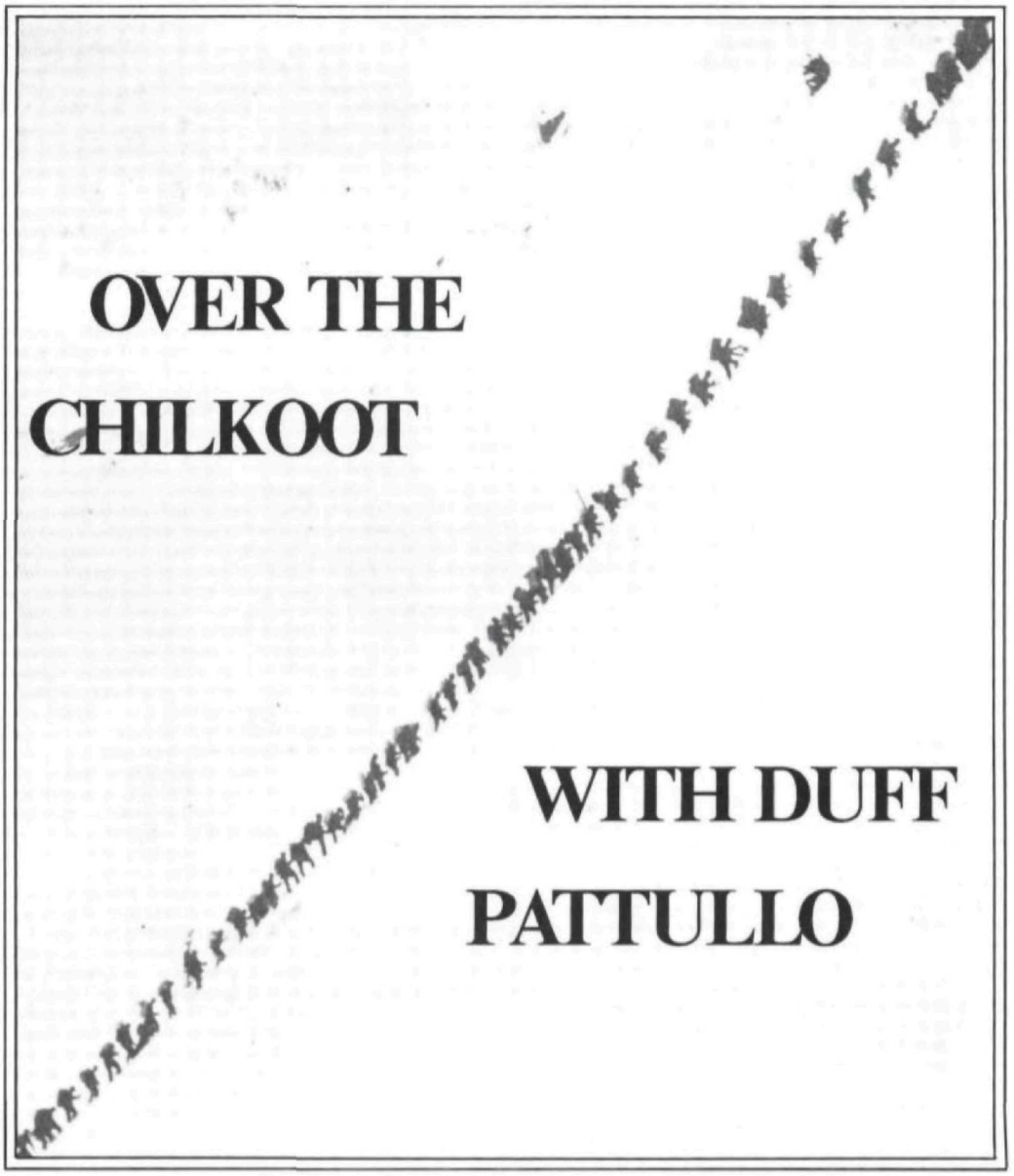


OVER THE CHILKOOT WITH DUFF PATTULLO

Perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most frequently used image of the Klondike gold rush is a photograph of a single strand of men, each with his world upon his back, trudging up the golden stairs: that final, thirty-degree slope that took them to the top of the Chilkoot Pass. Black against the white snow, they appear as shadows, anonymous and insubstantial, yet caught for an instant and forever by the photographer's lens. Each one was an individual with a story to tell, but many of them left no other record of the fact that they had made the terrible climb. One among the thousands of men who crossed the Chilkoot in the winter of 1897-98 was T.D. Pattullo, who in later life would be premier of British Columbia, and he did leave a record of his experience.

