

PETER LOURIE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WENDELL MINOR

JACK LONDON

AND THE

KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH



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—•— **AND THE** —•—
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GOLD RUSH**

Peter Lourie

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Wendell Minor**

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**It was in the Klondike I found myself.
There nobody talks. Everybody thinks.
You get your true perspective. I got mine.**

—JACK LONDON



**He was an adventurer and man of action
as few writers have ever been.**

—GEORGE ORWELL



**He was a fighter. He was a terrific competitor.
He wanted to win whatever he did. . . . At the same
time, while he was physically tough, he was emotionally
sensitive. He could cry over the death of his favorite
animal, or over the tragic episode in a novel.**

—EARLE LABOR

**BIOGRAPHER AND CURATOR
JACK LONDON MUSEUM
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA**





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DEDICATION AND GRATITUDE

To David Neufeld, Earle Labor, and Dawne Mitchell, without whom I never would have written this book. And a special thank-you to Karl Gurcke, as well as Whit Bond, the grandson of Stampeder Louis Bond, who befriended Jack London when he arrived in Dawson.

Thank you also to Steve Shaffer, Jack London's step-great-nephew, who, with his cousin Brian Shepard, now manages Jack's ranch and vineyards in Glen Ellen, California.

INTRODUCTION

Jack London headed north to strike it rich in the Klondike. At twenty-one he was among the hundreds of thousands of Stampeders, as they came to be known, who left their dull and dreary lives all over the globe in order to make a dangerous journey into the heart of Canada's Yukon Territory. Between 1896 and 1899, forty thousand gold seekers, after months of grueling travel, arrived in the gold-rush town of Dawson on the banks of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers. A mere four thousand would actually strike gold.

Jack had decided very early on that he wanted to be a writer. He loved books, was good at writing, and desperately wanted to escape the hard work of his poor childhood. If he could strike it rich, Jack would devote his life to being an author. That was his dream.

During Jack London's time, the United States was gripped in an economic depression, and jobs were scarce. Although the typical wage was only ten cents an hour, Jack was not afraid of hard work. In order to make money for his struggling family in Oakland, California—across the bay from San Francisco—he had

labored with his hands from the age of six. He helped his father grow vegetables to sell. At eleven he ran two paper routes, one before and one after school. He was up by three in the morning every day, and on weekends he worked in the bowling alley, setting up pins. When Jack was fourteen, he spent ten hours a day canning pickles to bring home a dollar. Once, he worked in the cannery for thirty-six hours straight.

Lack of money forced him to drop out after only one semester at the University of California at Berkeley, and he got a job working in a laundry shop. He always wrote in his spare time and vowed to himself he'd write at least one thousand words a day—four typed, double-spaced pages. Writing steadily for the next twenty years, he would manage to produce more than two hundred short stories, as well as scores of novels and works of nonfiction. When he died at the age of forty, he had written more than fifty books, an output far greater than most writers.

From his early travels to the Klondike, Jack brought back the precious seeds of tales that bloomed into famous novels, such as *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*, and short stories, including “To Build a Fire” and “The White Silence.” Many believe his greatest works come from his experiences on that Klondike journey of 1897–98—narratives set in the Yukon wilderness.

Although he found little gold in the creeks, Jack London nevertheless became the first American writer of the twentieth century to earn a million dollars from his writing. He died one of the world's most famous writers.

This is the story of Jack London's journey in the gold fields of the Klondike—and what he discovered there.

TRAVEL ROUTES TO THE KLONDIKE



**JACK
LONDON
—• AND THE •—
KLONDIKE
GOLD RUSH**

PART ONE

AUGUST 7–SEPTEMBER 8, 1897

**FROM THE COAST OF ALASKA OVER
THE MOUNTAINS TO LAKE LINDEMAN**





The mudflats at Dyea during the Stampede
(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Hegg 54)

THE TRAIL BEGINS

IN A HEAVY DRIZZLE, Jack London and his gold-mining partners sat in dugout canoes loaded with five tons of supplies as Sitka Tlingit paddlers drove their seventy-five-foot-long boats through heavy seas. Clouds tumbled like ghosts over the craggy peaks above them. Jack had traveled a long way—first by steamer from San Francisco, California, to Juneau, Alaska, and now by wooden canoe to the coastal village of Dyea (pronounced Die-EE), Alaska, one hundred miles north of Juneau. Formerly a small Tlingit settlement, Dyea had become a raucous boomtown of wooden and canvas shanties with tenderfoot miners trying to get organized for a trek over the Coast Mountains to look for gold.

Under the scowling gray sky, wide-beamed sailing dinghies and flat-bottomed craft ran men and cargo from steamers anchored a few miles offshore to the wide mudflats at Dyea. Horses, cattle, and dogs were sometimes pitched overboard to swim to shore,

where masses of freight and baggage were dumped like garbage in chaotic heaps.

When the two canoes hit ground on August 7, 1897, Jack and his partners, along with the Tlingit paddlers and their families, jumped into the icy water and pitched gear onto the flats.

With the seawater above his knees, Jack worked furiously. At five feet seven inches tall and weighing 160 pounds, Jack was fierce and muscular. He had to work fast because it was low tide, and soon the water would rise and sweep everything away. So the curly-haired, gray-eyed lad muscled his cargo out of the boat and then more than a mile down the flats to higher ground.

In order to separate his and his partners' thousands of pounds of gear from the supplies of all the other miners, Jack strained under the weight of axes, shovels, pans, cold weather clothes, stoves, and tents, along with one-hundred-pound sacks of rice, flour, sugar, bacon, and, of course, endless cans or crates of tinned beans. Beans, bacon, and bread—the three Bs—were the staples of the Stampeders, food that he and his partners would live on for a year while they hunted for gold in the Klondike.

On the beach, wild-eyed men desperately grabbed their gear and began to sort through everything. It was a crazy open-air warehouse. Everyone was in each other's way, bumping and shoving and shouting. Jack heard loud curses against the sea wind. Dogs snarled and fought among their masters' legs.

When he finished getting all his gear organized, Jack explored the makeshift settlement of fifteen hundred tents and crude wooden buildings crammed among the coastal scrub. He passed jerrybuilt stores selling food and supplies at exorbitantly



It was chaos on the Dyea waterfront.
(Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, shs2365)

high prices. He saw saloons where miners gambled and drank until they couldn't walk. He heard rowdy men shooting into the air just for the heck of it.

Here was the start of the long trek. Here Jack and thousands of other would-be miners geared up for the trip to the Klondike gold fields, six hundred miles into the interior of the Yukon. These inexperienced miners were called *cheechakos*, the term for newcomers who were ignorant of the terrain, the weather, the animals, the culture, and the necessary survival skills for the harsh Arctic winter ahead. Many would quit along the way, but Jack was sure he'd succeed.

One problem, though, was that he had to take care of his aged brother-in-law, James Shepard, a Civil War veteran. He had promised his sister, Eliza, that he'd help her sixty-year-old husband with his outfit, too—a second entire supply of food and gear. Jack was sure he'd be the only one on the trail hauling two outfits over the mountains practically by himself. As hard as that might seem, Jack thrilled at the challenge.

After hearing news of the Yukon gold strikes, Eliza had insisted that her husband, who was keen to join the Stampede, accompany Jack to the Klondike. In fact, it was something Jack couldn't refuse because the couple was funding Jack's trip. Eliza had mortgaged their house in order to buy Jack and her husband over a ton of food and gear.

