

Adventures
of
Peter Decoto

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Peter Decoto was the son of Ezra Decoto, one of three Decoto brothers that gave their name to the town of Decoto. Peter was born on January 4, 1869. He grew up in Decoto and attended local schools, graduating from Decoto Grammar school in 1884.

In January 1938, the Hayward Daily Review published a series of 5 articles on Peter Decoto and his adventures during the Alaskan Gold Rush of 1898. These articles have been digitized and presented in this paper.

“Gold discovered in Alaska!”

When these magic words were broadcast by Pacific coast newspapers more than 35 years ago, Peter Decoto, member of a prominent pioneer family here, was one of the first to heed the call.

Robert Lowrie, Mr. Decoto’s uncle was one of the first of the Alaska pioneers. In 1884, nearly 13 years before the famous discovery in the Klondike, he headed with 30 other California miners whose objective was the development of a silver mine at Galavin, near Nome.

A party of Argonauts including Michaelson of Hayward, Walton and the Late Judge Mickle, both of Centerville; Lowrie, cousin of the leader; Thompson, Jim Hawley and of Newark and Centerville. They loaded a boat with provisions and left San Francisco for their claim. Reaching it safely filled the holds of the boat with ore, and leaving behind Robert Lowrie, Michaelson, Thompson and Walton, to work the mine, set sail for home. The little schooner was never heard from, and her fate remains one of the unsolved mysteries of the Arctic.

Even before his uncle went to Alaska, young Decoto, one of a family of seven brothers and sisters, had become deeply interested in mining. Prospectors and placer miners were continually drifting from the Sierras to the coast settlements, showing nuggets and specimens of ore flecked with gold. Consequently, when the newspaper carried the message that the yellow metal had been found in the newly acquired territory, he was eager to join in the stampede that followed.

He was then 25 years old, 5 feet eight and one-half inches tall, and tipped the scales at 155 pounds. He had saved \$600. This was considered sufficient to pay his fare and purchase an outfit, with food and other supplies to last two years. It included overshoes, woolen underwear, rubber boot, pick, gold pan, shovel, whipsaw, axe, tent and sheet iron stove.

Engaging passage on the barkentine Marian of San Francisco, owned by D.C. Land, rung and bird store man of that city and owner of a cannery in Alaska, the youthful adventurer, after bidding goodbye to his parents, brothers and sisters, left San Francisco in April, 1895.

The first “rush” to Alaska was then on, though the excitement had not yet spread to the other coast. Some of the stampeders chartered vessels. Most were fortunate to have money enough over after purchasing outfits to pay for their passage.

Little was known of Alaska in those days. There were no regular steamship routes and sailing schedules. These not come until after the big rush in '98, and previous to that time it was the common method to engage passage to Juneau, and from there make one's way.

The Marian was bound for Cook's Inlet, about 800 miles north of Sitka. After touching at Ladd's station, there Land's cannery was located; the Marian was to land gold seekers on the Kenaipen peninsula. There gold had been found on Mills and Bear Creeks, and hundred of miners were on the stampede to the scene of the excitement.

Accompanying Decoto was a young, hardy youth named Kingsley Smith of San Jose. Though lacking an outfit, he had managed to scrape up enough money to pay his fare. He had left his wife behind but hoped to soon return with a fortune. The two young Argonauts formed a partnership.

The barkentine was scheduled to arrive at her destination in 10 days, but soon after she left the Golden Gate a storm came up which drove her south to the equator, and after six weeks of buffeting, the adventurers found themselves opposite of San Francisco.

A second gale forced the windjammer to turn tail and run, and when the storm had abated the ship was in the South Pacific, 400 miles off the Sandwich Islands [*Hawaii*]. After a run of many days, the weary seafarers sighted the mouth of the Columbia River, and then Seattle, at which point adverse winds again drove the vessel off course to within sight of Japan. Here favorable winds set in which bore the ship directly toward Alaska.

As the days had passed into weeks, and hardtack, water and rice became the fare, there been sinister talk of mutiny. But now that the ship was headed for her goal, this talk eased. Many had been seasick. There had been squabbles and a few fistfights among the passengers. There was one passenger, in particular, who was quarrelsome and essayed the role of bully, electing to "pick" on a miner known as "Sharkey," a man of less than half his size.

