

# Yukon's Gold Legacy: Richness of the Klondike

*From Yukon's Gold Legacy, Written by Lee Olynyk, for MacBride Museum, [www.macbridemuseum.com](http://www.macbridemuseum.com), 1995. Used with permission.*

**A**lthough the Klondike was exceeded by other gold camps throughout the world in total production, portions of it were reputed to be the richest worldwide per square foot of area. Notably rich were portions of Bonanza and Eldorado creeks.

Reporting on the wealth of the Bonanza Creek gravels, R.G. McConnell commented in 1905:

*Some of these 500 foot claims have yielded upwards of half a million dollars each or at a rate of \$1,000 per running foot of valley (625 ounces per foot or 31,250 ounces per claim length at \$16 per ounce). A fraction at the mouth of Little Skookum Gulch, about 80 feet in length, commonly known as Dick Lowe's fraction, is reported to have yielded over \$300,000 (18,750 ounces at \$16 per ounce or 234 ounces per running foot).*

Commenting on the richness of Eldorado Creek, R.G. McConnell states:

*Eldorado Creek has proven the richest creek in the Klondike district and one of the greatest placer creeks ever discovered. The first thirty-seven claims (from the mouth up), with a few intervening fractions, have yielded gold of an estimated value of between twenty and twenty-five million dollars and several millions will be added to this amount before the creek is exhausted. No. 17, at the mouth of French Gulch, reputed to be the richest claim in the whole district, had yielded nearly a million and a half dollars worth of gold (100,000 ounces at \$15 per ounce).*

G.W. Gilbert, in "A Brief History of Placer Mining in the Yukon," commenting on the tremendous wealth of the creeks, stated:

*Bonanza and Eldorado proved to be two of the richest creeks ever found. For example, Eldorado No. 17, a 425 foot claim, yielded 125,000 ounces (4.3 tons of gold worth \$90,000,000 at 1980 prices). Lowe's 86 foot fraction just below Grand Forks produced more than 400 ounces for each foot of creek and further gold was recovered later by dredge.*

Probably nothing emphasized the extraordinary richness of the Klondike like the heart pounding effect produced by the sight of an exceedingly rich pan. Andrew Baird, "Sixty Years on the Klondike," commented:

*In the early days I saw several pans taken from the drifts which yielded approximately \$1,000. The first of these, which came under my personal observation, was taken from No. 2A below Discovery on Bonanza, Dick Lowe's famous fraction, possibly the richest piece of placer ground on the North American continent. It was panned by Hugh Coffee and yielded 64 ounces, which valued at \$16 an ounce, the then prevailing price of gold in Yukon, netted slightly more than \$1,000.*

*A variety of gold nuggets are shown here from Eldorado Creek. Alison Hartley (student assistant, 1999) smiling in the background.*



Mr. Baird goes on further to describe several other pans yielding \$1,000 each, of which he had personal knowledge.

*The "Dawson Daily News" 1899 ran daily accounts of the Klondike's remarkable wealth. One story reports striking ground yielding pans of 30, 54, and 62 ounces respectively. Another account told of a miner referred to as Caribou Bill collapsing his rocker canvas under the weight of 116 troy ounces (8 lb.) after only 3 hours of rocking. Another 6 hours of rocking yielded a further 181 troy ounces. ("Dawson Daily News," August 5, 1899)*

Early writers commonly agree that while working the virgin ground, gold could be seen throughout the deposit, with the naked eye. This has been verified by present day miners who have encountered a patch of rich ground missed, or purposely left as a support pillar, by underground miners. One such pillar was found in the early 1980s near the mouth of Mint gulch, a tributary to Hunker Creek. Upon its discovery, the two partners shut off their machines, opened a case of beer, and proceeded to pan out 85 ounces that hot summer afternoon. Many 1-ounce pans were had and gold could be seen throughout. (Story can be verified by Herman Liedke or John Erickson, the discoverers.)

Mike Olynyk, while pushing pay gravels on Henderson Creek, spotted a cluster of nuggets from the seat of his D8 dozer. Joined by fellow workers, he hand picked several ounces from a small area the size of a washtub. Mike reports that it appeared as if a person had taken a jar of gold and tossed it on the ground.

George Gilbert tells a story of a single miner who, decades ago, encountered a visible run of gold on Gold Run Creek and promptly cleaned up 4000 ounces with modest-sized equipment.

The author has personally taken a 3.5 pennyweight pan left from underground workings on 15 Pup, a tributary of Last Chance Creek. Rubbing his finger along the gravel, gold became visible every inch or so. This pan in 1995 represented \$65 (Ed. note: at \$530 Cdn per ounce of gold).

A great story of extraordinarily rich ground (discovered at the mouth of Glacier Creek, Sixty Mile) that started a stampede from Clinton Creek can still be gotten from one of the property owners, Lorenzo Grimard. Evidently, it took a bulldozer to clear the cut of Sunday "gold-pickers."

#### References

Baird, A., 1965. Sixty Years on the Klondike. Gordon Black, Vancouver, B.C.

Dawson Daily News, August 5, 1899. Dawson City, Yukon Territory.

Gilbert, G.W., 1989. A Brief History of Placer Mining in the Yukon. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Whitehorse, Yukon.

Grimard, L. personal communication.

Liedke, H. and Erickson, J. personal communication.

McConnell, R.G., 1907. Report on gold values in the Klondike high level gravels. Separate Report # 979, microfiche. Ottawa: GSC.

Olynyk, M. personal communication.