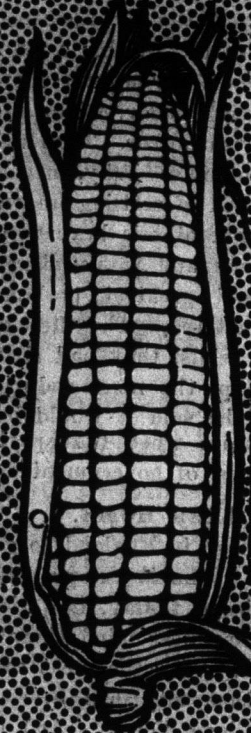


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The Prospector in Alaska.

How an Indian Chief recovered from the Copper Fever and the writer nearly lost his life. Written for the Western Home Monthly by D. G. Cuthbert, Vancouver.



I HAD finished my "mush" for breakfast, but the more I ruminated on the stuff the more convinced I became that it was too sour for even a prospector's taste. I therefore rose and "hiked" the two remaining bags to the door, resolved to give the shipmunks and whiskey-jacks a picnic; but the moment I was about to hurl the sacks down to the slope to the river, I beheld the huge brown figure of Big Bear the Shookum chief, followed by his young grandson, a boy of 14, stalking along the bank, each with a rifle on his shoulder.

Reflecting that Big Bear's palate was less discriminating than mine, I hailed him and asked him if he would take rolled oats for nothing.

He ascended from the river trail with an alacrity rather unworthy the dignity of a chief, but very creditable to a veteran hunter of ninety.

He and his grandson soon shouldered the bags and proceeded on their bear hunt, doubtless with happy visions of a feed of bear meat and mush in the evening.

"Yes, I know all about minerals," I replied, "except where to find them in paying quantities."

"But," he added, suspiciously, "you white men no good. You kill too many men."

As I did not attempt to defend our race he proceeded:

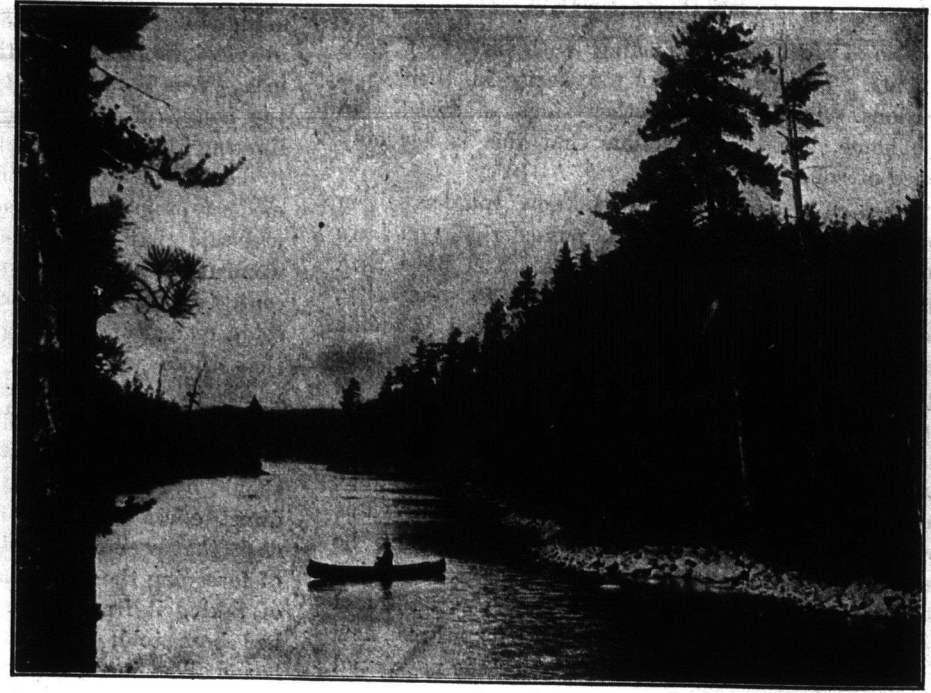
"But you look good. You savvy this stone?" And he produced from his smock pocket a piece of rich copper ore. I told him what it was.

"Copper?" he repeated, rather excitedly. "Well, me know where plenty of dis is, and me take you to place if you good. But most white men no good. But you must write on paper and drive in stakes for me."

I promised him that if the mine looked any good I would make out the titles in his name, and after weighing me with his keen old eyes, he seemed ready to take the risk of being "done" by me.

"Well," he said, "me take you to it. It is three days back in the mountain; and we go out at sunrise tomorrow."

It was consequently agreed that I was to call for Big Bear and his grandson next morning, with grub for a four day's journey; and, as an inducement for the Indians to stick to business and not depart on bear trails too frequently, I



A Picturesque River Scene.

Big Bear was well named. For the bear hunting he was dressed in a dark khaki smock, and his massive, dark-brown face, half covered with shaggy grey hair and grey whiskers, might lead a cinnamon bear to mistake him for an over-grown and over-aged brother—a bad mistake for the bear to make.

The same evening as I was sitting in the long twilight of the Alaskan June, staring at the far-off glacier of Mt. McKinley through a cloud of smoke, and wondering if I should strike a decent vein of ore before all my supplies gave out, I became aware of Big Bear's grandson standing before me.

The boy's Skookum blood was tainted by a white strain, but that gave him a command of English. "The old man want to see you," he said.

"All right," I replied; "I'll go along with you now." And together we beat the trail for their shack further down the river, with a curiosity on my part as to what the Indian wanted to see me for.

The shack announced itself by the slight smell of bear's meat, and Big Bear was sitting on a log by the door in the foreground of a row of stretching bear skins, a pipe in his old face.

He rose on my approach, and greeted me with a grunt.

"You savvy stones?" he inquired, eyeing me keenly.

packed up a good supply of biscuits cheese, pork and beans and tea.

In the early June morning I was in Big Bear's shack while he was yet snoring—lying on the ground with a bear's skin over his huge old body and, perhaps, one under him.

When I touched his shoulder he sprang to his feet and bathed his old grisly face in his big hands, and uttered terrible "Ughs," as if gripped by the ghost of a slain foe, and imploring the Great Spirit to assist him. Perhaps he had eaten too much bear and "mush" last night.

But he was himself soon, and clear-eyed, and at sight of the provisions he smiled down to the very bone. The "kid" was with much difficulty awakened, but once on his feet he stuck to part of the baggage, which, besides the provisions, included my rubber boots and prospector's kit.

Big Bear led the way down to the river where a cedar "dugout" was moored. The boy got into the bow, on his knees. I followed his example in the middle, and lastly the old man entered, and took up a paddle. To help him I turned round to do likewise.

But, "No, no," he cried; "you no move or canoe upset!"

And in this uncomfortable position, on the hard bottom, I had to remain for fully two hours, though there was no need to worry about Big Bear overstraining himself, for he sent the light