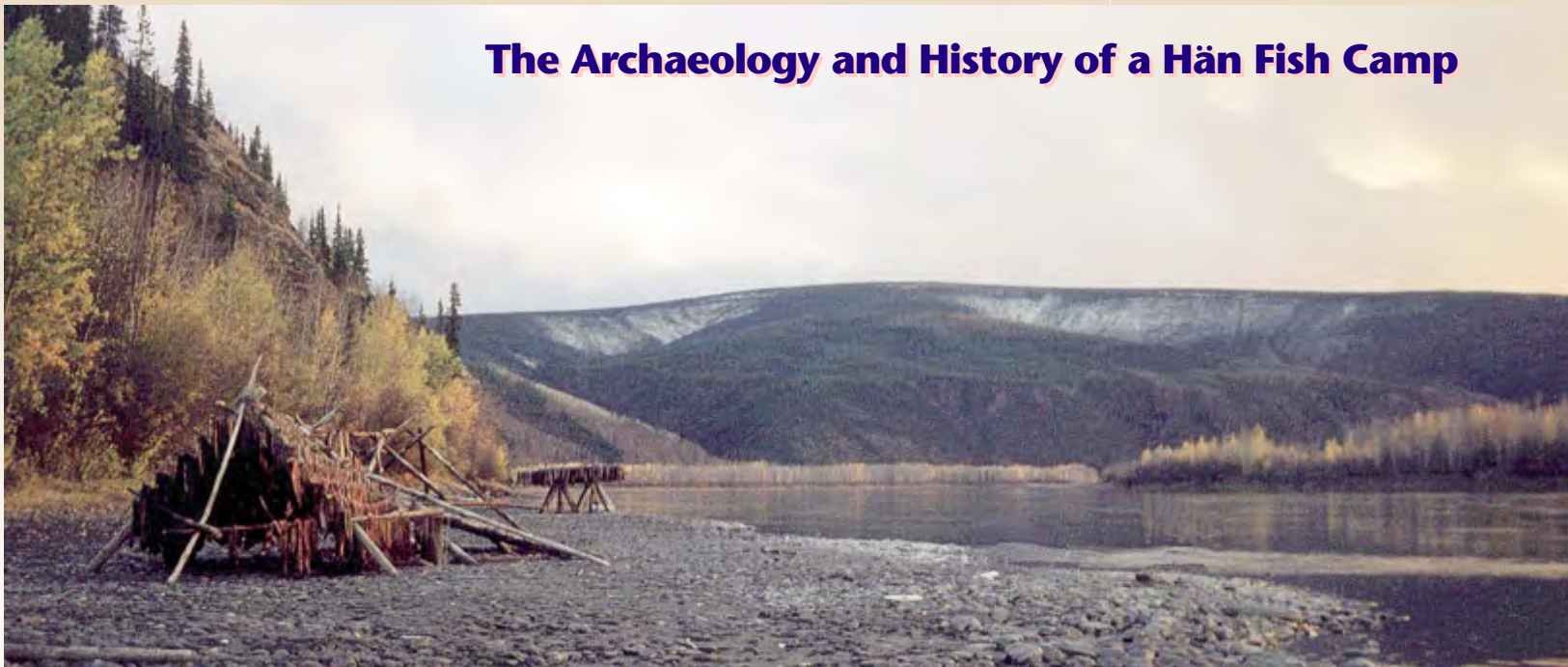


# Tr'ochëk

## **The Archaeology and History of a Hän Fish Camp**



*Text prepared by: H. Dobrowsky & T. J. Hammer*

*Edited by: Ruth Gotthardt*

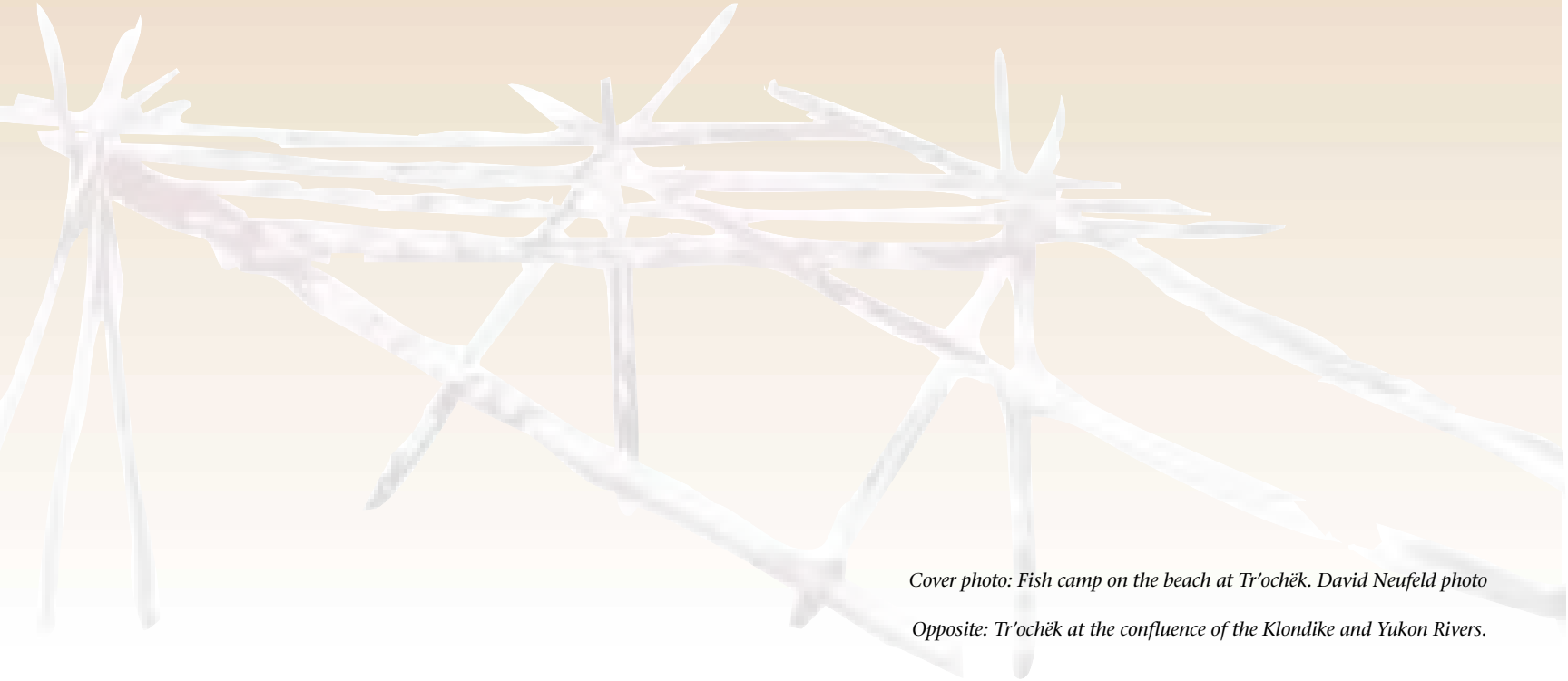
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*Cover photo: Fish camp on the beach at Tr'ochëk. David Neufeld photo*

