

→ Historic Sites ←



# BEAVER CREEK WALKING TOUR

**Yukon**



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## Introduction

**Nohts'eneh'jj tsin'jj choh ts'eninthän.**

(Upper Tanana - Scottie Creek Dialect)

**Dàyè yésóots'enindhän, dàkhwäts'enè'in yū.**

(Northern Tutchone - Snag Dialect)

**We are happy to see (all of) you.**

Beaver Creek, Yukon is located 35 kilometers (22 miles) southeast of the international border with Alaska. Beaver Creek has roughly 85 residents throughout the year and is home to the White River First Nation. White River First Nation is made up of two linguistic groups, Northern Tutchone and Upper Tanana. The Traditional Territory of the White River First Nation is extensive, expanding from the Kluane region in southwestern Yukon up towards Dawson City in the north and stretching east of Coffee Creek. The First Nation also has cultural and familial ties to neighbouring communities in the Yukon and Alaska.

Beaver Creek is situated at historic mile marker 1202 of the Alaska Highway, along one of the last stretches of highway to be completed in 1942. The community sits amongst the beautiful boreal forest and permafrost-laden boggy flats of sub-arctic terrain and is surrounded by magnificent mountains – Macauley Ridge to the East and Eikland Mountain and the Nutzotin Mountains to the South. This quaint border community is much loved by its residents, young and old. Beaver Creek is the most

# ➡ Historic Sites ➡

westerly community in Canada and is the last stop before entering Alaska and the first place to welcome you into the Yukon.

Beaver Creek was established in the 1940s during the construction of the Alaska Highway, when a semi-permanent camp was built here to support the American military regiments who were labouring to build the road. Once the highway was finished, the area attracted year-round residents who would provide services to highway travellers and establish a permanent community. The Canada Customs Agency began to operate out of this location in 1955, and gradually the community of Beaver Creek grew.

Snag, home to many Northern Tutchone families, was located East of Beaver Creek. In 1941, an airstrip was constructed near Snag as part of the Northwest Staging Route, a series of airfields in northwestern Canada. When the Snag airstrip was abandoned by the Canadian Government in 1968, many families in Snag moved to Beaver Creek.

Though the community of Beaver Creek didn't come to exist until the building of the Alaska Highway, the region has a far longer history. Oral history is supported by archaeological evidence found in the surrounding area, dating from recent times at least as far back as the late Pleistocene Period, some 14,000 years ago. The Little John Site located just north of Beaver Creek contains artifacts carbon dated to 13,720-14,050 years ago. Some descendants of the people who lived at this site now reside in Beaver Creek, Yukon. The oral histories of local Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone families connect back to a time when much of the Yukon was covered by glaciers, over 10,000 years ago.



## Beaver Creek Bridge



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Beaver Creek flows into Snag Creek which ultimately flows into the White River. Despite its name, beavers have not been seen in this creek until very recently. The community is located where the Alaska Highway crosses the creek, near the northernmost part of the creek itself. The original bridge was constructed by the United States Army in the winter of 1945-46. The workers poured concrete in sub-zero weather and had a heater under tarps to keep the concrete from freezing before it set. They only stopped work when the temperature reached close to -60°C (-76°F).

The original steel polygonal Warren-truss bridge was retired in 2005. An upgraded and standardized bridge replaced it to accommodate the ever-growing number of highway travellers.

The original Beaver Creek bridge in 1946.  
Photo: Yukon Archives, J. Quong fonds, 2006/140, 1-5-69



# White River First Nation Administration Building



White River First Nation's Chief and Council and administrative staff conduct business from this location. It was constructed in 2000 and solar panels were added in 2018. The building has offices, a board room, reception, and break room. The First Nation's logo, designed by Richard Peter, a member of White River First Nation, is displayed proudly over the entrance. White River First Nation has approximately 250 members in total. More than 40 live within the community of Beaver Creek, and many are employed by the First Nation.

Beaver Creek is not an incorporated municipality, so the White River First Nation Government is the local government in Beaver Creek.



