

THE ORIGINAL YUKON GOLD DISCOVERERS

Historian and Judge Frederick F. Howay's final text for a 1926 plaque regarding the first gold discovery in the Yukon totally ignored the contributions of the First Nations people. It simply read: "Yukon Gold Discovery—to the memory of the indomitable prospectors and miners who, braving extreme dangers and untold hardships crossed the Chilcat and Chilkoot passes into the unexplored valley of the Yukon, and thus paved the way for the discovery of the rich gold fields with which the names of Robert Henderson and George W. Carmack are inseparately associated." Any discoveries made by First Nations braves—or Heaven forbid—a First Nations woman by the chauvinistic and biased judge was simply out of the question.

HENDERSON'S GOLD SCALES

When the Canadian gold discoverer passed away, the scales were passed down to his son Grant. When Grant passed away the scales were willed to his son Chester. Chester prospected in the Yukon with partner Frank Burkhard. When Chester passed away the scales went to Frank who passed them on to his daughter Sylvia. Sylvia runs 33 Claim, a gift shop located 33 claims below the Discovery Claim. These scales were made by Henry Troemner, a highly reputable scale maker, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

COURTESY SYLVIA BURKHARD,
CLAIM 33 GIFT SHOP.



In later years there would be great controversy as to just who made the first discovery. The initial contenders were two whites, Robert Henry Henderson, a Canadian, and George Washington Carmack, an American, and two First Nations braves known as Kèish, meaning the lone wolf, or Skookum Jim (later James Mason) and Tagish Charlie or Káa Goox (later Dawson Charlie, relatives of Carmack's native wife Shaaw Tláa (later known as Kate).

Henderson, born in Gulf Shore, Nova Scotia, in 1857 left home at age 14 and signed aboard a sailing ship. He prospected in Australia, Africa and California before his wanderings took him to the Yukon and the Fortymile River at Ogilvie where he managed to wangle a grubstake out of Joseph F. Ladue. One of the first men to scale the challenging Chilkoot Pass, Ladue had been in the north for 14-years and although primarily a trader he had prospected for gold in the nearby rivers. He was one of the first men to search for gold in the Thronduick (later Klondike) River.

Three years younger than Henderson, Carmack had been a sheep herder in California before joining the United States Navy. He left the sea life and ended up in the Yukon where he found a coal deposit south of Five Finger Rapids on the Yukon River. Here he set up a trading post that he called Carmack's Post (later Carmacks).

It was during this time that he met Han braves Kèish and Káa Goox. He gave Kèish and Káa Goox the English names Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie. Both First Nations men were from the Tagish Indian village located not far from where the annual migration of caribou crossed the Yukon River. This spot was

first called Caribou Crossing but the name was later shortened to Carcross. The three men formed a partnership and to earn income agreed to pack Dominion of Canada land surveyor and afterwards Gold Commissioner of the Yukon Territories William M. Ogilvie's supplies over the Chilkoot Pass. It was during this time that Carmack learned that Skookum Jim had assisted steamboat captain William Moore ascent the Skagway River.

According to relatives at Carmacks, George's wife Kate had fished in a tributary of the Yukon River near its mouth and knew that the creek contained gold since the Han Nation had used the shinny stones for fish bait. As a result the couple abandoned Carmack's Post and set out by canoe down the Yukon River to Rabbit Creek. The pair were prospecting on the creek when located by her brother Skookum Jim and nephew Tagish Charlie.

This story of the first major gold discovery on 17 August 1896 does not quite jive with Ogilvie's account: "At the mouth of the Klondike Robert Henderson saw George Washington Carmack, whose story has connected prominently with the discovery of gold on the Klondike. Henderson, in accordance with the unwritten miners' code, told Carmack of the discovery he had made on Gold Bottom Creek, and invited him to come up and stake. Carmack was then engaged in salmon fishing with his Indian friends and associates, the male members of whom were Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie. As Henderson tells the story, Carmack promised to take it in, and take his Indian associates with him, but to this Henderson strongly objected, saying he did not want his creek to be staked by a lot of natives, more especially natives from the upper river. Carmack seemed to be offended by the objection so they parted.