*Opposite: Tr'ochëk at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers.*



# Tr'ochëk

## The Archaeology and History of a Hän Fish Camp

# Acknowledgements

This booklet is the result of a great deal of involvement and interest by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in members. Particular thanks to the Tr'ochëk Steering Committee. Its former and current members include Percy Henry, Debbie Nagano, Ronald Johnson, Mabel Henry, Edith Fraser and Ralph Blanchard from the First Nation; Gary McMillan (Parks Canada); and Ruth Gotthardt (Government of Yukon). David Neufeld (Parks Canada) and Georgette McLeod (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation) are the secretariat for the steering committee.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Director of Culture and Education, Angie Joseph-Rear, and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders Council (Percy Henry, Clara Van Bibber, Edward Roberts) collected Hän place names and stories about Tr'ochëk. Julie Beaumont and Ed Kormendy from Lands and Resources were most helpful with mapping and presentation materials.

Over the last few years, the history of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has been documented by extensive oral history and archival research. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in heritage officer Georgette McLeod assisted by Rachel Olson and Myste Anderson, and Ingrid Kritsch (Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute) interviewed elders from the Dawson area, Alaska and Northwest Territories. This work has built on other oral history work of the last forty years. Sincere thanks to the many elders who shared their valuable memories. The quotations in this booklet are from interviews with Doris Adair, Stanley Roberts, Joe Henry, Patricia (Isaac) Lindgren, Archie Roberts and Ronald Johnson.

As well, a review of written and photographic records at various libraries and archives also provided material for a history of the Tr'ochëk site. This work was supported by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Parks Canada, the Yukon Historical & Museums Association and the Dawson City Museum.

The Tr'ochëk Archaeology project was carried out in partnership between the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Government of Yukon Heritage. Special thanks must go to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in staff for their support for the project over the years and to the citizens who visited the site and shared their memories and experiences at Tr'ochëk. Georgette McLeod and Myste Anderson of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Office provided the much needed logistical support and overall project organization and without their assistance the project would not have been possible.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elders Mr. Percy Henry and Mr. Edward Roberts shared their knowledge of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in history with the archaeologist and crew.

Chris Thomas (Heritage Branch summer student) provided assistance to the project in the 1998 and 1999 field seasons and helped supervise the excavations. Greg Skuce and Barb Hogan shared their past work at Tr'ochëk with the archaeologists and trudged through the site yet one more time in search of historic features. Michael Brand, Dave Burley and Michael Will of Simon Fraser University provided assistance to the archaeologist and crew, as well

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Helene Dobrowsky  
T. J. Hammer

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*Boiler remains from the turn of the century Sawmill at Tr'ochëk.*

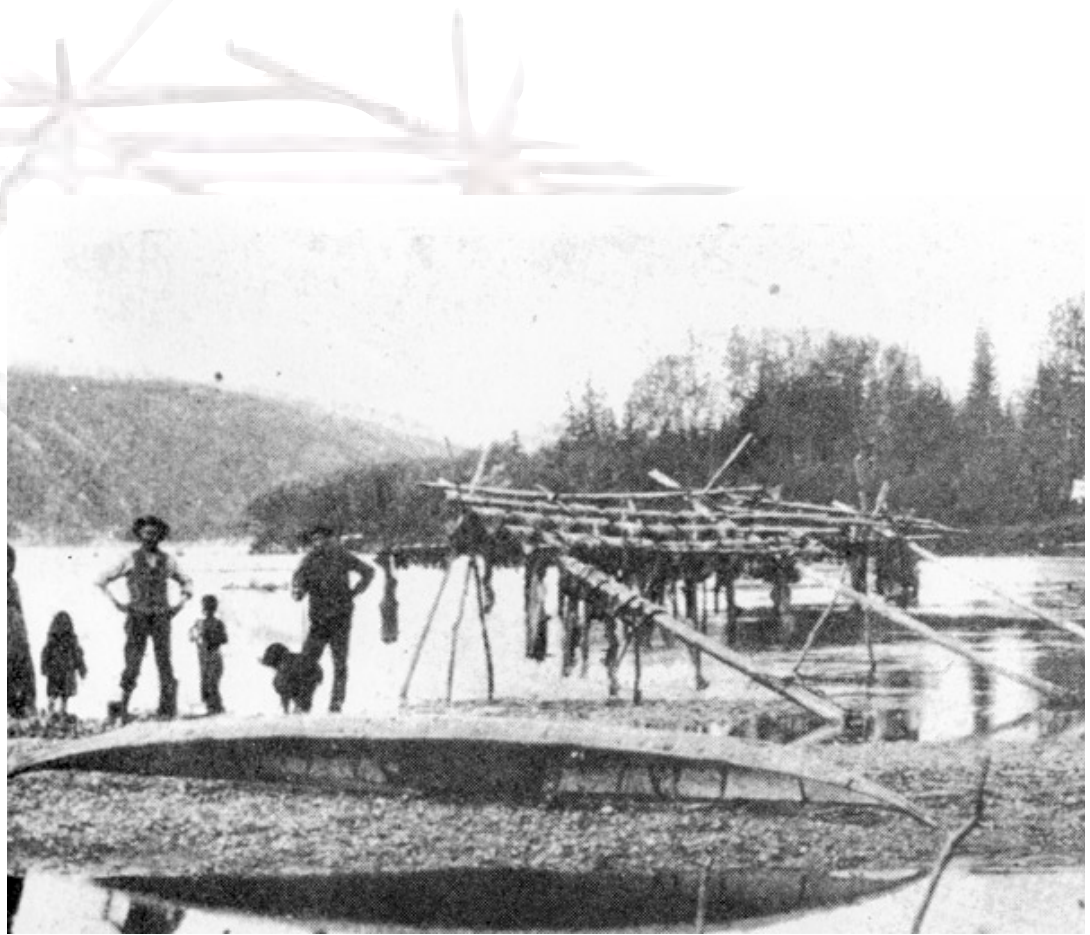
## Introduction

*[Lucy Wood] told me when she was a little girl that people used to cut fish over there and it's a homeland to them . . . it's their land. They argue about that so many times, that's where we originally from, everybody gathers there. If they go hundred miles away, you always come back to the same spot.*  
– DORIS ADAIR TALKING ABOUT TR'OCHĚK 1999

For millennia, the Hän-speaking people of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and their forebears lived and travelled in a vast territory extending from the Yukon River valley into the mountains to the north and south. The heart of their homeland, however, was a fishing camp at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers. This site, Tr'ochëk, was also an important summer gathering spot and base for moose-hunting on the Klondike River valley.

