

Glorious Illahee

Glorious Tulameen, land of sunshine and romance. Tulameen has become one of the best-known and most popular resorts in British Columbia. It is easy of access by road and the lake is an ideal landing place for sea-planes. Each summer an increasing number of families from Vancouver and Fraser Valley find an ideal holiday here, swimming, boating and hiking. After the heat and fun of the day visitors gather around a blazing bonfire on the sandy lakeshore, and laughter and song mark the close of another health-giving summer's day. And so on, far into the night. This is Tulameen, Otter Valley, Otter Lake, glorious Illahee.

Princeton is the jumping-off place to Tulameen. The Similkameen road system can be likened to the fingers of an outstretched hand. With Princeton as the centre of the palm, the middle finger represents the Hope Princeton Highway. The first finger is the proposed road through to Peachland. The third finger points to Tulameen. It is reached by a scenic mountain highway. Far below are the railway and the Tulameen River winding their way through the valley. Twelve miles from Princeton is Coalmont, which used to be the railway port for the Blakeburn coalmine. Granite Creek, scene of gold rush in 1885, is only a mile distant. Four miles beyond Coalmont one comes to the unincorporated village of Tulameen on Otter Flat. Otter Lake, over three miles long, and from quarter to half a mile wide, is less than half a mile beyond the village.

In the early sixties, the Tulameen River was also known as the North Similkameen. The two branches come together at Princeton, which was at one time called The Forks. There is no agreement as to the meaning of the Indian word Similkameen, but its sister word Tulameen means red earth, and refers to deposits of ochre which are common in the area. This ochre was formerly highly prized by the native peoples who came long distances to trade for this paint. Allison subdivision in Princeton before the white man came was called Yak - Tulameen or the place where the red earth is sold. It was the first market place in the valley, and red ochre was our first export.

No one can learn to love the Tulameen Valley, with its lakes, rivers, creeks and mountains, without desiring to know something of its history. This record will not be exhaustive, but it will give a general idea of much that has gone before, some account of things as they are today, and perhaps a word about the future.

Looking Backwards

A backward glance must include the native peoples, the Hudson's Bay Company fur traders, the search for gold, the lumber industry, transportation and community life.

INDIANS: The Tulameen Indians belonged to the group known as the Interior Salish. They lived by fishing and hunting. The women and children went berry picking every Fall, as hundreds do still, going to the end of the Dornberg road. There was an Indian settlement near the lake long before the white man came. The fur traders called it Encampment des Femmes, because the women remained there when the braves went hunting or fighting. In the middle of last century, a famous Indian Chief called Blackeye had a lodge at the second lake beyond Otter, but search failed to find any trace of this early building. It may have been burned.

The Tulameens did not leave any records on the rocks as did the Similkameens who were masters in the art of painting pictures on rocks and cliffs. They had their medicine men, as did other tribes, and had learned the arts of peace as well as war: how to make fire and preserve food, both of which were necessary for survival. They lived close to nature, and the white man of today may learn something from their way of life.

It would be a wholesome exercise for young people today to learn to make fire without matches. Their lives might depend on this knowledge. It is commonly said that the Indian made a little fire, and sat close to it, whereas the white man makes a big fire and sits far back.

FUR TRADERS: Fur traders were the pioneer exporters of Tulameen. After the Boundary award of 1846 setting the international line at the 49th parallel, it became imperative that the Hudson's Bay Company discover an "all - red - route" to and from their northern preserves. The man selected to discover this route between Kamloops and Hope was A.C. Anderson. He had to discover a trail north of the International Boundary, and one that would avoid the dangerous Fraser River rapids, especially Hell's Gate. With five men, he left Kamloops on 15 May, 1846, and travelled to Fort Langley by way of Harrison and Lillooet Lakes. The return journey brought them to Tulameen. A chief had undertaken to guide Anderson and his party from Hope to the headwaters of the Similkameen, which they would follow to Otter Flat, then cross over to The Forks (Princeton) where guides with horses from Kamloops would meet them. The Indian guide proved unreliable, and Anderson had to depend on himself for guidance.

