

THE EARLY BIRD

By J. HARMON PATTERSON

The tide of discovery was moving westward and wherever prospectors foregathered that winter the same vague rumor was afloat. Nothing definite of course. No one even so much as gave a hint of where he intended to strike in the Spring. Each had a definite plan, but this was more than I had. I was already hired for the season by a good syndicate and on very generous terms—but where was the new field? The country was large and no detailed map of it was in existence. I wanted one badly, but no government explorer had given it his attention. Well if he had not, some Indian trapper had. I would hunt up Fred my Indian guide. He would know.

I had trouble in locating Fred, but after a three days' journey into the wilderness I came to his shack. He and Indian Charley were trapping together. They were very glad to see me and for the next day we ate much of beaver and moose and of the good things I had brought with me.

The Indian who was my guide I did not trust, but the next day I got him out with Indian Charley and came to the point.

"Why yes," Fred replied in answer to my questions. "Charley trap there all one winter, know all the country, make a good map."

"And does he know diabase when he sees it?" I asked.

"Oh yes, he know diabase. Pretty nearly all rock he know," was his reply.

I made up my mind at once. "My idea is this," I told him. "You come with me of course and if Charley is willing I will hire him for a month or two to get in supplies. We will not wait for Spring but strike in about the middle of March, find the best place, get in plenty of grub and stay on the job. But I don't want anyone to know where I am going."

"Good," was his reply, "can go in from here, only about thirty miles and good trail. Charley will go, not getting any fur worth while."

Next day I had a long talk with Charley.

"Coshawong lake place to go," he said. "Lots of diabase there, plenty big rocks. I see some calcite there too," he added, proud to show his knowledge of geology.

I went out next day, after arranging that they were to meet me at the railway with toboggans two weeks later. I gave Fred the money and he purchased the necessary supplies. Three days later we arrived at their camp with over two hundred pounds of provisions. I stayed in while they went out for another load. To the inquisitive merchant they explained that a fool white man who was not well was to stay with them for a month and was afraid that he might starve.

Then we made our way up to Coshawong Lake, arriving there after a hard trip of four days. Here we pitched our tent, set up the sheet iron stove we had brought with us and made everything comfortable. Then Fred and Charley went out for another load. During the week they were absent I made short trips around the lake and was much encouraged by what I saw. To the south and west the rock looked favorable wherever exposed. When they returned we had four hundred and fifty pounds of supplies, but I sent Charley back to the camp again for a lot of moose meat they had left, though he suggested that it would be easier to kill another moose. The meat at this time of the year is very good to eat and is a pleasant change from salt pork.

We then made long trips in every direction, often taking provisions and a fly with us and remaining over night but no place I saw could at all compare with Coshawong Lake, and I was soon satisfied to confine my attention to it.

It was now the last of March and the weather was quite mild at times, so I sent Charley out for his canoe which I purchased from him. I paid him liberally for his time and he left us well satisfied.

One afternoon while walking along the shore of a small lake about a mile from camp I saw a piece of calcite and soon uncovered a vein about six inches wide. It was almost pink in places with cobalt bloom. I traced it for about twenty feet, but the snow was deep and I could not do much. We held a feast that night in honor of the discovery. We had moose soup with dumplings, boiled moose meat, boiled rice with apple sauce, real biscuits with butter and tea. Next day we carefully staked the claim. Then Fred found another good vein which we also staked.

As the snow melted more and more rock was exposed, and by the first of May we had five good claims, all adjoining. Though we had looked over the country pretty well we saw nothing else worth taking up, so a week later we decided that it was possible to get out to record the claims. That trip was a hard one. The rivers were open but nearly all the lakes were yet full of ice and there was much snow in the bush. We dragged the canoe across many a lake on the ice and over many a portage where the snow was still deep.

I was very glad at last to see the houses of the village in the distance. It is pleasant to sit up to a table again with a white cloth and eat a real meal from real dishes. Fred and I certainly enjoyed it though the food was no better than we had ourselves.

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Ten days later I met Fred and we returned to our camp. The second day after our arrival we made a trip around the lake. Stakes everywhere. Not an inch of diabase left. We went back half a mile, still stakes. There were five tents and twelve men at the south end of the lake. Coming back we met four canoes and nine men who had just arrived. We went back to a ridge which we had seen in the spring, it was all staked.

The country was simply blanketed. The men did not grub around till they made a discovery and then stake a claim. They staked first and prospected later. Two young fellows who were prospecting found out that while they were at work other men had run lines around them.

That night when we got in we found seven men at our camp. They were all old hands and a hard bitten bunch they were. Most of them had been staking all day with no discovery. Just getting some ground as one expressed it. I gave them all the information I thought wise and a rough plan of the country. Each man made a copy.

We now got down to hard work on our claims grubbing away among the roots and gravel to find other veins. We had visitors every day who examined our showings and all pronounced them very promising.

We had been at work a week when we made the big find. I had walked over the place several times. It was a small calcite vein about an inch wide. I knocked a piece out with the pick. The silver showed plainly in sprays like moss. We borrowed a drill and a stick of dynamite, as we had none with us, and put in a shot. The vein was full of silver and a thin leaf lay along one wall. No more work that day. The news spread like a forest fire.