THE
YUKONER
MAGAZINE
$4.95
• Another Great Story by Yukon Pete Esser
• The Roving Reporter: Archie Gillespie
• Jim Robb's Ice Worms
• The Chilkoot-The Wrong W
• Clinton Creek Mine
• Stroller White
ISSUE No.23

# WHITEHORSE MOTORS

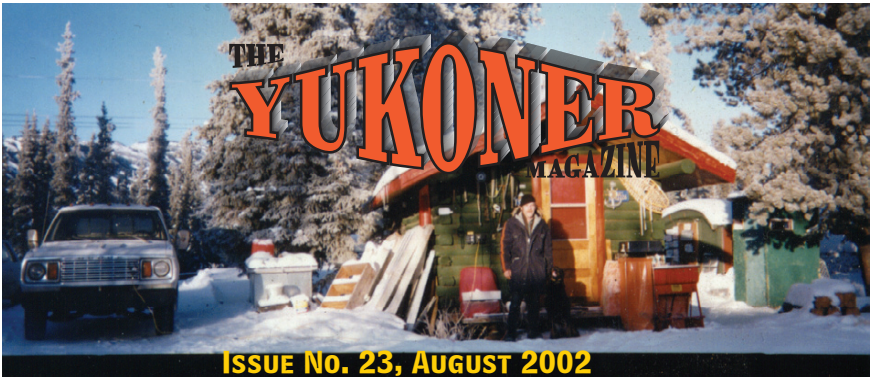
Ford

## SALUTES

Lee Olynyk, from Ft. William, Ontario, came to the Yukon in the fall of 1973 in his '55 GMC half-ton pickup. He cleared some land far up the McLintock River Valley and is a pioneer of that district where he and his wife, Wan-Lee, have a farm. They cleared the land themselves and built a house. Only lately did they get electricity and telephone service. Lee has been placer mining on Last Chance Creek near Dawson City since 1992. The gold nuggets we have sent to our subscribers have all come from Lee's gold mining operation. In the above photo Lee is holding some 25,000-year-old bison horns. The background shows his big operation on Last Chance.

**ISSN NO. 1206-6974**

Canadian Publications
Mail Registration
No. 08098
Postage paid at
Whitehorse, Yukon




ISSUE NO. 23, AUGUST 2002

www.yukoner.com

Click on these page numbers to go to that story. Click on page header (Yukoner Magazine) to return to the contents page.

**From the Editor** 4

**The Mail Run** 5

**So Far Away (in Clinton Creek), *by Pete Esser*** *9*

**White Gold (asbestos), *by Archie Gillespie*** *21*

**Archie Gillespie, The Roving Reporter** 26

**Jim Robb's Iceworms, *by Archie Gillespie*** *33*

**Jack & Flo Christy of Watson Lake, *by John Skelton*** *37*

**Over the Chilkoot, *by Jim Lotz*** *44*

**Kicked by a Dead Moose, *by George Gilbert*** *56*

**Stroller White, *by Nancy Bennett*** *61*

**Mystery photo from the 1940s** 66

*Cover:* Vanessa Loewen, a researcher/expediter for Frantic Films, on Last Chance Creek near Dawson, June, 2002. She is holding some prehistoric bones. [S.H. photo]

Published four times annually by GreenInk Publishing
Whitehorse, Yukon
Postage paid at Whitehorse, Yukon
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40019654
PAP Registration No. 08098
For advertising rates, call 1-867-660-5030
website: www.yukoner.com e-mail:yukonermagazine@gmail.com
Publisher: Dianne Green Editor: Sam Holloway

# From the Editor

There will be an interesting TV series playing in February on the History Television Network, called "Klondike: Quest For Gold." It is a re-enactment of the Gold Rush but the best part will be all the film footage of the Yukon, and of the Klondike. I would say it will be quite spectacular even for those of us who live here.

I was a location guide for the last episode, and I may be in that segment for a few seconds, if they haven't clipped it out. Even so, you will see the claim on Last Chance Creek where the new Stampeders dug for gold. There was too much water and they couldn't get down to the gold on bedrock, although they did find some on a creek close by.

Frantic Films paid me for my time and expenses and out of all that, I got my dream truck—a '67 Dodge Power Wagon, 3/4 ton, shortbox. It has a few rust spots but runs like an old Singer sewing machine. Whenever the stress of all the traffic and hot weather in the Yukon gets to me, I head for the bush with my new old Dodgie and come back feeling very refreshed.

I had to promise the former owner (Tina Sebert of Whitehorse) that I wouldn't sell it because her Dad loved that truck and she had to find a good home for it. Never fear, Tina, not even if every subscriber drooling over the photo offers zillions of dollars for it.

I also quit the old pipe in September, thereby losing much of my character. Better to be a live non-entity that a dead character of the Yukon.

The winner of the nugget draw (for subscription renewals) this time is Thomas Watson of Hinton, Alberta.

Sam

# The Mail Run

*Dear Sam Holloway,*

I greatly enjoy the magazine. I had hoped to meet you when I came up to Whitehorse last summer to take part in the Shipyards film, but time ran out. I was last in Whitehorse in 1971 and then I quit the north as I stood in danger of becoming a "northern expert." I have written many times about the need to recognize the knowledge and wisdom of the people who live in the north. You are doing a great deal in this cause. I wish you luck in keeping alive the old days in the Yukon and preserving the stories of people who lived in the frontier time.

*Jim Lotz*
*Halifax, N. S.*

*Dear Sirs,*

In 1958 I was an electrician in Army Engineers stationed in Edmonton to work on North West Territories and Yukon radio stations doing maintenance and construction. The system was administered and operated by Royal Canadian Army Signal Corps, maintained by Royal Canadian Engineers.

I had a week's work in Mayo Landing, north of Whitehorse. At that time there was an overnight in Whitehorse to make connections of flights. I had time to walk around town and see places like the museum. My memory of that visit, over the years, was the large piece of copper.

Since l989 I have visited Whitehorse six times as an RV tourist. Have found some interesting books on history of that area during the war, also the piece of copper still there.

*G. Douglas Imlay*
*Halifax, NS*

*Dear Sam & Dianne,*

I particularly enjoyed the article about United Keno Hill Mines as I feel some connection. Sorry to hear it no longer exists.

In early spring 1952, two buddies and I headed west looking for work. I got a job with Ace Line Construction Co., a private contractor. The job was building power lines into the oil wells. This was at Devon near Edmonton. Ace later got a contract to build a power line from a new dam site and powerhouse near Mayo Landing to the mine at UKHM. I jumped at the opportunity to go because as a young boy I had read a lot about the prospectors, trappers, miners, gold dredgers, river boats, etc. and had developed a keen interest in the Yukon.

Arrived in Mayo the first week of July to 24 hours of daylight, which took some getting used to, also the bugs. Our camp had a lot of bear visits. The cook shot a bear tearing off the screen door at noon one day.

# THE MAIL RUN

Stringing the wires over hills, muskeg, swamps, etc. presented some problems, as they didn't use the conventional method of putting three reels of wire on stationary stands and then stringing them out using some type of vehicle. We had to mount the reel stands on a large float and move the whole thing at once. This was to prevent any damage to the conductors. The job was completed before freeze up and I went back to Ontario, re-joined the Hydro, married and settled down. Fifty years have passed and hopefully next summer I will return to visit the places I missed.

*Carl D. Pettifer*
*Bancroft, Ontario*

**Editor's Note:**

The mine at Keno Hill is not dead yet. The Yukon government is assisting the new owner in trying to revive the operation. They first want to mine the oldtailings, then use the profits from that to re-open the mine itself.

*Dear Sam & Dianne,*

Just a note to tell you how much I enjoyed your special issue of *The Yukoner* dealing with United Keno Hill Mines. My parents lived in Elsa from 1957 to 1967 up to my father's retirement, and we visited them there in 1958 and 1964. It was great to get the background history and also hear what happened…. My main reason for writing you is to tell you that on September 5th, 1957 Canada Post issued a five cent stamp to honour Canada's mining industry and the Sixth Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Congress in Vancouver that month. The stamp shows a miner operating a pneumatic drill and although the location is not identified it is actually at United Keno Hill.

*Bill Southam*
*Kingston, Ontario*
*Dear Mr. Holloway,*

You requested nicknames of miners who worked in Calumet or Elsa. I can still remember a few. One was "Bull Eyes" McFarlane. Also "Harry the Horse" Wanchaluk and "Billy the Bitch." I can't remember his last name but he was only 16 years old (lied about his age to get employment) and he had already worked previously at the Bralorne mine in BC.

*Robert Leftrook*
*New Denver, BC*

*Dear Sam & Dianne,*

First, I hope you can read my typewriting. It's been 75 years since I used one in school. I have lots of trouble with spacing. I hope you can find room for another trap line story. So many men and women dream all their lives of a life in the bush yet never get out past the city limits. People ask me "weren't you awful lonesome alone out there?" and I wonder what they are

talking about. I am sure you know what I mean. October 17th was our 71st anniversary. We got married back in the dirty thirties and what a difference it is now.

*Tin and Marian Johnston*
*Ross River, Yukon*
*(Congratulations Tin and Marian on your 71st anniversary. Thanks for sending in the two stories below.)*

## A COLD NIGHT

Near the first cabin on my trap line was a small lake and down stream from it were three more small lakes that I believe back in time were part of a long beaver meadow. There were a number of old beaver houses and a few occupied ones too. I guess it would be three miles down to the end of those four lakes and I had a string of traps all along both sides and, as it was rough going, I always show shoed around to them.

In spring I'd built a small three-sided pole shelter with a tarp over it where I used to sit and watch for beaver. I'd piled a bunch of branches and some logs the beavers had left beside it because some of those rainy spring days got pretty chilly and a small fire was nice. Well, on this day when I checked my traps it was near minus 25 and I got out early and went clear to the far end.

I was coming back about three hours later some time past noon. I had 11 martin and one lynx in my pack and two to three traps left to set. I was looking for a couple of good sets when I stepped into about a foot of over flow under the snow. Of course when anyone steps in like that most always they fall. It's pretty hard to pull up your foot with a snowshoe loaded with water and snow. I fell and got wet—my mitts full of water and my boots too. Well, I got out of there and I wasn't far from the little shelter I'd made so I headed for it. There were leaves in the back of it so I got a fire going fairly quick. I stripped my clothes off and hung them up as best I could to dry. I drained out my boots and I had a pair of dry socks in my pack for times like this. I brushed out the shelter and got a second fire going and stood between the two fires.

It was really miserable. By then it had started to get quite dark and it takes forever to dry out winter clothes but I kept trying. Eventually I burned up all the wood I had close by and it was too dark to find more so I started burning the poles from my shelter.

Time went mighty slow that long cold night let me tell you but finally I got my clothes all back on and as soon as I could see I headed back for my cabin. I left my pack and ice-covered rifle there and went back two days later and got them. When summer came I built another shelter down there with a good supply of wood by it and I took a lantern there and hung it up just in case but I never did use it again.

I don't recommend trying to stay in the bush over night in winter with wet clothes. It's no fun.

## OVERFLOW

One time many years ago, when I first moved to Yukon, I was trapping in the Long Lake (7-Mile Lake) area and had a nasty experience with overflow. Now any one in the north who has anything to do with over flow at 30 below zero knows it's not nice. I wasn't familiar with that area so I set up a tent and stocked it. Usually I stayed a day or two and reset traps and cut firewood and looked over more new country till I got to know the area better.

Well, it was about the middle of January and I went in there early in the morning so by the time I got there it was getting dark. I had a nice bit of fur and anticipated a warm evening skinning and preparing it but imagine what my thoughts were when I saw my tent half-covered with ice and sitting in the middle of an ice pond! Over flow had broken out of the ground and buried nearly everything.

There was ice on everything inside and everything was wet so I got right at it and chopped the tent loose, got my stove and lantern and my wet sleeping bag and moved back down the trail about and mile and set up. It was real dark but with the skidoo lights I cut some firewood and put some spruce boughs down inside the tent. The sleeping bag was too wet to use so I spent a sleepless night trying to keep warm.

I guess it could have been worse but me and Judy my dog survived the night and next morning went back and dug out a can of beans, two cans of sardines and a piece of moose meat for breakfast. After we ate, I reset the tent and fixed a bunk and cut a good pile of wood and tried to dry out the sleeping bag. No luck with that let me tell you. I was always particular where I set up my tent after that. I always set up in thick timber not in the willow bushes again.

After making things as best I could, I loaded up the furs, which were frozen hard by then, and started back for home camp. A couple miles back I was crossing a small lake and came onto a nice herd of caribou. I needed meat so I shot one but it acted as if I had made a clean miss and ran out of sight into the bush. I checked my rifle and it seemed okay so I shot another one and went and dressed it out. Then I looked at the tracks and followed them just a couple hundred feet and there laid the other one. It was a good killing shot but sometimes an animal will go a ways even when it should have dropped right there.

Well, two caribou was a big load and I had plenty of trouble on the hills coming out. I was really ready for supper and bed when I got to my cabin and had company waiting. Two RCMP boys had come out on patrol. We had a good feed of caribou and they stayed over night for a nice visit. They were glad to take some of the meat home with them, also, a loaf of fresh raisin bread. I believe I was 67 or 68 that year but I still had a few more lessons to learn about over flow. I will never forget my life on the trap line. Just wish I could live it over again.

*Tensley Johnston*

# So Far Away

## By Yukon Pete Esser

We were both lying on top of the bed, my wife Karin and I, on this evening of October 30, 1967 . Our five-year-old daughter, Susie, was asleep in the small room next to us. Music from Glen Miller was playing on the radio and a storm was hitting Vancouver and the little house we had rented at 47th East with full force. If it had been a movie, most likely we had to make love, but this was not a movie and our minds were miles away on this last evening we had together.

Karin was looking, at the ceiling and we both wanted to say so much to each other, but we could not. On the 7th of October we landed in Montreal, new immigrants to Canada coming from West Germany.

I was lucky to find work as a laborer in some asbestos mine in the Yukon for the 2nd of November. Looking across the bedroom I saw my suitcase ready beside a new pair of winter boots I had bought at Army and Navy.

I didn't know too much about the North. Well, to be honest, I didn't know anything, only that it is cold and far away from my family.

The rain was hitting the windows hard and the wind was getting stronger. "Pete, I do not like that you have to go in this weather, and by plane." Tears were running down her cheeks when she put her head onto my chest.

"Nothing will happen Karin. Planes can fly in all kinds of weather"

But you will be so far away from us."

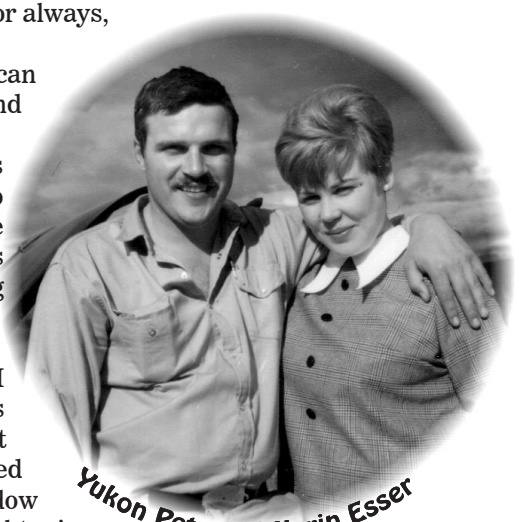
"I know , but it will be not for always, you will see."

"I can't see this far. I only can see you leaving in the morning and this makes me sad."

At 0600 hours the taxi was there to pick me up. I took a deep breath kissed Karin and Susie goodbye, swallowed my tears and walked through the falling rain to the taxi.

"To the airport please."

"Good morning, sir, may I have your boarding pass please?". The flight attendant showed me to my seat and wished me a good flight. I had a window seat with a view of the two right wing engines of the DC-7. The constant action



Yukon Pete and Karin Esser

around me, helped me to ease the feeling of guilt, to leave my family behind.

Gray and black smoke came out of the motors' exhaust pipes when the big prop started slowly to turn and the engines sprung to life. The low clouds and the heavy rain kept Vancouver out of sight, while the big plane was taking its place in the sky, slowly but surely climbing where eagles dare. When the clouds started to break up, the beauty of the mountains below us with their peaks covered in snow was a sight to see. The no smoking, fasten your seatbelt light was turned off and I pulled out my last pack of German cigarettes .

The fellow sitting beside me looked at the package in my hand, as only a smoker would do. "You like to have one? " I asked.

"Yes, thank you very much," and he helped himself. "By the way my name is Tom," he said. I reached over to my left to shake his hand. He must have been in my age, around 26 years old.

"It is good-tasting."

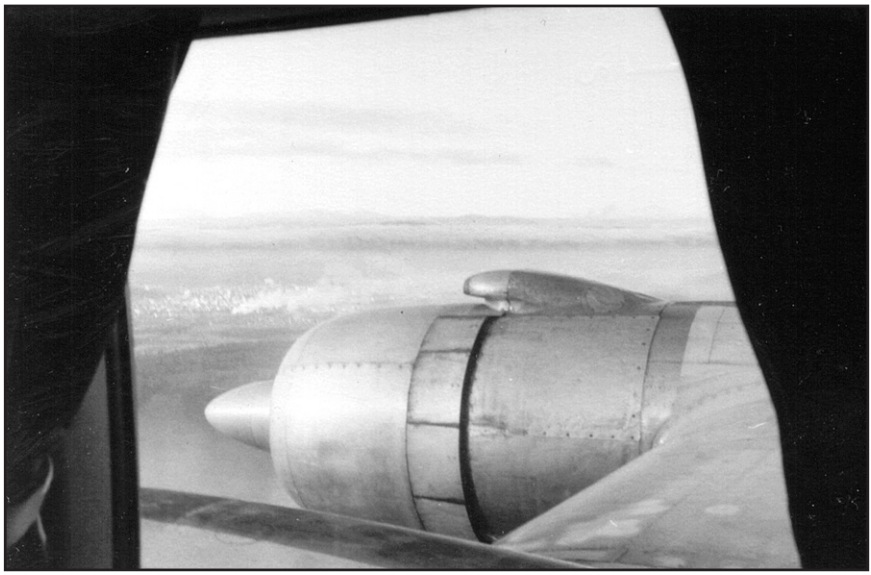
"Yes, it is a blend of Turkish and Arabian tobacco, very good."

