



TESLIN WALKING TOUR



Culturally Modified Trees Forest Trail

TESLIN WALKING TOUR

A Brief History

The coastal Tlingit travelled through this area for centuries, trading with the interior Dene, and some Tlingit moved inland to marry into the families of their Dene trading partners. The Teslin Tlingit trace their lineage to Juneau, Alaska and are closely related to other Inland Tlingit living in Carcross and Atlin, British Columbia. Two of the trading routes to the coast were used by the Klondike stamperders who named them the Ashcroft and Stikine/Telegraph trails.

Teslin was originally called *Deisleen* meaning “long narrow waters” in Tlingit, and is located on a peninsula at the intersection of two well-travelled waterways. *Deisleen* was a favoured fish camp for catching spawning whitefish when Tom Smith set up a trading post and freighting business here in 1903. A summer community grew up around the post. When Taylor and Drury bought Smith’s post in 1907, they expanded the business. An Anglican church and seasonal school was built by the Teslin Tlingit congregation in 1908 and the Mounted Police established a Teslin post in 1919. The Inland Tlingit from the south end of Teslin Lake and Johnston Town area, largely of the Eastern Orthodox Catholic faith, were attracted to the growing community and they started building and relocating several frame houses here between 1922 and 1928. A Roman Catholic mission was established in 1938.

The Alaska Highway was built through the small community in the fall of 1942. The population was exposed to eight epidemics of contagious disease, and limited statistics indicate there were more deaths than

Historic Sites

births during this period. Families stayed away from their trap lines, and suffered through a very cold winter in houses built for summer use.

Significant eras of town expansion followed that of the early 1940s, with federal government-supported housing built in the 1960s and 1980s. The Teslin Tlingit were active in land claims negotiations beginning in 1973, and the Teslin Tlingit Council was one of the first four Yukon First Nations to sign a Land Claim and Self-Government Agreement in 1993. Under the Agreement, the First Nation can make laws on their own lands, can deliver programs and services for their citizens, and is a strong voice in managing lands and resources within their Traditional Territory. Many of Teslin's modern buildings were built under the authority of the Teslin Tlingit Council.





OPEN



Nisutlin Bay Bridge



In 1942 the United States Public Road Administration constructed a 709-metre trestle bridge across Nisutlin Bay. The piles were driven 30 metres into the glacial silt, but the bridge was affected by ice jams and deteriorated quickly. In 1946, a truck carrying a caterpillar tractor broke through the deck and fell into the bay, effectively closing the bridge for two weeks while the bridge was being repaired. A new bridge was built in 1956 with a concrete deck, heavy piers, and adequate clearance to eliminate ice and driftwood jams. The concrete deck was replaced by a steel grid in 1971. The 584-metre Nisutlin Bay Bridge is the longest on the Alaska Highway.

Gazebo at public marina



Yukon Motel Wildlife Gallery



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The Yukon Motel, near Nisutlin Bay, hosts the Wildlife Gallery. Many species of northern wildlife are displayed in dioramas showing the animals' habitat. Yukon's animals are often elusive, so this roadside gallery is an excellent opportunity to view a variety of magnificent animals. The beautiful wildlife exhibits were prepared by the late Carcross taxidermists Chuck and Shane Buchanan.





Bonar Cooley, George Johnston, and several other community leaders founded the Teslin Historical Society in the early 1970s. The group raised money for the building construction, donated some of their private collections for the exhibits and held a grand opening in July 1975. The museum is named for George Johnston, an Inland Tlingit entrepreneur and photographer. He is the subject of the National Film Board of Canada documentary *Picturing a People*, directed by Carol Geddes. Johnston opened his first store in his home in the old village, and owned Teslin's first vehicle which he operated on the frozen lake. The museum has exhibits on Teslin lifestyle and features George Johnston's famous vehicle and his photographs of everyday events dating from the 1930s to the 1950s. The George Johnston Museum is operated by the Teslin Historical Society and is open from June to September.





