
THE
YUKONER
MAGAZINE
ISSUE No.21
$4.95
I'll start with you
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• Trapping Stories
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WHITEHORSE MOTORS

Ford

SALUTES

Phil Todd was attending a trade school in Red Deer, Alberta, when he was asked to help bring some equipment up the Alcan for the Northwest Highway System. Counting the train journey to Dawson Creek and the trip over the highway (not much better than a trail through the wilderness at that time), it took him almost three weeks to get to Whitehorse. That was in 1946 and he has been here ever since. He operated the McRae service station from 1955 until 1968 and since then has owned a salvage business at the Carcross Cut-off.

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Cover: Alexis Somerton, stocking the seed rack at Canadian Tire, Whitehorse, April, 2002. [S.H. photo]

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From the Editor

Regarding the video advertised on the inside front cover: For those of you who missed it on CBC, this film is almost like a visit to the Yukon, with lots of scenery shots and close-ups of many Yukoners, including your editor. John Hatch, whose photos have graced our covers since the Yukon Reader started in 1989, was one of the most lovable characters ever to live in the Yukon. The director, Andrew Connors, follows John's battle with the bureaucracy, and in so doing, captures a life-style that will never be known again in Canada.

However, our costs to ship that tape through the mail is prohibitive, to say the least. Dianne and I were shocked when we took it to the post office to learn it would cost anywhere from $6.70 to $7.45 to mail the video, plus the cost of a padded envelope. The rates have crept up every year and Canada Post is making millions of dollars in profits for the federal government. Then they have the gall to charge GST on top of it. So if we don't sell very many copies, we won't be surprised.

As soon as I finish this lament, I must clean all the old ink off the press and get ready to print this issue. The last one didn't go very well. The new ink I used wouldn't dry properly and curled the pages so they wouldn't go through the collator. We had a very dry month and the static in here was terrific, enough to make your hair stand up. Some of you may have received a magazine with a few blank pages and I hope you will call or write for a replacement. (Fred's Barber Shop in Whitehorse has an issue with some pages printed upside down. I offered to replace it but he said, "No way; that's a collector's item.")

This time, I have different ink and a gadget on the press called a static eliminator so all should go swimmingly, I hope.

It reminds me of a character in Whitehorse who had the contract to pump out all the biffys in town. He pulled a trailer behind his old truck. The trailer had two steel tanks welded together.

His last name was Murphy and of course everyone called him "Shitty Murphy." He would often say, "It may be s__t to you, but it's my bread and butter."

He had a habit of leaving the valve partially cracked on the tank and so it left a brown trail everywhere he went, especially thick when he drove up the Two-Mile Hill. Whether he did that out of revenge for his nickname or to save fuel, no one knows.

Thanks to Art Smith of Tagish Services (the Gazebo) for telling me about Mr. Murphy.

The winner of the gold nugget (pictured below) for subscription renewals this time is J.S. Hoek of Lillooet, B.C.

And now it is time to get this issue onto the press. Somebody has to do it.

Sam

The Mail Run

Hi Sam & Dianne:

As a multi-year subscriber to the Yukoner, this is the first time I've responded to a particular issue, in this case, Issue No. 20. I'm not motivated by the fascinating article about "The Yukon's Most Famous Survival," — a riveting story—nor by the pretty lady who graced the cover. Rather, I'm writing to voice my dismay that you replaced the photo of the publishing shack and "old Dodgie" with a photo of the Yukon River and paddle wheel boat.

We live in an age of disenchantment where little is sacred. Aware of your ongoing struggle and having sat in the haloed atmosphere of your print shack, I'm writing to tell you that you've omitted a sacred feature of the magazine and replaced it with a photo of the ordinary (i.e.: river, boat, school). In publishing lore, the log shack that churns out *The Yukoner* stands as a monument to the conquest of adverstity and is thus, to the reader, sacred. I'm sure you will do the right thing by bringing back "Dodgie" and the earthy, unique print shop photo.

Al Ross,
Texada, B.C.

Dear Dianne,

I would like to gain your interest in anything about my grandfather you might find. He is John Cumberland and is buried in the little graveyard 400 yards south of Lake Bennett church under a stone with three other men. We believe it was 1899 and it must have been winter to put four in one grave. I have photographed the stone. He was a highly trained blacksmith mechanic and would have had no trouble getting work on the Yukon White Pass Railroad. He had gold fever for years having been to California. In the Cariboo he was credited with shoeing some of the camels that were brought in as pack animals.

In 1889 he had a sheep ranch in the Cypress Hills south of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan with a wife and four children. Bad weather and bad luck and gold sent him off in April 1898 to look for a better living for all. He may have gone in the Atlin route and was headed home when he died at Lake Bennett.

I am hoping that somewhere you might have noted the Reverend Sinclair and Dr. Parry mentioned in records. (Dr. Parry attended to John Cumberland during his illness. Money for the headstone was sent to Reverend Sinclair.)

John Fulton
Medicine Hat, Alberta

Dear Mr. Holloway,

My late step grandfather, Alexander Mackenzie Robertson, may have been able to provide you with some interesting stories of the Yukon. He was

a member of the Northwest Mounted Police in the 1890s and I understand was the ranking officer at Dawson City during its short-lived goldrush period.
Brian R. Johncox
Belwood, Ontario

Dear Dianne and Sam,

A friend from Sudbury loaned us a few recent copies of The Yukoner and we were greatly pleased and enthralled to read the wonderful articles about our favourite corner of Canada. We had lived there for the first seven years of our married life and moved out in 1963. I had first ventured there in the fall of 1951 and put in a year at United Keno Hill Mines before going on to the University of Alberta - Mining Engineering. I worked there the summers of '53, '54, and '55, and had some great times! So after graduation and marriage it was not a difficult choice to return to UKHM, although I had to work for three months before I was allowed to bring my wife in.

We returned to Yukon in the summer of 1998 in our fifth-wheel trailer accompanied by two of our grandchildren. We showed them where their mothers were born (Mayo Hospital) and even got up to Calumet Camp above Elsa to the site of our first home. We were greatly pleased with the marvelous state of all the highways in Yukon. (Quite a change from the 1,000 plus miles of gravel we had to ensure each way on our annual vacation trips "outside".)
Isabelle and Joe Riddell
Onaping, Ontario

Dear Dianne and Sam,

It has always been my wish to 'go North' and to visit every province. However, I'm a product of the Dirty Thirties-in fact, lived in the Dust Bowl. Then came WWII and a family. Finally, I managed to visit all ten provinces, even lived in three of them. However, I finished doing that when I was 79. By that time, only my spirit was willing and able and the flesh was no longer able. So at the age of 85 I read about the North.
Kathleen Smith
Bothwell, Ontario

Dear Dianne,

I had a tour to Skagway and Juneau, also the small train to Bennett Lake eight years ago. But one never has time to look around and dig!!! Maybe I will be lucky for a gold nugget. (Editor's note: Those who renew their subscriptions are eligible for the Gold Nugget Draw. We do this three or four times a year, whenever we publish another issue.)
Rose Thompson
Kitchener, Ontario

THE MAIL RUN

Bonjour Sam and Dianne,

Love your little magazine, always interesting articles and since I like Canadian history, popular or otherwise, this publication is for me. I got a real charge out of the "To Kill a Shrew" story! Was up in your neck of the woods in 2001. I rode a motorcycle but met people, walking, cycling, camping on the side of the road. It seems the Yukon still draws a lot of people, like my two great uncles in 1898. Keep the stories coming. You're in the right place for that.

Ray House
Guigues, Quebec

Dear Dianne and Sam,

I was most interested in "Klondike Nurse" in your issue No. 10. Jean Gray trained as a nurse in St. Paul's hospital at the same time as one of my sisters-in-law and I saw her several times during my time in the Klondike. I also knew Chris (although I always thought his name was Bratenberg,) and I well remember his accident. I was working on Lower Sulphur Creek preparing the ground for dredging and there was a similar operation working its way up Dominion Creek. Both crews were housed in Granville Camp.

The accident happened in the fall of 1938. Chris was an oiler on Dredge No. 5. (It could possibly be No. 6 - both dredges were working only a few hundred yards apart - as I recall No. 5 would work its way up Dominion Creek while No. 6 would proceed up Sulphur Creek.) Chris was working on the stacker, at the rear of the dredge, when apparently his clothing caught in some machinery and he was carried up the belt and dumped onto the rock pile. With his one arm pulled out at the shoulder, he then made his way around the tailings pile to the front of the dredge where he was spotted by the winch man. It was about a 45-mile drive for the doctor to get there and a similar drive back to the hospital.

I went outside that fall and returned again in the spring of 1939. At one point on the railway trip from Skagway to Whitehorse we passed another passenger train, which was stopped but was heading in the opposite direction. While watching the other train pass by, I saw Jean Gray standing in the open door of the train, and I was told later that she was accompanying Chris to the outside.

I would see Jean and Chris once more; they and I were both guests at my brother and sister-in-law's place and, as I recall, Chris was then working as an accountant for a logging company.

Keep those memories coming.

Bill Swanson,
Kaslo, B. C.

The Mail Run

Dear Yukoner Magazine editors,

Just a short note of praise for your most interesting magazine. I read it cover to cover as soon as it arrives. The articles describe another world to me in central Canada, and an upbeat mood of cheerful optimism, making the best of what life offers, makes happy reading for me. I hope I am successful in the draw for a gold nugget, but if not - cheers to the winner.
Leita Aitken
Hamilton, Ontario

Dear Yukoner,

If I could live my life over again I'd do it in the Yukon!
Mildred Brandt
Magnetawan, Ontario

Dear Sam and Dianne,

Just recently received the latest copy of the Yukoner and wanted you to know how much I have enjoyed it, particularly the incredible story of Helen Klaben and Ralph Flores. That they survived at all in the northern winter at - 40 or worse temperatures and one develops a vast respect for what that kind of cold can do to the human body. That you did the follow-up on this story, Sam, was especially interesting. I always find the aftermath to such life and death situations particularly interesting. Another feature story I've found fascinating is the continuing saga by Arthur Walden of his dogteam freighting of supplies to Circle City and other outlying camps. The sheer grit of man and dogs in that unforgiving environment is amazing. As you can see, the stories of those who came north and stayed to make it a better place are my favorites, so please keep bringing back Yukon history. There's no place and no people quite like it. Many thanks to you both for the pleasure your magazine brings.
Nora B Stade
Telkwa, B. C.

Dear Sam and Dianne,

We have certainly enjoyed The Yukoner which brings back memories of our trips by car to the Yukon in 1958 and 1965. These trips were occasioned by my father's 1957 move from the Big Bull Mine at Tulsequah, B. C. to United Keno Hill Mines at Elsa where he was safety engineer. We drove from Arvida, Quebec both times, a return distance of 9500 miles but the second time we returned via the Alaska Ferry from Haines to Prince Rupert. The first time we had two children and we all slept in our station wagon but, by the second time, we had a third child and the children were bigger so we used a tent trailer for sleeping quarters.

The Mail Run

The Alaska Highway was gravel from a little north of Dawson Creek. We learned to close the car windows quickly when we met traffic because of the dust. We also appreciated radial tires, which had appeared, by our second trip. We went in June both times and enjoyed the longer days as we went north. Our parents' first house was on the side of a hill in Elsa and the sun barely dipped below the hills across the valley. We enjoyed visits to Mayo and Keno Hill where we drove to the top to see distance signs to major cities around the world, a leftover from a recent mining congress. We also remember the snowy areas as we drove up Keno Hill and the complete silence at the top. Of course we remember the wildflowers everywhere.

Both times we drove home through Dawson and across the top of the world highway to Chicken and south to Tok Junction. Of course both times we visited the Midnight Dome, Robert Service's cabin, Bonanza Creek and the gold dredge and the restored Palace Grande and a riverboat in 1965.

In 1965, there had been major flooding on a small stream in Alaska and we had the experience and the thrill of crossing on very makeshift bridge. On our 1958 return we passed through a long stretch where forest fires had burned and in some cases there were still flames on both sides of the road. The smoke from these fires extended for hundreds of miles and at the Nahanni River the sun made the whole sky a copper colour.

My father and mother retired from the Yukon to Nova Scotia in 1967. For the last few years in the Yukon, my dad was member of the Yukon Territorial Council for Mayo.

We often think of revisiting the Yukon but I doubt that we will because of the distance and our age but we certainly do enjoy revisiting it through the Yukoner.

Merle and Bill Southam
Kingston, Ontario

Dear Friends Sam & Dianne

I do hope you can use this little story in that wonderful little magazine, also I hope it's legible. My old hands get shakier each day. I get lots of letters fromsubscribers and it makes me happy to answer them all. Wish I could write better stories but memory is fading along with my dreams and it's too late now to learn better ways t o tell my stories. Guess readers don't mind too much from the letters I get. Like you say as long as we can hunt for gold it don't matter if we don't find it.

Tensley Johnston
Ross River, Yukon

A Wolverine Story

We had just ended a three-day blizzard and I was anxious to get out so

I ran my trapline up groundhog creek and I'd gotten three marten so I felt pretty good. I came to a set on a steep bank at the roots of a tree where, with a few branches and sticks, I had made a nice cubby set. Well I could tell right away I'd made a catch so I uncovered the snow and found my trap wire going up the back side of the tree and looking up there was a dead wolverine hanging over a limb about seven feet up. I tried to get it down but it was fast so I couldn't move it, so I thought I'd go get the chainsaw and cut down the tree. On second thought maybe with a notch or two I could climb up to it so after some very strenuous work I did climb up and chopped off that limb and got the trap loose. It was quite a feat for a 78-year-old man I would say. Well, I went on to my line camp and made supper for me and "Sally" my dog. I split a bit of firewood and skinned the martens and stretched them.

By then I was pretty tired so I went to bed after hanging the wolverine up to thaw. Spent the next day on camp chores and skinning the wolverine and getting it on the board. The next day looked stormy so I started back to base camp and when I got back to where I got the first wolverine I had another one in that trap. As I went to shoot it came right at me and bit on my gun and took it right out of my hand then dropped it and got as far away as it could. Now I wasn't about to get that close again so with a long stick I fished my gun into reach and shot it. It was a huge male, well marked and I sold it for $575, the best I ever got for a wolverine. Mom says she always regretted she couldn't go along with me and the camera especially to see me up that tree. Nothing can compare with my life out on the trapline those many happy years. Sure do miss it.

Tin

The new cairn marking the Arctic Circle on the Dempster Highway. [Government of Yukon photo]

John Shaback's Last Stand

By Elizabeth Reid

John pushed his old army cap back on his head. A slight man, about five feet nine inches, with sandy hair and no distinguishing characteris tics, he commanded no unusual attention. He was of Russian descent and had just been discharged from the Canadian army, and was going nowhere in particular. As he ambled along the busy Edmonton street, enjoying a leisurely walk instead of a route march, he wondered what his wife would be doing just then. Likely at work he thought, as she was the cashier at a local dry-cleaning establishment.

His thoughts about his wife were uninspired, almost routine. After 18 years of married life a creeping sense of boredom was becoming more evident. Probably it was mutual. As he glanced across the city street he realized he was near the bar where several of his army buddies dropped in for a beer, Looking both ways until traffic cleared, he quickened his steps as he zeroed in on something that interested him. Maybe they would have some news of vending jobs or activities available for returned army personnel.

On entering the pub he saw that most of the individual tables were occupied, with the exception of one off in a corner. He walked over to it and sat down with his back to a group of men. He ordered a beer and when it came he settled back to relax and enjoy it. The men behind him were discussing their plans and future projects and they seemed to have a strong sense of where they were going and what they intended to do.

One man, who had a slight accent and spoke louder than the others, told of his very successful winter the year before. When pressed for details

Photo above: Jim Reid and his dogteam on patrol in the Arctic.

he told of having a very good trapline in the Yukon where he was successful in harvesting over 100 marten and as many mink, His income from the five months work was well up in the thousands. He minimized the amount of effort and risk in the description of his lucrative career. No mention of the isolation or discomfort from the extreme cold and nagging loneliness - - just the monetary reward and the good life he enjoyed when he returned to civilization in the spring.

John was fascinated by the man's account of his success and he turned in his chair and asked where all this good fortune was to be found. The man looked at John and told him that he flew into the Yukon each fall. After he had made a couple of trips he finally settled beside a lake where he built a cabin and spent the winter establishing a trapline.

His description was sketchy at best but John imagined that it would be easy to find, thinking that the Yukon wasn't such a huge area. After all, he just had to find a large lake and maybe a cabin wouldn't be so far away.

