

**THE**

# **YUKONER**

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## **MAGAZINE**

**NO.  
6**

- ODYSSEY ON THE BIG SALMON
- GOING OUTSIDE
- CHRISTMAS ON THE TRAPLINE
- ROBERT CAMPBELL, PART TWO
- A NOVEL OF THE GOLD RUSH



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Lapie River, near the village of Ross River (SH photo).

# THE YUKONER

Issue No.6  
November, 1997

## MAGAZINE

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Cover: Garry Phillips (of Philmar Enterprises) and his dog, Terra, on the South Canol Road. Photo taken by Bruce Horning (captain of the "Schwatka").

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## From the Editor's Desk



Since the last issue, winter has arrived and we are free of bugs, dust and motorhomes for at least six more months. The northern lights are dancing above this cabin right now and the woodpile looks big enough to keep the fire going till spring.

Old Dodge blew her innards on the way to town a few weeks ago. She slowed down on the hills and when everything let go, the vehicles behind me had to pull over and stop; they couldn't see for smoke, steam and balls of fire.

I had another motor out in the yard and tossed that one in. Except for an oil leak, which I will fix one of these days, old Dodge should be okay for another five years or so.

On page 25 is a story about my friend, Gene Dubois of Dawson City. I still can't believe he is gone, that he won't be part of the scenery on my next run to the Klondike.

We prospected some claims in the Sixtymile area some years ago. Gene had a philosophy for every situation. It rained hard on that trip and I bitched about it but he explained how that was Nature's way of washing the earth, making it clean and green and beautiful. He lost an expensive watch in the creek and said, "oh, well, the people that make those things have to live too you know."

He made a great impression on me, as he did on many others. During the time I knew him, he was being himself—careless with money, unworried about the future, appreciative of every day of life. That philosophy must have changed somehow because the Gene Dubois I knew could never take his own life.

But I guess there are some things we will never understand.

In the back of this issue, I've started another novel and we're stuck with it until it finishes. Those characters must live out their destinies, just as we do. I am not their creator but just a witness writing down what they do. That's how the writing process works and we'll never really understand that either.

Besides being a compulsion, writing and publishing is a lot of fun. The trick is to keep eating while you're doing it, so thanks very much for all the subscriptions and letters.

So long for now,  
Sam

# Christmas Journey

By Delores Smith

[From an unpublished manuscript, *"Trappers Trails"*]

I'd like to take you on a journey for Christmas. You're coming out to our trapline on the Hess River.

Imagine you live in a small one room log cabin in downtown Whitehorse. Then, imagine it is the only house and you're the only two people between Haines Junction and Johnson's Crossing (see map on page 8). Remove all the other buildings, the electricity, plumbing, running water and roads. Add forests, swamps, numerous Moose, Caribou and wolves, and you get a good idea of what it looks and feels like to be out there.

You've been there since October when you flew in with enough supplies hopefully to last until March. It is now late December and the sun has not directly shone on the cabin for almost a month, even though it sits in a south facing location. The mountains all around are just too high for the weak sun to climb over. You have to march up the hill out back if you want a glimpse of the golden orb.

There are 18 hours of darkness. Your only light comes from candles, kerosene lamps, or flashlights. More and more of your time is spent inside a seeming cocoon of this light whenever you have to travel. To get from the last tent camp home, a distance equal to going from the Mayo



Harald washing up by lamp light in our cosy Nidderly cabin.

cutoff to downtown, will take all of the daylight hours and then some if you hustle and don't have any setbacks. You're walking on snowshoes through at least two feet of snow, pulling a light toboggan, over hill, through swamps and across lakes.

Just when you think you cannot take any more of the dark and cold and the steady chores, two events occur almost simultaneously. The first is the Winter Solstice. The distant sun has finished trying to escape to the south and you can now start adding minutes to your day instead of watching them disappear into a black hole.

The second, but no less important is Christmas. This is the time to celebrate the renewal of the Spirit. The cabin is transformed into a glowing nest of warmth as the one box of supplies hidden until now is brought out and unpacked. In it are candies and nuts and a little bit of overproof rum. Small presents bought and wrapped in October find their way to a decorated corner of a shelf. There's no reason to bring a tree into the already too tiny space inside the cabin. Everywhere you look outside is filled with snow frosted evergreens. The cheery pinks and yellows of the wintering pine grosbeaks and white-winged crossbills are the only adornments needed to brighten the forest. Christmas Eve night is spent listening to C.B.C. Radio while fireside Al reads again Frederick Forsythe's *"The Shepard,"* one of my all-time favourite stories, because it involves airplanes and miracles. Greetings are sent over the 2-way radio to all the other people dotted around the north woods who listen to the "Sked." One can then stand in the doorway of the little cabin at midnight, looking out into the blackness and hear a lone wolf singing in the distance. The Northern Lights shimmer their brilliance across the sky. Stars are everywhere. It's a silent night, a holy night. How much closer to Heaven can one get?

Stuffed moose heart is on the menu for tomorrow along with rehydrated mashed potatoes and gravy, and pea salad. Wild cranberries have been gathered from under the snow to make a great sauce. A tin of pumpkin and some dream whip have been hoarded away to become a delicious pie. The crowning glory to a dinner cooked to perfection on top of the barrel wood heater gracing the middle of the room. The red backed vole living under the cabin has been included in the festivities and given an extra sugar prune to go with his oats. The day is finished lounging out on the bed/sofa stuffed like ticks that have had too many dogs. Time enough tomorrow to go look for some get- up-and-go.

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# Paddlin' the Big Salmon

By Gerry Warner

“AWESOME.”

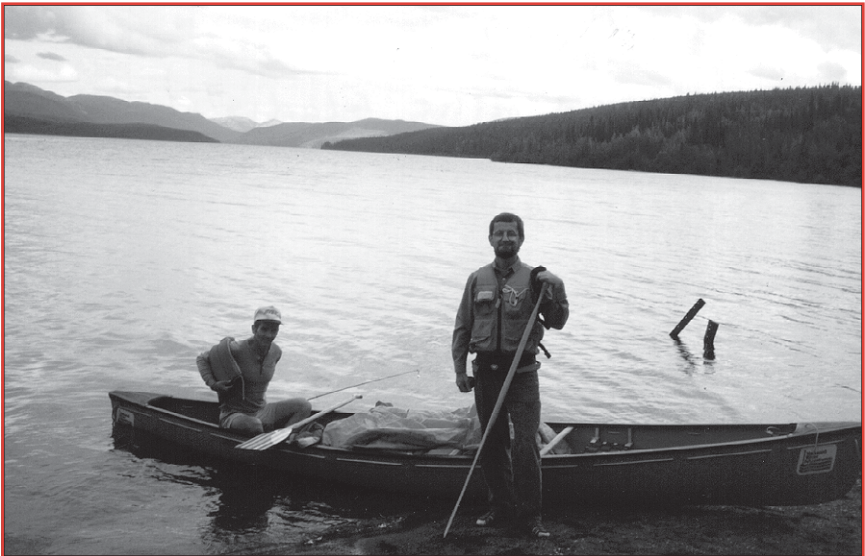
It was an exclamation we were to hear many times over the next eight days as we dipped our paddles into Quiet Lake just after noon July 26 and pointed our bows eastward to begin a 222 mile odyssey down the Big Salmon River to Carmacks.

Unlike Ulysses and his able crew of Greek seamen, we were a motley collection of seasoned veterans and raw rookies united by our desire to experience one of the most pristine rivers in the southern Yukon and escape from our respective jobs, spouses, kids et al.

Our peerless leader was Al “spandex” Ekholm, otherwise known as “Commodore Al,” who wielded a deft paddle and was fond of early morning reveilles and regimental strategy and debriefing sessions as only a retired military man could be.

Al’s partner in crime was Wayne “wanna see my lighter” Wannamker, recently retired from the DOT and whose “awesome” appreciation of the wilderness scenery surrounding us was only exceeded by his fascination with every high tech gadget he could put his eager fingers on.

Snug in the stern of the other red canoe rode Fran, “bees have feelings too” Curran, a health care administrator and experienced paddler who took a passionate interest in the well being of all the wildlife we saw



The author (standing) and Mike Gladish on Quiet Lake at the start of our trip.

including some humble wasps who had the temerity to sting Wayne while he was preparing to do yet-another dunking demonstration with his super, waterproof lighter.

Navigating the currents from the bow of Fran's canoe was Pollyana Jackie, "isn't this wonderful" Gibson, the Century 21 "salesman of the month" who resolutely stuck to her vow of not talking shop as long as she was on the water.

Guiding (as it turned out not all that successfully) the third canoe was an odd couple comprised of ex-weatherman Mike, "the lovebird" Gladish and Gerry, "wet bagel" Warner, a weatherman wannabe who kept the crew entertained with his humble opinions on feminists, land claims, the metric system, the school system, the (in)justice system etc. etc.

How this crazed crew got down the river at all will be one of the ever-enduring mysteries of the trip. But no one was thinking of this as the three canoes sliced through a gentle ripple on Quiet Lake as thunder rumbled ominously in the background.

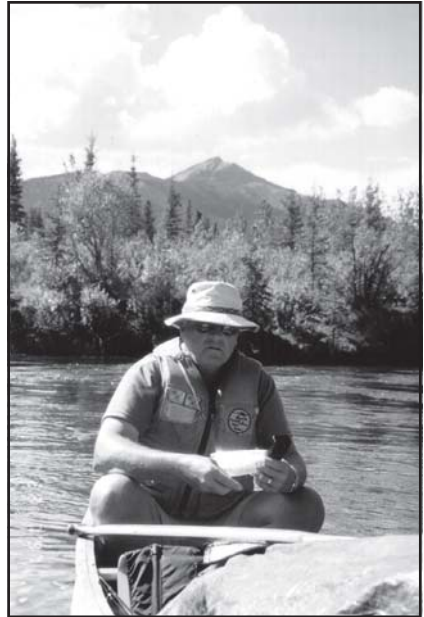
The thunder proved to be a harbinger of dramatic events to follow as the group set up its first camp site on the west shore of Big Salmon Lake. No sooner were the tents up and the freshly-caught grayling roasting in the fire when a solid black wall of clouds darkened the sky and a thunderstorm of mega proportions swept over the hapless crew.

We were not exactly prepared for the onslaught of the fierce storm and the hurricane-like winds that accompanied it. A tarp we had strung up over our makeshift table was blown right out of our hands despite six people holding on to it for dear life. After abandoning the tarp, everyone dove for the tents and it's a good thing we did or they would have blown away too.

But Commodore Al showed his mettle, bravely sticking his face out the door of his tent at the height of the gale.

"The rain wasn't falling down. It was blowing straight in my face. I've never seen a storm like that in the Yukon," he exclaimed later around the campfire. Perhaps we should have consulted Gus Karpes fine booklet on the Big Salmon river which warns "Big Salmon Lake can have some fierce storms on it." No kidding!

Fog and mist rising gently off the lake the next morning made the



Commodore Al plans his next move.



storm seem like a distant, surreal memory as we pulled out from shore and paddled less than an hour to the end of Big Salmon Lake and our long sought-after destination, the Big Salmon River.

After a quick tour of a rustic log cabin with a sod roof and a meat cache tower deep in the spruce and fireweed at the head of the lake, we casually pointed our canoes downstream into a tangle of log jams, snags and sweepers that clog the upper sections of the Big Salmon.

Big mistake!

At least it was for Mike and Gerry, whose 18 ft. canoe got hung up on a snag between a sweeper and a log jam and suddenly filled with water as the force of the current turned the craft broadside to the waves.

Sheee-it!

In the interests of maintaining family reading material, the rest of the profanities will be deleted as Mike and Gerry watched their belongings that weren't tied into the canoe drift down the river to an uncertain fate.

Mike had the presence of mind to yank the remaining gear out of the water-filled boat and throw it ashore as Gerry gingerly grabbed his camera which was floating in its case dangerously close to the gunnels of the sinking canoe. After all the gear including the water-logged camera had been thrown up on the bank, the two chagrined paddlers managed to flip the canoe over and re-float it and guide it into some quiet water below the snag.

Meanwhile their yelling and cursing alerted Commodore Al and the rest of the merry paddlers who did a heroic job of recovering the floating gear including a soggy bag of bagels that were to bedevil Gerry for the rest of the trip.

Two fishing rods went into the briny deep, never to be seen again, as well as a few other odds and ends. But all in all, the losses were almost inconsequential to the disaster that could have happened. After a debriefing session with Commodore Al, we all emerged wiser for the experience and much more respectful of the strength of the river.