All went well with the bully, until the little man, tired of being made the butt of the big man's jokes, seized him and threw him headlong to the deck. Back in the "States" Sharkey had been a professional wrestler. There was no more trouble with the bully after that.

As the ship neared Alaska, the captain offered a prize of five pounds of tobacco to the first to sight land. From early dawn now all on board scanned the sea the promised shores, and at last, when the Alaskan coast was sighted the captain was forced to bring into play his utmost skill to save the ship from running ashore.

It was believed that land would be sighted from abeam. With a mist hanging low over the water, the coast was not seen until the vessel was almost on the rocks. But though shipwreck had been narrowly averted, the sight of the purplish towering peaks in the distance was a glad sight, especially so after 61 days at sea.

As if to test the mettle of those who participated in the first rush to the Alaskan gold fields, a violent earthquake shook the region soon after the miners landed, according to Peter Decoto, former Alaskan, who during his 11 years as a "sourdough" was a packer, pilot at the famous White Horse rapids, and a miner. Twice he "struck it rich."

Arriving in Cook's Inlet in June, 1895, after a 90-day passage on the barkentine Marian of San Francisco, Mr. Decoto and his partner, Kingsley Smith of San Jose, were among the first of hundreds of stampeder to set foot on the Kenaipen peninsula, where gold had been discovered.

Traveling with the tide, which in Alaskan waters attains a maximum of 60 feet, the barkentine entered the mouth of the Resurrection River. Putting down her anchors and settling on the mud as the tide receded, and then on with the rising waters, by degrees the vessel was worked upstream.

The barkentine came to anchor in a natural basin. Ahead lay a little settlement, consisting of about a dozen log houses, with a few boats drawn up on the beach. Waiting until the tide was favorable, for here the incoming tides or bore, was marked with waves 6 to 12 feet high, the miners disembarked in the ship's boats, with their outfits.

The first work was to build cabins. Winter comes early in the Arctic. Each man had by then selected a partner. Straight trees were felled, cut to required length and "notched" on the ends. In a few days more than 15 cabins with sod-covered roofs and rough stone chimneys had been added to the settlement.

The scene of the gold excitement was some miles inland. Once the precious provisions were under roof, the men prepared to leave for the mines. As they set out, down an already worn trail, each man carried a pack and was armed with a rifle or revolver. Some had regulation knapsacks; other packed like the Indians, with a harness and "head strap," while a few used extra pairs of overalls for packing purposes.

Decoto and Kingsley were among the first to take the trail. "We had proceeded about half a mile," said Mr. Decoto, "and had halted in pack harness, with the packs resting on conveniently located tree stumps, when there came a low, ominous sound which, quickly ascended until it was like the road of speeding train."

"'Earthquake,' I shouted to my partner. The ground shook so we could hardly keep our packs on the stumps. We had been talking to a miner who had been chopping wood nearby. I said 'had been,' for the moment the ground began to shake the fellow threw down his ax, ran to his tent and plunged inside."

"Then we saw some comedy. Hardly had the fellow ducked into the tent, when his partner, who had been reading a magazine inside, ran out and tried to run up the trail. The man inside tied up the flaps of the tent. As for the stampeder, he quickly discovered he couldn't keep his feet, so he just sat down, white-faced and scared."

"The quake lasted for fully 10 minutes. There was no going to the mines that day. When the shaking had ceased, Kingsley and I retraced our steps to the settlement to see if our cabin was standing. We found the cabins intact but most of the miners in a panic. The gold craze was forgotten. Outfits were sold for what they would bring, and more than half the miners left on the departing barkentine."

Decoto and Kingsley were not so easily discouraged, however, and in a few days made a fresh start for the "diggings," but not before the two had purchased three outfits of the departing miners, at \$70 for outfits that had cost \$100 each. They now had provisions and other supplies to last them through several winters.

A few miles of packing soon convinced those who had elected to stay that the clothing and other gear they had purchased in the “States” was not practical for Arctic use. Bartering with the Indians, they received in trade, for tea, tobacco and other luxuries, “muk-luks,” caribou fur coats, muskrat caps and fur mittens, all of which they put away for winter use. Decoto traded a pound of tobacco and five pounds of sugar for a squirrel coat, which was made up of more than 150 squirrel skins. Though fragile, it meant warmth in the coldest winter.

