

G O W G A N D A H O.

this is the
Story of my first trip to Gowganda when it was first rumoured that Silver and Cobalt had been discovered in that area.

Back in 1907 when we had already followed a good many reports of discoveries that turned out to be phony, whispers began to reach the eager prospectors in the Haileybury, Cobalt, & South Lorrain Camps to the effect that promising showings had been located in the vicinity of what is now Miller and Gowganda Lakes. These stories in those days always had an electrical effect on the seekers of precious metals, and the urge to investigate became too strong to resist.

I had occasion to make many visits to the town of Cobalt in those days and while there met an old timer who had come all the way from British Columbia where he had been prospecting high up in the Rockies and we became fast friends almost from the first meeting. He finally let me in on a great secret, - that was to the effect that big things were likely to happen in the area mentioned above, and cautioned me not to disclose the locality, he further offered to make me a partner in the venture, and advised that he had bought a canoe for the purpose of going up the Montreal River the East Branch of which wended its way into this treasure land.

Well while I appreciated the old chaps friendship and his offer to share his fortunes, yet when I got a look at the canoe my enthusiasm died a sudden death and I concluded that I had better make other arrangements. There was scarcely a foot square of the canvass that did not have a patch plastered on it, and the ribs looked as though they had been in a boxing match with an opponent that had been a severe body puncher. I had to offer an excuse that I could not possibly go for some time, but would later and would probably run across him on the trail somewhere, as I eventually did much later in the season which I will mention further along in this narrative.

His enthusiasm had infected me and that night when I got back to Haileybury I began to discuss the advisability of making a trip to explore the prospects. At that time there was in Haileybury a Geologist and Mining Engineer by the name of Morse who had spent most of his time in the Western States but having heard of the rich discoveries at Cobalt had been sent by his principals to look over the camp. He was all for making the trip and we began preparations by purchasing a canoe, one in somewhat different condition than the one which my friend from B. C. had secured. Supplies were obtained at the local stores placed in pack sacks with a blanket or two and a few tools and we caught the first train for Lathford. On arriving there we found that we could manage the trip as far as Elk Lake by going in the boats of the lumber companies, but would have to remain over night as the boat had left for Pork Rapids earlier in the morning.

Already prospectors were flocking to Elk Lake, but very few mentioned going further west to Gowganda, and we were careful not to disclose any of the information which we had received.

What a time the fellows were having at the hotel at Lathford which I believe was operated by the late James Kingston. There was booze a plenty and many of the fellows were not playing the part of the camel. Some person had a fiddle and that was enough to start the hob-nailed boots flying to the extent that the floor in the rotunda of the hotel received more or less damage and the proprietor began to protest. As far as I can recall, the well known Tommy Seville was with the crowd. He was then known as the Great White ~~the~~ Guide. If it was'nt Tommy then some fellow must have been impersonating him. This fellow claimed that he was six years old before he had seen a strange white man, and he got into an argument by calling some very old timer "An Irishman" who for some reason very much preferred to be called by his own nationality, what ever it was.

Next morning we headed for the boat landing, many of the gang of the night before looking ~~xx~~ quite ~~seedy~~ and with all their hilarity gone.

The old steam boat plugged right along and eventually landed us at the Pork Rapids where there was a rough trolly track fixed up on which you could place your pack and avoid carrying it over the portage.

There was a log shanty at this point where meals were served, and I well recall the Mowatt Family as being residents on the shores of the Montreal River, and I understand that some members of that family are still living at where the Mattawapika joins the Montreal.

After dinner a number of the party began to show more signs of life and that they had managed to shake the effects of the night before.

The total stretch of river was covered by boats provided by the lumber companies, and as I recall it Captain Hendry was manager. What a circus going up the river; some fellow had a banjo and to give him proper credit he could do an Alabama Negro full justice. Fortunately most of the boat decks had metal covering and the hob nail boots did not eat their way through the metal. It must have been specially hardened.

We passed such points as Flat Rapids, ~~XXXX~~ & Red Pine Rapids and Mountain Chutes, after the latter the sailing was quite smooth into Elk Lake which at that time was a bustling village of tents and shacks, but not lacking in enthusiasm. Nearly every fellow had stakes around a claim and in every case he had little doubt but what it would make a mine. When it was discovered that the chap accompanying me was a mining engineer representing mining magnates in the U. S. I never thought we would be able to get to bed, and we figured on a hard paddle the next day. The Elk Lake rush was just well under way at the time, and as a matter of fact some wonderfully rich samples of ore were exhibited by various prospectors and the talk of was long and loud.

We got the low down on how to get to Gowganda Lake without arousing too much curiosity, and in the morning headed for Indian Chutes where the portage led over to the river. I might add that we were put up for the night by a Dr. Robinson who made the trip in with a patient afflicted with lung trouble in the hopes that the northern air might cure the condition. They certainly were very nice and made us welcome.

Arriving at Indian Chutes after having a look at the raging waters that now forms the power which has been developed at that point we got a glimpse of the sand banks which we had to climb up and carry or drag the canoe as well as the pack sacks.

At the top where we sat down to get our wind we noticed a blurred sign which being deciphered said " One & One half Miles to River) and the day was a real red hot one. This however as was the case with most prospectors of the day did not altogether discourage us and soon we were on our way to encounter many more portages but none quite so long.