White River First Nation  
Gathering Place



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Completed in 2023, this new gathering place is a space for events, celebrations, and workshops hosted by White River First Nation. Ask at the Visitor Information Centre to learn about events and programs hosted here.

Conceptual drawing by: Kobayashi + Zedda Architects





In 1962, the late Father Morisset built this church using prefabricated army buildings. Many of the so-called “temporary” structures put up during Alaska Highway construction are still in use today, as Yukoners repurposed them as garages, shops, residences, and churches – like this one and Our Lady of the Way church in Haines Junction. The central dome of this church is an old army Quonset hut relocated from Koidern, south of Beaver Creek, which was once the site of a telegraph repeater station. Father Rigaud, a late well-known priest in the area, had helped build the churches in Snag, Burwash Landing, and Haines Junction, before assisting Morisset with completion of Our Lady of Grace in Beaver Creek. The church has an occupancy of 25-30 people. Although Beaver Creek has never had a resident priest, services are still being offered every second and fourth Sundays of the summer months. The church can be opened for visitors. Stop by the Visitor Information Centre for more information and to request a viewing.



## Beaver Creek Maintenance Compound



Historic milepost 1202 marks the location where the final section of the Alaska Highway was completed, after over 2,000 km of road was constructed by soldiers working simultaneously from British Columbia and Alaska, finally meeting here at Beaver Creek. The soldiers of the 97th Engineers, a Black regiment within the segregated American military, were the first to arrive on 20 October 1942. They were followed soon after by the soldiers of the 18th Engineers. The staged publicity shot of Corporal Refines Sims Jr. and Private Alfred Jalufka shaking hands over the blades of their bulldozers was seen in newspapers around the world.

This grader station is the operations centre for Alaska Highway maintenance for the Beaver Creek area. Highway maintenance was initially the responsibility of the American military and was transferred to the Canadian military in 1946. Highway maintenance was turned over to civilian authorities in 1964 and the Yukon government took over from Public Works Canada in 1992.

The section of the Alaska Highway from Destruction Bay to the Alaska-Yukon border was reconstructed between 1992 and 2002. The route is heavily affected by ice-laden ground, and it takes around 40 years for disturbed permafrost to stabilize. As highway travellers can attest, techniques to quicken the stabilization process have met with varying success.



White River First Nation established a community greenhouse in 2007 as a northern food security initiative. Like other rural and northern regions, food security is an area of concern for residents of Beaver Creek. The community is several hours away from a conventional grocery store, and many residents travel to larger centers like Whitehorse to purchase supplies. Barriers to transportation are not limited to the cost of vehicle maintenance and fuel, and can include delays due to road closure in the event of severe weather, flooding or forest fires. To help relieve the stress of constantly needing to travel for food, the greenhouse was built to allow a space for residents to grow their own. Residents have grown potatoes, carrots, beans, and herbs in the greenhouse and on the land out front.

There is a long history of hunting and harvesting around Beaver Creek and many community members, especially members of White River First Nation, continue to eat traditional foods such as moose, caribou, fish, and berries. The community has discussed a variety of steps to address food security, including installing a cold storage facility in Beaver Creek, to preserve foods from the community greenhouse and garden along with traditional foods for consumption throughout the year.



The original Visitor Information Centre was built in 1969 to serve and assist the growing number of Alaska Highway travelers. The current building, built by Watson McKinnon, was officially opened in May 2000. The Visitor Information Centre features a collection of artworks by local artists and past residents, including members of White River First Nation. The Centre has information panels on local history as well as research on permafrost and its effects on the Alaska Highway.

This is the hub for connecting to what's happening in Beaver Creek. The Centre's staff are local residents, some of them long-time Beaver Creekers. This is a great place to stop, take a rest, and learn more about the history of the area. You can ask here about meeting local artists and connecting with the Beaver Creek community through local events and more. Friendly smiles and knowledgeable staff are eager to greet you and answer any questions you may have of our wonderful little border community.

