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THE YUKONER

MAGAZINE

**NO.
7**

- LIFE ON THE TRAPLINE
- A TRIP ON THE GOONEY BIRD
- THE FRIENDLY WOLF
- ROBERT CAMPBELL, PART THREE
- THE GOLDSEEKER, PART TWO



A mining trail near Dawson City. (SH photo)

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

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From the Editor

I gave myself a smaller box in this issue, so as to make room for "The Mail Run."

Much of our mail comes from "Outside" subscribers. Although we have several hundred subscribers in the Yukon, they limit their comments to short notes and phone calls (much appreciated). I think that's because Yukoners are a very busy bunch, mostly from trying to survive here. Anyway, the mail is important; it helps us gain a perspective on this publishing enterprise.

As an old friend of mine, Chum McNutt, formerly of Dawson City but now in the soggy town of Truro, Nova Scotia, always says, "We can never truly see ourselves."

In the last issue we ran a story about Jean Dubois. I got the photo of Jean from the *Whitehorse Star* in exchange for a short article. CBC North saw the article and came out here to the cabin to film an episode for "Northbeat," a half-hour news program shown north of 60.

What an ordeal that was. I could hear old Jean chuckling somewhere everytime I screwed up and they had to do another take.

I had to retire old Dodgie. Couldn't make her get through the winter. I bought another Dodge truck, much newer and fancier (1984) but I sure miss the old one. I suspect if spring ever arrives, I will be in the yard monkey-wrenching that old truck.

A shaft pin broke on the press and had me wondering if this issue would get printed. But I found another one and so everything is a go.

So long for now,
Sam

THE MAIL RUN



July 22, 1997

Dear Sam,

I've wanted to write you for some time now, but until very recently have been occupied caring for elderly people in my Adult Foster Home. I retired my business on June 30th and am taking advantage of the unaccustomed free time to write the first letter that I've written in ever so long. Have read so many of your articles and tales of the North country that I feel I know you.

My husband and I were in Whitehorse last summer. No, you didn't see me there because I felt that I was invisible. Or at least so it seemed. There were no familiar faces on the streets or in the cafes, and the town was so unfamiliar that for a time I was nearly disoriented. The last time I had been in Whitehorse was in 1980 when my mother died, and I had to curb the impulse to shout, "Hey, look at me—I belong here—don't you know me?" I walked these streets when there were wooden sidewalks, had coffee in the Hollywood cafe and went to the show at midnight on Sunday nights standing in line at 40 below stamping and blowing like an old horse trying to keep warm".

In those days when I was 17 I worked at the old Whitehorse General Hospital washing dishes by hand and setting up trays. An enormous wood cook A was kept fueled for the cook by a maintenance man. Jimmy Gentleman was the Administrator at that time, and Miss Ada Squires was Head nurse. Billie Bellway, Ada Crawford, Mrs. Krautschneider, and later my mother, all confronted the beastly wood stove as cooks every day.

The kitchen was in the basement of the building, with short windows over the sink. From my vantage point I can remember the roars of rage and the bottom half of the legs of a prominent citizen (name withheld) when they brought him in for periodic "drying out".

One morning one of the men came to my one room cabin near the hospital, and banging frantically on my door shouted that the cook was drunk and breakfast for the patients not even been started. I arrived in a dither to a cold sulking stove, and somehow managed gluey oatmeal, toast (made on racks atop the stove and prunes. Almost got a medal for that one!

While in Whitehorse we visited Elly Porsild, who in addition to being the mother of my best friend, Betty, is also Ellen Davignon's mother. I hadn't seen Ellen since we were both in our teens and was so pleased that she came to her mother's house to visit with us.

We (Mom, Dad and four kids) were raised on the Alcan Hwy. also, and knew all of the personalities that Ellen spoke of in her book, and

others of an equally colorful nature. One of the real high points of our trip last year was locating an old friend in Teslin that I hadn't seen in nearly 50 years. The daughter of George Johnston, Dolly Porter, of whom my sister and I were the best of friends in the late 40s. Even though Dolly spoke little English at that time, as young adolescent females we always had something to giggle about and easily surmounted the language barrier. George Johnston tried valiantly (and fearfully) to teach me to drive when I was fifteen. His patient nature was sorely tried and inevitably he would wind up shouting, (referring to the gear shift), "Like a Haitch (H) Bobbola" as he clung nervously to the door handle. That old car is proudly displayed in the George Johnston Museum in Teslin now, and I thought when I saw it last year that part of its history included ME!

When we travelled over the Alaska Hwy last year we marvelled at the modern accommodations and the ingenious engineering that has improved that road so significantly since I first made the trip in 1947.

September 7, 1997

Dear Dianne,

Thank you for your letter which was received about an hour after our telephone conversation. I was sorry that you were unable to use mother's stories, but perhaps I will try another publisher sometime in the future.

As for the facts you wished confirmed—Our family was what is known today as a "blended" family. Our stepfather's name was Tom Kimberlin. The two boys, Jim and Bill were his. My sister, Cindy and I shared the surname, Kronauge. Marriage did not improve my lot as far as last names were concerned.



The George Johnston store in Teslin, 1954. L-R, Mrs. Frank Johnston (George's sister-in-law), Dolly (George's daughter), me, my daughter Rita, my grandmother, Elizabeth Goetz.

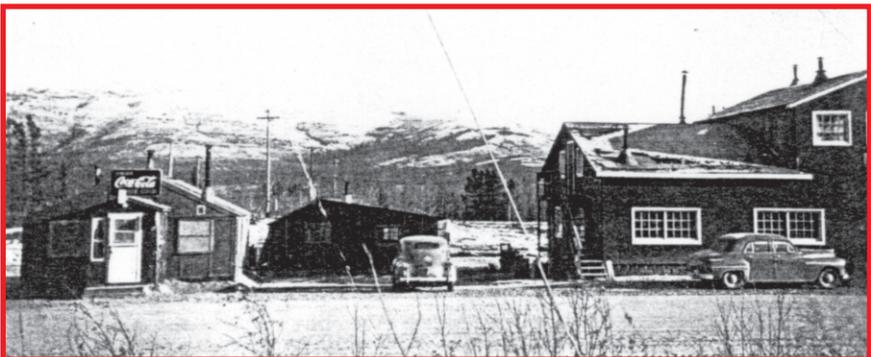
Our family arrived at Mile 777 early in 1947 after purchasing the abandoned U.S. Army construction camp from war assets in Whitehorse. We subsequently transformed this collection of 14 various sized buildings into a presentable, if primitive (typical of the times) lodge, with restaurant, sleeping quarters and {sort of }cabins for tourists which were a much maligned commodity. We had a generator at times-but it was moody, so we resorted to Coleman lanterns most of the time.

“The facilities” consisted of a state of the art, well constructed eight-holer outhouse, complete with trough for a urinal. One hole was carefully sectioned off with it’s own door stenciled in big black letters, “FOR OFFICERS ONLY”. Water for every purpose was hauled in buckets up the slippery banks of the Morley River. We called the lodge Welcome Inn, but it was generally referred to just as 777. For a time we also had a lodge at milepost 843. We sold it to Bert Law who called it the “Silver Dollar”. I believe it later burned.

777 was 26 miles south of Teslin. It was our nearest contact with civilization. I have many memories of Teslin and have always remembered it as one of the loveliest places on earth

We were at 777 for three or four years. Our “blended” family came unglued and mother, Cindy and I moved to Whitehorse—thus my stirring recollections from the Whitehorse hospital. As I explained to you on the phone we lost almost all of our photos in a fire at McCrae in January 1952. Mother, Cindy and I had been running the cafe there, and the house we shared burned to the ground. The Lodge at 777 is still alive and well, although with different buildings. We stopped there last year on our journey into nostalgia, and even though the river and trees seemed to whisper, “Hey, where the heck have you been all these years?” It was the only stopping place on our entire trip that there were no rooms available due to a construction crew. Well, now I’ve gone and bent your ear again. I really must close.

*Warm Regards to you
Barbara Kockritz
Brookings, Oregon*



Mile 910, McCrae, in 1951. L-R, cafe, house, hotel, beer parlour.

February 6, 1998.

Dear Sam:

Got the six back issues of the Yukoner and the magazine has taken me in completely. I love it. It is simple, it is fresh in mind and written, so that a normal human being can understand it. The format is easy to carry on all the trails one brakes or follows.

And a lot of trails I left behind me. Well, I think by now you would like to know, who is that? taking my time? Well, I may introduce myself.

My name is Pete Esser, to some still known as Yukon Pete. I lived in the Yukon for 11 years, 1967-1978. I call myself a Sourdough. Now I am retired in B.C. but in my heart I am always a Yukoner.

Along my Yukon trail I met some fantastic people like my old friend Chester Henderson, Father Marcel Bobilier, two true pioneers of the North as are so many others: Ruby Scott, Black Mike, Steve Kormandy, Bob Russell, just to name a few. All of them have in one way or a other influenced my life. A lot of them are not around any more but they will be with me to the end of my days.

At times I would like to send you some reports about my adventures in the North and if you think it's printing material, feel free and do it. If not, put it in your stove to keep you warm in the those long Yukon nights.

I thank you for your time. Please keep up the good work and don't forget to grease the old press and keep sending the *Yukoner*.

So long old boy and happy trails,

Peter Esser, Abbotsford, B.C.

Feb. 1, 1998

Dear Editor:

I've read six issues of your magazine with great interest. My brother, Doug Beaumont, sent them with a subscription as a Christmas gift. He and our mother, Florence Troberg, were born and raised in the Yukon.

I get great enjoyment from seeing your "Home of the Month." So, I have included ours. My wife and I live in a float home in the Queen Charlotte Strait area of the B.C. coast. (Note the green trees and open water—in January). Our house started life as a tool shed for a logging company, about 60 years ago. Currently it is on its third float. It's built on skids so a short haul with a Caterpillar moves it over. Yes, the flagpole in front has a Yukon flag flying. It causes much head scratching amongst the locals and summer tourists.

Anyway, good luck to you and your magazine.

Ralph P. Beaumont, Pt. McNeil, B.C.

Dec. 11, 1997

Dear Publisher & Editor

I received my first issue of the Yukoner. I sure enjoyed reading it. Read it over again and again. Looking forward to the next part of the Goldseeker. The story of Gene Dubois was sure interesting. I remember hearing of his sled dog run to Quebec in the news. I worked for Cassiar Asbestos in 1956, so that's one of the reasons I like to hear about the Yukon. Thank you,

Henry Austin, Penticton, B.C.

Living The Dream

(Our years on the trapline)

By Kathryn-Cameron Boivin

Leaves fluttered casually to the ground as I threw another armload of branches onto the blazing bonfire at our new trapline cabin beside the Stewart River.

As the spruce needles popped and ignited into flames great clouds of smoke billowed up into the autumn sky. The smell of the moist forest floor mingled with the acrid aroma of smoke drew me back in time to a similar situation in a different place by the same Stewart River. As I stepped whimsically into my daydream suddenly I was 17 years younger, without children and, seemingly without a care in the world ready to embark on an adventure that would change the direction of my life permanently.

It was late September when we sat near the Mayo float plane dock waiting for our turn to charter the single engine otter bush plane. Ahead of us on the schedule were outfitters, miners and moose hunters with an endless array of antlers, meat and supplies to haul out of the bush back into civilization. My partner, Rock and our good friend, Marc Chouinard were set to haul our piles of food, equipment and supplies in the opposite direction out to a place called Worm Lake. which was about one hundred



Kathryn Boivin working on a swinging bench in front of her new cabin.

air miles from Mayo. We had heard that there was an open trapline concession there and planned to spend the winter in the area to assess the fur situation. We were young, spirited and ready to get 'back to the land' in the northern way so sat patiently on our piles of gear with our five sled dogs and waited for our turn to come.

We had enough supplies to fill three flights so Rock went with the first load one frosty morning several days later. When he reached Worm

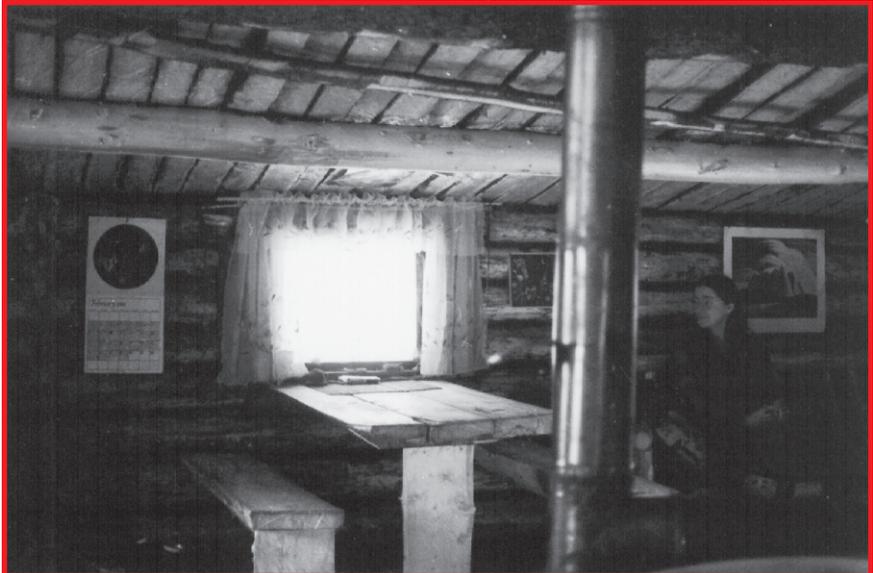


Rock Boivin works on the cabin. The first snow of winter has already fallen.



