

MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH – 297th Edition – November 15th, 2009

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To use an e-mail address from the MocTel, replace the * with @.

A Yukon Scene



Photo courtesy Joyce Yardley Joyce@dataspan.ca (In Nanaimo BC)

Fireflower

A brilliant blaze of color

In a burned-out patch of trees

Or bordering the road in crimson harmony

Cheering the heart of all who pause to see

Fireflower – you'll never be a weed to me!

© Joyce Yardley



LEST WE FORGET

NOVEMBER 11th

Pause for a moment to remember the fallen.

Flying the Yukon's Bush:

By Kit Cain soulfulstories@gmail.com (In Yarmouth NS)

Story section continued

Operation Porcupine – (Continued)

The Mother Lode: Iron Ore at its richest.

Flying along the side of a mountain in the Mackenzie Range just above the Snake River, I was looking for the orange tent of a fly-camp Geologist who had radioed our base camp for a pick-up. As I rumbled along, I spotted several red stakes stuck in rock cairns on the mountainside. Thinking they were old claim or survey stakes, I thought no more about them.

When I finally found the fly-camp and squeezed in under a cloudy, low ceiling to land, I found the geologist quite excited about what he had discovered. Stacked outside his tent stood nearly 200 pounds of extremely heavy, dark red rock which none of us had ever seen before during the expedition.

Having myself had a number of college level courses in Geology, I quickly recognized what the Geologist had become so excited about: the rocks were extremely rich chunks of Hematite, or very high-grade iron ore. He had seen the stakes as well, and said they were recently placed there, probably as claim stakes. The stakes began to take on a newer meaning.

The very next day, the California Standard Oil Company walked into the Territorial Mining Recorder's office in Mayo with a fiber case full of cash to pay for 388 iron claims on the same mountain. The stakes weren't more than a month old; they'd been put there by California Standard work crews who had been studying and staking the area for six months. They had been so secretive about their movements that no-one even knew they had a 50-man camp and four helicopters hidden from sight in a mountain valley nearby.

As we flew the Geologist and his camp out, we happened to pass over a small lake and noticed the Standard Oil Beaver floatplane landing there to meet a helicopter that we did not recognize. I went down for a look and recognized the helicopter as belonging to Okanagan Helicopters of Vancouver. Men in business suits were climbing out of the Beaver (300 miles back in the wilderness) and my curiosity got the best of me. We went in and landed alongside the Okanagan chopper. As it turned out, the businessmen were executives of Standard Oil and they were very glad to have the chance to talk to us and discover that we were not Shell Oil or any of their other competitors who had discovered what they were about. They had heard our helicopter in the area for several days and, not wanting to be discovered or risk losing the secrecy of their huge iron ore claim-staking operation they had been so careful to maintain for the past year of work, had quickly gone ahead and filed what claims they had.....just in case. Once they knew that we were disinterested Geologists from the Geological Survey of Canada, we heard their whole story.

Supposedly the discovery is one of the largest in this part of the world; but they will have to drill down through it to determine its size accurately. Even if it is the largest, the cost of mining it, processing it, and building 500 miles of railroad line through the mountains to remove the ore is prohibitive until the present ore reserves reach a lower state and prices rise to compensate for the expense of extraction.

Experiencing wildlife from a helicopter is like being in their midst.

Leaping with unbelievable agility and swiftness among the jagged pillars of grey rocks and razorback ridges, Dahl Sheep seem oblivious to the sheer 2,000-foot drops beneath them. Even the tiny youngsters seem to inherit the nimbleness of their parents from the day they're born. Moving in groups of six or seven, they feed on the high, sunny, grassy slopes. Occasionally a big ram with a full curl-and-a-half of horn jerked his head up at the sound of the helicopter and bounded off.

I can't think of any better way to observe wildlife than from inside the bubble of a small helicopter. I've hovered just over the tops of 2,000-pound Grizzlies who stand 12 feet tall on their hind feet looking me straight in the face, wind from the rotor blades ruffling their fur, and the roaring noise of the engine not seeming to bother them at all. I often landed right in front of a wolf or wolf pack as they sat observing me fearlessly. I often saw Gold-colored honey-tip Grizzlies, Barren Ground Grizzlies, and Black Bear feeding on lower mountain slopes, or out on the tundra digging ground squirrels out of burrows or feeding

on dead caribou carcasses. Snow-white Ptarmigan feed on blueberries and flutter around close to the mountainside using updraft winds to help their flight.

In the lowlands, below the timberline, black or beige colored wolves stalk snowshoe rabbits and sniff the winds for the scent of carrion. Moose wade out into the cold water of swamps to escape the incessant ravaging attacks by mosquitoes, black flies and other insects, burying their heads underwater in a search for tender grass roots. Scattered herds of caribou—six or seven thousand strong—feed on moss and lichens, constantly on the move, sometimes running about as if driven mad by the scourge of insects.

Bald Eagles, perched on rock ledges or in trees, blend with their background and watch for a lemming to scurry or a fish to dart and mark its doom. Seagulls, Canada Geese, swans, and birds of every description flew over Hungry Lake and its nearby mountainous regions on their way to the secluded breeding grounds of the northern lakes and Mackenzie River delta.

I once spotted a female Bald Eagle flapping along lazily above where the Peel River tumbles down into the Peel River canyon. I gradually eased over next to her until the two of us were flying along in formation at almost 70 miles an hour. When she started getting a little nervous about what kind of strange bird I was, I turned off and went down into the Peel Canyon for a rather nerve-wracking landing to unload the Geologist and his camp.

Landings were often inches from disaster

There were no openings in the scrub trees for a landing so I had to find a spot on the very edge of the canyon that would allow me to squeeze the front portion of the skids onto solid ground while the Geologists unloaded their camp and supplies. The delicate tail rotor of the helicopter hung out over a 200-foot vertical drop into a raging torrent of muddy, roiling and boiling Spring breakup of water. The main rotors whirled above several short scrub spruce, clearing them by inches. There was no time for thoughts of “what if”!

