

# the WEST WIND

I WAS down in Southern Alberta painting about Waterton Lake, which is half in Montana, when I received a telegram from the Director of the National Gallery asking me if I would go up to the Alaska Highway and make some sketches there. So two weeks later I found myself sketching on another lake almost on the American border again, fourteen hundred miles north and west of the Lake of Waterton. This was Kluane Lake, and not so very different from Waterton when one considered how far apart they are. H.G. Glyde of Calgary was with me and for a thousand miles we sketched and made notes along the Highway, the last sketch being at the Peace River Bridge near Fort St. John.

I had been told many different things about this highway, that it was only beautiful at the far end and all the rest just monotonous bush. It may have been the low angle of the bright sunlight in late October and the sombre richness of the colour, ochres and browns, against blue snow-covered mountains, the frost on the spruce trees, the pattern of ice forming on lakes and rivers, but we found it fascinating the whole way. The monotonous bush country we did not discover at all.

For ten days Whitehorse was our headquarters. It still possesses much of the glamour that Robert Service

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**The recent death of A.Y. Jackson, the last surviving member of Canada's Group of Seven, calls to mind his remarks on an artist who in some way typified that school: Tom Thomson. Though not strictly one of the Seven, Thomson produced many paintings epitomizing their way of seeing nature. Jackson's reminiscences reproduced here were occasioned by the release of the National Film Board's documentary on Thomson, aptly titled *The West Wind*. His talk was given at the premiere of that film in Toronto in 1943. The film is available from the Canadian High Commission film lending library.**

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endowed it with. "The Northern Lights have seen strange sights": they are still lighting up the northern skies, and looking down on stranger

sights than ever Service dreamed of. Doughboys, and trappers, airmen, prospectors, Indians, husky dogs and giant tractors, bulldozers and other monsters. Most of old Whitehorse is still there, with big camps shoved in wherever room could be found for them.

What to sketch was the problem, the highway with all the activity of construction, the country itself, mountains and lakes and rivers and great vistas changing with every rise or swing of the road, the camps with all the big road building machines, tents, Nissin huts, log cabins, the old settlements, shacks, trading posts, and all the junk one finds in such places.

You would step out of the car and would not know whether to sketch north, south, east or west. Great rivers we crossed that are only names to most of us, the Liard, the Muskwa, the Dease, the Sikana. Here is a great land suddenly opened up to us. We have a million square miles of almost unknown country that remains a challenge to every adventurous spirit in Canada.

Do we love comfort too much to pack over the long portage or run the wild rivers or to build the camp fire against the frosty nights or to