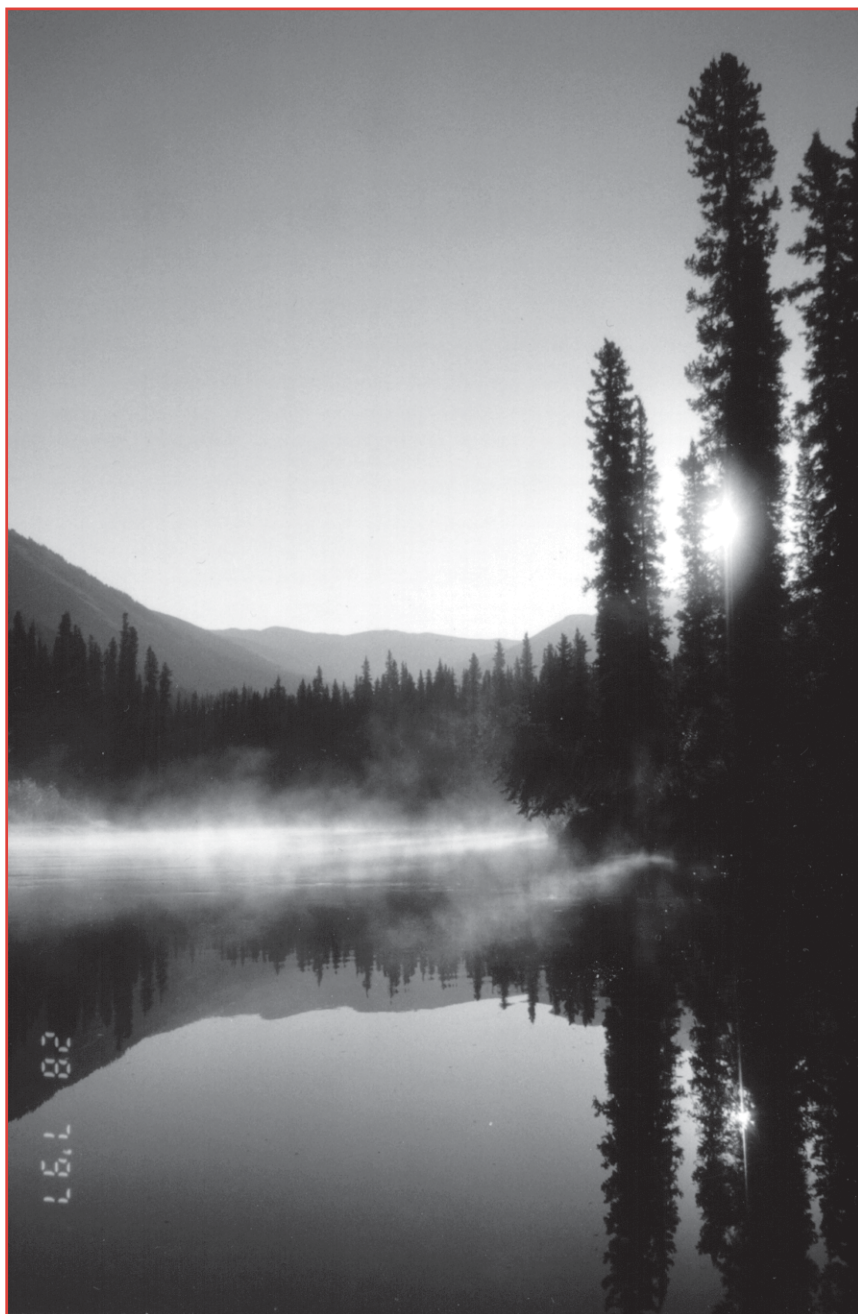
Hell, we even saved the bagels. What more could you ask?

Drying quickly under a scorching sun, we next encountered a major log jam, which completely blocked the river and forced us to drag our heavily-laden canoes over it.

"That's the worst of 'er," Commodore Al brightly informed us after we crossed the jam.. "Except possibly for the rock garden further down. Bit of white water there. But no sweat!"

After our shaky start, we settled into a routine and started to enjoy the spectacular wilderness scenery of the Upper Salmon. Below us was the serpentine river, so clear you could see right to the bottom while the forested slopes of the Pelly Mountains thrust into the azure sky on either side.

Later in the day, we rounded a tight curve to see a majestic bald eagle peering down on us from the top of a tall, white spruce tree on the river bank. The great leviathan of the air hardly moved a feather as we



**Mist on the river.**

quietly drifted by with only the click-click of our camera shutters disturbing the wilderness silence.

But his great white head and piercing eyes followed our every movement as he scornfully checked out the strangers intruding on his domain.

"Awesome," said Wayne in what was to become a familiar mantra for the trip.

About 5 pm, we pulled into a gravel bar at the mouth of Sheep Creek and wolfed down a pot of Commodore Al's barely unfrozen chili garnished with clouds of mosquitoes which emerged from the forest every time the wind died down.

Despite this, Mike managed to cool his ardour for the latest love in his life by taking a quick dip in the sparkling waters of the Big Salmon.

"It sure beats cold showers," he ruefully commented as he waded into shore.

Not long into day three, we encountered a "holy cow." We're not talking India here. It was actually a cow moose, which part of our crew was lucky enough to see before she clumped back into the forest out of our eager view.

But this got us eager to see more game, which aside from the eagle, we hadn't seen much of so far. Our luck changed quickly. Stopping for a "pee break" later in the day, we scampered to shore on a muddy bank lined with giant humps of swamp grass. Gerry, trying to find the perfect spot for his ablutions, was just ready to heave out his mighty hose when a cacophony of feathers and beating wings exploded in his face.

It stopped him in mid-stream and when he recovered he realized a mother wood duck had just abandoned her warm nest inside of which was



Morning of Day Two

nine, count 'em, nine dappled brown eggs ready to burst with the next generation.

"Holy sheeet," Gerry exclaimed as he raced back to his canoe for his trusty camera which he had managed to dry out from the spill the day before. (The bagels took a little longer.) Pushing some of the reeds aside, he bent close to the nest for a picture, but careful not to touch it for fear of scaring away Mama Duck permanently.

Suddenly from behind Gerry's back came the voice of Green Peace. "Don't get any closer to that nest. The mother may never come back," said Fran, ever vigilant in protecting the creatures of the forest.

Gerry jumped back. Disturbing a mother duck is bad enough. But the wrath of Fran? Even Gerry knew better.

But this wasn't the end of the wildlife sightings that day. Far from it. Because only a few minutes later Mike and Gerry rounded another curve in the river and came face to ugly face with a giant bull moose with a velvet-covered rack quietly sleeping in the reeds along the bank.

Fumbling for his camera, Gerry managed to get off an unfocused shot before the huge beast heaved to his haunches and plunged into the bush before the rest of the crew rounded the turn.

"Sure, you saw another moose. And one with huge antlers. Did he wave as you went by?" said a disbeliever from the rest of the crew who had missed the lucky sighting.

"There are moose that are nameless and rivers that run God knows where," chimed in Commodore Al in his best Robert Service imitation. The day ended with another severe thunderstorm, which we prepared for by setting up a camp in a deep spruce thicket near an "unnamed creek" (no kidding) just below Souch Creek on the west shore of the Big Salmon.



Camping, Day Three. Wayne Wannamaker in the foreground.



Commodore Al claimed he saw a “mega moose” later that night when he went out to answer a call of nature. But no one believed him.

The next few days rolled by enjoyably, and at times, spectacularly. We began seeing the first outliers of salmon, already turning crimson as they neared the end of their marathon journey from the Bering Sea. The whole crew finally got lucky on day five as we drifted close to a cow moose and her (cute?) calf near one of the numerous ox bow lakes that line both sides of the river.

Bald eagle sightings became routine as the giant raptors seemed to appear every third or fourth bend guarding their section of the river. We also saw numerous kingfishers, shorebirds and ducks including one busy mama with 16 ducklings swimming in a perfect string behind her.

Wolf tracks were common along the river bank and we saw grizzly tracks as well. But thankfully, we didn’t have a single bear encounter the entire trip. We dined on arctic grayling several nights and we were even treated to a rare sighting of a wolverine on the last day of our water-borne odyssey.

The landscape also changed dramatically as we drifted downstream. Just below Big Salmon Lake the gnarled rocks of the Pelly Range reared steeply above us in a succession of grey, pyramid-shaped peaks. Later on the country began to flatten out as the mountains receded to the jagged horizon.

Further downstream, the river began to cut its way through giant clay banks similar to the ones around Whitehorse. And because the river never sleeps, the banks are constantly eroding resulting in huge spruce and pine sweepers arching over the water at every imaginable angle.

A week on the water has its effects, even in good company.

One night Commodore Al did his infamous “spandex dance.” There were several suggestive moves and some rude comments about the svelte yuppie types that frequent some of the upscale exercise spas around Whitehorse.

Another night he claimed to see a “star of wonder.” But we put this down to some mushrooms he’d been picking earlier that day.

“Wet-bagel” Warner was often a source of entertainment to the bemused members of the crew. Every night, he would carefully lay his bag of soggy bagels close to the roaring fire along with his equally soaked sandals which would sit steaming by the blaze.

“Which would he eat first?” some of the crew rudely wondered.

Warner’s political views on a number of issues also entertained, and at times appalled, several crew members, especially his diatribes on the “feminazis” he claimed destroyed his journalism career. We’d better not get any further into that.

The ladies of the crew did a magnificent job of restraining the excesses of the men. (Little did they know that the men (“boys,” really) were constantly tittering about the antics of the “girls” as they practised their draws, prys and landings with their wobbling canoe.

All of us could see subdivisions in Jackie’s realtor eyes as we glided



A big storm blows up on Big Salmon Lake.

past “wilderness development sites” in the valley. But never did the word real estate pass her lips though we could see she was thinking it all the time.

And Fran did a magnificent job of controlling her animal rights proclivities, especially when Commodore Al launched a naptha-laced, scorched earth attack on the hapless wasps that stung Wayne in the middle of his waterproof lighter demonstration.



Jackie Gibson and Fran Curran strut their strokes.

On the river you learn to get along.

But the final night on the river was by far the best. Earlier on that rain-soaked day, we stopped at Little Salmon where we met Hilda Popadynec, a proud Northern Tutchone woman who was smoking salmon on a drying rack as her people have done for several millennia.

Pungent smoke wafted through the ancient structure as Hilda deftly wielded her sharp blade cutting the Chinook salmon into long, notched filets then hanging them on the drying rack over an alder smudge.

And all the while she regaled us with stories of her family, her not-always-easy life and the traditions of her people who knew the Big Salmon River as Gyu Cho Chs, literally “Salmon Big Water.”

She and her son Joe also served us steaming, hot tea (much appreciated that cold day) and donuts. And as we left, she gave us a big, plastic bag filled with fresh salmon steaks that had just been caught that day.

Later in the evening we camped on a thickly, forested island in the Yukon River before the final push to Carmacks. Out came Commodore Al’s “bannock-in-a-bag” and Hilda’s salmon, which we baked with butter and garnished with wild chives which we found growing on the mossy banks of the island.

Mmmm, mmm good! It’s the kind of experience that could only happen in the Yukon.

And all of our tired crew felt much the better for that.

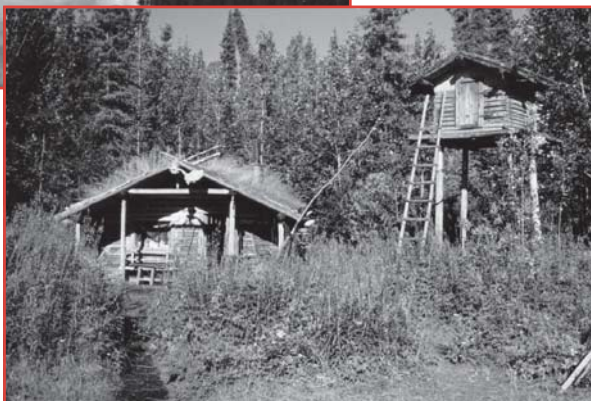
The end (thank God)



\*Photos by Gerry Warner

Calm on the river,  
near its source  
between Big Salmon  
and Little Salmon  
Lakes.

An archetypical Yukon  
River wilderness cabin.  
This one nestles near  
Little Salmon Lake and  
was built by an  
Austrian.



# Pioneer of the Yukon: Ruth McIntyre

*By Darrell Hookey*

Ruth McIntyre was born to a family that loved being a family in a community that loved being a community.

She cannot believe she could have grown up in a better place than her family's farm in Assiniboia, Saskatchewan. Ruth Batty was born September 2, 1921, the fourth of ten children and, unlike her two older brothers, had few responsibilities.

The work that did befall her never seemed like work. Her father, a former teacher who left Ontario to homestead the 160 acres he was given, was a great organizer. He would be the foreman as all hands planted the garden with assembly-line efficiency.

Harvesting was another big day. But as important as it was, the close-knit family had fun.

Good times are a never-ending pursuit on a farm when you're a kid. Dugouts to catch the spring thaw would be flooded for skating in the winter. And in the summer it's muddy waters were considered just fine for swimming.

With an uncle living 1.6 km west and another 1.6 km north, and good neighbours and friends everywhere else, Ruth fondly remembers Sundays spent visiting.

As a treat, ice would be pulled from the sawdust storage of the ice house and ice cream would be made.

While her father made things happen, it was Ruth's mother who made the farm a loving home. She always had time for the kids and had home-baked snacks waiting for them after school. Neighbours could rely on her, too, as she would be available to them in any emergency.

"She was just a wonderful person," Ruth says today. "I kept hoping I would be like her."

Of the six girls and four boys in the family, all but the two oldest boys finished high school. The oldest boys were too busy on the farm and planned on staying anyhow.

Each of the girls attended Normal School to become a teacher. Ruth took her year's training starting in 1940 and practised in a city school. It was "different" seeing an entire class with only one grade in it.



Ruth at teacher training school, 1941.



Ruth only taught for two years until her sister, Bertha, urged her to sign up to serve in the military. It was 1943 and the war was almost over. They were fully trained as radio telephone operators and only worked for two months before they were released.

