

FRASER RIVER GOLD RUSH ADVENTURES*

Agreeable to my promise some time ago, I submit to you my personal recollections of an overland trip from the Dalles, Oregon, to the Fraser River mines in 1858, which includes the fight the McLaughlin party had with the Indians, in what is now known as McLaughlin Canyon on the Okanogan River, as near as I can tell about twenty miles south of the British line.

Early in the year 1858, it was circulated all over the Pacific Coast that gold was discovered in paying quantities, for miles up and down the Fraser River. As I recollect this was given out by the Hudson's Bay Company, or by those who were in their employ.

Sometime in June, 1858, a few of us who were then living in The Dalles made up a party to go through. As near as I can recollect there were about twenty-five or thirty men. We procured our horses and supplies, and started up the river trail to Wallula. Somewhere between the mouth of the Umatilla, and Wallula, we had our first mishap. Going up the trail close to the river, a middle aged man, (I have forgotten his name) left his horse, and went down to the river to get a drink, taking his rifle along with him. After drinking he came up the hill carrying his rifle in his left hand. About half way up the hammer caught in some sage brush, the gun went off, and the ball must have gone straight through to his heart, as he was killed instantly. As the country was then wild, with no settlers, the only thing we could do was to bury him the best way we could.

Now at this time the Indians were getting very troublesome. We camped at the old Fort at Wallula, and after getting what information we could, and studying the situation over, we concluded to cross the Columbia River and go up the Yakima side. We made the Yakima River at its mouth, and went into camp there to await developments, as from the way the Indians were showing up it looked a little dubious. We stayed in camp several days and were visited by Indians daily. I well recollect Chief Homely of the Yakimas; I think he had a paper appointing him chief, issued by Governor I. I. Stevens. This cut no particular figure with us; we could see they were playing double, and after a few days we con-

* Robert Frost wrote this letter to Miss Carrie B. Allen, sister of United States Senator John B. Allen, under an Olympia date, May 3, 1901. Miss Allen was interested in gathering and preserving historical data and had appealed to Mr. Frost for an account of his adventures in going to the Fraser River gold mines in 1858. Parts of the letter have appeared elsewhere but it merits reproduction in its entirety. Mr. Frost gave a copy of the letter to Mr. Adolph D. Schmidt, from whom it was obtained for this publication.—EDITOR.

cluded that they were too numerous, and too treacherous, also that we were not strong enough to fight our way through alone, so we turned back to Wallula, except three who were foolhardy enough to take their chances. I recollect that one was Joe Winlock, another was Sanburn, and the third was Charlie. It turned out afterwards that the Indians waylaid them and killed Winlock; Sanburn and Charlie got away, losing their outfit and had to live on berries, and anything they could find for six weeks, in the mountains before they got on the western side of the Cascades. I met Charlie and Sanburn the following winter in Olympia and got their story; it was a miracle that they ever got out alive. Joe Winlock was a first cousin of the late General W. W. Miller, who was one of Olympia's pioneers. We got back to Wallula, and went into camp on the Walla Walla river a mile or so above the old fort. We heard that a party were coming overland from California and quite a party from Oregon, piloted by Dave McLaughlin from Oregon City, were on the way, so we concluded to take it easy until they came along, when we could join them.

While we were in camp at this time, Colonel Steptoe went out from Walla Walla on his famous picnic, and ran up against the Indians somewhere near where Colfax now stands, and where Captain Taylor, and Lieut. Gaston, and several men were killed. We saw the men when they came back and a sorry looking sight it was. Well, later McLaughlin and his party arrived; we joined them and started. It was a queer outfit, men from all over the coast; some well armed, and well supplied and some with scarcely anything. We mustered about 150 men, and fully one-half had no arms of any kind. We finally got started some time in July. This time we went up on our side of the Columbia River; crossed Snake River at its mouth and kept on up the Columbia for a few miles and then left the river. We made a detour around Priests Rapids, and entered the Grand Coulee. Right here we had another mishap. There was one man in the party, (a Californian) who had a pack, and saddle animal, and who was always the last to get off in the morning; he was repeatedly told that he was taking chances in lagging behind, but he paid no attention to it. This morning in particular, when we started, he was just getting ready to pack up; this time he never caught up with us. The Indians got him, and his outfit.

About this time there was some dissatisfaction in regard to Dave McLoughlin's leadership and one afternoon in camp, all bands held a council and quite a number favored a change, making a white man by the name of Jim McLoughlin, captain of the com-

pany. Jim was a Californian and a natural leader, and a typical frontiersman, (a few years ago Okanogan Smith told me that Jim was still living on the Okanogan River). There was considerable feeling shown during the "pow-wow," and Jim expressed himself pretty freely. Dave McLaughlin picked up his rifle and drew a bead on Jim who was not more than fifteen feet away. I shall never forget the picture of Jim, who, unarmed, stood like a statue, upright and looking Dave straight in the face, saying something like "Shoot, you dirty coward." Dave dropped his rifle when the boys jumped in and stopped it. It was smoothed over somehow after a fashion and we proceeded on. We struck the Columbia opposite the mouth of the Okanogan River. At the mouth of the Okanogan stood the old Hudson's Bay Fort.