Presently the men at the table behind him got up and left, leaving an inspired listener who felt he finally had got a lucky break. By golly, he too would go north and make his fortune, maybe then Stella, his wife, would have more respect for him and life would be easier.

All this happened early in September and John decided he should make plans and arrangements before freeze-up. He inquired around Edmonton if there was a charter service with planes going north and he was directed to a company, which agreed to supply him with a plane and pilot to fly him out in the middle of September.

In the meantime his wife had gone to visit relatives in Oregon. John hadn't discussed his scheme with her because he was afraid she would ridicule his plan. But maybe she would be glad to have him out from under her feet for awhile. Galvanized into action with more enthusiasm than information and even less skill, John got a few supplies together and hired a truck to take him and his gear to Cooking Lake, just outside Edmonton.

On a bright, brisk morning the pilot helped him load his small supply of grub, traps and winter supplies. Because John had assured the pilot he was flying to "X" lake, the pilot assumed that his passenger was familiar with the lay of the land. He didn't file a flight plan because John was positive it was not very far from Edmonton. This was the first of many tragic mistakes for John. They took off on September 10th.

As time passed, John became aware of the changes of the contour of the land. For the past two hours all that could be seen was bush and then heavy timber. He stared out the window overlooking the miles of wilderness. Suddenly he saw the reflection of a sizable lake. Quickly he motioned to the pilot to circle and put the plane down, as he saw what seemed to him to be a likely spot to set up camp, with a small pond nearby. So down they glided, landing softly on the lake, and taxied to the shore.

The pilot cut the engine and looked at John. He asked him if he thought this was the place from which his friend had gone trapping. John didn't know as there was no evidence of a cabin but it looked good to him and with the

naive confidence of a greenhorn he started to gather together his gear. He assured the pilot that it wouldn't be hard to find the trapper as it looked like a rich area.

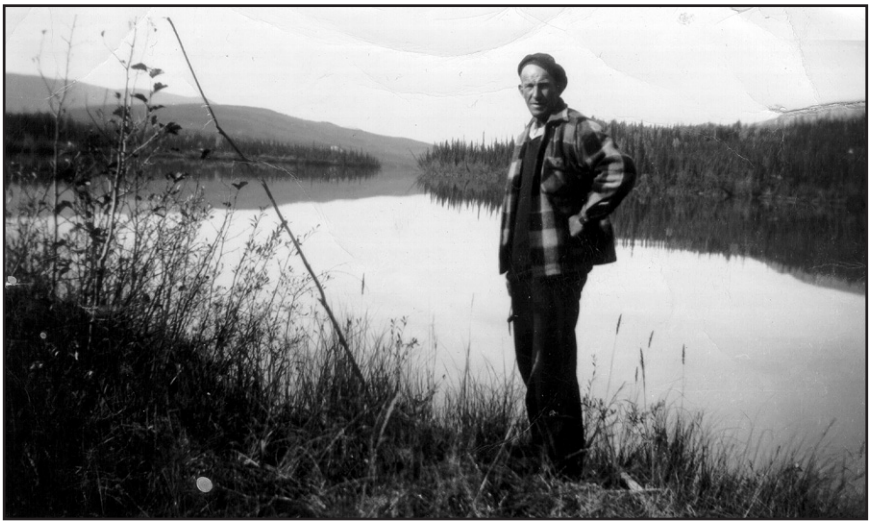
When John's supplies were unloaded and piled on the bank, the pilot climbed back into his plane, warmed up the motor and taxied out to the far end of the lake, then with a roar he took off over the spot where John stood alone. He circled and dipped his wing in a gesture of goodbye and flew out of sight, returning south to Alberta.

John experienced a feeling of finality but also he felt free and alive and leaving his belongings where they were unloaded, he climbed up a nearby hill to survey his surroundings. All he could see was dense forest, spruce and pine, with the occasional willow where it was swampy. He thought, "this is the perfect place." He had shelter in the forest and a lake nearby for water and food. and no one to tell him what to do or how to do it. Finally, he was master of his fate; such was his outlook on life on September 10th.

John was glad to be alone and too tired to make a fire or a meal, so he spread out his ground sheet and lay down. Finishing off his sandwiches he curled up and went to sleep under the stars.

Next morning he ate breakfast and started a search to see if he could find anyone near, but after walking all day he returned to his pile of belongings, sat down and decided right then and there that he had to build a shelter. It was September 12th.

The following day he went hunting, shot two chickens (willow grouse) and a duck. After walking all day he was pretty tired, so he went to sleep in his sleeping bag and when he awoke in the morning the ground was covered with ten inches of snow - nearly up to his knees.



Gus Kraus, who would help in the search for John Shaback, standing about 100 yards above Virginia Falls. [1952]

The next three days were bad. The wind kept moving the clouds and rain followed, it was hard for John to do very much.

John put in the next week cutting logs for his proposed cabin, and on September 20th he had the frame built: it was 12 X 10 X 7 feet. Two days later he finished the roof, putting a cloth over a hole for a window and a tent over the door opening. He decided to make a fire but the smoke "nearly ate my eyes out" he said, He tried to make a fireplace using the ground (from his floor) but with no stones and the earth so hard it was impossible, the earth just crumbled in his hands.

John was lucky to have snowshoes. But although he walked miles, he saw nothing. He checked and found he had two-and-one-half dozen cartridges. Smiling to himself, he thought he likely looked like a village uncle in the Old Country - with his big beard and moustache.

Nothing unusual happened for the next two weeks. John would catch the odd fish which he hung outside to freeze but a marten came and stole his trophy, On reflecting on his lack of preparation he admitted to himself that he really wasn't prepared to stay very long but how could he return home?

October arrived and brought more snow. John finished the chimney of his fireplace but where the fire burned, some of the earth fell in, causing a terrible headache.

Forty seven days passed and John didn't see a living soul. With the days getting shorter and colder he had no light to speak of. He started to worry how he could get out of the North but he was pretty sure that God would give him some means to return home.

John had been keeping this diary but he was running out of paper, also there was little light except from the fireplace. All his candles were done and he had frozen toes. Then he discovered a way of keeping them from freezing again by putting two pairs of socks in his moccasins, then he put on his big boots and over that he covered them with rabbit skins, He said to himself, "Now 1 can whistle at the cold which was well below -50 degrees F.

"Exactly two months since my arrival," he wrote. 'Tomorrow is the new moon." John resented the fact that many people who don't believe in God make thousands of dollars and he not made one hundred. The animals were springing the traps but not getting caught.

With nothing to write about except frost and winter John sat beside his fireplace and read the Bible "Blessed is he who listens to the words of the prophets"- - Isaac 1-8.

On December 2nd, John had the worst luck. A wolverine came across his trapline and took the rabbit that had been caught. Not only that, but he sprung all the other traps. Poor John's morale bit rock bottom. He stayed in his cabin all day while it snowed another foot. He had no light but decided he'd try to make some, so he took the fat from the ducks and burned it. Not the best fight but better than sitting in the dark all day.

John took stock of his food supplies: he had 50 lbs. of flour, 10 lbs. of sugar, 5 lbs. of butter, 11 lbs. of milk powder, 1 lb. tea and coffee, 7 tins sar-

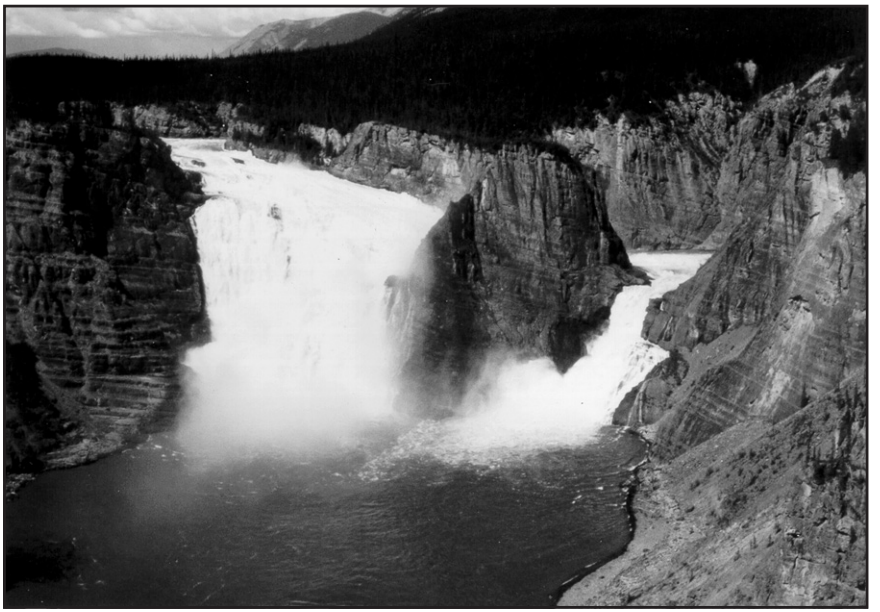
dines, 1 lb. of beans and one rabbit. Once again he quoted from the scriptures that God's eyes are on those who fear him and who carry out his wishes.

All this time, John's wife was wondering where he could be. Routine inquiry was made to Ottawa concerning a certain individual whose wife was becoming anxious as to his whereabouts. Not hearing from him she requested the assistance of the RCMP to try and locate him.

Somehow John's wife found out he was supposed to meet a man in the Yukon and they were to trap together in the winter. The wife also discovered that the trapper's name was Nazaar. This information proved negative but in the meantime information was received that there was a trapper named Nazaar who was using poison to catch marten. This complaint was sent to J. Reid, RCMP, Liard Detachment and he was advised that the police plane would be coming to Liard and that permission was granted to use the plane to check on this latest complaint.

So Reid and his special constable, Willie, loaded their equipment and four dogs onto the plane and took off with John Nesbitt, the pilot, to search for the suspected trapper. After a two-hour flight they saw a small cabin on a lakeshore. On landing they found the cabin to be empty but a trail was seen leading across the lake.

On searching the cabin the police found 100 marten hanging from the ceiling, also 20 beaver, the latter having been taken out of season in that area. The illegal beaver pelts were placed in the plane and marked. In the morning, the special constable and Reid harnessed up the dogs to haul their equipment while the two men followed on snowshoes.



Virginia Falls on the Nahanni River. It is being proposed to name these falls after Pierre Elliot Trudeau. [Don Sawatsky photo]

About 11 am. The police plane flew overhead and the pilot, John Nesbitt, called down that Nazaar had arrived back at camp. Returning to the camp the police asked if Nazaar saw any other trappers in the area but he did not and during the evening Jim Reid discussed trapping but no mention was made of the beaver pelts. A check of the marten revealed no sign of poison being used, and they were cleared. Jim gave Nazaar time to mention he had acquired beaver hides but no mention was made so then he told Nazaar he had confiscated his beaver and had them on the plane. Nazaar tried to tell them he had trapped them for meat but that was untrue as he had a winter's supply of food on hand and in his cache.

Nazaar was informed he would be picked up by RCMP plane in the spring and taken to Watson Lake where he'd be tried for illegal trapping of beaver. This was done and he was found guilty, the beaver were confiscated and his Yukon trapping license was canceled.

In the meantime John Shabek was having an especially tough time. He broke the handle of his best ax and his smaller ax wouldn't get sharp regardless of how often he tried. He had used it to cut earth. It was now December 9th.

On December 11th, John did a foolhardy thing. He took a short cut across the mountain to cut off two miles. That was at 2 p.m. — and the sun goes down at 3 p.m. Not seeing well, John nearly slipped down the mountain —it gave him a terrible fright, he would have fallen nearly 90 feet but he hung on to a tough little cedar growing out of the rocks and managed to crawl on his hands and knees to safety.

When he returned to the warmth and safety of his cabin, John faced the truth — he had to go home. He talked to God and wondered why things went bad for him and yet people who do not believe in God they fare so well. He quoted to himself, "Who gives God the most, will receive the most from God." Tomorrow I will cut the wood for a sleigh and then I will start home. If it is God's will that I should not be richer it that is how it has to be — it is impossible to go against God's will.

On December 15th, John looked around his cabin. There were only 10 days to Christmas and he wrote in his diary the first of several entries about his predicament: I wonder how this Christmas will be for me. There is still some bread - I opened the 50 lb. sack, 5 lbs. of sugar and 7 tins milk and 1 lb. tea, no meat. I still have 3 lbs. butter - so I bake the bread and use the same butter for a light.

December 16th: I quit smoking. I still had tobacco for another two months but I threw it all in the snow and burned it. It is hard to do but it is bad for health - and I cough a lot.

December 17th:.Caught a large marten today. I worked all day making the sleigh, just have to sew around the sleeping bag with the rabbit skins so I'll be able to sleep in the bush. It looks like I'll be on the road New Year's Day, I wish I had brought more food.

December 20th: Today I suffer from hunger — no meat. I shot two chickens but couldn't find them. Only every minute I am thinking about the long road over which I will start and I am worrying.

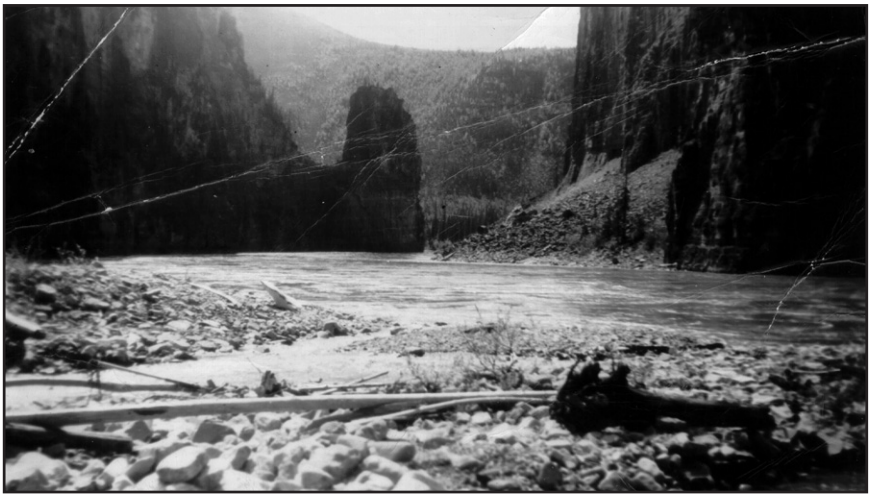
December 23rd: I am taking 3 dozen traps, 11 marten, 3 mink, 4 weasels. My earnings may reach $1,500. I plan to leave on Christmas Day. I will sing carols, then pull the sleigh.

December 20th: I am ready for everything for tomorrow morning to leave this place my cabin on which I worked so hard and so long. When I sing the carols I will thank God for all his blessings up to now. It was a proper Lent, only fish to eat.

December 25th: Today, left the cabin, started on the road, not a whole can of milk, 2 lbs. sugar, nearly full can of butter and 20 lbs. flour. This is all I have. Frost is -35 degrees, cold biting wind; sweating; hard to walk, so much snow. maybe four to five miles a day. No food 1 lb. milk, 7 lbs. flour that's all I have. Frost is -35 degrees; very biting. I do not know what will be if I do not meet anybody. Already got through the terrible snow, at first I have to make a trail then come back and take the sleigh and pull it. The situation is serious but there is one hope that God will keep me by some means and will save me. It is a fright, a death by starvation and I cannot keep my mind at peace.

John Shaback had left Edmonton in September in search of a new life and it wasn't until the following spring that his wife became sufficiently alarmed that she reported him as a missing person. Then it was because of her nagging relatives. She had heard reports that he had taken off with another woman and was not as alarmed as she was hurt by his absence. Finally she filed a missing person report that circulated throughout the provinces and copies were filed with the RCMP.

Because our spring mail schedule was in early March, before the ice went out, we did not receive the notice at the detachment until the July mail. The end of the first week of July, after receiving the bulletin, my husband, Jim, and Willie, his half native interpreter, made a patrol to South



Hell's Gate on the Nahanni River. (badly cracked photo, 1952)

Jim Reid standing by John Shaback's last abode. Shaback's hat hangs on the post and the sign reads, "Dead Man Here."

Nahanni where they visited the trading post of the Turner brothers, Stan and Dick.

Jim mentioned the disappearance of a man from Edmonton, and the Turners told him that in late winter some of the younger natives had gone up the Nahanni River to set traps. On the front of one of their old out-cabins they had found a soldier's cap on a nail and a note that read "Dead Man Here". They took off and never looked back until they reached their parents' home camp, where they reported their discovery. The senior members decided to make a trip back up the river where the young men had gotten their terrible fright.

