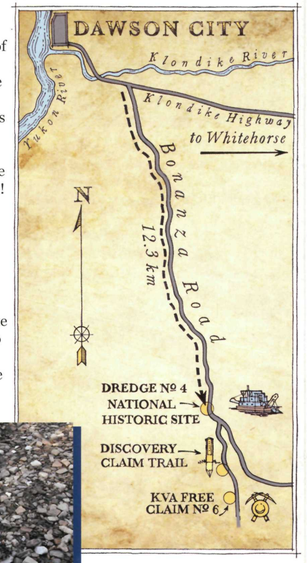
DISCOVERY CLAIM TRAIL

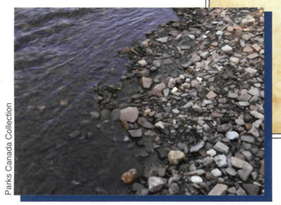
How to Get There

As you drive through the goldfields along Bonanza Creek Road, you will be amazed at the enormous changes brought to the landscape by more than a century of evolving mining technologies.

Be sure to stop in at the impressive **Dredge No. 4** to learn about this marvel of engineering and human ingenuity. At the fork in the road, keep right to reach **Discovery Claim**. There is plenty of parking, and a portion of the trail is wheelchair accessible. Make a day of it out on the creeks!

Though it is tempting, please do not pan for gold or you will be "claim jumping". This valley has been continually mined since 1896 and the gold claims are active and private property. You are invited to pan for gold for free at **Claim No. 6**–a short drive beyond Discovery Claim.

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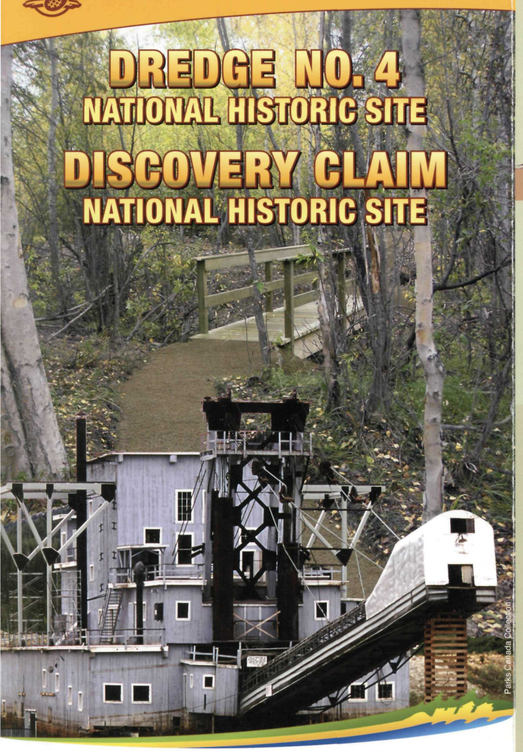
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DREDGE NO. 4
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
DISCOVERY CLAIM
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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Canada

Prospectors looking for gold were trickling into this region as early as the 1870's. The relentless pursuit of new discoveries drove them onwards from California to the north. By systematically exploring the region, they were able to make a living on modest finds, but it was the discovery on this creek, then known as "Rabbit", that changed everything.

Timing and luck were on the side of Skookum Jim (Keish), Dawson Charlie (Káa Goox), and George Carmack. On August 17th 1896, they staked the Discovery Claim on this creek. They were credited with discovering the gold that sparked the Klondike Gold Rush, forever changing the lay of the land and the lives of thousands. By October nearly all the ground in the vicinity was staked by prospectors fortunate enough to hear of the strike by word of mouth. Though thousands of gold-fevered fortune seekers from "outside" would arrive soon after, only a few would manage to secure a claim. The impact of this discovery would create a city known world-wide and mark the beginning of the Yukon Territory. What began with picks and shovels and a trickle of prospectors ended with a flood of more than 40,000 stampeders. The Great Klondike Gold Rush lasted but a few short years; by 1899, prospectors were chasing new golden dreams into Alaska, and machines were replacing men on the creeks.


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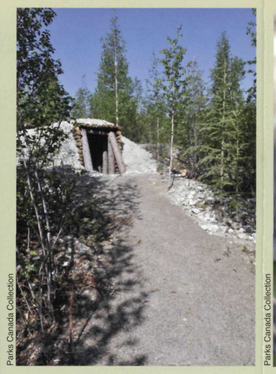
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Illustrations: Lorne Carnes

YOU can experience the place where it all started...

