

## Statement of Significance Telegraph Creek Townsite



### Description

The original portion of Telegraph Creek consists of a small community located at the foot of a steep bank on the Stikine River in northwestern British Columbia. Small in scale, the town consists of a number of historical buildings, mostly of wood frame construction, arranged along streets that follow the contours of the riverbank. The buildings range in their current physical condition; those currently used are well-maintained but others are in various states of disrepair.

The historic place consists of the buildings and natural features of the original townsite, a subdivision of District Lot 11, Cassiar District.

### Heritage Values

The heritage value of Telegraph Creek is found in the complexity of its history which touches on several themes important to the Kitimat-Stikine region. Its location, geography and the historical events that have occurred here have determined the town's form, character, cultural and historical associations.

Cultural significance is found in the place through the ongoing presence of the Tahltan First Nation and its connection to the land and cultural traditions. Dry Town was an area of Tahltan settlement, originally used as a winter home away from the more remote summer fishing camps. First Nations residents value and continue to practice traditional lifeways, teaching children and grandchildren their inheritance of skills, languages, and an appreciation of the Stikine River and its valley.

This place is significant historically as a Stikine River settlement representative of B.C.'s natural resource-based development since the 1860s. The modern history of the Telegraph Creek area dates back to the discovery of gold on the Stikine River in the 1860s and near Dease Lake in the 1870s. During this time the Hudson Bay Company established a trading post first down river at Glenora then later at Telegraph Creek in 1900. The village was also the trailhead for the Stikine and Teslin trails to the Klondike goldfields in the late 1890s. Its location on the route taken by

the Yukon Field Force, which assisted the Northwest Mounted Police in keeping order during the Yukon gold rush, is a valuable reminder of the geographical relationship of Telegraph Creek to points west in Alaska and north in the Yukon.

Telegraph Creek is historically significant as a staging point for two telegraph lines. The Collins Overland Telegraph Line proposed to connect North America to Europe through Siberia. In 1866, surveying for the construction of this overland telegraph gave Telegraph Creek its name, although the line was never built. As the head of navigation on the Stikine River, Telegraph Creek functioned as the northern outpost for the Dominion (Yukon) Telegraph line, with survey and construction occurring north to Atlin and south to Hazelton. Sternwheelers arrived regularly with wire and other construction materials. Completed in 1901, the Dominion Telegraph line connected the Yukon with southern Canada following much of the Collins Overland proposed route. As a result Telegraph Creek became the major centre between Hazelton and Atlin.

Telegraph Creek is valued for its historic character, which is found in the overall effect of the physical presence of the Stikine River, buildings, structures, built features and landscape, both individually and collectively. This character is also revealed in the intangible heritage of memories, stories, and ongoing traditional and small town activities. Telegraph Creek evokes a sense of a bygone era, and retains the character of a nineteenth century small town in its variety and style of built structures in an area of remote wilderness.

The village is a touchstone for residents of the northwest area of the province because its tangible and intangible heritage values represent what is important to them about the north west of British Columbia.

The unique physical form of the village has been influenced by local topography. The layout of roads that parallel the Stikine River and follow the land's contours reflects the original focus of the town towards the Stikine River, the region's primary transportation route. The natural environment provides a backdrop for the community, high aesthetic value, and opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, such as guiding for hunters, an important economic driver since the early 1900s. The townsite reflects significant natural heritage values; these values are embodied in the fresh water and ecology of the creek and river, the geography of the area, the unique microclimate, wild area values and significant views to nearby mountain ranges.

### **Character Defining Elements**

Key elements that define the heritage character of Telegraph Creek include:

- Remote location
- Direct connection and relationship to the Stikine River waterfront
- Spatial layout of the townsite following geographical contours, the river and extending into the upland
- Winding gravel roads, including access road at the top of the escarpment
- The rise of the basalt escarpment behind the village
- Telegraph Creek flowing through the townsite

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- Natural vegetation
- Views to the Stikine River
- Remains of walkways and trails throughout the village
- Cemetery
- Dry Town area
- The rainshadow microclimate created by its geographical location
- Small scale built features such as rock retaining walls, stairways boardwalks and wooden fences
- Collection of small-scale historical buildings of a variety of types:
  - Institutional and commercial buildings, such as the Anglican church, hospital, telegraph office, schoolhouse, Stikine Riversong Cafe (former Hudson's Bay Post), Lodge, general store and former RCMP residence/office/jail
  - Original private homes in several architectural styles, such as the Hudson Bay Company factor's house, the Senator Bradshaw house, the McPhee house and the George Ball house
  - Modest houses and log structures, including the original Vance house and structures at Dry Town
- Building details including wood cladding, gable roofs and dormers, metal roofs and porches
- Strong street edges created by the buildings along the winding main road
- Small town scale with walkways and trails suitable for pedestrians
- Streets parallel to the water
- Warehouse structures built on pilings extending over the river



