



## The Land of the Midnight Sun

Established 1898  
2nd Territory

### Did You Know?



- Yukon is home to the world's smallest desert. The Carcross Desert is a stretch of sand dunes that covers an area less than 260 hectares (642 acres).
- The word *Yukon* comes from an Athapaskan word meaning "the great river." The Yukon River is one of the longest rivers in the world, at 3,187 kilometres (1,980 miles) long.
- There are almost as many caribou as people in Yukon!
- More than two thousand glaciers are found in Kluane National Park, including Lowell Glacier, which is 65 kilometres (40 miles) long. The Kluane Icefield, located in the Saint Elias Mountains, is the largest nonpolar ice field in the world.
- The Signpost Forest in Watson Lake began in 1942 when a homesick U.S. army soldier working on the Alaska Highway put up a sign with an arrow pointing to his hometown and the number of miles to get there. The idea caught on and today around 100,000 signs decorate the highway.
- The Dempster Highway is the only public highway above the Arctic Circle that is open year-round. Located mostly in Yukon, it runs 720 kilometres (447 miles) from Dawson, Yukon, to Inuvik, Northwest Territories.
- In the summer near the Arctic Circle, it stays light outside so long that Yukoners can read outside at midnight without a flashlight!

### Quick Facts



**Capital city:** Whitehorse

**Population:** 37,492

**Total Area:** 482,443 square kilometres (186,272 sq miles)

**Population Density:** 0.07 persons per square kilometre (0.18 per sq mile)

### The Place



#### Climate

Most of Yukon has a *subarctic* climate, with long, cold winters and short, warm summers. Yukoners joke that there are only two seasons in the territory: this winter and last winter! Because the climate is also very dry, snowfall is not usually heavy. Temperatures are warmest in the south, where the average winter temperature is  $-19^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-2^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and the average summer temperature is  $14^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $57^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). The northern part of the territory, along the Arctic Coast, has an arctic climate and is much colder than the south. This arctic land contains *permafrost*, where the ground is permanently frozen year-round, so very few plants can survive there. In far northern Yukon, it is dark for almost the entire winter. However, during the short summer months, the sun doesn't set at all.



#### Average Seasonal High and Low Temperatures

Spring:  $3/-9^{\circ}\text{C}$

Summer:  $20/8^{\circ}\text{C}$

Fall:  $-2/-10^{\circ}\text{C}$

Winter: -14/-23°C

## Geography

A little larger than the state of California, Yukon covers an area of 482,443 square kilometres (186,272 square miles). The territory is shaped like a triangle and shares its western border with Alaska. The landscape of Yukon is made up of a series of high *plateaus* (flat highlands) surrounded by long mountain chains and deep river valleys. Yukon's mountains are part of the Cordillera Mountain range, which stretches all the way along the west coast of North and South America.



Yukon's three main regions are the Western Cordillera, the Interior Plateau, and the Eastern Cordillera. The Western Cordillera covers the southwest portion of the territory and includes the Saint Elias Mountain range. The highest point in Canada, Mount Logan, is found in the Saint Elias Mountains. The Interior Plateau is in the centre of the territory and is located between the mountain ranges. The Yukon River, the second longest river in Canada, runs through this region and then crosses through Alaska to empty out into the Bering Sea. The Eastern Cordillera includes the Selwyn and Mackenzie mountain ranges.

## Wildlife

Unlike other areas in Canada, Yukon has remained home to many of the animals that lived there before Europeans arrived. Herds of caribou, grizzly and black bears, wolves, and coyotes are all still found across the territory. Eagles, falcons, and hawks also make their homes in Yukon. In the north, near Herschel Island, polar bears are found in small numbers.