Their release was earlier than usual since the country needed teachers, yet neither went back to teaching. Bertha went to the University of Edmonton to become a geologist and Ruth to the University of British Columbia to earn her Bachelor of Arts degree.

In her third year Ruth ran out of money. She was boarding with a member of the RCMP who had seen an advertisement seeking teachers in Whitehorse, Dawson City and Mayo. She knew nothing of Mayo so that was the position she asked for. She stuck to her decision even though she was offered a job on the coast.

Ruth was directed to buy a ticket, but she had to admit she had no money. So, she became the first teacher to be sent C.O.D.

The trip didn't go smoothly and she arrived a week late. She was greeted at the plane by town folk who wanted to check out the new teacher.

She also received a visit at her home from three men who introduced themselves as the "school board". The questions started to get personal so she figured out that a joke was being played. One of the men was Gordon McIntyre, her future husband.

Ruth's cabin (rented) at Mayo, 1948



The reception was warm, but the weather wasn't. Her first January never saw temperatures above -50 degrees Fahrenheit. That was the year the temperature plunged to -80 degrees Fahrenheit. The Caterpillars would be left running all night and wood was delivered from the government pile since it was too cold to cut their own.

The school she taught in couldn't operate when it was -50, so her students missed a lot of classes. It wasn't until the temperature rose to -40 degrees that people milled about town once again tending to their chores.

Mayo found in Ruth a teacher who was happy to be part of the community. She played badminton, visited, attended dances and played cards. She was friends with the parents of her students and so the students got to know her on a personal level as well.

Often she would find herself playing or dancing with one of her students. Young people were full members of the community and Ruth feels they matured faster by interacting with adults more. Besides, they saw her as a human and not just a teacher.

Whenever time allowed, Ruth would join the kids playing games during recess. But when she was once again standing in the front of the class, they would settle down again.

"She had the eye," Gordon says today of his wife. "She never used the strap, but she had that eye."

In her second year in Mayo, Ruth moved into a cabin heated by the wood she chopped herself. It was only one room and not well built. She remembers Charlie and Betty Taylor visiting while up checking on the Taylor and Drury Store. They sat on her bed with their boots on to protect against the draft coming from where the walls should have met the



Ruth and Gordon brewing a cup of coffee, Mayo, 1948.

floor. Yet they were warm above the shoulders as the heat from the stove rose.

At 11:45 that night, the lights dimmed to warn them of the midnight shutdown of the town's generator. They gathered up the candles and lit them to carry on their visit.

Ruth says she doesn't remember the hardships of those years since the good times outnumbered the bad.

She didn't have much of a budget to teach her Grades 1 to 8 students, but they did have enough books, paper and chalk and the games they played didn't require equipment.

In 1948, Ruth began teaching in the new high school. The building itself wasn't new, it was the old mining recorder's office pulled to its new home on skids by a Caterpillar. Yet 12 students were able to study in their own town.

With the new high school came an enthusiastic school council called the Polar Bear Club. Two dances were held that first year and attended in record numbers. Enough money was raised to build a skating rink on land behind the school donated by a local farmer.

After spending an entire weekend flooding the rink, a foot of snow covered it which was discouraging enough for it to be left for the rest of the year. Yet in the spring it was used as a baseball diamond with a bat and ball purchased with the dance money.

With extra money, a basketball was bought. A local blacksmith volunteered to make the rims while the students made the nets.

Another money maker was the Spring Fair featuring games, baked goods and drinks. This money was used to buy a slide projector and screen and more sports equipment.

The Polar Bear Club expanded to include intramural sports and trips to challenge other schools.

Keeping up with the active students and taking part in Mayo's social life exhausted Ruth. She decided to take a business course Outside and get a job in Whitehorse.

Her plans changed, however, after seeing an abandoned restaurant in Mayo. Despite having completed the one-year course, Ruth parleyed her \$80 savings into Ruth's Luncheon Bar in the Silver Inn Hotel.

The first month's rent was deferred and \$50 went into the purchase of a licence. Since the restaurant had all the cutlery, plates, linen and cookware that she needed, all she had to do was supply the food. The Northern Commercial Company gave her credit for her first day's needs with the understanding she pay what she could the next day.

After a lot of cleaning, she was ready to open the doors.

Business was brisk. The mining boom was on as companies tried to copy the success of United Keno Mine. There were also workers from the construction of the highway and hydro plant.

Just one month in business, Ruth would open the door in the morning and allow enough of the line in to fill the five tables and counter area. After feeding her first customers of the day, she would usher them out the back door and let more of the line in through the front door.

Her staff included Jean Boyle, Rose Wood and Vi Lakness. Rose would bake cakes, muffins and tarts at home and bring them in the morning. She could only keep this up for a week until it got too busy at the restaurant and a cook was hired.

Ruth remembers how hard Rose worked. She would have to stop at a friend's house on the way home at night to soak her feet so that she could complete the trip.

Ruth worked hard, too. Her lease with the hotel required her to stay open till one o'clock in the morning for the bar crowd. Ruth would be there to close the restaurant and then back again at five to open for the morning rush.

She missed a lot of dances, gave up badminton and cut back on cards to just a game a week on Sunday when she closed early at 8 p.m. But Ruth said it was so much fun at the restaurant and she had met so many people that it didn't seem like work. With all of the bagged lunches she prepared for the ore drivers she found she was never alone out on the highways either as each of her customers would give her a honk and wave.

After six months of operating her restaurant, Ruth met with Sadie Dougall, a teacher at the Mayo native village. Sadie knew a Grade 8 graduate who needed a job, yet was painfully shy having grown up in an isolated village.

Ruth hired her and started her out peeling vegetables in the back of the kitchen out of sight of the seating area. After a couple of days, she was given the job of washing dishes which required her to stand closer to the customers. Then she progressed to picking up the dirty dishes from the tables and, after 10 days, she was waitressing.

## Remember Yukon Electrical's office?

For more than 50 years, Yukon Electrical operated out of its plant building beside the White Pass train station. The company opened this office on Main Street in the 1940's or 1950's. If anyone has any information on this office and what happened to the neon sign, please contact Yukon Electrical at (867) 633-7000.



**YUKON ELECTRICAL**  
An **ATCO** Company



By the time the first employee “graduated”, another was there to start peeling the vegetables.

The employees included Flora Harper (nee Moses), Helen Buyck (nee Hager), Bella Peters (nee Hager), Ida Peters and Irene Melancon (nee Hager). Ilene Shilleto (nee Woods) and Maggie Wallingham (nee Woods) were graduates, too, yet shyness was not something that ever bothered them.

Urging the young women out of their shyness sometimes took ingenuity. Today, Helen Buyck says to her: “Ruth, I know now why you gave me a quarter for the jukebox when you were perfectly able to go out there yourself.”

In about 1952, Ruth decided to open a store in the Chateau Mayo where the Nagano Restaurant used to be. She called it Ruth’s Dress and Novelty Shop and she sold just about everything. The former kitchen area became her home.

Staff included Kathy Wuerr, Rose Wood and Jean Boyle.

Soon after, Ruth moved the restaurant over to the Chateau Mayo.

As if she wasn’t busy enough, she allowed herself to be talked into teaching in Keno City. It was October of 1953, and Mackeno Mine and YTG had just made an arrangement to open a school for the nine children in town. The school helped attract more families to the town and the school grew.

She commuted most nights, but not often in the winter. In the winter, Gordon would drive to Keno City and a gang would go bobsleighbing on the Bellekeno Hill. With frozen eyelids they would warm up in the Bellekeno offices and then a company truck with four-wheel drive would take them to the top of the hill again for another go.

Ruth only taught in Keno City for the first year until they were able to find someone else. She went back to her businesses, but the boom years were over as the dam and highway were completed and the workers from Elsa now had their own stores and restaurants.

In 1955, Gordon and Ruth were married so she sold the restaurant. Angus was born in their first year of marriage and Mary was adopted two years later. Four years later, Norman was born.

The store operated without her during the day and at night, after supper, she would go in to do the books and ordering.

Meanwhile, she volunteered to work at the church quite a lot, played cards and helped neighbourhood children with their homework. Her family enjoyed picnics and visiting other families in the friendly town.

They didn’t have a television back then, but they did have a record player and at least 25 children’s records.

Ruth found rearing children in Mayo to be relatively easy. They hadn’t developed expensive tastes in footwear and most parents took an active interest in their children.

Easter was spent at the airport looking for nests of candy made from packing paper. Discovery Day was filled with ball games, bike and trike decorating, contests and food. Discovery Day was actually celebrated on Canada Day since the weather was always too nasty in mid-August.

Throughout the year there were 16 mm movies rented from Vancouver and shown at the community hall. And in the winter there was tobogganning down the hill the Anglican Church stood on.

It was with mixed feelings that the family left Mayo in 1965. Gordon had received a promotion within the territorial government that required a move to Whitehorse. Jean Boyle was left in charge of the store until Ruth sold it three years later.

Ruth would spend the next 20 years in the educational system in Whitehorse offering up her special form of frontier teaching that would make her locally famous even today.

She started with the Yukon Technical and Trade School, helping upgrade the skills of adults so they could better handle the skill training.

It was the kind of individual teaching she enjoys. Yet she found she was working with adults who had dropped out of school in their teens. It may have been a “far-flung idea”, but in 1969 she decided to teach young people before they drop out and perhaps encourage them to carry on. She accepted a position at FH Collins Secondary teaching English.

The next year she was promoted to vice-principal. Besides keeping track of attendance and chasing down truants, she kept her door open for any student who wanted to talk. Her door was open before classes started and long after they were over. Often she would return to the school after supper to finish up one thing or another.

She earned the nickname “Mother Mac”, which she is still called by some to this day, and is credited with making the school less of an institution and more of a “home for learning”.



Ruth as vice-principal at F.H. Collins High School, Whitehorse, 1973.

Ruth left in 1974 a little burnt out and looking for a change. She took a job teaching math at GA Jeckell Junior Secondary. She was known for her work with special needs students, so she was given the remedial class for home room.

She tried an innovative method for teaching them math and other skills. They started a mobile store which required planning, measuring, keeping a record book, checking invoices from suppliers, banking and counting out change.

The mobile store was open at recess and at noon and they were often busy selling the pudding cups, chips and chocolate bars. With the profits they bought games and rug hooking kits for their classroom since many of the remedial students didn't like to mix with the other kids in the school. Yet these new games drew other students into their classroom which Ruth considered encouraging.

With the rest of the profits, Ruth started what may have been the territory's first breakfast program. It helped build a rapport with her students, improved attendance and gave them a good start to their day. She knew you couldn't learn on an empty stomach.

Ruth pulled in a dedicated core of volunteers to help her. Some helped with individual testing, tutoring and paperwork. Another teacher in the school would help her on his spares and she would help him on her spares.

Jack Burrows, a friend and carpenter, put a lot of hours into building the mobile store for the class.

Gordon helped make spaghetti, pancake batter and syrup before they left for work in the morning for her to take in for breakfast.

Since Ruth also taught Home Economics, she would sometimes bring her students to her own home to teach them how to make stew and biscuits. She would also load them into her Kenwood station wagon to bring them home to finish other assignments as well.

To help recover from an illness, Ruth decided to take a year off. But by Christmas she was lured out of her break to develop a remedial tutor program for adults wishing to upgrade their skills before attending university.

That was her first introduction to the Yukon Teacher Education Program. Over the next seven years, it would expand and change and develop into Yukon College.

Ruth is proud of her involvement in the planning and developing of Yukon College. It has helped so many people get their post-secondary training without the expense and trouble of leaving their Yukon home.

The new college opened without Ruth, though. She retired in 1986.

Besides her volunteer work, Gordon and Ruth are busy with their children and grandchildren who all still live in Whitehorse. "It's a great way to enjoy retirement."

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# *Mush On, Gene Dubois*

By Dan Davidson

**F**riends and family were saddened to hear, in early August (1997), that one of Dawson's truly unique characters, Gene Dubois, had taken his own life in his cabin at Granville. He was just 56 years old.

Dubois was raised in St. Paul, Alberta and came from a mixture of French, Irish and Mohawk ancestry. He blamed the latter strain for his love of wild places. "It's given me ... my genetic instinct for going back to the bush. For me it's always been the wilderness..."

That helps to explain how Gene uprooted himself and moved to the Yukon, coming first in the winter of 1966 to work on the building of the Clinton Creek asbestos mine, and returning in the summer 11 years later via the Yukon River "in a 7 man airforce survival raft with no equipment and almost no money."

The wanderlust that took him from place to place also resulted in a plethora of jobs: cowboy, farmer, logger, sawmill operator, blaster, truck driver and oil rig swamper, to name a few. Settling into Dawson Gene became a trapper/fisherman, with a reputation for singing a mean tune in the local bars (and music festivals in Dawson and Whitehorse) and partying hard.

He once characterized himself as being the fellow who arrived at the bar broke and sang for his drinks. In the 1990s he would turn his battles with alcohol into a rather stark play, "Whiskey", a meditation on the damage which alcohol has done to aboriginal peoples. He produced this with the assistance of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation.

Over the years here he added butcher, tour guide, ferry operator and writer to his resumé. In 1983 he became nationally famous while living up to his local nickname of "Crazy Gene" by mushing the mail from Dawson to Quebec City.