“Chechako,” a word of Indian derivation, meaning tenderfoot, was already in general usage in the country. Though all possessed firearms, there were few “bad men” among the miners, and a spirit of friendliness and comradeship prevailed. Theft was almost unheard of, and to pilfer another man’s pack meant the choice of exile or a well placed bullet.

The “excitement” was on Mills and Bear Creeks, where the newly arrived gold seekers made haste to stake off claims and construct “cradles” or sluice boxes preparatory to mining operations. In the event that sluices were to be used, the work also involved the building of dams and digging of ditches. Most of the miners “prospected” before staking off claims. A claim was considered good if it would “pan” 10 cents to shovel full.

“Lumber for the cradles and sluice boxes had to be whipsawed from green timber, hard work for ‘chechakos.’ When completed, the boxes were about 10 feet long, 14 inches wide, with 10-inch sides, and so made that one would fit into the end of the other. In the bottoms of the boxes were installed “riffles” for catching the gold.”

Decoto and Kingsley joined a company of six and leased a claim on Resurrection Creek. The men worked practically all summer to get to bedrock, and when they “cleaned up” for their summer’s work they realized a total of \$42 in gold dust, or \$7 apiece. They were discouraged, to say the least. But many others, who had come to the new land with the expectation of “picking gold from the trees,” had fared no better.

That summer 5,000 miners were in the Kenaipen peninsula, but before winter 4,000 had returned to the “States” and by next summer half of those had left. The first Alaskan gold rush had all but proved a fiasco.

The Chilkoot Pass Trail!

Except the western surge of emigrants across the plains, no other incident in American history can compare with the trek of the miner over the Chilkoot Pass during the Alaskan gold rush, believes Peter Decoto, who was a packer over the historic trail during the Klondike stampede.

Participating in the first rush to the Kenaipen peninsula only to find disappointment when, after a summer’s work, the “cleanup” from a placer claim betted him only \$7, Decoto did not, like the majority, return to the “States,” but stayed in the hope that he would yet “strike it rich.”

Smith, Decoto’s partner, “got cold feet,” and Decoto selected a new partner, a young, wiry fellow named Guy Rawlins. Rawlins and his partner, the latter a big, fat man, had “split up” over whipsawing, one claiming that the other was not doing his share of work. Decoto and Rawlins, accompanied by Smith, who was awaiting an opportunity to return to California, leased a claim on Canyon Creek, a

branch of Six-Mile. In the week they took out \$5,000 in dust.

Though the claim was good, water could not be led to it. As a consequence, they soon gave up their lease and purchased a half interest in a claim on Mills Flat from a man named Gladhouse and his partner, Jack Frost of San Jose. That winter Decoto and Rawlins stayed to whipsaw and to work the claim, while Gladhouse and Smith left for California to bring back their wives.

While at Mill Flat, Decoto bought an Alaskan sled and several "malamute" puppies, paying \$5 apiece for them. The two men worked the claim until fall, using an improvised hydraulic apparatus, but being unable to get to bedrock, abandoned it. Commissioned by his partners, Decoto set out for Seattle with the hope of selling the claim.

Taking his outfit and dogs, he engaged passage on a small schooner. After sailing for three weeks, during which time the craft ran into a blow which cracked her bowsprit and upset the galley stove, putting the cook to rout, the seafarers found themselves back in Cook's Inlet, the point from which they had set sail. The captain swore long and heartily. A careless sailor had left an iron belaying pin beside the compass, and the ship, in effect, had been sailing around the belaying pin.

The schooner stood to sea again and Decoto landed safely at Sitka with enough money to pay for his passage to Juneau, point of departure for Seattle. He set foot on the Juneau beach with but 75 cents in his pocket. Hardly had he landed when he met two men he knew. They advised him to take a job at longshoring. He accepted their advice and worked for 42 hours straight, at 50 cents an hour. Then, with \$21 to the good, he rented a cabin and got a job in the "Glory Hole" of the Treadwell, one of the richest mining properties of Alaska. The "Glory Hole" acquired its name from the fact that the miners were frequently killed in the "diggings" by falling rocks and thus transported to Glory.

