

“Letter to the Editor – C.Gardiner”

No doubt you are aware that about the 1st of May last a great excitement arose, and spread quickly over the lands of California, Oregon and Washington Territories, proving equally infectious to men of all vocations – the merchant, the farmer, the mechanic and miner – that gold in abundance was found on the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. I being, perhaps, like many others, of somewhat excitable disposition, left, on the 20th May [1858], a mining town in the interior of California, and proceeded to San Francisco, where I found the excitement even more intense than in the mountains – the greatest credence being given to the stability of the reports, they going unanimously to prove the country could not be surpassed in richness with gold.

...Some thousands men were waiting there at that time in the greatest dilemma not knowing which way to proceed to the new mines. Fraser River being so high could not be ascended for two months, a sufficient distance to reach the main diggings, on account of the current running so swiftly through the Big Canyon, forming rapids, which would be impossible to navigate at that stage of water. Nevertheless, many would form in companies, buy a canoe, lay in from three to six months' provisions, and start, working their way as far as possible, until the river fell. Others would assert they would wait for the trail, which was then in operation of being cut through the country, across the Cascade Mountains to Thompson River, at the expense of some Land and Town Lot speculators, who were determined to have the great depot and centre of trade, effected by the new mines, on American soil. The balance of the men were divided in opinion, the weaker, or perhaps I may now justly allow, the wiser, being disgusted with the chances of getting to the New Eldorado, resolved to return to California.

The upsetting of our canoe was nothing more than an accident, which most every company experienced, many not only losing their grub, but their lives. We very nearly lost two of our men, but were providentially saved by catching hold of the branches of a leaning tree, as the current was taking them swiftly down.

Every day of the 23 [days to get up the river] we were in the cold water most of the time, with our heads out, but very frequently with them under, an unpleasantness which could be avoided, in passing the line outside the trees and brush which grew on the banks of the river, when the water was low, but were now submerged half way to their tops. Those nights we passed in sleeping in our wet clothes, or part of them only, as each in his turn had to keep watch, with revolver in hand, that the Indians did not steal our provisions, as well as Mamaloose [kill] us while asleep. Notwithstanding our guard, every few mornings one or the other companies would have something missing that the Red Skin had stolen at night. Indeed it is considered as impossible to keep them from or detect them stealing.

We found a number of men camped on the river banks, the most of whom had come by trail from the Colville Mines in Washington Territory, and who were forced to kill their horses and mules, the flesh of which they had been subsisting on for the last 4

weeks. Flour we soon ascertained (if there was any for sale) was worth \$125 per 100 lb., meat of all kinds \$1.75, beans \$1.00, and everything else in proportion.

Five of us in Company pitched our tent, fixed up our mining tools, and went to work. We prospected up and down the river a distance of 40 miles each way, and could find gold in small quantities most anywhere on the surface of the bars, which were then getting bare, as the river fell. The gold is much finer than any found in California, and found in a different deposit. On Fraser River what has been dug has been found within three to eighteen inches of the surface, in a kind of sand being underneath a very pretty gravel, but no gold in it. In this country it is just the reverse, in sand like on Fraser, we can find nothing in California, but in the gravel, and the nearer we approach the bed rock, the coarser the gold, and the richer it pays. After working there about six weeks our stock of provisions was getting nearly exhausted, and we concluded to pack up and start down stream. I for one was getting tired of living on bread and water alone, for long since the Indians had stolen the coffee. Not any of the miners within fifty miles of us at this time were making grub, at the price of provisions; indeed it was hard to get it at any price, as few had it to spare. The river had fallen quite low, and where we expected, as in California, to find it rich, we could make nothing. Men began to think it a great humbug, and the glowing accounts of the Fraser River became gradually pronounced a fiction. The natives there were all so very troublesome, stealing and pointing guns at men was a prominent feature of their character.

I am afraid, Mr. Editor, I have taken up too much space in your columns, and shall conclude by saying I should not advise anyone from P.E. Island to come to Fraser River, with the intention of making his fortune; and I'm quite sure, speaking from experience, nothing will be gained for anything else, as the trip is a very expensive and laborious one.

Michigan Bluffs, Placer County, California.