Here and there we examined the rock shores and Mr. Morse made various comments and entered notes in his book. Moose & red deer appeared to be plentiful in the area as we noticed several on our way in, also a black bear or two, and the waters were simply alive with fish. We met a family of Indians on the portage from Crotch Lake to O-Bus/Kung and I feel quite certain that one member of that party was one of Gowganda's very old residents of late years, - viz. James Pearce, but he was unable to recall the occasion, and further than to state that he made many trips out the Matchewan & Elk Lake way during those years.

I had little idea at the time that after many years I was to become a resident of Gowganda myself.

After a hard days paddle from Crotch Lake we finally emerged at Gowganda Lake. The formation at certain points along the route held promise.

Much to our surprise there were two tents on the East Shore of Gowganda Lake just about the spot where the town began to take shape later. We also noticed

A canoe here and there along the lake shore as we proceeded to examine the rock formation here and there at the waters edge and by making short excursions into the bush away from the lake.

Mr. Morse did not appear to be very well impressed with the formation on the west and north west side of the lake, but other ~~are~~ sections held out some promise of yielding results. Although we had not thought of meeting folks in that neighborhood, yet that is just what happened, - no less a personage than the famous Fog Horn MacDonald was making his way in to have a look with a couple of fellows he had hired for the trip. Rounding the bend of the River where it comes in to Gowganda Lake we heard a conversation quite clearly and the fact that it was intermingled with some real swear words made it the more interesting, and before I was actually in sight of the party I had identified one of the party at least as Fog Horn. He was cooking some sort of a dish for himself and company and apparently one fellow was not bringing the wood fast enough. We were offered a dish of tea which we gladly accepted, and then followed a discussion as to what the prospects of a silver camp in that area, ^{were} but nothing definite was decided. It was evident that a few claims had already been staked as we ran across some stakes in more than the one location, but whether they had ever been recorded was not known.

With the scant amount of supplies we had it was decided that there was little sense in remaining to prospect, and up to that time we could get no trace of the rumoured discoveries. We decided to return, ~~fixx~~ home, fit up properly and come back.

On the way out we met with several canoe parties on their way in, so that it was evident the news was leaking out which we had heard. I knew a number of the prospectors who were going in, but did not see hide or hair of my B. C. Friend.

Numbered among the folks coming in at the time were prospectors that staked out claims and later made quite a stake, such as the Holland Boys, Wilse Lang, Fred Kenning and Doc. Pullis, all of which have since passed to their reward; such as may be available for prospectors.

Elk Lake was becoming quite a scene of activity, and the well known Jack Munroe was one of the active ones we met there, Asa Ribble and others.

On arrival at Haileybury Mr. Morse received instructions to proceed and examine a property out west some where, and I had to give some attention to claims which I held in South Lorraine, so the intended trip back had to be deferred for a time at least. I arranged to hire a couple of fellows and send them up instead. It was well toward fall before I could get back, and what a change, - the whole area was buzzing with activity such as had been seldom witnessed. Some fellows on their way out to record and bring in more supplies assured me there was more silver on one claim in Gowganda than in the whole of South Lorraine. That was an intimation not to be spending my time in South Lorraine when such a place as Gowganda existed.

Lo and behold one of the first to greet me at Elk Lake was my B. C. friend. After a warm shake hands I said to him "Well I expect you had a good summers prospecting" ~~"XXXXXX"~~ "Oh No - Just thirteen days he assured me" "What happened were you sick?" No I came here and prospected for thirteen days, - then some body steal my canoe (the canoe already mentioned and described at the commencement of this article) So I quit the prospecting and I looked all summer for my canoe: I find it too. Fellow that steal that canoe was stay thirty days in the jail at North Bay: The chap with me when we were again by ourselves said "that fellow must be nuts", and I had to agree with him.

Prospectors were everywhere by the hundreds. We covered the same trail and this time were enabled to visit some of the showings. We met our party who ~~was~~ were on the point of coming out. They had staked a total of 12 claims, and I

believe we could have sold the lot before ~~the~~ we got back to town, and in fact we did sell all twelve before the snow was on the ground although no assessment work had yet been done on them. That winter roads were cut and machinery was brought in, a town sprung up and mining proceeded at full steam with varying success. Literally thousands of claims were staked out so that late arrivals had to go miles out to locate open ground.

Half way houses were built on the winter road to Elk Lake and the road ~~its-~~ itself was strung out from end to end with teams loaded with all manner of supplies to say nothing ~~to~~ of the dog teams and the mushers, also the lone fellow pulling his tobaggan and travelling on Shanks Ponnies. Gowganda was a mining rush such as may never be experienced again and certainly has not been surpassed todate.

The sad note in the whole story is the fact that so many of the pioneers who trod the paths and portages of those days have passed to the Great Beyond, that the writer feels lonely when thinking of the various ones who were ~~there~~ there at the time but are absent now and Have made the last portage.

It would be a real accomplishment if a Re/Union of all those who could find it possible to attend would gather and rehearse the past, that is those who witnessed the birth of Gowganda as a Mining Camp.

Contributed by N. R. Green.