In Dyea, someone just back from the mountains looked at old Shepard, then turned to Jack and said, "You ain't gonna make it, son. It's already August. You and the rest of 'em can't get over those mountains and down the river to Dawson before the river freezes in October. You just ain't gonna make it."

Jack felt a panic like a punch to the gut. To come all this way from California and then possibly not even stake a claim on a creek!

Failure? *Not me*, thought Jack. Even with Shepard along, even if the others failed, Jack was sure he'd make it down to Dawson before freeze-up. He had proven himself many times in the face of danger. He was a winner.

At seventeen, Jack had shipped out on a sealing schooner for seven months. One night, a typhoon had whipped the Sea of Japan into a torment. Hardly any sail showed, just "bare poles,"



as sailors call it, meaning Jack could only make out the masts. The schooner was ripping along, diving into wave after wave of white spume as the wind tried to drive the boat under. Jack's sea mates saw that Jack had learned quickly how to handle the tiller of the big ship, so they went below to eat their breakfast and left him alone to skipper that three-masted schooner single-handedly through the fierce storm.

He could barely keep the ship from rolling over. He was terrified, but when the gale was over and he was finally relieved of duty, he felt as if he could conquer any adversity.

That was when he was seventeen, and now at twenty-one, he was even more ruggedly capable—getting to the Klondike was not a problem for Jack. Or so he thought as he went back to his piles of boxes and crates and sacks to guard them against thieves on the Dyea waterfront.

Jack knew he was in a tight race against the Arctic winter. With all the gear he had to haul up over the Coast Mountains and down the Yukon River, it would take at least two months—the rest of August, all of September, and into October—to make the trek from Dyea to Dawson, known as the City of Gold, deep in the interior of Canada’s Yukon Territory.

Only the year before, a great vein of gold had been struck where the Klondike River feeds into the mighty Yukon. In August 1896, three buddies—Keish (Skookum Jim Mason), Káa Goox (Dawson “Tagish” Charlie), and George Carmack—were hunting

moose in the hills when they discovered gold shining “like cheese in a sandwich” on little Rabbit Creek, a stream that feeds the larger Klondike River, which in



Skookum Jim Mason (Keish) poses with children at Bonanza Creek, ca. 1898.

(National Park Service, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Candy Waugaman Collection, KLGO Library, DP-110-9028)



George Carmack with pick
(Royal BC Museum and Archives,
Image B-08421)

turn feeds into the Yukon. They quickly staked and registered their mining claims and began to extract masses of gold. Prospectors already living in the area rushed to stake other creeks nearby, but the remoteness of the region and the cruel winter conditions would prevent the bulk of the world's Stampeders from reaching the area for many months.

Over the next few years, Rabbit Creek (immediately renamed Bonanza Creek) and nearby Eldorado Creek yielded some of the richest gold deposits ever.

In mid-July 1897, a year after the initial strike, two steamers from Alaska pulled into the ports of Seattle and San Francisco. Waterfront crowds watched as the newly rich prospectors carted their gold down the gangplanks, some with wheelbarrows. Here was confirmation of all the wild rumors of gold in the Klondike that had been circulating in newspapers for the previous six months.

Like tossing gasoline onto a smoldering fire, fresh news of the Klondike strike rang out across the world, and the Stampede north was on! Secretaries, bartenders, teachers, doctors, and laborers—everyone wanted to go find some gold. As many as a hundred thousand people set out for the Arctic, some of

them bankrolled by investors in towns like El Paso, Texas; New York; and the capital cities of Europe—Berlin, London, and Paris.

In an August 20, 1897, article titled “Missing Long Island Boys,” one newspaper reported that two thirteen-year-olds wanted to get their own gold and were planning to stop at the Central Park Zoo along the way “to see the animals.”

Like everyone else in the San Francisco Bay area, Jack read about the Yukon and the arrival of the steamship in the *San Francisco Call* on July 15, 1897:

GOLD FROM THE YUKON RIVER

Half a Million Dollars'
Worth of Dust Comes
by the Excelsior.

One of the Miners Has Over
\$40,000 to Show for a
Year's Work.

Among All the Steamer's Passengers
Not One Has Less Than \$3000
To His Credit.



The Excelsior leaves San Francisco for the Klondike. July 28, 1897.

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections UW14504)

A mere ten days later, with their “outfit” of thousands of pounds of food, clothes, and mining gear, Jack and Shepard boarded an overloaded steamer heading north. They and thousands of others were among the first Stampedeers to the Yukon. The newspapers often referred to them as “Argonauts,” harkening back to the Greek heroes who accompanied Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece.

Jack also heard the disturbing news that veteran prospectors already living in the Yukon had claimed all the good areas along the creeks and rivers. People said it would be difficult to find a section of a creek to look for gold.

On board the overloaded steamer from San Francisco to

Seattle and then aboard another rust-bucket steamer to Juneau, Alaska—where they glided along with glacier-packed peaks in the background and porpoises and killer whales alongside—Jack and Shepard formed an important partnership with three other Stampeders. Since his old brother-in-law was fairly useless, Jack thought it would be wise to connect with younger men with varying skills that would allow them to pool their talents and gear (they could take only one tent, for instance), making it more possible to achieve the goal of reaching the Klondike.

They partnered up with “Big Jim” Goodman, an experienced logger and miner in his forties with a close-cropped beard and mustache; bantamweight Merritt Sloper, shorter than Jack, a little bit older, and a master carpenter and boatbuilder just back from adventures in South America; and red-whiskered Fred Thompson, like Goodman also in his forties, a tall and tidy man, who talked a lot and was a court reporter from Santa Rosa, California. Thompson said he would keep a diary of their journey to the Klondike. Big Jim had prospected in the western states of the USA and knew real gold when he saw it.

To reach the Klondike, they’d first hike the Chilkoot Trail, which was the main access route from the coast to the Yukon gold fields. The Chilkoot was a rugged thirty-three-mile trading route from Dyea through the Coast Mountains, up to Lake Lindeman and Lake Bennett in British Columbia, Canada. It was a major route for the Tlingit, Tagish, Hän, and other First Nations groups in the area. (In Canada, Native Americans are called First Nations people.)

After the Chilkoot, they’d have to build a boat (Merritt

Sloper's job); then navigate rapids, lakes, and rivers for more than 550 miles (Jack would be skipper); then begin to mine the creeks (Jim Goodman's expertise would come in handy). Fred Thompson "was the business man. When it comes to business and organization he's boss." It was a good mix of talented men and boded well for their success. The only problem was Shepard, who complained about aches and pains from the very start.

Back in Juneau, Jack had heard so many frightening stories about the trail ahead that it must have been difficult to know what to believe, except that every story seemed to warn of unbelievable troubles at the Chilkoot summit.

In order to avoid the overloaded and often delayed steamers in Juneau, Jack had hired paddlers with two seventy-five-foot-long Tlingit dugout canoes to take all their gear the one hundred miles to Dyea. The paddlers brought along their wives, babies—dogs even—and they traveled for two days, a trip Jack later described as taking him "between mountains which formed a Yosemite Valley. . . . Glaciers and waterfalls on every side."



NOW, TO BEGIN THE JOURNEY from Dyea, Jack bought a boat for ten dollars to haul his and his partners' five tons of equipment up the course of the swift Dyea River that tumbled down the mountain valley. The boat would save at least a few miles of backbreaking carries.

