[from J.F. Smith Kamloops 1930.]

[From RCR - July 1944 No cost of service.]

Victoria, Vancouver Island,
October 30th, 1862.

My Dear Friend Hutchinson,

You will, no doubt, long ere this be charging me with black ingratitude, breach of promise, and every other vile thing. I acknowledge you have apparent reason for so doing, but wait till you read to the end, and then condemn me or acquit as your judgment may direct. I wrote to Mr. Campbell, from Lillooet, on my way up to the mines, requesting him to give you an account of my voyage up to that date. I could not find time then, even to write to my brother, at least not a long letter such as he would expect. I will now endeavour to give you a brief account of my pilgrimage through this wild, barren, barbarous, and most uncivilized country on the face of the globe. Now then you will know how much I appreciate this beautiful farming country described by the Rev. White of New Westminster. You might travel for hundreds of miles among mountains and scarcely find soil enough in which to inter a dead body. But I am getting away from my subject. I intended to give you an account of my wanderings up and down, so here goes. Having formed a partnership in Lillooet with John James & Thos McGlashan, of York, we bought a horse--price $110--paid for shoeing $5- for pack saddle &c $5 more, making in all $120. We than loaded with flour, beans & bacon--also a few pounds of tea, dried apples &c. The price of the load amounted to about $100--Flour being worth 25 cents a pound, beans 27 & bacon 40. But the prices of provisions vary in proportion to the distance from Victoria, and even in the same place it varies from week to week--Well having got all things ready for the journey, we started from Lillooet, on the 20th June, in company with a pack-train which was loaded with provisions for the mines. The first two days travel was on the new road being constructed by Government--then commenced the mountain trail--ascending and descending mountains in some places almost perpendicular. Often did I expect to see some of the horses tumble down the precipices which had to be passed on a path in some places not more than six inches in width--but these Cayoosh horses are generally sure-footed. I

think they are quite as good as mules and in soft ground much better. There were some thousands of animals employed in "packing" this summer, and it kept them all busy. The owners of trains did a lucrative business. It was almost equal to coining. They charged from 25 to 40 cents a pound for every pound weight from Lillooet to the forks of Quesnelle, a distance of 227 miles, and each animal on an average carries from 200 to 300 pounds weight--From the Forks to Antler the price is from 20 to 25 cents a pound--A train can make about three trips in the season. So you can calculate what a train of 30 to 40 animals would realize in one season, provided none of them died or got killed by the way--Good mules will carry four to five hundred pounds weight but are not much used between the Forks and the mines as their narrow feet dont answer well for such soft roads. To return to my journey--on the afternoon of the second day we camped at the foot of what is called Pavilion mountain--the next day being Sunday we rested and allowed the horses to graze, which was only humane as they had been starved for about a week at Lillooet to such an extent that I actually saw some of them attempt to eat pieces of gunny sack lying about the streets--On the Monday following we ascended Pinnacle mountain, which was my first experience, I may say, in mountain-climbing. On the top of this there is a considerable extent of undulating prairie like country almost free from trees and covered with a kind of hard, tough grass, which the animals seem to relish much--but although this, and all the other tracts of prairie land through which I passed, and which are only to be found on the tops of mountains, may look nice and refreshing to the eye, they are in point of agriculture except for pasture, valueless, in as much as it freezes at night, at this elevation, even in July--On the night of the 4th of July we camped beside a stream in a beautiful open prairie on one of these heights--next morning I took ice from the water nearly ¼ of an inch in thickness--talk of farming in such a climate as this--'tis sheer nonsense.

And then the mosquitos! they are the largest, the most numerous, and the most tormenting to be found in any country. I thought some of the Canad-ian swamps bad enough--they are really nothing--and here the order of things is completely

reversed, if you want to know what mosquitos can do, go to the tops of the mountains, if you want lakes or swamps go to the tops of the mountains for that is the only place you can find them--There is a large species of yellow mosquito in the upper country, which is almost equal in size to the dirt flies in Canada, in fact there are three distinct kinds--and in passing through these dry prairies you are surrounded day by day with swarms so thick that at times one can scarcely breathe, nor do their ravages cease at night fall--they come into the tents in legions and if you are fortunate enough to get to sleep, which one must do occasionally even at the risk of being devoured, for nature must have repose, you may, very likely, have the satisfaction, on awaking, of finding that your eyes are "bunged up", and your facing in general presenting a very scurvy appearance. I have seen green horns, fresh from the old country, with faces so swollen that they could scarcely see, in fact you would have thought they just rising out of small pox--didn't the Englishmen swear at the mosquitos. I guess they did but it was of no use--At the end of 24 days we reached the forks of Quesnelle, where we stopped about six hours, and, parting with the packtrain as it went no further, we determined to prosecute our lonely journey--up to this point the trail was in general dry, but now that we are in the Cariboo country, where it rains almost incessantly during summer, and snows without intermission most of the winter, you may have some idea of the state of a trail about as wide as a cow-path, and trodden by hundreds of animals every day--Sometimes I would almost despair of ever getting through, as we had 45 miles of this travelling through pine bush so thick that in many places you could not see a rod a-head, ere we reached the first of the celebrated Gold creeks, viz Keithleys--Then I thought of Canada, and the good roads you had at that season, while, I like a poor pilgrim, was plunging through mud and water up to the knees--Believe me it is hard work, especially when followed up day after day in a drenching rain.

(Note--From here on the writing is exceptionally small).