Lake he had found it to be frozen over so had looked on the map to find a lake with a similar radius from Mayo and had asked the pilot to head there. That place, literally picked out of the blue, was Ortell Lake and when it was found to be unfrozen became our new destination. We did not obtain the trapping rights for that area until much later but since we had no intention of trapping that first season anyhow this seemed to be a minor technicality to us adventurers. We had found a place to land and had everything we needed to survive for the winter so one lake seemed just as good as another. Ortell Lake became our new home!

It was a deep, serene lake backdropped by the Selwyn Mountain Range with the main peak of Ortell standing paramount. The shores were thick with stunted spruce, muskeg and immediate, gentle inclines. The waters were abundant with northern pike and lake trout plus a family of loons and a family of swans. The whole scene was invitingly tranquil and we all felt relief to be landed somewhere before winter set in so we made use of an abandoned mining shack on a dry point of land to start our camp. We erected one wall tent for storage and another as Marc's bedroom. The dry shack became the kitchen and our sleeping quarters. A raft was built forthwith so that we could explore the lake and go fishing. We also used it to cross the waters to go to the Stewart River, which was a three mile hike over a hill and down into the adjacent valley. Then, once we were comfortably set up, we began to hunt for a moose to fill our meat larder for the winter. We also spent time hauling firewood into camp behind the raft and picking huckleberries, which I boiled down into jam on a daily basis. We had an A.M. radio for outside news, a chainsaw and fuel for



Kathryn enjoys the interior of the finished cabin.

modern technology and a zest for the wilderness that exceeded our experience there. Indeed, Rock and Marc had trapped the previous winter at an isolated location along the Snake River and I had lived for one winter alone at a small cabin along the Dempster Highway but, beyond this and our childhood experiences in the woods, we were all pretty new to remote bush living. However, the eagerness, adaptability and physical perseverance of youth made up for our lack of knowledge.

We had been out in the bush for nearly a month when Rock and I



Above, Rock building the raft. Below, Rock and Marc out on the lake.



realized that the dry shack and the tent would be inadequate shelters if the upcoming winter proved to be exceedingly cold. We scouted the banks of the Stewart River until we found a beautiful location surrounded by plentiful, straight spruce trees then, on November 1st, we began to build our first cabin together. Rock felled the trees with the chain saw while I limbed them with an ax then measured them with a four-foot Swede saw. To move the logs we suspended a rope from opposite sides of a stout, four-foot pole which we then used to lift the butt of each tree off the ground. When each of us pushed equally on our side of the pole we were able to move the tree forward with the bulk of it rolling on ground irons, which we had strategically placed on a path toward the house site. It was slow work. Once we had all the logs on site Marc was enlisted to help raise the walls which we put together with saddle notches. Peeling the logs was put off until a later date since the season and our schedule did not allow for such trifles.

Once the walls were up and the gable ends in place we hauled in hundreds of small poles to use for the roof. While Rock was busy putting up the pole roof, I used a pick to chop the frozen ground down deep enough to lay in place the log floor joists. The cabin measured 24 feet by 24 feet so the roof and the floor size both seemed equally daunting as we worked in sub-zero temperatures with a minimum of tools and no ready-made lumber. When I was not busy inside the log cave I was out digging under the snow for moss to chink the cabin walls and to lay on top of the cabin roof.

All the time we were building the cabin Rock and I stayed on site in a 10-by-12 foot wall tent which was heated by a small wood cook stove.



A Single Otter plane landing on Ortell Lake with our supplies.

Near the end of November the thermometer sat steady at minus 40 degrees and, even with the little stove glowing red with heat, the tent was a miserable place. The big, windowless log cave, which was how I had begun to view our cabin at this point, seemed to look more attractive with each dropping degree on the thermometer. Rock made a barrel stove by cutting a circle out of the end of a 45 gallon drum for a door hole then cutting the end of a 10 gallon drum for the door itself. The stove pipe hole was cut out of the top of the big drum and then these two drums miraculously became our wood heater.



Above, our dogs. Below, here they are doing some work.



When the tarps were laid on the roof and moss piled on top of that I begged Rock to make a door so that we could move in. On December 1st we left behind the canvas walls for the dark, frosty log cabin and I was never happier! We kept the barrel stove burning full blast both night and day, in an effort to thaw the place out, but the weather remained extremely cold so those logs stayed frozen and frosty for quite some time. Everywhere inside was the sweetly pungent smell of spruce as I knelt in front of the barrel stove to cook meals. I shovelled wood and coals to the back of the stove and mostly put our covered cast iron cooking pots inside the stove to make best use of the heat.

The day that Rock cut the first window in our humble domain was the day I almost passed out inside the cabin from lack of oxygen. With the barrel stove sucking air constantly out of the cabin and the door only being opened quickly and infrequently, we had created quite a vacuum inside. In the middle of the day I became quite lethargic and extremely sleepy so had just lain down on the bed when Rock came in the door, assessed the situation and then shoved me out the door quite handily. Windows and ventilation were the next necessities on our list.

When temperatures moderated Rock cut long trees in half with the chain saw to make our floor in front of the window. He then hand split large trees to make skookum counter tops and I suddenly had a kitchen. There may only have been double plastic in the windows and rough boards on the floor but in the midst of the wilderness my emerging cabin looked like a little piece of civilization .

Gradually throughout the winter a new window was added or a new patch of floor was completed. Trees were split to make the plank table



Kathryn chopping wood.



and benches as well as the little couch in the corner, which I covered with an old foamie and some material left behind by the mining company. We dug three feet down into the ground in a 12-by-12 foot corner then banked this up with log planks to make a dirt floored workshop for Rock.

Above this workshop was the same sized sleeping space which could only be described as a half loft as the headspace was minimal. The other portion of our cabin became a sewing area where I set up my hand crank machine in front of a tiny window. Baths and laundry were done in a big, round wash tub, water was hauled by bucket from the Stewart River and the dogs moved down from the lake to become our transportation. A small cabin was built for Marc quite close to ours and the rest of the winter was spent traveling, exploring and fixing up our new homes.

When springtime neared we pondered ways to head back to town. Rock decided that he would snowshoe to town then send a plane back to pick us up. With a small pack of provisions on his back he snowshoed nearly 150 miles in 10 days on the Stewart River and then the Ladue River to reach the Elsa-Keno road and civilization. Marc and I spent this time snowshoeing an airstrip on the lake and preparing the cabins for our departure. When we heard the plane approaching we hitched up our dogs and raced up to the lake to climb on board.

When we returned to our trapline homestead year after year we brought in new amenities and improved our way of life. We dug out a well and a root cellar, added a high cache and a sauna and made a porch and log dog houses. When our first child, Kyla, arrived we added a full 12-by-12 foot upstairs bedroom and then dug a garden and made a greenhouse. Life became easier as we brought in a two way radio and were able to call



Kathryn standing in the sunshine in front of the finished cabin.

in a plane load of mail and supplies at Christmas. We trapped the line and cut trails through the wilderness We planted rhubarb and raspberries. We painted flowers on the shutters and made a swinging bench outside on the porch where we could sit to watch the sun going down.

As we became more settled I came to realize that all the new triumphs and joys that we experienced could never really compare to our initial feelings of accomplishment. Those accomplishments that were gained by the strength of our backs and the sweat of our brows changed me in a positive way.

I learned to rely on myself and my partners. I learned to do things because they had to be done and, if I didn't know how to do them then I learned how. I learned a lot about basic, simple pleasures that can enrich a life: the rich, juicy taste of deep lake trout after one has chiseled a hole in the ice and waited half the day for a bite, or the peacefulness of catching a Christmas station on the A.M. radio while making ornaments out of tin foil and old shirts, or the camaraderie of three friends relying on each other and making music, wine and meals together.

I snap out of my nostalgia as the bonfire smolders down and threatens to die. I hasten to collect another armload of the seemingly endless debris of branches and sticks that cabin making can provide, then watch as the glowing coals ignite again into flames. I consider the many changes we have undergone from the first trapline days to now with the addition of two children and the passing of years.

Our dog lot now includes racing dogs as well as freighting dogs. We now spend more time closer to town and have to haul extra supplies to the trapline for the winter months. However, most basic things have remained the same like trapping the line by dog team and shooting two moose in the fall to last us for a full year. We also still gather wood from the forest to cook our food and to heat our cabin and we still read aloud to each other every evening before going to bed. Our life may seem simple and even backward to many in this day and age but, enjoying a practical existence surrounded by the wilderness was one of the original dreams that we had 17 years ago. When we boarded that bush plane and headed to an unknown destination how could we know that it would take us this far or teach us so much? We were simply young fools trying to live a dream.

BAN EVERYTHING GROUPS

By Delores Smith

[From an unpublished manuscript, "Trappers Trails"]

"If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a fur coat. But not a real fur coat, that's cruel."

Why is it that people in the music business feel they can destroy someone else's livelihood? Especially if that livelihood has anything to do with renewable resources, like hunting, fishing, ranching and, of course, trapping. How often have you heard that particular line of that song over the past few months? I'd call it an ear-worm, I've heard it so much. The band in question is the flavour of the year in Canada. No impact? Are the kids really listening?

Witness the recent fur auction in Vancouver where placard-waving protesters stood in the rain while the auction went on inside. They even glued the doors and locks shut with Crazy Glue. And these misguided kids probably bought memberships or gave money to some anti everything group making a living from their ignorance.

Maybe it's time people who work in these beleaguered jobs started fighting back, whether we have a million dollars or not. A good law suit for libel or loss of income might get their attention.

I've always thought the seal hunters of Newfoundland should have sued Greenpeace all those years ago. Maybe they still can. It's ironic that most of the Greenpeace leaders are comfortably wealthy while most of the seal hunters are on welfare. The Greenpeacers made their money by saying seal hunting was cruel.

A blow to the head is the easiest way to die. Unconsciousness precludes pain. Was it cruel to kill the young before the mother abandoned them to fend for themselves a few days later? The media coverage was a shock to most people who live in an insulated and safe world: people who didn't ever have to think about where their comfort came from.

Why is it all the millions of dollars being spent by the fur institutes on education and research into humane trapping can be thrown away by a thoughtless comment? We don't need the aggravation.

Also, how is it that these rock bands can get away with criticizing trapping when their way of life is often more damaging to the environment than anything a trapper could dream about? The list includes habitat destruction for cities and clear-cut logging of the coastal hemlock forests to produce cellulose for cellophane to wrap their CDs in.

How about the ozone depletion caused by the fuel for the jets they use to fly from city to city as they tour the world? The list is endless.

The point I'd like to make is that it is always easier to find fault with something or someone other than what you're doing yourself. To them, it's justification if they entertain the folks. To me, it's a contribution to the destruction of the natural world.

It is also my impression that these “antis” don’t like animals. They seem bent on eliminating them from the Earth instead of living in harmony with nature. That harmony includes death. A misconception most people have is that animals won’t die if humans don’t kill them. In fact, humans are the only animals capable of killing humanely.

They also have no problem with killing nuisance animals or weeds. Mice, rats, bears, wolves, coyotes, dandelions and even mosquitoes. There was not one objection against the regular spraying of a mosquito pesticide in Vancouver while daily marches went on to protest the species-directed spraying of the gypsy moths, a potential threat to all deciduous trees in that area.

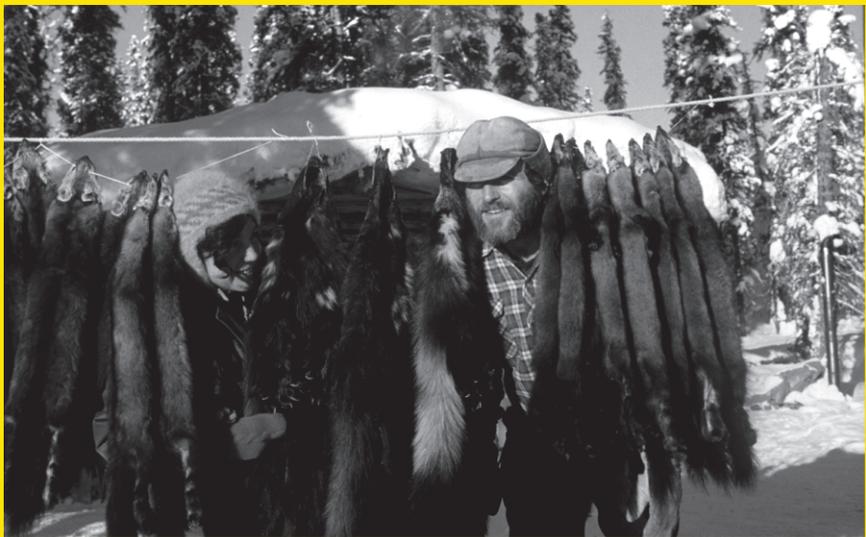
Another example is the P.E.T.A. (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals organization). When they couldn’t find anyone to take in all the cute little chickens, ducks and goats they had gathered up to save from the cruel world, they had them “put to sleep.”

They were killed just because they weren’t wanted anymore. Or how about the ones who held starving elk inside overcrowded park boundaries to prevent them from being hunted?

Starvation is such a humane way to die. I don’t know why we don’t all practice that method. Then, again, the park mentality is to blame for that. People think parks are in balance the way nature intended instead of the islands of ecological deserts they really are.

The only amusing incident regarding these antis was when a bunch of them paraded around New York City without any clothes on. They wrapped themselves in a banner that read, “I’d rather be naked than wear fur.”

