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# OLD CROW WALKING TOUR

**Yukon**



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## A Brief History

Old Crow is named after Chief Crow May I Walk, Deetru' K'avihdik, a respected chief who died in the 1870s. Located at the confluence of the Crow and Porcupine rivers, the village of Old Crow is the most northern community in Yukon. It is part of the Traditional Territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation: the people of the lakes. The area has an ancient history of human occupation, and the Gwich'in are responsible caretakers for this land. Today, residents of Old Crow combine traditional and modern lifestyles—travelling the land to trap, hunt and fish while also incorporating new occupations and continuing the development of self-government.

Old Crow was established on the site of a productive fish camp and close to the migration route of the Porcupine caribou herd. In the early 1900s, catechist and community leader John Tizya, built a camp at the mouth of the Crow River, and this site eventually became the village of Old Crow. According to the late Vuntut Gwitchin Elder John Joe Kaye, people began to live at Old Crow in 1904 and the first trader opened for business in 1911. By the following year, three families were using Old Crow as the base for their seasonal activities. In 1918, the Anglican minister Reverend Toddy recommended the construction of a mission building and, soon after, more Vuntut Gwitchin families moved to Old Crow—many from Rampart House.

# Historic Sites

Rampart House was a trading post and community on the Porcupine River directly beside the border between Yukon and Alaska. It was located approximately 80 kilometers (50 miles) down river from Old Crow.

One reason people may have chosen to relocate from Rampart House to Old Crow was the newly enforced restrictions on the movement of goods and people at the Canada-U.S. border. As well, late Elder Charlie Peter Charlie Sr. has suggested that the trading posts at Old Crow were convenient for Gwich'in trappers trading furs after the spring harvest in Crow Flats.

In 1995, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation was among the first Yukon First Nations to settle a land claim and sign a Final and Self-Government Agreement. This thriving community of about 300 people is governed by the Chief and Council of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.





1

The John Tizya Centre was custom-built in 2008, complete with displays on the culture, history and traditions of the Vuntut Gwitchin. The centre is a multi-use facility offering educational opportunities for community members and visitors. The centre houses offices for the North Yukon Renewable Resources Council, Vuntut Gwitchin Government Heritage Branch, Vuntut National Park and Government of Yukon Social Services.

The centre was named for the late John Tizya, an early inhabitant of Old Crow. He was a catechist and one of the first Gwich'in to learn to read and write in English and Gwich'in. John married Sarah Chisson and together they raised seven children. Their lineage remains strong, with descendants throughout Canada and Alaska. Staff at the John Tizya Centre offer interpretive walks and exhibit tours, so be sure to visit while in Old Crow. This is also the place to receive your stamp as part of Yukon Gold Explorer's Passport contest.



The Old Crow Research Facility with solar panels is located beside the John Tizya Centre.



## Sarah Abel Chitze Building



The Vuntut Gwitchin Government administration building was constructed in 2000 and is named in honour of Elder Sarah Abel Chitze. Sarah was a well-respected spokesperson for the First Nation who provided advice and leadership on many issues. She passed away on August 14, 1998 at the age of 102. Her last recorded speech was on her 100th birthday on April 10, 1996. The administration building houses the Vuntut Gwitchin Government departments of Housing and Government Services, Finance and Human Resources, Education, Natural Resources, Information Systems, Health and Social Programs, and the offices of the Executive and Chief and Council.



## Kenneth Nukon Cache



This cache belonged to the late Kenneth Nukon and it stands today as a symbol of the traditional way of life. Caches of this type were commonly used to store meat, fish and fur supplies. They were also used for personal belongings such as snowshoes, hunting gear and harnesses that could not be stored inside a house in winter.



## Edith Josie House



This was the home of Old Crow's world famous journalist, the late Edith Josie. In 1963, the Whitehorse Star began printing Edith's newspaper column, "Here are the News," about life in Old Crow. Edith started writing her column to share news about her community. According to Edith, "People have to get together and tell funny story and laugh". The column gained widespread popularity for its charming insight into northern life. It was syndicated to the Toronto Telegram and the Fairbanks News-Miner and was translated into several languages, gaining Edith fans throughout the world.

Edith Josie was born in Eagle, Alaska and moved to Old Crow with her family around 1940—they had walked for six months to get there. She was recognized nationally for her work, receiving the Canadian Centennial Award, the Order of Canada and a National Aboriginal Achievement Award. Edith Josie's last column was published in 2005 and she passed away in 2010. A selection of her Whitehorse Star articles has been published as a book, *Best of Edith Josie, Here Are the News 1963-1964*.





