

# IN ALASKAN GOLD FIELDS

## AN UNPRECEDENTED RUSH OF MINERS THIS SEASON.

### Not Transportation Enough for the Men Going to the Yukon, Juneau, and Cook's Inlet Districts—The Perils and Hardships of the Trip to the Yukon over 750 Miles of Mountain, Lake, and River—The Cost of Living and the Profits.

TACOMA, Washington, March 30.—When William H. Seward purchased Alaska for \$7,200,000, in 1867, he had little idea that within thirty years that territory would produce more gold in a single year than the price paid for it by Uncle Sam. Yet the estimated yield of gold for 1896 is between \$8,000,000 and \$10,000,000. Five thousand miners will be taking gold from the scores of creeks, rivers, and inlets throughout the length and breadth of Alaska this year. The number will be even greater than this, if the hundreds of miners and prospectors desiring to go can find the means of getting there. Just now the rush is at its height, and scores of passengers are left behind when each steamer sails. All passenger accommodations have been taken for months ahead. Four steamers are now plying between Tacoma and Juneau and Sitka. It was only the other day that a score of miners, including a number of Japanese, were so determined to go to Alsaka on a steamer about to sail from Tacoma that they boarded her by force a few hours before her departure. Some of them detained the seamen, while others threw their luggage aboard. Some of the party were put off, but a number of them succeeded in going, although the steamer had a full load before. Not only had every stateroom been taken, but prospectors had laid down gold coin in payment for sleeping accommodations on the cabin floors. On each trip now the cabin floors are thus leased out.

The mining development now going on in Alaska may be divided into three great districts. First, the Yukon Basin, to which a great majority of the miners now rushing in are going; second, the quartz-mining operations in progress on Douglas Island, in the Silver Bow Basin, and other quartz camps about Juneau, together with similar operations on many islands skirting the coast for several hundred miles to the northwest of Juneau; third, the Cook's Inlet district, 1,000 miles northwest of Juneau and Sitka. In the quartz districts along the coast several thousand men are employed. The operations here are carried on chiefly by large companies, including the great Treadwell mine, the largest gold mine in the world, which will this year take at least \$1,500,000 in gold from Douglas Island; the Nowell Gold Mining Company of Boston, which will take out \$350,000 at Berner's Bay; the Silver Bow Basin, which will produce \$750,000, and the Lane & Hayward Company of San Francisco, which operates a thirty-stamp mill, and will take out \$250,000. The large companies together will produce fully \$3,000,000 this year. The 5,000 placer miners who will soon be working in the Yukon Basin and at Cook's Inlet will take out, it is estimated, \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000 more. Last year the placer miners made \$1,500 to \$2,500 each, and after paying expenses, cleared on an average \$1,500 each.

Few people have any idea of the hardships encountered by the men who make the journey of 750 miles which the miners must take in going from the head of navigation to Forty Mile Creek, on the Yukon, in the interior of Alaska. Most of the miners go in prepared to stay three years at least. To stay on the Yukon three years practically insures success. It takes a large part of the first season to get there and locate a claim. The second season is spent in development work. During the last half of this season and the third season the miner usually makes his stake. Some, luckier than the others, make a rich strike the first season, and are able to come out with several thousand dollars in dust and nuggets in their belts. But these are exceptions.

The miners begin leaving Tacoma for Juneau the latter part of January. They must leave Juneau early in March, in order to get over the mountain passes and down the largest of the lakes before winter breaks up, turning the snow and ice into torrents which make the passage difficult and dangerous. The first requisite of the miner is a good outfit. This must include strong, warm clothing, light, warm bedding, a Yukon stove, an Alaska sled, an axe, a saw, and other tools necessary for making boats and rafts, at least fifty feet of rope, a small medicine chest, and his provisions. The Yukon stove is a light sheet-iron affair, now become almost indispensable to miners in the far North. It can be set up on the snow or anywhere, uses less wood than an open camp fire, gives better heat, protects the eyes from smoke, and is more convenient for cooking. The Alaska sled is a skeleton sled, made of the best hardwood and shod with steel runners, being 7 feet 3 inches long and just the proper width to track behind snowshoes. The outfit costs from \$50 to \$200. An ordinary outfit will weigh 400 pounds.