A young man in his early twenties, Duff Pattullo in 1897 seemed to be one of Robert Service's "men that don't fit in." Since leaving school in Woodstock, Ontario, he had not been able to find a place for himself or a career that suited him. He had tried many things, but none had been to his liking and he was heavily in debt. Now, in the fall of 1897, his father's considerable Liberal Party connections landed him the position of secretary to Major J.M. Walsh, the newly appointed leader of a federal government party that was to be sent north to the Yukon to establish law and order on the goldfields. As well as being Liberals, the Pattullos were newspaper people. They had owned and published the *Woodstock Sentinel* for nearly thirty years. Duff had worked on the family newspaper for a while and he had also edited the *Reformer* in Galt for a few months in 1896. So before he left for the Yukon he arranged with his father to send back accounts of his travels to be published in the *Sentinel*

A Future Premier of British Columbia Met His Destiny on the Trail of '98

BY ROBIN FISHER

and syndicated in the Toronto *Globe* and as many other eastern newspapers as possible.

The notion of the Klondike stampede as a grand adventure on the northern frontier was largely the creation of newspaper reporters and popular authors. In contrast to the photographers who were confined to black and white, many of the writers who publicised the stampede used plenty of colour. Purple prose and hyperbole were their stock in trade. Pattullo's writing was different. He obviously hoped to sell his stories and certainly needed the money, but he did not peddle fiction. In his letters to his father his writing was crisp, simple and direct as he described the journey to the Yukon.

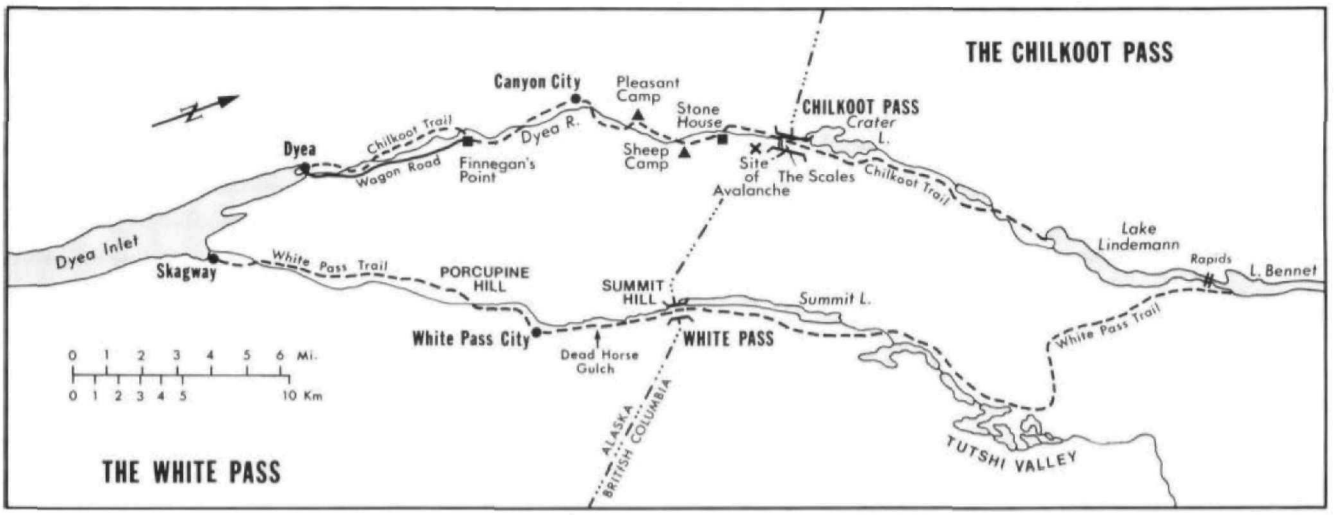
In mid-September 1897 Pattullo went up to Ottawa to meet the rest of the party assembling for the Yukon. Like Duff, nearly all of the members were there largely because of their political influence. The leader, Major James Morrow Walsh was a personal friend of Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior. The veteran of the North-West Mounted Police and the hero of the confrontation with Sitting Bull and the Sioux Indians was a popular choice with the public and initially Duff was also impressed with the Major's apparent strength of character and organizational ability. Later, however, both Pattullo and the public would revise their views. Other members of the expedition included T.H. McGuire, appointed judge of the Yukon Provisional District Court; F.C. Wade, who was to be crown prosecutor and registrar of lands; two inspectors of mines, J.D. McGreggor and Captain H.H. Norwood; Captain H.A. Bliss went along as an accountant; and the Major's brother, Philip Walsh was in charge of transport. Duff was officially slated as the stenographer and typist of the party but was, in fact, secretary to Walsh. The title of secretary went to A.J. Magurn, a Toronto *Globe* correspondent whose real task was to write newspaper reports that would reflect well on the federal government. The hard work was to be done by a number of Indian packers who were hired en route.