Jack, Shepard, Sloper, Goodman, and Thompson loaded up their little boat and threw their backs into the ropes, inching the vessel up the swift current. Occasionally, Jack spotted the

snow-spiked peaks above. The ghosting and sinister fog would clear for only a second, and suddenly a massive rock face towered over hundreds of Stampeders camping everywhere on both sides of the speedy stream. Jack noticed that it was little Sloper who had the most drive. He quietly worked harder than the rest. His wiry frame, just over a hundred pounds perhaps, strained hour after hour and with no complaints out of his mouth. Recently, he had wandered through South America, working with his hands as a carpenter, and he seemed to have learned a great deal of quiet wisdom from his travels. His silent industriousness impressed young Jack.

Whenever a miner's boat overturned in the swift stream, all hope for finding gold was instantly dashed. Jack hiked past



*Stampeders ford the Dyea River
with a cart full of supplies on the Chilkoot Trail, Alaska, 1897.*

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, La Roche 2010)

disappointed men slumped over their battered and broken boats, their heads drooping into their hands, defeated even before they had begun to hike the dreaded Chilkoot.

It took Jack and the others three days and three boatloads to haul their gear a mere four miles. Finally, they offloaded the last of it at what was known as Head of Canoe Navigation, and were as ready as ever to pack over the trail. If they got to the summit soon, it might be passable. Even now, Jack heard, it was a veritable wall of mud and cold rain. Increasingly, too, there were bouts of snow up there. True or not true, reports of Stampeders dying up ahead filtered back along the trail, and many men grew fearful.

One day, Jack heard that a blizzard—it was then late August—had swept over the summit, taking the ragged Stampeders by surprise. But down on the lower part of the trail, Jack was busy with other perils.

CHEECHAKO

LUGGING HEAVY LOADS of gear required heaps of food to relieve Jack's raging hunger. He had never eaten so many beans, so much bacon and sourdough bread. At first his stomach rebelled and couldn't keep anything down, but a few days up the trail it quieted, and he ate ravenously.

At the beginning of the Chilkoot, he and his companions hiked over sand and gravel. They maneuvered up and down the uneven trail, around boulders, through stands of cottonwood, spruce, and birch trees. They followed the canyon wall along the icy stream through thickets of alder and willow. Some days, Goodman, who was an expert tracker and hunter, left camp to roam the hills above, looking for mountain sheep and other game.

Tlingit fishermen sold ten-pound salmon and three-pound trout to the Stampeders for twenty-five cents a fish. Men with



Klondikers packing supplies on the Chilkoot Trail near Sheep Camp

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, La Roche 10042)



horses and mules passed Jack as he panted like a dog on the trail. Jack lifted his aching and sweat-stained eyes to see the pack-horses suffering because the men hadn't cinched their loads on tight enough. The much-too-heavy loads were balanced unevenly on wet blankets, and the beasts suffered sore backs. Jack winced when he heard the horses groan under their huge packs as they went by him on the crowded trail. Sloper bumped into him, but Jack held his tongue.

Some of the cheechakos were able to hire native packers to help get their gear to the summit thirteen miles ahead. During this early part of the gold rush, these porters charged only eight cents a pound to pack goods, but a year later, the cost would soar to fifty cents per pound and even up to a dollar per pound for taking an outfit over the top.

Jack had no money to hire porters or buy horses. His first loads of food and equipment were sixty pounds. Shepard could barely carry forty pounds. As young Jack grew stronger and got the hang of it, he discovered the key to climbing was to make short spurts and to pace himself. He learned the native people's tump strap method of carrying heavy loads, using one long strap, wide at the center for shifting the load to his forehead and chest. The ends of the strap held the pack against his shoulder blades,

centering on the spine and leaving his hands free to carry a gun or an ax. Crossing dangerous streams this way kept Jack and his partners from drowning. If Jack were to fall into the water, he would still be able to move his arms so as not to get dragged down by the heavy load on his back.

The Dyea River and all the other mountain streams grew swift and treacherous. The frigid water rushed over slick boulders. Sometimes Jack saw moss-slimy logs lashed together floating downstream, all that remained when men with huge packs lashed to their backs had lost their balance on these logs and toppled into the freezing water. The unlucky ones who could not break free drowned.



A FEW MONTHS after Jack made the trek, in February 1898, the North-West Mounted Police of Canada, known as the Mounties, began requiring Stampeders to carry a year's supply of food with them because the Mounties were concerned about starvation in the Yukon. It was their job to keep the Stampeders safe. In addition to food, people had to take equipment such as tents, clothing, stoves, and pots and pans. This could work out to be around two thousand pounds per person. But the important thing for the Canadian Mounties wasn't the weight of the outfits (the professional packers were the ones who were keen to weigh packs in order to charge accordingly), it was the amount of food that each Stampeders took. Checking Stampeders' supplies allowed the police to keep out anyone who might starve. They could also cut

out the riffraff who lived off the proceeds of crime—people who rarely packed more than a deck of cards, dice, and maybe a pistol.

SUPPLIES FOR ONE MAN FOR ONE YEAR

The list below, taken from *The Klondike Stampede* by Tappan Adney, shows suggested equipment prospectors should gather before seeking entry into Canada at the summit of the Chilkoot Pass between 1897 and 1899.

Total weight: 1 ton.

8 sacks Flour (50 lbs. each).	1 gal. Vinegar.
150 lbs. Bacon.	1 box Candles.
150 lbs. Split Pease.	25 lbs. Evaporated
100 lbs. Beans.	Potatoes.
25 lbs. Evaporated Apples.	25 lbs. Rice.
25 lbs. Evaporated Peaches.	25 Canvas Sacks.
25 lbs. Apricots.	1 Wash-Basin.
25 lbs. Butter.	1 Medicine-Chest.
100 lbs. Granulated Sugar.	1 Rubber Sheet.
1½ doz. Condensed Milk.	1 set Pack-Straps.
15 lbs. Coffee.	1 Pick.
10 lbs. Tea.	1 Handle.
1 lb. Pepper	1 Drift-Pick.
10 lbs. Salt.	1 Handle
8 lbs. Baking Powder.	1 Shovel.
40 lbs. Rolled Oats.	1 Gold-Pan.
2 doz. Yeast Cakes	1 Axe.
½ doz. 4-oz. Beef Extract.	1 Whip-Saw
5 bars Castile Soap.	1 Hand-Saw.
6 bars Tar Soap.	1 Jack-Plane.
1 tin Matches.	1 Brace.

4 Bits, assorted, $\frac{3}{16}$ to 1 in.	10 lbs. Oakum.
1 8-in. Mill File.	10 lbs. Pitch.
1 6-in. Mill File.	5 lbs. 4" Nails.
1 Broad Hatchet.	5 lbs. 3" Nails.
1 2qt. Galvanized Coffee-Pot.	6 lbs. 2" Nails.
1 Fry-Pan.	200 feet $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. Rope.
1 Package Rivets.	1 Single Block.
1 Draw-Knife.	1 Solder Outfit.
3 Covered Pails, 4, 6, and 8 qt., Granite.	1 14-qt. Galvanized Pail.
1 Pie-Plate.	1 Granite Saucepan.
1 Knife and Fork.	3 lbs. Candlewick.
1 Granite Cup.	1 Compass.
1 each Tea and Table Spoon.	1 Miner's Candlestick.
1 14-in. Granite Spoon.	6 Towels.
1 Tape-Measure.	1 Axe-Handle.
1 1½-in. Chisel.	1 Axe-Stone.
	1 Emery-Stone.
	1 Sheet-Iron Stove.
	1 Tent.

