

# The path to World Heritage Status has had its ups and downs

Story & Photo  
By Dan Davidson

Last issue I introduced you to the idea that the Klondike is under consideration to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is a public discussion that began in 1997, during the Gold Rush Centennials. The discussion has been simmering – on and off the burner – ever since.

When Parks Canada finally succeeded in getting their proposal on to Canada's tentative list of sites in 2004, it was recorded in the "cultural" category as opposed to the "natural".

Parks felt that two of the cultural criteria applied to the Klondike, and expanded the idea to include the long

ago, was not in favour of pursuing the proposal. There were many folk who thought that might be the end of the process, because it certainly could not advance without TH support, but times change, councils change and opinions change.

ICOMOS defines in this way. "Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity."

Parks intended their nomination to be a trans-boundary proposal that would include selected areas connected to this theme and located between the Klondike and Skagway. The United States' National Park Service was enthusiastic about this concept but, for reasons now lost to history, Skagway's town council was not at that time, and so the proposal languished.

The heat under the pot was

Over the last few years the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in have followed through on another portion of its Land Claims implementation process and produced a regional economic development plan. Looking more closely at World Heritage Status is an important part of that plan and so it is that TH - in collaboration with the City of Dawson, the Klondike Visitors Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Dawson City



Dawson attempts to have its streets convey an early 20<sup>th</sup> century period look as Third Avenue demonstrates.

tenure of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in people as well as the Gold Rush significance.

They worded their proposal this way:

"iv. The Klondike is an outstanding example of a landscape which illustrates exceptional adaptation and innovation by First Nations people for thousands of years, up to the present day, in responding to a challenging environment;

"v. It is an outstanding example of a mining landscape which includes the resource, transportation, supply, and administrative and institutional components."

Statements such as this are intended to support the idea that a given area has what the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) would recognize as elements of Outstanding Universal Value, which

turned up next during the years when John Steins was Dawson's mayor. His council was keen on pursuing a form of the proposal, which, as hinted in the Parks' submission, placed more emphasis on aboriginal history along with the Gold Rush. The Klondike Development Organization produced a detailed background study, but the road was not smooth.

As TH Deputy Chief Clara Van Bibber noted during last August's Discovery Days celebrations here in August, "... our First Nation is sometimes conflicted about celebrating the discovery of gold in our region. The initial find at Bonanza Creek kicked off an influx of newcomers to our home and changed our traditional way of life forever."

That said, it's not entirely surprising that the TH Council of that day, just a few years

Museum, the City of Dawson, the Yukon Government-Tourism and Culture, and Parks Canada: KNHS - is now driving the investigation into the matter.

Next time I'll look at why anyone would want to get involved in this process.

This week is significant to this project as the working committee has been holding its second set of workshops to draft a statement of Outstanding Universal Value to guide the direction of the application, should it be decided to make one.

The local advisory committee, of which this writer is a member, meets monthly.

*A slightly different version of this article appeared in What's Up Yukon last fall.*

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GST #: 12531 0581 RT / Societies Registration #: 34600-20  
Print by THE YUKON NEWS, Whitehorse YT

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.