"Are you on holidays in Canada?"

"No, I am a new immigrant on the way to start a job at an asbestos mine close to Dawson City in the Yukon. Do you know Dawson City, Tom?"

"No, but I do know it is 450 miles North of Whitehorse."

The stewardess served us a breakfast. With my poor English it was not easy to keep a steady conversation going , but Tom loved talking and so the hours went by, till I finely dozed off. Never managed to sleep too long on a plane and after an hour or so I was back again while Tom was still in the land of dreams.



On the way to Whitehorse on Canadian Pacific Air, October, 1967.

Below us all was white and with the sun out it was a clear but short day. After a short stop at Prince George, the silver bird took us up again.

"Tell me Pete, how did you manage to get a job at the mine?"

"Well, Tom it is a long story, but in general it happened like this. I have a friend in Vancouver, who has a neighbor, who has a friend and this friend is the hiring agent for Cassiar Asbestos Corp. and he hired me for the mine. So lady luck was with me and here I am."

It was early afternoon when we landed in Whitehorse under a darkening sky. We walked to the terminal to wait for our luggage and the cold northern air was forcing me to keep my mouth shut.

"Your flight to Dawson City is leaving in the morning. Do you have a place to stay Pete?"

"Yes I have a room arranged by the company in a Hotel called Whitehorse Inn."

"OK. I have to go downtown too so let's take a taxi."

The airport is located at a hillside above the town like a plateau in a big valley surrounded by rolling hills and mountains. After a short drive we stopped in front of the old hotel."

"Well, Pete, that's it. I wish you all the best and good luck."

I walked into the old wooden building called Whitehorse Inn and was instantly put back 80 years. The decor was like in so many western movies I had seen, and now it was reality. The clerk looked at me and seemed to enjoy how I admired the place. "Can I help you young fellow?" asked the old man.

"Yes, yes. I am Peter Esser and I have a room reserved for one night."

He opened a big book in front of him and looked over the page for a short moment. "Yes, Pete I have you right here. Would you please sign your name?"

He reached back to give me a key from the wooden board and pointed to the old staircase. "First floor at the end of the hall on your left."

How many people must have walked this staircase and these halls? If only the walls could talk. When I stopped in front of my room I put the key in but could not turn it. I turned the handle and opened the door. What happened now? What my eyes picked up and what my brain registered will stay with me forever and a day.

On the bed were two naked people, a young woman with a man on top of her so involved in making it, that they did not notice me at all standing in the open door. She had deep black hair and a slightly tanned skin color, while he was as white as the bed sheet they were on . A case of beer was beside the bed and all their clothing was lying on the floor beside a few empty bottles. I stepped back and closed the door softly, not believing what I just had seen. I looked at the key in my hand and its attached number. It was the same number as on the door. Scratching my head, I realized I had to wait it out and with my poor English I didn't want to talk to anybody about it. The clerk looked at me with open mouth.

"You are leaving?"

"No, on the way up I remembered I had to do something so would you please keep an eye on my suitcase? I will be back soon." And out I walked.

By now it was dark and while walking along Main Street I saw a few people of the first nation for the first time. Also I got very fast used to the dry cold air that is easier to take than the wet cold air of the winter in Germany. But after a while of walking along the few stores, my ears told me get indoors. Hougen's with its sport department got all my attention and I said to myself one day I will own a 30-30 Winchester.

A half an hour later I was back at the Whitehorse Inn grabbed my suitcase and walked to the door I had found unlocked. I knocked at the door, but there was no reply so I pushed the key in the lock unlocked the door and opened it. The bed was made, the room was aired and there was no trace of what had happened a short while ago. The room was small not more as 10 by 10 feet, one bed, one clothes closet, a small sideboard with a washbasin, wooden floor and a five-by-two-foot window with some old curtain in front of it. It was simple but would do fine for me.

It was now close to 1800 hours and the sandwiches Karin had made for me with so much love were welcome now. Each of them had a little note attached and I was reading it while chewing at the same time.

I had seen a saloon down there but I did not want to go. I was too tired and had to be up early.

The next morning the wind was playing with the falling snow and gave it little time to settle on the tarmac in front of the waiting room at the airport. The big window allowed us, the few men and me, to watch the DC-3 being pulled by a small tractor out of a hanger. The outdoor lights with the falling snow and dark sky gave the plane a majestic look. Two men in blue uniform and parka climbed on board and a short time after the starboard engine sprang to life. The side door was opened all the way and plenty of freight was loaded into the plane. Several dogs in cages had to be lifted in and then it was our turn to board . The flight steward dressed in the same blue parka walked us to the plane. Most of the seats had been removed to give room to all the freight.

Five weeks ago I was still in Germany and now it looked like I was a member of an arctic expedition. All of it was so new, so simple and with the door open so cold.

I counted seven passengers, all men, and four dogs, a breed I never had seen before. They were wild in their look and part wolf for sure. I had the feeling their eyes were all over me and with them being in their cages it gave me a good feeling.

The plane was flying very low and in the moonlight, I could see the mountains, hills and trees below. The darkness gave away to a faded light in the eastern sky. A change in the sound of the two motors told me we were going to land soon. On an airfield at Mayo we came to a stop. The little heat that had taken hold in the plane was wiped out when the door opened. The dogs, three men and some freight went out. That's it the attendant said and a short time later we were up in the air again on the way to Dawson City.

By now it was late morning and. At times we could see the Klondike

Highway below and patches of open water on the frozen Yukon River. I could see the back of the two pilots and hear them contacting the Dawson Airport.

The sun was full out as we landed. An old windsock passed my window and a wooden building with plenty of smoke coming out of its chimney. The plane rolled back to it and this was the Dawson City Airport. When I left the plane, the snow, the sunshine, the light was so bright, I was blinded and had to put my hand in front of my eyes, but after a little while I got used to it. The four of us walked over to the wood building . The small waiting room was well heated by a wood stove and the fellow behind a counter looked at us.

"My name is Fred Cook I am the agent for the Clinton Mine and I will take you there, but first we will have to stop in Dawson City."

We loaded all our belongings in his big four-door truck and after a good drive of 30 minutes, coming around the last bend of the snow covered road, I said to myself, it can't be true. Whitehorse was a surprise to me but this knocked me out of my socks: The old buildings, some dating back at least 75 years, the smell of all the wood fires and the smoke hanging over the town, no people on the streets, only the odd dog showing itself and a few old cars parked under the snow.

Time had stopped in this part of the world. And so we did in front of a building three times my age. Fred Cook's office was not very big but what got my attention, he had at least 40 old rifles hanging on the wall: Marlins, Winchesters and a set of Cold rifles. I looked at them like a kid at a toy with my mouth open.

"These are old, some going back 80 years." Fred told me. When I think back, that he lost them all and the building in a fire a few years later, what a shame.

We left Dawson City early afternoon under fading daylight. We drove over the frozen Yukon River by crossing the ice bridge and up the Top of the World Highway. It was 68 miles of the most beautiful countryside I ever

The mill at Clinton Creek, Nov. 1968. This is the tunnel I had to clean on my first shift.

have seen in my life. There were mountains on both sides: in the East the Olgilvie and in the West the Alaska Range, showing itself in colors of light to dark blue with white tips and gold where the fading sun kissed them goodbye.

The warm air in the truck and the long day, took its toll on me. I dozed off until I heard Fred say, "Pete, hey wake up we are here."

We had stopped in front of an orange-painted building on a hillside. It was the administration building we entered.

"I need one man to work the night shift in the mill tonight," said the small round man with a red face and a big smile in it. "By the way, my name is Ed."

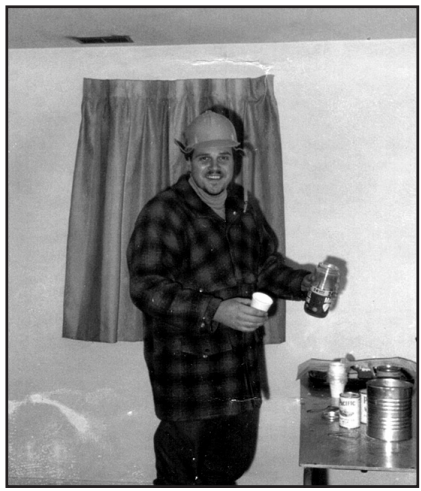
"Well the man you need it will be me," I replied, introducing myself.

"Fred will take you later to the camp, Bunk House 3. See the bull cook. His name is Tony. He will give you a room and brief you. The kitchen is in the camp and at 11:30 p.m. the bus to the mill is leaving from there. Welcome to Clinton Creek."

Coming out of the office for the first time I noticed a big, seven-story building. "It is the mill," Fred told me. "And it is the tallest building in the Yukon." With the garage, service, electrical and maintenance building and warehouse connected to it the mill looked like a fortress to me.

A winding road along the Clinton Creek from which the mine took its name got us to the campsite. "Over there," Fred said pointing to a two-story building along a wooden sidewalk. With my small suitcase in hand I walked toward it. It was cold, but there were plenty of men moving around between the buildings, which were hidden by the dark and trees.

The place was alive. Some men were sitting in the big living room reading. One of them directed me down the hall to room number one. The long hall with at least 10 doors along its side had a floor as clean as in a hospital. Tony the bull cook was in his room, which also was an office. He turned out to be a very nice fellow. He briefed me about the camp's rules and regulations and pointed out the kitchen, commissary, first aid station and bus stop. I had spent a few years in the military as a drill sergeant so I felt like a fish in the water. Camp life was made for me.



Pete Esser, Clinton Creek, Dec. '67.

We walked to my room, number eight. It was eight by ten feet in size with a bed, table, chair and a clothes cabinet. The curtains were gold.

"That's it , it's all yours. You know, in order to let everyone know if you are in or not, put a circle made out of cardboard on you door with a hand in the center pointing on the shift you are

working. Keep it quiet. There are always men sleeping and have the music on low . I will make your bed and keep the room clean. OK. you can clean the floor, but the rest I do myself. By the way, there is always fresh cake, coffee and hot cocoa in the living room and please carry your boots in." And with this he walked away.

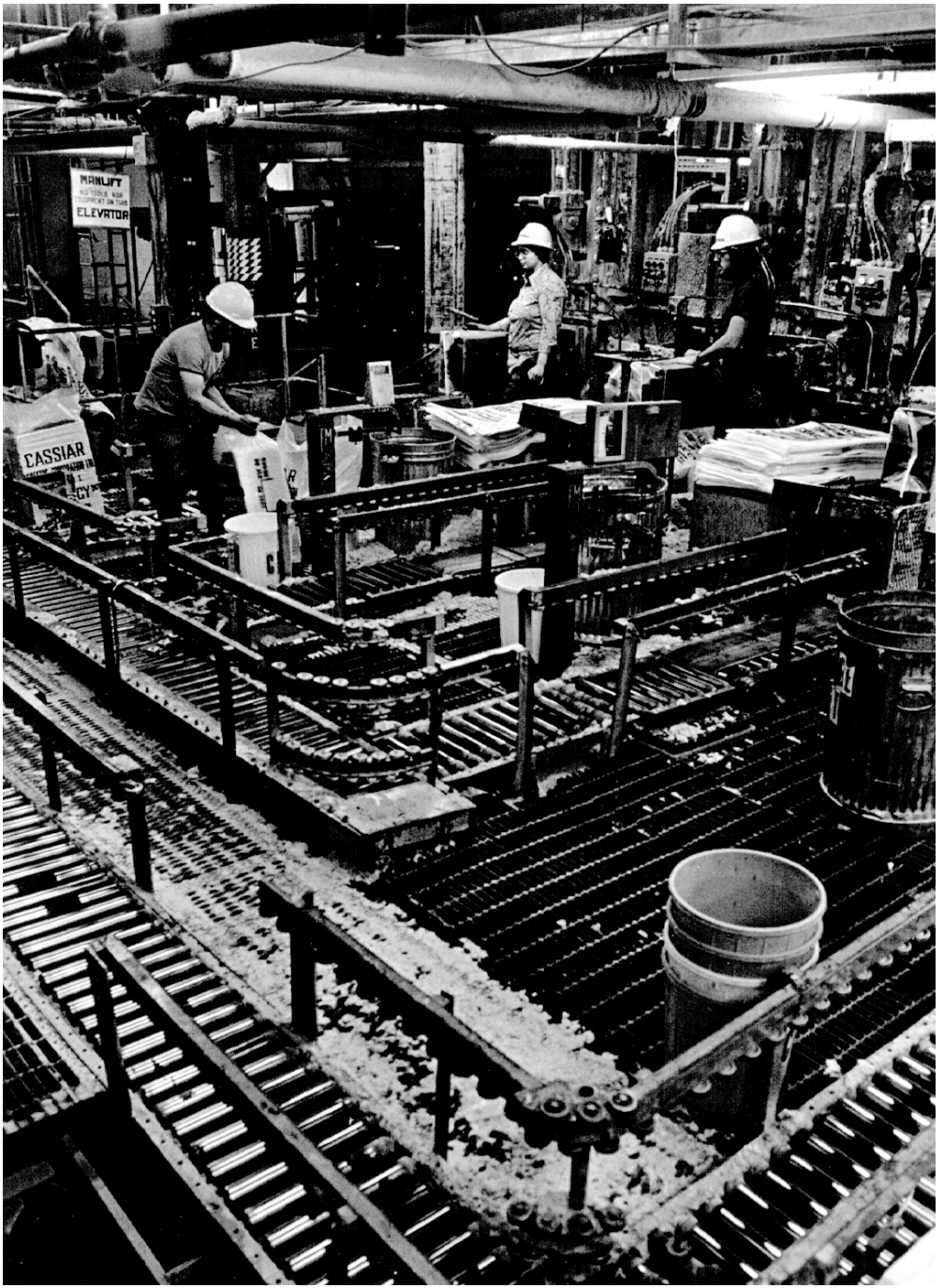
In no time I had contacted the fellow next door and we walked together to the kitchen. As a newcomer to Canada the food and the variety of it in this camp was the best I ever had seen and tasted. This kitchen was open 24/7 and on a small note block I only had to indicate what kind of sandwich I liked to have for lunch and how many. Free room and board was part of the contract.

While the camp was still under construction, there were at least 500 men were in the camp. Like in the old days of the gold rush a miner's law was in the camp too. There was no police around but rules and regulations set by the company were respected by most.

A few rooms down the hall from me, was a French fellow. We had all nationalities in the camp with Irish and eastern European in strongest numbers . Well this young French man loved his music so much that you could hear it all the through the bunkhouse. "Please turn it down," he got told a several times, but with no luck . We called him Tiny. He was at least 6'7" tall, built like a tree and had hands like shovels. He never talked much, guess he did not want to. He walked down the hall into the room from where all the loud music was coming, opened the window by pushing up the lower frame and out went the radio followed by the French man. Quietly he closed the window again and walked back to his room, without saying a word.

The French fellow was converted to a church mouse and lived like one from this day on.

Bunkhouse #3 at Clinton Creek, Nov. '67.




Clinton Creek mill, 1968. Richard Harrington photo. (Yukon Archives, Collection 81/18, Public Affairs photo]

Yes, with the long winter nights and 24 hours of darkness some men went strange. Like the one who took all of his money out of the bank and glued it to the wall as a decoration. But, in general, all worked very well and fights got stopped before they ever started. We all were there for one reason- to make money- and plenty could be made with all the overtime available and good pay .

I had a few hours left to get some sleep before going to the bus and to work for the night shift November 02 1967. This first night shift I never will forget in my life. My job was to shovel the ore spilled back onto a running conveyor belt. It was so cold I had to keep working in order to stay warm and cleaned the 1/4-mile belt in one night. I dropped into my bed and slept all day . The second night shift I got called to my boss. "Well, Pete, you did a good job last night." He put a big smile on and said, "You will have to do it again." And so I did. That got the attention of my bosses who started giving me more responsible work and training that brought me up the pay scale.

Middle of November the bank came to the camp and for me my first pay cheque. The Canadian Government had paid $800 for my family and me to come to Canada and this I wanted to pay back A.S.A.P. I gave the bank clerk the loan number and told him to pay it off, $50 every two weeks. For myself I took $20 and the rest went into a money order for Karin. I had left enough cash with her for at least two months to cover all expenses.

Three weeks into the job one morning I woke up with pain in my belly like a horse had kicked me . My right side was burning .At first I paid little heed to it but later in the day I walked over to the medicine man as we called the first aid man, a leftover from the Korean War. He gave me a pretty good check up and a few pills.

"You know I think it is my appendix."

"Well I am not too sure so take these pills first and let me know in the morning."

I went back to work and for a while the pain left, to be back with more force than before. It was on the third day while at work, that I got called to the shift boss . I got a call from the medic he said he is sending you to Dawson City to see the Doc.

"What, dirty as I am?"

