

# Rossland Miner

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## CONSORTS OF THE STARS . . .

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(By Gordon Perkins)

"Way up on a mountain  
On a mountain so high,  
Four men are watching  
The vast, lonely sky.  
\* \* \*

This is a story about Old Glory and the men who know her so well. Old Glory is a mountain, 7,792 feet high to be exact, and it is the highest isolater weather station on this continent.

To get to Old Glory, you can drive a car as far as what used to be O'Brien's camp where the road comes to an end. Then, if you're a real hiker, you'll walk the rest of the way, although many people seem to enjoy the trip on horseback.

During the summer months, Wilf Gibbard, his wife Ruth, and their three kiddies live at O'Brien's Camp, in a cozy little cabin that Ruth keeps spotlessly clean and neat.

Wilf and Ruth Gibbard are two of the nicest people you could ever know. Dedicated to the outdoors, they are one of the happiest couples on the face of the earth. Wilf spends the summer months packing supplies to the boys on Old Glory and these supplies include everything from marmalade to coal. The entire winter supplies are taken up in these few summer months, and Wilf is using seven horses for the job. He treats the horses like they were human beings, talking to them worrying about them when they are under the weather, caring for them with an affection that is heart-warming.

### 'AND THE HORSE TOLD ME'



Packing supplies up to Old Glory is Wilf Gibbard's summer occupation, and when he's not packing, you're liable to find him fishing or hunting. Wilf uses seven horses while he's packing, making several trips to the top each week.

Three years ago, Ruth stayed up on Old Glory as assistant ranger, spotting forest fires. There aren't many women who would forsake the city life to take on a job like that, but as Wilf says, "I married an exception." There's a quiet pride in his voice when he says it. Ruth stays at O'Brien's these days raising her family. The little one isn't quite big enough to take to Old Glory for the summer months, so Ruth doesn't get much opportunity to go with her husband up the stairway to Glory. But her heart is

top. You're not hemmed in like you are down here." Ruth is from the prairies, and the view from the top of Old Glory reminds her of home. Up there, on a really clear day, you can see from 90 to 110 miles in all directions, with nothing for your eyes to rest against, but the clouds on the distant horizon.

The trail from O'Brien's to Old Glory reminds you of a winding stairway with its twists and turns. A mile up the trail there, for she says, "I'd like to be up there again. You can see something when you're up on from O'Brien's, the original path becomes two, and little signposts inform you that if you take the path to the right, it is five miles to Old Glory, and if you take the path straight ahead, it is seven miles to the top. Wilf uses the longer trail when he's packing, because it is a more gradual climb for the horses and their condition is his first concern. Chances are that you will take the shorter trail, figuring that a little steeper climb is worth it if it will save you two miles. The trail drops down into a little gully, where a sturdy bridge spans a mountain stream which seems to chuckle and gurgle like a contented child as you approach it. Across the bridge you go, and up the other side of the gully, and soon you come to another little stream, spanned by another sturdy bridge, making you wonder for a moment whether you're walking in circles or not. Then begins the climb that takes you up the stairway. As

you climb, you become aware of the sounds that are so audible. Gradually, the murmur of the creek disappears, and the humming of the forest insects becomes more intense in the silence. Up through the tall trees you go, and a squirrel chatters at you as you pass him perched up on a branch. Long fingers

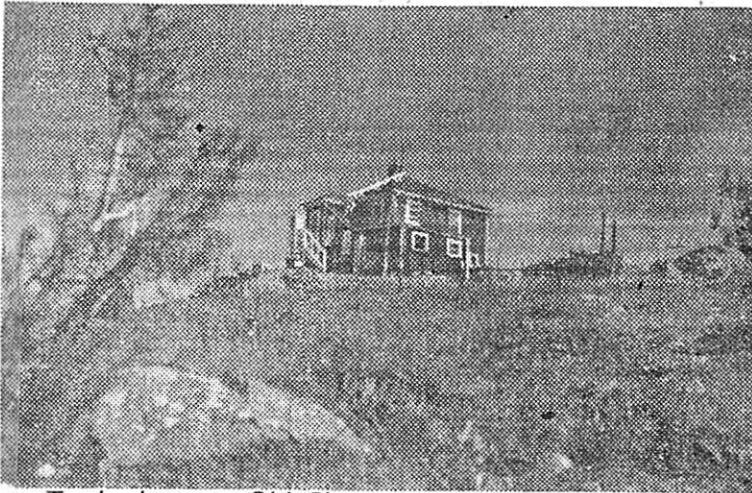
cool drink. And you'd best take it( because this is the last place to have a drink until you get to the bottom of Old Glory.