## Old Crow Community Garden



5

Despite the community's location north of the Arctic Circle, Old Crow residents started a community garden in 2011. Volunteers plant seeds, care for the garden and share the produce they grow. The gardeners have produced lettuce, kale, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini and beautiful flowers. They look forward to many seasons of experimenting with northern gardening.



## Alice Frost Community Campus



6

The Alice Frost Community Campus is a satellite campus of Yukon College. It first opened in 1987 and, after moving several times, the community campus now has its own building with two spacious classrooms and offices. Strong partnerships with the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Chief Zzeh Gittlit School have ensured the success of programming in Yukon's most northerly community. The campus is named in honour of Alice Frost—the late Elder, former Chief and strong advocate for education. Her leadership led to the construction of the community campus building.





## Alfred and Helen Charlie House



7

This was the home of active community members Helen and Alfred Charlie, who passed away in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Alfred served as Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation from 1968 to 1972 and Helen served for years on the council and with the Women's Auxiliary. Their six sons, who were raised in this house, were renowned for their hockey skills. They were a force to be reckoned with at the annual Native Hockey Tournament held in Whitehorse. Helen Charlie took pride in her yard and her sons continue the tradition.



## Victor Peterson House



8

Victor Peterson's house was completed in 2013. All of the logs for this house were shipped to Old Crow from British Columbia. Peterson's experimental house is an example of four new log-homes in the community.



## Martha Benjamin House



9

Martha Benjamin's house was built in the 1970s and renovated in 1991. Martha is an avid cross-country skier; she began her skiing career at the encouragement of the late Father Jean-Marie Mouchet. In 1963, at the age of 25, she won the Canadian cross-country ski championships. Although she trained for the Olympic Games, she left competitive skiing and returned to Old Crow. There, along with her late husband RCMP Special Constable Peter Benjamin, she focused her energy on raising seven children, on community service and, later, on her grandchildren.



## Antler Pole



10

Old Crow's antler pole was erected by Stephen Frost Sr. in the 1980s. Over the years, the pole has become an icon of Old Crow. Yukon artist Jim Robb featured the pole in one of his prints.

## ➤ Nursing Station Warehouse ➤



This warehouse temporarily became a school house after a fire destroyed the school building in 1963. Students who were in grades seven and eight at the time recall their teacher playing guitar and fiddle music to keep them engaged. The oil-burning heater would regularly stop working in the morning, causing the teacher to cancel class for the day. Many years later, the retired teacher discovered that a student had been sneaking into the heater room and shutting off the heater. The building is used as a warehouse for the nursing station.

## ➤ St. Luke's Anglican Church ➤



YG Photo

St. Luke's Anglican Church was built in 1959 to replace the community's original church. In 1985, the Most Reverend Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, visited the church and praised the North's ecumenical spirit. This log building echoes with memories from the past and the voices of those who ministered to the people of the region. Past Gwich'in ministers include John Tizya, William Njootli, James Simon, Joseph Kyikavichik and his daughter, Ellen Bruce. Reverend Bruce was ordained in Old Crow in 1987. She was the second Aboriginal woman in Canada, and the first in the North, to be ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church. She held an honorary doctorate in divinity from St. Stephen's College in Edmonton. She was also named to the Order of Canada for her outstanding achievement and service. Reverend Dr. Ellen Bruce died in 2010; since then, local deacons have continued to provide clergy services for the community.



This church was built in 1926 to accommodate the growing congregation in Old Crow. The Anglican minister Reverend Moody moved from Rampart House to Old Crow around 1923. The congregation built a residence for him, from where he also held services and taught school. In 1926, Reverend A. C. McCullum was ordained in Old Crow and this church was built with local assistance. It has not been used as a church since St. Luke's was built in 1959.

The church is named for Archdeacon Robert McDonald, who ministered to this region for 42 years. Robert McDonald became an Anglican priest in 1853 and was posted to the North in 1862. McDonald was a gifted linguist and translated the Bible, prayer book and hymnal into Gwich'in. Reverend McDonald married Julia Kutuq, a Gwich'in woman, in 1876 and their descendants continue to live in the North.



Photo: Archbould Photography



14

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Corporal Arthur B. Thornthwaite was posted to Rampart House in 1926. Three years later, he and the detachment were relocated to Old Crow. Thornthwaite, Sidney May and Special Constable Fox, a police carpenter from Dawson, used logs to construct the first Old Crow detachment building. The RCMP detachment patrolled an area of more than 27,000 square kilometres (17,500 square miles). Personnel included two police officers and a special constable, who served as a guide and interpreter. More recently, a local auxiliary officer assists three RCMP members to operate the station. The oldest building in the compound dates to around 1963.

