smart Man" by the Inland Tlingit, in legend the fox was blamed for the anguish of human death. If foxes were seen near a home it was considered a bad omen for those who lived there. Despite its role as a harbinger of ill fortune, Yukon First Nations also regarded the fox as a spirit helper.



Although its meat was not eaten, the fur of the red fox was traditionally used by people for robes and linings. Foxes were trapped with snares and deadfalls, and were hunted with bows and arrows. The carcass of the fox was treated with respect.

The red fox was the first furbearer to be raised in captivity for pelt production. In the Yukon, fur farming reached its peak in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

*Annie Geddes' own family moved to 31 Mile in the mid-1920s. Her father 'started this mink ranch at 31 Mile and there was only a few Indian families there*

*and he hired some of the men to help build the fox ranch and the log cabin that we lived in.' ... The fur ranch operated for most of the 1920s. 'It was a fox ranch ... mink and fox ... It was before I went to school ... he had this huge log building built, moved us into and he built this fox ranch and mink ranch and my grandfather helped him ...'*

Yukon fox fur was known worldwide for its superior quality and was in high demand in Europe and the United States. Fur farms were set up in hopes of breeding large numbers of the highly sought after silver fox. But a change in European fashions and import quotas resulted in a declining market, and this once lucrative business met its end.

[From <http://www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca> and *Ta'an Kwäch'än Cultural History Project* 1989]

## Farming in the City?

One of the unsolved mysteries at Canyon City was a collection of wire mesh pens located among the trees at the far-east end of town. The pens, which included subterranean, log-lined enclosures within most of the pens, may be related to fox farming activities which were common in southern Yukon in the 1910s and 1920s. There were 17 known fox farms operating in the Whitehorse area at the time. After 1920 fox farms were generally replaced by mink farms, which persisted through the 1930s. If this interpretation is correct the wire mesh pens post-date the Gold Rush occupation of Canyon City, and represent the only significant re-use of the area.

[From <http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/991.html>]

## Gardening

In older times First Nations women would harvest a variety of plants and berries. They would store them in tightly sealed birch baskets and enjoy fruits and vegetables throughout the year. At the onset of the gold rush First Nations people were encouraged to grow vegetables in gardens located in more settled areas. These market gardens were a source of income for families as well as a source of healthy food.

In the early years gardens were not always successful as people would leave them unattended as they went off to their fish camps in the later summer months when they required the most attention.

Eventually gardening did catch on and people successfully raised a variety of vegetables including potatoes, turnips, carrots, cabbages, and other produce. In 1932 and 1933 Jimmy Wood, of Moosehide, won first prize for his potatoes at the Dawson harvest fair.

*People used to make garden at Moosehide. Better gardens even than Dawson. All kinds of vegetables. They even get prize at Discovery Day. Best vegetables in the Yukon!*

Patricia Lindgren, 1974-75

[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## The Influenza Epidemic

Unfortunately staying in one place with larger groups of people meant that families were exposed to a number of diseases. Epidemic 'flu broke out worldwide in the early 20th century and even those in the far reaches of northern Canada could not escape.

In June 1900 an epidemic broke out in the Aleutians. This time influenza was the killer that barreled from west to east in a sweep that is remembered as the "Yukon Indian Influenza Epidemic." It first erupted among the Aleut (Unangan) people, then spread north and east through Yup'ik country and into the Athabaskan villages along the Yukon River. From there it coursed eastward along the river into Yukon Territory.

The effects of the epidemic are recorded in the *Encyclopedia of Plague and Pestilence*: "A woodcutter who accompanied the priests to the camps wanted to burn sixteen Indian corpses too putrid to handle; the Indian survivors, however, refused to allow him to build cremation bonfires. Untold hundreds of Indians died from influenza during the epidemic, which spread south [from Yukon Territory] into British Columbia by December 1900."

With each wave of viral attacks, northern First Nations populations suffered tremendous losses, attacking them culturally and spiritually as well as physically. However, the worst of them all was the worldwide pandemic of Spanish influenza, which decimated the First Nations people as it swept through the North in the autumn and winter of 1918-19.

Around the world, as many as 40 million people died. The disease seemed to hit hardest among the healthiest young adults. Throughout Yukon one can find numerous graves from this time period – many marking group burials.

Many Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in people were market hunting in Dempster country. As you travel along the highway you will stumble upon several graves. One grave in particular tells a tragic tale. It is the burial of a woman named Selea and seven of her children – all victims of the 1918 'flu epidemic.

It is estimated that anywhere from 20 to 100 million people were killed worldwide, or the equivalent of one third of the population of Europe, more than double the number killed in World War I.

[From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_flu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu) - cite\_note-Patterson1-2]

Stories of relatives dying from 'flu are prevalent in oral histories. In some areas First Nations people speak of forewarnings given to them from their Shamans through stories.

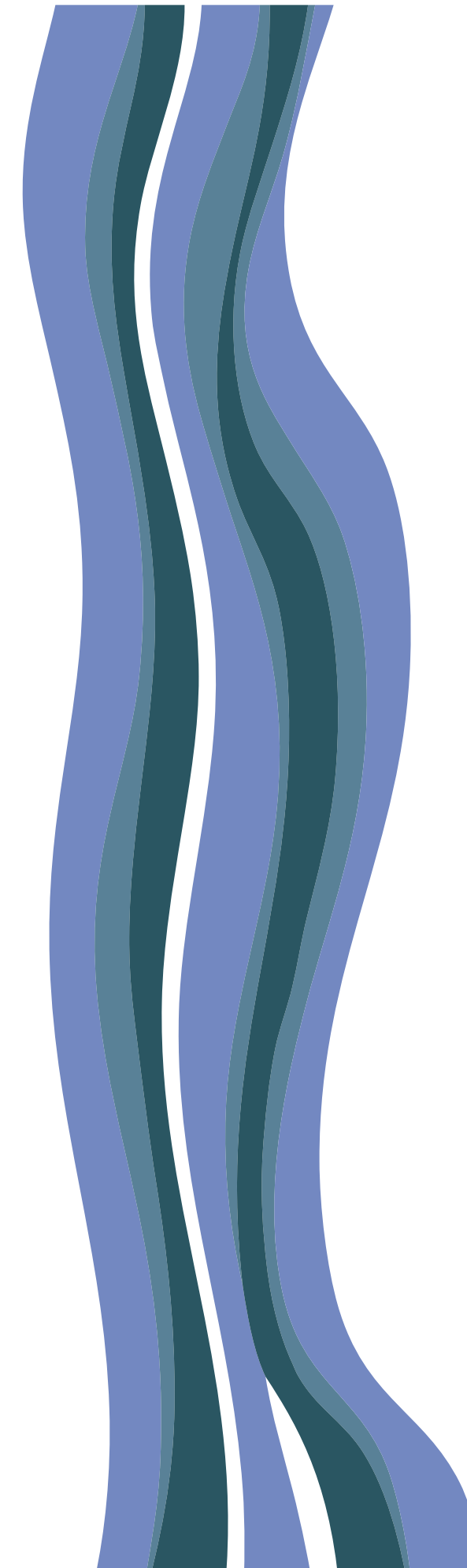
*Angela Sidney of Tagish and Inland Tlingit ancestry, remembered a Shaman named Małal, who told people in 1912, 'This ground is going to burn all over.' She reported seventy years later about the time when she was ten years old, 'I saw this old man too: he was Indian doctor. One night he was singing: he made Indian doctor. In the morning, he told people: 'This place is on fire all over.' And people thought it was the flu. That flu was going to come in 1918, or whenever, when lots of people died. That's the one he talked about. That's just like fire, all. Lots of people are going to die. But if you pray to god all the time you are going to pass through this fire. In 1918, '19, '20, there was 'flu. Lots of people died.*

Regardless of any forewarning there was little to be done to protect people from the Spanish 'flu. It tore through communities on a global scale and decimated populations throughout the world. This epidemic was an added pressure on a group of people already struggling to maintain their culture. Fortunately Yukon's First Nations people are resilient and their traditions survived this crisis.

[From <http://www.litsite.org/index> – *The Social Life of Stories*, Julie Cruikshank]



Georgette McLeod makes an offering at the grave of Selea and her seven children, all victims of the 'flu epidemic of 1918.



# FYI: Homesteading

## Key Messages

Once newcomers began to arrive in the Territory in greater numbers the changes in traditional lifestyles were numerous. First Nations people began to take part in new economic activities which led to a change in subsistence patterns.

In the 1910s fox farming became popular throughout the Territory. Several First Nations people also made a good income by live-trapping foxes and selling them.

At the onset of the gold rush First Nations people were encouraged to grow vegetables in gardens located in more settled areas.

In the early years gardens were not always successful as people would leave them unattended as they went off to their fish camps in the later summer months.

In the early 1900s 'flu epidemics broke out in Alaska and Yukon. With each wave of viral attacks, northern First Nations populations suffered tremendous losses, attacking them culturally and spiritually as well as physically.

The worst of them all was the worldwide pandemic of Spanish influenza, which decimated the First Nations people as it swept through the North in the autumn and winter of 1918-19.

This epidemic was an added pressure on a group of people already struggling to maintain their culture. Fortunately Yukon's First Nations people are resilient and their traditions survived this crisis.

## Telling the Story

If a fox is seen while on the trip take this opportunity to explain First Nations beliefs about the animal. Describe fox farming.

When pointing out plant foods explain the introduction of gardening. Talk about the success of gardening in a land with 24 hours of daylight.

Share Angela Sidney's story of the forewarning of the 'flu epidemics. Discuss the impacts this had on populations.

## Study Questions

How did participation in the cash economy impact traditional lifestyles?

Name some First Nations beliefs surrounding foxes. What do the inland Tlingit call the fox?

Why were early gardens unsuccessful for many First Nations people?

How did the Spanish 'flu epidemic impact First Nations people?

