

Eskay Creek, Then and Now

OUR INAUGURAL *FRESH INK* COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS AN EXCERPT FROM *PROSPECTORS, PROMOTERS AND HARD ROCK MINERS*

In 1989, when Murray Pezim's Calpine Mining hit the bonanza at famous Hole 109 on Eskay Creek, that name became instantly renowned in the mining world. But I know many pioneers who had worked that area years earlier. In those days, we called it the Unuk, which was the name of the river that drained into Burroughs Bay on the Alaska side.

Tom Mackay and his associates were the first stakers of what is now the Eskay Creek mine. In 1932, using a float aircraft, they landed on Tom Mackay Lake and staked the location of the present-day mine. Tommy was the assistant manager of the Premier mine; he had started there as a dishwasher while paying his way through school.

His associates were all the supervisors at Premier and, while not one of these associates profited a nickel from the property, their names have been attached to landmarks in the area . . .

Although the property was diamond drilled several times with indifferent results, Tommy never despaired and held title to the property until it was optioned to Pezim. By the time the ore was hit, Tommy had passed on but his wife became very rich thanks to his foresight . . .

Tommy was quite a storyteller and the following one I heard from him a number of times. As assistant manager at the Premier mine in the '30s, he did a fair amount of travelling. One time, he was in Toronto on business and staying at the Royal York Hotel, which was then, as now, a prominent hostelry. He signed the register "T.S. Mackay, Premier, B.C." The name "Premier" was all the address ever needed because the postmaster always distributed mail personally. Tommy put

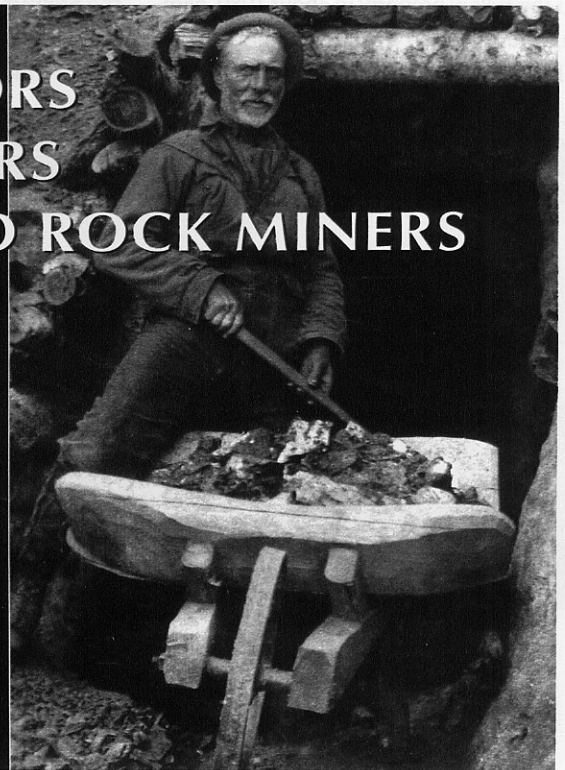
his bag in the room and went out to do his business. When he returned that evening, he discovered a bottle of champagne on ice and a bouquet of flowers on the table. The card read:

PROSPECTORS PROMOTERS AND HARD ROCK MINERS

Tales of the Stewart, B.C.
and Hyder, Alaska Camps

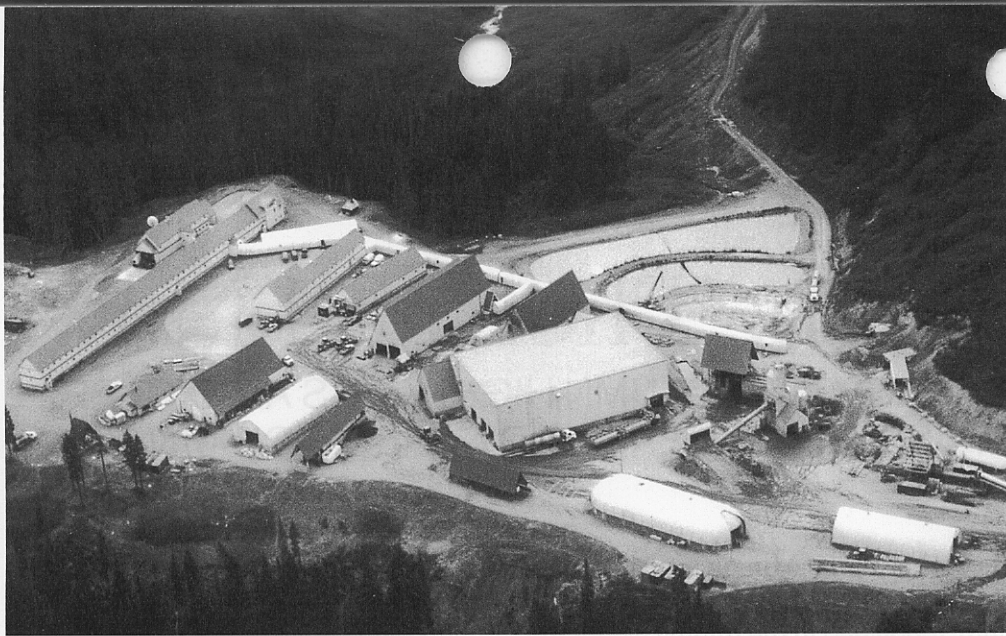
By IAN McLEOD
With HOLLY McNEIL

THIS PHOTOGRAPH BELONGING TO JACK McLEOD, THE AUTHOR'S FATHER, SHOWS CLAY PORTER AT HIS PORTER-IDAHO MINE ON THE EAST SLOPE OF MOUNT RAINEY. NOTE THAT THE PROSPECTOR WOULD CARRY HIS TOOLS AND THE WHEELBARROW WHEEL INTO THE BUSH AND CARVE THE REST OUT OF LOCAL TIMBER WITH AXE AND SAW. THE BANK OF HYDER LETTER (SEE CHAPTER HYDER, ALASKA) RELATES TO CLAY'S PROPERTY AND THE ATTEMPT OF THE PREMIER COMPANY TO BUY IT.



"To the Premier of British Columbia, with best wishes from the management of the Royal York Hotel." Tommy hesitated for only a moment. Then he decided that to correct the mistake would only embarrass the management, so he uncorked the bottle and quenched his thirst after a long and tiring day!

Tommy McQuillan (with namesake McQuillan Ridge) was the real pioneer of the Unuk River area and also the



Eskay Creek Camp (left): 108 diamond-drill holes, 57 years and no cigar, until Murray Pezim's Calpine Mining hit the motherlode in 1989.

prospector responsible for the staking of the Granduc mine. He was not only a friend, but also one of the finest men I have ever met. McQuillan prospected the whole area and spent many winters on his trapline there.

Mackay and McQuillan joined forces on the Eskay property in about 1980, naming their property Stikine Silver Mines, which eventually was the entity to option

claims to Pezim's Calpine Resources. After Hole 109 was drilled, the stock in both companies skyrocketed and, like Mackay, McQuillan also left behind a rich widow. We called them "the two Tommies."

Once Pezim's drilling outlined the rich ore body at Eskay, a road was built to join the Stewart-Cassiar Highway at Bobquinn Lake (Bob Quinn was a line man on the Yukon Telegraph in this area) and produc-

tion commenced there in 1994. The ore was so rich, it was shipped raw. Half went to the port of Stewart for shipment to a smelter in Japan and the other half went to Kitwanga, B.C., from where it was transported to a smelter in Québec. [By] 2003, the Eskay Creek gold and silver mine [was] one of the richest in the country. Production at the end of 2002 was 2.3 million ounces of gold and 100 million ounces of