Just a handful of miles from the beginning of the trail, Jack looked around him. The surrounding woods seemed lifeless except for the loud croaks of ravens in the foreboding gloom. When he listened carefully, he could hear the small chirps of sparrows. He also made out the sound of gunshots on the distant mountain peaks where fellow prospectors like Goodman hunted mountain goats for food and sometimes stumbled onto grizzly bears.

OYSTER PIRATE AND SAILOR

JACK NOW TRUDGED UPWARD through constant rain. Progress forward in the lower canyon grew torturous. Some days were unbearably wet; some were just hot. Day after day, the group hauled their goods in spurts. The terrain steepened. Jack's partners passed by each other endlessly and in silence. Jack's legs ached like never before, yet he had to keep going back down the trail to get more gear and haul it up.

The journey to the summit of the Chilkoot is sixteen and a half miles from the coast, covering an elevation rise of 3,525 feet. What starts out as a fairly gentle climb through a forested canyon turns into a nightmare climb the last half mile, with five hundred practically vertical feet to the summit.

Beyond the Chilkoot summit, it would be another ten-mile slog to the shore of Lake Lindeman, where Jack and his partners would need to chop down trees and build a boat big enough to carry themselves and all their gear 550 miles down the Yukon River to Dawson City.

But Jack couldn't think that far ahead. He devoted every ounce of aching muscle just to getting the next hundred-pound load a mile up this trail.

During some of those early days on the trail, Jack was in



Stampedeurs on the Chilkoot Trail approach the summit.

(Yukon Archives, James Albert Johnson fonds, 86/15, #3)

great pain. After a week, he'd lost weight and his face grew lean. At times he plodded forward, but when he went back "light" to get another load, his feet dragged. Like other Stampedeurs at day's end, he could easily have fallen asleep over his food if it weren't for the excruciating cramps in his legs.

Jack took heavier and heavier loads. But even at one hundred pounds a load, to tote eight hundred pounds only two miles required hiking a total of thirty miles, there and back. Sometime after eleven trips, he had only managed to move his and Shepard's outfits a mere mile.

On the trail, Jack had a lot of time to run numbers over and over in his head. He figured that in order to cover the entire Chilkoot, it would require a man to walk a total of five hundred miles, and half of that uphill.

In spite of this gargantuan task, Jack grew confident, cocky, as he got stronger. He even challenged some of the native porters, claiming he could now carry one hundred and fifty pounds of gear at a time. And he did it, too.

But where did young Jack get all that confidence?

When he was fifteen, he had borrowed three hundred dollars to buy a small sloop called the *Razzle-Dazzle*. He loved the freedom of sailing in San Francisco Bay, and he dreamed of adventures crossing oceans, anything to escape the life of the “work beast,” holding down all those menial jobs to earn enough to help his family survive.

With his new boat, and inspired by some tough Oakland wharf companions, he decided to become an oyster pirate and raid the commercial oyster beds for profit. It was dangerous work done under the cover of night. Armed guards patrolled the oyster beds—getting caught would mean prison time. To dash in and out with the oysters, Jack had to use all his sailing skills. He loved the work and thrilled at the challenge.

When other boys his age were studying for college, Jack lived a restless, nomadic life. He spent less time reading books and made more money in a week selling stolen oysters than he ever could earn in a year of working in a factory.

None of the “pirates” was more daring and successful than

Jack London. Soon his cronies called him the “Prince of the Oyster Pirates.” Jack’s confidence in himself grew. A regular at a bar on the Oakland waterfront called the First and Last Chance Saloon, Jack hung about with seamen. He was a good fighter, an excellent sailor, and a famous drinker.

About this time, even Jack started to worry about his drinking habits. Still only in his late teens, he knew his days might be numbered if he kept drinking so much in the saloons. One day, staggering drunk, he plunged into the bay and nearly drowned as the riptide tugged him toward the open sea. After four hours floating in the icy water, he was plucked out by a Greek fisherman.

Jack decided he must control his drinking. He wanted bigger things for himself. He wanted to explore the world beyond Oakland—he craved romance and adventure.

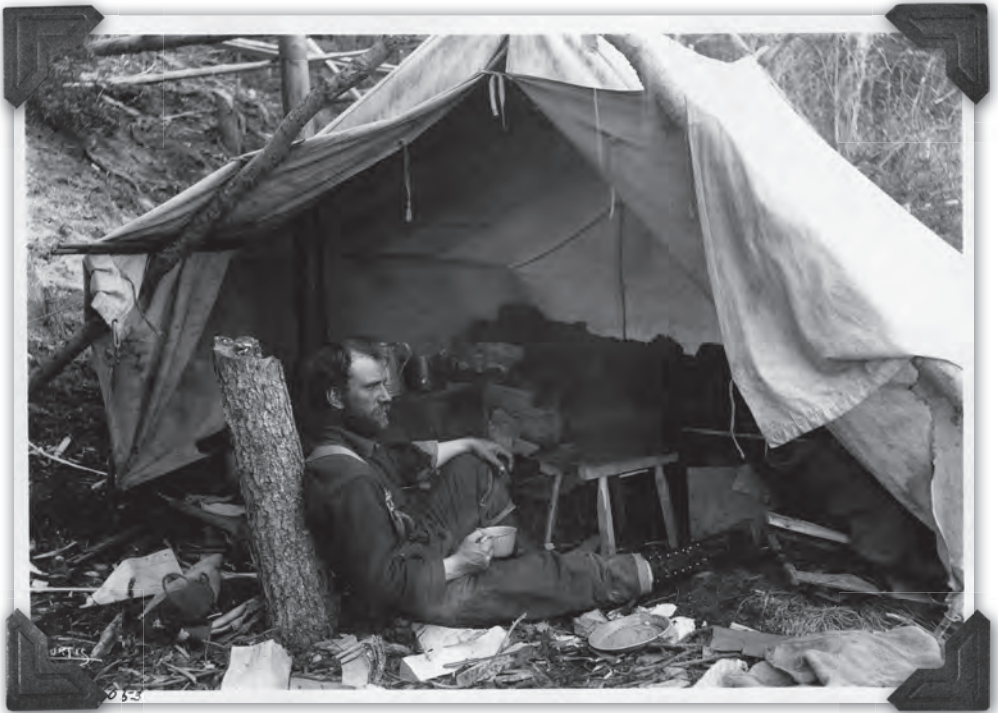
Having never tried deep-sea sailing, Jack trained himself to sail small boats in all kinds of weather and began to hang out with deep-sea sailors from the sealing fleet wintering in the bay. He soon signed on as boat-puller for the next cruise of the three-masted schooner *Sophia Sutherland*, heading to the coast of Japan and the Bering Sea to hunt seals.

Now, four years after that deep-sea experience, Jack’s wild spirit and hunger for adventure drove him up the fabled Chilkoot Trail. For days, Captain Shepard tried bravely to keep up with the younger men as the climb steepened, but every joint ached from arthritis. Finally, on one of the hottest days so far, the sixty-year-old confessed he couldn’t continue another step. He was in too much pain and knew he’d only hinder Jack and the others. So he decided to turn back. Inside, he felt crushed. All

the money and effort it took to get to the Klondike suddenly seemed wasted. He hugged Jack and shook hands with the others, and walked slowly down the trail from where they'd come.

