

Some Bear Yarns from British Columbia

By Bonnycastle Dale.

WE were in the valley of the North Thompson. Fritz had found one of the curious old deserted underneath dwellings of the natives, a sort of half cellar roofed with poles, with grass growing richly on the sods that formed the roof. The lad plunged into the subterranean ancient home for all the world like a ground hog dipping into its hole. I was busy on an adjacent rockslide trying to picture all that remained of a native grave, just a few huge rocks and a litter of small shale-like ones. The custom of these Thompson River Indians had been to make a small trench on the steep side of a hill where a great avalanche of shale and rocks had occurred, in this they placed the body of the dead, rarely they used even a rush mat or a bit of native cloth for a cover. No sooner was the remains of the Indian laid in the trench than the rock slide was started again on its overwhelming path and all trace of the grave was deeply buried for ever. In this case a small tent of poles marked the last resting place of the squat native.

"Oh! please come here!" sounded out of the bowels of the earth. Mr. "Groundhog" Fritz was calling. "I've found something, come here." So there was nothing for me to do but leap into the dark hole. I knew them to be only about five feet deep so in I went.

"Ouch!" said Fritz. "You came near squashing me and breaking this." This was a skeleton. By the aid of my torch I soon found the find was a wolf skeleton, the beast had evidently broken through the earthhouse years ago and perished trying to leap out of the narrow roof entrance.

We were travelling along the North Thompson River in B.C. in Kamloops district, a wild rocky mountain game infested region. Our pack train was southern bound along the course of the Canadian Northern Railway construction. It was very odd to see, as we popped out of some cave or earth dwelling, a civilized transport pack train "slop slopping" down the wet trail, to see the laden horses playing a wild game of "follow my leader" across some treacherous mountain river, and to hear the excessively polite language of a packer when his provision laden beast slipped and with all the perversity of packhorse nature fairly rolled in the cooling stream. Soon the iron horse will

go snorting down its steel way bearing passengers along this wonderfully scenic route, or again we would meet the loaded pack trains on the construction right of way, on a narrow trail laboriously cut through the primeval forest and swap lies with them. I found even Fritz's ample store of these to pale into insignificance beside the true story, "why, I seen it myself," of these travellers of the wilds. We had taken a big panther while on the island of Vancouver, and Fritz innocently added only two feet to its length and a hundred pounds to its weight trying to "match up" with a packer's yarn, he should have added many more as I heard the man tell him "and the great bloody beast came back to my ranch that very same night and carried off my sow and five pigs at one bundle in its great mouth." Fritz foolishly asked how long it was. "A bit over twenty feet," answered the ever truthful packer. Fritz sighed "what's the use" and dropped out of the contest.

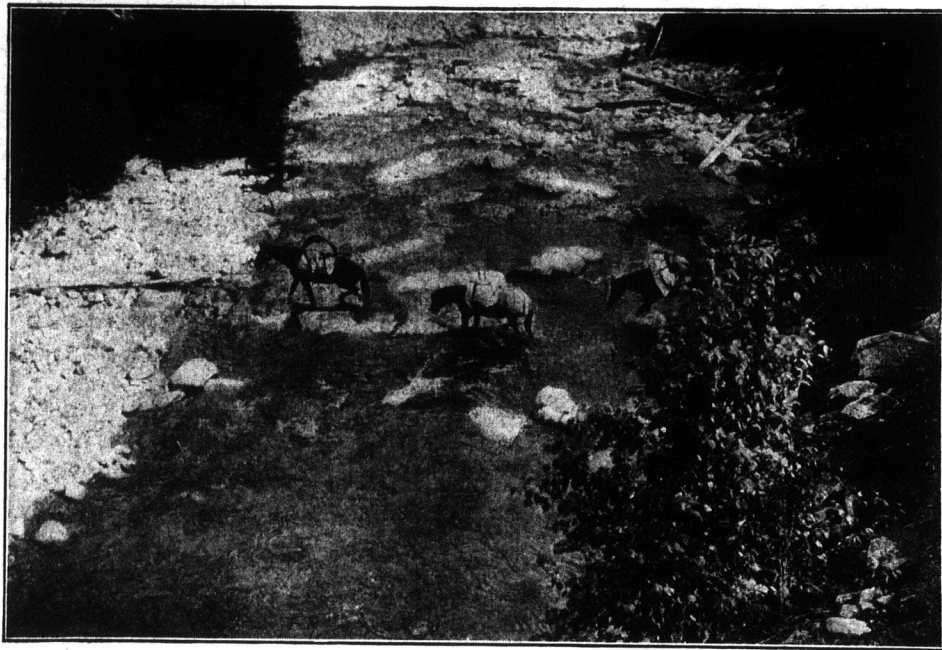
One day as we were slowly picking our way along an unnamed creek which flows into the North Thompson, as we were plodding along, stopping here to pick up at a deserted native village some rare basalt "scraper" or chisel or axe of the "stone age" or needle of the "bone age," or strange shell beads used for