## Flora and Fauna

### Common Animals

- Arctic ground squirrel
- Bald eagle
- Beaver
- Black bear
- Canadian lynx
- Caribou
- Elk
- Fox
- Gray wolf
- Great horned owl
- Grizzly bear
- Moose
- Mountain goat
- Muskrat
- Pine marten
- Ptarmigan
- Raven
- Red squirrel
- Snowshoe hare
- Thinhorn sheep

### Common Plants

- Arctic lupine
- Balsam poplar
- Black spruce
- Felt-leaved willow
- Fireweed
- Labrador tea
- Lodgepole pine
- Lowbush cranberry
- Mountain cranberry
- Northern goldenrod
- Prairie crocus
- Quaking aspen

Wolverine

**Endangered Animals**

Little brown bat  
Northern long-eared bat

**Endangered Plants**

Yukon draba

**Environmental Issues**

**Climate Change**

As the earth’s atmosphere warms, Yukon’s *permafrost* (frozen ground) and glaciers are melting. Global warming is causing higher year-round temperatures, with winters in particular becoming warmer. It is also causing more precipitation in the winter and more extreme weather events in both winter and summer, such as heavy summer rainfall and thunderstorms. Territorial researchers are working to understand this problem better so that solutions can be found. Strategies focus on decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. These pollutants speed the process of global warming. Teaching people what they can do to help is also a part of the strategy. The warming climate trend is expected to continue for many years.



**Bears**

Mainly black and grizzly bears live within the territory’s boundaries. Education about bear safety is available to the public to limit the number of bear encounters. However, conservation officers report that encounters are increasing, and they are asking the public to be more careful about bear safety, especially when throwing away trash. Bears enter residential areas in search of food. When residents do not take care of their garbage properly, bears come after it. Especially in the fall, bears seek out food because they are preparing to hibernate for the winter. Unfortunately, because of the danger involved, some bears are killed in order to protect neighbors, but many people are hopeful that increased public awareness of bear safety will prevent further attacks.



**Resources and Industries**

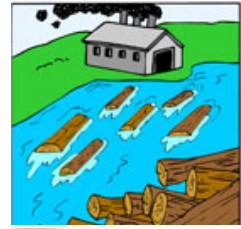
**Agriculture**

The cold, dry climate of Yukon is not ideal for farming. The growing season is very short, and most farmers mainly stick to growing crops to feed their livestock.



## Manufacturing

There are some saw and paper mills in the territory as well as several *hydroelectric plants*, which provide the water power needed to run these mills.



## Mining


Mining is the main industry in Yukon and has been ever since the Klondike Gold Rush. Gold was the main mineral mined in the territory for many years until the middle of the 20th century, when zinc and lead mines took over. Zinc is used to strengthen steel and keep it from rusting, while lead is frequently used to make car batteries and bullets.







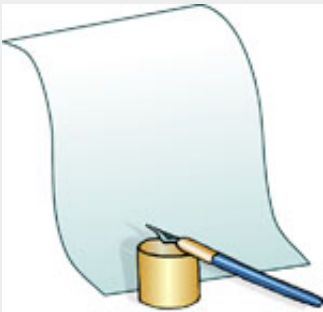

## History



### Time Line

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>10,000 BC</b>  |  |
| 10,000 BC   | Natives live in what is now northern Yukon and hunt caribou with <i>atlatis</i> (spear-throwers) |
| 1200  | Bows and arrows appear for the first time in what is now Yukon                                   |
| <b>AD 1800</b>  |  |
| 1825  | John Franklin explores the Arctic shore  |
|  |  |
| 1842  | Fort Frances trading post is built by Hudson's Bay Company fur trader John Campbell              |
| 1848  | Robert Campbell establishes Fort Selkirk   |

|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1860s       | Missionaries arrive in Yukon   |    |
| 1867        | Canada acquires Hudson's Bay land, and Alaska is sold to the United States                                   |   |
| 1895        | Yukon becomes an official district of the Northwest Territories  |   |
| 1896        | Skookum Jim, George Carmack, and Dawson Charlie strike gold on Bonanza Creek in the Klondike Valley          |    |
| 1898        | The Klondike Gold Rush begins; Yukon becomes an official Canadian territory, with Dawson City as its capital |  |
| <b>1900</b> |  |   |
| 1900        | The White Pass and Yukon Railway opens; the town of Closeleigh (later Whitehorse) is established             |   |
| 1911        | A <i>residential</i> (boarding) school for native children opens in Carcross                                 |   |
| 1919        | Silver and lead mines open at Keno Hill  |   |
| 1942        | Construction of the Alaska Highway begins  |  |
| 1953        | The capital is moved from Dawson City to Whitehorse  |   |

