SEASONS OF GOLD: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE CARIBOO GOLD RUSH

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ABSTRACT

Seasons are history’s constant companion. Spring, summer, winter, and fall mark the calendar and define the possibilities of labour and gender. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the pivotal events that unfolded during the Cariboo gold rush of 1862. In a world before climate-controlled homes, miners, Natives, Chinese, and Hurdy Gurdy girls all had to reckon with nature’s rhythms. This thesis explores how seasons, compounded by the contradictory forces of geographical isolation, a global market for gold, and environmental experiences in previous North American rushes, played a key role in how miners and their accompaniments related to nature and to each other. To pursue the latent wealth of the Cariboo, gold miners had to accommodate the region’s seasonal contingencies. The result was a peculiar rhythm of mining that revealed the intricate ways that nature shaped the most northern mining frontier before the Yukon.

Keywords: 19th century, British Columbia, Cariboo, gold rush, mining, seasons.

Subject Terms: Environmental History, Western History
DEDICATION

For my family who have supported me through all of life’s seasons.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval .............................................................................................................. ii
Abstract ............................................................................................................. iii
Dedication ........................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................ v
Table of Contents .............................................................................................. vi
Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 1: Rhythms of gold ............................................................................. 10
Chapter 2: Seasons of Work ............................................................................ 34
Chapter 3: “Naturing” Gender ......................................................................... 72
Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 93
Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 98
Abbreviations ................................................................................................. 98
Primary Sources ............................................................................................. 98
    Archival Sources .......................................................................................... 98
    Published Primary Documents .................................................................. 100
    Newspapers .............................................................................................. 101
    Visual Records .......................................................................................... 101
Secondary Sources ......................................................................................... 102
    Books and Journals ................................................................................ 102
    Theses and Dissertations ......................................................................... 106
INTRODUCTION

Simon Fraser University houses two John Innes paintings that attempt to depict the history of the Cariboo gold rush. The 1925 images hang side by side in the Academic Quadrangle. “Finding Placer Gold by Pioneer Miners in the Cariboo A.D. 1858” and “Overland Pioneers journey through the Rockies A.D. 1862” are large but not artistically spectacular, and they tell a powerful metanarrative about Western pioneering, reinforcing myths of rough and ready Anglo-European masculinity, the ability to conquer nature, the allure of yellow treasure, and the civilizing influence of the white female. The paintings in short reflect British Columbia's “imagined West,” a history that “began with the coming of the pioneers” and where nature yields to their will.¹

The Overlanders were a group of Canadian and British goldseekers who travelled overland from Ontario to the Cariboo. Most were pauperized at the end of their journey. Some perished. Few struck it rich. But to reinforce the myth of the white pioneer, Innes chose instead to portray these miners as pioneers. The Overlander painting reveals a tangled forest that blurs seamlessly into distant Rocky Mountains, and a pack train of people, horses, and oxen struggle through this picturesque wilderness. Conveying a sense of healthy, clean, and vigorous manhood, the Anglo men blaze a trail for the party, at the centre of which stands a lone woman with a small child clutching at her immaculate apron. She is the Madonna of the Rockies, the focal point of the composition

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who commands all with serene civility and embodies an unambiguous and uncontested ideal of a peaceful civilized, and ultimately white British Columbia.²

The second painting depicts the actual discovery of gold in the Cariboo. The picture is framed by forest and stream, and at the centre is a hearty prospecting “pioneer” cradling a pan laden with gold. Behind him, two partners are frozen in a state of disbelief or elation or perhaps covetousness. All three, like the Overlanders, are white, and nature has just offered its wealth. Indeed, a natural path seems to have guided them to the site. Otherwise, nature remains pristine and the consequences of men’s labour are invisible save a shovel and pick neatly stuck in the gravel. Divorced from their itinerate history, the men are recast as pioneers who built the Province. They are paradoxically accorded a kind of historical permanence. The painting thus releases the audience from having to address the environmental legacy of mining, and the actual power of nature in this story.

The two paintings are thus mutually reinforcing, and it is little surprise that they were donated to Simon Fraser University by the Native Sons of British Columbia, a group of Anglo men whose values and beliefs reside in the imagined West. As Richard White observes, however, the West is “constantly changing but always present,” and the subordinate and marginalized voices are never really erased.³ The Cariboo gold rush offers a lesson in the vitality of the past and the possibilities for unearthing new tales from old tailings. These stories help reveal the context and contingencies of experience

³ White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”, 617. While the American West and the Canadian West have been constructed by different forces and undergone different histories there are connections and comparisons that can be made. This includes Richard White’s stipulation.
in the nineteenth-century North American West, and the power of nature to shape the Cariboo gold rush.

The Cariboo gold rush is an epochal event in British Columbian and Canadian history. The discovery of gold revealed the mineral potential of the region, and the ensuing invasion of miners, many of whom were not British citizens, was a crystallizing event for colonial officials, bearing the necessity of stronger union with the British empire to forestall annexation to the burgeoning United States. Thus the rush was about much more than easy wealth, and most historians have noted the imperial implications of this tale.4 More recently historians have also noticed the complex interplay of humans and nature in the mines. Kathryn Morse has detailed how goldseekers’ work highlighted the human ability to imbue a yellow ore with cultural and social value. Joseph Conlin, Donald Pisani, Malcolm Rohrbaugh, and Elliott West have illustrated the many ways miners rearranged nature and culture in their pursuit of gold, while Albert Hurtado and Susan Lee Johnson have explored the gendered complexity of mining communities. No historian has yet applied these lessons to the Cariboo, yet the Cariboo is more than just another place where the same things happened. The peculiar natural rhythms of this far northern, intermontane region offer a way to critique and advance our understanding of the history of western North American mining booms in general. Nature played a critical role in shaping the character of the Cariboo landscape, and the relationships that people

established with the land and each other in turn will cast light on stories about other places.  

The most important element in this analysis are seasons. Seasons are the consequence of the earth’s annual circling of the sun. Climatically, they are further shaped by the latitude and altitude of place. Over billions of years, the fauna, flora, and physical makeup of the land reflects changes in local seasonal cycles. Some species failed to adapt to change. Others flourished. Of course, this is not quite a story of tooth-and-claw Darwinism. There have also been powerful elements moderating events: lakes, seas, oceans, meteors, tectonic movements, and shifts in the earth’s rotational axis have also influenced the course of seasons. Perhaps on of the most powerful force, though, belongs to the one species that has prospered more than any other over this very long period: human. Seasons have been historically amplified or modulated by the vast energy humans have deployed to understand, alter, and adapt to nature. They tried to make sense of the physical world, and attached powerful meanings to these cycles. The expectations that Cariboo goldseekers associated with seasons reflected both the very long-term efforts to master nature and the very short-term values of the nineteenth-century West. Thus environmental and human contingencies converged to shape the history of the Cariboo.

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By the early 1800s, Europeans and North Americans framed their relationships with the natural world in terms of progress. Nature must not impede civilization but yield its resources for human profit. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man."\(^6\) Not content to submit to nature's pace, humans increasingly manipulated the environment through technology. In the process they also began to experience nature differently, and a sense of domination and alienation from nature ensued. While humanists and transcendentalists fretted over social decay, most observers at the time saw great profit and power in the control of nature.\(^7\)

One example of this perspective comes from the writings of the educated Englishwoman Susanna Moodie, who immigrated to the wilderness of Upper Canada in 1832. Moodie provided insight into both a woman's backwoods experiences and the Western view of nature. For her advancing civilization would reconstitute nature through disciplined hard work. The result profited both the individual and the collective:

> The great Father of the souls and bodies of men knows the arm which wholesome labour from infancy has made strong, the nerves which have become iron by patient endurance, by exposure to weather, course fare, and rude shelter; and he chooses such, to send forth into the forest to hew out the rough paths for the advance of civilization. These men become wealthy and prosperous...their labour is wealth, not exhaustion.\(^8\)

Seventeen years later the discovery of California gold was tangible evidence that God had placed treasure in the bosom of North America, and men and women rushed in from around the world to further progress.