What was the name of the Shaman who forewarned of the 'flu epidemics?

# Fort Selkirk: Trade & Commerce



Fort Selkirk viewed from the basalt cliffs across the Yukon River.

## Early Trade

The Northern Tutchone people, now known as the Selkirk First Nation, led a nomadic lifestyle of hunting and fishing spent in groups of one or two families. Their seasonal cycle also included trade and travel, feasts and potlatches, and seasonal festivals at certain times of the year. In the early days, family groups got together in the Pelly River area to trade and visit.

They also met with other First Nations people - the Hän people further downriver, the Kaska people from the upper Pelly River area, the Southern Tutchone from Aishihik or the Donjek River, and Tanana people from the White River area.

Their main trading partners in the late 18th and 19th centuries were the Chilkat Tlingit (Elró,) who traveled inland over the Chilkat Pass, then along the traditional route that later became known as the Dalton Trail. This trade took place in the spring and summer, usually at fishing camps, one being near Minto and another near the present site of Fort Selkirk.

After the coast people began to trade with Russians and other Europeans, they introduced guns (muskets), kettles, wool blankets, blankets decorated with mother of pearl buttons, metal knives, iron adze blades, metal bars, small Chinese tea boxes used for the ashes of the dead, cloth, steel needles, tobacco and tea to Yukon people. The Elró charged high prices for their goods - a single musket cost a pile of beaver skins stacked to the height of the gun.

## The First Fort Selkirk

The concept of “Meeting Place” describes Fort Selkirk as a place where Selkirk First Nation members

meet with each other, with other First Nations people, and with people from other cultures. No other factors played a more important role in the settlement and eventual abandonment of Fort Selkirk than its history of trade & travel.

In the mid-19th century a new trading partner, the Hudson’s Bay Company, came to Fort Selkirk. Robert Campbell established his first post in 1848 on the east shore of the Pelly River just above the Yukon. In 1851 he moved the post to its present location.

The HBC post was of serious concern to the Chilkat, and by 1852 they could no longer tolerate the competition. While the local Northern Tutchone were away fishing, a group of Chilkat (led by chief Kohklux) raided and pillaged the post at Fort Selkirk. Campbell and his men were forced to flee.

For the next 40 years, Fort Selkirk returned to being a trade rendezvous point for the Northern Tutchone and Chilkat people.

*My grandfather, my mother’s father, got his name from the Hudson Bay man Robert Campbell. That time when the Alaska Indians came to burn down his post, my grandpa saved him. He hid him and tied him to a boat and pushed him out into the river. So he saved his life. At that time, Indians had no white man name. So Robert Campbell said to my grandpa, “Because you saved me, you have my name.” My grandpa tried to tell him to come back (to Fort Selkirk). But Robert Campbell, the white man, never came back. I guess maybe he went to build a post somewhere else.* Rachel Dawson quoted in *Reading Voices*, p. 87.

## White Traders Return

In 1889, an American, Arthur Harper, and his Hän wife set up a new post near the abandoned Hudson’s Bay site. They built a store, a warehouse and a number of small cabins where First Nations traders could stay while they sold their furs and bought supplies.

From this time onward, the First Nation has shared the site with European traders, missionaries and settlers. As

the two cultures came into contact they became increasingly dependent on one another. The Northern Tutchone adapted readily to new technologies brought by the white man, and took advantage of many of the goods, services and employment opportunities provided by the new culture. The European newcomers relied on aboriginal people to teach them the means of survival on the land.

Fort Selkirk became a supply centre for the area. Northern Tutchone people traveled there at certain times, such as Christmas or the spring, to sell furs, to obtain supplies and visit one another. The rest of the year was spent on the trapline, at the wood camp, at fish camps and other pursuits on the land. When they arrived in town, the small settlement became a livelier and more exciting place. Their structures at the post tended to be small, portable and easily heated. There were few cabins, most people stayed in wall tents.

The non-native trading posts were located at Fort Selkirk to take advantage of the well-established fur trade in the area. Land use in the area changed with the arrival of these Euro-Canadians and their institutions. First Nation people trapped increasingly for fur, and some began to live at Fort Selkirk year-round in permanent log cabins.

By the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, there were other stores at Fort Selkirk and the settlement was well-established as a trading and supply centre for a large area extending up and down the Yukon and Pelly Rivers. First Nations people as well as white prospectors and trappers traveled here to sell furs and buy provisions. Since there were always at least two stores, people had the opportunity to bargain and find out who was offering the better price for furs.

Fort Selkirk proved to be an ideal spot to provision the many riverboats that were making the journey between Dawson City and Whitehorse. Many First Nations people found seasonal work either on the boats or at the wood camps that supplied them with fuel. During this time, many portions of the shoreline were depleted of trees.

The wood camps also supplied firewood to Dawson residents. Some Selkirk First Nation men, such as Little Sam and Johnny Tom Tom, became skilled in piloting the large cordwood rafts from wood camps on the Pelly and Yukon Rivers down to Dawson.

These rafts were made from 16 foot (5m) logs, were 32 feet wide (10m) and built in sections. Johnny Tom Tom built and piloted one of the largest cordwood rafts - it was seven sections long and held 156 cords of wood! At a price of \$14/cord, he made a good profit.

There were negative aspects to the relationship between the Northern Tutchone and the white inhabitants of Fort

## The Kohklux Map

In 1869, at the request of scientist George Davidson, a Chilkat Tlingit chief named Kohklux drew a map of the route he had taken with his father in 1852 from the Chilkat River (in northern BC) to attack the HBC post at Fort Selkirk.

Though he had never held a pencil and paper, Kohklux and two of his wives completed a richly detailed map in three days. It is the earliest known map of the southern Yukon and the first known map to be committed to paper by a First Nations person in this part of the world. The map, later redrawn by Davidson, helped open up the Yukon interior to non-native traders and prospectors.

In the summer of 1994, to mark the 125th anniversary of the drawing of the Kohklux map, the Selkirk First Nation hosted Chilkat First Nation people from Haines and Klukwan at a celebration at Fort Selkirk.

## Selkirk Volcanoes

The Fort Selkirk area features a series of volcanic centres. Northern Tutchone elders still tell the story of the explosion of the mountain called Nelruna (Volcano Mountain). While scientists have not been able to date the oldest of the volcanic eruptions and lava flows, the youngest of these would appear to be at least 4,200 years old (Jackson & Stevens, 1992). This is a recent event geologically but a very old story to have carried forward in oral tradition.

*Łyó yí hùkhyá. (It snowed with ashes).* Tagayme, Big Salmon River Elder, d. 1939.

Selkirk. People of the First Nation, in particular, suffered with social change, epidemics, and game depletion. As the Selkirk people became more involved in the wage economy, they spent less time on the land. New regulations restricted hunting and fishing. Nonetheless, the people kept strong ties to traditional fish camps and hunting areas.

Despite these negative aspects, the two groups had become linked through work, crises such as forest fires, and sometimes marriage. Fort Selkirk provides an historic example that difference doesn't necessarily mean separation or conflict, but diversity. A number of prominent families in the area - the Horsfalls, the Blanchards, the Van Bibbers - were founded from marriages between the two cultures.

### After the Gold Rush

In the early 1900s traffic on the Yukon River began to subside, but Fort Selkirk continued to be an important trade centre for another 50 years. A number of independent traders and companies established stores and hotels here, including Anton Klimesch (the Dominion Hotel), Taylor & Drury, Joe Horsfall, and Schofield & Zimmerlee.

By this time Fort Selkirk had become the main settlement of the Northern Tutchone people who would come to be known as the Selkirk First Nation. These people celebrated many special occasions at the Big Jonathan House, the home of one of their Nation's chiefs. People gathered here for drumming, dancing, singing, storytelling, stick gambling and feasting. Though local traders, such as the manager of the Taylor & Drury store, often hosted parties, the best party was at the Big Jonathan House. Everyone prepared food. The dancing began at six o'clock on Christmas Eve and might continue all night long. Many people met their future husbands or wives at Fort Selkirk gatherings.

In 1938 the Hudson's Bay Company decided to move back into the Yukon, purchasing the Schofield and Zimmerlee store. The store prospered sufficiently that they decided to erect new buildings in the mid 1940s. In 1946/47, the Hudson's Bay Co. built a substantial frame store and residence. This proved to be poor timing as Fort Selkirk was in its last years as a trade and supply centre. The Hudson's Bay Company was the last commercial trader to operate at Fort Selkirk, and it closed nearly 100 years after the abandonment of Campbell's original post.

Construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942, and of an all-weather road from Mayo to Dawson City in

the early 1950s, signaled the end of the riverboat era and the steady stream of traffic to Fort Selkirk. Many First Nation people left Fort Selkirk and moved to Minto to work on the highway. As the population dwindled, the businesses that once occupied the town left. Highway travel proved both faster and cheaper than river transport and the people who left Fort Selkirk didn't return to the remote river community. By the mid-1950s Fort Selkirk was essentially abandoned.

Most people moved on to the new community of Pelly Crossing, although Selkirk people have ended up all over the Yukon, from Watson Lake to Burwash Landing.

Fort Selkirk Historic Site is co-owned and co-managed by the Yukon Government and the Selkirk First Nation. The successful, close working relationship between the two governments in managing and presenting a common heritage is precedent setting. Fort Selkirk is viewed as a cooperative model of international stature. Its role as a "Meeting Place" carries on as visitors are able to appreciate a shared heritage and the promise of cross-cultural collaboration.

Fort Selkirk remains important to members of the Selkirk First Nation. It is in the heart of their traditional territory, the homeland of their ancestors and is a key place in their oral tradition, with stories that date back thousands of years.



