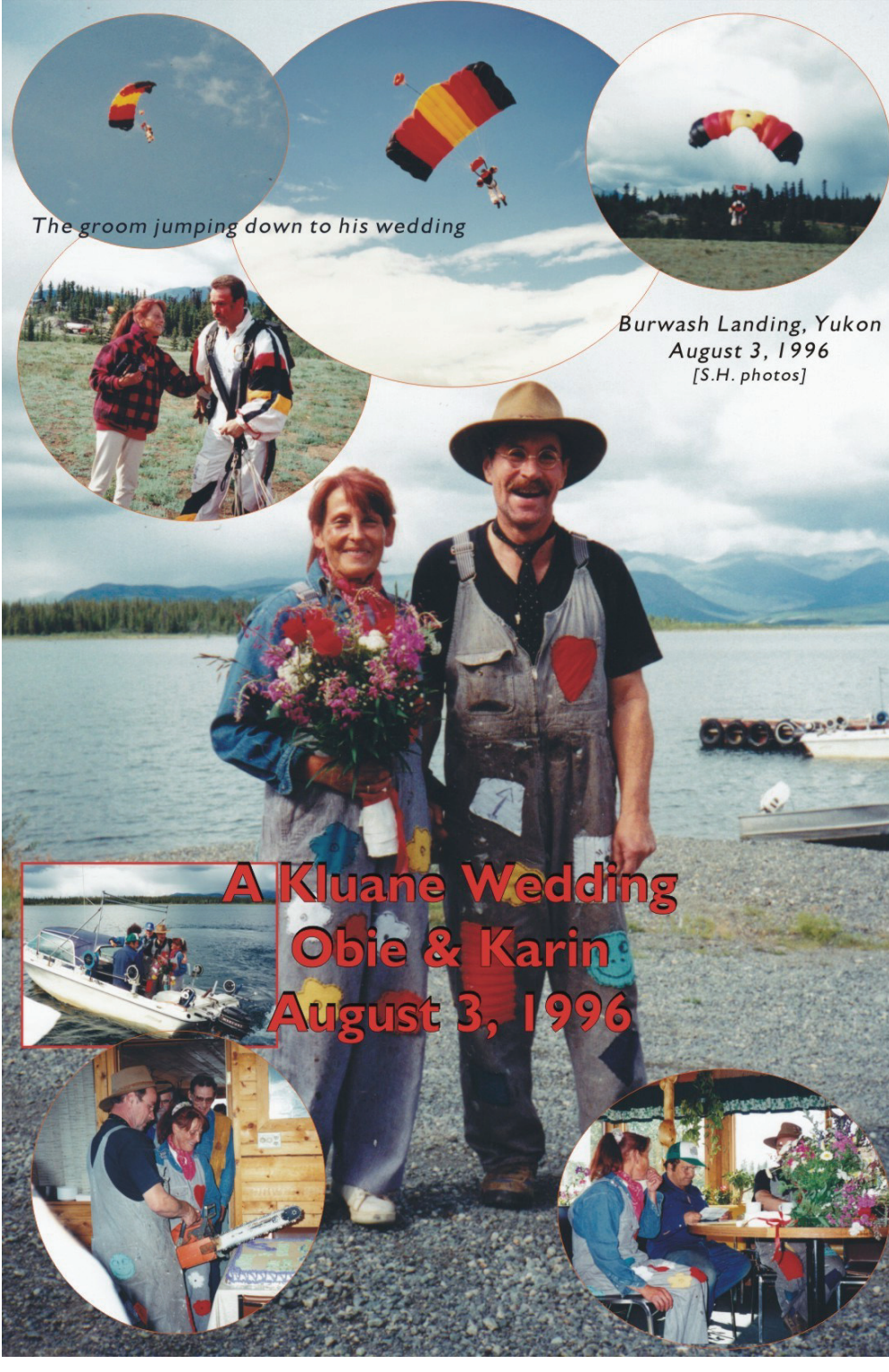
#2

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

Price: $3.95

**INSIDE: Hector Lang,
Whitehorse in 1952,
a trip along the South Canol Road,
a tall tale, photos, more...**


The groom jumping down to his wedding
Burwash Landing, Yukon
August 3, 1996
[S.H. photos]
A Kluane Wedding
Obie & Karin
August 3, 1996

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

Issue No.2
October, 1996

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

Cover photo: Chuck Walker with this year's moose; photo by Darwin Wreggitt

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From the Editor's Desk

In the last issue I tried to discourage subscriptions to this magazine. Publishing is just too tough a business to ever guarantee success (success means to keep publishing without going under). On the other hand, we are doing this on our own press and the last issue actually made a small profit. What an enjoyable time beckons for the next few years, getting all these great Yukon stories and photographs into print!

Darrell Hookey has promised to keep interviewing the unsung heroes of the North and we hope anyone with a story to tell will send it in—on tape, table napkins, or computer disk. In the next issue we will be running the most articulate personal account of the Gold Rush ever. Descendents of that person still live in the Yukon.

Last month an old prospecting friend of mine, Dennis Moore, dropped by the cabin here. He'd been in Venezuela for some years and oh the stories he had to tell. His stories recall the old days along the Yukon, before big government and environmentalists moved in.

Anyhow, Dennis told of a placer field in the jungle where about 60 men were digging for gold and diamonds. A flat-bottomed boat with three pretty ladies and a refrigerator arrived. The girls dragged the fridge onto the riverbank and plugged it into a portable generator. They stuck a sign on it—COLD BEER FOR SALE—and set up three little tents They left a week later with a small fortune.

He talked about how hundreds of miners would come out the gold and diamond fields to the towns along the coast where they would carouse and gamble till they went broke. The hookers financed the miners' return to work and would be repaid as soon as the boys got back to town. Compared to the mowing down of the forests to make way for farms and cities, these fellows do no damage at all.

In the last issue I mentioned a lost gold mine that four of us went looking for. Two of those fellows are dead now and the two survivors are in the photo yonder—me and Prospector Jim White.

I did a terrible thing to my old pal Jim: I wrote his obituary for the newspaper. It turned out that another Jim White had died. As you can see, this one is getting a little white around the ears, but he's still pretty chipper.

I've added on to the cabin here so as to make room for a collator. What's a collator? Well, this magazine comes off the old printing press and makes 13 stacks of paper, 2000 sheets high. They have to be sorted into bundles which are later folded, stapled and trimmed into Yukoner Magazines.

I found some old plywood and built a set of bins. Then I went to Horwood's Office Supply and bought four rubber fingers, the kind you use for counting money, which I don't have much of.

Anybody that walks in here is given a set of rubber fingers and bingo, he or she is now a collator.

It must work or you wouldn't be reading this page. Someday I'll have a spare 60 grand for a real collator, but in the meantime, this system works fairly well, as long as I don't lose all my friends.

In the next issue, I'll probably show a photo of this cabin, along with our half-Rotweiler, half-chicken dog named Pooper and the two de-masculated cats, Barf and Sneaky. Dianne is a little camera shy, but she'll probably relent and let me put her picture here too.

In the meantime, I hope you have your firewood in and your chimney cleaned.

Sam

The editor (left) and Prospector Jim White in the supermarket parking lot, two days after Jim was said to be dead.

WHITEHORSE IS HEAVEN FOR A SINGLE GIRL

By Jack Scott

FOUR OUT OF FIVE of the four thousand citizens of Whitehorse, capital city of the Yukon, have arrived there within the last ten years and there's never been a known case of love at first sight. Like a rare Gorgonzola, the real worth of this metropolis of the future growing from a shanty town takes time to appreciate.

Few frontier communities have gone through such agony of growth. The result is an onslaught to the eye that has caused many a new arrival to depart in panic by the next plane. Taxi drivers who meet incoming flights are hardened to expressions of disgust as their fares get a first close-up of the city.