Discovery Claim Trail is an authentic experience for any cultural history buff. Just over 1 km, this wilderness hiking trail can be managed at an easy pace and an average-to-sedentary level of fitness. Watch for interactive interpretive panels along the trail that tell the amazing story of this area's past. Discovery Claim Trail is the newest attraction in the Goldfields.

This project was envisioned by the Klondyke Centennial Society (KCS), through the generosity of the late Art Fry, the last active miner on this claim. The KCS has been instrumental in spearheading Discovery Claim Trail: Parks Canada and Yukon Government are committed partners in this endeavour.

KLONDYKE CENTENNIAL SOCIETY 100 DAWSON CITY YUKON

Yukon Government / Gouvernement

Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Two cultures met in this historic place: Discovery Claim is in the traditional territory of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The arrival of non-native newcomers had a profound impact on the lives of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.


Alaska State Library, C.H. Metcalfe Coll. PCA34-121

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in were hunters of caribou and moose, fishers of salmon and keen traders, well known for their hard bargaining. Early prospectors depended on the First Nation people for necessary skills needed to survive in the North. Though displaced by the influx of stampeders, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in adapted and utilized western influences, and shared their knowledge readily. Some aboriginal people joined the wage-earning economy, cutting wood for the sternwheelers, piloting riverboats and working on the dredges. Today, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are an integral part of the community. They remain a resilient, self-governed people, keeping their language and traditions alive.

Try it for yourself!

CLAIM No. 6

There's still gold to be found in the Klondike, all you need is the right combination of patience and luck. Take your pan to **Claim No. 6**. Dig some dirt from the surrounding banks and wash it out in the creek. Any gold you find, you can keep. The Klondike Visitors' Association maintains this site and welcomes for free anyone who wants to try their luck. Panning is restricted to hand tools, which means only gold pans and shovels: bring your own equipment.

Imagine it's 1898. You have gold fever...


Parks Canada Collection

You are a "cheechako",

a newcomer to the Klondike. In your one-ton outfit that you packed over the Chilkoot Trail, hopefully you brought along the "tools of the trade": a pick, shovel, and gold pan.

Now, ***WHERE'S THE GOLD?***

Placer gold (pronounced with a short "a" as in "at") occurs after thousands of years of erosion has settled the gold in gravel. It is commonly found in stream-beds above bedrock. Known as "poor-man's gold", it can be dug from the ground with simple hand tools such as a pick or shovel. You might consider staking a claim if you pan out ten cents worth of gold from a creek. In 1898 the price of gold was 20.67 U.S. dollars per ounce.

Eureka! Stake your claim...

In 1898 you would be entitled to the width of the valley, rim to rim, and 500 feet along the creek. If you want more ground, there are no restrictions preventing you from acquiring further claims by purchase.

Claim Posts must be made of wood, and inscribed with the following: The claim number - if you are the first on the creek, it is a Discovery Claim, and everyone will stake up and down stream of you, your name, the date, and post numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Almost done! *Now you just have to register your claim at the nearest Dominion Lands Office. If you were here before 1896, prior to the existence of Dawson City, the lands office was 50 miles down the Yukon River at Forty Mile. You would have had 60 days to get there. Lucky for you, Dawson is now a bustling service and supply centre, catering to the every whim of the miner. Better register your claim there.*

Staking on this creek after discovery was like a stampede, with all the prospectors in the area clamouring to secure a claim. William Ogilvie, the Dominion surveyor, was tasked with re-surveying Bonanza Creek after the staking rush was over. Though for the most part the miners were fairly accurate, one unfortunate fellow "...had so meandered that his lower stake was actually 12 feet farther up the valley than his upper one, that is, he had actually staked 12 feet less than nothing."
(William Ogilvie)

Finding the gold is the easy part


Parks Canada Collection

Now, the back-breaking work of extracting the gold begins. Fires can thaw a shaft down to where the richer deposits of gold lay. The muck is hauled up to the surface with a windlass, and dumped beside the shaft. A productive day can yield a pile of pay dirt about the size of a small car.

Through temperatures of -50 degrees Celsius and a diet of meagre rations, your worth is measured by your determination to get the dirt out of the ground. By spring you might have sunk 2 or 3 shafts to test your claim, and you should have some decent-sized piles of pay dirt to sluice.