Ducks, I found, also move through the air very quickly. I flew along just above one Goldeneye in the helicopter and clocked him at 70 miles an hour on the airspeed indicator. One morning about 6AM I rushed out of my tent after hearing a rushing sound like jets high overhead. Peering up into the overcast sky I saw a flock of about 50 Goldeneye ducks as they passed overhead in a screaming dive of over 100 miles an hour from high altitude well above the clouds. They pulled out of their steep dive at about ten or twelve feet above Hungry Lake, their motionless wings tightly locked in position and swishing through the air as they jockeyed back and forth amongst themselves in a tight formation. The entire flock stayed in tight formation at very high speed and made a long turn around the lake, gradually slowing down to land on the only section of open water not covered by ice.

Every bit of me was right there in the middle of that flock, for I too had flown in formation flight just as they were doing at that instant. I had learned tight formation flying as a U.S. Marine pilot in the U.S. Navy's flight training programs. Nothing else I've ever done can compare with the feeling of controlling a powerful engine and airplane with my fingertips as it screams up into the sky in hot pursuit of the flight leader, joining up with him in a long climbing curve, throttling back to lock myself into position not ten feet away from his wingtip at 200 miles an hour.....my total and complete concentration on the slightest change of speed or motion of the flight leader. That feeling of power and control I will never forget as long as I live.....and I knew that those Goldeneye ducks could feel the thrill of their power and speed just as well as I had.

The departure from tree country

At the end of our allotted time at Hungry Lake, the expedition moved its base camp 200 miles northward to Horn Lake. That put us at the edge of a long mountain-front in the Rat River valley where we could look out to the east and see the broad, flat expanse of the Mackenzie River delta disappearing into the horizon. The variable northern limit of trees passed slightly to the south of camp leaving our tents exposed on the barren, moss-covered tundra. The only trees this far north, 90 miles above the Arctic Circle, were clumps that survived in river bottoms or on leeward hillsides. For camp cook tent benches and tables we imported the spruce poles from Hungry Lake, but when we tried pounding one of these poles into the frozen muskeg beneath the moss, the ground proved solid as stone. Aluminum tent pegs were the only objects which penetrated and held.

Insects: the scourge of the North

To say that the mosquitoes and black flies on the delta and at Horn Lake were bad would be an understatement of Gargantuan proportions! They were a tormenting stone-in-the-shoe-of-progress which afflicted us every working minute—a pestilence from which the only refuge was a mosquito-proof tent and an aerosol bomb! At one point, Ernie and I and two geologists took a three-day traverse out onto the Mackenzie River delta whose waters are a bug-breeding heaven. No sooner had we begun to set up camp on a lake shore than we were besieged by swarms of the hungry little biters. They flew in clouds, covering clothing, biting through dungarees, crawling up pants legs, dying by the dozen on plates of food, and forming a layer of dead carcasses on the surface of a hot cup of tea. Worst of all, they made their way into the helicopter bubble by the thousands and fed on us at will. I had to have both hands on the controls at all times or lose control of the helicopter. Every time I climbed into the helicopter bubble and closed the side doors, the first order of the day was to swat mosquitoes for 5 minutes with a cap until most had been done away with.

Experience had taught us to carry head nets, mosquito dope, and mosquito-proof tents everywhere; otherwise we'd have been stark raving idiots in a matter of minutes.

The Mackenzie River: Highway through the North.

In spite of the bugs, the Mackenzie delta is one of the main focal points for Indian and Eskimo activity in the western Arctic. Its 50-mile width is a hundred thousand lakes, swamps, river channels and banks of fertile river silt covered by a thick forest of evergreens.

Aklavik is the name of the old Indian settlement on the main channel, and Inuvik is the new, government-planned community on an eastern side-channel. The Indians prefer the old town of Aklavik to the newer one because of its nearness to caribou in the mountains, and its proximity to the main river channel where fish are most abundant.

From Aklavik, the Indians head upstream in canoes and 30-foot, square-ended riverboats powered by outboard motors to live in their remote fishing camps along the banks of the Mackenzie River. Their camps may be either one or two eight by ten canvas wall tents, or a shack made from river driftwood and roofed over with flattened five-gallon gas cans. Most Indians prefer to use a tent for the simple reason that, when they kill a Moose, it's easier to pack the camp to the Moose than it is to pack the Moose to the camp.

Here and there along the riverbank, clearings with piles of sawdust indicate a portable sawmill has chewed its way through some of the larger evergreens to make lumber for the river towns. Barges hauled by small, shallow draft tugs haul the lumber up or downstream with supplies, barrels of gas, and mail.

Inuvik is the largest town in the Mackenzie delta area and was built by the government for the specific purpose of being a headquarters for far northwestern activities. Its gaily painted buildings sit on pilings driven into the frozen ground and are serviced with water and plumbing pipes which travel from house to house above ground in insulated, aluminum-covered, tunnels. Here at Inuvik, there's a gravel-strip airport with scheduled airline flights; a modern hospital; a Hudson's Bay Company department store; and a school with boarding facilities for hundreds of Eskimo and Indian children from scattered outlying villages. The kids are flown in for school sessions, and have their vacations in May and June so the Indian children can go muskrat trapping with their families.

When I looked for Eskimo stone carvings from local artisans, I was disappointed to find that the carvings in the Hudson's Bay store were the only ones available. They had been flown from Cape Dorset in the eastern Arctic south to Winnipeg, and then back North to Inuvik in the western Arctic. I found out later that the reason for this is that there is no local supply of the soft, easily-carved soapstone in the western Arctic.

Farther out the eastern edge of the delta, almost to the Beaufort Sea, lie the Eskimo villages of Reindeer Depot and Tuktoyaktuk. The Eskimos at Reindeer Depot are an extremely jovial and smilingly friendly people, taking time to explain how they herd reindeer with planes and Army surplus half-tracks, slaughter them, and send the meat and

hide out to native missions. The reindeer now number approximately 7,000 and were originally herded by Laplanders across the Arctic from Siberia.

