



# Yukon Prospectors' Association

- Meetings
- Metal Prices
- Home
- Hall of Fame
- Honour Roll
- Contact Us
- Prospector of the Year
- Yukon Geoscience Forum
- Properties for Option
- Larry's Corner

## EARLY GOVERNMENT SURVEYORS LEFT A PERMANENT MARK ON YUKON by Jane Gaffin

Jane Gaffin is a Whitehorse-based freelance writer who specializes in mining.

In September, 1941, the Legislature of the Province of Canada passed the resolution “That a sum not exceeding one thousand, five hundred (1,500) pounds sterling be granted to Her Majesty to defray the probable expense in causing a Geological Survey of the Province to be made.”

The Survey is usually known simply by the initials GSC. The scientific agency was the first government department in Canada. It is ranked as one of the world’s oldest national geological surveys. Only Britain and France established earlier surveys in the 1830s.

Canada’s GSC came to life in April, 1842, under the professional guidance and directorship of the charismatic, 44-year-old William Edmond Logan.

Logan, fluent in English and French, was born in Montreal on April 20, 1798, and was educated in Britain. He became a recognized authority on the geology of copper and coal in the Swansea district of South Wales.

His task with the newly-formed GSC was to survey what was known as Upper Canada and Lower Canada to determine if a resource base existed to support an industrial economy.

The first survey carried out in Quebec for coal was unsuccessful, but the GSC did recognize the possibility of mineable deposits of copper and other metallic minerals. It set the stage for much of Canada’s 20th century hard rock mining industry.

Logan was an exemplary role model for later Surveyors. He was said to have worked like a Trojan and lived like a Spartan. By the time Logan retired at 70 years of age in 1869, after serving 27 years, his accomplishments were legendary.

In the early days, the Surveyors examined more than geology, thus expanding the nation’s knowledge about the diverse country. The scientists studied and documented geography, topography, plants, animals, birds, archaeology, climate and people.

Invaluable reports, maps and photographs resulted from early explorers going into Canada’s remotest, untouched reaches. Their early endeavors served as invaluable tools and leads for helping the private-sector mining industry find deposits worthy of developing into mines.

The information is the cornerstone to Canada’s archival materials and has allowed Canadians the opportunity to get to know themselves and the vast land that affords them a

living.

The GSC was the impetus behind geological mapping of Canada's 10 million square kilometers of land and fresh water lakes and over six million square kilometers of continental margin, or coastal boundaries.

Under Logan's stewardship, the GSC blossomed. He promoted Canadian natural resources abroad. Links were formed with American and British geological surveys; the GSC participated in international exhibits.

Logan was inducted into the Royal Society of London after an exposition staged in that city in 1851. During his career, he received the Wollaston Palladium Medal, the highest honour of the Geological Survey of London.

He was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour from France while in Paris, where, due to Logan's work, Canada received worldwide acclaim during the 1855 Universal Exposition.

In recognition of his work, Queen Victoria knighted Logan in 1856.

Logan died in Llechryd, Wales, in 1875. He was 77. The eminent scientist and founding director of Canada's venerable scientific institution is still heralded among the greatest of all Canadians.

The Yukon has the honour of hosting the 5,959-metre Mount Logan, a namesake of Sir William Logan.

Canada's tallest peak and the second highest in North America is in the St. Elias Range. A popular mountain with climbers, Mount Logan was named in 1890 and first ascended by a joint Canadian-American expedition on June 23, 1925.

The pinnacle was officially measured in 1992 as a project celebrating the 150th birthday of the Survey.

Further tribute was paid to Logan in 1929. The name Logan was attached to a mountain range in eastern Yukon near Frances Lake.

A myriad of academic government geologists too numerous to list are legendary for their early-day work in the Yukon. Some of their writings are of such general historical value that the important GSC reports were reproduced to sell as Northern books.

One is George Mercer Dawson's Yukon Expedition. Field parties led by William Ogilvie and R.G. McConnell traveled the major rivers of the Yukon and northern British Columbia in 1887, too.

Ogilvie was the first to survey the northern border that separated Canada and the United States. While on the 1887 Canadian government expedition, surveying the Yukon River and Alaska boundary, Ogilvie provided what is one of the most accurate and optimistic accounts of early days in the Yukon, a district of the Northwest Territories.