Here we had to get canoes, and Indians to ferry us and our supplies over, and then we had to swim our horses. We lost three or four horses in the stream and I was unfortunate enough to lose my saddle horse. I felt that I had truly lost my best friend. I bought him from an Indian in Walla Walla, perfectly wild, and unbroken, but in three or four days I had him a perfect pet; he would follow me around and when I would stop, he would come up and lay his head on my shoulder for a caress. After all these years I have not nor never shall forget him. We found at the Fort that the very devil was in the Indians, but they kept themselves pretty scarce and mostly out of sight. Right here I will say that I had lost all dates since the Fourth of July, and we were camped on the Walla Walla River.

We started up the Okanogan River on the old Hudson's Bay trail which was sometimes on one side of the river then sometimes on the other. One morning about 10 A.M. when we were on the right bank of the river, we came to a bold rocky bluff which ran clean out to the river, and it was impossible to get around it, so we had to make a detour to the right and go through what is now known as McLaughlin's Canyon, before we could get to the river again. I have not seen this canyon since, but as I recollect it, it is quite narrow with high perpendicular walls, and natural terraces, and benches. The benches being only accessible from the northern end; at the south end (our entrance), it was an utter impossibility to get at anyone on those benches except with a rifle.

Now evidently the Indians had their runners out, and were prepared for us, for they had gotten on these benches, and thrown up rock breastworks and laid for us. Now every morning in starting out, we had a head and rear guard, generally from six to ten

in each. Men would change about; this morning I was in the rear. The head guard had gotten well into the canyon, and part of the train. The object of the Indians was to get us all in the canyon, and had they succeeded, very few of us, if any, would have gotten out alive. As it was an Indian on one of the benches showed himself, and one of the head guard gave the alarm when they opened fire. As quick as possible the horses were rushed to the rear, back to the river, and all those available took what shelter they could get, behind scrub trees, and rocks and drew a bead on an Indian whenever chance offered. After the animals were down on the flat, every available man with a gun was up to the front.

There were six of our men killed in the start; I do not remember their names except one, Jesse Rice, from Cache Creek, California. He was a fine man, and everybody liked him. I recollect Tom Menifee, who was afterwards prominent to Cariboo men, having kept a road house I think on or about William's Lake. Tom was very badly wounded, being shot in several places with slugs. Wm. P. Wright, a brother of Captain Tom Wright, prominent as an old steamboat man of the Sound, in early days, and Jim Lower from Vancouver, Washington. These are the only names I can recollect. Here occurred an act of bravery seldom witnessed. Jim Lower, and Bill Bunton were partners. They were of the first to take shelter, Indian fashion, and fight. I think they were about twenty yards apart, having scrub pines for partial shelter. After a while Lower was badly shot down. However he could call to Bunton, who deliberately left his shelter, ran over to Jim and picked him up, got him on his shoulder, and carried him to the rear. About noon we had to give way, and back across to a side hill at the mouth of the canyon, where a portion played long shots with the Indians that afternoon, and night. The rest were engaged in building rafts, and carrying the freight across the river where it was open, (an Indian will never fight you in the open unless he has a decided advantage). Another portion was busy carrying water from the river to the men on the side hill. During the night we ferried everything across the river, and by daylight we had the horses together. We ran them down to the river a hundred yards to a ford, and got them safely across. The Indians followed us to a ford on a parallel with the mountain, and gave us a parting shot, but the shots were too long, and did no harm. We stayed in camp here several days attending to our wounded.

Now it is well known that the average sailor is very handy, and generally a good all around man most anywhere, and here comes

a practical illustration of it: We had an Irish sailor in our party (I have forgotten his name), who had been in the English navy, and had been through the Crimean War at Sebastopol: He was the nearest we had to a doctor. Several of the boys were provided with a box of pills; he selected one and gave each wounded man a dose, then made a clean pointed stick to probe the wounds with, enough to keep them open, and after washing them laid a piece of wet cloth on the wounds, and would go around twice or more during the day, probe and wash. The pills, stick, cloth and water did the whole business. They all got well but it took Menifee the longest to get over it. We kept our guards out all the time, and on the second day we knew the Indians had broken up, so far as this point was concerned, as we could see them in small parties on the plains working toward Chelan and the Columbia River. I think it was on the third day that a party of a dozen of us went up on the west side of the Okanogan, well armed with tools to bury the dead. They crossed the river at the north end of the canyon, and entered it. They met with no resistance and came to our dead comrades. The Indians had stripped them of everything and mutilated them. They were buried the best as could be done under the circumstances. Well, we had to get out of this, so we made two horse litters, with two long poles, and two cross pieces in the center, lashed them together with a blanket or two in the center, making a cot, with a gentle horse between the poles at each end. These carried Menifee, and Lower. The rest could ride without much assistance. I think we had been in camp about a week, when we started north again, on the west side of the river. Somewhere hereabouts some of the California boys picked up an Indian, and brought him in. We concluded we would take him through as a sort of a hostage, and kill if we were attacked again. The Indian admitted that we got several, but none but themselves knew how many, as they would never tell.

