



Historic Sites



Arne Ormen Cabin

CARCROSS WALKING TOUR

**Yukon**



CARCROSS WALKING TOUR

A Brief History of Carcross

The Tagish name for Carcross is Todezaane that means “blowing all the time” and in the Inland Tlingit Language it is referred to as Nàtase Hîn, meaning “fish camp in the narrows between the lakes” or “sleeping waters.” The coastal Tlingit writing system that Carcross/Tagish First Nation (CTFN) follows would spell it Natasahéen meaning “going through narrow waters”, and is also known as “sleeping waters”.

In 1899, the community was officially named Caribou Crossing, referring to the spot where a local woodland caribou herd crossed the narrows. Bishop William Bompas requested Caribou Crossing be changed to Carcross in 1904, and the government approved the change in 1906. J. H. Brownlee surveyed the town site in 1899 for the White Pass & Yukon Route (WP&YR). Before the completion of the railway in 1900, Carcross consisted of a North West Mounted Police post and associated reserve on the north side of the narrows, and a First Nation community on the south. The town was established by WP&YR to maintain the railway and connect freight and passengers to Atlin and points around the lake via the sternwheelers. A major fire destroyed the downtown core in 1909, but the town survived. Over the years, buildings were relocated to Carcross from Bennett City, Conrad City and other abandoned mining communities in the area. The stampede town of Bennett City, on Bennett Lake, was abandoned after 1900. Conrad City, a supply town and shipping depot for the Windy Arm Mining District, was abandoned in 1914 when the price of silver dropped. The homeowners along Bennett Avenue and the Bennett Lake beachfront were considered “squatters” until the regulations changed in 1983, allowing these properties to be titled.



White Pass & Yukon Route Complex



1

The White Pass & Yukon Route (WP&YR) railroad depot was built in 1910, following a fire that destroyed the original depot. The WP&YR ran a passenger and freight railway from 1900 until 1982. The warehouse behind the depot was used for freight storage in later years. The wharf was used for the sternwheelers and gas boats that ran on Windy Arm and Bennett Lake. In 2006, the line between Skagway, Alaska and Carcross re-opened as a scenic railway attraction, ending at the WP&YR railroad depot. It is a designated Heritage Railway Station of Canada.



Swing Bridge



2

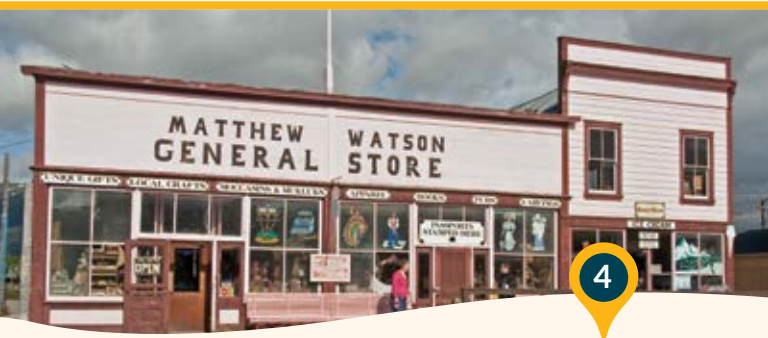
This 125-metre railway bridge was built in 1900 by the Puget Sound Bridge and Dredging Company, under contract for the WP&YR. The bridge was designed so that the 46-metre midsection could pivot on a central axis, allowing large boats to pass on either side. Commercial navigation dwindled after the railway began operating and the swing span was opened only a few times before it was permanently closed. In 1969, pilings were set under the bridge to increase its load tolerance. The bridge is still used by the WP&YR.



