

Dawson's currency was gold dust. Every home contained a set of scales. Activity in the city never ceased; bars, casinos and brothels were open 24 hours a day. A strong contingent of Royal Canadian Mounted Police was soon dispatched there to keep crime under control, and the inhabitants of the Yukon prospered.

But, by the turn of the century, Dawson's boom began to falter. Gold became less and less plentiful and many prospectors had departed, either with pockets and wallets bulging, or disappointed and empty-handed.

By the end of the First World War, Dawson's spirit had withered and only a few hundred residents were left. The riverboat traffic had slowed to a trickle. Few Klondike miners remained and their tiny claims had been consolidated by larger mining entrepreneurs.

Between the world wars, activity in the Yukon was at a very low level. It stayed that way until the Second World War, when it was jolted awake by the push to construct a modern highway through the Yukon. In 1941, Japan was threatening to take control of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, which could threaten North America. As the danger became imminent, the United States requested permission to build a road to Alaska to speed the movement of military equipment. The Alaska Highway began at Dawson Creek in northern British Columbia, crossed the 60th parallel near

Watson Lake, and continued to Fairbanks, Alaska through Whitehorse, a distance of 2,431 kilometres.

Building the highway was no simple feat. Fleets of heavy bulldozers and trucks struggled through cold, rough terrain to complete the project. Thick muskeg covered much of the route and permafrost made building difficult. Construction crews were compelled to pile thick layers of brushwood on the ground, then add to it a gravel topping before the road could be built. Often they were forced to make giant detours around muskeg to build on solid rock.

Despite the adverse conditions, the Alaska Highway was completed in November 1942 after nine months of continuous work. In 1946, the United States turned the Canadian section of the highway over to Canada for use as a permanent road.

### *The economy*

The Yukon's first source of wealth was mining — and mining still occupies first place in the Yukon's economy. Approximately \$200 million of revenue from mining is earned there each year.

The Yukon's mineral industry has undergone astounding growth in the past decade. There are five producing mines, two open-pit and three underground. One, an open-pit lead-zinc mine in the Anvil mountains, accounts for more than one-third of the Yukon's total earnings. Ore from the site is concentrated there, then sent by truck to