Eclipse
NORDIC HOT SPRINGS

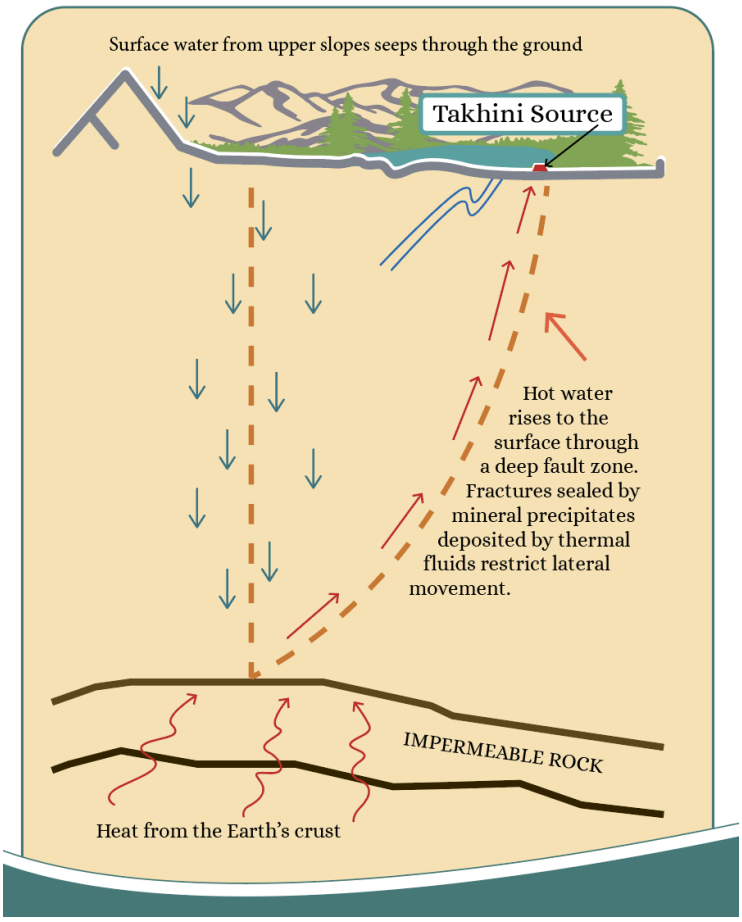
How are Hot Springs Created?

200 million years ago, the region where the Yukon now sits was submerged under an ancient ocean. Over time, mud layers accumulated on the ocean floor and compressed to form shale, while sand layers compacted to become sandstone. These sedimentary rocks are the foundational materials of this area.

The Yukon was also an active volcanic zone, part of the famous Pacific Ring of Fire. Approximately 60 million years ago, the Yukon saw a surge of volcanic activity with over 100 volcanic centers becoming active. In the vicinity of the current hot springs, molten lava crystallized beneath the Earth's surface, and tectonic movements pushed various igneous and metamorphic rocks, including granite, upwards.

The Miner's Range Mountains, located near the hot springs, were sculpted by glaciation over the past million years, with the last glaciers receding approximately 18,000 years ago. The terrain we see today in the Miner's Mountain Range is a result of this glacial activity that shaped the landscape.

The thermal waters of the hot springs originate from precipitation in the Miners Range mountains. The water seeps into the ground at higher elevations, flows through fractured sedimentary rocks to a depth of 4-5 km, and finds its way back to the surface through permeable pathways. This underground journey through various rock formations contributes to the water's unique characteristics and temperature.



What Causes the Water to be Hot?

The hot springs' water temperature is influenced by two main factors. Firstly, the natural thermal gradient of the Earth plays a role in heating the water. The ground temperature in the Takhini area rises by around 15° to 25 °C per kilometer depth, from the heat generated within the Earth's crust.

Secondly, the water can acquire warmth as it passes through granite rocks that have been heated by radioactive decay. Granite formations in the region contain radioactive elements like potassium, uranium, and thorium, which emit heat as they decay. The combination of the Earth's thermal gradient and the radioactive decay within the granitic rocks contributes to the overall warmth of the groundwater feeding the hot springs.

Studies have shown that the Takhini Hot Spring water reaches a maximum temperature of 96 °C (205 °F) during its underground journey. This information was gathered using geo-thermometry techniques, which indicated that the dissolved minerals present in the hot springs water could only exist if the water had reached that temperature.

⬅️GRANITE FORMATIONS 2KM WEST OF THE HOT SPRINGS.

Langevin, H., Fraser, T., and Raymond J., 2020. “Assessment of thermo-hydraulic properties of rock samples near Takhini Hot Springs, Yukon.”
In: Yukon Exploration and Geology 2019, K.E. Macfarlane (ed.), Yukon Geological Survey, p61.

Artesian Spring

Geologists tell us that the hot springs sit atop intersecting fault lines with inclined sedimentary rock, which form permeable pathways for hot groundwater to make its way back to the surface. Pressure is created by water at higher altitudes, propelling it towards the surface where it exhibits artesian characteristics, akin to a continuous gush from a hose. This flow of water cannot be turned off and flows from the ground at 386 liters (86 gallons) per minute. Despite cooling on its journey upwards, the hot springs water maintains a toasty 46.6 °C (116 °F) as it surfaces, a consistent temperature for over 120 years.

If you look into the hot spring crater, you can see the spring bubbling to the top in several places. From here, the water is gravity-fed to the bathing pools, which continually drain into the large pond in front of Eclipse. This unique “flow-through” system ensures fresh hot springs water constantly flows with a turnover rate of about three hours.

We are fortunate that the alignment of tilted rocks at intersecting fault lines allows the hot springs to exist here. The next closest hot springs accessible by roadway is the Liard Hot Springs, 650 km away on the BC Yukon border.

Water Predating Nuclear Testing

The water from the spring has been underground since before 1945. Scientists know this because our hot springs water does not have more than the natural background level of the radioactive isotope called tritium. This isotope is present in water all over the surface of the earth, and all surface waters today have an enhanced level of tritium as a result of nuclear weapons testing starting in 1945.

⬅️Eclipse architect Rob Sieniuc, from Broadway Architects, pointing out the white ash layer in the tufa deposits. Photo Eclipse collection.

How Much Water is Stored Underground?

Here is an interesting calculation regarding the amount of water underground in the Takhini area. We know the water flow at the source is a constant 386 liters per minute. We also know that the water has been underground since at least 1945, or 80 years ago.

A calculation as to the minimum amount of water underground goes as follows: 386 litres per minute (0.386 m.3) X 60 minutes per hour X 24 hours per day X 365 days X a minimum of 80 years = 386 X 60 X 24 X 365 X 80 = 16,230,528 cubic meters. This is equivalent to a lake 16.23 km long, 1 km wide and 1 meter deep. And this is only the minimum amount of water underground… it could be 10 times this size or even 100 times this size if the water has been underground 10 times or 100 times longer! We can be certain that there is a vast network of underground water storage in the area.