It was a 5,000 mile cross-Canada ordeal that took him from Dawson City to the side door of the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City. It took him from August 20, 1982 until February 23, 1983. He started out with rubber tires on his sled but ended up on regular runners, carrying 500 specially stamped envelopes to help celebrate Dawson City's 80th anniversary.

"It was the longest one man mail run carrying the mail the full distance with the same dogs," Gene recalled during our interviews in 1993. "I made it with 9 of the 10 dogs I left the Yukon with and 8 of the 12 I left Dawson with."

It was in that same interview that he revealed his deeper motivation for doing the run.

"I came back here with the idea of makin' big tracks, so my kids would know what I'd done, 'cause I was divorced already. Mainly that mail run



was done for my children, which I never told the news media, 'cause I didn't want 'em to be bothered. This was kept a secret for a long time, but is out now. Just the kids knew about it then and they had their own newspaper clippings and everything else. I met 'em 2 years ago (fourteen years after the separation) and they did have that memory, so it worked."

"When he found his kids it was just the greatest thing," ex-wife Marie Gogo recalled in a recent interview from Toronto.

His son, Jeff, subsequently moved to the Yukon, where he has now lived for about 5 years.

Gene's yearning to make big tracks also had something to do with a need to be accepted by people, to prove himself. Gogo and good friend Lee Woodley agree that Gene lived his life plagued by the memories and fears brought on by a rough childhood. He did not like to be alone, except in the bush, and later on, not even there, really.

Gene's death inspired a lot of inquiries both in Dawson and at the Whitehorse Star. When would there be an obituary? Why were we taking so long to celebrate his life? Probably because it was so hard to believe that this life was over.

Aside from his music, his cross-Canada mushing, his writing (the play and a number of humorous short stories that went under the heading, "My Granpa Said So"), Gene touched people in a number of personal ways.

Tom Naughton, a former employee at Klondike National Historic Sites, e-mailed the following from Winnipeg.

"Since I left Dawson it has taken me a number of years to find and develop a friendship where I can talk about anything. It is curious that Gene and I could talk like that 5 minutes after we first met."

I found him the same. I first interviewed Gene when he was starting the annual kids' ice fishing derby, which has gone on to become a tradition here under the sponsorship of the Yukon Order of Pioneers. It was a lot of work to get the thing under way and run it for the first several years until it proved itself, but he did it because he thought it would be good for people.

After that, Gene and I seemed to be able to talk about nearly anything. We discussed our pasts, our totally different lifestyles, our enjoyment of writing and music. When it came time to do a 20th anniversary piece on his cross-Canada run, he was the soul of cooperation.

I last spoke to him at Klondike Kate's, probably a week before he died. He was happy to be working with heavy equipment on the highway crew, doing something with a challenge to it.

He had a big heart. Lee Woodley speaks of his special affinity for the young, and how he had all the time in the world for them.

Tom Naughton writes of his generosity: "All the time I knew Gene he had money troubles. Every time he got money someone else needed it and he always helped them out. So many people owed him money and so few paid him back. But he never worried about it. If a friend was in need THAT was most important."

Gene suffered from chronic back problems after being hit by a tree

years ago while logging, and had had knee troubles more recently. He lived with a lot of pain, both physical and emotional, that he rarely showed people. One can only surmise that it finally got to be too much for him on that sad day, August 2, 1997.

Yukon artist Jim Robb was one of those who pushed for this piece to get written. He saw Gene as being one of the special people that help make the Yukon stand out.

"He's clearly one of the Colourful 5%," Robb said. "They broke the mould when they made Gene. His mush from Dawson to Quebec City was a one-of-a-kind thing. It was epic. Who else but Gene would do it?"

Who but Gene would have done a lot of things? Who indeed?



Gene Dubois training his dogs for the long journey (on a highway outside Whitehorse, 1983). Photo courtesy of *The Whitehorse Star*.

# Going Outside

*By Sheila Rose*

Annette just stopped by my office. Well she didn't really stop by; she sort of floated in the doorway with her eyes glassed over. I took one look at her and said, "You are going outside."

Someone who does not live in the Yukon might not understand what it means for a person to go "outside." But just as we have two seasons—this winter and next winter—we acknowledge the existence of two places: the Yukon and "outside." In this way "outside" serves as a kind of "none of the above" category, similar to how Newfoundlanders refer to someone leaving the island as going "away."

The symptoms of a Yukoner going "outside" are obvious. There is a look—no, an aura—about a dyed-in-the-wool sourdough about to make a trek south of 60. When someone's turn comes up, whether it's for Christmas holidays or summer vacation, they perk up, their demeanour changes, and they display a giddy attitude. They change and life around them changes.

This doesn't mean that we don't like living in the Yukon. I love the Yukon and after eight years it is my home. I relish walking to work in the



The writer (2nd from left) in Hawaii.

darkness of a winter morning. The pristine snow glistens like diamonds, the moon appears suspended in the heavens, and the veil of ice-fog envelops everything. I love the seasons and their changes: the fragrance of the wild roses on a June morning, the butterflies in the fireweed, the spongy step of a warm forest underfoot. But what I also love, long for, and lust after is to go outside.

Why is this ? Perhaps it is because the outside is so different from the Yukon. Whether it is British Columbia or Hawaii, Paris or Petrolia, we are the Yukon—the magic and the mystery—and they are something else.

When the Canadian Airlines International 737 takes off those who can hear it or see it become instantly aware. There are other airlines that fly outside but they are either seasonal or operate on a charter basis. Canadian Airlines sticks with us through thick and thin, through cold and not-so-cold, when

the economy is booming and our min-are exploring and when the goes bust der runs our sense of Twice a day rives bring-ones and seekers and departs taking



the economy is booming and running, and a shutdown through well-being. the 737 arriving loved adventure twice a day it people outside.

The airport and tears. With each ar-standing around empty handed as grandparents snatch up new grandchildren who have the look of “let the good times roll” in their eyes. Or you can hear a Swiss lover with the long alpine horn serenading his fian-gee as she arrives. There are people with dogs, flowers, and balloons, and sometimes extra parkas draped over their arms for guests who thought they could get by with just an extra sweater under an all weather jacket in January.

Of course not all trips outside are holidays. Sometimes travel arrangements must be quickly made in order to attend a funeral, seek medical care, or solve a business dilemma.

Still I do enjoy it all. But there is a rub.

Most of us have left large extended families to come here. Despite the distance we are still expected to attend family events. Yet family members do not feel the need to reciprocate. A friend recently told me that she and her husband have been out to three nieces’ weddings in the past year. This year her son is getting married and no one from outside is attending.

I know how she feels. As I grow older I appreciate my family’s quirki-



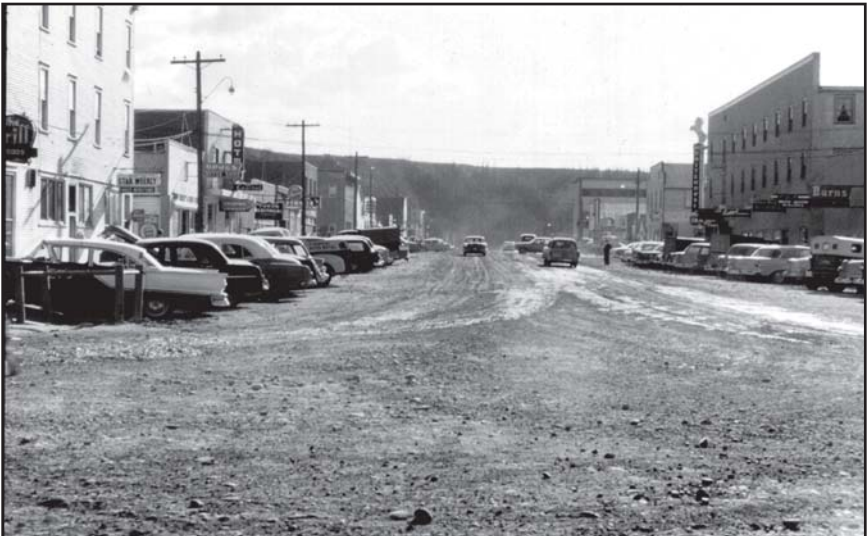
ness and idiosyncrasies more and more. And so I spend my holidays at weddings, anniversaries, and family reunions. These visits are usually hectic as I try to visit too many people in too little time. This would be fine except no one has come to visit me. I have sent rolls of photos of the Yukon wilderness, exquisite artwork, tacky souvenirs, and glossy books. Yet nothing has induced any of them to visit.

I can understand their concerns about the high cost of travel. But it's just as expensive to fly from Whitehorse to Toronto as it is to go the other way. Even with careful planning a plane ticket costs \$1000 before I turn around and most trips cost \$1500 to \$2000. Now I want to see my children and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, and everybody else. I am treated like eccentric royalty when I visit. But I just wish they would come up and see me sometime and not just to save me money. This is the land and lifestyle that fits me, the one I have chosen. I want to share it with them.

Yes we all have a good grumble about it from time to time. We commiserate and vow to not spend every holiday with family. We are resolute, determined and have the support of our Yukon friends. And then we find ourselves booking a ticket to a great aunt's 90th birthday party.

But this year I broke the pattern. I divided my two weeks of vacation between two destinations. I spent the first week with family. The second week I spent in Hawaii. Before I departed Petrolia there was a slight hint in the conversation that they could not understand why I would want to be anywhere but with them. But I am strong. I have no guilt. I sent them all grass skirts from Honolulu.

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Main Street, Whitehorse, in the late 1950s. Photographer unknown.

# Magic & Mystery

By Rob Alexander

All of us at some time or other have wondered where certain objects go when they disappear. You know, things like socks and lighters. Even more puzzling is why paired objects such as socks vanish from our washing machines *one at a time*. Why don't *both* socks disappear together, as a team? Likewise, why do we often see a *single* shoe on the edge of the Alaska highway instead of a pair? Where does the other shoe go? I cannot for the life of me imagine that people would pull onto the shoulder of the highway, open the door of their vehicle, drop one single shoe onto the shoulder, then speed away before anybody sees them. If shoes hurt, most people would throw away both shoes, wouldn't they? It is unlikely they'd retain one shoe; what would be the point? Sensible people leave pairs of shoes beside the highway so that other people can stop and pick them up if they are in need of shoes, but then something, or someone, comes along and steals just one single shoe. Why? Washing machines may be responsible for the disappearance of single socks, but I have never seen washing machines lurking in bushes alongside the highway, leaping out grabbing single shoes and running away before anyone sees them. Therefore, something else must be the cause.

I wondered if somewhere up there in orbit around our planet was a mothership full of one-legged aliens, the same ones who - according to "X Files" and totally reliable New Age sources - once abducted millions of humans into their UFOs for biological experiments. Surely a race of beings capable of constructing a mothership and performing delicate operations on humans would also be capable of constructing simple objects like socks and shoes? Or are such mundane things beneath their dignity? Obviously, there has to be a different explanation.

If we lived down south we could blame it on the Bermuda Triangle. Lots of things disappear down there, including people and even large objects like planes and ships. However, because the Bermuda Triangle does not extend as far north as the Yukon, we must look for some other explanation. The answer is annoyingly obvious, because all of us have seen it before dozens of times; everytime we look at a map of the Yukon. The land mass of the Yukon is *shaped like a triangle*. The only difference between the Bermuda Triangle and the Yukon Triangle, apart from the spelling, is that for most of the year you would not want to wear Bermuda shorts in the Yukon.

So why is the Yukon Triangle not well-known? How come the Bermuda Triangle gets all the media attention? Well, the Yukon Triangle operates on a more subtle level. For example, instead of blatantly calling itself "The Yukon Triangle" and immediately attracting world-wide attention and causing an influx of millions of tourists with millions of dol-

lars to spend, it behaves in a typically quiet and dignified Canadian manner and uses more indirect references such as “the land of magic and mystery”, a description that softens and lulls us into thinking only pleasant thoughts about our territory. In addition, the Yukon Triangle avoids publicity by selecting items of lesser importance for removal, and *smaller* items rather than large, so that hopefully we won’t notice what it’s doing, or if we do notice we’ll probably consider it a nuisance but not really important enough to bother with. You know, things like lighters, pens, screwdrivers, socks, or husbands. So instead of removing large and very important items like ocean-going liners or squadrons of military aircraft, it goes for the insignificant. Not that one sees many ocean-going liners in the Yukon, but there are some quite large houseboats on Marsh Lake that it could make off with.

Occasionally the Yukon Triangle does goof by selecting somewhat larger items, which may explain why so many hunters lose this year’s moose. The loss of some items may cause inconvenience or sadness, or get some people’s knickers in a twist (the moose), but most people would not consider the losses significant enough (the husband) to bother reporting such losses to the authorities. Sometimes the Yukon Triangle does claim more important victims, such as honest lawyers, trustworthy politicians, sympathetic bureaucrats, and so on. In fact, in recent years these types of persons have been disappearing in such large numbers that many of them are now on the endangered species list.

So what are these Triangles and why do they exist? Basically, triangles were discovered by the Greek mathematician Pythagorus whose famous theorem states that the square on the hippopotamus is equal to some of the squares on the other two sides. This means if you shove a hippo through the Yukon Triangle it comes out more or less equal but *on the other side* of the Bermuda Triangle. Which might explain why hippos are rarely seen in the Yukon. The two Triangles (Yukon and Bermuda) and perhaps the constellation known as Triangulum, are probably gates or portals through which socks, shoes, lighters, pens, screwdrivers, mooses, husbands, endangered people, and various other odds and sods, pass through into other dimensions.

