

## After the Gold Rush

Our Yukon expedition began in Whitehorse, which was named for the White Horse Rapids due to their resemblance to the mane of a white horse. We were eager to witness the launch of the “Yukon River Quest” as some 88 teams prepared to make the mad “Dash, Splash & Paddle” down river in canoes, kayaks and even paddle boards. They faced 715 km of hard paddling to Dawson City.

On the way to the first stopping point for the River Quest group, we stopped to enjoy the beauty of Emerald Lake, named for the intense colouring caused by the high concentration of calcium carbonate from limestone gravel deposited here 14,000 years ago. Glacial erosion during the last ice age is responsible for the formation of the lake bed.

Soon, we came upon the Carcross Desert. A phenomenon of nature just one kilometre north of Carcross, we took a leisurely walk in the sands considered to be the smallest desert in the world. Measuring approximately 2.6 km, a series of sand dunes, formed this desert during the last glacial period with the silt deposits of large lakes. The Yukon Territorial government made efforts to protect the Carcross Desert in 1992, however, locals opposed these efforts as they would often use the dunes for recreational purposes.

The Carcross/Tagish First Nation (CTFN) is one of 11 Self-Governing First Nations in the Yukon. Originally a fishing/hunting camp for inland Tlingit and Tagish people, artifacts dating back 4,500 years have been found in the area. Here, we found Matthew Watson’s General Store, the Yukon’s oldest operating store from 1898. In the days of the Klondike Gold Rush, Carcross (Cariboo Crossing) was a major stopping point for prospectors. The Royal Mail and the Dominion Telegraph Line also had installations here and served as a communication point along the Yukon River.

The original discovery of gold has been attributed to two natives of the Carcross region. Skookum Jim Mason (a.k.a. Keish) and Dawson Charlie (a.k.a. Tagish Charlie or Káa Goox), and accompanied by George Carmack, staked their first claims on Rabbit Creek, in August 1896. The group later renamed their claim “Bonanza.” More gold was soon found on Eldorado Creek, and so began the Gold Rush.

The ensuing settlement of early miners soon developed and became known as the “Town of the City of Dawson,” or Dawson City. In earliest times, this was a fishing camp and base for moose hunting in the warmer months. Located at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers, the current city was officially founded by Joe Ladue who, in 1897, named the city for noted Canadian geologist, George M. Dawson, who explored and mapped the region in 1887. Many other notable personages are known to have made their mark on Dawson City.

Robert Service (1874-1958) a.k.a. the “Bard of the Yukon” lived in a two-room cabin on Eighth Ave from 1909-58. Pierre Berton (1920-2004) lived in Dawson City until he was 12, when his family moved to British Columbia. Now known as Berton House under the Writers’ Trust of Canada, it is used as a retreat for professional Canadian writers.

Jack London (1876-1916), an American novelist, joined in the Klondike Gold Rush at age 21 but, like many other miners, became ill with scurvy and returned to California in 1898. The Yukon, however, became his inspiration for one of his most successful works, *To Build a Fire*, in 1902.

Alexander Pantages (1867-1936), vaudevillian, motion picture producer and impresario, travelled to the Yukon where he became partner and lover to saloon dancer and brothel-keeper “Klondike Kate” Rockwell. Operating a small vaudeville/burlesque, the Orpheum, the pair began building a chain of theatres and, in 1914, he married musician Lois Mendenhall.

Klondike Kate sued him for a breach-of-promise-to-marry and later wrote that he had stolen money from her with which he purchased the Crystal Theatre in Seattle, WA in 1902.

Joseph W. Boyle (1867-1923) arrived in Dawson City in 1897 just ahead of the Gold Rush. With business ventures in utilities and supplies, he also became deeply involved in all aspects of Dawson’s community life. In 1905, he organized and managed the Dawson City Nuggets hockey team, taking them to Ottawa to play the Silver Seven to compete in the Stanley Cup final. Unfortunately, they did not win the cup. But that was then.