Sloper, Thompson, and Goodman were deeply relieved when Shepard chose to go back to California. Someone said under his breath, "Finally," as Jack watched his brother-in-law disappear down the trail, a great relief for him, too.

They all turned, put the next loads of gear on their backs, and slogged up the endless trail toward Sheep Camp, the site of a large encampment of Stampeders who were organizing and resting before the final push over the summit.



Resting on the trail

(Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, shs16668)

DEAD HORSES

THE NARROW TRAIL in the hot August rain was choked with horses and mules panting and pulling freight through muck and drizzle as the climb grew even steeper. Stampeders pitched their tents haphazardly along the trail, everyone and everything the color of mud.

In the silence of concentrated hard work, Jack passed group after group of ragtag miners. Like Jack, none had bathed in weeks. Back then, no one took showers and baths the way we do today. Maybe in a hotel, maybe onboard a steamer, but certainly not on a trail. And everyone got used to the pungent smell of their companions.

With so many people passing over the same trail, it also became harder and harder to find uncontaminated water. Some people used toilet paper and buried their waste. There were out-houses at some of the bigger camps, but the usual way of going to the bathroom meant finding some bush or tree just off the trail and using leaves or water from a stream or snow to clean themselves.

Although some Stampeders carried guns on their belts, Jack didn't feel any sense of danger as he hiked. Everyone on the Chilkoot was driven by one goal alone—to get to Dawson before freeze-up and start mining for the yellow metal.

The horses paid the biggest price as they approached Sheep Camp. Their legs were cut and bruised from the rocks, and they'd

grown as thin as snakes, starving as they climbed higher, where the vegetation faded away.

At night when Jack camped, he cooked pork and beans, baked bread in a frying pan, washed the dishes, then cut shavings and kindling for a breakfast fire before falling dead asleep in his bedroll, listening to the constant chatter of Thompson. Sometimes during dinner Sloper sharpened his knife, Jack his ax. One of them might mend pack straps, preparing for another day of agonizing work ahead. Big Jim Goodman, after roaming the hills with his gun, knocked out his pipe and pulled off his shoes for bed.

When Jack had a little energy at the end of the day, he'd strike up a conversation with a fellow countryman or a few foreigners who had come from as far away as Norway and Germany to strike it rich. He was very social, and he loved to share camp stories with strangers.

Jack would ask a ton of questions to everyone he met. He genuinely liked people, from hobos to sailors. Here, too, he enjoyed



listening to the tales told by Stampeders, even when they were tall tales told by veteran miners returning from the Klondike who tried to scare the newcomers.

One night, a man camping nearby, who was just back from Dawson, talked over the fire about Bonanza Creek, where men were finding gold everywhere. The prospector had nuggets in his pockets the size of walnuts. He said, "You can just reach into the stream and grab these things." He pulled out a nugget and rolled it around the palm of his dirty hand. The light from Jack's fire twinkled off the shiny gold material like a dream come true.

This gold, the old miner said, was everywhere in those streams, and deep in the earth, too. Stories like his fed Jack's fever for gold and kept him from sleeping that night, even though he was plumb exhausted.

Next day, Jack and his partners found new energy to lug their outfits over the trail again. Especially garrulous Thompson. But tensions were running high even among friends. The stress of the trek pushed many to their breaking points. Miners began to curse each other. Sloper and Goodman got into it, but Jack kept them from fighting. They squabbled over who should cook and who should carry that day. Thompson said he'd much rather carry a pack and that most of the cooking had fallen to him, which made him very grumpy.

They heard the story about two men along the trail who got into a terrible fight and decided to go their separate ways. They had divided their gear in a ridiculous fashion. First, they cut their one and only tent into equal halves; then one of them took the stock of their only rifle while the other took the barrel. Each of

them was sure he'd outwitted the other. Under the strain of the trail, some cheechakos had already started to go mad.

Yet in spite of the tensions, Jack felt a great sense of unity among his partners and among the Stampeders as a whole. What bound them like brothers was the hard work and the general fear of the last leg of the upward climb; everyone chatted constantly about the infamous Chilkoot summit ahead.

After Shepard left, Jack took on a new partner, a feisty sixty-six-year-old veteran prospector from Santa Rosa, California, named Martin Tarwater. He traveled light and didn't add to the group's gear. And he said he was good at repairing shoes and boots.

Tarwater made his case to be brought into the group: "I got a proposition, boys. You can take it or leave it, but just listen kindly to it. You're in a hurry to get in before freeze-up. Half the time is wasted over the cooking by one of you that he might be puttin' in packin' an outfit. If I do the cookin' for you, you all'll be better, and that'll make you pack better. And I can pack quite a bit myself in between times, quite a bit, yes, quite a bit." They looked at the wiry old buzzard and figured he wasn't lying, so they voted him in.

Tarwater's cooking skills were complemented by his energy for cleaning and hunting for dry wood. He freed up the other four to conduct the endless task of packing their gear up the trail. Thompson couldn't have been happier.

Jack's constant back-and-forth, miles and miles, only to move all his gear forward by a mere mile or two, felt like being in prison; at this rate he'd never make it to Dawson before winter. There was no escape from the toil. Yet he sweated and struggled



Pack trains on the Chilkoot Trail, which has been blocked by a fallen horse, 1897
(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, La Roche 2030)

on, every muscle and tendon inflamed when he crawled into his bedroll for a few hours of sleep. The campfires had turned his clothes to smoke rags, and he could fall asleep instantly no matter how much Thompson would chatter on.

As Jack moved closer to Sheep Camp, he smelled an even more pungent odor than the unwashed men—the rotting flesh of dead horses. He was again appalled by the way many treated their animals, as his writing about the White Pass (also known as the Dead Horse Trail) shows:

From Skaguay to Bennett they rotted in heaps. They died at the Rocks, they were poisoned at the Summit, and they starved at the Lakes; they fell off the trail, what there was of it, and they

went through it; in the river they drowned under their loads, or were smashed to pieces against the boulders; they snapped their legs in the crevices and broke their backs falling backwards with their packs; in the sloughs they sank from sight or smothered in the slime, and they were disembowelled . . . men shot them, worked them to death, and when they were gone, went back to the beach and bought more. Some did not bother to shoot them—stripping the saddles off and the shoes and leaving them where they fell. Their hearts turned to stone—those which did not break—and they became beasts, the men on the Dead Horse Trail.

Some Chilkoot outfitters turned their horses loose when the trail got too steep for the weak ones to climb farther. Without anything to eat, the pitiful beasts hobbled through camp, tumbling over the guy wires of tents and rummaging through empty boxes for food. It broke Jack's heart to see them. So many horses starved near Sheep Camp.

SHEEP CAMP

THREE MILES FROM the summit, Sheep Camp was the last place for firewood and tent poles. The gorge they had followed for days opened into a broad valley. Jack's eyes panned across the chaos of tents and piles of goods sprawled

over the open notch in the mountain. The swift river, maybe sixteen feet wide, poured through camp. Here were crowded saloon tents and a twenty-by-forty-foot wood structure with a sign out front that said HOTEL. It was one large room where scores of men flopped on the floor like dead fish to sleep at night.

Jack heard the crack of a rifle and saw a man putting his horse out of its misery rather than letting it die slowly of starvation. One man sat crying softly beside the trail that led into the camp. He'd lost all his gear over a cliff. Some had turned tents into stores and were trying to sell their supplies before heading home.

