



"While his six-horse team snorted in terror, Al signed the death warrant of the Cariboo as a coachroad."

And so The Great North Road Was Born

By SYDNEY SCOTT

EXACTLY thirty years ago this month the Great North Road was born.

It came into being, unsung by the world, in the green timber between Lac La Hache and 150-Mile, on the old Cariboo Road, and its first "bottle" was a case of lamp gas. On a similar diet through the years it has become a slightly crooked giant, with feet anchored in Vancouver, head in the Arctic and arms outstretched towards the Pacific at Prince Rupert, and towards the prairies at Edmonton — the most spectacular tourist highway in the world.

The act which gave birth to the new artery was the meeting of Al Young, "toughest stage driver on the Cariboo," with the brass-bound "gas wagon" sent by the Guggenheims to the Bullion mine, on June 16, 1907. While his six-horse team snorted in terror at the Peerless car half-hidden in the side brush, Al passed over the precious fuel which was to keep it going, and so, symbolically, signed the death warrant of the Cariboo as a coach road.

The Guggenheim Peerless was the first car to venture over the Cariboo proper. Before the summer was over "them pesky things" were frightening horses all along the road, and within five years Al Young (whose toughness is a physical, not a moral attribute) and his comrades of the stage-coach were off the road forever.

This birth year is one of five significant dates for the Great North Road.

The second is 1911, that of the famous and remarkable pil-

grimage of the Pathfinder car from Vancouver to Hazelton, during which it travelled nearly 100 miles without touching the ground.

Third is 1924, when an Automobile Club of B. C. reconnoitring party found itself near the top of Jackass Mountain, surveying an imaginary highway to Vancouver.

Fourth is 1930, when Premier Tolmie of British Columbia led his government motorcade into Hazelton, and not only definitely put the Great North Road on the map, but seemed in a fair way towards having it extended to Alaska.

And fifth was that of the time-erasing return cavalcade of the Cariboo to Vancouver last year, when the people of the Great North Road made sure of its place on the map by building a gigantic map to put it on. Their "living map," 50 feet long by 10 feet high, and their parade, reaching back into the most romantic periods of their road, were the chief daily features of the Vancouver Jubilee demonstration. This year the great cyclorama, with its images of the game, the fish, the miners and cowboys, all emblematic

of the bountiful resources of the vast kingdom that produces them, is again in Vancouver, having escaped the fire which destroyed its last year's home.

The story of these expeditions, each an adventure, is worth re-telling. They were all momentous occasions



The Cariboo is still the he-man country it was—a place where cow-punchers do more than play guitars.

for the interior, and indirectly for the coast.

The Guggenheims sent a late sports model direct from New York to Ashcroft to attempt the first penetration of the "wilderness." With it they sent C. B. Perry, general manager of their placer interests in America; the late Prof. Newson, of Leland Stanford University, and J. A. Quick, secretary to Mr. Perry, now superintendent of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, at Squamish. The driver was Harry ("Happy") Fowler.

The party left Ashcroft amid frank sarcasms of jerkline drivers whose ten-horse outfits had



Toboggan Glaciers, seen from highway near Smithers.

clumped whole sections of the road into a morass, axle deep in ruts, completing the devastation of a generation of bull teams.

"Them machines is all right for city pavements," allowed old-timers, "but she'll never make it up them steep pitches."

But she did. "She" reached Clinton on time, and word went along the Yukon telegraph line to watch out for her—she was "big business." The little office at Lac La Hache, 70 miles beyond, sprang into the limelight for the first time in its career. The enterprising operator established a signal service of his own—a line of excited boys stretching along the snake fence lining the roadway. The whole Yukon system from Ashcroft to Dawson listened for word from Lac La Hache.

It did not come until nearly dark, when wild shrieks from the human telegraph line announced that fame, in the rather soiled person of the Guggenheim Peerless car, had reached the village.



Louis LeBourdais, organizer of last summer's Cariboo Cavalcade. Yes, the whiskers are real—an important part of his picturesque show.

But all was not well. The Cariboo, sogged by a week's rain, had done its work; the car had survived the run, but not the gas. "Happy" wasn't sure if there was enough to get it to its destination, even with the bottle of clothes cleaning fluid that a generous housewife had sent, like a message to Garcia, by the outstretched hand of a hard-riding horseman as soon as she was apprised of the situation.

Up and down the telegraph line sped news of the invaders' dilemma, and from 150-Mile House came word that a case of "Queen" gas would be available. Thus came about the historic transfer of the Great North Road's first nourishment.

The miracle of the 100-mile trip by the 1911 pathfinder car in ap-



Lake Kathlyn Mountain and Glacier reflected in Lake Kathlyn at Smithers' B. C.

parent complete defiance of the laws of levitation was performed by Mr. P. E. Sands, of Seattle, and his party. His expedition, which followed one to Mexico, was a sensation acclaimed up and down the coast. It was celebrated by the production in Detroit of a wonderful illuminated booklet, founded, it said, on Sand's log and personal story.

One of the chief sponsors of the drive was that champion of good roads, A. E. Todd, of Victoria. The route was from Seattle via Snoqualmie Pass and Ashcroft.