The Klondike gold rush brought many changes to the lives of the Hän people, including the displacement of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in from their traditional home. The village site became the infamous red light district of Lousetown and later, Klondike City, an industrial suburb of Dawson City.

In this booklet, you will learn of the many changes to the Tr'ochëk site over the past century,



the continuing relationship of the Hän to this special place, and how the archaeological work helps tell the story of the Hän and their lives at Tr'ochëk.

*Chief Isaac fish camp at Tr'ochëk, ca. 1896. Note the overturned birch bark canoe. Sether photograph, from Tappan Adney, The Klondike Stampede.*



*Part of the settlement at Tr'ochëk, 1895. YA, Coutts Coll., PHO 95.*

## Early archaeology in Hän country

A caribou antler punch, used to fashion stone tools, was discovered in the mucks of Hunker Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River. This 11,000 year old artifact is the earliest physical evidence of First Nations' use of the Dawson area. This was the end of the last great Ice Age when Pleistocene fauna, such as woolly mammoth and small horses, began to disappear from the landscape.

Our story continues at an archaeological site on an ancient river terrace overlooking the present day Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in village of Moosehide. The Moosehide site has revealed traces of ancient occupations dating back 8,000 years. At that time, the Yukon River was higher than present levels and wound its way through the largely treeless environment populated by large herds of caribou and bison and the hunters who pursued them. A few stone chips uncovered about 50 cm below the ground surface are the only traces of the first occupants at Moosehide.

In the soil layer above these ancient chips are the remains of a second episode of human habitation, dating from about 5,600 years ago. By this time, the Yukon River and its surrounding environment looked much like it does today. Numerous small, parallel-sided stone blades

referred to as microblades were collected from this layer. These tools, expertly crafted by the caribou and bison hunters, were insets for antler or bone spear points. The presence of obsidian – volcanic glass not available locally – is evidence that these hunters were part of a wider trade network linked to southwest Yukon and northern British Columbia. Other artifacts from this layer include lanceolate shaped stone spear points, fragments of mammal bone, stone hide scrapers and a notched cobble, probably a net sinker, that suggests people were beginning to fish on the rivers.



A third occupation occurs just under the present day ground surface. Radiocarbon dating indicates that people used this camp approximately 1,400 years ago. During this time, people relied on fishing much more than in earlier times but caribou were still an important food source judging by the bones left behind. This period of occupation at Moosehide also reveals significant changes in technology have occurred: microblades fell out of use some time after 4,500 years ago, replaced by a variety of notched and stemmed points made entirely of stone. Small tanged points are added to the armoury about 1,400 years ago heralding the first appearance of bow and arrow technology in the region. Metallurgy is a new technological innovation of this period as well, based on native copper traded from sources in the Copper and White River drainages to the southwest of Hän country. The production of copper implements and ornaments indicates direct Hän involvement in extensive networks of trade and exchange throughout Alaska and Yukon, and indirect contacts to the distant metal working cultures of Siberia.

*View of the present day village of Moosehide. The 8,000 year old archaeological site is on the lower terrace overlooking the village. Photo Jeff Hunston*



## Layers of time at Tr'ochëk

The Tr'ochëk site offers a view into the more recent archaeological history of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The site is on a triangular peninsula extending out of a steep bedrock hillside dissected by a slough and bordered by the Klondike River to the north and the Yukon River to the west. This peninsula was initially created by silt deposited by the muddy waters of the Yukon River. Periodic floods, resulting from the frequent ice jams and annual spring run off, added to the rising land mass.

The history of intermittent flooding allows archaeologists to view past occupations of Tr'ochëk in layers. During flooding episodes, as the water slowed, silt suspended in the floodwaters settled and gently blanketed the ground and the remains of abandoned campsites. In subsequent seasons, people would make their camps on the new ground created by the flood silts. At Tr'ochëk, the archaeologist and crew identified at least six different occupation layers (strata) in the area bordering the Yukon River. The thin, black lines or organic layers in the photograph are old ground surfaces separated by grey silt, which represent floods.

*Ceremonial dance in Dawson, 24 May 1901. Goetzman photographer. YA 6290/Roozeboom coll.*



*The layers of time at Tr'ochëk as seen in a excavation unit's wall profile; student Spruce Gerberding in background.*



*R.J. Nagano and Matthew Morgan discussing the finer points of excavation at Tr'ochëk.*

The flooding of Tr'ochëk not only created an excellent environment for the preservation of artifacts but also has, in essence, produced layers of time. This layering (stratigraphy) enables

archaeologists to isolate and identify discrete occupations (living floors) or occupational periods as reflected in the material left behind by the people using the site.



## Seasonal round

*[Lucy Wood] said this Dawson area use to be marsh country for moose, they hunt moose in this area, swamp. Lousetown use to be where they dry their fish and dry their meat when they go hunting. . . Lousetown too, they go up on the hill and they picked cranberries and blueberries in the fall time for their winter feed. Then they use to fish up the Rabbit Creek that they used to call it.*

– DORIS ADAIR, 1993

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in made their living on the land. People travelled between the rivers and creeks and the mountains, according to the season, harvesting fish, game, and berries. They devised ingenious tools and devices from wood, skin and stone to trap, hunt, net and store their food. Resources from the land also provided clothing, transport and shelter.

Their diet included large and small mammals and various edible plants. The caribou from two annual migrations were an important source of food and materials. One of the most prized and abundant source of food was the salmon.