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\(^7\) Ibid, 186-187.

Hard work did not automatically make men rich, but it did draw goldseekers into a new relationship with nature. In California, Oregon, the Fraser River, and Idaho, men strained every fiber of their bodies for ore, battling not only dirt and rock but climate and isolation. All shaped the ensuing history of labour and technology, but the Cariboo did not easily fit these patterns. Mining in such a climate had no historical parallel in 1862. The Cariboo diggings were the most northern mining boom in North America, and the region’s isolation and seasonal patterns confounded miners. Many saw little value in the region except for the gold beneath its surface. The seasons were harsh and inflicted trauma on men’s bodies and psyches. Yet they could not blame nature because nature was, according to the logic of the time, clay to be molded. Miners could not admit that the Cariboo had got the better of them, so they instead fingered human greed and deception as the reason for their failures. They struggled to master their work, eventually developing a two-season mining pattern in which they worked from late-spring to early-fall and then fled to lower elevations. In the process, though rarely admitted outright, miners conceded to the might of the Cariboo.

Seasons shaped not only labour but gender roles. As in previous mining booms, men and women found the mines a flexible social and cultural space, and seasons gave natural structure to that flexibility. Nature’s rhythms brought disparate groups of people together and then bound the space in which they worked. Nineteenth-century masculinity valorized the ideal of rugged individuality, but physical and emotional degradation was the overwhelming reality of most mining booms. As manly miners crumbled, they again

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9 For example see “Letter From Quesnel City” The Daily Colonist 2 August 1861; “Correspondence” The British Columbian Saturday October 11, 1862. For the local First Nation groups of the region there was considerable value in the Cariboo. The seasons brought with them particular resources and signified important social and spiritual activities.
tended to blame crooked officials and misleading boosters rather than the power of nature. Other men sought a different path by honing skills in the liberal arts and traditionally feminine duties. Some found survival and profit as cooks, caretakers, or launders. Women also sought wealth. Their rarity in the camps enabled them to take social and financial advantage of men’s nostalgia for feminine company. They owned and operated business that played to masculine needs and desires, but they were as subject to the Cariboo’s seasons as the men, perhaps more so. Everyone operated within the parameters of Cariboo nature.

Local First Nations in the Cariboo also operated within seasonal parameters. In many ways Native seasonality was interrupted by miners’ work. For example, Cariboo creeks, rivers, and the environments around them, were spaces socially defined and given meaning by Native work on them. They were also pivotal sources of food. For miners, however, the creeks were defined by their potential gold bearing qualities. Goldseekers attached very different values to Cariboo nature. Mining activity in the creeks during summer and fall months often disrupted Native’s seasonal rounds. As a consequence contests over the rivers peaked in the warmer months. The warmer season brought Natives and newcomers together. People then defined this period as a time of work, and by extension a time to contest the meaning and uses of the Cariboo environment. Clearly the story of Native and goldseeker seasonality is significant. However for the purpose of maintaining a focus on how seasonality shaped mining work in this frontier, the full story of Native and newcomer seasonality is large goes beyond the scope of this work.
Historically, the Cariboo is an ambiguous physical and political space.\(^{10}\) The gold rush society that erupted along its auriferous creeks was hard to define to outsiders, and the fluid and ephemeral nature of these communities made them quite literally difficult to pin down.\(^{11}\) Thus for the purposes of defining an area, in this study the Cariboo extended northward from Cache Creek to Prince George. Its western rim was the banks of the Fraser River, and the Cariboo Mountains defined its eastern edge. Within this space, men and women sought and occasionally realized vast riches, but they all developed a peculiar society at the intersection of natural and cultural contingencies. Americans, Brits, Canadians, Chinese, Europeans and Natives rushed into an area rich in seasons and gold. For many this was a difficult pairing. Seasons did not equalize the playing field. An individual could get lucky, but people with capital still held the upper hand. The Cariboo was thus very much an extension of earlier mining frontiers, yet it also represented a diversion from pre-existing patterns and, in the longer run, set the stage for later, even more northerly booms such as the Klondike and Nome gold rushes.

The recent academic rush of historical inquiries has examined the content and meaning of North American mining booms, focusing mainly on the development of mining processes, the mass movement of people and industry, the resettlement of the land, and the region’s physical and ideological assimilation into the rest of the continent. In short, mining remains a central element to telling the story of the settlement of the

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10 For a more detailed description of the various regional interpretations of “where” the Cariboo is see Robin Skelton, *They Call it the Cariboo*. (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1980) 11-17.
11 The Nlaka’pamux, St’atl’imx, Secwepemc, Tsilqot’in, and Dakelhne had all been utilizing these spaces as a part of their own seasonal rhythms and understood the region in a very different way. But colonial authorities were not far behind the earliest prospectors and the conception of the Cariboo as a mining space subsumed any Native interpretations and uses of the environment.
West. In this vein Rodman Paul’s *Mining Frontiers of the Far West*, an older text in the field, nevertheless still evokes the central thrust of most of these tales:

Wherever miners went, farmers and shopkeepers and lawyers and all the multitudinous creators of modern civilization followed them . . . miners were attracted to mountain and desert lands that might normally have waited generations for occupants . . . the mining frontier moved in a series of thrust . . . that left islands of wilderness between new communities.\(^\text{12}\)

For a short period the Cariboo was one such community, but where Paul viewed people moving across the land as a tautological process of settlement, this thesis approaches the Cariboo gold rush as a constantly shifting, never quite settled negotiation between a polyglot society and a dynamic environment. The narrative of North American mining has benefited greatly from analyses of the gold rush phenomenon, but it still has a ways to go. Seasons were both constructed and constituting forces, and they have largely been taken for granted. The environmental history of the Cariboo has so far been, as William Cronon put it, another one of those places “where nature is not.”\(^\text{13}\) Rather than dismiss seasons’ historical implications, though, this thesis uses the Cariboo gold rush to illustrate how nature’s rhythms were a historical agent.

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CHAPTER 1: RHYTHMS OF GOLD

The discovery of gold in California unleashed a wave of human activity across western North America. Argonauts, as they were called, sought out the auriferous creeks, rivers, hills, and mountains of the region. Mining booms erupted in Oregon, British Columbia, Colorado, Arizona, Montana, and Idaho. British Columbia was singular to these frontiers. A colony on the edge of a European empire, British Columbia was the northernmost extension of the western mining rushes in the mid-nineteenth century.14 The colony’s first gold rush happened on the banks of the Fraser River in 1858.15 From the Fraser, goldseekers pushed further into the interior, and by 1860 they had found more of the precious metal in an area called the Cariboo.16 Like other mining areas, the Cariboo’s geography and climate shaped the social and cultural dynamics of its development, and it was unmistakably a larger expansion westward and northward of what Rodman Paul would later call the mining frontier.17 The Cariboo shared much with other mining booms, including technologies, demography, ecological deconstruction, and maltreatment, often vicious in nature, of Native populations.

14 For a more detailed discussion on the colony on the edge of a European empire, not based on geography, see Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire.

15 The central reason colonial authorities created British Columbia as an official colony was because of the gold rush. Authorities felt that the heavy influx of American miners threatened English control in the region.

16 Contemporary popular sources on the Cariboo rush place its inception with the strikes made along Williams Creek in 1862. Yet other important and rich Cariboo strikes were made in 1859 in the Horsefly creek and in the early summer, beginning in 1860, with Doc. Keithley’s party finding gold on Keithely Creek.