They discovered sheets of paper strewn around the cabin and in the immediate area outside. Signs around suggested to them that bears had discovered the remains and had dragged the corpse outside where they finished it off, leaving the larger bones scattered nearby.

Cautiously the natives gathered the remains and put them in a pail, hanging it from a rafter in the cabin. They then returned to their base camp and trapline, where they remained until the end of the trapping season. Later in spring they went down river to the mouth of the Nahanni where they related their story to the Turners, who in turn relayed it to Jim and Willie. The two men decided that a trip up the river was necessary but first they would have to return home to make preparations, as the trip would take about a week.

First Attempt at Recovery

Clarence, a newly appointed Game Warden from Alberta, and a greenhorn to the north was very keen to go on the trip. He knew where the bad spots were on the river and as any information was very welcome Clarence was included in the plans. Two days later the three men Jim, Willie and Clarence set off in an 18-foot freighter, canoe with two nine-horsepower kickers attached to the back. It was 80 miles to the junction where the Nahanni River flowed into the Liard where they turned and headed up towards the Hot Springs. They stopped there at the cabin of an old friend and trapper named Gus Kraus. Gus warned them of very fast water ahead but Clarence assured the men that he knew all the dangerous spots. He wasn't at all concerned that he couldn't swim.

Off they started up against the fast flowing river, which was banked on both sides by steep cliffs of sheer rock. Coming around a sharp bend in the river they found themselves confronted by a wall of rushing white water rapids. Clarence had forgotten about the hidden area. Too late they were thrown against the stone wall where the boiling water hit the bank at right angle, then rolled back to the river. A large wave rolled over the boat and the motors shorted out. The canoe shot backwards down the rapids. The men grabbed their paddles and frantically worked their way to calmer water. There they did some quiet thinking, grateful that they had survived the wrath of the dangerous river. The final outcome was to attempt travel later when the water was higher and it would be possible to skirt the rapids.

This they did the following summer but on the next trip a native named Joe Donta who was skilled at reading water replaced Clarence. Their trip was successful and, arriving at the dilapidated cabin, they found the pail, bones and diary inside. The cap was still hanging on the cross board at the entrance to the shack.

When the men returned to Liard, John Shaback's bones were turned over to the Roman Catholic mission, which conducted a proper burial.

John's final words were scribbled almost illegibly on scraps of paper. John had stumbled across an old out-cabin on the bank of the Caribou River and this was to be the end of his trail.

January 4th to 21st: These are the last words I am writing as I have no more strength. This is the 28th day of my travel - sufferings are hellish, it is already the 5th day, I had not a thing to eat, my strength has already left me and I am unable to make a fire. Maybe I will live until tomorrow before my soul will fly away - cramps in the stomach have started, ends of my fingers are frozen off. The clothing on me is nearly burned off. Unbelievable sufferings have come. I am still able to sit and today I walked for 2 hours and I was close to Liard River where there is a trading post, but the strength has left me and I have to die this way, I am so anxious to live. This was the most frightful time of my life, and he will, the one who reads this, do not say a bad word about me, and it will be easier for me to rest.

Signed J. Shaback
Son of Talymum

The tragic part of John's death was if he had travelled around one more sweeping curve in the river he would have come upon a trapper's cabin in which a. large cache of food was stored.

This area is rightly called "Headless Valley" or "Deadman's Valley." because two prospectors were discovered murdered, still in their sleeping bags — their heads missing. They were the MacLeod brothers, uncles of our interpreter, Willie MacLeod.

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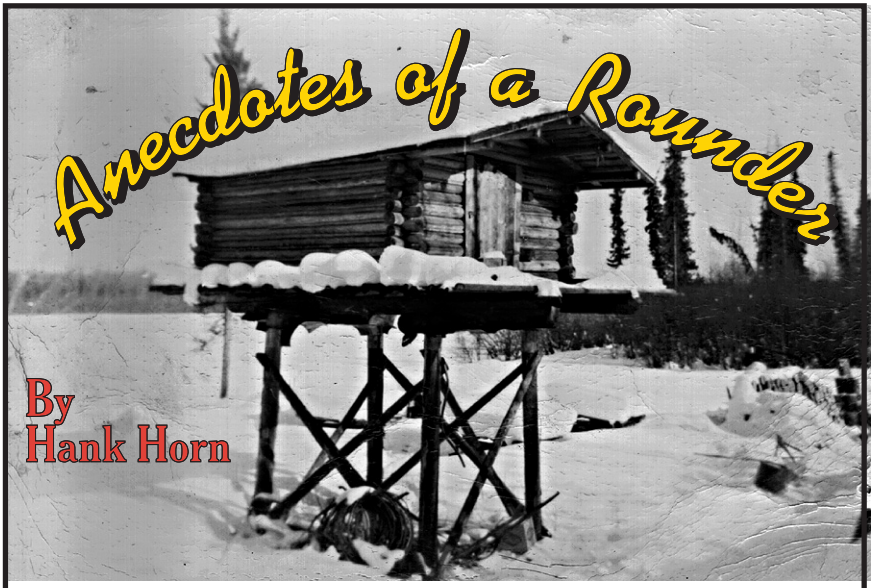
John Shaback's marker in the Catholic church graveyard, Fort Liard, N.W.T.



The three stories presented here all have a Lower Post, Watson Lake connection. "Bare Soul" was Hank's introduction to trapping with Black Angus McDonald. In 1950, Hank lost two fingers buzzing cordwood for Father Poullet. Later, he built a cabin on the Hyland Rivers, a mile from Fred Herbert's cabin. It was Fred's boat and Hank's rifle that "Yukon Joe" lifted when he got into the scrape described in the second story. The last story is about Hank, his partner, "Boots," and Fred's dog.
The above photo shows Hank and his partner's cache at 12-Mile on the Liard River, about 1950. Note the tin on the legs to discourage scavengers.

BARE SOUL IN THE BEAR HOLE

The trappers could not be faulted for their gently humorous comments when the starry-eyed youngster let it be known that he was going to be a partner of Black Angus, their friend and fellow trapper. They all felt that Angus was aptly named. His appearance and demeanour were not unlike his four-legged namesake.

After arranging "Jawbone," the local term for credit, with the Hudson's Bay Manager and packing their supplies down to the boat, Black Angus and his protege were on their way to 12 mile on the Liard River, the home cabin on Angus' trap line.

The supplies were packed up to the cache after which the lad had his first taste of moose meat and bannock with dried fruit for dessert. He marvelled at it all. There was not a word of complaint so far.

Hank Horn with mink, lynx, fox, fisher, 11 marten, all part of winter catch, 1948-49.

The following day the wise old trapper asked his partner to take the boat back to Lower Post and pick up some forgotten supplies, and then suggested, slyly, that they could use another moose as well. Sure enough, though the trip to town was uneventful, he ran across a bull moose standing in a snye of the river, on the return trip just a few miles from the cabin. The bull was obviously in rut, for as clumsily as the rookie handled the boat and breathlessly sprayed him with a clip full of shells from his little deer rifle, the huge animal barely moved his head to signal that he had been hit. The bull finally walked into the woods and out of sight of the would-be hunter.

Exhilarated beyond his comprehension, the youngster headed the boat to 12 mile where Angus waited. Having heard the shots he could hardly contain his laughter. The moose was eventually found. The best meat was packed in a brine barrel to serve them through the winter while the dogs chewed up the leftovers. The young novice was hooked forever.

In due time the first snow fell. The preparatory work on the lines had been done, on foot, and with the dogs packed. The dead work of cutting wood, repairing stretchers and traps, preparing scent with beaver musk and fish oil was interesting but beginning to drag.

Several days after the first snowfall the dogs caused a big uproar during the night but Black Angus decided it was not worthy of his attention and eventually all was quiet again.

The next day came the big surprise. A huge bear track indicated that an over-sized Grizzly had ventured between the dogs and scooped up some leftover moose guts. Apparently, he then retreated after his snack and, finding Angus' trail to the first out-cabin more to his liking than ambling through the brush, wandered away.

The cautious old-timer (never trust a grizzly) and the intrepid novice accompanied by Rum, a lead dog, who was eager to take on the bear, headed out after the big bruin. In a manner that seemed totally out of character, the bear, followed the trail for several miles before he finally veered off. Soon the dog became noticeably agitated. Eventually the trio spotted some fresh earth strewn on the snow at the base of a small knoll ahead of them. Almost immediately they heard the roar of an angry bear. Warily they circled the spot and discovered that the grizzly had found an old black bear hole, and after customizing it had crawled in, ostensibly for his long winter sleep.

Black Angus suggested that he and his partner should separate slightly and both fire shots into the hole blindly. The grizzly, having settled in, was reluctant to move and so, after several shots into his lair, the very scary thunderous bellowing ceased.

The next suggestion of Angus' gave the young man pause to wonder if his eagerness to become a trapper hadn't gotten out of hand. He was being asked to climb into the hole, head first of course, to see if he couldn't grab something on the bear that might ease its removal from the hole. After forcefully explaining to Angus how he wanted him to hold his legs and yard him back the instant he heard him holler, with trepidation the young man crawled into the bear's den. The opening was barely big enough for the lad to squeeze his shoulders in and the second he did there was complete darkness. He put

his hand forward and felt a warm, furry object and there was no immediate reaction. Emboldened, he felt his way and found what he took to be an ear that he tugged on - till the bear's head flopped back and the tongue and slack jaw snapped together. The boy screamed at Angus to get him out, which he did as quickly as he could. The young man sat in the snow frightened, somewhat sheepishly, wanting for all the world to be as nonchalant as his would be, fraternal brothers would have been.

After a brief rest he again entered the hole but struggle as he might, he could not bring the animal to the mouth of the den.

The trip back to the cabin was a time for sober reflection for the young man. Over night his spirits rose and the trip back to the kill was enjoyable, what with the full team of dogs in harness, seemingly sensing there was a feed or two of fresh meat at the end of their workout.

Soon it was time again to re-enter the hole and put a rope around the bear's neck and Angus, he, and the dogs, took a pull on their haul. All their efforts were for naught until the young man took a dry spruce limb and placing it between the bears' leg and his body, levered out one leg then the other. The dogs gave a mighty heave and out came the bear.

Black Angus sized up the situation in true trapper fashion. The Bear, he said, had gone in the hole to die. He had no fat on him, his canine teeth were broken, has head was scarred and he had two claws missing. Grizzlies he said, unlike black bears, don't hibernate till much later, sometimes Christmas. He said even the dogs would turn up their noses at a feed of this guy, pointing to the bear.

At the pleading of his partner Angus finally agreed to load the bear and take him to the cabin. He showed the young man how to skin him, taking care to cut out the paw pads but keep the claws with the hide.

The skinned bears forearms looked like steel sinew and Angus was right

Black Angus making underwater set for beaver.

- the dogs were not interested enough to even nibble, on him. Everything was done to complete the skinning but the lad finally gave up on trying to dry the hide completely, it being too cold and Angus did not want the damn thing in the cabin. He wrapped the heavy fur as best he could and before the river froze up totally, he took it to Lower Post and put it on a truck heading South. He had planned all along to send the skin to a friend in B. C.'s Lower Mainland so that he might have it tanned. It would be worth at least $500, he thought.

Months later the partners made a trip to town with the dogs, snowshoeing a trail ahead The young man picked up his mail and excitedly opened the letter from his friend. His joy was short-lived when he read the part about his prized bear hide having arrived in the balmy of the West Coast, a stinking rotten mess that was immediately taken to the land fill. One more lesson in the education of a fledgling trapper.

"YUKON JOE"

His heavy salt and pepper beard and that leonine head of hair topped by a toque served to make one wonder what this man really looked like. No one knew his real name or where he came from.

Without a registered trap-line, he was reduced to running up and down the Alaska Highway with his team of dogs, in harness, on wheels when it was tough sledding and decked out in native finery in the winter. Hundreds of tourists had their pictures taken with Joe and his dogs, for a small donation, which seemed to be his only source of income. Although he had no other income, he did not seem to be destitute.

Yukon Joe was a capable gunsmith, a dead shot, and an extremely clever hunter, trapper and all round woodsman. These attributes, along with the fact that he was generally considered to be playing with a short deck, led people to conclude that Joe deserved to be treated with care and consideration.

The highway maintenance crew was obviously not familiar with the stories told about Joe, or decided to ignore them, when they chose to torment the hermit, at the Iron Creek Cafe, while on a coffee break. In short order Joe's gorge rose and he stormed out to his toboggan and dug out his trusty model 94 Winchester and strode back to confront the knee-slapping road crew. When he threw a shell into the chamber and stared at the others with a wild look in his eyes, the hilarity quickly changed to looks of fright and embarrassment.

The unflappable waitress suggested that Joe should do up his fly. For an instant Joe's eyes stopped rolling as he looked down and that action served to break up the intensity of the moment. His face showed the anguish and the anger that the remark was guaranteed to ensure.

Sadie then volunteered, in her monotone, that Joe had better put down

the rifle or he would probably spend a little time in the slammer with a bunch of guys who might just take a liking to his cute little buns.

This was enough to break the spell and Joe shouted at Sadie that she should shut-up, then muttered some obscenities. He then told the road crew not to follow him, which was hardly likely anyway, then wheeled on his heel and ran out the door. As he left the yard with his dogs, he stopped and, pointing the gun upwards, skilfully shot the resistors and wires off the telephone pole cross-arms, cleverly thinking the Highway crew would phone the bulls and complain about his actions. This also gave him a little time to get out of sight since no one in the cafe was prepared to move when they heard the shots.

After tying up his dogs where he knew they would be found and cared for, he figured he was safe when he made it to the Highland River without seeing any sign of the Queen's cowboys.

He took a chance and headed down the river towards a cabin owned by

Hank Horn, author of these stories. Notice hole in fish where it had been shot with a big rifle.

a couple of "outsiders" who played at trapping and sniping gold off the river bars between drinking bouts at the Watson Lake "Y," 30 miles up the road in the Yukon.

Realizing at once that it was playtime for the greenhorns, he went through the cabin scooping up some grub and a pump-action 30:06 Remington rifle before jumping into the riverboat owned by the neighbour, old Fred Herbert. He let it drift down the river and eventually entered the Liard and carried on 'til he found Big Malcolm's abandoned cabin and there he rested, waiting for what he felt would be the inevitable call from the constabulary.

Little did he know how the police and others would receive his actions. The Police had no alternative but to lay charges now that theft was added to complaints of public endangerment and threatening. This would obviously require a search and this brought to mind the old "Mad Trapper" stories, not something the local gendarmes were thrilled about. However, they made noises in the direction of a manhunt but suggested that the playboys should join in to identify the stolen goods, etc.

Gauging that the boys' lack of enthusiasm matched their own, the police then threw out a suggestion about hiring a search plane as soon as that was feasible. The fact that prospecting was going full tilt and raging forest fires were tying up all available planes was not lost on the constabulary and they cared not that anyone would take notice of their chariness.

Since no one had been physically harmed and the thefts had not caused irreparable harm, why should they stick out their necks and run up a big bill? Inactivity worked its magic and, as far as the authorities were concerned, it was something that could be put in the dumper to make room for more important files.

Months later at the playboys' favourite watering hole, the Watson Lake Hotel, a hard-rock trucker by the name of Baldock called out the Highland River dilettante pair and motioned them over to where his rig was parked. He had already had a skinful of booze and seemed terribly pleased with himself. He related how he was humping it down the Highway at a point between Coal River and Fireside when he spotted someone in the weeds at the side of the road making only a half-hearted attempt not to be seen. Baldock threw on the binders and came to a stop. He had a sneaking hunch who it was, having seen the heavy face fuzz, but was not completely certain. Sure enough, Joe made himself visible and, without too much finagling, eventually jumped into the cab with Baldock, a man he knew and respected.

Baldock then told the party boys that Joe had their rifle with him. It took 500 miles of hard negotiating to get Joe to give up the weapon so that Baldock could return it to its rightful owners. Baldock knew the risks he was taking by keeping company with the fugitive but made sure that Joe shaved off his beard and had his hair cut short. It was his observation that Joe could approach any Mountie, in the Dawson Creek post office, and stand beneath the wanted poster without needing to ever fear detection. And it appears he was right.

Having said his piece, he reached into the sleeper and pulled out the

stolen rifle and was instantly angry when he saw the look of stunned reluctance, on the faces of the two ham-and-eggers. Realizing that Baldock was meaner than a one-nut stud at the best of times, they quickly attempted to assuage his bruised feelings by blurting out the reason for their own lack of enthusiasm, or gratitude, for Baldock's risky act of thoughtfulness.

