Heritage Conversations

Volume II

Heritage holds special power; it carries the stories of our past, reminding us of who we are, where we came from, and what has shaped the world around us.

Contents

COVER PHOTO

Elders and youth watching caribou all over the Dachan Tr'iivan (Bonnet Lake) area.

Photo courtesy of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government

All stories were written by Leighann Chalykoff.

Heritage Conversations columnist Leighann Chalykoff is a Yukon writer chronicling projects and people preserving Yukon's history. This series is provided by the Government of Yukon Historic Sites Unit to highlight the work of Yukoners and their connections to the territory's heritage.

Thank you to all the people who shared their stories and photographs in this publication.

Introduction

Welcome to Heritage Conversations, Volume II. This series began with an idea sparked from a slip of the tongue. In 2018, Brent Slobodin (1957-2019) misspoke during an event and said, "heritage conversation," instead of "heritage conservation". The unintended phrase stayed with Yukon Historic Sites Unit manager Rebecca Jansen, and the idea for the series took root.

The first 15 stories were collected in a booklet, published in 2021, titled "Stories of Yukoners connecting to their heritage". Now this second volume focuses on 18 more people, places and objects that speak to different aspects of the Yukon's rich heritage.

These stories were originally featured in "What's Up Yukon", Yukon's biweekly events and entertainment magazine from 2022 – 2025. They are also featured on Exploring Yukon History, where you can interact with the Yukon's historic places. For this collection, these stories have been slightly edited for consistency and clarity.

From the discovery of Nun cho ga, the mummified remains of a baby woolly mammoth; to the preservation of historic buildings; to reconnecting with ancient wisdom by learning ancestral skills, each story offers a unique and captivating perspective.

We hope you enjoy this second volume.

Visit the Exploring Yukon History webpage:

LEFT

The 6000-year-old atlatl dart found on the Alligator Creek Ice Patch in 2018. It was made from three pieces of birch tied together with sinew. Its stone point and the eagle feathers in its fletching were still firmly attached.

Read more about this dart on pages 60 to 63.

Credit: Government of Yukon

Found in the Yukon

What to do if you find something that looks like it has heritage value?

If you can, leave it where you found it and report your find. Often, the location of an object or other things found nearby can provide a lot of information about the history, heritage and cultural value of an object.

Also, wherever you are in the Yukon, you're on a the Traditional Territory of a First Nation or many First Nations. There are Yukon and First Nations government laws which state that artifacts may not be removed.

To find out more call 867-471-0950 or visit **yukonlivingheritage.ca**.

Unearthing a ‘miracle’

Nun cho ga is proving to be an extraordinary discovery that’s changed lives, connected Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in to the ice age stories of their lands, and may add to the world’s scientific understanding of evolution and adaptation. That’s a lot of work for a baby.

During the summer solstice of 2022, placer miners with Treadstone Gold were working at Eureka Creek on Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in (TH) Traditional Territory. In the early afternoon, Travis Delawski was using an excavator to cut into a bank of permafrost when he looked down and saw a face he’ll never forget.

“Something was looking at me,” he says, “so I hopped down to investigate.” Then, Delawski picked up the two-way radio to tell his boss, Brian McCaughan, that he had “found a body”.

It’s common for Klondike miners to uncover fossilized ice age bones, skulls, tusks and teeth buried in black muck, the mixture of silt and organic material that lays atop gold-bearing gravel. But on that day Delawski had unearthed something special and extremely rare — a near complete, mummified female mammoth calf with skin and some hair intact.

Over the next few hours, the miners worked closely with Yukon government scientists to make sure the animal was carefully excavated and safely transported into cold storage.

As the vehicle carrying the mammoth left Eureka Creek, there was heavy rain, strong winds and thunder, as if the weather itself was marking the significance of the discovery.

“The storm at the end of the day was right out of the movies … lightning bolts were dropping around us,” says McCaughan. “I shut the crew down, and it just poured sideways for I don’t know how long, but we were drenched.… That was surreal and significant in itself.”

TH Elders named the mammoth Nun cho ga, a Hän name that translates as “big animal baby”. There is no word for mammoth in the Hän language.

There’s still a lot to study and learn about Nun cho ga. Current evidence indicates she was just 30 to 35 days old and possibly standing near a stream when she was caught in a mud flow triggered by a storm. The quick burial is likely why the body was fixed in one place, undisturbed by scavengers and preserved in the permafrost for thousands of years.

Nun cho ga was discovered at the Treadstone Gold operation in the Klondike.

Photo courtesy of the Klondike Placer Miners’ Association

“Nun cho ga was and is a living being; she had a heartbeat, lived and passed on to her next journey on Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in lands. As a result, our First Nations people have a responsibility to care for her.”

Chief Roberta Joseph

It’s believed this young mammoth lived and died 30,000 to 40,000 years ago, during the last ice age. At that time, glaciers covered much of Canada, but the Yukon’s tundra was flush with wild grasses, small hardy flowers and megafauna — long extinct animals, such as giant beavers, scimitar cats, giant short-faced bears, and woolly mammoths.

Since her appearance, Nun cho ga has set scientific hearts aflutter all over the world. She is likely the best preserved, most complete example of a baby mammoth that’s been found anywhere ever. That means she may be able to teach us about evolution and adaptation in a way that bones and partial remains cannot.

For the TH, Nun cho ga is much more than a scientific specimen: she’s a “sacred ancestor”, a reminder that life is fragile, and a connection point between past and present on the land that has sustained their people for millennia.

“We are thankful she has chosen to reveal herself to us today,” says TH Chief Roberta Joseph. “Nun cho ga was and is a living being; she had a heartbeat, lived and passed on to her next journey on Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in lands. As a result, our First Nations people have a responsibility to care for her.”

For Chief Joseph that responsibility is a “happy obligation” that transcends time. She says: “When we look after our relatives, they look after us, including this little big baby female woolly mammoth, Nun cho ga.”

TH people have lived and thrived on their Traditional Territory for thousands of years. The ancestral connection to the land was crystallized into law when the First Nation, Canada, and the Yukon signed final and self-government agreements in 1998. Among many other things, these agreements empower the First Nation with certain rights, responsibilities, and authorities on its Traditional Territory.

“We respect everything that is on our land, and we reciprocate: We take from the land, but we also have to give back,” says TH Heritage Director Debbie Nagano. “In everything we do and the government we set up, we’re mandated to remember our culture and our traditional knowledge.”

When the First Nation heard about the remarkable find, they looked to Elders for guidance on how to proceed. The Elders gave the mammoth a name and planned a ceremony to honour and bless her.

Out at the mine site, Elders, youth, and TH heritage employees gathered with the miners and scientists who were involved in the discovery. The group formed a circle around Nun cho ga, and at first, they stood in silence.

“When I first looked at it, it was something I couldn’t fathom,” says Nagano. “There were so many amazing and powerful split-second moments of connecting to the spirit of this animal.”

“We could see the eyelids, the toenails, the tusk — it was a very powerful thing,” she says. “Then, a ceremony was performed and it was blessed in a good and respectful way.”

Nun cho ga has spent thousands of years on TH Traditional Territory. With the Yukon government, the First Nation will decide its next steps with the guidance of Elders and citizens in a way that honours their traditions and laws.

Nun cho ga will be a teaching tool, and it could herald a new way for the First Nation and the Yukon government to co-manage heritage.

“This historic moment requires collaboration and commitment from all of us who work together,” says Chief Joseph. “We appreciate the stronger relationship Nun cho ga has already initiated, fosters, and continues to build amongst us.”

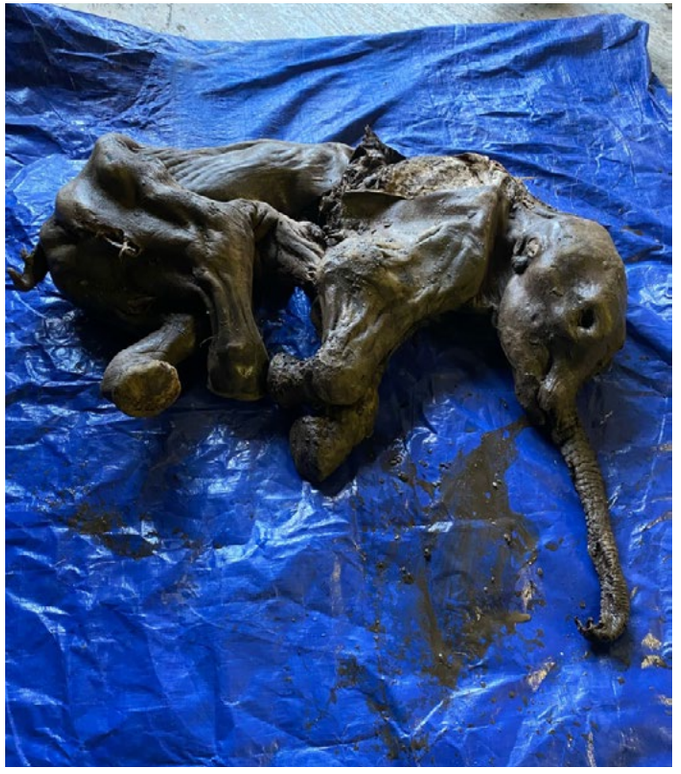
Nagano believes there is a reason why Delawski and McCaughan found Nun cho ga. And she hopes the strong partnership that’s been built will open the door for other miners and industries operating in TH Traditional Territory to work more closely with the First Nation.

“There’s a connection there that needs to be played out too,” she says. “This story is just beginning.”

For McCaughan, finding Nun cho ga was a life-long career highlight, a “miracle”, and a “message”.

“For us to get it out of the earth the way we did is a miracle in itself, never mind how it was preserved and how it passed away,” says McCaughan. “It’s a definite message ... I truly believe that ... and hopefully we’re all going to learn a ton. I think it’s a super positive thing, and the world needs some positive things these days.” •

This article was originally published in the August 31, 2022 edition of “What’s Up Yukon”.



The trunk, ears and tail of Nun cho ga are almost perfectly preserved.

Credit: Government of Yukon

This cache of 19th and 20th century coins was found about a metre underground.

Photo courtesy of Bill McLane

Stolen loot or hard-earned savings?

A chance discovery at a gold-rush-era squatters' site offers a shimmering glimpse into what life was like on the outskirts of Dawson City more than a century ago.

As a professional trail builder, Bill McLane spends a lot of time digging earth, moving rocks, and finding treasure. Usually, that "treasure" consists of broken saws, railway spikes, and old bottles.

"I love history and learning about history, so it's all interesting to me," he says. "But I've never found anything like this before."

In the summer of 2018, McLane spent six weeks in Dawson City. He was working with a crew hired to build a new trail across the side of the Dome. Now overgrown with plants and trees, many people called the area home during the Klondike Gold Rush and up until the 1910s.

"We were in an area of the forest where you could see the old dirt streets and tent sites with stoves," says McLane. "We had permission to use one of the old streets as part of the trail, which was really cool."

Historical photos from the early 1900s show dozens of tents and cabins on the hillsides around Dawson. As the boomtown expanded and the population grew, the price of real estate increased. Gold rush stampeders couldn't afford to live in the town, so they built up.

"On the hills above the city, to the east, lived a variety of curious men in tiny, immaculate log cabins with thick sod roofs," according to author Laura Berton who came to the Yukon in 1907. On walks through the area, Berton mentioned hearing the "sounds of gramophones filtering through the woods."

More than 110 years later, McLane was listening to heavy metal music as he worked on the new trail.

"I was just digging away in a bit of a daze, honestly, because I'd been doing it for six weeks or so at that time," says McLane. "I'd get pretty zoned out."

He scooped up some dirt, and when he unloaded the bucket a pile of sparkling coins came flying out. No box, no wrapping, just shiny silver coins mixed in with the dirt, roots, and leaves.

"It didn't seem real," says McLane. "You're not used to seeing that kind of thing come out of the bucket."

It took him a moment to register what was happening. It also took him a moment to decide what to do next. No one else had seen the coins. He was alone in the forest with a pile of actual treasure. So McLane told his project leader, Derek Crowe.

ABOVE

Trail builder Bill McLane at work.

Photo courtesy of Derek Crowe

RIGHT

An aerial view of Dawson City showing the Dome in the background.

Credit: Government of Yukon / Justin Kennedy

"I walked into Derek's camper, and I says, 'Hey, I found something.' He didn't even look up from his cereal," says McLane. "So, I put this sock full of coins down on the table, and then his eyes turned into saucers."

In all, McLane unearthed 23 coins: Canadian and American quarters and half-dollars, dating between 1864 and 1902.

At face value, they're worth about $10. That's roughly $400 in today's dollars, and they would be worth even more in a collector's market.

"I think the story is more valuable to me than having a bunch of coins that I can never show anybody," says McLane. "I'm a blabber mouth, so I wouldn't have been able to keep it a secret very long anyway."

Crowe called in the find, and they arranged a hand-off with Tr'ondëk Hwëchin Chief Roberta Joseph and Wayne Potoroka, former Mayor of Dawson. After that, the cache ended up with the Yukon government for analysis and safekeeping.

"The Dawson area is continuously surprising us," says Yukon government archaeologist Ty Heffner. "You can't really do anything that scratches the ground without something interesting popping up."

Heffner is one of the experts who gets a call when something unexpected — like a stone tool, an abandoned safe or a coin cache — is found in the Yukon.

"There are always these chance discoveries where people are going about their daily lives and they run into things," he says. "It's a great opportunity to raise awareness because it's in those moments that people really get excited, and they see the real value in heritage."