Sands was awarded the Challoner & Mitchell trophy, a medal of solid gold, as "the man who should first drive a motorcar into Hazelton." Conditions of the contest said nothing about how the car should get there, and in the subsequent banquets at Victoria and elsewhere to mark the triumph, the participants did not go too fully into details.

Actually, they did not drive all the 1281 miles mentioned in these speeches. The reason was quite simple—hardly worth mentioning, in fact, for it wasn't mentioned. It was that for more than 90 miles there wasn't any road. The highway terminated suddenly at about Fraser Lake, and did not resume again until where Topley now stands on the Canadian National's north line—only there wasn't any C. N. R. there then.

The handsome booklet said "before leaving Fraser Lake, Mr. Sands engaged an Indian guide, two axemen and a pack team, to carry supplies of the party, and to work out his directions in preparing a road through the wilderness. For twelve

days the car and its crew were engaged in a battle, the like of which no motor car ever fought before—"

This passage is at least deceptive. For the party certainly didn't build a 90-mile motor road in the five weeks it took them to make that distance. They found it easier to take the car to pieces and mount it on the pack mules or horses. This performance was not considered worth referring to at all. Perhaps it was covered by the repeated

phrase, "We travelled on low gear."

That some trouble was experienced with the pack-mounts is indicated, however, by one reference in the booklet, "On the first day's run the only feasible route led, time and again, along the sides of hills where the car was compelled to run at such an angle that the gasoline slopped out of the venthole in the top of the tank."

And, later, Mr. Sand's log admits, "I can't refrain from taking time to give the car credit for the way it stands up, in spite of the outrageous way we have had to treat it—why there is still a gear or pinion left I do not know."

The hidden meanings in the log, and the booklet founded on it, are tribute to the wit and the imagination of the author. Sands courageously led the procession throughout, apparently pulling the bell-mare of the outfit, loaded with the front axle and the steering gear of his car. The few people who knew the secret kept it, and the expedition made a glorious entry into Hazelton where, at least, according to the log, sixty persons at the welcoming banquet drank seventy-three bottles of champagne before adjourning to the bar.

It was not until settlers, drawn by the fine publicity for the region, resulting from the trip, found that the road ended too soon, and made a protest to Victoria that the facts eventually came out. There is no doubt, however, that Sands' exploit expedited actual completion of the northern section of the Great North Road from Ashcroft through to Hazelton.

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epic finds the late F. G. T. Lucas, then president of the Automobile Club of British Columbia; Stanley Peters, of Vancouver, together with delegations from Kamloops and Lytton, standing on a little cribbing bridge far up Jackass Mountain on the surviving section of old Cariboo road, between Lytton and Yale. They had come from Lytton, and were trying to find out why the "missing link" through the canyons couldn't be built if the government and the people put their minds to it.

Their report and the insistence of the people of Vancouver and the interior brought results. In an engineering feat which was as much of a miracle as the construction of the original coach road, the distance from Hope to Lytton was bridged and the Great North Road was complete. The Royal Engineers and their aides had spent a million dollars, the rebuilding had cost another million and a quarter, and since then another million in labor and materials has been and is being invested in the road.

To make such a vast investment pay, Hon. S. F. Tolmie's government-sponsored "Cavalcade" took the road in 1930. He made it part of an Alaska Highway project, and accompanied as it was by representatives of the press from all the Pacific Coast states, it gave this gradually-developing scheme its greatest impetus.

As a successful advertising venture, however, it was no more ambitious than the return cavalcade of the residents of the road. Organized by Louis LeBourdais, of Quesnel, with G. Earl Malcolm, of Quesnel,

and W. L. Armstrong, of Prince George, president of the Central B. C. Boards of Trade, it brought to Vancouver during that city's Jubilee celebrations all the lure and romance of the old days. Meticulous as to detail, Al Young furbished and drove his six-horse coach, giant George Riviere his ten-horse pack team, the late Frank Hayward his bull team and rumbling covered wagon (without regard for traffic lights), Ben McNeil his double-wagoned jerkline outfit, and Steve Tingley the famous Dufferin coach. Back-packers and a two-man barrow leading the procession showed how far methods of transport had progressed since '58.

And, to add to the verisimilitude, LeBourdais and Malcolm, together with Jack McMahan, of Quesnel, and others, spent five months diligently growing whiskers to fit the period they intended to display.

The whole province from Victoria to Peace River was combed for animals and equipment. There were to have been camels, too, such as those which slouched superciliously and odoriferously into Lillooet, and

afterwards into Barkerville, before the Cariboo coach road was built. They were actually obtained and ready for taking to Vancouver (obtained, be it said, in the face of a "blessed event" on the part of one of them), but the cold fear of the law prevented their participation. Even the B. C. Chamber of Mines, chief sponsors of the Cavalcade, refused to pay damages if the animals repeated the offence of their predecessors of frightening horses off the road. The cost of a runaway in Vancouver's main streets might come too high even for enthusiasts for local color, such as were the Great North Road contingent.

The Great North Road, product of the old stage coach and the motor car, retains the romance of the coach and its forbears, and adds to it the modern comfort of the car. Its storied past, as much as its limitless resources in hunting and fishing, its scenic magnificence, its climate and its fascination as a "cowboy country" has a call for the traveller which no other single tourist highway can boast.



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