The rectory and church at Fort Selkirk



*Fort Selkirk really important place. Everyone came there to trade - Ross River, Carmacks, coast. Lots of potlatch, there....I think about the dancing there, Jimmie Johnson and grandpa went there and took those two out of there. (Our grandmothers.) Sometime around 1900s. They sent two guys from here, one from Champagne, one from Canyon Creek - Fred Stick and Jim Shorty, they went up there for competition. They come from long ways, they invite them too. Oh boy, they dress up good, paint up their face, feathers in their head. Some of their wives came along. One song I think they sing. Kind of old stories. Maybe I'm baby, just born that time, I'm born 1908. Sam Williams speaking to Mary Jane Johnson, 1993*

*I remember that long time ago Mackenzie Indian, lots come down under an old bush there (the flat upriver of the Yukon Field Force site). Gamble stake. And they gamble going on. And Selkirk Indian or Mackenzie Indian, all playing the gamble. For two weeks steady. Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum... Tommy McGinty (FSEOHP, 1985, p. 204)*

*When people from Pelly are down there (Selkirk), they are really happy... Just a good feeling when everyone gets together down there.*

Alex Morrison, 1994



# FYI: Fort Selkirk

## Key Messages

Trade was common among First Nations before newcomers arrived. Fort Selkirk was an important trading place.

The Northern and Southern Tutchone, and Hän-speaking people traded with each other and with the powerful Chilkat Tlingit (Elró,) who traveled inland over the Chilkat Pass.

After the coast people began to trade with Russians and other Europeans, they introduced guns (muskets), kettles, wool blankets, blankets decorated with mother of pearl buttons, metal knives, iron adze blades, metal bars, small Chinese tea boxes used for the ashes of the dead, cloth, steel needles, tobacco and tea to Yukon people.

In the mid-19th century a new trading partner, the Hudson's Bay Company, came to Fort Selkirk.

First Nations people shared Fort Selkirk with European traders, missionaries and settlers. As the two cultures came into contact they became increasingly dependent on one another. The Northern Tutchone adapted readily to new technologies brought by the white man. The European newcomers relied on aboriginal people to teach them the means of survival on the land.

By the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, there were other stores at Fort Selkirk and the settlement was well-established as a trading and supply centre for a large area extending up and down the Yukon and Pelly Rivers.

Construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942, and of an all-weather road from Mayo to Dawson City in the early 1950s, signaled the end of the riverboat era and the steady stream of traffic to Fort Selkirk.

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## Telling the Story

As you travel the river explain the connections that First Nations had among each other. Talk about trade relationships and the types of goods that were traded before European goods arrived.

At Fort Selkirk describe the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company and the relationship between First Nations people and the newcomers.

Tour Big Jonathan House and describe the gatherings that were held there.

Explain the restoration of the site and the co-management agreement between Selkirk First Nation and Yukon Government.

## Study Questions

Name the goods that were introduced to Yukon First Nations by Tlingit traders before Europeans travelled into the interior.

Describe the history of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Selkirk.

How did First Nations and Europeans help each other at Fort Selkirk?

What is the Kohklux map?

What did people do at Big Jonathan House?

Why did people leave Fort Selkirk?

# Wilderness Outpost

During the years leading up to the Klondike Gold Rush, and those following it, many First Nations people in Yukon continued to lead primarily traditional lives. Of course there were some changes as newcomers moved to the Territory in greater numbers. People became involved in some economic practices based on traditional pursuits. Although these were much like old time activities they did impact the subsistence lifestyle and brought lasting change.

At the time when some newcomers were setting up camps and cabins in the wilderness along the Yukon River First Nations people were interacting with them on a regular basis as they traveled about the country hunting, fishing, and trapping.

## Trapping

First Nations people have always used a variety of traps and snares to harvest animals – for both food and fur. With the advent of the fur trade people began to trap fur bearers for cash and other goods. This changed the traditional seasonal round but also brought new technologies that assisted with subsistence living.



*JJ Van Bibber with some of his family's fur harvest.*

People learned to build and use wooden sleds. They would often own a larger number of dogs than in older times as they were needed to pull loads of fur. One would think that this would mean easier times for families but we must remember that more dogs equals more mouths to feed. Men had to harvest more fish and meat and women had to cut and dry these foods. They also had to prepare the extra hides taken through trapping. If food ran out, either for people or dogs, they would need to trade for or buy more supplies at various outposts and trading spots along the river. This meant that they would have to trap more and more furs just to stay ahead of the game.

During trapping season families would make a base camp. The man would travel out along his trap lines while the women and children remained in camp. When he returned the women would have to prepare the furs for trade. In the older days relatively few furs were required for clothing. Now, in order to make ends meet, a significant number of furs was required. Women also had to learn new tanning techniques as traders had certain ideas of how they should be prepared. For example beaver skins were to be stretched into oval shapes and lynx skins were to have the front paws intact. Sometimes a woman would make her husband a coat or robe from the hind paws of a lynx as this is what was left following trading.

In the older days a lot of hunting was done communally. Trapping is not conducive as a large group activity although most men preferred at least one trapping partner. This changed some of the social dynamics which were central to First Nations culture.

Metal traps, snare wire, and commercial bait were introduced. These new implements made trapping profitable – if they were used properly. Many older people continued to use traditional methods though as they would not have to pack new materials through the bush. They could rely on the natural resources at hand.

*[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]*

## Trapping in Yukon Today

The Yukon is home to fourteen species of furbearing mammals that are trapped for their fur: beaver, coyote, fisher, coloured fox, Arctic fox, lynx, marten, mink, muskrat, otter, squirrel, weasel, wolf and wolverine.

Over 400 Yukoners hold trapping licenses; most are registered trapping concession holders, and the others are assistant trappers. Most pursue the occupation for its unique lifestyle. Trapping provides an opportunity for self-employment in one of the best working environments - the great outdoors.

Approximately 50 percent of Yukon trappers are First Nations. For them, trapping is a way of life with strong social and cultural traditions that pre-date the arrival of white men to the territory.



*Peggy Kormendy with harvested furs in Dawson City.*

A registered trapping concession is a parcel of land on which the holder is given exclusive rights to harvest furbearing animals. There are 333 registered trapping concessions in the Yukon and 18 group areas, most of which are held either by a collective group of family or First Nation members. This system encourages trappers to manage an area the way farmers manage their land and livestock; through monitoring of furbearer populations and their habitat, and taking a sustainable harvest.

The economic value of trapping in the Yukon is significant. It is an important winter revenue source in many smaller communities, providing income at a time of year when unemployment is high. Over the past two decades, the Yukon's fur harvest has fluctuated in value between \$250,000 to over \$1.5 million annually, with economic spin-offs worth two to three times that amount.

Trapping is a legitimate and sustainable use of a renewable resource and is vital to the economy and lifestyle of Northern Canada. Trappers have been in the forefront of promoting the search for humane and efficient trapping systems. Canada leads the world in humane trap research.

*[From <http://environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/huntingtrapping>]*

## Market Hunting

During the gold rush and the early years of the 20th century selling game meat, or market hunting, was an important source of income for many First Nations families. In Dawson City thousands of newcomers relied on the com-

mercial harvest of meat by First Nations people. In 1921 alone, meat dealers in Dawson purchased 3 220 kg of moose and 1 633 kg of caribou. This was in addition to private harvesting.

Market hunting undoubtedly led to a decline in game in the Dawson area. In 1947 market hunting was made illegal in Yukon. Unfortunately this deprived a number of First Nations families of their income.

*... they moved to another place to spend the fall. By that time it's freezing, so they freeze meat for sale. At the time Dawson buy meat by the ton. After that they bring the meat in and sell it. That's how things go in them days. After they bring the meat in and sell it, they buy what they need and buy some grub.*  
Annie Henry, 1990, TH Archives

*[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]*

## New and Improved

European trade goods began arriving in Yukon long before outsiders did. As more new people arrived the number of goods increased. First Nations people quickly adapted some new technologies into their traditional way of life.

Guns were available relatively early but the first models were often unreliable and dangerous. Many First Nations people continued to use bows and arrows, snares, deadfalls, and other hunting implements rather than old-style flintlocks. They simply found them more effective. Once repeater rifles arrived in the Territory people started to use guns in greater numbers. This led to more individualized hunting patterns.

Newcomers also brought canvas tents and other new housing styles. Wall tents were used commonly by First Nations people – and still are today. They were portable and could be used in much the same way as skins had been used in the older days.

*"People wanted to try it out, to see if rain would go through it but it didn't. Oh everybody bought tents" - Polly Irvine*

New metal tools made log cabins a possibility. Many families would build a cabin near a settlement though they continued to travel throughout the seasons. Sawn lumber houses were also possible when the newcomers introduced sawmills. People would build simple frame shelters. Because of the cost associated with lumber they would often dismantle the shelter and rebuild it as they moved around the country.



Popular household items included pots, kettles, and utensils. Women no longer had to cook food with hot stones. They could hang a kettle or pot directly over the fire.

[Part of the Land, Part of the Water, Catharine McClellan]

## Regulations & Registration

The Yukon government eventually imposed regulations on hunting, fishing, and trapping. In 1900 the Yukon government amended the Yukon Act to gain more control over hunting and fishing. This largely did not impact First Nations people until 1920 when newly established regulations did not allow people to sell game without a licence. The licence itself was expensive and ate up much, if not all, of the profit that was once made by market hunting.

In 1949 trapping regulations were put into place. The original idea was to protect First Nations trapping areas. Unfortunately the regulations had the opposite effect. For \$10 people could register their trap line annually. When fur prices decreased it became too expensive to continue trapping and many people sold their trap lines. The new system of registered trap lines limited traditional patterns of movement.

*...we were lucky to get 25 cents a pound for salmon in town. If you couldn't fish and make money ... then you couldn't really trap cause it cost to run dogs you know, it's like everything disappeared.*

John Flynn, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Archives

New regulations and government management of resources, coupled with inconsistent markets, meant that First Nations incomes fell drastically. It was difficult to find a place in the Territory's new economy as traditional harvesting patterns changed and new hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities were impacted by "clumsy government management."