Recently, Yukon First Nations and the Yukon government launched a campaign called Yukon's Living Heritage to guide people who find something that looks like it has heritage value in the Yukon. It asks people to leave the object in place and report the find, but in this case, that wasn't possible.

"In this case, leaving a pile of coins exposed in the woods doesn't make a lot of sense," says Heffner. "The trail-building crew reported the find and the coins will remain a public heritage resource."

For Heffner, the coins are an intriguing link to our collective past.

"I think the really interesting part is all the unanswered questions," he says. "Who put them there? Why did they put them there? And why didn't they come back for them?"

From the dates on the coins, it's certain that they were buried during or after 1902. The rest of the story is a best guess.

It can be assumed that they belonged to one of the hillside residents, who was likely a less-affluent miner or labourer who came to the Yukon and planned to stay for a short time. Perhaps they belonged to one of Laura Berton's "curious men".

"If it was somebody working in the gold fields and only coming into town at odd hours, they might not necessarily be able to access a bank reliably," says Heffner. "I'm sure there were lots of accidents out in the gold fields too, so maybe something happened to this person."

Since finding the coins four years ago, McLane has speculated on the fate of their original owner.

"I think somebody made enough money to buy their ticket home, and they buried it behind the tent so they wouldn't spend it," says McLane. "That's what I would do; I'd make sure that I had enough to get home and then mess around and gamble or whatever. But something must have happened for them to not come back for the money."

In honour of the mysterious cache of coins, part of the new trail is now called Buried Treasure.

In summer 2022, McLane was back in the Yukon again working on a project with Crowe and the Singletrack to Success crew in Carcross.

"Finding those coins was a total once-in-a-lifetime thing," he says. "If something like that ever happens again, it'll just be absurd ... people won't believe me. Derek was even joking about it. He says: 'I don't know how you're going to top those coins, but I can't wait to see.'" •

This article was originally published in the November 16, 2022 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

Breathing new life into a 1950s mystery

The search for the missing U.S. Air Force Douglas C-54 Skymaster

It could be a military dog tag, a cut of metal, or a twist of fabric. Uncovering even the smallest thing from a plane that disappeared more than 70 years ago has the power to change lives. It can give certainty and closure to families still missing loved ones.

"I feel their anxiety," says Donna Clayson. "It would be wonderful if we could go to the families and say: 'We found them'. I can't even imagine that feeling. It would be such a relief."

Though Clayson has not yet met them in person, she feels a connection to those families, and that's what motivates her to help search for the US Air Force Skymaster passenger plane that vanished in the air over southwest Yukon on January 26, 1950.

Here's what we know: The plane left Anchorage, Alaska and followed the Northwest Staging Route—a series of airfields and radio operator stations constructed during the Second World War—bound for Montana.

The plane checked in at Snag, reporting ice on the wings and turbulence, relatively common problems at the time. About half an hour later the plane should have been at Aishihik, but it never arrived, and then nothing.

There was an extensive search, but the Yukon's mountainous terrain and vast unpopulated areas make finding lost things difficult at the best of times. The brutal January cold didn't help. Four search planes crashed while looking for the Skymaster, but miraculously no one was killed in those accidents.

After three weeks the search ended. The plane and its 44 passengers — all military men except for one pregnant woman and her small child — had seemingly vanished.

Decades later, the missing plane had been mostly forgotten until a crumpled piece of metal helped bring the story back into the light.

In 2018, Toronto-based filmmaker Andy Gregg was in the Yukon presenting *Secrets From the Ice*, a documentary on ice patch archaeology, when a piece of metal on a storage shelf caught his eye.

The specimen, which Gregg describes as "a twisted mess of rivets and aluminium," had been recovered during archaeological field work. At first, it was thought it came from the Skymaster, but it didn't. Turns out, it was the mechanism from a fuel tank commonly dropped from smaller planes used on the Lend-Lease Program during the Second World War.

"During that period in Yukon history, aviation just went crazy," says Gregg. "Because the Yukon airspace was in between the southern US and Alaska, it became the graveyard for so many different wrecks."

ABOVE

The missing plane — a Douglas C-54 Skymaster 2469.

Photo courtesy of Andy Gregg

RIGHT

Donna Clayson and Dave Downing from the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association.

Photo courtesy of Alistair Maitland

One of the US Air Force C-47 planes that crashed while searching for the Skymaster.

Photos on this spread courtesy of Andy Gregg

Nevertheless, the story piqued Gregg's interest. He started investigating and communicating with families of the missing. In 2022, he released a documentary called Skymaster Down. It chronicles how the plane went missing and follows some modern-day searches for its remains, but the heart of the film is the personal stories from the families.

"Most of these people had never told their stories before," says Gregg. "I went down to Alabama and talked to Judy Jackson about the father she never met because her mother was pregnant with her when he went missing. Still, all these years later, she breaks down in tears that she never knew her father.

"All of a sudden, a sort of amorphous idea that there's a missing plane out there changes when you realize it's 44 individuals that went missing."

There are three basic theories on what happened to the plane: One is that it went into a lake, but personally Gregg thinks that's a long-shot.

"It would have taken an immense amount of power for the plane to puncture the thick January ice, and it would have made a huge noise," he says. "In the spring, fuel and anything that floats would've come to the surface, and nobody ever reported anything like that."

The second theory is that it fell into a crevasse somewhere along the flight path. Gregg doesn't think that's the case either.

"My own personal opinion is that it's not there," says Gregg. "That area has been crisscrossed by outfitters, miners, geologists, truckers, hunters, trappers, First Nations. And a good number of the bush pilots out of Whitehorse know about it, so they've been keeping their eyes open for years ... and there are no reports of a big airplane lying out there anywhere."

The third theory is that it ended up somewhere in the St. Elias mountain range. Gregg thinks this theory is the most likely.

"I found the radio operator who was in Snag that day, and he says pilots had a tendency to take shortcuts," says Gregg. "If they thought, 'Hey, let's try going to the south,' they'd go straight into the front range of the St. Elias Mountains. So, I think it hit one of those mountains, and my worry is that it's buried in a glacier."

There are more than 500 documented plane crashes in the Yukon. Based on flight plans and communications from aircraft, it's believed there are at least four more that have not been documented.

The Yukon has vast areas of wilderness and lots of places for wreckage to hide.

Few know that better than Clayson, a long-time search-and-rescue volunteer and seasoned plane spotter. In fact, she received a Commissioner of Yukon Public Service Award for her volunteer work in 2022.

Clayson first became involved in the search for the Skymaster through the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, commonly known by its acronym CASARA. Over the years, she's helped the group with administration and spent countless focused hours peering out of plane windows surveying the landscape for signs of a wreck.

"When I heard about the Skymaster, I felt something in the pit of my stomach," says Clayson. "It felt as if it was talking to me saying, 'Here I am, come find me. I'm here. You just need to look.'"

So that's what Clayson is doing, but it's not easy work. Searching for a plane that disappeared over rough mountainous terrain takes research and technical expertise. It also requires paperwork and gas money to keep the search planes in the air.

In 2022, Clayson and other interested volunteers formed a new society called Skymaster 2469 CAN/AM. It's named for the plane and the fact that the search involves both Canada and America.

Skymaster 2469 CAN/AM is reaching out to pilots and putting together computer simulations of possible shortcuts the Skymaster crew may have considered. They will use this information to plan ground and aerial searches over the summer. In the meantime, they want to make sure people know that the plane is out there.

"Nothing is insignificant," says Clayson. "Just keep an eye open, but don't remove anything and take note of what you saw. If you see something ... anything ... contact the Yukon government reporting line."

US Air Force searchers land at Snag.

Seeing his documentary help to fuel a renewed interest in searching for the plane and those missing 44 individuals is a gift for Gregg.

"I'm thrilled now that it's back in the conversation," says Gregg. "So, the film spurred this interest in searching and that's all I can ask for. It's better than any prize, it's better than anything."

Both Gregg and Clayson believe the Skymaster will be found one day.

"We need to find this aircraft," says Clayson. "We need to do everything we can to bring closure to those families. We just have to keep looking."

See Skymaster Down on CBC Gem. Find out more about the Skymaster 2469 CAN/AM Society on their Facebook page, or contact president Brent McHale at mchalebrent@gmail.com. •

This story was written in October 2022. Sadly, Donna Clayson passed away in September 2023.

This article was originally published in the March 8, 2023 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

Built heritage

The Historic Properties Assistance Program

The Government of Yukon's Historic Properties Assistance Program provides technical and financial support for privately owned historic properties in the Yukon. To find out more visit **www.yukon.ca/historic-properties-assistance-program**.

The *Sibilla* gets a facelift

Since it was built more than 90 years ago, the *Sibilla* has had many lives. Now, it's been refurbished and fixed up for display to help tell the story of Carcross' history.

When Bob Cameron was a kid in the late 1950s and '60s, his family spent summer weekends boating on Tagish Lake.

"Back then, there was no highway going through to Skagway," says Cameron. "The southern lakes were the ultimate waterways for boating."

They would stop on the lakeshore to fry up the fish they'd caught and explore the abandoned mining camps in the area.

"There were miles of pristine wilderness and abandoned settlements: Tutshi, Engineer Mine, Taku Landing, Venus Mine and Conrad," says Cameron. "It was a big adventure to check out the inside of the old buildings, or peer through windows and cracks in the walls if they were locked."

In Carcross, the family would load onto a former work boat, the MV *Dorothy*, that Cameron's father had salvaged and fixed up. Friends cruised alongside in their own boats, including George and Emily Simmons who owned the *Sibilla*, a former British Yukon Navigation Company (BYN) gas-powered work boat that had been converted into a recreational yacht.

The *Sibilla* was constructed in 1932 at the Whitehorse shipyard. Like many of the BYN boats built in Whitehorse, the *Sibilla* was designed to navigate well in shallow water. It had a canoe-shaped hull with a recessed propeller, a solid deck, and a wooden frame superstructure overlayed with canvas.

It was sent into service on the Yukon River, but was moved from Whitehorse to Carcross in 1940. There, the *Sibilla* helped chart the most navigable channels for larger boats each spring, and scraped out sandbars if they were dangerously in the way.

It also served as a freight boat, pushing a barge laden with supplies—barrels of fuel, explosives for the mining operations, food and liquor—to settlements along Tagish Lake.

Leaving Carcross, the *Sibilla* headed east on Nares Lake, past Windy Arm on Tagish Lake and then turned south. At a narrow part of Taku Arm, called Golden Gate, the *Sibilla* turned east into Taku Inlet (also known as Graham Inlet) and on to Taku. There, the Taku Tramway, a 2-1/2-mile railway, transferred freight from the barges and boats to Atlin Lake, where another gas-powered boat, the *Norgold*, carried the freight the rest of the way to Atlin.

TOP

The *Sibilla*, 1958.

Photo courtesy of Bob Cameron

BOTTOM

Jamie Toole with the *Sibilla* in Carcross in September 2022.

Photo courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

The *Sibilla*, 1958.

Photo courtesy of Bob Cameron

In 1944, "Scotia Mac" John McDonald was captaining the *Sibilla*, and "he was not an easy man to work for," according to Ron Willis who worked as a deckhand on the boat.

For McDonald, the cargo came first. While still a long way from shore, he'd start hollering for Willis to "Jump! Jump!" into the ice-cold waist-deep water to moor the *Sibilla* and its barge.

Though it was hard work, Willis says he would do it again in a heartbeat: "I would go right back up and I would work for nothing ... well ... we practically got nothing anyway," he says with a laugh in a 1993 interview.

In 1955, the *Sibilla* was sold to George Simmons. It had a few more owners until one winter in the late 1970s when it was left in the water too long and its hull was crushed by ice. It was pulled from the frozen lake and left by the Carcross airstrip "patiently awaiting restorations," according to a 1994 article from The *Carcross Chronicle*.

In 1998, it was relocated to the yard beside the Carcross Barracks. And that's where Jamie Toole and his partner Anne Morgan found it more than a decade later. In the 2010s, they purchased the barracks, now the Sourdough Bakery.

"It was basically buried beside the bakery on a trailer," says Toole. "So, it had been drydocked at the airport, then hauled from the airport on a trailer, and they dug a trench and backed it in there, and then backfilled it."

It stayed buried for decades, until Toole recognized the boat's heritage value, dug it out of its hiding spot, and moved it onto a concrete pad to be rebuilt.

"Well, the *Sibilla* is quite important because it's one of the very last remaining boats," says Toole. "I think there's only four left in the Yukon that belonged to the BYN, so it's an important piece of history."

His goal is to "get it fixed up and beautiful." The job involves replacing rotten planking, installing new windows, painting and refinishing the outside, and adding a new flagstaff. Toole uses old photos and documentation to piece together what the boat looked like in its heyday.

"I don't think there's a person on the planet that knows how to build a boat like that anymore," he says. "Back in the day, 80 to 100 years ago or longer, it was a common practice to build boats like this using all hand tools, but that common practice is long lost."

After 45 years working as a building contractor and carpenter, Toole has the skills and experience to take on the work. He also has the drive to preserve the original piece of history before it's too late.

"It all takes time, and you have to have a passion for it," he says. "Oftentimes, people don't realize how important things are. Like the historic buildings in Dawson, once you lose history like that you can never get it back."

When Toole started fixing up the boat, he found a surprise artifact — a small connection to a builder that would have been working on the vessel nearly a century ago. Between the galley's ceiling sheeting and the top decking, he found half of a tapered candle.

"We didn't expect that candle, and so it was kind of cool," says Toole. "Was somebody working a little later in the evening, and they broke the candle in half and stuck it there to do some more painting or something like that? Or did they just put it in there for safekeeping? It's hard to say."