I’d like to see them come up here and do that. I think their message gave a good example for the use of fur. The human is just a thin-skinned animal that needs external protection from the elements.



Surrounded by some of the seasons’ furs at Beavertail.

Working the Fortymile River Bars

By Ron Wendt

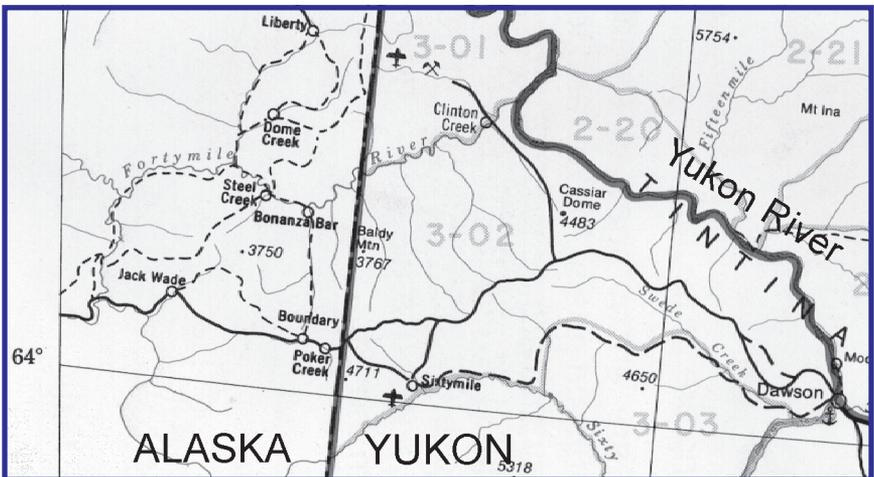
The Fortymile Mining District is one of Alaska's oldest continuously mined goldfields in the state. First mined in 1886, when Howard Franklin discovered gold on Franklin Gulch, Fortymile has become legendary in Alaska's mining world.

Probably the legend came about from the old timers who worked its creeks. They were veterans of previous stampedes like the Caribou and Fraser and Cassiar of British Columbia, Deadwood, South Dakota, and a few ancient bearded prospectors who had survived the California Gold Rush of 1849. A few outlaws who were looking to put some mileage between them and the law, also participated in the Fortymile gold rush.

The Forty- Milers, as they have sometimes been referred to, were indeed a hearty breed. The Fortymile not only had a fair paystreak running through its hills but it was a harsh region, but habitable, and small settlements sprang up along tributaries of the Fortymile watershed.

The Fortymile, with its foreboding dark, steep gulches, became the extreme school of Northern prospecting that would set a precedent for future gold regions where gold would be found in the later years to come, like the Klondike, Nome, Fairbanks, Koyukuk, to name a few. It was in the Fortymile that geologic formations were comparable to many others in the north and the early prospectors of this region were tried and tested on the gulches and river bars of the Fortymile River.

For some odd reason, there were a number of these old sourdoughs who endured the rigors of this unique region, staying on, working their claims or sniping the benches and bars, perfectly content to spend 50 years or more working the gold laden gravels of the region.



It was men like George Matlock whose previous occupation was buffalo hunter, a stump remover from Vancouver's Grand Avenue using oxen to pull the huge stumps, came north for the Fortymile strike and declared in 1932 that he had been mining in the Fortymile for a half a century, working the river bars and paystreaks along the South Fork of Fortymile. Also in search of a missing paystreak he had once discovered and lost on the river in 1891 and continued his search till the day he succumbed to the dreaded gold fever.

Matlock like many others took a course on river bar prospecting, and unlike today's prospectors used basically a pick, shovel, gold pan, and whip sawed sluices he built along his journey up and down the watershed.

I thought about Matlock and his cronies many times while prospecting this region. In fact, some evenings, I was pretty sure a few were watching me, floating about, looking over my shoulder trying to tell me where the best spots were. They were kind enough to give me the opportunity and allow me the joy of finding a piece of the paystreaks they missed.

My first river bar experience happened on the lower Fortymile. I was actually lying down in a stream channel upstream from Clinton Creek, drinking from the cold clear water. I took my loaded pack off and laid my 30. 30. Winchester along the bank. My lips touched the icy clear water as I drank and looked into the bottom of the stream, hoping to get a glimpse of gold. I was nearly finished and resumed swatting mosquitoes when I looked up. Somehow, quietly, a man stood, straddling the streambed, holding a rifle looking down at me, not 15 feet away. I was rather surprised, and figured he could have just as well have been a bear. I slowly got up, not expecting him to gun me down and rob me of my goldless pack. I smiled, nodded my head and stood up. We shook hands and formally introduced ourselves. He was a gruff looking Canadian out of Ontario who had escaped the horrors of the crowded cities and was quite thankful to be out in the Yukon wilderness, enjoying his wall tent along the liquid flowing Fortymile River, where time passes by slowly.

We sat around his nearby campfire and exchanged stories, smoking our pipes and laughing. Perhaps 80 years before, there were others like us, maybe like George Matlock, who had spent time around the campfire, telling tall tales, lost in the wilds without a care in the world, unaware of the wars and problems of the world.

My Canadian friend showed me a small vial of gold he had dug up nearby from a patch of gravel covered bedrock. It was mostly fine with a few clinkers in the bottom, maybe \$100 worth. At this point along the Fortymile river, the late afternoon sun glistened through the aspens along the river bank, and sparkled like diamonds of the waters surface.

In the old days, the prospectors would load up their supplies at the town of Fortymile about 5 miles downstream from here. They would pole their boats upriver, sometimes getting out and lining them, walking the boats along with a rope, pulling them over gravel bars through shallow

sections of the river. Depending on the year the river could be high or low. If it were low, you stood a good chance of reaping great golden rewards on the gravel bars.

It was time to bid my Canadian friend farewell. I would never see him again, but would always remember our time around the fire sharing our experiences, telling our stories. I always wondered whatever happened to him, if he struck it rich? Or is he wondering the same thing about me?

Farther upstream, the gravel bars invited me to snipe after I found a bedrock patch made up of quartz diorite and schist, quite common in these parts, a general part of geology in the Fortymile.

It is in my opinion that gravel bar prospecting is preferable to other types of sniping. For one thing the gravel is easier to shovel and the rocks, as a rule aren't as large, because they move around. That's not to say boulders don't exist, they do. Not far upstream from here, a couple of prospectors in 1934, worked the head of a gravel bar at Long Bar at 67 mile, and found 18 ounces of gold in a few days by using long toms. The gold was the size of wheat grains. Over 20 ounces of gold were found on the river bars near Montana Creek at 48 mile. It was said some of these prospectors were more successful than some miners who worked their claims.

River bars are an amazing renewable resource, and one can usually come back time and again to work gravel bars. I had done this in the Klondike goldfields on upper Bonanza Creek on several occasions, reworking old river bars that replenished each year.

At one point I came across a couple of prospectors with a small flat bottomed boat, loaded with supplies they too were working gravel bars and bedrock along the river. They had a camp located up in the aspens and were sniping along the river bank by hand methods. I stopped and paid them a brief visit. They too had some gold which I estimated to be about an ounce worth and mostly fine in content.

It was encouraging to see fair results and knowing what had been worked along the river in the past.

Occasionally I would hike up in the woods to examine a suspected ancient camp from perhaps the 1890s or earlier. This indicated to me the old timers might have spent time working something nearby. A collapsed log cabin was always a good sign meaning someone spent much time nearby, usually trapping and mining, so the records show.

George Matlock nearly starved to death one year along the Fortymile. In 1889, he had taken up with an Indian woman and left Fortymile City in the fall. Supplies hadn't made it upstream from Fort Yukon over in the Territory of Alaska, and local miners were warned not spend the winter at Fortymile or at least prepare for the worst. Not knowing what lie ahead, and having only about 25 pounds of moldy flour, Matlock was able to shoot several moose and some caribou and lived quite comfortable with his squaw in the gulches at his cabin on the South Fork. It was a year

earlier that George Matlock had been in a fight with a local troublemaker. Matlock killed the man in self defense. But he bore the scar of a deep knife wound in his back from the outlaw.

I settled down to a camp along the river on a high gravel bar and pitched a tent. The river was peaceful here and as a rule it usually ran clear but looked like brown tea as one looked into it. For taste, the river was good drinking, but I had gotten sick from it one year acquiring "beaver fever" the scourge of water, created by sickened beaver with parasites one cannot see or taste. It doesn't take long for it to take hold of the system and will wipe out a good man in a couple days leaving him weak. Some never get over it. Always check for beaver sign before drinking, or boil your water

There are quite a few sites to river bar prospect on the Fortymile River. It would take several years and perhaps a lifetime to prospect this watershed. Maybe 50 years like Matlock had spent. As the years went on though, he probably realized it had become his way of life which he chose over civilization.

The river bars were named by the old timers who became experts at the game. Most of these spots contain gold too.

Though I had found a lot of fine gold at the mouth of the Fortymile, the first paying gold doesn't occur until the Clinton Creek Riffles, about 5 miles upstream. After Clinton Creek, the bars go something like this, starting mileage from the mouth of the river:

Sourdough Island 7, The Canyon 11, Bear Creek 12, Log Cabin Bars 15, Matheson Creek Bar 17, Boundary and Sam Patch 23, Moose Creek Bars & Riffles 27, Cleghorn Bars and Riffles 30, Discovery Bar 33, Smith Creek Riffles 34, Dead Man Riffles 35, Green Island Bar 37, French Joe Bar 37, Bonanza Bar & Bench 38, (a site where suction dredgers have done well in the past), Jew Bar 39, Nugget Bar 39, Fly Point 40, Twin Creek Bars 41, Steel Creek Bars 42, Maiden Bar and Benches 43, (named after prospector Andrew Maiden, an original Yukoner), Flat Creek Bars 45, Five Mile Island Bars 46, Scurvy Bar 47, Montana Bars 48, O'Brien Creek Bars 49, Falls Bars 51, Wheelbarrow Bar 53, Carter's Bar 55, Indian Creek Bars 57, White Bluff Bar 59, Sourdough Bar 60, Long Bar 63, Hyde Bar 66, Wildcat Riffles 69, Butte Bar and Bench 73, Uhler creek Bar and bench 76, Pump Bar 77, Cranston Bar 78, Chaska Bar 80, Troublesome Bar & Bench 84, Napoleon Bars & Bench 86, Corkscrew Riffles 87, Walker's Forks Bars 89, McRay Bars 92, Atwater Bars and Bench 95, Hellgate Riffles 96, Sterling Bar 97, Gibraltar Bar 98, Lost Chicken Bar 99, Ingle Creek Basin 107, Taylor Creek Bars 114.

One can't know for sure how much gold has come out of these bars, but most of the old timers according to the records have attested that these sites have been producers in the past.

My efforts were concentrated primarily on Clinton Creek Riffles and Sourdough Island. After learning the pattern of the Fortymile River, gold is found frequently in its gravels. In many of these spots it takes a little

wading out to the gravel bars. I noticed in late spring, evidence that ice has pushed up gravel can also be seen. I have had some fair luck getting gravel from the gouged out gravel near the edge of the gravel bars where ice has dug into the gravel during breakup. As a rule, bar sniping does not require digging great depths. Since most of these deposits are surface in nature, the pay when found might only be down a foot or two into the gravel. Look primarily at the top half of the gravel bars and on the sides. The gravel is easily dug out from these areas and sluiced and processed by rockers boxes.

Along these riffles and bars, one does not have to look far to find old wooden sluice boxes up in the trees along with rusted cans and broken bottles where the pioneers left their mark.

As I worked the gravel bars my methods consisted of setting up an aluminum sluice on a pile of rocks, tilted slightly, and dumping gravel into the top and washing down the dirt with a bucket. A high banker also works well on the bars as does a dredge. However, because of Alaska slowly becoming a socialistic state, piles of government permits are required to operate in supposedly free America. Some miners complain of harassment by overzealous officials. Sometimes its best to not attract attention and use hand methods which produce amazing results at times.

Not until 23 miles up the Fortymile does the miner have to worry much about harassment because those first 23 miles from the mouth upstream are in the Yukon Territory.

A prospector over in the Eagle area in the early 1900s, would prospect the river bars of American Creek and 70 Mile River and would pull out as much as 70 ounces in a month in the fall when the creeks were low and winter had not quite set in.

It might require a little harder work but the old timers used basically their gold pans, sluices, picks, and shovels, and made livings with these methods.

After much sluicing and bedrock sniping, I too pulled out a vial of gold, as my Canadian counterpart and the two other prospectors on the Fortymile.

I was sitting along the Fortymile River one evening at the prospecting camp, puffing my pipe, swatting mosquitoes, and listening to the fire crackle, pondering how bad I had it out here compared to those lucky people in the cities. I was painfully watching the river flow by, not being able to hear the sirens of town, or the roar of cars going by, or the television babbling on. The only babbling I could hear was the water flowing over the rocks. I clutched the gold tightly in my hand and smiled.

As Time Goes By

By Sheila Rose

At a dark, fog-bound airport passengers furtively scurry across the tarmac to a vintage aircraft. The fog swirls, talk is in whispers, passengers wave back to blurry, back-lit figures in the airport windows. A melody is recalled as the plane's engines hum:

*You must remember this,
A kiss is just a kiss,
A sigh is just a sigh,
The fundamental things apply,
As time goes by.*

I could be describing Bogart and Bergman, romantic characters in far-away Casablanca giving it all up for duty or the memory of lost love.

