

# Footloose in The Sawtooths

## CONCLUSION

BY ANDREW GIBSON

*WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:* The two surveyors, accustomed to the Vancouver rain-forest, found themselves plucked from under their umbrellas and transported to the 7000 foot level of the Sawtooth Mountains, in the Washington Cascades. Their mission — to locate certain holes being drilled into the mountain by a party of human flies, backed, at a safe distance, by an army of purple prose penny stock promoters. Would they succeed, or was the site doomed to go down in history as just another Lost Silver Mine? Read on.

These were the days when E.D.M. equipment, although much improved over the pack-train type prototypes, was still bulky, and generally powered, as was ours, by a car battery, designed to be carried by a car, and not by a homo sap. Consequently, being only a 2-man crew, we were overloaded in a manner not seen since the piano was carried over the Chilkoot pass by the Lady known as Lou.

One morning the E.D.M., in its broad fibreglass box, was strapped securely to my back, while my companion got the theodolite and the battery. We then piled each other high with accessory equipment, and staggered off through the snow drifts which covered the steep alpine meadows we had to traverse. They were bounded on the up side by steep rock walls, and on the down side by thin air, and, considering the 30% slope, it would have been dangerous enough, except that the snow was deep and sticky, with no tendency to slide.

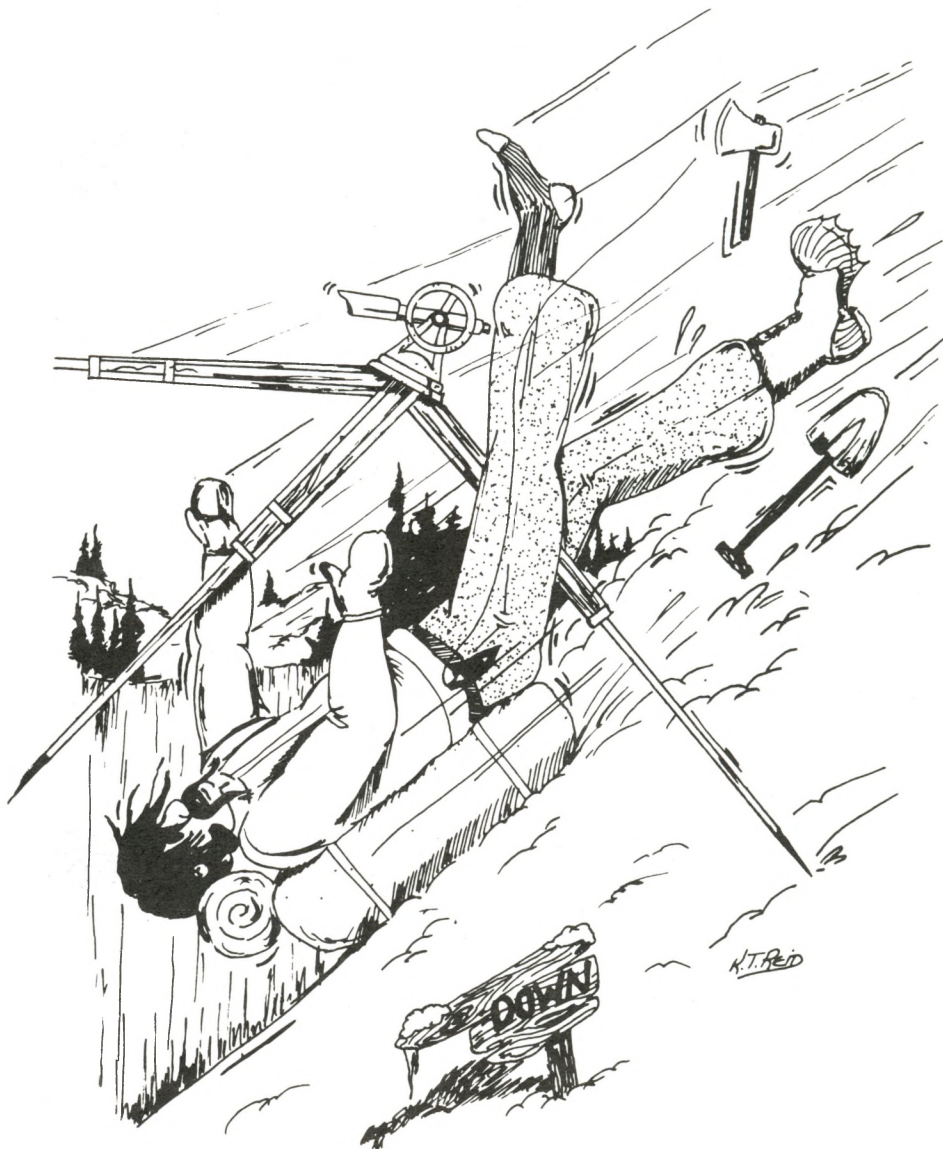
But then came one of those accidents with which the Diety favors us every now and again, to keep us burning our candles, fingering our beads, or spinning our prayer wheels, depending upon the theology of our choice. The fibreglass E.D.M. box, to which I was lashed, had the shape of a toboggan, and the slip quotient of a banana-peel, and when I slipped and fell on my back, I took off backwards like a rocket-powered bobsled. My account of what happened then can be freely borrowed by anybody in search of material for a first-class nightmare. My only hope of stopping was to either turn over, or turn around to go feet first, and, no matter how violently I wrenched myself, I could do neither. My life flashed in front of me in glorious technicolor (trade name). So, more poignantly, did my im-