They had, they said, reported the theft of the rifle to the Mounties and they were petrified that they would be found with the stolen contraband.

Though they eventually consoled the irate teamster, thanking him profusely, they spirited the suddenly very hot gun to the "outside" where eventually it was sold to the first man who answered the ad, carefully worded and, placed in the local rag. The buyer seemed familiar to the seller. He said his name was Joe, paid cash, and he fondled the rifle like he had found an old friend.

ACT OF MERCY

Fred Herbert was a man of many words. He was born in some jerkwater town in Nova Scotia and was of the Catholic faith, at least until he reached the age of reason, which was around the time he served in the Canadian Army in Europe during the First World War. His life after that was one of a round-heels drifter. Though extremely well read, the word marriage just wasn't in his wide vocabulary.

Unencumbered, he led the colourful life of an overage adolescent. Time took its toll and in the downhill years, Fred found himself the owner of a trapline which stretched from the 60th parallel (the Yukon Border) south to the Liard River and from west of the Hyland River east to Iron Creek.

His home cabin was situated just below the Hyland River Bridge. His line didn't yield much fur so he supplemented his meagre income by sniping gold off the sandbars on the river above and below his cabin. Hunting moose from the boat was simple and far less tiring than hunting in the traditional manner. He packed the meat in brine and rounded out his diet by having a very productive vegetable garden.

When Fred first worked his line he had managed to buy several dogs from other trappers in Lower Post. In this effort to build a team, he was fortunate enough to pick up a husky pup that turned out to be a world-beater, the envy of every trapper in the surrounding territory. The dog was a husky-malamute cross with the best attributes of both breeds and a strikingly handsome one to boot. By the time King had reached his fifth year, Fred had tired of the strain of keeping and feeding his five other dogs and, as well, had tired of chasing them down the trails for ever smaller catches.

King alone could do what the five other dogs together could do, and that's the way Fred ran it from then on. He did most of his trapping in the spring from the boat. Beaver rats and otter paid him just as much as he made on winter fur and it was a hell of a lot easier.

Save for the occasional trip to the watering hole in Watson Lake, Fred and King were never apart. Fred finally broke the unwritten rule that you

never take a dog into your cabin. He allowed King to roost under his bunk even though it was a stretch for the big dog to get under without bucking Fred out of bed.

It seemed that it was downhill from then on, for King at any rate. When he accompanied Fred on his occasional hunting trips he did little more than bark at the moose from the boat, a far cry from the days when he seemed to be in the moose's face before the first shot was fired. Years before, Fred saw the big dog with his jaws locked in the bell of a giant bull moose that Fred had wounded. The moose shook King like a rag-doll but King refused to let go. Fred's next shot killed the animal but he had to talk to King for quite a while before he let Fred put a knife into the carcass. After all he had killed that moose he wanted Fred to know.

Age took its toll and though King kept his sight, his hearing suffered and arthritis made his simplest movements painful. Soon he found it difficult to walk up to the bridge where Fred took the readings of the water level of the Hyland River for some obscure Federal agency.

Fred Herbert skinning beaver, his famous dog watching.

The degeneration accelerated until the beautiful canine was immobilized when his hindquarters seized up from his affliction. Fred became ever more despondent seeing the once splendid animal's discomfort. The thought that he was responsible for the dog's misery ate at Fred's guts. Though his chosen profession included the killing of so-called dumb animals, his intellectual honesty caused him a great deal of anguish when it came to his soul mate. Even if he decided that King was better off taking the long sleep, could he go through with the task? All the time he wrestled with the problem, King's condition worsened. Finally Fred made his decision, and with that he went from the cabin about 50 yards up against a steep sidehill and dug a deep hole.

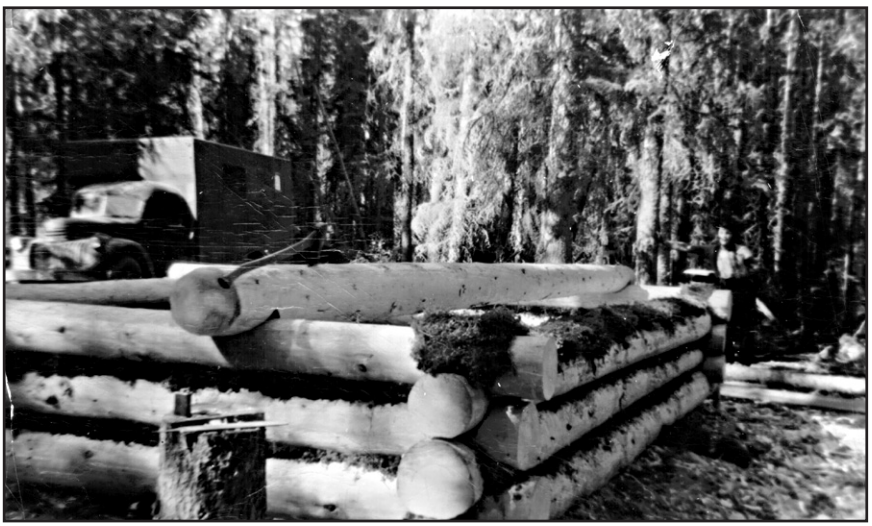
Fred's neighbours, a pair of young men much in his image, had their cabin about a mile down river. It was their habit to come by Fred's cabin to check on their neighbour's well-being and to see whether or not he might need some supplies that they could pick up on their way through Lower Post to the bar in Watson Lake. Fred had taken a shine to these guys be-

Hank's partner, "Boots," with beaver hide just stretched.

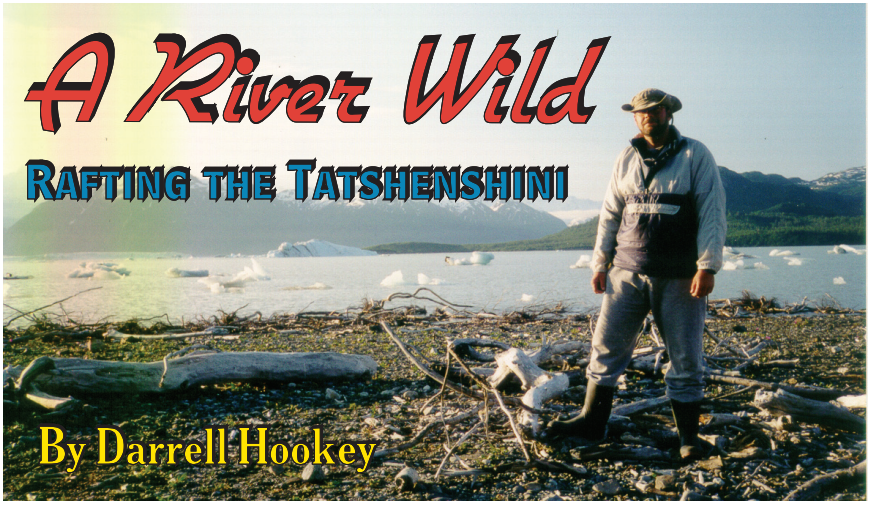
cause, despite their comparative youth, they each had a wide variety of experience and in fact, one of them had trapped with a friend and fellow trapper. It was Fred's intention to ask the young trapper to put his tortured canine companion out of his misery, the task he could not bring himself to do. It only made sense since, in Fred's mind, the young man with trapping experience had, like himself, become familiar with the necessary killing of animals in the harvesting of furs. He would understand, as the dog's owner did, that it was the humanitarian thing to do, whereas most trappers would think only that the dog's usefulness was at an end. That was just a fact of life in the north, one does not waste feed and time on a sleigh dog that cannot pull or pack.

Fred's reasoning was bang on but what he had not reckoned on was the other young man's point of view. This man had not had the benefit of trapping experience and his background and reasoning gave him a totally different slant on the issue. Consequently, a rift appeared in the friendship between the two young men. Fred regretted this turn of events but pressed his young friend to carry out the deed. Despite the hostility of his partner, he packed the helpless animal over to its final resting place. With his friend's stinging barbs ringing in his ears, he raised Fred's rifle and pulled the trigger. King, it seemed, had understood completely. He looked in the hole then at the rifle before he fell into his grave. The scene was one of raging emotions. One man devastated at the loss of his friend, one man angered at what he perceived to be an unnecessary assassination, and one man sad for his neighbour, and sad that his buddy could not understanding his motivation.

On sober reflection the following day it was tacitly agreed that life does go on. ❐



Building my cabin on the Hyland River, 1950. Note moss laid before log was put in place. This is where Yukon Joe stole grub, my gun and Fred Herbert's boat.



A River Wild

Rafting the Tatshenshini

By Darrell Hookey

I parachuted from an airplane once. Of course, this has nothing to do with my 255-kilometre rafting trip of the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers.

But I need a way to compare the feeling I had standing on the bank — decked out in rubber boots, rain suit, life preserver, sun screen and a sensible hat — watching the big water of this fabled northern river surge by at 16 kilometres an hour. From the sub-Arctic region of the Yukon, through the highest mountain ranges of British Columbia, I would be swept to the Pacific Ocean's coast along the Alaskan Panhandle.

Eleven of us were about to trust our lives to the rafts that were being expertly prepared by three river guides. These rafts had to stay together even if they were careening off canyon walls upside down. From Dalton Post, Yukon, we faced an elevation drop of 615 meters riding three times the volume of water that flows through the Grand Canyon.

My mind was thrown back 12 years to the moment I asked the parachuting instructor to pull that one strap even tighter. Because once I jumped out of that airplane there was nothing (nothing!) that would save me except for the training I received and that funny back pack thingy.

Rafting is a lot like parachuting: They both only go one way. And once you shove off you have no contact with the outside world. You are totally dependent on your training and the equipment you bring with you.

But for rafting that isn't exactly true. We did have a satellite phone with us and a Global Positioning System. A helicopter could pluck us from a rock within 30 minutes of breaking a leg.

And we were in the care of Nahanni River Adventures' river guides who were prepared to do everything but chew our food for us.

After a safety chat we headed to the rafts and were pleasantly surprised with the comfortable seating. Rafts are full of air, after all, and there were lots of packs to lean back on.

There is no sensation of moving when you are in a raft, nor when you are falling from an airplane. But just as I watched that airplane shoot sky-

ward and away from me, I watched the bank drift away. The force of the Tatshenshini forbade that perch to the outside world just as determinedly as gravity prevented me from jumping back onto the plane. I won't see my world again until I land ... but this time it will take 11 days, not just three minutes.

But we were headed forward and that's where my thoughts returned.

Right away we found out why they call this an "adventure tour". The idea was to stop and camp along the banks after only two hours of rafting. But our intended campsite was flooded by the more than expected spring run off from the St. Elias Mountains.

"If it's Tuesday, this must be Belgium" doesn't work out here. Helmets were passed out as we were told we would be hurtling ourselves through Lower Canyon a day sooner than was planned.

A more intense safety lecture was presented. As amiable and goofy as our river guides could be, we all understood that nobody would be hurt on their tour. We all gleaned from the lecture that these men had a tremendous respect for the power of "The Tat". They knew it was in charge, but they also knew the rules.

They also knew the laws of the Venturi Principle: A constricted flow of water will compress and/or speed up. The Tat under pressure was a powerful example.

As the canyon walls closed in, The Tat was furious at being constricted. It built up energy in waves leaving horrific voids to be crashed into just as the next wave threw our rafts into the air again. Outcroppings caused eddies; rocks on the river bed caused even more waves. A boulder protruding the surface formed a dreaded "hole" as a waterfall was impossibly created heading upstream to fill the vacuum behind it.

River guide, Trent Abbott, of Perth, Ontario, steers the raft as the force of the Tatshenshini River pushes it towards the Pacific Ocean.

Soaking wet and numb from excitement, we landed at Silver Creek and helped unload the rafts and then pitch our tents. Dry once again we ambled back to the kitchen area and were surprised once more by our river guides. After battling the worst The Tat had to offer and bringing us to this safe harbour, they had already set up benches around a cheery fire.

Bob Hanley, the crusty but lovable lead river guide from Whitehorse, Yukon, savored the shocked look on his guests' faces as he offered a tray of appetizers of smoked halibut, crackers and cheese.

Behind him, Perth, Ontario's Trent Abbott and Ron Morrison, of Whitby, Ontario, prepared a salmon with two different sauces and had already whipped up a tangy, yet sweet, salsa. And for dessert (surprise, surprise) a delicate banana cream pie.

We were all confused. But surely, we told ourselves, this was the last time we would see fresh vegetables, fruit and meat on this trip. We would be proved wrong everyday as the rafts' coolers were stuffed with all of the good stuff.

The next morning I awoke under a carnival of colour and shapes as my canvas ceiling glowed with the morning sun. Although I had slept for 10 hours, The Tat still roared outside my tent. But it was a blessed substitute for my clock radio back home telling me my team had lost again, and, oh, by the way, it's time to get up and go to work.

I was still luxuriating in those first-day-of-vacation feelings when I heard "Coffee, hot water for tea, hot chocolate" wafting up from the kitchen where a fire was already warming the early risers.

Yep, that's much better than a clock radio. But I still had to get my mind around the fact that for the next 10 days I won't have my day start with an alarm, or I won't have to fight traffic, or I won't have a newspaper to read, or a radio to listen to, or even a CD player, or a video game. My leashes in life (cell phone, pager, emails) and chains (time, intentions, obligations, design) were all gone.

Yep, this is the only way to vacation (if I may use that word as a verb). I dressed in my own sweet time and headed down for fresh-brewed coffee, juice, a light and airy omelet and a chat with all of my new friends.

On the water once again, I realized rafting is the only way to enjoy nature at its wildest. Build a highway through the bush and you can't see the trees for the sign forests. A train is too noisy and too fast and you can't get "up close and personal" from a plane. Hiking and biking paths would be impossible to maintain so far from civilization.

Lounging in a raft sweeping silently along at 16 kilometres an hour is smooth enough to hold your camera still for pictures, doesn't scare away the wildlife and gives you time to let it all sink in.

It is crazy to think the world almost lost this "River Wild" to a copper mine in the1980s.

The toxic fallout would have threatened the 50 mammal species that depend on this river. Roads and construction would displace grizzly bears, dall sheep, mountain goats and wolves. Tailing ponds and dams could not

be counted on since Windy Craggy, the proposed site, is in the most seismically active area in North America. As one of only three major salmon-bearing rivers on the northern Pacific coast, the bald eagle population was equally threatened.

Lobbyists for the mine argued that only a pampered few would ever see this river system. I looked at my fellow guests and saw a nurse, civil servant, teacher, small business owner and an administrator. None of them seem pampered.

One thousand such people see this river each year, mostly as guests of river guiding companies. At the urging of Tatshenshini International (a coalition of over 50 conservation groups), the governments of British Columbia, the Yukon, Canada, Alaska, the USA and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations co-operated to create a Class A wilderness park.

The St. Elias-Tatshenshini World Wilderness Reserve is now 8.5 million hectares of pristine nature that will never be developed. It is the largest reserve in the world.

I looked at the passing scenery of spruce, willow and birch trees with renewed interest as I imagined my great-great grandchildren experiencing the exact same sight that I was enjoying right then.

Delicate wild flowers blanketed the alpine tundra, yet we disturbed none of them. Our fires were built in fire pans to prevent scorching the ground, all of our waste was carried out and we even scattered rocks and un-used firewood to make it look like we were never there.

But Bob informed me the river won't look like this in 100 years. It is the nature of all rivers to change. The Tat always seeks the path of least

Rafting is great. But, sometimes, you have to get out and appreciate the calm and quiet of just one spot.

resistance, corroding away at the landscape as it flows downhill to the Pacific Ocean. I looked again at an abandoned river bed to our left, and at flooded trees to our right. Trees that already had the soil cut away from beneath floated along with our rafts. The Tat was changing even while we watched.

You can't experience everything from the raft, so our second day found us camped beneath an unnamed mountain at Sediments Creek. The next day we had a choice: Some will stay at camp to relax and the rest will climb the first hill. Then the fittest will climb the mountain behind.

It was our first look at the sweeping vista we've been floating through. The Alsek Mountain Range awaited us downriver. Its meltwater spilled into the Tatshenshini, along with the O'Connor River, to make it double in size.

At our next camp, the mood became quiet. The excitement of new friendships gave way to the space we give, and the serenity we take, from old friends. People found quiet places to sit and think. Long walks along the shore and writing in journals, each were finally able to leave the concrete world for a while for some introspection. Years of hectic lifestyles were finally surrendered to the gentle nurturing of nature.