Mukluks by Nelnah Bessie John. Photo by Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé





The Community Hall was built in 1965 and originally run by a committee of local residents, the Beaver Creek Community Club. It is now managed by White River First Nation. The Community Hall is made up of a multipurpose main building and a separate, adjacent indoor pool. The main building includes a gymnasium, library, commercial kitchen, communal dining area, and a curling rink. The post office and bank is usually run out of the back of the main building. The Community Hall is the primary gathering place for Beaver Creek residents.





Bordertown Garage and Museum is a quirky private collection of antiques, artifacts, and vintage cars owned by Sid van der Meer. Sid's home was originally built for late-White River First Nation Elder Billy Blair in the late 1960s. After Sid purchased the property, he quickly expanded and built several garages to house his collection of cars. He also constructed a museum in his backyard to store his ever-growing collection of Alaska Highway memorabilia, World War II artifacts, and other Yukon treasures.

Although this space is private property, Sid welcomes visitors to his home and offers guided viewings of the museum and his collections. To ensure Sid's availability, please stop by the Visitor Information Centre to express your interest in taking a tour prior to visiting the property.



- 1** Beaver Creek Bridge
  - 2** White River First Nation Administration Building
  - 3** White River First Nation Gathering Place
  - 4** Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church
  - 5** Beaver Creek Maintenance Compound
  - 6** Community Greenhouse
  - 7** Visitor Information Centre
  - 8** Beaver Creek Community Hall
  - 9** Bordertown Garage and Museum
  - 10** Nelnah Bessie John School
  - 11** Far West Plaza
  - 12** Westmark Inn Beaver Creek
  - 13** The Mini Mart (Beaver Creek RV and Motel)
  - 17** Buckshot Betty's Restaurant & Rooms
  - 18** Ida's Motel and Restaurant
  - 19** Beaver Motors
  - 20** Far West Holdings Ltd.
  - 21** 1202 Motor Inn
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  - 23** Beaver Creek Airport (CYXQ) and Stalberg Airfield
  - 24** Canada Border Services Agency
  - 25** International Boundary Monument

## **Emergency Services:**

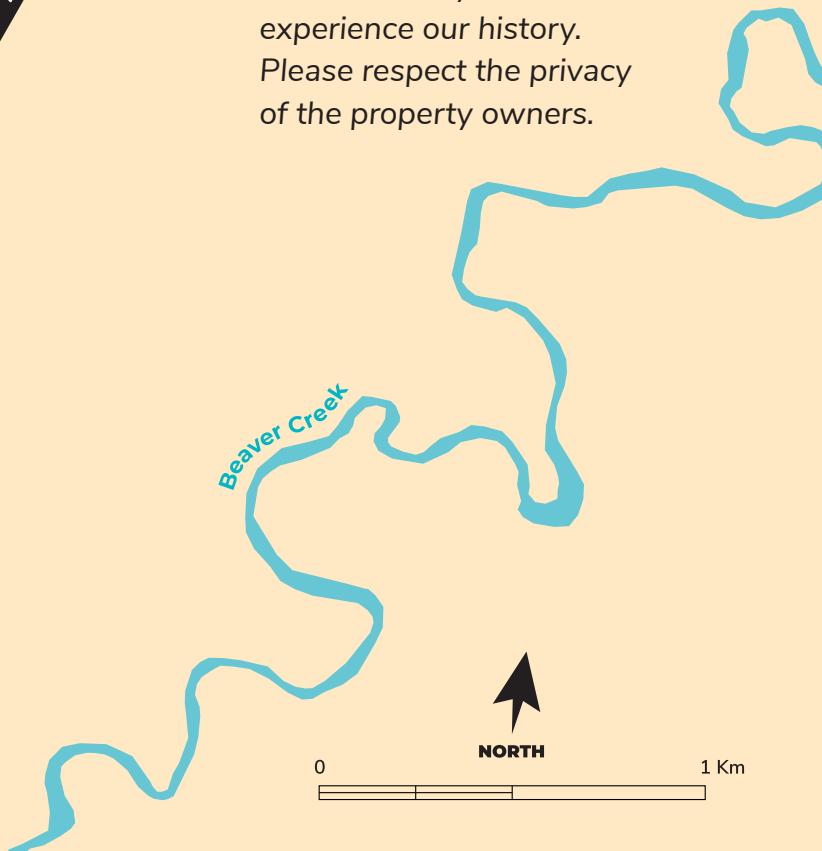
- 14 Fire Department
  - 15 Health Centre
  - 16 Police Detachment

