

STERNWHEELERS ON THE YUKON RIVER – March 9, 2003

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Many thanks, to all of those who have provided the information in this collection of Yukon history.

Please access the photos that describe these stories at this address:
<http://community.webshots.com/album/65874057hWGktv>

Overview –

Invaluable historical information has come in from **John Gould**, **Les Somerton** and **Henry Breaden** regarding the Sternwheelers that plied the Yukon River. I have received photos from each of these generous men and would like to put them out for all to enjoy and preserve for the future.

John Gould and **Les Somerton** have provided photos of the Str. Dawson where she met her demise on a reef at Rink Rapids.

Les Somerton has provided a photo of the first Casca, in Lake Lebarge, taking a smoke break he tells me.

Henry Breaden has provided photos of the Str. Casca & Whitehorse during their working life on the Yukon River.

I, **Sherron Jones** have provided a set of 15 photos of the Str. Casca & Whitehorse taken during their fateful day in June 1974.

There were three Sternwheelers that bore the name Casca. The remains of the original is at Lower Lake Lebarge. Casca No. 1 at Lower Lebarge (north end) of the Lake. Casca 2 is ½ mile below the reef at Rink Rapids in a side slough. The third was one of the two Sternwheelers that burned in Whitehorse in 1974.

1) The first Casca (which earlier sailed from Victoria) was scuttled. The hull was floated to Lower Lebarge and became a floating dock for offloading freight. PHOTO # 6

2) Casca No. 2 was built in Whitehorse and ran till 1936 when it hit the remaining boiler at the site of the sinking of the Dawson at Rink

Rapids. Henry last sighted the Casca 2 about a half-mile further down stream in a slough, on the left hand side.

3) Casca No. 3 burned in Whitehorse in 1974.

A tool to envision the location these photos were taken is a chart of mileages on the Yukon, provided by Henry Breaden. Taken from records in his Log Book, which was recorded during his years on the River. The chart can be obtained from this website. You can “select all”, “copy” and “paste” it into your own records.

<http://www.explorenorth.com> <http://www.explorenorth.com/index.html>
[/library/ships/yukonrivermiles.html](http://www.explorenorth.com/library/ships/yukonrivermiles.html)

A complex web of information on these and other Sternwheelers, presented by Murray Lundberg, is located at:

<http://www.yukonalaska.com/history/ship.html>

15 photos of the “Casca & Whitehorse Burning – June 1974”, can be seen at::

<http://community.webshots.com/album/63868116QYCYdu>

Background –

John Gould provided a photo and first hand recollection of the Str. Dawson on her fateful day in October 1926. Some of you have read this brief.

Dear Sherron;

Here is the story of the Steamer Dawson.

To start with my Father was from Nova Scotia and Mother was from Boston.

In 1926 they decided that they should make a trip back home. It had been many years since they were back home.

We left Dawson on October 12, 1926 on the steamer Dawson. On October 14 the steamer hit a rock or something in Rink Rapids and sunk, the water wasn't very deep maybe three feet. We were able to stay on the boat for three days while the men cut a trail up to the over land road. Cars came from Whitehorse and took us by car. Which in those days took two days. We stayed in a roadhouse the first day off of the boat. I think it was the Montague out of Carmacks, but I'm not sure. There were five of us Gould children myself as the oldest at 7 years and my sister Lenore 18 month old. The Dawson paper had only two of us mentioned but there were five. There was quite a list of passengers on the steamer. Among them was Ralph Trobert, Helmer Samuelson, Mr. & Mrs. Andy Rystogy, Mr. & Mrs. Elingson, Mr. E. Schink to name a few.

Once in Whitehorse we stayed in the Regina Hotel on Front St. We finally arrived in Halifax after a long train trip across Canada. Mother must have had quite a trip with five young children. I don't remember much about the trip. We spent the winter at Dad's home in Middle Musquodoboit. I, and my brother Bob went to school there for the winter. We had no scribblers. Slates were used. We made a short visit to Boston to visit mother's family, and then in the spring we were back in Dawson, and up on Nugget hill for the summer.
Regards John Gould

PHOTO #1

Moments after John's letter and photo were sent out to many of you, he informed me that the photo of the Str. Dawson was taken by **Les Somerton's** dad **Ernie Somerton**.

Les Somerton then dug through his photos and came up with two more photos of the Str. Dawson in various stages of distress. With **John Gould's** blessing we are adding these to the story.

Les' photos bear the date 1927. From the photos it appears that one may have been taken the next year. The water level seems higher and to me, the novice, that denotes spring runoff. Furthermore, the Dawson is in an obvious state of dismantle as the windows have been removed.

Henry Breaden's recollections:

Steamer Dawson – Sinks at Rink Rapids – 1926

Having another look at the **Str. Dawson** and it is a different photo than I remember. The one I saw was from the stern, and it may be in our photos. **Capt. Raab** was skipper who put her on the reef, and **Capt. Joe Gardener** who I knew well was in the wheelhouse. He said to **Raab**, "*Skipper aren't you getting a bit close to the reef?*" Maybe **Raab** did not like to be advised by a junior, or maybe he tried to give **Joe** a scare, but **Joe** said that he put the wheel over and went right on the reef. All the hardware was salvaged to build other boats, but the boiler was left in the water, the year was 1926.