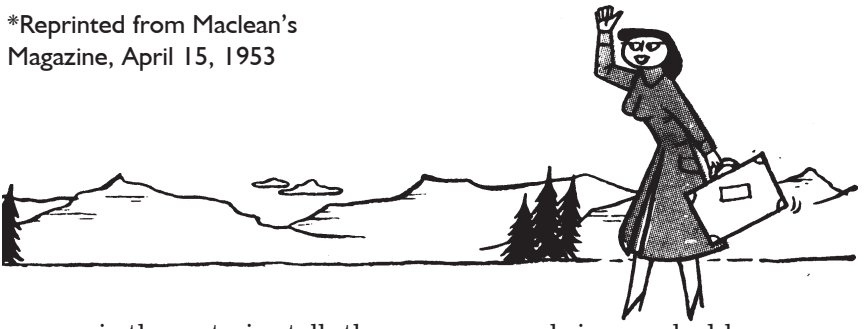
A typical first impression was that of Cecile McDonald, a winsome, auburn-haired, twenty-three-year-old sales clerk of Vancouver, who had saved money enough for a one-way ticket. Cecile is an example of the strangest kind of pioneer since the rush of '98. Each year since the war's end single girls by the hundreds have been making a pilgrimage to the Yukon from all parts of Canada.

While Cecile, like the others, speaks of "adventure" and "a change of scene," she admits also an awareness that the single female in Whitehorse holds an excellent bargaining position. It is one of the world's richest sources of bridegrooms. The latest census figures show that in the entire Yukon population of 9,096 the male outnumbers the female five to three.

Even these statistics palled as Cecile's taxi turned at the 919-mile post of the Alaska Highway, which borders the airport, swung down Two-Mile Hill and entered the city, sprawled on the flats between tan cliffs and the swift-running apple-green Yukon River.

Except when it's under the dry winter snow Whitehorse's colour motif is weathered grey wood, mud or dust. There seem to be no two structures which belong to the same school of architecture. Through the cab's windows Cecile saw ancient spruce log cabins built by prospectors half a century ago, tar-paper shacks with tar-paper outhouses and an occasional trim bungalow with Venetian blinds. There are shed like bunkhouses, square little hutches of imitation brick, Quonset huts, lean-tos of corrugated iron and false-fronted frame buildings. One log cabin known as the Yukon Sky-

*Reprinted from Maclean's Magazine, April 15, 1953



scraper is three stories tall, the upper rooms being reached by an open outside stairway.

There's not a blade of grass in the volcanic soil. Spruce and jackpine, their straight thin trunks talcumed with dust in summer, stand everywhere. Under them are the rusted hulks of trucks and bulldozers, oil drums, piles of salvaged lumber and piping.

Much of this debris is evidence of an invasion that might have killed a less hardy town. The pre-war Whitehorse had a population of four hundred and fifty. When forty thousand American soldiers and construction workers descended on it as a halfway base for the construction of the Alaska Highway they produced a town planner's nightmare. Whitehorse is still plucking away at the mess they left behind.

Cecile stepped from the cab in front of the Whitehorse Inn and asked the driver, "Which way is the main street?"

"This is it," the driver said.

That was eighteen months ago. Cecile is still in Whitehorse, a clerk in a dry-goods store at two hundred a month. Like many who trekked north to "make a fast buck and get out" she did neither. Like many another she discovered that Whitehorse, behind its grim facade, is a place of comfortable and even luxurious living by a gregarious people starting a solid future.

Whitehorse became an incorporated city in 1950 and became the Yukon's capital the next year. With a mayor and four-man council (and not a dime in the bank) it tries its best to act its new role.

Soon after the first hotel-room council meeting assessors set a value on hitherto tax-free property. Whitehorse's largest department store found its taxes hiked from $37 a year to $1500, its business license up from $150 to $566. An average of $60 taxes was set on the city's five hundred wildly assorted homes.

Outside privies and the sale of half lots are now outlawed. There are license fees for bicycles and dogs and a development blueprint with an area zoned optimistically for heavy industry. Work began last summer on a $1,670,000 Federal Building, costliest structure in the Yukon's history, and

the move of the territorial government from declining Dawson City in the north, is expected to be completed early next year.

The Federal Building is part of a five-million-dollar construction boom that's changing the face of Whitehorse. Last September a half-million-dollar school was opened, partly financed by the armed services whose children make up half its enrollment. Before the winter set in the steel was up for a seventy-thousand-dollar civic centre.

The new economy is based on military defence. At least half the population, in uniform or in civvies, is there because of the army and air force. Whitehorse is headquarters for the army's Northwest Highway System, which maintains the all-weather Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek, B.C., to the Alaska border. It is headquarters, too, for the RCAF-maintained Northwest Staging Route, the string of intermediate and emergency landing fields on the heavily traveled skyway to the Alaskan bases.

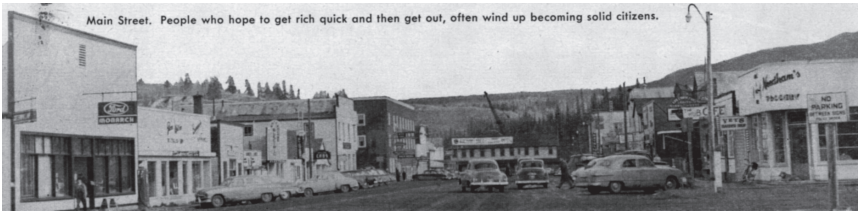
The two services are building spanking new suburbs in upper Whitehorse, the long wooded benchland overlooking the flats. On its crescent drives stand attractive bungalows and more than a hundred modern three bedroom duplexes for servicemen with families. Tenants have hauled in topsoil for lawns. Nearby is a half-million-dollar barrack block housing single men, and a mess building that seats five hundred. A headquarters' office block will complete the army's move from the flats.

There is no jealousy in the lower town where families pay up to eighty dollars a month for ancient three-room cabins. No merchant in the Yukon is unaware of a combined services' payroll of more than five million dollars.

Relations between the military and civilian population are amicable and interlocking. Meetings of the service clubs or school board may be attended by as many men in uniform as in business suits. Brigadier H. W. Love and Wing Commander C. L. Olsen turn up at the meetings of the ParentTeachers Association.

Each Saturday the Twelve-to-Two Club convenes in the army officers mess where the army plays host to the leading citizens. At one of these sessions Lt.-Col. M. C. Sutherland Brown, the senior highway engineer, glanced at his watch and departed hurriedly. He was late for his lecture to the Girl Guides.

Servicemen on the Outside, as Whitehorse refers to the rest of the world, are said to pale when informed of a Yukon posting, yet most soldiers


Main Street. People who hope to get rich quick and then get out, often wind up becoming solid citizens.

and airmen enjoy the life there. Many work at extra jobs when off duty. The childless wives of soldiers and airmen make up the city's most reliable labor pool.

Gene Lewicki, a lean voluble twenty-nine-year-old Army Service Corps private from Winnipeg, serves in his duty hours as a chauffeur and batman. In his own time he drives a new Pontiac sedan, for which he paid cash, and totes a bankbook that shows a five-figure account in savings. Lewicki's regular private's pay of $200 is augmented by an $87.50 "northern allowance." His wife Charlotte works as a stenographer for the British Yukon Navigation Company and brings home another $230 each month.

They live in a snug five-room home—"emergency married quarters" in the army's language—for which they pay just seventeen dollars. That includes furnishings, heat and utilities. They're in line for one of the new duplexes or—"permanent quarters"—that are springing up around them.

The Lewicki's' savings account illustrates the sort of opportunities that abound in Whitehorse. Because the city was without a newsstand they cashed a small nest egg in savings bonds and opened Mac's Newsstand. Business was brisk and last year they sold out for five thousand dollars.