Caribou Hotel



Dating to 1910, the Caribou Hotel is one of the oldest buildings in the Southern Lakes region. The original building was moved here from Bennett City on a scow by the owner, W. A. Anderson. In 1903, Dawson Charlie (Káa Goox) purchased the hotel from Anderson. Charlie was a member of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and one of the co-discoverers of gold in the Klondike. He named it the Caribou Hotel and the business prospered under several different managers. Dawson Charlie died in 1908 and his heir, Annie Auston, leased the hotel to Edwin and Bessie Gideon, until it burnt to the ground on Christmas Eve, 1909. The Gideons rebuilt the hotel using material salvaged from a building in Conrad City. They continued to run the hotel until Mrs. Gideon died in 1933. Her ghost is said to roam the third floor. Over the years, the hotel has provided accommodation for locals, miners, tourists and visiting dignitaries. Johnnie Johns, a world renowned big game hunter, had a long relationship with the hotel and many of his clients stayed here. The hotel was also known for Polly the parrot, who lived here from 1918 to 1972 and entertained the guests with his renditions of “I Love You Truly” and “Springtime in the Rockies”. The Caribou Hotel is a designated Yukon Historic Site. The current owners are undertaking restoration work.



The Matthew Watson General Store is one of Yukon's longest operating businesses. Following the 1909 fire that destroyed much of downtown Carcross, the store was reconstructed using two buildings retrieved from the dwindling mining communities of Conrad and Bennett. Matthew Watson was a prospector who had travelled over the Chilkoot Pass in 1899. He bought the store in 1911 and carried general merchandise and miner's supplies; he also outfitted hunting parties. Watson and his descendants continued to operate the store until 1982, when it was purchased by Stan and Jean Tooley. When the Tooleys took over, the store still contained elegant top hats in silk-lined boxes and dusty jars of liniment promising cures for everything from sprains to baldness.





Bobby Watson House



Jack Pooley, who worked at the Venus Mine, built this house in 1903-04. He sold it to Matthew Watson in 1914, who lived here with his family. The house remained with the Watson family for many years, although they rented it out for a variety of purposes. In the 1920s, it housed the North West Mounted Police barracks and was fitted with a jail cell. Between 1939 and 1941, the school principal, Rev. H.C.M. Grant, and his family lived here. Bobby and May Robson ran a tea room and barbershop out of this house from about 1948 to 1950. The RCMP had a barracks here again in the 1950s. Around 1955 it became the year-round home of Bob and Nellie Watson, Matthew Watson's son and daughter-in-law. It remains a private residence today.





Simmons House



This house was moved from Conrad City to its present location by Leo Simmons, a local mink and fox rancher. Simmons owned this house with his wife, Grace. In later years she was affectionately known as “Ma Simmons”. They raised three children here: James Aubrey, George and Gladys. James Aubrey became the member of Parliament in the 1950s, George started Northern Airways in Carcross in the 1930s, and Gladys worked with George. The building of the Atlin road, in the 1950s, shifted George’s business interests from aviation to trucking. George married Emily Hill in 1948 and they lived most of their married life here. When George died in 1985, Emily continued to live here seasonally until she passed away in 1996.



Tommy Brooks Cabin



Tommy Brooks, a prospector and poet of some fame, lived in this tiny house from the late 1920s to the early 1960s. Poor health forced him to leave his beloved home for a seniors’ residence in Whitehorse. In 1989, Albert Peterson and his wife, Jennifer Stephens, bought and renovated the house. Albert painted many fine pieces of art in the small living space of this special cabin. It continues to be a private residence.

Post Office



The first post office opened in Carcross in 1902 in a building located at this site. The original building also served as a telegraph office and the North West Mounted Police detachment. The first postmaster was W.J. Scott. The current Carcross post office building has been in use since it was built in 1910. It is the longest, continuously used post office building in Yukon.

Phelps House



This log structure was built in 1905-6 for the American entrepreneur Col. John Howard Conrad, who won and lost many fortunes over his long life. As president of the Conrad Consolidated Mining Company, he invested heavily in the Windy Arm Mining District, mining silver ore in the region. Beginning in the early 1900s, he shipped about 50,000 tons of ore from Conrad City. By 1912, the price of silver was low and Conrad was forced into bankruptcy. Instead of paying his debts in cash to Whitehorse lawyer, Willard Phelps, Conrad deeded his Carcross property. This building once housed Conrad's office and living quarters, and provided accommodation for workers at the Conrad mines. The property remains within the Phelps family.