PHOTO # 2 (2 photos)

The three Cascas -

Ten years later the **Casca No. 2** got out of position and hit the boiler, which remained in the river at the reef in Rink Rapids, ripping out the planking and the remains the last I saw of Casca 2 was downstream of Rink Rapids about 1/2 mile in a slough on the left hand side.

In 1936, BYN lost two boats within two weeks, the **Casca No. 2** and the **Klondike No. 1**.

Casca No. 1 which was built in Victoria and sailed with the 10 other steamers to the Yukon River in 1898. She was getting rotten and was used as a landing barge at the foot of Lake Lebarge.

When we took the **Keno** to Dawson in 1960, there were still remains of the old **Casca**.

Casca 1

The **Steamer Casca** was built in Victoria, for the Stikine River run originally, as were 10 other vessels. The plan was to travel the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek, and a railway was to be built by the CPR from there to Teslin Lake, Yukon. The paper was defeated in Parliament and the idea of a railway was scrapped. As the boats were being built in Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria, it was decided to run them across the Pacific Ocean to Unimak Pass in the Aleutian Islands, and the Bering Sea to St. Michael Alaska. Then they would steam the Yukon River to Dawson City, Yukon. In July 1898 that group accompanied by one towboat was: Canadian, Casca No. 1, Columbian, James Domville, Lightning, Marjorie, Mona, Sybyl, Tyrrell, Victorian and Yukoner.

This was of particular interest to me as my grandfather crewed on the Lightning, and that is how he went to the Yukon. Not too many wood piles on the Pacific Ocean, and although I have never seen it written, I would assume that they loaded with coal which would have been railroaded to and picked up from upper Vancouver Island.

They apparently hit one storm in the Bering Sea and it was every boat for them selves but none were lost. So this explains how the **Casca No. 1** built in Victoria ended up at the foot of Lake Lebarge.

The **Casca No. 2** replaced the No. 1 and No. 1 became a dock or barge at Lower Lake Lebarge The most prominent building near the lake is of

logs and was the Telegraph Office, and a line from the south to Dawson was handled all by Morse code. It was common for trappers to have cabins at a location such as that, and could account for some of the other buildings.

PHOTO # 3

Here is the **third Casca** aground at Williams Creek. I was on the Loon with Emil Forest and we ran lines to get them off.

PHOTO # 4

This one is the **Steamer Whitehorse** and barge which not too many photos showed them hooked up like this. It was quite common, for the Whitehorse, Casca and other boats towed barges in this fashion. The Klondike being so long pushed barges upstream but not too often downstream where they would have to drift bends.

PHOTO # 5

Please find attached a photo of the **third Casca** coming up through the Five Finger Rapids in 1947.

This is the Casca that later burned in Whitehorse.

RIVERBOATS BURNING - the third Casca and the Whitehorse

I remember well the burning of the boats as I first saw it from the spillway and thought it was the hospital. I was real concerned and quickly drove across the dam and to the hospital area. Quite relieved to find it was not the hospital after all. That was a sad day for Yukon history.

Murray Lundberg of Carcross has many websites on Yukon history, and excellent ones I might say. In the roster of Yukon Riverboats it shows a group of photos of the boats burning, and the only one I had seen to that point was the one on the White Pass Calendar. The Date was June 20, 1974 and I have this group printed.

It was interested in the roster as my grandfather was skipper on the Taylor and Drury Str Thistle in 1921. Under another skipper the Thistle was lost in Lake Lebarge in 1929.

I spent nine seasons on the old boats from 1942 to 1950 I had a great interest in them. In 1960 I was part of the crew that took the Keno to Dawson, and there is a write-up in this series of that trip. - **Henry**

Hi Sherron; I like the draft of your riverboats. Here is another one story. The old shipyard on the west bank of the Yukon down stream from Dawson there is the remains of the Julia B.

I got this story from **Elmer Gaundroue** many years ago.

The Julia B was purchased by **Wernecke**, (I think that's the way to spell it) The silver mine at Elsa was fighting with the White Pass over freight rates, they bought the Julia B and threatened to use it to get the ore to Whitehorse, apparently White Pass made a deal with them. So the Julia B was dry docked at the old shipyard across from Dawson it was the last one to be put there in 1925. Elmer had the strong box from it, which he gave to me. I still have it.