But the scene took place in Whitehorse. I was among the passengers huddled on a freezing Air North DC-3 heading off to Dawson City, Old Crow and possibly Inuvik if the weather was bad.

Air North doesn't fly DC-3s any more but I wouldn't trade my experiences on that venerable aircraft for the speed and agility of a Navajo, or a Cherokee, or the comfort of a Hawker-Siddley. A Twin Otter can tempt me and a Hercules has a certain muscular charm. But the DC-3 will always have my flying heart.



Sheila, Floyd and the DC-3, Dawson City airport, Dec. 20, 1989. The DC-3 in this photo has been flying for more than 50 years.

It was love at first sight on that bitterly cold morning in November 1989. I had just moved to the Yukon and was conducting a quick visit to the schools in the communities. On this day I was booked for Dawson City and Old Crow. New friends in the office said, "Poor you, you are going on Wednesday. It's a supply run so you'll probably fly on a DC-3. Bring all your warm clothing."

I thought this was a survival precaution, in case the plane went down. I found out that it was a survival precaution but it applied to the first hour the plane is in the air.

On departure day I bundled up in long underwear decorated with hearts and teddy bears (a joke gift from long-time friends in Ontario), corduroy jeans, wind pants, turtleneck wool sweater, and a parka.

I looked through the airport window and there was the DC-3. It looked like a huge bumble-bee. As we climbed in (and you do climb, up the outside stairs and up the ramp-like aisle to your seat) it was like stepping onto the set of Casablanca.

Of course some things were pure Yukon. The spring and web seats are adjustable in number and there are just enough seats for the passengers. The cargo hold was filled with groceries (racks of bread and canned goods), and an all-terrain vehicle. In the back of the passenger cabin sat two huskies in cages. When you are new to the north it is an awesome sight to look into the other-worldly eyes of a husky.

We seated ourselves and our frozen fingers fumbled with frozen lap belts. Everything was frozen. It was just as cold inside the plane as it was outside. This is because the plane's heaters don't click on until the engines are running. The flight attendant was cheerful as she handed out blankets. We wrapped ourselves and watched out the window as the engines revved up and the propellers slowly began to turn.

The DC-3 rattled and we started to move on tires square from the cold, through the ice-fog and darkness to the end of the runway. I could hear a murmur in the cockpit and through the open doorway I saw the last minute checks. Then the gloved hand of Captain Joe Sparling pushed the throttle forward. The frozen metal plane began to vibrate a forté. A numbing crescendo built as the plane hurtled ever faster through the darkness, down the runway. The dogs paced in their cages, and I glanced at the rivets around the windows and in the metal walls to see if they were holding. Then we lifted off — we were flying — and I thought, "I love this experience. I love this plane."

It took a while before the first blast of heat made its way through the cabin. Soon the passengers were engaging in a northern striptease: off came the blankets, then the parkas were undone, gloves and hats were discarded, boots were loosened as the heat kept on coming.

I then picked up the scent of sausage and eggs. Yes! A hot breakfast. There is no galley on the DC-3 so the freshness of the breakfast could be in question. But I didn't care, it was great.

The darkness of the northern morning eventually gave way to streamers of light in the eastern sky. Some passengers began to chat about where they were going and why while others, in the heat of the

cabin and the drone of the engines, resumed the sleep they had interrupted to make the flight.

I was so thrilled by the experience that when my partner told me he was coming to Whitehorse for Christmas I immediately booked us return tickets to Dawson City on the DC-3. I imagined us cozily snuggled in our seats, drifting off to the Klondike.

Wrong ! My assumptions and my relationship were on a collision course. He finds flying in a Boeing 737, with all its amenities, an uncomfortable experience. "It was built during the war" I said, trying to inspire in him the same romantic feeling I felt. "Are we expecting anti-aircraft fire over Stewart Crossing ?" he asked. Despite his reservations we made the trip.

We were the only passengers waiting in the Dawson City airport when the time came for the return trip to Whitehorse. But we wouldn't be the only passengers on the plane. It was a busy week for Air North. A volcano eruption near Anchorage had created poor visibility and the possibility of airborne ash clogging jet engines. As a result almost all air travel out of Anchorage was shut down and hundreds of southbound passengers were marooned in Alaska.

To the rescue came Captain Sparling and the DC-3. Air North was ferrying people to Whitehorse where the stranded could make connections to Vancouver and points south.

Thinking the aircraft was partially filled with properly dressed Yukoners we took our time boarding. We even stopped to get "Buffalo", the driver of our airport shuttle, to take our picture with the DC-3 in the background. Meanwhile the flight attendant was waving frantically at us. It was -37C and the passengers were not dressed for the weather. The crew wanted to get the plane's engines going again to heat up their human cargo. We were barely in our seats when the door slammed shut and the plane droned down the runway, through the valley and into the clear sky.

I flew in the DC-3 at every opportunity. I travelled in the spring with crates of chickens headed for Dawson City. I flew with fresh fruit on my lap for the teachers in Old Crow. I sang songs with a group of nurses heading for a winter holiday. I heard Glen Miller's "In The Mood" wafting through the plane. I nibbled on wine and cheese on the late afternoon run.

I have dreamed dreams for the North, and thought I could write poetry as I looked out the window to the landscape below. To move through the sky as the sun is setting and the clouds are wrapping themselves around the plane like a feather duvet is to experience bliss.

Plane buffs can tell you of the DC-3's durability, how its wings were tested by driving jeeps over them. Whenever I mention my love for the DC-3 I am regaled with specifications, personal anecdotes, and aviation history. But my memories of the DC-3 are more mythical. It has not only transported me to different places but to a different time. So, while others discuss details I sit back, smile and think, "Here's looking at you, kid."

Growing Up at Telegraph Creek

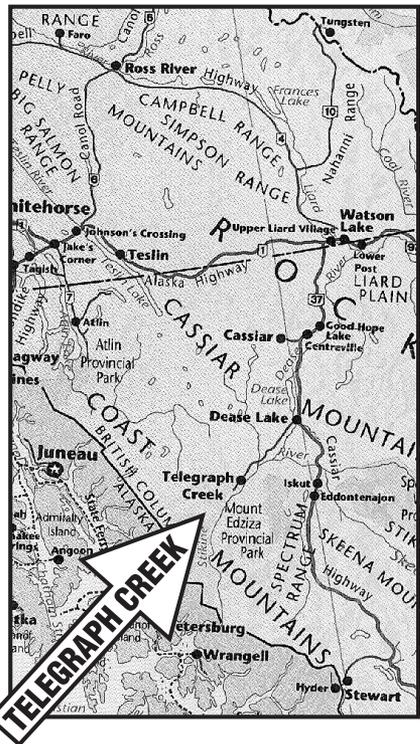
Two Stories by Lena Mann

The Homestead

In 1977 my parents along with eight of us kids decided to homestead in Telegraph Creek. We built the four mile road by hand and built a forty by twenty cabin on a hill beside a creek. By the time this was done, we'd been eating fried bread dough for a month.

My dad hunted for moose the way he use to for elk, but the two animals are far different. Hungry for meat, we took a ten mile or so hike up the Tahltan River looking for a good fishing spot. Ten miles doesn't seem awfully far, but the old horse trails winding along the river were straight up and down, and the youngest kid was only four. We found a perfect place to fish: The meadow grew right along the river and there were deep pools. Within a few hours, we filled every bag and bucket we brought with Dolly and Rainbow and ate all the fish we could over a fire before starting the hike out. By the time we were half way, it had grown dark, and we were walking in the moon light, but not many of us were looking up. The buckets and bags were heavy and it seemed the ten miles had turned into a hundred. We still had a couple miles to go, but us kids couldn't walk any more. We dug into some sand, bringing it over us like a blanket and slept beside our buckets of fish until the sun was high. When we reached home, everyone of us were sick, and mom was kept busy holding kid's heads, trying to get our fevers down with no medicine but rubbing alcohol wiped beneath our armpits.

The fish didn't last long and mom didn't dare write any more short cheques at the local store. In between hunting for moose, Rod, my eldest brother, shot a beaver. We ate everything but the tail, supposing the best piece, but it did look like a piece of checkered fat. One day we saw a young bull standing on the road below our cabin and too far to shoot. There was a scramble as dad, mom, Rod



and Carrie grabbed rifles and all ran in separate directions to circle the moose, believing that if one scared it, the other would get it. Within half an hour us kids at the cabin heard several shots. We were excited and raced out into our tiny yard. Slowly everyone came back, until dad was the last one. He seemed ashen and a bit shaken. The only thing he saw was a huge bear rising out of the swamp a dozen steps away. He shot the bear point blank.

We finally got a moose, and it was a lesson to be learned. All the months of crashing through the bush had been useless. Late one evening while dad and Rod were down in the wild hay meadow, crouched down to look and see if any of the grass seed they'd planted had took, they heard a loud thudding noise. Looking up, there were two cow moose headed fast toward them, and only a short distance away. Neither hesitated as they rose, shooting their guns empty. The cow they hit ran into the brush and died. We all helped gut the moose, but while we were packing the meat skinned from the bones away, Chrissy, my youngest sister, poked the stomach, and for the rest of the late night we worked, we had to smell the stink. We buried the guts in case the shots could be heard from the village and someone decided to turn us in, and then mom spent around the clock for the next four days canning.

Basically, we learned to wait for the moose, and they'd come to you. Over the next few years we ate a lot of moose meat, never allowing any to go to waste. My brother, Clint got his first moose when he was ten. But Clint liked the water... His first moose was a big bull that had to be drug in to shore, and the two year old calves were in a chest-deep swamp. We never really thought we were breaking the law as we needed the meat. We always buried the bones and canned the meat quickly. Once when we knew we were turned in, we buried all the meat under the horse's feeding grounds in the snow. The warden never found any sign, but it really didn't seem he was looking that hard.

In the years that followed, us girls would hunt for grouse and rabbit. We had a steady supply of fresh meat, although to this day I don't care for rabbit. Mom learned to garden in the north, and we had a good supply of fresh stuff in the summer. My dad worked in Dawson Creek and Alberta most the time, and so mostly there was only mom and us kids. Mom as the best shot on the place, and if us kids failed to bring back meat, mom would. But then, that's another story....

Wolves

The idea that wolves are gentle creatures that live on mice is really quite funny. Having spent most of my life in the bush I've seen what wolves are really capable of. Believe me, they're not like that sleepy little dog on your door step.

In '77 we lived on a homestead in Telegraph Creek. My dad and older brother was gone most of the time working down south and so it was just mom and the other seven of us kids. It seemed dad was hardly out of the

drive before the old blue army four by four would break down. The first time, mom rolled it just below the store into the Stikine where luckily there was still an edge of ice that broke her fall. But both her and the truck got beat up pretty badly, and mom had to walk the nine miles home. Another time, she buried the truck in a swamp and worked on it for several weeks trying to dig it out, but when the jack came up and nearly knocked her out, she left it. So we depended on the horses to get us to town once a week for mail and groceries.

The first encounter with wolves was in the dead of winter. My two sisters, Julie and Carrie and I we're riding back from town. It was cold out, about twenty below Fahrenheit, and since there's little daylight in the winter, we were riding in the blackest of nights. The road up to our place begins about five miles out of town, we couldn't get off and walk, even though we were cold, since it was harder for us to find our foot steps than it was for the horses.

Within a half mile up our road we heard the first moaning of a wolf. It was close. Too close.

The horses were tired, but suddenly they became tense. We fought their heads as they tried to bolt. The wolves, about half a dozen, moved in closer. They were all around us, as we could hear them in the brush on either side of the road. Dark shapes slunk across in front of us, and one stayed on the road behind us about two hundred feet. We shouted, but it didn't seem to matter. The horses were walking fast, constantly fighting us, and were steaming in the cold. We hoped the wolves would vanish before our heavy gate that marked two miles from the house.

Julie, the youngest and riding the smallest horse, and also, shegot off at the gate. The wolves still didn't run. They were making deep sounds in their throats which I'm sure spoke of how hungry they were. I wondered why they didn't go chase mice like that author of some wolf book said they did, I mean, these wolves were too close, and their dark shapes seemed huge. People say wolves won't attack humans, but then I wondered about that woman who lived in the village being treed by a pack. The wolves continued to stay close to us all the way to the barn and then they melted into the trees where they started to howl.

It shook us up pretty good, although, of course we couldn't admit it. Within a week, we could hear the crying of the pack. There's nothing beautiful about a wolf pack chasing something. We'd heard the wolves once pull down a cow moose below our place, and the sickening sounds from the cow was painful. But now, fearful for our horses, we ran to the barn in the dark, calling the herd in, we threw extra hay out and counted the herd. They were all there but a six month old filly.

The next morning, us three girls walked down the road looking for the foal. Carrie and I found her first and we hollered at Julie to stay back, since it was her horse, but Julie ran up to us anyway. The filly's head lay in a snow bank, her teeth bared from what must have been a painful

death, the rest of her body parts were scattered over fifty feet as if the wolves had a tug-of-war with her. But worse than the death, we followed the tracks for half a mile where they had played with the filly before killing her. Again and again, it was obvious from the hair, blood and tramped snow that they had got her down, only to release her and play chase until they got her again.

We lost another horse to the wolves in the spring. A little stud who had, from the tracks in the mud, had made the mistake of going into an alder patch when the wolves had chased him. From the tracks, it was again a game before they ripped him apart. We set traps around the carcass, but the wolves dug the traps up without releasing them.