I have this story essentially the same from both Henderson and Carmack, the latter, of course, laying a little stress on the objection to the Indians. I have had long interviews with both Jim and Charlie, and some of the others camped with them on the Klondike at that time, and reduced the purport of our talks to writing. As I have said, both Henderson and Carmack gave me the same story about Henderson having told Carmack of the new discovery, and the Indians assured me that they knew Bob, as they called Henderson, told George, as they called Carmack, of it and asked him to go and stake on it; that much, therefore, may be assumed without doubt.



WILLIAM M. OGILVIE (1846-1912)

This man surveyed the boundary between the United States and the Canadian borders prior to the Yukon Gold Rush. He afterwards became the first Gold Commissioner in the Yukon. Although the credit for the first gold discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek remains disputed, Ogilvie, upon interviewing the participants at Carcross, credits Skookum Jim with the actual find.

DAWSON CITY MUSEUM & ARCHIVES ACCESSION#1978-1-951
BY THE STRANFORD STUDIO, SAN FRANCISCO

George Washington Carmack

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON DIGITAL COLLECTION #CUR1618
BY ASAHIEL CURTIS PHOTOGRAPHY



The stories told me by the Indians may be questioned, but they were very sincere in their tone and assertions when telling me. I took the precaution to interview them separately and afterwards get them all together and criticize and discuss the narrative of each.

Put in as concrete terms as I can frame it, Jim's story tells us that he, Charlie, and George were, as we know, camped at the mouth of the Klondike fishing, but as a straight fish diet becomes monotonous in time, in order to procure some variety it was agreed they would get out some logs, take them down to Fortymile, and sell them to the saw-mill there. Much depended on Jim in this work, and he did a good deal of examination of the woods around the place to find the best and most convenient logs. This work took him some distance up a creek afterwards known as Bonanza. He informed me that he found some very good logs at various places, and in order to learn whether or not they could be floated down to the Yukon, he had to make a close examination of the creek bed. In doing this he said he found some colours of gold at various places in the gravel, and particularly at where claim sixty-six below discovery was afterwards located he found what he considered very fair prospects. He told the fishing camp of this find, but it did not arouse much interest. Jim, according to his own story, was anxious to further investigate, but as George was chief councilor in the camp and did not appear much interested in the matter it was allowed to drop temporarily.

About twenty days after Henderson called at the camp, George told him to get ready for a tramp to find Bob. The three men started up Bonanza on the quest, with (prospecting) tools...for a prolonged stay away from camp, and such provisions as their means afforded...

A short distance below where they afterwards made discovery, both Jim and Charlie told me they, while panning during a rest, found a ten-cent pan...It was decided (among the trio) that if Gold Bottom trails failed they would devote further attention to this place...

As they did not find any prospect approaching in value the ten-cent pan on Bonanza, they remained a very short time at Henderson's camp...Before they got down far (Bonanza) their provisions were entirely exhausted, and as they prospected on their way down, and Jim was hunting for meat, their progress was slow... Jim at last, when they were all too tired and weak to do further prospecting, got a moose...

Jim says he called on the others, whom he had left some distance away, to come to him. While waiting for them to come he looked in the sand of the creek where he had gone to get a drink, taking with him a bit of the moose. He found gold, he said, in greater quantities than he had ever seen before. When the others joined him the moose was cooked, and they had a feed. Then he showed them the gold in the sand. They remained two days at this place panning, and testing the gravel up and down the creek in the vicinity. After satisfying themselves that they had got the best spot, and decided to stake and record there, they got into a dispute as to who should stake discovery claim, Jim claiming it by right of discovery, and Carmack claiming it, Jim says, on the ground that an Indian would not be allowed to record it. Jim says the difficulty was finally settled by agreement that Carmack was to stake and to record discovery claim, and assign himself half of it, or a half interest in it to Jim..."

Meanwhile Henderson was panning a tributary of a small stream that emptied into the Klondike not far from where that river flowed into the Yukon River. He found colors and consequently called the stream Gold Bottom Creek and on his way back out to civilization told everyone he encountered about his good fortune. It was when returning from Ladue's trading post at Forty Mile with more supplies that he ran into Carmack and his First Nations relatives. They talked and Henderson told Carmack about his discovery but made it explicitly clear that his tip did not include the First Nations men because he did not like the way they treated their women. Henderson refused to either sell or give some of his tobacco to Jim or Charlie. Perhaps more out of curiosity than excitement Carmack and his companions decided to check things out on Gold Bottom Creek. According to legend, Carmack promised to send word back to Henderson should he make good finds to repay him for his kindness. The three men lingered a bit but then moved back to Rabbit Creek, another stream that they had already been sampling. Carmack claimed that he was the one that found the first nugget on Rabbit Creek—soon to be renamed Bonanza Creek—on 17 August 1896 although his two companions stated otherwise claiming that it was Jim that made the initial discovery.