After acquiring a "stake," Decoto continued his journey to Seattle, where, unable to sell the claim at Mills Flat, he returned to draw what money he had left. He was now a full-fledged Alaskan. But he did not linger to enjoy that distinction. Gold in fabulous quantities had been struck in the Klondike and the greatest gold rush in history was on, with the storm-swept peaks of Alaska barring the converging thousands from the gold fields.

Decoto arrived in Juneau; the outfitting point for the upper Yukon, to find the rush had taken it inhabitants by surprise. The stores were short of clothing and other supplies, and those who had already outfitted at San Francisco, Seattle or Victoria were fortunate. Hundreds had already landed; hundreds more were pouring in. The beach was piled high with outfits and dotted with tents; boats plied back and forth between ship and shore in the task of landing freight. Activity was everywhere.

There were two chief routes to the Klondike. One was the Chilkoot trail, from Dyea to Chilkoot Pass, 27 miles to Lake Lindeman, the main tributary of the Yukon River and 575 miles to Dawson. The other route was the White Pass trail, later known as the Skagway trail. The trail started four miles from Dyea, ascending the Valley of Skagway River over a pass, 2,800 in elevation.

Of the two routes, the Chilkoot trail was the best known, though the White Pass trail was then being vigorously advertised as a good horse trail all the way. Some of the gold seeker elected Chilkoot; as many more White Pass. But for Decoto there was little choice. He had played the Alaskan "game" once, and had lost; now, with only a few dollars, his team and his experience in the Kenai

peninsula, it was up to him to win his way to the Klondike by brain and brawn.

As usual, an opportunity presented itself. The services of freighters and packers were in great demand. On the Chilkoot trail the rate was 10 cents per pound to the top of the "hill," and from there 10 cents a pound to Lake Lindeman, head of navigation to the Dawson. The average outfit of a Klondike weighed one ton. Many of the miners packed on their backs, moving their outfits forward at the rate of a few miles a day; others hired packers, Indians and whites. Horses were used. Dog sleds were common. A few miners used pushcarts, specially constructed for narrow trails.

Mushing to Dyea, Decoto freighted from there over Chilkoot Pass and to Lake Lindeman all winter. From Dyea to the summit of Chilkoot is about 19 miles. The method used was to move an outfit to the foot of the pass, and from there it was carried by pack to the summit, the 3,500-foot pass, a precipitous wall of rock, reaching into the sky, being scaled by means of steps cut in the snow and ice. Burdened by a 100-pound pack, it took a strong man two hours to make the ascent. Once on the summit, the packers threw aside their loads and sitting on them, slid to the bottom of the pass for another load. Six hours constituted a good day's work at the pass.

The steps were kept open by a novel method. At the end of each day the miners took up a collection. This went to volunteers who during the night, with shovels and axes, cleared away the snow or further improved the trail, so it would be ready for the packers in the morning.

Despite the hardships and uncertainty ahead, most of the gold seekers were a cheerful lot. Here and there in the motley throng, however, could be readily picked out the men who were "getting cold feet," Mr. Decoto said. That throng, which during the winter of '97 and '98 numbered thousands, ranged from young and sturdy men to the weak and aged. Frail women braved the Arctic cold. The streams of humanity which during that winter poured over the Chilkoot and White Pass trails formed a spectacle almost unparalleled in history.

But if suffering and tragedy were to be found on the trails, there were many odd sights. One man, Mr. Decoto related, packed a heavy grindstone on his back, and all wondered what he would do with it. Later he set it up at Dawson and charged miners for the privilege of using the stone to sharpen axes and picks. Another man drove an immense ox before him. Still another staggered under a load of glass windowpanes, which he sold in Dawson for \$2 apiece.

Prices were "sky high." At Sheep Camp, near the foot of Chilkoot, in a "hotel" of rough boards, a meal of bacon, beans and tea cost 75¢. Horses were worth from \$150 to \$200, poor ones at that. On the White Pass trail horses were valued at 20 cents once they had reached the summit. Oats sold at \$16 a sack. Hay was \$325 a ton. Horseshoe nails sold at a dollar a pound. A set of horseshoes cost \$10. Packers were paid as high as \$26 a day.