In all, the party numbered fifty or more and it was elaborately fitted out for arctic conditions. Pattullo reported that each member was given an "eider down quilt, a pair of blankets, a wolf skin robe, a rubber sheet and a belt and a brace of revolvers with one hundred rounds of ammunition." He had to provide other supplies himself and these included: "water tight boots, moccasins, rat skin socks, chamois vest and drawers, heavy underclothing, musk-ox mittens, corduroy suits, rubber skins for fording, oil skin suit, coon skin coat and cap, deer skin leggings." If nothing else, providing for the expedition must have seriously depleted a number of species of wildlife. Thus equipped, the Walsh party, accompanied by Clifford Sifton, left Ottawa by train and headed west.

As he travelled across the prairies Pattullo was impressed by the expansiveness and optimism of a new frontier that was just opening up. "No western Canadian," he reported, "has any doubt about the future." Westerners were certain that increased population would lead to development on a grand scale, and, according to Pattullo at least, they saw the Walsh expedition as a splendid advertisement for Canada and the Canadian government's ability to assert control over a new territory. He was invigorated by the whole enterprise and told his father that he was feeling "as strong as an ox for the great undertaking."

Pattullo drew little inspiration from the prairie landscape, but when they reached the mountains he knew that he had come to another world. As the train wound its way through the Rockies he was deeply moved by the wild grandeur of the scenery. Words failed him as his thoughts and feelings outstripped his ability to express them. It was fall, and the mountain sides and valleys were, as he put it, covered with "stately trees and luxuriant shrubs with their varied hues and beautiful autumn tints." By the time he reached Vancouver he had seen enough of British Columbia's spectacular natural beauty to know that it was a very different place from the one that he had left behind. He was attracted to the wild splendour of a landscape that was so unlike the gentle, man-made geography of southern Ontario. Already acclimatizing to the west, Pattullo was becoming a British Columbian.

The expedition arrived in Vancouver on 1 October 1897 and spent a day preparing for the passage up the coast on the vessel *Quadra* under the command of Captain John Walbran. They were also joined by William Ogilvie who had spent several years exploring and surveying in the Yukon and so knew the territory into



which they were heading. The following year he would replace Walsh as the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory. He accompanied the party on the next leg of the journey towards Dawson City. Amid the clicking of cameras and the cheers of the crowd that had assembled on the dock, the *Quadra* pulled out of Vancouver and headed up the coast. The weather was less boisterous than it often is in the first week of October, but in rough seas off the Queen Charlotte Islands Duff worried that his inadequate shorthand would fail him completely when he took dictation from Sifton. He was relieved when the minister returned his notes with only a few changes saying that the work was fine given the conditions. Pattullo seemed to be in his element on the coast and, while others went down with seasickness, he felt "like a fighting cock." There were lighter moments and, when the seas were calmer, they played Ogilvie's gramophone for entertainment. After calling at the old fur trading community at Port Simpson, the *Quadra* proceeded north and, steaming up Lynn Canal on 9 October, it approached the ramshackle town of Skagway: the port of entry to the Yukon.

In 1897 Skagway was an instant outpost of American freedom, enterprise and somewhat *laissez faire* attitudes towards law and order. In contrast to their grand entry into Canadian towns, the representatives of Dominion authority received no welcome in Skagway. Since there was no civic government there were no city officials on hand to mark the arrival of the Canadian party. For the young Pattullo it was not a great loss as "The inevitable addresses from these high officials were also wanting — a cause of general thankfulness." Yet for his own part, Pattullo was intent on keeping up appearances. While others changed clothes in preparation for roughing it, Duff planned to go ashore in a Wilfrid Laurier stand-up collar and a grey fedora. Captain Bliss had already warned him that his collars could not be packed over the mountain pass, not knowing that Pattullo also had a couple of white flannel suits stashed away in his gear.