How Long has Takhini Hot Springs been flowing?

The Takhini Hot Springs source has probably been flowing for thousands of years. The orange earth, or tufa, covers a large area around the hot springs. This tells us the spring moved a few times as mineralisation built up, causing it to create different channels in different directions. The spring has likely moved a few kilometers over the millennia.

The tufa here is about 2 meters (7 feet) thick. There is an ash layer in Yukon soils from the White River volcanic eruptions 1500 years ago. Paddlers on Yukon rivers see this ash about a half foot deep in the soil on the river banks. Here on the property, we see this ash at the same depth in the undisturbed tufa layers. However, the tufa continues down another 6 feet, suggesting an accumulation of tufa for the past 15,000 years. This coincides with the end of glaciation, suggesting a theory that the hot springs started to flow as the glaciers retreated and the land began to slowly lift. The land lifted after the weight on it from the glaciers disappeared. This then made the land “lighter” and created open pockets and fissures in the underground.

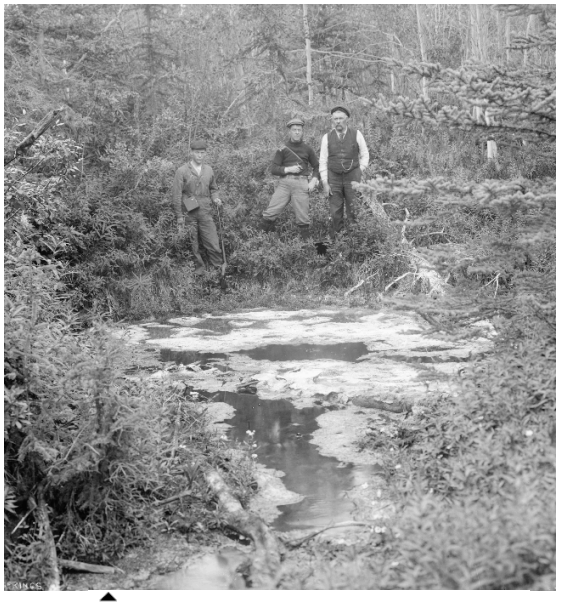
Overall, the Takhini Hot Springs stand as a testament to the complex geological processes and natural forces that have shaped the Yukon region over millions of years, offering a unique and fascinating glimpse into the Earth's history and its thermal wonders.

The Hot Spring

The first known photo of the hot springs was taken by Whitehorse photographer E.J. Hamacher in 1907. In this news article from the Weekly Star on June 28th, 1907, Mr. Hamacher tells of the recent colonial discovery of the Tahkeena Springs:

The springs are located in a beautiful spot almost level but sloping gently toward the river. The water boils up from a bowl-shaped basin, overflows at one edge, and runs over the sloping ground until it reaches a deep canyon through which it makes its way toward the river. At the foot of this canyon is a large crescent shaped slough or lake which has an outlet to the river.

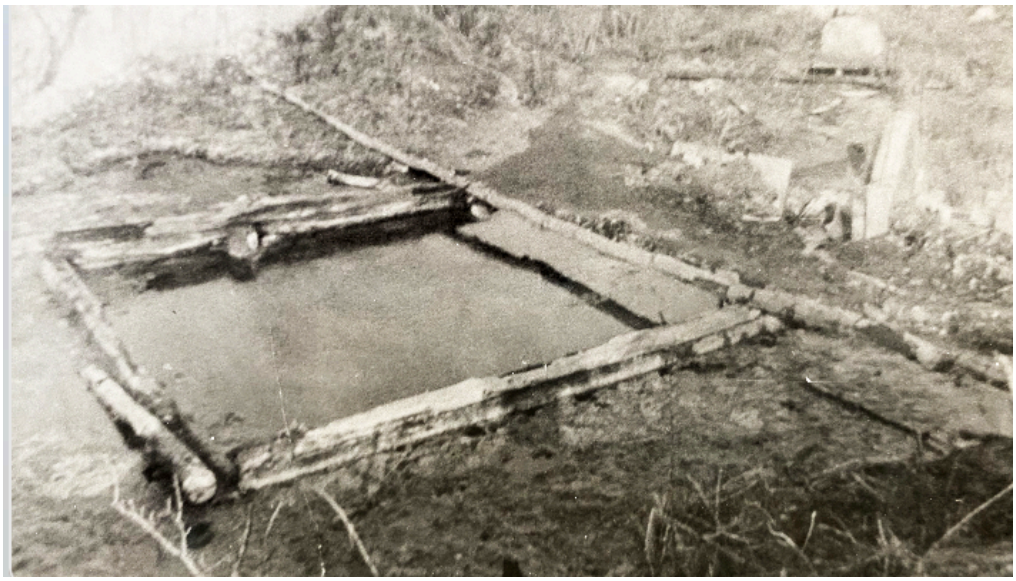
The volume of water which flows from the spring would fill a six-inch pipe and its deposits below the springs show large quantities of iron and lime. The temperature of the water is about 120 degrees, Fahrenheit.



TAHKEENA HOT SPRINGS Photo Yukon Archives, E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection), 2002/118, # 827.

In 2013, it was decided to “clean out and spruce up” the spring.
A specialized Japanese hot springs building crew led by highly regarded expert Mike Sato from British Columbia was hired to do the “hot springs plumbing” and stone work. The garage-like structure (in the above right photo) covered the source, and a six-inch pipe took the overflow water from the crater to the hot springs swimming pool. The building was removed and a temporary high-volume pump was installed to pump out the hot springs water just as fast as it bubbled to the surface through what can be described as the “quicksand porous surface of the mudhole bottom.” Decades-old log cribbing was discovered submerged in the water – there to keep the water clean from mud. Once the cribbing was removed, the source was back to its original natural state.

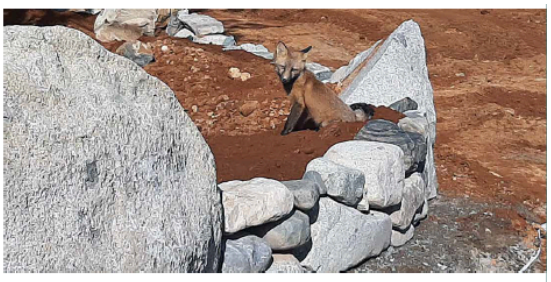
Source enclosed in a building, 1998. Photo courtesy Garry Umbrich.



Hot springs source pre-1948. Photo Eclipse collection.

Marc Goudreau, co-owner in the hot springs, working inside the source as it gets drained. Photo Eclipse collection.