For Toole, the *Sibilla* is another piece of the story of Carcross. For the past decade, he has also been working on fixing up the Caribou Hotel and its surrounding properties. Both the restoration of the boat and the hotel were supported in part through the Yukon Heritage Resources Fund.

"Well, I always just liked the history," says Toole. "So, I take on these projects and everybody really appreciates it because a lot of people don't really know how to do it, but they don't want to lose it.

"So, if I can do my part by saving a little bit of that history, then I'm happy." •

This article was originally published in the May 3, 2023 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

The Carcross pleasure boat fleet: *Turtle* (Canadian Army), *Dorothy* (Cameron family) and the *Sibilla* (George and Emily Simmons).

Photo courtesy of Bob Cameron

‘Keeping the stories alive’

The long history of the Old Log Church Museum

It was built in just a few short months in 1900, and in 2025 the Old Log Church Museum — one of Whitehorse’s oldest buildings in continuous use — turns 125.

“I think it’s a beautiful building inside and out,” says Linda Thistle, who has been volunteering with the group that operates the museum for nearly 30 years. “It’s still exciting to me.”

Over the decades, she has seen many renovations and refurbishments of the log building. Most recently, the historical windows were refreshed. The frames were repaired and the cloudy plexiglass protecting the panes was replaced with clear panels.

“It made a glorious uplifting of the building,” says Thistle. “Everybody noticed it.”

In years prior the roof on the church and the rectory were re-shingled with fire-retardant shake shingles; a modern fire-suppression system was installed; and the logs were re-caulked with oakum—a tarred and loosely twisted hemp or jute fibre traditionally used in shipbuilding. Unfortunately, birds find the substance tasty and pull it out each summer, so the museum hires someone to poke it back in.

Much of this work was done with the support of the Historic Properties Assistance (HPA) program, administrated through the Yukon government’s Historic Sites Unit. The HPA program provides funding to preserve, restore, develop or interpret privately owned historically significant properties in the Yukon.

“I always say if we could just have a dollar for everyone who takes a picture of the outside of the church, we’d be all right,” says Thistle. “But we’re very lucky to have the funds and expertise from Historic Properties to assist with large projects in keeping the building preserved for future generations.”

Because of its historic designation all repairs must follow the Standards and Guidelines for Historic Places in Canada. That means using materials that would have been available at the time the church was constructed to preserve the historic character of the building.

The church was built using simple half-lap construction. Additions show the growth and development of the building through improved craftsmanship and the introduction of traditional church design features, such as the sanctuary, vestry and baptistery.

“I think it’s very unique. It’s worth continuing to save as a historical site and worth keeping as a museum,” says Thistle. “There are lots of stories to tell here and it’s about keeping those stories alive.”

For Thistle, the history of the building as well as the exhibits are part of the stories told at the museum.

The building’s history begins in 1900 when Bishop Bompas decided the small town of Whitehorse needed a place of worship. So, he called on Rev. R. J. Bowen, who had already built churches in Dawson and Forty Mile, to do the job.

TOP

The Old Log Church, July 2024.

BOTTOM

President Linda Thistle and Len Beecroft, treasurer and maintenance, stand in front of the museum’s side entrance.

Photos courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

The Old Log Church, 1955

Yukon Archives, James Y.C. Quong fonds 2006/140, 1-11-282

Bowen and his wife, Susan, arrived by steamboat in August 1900. They held their first services in the community in a wall tent while they were building what would become the Old Log Church Museum.

With help from the community, the church took just two months to build. They called it Christ Church and the first service was held on October 7, 1900. The Bowen's lived in part of the church building until the rectory was completed in spring 1901.

It was a community gathering place for many years. During the Second World War, it provided a place of worship for the Army personnel who were stationed in Whitehorse while building the Alaska Highway. It was so popular that Army personnel made up half the congregation. One officer, using his bed sheet as a canvas, painted the large picture that now hangs above the front door.

Rev. Blackwell in front of Christ's Church, ca. 1910 – 1916.

Yukon Archives, Rev. W.G. Blackwell fonds, 91/38 #1 (PHO 417)

In 1953, the church became the diocesan cathedral. The building quickly became too small for the growing congregation and a new purpose-built cathedral was constructed in 1960.

The Old Log Church became a museum in 1962 and was still used as a church into the 1980s when it was known as St. Simons and was attended by a First Nations congregation.

In 1982, the Yukon Church Heritage Society was formed to restore and preserve the building and operate the Old Log Church Museum. Since then, the society has been caring for the buildings

Originally, the church was built directly on the ground. Over the years, the freeze-thaw weather cycle took its toll and the building had to be moved onto a foundation. In 1989, the log building was raised and moved to the adjacent street while a new basement was prepared. Then Andy Hooper, well known for moving buildings at the time, moved the church back to its original site and placed it directly on the new basement foundation. (Hooper's legendary truck is on display at the Yukon Transportation Museum.)

In 2014, the Yukon government and the City of Whitehorse designated the church and rectory official historic sites. The museum is open to the public and continues to hold special church services during the summer. •

This article was originally published in the October 9, 2024 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

Yukon Theatre with new neon lettering, 2024.

Photo courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

Bringing the light back to a 70-year-old Whitehorse landmark

The Yukon Film Society is working to repair and refresh the Yukon Theatre building, bringing back some of its historical glow.

When the Yukon Theatre first opened its doors on December 3, 1954, it was billed as a sophisticated night on the town. Advertisements asked patrons to leave their children at home, tickets sold out, and theatre-goers dressed up for the Yukon premiere of The Glenn Miller Story in the new theatre located on Wood Street in Whitehorse.

It was one of the first purpose-built cinemas in the territory, and the *Whitehorse Star* called its design "... one of the Yukon's finest, showing taste and quality design rare in the North ...".

Throughout its 70 years in operation, the building has seen many renovations, many different owners, and many different exterior paint colours.

Since 2021, the Yukon Film Society (YFS) has been working hard to bring the building back into shape, including fixing and replacing the unique neon letters on the theatre's exterior.

This work was done with support from the Historic Properties Assistance (HPA) program administrated through the Government of Yukon's Historic Sites Unit. The HPA program provides funding to preserve, restore, develop or interpret privately owned historically significant properties in the Yukon.

"The sign is iconic," says YFS Artistic Director Andrew Connors. "We see people taking photos of the building and the sign every day, and the cinema holds a special place in the hearts of a lot of Yukoners."

In October 2023, the sign was repainted with marine paint so it can better withstand the elements. Then, because a third of the glass letters had been damaged through the years, they were rebuilt and replaced along with many of the transformers.

A lighting company in Vancouver did the work. It required two trips to Whitehorse: one to examine the letters and determine what supplies they needed to bring back; the second to do the repairs and replacements.

In 2023, the project won the Heritage Conservation Project of the Year Award from the Yukon Historical and Museums Association.

"We saw an opportunity to bring the sign back to life,"

The Yukon Theatre under construction in 1954.

Yukon Archives, Cooper Family fonds, 2006/138 #57

says Connors. "We're in the process of restoring the building bit by bit as we can get resources to make it a great space again for community events and film enjoyment."

Opening the theatre as a community space has been a YFS goal for many years. When the theatre closed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the owners decided not to re-open, there was an opportunity for the society to lease the space and run it themselves.

Since the theatre re-opened in 2021, YFS has been screening a wide variety of films, from arthouse to blockbuster, hosting special events during its annual Available Light Film Festival and renting it out to community groups for education and entertainment purposes.

Although much has changed, including the configuration of the theatres and the lobby, the building has retained some interesting original features. For example, the upstairs projector room still has thick metal doors and shutters on the windows, reminders of a time when projectionists had to contend with an extremely flammable type of film made from cellulose nitrate. The film caught fire easily, burned hot, and was difficult to extinguish.

If a reel of film caught fire, the doors and shutters would close, trapping the operator in the room to deal with the blaze while the audience was able to exit the building safely. Tucked behind the projector room was a small bathroom containing a shower that the projectionist could use if the flames became too hot. Thankfully, cellulose nitrate film was largely discontinued in the 1950s and replaced by a safer acetate film.

Over the years the theatre was painted and repainted many different colours, including sage green, orange and navy blue, and white and light blue. Its first-floor windows were covered to make space to hang movie posters. In the future, YFS plans to uncover and re-open the windows to bring more natural light into the lobby.

In 1987, the theatre was twinned, so two films could be shown at once —another renovation that YFS plans to undo. If they can find funding, they will revert the two theatres back into one larger space.

One step at a time, the YFS team is working to repair and refresh the building. They started with the exterior and the neon sign to signal to the community that the theatre was running again.

"We figured that the sign would be another beacon in the downtown, especially in the winter, illustrating that the cinema is open again, and to try and get people excited to come back," says Connors.

"We talk to people all the time who come through with stories and memories to share about experiences they've had here and what the building means to them. This theatre is a conduit to 70 years of Whitehorse history and Yukon history." •

With files from T. Berto. This article was originally published in the October 23, 2024 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

"We talk to people all the time who come through with stories and memories to share about experiences they've had here and what the building means to them. This theatre is a conduit to 70 years of Whitehorse history and Yukon history."

Andrew Connors

TOP

Yukon Theatre lobby and ticket window, date unknown.

BOTTOM

Yukon Theatre exterior, date unknown.

Yukon Archives, James Y.C. Quong fonds, 1-5-333-55 and 1-5-334-55

Finding a new footing

With a new foundation, the Melanie Morice House gets new life

On the east slope of Dawson City, overlooking the Moosehide Slide, is a cluster of centenarians – homes that were constructed in the early 1900s and have stood the test of time. One of those homes, with a distinctive roof line, decorative trim and a large bay window, is known as the Melanie Morice House.

After admiring the house for years, Dawson City resident Karen Murray purchased it in 2021.

"I thought it was pretty cool because it's named after a woman, and it's pretty uncommon for women to have anything named after them from that time," she says. "I bought the house on my own, so it felt like a nice connection."

Once she moved in, Murray realized the house needed a lot of love.

"Essentially, the house was falling down," she says. "I guess I knew it when I bought the house, but I thought 'It can't be as bad as it looks'. It was."

Because the house was built directly on ground that had frozen and thawed many times over the past 122 years, its foundation was failing, and its basement walls were falling in. The slope of the property and nearby street caused drainage issues that put pressure on the basement walls, making the building unstable.

"The basement was terrifying," says Murray. "All four walls were fully slanted, and one was completely caving in at the bottom. Even the beams that were supposed to straighten the house were on a slant."

After consulting professionals, Murray knew that to save the house, she would have to fill in the basement. This meant moving the house off its foundation, filling the basement with gravel and creating a new foundation, and then moving the house back and placing it on raised cribbing.

With support from the Yukon Historic Properties Assistance (HPA) program, Murray was able to complete the necessary work in the summer of 2022. The HPA program, administrated through the Government of Yukon's Historic Sites Unit, provides funding to preserve, restore, develop or interpret privately owned historically significant properties in the Yukon.

Built in 1902, the house is considered historically significant because of its age and because it is "a contributing element to the historic residential character of the east slope area in Dawson City," according to a Yukon Historic Sites' record.

"I think it's really great that these funds exist," says Murray. "Fixing up these old buildings is a huge undertaking and that's why so many of them go into disrepair and ruin. I'm very grateful that I have the support of my family and the support of these funds, because it's definitely a larger undertaking than I thought I signed up for."

Murray says the house still needs a lot of work, including upgrading the insulation in the walls and attic, new flooring, refurbishing the kitchen, and renovating the bathroom. Despite the challenges, she remains committed to fixing up the historic home.

"I think the infrastructure here is what makes Dawson special," says Murray. "When people come to visit, they're really stepping back into a period of time that has been preserved. You come to Dawson City and it's not this made-up town that's trying to look old. A lot of these buildings are original from the Gold Rush, which is really neat."

In 2022, Murray was awarded the Yukon Heritage Conservation Project of the Year Award for her work on the house.

"The community's very grateful," she says. "I get so many comments all the time, like 'Thank you so much for putting the work in and not either letting the house go into ruin or attempting to tear it down, which would probably be cheaper in the long run.'

"It's just nice to be able to leave a bit of a legacy in this town and something that people can remember. It feels really great."

Karen Murray and her dog, Arrow, in front of the house when it was sitting in the middle of the street while the basement was being filled in.

Photo courtesy of Karen Murray

“I think the infrastructure here is what makes Dawson special. When people come to visit, they’re really stepping back into a period of time that has been preserved.”

Karen Murray

The house was moved on steel beams while the new foundation was constructed.

Photo courtesy of Karen Murray

Author’s Note: Morico or Morice?

When I started researching this story, I was told the house was named for Melanie Morico (with an “o”) instead of Melanie Morice. I looked, but I could not find a record of anyone with the last name Morico living in Dawson City in the early 1900s. I did find references to a French woman named Melanie Morice, and land title records confirm she was the actual owner of Lot 1 in Block H of the Menzies Addition, the property the historical home sits on.

In the original title document her name was handwritten in cursive and the final “e” in Morice has a long tail on the end that loops upward, making it look a lot like an “o”. This could explain the different spelling of her name.

Melanie Morice was married to Charles Frias, so she also sometimes also shows up in records as Mrs. Charles Frias or Mrs. Melanie Frias. For example, the Polks Gazetter 1903 directory lists a Mrs. Melanie Frias living in Dawson City. Her occupation was listed as housekeeper.

On September 16, 1908, a Mrs. Melanie Marie Frias passed away, according to the Yukon River Basin, Deaths and Burials, 1887-2007 database. Unfortunately, there is no further information on where she was buried.

