

TOLD 'ROUND A POKER GAME

Interesting Stories of Impossible Vehicles

Which Were Intended as Means of Transporting Men and Goods to the Klondike.

Although the candle was whole at the commencement of the play, it had now burned dangerously close to the hewn table on which it rested. The cards lay in a disordered heap where they had been thrown by the man who had just lost on three kings. Another threw himself listlessly on the bunk on which he sat, while he who acted as banker ruefully regarded the pile of beans monopolized by the fourth, and which he was in honor bound to redeem at 25 cents apiece. Outside was heard a sharp jingling of bells and a moment later a dog team of four huskies struggled with their load from the ice on the Klondike river to the bank, and continued their tireless trot up the Bonanza trail.

"Fine night for 'mushing,'" said George, interrupting his bean counting. "This bright moonlight reminds me of a night on the Stikine river when we pulled until midnight trying to get through Big Cañon."

"In the spring of '98?" asked Webb from the darkness of the bunk, dismissing the haunting visions of straightflashes open in the middle and club flushes with intruding spades. "Those were great days," he continued growing reminiscent. "Many's the poor devil who started over the Stikine river trail, and many's the night they pulled into camp with aching bones. Ugh!" and he shuddered at the recollection of those dark days.

"And many's the scheme they worked to get over the ground," added George, as he pushed the beans, reduced to a pile of 25, to the banker. "I remember when I was at Telegraph creek during the spring rush. Every animal capable of carrying a pack was engaged at enormous prices to pack the outfit over to Teslin lake, and the mushroom town was still filled with feather-bed prospectors who acted as though their future salvation depended on their reaching Teslin with their outfit in the next week. Some decided to pack their stuff themselves, and weeded from their outfit such incongruities as a camp stove and a rolling pin, and cut down the number of picks and shovels. In short, reduced a ton outfit to about a hundred pounds, and strapping this on their backs and carrying a frying pan and two or three kettles in their hands, these people, whose most arduous task in the past had been to carry the baby, waddled on the trail in a way that would convince you they would be bow legged before they reached the Hudson Bay summit. I passed some of them with the pack train, a short way out. They had thrown off their coats and hats, and sat on their jumbled packs sweating like Esquimaux in the tropics, and asked if I knew how far it was to Teslin lake. Others constructed rude push carts, the weight of which alone would discourage a longshoreman and used up all their time, strength and a great deal of profanity in an attempt to get over the long divide.

"The funniest of the bunch, though," he added, "was an old Dutchman. In some inscrutable way he had succeeded in bringing in an outfit consisting of flour and bacon, an old umbrella, and last, but not least, a scrawny looking goat. With the fervor of a Mohammedan devotee he was bent on taking the undivided outfit to the Klondike. He cut a piece from the end of a round log, and boring a hole in the center, made it suitable for a wheelbarrow. In a short time he produced a wheelbarrow that would weave at the handles and fall down if you left it alone. The next day he tied a rope to the front, and rigged up a fantastic harness for the goat. We began to have an inkling of his scheme. For a week he put that goat through a daily drill with the wheelbarrow, and as the poor animal began to show signs of tractability, he talked excitedly of how he expected to beat the pack trains to Teslin lake. I saw him the morning he started out. His blankets and provisions filled the barrow, and on this head he had balanced the mattress, binding it down with pieces of rope. It was a ludicrous sight when he harnessed the goat to this equipage and started on the trail. The people in the camp lead the goat, balanced the mattress and pushed until we finally got him up the long hill and started on the level. Here we

bade him goodby and good luck. That day I left with the pack train for Teslin, and as I was bringing the mules back about ten days later I saw him again. He had then reached the Tal-tan river, about ten miles out. His wheelbarrow was upside down at the end of the bridge, his harnessed goat was trying to hustle something to eat among the rocks by the fishermen's cabins, and he himself was half way up the farther hill with the mattress on his back. He reminded me of a picture I've seen somewhere of Samson carrying off the gates of the city. I asked him how he was getting along, but he only looked mad, and said something excitedly in a language I couldn't understand."

The sudden flickering of the light announced that the candle was burned down, and George, crushing the taper end of a fresh one, lit it and, allowing a few drops of the hot grease to fall on the table, plunged the candle quickly into the midst of it, thus glueing it to its place.