Tuktoyaktuk sits far enough north of the tree line that they might easily have a serious fuel problem were it not for the abundant supply of logs, branches and timbers torn from river banks hundreds of miles southward and deposited along the River's shorelines as the current abates during slack flow seasons.

The Story in Pictures section – continued

Operation Porcupine – (Continued)



Caribou on ice

A string of Caribou make their way gingerly across Hungry Lake during a two week period when we were unable to have any fresh supplies or parts flown in while the ice gradually melted and left enough open water for the Beaver to fly in. The ice is rotten in this picture and unsafe for ski-equipped planes to land on.



Beaver at Hungry Lake
Photo by Kit Cain

In due course, the lake ice disappeared and the DeHaviland Beaver flew in from Dawson City with fresh supplies and some helicopter parts. By this time, the camp had strung HF Radio antennae wires and established contact on a daily basis with Dawson Radio, Dawson City's Government radio station and occasionally with the helicopters and other aircraft when weather and distance conditions permitted. HF Radio is not the most dependable level of communication, but it's certainly far better than no communication at all, as I was to discover during a later engine failure in the middle of nowhere better known as Old Crow Flats. Note the quantities of expensive aviation fuel required for this first part of Operation Porcupine (about 1/4 of the total).



Hungry Lake Helipad
Photo by Kit Cain

Helicopters operate continually under conditions of severe stress. They have high levels of vibration at a number of different frequencies; have high torsional stresses on blades and rotors; and operate at full throttle more often than other aircraft, boat, or automobile engines. They require constant attention and care and thus a landing platform had to be built for each machine to facilitate mechanical work as well as refueling and to ensure that each landing was made to a firm, level surface. Not all landings are made to a level or firm surface—in fact few landings in the bush would be called that—but stability is always a major issue with these basically unstable machines. A flat, firm, level landing pad is always a welcome relief at home base.

Getting one's self clean in the bush is never an easy task at best. Rivers and lakes are always ice cold. Even a home-made shower at base camp can feel better than a hot tub at the Ritz after weeks of sweating up and down mountains and gullies and working in the same clothes for the same period of time. You can't see the hordes of mosquitoes in this picture, but they are none-the-less there. One does not stand naked in the bush for any more than a few seconds unless within the confines of a mosquito-proof tent sprayed with bug poison. Water for the shower is heated in a 5-gallon can over a camp stove—a procedure which can take half an hour in itself and even then the temperature is never exactly right. Then the can has to be hoisted up seven feet and balanced there long enough to take a shower. Mosquitoes drown by the thousands.



Shower

Photo by Kit Cain

Always a most important part of any expedition, where there is the steady pressure of hard work seven days a week, is the kitchen and the food served. Oris Gunderson, camp cook on Operation Porcupine, kept all of us contented and uncomplaining for the entire 6 months we lived in tent camps in the bush... and that's quite an accomplishment considering the amount of work involved and the times when rations were short due to bad weather preventing fresh re-supply. Every now and then, a specialty of fresh Mountain Goat or Dahl Sheep would grace the menu. We called it "Road Kill", but the flavor belied the method of acquisition! Sitting in a helicopter all day and part of the daylight night put an extra 20 pounds on me that I had a hard time losing later.



Camp Cook - Oris Gunderson
Photo by Kit Cain

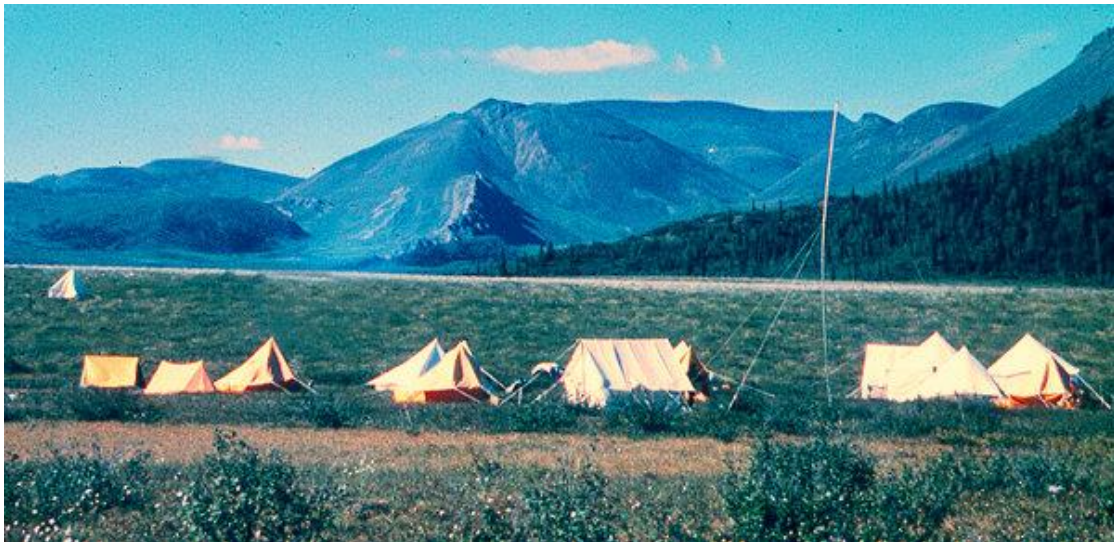
The next two pictures give a good idea of what life was like at the Horn Lake base camp located above the Arctic Circle and right at the northern edge of the tree line (see map). It would have been located at McDougal Pass in the Richardson Mountains just west of the MacKenzie River delta. On the other side of the mountains in the upper picture lay the Arctic Coastal Plain with its constantly changing Thule ground fog and high wind conditions. The lake is visible to the left, above, and Ernie is loading a Geologist's Fly Camp bound for the mountains where large amounts of exposed rock enabled the Geologists to read the stratigraphy in greater detail and easily take rock samples.