17 Rodman Paul, Mining Frontiers of the Far West.
Despite these commonalities, the Cariboo has not fit easily into the historiographical or environmental patterns of Western North American mining, and climate has always been the distinguishing factor. Harsh seasons compounded an isolated geography in a foreign territory. Short summers and long winters magnified the energy and capital spent in extracting gold. Regional anomalies translated into a seasonal labour pattern that was different from previous rushes in California, Oregon and even Idaho. The Cariboo challenged the contemporarily embodied social and cultural knowledge of gold mining, and it forced a somewhat unique cohort to invent anew the means and processes of claiming nature’s wealth.

In his seminal text, Mining Frontiers of the Far West, Rodman Paul argues that mining rushes in the West should not be conceived of as a single experience, but rather “as a series of frontiers, sometimes successive, sometimes widely separated geographically and chronologically,” and that “it must be recognized that within each major region there were retarded subregions, such as the mountains in the northwest corner of California...and the northern part of Idaho.” Paul suggests that these regions experienced stagnation because of their isolation. In the early decades, however, all mining regions were isolated. The challenge of traversing hundreds or thousands of miles through unfamiliar and life threatening terrain were fundamental physical realities. The financial, physical, and social struggles of goldseekers, prospectors, merchants, and businessmen highlighted the power of physical geography in the gold mining frontier.

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18 In this instance the terms isolated and foreign is applied in a non-Native perspective.
19 Paul, Mining Frontiers, 11.
20 The challenges also tell of the remarkable energy with which gold rushes were created. Miners, and the service-support industry that accompanied them, adapted to the land and in turn also shaped the land they moved over.
Each region was different and labour had to adjust.\textsuperscript{21} Thus a central theme in each rush was the organic relationship between climate and labour in the mines. Regional climates laid down environmental rhythms that labour had to accommodate. These became the social rhythms of the diggings. Each successive gold rush built, elaborated, expanded, or discarded these rhythms according to their contexts. Seasons molded the development of mining frontiers in subtle or overt ways. The Cariboo gold rush shared some qualities of its predecessors, but it also developed a distinct seasonal pattern that complicates Paul’s arguments. The Cariboo rush was influenced by previous mining experiences, which were then reshaped because of the regions natural contingencies. The natural environment, and seasons in particular, played an important role in how mining frontiers developed, and the extreme nature of the Cariboo helped make it an extreme mining frontier.

A handful of miners in the Cariboo honed their skills in the California gold fields.\textsuperscript{22} The knowledge they brought north was key to developing placer mining in British Columbia, yet California was a very different place than the Cariboo. As the

\textsuperscript{21} Paul Mining Frontiers, 11.

\textsuperscript{22} The number of men who worked in the California gold mines and proceeded to the Cariboo has not been accurately researched. However, newspaper records and personal accounts note the importance of these miners’ experiences. See for example The Cariboo Sentinel or Victoria’s The Daily Colonist. The actual population estimates of the Cariboo gold rush have been debated on numerous levels. Extreme estimates place the population from 1861 to 1871 at 10,000 participants. More conservative estimates place the mining population at 4,000 to 5,000 participants. Recent scholarship indicates that the conservative estimate is much more accurate. Unlike the Fraser River gold rush, American miners did not dominate the Cariboo. With the start of the American Civil War and rushes in Idaho and Colorado, American miners on the Fraser returned south. Instead newcomers, including a large contingent of English, Canadian, Chinese, Australian, Chinese, and Continental Europeans miners, played a larger role in the Cariboo than on the Fraser. Much work is still needed on this topic and the role that demographics played in the history of the Cariboo and Fraser gold rush. For further discussions see Bill Quackenbush, “Population of the Earlier Period in Barkerville” (essay, compact disk, Barkerville archives, 2003), 1-3; Christopher Douglas Herbert, “Unequal Participants: Race and Space in the Interracial Interactions of the Cariboo Gold Fields, 1860-1871.” M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2005; Perry, On the Edge of Empire; Ying-ying Chen, “In the Colonies of the Tang: Historical Archaeology of Chinese Communities in the North Cariboo District, British Columbia (1860’s-1940’s)” PhD Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2001.
archetype for gold rushes, California’s geography and local ecology formed the foundation for how goldseekers would theorize and perform their work. Historian Malcolm Rohrbough has noted that when miners arrived in California they “soon discovered that the land of gold was not always welcoming and hospitable,” and that it “imposed difficulties on those who would exploit it.” The main geographic barriers were distance and the location of gold deposits. In 1848, California was a long way from major supply cities. Prices were dear and communication difficult in the gold fields. Trails, roads, and waterways were passable at most times in the year, however, softening the impact of distance. Towns such as Sacramento, San Francisco, Stockton, and Marysville quickly ballooned into dependable, thriving markets, stocked with anything an enterprising greenhorn or jaded old-timer needed.

Thus isolation in the diggings did not last long. The thriving entrepots, fed by the main port city of San Francisco, worked to compress time and space for miners, buffering the idiosyncrasies of California’s many varied landscapes. The sheer volume of men and capital directed at the landscape produced vast numbers of trails, roads, bridges, though many were rudimentary in form. These connective networks bound camps and towns to the diggings. In short, restless California miners rarely faced the threat of being trapped by the physical environment, and this in turn encouraged the ephemeral

23 Paul, Mining Frontiers, 122.
25 San Francisco was the main city. The rest acted as interior distribution centres, or “jumping off” points, to the gold fields. For more on this see Paul Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 21-22.
27 Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 168-169
28 Ibid, 163-164
nature of the California rush. The location of gold deposits were, however, not always easily accessible to the prospector. Miners in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada found that moving safely and mining efficiently were a challenge. Valleys with sheer walls, steep hills, sparse vegetation, and very deep ravines all contributed to the patterns miners developed to move through the landscape. Gold mining was dangerous work, and it required men to form cooperative parties who combined their financial means, physical labour, and companionship into a unit of men that coped, and hopefully succeeded, in the hot California landscape.

California’s climate created parameters for incredibly flexible mining seasons. With some exceptions, California mining areas enjoyed moderate to warm temperatures with warm to hot and very dry summers, and a few winter months with rain and some snow. Snow was heavy enough in the northern mines to shut down operations for two or three months some years. Some men wintered in the larger cities, but temperatures were usually mild enough that most chose to stay in the diggings. The choice to over-winter was not always easy, but miners continued to labour with peace-of-mind, knowing there were supplies, provisions, and company within a few days travel. As Paul has noted, much of the mining done in the early years was performed at altitudes of less than 2500 feet, “and thanks to the blessing of the famous California climate, this meant tolerable

29 Ibid, 122
30 Ibid.
32 Some of the exceptions to this general trend include Death Valley’s scorching heat or the freezing temperatures of the Trinity and Sierra mountains. For more information on the general geography and climate of California see http://www.netstate.com/geography/ca_geography.htm.
33 J.S. Holliday, The World Rushed In, 320.
environment for life and work during all save the heaviest winter rains."\textsuperscript{34} Indeed many gold seekers developed romantic notions of California, and its climate was a key factor in the courtship.\textsuperscript{35}

Despite the favourable seasons, gold rush participants could not ignore the difficulties of the landscape. Instead, the technologies they deployed helped moderate their labour and became the standards by which following gold rushes developed. Water was a main concern for all goldseekers. Without this resource placer mining did not occur. Conversely, too much water threatened to wash away mining operations and even miners themselves. Water availability was not a great concern in the northern mines, which were fed by frequent rains in the mountains and snow reserves from winter months.\textsuperscript{36} Accordingly, technology was developed that required an abundance of free flowing water and excelled in hilly terrain. Hydraulic mining was an example of an effective adaptation to the resources available in California.\textsuperscript{37} In the south, at lower altitudes, there was less precipitation and smaller snow packs. As a result these areas were known as “the dry diggings.”\textsuperscript{38} The climate of the southern mines translated into a mining season that, if a miner so desired, was almost a year-round operation. But the

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{34} Paul Mining Frontiers 21.
\textsuperscript{35} Paul, Mining Frontiers, 21. Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 121-122.
\textsuperscript{36} The Northern mines pivoted around the Feather, Yuba, Bear, and American Rivers. Holliday, The World Rushed In, 304.
\textsuperscript{37} Paul, Mining Frontiers page 29.
\textsuperscript{38} The Southern miners depended on the main rivers of Consumnes, Mokelumne, Calaveras, Stanislaus, Tulomne, Merced, and the Mariposa. The tributaries of which could run dry in the summer months. Holliday, The World Rushed In, 304.
critical challenge was acquiring a stable supply of water. In both regions mazes of dams, ditches, and flumes turned water from its bed. Miners then turned the beds upside down and diverted the lot to rockers, sluices, pumps, and hydraulic hoses all of which worked to extract gold and alter the landscape for much of the year.