Why people in those other dimensions need such things is not as important as the question: what do *they* have that we don’t, and how can we get our hands on it? We can only hope that people such as the British scientist Stephen Hawking will eventually hack their Unified Field Theories into the right shape (a triangle) so that we can take advantage of whatever this or any other universe or dimension has to offer. Or at very least, get back all those missing socks and shoes, and perhaps a few sympathetic bureaucrats. On second thoughts, just the socks and shoes.

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# The Yukon's Greatest Explorer: **Robert Campbell**

**Part Two of Four**

By William J. Betts

continued from  
Yukoner Magazine No. 5

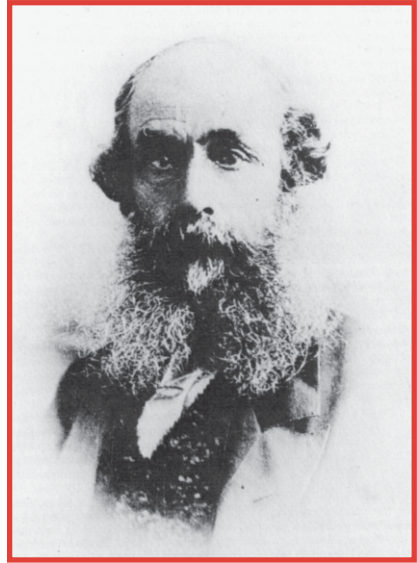
In August he was surprised to see Mr. Hutchison arrive with his men from Fort Halkett. Wasn't he supposed to have gone to Dease Lake to build a new fort?

Hutchison had started out with several men to do as he was instructed, to establish a fort on Dease Lake. They had not proceeded far when they were alarmed by a large group of "Russian Indians" (Nahannis) who were in the vicinity. Scouts had seen as many as 60 warriors, faces painted in black war paint and heavily armed. The scouts ran back to inform Hutchison that they would be slaughtered should they continue.

According to Hutchison's report, the Nahanni Indians had threatened to massacre them following the establishment of Fort Halkett, but he was determined to fulfill Governor Simpson's orders to build the new fort and proceeded despite the danger. When his scouts reported the hostile Indians were ready to attack he thought it wise to clear out. Before Hutchison's party could load all of their gear into their canoes, they observed a large contingent of Indians advancing toward them. The men dropped their gear, jumped in their canoes and quickly paddled downstream. In his report Hutchison wrote, "Ocular demonstration then convinced me of the narrow escape that we made and that our young scouts had by no means exaggerated their numbers, but to the contrary."

Whether McPherson believed the report or not he sent it on to Governor Simpson. He also wrote a letter saying that he would persevere in establishing a post on Dease Lake the following summer. This expedition would be lead by Robert Campbell who had gladly volunteered his services. Hutchison would be passing the winter at Fort Simpson but had put in for retirement. Evidently he'd had enough of the frontier.

McPherson, after reading Hutchison's report about the aborted trek to Dease Lake, had some doubts. It sounded to him like a story Hutchison



Robert Campbell



had made up so he would be given early retirement. McPherson was sure that Campbell would never turn back come hell or high water. The Scot was a hard working, very devoted, dedicated man and fear of Indians wasn't part of his character.

In March, 1837, Campbell left Fort Simpson with a party of men for Fort Liard. There they built two birch bark canoes for the trip to Dease Lake. As soon as the river ice broke up Campbell would be ready for the adventure that he'd dreamed of all his life: to explore a new country and open it up to the fur trade. The only problem was getting men to go on the trek. They had heard the story that Hutchison had brought back and they were not enthusiastic about the venture. By the middle of May he was able to put together a crew of 16, eight to each canoe.

On the third day out from the fort, three Indians left during the night. The men who stayed were so fearful of meeting hostile Indians they refused to go on. Campbell realized that there was not much use continuing with such a timid crew. He decided to go back to Fort Liard and recruit some good men.

Back at the fort, Campbell gathered the men about him. He explained that this would be a difficult trip but there were not, in his estimation, any hostile Indians out there.

"I'll back you up. And I won't expect you to do anything that I wouldn't do myself," he told them.

"What about the war party that Hutchison saw?" someone asked.

"Well, now," he replied in his thick Scottish tongue, "if we meet any hostile Indians, which I doubt, we'll fight them. No Indian can better us if we all stick together."

He paused a moment, looking at the men gathered about him, "But I'll tell you this, if any man shows signs of insubordination it will be at the peril of his own life."

By the next morning, having gathered his men together, they started up river to Dease Lake. But before they reached "Hell's Gate" the river was in summer freshet. With the river in flood stage, no boat could possibly ascend from what was called "The Devil's Portage". The current is strong and there are numerous whirlpools that suck a canoe down. The river ran between perpendicular walls of rock two or three hundred feet tall.

Their progress was slow and hard work. But it wasn't the danger and work that kept Campbell anxious but the fear that the men would lose heart at the merest noise— a frog croaking or the screech of an owl — thinking it was an Indian signal. These imaginary fears were worse than the real ones.

At last "Devil's Portage" was reached and the canoes beached, the bundles of supplies stacked above water line. As they were about to retire, the sled dogs they had brought with them for winter travel began barking at something in the woods.

"There could be Indians out there," one of the men declared.

"That's only a bear or some other animals the dogs are barking at," Campbell told the men.

But they weren't appeased and still mumbled amongst themselves. Finally the dogs stopped barking and the company went to sleep. Early in the morning, as was his practice, Campbell was up and looking about. He would scout the portage trail, make sure that it was clear for packing their gear. He noted the bundles of supplies stacked on the trail where the men had taken them the day before. They would be taken on up the trail this morning. On the way back to camp he was met by his guide, Louis Lapierre.

"The men are laying around camp with their guns in hand," Lapierre told Campbell, "they are sure Indians have come in the night. One of the bundles has been cut."

The two men hurried back to camp. Campbell was furious. The men were such cowards.

"Men, we've got to get going. We can't waste time like this!"

"Indians were by here last night. They cut one of the bundles," one of the men answered Campbell.

"Now then, you can't fool me with such talk. I noticed those bundles this morning and none of them were cut. Besides, I don't think an Indian would have been so clumsy. Now let's get moving!"

The men could see that their little scheme would not work with this big man with the heavy black beard. Later some swore that they could see sparks fly from his eyes. Maybe this man's very presence would scare any Indian to the happy hunting ground. So they quickly went to work packing their gear over the portage. It took them three hard working days to cross the portage with all their gear. They met no Indians.

Soon after crossing the portage, they were at Fort Halkett which was situated on the Smith River at its confluence with the Liard. The fort was deserted and it appeared that not a single soul had visited it since Hutchison and his men had left it. Certainly no Indians.

Campbell decided to winter over at Fort Halkett as he felt it too late in the season to go further. He knew that Halkett was to be abandoned as soon as the new fort was built on Dease Lake. Here at Halkett the hunting was pretty good and there were fish in the surrounding lakes. Some of his Indians had to return to Fort Simpson but the rest could sustain themselves by hunting and fishing. With the supplies they had packed in, they should do well enough.

Campbell was determined to go on to Portage Brule' to the spot where Hutchison and his men had declared Indians were about to attack them and they had to run for their lives. When Campbell arrived at the area of the so-called attack he found the bundles just as the men had dropped them in their haste to get to their canoes and away. It appeared that no one had touched them except for animals who got into the food supplies. Some of the items were still sound, such as ball and shot, small tools, some of the clothing (all trade goods) items that would have been quickly taken by Indians.

When Campbell returned to the fort he called a meeting.

"I want you to know what we found. All the goods were right where they were dropped when those cowards thought they were to be killed by Indians. Why, there were no Indians there at all. Some of the goods are still useable and we'll get everything useable and pack it back here. So you can see that the whole thing was just a pack of lies because they were cowards. Now I know that none of you are cowards," he told them, looking from one to the other. "We aren't afraid of Indians, are we?"

Some one laughed and then another and they began talking among themselves. Now they knew for sure that their fears were groundless. Oh, maybe there were Indians. Friendly Indians. Didn't they need Indians to bring their furs to trade? After all that was their primary reason for being here. From this time on the men with Campbell went about their work unafraid.

The men began the task of re-fitting the fort for their winter's sojourn. It was a formidable task as the buildings were in bad shape, having had no care for many months.

When the Indians who had traded at Fort Halkett in the past, saw smoke coming from the buildings they came in to trade their furs. Many of them were out of ammunition and the trading became very brisk.

During the winter of 1837-38, the outfits they would need had been shipped to Devil's Portage where Campbell and his men picked them up and brought them on to the fort. The winter passed peacefully. The men spent time hunting and fishing for food. Game was plentiful and the fishing good.

With the outfit from Fort Simpson came a letter to Campbell from Governor Simpson that pleased the Scot. It read:

Norway House. 4th July, 1837

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 30 Nov., and am very much pleased at your spirited tender of your services to establish Dease's Lake, which was called forth the approbation of the Council and led to your promotion to the rank of Clerk with an advance of salary. Rest assured that merit will in this service always meet its reward

Let me beg that your attention be particularly directed to pushing the trade across the Mountains and down the Pelly River (here the Stikine is meant as Campbell found that to be the case), and Robert Campbell is not the man I take him to be unless in due time he plants the H.B. standard on the shores of the Pacific\_

With best wishes, I remain,

Yours most sincerely,

Geo. Simpson.

Campbell was very pleased that his diligent work had paid off with a raise in rank and pay. He was looking forward to his new work, exploring the Dease Lake region and building the new fort there.

In the spring a party of men, including an apprentice clerk, A. R.

McLeod, Jr., and additional supplies arrived from Fort Simpson. Campbell had hoped they would bring more supplies but was, as always, happy to receive what he did.

Fort Halkett was again to be abandoned. All supplies and trade goods would have to be transported to Dease Lake, a formidable task. Campbell asked the local Indians to follow them and hunt along the way. They would need all the meat they could kill in order to save as much of their provisions as possible. Hoole, Campbell's interpreter, stayed with the local Indians to encourage them to hunt for the exploring party.

As soon as their preparations were made they left for Dease Lake. They had two canoes manned by eight men each. The water was high with very strong currents, making travel exceedingly slow and very hard work. There were numerous portages to make. Their route led through the Cassiar Mountains which were wooded with pine, spruce, poplar and birch. There was an abundance of game — moose, caribou, black bear and grizzly. There was plenty of beaver sign, a welcome sight for Campbell who thought this country should produce plenty of fur for the company.

The country levelled off and they made better time. They finally arrived at the confluence of the Liard and the Dease rivers. Then as they followed the Dease River the country again became mountainous with high rising peaks, many of them snow capped. One of the mountains Campbell climbed reminded him of his Perthshire Mountains in Scotland. He named it Ben Lawers after his mountains back home.

Near the beginning of July, 1838, they reached Dease Lake. They selected a site some five miles from the mouth of Dease River on which to build the new fort. Campbell wasted little time, starting almost immediately to begin building operations. This meant cutting timber, getting it to the site and building the fort.

On July 20, Campbell decided to leave McLeod in charge of the construction while he explored the land to the west. He took Hoole, as well as two very fine Indian lads, Lapie and Kitza, with him to carry out the instructions of Governor Simpson— "to push the trade down the Pelly (Stikine)." At long last the adventure of exploring new lands would begin. This is what he'd been waiting for all the long seven years that he'd been with the Company.

Campbell decided to take his trusted Hoole and his two Indian lads, Lapie and Ketza, with him, leaving the rest of the men to build the new fort and trading post. They left in spruce bark canoes and travelled some 20 miles to the south end of Dease Lake where they beached their canoes to travel on foot. They would travel light with the usual camp supplies and a minimum of food. They did carry a good supply of tea and tobacco as well as some trade goods. They would depend on their guns to provide them with food.

By six o'clock the evening of July 21st, they had reached the "terror bridge", as McLeod had called the rickety structure that crossed the Tuya River. It was here that McLeod had turned back due to the fear of his men.



The bridge was constructed of spruce poles held together by splices of hand woven rope high above the raging torrent below. To make it even more unsafe it sloped to one side, nor were there hand holds that one might steady oneself. One look at the frail structure and Hoole said he could never cross such a dangerous structure. Then to make matters even worse they observed an Indian hut on the opposite side of the river. There was smoke issuing from the topside indicating that there were Indians at home. That did it for Hoole, he wouldn't cross that dangerous bridge only to be slain by unfriendly Indians.

"Hoole lad, you'll go with us. There's no need to be afraid. We can surely cross the bridge and the Indians will not harm us. We will all go," Campbell insisted.

When they reached the bridge they observed an Indian standing in front of the hut looking their way. Campbell hailed him, beckoned for him to come over the bridge to talk. The Indian, however, had no intention of following Campbell's invitation and disappeared beyond the hut.

Campbell was undecided for a moment. It was getting late. Perhaps it would be best to make camp on this side of the river. But then why wait? They would cross the bridge and see if they could talk to the Indians.