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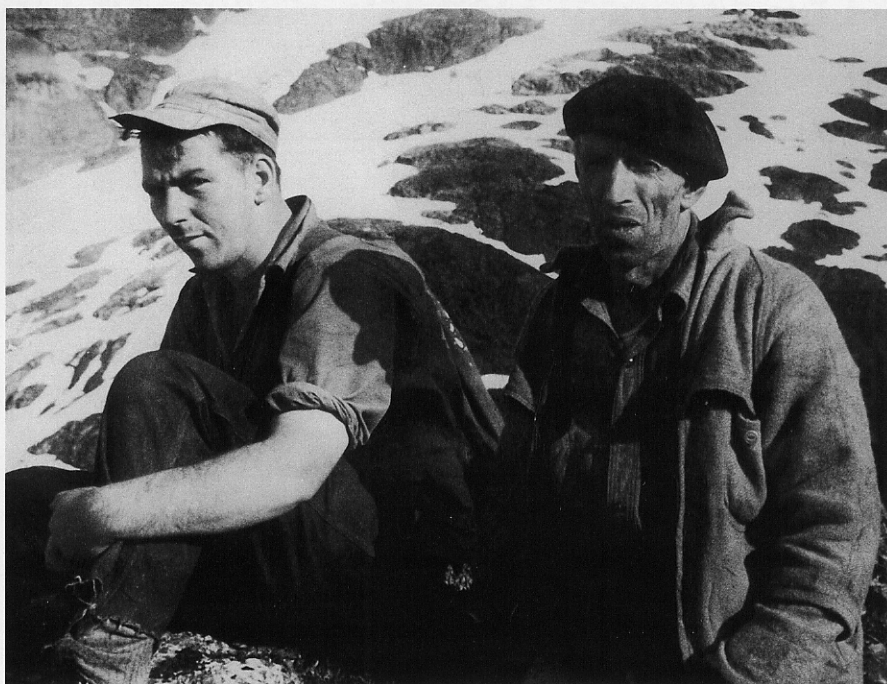
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Winging it (above): In 1946, pilot Pat Carey flew Tony, a horse, to Mackay Lake. The animal not only hauled mining supplies, but also became a great pet to the crew.

All he wrote (right): Book author Ian McLeod with partner Angelo Bugnella.



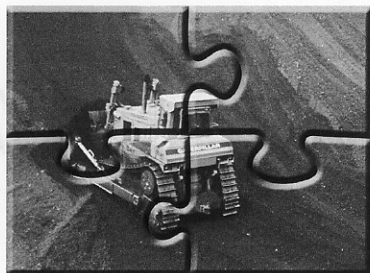
silver. Reserves were about 1.8 million ounces of gold and 80 million ounces of silver, so Eskay Creek will undoubtedly be the richest gold and silver mine in the history of British Columbia.

I was always amazed by the enduring faith of the two Tommies in that property, and I'm sure if they are looking down they are feeling mighty pleased. But Pezim and his geologists also deserve much praise for

their efforts. It is amazing that they would diamond drill 108 holes with mediocre results, and not give up. A good mine is like a good woman – hard to find but definitely worth the search! ❧

For more information, contact Holly McNeil at The Book Shelf Bookstore, 3250A Berry Road, Lake Country, B.C., V4V 1Y6; phone 250-766-2079; fax 250-766-0643; website www.paragonbc.com/stewart.

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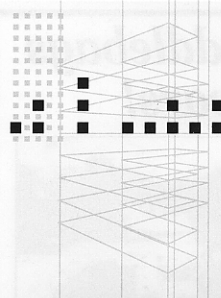
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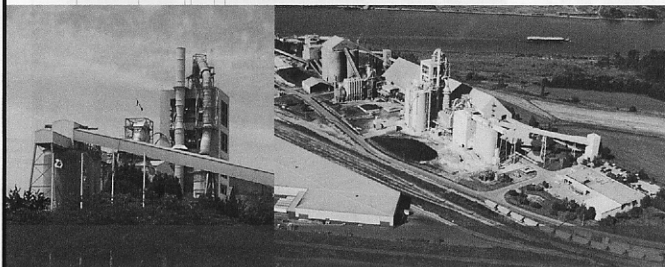
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