The Aeradio Navigation Range Station is the only known surviving structure of a string of buildings constructed to house the Northwest Staging Route electronic and communications equipment. During World War II, equipment in this building supported air travel between the airports and airstrips that paralleled the Alaska Highway. Pilots were guided by a channel of radio signal beeps emitted from three 42-metre towers. The guidance system helped ferry approximately 8,000 aircraft to Russia in a WWII lend-lease program.

The transmitters were shipped into Teslin by boat in 1941, before the Alaska Highway was built. Thorstein Johnson was working on the building when he signed and dated a log on February 15, 1942. Two large vents in the side wall, and a roof vent, are evidence that the equipment, manufactured by the Canadian Marconi Company, operated at a high voltage and gave off considerable heat. The guidance system remained in use for civilian air traffic until the early 1960s when the towers were dismantled.

The building was originally located on a hill about 5 km from the end of the Teslin airport, and was moved as a derelict building to the museum grounds in 2005. Pieces of electronic equipment, on loan from the Yukon Transportation Museum, are the centrepiece of the exhibit.





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This warehouse was constructed near the waterfront when Tom Smith and George Geddes built Teslin's first trading post in 1903. Smith moved freight and passengers from Hootalinqua, on the Yukon River, via the Teslin River to Teslin Lake. He sold his interest in the business and a steamboat to the Whitehorse-based Taylor and Drury (T&D) retail business in 1907.

Before the highway was constructed, T&D brought three boat-loads of supplies every year from Whitehorse to last through the winter, and stored the goods in this warehouse. By the 1930s, the company was the biggest fur buyer in the north. They gave generous credit to trappers, and charged a minimal fee of 10% on furs to cover shipping and losses. T&D expanded their Whitehorse business to include Taylor and Drury Motors in the 1920s, and shipped George Johnston's car to Teslin on a company boat.

This warehouse was moved closer to the highway in the 1940s, when goods could arrive by road as well as by water. The building housed the Teslin Lake Joint School between 1948 and 1951. At that time, it was Yukon's only integrated school.



The Alaska Highway was built in 1942 to supply fuel and equipment to Alaska and the airfields along the Northwest Staging Route. The first rough pioneer road was constructed in just nine months by the American Army. The United States Public Road Administration contracted a few construction consortiums to stabilize the road and build more permanent bridges. The Canadian military took over the construction and maintenance of the highway in 1946, and it was turned over to the Canadian Department of Public Works (DPW) in 1964. First Nation guides helped surveyors lay out the first road, and they and other civilian workers contributed to the construction of the road and the airports. These ambitious WWII projects formed the backbone of the Yukon transportation system.





The Khàtinas.àxh Community School in Teslin teaches children in pre-kindergarten to grade 9 classes and is committed to the success of every student. The community is highly involved with the school, and the Teslin Tlingit Council provides an Elders in the School Program, and cultural and experiential activities including an annual Culture Camp. An education support worker provides liaison for teachers, parents and the First Nation government. Students have to leave Teslin to attend grades 10 to 12 in Whitehorse. A program brings students to Whitehorse twice a year to tour the high schools and allow students to sit in on classes. The school is named for the late Khàtinas.àxh (Billy Fox), who was known for his knowledge of the land, his work as an RCMP special constable and his community leadership. He was an advocate for a modern school in the community of Teslin. Khàtinas.àxh is a Kookhittaan Clan name, meaning, a raven that can be heard a long time after he is gone. He still makes noise like an echo.





Teslin students attended the Teslin Lake Joint School or the Roman Catholic day school from 1948 to 1951 when the Teslin Teacherage was built. The Teacherage accommodated 30 students and housed the teacher in a three-room suite above. This was Yukon government's first purpose-built school in Teslin. Although the Teslin Lake Joint School had been integrated, First Nation children did not attend the teacherage for the first few years of its operation. By 1954/55 Indian-status children were being accepted at many territorial schools, and the Department of Indian Affairs was accepting white-status children in its schools.