In October 1908, the *Weekly News Advertiser* in Vancouver published her obituary. It read: “Madam Charles Frias, one of the pioneer women of the Klondike, is dead.”

It confirmed that she worked as “... a housekeeper of the private mess for a number of the highest government officials and by her good graces and careful and skillful service won from them and their many guests the highest of esteem and commendation.”

It also mentioned that Morice loved to garden, and she prided herself on having “... the first and finest sweet peas and other flowers in Dawson City”.

According to Morice’s estate files, held at the Yukon Archives, at the time of her death she owned two pieces of property in Dawson City. It appears that both properties were sold by the Public Administrator and Morice’s estate was split between her siblings in France. •

This article was originally published in the November 13, 2024 edition of “What’s Up Yukon”.

The house pictured in 1973.

Photo courtesy of Parks Canada

A piece of Yukon history goes digital

A new Venus mill documentation project aims to illuminate and educate using digital technology

Perched precariously on a steep slope on the west side of Windy Arm on Tagish Lake, the Venus mill's remains are a recognized landmark to those who travel the South Klondike Highway in the Traditional Territory of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

The deteriorating structure inspires curiosity and conjures images of a lesser-known period in Yukon history; a time before highways when silver ore was shipped on Tagish Lake in the early 1900s.

Though the mill has deteriorated passed the point of structural conservation, technology and innovation are enabling a new way to conserve the site and give the mill new life through documentation and interpretation.

John. H. Conrad came to the Yukon in 1903. With dreams of becoming rich, Conrad became president of Conrad Consolidated Mines Ltd. and began optioning mining claims around Windy Arm.

The company eventually built and operated the Venus mine, and at first the financial outlook was promising.

In June 1906, the *Whitehorse Daily Star* reported that an assay from the mine netted 900 ounces of silver and $70 worth of gold per ton, which "shows it to be the richest property discovered in modern times".

In 1908, Conrad finished building a seven-level 91-tonne mill to process the silver ore on-site, instead of losing money by shipping it out for processing.

The Venus mill shown from Tagish Lake before the South Klondike Highway was constructed.

Yukon Archives, Mervyn-Wood family fonds, 98_87 402

Stephanie Murray 3D scanning the mill in July 2023.

Photo courtesy of Mario Santana Quintero

The Venus mill became the first concentrating mill in the Yukon, and it was outfitted with the most modern equipment available at the time.

While in operation, an aerial cable tramway ferried ore about half a kilometre downhill from the mine to the mill. There, the ore was fed into a hopper and a steam-operated pulley system carried it down through several levels of crushers, screens and concentrators that all worked to separate the mineral from rock.

Once at the bottom, the concentrated powder was loaded onto a steamship for transport to Carcross, and then it was brought by train to Skagway, Alaska to be shipped out for smelting. At peak performance, the Venus mill could process 10 tons of silver ore concentrate per day.

"Complicated yet simple, it is a wonderful combination of mechanism, perfection and utility," reported the *Whitehorse Star* in November 1908. "One thirty-horsepower engine operates the whole

thing, every part of which runs with the smoothness and nicety of a new sewing machine and with but little more noise."

Over time, the mine proved less lucrative than first hoped. The ore in the Venus vein was not consistent in quality. It was also oxidized, which meant that it had to be chemically treated before fully extracting the metals. There were plans to bring a treatment plant on site, but those plans did not materialize.

Due to ore quality, falling silver prices and high shipping costs, the Venus mill closed and was abandoned in 1912. Between 1916 and 1920, its equipment was updated, and it was reopened and run by a series of other companies, each for a short time.

The mill was never used again after 1920, although there were intermittent efforts to mine the area again in the 1960s and the 1980s.

Today, the site is a heritage reserve, managed by the Government of Yukon. The mill's age, condition and situation on a steep slope make it unstable and at risk of collapse.

"It was highlighted as a site where we really need to do something now or we may lose the opportunity," says Rebecca Jansen, Manager of the Historic Sites Unit (HSU) with the Government of Yukon. "In this case, we're focusing on thorough documentation to be able to tell the story of a place that we can't physically conserve in perpetuity."

Good documentation ensures that if something were to happen to the site, the HSU has a comprehensive record of what was there to further understand the site, how it worked and what it would have looked like while in operation.

"So, while it may appear that we're doing nothing because the structure is deteriorating, we're actually doing a lot to conserve aspects of this site by using new, innovative technologies for documenting and presenting that information out to the public in a safe and accessible way," says Jansen.

A few years ago, the HSU began its research and partnered with digital documentation experts through Carleton Immersive Media Studio at Carleton University, located in Ottawa, Ontario. In July 2023, faculty members and researchers spent a week taking photos and measurements of the mill, including 3D scans, panoramic photographs, as well as drone images to map the site's topography.

Because of safety concerns, the team was not able to enter the structures, but they used state-of-the-art technologies that could collect the data they needed from the edges of the site.

"You don't need to go and measure by hand; you don't need to be physically there engaging with those areas that are quite dangerous," says Mario Santana Quintero, a professor in architectural conservation and sustainability engineering at Carleton University´s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

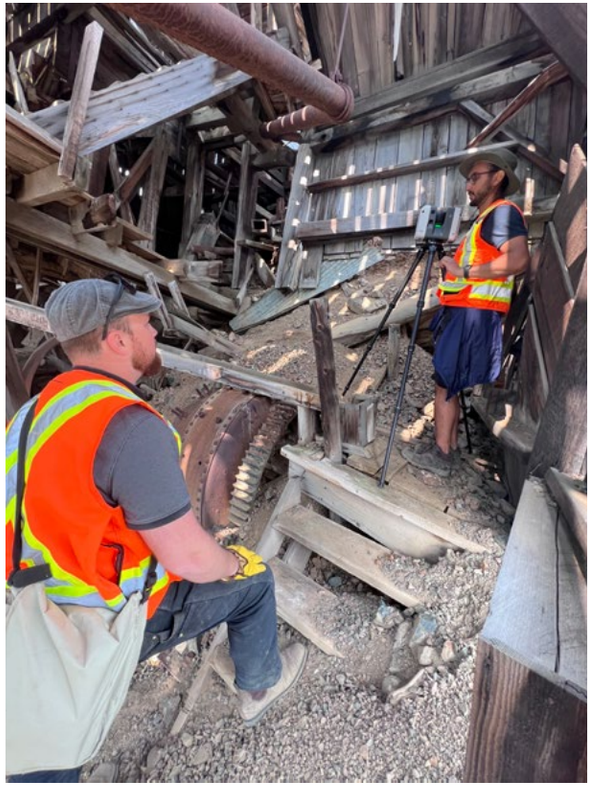
"Basically, a laser scanner is a device that you put on a tripod. It rotates, and it captures a three-dimensional point cloud of the space. Then, you can use all these clouds to either model the site, or to create measure drawings."

Santana Quintero's team is multi-disciplinary, made up of students and researchers from different departments, from architecture to engineering to media studies. They work on documenting heritage in Canada and internationally.

The data collected in the Yukon was used to prepare floor plans and cross-section drawings of the structures. In the current phase of the project, another team in the media studio is using that data to create a virtual tour that will eventually be presented to the public through interactive online storytelling.

"We strongly discourage people from entering the area and putting themselves and the structure in danger by trying to climb around it," says Jansen. "Instead, they will be able to see and learn about the site through the virtual tour once it's available." •

This article was originally published in the April 9, 2025 edition of "What's Up Yukon".



ABOVE

Adam Weigert and Arkoun Merchant recording the accessible areas of the mill's interior using a 3D scanner, July 2023.

Photo courtesy of Mario Santana Quintero

LEFT

The Venus mill's remains, 1975.

Yukon Archives, Richard Harrington fonds, 79_27_71

Faro's unique history tells a tale of transformation, resilience, and a lasting sense of community

The Town of Faro has a "weird staying power," according to long-time resident Katy Peeling.

Peeling has lived in Faro for over 50 years through the community's boom-bust cycles. She calls it a "serial community," meaning that it has changed and reformed many times, and it keeps going. Each new community that forms has a "different character and personality," she says.

Faro was first created as a home for workers at the Anvil (later, Cyprus Anvil) open-pit lead-zinc mine. The mining company built the town's infrastructure, including many different types of houses, a K to 12 school, a medical center and recreation facilities.

"When staking began, the claims were named alphabetically and the sixth claim – the Faro claim – was the winner," says Peeling. "So, they named the new town after the discovery claim."

In July 1968, the Yukon Territorial Council agreed that the townsite would be named Faro, also for the card game in which players bet on card order, in the hopes that Anvil would "hold a winning hand," according to the *Whitehorse Star*. The Faro mine area is located on the traditional lands of the Kaska Nation and is known as Tse Zul to the Ross River Dena for the "hollow rock" found there.

Shortly after construction began in June 1969, a lightning-caused fire destroyed most of the town. Just two houses and two maisonettes on Ogilvie Cres. were left standing. Undeterred, the mining company rebuilt, and by September people were moving into homes in Faro.

In 1974, Peeling and her husband came to the town in a Chevy pickup with their own home-built camper on top. They left again in '75 because there was not enough housing. Friends encouraged them to apply for work at the mine, so they came back and stayed.

Over the years the town grew to over 1,600 people, and there were lots of activities to keep them busy, including a slate of hockey leagues, an annual curling bonspiel called the Sleeping Bag, and Farrago, a music festival that pulled in bands from across the country. With major expenses, such as housing and groceries, subsidized by the mining company for mine workers, it was a golden age in the community.

"It was so much fun to be in the community at that time, but everything at that period was," says Peeling. "People were involved in the community. In a small town, if you want something to happen, you have to pitch in and do it right."

In 1982, mineral prices plummeted causing mines throughout the Yukon to struggle, and Cyprus Anvil

Faro townsite sign, 1969.

Credit: Government of Yukon / Harmut Dege

Following the lightning-caused fire in 1969, the town had to be rebuilt.

Credit: Government of Yukon / Harmut Dege

View of Faro's lower bench, 1970.

Yukon Archives, Richard Harrington fonds 79/27 #140

to close temporarily. When it reopened a year later, workers came back to the town, but the community was different.

Peeling remembers it being difficult to describe how vibrant the town was before the first shutdown. “We tried to explain to the new people coming into the community that we did this, that and the other, and they said, ‘Oh no, you couldn’t do that in such a small town.’ But we had a local newspaper, for instance, that came out every two weeks and they didn’t see how that could happen.”

A typical maisonette, 1970.

Yukon Archives, Richard Harrington fonds 79/27 #146 PHO 103

The mine closed again in 1985, and the town’s population plummeted to 400. There were efforts to open the mine again in ’86 and ’96 that were successful for a few years before the site was finally shuttered to active mining in 1998. Today, it is one of the “most complex abandoned mine clean-up projects in Canada,” according to the remediation project’s website.

Faro was one of the last mine sites in the Yukon that constructed a town, rather than a camp, to house employees. And unlike other mining communities, the town of Faro was able to continue after the mine closed.

In the early 2000s, Faro set out to grow its economy by increasing tourism. They built the Campbell Region Interpretive Centre and the Faro Golf Course, which runs through the town. The Crane and Sheep festival and the Faro Golf Tournament have become annual highlights, drawing visitors to the community.

Now, working alongside the town’s administration and community members, the Yukon government’s Historic Sites Unit (HSU) is determining which of Faro’s buildings to include in the Yukon’s Historic Sites Inventory. The inventory is an online database of more than 4,000 built sites that have cultural or historical significance, such as buildings or bridges.

To make the list, a building needs to meet a few key criteria: it must be over 50 years old, retain its original character, meaning that it has not undergone major alterations, and have significance to past, present or future generations. The HSU staff have started conversations with community members in Faro to find out which sites are important to them.

Faro has some historically significant buildings, such as the theatre, which was built in 1966 near Cobalt, Ontario. It was moved to Faro in 1971 to provide a space for more entertainment and cultural experiences in the town. There are also buildings that could be significant because they represent a certain time in the community, such as the different types of prefab housing built through the years for mine workers and their families.

The inventory is one tool that HSU uses to manage heritage sites in the territory. It includes a record of almost 50 years of documentation for sites scattered across the territory — from actively managed sites such as Fort Selkirk, which is co-managed with the Selkirk First Nation to hundreds of relic sites in the Klondike Gold Field, to the remains of Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen’s winter cabin on the Yukon’s North Slope. Once a site is listed in the inventory, it may also be considered for further protection, preservation, and education to ensure its historical and cultural value is recognized and maintained for future generations.

What’s next for Faro?

“I think we’re all trying to figure that out,” says Peeling. “I feel so grateful for having watched it over the past 50 years. It’s a long time, and I know it will all come out right in the end.” •

This article was originally published in the May 14, 2025 edition of “What’s Up Yukon.”

Aerial view of Faro, showing the Pelly River.

Credit: Government of Yukon / C Archbould

Climate change and fragile heritage

Find out more

To learn more about Yukon's heritage resources, archaeology and palaeontology, visit the Find heritage research and publications page on **Yukon.ca**

Elders and youth watching caribou all over the Dachan Tr'iivan (Bonnet Lake) area.

All photos courtesy of Vuntut Gwitchin Government

Connecting to the land, connecting to each other

Vuntut Gwitchin youth and Elders gather at heritage camps

It was a perfect summer morning in July 2023. Vuntut Gwitchin youth and Elders gathered for breakfast at their heritage camp beside Dachan Tr'iivan (Bonnet Lake), a roughly 30-minute helicopter ride from Old Crow. As they ate, the group looked up to a mountain ridge across the lake and saw lines of Porcupine caribou moving south along the mountain.