Wolves are smart creatures, but I would never trust them. One look at what they can do to a bull moose makes me wonder what they could do to a human. I think they're even more smart than bears. Once, when a bear had cornered our calves.... But that's another story....



Telegraph Creek, (SH photo)

The Miners' Ghost of Elsa

By Fr. Andrew Cuschieri

The Yukon, like any other place, has its own ghost stories to tell. I came across my first story in the Yukon when I read the book by Laura B. Berton, "*I Married The Klondike*." The story took place in Dawson City concerning the tragic death of Dr. Lachapelle who drowned while hunting ducks in the Yukon River in the proximity of Stewart Crossing. It appears that on the day Dr. Lachapelle drowned, his spirit presented itself at the kitchen door to his Japanese housekeeper. There the specter stood for an instant, soaking wet, and disappeared. The poor woman took to flight screaming with terror. Many shrugged their shoulders at her story. Several weeks later, the master's dog, a cocker spaniel, found his way back to the Stewart City Road House exhausted and starving. His arrival set the alarm and confirmed the housekeeper's story. The boat was discovered but not the Doctor's corpse.

I haven't gone out of my way to compile a series of ghost stories pertaining to the Yukon which, I am sure, would amount to hundreds. Nevertheless, I have heard several. Of these I selected some worth recording.

The following incident took place in Elsa. When the silver mine was in operation, Elsa was a cute little town overlooking a gorgeous valley the width of which extends to the mountains close to Stewart Crossing. The Catholic church and rectory, where I stayed a couple of days some six years ago, excelled all other missions in scenic beauty. Perched on the side of the mountain, the rectory commanded a tremendous panorama of the town and the awesome wilderness.

The encounter with the ghost happened to Fr. Dave Daws. Then a young man of 17, he worked at this mine from May to September of 1964. He and an Italian fellow, by the name of Nick, were assigned to work at the fifth shaft, some 500 feet below surface. This shaft had been closed down for some time and therefore they were asked to salvage any material still serviceable. This was not feasible unless they had first removed a mining ore car which was derailed and blocking the entrance.

The only possible way to wedge the car from its position and place it back on the tracks was to use sturdy poles. Nick went in search of these at the fourth shaft. Dave, in the meantime, was trying to free the car from its jammed position when a miner coming from behind asked Dave what was he trying to do. Dave never bothered to look straight at the miner's face but he recalls the man dressed in a brown jacket, rubber pants and boots and wearing a brown helmet.

Dave cannot vouch that he heard the man utter a word. Still, he intuitively knew what the miner was asking and he explained his intent to the newcomer. With the strength of both men the car was shifted back on the rails. Before Dave could turn and thank him, the miner disappeared

into the dark. Upon his return with the timber Nick asked Dave how on earth he succeeded in accomplishing the job by himself and more so without wedges.

"Oh, another guy helped me out," answered Dave.

"No," replied Nick, "a dead man came to your rescue. There is nobody on this shaft except you and I. Once in awhile this dead man makes his presence felt around here. This shaft has been closed down because two years ago the ceiling collapsed and killed two miners..

This story was too fantastic for Dave to swallow. He therefore tried to locate the mysterious miner in the cafeteria during meals—but all in vain. He soon found out that other miners had stories to tell about the ghost of the mine. It seems that the specter not only wanted to give a hand when needed but was also concerned with the welfare of the miners. On another shaft, a miner (again his name was Nick) was carelessly storing dynamite in a hole. The ghost took shape and instructed Nick not to place the dynamite in the way he was doing. This time too the ghost never spoke a word yet Nick perceived clearly the admonition of the phantom.

The mine in Elsa claimed several lives but this seems to be the only ghost that cared for his fellow miners.

* Fr. Cuschieri lives at St. Augustine Seminary in Toronto; Fr. Daws is resident Catholic priest at Faro, Yukon.



Abandoned mine buildings and equipment at Elsa (SH photos, 2001)



SUMMER OF THE WOLF

By Jean & Doug Gonder, Jr.

Dogs descended from wolves, who knows how long ago. At least as far back as the days of cavemen, dogs were the friend of human beings.

This series of photos, taken by Jean and Doug Gonder, Jr. at their gold mining camp at Livingstone, Yukon, shows how it all might have happened.

In the summer of 1995, they heard a pack of wolves ranging the valley of the South Big Salmon River, near their gold mine. Then, "Timber" showed up at the camp. He stayed around all season and became a cautious friend.

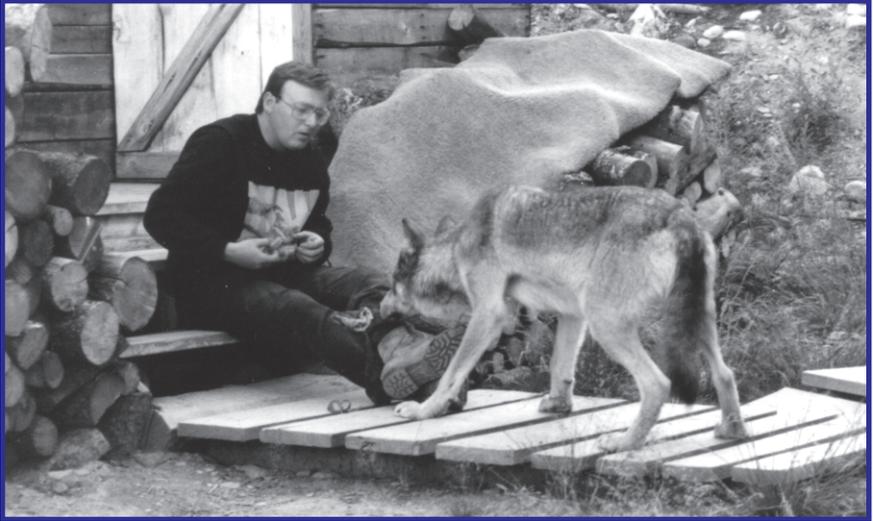
Perhaps the pack had rejected him for some reason of their own. But he was all alone in the world until Jean and Doug befriended him.

It is possible that Timber wandered into another camp and was shot. Or he might still be wandering the Yukon. But the Gonders never saw him again after that summer.

If we imagine ourselves going back thousands of years in time, a wolf very much like Timber could have been the first dog in history. The trouble is, if a poodle walked into his path, Timber would probably have it for dinner. S.H.



Our first encounter with "Timber."



Doug Gonder, Jr. and Timber.



Although there was some trust, Timber was always as much on guard as I was.



Timber never showed any sign of aggression, and would take food from me, but he always watched where my hands were.



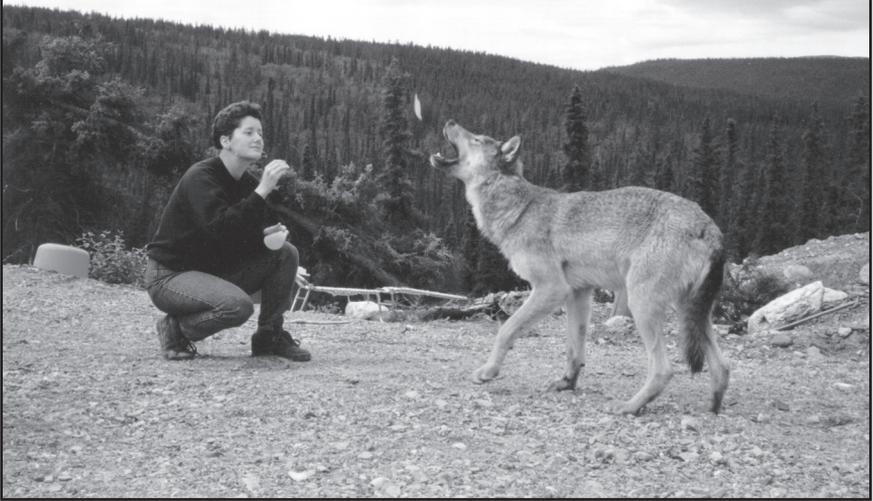


This was his resting spot outside our cabin.

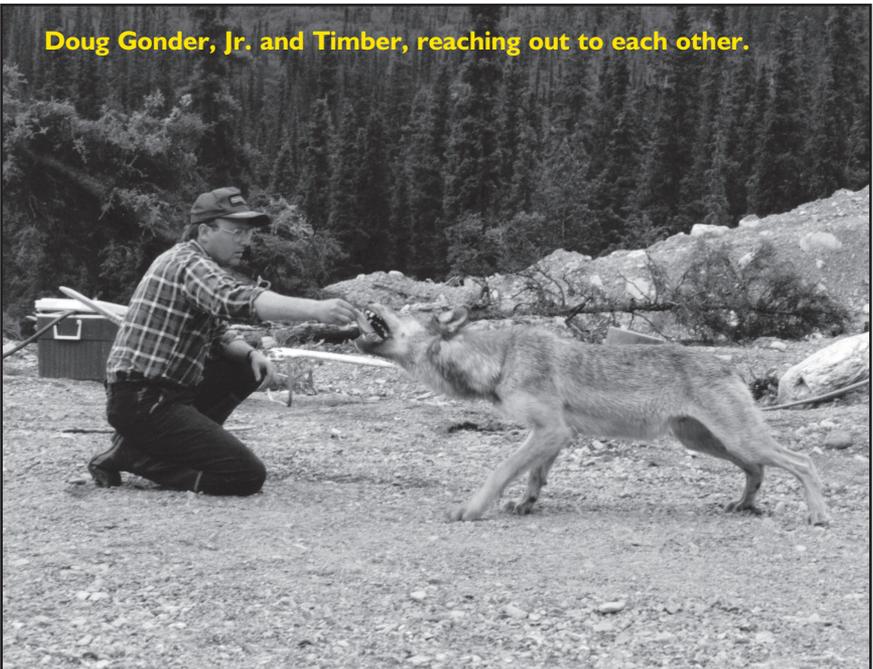


He grew considerably as the summer went by, and this is one of the last photos we took of him. This photo is on the cover of the magazine.

Jean Gonder and Timber, playing catch with some canned meat.



Doug Gonder, Jr. and Timber, reaching out to each other.



The Yukon's Greatest Explorer:

By William J. Betts

Robert Campbell

Part Three of Four

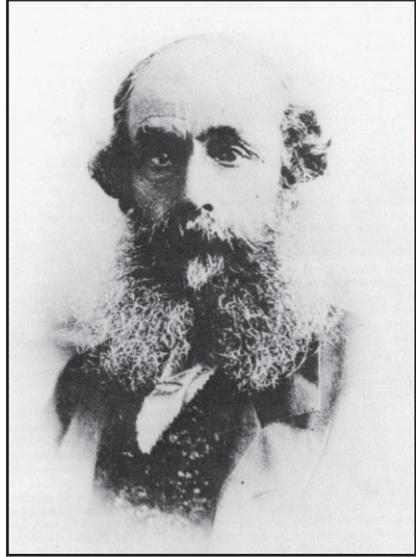
continued from
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Campbell and his men encountered numerous water fowl as they drifted down river. They quickly killed enough for a sumptuous meal, the first in a long time. Now they would eat more regularly. Ducks and geese as well as plants, now springing up along the river banks, would feed them well.

In their progress down river they encountered an Indian camp, the very same Indians who had harassed and pillaged from them. Campbell and his men, now together, were a force to be reckoned with. They confronted the Indians who were now alarmed for their safety. Some of Campbell's men were all for killing a few of the Indians just to show them "who was boss". Campbell would have none of that as it was the Company policy to treat the Indians with as much kindness as the situation would allow. However, he demanded that they return the goods they had taken from them. They parted in peace, much to the relief of the Indians.

On the 14th of May, while camped on an island at the junction of the Dease with the Liard River, Campbell wrote a letter to McPherson describing the awful winter they had spent at Dease Lake. In the letter he wrote: "It is a cruel thing to be at the mercy of savages as we were, and to see our property scattered among the devils. They pillaged us of all we had except our nets, and not satisfied with emptying our store, they robbed us of all our utensils, nor did they stop here. On reaching the upper end of the lake they reduced those there to nakedness and expelled them from the place, and it was with difficulty that McLeod succeeded in preventing their taking one of the men as a slave."

Campbell went on to explain that it would be impossible to maintain a trading post at Dease Lake without more men and adequate supplies to feed them through the winter months. There was just not enough game "to live off the country." The Indians were hostile and there wasn't much fur to be traded. Campbell chose two of his best men to take his journals



Robert Campbell

(these to be copied and returned) along with the letter and several packets of fur to Fort Simpson. Campbell, with the rest of the men would stop at Fort Halkett where they would wait for the arrival of the supply canoes from Fort Simpson.

In September the supply boats arrived, a welcome sight to Campbell until he read the letter sent him from Gov. Simpson. It was, in a way, a blow to Campbell. Simpson congratulated him on his exploration of the Stikine watershed and commended him highly for all that he had accomplished during his stay at Dease Lake. Gov. Simpson went on to say that during his trip to Europe he had gone to Russia where he met with Baron Wrangel of the Russian American Company and concluded an agreement whereby the Hudson's Bay Company would lease and be the sole trader of the Russian Territory at the mouth of the Stikine River as well as the area west of the Mountains. The Tlingit chief, Shakes, held sway over the whole area. The Coy, as Gov. Simpson called the Hudson's Bay Company, would take possession of the Russian trading post on Point Highfield at the entrance of the Stikine River. They would no longer need the fort at Dease Lake.