"Yes, we have a plane at the airfield. A fellow cut four fingers on his left hand and has to be send out so you are going with him. Let's go we are wasting time."

The old beaver had us faster in Dawson City than by car. While the doctor was helping the poor fellow first, I asked the nurse if I could take a shower as I felt so dirty coming from work. She gave me soap and a towel and took my clothes.

The doctor checked me over, gave me some pills and told me he had to send me to Whitehorse. The pain turned into numbness and I moved as little as possible while I was waiting. It was dark, late afternoon. Fred Cook walked in. "Let's go," he said and helped me into his pickup. A second pick up was following us. When we came to the Dawson airfield the snow was

blowing horizontal along the airfield. Open oil drums were placed along the runway 60 feet apart, a mixture of oil, sawdust and whatever burned very well when Fred lit it.

"This will help the pilot to find the runway. It is not the best weather to fly in," Fred said. With his light flashing he parked at the end of the runway. The second pickup parked on the opposite end. While waiting, I was chain smoking and then out of nowhere the two-engine plane came low over us only to climb into the night again. Once more he came over us even lower than before but this time he stayed down and we drove over to him. While the engine was still running, Fred helped me into the plane.

Off we went only to be tossed around by the wind like a leaf once we were airborne. I was hanging in my seat with increasing pain and moaning. Sitting behind the pilot, I did not have the best time. We were climbing and climbing till we broke through the clouds and out of the storm. He leveled the plane put it on auto pilot and turned to see how I was doing.

The moon was out, the night was clear and flying low over the clouds gave the impression we were rushing along at top speed. In the far distance a few Northern Lights were playing around helping me to put my pain on the back burner. We talked a little but in general kept the conversation to a minimum . He was most of the time on the radio talking with the control tower in Whitehorse.

Whitehorse was under heavy weather too, but with all the radio control and radio beacon a big airport has, it was kids play and in no time we were on the ground rolling into a big hanger. We stopped beside a beautiful Ford Mustang . "It's mine," the pilot said. "You think you can get into it?"

At Whitehorse General Hospital a nurse met me. It was now close to nine p.m. and an hour later I was under the knife. When the Doctor walked in the following morning, he looked at me.

"Good morning, Pete. I am doctor Tanner. I am the one who operated on you last night. How are you feeling?"

"Better than yesterday, thank you."

"Well you made it."

"What do you mean?"

"It was time for your appendix to come out and if all is well in a week you should be back at the camp."

Five days later I was back. I had to make money and was put on light duty on steady day shift for a while. My boss told me to take this time to learn as much about the system and the operation in the Dryer Building as I will be the third operator as soon as we go on full production.

And so it was plenty of work and plenty of overtime with little time off. We had no T.V. but we had a good-size recreation building with two pool tables, snooker and several tables where you always could have a poker game going and this was a sight to see . A small section of the room was like a store where from soap to smokes, magazines to stamps, one could buy what was needed in a camp so isolated as we were.

But coming back to the poker games, like I said, it was a sight to see. In the far corner of the room there was always a crowd of men standing around in a cloud of smoke in a circle behind the players in total silence. A pile of

money was in the middle of the round table and the only talk from the players was: : “Hit me again. I am out. I raise a 20.”

And there was money to be made and lost. Very clearly I remember the fellow with the face of a choirboy. He worked as a bull cook in the camp but was raking it in on the tables. If you wanted to see a wolf in a sheepskin you had to see him.

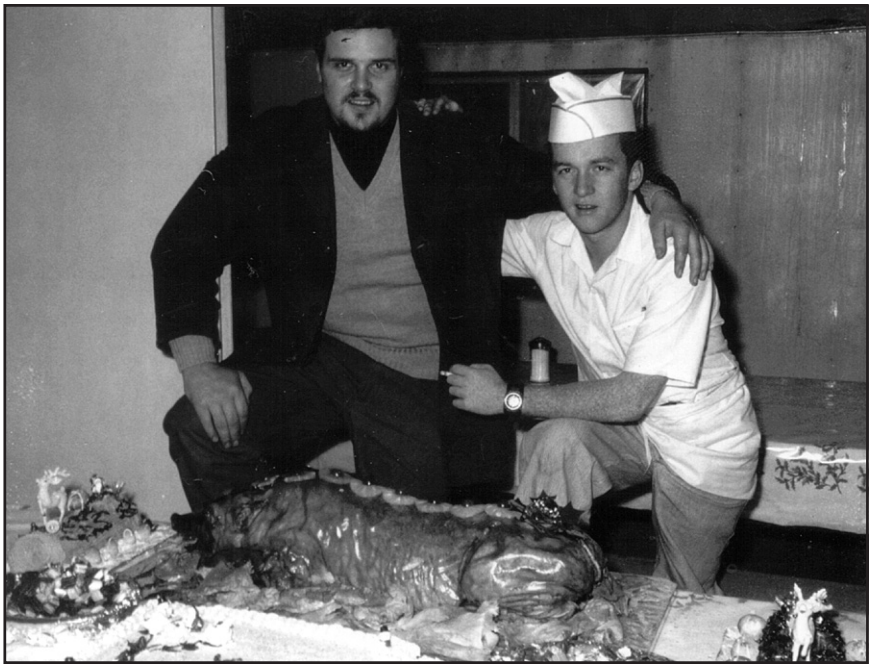
Yes, booze you could buy in the camp too but only under the table and for a high price. In 1967 I paid $10 for a bottle C.C.and $6.50 for a case of 12 beers.

Reading and learning English, playing chess and writing every day to my wife in Vancouver took care of most of my free time. Mail was coming in and going out whenever possible, depending on the weather. I had a very small but good FM/AM and short-wave radio and in clear weather I was able to listen to the communication between the U.S.A. fighter pilots flying their mission during the Vietnam War.

The day I got my bill from the hospital it was a pill not easy to swallow . I had to pay $1,000 for the stay and operation, while I was one week short to be covered by Yukon Medical.

The company was generous and carried the cost for the plane so I was able to pay the hospital. The weeks were passing like time was rushing. Christmas and New Years I spent working double shift so another operator could see his family in Dawson City. Mail was very slow due to minus 50 degree F. temperature but mine and mill operation kept going around the clock seven days a week.

It was close to the middle of January, when I got called to the main



Christmas, 1967, Clinton Creek. Pete and the cook

office to report to the personnel manager . Ed was sitting behind his desk. He looked at me and pointed to a chair.

"Have a seat, Pete. How is your family doing?"

"As far as I know they are fine."

"Well, Pete, I do not think so."

"What's wrong?"

"Your wife has no money. Your daughter is starving and, frankly, we do not like men who do not take care for their family."

"Hold it. Hold it. There has to be some mistake."

"Yes, most likely you are the mistake, mister, and if it is so, believe you me, you will be send out with the earliest flight."

"This can't be real. What makes you talk like this?"

"Your wife called our agent in Vancouver, yesterday. She is worried because she has not got a single penny from you since you started working for us."

"Impossible, I do not believe this, Ed. I only keep $40 per month for myself. Whenever the bank is coming in I pay $100 for two loans and the balance of my cheque is going to Karin.

"How you do that?"

"Well by money order. I do have all my receipts if you like to see them. They are in my room."

"OK. Let's go," he said, got up and called a clerk to come with us as a witness."

We drove the seven miles back to the camp without talking a word. With a key I opened the small fireproof metal box I had stored in my suitcase. I handed my receipts and to Ed . He looked at them, then he looked at me with his mouth open like he had trouble breathing. "These are no receipts. These are complete money orders."

"What do you mean?"

"Pete, the thin paper on the top is your receipt. "The stronger paper you have to send to your wife after you filled it in."

"I thought the bank is sending the money."

"No, they are not. You have to do it."

"Oh, no , she must be in trouble, Ed. You are looking at a full-grown idiot."

"How long you are now in Canada?"

"A little over three months."

"You saved a lot of money here. I tell you what. We are going to have a courier going to Vancouver tomorrow and I will send your money orders with him to your wife."

"I thank you, Ed. I do not know how to make it up to you."

"I know how. Stick around, Pete. We need good men like you."

And so I did for 11 years. Eight months later I was promoted to the position of mill shift boss and with this came a three-bedroom house for me and my family in the new town called Clinton Creek.

**********

# White Gold Gambler Of the North

By Archie Gillespie

It was a cold day in February, 1957, when the two, trail-weary young Indians limped into the Penguin Café in Dawson City and ate their first hearty meal in days. They had been on a long trip by dog team down the Yukon River and had just returned, tired, hungry but with high hopes in their hearts. They had found some valuable specimens that they figured might some day bring them a sizeable stake. First of all, they had to sell some local man their "find" and get him to back them up so could do some further prospecting. If they could uncover what they hoped to find, they knew they had a valuable mine.

After the two had eaten and lit up cigarettes, they called the proprietor of the little northern café, who was working out in the kitchen, and asked him if they might see him in private. "Mitch" Nekano was a jovial and hard-working young Japanese man. He had a reputation for gambling, either at cards or on a new mineral find. The two natives figured he might be their best bet. They decided to confide in him.

The Japanese café proprietor invited the Indian lads out to a little office off the café kitchen, told them to sit down and politely asked: "What do you want?"

Both Indians reached into the pockets of their parkas and pulled out a bag of thready-looking samples, many of them measuring an inch-and-a-half in length. Any person knowing anything about the mining game would recognize the samples in the shake of a lamb's tail.

Nekano poured the contents of the two bags out on paper that he spread across a small table and studied the specimens carefully. "Asbestos," he grinned.

"Yup," chorused the Indian lads. "We know where there's a whole mountain of it. We want to know if you'd grubstake us so that we can go back down river and explore it some more."

"Where did you find it?" the Japanese asked.

"Down river fifty, sixty miles from here," one of the Indians replied.

Nakano eyed the two suspiciously. "Looks like asbestos to me," he said, "but how do I know you have lots of it?"

"You'll have to take our word for it," the Indian replied seriously.

"How much you need?" Nekano asked glibly.

"Five hundred dollars," replied the older man. "Grub, tobacco, we go back down there, work till spring and bring you back more good samples."

The three men talked for a long time, but the more the two young prospectors tried to persuade the café owner to back them up, the more suspicious he became and he finally turned them down with a very definite "no dice."

There wasn't much more George Walters and his partner Art Anderson could do about it. It was strange, though, they reasoned to themselves, why Nakano should turn them down. Mitch was known to have taken numerous gambles in the mining game around the Dawson area and they couldn't figure out why he wouldn't come in on this one.

A few doors down the street a blinking neon sign above a store door flashed out the name: "Caley's." That's where Walters and Anderson headed. Both men were well known in the Klondike and they had both done business with Fred Caley, the owner of the store, for many years. Trouble was they both owed him a few hundred dollars, thus their reluctance to go see him first. But now, as a last resort, they decided to show their samples to the grocer and trust that he might see enough in their samples, and believe their story enough to come in with them.

Fred was alone in his store when the two entered. He greeted the two men jovially figuring they had come in to make some purchases.

"Where have you two been lately?" Caley asked them casually.

"Long trail away," Walters replied. "That's why we come in to see you. We found something good."

With that Walters pulled out his bag of samples and his partner did likewise. They spilled the contents out on top of the grocery counter. Caley leaned over the counter, ran his fingers through the fluffy specimens, green gold in color, sorted the samples out, and studied them.

"H'mm," he grunted. "Not bad. Where did you find this?"

Walters and Anderson both grinned. "Down river," Anderson told him. "In the forty-mile country."

"Good-looking asbestos," Caley said enthusiastically. "Have you showed this to anyone else?" Both Indians looked sheepish.

"Yeah" to Mitch," Anderson confessed.

"What'd he say?" the grocer asked.

"No dice," Anderson replied.

"What's the deal?" Caley asked the two prospectors.

"You back us up," pleaded Walters, who was a better talker than his partner. "Put up grub, tobacco. We'll go back, do some more prospecting and bring you back more samples."

The grocer looked at the two men speculatively. "This looks real good to me," he said candidly. "But have you got much of a showing."

"We think there's a whole mountain of it," Walters shot back.

Caley grinned at that statement. How many times in the past had he heard such a remark? This wasn't the first time that he'd been approached with a prospecting proposition. As a matter of fact he had spent many thousands of dollars, and had backed many a prospector in the north, always hoping that someday his gamble might pay off. Some of them had, others hadn't. He wasn't going to walk into any kind of a deal with his eyes shut, no matter how good these samples appeared to his trained eye. Caley had studied rocks and mineralogy and he didn't make many mistakes. He knew a good ore specimen when he saw one and he knew a worthless sample as well.

He pawed over the specimens on the grocery counter for quite a while, saying nothing while the two natives waited impatiently.

Finally Caley spoke up. "Tell you what I'll do," he told the two partners. "I'll put up the grub and the tobacco. You have your dog teams. Take me with you and show me where you found it and I'll back you up providing you give me the opportunity o take right next to you if it's any good. I'll soon be able to tell if you show me where you found this."

Walters and Anderson hesitated but only momentarily as they spoke back and forth to each other in their native language.

"That's okay with us," Walters spoke up. "When do you want to come with us?"

"Soon as you're ready to go," Caley replied.

"Two days," Walters said. "Two days we get our outfit together, rest up our dogs and then we go back."

"Fair enough," Caley grinned. "You come in here tomorrow and we'll make up the grub order and I'll be ready to leave with you day after tomorrow."

The three men shook hands.

"I'll keep these samples here," Caley quipped. "I don't want you to go out and show them to anyone else."

The two prospectors left the store grinning from ear to ear.

"See you tomorrow, Fred," they said in chorus as they went out and shut the door.

The grocer picked up the asbestos sample and a strange, quizzical look spread across his face.

"This could be it," he muttered to himself. "It's quite possible it could be."

The midwinter Yukon day broke gray and cold, exceedingly cold as the two mining partners brought their dog teams to a halt at the back of Caley's store. All the grub and supplies they had bought the previous day had been neatly packed and Fred Caley and his son, a tall, strapping youth with wide shoulders and a faint limp were ready to leave. It didn't take the four men long to load up the toboggans and just as the first streaks of dawn began their reach across the northern sky the Indian lads cracked their whips, yelled "mush on" to their dogs and the whole outfit moved ahead.

Fresh from their two-day rest in town, the dogs yipped and ki-eyed and set off at a full gallop. Within minutes they swung down from Dawson's Main Street onto the Yukon River where a dimly outlined trail curved and twisted around the rocky bluffs below the town. The two townsmen rode on the toboggans but Walters and Anderson, who were in good shape for the trail, ran along behind the toboggans.

It wasn't long before the frisky animals slowed to a steady trot along the river trail. The miles swept swiftly by but the party had a long, 50-mile journey ahead of it and the men realized that it would be long after dark before they reached their first camp at the island of Fortymile. The prospect to where they were headed was located some two miles up the Fortymile

River and thence up Clinton Creek for a distance of five or six miles. Before leaving Dawson they had agreed to make camp at the Fortymile where Anderson had a good log cabin. They would stay there overnight, then go on to the asbestos prospect the following day. They figured they would reach Snowshoe Mountain around noon and that would still give them enough daylight so they could make a close inspection of the property.

It was around 40 below when the party left Dawson but, after a few hours of travelling, a sharp wind came blowing up the river from the north and this chilling wind increased the intense cold. The four men took turns riding in the toboggans and then running behind the dogs, swinging their arms against their chests to keep their circulation going.

At noon they camped at a point along the river, flanked by towering spruce trees. They scooped out the snow, gathered some dry twigs from the underbrush and made a fire. Here they broke out a lunch, which had been prepared before they left town, heated the beans and the doughnuts over the flames and sat back against the spruce trees to light up cigarettes and enjoy a 15-minute rest. They started out again still following the long, twisting course of the Yukon River where there was no protection from the sharp wind.

The early dusk of the northern afternoon was beginning to creep across the land by the time they had covered another 20 miles and already a slim sliver of a moon was edging up from behind the distant mountain ranges. Dogs and men kept grimly on and by the time complete darkness had set in they came up on the familiar landmarks of the little island settlement of Fortymile.

It felt good to reach the island and it didn't take the two native men long to get a fire going in Anderson's cabin, feed the dogs and cook a good dinner on the red-hot wood stove. They re-packed all the perishables from their loaded toboggan and then sat down to eat. The cabin was warm and comfortable and, after they'd eaten and smoked a cigarette or two while talking over the plans for the morrow, the weary trail mushers turned in for the night, determined to get away to a bright and early start the following morning.

It was still around 40 below the next morning but the wind had abated. While Anderson stoked up the stove and cooked a hearty breakfast of flapjacks and bacon and coffee, Walters briefed Caley and his son on the condition of the trail and gave them a detailed outline of what they would be up against before reaching Snowshoe Mountain and the asbestos showing.

"We're the only ones that have been over the trail this winter," Walters told them, "and the snowshoe trail we made before leaving for Dawson will be drifted in. It won't be too bad for the first two miles up the Fortymile but probably after that we'll have to pack a new trail for the dogs.

Caley and his son took it all in stride. "If you two can make it," he told Walters, "guess Bobby and I can do it too."

As soon as the prospectors had eaten and hitched up the dogs and reloaded the toboggans, the four men set out again. The first shafts of day-

light were starting to creep into the valley and they had no trouble during the two-mile trip up the Fortymile River. It was daylight by the time they reached the little tributary of the Fortymile known as Clinton Creek. At this point they had to leave the river trail, head up a high, sloping bank and then proceed along a faintly-outlined trail through the brush and timber. As Walters had predicted, the old trail had blown in with fresh snow and they hadn't gone very far before they had to stop and put on their snowshoes. All four men headed out ahead of the dogs, breaking a new trail in the deep snow. It was slow going but they trudged along steadily, stepping every so often to catch their wind or to light up a smoke. Along about noon they came to a narrow valley and after turning a sharp bend around a low-lying ridge, they came onto a small tent, well sheltered in a clump of spruce trees.