We allowed ourselves to be treated like the guests that we were. On a trip like this you are never hungry ... but when food is offered, you eat. And you are never tired ... but when you lie down, you sleep.

After a two-day stay, we floated down to Confluence, by far the most beautiful and serene spot on the river. This is where the Tatshenshini meets up with the larger Alsek River taking on the latter's name.

The other face of an ice cap is explored in river rafts that become sluggish without the 16-kilometre currents pushing them.

They meet in a bowl of surrounding mountains where a glacier once sat. From this spot we could see 27 different glaciers hanging over the shoulders of these mountains, barely containing the world's largest non-polar ice cap. In all, there were 31 surge-type glaciers and 350 valley glaciers ... one of which we would get a chance to walk on at the next camp.

It is called Walker Glacier, owing to the fact it is close enough to walk on. Approaching it we were in T-shirts, but once we climbed over a small hill and stepped onto the glacier we found we were in another world. We hastily pulled out sweaters against the cold of the ice and jackets for the wicked valley wind.

Another look around and we saw the glacier had its own eco-system. There was moss growing on the ice and willows had planted themselves in the dirt pushed out of its way. Although the pressurized ice doesn't melt fast, there was a river beneath the glacier roaring towards the Alsek River.

Ice crunched beneath our feet as we walked to the aqua-colored, craggy peaks of the mass retreating between the mountains. After half an hour it seemed we were not much closer, forcing us to realize it was much bigger than we thought.

Our final two nights were spent on Alsek Lake, where the other face of an ice cap was exposed to us. Icebergs, having just calved from glaciers, floated in a field of frozen statues. From shore we could count at least a hundred. It was the first time in nine days we hadn't heard the rush of The Tat, but the eerie quiet was broken somewhere to the right of us as an iceberg flipped over in an explosion of splashes. The under-water currents melt the icebergs faster on the bottom than the sun from atop, but it happened so quickly it was difficult to decide which one just flipped.

The next day we took a tour of the icebergs in the rafts. We took care not to get too close in case one flipped on top of us. Back at camp we enjoyed our last night practising loon calls, pretending we didn't have to return to the world.

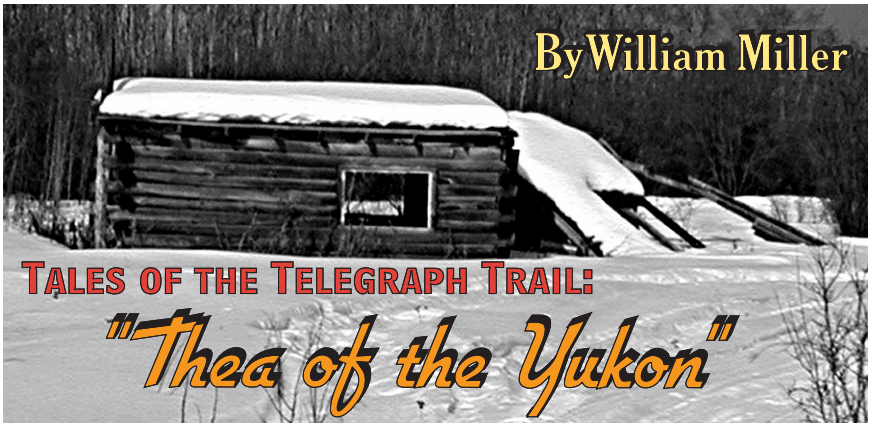
Just as my parachuting adventure began with an airplane, this adventure exploring one of the last refuges of nature ended with an airplane. A Hawker Sidley turbo prop came thundering through the trees onto an impossibly short and narrow runway at Dry Bay, Alaska.

The technology and civilization this plane represented thundered into our consciousness, as well. It was a little too much, a little too soon. But as we settled into the cushioned seats and gave our snack orders to the flight attendant, we fought off sleep long enough to say goodbye to The Tat.

We were shocked to be reminded that the river, which just recently seemed so huge and powerful, was just a thin ribbon of life winding through endless snow-covered mountain ranges ... the very granite crust of our earth. Beyond the farthest mountain was another mountain even further away.

Looking down from the plane it now seemed small and fragile. But, after 11 days, it taught us we can find our real home only in nature. It is the only place a human soul can truly relax. ❐

[Photos by Darrell Hookey]



By William Miller

Tales of the Telegraph Trail:
"Thea of the Yukon"

The Yukon Telegraph was built by the Dominion government between 1899 and 1901 to provide faster communication between the Klondike and lower Canada. From Dawson City it followed the Yukon River to British Columbia where it went through one of the wildest stretches of country south of 60, the 540 miles between Atlin and Hazelton.

There were probably more people living in this area 100 years ago than there are today. That's because the government built cabins every 20 or 30 miles along the way to house the telegraph linemen who were employed to keep the line operating through all kinds of hazards: fires and floods in the summer, blow down and avalanches in the winter.

Originally the trail along the telegraph line was used only by these linemen on their trips to inspect and repair the line, by native people, by occasional trappers and hunters, and by the pack trains that brought provisions to the isolated stations.

In the 1920's, however, the trail began to attract a different kind of user. These were independent souls who were looking for a wilderness experience, a taste of nature in the raw. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for these, mostly inexperienced, adventurers to travel safely through the area without the help of the telegraph linemen. The men in the cabins provided much needed sustenance and succour, and took great pride in seeing that they all got safely through their sections. Often they would escort the hiker along the trail until met by the lineman from the next cabin.

One of the most popular treks was the 320 miles of trail between Hazelton and Telegraph Creek. Starting from Hazelton, the cabins were given numbers, First Cabin, Second Cabin, etc., up to Ninth Cabin, and then there were several others before Telegraph Creek. In 1925 half the stations were vacated so that the distance between the remaining cabins was between 40 and 50 miles.

Smaller refuge cabins, spaced about ten miles apart, had been built for the linemen to stay in when unable to return to their home cabins because of bad weather. Equipped with a stove, bunks, and an emergency food cache, these cabins were also available to the itinerant traveller. They were used

not only to get out of the weather, in a land where it seemed that rain was a part of the landscape, but also for relief from the ubiquitous mosquitoes.

Perhaps because they were more likely to record their trips in journals and letters, it seems that a disproportionate number of the trekkers were young women, often hiking alone. One who headed out on the trail from Hazelton in 1932 called herself "Thea of the Yukon."

Before starting out on her adventure she had become friendly with Louis LeBourdais, a long time telegraph operator in Quesnel. Part way through her journey she wrote a letter to him describing her trek so far and her experiences with the linemen she had met, particularly those at Eighth Cabin. [Her letter has been edited for clarity.]

8th Cabin - Home Station
August 9th [1932]
Yukon Telegraph Trail, B.C.

Dear Louis,

Well here I am on top of the world. This is not a trail but a mud hole.

Yesterday I only did a little over four miles, and it took me from 8:30 until 2 o'clock. I spent the night at the last refuge cabin and got to Mooney Creek. The trail led to the creek, and the only way I could see to get across was the emergency cable platform with two hand locks or hooks. In time I got up enough courage to go across that way and I managed to take off, only to have the locks open and dump me. Luckily I landed at the edge of the creek and not in the middle. I tried again but gave it up, sat down and cried and called myself a coward. After an hour I started back for the cabin and saw a sign which led me to a narrow bridge. I was so shaky by that time that I just crept on it.

I made the four miles to Eighth Cabin in almost tears as the flies and mosquitoes fairly devoured me. I got into mud over my knees. The worst thing was that I lost my balance altogether and went backwards right in the worst mud hole. After fighting weeds and willows, I finally arrived at Eighth, where I was received royally by the linemen, Mr. Jensen and Mr. Janze. Mr Jensen turned his cabin over to me; he went and bunked with Mr. Jantze. Both my hosts are treating me fine.

I had to take a day off in order to wash out the mud. Were all having a grand time, three dogs and a cat with frozen ears comprise the rest of the family. Mr. Jantze got a new radio and so tonight I was cutting up generally, such as dancing a ballet and a jig.

But seriously, this is a terrible trail. It takes all day to do about 10 or 15 miles, and one is exhausted from wading glacial creeks or else crossing them on slippery logs, and from here to 9th Cabin, I am told, there are more cables. The mud, especially after the pack train has been over the trail, is unbelievable. I have to put my stick down and if it holds a few inches I put my foot there. The weeds are taller than a tall man and often hide the trail so that you must feel your way.

From 4th Cabin to 8th I wore Mr. Smith's shoes (rubber) and now my

hosts here have given me a taller pair, which I shall wear with two pairs of linemen's socks.

My own breaches are patched with the legs of a pair Mr. Ironsides gave me at 6th. I also have a pair of corduroys which Mr. Ironsides brought along with him on the line and I wore from 7th to 8th. The men are all peaches and try to do everything to make one comfortable at the home stations.

Mr. Smith, when I got in at 4th, even pulled my shoes and socks off, bathed my feet and put a brand new pair of socks and moccasins on them. He escorted me over his line, that is he went ahead and cut brush, even insisting upon packing me on his back over a few places where I could not find a foothold because of the mud, both feet having been hurt two days before. (A mosquito is doing a jig on this paper to the music.)

It rained here for more than two weeks straight and I have gotten accustomed to being a dripping being.

Traveled for nearly a week with Arthur Hanlien [sic], a former Indian outlaw called Simon Peter Gun-an-oot (who had formerly helped to build this line and trail), [see *Yukoner* No. 17] and a little man who is trailing along with them. I had an interesting time, though the traveling through mud was most difficult. They were very good to me.

Bread is baking. It is going on to eleven o'clock P.M. It seems as if I have never known any other kind of life, just living in log cabins, fetching water and bathing out of two pails, washing mud out of my clothes, oil lamps

Cable platform similar to the ones used by Thea of the Yukon to get across streams during her trek on the Telegraph Trail. [Yukon Archives photo, John W. Sutherland Collection]

and candles. As for food I am doing very well. But the going is terrible. There is no other trail like this in the world.

This is a messy letter, and I hope you will get it sometime as Mr. Beirnes [the packer who brought provisions to the cabins] is coming back with the pack train and will take it back. I am going to turn in soon as I must do a little more mileage tomorrow.

The radio is playing a lovely melody. My remembrance to everyone.

Thea of the Yukon writes about the helpfulness of the telegraph men and the good times she had at their cabins, but these were the pleasant exceptions to her trip. Between the occupied cabins she carried all her food and supplies, and spent many nights alone in refuge cabins or camping out. Only occasionally was she able to listen to a radio, do a jig, and sleep in a cosy bed.

When the telegraph line through this area was abandoned in 1935, an old clock, dating to the beginning of the line, was brought out from Eighth Cabin. It was inscribed with the names of many of the men who had been stationed there, and also included the names of 'Minny Matheson and Thea Francis, NY, 1932, who were getting color for their stories.'

The mystery is that Thea's letter does not mention a traveling companion. We also do not know if any of their 'stories' were ever published.

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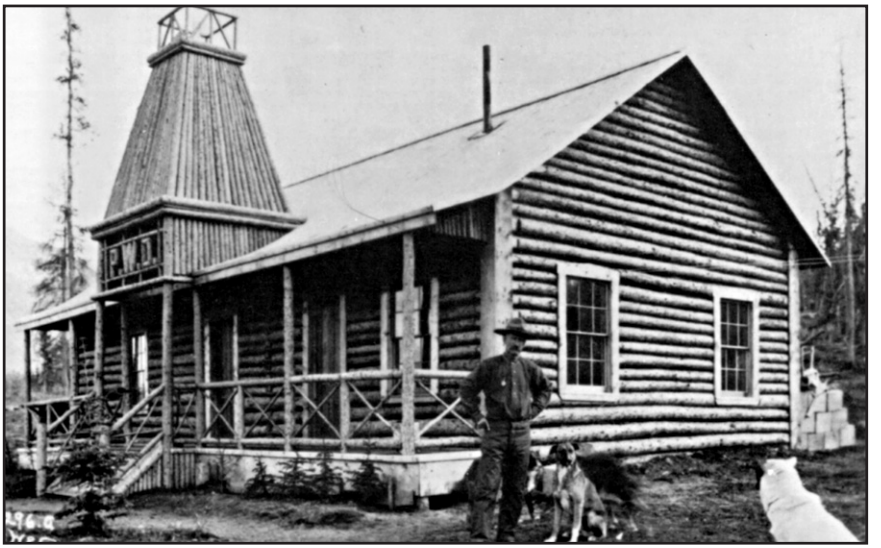


Telegraph station and N.W.M.P. office at Carcross, Yukon, 1906.

Stroller White: Newspaper Man

By Les McLaughlin

The Yukon has had more than its share of characters. One of the most observant was a lifelong newspaper man who covered the territory for seventeen years. His columns depict a slice of life that we otherwise might have forgotten. Simple stuff, yet meaningful in the long term authenticity of a region's history. Not only that, but a young Scottish poet may never have seen his poems in print had it not been for Elmer White, the newsman.

It seems when he was born in Ohio in 1859, Elmer J. White's tiny hands were ink-stained. The first newspaper to carry his acerbic wit and wisdom was the *Gainesville News* in Florida. Later, he moved to Washington State where he was living when news of the Klondike gold strike hit the outside world. With his wife Josie and small daughter in tow, White joined the rush. His mission was not to mine for gold, but rather to tell the gold rush story. If the news will not come to you, go to the news, was White's lifelong motto.

In Skagway, White became an Associated Press correspondent. Here, he wrote many accounts of Soapy Smith and his notorious gang that had been terrorizing the Alaska boom town. He covered the bloody shootout on the Skagway waterfront when Frank Reid confronted Soapy Smith. Smith was killed instantly while Reid hung on for 12 days before passing into the history books.

In 1899, White moved to Dawson City where he covered local stories, but more importantly began a gossip column called "The Stroller" by E.J. White. He left Dawson for Whitehorse in 1904 to edit the *Whitehorse Star* and carry on the traditions of telling all; true or fanciful. White had a witty streak that sometimes entered his columns and made it seem as if it were the real McCoy. When he wrote a far-fetched story of blue snow and ice worms that appeared when the thermometer dipped to 75 below Fahrenheit, the Smithsonian Institute, America's prestigious scientific body, wrote to the Star's enterprising editor asking for more detailed information about his fascinating scientific discovery.

White, in a spate of creative journalism known only to the most inventive mind, had written up an interview he supposedly had with a native elder

who then was more than one hundred years old. The elder had described in detail the ice worm that under ideal conditions could swell to four feet in length with a head on either end of its long slippery body and chirped lustily if the temperature stayed steady in the minus 70 to 80F range for a few weeks. Under those conditions, White wrote, the snows—if they fell—would be blue.

When the Smithsonian's interest became known, newspapers in the southern States picked up on the story. In January of 1907, the *Philadelphia Ledger* carried a news report from Yukon Crossing (near Carmacks) telling its spell bound readers that the ice worms were in lusty voice since the temperature had reached minus 82F. Sadly, the paper went on to say that after a week of delightful bliss in the ice worm colony, the temperature shot up to minus 45F and the poor worms were suffering terribly in the suffocating heat.

A young poet later immortalized the nonexistent worms in a brilliant little ditty called "The Ballad of the Ice Worm Cocktail." In fact White appears in more than one poem by the Yukon's bard, but then it is the least the poet could do.

After all, Stroller White was the first in Whitehorse to encourage Robert Service to publish his poems, much to Service's everlasting gratitude. White convinced the young bank clerk who dabbled in recitations to give the Women's Auxiliary of the Anglican Church a bit of "the salt of our own earth." With that coaxing from the Star's editor, Service went on quickly to write both the "Cremation of Sam McGee" and the "Shooting of Dan McGrew." And the rest, they say, is history.

As for blue snow, White had the presence of mind to offer a printed explanation for its non-appearance during a bitter cold snap. The wind direction was not right since blue snow could only materialize if the winter winds came from the coast. Whether anyone in the Yukon bought into this excuse is debatable, but in January of 1906, Taylor and Drury's ran an ad warning Whitehorse residents to buy warm clothes "before the blue snow falls."

In 1911, the same poet who by this time owed much of his new found fame to the prodding of Stroller White penned a song that has perhaps been sung around more campfires than any Wilf Carter classic.

"In the land of the pale blue snow
Where it's ninety-nine below and the
Polar bears are dancing on the plain.
Oh, my Heart, my Life, my Soul,
I will meet thee when the ice worms nest again."