Campbell and his three Indian companions very carefully crossed the bridge giving encouragement with every step to the timid Hoole. Across the bridge the four men climbed a zig zag path up to the hut. They found it deserted although there was a fire burning indicating the occupants had just fled in fear of the big white man and his three Indian companions.

There were several metal pots as well as other gear that indicated the occupants had traded with either the Company, or more likely, the Russians on the Coast. In one of the pots they found salmon ready for cooking. The four hungry men helped themselves to this delicious fish for their supper. When they left Campbell replaced the fish with tobacco, as well as a knife, in payment for the salmon they had eaten. They re-crossed the bridge and made camp in a cave-like niche in the rocks.

Early the next morning (July 23rd) Hoole awakened the rest of the party by yelling, "Indians! Indians!" Campbell jumped from his blankets and looked up toward the hut to where Hoole was excitedly pointing.

"We gotta run," Hoole shouted, "or we'll all be killed!"

"Hoole, shut up!" Campbell exclaimed, "It won't be the Indians doing the killing, I'll do it myself if you don't settle down ! "

Hoole quieted down somewhat but was still apprehensive as well he might be. Campbell hoisted the Company flag and made signs for them to come on over across the bridge. It took a lot of shouting and signaling but the Indians finally crossed the bridge.

The chief or headman held out a pipe which Campbell filled with tobacco. They each smoked a few puffs, the universal peace ritual. They "talked", with the help of one of the Indians who spoke passable English.

While this talk was going on some of the younger Indians used long poles with hooks on one end (Campbell called them “creeks”) with which they used to gaff salmon from the river. Soon there were salmon flopping on the rocks which all of them feasted on.

It had been the gift of tobacco and the knife Campbell had left at the hut that indicated to the owner they were friendly. He ran with the news to the main camp but told only his own people, the Nahanni, about the four men at the bridge. The chief, with some of his people, secretly left camp without telling the other Indians, the fearful Tlinget from the Coast. The chief was afraid that they would come and kill the white man and his three Indian companions.

“I am not afraid,” Campbell told the chief. “I want to visit the main camp.

Their new Indian friends, however, insisted he not do so as the great chief “Shakes” from the sea, with great numbers of his braves, was camped there. It would be suicide to go. Campbell was adamant, he would go to the big camp.

“I am not afraid of this Shakes, as you call him,” Campbell replied, “we must go visit the camp. I have been instructed to do so.”

“Shakes will surely kill you. Even though my band and I would try to protect you we could not do so. Shakes and his band are many, like sands on the beach. He will surely kill you. “

Such threats would stop most men, but not Campbell. He was stubborn. He was determined. No so-called chief could stop him from going to the camp. And when the Nahaney chief saw that Campbell could not be persuaded to stay away from the fishing-trading camp he sent two runners to let the rest of his band know that they were coming.

At times, as they progressed, parties of two to three Indians would intercept them. They would try to turn them about, always with the same message, “If you go on you will never return; Shakes will certainly kill you.” They told Campbell that they would take him to an observation point where he could view the camp without being seen. When he saw how many Indians were in the camp he would be convinced it would be folly to proceed with his plans.

Campbell began to think that there might be some truth to what the Indians kept telling him. He would make contingency plans just in case he didn’t return. He would send Hoole and Lapie back to the bridge where they would wait for him. If he didn’t return in two days they were to cut the ropes of the bridge and return to Dease Lake, report what happened. Hoole was very happy with this as he felt it meant certain death to go into the camp. Lapie didn’t like the idea, nor did Ketz. They vowed not to leave Campbell. Hadn’t their fathers instructed them if they deserted Campbell they need never return to their home? Campbell decided to take them all with him, much to Hoole’s disappointment. The large encampment on the Stikine was some 13 miles from the bridge on the Tuva River. It was here that the powerful Tlingets came to trade with the inland Indi-

ans as well as fish for salmon. Shakes, as he was called, was an imposing figure, taller than the average Indian, with powerful shoulders. He held power over several bands of Coast Tlinget as well as many bands living on the west side of the mountains. This was the Indian whom Campbell wished to meet.

The Campbell party, his three Indian companions as well as several Nahanni, finally reached a hill overlooking the large encampment. Campbell was impressed. He had never seen so many Indians camped in one place before. The camp was situated on a plain above the river with many temporary shelters.

Campbell, his trader instincts aroused, could see the possibilities such a large gathering could be for the Company. What he didn't know was that the trade was dominated by the powerful Tlingets who were used by the Russians as partners. The Russian traders never went inland, leaving the trading to the Tlingets. The powerful Coast Indians would not permit others to take away their trade.

Campbell, having come this far and in spite of his new found friend's admonishment, "That Shakes will surely kill you," would not give up now. What went on in the Trader's mind we can only guess. Did he feel that he would be killed as the Nahanni claimed? If so it took a man of great courage to proceed. He went alone.

As soon as he entered camp he was surrounded by curious Indians. One, by the name of Jack, who could speak broken English, attached himself to him as his guide. Every time Campbell answered one of the many questions asked, the crowd surrounding them would yell and that echoed off the rocks of the valley. Campbell began to sweat.

Campbell was well armed. He had two pistols and a dirk thrust in his waistband and carried a double barreled percussion gun. He would go down fighting and if he had to die he'd take a lot of the Indians with him. There was no attack. Suddenly a path was made through the crowd around Campbell and a very imposing figure strode toward him. It was Shakes, the powerful leader of the Coast Tlingets.

Campbell was escorted to a tent that had been set up especially for him to meet with Shakes and the lesser chiefs of the Indian bands. Then they were inside and seated in a circle a bottle of whiskey was produced and some poured into a cup. It was handed to Campbell who took but a sip. It was passed around, the Indians drinking the contents of the cup in gulps after each refill.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside the tent. The tent was torn down. Campbell jumped to his feet clasping his gun ready to shoot. An Indian shouted, "If the white chief is killed there will be plenty of blood spilled here."

The Nahanni had feared Shakes would have Campbell killed. But the powerful Tlinget had no thought of killing Campbell, at least not at this time. He seemed more interested in the double barreled gun that Campbell carried. He had never before seen such a gun and wanted to have Campbell fire it.

Campbell feared that this was just a ruse to render his gun useless so he made sure he had powder, ball and cap in his hand ready to re-load the second he fired the gun..

Campbell would fire the gun, quickly re-load and fire once more. At every shot the crowd would yell with such a frightful noise that it made the hairs on Campbell's neck stand on end. The demonstration seemed to mollify the chief and there was more talk.

Walking about the camp Campbell learned that several of the Indians knew about Dr. McLeod's venture and about finding the headwaters of the Stikine. That he had raised the Company flag taking possession of the territory for HBC. Indians were in awe of writing on paper, thinking it magic and would often deliver such communications. In this case it did happen as Douglas reported receiving the letter from Campbell.

While at the large Indian camp Campbell was to meet a person who probably saved his life on more than one occasion. This person was an Indian "chiefteness", as Campbell called her. She was the leader of a band of Nahaney Indians of about 500 individuals. She was married to a weak man who held little sway over the people. She was unusually tall and slender for an Indian, very clean about her person, wearing her clothes more like a princess, with silver bands about her arms. Her jet black eyes would sparkle like fire when amused or angered.

Although their communication was limited due to their language barrier they became very friendly. Had Campbell, being away from his Scotland and the bonnie lasses for so long, been smitten by this Indian beauty? Campbell was the first white man the Chiefteness had ever seen. Campbell, writing about it decades later, in his memoirs, could recall every detail of this meeting.

The Chiefteness accompanied Campbell back to where his party was waiting for his return. The longer the two were together the closer this bond became between the lonely Scot and this beautiful Indian lady.

Joining his three Indian friends Campbell was informed by Hoole that some member of the Nahanni band had stolen an ax, a gun, a fire bag as well as a small kettle, all items needed for their return to Dease Lake. Campbell was furious. Why didn't they watch their equipment better! But then he relented knowing that Indians didn't call it stealing when they took things. They had different rules than the white man.

The Chiefteness, seeing something was bothering her new found friend, asked what had happened. When she was told about the items being taken she quickly dispatched two runners back to the Indian encampment. Much to Campbell's surprise and delight, they soon returned with the missing items.

Campbell and his three Indian companions began the long hike back to Terror Bridge. The Chiefteness accompanied him part way. She kept admonishing him that as soon as they reached the bridge they should hurry back to their people as she was sure that Shakes would send young braves to kill him and his men.



Before the Chiefteness left to return to her people at the encampment, they clasped hands in a long handshake. The Indian put her hand on Campbell's shoulder. They looked at one another for what seemed ages but was only a moment or two. Then Campbell gave her his handkerchief as well as all the loose knick-knacks he had on him. She in turn gave him the silver bracelets that she wore. She turned and walked away, later turned again, waved in a final farewell.

The Company explorers (that's what they were) left early the next morning for their return to the new fort on Dease Lake. The construction on the buildings was going well. Campbell felt that the fort would be completed before winter set in.

The selection of the Dease Lake site for the new trading post was not the best. Number one, the area was more or less dominated by the Tlinget Indians who would not tolerate trading with the Hudson's Bay Company. Number two, it was located in an area where game was not plentiful. Nor was the fishing very good. Campbell sent out his hunters as well as establishing several fishing camps without much success. Something would have to be done if they were to have food enough to survive the winter.

Campbell decided to go to Fort Simpson. After all, his discovery of the Stikine and all it meant to the Company warranted a trip to report his find. And at the same time he would ask McPherson for additional supplies of food to help them through the winter. After a dangerous trip to the Fort, they arrived on August 20th. McPherson was pleased with Campbell's successful exploration but would not give him additional supplies. He told Campbell they would have to "live off the country."

Campbell arrived back at Dease Lake October 11th amid a violent snowstorm. He had very little additional supplies having used most on their return to the fort.

Now he faced a long dreary winter with few supplies to feed ten men, one family, a clerk and himself. The nearest Company post, Fort de Liard, was some 600 miles away. And the Indians were not friendly.

By November they were very short of food. Campbell, with several of his Indian hunters, crossed the mountains again to hunt in the headwaters of the Stikine. They found the territory all but devoid of game where during the summer it had been plentiful. They returned by a different route to the fort in the hope of finding game, found nothing.

All winter they pursued fish and game relentlessly with very little success. With hooks and nets for fish, and with snares, traps and gun for anything that could be thrown in the stew pot, anything with fur, feathers or scales. They barely procured enough food to stay alive. And to make matters even worse they had to watch for Indians, especially those loyal to the Tlingets who wanted them out of what they considered their trading district.

Not all of the Indians were unfriendly to them. The Chiefteness and her band also made frequent visits to the area. In February, 1839, she and her band stopped at the fort. One of the men had died from starvation

and the rest were in pitiful shape. The Chiefteness quickly had her servants (slaves, all Indian tribes kept captives as slaves) cook up a repast for the men of the fort. The first good meal they had in weeks, if not months. Campbell felt bad that he could not give her some gift in return.

She and her band spent the night at the fort. When everything had quieted down for the night Campbell was rudely awakened by yell after yell. The Indians rushed into the main room where Campbell slept and where the guns were racked on the wall, seized the guns and threatened Campbell.

The Chiefteness, lodged in another part of the house, heard the commotion and rushed into the room. She demanded silence. The yelling Indians quieted down. She soon found the instigator of the violence. She confronted him, her eyes blazing, stamping her foot, castigating him for threatening their friend, Robert Campbell. The Scot could only look and marvel at the power of this gallant Indian leader. The Chiefteness probably saved Campbell's life and he never forgot it.

After the Chiefteness and her band left for the Stikine, Campbell and his men at the Fort were once more threatened by Indians. These were the bands of Indians under the influence of the Tlinget chief Shakes who wanted the white man removed from his trading territory.

They came across the frozen lake in single file, firing guns and yelling. They pushed past Campbell standing in the doorway of the main trading house and fired into the walls and ceiling.

"Well, McLeod," Campbell remarked, "I have often heard it said that a ball passing through one feels like an icicle. We will soon know."

However, they stopped firing their guns and confronted Campbell, "You white people have made this country stink and the game has fled and we starve," their leader told him through one who spoke some English.

Campbell told them that wasn't so, that the animals had gone because of over hunting and they were starving as well. It took a lot of talking as well as gifts to get the Indians to leave. This band was but one of many that harassed Campbell and his men. Half starved as they were, all they could hope for was to somehow make it through to spring.

In March another large party arrived at the fort. It was a Sunday and Campbell was alone with Louis Lapierre, an old French Canadian. The other men were out in twos and threes either hunting or fishing. The Indians crowded into the house and roughly seized Lapierre.

"Are we to yield to them," Lapierre asked, "or are we to sell our lives as dearly as we can?"

"Louis," Campbell replied, "don't struggle. We'll try to calm them down."

Campbell had been reading his Bible when the Indians had come rushing into the house. He now opened it and began reading out loud from Joshua I, 9th Verse, "Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee wheresoever thou goest."

The Indians quieted down. The leader pointed at the ceiling and asked if it was the Great Spirit. Campbell nodded and continued to read from the Bible. The Indians were in awe of books and evidently these Indians had come in contact with missionaries somewhere. Campbell was thus able to somewhat control the Indians and talked them out of inflicting bodily harm upon them. But not before he gave them gifts of blankets or whatever else they demanded from the trading goods.

