



There's nothing drab about Dawson City. | ARLENE AND ROBIN KARPAN PHOTOS



The paddlewheeler graveyard, where once magnificent riverboats were left to die, is popular with tourists.

Dawson City still known as Canada's icon of the North

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Dawson City is a fundamental part of the Canadian psyche. Just think of the

North and this icon of the Klondike Gold Rush springs to mind.

In the late 1800s, it seemed that the entire world was stampeding to the Yukon, where fortunes were both made and lost.

Almost overnight, Dawson City became the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg, complete with larger-than-life characters, and where writers the likes of Robert Service and Jack London transformed Yukon into a land of mythic proportions.

Visiting today provides a taste of

those heady times, with much of the town restored to the gold rush glory days. Don't expect a staid museum piece; we found the Dawson City of today just as intriguing as its illustrious past.

Parks Canada's Then and Now walking tour sets the stage. We wandered the wooden sidewalks accompanied by a guide, who talked about the present, and along the way kept meeting another guide in period costume who played different Klondike-era characters.

While some historic buildings are museums, most are still used as businesses. Impossible to miss is the gaudy pink Westminster Hotel. Built in 1898, it has long been the town's most famous watering hole. Its bar is known as the Pit, though previously the two parts of the bar were called the Snake Pit and the Arm Pit.

Those who prefer drinks on the exotic side can stagger over to the Sourdough Saloon in the Downtown Hotel, home to the infamous Sourtoe Cocktail. The drink is gar-

nished with a human toe, and to drink it properly, the pickled toe must touch your lips. As Robert Service observed, "There are strange things done in the midnight sun..."

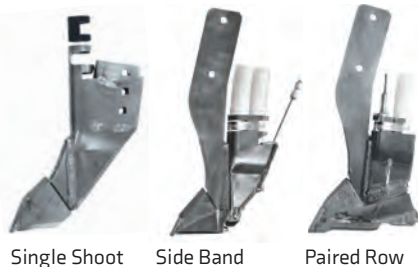
The most popular night spot is undoubtedly Diamond Tooth Gerties, noteworthy as Canada's first legal gambling hall. Nightly performances feature gold rush era entertainment including high-kicking can-can dancers, and songs by Gertie herself, a mythical character who was said to have a

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Food guide has little influence, study finds

BY BARBARA DUCKWORTH
CALGARY BUREAU

RED DEER — Most Canadians know a food guide exists but it may not make much difference in their meal choices.

"What I am reading from this is the food guide is completely detached from our own reality as Canadians. That is a huge problem," said Sylvain Charlebois of Dalhousie University.

Partnering with the University of Guelph, he was one of the principal authors of a new report analyzing the impact of the new guide released last month.

More than 1,000 Canadians were surveyed to test their awareness of the newest version as well as how applicable it might be. The authors also analyzed the costs for an average family of four following the guide.

The new guide could cost a family \$26 each day versus \$28 under the old guide but that will change over time. Food waste was not considered in this survey. Money spent at food service was not calculated although it is known Canadians spent about a third of their budget on meals outside the home.

In two to three years, the gap will narrow and disappear by 2022.

"Our message to Health Canada is savings are not going last," he said at the Alberta Beef Industry Conference held in Red Deer from March 12-14.

The guide encourages eating more plant-based proteins like beans and lentils. Canada exports most of these and imports billions of dollars

worth of fruit and vegetables.

"If the Canadian dollar tanks we are going to pay even more. We have a very vulnerable population relative to fruits and vegetables," he said.

"The food guide was a missed opportunity for Health Canada to really make a difference in Canadians' lives while considering what we actually grow and produce in this country," he said.

General awareness was also assessed.

They found 91 percent know there is a food guide but only 74 percent were aware of a new version. The least aware was Ontario while the most aware lived in Atlantic Canada.

More people, especially the younger generation, are not likely to consult the food guide when making meal choices.

The respondents rated family and friends as their number one source for food and nutrition information.

This was followed by general research, social media, cookbooks and television programs, followed by celebrities like actors and chefs seen on TV.

"The Canadian food guide is number six in terms of how influential it is," he said.

The leading barrier to adopting the new recommendations was a perception that the new guide is not affordable. Others said the food did not fit their taste preferences or dietary needs.

"People don't see how they can put it into practice," he said.

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During the Klondike Gold Rush in the late 1800s, Dawson City became the largest Canadian City west of Winnipeg.

diamond wedged in her teeth, and who used her charms to relieve miners of their gold.

A few blocks away sits the simple cabin where Robert Service lived. Known as the “Bard of the Yukon,” his poems such as *The Cremation of Sam McGee* popularized the gold rush and the Canadian north.

Almost next door is Jack London’s cabin, moved here from where the young, yet to be famous writer, tried his hand at prospecting. London struck it rich, not by gold mining but through his books such as *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, inspired by his Yukon experience.

Paddlewheelers were once the lifeline of the Yukon River, although today the Klondike Spirit is the only one running. It takes tourists cruising from Dawson City to the paddlewheeler graveyard, where once magnificent riverboats were left to die, and to the confluence with the Klondike River. The young woman providing the cruise commentary

covered Dawson City’s history, but even more interesting were her tales of life today. She lives in West Dawson, just across the river from Dawson City. Unlike the main town, this area is completely off-grid, with no power or other utilities and long winter hours spent cutting wood and melting snow for water.

Getting into town from West Dawson in summer is easy on the ferry, and in the dead of winter it’s possible to cross the frozen river. Things get tricky in spring and fall when there’s too much ice for the ferry and not enough to walk across. Residents must be well-stocked with supplies.

A helicopter comes for medical emergencies, although there was one drawn-out spring when residents chartered a chopper when they were running perilously low on beer.

For the ultimate in off-grid living, our guide showed us a Canadian flag stuck into the ground and an upturned canoe on the shoreline. It marked the home of Caveman Bill who lives in a riverbank cave. It seems that Dawson City hasn’t lost its touch when it comes to colourful characters.



For more information, check out www.travelyukon.com.

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