—Robert W. Service

Elmer White was also the American Consular agent in Whitehorse. Those may have been busy times for him since Canada was not paying much attention to the Yukon, nor the comings and goings of tourists, workers and other less notable travellers on board the little White Pass railway. White leased the *Whitehorse Star* to the Rousseau family in 1916. He moved to

Douglas, Alaska where he began publishing the *Stroller's Weekly* and carried on the witty tradition of tweaking noses until they were firmly out of joint.

In 1921, the *Star* faced the prospect of closing down altogether. Mr Rousseau had died. White, while still the owner, could not carry on the business from far off Douglas and so a group of citizens took over the weekly newspaper to run it as a community enterprise. Stroller White's days as a Yukon newspaper man ended.

He was elected to the Alaska House of Representatives. His days as a politician may have been fulfilling, but to the end he remained a journalist. White's view of journalism is best summed up with a few lines from a long letter he wrote to his nephew, who was about to become a journalist.

White wrote: "In the first place Walter, the newspaper profession in a sense is the ruination of all who engage in it as no other calling gives so much insight into human nature. No one my dear nephew who would succeed as a newspaper man, will ever allow sympathy or sentiment to interfere with the publication of news. If it comes to your attention that your beloved pastor or Sunday school teacher was seen emerging from the back window of the house of a parishioner who is away from town on business at two am, do not allow his second calling to prevent the publication of the story. If he has no respect for his calling, why should you have?

Use adjectives freely in writing of the ladies. While Mrs. Arabella Bourbon was homely enough to stop a mill that grinds mud for a brickyard, your uncle always referred to her as 'the beautiful, charming and accomplished daughter of our distinguished and blue-blooded fellow citizen, Colonel Bourbon.'"

White continued: "Always boost the patrons of your paper. If Mr. and Mrs. Pat Cassidy give a party and every male goes home with his nose peeled and his eyes bunged shut, refer to it as a swell society party. It will please the Cassidys and other people will see the brace of humour."

That letter captures in the essence of Stroller White, a frontier journalist ahead of his time who died on Sept 28, 1930. ❐

The beginnings of Whitehorse, 1898.

Those Damn Disney Dogs

When the Northwest Mounted Police arrived in the North they soon found out that dogs were indispensable. Due to the harshness of the land they now had to police, the traditional horse was soon abandoned for dog teams. Dog power was used for everything. They hauled wood and water, delivered mail, and hunted down criminals. In the winter of 1898 the NWMP and their dog teams covered over 64,012 miles with between 500 to 700 pounds of mail each way. To say the dogs used by the police were tough was an understatement. Major Wood's team once made the 57 mile trip from Tagish post to Bennett in seven hours. Wood's team also had the gruesome reputation of having once killed and eaten a previous driver.

First the NWMP used local dogs,renting or buying them at inflated prices. Then they decided to import their own dogs from the mainland. The first four dogs were sent by steamer in 1895. This quartet of unknown breeds were named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

John took one look at his new northern home and jumped ship, drowning himself. Mark and Luke formed a murderous partnership and killed Matthew. Then they terrorized the town with their fighting and barking. They were eventually destroyed.

The best breed for the job was found to be Siberian Huskies. The force began to build up a breeding stock. During the 1960's many in the north abandoned the use of dogs in favour of snowmobiles, but the Police were still using teams. But many of the dogs used by the RCMP were in danger of dying out. Death by accident , poor diet or disease had taken its toll. The year before an epidemic had wiped out over 90 percent of the dogs stationed in southern Baffin Island. In 1960 Superintendent W.G. Fraser decided to"institute a breeding program and attempt to restock all detachments with a different breed of dog then that presently in the Arctic and of course breed from pure-bred, or as near pure-bred stock as possible."

Where would they find these dogs?

It seemed that none other then Walt Disney provided the answer. In 1960, Disney with their partner, Cangary film produced a film in Banff, Alberta. It was the story of a Northern sled dog and his life and Walt Disney found a model for him at the home of Bill and Virginia Bacon in Whitehorse—a male Malamute Siberian Husky cross called Smokey. He had a greyish white coat and full mask. But one dog alone could not run the show. "Nikki", as Walt Disney dubbed him, was to be represented from a pup to adulthood, having adventures and running with his husky friends. Now all they had to do was to find several Smoky look alikes.

They scoured the country for the right dogs. Breeding programs were also put into place to produce pups of the exact colouring and a good temperament. In all, Nikki was to be played by 13 different dogs and other huskies were bought in as extras. When the movie was finished , Disney packed up , leaving 200 dog stars out in the cold.

Some were adopted by families in Alberta, others went to Parks of Canada members, two even ended up in the Calgary Zoo. But a surplus of 19 dogs still remained.

Superintendent Fraser heard of the dogs and wrote to his superiors" Early in June of this year a member of this Division whilst on leave in Alberta learned that one of Walt Disney's enterprises known as Cangary Films ltd, were in possession of several purebred Siberian Husky dogs whose services were no longer required in the making of the film..this member contacted those in authority there and learned that these dogs would no longer be required and if the proper representations were made to the higher authorities of the organization, it is possible that these dogs would be turned over to us. "

The Nikki dogs arrived at Fort Norman in the Northwest Territories, where the forces hoped to breed enough dogs to supply all the police posts. The group consisted of two "pure bred"husky males, six female malamute/husky crosses and one female with a litter of 8 puppies. Roxy(5 month old female) Rita and Rossi(both 9 month old females) Rilla and Rejane(7 month old females) and King and Kenny the two males.

To say that the animals were purebreds was misleading .They were not so much bred for work as for looks. Dogs became known as"On strength" when they reached the age of six months and at this time were given an official number starting with the letter grade G. In this way the RCMP kept track of all working dogs and their offspring. For instance it is recorded that dog G3792 Rita known as a nervous but fair mother had four litters, the first two of which died, the second lots which ended up in Cambridge Bay, Aklvik, Coppermine, Fort McPherson and Hershel Island. Other pups ended up in Old Crow, Spence Bay, Eskimo Point and the Central Arctic Subdivision. G3795 Reni known as a fair mother had three litters, the first sired by a dog named King, all of whom were pressed into service Her second litter sired by an unknown indian were listed as given away due to an undesirable sire, and the third litter all were place with their mother on Hershel Island.

In two years time a quarter of all the outposts had dogs from the Nikki bloodline. In 1962 the program was moved to Hershel Island. This was the Mounties most northerly location and known to foster only the strongest men and dogs.

But though the Nikki dogs looked the part , they were not the best of sled dogs. They had been bred for colour and for character and not to pull the weight of the sleigh. In truth the Nikki dogs were quite small. They did not seem to have either the physical or mental stamina to be an arctic sled dog. Many members of the force began to curse the day they ever considered using those " Hollywood dogs."

By 1964, each detachment had enough dogs to breed their own sled dogs and the Hershel Island project was abandoned. By the end of 1965 all of the original 19 Disney dogs were dead, but their offspring continued to flourish in various areas.

By 1969, snowmobiles and planes were now found to be more useful in policing the North and the sled dog's days were numbered. Only four detachments were still using dogs and they were told to get rid of their pups and sled dogs.

Those who still had pups remaining were ordered to dispose of them humanely, a tough job for men who raised and worked with these fine animals. Some of the dogs were given away to the local native people who had served the police so well over the years as guides and trackers. Still others made history.

The last patrol took place on March 11, 1969, when Constable Warren Townsend and Special constable Peter Benjamin drove the last convoy of dogs from Old Crow to Fort McPherson. In this convoy were many of the Disney descendants.

The patrol drove 21 dogs that day and magazines form National Geographic to Canadian Magazine tracked their progress and photographed the historic ride. When the dogs pulled into the Old Crow 26 days after their round trip, the final call was uttered on the wind. The dogs stood down, waiting eagerly to be unchained and their reward of a meal and a long rest. They did not know that this was to be their last call to duty.

The next year, mushers began to make commemorative runs, following the old RCMP trails. The dogs of the last patrol were given to Peter and Martha Benjamin and Martha who along with her brother Stephen Frost, continued to race the dogs. And when Bill Hodgson broke the Rendezvous track record in 1976 he owed much of it to his lead dog Frosty, one of the great grandsons of the original 19.

The descendants of the Hollywood dogs can still be found in Northern Settlements from Spences Bay to Old Crow. Most have been bred with the sturdier Husky population and perhaps lost the stigma of being one of those damn" Disney dogs." ❒

Some offspring of the Disney dogs at Old Crow, 1969. [RCMP photo]

Allan MacMillan Downes, Dec. 17, 1928 — Jan.1, 2002

Al Downes loved his family, dogs, old trucks, and the Yukon.

In 1949, with his buddy, Wayne Hobbs, he rode the rails from Ottawa to Vancouver. They hid in the coal car just behind the engine, and got themselves covered with black smoke and cinders, not to mention coal dust. A railroad cop threw Wayne off at Winnipeg but Al made it to Vancouver. He got off the train with $4.20 cents in his pocket and even though his first wish was to have a good bath, he couldn't afford one. Wayne showed up about a week later.

Al signed on with the Yukon Consolidated Gold Company which sent him to Dawson City to work on the dredges. And that's how he got to the Yukon.

Dawson in 1950 still had many old denizens of the Klondike Gold Rush sitting around, telling their stories over and over, and the big dredges churned up the creek valleys, creating a prosperity for the town that had been pretty steady for half a century. There were many jobs to be had for a young man who could handle hardship and danger.

Al worked on the dredges for a time then prospected in the Hart and Wind River areas for Con-West Exploration. He hauled logs over the Top of the World Highway when it was just a track across the mountain tops. Faint traces of the old highway can still be seen if you travel the new road, which has been known to terrify tourists in their motorhomes, sometimes to the extent that someone else has to drive for them.

Young and full of zest for life, Al was known as a pretty wild character in the Klondike. He got to know many of the colourful citizens of Dawson, such as the two reigning madams, Ruby Scott and Bombay Peggy. He knew Madame Zoom, Two-Man MacDonald, Black Mike, and many others. For a little while, he worked as a timekeeper at Peggy's two-storey establishment. Al sat in the parlour, and when the customers' 20 minutes were up, Al would bang on the ceiling with a broom handle.

Later, he hauled gravel and helped build roads in the Fox Lake area and worked on the Alaska Highway bridge at Teslin. Then, in 1955, he left the Yukon to return to Ottawa where he made a living in heavy construction work. He supervised a crew on a big dam project in Labrador and for a time sold real estate in the Toronto area.

But the spell of the Yukon never left him. He talked about it all the time and about how he would go back someday.

He did just that in 1980 and acquired some claims in the Sixtymile goldfields, northwest of Dawson. There he set up a camp, staked more claims, and prospected the area every summer. He spent his winters in Whitehorse and many restaurant tables felt the clunk of ore samples that Al often showed to his mining friends. His latest discovery was a rich nickel deposit that had several big mining companies very interested.

Al had a remarkable rapport with animals. For a few summers a fox he called Nosey would come right into the kitchen at Sixtymile and sit at the table. One day an old friend showed up at Al's camp bragging about the fish he had in the back of his truck. Mysteriously, the fish disappeared. Only Al and his family suspected Nosey and they would never rat on their friend. Al had a dog who lived for 25 years, content to be in the truck or the house and never leaving Al's side in all that time.

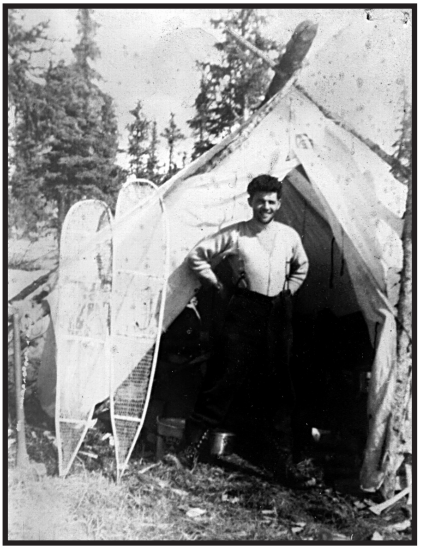
Only as a very last resort would Al shoot a troublesome grizzly. He once had a mobile home on Glacier Creek that had a full-length mirror in the hallway. A big grizzly got into the trailer, saw himself in the mirror, and ran right through the wall opposite. Al was pretty proud of that bear and showed everyone the hole in the wall that his buddy had made.

A few years ago an old prospecting friend of his died (Bill Macmillan) and Al spread his ashes on Moose Creek in the Sixtymile and fastened a plaque to a stone there.

Yet, before his own passing, Al Downes had decreed that there be no ceremonies or funeral. He didn't want everyone sitting around feeling sad. He enjoyed everything about living and did not go gently at the end, fighting off the effects of a heart attack to no avail.

But he has left behind a loving family (wife, three daughters and 11 grandchildren) and friends all over the country, especially in the Yukon.

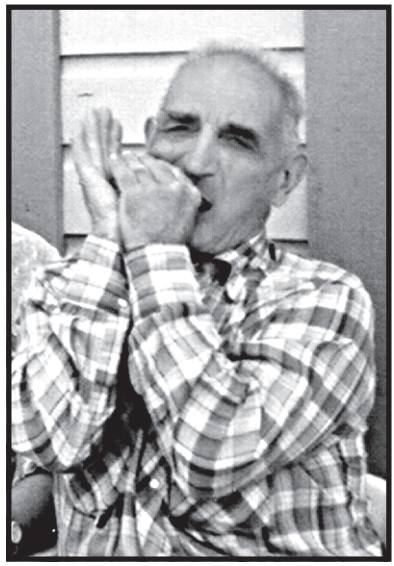
I for one am glad to have been one of those friends. S.H.



Above: Al Downes in 2001. Right, prospecting in the Hart River country for Con-West Exploration, 1953.

The Music Man

By Mag Mawhinney



My husband and I were walking on Front Street, Dawson City, when I heard a voice say, "They should really fill that hole. Somebody might get hurt."

I turned to find a slightly-built, elderly man, carrying a gift bag. "Yes, I agree," I said.

As we walked the boardwalk, the man kept pace with us and we started to chat. Because I detected an accent, I asked him where he was from.

"I'm from St. Alphonse, Manitoba," he answered.

"Oh, are you Ukranian?" I asked.

"No, I'm Belgian."

"I lived in Manitoba for seven years and I know there are many Ukranian and Polish people there. That's why I asked," I explained.

His eyes lit up. "Where did you live in Manitoba?" he asked.

With every town I mentioned, his smile widened and he said, "Beautiful place, wonderful place. I remember playing on an inner tube, as a kid, in the lake at Gimli. My grandpa would take me there. I had a green bathing cap, I remember. When the waves got too high and grandpa couldn't see my cap, oh, I'd really get into trouble when I got out. And in Winnipeg Beach they have a carnival, you know." He looked at me and I nodded "yes". Then he continued, "I always wanted to go on the bumper cars so I got a job there. Then I could go for free on the cars."

We sat down on some chairs just outside an ice cream parlour and I became completely entranced by his enthusiasm and charm as he continued his story. He was a farmer by trade and it had taken him ten years to get to Dawson City. He'd always wanted to visit the Yukon.

"I would have flown my own plane, but it's too small to come over the Rockies," he laughed.

"You fly too?" I asked, amazed at his diversity.

"Oh, yes, it's beautiful up there, so beautiful," he said, with his ever-ready smile. Then he reached into the pocket of his shirt and pulled out a small mouth organ. "I'm going to play us a tune. It makes people gather around. You watch, it won't take long."

Sure enough, people smiled as they passed and some stopped and clapped their hands in time to the happy music he played. In between polkas and waltzes, he told me he'd started playing at age ten and he's seventy-seven now. He said he has six children and all of them can play an instrument.

He went on to explain, "My wife played the piano. I didn't know this until I went to her house soon after we met. She didn't know I played the harmonica either. She was blonde with brown eyes."

His face saddened for a moment, then his smile reappeared and he added, "I know what I'll play-"Beautiful, Beautiful Brown Eyes"."

The lovely strains caught the attention of a little girl, about four years old, accompanied by her father. She wanted to give the music man a quarter, but he said, "Oh, no, sweetheart. I don't want your money, but I would like it if you'd dance for me." With that, he stood up and started playing another tune. The little girl watched his feet and soon she was smiling and mimicking his movements.

"Now," he said, "this is what we do at the end." He wiggled his bum side to side in time to the last two notes. They repeated the movement a couple more times as the crowd clapped and laughed. He reached into his pocket and handed her a loonie and she insisted that he take her quarter.

