

Early in 1849 the sleepy quiet of Victoria , Vancouver Island was disturbed by the arrival of straggling groups of ragged nondescript wanderers who were neither trappers nor settlers.

They carried blanket packs on their backs and leather belts filled belted securely around the waist close to their pistols. They did not wear moccasins after the fashion of trappers but heavy , knee high hobnailed boots. In place of guns over their shoulders they had picks and hammers and such stout sticks as mountaineers use in climbing.

They volunteered little information as to whence they had come or whither they were going. They sought out Frederick Finlayson , chief trader for the Hudson's Bay company. They wanted provisions from the company, yes, rice, flour, ham, salt , paper sugar and tobacco and at the smithy they demanded shovels, picks, iron ladles and wire screens.

It was only when they came to pay that Finlayson felt sure of what he had already guessed. They unstrapped those little leather bags around their cartridge belts and produced in tiny gold nuggets the price of what they had bought.

...the fur trader hated the miner. The miner, wherever he went, sounded the knell of fur-trading and the trapper did not like to have his game preserve overrun by fellows who scared off all the animals from traps, set fire going to clear away underbrush and owned responsibility to no authority.

No doubt the men were argonauts, drifted up from the gold diggings in California; no doubt they were searching for new mines but who had ever heard of gold in Vancouver island or in New Caledonia as the mainland was named.

...Finlayson took the nuggets at eleven dollars an ounce and sent the gold down to San Francisco, very doubtful what the real value would prove. It proved \$16 to the ounce.

For seven or eight years afterwards rumors kept floating in to the company's first of finds of gold. Many of the company's servants drifted away to California in the wake of the Forty-Niners and the company found it hard to keep its trappers from deserting all up and down the Pacific coast.

The quest for gold had become a sort of yellow-fever madness. Men flung certainty to the winds and trekked recklessly to California, to Oregon, to the hinterland of the country around Colville and Okanogan, Within two miles of Mile 80 "Indians and 30 white men were working the goldbars ; and log boarding-houses and saloons sprang up along the river-bank as if by magic.

Naturally the last comers of '58 were too late to get a place on the gold-bars and they went back to the coast in disgust, calling the gold stampede "the Fraser River humbug." Nevertheless men were washing, sluicing, rocking and digging gold as far as Lillooet. Often the day's yield ran as high as \$800 a man and the higher up the treasure seekers pushed their way the coarser grew the gold flakes and grains.

Would the golden lure lead finally to the mother lode of all the yellow ~~Washington~~ washings. That is the hope that draws the prospector from river to stream, from stream to dry gully bed; from dry gully to precipice edge and often over the edge to death or fortune.

..Then he had pushed on up the river to Cariboo, travelling as he told us by the Indian trails over Jacob's ladders--wicker and pole swings to serve as bridges across chasms--wherever the float or sign of mineral might lead them. Both on the Fraser and in Cariboo he had found his share of luck and all luck and he regretted the passing of the golden age of danger...but he said if we prospectors hadn't blazed the trail of the canyon you wouldn't have your railroads here today--they only followed the trail we first cut and then built. We followed the "float" up and they followed us.

What the trapper was to the fur trade, the prospector was to the mining era that ushered civilization into the wilds with a blare of dancehalls and wine and wassail and greed.

Float..

What was the float..a sandy chunk of gravel perhaps flaked with yellow specks the size of a pin head. He wanted to know where that chunk rolled down from. He knocked it open with his mallet. If it had a shiny yellow pebble inside only the size of a pea, the miner would stay on that bank and begin bench diggings into the dry bank. By the spring of '59 dry bench diggings had extended back fifty miles from the river.

If the chunk revealed only tiny yellow specks, perhaps mixed with white quartz, the miner would try to find where it rolled from and would ascent the gully or mountain torrent or precipice.

Pack string...