"We were just all standing there in awe, just watching caribou, because caribou is part of who we are, our lifestyle," says Mary Jane Moses, Teetl'it Gwich'in Elder and heritage facilitator in Old Crow, Yukon. "The youth, they were just so excited because of what that meant for all of us, soon we're going to have caribou meat again, we're going to eat good again."

Moses was thrilled to see the caribou coming through Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory on their fall migration back to their wintering grounds, but she also wondered why they were earlier than usual. In fact, over the past few years she has noticed a change in the animal's seasonal round. They've stayed to the east in Alaska longer.

"They've been doing that for a few years now," says Moses. "Most people are saying they're staying in Alaska because it's too strenuous for them to make their way through deep snow. It'll just deplete their energy levels, and they'll be in poor shape."

The Porcupine caribou herd's range covers 250,000 square kilometres in northern Yukon, northeastern Alaska and the northwestern edge of the Northwest Territories (NWT). They have the longest yearly land migration route of any mammal, travelling roughly 2,400 kilometres between calving grounds on the coastal plains of Alaska to wintering grounds in the boreal forests of Yukon and NWT.

"I think they're smart that they stay in one place," says Moses. "But then, on the other hand, we depend on the caribou for food. So, it's been hard on people who rely on caribou meat versus store-bought meat."

Moses was waiting for the herd to return so she could restock her freezer and make her grandchildren dry meat and ch'itsuh (pemmican), roasted meat mixed with bone grease or fat. In fact, Moses has a recipe to share at www.oldcrow.ca/recipe1.htm.

Shifting migration patterns is one of many changes that have been observed on Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory.

"With the permafrost melting, there's changes in the water levels: some lakes are draining, some

> **“Our people are still eager to go back to the land where they were raised up, and where the land is so rich in everything. It’s healing just to be out there in the wild spaces, observing the land and seeing the changes.”**
>
> Mary Jane Moses

Jayce Charlie filming Elder interviews at Dachan Tr’iivan.

are swamping with way more water,” says Vuntut Gwitchin Heritage Manager Megan Williams. “The birds are changing. There are an incredible number of seagulls now to the detriment of ducks.”

The Vuntut Gwitchin have seen a phenomenon called shrubification, the overgrowth of vegetation that can slowly transform the types of plants and animals that can live in the arctic tundra. They’ve also seen the erosion of lands, making rivers wider so water levels are lower. Shallower water can make travel by boat increasingly more difficult, if not impossible.

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Heritage Department designs the heritage camps to connect youth and Elders to the land, so they can see the changes and learn how to look after the land.

“The youth get a good solid basis of what the land is like, how they expect it to behave, and how to work with the changes that are happening around them,” says Williams. “That’s how the teachings get passed down.”

In summer 2023, the group of four teenagers and six Elders learned traditional skills, such as how to make rope from willow bark, and spent time together laughing and sharing stories. They took a day trip to Daadzaii Van (Summit Lake) to pick cloudberries and learn about protected areas. The youth also learned how to document their experiences. They took photos, and videos, and they interviewed the Elders and each other.

“These camps are opportunities for them to learn and pick up skills so that, as they get older, they practice them too,” says Moses. “They’ll teach their peers and younger children. So, that’s how we pass information down.”

By the time their six-day on-the-land camp was over and the group was ready to helicopter back to Old Crow, nearby forest fires had brought smoke into the area. It was just days before Old Crow was under an evacuation order for nearly a week in mid-August due to forest fires and unpredictable winds.

“We were coming back to Old Crow, and we were seeing places where there was fire and thick smoke,” says Moses. “I was just wondering about the caribou we’d seen. Which direction they were going to go. If they were going to keep going on their migration route, or go a different way because of the smoke?”

Moses has been taking part in these camps and cultural activities for more than 20 years. Every time she goes out on the land, she learns something new. And she is grateful for any time she gets to share that learning with youth.

“Our people are still eager to go back to the land where they were raised up, and where the land is so rich in everything,” says Moses. “It’s healing just to be out there in the wild spaces, observing the land, and seeing the changes.” •

This article was originally published in the June 5, 2024 edition of “What’s Up Yukon”.

Youth participants Logan Williams, Gavin Charlie, Desmond Kyikavichik at the Dachan Tr’iivan (Bonnet Lake) camp with elder Danny Kassi.

Preserving historic buildings on Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island

How do you protect the oldest wood-framed building in the Yukon? Lift it off the wet ground extremely slowly—one shim at a time.

In August 2023, three specialists from the Yukon government's Historic Sites Unit lifted the 130-year-old Pacific Steam Whaling Co.'s Community House on Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island Territorial Park a full 18 inches off the ground.

It took four 11-hour days, plenty of planning and a lot of hard labour.

"We started with 16 airbags and six tow jacks, and then just lifted a one-half inch by one-half inch and levelled it out as much as we could," says one of the specialists, conservation carpenter Stephan Biedermann.

They slowly pumped up the airbags and then placed plywood shims in every gap to support the walls. As the gaps got larger, so did the shims until they were replaced by wooden cribbing.

"We were running around, moving around a lot, and crawling under the building to get cribs underneath the other sets of beams," says restoration and reproduction specialist Gisli Balzer.

"It was like the building sort of smiled at us when we'd lift the outside, and then we'd settle it down again. It was amazing."

The Community House is the fifth building that's been lifted and placed on cribbing on Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island. The Northern Whaling and Trading Company Warehouse, the Northern Whaling and Trading Company Shed, the Customs Warehouse, and the Karlik House were successfully lifted in past summers, but the Community House was the largest, the heaviest, and the most challenging.

The Community House is approximately 9.4-metres wide by 17.7-metres long. Its weight is unknown, because there's no way to put it on a scale, but the team knows they used 16 airbags, each with a point load of 11.7 metric tonnes, and six toe jacks, each with a point load of 6 metric tonnes. That's a total of 223.2 metric tonnes of lifting power to raise it and ensure that its weight was distributed along its beams, so the structure wasn't damaged.

Luckily, the building was so well-built that it was raised up in one piece.

The Community House in 1987, the first summer that the Yukon Historic Sites Unit were on site

Credit all photos: Government of Yukon / Brent Riley

"The big, huge spikes that they drove in 130 years ago, they stuck everything together," says Balzer. "So, the building just came up and those beams just stuck to the floor. It was pretty wild."

The Community House and other structures on Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island were built right on the gravel bed at Simpson Point. For decades, that wasn't a problem.

Now, with increased coastal erosion, loss of sea ice and rising temperatures the once-dry ground is often waterlogged in summers. There are pools and puddles of water.

"All the buildings were originally built right on the ground, so they collect moisture from the ground and start deteriorating from the ground up," says Biedermann.

Biedermann, Balzer and the third specialist, Brent Riley—for whom getting the Community House on cribbing was a crowning achievement before his retirement—hope that lifting the building out of the water will stop the damage in its tracks. It will also help prevent rot and mould which could permanently destroy or disfigure the historic structure.

“It was like the building sort of smiled at us when we’d lift the outside, and then we’d settle it down again. It was amazing.”

Gisli Balzer

Gisli Balzer (left) Stephan Biederman (right) placing wooden shims under the building in August 2023.

The Community House was constructed in 1893. The wood, mostly rough-sawed Douglas Fir, was pre-cut and labelled in San Francisco. Then shipped as a kit to Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island with the Pacific Steam Whaling Co’s whaling fleet.

It was first used as a community building for the officers (of the whaling ships) who spent winters on the island. After the whalers left, it was used by Bishop Isaac Stringer and the Anglican Mission, the North-West Mounted Police (precursor to the RCMP) and by researchers studying the island. It’s currently used as a park office and a meeting place for visitors.

The Community House has been standing for 130 years. It has survived 10-foot-high snow-falls, howling winter winds and powerful storm surges.

“Some of the woodwork is perfect,” says Balzer. “The building is extremely strong. It’s a little bendy because it’s so wet, but it’s just really beautiful. It’s a great building—the more you see, the more respect you have for the previous builders.”

Each summer, the Historic Sites Unit team spends at least two weeks on Qikiqtaruk-Hershel Island to keep up with regular maintenance and monitoring of the buildings. In the next few years, they plan to also lift the Bonehouse on to cribbing to save it from deterioration. During the island’s whaling era, the Bonehouse was used to store valuable baleen—a giant filter in the jaws of baleen whales used to sieve out their food.

“When I started the job, I didn’t have the history lesson. And I still don’t have it all, but the more I learn the more I just really enjoy the work,” says Balzer.

Watch a time-lapse video of Historic Sites Unit specialists Brent Riley, Gisli Balzer and Stephan Biedermann lifting the Community House at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dByDVFYCVSE.

The Pacific Steam Whaling Co.’s Community House before the lift in 2019 (top), and after the lift in 2023 (bottom).

Find 3D drawings of the Community House and other historic buildings at herschel.preserve.ucalgary.ca. •

This article was originally published in the July 3, 2024 edition of “What’s Up Yukon”.

Preserving heritage sites on Qikiqtaruk-Herschel Island one pixel at a time

As a young archaeologist in the 1990s, Peter Dawson spent three seasons working on Qikiqtaruk—Herschel Island.

"After that I went on and did my own archaeology in various areas of the Arctic, but I always had a soft spot for Herschel [Island]," he says. "It was just a fascinating place with this interesting intersection of Inuvialuit history and settler history."

Over the years Dawson worked on many sites throughout the North, seeing up close the impacts of a changing climate on the western coast of Hudson Bay and in the high Arctic on Ellesmere Island. It made him think about what was happening on Qikiqtaruk—Herschel Island.

Nearly 30 years later in 2018, Dawson returned to the island as a professor and researcher with the University of Calgary. He was surprised to see how much the landscape had changed.

"I remember getting off the Twin Otter [airplane], and just being shocked by what I saw. Everything seemed so familiar, but so different," says Dawson. "There were standing pools of water, some of the buildings had moved, and a lot of the coastline had changed.

"It was a real awakening, and it spurred my interest in digitally capturing and preserving the heritage resources on Herschel Island, so that they would remain accessible for future generations."

The University of Calgary project, called Digitally Preserving Herschel Island—Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park, is done in partnership with the Yukon government.

Over the past five years, Dawson and his team have been collecting drone images and terrestrial LiDAR—also called 3D laser scans—of landforms, such as Pauline Cove and Avadlek Spit, and buildings, such as Inuvialuit sod houses, remaining whaling buildings, and the Anglican Mission.

"It's kind of like a 3D camera," says Dawson. "It emits millions of points of laser light as it rotates 360 degrees and calculates the amount of time it takes for each one to leave the instrument, strike the surface of a building, like a wall or what have you, and then return."

Once an object, like a building, is scanned from many different angles those scans are stitched together to create a three-dimensional cloud made up of millions of points. The spacing between the points is less than a millimetre, so the measurements are incredibly accurate.

"That's what makes these images so valuable," says Dawson. "They're not just a three-dimensional image. They actually have metric data attached to them, and that makes them invaluable because you can use them to create as-built architectural plans."

So, should anything happen to the actual buildings, the data could be used to either repair or restore them. The restoration and building maintenance work on the island is done by specialists with the Yukon government's Historic Sites Unit. They use the data to find accurate measurements of building features and monitor changes.

In fact, this digital record serves many purposes. The images and data collected by Dawson's team is available publicly through a well-visited website at

LEFT

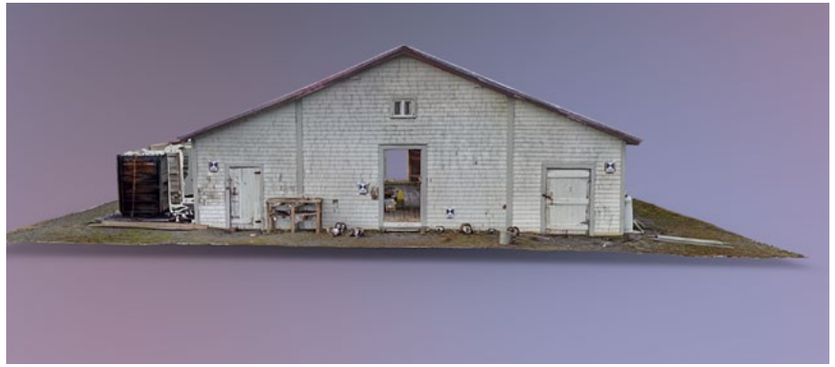
Pauline Cove on Herschel Island.

Credit: Government of Yukon

RIGHT

Peter Dawson launching the drone with Yukon archaeologist Christian Thomas pictured in the background.

Photo courtesy of Peter Dawson



TOP LEFT

Dawson's team scanning the Pacific Steam Whaling Co. Bonehouse.

Credit: Government of Yukon

BOTTOM LEFT

The resulting 3D digital render of the building.

Credit: https://herschel.preserve.ucalgary.ca

https://herschel.preserve.ucalgary.ca. The website includes open-source data files on key landforms and buildings created through laser scanning and drone photogrammetry, which is stitching together overlapping photographs to create 3D models.

The website brings the experience right into homes and classrooms for people who may not be able to travel to the island to experience it in person.

"A lot of polar heritage sites are very difficult for the public to get to because they're in remote areas," says Dawson. "With this archive the public can view and interact with 3D digital models of the various historic buildings and Inuvialuit sod houses, and also learn about the history and significance of Qikiqtaruk, what it means to Inuvialuit in the region today, and its history of Euro-North American whalers at the turn of the century."