On a trail where hard-working men learned for the first time what work was . . . Driven desperately on by the near-thrust of winter, and lured madly on by the dream of gold, they worked to their last ounce of strength and fell by the way. Others, when failure made certain, blew out their brains. Some went mad, and still others, under the irk of the man-destroying strain, broke partnerships and dissolved life-time friendships with fellows just as good as themselves and just as strained and mad.

At Sheep Camp, Sloper, Goodman, Tarwater, Thompson, and Jack stood among bearded men for a photograph. The picture shows just how young Jack was on his Klondike adventure; he was by far the shortest and youngest-looking of the shabby Stampeders. He had a sensitive face and the eyes of a dreamer, yet those were also the fierce eyes of a man who would find his gold somehow.



In this photo at Sheep Camp from August 1897, Jack London is believed to be the shortest and youngest-looking man (see detail, second man from left).

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, La Roche 2033)

The hardier Stampeders plodded on like oxen. Jack confronted the challenge of the Chilkoot head-on, just as he had done in every pursuit in his life. As he gladly left Sheep Camp, he skirted huge boulders blocking the trail and recalled the long, tedious hours shoveling coal to make money for his family back

home. The memory injected new vigor into his movements. He threw another big load onto his back and trudged a short distance before dropping the pack and returning for more.

On August 23, in the rain and mud, three weeks after leaving Dyea, Jack and his partners camped in a less crowded spot above Sheep Camp. Tarwater whistled as he mended everyone's shoes.

Some days were warm and rainy; others were raw cold and rainy, though at any moment the shifting weather could blow snow and ice. Blizzard conditions were common. And now that they had climbed above the tree line, nighttime temperatures dipped well below freezing. Occasionally, if he could build a fire with wood carried from below, Tarwater managed to cook mush, fried bacon, hot rolls, and coffee for breakfast. Stiff and sleepless, the others woke to the old man's good cheer and constant humming. Most days, breakfast was scant for lack of fuel, but Jack approached the snowline with a light heart.



A FEW WEEKS LATER, the Dyea River would swell into a wall of water that flooded Sheep Camp, picking up miners' outfits like toys and dashing supplies helter-skelter down the valley. This was caused by the collapse of a glacier dam that sent tons of water, rocks, and other debris down the steep mountainside and into the valley above the camp. At least one man died. Many Stampeders would take this as another sign to pack it in and return home.

In the three miles between Sheep Camp and the Scales (where gear was weighed before being taken over the summit into Canada), Jack, Tarwater, Goodman, Sloper, and Thompson

climbed past another part of the trail, where, the following April, an avalanche would kill seventy miners in one of the worst disasters of the Stampede.

Native packers wisely refused to work in heavy, deep spring-time snow, which the warm southern winds could make unstable. They knew the dangers of attempting to climb the Chilkoot in these conditions. But on April 3, 1898, a group of miners from the flat states of the Midwest were camping at the Scales when an avalanche hit them in the early morning. Some retreated downslope to Sheep Camp, only to be hit by at least two more blasts of snow, back-to-back. A massive wall of white death crashed down the slope, burying scores of men under fifty feet of snow.



Volunteers search for bodies after the Chilkoot avalanche of April 3, 1898.

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Hegg 202)

After a short, eerie silence, gunshots rang through the valley. Fifteen hundred Stampeders stopped their treks in order to help save people from the avalanche. As the victims lay buried in snow, rescuers hurried to dig them out, hoping to find some still alive. Legend says one woman looked feverishly for her man and found him lying with the dead. She refused to believe he'd departed. She threw herself on her lover, rubbed his chest for hours, and breathed air into his lungs, until, in a miracle of love, he opened his eyes and called her name. She was known as the Lady of the Chilkoot. (A variant of this story is that her "lover" didn't recognize her and had no idea who she was!)

Many of the dead from the avalanche were carried back to Dyea and buried in a small graveyard. Some of the bodies were shipped on steamers home to family.

TARWATER

WHEN JACK AND HIS PARTNERS replaced Shepard with Tarwater, they had no idea what a wonderful asset the old man would be. But he soon proved indispensable. Jack captured this remarkable character in his writing:

Tarwater became a striking figure on a trail unusually replete with striking figures. With thousands of men, each back-tripping half a

ton of outfit, retracing every mile of the trail twenty times, all came to know him and to hail him as “Father Christmas.” And, as he worked, ever he raised his chant with his age-falsetto voice. None of the . . . men he had joined could complain about his work. True, his joints were stiff. . . . He moved slowly, and seemed to creak and crackle when he moved; but he kept on moving. Last into the blankets at night, he was first out in the morning . . . and, between breakfast and dinner and between dinner and supper, he always managed to back-trip for several packs himself. Sixty pounds was the limit of his burden, however. He could manage seventy-five, but he could not keep it up. Once, he tried ninety, but collapsed on the trail and was seriously shaky for a couple of days afterward. . . .

Work! Old Tarwater could shame them all, despite his creaking and crackling and the nasty hacking cough he had developed. Early and late, on trail or in camp beside the trail, he was ever in evidence, ever busy at something, ever responsive to the hail of “Father Christmas.” Weary back-trippers would rest their packs on a log or rock alongside of where he rested his, and would say: “Sing us that song of yourn, dad, about Forty-Nine.” And, when he had wheezingly complied, they would arise under their loads, remark that it was real heartening, and hit the forward trail again.

One late afternoon when the men rested beneath a boulder, with Tarwater already up ahead making dinner, Big Jim Goodman said as he smoked his pipe, “Tarwater sure earned his passage with us, didn’t he?”

Sloper agreed and said he should become a full partner.

Thompson quickly said, “NO way. The deal is that when we reach Dawson, he’s on his own.”

Jack listened but kept quiet. He was thinking how glad he was to have this ever-upbeat and feisty old man along instead of his arthritic and complaining brother-in-law.

THE SCALES

ON AUGUST 27, JACK finally lugged his outfit above three thousand feet, where the shrubs of the subalpine zone, caressed by swirling clouds, looked more like animal apparitions to the minds of exhausted men. No trees or shelter, only the stacks and stacks of provisions the miners would carry in hundreds of loads on the last terrible leg up and over the summit.

The Scales was indeed a pitiful place, full of crazed men in a cul-de-sac at the foot of a rock wall. Yet in all that gray, Jack noticed the unexpected dots of color where men had thrown bright blankets on the boulders to dry.

The scene above the Scales sent terror through Stampeder blood. It was a sheer wall of mountain with a tiny, thin line of humans leading straight upward. On August 28, 1897, Jack and his partners finally joined that long string of Stampedeers pushing for the top. Everywhere along the trail could be spotted discarded gear: bits of worn-out boots and tin cans, and even

crates and bags of flour, left there by men who had panicked at the sight of that last push to the summit.



These photos give an idea of what the majority of Stampeders went through as they left the Scales and headed up the last steep climb to the summit. Although Jack faced bad weather at the top, since he arrived here in late August, he would have seen less snow and a lot more rock.

(Library of Congress LC-USZ62-41760 & LCUSZ62-41761)



Out of the corners of his eyes, Jack saw remnants of glaciers. At times, he had to crawl on hands and knees from boulder to boulder, where stubborn mosses and hardy lichens thrived. An occasional alpine flower grew out of a crag near the site where Jack and his partners set up camp. When it got too dark to climb, the group dropped their blankets on the cold, stony ground and fell into dead-man sleep. Icy water ran everywhere in the rocks below their blankets. The wind howled like the voices of ghouls.