Rock samples were always a big issue with me. I had to constantly weigh fuel load with rock sample load to make sure we all landed back at base camp with the engine still running. More than once Ernie remarked to me what the fuel gauge had already told me. "Well...you just barely made that trip, Bunky!" Rock samples, of course, were of major importance to the mission's success. I must say there was as much good fortune as expertise involved because there was no way a pilot could estimate fuel consumption versus constantly changing headwind conditions, and there were no scales with which to measure the rock sample weights...and every single rock sample was considered vital.



CF-MLL at Horn Lake - Photo by Kit Cain

That kind of pressure and the sight of the very accurate fuel gauge sitting on empty were major factors in making me decide to choose another occupation. Neither Stu Pollock, the pilot of the other helicopter on Operation Porcupine, nor I had to have fuel flown out to us due to misjudgment, and every hour of helicopter time had been carefully allocated to specific areas and jobs. In the picture below, that's the latrine tent sitting out beyond the camp....not the punishment tent!



Horn Lake Camp - Photo by Kit Cain



Ice Pack Fog - Photo by Kit Cain

The Trout Lake base camp was the farthest north camp, having been located on the Arctic Coastal plain itself, just north of the Barn Mountains. It was certainly one of the most interesting camps for a variety of reasons. For one thing, whenever the wind came out of the north, it moved the coastal ice pack in toward shore and brought with it the dreaded ice fog which is the nemesis of any pilot's existence. Super cooled moisture freezes instantly on aircraft wings, propellers, and rotors ruining their lift capacity and loading them with excess weight to the point that they ultimately have to land, or crash. It moves in so quickly that there is barely time to get back to home base.

Fifteen minutes after the above picture was taken, base camp looked like the picture below. Otherwise, as often happened, one landed and remained in the most convenient place until the fog lifted enough to creep back to base camp down some river valley.



Thule Fog - Photo by Kit Cain



Wreck –photo taken 1962 - Photo by Kit Cain

This was probably a supply plane for two DEW Line sites, one at Shingle Point, and one further west at Komakuk near the Alaska ! Yukon border. There's no telling what the problem leading to the crash was.

I don't recall the precise location, but it was on the Arctic coast of the Yukon not far from the Shingle point DEW line site.

(To be continued)

George Black Biography Update by Kathy Gates

Michael and I are recently home after a wonderful trip down east in search of the history of George Black, Yukon's famous MP! We also celebrated my birthday and our 30th wedding anniversary, so the entire time was brimming over with excitement!!!

I am enclosing some photos of George Black...dating from January of 1917 when he was photographed in his Military Captain's uniform about to head overseas in WW1, through his being Speaker of the House of Commons, to being a Privy Council member.

There are a couple of photos showing myself with House of Commons Speaker Milliken beside the portrait of George Black that hangs in the Centre Block of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa , as well as a photo of Michael and myself in the Speaker's office, with Speaker Milliken. Although refurbished, this is the same office that George Black used when Speaker of the House of Commons, from 1930 through January of 1935. One of our questions related to whether George could possibly have shot 6 rabbits from his

Speaker's office window back in 1932...and Yes, he could well have. This story made the rounds of media all over North America, and helped contribute to George getting the label as being "eccentric".

We could not have made this trip as rewarding as it was, without the grant from the Yukon Foundation, and with great assistance from Yukon MP, Larry Bagnell's office. His assistant Denis Sabourin guided us through the maize of red tape and security for a most memorable day at the House of Commons. In addition, it was Flo Whyard who first hired me to help her undertake the research, who gave me the history bug where George Black was concerned....It was not difficult to want to keep on researching his life. Flo turned the material over to me a year or so ago.

We gathered material on George Black and his beginnings in New Brunswick; this included visiting the site of the farmhouse in Woodstock, where he was said to have been born in 1873; we tracked his Law qualifications, and despite George and the media reporting over and over again that he had gone to the University of New Brunswick and graduated from there with a law degree, we unearthed the fact that he spent 4 years learning to be a Lawyer in his Uncle John's Law Firm and sat and passed his exams in November of 1895.

At the National Archives in Ottawa we piled up the research material...although there is far more work to be done there, and came home with a small suitcase filled with copied research material.

I would mention one very unsettling item we found, when in a 2nd hand bookstore in Fredericton. Checking out books about Canadian politicians, I came across the book by Canadian author Heather Robertson called "*More than a Rose*" dated 1991, The book covers the lives of many of the wives of the Canadian politicians over the ages. I was somewhat staggered to read how she summarily wrapped up the lives of George and Martha Black, to quote:

"She (Agnes McPhail) was joined in the House of Commons by the second woman MP, Louise Black, widow of the former Conservative Speaker, George Black, a madman from the Yukon. He shot rabbits out of the window of the Speaker's Chambers. Mrs Black represented everything Agnes abominated- a dutiful wife who won her seat on her husband's popularity."

(source: "More than a Rose" by Heather Robertson, 1991 Seal Books, Toronto. page 210)

Perhaps material written like that, about George or Martha for that matter, is why I was spurred to write George's story....there are so many factual errors in his biography so far, that he needs his own story told. It is a colourful, rollicking story of adventure....

One big area that still seems to be escaping us, is first-hand knowledge of George Black...even of Martha Black....If any MocTel readers know even one tiny story about

George, it would be most appreciated for the biography that I am writing, (with assistance from Michael). They can be good or bad recollections....we know by now he wasn't perfect..... Any stories used in the biography I would naturally credit the person providing the information. We are looking for photos, letters and indeed any story about meeting with George, or Martha for that matter. If the information is worthwhile, which I am sure it will be, I am prepared to offer a free copy of the book, once published, in exchange for the assistance. For instance, have you heard the story where George chased the Prime Minister R.B. Bennett around Parliament holding a shotgun at him? Or a variation on that one....we have heard it over and over, but cannot turn up one letter, news clipping or mention of that incident if it happened. Was it just a Yukon tall tale or do you have evidence something of the kind took place? We'd love to settle the incident once and for all....