"That is a funny coincidence," he said, this task completed. "I was over that same trail the following winter on my way back from Atlin, and saw those same push carts and all manner of wheeled vehicles lying where they had been thrown away on the trail, and, gentleman, not far from the Hudson Bay summit I saw a rusty mattress leaning up against a tree. In order that Webb's story might have a fitting conclusion I would like to add that lying side by side on the ground, I saw the ribs of an old umbrella and the skeleton of a fat Dutchman, but you know that I am nothing if not truthful, so will be confined by the strict limitations of fact."

"But I saw something at Fort Wrangel that was a little on the mammoth order. You will remember how in the winter of 1897 immense crowds endeavored to get in here by impossible routes. A great many of these chose to go up the Stikine river and portage over to Teslin lake, thence down the system of rivers to Dawson. Among them was an old duck who thought he would not only get in easily and rapidly himself, but would make a stake taking other people in. His scheme was to run a sort of freight train over the snow. He brought in a stationary engine and a steam wench, and bought lumber to build cars. In the course of a month or so he had his outfit completed. The engine and wench were mounted on a sleigh in front; coupled to this was another sleigh for carrying freight; then a car for passengers. In short everything was fitted up for comfort and convenience. His scheme was this. Attached to the drum of the wench was a long wire cable. This he would carry ahead and make fast to a pin set in the ice or to a convenient tree on the bank. Then the steam would be turned on, and the wench would pull the equipage ahead to the stake. The cable would again be run out and made fast as before. In this way he was going 150 miles up the Stikine, thence over a mountain pass nearly 200 miles to Teslin. By that time he expected spring would be opening when he would utilize their lumber to build scows, and, loading everything on board, float easily down the river. That is what he planned. This is what actually happened. When everything was in readiness the passengers and crew fired all the ammunition out of their guns as a sort of parting salute and shouted themselves hoarse. Then the passengers settled themselves comfortably in their car and composed themselves for their long journey. The cable was made fast to a root which projected through the ice; the word was passed to the engineer and as two long whistles told the world they were starting, the wench began winding in the slack. Then as the cable became taut there was a sudden pause, followed by the rapid 'chug, chug' of the wench's exhaust, and a confused shouting from ahead. The passengers tumbled out to see what manner of accident had happened. They found that the matter of loosening the brakes had been neglected and consequently the heavy strain had broken the stump root off short. This time 15 minutes were consumed in cutting a hole in the ice in which they set a crowbar and with this firm bite they crept slowly forward. During the next hour they made about 300 yards. Then the passengers began to get restless. They suggested that they should not all stop for dinner at once, but that the machine should be kept going while they went over to the bank, built a fire and cooked dinner. Then they would walk over to the train and keep it going while the crew had their dinner. They explained that they would built the fire opposite the engine so that the crew could use the same fire and then catch the rear car after they had finished their dinner.

"They worked hard all that day. At night they paced off the distance they had traveled and found it was just a quarter of a mile. That night the engineer, conductor and general manager of the line walked off alone and constituted himself chairman of a committee on ways and means. He unanimously decided that life was too short to experiment with novel methods of transportation but recommended that in the summer much money might be made running steamers up the Stikine river to Glenora. The next morning he took an ax and proceeded to convert his train into a flat bottomed steamer, using the boiler and buying some more machinery. This proved a success. When the river opened in the spring he was ready for traffic. He was kept busy all that summer plying between Fort Wrangel to Glenora and Telegraph creek, and I believe his last venture was a financial success. But do you know," he concluded, "I have actually met people who paid large sums of money in Vancouver for through tickets to Dawson city over his steam sleigh line."

"Boys," and the voice of the speaker was so stern as he broke the silence which followed this recital, "boys, to those of us who came into this country by the direct route of the Chilcot or White Passes, it may seem that George exaggerates, the 'chechako' to whom he may relate his experience when he goes back to civilization, may even accuse our beloved brother of willful prevarication, but to us, who have wandered into every nook and corner of this frozen land—we know that he speaks the truth. If further evidence were necessary that such attempts were common on the remote trails, I could tell of things I saw at Edmonton."

"Edmonton!" they interrupted in concert. "Are you an Edmonton trail man?"

"I am," he said proudly, and the 'trail of death' man fixed his gaze on the candle lights which mark the cabins on the table land back of Dawson. For in this posing as a museum freak he found the only consolation for those weary months.