In the morning, Jack dragged his body off the hostile rocks to climb back up to the summit with another hundred-pound load. Hand over hand, pulling to the summit, Jack clenched and unclenched his fingers to keep them from cramping. He blew warm air through his fists.

Up that relentless face of broken rock fragments, he clawed his way out of the last of the dwarfed shrubs below and joined once more the twisting line of men, a long string of leaf-cutter ants marching up and over the crest, where they seemed to vanish.

Suddenly, Jack had to shake his head in disbelief. Someone near him was carrying a sled dog over his shoulders up the trail to the summit! It was just one of many crazy ideas of the Stampeders. Others brought large iron stoves. Someone said that the grand piano at the Palace Grand Theatre in Dawson had also been carried over the pass.

In another few months, unfazed by winter, the Stampeders would still be clawing and inching their way over the ice. On this final ascent, enterprising Stampeders would chop 1,500 crude stairs into the hard-packed snow for easier climbing, then charge a fee to use what came to be known as the Golden Stairs.



If you left the line leading to the summit, you were out of luck.

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Hegg 97)

Jack's problems in August were mud and constant cold rain. His boots slogged heavily with something like liquid ice.

In that desperate line of men scrambling up the last five hundred feet of elevation, while his own load cut deep into his flesh, Jack saw some lose their toeholds and move to the side of the trail. In a few weeks, when it would be covered in snow, men would slide all the way back down and have to join the line again—if someone was kind enough to let them in.

After countless trips back and forth, battered and utterly out of breath, Jack finally reached the summit one last time. He



dropped his load and stepped out of the snaking line of ever-moving men.

He stood motionless at the top. He turned and looked down at the laboring miners gasping for air, lugging their stoves and crates and sleds and tents and beans and rice and beer and whiskey and boards and sometimes even their animals up the ridiculously steep face.

For a moment, Jack felt part of something bigger than just greed for gold. He lifted his eyes from the trail below him and gazed out through the gloomy mist that had settled over the coastal mountain chain.

He'd left California on July 25, and it was now the last day of August. He'd been on the journey for a month, and he knew he had perhaps two months more travel to reach Dawson (he figured he'd be lucky to get there sometime in October). He felt good that he'd made it this far, all the way to the summit, when so many had turned back. He had hauled thousands of pounds of gear in small but heavier and heavier loads. He'd grown stronger than he'd ever been in his life, even more than in the days when he'd shoveled coal for ten hours at a stretch to help support his family.

He was only twenty-one. The gold was waiting. The adventure stretched out before him. But something deeply troubled him.

He looked down at the rocky and shrubby land enshrouded in mist, and had time to think of his father—not John London, the man he had always thought was his father—but another man with whom he had exchanged letters just before leaving California.

In fact, it was only the month before Jack headed north that he learned the truth about his real father.



FOR A BRIEF TIME, Jack's mom had lived with a man named William Henry Chaney, a cranky but avid astrologer, distinguished orator and lecturer, a traveling lawyer, editor, and preacher. In many ways, Jack was a lot like him—highly intelligent. Both of Jack's parents were eccentric freethinkers. They were similar to each other in many ways, but they could not get along. So by the time Jack was born John Griffith Chaney on January 12, 1876, in San Francisco, his father, William Henry Chaney, had already jumped ship.

Jack had a complicated and emotional mother. Flora Wellman was prone to depression and rages. She made money as a seamstress and piano teacher; she was always scheming to get rich. She also believed in spirits and conducted séances in their home (Jack was embarrassed by this when his classmates came over to the house).

Eight months after Jack was born, an older man named John London, who was living in Flora's rooming house, married Flora and gave her son his surname. John London was a carpenter and small-time farmer, and also a Civil War veteran who needed a wife to help raise his two daughters by a previous marriage.

He was a kind and gentle man, a stable influence in the family, and a good farmer. Jack had done thousands of chores on John London's small farms. Scraping for cash, John tried his hand at carpentry and selling sewing machines door-to-door, but

he did best growing potatoes, corn, grapes, fruit, and olives. He raised chickens and kept bees.

Jack loved the man. Mostly he liked to listen to John London's adventure tales from his younger days, when he worked as a scout and Indian fighter, or so he said. John, in turn, had great faith in Jack. When Jack was madly preparing to depart for the Klondike, his parents weren't at all opposed to the upcoming adventure. John London thrilled to the idea. If he weren't seventy years old, he said, and prone to sickness (weak lungs and broken ribs), he, too, would go to the Klondike with Jack. Maybe even get healthy in that clean, crisp Yukon air! And he fully believed Jack would come home from the gold fields triumphant. "He'll come out all right, you watch his smoke, and come out big, mark my words. . . . Jack is going to make a success out of the Klondike—whether he digs it out of the grassroots or not."

Jack hated to leave John London behind, fearing—correctly—that he might never see him again. John died while Jack was in the Klondike.



THE WIND WAS STRENGTHENING at the summit. Jack felt winter closing in. Flakes of snow stung his face. An icy fog rolled down out of the gray sky with a brutal rain that kept alternating with snow.

Jack leaned over to pick up another hundred-and-fifty-pound load. He drew the strap around his forehead, adjusted the pack over the center of his spine, and turned toward the lakes, the river, and the gold in the creeks that was waiting for him.

DOWN TO LINDEMAN

NEARLY A MONTH into his hike, Jack's clothes hung on his thin frame like laundry on a stick. He'd had to tighten his belt a few times. Even so, he had become one of the strongest non-native packers over the 33-mile Chilkoot from Dyea to Lake Bennett. Although his partners had had money to hire packers to help them with that last haul to the summit, Jack had grunted his way up and over with his own gear.

He now walked on the muddy, tea-colored trail under hanging glaciers. In camp at night, he looked into the open sky above the mountains, where the iridescent reds and greens of the northern lights, the aurora borealis, swirled above him. He felt bewitched by so much silent movement of color and light, by the mute but spectacular fireworks in the night sky.

Today's hikers along the Chilkoot Trail find objects the Stampeders left behind more than a century ago.

(Photo: Peter Lourie)





Boots wore out in days and were cast away.

(Photo: Peter Lourie)

The next day, he and his partners passed hundreds of empty tins of canned food, evaporated milk, and beans, as well as broken beer bottles and discarded scraps of metal. He saw bits of new rubber boots already worn out by Stampedeers toiling over such rocky ground.

Big Jim Goodman, Merritt Sloper, Fred Thompson, Tarwater, and Jack finally reached a place called Happy Camp, happy because the Stampedeers were on the downhill slope past a series of pristine alpine lakes with names such as Crater Lake, Long Lake, and Deep Lake. Happy, too, because after the barren summit of the pass, the Stampedeers were coming again to the tree line, where they would more easily be able to build fires to warm

themselves (one Stampedeer mentioned it cost him \$5 for the wood to build a fire above the tree line: Since \$1 then is worth about \$28 now, that's \$140 in today's money).

The clouds lifted off the glacier above, and the sun blasted down on the men. The frigid lakes mirrored the blue sky and ice-clad peaks. Jack could smell the coffee brewing over hundreds of campfires, and his spirits soared.



Deep Lake, one of the Alpine lakes just past the summit of the Chilkoot

(Photo: Peter Lourie)

In the morning after a night rain, Jack and his partners squeezed the water out of their itchy wool clothes only to put them back on. They passed through increasingly wooded country. “Scarcely could it be called timber, for it was a dwarf rock-spruce that never raised its loftiest branches higher than a foot above the moss, and that twisted and groveled like a pig-vegetable.”