B.C. Grizzly Bear and hunter

tokened, as we drew nearer we found it to proceed from a chink, I could hardly call it a window, in a log shack, so Fritz started to whistle "There's a light in the window" as an announcement, and a great grey beard emerged from a door, and an old man followed it. We pitched our tent on his "lawn" (he called it this, and the following he is to blame for:

the stream; in would go a long, black paw and out would flip a big salmon, and off would scamper the two big, fat cubs. They just tore the fish open and ate up the heart and brains, the few eggs left, and a bit of the best meat, and ran off to another wrigglin' fish. Alexander and I decided the cubs had better have the old lady to help den them up in December, so, as these bars are all my ranch animals, I jest clapped him on for the fun of seeing them run, and I set off a-looking for a male bar. I guess Alexander must have nipped one of them cubs, as he was bleeding considerable when he caught up, so I jest washed the cut out, stuck my knife into a spruce blister and rubbed the juice over it, and off we went as spry as ever. (I'll swear the old graybeard was seventy-five). "I couldn't round up any more of my beasts, so we set off for home, and Alexander bristled like a porcupine when we got near the house. You see we had packed in a couple of young porkers

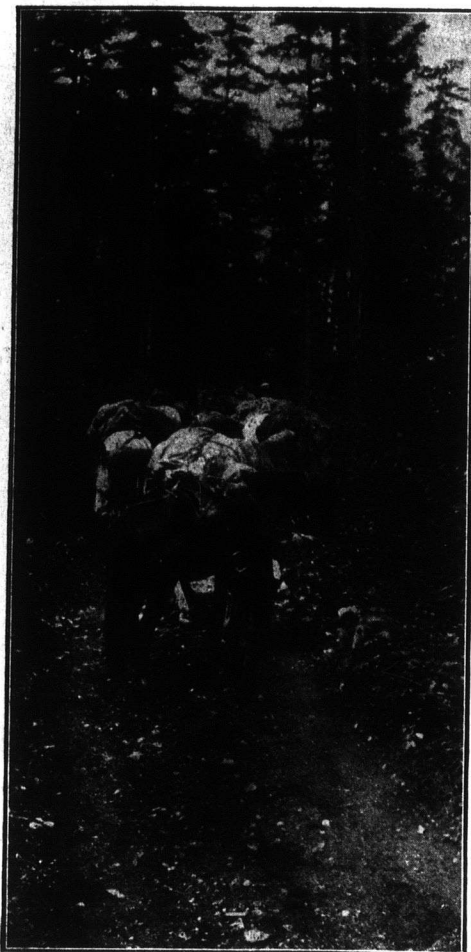


Packing Horses fording Canoe River, C.N. Railway

ornamentation by these passing, aye! almost passed people, for very few are left alive, we suddenly turned a sharp elbow of the wild animal trail we were on and came plump onto a grizzly slouching along the densely wooded path. Instantly, with a motion too swift almost for so clumsy a looking beast, it leaped into the low swamp cedar and crashed off to safety. We have very seldom been killed out here by wild animals, notwithstanding the awful yarns you hear. After six years wanderings all over British Columbia we have decided the only danger to man is a falling tree. No animal wilfully attacks man in all this great province.

One night, quite late, as a camping place with a bit of fodder for "Buster" and "Ninety," the pack horses—so called as to the former because of his uncanny way of smashing and "busting" everything intrusted to his scrawny back, so called as to the latter because his full name was "Ninety-nine." I had decided, by a tiny streak of work I had found in him, that he was not more than ninety years old, so I, in justice, changed his name. He also had a habit of rolling, but he did this on dry land, so our outfit has a daily choice of being drowned or smashed—and it usually got both. Well! quite late at night we saw a light ahead, a light in the range always betokens human beings, and as neither we nor O'poots, our guide and horse wrangler, had seen a man, red, white or black, for some ten days, we were all guessing what the light be-

not we), made him come into supper, Fritz started it all by telling him about a fine pointer, a noble dog in the field. The old man withered him with a glare, switched his long beard over on to his other knee and whistled. In through the open chink leaped a purely bred mongrel, he looked at least part dog, the rest was wolf and darned meanness and starvation in about equal parts: "Best bar dog in the whole Rockies. Last fall I sends for 'Grunter,' a Kamloops Indian, to go a-hunting, he fed up-the-trail, eating a bit at every ranch in the lower valley, and carrying off all he could, and having a hyas potlatch (Chinook for 'big feast' in the Coast dialect) in the woods all by his lonesome. Say! he took two weeks to eat up the trail and then he turned and ate his way back; so I never seen hide nor hair of him, so Alexander the Great (here he pointed at the mongrel) and I went after the bar all by ourselves. It was just when the salmon was a-runnin' up the creek to spawn and the banks was lined with spent fish, just kicking and splashing and dying—as you know, them salmon die as soon as they get ripe and full of eggs at four years old, an' the funny thing is they fight their way all the way from the Pacific Ocean five hundred miles upstream, just to lay the eggs right in the parent stream where they was born four years ago—and maybe the bars don't know this! Well, Alexander and I hikes down the creek and squats and watches a black bar, an old sow with two well-grown cubs, picking her supper out of



Along the trail, North Thompson Valley

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