Many of the stampederers, instead of waiting until reaching Lake Lindeman to cut timber and build boats, carried boat building material with them. Other were laden with collapsible canoes. A large number brought boats to Juneau, and there abandoned them. Enough boat building material was brought in, it was estimated, to pave from one end to the other both the White Pass and Chilkoot trails. One stampeder, who succeeded in getting a boat over the summit and to Lake Lindeman, loaded the craft and went to sleep, only to find on awakening that it had been stolen and was on its way to the Yukon.

During the winter that Decoto packed on the Chilkoot trail occurred the snow slide at Sheep Camp, in which 60 were smothered to death. The snow swirled down from the Scales side of the “steps” sweeping away 60 out of 80 who were on their way from the Scales to Sheep Camp for the night. Decoto, who was on the summit when word of the tragedy reached him, made haste to the scene of the disaster and helped dig the dead out.

The dead, numbering men and women, were taken to Dyea. There the frozen corpses were placed in a small room. To conserve space, Mr. Decoto related, the bodies were arranged in an upright position, shoulder to shoulder, along the walls.

The Klondike stampede of 1897-1898 will go down in history for all time. No less than 30,000 persons, representing the daring from all parts of the world, toiled over the White Pass and the Chilkoot trails that winter in the mad rush for gold.

Barrier after barrier they stormed. They adopted the skin and fur garb of the Eskimo and conquered the Arctic cold. They negotiated seemingly impossible trails, moving cumbersome outfits forward at the rate of but a few miles a day. Resorting to methods used by their forefathers, they whipsawed lumber for boats from green timber. They dared fearsome rapids; braved the ice floes of the Yukon, and those who survived reached Dawson, the objective, where even a greater test awaited them.

Social distinction did not take precedent on the Arctic trail. A college education might be of some benefit, but unless backed by courage and practicability meant nothing. Nor did Nature always favor the physically strong. Perhaps the greatest equality was moral courage.

Illustrating these points is the story of Peter Decoto and Guy Rawlins, two California youths who were partners during the great stampede, Decoto had landed at Juneau, starting point for the Yukon, with even less capital; and both packed goods for others in order to win their way over Chilkoot. Yet, out of the 30,000 that stampeded that winter, they were the first to reach Dawson!

In accomplishing this feat, Decoto had a point to his advantage. He had spent a winter in Alaska. He had adopted the dress of the Eskimo. He had acquired a dog team and sled. He had worked in the mines and “mushed” over Arctic trails. He was no “chechako.” He was as hard as nails. So was his partner, Rawlins.

Decoto’s dog team consisted of four “malamutes,” wolfish, fierce dogs, yet loyal and even affectionate if treated with kindness. On the Chilkoot trail the partners split the team, each taking two dogs, and Rawlins acquired a sled. Six cents a pound they made in moving freight from Juneau to the Scales; from there they packed it up the “steps” for 10 cents a pound. And they made good wages, as high as \$46 a day apiece.

Once an Alaskan reached the “summit” with his outfit, the worst part of the trail was over, though ahead were the rapids of Miles Canyon and White Horse, and beyond the grinding, crushing ice of the Yukon River.

Crater Lake, a small body of water, lies just on the other side of Chilkoot Pass. It was frozen. To reach it, many of the stampedeers rode their outfits down, toboggan fashion. Decoto and Rawlins, moving

their combined outfits, totaling 3,500 pounds, skirted the lakeshore. About two miles distant from Crater Lake is Long Lake. They sledged its length, three miles and reached the shores of Lake Lindeman, as miles distant from Chilkoot.

Lake Lindeman, on the shores of which the majority of the Klondikers assembled or built boats for the passage of the Yukon, is four and one-half miles long, narrow, and on one side walled in by a towering mountain. At the head of the lake, on the left hand, a river enters, where is timber for boats. Timber also was to be found two miles back from the lake. There were both spruce and fir.

When Decoto and Rawlings sighted Lindeman, there were about 50 tents on its shores, though this number increased to 1,000 before they left. The wood rang with the strokes of axes. Dog teams labored in the traces, dragging sleds loaded with green logs. Men were busily engaged in erecting sawpits. Others were laboriously sawing, and others more fortunate were building boats, craft ranging from longs, slender waisted bateau to clumsy skiffs and heavy skows. Smoke curled from the numerous Arctic stoves. The savory odor of cooking was in the air. The sun was shining, but the air was bitterly cold.

