

Proposing World Heritage Status for Trondek-Klondike

Story & photo
by Dan Davidson

The headline on the front page of the July 24, 1997 edition of the *Klondike Sun* boldly proclaimed, "Berton Proposes Dawson for World Heritage Site Status." The "Berton" was Pierre Berton, of course, Dawson's most famous living son at the time and author of some 60 books, half of which touched on the North to some degree, most notably in the Governor General's Award winning volume *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899*.

It wasn't the first time that anyone had suggested the Klondike should be recognized under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, but it was the loudest statement at a significant time, during our Centennial years.

Berton had contacted me about a week before I wrote the article to set up telephone interviews with himself and Pierre Dalibard. Dalibard had been with Parks Canada when the Klondike National Historic Site was created back in the 1960s. He had later been the executive director of Heritage Canada, a non-governmental organization, and was then a professor of historical conservation at the University of Montreal.

He also used to sit on the UNESCO board that governs WHS selection.

Berton had already approached the Dawson City town council of the day and Mayor Glen Everitt had taken his letter to councillors who were still excited about the Gold Rush Centennials, which were then approaching their 1998 climax, having begun in 1996.

Berton proposed that "Dawson qualifies under at least two of the six cultural criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List, which is divided into physical and cultural categories."

Dawson would be a cultural site, which would, according to the text from UNESCO's own website:

"ii. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture

or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design...

"iv. be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history..."

During my interview from Ottawa on July 10, Dalibard suggested that Berton was being too modest and that another criterion also would apply, covering the contributions of Robert Service, Jack London and Berton himself.

"vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance..."

The World Heritage Site program was established by the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization in 1972. The actual decision would be made by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

Should Dawson City or the Klondike ever be approved, it would join 981 properties on the World Heritage List. The UNESCO website lists 759 cultural, 193 natural and 29 mixed properties. The cultural list has nearly doubled since 1997.

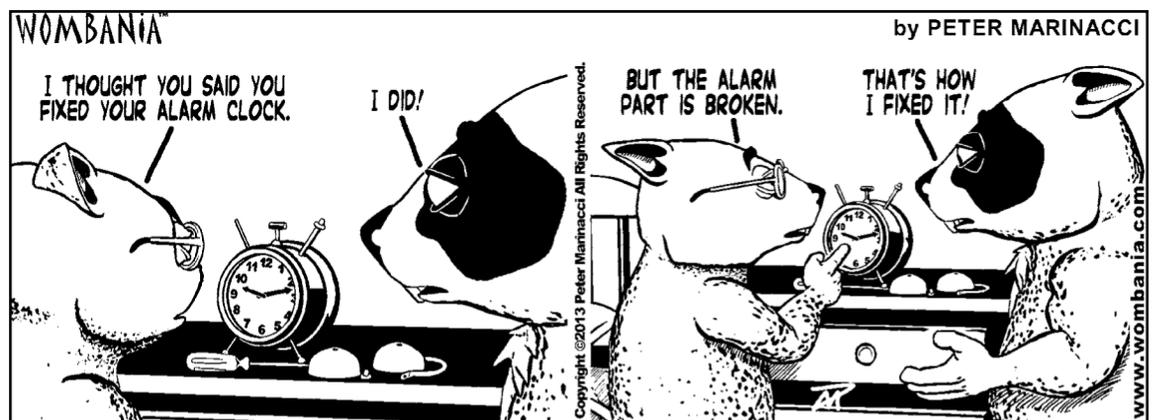
In Canada there are currently 15 sites, established between 1978 and 2013. They include places like L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park (the site of the first Viking settlement in Newfoundland), Dinosaur Provincial Park in Alberta, the historic area of Quebec City and the old town section of Lunenburg in Nova Scotia, just to name a few. The most recent is the Red Bay Basque Whaling Station in Labrador.

Public debate on the merits of this proposal have waxed and waned over the 16 years since Berton's proclamation. Future columns on this topic will explore some of the history and implications.

(Editor's note: This column is the first of three that originally appeared in slightly different form in What's Up Yukon.)



Wombania by Peter Marinacci



50th Anniversary Celebration

The party of the half-century. Don't miss it!



Friday, November 29, 7-10:30pm
Ayamdigut Campus, Whitehorse
RSVP: www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/hub/rsvp

Celebration Contributor