Some civilians, too, are striking it moderately rich. Norman Chamberlist a gangling forty-two-year-old electrician who emigrated to Canada from England in 1948, is one. Eight months ago he drove into Whitehorse with seventy-six cents in cash. A two hundred - and - fifty - dollar bank loan started him in business. He found an empty store, talked the owner into giving him three months rent-free and lived in the rear. Today, as owner manager of Whitehorse Electric, he has nine men working for him.

"I'm here for good," he says. "This is the friendliest place in Canada. All a chap needs here is a little faith in the Yukon's future and a capacity for hard work."

Forty - year - old Norman Bain, a salesman in a Vancouver printing firm, raised seven thousand dollars and purchased the weekly *Whitehorse Star* in 1949.

"My friends in Vancouver thought I was crazy," he recalls. They would have thought him even crazier if they'd seen the Star building a small frame shack on Main Street, leaning rakishly with age. The paper had been published right there on a hand-pressure press since 1900 (in its back files may be found some of the first published verse of Robert W. Service, then a teller in the Bank of Commerce four doors down the street). The circulation was three hundred and fifty.

Bain introduced high-pressure circulation methods, decided on an editorial policy that occasionally antagonizes the higher echelons of the services. When he ran the story, complete with names, of a businessman accused of assaulting his wife, the businessman visited the Star office with knife in hand. The editor, who is more than six feet tall, chased his subscriber from the premises.

Last year Bain was elected a councillor, his *Star* grossed $68,000, and circulation topped seventeen hundred.

Wages are high in Whitehorse but the cost of living is an equalizer. National Employment officials discourage itinerant job-seekers. They advise single girls to locate a job in Edmonton first and wait there for an opening. Many come on anyway and several have thumbed their way up the Alaska Highway.

Prices are higher than Outside. Milk is fifty cents a quart. Lettuce flown in air freight from Seattle is forty cents a head. But this doesn't discourage the Whitehorse citizen, according to Jim Smith, the young president of the Board of Trade, who is manager of a groceteria. The per capita consumption of sirloins, he claims, is higher than it is anywhere in North America. Margarine is sold, but most of Whitehorse eats butter.

The Yukon Skyscraper is a familiar landmark. But big new buildings are going up on the bluff.

"People who were here before the war never complain about our prices," Smith notes. "Before the highway opened the way for the trucks our cost of living here was double what it is now. And don't forget that in 1896 a steak here cost you five dollars. The north has always paid the top price."

Workers who bring their families north are lucky to find a house of any kind and upkeep is punishing to a normal budget. Fuel oil, pumped in through the wartime Canol pipeline from tidewater at Skagway, Alaska, is thirty cents a gallon and the heating bill in some homes reaches seventy dollars a month in winter.

While the army homes are served by a water system, most civilians rely on unpredictable wells or buy water from Fred O'Toole who makes regular truck deliveries at thirty-five cents for twenty-five gallons.

The expanding population has attracted what one RCMP official calls "the usual undesirable frontier types" and the fifteen-man Whitehorse force under Inspector J. R. Steinhauer took six hundred and seventy-five cases before the courts in the first eight months of last year. Burglaries have so increased that the Whitehorse Inn, which prided itself on maintaining the tradition of the north without a lock on any door, sent an order to the Yale company. Apart from two "star boarders" in police cells, Steamboat Mary and Klootchie Jean, there is no organized prostitution.

In this lusty frontier atmosphere the consumption of grain spirits is an awesome spectacle and Whitehorse has what may be the most northerly branch of Alcoholics Anonymous. The city, with one movie house, has two beer parlors and four saloons that open in the morning at eleven and close at midnight. The citizen who buys his water by the pail may purchase for a dollar an Overproof Alexander (creme de cacao, cream and rum) in lounges where the lights are as soft and the decor as plush as any Montreal bistro.

On a Sunday morning last autumn after the Saturday-night opening of a new lounge, the Rev. Norman E. Tannar, youthful rector of the Old Log Church where Robert Service wrote his verse in the vestry, observed wryly that there were just thirty-five present in his congregation.

The lounges are changing the traditional drinking habits of the Yukon. In the earlier days bartenders in one saloon served mixtures so fiery that a whisk broom was provided with each drink so that the imbiber might brush himself off when he fell from the rail. Overproof rums are still popular in winter, but the new pioneers order more Pink Ladies.

One of the colorful bartenders is Cal Miller, an affable extrovert of thirty-six, member of Kiwanis and a leading citizen in a classless society. Noticing a certain uncouth turn of phrase among his clientele Miller purchased a gigantic porcelain piggy-bank and inaugurated a system of fines for ungentlemanly language at a rate of ten cents a word or three for a quarter. The proceeds go to charities.

Miller speaks of the nightly throngs in his dimly lit bar as a captive clientele. "There's nothing much to do here after dark except this," he observes. "Folks here have either got so much money that they can afford to stay and drink—or so little that they can't leave and must drink to forget it."

Whitehorse levies a local tax on all spirits. In addition to the regular government taxes there's a ten-cent tariff on wines and beer-by-the-dozen and twenty-five cents a bottle on hard liquor. This revenue is split three ways for schools, hospital and recreational facilities.

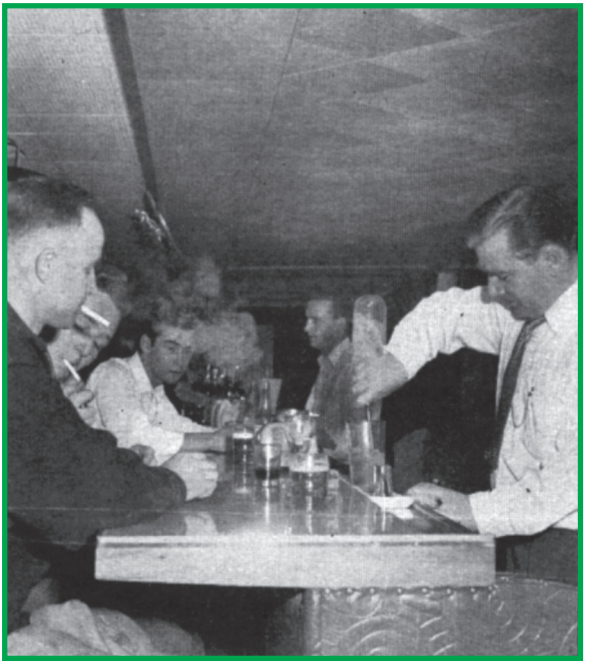
Newest and largest of the four bars is the Rainbow Cocktail Lounge, beside the Whitehorse Inn. At its opening a visitor might have met in an hour a cross section of the town.

At one table was Mayor Gordon Armstrong, a tall rawboned man who manages the Burns Meat Market next door. He admired the twenty-eight

foot bar, the room's uninhibited color scheme and the flowers flown in from Hawaii. "We've got a long way to go," he ruminated, "but we're gradually clearing things up. Our plan is on paper--streets, water, sewers. Haven't borrowed a cent and we're not in debt, but I suppose we'll have to borrow some day. Got this big, of course because of the military here. But even without them we've come too far now to stop growing. What we need most is a feeling of permanence."

At a nearby table, filling to capacity a bucket chair of blond wood upholstered in mauve nylon, sat T. C. Richards, owner of the Inn, the lounge itself and, as Yukon representative for Burns and Company, the mayor's boss. T. C. is Whitehorse's most fabled character and dresses the part. He wore a wide-brimmed pearl-grey Stetson tilted well back, grey silk shirt, grey gabardine suit, grey suede shoes and a cravat with a cubist pattern.

"Been here thirty-seven years now," he said, "thirty-seven years too long. Came up here for P. Burns to kill cattle and I still represent the firm. I'm a man of no ambition. Get drunk when I want, have a holiday when I want."



Cal Miller mixes drinks in one of four saloons. Today's pioneers ask for Pink Ladies, not redeye.