Regards **John Gould**

Livingston Wernecke worked out of San Francisco and was the General Manager and Consulting Engineer for Treadwell Yukon Company Mayo, Keno Hill and Elsa, a geologist for Alaska Juneau Gold Mines, and President and General Manager for three other mining companies in the Western States. In Gold and Galena there is a nice photo of him. - **Henry Breaden**

Tell me Henry: I understand there were boats run by steam, by coal and by wood. Can you break this information down for me into a more understandable scenario? When was each used, why, how was it done? For example I know that Natives were hired to cut wood and the boats would pull in and the wood was loaded. I think this information would be invaluable for people like me that just don't understand. I've always loved the boats and have been fascinated by them since moving to Whitehorse. - **Donna Clayson**

The boats ran on steam, which was generated in the boilers with wood. The wood was cut in 4-foot lengths by all those who were interested in making a buck during the winter and stacked in the bush. Whoever ran the wood camp would haul it from the bush to the riverbank and stack it 6 feet high and quite often hundreds of feet in length. When we came in to wood up, either the Purser or one of the Mates would measure five foot four inches for each cord required and put a chalk mark at a 45-degree angle so that the wood could be taken to that point. At the next loading, the mark was taken from the centre of the last 45-degree angle and measured. We had a wooden, 8-foot measuring rod which was marked at the 5 foot four inch length for each cord of wood. To load the wood, in high water both gangplanks would be run out and hand freight trucks with a backboard could be loaded with about 1/4 cord of wood. This was trucked from the pile down the planks and stowed in the

gangways each side of the boiler. During low water, we had to run the wider gangplank out and stand it on about a five-foot "horse" and run the other narrower plank from the end of it to the woodpile. The one plank was made to fit inside the wider one and a toeboard gave a slope from one plank to the other. Another toeboard was used from the wide plank to the deck. To truck from the pile to the first gangplank we used Double Enders which were planks 12 feet long and in width would fit inside the wide and narrow gangplanks. At low water there was quite a slope to the planks and many deckhands had a wild ride down with a hand truck including me.

From time to time someone would get the idea of burning Carmacks coal but it was never a success. Being that it was a lower grade of coal and a lot of powder, it would go black on the boiler grates. As far as I remember, the last time that coal was tried was in 1948 on the Str. Whitehorse. The Whitehorse made it to Scatterass Bar below Whitehorse and the Loon with **Emil Forest** had to haul wood down to her so that she could get back. With modern methods of gunning in coal, it would likely be a success if it were now. **Henry Breaden**

Something I wanted to mention, the photo of the Whitehorse and barge: notice the boxie looking thing at the boat end of the barge? That was a freezer, which was used to transport frozen products to Dawson. We used to have interesting freight, anything from fresh bananas to frozen beef. **Henry**

All the photos of the Casca I took and also the Whitehorse. I have one on that trip of Lake Lebarge early morning and totally calm. Took the photo because it was hard to see the right way up with the mountains reflected in the lake. These photos all taken with an old 116 camera and so different from today. That was a lifeboat tied to the barge in John's photo of the Dawson. The Loon was not built till later, and even its forerunner the Hazel B was about the same size. Cheers, **Henry**

MS Loon

You will notice that I use the letters MS? It is for Motor Ship. I checked in the roster, but the Loon was not there. I first remember the Loon in the 1930s and it would be about 40 feet in length and a beam of about 12 feet. It was housed, in leaving a foredeck and stern deck to work from and headroom of about 6 feet. The wheelhouse was set on top near the stern to give good visibility. Don't know what engine it had originally, but after the BYN bought the Yukon Rose from Taylor and Drury, they

removed the engine from the Rose and put it into the Loon. The engine was a gasoline driven Vivian Marine engine built in Vancouver. From the early 1940s, Emil Forest was the skipper, and put in buoys to mark the channel and other jobs to make channel marking easier. The Loon was built for the river, had a shovel nose and had a barge about 30 feet in length. Emil was always experimenting, and came up with a double tooth drag, to open channels made from 2 ripper teeth from a D8 Cat. The drag was mounted near the stern of the barge, and had an overhead hoist to lift it. In 1947 we could not get up the Stewart River beyond Eagle Bluff with the Keno because of low water, but Emil worked his magic with the drag and cut a channel for us. As it was fall, I went with Emil on the Loon and got some nice photos on the trip to Whitehorse. On the roster of riverboats by Murray Lundberg of Carcross, if you click on "Keno" and follow it to the bottom, you will find the Death of **Emil Forest** which gives quite a history on his life. He was to be our skipper to take the Keno to Dawson, but he died when the Keno was being launched. In the 1930s Emil ran the power plant at Mayo, and made many things for the children's playground, swings, teeter totters, and roundabouts that some got sick on! We can say that he was a real asset to the Yukon. Just recently I found that the present owner of the Yukon Rose was given the Loon, and low and behold; here was the original engine. - **Henry Breaden**
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Murray Lundberg's Sternwheeler Roster -
<http://www.explorenorth.com/library/yafeatures/bl-boats.htm>

The Casca 1 in her happier days -
<http://www.explorenorth.com/library/communities/canada/images/casca-pc1.html>

Hank Karr has a song called Paddlewheeler at
http://www.eriksyukon.com/subpage-hank_karr_page.htm just scroll down and click on the interactive tune named Paddlewheeler, when you get to this site.