After a short rest, you're on the move again, and in a while, you leave the "burn," which is the wooded valley you have been hiking through, and follow the trail up the open hillside. Ahead

between you and Old Glory, lies a long valley. The trail drops down into it, and winds its way to the foot of Old Glory. To get to the top, it is necessary to hike to the far end of the mountain, where the slope is gradual, and then climb this slope to the top. The trail is clear and well defined at all times. As you walk to the far side, you'll come to the water hole. Running through a rock slide, which covers the lower part of Old Glory on this side, the cool, fresh water offers the hiker a welcome rest after the long hike over the ridge. Water bags will probably be found at the water hole, and these are used by the boys on Old Glory for obtaining drinking water during the summer months. Wilf carries the full bags to the top while he packs supplies, and on the return trip, leaves the empty bags at the water hole for the next day. Contrary to popular belief, snow is not used all year round for drinking water. The few patches of snow that stay all year round, provide water for washing clothes, etc. During the winter, however, snow is used for all purposes.

Old Glory is not what you would call a beautiful mountain. It is a mass of stone, sprinkled with mountain grass and shrubs. But there is something about her that attracts the hiker. Perhaps it is the knowledge that once you have reached the top, the world takes on a different aspect. Though it isn't such a high mountain in comparison with peaks in the Rockies and  
(continued on page seven)

### HOME SWEET HOME



To the boys on Old Glory, this is home while they are on top. That is a ladder below the chimney and Stan was using it while he tarred the roof. Covered with tar, he informed us that the roof wasn't "quite dry yet."

of sunlight penetrate the canopy of branches. Cowwebs, strung among the tree trunks, sparkle and glisten like threads of spun gold. Pine needles, sprinkled over the path, form a spongy cushion for your feet. A little further on, a stream runs across the path, giving you a reason for stopping for a rest and a

of you lies the ridge. Dead-woods sprawl about, along the hillside, and mountain flowers nod sleepily in the warm sun. Slowly the trail winds its way towards the top of the ridge, and in a very few minutes you reach it. And there lies Old Glory, coming into view with startling suddenness. Before you,

## CONSORTS OF

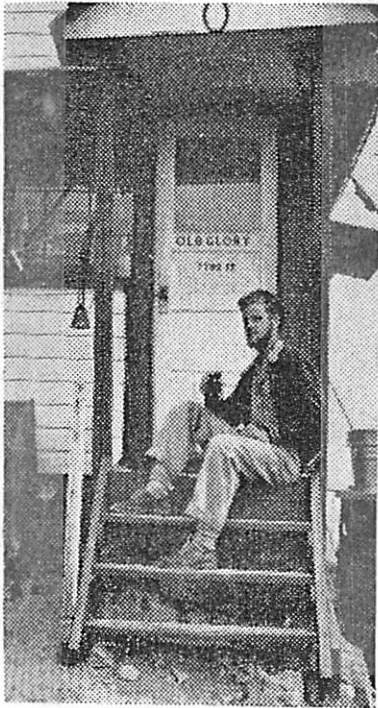
(continued from page one)

other famous mountain ranges, it is one of the highest in this district.

Valleys, veiled in purple haze, lie at your feet. To the north lies Sheep Lake, set like a jewel in a carpet of trees. Far beyond, the jagged mountains stretch in the warm sun, and the like of the horizon wanders in and out among their lofty heads. You have the feeling that you are on top of the world.

The boys at the Met Station have probably been looking for you with the binoculars if you let them know you were coming, and a warm welcome awaits

## WHERE'S MY RAZOR?



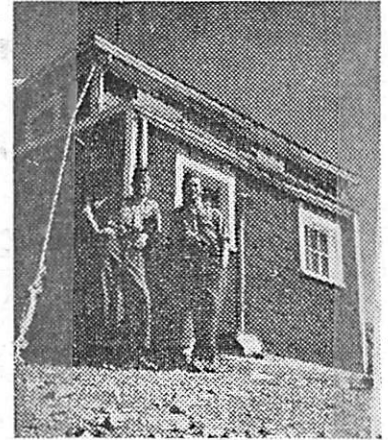
Jim Waldie, Lookout man on Old Glory, sits on the steps of his "summer home," looking for telltale smoke . . . or a razor.

you. Chances are they'll all be sporting a few days' growth of whiskers, and they'll be wearing wrinkled slacks and shirts. And they'll put you at your ease with their easy going manner and friendliness. There's Lyle Fleming, officer in charge; Stan Bremner, and Al Latsch on the weather station. Lyle's from Revelstoke, Stan's from Calgary and Al's from Southey, Sask. And you'll meet Jim Waldie, too.

Just up the hill from the Met Station stands the Forestry Lookout, and that's where you'll meet Jim Waldie. Jim went to high school in Rossland, and now attends Art School in Vancouver. He'll probably be wearing a toque perched on the back of his head, and a luxurious beard will cover his chin. Jim is very proud of that beard, and for three months he cultivates it with loving care. Perhaps if you're lucky, Jim will whip up a batch of muffins while you're there. There's nothing better than sitting nearly 8,000 feet up in the air, eating piping hot muffins and a steaming cup of coffee while you look out over the country that meets your eyes. And while you're at the Lookout, be sure and sign the guest book. Reading the writing of other hikers, you see in a very few words just what effect the mountain has on a person. Sprinkled throughout are such phrases as "wonderful view," "the hike was really worth it," "fine hospitality," and many other notes too numerous to mention here.

