

THE CASSIAR GOLD RUSH OF 1874

Two miners named Choquette and Carpenter started interest in this area with the discovery of placer gold in the gravel bars on the Stikine River in 1861. When this news reached Victoria the next winter it excited a few parties who prepared and headed up the next spring. It was Captain William Moore and his small steamboat that brought them up to the Stikine from the Wrangell. However, most of the deposits on the Stikine proved to be quite small, and most of the men returned south in the fall. Coquette continued on prospecting and also operated a small trading post on the Stikine for some years.

It was this rush of activity which caused the Stikine territory to be defined in 1862. The area was put under control of Governor Douglas. Due to the Western Union or Collins Overland Telegraph Company extending northward in this area in 1866, explorations were made. At this time Telegraph Creek was named for the intended crossing of the telegraph line. This work was stopped, though, when the laying of the transatlantic cable was successfully laid in 1867. The Dominion Government took over the telegraph system in 1871 when British Columbia became a province. What then happened was that the telegraph system was only maintained as far north as Quesnel and the rest was left to fall apart.

A second wave of gold interest was created in 1873 by the discovery of gold on Thibert Creek (close to Dease Lake) by Thibert and McCullough. This was called the Cassiar Gold Rush of 1874.

Riverboats brought prospectors as far as Glenora, and then they headed overland to Dease Lake. It was at this time that the Hudson's Bay Company and John C. Calbraith set up trading stores in Glenora. Captain Moore then obtained a contract from the Provincial Government to build a road from Glenora to Dease Lake along the aboriginal trail that had been followed by Campbell 36 years earlier.

This new rush of gold prospectors was to prove negative to the Tahltan way of life. Large quantities of liquor and diseases such as measles were introduced. This helped to create hostility and conflict between the white settlers and the Tahltan people. Ultimately, the result was a loss in the Tahltan population.

This strain caused all the Tahltan clans to gather together in

one communal village close to where the Tahltan and Stikine Rivers joined, a place not far from the trading stores at Glenora. Although the Tlingit continued to come into the area and fish until the turn of the century, the trade monopoly of the Tlingit was broken down and traditional trading patterns between the Tlingit and the Tahltan were destroyed.

All of this was followed by a third wave of gold seekers: the Klondyke Gold Rush. The Stikine was the first leg of the journey north, and during the winter of 1897-98 between 3,000 and 3,500 men camped at Glenora. This occupation was the largest and briefest the area has ever seen. Due to this influx of movement, Telegraph Creek became an important centre as the head of navigation on the Stikine as it was only twelve miles upstream. In 1897 the Telegraph Trail, which ran from Telegraph Creek north to Atlin, was established and used as a major transportation route north to the Yukon. In 1899 the Dominion Government began to connect the Yukon telegraph line with the British Columbia system that had previously ended in Quesnel. In 1901 the line was completed.

Further destruction of the Tahltan traditional way of life occurred when foodstuffs became more readily available. Previously, the Tahltans had been dependent on hunting and fishing as their primary means of survival. Now, however, furs could be traded for food.

On top of the economic boom for the Tahltans with the trading of furs came the employment for young men acting as packers and hunters for the trading stores. Because of the previous drop in population, the Tahltan people allowed their traditional marriage regulations to be relaxed in order to encourage intermarriage and population growth. This development caused many non-natives to stay in the area after the gold rush, as well as led to the introduction of missionaries.



Cassiar