Many stories have been told of Richards acquiring the Inn from its former Japanese owner over a poker table but T.C. himself seems vague about details. "I wouldn't say I won it," he said recently, "but I did take it over after a game. Blackjack, as I recall it. Those were the days," he added. "We kept the liquor in the safe and the money under the counter."

Lloyd Camyre, a thickset dark complexioned man who manages the lounge for Richards, recalls that until 1946 Ace-Away, a three-dice game flourished in several clubs. Camyre claims that an article in Maclean's caused the RCMP to close them. There are sporadic floating - crap - game revivals, but no more permanent clubs.

"We had our best games when the American speculators came north in the postwar years to buy war surplus," Camyre recalls. "You could get faded for twelve thousand almost any night. In the earlier days the boys used to dig into their pokes for gold dust. Last time I saw anything like that was when a fellow we call 'Cock-Dice' Oley Henderson lost his cash and produced nuggets worth six hundred and fifty. Lost them, too."

Among the thinning ranks of those who remember the earliest days of Whitehorse are Mr. and Mrs. George Black. George Black was six times commissioner of the Yukon and represented the territory several years as Conservative MP and later as Speaker of the House. Today at eighty he is a ramrod-straight man who still practices law from a small office to the rear of his home. His wife, Martha, is eighty-seven. Eighteen years ago, when illness forced her husband to retire temporarily from politics, Mrs. Black took his place. She was approaching seventy when she sat for the first time in the House of Commons.

The windows of the Blacks' white cottage gaze across the river (properly the Lewes, but commonly called the Yukon) where George and Martha having survived the Chilkoot Pass, rode the fast current north to Dawson City and the promise of gold. A short walk along the river bank are the wild waters of Miles Canyon, the whirlpool known as "the Squaw" and the foaming White Horse Rapids. Two dozen men lost their lives in this angry stretch of the river in the first summer of the gold rush.

The town at first stood on the east bank and was called Closeleigh. It was moved across the river and took its present name when the narrow gauge railway arrived from Skagway to link up with the paddle-wheelers which had started two years earlier to run between Whitehorse and Dawson City.

Today Whitehorse, aware of its reliance on the army and air force, is anxious to justify its existence on other grounds. The recently adopted coat of arms, showing four modes of transportation grouped around a white horse, is a reminder of the city's strategic importance as "the hub of the north."

Lately Whitehorse has become more conscious of the tourist dollar and thus increasingly aware that Robert W. Service was a local boy. The cabin of Sam McGee, hero of Service's poem, "The Cremation of Sam McGee," still stands and the IODE has taken it over as a museum. Sam himself died quietly in Calgary twelve years ago. He was not cremated.

Some Whitehorse businessmen think the city's real hope of permanence lies in mining and there are frequent rumors of a smelter being built. Even without a smelter the city is supply base of a mining district of eighty-nine thousand square miles.

Placer and quartz operations on the Yukon creeks are still taking out millions of dollars in gold that escaped the crude methods of the early prospectors. Two hundred and seventy miles to the north the once-aban-

doned town of Mayo is booming from the Keno Hill mines. The biggest of these is United Keno, the world's largest silver-lead mine, which employs five hundred men.

Whitehorse is excited, too, by the prospects at Quill Creek, two hundred miles to the west, where more than a thousand claims were staked last summer. Quill Creek was overlooked for years until a sample brought in to be assayed for copper was found to be heavy with nickel. Hudson Bay Mining , owners of Flin Flon, have optioned property and are making tests.

All of this contributes to the determined optimism with which Whitehorse looks beyond its shanties of today to the bright promise of the future.

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Amalie Young on Main Street, Whitehorse, Rendezvous 2005 (SH photo).

The house that Fred built...and rebuilt

By Dianne Green

Fred Doehle remembers 1982 as the toughest of his 47 years in the Yukon.

On February 25th that year a fire levelled his home at the present site of the Lakeview Marina. It was his birthday. Doehle remembers driving home from Whitehorse along the south Alaska Highway at about 9:00 p.m.

"As I came around the end of the lake I saw a big orange glow in the sky," he says, sipping tea in the dining room of his new Marsh Lake home.

Doehle had no insurance to cover his losses after the fire. Not only was he homeless, his business had gone up in smoke as well. The big frame building with the panoramic view of Marsh Lake had been the cornerstone of a commercial venture that Doehle had worked on for seven years.

In 1975, shortly after he sold his Whitehorse plumbing business, Doehle pushed a road from the Alaska Highway through dense bush to a huge stone outcrop at the water's edge. There he built an RV park, a marina, and ten cabins.

Marsh Lake's Lakeview Marina before satellite TV.

In his spare time, Doehle worked on his house, which included a store upstairs and public washrooms and a laundramat on its lower level. He applied for a liquor licence and planned to add 10 motel rooms.

Doehle and his son Bill had lived in the house for 1-1/2 years when it burned. The fire started when a wind came up, fanning some ashes from the fireplace, until they burst into flames. The ashes had been left on the back porch.

The fire couldn't have happened at a worse time. The economic recession of the early 1980s had reached the Yukon. Doehle recalls how difficult it was to raise the money he needed to rebuild.

"The banks had suffered some losses and didn't want to lend money. You couldn't sell anything. Nobody was buying real estate as an investment. You could earn more by putting your money in the bank. The federal government was guaranteeing bonds at 19 per cent. It was the best way of killing a country there ever was."

Using his cash reserves, Doehle did enough rebuilding to restore services for the RV Park. At the same time, he framed in 10 motel rooms above the washrooms and laundramat. Then his money ran out.

"I had some land in B. C. that I sold at a $40,000 loss. I also sold a house I owned on Tagish lake at a loss," he says.

Doehle wanted to finish building and open the motel, restaurant and bar before his liquor license expired.

"I let the floor sit for 1/1/2 years. I closed in the windows at the end of November 1983. That winter I worked on finishing the inside."

The Lakeview Marina, as it now stands, opened in June 1984. At the same time, Len Sumner, a contractor who had worked with Doehle on the

Lakeview Marina from the air.

building, constructed a dike in the bay below the big rock and moved the docking area to a more sheltered location.

The Lakeview Marina complex sits on eleven acres of prime recreational property. Doehle had had his eye on the site for some time before he was able to lease it.

As an employee of Canadian National Telecommunications, he became familiar with the Alaska Highway corridor and saw the potential of the Marsh Lake area. Doehle was one of a small army of tradesmen who built staff housing for CNT employees and their families who lived along the telephone line. For most of its length, the line followed the highway. There were CNT repeater stations every 100 miles from Grande Pairie, Alberta to the Alaska border. Doehle worked at most of them.

Born in Saskatchewan, Doehle came to the Yukon in 1949. Following his work with CNT, he became a partner in a Whitehorse plumbing and heating business. After three years, he left that business and worked for various employers including the Canadian Airforce and the Yukon government. In 1966, he started Fred's Plumbing and Heating, a Whitehorse business that still bears his name.

In 1970 or 1971, he built an A-frame cabin on a 200 by 200 foot lot at Old Constabulary Beach on Marsh Lake. Soon others came and started building. Development along the beach proceeded in a haphazard manner until the government stepped in and re-surveyed.

The new lots were much smaller. Doehle was one of three owners who were able to keep the 200 by 200 foot lots they had staked originally. Nonetheless, he felt hemmed in and began looking for a more secluded piece of property.

He already knew about the spot where the Marina is now but he wanted to avoid a repeat of what had happened at Old Constabulary Beach. He knew if he pushed a road through to the lake the area would soon become crowded.

"I wanted a bigger piece of ground but to get anything bigger I knew I had to do something commercial," he explains.