"Here we are," Walters grinned as they drew abreast of the tent. "There's Snowshoe Mountain straight across from here. "That's where we made our find. We'll eat here in the tent, and then head up the mountain. It won't take us long from here.

While Walters and Anderson remained at Clinton Creek to obtain more samples, Caley and his son returned to Dawson. Caley was a long-time friend of Alex Berry, a widely known Yukon mining man who was then working for Conwest Exploration Co. He advised Berry of the asbestos discovery and showed him samples. It was through Berry's promotion and enthusiasm for the new find that his company sent in their geologists and other company executives the following year. It didn't take the Conwest people long to realize the value of the Clinton Creek asbestos find and the company took a lease on the property and began development work.

Satisfied with their preliminary exploration of the asbestos, the company bought out the interests held by Walters, Anderson, Caley and the latter's son for $120,000 plus shares in the company.

**Editor's Note:**

This story written by the late Archie Gillespie in 1963 is a somewhat romanticized version of these events. Art Anderson had actually seen the asbestos with his father, Pete Anderson (a Dane who had arrived during the Klondike Gold Rush), in the 1930s. But he couldn't find it again and hence needed a prospecting grubstake.

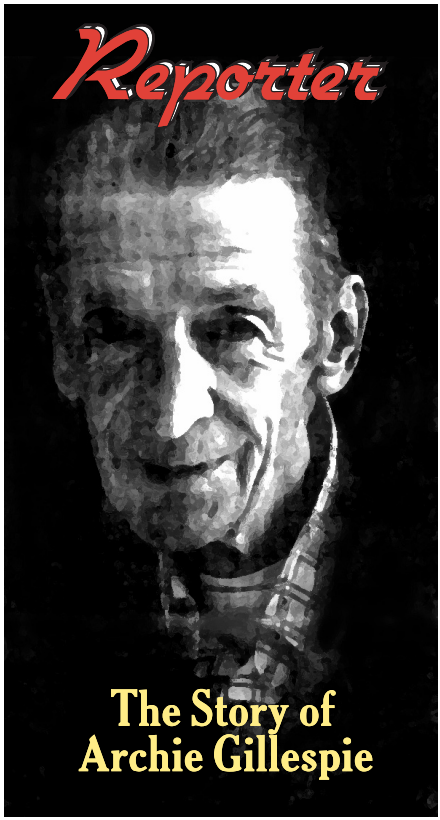
Clinton Creek Asbestos, owned by Cassiar Asbestos, opened the mill on site in 1967.

The mine closed in 1978 and the townsite was auctioned off. The buildings and trailers went all over the Yukon.

Your editor worked on an auxiliary deposit near the original site. One of our subscribers saved my life by pulling my old truck from the path of an loaded asbestos truck on the Top Of The World Highway. The ore truck was hurtling down at us, out of control, and missed me by inches. That subscriber is Gordan Koppang of Whitehorse. He has been granted a lifetime subscription to the magazine, which would not exist if Gordon hadn't been on the road that day. It's a long story but you get the gist of it.

# The Roving Reporter

## As Told By Archie, His Many Friends, And Kinfolk




## My Life In Dawson City

I was born in a little log cabin on Bonanza Creek, about 15 miles from Dawson City.

I grew up as a child among the early day gold miners of the Klondike. Growing up was fun. At 18, after graduating from Dawson High School, I joined the Canadian Bank of Commerce, where I spent five years, under Captain Donald Thomson, a war veteran of World War One. He was a Scotsman.

I learned to play hockey when I was 14 and loved every minute of it. At 30, I decided my hockey days were over.

I was baptized as a Presbyterian, by the Rev. John Pringle.

Life in Dawson City didn't mean too much to me because I was too young to know what it was all about. I gambled and used to meet the sporting girls in Klondike City, most of them were beautiful.

In 1928 I went to Vancouver, worked on the *Vancouver Province* as a feature writer. I had to go Vancouver General Hospital for an operation on my eye, from an old hockey injury. That is where I met my wife, a beautiful English girl, Lillian Ada Poale. Our first son was born in Kelowna.

We came back to the Yukon, to Mayo, where we ran a paper for seven years. Our youngest son, Don, ex-Mayor of Revelstoke, was born in Mayo. When Mayo went "boom", we moved back to Dawson, my old hometown. It wasn't the same anymore. Our daughter Ruth was born in Dawson, and later became the "Queen of the Lake" in Kelowna. She was a real doll.

Dawson, in my youth, was a fascinating place. I got to know Joe Boyle, A.N.C. Treadgold, and many other big shots up the Klondike. To me living in Dawson was an experience in life. I spent one winter as a guest of Bishop Stringer and his wife. I knew all their kids from Wilfred to Rowena.

Today I am back in the Yukon, the land I love, I've got every bad habit going, booze, girls, dancing, gambling.
From *The Whitehorse Golden Age Society Newsletter,* Winter, 1979.

## A Part of Yukon History Died With Archie Gillespie

### By (the late) Don Sawatsky

The dean of northern newspapermen, Archie Gillespie, is dead, and with his passing goes a respected and honourable part of Yukon history.

Archie was 78 years old when he was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident (on Dec. 14, 1979). Despite his age and broken hip suffered in a fall about two years ago, he had continued his writing. He wrote not of politics but of people and his affection and understanding of his fellow man was legend.

He was born in Dawson City in 1901 and worked as a reporter and editor for the old *Dawon Daily News.* From there he went to Mayo as publisher and editor of the *Mayo Miner.* When that paper folded, Archie came to Whitehorse where he wrote for the *Yukon News,* then owned and edited by Ken Shortt and finally as a freelance writer.

His Yukon articles appeared in such newspapers as the *Vancouver Province* and the *New York Times* as well as *Time Magazine.*

But the real Archie Gillespie emerged in his column called Roving Reporter that he wrote until his death. It was in this offering on a more-or-less regular basis that he displayed his unabashed love of people, his patience for their shortcomings and his underlying interest in what was going on around him.

It was this "tid-bit" type of column where he brought out his sense of humour in a world that is often taken too seriously by many people.

One short line I recall took a good-natured shot ats John Milller, operator of the Capital Hotel. John at that time was writing a local sport column for the local rags and Archie observed that John wrote "almost as well as Edith Josie (of Old Crow, "Here Are The News") except she spells better.

On another occasion, he ripped into yours truly, saying he was certainly glad the photo accompanied by my weekly *Yukon News* column had been removed. Then he followed up by calling me "the wild Cossack of the Mountains" and expressed the hope that some day someone would shoot me into outer space so I might find out where the real world is.

For some months I promised Archie dinner at our home, but as those sort of things go, we never set a specific date. Then one day we picked up his column and read, "I am certainly looking forward to that long-promised supper at the Sawatsky's." The date was set.

Archie could laugh at himself too. Four or five years ago my wife and I got him a birthday cake and planned to go with him to a party which was to be thrown by some of his friends. I arrived with the cake only to find I was a week early. So we froze the cake and returned to his small room on the

proper day. As we were leaving for the party, he picked the cake up and promptly dropped it on the floor.

He was astounded as he looked at the crushed remnants of his cake. I picked up the ruins and told him, "Don't worry, Arch. Just remember that you're the only man ever to have a birthday pudding."

He was embarrassed about the incident but it was his favourite story and he never tired of telling it on himself.

The Roving Reporter was a very human person and he was my friend. He will be sorely missed.

Archie is survived by three sisters, Vera, May and Margaret and four children, Don, Dick, Keith and Ruth.

**From *The Whitehorse Star*, January 2, 1980.**

## The Gillespie Family Story

### By Don Gillespie (Archie's son)

I will give you some background on the Gillespie family that my grandfather Richard started.

He came from a large family, seven brothers, two sisters, all born in Prince Edward Island. As far as I know, he and his brother Frank were the only ones of the family to go to the Yukon. I was told my Dad Archie was the first white child born in Dawson (actually, on Bonanza Creek). He was the only son but had four sisters and was raised in Dawson.

We moved to Dawson in 1938 when I was four. I was born in Mayo and the doctor who delivered me was Alan Duncan who has written a book about being a doctor in Mayo and Dawson. My sister Ruth was born in Dawson in 1945. My brothers Dick and Keith were born in B.C.

My brother Dick was mostly brought up in Dawson and lived there the rest of his life. He started his own company, Gillespie Equipment Rentals, which he operated until his death in 1993. He was married to to Madge Caley of Caley's Grocery Store in Dawson. They had one son, Rick, who has taken over his dad's business. Rick has two sons, ages ten and eight. They are the fifth generation of Gillespies that have lived in Dawson.

I moved from Dawson when I was 15 and stayed with my grandparents in Kelowna because there was a better high school and more opportunities for me there. But I have very good memories of my years in Dawson, working on the paddlewheelers in the summer months, also at Mike and Tim Cole's placer gold mine on Bonanza Creek. I remember such things as no indoor plumbing. It didn't take you long to go when it was 40 or 50 below zero. They delivered water in buckets in the winter. We only had a kitchen stove and a heater made from a 45-gallon drum. At night the kitchen stove would go out and the water was always frozen in the morning. I remember the honey wagons, the really cold winters when it would hit 70 below zero. If you threw a bucket of water, it would freeze before it hit the ground.

Christmas, 1939. Archie Gillespie; wife Ada; sons, Dick, Keith, Don.

We had great gardens. I remember the August 17th celebrations (Discovery Days), the ball games, how the whole town showed up to meet the sternwheelers. Short days in winter—dark when we went to school and dark when we came home. The midnight sun on June 21st, northern lights in winter—I could go on an on.

I knew some of the oldtimers such as Black Mike, Dan Van Bibber, Art Fry, Elmer Gaunreau, Fred Caley, Joe Redmond, and many others.

Sam, it was nice meeting up with you in Dawon this summer. The next time I am in the Yukon, I will sure make time to see you at Army Beach.

## The First Gillespies in the Yukon

### By May Gillespie (Archie's sister)

Our father, Richard Leonard Gillespie, left his birth place of Clyde River, P.E.I. as a very young chap to venture out west. His brother Tom had already left for California. Dick and brother Frank arrived in Vancouver in 1896. They couldn't find work so they went to Bellingham, Washington, where they worked as deckhands on a boat going to Skagway, Alaska. On arriving at Skagway, the news came in that gold had been discovered on Bonanza Creek in the Yukon. So they trekked over the trail from Skagway to Lake Bennett. They had enough money to buy packhorses and some supplies. Due to their youth and good health, they arrived at Lake Bennett to realize the worst was yet to come. They were experienced loggers and were able to cut down trees and build a small raft. They loaded their supplies and started out on the journey to Dawson.

Little did they realize at that time the hazards they would encounter on the Yukon River. They reached Whitehorse without mishap. It was a small stopping place but there was a hotel, a couple of saloons and several cafes. They had a good night's sleep and got up early to get a good start on the Yukon River.

They passed Lake Laberge and all went well as they found a sheltered bay to make camp. In the morning they awakened to a cold wind and some snow flakes but decided to continue although Frank was not feeling well, with cramps and diarhhea. They had trouble controlling the raft and the snowstorm turned into a blizzard. The raft started breaking up. One log after another broke away and they were cold and bewildered and their endurance was beginning to wear off.

Their feet and hands went numb and they were losing hope and wondering why they had left P.E.I. Although their parents had been quite religious and the boys had attended church, they had never been serious about praying. My dad Richard told me in later years that he sent up a prayer for God to help them. Within half an hour they saw a dim light in the distance. The storm abated and they were able to bring their raft—what was left of it—into shore. They had reached the small settlement of Stewart River.

The settlers made them welcome and provided a hot meal and warm beds. The next day broke clear and calm and they repaired the raft and got more supplies at the small store. They had clear sailing to Dawson and arrived there to find some tents up on the shore and a couple of cafes. They were well ahead of the big rush that was to come later.

My Dad and Uncle Frank pitched their tents and spent several days listening to the news about the gold strike. They proceeded to Bonanza Creek where they staked claims and built themselves a cabin. The next year my Uncle Alex (on my mother's side) from Ontario arrived on the scene. He and my father became great friends and they mined together. Uncle Alex was very homesick so he had his sister Margaret McLennan come up from Ontario to keep house for him. You can imagine what a different life it was for her, having just graduated from Normal School. But she was of Scottish ancestry and had lots of fortitude. Within a year, she and my father were married.

My dad had been quite successful mining so he and his bride went to Ontario for their honeymoon. After the children were born on Bonanza Creek, they moved to Lovett Gulch and that's where I was brought into the world. My dad was no longer doing well with mining so the decision was made to move to flourishing Dawson. It had government buildings, schools, nice homes, saloons, cafes but no flush toilets or running water.

But we did have "Scotty" come once a week to pick up the frozen toilet cans and water was delivered in buckets.

Although my Dad had little schooling, he was appointed to Dawson City Council and became the mining recorder for the district.

So now we had a nice cozy home in Dawson and we all went to school, two miles each way. Our father used to go out on weekends and cut firewood and haul it to Dawson by team—he really worked hard. Wood was $50 a cord

then. We had a big heater in the front room and then the kitchen stove which had a tank for hot water for our Saturday night baths in the big galvanized tub. Our house was warm but my sister Vera was the warmest as she slept in a coat on lined with squirrel.

We attended school until the temperature reached 40 below, then stayed home. But always, when the Robbie Burns concert was held, we went, although it would be 50 below in the Pioneer Hall. What a huge building it was.

There was always a Christmas dinner and another on Boxing Day for the oldtimers. We all went to wait on the tables. Then the Eagles had a Christmas party with presents for all the children. What happy memories!

The hockey games were one of the highlights, especially because brother Archie was on the team. What a skater and hockey player he was. Before the game, he wouldn't eat anything but raisins. Then there was the skating, glare ice and you could skate for miles and there was always a big bonfire. What fun.

Of course my first skates were hand-me-downs, far too big, but I managed to learn. In later years I was skating at 30 below and one ear froze then the other.

One of our most exciting memories is the annual trek to the Dome to see the midnight sun. Imagine playing tennis in the middle of the night.

Front, L-R, Archie, Mrs. Gillespie, Laura, May, Mr. Gillespie (Richard). Standing, L-R, Margaret, Vera Gillespie. [Yukon Archives photo, Hare Collection]

One of the worst troubles to come into our life was when the Princess Sophia went down out of Skagway and we lost so many friends.

Then came the day when my eldest sister graduated from high school and left for Edmonton to go to normal school. She was only 16 years old.

One little anecdote I will never forget. In our history class, we were learning about the Lost Fitzgerald Patrol. There was a monument to the lost Mounties in the police grounds. I volunteered with my friend Lizzie to go on our way home and write down the words from the monument. I froze my fingers while doing it. When I got home, my mother had to put my hands in snow to thaw them out. Fortunately, I never lost any fingers. I was to meet Corporal Dempster many years later—he was the one who found the frozen bodies. Gruesome.

In 1921, silver had been found on Keno Hill. There was a small village at Mayo, 150 miles from Dawson, so my Dad was sent there to open a Mining Recorder's Office. My mother and I went along—and my whole life was changed.

There was a well-built log cabin the government rented. The office was in front and we had small quarters at the back but my father soon found property and with the help of Uncle Frank, who was now in Mayo, built a home for us. There was a school, Dorothy Hogan was my teacher, and so I continued my education. But when it came to grade 12, there was no one to teach. The government managed to hire Harold Tabor, who was in charge of the newly built radio station. The next year the minister, Reverend Frank Buck, took on the four of us—Nora McLaren, Annie Churchill, Johnny Miller, and me. What a marvellous job he did. We all passed our exams.

My father became very busy as more claims were being staked and mining properties on Galena Hill were being opened up. Keno Hill Ltd. was shipping concentrated silver ore and the White Pass sternwheelers were arriving twice a week taking the silver out on barges. The ore was in big sacks.

I began to help my Dad in the office and decided to go to Vancouver to take a commercial course. At this time, Vera and Margaret were in Vancouver finishing their education. I returned to Mayo to work in the Mining Recorder's Office as a typist and secretary. The mines were going full blast and gold had been found at Minto Lake. My Dad was busy inspecting the mines to see if the cribbing had been properly constructed. Gold began coming in and certificates had to be issued and gold weighed.

Our main interest in Mayo was when the boat came in and we would get a dance going. In winter we played bridge and badminton. One New Year's Eve, I danced till four o'clock and had a hole in my shoe. Garry McArthur played the piano and Alex McArthur the saxophone. Laura had arrived in Mayo to teach and she often....

**Editor's Note: Here the hand-written manuscript ends. I hope to run more stories about this remarkable Yukon family, including the uncle, Frank, who had a mineral named after him, called "Gillespite."**

# The Ice Worm Kid: A Tale of Jim Robb

By Archie Gillespie

**Editor's Forward:**

This story, written in 1963 (and the asbestos story), turned up in a strange manner, as if Archie's ghost had a hand in it.

I went into the *Whitehorse Star* looking for a photo of Archie. Jackie Pierce, the publisher, showed me a file folder full of Archie's writings and his diary from 1963. It happened that a few days earlier, in a gift shop on Main Street, a carpenter was tearing up the old floor to replace it. The building had once been the *Whitehorse Star* office. Between the floor joists, he found some file folders, onc of which was Archie's, and delivered them to the *Star*. That same week, Jim Robb and I had been at the Gold Rush Inn talking about his old friend Archie.