Today’s Dawson City is still a vision from the past. Yukon’s original capital (moved to Whitehorse in April 1953), it grew to 30,000 people by 1888, and is now a National Historic Site of Canada. Strolling along the current day streets of Dawson City, we admired the restored façades of saloons, rooming houses, blacksmith shops, general stores, banks and other businesses necessary for a community to prosper.

Passing by the Dawson Gold Shop, I found a crowd gathering at the riverfront. The annual gold-panning competition was in full swing. As we watched in fascination, I discovered the victor of this competition could win a chance to travel to Scotland to compete in the World Gold Panning Championship. While at the competition, I learned about a place where we could do some panning of our own. Claim 33, just 2.5 km south of Dawson. Well, maybe on the way home as we didn’t want to get caught up with gold fever.

The Downtown Hotel was the place to stop to learn more about the strange tradition of the Sourtoe Cocktail. In the 1920s, rum-runner Louie Linken encountered a nasty blizzard while trying to direct his dogsled team when he slipped into an icy overflow and froze his foot completely. With the police after them and prolonged exposure to cold, Louie was facing gangrene from frostbite. His brother did the only thing he could think of and amputated the toe, preserving it in the only thing they had, alcohol.

Years later, Captain Jack Stevenson discovered the toe in an abandoned cabin and established the Sourtoe Cocktail Club, currently on its thirteenth (donated) toe. Naturally, I just had to buy myself a shot to take the challenge. Swearing the "Sourtoe Oath," I watched as a real (dehydrated) toe was dropped into my drink, and tossed back my shot of Yukon Jack, allowing the toe to touch my lips, remembering just in time not swallow it. Having followed all the rules, I was awarded club certificate number 72033.

We reserved a table at Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall for our final evening. Canada's first and most northerly casino, the building was established by the Arctic Brotherhood in 1901 as the AB Fraternity Hall. Their motto: "No Boundary Line Here." Members included William McKinley, Warren G. Harding, King Edward VII and Theodore Roosevelt. The city of Dawson obtained the title in 1951 when it became the community hall and, in 1967, was renamed Centennial Hall for Canada's 100th birthday.

When the building was leased to the Klondike Visitors Association in 1971, it became Diamond Tooth Gertie's and is now a mainstay of Dawson's entertainment scene. After trying our hand at the tables, we settled in to watch the popular Cancan show and enjoy a beverage or two to rinse the residual toe out of our mouths before turning in for the night. Tomorrow, there would be many more interesting stops along the Klondike Highway.

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#### IF YOU GO:

Yukon Tourism:

[www.travel yukon.com](http://www.travel yukon.com) (<http://www.travel yukon.com>) or  
1-800-661-0494

Carcross Tagish First Nation

[www.ctfn.ca](http://www.ctfn.ca) (<http://www.ctfn.ca>) or  
1-855-686-4251

Klondike Gold Rush: [www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klondike/home/indexen.html](http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klondike/home/indexen.html)  
(<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klondike/home/indexen.html>).

Pierre Burton - Burton House:

[www.bertonhouse.ca/en/index.html](http://www.bertonhouse.ca/en/index.html) (<http://www.bertonhouse.ca/en/index.html>).

Jack London:

<http://london.sonoma.edu/jackbio.html>  
(<http://london.sonoma.edu/jackbio.html>).

Alexander Pantages:



(<https://www.seniorlivingmag.com/linkout/1774>).

<https://web.stanford.edu/~ichriss/Pantages.htm> (<https://web.stanford.edu/~ichriss/Pantages.htm>).

Klondike Kate:

[www.altonm.ca/Klondike\\_Kate/klondike\\_kate.html](http://www.altonm.ca/Klondike_Kate/klondike_kate.html) ([http://www.altonm.ca/Klondike\\_Kate/klondike\\_kate.html](http://www.altonm.ca/Klondike_Kate/klondike_kate.html)).



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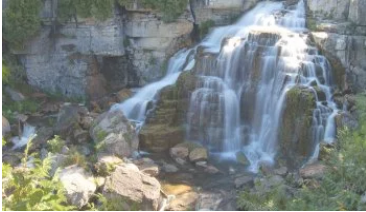
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