

OLD TOWN

Heritage Walking Tour of Yellowknife

Northwest Territories



An Introduction to this heritage walking tour:

The first city guide for historical walking tours of Yellowknife was published in 1987. This revised guide includes four distinct routes in the Old Town area, covering many points of interest in the original areas of community development around Latham Island, the Rock, and the neighbouring flats. It is easy to link tours together and the entire area can be covered in an easy afternoon's walk. The City's roots and pioneer charm rest in the waterfront streets and structures of the Old Town.

On the centre page of this guide is a map of the Old Town area. Each consecutively numbered site, street or building in the text is shown on the map. Italicized sub-headings in the text describe the general location or direction of the walking tour route. A ■ symbol indicates the site has a descriptive plaque; a ★ symbol indicates the site is one of the City's designated Heritage Sites.

You will find that the route described in this guide, along with the routes described in the New Town guide, can be taken in pieces or linked together to cover any amount of time one might wish to spend strolling through the heritage of the City.

Certain sites included in this guide, and many more in the Old Town guide, are documented in the City of Yellowknife Heritage Committee historical building inventory. It is available at the Yellowknife Public Library, the NWT Archives at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife City Hall, or on the City Hall website (www.yellowknife.ca).

Old Town Walking Tour

A brief history of Yellowknife:

Yellowknife and the adjacent river and bay on Great Slave Lake derive their names from the knives once used by Dene in the area. The blades were fashioned from copper deposits mined along the Coppermine River area in present day Nunavut.

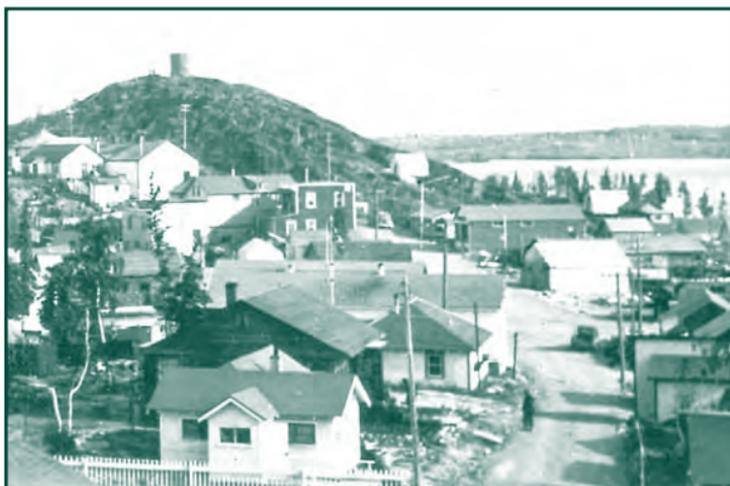
The people of the City's two neighbouring communities of Dettah and N'Dilo are the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Their ancestors – Slavey, Dogrib, and Chipewyan speaking Dene – have inhabited the region for thousands of years, living very traditional ways of life out on the land.

During the late 1700s, newcomers trickled in with the expanding fur trade. First came Métis families connected with the trade, then came the trade company explorers: Samuel Hearne in 1770, Peter Pond in 1786 and Alexander Mackenzie in 1789. An outpost called Fort Providence was established near Wool Bay, 20 kilometres south of present day Yellowknife. It was a regional centre for trade between Aboriginals and European traders and explorers. The post was abandoned in the 1800s but the Aboriginal people stayed in the area, eventually congregating at a point of land on Yellowknife Bay's east side – Dettah.

What brought the white people back north was gold. Though the metal was first detected by prospectors passing through Great Slave Lake on their way to the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, the Yellowknife area was considered just too isolated to spark any excitement.

The development of the bush plane changed all that. Slowly, prospectors, businessmen, traders, and government bureaucrats were again looking at the north for its potential resources. The bush plane was an economical way to explore the huge NWT and establish new settlements. The once distant arctic was more accessible and in the 1920s-30s several prospectors were combing the bush between Great Slave and Great Bear hunting for important minerals. They included Herb Dixon and Johnny Baker, who in 1933 canoed down from the headwaters of the Yellowknife River and found a number of small gold showings. They returned the next year and made a rich gold find on the east side of Yellowknife Bay, known as the Burwash. By the end of 1936, enough gold had been discovered regionally to prompt

serious mining development. The Con Mine became the first NWT gold producer with the pouring of a brick on September 5, 1938. The Yellowknife we know today was born!



