



In the Evolution of the Locomotive the 1914 method of hauling freight over the Cariboo Trail by gasoline tractors might be considered.



Go back a few years and you find a still earlier type of freight train, but one still in use on the Cariboo Road, from Ashcroft to Fort George.

The New Cariboo Trail

In Central British Columbia, the Nearly Obsolete Stage Coach with its Six-horse Swagger is Modernized for Twentieth Century Needs

By C. W. ESMOND

THE morning is clear and crisp. The frost patches on the bare, bold bluffs and rolling hills sparkle with diamond brilliance. Down in the little town of Ashcroft two big, red motors whiz hither and thither. Here a passenger is taken on. There a piece of baggage is picked up.

Now, ours nearly has its load. The little bank inspector thoughtfully provides himself with a flask of brandy, "in case of accident." Both he and the young doctor have a plentiful supply of cigars and cigarettes. The former takes the front seat with the driver; the latter sits behind with the silent man and woman whose "right smart" and "I reckon" proclaim their Dixie Land origin. I take one of the chairs. A huge pile of suit-cases, tarpaulin-covered, are strapped on behind.

"I have two Chinamen to go," says the young traffic manager, standing on the footboard and tucking the robes warmly about everybody. "But they are small fellows," he continues, with a vocal inflection from which you infer that it would be perfectly all right to fold one of them up and sit on him. So we shoot off to Chinatown. Out from Chang Wang's laundry comes one slippered Celestial with a large suit-case, and forth from Wo On's chop suey steps the other with a large bag filled almost to bursting. The bag and suit-case are loaded on either side of the engine in front. Both the Chinamen, however, are much larger than we had pictured them, and neither looks sufficiently flexible for a cushion. But they are loaded in beside me, one on a gasoline can and the other on the second chair. A big load is warm and makes the springs more flexible. There are eight of us with the driver.

Now the impatiently throbbing engine of the 60 h. p. Winton car is given its head and we shoot off. Darting across the bridge we fly at the stiff grades that lead up out of the valley of the Thompson. Every turn, every new elevation, is a fresh revelation of glistening, sparkling beauty. It is December. Yet the morning seems to have been plucked from the time when the "frost is on the punkin", and the corn is in the shock. The wind of our motion fans cheeks into a burning glow. The speed exhilarates like wine.

Ashcroft quickly hides behind the low hills. We roll up onto the level grade and whirl along the frozen road in a world flooded with sunshine. Just ahead of us is a freighter. He has two huge waggons coupled together. They have towering high boxes and the canvas tops of prairie schooners. They are packed with goods for the Fort George country, whither we are speeding. This freight train will be about three weeks on the road. With a clack, clack of its Klaxon our express takes the side and whirls by. Another open stretch and a wide open throttle. Here is another freight train, empty this time, coming toward us. The driver sits in his saddle, holding the reins over his six-horse team. A chime of bells above the collar of each of the leaders ring out on the frosty air and the horses swing jauntily along to the music.

HERE we round the bold face of the bluff and look down a sheer wall of a hundred feet to the bed of the shallow but turbulent creek. Down the long grade we roll and duck around the spurs along the tumbling stream. Now we are on another level grade and shoot past a large, comfortable ranch-house, with its corral and numerous out-buildings. Creeping through the bumps, thundering over the level stretches, on throbs our motor until in little more than an hour we roll into the sleepy little village of Clinton. Just a pause here for gasoline and we are off again like the thunderbolt.

Level creek bottoms and long hill slopes here give us a far-stretching view of brilliant beauty. Then the forest hems us in and we run between two sombre walls of green. We round a bluff that drops into a little lake and suddenly stop against the noses of a freighter's team. It is an unexpected meeting. By careful manoeuvring a passage is arranged and on we go. Now the front wheels strike an unexpected series of bumps. The Chinese suit-case on the engine, after a series of high jumps, hits the track from where it bounces into the ditch on the opposite side. The hitherto silent Celestials become suddenly voluble in Chinese. We let our imaginations interpret for us in the light of what we would say under similar circumstances. Back we go an incredible distance, pick up the resilient baggage and sweep on to 74 Mile House for lunch.

With what appetites we demolish the vegetables, beef and pie need not here be recorded. It is a good old-fashioned dinner, served in a farmhouse, and therefor we pay "four bits," fifty cents. Then, with



The Cariboo express train that rushes travellers over the trail from Ashcroft to Fort George, by the old gold trail of the '60's.

that comfortable feeling that follows a good meal, we resume our journey. Throughout a mild afternoon we gaze on an ever-changing panorama of ranch, peaceful lake, sloping hillside, evergreen forest and daring mountain road, all seeming to pass with moving picture swiftiness. Dusk begins to fall. The moon peeps over our shoulders. Here at a ranch-house the driver telephones ahead to have supper ready at Mile 134. Then on we go for another hour in the growing light of the moon.

Mile 134, if anything, surpasses the cheer of the lunching place. Mr. Ross, our host, is a typical Cariboo rancher, well read, comfortable and contented with his 700-acre estate. But the moon is filling the valley with a silver glow, the roads are good and on we go for fifteen joyous miles to 149 Mile House. Like an invading army we swarm in upon them. But they are quite equal to the emergency and quickly have us suitably accommodated for sleeping. After a short night of "dreamless" the breakfast call sounds in our ears and we are shortly tucking away the porridge, ham and eggs, hot cakes and coffee. Breakfast over, we inspect the ranch and visit the captive bear. Bruin, however, has gone in for his winter's nap and we can only see two very sleepy eyes raised with a great effort at the noise of our approach.

BY this time our driver is ready and we whirl along as yesterday. More than an hour we pass in climbing hills, creeping around precipitous spurs and rolling down grades. Then suddenly before us opens a deep valley and bits of the silver ribbon of the Fraser appear. Down in there is the little village of Soda Creek. But how we are to descend, except by airship, is past understanding. However, the mystery is solved as we proceed. Along the steep side of the high bank runs the well-graded road. Down a series of switch backs we roll as safely as down a city street. Below yawns the canyon which here compresses the Fraser's volume into a narrow flume.

If it were summer we should here leave the motor and take a comfortable river steamer up the Fraser, making the trip to Fort George in two days. As it is, we get gasoline and then follow the road along the river toward the village of Quesnel. After another of those comfortable farmhouse lunches we roll for miles along the ragged edge of the high bench that gives us a far-stretching view of the Valley of the Fraser. Suddenly in mid-afternoon it broadens and we look down to where the village of Quesnel nestles at the junction of the Quesnel and



The man that handled the "ribbons" over the six-horse team swinging the mails up from Ashcroft to Quesnel would have created a sensation at a down-east horse show.