Only three years after the original strike at Sutter’s Mill, goldseekers pushed north into Oregon Territory on the Illinois River. Oregon’s integration into the mining frontier was a rather seamless extension of California’s history. The territory had already shaped much of its market activities for the needs of the California rush. Combined with its proximity to California’s northern gold fields, its own untapped placer diggings, and accessible port cities, Oregon was a ready space to transplant established mining patterns. The climate did begin to vary from the warm, dry, salubrious atmosphere of California, but it was not sufficiently different to alter the eight to nine month mining season. As in California, Oregon miners moved through a generally temperate climate with few regional variations. The Cascade Mountains divided the region west and east. The western portions experienced heavy rainfall and moderate temperatures. Eastern Oregon had relatively low precipitation and cooler temperatures. In the southwestern

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39 Water’s central role in the history of mining, and the development of the West, has been explored by historian Donald Pisani. In the early years of California the rights to water for mining purposes took on at least three variations: Hispanic communal rights, riparian rights, and prior appropriation. Prior appropriation would eventually sweep across the West and has led to a history of misuse and reflects, in the case of water rights, “culture counts for more than climate.” Donald Pisani Water, Land, and Law in the West, 1-23. I am not arguing that seasons carried greater or less influence than culture. Seasons were not seen as a resource that could be attached to property rights. Rather, in part, it was the effects of seasons, such as higher water levels and the river itself that miners and businessmen fought to own.

40 For a successful season California miners depended on rain. Paul notes that the rains ended in May, with water in the river staying high until late June, at which point levels fall until the return of rain in late November or early December. This left miners to work for about 8-9 months a season. Rodman Paul, California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1947), 124-125. For the social history of this region see Susan Lee Johnson, Roaring Camp.


42 Joseph E. Taylor III Making Salmon, 47; Paul, Mining Frontiers, 41.
region on the Illinois River, the region presented moderate temperatures and considerable precipitation much like the Klamath, Trinity, and other northern mining areas of California.\textsuperscript{43}

As miners rushed into the Rogue River basin in December of 1851, it was clear that the winter months did not block the development of new mining communities.\textsuperscript{44} Paul dismissed the Oregon rush as having only local consequences, yet it was devastating for Indians.\textsuperscript{45} Mining camps were connected via wagon roads and trails to regional entrepots. Large supply centres such as Jacksonville boomed, and local farms and timber operations built near the mining camps, which, while secluded, were by no means completely isolated by the local climate and geography. The gold rushes in Oregon also deployed the same technology and labour patterns as California. The slightly wetter, cooler setting did not considerably shift miners' work.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 47.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 47.
\textsuperscript{46} Paul, \textit{Mining Frontiers}, 89. From Oregon and California miners moved simultaneously in two directions: north and northeast.
The years leading up to the Cariboo made miners confident in their ability to master nature and the 1858 Fraser River Rush was a particularly reinforcing event.\textsuperscript{47} The Fraser was an appendage of other gold rush frontiers, yet it had peculiarities that were particularly significant because the Cariboo was heavily influenced by the Fraser River, the diggings along its banks, and the miners who worked them. The rush drew gold fever into a now colonial context and pushed the mining frontier much farther north.\textsuperscript{48}

The Fraser also established new rhythms of labour, based on local conditions, that miners readily assumed were transferable to the Cariboo. Unlike previous areas, success pivoted on a tempestuous river and the climatic forces that shaped its character. Goldseekers had to adjust by migrating to and from their claims on a seasonal basis, and they were much more dependent on the distant port cities of New Westminster and Victoria during winter months.\textsuperscript{49}

The received wisdom about this pattern was particularly important because most miners who set out for the Cariboo had little or no experience in the colony. Old-timers were men who had joined the Fraser River rush in 1858, or who had experience

\textsuperscript{47} Many scholars have pointed out the ways in which 19\textsuperscript{th} century gold rushes beget alternative mineral rushes. A pattern of development was built on the experiences of men and women who participated in these events. Consequently miners came to British Columbia with a predetermined set of physical and ideological tools that were built on these experiences. For examples see Paul Mining Frontiers; Douglas Fetherling, \textit{The Gold Crusades}. However, the ways in which the natural environment shaped miner’s experiences, and their speculations about other landscapes, has not been explored in the context of the Cariboo gold fields.

\textsuperscript{48} Several of the auriferous creeks of the Cariboo eventually emptied their waters into the Fraser River. For example the Bowron River, which “has two famous gold-bearing creeks, Cunningham and Antler, whose sources are on the Snowshoe Plateau in the Cariboo Mountains.” Noel G. Duclos and Blanche Duclos, \textit{Packers, Pans, and Paydirt: Prospecting to the Cariboo} (Quesnel B.C.: Arthur Duclos, 1995) 3.

\textsuperscript{49} As Conevery Bolton Valencius outlines in, \textit{The Health of the Country}, 19\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century labourers shaped their lives with an understanding of the seasons. Knowing the seasons and the natural world was a path used to help them determine the quality of the land as well as how local environments effected human bodies. Conevery Bolton Valencius, \textit{The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land.} (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Thus the concepts of a mining season was familiar to 19th century miners because of previous gold rushes and the labour that many young men performed on the land at home.
elsewhere. Most of these miners were young men who had come for a variety of reasons. As historian Malcolm Rohrbough notes for the California gold rush, "Men did not go to California solely to escape poverty or to make possible a rise in family fortunes, however, for some, it was also a coming-of-age voyage, a declaration of independence from their parents and siblings." Many participated in the California, Oregon, and the Columbia River rushes, the overwhelming majority of whom were American, but Canadians, Australian, English, French, Chinese and New Zealand miners also comprised a large group of immigrant miners. Few, however, had ever set foot in British Columbia, and fewer still had significant mining experience on such a large river.

Thus old-timers were particularly influential. On the Fraser these were the men who had prospected their way up from California. They helped establish what became a new seasonal pattern of labour. Central to this new rhythm was the rise and fall of the Fraser. At the head of the canyons in the mining camp of Yale, one participant remarked on the change in character of the river at this juncture: "The Fraser, rarely anything but a rocky rapid in any part of its course, here goes utterly mad, and foams and

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51 Other participating groups included miners from Mexico, Hawaii, Continental Europe, Hudson’s Bay men, and Native men and women mainly from the Sto:lo Nation.

52 For examples see Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades* and Robin Skelton, *They Call it the Cariboo*.

53 Miners would go up country earlier to beat the floodwater, wait, and hope that the river would not be swollen for too long. In the interim they sought out other work such as road building, packing, sawing lumber, or local prospecting.

54 Alfred Waddington noted in *The Fraser River Mines Vindicated* that many miners, packers, and businessmen were forced to quit their endeavours because they had not considered the seasons of the Fraser River and its auriferous banks. Alfred Waddington, *The Fraser River Mines Vindicated or, The History of Four Months*, (Victoria: P.Dr Garro, Wharf Street, 1858) 21-22, 36-38.
rages at the rate of twenty miles and hour.\textsuperscript{55} Beyond was another matter. Below Yale “miners were elated to have the mild weather of the Pacific slope in their favour. Here they could seek paydirt the whole year round.”\textsuperscript{56} Getting past the Fraser canyon’s churning and violent rapids during the spring melt was all but impossible. Miners struggled physically and psychologically at this telluric and climatic juncture. Spring marked the promise of sudden wealth. It was the season that could make success, yet the swelling river could break a miner even more quickly, drowning provisions, bodies, and dreams of gold.