What Northern Tutchone and Upper Tanana street names can you spot during your visit?



# BEAVER CREEK WALKING TOUR

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





Prior to the construction of this school in the early 1960s, students who attended school in Beaver Creek did so in an army canteen building. In 2004 the school was named in honour of the late-White River First Nation Elder Nelnah Bessie John. Nelnah Bessie John dedicated much of her life to teaching, preserving, and revitalizing the Upper Tanana language, specifically the Scottie Creek Dialect. After founding the Upper Tanana Cultural Society in 1988, Nelnah Bessie John began teaching Upper Tanana at the school in 1989. Retiring in 1993, she continued to work in culture and language instruction and was instrumental in compiling a glossary of the Upper Tanana - Scottie Creek dialect, completed in 1997. Northern Tutchone was taught at the school for many years by Elder Agnes Winzer. Today, the school has returned to teaching Upper Tanana. A mural is prominently displayed out front of the school and was painted by students, with the assistance of Yukon artist Helen O'Connor, to depict what they love about their community. The mural also features a tribute to Nelnah Bessie John.

The school accommodates a small but mighty crew of students from kindergarten to grade 9 and offers cultural activities led by White River First Nation Elders, including a muskrat camp in the spring.





The Far West Plaza was established in 1992 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alaska Highway's construction. It originally featured a monument designed by Glenn Stephen and Doris Johns to mark the meeting of the two US army regiments who completed the last stretch of highway in 1942. The plaza was created by the Beaver Creek Community Club and was reconstructed and expanded by Far West Holdings Ltd. in 1996, with funding from the Centennial Anniversaries Program. Sculptures were created by Tim Cant of local residents and displayed in the space, although they have since been moved. Two sculptures – depicting Beat Ledergerber and Roberta Dickson – now sit in front of the Beaver Creek RV and Motel. Three other sculptures now live at Bordertown Garage and Museum.

Today, the Far West Plaza includes a walking path near the Visitor Information Centre and runs along the front of several homes. These homes were built in the 1950s to house the Canadian Department of National Defence who had previously overseen the maintenance of the Alaska Highway prior to Yukon Highways and Public Works. The homes are now occupied by staff of the Canada Border Services Agency.



➡ (formerly) Westmark Inn  
Beaver Creek



This complex of buildings was originally built in 1955 by Clyde and Helen Wann as the Beaver Creek Lodge at Mile 1202 on the Alaska Highway. Clyde Wann owned four lodges along the Yukon stretch of the highway, and a 1958 Alaska Highway guidebook called this lodge the finest of the four. In 1957 the Wanns ordered a neon sign from Vancouver to promote the Lodge – it was striking to look at in red, green, and tangerine neon, though difficult to maintain. The Wanns sold the Beaver Creek Lodge to Westours, Inc. in 1961 and the name changed to Alas/Kon Border Lodge. The company was taken over by Holland America and the lodge became the Westmark Beaver Creek. As the business passed through several hands over the years, the complex grew to include hotel rooms, a restaurant, taxidermy museum, lounge, dinner theatre, mini golf, gas bar, and much more. The property is now owned by Beat and Jyl Ledegerber and forms part of the neighbouring Beaver Creek RV Park and Motel. Although the buildings are no longer in continuous use, the Ledegerbers have hosted concerts, weddings, and community events here.



