



KWANLIN

“WATER RUNNING
THROUGH A NARROW PLACE”



Home of Kwanlin Dün First Nation

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Front Cover: Jenny and Jack Shagoon, 1915.
Yukon Archives, MacBride Museum Collection

Back cover: Sundog carvers carry a dugout canoe they made. The canoe will be housed in the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. **John Meikle**

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Acknowledgements:

The historical information in this publication draws substantially from Kwanlin Dün's *Back to the River* booklet, produced in 2003. We gratefully acknowledge the many elders and citizens that contributed to an understanding of our history and place on the Yukon river and the people who worked on the production of that publication. The *Back to the River* booklet is available for download at www.kwanlindun.com/about. We also acknowledge the leadership and support of our Chief and Council.

Welcome

The values, language and traditions of Kwanlin Dün First Nation are rooted in the land and waters of Whitehorse and the surrounding area.

For thousands of years our ancestors moved around a large area extending well beyond what we now call the City of Whitehorse.

We have a long tradition of welcoming visitors to our area. Our Tagish Kwan and Kwanlin Dün ancestors welcomed other First Nations from as far away as Atlin and Tagish to the southeast, Little Salmon to the northwest and the Kluane area to the west.

In the late 19th century, we greeted and assisted many of the early non-First Nation explorers and prospectors.

And Kwanlin Dün's Chief and Council welcomes you to our lands today. We hope this information booklet will help you learn about and the history and present day life of Kwanlin Dün people.



Thousands of years

This land is our ancestral home. In the summer, our people navigated the waterways by raft, spruce bark and balsam poplar dugout canoe, and moose skin boat.

We travelled on foot over a network of trails that covered thousands of kilometres.

As the season progressed, berries ripened and were picked. In the fall, we hunted moose, sheep, elk, caribou and woodland bison.

In the winter, families trapped fox, mink, lynx, marten, coyote and wolf. In spring and summer,

Skilled First Nation fishers use to use gaffs and spears to haul fish out of the churning waters at the Whitehorse Rapids (before the hydropower dam was built in the late 1950s).
Yukon Archives, Claude and Mary Tidd Collection, #7581, cropped.



Languages

small game such as grouse, rabbit, beaver, porcupine and ground squirrel also provided food.

Fish have always been an important source of food for our people. At different times of the year, we traveled to fishing spots on lakes, creeks and rivers. We fished for grayling, whitefish, ling cod, pike and lake trout.

But the most prized fish were the salmon. These migrated upriver in two different annual runs.

The salmon run was a time of plenty. People from all over came to the area to feast, visit and trade.

There are eight aboriginal languages in the Yukon. The main one used by Kwanlin Dün is Southern Tutchone. Tagish is also a traditional language of some of our people.

As First Nation people have always moved around to hunt, fish, trap, visit and trade, there are no clear language boundaries in the Yukon. In Whitehorse, Northern Tutchone, Tlingit, Hän, Kaska and Gwich'in have also been spoken.

Some Southern Tutchone words:

Kwanlin - Water running through a narrow place

Dün - People

Chu Nínkwän - Yukon River

Chu - Water

Män - Lake

Łu - Fish

Hanay - Moose

Dänch'ea? - How are you?

Shǎw íti - I am fine.

Àghāy - Yes

Äjù - No

Shǎw Níthän - Thank you

Uncovering our past

For many years Kwanlin Dün has worked with the Government of Yukon and other First Nations on a number of archeological digs in our traditional territory.



Youth working on a dig near Whitehorse. Inset shows artefacts from other projects.
John Meikle

identify and manage important heritage sites. It has also helped to educate our youth and others about our rich history and traditions.

Recently, we have also been involved in recovering artefacts left by melting ice patches in the nearby mountains. For thousands of years, ice patches in the southern Yukon were used by caribou herds to escape the insects and heat of the Yukon summers. They were also places our people hunted.

Our work at these sites has revealed antler, stone and wooden tools that tell us about our ancestors hunting caribou, sheep and bison in the Yukon's alpine regions.

In addition to uncovering physical artefacts, we have also gathered oral histories from our elders to help learn about and document our traditional life. This work is important to helping us



This long antler arrow point is 35 cm. (14 in.) It was recovered from a melting ice patch and is over 900 years old.

Government of Yukon

The stretch of river from what is now called Miles Canyon to the end of the Whitehorse Rapids was well known to generations of First Nations people. Our ancestors called the area Kwanlin, which means “water running through narrow place.”

People traveling to the area would say they were going to Kwanlin.



Fish have always been an important food source and part of our culture.

