

shallow to make it viable. Seeing these boats always reminds me of the musicals from the Deep South of the USA, an incongruity, especially at 50 below Celsius when the Keno sits high and dry in the snow. (Joyce)



**Journal No 4: Time**

My last journal mentioned that the Demster Highway is the only stretch of tarmac in Dawson but in fact its not, there is no tarmac. The Demster is dirt and oil. I remember it as tarmac from my visit here two summers ago when the

# Dawson City Journals, Jan/Feb 2005: Part 1

Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski

One of the legacies left behind after the Yukon Gold Rush, are the showy Sternwheeler boats that used to make their way up and down the Yukon River from Whitehorse to Dawson City, carrying passengers and supplies. Massive amounts of wood were cut and stacked along the rivers' shore to feed the furnaces. It took about 40 cords of wood to head downstream to Dawson but 100 cords for the return journey. A cord of wood measures 8 feet long by 4 feet wide by 4 feet high. If you take time to search the shores, say on a canoe trip to Dawson, you may discover a few forgotten stacks of wood that remain along the river, now overgrown with vegetation.

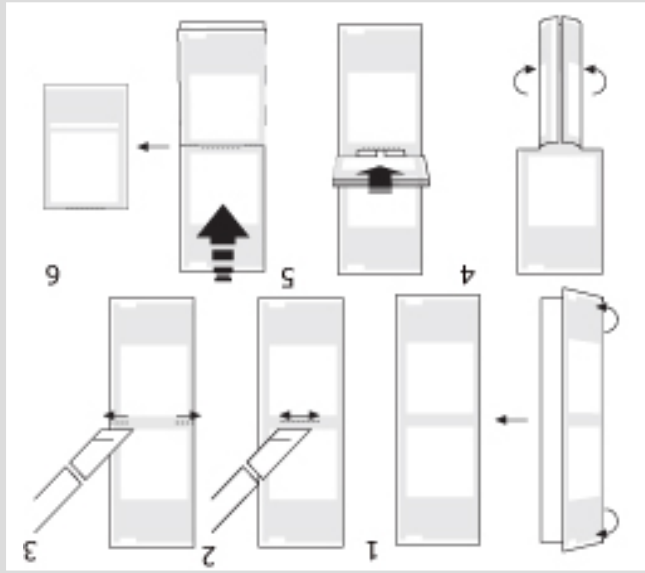
Sadly only a few of these majestic ships remain. A fire in the Whitehorse Shipyards (named for the docking area) tragically destroyed the remaining few in the mid 1970's. Fortunately the SS Klondike had already been moved to a new position in Whitehorse and the SS Keno was in Dawson. A Whitehorse businessman tried to recreate the river journey using a smaller scale ship in the early 1990's, but found the river too

Winter or panned the creeks all summer.

On the 14 January 2005 Alice Angus set off from the UK to Canada's Dawson City where she met with collaborator Joyce Majiski to spend 5 weeks in residence in the Northern Yukon town. Arriving into the stillness of a thick ice fog and sub-zero frigid air, it seemed this is the place where all winters start and end.

But the temperature warmed, the fog lifted and Dawson came alive. Dawson City, a Klondike gold-rush town once known as Paris of the North, is a place of myths and contradictions. With its clapboard main street of ornate wooden facades it was as the perfect place for Joyce and Alice to continue their exploration of imagined landscapes, uncovering the relationships between the lived experience of a place and how we might imagine it.

As they journeyed through January and February they dispatched a regular e-mail journal of stories and images. This e-book is a record of that journal.



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**Dawson City Journals, Jan/Feb 2005: Part 1**  
**Alice Angus and Joyce Majiski**



**Journal no 1**

When we arrived in Dawson City, over a week ago now, a thick ice fog had settled into its streets and lanes filling up every nook and cranny with freezing mist. At -50C not many people were on the streets and an eerie silence descended upon

the world. I have never been in an ice fog, so as I moved in the murky haze and through the town it felt as if I was in a place outside time, set apart from the rest of the world like the sand dwellers in Kobo Abbe's Woman of the Dunes. Smoke rose from the houses but I never saw people, all was silent. Inside my clothes all I could hear was the echo of my own footsteps - after a while I w ordered if I was being followed and I hipped round, to find myself staring into the back of my hood.