The fare from Tacoma on comfortable steamers is \$12 for cabin and \$6 for second-class passage. At Juneau the miner completes his pack, if anything is lacking, and takes the steamer for Dyea, the head of canoe navigation, at the foot of the Chilkoot Pass, over which the miner must pass. Dyea is 106 miles from Juneau, and the fare by steamer from Juneau is \$10. Miners usually go in parties of four or five, for that number can use one tent. One of the party should have a knowledge of cooking, and another must know how to build a substantial boat. At Dyea the salt-water journey is ended, and the outfits of the miners

are piled upon the beach. Each man must now look out for himself and his luggage. Before him rise the Coast Mountains. Then commences the ascent of the Chilkoot Pass. The outfits are taken ahead, a part at a time. The first day the miners travel but five miles, which brings them to the mouth of the Dyea Cañon. Here tents are pitched in the woods, on top of eight or ten feet of snow, into which the poles and pins are pushed down. The Yukon stove is quickly arranged on a "gridiron" inside the tent. The gridiron consists of three poles laid on the snow, across which the stove is placed. The heat from the stove quickly melts the snow underneath, but enough firm snow is left under the ends of the poles to hold it up. For the bed, hemlock brush is cut and laid on the snow to a depth of a foot or more. This is covered with a large square of canvas, on which the blankets and robes are put. When finished, it forms a natural spring bed, for which the miner is truly grateful after his first day's experience in hauling the sled.

This day's work is typical of the entire journey of 750 miles to Forty Mile, which requires six to eight weeks' time, though it is far less dangerous than the experiences of many succeeding days. It is nine miles from Dyea to the summit of Chilkoot Pass. The greatest care has to be exercised in crossing the pass. In bad weather everything is liable to be swept from the pathway by a snowslide or avalanche. When this happens, the native Indians are of great assistance in recovering the things. With long, slender rods, tipped with steel, they feel down in the snow and locate the largest packages, which, without them, could never be found. Raising the outfit the last 600 feet to the summit is known as the tug of war. Every step must be cut in the ice, and so steep is it that a person with a pack on his back must constantly bend forward to maintain his equilibrium. The descent of the first half mile from the summit is steep. Then there is a gradual slope to Lake Linderman, ten miles away.

After reaching Lake Linderman, the miners have a somewhat easier road to travel. Before them for several hundred miles stretches a series of lakes and rivers, which must be traversed before the Yukon proper is reached. At this season the lakes are covered with ice and snow. Lake Linderman is seven miles long, Lake Bennett twenty-five miles, Takou Lake twenty miles, Mud Lake ten miles. At the foot of Mud Lake open water is usually found in April, and here a raft or boat must be built. Dry timber is obtainable on the shores. The raft carries everything to the Lewis River Cañon, forty miles to the northwest. Here a landing must be made and the outfit portaged a mile around the cañon. Below the cañon are the White Horse Rapids, which also give trouble. All who ever attempted to run this cañon on a raft have been drowned. Of two men who made the attempt in May, 1888, nothing was found but a bundle of blankets. Below the White Horse another raft is built, and the journey continued seventy-five miles to Lake Le Barge. This requires three days. The current in the lakes and their outlets is here less swift, and ice is found on which to cross this lake, which is forty-five miles long. This completes the sledding.

Here a boat is built and the journey is resumed. Going down the Lewis River from this point, the chief peril is met at the Five Fingers. Here stand four great buttes, like giant sentinels of stone. The water in five streams runs swiftly between them. The right-hand passage is the only safe one. In a jiffy the boat, with its precious load, has been whirled down to Reef Rapids, three miles below. Here again the right hand insures safety, and, having passed them, the last dangerous water is left behind. Few parties go through these dangerous waters without mishaps of some kind. Sometimes the entire party is thrown into ice-cold water, and seldom a party gets through without losing something.