Most of those who envy his talents think he's nuts. Other claim he's about as close to a Beatnik as you could find in the Yukon. Still others think he's lazy and that he only uses his painting and sketching skill to keep himself in hamburgers and beer.

Actually Jim Robb, 29, is far from being a nut, a Beatnik or an Idler. He's a tall, dark-haired, personable young man, a typical extrovert who talks quietly but with a lot of enthusiasm about the various projects he has in mind. Jim has a terrific imagination and the energy and ability to put his fondest dreams to tangible use.

Right now he's chock-block full of enthusiasm for his pet theme for the World's Fair to be held in Montreal four years from now (Editor's note: this would be Expo '67). Just back from a five-month visit to relatives In Quebec, artist Robb proudly displays an original drawing which he has made of a giant spinning wheel. He believes that the spinning wheel truly symbolizes Canada and that it would give Fair visitors of all ages something to remember.

Incorporated in the spinning-wheel, would be a Ferris wheel, restaurant and rotating spotlights. Access to the Ferris wheel would be by way of Indian peace pipes which would serve as legs for the spinning wheel. He conceives an elevator in one leg to whisk visitors to the top of the giant wheel and escalators in the other two legs.

He stresses the fact that the restaurant would feature typical French

Canadian foods and habitant bread. To further stress the Canadian motif, Robb would have the huge Ferris wheel decorated with Canadian symbols such as the beaver, maple leaf, fleur-de-lis, and other true Canadian symbols.

Jim Robb came to the Yukon eight years ago (in 1955) from his native Quebec and he was quick to realise that the far north country enjoyed a wealth not connected with gold and silver. It was the wealth of tradition and folklore. Ever since he has been in the Yukon he's been making a study of Indian folklore in particular. Last summer, during the Gold Rush Festival in Dawson, he painted many of the old landmarks and did a number of large murals for Dawson business houses.

But painting and sketching did not take up all of his time. He had first been lured to the Yukon by reading the poems and tales of Robert W. Service, the bard of the

Yukon. It was through reading early day ballads of the northern goldfields, that he first heard of the famous Klondike ice worms, little, wriggly creatures that pop up out of the snow and ice at certain times of the year, generally in the springtime. Even songs had been written about the northern ice worms and special ice worm cocktails used to provide a drink deluxe for the sporting girls and the elite of Dawson city in the madcap, gold rush era.

One young English chap who come north loaded with titles and glamour but short on constitution, ordered an ice worm cocktail in one of the

Joyce Isaac (granddaughter of the famous Chief Isaac of Dawson) and Jim Robb, holding a sketch of his Ferris wheel, in 1963,

famous old bars on Front Street. The crowd at the bar had explained the special drink to the young bloke, so he insisted he must have one. The bar tender, in on the gag, served up a tall glass of sparkling gin and soda water, well studded with long stems of vermicelli. They looked like the pure thing. The Englishman eyed his drink, squinted at the wiggling worms in the glass and passed out cold.

But Jim Robb conceived the idea of making these ferocious looking little dragons out of fur, with glaring eyes. Whenever you stroke the fur, the little rebels rear up their necks and become uniquely alive.

Daring the Gold Festival in the summer of 1962, artist Robb sold hundreds of these homemade ice worms to the tourists at $1 a throw. When he was in Quebec this past winter he demonstrated his wiggly little monsters in several nightclubs and other resorts with the results that he received dozens of orders.

Every night now, while other young people are enjoying themselves at the picture shows or dances, this enterprising young folk lore artist may be found behind his small desk in a local publishing shop, cutting out, fashioning and decorating his ice worms. They bring him in a fair amount of revenue.

Jim left Whitehorse shortly before Christmas to visit his brother, a schoolteacher at St. Jerome, Que-

Jim Robb on Main Street, Whitehorse, summer, 2002. [S.H. photo]

bec, and his aunt and uncle at Ste. Adele. During weekends he worked at Mount Alouette, famous ski resort. But what he liked best while on his holiday back east was talking about the Yukon, publicizing it and explaining to those he talked with some of the moot outstanding and fascinating highlights of the north country.

Robb travelled east by Canadian Coachways and the journey across Canada took him four days, with the bus travelling night and day.

When Jim returned, also via bus, he looked, talked and acted the same as the day he left the Yukon. Even his best friends would never know that he had been frequenting some of the most illustrious nightspots in the east, or that he had even been away from his little log cabin in the north. Jim's like that, a young man with brilliant ideas, an artist's love for freedom of deed and thought, and an enthusiasm that is infectious.

Should this personable and popular artist have his spinning wheel concept accepted as a symbol for the World's Fair, he will have gone a long distance in giving the Yukon some of the best publicity it has enjoyed in years.

And who knows. "The Ice Worm Kid" may just possibly put it over.

---

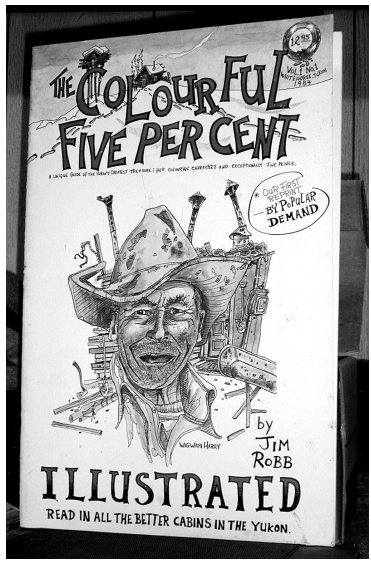
## More Editor's Comments:

Indeed, Archie Gillespie's predictions for Jim Robb came true. Jim is the Yukon's foremost artist, and you would be hard pressed to find a building or home here without a Jim Robb painting in it.

In 1957, as Jim was sitting in the Grill Cafe in the White Pass Hotel, he saw Wigwam Harry dancing beside the jukebox. Wigwam was well known for his dancing, his slight of hand tricks, and for the ability to work hard at manual labour. In fact, Wigwam once dug a basement by hand in three days, but when the owner was slow to pay, Harry filled it back up in just one night.

Jim produced a large painting of Wigwam that hung on the wall of the Rainbow Room at the Whitehorse Inn. Painting colourful characters and buildings became Jim's life work and he is still doing it.

However, a Jim Robb original today would take quite a bite out of your budget. Prints of Jim's work are available at a reasonable price and you can always buy one of his *Colourful Five Percent Magazines*, of which there are three volumes in print.




Wigwam Harry on the cover.

# Jack & Flo Christy

## PIONEERS OF THE ALASKA HIGHWAY

### By John Skelton

Jack Christy [J. Skelton photo]

Jack and Flo Christy operated a number of highway lodges in Northern B.C. before moving to Watson Lake, Y.T. in the early 1960s. I know little of Jack's early history other than he was raised in Manitoba and sold Singer sewing machines in Northern Manitoba during the depression years of the 1930s. Jack was a natural salesman, which he had to be to survive as his potential customers, nearly all farmers, had little or no cash. Jack would take their farm produce as both down payment and subsequent payments; he would then transport the produce to Winnipeg or another large centre and sell to whom ever he could. Flo was raised in Alberta, and before marrying Jack, worked as a schoolteacher in that province.

Jack's first introduction to this area was running busloads of U.S. soldiers from Dawson Creek, B.C. to Whitehorse, Y.T. during the war years. I understand that during these trips he managed to provide some of the soldiers stationed along the highway with the odd bottle of very expensive whiskey. Once civilian traffic was allowed on the highway and there was a need for freight and highway services, Jack and Flo went into action establishing lodges at Fireside and Lower Post, B.C. They also started a trucking firm to supply their own and other lodges along the highway with fuel, groceries and dry goods.

Jack and Flo settled in Lower Post where they operated a hotel, store and sawmill. Many of the help at the sawmill were local natives, and Jack decided after a short time in business that he would pay the help daily at the end of each shift. He found that once the men had bought groceries, tobacco etc. at his store, there was little left to spend in his beer parlour which pretty well insured that the men would show up for work the next day. This method of payment did away with the need to give credit at the store and provided a steady cash flow. The only competition for Jack and Flo at Lower Post was the Hudson's Bay Company; however, they soon closed their store and the Christys ended up with the sole retail establishment in the village.

After working for years without holidays other than perhaps a few days in Dawson Creek, B.C., Jack and Flo decided on a Hawaii holiday. However, this proved to be not the vacation they were looking forward to as they experienced severe seasickness on a very rough boat passage to the Islands. On returning home, they found that they had lost a large fuel contract to the competition, so they swore that this would be the last holiday they would take, and this remained the case for many years.

In the early 1960s, the Christys sold their Lower Post operations and moved to Watson Lake, Yukon. They retained the trucking firm and continued to supply fuel to stations up and down the Alaska Highway. In 1969 they purchased the Pacific Petroleum bulk plant in Watson Lake, which supplied fuel to places as far apart as Telegraph Creek, B.C. and Faro, Yukon, with even one trip to Dawson City. I think that Jack bid low on the Dawson City haul knowing that this would probably be the only way he would get to see Dawson City. It is unbelievable to me that after spending some 40 years in this area, Flo never got to Dawson City.

I arrived back in Watson Lake on January 1, 1970, to find that my first day at work was to accompany Jack, and "Jack of All Trades," Bud Stephen, to a curve on the Cassiar road where Jack's small tanker had been forced into the ditch by a large White Pass tanker.

The temperature was around -minus 45 F, but in spite of the cold, we had no problem recovering the tanker due to the many times that Jack and Bud had done this type of work before. Several years later, Bob Bailey, one of our part time employees, returning from a trip to Cassiar and driving one of our small tankers, was accused of forcing a White Pass tanker to hit the ditch. This accident also happened on the same stretch of road. Bob carried on to Watson Lake unaware that the White Pass truck had run off the road and turned over. White Pass decided to sue our firm, so Jack and Bob travelled to Whitehorse to attend court. Just before going into court, Bob, who, sang and played guitar at the Belvedere Hotel, told Jack that he was losing $150 per night for the days spent in Whitehorse, and that he would not testify for Jack unless he was paid this amount as well as daytime lost wages and any Whitehorse expenses.

Jack had no option but to fork over the cash and fortunately, after Bob's testimony, the lawsuit was thrown out of court. It should be noted that we only used Bob in a pinch as he made the trip hours faster than any other driver, and the truck he drove required three quarts of oil after each trip. So perhaps he had indeed caused the accident. The Cassiar road was narrow with lots of bad bends and normally very rough due to the pounding it took from the ore trucks. With all the heavy traffic and poor road conditions there were bound to be lots of accidents. The ore was shipped to Whitehorse, loaded on the train to Skagway and shipped by boat to Korea and Japan.

Not long after starting work, I was going over the credits received from Pacific Petroleums and was unable to figure out the amount of commission they paid us to deliver fuel to their customer, the Department of Highways camp at Dease Lake. I wrote Pacific Petroleums to question their calcula-

tions, which actually seemed to favour us. They replied that they had checked their records and their credits were correct. At a later date, I went back over our records and realized that we were being paid to haul the fuel from the Taylor refinery to Dease Lake and also paid again to haul the same fuel from Watson Lake to Dease Lake. Almost a year later, after thousands of dollars of overpayment by Pacific Petroleums, the district manager showed up at our office to tell me that he had a big problem.

He explained how they had overpaid us over many months, and he was not looking forward to giving Jack this news. I showed him his firm's reply to my letter and told him that we were not being paid enough under the original contract to haul fuel over the "goat trail" to Dease Lake, but that I could probably get Jack to refund half of the overpayment. He was happy with this and so was Jack, whom I had previously made fully aware of the situation.

Jack & Flo Christy with grandchildren. [J. Skelton photo]

One day Jack and I were having a drink after work at a local bar when a friend we will call Bob, a liquor store employee, walked in with a big grin on his face and said, "I did it and it worked." Of course we wanted to know what he was talking about, so he told us that he had one particularly loud, drunken and altogether obnoxious customer, who we shall refer to as Harry who came in on a almost daily basis and purchased one bottle of cheap wine of the screw cap variety and was driving poor Bob nuts. Bob who no longer works in the Yukon took a bottle of the wine in question, poured a liberal amount out and replaced it with a similar amount of X-lax before carefully resealing the bottle. He then placed the bottle at the back of the shelf until he saw Harry entering the store. Bob was able, unseen, to take the bottle from the back of the shelf and move it to the front where sure enough Harry nabbed it. Several days later Harry returned to say he was not going to buy any more of that brand of wine as it didn't taste all that good and as well gave him a terrible case of the "shits." Bob discovered after this happened that he found it much easier to serve Harry as just seeing Harry brought back fond memories of this episode. Jack and I were sworn to secrecy; however, as this was over 35 years ago, I am sure the statute of limitations must have kicked in by now. If there is a moral to this story it would be do not give your liquor store employees a hard time.

Flo was a sharp businesswoman and one example that comes to mind was when we had a small tanker break down about 80 mile north of Watson Lake on the Campbell Highway. We arranged for Mickey and Danny Miller to take their wrecker and haul our tanker back to Watson Lake. The Christys' living room looked out over the Alaska Highway and that evening Flo happened to glance out the window to see our fuel truck pulling Miller's wrecker down the highway. It did not take Flo long to get on the phone and find out what was going on. When Mickey and Danny reached our tanker, their wrecker conked out; fortunately, they were able to get the tanker going and used it to pull their wrecker back to town. Because of the circumstances, Flo got Mickey to agree that she would only have to pay half the normal charge for the recovery job.

As I was out of the office from time to time making local deliveries etc, Flo decided that we should install a telephone answering machine. CNT hooked us up but, although there were a fair number of calls logged in, very few messages were left. This seemed strange, so I called the office from my home phone. The message had been recorded by Jack and was the normal," We are out of the office at present, but please leave a message etc." However, before Jack had finished his message, Flo's loud voice broke in, "Damn it all to hell Jack! Those S.O.B.'s Boswell River Mines still haven't paid their account." Our customers were probably so busy laughing that they forgot to leave a message. I phoned Flo at the house and asked if she had ever listened to the full message on the answering machine, and she said," No and why should I bother?" I told her it might be interesting for her to do so. Later that day acting on Flo's instructions, CNT came to the office and took the machine away.

Jack was also pretty sharp as well as lucky as shown by the following case. We had installed several large fuel tanks at Boswell River Mines, that were located some 20 miles or so off the Alaska Highway. This company closed down their operations and did not return in the spring as expected, so later that summer, Jack drove in with a four wheel drive to check on the tanks only to find that they were gone. By checking with a local lodge owner he found that the tanks had been hauled out by a Whitehorse drilling company, who had money owing to them. Jack then called the local RCMP and informed them that his tanks had been stolen and gave them the name of the drilling company. He asked the RCMP to tell the Whitehorse firm that he would not press charges if the tanks were returned to his Watson Lake yard by the weekend. The tanks showed up in short order in good condition and we were spared the expense of hauling them out, which would have required the use of a cat and several large trucks.

Jack's pride and joy was his fleet of trucks although they always seemed to be breaking down. If you could get him away from the trucks and business in general, he had a great sense of humour and was a gifted storyteller. Jack and Flo rented a large near-new house trailer to Grant Taylor, a former Bank of Montreal manager, who had returned to Watson Lake to operate a Texaco bulk plant and Kal Tire dealership. Grant was advised that there were no pets allowed to which he agreed. But soon after, Lawrence Purdy, who operated Frontier Helicopters, offered him a purebred Labrador puppy. Grant took the puppy hoping that he could keep it hidden until he could show the Christys that it would not cause any damage to the property.

Several weeks later, Grant and Marguerite had Jack and Flo over for dinner. As they were relaxing with drinks after dinner, Jack asked about the dog he understood Grant had been given. Grant confirmed that he did

Some of the Christy's trucks. [J. Skelton photo]

have a puppy but that it was well trained and had done no damage to the trailer and brought the dog in to show Jack. Jack agreed that the puppy looked fine and the evening carried on in a relaxed atmosphere until suddenly Jack slapped his forehead and yelled, "Jesus look!"

At the same time he pointed to a pile of dog poop on the carpet. Grant sprang to action, grabbed the puppy, pointed its nose towards the mess and started to spank it at which point Jack yelled, "Don't beat the dog. It's not its fault; he just hasn't been properly trained!" Grant left the room and returned with two pieces of cardboard, he then knelt over the mess and gingerly started to scoop it up before suddenly realizing that it was made of plastic.

Grant had a previous trick played on him that nearly gave him a heart attack. Shortly after his arrival in Watson Lake as the new bank manager, John Jamieson, the highway's camp foreman and a native friend, invited him on a hunting and fishing trip on the Frances River. The first evening, after setting up camp, they decided to catch some fish for supper. Grant happened to snag his line and he cut off a fairly long length, which he was unaware got caught around his ankle and played out as he walked through the reeds along the riverbank. John and his friend noticed the line, so John picked up the end and gave it a yank at the same time yelling at Grant, "Watch out! Swamp rattler!"

A shaken Grant cried out, "Christ it bit me!" before turning to find John and friend doubled up with laughter. This episode made the rounds of town much to Grant's embarrassment.

Our short haul drivers seemed to be able to do the impossible. On one trip the driver returned having delivered 50 more gallons of gasoline and 50 gallons less of diesel than he carried. A customer came in a few days later to say that he had diesel mixed in with his gasoline, but as his tank held 500 gallons there was not enough diesel mixed in to be a problem.