Telegraph Creek, 1920s.  
BC Archives photo e-03457

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Telegraph Creek, c.1900.  
BC Archives photo b-04078



Telegraph Creek, early 1920s.  
BC Archives photo a-01574



# Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine

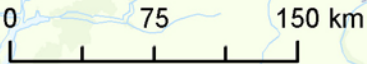
Telegraph Creek

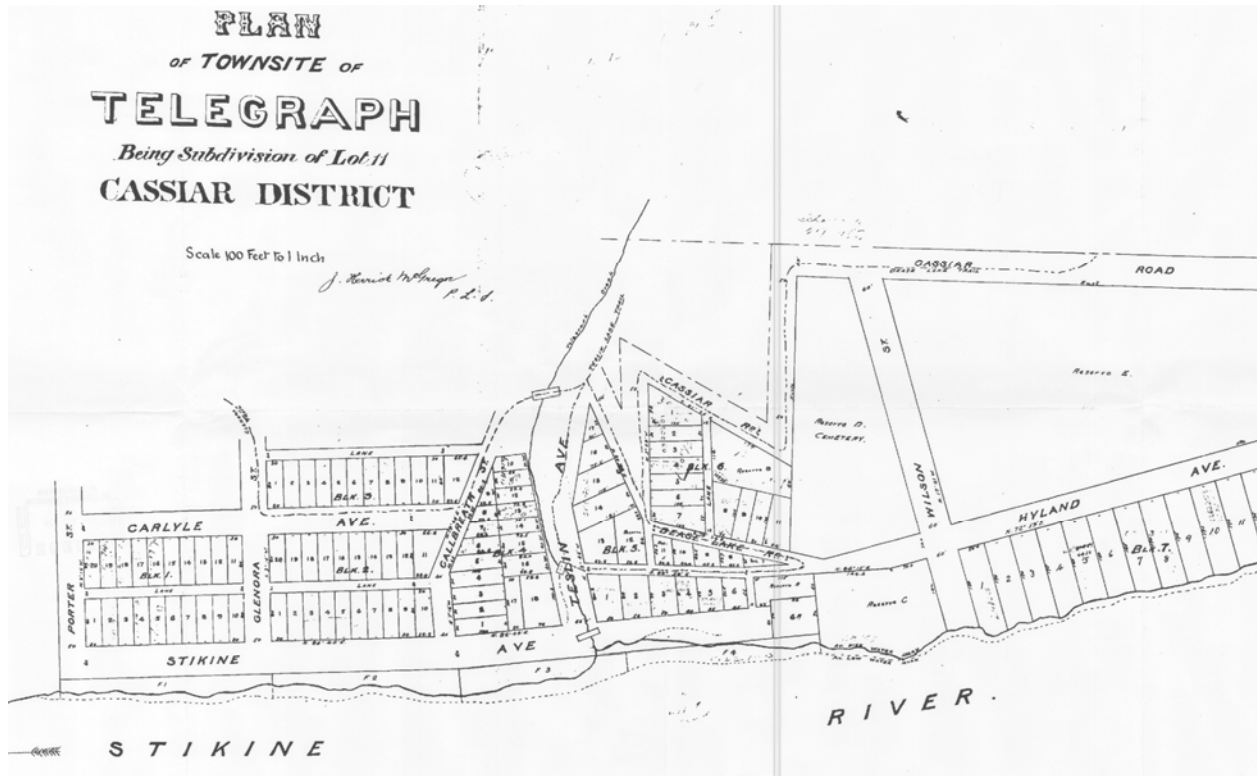


**Legend**

- Parks and Protected Areas
- Nisga'a Lands
- Municipalities

British Columbia Regional Districts

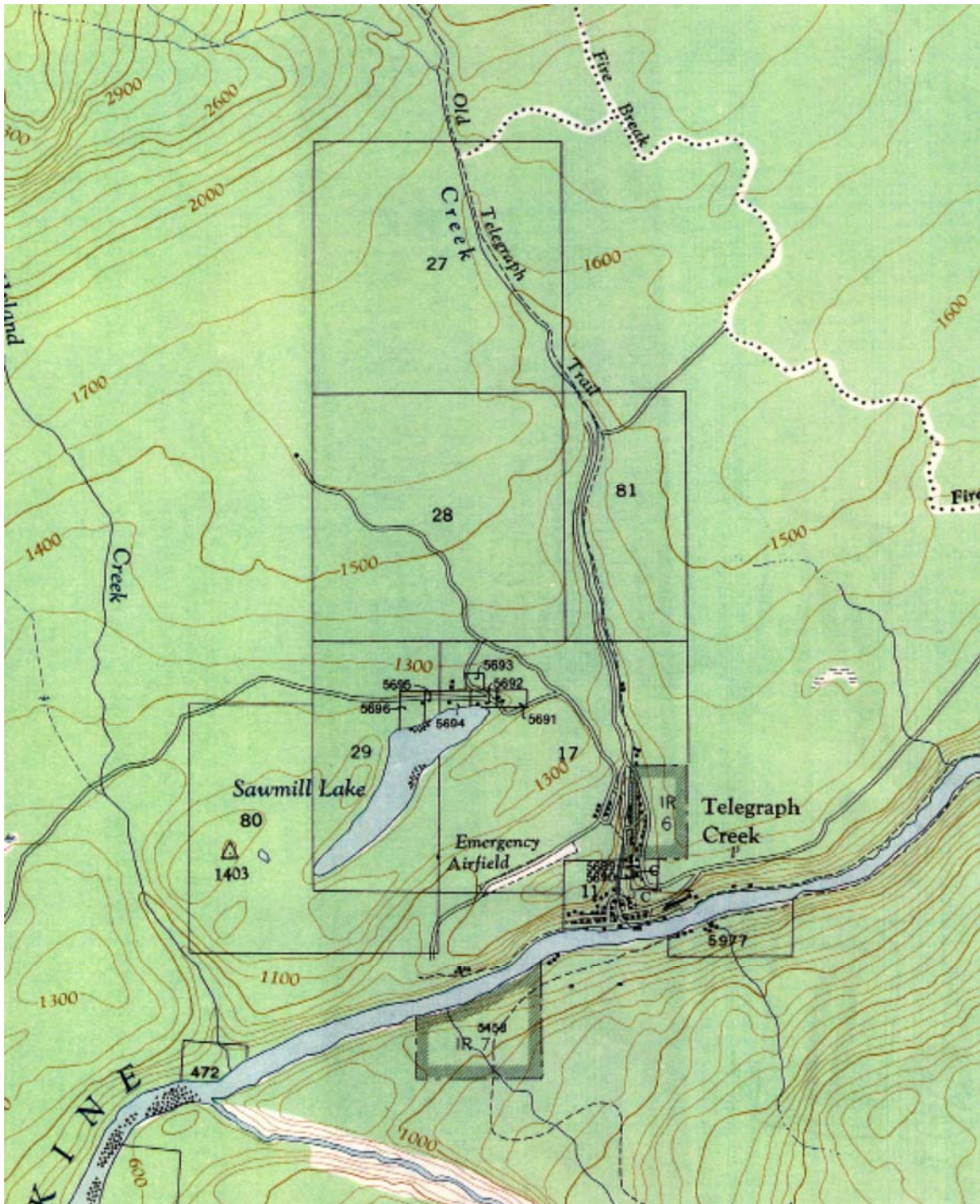




Undated [c.1900] survey of Telegraph Creek showing the original layout of the settlement and its response to the localized topography, Telegraph Creek and the Stikine River. Also shown are Reserve D, the site set aside for the cemetery and Reserve E, Dry Town, the site set aside for First Nations settlement. *Office of the Surveyor General, Victoria.*



