



MINES AND MINING

BY JOHN A. THOMPSON

THERE is a gold-placer region in still gold-rich Alaska that produced some three million dollars before the war. It is hard to reach. For much of forty-two miles a low, marshy, almost impenetrable swamp guards the entrance to the gold country in summer time. Back of it lie high, barren mountain peaks and the solid, eternal ice of a glacier wall.

Ultra-modern airplane travel is about the best way for a prospector to get himself and his supplies set down in the heart of this gold section. And it is the best way for him to get out when snow flies and winter ice locks the water in the creeks, shutting off his summer season's work.

The district, known as the Chistochina, lies in the northern Copper River region in southeastern Alaska. The Richardson Highway from Valdez at the head of Prince William Sound will take you within striking distance of the gold-carrying gravels of Slate Creek, Chisna River, Miller Gulch, Middle Fork and Eagle Creek, all of which are tributaries of the Chistochina River which heads high up in the mountains at the foot of

the Chistochina glacier. But most of the way you are on your own, unless, of course, you fly in.

Some thirty miles from Copper River the Chisna joins the Chistochina. Back around 1900 placer gold in rich concentration was discovered along the Chisna. Slate Creek and Miller Gulch up in the glacier country near the head of the Chisna have yielded a good share of the district's past production. Though recent operations have been chiefly in the lower part of the Chisna River valley where the mountain and lowland areas meet, it is reasonable to believe that the entire valley is likely to be prospective placer-mining ground. Authorities have pronounced it so.

There used to be a post office at Chisna in the camp's first heyday but that too is now in ruins. Or was just before the war. The gold claims in this section lie where the valley is fairly wide, the broad flat extending westward to the Chisna's junction with the Chistochina. Further north the river valley closes in until there is only a narrow gorge between high, rugged mountains through which the

waters of the Chisna tumble turbulently.

In places there are gravel benches above the Chisna. These have not, so far as we know, been thoroughly prospected and they may prove a potential future source of further placer gold deposits.

Slate Creek, one of the rich producers in the early days, joins the Chistochina up near the later's source less than a mile below the foot of the Chistochina glacier. Being high up in a region of steep, snow-covered glacier-blocked mountains, the Slate Creek region has a mighty short open-water summer season, even for Alaska. The ground does not thaw out until very late in the spring and early fall brings frost and freezing weather. Add to this the hazards of swift floods that occur some summers, landslide dangers and the fact that the set-up is above timberline and far from even a source of firewood and you can readily understand why prospecting in this area is strictly a proposition for the hardy, resourceful and adventurous.

Miller Gulch, another rich section originally, lies on the south side of Slate Creek about two miles from its mouth. Though the Gulch is narrow and steep and less than a mile long it has produced a lot of gold in the past. A few patches of virgin gold ground, still left, were being worked by individuals using small-scale

placer equipment in 1941 according to F. H. Moffit who visited the section that year to prepare a firsthand report on mining in the northern Copper River region for the U. S. Geological Survey. In his report—U. S. Geo. Survey Bulletin 943-B—Moffit says of one of these one-man outfits working in the gulch:

"The deposit is frozen and requires thawing before it can be shoveled into the sluice boxes. Most of the work was done at night to avoid the danger of rocks falling from the high face of the cut during the day. The ground carries sufficient gold to permit of its being mined in this small way, and the operations have been carried on for a number of years. . . ."

That gives you an idea of what small scale placer gold mining is like in this particular part of Alaska and the hardships that must be faced and conquered if you hope to make a stake mining in this hard-to-reach region of Alaska in the post-war days to come.

All of which should answer, at least in part, Reader B. J.'s recent query from Portland, Oregon, concerning a "remote" gold-prospecting section in Alaska. "If," his letter asked, "such sections still exist?"

They sure do, B. J. The Chistochina district is only one of them. One of many, as a plain matter of fact.

If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y., will bring a prompt, authoritative, personal reply. Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received; please keep them as brief as possible.

GUN MAGIC

by WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

To the frightened people of Antelope, Bill Biedler wore the tainted brand of a hired killer, yet no amount of money could have bought his guns



LARGELY because of Price Chilton's reputation for fair dealing, Antelope shipped more than its share of the cattle that came in off the desert. During the shipping season Antelope was a roaring, brawling cow town. The rest of the year it dozed peacefully, the even tenor of its life broken by nothing more than the toot of a passing train, or the arrival of the whiskey drummer who always stopped at the Staghorn and passed out samples of his goods. It

was natural, then, that every stranger should come under immediate observation. So it was with Bill Biedler when he rode in off the desert.

Biedler was not a handsome man. Neither was he exceptionally tall, nor thick of body, yet he was a man who would stand out in any kind of company. He rode the full length of the street, and back as far as the small