The research team has also used their data and worked with Inuvialuit communities to create educational tools for youth in schools. For example, they created a two-metre-long 3D model of Pauline Cove and turned it into a jigsaw puzzle for a school in Aklavik, NWT.

"In the process of building Pauline Cove as a jigsaw puzzle, they actually got a sense of what the cove looked like and the proximity of the buildings to the coastline," says Dawson. "So, it was an amazing way for the kids to experience Pauline Cove and develop an understanding for some of the impacts that are affecting it in terms of coastal erosion."

According to the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, it is the Yukon government's responsibility to maintain the historic park to the standard of a national historic site. Climate change is making that increasingly more challenging.

The data collected through this project helps the Yukon government and other park caretakers make informed decisions about how to best protect the heritage resources on the island. Because the data points are so accurate it's easier to see how buildings are moving and how land is eroding.

"One of the things we found is that climate change is like watching the second hand of a clock move," says Dawson. "It's very difficult to detect when you're on the ground, but these tools allow us to see everything everywhere all at once. It is such a powerful way of understanding the transformation that's happening to that landscape."

Dawson says the project will continue for the next decade at least to continue monitoring changes and digitally preserve heritage sites.

"I think we sort of take heritage for granted, you know? We just assume it's always going to be there because it's always been there, and sometimes it's a bit of a shock when we learn that a site is lost," says Dawson. "So, it really is important that we do whatever we can, leverage some of these new technologies to make sure that people 50, 60, 70, 100 years from now, know what these sites looked like and how significant they are." •

This article was originally published in the June 11, 2025 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

A race against the clock

Ice patch melt is speeding up the search for cultural artifacts before they deteriorate or disappear

On a Saturday in late August 2018, with just a half hour left in their helicopter budget for the season, Yukon government and Carcross/Tagish First Nation (C/TFN) archaeologists decided to revisit the Friday Creek ice patch near Alligator Lake one last time before the snow came.

Moments after landing on site, they found the ice had melted back about three metres, revealing a long wooden throwing dart perched on stones and caribou dung.

It was the most-complete atlatl (a type of ancient throwing dart) ever found on a Yukon ice patch, and it was in nearly perfect condition. The shaft was two-metres long and made from three segments of birch tied together with sinew. Its stone point and the eagle feathers in its fletching were still firmly attached. Radiocarbon dating found it was 6,000 years old.

"If we had not gone up on that trip and that atlatl had been left exposed for an entire season or perhaps longer, it could have been lost very quickly, very easily," says Jennifer Herkes, an archaeologist and anthropologist who has worked on ice patches with C/TFN for seven years.

Ice patches in the southern Yukon are a component of traditional hunting landscapes. For millennia, animals, such as caribou, bison and sheep, have headed to the alpine to forage and to escape the bugs and heat of summer. Up to the 1800s, hunters followed those animals up to the ice patches, and there they left behind evidence of their tools and technologies.

Ice patches are repositories for these ancient artifacts. Nearly 400 cultural artifacts—arrows, darts and cutting tools—and 2,500 paleontological fossils have been found and recovered from Yukon ice patches so far.

Natural materials, such as wood, sinew and feathers, can be preserved if they're frozen in ice for millennia. Once they melt free, they're exposed to air, wind, rain, snow, and scavenging animals, which can cause them to deteriorate quickly.

Yukon ice patches are receding due to warming temperatures and changing weather patterns. This rapid change makes finding and safely recovering culturally significant artifacts more challenging and urgent. Archaeologists need to be on-site during the narrow summer window—when objects have had time to melt free of the ice and before they're covered in snow again.

With changes in climate affecting the ice patches, governments—such as C/TFN and other Yukon First Nations—are doing as much work as they can while there is still ice. This begins with finding the patches most likely to contain artifacts, and then monitoring those places as often as time, weather and budgets allow.

The tip of the atlatl dart found in 2018, showing the beaver castoreum coating the sinew that attaches the stone point to the shaft.

Credit all photos: Government of Yukon

"The melting is not something we can negotiate with or stop," says Yukon government archaeologist Chris Thomas. "For the next 20 to 30 years, an ice patch is an imperiled landscape feature that's melting away and that gives us the opportunity to retrieve these cultural artifacts that are in perfect condition. I think that is the important part for the First Nations involved—that the difference between just a little broken stone tool and a fully formed artifact with engraved artwork and paint and all these different materials is quite profound."

When the Yukon government takes a helicopter to an ice patch, there's usually just one archaeologist on board. The rest of the seats are filled with First Nation community members, youth and Elders, so they can see the ice patches first-hand.

"There's an aspect of collecting things, but there's also an aspect of bearing witness and having as many people as possible recognizing what an ice patch looks like now, what it looks like when it's gone, what it looks like a decade or two after it's gone," says Thomas.

"It's about keeping people familiar with these areas that used to have a different cultural meaning. They

would have been hunting sites, now they're areas for science, education or conservation work."

In the southern Yukon there are dozens of culturally significant ice patches on the Traditional Territories of C/TFN, Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN), Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Kluane First Nation, and Teslin Tlingit Council. In some places, such as the Friday Creek ice patch, the territories overlap. The remarkable atlatl was found on both C/TFN and KDFN land.

Since it was recovered, the atlatl has been studied by the Canadian Conservation Institute and found to have parts coated with castoreum, an orange sticky substance produced by beaver to scent-mark their territory. It was the first time castoreum was found on an ancient hunting tool.

The atlatl has also been used for cultural learning about traditional tool-making and hunting methods. C/TFN master carver Keith Wolfe Smarch created a replica of the throwing dart that now hangs in the First Nation's Cultural Centre, Haa Shagóon Hídi – Our Ancestors House. And the C/TFN Heritage, Lands and Natural Resources Department is planning a workshop where youth can learn the skills involved in creating the throwing dart.

Dozens of hunting blinds and lookouts were found near the Friday Creek ice patch.

"It's a way to connect to the knowledge of our ancestors," says C/TFN Heritage Director Sean McDougall. "We know that in our cultural ways, we didn't do anything without a purpose, whether it was spiritual, ceremonial or useful in our day-to-day activities. So, this atlatl really brings a lot of thought about our past heritage and the connection that we had with our surroundings."

When Herkes started working on the ice patches seven years ago, the team would walk the length of an ice patch looking for objects and then leave. Now, they walk the ice patch but they also look beyond the ice-patch area to get a clearer picture of the relationships between the animals, the people and the landscape."

Sheep move to the alpine to forage and escape the summer heat and bugs.

C/TFN and the other nations really pushed to expand the understanding of ice patches beyond just repositories for artifacts," says Herkes.

"Understanding that caribou were there to get away from the bugs, people were there because of the caribou, and what else is happening on the landscape? How were people getting there? Where were they stopping along the way? What other features tell us that story? What is the traditional knowledge and in our stories also helps support that understanding?"

For example, not far from the ice patch at Alligator Lake, they found dozens of hunting blinds and lookouts, piles of stone that were used to camouflage a hunter from their prey. These remnants suggest many hunters used the area, giving. more context to the history and the stories that unfolded on these alpine landscapes.

"With the ice receding, it's not just about the loss of heritage, it's about a loss of relationship," says Herkes. "Eventually, all that will be left is what we have recovered in the museums, because the ice patches won't be there, the caribou won't be there and there won't be an opportunity for people to live that heritage because the relationships just aren't there. It's a huge loss. It's inevitable. It is what it is." •

This article was originally published in the May 1, 2024 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

A changing landscape

Thawing permafrost brings new challenges to the Inuvialuit Settlement Region on the Yukon North Slope

In northern Yukon, 343 kilometres of coastline stretches between the Alaskan border and the Northwest Territories. That coastline, the adjacent Yukon mainland, including Ivvavik National Park, Qikiqtaruk—Hershel Island, and a chunk of the Beaufort Sea are part of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. For centuries Inuvialuit people have been living and thriving in the area.

"Being out on the land or at the coast is like a renewal, refreshing your spirit of yourself. That's what I get out of it," says one participant from an Inuvialuit Traditional Use Study released in 2018. "It doesn't matter where I am or who I'm with, but when I'm out there it's, by golly, you just let go of everything."

Now the landscape on the Yukon North Slope is changing. Land is slumping and sliding into the sea and what used to be open water is riddled with sandbars. Spots that once offered boats shelter from high winds and waves have disappeared. With that changing landscape comes the loss of cultural sites related to traditional Inuvialuit life.

"Those safe places we had and the generation before me, they're not there today," says Michelle Gruben, resource person for the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee. Since 2009, she has worked with the roughly 280 Inuvialuit harvesters in the Aklavik, NWT area.

The Inuvialuit's connection to the land and water of the North Slope predates territorial borders. Although the committee is based in NWT, it is involved in land management in the Yukon portion of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Gruben's experience on the land helps inform her work.

"As a kid, I loved to go down on the land with my dad. I always went geese hunting in Tuktoyaktuk and along the coast," she says. "I'm right in the mix of what these harvesters see on the land. I'm not a full-time harvester, but I'm still a harvester and I understand what they see."

On the North Coast weather can change quickly. Winds can kick up and storms can come in fast. That means boat pilots need to be experienced and know the landscape, but when that landscape is changing, staying safe while travelling is even more challenging.

"Now, if they ever had to go to a safe place along the ocean—say from Shingle [Point] to Herschel [Island], somewhere in there—I don't know if they would know where's a safe place to park," says Gruben. "There are certain ways to park your boat. You can't just stop anywhere because you could get swamped."

Despite the changes, hunters, trappers, and harvesters are pairing traditional knowledge with

"Those safe places we had and the generation before me, they're not there today."

Michelle Gruben

TOP

Michelle Gruben on a fishing boat on the Beaufort Sea.

Photo courtesy of Michelle Gruben

BOTTOM

View of permafrost slumping into the ocean at Sabine Point.

Credit: Government of Yukon

new technologies, such as weather and wind apps, to prepare for spending time on the land.

"Even with climate change, people are still going to find a way to harvest food, because that's what you need," says Gruben. "You make your herring dry fish, you're going to eat it middle of winter, or you're going to eat it at carnival time. You're going to eat it all year; it's going to sustain you for the winter."

While the changing landscape is affecting how people move along the coast and practice traditional harvesting, it's also affecting heritage sites at an alarming rate. Many of the sites on the North Slope are important to the Inuvialuit. They are camp sites, housing sites, and burial sites that help tell the story of the people's ancestral connection to the land.

Coastal erosion is causing some heritage sites to become exposed and is making them more vulnerable to damage or loss.

"Back in the day, people used to walk from Alaska to Qikiqtaruk [Herschel Island] or from Qikiqtaruk to Shingle [Point]. It was nothing for them to walk it and sometimes people would pass away on the trail, so now you're seeing skulls washing up," says Gruben. "They have to do their due diligence to see if it's a missing person, but after that, us Inuvialuit people just want that skull buried back where they found it. We know more is going to come to the surface with the erosion happening."

As part of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, the Yukon government is responsible for monitoring these heritage sites and working with Inuvialuit groups to determine how the sites are handled: Are they left to nature, or are they excavated to preserve artifacts?

"The key is to find the sites, monitor them, and give the community the information they need to make decisions about how they want things remediated," says Yukon archaeologist Chris Thomas. "They face a lot of their own issues with the coastline changing all the time because they're active mariners, whale hunters, and fishers, so they're always out there. They understand these issues."

Over the past few years, Yukon archaeologists have been re-finding the archaeological and historic sites that were documented in the 1980s and '90s. They found that some sites had been plotted in the wrong location, they found some new sites, and realized that some of the sites have been lost to coastal erosion or flooding.

For example, a village and burial site at Kay Point, which was documented in the 1950s, has disappeared as summers warmed. "Its former location is now a half kilometer out to sea, and the sand spit that it was on is completely reformed," says Thomas.

In fact, a recent research study found that about 25 per cent of the documented heritage sites in Ivvavik National Park have already been impacted or destroyed by coastal erosion. The same study predicted that up to 61 per cent of the documented sites could be destroyed by the year 2100.

Yukon government archaeologists and historic sites planners stay in contact with Inuvialuit governing organizations and committees. They hold community meetings in Aklavik to present updates on the monitoring efforts.

Innovative tools handcrafted from bone, such as needles, buoys, and fishhooks, have been unearthed at these sites. Connecting with these objects can help current and future generations learn about their heritage.

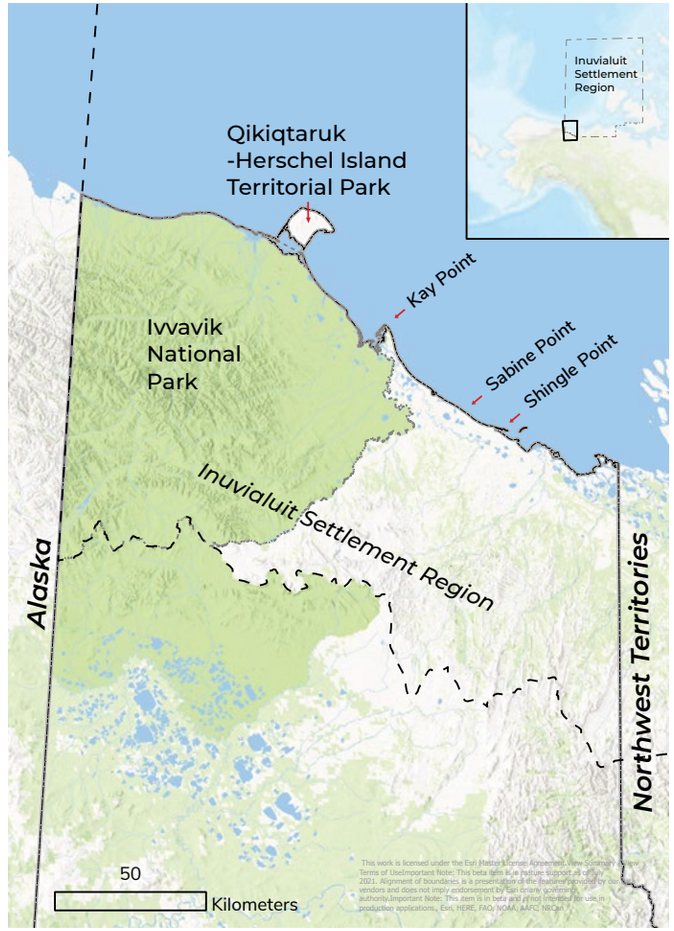
"If we find archaeological evidence related to fishing, hunting, trapping, whaling—that sort of stuff—the Inuvialuit want that to be brought back to the community because they've lost so much of it," says Thomas. "They don't want the impacts of climate change and the impacts of an archaeologist digging it up to be the same thing for them.