Doehle managed to lease a large parcel of land with over 2500 feet of waterfront on a point. At the time, there was no land for sale at Marsh Lake. Only short-term leases were available. The federal government put a moratorium on the sale of land pending the outcome of a proposal to dam the Taiya River in Alaska. The Frobisher Dam project, as it was called, would have supplied power for an aluminium smelter at Skagway, Alaska. Also, it would have flooded the chain of lakes that had provided a gateway to the Klondike gold fields in 1898. Marsh Lake would have risen 60 feet, to the level of the present Lakeview Marina restaurant floor. The Alaska Highway would have been underwater. The Canadian government rejected the proposal in January 1953 but the moratorium on land sales stood for another 30 years.

With the opening of new residential subdivisions at Marsh Lake in the

1980s, more people built year-round homes in the area. The Lakeview Marina provided essential services to a growing number of "bush people" and retired folk.

The bar, restaurant and laundramat became a gathering place for people who came to do laundry, take showers, use the telephone and take a break from their own cooking. In those days, there was no water delivery to the subdivisions, and wells drilled in an attempt to get water often didn't produce. People rigged up their own water trucks, which they drove to the Marina and filled using a garden hose hooked up to the Marina's water system. On a winter's night, it was common to see an unattended watertruck filled to overflowing and iced over as the owners sat warming themselves in the bar. Then there were the vehicles which never quite managed to negotiate the icy overflow at "truck trap creek" on the trip back out to the Alaska highway.

Fred Doehle

In 1986, Doehle turned the business over to his son Bill, and daughter Laurie. The younger Doehles and their spouses, Gary and Melody, waited tables, pumped gas, cooked meals, served drinks, took telephone messages and listened to the mid-winter woes of their neighbours. They hosted Christmas and Halloween parties and community meetings where people rallied to get telephone service and a firehall.

Now the Marsh Lake community has come of age. The bush people are raising families, driving new cars and commuting to jobs in town. Earlier this year the Doehle family sold the Lakeview Marina. The younger Doehles felt that, after ten years, the business needed new energy and ideas. Also, they wanted to spend more time with their families. The new owners are Dwayne Holt and Ian Stallabrass.

Fred Doehle looks wistful as he talks about the sale. The Marina has been a part of his life for 20 years, so it's not easy to let go. He wishes the new owners well and keeps busy with new building projects. One of these is his own new house just down the road from the A-frame he built 25 years ago. The new place has big windows, high ceilings and brown siding. It looks quite a bit like the Lakeview Marina. ¤

Hector the Bridge Builder

The Story of Hector Lang

By Darrell Hookey

An appreciation of geography and world history backs up some pretty strong opinions and he's given to expressing these opinions in a confident manner. A lifetime of hard, honest work gives him that right.

Hector has never been afraid of hard work. He chased hard jobs all over the Yukon building piled bridges. And he was smart about it, too. While other construction companies factored in costs for a camp cook and foreman, he and his partner, Gunnar Nilsson, went in with a small, reliable crew. Scavenged materials, a second-hand crane and logs cut at the site was all they needed.

They built over 70 bridges covering every road in the Yukon. But we'll never know just how tough it was because Hector doesn't belly ache about such things.

Not even a Yukon winter would slow him down. If there was work to do, he and Gunnar would just bring in the steamer and melt the ground.

The son of a learned man, Hector has a university degree himself in agriculture. But he liked heavy construction and he yearned for a job that would find him tired by the end of the day.

After service as a naval officer in the Second World War, Hector decided it was time to move in with his family fulltime. He had met Margaret Campbell, an army nurse, through a friend. He knew her three years before "pitching heavy woo" and finally marrying her in February of 1942.

Margaret and their two daughters had been living in a re-modelled garage on her father's farm near Edmonton when he came back from the war. But, like so many other servicemen of his day, he was unprepared for "civvie street". He took a job selling construction equipment, drank too much and fell into debt after trying his hand at his own business.

He "woke up" and realized he now had four kids, a wife and

Naval officer Hector Lang

mother-in-law relying on him. He told Margaret it would take 10 years of hard work to get on top of his troubles and perhaps start a business again.

There was no doubt about it, he would work in heavy construction whenever and wherever he could.

The family moved into a trailer and travelled from dam to bridge to building from Calgary to Edmonton to Cold Lake. He never missed a shift in those 10 years and worked so many 12-hour days "it would frighten you".

Finally, with a guaranteed job in Whitehorse working on the hydro electric dam, Hector and his family headed north.

He knew that a frontier town is a place where a man can do well with his own business if he behaved himself and worked hard.

But they only got as far as Dawson Creek when an early snow made driving too treacherous. To a family like the Langs, however, that just meant finding a trailer park, schools for the kids and work for Hector.

Margaret Lang

They stayed for eighteen months while Hector helped build three railway bridges over area highways. Then it was back on the road to Whitehorse.

Working on a dam is a good job since your family can stay in one place for a couple of years. You can hook your trailer up to water and sewer and your kids can finish a couple of grades in one school for a change.

Construction workers on the dam parked their trailers at the future site of the Robert Service Camp Grounds on the South Access Road.

Margaret and Hector's twin boys, Dan and Archie, started Grade 5 while Mary and Heather entered Grades 8 and 9. All four went to Whitehorse Elementary School which offered 12 grades in those days.

They were only a little worried about them settling down to one school. The kids liked moving from town to town and meeting new people and Hector felt they learned early in life they weren't big fish in little ponds. Travel teaches you that.

Today, each of his sons and daughters lead successful careers. Hector begs part of the credit for being the one who "got their asses out to work at 15 or 16".

Whitehorse at the time had a population of 4,000 and everyone knew everyone. The children, especially, enjoyed a freedom not known in the cities.

Hector, meanwhile, went to work for Poole Construction Ltd (now known as PCL) on the dam. He worked a lot of 70-hour weeks at $2.75 an

hour and half that again for overtime. He's proud today to say he paid off every debt in full.

The dam is where he met Gunnar, a guy "full of volts" and an "artist with iron". More importantly, he was a hard worker and honest. Nothing gains Hector's respect faster than that combination.

The two became friends and, later, when an opportunity arose, business partners.

There was a need for three piled bridges on the South Canol Road north of Whitehorse. Hector knew what the going price was for other bridges that had been built for the territorial government, so he and Gunnar bid less than that and got the job.

They took everything they needed (smart people don't run into town everyday), pitched a tent and went to work. They finished the $13,000 job in two weeks.

From there they headed to Faro to put up three buildings in Anvil's camp. The partnership of Hector Lang Construction and Gunnar Construction was kept busy ever since.

There was never a contract between them, not even a formal handshake. They just paid their bills from a joint venture account and split up the rest.

Even when building a bridge for an exploration camp there was seldom a contract with the customer. They accepted the word of the foreman and they would be paid at the mine's office when the job was done. Usually somewhere between $8,000 and $20,000.

One of Hector and Gunnar's piling bridges.

Hector would shake his head in disbelief when, two months later, he would receive a rubber stamped set of plans from the mine's head office in Vancouver telling them to go ahead with the job.

They never lost a dime. Construction workers, as a breed, don't like to work for people they don't trust or people who don't trust them. For government jobs, however, they signed a contract, but only because the government has their rules they have to live by.

Things are changing, though. Hector is contemptuous of "those wide-eyed, polished-up college graduates who think a good week's work is breaking a couple of gold miners".

But Hector's word is good, he knows no other way. If he agrees to move that pile of dirt for you ... it will be moved.

His father, Hector Senior, was an honourable man, too. He was mayor of Medicine Hat, Alberta for twenty years and was elected last when he was 79 years of age. He introduced himself to every new face in town and offered his help. And, true to his word, he ended up helping a lot of people.

It was Hector's pleasure to meet many people in the Yukon who had a sense of honour as well. Many of them worked for Gunnar and himself on their many projects around the Yukon.

Many of these men he knew as boys, playing with his own kids. He recognized their integrity and ability to work hard and gave them a job when they were ready.