There is always the wise old bell-mare leading the way. There is always the lazy packer that has to be nipped by the horse behind him. There are always the shanky colts who bolt to stampede where the trail widens, but even shanky-legged colts learn to keep in line in the wilds.

Caribou-Cariboo..

To the miners penetrating the wilds north of the Fraser the caribou proved a good godsend during that lean first winter. The miners spelled it "cariboo" and thus gave the great gold area its name.

Cradling

Wherever a sand-bar gave signs of mineral it was tested with the primitive frying-pan. If the pan showed a deposit the miner rigged up a rocker, a contraption resembling a cradle with rockers below, about four feet from end to end, two feet across and two deep. The sides converged to bottom.

At the head was a perforated sheet-iron bottom like a housewife's colander.

Into this box the gravel was shovelled by one miner. The man's partner poured in water and rocked the cradle-cradled the sand. The water ran through the perforated bottom to a second floor of quicksilver or copperlate or wooly blanket which caught the gold. On a larger scale, when streams were directed through wooden boxes, the gold was sluiced; on a still larger scale the process was hydraulic mining through the same principal.

In fact, in huge freemilling works where hydraulic machinery crushes the gold-bearing quartz and screens it to fineness before catching the gold on delicate sieves, the process is only a complex refinement of the bar washer cradling his gold.

Cariboo trail..hemlocks, before cleared by fire; crisscrossed the height of a house with branches interlaced like wire. Cataracts fell over lofty ledgs in wind-blown spray. Spanish moss grey-green and feathery hung from branch to branch of the huge Douglas fir.

Cariboo

Indian unrest was probably first among the causes which led the miners to organize themselves into leagues for protection. The Indians of the Fraser were no more friendly to newcomers now than they had been in the days of Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser.

They now professed great alarm for their fishing grounds. Men on the gold bars jostled and hustled and pegs marking limits were pulled up.

A danger lay in the rows of saloons along the water-front, the well known danger of liquor to the Indians. So the miners at Yale formed a vigilance committee and established self-made laws. The saloons should be abolished whomsoever was forbidden. All liquor, wherever found, was ordered spilled, Any one selling liquor to an Indian should be seized and whipped thirty-nine lashes on the bare back. A standing committee of twelve

was appointed to enforce the law till the regular government should be organized

It was July '58 when the miners on the river-bars formed their committee. They formed it none too soon for the Indians were on the war path in Washington and the unrest had spread to New Caledonia.

Young M'Loughlin, son of the famous John M'Loughlin of Oregon coming up the Columbia overland from Okanagan to Kamloops with a hundred and sixty men four hundred pack horses and a drove of oxen had three men sniped off by Indians in ambush and many cattle stolen.

At Big Canyon on the Fraser two Frenchmen were found murdered. When word came of this murder the vigilance committee of Yale formed a rifle company of forty which in August started up to the forks at Lytton. At Spuzzum there was a fight. Indians barred the way; but they were routed and seven of them killed in a running fire and Indian villages along the river were burned. Meanwhile a hundred and sixty

volunteers at Yale formed a company to go up the river under Captain Snyder. The company's trader at Yale was reluctant to supply arms for the company's policy had ever been to conciliate the Indians. But when a rabble of two thousand angry miners gathered around the store the rifles were handed over on condition that forty of the worst fire eaters in the band should remain behind. Snyder then led his men up the river and joined the first company at Spuzzum.

At China Bar five miners were found hiding in a hole in the bank. With a number of companions they had been driven down stream from the Thompson by Indians and had been sniped all the way for forty miles. Man after man had fallen and the five survivors in the bank were all wounded.

When the Indians saw the company of armed men under Snyder they fled to the hills. Flags of truce were displayed on both sides and a peace patched up till Governor Douglas came up from the coast. (Sir James Douglas)

At Long Bar, when an Indian chief came with a flag of truce two white men snatched it from him and trampled it in the mud. On the instant the Indians shot both the white men where they stood.