[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## The Van Bibber Brothers

Ira and Eliza Van Bibber raised their large family at the Pelly homestead. Their tight family unit shared the knowledge, responsibility, and benefits of working together.

The Van Bibber family was self-sustaining. Harvesting fur was a land-based way to bring in funds to purchase goods that would generally be beyond a large family's means. Trapping became the mainstay of the Van Bibber family and forged a strong bond between the Van Bibber brothers.

The Van Bibber boys loved being out on the land and documented much of their lives with a series of cameras purchased with the profits of trapping. To many the photos are history, to others art, but for the boys it was a way to remember and share the good times and exploits of a good life.

JJ Van Bibber has remarked on more than one occasion that land and family were everything and the distractions of town life were of no interest to the Van Bibber boys. They lived life by the seasons and worked hard for the betterment of the family.

*We went down the Miner River about 60 miles ... see all this beaver cutting all the way ... Dan said 'well, when we go back to Dawson in the spring' he says 'we don't do anything in Dawson, we just sit around you know' and he said 'I'll tell you what we'll do' he said 'we'll just build a mooseskin boat and go down the Miner River trapping' you know. ... When he come in, ... he brought a load of fur in here, and we stayed out there, Archie and I stayed out in the bush, god damned near starved to death too. It had turned cold and we couldn't get any meat and I lived four days on a moose nose ...*

JJ Van Bibber

[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department]



Two of the Van Bibber brothers build a frame for a moose skin boat.

## Coffee Creek

Coffee Creek is an old gathering site on the Yukon River, located just above the mouth of the White River. During the era of steamboats, there was a village here with a number of year round Northern Tutchone as well as non-native individuals and families. A native trail led from Coffee Creek south to K'elt'a Män (Lilypad Lake) and the Donjek River.

[From [http://www.yukonplacenames.ca/annualreports/Annual\\_Report\\_2006-2007.pdf](http://www.yukonplacenames.ca/annualreports/Annual_Report_2006-2007.pdf)]

## Lost in Two Worlds: Jack Flynn

*He [Jack Flynn] traveled the river a lot and trapped all through the Yukon and with dog teams when he was a younger fella, into the Northwest Territories and all over, quite a few people knew him, he traveled a lot by dog teams and trapped and hunted. That was basically his life.*

*He was game guiding, that still involved hunting...that was his life, hunting and fishing and trapping, that was it.*

*[But] at that point in time, it wasn't useful anymore, people were finding other jobs and he didn't know how to do anything else but hunt and trap and so he was caught in between, now you know people are looking for wisdom from people that hunted and trapped and stuff like that, but back then there was no call for it so he just couldn't make a living anymore, I think that took the toll on him. [It's] sad, the knowledge is just gone now ...*

*There's lots of people in town like that I think that were caught [in-between] ...couldn't provide anymore, couldn't make a living, took their toll.*

*And I always tell people that hike up the Twelve Mile and stuff they better take some coffee and tobacco for him cause he's still down there somewhere roaming around cause that was his spot.*

*I find when I go to Twelve Mile now I mean I still could feel my dad, you know my dad is buried here in town but I'm sure his spirit still roams Twelve Mile.*

John Flynn

[Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department]



Jack Flynn on the land.

# FYI: Wilderness Outpost

## Key Messages

At the time when some newcomers were setting up camps and cabins in the wilderness along the Yukon River First Nations people were interacting with them on a regular basis as they traveled about the country hunting, fishing, and trapping.

First Nations people have always used a variety of traps and snares to harvest animals – for both food and fur. With the advent of the fur trade people began to trap fur bearers for cash and other goods. This changed the traditional seasonal round but also brought new technologies that assisted with subsistence living.

Over 400 Yukoners hold trapping licenses today; most are registered trapping concession holders, and the others are assistant trappers. Most pursue the occupation for its unique lifestyle. Trapping is a way of life with strong social and cultural traditions.

During the gold rush and the early years of the 20th century selling game meat, or market hunting, was an important source of income for many First Nations families.

The Yukon government eventually imposed regulations on hunting, fishing, and trapping. It was difficult to find a place in the Territory's new economy as traditional harvesting patterns changed and new hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities were impacted by government management.

Coffee Creek is an old gathering site on the Yukon River, located just above the mouth of the White River. During the era of steamboats, there was a village here with a number of year round Northern Tutchone as well as non-native individuals and families.

European trade goods began arriving in Yukon long before outsiders did. As more new people arrived the number of goods increased. First Nations people quickly adapted some new technologies into their traditional way of life.

## Telling the Story

Arrange for a trapper to share information about their lifestyle with guests.

Explain the impacts that government regulations would have on subsistence harvesting.

Walk around Coffee Creek and discuss what it might have been like to live in a remote area.

## Study Questions

How did people trap when they began to harvest furs for cash?

How did trapping fur for money change family and group dynamics?

What are registered trapping concessions and how do they work?

What is market hunting? How would it impact wildlife numbers?

How did the arrival of guns impact older hunting techniques?

How did the introduction of hunting and trapping regulations impact First Nations people?

# The Klondike Gold Rush

*It started with the first whiteman we seen. One man he went to hunt along the river over the hill. That's the only way over. And he run home. He say war coming. He say big thing coming down river. ... And big scow come around the corner. All the men inside. That cap with arrow, that all we got. No knife. All the men go and then we see they land in front. They camp. ... They give us oranges, something red anyway--we don't know what's that. Apples, bread. ... Those guy up Bonanza over the hill. You see, we been there before. You know, little water creek coming out? Some place you see there, just yellow! Ah, ha. My Mother make little skin bag for us and we pick it. We pick it and we come down top of raft and we throw it back in the river. Oh, if we know that's gold!! ... I wish I know gold that time. I wish for to keep it.*

Martha Taylor, 1992, TH Archives

By the mid-1880s more and more newcomers began to trickle into Yukon. Prospectors headed north in search of the gold that they were certain was in the area. People prospected bars on the Yukon River and a number of its tributaries and usually made enough in a season to survive until the next. It was not until August 16th, 1896 that members of the Tagish First Nation -- Skookum Jim, Dawson Charlie, and Kate Carmack (George Carmack's wife) -- and non-native -- George Carmack -- discovered gold at Rabbit Creek, later named Bonanza Creek, near Dawson City. By 1898 thousands of hopeful prospectors had made their way to the heart of the traditional territory of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

The impact of the Klondike Gold Rush on Yukon's First Nations people throughout the territory was immense. The sheer numbers of people and new ways of life left a permanent mark. Life would never be the same again for the first peoples of the Yukon. Throughout their history First Nations people have proven to be resilient and adaptable and this time period was no different.

Knowledge that gold existed in Yukon was not new. First Nations people were aware of its presence though not necessarily of its value to newcomers. Early explorers and traders also referenced gold. Geologist George Dawson predicted a major find when he surveyed the area in the 1880s. Still, the term discovery always refers to the accidental sighting of gold on Rabbit Creek.

Written accounts tell us that gold was discovered by Skookum Jim (Keish), Dawson Charlie, and Kate (Shaaw Tláa) and George Carmack who were travel-

ing about the country looking for suitable areas to prospect. The stories paint Skookum Jim as a frontiersman -- and gold rush hero -- who traveled north specifically in search of gold. Pierre Berton describes him as

*A giant of a man, supremely handsome with his high cheek bones, his eagle's nose, and his fiery black eyes -- straight as a gun barrel, powerfully built and known as the best hunter and trapper on the river ... Just as Carmack wished to be an Indian, Jim longed to be a white man -- in other*

*words, a prospector. He differed from the others in his tribe in that he displayed the white man's kind of ambition.*

These accounts of the discovery emphasize Skookum Jim's quest to find gold. Little mention is made of the role his sister, Kate Carmack, played in the event.

Oral accounts from First Nations elders tell a very different story.

Though there is no doubt that Skookum Jim, along with Dawson Charlie and Kate and George Carmack, discovered gold, his reasons for traveling north were very different than those recorded in written records. The oral histories tell us of a very different man than the heroic frontier prospector seeking out his fortune. Skookum Jim was, instead, a deeply spiritual man who was aware of his social obligations to his people. It seems that the discovery of gold was not his life's ambition after all.

Skookum Jim's real name was Keish. He was of Tagish and Tlingit descent. He was known personally by elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. Their stories of Keish provide a different perspective on the discovery of gold.

As mentioned Pierre Berton describes Skookum Jim as a man of great physical strength and ambition. Angela Sidney, on the other hand, emphasizes his keen understand-

ing of his social obligations to his people. She begins her story by explaining how Keish came to have the frog as his animal spirit-helper.

*As a young man, Keish once saved the life of a frog trapped in a deep hole. Later the same frog returned to him on two different occasions, once in its animal form when it healed a wound he had received, and once again in the form of a woman, showing him a gold-tipped walking cane which would direct him toward his fortune downriver. People credit Keish's Frog helper with a significant role in his eventual discovery of gold.*

All three elders -- Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned -- emphasize Keish's understanding of his social responsibilities when they talk about his life. Their stories relate a complex family history outlining the marriages of his many brothers and sisters. There were many tragedies in the family resulting in several of the members losing their husbands and wives. Subsequent marriages were made in accordance with clan law. These events led to the eventual marriage of Kate, Keish's sister, to George Carmack. Keish and Carmack became strong allies.

Shortly after Kate and George were wed they followed Aagé, another of Kate and Keish's sisters, downriver in search, not only, of their missing sibling but of gold as well. In the years following their departure several of Keish and Kate's siblings passed on leaving only one sibling living at home. The elders insist that Keish was not prospecting for gold in 1896. Rather, he was living in southern Yukon preoccupied with the whereabouts of his two missing sisters.

