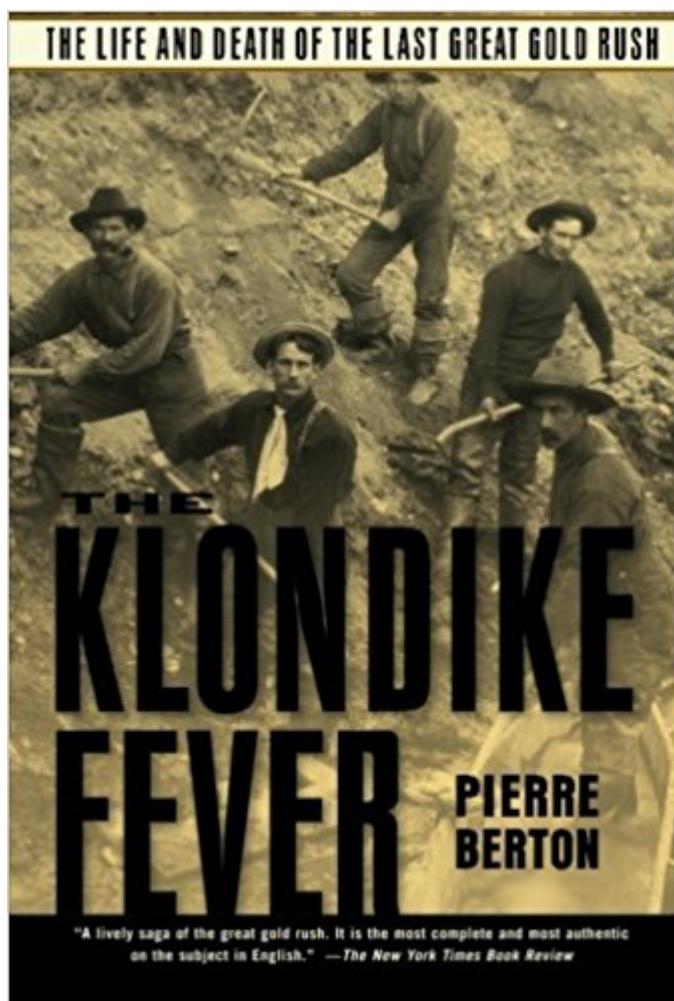


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The Klondike Fever: The Life And Death Of The Last Great Gold Rush



Synopsis

In 1897 a grimy steamer docked in Seattle and set into epic motion the incredible succession of events that Pierre Berton's exhilarating *The Klondike Fever* chronicles in all its splendid and astonishing folly. For the steamer *Portland* bore two tons of pure Klondike gold. And immediately, the stampede north to Alaska began. Easily as many as 100,000 adventurers, dreamers, and would-be miners from all over the world struck out for the remote, isolated gold fields in the Klondike Valley, most of them in total ignorance of the long, harsh Alaskan winters and the territory's indomitable terrain. Less than a third of that number would complete the enormously arduous mountain journey to their destination. Some would strike gold. Berton's story belongs less to the few who would make their fortunes than to the many swept up in the gold mania, to often unfortunate effects and tragic ends. It is a story of cold skies and avalanches, of con men and gamblers and dance hall girls, of sunken ships, of suicides, of dead horses and desperate men, of grizzly old miners and millionaires, of the land — its exploitation and revenge. It is a story of the human capacity to dream, and to endure.

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Customer Reviews

Mr Berton you excel yourself. This book is very well written, meticulously accurate, entertaining, and justifies its reputation as one of the very best accounts of the last of the great gold rushes. As Mr Berton says, who grew up in the site of the infamous rush in Dawson City, "it was certainly one of the strangest mass movements of human beings in history.". At least 100,000 people from all over the world set out seriously for the gold fields on the remote Klondike Valley in the late 1890s.

(Probably at least 5 times that many set out half seriously, but never managed to get even close to

the Klondike). Of these, only around 30,000 actually made it to their destination. Of those who made it, only around 0.5% actually made any decent money. Of those, most blew their money, and very few indeed managed to keep their money for the rest of their lives. Thousands perished on route, most of these succumbing to poorly planned expeditions, over mountainous passes and remote icefields that they never dreamed of when they set out. Most of those who actually arrived in the remote location were too exhausted financially, emotionally and physically, to bother looking for gold. Furthermore, when they arrived they found that all the land was already staked. Most simply booked a ticket on the nearest steamship, and went home. Amongst the way there were many bizarre and tragic stories, which are too many to detail here. Avalanches, sunken ships, freezing winters, con-men, women, children, old men and young, gamblers, dance hall girls, swindlers, dead horses, suicides, -they were all there. The desperate, the poor, the rich, the ignorant, the informed, the millionaire and the pauper alike, rubbed shoulders in a wild human exodus that has seen little like it, before or since.

For those of us whose knowledge of the Klondike Gold Rush comes mostly from the 1950s radio drama, "Sergeant Preston of the Yukon" this is a fine book to read. (Trivia question: What was the name of Sergeant Preston's preternaturally intelligent huskie?) Originally published in 1958, "Klondike Fever" has proven to be a minor classic. (See note below concerning a new edition of the book.) This Gold Rush, named after the Klondike River in the Yukon territory of Canada, was the last great scramble for gold in the old West. One hundred thousand persons, mostly from the U.S., set out for the Klondike in 1897, 30,000 or 40,000 got there, after an arduous journey through killing winter snows, and a few hundred found gold. The stories of the long, hard journey into this Arctic wilderness are often horrific. In one party of 19 men, 15 died or were killed along the route and the other four had eyes damaged by snow blindness. The gold seekers included author Jack London, Wyatt Earp, and poet Joaquin Miller. The author tells a compelling tale of the men and women who participated in the Klondike Gold Rush. It was indeed a fever. The characters in this book include crusty old miners who suddenly became rich beyond their wildest dreams, stalwart, incorruptible Canadian Mounties, conmen like Soapy Smith -- who in the dramatic tradition of the West receives his just deserts -- prostitutes, madams, gamblers, angels of mercy, last-chance losers, rich adventurers, Indians, and missionaries. It's a fascinating read, based on research that included interviews with many of the oldtimers who lived to talk to the author in the 1950s. The author's standard of truth telling is high; he identifies a tall tale or an unlikely exaggeration when he finds them.

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