HISTORICAL Old Town view 1945

Early Yellowknife was a haphazard collection of tents and log shacks, erected with little thought or planning. The Old Town area was the centre of Yellowknife in the earliest years and commerce took root on a peninsula that juts into the Bay, around a prominent hill called The Rock. By the summer of 1938, there was a wide array of modern businesses and services. It thrived on the exciting prospecting and mining activities but was also a hub for trapping, commerce, transportation, and government services throughout the NWT.

By 1942, Yellowknife was a small village with many modern services, a local government committee, and several gold mines. World War II began to have an impact on the mines as manpower and supplies were diverted to war-time projects. But a new rush started when Giant Mine struck gold in 1944. With no room for expansion in the crowded Old Town, a new town site in the present day downtown area was surveyed in 1945.

In the summer of 1953, Yellowknife became a municipality and its first mayor, John G. (Jock) McNiven, was elected. In 1967, Yellowknife was named capital of the Northwest Territories, and was designated a city on January 1, 1970. The gold mines which established Yellowknife were closed by 2004, but the mining industry remains strong with a bright future through the rich diamond mines 200 kilometres north of the City.

The Tour

School Draw and Franklin Avenue

From downtown, walk north along Franklin Avenue and down the hill to Old Town. At the intersection with School Draw Avenue, you are at Willow Flats. If you are starting at the end of the New Town tour, simply proceed north on School Draw Avenue to the intersection with Franklin Avenue. School Draw was the road connecting Con and Negus gold mines with Old Town Yellowknife in the early 1940s and was named because of a small school that operated from 1940-1947.

Turn off Franklin Avenue to School Draw



Original Sutherlands Drugstore

(1) Original Sutherlands Drugstore

In 1948, Sutherland s Drugs built this new store on Old Town s busy main street on The Rock to replace its original store that was moved up to New Town. In 1956, the building was damaged by fire, but was moved to Latham Island and renovated as Louis Lessard s new Rex Café. It was moved again to its present site in 1974 and was home for a time to the Yellowknifer newspaper, the Woodstove Shop, a parlour, and private apartments.

Continue down School Draw one and half blocks to Lundquist Road

Old Town Walking Tour



The Barn

(2) The Barn

Known locally as 'The Barn' (although never built to be one), the now renovated house was built by Rolf Hellenius, a local carpenter, in 1946, and was originally located on McDonald Drive, a landmark on the shores of Yellowknife Bay. Designed for storage and shop space, the building had many owners including mining companies, air charters, and government. Al Oeming, who had a game farm in Edmonton, temporarily stored six baby muskoxen here in the 1960s until they could be flown out. In 1985, it was moved to this spot and redesigned for residential use. The unique house is complimented by a colourfully decorated yard with flower gardens and pioneer tools and artifacts.

Head back to Franklin Avenue via School Draw, and go north towards the Gallery of the Midnight Sun.

The large mural on the wooden fence along the way was completed by a trio of Yellowknife artists to commemorate the role of barges and water transportation in the City's early years.



Mining Display

(3) Gallery of the Midnight Sun

A small display of mining equipment in front of the art gallery is a reminder of Yellowknife's hard rock mining past. There is an ore car and plugger drill. The wheeled tanker is a piece of equipment once used by Giant Mine's fire fighting department and was also used to water the roads at the dusty mine.

A plaque on the Gallery's wall introduces Willow Flats.

Continue to the corner of Boffa Drive and Franklin Ave.

(4) Cultural Crossroads Exhibit

Across the road, the sculpture and colourful art on the rock is a collaborative work of Métis, Dene, Inuvialuit, English and French participants in a project dedicated to all the peoples of the North.

Directly across Franklin Ave.

Old Town Walking Tour



Old Log Cabin

(5) Old Log Cabin

This tiny log cabin was a common style of Yellowknife's earliest resident shacks. It had many commercial uses in its past, including a warehouse for a diamond drilling company. It was originally located a short distance nearby and moved here for future renovation.

Continue on Franklin Ave.



News of the North

(6) News of the North

The former News of the North newspaper office was built in 1945 and was home to the paper until 1958. Founder Duke DeCoursey had his original office in a nearby tent. An insulated, heated building was much better at keeping the printer's ink

flowing smoothly! The original printing press is now at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. After the newspaper moved out, Johnson's Building Supplies incorporated it into its lumber yard for storage space. Johnson's was started in 1946 by Ivor Johnson, a carpenter who built many of Yellowknife's early residential and commercial buildings.