Erlam Cabin



This cabin was built as a residence around 1910. It was owned by lawyer Willard Phelps and rented throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Bob Erlam, owner and editor of the Whitehorse Star newspaper, owned the cabin for over 15 years beginning in the 1980s. It continues to be a private residence.



Watson Cabin



This single-storey log cabin dates to the early 1900s and was one of several properties owned by Matthew Watson. It was available for rent on a seasonal or year-round basis and, over the years, many prominent Carcross residents lived here, including Robert Watson, Millie Jones and Johnny Williams. Other occupants reflect the colourful history of Carcross and it is rumoured that it was once used as a brothel. The 1950s Chevy pickup truck parked outside belonged to Jack McMurphy, the owner's grandfather. The cabin continues to be a private residence.



This cabin was built in 1938 with logs that came from a circa 1902 home in Conrad City. Alf Dickson constructed the cabin as a guesthouse and rental unit beside his larger, log home. Around 1940, Herman Peterson, a pilot with Northern Airways in Carcross, documented some of the community's history in a makeshift darkroom in the back of the cabin. Don Jones purchased the cabin in 1952 and since, it has been renovated and is used as a seasonal residence.





Miss Matthews' Cabin



13

This home was built by a Mr. Kennedy from Conrad City in 1905. Around 1907, when Conrad mining operations slowed to a halt, Kennedy left the Carcross area. Matthew Watson acquired the cabin in 1910 and used it as a rental property. At one point it became the local teacherage, housing single schoolteachers. In the mid-1950s, an Anglican missionary, Miss Ruth Matthews, rented the cabin. Over the years she became greatly involved in the community and the cabin became known as “Miss Matthews’ cabin”. Around 1980, Bobby Watson sold the little cabin to Helen Williams and Margaret Wilson, two nurses from Whitehorse. It remains privately owned.



Peterson Store



14

This building was constructed around 1947. It was initially a store operated by Joyce Richards and Doris Peterson. After Joyce married Gordon Yardley, they built three rental cabins behind the house. One cabin remains, although it has been moved close to the Caribou Hotel. The Yardleys had a lasting connection to Carcross. Gordon Yardley came to Yukon in 1937 and worked on the S.S. Tutshi and for Pan American Airways before becoming a contractor. The Yardleys raised cattle and bought a ranch nearby. They also had a sawmill.



Herman Peterson House



Herman Peterson built this house using material from a structure at Engineer Mines on Tagish Lake. Peterson was a pilot for Northern Airways in the early 1940s and he was transferred to Atlin before the house was completed. The building was used as a schoolhouse from 1953 until the new school was constructed in the 1970s. It is now a private residence.



Arne Ormen Cabin



Arnulf “Arne” Ormen was a woodcutter, of Scandinavian descent, who lived at 12 Mile on the Tagish Road from the 1940s to the 1960s. He would ski into Carcross in the winter and bicycle in the summer to get his supplies and to visit the beer parlour. As Arne grew older he thought he should live in Carcross and so he built a little cabin where he claimed he could do what he always wanted-to light his fire without getting out of bed. He was a very tall man and could not stand up straight in his cabin, only in the outhouse. Unfortunately, Arne didn’t live for very long after his diminutive cabin was built.

Historic Sites

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To Whitehorse 74km

To Tagish 31km
To Atlin 149km

SOUTH KLONDIKE HWY

CARCROSS WALKING TOUR

We welcome you to experience our history. Please respect the privacy of the property owners.

NARES LAKE

To Skagway 106km

Carving Facility

NARES RIVER

WATERFRONT DRIVE

MONTANA MOUNTAIN ROAD

Foot Bridge

AUSTIN

TUTSHI

FOX

TAGISH

BENNETT

McMURPHY

GIDEON

S.S. Tutshi Memorial

Visitor Information Centre

BENNETT LAKE



Matthew Watson House



Matthew Watson, owner of the general store, lived and farmed here from 1920 to 1957. At one time he also operated a fox and mink ranch on this spot. In those days, Carcross was much smaller, and this house was considered “out of town”; visitors would pack a lunch when they visited. This house is constructed from several houses that were moved from Conrad and Carcross. While the dining and living rooms match, the kitchen was part of a different building. At least one interior cupboard was originally from a White Pass sternwheeler. One of the outbuildings was also relocated and has “P. Martin Conrad” painted on the exterior. The house is maintained as a private residence.