When living in the bush they were up at 6:00 a.m. to a hearty breakfast of pancakes. It was a big meal because they instinctively knew a big lunch would make them lazy. They would continue working until they got tired.

If they tried to work as long as Gunnar, though, they would have a very long day in front of them.

But nothing would be said if the workers turned in too soon. If you are tired, you are tired. But they did know that money would be saved if the job was finished ahead of schedule and it would be split fairly.

It was a family working together out there in the bush. And Hector and Gunnar were the Dads. The "kids", though, knew their jobs and they worked hard.

Gunnar turned to Hector one day and said, "You know, we just built a million dollar bridge and nobody told anybody what to do."

They quickly got a reputation for building good bridges and building them fast. Many mining companies would call them first.

But bridge work is crane work and so their business spread out to include construction of buildings of all sizes. There aren't too many buildings in the Yukon that don't have a furnace, bank vault or truss lifted into place by one of Hector or Gunnar's cranes.

Still, it's bridges they are known for best. The very first members of the Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame were Hector and Gunnar. They were chosen the Transportation Persons of the Year for 1996 for "improving transportation corridors to key areas of the territory".

The Langs at their fortieth wedding anniversary

Today, Hector is proud of every bridge they built.

He turned 80 this past summer, but, sadly, is without Margaret. She died last year. Heather's daughter, Sara Paquet, was raised by Hector and Margaret and visits often to help out.

As well, his other sons and daughters call on him on a regular basis just to chat.

But they aren't the only ones In Hector's life. By 7:00 every morning, his breakfast table is surrounded by "useful construction people" who drop in for coffee.

Many work in one of the seven businesses on the 11 acres of land Hector owns in the Porter Creek Industrial Area. Conversation usually centres on the construction business.

Construction is a business Hector has no intention of leaving. He is part owner of a placer mine that will be in operation next year and he intends on overseeing it personally.

Gunnar is now owner and operator of a sawmill in Whitehorse and is working 10 hours a day.

Besides Margaret, his wife of 54 years, and his children, construction has been his life ... and he would not have changed a thing.

"The people working construction are the luckiest people in the world," he says today. " They work hard and can look back at the end of the day to see what they have built." ¤

THE ROAD TO ROSS RIVER

By Frank McLaughlin

"Is this it? "

I back my rented compact car to check the crooked sign on the rusted metal pole. A faded black numeral six on a bullet-pocked white square. I pull the car off to the side and step out. I'm on a narrow gravel road. Two sawhorses painted as road barriers - one on the road, the other off - are up the road. I walk around the roadblock to the first hill and look down the road 'til it disappears in the underbrush.

I return to the car and glance at the 1992 Rand McNally Road Atlas on the passenger seat. The back cover has a map of the Yukon Territory, where I happen to be. The cover's meant to be humorous - the remote, triangular territory that borders Alaska is pictured with the caption: "the only place in North America where you won't find a Choice Hotel." Or anything else, I mutter, unless like myself you've become addicted to peopleless places and silence.

On my road map of the Yukon, the Canol Road is listed as a summer road. Last night when I stopped for gas at Jake's Corner, the attendant thought the road was closed. Today is May 26th, 8:45 a.m. I've estimated the distance from Johnson's Crossing to Ross River to be 160 plus miles. There's only one other possibility - reverse direction, drive back through

South Canol Road [Richard Harrington photo]

Whitehorse and up the Klondike Highway - a total distance of nearly 400 miles. It's either this way or forget it.

The Canol Road was built during World War II to maintain a pipeline constructed to pump oil sough from the oil fields in the Northwest Territories. The road snakes its way in a north-northeasterly route from Johnson's Crossing to the tiny outpost of Norman Wells on the Mackenzie River - a distance of 513 miles. The road (along with the pipeline) was abandoned near the end of the war. Portions of the road have been gradually reopened by the Yukon government; it is principally used by mining companies in search of minerals. The upper third of the road is impassable. Running from the Yukon-Northwest Territories border to the Mackenzie River, it is now called the Heritage Trail. I'll attempt the best maintained third, running from here to Ross River - the South Canol Road.

Visiting Ross River is one of my two goals. Four years ago I flew to the Yukon to fulfill a dream. I had written a 26-page outline, Yukon Journey, which I wanted to expand into a novel. I chose this remote native settlement because it is only about 200 air miles south of the Arctic Circle in rugged mountain country. I spent that ten day trip absorbing as much as I could about wilderness, bush pilots and the weather. My knowledge of the area came from a book, two conversations, and a tattooed aeronautical map given to me by my new bush pilot friend, Moe Grant.

I was better prepared this time. Although I couldn't afford this trip anymore than the first, I had made a new friendship. Through phone calls and letters I now knew and wrote for Sam Holloway, publisher of *The Yukon Reader*. I was here now because Sam had helped me cut my expenses

South Canol Road [Richard Harrington photo]

by one third. The sequel to Yukon Journey would concern wolves. I was hoping to observe them and had spent more than a year researching timber wolves. Although I had visited two wolves in captivity, my second goal was to learn as much as I could about them in their natural habitat.

Yesterday I visited Sam at his cabin on Marsh Lake. He asked, "Do you have a weapon?"

"An ax," I told him.

Sam grinned. "Do you have any idea how fast a bear could take an ax out of your hand?" he questioned.

I didn't; I wasn't sure if he was serious or kidding.

"Got extra food, clothes?" he continued, making sure I was prepared if I ran into trouble.

I am acutely aware of that question as I squeeze the car around the roadblock and head north. I have a canteen of water, two apples, four granola bars and a two day supply of trail mix. The travel road is very narrow and rough. I remember warnings about big ore trucks from my first trip. The road surface is like a washboard. I bounce along under twenty, pass a couple of rundown homesteads - shacks with rusted car or old machinery nearby. Red flags appear at intervals, signaling soft patches where the road is crumbling. The road is only wide enough for one vehicle. No more signs of human shelters.

It's raining lightly and getting more dangerous. This is the third hill I have to take blindly. I open the window to hear any truck that might be coming the other way. Raindrops spatter my arm as I start down a steep hill. The tires are slipping on wet gravel. Down and up rollercoaster hills with snow showing on either side as the elevation increases.

I come over the crest of another hill and look down at the foot of an even steeper descent. A fast-running creek, strewn with snow-topped boulders, rushes along at the bottom as the road curves three feet away. Even though I use neither gas or brakes, the tires slide. I manage to hold the car on the road and make the turn. The water roars beside me. This is crazy, I tell myself. I stop, eat a granola bar and two handfuls of trailmix. I'll turn around next chance I get.

I start forward, the landscape is spectacular as it twists gradually higher. The road widens a bit and trees reappear. I pass a few opportunities to turn around and keep going, winding slowly downward. Only a trace of snow. Forest on either side now. I swing around a turn and come over a rise.

A wolf is crossing the road. I stop. The wolf stops. It is a young, big timber wolf. It gazes at the car. At a distance it would be called a gray...but its healthy coat is actually a mix of black, brown, gray and white. Less than 30 yards away, its head is brownish-gray with white fur under its eyes and around its muzzle. I fumble for the camera. The wolf, head slightly cocked, has not moved. I open the door and step outside. The wolf trots off the right side of the road.

I call out...the wolf stops and gazes at me. I raise the camera and the wolf glides into the underbrush. I call again. The wolf stops. I raise the camera and the wolf disappears into the forest. I follow...call again and thread my way between trees, then stop. I look back; the car is idling in the middle of the road. I go back to the car and toss the camera on the passenger seat. I am irritated. I could have maintained contact with the wolf longer. No reason to use the camera. More important to register its image, manner in my mind's eye.