In any event, all three men instantly recognized the significance of the discovery and after a short celebration began panning in earnest. Another equally plausible story was that Kate Carmack, George's wife and Skookum Jim's sister, had made an earlier discovery. It didn't take long for Carmack to fill an expired shotgun



TAGISH SHAAW TL'ÁA (LATER KNOWN AS KATE (MRS. GEORGE WASHINGTON) CARMACK)

According to her story, she took her husband to Rabbit Creek, a tributary of the Yukon River, and showed him where the First Nations located gold nuggets that they used for fish bait.

YUKON ARCHIVES 2000/37, #5

TAGISH KATE CARMACK'S STORY

George Carmack's Indian Wife Tells Strange and Plaintive Story of Love, Marriage, and Desertion.

How She First Met and Loved Paleface George.

Betrayed her Brothers.

White Man Pressed Her Hand When She Show Him Gold - Yellow Hair Caused Trouble.

From Saturday's Daily San Francisco News

November 6, 1900 via Skagway, November 10, 1900

Mrs. Kate Carmack, the Indian wife of the Klondike Millionaire George Carmak is suing for divorce at Hollister, California, the case being one of very great interest on account of the great wealth of the husband who was the first white man to find gold in the Klondike. The prominence of the case caused the Examiner of this city to devote a full page to its



casing with flakes of gold. The next day they began staking claims. As discoverer, Carmack was allowed two rimrock-to-rimrock claims of 500-feet each on both sides of the stream. The two other men staked one claim apiece. The two First Nations miners staked upriver from Carmack's two claims. Jim's claim, immediately above Carmack's two claims, was called One Above, while Charlie's, located downstream from Carmack's double claim, was called Two Below. They then set off to record them at Fortymile. Moving downstream, the party of three encountered four Nova Scotians recently from California and Carmack told them of their good fortune and urged them to stake their own claims on Rabbit Creek. At the mouth of the Klondike, Carmack saw two French-Canadians and gave them the same tip. All these men would soon become wealthy as a result. He failed to pass the tip to Henderson. The claims' recorder at Forty Mile first mocked Carmack but then realized that the gold in the shotgun shell was of a color and texture never before seen in the north and that just maybe this was the beginning of a strike. Ladue recognized a possible opportunity of a lifetime and immediately staked out a town site at the junction of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers. He named the spot Dawson City in honor of George Mercer Dawson, the Canadian geologist, and then opened up a lumber mill for the anticipated building boom. Ladue then returned to the village of Ogilvie and floated his entire sawmill to Dawson City. Many of the early stakers sold their claims for a pittance before even thawing the ground and putting down shafts to bedrock.

To everything there was a season and this certainly applied to the gold miner of the Klondike—with specific work taking place during the winter months with 20 hours of darkness per day or the summer months with 20 hours of daylight per day. Shaft sinking had to take place during the cold winter months in sub zero weather when the gravel overburden was frozen solid. Unfortunately for the miners the vertical shafts that had to be dug to reach the ancient streambeds had to take place during the long nights of winter and

OPPOSITE

Daakuxda.eit (Mary) and Kèish (Skookum Jim) Mason and daughter Saayna.aat (Daisy).

Jim's fob, gold-studded chain and pocket watch were donated to the MacBride Museum in Whitehorse but were stolen in the 1990s.

HISTORICAL PHOTO #06547 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

details. The simple story told to the court by the deserted wife was as follows:

"White man, George Carmack, have break Tagish Kate's heart. I want white man's divorce because I am white man's wife. I pay white man for his love and he cheat me. My papoose and me he desert. I want white man's justice for me and my papoose. "One night at dance in frozen country I first met white George. He talk to me and press my hand. He tell me how he walk about all over big, frozen country many, many moons and he tell me how he never find so much as one little piece of great gold which make white man's heart glad.

"Then he press my hand some more and love came into my heart and I remember some things I hear my brother Skookum Jim and my brother Tagish Charlie say. I think of what they tell me of a place where gold is as thick as the sand when one digs on the shore of the Meiozikaka, and I say: 'Whiteman, meet me by the river at midnight and I tell you something to make your heart glad and love will come to you for Tagish Kate.'