## ►► The Mini Mart (Beaver Creek RV Park and Motel)



This building was originally constructed as the Canada Border Services Agency in the 1950s. Border Services was first located in a reconditioned army building at Mile 1206, north of present-day Beaver Creek. Sometime before 1950, Pete Eikland and Billy Blair constructed the next customs building at mile 1220.5. In 1958, border services were relocated to this building in the heart of Beaver Creek. For locals, this meant driving past customs in order to get to the other side of this small community. Tourists travelling the highway sometimes mistook the building for a gas station or fried chicken stand, and often drove right past. Customs officers would activate a light and siren in an attempt to stop them before they left town on their way to Alaska. After years of requests from Beaver Creekers to politicians, Canada Customs was finally moved out of the centre of town in 1983. It is now located past the Beaver Creek Airstrip. Moving it has not fully resolved the problems: the local garbage dump is past the border station and there are many harvest areas in the section between the border station and the border itself. Be sure to always stop and report to border services on either side of the border.

This building was originally located across the highway from here and was moved to this spot in the 1980s. It is now the Mini Mart and is the main hub for the Beaver Creek RV and Motel, which includes the former Westmark Beaver Creek. The Mini Mart is home to Coffee Time, an occasional community gathering where coffee is served. The song “Coffee Time in Beaver Creek” was a popular musical number performed in the Beaver Creek Rendezvous – a dinner theatre hosted at the Beaver Creek Lodge during its Westmark days.



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## Fire Department



Photo: Diyet van Lieshout

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## Health Centre



Photo: Diyet van Lieshout

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## Police Detachment



## Buckshot Betty's Restaurant & Rooms



Photo: Diyet van Lieshout

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Buckshot Betty's Restaurant & Rooms is owned and operated by Carmen, also known as Buckshot Betty, a local entrepreneur and chef. Buckshot Betty has spent most of her life in the Yukon and has called Beaver Creek home for many years. Buckshot Betty's Restaurant & Rooms has undergone a full renovation in 2010 which expanded the restaurant to include a bar, gift shop, and patio. Buckshot Betty's or Buckshot's, as locals refer to it, offers homecooked meals and quaint accommodations.





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Ida and Gene McCabe constructed a log building in 1958 as the first Ida's Motel. A fire destroyed the structure in 1961. The motel was rebuilt and became a social hub for Beaver Creekers during the 1960s and 1970s. During these years it was one of the only restaurants that stayed open during the winter months, making it a gathering place for community and holiday celebrations. Several more fires hit in the years since, and the motel underwent several reconstructions over the years. The most recent was in 2004 and has remained as is to this day.

## Beaver Motors

Beaver Motors was built in 1957 by local aviator Jack Stalberg to serve highway travellers and locals with mechanic services, towing, and gas. In 1967, Beat Ledergerber constructed the buildings you see today. From 1966 to 1970 Beat was the Beaver Creek fire chief, and the garage served as the original firehall, housing the first fire truck in Beaver Creek. Beat operated a garage out of the space until the 1980s. Beat and Jyl, his wife, converted Beaver Motors to a residence and the business is no longer in operation. It remains a private residence today.

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Photo: Diyet van Lieshout



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Far West Holdings Ltd, an automotive shop and former towing service station was built in 1967 by Freddy Pride as a Texaco gas station and garage. The property was sold to Al Morgan who in 1970 transferred ownership to Walt Dryke and Carl Michaels. The Dryke-Michaels and Lemley family still own and operate the garage today. This is a priority stop for many truckers on their way to and from Alaska.

 **1202 Motor Inn** 

1202 Motor Inn was built by Dell and Sally Mickelson in 1988. Dell was a log-home builder and used logs from the Snag Valley and Haines, Alaska to construct the building. Dell passed along his knowledge of log-home building to local residents who went on to construct several log-homes around Beaver Creek. Perhaps you can spot them on your walk-through the community!

Dell and Sally sold the business to the Beatty's, a local family, in the 1990s and it is now owned by Colleen May. 1202 Motor Inn is named after the mile marker of Beaver Creek and includes a gas station, small grocery store, food services, bar, and hotel rooms.