There was no wharf at Skagway, so however elaborate the preparations the actual process of getting ashore was somewhat undignified. The men of the party had to scramble "over barges, scows, houses, boats, planks, logs, rails, and posts" until they reached dry land. The main street ran from the foreshore towards the mountains behind, and walking along it for the first time was Pattullo's initiation to a wide-open, free-wheeling, western boom town. Hundreds of frame houses and huts were being thrown up in short order as wood replaced canvas as the primary building material. The business section was dominated by hotels, saloons, real estate and mining agencies and, as Pattullo understated it, everybody was "advertising himself and his wares in a most striking and conspicuous fashion." People of all classes and all walks of life were randomly thrown together. A "heterogeneous host," all rubbing shoulders as they struggled through a sea of mud. "There is a large sprinkling of gamblers and women of the street," wrote Pattullo, "but there are respectable people too." Presumably having investigated the matter with some interest, he also reported that the cost of liquor meant that there was little drunkenness in Skagway. Duff estimated that "It would cost a fellow about $25 before he could get even a moderate jag on."

Skagway was the entrance to the White Pass route into the Yukon. Pattullo climbed up the mountains behind the town as far as the station at the summit that was manned by the North-West Mounted Police. He was appalled by what he saw. The human misery and strain as men struggled up the pass was bad enough, but even worse was the sight of the oxen and horses falling off the side of the trail and plunging to their deaths below in what became known as Dead Horse Gulch. Other animals collapsed from exhaustion and

died where they lay in the middle of the trail. It has been said that Pattullo even insisted that he saw an ox trying to fling itself over the cliff rather than tread the terrible trail. Down in Skagway he had been impressed by the optimism of the people. Even those who had known hardship and had bitter or pathetic tales to tell still hoped that good fortune would overtake them. But up on the trail there was only hard reality and Duff heard stories of big, strong men starting over only to return in a couple of weeks looking twenty years older and unrecognizable to their friends. Already his advice to those thinking about coming to the Klondike was that they would be better off to stay at home.

While Pattullo and the rest of the party remained in Skagway, Walsh, Sifton and Ogilvie went ahead to reconnoitre. They went in over the Chilkoot Pass as far as Tagish Lake and back down the White Pass. On his return Sifton said that he would not send his worst enemy over the White Pass and so the expedition moved over to the other branch of the Lynn Canal and the rival town of Dyea. The supplies and equipment were manhandled across the shallows and mud flats and put ashore above the high tide mark. As Walsh's men prepared to move up to the Chilkoot they knew that, having crossed the shoreline, the going would soon be a lot tougher. By now it was the last week in October and winter would soon be upon them. Walsh tried to conceal his apprehension with a bit of bravado, saying to Duff, "I hope it is raining and snowing on that pass like the devil just to see what it is like." He was soon to have his wish.

At first the trail inland was easy and inviting, but the land revealed its true nature when they reached the canyon of the Dyea River. The canyon trail was in a "deplorable condition." It was littered with logs and boulders and the defile was so narrow that they had to lift their legs up onto the horses' necks to prevent them being crushed on either side. "Capt. Bliss' monumental figure was too much for his charger" so he was frequently obliged to get off his horse, but Pattullo and Philip Walsh rode right through without dismounting. They were told afterwards that what they had done was extremely dangerous and they were lucky not to have been killed. Had the horses missed their footing the riders would have been hurled hundreds of feet below. But, wrote Pattullo, "Fortune favoured us" and they arrived safely at Sheep Camp at the far end of the canyon.

Located in a basin at the foot of the mountains, Sheep Camp was so named because it had been a meeting place for sheep hunters. Now the area was a constantly moving chaos of men and equipment. The stampeders paused only briefly at this point to assemble their supplies and gather their physical and mental resources as they contemplated the final assault on the

The young Pattullo, taken in Woodstock before he left for the Klondike.

Chilkoot. The summit was now only about four miles away and in good weather the top of the pass was visible from Sheep Camp. But most of the 3,500 foot ascent from Dyea to the top still had to be climbed. To make matters worse the weather turned nasty as the Walsh party arrived at Sheep Camp. A strong south wind blew in sleet and snow and the packers who began ferrying the supplies up to the final slope returned with the news that the summit was impassable.

