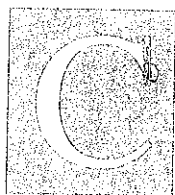


*It began as a road to riches, ended as
a trail of broken dreams, but led many on the
adventure of a lifetime!*

Iron Trails to Adventure

Newspaper Article by Catherine George



limb aboard, folks. We're off on a trip into history. Gold Rush history.

You're aboard the White Pass and Yukon Route, a narrow-gauge rail line that traverses the coastal mountains between Skagway, Alaska, and Lake Bennett, B.C. The trip over the White Pass summit is considered one of the world's most spectacular train rides for its heart-stopping scenery and almost-perpendicular climb.

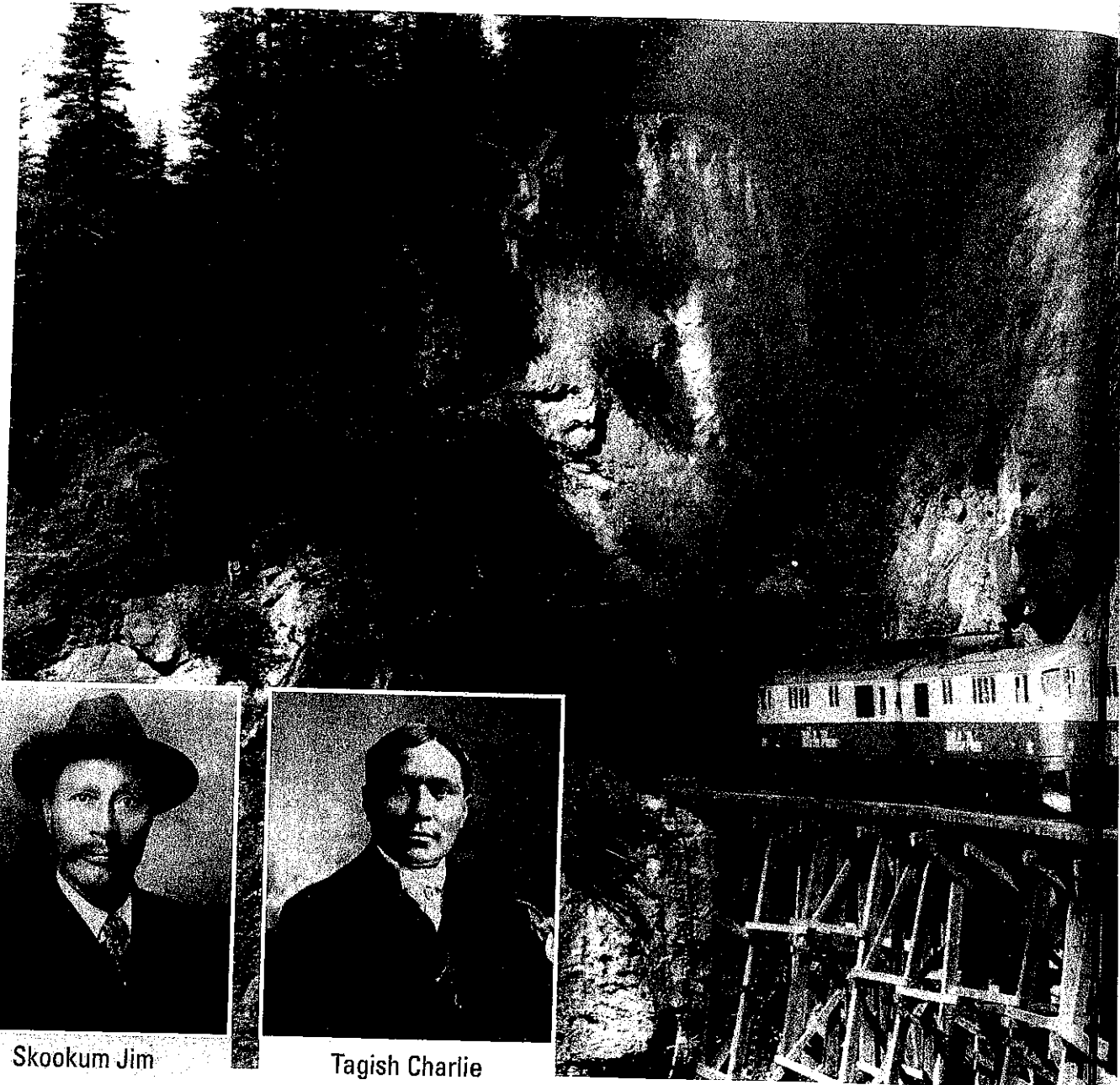
The 64-km journey traces the historic "Trail of '98," one of the daunting routes that took