Now the “plumbing” of the new source was added. A trench was dug to add a bottom drain line (think of a drain in the bottom of a bathtub) so the source could later be drained and cleaned regularly. A second overflow drain at the top of the mud hole was installed and joined downstream to the first drain (just like a bathtub where you have an overflow drain near the top). Finally, the main feed line was added, located just below the overflow drain, sending the hot springs water via gravity flow to the Eclipse hot springs facility. Debris-collecting screens were placed over all three lines to ensure they do not get blocked or plugged.



Foxes have used the abandoned water pipelines that are underground near the source for their dens. The soil is warm, and the fenced property creates a safe environment to raise a litter of young.

The fox kits emerge from the den around May and hang around the source forest for a few months. The parents then move the family to another location farther away.

With all the drains installed, the mud hole was then lined with the large boulders you can see. A portable spider crane was used to hoist the boulders so as to not disturb the crater. Washed rock was then added around the surface and on the bottom of the mud hole, transforming it into the beautiful artesian hot springs source it is today. The last step was to add the gazebo over the source to cover and protect it from leaves and other blown-in debris, and to keep out voles, mice, gophers, squirrels, weasels, birds and other creatures who, like humans, are attracted to hot springs. The source gazebo is built from cedar (to prevent rot), stainless steel (to prevent rust), plexiglass (to allow viewing of the source) and galvanized steel mesh (to allow all the humidity from the 46.6 C water to escape and let the structure breathe).

Portable spider crane lifting flagstone, 2015. Photo courtesy Garry Umbrich.

First Nation Ownership

Takhini Hot Springs is located on the traditional territory of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council, the First Nation based at Lake Laberge. The hot springs was owned by Kishxóot (Chief Jim Boss), who was the traditional chief of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council for over 40 years. When Jim Boss saw all the white gold seekers passing through his homeland, he took action. He knew the importance of preserving the land and its resources for his people. Jim Boss' name Kishxóo,t means "pound the table with fist."

Picture of Kishxóot as a young man, Picture of older Kishxóot in regalia

Chief Jim Boss in a finely decorated white leather Southern Tutchone tunic trimmed with porcupine embroidery.
Photo Yukon Archives, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection), 2002/118, # 697.

In 1902, Jim Boss, along with his lawyer, requested that the government of Canada and King Edward VII begin a treaty or land claims discussion with the Yukon First Nations. In a letter to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Boss demanded that the lawyer write," Tell the King very hard, we want something for our Indians because they (the colonialist gold seekers) take our land and game." Jim Boss' vision sparked the beginnings of land claim negotiations for all Yukon First Nations with the Canadian government, many decades later in 1973. Unfortunately, the First Nations were not allowed to negotiate for any of their land that had been privately sold. The Ta'an First Nation was given a land claim settlement in 2002, but the fact that the springs had been stolen from their First Nation was still a problem for its citizens. Unsettled reconciliation with the Canadian government and the present owners continues to this day.

Besides being influential and a strong leader, Jim Boss was also an incredible entrepreneur, owning many businesses throughout his lifetime. His first job was trading goods between the Coastal and Inland First Nations. At the onset of the Klondike Gold Rush, he abandoned his trading work and set up a roadhouse at Lake Lebarge. This was the first of multiple roadhouses that he would eventually own. Boss also owned a fox fur farm as well as fishing and lumber operations. His leadership in business and politics paved a path for southern Yukon First Nations to learn how to integrate a Euro-Canadian economy into their traditional lifestyle. In 2001 Boss was designated a Person of National Historical Significance by the Canadian government. Since Jim Boss's time, there has been a succession of colonial owners and business operations on-site.

A Sacred Place

According to some Elders, Takhini Hot Springs was considered a sacred place, similar to the hot springs in the McArthur Wildlife Preserve near Pelly Crossing. People respected the hot springs and left the area in its pristine state after their visits. An Elder who lived in the vicinity of Takhini hot springs said that the hot springs was a sacred place and that it was forbidden to hunt there. The hunters would only come to hunt at the hot springs in times of scarcity. The area was known to have lots of wildlife, and it was used as a food reserve in times of starvation. In fact, hot springs all over the world are well known for attracting wildlife.

Aerial view of Old John's Slough. Photo Eclipse collection.

Here at Takhini, the hot springs overflow, the creek and pond often have the only open water at certain times of the year for animals to drink. Animals are also attracted to the salt and mineral deposits on the rocks. Moose and bear tracks can sometimes be seen in the early morning at the pond. In the spring, the creek beds and the area near the source host the first plants and greenery, attracting animals to forage. These plants sprout early in the season from the heat of the water.

It was also forbidden to harvest fish and waterfowl at Old John's Slough, where the hot springs overflow enters into the Takhini River, according to the Elder. Although it is abundant with plants, fish, and waterfowl, this section of the river was also reserved for hunting and fishing only during hard times.

Takhini Hot Springs Name

The name Takhini most likely comes from the Tlingit word ‘' T’ahéeni,” referring to the Takhini River. In Tlingit, the word ” T’a “means king salmon, and the word “ héen” means river, so King Salmon River. One Tlingit dictionary refers to the place name for Takhini Hot Springs as “Taxhéeni “or “boiled food water”. Perhaps the hot spring, with its iron particulate in the water, looking a little yellow, reminded people of bone broth or soup. The hot springs have also been referred to as “Jim Boss’ bathtub”. Oral tradition tells us that Jim Boss brought a bathtub to the hot springs to bathe in. According to Ta’an Elders, during his later years, he often came to the hot springs to ease his arthritis and stayed in a cabin by the pond.

Left- Chief Jim Boss of Laberge and (Right)-Chief John Fraser of Champagne at the Whitehorse Winter Carnival in 1948.
Photo Yukon Archives, Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 2009/81, # 317.

Land Acknowledgement

The owners of Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs would like to acknowledge that we are standing on the traditional territory of the Ta’an Kwach’an Council. We want to thank the First Nation and show our immense gratitude for their stewardship over the millennia of this sacred place. We would like to show respect for this sacred gift of healing and restorative water. Shäw Níthän. Thank you.

A Perfect Hot Spring

The Takhini Hot Spring is what the health and wellness industry considers a rare “Goldilocks Hot Spring.” Here’s why:

• The natural temperature of the water is ideal, ranging from 39 ºC to 41 ºC (102 ºF-106 ºF) in the hot pools. The temperature is not adjusted at all.

• The water is 100% pure. It is not filtered; no minerals are added or removed.

• The artesian water from the hot springs source flows to the pools using only gravity. No pumps or other instruments are used.

• The pools are “flow-through,” meaning 100% of the pool water is continuously replenished (every few hours) with new water. Almost all other commercial hot springs facilities in North America and Europe are not able to use flow-through and must instead recirculate their water.

• The Takhini Hot Springs source is natural and not drilled. You get to experience pristine water that has been flowing naturally in this area for thousands of years.

• The water is high in sulphur but the molecules are bound and not in the form of hydrogen sulphide gas. For this reason, Eclipse doesn’t have the rotten egg sulphur smell associated with some hot springs.