He followed the big bend of what is now called the Tulameen River, and suffered great hardships. Finally he met old Blackeye and his son-in-law on their way to visit their deer snares. Food for Anderson's party was nearly exhausted, but Blackeye took him to the Lodge, and there the travellers enjoyed a meal of fish. This seems to be the first record of Tulameen fishing. The Indian Chief had the horses brought from the Forks, and Anderson and his party travelled through the Canyon, past Aspen Grove and Brigade Lake on to Kamloops.

The Anderson trail became "the Brigade Trail" between Hope and Kamloops, and Tulameen was an important stopping place, though there are few reminders of this today. Traces of the old trail can still be found on Jackson Mountain to the south; and the HBC storage cellar has been located.

The great, ribbed mountain to the south, called Jackson, 4535, is not difficult to climb. In 1937, the writer travelled with W.A. ("Podunk") Davis from Otter Flat, across the Tulameen, and over Jackson to Lodestone mountain and lake, where was one of the Brigade camps. It was in the Fall of the year, and after an hour's climbing we stopped to rest. Through the tree tops we could see Otter Lake to our left; and the Valley below, green and gold, threaded by a ribbon of blue, with mountains rising on the far side presenting tree lined ridges against a clear sky. The morning mists had passed away, and the forenoon was comfortably warm. We came to the Brigade Trail at a point where it switch-backed. Podunk pointed to a stump from which a piece of wood projected forming a triangle with the trail. This was a little scheme the brigade men had to keep the horses from rubbing their packs against the tree. When he saw this Podunk had no doubt that we were on the old trail.

Anyone with a taste for history or archaeology will want to locate the Hudson's Bay storage cellars. These will be found on the back road skirting the mountain base, behind the Coot's house. At one time J.A. Schubert used to store powder, and afterwards it was used as a root house by Mr. Coots. It was well built in under the mountain, and had a heavy door. The main entrance was about 6' x 4'. There were two cellars, seventeen paces apart. The cellars were 10x20 yards. These cellars, and the vestiges of the old trail, are all that remain to remind one of the time when Tulameen was an important point on the HBC trail.

Trapping is still carried on for prized-fur animals, but otters are no longer as common as when they gave their name to the valley. Big game hunters go after bear, and every Fall get their limit of deer and ducks.

GOLD: The search for gold began with the fur traders about the middle of the last century. Old Hugh Hunter, Gold Commissioner at Granite Creek, and afterwards at Princeton, always maintained that there was gold in "them thar hills," and that the big strike would one day be in Tulameen. When it came it would put John Chance and Granite Creek of 1885 in the shade. Prospectors live in hope.

Railway surveys had much to do with opening up the country. CPR surveyors in 1874 were not encouraged and no further surveys were made through the Hope Mountains til 1901 when H.E. Carry ran a line through the district. After the Granite Creek excitement Dr. G.M. Dawson visited the region, making notes on Geology and placer deposits. More incentive work was done in 1900 by J.F. Kemp who reported on platinum deposits. W.F. Robertson followed in 1901, and Charles Camsell in 1906, 1908, 1909 and 1910 made intensive studies preparatory to publishing his report in 1913. Gold platinum, diamonds and other minerals have attracted prospectors who are convinced that the best mining days are yet to come. They may grow tired, but they never weary in the hope that their dreams will one day come true.

Many camps have been established in the district. C.F. Law's property was rich in gold and platinum. The Dornberg mine at Summit Camp is still potentially rich in silver-lead. On many creeks gold has been washed in paying quantities. The Tulameen black sands are rich in values, and it is only a matter of time before the hidden wealth is systematically exploited. It is now agreed that so-called strategic minerals are about to be developed in the area on a large scale.

LUMBER: Just as John Chance's discovery of gold at Granite Creek in 1885 sparked the search for gold and other minerals elsewhere in the Tulameen Valley, so the discovery of coal at Collin's Gulch, and the development of the mines at Blakeburn with its railway port at Coalmont (Coal Mountain), created a demand for lumber. The industry this created has remained one of the sheet-anchors of the valley. In the early days much of the lumber business was on the "Do it yourself" plan. The pioneers could not simply order what they wanted: they had to go and get it. In connection with river gold mining there was a steady demand for lumber. Log cabins and houses went up wherever men decided the search for gold would be profitable. Homes may have been primitive, but they were also picturesque: cool in the summer time, and warm in winter.