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church



St. John the Baptist Church was brought from Conrad City to this site in 1939. A local First Nation couple, William and Winnie Atlin, were the first to be married here. A pastoral worker conducts regular Sunday communion services.



Old School



19

The first primary school in Carcross was built in 1909 when the Anglican mission began to accept only First Nations children; it operated until 1914. A second school building burnt down in 1936. This schoolhouse was built in 1939-40 by William Geddes, the Anglican Bishop of Yukon, for use as a territorial school. It was used as such until 1953 and later became the parish hall for the Anglican Church.



The Barracks



20

Johnny Williams, a foreman with the White Pass & Yukon Route, constructed this building in 1921. He used logs from trees burned in a fire beside Lake Bennett. Over the years, the building served as a private residence, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police barracks and a craft shop. In 2011, it reopened as the Klondike Trail Bakery. The building has its original doors and windows, and a unique piece of rounded wood that Williams found as a door header. Ship canvas still covers the walls and ceiling and some of the original oakum forms the chinking between the logs.



In 1932, British Yukon Navigation Co. carpenters built the motor vessel Sibilla. They modelled it after the historic Sibilla, a mail service boat in the British Yukon Navigation Co. fleet. The boat has a “Canadian launch” design with a canoe-shaped hull and recessed propeller. It was sent out in the early spring to chart the most navigable channels in the waterway. The Sibilla worked laying cable and dynamiting sandbars to aid larger steamers in river navigation. Around 1944, it was moved to active service in Carcross.

» NWMP Barracks »



This frame building was originally the North West Mounted Police barracks and jail for Carcross. It was built circa 1900 and Sergeant Major Orrin Wells Evans was posted here. The first Carcross detachment was built in 1898 with the help of Constable Thomas A. Dickson. In 1900, Constable Dickson left the force to marry Louise George, a Tagish First Nation woman. Following the Klondike Gold Rush, the number of officers stationed in Yukon declined drastically. By 1910, only 50 officers were left in Yukon. The Carcross detachment remained open staffed by just one officer.



St. Saviour's Anglican Church



Bishop Bompas and his congregation constructed St. Saviour's in 1904 on the south side of the narrows between Bennett and Nares lakes. Skookum Jim's daughter, Daisy, was the first person baptized here. The church was brought across the river by scow to its present site in 1917. Regular Sunday services are held here.



Skookum Jim House



Skookum Jim Mason (Keish) had this house built in 1899, just after he discovered gold near Dawson City, an event which sparked the Klondike Gold Rush. He imported the lumber and furniture, and had them shipped from Skagway to Lake Bennett by White Pass & Yukon Route and then by raft to Carcross. Skookum Jim (Keish) died in 1916 and Johnnie Johns bought the house in 1920. Johns did not live in the house, but held it in trust for the Wolf (Daḵl'aweidí) Clan. When the original Skookum Jim House collapsed during renovations around 1987, Joe Schinkel built a replica to honour the memory of Skookum Jim Mason (Keish) in the same year. The house remains the property of the Daḵl'aweidí Clan within the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. The building has been renovated and moved to downtown Carcross, where it is the cornerstone of the Carcross Commons development. The exterior mural was designed in the coastal tradition by Tlingit artist Keith Wolfe Smarch and painted by Bill Oster.



S.S. Tutshi Memorial



25

The sternwheeler Tutshi was built in 1917 to accommodate the increasing number of tourists visiting Yukon's Southern Lakes. When tourism waned, the S.S. Tutshi was kept busy carrying mail and freight to mines and small communities. The completion of all-weather roads in the 1940s ended the era of the sternwheeler and the S.S. Tutshi was decommissioned in 1955. The Tutshi burned in 1990 and the remains of the boat are interpreted here at the S.S. Tutshi Memorial.



