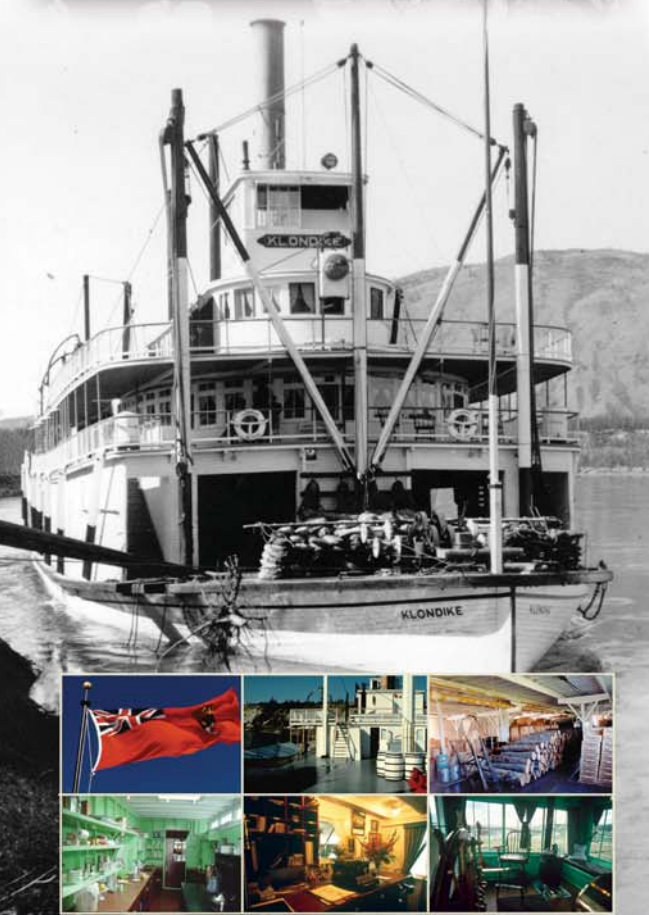


S.S. Klondike

National Historic Site of Canada



Why an Historic site?

S.S. Klondike National Historic Site is a Parks Canada heritage place, one part of a system of national and international heritage places. The natural and cultural heritage represented by these places is our legacy as Canadians and a significant element of Canadian identity.

The S.S. Klondike National Historic Site represents an era of riverboat transportation. It was the sternwheeler that brought the world to the Yukon and it was the Yukon River that carried these changes.

The transportation story includes Whitehorse as a transfer point between rail and riverboat and the site of important shipyards and ways. Other related sites such as the MV Tarahne in Atlin, the Thirty Mile Heritage River, S.S. Keno National Historic Site, Canyon City and Fort Selkirk and Dawson Historical Complex National Historical Site are part of this story.



Archives of Canada

Setting the Stage

Steam powered river transportation was the central element in the development and connection of the Yukon to the outside world for almost a century after the first vessel reached Fort Selkirk in 1866. The character of the system that developed was shaped by the geography of the Yukon and the technology of the riverboats. Alternative transport options developed slowly.

Overland winter travel supplemented the summer river transport, but in the late 1920's a more direct challenge appeared as aircraft began regular service to Yukon communities. It was only during and after World War II that road transport finally ended the importance of the inland water transport system in the Yukon.

Cover
Crew: Bill Lesyk/Parks Canada
Boat: Frank Coghlan/Parks Canada
Color insets: Parks Canada



John Dunn/Parks Canada

A History of the S.S. Klondike

Built in Whitehorse in 1929 by the British Yukon Navigation Company, a subsidiary of the White Pass and Yukon Route, the S.S. Klondike I represented a major breakthrough in sternwheeler design. Her cargo capacity was increased 50 percent over other boats on the river without sacrificing shallow draft. The vessel was the first sternwheeler large enough to handle a cargo in excess of 272 tonnes (300 t.) without having to push a barge. The career of the S.S. Klondike I came to an abrupt end in 1936 when the vessel ran aground on a section of the Yukon River between Lake Laberge and the Teslin River.

The company immediately built the S.S. Klondike II a virtual carbon copy of her predecessor. She had two careers. From 1937 to 1952 the Klondike II was employed primarily as a cargo vessel. Carrying general merchandise and a few passengers, the Klondike II could make the downstream run from Whitehorse to Dawson (740.27km/460 mi) in 36 hours with one or two stops to take on wood.