"White George he shake his head to show me he no believe Tagish Kate, but all same he came to river at midnight. I took him out in my canoe, away out in middle of river where no red man can hear and I whisper in white George's ear: 'I know spot where gold is thick like sand.'

"I tell paleface George he love me, me show him gold. He shake his head and say he no believe Tagish Kate.

"Then I tell him how my brothers, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley, have found place where they get heap much gold, and I tell him how they go and bring me back necklace all made out of little gold stones. When I see paleface George's eye grow bright by light of moon and when he press my hand with his big strong hands I take one, two, three gold stones from under my dress and show them to him. George look at them and his eyes grow big. He swear he love Tagish Kate. I ask him if he make Tagish Kate his squaw? He say yes, yes many many times. He take me in his arms; he kiss me and say he love me. Tagish Kate believes and is happy, very, very happy. Then comes wedding and plenty much to eat.



KAA GOOX (LATER KNOWN AS TAGISH CHARLIE AND THEN DAWSON CHARLIE)

Attired in white men's clothing with a gold nugget collar pin, a watch chain with a gold nugget fob and a gaudy gold nugget ring, Dawson Charlie poses for a full length portrait session in a studio in Seattle, Washington, at the turn of the 19th century

YUKON ARCHIVES 2000/37, #2

in sub zero weather when everything liquid was frozen solid. It was only then that the miners could safely dig vertical 4 by 4-foot square foot vertical shafts to the ancient streambeds that contained the placer gold. The men built windlasses to haul the frozen muck to the surface. It was a cold job for the man hauling the bucket to the surface. The frozen earth that covered the bedrock, often to a depth of 100 or more feet, was called overburden and consisted of, moss, muck and gravel. The prospectors lit fires of brush to thaw the overburden, dug down through a few inches of thawed dirt, and then repeated the process day after day during the winter months when there were only a few scarce hours of daylight. When the miners reached the frozen bedrock, they hauled the gravel to surface and stock piled it for the separating of the gold nuggets from the gravel during the long days of sunshine in the summer months. Just like in the California and Cariboo gold camps, the miners, upon reaching bedrock, dug drifts or tunnels from the bottoms of the shaft in several directions.

The miners had to thaw the bedrock with steam that was carried down by long hoses from boilers above ground. In the initial stages, the loose gold-bearing gravel was hauled to the surface by a crude hand pulley. Sometimes the chap working the windlass at the mineshaft endured 40-degree below zero weather. In most cases veteran miners built a crude cabin with a wood-burning stove to enclose the shaft for protection against the harsh elements. From November through January the miners toiled in their tunnels and hoisted the pay dirt to surface and soon the piles of gravel reached considerable depths. In spring the prospectors shoveled the gold-bearing gravel into sluice boxes to wash away the lighter gravel to recover the gold in the riffle boards. The methods of operation for separating the gold from the gravel during the summer months were pretty much identical to the Cariboo workings.

The following was taken from the "Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada" plaque erected at Carcross (originally Caribou Crossing), Yukon. "James "Skookum" Jim Mason - Kesh (meaning The Lone Wolf) - "Skookum Jim", a Tagish of the Dakhtawèdé clan and the Wolf moiety, found a nugget on Rabbit (Bonanza) Creek in August 1896 that began the Klondike Gold Rush and changed the history of the Yukon. He made the discovery while on a journey down the Yukon River to find his sister Kate and her husband George Washington Carmack. Renowned for his legendary exploits and physical abilities, "Skookum" (strong) Jim believed

his Frog Spirit had guided him to the gold. He became very rich but remained a generous man who never forgot his obligations to this community.

August 27, 1897

SKAGUAY, Aug. 17, 1897

Dear Wife,-We have been here three days and we have packed our provisions five miles up to the foot of the mountain. You never saw such a rush as there is around here, the road is lined with camps the full five miles we went. There must be 6000 people camped here. I went up the trail yesterday six miles. It is an awful rough trail, every outfit that has gone through yet has lost half of their horses killed, or crippled so that they would have to kill them. The trail is one solid line of horses and people coming and going and the worst is coming back empty for one has to give the trail to the people going in loaded. Sometimes a person will have to wait in a place an hour or more to let them pass. I think where we are camped now at the foot of the mountain we will be about twenty days. We will pack about nine miles and back the same day to where we are now camped. We will take about one hundred and twenty-five pounds to the horse and pack what we can ourselves. We have packed now three days and are all about played out. More than half of the people that come here back out and sell their outfits when they see the mountain, but a good many of them intend to stay here this winter and going the spring.