**Yukon Archives,
Father Jean-Paul
Tanguay fonds,
88/150 #2,
cropped.**

Life on the waterfront...

Stories of the waterfront have been passed down from generation to generation.

Our elders tell of a time when only First Nations people lived along the river.

They describe the area of the Whitehorse hospital and Riverdale on the east side of the Yukon River as being “camp.” The west side of the river, now downtown Whitehorse, was a place to catch and dry fish.

The arrival of newcomers and the construction of the White Pass railway and Alaska Highway all caused great changes to the way our people lived.

Captain Frank Slim, born at Marsh Lake, was the first First Nation captain of a sternwheeler. However, he lost his legal status as an Indian under the Indian Act as part of getting the job.





Wolf and Crow

Our society is divided into two halves, or “moieties” as they are called. The two moieties are Wolf and Crow.

First Nations in the area trace their ancestry through the female side of the family.

Children take on the moiety of their mother. If their mother was a Crow, they were Crow. If she was a Wolf, they would be Wolf.

Traditionally, as people married someone from the opposite moiety, one parent would always be a Wolf and the other a Crow.

Although a child would be the same moiety as their “mother’s people”, they would need their “father’s people” to get through life.

Wolf and Crow members help each other at important times of life and frequently share food and other resources.

Some families continued to follow the seasons, hunting and trapping. Often their travels took them back through the Whitehorse waterfront. Here they were welcomed into homes by family and old friends.

Working the waterways

Many First Nations people worked along the waterways.

Families cut wood to fuel the steamboats. At that time, the going rate was two dollars a cord. Others hauled freight for Taylor and Drury company or worked to load barges.

Colourful communities

In the early 1900s, cabins started to be built along the waterfront by shipyard workers and First Nations people. These areas became known as the Shipyards and Moccasin Flats.

These communities were home for many families over the years. Later, the neighbourhood of Whiskey Flats developed upriver, in the area between a bend in the Yukon River and the railway tracks.



Whiskey Flats (circled above) was split in two when a bridge to the new subdivision of Riverdale was built. In the 1960s, people's homes in Whiskey Flats were demolished to make way for the SS Klondike on the south side and Rotary Park on the north. **Hougen Collection**



While some First Nation people settled in houses in Whitehorse, others continued to live more traditionally on the land. They came to town to get some supplies and visit. This photo was taken around 1950. **Hougen Collection**

In the 1950s, as Whiskey Flats filled up, the Shipyards area expanded. The newest grouping of homes became known as Sleepy Hollow.

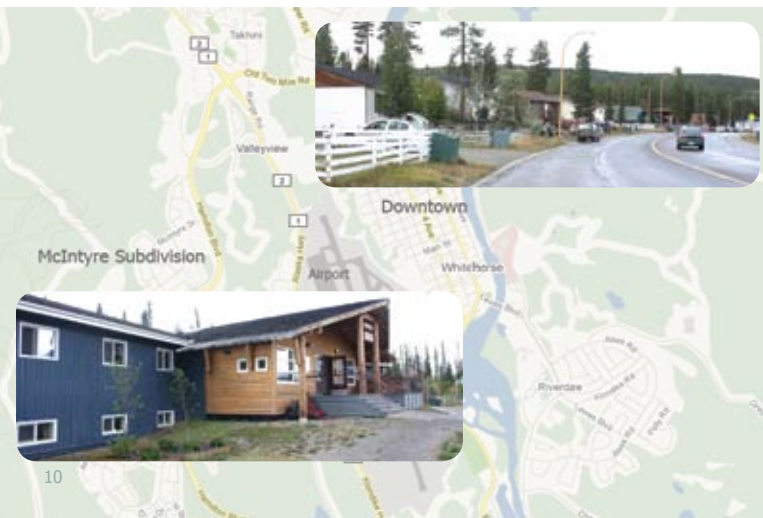
Over the years, the waterfront communities continually came under threat as the City of Whitehorse expanded and the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway company found other uses for the land.

As urban development continued, our people were moved to less desirable locations downstream of the city centre. Many times we were moved to sites not of our own choosing.

For First Nations people, the waterfront was home. We hunted, trapped, fished and raised generations of children along the river. We celebrated the life of the river and gave thanks for what it gave us in return. The river defined us as a people.

However, after many years of being displaced, in 1988 Kwanlin Dün moved to a new subdivision away from the water. Today, the offices of our First Nation government and the homes of many of our citizens are located in McIntyre subdivision, over three kilometers (two miles) from the Yukon River.