✂️ The Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church ✂️



The present Catholic Church is the third Catholic church to be built in Teslin. During a visit in 1937, Teslin people asked Bishop Coudert for a resident priest. Jean-Louis Coudert was the first appointed Bishop of the vicariate (region) of Whitehorse. Father Albert Drear, an Oblate missionary, arrived in 1938. He started a mission and built a small church. A bigger church was built across from the present site in 1946, and the current church was constructed in 1970. This church was constructed using plans created by Conrad Domes and the students of the Yukon Vocational School in Whitehorse. The church's log form resembles a First Nation summer shelter, but with copper and brass appointments. The three peaks of the roof refer to the mountains in the region, and especially one dome in the Dawson Peaks, a mountain located across the lake from the village. The beautiful interior is enhanced by locally embroidered and beaded altar cloths.





This cabin, built in the 1930s, was originally located near to the Nisutlin Bay Lodge. Robert McCleery was an RCMP officer stationed at Teslin. He and his wife, Laura and children stayed in the community after his retirement from the RCMP. The McCleerys ran a trap line and built the Nisutlin Trading Post in 1926. Anticipating a lively tourism business after the highway was completed, McCleery built the Nisutlin Bay Lodge, with accommodations for twenty people, and erected several small cabins like this one. The family opened a restaurant, and the elegant Laura McCleery served meals to highway construction workers. The lodge offered modern plumbing and lighting, big game and fowl hunting, fishing, boating, bathing, stream fishing, First Nations handicrafts, and a gas and oil service. A modern airport was located nearby, and there was a seaplane base on the lake. This cabin is all that remains of a delightful northern lodge. The cabin has been used as a store and a residence, and has been moved several times since its construction. The cabin has been stabilized and is currently owned by the Teslin Tlingit Council. The original Nisutlin Bay Lodge and Trading Post have been removed from this site.



Old Teslin RCMP Detachment



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Northwest Mounted Police constables were first posted to Teslin during the summer of 1906 when the individuals from Atlin, British Columbia were suspected of smuggling liquor across Teslin Lake. A permanent detachment was set up in 1919 as a small post manned by Corporal C. Stephens and Corporal Robert McCleery. They initially rented the original Anglican Rectory and operated it as an office and residence. After that building became unusable, a new office and barracks was built on Jackson Avenue. The current building was constructed by a Vancouver firm in 1957 to house the detachment office, married quarters, and jail cell and the frame building sits on a substantial concrete basement. Corporal Robert McCleery remained in Teslin with his family after his retirement from the RCMP in 1928.





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This building was constructed in 1906 as a church and school. Anglican divinity student J. R. Blythell established the first Teslin school during the late summer of 1908. The missionary taught about 40 students, almost all adults in those early years. The seasonal school started receiving federal support in 1911. The school did not open every year, but by the 1930s it was so well-attended that Lily Jackson was hired to assist the teacher. Basic book-keeping and a sports program were added to the curriculum.

In the mid-1920s the building was used by the RCMP during the winter while the First Nation congregation was out of town on their trap lines. The divinity students could not keep up repairs on the church, and in 1931, the school children were able to see through the sides of the building and the roof was in sad disrepair.

In 1932, the church was pulled down and rebuilt using the old logs. The walls were chinked with mud and lime mixed with moose hair, and the sod roof was replaced with galvanized iron. Around 1934, after a new frame church was built, the old church was deconsecrated and the bell tower removed. The congregation started using it as a parish hall in the mid-1950s. St. Philip's Parish Hall is the oldest building still standing in the village.



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Theology student S. W. Semple was the seasonal minister in 1934 when the Teslin Tlingit congregation constructed St Philip's Church. Reverend Bob Ward had been a theology student stationed at Teslin in the 1930s, and he returned in 1942 as an ordained minister. He turned the church into a hospital when epidemics of measles, mumps and meningitis severely affected the First Nation population during the Alaska Highway construction. In 1955, Reverend Fred Lapham and local carpenter Peter Smarch added ten feet to the length of St. Philip's Church.





The three buildings at the corner of Tlingit Drive and George Johnston Drive are examples of three different eras of Teslin architecture. The Freddy and Nina Johnston House was constructed in the late 1920s when Teslin Tlingit from southern Teslin Lake moved into Teslin. The Joe Jackson House, to the left of the three, was built in the 1960s by local carpenters under a federal housing program. The Wanda Jackson House, across the street from Joe Jackson's, towards Teslin Lake, dates from another federal housing program in the mid-1980s. The milled log houses were said to be colder and smaller than these 1930s-1940s buildings constructed of locally-planed material. The houses pictured here are private residences.





