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ALASKAN RAMBLES.

EXPLORING THE LAKES OF THE TAKONS.

Besieged by Mosquitoes and Floating Timbers—Twenty to Thirty Miles a Day Under Sail and With Oars—Legends of the Takons.

[By E. Dorsenfield, Press Association.]

ON SEWARD ICE, Barrow S. W. T., July 1, 1891.—The last letter left us just reaching the shores of Ahklakleen or the Big Lake. There are several Ahklakleens (or big lakes) in this general locality, however, which would seem to suggest that the title is only descriptive after all, and has not the full signification of a proper name. Had we taken the northern path at "The Trail Splitter"—which we came near doing by mistake—its course would have led

us to another Ahklakleen, which is simply the largest of a series of lakes on that local accounting to the Indian version. Again, Lake Bennett (which I named after James Gordon Bennett in 1885) is Ahklakleen to the Chilkats; a land of Tlinkits that trade in the interior by a trail that takes them over this lake and several others, of which Bennett is among the largest. So several more or less clearly defined Ahklakleens have been known for varying periods as existing hereabouts and some of them have even crept into maps but nearly always as Lake Ahklakleen (with several methods of spelling it), a lexological error about equivalent to Lake Lake Quiparie or Rio Grande river. One of the attractive features of its shores was the large number of wild roses seen in bloom and that crowded all the open spaces where timber fires had killed the trees and allowed the sun to get freely at the soil. The pebbles and the roses were a grateful contrast to the snow banks and ptarmigan we had recently left behind. But there is no rose without a thorn, and there were certainly a thousand thorns in this one for each rose if the mosquitoes can be figuratively spoken of as such. Two of the party tried to take a short hunting and fishing tour up the lake and were driven back by these numerous pests. The 17th of June was spent in rigging out the folding canvas boats for lake navigation. Masts and oars were made from poles and boards and fish-sinker blankets were extemporized into sails. Very good oars were made by Russell from rough slabs, he being a carpenter and boat builder. We had not struck the upper end of the long narrow lake as some may imagine from my previous descriptions, but on the western shore some distance from that point. To determine how far it was to this end and make its survey complete, the doctor and I started for it in a boat the afternoon of the 17th, but after rowing vigorously half the afternoon against a head wind, we were forced to turn back, the lake still stretching out southward around a slight bend as far as the eye could reach. It was quite evident that the lake, like the river we had met on the Pacific slope, was far above its normal level. All of the shore line timber was half under water, showing that the lake beach was well submerged, and it was only at the very open places we could launch or land our boats favorably. During the day we saw a heavy signal smoke far down the lake shore—that all the Indians had not left the country despite the large number of outward bound fur traders that we had met on our one trail. In fact I was surprised to find such a number of Tlinkits of any clan (these are the Takon clan) making their homes on the British American Inland plateau. I knew personally that several of the clans had traffic leading thereto, but supposed they only sent them to make fur-trading excursions to the inland tribes. The Takons have a legend, so my own Indians told me, that all the Tlinkits were once Takons and lived as friends in one big village on the banks of the Takon river until a general quarrel arose (it may be a waste of pristine ink to state there was a woman in the case) and many were killed and maimed therein. As a consequence a number of discontented parties fulminated out from this Tlinkit Babel and founded the various clans or sub-tribes of Chilkats, Stikins, Kootznahoos, Auks, Sitkanas, and others of the Tlinkit tongue.

From Ahklakleen a trail, wagon road or even railway could be run practically in any direction that does the cardinal point of eastward in its course.