The source is drained twice annually, the boulders are scrubbed of accumulated silt and minerals, and the source is inspected to ensure it remains in as pristine a state as possible. A translucent biofilm often can be seen, along with the ever-present bubbles that make their way to the surface of the spring, a common feature in almost all hot springs.

Original source after being cleaned up in 2013.
Photo Eclipse Collection

TABLE 7: RESULTS OF CHEMICAL AND ISOTOPE ANALYSES

Analyte		Units	Sample Name	Takhini Hot Spring
			Lab	CanTest
			Lab ID	811270391
			Sample Date	25-Nov-08
			Sample Location	Cistern
			Easting (UTM, Nad83)	08 480457
			Northing (UTM, Nad83)	6749360
			Matrix	Geothermal Groundwater
			Detection Limit	Results
Ion Balance		%		-1.5
Water type				$Ca\text{-}SO_4$
Field Parameters				
Temperature	T	°C		46.2
pH		pH units		6.70
Dissolved O_2	DO	mg/L		0.5
Electrical Conductivity	EC	µS/cm at 25°C		2289
Total Dissolved Solids	TDS	ppm		1145
Ferrous Iron	Fe^{2+}	mg/L		0.9
p-Alkalinity		mg/L $CaCO_3$		0
m-Alkalinity		mg/L $CaCO_3$		140
Physical Parameters				
pH		pH units	-	7.55
Electrical Conductivity	EC	µS/cm at 25°C	1	3400
True Color		CU	5	<5
Turbidity		NTU	0.1	5.1
Hardness		mg/L	1	1770
Dissolved Major Ions				
Calcium	Ca	mg/L	0.05	580
Magnesium	Mg		0.05	78.2
Sodium	Na		0.05	36.5
Potassium	K		0.1	8.7
Silicon	Si		0.25	19.8
Chloride	Cl		0.2	1.5
Fluoride	F		0.05	3.62
Nitrate - N	NO_3		0.05	<0.05
Nitrite - N	NO2			-
Nitrate and Nitrite - N				-
Sulfate (SO4)	SO_4		0.5	1740
Ortho Phosphorus	P		0.02	<0.02
Hydroxide Alkalinity	OH		0.5	<0.5
Carbonate Alkalinity	CO_3		0.5	<0.5
Bicarbonate Alkalinity	HCO_3		0.5	127
Total Alkalinity	$CaCO_3$		0.5	104
Metals - Dissolved				
Aluminum	Al	mg/L	0.005	0.013
Antimony	Sb		0.001	0.002
Arsenic	As		0.001	0.008
Barium	Ba		0.001	0.016
Beryllium	Be		0.001	<0.001
Bismuth	Bi		0.001	<0.001
Boron	B		0.05	0.05
Cadmium	Cd		0.0002	<0.0002
Chromium	Cr		0.001	<0.001
Cobalt	Co		0.001	<0.001
Copper	Cu		0.001	0.001
Gold	Au		5E-11	<5E-11
Iron	Fe		0.05	0.53
Lead	Pb		0.001	<0.001
Lithium	Li		0.001	0.027
Manganese	Mn		0.001	0.017
Mercury	Hg		0.00002	<0.00002
Molybdenum	Mo		0.0005	0.0049
Nickel	Ni		0.001	<0.001
Phosphorus	P		0.15	<0.15
Selenium	Se		0.001	0.001
Silver	Ag		0.00025	<0.00025
Strontium	Sr		0.001	14.0
Sulfur	S		-	-
Tellurium	Te		0.001	<0.001
Thallium	Tl		0.0001	<0.0001
Thorium	Th		0.0005	<0.0005
Tin	Sn		0.001	<0.001
Titanium	Ti		0.001	<0.001
Uranium	U		0.0005	<0.0005
Vanadium	V		0.001	<0.001
Zinc	Zn		0.005	<0.005
Zirconium	Zr		0.01	<0.01
Environmental Isotopes				
Oxygen-18[1]	$\delta^{18}O$	‰	-	-22.4
Deuterium[1]	$\delta^{2}H$		-	-174.9
Tritium	^{3}H	TU[2]	-	0.8 ± 0.3

Takhini Hot Springs Colonial History since 1900

ROADHOUSE ERA

The first roadhouses were built in the Yukon in 1899, serving mainly as stopovers for people delivering mail throughout the territory. In the summer, mail was delivered by sternwheeler or boat, and in winter by dogsled.

The Klondike Gold Rush brought such an onslaught of visitors needing mail, transportation and supplies during the winter that the Canadian Government decided to build an overland trail between Dawson City and Whitehorse.

In 1902 the White Pass and Yukon Route company was contracted to create the trail, and in exchange for building the route, the WP & YR was given the contract for the Royal Mail Service. The Overland Trail was 531 km long (330 miles) and finished the same year.

Dogsleds were no longer needed to deliver supplies and mail. Wheeled stages were used in the spring and fall, and sleighs in the winter. Roadhouses and stables were built every 32 to 40 km (20 - 25 miles) so the White Pass drivers could change horses and provide food and lodging for passengers.

At that time, the fare alone for the average five-day trip was $125, equivalent to $3,500 today. A room overnight at a roadhouse cost an extra $1.00 per night and meals were $1.50 each.

The Takhini River was the first of the four rivers to be crossed on the northbound trail. Its crossing was known as Takhini or “Tahkeena” Crossing. Here was the H & T Roadhouse, owned by Captain Hoggan.

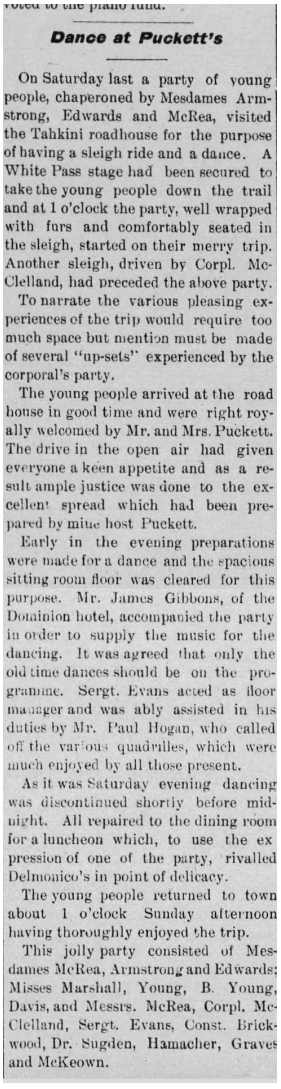
It was the first roadhouse on the northbound route, built in 1899, eight kilometres (five miles) from Eclipse’s current location on the banks of the Takhini River. In1902, Hoggan sold it to William and Anna Puckett and it became known as the **Tahkeena Roadhouse**.