The offices of Kwanlin Dun First Nation and homes of many of our citizens are located in the McIntyre subdivision. **Jennifer Ellis**





Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre

Kwanlin Dün is returning to our traditional home on the Whitehorse riverfront with the building of a new Cultural Centre on the banks of the Chu Nínkwän (Yukon River).

Located at the foot of Black Street, the sustainably built facility will be the largest meeting space in the city. It will contain a 1,200-person longhouse; a 250-person multipurpose space for community and cultural events, conferences and conventions; an elders' lounge; exhibition areas; and many other gathering or work spaces. It will also house the new Whitehorse Library and Kwanlin Dün's archives.

The Cultural Centre will celebrate and share our history, traditions and culture with Yukoners and visitors from around the world. It will also provide economic opportunities for our First Nation and be a place for artists to make and display their work.

Through the Cultural Centre, Kwanlin Dün First Nation will be able to maintain our tradition of diversity and welcoming others to experience, respect and enjoy the Chu Nínkwän and the many territories it crosses.

History of Yukon Land Claims



Chief Jim Boss (Kishxóot). Yukon Archives. E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen Collection), 2002/118 #697.

In 1900, the traditional chief of the Ta'an Kwäch'än, Chief Jim Boss (Kishxóot), saw the growing non-aboriginal population encroaching on their traditional territory. He recognized that his people needed protection for their land and hunting grounds.

Chief Boss petitioned the Commissioner of the Yukon, William Ogilvie, for a 1,600 acre reserve at Ta'an Män (Lake Laberge). A reserve of only 320 acres was granted.

Not satisfied with this outcome, Chief Boss wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa in 1902, demanding that over-hunting by newcomers be controlled and that his people be compensated for lost land and the impacts on wildlife. This letter contained his famous quote "Tell the King very hard we want something

for our Indians, because they take our land and our game.”

The only response Chief Boss received was that the police would protect his people and their land.

The exchange of these letters represents the first attempt at land claims negotiations by a Yukon First Nation.

In Whitehorse, the aboriginal people were also granted a reserve. However, between the years 1915 and 1921, the Whitehorse Indian reserve was relocated four times by the federal government’s Indian Agent.

Distinct groups

In 1956, the Department of Indian Affairs unilaterally decided there were too many Indian bands in the Yukon Territory. For administrative purposes, it joined six bands into three.

This decision grouped together Kwanlin Dun people, traditionally from the Marsh Lake area, and Ta’an Kwäch’än people who were traditionally from Lake Laberge. Many other First Nation people who had made Whitehorse their home were also included in this band.

The new band was called the Whitehorse Indian Band. The name was later changed to Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

However, in 1998 the band split into two distinct and independent groups: Kwanlin Dün First Nation; and the Ta’an Kwäch’än Council.

Other Yukon First Nations have also regrouped themselves. Fourteen First Nations are now formally recognized in the Yukon.

By 1948 Ottawa withdrew the status of Whitehorse Indian Reserve No. 8 as a reserve under the Indian Act and the people of Kwanlin Dün found themselves with no solid claim to their traditional land.

In 1972, a contingent of Yukon elders, led by Kwanlin Dün elder, Elijah Smith, presented Prime Minister Trudeau with a document called *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. At the core of their message was a clear statement: “without land, Indian people have no soul - no life, no identity - no purpose”. Thus began the modern Yukon land claims process.

Elijah Smith (far right) and other Yukon First Nation leaders in Ottawa.
Government of Yukon



Current Governance



The Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Kwanlin Dün's Chief and the Yukon's Premier hold up the signed Final and Self-Government Agreements.

On April 1, 2005, after decades of negotiation and ratification by its citizens, Kwanlin Dün's Final and Self-Governing Agreements came into effect.

Our First Nation became one of the first in Canada to select and receive land within a city border. We were the 10th self-governing First Nation in the Yukon to gain treaty protection under Canada's constitution.

Kwanlin Dün is guided by our own constitution. The constitution outlines the powers of our government and the rights and freedoms of our citizens.

Kwanlin Dün is governed by a Chief and Council, which are elected every three years. There is also a General Assembly, an Elder's Council, a Youth Council and a Judicial Council.



Kwanlin Dün's Health Centre provides health services to any Yukon citizen. Next door, there is a learning centre for young children. Kwanlin Dün also runs a land-based healing centre at nearby Jackson Lake. **Kwanlin Dün First Nation**

The transition back from an *Indian Act* “band” to a self-governing First Nation has brought many changes.

Self-governing First Nations have regained jurisdiction over our own internal affairs, our citizens and activities on Settlement Land.