You are in the heart of Teslin’s old village, the centre of the traditional settlement land of the Teslin Tlingit. This area was first settled when a Teslin trading post was established in 1905. Structures like Joe Jackson’s log house were built around 1965 by the Teslin Tlingit, and were part of a federal government inventory. They were called “apple boxes,” or “apples,” in reference to their red colour. The lands and buildings in this area were transferred to the Teslin Tlingit Council after their Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements were signed in 1993.



Freddy and Nina Johnston Heritage House



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This is one of the first frame houses to be built in Teslin and dates from 1928. It was built by Bobby Jackson, with the help of his father John Jackson Sr. and his brother Matthew, at Indian Point (Xaaka'yee) British Columbia. It was located across Teslin Lake from the Inland Tlingit community of Johnston Town. The lumber was salvage material from the roof of a Hudson's Bay post at the south end of the lake. In 1928, the boards were brought up the lake on Shorty and William Johnston's boat, the Nakina, and reused to build the walls of this house. Several framed houses were built near here by people migrating from the southern end of Teslin Lake between 1922 and 1928. The Teslin Tlingit fished on nearby lakes and rivers during the summer, hunted in the highlands during the fall, and went out on traplines during the winter. The steep slopes of this house shed snow while the owners were out on the trapline. Freddy Johnston was George Johnston's nephew, and they were both excellent photographers. The Teslin Tlingit Council is undertaking restoration work on the Freddy and Nina Johnston Heritage House. When restored, they plan to exhibit early photographs of the Old Village and interpretation about the house construction and the Teslin Tlingit Council's restoration project.



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The walking and ski trails around Hermit Lake passes by fishing spots, places to pick medicinal plants, and birch trees harvested for snowshoe-making. An important and extensive stand of culturally-modified pine trees are found in this area. The trees show scars from harvesting the cambium, or inner bark, that contains carbohydrates, dietary fibre, Vitamin C and minerals. These were complements to a protein-rich diet and were very important in the late winter. Some of these trees date back to the mid-1800s.





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The George Johnston hiking trail is an easy route paralleling the lake and the highway between Teslin village and the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre at Fox Point. George Johnston brought the first car to Teslin in 1928 and drove it on a widened foot path around the village. Over three years he hired men to construct a six km road, complete with culverts and a short-span pole bridge, from the village to Fox Point. On the local July 1st Sports Days, he dressed in white shirt and tie and offered a taxi service, charging \$1 for the round trip. George's Fox Point road became the route for the Alaska Highway in this area.

The George Johnston Trail is a year-round trail used by hikers, bikers and cross-country skiers. A trail head is located across the Alaska Highway from the old village.



The Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre sits at a beautiful location on the shore of Teslin Lake. It can be accessed from the Alaska Highway at km 1248. Exhibits in the centre illustrate the last two hundred years of Inland Tlingit culture, and provide insights into traditional ways of life. The permanent collection includes 42 masks, expertly carved by local artists. The masks bring to life the stories of the Teslin Tlingit people. There are films, temporary exhibits and a gift shop stocked with local and other crafts. The five clan posts outside the Centre were created in a project directed by master carvers Dempsey Bob, Keith Wolf Smarch and Stan Bevan. Outdoor interpretation includes learning stations to hear or read about big-game outfitting, tanning hides, and salmon fishing and processing. The beautiful dug-out canoes are used in races at the Haa Kusteeeyí biennial Inland Tlingit Gathering celebrations.



» Tom Dewurst »
Recreation Complex



» Municipal Centre »



» Friendship Park »



➤ Greenhouse ➤



➤ Teslin Cemetery ➤



Teslin Tingit Heritage Centre



George Johnston Museum



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We hope you enjoyed your tour of historic Teslin. Thank you to the Teslin Tlingit Council, the Village of Teslin and the George Johnston Museum for their contributions. If you have additional information, please contact the Government of Yukon Cultural Services Branch at 867-667-3458.

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