Gold is 19 times heavier than water and can be freed from the gravel by a washing process known as sluicing. To wash the gold from the gravel, build yourself a rocker box. Resembling a cradle built of wood, rocker boxes have an uneven surface, or riffles, along the bottom. By shovelling the pay dirt in to the box, washing water over the gravel, and rocking the box, the gold should settle in the bottom of the apparatus, with the gravel discarded.

Is it time to go on a spree?

Only after your winter's work will you know if you are one of the Klondike's newest millionaires. While you have been toiling away, Dawson City, "Paris of the North", has sprung up on the banks of the Yukon River, where there is no shortage of ways to spend your newfound wealth.


Parks Canada Collection

How to pan for gold:

Find a pan with sloping sides...Fill the pan ¾ with gravel...dip the pan into water...shake the pan in a side to side manner...pick out any big rocks...tilt the pan away from you at an angle and allow the gravel to trickle out... add more water and keep it a soupy consistency...continue to tip the gravel out of the pan but do not let the bottom of the pan get higher than the lip of the pan... when the last bits of gravel are still in the pan, begin a circular motion to separate the gold...the last dip and tilt should get rid of the remaining gravel and leave the heavier gold in the pan.

DREDGE NO. 4 NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

What IS this thing?

You are looking at a giant gold digging machine.

Imagine this vessel, inching forward, year after year, forever altering the landscape. **Dredge No 4** was the largest wooden-hulled bucket dredge in North America. It was designed by the Marion Steam Shovel Company, and built for the Canadian Klondike Mining Company in 1912.

The dredge moved along in a pond of its own making, digging gold bearing gravel at a rate of 22 buckets per minute. It would operate for 24 hours a day for a season of approx 200 days, April-November, depending on the weather. Though only moving forward a half mile per season, it unearthed nine tons of gold, grossing 8.6 million dollars over 46 years. On its best day, it unearthed over 800 ounces. As well as gold, the dredge recovered everything in its path, including some old cured hams thrown down a shaft in days gone by, prehistoric mammoth ivory, and a set of false teeth.

Dredge No 4 is two thirds the size of a football field in length, and is eight stories high.

How did it work?

The dredge was powered by electricity.

Once in thawed ground, the Spud (anchor) would be lowered and act as a pivot point.

#1 Cables were attached to logs buried in the hillsides, and controlled by a **winching system** to manoeuvre the dredge within the pond.

#2 The **bucket line** on the bow dug up gold bearing gravel and deposited it to the **hopper.**

#3 The **hopper** fed gravel into the **trommel**.

#4 The **trommel** was a revolving tube-like metal screen, constantly rotating. Varying sizes of holes proceeded along the 50 ft length.

