**Barkerville and the Fraser River Gold Rush**

In the mid-1800's, news of the gold in the Fraser River had reached the outside world and created a buzz for prospectors around the globe who were in search of wealth. Many of these prospectors traveled to the west coast of Canada in hopes of striking it rich in discovering immense gold deposits in the river. With prospectors and miners coming from every direction, the gold deposits in the rivers would quickly decline, which led to many of the more brave prospectors to follow the Fraser River north where they would eventually reach the Cariboo region. A prospector by the name of John B. Wilkinson, made the journey up the Fraser River with a small party of men after they had received news of the fortunes that the Fraser Valley brings. On John's journey, he writes his brother and family whenever the opportunity arises. In John's letters, he describes the struggles of navigating through the canyons of the Fraser Valley and all of the fortunes he encounters in his travels, as well as constant updates on the condition of the gold rush, as he doesn't want his brother to embark on the journey too soon.

In John's first letter to his brother, he describes the treacherous conditions he and his party had to overcome in their travels, the water levels in the Fraser River got rose at such a rapid speed that they were forced to put a halt to their travels until water levels decreased. Although Johns expedition up the Fraser River wasn't as smooth sailing as he might have hoped, he writes to his brother that he is "very much pleased with his trip, and also notes that he is in good health first class spirits, strong and hearty as a Buck"(Wilkinson, John. 1860). Though John is very pleased with his expedition thus far, he pleads to his brother to stay put where he is, as the provisions from the gold rush aren't too prosperous, though he notes that the rations of food and supplies at Fort Alexander were very cheap and living was very easy. Once the winter started to set in, John and his party of men started the journey south to Victoria, where they would reside until the spring season, at which time they would embark on the journey back to the Cariboo region.

John took the time to write his brother a second letter some two months after the first one. In his second letter, he reiterates his notion of not letting the various reports of the contents of the gold rush impact any decisions his brother may make. John emphasizes the hardships the journey up the Fraser can put on a man, in Johns letter, he notes, "I had fully counted the price, the so-called hardships, privations, and what was not to be lost sight of the expense for you have to depend entirely on yourself, get broke, and you have no bank to run too, and as prices run a man with one hundred dollars in his pocket may consider himself about broke, for it amounts to nothing." (Wilkinson, John. 1862). As the spring set in, John and his men once again took on the journey into the Cariboo. On this trip, they hired a group of indigenous people to pack their supplies and traps to ease the workload on themselves as they take on the terrain of the canyons throughout the mountains. Throughout the gold rush era of the 19th century, it was very common for pioneers to hire groups of indigenous men to pack their provisions as they commenced on these long expeditions into the mountains. John makes special note of the awful time he and his men had navigating through the mountains, he mentioned "the foot trail through the canyons is really an awful one up and down mountains over and under rocks until you really have a doubt in your own mind which you prefer going up or coming down." He also joked, that at times it would depend on which side of your mouth you put your tobacco, as the slight weight difference could put you off-balance, and tip you over the edge of the canyon. As John continued on his path to the Cariboo region, he claimed to have crossed paths with many men on their way back from the gold rush, denying that there was any gold in it. While these claims forced many of the men in his party to turn back, John was determined to keep going and see the ‘country' for himself.

As the spring of 1862 comes, John takes the time to write home again, he informs his family to not take the false statements that are being portrayed by the well-written articles and newspapers too seriously. He claims that unless someone with considerable odds in his or her favour, then there will be much disappointment on anyone who leaves their comfortable home in Canada in attempts to strike it rich in the gold fields. He assures his family to take his word on the conditions of the Cariboo, and to only leave home when he writes to. John pleads to his family that he wishes Mr. White, one of many authors who wrote very highly of the Cariboo, "no other punishment than to land at the Forks of Quenelles with 100$ worth grub and not a friend to give additional help and let him pack his grub and traps over the mountain and hunt for one of these rich claims he has told the Canadians are awaiting every one of them" (Wilkinson, John. 1862). John believes that many of the pioneers would feel great satisfaction if Mr. White went through the hardships that many of the people that have traveled to the Cariboo have gone through.

As the 1862 season in the Cariboo comes to a close, John notices the looks of dissatisfaction and hardship on many of the people that are packing up their provisions and heading home. The 1862 season had been a particularly hard season for many of the pioneers, due to the fact that a flock of miners had migrated to the Cariboo in the season prior, after reading success stories in the papers. The troubles had started when credit was given to the miners, and a limited amount of repayment was given to the banks. With the limited amount of funds available in the Cariboo, few miners were able to be prosperous in their efforts to find gold. Despite the horrid conditions that this season had brought, John remains reluctant to leave the Cariboo and continues to promise to send for his brother's arrival when conditions improve and John thinks that he will prosper in the riches.

**Bibliography**

Wilkinson, B. John. 1860-1862. http://www.cariboogoldrush.com/primary/wilk.htm