"When I was in Edmonton," he continued, "I found things in much the same condition as described by George. People were there from every quarter of the globe. There were titled Englishmen who brought compressed hay all the way from England, when they could have bought it in Edmonton for \$3 per ton. Others brought a cooking range all the way from the east, expecting to use it on the trail. There were people with dogs, and people with horses; some going by water and others by land, and everybody had their own idea about the style of vehicle best adapted to the country. One firm produced a combination sleigh and canoe, which looked like two bath tubs hinged side by side. When traveling over the snow they were closed, one forming a lid for the other. If they came to a river, all that was necessary was to open them up and as two canoes they took to water like ducks. They overlooked the fact that in traveling over the intervening country they would be so battered up and broken in that they would not be sea worthy when water was reached. I know that some people started with them, but I never heard that they were ever used on water.

"As to Wrangel, however, there was one party who overreached all others in their powers of imagination. Their's was a steam sleigh idea, too, but differed somewhat in the method of applying the power. The first thing we saw was a big marine boiler and engine come in, and for days after that a gang of men were busy in a blacksmith shop. Soon things began to assume shape. The engine and boiler were connected on the first sleigh, and strung out behind were three other cars—a freight, a sleeping, and a dining car—all fitted out in the most approved manner. A framework containing a heavy toothed wheel, three feet in diameter, was hinged loosely in front of the engine. This was connected by a sprocket chain to the engine and was to furnish the motive power. To anyone who understands the difficulty in building traction engines, where almost the entire weight of the engine is on the rear drivers, the impracticability of this scheme is apparent; but those people were skillful mechanics and were sent out by a Chicago company. Their idea was to go down the Mackenzie water system on the ice and portage in some way to the Yukon. This journey, they claimed, they would make at the rate of 15 miles an hour. They also spoke glowingly of the sawmill they were going to start in the spring, when they got their engine to the Klondike. I asked an old Hudson Bay Company man who had spent his life in the Arctic, what he thought of the scheme. He laughed as though it were a good joke and said a dog team could hardly get over the road they proposed following. In due time the outfit neared

completion. The newspaper reporters came around, photographed the outfit and got a statement of their intentions. It was announced that on Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock they would give an exhibition trial on the streets. The time came and conditions were favorable. The couplings were all made, and the engineer turned on the steam. The toothed wheel threw snow ten feet in the air and began to scratch a hole in the frozen ground, but the sleigh didn't move. They uncoupled the engine from the train and blew the whistle, but the result was the same as before. They conferred together, and gave it out that they were going to make some changes. They did. The next day they sold the engine to an enterprising man who pulled them on a side street and rented them as dwelling houses at \$300 a month each to the Klondikers who then filled the town."

At this point the banker who had checked over the stack of beans, counted out their value in money and threw it to the winner across the table, which caused one of the number to remark: "Boys, this exchange of experiences is all right in its place, but our clear duty at this time is to rob that millionaire. I have a 'hunch' that our luck has turned. Mr. Banker, give me 25 more beans."—Sidney Church.

Flood of June '98.
Editor Nugget:
Sir—Will you kindly inform a number of readers, and thereby decide a bet, when the flood of '98 commenced, and when it was at its height.

READER.
(The flood of '98 occurred during the month of June, and according to the best sour dough recollection at hand it commenced during the first week of that month, and was highest during part of the second and third weeks.—E.D.)

Having Hard Luck.
W. H. Burritt, the well known attorney is having hard luck lately. He recently broke his leg and after recovering from that mishap has been confined to his room by a severe cold. He is now much better, however, and is expected to appear again on the streets in a short time.

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SOCIETIES.
THE REGULAR COMMUNICATION of Yukon Lodge, (U. D.) A. F. & A. M., will be held at Masonic hall, Mission street, monthly, Thursday or on or before full moon at 8:30 p. m. C. H. Wells, W. M. J. A. Donald, Sec'y.

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Notice.
Notice is hereby given that on and after March 1st, 1901, grants for all applications for relocation will be issued at the time the application is made, wherever the claim applied for appears open for relocation upon the records. The allowance of two weeks which has hitherto been made for holders of claims to take out a certificate of work will cease on and after March 1st. Holders of claims are warned, in order to avoid trouble with relocators, to take out a renewal of their claims on or before the expiration of their former lease.
(Signed) J. LANGLOIS BELL, c28 Assistant Gold Commissioner.

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