I resume the journey...no thoughts of turning back. Twenty minutes later I see water on my right and check the map. The Nisutlin River - ice chunks visible in patches. It begins to drizzle. I muse. Two days ago Moe Grant took me up in his Pipercub floatplane. We flew south-easterly from Schwatka Lake over Sam's cabin at Marsh Lake toward the British Columbia border. Roof damage was reported on a client's cabin at Striker Lake; Moe wanted to check it out. Two hours in bright sunlight back and forth. Flying low between mountains, following streams and rivers, we had perfect visibility. Thousands of acres of wilderness...not a sign of animal life. It set me thinking about predator/prey relationships. Wolves went after moose, caribou and sheep. Immense distances had to be covered. I realized how lucky I had just been. Many Yukoners have never seen a wolf.

Thick forest on either side; I've lost sight of the river. A huge expanse of water appears o my left. I come to a landing and pull off; check my atlas - Quiet Lake. It's 20 miles long, three quarters of its length paralleling the road. A thin ice skin covers the water about half way across. I eat an apple and trail mix, stretch and walk the lakeshore and a trace of trail for 20 minutes. The spongy footing, wide spacing between evergreens makes a refreshing respite. The lake lives up to its name.

I'm only about a third of the way to Ross River and want to make better time, but the road is a driveway - narrow, dirt surface. Ten minutes pass. As I wind slowly uphill, I am looking at the lake. Splash. A blur of movement. My foot lifts from the gas pedal. A black bear, water flying from its fur, cuts in front of me. I hit the brake. The bear hurtles past, two feet from the front bumper, jumps a gully, crashes through brush, and vanishes in the trees uphill to my right. He passes so fast my hand never touches the camera. I grab my field glasses from the back seat, step out of the car and scan the hill. No bear. I must have spooked him.

As I resume driving, I'm amazed at what I've seen. Neither wolf nor bear were cubs. Both were young, perhaps two years old. The coats of both animals glistened with health. Quiet Lake has disappeared on my right; the road winds upward away from it. Snow appears again. Red flags more numerous. I'm on a plateau now. I cross a huge crack in the middle of the dirt road. Few trees. Muskeg on either side. A river appears on my left. I slow and watch it loop. Open country on both sides. Two huge mountains loom ahead. I look at the car clock and realize I have been on the road for more than four hours and have not seen another vehicle.

I am approaching a pass between the mountains. The turns are progressively sharper, winding upward. The road is a dirt ribbon cut into the side of the mountain. I come around a curve, hugging the rock wall and ahead see nothing but air. I stop and fight my fear of height. I walk up the road. A rock wall towers on my left. Fallen rock along the footing. I kick several reddish-brown chunks to the side. I walk to the road's edge at the corner. A cliff. Looks like a thousand foot drop, probably less. Had I driven straight ahead another 35 yards, I would have dropped into the abyss. The road makes a 90 degree turn. With two feet of jagged, crumbled rock on my left, my outside tires will be less than two feet from the edge. The road after the turn gets no better. For a 100 yard stretch there's a sheer drop on the right..no margin for error. A loaf of bread sized rock sits in the middle of the road; I shove it over the side. As I return to the car, I realize if the road gives, I am dead. No one would ever find me or the car.

I hold my breath and inch forward. I concentrate on keeping the left tire close to the wall. I make the turn and begin the slow descent. My heart pounds as the wall on my left slowly recedes and a bush and some dwarf trees appear on my right. My neck is so stiff I can barely turn my head. I loop downward around a series of switchbacks before the road levels out and widens.

The road is drier here; gravel surface again. Snow is gone. I can make better time. I look at the gas gauge: one-eighth of a tank. I remember having three quarters of a tank this morning when I left the Marina Lodge on Marsh Lake. I drift to a stop and take out the map. It looks like I'm at least 40 miles from Ross River. I'll need to conserve gas and hope I don't have to walk.

Forest closes in on both sides. A half mile straight away, then a mild turn. A pattern that repeats itself. Coming around a curve, I spot something ahead. I slow to a creeping speed. Some type of animal. On stilts? Within a hundred yards I realize it's a moose. A young moose, gangly, ungainly. Can't be more than a year old....clomping down the road. I stop. The moose stops. I grab the camera and get out of the car. I snap a butt shot as the moose clops down the road. I get back in the car and follow. I stop again. So does the moose. As I get out and lift the camera, the moose ambles down the road. Back in the car I repeat the sequence. Again, the moose resumes its marionette-like trot. I feel like the straight man in a comedy routine. Again, I reduce the distance and the moose clumsily veers into the woods. I now see why young moose are such easy prey for wolves.

I pass a huge, snow-covered mountain on my right, and then cross a fast-running river. The gas gauge hovers at empty. I check the map. I've got to be close to the Campbell Highway...then I realize Ross River is a few miles on the other side...on the south bank of the Pelly River. I'm hoping there'll be a gas station at the intersection. I coast down hills. It's dry and hazy...sun out. I see a quarry sign....then the turnoff and mounds of gravel. A cloud of dust in front. A black pickup truck swooshes by. The first vehi-

cle I've seen in just under seven hours. Five minutes later I come to the Campbell Highway. I pull the car off and check my *Mileposts* book. No help. I get out, jog half a mile east, then half a mile west...looking for gas. Nothing. No signs.

A small break a few yards down the highway on the other side...I guess it to be a continuation of the Canol Road. I start along the thin gravel strip. Five twisting, rolling miles later...anything. Just when I know I must be down to fumes, I see an airfield on my right. Then a few rundown cabins. I'm in Ross River. I spot the Welcome Inn and a gas pump about a block away. I fill up, then go to the motel's bar and have a cheeseburger and coke. Three elderly native women are drinking beer at a nearby table. I had planned to stay overnight here but am uncomfortable.

I slowly drive around Ross River. The dirt roads are muddy in part. Cabins look old, tired. The only building that looks clean and modern is the school. The settlement feels poor, desolate. I drive down to the Pelly River. A ferry is parked on this side. I rusting footbridge spans the river. I walk up the wood stairs and onto the wood floor. The walkway is warped, you lean to one side. I walk to the middle, watch the fast flowing brown water then return to the south shore. Ross River is not as I imagined it; it is a depressing place. I go back to the Campbell Highway and head toward Carmacks.

The next afternoon I arrive back in Whitehorse. 3 p.m. I grab a coke and return to my threadbare room in the Fort Yukon Hotel. I sit at the table and begin expanding a few phrases I had written on the trip into sentences. A knock at the door. I open it. Sam.

"How did'ya know I was back?" I ask.

"I didn't," he replies. "Just wanted to make sure you made it.

I go out to the car and retrieve a cinnamon roll a friend had given me for Sam. I toss it to him. "Stayed at the Braeburn Lodge last night. Steve sent this." Sam nodded.

A few minutes later we drive over to the Airport Chalet for soup and a sandwich. I tell Sam about my good fortune - seeing the wolf, bear and moose. I also describe a couple of my hairy moments on the road.

"That's why I stopped by," Sam says. "Most folks don't use that road to mid June. If you weren't back in two days, I would have come looking for you." I tell Sam how amazed I was at the swiftness of the black bear. Sam then relates a scary encounter he had with a grizzly sow years ago when he was prospecting.

Two weeks later as I sit musing by my typewriter at home in New Jersey, Sam calls. He explains that a section of the South Canol Road has collapsed and the road will be closed for two weeks.

I can almost guess which section. "I'm glad you didn't discourage me about the road," I tell Sam, "and thanks for not telling me your bear story 'til I got back." We both laugh.

Few people know about the Canol Road; only a handful outside the

Yukon have even heard of it. It was built after the Japanese seized Attu at the end of the Aleutian chain. It was a costly military mistake. The cost of the road and its frail four-inch diameter pipe exceeded that of the much longer Alaska Highway. Thousands of men and hundreds of trucks and earth moving machines were used to build a pipeline and road that were abandoned on April 24, 1945.