The Pucketts had been recently married and Anna, a widow, brought her three children to the marriage. The couple were local business people who also owned the next roadhouse on the route, Little River Roadhouse. The Tahkeena Roadhouse had a fur trading store, barns and some log cabins. A barge ferry was constructed, pulled by cables to transfer goods and passengers across the river. The crossing was such a busy place that the Northwest Mounted Police built a post across from the roadhouse.

⬆️1922 photo of the police headquarters (Left) and the roadhouse (Right). Yukon Archives, Claude and Mary Tidd fonds, 77/19 # 7231.

The roadhouse was a popular place for parties. Groups would come from Whitehorse, spend the night, and travel back home the next day.

⬆️Photograph taken at Tahkeena Roadhouse, showing a sleighing party. L to R: William Puckett; Anna in striped dress and her young daughter, Deyo; Anna's sons, Archie and Camden (Cam) Smith. Middle: The ladies bowling team. Photo provided by Mary Heim (nee McRae) whose father, Mr. McRae, was a chaperone for the group.
Yukon Archives, Mary Heim collection, 89/25, #1.



Dance at Puckett's

On Saturday last a party of young people, chaperoned by Mesdames Armstrong, Edwards and McRea, visited the Tahkini roadhouse for the purpose of having a sleigh ride and a dance. A White Pass stage had been secured to take the young people down the trail and at 1 o'clock the party, well wrapped with furs and comfortably seated in the sleigh, started on their merry trip. Another sleigh, driven by Corpl. McClelland, had preceded the above party.

To narrate the various pleasing experiences of the trip would require too much space but mention must be made of several "up-sets" experienced by the corporal's party.

The young people arrived at the road house in good time and were right royally welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Puckett. The drive in the open air had given everyone a keen appetite and as a result ample justice was done to the excellent spread which had been prepared by mine host Puckett.

Early in the evening preparations were made for a dance and the spacious sitting room floor was cleared for this purpose. Mr. James Gibbons, of the Dominion hotel, accompanied the party in order to supply the music for the dancing. It was agreed that only the old time dances should be on the programme. Sergt. Evans acted as floor manager and was ably assisted in his duties by Mr. Paul Hogan, who called off the various quadrilles, which were much enjoyed by all those present.

As it was Saturday evening dancing was discontinued shortly before midnight. All repaired to the dining room for a luncheon which, to use the expression of one of the party, rivalled Delmonico's in point of delicacy.

The young people returned to town about 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon having thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

This jolly party consisted of Mesdames McRea, Armstrong and Edwards; Misses Marshall, Young, B. Young, Davis, and Messrs. McRea, Corpl. McClelland, Sergt. Evans, Const. Brickwood, Dr. Sugden, Hamacher, Graves and McKeown.

The Weekly Star, February 21st, 1903.
Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd. Fonds.➡️

TAHKEENA HOT SPRINGS

Sometime after 1902, William Puckett heard about the hot springs, most likely from First Nations people since their chief, Jim Boss, owned the hot springs.The First Nations had owned and been using the springs for generations. At the turn of the last century, however, the Canadian government's colonial policies did not recognize First Nations ownership.

A snapshot of roadhouse life and William's introduction to the hot springs is recollected in a letter written by his stepdaughter Deyo LeVake in 1980, then aged 81:

> **Dad and Mother Puckett owned the first two roadhouses out of Whitehorse - It was spelled Tahkeena in those days, and the next one was Little River, …Dad had a big storeroom built off the kitchen at Tahkeena where he entertained his Indian friends and bought furs…. Then Dad would serve tea and hard tack out there and haggle over the furs. We had a short handled half-gallon tin dipper, so after old Jim finished that Dad would ask him if he wanted more and he would say "No, one cup plenty." Which got to be a household by-word.**
>
> **So it was the Indians that told Dad Puckett about the hot springs. There was no trail - not even a path - just general directions. One day Dad and somebody else - can't remember who - took off to find the springs. Afterwards we all went out and took along a picnic. It was in the midst of wilderness - one big hole that you couldn't even stand to put your hand in, then as it overflowed and cooled off you could wade up to a certain point, and where it had overflowed and cooled off it was like jell hardened and slippery.**

A later reference to the hot springs is found in Anna Puckett's diary. On June 5, 1907, she wrote:

> **I am real worried about Will—having the two roadhouses just about finished him off, and now he is lying in bed all doubled up with rheumatism.**

In her diary entry on Aug. 22, 1907, she writes further:

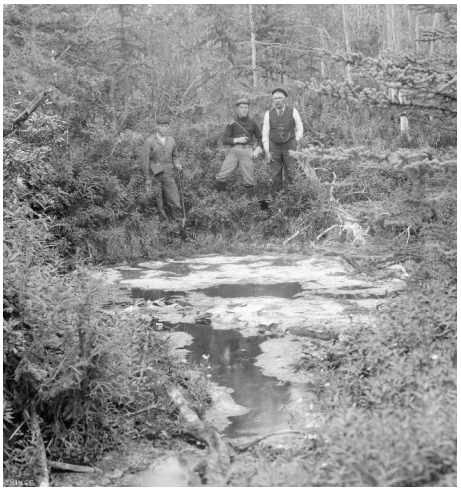
> **Staying at the Hot Springs which seems to be doing Will a power of good. Archie is still with us, but all he does is moon over some girl in Tacoma and carve her initials on everything. I am having a wonderful time—croquet, bathing, fishing, and playing bridge at night.**

June 5th, and August 22nd, 1907, Diary of Anna Puckett, MacBride Museum of History (1998-6-44), www.macbridemuseum.com

The Pucketts left the roadhouse business in 1907. The hard work was taking its toll and by moving into Whitehorse, Deyo, age 10 at the time, could attend school. The couple purchased a hardware store in town. However, it seems the Pucketts were still interested in doing some business in the Tahkeena area.

In the same year, William Puckett, along with Mr. Stephen Simmons (another roadhouse owner), obtained a lease from the Dominion government for the hot springs for $2 an acre.