Douglas had been up as far as Yale in June but was now back in Victoria where couriers brought him word of the open fight in August. He promptly organized a force of Royal engineers and miners and set out for the scene of the disorders.

Royal Engineers to the number of a hundred and fifty six and their families had come out from England for the boundary survey and their presence must have seemed providential to Douglas, now that the miners were forming vigilance committees of their own and the Indians were on the war path. He went up the river in a small cruiser and reached Hope on the first of September. Salutes were fired as he landed. He knew how to use all the pomp of regimentals and formality to impress the Indians.

He opened a solemn powwow with the chiefs of the Fraser. As usual the white man's fire-water was found to be the chief cause of the trouble. Without waiting for legislative authority he issued a royal proclamation against the sale of liquor and left a mining recorder to register claims. He also appointed a justice of the peace. Then he went on to Yale. At Yale he considered the price of provisions too high and by arbitrarily reducing the price at the company's stores he broke the ring of petty dealers. This won him the friendship of the miners. Within a week he had allayed all irritation between white man and Indian.

British Columbia

At Fort Langley on November 19, 1858, the colony of British Columbia was proclaimed under the laws of England.

Claim jumping

...a man lost his claim when he stopped mining for 72 hours...

...towards spring when the prospectors had succeeded in packing in more provisions they began striking back east from the main river, following creeks to their sources over the watershed to the sources of creeks flowing in a opposite direction.

Late in '59 men reached Quesnel Lake and Cariboo Lake. Binding saplings with withes the poled laboriously around these alpine lagoons and where they found creeks pouring down from the upper peaks they followed these up to their sources.

Pockets of gravel in the banks of both lakes yielded as much as two hundred dollars a day. On Horse Fly Creek up from Quesnel Lake five men washed out in primitive rockers a hundred ounces of nuggets in a week.

The gold-fever which had subsided when all the bars of the Fraser were occupied mounted again... Bank facings seemed to indicate that the richest pay-dirt lay at bedrock. This kind of mining required sluicing and long ditches were constructed to bring the water to the dry diggings. By the autumn of '59 a thousand miners were at work around Quesnel lake. By the spring of 60 only 100 Yale and Yope were almost deserted. Men on the upper diggings were making from sixty to a hundred dollars a day.

Only Chinamen remained on the lower bars.

Toled up the creek five miles followed signs up a dry ravine seven miles farther. Reaching the divide at last they came on an open park-like ridge bounded north and east by lofty shining peaks. Deer and caribou tracks were everywhere. It was not what the region became known as Cariboo.

...This was in the spring of '61; and Antler creek proved only the beginning of the rush to Cariboo. Over the divide in mad stampede rushed the gold seekers northward and eastward.. Williams creek called Humbur creek when started to pan out.. miners decided to look beneath blue clay. Took 48 hours to dig down. Hauled thousand dollars worth of wash gravel. Put in shafts and tunnels through the clay and sluiced in more water for hydraulic work. Claims on Williams creek

produced as high as forty pounds of gold in a day.

From another creek, 400 feet long, \$50,000 worth of gold taken in six weeks. Lightning Creek yielded a hundred thousand dollars in three weeks.

In one year gold valued at two and one half million dollars was shipped from Cariboo...

The whole world took fire came by way of the Maritime Provinces, the British Isles... all set ago... came by way of Panama, San Francisco, Spokane and Victoria, by way of Winnipeg and Edmonton came the gold seekers, indifferent to the perils of sea and mountains... maddest rapids in America...

dance hall girls with only recklessness and slippers and danced them to

Cariboo... by opening of '62 six thousand miners were in Cariboo and Barkerville had become the central camp. Some by packtrain, some by canoe, most by foot... Before the Cariboo Road had been built...

Gov. Douglas could not regulate prices here and they jumped. Flour three hundred dollars a barrel. Dried apples two dollars and fifty cents a pound and for lack of fruit many miners died from scurvy. Boots \$50 a pair.