Part of the building has been re-sided with new metal sheeting and its foundation has been repaired by its new owners, hoping to find new uses for this very old Yellowknife structure.

South on Bretzlaff Drive



Glamour Alley Cabin

(7) “Glamour Alley” Log Cabin

While the miners came to Yellowknife to mine the gold, prostitutes and gamblers came to mine the miners! Bretzlaff Drive is part of the area where they plied their trades and this log cabin is reputed to share a part in “Glamour Alley” history. Much later it became the early residence for Johnny and Mary Rocher, whose family arrived in 1959.

Continue on Bretzlaff Drive

Old Town Walking Tour



Woodyard

(8) Einer Broten's Woodyard

This area was first settled in 1937 and was associated with commercial wood cutting and fishing for many years. Tom Reed hauled firewood to locals using a small team of horses in the early 1940s. In 1946, Einer Broten and Hans Hansen became the new firewood merchants and occupied this area. Many of the early pioneers, including Broten, were of Scandinavian origin. Today, the Woodyard is a residential area, and the small shacks are homes for those who prefer a simpler lifestyle.

South on Ragged Ass Road

This section of Yellowknife has befuddled planners since the first town surveys in 1939. Shacks, cabins, and outhouses were dotted among the inconsistent bush and rock outcrops, and a narrow road curved through the block, ignoring the straight surveyed route. The name “Ragged Ass Road” has stuck for many years. It's a favourite of Yellowknifers and visitors and the title of an album by singer Tom Cochrane. Authentic “Ragged Ass Road” signs are available for sale at city gift shops.

Continue down Ragged Ass Road to the corner of Brock Drive



Quaint & Comfy

(9) Quaint and Comfy

Now a quaint, small, wood-framed house from the 1940s, this building is typical of a time when housing was becoming more spacious than the log cabins and tents of the late 1930s. Firewood has been chopped in this yard for over 60 years.

Turn north off Brock onto Bryson Drive



Warehouse Then and Now

(10) Warehouse Then and Now

This small wood shack was built at the Negus gold mine, one of Yellowknife's original mines, south of the City. It was used for storage there and has been used for the same purpose here. The exterior wood boards are known as "ship-lap" because of the overlapping grooves that form a tight seal when connected. It was the most common construction sheeting material before the days of plywood.

Continue down Bryson

Old Town Walking Tour



Old & New

(11) The Old and the New

Dating from the 1940s, this log building was located in the New Town area. To make room for a new residence, it was moved to this Old Town neighbourhood where it fits in very well.

West on Hamilton Drive and across Franklin Avenue

Peace River Flats 

This area is named for settlers from the Peace River country of Alberta. Travelling down the Peace and Slave Rivers and then across Great Slave Lake, settlers and their families arrived by boat and barge in the late 1930s. This flat expanse of land gave easy access to the lake for water and transportation. Recent construction has updated the look of the area, but the friendly Old Town atmosphere remains. A plaque at the entrance to Peace River Flats shows a picture of the area in the 1940s.

Walk down Knutsen Lane



Refinery to Residence

(12) From Refinery to Residence

This attractive looking house has undergone transformations that typify the Yellowknife tradition of recycling buildings. It was constructed in 1947 at the Negus mine as the refining and smelting plant where gold was poured into bricks. It was moved here in 1960 and used as a commercial blacksmith shop, and has since been extensively renovated into a private residence.

Turn on Stout Road, east on Primrose Lane



Old Town Walking Tour



Chippy's Place

(13) Chippy's Place

This eccentric little log cabin is hard to miss! A plaque put together by local residents tells the story. Built in the 1930s by woodcutter 'Chippy' Loutitt, the logs came from the Yellowknife River where many good stands of timber could be harvested in the early years.

Right beside Chippy's Place



Don Jossa's House

(14) Don Jossa's House

Originally built as a warehouse with living quarters, this house was constructed by Consolidated Gold Mines in the 1940s. The second storey was later added on by Don Jossa. It was Don who coined the name Primrose Lane for the alley behind the house and posted the sign on the side.

North on Lois Lane

Local residents named this street many years ago. It was known as Penny Lane at one end and Lois Lane at the other, after two local residents. Lois won out when the City picked the name of Superman's girlfriend, played on film by the actress Margot Kidder, who was born in Yellowknife. Long-time resident Lois Little, who lives in the area, is also honoured through the name.