"They want to see the results of heritage site management be a positive benefit to their community through improved access to cultural materials and education programs."

One way to do that is through digital documentation of the artifacts on site.

"We have to be conscious to collect not only the artifacts and do the mapping; we also have to be conscious about collecting a digital legacy," says Thomas. "That will give the people viewing this in the future a better sense of place." •

This article was originally published in the April 3, 2024 edition of "What's Up Yukon".



Map of the Yukon portion of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

Credit: Government of Yukon

People connecting to their heritage

Growing up Van Bibber

At 96, Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson reflects on her early years growing up at Mica Creek, working at St. Mary's Hospital in Dawson City and gaining the skills and experiences that would serve her well throughout her long, full life.

When Elder Lucy Sanderson (née Van Bibber) was growing up at her family home in rural Yukon in the 1930s, she dreamed of travelling.

"The cranes would fly overhead in the spring and fall, and I thought: Oh, I wish I could go with them," she says. "I always wanted to see what was on the other side of the hills."

Sanderson is the fourth youngest of 16 children born to Ira and Eliza Van Bibber (two of the children were stillborn). Like many of the Van Bibber children, she was born at the family home at Mica Creek, located about 1.5 kilometres from what is now Pelly Crossing.

While growing up, the children learned how to be self-sufficient and live on the land. They hunted and trapped, spending some winters at a trapping cabin at Crooked Creek. They helped keep up the family garden. They studied and learned. And they also had a lot of fun.

"We had a road going up the back of the trapper's cabin. We used to get high up there [on the snow in winter], and then we'd slide down in a toboggan and hit the side of the house to stop," says Sanderson with a laugh. "My mother would just shake her head."

Sanderson's father, Ira, came from West Virginia to the Yukon with his brother during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. His brother carried on to Alaska, but Ira stayed in the Yukon.

One day in the summer of 1907, he was stocking up on supplies at Fort Selkirk when he met Eliza Jackson. The pair married, and the rest is history. In fact, many of the Van Bibber children led notable lives, including Alex who was a well-known trapper, and J.J. whose memoirs and photos were published in the 2012 book, *I was born under a spruce tree.*

ABOVE

Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson at St. Mary's Hospital in Dawson City where she worked as an aide in the early 1940s.

Photo courtesy of Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson

LEFT

Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson in her home in March 2023.

Photo courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson fleshing a moosehide.

Photo courtesy of Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson

Sanderson remembers seeing her older siblings set off on a raft—loaded with dry fish, boxes of vegetables from the garden, camping gear, and supplies—to go to school in Dawson City. She was too young to go with them at the time.

"As they were pushing out from the shore, father was calling out instructions: 'Now when you get out on the Yukon River and the raft starts sinking, pull up to a big driftwood pile and get two good logs to put on each side of the raft,'" says Sanderson.

Later, Alex told her he was grateful for that advice as the raft did start sinking and the extra logs saved them from going under.

Though Sanderson never went to school in Dawson City, she did take lessons at Mrs. Cowaret's home in Fort Selkirk for a few years during the winters.

"My brother Dan took us to Minto with a dog team, and we would cross over to Fort Selkirk once the Yukon River froze up," says Sanderson. "Then, we would come back home before the ice got rotten."

She and her younger siblings also took lessons at home from their older brother, Alex.

"Father had him set-up a school room in one of the bedrooms on the corner of the house, and he taught us how to read and write," she says.

When Sanderson was 16, cousins from West Virginia visited the Yukon. She told them about her dreams of travelling, and they urged her to go to Dawson City to find work.

When a steamboat stopped at Fort Selkirk on its way downriver, she bought a ticket from the purser and hopped aboard. Her parents were not there to see her off and almost missed saying goodbye. They had to run down the riverbank alongside the boat to wave.

"I felt so bad for them. I waved and waved, and they saw me, so they waved back," she says, "and then the boat turned and went toward Dawson."

Once in Dawson City, in the mid-1940s, she worked as an aide at St. Mary's Hospital, a three-storey building that was located in the north end of town below the Moosehide Slide. Sanderson worked and lodged in the children's ward, and she remembers being woken up one night by some tremendous shaking.

"It was an earthquake, and it scared me half to death," she says. "My little bed had wheels on it and it rolled—Bang, this way! And then, bang, that way! The hospital was rocking, and I thought we would roll down into the river."

Sanderson was interested in nursing, and so she asked if she could watch a surgery. Her request was granted and one of the nuns working in the hospital set a high stool in the corner of an operating room. As Sanderson sat up on the stool and watched a young woman get her appendix taken out, the nun was worried that the sight of blood would upset Sanderson. "She would look over at me and say, 'How you doing? Are you okay?'

"I was fine," says Sanderson. "She didn't know we trapped and skinned, killed moose and caribou and cut them up all the time."

In fact, after her experience at the hospital, Sanderson wanted to become a nurse's aide. She pursued studies in Regina, Saskatchewan, until she left to provide care for her uncle in Alaska. After he passed, she moved to Calgary to take a secretarial course.

She completed the course and worked at the City of Calgary until she got married. At that time, women were encouraged to stop working outside of the home once they married.

Sanderson and her family lived in Calgary for eight years, before moving to Cranbrook, BC. She raised four children and helped to support her family by selling her paintings. A talented and prolific painter, Sanderson paints from photographs she's taken, from her memories and from life. For years, she had a box of paints she would carry around with her.

"I liked to paint everything but portraits," she says. "When you paint people, they look at the painting and say: 'I'm not that ugly ... can't you make me look nicer?' And, I don't want any squabbling."

During the summers, Sanderson would spend time in the Yukon where she and her sisters, Linch and Kathleen, sold their paintings at roadhouses along the Alaska Highway.

"We'd hang our paintings on nails on the walls [of the roadhouses]. They'd sell them and call us and say, 'Your nails are getting empty. Fill them again,'" says Sanderson. "We painted nonstop, more or less, when I'd be up in the Yukon all summer. We did quite well."

Sanderson recently moved back to the Yukon to be closer to friends and family.

Now at age 96, Sanderson has lived a full life. Like the cranes she envied as a child, she has travelled to many places—as far north as the Arctic Ocean and as far south as Antarctica. The walls of her home are covered in her paintings and photographs of her family, and she still keeps a large photo of that Mica Creek home to fondly remember the time she spent there with her parents and large family of brothers and sisters. •

Author's Note: This article was written when I had the pleasure of interviewing Lucy Van Bibber Sanderson at her home in March 2023. She passed away in March 2024.

This article was originally published in the July 5, 2023 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

‘We have never got rich, but we sure have a good life being poor.’

For nearly 70 years, the Bradley family have called the Pelly River Ranch home. Through the ups and downs of remote northern farming, they’re still finding ways to make things work.

Dale Bradley’s roots run deep at the Pelly River Ranch. In his front yard, there’s a slump in the grass where the former farmhouse once stood, and just inside the fence are weathered boards from the floor of the original barn.

When he looks upriver, he sees the spot where his uncle Dick first crossed the still-frozen Pelly River with a tractor and farming supplies in 1954, starting the family’s legendary farming legacy in the Yukon.

For nearly 70 years, the acreage — located on the banks of the Pelly River in central Yukon — has produced tonnes of vegetables, grains, and grasses. It has nourished a herd of cattle, a flock of chickens, and many generations of the Bradley family.

The Bradley’s Yukon story began in the early 1950s, when Dale’s Uncle Hugh spent his summers working at the federal Experimental Farm near Haines Junction. In 1953, Hugh’s colleague John Stelfox was visiting farms north of Whitehorse to collect seeds and harvest data. Once he saw the Pelly River Ranch, he knew he’d found a special place. As luck would have it, the current owners were selling.

Dick and Hugh grew up on a farm in Alberta. They both knew that they wanted to farm for a living, but they weren’t in line to inherit the family farm. So, they needed to find a place of their own.

“At the time, the cost of land in Alberta was outrageous,” says Dale. “This place was cheap in relation; all it was going to take was blood, sweat, and tears.”

So, they signed on to put in some “blood, sweat and tears.” The two brothers and two friends, Stelfox and Buck Goodwin, partnered to purchase the property in 1953.

The ranch has never been easy to get to. In April 1954, Dick came up the Overland Trail from Minto and locals helped him get his equipment and supplies across the ice. A few months later in June, Hugh and Buck walked in with four cattle.

Dale Bradley pictured in front of his farmhouse at the Pelly River Ranch in July 2022.

Photo courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

“They came up the highway, and then walked from Pelly Crossing through the bush,” says Dale. “That was the start of the herd that we still have here today.”

In 1959, Dale’s father, Ken, came to the Yukon. He worked and farmed in Haines Junction and Carmacks before ending up with his brothers in

Cattle at the Pelly River Ranch, 1960.

Yukon Archives. Richard Harrington fonds, 79/27 #686

1961. Dale was just an infant when they arrived at the Pelly River Ranch.

While growing up, Dale learned the ins and outs of farming from his uncles and his father. As a young man, he left to explore the world. After working in gold mining and highway construction, he eventually found his way back to the ranch.

"I got tired of working for people and wanted to do something for myself ... that's what brought me back here," says Dale.

Dale bought Dick's share of the ranch when Dick retired in April 1990. Dale ran the ranch in partnership with Hugh, until Hugh passed away in 2012. Currently, Dale and his wife Sue are the main owners, and that means their skills must be wide and varied to make remote farm life work.

"Here, you're an everything-kind-of-guy all the time," he says. "You're a carpenter, you're a mechanic, an electrician and a veterinarian, and anything else you need to be on that day.

"Yeah, I get to do it all ... sometimes I don't want to," Dale adds with a smile. Along with the ranch and a strong work ethic, it's clear that Dale also inherited his uncles' sense of humour.

A tour around the ranch takes you through a well-organized maze of metal, wood and spare parts that speak to the farm's self-sufficiency over the years. Nothing is wasted.

A stone's throw from the farmhouse is a blacksmith shop full of tools and equipment that date back more than a century. Some of the now-antique tools are still used in a pinch.

"There are rare tools in here that not everybody can say they've seen," says Dale, holding up a V-belt made from wooden blocks that used to drive the fanning mill. "It's older than you and me put together."

The blacksmith shop was likely constructed in 1901 by the property's original owners, Edward Menard and George Grenier. When Dick and Hugh arrived in the 1950s, they used the shop to make and repair parts for their farming equipment.

"Dick and Hugh's old threshing machine took Babbitt bearings, so they would pour bearings heated up on that forge," says Dale.

The grinder and drill in the shop were used until electricity came to the ranch in 1960. Today, the farmhouses run on solar power, and the rest of the ranch relies on generators and headlamps for light during the dark days of winter.

The Bradley family story of remote northern farming has been drawing interest since the brothers first set foot on the property. Perhaps most notably, they caught the attention of Marjorie Lucknow, a young nursing student in Ontario in the early 1960s.

While working in a hospital, Marjorie was reading to a patient — an 87-year-old retired farmer — when she came across an article about the Pelly River Ranch. The more she read, the more her patient wanted to know. He asked her to read the article over and over, and eventually persuaded her to write to the brothers on his behalf.

"The urgent need to know how anyone could make a living raising cattle and growing grains where there is very little rainfall and winter temperatures could be minus 70 degrees Fahrenheit was almost too much for this old gentleman," wrote Lucknow in a story she recorded later in life.

On a whim, she chose to address the letter to Dick because he was the older brother. Dick wrote back and over the years the couple developed an intimate relationship, which led her to board a bus and move to the Yukon with her young son, Glen, in 1973. She and Dick married the day after she arrived.

Later in life, Marjorie wrote a short history of the farm, so that the personal parts of the Bradley family story would not be lost over the years. She was worried all that would remain from the farm would be the sterile soulless official government records.

"How much reality, heartache, success and failure, to say nothing of the scenes of everyday life, can one find in a piece of paper," she wrote. "We have never got rich, but we sure have a good life being poor."

Marjorie described the brothers' approach to life as "one straight line," never showing "undue happiness, anger, frustration or discouragement."

She also delighted in their dry sense of humour. For example, during his 58 years on the farm, Hugh monitored the Environment Canada weather station on the property. Marjorie wrote: "Usually on wash days, I ask him what's in store weather wise. His only answer is: 'Yep, we're bound to have some.'"

To recognize their decades of contributions to the Yukon, the Bradley family received the first Yukon Farmer of the Century Award in 1999. A tribute in the Yukon Legislature proclaimed: "The Bradleys have set an outstanding example for all Yukon agriculturalists, present and future. Their model of perseverance, dedication, and hard work, laced with a positive attitude and humour is something everyone aspires to.... Through the thick and the thin, they have succeeded in finding ways to make things work."