*Left: Hän camp. Note dipnet at right. Yukon Archives, Tappan Adney Coll., 81/9, 77. Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections of McGill University Libraries.*

*Right: Constructing birch bark canoe at Moosehide. Washington State Historical Society, Curtis #46140.*

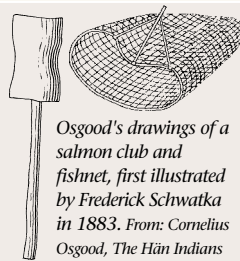


## Salmon fishing

*What my old man told me was that the people had fish traps at the mouth of the Klondike River, way before the white people came to this country. They used spears and it was a long skinny stick. They put a sharp bone on the end of the stick. When the salmon comes up, the people speared it. They threw them, the salmon to shore. The women were busy carrying fish and everybody shared.*

– STANLEY ROBERTS, 1987

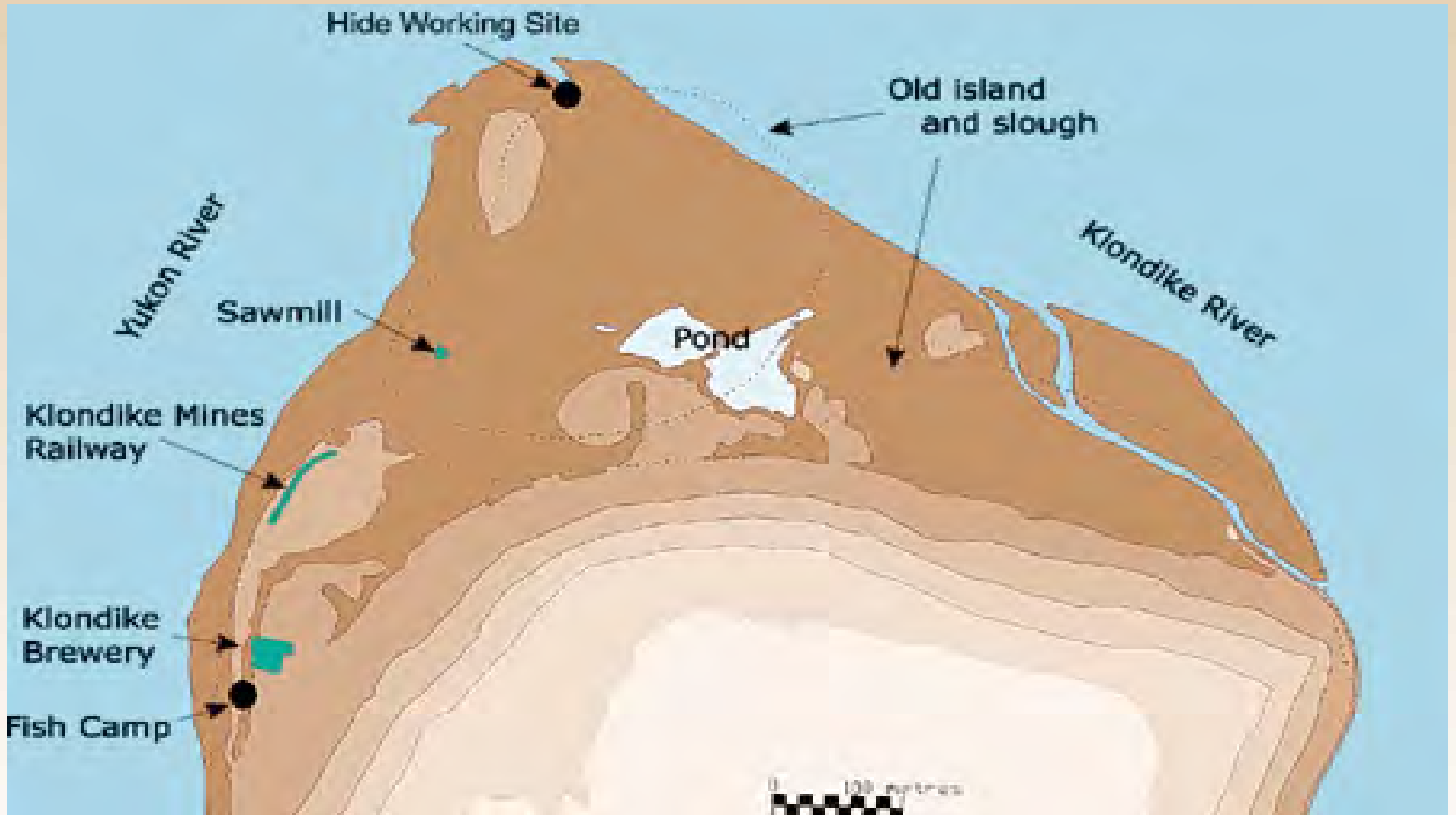
By late June, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in eagerly awaited the arrival of the salmon that migrated up the Yukon River from the Bering Sea to spawn in side streams and on shallow gravel bars. Two species reach the mouth of the Klondike River: the Chinook or king salmon, followed later in the summer by the smaller chum or dog salmon. As well as using fish traps and spears in shallower waters, Hän men steered their birch bark canoes onto the river where they scooped salmon with dipnets. Rowena Flynn told a story of many people wading into the shallow waters of the Klondike to gather fish in a large net woven from spruce roots. Women skilfully cut up the catch, smoke dried it, then cached the fish for future use.



*Osgood's drawings of a salmon club and fishnet, first illustrated by Frederick Schwatka in 1883. From: Cornelius Osgood, *The Hän Indians* (Yale University Press, 1971, pp. 67 & 69).*



*View of Tr'ochëk fish camp at the river's edge, 1894. YA/Veazie Wilson photo*



Map of the Tr'ochëk Heritage Site archaeological features

## The fish camp at Tr'ochëk

Elders identified Tr'ochëk as one of the principal salmon fish camps of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. During the initial archaeological testing, two places were identified as traditional use sites. One locality, situated along the Yukon River, was likely the main fish camp and covers an estimated 4200m<sup>2</sup>. What appears to be a hide working area is along the edge of the Klondike River.

The Hän mostly used fish weirs and basket traps to take salmon. These would likely have been set in the shallow, slow flowing slough running through the site. The slough is now filled in as a result of turn of the century milling and mining activities along the Klondike River.

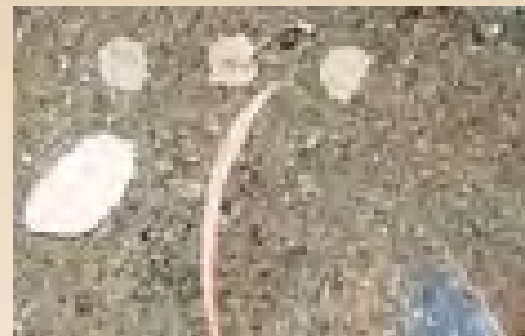
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elders Mr. Percy Henry and Mr. Edward Roberts visited Tr'ochëk many times during the archaeology program. They provided the crew with valuable information on the uses of the many large and small stone scrapers recovered, identifying them as hide and fish processing tools.