Davey Jones' Shack

Turn east onto Anderson Thompson Blvd

(15) Davey Jones' Shack

Behind the asphalt siding of this house is a log cabin built in 1937 with a small addition built in 1958. This is one of the few original Peace River Flats houses. The current name refers to its present owner.

North on McAvoy Road

Old Town Walking Tour



McAvoy

(16) McAvoy Office

McAvoy Road is named for an early family of bush pilots and prospectors. Jim McAvoy Sr., a prospector and diamond driller, operated a number of small high grade gold claims in the Gordon Lake area. Both sons, Chuck and Jim, were well known bush pilots. Chuck disappeared on a flight to a mining camp in 1964. Despite extensive searching over the years, the wreckage of his plane was not found until the summer of 2003.

Go up the hill (Boffa Drive) and turn northeast onto Pilots Lane.



John Anderson Thomson's House

(17) The John Anderson-Thomson House

This beautiful house was built by Bear Exploration and Radium Limited in the mid 1940s to house their field engineers and

geologists. At one time, this company had extensive holdings in the Yellowknife area and was very active in the search for gold. John Anderson-Thomson bought the property in 1948 and lived in it until his death in 1985. A geologist and surveyor, he was one of the men who surveyed the Mackenzie Highway Route, and was a justice of the peace for 22 years. His wife Janet designed an NWT Tartan which is on display at the Legislative Assembly building.

