

66 degrees north latitude. Beyond there, the Yukon is known as "The Land of the Midnight Sun" because for three months in summer sunlight is almost continuous. In winter, however, darkness sets in for a quarter of the year and the sun is rarely seen.

In many locations, the Yukon can be considered a vast frozen desert, receiving no more rainfall than does Cairo, Egypt. The St. Elias mountain range acts as a barrier to moist air coming from the Pacific, resulting in very little precipitation. Mean annual precipitation ranges between 23 to 43 centimetres.

The high altitude of much of the territory and the semi-arid climate provide relatively warm summers with temperatures frequently reaching 25 degrees C or more during the long summer days. In winter the temperatures range between 4 and -50 degrees C in the southern areas and slightly colder farther north.

The coldest temperature ever registered in the Yukon was -62 degrees C at Snag, in February 1947.

The people

The Yukon has a population of almost 22,000, 3,300 of whom are Indian, 1,200 are Métis (the product of Indian and European parents) ten are Inuit* and some 17,500 are of non-native origin.

North America's first native people are believed to have come from Asia by

way of the Bering Strait. The first of these nomads entered the Yukon as long as 30,000 years ago.

The Yukon's native people are grouped into 12 bands, of which eight are Kutchin, two are Nahanni and two are Tagish. South of Whitehorse are the Tlingit-speaking Tagish tribes. For centuries, the Tagish have maintained trading links with bands nearer to the interior, living by fishing and trapping in the forest.

The rest of the Yukon's native population is Athapaskan-speaking, comprising the Kutchin and the Nahanni people. The major Kutchin group is often referred to as the Loucheux, a French term meaning "squint-eyed". This name has been more accurately translated as "those who looked both ways", as the Loucheux have historically been pressed between their traditional enemies the Inuit to the east and the more culturally advanced tribes to the west.

The life of the Yukon Indians was controlled by their severe environment and the resources on which they depended. The long, dark winter and short summer with its long days, dictated their daily pattern of activity.

Until European tools and ideas reached the Yukon, its people were dependent on stone, bone and wood implements, and their main source of food was the moose.

Naturalist Ernest Thomson Seton wrote in 1909 that the moose "is the creature that enables the natives to live

*Most of Canada's 23,000 Inuit live in the Northwest Territories. Others live in northern Quebec and Labrador.