TRANSPORTATION: Until railways and modern highways linked Tulameen with the rest of the province, transportation was one of the problems that plagued pioneer and prospector alike. Native Indians and HBC men pioneered the first trails. The railway did not come til 1914. Before that time, however, the Government had constructed roads from Otter Flat to Summit Camp, and from Tulameen to Princeton, and from there to Aspen Grove where it joined the Canyon Road from Otter Flat. In modern times, with modern equipment, logging companies have made roads wherever they wanted them.

Before the railway was completed the quickest way from the coast to Tulameen was the CPR to Merritt, thence by stagecoach to Otter Flat. With railway construction, Tulameen was for a time a boom town. The days of trails and packtrains gave place to rail and road traffic, and the country closely evolved to the land we know today. Mining engineer Frank Bailey made his first trip to Tulameen in 1899, and thereafter came every year till his death. He reported the largest gold nugget found at Granite Creek at \$350.00 while several nuggets along the Tulameen ranged from \$85 to \$150. Potential wealth made transportation a problem to be solved, and solved it was.

COMMUNITY: After the excitement of rail and road building died down settlers began to realize that the boom days were over. Then came the great wars, and in between them the long depression years. Ranchers were able to weather the storm. The rancher is always more independent than dwellers in city or village. Fortunately, the mines at Blakeburn kept running during depression years. Every summer the Blakeburn picnic at Otter Lake was the event of the season. Those who lived in Tulameen could see no better place elsewhere so they just stayed till times came good again.

The Otter Flat hotel was built for boom days, and was run by Mrs. E.J. Henderson (Proprietress) and Charles Henderson (Manager). It was the stopping place for stages and autos. They advertised good fishing and boating on the lake, and furnished guides and packhorses for tourists and mining men anxious to leave the beaten track.

Mrs. E. Rabbitt, who was elected Similkameen Queen for the provincial centenary celebrations in 1958, tells of coming here in 1889, to become the bride of Thomas Rabbitt. He had a general store at Slate Creek, three miles above the village, where he had been for five years. Before that time he had a business in Tulameen. Business in placer was brisk. The Wells residence was in the business section of town. Between the school and Jackson house was a Chinese bakery with clay-brick oven, and a turn-out of 200 loaves daily. Two joint stores and hotels were operated by Mr. Jensen and Mr. Charters. The latter had a saloon. When Mrs. Rabbitt first arrived, merchandise was brought in by pack trains of from thirty to forty horses, and Indians were employed for this work as well as white men.

Church and school followed the growth of the community. Just before the turn of the century prospectors over-ran the country in search of gold and platinum and of placers. In 1900 mineral claims on Bear Creek were staked out, and Law Camp began. The following year copper ores were discovered and Independence Camp came into operation. Silver lead was mined at Summit Camp, and all these operations helped to maintain Tulameen community. Railway construction followed surveys, and trade winds were brisk till the outbreak of war in 1914.

Tulameen Today

What about Tulameen today? The search for gold goes on, but in a more prosaic way. Trappers still hunt for furs. Prospectors never give up, even when they can no longer roam the hills as they did years ago. They have an undying faith. A man like Harry Lowe is as keenly interested in mineral possibilities as ever he was.

Jim Schubert ran a store for many years, and there is a place up the river still remembered as Schubert's Pool. He was one of the Overlanders who came to British Columbia in 1862, and was buried in Tulameen.

Mrs. Squelch ran a general store known as the "Trading Post". During the last ten years Tulameen has come into great favour as a summer resort. Scores of summer homes have been built at and around the lake. At the lake a store was operated during the summer months by Mrs. Annie Anderson, who died in 1963. A Drive In, called the "Totem Away", had been operated by Mrs. Eric Goodfellow, and each year they added more facilities, 1963 seeing electric lights and power. The summer population increases each year, and there is no end in sight to the development that is taking place.

* The future will bring great improvements - better roads, community organization, and a sense of pride in the community. All who live in Tulameen are quite certain that the best is yet to be.