All the privation, the suffering and hunger of the preceding winter on Dease Lake went for naught. But the letter wasn't all bad news for Campbell. Gov. Simpson (now Sir Simpson as he had been knighted while in England) wrote that he, Campbell, could now push his exploration into the Peel River country. "I am quite sure," wrote Simpson, "you'll distinguish yourself as much in that quarter as you have latterly done on the west side of the Mountains."

Campbell must have been somewhat disappointed that he didn't receive a greater acknowledgment for his accomplishments, yet he was intrigued by the possibility of going into the new territory. He was a Company man first but his natural craving for exploring new lands would always be a driving force in his day to day work as a trader.

Here is how the Council of the Northern Department put it in their minutes of 1839. "That Chief Trader McPherson take the necessary steps to establish in the summer of 1840 a post on the Peel's River under the direction of Mr. Bell, and in 1841 another post on the headwaters of the Colville River, and as the recent arrangements with the Russian-American Fur Co. renders it unnecessary to extend the trade down the Stikine River from the east side of the mountains, as formerly contemplated, that Mr. Campbell and people intended for that service be employed in assisting Mr. Bell to extend the trade from the Peel's River to Colville's River in 1841."

The plans as outlined in the above minutes were somehow set aside and there were other arrangements made. It would be another decade before Campbell was to see the far northern rivers.

Letters or instructions were slow and it often took months for orders to reach the outlying posts such as Fort Halkett. It wasn't until February 25, 1840, that Campbell received further instructions. William Mowat arrived from Fort Simpson to relieve Campbell and give him his latest orders. He was to follow the Liard River to its source and cross over into

another drainage area and try to discover any large rivers flowing westward.

Campbell didn't leave until the end of May. With him were seven men, among them his faithful Lapie and Ketz as well as the interpreter Hoole. There was plenty of game, especially beaver, as well as plenty of fish in the streams.

On July 19th they reached a beautiful lake which Campbell named Frances Lake in honor of Lady Simpson. They followed the west branch of Frances Lake and along the river that flowed northwest from it. It flowed into another lake which Campbell named Finlayson Lake as well as the river that flowed into it. Today a highway, named after this early explorer, runs from Watson Lake to Ross River along much of the route that Campbell and his companions took on that first exploration trek.

For three days they didn't eat. There just wasn't any game. It was an all too grim a reminder to Campbell. He wondered if the new area would be much different than Dease Lake.

When they finally arrived at Finlayson Lake they found suitable spruce trees from which they stripped enough bark to make a canoe (Hoole was an expert canoe builder). They moved more swiftly in the canoe and soon reached the far end of the lake. Now they found the game more plentiful and once more they enjoyed full stomachs.

From the end of the lake they would have to cut across country over some rugged terrain, often tangled with underbrush or fallen trees. From a large bank or hill (Campbell named it Pelly's Bank) they observed a large river flowing to the northwest. He named the river Pelly also, after Sir H. Pelly, an official of the Hudson's Bay Company. They descended to the river and drank a toast to Queen Victoria from the clear water and of course to the Hudson's Bay Company.

A raft was constructed and they floated down the river for several miles. In his report to the chief factor of the MacKensie District, John L. Lewes (he had replaced McPherson) Campbell wrote that he had observed salmon in the river. This led the Scot to believe that the Pelly did empty into the Pacific Ocean. Not far wrong as it did in a way; it emptied into the Yukon, which in turn empties into the Bering Sea, not the Pacific.

Campbell as well as Gov. Simpson believed that any river flowing northwest would have to be the Colville which is an Alaskan river flowing into the Arctic Ocean. The closest it gets to the Yukon is some 250 miles but the importance of the discovery was in no way lessened by this misconception.

Campbell, in his report to Lewes, wrote that he thought that a trading post somewhere in the area would be advantageous to the Company. Unlike Ft. Halkett or the Dease Lake area he felt that game and fish would be much more plentiful.

He did point out, however, the disadvantage of the remote area and in supplying such a post they would still have to use the dangerous route up the Liard River. Still he felt that it would be opportune for the Company to establish such a trading post.

The trip back to Fort Halkett was leisurely, there were no problems except the usual work and coping with the wilderness that now seemed kind. There was plenty of game and they encountered no Indian, friendly or otherwise. They arrived at the fort loaded down with dried meat which was a welcome sight for the few men still at Fort Halkett. The next day the supply canoes arrived from Fort Simpson.

Since Campbell was back there was no longer the need for Mowat—he had been left in charge—to remain. He would leave with the returning voyageurs to Fort Simpson. They left at dawn to negotiate the dangerous Liard River. The large canoe was a new one, well made and would be able to negotiate the river rapids except for the usual portages. The eight voyageurs at the paddles were all experienced men. When the most dangerous areas of the river were passed, the men were in high spirits, laughing and singing. The worst of the river was behind them.

Suddenly, before they could turn away, the canoe entered a large whirlpool broadside. Over it tipped and broke in half, sending the occupants into the swirling water. Of the nine men in the canoe, six lost their lives, including Mowat. What the Indians couldn't do the Liard River did.

The three survivors returned overland to Fort Halkett, half starved and close to the end of their endurance. They had lost all of their supplies and fire making equipment in the accident. All they had were the clothes on their backs. Campbell allowed them to rest for three days and then sent them on to Fort Simpson in good hands—old Lapierre.

It was the usual problem for Campbell, procuring enough game to feed the remaining men at Fort Halkett. It was “the worst in the whole district,” as Lewes reported to the Governor and Council of the Northern Department. The local Indians suffered greatly as well as the Company employees. Campbell estimated that at least 100 Indians had died from starvation. With the Indians starving they trapped no fur to find its way to the Company.

Because of the starvation due to the lack of game in the Fort Halkett area, Lewes recommended that a new fort be established at Frances Lake. “Which I shall,” he wrote in his report, “use my best endeavors to have done under the management of Mr. Robert Campbell, who from his zeal, activity, and steady perseverance in the performance of his duties is well qualified for such a charge.”

In the spring of 1841, Campbell went down the Liard to Fort Simpson with the annual fur packets. He encountered no problems on the river but hated the work portaging around the dangerous areas. At Fort Simpson, Campbell met Lewes for the first time. He found him much to his liking. Lewes left him in charge of the fort while he went to the annual gathering at Portage la Loche on Lake Winnipeg.

In his report at the meeting, Lewes reported that the Indians in the Fort Halkett area were suffering from starvation, that some had died. He reported that few furs were procured and that it seemed a better policy to

establish a new trading post in the Frances Lake area where game was much more plentiful and consequently there would be more fur trade. He also pointed out the terrible dangers involved in negotiating the dangerous Liard River and that, consequently, good men would have to be engaged for navigating the dreaded river. He said that he had engaged one such man, at 30 pounds per annum, a man named Francis Whitford who had a lot of experience navigating turbulent waters.

When Lewes returned in the fall, Campbell left for Fort Halkett. Negotiating the Liard against the current was back breaking toil. Campbell hated the river as did every man who was employed in the Company's service. The usual singing of the voyageurs was replaced by the grunts and curses of the toiling men as they pulled supply laden canoes against the current or carried packs over the portages.

Campbell had received a letter from Gov. Simpson written at Red River on June 24, 1841. In it he wrote that due to Campbell's explorations the Company was planning to extend its trading to that quarter.

He had also written to Lewes that it would probably be better to supply such a fort from the Pacific rather than the dangerous Liard River route. Both Campbell and Lewes would heartily agree to a change in the supply route and abandon the Liard River altogether.

In June of 1842, Campbell was again at Fort Simpson having brought the winter's fur catch from Fort Halkett. While here, Lewes handed him written instructions as to how he should go about building the new trading post, or perhaps they may have talked about it and then later Lewes sent Campbell a letter as well. The written instructions were in great detail and later Campbell was to ponder over them.

Campbell was given two fine boats in which to return to Lake Frances as well as supplies and trade goods. Tools were also provided, saws, axes, drills as well as the hardware needed to build such a fort. On June 27th, at 2:00 a.m., Campbell and his crew of 12, left Fort Simpson on their long trek to Frances Lake.

Campbell and his crew labored for 20 days to reach Fort Halkett. The Liard was high and it was nearly impossible to advance against the swift flowing currents. The portages were long and hard; no wonder the men hated the dangerous Liard River. They arrived at Fort Halkett on July 24th.

Campbell did not waste much time at the Fort, just long enough to rest his men and reorganize his supplies. Some he would leave at Halkett as emergency rations, with instruction they would, under no circumstances, be used. They left on July 27th and arrived at Frances Lake on August 13th. They toiled over portages, ran dangerous rapids, but arrived with all supplies and goods intact. Now would come the hard work of building the fort.

Campbell and his crew wasted little time getting organized. They set out six nets before retiring for the night. When checked later, the nets produced 49 whitefish. The next day they netted 61 fish. The prospects looked good.

As winter drew near, however, the fisheries declined. There were few catches. It became evident to Campbell that if they were to survive the winter he would have to cut back on his crew though he needed them badly for constructing the fort. Memories came crowding back recalling the frightful winter on Dease Lake. He put off sending men back to Fort Simpson.

On October 5th, Francis Whitford, the guide, arrived from Fort Simpson with more supplies as well as a letter from Sir George, as he was now addressed. Simpson commented on the horrible time that Campbell endured at Dease Lake and hoped that the new fort would be better.

Simpson went on to write: "While at Stikine about a month ago (October of 1841), I heard of your old friend the Nahaney Chieftness, who assisted you in your distress in the mountains 3 years ago. She was then upon a visit to the Coast, where she is much respected. I understand she spoke of you in terms of high commendation." How many times did the lonely Scot read that letter? Perhaps he hoped that his "Chieftness" would one day visit Frances Lake.

Simpson also wrote that he could see no reason to trade with the Indians on the west side of the mountains as there was so little to be gained. He planned to go along with the old Russian trade methods by leaving the Tlingits in control. They would have much better results. So this again revealed to Campbell how useless had been his explorations of the Stikine.

Campbell allowed Whitford a two week rest and then sent him back to Fort Simpson with three of his crew. The remaining men would have to work at building the fort as well as procuring enough food to see them through the long winter months.

It is most difficult to imagine what such a life in the wilderness hundreds of miles from the nearest supply base, must have been that winter of 1842-'43. Even today with all of our modern means of transportation, the airplane, snowmobiles, living in remote Canadian areas is no piece of cake. Reading Campbell's journals for the time gives us an insight into how brave these men were. To have hunted and fished enough to fend off starvation while working hard at constructing the fort, isolated as they were, gives us a clue to the characters of these early Hudson's Bay Company employees.

Lapierre, Campbell's trusted old voyageur, maintained a fish camp some miles from the location of the new fort. At times the nets yielded a fine catch and at other times barely enough to feed the men a good meal. Other men were hunting anything that would furnish food.

While the fishing and hunting continued, Campbell still had a fort to build. In addition there were needed winter items, like snowshoes and sleds, that had to be constructed. Campbell mentions dog teams but gives no indication how the dogs came to be at Frances Lake. Had they brought them from Fort Simpson? Or had they, which is more likely, traded local

Indians for them? At any rate, to travel in winter, sleds, snowshoes and dogs would be needed.

Hoole was not only a great canoe builder but a fine craftsman when it came to sleds and snowshoes. Campbell sent Hoole, along with another man, to select wood for a sled. This was on November 25th. Somehow the craftsman cut his foot badly with an ax. Just when he was needed most he would be out for weeks to come. Also medication was very limited and there was always the danger of blood poison, or worse yet, gangrene. Hoole was to recover, however, with no complications.

All through the month of December the builders of Fort Frances had difficulty catching enough fish and procuring game to feed them. Short rations were nothing new to Campbell. There were some food supplies such as pemmican but that wouldn't last long if that was all they had to eat. He only issued it out when there was no fish or game. It wouldn't last long. Still, they always seemed to make out and work continued on the fort.

Once, when Campbell was alone (the others were either at fish camps or hunting) the trader nearly lost his life. He went to some nets in the lake, where there was enough current to form open water, to check for fish. When he reached over to pull the net he fell headlong into the frigid water. Somehow he managed to get back on the ice, just how he never knew. By the time he was back at the house he was covered with ice. Had he not been able to get out of the water he would surely have met his death.

In February the situation turned for the better. On the 18th a caribou was killed by Hoole. On the same day two more were killed by two young hunters. By the 24th, they had killed and brought back to the fort 20 more caribou. Fishing had improved. The danger of starvation seemed to have passed, at least for this winter.

During these winter months the Indians came by with pelts to trade, beaver, fox, martin. They traded several pounds of castorium as well. Many pelts came in but very little provisions. It was a very profitable season for the Company.

In March, Lapierre began squaring timber for the bastion around the buildings of the fort. This fort would not be like the post at Dease Lake where they were at the mercy of hostile Indians. This was slow work as was making the other lumber used in the construction of the buildings. Much of the lumber was made by the pit saw method, the most tedious toil invented by man. In this method two men would work the whip saw, one in a pit the other on the top pulling the saw blade back and forth. The man in the pit got all the sawdust showering down on him with every pull of the saw. At Frances Lake a scaffold was used rather than a pit but the principal of sawing lumber was the same.

On March 28th, Francis Whitford and another employee, Sahys, arrived from Fort Simpson by dog sled. They left Fort Simpson on the 16th of February; that was 40 days of mushing over frozen rivers and snow fields, stopping only for short rests at Fort Liard and Fort Halkett.