After Hugh, Dick, and Marjorie passed away, their ashes were buried on a hill overlooking the ranch. Perhaps they're keeping an eye on the current generations—Dale and Sue, their children, and family friends—who are still following that winning formula of perseverance and hard work combined with a positive attitude and welcoming sense of humour. They are still finding ways to make things work.

"It's my home and I'm stuck with it now... I can't get rid of it," says Dale with a smile that implies he wouldn't want it any other way. •

This article was originally published in the October 12, 2022 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

Community, connection, and caribou

Gwich'in sisters practice ancestral skills to honour their heritage and their family, and to help with their healing journey

On a winter afternoon, Montana and Delaney Prysnuk are hanging a caribou hide to dry in the sun. It has taken months of work—scraping, stretching and smoking—to prepare the hide, and countless generations of ancestral knowledge, passed down through the family, to refine the skills involved.

"The caribou is such an important animal to the Gwich'in people. It's how we survived since time immemorial," says Montana. "We live down here in Whitehorse, but using the caribou is our way to connect to that culture and history."

The sisters, who are Vuntut Gwitchin, Ukrainian and Scandinavian, say hide work is "embedded in their DNA". They grew up hearing stories of their ancestors: strong matriarchs who took on the physically challenging work of tanning hides — transforming an animal skin into a soft, durable leather — to clothe and shelter their family.

Montana and Delaney knew that ancestral knowledge was inside them, and they waited for the right time to wake it up.

In early 2020, the sisters' busy lives slowed down. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions gave them a chance to pause and reflect. Just months earlier in June 2019, they lost their younger brother, Mckeehan. And in 2014, they lost their cousin, Stephen Mills Jr., who was like a brother to them.

"I definitely think that after our brother passed away, hide tanning saved my life a little bit," says Montana. "We've dedicated our hide tanning journey and this hide camp to Stephen and Mckeehan because they're not with us anymore. It's what keeps us going."

Montana took a hide tanning course with Margaret Douville at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, and the sisters relied on their community of friends and family to share knowledge, materials, and support as they built their skills.

"Learning to tan hides gave us purpose, and we were able to feel that connection to something we knew was in our blood," says Delaney. "I finally felt grounded. It was very healing, and it just felt right."

They had saved the hides from Stephen Mills Jr.'s feast for many years, which had been harvested by Mckeehan and their cousin Yudii. They decided it was time to pull the hides out of cold storage and get to work.

The sisters created a hide camp on the land beside the home they grew up in. Their father, Allan, helped them build a warming hut with comfortable places to sit, a woodstove and warm drinks. Just outside, they placed a fire pit for smoking hides and sharing stories. The pit's cauldron was welded by Mckeehan, who was a talented mechanic and maker.

"People are drawn to the fire," says Montana. "You'll hear youth tell stories that they're just remembering now, and they've never really told anyone before. Like, 'Oh yeah. I think I remember my grandma talking about hide tanning. Oh, I did that with my grandma when I was little.'"

Montana and Delaney use the camp to spend time on the land developing their traditional skills. They also invite others to come, learn and heal with them.

"Relearning our cultural practices are a form of healing from past traumas and current traumas," says Delaney. "We want to provide a space where people can feel comfortable and relearn the things

LEFT

Delaney and Montana at their hide camp, just outside of Whitehorse.

All photos courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

TOP

Montana hangs a caribou hide to dry.

BOTTOM

Delaney with some of the sisters' handmade jewelry.

our generation lost and were taken away from us; the culture practices that people haven't been able to practice in many, many years."

The sisters have run hide camps for school groups and through the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate.

"It's really cool to see that connection," says Montana. "In some kids, it's totally a spark that happens and they feel empowered and proud."

Their best days at camp are when they can help engage youth, who are going through a hard time or have not been inspired in school.

"We had one teacher come over at the end of the day and say, 'Thank you so much. I haven't seen some of these kids do anything, and they actually picked up tools and worked on hides. This is a solid win for me today as a teacher,'" says Montana. "That's such a great compliment. Yeah, I was tearing up."

The hide camp is a new addition to Copper Caribou, a business the sisters have been growing and developing for over a decade. It began as a way to make extra cash while they studied at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George.

At that time, Delaney took an odd job cleaning up a construction site where she was able to salvage scraps of copper wire destined for the landfill. The pair started making jewelry by wrapping the copper wire around interesting shells and rocks they had collected over the years.

"I have always been inclined to dig up things out of the earth and see the beauty in them," says Delaney.

After moving back to Whitehorse, they began incorporating cross-sections of caribou antler into their designs. Inside each antler is a unique pattern of coloured rings, depending on the age of the animal and where they were kept after they were shed.

"A lot of the antlers we use are donated by friends and family who hunt and spend time on the land," says Delaney. "A good community connection, as well, for our family."

Now, the ringed cross-sections of antler paired with colourful beadwork have become a hallmark of the sisters' designs. Their handmade earrings and necklaces sell for hundreds of dollars at local shops and markets.

Over the past few years, the Adäka Cultural Festival has given Copper Caribou the opportunity to branch out into fashion design. In 2022, they designed and created two outfits for the Dà Ze Tsàn (From Our Hearts) fashion show with help from their mother, Penny, a talented sewer and beader.

"When we created those bigger pieces last year, it was a whole new invigorating feeling," says Delaney. "There's a whole other world that we could get into."

Delaney and Montana were also selected to attend Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto in 2022, as part of the Fashion Forward initiative, supported by the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association and the Yukon government.

"I hope people feel strong when they wear our stuff," says Montana. "I hope it gives them a sense of power."

Their fashions reflect ties to their culture and heritage and also their commitment to upcycle and reuse materials. In fact, their Mossy Raven blazer is covered in feathers crafted from salvaged bike tire tubes.

Being able to move from making jewelry to designing fashions to working at their hide camp keeps the sisters from getting burned out.

"There are so many heavy things going on in the world right now, but we try to keep grounded and take breaks as needed," says Montana. "It's important to make sure your brain is okay, and your body and your soul feel right too."

In the future, the sisters plan to grow their hide camp and continue their learning and sharing journey.

"I like to support kids, especially youth, these days," says Montana. "It's a tough time for a lot of people, and just having something to feel proud and passionate about is really important for everybody." •

This article was originally published in the June 7, 2023 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

Montana holds an ulu, one of the tools they use to prepare hides.

From the ‘impertinent wacky disorder’ of Whitehorse in the ‘50s to the capital city of today

For over 70 years Pat Ellis has been collecting stories from Yukon’s history by going right to the source: the people who lived it.

When Pat Ellis walks around downtown Whitehorse, she sees evidence of the past because she knows just where to look.

She sees parts of Quonset huts and barracks left behind by the US Army subsumed into new buildings still in use today. She sees remnants of former “squatter” homes that once dotted the riverfront. And she sees the foundations of buildings from the short-lived CANOL refinery, still intact in the industrial area.

“Many people don’t know these parts of our history; there was a major refinery right in downtown Whitehorse that smelled like rotten eggs when it was running,” she says. “It opened in April 1944 with lots of fanfare, and then less than a year later it closed. Soon after, forgotten.”

Ellis came to Whitehorse in the mid-1950s. Over the years, she has been preserving, documenting, and presenting stories from Yukon’s history, especially ones that she thinks deserve more attention.

For example, she became interested in the CANOL (an acronym for Canadian American Norman Oil Line) project after hearing the incredible story from friends who were involved.

During the Second World War, the U.S. Army needed a reliable supply of oil to fuel the war effort in Alaska. So, it constructed a 2,600-kilometer pipeline to move oil from Norman Wells, NWT, to Whitehorse where a refinery was built to process the oil.

As it turned out, the price of fuel produced was high and the war ended, so the project was shut down in 1945. The U.S. Secretary of War later referred to it as “a waste of public funds.”

“It’s kooky,” she says. “The whole thing was approved based on a two-page letter.”

Artist and historian Pat Ellis at her home in 2021.

Photo courtesy of Leighann Chalykoff

> **“There’s so much history and the stories are so interesting; you can just keep going and going.”**
>
> **Pat Ellis**

Ellis self-published a book called The CANOL Adventures in 2008. It’s a collection of historical documents and memories from people who were involved with the project in different ways, including Alex Van Bibber, who worked with the team that surveyed the pipeline’s route, and Gertrude Seidel, a refugee from the Nazis, who worked in the CANOL’s Whitehorse office.

“When I talked to Gert (Seidel) about it, she says it was a big deal in the town,” says Ellis. “She was puzzled that it was just forgotten.”

Though she’s long-since retired, Ellis keeps working hard to keep her friends’ stories alive. She wants to help people understand what happened in the past, and to forge connections to that history through first-person accounts from people who lived it.

“I think people should be asked if they have a story to tell, and those stories should come right from the source,” she says.

Lured by the promise of high wages, Ellis arrived in Whitehorse as a “starving art student” looking for a summer job in 1953. She rented a room and quickly got a job as a “sort of scatter-brained secretary” with a busy construction company.

At that time the streets were unpaved, and the city was “gray with gravel, but green with money,” she says. “You could make about double what was being offered in the rest of Canada.”

It was nearly a decade after the U.S. Army left, and scrounging for wartime leftovers—windows, doors, and oil stoves—was a lucrative pastime. Construction was haphazard; Ellis called it “impertinent wacky disorder”, and rent was cheap.

“Without nosy building inspectors, many buildings were several per legal lot, at whatever angle they landed,” Ellis wrote of her first impressions of the city.

After another year of school, she returned in ’54 and found a job at the Taylor and Drury department store, located where Horwoods Mall is now, on Main Street.

Ellis and a friend rented a small cabin in Whiskey Flats, a squatter community located where the SS Klondike National Historic Site and Rotary Park are today. Built from a cut-down U.S. Army barrack, the cabin was just one partitioned room with a “temperamental wood stove,” a water barrel, and a chemical toilet. The door didn’t lock.

Pat Ellis, far right, won a Yukon Heritage Award in 2016 for her tireless work in preserving, presenting and promoting the Yukon's history.

After a few months, her friend left to get married in Vancouver. Ellis found another place to live but decided to stay in Whitehorse. And over the years she raised a family of three children. For a while she worked as a stay-at-home mom, supplementing her income by selling her paintings. Then, she got a job at the *Whitehorse Star* print shop where she learned "paste up," a now old-fashioned method of laying out newspapers by hand.

"There were a lot of people coming and going, like Flo Whyard, a very talented editor, and Bob Erlam, a wheeler dealer owner who knew how to keep the business going," she says. "It was a very stimulating time in Whitehorse."

In 1969, she created her own job after hearing that the federal department of Indian Affairs had started collecting local handmade crafts. She helped open a shop to sell the crafts on Main Street, and stayed on a contract for five years.

She bought crafts from local craftspeople who sewed, such as Annie Smith, Sophie Miller, and the Chambers family.

"These people were artists: They knew how to cut stuff that fit, and they would come up with the most spectacular designs for hats and mitts," says Ellis. "It was all so creative and unique. You couldn't order a crate of mukluks, and that's what made them so beautiful."

Ellis still sees some of the designs that were sold through the shop in use on the streets of Whitehorse today. After Ellis' contract ran out, Lorraine Joe took over the business and has been running the Indian Craft Shop ever since. The money from product sales was used to fund grants through the Yukon Foundation.

Meanwhile, Ellis used her savings to purchase a small home at the foot of the clay cliffs, but just a few years later the City of Whitehorse bought her out as part of the escarpment clearance in 1974.

Once her kids grew up, she travelled and found her strengths in writing, drawing, and painting. As a member of the Yukon Art Society, she found many opportunities to use her artistic skills.

"I always enjoyed sketching and history. It all sort of grew out of that, like a mushroom on a manure pile," she adds with a laugh.

In 1992, she published Yukon Sketchbook: A Travellers Companion, a collection of her drawings of historical places and events. Over the years she's also painted public murals in Atlin and in Whitehorse at City Hall, Shipyards Park, Copper Ridge Place, and a giant 30-panel mural at the Yukon Transportation Museum that she drew out with Edith Jerome.

"We never made much money at it, but it was fun," she says. "You can't be too serious about art; people try, but that's just silly and pretentious."

In 2015, Ellis published a collection of stories and photographs from the former residents of Whiskey Flats, Moccasin Flats and Sleepy Hollow called The Squatters of Downtown Whitehorse.

"I wanted to do it because I was mad: there were lots of convoluted stories about who was living in these squatter areas," she says. "I wanted to set the record straight: There were really hard-working people living there."

Throughout the years, she's also written countless stories for local newspapers and worked on several other projects, including a book on riverboats, a collection of stories about the Trump family's connection to the Yukon, and some research for the Anglican Church in Whitehorse.

In 2016, Ellis was recognized with a Heritage Award from the Yukon Historical and Museums Association. And in 2019, she was one of the first to be inducted into the Order of Yukon.

Despite all she has accomplished, Ellis is humble. She would much rather tell a story about history than talk about herself. Most recently, she received a heritage grant to collect information about Father William Judge and the former St. Mary's Hospital in Dawson City.

"There's so much history and the stories are so interesting; you can just keep going and going."

Ellis has no plans to stop anytime soon. •

This article was originally published in the February 22, 2023 edition of "What's Up Yukon".

LEFT

Pat Ellis managed a handcraft shop on Main Street in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

RIGHT

Ellis shown at a local bazaar in 2015.

All photos courtesy of the Whitehorse Star

Yukon