Often the Fraser’s setting overwhelmed the miners. Alfred Waddington wrote about the many miners who, in the spring of 1858, had ventured up the Fraser expecting to make their pile within a season.\textsuperscript{57} Most goldseekers had not anticipated the power of the spring freshet on the muddy Fraser. Once they arrived at the boiling rapids, most sojourners were waylaid. Even for the few who squeezed into the upper Fraser canyons, or those who ventured through the Harrison Lake trail, the swollen waters remained and were too high to exploit. For months claims could not be worked, and provisions ran short. By April 1858 a rumour spread that,

the river did not fall, some even said that it would never fall; and as nobody had ever thought of mining any where else except on the river, the state of the river became the barometer of public hopes and the pivot on which every body’s expectations turned.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Viscount Milton \textit{The Northwest Passage By Land} (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, Ludgate Hill E.C., 1865) 345.
\textsuperscript{56} Duclos, \textit{Packers, Pans, and Paydirt}, 5.
\textsuperscript{57} Waddington, \textit{The Fraser River Mines Vindicated}, 20-23.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. 22.
Miners “were now occupied in looking at the river and eating their provisions.”

Supplies and patience were both quickly exhausted, and many embittered men returned downstream having seen the elephant but little colour.

By early spring 1859, miners had learned to travel up the Fraser in late spring to beat the freshet. Prospecting, mining, and building infrastructures for wages and food were remolded to the river’s rhythms. Miners then cut cords of wood, built roads and bridges, and prepared their rockers and sluices so they would be ready once the swollen waters subsided. Men and women from Victoria to Lillooet began to pay close attention to the region’s seasons, noting connections between weather, runoff, and prospects for mining. In April a Yale resident noted,

> The weather has been a little milder lately than usual, although we have occasional storms. The snow does not lay long on the ground - that is, on the flats where our little town is built. The miners have started to work again. During the past week quite a number of companies have fitted out and started on their long journey to the Upper Fraser … via the Kanyon [sic].

The transient demography of the diggings was reinforced by the seasonal migration to the lower country. From mid-November to early December miners, packers, grocers, and other participants fled the hardening winter of the Interior Plateau. Their destination was the wetter but warmer climes of New Westminster, Victoria, or San Francisco.

Economics magnified the importance weather in this migration. Most miners lamented

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60 Ibid, 21-22.
63 Duclos, Packers, Pans, and Paydirt, 5; Both Malcolm J. Rohrbough’s Days of Gold and in J.S. Holliday’s The World Rushed In note that the California miners also had established a seasonal pattern of returning to larger urban locations where the men could spend the winter months closer to good provisions and, to some degree, be provided with shelter from the weather. See Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 155, 162; Holliday The World Rushed In, 326-327.
the expense of staying upriver year-round. Staple provisions became as precious as gold in winter. Flour and bacon climbed to over seventy-five cents per pound, and the paucity of paying work in winter threatened their fiscal and physical well-being.⁶⁴

The seasonal retreat, however, was primarily driven by the climatic changes on the upper Fraser. The interior was much cooler. Alfred Waddington noted how miners balked at over-wintering in the interior:

> It has been said that, one half of the amateur miners who came in the spring only did it for the fun of the thing; and one half of the real miners who have left latterly, have done it because they are afraid of the cold. When I see Bostonians, who have been living in California, shaking here with a white frost I am inclined to believe it.⁶⁵

The river threatened to freeze solid, and the semi-arid climate presented immense difficulties. What little precipitation appeared fell in the form of snow, and mining operations came to a standstill without free-flowing water.⁶⁶ Financially, physically and psychologically, the proximity of cities was too strong a pull. Miners headed to the lower country in droves. As Mr. Batterton reported from Yale and Pavillion in January 1861, there was “no mining going on at any point on the river, except a few men rocking. The weather is too severe to work.”⁶⁷ Winter threatened starvation and exposure. The Fraser River rush offered a chance at El Dorado, but fortune beckoned only during six-to-seven months of the year.

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⁶⁶ While not common, the Fraser River could completely freeze over, and did so in 1862. This event would have been more common in the upper Fraser but the winter of 1862-63 was particularly cold. As a result the lower Fraser froze, halting all river traffic and isolating miners from the most expedient source of provisions, communication, and aid.
For the miners who succeeded or failed in 1858, and for those who followed later, the Fraser River gold rush was a learning experience and a springboard into the Cariboo. The *Daily Colonist* commented that it was very desirable that miners and others proceeding to the Cariboo country should see a little of the mining that is going on that banks of the Lower Fraser, which would give them a good insight into the nature of the mining districts of British Columbia and probably be of service here after.\(^\text{68}\)

The interior mining districts were marginal environments. Miners had to develop fundamental skills before venturing into the Cariboo. As the challenges became better known, miners grew more deliberate in directing their energies, anxieties, and curiosities. Obtaining “good insight into the nature of the mining districts of British Columbia” also shored their confidence.\(^\text{69}\) Yet their faith in human control of nature resulted in a myopic view of fate. Miners were not prepared for the many ways that nature’s seasons confused their work. Miners “drove themselves relentlessly in their work, propelled forward by optimism and ambition, guilt and fear,” but this was not necessarily evidence that they understood the rhythms of the world they explored.\(^\text{70}\)

At the same instant of the Cariboo gold rush, southeast of the 49\(^\text{th}\) parallel, another mining frontier also opened. With violent encounters between the American military and local Salish bands throughout Washington and Oregon territories, the Nez Perce Indians had somehow managed to avoid clashes with American authorities and settlers in the first two decades of American expansion in the region.\(^\text{71}\) They were less successful at stemming the tide of prospectors, miners, and servicemen from California

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\(^{68}\) “Letter From Lytton City” *Daily British Colonist*, 1 May 1861.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 146.

and Oregon who struck gold along the Clearwater River in the summer and autumn of 1860. The area was on the periphery of the Columbian Plain. The rush would eventually extend beyond the borders of the plateau into the Boise Basin and northern Washington, but the initial focus was in the centre of the Nez Perce Nation. Drained by the Clearwater River, the areas geography and climate was an important force for the development of the Nez Perce rush. The climate was relatively extreme. The dominant physiographic features of mountains and deep canyons forced miners to re-calibrate how they evaluated the land and their approach to the mining season. Bounded by the Cascade Mountains to the west and by the Rocky Mountains in the east, the upper Clearwater basin’s climate did not accommodate the temperate mining seasons of California, Oregon, and even the Fraser River. The seasonal cycle, more pronounced than the rest of the Columbia Plain, “was one of cool...moderately snowy winters, wet springs, hot dry summers, and warm predominantly dry autumns.” Like the Cariboo, the Nez Perce rush lay in the Intermontane Region where weather and climate were shaped by both the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. The warmer summer and fall months did not provide an overabundance of precipitation but the Clearwater’s tributaries and the mountains’ melting snow packs were dependable.

Isolation was thus a greater concern in Idaho than it had been in California, Oregon and the Fraser. Miners had to consider seriously the implications of being snowbound in the mountains around Orofino. A climate of “heavy snows, intense cold”

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73 Meinig, The Great Columbia Plain, 211.
74 http://serc.carleton.edu/research_education/nativelands/nezperce/physiography.html.
75 Meinig, The Great Columbia Plain 16.
76 Ibid, 11.
amid "intolerable trails" was not taken lightly. Most men waited for spring to melt the threat of sub-zero temperatures before venturing into the Idaho diggings. The Nez Perce rush, like but independent from the Cariboo, also established a shorter mining season with most miners performing their labour in the summer and fall months. Little technological change took place, however. Placer mining continued to rely on simple methods of extraction, and miners continued to construct their labyrinths of flumes and ditches for rocking and sluicing.