Leaving Lindeman, and moving slowly, half a day forward, caching the goods, and then on with the camp outfit as far as they could, they freighted to Marsh Lake, 70 miles from Lindeman. Here they resolved to build their boat. Only two other outfits were camped at Lake Marsh.

They created a sawpit and whipsawed boards from spruce. When finished and seams caulked with oakum and tarred, the craft was clinker-built, 27 feet long, 9 foot beam, and when loaded with outfits, dogs, and sleds, drew 18 inches of water, with 12 inches freeboard. They fashioned two oars, 12 feet long, and a steering oar, and also installed a "mast," using a tarpaulin for a sail.

It was still winter and they waited for the ice to break. But growing impatient, they moved the boat of sleds to the foot of the lake and continued from there to Sixty Mile, where they launched their craft, loaded it and floated down the stream to Lake Labarge.

At Labarge they found ice, and here, in transferring their outfits and boat to the ice, Rawlings had a narrow escape. Stepping onto a patch of thin ice while engaged in unloading, down he went, with a heavy sack of beans on his shoulder. Under the ice the current from the river flowed swiftly. But Rawlings bobbed up, with the sack of beans still on his shoulder! The day was saved, and so were the beans. Rawlings was chilled to the bone, however, and after changing clothes behind the shelter of a tarpaulin, had to run up and down on the ice to get warm.

Malamute dogs, trained in Arctic way, refuse to venture on treacherous ice. In freighting across Labarge, Decoto's team balked. Another Klondiker, sled and team passed him by. Decoto plied the lash. But a moment later he was sorry. Hardly had the Klondiker proceeded 100 yards, when he, sled and dogs, crashed through the ice. Catching up a board from the sled, carried for just such an emergency, Decoto rushed forward and managed to rescue the man and from the traces. But the Alaskan's sled and outfit were gone, and so were his hopes of reaching Dawson.

Waiting overnight for the lake to freeze solidly, the partners freighted the length of Labarge to Thirty Mile and so came to Miles Canyon, the first of the rapids. There were 40 boats behind them. There were one or two boats ahead and several big skows. Miles Canyon describes an "S" in its windings. On

either side are walls of rock from 60 to 80 feet high. The current is so swift that the water flows with a "crown," that is, it is higher in the center than on the sides.

The trick of shooting the rapids was to stay on the crown, avoid the rocks on the left and a dangerous eddy on the right. Without lightening the boat, and with Decoto at the oars and Rawlins in the stern with the steering oar, the craft shot through at dizzy speed. Past the rocks they glided safely, past the eddy. In another moment the boat was riding in comparatively smooth water.

To see how some of the other boats had fared, Decoto rowed back a distance. A boat containing two lanky Swedes was held fast in the eddy. Around and around the craft circled. The two Vikings heaved on their oars. Surrendering to the eddy, they stood up and shouted and gesticulated for help. They ranted and uttered words not to be found in the dictionary. Finally after having been in the grip of the miniature maelstrom for more than an hour, and in despair of ever getting out, they dropped on their knees and prayed fervently. Just then the boat shot out in the stream.

The thrills of shooting White Horse rapids, one of the last natural barriers that intervened between the Alaskan stampede and the gold fields during the famous Klondike stampede of 1897-1898, were vividly related here yesterday by Peter Decoto, who was a pilot at the rapids during the gold rush.

White Horse rapids, which during the stampede days claimed the lives of scores, is located the head of navigation to the Yukon River, about 124 miles from Dawson. The rapids are formed by the pouring of the whole body of the Lewes River through a gorge of basalt 20 to 30 feet high. For a quarter of a mile the river lashes itself into a perfect fury, and then, with a jumping and tossing, bursts through a gorge a span wide with banks level with the water and spreads out, once more a wide, serene river.

Decoto and his partner, Rawlins, had run the canyon rapids with their sturdy clinker-built boat fully loaded, and had shipped little or no water. But here, at the head of White Horse, they pulled to shore and unloaded enough tools and supplies so that, if they met disaster in the rapids, they could at least build another craft.

Then they sat on the bank of the Lewes and watched the others enter the white water. About every other boat came to grief. Then they studied the methods of a policeman of the Canadian Mounted Police, who took several boats through safely, and by this observation learned where the channel was.

