



A NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Release

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CARIBOO GOLD

WASHING DOWN A MOUNTAIN FOR GOLD

LAST OF HYDRAULIC MINES IN CANADA

Wells, B. C., summer 1958.

"There's gold in them there hills" and the last of the placer miners, John MacDougall, is washing down a mountain near Wells in the famous Cariboo country in the heart of British Columbia, to get at that pay dirt.

Almost 100 years ago the word spread that gold had been discovered in this territory and the Cariboo Gold Rush was on. Thirty thousand men flocked into the Cariboo in search of the yellow nuggets that were found -- some succeeded -- most failed. Millions of dollars in gold was taken from the area but the thousands who came and went left behind ghost towns and today only one or two lode mines are still operating.

John MacDougall, a quiet spoken patient man, came to the Cariboo over 37 years ago, and decided there was still gold in the hills. He established claims and his mine is the only placer operation left in the Cariboo today.

In late spring John starts his placer mining in a water worn canyon. Damming the spring run-off from the extremely heavy snowfall (there is snow in this valley until July) he places lengths of 12-inch pipe from the dam to the area to be mined. At the head of the pipe the men fix a "handy monitor" -- a swivel head spout that can shoot the gravity flow a hundred foot distance. John MacDougall decides where the gold should be and guides the flow into the gravel sides of the canyon. As he does this he unearths old cedar stumps, supports of an underground mine put in by a group of Chinese nearly 100 years ago. He washes the area clean, down to the rock, hoping there is plenty of gold in the overburden.

As the washing down process goes on, a bulldozer pushes the gravel and water down a water worn bed to a sluice box. The sluice box is heavy planking along the side and steel rails in the bottom. As the water and gravel is pushed down into the sluice box, the gold which is 19 times as heavy as water, falls to the bottom of the sluice in between the rails. This process goes on from early morning until dusk and there's always someone on duty at night to protect the claim.

Although patient, this hardy miner still finds use for the old gold pans and once or twice a day he takes time out from the monitor to take a sample. Filling his big pan with gravel and water he swirls it around and around, pouring out loose gravel and water at every other turn until he has nothing in the pan except a tiny nugget or gold dust. Then he knows he's in the right area.

At clean-up time, usually three times during the six month season, excitement runs high. The water is closed off and the boards and cross rails scrubbed with a brush to remove gold particles. The men rake the area to uncover any nuggets and sweep the heavy sand into boxes for panning.

After the first screening Mr. MacDougall comes up with a panful of gold nuggets. He expects to get 150 ounces out of this clean-up. Last year during the six months of operation he took out 540 ounces of gold, roughly \$18,000 value. He expects to do the same this year. But it's a gamble. He may work for months and find barely enough to pay his helpers.

Where there's gold there's always a chance of a fortune and Mr. MacDougall believes there's still Gold in the Cariboo.