To the occasional hiker, the atmosphere and isolation of the Met Station and Lookout, offer a sanctuary where one can get away from the trials and tribulations of the world, and spend a few peaceful hours. Jim says he looks forward all winter to the time when he can come back to Old Glory for the summer months. He says, "It gives a fellow a chance to think clearly, and when a fellow is alone with

## MEET THE "MET" MEN



Weatherman Lyle Fleming and Stan Bremner stand at the corner of the "Met" Station. That is a cable to Lyle's right, used for keeping the station where it belongs during a heavy storm.

his thoughts, they make a lot more sense when he has a chance to straighten them out." Jim's friend, Dave Keffer, is Lookout man on Morrisey Mountain, over in the Grand Forks district, and each day, at a certain time, Jim brings out a large piece of glass, and using the sun's rays for reflection, flashes to Dave. Suddenly, 21 miles away comes an answering flash. Dave sends his greetings. There is no message, just this contact between two close friends. Such is friendship.

And so Old Glory offers the hiker a new experience. Never completely out of touch with civilization because of the telephone, radio, and electric lights which you will find in the well-built weather station, you are far enough from the monotonous sounds of the city, and these few hours bring a welcome change.

Staying up there all year as the weather men do, is a different story. Nature has a way of gaining revenge on those who look into her life and foretell her future. She has played many tricks on the "Met Men." Frequently, 40 and 50 mile winds scream about the house during the winter and spring months, and a wind of 90 miles an hour has been recorded. The station

## ON THE CUFF



Albert, the "squirrel who came to dinner," uses Jimmy Douglas' arm for a chair as he prepares to dine on his favourite repast, dry bread.

is cabled down for this reason. Earlier this year, a 60 mile wind drove a wall of hailstones before it, and when the storm had ended, 16 windows had been shattered.

The boys will tell you what it's like to sit right in the middle of a thunderstorm. The filing cabinet is scarred due to a bolt of lightning, even though the house is well grounded. Often, during a thunder storm, the boys witness a sight that few people see once in a lifetime, unless you're a seaman or flier. The phenomena they see is called St. Elmo's Fire. This is an electrical disturbance caused by a charge of static electricity building up on a metal object. The metal object is outlined in a blue light, and Jim has seen it form in the corners of the rain troughs, as round masses of blue flame. It is not dangerous and is very beautiful when seen. When lightning strikes it clears the air, and the fire disappears. It is named after the patron saint of the sailors, who first noticed it on the prow of their ships during a storm. But the boys willingly admit that when a storm is beating at the house, their hearts are pounding. Lyle figures a direct hit by lightning would destroy the house. One can imagine what it is like sitting on the top of a mountain with the lightning flashing all about, and the thunder crashing like someone had set a cannon in the same room.

And sometimes during the winter, the fog will roll in with an intensity hard to believe. Visibility is complete zero, and there have been times when the

boys have been confined to the house for two weeks at a time. It's dangerous to go outside when the fog is dense, for you may fall down the "Goat Hole," which is the name of the face of the mountain on the north side. It's a long way down, a thousand feet at least, and in some places more.

To these men, it is all part of their job, and one that is often thankless. Consorts of the wind, the sun and the stars, the life of Nature has become their biographies. You'll find men like Mike Dolan among them. Mike froze his feet on a trip down from Old Glory during the winter and spent months in the hospital while his toes were amputated. And yet, he is still in the weather service, now in charge of the station at Comox. Nature played a cruel trick on Mike, but he took it with a smile. Why, one day in the hospital he told us he thought he might try some skiing this winter.

The men on Old Glory are examples of the men who forecast the weather from stations all over Canada, as far north as Resolute Bay, within the Arctic Circle.

So why don't you pay them a visit one of these days. You'll see magnificent sunsets, inspiring sunrises, and you'll meet some fine fellows. Who knows, you might see a snowstorm in August, or "ride out" a thunderstorm, or look down on a sea of fog, as it cavorts in the valleys. Or maybe you'll sit on the steps of the Lookout as the sun, clad in its multi-coloured cloak, sinks behind the horizon, and the stars appear.

And as you sit there under a veil of stars, listening to the nightwind, perhaps the words of a poem Jim has hanging in the Lookout will run through your mind; words that strike home when you think about them.

But you don't have to be up on Old Glory to understand or believe them. Wherever you are when you read them, you'll realize that they bear much truth. They were written by a man named Joaquin Miller and they go like this:

In men who men condemn  
as ill,  
I find so much of goodness  
still,  
In men whom men pronounce  
divine,  
I find so much of sin and blot  
I hesitate to draw the line,  
Between the two, where God  
has not.