

TAPPAN ADNEY AND THE KLONDIKE STAMPEDE

by Michael Gates



City of Vancouver Archives

1 The Klondike Gold Rush (1897-1899) was an **epic journey**, to an uncharted land in search of adventure and opportunity in the continent's **final frontier**. It seared the word "Klondike" into the collective consciousness of a generation. That is the way it was then, and people still seek to follow the steps of the Klondike stampede to this very day.

2 While gold had been sought in the Yukon basin for many years, it was the 1896 discovery on a tiny tributary of the Klondike River **meandering through muskeg and moose** pasture that sparked the stampede that became known as "The last grand adventure."

3 Digging by hand deep into the frozen gravels of creeks named Bonanza and Eldorado, miners uncovered gold in quantities that could not be imagined. Bearded dirty men in tattered clothes were transformed into millionaires by the chance turn of a shovel.

4 It took a year for the full extent of this discovery to become known to the world. The Yukon was locked in frozen isolation, and it took that long for these **newly minted men of money** to make their way to what those from the north lovingly refer to as the "Outside."

5 News accounts of men and women from the Klondike, dressed in tatters, disembarking from ships in San Francisco and Seattle carrying gold in bags, satchels, and even wrapped up in blankets, sparked a mania that the world found irresistible. It was called "**Klondicitis**."

6 Overnight, tens of thousands embarked on an epic journey to the Klondike. Overnight, Klondike became a common part of everyone's vocabulary. If they weren't going to the Klondike, people were thinking about it, and if they weren't thinking of going, they talked about it.



A fully loaded scow headed to the Klondike, 1900. City of Vancouver Archives

7 The men and women who ventured forth to the coastal posts of departure like Seattle, San Francisco, Victoria and Vancouver, had no idea of the challenges that lay before them. Anticipating chaos and starvation, the North West Mounted Police had issued a decree that made a year's supply of tools and provisions mandatory for anyone venturing into the Canadian Yukon. Once they had secured their ton of supplies, the Cheechakos (the term used to describe newcomers to the north) had to book passage on any one of dozens of obsolete rust buckets put back into service to meet the sudden demand. They risked riptides, reefs, violent storms and incompetent crews during the hazardous thousand-mile journey up the Pacific coast. They hauled their outfits over snow-bound trails and labored over high mountain passes, the most famous being the Chilkoot. Images of the human chain laboring up the steps chiseled out of the ice of a gravity-defying climb through a tiny cleft in the coastal mountains became one of the iconic images marking the gold rush.



Scales & Summit of Chilkoot Pass, 1898. City of Vancouver Archives

8 Men risked avalanche, exhaustion, injury, scurvy and depletion of the soul in their frantic
compulsion to reach the Klondike. Having crested the Chilkoot Pass two dozen times or more to
transfer their ton of supplies to the summit, the stampeders then proceeded to Bennett Lake,
British Columbia, where they had to cut and haul timber, and then mill it into lumber with which
to build their boats.

9 When spring broke, they navigated 600 miles of lakes, rivers, canyons and white water to attain
their goal. Friends were made and lost. Character was built and spirits broken. For most, having
reached the Klondike was accomplishment enough; many never bothered to look for gold or
stake a claim.



Klondikers on raft navigating Miles Canyon on the Yukon River, 1898. University of Washington

10 As much as the quest for gold, the Klondike Gold Rush symbolized the fulfillment of a dream,
for adventure, discovery and fortune. Although thousands returned with empty pockets, having
endured extreme hardship, they came home spiritually enriched. They learned "... to better
separate the good from the bad, the essential from the non-essential, and to recognize the real
blessings and comforts of civilization." Forever after, they lived their lives as though they were
scaling a perpetual Chilkoot.

11 The Klondike Gold Rush was the focus of more media attention than any other gold rush in
history. Add to this the advent of the portable camera, and the Klondike was the most heavily
documented gold rush ever. Around the world, readers were hungry for news of the Klondike;
the newspapers and magazines of the day met the demand with a constant stream of reports,
dispatches, articles, letters and photographs direct from the Klondike. Publishers met the demand
by producing maps, brochures, pamphlets and guide books.

12 **Hordes** of journalists converged upon the Klondike. Flora Shaw of the *London Times*, one of
Britain's most highly regarded journalists, was there. Arthur Newton Christian Treadgold was
there, writing for Britain's *Mining Journal* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and Alice Freeman,
writing under the pseudonym Faith Fenton, prepared articles for the *Toronto Globe*. Other
articles appeared in *The Illustrated London News*, *Scribner's* and *The Century*. Joaquin Miller,
the famed "Poet of the Sierras," was there to send out first-hand accounts.



Tappan Adney taken at Seattle just before leaving for Cape Nome, 1900. Carleton Co. Hist. Society

13 Of all the journalists who covered the Klondike Gold Rush, the words of E. Tappan Adney, writing for *Harper's Weekly*, have endured the century.

14 Adney, was born in Athens, Ohio in 1868, the son of a university professor. A **precocious youth**, he entered university at age 13, was reading classical literature in the original Greek and Latin at 15, and had graduated from art school in New York by 18.

15 Adney had a brilliant mind, and a wide variety of interests. He combined his fascinations with birds and his artistic talent to produce 110 line drawings for *The Handbook of the Birds of Eastern North America*.

16 He mastered the Maliseet language of New Brunswick, became the world authority on the topic of birch bark canoes and was Canada's foremost authority on heraldry. He was widely respected by cultural anthropologists and linguists of his time, even publishing an account of a hunting trip he took with the First Nation people of the Klondike at the height of the gold rush.

17 Adney was a writer and illustrator for *Harper's Weekly* when the gold rush occurred, and it was his assignment to follow the most unusual mass migration of the 19th Century, and chronicle the event for Harper's readers. Combining his journalistic eye for detail and human interest with his skill for writing, he produced the most powerful first-hand account of the gold rush. His book, *The Klondike Stampede*, is a classic that remains in print today. The perceptive observations, colorful descriptions, photos, illustrations and gripping narrative of his trip to the Klondike, resonate with contemporary readers as they did with those of a century ago.

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