While Idaho produced some of the most ephemeral mining populations, its climate imposed a firm seasonal pattern of mining. Some miners did over-winter along the creeks in 1861, but a "much larger number impatiently assembled during the winter at the frontier town of Walla Walla, Washington Territory while others founded Lewiston." The main supply centre was Lewiston, but unlike the Cariboo, Lewiston had a number of competing supply centres, including San Francisco, Portland, and Salt Lake City. Other sources came in the form of established cattle ranches and farms in the region, and to the south, the Oregon Trail offered alternate commercial material and social possibilities. But the rush to Idaho and its extension southward and northward

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77 Paul, Mining Frontiers, 142.
78 The Cariboo gold rush and the Nez Perce competed for miner's attention. The region's businessmen and local authorities argued in the papers for the supremacy of their own gold deposits, the prices of provisions, climate, the and distance between entrepots, over the other. For example see "A Cariboo "Croaker" of the First Water" British Daily Colonist 3 December, 1861; "News Advertisements: The Cariboo Mines" British Daily Colonist 4 December, 1861; "Summer and Winter Diggings" British Daily Colonist 10 December, 1861; "Cariboo and Nez Perces Mines and the Portland and San Francisco Newspapers" British Daily Colonist 15 November, 1861;
79 Paul, Mining Frontiers, 138-139.
80 Ibid, 138.
81 Ibid 139-151.
82 Ibid, 139. Some of the competing supply cities included San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Portland, and even Victoria.
fostered mining camps over a large, particularly unstable region. Labouring in the fetters of a shortened season, miners moved frequently among these camps, often finding themselves moving significant distances from one season to the next. During the same period, the Cariboo rush was largely confined to one mountainous area. The Cariboo was thus never as diffuse yet was always at much greater distance from provisions. Consequently Cariboo goldseekers and merchants had to struggle with similar seasonal patterns but on a much more taxing scale.

The sum of miners' experiences in California, Oregon, the Fraser, and Idaho set the stage for future gold mining frontiers. The period in California between 1848 and 1858 had been, in retrospect, "a time of apprenticeship and learning by the expensive method of trail and error." If, as Paul claims, "what little mining there was elsewhere in the Far West during the decade was essentially a spilling over of Californian effort," then the lessons were indeed in the form of technological development and general labour patterns. If this was the case, then the miners who entered the Cariboo collided with new, harder lessons. To work in the Cariboo mining patterns had to be relocated on a temporal and spatial level that corresponded with the Cariboo seasons. In order to accomplish this shift successfully miners had to respond to the current manifestations of seasons past work.

The story of seasons and the Cariboo gold rush had been millions of years in the making. Climate had shaped the land that the miners encountered in the mid-nineteenth century, and, successful or not, their intimate relationships with the region’s gravel, forests, and creeks were, in part, the product of the climate’s awesome ability to

83 Paul, Mining Frontiers, 138-139.
84 Ibid, 192.
85 Ibid, 193.
simultaneously tear down and build up the earth. At the height of the Cariboo rush between 1862-1865, miners literally turned the region upside down in search of gold, but their labour, while violent and alienating, also connected them to deep and more ancient natural rhythms.86

During the Pleistocene the Cariboo experienced at least two glacial episodes when huge sheets of ice covered and carved the major geographical features that miners would encounter.87 The epoch was not all frozen earth but rather an extension of "a series of climatic ups and downs, of moderate climates alternating with distinctly cooler periods. In the last 800,000 years alone there have been twelve of these cycles."88 These prolonged periods of extreme cold were coupled with phenomenal movement. Glaciers flattened plateaus, altered rivers, and deepened lakes. They ground down mountains, shaving and depositing billions of tons of earth. This process helped to expose gold bearing rock.89 These cycles of glaciation gave way when relatively shorter and warmer winters forced the retreat of ice into the mountains. In some places, the Cariboo included, glaciers disappeared completely. Flowing waters then further eroded mineral deposits, and gold bearing rock began another journey. By ten-to-twelve thousand years ago, gravity was collecting melting ice and rainfall. These forces tumbled and tossed the

88 Cannings, Geology of British Columbia, 41.
89 Ibid, 41. The repetitive and sporadic advancement and retreats of glaciers left their marks on the modern geography and geology of British Columbia. In some cases pre-glacial gold bearing streams were covered by glacial drift and sediment that was washed down by melting glaciers. The gold remained buried until a lucky miner's shovel revealed the ancient creek bed.
soft yellow metal slowly down mountain streams and creeks into the Cariboo's deepening valleys.90

It was at this time that the seasons began to take on the characteristics that miners would later encounter. Once prospectors had struggled over “the Snowshoe Plateau and penetrated the Cariboo Mountains at the seven to eight thousand-foot level [...] they experienced the bitterness of a mountain climate.”91 Winters were long and typically marked by very large snow packs.92 Spring offered no certain respite. Warming brought “a difficult combination of rain and snow while frost was present in all but the warmest summer days.”93 Summers were short with cool nights. To add to future miners’ considerable distress, the region’s “incessant summer rains made their working lives miserable.”94 Fall began early. Usually by September there was snow on the ground, although it was not unusual to have violent snow and hail storms any month of the year. With a general ridgeline of 7,800 feet, often-snowcapped year-round, the Cariboo Mountains encouraged further geographic rainfall.95 The mountains shaped the Cariboo’s seasons and underpinned the cyclical deposits of gold in creek beds.96 In these ways periods of mountain building and erosion set the stage for the modern Cariboo. Millions of years worked to loosen and redistribute the gold that, once in the valleys, came to rest in the banks and rivers throughout the region.

90 Cannings, *Geology of British Columbia*, 43.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/PROJECT/organization/Cariboo/climate.htm
Even in the narrow valleys, though, the Cariboo was never an accommodating space for miners. The steep hillsides were covered in thickets of pine and spruce. Dense bio-mass and trees got in the way; yet tree stature and circumference was influenced by the short growing season in ways that made the timber particularly suited for mining construction. These forests would become an important resource for miners who seemed to gobble wood for mining technologies, houses, and fuel. Conversely, the wetness of the region fostered a tangle of marshes and bogs along the valley bottoms. Nature offered little grazing vegetation for mules, horses, and oxen, and miners cursed the deep muck that starved their beasts of burden and impeded their progress. Nor did the local ecology support an abundance of game. Seasonal Woodland Cariboo, grouse, duck, bear, and fish were an occasional source of sustenance for the able-bodied hunter, but nothing came easy or cheap in the Cariboo.

Compounding the difficult transition was the extreme distance between the Cariboo and New Westminster or Victoria. The region's isolation combined with Anglo-European's limited geographical knowledge to produce confused reports about the place. Knowledge about the Fraser was not easily transferred to the Cariboo. Seasonal time shifted as miners moved through geographical space. Winter was short in the Fraser Valley, spring came sooner, and its relatively mild temperatures resulted in an abundance of game and provisions. Cariboo winters were by comparison long and hard. As became clear, the Fraser River mining season was not an applicable analog for the Cariboo diggings. Miners had to develop, almost from scratch, a new body of knowledge about seasonal labour.

97 Duclos, Packers, Pans, and Paydirt 5.
98 Ibid, 5.
The experiences of John Wilkinson illustrated how the forces of history collided with environmental contingencies in the Cariboo. Writing to his brother in January 1860, Wilkinson champing at the bit, ready to go “up country as soon as spring opens.”