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Photos: Diyet van Lieshout

## Ddhälh kít Nelnah Studio & Stsăay Ch'ídzüü' Camp



Ddhälh kít Nelnah, also known as Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé, is a member of White River First Nation and a visual artist and curator. She has converted an old Apollo motorhome into an art studio and has created a hide tanning camp with her Grandma Marilyn John, also known as Stsăay Ch'ídzüü'. This camp marks the revitalization of traditional hide and fur tanning within the community, the knowledge of which has been passed down through countless generations.

Beaver Creek has a large population of local artists, who work in beadwork, wood carving, knifemaking, painting, canoe building, traditional tool making, amongst various other media. Visit the Visitor Information Centre to learn more about the local arts community.

Ddhälh kít Nelnah Studio & Stsăay Ch'ídzüü' Camp is private property but Teresa welcomes visitors throughout the spring and summer months. Stop by the Visitor Information Centre and ask if Teresa is in Beaver Creek or look for an open sign outside the camp's entrance along the Alaska Highway.

Cut moose hair (below). Photos: Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé



## ► Beaver Creek Airport (CYXQ) ◀ and Stalberg Airfield

Photo: Diyet van Lieshout

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Well-known aviator, the late Jack Stalberg, constructed the airfield and runway in the 1960s. He leased the land from the government, cleared 500,000 square feet of land for the runway and maintained it at his own cost. The Yukon government eventually took over maintenance in 1971 and the terminal opened in 1982. The airfield was dedicated to Jack Stalberg in 1998, and Stalberg was awarded the Order of Polaris in 2016, in honour of his significant contributions to Yukon aviation.

The airport is used primarily by the Canada Border Services Agency as a point of entry, as well as for medivacs (medical evacuation services), and by industry. The only permanent plane residing at the hanger is owned by Beat Ledergerber.

## ► Canada Border Services Agency ◀

The Canada Border Services Agency has been located in or near the community of Beaver Creek since 1946, including being located near mile marker 1220 for several years. The current building, located about 2 miles north of Beaver Creek, opened in 1983. Located over 26km from the border, this Canada Border Services Agency is the furthest from the international border itself. Staff and officers of the Agency reside in the community of Beaver Creek and often see thousands of travellers during the summer months. The Agency is open 24 hours a day year-round.

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# International Boundary Monument



Photo: Sally Robinson

The field workers of the International Boundary Commission marked this point as they surveyed and cleared the international boundary along the 141st meridian between the United States and Canada between 1906 and 1913. Monuments like this one were placed at regular intervals along the border. This monument was recast after 1925. An impactful view presents itself here, as a large strip of forest has been cut to represent the boundary. This line of cleared land stretches along the border from the Arctic Ocean to the Wrangell Mountains.

The US Border Inspection Station is located just across the border from here, at Alaska Highway Milepost 1221.8. In 1971 it was relocated from Tok, Alaska, 90 miles (140km) from the actual border to Little Scottie Creek, an Upper Tanana community known as Ts'òogot Gaay.

Despite the challenges of the border's forced division of families and land, White River First Nation members have maintained their connections with relatives and lands on both sides of the international border. This is a place where Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone People have lived for millennia, and trails lead from here in all directions across their Traditional Territory, to camps, villages, harvest areas, and across the mountains, to Northern Tutchone, Tanacross, Ahtna, and Han relatives. The White River First Nation has occupied this area from time immemorial and the hills, bodies of water, and valleys have a deep history and relationship with White River First Nation. The community of Beaver Creek asks you to respect the land you are on and to travel safely to your next destination.



# NOTES



Thank you to the following for their contributions:  
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Beat and Jyl Ledergerber; Sid van der Meer; Sally  
Robinson, and; Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé.

If you have additional information, please contact  
the Government of Yukon Cultural Services Branch  
at 867-667-3458.

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Photos: Government of Yukon unless indicated.