minent death, although I tried vainly to console myself with the thought that it was at least a spectacular way to go. But I got into an abtruse argument with myself as to whether it was possible for an occurrence to be spectacular when there were no spectators. I was still mulling this over when I hit a small tree, turned sideways, and then fetched up deep in the gnarled and highly abrasive branches of a grotesquely stunted pine, about 20 feet from the edge. Calling piteously for a St. Bernard, or at least for his keg of brandy, I untangled myself and crawled back up the slope. The

whole episode had gone unnoticed by my companion, who was out of sight by the time I reached the trail. While I toiled along after him I speculated on what would have happened had a tree not been there — it was snowing, and by the time I was missed (about noon — I was carrying the lunch) my slide marks would have been covered. Years later, perhaps, some antiquated equipment would have been found, far below, near the skeleton of a male caucasian, with a plumb bob attached to his hip. Unnerved by the pathos of it all, I resolved to take safety precautions in future. From now on, my companion would carry the E.D.M.

During three days we shaved away at enough bearing trees, and found enough corners to locate the incipient bonanza, and it came time to bid farewell to the tent which had been our cliff-edge home, where we had spent those exciting

Continued on Page 28



nights wondering if we were about to be blown away, where we had tested our skill at poker against the diamond drillers, and had been plucked like chickens, and where, without the assistance of bicarbonate of soda, we had lived through drill-camp cooking, a feature of which was torpedoes fried in axle-grease. We radioed for the helicopter, but were given the disturbing news that there had been a breakdown in communications between our client, the Bottomless Pit Metal Extraction and Prospectus Company, which had its international headquarters over a drug store in Snohomish, and the Uptite and Shuddering Helicopter Co., whose flagship a few days before, had abandoned us halfway to the drill camp. It was a matter of money — Uptite and Shuddering hadn't received any, although the cheque was reputed to be permanently in the mail. Until they got some, or, in lieu thereof, a pound of the fair flesh of the president of Bottomless Pit, we could stay up on the mountain until we rotted.

The drillers were not perturbed. Penny stock mining companies, they said, only paid their bills as a last resort. Everybody knew that, and this was just part of the ritual money dance they engaged in to frighten each other. In a few days, they were sure, the helicopter would come up for us. "Stay here!", they pleaded avariciously, "We'll play some more poker!" "Little do they reckon of British fortitude!", we cried, baring our teeth and throwing out our chests (or it may have been the other way around). "We'll walk down".

And so we stumbled 20 miles down the mountain, loaded in a manner which, had it happened to mules, would have brought immediate charges from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The next day, as we crossed the Canada-U.S.A. border at the Peace Arch, with its beautiful Latin inscription, lovingly carved by the native peoples "In malem crucem domus ambae" (a plague on both your houses), we resolved to lose no time in getting another assignment from Bottomless Pit Metal Extraction and Prospectus Co. — we'd do it right after Hell froze over.