During the off-season he had taken detailed notes about the climate in Victoria. He meticulously monitored Victoria’s temperatures with a thermometer that lay in the shade, at noon, each day. He approved of Victoria’s elements and temperate climate, which he readily projected to the mouth of the Fraser River. Victoria was not the Fraser Canyon, however, and compared even less to the Cariboo. Seeking other miners’ experiences, Wilkinson learned that

“the cold increases as you proceed up the river, for this reason it is not advisable to start from here for the Upper Country until the latter end of Feby [sic] at the earliest. The seasons for mining at so far a distance up as Alexander is therefore comperitivly [sic] short.”

Like many other miners, Wilkinson projected his expectations onto a geography he had yet to experience. The journey to the Cariboo, like previous gold rushes, was “considered a geographical hiatus, interesting and sometimes beautiful but finally a trial to be endured.” Gold compelled miners to anticipate geographic and climatic change, but it was difficult to understand in advance how new environments would bear on their ability to accomplish their quests.

On the last day of February, Wilkinson and his party were laid-over in Lillooet when they confronted the reality of seasonal risks:

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100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 West, The Contested Plains, 98.
There finding we were too early in the season to proceed further up we remained nearly a month, many over anxious had rushed on through the snow and ice using up there means and provisions, and unable to remain up and wait till ice left the river, had to return without doing, seeing, or knowing anything about the country.¹⁰⁴

Frustrated prospectors and merchants found that knowing the Cariboo’s seasons required endurance, capital, and in some cases, good fortune. The anxiety of getting to the gold often trumped careful planning, and uncritical and often disingenuous booster reports confounded even the most deliberate efforts.¹⁰⁵ Reports such as Wilkinson’s misadventures discouraged many goldseekers about the nature of the climate above Lillooet, but these hard-earned lessons were often easily diluted by suggestions of much different experiences. One unnamed source, for example, insisted that with regards to the climate, one or two simple facts are quite sufficient to refute all the stories which have been so industriously published in California about the long sterile winters and sever frosts of this region: wheat, barely, oats, peas, potatoes, and even tomatoes and water-melons, and various other vegetables have been successfully raised in the neighbourhood of William’s Lake...¹⁰⁶

William’s Lake was indeed a more comfortable climate than the diggings. Yet conversely, the diggings were not at Williams Lake. Local boosterism did not well prepare miners for what they would experience in the Cariboo Mountains. Boosters did not intend to mislead but rather to encourage.¹⁰⁷ Glowing reports about the land and climate, while encompassing what came to be known as the Cariboo, did not elaborate on

¹⁰⁵ In this case “development” translated into capturing the backwoods of British Columbia into a productive sight for colonial capital, and as an example of white Anglo dominance of the natural world and its Aboriginal inhabitants.
¹⁰⁶ British Daily Colonist, 19 December 1860.
¹⁰⁷ For more on the role of Boosters and the West see Bradley J. Birzer, “Expanding Creative Destruction: Entrepreneurship in the American West” The Western Historical Quarterly 30(1) (Spring, 1999), 45-63; David M. Wrobel, Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002)
the disparate environmental contingencies of particular regions in the Cariboo.
Boosterism thus fostered intellectual chaos. The Cariboo's climate did vary, but how that translated into chances for success was ambiguous at best. Most miners seemed aware of the interior's inclement weather, but few had a clear sense of what that meant in practical terms until after they had been on the ground for a season.

In the meantime miners worried about how much time and labour the Cariboo consumed, and how the seasons taxed their moneymaking months. This preoccupation remained germane almost forty years later in the extreme environment of the Klondike gold rush in 1896. Bursting with industrial vigour, miners attacked the Klondike for its wealth. As with the Cariboo their plans were shaped by the rhythms of a hard and harsh climate. Simple tasks in the wrong season became monumental efforts that required humans to take careful note of when they should and should not expend energy. Historian Katherine Morse has noted how climate shaped miner's plans:

Much of the miners' knowledge of nature came from seasonal change. Packing and hauling required far less human and animal labour in the winter, when frozen mud and ice provided a hard surface for sleds, wheels, snowshoes, and for the humans and animals that did the pushing and pulling.  

Even with the advantage of a half-century of mining experiences miners in the Klondike still struggled with the seasonal rhythms of the nature. The contingencies of local environmental contexts still mattered. As in the Cariboo, "placer miners struggled to fit the basic tasks of gold mining into...seasonal extremes".

From California to the Klondike, mining frontiers were shaped by nature's rhythms. California set the stage for a succession of gold rushes, and each of which had

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109 Ibid, 93.
to adjust to local conditions. Not until the 1860’s, though, did miners face climates that forced them into tight seasonal rhythms of labour and leisure. A smaller rush, the Cariboo was a mining frontier that tested the goldseekers’ flexibility and exasperated or ruined those too rigid to adjust. Seasons also framed social interaction: conflicts over the meaning of seasons, their purposes, and the nature of disparate groups grows clearer through the lens of seasonal rhythms. Close examination reveals that the environment helped to focus and direct the contest for power and dominance over both nature and people.

It was gold that stirred people, and the Cariboo brought them together. Gold linked miners to a geography of ancient climates and modern ecology. These forces shaped the nature of labour and influenced how people related to the environment and to each other. The energy of the climate continually worked its way through the diggings and miner’s bodies. Seasons connected gold and miners to a vast amount of geological and geographic energy released over millions of years. Seeking to profit from this work, miners tried to tap the Cariboo’s latent wealth while struggling with the region’s powerful rhythms. They sought the accumulation of millions of seasons for their fortunes, all the while dreaming of financial emancipation, but to achieve their fantasies they had to come to terms with the hard realities of nature in the Cariboo.
CHAPTER 2: SEASONS OF WORK

At the most intimate levels, goldseekers came face-to-face with the nature of the Cariboo through their work.\textsuperscript{110} Labour in the diggings reflected an exhausting and violent relationship with the land. Nature in the Cariboo forced miners to re-negotiate their work and their hope for riches through the seasons. As miners prospected into the Cariboo and began their work, it was clear that the region would not offer up treasure so easily. A limited mining season was not a concept easily wed with rush ideology. Previous rush climates had not significantly strained miners' ability to extract gold. As a consequence Cariboo goldseekers often felt they were going into battle. In spring, miners saw "dense forests of alder bushes...[that] sprung up like magic, and offer[ed] an obstacle to the traveler almost as impenetrable as a phalanx of some of those stubborn spears which we read about in connection with the Middle Ages."\textsuperscript{111} After two weeks of rain, the snow made moving about the creeks almost impossible, as men would "sink up to the knees in a compound of snow and water, commonly known as slosh."\textsuperscript{112} Nature made work an on-going struggle.

In many ways miners did fight nature. Snow, violent creeks, and thick mud thwarted mining attempts while mosquito-infested swamps, exhaustion, and hunger pummelled miner's psychological and physical health. Oppressive lessons, however,

\textsuperscript{110} White, \textit{Organic Machine} 3-29.
\textsuperscript{111} "Letter From Quesnel City" \textit{The Daily Colonist} 2 August 1861.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
enabled miners to understand Cariboo seasons.\textsuperscript{113} Newcomers worked at shaping their
time in the Cariboo to a particular efficiency. In order to accomplish this, mining work
began to reflect special experiences associated with nature’s rhythms in the Cariboo. As
newcomers arrived in significant numbers they used capital and technology to try and
regulate their relationship with nature. On one hand, miners fought the seasons and
sought to transform nature, on the other, miners emulated them through their deposition,
damming, and the disassembling of hillsides. The goldseekers’ relationship with seasons
in the Cariboo was complicated. The work that they did was often confounded by
seasonal events and this broke men’s spirits and livelihoods. But many remained
convinced that Cariboo nature was a trade-off, or an equalizer, for the gold hidden in the
creeks. The Reverend Sheepshanks, a seasonal visitor, was of a such an opinion: “my
belief is that the God of nature in denying to this part of the country many advantages
which other lands possess, has bestowed upon it abundant mineral wealth as a means of
peopling it with a busy and thriving population”\textsuperscript{114} Miners were sure that hard work
resulted in riches. Miners were not sure, however, how hard work would be shaped by
seasons.

