

Kwaday Dän Kenji (Long Ago People's Place)

Champagne area

Started: 1995

Contact: Harold Johnson and Meta Williams of Indian Way Ventures

Located on the highway between Whitehorse and Haines Junction, Kwaday Dän Kenji provides interpretive tours through a "live" outdoor museum made up of First Nation pre-contact shelters, caches, hunting traps and a post-contact trapper's cabin.



Getting started: Harold and Meta began working on the idea of creating a traditional and cultural place by talking with elders to gather information, doing research, and spreading the word about their plans. Permission to use Champagne & Aishihik First Nation settlement lands was received from Chief and Council. In 1995, after constant work on the site through the spring and summer and using only the owners' own financial resources, Kwaday Dän Kenji was opened for a short six weeks in August and September.

Key to success: Kwaday Dän Kenji has received tremendous support from the elders and other members of the First Nation. Donations of knowledge, time and even crafts have helped the business get off the ground. A web page on the First Nation site helps promote the business at no cost.

Lessons learned: Financial resources for expansion and for marketing have been very limited. Though the business is growing, the owners must still raise income from other sources. The steep access road to the site deters some RVs and buses from entering and many drive by.

Future of business: Meta is finishing up a two year tourism diploma and will be applying her new skills to the management of the business. Plans are to increase the number of traditional shelters that people can stay in overnight and to build a longhouse for hosting gatherings of 35—40 people. This summer will be the first time arts and crafts are sold in a store instead of being put on display outdoors. A longer term idea is to make the operation run year round, possibly by expanding into dog mushing and other winter-based activities.