Get your glasses now and if you have none better borrow a pair before you commence this page, my paper is more than half done, and my story not well begun, so in order to economise space I have laid aside the long primer and commenced the diamond type--I believe I left you in the mud, when we parted on the last page, between the Forks and Keithleys--this is indeed a wretched trail--there are dead horses and mules thickly strewn along the trail--one I am sure for every quarter of a mile of the distance. Some die from exhaustion and want of food, as there is no grass but what grows around little lakes and in swampy ground and even there it is all eaten bare by the numbers of animals that are constantly travelling. But there is a kind of poison grass that destroys more animals than anything else. The poor animals when starving, will greedily snatch at any thing green as they walk along and this poison grass allures them to their doom. In some places the stench of the decomposing animals substance is almost unbearable--However we got our horse safely through and in good condition. We tied him up at night and as there were three of us, if grass was to be had we soon pulled as much as he could eat--After much toil and patient endurance we reached Keithley, and here we made no delay, as there are few miners on this creek on account of the difficulty of working it--It is full of large boulders that require blasting to get them out of the way--Leaving the village or rather the two or three shanties that comprise it we wended our way up a mountain the slant height of which is about 4 miles--camping for the night within about half a mile of the top--I felt cold enough at that elevation, sleeping in a cotton tent, however we could get plenty of pine brush for a bed in every place we camped--there is scarcely any thing but pine in the upper country but it is very different from the Canada pine--Well these pine tops are the only feathers we have in Cariboo but one can get used to any thing except mosquitos--we were now out of their clime, and glad I was. Next morning we gained the top when we saw Snow-shoes mountain at a little distance, towering up to the clouds, its peaks and ravines mantled with snow which lies here throughout the year, and from which circumstance it derives its name--We had to cross this mountain, and on gaining the top my astonishment

and delight were beyond description, never before have I had such an extended view of this nether world. Far as the eye could reach on either side were to be seen mountain peaks towering above each other in majestic grandeur--their peaks and sides for the most part covered with everlasting snow--What a vast deep solitude lay stretched around. I could fancy I almost saw the first tier of the Rocky mountains--At that moment the sight inspired me with such enthusiasm that I thought I was repaid for all my toil in clambering up mountains and wading through marshes to that time--proceeding across this mountain we walked on snow that I think could not be less than 8 or 10 feet deep, but this is not all over the ground, only in patches and ravines where it has been drifted. This was on the 17th July. We travelled the remainder of the afternoon, and slept that same night on Cariboo feathers on Snow-shoes mountain, next day we reached Antler which is about 25 miles from Keithley's--Here for the first time I saw gold mining in all its operations, and indeed I was not much charmed with the sights. Men standing in mud and water up to the knees throwing dirt into sluices through which a stream of water ran, washing away the clay, gravel and stones, leaving the heavy and precious metal, if there happened to be any behind. My partners, being acquainted with one of the miners got work by the day, at $8 and board themselves which would take about $4. I did not succeed in getting work consequently we sold the horse and what provisions we had left and divided the proceeds, which cleared up all expenses up to the mines, and a small balance as profit. We got $125 for the horse, $1 a pound for flour, the same for beans & $1.25 for bacon. I found it was foolishness to prospect a claim on my own hook, as I met some who had spent from three to five thousand dollars prospecting, and after all got nothing, and having spent every cent of their money could not come back for want of means--they were therefore obliged to pack provision on their back from one creek to another for a small remuneration, just enough to keep from starving--Packing on the back over mountains and through mud to the knees is not work for any white man. I had just enough experience in packing to know that it is hard work and therefore I thought it best not to stay so long that I might be obliged to do it. It was next to impossible to get work by the day, hundreds tried in vain--some offered even to work for one meal a day and was refused--I met Wm.

McCormack & Wm. Dallimore on Antler, so after looking around a few days we went over to William's Creek resolved to see as much of Cariboo as we could. We found things there much the same as on Antler--men working hard and living on still harder fare, some having nothing but beans & bacon for a number of days. Flour here was selling for $1.50 a pound, bacon the same & beans $1.25, nails, tobacco and candles each $3. a pound, a small loaf weighing about half a pound $1 a small pie $2--This is the greatest country for eating any where to be found. Every body could eat every hour in the day and everything, in the shape of food, that comes before him--
It is all nonsense to talk of 3 & 4 feet diggins'--
In most places shafts have to be sunk to the depth of 30 to 40 feet before reaching pay dirt. Just in the same way as sinking a well, and then if there should be no gold in the bottom of the shaft, they resort to what is called drifting or tunneling under the bank from the bottom of this shaft, trying to "strike the lead"--In many instances it is a work of great labour and expenses before gold is found--It would take from one to two thousand dollars this year on account of the high price of provisions to open a claim. After staying at Williams a few days we went to Lightning a distance of 20 miles--
Here we saw Dr. Wilkinson, who was getting his claim opened--
I have since heard that it turned out nothing. Of all the claims on all the creek I think not more than 20 or 30 were paying expenses--About 2 or 300 men out of 15 or 20,000 who went up this year made anything and these had their claims last year--
We soon made back tracks from Lightning and came down another trail all along the banks of the Fraser, a long weary mountainous trail--At length we arrived at Lillooet where W.D. got work at $50 a month and board. W.M. and myself came down to the new road where we took a contract to build a bridge 40 feet high by 135 long, which we finished in about 6 weeks, clearing about $115 each--We then left for Victoria--4 days after arriving W.D. came down. We are keeping bachelor's hall.
W.M. & W.D. are building a house, wages $4 a day. I thought to finish on this page but find I cannot, so good night. I will finish off to-morrow.

(Signed) "I.M."

Note--Letter to Isaac Hutchinson from I. McIlvene.