Their boat was heavy, with little if any freeboard to spare, and it was decided to shoot the rapids stern first, with Decoto at the oars and Rawlins at the steering oar. They pushed into the stream. The current gripped the boat; they shot into the seething crest, with Decoto straining at the oars and Rawlins doing his best to aid the rower in keeping bow pointed upstream.

At the first leap into the "soapsuds" the spray flew several feet outward from the flaring sides of the craft. After a dozen or two lunges into the crests of the waves they struck a submerged rock. For a split second the boat was perilously near capsizing; then they slid over and were again shooting downstream. In a few more seconds they were in smooth water. White Horse rapids was behind them!

Many of the more timid soon besieged the two daring young Californians, and they safely piloted more than 30 boats through, for which service they received \$10 per boat. Soon, however, they gave up piloting in favor of the Canadian policeman who had been stationed at the rapids, inasmuch as their pay

was only \$20 monthly, and the extra money they could make as pilots came as a godsend.

Resting from their strenuous labors, the two partners camped below White Horse. While there they were eyewitness to an incident, which illustrated another, and humorous side of Alaskan life. Two partners had agreed to disagree, and the climax of a heated argument sawed their boat in two, each taking his half. Each then boarded over the end of his "boat," took aboard his outfit, and they floated down the stream, one pretending indifference to the other.

Disagreements of this kind were common, Mr. Decoto said. He told of another incident wherein two partners, after a "fight," smashed their boat to bits and then floated down the stream on rafts.

Breaking camp after a few days, Decoto and Rawlins embarked and floated down as far as the Hootalinqua River, where they encountered an ice floe so strong that they were forced to make their way to shore and camp. Here another boat and party of Klondikers joined them, and when the floe had passed the two boats floated down the river together.

Just above the Pelley River the voyagers sighted an ice jam and as the risk of being sucked under the ice, boats and all, were forced to make for shore in a hurry. The current was running swiftly. As Decoto's boat nosed the bank, Rawlins sprang to shore, painter in hand. Brace himself as he might, however, he could not hold the boat, and had had not Decoto managed to swerve the craft into a jutting point of land, the boat and rower doubtlessly would have been swept into the suck of the ice jam.

The other voyagers had succeeded in getting to shore, in the shelter of a little cove. Decoto and Rawlins joined them, and to save their boats from being smashed to kindling, with oars "poled" the crowding, grinding ice cakes by, until the worst of the floe had passed.

The two parties were ahead of the hundreds of Dawson-bent. When the ice jam broke up, Decoto and Rawlins pushed out into the stream, but the other voyagers elected to wait for more favorable conditions. For two days and nights, unable to land because the ice was piled up 30 feet high on both shores of the river, the two Californians floated down stream.

Above the Stewart River they found a place to land and camped three days. The river was still filled with floating ice, they pushed on and the next day, on May 4th, sighted Dawson, the city of their dreams. A crowd of 20 or 40 men and women was waiting for them on the bank, eager for the first news.

"Dawson looked mighty good to us," said Mr. Decoto. "The town then consisted of 20 or 40 cabins. Snow was still on the ground. We put up a tent, stored out outfits and slept in my uncle's cabin until we could build a cabin of our own. Dawson was wide 'wide open.' Everyone had money or its equivalent, gold dust. A meal cost \$8 and comprised coffee, bacon and dried eggs. Whiskey sold at 25¢ a glass. A quarter was the smallest piece of change in the Klondike. Old timers saw to it that nickels and dimes were gathered up as fast as the chechakos brought them in and thrown into the Yukon."

At the time Decoto and Rawlins landed at Dawson the "diggings" where fortunes were being taken out were on Hunker, Bonanza, El Dorado, Bear and Dominion Creeks. Bear and Bonanza Creeks were located about three miles from Dawson; El Dorado, 20 miles; Hunker, 25 miles; and Dominion, 40 miles.

Contrary to the pulp-magazine “thrillers” of northern life, though “six-guns” were prominently carried at that time, they were not intended for use against fellow miners, and every gun had to be registered with the Canadian government, Mr. Decoto said. “Bad” men were scarce in the Klondike, for Old Father Chilkoot was particular as to whom he admitted.

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