



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

WALLY GREEN: THE MINE-FINDER WHO WASN'T INTERESTED IN MINES

by Jane Gaffin

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(This article was excerpted from the 1974 LodeSTAR and the book Cashing In: the Yukon's Hardrock Mining History, 1898-1977)

The late Wellington (Wally) Bridgeman Green came to the Yukon in 1944 as an army cook during Alaska Highway construction.

In his spare time he prospected.

"Whenever I found something that looked good," he said, "I would take off my apron and go stake it."

He had a nose for minerals and was well-versed in tungsten and gold. But he was inexperienced with nickel.

He was a hard worker and completely honest. Privation was meaningless to him. He would sleep on the ground, go without meals, walk for miles. When more than 80, he was still receiving a \$900 prospector's assistance grant and traipsing the bush looking for minerals.

Wally was devoted to rocks, but he wasn't fascinated by mining. "I just wanted to find the minerals."

In those early days, he did not have anybody to talk geology with him. "Everybody knew placer," he said. "For placer mining you need a strong back and a light head. Too hard of work for me."

Wally had explored for rocks since a youngster growing up in the bush near Huntsville, Ontario, where he was born July 9, 1896.

His father worked for Canadian National Railways, but contracted typhoid fever and was unable to work for six months. Accepting the role of family supporter, Wally, age 13, went to work earning 50 cents for a 10-hour day in an 85-man camp.

"I was a cookey. You know, a flunkey, a helper who washed dishes and scrubbed floors."

In 1914, he and his brother enlisted in the Canadian Army and served two years in France.

Back home again, Wally took a prospecting course.

It was while cooking in forestry and mining camps, he heard about the Alaska Highway and headed North.

In 1952, Wally backpacked into the Kluane Range area near Burwash Landing. He and his partners, Chuck Hankins and Charles (Lofty) Ayrd, were looking for copper. But they would settle for anything they found.

On the third day, Wally went to a stream for camp water and noticed a peculiar rock. "It was just like an egg, sort of rusty. I didn't know what I'd found."

They staked it anyway.

When they did find out what they had staked, the prospectors assumed the copper and zinc content were too low to make the property worthwhile. They felt safe exposing the showing to a stranger.

The stranger was Ted Chisholm, chief geologist for Toronto-based Prospectors Airways, the exploration arm of Anglo Huronian. Chisholm, who had a long association with nickel deposits, knew what the Quill Creek samples really contained.

Chisholm made a field trip with the three prospectors. Although the actual grades were unknown, Chisholm was confident, if large enough, the distinctive-green showing was a natural-made mine.

A nickel discovery in the Yukon was an unusual, outstanding accomplishment. Other than Sudbury, Ontario, the world's nickel capital, nickel deposits were rare commodities, searched for internationally without new ones being found.

Prospectors Airways' offer to option the property from the prospecting syndicate, Yukon Mining Company, also was based partially on platinum results.

Chisholm had somewhat doubted the first platinum assays returned from a Vancouver laboratory. At the time, International Nickel was probably the only company capable of conducting a reliable test for platinum.

"A reading of eight ounces of platinum to the ton alone would have made the showing a tremendous gem!" said Chisholm, whose \$10 cheque was later returned with the assay lab's apology. The platinum reading was reduced substantially to .08 ounces to the ton.

The syndicate declined Prospectors Airways' offer and accepted Hudson Bay's which promised the prospectors a higher percent of stock in the future.

The next year, Hudson Bay drilled, did adit work and invested several million dollars in exploration, underground development and building a 500-ton-a-day mill.

Wally Green was known for and most disappointed over his namesake, the Wellgreen Nickel Mine.

Hudson Bay had formed a new company, Hudson Yukon Ltd., in which the prospectors

received only seven percent. The lion's share was held by the company. To no avail, Wally Green protested he had been verbally promised 15 percent in the \$3-million company.

"A prospector must learn to see indication," Wally said. "Not just massive showings. He must also study more than rocks."

Wally suggested a prospector study the business end of prospecting. " Else he's going to be fleeced, taken to the cleaners. A prospector has to know who he is dealing with. Too many times, it's just promotion and the prospector gets nothing. Prospectors should take courses in basic law."

The Japanese were listed to buy the concentrates from Hudson Bay. The mine operated 14 months before the material proved too insufficient to be economical.

From May 1972 to July 1973, three shiploads of concentrates, averaging 13,000 tons each, were trucked from the minesite to Haines, Alaska, by Ray Russell Transport of Whitehorse before Hudson Bay dropped the idea of mining the property.

The Wellgreen property was revisited by All-North Resources Ltd., but its possible 1995 open-pit production date never came to pass. The nickel-copper-platinum deposit's reserves have been calculated to exceed 42 million tonnes.