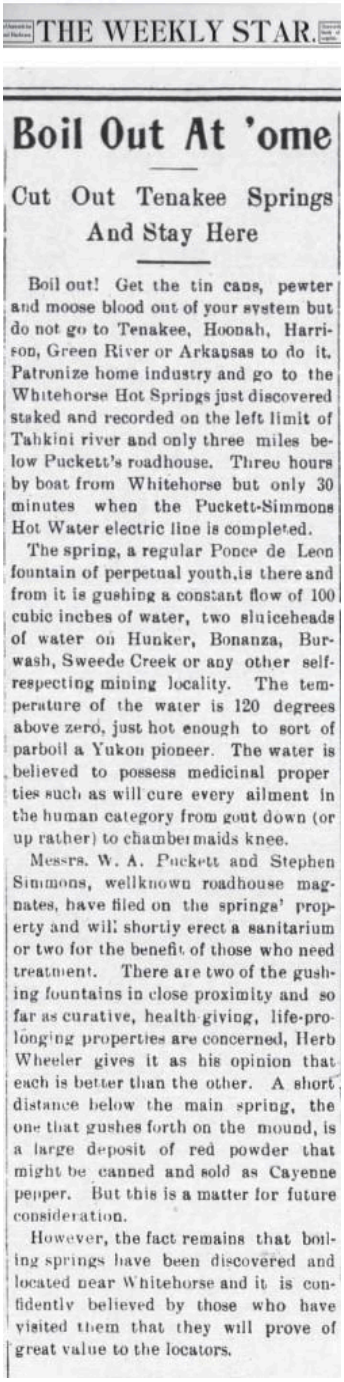
There were several stories in the Whitehorse Star about the hot springs that year. This is the earliest-known photo, taken by Whitehorse photographer E. J. Hamacher.



FIRST TAHKEENA HOT SPRINGS PHOTO 1907

⬅️**Left: stepson Archie Smith. Centre: stepson Camden Smith. Right: William Puckett.** Yukon Archives, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection), 2002/118, #827.

Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd Fonds 82/563.➡️



THE WEEKLY STAR.

Boil Out At 'ome

Cut Out Tenakee Springs And Stay Here

Boil out! Get the tin cans, pewter and moose blood out of your system but do not go to Tenakee, Hoonah, Harrison, Green River or Arkansas to do it. Patronize home industry and go to the Whitehorse Hot Springs just discovered staked and recorded on the left limit of Tahkini river and only three miles below Puckett's roadhouse. Three hours by boat from Whitehorse but only 30 minutes when the Puckett-Simmons Hot Water electric line is completed.

The spring, a regular Ponce de Leon fountain of perpetual youth, is there and from it is gushing a constant flow of 100 cubic inches of water, two sluiceheads of water on Hunker, Bonanza, Burwash, Sweede Creek or any other self-respecting mining locality. The temperature of the water is 120 degrees above zero, just hot enough to sort of parboil a Yukon pioneer. The water is believed to possess medicinal properties such as will cure every ailment in the human category from gout down (or up rather) to chambermaids knee.

Messrs. W. A. Puckett and Stephen Simmons, wellknown roadhouse magnates, have filed on the springs' property and will shortly erect a sanitarium or two for the benefit of those who need treatment. There are two of the gushing fountains in close proximity and so far as curative, health-giving, life-prolonging properties are concerned, Herb Wheeler gives it as his opinion that each is better than the other. A short distance below the main spring, the one that gushes forth on the mound, is a large deposit of red powder that might be canned and sold as Cayenne pepper. But this is a matter for future consideration.

However, the fact remains that boiling springs have been discovered and located near Whitehorse and it is confidently believed by those who have visited them that they will prove of great value to the locators.

The Weekly Star newspaper stories and ads show that the partners did some business promotion. In this news story from May 3, 1907, Stroller White writes:

After 1907, there are reports that Cam Smith would take sightseeing tours to the hot springs in his boat. Beyond the odd excursion, there is no more mention of the hot springs.

There was no Klondike Highway or Hot Springs Road at that time, so people who wanted to visit the hot springs would usually take one of two routes. They could travel the Overland Trail and take the ferry at Takhini Crossing and then walk eight km (five miles).

Or they could take a sternwheeler or boat on the Yukon River for 22 km (14 miles) to the mouth of the Takhini River, boat upstream 24 km (15 miles) to the hot springs landing, and then travel 2.4 km (1.5 miles) by foot to the spring.

You can find the original Takhini Crossing spot by going eight km (five miles) down the Takhini River Road. On the left side of the road there is a pullout. Look for the historic sign marker for the Overland Trail on the far-right end of the pullout. Take the Overland Trail to the Takhini River to see old footings for the ferry crossing. No buildings remain for the North West Mounted Police post or the roadhouse.

WAR YEARS

In the 1940s, transportation needs changed the history of the hot springs once again. Forty years earlier, the Overland Trail was built to connect Whitehorse and Dawson City. Then, in 1942, the threat of a Japanese invasion in Alaska spurred a U.S.-Canada agreement to construct a highway from British Columbia to Alaska.

In 1942-43, the U.S. Army built a rough road between Dawson Creek, B.C., and Fairbanks, Alaska. Before the army arrived, the population of Whitehorse was recorded as 727 people. Alaska Highway construction brought tens of thousands of troops and civilians flooding into Whitehorse. Many rivers were bridged, including the Takhini. Now visitors could reach Takhini Crossing by road instead of sternwheeler, boat, stage or sleigh.

⬆️TWO TRUCKS WITH SUPPLIES AT THE TAKHINI FERRY CROSSING 1937. Aboard the ferry L to R: Babe Richards; Mike Murphy; Charlie Baxter; T.C. Richards; Bud Harbottle. Yukon Archives, Bud and Jeanne (Connolly) Harbottle fonds, 82/345, #6166.

The hot springs became a popular recreation spot for the military while they were building the highway. With such an onslaught of visitors, it was just a matter of time before someone decided to add more development.

According to Land Titles, the first original sale of the hot springs by the Crown was to William Rowling in 1944. Surveyor J.B. Walcot described how the hot springs development had been expanded in a report to the Surveyor General of Canada in 1947.

“After returning to Whitehorse, we surveyed W. N. Rowling’s 50 acres twenty miles west of Whitehorse, 7 miles north of the Alaska Highway, which includes a hot spring. Greenhouses for growing tomatoes, etc., have been built, and a swimming pool constructed. Some local doubt was expressed as to the propriety of selling the hot springs to a private owner.”

Rowling, a Whitehorse carpenter, formed a gentlemen’s agreement to buy and develop the hot springs with T.C. Richards and his son R.S. Richards, both well-known local merchants and contractors. The Richards supplied the money, materials and wages for the development. Rowling oversaw the work.

Records show Rowling constructed a 24- foot by 60-foot log-cribbed swimming pool lined with canvas, a bathhouse and three small cabins. The army constructed three greenhouses heated by piped hot water from the hot springs and produce was sold year-round.

The greenhouse business was abandoned after the army left the area. Rowling charged visitors a $1.00 entry fee to use the pool. He also built a crude eight-kilometre (five mile) road from Takhini Crossing to the springs.

A dispute between the partners ended up in court, and eventually, ownership went to T.C. Richards. He only held the title for a year before selling it to Karl Springer, a mining engineer, in 1950.

In 1950, rental cabins and the first concrete pool were built on the hot springs site. The pool was 2.75 meters (nine feet) deep. The facilities were built by two brothers from Mayo, Jack Bonner (Bon) Kunze and Edwin Kunze. In 1952, Springer sold it to the brothers.