Another time the driver returned having delivered approximately 100 gallons less than he had left with and was unable to explain the difference. It was only many years later, while working for Northern Metalic, and talking with Frank Peters, a grader operator with the highway department, that I learned of the reason for the shortage. Jimmy, our driver, had hit the ditch, and although the truck did not roll on its side, it was leaning over at quite an angle, and fuel had spilled out of the dome hatches. Frank had been good enough to pull the truck out with his grader and at the Jimmy's request, had not mentioned the accident to anyone.

Jimmy quit driving for us after Flo had him water her greenhouse. The reason he gave me was that he was a truck driver not a "bloody farmer." He had previously threatened to quit if we ever sent him on another trip to Telegraph Creek and after travelling the road I could not blame him. Shortly after Jimmy's one and only trip to Telegraph Creek, Flo had reason to understand his refusal to make another as she and Jack together with Lawrence and Mel Purdy, long time Yukoners, and former owners of Frontier Helicopters of Watson Lake, decided to drive in using the Christys' Chrysler

and the company pickup. Flo accompanied by Mel drove the Chrysler with Jack and Lawrence following in the pickup. All went well until Flo reached a point on the Telegraph Creek road where a steep cliff rose on the passenger's side and a sheer drop of hundreds of feet on the driver's side. At this point the road made a sharp bend and Flo, a short woman, was unable to see anything but blue sky over the hood of the car. Near panic she stopped the car, opened the door, slid out, and dropping to her hands and knees crawled on all fours back to the pickup where she let Jack know in no uncertain terms that she was not driving one foot further at which point she switched places with Lawrence and they continued the trip.

Jack had an accident that probably hastened his retirement. He had purchased a brand new Mack truck in Dawson Creek and decided to drive it back to Watson Lake with a load of fuel. The trip was fine until he turned off the highway at Fireside. At the exact moment he was on the sloped driveway entrance, a small brass fitting broke off causing the tank trailer brakes to dynamite and the tanker to roll on its side. Jack was not hurt although his pride may have been.

Jack and Flo sold the bulk plant and trucking firm in the mid '70s and a year or so later moved to Kelowna, the home of so many retired Yukoners. They always had a big welcome for friends from the north. Jack passed away in 1991 and Flo four years later. ❑

Alaska Highway along the Rancheria River in 1977, when it was gravel all the way. (S.H. photo)

# Over the Chilkoot – the Wrong Way

By Jim Lotz

## The Yukon Adventures of an Ottawa Civil Servant

I joined the Department of North-ern Affairs and National Resources as a community planner in 1960, just after the birth of our first daughter. My first assignment was to study the squatters of Whitehorse. They had a fearsome reputation in Ottawa and had been labelled a problem. I took home a huge batch of files on this problem, but they told me almost nothing about the real world of the squatters and why they lived as they did on unserviced land around the margins of the town site.

Before I started my study in October, I stood on the Robert Campbell Bridge, looking over Whiskey Flats, wondering: "What right do I have to ask these people personal questions?" Then I met "Hammy" Hammond. He worked one day on/two days off as a firefighter with DND and had built a home on the flats. After interviewing him, I received permission to hire this insider to work with me. We knocked on the door of every squatter house on Whiskey Flats, Moccasin Flats and Sleepy Hollow. Hammy would enter first, saying: "I'm a squatter. This guy's from Ottawa doing a survey, but he's O.K." We received a welcome wherever we went. Only one guy became stroppy and I argued back with him. He invited me to supper.

An old timer gave me the clue as to why squatters were considered a problem in Ottawa: "We were invisible before they built the Robert Campbell Bridge and Riverdale. Then civil servants saw Whiskey Flats four times a day as they drove back and forth to work. So the place became an eyesore and we became a problem."

I told everyone with whom I spoke that I could not promise them anything except a copy of my report. Many of the squatters, living with uncertainty, wanted their status clarified. Hammy expressed constant amazement at conditions in some of the other squatter areas. They ranged from areas of well-built housing to places lined with shacks. We did not meet Wigwam Harry, who lived as a squatter in a piano crate until someone stole it. Or so the legend went.

Squatting is a logical adaptation to uncertain conditions on the frontier where people are unsure how long they will stay before they move on to new challenges. My report indicated that about a third of the population of Lower Whitehorse lived as squatters. Because they had built their own houses or paid low rents they could work for low wages and still survive. And they bought lots of goods and services from local merchants. The squatters played a vital role in sustaining the economy of the city. They also served as a constant reminder of the old days in the territory and how most people lived before middleclass morality and standards caught up with this frontier re-

gion. The squatters were not pariahs, problems or parasites, just ordinary folk trying to make a living. The best solution to the "squatter problem" came from a departmental lawyer: "Slap some coloured paint on the houses, call the area 'frontier Town' and develop it as a tourist attraction."

Returning to Ottawa, I finished my report and handed it to my boss. He threw it on a shelf -- the fate of many reports in Ottawa, then and now. As a new bureaucrat, unaware of protocol and furious at my work being ignored, I went over my boss's head to his boss -- Don Snowden. I told him I'd promised people in Whitehorse, in and out of government, that I would send copies of what I'd learned to them. Don said; "O.K. Let's print it." He made this decision without checking with his boss, but that was the way Don did things. Copies of the report went back to Whitehorse. For the first time, everyone concerned with "the squatter problem" had the same data and information. Instead of bringing in the bulldozers, the governments put together a set of proposals to meet the needs of the squatters in ways acceptable to them.

Andrew Connors' fine film, *Shipyards Lament*, catches the feel of what squatter life was like. The houses looked messy and dilapidated, but their insides, warm and comfortable, always had the feel of home. Here, in the wilderness, someone had found peace, made a new life, lived, loved and turned their hand to anything to make a buck.

I had found a welcome in the Yukon, an openness and friendliness in a lovely land, and looked forward to a chance to return there. In the winter of 1961, I went back to the Yukon, to Dawson and was grabbed, as many other visitors were, by the sad state of the old gold mining centre. No one was sure where the idea of revitalizing Dawson City by creating a festival came

Jim Lotz on the Dempster Highway, 1963.

from -- nor was anyone willing to claim credit after this ill-conceived Ottawa proposal ended in financial disaster. But the idea originated in Ottawa, not in Dawson. Suddenly, someone remembered that people lived in Dawson and they had not been informed or involved in discussions about the proposed festival. The originators brought in Tom Patterson, founder of the Stratford Festival and sought his advice. The Ottawa logic -- if it can be called that -- went: If a small community became a world famous theatre centre, could not Dawson reclaim some of its past glories by packaging and selling its history to tourists?

So I went to Dawson in the winter to determine how the residents felt about the festival. Treated kindly by everyone I met, I soon realized that the locals wanted a small-scale event in contrast to the grandiose scheme promoted by Ottawa bureaucrats. While driving around Dawson with the town engineer, we saw smoke billowing from a wooden box. "The fire hydrant's on fire"! he exclaimed. The town's hydrants, enclosed in wooden containers, were heated by electricity. A short circuit set one on fire. The engineer and I shovelled snow onto the flames, dousing them.

Back in Ottawa, the first draft of my report pointed out that the people of Dawson, the intended beneficiaries of the festival, were pissed off at the plans for it that had been made without their participation. But they felt they had to go along with them. My report went through three rewrites before it appeared in watered-down form.

Dawson and its people survived the festival.

My short visit and the stories I heard from residents sparked my interest in spending a longer time in the old town. In 1962, I transferred to another branch of Northern Affairs, the Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, and initiated the Yukon Research Project. It sought to examine some of the problems that residents of the territory believed worth studying.

My brief time in Dawson convinced me that an overview of the community would be useful in planning its future. In those days, Ottawa had only a vague idea about how people north of 60 lived and how the settlements there worked. I decided to spend the summer of 1963 in Dawson and to start my journey there as the gold seekers had done, by following the Chilkoot Trail.

I reached Skagway by the new ferry system on July 3. The man in charge of the U.S. Customs office expressed concern about my trip across the Chilkoot Pass. The lady at the White Pass depot seemed less concerned, but I found out later that she began to pray for me as soon as I left her office. In this way, I learned one of the laws of the north: If someone is going to do something stupid, you let them find this out for themselves.

I made the nine miles to Dyea in good time. At the outlet of the Taiya River, a sign identified the start of the Chilkoot Trail to the right of the road. Some effort had been made by the early sixties to clear the trail on the American side. I plunged into a mass of alders, swishing away with my machete. My wild swipes made no impression at all on the thick vegetation barring my way. Soon my clothing became soaking wet on the outside and the inside. My glasses misted up as I plunged ahead, and I could see little. The trail began to climb the valley wall, marked by red rags and blazes on

the trees. Major deadfalls had been cleared. But it was still hard travelling. I plunged on, the head-high alders drenching me, hoping to make Canyon City by nightfall: It lay nine miles ahead.

Thrashing around in the brush, I realized I was lost. Darkness loomed and the valley began to fill with mist. I decided: "If at first you don't succeed, give up. No point in making a fool of yourself and suffering more." As I backtracked, my poor sense of direction became increasingly apparent. Stumbling and blundering, I dove through dense alder thickets, tripping over deadfalls, trying to make my way back to the mouth of the Taiya. The whole area, crisscrossed with trails, confused me as I staggered down the valley. The traces of a wagon road led to a large bridge across the river. Nearby stood a head frame with a ladder up its side, the remnant of some lost mining enterprise. All around lay steel cables, logs that had been squared, tree stumps, signs of the frantic activity that once filled this valley. Wading through a stream, I finally located the trail, and followed it to the Dyea flats. Near a tumbledown shack, I stripped off, , changing my soaking clothes for dry ones, made a fire and gulped down soup and tea. Mosquitoes dined on me through a restless night, and I awoke at five in the morning to the patter of rain on the roof of my shelter.

I walked out to the site of Dyea and located the start of the Chilkoot Trail. Near my campsite, a sign said, "Chilkoot Trail Cable Crossing 1.3 miles." How had I managed to miss a trail that thousands of gold seekers had followed? I visited the Slide Cemetery where one grave said simply: "Shot in the Mountains." I looked up the Taiya Valley. The rain poured down relentlessly and mist swirled around the valley sides. I thought of tackling the trail again, but decided against it. I could hardly walk on blistered feet, my shins were battered and cut and my shoulders ached. I limped back to Skagway and took the train to Whitehorse.

I'd learned another law of the north: Don't try to tackle dangerous assignments on your own. Many gold seekers survived because they went with friends, or found them on the way to Dawson.

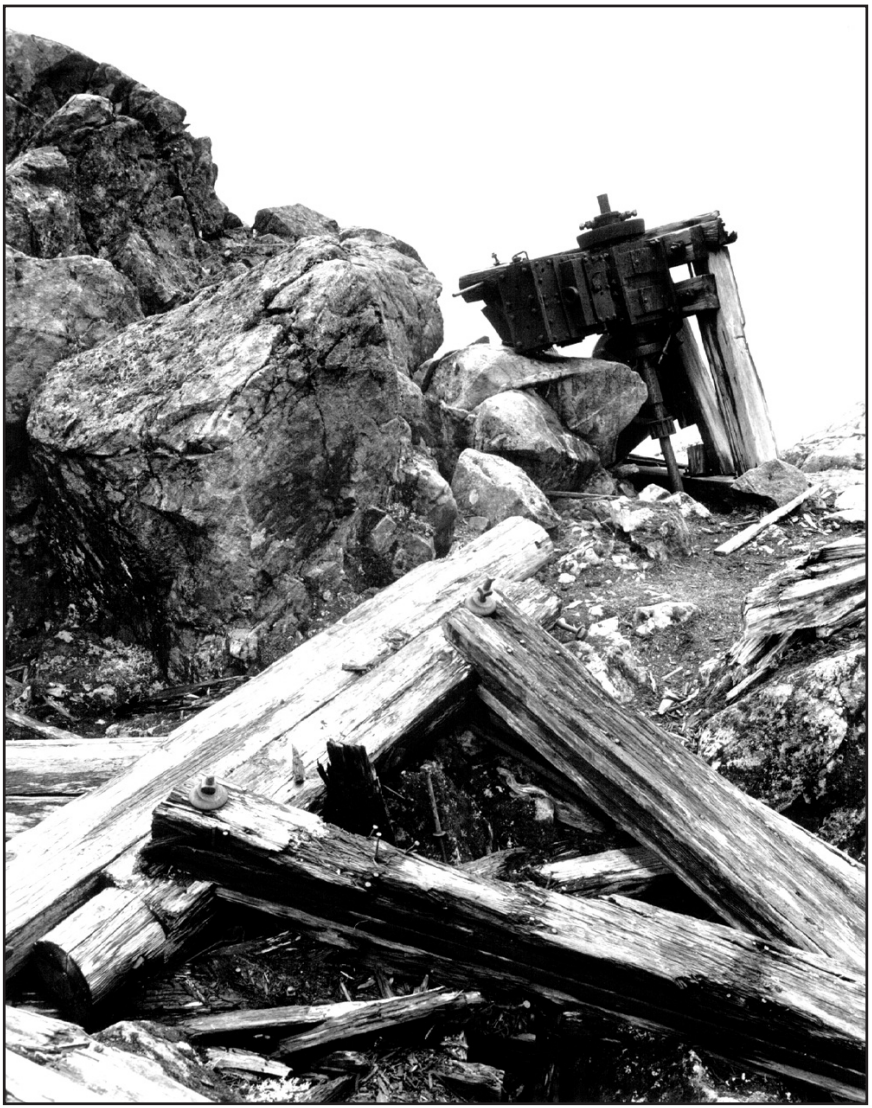
My next trip along the trail almost ended in disaster for three companions and me. We went over the Chilkoot Pass by a route that few, if any, travellers have ever taken.

By some estimates, about 30,000 gold seekers went over the pass. It gained a fearsome reputation as the biggest barrier to the interior: One illustration of it shows a man clinging to a sheer mountain face. A famous photo shows a line of men, frozen in time, moving up the pass. A chain of outdoor equipment stores, named for the pass, uses one of these men as its logo. What happened to him? Did he reach Dawson? Did he make his fortune? Most of the '98ers came from cities. They had never been in the northern wilderness before, let alone confronted a pass like the Chilkoot. The coastal Indians, who became carriers, had been crossing it for hundreds of years to trade with the people of the interior. To them, crossing the pass was something they took in their stride. Frederick Schwatka, a flamboyant American army officer, crossed the Chilkoot in June 1883, and contributed to its mythology. He renamed it Perrier Pass, after a colonel in the French

Geographical Society. No doubt the bottled water company would be using the pass to promote the name had it stuck.

Schwatka described his Indian carriers toting their 100-pound packs:

"Up banks almost perpendicular they scrambled on their hands and knees...Along the steep snow banks and ice fronts of glaciers steps were cut with knives..." He called "marvelous beyond measure" the way the heavily laden Chilkats moved up "such a precipitous mountain of ice and snow where



Abandoned equipment on the Chilkoot. Richard Harrington photo, ca 1970. [Yukon Archives photo, Harrington collection]

a single missed step or the caving in of a foot hold would have sent the unfortunate traveler many hundred feet to certain destruction." Schwatka estimated the height of the Chilkoot Pass at 4,200 feet above sea level: the correct reading is 3,739 feet.

*The Dyea Trail* of April 9,1898, states simply: "The trip is very fascinating and not at all difficult. I would not miss the grandeur of this trip for thousands of dollars."

My first encounter with the Chilkoot Trail gave me a sense of kinship with the gold seekers. Most of them were poorly equipped, mentally and physically, for the challenge they tackled -- just as I had been on my first attempt. On Discovery Day in Dawson, a truck carried 20 of the old timers in the procession, Looking at their withered forms and parchment faces, it was hard to see any sign of the strong, resolute men who'd set out to find their fortunes 65 years earlier. Scurvy-ridden, frozen to the bone, carrying endless amounts of goods to the summit of the pass and down the river system, they had kept on, driven by something more than the lure of gold. Watching them pass by, I determined to take another crack at the Chilkoot Trail. After the summer in Dawson, I returned to Whitehorse in late August, seeking companions for the journey. Rod Crook, a sociologist, wanted to make the trip, as did Dr.David Kinloch, the Yukon's Chief Medical Officer, and Dr.Hamish Symond, a RCAMC captain.

On Friday, August 23, we carried our tents, sleeping bags, canned food, knives, and two 303 rifles on to the train to Skagway, confident that we'd be back in Whitehorse by Sunday. Dave, big and burly, with a lively sense of humour, had some mountaineering experience. The rest of us had none. Hamish brought his recorder and mouth organ, running through his repertoire each evening before we went to bed. He shaved twice a day, fired off a rifle every so often, and worried about catching hell from his superiors if he was not in his office on Monday morning. Rod had spent his summer sifting through data in an office and was overweight and in poor physical shape. I'd walked around a lot during my time in Dawson, and felt very fit.

