

A Few Western Beauty Spots

Untouched by Man, and Some Whales, Panthers and Giant Trees

Written for Western Home Monthly by Bonnycastle Dale

If you would take a trip, an unusual trip, seek the unsettled portions of British Columbia, select one of those copper coloured, squat, silent natives and his big, high prowed cedar log canoe and let him take you up the far reaches of the fjords, along the natural canals that intersect this ocean-worn and even coast—all is as Quadra saw it an hundred and forty years ago, unchanged as the scenes Cook and Vancouver gazed at from their ocean harried vessels. Here is truly "the forest primeval". One thing impresses you at once, the total absence of bird song and animal movements. A mile back from the ocean the mighty forests are as still as death, only when a vagrant current of air tosses the great boughs of the giant Douglas Firs are you conscious of any sound—see this magnificent peak, part of the backbone of Vancouver Island—called after the great Queen and Mother, Victoria—from where we sat and ate our simple lunch it rose in snow crested majesty above us—but during the two hours rest we did not see a single living creature on earth or air, yet, as if arranged specially for us a devastating avalanche swept down the old glacier path. With powerful glasses we could see the mighty trees snapped off and carried along and piled up in the trough as if they been but catches—O'poots deigned to grunt (these Nootkan guides are so very loquacious). I noticed my Gordon setter side up and crouch down closely beside Fritz, who for once did not dare to gibe and jest, this awful thunderous rush quieted even the cloy boy—we could feel gust after gust, vibration after pulsation across the mile wide space that separated us from the grand display. An odd thought struck us—had we not been here there had been no noise, for none of the terrific crashes could be a sound if there was no ear receiver to take them.

Away off below us, as the setting sun's last rays glittered on the little unnamed

lake some thousands of feet beneath us, we saw, through the binoculars, a herd of elk enter the shallows; even with the strong glasses they were but pigmy animals. O'poots begged of me to shoot—I just mention this to show you their utter absence of knowledge of rifle distances—it looked like a good shot to hit the wee bit lake let alone the timid animals drinking there—we made our camp on the dry fern and ever present sallow, just the tossing out of your blanket and the closing of the eyelids, for mountaineering in this blessed land prohibits all the luxuries and many of the necessities too. Sometime during the night, by the telltale black earth of the trail, a "cougar," (the panther, felis concolor) visited our open air encampment, its great soft pads showed where it had crept up to the bend of the trail and had lain there vainly inhaling the scent from Daisy; it had turned and on velvet feet, carefully inserted in the upward trail marks, had stolen off noiselessly into the night. I especially mention this as these great cats are perfectly harmless to man. I show you the size of one dead over this good hunter's shoulder, so if you travel along the coasts of Oregon, Washington, or British Columbia have no fear of the terrible "Mountain Lion" of the magazine writer.

Many pleasant days passed by, we were leisurely tracing up the "flour gold" from Wreck Bay on the West Coast up over the shore plateau to Kennedy Lake—how many a poor mortal has made this vain quest—we walked over a nice snug fortune in the shore sands of the well-named bay, it was there, right beneath our feet, for several miles out handsome fortunes lay in the black magnetic sands but—Oh, this is a real large BUT please—a mighty surf that seemed by its power to come from far distant Japan beat upon it day and night. Several small fortunes have been poured into these sands by gold seekers but none have been taken out. We stood and

watched the tiny rivulets that trickle out from under the high cliffs and sandbanks, these carry the black sands that bear the precious metal—so we just wondered, as they came from the foothills, would it not be well just to step up that way—and a nice long step it was too. Before we left the beach I played, for once in my life, the hunted—I had left the guide and boy catching small, very small, trout. The protruding timbers of old time wrecked vessels lured me on westward along the lonely sands. I must have walked some four miles when I came to a lagoon formed by the highest high tide, on the opposite side, some hundred yards off stood a native, clothed, or unclothed as you will, in shirt and ragged torn off trousers. I had been among all the tribes and met with little if any trouble so I paid no attention, but just happened at that moment to turn my steps back towards my party, as I did so the ragged figure splashed through the shallow water and took up my trail. Naturally I stopped and said: "kla-how-yah" (good day in Chinook). No answer. He just stopped in his tracks. I resumed my walk and he took up my trail; again I stopped, as I noticed he was within about 15 feet of me, he also came to a dead halt—answer me he would not—time after time he stopped dead just as I turned about. At last, worried a bit at his unusual behaviour, I set the big reflex, grabbed a nice stout little club from off the jetsam and proceeded. This club made him keep his distance. I asked O'poots later, he said he was "a cultus chee-chah-ko" (a bad new comer). I always regretted not picturing my unwelcome trailmate.

We did not find that mother lode but we did get some most excellent trout fishing as soon as we got to Alberni Canal and took over our canoe again (it had come about from the outer coast by the steamer Tees). We fished at the beautiful Stamp Falls, untouched by man, the scene is wild and beautiful. We also pictured some strange native carving in the rocks, carvings of fish and animals.