This is likely going to be the only book ever written about George Black, and whether those who knew him feel he was "good or bad" it is about time to get his story out there. It makes for a fascinating read so far, in my research. I have uncovered all sorts of letters he wrote about his trip to the Yukon in 1898, 1899 and 1900; I have the letters of a cousin who came north with George on his 2nd trip to find his Gold.....and of course, files upon files of stories, news clippings and letters. Personal glimpses are few and far between. And there is so much more to research. Michael and I both agreed that we set out on this journey to answer many questions about both George and Martha Black, and in finding some answers to those questions, we have created even more questions.....

Material gathered so far, comes from archives and other sources in Vancouver, Victoria, BC, Kansas and California and Illinois in the USA, New Brunswick and Ottawa, Edmonton and Calgary, and some right here in the Yukon, although Yukon specific research is my next objective. So anecdotes, stories, photos and anything else good or bad that can be recalled about George in particular would be most appreciated. Aside from the Yukon Foundation grant, all expenses over and above the grant come right out of my pocket.

So, if any MocTel readers can help me out, I would be most appreciative of that.

I am juggling this work with a retyping of the story of the Carnegie Library which is long, long overdue. If any readers have memories of using or visiting the Carnegie Library in Dawson City, I'd really appreciate knowing their stories also. The resulting manuscript is not mine to give away, but I am sure I can submit a list of those who helped, and hopefully get copies to send by way of a thank you for assistance. Did you, the reader know that this was the most northerly of the Carnegie library gifts?

Thanks in advance to everyone who can assist me.

Kathy Gates kmgates*northwestel.net (In Whitehorse)



Captain George Black, January 1917, in uniform preparing to head overseas in WW1.
Photo credit: Public Archives of Canada PA 4947

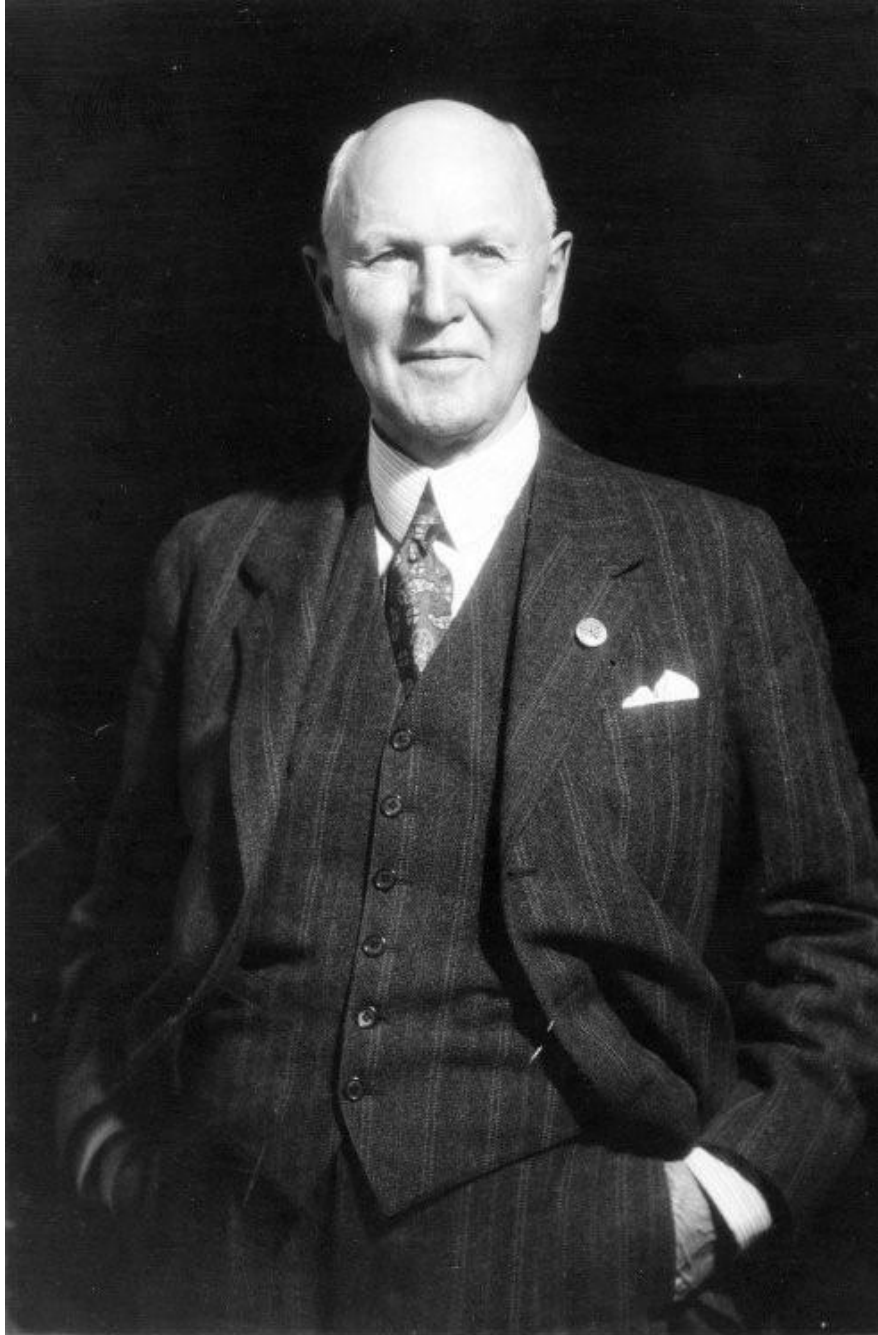


On the troopship heading to England January 1917. Martha Black standing in middle of photo..... was the only woman on a troopship carrying 3,500 soldiers. Captain George Black is 2nd from the left, standing beside Martha.
Photo credit: Public Archives of Canada C-6118