In his 1888 report, the soothsayer predicted: "While the Yukon district and the northern portion of British Columbia are at present far beyond the limits of ordinary settlement, we

may be prepared at any time to hear of the discovery of important mineral deposits which will afford the necessary impetus and may result, in the course of a few years, in the introduction of a considerable population into even its most distant vastnesses.”

On this first reconnaissance survey, their regular route of travel took them through the Cassiar district in north-central British Columbia. Dawson correspondingly named the mountain range “Cassiar” in 1887.

His work showed geological conditions favorable for the occurrence of minerals but the results of his survey were not fully disclosed to the public, for whatever reason.

Existence of an asbestos deposit, however, had been known before he entered the country. Early prospectors and Indians told of mountain sheep bedding down in the matted fibres that clung to their wool and of birds building nests that withstood brush fires.

The Surveyors’ observations focused on geology, zoology, botany and climate as well as frontier history and native culture.

Ten years hence, in 1897, when gold was reported in the Klondike district and sparked a stampede, the waterfront town that sprang up out of the excitement was named Dawson City in honour of Dr. Dawson.

He was appointed the GSC’s third director in 1895, following in the footsteps of Logan and Alfred Selwyn. Dawson had served only six years in the position when he died unexpectedly after a day’s illness.

R.G. McConnell was the first Surveyor sent to report on the Klondike goldfield circa 1902. D.D. Cairnes was the Yukon’s specialist from 1905 until his death by drowning in 1917. His parties mapped a strip along the Alaska-Yukon border from 1912-14.

Dr. Hugh Bostock is the most revered of all Surveyors into the Yukon. He led Yukon reconnaissance mapping expeditions for 24 years, from 1931 to 1954. He was a legend within his own time. Local denizens remembered his friendship, kindness and scientific prowess.

The remarkable man inspired people. He possessed empathy for the Yukon, the people, little animals and the environment. His natural aptitude for storytelling is reflected in his writing style.

In 1957, he compiled selected GSC field reports, 1898 to 1933, into the popular Bostock’s Memoirs #284. The condensed version of many reports is treasured by anyone fortunate enough to have latched onto a copy before it went out of print many years later.

His Pack Horse Tracks published in 1979, was a big hit that fills in some historic blanks. It is a day-to-day account of his field expeditions from 1924 to 1954."

In 1963, he expressed some of his field adventures as poetry.

Bostock was generally accompanied by a party consisting of a cook, a packer, three or four student assistants and a string of nine to 14 horses.

One of the best-balanced parties was in 1939. Bill Bacon was chief assistant; Jack

Young, Fred Pierce and Tubby Anderson were junior assistants; Bill Duncan knew how to keep the men content with his cooking; and first-rate horseman Clarence Reinertson was an outstanding packer.

The cook and horseman were always ready to move camp and see new country, which made them, along with the others, a great asset for the three seasons the strong team worked together congenially. One year, they accomplished the great circle tour of the Mayo map-area before snow curtailed their efforts.

Today's field personnel will never experience the privations endured by early explorers. Bostock told of leaving Ottawa about May 20 and returning home around October 10.

He sometimes went six weeks without mail. Before setting out into the wilds, trading posts such as Fort Selkirk, were instructed to dispatch an Indian carrier with any urgent telegrams.

Until 1943, an emergency return for him would have entailed catching a riverboat to Whitehorse; a train to Skagway, Alaska; a voyage down the coast to Vancouver; and a rail crossing to Ottawa.

With the advent of radio, helicopter and planes, such long, inaccessible separations from families disappeared forever, wrote Dr. Bostock, who died on February 1, 1994, in Ottawa. He was 93.

In 1956, the helicopter revolutionized Geological Survey reconnaissance mapping programs in the Cordillera, a Spanish word denoting the "mountain chain" that runs from the tip of South America and continues up the whole western coast of North America.

The Geological Survey of Canada and the five above-noted Surveyors were inducted into the Prospectors' Honour Roll in 1988. The Honour Roll is designed to pay tribute to key people and supportive organizations showing faith in the mineral prospectors while they tread their rocky road.

Their names are engraved in the base of the prospector statue that stands watch over Whitehorse from the corner of Main Street and Third Avenue.

- 30 -

\*Whitehorse-based prospector Allen Carlos sponsored the research for this piece.

Articles are published on this website with the permission of the authors.

The authors retain the full copyright to their work.

1998 - 2013 Yukon Prospectors' Association