

kenzie Delta in 1840. Bell explored the rivers of the area, reaching the junction of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers in what is now Alaska, where he founded Fort Yukon.

On a separate expedition, Robert Campbell, another Hudson's Bay employee, built a small fort on the Pelly River, then travelled downstream until he met the Yukon River. There, in 1844, he built Fort Selkirk, which became a central trading post for Indians who had previously confined their trading to coastal tribes.

Fort Selkirk was destroyed in 1852 by marauding Indians, but the Hudson's Bay Company had by that time established many other prosperous trading posts. They were so successful, in fact, that they undermined the business of the Russians who were trading in Alaska. In 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States for the paltry sum of \$7,200,000 and the land to the west of the Yukon changed hands.

Gold fever

The Yukon Territory is most famous for its memorable gold rush. It started in 1896, when an American woodsman named George Washington Carmack, his Indian wife and two others discovered gold in Rabbit Creek, a small tributary of the Yukon. It was the richest concentration of placer gold the world had ever known. The gold was just lying among the pebbles, "like cheese in a sandwich", Carmack said.

Rabbit Creek was quickly renamed Bonanza and nearby settlements were emptied as residents swarmed to the Klondike. Within one month 200 claims to the region were staked.

By the following spring, many of the prospectors had fortunes to show for their efforts. Some, with pockets full of gold, returned by steamer to Seattle, U.S.A.

When the ship docked, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported, in a single paragraph, that a steamer had arrived with a ton of Yukon gold. The residents smelled fortune and almost immediately the ship, and many others, were crammed full of would-be millionaires on their way to the Klondike.

The stampede had begun. Between 1897 and 1899 an estimated 100,000 people swarmed into the Yukon to exploit the world's greatest gold field.

This amazing influx of gold-seekers first put the Yukon on the map for, almost overnight, the region entered the world spotlight. The gold rush also speeded up the process by which the Yukon became a Canadian territory — in 1898 it was separated from the Northwest Territories and was made a territory in its own right.

One of the greatest beneficiaries of the gold rush was the town of Dawson, which burgeoned from a tiny outpost to a city of over 40,000. For a short while Dawson became known as the "Paris of the North".