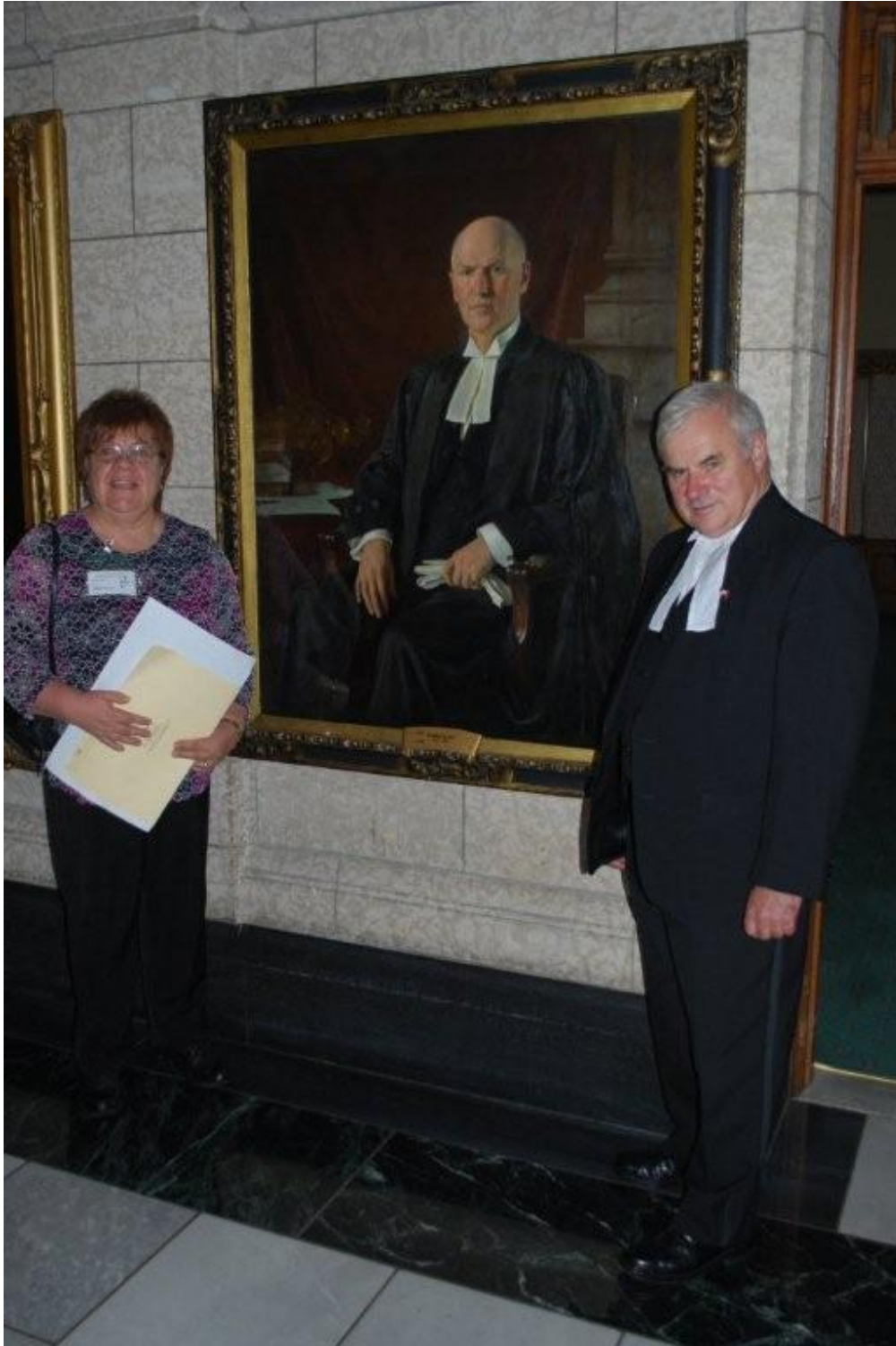
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Speaker of the House of Commons, George Black
Photo credit Public Archives Canada PAC 123538



PA-047082

George Black in 1949 after his Privy Council appointment.
Photo credit: Public Archives of Canada PA 047082



Kathy Gates with Speaker Peter Milliken and the portrait of George Black that hangs in the House of Parliament Centre Block. Unfortunately due to security reasons, those wishing to view this portrait, and other Speakers portraits have to do so accompanied by a sitting MP.

Photo credit: Michael and Kathy Gates Collection



I-r: Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken, Kathy Gates and Michael Gates in the Speaker's offices, Centre Block, Parliament buildings Ottawa.
Photo credit Michael and Kathy Gates collection

CURRENT PHOTOS FROM NORMA WADDINGTON



Caribou Hotel Painted 2009
Photo courtesy Norma Waddington norma*coldwellbanker.ca (In Carcross)



First Snowfall Oct 30 09

Photo courtesy Norma Waddington norma*coldwellbanker.ca (In Carcross)



Fog columns rising on Bennett Lake

Photo courtesy Norma Waddington norma*coldwellbanker.ca (In Carcross)



Sunset on Bennett Lake
Photo courtesy Norma Waddington norma*coldwellbanker.ca (In Carcross)

NEWS FROM DAWSON

The Shadows Know

by Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

In the afternoon glare
of October
elongated shadows stretch north
across the town,
reaching for winter.

October 29, 2009



Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

The Icing on the Season

By Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

There are signs of season's changing
that we all can recognize:
falling leaves and boarded windows,
filled with plywood cut to size.

Hotels close and shops cut hours
and the RV parks shut down,
and the last canoeing Germans
take their tours around the town.

But the icing on the season's
when the snow comes down to stay;
puddles frozen in the morning
that remain that way all day.

And when slush forms in the river
we know what that's all about,
'cause we know that winter's coming
when they pull the ferry out.