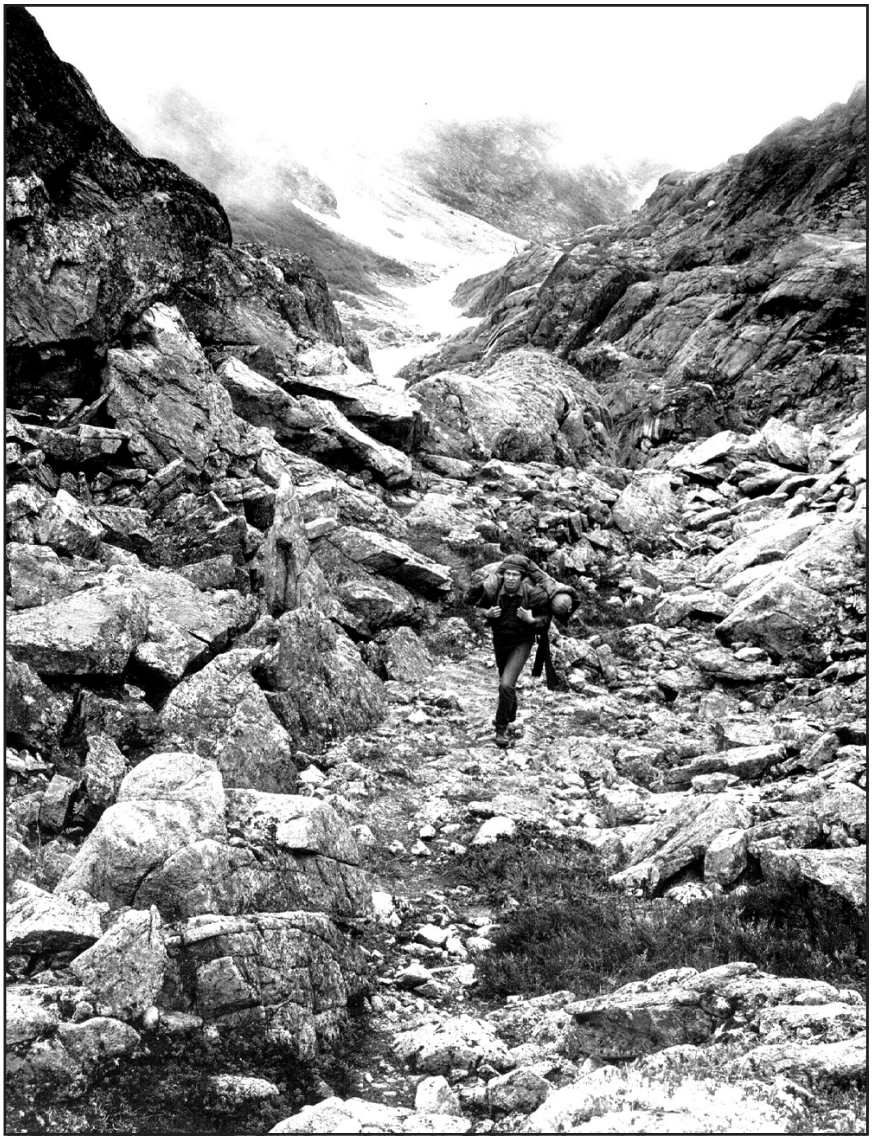
We picked up a bottle of brandy in Skagway -- for medicinal purposes. The Trail of '98 Volkswagen took us to the cable crossing. As I pulled myself over the Taiya River, I failed to notice I was sitting on the rope: The friction burned a hole in my pants. Mishandling a pack, I ripped another gash in them. Hamish kindly sewed up the holes.

Singing lustily, we followed a bulldozed road, our voices faltering slightly when we smelled a bear and saw fresh spoor, six or seven inches long, on the ground. Leaving at 5:30 p.m., we hoped to make Canyon City by nightfall. A path marked with red rags led up and down the side of the valley. Around 7:00 p.m., we reached a clearing as the light began to fade. Here, by the side of the river, stood a well-built cabin with eight bunks. Slipping off our packs, we cooked bacon and beans for supper, as the old timers would have done, then crawled into our sleeping bags.

Saturday proved to be fair. We followed the trail through the forest. Above us snow patches hung on the mountain faces.

We made good time -- and our first mistake.

At a fork in the trail, we turned left, crossed the river, and came to Canyon City. The bush had reclaimed what once had been a thriving community. Scores of horseshoes mixed with bits of iron lay strewn around. A stove sat in the open, near a large boiler on a rotten wooden base. A well-marked path led out of the old settlement through young spruce and alder. We followed it. The valley side closed in, the bush became thicker and we realized



Close to the summit on the Chilkoot Pass. Richard Harrington photo. [Yukon Archives photo, Harrington collection]

we were lost. Backtracking, we reached a cleared space by the side of the river. Rod put on his sneakers, slung his pack over one shoulder, and plunged into the stream. He searched for the trail on the opposite bank, finding no sign of it. Returning across the river, he almost lost his balance, staggering ashore with numbed feet.

Making our way back to the bridge, we found a sign: "Pleasant Valley" and realized we'd taken the wrong road at the fork. The trail, cleared and well-marked, led up the side of the canyon, past an old telegraph pole. We snacked on spam and biscuits while resting, then crossed small streams and wet patches over logs laid during the Gold Rush. The Taiya River gleamed like a silver ribbon as the trail rose, then descended to gravel flat, the site of Pleasant Camp. We crossed the river here on wobbly tree trunks, scared stiff. Interlocking spurs blocked our view of the pass as we walked through scrubby alders, losing our way yet again before reaching Sheep Camp. Vegetation had reclaimed this rocky spot which once had two drug stores, a hospital, 15 hotels and restaurants, two laundries, store houses, coffee shops and lodging places. The gold seekers had left plenty of ironware behind and we found the base of a large building. Nearby lay a cabin where we found five cases of "C" rations.

At the base of the Chilkoot, about four miles from Sheep Camp, lay the Scales, where the goods of the stampeders were weighed before being carried up the pass. On Sunday, we set out under a clear, blue sky, confident of reaching Bennett by nightfall. The trail led to a riverbed, then across a patch of stones and gravel and past a waterfall. We thrust our way through what seemed to be a tropical forest where ferns flourished. The trail had been brushed out and offered easy passage. Striding on, we moved across a boulder field and headed up the side of the valley. Old telegraph poles, rusty shovels, wire and other debris convinced us that we were following in the path of those who had gone before.

Stopping for tea above the tree line, we looked down the valley of the Taiya. Glaciers, free of snow, gleamed greenly in the sun. Dave wanted to spend a week here, climbing mountains. Already behind schedule, we scanned the skyline. To our left, the Chilkoot Pass notched the sky. To our right lay a large scree slope and a wider pass. This was part of the Petterson Trail, along which some stampeders took sledge dogs, packhorses and oxen. I'd seen a photo of it in winter and it seemed to offer easy passage. To cross the Chilkoot, we would have to descend to its base. We decided instead to keep moving along what we thought was the Petterson Trail. Another mistake!

Ahead of us and to the right lay a large boulder that we thought marked the summit of the pass. We headed for this, with me in the lead, across boulders and streams, glancing at the remnants of old tramways that hung on the walls of the Chilkoot

Suddenly, we found ourselves on a scree slope, clinging to it like flies, hanging on, several hundred feet above the valley floor. Patches of unstable shale alternated with firmer places. The only thing that kept us going was the conviction that we were following an old trail. If large animals had gone

this way, why could not we hardy travellers? This false illusion drove us across this dangerous slope.

Here I learned another lesson from the north.

Leadership belongs to experienced people in a particular setting. Dave moved ahead of me, scanning the slope, locating firm footholds, calmly directing our upward path. Below, in bad shape, Rod eased his way across the scree. At one point, his feet slipped and he hung by his fingertips. I looked down at his scared and sweating face and trembling body, and knew I could not do a damn thing to help him. Had I offered a helping hand, both of us would have rolled down the slope. Another lesson -- never risk your life in impossible situations.

Creeping across the scree slope, we followed Dave, convinced of his superior knowledge about navigating. After moving past one section, I saw it crumble and thunder into the valley. Then my feet went out from under me, and I hung with my fingers to the rock for a few terrifying seconds.

Finally, we reached a patch of boulders, still wondering how the hell anyone could have taken animals across this sheer scree face? Crossing two snow patches, we moved up a gully and finally stood on the height of land. Oranges relieved the dryness in our throats and we toasted each other with the last of the brandy. We felt -- literally -- on top of the world, just as the gold seekers must have done. Below us nestled Crater Lake, blue in the afternoon sun, and all around stood mountain peaks rising into a cloudless sky.

Then we looked down.

A glacier blocked our way to the trail, its surface gleaming with bare ice in places. We moved gingerly around the glacier's upper rim, looking for a place to descend. Suddenly, Hamish shouted: "You can only die once"! He sat down and whizzed down the glacier, hitting a patch of glare ice and crashing into a boulder at its base. We felt sure he had broken both legs. As Rod moved cautiously across the ice, his feet went from under him and he slid towards the boulders. Dave took another tack, trying to zigzag across the ice. At the first turn, his feet slipped and he followed the others. Viewing their efforts, I made for the edge of the glacier, slid down the side of it, and fell into the gap between the ice and the nearby rock face. But I made it to Crater Lake before the other three, reassured by the sight of them walking towards me, all unhurt. Looking back, we realized our mistake. We should have followed the ridgeline to the head of the Chilkoot Pass and walked down an easy slope in its lee.

We stopped for a mea1 on the shores of Crater Lake. Squared timbers had been embedded in its marshy surface. All the wood was wet so we could not start a fire. Hamish produced a can of Sterno, we brewed up some soup and took to the trail again. It crossed a flat, went over a low ridge, and on to another flat through which ran a river that drained from a glacier. We encountered a bear near here but it moved away quickly. We carried tins with stones inside to warn such creatures of our coming. We came across plenty of evidence of the Gold Rush -- foundations of buildings, a shattered wagon, horseshoes and animal bones, rusty tin cans. Again we wondered what had

happened to the men and women who had left them in this empty land. Whatever happened in the future, they would always remember, as we did, the challenge they had tackled. That memory would stay with them all their lives, whether or not they struck it rich.

The walking here proved easy, with a breeze keeping away the mosquitoes. A little after sunset we found a sheltered spot near wood and water, erected our tents, collected stones, built a fireplace, made a meal and crawled into our sleeping bags.

We awoke at 5:30 a.m. to an unpleasant day. Low stratus clouds poured over the pass, covering our tents in a blanket of wet greyness. Packing up, we walked down a wide valley leading to Long Lake. Faint traces of the trail could be seen along its shores, but time and vegetation had erased them in many places: we saw what looked like wagon tracks from time to time.

The land behind us had filled with cloud and a few drops of rain fell as we crossed the river linking Long and Deep Lakes. Then came one of the easiest parts of the trip, along a coarse, sandy beach to the outlet of Deep Lake. From here, an unnamed river crashed through rapids to Lake Lindemann. While above the tree line, we had easy passage. But then came one of the hardest parts of the trail. From a ridge top, we scanned the country ahead of us. We caught sight of Lake Lindemann, but below us stood thick stands of alders and patches of marshy ground. We descended and blundered through this until we finally came to a beach on the lake. Here stood a trapper's cabin, built in 1912. In poor condition, it had a hole in the roof and two bunks inside. Someone had left food here, so we helped ourselves to sugar since we had run out of it. Emptying our packs, we dumped our spare food for those who came after us, glad to be rid of its weight. Two ruined sledges lay outside the cabin -- and a white pair of women's panties, obviously not a remnant of the Gold Rush. Along one wall of the cabin were messages scrawled by other travellers.I put up a card with our names on it and the date of our trip, adding; "Glaciers explored."

We awoke to a grey day with low cloud hanging over the mountains and a breeze churning the lake waters. To the north, the sky had opened up and we blessed our good fortune at having the right kind of weather for tackling the trail. Then we faced another barrier. The gold seekers made boats to take them to Bennett. How would we reach that place?

Without difficulty, we crossed the river that drains into Lindemann. Then we hopped from boulder to boulder and over dead grey trees lining the lakeshore. After about a mile of this kind of travelling, and realizing it would take a day to reach Bennett by this route, we headed inland. We walked for a while along ridges running parallel to the lake, making for the mountain ranges at the end of Lake Lindemann. This proved equally difficult, so we veered in, crashing through thick forest and swamps and across ravines. Dave announced that we would not make it to Bennett station in time to catch the train to Whitehorse. Rod, now in real trouble, moved his feet slowly, his eyes glazed and unseeing. I went ahead, climbed another ridge and saw the White Pass and Yukon railway embankment. Dave took Rod's pack, and I relieved him of the rifle and the four of us charged ahead, each making his

way through thick bush, across a river and a muddy lake bed towards the railway line. Reaching it, I fired a shot into the air and Hamish replied with his rifle. It had taken us four-and-a-half hours to cover the few miles from Lake Lindemann. A White Pass worker who heard our shots came to investigate, offering to take us to Bennett on his speeder when the train had passed. We changed our clothes, threw away the worn out bits and luxuriated in the sunshine while awaiting our transportation.

At Bennett station, we met the late Roy Minter, the White Pass public relations man. Guzzling down a huge meal, we told him our story. Roy had reassured the wives of the other three that the trail was an easy trip, and they should not worry about their men. But when we failed to arrive on Sunday, they had become frantic and wanted to launch a search party to find us. How could we have become lost on the famous trail?

Lolling in the comfort of the train to Whitehorse, we agreed that this was the way to travel. Tired but elated, our bodies scarred and bruised, we felt a strange satisfaction with our journey. Again, we felt a kinship with the gold seekers who still faced challenges ahead of them when they reached Lake Lindemann.

But they'd made it over the Chilkoot. Nothing the world could throw at them would dismay them again!

The journey, not the arrival, was and still is what the Trail of '98 is all about.

At the end of summer, 1964, I went over the Chilkoot again -the right way, from the Canadian side. Dave Kinloch, Adrian Tanner, an anthropologist, and I flew up to a lake above Whitehorse, spent the night there, then headed for the pass. Two memories remain from that trip -- picking our way over the boulders below the summit of the Chilkoot, a delicate but not difficult task, and a strange "out-of-body" experience, seeing the party walking through the forest alongside the glistening Taiya River, as if I'd become the ghost of a gold seeker keeping my eye on others using the trail.

During my time in the Yukon, I sought to make my research useful and accessible to residents. I remember an old-timer in Dawson. He listened as I told him why I was in the community and commented: "You're a paid tourist." In the summer of 1963, I'd met the director of corrections for the territory. His name, alas, escapes me, but I think he was called Dick. He had a vision of clearing the Canadian side of the trail with some of those in his charge. He saw the work as a way of rehabilitating offenders and a chance for them to recognize the struggles of those who had passed this way, so many years ago. Out in the open air, making the trail passable and easier for future travellers, they might find challenges and chances to savour some small victories in a tough environment.

On my return to Whitehorse in 1964, I met again with Dick who asked me to prepare a report on the state of the Chilkoot Trail, with recommendations on ways to clear it. At the time, Dick was dying of cancer —and he knew it. But his vision did not falter. So, after my second trip along the trail, I wrote a report on it.

Dick, like so many other Yukoners, kept his eye on the future, while looking for ways to improve things in the present. This is the Canadian way—to look ahead, keep hope for a better life while struggling through daily difficulties. This was the way the gold seekers thought and acted. They pushed ahead, overcoming difficulties and hazards. The gold they found was seldom of the tangible kind, for few made their fortunes. Their gold derived from a unique experience that changed their lives. They learned to live with themselves, and with others, as they joined other adventurers who had decided to leave old lives behind and find their fortunes. This is the way of the North, and the way of Canada. We are all in search of a better world while respecting the past and those who have gone before.

The Chilkoot Trail is an easier passage since we tackled it. It is not only a monument of the gold seekers but a memorial to Dick and those who cleared the Canadian side. In their own way, they were pioneers.

**********

An old steam boiler on the Chilkoot. Richard Harrington photo. [Yukon Archives photo, Harrington collection]

# Kicked By A Dead Moose

## ...AND OTHER STORIES OF 65 YEARS IN THE BUSH

By George W. Gilbert

## Buck Fever

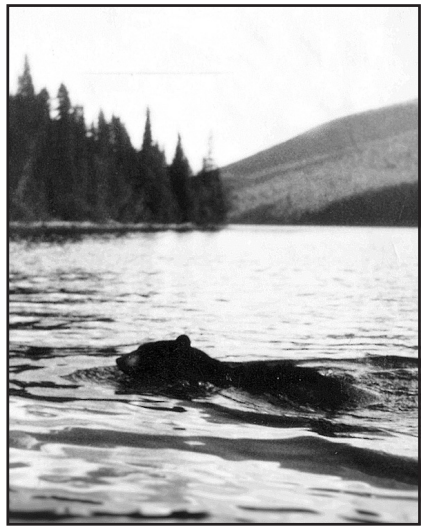
Once, I was guiding two Americans who were scheduled to go up into the mountains later to look for grizzlies, caribou, etc. In the meantime, I was to take them fishing on Isaac Lake for Kamloops and lake trout.

As we were trolling along south of Lynx Creek, we came to a black bear swimming across the lake to the east shore. One hunter said that he wanted a black bear, but I told him he couldn't shoot it until it landed. I quoted the game regulations which stated, rather ambiguously, 'it is illegal to shoot an animal while swimming.' (It's not only illegal, it's extremely difficult!)

We reached the shore before the bear and waited for him to land, about fifty yards up the beach. I told the hunter that it was now okay. I waited for the report of his lever-action rifle, but instead, I was amazed to see him aim and then lever all the cartridges out on the sand without firing a shot. He turned to me muttering something about the sights being 'off.' He obviously thought he had fired several shots and missed. The bear watched this performance for a while and then turned and strolled into the bush.

This incident was a classic example of 'buck fever' – a highly nervous condition that often affects inexperienced hunters on their first hunt. Unlike this man, however, most 'first-timers' will blaze away, hitting everything but the animal, and then claim that the rifle sights had obviously been knocked out of line previously.

About a week later, the hunter arrived back at the lodge at Bowron Lake with a grizzly, so I guess he had overcome his 'buck fever'. I was given the tedious job of cleaning the skull prior to mounting the trophy. To my surprise he tipped me five dollars – a day's wages for me. I got the impression that this over-generous tip was designed to secure my silence, rather than for any imagined expertise on my part in skull-cleaning.



