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Tommy Kerruish
By Dick McKenna

Tommy Kerruish was a knowledgeable and highly respected “mine boss” who at one time or another was in charge of mining operations at nearly every one of Whitehorse’s leading copper mines.

Kerruish was born in 1873 at Ramsay in the Isle of Man and in 1892 at the age of 19 he immigrated to the United States. Continuing westward, Kerruish at first settled in Montana where for a number of years he worked in the Butte copper mines before crossing the border into British Columbia where he again found work as a miner in the Slocan Silver District. Setting his sights northwards, in 1903 Kerruish journeyed to Alaska and two years later his trail ended at Whitehorse. Whitehorse would be his “home base of operations” for his remaining years.

By the time he arrived at Whitehorse in ‘05 Kerruish was a seasoned miner and mine foreman and his services were in high demand. At first he went to work at the Grafter Mine as foreman and over the proceeding years he also worked at the Copper King, War Eagle, Carlisle and Pueblo Mines. His last job in the mines was for Richmond Yukon in 1928 as Superintendent of drilling operations at the Pueblo.

Kerruish brought experience and leadership to the mines. He knew all of the practical aspects of mining from A to Z. From single jacking to double jacking to diamond drilling to machinery installation and all points between. He knew how to choose and handle a crew, how to keep good one’s on the job and above all he knew how to keep his men safe. In fact, not once during his quarter century career in the mines has any of his men suffered a major injury. A commendable record in any era.

After the copper mines closed Kerruish decided to try his hand at prospecting and in 1929 he went with his helper Chappie Chapman on a stampede to Squaw Creek in the Kluane country. Upon their arrival however, Kerruish found that the “pay dirt was too deep and the boulders unsurmountable”, so they left the area for shallower diggings on the Hootalinqua. Here they spent several months prospecting and “rocking” the bars and in the process recovering a certain amount of fine gold dust, mostly from O’Brien’s Bar.

The following year (1931) Kerruish took up a lease on Lake Creek in the nearby Livingstone Camp where he settled down with his wife in a comfortable cabin overlooking the Big Salmon country. Here they remained operating a small but successful placer mine into the 1940's. In January of 1944 Mr. Kerruish passed away and he was subsequently buried in Whitehorse’s pioneer cemetery.

Interestingly, Kerruish’s wife, whom he married in 1918, was herself a very industrious,

handy and versatile “lady”. Not only could she do every thing in the order of mining (except blasting), she could handle a team of dogs like the best of em, and among other things, she was a “crack shot”, or according to Kerruish, “Everything she aims at is in the pot”.

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