Oct. 31/09



George Black Ferry removed from the river
Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish@northwestel.net (In Dawson)

Ferry Season comes to an end in Dawson

By Dan Davidson uffish@northwestel.net (In Dawson)
November 1, 2009

It's been a long season for the George Black Ferry this year. While there was ice in the rivers from Carmacks to Stewart by Thanksgiving, it took several days for it to float down to Dawson and then it just passed on by. With the warming trend in mid-October all the rivers cleared out except for some rime ice along the shores, and it was only during the final few days of the month that serious frazil ice pans began to show up once more. West Dawson residents could be seen stocking up on food and water as the weekend progressed. No one ever knows how many weeks it will take for the river to stop moving completely and the ice to begin to thicken enough for safe passage. It all depends on how cold it gets and how fast it gets there.



The George Black Ferry ploughs through increasing slushy frazil ice pans on Hallowe'en.
Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

The George Black Finds its Winter Home

by Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

November 2, 2009

The last passengers on the George Black Ferry were the crew of six who rode the boat from the ice encrusted Yukon River to its winter berth up on the level of the dike. The river began to fill up quickly after the first tentative slushy ice pans on Saturday and by Sunday it was clear that the decision pull the boat on Monday was not jumping the gun at all. On Saturday you could still see reflections in the water; by Monday you could hardly see the water.

The George Black made its final crossings on Monday morning nosing through the rapidly accumulating ice pans. Shortly after noon it moved to the base of the wooden railed ramp which leads to its winter berth.

The cable spools, pulleys and heavy equipment were already in place, waiting to be put to use. Two cats are chained directly to the ferry, while the cables lead through a series of pulleys to a pair of graders perched on the dike.

Workers grease the rails with canola oil which, at -10°C with a still breeze quickly

freezes into a more solid lubricant coating much to the delight of the local ravens, which multiply from 1 scout to over a dozen in about 3 minutes, the others called to the feast by some mysterious telepathy known only to ravens.

The first pull begins around 3:10 p.m., sliding the already grounded George Black out of the water and part way up the ramp. During this pull the grader on the south cable travels most of the way to the General Store along Front Street and the northbound grader makes it to the ferry landing.

Then it was time to anchor the boat, move the pulleys, bring the graders back to the dike and shorten up the cable for the second pull.

During this half hour the ravens quickly discover that they will not be disturbed if they snack off the rails the boat has left behind it; that leftovers are safer than the fresh stuff.

Technical arrangements complete, the word is passed by radio to the operators of the cats and graders and the final pull begins. The boat glides up the rails, pushing a ridge of frozen canola oil as it advances, crests the bend in the rails and thumps lightly onto the level berth at the top of the hill. By 3:55 the job is done save for packing away the moving gear.

Its final journey of 2009 at an end, the boat will sit there until its annual refit begins about a month before it launches again in May.



The George Black waits to be hooked up to the machines that will pull it from the water.

Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)



The first big pull brings the ice encrusted ferry out of the river.
Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish@northwestel.net (In Dawson)



Workers adjust cables and measure angles as the last stage of the extraction is prepared.



The George Black begins its final ascent to its winter berth.
Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish@northwestel.net (In Dawson)



Passengers on the last ride of the season.
Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish@northwestel.net (In Dawson)



Ravens feast on frozen canola oil.

Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

Dawson was an Unexpected Experience for Pasha Malla

by Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

October 8, 2009

Relaxing in an easy chair in Berton House in late September, Pasha Malla chuckles a bit when I ask how his stay in Dawson has been for him.

“Oh. it’s been great. Does anyone ever say it’s not?”

“I mean, it’s a super comfortable house. I got comfortable here right away. I’ve got 62,000 words into my novel. I’ve written I don’t know how many essays, articles and reviews and stuff done since I’ve been up here - probably one a week.”

Some of these have been the bread and butter items of a working writer who has bills to pay, but others have been for markets that don’t actually pay but allow him the freedom to write about things he finds interesting.

“One of the great things about being here is that it’s rent free and you get a stipend, and you don’t have to worry about hustling to pay bills for three months.

“So it was really nice to do some writing that didn’t feel compromised in any way because of wanting to get paid. It was great not to feel the stress of having to pay bills by writing things you don’t want to write.”

Malla says that earning his living by writing does lend a certain amount of stress to the

joy of following his muse when he's not writing for money. It's the same physical activity, either way, but it's so much more enhanced when "everything that you're writing is a joy."

Malla has been writing full time for the last seven years, having first had a stint as a school teacher before starting graduate school in 2002. When he decided he might want to be a writer he signed up for a Masters program in English and Creative Writing at Concordia.

At the time he felt the creative writing course was necessary, but he isn't sure now that it was.

"I was teaching and I didn't know how to put myself physically in a chair and write. I needed something to kick start a routine and learn the physical practice of writing. I realized I wasn't going to do it unless I had strict deadlines. School is really useful for that."

Dawson surprised him, as he told his reading audience earlier that week. He took the residency to get away from cities, and found himself in a place that was a microcosm of cities. Far from what he expected, based on descriptions and the photos on the Berton House website, the place is surrounded by homes, not actually pastorally quiet, and smack in between the tourist attractions of Robert Service's and Jack London's cabins. "Dawson has ended up getting into this book of mine as much as New York did. It's been really interesting to be influenced by a place that I thought was completely beyond what I was writing about. It didn't feel like a writing retreat so much as a continuation of the moves I've been making while I'm writing this book."

In addition to writing, Malla hooked up with the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture and offered a four week course in short fiction writing to just over a dozen students in September, as well as a more intense "flash fiction" workshop on his last weekend in town.

Besides his own reading at the Dawson Community Library, he also teamed up with ODD Gallery director Lance Blomgren to do a second reading of both their published work on September 26.

"There's a lot going on here that's really fascinating," he said. Being the sort of person that usually needs to get away from a place before he can process it and write about it, he expects that there will be a lot about Dawson emerging from his thoughts once he has had a chance to reflect on it.

