

## The Last Pioneers

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Bonnycastle Dale



Novel Boating—Back to Boyhood Days

"Do trout fly out here?" asked Fritz. Truly it looked like it. We had been vainly trying to hook any one of a large number of good big fish which were playing in the pools of the North Thompson. We had tried every lure and bait we could improvise, but not a rise. Big silvery greenish things, how tempting they looked in those shallow pebbly reaches of icy water pouring down from one of the glaciers on majestic Mount Robson. Then, tired with our scramble we had seated ourselves at one end of a long pool, and had just seen a glittering trout ascend into the broad-leaved maple trees that crowded about the other end.

"Look!" cried the lad, "there goes another." And up went trout number two. "Try the glasses, see the Indian hidden in the branches?"

I passed the binoculars over to Fritz, and we located the cause and went down to see the effect.

"When the bears raid the pools the fish are very scared," the Yellowhead Pass man told me, and he showed us a long line of wildcat gut. We stole along to another pool, and watched him secrete himself, pressing his body close to the bole of the maple and letting the wood-maggot baited hook fall "splash" into the water. Instantly a three pound Rainbow trout seized it and swiftly ascended into the tree. We returned to our pack animals assured there was always something new under the sun.

At Tete Jaune Cache we met the camps of the Canadian Northern, the last pioneers to cross the Rockies, as now all the passes, Kicking Horse, Yellowhead, Crow's Nest echo to the snort of the steel horse, but even so you can yet kill your blacktail or black bear, your moose or elk or grizzly, your sheep or goat within sound of the "whoof, whoof" of the Moguls. Did you ever hear a lion roar?—a mountain climbing engine gives out almost exactly the same note. "Whoof."

We came across a settler's well-built shack—another pioneer. Every pound of necessities had to be packed before the steel came along, but the cabin in the valley had not interfered enough to dim the tracks in the animal trail that skirted the foot of the mountain. Here is an excellent place to start from. Looking back over our trip I would advise hunters who wish to obtain the full limit of the kuli, and to have some excellent fishing on dull days, to stop off at Tete Jaune Cache, and get a real native to guide you. We were much amused at the novel contrivances we met on every side in this heart of the opening wilderness. One river ferry was unique, just a narrow raft of logs, two arched bits for gunwales, two round ones for oarpins, and two rude oars and off you went, dry, unless the river was in flood. One chap who made one of these rude floats was pulling slowly across one morning just before daybreak. Half way across he spied a floating root. Then he

saw the supposed roots toss a bit, and he knew it was a big buck deer. Casting loose his shoreline he rowed might and main down the river after the now thor-



Boat Building in B.C. Forest

oughly frightened animal. Once he managed to run the bowlogs up on to the poor thing's back, and it pawed wildly at him, and swung its great horns menacingly—just then the navy noticed it was broad daylight, he could hear the roar of the rapids right ahead, so, throwing off his boots, he leaped into the swiftly running water and made shore safely—six miles below the camp—he told me the buck slowly waded ashore as soon as the raft left direct pursuit.

Some of the bridges our poor pack animals had to cross were rather "swinging" as Fritz said, the steady "tump, tump" of the animals feet giving the green wood a most unusual motion, one poor little beast, a pet too, "Ninety," a buckskin broncho, essayed to cross a single log, a trail for men only, we were all as busy as we could be leading the other horses in water well up to the knees, the inevitable falls were immediately below and by the bellow they were big ones. Poor "Ninety," she made several steady steps along that four foot fir, then she slipped and straddled it. I called loudly to the last man in to drag his horse ashore and grab her rope, but the roar of the river drowned my cry, and in she went with a great splash. She made a noble effort to regain her feet, but this is rarely accomplished in very swift water, and on she swept for the falls. Within fifty feet of them a glacial boulder projected a foot above the water. A pine log was also reefed there. The pony struck the rock and instantly straddled it. We,

by this time ashore, tied our horses, and seizing lines rushed down to save her if possible. One of the men, O'Poots, a Coast Indian, was very good with the pack ropes, so we made up a long line, and after three casts he managed to rope her fair over the head. "Mem-a-loost sis-ki-you hon-hon" he called to me in Chinook ("die or choke, little bob-tailed horse"). Now for a mighty tug-of-war, with the full current of the North Thompson on the other end.

