

The name Yukon has been synonymous with adventure since late in the last century, when tens of thousands of fortune-hunters invaded the area in the Klondike gold rush of 1898.

Although the frenzy is over, the pioneer spirit still lives. For the Yukon, part of the great Canadian North, is also North America's last frontier.

The land

The Yukon has an area of 536,326 km². The perimeters of this mountainous territory form a rough triangle bordered on the south by British Columbia, on the west by the state of Alaska in the U.S. and on the east by the Northwest Territories. The northern tip of the triangle meets the chilly waters of the Beaufort Sea.

The Yukon can be divided into two broad geographical regions: taiga and tundra. Taiga is the boreal forest belt that circles the world's sub-Arctic zone, including most of the Yukon. Tundra is the more northerly, rocky Arctic region, where the extreme climate has stunted vegetation. Permafrost — frost so deep that it does not melt even in August and so thick that a fence post cannot be driven into the ground — makes it impossible for trees to take root in the tundra.

The Yukon is a land of varied topography. Its highest elevations are in the St. Elias mountains in the southwest; rough, irregular uplands join the lowlands of the shores of the Beaufort Sea. The Yukon mountain chain is part of

the Cordilleran, the great ridge of mountains which wrinkles the west coast landscapes of both North and South America, where Canada's highest peak, Mount Logan, (over 6,000 metres) is found. It is surrounded by several other mountains of the St. Elias range which run through Alaska and the Yukon. There, the world's largest glaciers outside polar regions are located.

The interior contains several smaller mountain ranges. In this area is most of the Yukon's mineral wealth of zinc, lead, coal, copper, asbestos, oil, natural gas and gold. The Richardson range of the far north and the Mackenzie mountains of the west, share the border with the Yukon's neighbour territory, the Northwest Territories.

Like almost all of Canada, much of the topography of the Yukon was moulded by glacier movement during and since the last ice age. Although parts of the territory are still covered by immense glaciers, especially in the St. Elias region, central areas of the Yukon escaped glaciation completely.

The two main unglaciated areas are situated north of the Ogilvie mountains to the Beaufort Sea, and south from Dawson to the St. Elias mountain range.

The northern section of the territory is located within the Arctic Circle, the imaginary line within which the sun does not rise for one or more days in winter and does not set for one or more days in summer. This occurs at about