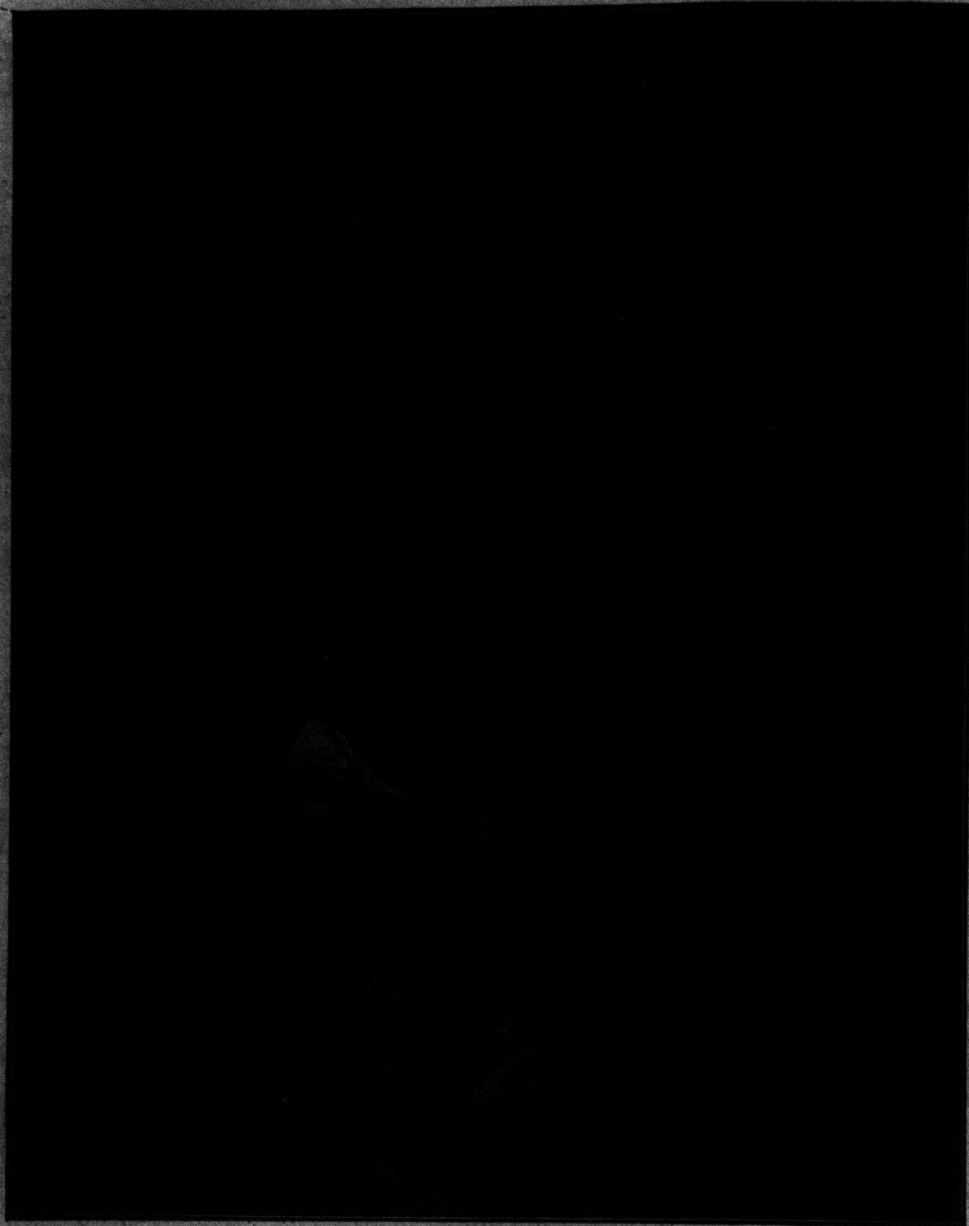
O'poots, seated in the stern of the canoe, paddled our little expedition slowly up until we were close to the mighty wall of falling water; he pushed the bow ashore on the crushed fragments of fallen rocks—just at this moment a Water Ousel flew over my head, passed in through the curtain of falling water and disappeared. Fritz ejaculated: "Oh! we never can find

that bird's nest." As a seeming answer O'poots started to throw off his few clothes and then stepped out of the canoe into the swift current as naked as the day he was born. Stooping low, and shielding his head with his hands, he approached the tumbling mass of green water and white foam and—just like the Water Ousel—disappeared. "You don't think he could come to any harm?" I asked Fritz, after he had been gone a few minutes. "I think, at times, I can see him," answered the lad. "Is that a rock or O'poots' brown back?" pointing at a dark mass behind the water but much closer to the canoe than where the guide entered the fall. For an answer the seeming rock backed—out of the falls right in front of our bow in his dripping hand he held two tiny grey blackeyed birds, just getting their coat of grey feathers over the black down.

"Me-si-ka man-a-loest kal-ak-a-al" (you kill the birds) he said handing them to Fritz. The lad instantly shook his head and cried: "Wake! Wake! No-No!"—then the Nootkan handed them to me—I thought it best to take them, as after a chap had risked his life for two little fledglings it was not well to hurt his feelings. "Nah-hal-les wake te-peh" "Look here no feathers," I told him. "Ikt dollar—go put them back to grow." The dollar tempted him and back through the rushing tumbling water he made his way and emerged, a very copper god, with streams of crystal water streaming over his shapely body.

"Say!" cried Fritz, "what an act for the ten, twenty, thirties," if you can take the entire thing east, Sir, I will produce it and allow you one hundred dollars per"—and he pursed his lips and folded his hands just as Marcus Lowe would have done with such a chance staring him in the face—instead we once more paddled off trolling and landing goodly numbers of "cut-throat" trout. As we passed a tiny slip at the end of a little clearing—and while I was waving my hand to the lonely squawman at the far off open door—Fritz nimbly emptied a landing net full of trout into the little log canoe moored at the end of the wharf. "Now, we can get busy and catch some for our own supper," laughed the lad as the current swept us on down stream.

For several days our long log canoe headed on down the "Canal" towards the ocean—at one spot we had an interesting



The Great Tree and the Ineffectual Axe



A plain Panther or Cougar or so called Mountain Lion