The freezeup of June 19 we got away under "wicker" sail with a fair four-mile breeze. Some six or seven miles beyond came there a tumble down Indian "shack" on the east bank that may be inhabited occasionally for I had found out by this time that however dilapidated a native building looked, especially about the roof, it was no positive sign but that that hut had been occupied recently and at certain seasons it is occupied. A heavy rousing sound from this same shanty so that quite a large crowd began to have it. It was about fifty paces wide, shallow but rapid, while its mouth was clogged with drift timber. Away where along the shores of the lake the drift timber was to be seen. Whenever we tried to land this driftwood on the lake shore, at this high stage of water, turned out they were overwhelmingly, and we were lucky indeed where the driftwood was solid, and we could carry the boats ashore from the other shingle. In nine instances of ten, however, the outer fringe of logs were loose in the water, would roll over when stepped upon, and the unshipped with their sipper, sling sides made landing an elastic undertaking not very agreeable in our stiffened condition, after several hours in the boat. About noon our wind died out and the rest of the day we spent at the oars. The middle of the afternoon a breeze set in softly from the north and delayed us a great deal. This afternoon of forenoon and afternoon which in opposite directions we found to be quite common but with considerable diversity as to the time of day when the change took place. Ahead we now saw a large river coming in from the east. By a setback we reached Cliff Point on the eastward, the first abrupt promontory on the lake that we had met. It was granite, some 75 to 100 feet perpendicular and a most picturesque and conspicuous break in the gentle geologic so characteristic of the shores of Ahklakleen. There were twenty-three great big miles to our credit that evening, a distance that appears insignificant now looking back from the land of railroads and ocean steamships, but that under many seems like a foreign country from the place we had left in the morning by comparison with our former gait. The next day, June 18, was almost a repetition of the one described. A north storm that day we came abreast of the Cariboo range, so called by the Indians. This is a social conspicuous isolated cluster of peaks on the west shore, around which the lake slightly bends as if divided at this point into two great arms. The first day's beating had not given us a single "rise" with three trolling lines set out, but this day, when we saw some bull bonging, the trolls were again cast and two salmon trout.

With a twenty-seven mile record that day we fell into camping early, but the driftwood vetoed our efforts and warned us convincingly that if we wanted to get all work done before dark we must hereafter seek an early camp to compensate for time lost in this way. We got away early the 20th as a crashing breeze one way followed us to press matters while it lasted.

About 8 we passed the mouth of the Seed-blada (Beaver in Tlinkit), or Big River of the Indians. It comes in from the east and is 50 to 150 yards wide. The water is conspicuously and can be traced back inland for twenty to fifty miles large unwooded hills damming it on the southwest. It is probably the largest river draining into Ahklakleen. Here a couple of Takon Indians, in a light birch-bark canoe, paddled over to us from the west side, having previously signalled us by a green blanket. They had a sad unlearning dried moose meat with them, but we bought the best looking piece among the lot, they, as usual, getting the best end of the bargain. That evening's meal had the best the market afforded, there being grain eggs, moose meat and salmon trout, with pork and beans for dessert. The record for the day was twenty five miles, the greater part being done by good, honest rowing. The next day, in the early afternoon, the lake began to narrow rapidly, and the outlet could be seen among a lot of white broken banks. At 4:20 we entered the draining river and once more took a good gait without labeling for it. That day we made twenty miles on the lake, or ninety-five in all. It is therefore safe to assert that Ahklakleen is over one hundred miles in length and will therefore take its place among the great lakes of the British American Northwest, a land famous for its large lakes. The people of the Takons may be said to end with it, the farthest inland of any of the Tlinkits. Yet I came in contact several times with the fact that they knew something of a Tlinkit band, the Stikinens, showing that a probable inland communication exists between them. The Stikinen country is around Wrange II, Alaska, the town depending on the a Cassiar mines, reached from Wrangell by Stikinen river. This stream is navigable for 140 miles, then there are some seventy-five miles by pack-trains to Dease Lake, and then five miles over it to Cassiar. All through this land the Stikinens have been employed and may have extended their trading excursions to the Takon land of lakes. Katowhan, the present Stikinen chief, gave me lot interesting information as to the use to which the Tlinkit intermarries are put and regarding which there are a number of conjectures. He said that ex-

BURIAL PLACE OF SIOUX NAR-LOOS.

cavations in them are often used as burial places for the tribes of extinated Indians, while others are geneological and historical.

These Indians have a legend that the great Stikinen glacier once reached across the river which flowed underneath. Through the icy tunnel they now cast an old man in his canoe. To corroborate the fact there can still be seen the remnant of a glacier opposite the main mass of ice, but nothing to corroborate the second except the supply inherent instincts of tribes to do such a trick, especially if the old man was a decrepit and valueless slave. I was told that about the same 70's Shot-rich, chief of the Chilkats, of whom I have already spoken, killed sixty slaves before Skolum, chief of the Stikinens, died, not to be outdone in abolishing slavery, slew sixty-five before Shot-rich. Then the two clans fought and the Stikinens were whipped, my informant adding that Shakes committed suicide as a result.

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