Continue northeast on Pilots Lane



Rayrock House

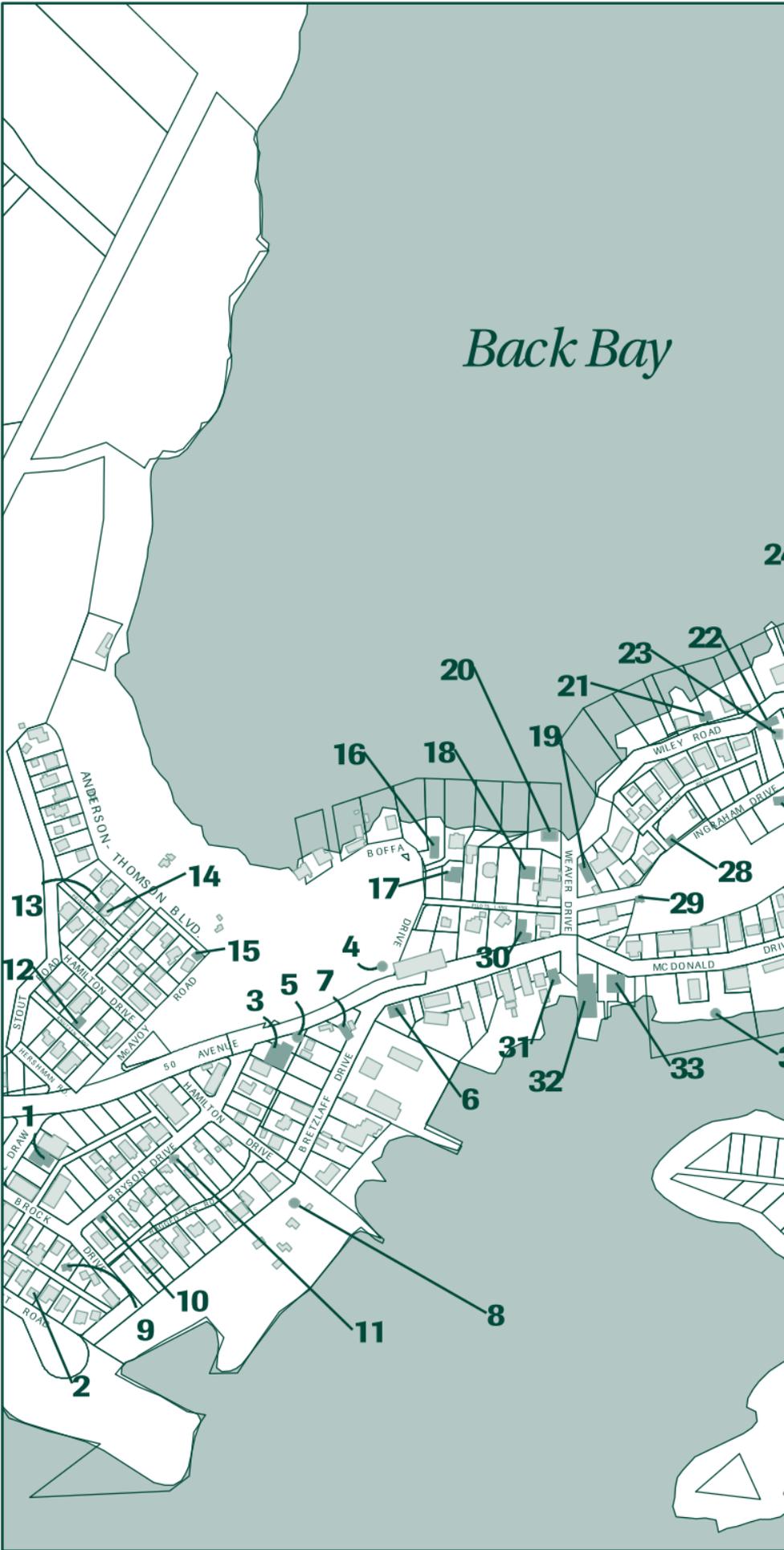
(18) Rayrock House

The Rayrock uranium mine northwest of Yellowknife was the talk of the town in the 1950s. Thousands of prospectors were looking for uranium at that time to supply nuclear material to the United States. It was the height of the Cold War, and the Rayrock Mine produced briefly during 1957-1959. It was moved here in 1962 on the winter road and is home to members of the Weaver family.

The prominent outcrop known as “The Rock” dominates this part of town. Perched atop, overlooking Yellowknife Bay, is the Bush Pilot’s Monument. This next part of the tour takes you along the west side of The Rock and makes its way to the stairway leading to the top and the Monument. The Rock was the hub of commercial Yellowknife before 1945. Now it is a picturesque residential area with several interesting businesses to visit.

North along Weaver Drive and Wiley Road

Back Bay





39

N'Dilo

41

25

4

37

40

38

27

36

26

35

34

Yellowknife Bay

Jolliffe Island



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Before the road, there was a wood plank boardwalk hugging the steep rock cliff, connecting businesses on both sides. The boardwalk was built in 1939 but was soon replaced with rock fill for the encircling road. The story is that in the early 1940s the only two vehicles in town crashed head on while driving in opposite directions around the rock.

Intersection of Wiley Road and Pilot's Lane



Original Weavers (now Bullocks)

(19) Original Weaver and Devore Store



The original, restored log cabin trading post is now home to a popular bistro called “Bullocks”. A designated heritage site, it was built in 1937 by Harry Weaver and Bud Devore and their business is the oldest in Yellowknife. The “new” store is in the large Quonset hut across the street. The green-sided warehouse section was built in 1937 by the Mining Corporation of Canada, which was developing a gold mine on Gordon Lake. The Weavers bought the building in 1960 and attached the Quonset hut in 1967. Weaver & Devore Trading Ltd. still thrives today supplying residents and bush camps. It has been operated by three generations of the Weaver family and the future is still bright for the business.

Across the road from Bullocks



Log Cabin

(20) Log Cabin

This tiny log shed is one of the oldest buildings in Yellowknife. Built in early 1937, it was a shed and office for the Mining Corporation of Canada before the larger warehouse (noted above) was erected.

Travel north along shore of Back Bay along Wylie Road



Wardair

(21) Old Wardair Base

Max Ward arrived in Yellowknife to start an airline business in 1946. He started with a Fox Moth. In 1951 he purchased the first Single Otter aircraft in the NWT. A similar fabric-covered Fox Moth is celebrated in the Aviation Gallery at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. Ward also introduced the Bristol Freighter (the big blue plane on display near the Airport) which was the first airplane to land at the North Pole on wheels in 1967.

Old Town Walking Tour

Wardair later became a national airline and was purchased by a competitor in the 1980s. The two buildings on his old float base date from the 1950s and are still maintained by the Ward family who fly north every summer in an aircraft.

Continue north on Wylie Road



Wildcat

(22) The Wildcat Café

The Wildcat Café is the most famous restaurant in town and a favourite for visitors during the summer. It was opened in 1937 by Willy Wiley and Smokey Stout. The small addition at the front door was built in 1939 and was used as an ice cream parlour. The café closed in 1951 and was due for demolition until a group of local citizens formed the Old Stope Association to preserve the building. In 1979, the Wildcat Café was reopened as a summer restaurant and continues to operate under the protection of the City of Yellowknife. The building is a designated heritage site and celebrated with a replica in Canada's Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, Ontario.