Whitford delivered a letter to Campbell from Lewes. Lewes wrote at length, not only commending Campbell for sending men back to reduce the number to feed, but also giving directions as to what he should do in the spring and summer there at Fort Frances. Campbell was to explore the Pelly and keep a journal, to record everything that happened even if it seemed trivial. He cautioned Campbell to protect their lives from Indians if that became necessary but to treat the Indians well if possible. Also, he wrote, "I have now officially to inform you that the Council last summer have augmented your salary to ~ 100 (pounds) per annum commencing the 1st of June 1841 to 1843." That was the best news in the long letter. Also Campbell was looking forward to exploring the Pelly in the coming summer.

Campbell kept a journal which he called "The Frances Lake Journal." From some of the entries we catch a glimpse of the work the men accomplished in the wilderness.

"On May 2," Campbell wrote, "the three men off in the woods who were felling trees and sawing them into logs came back to the fort, having left about thirty logs at the pit-side; Francis Whitford and Desrivienes were sawing, and Sahys squaring and cooking for them, and Hoole preparing wood for flooring of the men's houses, 30 feet by 16 feet."

So the building of the fort was rapidly being completed. On May 6th, the sawyers had 94 planks ready and four days later a 45 foot flag staff was put up over the gate. Much of the work was accomplished by that venerable French Canadian, Lapierre, who, as someone said, "seemed born with a paddle in one hand and an ax in the other."

Time was fast approaching for Campbell's departure down the Pelly. He had not yet answered Lewes' letter brought by Whitford. He would send his answer back when some of the men returned to Fort Simpson. Campbell was confused about some of the instructions in the Chief Factor's letter. He wrote the reasons he could not do some of the things that Lewes had instructed him to do in the fall. He then wrote, "But what I wish and hope the more sincerely is that the river (Pelly) may prove to be more easy and practicable channel for ingress and egress to and from the Pacific to the interior than this confounded river (Liard). Hoole is now building the canoe, and with the help of God I trust that before I turn my face homeward to know and to impart to others all the particulars regarding that river and the country through which it passes."

It might be added that during the winter Campbell sent Hoole and two other men over to Pelly Banks by dog team. He had sent over birch bark (from Fort Simpson) from which a canoe would be made later. The men also built a small house which would be used when the exploration of the Pelly River would begin.

Soon now, Campbell would embark on his journey of discovery down the river. He was anxious to go. The Pelly beckoned him like a beacon.

To be continued

The Part Two
Goldseeker
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I trudged over the bridge crossing the St. John River a couple of days later. I had run part of the way, stopping for short sleeps and walking by night as well as day. I had no money at all, only enough food for a couple of days, but a tremendous faith in my destiny kept me in good spirits as I walked around the streets of Saint John. It was the first big city I had ever seen.

For the number of people that lived here, the city didn't look too busy to me. I had heard stories about the big fire some years before that had wiped out most of it, and that work was scarce, with people leaving for Boston and other places. The changeover from wood to steel ships had been a disaster for Saint John. The men of this city had been among the best wooden ship builders in the world, turning out sailing ships by the hundreds. In those days the city had thrived, full of well-paid craftsmen and their families. Now that industry was gone, but I had heard that the national railway had built a grain terminal here so they could load prairie wheat onto steel ships going to world markets. With all that going on, there had to be a job for me somewhere.

I tried to look people in the eye, intending to ask them a few directions, but nobody would glance my way. They were intent on their own survival and a tramp with a pack on his shoulders could do them no favours.

The small eating places and taverns beckoned me with their cheerful signs. The smells of fish being baked or fried and freshly brewed beer wafted from the doors of these establishments every time a customer went in or out. I decided to sit in one of the taverns and just listen to what these city folk talked about. I pulled open the large wooden door to a place called The Lobster's Tail. I could see a large sign over the bar, BEER, 5 CENTS A MUG. Amongst the dim lighting and pipe smoke, I also saw two big men wearing aprons approaching me. Between them they half-carried a young man dressed very much like myself.

The door had just swung shut behind me as they rammed his head into it and it flew open again. I could see them tumble the young man out into the daylight, onto the street paved with stones and mud.

"And don't you come back till your pockets are jingling, you young bastard!" shouted one of the barmen as he pulled the door shut with a loud slam.

A wooden counter ran the length of one side of the tavern and I shuffled up to it, thinking if I didn't order a drink they would toss me out too. As the bartender approached me, I lost my nerve and headed for the door. No one followed with kicks or shoves and an instant later I found myself outside on the street.

The fellow they had ejected so roughly stood with his back to the tavern wall. His bloodshot eyes gazed intently at me. I could see he hadn't washed or shaved his chin in many days. His lips hung loose on his face but they curled into a sneer as he said, "So, another wretch with no money for a beer, ay?"

He stumbled then and fell down onto the cobblestones. I helped him up and told him I'd never had a drink in my life. He laughed and cackled till he ran out of wind and started coughing. I steadied him so he would remain standing. Drool ran down from the puffy lips and dangled from his chin. I turned to walk away and he said, "Looking for work, sonny? If I tell you the best places to look, will you help me walk to my ship?"

"All right," I said. I grabbed his left arm and slung it around my neck. He pointed with his other arm and we slouched along the streets, turning this way and that. Between his staggering and the weight of my packsack, we surely looked like a pair of drunken sailors. At length we came to a hill overlooking the huge harbour. Ships of all shapes and sizes lay at anchor in the quiet bay and a few more had tied themselves to the docks, offloading or loading cargo. At least a third were wooden sailing ships, diehards from the old days. I could see men going up and down long wooden ramps to these tied-up ships, pushing large carts.

"That yellow one, that putrid yellow rust-bucket down there. That's where I belong," said my drunken guide.

His arm waved toward one of the smaller ships in the harbour. Long, thick ropes fastened it to the dock and as we got closer, it looked to be the biggest thing I had ever seen. As we thumped along the wooden dock, I could see a man seated on a chair with a small table in front of him. The table was set up alongside the yellow ship and the man wore a peaked cap and a red shirt.

"Captain! Skipper!" yelled my friend. "It's me, back for another voyage. What are you doing out here, Skipper?"

"Why, Joe, I'm interviewing."

"Interviewing? What's that mean?"

"It means, you stupid S.O.B., that your berth is gone. You were supposed to be here yesterday. You've cost us a day's voyage."

"But Captain, there's nobody here to... what do you call it?"

"Interview?"

"Yes, Captain. Inter..."

I tried to pull the drunken sailor's arm off my shoulder. His arm was caught between my neck and the packsack. I reached behind and fed his arm through and let him go. He stood there weaving and I thought to myself, 'Did I owe this man Joe anything? What would he do if things were reversed?'

I stated, much louder than I intended, "Captain! I'm here for an interview!"

"All right," said the Captain. "Where are you from?"

"St. Stephen."

"How many push-ups can you do?"

"Push-ups," I asked. "Push-ups?"

"Yes, goddammit. Push-ups?"

"Captain," said Joe. "Watch me, Captain! I'll do push-ups!"

Joe crashed down onto the dock and we could see his forehead bounce from the planking. He lay perfectly still and the Captain looked at me with shining eyes. He seemed delighted with the situation.

I dropped down and began pumping, with the Skipper counting. Fifty, seventy-five, a hundred, and hundred and ten... by now my shoulders were bursting with pain but I kept going... a hundred and twenty-five... a hundred and thirty...

"All right, all right. Get up off there. Grab your pack and let's go aboard."

He folded the chair and table into their proper shape for storage and carried them up the ramp behind me. Even though I walked somewhat above him on the ramp, he towered over me and I could hear his heavy breathing. When we reached the ship's deck, I said to the Captain, "I know nothing about sailing. Nothing at all."

"Oh, yes you do, boy. With those arms of yours, you'll fit right in."

"Would you mind telling me, sir," as I looked up into those shining, wolfish eyes, "where this ship is going?"

"Kingston, Jamaica. With a load of flour. Then it's back with a cargo of rum. Five weeks sail, six at the most."

I'll tell you about the ship now, although I was many months learning these things.

She was about 160 feet long with all cargo storage below the decks. The ship ran on a huge triple-expansion steam engine with a screw propeller, quite modern considering the derelict appearance of the outside of her. The engine and boiler took up the last third of the ship below decks at the stern. Behind that, toward the centre of the ship, was the coal-storage area, leaving just over half her total length for cargo. All the crew's quarters and the galley were built on the main deck and the wheelhouse was on top of that. Because of this low centre of gravity, it was said that no storm at sea could capsize it.

My pay was to be thirty dollars a month, working eight-hour watches with eight hours rest in between. It came out to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week for that thirty dollars.

My job: shovelling coal into the boiler. That's all I had to know how to do. The fire was never to get low, and God help me if the engineer called for more steam and I didn't have enough coal in the boiler. We would have the northeast trade winds on our back on our outward voyage so the work wouldn't be so hard as it would on the return trip.

The Captain beckoned me to follow him to the wheelhouse for my “breaking in” talk as he called it.

“When we leave this harbour in the morning, you belong to this ship, mind, body and soul. And I am its master, which means I am your master. I have the power of life and death over you and can punish you any way I see fit. So do what you’re told, laddy, and do it fast and well.

“The First Mate will instruct you in your duties after supper. If you have any questions, keep them to yourself. Now get down to the galley and out of my sight.”

As I walked toward the centre of the ship, I thought, okay, I can do anything for a month or two. Then I’ll be riding the train from Saint John to the West Coast. A letter to Beth would have to wait until I returned from this voyage. Little could I know that I would never see my homeland again.

A week later we were sailing the Atlantic Ocean, heading south by southwest. We had left the calm waters of the Bay of Fundy and the little ship rolled and pitched as I tried to find my sea legs.

I shovelled coal in through the small boiler door and if I lost my balance it spilled from the shovel onto the deck. Once, I burned my hand on the edge of the opening. But I got the hang of it and shovelled away. I had no watch nor was there a clock to be seen in the boiler room. Halfway through my watch, the cook’s helper came in with a tray of food. It was the only mark I had for the hours that had passed.

An international connection

Through its parent companies, Yukon Electrical is linked to a corporate world that stretches from Australia to London to the Beaufort Sea. Yukon Electrical became a member of the ATCO Group of Companies in 1980, after two years of intricate negotiations by Calgary-based ATCO Limited to acquire ownership of Canadian Utilities. ATCO started as a tiny trailer-rental firm by a Calgary fireman and his son with \$4,000 in capital. There was a practical reason for going after the ownership of Canadian Utilities which had bought Yukon Electrical in the 1950’s. The idea of bringing home the ownership of a major Western Canadian company that provided essential services to Canadians appealed to Ron’s sense of nationalism.



THE YUKON ELECTRICAL
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I drank gallons of water from a cask, and sweated it all out in the hellish heat of the little space between the coal bin and the boiler.

It was the most repetitious, mindless toil I could ever have imagined. Only because I knew the ship moved through the water beneath my feet, was I able to bear it. When the relief man came to take my place, I was always too tired to enjoy my time off. I ate silently in the galley in the presence of the cook and a few others, then went off to my bunk.

The Second Mate came in to check my work. He loomed over me, like the Skipper, but he seemed fairly decent. He taught me the beat, the rhythm, that could make any physical work come easy. The coal came down a chute to a box behind me and he showed me how to turn, pause, and dig into it, wait a second, turn, pause, and pitch it into the boiler, turn again and dig, all to the beat of a phantom drum.

Turn, rest, dig, rest, turn, rest, and pitch. I forced my muscles to relax at each tiny rest between strokes. At the end of that day, I no longer staggered to the galley. In fact, I almost felt rested and could linger at my meals and work on a long letter to Beth.

If I could have written everything I thought about as I shovelled coal, the letter would have been thousands of pages long. But I settled for telling her how much I loved her and missed her and how I would avoid violence for the rest of my days if that's what she required of me.

I told her how the two bosses of the ship, Skipper and the First Mate were so much bigger than the rest of us, yet they did no real work at all. In fact, the skinniest fellows aboard were myself and the other fireman yet we kept the ship moving on our efforts with the shovel. Yet I conceded that the Captain knew how to navigate, by day and by night, for we entered the harbour of Kingston, Jamaica after three and half weeks of sail.

As the newest man of the crew, I was left aboard to watch the ship while the crew went into the city for their carousing. I didn't mind at all. The next day a small crane dipped into the hold, scooping out the pallets of flour sacks and setting them down on the loading docks. By now the crew had all returned—save one—and we loaded the rum, which was not so easy.

The casks were lashed in groups of four on a wooden base and had to be lowered carefully into the hold and arranged down there so they butted one against the other. If any space were left between them, the barrels might clash together at sea and break. That night at supper in the galley, the Captain came in. Normally, he and the First Mate had their meals brought to them in the wheelhouse but this time he chose to eat with us lesser beings. Everyone knew something was up.

"Boys," said the Captain, who owned part of the ship, with the Second Mate owning a percentage also, "I've got something to tell you. We're not sailing for home, not right away. We're going to keep our rum and head for California."

The Second Mate piped up, "Skipper, that's an awful long trip—through the Strait of Magellan and up the west coast. It'll take months before we're home again."

“Yes, you stupid bastard. I know all that. But we can get ten times more money for rum in San Francisco than we can sell it for in Saint John. If we load the upper deck, we can take another third as many kegs. I’m promising everyone in the crew a bonus when we get home. If you don’t finish the trip, you get nothing at all.

“Now, here’s your choice. You can sail with us around South America or get off yourselves off my ship right here and find your way home. By the way, has anyone seen Alistair, our other fireman?”