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1973        | Elijah Smith and Yukon First Nations chiefs travel to Ottawa to begin working on Yukon Land Claims  |  |
| 1989        | Audrey McLaughlin becomes the first female leader of a national political party—the New Democratic Party (NDP)  |  |
| 1993        | The Council for Yukon Indians signs the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement with the federal government, giving Yukon’s First Nations peoples rights to their land and self-government |   |
| 1996        | The territory celebrates the 100th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Yukon  |  |
| 1998        | The territory celebrates its <i>centennial</i> (100th anniversary)  |  |
| <b>2000</b> |   |  |
| 2003        | The Yukon Act is updated and the name of the territory is changed from Yukon Territory to Yukon   |  |
| 2004        | Yukon legalizes same-sex marriage   |  |
| 2012        | A mining rush increases the population and housing prices in Whitehorse   |  |

**PRESENT**

**Crow and Wolf**

Today’s Yukon First Nations peoples descend from two separate clans: Crow and Wolf. These two clans are *matriarchal*, meaning mothers are the head of each clan. When children are born, they belong to their mother’s family. For thousands of years, young adults were instructed to marry someone from the opposite clan. Crow married Wolf, and Wolf married Crow. This way there would always be strong ties between the two powerful clans. Both clans hoped these ties would help avoid war. Yukon First Nations peoples lived off the land and hunted caribou and moose, using their meat and skins for food and temporary shelter. Crow and Wolf people believed that everything in the world had a spirit and with every spirit came certain powers or gifts. They felt it was each individual’s responsibility to develop their spiritual powers and talents to help the clan or community.



**Fur-Trading Forts**

Russian explorers travelled along the Alaskan coast in the 18th century. They mainly stayed in the Alaska area, however, and did not trade much with Yukon First Nations peoples. Soon after the Russians, Hudson's Bay Company and independent American traders reached the area and began setting up fur-trading forts such as Fort Frances and Fort Selkirk along the Yukon River. *Aboriginal* (native) groups already had well-developed trade networks between themselves. Soon, these native peoples began trading fur for European goods, such as tobacco, guns, metal goods, and blankets. The Tlingit First Nation often ran trade negotiations between First Nations peoples and European traders. However, the native way of life was quickly changing as Christian missionaries came to Yukon. These missionaries set up schools and churches to teach and convert the natives. Many *aboriginals* died from smallpox, measles, and other European diseases they had never been exposed to before.



### Klondike Gold Rush!

The gold rushes in California and British Columbia convinced prospectors that there must be gold in Yukon. In 1896, Skookum Jim, his sister Kate, and her husband George Carmack discovered gold nuggets in Bonanza Creek near where the Yukon and Klondike rivers met. In no time at all, thousands of people poured into Yukon in search of gold. These people became known as *stampedeers* since they caused a stampede of gold diggers to come into the area. Many *stampedeers* traveled across the Chilkoot Pass from Alaska and across the Coast Mountains into Yukon. In fact, so many crossed the pass that the North West Mounted Police had to set up a post at the top of the Chilkoot Pass to maintain order and to monitor what *stampedeers* brought into Canada. After crossing the pass, *stampedeers* had to build a boat to sail across Lindeman Lake and down the Yukon River to Dawson City. By 1898, about 40,000 people were living in Yukon, and the Canadian government declared it an official territory, with Dawson City as its capital.



