

CAPTAIN EVANS & HIS COMPANY OF WELSH ADVENTURERS

Welshman John Evans and his 26-man 'Company of Welsh Adventurers' traveled halfway around the world in order to reach the Cariboo diggings in the summer of 1863. Evans' small amount of knowledge about mining had been gained by working for 3 years in a Welsh slate quarry. Henry Beecroft Jackson, a Manchester industrialist who befriended Evans when the pair worked together in the cotton industry, financed Evans' venture in the Cariboo.

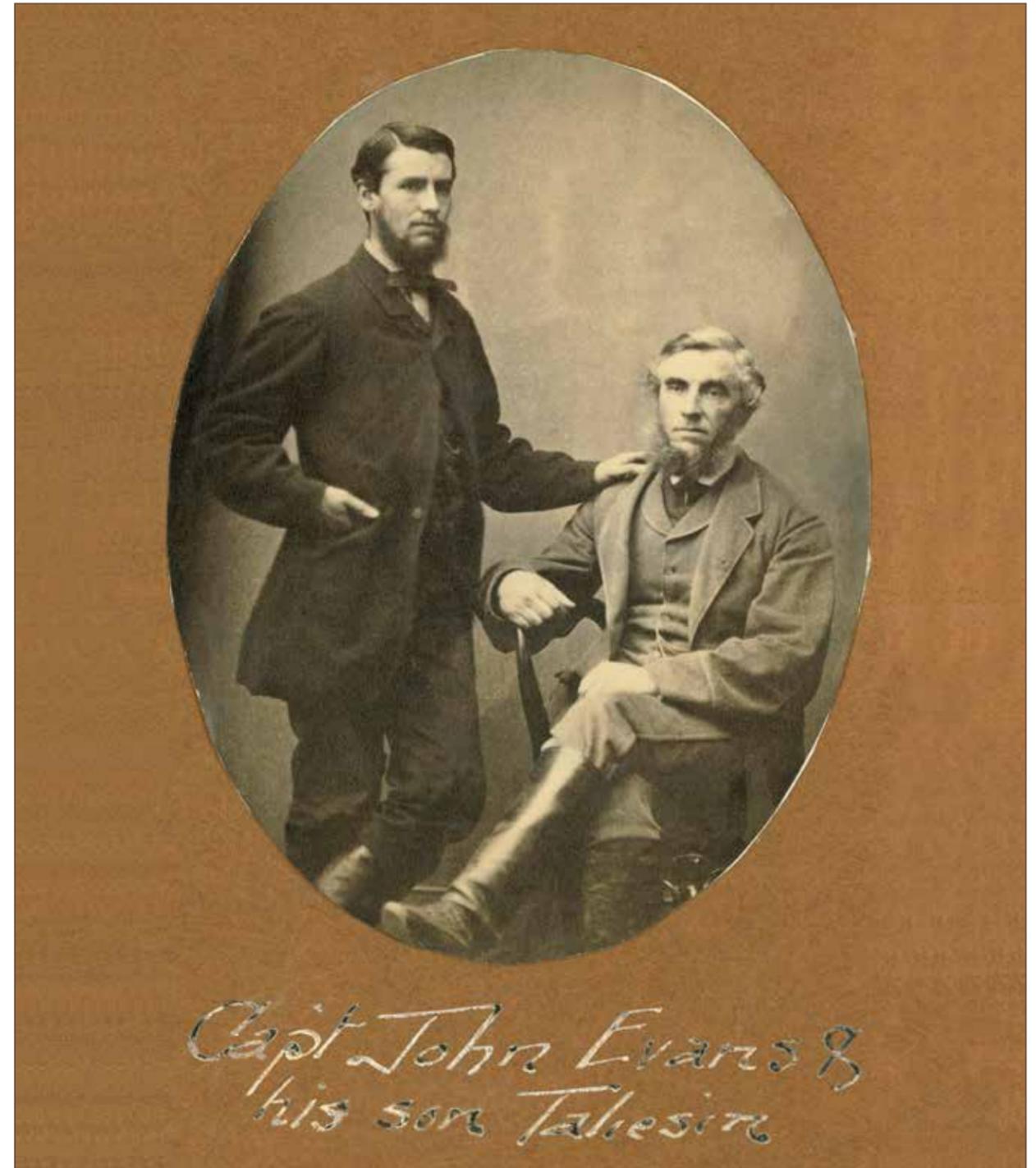
Upon their arrival at the diggings, Evans chose to stake a quarter section (160 acres) of ground on Lightning Creek where 'Cariboo slum' had already defeated more experienced miners. After leveling some uneven ground to pitch their tents, Captain Evans had his men form a circle and bow in silent prayer before initiating the sod-turning ceremony. His men immediately set to work and built an 18-foot by 36-foot bunkhouse. In a very short time, the company had whipsawed several hundred trees, dug drainage ditches, and installed flumes to bring water from a quarter of a mile away to a shaft site.