I have returned to the Yukon four more times - each time driving or biking the Canol Road. Ross River's fortunes seem brighter; I stayed over night at the Welcome Inn on my last trip. For wilderness lovers, the road is a corridor to adventure and spectacular vistas. Maybe I'll meet you on the road my next trip. ¤

The last section of the South Canol Road as it descends into Ross River. (SH photo, 2004).

Almost True Tales of the Yukon

By Sam Holloway

Watch What You Pray For

Did you ever have the feeling you were being watched... you know, like certain women must feel when some guy leers at them on the street? I had that feeling once while I was digging around by the Little Big Salmon River...

I had moved into a little cabin on Lake Creek. It had just enough room for a cot, a stove, a tiny table and one chair. The door was split in two so you could open the top half for fresh air, or, when it was cold, just open the bottom half so the heat wouldn't all leave when you did.

I was running gravel through a sluice box, hoping to get enough gold so I wouldn't have to take a real job. Trouble was, the gravel had clay in it that carried the gold right out the end of the sluice box and at times I felt like shooting myself.

But I kept at it by drying the clay on the creek bank and then running it through with a little more success. Then it started to rain, every day for days and days and I holed up in the cabin trying to make sense of things.

One night as I lay there on the cot, I sent up a prayer to whatever gods there might be in that lonesome valley.

"Wouldn't it be nice if a woman showed up here? I asked. "It wouldn't be quite so lonely, would it?"

Now, anybody that's been over the road will tell you to be careful what you pray for—you might get it.

A couple of nights later I felt the bed moving. Or maybe the whole cabin was shaking a bit. Quickly, I struck a match to the coal-oil lamp and here's what I saw:

A woman was sitting on the end of the bed, with her legs crossed under her, Indian style. I knew she was female just by the look in her eyes.

But she had an awful lot of body hair. In fact, she had a coat of brown, greasy hair covering her whole body. It was then I realized: I was looking at a genuine, real-life sasquatch woman!

And from the look in her eyes, she was in love with me to boot!

I made a run for the door but she got there ahead of me and blocked it. I gave up on that idea and sat in the chair by the table. She watched me for a while and climbed onto the bed again, still looking at me with those hungry eyes. If I looked toward the door she would leap across the floor to block it.

As readers of this column know, I've been in some tight spots, but this one topped everything. I tried to talk to her, saying, "You don't want me.

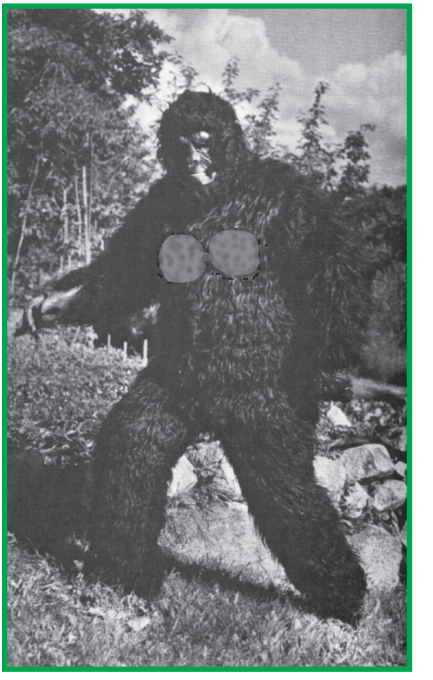
Anybody in the Yukon will tell you I'll never amount to anything. I don't even have potential."

But she didn't understand. Just kept staring at me from the bed.

And then I remembered what I had in my pocket. I took out a roll of money, about two hundred dollars all in small denominations.

I walked over and threw the roll on the bed. She bent over to count the money and I made a another run for the door. This time I got there ahead of her. I galloped down the rocky trail to my canoe and leaped aboard, with the paddle flaying water for ten feet as my trembling knees hit the deck.

I never saw her again but I heard she teamed up with some guy in Carmacks who likes hairy women.



Street scene in Ross River, August 2004. (SH photo)

The Killing of Sheslay Free Mike

By Sam Holloway

Mike Oros [RCMP death photo]

On March 19th, 1985, nine Mounties carrying M-16 rifles arrived in Teslin, Yukon Territory, dressed in bush clothes and camouflage suits. They had a job ahead of them: to kill a man—a man said by many to be the toughest bushman ever to walk the North. They had been warned before they left their Prince Rupert, B.C., detachment that in this operation at least one Mountie could die.

The man they pursued had vowed he would never surrender. His name was Michael Eugene Oros, otherwise known as Sheshlay Free Mike. He could travel hundreds of miles through the frozen forests on snowshoes and live on raw meat that he shot down with one of his many rifles. He could do this as easily as most folks might take a walk around their block to a corner store. The RCMP, on the other hand, hadn't been on this kind of operation in decades.

They had arrested him once before at his cabin, in 1982, and charged him with the murder of a trapper. In spite of all the evidence, a provincial judge proclaimed Oros innocent and he returned to the woods. During his time in jail awaiting trial, the Mounties had killed his beloved dogs and confiscated his meticulous diaries. The diaries and dogs were Oros' only connections to life and now these were gone.

But he still had his guns and a burning hatred to keep him going. On March 18th, 1985, someone reported that their cabin had been vandalized and they recognized the culprit as Sheshlay Free Mike by spotting him through binoculars. It was this incident that set off the final manhunt.

A spotter plane crew had observed Oros on a brush-covered island at the south end of Teslin Lake. But delays in finding aircraft and equipment cost the Mounties many hours and by the time the helicopters arrived in Teslin, Oros had moved off the island. He was spotted hauling his toboggan over the ice, some distance from the shore of the lake. An open stretch of water lay between him and the shoreline. He also had a second toboggan, this one pulled by his new team of dogs.

The helicopters landed and dropped off two groups of Mounties, with one three-man team behind Sheshlay Mike and another just ahead of him in order to cut off his approach to a spit of land jutting out into the lake. They only had two choppers so the third team stayed behind. The group on the peninsula consisted of Corporal Mike Buday and his dog, Trooper, and

Constables A.G. Rodgers and P. N. Haugen.

Haugen got into position and camouflaged himself. He could hear Buday and Rodgers thrashing in the brush as they tried to settle into hiding. Almost immediately he saw Oros walking toward them. Then, suddenly, Oros grabbed a rifle from his sleigh and, abandoning the dogs, strode swiftly to shore over the thin ice just in front of Haugen.

From studying his tracks afterward, the Mounties discovered that Oros had travelled all the way back to the team behind him and crept within yards of their positions. He might have killed them all but decided to go after the other team. As swiftly as a snow leopard, he raced through the woods on his snowshoes and reappeared at his toboggans where he shoved the rifle back into the load. Then he approached the waiting Mounties again. They could easily have shot him but first they had to try an arrest.

Suddenly Oros grabbed a spare set of snowshoes and the rifle and angled into the shoreline brush. Now the Mounties couldn't see him.

Haugen and Rodgers spotted Oros who was heading straight for Buday. Then he disappeared again—Sheshlay Mike was stalking them.

Suddenly Rodgers yelled to Buday, "Look out! He's right behind you!" Then, a rifle shot. The madman swerved around to point his rifle at Constable Rodgers. The Mountie saw him lever a fresh round into his rifle—it was then that Rodgers knew—Buday had not fired the shot.

Oros aimed at Rodgers and pulled the trigger. Rodgers fired back a split-second later. Oros face disappeared but no one knew whether he was alive or dead.

The other team of Mounties came up to the scene, following Oros' tracks. They could see where he had stalked the Mounties, coming within a few feet of their positions. Why hadn't he killed them all?

Then they found him, lying on his back in the snow. In the centre of his forehead, just at the hairline, they saw where the bullet had entered. Seventy-five feet beyond, they found the body of Corporal Buday.

When they checked Oros rifle, they found a live round in the chamber—a round that should have fired but didn't. It was only this defective bullet that had allowed Rodgers the chance to shoot back.

And that was how they got Sheslay Free Mike. ¤