### The Alaska Highway

During World War II, the Americans feared that the Japanese might attack Alaska. The U.S. government wanted to move troops north to Alaska, but there were no paved roads on which to travel. At first, the Canadian government did not want to spend money and labour on building such a road. But the American government promised to turn over the Canadian portion of the highway to Canada after the war.



In 1942, American military and Canadian *civilian* (non-military) workers began construction on the Alaska Highway. Many First Nations peoples worked building the highway, and many Yukon women ran camps to feed and support the workers. The highway began in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, and stretched north through Whitehorse, Yukon, and over the Alaskan border into Fairbanks. By the time it was finished just eight months later, the Alaska Highway was 2,446 kilometres (1,520 miles) long and considered a wonder of engineering.

### A New Capital

Whitehorse became the construction headquarters during the building of the Alaska Highway. After its completion, many of the workers stayed in Whitehorse, and the city quickly grew. The White Pass and Yukon Railway brought more people and industry to Whitehorse, linking it to other business and transportation centres throughout Canada. The city was growing so much that in 1953, the Canadian government moved the territorial capital from Dawson City to Whitehorse. A few years later, lead and zinc mines were discovered in nearby Faro. Whitehorse's place as the focal point of the territory was firmly settled.



### Yukon Umbrella Agreement

Unlike many other First Nations peoples in the rest of Canada, Yukon First Nations never signed treaties giving away their land to the federal government. Since the 1970s, they have been negotiating with the government to gain full rights to the land that is theirs, specifically the rights to the natural resources located on that land. In 1973, Elijah Smith formed a political group called the Yukon Native Brotherhood and published a document titled *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. This pamphlet outlined their land claims in Yukon and asked the federal government for *compensation* (payment) for the *aboriginal* (native) lands it had used.



In 1991, the Council of Yukon First Nations, representing all the fourteen Yukon *bands* (tribes), signed an umbrella agreement with the federal government. It was called an umbrella agreement because it covered all the *bands* in the territory. The agreement was meant to give the First Nations of Yukon land, hunting and fishing rights on that land, and some federal money to be used for education, housing, and health care. In 1993, four of the fourteen bands signed a final umbrella agreement, which gave 12 percent of Yukon land to the First Nations to divide among themselves. It also allowed them to form their own local governments and to decide how they wanted their lives to be run.