The next day Walsh directed Pattullo to lead the first group on the next stage: the climb up to the Scales. The wind was stronger and had swung around to the north so that it was ripping down the pass into their faces. By the time they reached the great boulder known as the Stone House snow was building on the trail. It was up to their armpits in a couple of hours. The last part of the day's climb was on hands and knees, but finally they crawled, exhausted, up to the Scales.

They were now at the base of the final hill, on a flat area of ground known as the Scales because everything was reweighed prior to the final climb. Pack animals could not carry loads any further and so, before

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The Walsh party leaving Vancouver on the Quadra. Pattullo is standing third from left along the rail.

the first tramline was built in December 1897, manpower was the only way to get supplies over the summit. But the gale force winds and driving snow could make the slopes impassable for days. Not knowing how long they would have to wait for the weather to clear, Pattullo and the others pitched their tents. They dug out the snow and put up the tents on the bare rock. The huge projecting stones meant that when they threw down their blankets at night it was "like sleeping on church steeples." There were no trees above Sheep Camp so they had to send back down for firewood. The wind picked up even more overnight and they had to build a six foot wall of snow around the tent to prevent it being torn away in the gale. "Truly," wrote Pattullo, "we had struck the roughest spot on the whole trail." They soon decided that only something frightful would prevent them from crossing the summit at daylight.

With the wind raging around them all night they had little sleep, but the gale subsided about four in the morning. By nine o'clock it was clear and the sun glistened on the newly fallen snow. Already the packers were coming and going, some of them with huge loads, taking the baggage up to the top. They also made the way easier for those who followed by breaking in the trail. Pattullo's climb up the 700 feet from the Scales to the top of the Chilkoot was even a little anticlimactic after what had gone before. They struck camp at 10:30 in the morning and started up what seemed like an almost perpendicular slope. He reached the top at 11:10. In his matter-of-fact prose he noted: "Distance from Sheep Camp about five miles. Distance from Dyea from 18 to 20 miles. It seemed like a hundred."

As a member of an organized government expedition that included a large cohort of Indian packers, Pattullo only had to cross the Chilkoot once. Individual stampeders had to climb the pass over and over again. The Canadian government required that a miner have one ton of supplies before he could cross the border at the top of the pass and fifty pounds was about as much as the average man could carry in one load. For many the process of lugging their goods and chattels up the final slope took weeks. Now that he had crossed "the awful divide," Pattullo reflected for a moment on the

Collection of Mrs. D. Collison

The Walsh party in the woods between Dyea and the Chilkoot.

Landing at Dyea. Pattullo in background wearing a cap.

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The young Duff Pattullo (back row, second from left) on his way to Dawson City with a group of government officials and their Indian packers, 1897.

plight of those with whom he shared the trail. The scene at the Chilkoot had affected him deeply and his writing became a little more fulsome. "It seems to me," he told his father, "that for the man in search of riches the glamour of gold must lose some of its brilliancy and in its place come the gloom of stern reality darkening his expectations . . . To see the despair written on men's faces as they carry their packs up and up the awful hill is almost enough to make one's heart ache." His advice to the thousands who were still thinking of coming to the Yukon was simply, "don't. The chances of gold aren't worth the hazard . . . I venture to say that 75 per cent of the men who come here and do all their own packing, go back broken in health."

Nor did the hazards end at the top of the pass. Such was the reputation of the Chilkoot that many thought that once they reached the top their troubles were over. But, as Pattullo found, they had only just begun, with Dawson City still a distant objective. The Walsh party pressed on, but they had lingered too long at the coast and winter was closing in as they crossed Lake Bennett and travelled down the Yukon River. Ice was already forming on the water as they crossed Lake Laberge, and about six miles beyond Big Salmon River Pattullo very nearly lost his life as his boat was caught in an ice flow. It was clear that they would not reach Dawson City before spring break up.