The boat outside the detachment was used by the RCMP in the 1940s. Marshal McKinnon was a boat captain during his post to Old Crow and recalls using the boat to patrol the Porcupine and Yukon rivers as far as Dawson. Restoration of the boat is ongoing.



## Chief Peter Moses Centennial Hall



YG Photo

15

This building was constructed as a community hall in 1966-67 with logs that were barged up the Porcupine River on the MV Brainstorm. It commemorates the late Peter Moses who was chief in Old Crow for 18 consecutive years (1936-1954). It is also named the Centennial Hall to mark its construction during Canada's 100 year centenary. During the Second World War, Chief Moses and his people sent money to London, England to support children who had lost parents in the bombing raids. For this honourable gesture, Chief Peter Moses received the British Empire Medal in 1943, which he accepted on behalf of his people. The medal and associated letters can be viewed in the Sarah Abel Chitze building. The Chief Peter Moses Centennial Hall was used as the base for land claims negotiation, and then Department of Natural Resources until 1998. Today, it houses the community fitness centre.

## Community Hall



16

The community hall was built in the early 1980s. Old Crow citizens gather here for meetings, potlatches, annual gatherings, workshops and dances. Inside, photographs of community Elders, past and present, are hung on the walls in family groups to illustrate family connections.



## Old Crow Youth Centre



17

The youth centre was constructed in the early 1990s to provide youth in the community with a building of their own. The centre offers after-school programs, fun nights and small concerts. It also houses the local radio station. The logo on the outside was painted by a local youth artist, Dale Kakfwi.



## Old Crow Ski Chalet



18

The Old Crow Ski Chalet is located across the runway from “downtown” Old Crow. The ski chalet promotes skiing activities for all ages. There are two-, five- and eight-kilometre ski trails in the foothills behind the chalet. The strong tradition of cross-country skiing in Old Crow dates back to the 1950s when Father Jean-Marie Mouchet shared his passion for the sport. The Territorial Experimental Ski Program (TEST), initiated by Father Mouchet, produced national champions from northern Aboriginal communities, including Old Crow. Father Mouchet, who spent 25 years in Old Crow, passed away in 2013.

In 1972, the ski complex was dedicated to the people of Old Crow and, later, in loving memory of Dean Feist and Don Doll, who died when their plane crashed. The two men were caribou biologists respected for their collaborative work with the people of Old Crow.



## Crow Mountain Road

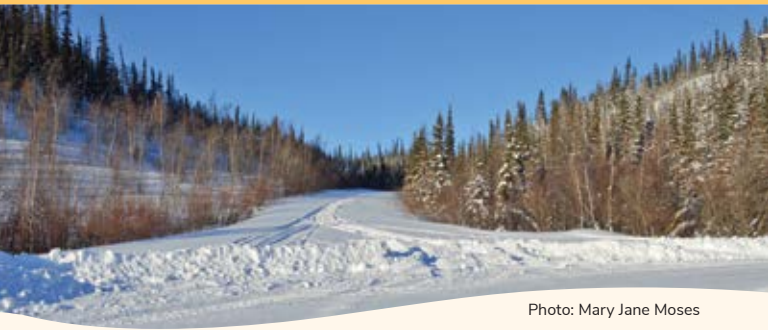


Photo: Mary Jane Moses

Crow Mountain Road, at the north end of the community, makes a good route for a hike. This 2.5-kilometre gravel road winds up the side of Crow Mountain and is accessible year-round. The road was built over an existing trail to Crow Flats; families used to travel with dogs, equipped with dog packs, to hunt caribou or pick berries on Crow Mountain. Crow Mountain Road continues to provide local access for hunting caribou, harvesting berries and travelling to Crow Flats.



## Island Trail



Photo: Mary Jane Moses

This moderately challenging one-kilometre trail is located at the northeast end of the community and leads up to Crow Point. The trail winds along the east side of Old Crow Island and back into Old Crow via a slough located below the skating arena.



# OLD CROW WALKING TOUR

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

- 1 John Tizya Centre
- 2 Sarah Abel Chitze Building
- 3 Kenneth Nukon Ground Cache
- 4 Edith Josie House
- 5 Old Crow Community Garden
- 6 Alice Frost Community Campus
- 7 Alfred and Helen Charlie House
- 8 Victor Peterson House
- 9 Martha Benjamin House
- 10 Antler Pole
- 11 Nursing Station Warehouse
- 12 St. Luke's Anglican Church
- 13 Archdeacon McDonald Memorial Church
- 14 RCMP Detachment and Boat
- 15 Chief Peter Moses Centennial Hall
- 16 Community Hall
- 17 Old Crow Youth Centre
- 18 Old Crow Ski Chalet