*In the first place, he wasn't looking for gold. Skookum Jim went downriver to look for his two sisters, because [people] missed them. They were gone two years already -- no telegram, nothing! He didn't know whether his two sisters were alive or not. That's why he thought he'd go down the river too, to see if he could find his sisters, Aagé and Kate. They were strict about that kind of thing, old people.*

Angela Sidney

In Kitty Smith's version of the story the actual discovery of gold is secondary to Keish's journey downriver to find his sisters. Keish's sisters were members of his clan so he was ultimately responsible for them. In his journey down the Yukon River, he was not only following the guidance of his animal spirit-helper Frog, he was also carrying out his responsibilities as a clan member.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the discovery of gold it was indeed discovered and by 1898 the rush was on. As prospectors made their way to the Klondike they came into contact with a number of First Nations groups and undoubtedly left an impact on them all.

[*Who Discovered Klondike Gold?* From *Reading Voices*, Julie Cruikshank]

## From Tr'ondëk to Klondike

The word Klondike is derived from the Hän word Tr'ondëk. The first written use of this word is found in the journals of Leroy Napoleon McQueston, who wintered at the Sixtymile River in 1877.

*There were three bands of Indians within the area, Davids, Charley and the Tronduk--they would send in a messenger every day to hear how I was getting along and the Shoman were making medicines for me to get well and still they were twenty miles away. They thought if I should die that they might be blamed for killing me as there was no other white man in this part of the country.*

It's pretty clear that the river was commonly known as the Trondec or Trondag to miners and traders by the early 1880s.

In 1895 William Ogilvie refers to the Klondike, but notes its original name as Thron Diuck. That same year Joseph Ladue refers to it as Klondyke, and also mentions its native name.

## Displacement: Tr'ochëk to Moosehide

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in most certainly felt the impacts of the Gold Rush to a greater degree than other Yukon First Nations. For thousands of years the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in gathered each summer at the heart of their traditional territory -- Tr'ochëk. Located on the Yukon River and directly across the Klondike River from present day Dawson City, Tr'ochëk was a gathering place and prime salmon harvesting spot. During the years leading up to the Gold Rush it was populated by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and their leader Chief Isaac.

When gold was discovered a trader named Joe Ladue staked the area of land that was to become Dawson City. He erected a sawmill and saloon and began to sell lots for \$300 each. Many of the miners in the area did not want to pay such an inflated price and instead moved to Tr'ochëk. They staked any available land including the spaces between Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in dwellings. The people at Tr'ochëk felt that they were being forced off of their lands.

In 1896 the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in accepted anywhere between \$50 and \$200 for the dwellings at



Tr'ochëk Heritage Site at the mouth of the Klondike.

Tr'ochëk. The miners assumed they had bought the land as well. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in thought that they were only selling the buildings and that they would be moved to Dawson City. Instead the newcomers set up permanent occupancy and eventually created a new town called Klondike City.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in moved across the Klondike to the south end of Dawson City. Unfortunately the North West Mounted Police had staked this area for their barracks and compound.

*The police saw the First Nations people as undesirable neighbours, squatters on officially surveyed land.*

Over the next months, with the assistance of missionary Frederick Flewelling, Chief Isaac corresponded with officials in Ottawa in an attempt to first determine a place to settle, and second, for the protection of the salmon fishery from non-native use. In late 1896 William Ogilvie interceded and requested that Canada protect the fishery at the very least.

The decision was held up in Ottawa for some time and with mail delivery taking at least two months a full year had passed by the time word was received from Ottawa. In the meantime the Church, the North West Mounted Police, and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in had reached an agreement. They would relocate 5km down the Yukon River to another traditional site just below Moosehide Creek. The Hän name for the site is Jëjik Ddhä Dënezhu Kek'it. It became commonly known as Moosehide. This site was eventually set aside as a reserve – one of the only ones established in Yukon.

For all practical purposes the request that the fishery remain solely for the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in was ignored.

Chief Isaac was instrumental in the decision to relocate. He remained on good terms with the people in Dawson City but “never failed to let them know that they had gained their prosperity at the expense of his people. He reminded the newcomers that by taking First Nation lands, driving away game and dispersing his people, they had reduced a once prosperous people to poverty.”

[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## Tr'ochëk Today

Following the Gold Rush, Tr'ochëk or Klondike City, was largely abandoned. It was populated by a few First Nations families originating from the Pelly area

and was also used for market gardening. By the latter part of the 20th century Tr'ochëk was deserted. In the 1970s gold prices began to rise and several claims were staked at the site. During the following decades placer mining took place at this important traditional site. In the 1990s Arkona Resources Inc applied for a water licence to fully mine the site. While in the environmental review process several interested parties stated that the site should be protected. In 1992 Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in commenced an action against Arkona Resources in the Yukon Territory Supreme Court. Unfortunately the Umbrella Final Agreement protected existing mining claims by grandfathering them. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in needed another avenue to save the site.

Heritage professionals were called in to research the significance of the site.

*[Working with elders they determined] that the fish camp was much more than an important gold rush site. Its significance as the traditional heart of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory outshone the relatively brief use of the site at the time of the gold rush.*

In May 1997 as a part of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's land claim agreement the Canadian government purchased all mining interests at the site for one million dollars.

*The ancient village site of Tr'ochëk was to be protected for all time as Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in settlement land and a heritage site under the final agreement. According to Chief Steve Taylor, “This is a victory for our people and for all Canadians who respect aboriginal culture and history.”*

Tr'ochëk was designated a National Historic Site of Canada on July 19, 2002.

## New Economic Opportunities

The new economy in Yukon provided opportunities for First Nations people to participate in different types of employment. Newcomers were often not prepared for life in the north and required guidance and assistance for survival. In most cases First Nations people welcomed the newcomers as they would any visitors to their traditional lands. They shared resources and knowledge. It was not until it became clear that their resources were being depleted at a rapid rate that people began to speak out about the impacts of a growing population on subsistence lifestyles.

*All Yukon belong to my papas. All Klondike belong my people. Country now all mine. Long time all mine. Hills all mine; caribou all mine; moose all mine; gold all mine. White man come and take all my gold. Take millions, take more hundreds fifty millions, and blow 'em in Seattle. Now Moosehide Injun want Christmas. Game is gone. White*

*man kills all moose and caribou near Dawson, which is owned by Moosehide. Injun everywhere have own hunting grounds. Moosehides hunt up Klondike, up Sixtymile, up Twentymile, but game is all gone. White man kill all.*  
Chief Isaac

At any rate it appeared that the prospectors and others hoping to strike it rich were here to stay. In the early days of the rush First Nations people laid out the best possible routes to the gold fields; packed tons of required supplies over the treacherous Chilkoot Pass; built boats at Lake Bennett; and, sold traditional clothing to the gold seekers. Seasonal employment became available on sternwheelers, in wood camps, and in gardens established to feed the local population. Hunters sold meat to the town in great quantities and trapping was still a viable part of the economy. These activities are discussed in previous sections of this manual in greater detail. See *The Yukon River Highway* for information on sternwheelers, wood camps, and freight; *Homesteading in Yukon* for information on gardening, farming fur, and the influenza epidemic; *Fort Selkirk* for information on trapping and trade; and *Wilderness Outposts* for information on market hunting, trapping, and new technology.

Long-term settlement for most of the newcomers would not be the case as gold became more difficult to unearth. In the early 1900s many of the outsiders left the area – in search of gold in other areas. New mining technologies like industrial dredging required fewer employees and also resulted in a dwindling population. Dawson was smaller in size but perhaps more respectable and settled with schools, civil servants, and an active community life with a focus on family.

## Mining the Miners: First Nations-Style

First Nations women played an active role in the new economy. Their knowledge and skills were a necessity for anyone new to the Territory. Women quickly recognized opportunities to augment their families' incomes. In the early days they sold traditional clothing to newcomers as fast as they could make them.

*... the women of Moosehide had quickly mastered the knack of thriving in a market of shortages and high demand. In December 1897, they were earning \$20 to \$40 per day making moccasins and gloves for the miners. Within a few months, the price of native moosehide moccasins had escalated from 75 cents to seven dollars. Moosehide gloves now cost eight dollars.*

In 1902 two Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in women made the news when they purchased a sewing machine. They were able

to produce clothing easily and quickly to meet the demands of the market. Women also did laundry for miners and worked in the local market gardens.

Men were employed by various businesses in Dawson and Klondike Cities including freight companies, the Yukon sawmill, and O'Brien's Brewery. They also worked on the Klondike Railway and on the dredges.

The seasonal nature of many of these jobs allowed most families to continue traditional subsistence activities to some degree. It is important to note that participation in the cash economy created a dependence on cash that was non-existent in earlier days. As people took employment they had to remain in the Dawson area for longer stretches of time than normal and were thus unable to harvest enough resources as they once had. This created a dependence on those jobs and eventually led to a more settled pattern of living.

[Hammerstones, Helene Dobrowolsky]

## Gold... But at What Cost?

The Gold Rush undoubtedly changed the lives of First Nations people forever. Positive changes included new technologies, new medicines, new ideas, and new economic opportunities. Negative changes included a loss of traditional food resources, new diseases, and the introduction of alcohol and other unhealthy activities. Fortunately the intelligence and adaptability of First Nations people allowed them to survive and in many cases thrive. Today Dawson City is a healthy, integrated and prospering community.

# FYI: Klondike Gold Rush

## Key Messages

On August 16th, 1896 Tagish First Nation members -- Skookum Jim, Dawson Charlie, and Kate Carmack (George Carmack's wife) -- and non-native -- George Carmack -- discovered gold at Rabbit Creek, later named Bonanza Creek, near Dawson City.

The impact of the Klondike Gold Rush on Yukon's First Nations people throughout the territory was immense. The sheer numbers of people and new ways of life left a permanent mark.