Around the 200-year-old pre-contact hearth at the Fish Camp locality, the archaeologists recovered fish remains including salmon scales, ribs and two otoliths or ear bones. Within the hearth, a matrix of hard packed ash yielded charred fish and mammal bones. Salmon ribs, up to 150 years old, were also found in the historic levels.

Even though the crew excavated less than one percent of the site, they found archaeological evidence attesting to the long use of Tr'ochëk as a fishing camp. These preliminary results indicate that there are significant archaeological resources at the site and still much to learn about daily life and activities at Tr'ochëk.



*These eight stone tools are referred to as end scrapers by archaeologists and were collected within the ancient hearth at the Fish Camp. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elders identified these implements as fish and hide processing tools.*



*These stone tools including microblades (the small blades) dated ca. 5,600 years ago are evidence of early First Nation's use in the Dawson Area. Salmon remains carefully excavated surrounding this fire place.*

*The orange area in this photograph represents the outline of the 200 year old hearth unearthed by the Tr'ochëk field crew. The remains of two posts are visible on the left and right sides of the photo, indicating a rack may have been placed over the hearth.*



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*Shane Christiansen holds up a large stone hide scraper that he uncovered while excavating a First Nation's historic period hearth at Tr'ochëk.*

*Tr'ochëk Crew excavating at the Fish Camp Locality. Left to right: Kyle Isaac, R.J. Nagano, Randi Henry, Matthew Morgan and Andy Isaac.*





## Hide processing at Tr'ochëk

A rare glimpse of a prehistoric hide-working area was revealed on the Klondike River side of the Tr'ochëk site. Four bone tools, including two awls, and two stone (schist) skin scrapers lay near a small hearth on a thin organic layer 60 cm below the present day ground surface. Taken together, the artifacts represent a hide processing tool kit.



*Excavations of the hide processing area along the Klondike River during 1998.*

The presence of caribou bone suggests that the hide processed was caribou. These animals were not only an important staple food for the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in but also supplied them with skins for clothes and dwellings, bone for tools, and sinew and babiche. A thin notch on one bone tool from the Hide Working site suggests that this implement may have been a



*Bone implements recovered from Hide Working area on the Klondike River side of the site. From top to bottom: bone awl, grooved bone netting needle, rib awl, and antler point fashioned by a steel knife.*

netting needle used in weaving and repairing sinew nets. Scattered rolls of birch bark represent the remains left from making birch bark baskets sewn together by spruce root and used to store berries and other foodstuffs.



*Hide processing implements recovered from Tr'ochëk. Top two artifacts are schist skin scrapers, bottom artifact is a classic "moose skin scraper".*

## Hän traditional territory



## Trade and the contact period

The Hän were accomplished traders and maintained a complex network of trade and exchange with their neighbours including Gwitchin people to the north, Southern Tutchone in the Kluane area, Northern Tutchone further upriver and Tanana to the southwest. People walked hundreds of miles to trade and visit over an extensive network of trails. The Hän traded birch bark, red ochre and salmon for the much sought after native copper, obsidian from southwestern Yukon, and dentalium shells from the Coast.

Long before the first white traders steamed up the Yukon River, the Hän were already using kettles, beads, tobacco and tea acquired through this trade network. The Hudson's Bay Company and American fur traders arriving in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century were met by shrewd entrepreneurs and quickly became integrated into the trade network of the Hän people.

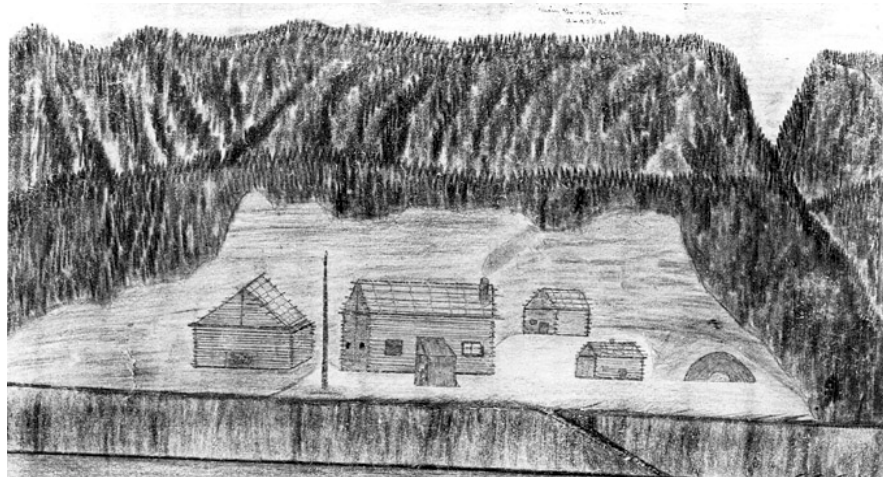
The first trading post in Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory was established at Fort Reliance in 1874. Over the next 10 years, more outsiders moved into the Yukon basin, seeking gold rather than fur. Yukon River traders began stocking mining supplies. A major gold discovery at the Fortymile River in 1886 drew hundreds of miners to this

Yukon River tributary and the lively settlement of Forty Mile sprang up at the mouth of the Fortymile River

Many First Nations people were drawn to the new community. Here they found new sources of income – providing meat and fish to the newcomers and selling them fur and skin clothing to withstand the cold winters. But there were also drawbacks. As the population increased, game moved farther from the Yukon River corridor, making hunting more difficult. Newcomers cut most of the firewood and

competed for fishing sites. There was the bane of alcohol supplied by the miners. Most tragically, the Hän had no resistance to diseases introduced by the strangers and many died.

Within a few years, life would change even more for the Hän people. When George Carmack, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie discovered gold on Rabbit Creek in August 1896, they triggered the greatest gold stampede in world history – the Klondike Gold Rush – and drew tens of thousands to the heart of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory.