None had. And none objected to the long voyage. Especially me. I would be going to the West and then to the Northwest, to the land of gold I had heard about, and where I would make my fortune. The Fates had dealt me a good hand. Or so I thought at the time.

Sailors had yet to form protective unions in those days. Indeed, a captain could flail a man to death at sea. Unless a reporter got wind of it and published the story in the newspapers, no one really cared. Especially the shipowners.

I could never say whether everyone agreed to go on the long voyage out of fear or greed. Fireman Alistair never showed his face during our time in Kingston. We got a black face instead.

His name was Ben, a descendant of African slaves. He had never been amongst white men before. He would become my friend and the reason for breaking my vow to Beth.

We set out for the tip of South America with our shipload of rum. Some 500 kegs had been lashed onto the upper foredeck, with ropes holding the barrels together with the whole lot being tied securely to the rails and bollards. One crewman’s job for the entire trip would be to tighten and retighten these ropes lest the kegs came loose in a high sea. If that happened, they could wreck the ship.

Our new man Ben, being very small and looking like he’d never had a good meal, did not take the missing fireman’s job. Instead, he became the cabin boy and cook’s helper. The old cabin boy changed watches with me on the first day out. When I came back to the boiler room to start my second watch of the day, two men walked past me and out the door. For the rest of the voyage, I shovelled alone while two others took my place. I did not complain, knowing that no one would care and I rather liked being alone—alone with my fantasies of Beth and how I would strike it rich in the far north.

The cook, (as cooks are known to be all over the world, in lumber camps and ships and wherever there are isolated groups of working men) was as contrary and mean as a human being can be. His complexion and body shape gave the him the look of a boiled roll of baloney. At my second meal in his galley, I had set my hat on the edge of the table. He swept it off there with a meaty hand and roared to the crew what a filthy creature had sat to his table. He went on about the hat, raging and ranting... and I never left it there again.

I came in to the galley more tired than before, because now the little

ship faced the southeast trade winds and needed more coal to move herself along. No matter what watch I finished, the cook would be raving at poor little Ben.

“Nigger! You didn’t peel enough potatoes again, you black little bastard! Get that stove wiped off! It’s as black as your hands, so you can’t tell if it’s clean, can you, you little jungle bunny!”

The rest of the crew would laugh at the show. I watched Ben closely and could see the skin on his forehead tighten every time the cook spoke to him.

We sailed on down the east coast, stopping in at Rio de Janeiro for more food and to take on some extra coal. Then we passed between the Falkland Islands and Argentina. I shovelled coal and ate and slept and never really knew where we were on our journey. I know we passed through the Strait of Magellan and started northward again. The trade winds came up behind us again and pushed us along. The maw of the boiler need less coal and I started writing to Beth again when I came off watch. I had given the captain two letters to mail from Rio and would send another from Lima, Peru, our next port of call. I found the letters on my bunk later. Nobody knew where to mail them, and besides, they would get to her sooner if I sent them from ‘Frisco.

In the meantime, the cook terrorized little Ben and the injustice of it all began to bug me. The rest of the crew now had joined in, sticking a foot out to trip him if he carried a load of laundry and kidding him about his suntan.

We stopped at Lima for one day to take on coal and food. We had been eating very old potatoes and from cans for most of the trip. The fresh fruit we took on at Lima brightened the trip for everyone.

Again we crossed the equator. For all of the weeks we had been sailing, nothing like a gale or typhoon had hit us. We had gone from a hot climate to a cold one then back again and no one came down with scurvy or any serious illness. Until the cook got a pot of boiling water in his face.

At the time, according to the gossip of the crew, we had about five days sail to reach San Francisco. The Skipper had kept us well out to sea from the coast and had just turned the rudder to point us to the northwest.

After he threw the potato water into the cook’s face, Ben had dashed out of the galley to hide somewhere on the ship. Meanwhile the cook howled in agony, “Tabernac! Colis! Mon Dieu Criste! Tabernac! I am going to die, I am going to die!”

No one knew what to do for him. The Third Mate ran to the engine room and came back with some black grease and patted some on the cook’s face. It seemed to help the pain and while the other Mates held his arms, the Third Mate plastered a thick layer all over the cook’s face, neck and chest.

Second Mate went off to fetch the Captain and tell him of our trouble. Skipper came into the galley to make his own investigation of events.

When he saw the cook, he began to laugh.

“So who’s the nigger, now, ay, Cookie? Har, har, har.”

And the rest of the crew joined in till the galley boomed with the roaring of half a dozen men.

“Now,” said Skipper to the First Mate, “Find that cabin boy and let me know when you do. Send the whole crew to look for him. All except you, Hank. You have to stand your watch, starting now. Hop to it.”

So I went back to my boiler room to shovel coal. Once in a while I opened the door to take a quick look on deck but nothing was happening. At last I finished my shift and headed for the galley.

The cook was already back to work, his face covered in black grease, and he moaned to himself in French. The boiling water had not hit him in the eyes and so he could see what to do. And that was to make a cold meal for us, out of canned fish and bread. A deckhand came running in.

“They found him. They found Ben. Captain’s gonna have him winched, out on the afterdeck.”

We all ran out to see what winching would do to a man. Ben had been fastened feet first to a bollard and his hands, tied tightly together with rope, were attached to a steel cable. The cable fed into a huge winch operated with capstan bars. Two men leaned on the capstan bars, tightening the cable while Ben screamed in agony. It seemed they had stretched him to be a foot taller than he was before. Beside him stood two men with short, thick ropes and I could see they intended to give him a beating. I looked up to the heavens, as if I could ask something above me just what to do. I noticed the sky had darkened even though it was mid-afternoon. I heard Ben cry out again and I ran for the galley.

I pushed the cook out of my way and reached for one of his big knives hanging on the wall. He swung at me with his right arm and I punched a solid smack in his greasy face. He clapped his hands up there and I ran out of the galley for the afterdeck.

The deckhands were still leaning on the capstan bars, stretching their victim, when I cut the ropes holding his feet. Then I turned quickly and cut the rope holding his hands to the cable. I stood there with the knife held in front of me and no one came near.

Ben lay before me, rubbing his wrists and ankles. Then he got up and ran toward the centre of the ship. I never saw him again. I stood there, waiting. The sky blackened over us and the crew, one by one, walked past me and disappeared into the galley. I felt the ship slowing down, as it ran out of steam. Everyone knew something else was to happen, this time to me, and they all wanted to see, including the other firemen and engineer.

I stayed where I was and finally Skipper came striding back toward me.

“Hank,” he said, “You’ve been a damn fine hand. But you’ve broke the law of the sea. You’ve interfered with my running of this ship. Now, if we get Ben back here to finish his punishment, what will you do?”

“I’ll cut the ropes, Skipper. And if you try any of that on me, I’ll cut you too.”

He stayed back. I could see a bit of fear in his face, although he towered over me. He wheeled around and walked to the galley, coming back in a moment with the whole crew, who stood there facing me as I leaned against the railing.

"Men," said Skipper, "Look over there, on the port side. What do you see, gentlemen?"

The First Mate answered, "It looks like an island to me, Captain. A fairly small island with a little cove that a rowboat might enter."

"And so it is. It will be your home, Hank. You're getting off here. But I'm a fair man so, you still have a choice. You can take your licks with the ropes and go back to your duties—or get off my ship."

It was not the pain of a whipping and stretching I feared. I could not accept the injustice of it. Ben had lashed out against tyranny, as any human should. And now we would be humiliated at the Captain's feet.

"I'll go ashore," I said.

The three Mates went off to prepare one of the lifeboats for lowering over the side. The lifeboats were lashed to the sides of the galley and they took down the smallest one. The First Mate, who always seemed such a big, gentle man, went into the galley and came out with a large sack of potatoes which he tossed into the lifeboat. Someone else came with my pack and threw that in. The First Mate had fetched a barrel of drinking water and was about to toss some cans of food into the boat. The Captain objected, "That's enough. Give him the water but no more food. He's got potatoes for a year there, if he doesn't feast himself. Har, har."

They attached the lifeboat to two small cranes and lifted it over the side of the ship. Now everyone looked at me, although the sky had darkened and a brisk breeze had begun to moan through the lanyards of the ship.

"Go, Hank," said Skipper. "Or we'll wait till you fall asleep and drop that knife. Then you'll find yourself a wee bit taller than you be right now."

The odds looked pretty awful to me. I held the knife before me and walked over the lifeboat. I got in and sat at the bow, facing the stern. The First Mate and two deckhands climbed in and the crew lowered us down to the sea.

The deckhands grabbed the oars and began to pull for the island. The waves had reached several feet in height but the wind fairly blew us along. I could see the crew lined up along the rail, watching us go.

Behind the ship, a long bolt of lightning flashed and struck the sea, the sound of it thundering across the waves. I heard the Captain yell, "Get up steam! Quickly, now!"

The ship seemed to drift towards us. I could see black smoke coming from the flume and heard the engine roar as the ship fought to hold herself against the wind.

We came into the little cove where the waves settled down to ripples. Some fifty feet out, in very shallow water, the Mate signalled and the sailors quit rowing. I jumped out with my pack and the water barrel. The Mate came too, carrying the sack of potatoes. As he came up onto the

beach, he murmured so the crew wouldn't hear, "I'll send a ship by here, as soon as I can."

He clambered onto the lifeboat again and they paddled out to sea. The ship's horn blew and blew and lightning lit up the sea again so the tips of the waves flashed and twinkled. The Captain had to wait. I believe if it were anyone but his First Mate, he would have left the lifeboat behind. It crawled toward the ship, bobbing up and down and at length it reached it. By now darkness had fallen and I could no longer see the yellow ship.

It began to rain, a hammering rain, and the wind howled like the seven furies, blowing over the island from the direction of the ship. The waves now danced so high, they came into the cove and broke themselves on the beach.

I covered my head with a coat and sat there. So much had happened in the past hours, that I let my mind go blank, thinking nothing except how small and alone I felt on this island by myself. I slept on the cold, wet sand for some hours, waking several times during the night until a gray daylight showed on the horizon.

The wind and rain never stopped, nor even diminished, so I stayed where I was and slept some more. I leaned back against the sack of potatoes, never allowing myself to think of my plight, lest I fall into a terrible despair.

I awoke later to a booming, slow drumming sound. The sounds came from both sides of me. I heard them again. The rain had stopped at last. Not ten feet away from where I sat, rolling back and forth in the shallow water against an embedded rock, was a wooden rum barrel. I looked again and saw three more along the beach. Out in the cove floated a dozen more, working their way toward the beach.

So, I figured, the ship couldn't get off the reef, and so the Skipper had ditched some of the rum from the upper deck. It would be the only way to lighten the ship and prevent the rocks from punching a hole in her. My island was just a mountain tip showing above the ocean and there would be rocks and crags for some distance all around it, as it sloped down into the ocean depths. I could see no sign of the ship, so lightening the load must have worked for them. It had cost the Captain a lot of money to ditch me here.

I had enough food for a hundred days, if I rationed myself to two potatoes a day. I had enough water for only half that time, and enough rum to last forever. In my pack I had some writing paper, a tin cup and an old woollen sweater.

The First Mate would likely do what he said, send a ship by this island—but when? Or maybe Ben could do something to get me out of here. I didn't know how black people were treated in California.

I rolled the rum barrels up on the beach and set them upright in a circle and they provided a little shelter from the wind. I had never been exposed to alcohol in my life. With my knife, I pried a wooden bung from a cask and tipped it over to pour some rum into my cup.

To be continued

From the Publisher

One of the best things about living at Army Beach is that it is close to the Marsh Lake dump. That's what some of my neighbours say and, when I think about it, they probably have a good point.

It's true we don't have to burn much gasoline hauling our household garbage away in Sam's old pickup. The dump (no one here calls it a landfill) is just across the highway on a high gravel bench. From my window I can pinpoint its exact

location. When it's daylight, I can see a column of smoke rising above the pit. At night a rosy glow from burning refuse lights up the sky.

Surrounded by pristine wilderness as we are, the dump is a point of reference. It breaks up the monotony of too much perfection and helps the locals stay sane. In winter people meet at the Marsh Lake dump to exchange gossip, old magazines and invitations to Saturday night supper.

In summer the dump is a good place to go shopping. One of the first gifts that Sam gave me is a big square electric clock that hangs on my kitchen wall. A relic from the 1940s, the clock came from the dump.

As the official graveyard for dead Yukon vehicles, the Marsh Lake dump is a popular place for the many do-it-yourself mechanics, plumbers and builders who live out our way. When Sam needs a piece of scrap metal to patch up his old Dodge or a piece of pipe to fix the furnace in the greenhouse, it's off to the dump.

Sam's prize find last summer was a slightly soggy, nearly complete set of the encyclopedia Britannica. He started reading it last September and is now on volume "M".

You'll find both men and women "pickers" at the dump and I marvel at their lack of squeamishness when picking through other people's trash. I can't do it.

For me, the dump is a good place to view wildlife. Our dump doesn't have an electrified fence around it. Bears, wolves, coyotes and other critters can forage in the pit feasting on garbage and the small rodents that scurry around down there.

Several years ago on a rare, solo trip to the dump I came face to face with a golden eagle. I watched the huge bird land inside the galvanized fence that partly surrounds the pit. The eagle tried to take off again but flew into the fence landing about ten feet from where I stood. We eyeballed each other for a few minutes then the bird ducked under the fence and flew off in another direction.

There's something for everyone at the Marsh Lake dump.



Beside a Model T at Jake's Corner, YT.