

And now it's an ALASKA PLATINUM RUSH



By Kay J. Kennedy.

ON the windswept coast of the Bering Sea in southern Alaska there is a region so barren, and uninviting that the Eskimo residents there have actually had less contact with white persons than their brethren of the Arctic slope way up north at Point Barrow.

Even missionaries have not been tempted to settle there. There are no schools. Until recently there was no post office. Just a handful of hardy whites even visited this area and fewer had the fortitude to live there. But now there has been a change because the magic words of "Gold! Platinum!" have echoed from this hitherto little-known region of Goodnews Bay.

For the past year it has been the Mecca of Alaskan mining men who have rushed in to stake claims—a modern stampede, nothing less. Today drilling outfits are busy determining the extent of the "pay" areas. Drag-lines and dredges are feverishly being installed to woo gleaming gold and precious platinum from the gravels of the bleak section during the short mining season. Indications all point to Goodnews Bay as an important platinum and gold producing area.

As history testifies, this is not Alaska's first stampede—but it is different. Alaska and the Klondike were popularized by a gold rush in 1898, but gold was being mined successfully and profitably long before that. Between 1890 and 1896 there were 200 vigorous men prospecting and mining in the Forty Mile, Circle City, and Eagle country along the Yukon river. These men were making good money. Gold dust in mooseskin pokes was the medium of exchange—gold dust worth \$20 an ounce.

Few of the men and little of their dust got out of the country because of the long trail to the outside and no regular boat service. Most of these men loved the north, had their friends and lived their lives in these isolated outposts. Once in a while some enterprising, restless soul would drift down the Yukon and over to the quaint Russian village of St. Michael, hoping to catch the Dora, a ship that came in once a year maybe. Perhaps the interior route cross-country and over the famous Chilkoot Pass via Dyea would be chosen.

At Haines the States-bound passenger would prayerfully await some boat. There was no Skagway then. If he had not spent or gambled away his dust there was a chance he'd make the boat.

With this natural damming up, the interior country got pretty full of gold dust—but for all that, the boys loved the thrill of a new stampede. After all, there was little other diversion. Each new stampede would add to the circulating gold.

Despite the inconveniences in transportation, about a million dollars worth of gold a year sifted out of Alaska one way and another from 1891 through 1894. This figure was boosted to about

Above—Map of Alaska, showing the location of Goodnews Bay and the "boom town" of Platinum. Below — Walter Culver, one of the leaders in the use of machinery to mine the gravels of the Goodnews country.



two and one-half millions annually from 1895 to 1897. Still there was no rush, no excitement, no stampede to Alaska.

It took that enterprising headline writer on the Seattle newspaper who translated ounces into "A TON OF GOLD!" A ton of gold, he said, had arrived from Alaska on the steamer Portland, July 17, 1897. Then the stampede was on!

Last year—40 years later—more than 15 tons, nearly a carload, of gold valued at \$16,000,000 was shipped from the Territory.

A FEW thousand ounces of platinum metals have been recovered annually in Alaska, mostly by crude hand methods, for the past few years; but last year, when nearly 10,000 ounces of platinum metals, varying in value from \$40 to \$125 an ounce, were mined, mining men began to sit up and take notice. Most of Alaska's platinum comes from the Goodnews Bay region.

Last fall there was a big rush accompanied by indiscriminate staking. Stak-



Only a few hardy whites occupied the immense district—until, at last, the magic words "Gold! Platinum!" brought on a stampede.

ing continued this spring until all the desirable parts, and some apparently undesirable parts, of a 100-square-mile area are now under stakes of prospectors.

Just now the men are busy drilling and prospecting, trying to determine what they drew in the deal. Big outfits and little outfits are all working madly side by side. The Geological Survey has a party looking over the region also.

An RFC loan of more than half a million dollars to the Goodnews Mining Company means activity in installing a huge dredge that will go the necessary depth to bedrock. The dredge will be the second largest in the Territory. Long hours of Arctic summer daylight are being utilized fully, for at best the working season is short.

Where reindeer came to lick beach salt a few years ago there has sprung up a town around Captain Pete Wold's trading post near the white metal region. Cap named his village "Platinum" and the main drag is Platinum Boulevard!

He confesses he has always had a hunch about Goodnews Bay and his trading operations have taken him into the Bering Sea coast yearly since 1906. When he saw small outfits and lone miners take out thousands of dollars in gold and, later, platinum also, Captain



Goodnews Bay Eskimos have had even less contact with white people than the Eskimos of the remote Arctic coast.

Pete looked on and said, "This is good." With foresight characteristic of a frontiersman he visioned a town growing up on the barren shores of the bay.

Three years ago he succeeded in getting a post office there. With every faith in the future of the region he has been acquiring placer claims.

ALL summer Captain Wold has been busy plying his vessel, the motorship Fern, between various points and Goodnews, taking in drilling equipment, crews, supplies and Matanuska products. However, it takes him several weeks to make the long trip around the Alaskan peninsula and back to Anchorage.

Much traffic and freighting has been done by air from Bethel, on the Kuskokwim river, and Anchorage, on the Alaska Railroad, especially before the ice broke up in the Bering Sea and boats were able to get in. As it is, dock unloading is done on "lighters" or sort of rafts and then taken ashore, as was done at Skagway before a dock was built there.

Last season a tractor equalizing spring was broken at Dave Strandberg's Clara Creek outfit. Time was important. Radio communications revealed that a replacement could be obtained at Fairbanks, nearly a thousand miles away, and Strandberg considered himself fortunate. The spring was shipped 400 miles by rail to Anchorage where it was loaded into a plane and speeded to Platinum. The freight bill amounted to \$240.

Strandberg has been mining gold in Alaska since 1898 and is not immune to the thrills of a clean-up even yet. But when he made his first platinum clean-up last season he was frankly disappointed. Platinum does not have the gleam, glitter and glamour of gold. The heavy, dull, gray, almost dirty grains in the pans weren't exciting to him.

So far, from 5000 to 10,000 ounces of platinum metals have been taken out of the Goodnews Bay region each season. These metals, when they are separated, are iridium, which sells at close to \$100 an ounce; palladium, which brings \$20 an ounce, and platinum, which brings \$60.

Altogether, the Goodnews Bay region comprises some 600,000 square miles, and prospectors and miners there do not have anything resembling a picnic. It is a desolate and treeless country, and there are only about 120 days in the year when placer mining can be carried on.

Last fall wholesale staking began to occur and larger outfits with the necessary capital to install the needed machinery for large scale operation became interested.

Walter Culver succeeded in interesting the Walter W. Johnson Company of San Francisco in the Wattamus gold placer country. Dave Strandberg has a dragline in the platinum region. The Goodnews Mining Company made an RFC loan to install a dredge on their properties and leases. Many others are trying to get fingers in the platinum pie now.