This is a place of great contradictions; it is desert dry and you walk down in slow bouncing motion like a spaceman taking gigantic slow-motion strides in your gigantic slow-motion and meet no-one. Slowly entering the grocery store, you find heat, humidity, bright lights and life, time speeds up, then leaving you are abruptly dispatched in the silent, slow world of a frozen morning fog. For the first few days we were so busy settling in that we began to take the fog for granted and didn't get out to film its hazy light. Then in the blink of an eye it was gone, the sun shone brightly and at only -25C the world came alive. Families came into the streets, toddlers in sledges, people walking their dogs,

pushing babies in strollers - it became a regular everyday town.

We missed the ice fog. Despite its great discomfort we wanted to film in it and so it seems we wished it back and this morning were greeted by its return along with a great drop in temperature. So we bundled up set out to film this city of contradictions with its architecture and pavements of wood and its bridge of ice... (Alice)



Last week the weather warmed and it became possible to linger, just a little while, outside and enjoy all that is Dawson. San Francisco based sound artist Loren Chasse wrote and asked "what does it sound like". Of course it sounds like Dawson City, and it also sounds cold. I think if you lived here it might sound like winter; the squawk of the ever-present ravens, the squeal of freezing fan-belts and the judder of frozen tyres

## Journal no 2: Chatter of Raven





bumping along the road but, beyond the raven, those things are not familiar to us from temperate climates and the phrase 'it sounds cold' means something different to everyone. So my time last week was spent listening intently so that I might report to Loren on Dawson City's audio ecology.

One of the most striking auditory experiences is an absence. There is very little concrete and asphalt here. Houses are built of wood and tin, all the roads (bar the Demster Highway that sweeps the front of town on its determined course to Inuvik in the far north), are dirt. Pavements are wooden boardwalks. Such things as I have only seen in movies; I surely didn't expect Dawson City to actually look like a celluloid gold rush town. But on the surface it does: Because it was. And so the sound in winter is of wood creaking and shifting, the hollow thud of frozen boardwalks, the padding of thick soled rubber boots, skidoos and the occasional car or truck on thickly packed creaking snow (when it is warm enough to start them) and the chatter of Raven, the trickster still out and at -40C, still scavenging when I thought all birds to be sung in nests or far south, it is lord of this domain. (Alice)

sun was high in the sky and temperatures neared 30C. That Dawson is so far away in my minds eye that I couldn't remember clearly - the change is so great between either end of the year. As we are here Dawson emerges from the winter and into the spring. The light increases by about 6 minutes a day, in the time I have been here we have gained about 2 hours of light and by the time I leave the days will already be longer than they are in most of the UK. Dawson is on the same latitude as the Shetland Isles and I suspect that the 70 degree temperature range between summer and winter makes the change between seasons an even grander, almost geological, event of awakening. A local writer remarked that the rapid change in light and season makes him feel as if he is always running to catch up, as soon as you get used to it, it changes and you are perpetually one step behind. I remember being in the Arctic in July, with the sun constantly circling in the sky and life bursting out everywhere in its short intense growing season, and even though we were way out beyond any settlements it reminded me of the heart of the city - alert and awake, bustling

In 1989, the gold-fields of the Klondike, located near Dawson City Yukon, attracted a stampede of approximately 30,000 people to the area. Affectionately called the Paris of the North, Dawson became a place to both make and lose spectacular amounts of money. During the heyday of the gold-rush, the world came to this remote corner of the Yukon. The gold attracted entertainment and entrepreneurs who in turn supplied caviar and champagne, a sharp contrast to the miners who toiled in frozen tunnels all

Journal no 3