After the girl and her father left to buy an ice cream cone, the music man sat down and said, "You know, I couldn't dance like that when I was fifty. I was in terrible shape. But I met someone from the States who told me to change my eating habits, cut out red meat and fatty foods. I eat fruit

Left to right: Tom Byrne, Mag Mawhinney, Celest Delichte. [2001]

for breakfast, lots of vegetables, fish, and eggs from free-range chickens. I lost forty pounds and never felt better."

He took a polaroid picture from his breast pocket, grinned and said, "See this picture? Last night, I started to play music over there(pointing to a bench by the river), and a young guy came over with his guitar. We had such a good time, and then some natives from that Culture Centre came to dance to the music. A lady from Vernon took this picture. I have met so many wonderful people, from all over the world, through my music."

"Isn't that great," I said. "What a lovely picture."

He looked serious for a moment and said, "You know, music is always a good thing. When bad things happen and there are troubles, I always said to my kids, 'Let's get our music going and be happy', and it always worked. When I go home, I'm going to get all my friends together and form a band. Maybe we'll call it "On the Road Again". We won't take money for ourselves. All my life I worked for things and money and it doesn't mean anything. We'll give all our earnings to underprivileged kids."

He played another tune while my husband took a picture of us. When the song was over, I told him we had to go to a writers' walking tour, starting at the Robert Service cabin. I told him I had written apoem for a contest and the winners were going to be announced at the Pierre Burton House.

His eyes twinkled as he said, "I hope you win. Write a poem about me and send it to me. And send me a copy of the picture you took, O.K.?" I promised I would, took his name and address and said good-bye.

My husband and I left our tour of Dawson the next day, but I learned Celest, the music man, stayed on for the next couple days. It was Dawson City's "Discovery Days" then and he joined in the festivities, playing his music whenever he got the chance— in the hotels, on the riverbank, on Front Street and even on the Yukon Queen to Eagle, Alaska. Through the boat's P.A. system, his music was heard all over Dawson.

Well, I didn't write a poem about Celest because I thought his story deserved to be told in detail. I wanted everyone to know the positive-thinking, sweet man I perceived him to be and I hope he can play his lovely music and make people happy for years to come. ❒

Goldrush Justice

The driver of the first egg sled to arrive at Dawson in the spring in gold rush days was a local celebrity for a few days, and was usually inter viewed by the newspapers.

One year, this event resulted in a celebrated local murder case. A Dawson newspaper reporter was arraigned on a charge he had shot and killed the driver of the sled.

His Lordship the Judge, informed the prisoner that he would be permitted to speak on his own behalf, but he asked that it be brief. His Lordship, it seemed, had a pressing dinner engagement.

The prisoner arose in the box, and began: "May it please your Lordship. The deceased came to me with an account of his strenuous trip down the congealed surface of the Yukon River as the driver of an egg-laden sled. I encouraged the driver to give me details of the trip that had taken him 26 days.

"He told me of the cold he endured, of fighting snow blindness, and how he had to keep oil lanterns burning under the tarp day and night to prevent the freezing of the precious cargo of eggs.

"He added many other interesting items concerning the business of freighting eggs. Some of this I already knew, but I could use of them in my story. In consequence I felt very kindly toward the man.

"But instead of concluding his story when he should have, he continued it. Looking me straight in the eye he described how he had made the mistake of using a single case of eggs as a seat during the entire early part of the journey.

"Without a sign of flinching he told me that after 21 days the entire case of eggs had hatched and that from that date on he had 360 young Shanghai and Plymouth Rocks to care for in addition to his task of keeping the remaining eggs from freezing.

"Your Lordship, I could have stood for this obvious prevarication, although it did destroy some of the friendly feeling I felt toward the man. But that was not the end. He edged close to the door, turned and said with a smirk, 'I consider without eggsaggeration, that I have had a most eggstraordinary eggsperience.'

"I could stand no more your Lordship. I saw red. I shot him. That is my sole defense."

"The jury will return a verdict of justifiable homicide," calmly announced the court. "Society must be protected. And the prosecutor will refrain in future from taking the time of this court with such trivial cases. The court is adjourned."

His Lordship and the late prisoner walked up the street together. A friendship was born that has not since been obliterated by time, nor dimmed by separation.

This story came from one of Dawson City's many newspapers of the period. Apparently in those times, in periods with little news, fertile minds,

and the pens of reporters and editors brought forth some elucidating tales, as they called them.

Is there a familiar ring to this century old tale? So what else is new? (From Doug Bell's Yukon scrapbook)

A cabin on the trail to the Sixtymile goldfields. Oldtimers in the area say it had once been a busy post office. (SH photo, 1984)

A DOG-PUNCHER ON THE YUKON

1896-1902

By Arthur Treadwell Walden

Part Seven

CHAPTER VIII

WITH THE RUSH OVER WHITE PASS

ABOUT the middle of the winter of '97-98 I decided to leave the country for a trip and come back in the spring, bringing back a load of stuff to sell. The first thing I did was to sell my outfit, and for this I got a dollar a pound for cases, bags, sleds—in fact everything: but I kept back five dogs and my camp outfit and enough food to take two men out of the country.

The next thing was to get a paying passenger, which was an easy thing to do that winter. The passenger was obliged to walk, do his full share of the work, and pay a dollar a mile in advance—six hundred miles, six hundred dollars. This was the regular tariff. In my case I drew a regular 'lemon'; that is, the man was a raw Cheechako, prided himself on being 'a gentleman,' and to my disgust kept a diary. He couldn't walk, he couldn't chop wood, and he couldn't cook. He could eat, and I suppose that the man who could eat my cooking should have credit for it.

Our ration consisted of bacon, frozen beans fried in bacon fat, flapjacks, and, of course, tea. About the second day out I discovered that he had worked in a lot of luxuries for himself, such as canned milk, some butter, and a bottle of pickles. This was too much for me, so I put the butter into the dog-food, threw the pickles away, and helped drink the milk.

When two men want to get on amiably on the trail they have to share the work equally. In fact each man usually tries to do a little more than his share. Both men must keep their mouths shut, and never want to stop because they're tired. At night my companion would come in so tired that he couldn't chop wood or cook: the fact is he didn't do any of the camp work except help put up the tent and get the stove started.

I kept my temper until I found that three men had caught up with us with only one dog apiece, each man pulling on his own sled with his dog. This as compared with my team of five good dogs! That night we camped in an old abandoned trading post. A roving band of Indians came in with some moosemeat to trade, and thereupon I discovered that my passenger had a whole medicine kit with him. Then I busted and we had a mix-up.

As luck would have it I happened to come out on top. He was a tall man, but I was fighting for a principle. After things had quieted down, he refused to go any farther with me, and called a meeting of the other three men. His plea in the matter was that I hadn't treated him as a gentleman. Mine was

that I hadn't any contract to treat him like one.

The upshot of the affair was that I gave him back a hundred dollars and left him to the tender mercies of the other three men. One of these men had told my passenger that he would take him out, the passenger interpreting the offer as involving no pay for the trip, but when it came down to brass tacks the man said he would charge him a hundred dollars. In the meantime I had invited one of the other men to go out with me. Therefore the man who was going to take my passenger thought he could buy the other chap's dog cheap. But as he had to pay a hundred dollars for it, he had my Cheechako on his hands and nothing to show for it.

The last day's trip was over Chilkoot Pass. We started from Lake Linderman early in the morning, leaving our entire outfit there, taking only the robes. We didn't need the outfit any more, and in case we couldn't get over the summit it was something to run back to. The tent was left standing, the stove up, the firewood cut, but our provisions were all used up. As we began to climb the snow got heavier, making the going very hard for the dogs. We were on snowshoes, one man ahead and one driving, but the dogs were wallowing badly, the sled blocked, and we made very slow progress.

After we got to Crater Lake the trail grew steeper. In fact it was almost an end. Only a few feet at a time could be made by man and beasts, and it was pitch dark when we got to the summit. Here the dogs were unhitched, and the sled tipped over and given a start down the other side. Then we sat down and slid after it. This was an almost perpendicular drop of twelve hundred feet, and once you start there is no stopping. It was safe, as there was an enormous amount of snow on that side. Our dogs came sliding down after us, sometimes on their backs, sometimes sidewise.

The difficulty began again at the bottom, when we had to find our sled in the pitch darkness. We hunted around for its trail, eventually finding it; the dogs were hitched to it; and both of us rode over the hard-packed snow, in great contrast to the conditions of the other side. We went down the fourteen miles to Dyea at a run. Everybody there turned out to greet us and relieved us of all the money we had, in every way they could think of. Coming from the Yukon with its high prices we were certainly easy.

Going into a store to buy a piece of chewing tobacco, I told the man to give me the smallest cut he could to last me till I left the country, when I always swore off. When I asked him the price he said, 'Two bits.' I handed him two dollars, being unable to realize the fact that prices were so much lower. He laughed and said that one would cover it.

I made arrangements with a man to keep my dogs until I got back. We had a man row us immediately around the point to Skagway, where we heard there was a steamer getting ready to start. It left shortly after we got on board. We were very lucky, as steamers were not running regularly at that time, and I heard afterwards that the other party with the Cheechako had to wait almost two weeks before getting one. What impressed me more than anything else, after my two winters in the Yukon, was to see such a large body of unfrozen water as that at Dyea.

I had intended to stop only a short time in Seattle, planning to ship my dog Shirley home from there, as the climate was a little too much for him. But at, the last minute I decided to take him back East, myself. However, I stayed only a few days in the East, stopping on my way back at Lake Winnipeg,; where I picked up sixteen half-breed sled-dogs. I left home in February, but was taken sick at Vancouver and didn't get back to Alaska until April.

Vancouver was a busy place that spring. Everybody was going to the Klondike, or helping some one else to get off. Since the Klondike is in British territory we could bond our goods through, and every one had made a rush for Vancouver as the most convenient British port on the border. The prices in Vancouver were soaring because of the rush, and my dogs' board while I was in hospital nearly broke me.

The steamers were now charging increased prices on passage and they sold tickets far beyond their capacity. A man having a first-class cabin ticket found himself obliged to sleep on the dining-room table or under it. There was a man on guard at the entrance to the steamer to count the passengers that went on board. I watched him for a while and found' that he was looking at the landscape and not counting.

The boat I went up on was jammed, and had a consignment of North-West Mounted Police on board as well. There were mules and horses, oxen, angora goats, a one-horned bull, and dogs galore. These were all meant as draft animals. The dogs were of every description.. One English doctor had brought over twenty nondescript mongrels from Belgium. I suppose he thought we had no dogs in the United States.

All the steamers bound for the Klondike stopped at Fort Wrangel, which was quite a sizable town at this time, being the port of entry for the Stickeen and Teslin Lake route. It was a smaller edition of Skagway, and its chief occupation was fleecing the Cheechakos.

There was a man on board with his sixteen-year-old son. In the few hours that the boat stopped at Fort Wrangel he lost all his money at some bunko game. The son, having more sense than the old man, stayed on board. The father on coming back to the boat was very much cut up about the affair and told his son what had happened.

Without saying a word to his father, the boy went to one of the passengers and borrowed a six-shooter. He went ashore and walked into the gambling-hall where his father had lost all his money. The old man couldn't have done this because, having lost his money, he was a marked man and would probably have been killed by a 'booster' if he ever could have got near the table where he had been fleeced.

But the boy walked up to the table, deliberately drew his gun, and pointed it at the dealer. The man was very much astonished, not connecting the situation with the father's loss. Even here a grown-up couldn't have accomplished what the boy did. He informed the gambler that he wanted his father's money back, and the boosters thinking it a good joke on the dealer, and the dealer himself having a sense of humor, the boy received the full

amount. The boy then put up his gun, turned, and went out of the saloon, with evidently no thought of the harm that might come to him. I think his courage had as much to do with his safety as anything.

The most popular port of entry to the Klondike now was Skagway, which was at the head of the new White or Moore's Pass. This town was a fierce rival of the older Dyea which led to Chilkoot Pass. While on the boat we heard of the fatal snow-slide in Chilkoot Pass, and this decided me to take the White Pass route. This is thirty-five miles long as against the twenty-three miles of Chilkoot Pass, but they told me it was much easier, now that the trail had been beaten through. This is about the route the railway now follows. It would have been impossible to make a packtrail over Chilkoot Pass without tremendous expense, but it was feasible to make one over White Pass. By the time we reached Skagway they had a trail finished to the summit, and a toll-gate was installed. This was my first impression of the changes that were coming over the Klondike, and I cannot see a toll-gate to-day without wanting to smash it.

About this time a young woman arrived in Skagway and started a laundry, where she did remarkably well. In one of the epidemics she acted as volunteer nurse and won the respect of everybody. The Colonel of the North-West Mounted Police complimented her by calling her the 'Belle of Skagway,' and she was much pleased with her title, but when an old gum-boot miner in the innocence of his heart called her 'Skagway Belle,' he couldn't understand why he got his ears boxed.

Since it was already so late in the spring the trail on the coast side of the range was nothing but mud, jammed up by the incessant traveling, night and day, of pack-trains and men. It was impossible to drag stuff over this surface with dog-teams. This was rather a poser to me, as I had only five dollars in the world when I landed in Skagway and it would cost over a hundred to get my outfit hauled over the pass. I didn't exactly see how it was going to be done.

There was a man on board with a large outfit and no draft animals, and he was wondering how he could handle it after he got on top of the pass and snow began. So we made an agreement by which he was to hire one of the regular pack-trains to take my stuff up to the summit of the pass, while I was to use my dogs to take his outfit down the other side and onto the lakes.

This was my first experience of driving dogs in traffic, even with an empty sled. All of my driving had been in places where there was anything but a crowd. The trail was literally jammed with a double line of people. Furthermore, the miserable, onehorned bull was getting into everybody's way. As the pack-train had gone ahead with my stuff on it, my dogs and I and our empty sled confronted the toll-gate with no money to pay our way through. As luck would have it, I met the empty pack-train that had taken my stuff up, now coming back, and we bluffed the toll-gate keeper into letting us pass. It was a clear case of bluff. Being on the American side it worked: it wouldn't have prevailed on the Canadian side where they had the North-West Mounted Police behind them.

Almost at the summit the snow started and you stepped from mud onto a hard beaten trail. There was quite a large settlement on the summit. A bad epidemic of spinal meningitis was' raging on this trail which took a great many lives. Also Soapy Smith and his gang accounted for a good many men.

There have been a good many stories told of the career and death of Soapy Smith at Skagway, and every tale seems to differ from all others. Where Soapy came from I don't know, but he was the leader of about the most desperate gang of criminals that Alaska has ever known. They preyed on the men going in and out of the Klondike by way of Skagway and White Pass, and they completely ran the town of Skagway.

Soapy himself was a tall man with a heavy black beard, an intelligent face, keen gray eyes, and a sense of humor. He was a bad man, but he wasn't as bad as his gang, who would stop at nothing. A good many of the gang were not known as such, which made it dangerous for a man to speak his mind in Skagway, as he might be talking to one of the gang without knowing it. These accomplices would always agree with what you said; but you would be sandbagged, or killed in some other way, before morning.

Conditions grew so bad in Skagway that nobody trusted anybody else. This was the reason that Soapy was able to break up a meeting that was held in one of the large dance-halls by the so-called respectable element, to see if the town couldn't be cleaned up. The man who was speaking at the time suddenly stopped and looked over the heads of the other men, whereupon every one turned around to see what had happened, only to find Soapy leaning against the door with his Winchester in the hollow of his arm, smiling at them.

His first words were, 'Gentlemen, I think you had better disperse.' A good many of the men were armed and as brave as Soapy, but none of them dared reach for his gun because he was afraid of being shot by his nearest neighbor who might be one of Soapy's men. And they all filed out past him, some of them joking with him as they went out. Any one knowing the state of affairs in Skagway at the time would appreciate this.

Later another meeting was held on the end of Moore's Wharf. This wharf was long and built in the form of a T. There were shacks huddled up close on either side of the entrance. The place was chosen so that Soapy could not repeat his performance. Two men were to be chosen by ballot to keep guard over the entrance to the wharf, as this was the only place of real danger, and any disturbance there would give ample warning to the meeting at the end.

One man had already been chosen, when a stranger volunteered to be the second man, with the remark that he cared nothing about their meeting, but he had a little business to settle with Soapy, and that the latter would never get by him alive. Everybody was satisfied except the other guard, who had already been chosen. However, the two men were installed on either side of the entrance to the wharf, with their backs to the buildings, facing each other. In this way they could watch up and down the street and had no fear of an attack from the rear.