The first day I got here I was offered five hundred dollars for two of my horses. If I only could have known what I know now I could have made a big thing on bringing a band of horses here, any kind of a horse is worth two hundred dollars here but I think that will only last the next month for they will have to kill them this winter, hay is worth sixty dollars a ton, feed \$2.50 a sack. You can see glaciers here of ice from three to four thousand feet of solid ice and mountains of ice floating in the salt water. Teams are making from fifty to one hundred dollars a day here hauling outfits. Scows are making from one to five hundred dollars a day landing freight from the boats. The pack-horses are standing here while I am writing this letter, waiting on me, so I will close and pack up. I will write you when I make a trip through to the summit of the mountains, and tell you how we are getting along. Archy Hammel and his wife got through to the lake and have started down the river, he was lucky, got a boat the day he got over. He is one of the first over the trail.

"Now is September and in frozen country we must wait, wait for summer before we can go and find gold. Then me tell my brothers, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, that my white chief George know where gold is. They very mad, but me no care. Me love paleface George, my chief.

"Then when summer came we make peace with Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, and one day all start together to place where gold is. Long, long time to get there. One day we came to Rabbit creek and George he lay down and sleep. While he sleep I fill pan with sand and put it beside him. He wake up and see pan and wash out dirt and in it is gold all same like three dollars. George glad. He find heap much gold and love Tagish Kate and buy me heap nice clothes. For five years he love Tagish Kate and take her in his arms and kiss her. He love papoose and buy heap much nice things. White chief George happy. Tagish Kate happy, papoose happy, all happy.

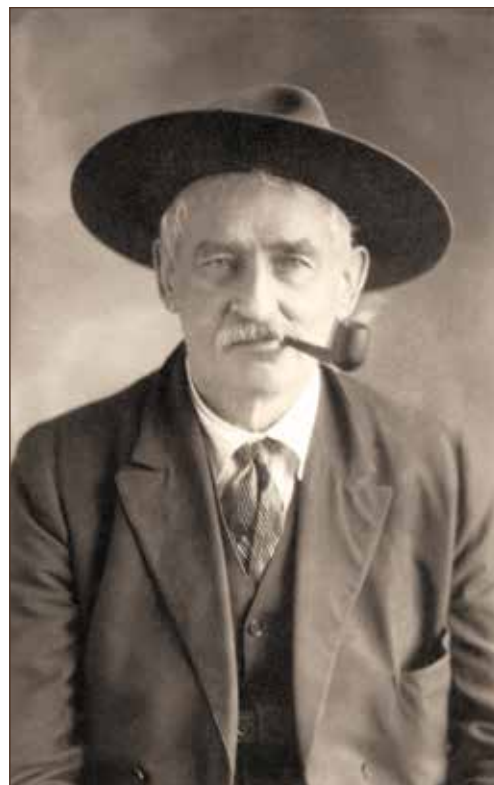
"Then yellow hair she come to town. Tagish Kate no good after that, papoose no good after that. Tagish Kate want white man's divorce from white George. Yellow hair can have him. He no want me. Tagish Kate no want him. I give him love, he cheat me"

KATE'S CAPE

This cape was made by Kate and is a mix of First Nations and European styles. The pattern of the cape is European in origin, however, the beading and felt along the fur hide is First Nations inspired. Kate probably made this cape after returning from the US in 1900 where she would have seen many capes in this style. The demi-length cape was a common overcoat for women at the time.

MACBRIDE MUSEUM OF YUKON HISTORY





ROBERT HENRY HENDERSON (1857-1933)

Was he the Canadian gold hunter who made the first gold discoveries to start the Yukon Gold Rush? This portrait was likely taken when he came 'Outside' of the Yukon to Vancouver Island in 1923 at age 66.

HISTORICAL PHOTO #005893 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES SHAW STUDIO, VICTORIA, BC

George Washington Carmack was the miner whose discovery claim on Bonanza Creek on 17 August 1896 started the Klondike Gold Rush.