Telegraph Creek, early 1920s. BC Archives photo e-03444.



Telegraph Creek NTS Map c.1950 showing the settlement within the context of the Yukon Telegraph Trail, the Telegraph Creek waterway and the Stikine River. *UBC Map Library.*



Telegraph Creek aerial dated 1965, Geographic Information Centre, University of BC.



Telegraph Creek aerial dated 1992, Geographic Information Centre, University of BC.





View east along Stikine Avenue. (2004)



Old Diamond 'C' Café & Callbreath Outfitters



Senator Bradshaw house

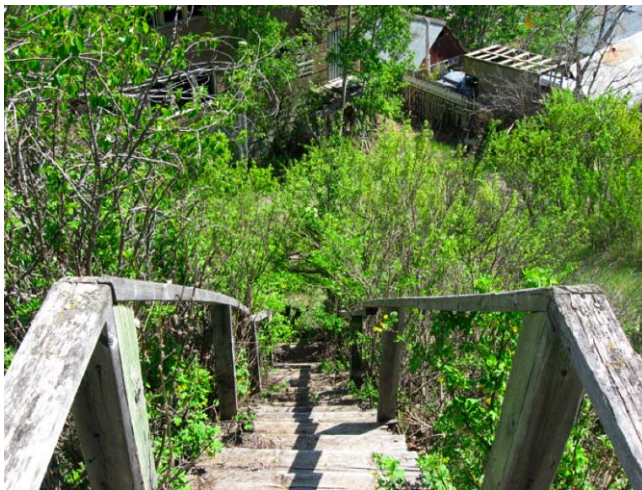


Old Vance house next to Telegraph Creek

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The Stikine Riversong Café (original Hudson Bay store building)



Stairs to Carlyle Avenue



Basalt rock retaining walls.



Old Telegraph Station building



Original Telegraph Creek school