Skookum Jim's real name was Keish. He was of Tagish and Tlingit descent. Elders insist that Keish was not prospecting for gold in 1896. Rather, he was traveling north in search of two of his sisters.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in most certainly felt the impacts of the Gold Rush to a greater degree than other Yukon First Nations. They were displaced from their traditional fishing and gathering site called Tr'ochëk and relocated 5km down the Yukon River to another traditional site just below Moosehide Creek. This site became commonly known as Moosehide and was eventually set aside as a reserve -- one of the only ones established in Yukon.

In 1998 Tr'ochëk became a designated heritage site within the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement and was designated a National Historic Site of Canada on July 19, 2002.

The new economy in Yukon provided opportunities for First Nations people to participate in different types of employment.

The seasonal nature of many of these jobs allowed most families to continue traditional subsistence activities to some degree. It is important to note that participation in the cash economy created a dependence on cash that was non-existent in earlier days. As people took employment they had to remain in the Dawson area for longer stretches of time than normal and were thus unable to harvest enough resources as they once had. This created a dependence on those jobs and eventually led to a more settled pattern of living.

## Telling the Story

Contact Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in for oral histories that discuss First Nations experiences with gold prior to the Gold Rush.

Discuss the impacts that thousands of newcomers had on the land. Explain how over-harvesting affected First Nations people.

Visit Dänojà Zho in Dawson City for Gold Rush interpretation from the perspective of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

Plan a walk at Tr'ochëk.

## Study Questions

Who discovered gold in the Klondike? On which creek?

How did Pierre Berton describe Skookum Jim?

According to the Elders, why did Keish travel north?

Explain why the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in moved to Moosehide?

What were the impacts when so many people moved to the Klondike?

How did First Nations people participate in the new economy?

## Where to Find More Information

These introductory manuals will provide you with a basic understanding of First Nations heritage and history along the Yukon River. First Nations culture is complex though and you will want to seek out other sources of information to gain more knowledge. The following lists some places you can go to gather more information as well as some published resources and websites that will be of assistance.

### Yukon's First Nations

Contacting the First Nations Governments is a good first point of contact. Staff can provide you with information and/or tips on where to get more details on their community. Many First Nations have resources on hand including archival records, libraries, and resource files. They may also know of citizens who may be available and interested in helping you. Please keep in mind that employees of First Nations Governments are very busy people with priorities that may not include lending a hand to a river guide. Call first and be prepared to send a list of the specific questions you have.

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation  
Box 94  
Old Crow Yukon Y0B 1N0  
867.966.3261

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Box 599  
Dawson City Yukon Y0B 1G0  
867.993.7100

Nacho Nyak Dun  
Box 220  
Mayo Yukon Y0B 1M0  
867.996.2265

Selkirk First Nation  
Box 40  
Pelly Crossing Yukon Y0B 1P0  
867.537.3331

Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation  
Box 135  
Carmacks Yukon Y0B 1C0  
867.863.5576

White River First Nation  
General Delivery  
Beaver Creek Yukon Y0B 1A0  
867.862.7802

Kluane First Nation  
Box 20  
Burwash Landing Yukon Y0B 1V0  
867.841.4274

Champagne and Aisihik First Nations  
Box 5310  
Haines Junction Yukon Y1A 1L0  
867.634.4200

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council  
117 Industrial Road  
Whitehorse Yukon Y1A 2T8  
867.668.3613

Kwanlin Dün  
35 McIntyre Drive  
Whitehorse Yukon Y1A 5A5  
867.633.7800

Carcross-Tagish First Nation  
Box 130  
Carcross Yukon Y0B 1B0  
867.821.4251

Teslin Tlingit Council  
Box 133  
Teslin Yukon Y0B 1B0  
867.390.2532

Ross River Dena Council  
General Delivery  
Ross River Yukon Y0B 1S0  
867.969.2277

Liard First Nation  
Box 328  
Watson Lake Yukon Y0A 1C0  
867.536.2131

### Yukon Government

Yukon Government's Department of Tourism and Culture has several branches that may be of assistance to you. Keep in mind that they may need permission from individual First Nations to release certain information. Two branches of the Department that may be of assistance include: the Historic Sites Unit and the Heritage Resources Unit – Archaeology, Palaeontology, and Geographical Place Names. Check out the Department's website at <http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca> for more information.

The Department of Tourism and Culture also oversees the Yukon Archives.

Yukon Archives  
400 College Drive  
Yukon Place (Beside Yukon College)  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Phone: (867) 667-5321  
Toll free (In Yukon): 1-800-661-0408, local 5321  
Fax: (867) 393-6253  
[yukon.archives@gov.yk.ca](mailto:yukon.archives@gov.yk.ca)

### Cultural Centres, Interpretive Centres, and Museums

Yukon has a variety of First Nations Cultural Centres, Interpretive Centres, and Museums which all have information that may be helpful to you. Many of these centres operate seasonally though you can often make an appointment to visit the centres during the winter months if you call ahead. We have not included information on all of Yukon's centres. Visit [www.yukonmuseums.ca](http://www.yukonmuseums.ca) for more information.

#### Tagé Cho Hudän Interpretive Centre – Carmacks

The Tagé Cho Hudän Interpretive Centre showcases the past and present culture of the Northern Tutchone with many fascinating exhibits. Indoor features include a moose skin boat, a dug-out canoe, a rare collection of stone and bone tools, a beaded slipper collection, and traditional outfits. Outdoors, visitors will find a walking trail through several First Nation outdoor displays. The centre is home to the world's only mammoth snare diorama!

The staff conducts guided tours in an oral tradition. Visitors are encouraged to listen to the stories and information, and learn about the culture and exhibits.

Location and Contact Info:  
Just north of the Yukon River bridge in Carmacks  
Phone: (867) 863-5830  
Mail: Box 135, Carmacks, Yukon Y0B 1C0  
Email: [tagechohudan@northwestel.net](mailto:tagechohudan@northwestel.net)

#### Big Jonathan House - Pelly Crossing

The Selkirk First Nation cultural centre at Pelly Crossing is housed in a replica of Fort Selkirk's Big Jonathan House. This attraction has a range of works by local artists, as well as locally-made beaded clothing, birch bark baskets, baby birch bedding and tools. A model of a fish trap and a fish rack illustrate the catching, drying and smoking of the summer fish catch for winter use. Enjoy listening to audio recordings of storytelling elders or try some Northern Tutchone language lessons on tape. Watch the *Fort Selkirk: Voices of the People* video to learn more about this interesting region and its people.

Location and Contact Info:

Next to Selkirk Grocery Store south of the Pelly River bridge

Pelly Crossing

Mail: Box 40, Pelly Crossing, Yukon Y0B 1P0

Phone: (867) 537-3150

### **Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre - Dawson City**

Situated on the bank of the Yukon River, Dänojà Zho (long time ago house) Cultural Centre is a gateway into Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in heritage. Our knowledgeable staff bring the Hammerstone Gallery to life, sharing the story of life before the arrival of the gold seekers and the stories of life on the land, survival skills, leadership, and the strength and success of our community today. In the Gathering Room we present a new exhibit each summer on a wide variety of subjects. The *Heart of the Homeland* river walk tour brings the focus to one of the most important heritage features of our traditional territory: the Yukon River and the ancestral fish camp of Tr'ochëk. Dänojà Zho provides a relaxed atmosphere for learning and sharing. We encourage our guests to take in a cultural program or hands-on activity while visiting the centre. The Dänojà Zho gift shop specializes in a wide variety of hand-made clothing, beaded footwear, and jewellery. We also specialize in Northern and First Nation books, art, music, and gifts.

Location and Contact Info:

Dawson City, across from Visitor Reception Centre

Phone: (867) 993-6768

Email: glenda.bolt@gov.trondek.ca

Website: www.trondek.com

Mail: Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, P.O. Box 599, Dawson City, Yukon, Y0B 1G0

### **Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre - Teslin**

The Teslin Tlingit Heritage Center welcomes visitors to participate in the day-to-day life of the Tlingit people whose traditions are reflected in every aspect of the facility. This striking building on the shores of Teslin Lake houses the Great Hall, home of the Clan Governance for the Teslin Tlingit people. Interpretive displays feature masks and artifacts that explain two centuries of Tlingit history and the culture of the Inland Tlingit people. Visit the gift shop/gallery for authentic Tlingit art.

Location and Contact Info:

3km west of Teslin on the Alaska Highway overlooking Teslin Lake

Phone: (867) 390-2070

Mail: Box 133, Teslin, Yukon Y0A 1B0

### **Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre - Whitehorse**

Imagine a world where the vast steppe stretches unbroken as far as the eye can see. Envision a place where predators of staggering proportions compete with human hunters for food in a cold, dry, treeless expanse. Explore the mysteries of that world within the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre and watch Beringia come alive. This multimedia exposition features life-size exhibits of ice age animals, interactive computer kiosks and dioramas depicting the unique landscape, flora and fauna of Beringia. Highlights of the centre include a full-size cast of the largest woolly mammoth ever recovered in North America and a reconstruction of the 24,000-year-old Bluefish Cave archaeological site.

Location and Contact Info:

Kilometer 1473 on the Alaska Highway

South of the Whitehorse International Airport

Mail: Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

Phone: (867) 667-8855

Email: beringia@gov.yk.ca

Website: www.beringia.com

### **George Johnston Museum - Teslin**

George Johnston Museum and Heritage Park is a must-see Teslin attraction named after the venerated Tlingit elder, trapper, fur trader, entrepreneur and photographer. George Johnston's photographs, his restored 1928 Chevy hunting car and colourful exhibits of Tlingit ceremonial regalia and traditional artifacts tell the story of the Inland Tlingit as they met the rapid changes of the first half of the 20th century. The museum gift shop replicating Johnston's 1950 general store stocks furs, Tlingit arts and crafts. A small theatre shows a renowned National Film Board film: "Picturing a People" by Tlingit Director Carol Geddes. Visitors can stroll prepared trails and picnic in the interpretive rest areas.