In 1950 the Mayo Road (north Klondike Highway) was constructed by the Yukon government, and the Kunzes built “the Hot Springs Road” to link their business to the highway. Now that the hot springs were completely accessible by road all year long, it became a busier place.

In 1956 the Whitehorse Gym Club offered free swimming lessons for people of all ages and looked for volunteers to drive people on the new road. Five hundred children took swimming lessons that year.

Photo of pool and cars in the parking lot, 1950s.
Photo Eclipse Collection.⬇️

Photo of Jack Bonner (Bon) Kunze.
Photo courtesy Erwin Kreft.⬆️

Soldier diving into the hot springs, 1950s.
Photo Eclipse collection.

Whitehorse Star, Friday November 26, 1954.
Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd.

Whitehorse Star, Thursday March 22, 1956.
Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd.

Old truck on the property.
Photo courtesy Garry Umbrich.

Whitehorse Star, September 26, 1957.
Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd.

1958 FIRE

The Kunzes later leased their property to Harry and Clara Gordon-Cooper with an option to buy it. The summer of 1958 was hot and dry and there were several wildfires in the area.

One fire started near the Mile 956 military maintenance camp on the Alaska Highway (near Mendenhall). Another started at Lake Laberge when the military carried out an exercise to dispose bombs.

Then these two fires merged. When the wind brought the flames close to the hot springs on July 17, the Gordon-Coopers and their two young children fled by car down the Takhini Hot Springs Road. The family barely escaped the flames driving 40 miles an hour, the fastest they could go on the rough dirt road.

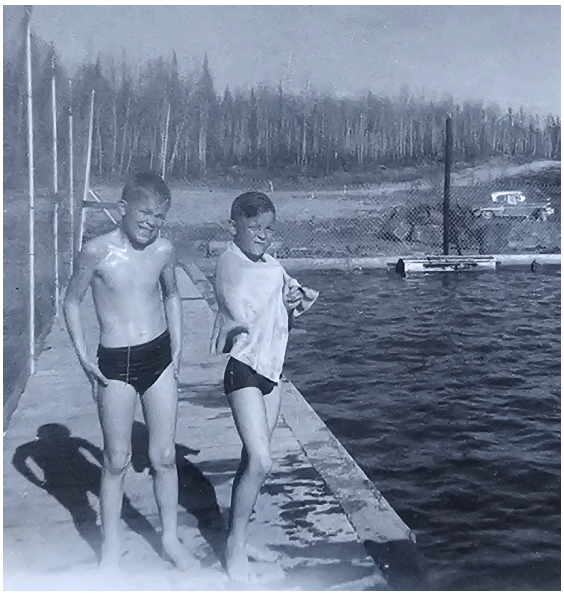
The hot springs buildings and infrastructure were completely destroyed and the Coopers lost all their belongings. The surrounding mature white spruce forest was destroyed as well.

Don Sippel, Staff Sergeant of the Rocky Mountain Rangers # 594873, Yukon Regiment of the Canadian Military Reserve, was 25 years old the year of the fire. In 2025, aged 90, he gave an account:

The forest fire service had a very small amount of people to fight forest fires. They asked the Yukon Regiment of the Military Reserve to do the night patrols. We had about 30 people in our unit, so we said OK. Most of us had daily jobs but we still had to do the night patrols to help them out. This went on for two weeks or so. One night the fire was heading to Takhini Hot Springs very fast. We had 20 people with pumps, cats etc. The fire was travelling at 30 kph. We had a small caterpillar at the hot springs when the fire hit. The sergeant in charge told everyone to get under the cat and bury yourself with dirt and sand. Well three soldiers made a run for it but the sergeant caught them and dragged them to the cat and covered them up. He had to knock two of them out as they still wanted to run.

Myself and another soldier were at the Takhini bridge hosing down the dairy farm buildings. It was pretty scary as the fire hit big trees and they would blow up with the intense heat. The next night we were catching a little sleep in our tents when about two in the morning we got a super big rain storm! We all came out of our tents, stripped down and ran up and down the highway naked yelling at the top of our voices! They had told people to be ready to leave Whitehorse at a moment's notice but the rain changed all that.

Twins Archie and Dan Lang were ten years old the summer of 1958 when the family moved to Whitehorse. This picture, taken after the family arrived, has forest fire smoke visible in the background. Dan recounted that they drove up the Alaska Highway and all the while the fire raged around Whitehorse and Haines Junction.



The Gordon-Coopers turned the hot springs back over to the Kunzes after the fire. The Gordon-Coopers then sued the Canadian government, claiming the military started the fire. Their suit was successful and they were able to recoup some losses. The Kunzes were given a financial settlement as well.

In 1959, The Whitehorse Star advertised that the Takhini Hot Springs had reopened for business. By 1964, the pool, buildings and cabins and picnic sites had been restored. By 1969 the surrounding forest was slowly coming back.

MODERN IMPROVEMENTS

In 1969, Bonner Kunze's daughter Linda and her husband, Ed Brennan, acquired the hot springs. This became a time of modern development.

In 1971 they built a new concrete pool. They also added a new campground and picnic sites. The road was almost impassable every spring due to flooding and seasonal breakup, and the facility was operated with generators.

Along with area neighbours, the couple lobbied the Northern Canada Power Commission for electricity. This request was granted and the power company installed power poles and Ed Brennan strung the wires with the help of a neighbour.

Ed approached the vocational school with the idea of having trade students learn surveying and road-building by having them improve the road. The school agreed to the plan and the road was improved in 1973.

The overflow from the new pool was dammed to create a pond. In 1974 fingerling rainbow trout were added to the pond in the hope there could be good fishing in the future.

In 1977, the hot springs business was sold to Mary and Erwin Kreft. They had two children, Heide and Bernie.

The Krefts owned Takhini Hot Springs for the next 21 years. In the first year, the business was managed by Rudy and Barbara Kushel. Barbara, who came from southern Germany, decided to add Black Forest cake to the café menu.

⬅️Linda Brennan (nee Kunze) in the café in 1971. Photo Yukon Archives, Whitehorse Star Ltd. fonds, 82/563, T6/33.

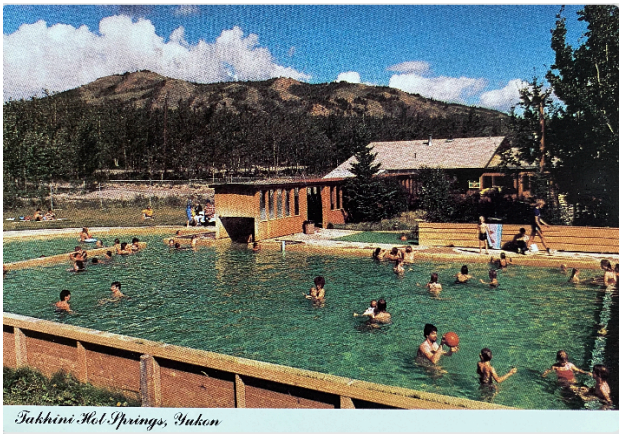
The couple didn't stay too long, so Erwin hired a local neighbour, Anne Domes, to manage the café. Anne increased the European items on the menu, including schnitzels and soups. These additions delighted visitors for nearly 30 years.