On 6 August, the Welsh miners began sinking their shaft. Some of them were assigned the construction of a Cornish wheel and two log pumps. These cumbersome wooden pumps were made from 12-foot long by 16-inch-diameter logs. Each was first drilled lengthwise with a 3-inch auger and then drilled again with a larger auger, made from curved knives, that removed a further one inch of wood so that the finished hole was 6-inches in diameter. The tops and bottoms of these logs were shaped so that they could be mortised one inside the other in order to reach far down into the shaft. To prevent wooden pumps from breaking apart from water pressure, they were generally bound with iron bands, but Evans, in an effort to keep expenses down, omitted the bands. He also refused to purchase steel with which to tip his men's picks and consequently the shaft men working in gravel or hardpan soon blunted their picks that greatly slowed work. The men became so desperate

that they scrounged scrap steel from abandoned sites in any spare time.

By early October the Welsh miners had sunk their shaft some 30-feet when water rushed in and drenched the men working at the bottom of the shaft. The two log pumps were put to work but kept splitting and clogging up. At this point, the miners relied upon an iron hand-pump and old-fashioned bailing by bucket and windlass. Although they worked day and night, nonstop, the cold water kept pouring into the shaft. To prevent the shaft from being totally flooded the men quickly constructed a third pump but Evans ordered a halt to the work until after the Sabbath before it could be installed. The men were sure all would be lost, especially since the nights were getting colder and Evans would not even allow further work to divert water away from the water wheel to prevent it from coating up with ice. On Monday work was resumed, but that night, the waterwheel became so heavy with ice and snow that it simply fell apart under its own weight. Thus, work on the shaft ceased until spring.

The company of men had to set themselves to repairing the machinery during these winter months to be ready to resume operations in the spring. They also started work on several tunnels in other areas of their claim. Captain Evans, upset by the financial disaster that had occurred, immediately decided to cut expenses once again—this time on the company food by reducing the menu to little more than beans. This 'prisoner' diet was the final straw to the disgruntled Welsh miners and they approached Evans with the ultimatum—the rules would be changed to suit the men or they would all leave. The captain, furious, jumped to his feet and told the men that they all knew where the trail was located and pointed to the door. Every man, including Evans' own son Talieson, was outside in seconds. Captain Evans quickly followed and begged them to stay agreeing to their terms.



WELSHMAN JOHN EVANS, HIS SON TALIESEN

Evans and his 'Company of Welsh Adventurers' arrived in the Cariboo in 1863 and set to work sinking several shafts on Lightning Creek where 'Cariboo slum' had already defeated more experienced miners.

HISTORICAL PHOTO #002876 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

OPPOSITE

A 1935 map showing some of the richest gold bearing claims in the world below Barkerville.

By the beginning of January the men of the 'Company of Welsh Adventurers' were striking 'colored' ground but the men were becoming sick. Evans' first thought was that they had rheumatism but a passing prospector informed them that it was scurvy and delighted Captain Evans by telling him that the cure could be found right outside the door. He instructed them to boil spruce branches and without spending a single penny for medicine Evans soon had all the men back in good health and back to work.

Although the men had been able to stockpile much pay dirt from the tunnels, they had to wait until spring to be able to hydraulic it to separate the gold from the tailings.

In the spring, they continued their efforts to successfully sink another shaft on Lightning Creek but they were again defeated. Lightning Creek, meanwhile, had provided the companies upstream from 'The Company of Welsh Adventurers' with deposits of gold with one particular nugget weighing over 30 ounces. By fall the men came to the conclusion that Evans was a loser because of his bull-headedness and inexperience with mining in the Cariboo and so they dissolved the company. Theirs was not the only failure on Lightning Creek as 'Cariboo slum' was the bane and defeat of many companies that struggled to get the gold that lay on the creek's bedrock.

John Evans went to work a claim on Davis Creek, a tributary of Lightning Creek, and was hired on as a surveyor by several mining companies. In the summer of 1875, the government requested that he write up a report and draw a map of the mining on Lightning Creek. This map was done so well that it was considered the best in the Cariboo. That fall, he was elected a Member of Parliament at Victoria as the representative for the Cariboo District. In 1877, he married Catherine Jones, who became his third wife; Evans had already been married and twice widowed. Catherine brought him great happiness. Two years later, he was again elected to parliament and remained a Member of Parliament until he died in 1879. Remembered by all as a man who was honest and forthright, he was greatly respected for having the courage to always express what he believed was right. He was buried in the Stanley cemetery close to where his 'Company of Welsh Adventurers' had established their camp on Lightning Creek.

A BARRELL OF CRANBERRIES

Cranberries were a most valuable commodity to the miners of the Cariboo; it provided the much needed vitamin C to prevent scurvy. Miners that could not afford to purchase cranberries were able to prevent scurvy by boiling up cedar boughs.

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