After deserting the United States Marine Corps in 1882, Carmack lived among the Tagish Indians in the Yukon Valley along with his common-law wife Kate and their daughter Graphie. Kate's brother, 'Skookum Jim' James Mason and Jim's nephew, Tagish Charlie, also made their fortunes mining for gold as partners of Carmack.

George and Kate later moved to a ranch near Hollister, California, and lived with George's sister, Rose Watson. George eventually left California after parting ways with his wife and former partners. He left Kate and Graphie with Rose and in 1900 married Marguerite Laimee in Olympia, Washington. Kate, left nearly destitute, began a difficult legal battle to prove that she was George's wife and entitled to alimony. She eventually dropped the case in the hopes of winning back her husband. When this attempt failed, she settled in Carcross, where she was looked after by her brother Skookum Jim. She died in 1920. Carmack died two years later in 1922. His daughter Graphie, now married to Marguerite's brother, and his sister Rose challenged Marguerite's appointment as the administratrix of Carmack's estate. The case was settled out of court.

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A PROSPECTOR IS LOWERED BY TWO COMPANIONS DOWN A SHAFT

in a second photograph taken in the same photo sequence the chap standing in the bucket in readiness for lowering to the bedrock is feigning obert henry henderson

TRIBUTE TO A MINER

In 2000 a monument was designed for the Klondyke Centennial Society by artist Halin de Repentigny that now sits in front of the Elijah Smith Building in Whitehorse.

It reads: "Dedicated to the Klondike Gold Miners past, present and future in recognition of their contributions to Dawson City and the Klondike Region. In 1886, gold was discovered on Rabbit Creek by Skookum Jim, George Carmack and Dawson Charlie, on the advice of fellow prospector Robert Henderson. This event sparked the Great Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, and Dawson City and the Yukon Territory were born."



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SKOOKUM JIM, WITH LEFT HAND HOLDING BACK HIS DRESS JACKET IN ORDER TO DISPLAY HIS GOLD FOB AND WATCH, STANDS PROUDLY AT HIS DISCOVERY CAIM ON BONANZA CREEK.

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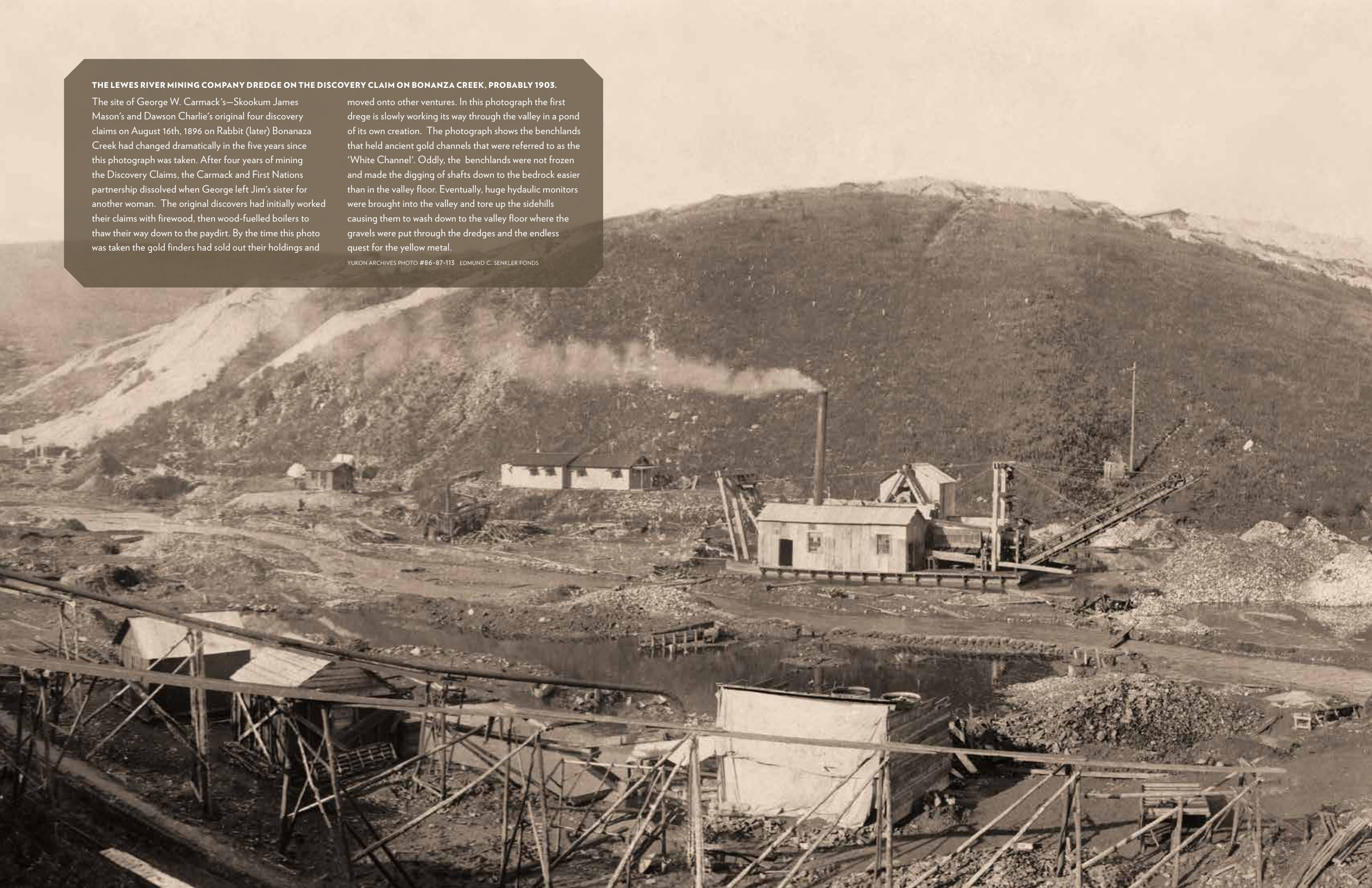
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THE LEWES RIVER MINING COMPANY DREDGE ON THE DISCOVERY CLAIM ON BONANZA CREEK, PROBABLY 1903.