thousands of gold-seekers from the staging grounds at Skagway to the gold fields of the Klondike in Canada's Yukon Territory.

You're seated in vintage parlour cars from the 1890s, trimmed in wood and brass, with potbellied stoves, old-time lamps, and all. The only thing different from Gold Rush days is the diesel engine that's pulling us this day. But if you happen to be here on select dates in the summer months, you'll be towed by refurbished Steam Engine No. 73, the last White Pass steamer, re-introduced to the WP&YR line in 1997.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Organize and keep track of information.
- Analyse the role of the media.



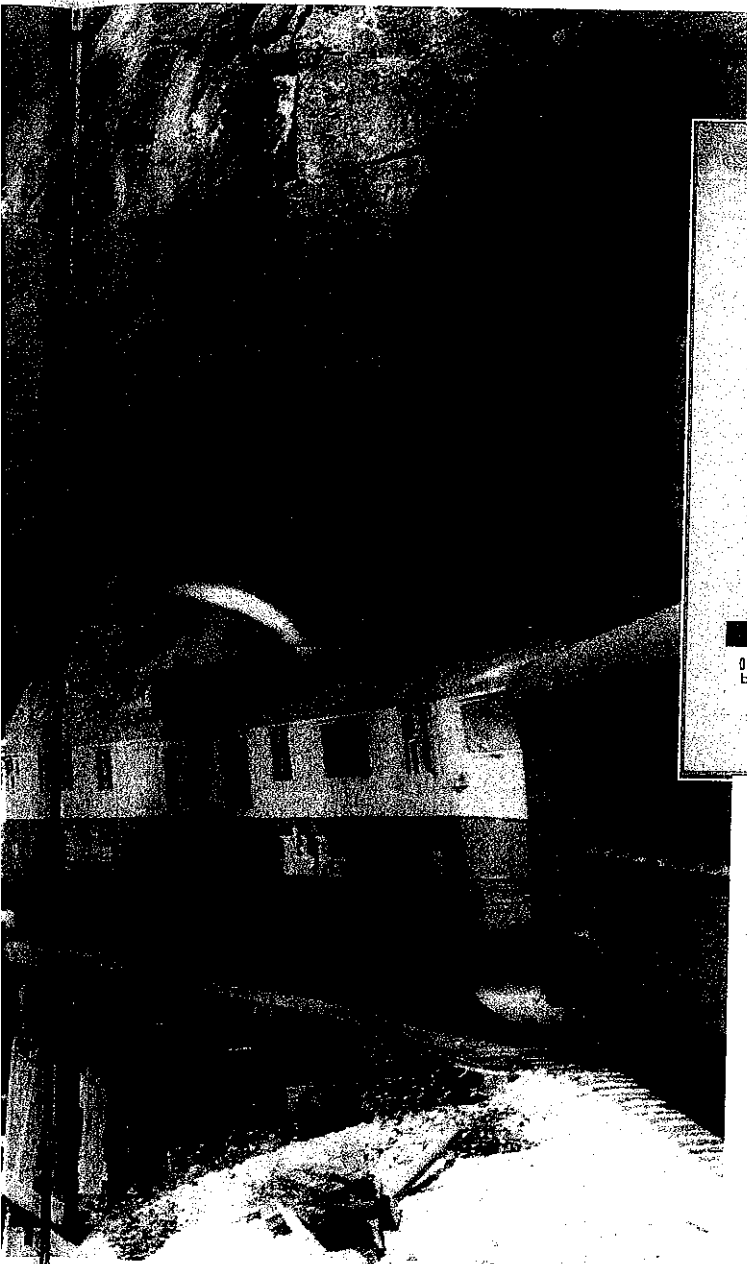
Skookum Jim



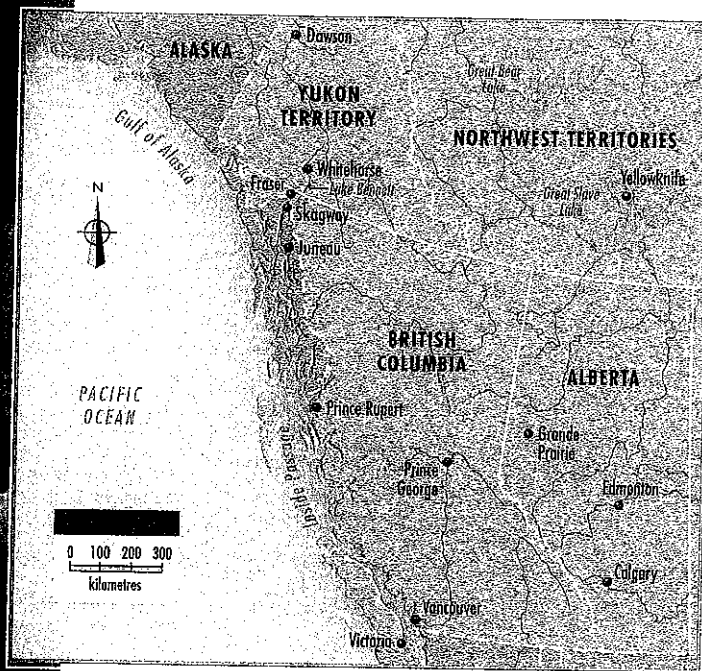
Tagish Charlie

Today's train trip will be a breeze, nothing at all like what the Stampeders, as they were known, experienced in their mad struggle

over the St. Elias Mountains more than a century ago. On foot. And in the heart of the northern winter.



As you'll soon realize, the White Pass and Chilkoot crossings were the toughest test of all for those with the unquenchable



thirst for gold. And those who made it as far as Lake Bennett still had another 650 km of treacherous rapids and whirlpools, swarms of mosquitoes, and dense forest to conquer before reaching the gold fields at Dawson.

It's said the stampede to the Klondike attracted the best and worst of men and women. For a few precious golden flakes, they were willing to suffer unspeakable hardship, risking life and limb, betraying their friends and their families. Because gold was everything, gold was all.