JACK HAD PLENTY OF TIME during the journey to roll over in his mind all he'd accomplished. In twenty-one years, he'd

worked more jobs and had traveled and seen more of the world

than many experience in a

lifetime. But one of his

happiest memories was

of meeting a librarian

who had changed his

life when he was only

ten years old. In the

Oakland Public Li-

brary, Ina Coolbrith, a

poet and magazine editor,

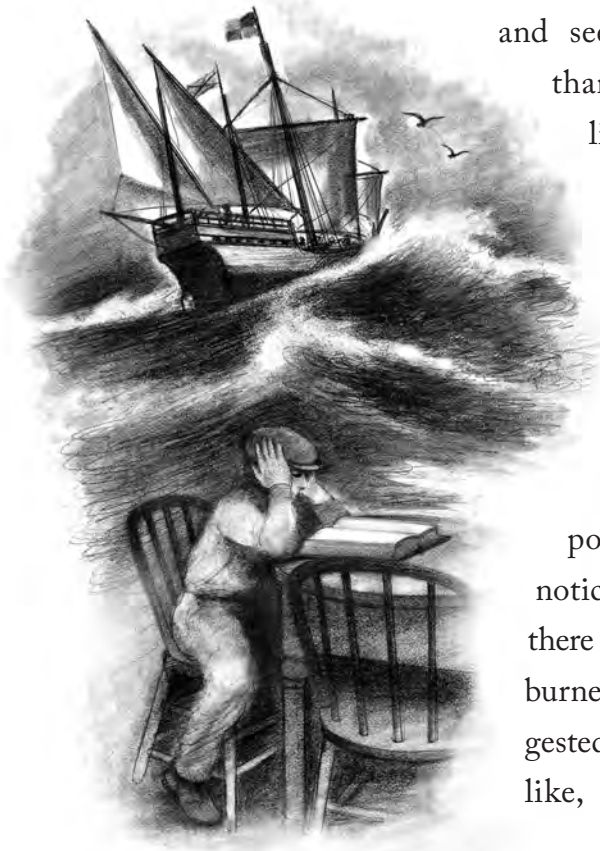
noticed the young lad sitting

there for hours until his eyes

burned. One day she sug-

gested a few books he might

like, and from then on, Ina



became Jack's literary coach, making lists of books that he consumed at two per week.

Jack's reading expanded to all kinds of subjects. He found escape and romance in literature, and he was able to roam the world in fiction and nonfiction. He read morning, noon, and night, even though he had chores at home and needed to work long hours at hard jobs. He took out library cards in every family member's name so he could check out more books. His best friend, Frank Atherton, called him an extremist, because whatever Jack London set out to do, he did it to the limit. When he played games and competed with other kids in school, he had to be a winner. Reading was no different. He was driven to excel. Winning was always Jack London's goal; he wanted to be the best reader ever.

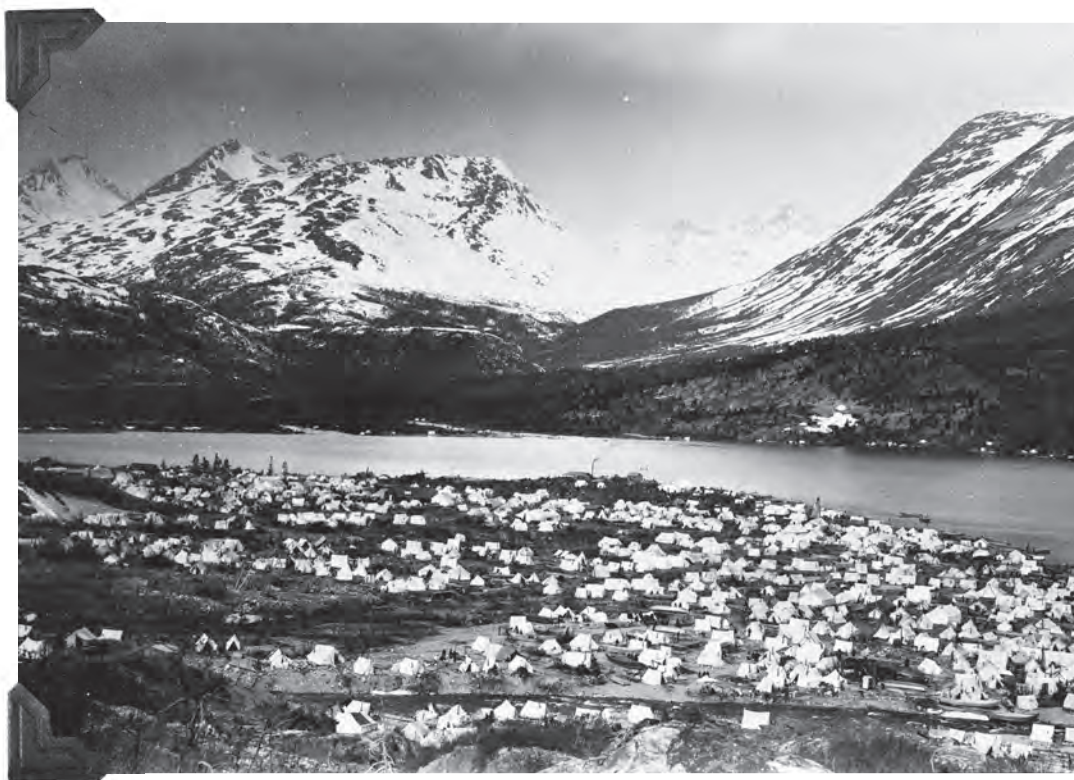


AT HAPPY CAMP, the sun disappeared quickly. Occasional snow flurries and driving cold rain slowed Jack as he moved all his gear downhill. A man just back from Lake Lindeman told Jack and his partners there were no more trees left and all boat building had stopped. *Liars*, Jack thought as he quickly loaded three fifty-pound sacks of rice on his back and picked up his pace. From Happy Camp down to Lindeman, it was a man-killing race against winter. Jack later said, "Men broke their hearts and backs and wept beside the trail in sheer exhaustion. But winter never faltered. The fall gales blew." Snow flurries increased, and the last three miles to the lake took twenty-four miles of hiking, twelve of those under the weight of a full load.

On September 8, 1897, nearly paralyzed with exhaustion, Jack and his partners piled their outfits on the beach at Lake Lindeman. They made camp among a hundred and fifty tents of all shapes and sizes—army tents, pup tents, saloon tents.

Lindeman was a small tent city of mad boatbuilders.

After Tarwater's hearty meal of bacon and beans, Jack, Goodman, Thompson, Tarwater, and Sloper went to sleep instantly, beaten down but not taken out of the game just yet. The days were shortening fast. The wind shifted into the north



Lake Lindeman during the Gold Rush

(University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW 26992)

and screamed off the lake, nearly ripping their tent from its stakes. Tarwater was jerking around in his bedroll, his legs running in his sleep. Goodman dreamed of hunting bear, and when Jack woke to stumble out into the night and pee, he remembered the typhoon in Japan and smiled.

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Here's your first clue:

Jack London and the Klondike Gold Rush

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adventurebiographies.com

There, you'll find all sorts of goodies
like extra material from the
appendix, current articles, teacher
resources, and more!

Cheers,
Pete Lourié