Just up the slope from the Wildcat



Pentecostal Mission

(23) Pentecostal Mission

This charming log cabin dates from 1937. It was built as a residence by Art Arbour on Latham Island. In the 1940s and 1950s it was used as a residence. It earned its name from a more recent owner, the Pentecostal Mission, and it served for many years at its original location as a shelter for the homeless. Many weddings and parties were celebrated here. It was later moved to this site and restored by the Old Stope Association.

Back on Wylie Road



Canadian Pacific Airlines

(24) Canadian Pacific Airlines



The summer of 1946 was a busy time for air traffic in Yellowknife as the hunt for gold was on. This building was a modern facility when finished by its first owners, Canadian Pacific Airlines, who held a virtual monopoly on air flights in the north during and immediately after the war. It had an office, dispatch, warehouse, passenger waiting room, and staff accommodations upstairs. In

Old Town Walking Tour

the early days it was the scene of many parties and banquets. Subsequent owners included Associated Airways, Pacific Western Airlines, Northward Aviation, Air Dogrib, and Adventure Air. In the 1990s it operated as a micro-brewery and part of the décor was a wing of a Beaver airplane which was the bar counter. It was designated a heritage site in 1992.

North on Wylie Road



HBC Warehouse

(25) Hudson's Bay Warehouse

The huge warehouse is the last remaining evidence of the Hudson's Bay Company in Yellowknife, once a strong and successful presence in the NWT and across Canada. Built in 1945, it replaced the smaller, original store that burned down nearby. It ran in conjunction with another store in the New Town until 1960 when the store and grocery in this location was closed and the entire building became a warehouse for HBC operations. It was designated a heritage site in 1994. The small sheet-metal shack at the back of the lot was the original HBC warehouse built in 1938. It was used to store furs until they were shipped out to the auction house in Edmonton.



HBC Staff House

(26) HBC Staff House

The residence on the corner of Ingraham Drive and Doornbos Lane is part of the old HBC staff house, now completely renovated into a private residence.

Southwest on Ingraham Drive



HISTORICAL Old Town Mainstreet 1947

This road was once called King Street and, along with the parallel Queen Street (now Raccine Road), it was the main commercial strip of Old Town Yellowknife. If you were standing along this road in the mid 1940s and you walked north, on the left you would have seen the Yellowknife Rooms (Vic Ingraham's original hotel), the Busy Bee Café, Jim McDonald's pool hall, Yate's Drugs, the Bank of Toronto (see #35), and the Legion Hall. Looking to the right facing Back Bay you would have seen the Bank of Commerce, the Wildcat Café (see #21), the Roving Hornet Café, two barber shops, Sutherland's Drugs (see #1), a taxi stand, the Old Stope Hotel, and Ed Groat's movie theatre.

Old Town Walking Tour

One of the most legendary buildings was the Old Stope. It burned down in a spectacular fire in 1949, was rebuilt, and burned again in 1969.

When the New Town was surveyed in 1945 many of the above businesses moved, and by the mid 1950s this area of Old Town was no longer a commercial centre. It is now a scenic residential area.

Continue on Ingraham Drive



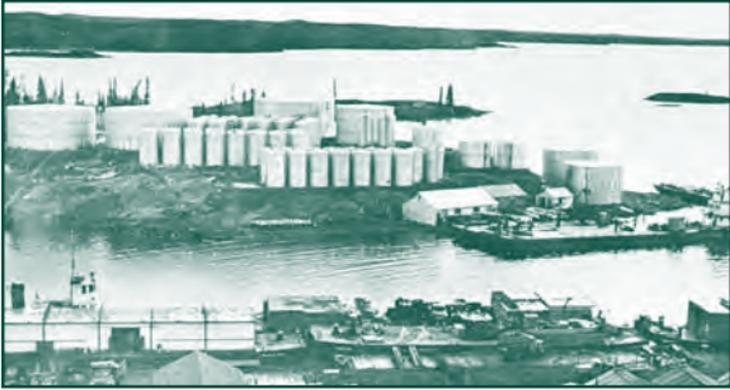
Log Cabin Incognito

(27) Log Cabin Incognito

Behind the wood siding of this house is Willy Wiley's original 1937 log cabin, later occupied by miner and prospector, Curly McDonald. Perched near the top of The Rock, it surely must have had the best view in town when it was first built.