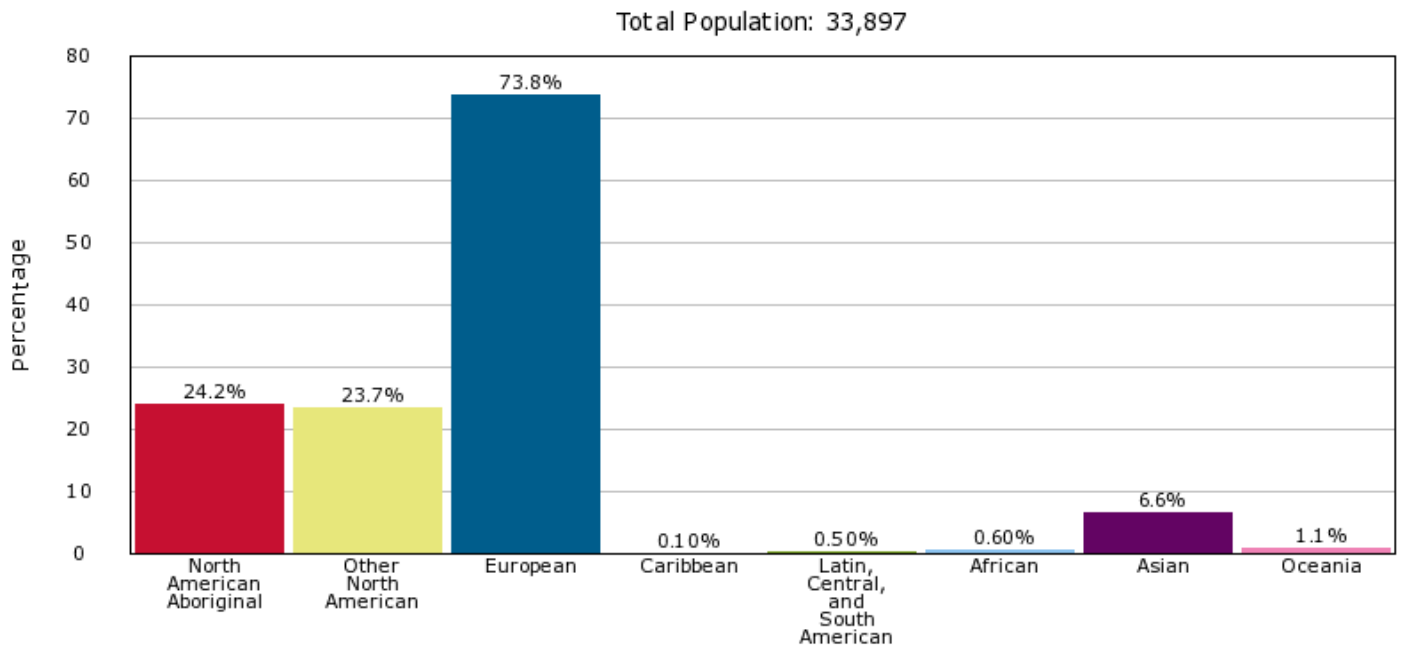
## The People



### Population

The population of Yukon hasn't changed much since the gold rush days. The majority of Yukoners live in the capital city of Whitehorse. The rest of the population is scattered around in smaller towns like Watson Lake and Dawson City. Though it has the second smallest population in the country (after Nunavut), Yukon is home to a large First Nations population. Altogether, native peoples make up around a quarter of the total population. Around three hundred Vuntut Gwi'chin people live in Old Crow, which is also the only Yukon community north of the Arctic Circle. The smaller settlements of Upper Laird, Two Mile Village, and Two and a Half Mile Village all have 100-percent native populations.





Canadians may belong to more than one group. Totals may not equal 100%.

## Government

### Federal

#### Senators: 1

Conservatives: 1

#### Members of Parliament: 1

Liberals: 1

In Canada, members of Parliament are elected from across the country. The leader of the party that wins the most seats in the House of Commons becomes the prime minister. The prime minister is the head of government in Canada. The monarch (today, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom) is leader in name only. She appoints a governor-general to be her representative in Canada. The role of this governor-general is largely ceremonial. In Canada, there are two separate lawmaking bodies, the House of Commons, which is made up of elected members, and the Senate, whose members are appointed by the governor-general under the advice of the prime minister. The House of Commons debates and votes on *bills* (proposed laws). The Senate carefully examines the *bills* and decides whether to approve, change, or reject them. For a bill to become law, it must be passed by both the House of Commons and the Senate and be given *royal assent* (approval) by the governor-general.

### Territorial

**Capital:** Whitehorse, population 23,276

**Territory Abbreviation:** YT

**Premier:** Sandy Silver (Yukon Liberal Party)

**Commissioner:** Doug Phillips

**Members of the Legislative Assembly:** 18

**Female MLAs:** 7

The commissioner of Yukon is appointed by the government of Canada and holds a position similar to lieutenant-governor in the provinces. The territory has an elected legislative body, the Legislative Assembly, which represents voters and elects the premier and a Cabinet. Each Cabinet member is placed in charge of a department such as education, health, or environment. The Cabinet members advise the premier, while the Legislative Assembly makes the laws.

## Key Issues

### Mining

Yukon's most important industry is mining. A gold rush took place in the territory many years ago, but gold is no longer the leading mineral. Many other minerals have been discovered since that time, including zinc, silver, and copper. Companies are spending money on exploration so that they can discover the untapped minerals. The government manages mining activities to make sure the environment and people are protected. But the exploration is encouraged because it provides jobs for many people and improves the economy. The growing industry offers many advantages to the people of Yukon.