The hot springs had now expanded to 240 acres. Hayfields for horses were added, as well as 30 kilometres (nearly 19 miles) of horse trails both on and off the property for horseback riding. The pond became a place where people would dump their goldfish and turtles when they no longer wanted their aquariums.

The government stepped in and eliminated all the fish in the pond, recognizing that these invasive species could create havoc in the Yukon River ecosystem.

The campground was extended to approximately 80 sites with electrified sites for motorhomes and included a large log picnic shelter. The pool building added a games room for the kids to play pinball and later video games. A sauna was installed.

Many kids on the Hot Springs or River Road got their first job here, and it was a well-loved local hangout for families in town and the area. For 20 years Anne taught many young girls how to make the famous Black Forest cake.



⬅️Heide Kreft, daughter of Mary and Erwin Kreft, photo with Black Forest Cake 1982. Photo and postcards courtesy Erwin Kreft.

In 1999 the hot springs business was purchased by Garry Umbrich, Carla Pitzel and a large group of local people from Whitehorse. In 2008 ownership was consolidated into a small group with Umbrich and Pitzel as majority owners.

From 1999 to 2021 the hot spring pools and buildings went through various renovations and changes before being demolished to make way for a new vision.

Several businesses and activities were added to the property including the construction of a campground building with a hostel, a retreat centre and cabins, an ice and rock-climbing wall business as well as a zipline over the pond, kids camps, and sleigh rides.

YEAR-ROUND PROFITABILITY

For the past century, all the hot springs owners struggled with profitability. In the summer, the business earned profits but, in the winter, especially during the cold months, it lost money.

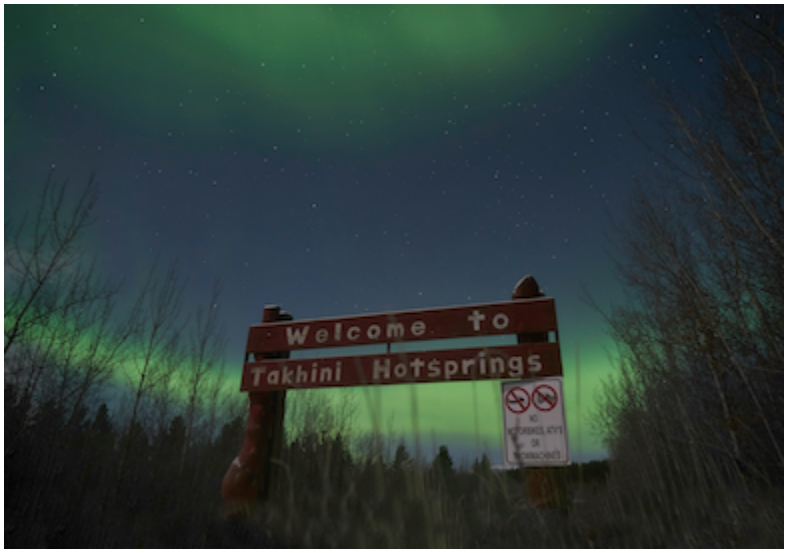
Over the years, several different owners approached the Yukon government to purchase the hot springs so it could be owned publicly. However, the government never took them up on the offer.

Erwin Kreft had the hot springs for sale for 10 years before it was finally sold to the Umbrich & Pitzel group in 1999.

By 2010, Whitehorse had grown to around 23,000 people. The population was big enough so that annual visitation by local people together with summer tourism made the business marginally profitable.

Around this time, tourism shifted when visitors realized there were many worthwhile reasons to visit the Yukon in the winter, not just the summer as part of an iconic Alaska Highway drive.

Year-round tourism began to improve. During fall and winter, the pool was often rented out by tour groups bringing tourists from other parts of North America and Asia for northern lights viewing.



In 2011, the hot springs staff came up with the zany idea of having a hair-freezing contest. This unique contest was added to the Rendezvous Winter Carnival calendar of events in February. There was already a Women's Hairy Leg contest and a Men's Beard Contest in the carnival, so it fit right in.

After a few years, the Hair-Freezing Contest was expanded to last all winter and thanks to the digital age, the hot springs became internationally famous. It attracted television, radio and media requests from all around the world. The Hair-Freezing Contest continues to attract media attention every winter.

Extremely cold weather (below -20° C or -4° F) brings an influx of locals and tourists to the hot springs. Tourists visit every winter to freeze their hair in crazy hairdos and go home with a one-of-a-kind souvenir photo and a chance to win a cash prize in the contest.

As the Washington Post reported in 2023, global warming is having an impact on the contest and at some point, in the future it may have to be cancelled due to lack of extreme cold. For now, however, our Hair-Freezing Contest still stands in the Guinness Book of World Records.


The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Warm winter threatens beloved Canadian tradition: The hair-freezing contest

Thanks, climate change!

Climate change and warmer winters threaten to disrupt the annual hair-freezing contest at Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs in Canada's Yukon region.

The Washington Post - Article - March 24, 2023

PRESENT DAY

A new pool complex, named the Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs in 2022, was constructed on a site near the demolished former hot springs building, overlooking the pond and Ibex Valley mountains.

Eclipse was designed by Garry Umbrich and Carla Pitzel, along with their son Andrew Umbrich. Together they decided to shift the design and usage of the facility from recreational to a health and wellness focus.

This decision was in part due to Whitehorse's new $30-million Canada Games Centre pool and multi-sport community and recreational facility built and subsidized by the territorial government for Yukon families.

Today, the Eclipse complex has returned the hot springs to the original First Nations use as a place of healing thanks to the restorative power of nature.

Garry spent over a decade studying and travelling to hot springs around the world before deciding to create the pools in a more natural Japanese style. To this, he added elements of a Nordic spa.

Nordic spas were a new wellness phenomenon in Canada, with outdoor heated pools using regular tap water (not hot springs water) and outdoor elements such as cold plunges and cold waterfalls, relaxation seating areas, hammocks and fire bowls.

Garry decided to combine the outdoor Nordic spa elements with natural hot springs pools. To this, he added the centuries-old Scandinavian health and wellness tradition of hot and cold thermotherapy.

The new facility opened its doors in May 2022 after five years of meticulous construction and craftsmanship.

We hope you enjoy Eclipse – **the first hot springs facility in the world that combines Japanese-style natural hot springs pools with a Canadian-style Nordic spa.**

⬆️ L to R -Christina Sim, Erik Umbrich, Garry Umbrich, Carla Pitzel, Andrew Umbrich