The junction of the Pelly and Lewis forms the Yukon proper. Here the first trading post is reached. It is known as Harper's, and is 510 miles distant from Juneau. A hundred miles below is Forty Mile Creek, the Mecca of most of the prospectors and the principal trading post of the interior. Forty Mile is the starting point to all the mines, and is 750 miles from Juneau. Here the Yukon is over two miles in width. Flour costs \$10 a sack at Forty Mile. Beans are 20 cents a pound. A miner's weekly laundry bill is at least \$5. Everything is paid for in gold dust or nuggets. The demand for sewing is so great there that a number of women with sewing machines are going to the Yukon this Spring. A party of three women has left Tacoma, all of them provided with bloomer costumes. With their sewing machines they will make as much money as many of the miners.

The chief mining country so far opened on the Yukon lies between the mouths of Sixty Mile and Birch Creeks, which are nearly 400 miles apart, on the south side of the Yukon. The sands along the creeks, particularly the headwaters, are literally lined with gold. Nuggets are quite plentiful. The largest nugget ever taken out on the Yukon was found by Conrad Dahl, in Franklyn Gulch, in March, 1894. It weighed thirty ounces and brought him \$491.45. Dahl had prospected there the Summer before. In the winter he thawed out the ground by burning wood on top. He continued this process until he reached bed rock. He hauled the dirt out and washed it afterward. The nugget was found on bed rock. The mining is carried on chiefly with rockers. Where practicable, the ground is sluiced.

The regular mining season on the Yukon lasts from June 1 to Sept. 1. Some of the miners work during the winter by burning wood to thaw out the ground. Few do this after their first year there. The miners spend the long winter in eating, sleeping, playing cards, and otherwise amusing themselves. During the short Summer season they work almost night and day. It is then as light at midnight as at midday, the bright Alaskan sun setting only for a few minutes each day.

The journey to the Yukon is made partly across American and partly across British possessions. The boundary line is first crossed just before Lake Linderman is reached. All the rest of the route to Forty Mile is on British soil. Just west of Forty Mile and Fort Cudahy the boundary is crossed again. The greatest part of the mining country now opened is on American soil. The influx of miners this Spring will have some effect on the boundary dispute question, should England attempt to enforce her claim to a larger share of Alaskan soil. A large majority of the miners are Americans. They prefer to carry on their operations under American protection, and would band together to fight on Alaskan soil itself if the need of it should arise. The feeling on both sides of the line in Alaska is at present most harmonious. Men work on either side, and cross from one country to the other without interruption. The Dominion Government has established mounted police on the British side, but their presence is welcomed by all the miners. Whenever a prospector is gone too long, his friends notify the police, and a party goes out on a scout. The missing man is either brought in or supplied with provisions to keep him alive until he can reach camp. There has never been any conflict of authority.

Great excitement prevails this Spring through the Northwest regarding the Cook's Inlet country. The number of men going there is limited or by the means of transportation. The district was discovered in 1894. Last year 225 miners worked there, of whom 125 remained all winter. The others are going back, and enough others to increase the number mining there this year to at least 1,000. The only regular means of travel is a small mail steamer running from Juneau. The rush there is so great that at least nine schooners will leave Puget Sound for the Inlet this Spring, all taking parties of miners. E. L. Jones, a returned miner, says the lowest amount of gold taken out by any of the men last Summer was \$8 per day, and the highest \$20. The mining there has so far been placer work entirely. Rich quartz has been found, and by another season stamp mills will be put in. Provisions at Cook's Inlet are less than half as high as on the Yukon, because of the entire water transportation. Game is plentiful, including moose, bear, fowls, and fish. Wild cranberries are plentiful. Grass covers the earth, and there is considerable small timber. These features make the Inlet region much more desirable to work in than the Yukon country. The working season is a month longer than on the Yukon.

In both the Yukon and Cook's Inlet districts, the miners are bothered by myriads of gnats and mosquitoes, and the yellow-bellied flies, whose thirst for blood reduces the avoirdupois of all. The Yukon mosquito is several sizes larger and fiercer than that of New-Jersey. All the miners carry mosquito netting with them, and cover their heads and necks to avoid the mosquitoes.