*Drawing of Fort Reliance in 1884. University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska and Polar Regions Dept., Dr. Willis Everette coll.*

## The contact period at Tr'ochëk

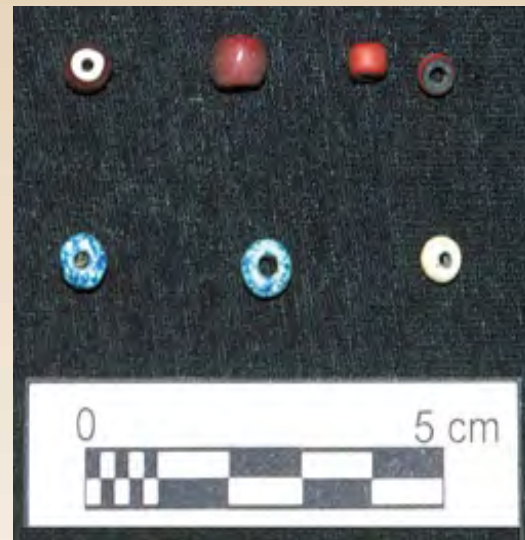
The archaeological record at Tr'ochëk offers archaeologists a glimpse into the turbulent period when the influences of the wider Euro-American culture were just beginning to be felt in Hän culture. The Hän proceeded judiciously in the trade for European goods. Items with obvious high prestige value such as glass beads were among the earliest European goods to be acquired by the Hän. Beads turned up in excavation of the Hide Working area at Tr'ochëk. European metal knives, which would have been available at the same time, were not being used because they were found to be inferior to traditional implements for hide working.

Opportunities to adapt and improve European trade items were not neglected. Several European manufactured objects recovered at Tr'ochëk were reworked into traditional types of tools. These included window glass fragments made into scrapers, and copper kettles dismantled and remade into knife handles and arrow points. In another interesting variation, European tools were used to shape bone and antler into traditional implements such as the 18 cm antler point created by a steel knife recovered from the Hide Working site at Tr'ochëk. The artifacts found to date provide intriguing insights into this complex period and lead us to wonder what other cross-cultural adaptations



*This hearth produced a number of First Nation and historic artifacts including window-pane-glass scrapers, remains of a copper kettle, trade beads, chert cobbles for making stone tools, and salmon, lynx and hare bone. Note the moose jaw bone.*

occurred during this time. The Tr'ochëk site provides an exceptional opportunity to investigate this period of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in history.



*Trade beads collected at Tr'ochëk.*



*Reworked copper piece of European origin, likely fashioned into a knife handle.*

## Profile: Chief Isaac

*My Dad [Chief Isaac] saw that they'd get civilized with that gold rush and was afraid that his people would learn bad habits from the white people, drinking and trouble like that. He wanted his people to be moved away from the city so he talked to government and got them moved three miles down to Moosehide.*

– PAT [ISAAC] LINDGREN, 1977

Chief Isaac was the leader of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in from before the Klondike Gold Rush up until his death in 1932. Elders agree that he came from somewhere on the "Alaska side." He spent part of his young manhood in the Fortymile area then married his wife Eliza and joined the people at the mouth of the Klondike River.

This highly-respected man did all he could to ease his people through a time of great turmoil and change. Chief Isaac made the decision to move from Tr'ochëk and worked with Anglican missionaries to negotiate the move to the relatively peaceful site of Moosehide.

He was skilled in the traditions of his people but also interested in the different ways and technologies introduced by the newcomers. In 1902, he travelled south by steamship as a guest of Dawson's three major trading companies to visit many of the coastal cities that the stampeders came from. Although a



member of the Anglican Church, he also honoured traditional ways and often played a leading role at potlatches in other communities.

Chief Isaac foresaw that his people would lose much of their culture as they were increasingly influenced by missionaries and non-native society. A famous story tells how Chief Isaac entrusted many Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in songs and dances to Alaskan people for safe-keeping. Today, as an important part of cultural renewal, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are relearning these songs and dances from their Alaskan neighbours.

Chief Isaac kept on good terms with Dawson residents who named him an honorary member of the Yukon Order of Pioneers. He never failed to let them know, however, that their prosperity came at the expense of his people. He frequently reminded the newcomers that by taking First Nations land, driving away game and dispersing his people, they had reduced a once prosperous and numerous people to poverty. While Dawson residents tended to disregard his message, they had great respect for this impressive leader.

*Hundreds of stampeder tents on the Tr'ochëk site and the west bank of the Klondike River, summer 1898. YA 2160/Vancouver Public Library Coll.*



STAMPEDERS CAMP, AND THE MOUTH OF KLONDIKE R., COPYRIGHT 1898

S. Hegg

## Klondike gold rush & displacement from Tr'ochëk

*Lousetown, old days is Indian town you know. Indian didn't want to get mixed up with white people so they moved down to Moosehide.* – JOE HENRY, 1993

The discovery of gold on Rabbit (later Bonanza) Creek in August 1896 signalled the beginning of Klondike Gold Rush; newcomers arriving at the mouth of the Klondike River soon occupied or staked every available piece of ground.

There are various stories of what happened at Tr'ochëk during this time. Miners bought some of the dwellings; many First Nations people thought that they were selling just the buildings, not the land beneath. According to one elder, some people were paid with gold-painted rocks. The end result was that the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in were displaced from their ancestral fishing village. Rafts of logs floating down the Klondike River destroyed the fish traps at the mouth. Developments such as sawmills put an end to salmon fishing at this traditional site.

Initially, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in moved across the river on to the land that became the police reserve. Through negotiations with Chief Isaac and the intercession of Anglican missionary, Bishop Bompas, the First Nation people arranged to move 5 km downriver to Moosehide in early

spring 1897. A few years later the Canadian government set aside a modest reserve for the community. When the first wave of stamperers reached Dawson after the break-up of the Yukon

River in late May 1897, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in were settled in their new home and their traditional village at Tr'ochëk became known as Lousetown.