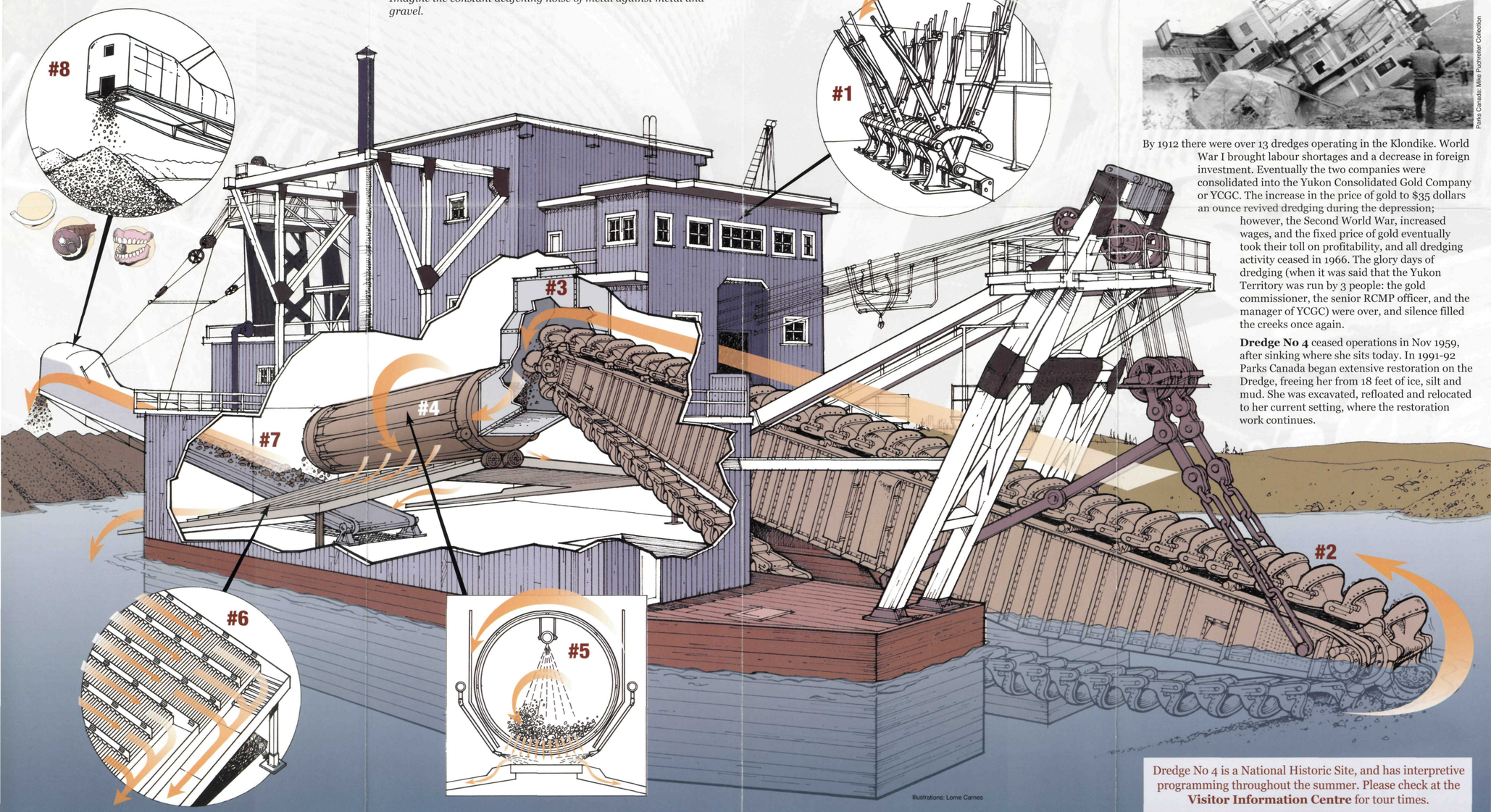
#5 Water was sprayed through the **trommel**, washing off the gravel.

#6 The gold would settle in the **sluice boxes** for collection.

#7 The waste gravel moved along a **stacker belt**.

#8 The resulting **tailing piles** would be deposited out the stern in a scalloped pattern.

When the dredge had dug to its maximum depth, the spud and digging ladder were lifted and the dredge was winched forward about 10 feet. *Imagine the constant deafening noise of metal against metal and gravel.*



Illustrations: Lorne Carnes

At the turn of the century

Parks Canada: Anita Johns Collection

At the turn of the century, mining in the Klondike was becoming more mechanized. Individual prospectors had exhausted the limits of mining by hand, yet vast reserves of gold remained. Steam shovels could dig deeper, faster. Water pumps could remove overburden more quickly, and steam points could thaw ground in a fraction of the time it would take thawing shafts by fire. Mining regulations were evolving as well: the government realized that to avoid the inevitable "boom and bust" trends that were typical of gold rushes, the emphasis needed to shift from individual to large scale mining. Significant concessions of land were granted, blazing the way for corporate mining. By 1905, dredges were the prevalent method of mining for gold in the Klondike. The two largest companies vying for control of the Klondike were the Canadian Klondike Mining Company, and the Yukon Gold Company. Both had significant funding from outside interests, including the Guggenheim and Rothschild families. Dawson City provided government administration and banking, which were essential services for corporate mining. A transportation network existed with the White Pass Yukon Route Railway, and steamships brought in the necessary heavy equipment for mechanical mining. Corporate mining would ensure the future of Dawson City and the Yukon.