Peter Johns Cabin



26

This cabin was built in Conrad City by Venus Mines around 1910. In the 1920s, Ernie Butterfield purchased two buildings, one log and one frame, and brought them over the ice from Conrad to Carcross with a team of horses. The frame and log buildings were joined to make a house. Butterfield sold the structure to Ed Blatta, who was a mink rancher and, for 15 years, a local policeman. Blatta's in-laws lived in the house, but when fur prices dropped in the 1940s they returned to Vancouver. It became the house of Peter Johns, the brother of Johnnie Johns. Their father was Tagish John (K̓aajinéek), the brother of Skookum Jim (Keish).



Dora Wedge House



Nick O'Brien and Ernie Butterfield built this house in the 1920s. Matthew Watson, owner of the general store, purchased it from them as a rental property. Dora Wedge, daughter of Tagish John (K̓aajinéek) and Maria, rented it from Watson for 10 years before purchasing it around 1975.



Bishop Bompas House



Bishop William Carpenter Bompas came to the North in 1869 as a missionary at Fort Yukon, Alaska. He and his wife relocated to Carcross in 1901 to open a mission school. They rented, and later purchased, this Canadian Development Co. bunkhouse. At the time, the building was much larger and T-shaped, extending back into the riverbank. The building was used as a school and for church services until a mission school was established in 1903 and St. Saviour's Church was built in 1904. Later, it became a residence and was last used in the 1980s.

Johnnie Johns House



This house was built by Johnnie Johns, son of Tagish John and Maria. Around 1977, Johns brought the main part of the house from Whitehorse and added a porch on the north side. His cache, behind the house, came from Conrad City. The smokehouse, which was originally built on the other side of the narrows, was hauled by Johns to its present position near the river. A renowned big game hunter and guide, Johnnie Johns ran a successful outfitting business for many years in southern Yukon.

Adam Dickson House



Adam Dickson built this house around 1914 before he left to serve in WWI. Dickson was a lineman on the telegraph wire that followed the lakeshore from Tagish to Carcross. Dickson's half-brother, Alf, lived in the house and added a front addition for the family before he too left to serve in the Great War.



Clara Schinkel House



31

Louis Sherella built this house in the 1920s of locally milled lumber. Sherella was originally from Yugoslavia and worked in the area as a carpenter and trapper. In his will, Sherella left the house to Douglas Watson, who had planned to use it as a summer cabin. Instead, Watson sold it to Joe and Clara Schinkel, who undertook extensive renovations. Clara Schinkel, a respected Elder and member of the Daḱl'aweidí Clan, lived in the house with her family in the 1980s. A spark from the stove caused a fire and considerable damage in the 1990s.



Beattie House



32

Johnnie Johns bought this house from a Mr. Hope in Conrad City and moved it to this site in 1924. Art Johns was born in the house and behind the building was Johnnie Johns' mink farm.



Yukon Hotel



This building was originally part of the Yukon Hotel in Conrad City. Johnnie Johns and Ernie Butterfield moved it to Carcross and sold it to Tommy “Togo” Takumatsu and his wife Jessie Jim, of the Ganaxteiti Clan. During WWII, when the Canadian Army was relocating Japanese Canadian people, Togo hid in a cabin built into a cave at 10 Mile, where he died during the winter. Jessie Jim remarried and lived in this house until she sold it to Tony Richard, who raised a family here. At one time the house had an attached log shed.



James House



Andrew James and his wife, Mary James, purchased the house from Gordon Yardley. William Atlin moved the building to its present location in two pieces via an old car bridge across the river. Mary passed the house on to her family and eventually it was sold to Betty and Jerry Pope.

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We hope you enjoyed your tour of historic Carcross. This brochure was produced with the help of the Carcross residents. The map is based on a hand-drawn map by Daphne Mennell. If you have additional information, please contact the Yukon government Cultural Services Branch at 867-667-3458.

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