

How To: Not Buy Land In the Yukon

By

Unknown Author

Step 1: Use a Cereal Company as Your Realtor

Back in the Golden Days of Radio, the Quaker Oats Company sponsored a program called “The Challenge of the Yukon.” Essentially the sort of story that Dudley Do-Right would later be created to mock, “Challenge” revolved around the adventures of a brave and true Mountie and his thematically named dog, Yukon King. But, with the advent of television, ratings for the show began to slump. Hoping a change of venue would do a world of good, Quaker ponied up the cash to transfer the show to TV. Along the way, they decided that they needed a way to make kids care about the Klondike again. Their solution: Pint-size plots of real estate.

Step 2: Stake Your (Square Inch) Claim

In 1954, Quaker executives decided that the best way to drum up press for “Challenge of the Yukon” would be to actually give away bits of said Yukon to cereal customers. Certainly a far better prize than your average cheap, plastic thingamabob, deeds to square-inch tracts of Yukon Territory land could be found in every box of Quaker puffed rice and puffed wheat cereals. The company actually sent a contingent of be-suited execs up to Canada to buy a 19-acre plot of moose pasture. (Along the way, one of the businessmen reportedly got frostbite.) Quaker divvied the land up and, because binding deeds would have been too much of a pain for the Canadian government to deal with, printed up pseudo-deeds in the name of the Klondike Big Inch Land Company.

Step 3: Fall Behind On Your Payments

The promotion, and subsequently the show, was a major hit. Hundreds of thousands of boxes of cereal flew off the shelves and children across America became land-owners. However, once the campaign ended, it became clear that nobody knew what to do with the land. Sure, plenty of kids wrote to Quaker asking about making improvements (one reportedly even sent a toothpick fence he wanted erected around his portion), but there’s really not a lot you can do with a square inch—even the person who managed to amass 10,000 shares still had much less than an acre. Eventually, Quaker just stopped paying the taxes on the land and the Canadian government sold all 19 acres for a little more than the equivalent of \$251. By contrast, the current collector’s price for a Big Inch Land Company deed is somewhere around \$50.