Location and Contact Info:

Km. 1,294 (Mile 804) Alaska Highway, Teslin, Yukon 1 km west of the Nisutlin Bay Bridge on the Alaska Highway

Phone: (867) 390-2550

Email: gjmuseum@hotmail.com

Website: gjmuseum.yk.net

Mail: George Johnston Museum

PO Box 146, Teslin, Yukon, Y0A 1B0

### **Dawson City Museum - Dawson City**

The Dawson City Museum is housed in the beautiful Old Territorial Administration Building National

Historic Site, one of the premier heritage attractions in the Yukon. The exhibits provide an in-depth look at Dawson's social and mining history, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in People, pre-gold rush history, the colourful Gold Rush era, and the natural history of the Klondike. Three Klondike Mines Railway locomotives, including one of the oldest preserved examples in Canada, are housed in the museum's train shelter. The Museum presents temporary exhibits, audiovisual programs, rocker box demonstrations, a series of special events, library and research services and a Gift Shop.

Location and Contact Info:

On 5th Ave., between Hanson & Turner Streets

Dawson City, Yukon

Phone: (867) 993-5291

Email: info@dawsonmuseum.ca

Website: www.dawsonmuseum.ca

Pan for Gold database: www.yukongenealogy.com

### **Kluane Museum of Natural History - Burwash Landing**

Kluane Museum of Natural History offers a world-class wildlife exhibit along with displays on the Southern Tutchone people and the many plant species that make their home in the national park. The museum features realistic diorama displays of over 70 animals, birds and fish native to the Yukon. It also contains displays of Southern Tutchone artifacts, clothing and tools. A video theatre continuously shows movies with northern themes. The gift shop features local crafts, northern books and videos, and hand-made moose-hide moccasins.

Location and Contact Info:

Historic Mile 1093 on the Alaska Highway

Burwash Landing

Phone: (867) 841-5561

Email: kluanemus@yknet.ca

Mail: Kluane Museum of Natural History

Box 45, Burwash Landing, Yukon, Y0B 1V0

### **MacBride Museum of Yukon History - Whitehorse**

Your Yukon adventure starts here! From gold rush fever to the birth of our capital city, the MacBride Museum of Yukon History offers a comprehensive view of the colourful characters and groundbreaking events that shaped the Territory. Come face-to-face with a seven-foot grizzly in our Wild World Gallery, and share an interactive experience for the whole family in the Kids Discovery Zone. Discover the truth behind the Robert Service legend at Sam McGee's Cabin and

learn about Engine 51, the locomotive that built the WP & YR railway, in our outdoor courtyards. Look for our new Modern History Gallery, which chronicles the people and events that built Canada's Yukon. We also offer guided tours, a first-class gift shop, and a chance to try your hand at one of the territory's oldest professions - gold panning.

Location and Contact Info

Corner of First Ave & Wood St.

Downtown Whitehorse

Phone: (867) 667-2709

Mailing address: 1124 1st Avenue, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1A4

Email: info@macbridemuseum.com

Website: www.macbridemuseum.com

### **Old Log Church Museum - Whitehorse**

Built in 1900, the Old Log Church and Rectory are among the oldest buildings in Whitehorse. Today, the church's exhibits and interactive displays tell stories about the early days of missionaries, whalers, explorers and Yukon First Nations. The impressive collection of artifacts, including a unique collection of Inuvialuit articles from Herschel Island, and numerous historic photographs offer a great way for visitors to learn about the early contact between Europeans and the Yukon's First Nation people. The museum is also the best place to hear about the legendary "Bishop Who Ate His Boots!" The museum gift shop is open daily. It has a good selection of books and locally-made products unique to the museum. Guided walking tours of the Pioneer Cemetery are also offered.

Location and Contact Info:

Corner of 3rd Avenue and Elliot Street, Whitehorse

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 31461, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 6K8

Phone: (867) 668-2555

Email: logchurch@klondiker.com

### **Yukon Native Language Centre**

The Yukon Native Language Centre is a training and research facility which provides a range of linguistic and educational services to Yukon First Nations and to the general public. It is located in the Commons wing of Yukon College, Ayamdigut Campus, Whitehorse, Canada. The Centre is administered by the Council of Yukon First Nations with funds provided by the Government of Yukon.

Today the Centre staff is actively teaching, documenting, and promoting Yukon Native languages:

- YNLC offers training and certification for Yukon





# Glossary

**Aboriginal Peoples** – are the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people - Indians, Métis people and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**Aboriginal Rights/Inherent Rights** – are rights that some Aboriginal peoples of Canada hold as a result of their ancestors' longstanding use and occupancy of the land. The rights of certain Aboriginal peoples to hunt, trap, and fish on ancestral lands are examples of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal rights will vary from group to group depending on the customs, practices and traditions that have formed part of their distinctive cultures. For rights other than aboriginal title, the Supreme Court of Canada has held that claimants must demonstrate that the right was integral to their distinctive aboriginal societies and exercised at the time of first contact with Europeans. While these may be now exercised in a modern way, practices that arose from European influence are not protected. This paradox is often expressed in relation to commercial trade in furs or fish, which the courts have seen as the product of European contact rather than integral to aboriginal societies prior to contact. Fishing for food, community or ceremonial purposes is, however, a protected aboriginal right and may be exercised in a modern way with modern fishing gear.

**Archaeology** – is the scientific study of past cultures and the way people lived based on the things they left behind.

**Band** – is a group of First Nation individuals that has its own chief and band council. A band may also be referred to as a First Nation. This is a term that is not used anymore in Yukon. People now use the term First Nation to mean a group of First Nations people and/or a First Nation Government.

**Chief and Council** – is the governing body of a First Nation made up of a chief and councillors who are elected for terms of two or more years to carry out government business, such as develop by-laws and administer community businesses and services.

**Culture** – can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called “the way of life for an entire

society.” As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, games, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the arts.

**Customs** – are ways of acting common to many; a method of doing or living; long-established practice, considered as unwritten law, and resting for authority on long consent.

**First Nation** – is a term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which many people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations peoples” refers to the Indian people in Canada, both Status and Non-Status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word “band” in the name of their community.

**Heritage** – is all that we gain from our ancestors, it is our cultural identity. Our cultural identity is made up of many things, language, creation stories, associations with place, and that connection with our ancestors made by accepting their gifts to us. Heritage is those values and attitudes that our families try to instill in us as children so that we can grow up to be decent and respectful members of our community.

**Indigenous** – means “native to the area.” In this sense, Aboriginal people are indigenous to North America.

**Kinship** – is the system through which we keep track of our relationships with others who are connected to us by ties we trace through parents and their offspring. This can be biological or not (ie through adoption).

**Land Claim** - claims of First Nations people about their right of ownership of the land they inhabited before the arrival of settlers, primarily Europeans. This process is most active in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, where many native populations have survived that have been greatly displaced from their historical territory by the arrival of European settlers.

**Oral History** - refers to the process of saving spoken memories by a sound recording. Oral historians should ensure this material is shared with others. By their stories, elders are not just telling about by-

gone days, but giving advice and messages that speak directly to how we are to live today.

**Oral Tradition** – refers to the ongoing process of sharing stories, songs, histories, personal experience narratives and even gossip, by word of mouth. Information is preserved by repeated tellings from one generation to the next. This was an important way of preserving history and heritage in preliterate cultures.

**Palaeontology** – is the study of ancient or pre-historic life on earth. Its main goal is to investigate the evolution of plant and animal species as well as the earth's ancient ecosystems and climate as a whole.

**Protocols** – are rules, guidelines, or documents which guide how an activity should be performed.

**Self-Government** – Negotiated arrangements that give Aboriginal people greater control over their own affairs, in areas such as health care, child welfare, education, housing, and economic development. The Government of Canada recognizes that Aboriginal peoples have an “inherent right of self-government” and has committed to negotiating self-government agreements with Aboriginal peoples. Since the settlement of land claims, there is a new level of government in the Yukon Territory: every Yukon First Nation that has signed a final agreement has also signed a self-government agreement meaning that the federal and territorial governments have agreed with the First Nation on a division of powers. Now First Nations can form governing and administrative bodies to make laws and regulations governing their people and activities on Settlement Lands. They also have the right to collect taxes and fees for the use of their lands, to borrow money and to enter into agreements with other governments.

**Subsistence** – is the basic means by which a human group extracted and utilized energy from its environment.

**Traditional Knowledge** – includes an immense body of cultural material: such as mythic stories of the days when animals could talk; detailed knowledge of the land and its resources; and practical information about hunting areas, trapping techniques, food preparation, etc. While this term is usually applied to aboriginal cultures, every society possesses a body of traditional knowledge that it transmits in various ways.

**Traditional Territory** – is the geographic area occupied by our ancestors for community, social, economic, and spiritual purposes.

**Traditions** – are beliefs, customs, and practices taught by one generation to the next, often orally.

**Values** – are principles or standards of behaviour.

**Worldview** – is a culture's orientation toward spiritual beings, humanity, nature, questions of existence, the universe, the cosmos, life, death, sickness, and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world. World view is the core of a culture.

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4: Georgette McLeod paddles a traditional Hän canoe on the Yukon River. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

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7: Allison Anderson fleshes a caribou hide. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

9: Ronald Johnson and Georgette McLeod welcome visitors to the Moosehide Gathering, 2008. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

9: Young Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Citizens enjoying Moosehide. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

14: Debbie Nagano prepares to barbecue fresh Yukon River salmon. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

14: John Flynn with a harvested moose on the Yukon River. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives, John Flynn Collection.

17: Map of Traditional Territories of Yukon First Nations. Yukon Government, Department of Environment.

19: Kwanlin Dün citizens. D. Smith, Kwanlin Dün.

21: Mariah Van Bibber at Fort Selkirk. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards.

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31: A Beringia painting by George Teichmann. Courtesy Yukon Government/Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre.

