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ACROSS THE ISLAND

'Klondike Trail' Days Recalled

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Provincial - Farm Editor

HUGH D. SMITH recalled for me some of his experiences in the Klondike Gold Rush, 1906 to 1909, as I sat in his lovely Summerside home at 175 Cedar Avenue, but I found it difficult to associate this smiling, young looking man with an operation of almost 60 years ago, for I had expected to meet a grizzled veteran of yesteryear as I nudged the bell button.

It was just a few days before the Smiths - Mrs. Smith was Belle Millar of Ellerslie - observed their 50th wedding anniversary that I talked to them, but at the time I had no idea the happy event was so near, for we were talking of the past, not the present.

Born in Freeland, Mr. Smith went west a few months after Jim Perdergast, and a cousin, Edgar Milligan had gone out in 1909 when he was boy of 17. Mr. Smith showed me a picture of a huge dump Milligan had on Quartz Creek that panned out \$40,000 in gold at an average of two cents per pan, which would hold as much as an ordinary shovel, Mr. Smith explained. That was 1907-08.

HUGH WAS best man when Milligan was married in Dawson in September 1907 to Daisy Baker, Seattle, Washington, who is now living in Northam. The bridesmaid was Mrs. Jack Clark, since deceased, who was formerly Rebecca Milligan of Freeland. Mr. Milligan hired an open car in Dawson, and paid \$75, plus a \$5.00 tip, to the driver, to take the wedding party to Quartz Creek, a distance of 27 miles.

Mr. Smith recalled for me that he and Edgar had walked nine miles more than a year later from Cleary City to a masquerade dance in Chatineka on St. Patrick's Day, 1909 and walked back after the festivities.

Hikes 480 Miles In 14 Days

BUT WALKING was the usual thing in those days - usually there was no other way to go - and the subject of today's column did plenty of it. He hiked 480 miles in a little more than 14 days in February 1909. He had two Norwegian companions, Fritz Johnson and Charlie Carlson, and "our outfit consisted of felt boots, moccasins, gum boots, two changes of underwear, several pairs of socks, a bottle of Scotch and a 38 Colt revolver with ammunition", he recalls.

"Neither Charlie nor I sampled the Scotch but Fritzie drank and sweated" he said. The Colt is interesting but I'm saving that for another story I hope to get first time I get up to Western Prince.

The trio munched an average 35 miles per day, with 45 miles being the biggest day. They put up at nights and had noon meals at road houses along the river where men trapped and cut wood for the stern wheelers plying the river.

I THINK the wood story is worth a note. It was placed on the bank at the water's edge, the boat pulled in as close to the bank as possible, a gang plank spanned the distance from boat to shore and the wood was carried aboard to be used for fuel to generate steam for engines that propelled and operated the boat.

They ate at times at lone cabins "for a Northerner always leaves the latchstring on the outside, so if the owner was out, we went in, cooked the meal, left the price and munched on.

"Some of the camps were run by one man, some by two, sometimes a man and a squaw. One man had two squaws to keep him happy." As Service observed in *The Parson's Son* - "Every man had his squaw and lived a wild, free and fearless life beyond the pale of the law."

Crossing "The Divide" was a problem. Warned not to attempt it if the sun was not shining or a high wind was blowing, the three started out in the morning when the weather seemed all right and they had no trouble going up. But the descent was a different problem. "The hillside was a moss-covered feeding ground where Caribou grazed in summer, but it was swept bare in winter by terrific winds which were encountered that afternoon. "It was so steep and bare we tried walking backwards, crawling, even rolling at times to reach the bottom without injury", he recalls.

Potatoes At \$20.00 Per Bushel

FRITZIE AND Charlie went their way and he never heard from them again. Mr. Smith went mining at Cleary Creek and expenses ran high. One dollar would buy three pounds of potatoes - that's \$20.00 a bushel - three loaves of bread or three pounds of sugar. There was enough food, but it got into the hands of a few who had their own way for a time.

It was June 1909, while at Fairbanks, Alaska, that he and some friends decided to head south by boat to Seattle, where Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition was being held.

"I went to the First National Bank, recalls Mr. Smith," to draw my deposit of \$2,500." This he had taken to Fairbanks after receiving the money from the hands of Robert W. Service, in the Canadian Bank of Commerce, at Dawson. But at Fairbanks he was informed there was no currency or paper money in the bank to be had. "I could have my choice of gold dust or gold coins," he said.

THE BANKER counted out 125 gold pieces each worth \$20 which he tried to pack several ways, including a leather belt for carrying coin, but which he found too sharp on his hips. Finally he "returned the junk to the bank and bought a draft on the Canadian Bank of Commerce at Seattle." After three weeks at the Seattle fair Mr. Smith "came east and started to farm live silver foxes which were selling then for from \$20,000 to \$30,000 a pair," he said. But, he told me, 102 pounds Sterling was the most he ever received for a pelt. He farmed from 1912 to 1947 at MacMeil's Mills, Freeland. I want to tell you something about his farm operations, but first a word about his Klondike souvenirs.

One of the most interesting was a watch charm - it's a souvenir brooch for Mrs. Smith now. There's a crescent of nuggets, a \$10 gold piece, there are likenesses in

miniature of such things as the midnight sun, a log cabin and a windlass, the latter a necessary part of the prospector's equipment.

Cribbage Board From Walrus Tusk

A PIECE of Walrus tusk about 20 inches long is beautifully decorated by Eskimo artists. There's a Cribbage board design in the center, and the opposite side carries a map of the Yukon with many famous names of gold rush days indicated. He bought it for \$30 at St. Michael's where the Yukon River empties into the Bering Sea, and found the same article was bringing \$130 at Seattle when he arrived. A piece of Mastodon ivory is also beautifully done in Eskimo art. He has another piece indicating he was accepted into "The Brotherhood of the Arctic", and there are many others.

A nugget, I found, runs "from the size of a fly speck or a grain of sand, to a chunk the size of your fist, which would be worth \$3,000 today and was valued at \$1300 to \$1500" in the good old days.

Before I leave the Klondike, I want to quote Mr. Smith that not all of the characters of that time were wild and wooly. Bobby Crawford who played the harmonica on the boats plying between Fairbanks and Seattle continued in music and became professor of music at the University of Miami some years later.

I HAVE room, I believe, for two references to the Smith farm operation. A beautiful big Percheron horse, "Darkie", was grand champion at Charlottetown over 45 entries in 1932 and was never beaten in the show ring later. The big fellow was kind and intelligent - he would put his foot up on a block for Mr. Smith to trim his hoof, and he was highly regarded, almost a member of the family.

The other item concerns the Oxford Down sheep the Smiths raised. They had 29 lambs from 19 ewes in 1927 which weighed more than 3,000 pounds with some going 130 pounds and one to 150 pounds. They were born in April and shipped in early November, I was told. The sire of the lambs was purchased from Jim Johnston at Elmsdale, he told me.

AND NOW a word of appreciation to Chief Justice Thane A. Campbell and the members of his committee - I do not know their names - who have nominated "Across the Island" for consideration for recognition by the American Association for State and Local History. My appreciation goes also to the many people across the Island who have written, telephoned or told me about so many interesting stories to research and develop.