It's hard to believe that the most convenient gateways to the Yukon were here at Skagway and nearby Dyea (now a ghost town). They were the easiest access to the inhospitable wilderness routes over the Chilkoot and White Passes and they became boom towns overnight when word got out that gold had been discovered on Rabbit Creek (later named Bonanza Creek) near Dawson in the summer of 1896.

Prospectors George Carmack, Skookum Jim Mason, and Tagish Charlie are credited with the discovery, though no one really knows which of them actually discovered the nugget that set off the greatest gold rush the world has known.

With the trio isolated in the wilderness and freeze-up coming, word of their discovery didn't reach the outside world until the following summer when Yukon miners loaded with gold started arriving in the ports of Seattle and San Francisco. At a time of deep economic depression, sensationalist journalism told of Yukon rivers flowing with gold, setting off the biggest mass migration of gold-seekers in history.

More than 100 000 headed

for Alaska and the Yukon Territory: accountants, dancers, shop clerks, dress-store owners, labourers, bankers, journalists, gamblers, and gangsters.

Katherine Ryan from New Brunswick was one of the first women to climb the trail into the Klondike, seeking adventure and riches. She later became the first woman to join the North West Mounted Police.

Those with gold fever arrived in Skagway on ships and pretty well anything else that would float, most of them ill-prepared dreamers. Few had any idea where the Klondike was or what lay ahead in the more than 700 km of harsh wilderness between the coast and the gold fields.