The Demise

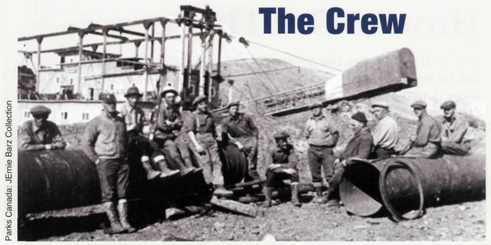
Parks Canada: Mike Pluchinter Collection

By 1912 there were over 13 dredges operating in the Klondike. World War I brought labour shortages and a decrease in foreign investment. Eventually the two companies were consolidated into the Yukon Consolidated Gold Company or YCGC. The increase in the price of gold to $35 dollars an ounce revived dredging during the depression; however, the Second World War, increased wages, and the fixed price of gold eventually took their toll on profitability, and all dredging activity ceased in 1966. The glory days of dredging (when it was said that the Yukon Territory was run by 3 people: the gold commissioner, the senior RCMP officer, and the manager of YCGC) were over, and silence filled the creeks once again.

Dredge No 4 ceased operations in Nov 1959, after sinking where she sits today. In 1991-92 Parks Canada began extensive restoration on the Dredge, freeing her from 18 feet of ice, silt and mud. She was excavated, refloated and relocated to her current setting, where the restoration work continues.

Dredge No 4 is a National Historic Site, and has interpretive programming throughout the summer. Please check at the **Visitor Information Centre** for tour times.

The Crew



Parks Canada: JEmie Barz Collection

Over a season, the dredging companies could employ over 750 men, including labourers, engineers, accountants and mechanics. The floating labour pool was sometimes recruited from "outside", bringing seasonal university students to the Klondike for a summer. Room and board would be provided, but you had to pay for your own ticket home in the fall. The **Dredgemaster** managed the fleet of dredges. He kept all the records, and oversaw the care of the dredges in the winter. On occasion, he would do some time in the winchroom during the day shift.

The dredge itself had an on board crew of only 4. The shifts were 8 hours long, 24 hours a day.

The **Winchman** controlled the digging and movement of the dredge.

The **Oiler** apprenticed under the winchman, and made rounds of the dredge, inspecting and oiling the machinery as preventative maintenance. He also provided a hot lunch for the crew.

The **Sterndecker** was stationed at the end of the trommel, keeping an eye out for any blockages to the stacker belt.

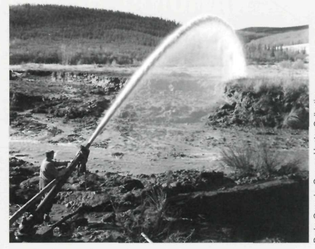
The **Bowdecker** was the rookie, standing out on the bow with a shovel, ensuring all dirt scooped up by the buckets was IN the bucket, and not clinging to the edges.

Parks Canada: Ted Thornton-Trump Collection

The **bullgang crew** of 5 worked outside the dredge, almost always standing in mud. They manoeuvred the electrical and winching cables.

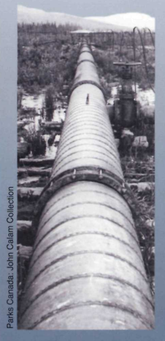
Ground Preparation

The ground in front of the Dredge was prepared in advance. Anything in the path of the dredge was removed, including moss, overburden, and gold rush era remnants. Water cannons would wash away the muck, and the thawing process began. Metal points were driven into the ground by sledgehammer and water sprayed through the hollow tip...this would thaw about 3-4 inches. It took roughly 2 weeks to thaw 25 feet down. The thawing crews were always wet, and worked through a sea of mosquitoes.



Parks Canada: George Hunter Collection

Water



Parks Canada: John Gilain Collection

"And up on the bench and hillside claims, miners were forced to sell off promising claims because there was, not enough [water] to make a cup of tea." [1]

The most important element of Placer mining is **WATER**. The Dredge's demand for water was enormous, for both hydroelectricity, and sluicing. A shortage of water in the Klondike prompted construction to begin on an engineering feat similar in scope to the Panama Canal. The Yukon Ditch was a system of flumes and trenches providing gravity fed water to the numerous mining operations on the creeks. Completed by 1909, it brought water to the Klondike Valley from over 70 miles away. A hydroelectric power plant was eventually built on the North Fork of the Klondike River. This brought enough electricity to the valley to power the dredges, as well as the City of Dawson. Citizens would pay their electric bill to the dredge companies.

[1] National Archives of Canada. Transcripts of Public Hearings, Britton Commission Inquiry Into the Treadgold and Other Concessions in the YukonTerritory, p.211