

Alaska Highway News

Arts council breathes new life into six-ton trencher used in highway construction

[William Stodalka](#) / Alaska Highway News

November 9, 2015 07:42 AM



Built by the Cleveland Trencher Company, this machine was likely used by the 340th Engineers during the construction of the Alaska Highway. Photo By William Stodalka

A historical society wants to turn an industrial machine into a piece of punk art with the community's help.

Roger Gregoire, a member of the Northern Trails Historic Society, said his group will donate a trencher that may have been used in the construction of the Alaska Highway to the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council, to be modified by local artists.

Gregoire estimates the trencher machine weighs six tons, and is eight-feet high. Trenchers such as these were used to build the ditches along the highway in the 1940s.

The machine was built by the Cleveland Trencher Company out of Ohio. It's current red colour is similar to that used by the 340th Engineers, the U.S. group that built the Alaska Highway.

The item has had numerous owners over the years. It originally belonged to an oil and gas pipeline outfit, where it was used to put dirt over a trench where a pipeline was placed. After that, it was taken to a farmer, who used it to pull items around.

And after that, Ian Middleton picked it up, not because he needed to dig trenches, but because he needed an engine.

The machine came into Gregoire's hands a year and a half ago—with a replacement engine.

The machine won't be used for building highways any time soon, but Gregoire and others are still hoping to put it to use for an art project.

According to Gregoire, a lot of museums have old equipment, but an artistic spin could help bring in a younger crowd.

The trencher will go to the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council, who plan to put out a call for artists at the end of November to do something new with it.

"We've got some fairly high-end artists who will give general advice and oversight of the project," said Donna Kane, the council's executive director.

"Hopefully, after the end of this year, we'll have identified the artists who are working on it, and then through 2016 they will be modifying (the trencher)."

The council hopes to have the project finished in time for the Alaska Highway's 75th anniversary in 2017. Kane said her group has not determined where the final project would end up.

reporter@ahnfsj.ca

© Copyright 2017 Alaska Highway News

Alaska Highway News

Sculpture to recognize Alaska Highway's 75th anniversary

[Jonny Wakefield](#) / Alaska Highway News

December 22, 2015 07:51 AM



Donna Kane, Emilie Mattson and Karl Mattson inspect a 40s-era Caterpillar trencher donated for a sculpture to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Alaska Highway. Photo By Supplied

Four Peace Region artists will team up to convert an old Alaska Highway trencher into a sculpture to commemorate the Alcan's 75th Anniversary.

On Monday, city council approved the sculpture in principle, setting aside a portion of the Northern Alberta Railway park at Mile Zero of the highway for the display.

It's one of several projects planned to celebrate the highway's construction, which began in 1942.

Donna Kane of the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council gave council details of the project at Monday's meeting.

Four artists will leave their mark on the sculpture—two indigenous and two non-indigenous.

The indigenous artists are Adrienne Greyeyes, a Fort St. John resident and Emily Carr University of Art + Design graduate, and Brian Jungen, a sculptor who grew up at the Doig River First Nation.

Rolla artists Emilie Mattson and Karl Mattson, who built metal sculptures for the Dawson Creek traffic circle and city hall, will also contribute to the project.

Kane said having artists of different ancestry will allow for varied perspectives on the highway's construction.

As for what the sculpture will look like?

"I can't tell you at this point what it's going to look like, it's a creative process," Kane told council. "I totally understand the city can't give approval to something (if) it doesn't know what it's going to look like."

The Caterpillar trencher donated by Roger Gregoire currently sits at the Mattson's Rolla property, where much of the work will happen.

It's one of four initiatives planned to mark the anniversary, including an Alaska Highway theme song contest. 2017 also marks the 150th year since Confederation, making it a potentially banner year for tourism.

Council will have a chance to review the sculpture before giving it the final nod.

