

Victoria to Skagway

Story of a Trip North on the Steamer Princess Louise.

A Journey Full of Interest and How Best to Enjoy It.

(Special Correspondence of the Times.)

Enough has been written to fill a good sized book-shelf of the hardships and privations that the Yukon pioneers had to undergo in order to reach this "El Dorado," and has been written from so many different "points of view," that anything further on this line would prove very wearisome reading, therefore I will venture to offer a few lines on a pleasure trip to the Klondike capital.

The excellent travelling facilities which are at the disposal of the traveler throughout the entire journey, make it one not only of exceeding great interest, but also a very comfortable trip. I will like the trip when everything is at its best, not too early a start must be made. The exact time changes from year to year; a start should not be made until the spring freshets have raised the lakes and rivers sufficiently to rob the sandbars and the boulders of their obstructions. The return trip commenced before the waters have receded to such an extent as to reveal the shallows and the obstructions. Were I to select the dates I would say do not attempt to reach Skagway until June 24th, and do not leave Dawson later than September 24th. This gives you three months, and a trip taken during that period—and it is well within the reach of most of those who indulge in an annual summer vacation—will fully repay you. There is not a mile of the journey but is pleasing to the eye, restful to the mind, and impressing by its scenic grandeur.

Most of the transportation companies have described the many points of interest from the Gulf of Georgia to Skagway. Any efforts of mine may be not be appreciated, so I will only mention those that interest me especially. I will not suggest any particular line of steamships as being the best for the enjoyment of the trip, for so much depends on Father Neptune being gracious, and I have failed to find out whether any particular line, or any special skipper has any monopoly of this gentleman's good graces. I think, however, that a steamer that takes three months to make the journey is rather to be preferred to a vessel where every comfort and enjoyment is sacrificed for speed, and where every nerve is strained from the captain to the cabin boy in their efforts to beat the record. (These greyhounds are generally fast, and the stewards and waiters overworked. If you are simply on pleasure bent you do not want your temper ruffled and your enjoyment marred by a hurriedly cooked or an ill-served meal. To recline in an easy steamer chair, in the soft twilight of an Arctic sunset, with the majestic scenery which Nature has so lavishly spread before you, unfolding itself before you in the perfect enjoyment of that peace of mind which only a good meal can produce, and under the soothing influence of a fragrant Havana, is a sensation that only those who have experienced it can appreciate. I am forced to leave off the scenery for a moment to turn to the practical side of this Alaskan trip as it presents itself to me, viz., that this whole country is simply a question of transportation. It offers greater inducements, a safer investment, and a more certain return for capital, than even the Klondike mines. Everything that is consumed by man and beast, all the machinery necessary for the successful operation of mining, both quartz and placer, has to be brought in here. When you think for a moment that a country with a population of under 15,000 has nearly to pay for transportation on at least 30,000 tons, and when you realize that the development of this country's mineral wealth is still in its infancy, only the faintest idea may be conceived of the possibilities for transportation in the very near future. This is only one aspect of transportation. The passenger traffic is increasing yearly and will continue to increase each season. The people in this country will always be great travellers. Many will come in and go out each season, and the remainder must go south at the end of every second season, if for no other reasons alone. It is not the "cheerful chaos" who get sick here, but the "sour doughs." Two Arctic winters, continued feeding on canned food and evaporated fruits and vegetables is nauseating, and saps the vitality. And most important of all is the fact that the man who wants to see the country and is willing to pay for it. Every tourist who makes the trip, unless he is extremely dull and very unobservant, will never fail to extol the beauties of the trip and recommend it to his friends. The voyage to be perfect will never end at Dawson, but must include a return via St. Michael, and from there by ocean steamer to the home port, making a round trip of nearly 5,000 miles. I am not stretching my powers of imagination, nor am I allowing my enthusiasm for the scenery to carry me away, when I state that I am certain that any company that will provide roomy and well appointed steamers, and will make such arrangements as may be necessary to secure close connections for the journey I have outlined will have a service that will be a credit to the port from which it sails and will be sure to yield an abundant harvest to those who make the venture.