The places of the gold deposits were freakish.

Sometimes found fifty feet under clay at the foot of a creek where the dashing waters swerved around some rocky point into a river. Old miners now retired at Yale and Hope say that the most ignorant prospector could guess the place of the gold as well as the geologist.

Willy Barker

Willy Barker, after whom Barkerville was named struck it rich by going down fifty feet below the surface down the canyon.

Cariboo Cameron, the luckiest of the miners and not originally a prospector, found his wealth by going still lower on the watercourse to a vertical depth of eighty feet.

For seven miles along William's creek worked four thousand men

Cariboo Cameron took a hundred and fifty thousand out of his claim in three months. In six months of '63 Wilson's Creek yielded a million and

dollars and this was only one of many rich creeks.

From '59 to '71 came twenty five million dollars in gold from the Cariboo country. By 65 hydraulic machinery was coming in and the prospectors were flocking out; but to this day the mines have remained a freakish gamble.

Overlanders..

Cariboo Road As long as the discovery of gold was confined to the Fraser River bars the important matter of transportation gave the government no difficulty.

Hudson's Bay's teamers crossed from Victoria to Langley on the Fraser which was a large fort and well equipped as a base for supplies for the workers in the wilderness.

Stern-wheelers, canoes and miscellaneous craft could, with care, creep up from Langley to Hope and Yale and the fares charged afforded a good revenue to the Hudson's Bay company. Even when prospectors struck above Yale on up to Harrison Lake and across to Lillooet, or from the Okanagan to the Thompson, the difficulties of transportation were soon surmounted.

A road was shortly opened from Harrison Lake to Lillooet, built by the miners themselves under the direction of the Royal Engineers and as to the Thompson, there was the well-worn trail of the fur-traders who had been going overland to Kamloops for fifty years.

It was when gold was discovered higher up on the Fraser and in Cariboo after the colony of British Columbia had taken its place on the political map that Governor Douglas was put to the task of building a great road. Henceforth for a year or two at least the miners would be the backbone if not the whole body of the new colony.

How could the administration be carried on if the government had no road into the mining region.

And so the governor of British Columbia entered on the boldest undertaking in road building ever launched by any community of

twenty thousand people.

The Cariboo Road became to British Columbia what the Appian Way was to Rome. It was 18 feet wide and over four hundred and eighty miles long.

It was one of the finest roads ever built in the country. Yet it cost the country only two thousand dollars a mile as against the forty thousand dollars a mile which the two transcontinental railways spent later on their roadbeds along the canyon. It was Sir James Douglas's greatest monument.

Five hundred volunteer mine-workers built the road from Harrison Lake to Lillooet in 1858 at the rate of ten miles a day; and when the road was opened in September packers' charges fell from a dollar to forty-eight cents and finally to eighteen cents a pound.

But presently the trend of travel drew away from Harrison Lake to the line of the Fraser. At first there was nothing but a mule-trail hacked out of the rock from Vale to Spuzzum; but miners went voluntarily to work and widened the bridle path above the shelving waters.

From Spuzzum to Lytton the river ledges seemed almost impassable for pack animals; yet a cable ferry was rigged up at Spuzzum and mules were sent over the ledges to draw it up the river. When the water rose so high that the lower ledges were unsafe the packers ascended the mountains eight hundred feet above the roaring canyon. When cliffs broke off they sent the animals across an Indian bridge.

The marvel is not that many a poor beast fell headlong down eight hundred feet down the precipice. The marvel is that any pack animal could cross such a trail at all. A traveler must trust his hands as much as his feet wrote Begbie after his first experience on the trail.

But by 1862 cutting and blasting and bridge building had begun under the direction of the Royal Engineers and before 1865 the great road was completed into the heart of the mining country at Barkerville.

Henceforth passengers went in by stage coach drawn by

drawn by six horses.