Climbing Pilot's Monument

Climb the steps to the top of "The Rock" and visit the Bush Pilot's Monument and plaque. The arrow points north as though it beckons the bush pilots farther into unknown territory. The monument honours all the early bush planes, pilots, and engineers who have charted the NWT since the first planes arrived in 1921. Aircraft contributed immensely to the search for minerals which led to the founding and modern settlement of Yellowknife. The monument provides a great 360 degree view of Yellowknife Bay and the City skyline.



HISTORICAL Jolliffe Island 1950s

Two other plaques on this hill introduce “The Rock” and Jolliffe Island, the large island south of the Old Town peninsula. Jolliffe Island is named for Alfred Jolliffe, a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada who mapped the region in 1935. In the early days, Jolliffe Island was a residential area and the site of a large Imperial Oil tank farm. It is still home to a few small cabins and is part of the houseboat community. Houseboats are a unique part of Yellowknife tradition, and form a wonderfully close-knit community.

Continue south to the crest of Ingraham Drive



House of Horrors

(28) House of Horrors

Built in 1938 by Alphonse Cyr as a rooming house, the building earned its name for the wild parties and card games it hosted in the 1940s. It has also been a barber shop and a private residence, but it has not been used in many decades.

Continue south on Ingraham Drive



Raccine House

(29) Raccine House

Pete Raccine built this house in the early 1940s and lived there for years. Raccine built an early hotel and cafe in Yellowknife, called the Corona Inn (1936), and was a renowned bootlegger.

*Intersection of Weaver Drive, McDonald Drive,
and Franklin Avenue*

If you travelled back in time to 1936 when the community was first being settled, and you stood here, you would be up to your shoulders in marshy Yellowknife Bay. Most of the land on the south side of the peninsula has been filled in with rock over the years. It is interesting to compare old photos to see just how much the settlement around “The Rock” has physically expanded.



Boyles Brothers Shop

(30) Boyles Brothers Shop

Several diamond drilling outfits have operated in the Yellowknife region but one of the most famous was Boyles Brothers Drilling Company who used this building in the 1940s-50s. In the very early years, this building served as a small recreation facility and it was also a temporary school house in 1940 run by Miss Mildred Hall.

Across Franklin Avenue



Ptarmigan Warehouse

(31) Ptarmigan Warehouse

Built at the Ptarmigan gold mine on the Ingraham Trail (operated 1941-1942) and used as a warehouse, the building was moved here when the old site was remediated in 1970. It has been extensively renovated and now serves as offices and apartments.

North on McDonald Drive

Old Town Walking Tour



Yellowknife Hardware

(32) Old Yellowknife Hardware

This 1941 building was the recreation hall at the Outpost Island gold and tungsten mine, 88 kilometres southeast of town. It was a war-time strategic-metal operation, producing a tungsten product that went into steel-alloys for military applications. The mine closed down in 1942 when the company went bankrupt. Walter England moved it here across Great Slave Lake in the winter of 1945 to house his new business – Yellowknife Hardware, another long-term family business. The England family still maintains it as their residence.

Continue north on McDonald Drive



Original Capitol Theatre

(33) The Original Capitol Theatre

This was part of the original Capitol Theatre built by Bill Cole in the New Town after the war. It was located one block east of where the current theatre now sits downtown. The building was

lifted off its foundations and moved here one summer evening in 1978 to make way for the Scotia Centre office tower, and was one of the largest buildings ever moved in Yellowknife.

Continue north on McDonald Drive



HISTORICAL Government Dock ships offloading 1940s

(34) Government Dock

In the 1940s the government built a wharf of crushed rock to service barges and boats unloading freight. The arrival of the “beer barge” after the spring break-up was always a big event in the early years before the Mackenzie Highway was completed in 1960. The dock is still active today, playing a role in local access to Great Slave Lake.

Continue north on McDonald Drive

Private residences and small businesses lined the shore of Yellowknife Bay along this road in the 1940s, including the Lakeview Café, a Catholic church and rectory, and the original RCMP station. You can still find some of the early houses in this area, one of which is occupied by a glass recycling business (#33). In the 1960s Ptarmigan Airways built a floatplane base (the large Quonset hut now occupied by Arctic Sunwest Charters).

Continue north on McDonald Drive

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YK Glass Recyclers

(35) YK Glass Recyclers Coop

This house and the shack behind it are the only original residences left on this part of McDonald Drive. Yellowknife Glass Recyclers occupies a house built in the 1940s by Jim Bryson. The small shack on the back of the lot was a staffhouse for girls working at the HBC store, and was later rented out to many well known locals including Otto Kurz, the Malmstens, Ted Cinnamon, and Knud Rasmussen.