What he knows now is that he had trouble getting used to the long days, that he kept losing track of what time it was, and that there was so much to do that he had trouble getting into a routine at the beginning. But all that was just fine in the end, as it got him out into the town and caused him to meet a lot of people.

Leaving Dawson, Malla did a reading in Whitehorse, spent some time in Calgary and went on to the Banff Centre for the Arts for a two week stint, after which he is slated to be an online mentor for four younger writers for the next five months.



Pasha Malla found both Berton House and Dawson to be very different from both his experience and his expectations.

Photo courtesy Dan Davidson uffish*northwestel.net (In Dawson)

A TRIP TO HAINES ALASKA

Eleanor Millard forwarded this message which is a link to some wonderful photos taken by her friend. Please follow the link below. – Sherron

Alaska-Yukon Fall Colours

During September, I made two trips to see the Fall colours in Alaska and Yukon. The first one was at the beginning of September with my friend Eleanor Millard in her Dodge camper van. Eleanor lives in Carcross, near Whitehorse. We left Carcross and drove west to Skagway, Alaska. We camped over night and took the ferry to Haines, Alaska the next day. Camped at the Chilkoot Lake Campground so we could watch grizzly bears fishing for salmon. Then we set off along the Chilkat River (bald eagle sanctuary) through northern BC and then to Haines Junction in the Yukon. This is known as the Haines Road and the Fall colours were lovely. So lovely in fact that I persuaded two photographer friends to return to Haines Junction with me the following week so we could take photos. We didn't have Eleanor's lovely camper van so we stayed in a little

cabin in Haines Junction on Friday night so we could get a quick start in the morning. I've selected a few of my photos from both trips and have put them on the web. Some of the photos are on this email. To see the rest go to www.gallery.me.com/janetwebster Hope you enjoy them. Cheers, Janet



Duane Hankins on right, visiting his friend Dan Hyman in Yuma. Dan is our neighbour across the street and Duane is a former Yukoner. - Sherron Jones
Photo courtesy Bill Jones ve7yi@shaw.ca (In Yuma)

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Hi Sherron, will you change our e-mail address, so we get the next Moc on Yahoo.
Thanks, Dianne Sutherland w.dsutherland@yahoo.ca (In Red Deer AB)

My new Gmail address is: CarolAMAFoster@gmail.com
Please use this Email address in future, thanks!
Carol (Domes) Foster (In Whitehorse)

In an attempt to control my intake of spam, and the demise of my old server, I have had to change my address to: meryd*northwestel.net
Marny Ryder (In Whitehorse)

NEW ADDITIONS

Please add me to your list of subscribersI am back in the Yukon now after an interlude on Saltspring Island and miss my Moctel. You may recall that we Dalziels are old timer aviation/trapping/outfitting folks in the Yukon and I have some stories to share.

Let me know how to get you money please.

Bonnie Dalziel
311-600 College Drive,
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 0B9
Bonniedalziel*klondiker.com

I would like to subscribe to the Moccasin Telegraph.

Cheryl Schneidmiller
Box 307
Sundre, Alberta
T0M-1X0

Home 403-638-3511
Office 403-638-3895 or 1-800-478-6373

I have never been to the Yukon. It is our intent to travel there eventually. However my husband Keith lived and worked in the Yukon in 1972 & 1973. He guided and outfitted with these people, Phil Temple, Cougar Long, Stan Burrell (a pilot as well) Rex Logan, Jerry Saunders, Joe Jackson. There are many others. My husband lived in Ross River those 2 yrs with his first wife Glenda and daughter Maxine.

Keith also worked as a mechanic at the service station in Ross River when hunting was not in season. He is the man with the stories. I wanted to subscribe to the newsletter out of interest sake.

Keith & Cheryl Schneidmiller tuffyhse*telusplanet.net (In Sundre, AB)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Be tolerant of the human race. Your whole family belongs to it -- and some of your spouse's family does too.” - Anonymous

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Easy Fudge

Submitted by Florence Roberts yapper@klondiker.com (In Whitehorse)

4 oz bitter chocolate
1 tbsp butter
Put on stove in a double boiler and melt

Take from stove – add
1 lb icing sugar
1 egg, slightly beaten
3 tbsp evaporated milk
Pinch of salt
1 tsp vanilla
½ cup chopped walnuts.

Put in buttered 8 x 8 inch pan. Cut in squares.

Mrs. C. Buckle
First Presbyterian Ladies Aid.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Yukoner's Christmas lunch

ABC Country Restaurant
6671 Mary Ellen, Nanaimo, B.C.

Thursday, Dec. 17th, Noon social, with lunch to follow.

More Info: Harriett Butterworth 250-751-1194
Sharon Redmond 250-729-9773

I just realized I had forgotten to put **RSVP** with the lunch announcement as I have to let the restaurant know the numbers.

Thanks so much,
Harriett Butterworth harriett3@shaw.ca (In Nanaimo)

Vancouver Yukoners' Association Christmas Lunch

11:30 am-2:30
10 December 2009

Croatian Cultural Centre Room C
3250 Commercial Drive, Vancouver BC
Parking plentiful and free
Transit accessible Handicap accessible

Lunch \$10 **RSVP** Helen Munro 604 937-3740

Vancouver Yukoners' Association Annual Banquet 2010

Tickets are already selling for the April 17 banquet. Suites are already being booked at the River Rock Casino Resort. The "buzz" is building, with families and old buddies making their plans to get together on banquet weekend. Check out all the details in MocTel Nov. 1 edition or wait for the ad in the next MocTel. Don't wait for spring, book it now!

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

If you have received this copy of the Moccasin Telegraph from a friend and wish to sign up to receive future editions yourself, the criteria is that you **are or were a Yukoner**. The goal of this project is to provide an opportunity for folks to reconnect. There is an annual subscription fee of (\$20 - \$25. your call) for the Moccasin Telegraph.

– Sherron Jones sherronjones*shaw.

MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

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