All they had was grit and a determination to reach Lake Bennett in time for the spring ice break-up. There they could fashion boats and rafts to take them down the Yukon River to the Eldorado concealed in the remote reaches of the Yukon.

Shortly after you depart the Skagway train depot, look out to your right. You'll see Gold Rush Cemetery, burial place for some of Skagway's early residents, the most notorious being swindler

and con artist Soapy Smith. Soapy never got as far as the gold fields at Dawson. Instead, he got rich mining the pockets of the cheechakos (greenhorns) who began arriving in Skagway in the summer of 1897.

Soapy's lucky streak eventually ran out when he was shot dead by local resident and hero Frank Reid in 1898. Reid later died of his wounds in the shootout and both are buried here in Gold Rush Cemetery.

Skagway today is a touristy little town of restored boardwalks, false-front souvenir shops, and old-time saloons, and is a popular stop for the cruise ships plying the Inside Passage in spring and summer. In fact, most passengers aboard the WP&YR are on excursions off the cruise ships.

It's said that Soapy made the Red Onion Saloon his last stop before his shootout with Frank Reid. These days it's a popular stop for sourtoe cocktails.

We'll climb 873 m on our 32-km trip up the "golden stairs" to White Pass summit. It takes us about an hour and a half. But for many Stampederers it took days, weeks, even months, often as many as 40 trips back

Some of the more famous adventurers include:

- Nellie Cashman, who opened a restaurant in Dawson City and then a grocery store in Fairbanks. She operated many claims on Nolan Creek and was still travelling 563 km by dog sled to tend them when she was 78.
- "Big Alex" McDonald from Nova Scotia, who was known around the world as the "King of the Klondike" because he operated and owned so many claims.
- Martha Purdy Black, who staked an extremely rich claim on Excelsior Creek, and after the Gold Rush continued to live in the Yukon. In 1935 she was elected a Member of Parliament.
- William Ogilvie, Ottawa's official surveyor in the Klondike, who had a reputation as an honest and scrupulous man who could not be bribed, no matter how big the gold nugget!

and forth through sleet and snow, carrying the ton of supplies that was required in order to cross into Canada.

They carried supplies, day and night, up and down, over what many of the sourdoughs described as "the meanest 33 miles (53 km) in history." And the North West Mounted Police were

there at the summit to see that each and every Stampeder adhered to the rules.

There's a famous moment captured on film—once seen, it's forever etched in the memory—of a long line of people, backs horribly bent from the weight of their packs, struggling single file through the deep snows toward a narrow mountain pass. One powerful image, in black and white, tells the poignant story of the world's last great rush for gold.

These days hikers, much better prepared, challenge the scenic trail of glaciers, waterfalls, and steep grades in summer, but the majority of visitors are passengers on the WP&YR as it wends its way through forest and mountain tunnels and clickety-clacks across trestles spanning deep gorges.

Belching smoke and clanging steel, the WP&YR follows portions of the trail that was carved by the gold-seekers so long ago. Remains of abandoned cook stoves, old boots, and picks are still evident, as are stone cairns marking graves of unfortunates who perished on the unforgiving trail.

At Mile 17.5 we cross over Dead Horse Gulch where some

3000 pack horses, overworked and overburdened, met their terrible end. They "died like mosquitoes in the first frost" was how author Jack London put it. Remains of their bleached bones can still be seen on the rutted trail.

At the summit, halfway to Lake Bennett, the American and Canadian flags fly side by side at the boundary line where the North West Mounted Police checked the fortune-seekers' supplies. If they didn't have enough grubstakes to survive a year in the inhospitable North, they were turned back.

Word of the Gold Rush had spread quickly. The *London Times'* colonial reporter, Flora Shaw (Lady Lugard), travelled from London to the Klondike in 1898 and helped spread the word about the fortunes being made. Also in London, a group of venture capitalists obtained rights to build a rail line over the mountains from Skagway. But, after surveying the terrain and experiencing the weather conditions, Sir Thomas Tancrede declared it couldn't be done. That was until Canadian rail contractor Michael J. Henley convinced him that with enough dynamite he could blast a road to anywhere.