For example, under our agreements, Kwanlin Dün First Nation is able to make laws in the area of health care, aboriginal languages, training programs, social welfare, education, and cultural beliefs and practices.

Land Claims Definitions

LAND CLAIMS is the general term used for the process of negotiating land and self-government agreements. The land claims package for all Yukon First Nations has two core agreements: the First Nation Final Agreement and the Self-Government Agreement.

SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS define the powers and tools a First Nation has to make laws and decisions about its land, citizens and governance. Self-government agreements in the Yukon recognize First Nations as an order of government.

We can pass laws related to the adoption of children, marriage, inheritance issues, and dispute resolution outside of the court system. Kwanlin Dün can make laws related to hunting, trapping, fishing, logging and other uses of our lands.

Kwanlin Dün also provides programs and services, such as health and housing, to citizens.

Kwanlin Dün is generating revenues and employing its citizens through a diversity of economic development activities and partnerships.

Kwanlin Dün First Nation



A FIRST NATION FINAL AGREEMENT is based on the Umbrella Final Agreement that was signed by Yukon First Nations in 1993. A Final Agreement deals with land rights, fish and wildlife management, resource management, economic development opportunities, financial compensation and much more. Each Yukon First Nation has its own Final Agreement.

SETTLEMENT LAND is land that a First Nation owns. The lands are identified in a First Nation's Final Agreement. Kwanlin Dun has over 1040 square kilometres (over 400 square miles) of Settlement Land.

To learn more:
www.kwanlindun.com/uploads/KDFN-Land-Claim-Agreement-Summary.pdf



Our culture

Because Whitehorse has been a gathering place for many First Nations for millennia, Kwanlin Dun First Nation's culture and traditions are diverse.



Our community has many art, craft and beading styles. Many of our citizens have their art work on display in public buildings and galleries around Whitehorse.



We also have many stories, songs and traditions. These have been passed down through our elders for centuries.

Our elders are an important part of our culture and daily life. They ground us and help teach us who we were and are today.

TOP: An Elder shows how to prepare fish. **Kwanlin Dün First Nation**

MIDDLE: Women sewing a blanket at National Aboriginal Day. **Government of Yukon**

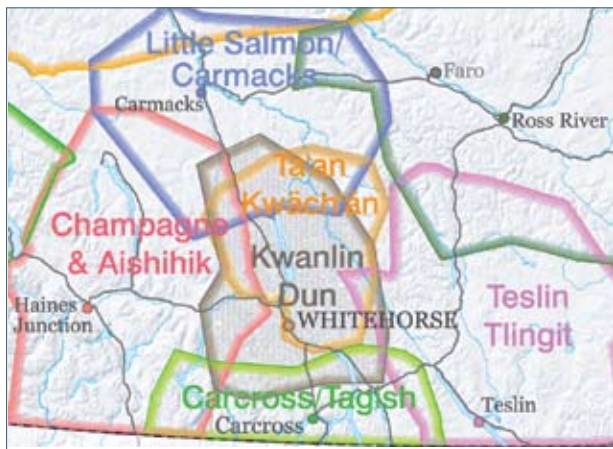
BOTTOM: Drummer at opening of healing centre. **Jennifer Ellis**

Our Traditional Territory

A traditional territory is an area of the Yukon that the people of a First Nation have traditionally used.

Each Yukon First Nation has identified its own Traditional Territory on a map which forms part of its Final Agreement.

A First Nation does not own a Traditional Territory like it owns Settlement Lands; however, the First Nation and its beneficiaries have certain rights (like special hunting, harvesting and economic opportunities) within their Traditional Territory.



This map shows Traditional Territories in the Whitehorse area. Only a small portion of Kwanlin Dün's land is not overlapped with other First Nations.

Spirit houses

Traditionally, we cremated people who passed away. Goods that were useful to a person and would be handy in the spirit world were placed with the body before it was burned. People from the opposite clan would prepare the body and carry out the funeral duties.

In some places, Spirit Houses were built as a home for the ashes and their personal effects.

With the arrival of missionaries we began to bury people who passed away. However, the houses continued to be built and placed on top of the grave.

Spirit Houses are respected as the resting-place of our ancestors. We ask that others do not visit or take photos of these areas.

These and other First Nation burial sites are sacred places that are now protected under land claims agreements. Markers, spirit houses, and related artifacts and bones cannot be disturbed. Any accidental discovery of such a site, which might be found near old villages, camps and trails, must be reported.

A few Kwanlin Dün Spirit Houses. **Kwanlin Dün First Nation**



