

SCHWATKA IN ALASKA.

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TAHKOU RIVER, May 26 1891.—On May 7, 1891, the Pacific Coast Steamship company's vessel, "City of Topeka," crossed Dixon Entrance and entered Alaskan waters, leaving behind those of British Columbia.

All of these waters, for a stretch of over a thousand miles along the Pacific coast are but deep inlets and channels, huge salt water rivers, so to speak, that, cutting in every direction, make a vast network of islands picturesque in the extreme and not even yet wholly explored. The most freely navigable of the many channels running parallel with the coast, is called "the inland passage to Alaska," and is yearly becoming more popular with summer tourists seeking rest and recreation here. One of the peculiar features of



this southwestern section of Alaska, and one that can only be appreciated by the explorer or hardy frontiersman, is the ease and pleasure with which one can travel the coast waters, only to plunge into the roughest of "roughing it," as soon as these are left, and the Alpine interior essayed.

On board the "Topeka" was the New York Ledger Alaskan expedition that had this prospect ahead of it, the subscriber being in command. One of our main objects was to cover as much unexplored country as possible, in any direction, yet a general plan had been formed to follow my old explorations of 1883 to, or near, the Pelly and Yukon river confluence, and there begin the work into the unknown interior westward and southwestward.

We had occasion to change this plan as to cover more unexplored country than usual. It came about by discussing a new and unexplored route from Juneau with citizens of that lively metropolis of our distant

colony, "the largest city in the largest territory in the largest republic in the world," as they used to patriotically put it. It was to go over what was called the Tahku trail that led to a large lake in the interior, and by its draining river, gain the Yukon, where I joined my old trail of 1883, and could then carry out the program as previously planned. It was believed an available commercial route might be opened up, that, with Juneau as a basis, could be made to supply the Yukon valley even to Behring sea, better than by any known route, while it would be no small feather in the cap of the New York Ledger expedition, to be able to do this preliminary pioneering. This belief was founded on information obtained from the interior Indians when bringing out their furs, and from prospectors who had searched this general line for precious minerals. It might be, also, that the present Yukon traffic would not pay, while the future might, and it was well to be prepared with the information. The many other reasons for or against this trail can be made clearer as we travel over it later. When we arrived in Juneau a corresponding interest was soon worked up by those on the steamer, the citizens pledging everything they could to make the enterprise a success, and so we disembarked here.

The first point we touched in Alaska was Tongass. After Tongass, we met nothing but salmon canneries for a few days, reaching Juneau on the 9th of May, where our freight is disembarked and we continue on, for this metropolis is of enough importance to be touched by the returning steamer, thus making a short round trip.

We wake up next day in Glacier Bay, on the first vessel of the season to essay it, as it is only visited in the interest of the summer tourists.

At Sitka we were crowded with passengers of the spring court term at Juneau. There were ten prisoners, only six of them being murderers, mostly confined to half-breeds and Indians. The naturally resulting conversation disclosed a statement that there had never been a Simon-pure lynching, nor a legal execution, in Alaska. At Wrangell, in early days, a murderous gambler was made chairman of a vigilance committee, the chair was pulled out from under him and he broke this peaceful record—also his neck; but any one familiar with frontier justice knows there is a wide chasm existing between this and lynching. In a somewhat similar action, an Indian murderer performed traction on a rope, to the satisfaction of the vigilance faction and the greater dissatisfaction of the lesser faction. Killisnoo is very agreeable to the eye but somewhat abominable to the nose, due to a flourishing herring fishery and attendant guano factory. The United States Marshal attempted to arrest a native here for trying to drown a squaw guilty of witchcraft. I have never yet seen anything bewitching about an Alaskan Indian woman, but I suppose tastes vary. This Alaskan, Cotton Mather had some inkling of the proceedings, so he secreted himself in the Alaskan woods, where the proverbial needle in a haystack would be as conspicuous as a circus poster by comparison. There were not eleven prisoners from Killisnoo to Juneau.

Juneau reached. preparations were

begun at once, the first obstacle being the report that the Tahku river was not yet open. A big canoe, a two-ton or three-ton affair, was easy enough to get but packers themselves over the land trail were hard to obtain until a sort of sub-chief of the Tahkus, Yashnoosh by name, a local policeman, stimulated by the citizens, took a hand and recruits were slowly obtained. Even then I could only obtain half enough, at good stiff rates of course, and had to double packs (averaging 100 pounds each) over the trail of nearly 100 miles as it proved.

The 25th of May we got away, seven Indians and three white men, six of the natives being packers and one, Robert, the owner of the boat. On the recommendation of some citizens who believed in the horror of the average Indian for all legal papers I had a huge contract drawn up, resplendent with many colored seals and ribbons, and this they signed by touch of pen, while the United States District court interpreter read aloud its contents with a solemnity equal to that given a death warrant. I still retain that page of legal ludicrousness, and while admitting it may have done me much good, yet I can only compare it with the verdict of the frontier coroner's jury wherein, sitting on a man's body dragged from the river's bed and riddled with bullets, they concluded that the deceased had come to his death from drowning, caused by water pouring in through the bullet-holes.

So about noon of the 25th, with the American flag hanging from the peak, we got away in the beginning of a wind and drizzling rainstorm that later made our first day's trip one of the most unpleasant of the whole journey. An enthusiastic crowd of citizens lined the shore near the steamer's dock, and as we paddled away down the channel gave us many a hearty cheer and many warm wishes for our success.

Let us now take a hasty look at the little expedition as it started, the Indians being sufficiently described to pass them over till events call them up in detail. The commanding officer was the heaviest one of the party and made excellent ballast in the rear part of the canoe.

The scientist of the expedition was Dr. C. Willard Hayes, representing also the U. S. Geological survey, through the courtesy of Major J. W. Powell, the head of that government bureau. To Dr. Hayes also fell the photographic work in the main, as well as the topographic or map-making. I had hoped to get a professional photographer, and felt sure of success when Mr. Landerkin, one from Juneau, made an application for the place. He was caught on the grand jury, having already been sworn in, but we both thought that a mere bagatelle as an obstacle, but the Judge and District Attorney thought otherwise. Both were willing enough, but there was nothing in the law (the Oregon code prevails here, by act of Congress "so far as it is practicable") that would allow it. The only excuse whatsoever was one of severe sickness, attested under oath by a physician.

"But suppose a grand juror dies?" I asked the Judge.

"I could not excuse him from duty on that ground," he replied, slowly, shaking his head. So Mr. Landerkin remained and Dr. Hayes did double duty. Mark C. Russell was the only other