### Health Care

Yukon suffers from a shortage of healthcare workers and doctors. The federal government gives more funding to Yukon's healthcare system to improve the quality of care and to encourage doctors to practise there. Yukon's government wants to give residents more access to family doctors. Sometimes doctors will work in Yukon for a couple of years and then close their practices. Then, other doctors fail to reopen these practices, and residents are unable to get local health care for their families. Yukoners are hopeful that more funding will give doctors and hospitals the support they need to permanently offer quality health care in Yukon.



### First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal Peoples

Yukon is home to fourteen First Nations peoples, who speak eight different languages, which are Gwich'in, Han, Upper Tanana, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tlingit, Tagish, and Kaska. The First Nations peoples represent a quarter of the total territorial population. Today it is very important to Yukon *aboriginals* (natives) to protect their culture and way of life. One way they do this is by holding regular *potlatches* (gatherings), at which they get together to sing, dance, feast, and play games.



One of these traditional games that has remained popular with young people is stick gambling. Stick gambling is played in two teams. Both teams kneel facing each other, and each player hides an *idzi* (token, often a small stone) in one hand. Drummers play a beat behind the teams, and when the drums stop, team members must guess which hand is holding the *idzi*. A stick is awarded for each correct guess, and the team with

the most sticks at the end wins.

## Famous People



**Tahmoh Penikett**

- *Laura Berton* – Writer
- *Pierre Berton* – Writer
- *Chief Isaac* – Moosehide chief
- *Robert Service* – Poet
- *Edith Josie* – Gwi'chin journalist
- *Audrey McLaughlin* – Politician
- *Tahmoh Penikett* – Actor
- *Sam Steele* – Mountie
- *Skookum Jim* – Co-discoverer of gold



**Robert Service**



**Sam Steele**



**Skookum Jim**

## Cultural Notes



## Yukon Quest

The Yukon Quest is a 1,690-kilometre (1,000-mile) dogsled race that is held every February. The race route stretches through the Arctic wilderness, going from Whitehorse, Yukon, to Fairbanks, Alaska, one year and from Fairbanks to Whitehorse the next. The route follows the path the gold rush and mail delivery took in the early 20th century. Each team has a *musher* (driver) and 14 dogs pulling the sled. The race lasts for two weeks and has one rest stop halfway along the course at Dawson City, Yukon. The Quest crosses frozen rivers and four mountain ranges and tests each *musher* and dog to the edge of their endurance. The winner takes home around \$30,000. *Mushers* between the ages of 14 and 18 can compete in the Junior Yukon Quest, which is a 217-kilometre (135-mile) version of the race that starts and ends in Fairbanks.



### Sourdough Rendezvous

The Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous is a week-long festival held every year in the capital city of Whitehorse. The festival began as a celebration of the coming of spring and the territory's gold rush history. Yukoners from all over the territory come to Whitehorse to celebrate, and many dress up in colourful gold rush costumes. The festival has many gold rush-themed contests, from beard growing and chainsaw chucking to flour packing and poetry reciting. The local shopkeepers join in by decorating their stores to look like old-time gold rush shops, and *cancan* (chorus line) dancers in long skirts and petticoats entertain festival-goers all over town.



## Fun Facts & Contacts

### Official Emblems

#### Territorial Flower

##### Fireweed

This reddish-purple flower grows from midsummer to early fall. It is called fireweed because it is one of the first plants to start growing again in burned out areas.



#### Territorial Bird

##### Raven

One of the smartest birds in the world, the raven is the largest member of the crow family. It plays a role in First Nations legends as the being that first brought light to the world.



#### Territorial Tree

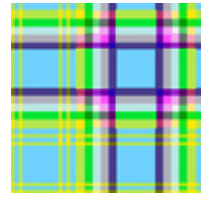
##### Sub-alpine Fir

This tree usually grows at high altitudes and is often used as a Christmas tree because of its beautiful shape and smell. Its needles are rich in vitamin C, and early inhabitants of Yukon used them to make a lemon-flavoured tea for curing colds.