The site of George W. Carmack's—Skookum James Mason's and Dawson Charlie's original four discovery claims on August 16th, 1896 on Rabbit (later) Bonanza Creek had changed dramatically in the five years since this photograph was taken. After four years of mining the Discovery Claims, the Carmack and First Nations partnership dissolved when George left Jim's sister for another woman. The original discoverers had initially worked their claims with firewood, then wood-fuelled boilers to thaw their way down to the paydirt. By the time this photo was taken the gold finders had sold out their holdings and

moved onto other ventures. In this photograph the first dredge is slowly working its way through the valley in a pond of its own creation. The photograph shows the benchlands that held ancient gold channels that were referred to as the 'White Channel'. Oddly, the benchlands were not frozen and made the digging of shafts down to the bedrock easier than in the valley floor. Eventually, huge hydraulic monitors were brought into the valley and tore up the sidehills causing them to wash down to the valley floor where the gravels were put through the dredges and the endless quest for the yellow metal.

YUKON ARCHIVES PHOTO #86-87-113 EDMUND C. SENKLER FONDS





THREE OF THE ORIGINAL YUKON GOLD DISCOVERERS DIED IN CARCROSS AND NOW LIE BURIED IN THE CARCROSS CEMETERY

Káa Goox, later named Dawson Charlie, died in 1908. His uncle Keish, given the English name of 'Skookum' Jim or James Mason died in 1916 while his aunt, Kate Carmack, the abandoned wife of George Washington Carmack, died in 1920. George W. Carmack died in 1922 and was buried in the Evergreen Washelli Memorial Park in Seattle, Washington.

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THE JAMES LEFFEL & COMPANY BOILER

This 10-horsepower steam portable engine was built in Springfield, Ohio, and could very easily have been used on Skookum Jim's Claim No. 1 above the Discovery Claim on Bonanza Creek. The boiler was first brought by sternwheeler to Dawson City and then dragged on steel skids by horses to the mining claims. These first boilers were built in 1890. The smoke stack was hinged at the top of the first joint so that it could be laid down on top of the boiler during transportation. The long lengths of hose with the boiling water were lowered down the shafts to thaw the frozen ground so that the gravels could be hoisted to the surface. During the short cold days of winter the underground miners stayed reasonably warm working with some source of light. The workers on the surface suffered the most. The miners kept digging their shafts downward until the bedrock, that contained the gold, was reached. This valuable gold-laden gravel was hoisted to the surface and carefully stockpiled for sluicing during the long days of summer.