We had no more trouble until we reached a spot somewhere about where Oroville now stands near the mouth of the Similkameen. There was a nice little flat bordering on the river, and the banks lined with cottonwoods; it was then a beautiful spot in its wild state. We arranged our packs in a semicircle the straight line being the cottonwoods; we may have had two or three acres to picket our horses in for the night. On this night we picketed the horses, and picketed the Indian with them. We had a guard out every night, as well as in the day time. On this particular night we had a guard at each end, and one in the center. The guard at the

south end was composed of some Californians, who had a "Digger" Indian with them. The "Digger" was pretty well trained by them, but he was an Indian all the same, and the Indian instinct served us well on this occasion. This night was the only time in my life that I think my hair really stood on end. I was not on guard this night, and my pack was about in the center of the circle. A friend, by the name of Homer McKinney, from Oregon City, who was not on guard, and myself spread our blankets, and were soon sound asleep, dreaming of home, and everything pleasant, when all at once it seemed that the "Lower Regions" had broken loose. We jumped up out of our sleep dazed; it was pitch dark, and the rifles were cracking all around us, the men yelling like mad. If any one reading this has ever jumped out of a sound sleep, on such an occasion he can understand it. I cannot describe the feeling. I can only say that once in a life time is enough for me. When we got quieted down a little it turned out to be this way. The Californians on guard at the south end of the camp were sitting down quietly, when the "Digger's" ears caught something below him. He told them quietly to "look out, the Indians are coming," and sure enough a mounted party of them were sneaking on to the camp with the intention of stampeding our horses by making a dash through our camp, and liberating our Indian, but thanks to the "Digger" they only had time to start their dash when the boys turned their guns loose on them, and sheered them off on the outside. Of course quicker than I can tell it every man was on his feet, and luckily no horse got away and no damage done. We stayed in camp next day, and in the afternoon the Indians showed themselves on the hill. Some of McLaughlin's men were half breeds and could talk to them, and when out with a white signal, and finally coaxed them into camp. I recollect Chief Tenasquot among them, and a fine looking lot of Indians they were. We made a sort of truce with them, gave them a few trinkets, and they went off.

Next day we started up the Similkameen, went over the divide and made the Thompson River about twenty miles above the forks, the junction of the Thompson River and Fraser River where Lytton now stands. We were never bothered any more by the Indians. We went down to the junction and then the party broke up, some going one way and some another up and down the Fraser, each man prospecting and locating to suit himself. I located on Foster's Bar about thirty miles up the river. I mined with indifferent success and operated a ferry with a large Indian canoe whenever anyone wished to cross.

Provisions began to run short, and then it took all we could make to live. We had to pay \$1.00 per pound for everything, flour, bacon, and beans, all alike. In October there was none to be bought at any price, so one evening a half dozen of us took an inventory of what we had, and it looked so scaley that we packed up next morning, left our tools, got into my canoe and started down the river. My stock in trade, outside of the canoe, consisted of my blankets, about four pounds of salt pork, and \$12.00 in gold dust. We made Boston Bar that afternoon, beached the canoe as we could not take it through the canyon, we started up the mountain; night overtook us and we had to sleep in the snow. About nine o'clock next morning we made the Lake House on the trail, a mere shack, where the proprietor got us up a breakfast at \$1.00 each. It consisted of hard tack, bacon, and beans with a raw onion. I thought at the time that it was about the best meal I had ever eaten. We started after breakfast, and made the river again just above Fort Yale, and stayed at Yale over night. From there it was no trouble to get out so we chartered a canoe to take us to Fort Hope, and from there we took passage on a small schooner to Victoria. After resting there for a few days we took passage on an old steamer, *Constitution*, Capt. A. B. Gove, for Olympia. The *Constitution* was a 1200 ton propeller, and used to carry the mail from Olympia to the different ports on the Sound, and to Victoria. At that time the route included Whatcom, and Semiahoo. She used to leave Olympia, every Monday morning, and never got back before the following Saturday, a week to make the round trip. What a contrast between then and now. But as this has nothing to do with the primary object of your request, I will now close and trusting that this covers what you wanted, I remain,

ROBERT FROST.