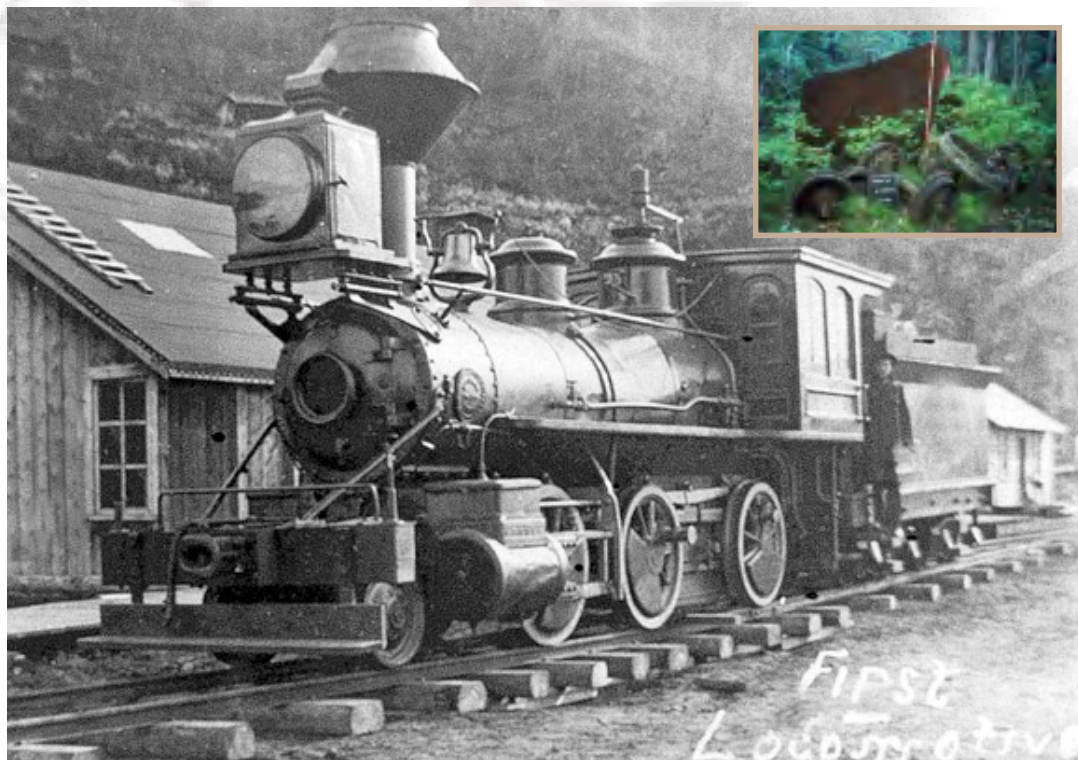
*Fish camp at Moosehide village, ca. 1898. YA, Tappan Adney coll., PHO 260, 45.*

## From Tr'ochëk to Lousetown to Klondike City

With the onset of the Klondike Gold Rush, the peaceful fishing village at Tr'ochëk transformed into a hectic gold rush town containing stores, saloons, a brewery, train yards, a large sawmill, a farming operation and the one-room "cribs" of prostitutes. Log cabins, shacks and caches were crammed in everywhere and even perched on platforms dug out of the hillsides.

The merchant and entrepreneur, Thomas O'Brien, a founder of the Yukon Order of Pioneers, was the main booster of the new community. Trying to shake the shady image of "Lousetown," he and a few others renamed the settlement Klondike City in October 1897. The new name better suited their dreams of a prosperous community, set to rival Dawson City as a commercial centre.

Unfortunately for O'Brien and his friends, the situation of the townsite was not ideal: there was little land suitable for building; the river at this point was too shallow to accommodate river steamers; and the main connection with Dawson City – a series of foot and wagon bridges – were regularly destroyed by heaving ice during spring break-up of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers. Finally, the end of the Gold Rush dashed any



hopes for the community. With the drop in gold production and population, Klondike City was virtually abandoned.

*Klondike Mines Railway locomotive at the rail yards in Klondike City. YA, Gaundroue Coll., PHO 17, 73.*

*Klondike Mines Railway tyre dump and snow plow remains at Tr'ochëk. (inset)*



## The Lousetown hillside

As the multitude of gold seekers arrived in the new town of Dawson, building space quickly became scarce and the population overflowed to surrounding areas and onto the steep hillsides. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than at Tr'ochëk.

With help from the Tr'ochëk archaeology crew, Michael Brand of Simon Fraser University undertook a two year project at Tr'ochëk and Dawson City to study the newcomers who made their homes on the hillsides. Period photographs show log cabins, wall tents and caches precariously perched on platforms along the steep hillsides. Along the bedrock face of the hillside, the archaeologists mapped 72 housing platforms interconnected by narrow trails.

The transient population put considerable effort into building the platforms for their temporary homes. First they would dig into the hillside. Then, using large cobbles that had eroded from hill, they built retaining walls and ledges extending outwards to make a level space on the steep slopes. With the platform complete, the more industrious constructed one-room log cabins while others simply erected pole framed wall tents. The housing platforms were interspersed with refuse dumps that tumbled down the hillside in great fans. Artifacts left behind by the



hillside dwellers – from their makeshift sieves, water buckets and candle holders all fashioned from tin cans, to the worn soles of their rubbers – indicate that theirs was indeed a humble existence.

*"In Lousetown". Hillside occupations during the Gold Rush. MacBride Museum Collection 92.93 X89.4.1A.836.*



## On the industrial side

In 1904, Thomas O'Brien began brewing the beer that "would make the Klondike Famous and Milwaukee Jealous." The O'Brien Brewing and Malting Company operated in Klondike City until 1919 when Dawson City fell under prohibition. The Yukon's first brewery produced a variety of beers and sodas for the many Dawson hotels and saloons and initially aspired to be the main northern supplier for Yukon and Alaska.

In 1998, Dr. David Burley and Michael Will of Simon Fraser University documented the brewery remains. Although no standing buildings remain, the archaeologists identified the three connected structures that made up the brewery and a small coopeage behind the plant. Within the buildings, large vat covers, a web of water pipes, and remnants of boilers were all that remained of the company's steam brewing process. Thousands of old bottles piled behind the brewery represent a collapsed bottle storage area.

Brewery workers collected used bottles from Dawson. Bottles with crown type closures, like today's beer bottles, were preferred. The most frequent type came from the Anheuser-Busch Company famous for their

*Left: Klondike City ca. 1901. The mouth of the Klondike River and Dawson can be seen in the background. YA 566/ National Archives Coll.*

Budweiser beer. Bottles rejected by the brewery were dumped in front of the plant along the Yukon River's edge. The broken glass makes walking this beach treacherous even today.

The archaeological investigation of the Klondike Brewery has shown that this is a valuable site for

documenting a unique Yukon industry. Other major sites relating to the Gold Rush occupations here that are yet to be investigated include the Klondike Mines Railway roundhouse, the O'Brien & Moran trading post and the "cribs" of the Klondike City red light district.



*The Klondike Brewery in its heyday. Klondike Mines Railway engines can be seen in the background. YA 564/National Archives Coll.*



## After the gold rush

*Town of Moosehide . . . used to be nice, nice place. Can see way down the river, you can see way up Dawson City to here. Boy, we never get flooded though. High, high bank there. And we get good water too. Cold water run year round there.*

— ARCHIE ROBERTS, 1993

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in remained at Moosehide after the Gold Rush seeking a balance between their traditional ways and the challenges of the new economy. As well as living on the land, people took seasonal jobs on sternwheelers, dredges, at wood camps and on the docks of Dawson.

At the Tr'ochëk site, a few Dawson gardeners raised vegetables and hay; otherwise it was virtually abandoned. Like Dawson City, it was periodically flooded during spring break-up but at Tr'ochëk, no one was around to clean up afterwards. Much of the shoreline along the Klondike River eroded, while the channel between Tr'ochëk and Klondike Island silted in. The link to Dawson was destroyed when the railway bridge washed away in the mid 1920s.