37: The Yukon River above Whitehorse. Kwanlin Dun photo by John Meikle.

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44: Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Citizen Sandra Roberts teaches her daughter how to bead. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

49: Waylin Nagano with caribou. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

49: Madeline deRepentigny with blueberries. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

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Page 51: Sheep horn spoon. Royal Ontario Museum, Cameron Collection???

51: Beaver. Kwanlin Dun First Nation photo.

52: Grizzly Bear. Photo by Jean-Pierre Lavoie.

52: High cache. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

53: Blueberries and salmonberries. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

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56: Library and Archives Canada/NL 19116 Traditional winter shelter. by Tappan Adney.

57: Georgette McLeod with a traditional Hän canoe on the Yukon River. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

59: Bannock. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

64: 2007 Jeux du Canada Winter Games photo by Michael Edwards.

64: Hän people with the gänhäk in Dawson City. YA Martha and Brian Kate’s Collection ACC #5781

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65: Michelle Olson of Raven Spirit Dance performs in Łuk Täga Näche (Salmon Girl Dreaming). Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

66: Beaded baby belt. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

66: Carver Eugene Alfred. 2007 Jeux du Canada Winter Games photo by Michael Edwards.

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68: Bev Buckway and Johnson Edwards. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards

69: Mask by Kwanlin Dun citizen Duran Henry. Kwanlin Dun photo.

71: Stickgambling at Fort Selkirk. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards.

74: The Yukon River at midnight on the summer solstice. Photo by Michael Edwards.

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84: Miles Canyon. Photo by Mike Colvin.

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110: Woodcutters posing with their axes and saws in front of C.D. Co. Post No. 8 between Chico and Selkirk, 1900. YA# 4923 H.C. Barley fonds

111: Remnants of wood piles from a wood camp in the White River area. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

114: Remnants of a fence from a fox farm in the Fortymile area. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

116: Georgette McLeod makes an offering at the grave of Selea and her seven children, all victims of the ‘flu epidemic of 1918. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

120: Fort Selkirk from the basalt cliffs across the Yukon River. Yukon Government photo.

122: The rectory and church at Fort Selkirk. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards.

123: Two drummers at Fort Selkirk. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards.

123: Two Selkirk First Nation youth. Yukon Government photo by Michael Edwards.

126: JJ Van Bibber with some of his family’s fur harvest. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives, JJ and Clara Van Bibber Collection.

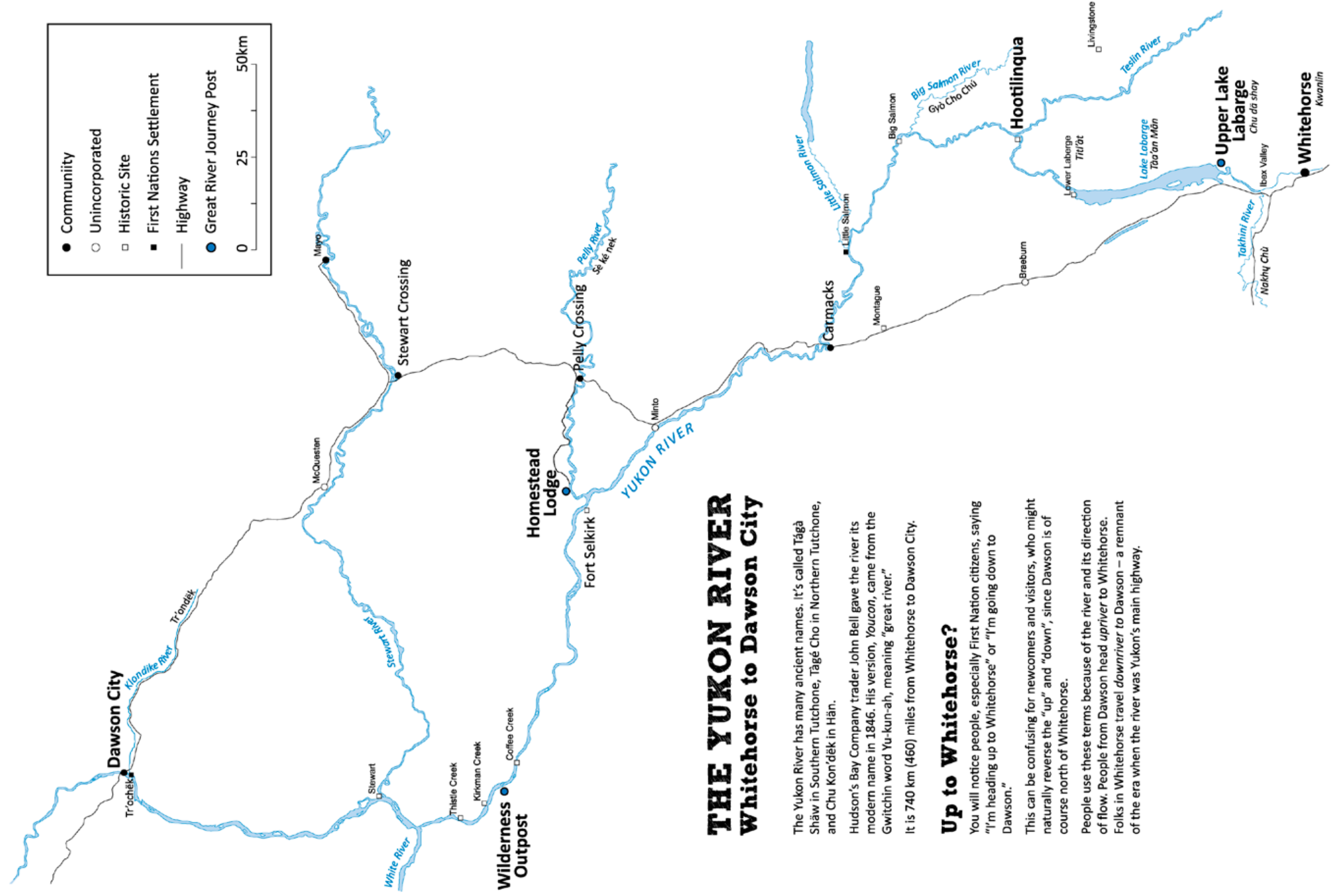
127: Peggy Kormendy with harvested furs in Dawson City. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives.

128: The Van Bibber brothers build a frame for a moose skin boat. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives, JJ and Clara Van Bibber Collection.

129: Jack Flynn on the land. Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Archives, John Flynn Collection.

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150 : Yukon River map by Michael Edwards.



# THE YUKON RIVER

## Whitehorse to Dawson City

The Yukon River has many ancient names. It's called Tágà Sháw in Southern Tutchone, Tágé Cho in Northern Tutchone, and Chu Kon'dék in Hän.

Hudson's Bay Company trader John Bell gave the river its modern name in 1846. His version, *Youcon*, came from the Gwitchin word Yu-kun-ah, meaning "great river."

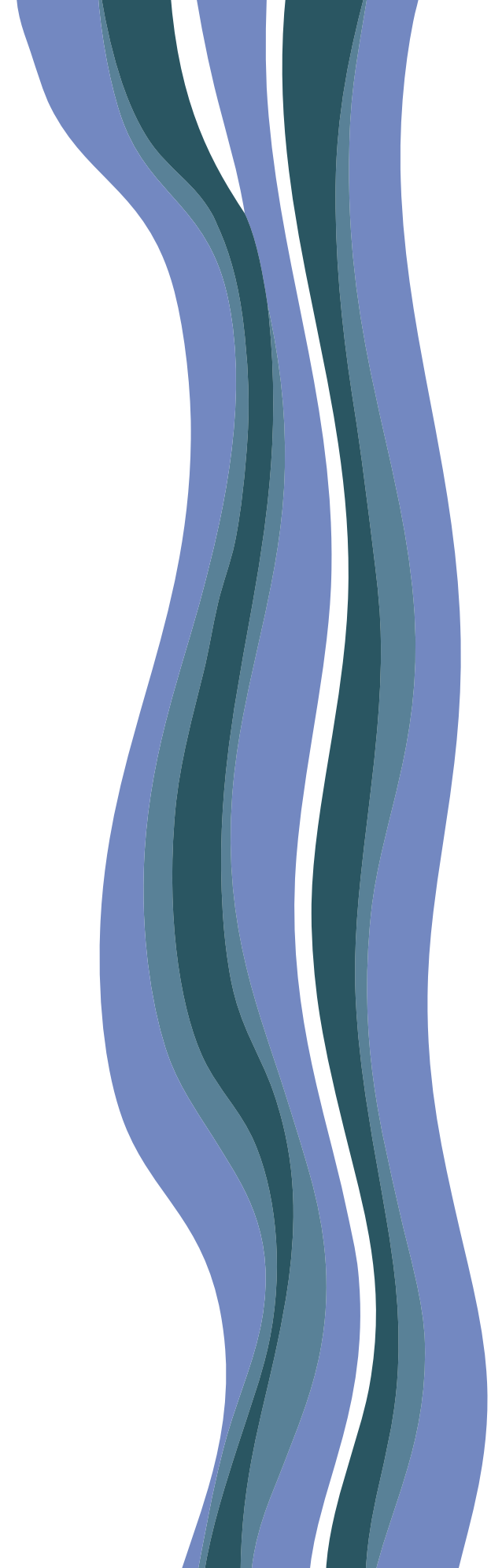
It is 740 km (460) miles from Whitehorse to Dawson City.

### Up to Whitehorse?

You will notice people, especially First Nation citizens, saying "I'm heading up to Whitehorse" or "I'm going down to Dawson."

This can be confusing for newcomers and visitors, who might naturally reverse the "up" and "down", since Dawson is of course north of Whitehorse.

People use these terms because of the river and its direction of flow. People from Dawson head *upriver* to Whitehorse. Folks in Whitehorse travel *downriver* to Dawson – a remnant of the era when the river was Yukon's main highway.



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