The 1,300-mile highway was completed during World War II to connect Alaska to the contiguous U.S.

reporter@dcdn.ca

© Copyright 2017 Alaska Highway News

Alaska Highway News

Work to begin on transforming historic trencher into art piece

Bronwyn Scott / Alaska Highway News

February 19, 2016 08:06 AM

A trencher used to build the Alaska Highway in 1942 was hauled from Fort St. John to a farm in Rolla Thursday morning as local artists get ready to turn the machine into a work of art in time for the highway's 75th anniversary in 2017.

A crew from Trans Carrier Ltd. loaded the trencher onto a truck at a Fort St. John property, and took it to the Sweetwater 905 site in Rolla, where it will stay for the next year as artists transform it into a work of art.

TCL General Manager Tyler Kosick estimated the trencher weighed between 8,000 and 10,000 pounds. He and his team used one of the company's articulating boom cranes to get the job done.

"It's kind of one of those 'feel good' projects in the community. It's good to work with the Arts Council and the different events that are going on," he said.



Brad Whiffin, a swamper with TCL, works to secure the trencher in place on a truck. - Bronwyn Scott

"It's just part of our social licence as a local business to try to help out where we can."

It took roughly an hour to get the trencher hooked up to the crane and lifted onto the truck bed, but Kosick said there was "nothing too out of the norm" in moving the old machine, aside from the fact that most equipment they move is operational and can be driven onto and off of the truck.

The rusted machine, owned by Roger Gregoire, had been discarded in the bush for 75 years. He donated it to the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council, which plans to make a unique sculpture with the help of local artists.

The design and concept for the piece has not yet been decided, but the Arts Council is "hugely excited about it," said Rolla artist Donna Kane, who serves as the council's executive director. "It's just such a unique, innovative project," she said.

The sculpture will be a collaborative project that reflects the perspectives of the people who built the highway, pioneers and Indigenous people in the region, according to the Arts Council.

Emilie Mattson and Karl Mattson of Rolla and Adrienne Greyeyes of Fort St. John will create and carry out the design of the project. Internationally-renowned artist Brian Jungen will provide overall advice and direction on the sculpture's development. Jungen is originally from Montney, and regularly returns home for artistic inspiration.

Other local artists will have a chance to get involved as well.

"Once we've got the concept, then we'll be doing a call to local artists who can contribute ideas toward the design that's going into the trencher," Kane said.

"We're hoping that we include all interested artists in one way or another."

The completed project will have a permanent home at the Northern Alberta Railway Park at Mile 0 in Dawson Creek.

peacereporter@ahnfsj.ca

© Copyright 2017 Alaska Highway News

Alaska Highway News

Call for artist submissions to include in trencher public art project

[Aleisha Hendry](#) / Alaska Highway News

December 2, 2016 06:26 AM



Detail of the trencher tracks. - Supplied Photo

Peace Region artists have the opportunity to be part of a public art project will be on display in the region for years to come.

In celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Alaska Highway, the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council is working with regional artist to turn an old trencher used in the construction of the highway into a public art sculpture.

The PLRAC is looking for local artist to submit designs that will be displayed on the caterpillar tracks of the trencher.

Guidelines include creating a design that reflects the artist's view of the Northeast.

Designs should be as simple as possible, as they will be laser cut onto metal plates that will be installed on the caterpillar tracks.

The curators and advisor of the project will select three to five designs, and those selected will receive \$500.

The main work on the trencher is being done by three Peace Region artists under the guidance of world-renowned indigenous artist Brian Jungen. Indigenous artist Adrienne Greyeyes will work on the engine, covering it with beads made of enameled aluminum.

Rolla artist Emilie Mattson will transform the two fuel tanks into dioramas that will depict a small scale replica of the highway's history from a pioneer perspective.

Karl Mattson, also of Rolla, will modify the grill and radiator using found objects and steel transforming it into an ambiguous animal like figure, providing a perspective on the natural history of the region.

Artists interested in submitting a design for the tracks have until Dec. 15. Designs should be emailed to Donna Kane at [dkane@pris.ca \(mailto:dkane@pris.ca\)](mailto:dkane@pris.ca)

ahendry@ahnfsj.ca

© Copyright 2017 Alaska Highway News