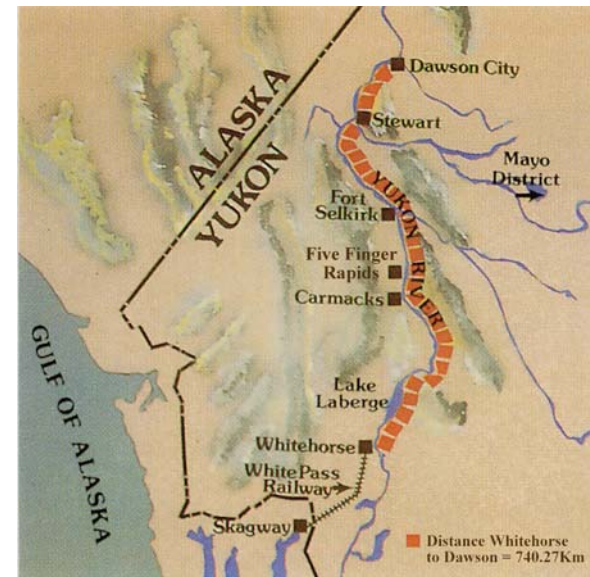
Vancouver Maritime Museum

Returning from Dawson the Klondike II stopped first at Stewart Landing where she loaded sacks of silver lead ore. Mined in the Mayo District the ore was carried down the Stewart River by small sternwheelers

such as the S.S. Keno. The ore would then be transferred in Whitehorse by rail to Skagway, Alaska.

The S.S. Klondike II was refurbished as a cruise ship, in an attempt to save the career of the flag ship of the British Navigation Company. Though her trips were well booked it was the increased cost of operation on the Yukon that ended her brief sojourn as a passenger ship. In August 1955 the S.S. Klondike II steamed into Whitehorse for the very last time.

The Whitehorse - Dawson Run



Lengthening the Season

Each spring navigation was delayed until the ice broke up on Lake Laberge. Lamp black was spread along the lake to speed up melting. In the 1920's a dam was constructed to hold back the headwaters of Marsh Lake to create a surge of water to speed the break-up



Parks Canada

of lake ice and to regulate water levels in early spring and fall.

Wood Camps

Wood was the standard fuel for the sternwheeler. The S.S. Klondike II could consume as much as two cords of wood per hour. Wood stations were provided at frequent spots along the river.



Faber/Parks Canada

Stewart Landing

With the opening of an all weather road to Mayo from Whitehorse in 1950 the S.S. Klondike II ceased being a cargo vessel. Silver lead ore could be hauled by truck year round and was not restricted by the short river season of four to five months.



John Dunn/Parks Canada

Five Finger Rapids. "A challenge to navigation"

North of Carmacks four massive knuckles of rock divided the river into five channels. A narrow channel offered safe passage; boats were often winched through the corridor by means of a cable attached to the bank.



John Dunn/Parks Canada

Dawson City

The "City of Gold" was the destination of most of the sternwheelers. It was the capital of the Yukon until 1953 and a major transfer point for freight and passengers bound for the gold mining operations in the region.



John Dunn/Parks Canada

S.S. Klondike II: Specifications

LaunchedWhitehorse, May 1937
Owner.....British Yukon Navigation Co/White Pass & Yukon Route

Port of RegistryDawson City, Yukon
Official No156744
Length64m (210')
Width12.5m (41.9')
Molded Depth.....1.5m (5.75')
Loaded Draught1 m (40")
Gross Tonnage1226.25 tonnes (1362.5 t)
Registered Tonnage918.45 tonnes (1020.5 t)
Cargo Capacity270 tonnes (approx 300 t)
Crew23 (in 1940)
Passengers (1st & 2nd Class) 75
Engines.....2 compound jet-condenser type producing 525 H.P.

Boiler.....Locomotive type (fire tube) manufactured at the Polson Iron Works Toronto 1901. Previously used in the Steamer Yukoner & S.S. Klondike I (working pressure 184 lb.sq.in)

Travel Time
(Whitehorse Dawson) 1.5 days
(Dawson -Whitehorse) 4-5 days

Information:

S.S. Klondike National Historic Site of Canada
Parks Canada
Room 205, 300 Main Street
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2B5
1-867-667 3917
Web site: www.parksCanada.gc.ca

What to expect:

In the company of a guide you will be taken on a tour of the S.S. Klondike. Tours are half an hour in duration, a video presentation is also presented in the Atlin barge tent. Parking can accommodate recreation vehicles and buses.

Gift shop, picnic tables and exhibits are located on site. Inquire about special group rates.

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