The Indian was also in awe of writing on paper and would often carry messages long distances for the white man. And this was the case in this situation. Campbell wrote a note for McLeod informing him to gather all the men and hurry back to the fort. One of the Indians was induced to carry the message instructing him to give it to McLeod. The message was indeed received and McLeod and the men were back at the fort the following day.

Not all of the Indians passing through were hostile. Campbell had instructed some of the Indians who had traded with him at Fort Halkett that he would be at Dease Lake and to come there for trade. They had to be careful coming and going as they were out of their territory. They traded some fur as well as provisions but nothing that would make the Dease Lake Post anything to brag about. The winter's trade gave them only a few bundles of fur and months of near starvation. Campbell was more than ready to leave this "desperately barren country", as he called it.

On May 8th, 1839, Campbell and his men prepared to leave Dease Lake. They removed all the leather from their snow shoes as they would not need them now that spring was here and along with the robbed us of all our utensils, nor did they stop here. On reaching the upper end of the lake they reduced those there to nakedness and expelled them from the place, and it was with difficulty that McLeod succeeded in preventing their taking one of the men as a slave."

Campbell went on to explain that it would be impossible to maintain a trading post at Dease Lake without more men and adequate supplies to feed them through the winter months. There was just not enough game "to live off the country". Besides the hostility of the Indians there wasn't much fur to be traded. Campbell chose two of his best men to take his journals (these to be copied and returned) along with the letter and several packets of fur to Fort Simpson. Campbell, with the rest of the men would stop at Fort Halkett where they would wait for the arrival of the supply canoes from Fort Simpson.

Continued in the next issue.

# The Goldseeker

Part One of Ten

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Old Yukon Reader subscribers will recall how I serialized the Bushman saga in that magazine. Well, I'm going to try that again. I created a narrator and two main characters and we'll see what happens to them. I'm writing this as we go along, so you know as much about what will happen as I do. S.H.

## Part One Forward

In 1996, I was prospecting for gold near Dawson City in the Yukon, trying my luck on one of the old mined-out creeks, when I found a body, frozen stiff, in the bottom of a deep mine shaft.

He had been there for close to a hundred years, I figured. What happened was, he dug a shaft into the frozen ground so far down that he ran out of air and smothered himself. Water ran down into this shaft and froze all around him. In recent years other fellows had bulldozed the creek bottom till it was almost scraped bare except for the spot where this oldtimer lay. A lot of moss and leaves had fallen into the shaft too and kept the ice from melting in the hot Yukon summers.

He had died sitting down. I chopped most of the ice from around him and then hauled him over by a poplar tree where I propped him up with some rocks. To be honest, I didn't really worry about this dead fellow being close by. Matter of fact, I forgot all about him as I made a big fire in that old shaft to melt the ice and frozen ground. Was he getting any gold in there? I had to know and I spent the rest of the day working at it there with the hot sun helping that ground to thaw.

As any Yukoner knows, it doesn't get dark here in the summertime. Sun shines more or less all through the twenty-four hours with a brief period of gray around midnight. I lit a small fire and was about to crash out for the night when I heard a dull thud then a gurgling, wheezing sound.

I walked over toward the noise and found my oldtimer.

He had fallen over and water ran from his mouth. He looked just like somebody that had been fished out of a lake so, for the hell of it, I flipped him onto his belly and tried artificial respiration. I remembered how from a first aid course I had enrolled in a couple of years ago. I thumped his back real hard and cranked his arms up and down like they showed us. More water came out. This time I could see bubbles in it so I thumped him again and kept hauling on his elbows to make him breath.

Finally I said to hell with it. This is crazy. I caught him by one elbow and rolled him over onto his back.



I think a woman would say he wasn't a bad looking bird, except for a deep scar running from his cheekbone to his jaw. Grey hair and beard and a big mustache and not much different from anyone you might see walking around Dawson City. I bent over closer to look at his wrinkles, thinking I could tell how old he might be, when his two eyes popped open and he stared at me square in the face.

I jumped back so fast that I tripped over a rock and went flying onto the ground, scraping my elbow bad and cursing a bit. From where I lay, I looked over at the oldtimer but he had gone to sleep again.

I watched him for a time and went over to check on him again. His eyes stayed closed and I bent my ear to his chest to listen for a heartbeat. My hearing has never been the best and I couldn't make out any action from his heart but as I lifted my head, there were those blue eyes looking at me again.

I said to myself, 'to hell with this,' and went back to my tent. It's all a dream. Too much sun, too much work, too many ghosts in this valley.

It was fairly dark in the tent; it had no windows and just a flap for a door, so I lit a coal-oil lamp and lay on the cot, thinking I might try to read myself to sleep. I picked up a book I had bought in a second-hand bookstore, 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' by Gibbons. It was my sleep book. I had been trying to read it for years and after one or two pages I could always go right to sleep.

I had just turned to the third page, my nerves being somewhat on edge this night, when the tent flap lifted up and there was that oldtimer standing there, holding up the canvas with his right hand. I said to him, "C'mon in. You can sit on that chair by the table. I'll boil up some tea."

I pumped up the Coleman stove and got the tea started. I could hear the oldtimer wheezing in his chair.

"What's the matter with your wind?" I asked.

He coughed a few times and spat out the door of the tent.

He began to speak. I moved closer to hear. His words came out clearly, cleanly, as if he were dictating into a tape recorder.

"I came into the Yukon over the Chilkoot Pass back in '98. Been here ever since. Just about everybody I knew in those days has died or left for the Outside. I can see, young fellow, from the books you got in here, that you're something of a literary man, aren't you?"

"Yes," I replied. "I've published a few stories but there's no money in it. That's why I'm out here digging."

"Well, son," he said, "You're making a mistake, with this writing business. You ought to be out in the world doing things, living life to the fullest. Then you'll have something to write about. Now you take my life, for instance..."

Again his voice filled the tent as he began his tale. I lowered the wick on the coal-oil lamp and turned off the Coleman stove. He didn't want any tea. He had been given a chance to tell his story and like he said, I needed something to write about. My mind followed his as we drifted back in time, to when he was young and all of life was before him...

My name is Henry Carlsbad, sometimes known as Hank. When I was a boy of fifteen in New Brunswick, I fell down a well. It was my habit after school to run through the fields above our old farm, hopping fences and being alone with the wind and my thoughts. I always raced by an old abandoned homestead but one day I went closer to it, stepped on a rotten board... and down I tumbled, feet first into a well.

I hit the water some thirty feet down and my legs collapsed under the shock of hitting bottom. It was the water that saved me, cushioning the fall so I lay there in the slime and cold with my arms wrapped about my knees.

After sucking in my first gulps of water, I made a leap upward. Standing up and tilting my head backward, I could breathe the dank air in the well and see the circle of light at the top. The sides of the well were about as far apart as I could reach with both arms extended.

As my body chilled, I felt a terrible pressure in my chest. I guess it was my heart working, trying to pump cold blood through my system. I kept looking up as I yelled for help, screaming until I ran out of breath and realized it was useless. The well had been cribbed with smooth, round stones that for years had soaked up water and slime and my hands would slip just leaning against them. Then I saw the rope.

It dangled along one side of the well and the end of it stopped about three feet above my head. I could see where it had rotted off into a pointed tail where the water rose that high during the rainy season.

I couldn't reach the rope and so there it dangled, tantalizing, and frustrating me into a state of terrible despair. All of life was there in that rope and I couldn't quite reach it. The black water slowly drained off my body heat and I knew I would die—alone. I would just disappear from the face of the earth, never to be seen or heard again.

Then, I quit thinking. I quit yelling and cursing and praying. My mind blanked until I was just a living organism clawing for life in the bottom of a well. When I let all thoughts go, when my mind became just an empty shell of fear and despair, with my ego truly cast out of the way, something else came rushing in. A strength, from somewhere outside of myself, entered my body. I kicked around in the well till I felt the bucket off to one side then I dove under to flip it over.

I stood up on it, reaching for the rope then the old wooden bucket crumbled into a soft heap beneath my boots. I swallowed a lot of water but kept clawing around in the well and I could feel heat and power rushing into me. It seemed to be expanding into the centre of my chest, as if it had been there all the time and I only had to wake it up. I flopped down into the water on my stomach and pushed my feet against one side of the well and my hands against the other. I could push hard enough to hold myself up, spanning the rock walls of the well. I started walking my way up.

I could feel the rope touching my back. I let one arm go and reached behind me and but couldn't reach the rope. My body twisted then and I

started falling back down into the well but I was able to grasp the rope. It burned like a hot poker as it slipped through my hands. I tightened my grip but as soon as my weight stretched the rope, it broke and I splashed down into the bowels of the earth again.

I should have been exhausted and ready to give up, but I tried again, the same as before. The power I felt earlier was still with me and this time I walked myself right to the top, hauled myself out, and rolled onto the ground.

I lay there, panting and shivering, with the sunlight warming my face, glad to be alive and able to smell the grass and hear the wind rustling the leaves in the trees. I felt like I was part of something much bigger than myself, that from somewhere in the cosmos a loving spirit had reached down and snatched me from an early death. These thoughts were too big to hold in my mind and they faded away like a dream you can't quite remember. I got up and walked home with the water dripping onto the ground from my pants legs and my feet sloshing around in my lace-up boots, for I had yet to take them off.

When I strolled into my mother's house, she and my sisters stared at the mess I was in. They looked too at my face; they could see something different there, like I was me and someone else at the same time. I could see a tinge of fear in their eyes.

I explained to my mother that I had slipped into the pond while skipping stones and she never questioned me further. From that day to this, some sixty years later, I told no one about my escape from the well, fearing that people would laugh at the story. Besides, I hardly believed it myself and sometimes think it was nothing but a dream.

But in the years to come, I would use that power again. I would discover a way to connect with it without being at death's door. But that discovery was a long way off.

My father, a fisherman, had been lost at sea on a tuna boat some years before and I barely remember him. Sometimes we travelled to St. Andrew-By-The-Sea to check with the tuna company there, so see if anything had been heard of his little ship. But no one knew even where they went down. So I grew up with my two older sisters, my mother, and an aunt from my father's side of the family. My mother had inherited the little farm from her dad and of course I was the only male heir. Everyone expected me to take over the place someday and I never spoke of it. But those sisters of mine were very pretty and I suspected one of them would bring a fellow home one day—someone who liked farming.

I believe growing up with women created a gentleness in me that other men don't have. Were it not for the experience in the well, I might still be there, doing all the heavy work on that old farm, neither wanting nor dreaming of anything more exciting than that.

Two farms down the road, toward St. Stephen, lived the most beautiful girl in the world. Everyone knew it, including herself. At fourteen, she had all the fellows in the country in absolute wonder of her, and so none of them called on her.

I walked by her place often. Her name was Elizabeth Bolton and she

lived with her parents in a small white house set back from the road. Behind the house stood a small barn. They had no cows, no chickens, nothing but an old grey horse, yet they seemed well off. The mother had never been seen outside her house, though we could catch glimpses of her in the front window. She sat there often, looking out, a mysterious, shadowy being behind a veil of lace curtain.

Folks in the area said they could hear screams from the house or the barn, always at night. Yet in daylight everything seemed normal—the woman sitting by the window and the daughter going off to school or to the general store a half mile away.

I sometimes walked alongside Elizabeth, or Beth as we called her, on our way to the one-room schoolhouse down the road. She never seemed that special to me as we were growing up. I was surrounded by females and she was just another one. But when she got to be around fourteen years old, even I could see the beauty in her. She never allowed me to walk to her door; indeed, we separated before reaching her house so her father wouldn't see us together.

"He's saving me for a rich man's son," Beth would say. "And you, Hank, are just not good enough. For my father, that is."

In spite of that, we grew very close over the years. We were the misfits of the county, she with her goddess-like beauty and I with my stargazing and talk about drawing energy from the universe. We rarely spoke to anyone but each other. It was understood that someday we would be husband and wife. We could sit for hours in absolute silence. With the life we had at the time, there wasn't much to talk about.

She had very black hair, cut short, and perfect features, something like you would see on a Greek statue. From out of that black hair and flawless skin gazed a pair of pale blue eyes. Sometimes when she looked at me with those eyes, I felt as if I didn't know her at all, that some great secret hid behind them that I would never know of.

She often missed school for a week at a time. When she returned from these bouts of sickness, she had a different walk to her, a slouchy kind of walk, like she was carrying a load of New Brunswick potatoes. I always watched her closely at such times and then would see her bounce and haughtiness return until she was the same as before.

She had a power over the boys at school that I found astounding at times. If one of them got up the nerve to speak to her, she would look them straight in the eye and the boy would drop his head and start mumbling, his courage lost.

One day a boy at the school asked me what I had that was so special, that I could get a girl like Beth to walk home with and to talk to. He stood a head taller than I and he was really bothered by my "uppityness" as he called it.

"Well," I said, "Why don't you ask her to walk with you then?"

"Hah!" he replied. "With that slut?"

I let go with a right fist to his stomach that had him bending over so I could clip him again. He fell down and as I walked away he grabbed my leg and tumbled me to the ground. The rage came out in his fists and

knees and by the time the other boys pulled him off me, I was beaten right into the schoolyard dust. I walked home with my hair full of dried grass and dirt, my eyes swelling shut and the taste of ozone strong on my tongue from all those blows to my head.

I staggered past Elizabeth's house and when I had gone a ways, she caught up to me and led me down to the small brook alongside the road.