*Group of men at a potlatch in Eagle in the spring of 1907. Chief Isaac is just under the flag. YA 5781/Kates Coll.*



*View of the Anglican church, cabins and fish racks at Moosehide. YA, Anglican Church coll., PHO 380, 1342.*

## Selkirk people settle at Tr'ochëk

When new all-weather roads were built to Mayo and Dawson after World War II, sternwheeler service on the Yukon River ended. People from river communities moved away to be near roads, schools and jobs. During this time, a number of families from Fort Selkirk moved into the abandoned buildings at Tr'ochëk.

IN A 1999 INTERVIEW, RONALD JOHNSON TALKED ABOUT HIS FAMILY'S LIFE AT THE SITE: *In those days, we . . . more or less live off the land. My father would go up the river or back in the high country . . . and get a moose, and all the family would go in and pack out the moose, bring it down to Louse, Klondike City and mom would cut it up and dry it on the rack. We also did some salmon fishing here around in [Tr'ochëk]. Just a little bit up the river, Yukon River, around the bluff we have a fish net and we catch some king salmon or dog salmon, you call that chum salmon.*

*. . . We spent most of our summer holidays on Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in land, helping out with our parents. We would go out berry picking and we would pack water for our parents and cut wood. And then, come September, the federal government came around, or you would call them Indian Affairs, saying that . . . the children has to be sent to a residential school. At first we didn't like it and our parents didn't like it, but we were sent away anyhow.*



Lousetown in later years. A number of Selkirk First Nation families settled in this area.  
Provincial Archives of Alberta / P7171

## Land claims & mining claims

In the 1970s, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in joined other Yukon First Nations in starting land claims negotiations. Elders worked with younger people to document traditional trails, camps, and fishing sites within the traditional territory. In 1975, Tr'ochëk was identified as a significant cultural site. While land claims dragged on for nearly a quarter century, it became apparent that the Tr'ochëk site was in urgent need of more immediate protection.

From the late 1970s, several mineral claims were staked at Tr'ochëk and some mining activity occurred. The First Nation and numerous representatives from Yukon heritage groups insisted that a site of such cultural and historic importance should be preserved. Nonetheless, in August 1991, a placer miner leased the claims and began mining the site. When he stopped, approximately 3.3 hectares (8 acres) of Tr'ochëk had been disturbed and left covered by a large settling pond and great heaps of gravel.

Despite a petition to the Canadian government requesting that Canada stop mining activity at Tr'ochëk, no action was taken and it appeared additional mining was imminent. The heart of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in traditional territory was threatened with obliteration.



*The settling pond at Tr'ochëk, June 1995. Greg Skuce photo.*

## Tr'ochëk today

This story does have a happy ending. In May 1997, the First Nation announced that the Canadian government had purchased all mining interests on the site for approximately one million dollars. The ancient village site is to be protected “for all time” as Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in settlement land and a heritage site under the First Nation's final agreement.

Since the settlement, the First Nation and Parks Canada representatives have been working together to develop a management plan for the site. A community-wide oral history project has focussed on learning about the individual and collective past of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation members. This work has been augmented by research at libraries and archives. Archaeology work at the Tr'ochëk site funded by the Government of Yukon provided First Nations youth with a hands-on opportunity to learn about their heritage.

The story of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is one of adapting to a changing world. It is also about preserving and learning from the knowledge of the elders. It is the story of a people looking to the future while honouring the past.

*The [Tr'ochëk] Heritage Site will provide Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in a long awaited opportunity to preserve and share our history and culture in the Klondike. The site will complement efforts by Parks Canada in the region, which to date have focussed primarily on showcasing the Gold Rush. The [Tr'ochëk] Heritage Site will feature the full spectrum of heritage values in our rich and diverse ancestral homeland. This will be of tremendous value to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and all Yukoners.*

*“This is an excellent example of a Yukon First Nation Land Claims Agreement benefiting the whole community.” stated Chief Taylor.*

– TR'ONDËK HWËCH'IN PRESS RELEASE, 1997



Matthew Morgan and R. J. Nagano excavating the Hän camp along the Klondike River.



Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elder Mr. Percy Henry being interviewed by CBC Northbeat at Tr'ochëk.



Kyle Isaac and R.J. Nagano documenting their finds at Tr'ochëk



## The Tr'ochëk archaeology crew

The Tr'ochëk Archaeology project owes its success to the enthusiasm and hard work of the Tr'ochëk crew, made up primarily of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in high school students. Members of the crews between 1998 and 2000 included James Christiansen, Shane Christiansen, Andy Crowther, Adam Farr, Lonnie Farr, Spruce Gerberding, Randi Henry, Andy Isaac, Kyle Isaac, Alex Kormendy, James MacDonald, Matthew Morgan, and R. J. Nagano.

During the first year of work at Tr'ochëk, the crew surveyed the entire site, documenting and then mapping 133 historic features from old building outlines and railway embankments to potato digging machines and turn of the century baby carriages. They also carried out a shovel testing program along the banks of the Yukon and Klondike River, digging 137 small pits spaced 20-30 metres apart and up to 1.5 metres deep. Their hard work paid off, when they located the traces of two pre-Gold Rush Hän fish camps buried deep within the Tr'ochëk soils.

The second year saw the crew, joined by a Yukon College field school, carrying out excavations at the locations of the two fish camps. The Tr'ochëk crew learned to carry out systematic excavation and detailed recording of the numerous artifacts and

features they encountered. During this year, the crew confirmed the previous year's theory that a prehistoric component to the site existed by discovering a large hearth containing numerous stone tools.

The two and three year veteran field assistants returned during the third field season in the summer of 2000. During the short two-week investigations, they further excavated the pre-contact hearth along the Yukon River. The crew hosted an interpretation program, organized by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, where they welcomed visitors and explained the contribution of their archaeological work in uncovering the history of Tr'ochëk.



*Alex Kormendy shovel testing along the Yukon River during the 1998 field season.*



*Chris Thomas and Lonnie Farr documenting the stratigraphy of a completed excavation unit along the Klondike River.*



*Adam Farr excavating a traditional Hän dwelling at the Fish Camp site, Tr'ochëk.*



*Andy Isaac and Matthew Morgan (in foreground) excavating at Tr'ochëk.*



*Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elder Mr. Percy Henry (left) with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in office staff and site visitors viewing the pre-contact hearth at Tr'ochëk.*