The lucky Isaac Lake black bear.

## Lightning

One summer Mahon and I were returning from Rum Lake and when motoring along Swan Lake saw light-

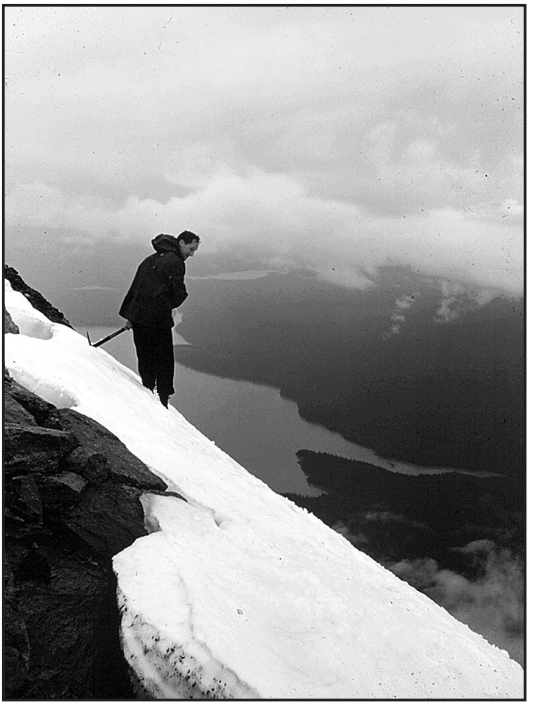
ning start a fire up on the west ridge. As a fire warden, I knew that the location of a fire was difficult to determine after the valley was full of smoke. So I suggested that we climb up and take compass shots at some of the many lightning strikes in progress, for the benefit of possible fire-fighting crews.

As we neared the top of the ridge, lightning struck a large balsam tree about 30 feet from us. The green tree did not catch fire, but most of the bark was stripped off and all the needles disappeared in a cloud of steam. The noise was tremendous and we were showered with needles and pieces of bark. Our proposed compass-bearing project was shelved and we were back at the lake in record time.

Most summers, our families would rent cabins and boats from Bowron Lake Lodge for a week or two. One time, three or four of us twelve-to-fourteen-year-old boys were staying in a log cabin on the beach with Ted Mahon as the adult in charge. A storm started so we retired to the cabin where Mr. Mahon was always good for telling us a few stories about Barbados, where he was born and raised.

A couple of steel, telescoping fishing rods were leaning against the outside of the cabin wall. We heard a loud clap of thunder but, as we were inside, we saw no lightning flash. When the storm was over we decided to walk along the beach to the river and do some fishing. But we found that one of the rods had the cork handle blown off and the telescoping sections were fused together: an unintentional lightning rod.

Ed Titley and I planned to climb Ishpa Mountain from the west ridge, starting at the southeast corner of Sandy Lake. We climbed up above timberline to the small snowfield overhanging the north side of the ridge. Suddenly, the sky became quite black and there was a dramatic increase in the temperature. Ed, an experienced mountaineer, recognized the signs and suggested that we get the hell off the ridge. About this time, I was astonished to hear both my ice axe and my belt buckle buzzing. I always wore a sweat- band made from a folded handkerchief



Ed Titley on the west spur of Ishpa.

of real silk. Ed said that I should remove it and shake it out, which I did. It stood straight up!

We ran down the ridge and were soon in the bush, where we stopped and looked back to see several bolts of lightning hit the ridge where we had been. Then came a virtual cloudburst. Soaking wet, we boated back to Rum Lake for a hot rum.

My calf portrait was featured on the cover of the railway schedule.

## Moose Photos

Early in 1951, Mike Mahon and I went up to the portage between Spectacle and Little (Skoi) Lakes, to run levels for assessing the feasibility of blasting a canal. As we motored along Deadman (Pavich) Island in Swan Lake, we saw a cow moose with two calves and thought we might get some photos. So we landed on the southwest corner of the island and made our way north along a well-used game trail to where we had spotted the animals.

Mother Moose wasn't too enthusiastic about our presence – if the hair on the back of her neck standing straight up was any indication. In the interests of safety (or 'chicken-heartedness'), we decided that Mike would climb up on one of the many high windfalls to act as lookout. I, meanwhile, would slowly advance until the moose charged, at which time I would snap the camera shutter, turn and 'absquatulate' back to Mike and join him on the windfall.

This procedure worked quite well, although Mike told me that every time I turned and ran, the moose would do the same. Of course I did not see this performance, but certainly heard the cow driving her hooves into the hard-packed game trail behind me. One snapshot showed a calf 'breast-feeding', while the other stood by waiting its turn.

Finally, Mother got tired of this invasion of her privacy and headed for the west side of the island – but accompanied by only one calf. I felt sorry for the abandoned, ugly little guy, so picked him up and carried him to the lake where the two animals could be seen swimming to the mainland about 200 yards away. Of course, I had to set the calf down in the sunlight and get a 'portrait' shot from five feet away.

Then I waded out into the water until the calf could float and lowered him into the lake. Meanwhile, I could hear the cow making moose noises on the mainland – the calf started to swim toward the sound. Mother swam out halfway and escorted No. 2 calf into shore. The last I saw of the family, they were trotting along the beach until they swung off and disappeared into the trees.

The picture turned out not too badly, considering the poor lighting in the heavy timber. The close-up of the calf ended up on the cover of the PGE (now BC Rail) railway schedule. Col. Parker asked me for a print so I made one for him. He then sold it to the railway company for fifty dollars.

He could tell that I was not too happy about this ... so he bought me a roll of film.

## Dog Problem Solved

Although this is not an actual 'bush episode', the stray dogs could be classified as 'wild animals' so I thought I'd include it because of its bizarre nature.

In 1947, I was approached by the local BC Policeman to see if he could borrow my old '25 Chev pickup. When I asked why, he said 'because it has

wooden spoke wheels.' He explained that he had put up a notice at the post office and at other places around town, stating that on such-and-such a day, people with dogs should keep them off the streets or they would be destroyed (the dogs).

Abandoned dogs had become a very real problem in Wells: they frequently formed in packs, tearing some hapless dogs to pieces, not to mention harassing the citizens.

The 'game plan' was to tie strips of burlap potato sacks to the wheel spokes and then drive through town. The dogs couldn't resist snapping at the cloth: one snap and the dog's neck was broken. I found this hard to believe so offered to help the policeman to see for myself.

So on 'D-Day' I drove through town at probably 15 miles per hour, stopping frequently so the policeman could throw the dead dogs in the back. Thence to the town dump and return for the next batch. There were no wounded dogs – they were all killed instantly: probably 20 or 30 of them.

I thought this operation was quite humane, and was safer and quieter than shooting them. After this decimation of the dog population, it was safe to walk around town again, and the incidence of dogs chasing cars seemed to drop off dramatically.

The policeman received fewer complaints from townspeople, which was the object of the exercise. I asked him how he had learned of this method: he said that he had an uncle who hated dogs, especially ones that chased his car. ■

George Gilbert in the '490' Chev in front of the Gilbert home in Wells, B.C. The vehicle's wooden spokes prompted an unexpected request relating to dog control (excluding Major, on the right).

# Stroller White

## With a Squirt of Lemon

By Nancy Bennett

There were those who travelled the Klondike trails to search out gold, and those who came to mine the miners. In this land where news of the outside world and the goings on in the social quilt of Dawson and Skagway were worth more than gold to a lonely miner's ears there came men to fill the need. Men like John W.Troy, George B.Swinehart and Roy G. Southworth went north in search of a good story and in 1898 Elmer J."Stroller" White set out to stake his claim in ink.

At the height of the gold rush the town of Dawson had not one but five newspapers. The first newspaper was a one shot deal produced by entrepreneur "Arizona Charlie." Arizona reckoned that is was people who made the news, and if so, why not let them pay for it? For a modest sum any miner, who had struck it rich or had delusions of doing so, could print his life story in his publication *"The Klondike News."* On April Fools day, 1898, the paper came out in print. It made the readers feel mighty proud of themselves and it made Arizona Charlie about 50,000 dollars.

But that was not the way most newsmen made their keep. There were the social events of the day, the ads for everything from flea powder to frying pans, the fires to report on and the controversies both local and worldwide. This was the meat and bones of a true newspaper. Stroller did more than just report the comings and goings of the Klondike rush. He wrote about the people in an affectionate way which made one feel a part of their world. He poked fun, most times with a healthy dose of truth in it, and ofttimes at himself! From his columns poured out the characters( the Sam brothers, Flot and Jet, were his creation) and the stories, good and bad, the shattered dreams and the champagne moments, all too fleeting. He was in a manner of speaking, the first northern columnist. And he liked to serve it up, like he liked his drinks, with a shot or two of lemon in it.

Stroller was not born in the Klondike but far off in the farmland of Ohio, near Cambridge on November 28, 1859. Farming was not at all in his

blood. The work was hard and the hours long and it wasn't how he planned to spend the rest of his days. As Stroller himself put it "The Stroller had the great good fortune to be born on a farm in Ohio, and an even greater fortune to escape from the farm at an early age. After several years of being herded with the cows and burning his bed every spring so he could devote his full time to herding a plough through a long furrow, he left the farm. He has never returned to it. Nor does he ever intend to return to it."

He went to college in New Concord, Ohio and embarked upon his newspaper career soon after graduation. He first found work with The Gainesville news, where he wrote everything from adverts to political pokings. For ten years he made Georgia and Florida his "beat" working on various papers. He got married, had a son named John and then for reasons unknown( perhaps his wandering soul?), got divorced and moved to the Washington Territory.

Though once bitten, Elmer was still looking for the right Mrs. White He continued on working for papers and lost his heart to a Miss Josephine Keys. As Stroller put it, "In Washington the Stroller acquired a wife and gave up eating pie with a knife-in that order." Josephine was ideally suited to Elmer and they were married in December of 1891. It wasn't long before the twosome grew and their daughter Lenore was born.

In the summer of 1897 the first news of gold from the Klondike came sailing in the form of a steamer called the Portland and not long after that Stroller felt the northern call. "The rush to the Klondike Gold fields began almost at once, and simultaneously the Stroller developed a severe case of itch in his pedal extremities. He tried plasters, ointments, salves and lenguents; he soaked his feet in cold water, hot water, lukewarm milk and Budweiser with an egg in it. Nothing helped. The itch grew worse instead of better, and by the following spring he could stand it no longer. His feet were killing him and the only cure was to get them moving, northward."

Josephine and Lenore followed him in the summer, where he had secured work for the *Skagway News*. The town was full of "colorful characters" some more colorful than others such as Soapy Smith and his gang. Perhaps, Stroller felt, somewhere more civilized say, Dawson, would offer him more opportunity and keep his wife and child secure from such colorful elements. So in the fall they began the move to Dawson, stopping along for a pit stop job at Bennett for the paper called the *Sun*. Dawson was calling, but getting there was going to prove another story .

Money was tight and Stroller could not afford the price of two full and one half fares on one of the steamboats which churned up the nearly 600 miles between the two towns. So Stroller signed up as an "able seaman" on a scow. It didn't appear to bother him too much, his overstatement of his sea abilities. Judging from the other "able seaman" signing on, he wasn't the only one to stretch the sail. And the boat seemed to have a mind of its own.

"The Stroller will not say that the scow hit every rock in the Yukon between Bennett and Dawson because he does not know how many rocks

there are in that stretch of the river. It did hit a great many rocks and he sometimes wondered when the scow went through its turning act whether it was trying to go back and make a swipe at a rock it had missed. ”

As the scow made its way up the river it got into more trouble to the point where a steamer came alongside and urged everyone to jump. With the waves crashing against the side, Stroller tried to convince Josephine to go, but one look at the four or five feet of churning ice cold water which stood between her and the steamer and she refused. While he tried to convince her one of the other passengers, thinking “women and children first” grabbed their young daughter Lenore and tossed her into the waiting rescue ship. Then the streamer roared off convinced the rest were all gonners. When Stroller and his wife found their daughter again she was full of questions. As Stroller explained:

“The steamer had gone but the little girl had been left with some people who were camped on the shore there. She was glad to see her parents, but she had a pressing question to ask them.

“What is an orphan?” she wanted to know.

“Why do you want to know that?” said her mother.

“Because those nice people on the boat seemed very sad and they kept looking back saying “Surely she must be an orphan by now.”

When the family landed in Dawson he soon got a job as editor of the *Dawson Daily Nugget*. Here the column that made him famous was born. Signing himself simply the ”Stroller” his musing about the places and goings on in Klondike society. He poked fun at his Ohio upbringing, his “newness” to the North and the forever changing faces in the streets. Stroller recollected about one restaurant in Skagway he had briefly fraternized .

“It opened early one morning next door to the printing office and by mid-morning its proprietor had peddled enough hot cakes to buy a ticket for Seattle. He sold it to another fellow who kept it through the lunch hour then sold it to a third party. The third owner served dinner, after which he got into a game of seven-up with one of his customers and lost his place. The Stroller did not return to the restaurant to learn what happened thereafter. As Mark Twain once said, there was too much variety to it for him.”

The paper did well, though as he mused it had “ no subscription list and no subscribers and it sought none.” Children in the Klondike could do well selling papers and many took up the lucrative position of paperboy. Even after paying for the papers, and renting a horse to make their rounds they could turn a tidy profit. Stroller also employed various men at various stages of desperation. But his most successful paper seller was 76 years old and weighed “ a pound or two more.”Her name was Barbara.

She told Stroller that she had come north without the knowledge of her grown children. They were under the impression she was on her way to Butte Montana. “All my life,” she said wistfully, ”I wondered what it would be like to go out among complete strangers and make my own way.” Stroller decided to give her a week and wire her daughter about her whereabouts before her money and health gave out. But he needn’t have worried about Barbara.

Before long Barbara was making more money than all the rest of the delivery boys put together. She visited all the gambling houses and made fast friends with gambler and barkeep alike. She had an interesting way of selling papers as Stroller observed.

She would come up to the gambler's who were cursing at tables and fasten her granny eyes on them and ask ,"Would you like to buy a paper, sir?" More often then not, red faced and embarrassed they would buy one, saying, "Keep the change." She got so well known that folks embarking off the streamers were told to "buy your paper from the old lady." In five months she had earned over 1,300 dollars. Then Stroller convinced her to take a trip home. Her daughter wrote to tell him that mother had arrived home, richer for the experience and was safely in Butte at last. Though Barbara told him to hold her job for the spring, she never did return.

Barbara was by no means the only one Stroller helped. Sometime later, an old lady showed him some poems written by her tenant. He was a bank clerk and his poems were full of color and cleverness, so much so that Stroller convinced the young man to write a poem for the church concert. The poem was *"The Shooting of Dan McGrew"* and the committee in charge felt it was too raw for the general public. Stroller continued to push the young clerk to pursue his writings and soon the world would know him as Robert Service, poet of the North and writer of such classic collections as "Songs of a Sourdough."

Stroller went on in the newspaper business and his column's popularity continued to grow. It was picked up by such papers as *The Dawson Freelance* and *The Douglas Island News* and was requoted in almost every paper in Alaska. He was also popular with the younger generation for the "Stories for Alaskan Children" he created.

In 1904 Stroller moved to Whitehorse where he took over the *Whitehorse Star*. For a time he tried to run it as a daily, but with the rush waning and more folk moving out than in he had to revert back to a weekly press.

Josephine delivered him a son, Albert (Paul) Hamilton during those years in Whitehorse and ten years later the Whites were moving again, this time to Douglas Alaska, where Stroller settled in and took over the weekly "Douglas Island News." Unfortunately they had only been there a year when the great Treadwell mine, the towns main employer, was shut down after a cave-in and flood.

It was then that Strollers interest turned to politics and he threw his hat in to he democratic ring. He had after all, followed politics in one way or another all his adult life with his quaint musings and poking of the pen. In 1918 he was elected to a seat in the House of representatives. He also became the first director of the Alaska Bureau of Publicity.

But ink was still in his blood. He returned to the work he enjoyed so much and for which he had so much talent, and he continued publishing his column, "Stroller's Weekly," reminiscing about his goldrush days, taking potshots at the politicians and giving his dry reflections on that sad state of affairs known as "human nature."

He had always hoped to publish a book or two on his recollections. The first he was going to call "Kids I have Known." The second "companion volume was to be called "Bartenders I have Kissed." Unfortunately a higher editor called in his column, and Stroller, never one to miss a deadline, delivered.

Elmer J. Stroller White. died in his home at Juneau, Alaska at the ripe old age of 74 years. On September 28th, 1930, he set down his pen and joined the journalists in the sky. One wonders what Stroller will make of Heaven? Or how he would report the goings on in Hell after spending all that time in Soapy Smith's Skagway? Or if he covers both from a "newsman's perspective."

For a time his wife carried on "Stroller's Weekly" and R.N. De Armond, then a young associate, fascinated by Stroller's work began collecting some for a publication. The result was the much admired "Stroller White, Tales of a Klondike Newsman" published in 1969.

Mount Stroller White near Juneau is perhaps the perfect tribute to the man. Like that Mountain some of his tales were tall and some a bit stretched. But like Stroller always surmised there is gold in them thar hills. You just gotta be willing to dig a little dirt, and what better person to do that than a newspaper man? ❐

Caribou crossing the Alaska Highway just west of Watson Lake (SH photo, unrelated to this story).

**This photo was taken in Whitehorse during or after WWII. Does any reader recognize these women? What were they working on?**

The order is at the request of E. Seabury, General Construction Manager.

And what exactly went on in the Quonset hut? (A reader answsers this question in the next issue)