Continue north on McDonald Drive

(36) McMeekan Causeway

The causeway and road to Latham Island was built in 1948, thanks largely to the lobbying efforts of Jock McMeekan, the outspoken journalist of the Yellowknife Blade newspaper. McMeekan had good reason to want a road connecting Latham Island with the rest of Yellowknife – after all, he lived on the island! The causeway was replaced with a small bridge in 1996.



HISTORICAL Latham Island across the Narrows, 1940

Latham Island

When the first entrepreneurs arrived in the fall of 1936, they sought the perfect place to build a hotel and restaurant for what they envisioned could be a gold mining centre. Pete Raccine, Ted Hickmont, and Gordon Latham eventually selected the northwest side of Latham Island and built a log cabin establishment called the “Corona Inn”. Latham Island did not become a commercial centre, but it was an important residential area. Prospector and trapper Sam Otto was one of its first residents who pitched a tent here in 1935 and later built a larger cabin.

Lining the shores of the narrows and facing “The Rock” were some small businesses, including Louis Lessard’s original Rex Café, Mary Watt’s laundry, and Ed Jones’ general store. The Federal government bought the building for use as a liquor store and warehouse. This was good news for the local water taxi run by Bertha Watt, who made great profits ferrying thirsty people back and forth across “The Narrows”. The north end of Latham Island is a First Nations community called N’Dilo.

North on Hearne Hill Road



Liske House

(37) Old Liske House

This house is one of the older log houses and was built by Pierre Liske in 1943. It underwent major repairs and now sits on a new foundation – a total renovation effort.

East on Otto Drive

Old Town Walking Tour



TD Bank cabin

(38) Bank of Toronto

This cabin dates back to 1939 when it was a small residence, and then became perhaps the smallest branch of the Bank of Toronto from 1944 to 1951. The Bank of Toronto arrived late in Yellowknife, joining with the already well-established Canadian Bank of Commerce (the city's first bank). This cabin may have been the busiest in town, especially on pay day. Bankers had no hours back in those days; if a prospector knocked on the cabin door at 5 am in need of a loan, the teller woke up and took care of business. Allan Lambert, who eventually became president of TD Bank, was manager of the tiny Yellowknife branch for a time. The cabin was originally located just below 'The Rock' in the commercial centre of early Yellowknife and was moved here in 1964 by prospector Sam Otto who rented it out as a residence. It was designated a heritage site in 1998.

North on Otto Drive up the hill into N'Dilo



N'Dilo Village

(39) N'Dilo village

Started as a small group of homes built by government for local Aboriginal families, N'Dilo is now a tranquil and interesting mix of old and new as the community expands and modernizes. It is governed by the Yellowknives Dene First Nation who traditionally occupied the Yellowknife area. When it was first built in the mid 1950s, N'Dilo was known as 'Rainbow Valley' because of the multiple rows of colourful houses. As you round the west side and walk back towards Morrison Drive, you may see these original houses, but they are quickly being replaced with modern band housing. N'Dilo is a great place to experience and learn about the local Aboriginal culture.

South on Morrison Drive



Herriman House

(40) Old Herriman House

Joe Herriman was a local prospector and miner. He worked at Giant Mine for several years but was most famous for his role in

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the development and promotion of the Ragged Ass gold mine on Hidden Lake. It is stylistic of the character and charm of Yellowknife houses in the 1940s.

Continue south on Morrison Drive



Cat Skinner's Caboose

(41) Cat-Skinner's Caboose

This shack was used by the operators of “Cat Trains” as a caboose - a bunkhouse and dining hall. A “Cat Train” is a tractor or bulldozer pulling a fleet of sleighs carrying freight. They were used to bring equipment and supplies to Yellowknife and then to regional mines from 1939 to the mid 1950s before more modern all-weather and winter roads were established. Yellowknifers have a knack for decorating their properties with old ‘junk’ to help bring out the city’s historical charm. What was once living quarters for “Cat Skinners” is now a home owner’s storage shed and artifact exhibit.

If you would like to know more....

Several books about the history of Yellowknife are available for browsing at the Yellowknife Public Library, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, or for purchase at the bookstores and shops around the City. If you would like more detailed information on the history of buildings and sites documented in this brochure, please contact Yellowknife City Hall, which maintains an inventory of heritage resources in the city.