Road-houses along the way provided relays of fresh horses. Freight went in by bull team, but pack horses and mules were still used to carry miners' provisions to the camps in the hills which lay off the main road.

It was while the road was still building that an enterprising packer brought twenty one camels on the trail.

They were not a success and caused countless stampedes. Horses and mules took fright at the slightest whiff of them. The camels themselves could stand neither the climate nor the hard rock road. They were turned adrift on the Thompson river where the last of them died in 1905.

There was something highly romantic in the stage-coach travel of this halcyon era. The driver was always a crack whip, a man who called himself an old-timer, though often his years numbered fewer than twenty. Most of the drivers however, knew the trail from having packed in on shanks' mares and camped under the stars.

At the log taverns known as road houses travelers could sleep for the night and obtain meals.

On the down trips bags were piled on the roof with a couple of frontiersmen armed with rifles to guard them. Many were the devices for the returning miner for concealing the gold which he had won. "fathurdy-gurdy girl which ~~00000~~ or sometimes a squaw would climb to a place in the stage and when the stage with a crack of the whip and a prance of the six horses came rattling across the bridge and rolling into Yale the fat girl would be the first to deposit her ample person at the bank or the express office when she could be safely sent down to Victoria. And when she emerged half an hour later she would have thinned precipitously. Then the rough miner, who had not addressed a word to her on the way down for fear of a confidence man abroad would present Susy with a handsome reward in the form of a gaudy dress of a year's provisions.

Start from a road house was made at dawn.

...the passengers tumbled from log-walled rooms where the beds were bench
berths and ate breakfast in a dining hall where the seats were
hewn logs. The fare consisted of ham fried in slabs, eggs, ancient and
transformed to leather in lard, slapjacks, known as "Rocky Mountain
dead shot," in maple syrup that never saw a maple tree and was black
as a pot and potatoes in soggy pyramids. Yet so keen was the air
..that the most fastidious traveller felt he had fared
sumptuously and gaily paid the two fifty for the meal.

Washing was only a trivial incident of mountain travel in those
days.

The passenger jumped for a place in the coach; the long whip cracked
the horses sprang forward and away the stage rattled round curves where
the hindwheel would try to go over the edge only the driver didn't let
it; down embankments where any normal wagon would have upset
where no horses ought to be driven at a trot and where the six
persisted at going at a gallop...

...Shuswaps and Siwashes, fat, ill-smelling, insolent and plainly
highly amused in their beady, watchful black ferret eyes at the mad
days of this white race; a still more ill-smelling Chinaman..

Bull teams of twenty yokes, long lines of pack-horses, led by
a bell-mare, mule-teams with a tinkling of bells and singing of the
drivers, met the stage and passed with happy salute. At nightfall
the camp-fires of foot travellers could be seen down at the water's
edge. And there was always danger enough to add zest to the journey.

While there was ten thousand men in Cariboo (a big town)
in the winter of '62 and perhaps twenty thousand in the winter of '63,
there were less than five thousand in '71....the cap had changed from a poor
man's cap to a cap for a capitalist or a company.

It will be remembered that the miners first found the gold in flakes, then farther up in nuggets, then that the nuggets had to be pursued to pay-dirt beneath gravel and clay.

This meant shafts, tunnels, hydraulic machinery, stamp mills, later when the pay-dirt showed signs of merging into quartz there passed away for ever the day of the penniless prospector seeking the golden fleece of the hills as his predecessor, the trapper had sought the pelt of the little beaver.

All unwittingly, the miner, as well as the trapper, was an instrument in the hands of destiny for shaping empire; or it was the rush of miners which gave birth to the colony of British Columbia.

Federation with the Canadian Dominion followed in 1871; the railway and the settler came and the man with the pick and his eyes on the "float" gave place to the man with the plough. The Cariboo Trail. A Chronicle of the Gold-fields of British Columbia. Agnes C. Laut. Toronto, Glasgow Book & Company, 1920. Copyright in all countries subscribing to the Berne convention.