She knew nothing of the reason for the fight and in spite of all the desires for her body that flashed through me these days, I could see that this person was my friend. Perhaps the only friend I had.

I stuck my face in the little creek and rinsed the muck from my hair. She handed me her sweater to dry with and asked me if I was going to seek revenge for the beating.

"Of course," I said. "What else can I do?"

"Does that mean you're just like all the rest?" she said.

"Beth, what are you talking about?"

She pulled her sweater away from me and ran home. For two days she wouldn't speak to me and we buried the incident between us.

Ever since my plunge into the well, I had felt myself growing apart from my mother and my sisters. I felt trapped by their expectations of me, which were simple enough: I should be normal and satisfied, like they were. But as I passed through my fifteenth year, a great restlessness grew in me. At times I felt almost a ring of fire in my chest and stomach, that travelled around and around and gave me no peace. I ran through the fields every day and worked hard at my chores to cool that burning ring. I think they all thought I was going insane.

I stopped going to the little Methodist church with my folks. I hated those hard wooden benches and mournful hymns. The preacher always read the most boring passages he could find in his humongous bible and thundered at us about a vengeful god and his son who lived 2000 years ago in some faraway place. To me, the gods were all around me and in me and surely it was some type of god that poured the strength into me when I was trapped in the well. When I threw myself down in the grass after a long run, I could feel vibrations coming up from the bowels of the earth. At night I loved to gaze at the stars and I was sure they spoke to me with words I could hear but never understand.

But I kept going to school and walking with Elizabeth. She had a bitterness in her that I didn't understand and when she decided on something, nothing could change her mind. She could determine that a dog was actually a cat and if you argued about it, she would smile at you until you lost your train of thought. Then the argument was over.

The next time she missed school, I didn't see her for almost two weeks. When she came out of her house again, she couldn't seem to straighten her back and so she walked almost stumbling forward. I caught her hand as we walked home from school and led her down beside the little brook.

I said, "Beth," I've got to know what's wrong. What happens to you in that house to make you like this?"

She took both my hands in hers and looked at me with those pale blue eyes. Never since the earth began has a more beautiful face been created.



"Do you love me?" she asked.

"Yes. For as long as we live, I will love you."

She sobbed and cried, "That's what's wrong! If you didn't care, I could tell you!"

"Tell me what, for God's sake?"

We sat down then by the brook, watching it sparkle in the sun and she held my hand to her breast.

"I need a promise," she murmured.

"You have it. Just tell me what it is," I replied.

"That you will never fight with my father, no matter what he has done."

She didn't have to tell me more. I knew, as I always knew somewhere inside, about the beatings she and her mother received. Always at night, always in the barn behind their house. It was the source of the screams folks had whispered about for years. I think I had heard them too but my young imagination could think of no cause for them.

"Beth," I said, "I can't promise now. Give me a couple of days. But why would you want such a promise? Don't you hate him?"

"Yes. I do. But if you come around with a club or a gun—those are the only ways you could beat him—you would be the same as him, don't you see?"

"No, I don't see that at all."

She got up then and walked away, slowly, toward her home. I willed her to turn and look at me and she did. We stared at each other without smiling then I turned and headed for home.

Now I was in a predicament—one that no amount of thinking could solve. That night I crept out of the house to run in the fields by moonlight. I sat on a cedar rail fence looking up at my friends in the sky. Were I to take vengeance on her father, Beth would surely hate me. In her way, she was as unbending and certain as the god of the old Testament. But for me to do nothing about her situation, was just as unbearable as the thought of losing her.

It was about this time that a letter arrived for my aunt. It was from her cousin in Ontario, or Upper Canada, as we called it then. She had married a government bureaucrat and they lived in Ottawa.

I never got to see the letter but my aunt said it talked about a rich gold strike in the Northwest Territory, up near Alaska. This was in the fall of 1896. I had gone through as many grades as they taught in the little school but I went every morning to walk alongside Beth. Then I would go home to the farm and work all day. I had just turned seventeen, she sixteen.

Two days after our talk by the brook, I promised. I would not take revenge on her father. But in turn, I got a promise from her. We would marry and go away somewhere. It had to be that way because there would be no room at my place, not with all the other women there. It had been my hope that one of my pretty sisters would bring home a worker for the farm. It would give me a chance to leave without worrying about their

survival. And sure enough, a young fellow started coming around to see my sister, Gale.

I had grown further from my womenfolk as the years passed until we had nothing at all to say. They went to their church and shopped in St. Stephen and voted for the same political party every year. I did none of those things but I kept up my end of the work on the farm.

I questioned my aunt one evening about that gold strike. She told me the information came from the wife of a Northwest Mounted Policeman stationed in the North. The only way to get there was to sail up the west coast of North America and to climb over a chain of mountains.

The very thought of it thrilled me and the burning in my belly got worse and worse.

I couldn't leave Beth behind, not with her father, yet how could I take her with me? Even if I knew how to get to this Eldorado?

A woman in those days had even fewer choices than men. She could educate herself and become a schoolteacher—and move away to some forsaken place. She could work as a servant in a wealthy home. Or she could marry and hope that her husband would treat her well and could make a living.

The women of my home had gotten used to my night wanderings in the fields and woods. Even in winter, when the snow drifted everywhere, I would tramp a trail and go for my solitary walks. That fall, when I learned the truth of Beth's situation, I walked sometimes for half the night.

She told me about her father. He had come from Britain, sent to Canada with his woman and paid a yearly sum never to return. They call such fellows "remittance men." Usually their families are very rich and of the ruling classes in England. Beth's mother was a "lady of the lower classes."

He had created a scandal for his family by refusing to join the army. Then, after being appointed to a position in the government, he was caught bringing women to his office. The final embarrassment was an affair with the wife of a navy admiral. So off he went to Canada with one of his lady friends, who was pregnant with Beth at the time. A banknote arrived every month to keep them alive. As the years passed and his daughter grew into the most beautiful female in the district, he decided to marry her into the monied classes of the New World. That's how things were done in England. Through her he would climb out of his situation. It was necessary to beat manners and submissiveness into her, the same as he had done for the mother. The beatings also helped him deal with his rage at being an outcast.

And he surely knew something of the feelings Beth had for me. Could I have been the cause of some of her suffering? She would not say.

So I wandered at night and worked by day and saw Beth every chance I could. I knelt by the old well on the abandoned homestead and talked down into the hole, thinking an answer to our problems might come from there. It had become my habit too to run behind her farm and pass close to that barn every night.

One night, just after dark, maybe it was nine o'clock in the evening, I heard a sound that froze my brain, that spun a terror through my mind worse than the time of my fall into the well. It was the sound of a girl screaming in pain—and the sound of a lash or a belt striking bare flesh.

The screams came from the barn behind her house, muffled by hay and the old boards of the building. I knew straight away I had to stop it. If it cost me her love, if it cost me my life, no one would ever abuse her again.

I flung the door open. A coal-oil lantern dimly lit the musty cavern of the barn. In the centre of the room stood a supporting post and there she was, naked, fastened to it. He held a wide leather belt, I think it was a razor strop, over his head, about to strike another blow to her bare back. I counted five bluish welts on her back and she was about to receive the sixth.

It never happened. I charged at him but he must have learned some defence techniques in the old country because he deftly sidestepped me and I tripped over his outstretched foot. I rolled to my feet only to face a long pitchfork he held in front of him. He made a thrust with it at my chest and I dropped to the floor.

Beth screamed for me to go away. "He'll kill you! Run, Henry, run!"

I scrambled to my feet and backed away from him. That was a terrible mistake because he ran at me with the pitchfork outstretched and I fell backward against the outside wall. I shifted sideways and one prong of the fork pierced my side, bouncing off a rib and embedding itself into the wall. I was held by my shirt for an instant before ripping myself away.

Then I ran. Out through the door with the Englishman close behind. I could almost feel the forks digging into my back. A small pond, used for watering cattle, lay just ahead of me, about a hundred yards from the barn. I dove into it headfirst.

I stayed under as long as I could then came up for air. I can swim like an otter and I knew he would never catch up to me here. The pond had fairly steep sides and was well over my head in depth. Various owners of the little farm had kept it dredged out so it would fill with fresh ground water.

I could see him standing at the edge of the pond with his pitchfork. I swam for the far side but he ran around and got there ahead of me, thrusting as far as he could out into the pond with the fork.

Now I could see his game. He would keep me in the water until I drowned or he would get me with the pitchfork if I came out. I could hear Beth screaming in the barn. She could not free herself and had no way of knowing my fate. I shouted to her, "Beth! I'm okay!"

"Not for long, you peasant bastard!" yelled her father as he paced around the pond, jabbing at the water.

I had been in this state once already in my life: water and a hole in the earth trying to suck my being down into it. I approached that state of mind where I became just a bodily creature, as my ego and all my thoughts and wants dwindled away until only one emotion remained—the desire

to live. Instead of cold from the water, I felt a warmth come into me from somewhere below me, or perhaps it was above me. And with the warmth came a source of power; it was if I had been handed the strength of the Fundy tide or the power of a typhoon's wind. I swam to where I could stand up in the water then walked toward Beth's father. He stood there, poised to strike as I came nearer to him.

"Beth!" I cried. "No!"

He turned to look behind him and by the time he swung around again, I had reached the edge of the pond. He swung the fork at my head. I caught the handle of it with my right hand and jerked it away from him, then threw it out in the centre of the pond.

He made a fist and swung at my head with it. I caught his hand and pulled him to me, swinging him around till I had his arm behind his back. Then I wrenched it upward until I heard the bone snap.

He screamed in agony as I held him off the ground then I threw him into the pond. He floundered there like a dying fish so I reached for him and pulled him out by his hair. I dragged him over to the barn and stood him up against it, holding him by the throat.

"You'll never strike her again, will you, mister?"

I let him go so he could answer. He collapsed on the ground and I picked him up by his shirt.

"What do you say?" I asked him.

No answer. I dragged him toward the pond, fully intending to drown him like a rat. He babbled on the way in his English accent and finally I understood.

"I shall nevah chastise her again," he said.

I left him there beside the pond and went into the barn. Beth stood against the post. Her wrists had been fastened in front of it with leather thongs and I pulled them apart until they broke.

"Where is he?" she asked. "Did you kill him."

"No. He's out there. He'll be okay."

She nodded and we both realized her nakedness. I had done the only thing I could do. Would she realize that? I knew her face so well I could read her thoughts. She was trying to decide. We could hear her father moaning and cursing as he made his way to the house.

She stepped toward me—then stopped. My heart felt like it was trying to pump a stone through it and it missed several beats. Then she turned and ran, out through the door and into her house. Her naked image branded itself into my brain, stored there like a painting for me to see every day for the rest of my life.

In the morning, I left an envelope at the school for Beth then went home, made up a small pack, slung it over my shoulder, and started walking toward St. John, 80 miles east. From there I would find a way to reach the goldfields in the northwest part of the continent. Beth would get over her anger at me, I knew. In the meantime, there was nothing I could do for our situation but to go somewhere and make my fortune—if I could.

# The Yukoner Magazine

## From the Publisher

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Like children waiting for Christmas, Yukoners are waiting for winter and wondering what to expect in this El Nino year.

Environment Canada has advised us not to get our hopes up. There will be no tropical fish swimming in Skagway Harbour. On the average, it will only be about two degrees warmer, they say.

I say, if one or two degrees can make or break an Ice Age, an extra two degrees of heat is going to make a difference in my life, beginning with my fuel bill.

The last big El Nino, in 1982-1983, was a real turning point for me. In March 1983 I was in Orthopedic Hospital in Los Angeles, laid low by hard work, divorce and an old sports injury.

After two weeks of daily massage and swimming laps in the hospital pool, plus several torture sessions called "traction," my back still had about as much strength as a rubber band. My left leg and foot were numb and I had given up walking.

Early one morning I was talking with a black woman with a southern accent who was waiting for her friend to return from surgery. As she spoke about life back home in Mississippi the sky grew dark. Outside, empty cardboard boxes and chunks of roofing tar pocked with gravel began circling through the air, headed toward my bed.

My companion wrinkled her brow as she tried recall a name for this vaguely familiar sight. "This reminds me of..." She shouted her next words at me from the bathroom: "Dianne, get in here now"!

Somehow, I flew across the room as a storm of flying debris hit the window.

The tornado smashed through windows and doors, grabbing at the hems of white-coated attendants as they raced down the hospital corridors to help their patients.

After my sprint to safety, my back grew worse. My doctor decided that surgery was the answer, and it was. After two years of suffering I was pain free. To celebrate, I hopped aboard an Alaska Airlines flight to Anchorage and started thinking about moving north. The following year I moved to the Yukon.

So here I am, waiting for another El Nino. Today it is plus four, warm for a November day, but, if the temperature drops, we are ready. We have a new oil heater in the cabin and, to be on the safe side, Sam has once again gone overkill on the woodpile.

He stacks the wood in ten foot lengths in a 20-foot-long pile, about six-foot high. It is supported at one end by the woodshed, which is empty. As anyone here at Army Beach can tell you, the main thing is to get the wood in the yard. Cutting it into stove lengths and stacking it is a minor detail not worth considering until the thermometer hits 40 below.

Besides, in a tornado all those short pieces of wood flying around could hurt somebody, couldn't they?