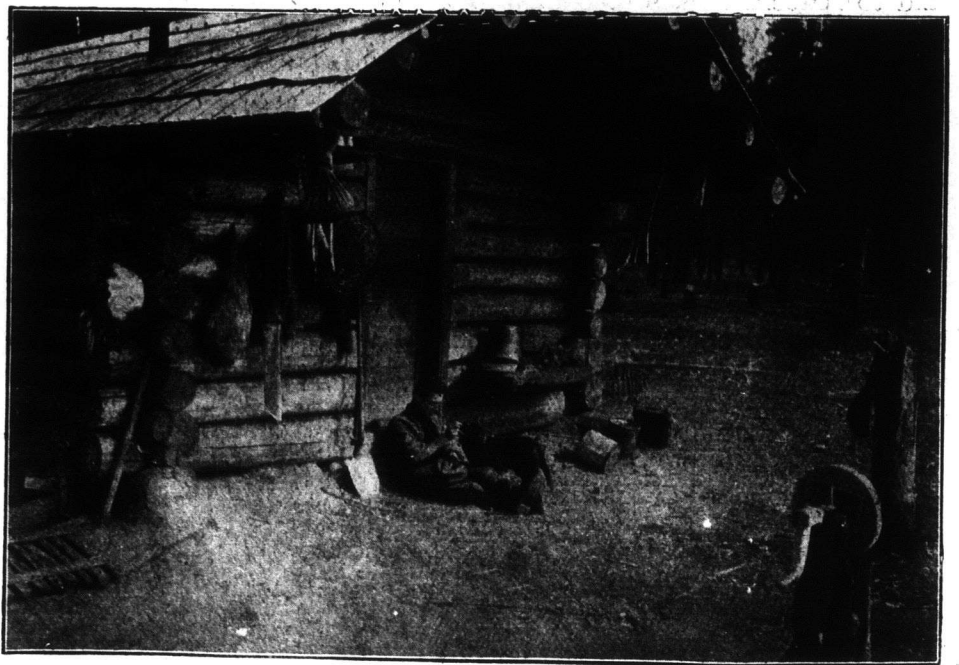
"Look out! As soon as she's clear of the rock we'll get it." I called to the men. We ran back around a fir bole and snubbed it once, then taking up the slack, we pulled her head over into the nearer current. Instantly we were all down in a heap, bracing our feet against tree or rock to keep from being dragged in. She swept across the current, lodged, stood up, shook herself, coughed and started to nibble some spray-washed ferns. We dragged her out as the cook came rushing up. "By golly," he screamed, "you've lost my dipper." My chum says he could not help it. Out shot his foot and he caught that cook as often as he had caught a rugby ball. Then we all washed our torn and bleeding hands, and the incident was forgotten.

Before we leave this most interesting part of the trip I want to show you the first rowboat made in these native forests entirely by hand; in fact, an axe and a hammer were the principal tools. For a few miles we followed one bank, then crossed the river again. The

The salmon were running up the river now, in countless thousands. In one particularly shallow spot where our horses crossed one was killed by being trampled on by "Ninety." Time after time Fritz and I have turned one over on its back with our feet as it wriggled and struggled across the almost dry pebbly reach on its belly. I should estimate in the less than two hundred miles course of the North Thompson there was easily one million salmon in plain sight during our downward trip. Poor things, they were literally worn out. The fins were all naked, like the sticks of a fan, the skin of the belly often had great holes worn in right through to the red flesh, the eyes were torn or fungus hidden, the mouths hooked. Struggling on to die at the "Cache" or the "Pass," for all Pacific salmon, so called, die at four year old maturity, once they have spawned.

We were mightily amused by the antics of the black bears. Fritz and I penetrated the untrodden sources of unnamed creeks, but even here the salmon had forced their way. It was October, cold nights and glorious days, and the big cowardly black bears were hungry. Seated astride of a pinnacle rock with our glasses searching the stream below I felt Fritz nudge me. Slowly I turned my head. He winked and cast his eyes down there, right below our feet. Some five hundred yards down was a big black animal squatted on a rocky point. With my powerful glass I could see her paws plainly. I knew she was a common black, as the grizzlies show the ends of their claws. As still as the rock on which she sat squatted the bear. "Did you see that?" whispered Fritz. "That" was a swift pass of her big black paw and a shining salmon sent flying through the air full twenty feet behind her. She peered back at it with her piglike eyes, and went on fishing. She clawed the next one out, and tore it a bit before placing it behind her, but she threw out the next three. She seemed to be satisfied with five, and started her supper. It was getting a bit dusk, but we could see her plainly. She tore the head partly off the first one, and ate into it, evidently the tiny heart first, as they are very fond of the eyes, brain and heart. This first fish she soon discarded, and ravished the second and so on until she had torn the five all to bits; then she licked her big paws, wiped her chops, waddled down to the water's edge, stuck her big blunt snout in, shook off the water that clove to the hair and disappeared into the cedar brush.

As I turned over these stained notebooks on my desk so many scenes rushed back, making it hard to choose of which to tell you. Our capture of a Blacktail fawn was interesting. We were walking along the west bank when we heard the shrill yelping of the native dogs, yellow curs from the old earth-covered village house. Right ahead of us, across the mouth of a branch, sprang a lithe bounding deer, all four feet hitting the one spot it seemed. It was travelling very rapidly, but no faster than the long line of yellow streaks that now passed through the ferns behind it. We ran as fast as the nature of the ground would allow us, and opened out a wide stretch of waters.



A Settler's Cabin in North Thompson Valley, B.C.