Pattullo had to cool his heels for a couple of months in temperatures that often went down to sixty below as the expedition wintered over at Big Salmon. Even when the weather improved in the early spring Walsh did not go on to Dawson, but instead went back to Lake Bennett to investigate a rumour that an American relief expedition was being sent to the Yukon. Walsh wanted to ensure that nothing untoward happened at the border. There was no international incident, but on 3 April 1898 there was a tragic natural disaster near the boundary. An avalanche tore down the Chilkoot Pass close to the Scales and took the lives of more than sixty people. Pattullo appreciated once again the power of the elements as he and Walsh went down to do what they could to help. For the rest of the month, however, he found it "ducedly monotonous" as he waited at Lake Bennett for Walsh to give the word to move out. Duff had felt the brunt of the Major's temper on more than one occasion by now and he was

somewhat disenchanted with his leader. He was relieved to be moving when they finally struck north for Dawson City on 3 May.

Pattullo eventually arrived at "the City of Gold" on 21 May 1898. By the time they reached the Klondike Walsh had already decided to resign his commission and he was soon ready to leave. But Pattullo stayed on in Dawson City for nearly ten years, working at first in the gold commissioner's office and later going into private business. In a town that called the rest of the world "the outside" he had at last found a place where he could fit in.

Like many who followed the "trails of ninety eight," in later life Pattullo looked back on his time in the Yukon, and particularly the journey in to Dawson, as a formative experience. He did not indulge in Klondike nostalgia and never cared much for the poetry of Robert Service even though he did later dash off some verse imitating the style of the bard of the Yukon which he entitled "Over The Chilkoot".

We was waitin' for the Major,
We was waitin' for the word
To surmount the orful Chilkoot,
What as everyone had heard
Was a roarin', ringtail snorter,
An' as much as life was worth,
But we only stood and trampled,
Waitin' for the Major's word.

Such a orful wind was blowin',
An' the snow was pilin' high,
An' we trampled, trampled, trampled,
Till we thought that we should die,
An' the wind kept blowin' harder,
An' the snow kept pilin' more,
An' a thousand feet above us,
We could hear the Summit roar.

While clearly of no great literary merit, Pattullo's ditty goes on to express the belief that it was perseverance and devotion to duty that overcame obstacles like the Chilkoot Pass.

For Pattullo, as for many others, the real lesson of crossing the Chilkoot was what he learned about himself. His favourite book about the Klondike was one that he read in the 1930s called *Sourdough Gold*. Its author, Mary Lee Davis, explained how the true adventure of the North was not the physical struggle with the elements but the spiritual search for oneself. Like Pattullo, she had gone to the Yukon in a turmoil of spirit and out of the "mutual madness of the stampede" had put together the broken pieces of her life. The Chilkoot and the river that it led to was the highway that carried the adventurer away from the accustomed world, away from the traditional supports, to a place where one had to learn to stand alone. The Chilkoot was the pass by which one crossed the height of land that divided the one world from the other, and the climb to the summit required more strength of will than physical stamina. Pattullo also agreed with Davis' view that "indomitable cheerfulness" soon turned out to be "the most indispensible luggage a man could pack over the pass." Having crossed the divide, Pattullo wrote to his father that "We surmount our hardships up here with a careless buoyancy that I didn't think possible, and many little things down east that we considered rough we now think luxuries."

At the same time Pattullo's optimism and new found confidence in the future was not based on ignoring the realities of the present. He was very critical of those other writers about the Klondike who exaggerated its potential for easy money. Along with those travelling in the same direction as he was, Pattullo had already met several stampeders who were on the way out: men who had made it to Dawson and were quickly disillusioned. Some of the retreating miners felt that they had been misled and told Pattullo that they reckoned this to be the "Greatest country in the world for liars." So he was still concerned to convey both sides of the Klondike experience to the readers back in Woodstock. He told them that "the man who is willing to pay misery for gold may have it, but he must count the cost as well. We do not hear of the poor fellows who pay all misery and get no gold. We only hear of the wonderful strikes and none of the suffering."

As he crossed the Chilkoot, Pattullo encountered the hardships of the land and saw the suffering of men. He had not gone to the Yukon in search of gold, but, like many who did, he unexpectedly learned some things about himself that he valued more highly than any amount of colour. Although he crossed the pass several times in later years, the exhilaration of overcoming the obstacles and getting to the top for the first time never left him. As premier he was fond of telling the members of the British Columbia legislative assembly that "you will never reach the heights by refusing to climb." At the same time, the rather naive view that sheer determination was sufficient to surmount any Chilkoot was also to be an ingredient in his later political career. He would approach politics as he had done the mountain pass, with more vigour than finesse. ♦

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