THOSE ADVENTUROUS STAMPEDERS

Some of the most interesting stories to come out of the Klondike Gold Rush focus on the courageous women who risked everything, including their lives, to struggle over the pass and fight for their share of the gold and the glory. One out of every ten Stampeders was a woman. The women worked just as hard as the men, and faced as many, if not more, hardships. Imagine trying to climb the pass wearing the typically long woman's dress of the time, with a corset making every breath difficult! Many women abandoned their traditional attire in favour of more sensible trousers, and faced the insults of men.



Klondike Kate

Kathleen Eloisa Rockwell, or "Klondike Kate," helped support her family by joining a travelling song and dance troupe headed for the Klondike. Kate became famous for her "flame" dance. She wore a red dress with more than 2000 m of chiffon that she swirled, much to the delight of the prospectors.

In 1897, Belinda Mulrooney heard about the Gold Rush and sold her dress shop in Juneau, Alaska. She bought fabric and hot water bottles, and carried them to the Klondike, where she sold her goods at a 600% profit. She stayed on to open a restaurant, hotels, and a construction business.



Belinda Mulrooney

Against all odds, Henley did accomplish the impossible. Construction began in the spring of 1898 and by the summer of 1899 the narrow-gauge line had reached Lake Bennett. It took just over two years and \$10 million to complete the line from Skagway to Whitehorse, an engineering marvel at the time.

Ironically, by the time the railroad was completed, the stampede to the Klondike had pretty much fizzled out.

Through the early part of the century the little line continued to carry passengers, freight, and mail in the North. It was chief supplier for the construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II, but hard times had forced it to suspend operations by 1982.

Oddly, it was the cruise industry that revived the rail line in 1988. And, instead of bringing gold out of the Yukon, the White Pass trip brings it in, in the form of tourist dollars.

From White Pass Summit the train makes its noisy descent

into the spruce- and aspen-covered Canadian landscape, then rolls through lunar-like terrain that is as close to desert as you'll find in Canada. It makes a whistle-stop at Fraser, B.C., where passengers can continue by coach on the Klondike Highway to Whitehorse.

Last stop: Lake Bennett at Mile 40.6, the end of the Chilkoot and White Pass trails where more than 30 000 Stampeders built a tent city in the winter of 1897-1898 waiting for the thaw. The forests were stripped bare as a flotilla of more than 7000 makeshift boats were constructed and launched. It is said more died on the treacherous Yukon rivers than died crossing the Chilkoot and White Passes.

And it's claimed that of the 40 000 who made it to Dawson only 300 found their fortune. Even so, many stayed on, captured by the spell of the Yukon and changing the North forever.

1. RESPONDING TO THE ARTICLE

- a. What elements of the 1890s journey attract you? Which do not?
- b. If it were possible, which version of the Gold Rush trail would you prefer to travel: 1890s or the present? Explain.
- c. Choose one of the people mentioned in the article. With a partner, discuss this figure's life and accomplishments.



2. RESEARCHING ORGANIZE INFORMATION

Locating relevant information and organizing it are important research skills. Divide a page from your notebook into four squares, giving each a heading (for example, geography, building of the railroad, impact of the Gold Rush, and notorious personalities). Reread the article and jot down the vital facts, recording information in the appropriate square.

What subheads do you think would help readers to better understand the article? Where would you place them?

SELF-ASSESSMENT: What benefits are there in organizing your information in these ways? How can this information be used in future writing?



3. MEDIA ANALYSE ROLE OF MEDIA

Reread this article and discuss with a partner the role the media played in the Gold Rush. Searching the Internet or using the library, locate and read some of the actual newspaper reports from the Klondike Gold Rush.

Imagine that you are a reporter in the summer of 1896. Write a sensational article for your local newspaper about the discovery of gold. Include a headline aimed at exciting your readers. Draw a picture or find a photo to help illustrate your article.