

GOLD RUSH IN SWING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Hundreds of Prospectors Gone North to Cassiar Wilderness

T. O. Slater May 27/25

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Vancouver, May 26.—Lured by the stories of a rich strike of gold last summer by two trappers, Hugh Ford and Bill Grady, who deserted their trap lines long enough to unearth a rich pocket, fortune-seekers are rushing into the Dease Lake country of the Cassiar.

Since the report of the strike reached the outside world, hundreds of prospectors — sourdoughs and checakos—have gone north to try their luck in the Cassiar wilderness. All except the hardiest spirits remained at Wrangell or Telegraph Creek because of the ice on the Stikine river, but with the ice gone the rush is on. Both Telegraph Creek and Wrangell, which depend mainly on the outfitting of big game parties and the fur trade for their livelihood, have been crowded all winter. Already the first boatload, commanded by Sid Barrington, veteran Klondike boatman, has started for the lake where the gold was discovered.

More than 150 tons of freight, including caterpillar tractors, auto trucks and oxen are being taken to Telegraph Creek in the first boatloads from Wrangell, which is the head of navigation on the Stikine.

The Cassiar gold field is not a new one, however. Although abandoned for many years it was one of the first to bring fame to British Columbia as a mining country, and the trails that are being followed to-day by prospectors in motor trucks are the same in many cases as those trod by shoe-leather and moccasins of the gold-seekers of half a century ago.

History of Cassiar

About that time the gold mines of the Cariboo and the Omineca districts began to peter out and the miners that had congregated there were in a receptive mood to follow up reports of prospects elsewhere.

The Cassiar strike gave them just the opportunity they were looking for and in 1874 there were estimated to be about one thousand six hundred miners in the Cassiar, principally on Dease Lake and Thibert Creeks, where most of this year's activity is expected to be centred. Though so far away from the centres of population and without the modern means of quick and convenient transportation, the new diggings are comparatively easy of access. From the head of navigation on the Stikine River to Dease Lake is only 117 miles of which 110 miles is land travel. The remainder of the route is along Dease Lake where at first canoes were used, but later a steamboat.

In the summer of 1874 Captain William Moore built a trail from Telegraph Creek, sixteen miles above the head of navigation, to Dease Lake, and this is the same trail that is being used to-day by the present generation of miners. The mines on Dease Lake Creek and the lower part of Thibert Creek paid very well during that summer. Barely one hundred miners dared to remain in the Cassiar during the winter, which is of almost Arctic severity. Those who did remain regretted their courage, for the cold was so intense that thermometers became congealed and several of the party died of scurvy.

Boom Breaks

In the following spring more than a thousand miners were busy on the various creeks around Dease Lake, but the output of gold for the season was somewhat smaller. Despite these returns the next season brought more than two thousand miners into the camp, resulting in poor wages for everyone and extremely high prices. From that year on the Cassiar goldfields declined steadily. Except for a few instances when miners struck rich pockets that were soon played out, those who followed received only fair wages for their labor.

Whether this year's crop of prospectors will fare any better will be demonstrated within a few months—possibly weeks. There is a tremendous area in the Cassiar where the clatter of the prospectors' hammer is still unknown and it may contain the hidden wealth for which the old-timers hunted in vain for more than thirty years. In the late 90's the discovery of gold in the Klondike diverted attention from the Cassiar altogether and also from the Cariboo, which returned to a brief period of glory between 1880 and 1890, and since then only an occasional wanderer has tapped the Cassiar for gold.