The meeting had hardly started when Soapy drew near with a sawed-off shotgun, loaded with chopped lead-pipe. What he had meant to do no one knows, but, as he suddenly approached from the direction that the stranger was guarding, he was shot, without a challenge, through the breast.

The tale was told that Soapy discharged both barrels of his shotgun into the stranger. The truth is that Soapy was instantly killed and did not even discharge his gun. The stranger and what was left of Soapy were taken into the adjoining shacks. Soapy was on exhibition and some pictures taken of him. Two coffins were buried. But one was filled with rocks, and the stranger was hurried out secretly on one of the boats, so that Soapy's gang could not revenge themselves on him.

The minute it became known that Soapy was dead, his whole gang started up over the pass to get into British territory. A good many men who were not suspected went with them, pretty well proving that they belonged to the gang. The North-West Mounted Police were ready for them. They were turned back, and most of them gave themselves up. Bowers, Soapy's right-hand man, was the first to come back and fairly blackguarded himself out of being lynched. What was done with these men I never heard.

It was discovered that Soapy was married and that his wife was living in the States somewhere. After hearing the news of Soapy's death, she arrived in Skagway with two children, showing letters from Soapy in which he posed to her as a model husband and claimed that the money he kept sending her was made by him at mining. A purse was raised for her and her children by the citizens of Skagway. This story was told me by one of Soapy's gang, two years afterwards, and as far as I know is correct.

I knew Soapy personally and was proud of it, but, as I had no money and knew enough to keep my mouth shut, I was absolutely safe. Soapy, I know, had done a good deal of charity work, giving to one man and another if he really needed it. He was also very hospitable. His gambling-saloon was of course crooked, and the men under him were the worst crooks of all.

I remember one night seeing a man knocked down with the butt of a gun because he tried to explain to a friend how a certain beehive game was worked. Bowers, sauntering up behind him, stopped to listen to the conversation. When the man got through, he slowly drew his gun, and taking hold of the muzzle struck the man over the head with the butt. He then mildly asked one of the boosters to pull the man into the street.

During Soapy's regime a Swede happened to come to town from the interior with two thousand dollars in a gold-sack. Not knowing the state of affairs that prevailed, he went into the saloon, called for a drink, and put his gold-sack on the bar. After weighing out the price and putting it into the till, Bowers, who was tending the bar, remarked what a nice lot of gold he had in the sack. Continuing, he informed him how tough the town was and what a chance he ran of losing it, and advised him to leave it for safekeeping.

The Swede said he guessed he was able to take care of his own gold without losing it. Whereupon Bowers said, 'I don't think you are,' and cracked

him over the head with his gun. When the Swede came to, he cried out for justice, and was informed by the sympathizers that he had got just what he deserved by showing his money in Skagway. This was seen by a number of people who didn't care to interfere.

A deputy sheriff trying to do his duty was shot by Bowers, who didn't know who the man was. As the sheriff fell on his face, Bowers rolled him over to see whom he had killed, and, recognizing him, made the remark, ' I've killed the sheriff. Ain't that too bad !' Like everything else of this kind, nothing was done about it.

Of course conditions are unusual when enormous crowds of men, coming from all parts of the world, stream through a country in which there is practically no law or organization of any kind. The place was supposed to be under civil law, but that, in the early history of our country, meant no law at all. Any crime could be committed with impunity, and might made right.

The cruelty to animals was something terrible, and strange to say it was not practiced by the so-called rougher element who knew something about handling animals. The worst men were those who in former life were supposed to be of the better class. These men lost their heads completely. I have seen horses that had stuck in the mud abandoned and left to die. They were not even killed, in the rush to hurry on.

Men left valuable stuff on the horses' backs, not even stopping to unpack it. I saw one man who, after having made his way over the pass and onto the lakes, where it was all smooth going, got mad at his dogs, and, after beating them with a club till they were unable to go, began with the leader and pushed them all down a water-hole under the ice. He cut the traces of the last dog, leaving himself absolutely stranded with no means of locomotion. Then he sat down and cried.

It is no use harrowing the reader with further details of these acts of brutality, and it would mean almost endless repetition. The whole trail was strewn with dead animals of all kinds, and there was no interference with this cruelty whatsoever. The unwritten law of the trail seemed to be, 'Mind your own business.' In any case it would have been of little use to interfere, as you would have to do it fifty times a day. Furthermore, when men are in this state of mind it would be necessary to kill them first in order to stop what they were doing. To show you how much we minded our own business, I remember seeing a dead man with the back of his head smashed in and every one passing him and paying no attention. This was probably the work of Soapy and his gang. The brutality and lawlessness, I am sorry to say, were practically all on the American side of the line. It seemed almost as if, after stepping off the mud into the snow, which was near the boundary, everything was absolutely changed. Here a little bunch of North-West Mounted Police held sway. How they managed it goodness only knows, but they did.

The little group of police in this part of the country were the pick of the Mounted, themselves a picked body. They handled the situation, not by brute force, which would have been a physical impossibility, but by common sense,

tact, and fearlessness. A single policeman would rise to an emergency and make his own law for the time being, and they were always Johnny on the spot.

Of course they were backed by Canada, and Canada was backed by England, and we all knew it and they knew it. I cannot say too much in favor of this wonderful body of men, and I think it would be absolutely impossible to find their equal. I am a good American, but I take off my hat to the Canadian North-West Mounted Police as I knew them.

The way down from the summit of the pass to the lakes would have been very easy if we had only had elbow room, but the crush was terrible. The traffic was crowded into two narrow lines, one going up and one coming down, with only room for single horses hitched to narrow sleighs. This narrow black line of double traffic extended up over the white mountain as far as the eye could reach. The two lines were so near together at the narrowest places that men drawing a hand-sled would almost brush elbows with the line going past in the opposite direction.

All kinds of animals were used here. Dogs predominated, but there were horses, mules, donkeys, a team of angora goats hitched dog-fashion, and my old friend the one-horned bull. Sometimes there would be a blockade somewhere ahead and we would have to wait for hours. Then at last the line would move slowly on, to stick again after a few feet.

I saw one funny thing happen here. Of course it took a good many relays to get our outfits down to the lakes. On one of these trips I saw a team of black Newfoundland dogs coming down loaded. Our friend the one-horned bull was going up with two empty sleds hitched to him. They happened to meet in one of the narrowest places on the trail, where the mountain rose sheer on the dogs' side, and dropped down almost perpendicularly on the bull's side. As luck would have it, the only horn the bull had was on the dogs' side.

When about midway of the team, the bull made a lunge at the dogs, caught the traces under his horn, and lurched back, stubbing his toe. Both outfits rolled down the hillside together. The drivers, of course, were walking behind their animals, and, having everything suddenly cleared between them, jumped together and struck a few blows. They then sat down and slid after their teams. Of course the line couldn't stop for a little thing like this and went on, but afterwards I saw both teams on the trail again.

This narrow trail was about eight miles long. Then it widened out like a funnel into a multitude of trails, and we all had plenty of room. Down near Lake Bennett, at the bottom, we had to cross a swamp for several miles. This was very bad for the dogs as it was so deeply cut up by t he horses. The man I happened to be with was a big Scotchman called Cameron. At first sight he was a terrible man. He not only stood six feet six and weighed two hundred and forty pounds, but he had a voice like a bull and he could put on the most ferocious expressions I ever saw on any man.

But Cameron was a good friend, got me through a lot of scrapes, and never got into trouble himself. He knew his stock in trade and worked it for

all it was worth, but underneath he had one of the kindest hearts I have ever known. One morning he filled both his side-pockets with cartridges, went back on the trail, and spent most of the day shooting abandoned horses.

We camped near Lake Bennett for several days, relaying supplies. The dog-people combined and cut a new trail across the swamp at some distance from the horse trails, which were nothing but mud and snow, pounded to pieces, and were almost impossible to travel on. Our fifteen or twenty tents went up at the beginning of it, and our one ambition was to keep the horses from starting down our new trail.

When we were all asleep, a horseman tried to sneak down past us, but was discovered by Cameron who happened to go outside the tent at the time. I shall never forget the roar that woke me up. Rushing out I found Cameron standing over rather a small man brandishing an axe high in the air, with his most terrifying expression on, and bellowing at the top of his lungs. It was only a question of a few seconds, it seemed to me, before every man in the encampment rushed to the rescue of our trail with every weapon he could get hold of. Rifles, shotguns, bowie-knives, axes appeared from every direction to threaten the one poor man. To say he was scared is putting it mildly. And he certainly was glad to escape back to his own trail. This was the only trouble we had.

After we got onto the lake itself the traveling was perfect. All the snow had melted and the ice was soft enough so that it didn't hurt the dogs' feet. With thirteen dogs in two strings I hauled forty-five hundred pounds of stuff on seven sleds. These sleds had to be pulled close together, and had to be started off with a jerk like a freight train.

A little sawmill had started up here. We bought enough lumber to build two boats rather than stop to whip-saw it out for ourselves. We loaded the lumber onto the sleds, and with a favorable wind down the lakes we decided to rig up impromptu sails. All the way down Lake Bennett and Tagish Lake we had excellent sledding, with sails hoisted. Occasionally a stronger puff of wind would come up, and then a man would jump on his sled, uncouple his dogs, and ride.

Some of the races between single hand-sleds were very amusing, but, as it was impossible to steer, the sleds were all the time running into each other and capsizing. The races didn't always go to the biggest craft. This was all a pleasant let-down after the strenuous work on the pass, and every one was goodnatured and cheerful.

It was here that I made a trip of a hundred and ten miles with my dogs without a stop. The latter part of this long trip, as the weather was warm, I slept a good part of the time on my sled. The trip was up the lakes and back again, and, as the dogs had been there before and knew where they had to go, they didn't turn off on the innumerable side trails that led to men's camps along the way. They kept up a steady trot the entire distance. The journey goes to show what the Eskimo dog can do.

At the foot of Tagish Lake we decided to stop and build our boats, as the river was open between Tagish and Mud Lakes. We built two, one for our-

selves and one for our dogs, loaded ourselves in, and sailed down the river to Mud Lake which was still frozen over. The river had cut quite a distance into the lake, and we had to go some way through slush-ice till the surface was firm enough to hold us and the boats.

This was bad footing. While we were getting our boats out, we kept falling into the water, and it was common to see a man disappear up to his hips. The ice was very thick, but rotten, and it would push down under us, but not break off like brittle ice. All we had to do to save ourselves was to put out our hands. But Cameron, with his great weight, absolutely refused to let go of the boat and was the greatest sufferer.

Away from the influence of the inlet the ice was firmer, and would hold a horse-team at night. A team of two mules, hitched tandem in front of a string of sleds, stayed too long on the lake after it began to warm up in the morning, and the whole outfit went down with the exception of the two men. It was never seen again. The heavy sleds pulled the mules to the bottom, and the ice closed in at once over the hole so you could hardly see where they had gone.

As it was warm weather, the two men lost even their coats, which they had tucked under the lashropes on the sleds. They were absolutely destitute. But inside of an hour men had helped them out, one with a coat, one with a sled, one with bacon, flour, and so on, until they had a complete outfit and were able to make another start.

We rigged up our sleds like a tricycle. The boats were loaded on top, and with the dogs running, all our goods inside the boats, the mast stepped and sails set, we went down the lake in fine shape. As we could steer the front sled we went in the right direction. The only way we could stop was by letting the sail down. The little dog-boat was trailing behind on its own separate sled.

Just before getting to Fifty-Mile River, which connects Mud Lake with Lake La Barge, we let down the sail, stopped the boat, loaded the dogs into the dog-boat and tied them in, waited till the wind stiffened with good force, and then with a rush sailed out into the open current. We must have been going ten or fifteen miles an hour when we struck the open water and started sailing down the lake. Then came a mad rush to cut loose the sleds and get them out from under the boats and on board.

We had no further excitement until we reached the Canyon and the White Horse Rapids. Here we caught up with a large crowd of people who were taking their stuff around the rapids. The Mounted Police had taken charge here and would not let any one run the rapids with an overloaded boat, or run at all unless he could give some kind of proof that he was used to river work.

Some men were permanently camped here, acting as pilots, and were making very good money, all the way from five to a hundred dollars a trip, according to the boat and what they thought a man could stand. As I knew something about river work and wanted to earn a little money, I acted as pilot for some time. Quite a number of men were drowned that year, but I didn't actually see any.

When we reached the rapids we turned the dogs out of our little dog-boat and cut it loose. It went through the rapids all by itself. One man coming in with a large number of barrels of whiskey threw them all into the river at the head of the canyon. The men at the foot of the rapids caught them, and I think he didn't lose a single barrel. Here I met Peter Bernard, whom I had left at home in New England on the farm. The last I had heard of him was a report that he had died of exposure somewhere in the Arctic.

The next thing of importance on this trip was crossing Lake La Barge. This was the largest of the lakes and notoriously windy. As all the boats were heavily laden all hands waited till the wind was favorable, when they could sail down in a few hours, accomplishing what would have taken them two or three days to do by rowing. For that matter the scows were not built for rowing.

More than a thousand boats had accumulated the day we started. When we were halfway down the lake the wind dropped and every one waited for it to come up again. The lake was crowded with boats of all descriptions.

A scow which was near our boat contained a man and his wife and another man. This scow was decked fore and aft and the woman was standing on the after-deck, when a sudden gust of wind caused her to lose her balance and fall overboard, there being no rail. The unattached man ran forward to let down the sail, leaving the husband to rescue his wife: but he, losing his head, began to run up and down the deck yelling for help.

A boat lying near by contained two men. While one of these was fumbling with his sail, the steersman jumped overboard, swam over to the girl, and brought her back to his boat, where they were both dragged on board by his partner. The scow in the meantime had drifted away. This was rather a plucky thing to do, as the lake was full of ice and the man was pretty well exhausted.

The partner then rowed his boat over to the husband's scow, where the woman informed her husband that she had had all of HIM she wanted, and that 'if this man will take me, he can have me!' The man gave her one look (she was a very pretty girl) and said, 'Yes, I'll take you!' Whereat his partner, who was back on the rowing seat, made a kick about a woman coming in between their long friendship.

At this the rescuer, drawing his six-shooter from under the canvas that covered their goods, where the guns were kept in readiness for game, dropped it on his partner, and informed him that the lady was under his protection now and he had nothing to say about it. Then, without taking his eyes or his sixshooter off his partner, he talked to the husband and told him to put the lady's effects into his boat, which was eventually done.

So much for men's friendships when a woman comes between! She eventually got a divorce from her husband, came back into the country, and married her rescuer. She had the admiration and he the envy of all the people who knew the circumstances.

to be continued...

From the Publisher

Pulling on my socks on a Sunday morning I'm a tad upset when I realize I have an audience. Someone is standing on the beach below my window. Quickly I move away from the wide expanse of glass and a view of the lake that stretches miles and miles toward the horizon. Cowering in a dark corner of the large room that serves as both a living room and a bedroom in our small cabin I wonder, "Did they see me?"

Of course it never occurs to me to pull the blinds before I begin dressing. Usually there's no one around, just a few birds, a neighborhood dog, or maybe a coyote or two. Other than that we have the beach pretty much to ourselves.

That could change. A few years back some folks here began talk about joining the small parcels of land set aside for public beach access to their own properties. They wanted to install a septic field or a well. They wanted more privacy, or they just wanted more.

Those requests sparked some heated arguments turning neighbour against neighbour. People who had been friends for 40 years suddenly were not speaking to each other. People who lived across the street from the waterfront homes felt threatened. How would they get to the beach if their pathway through the trees and over the sand dunes, an unmarked route only they and a few other residents knew, became private property?

The territorial government held public meetings to find out what people wanted. At those meetings officials made it clear that our sandy beach located only a half-hour drive from Whitehorse is a unique resource and must remain open to all. The government proposed better beach access and more parking lots and bigger playgrounds, even though the crowd of beach visitors grows smaller every year.

Still, government was willing to consider options to balance the rights of property owners with those of the public, so it struck a committee of volunteers to look into the matter. I am one of three beach residents on the committee.

You'd think that three people who love the beach as much as we do would be able to agree on the best way to protect and preserve this fragile wonder. We don't agree but it is not up to us to decide.

With some help from a consultant we mailed out a questionnaire to beach residents and invited input from the public. So far, the results indicate that our neighbours are as divided in their opinions as we are. Over the next few weeks the consultant, with input from committee members, will develop some options. Although the outcome is still uncertain, of this I am sure. In future people will have an easier time getting to the beach and I'll be pulling the blinds before I dress.