## Territorial Tartan

The blue represents the sky, while the green symbolizes the territory's forests. White stripes stand for snow, and the yellow ones represent gold. Magenta is the colour of fireweed, Yukon's territorial flower, and the darker blue represents the mountains.



## Territorial Coat of Arms

The *malamute* (husky) was widely used as a sled dog in the early days of the territory. The cross of Saint George represents the early English explorers who came to Yukon. The circular pattern in the middle of the cross is called a *vair*, and it symbolizes the fur trade. The wavy lines symbolize the Yukon River and the creeks of the Klondike. The two red spikes stand for the territory's mountains, while the gold circles inside them symbolize mineral resources.



## Major League Sports Teams

There are currently no Major League sports teams in Yukon.

## For More Information

To learn more about Yukon, see [www.gov.yk.ca](http://www.gov.yk.ca). Or contact the Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Yukon, Box 2703, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2C6; phone (800) 661-0494; web site [www.travel yukon.com](http://www.travel yukon.com).

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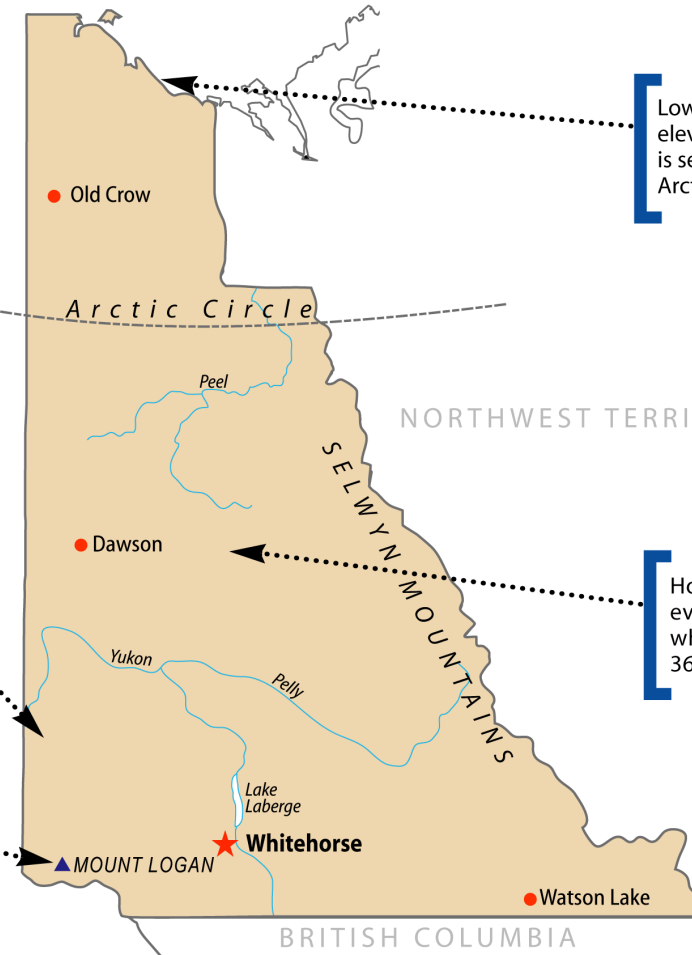
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# Yukon

## EXTREMES

Beaufort Sea



Lowest: The lowest elevation in the territory is sea level, at the Arctic Ocean.

Coldest: The coldest recorded temperature in North America was in the Yukon on 3 February 1947, when the temperature reached a low of -63°C (-81.4°F) in Snag.

Hottest: The hottest day ever recorded was in Mayo, when the temperature hit 36.1°C (97°F) in 1969.

Highest: The Yukon is home to the highest point in Canada. Mount Logan stands at 5,959 metres (19,551 ft) tall.