I started from Victoria on the steamer Princess Louise, and many were the condolences offered that a faster boat had not been our lot. True enough, she was never broken the record, but it proved to be the story of the ship and the tortoise all over again. Slow but sure. Day in and day out her paddle wheels kept up an even "Ra-ta-ta plan," and we were not so very far behind the "hares" who occasionally gave us a little "back wash," and they did not beat us very badly after all. To one whose stomach is responsible, I don't know if it is not proof against mal-de-mer, her obstinacy in declining to roll was appreciated, and I shall always have a kindly feeling for her and for her genial skipper, who was never too busy to name the innumerable headlands, inlets and channels when asked, and whose temper never even got ruffled if asked ten times in as many minutes: "How far are we from Skagway, captain?" "When do you think we will reach Skagway, captain?" and "Do you think, captain, this boat will coast with the train?" We had splendid weather throughout the entire trip, and when a breeze had to spring up, it only to keep itself from getting rusty, it was always "dead aft."

When we neared channels or narrows where fair tides are essential to safe navigation, we always got there with the "first of the flood." Having travelled with such good luck, I would be most ungrateful indeed if I did not doff my cap to my old friend the Princess Louise and her genial skipper, obliging officers and crew. All I ask is for the privilege of a duplicate journey.

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At Vancouver we filled the hold and every cranny and nook of the steamer with freight. The cargo was varied, from live animals to telegraph wire. To stand and watch the endless variety of articles as they were taken on board must impress the most casual observer of the wonderful capacity of the country we were bound to, for the consumption of produce and manufactured articles of all kinds. A large number of passengers joined us here.

passages; water falls are plentiful on both sides, some like a gossamer thread, others increasing in size to a successful cascade of falls. Some, again, assume large proportions, and although lost in admiration the practical side suggests itself as to the number of horse-power that is here going to waste annually. In some places they come in such rapid succession that it is a constant rush from side to side to see them all, and then the click of the camera going constantly around you, and many found themselves with just one shot left before they were half way through—a prolific cause for debate during the balance of the journey was when and where to use the remaining shot.

Early in the morning we reach Uncle Sam's domains and we moor to the wharf at Ketchikan. This is now the entry port to Alaska; it is more in the path of steamers than Mary Island. It was customary in the past for a United States officer to accompany every vessel to its destination and return, but this is now done away with. There are some very valuable quartz mines being worked here close to the town. The town itself is quite an important port, until the Alaskan boundary is settled, at least. We took in the town, replenished our supply of fruit at reasonable prices. The dealer told us with a feeling of pride that goods were sold at Ketchikan cheaper than in Seattle. A loquacious Irish-American enlivened our stay. He welcomed us by yelling before the ship was hardly moored: "By—, boys, is God's country, and don't you forget it."

I almost forgot to mention that it was raining here. On enquiry we were told that a rainy day excites no comment, and when the conversation turns to the state of the weather Ketchikaners invariably discuss the probabilities of a fine day.

We are soon in Wrangle Narrows, and again here the tide runs like a mill-race. As the objects on the shore fly past us we might imagine ourselves on an express train. At the end of the narrows is a very large cannery. A general air of prosperity and progress surrounds the place; we were told that it was owned and operated by Victoria capitalists.

Wrangle was soon reached. This place is an one of more than passing interest. This is an old place, started originally by Russian fur traders, and gained its first prominence at the time of the first Cassiar rush. For many years a garrison of American soldiers was stationed here; they have now been transferred to Skagway. During the Twain Lake railway excitement in 1898 Wrangle again grew into prominence, and had a population of 5,000, only a few of whom are left to-day. Water front lots were pointed out to us for which \$2,500 was refused during the boom. We were told that for \$25 we might get a claim deed for the same property. The people of Wrangle point proudly to the past history of their town, omit the present, and have great hopes for its future. As half our cargo had to be discharged here to await transportation to Glenora, we had ample time to see the town and look at the tottering houses, and a great number, very odd and grotesque some of them are. In each store you will find an endless variety of Indian curios. Five large river steamers are in their winter quarters here, and have been so since 1898. It is to be hoped old Cassiar may again be a meeting place for gold hunters and that there may be plenty of freight to give these handsome vessels remunerative employment. A remarkable thing in Wrangle is that there are no horses or vehicles to be seen, and that wheelbarrows are the only conveyances. The cause for this is not very hard to find. There are no streets fit to run a wagon on, the crossings from sidewalk to sidewalk are often miniature bridges some four feet high. They say it rains here every day. I am not in a position to contradict the statement, but the luxuriance of the vegetation affords ample proof that the climate is not hard to find. The cause for this is not very hard to find. There are no streets fit to run a wagon on, the crossings from sidewalk to sidewalk are often miniature bridges some four feet high. 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