Caribooites organized themselves into two major categories in the rush: those
who mined and those who serviced the miners.\textsuperscript{115} These two seemingly narrow

\textsuperscript{113} This was not the same lens that Natives used to view the seasons, however. Native social, cultural,

economic, and political structures reflected a different way of experiencing and knowing seasons.

\textsuperscript{114} “Correspondence” \textit{The British Columbian} Saturday October 11, 1862. Vol 2 No. 58.

\textsuperscript{115} Most gold rush literature recognizes that the economic demographics of a mining population can be

segregated into these categories of labour. The Cariboo gold rush is no different. Historian Tina Loo

highlights the nature of this economy. She acknowledges that there are the miners and those who serve

the miners. Tina Merrill Loo, \textit{Making Law, order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871.}

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.)
categories offered fluid ways of organizing work in the diggings.\(^\text{116}\) Through gambling, packing, inn-keeping, mining, road building, cooking, and other seasonal wage labour, men and women engaged in their work while trying to negotiate the seasons and thus reflected mid-nineteenth century Anglo-European cultural imperatives. Cariboo miners, “like all human beings understood and pursued their labours from within their culture, a broad and complex set of understandings, expectations, traditions, and rules that gave their work and their daily lives meaning, and helped explain their successes and failures.”\(^\text{117}\) Work in the Cariboo was a reflection of goldseekers’ desperate attempts to restructure the landscape while the seasons were just as busy shaping the land and their work. Together goldseekers and nature produced seasons of gold.

Just as the 49’ers envisioned California as a land of wealth and independence, miners in the Cariboo assured each other that nature would allow them to strike it big.\(^\text{118}\) Labour in the Cariboo was the product of previous experiences. The drudgery of mining work, the immediacy of survival, and the mutually dependent service industry of the Cariboo were structured by gold rush activities of earlier mining frontiers in California,

\(^{116}\) In her text *The Nature of Gold* Katherine Morse suggests that the men and women who travelled to the Klondike gold rush “faced a narrow range of choices for productive work and wealth.” In the context of a depression and industrialization this holds true for the Klondike. Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 137.


\(^{118}\) The expectations of the climate, land, and resources of most gold rushes in the 19th century were usually couched in a utopic narrative: If there was gold in California, Colorado, the Fraser River, or the Cariboo the region took on a projected mantle of a promised land. For examples of these ideas see Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*: 35-40; Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades: A Social History of Gold Rushes*; Agnes C. Laut *The Cariboo Trial* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); Margaret McNaughton. *Overland to Cariboo: An Eventful Journey of Canadian Pioneers to the Gold-Fields of British Columbia in 1862.* (Toronto; Montreal: W. Briggs; S.W. Coates, 1896.)
Oregon, Fraser, and Idaho. The plastic nature of this work in the diggings has been a topic of interest for many western historians. But few have focused on the ways in which seasons shaped this plasticity.

Setting the paradigm, early labour in the California mines centered around small units of men. People who travelled together across the country, or over the oceans, found security and company as an economic unit. In this capacity Argonauts were better able to organize their labour. Work in the mines demanded a particular industry that quickly wore down men's bodies. The technology for placer mining was simple, and necessitated an enormous input of energy and time. Much of the labour was spent locating gold and preparing to extract it. Miners on the Fraser River knew well the toll of this work. They packed in provisions, staked claims, cut cords of wood, constructed rockers, sluices, and flumes before washing for gold. The day was not finished, however, after hours of agonizing toil in the creeks. The labourious tasks of cooking, maintaining equipment, cleaning bodies, applying nostrums, and securing shelter further taxed the labourers. This work drained men's spirits and purses. For some, the wages

119 In Roaring Camp, Johnson speaks of the binary created between mining work and domestic work in the Southern Mines. In order to challenge this hierarchical relationship she recognizes the division that 19th industrial capitalism was establishing between productive and reproductive labour while also underscoring that "miners pay attention to the exigencies of everyday life. And, in fact, evidence shows that gold seekers paid great heed to their more immediate desires-for shelter, for food, for company, for pleasure..." Johnson, Roaring Camp, 101-103.
120 See for examples the following works: Loo, Making Law, Order, and Authority; Fetherling, Gold Crusades; Paul, Mining Frontiers; Rohrbough, Days of Gold; West, Contested Plains.
122 Other men, some coming via the Ocean route broke from their shipmates and found new companions once in the mines. Holliday, The World Rushed In, 296-30. Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 75-76. Still others remained in the larger distribution centres finding profit in the trade, service and entertainment industries.
they received hardly covered their basic needs. Miners on the Rouge River had to ensure that they could stay dry and warm for the evening, while parties in Idaho pushed their bodies to the limit knowing that winter would convert them from producers to consumers of wealth.\textsuperscript{125} Mining was not work that created a healthy population.\textsuperscript{126} However, goldseekers were willing to wager their bodies and relationships for the chance to strike it rich.

As miners ground down their bodies and the land, enterprising people learned to recognize the needs and desires of miners. Laundries, boarding houses, dance halls, cook tents, packers, saloons, brothels, saw mills, and hardware stores were just some of the services that boomed in California, Oregon, Fraser, Idaho, and the Cariboo\textsuperscript{127} In the Cariboo, however, entrepreneurs faced the same demands in intimidating isolation, while seasons also constrained mining activity and limited business profit. Newcomers struggled with the same late May-to-early-October rhythm. Seasonality was the dominating factor in the gold fields and towns of the Cariboo. Seasonality was also a dominating factor in the lives of local First Nations. For example, the Secwepemc and Tsilqot'in had their own seasonal patterns and values attached to nature. Seasonal rounds were an important part of Native social and economic life. This interface with nature was the result of thousands-of-years of coming to know the Cariboo. However, the gold rush ultimately drew newcomer seasonality and Native seasonality together. First Nations in the gold bearing region soon began to experience the seasonal pressure and demands of a polyglot hoard of unsympathetic goldseekers.

\textsuperscript{125} Paul, Mining Frontiers, 138-139.
\textsuperscript{126} Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 190-192
Already by spring 1859 mining parties were prospecting farther into the interior and by fall gold was located in an area called Cariboo. Following the Fraser River’s trail of fine gold, reports soon filtered back at the end of the Fraser River mining season. These strikes gave miners vague notions of a new labour pattern. Waylaid in Victoria and New Westminster, men of varying experience began to accrue information about the problems of travel and labour in the interior. Mr. Patterson reported from Horsefly Creek, a tributary of Quesnel Lake in the southeast portion of the Cariboo, that the “highest yield in one day was 25 ounces to thirteen men; two pumping; two or three stripping off the top dirt; one bailer; four rockers, and the [rest] carrying dirt.” Perhaps more significant was that he had left the lower Fraser for Quesnel River in early August and departed by mid October. Patterson’s report reached Victoria no later than December 6. The Quesnel region “was then very cold; river closed with ice; and 4 inches of snow on the ground.” The climate of the interior delimited work. Most telling, Patterson did not plan to return upriver until March. Miners were establishing that the interior necessitated a two-season mining cycle like that of the Fraser. A work season and, literally, a down season.

128 “Horse Fly Creek Diggings” British Daily Colonist 6 December, 1859. Volume 2, Number 76; Robert Galois also notes that by 1859 miners continued to move northward as far as Fort George. Of greater importance to the gold rush, however was the “movement along one of the tributaries of the Fraser River, the Quesnel River. This culminated in the discovery of the richest placer up to that time on Horsefly Creek.” Robert Michael Galois, “Gold Mining and its effects in the Landscapes of the Cariboo” (M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1970) 21. Originally the European name given to the Cariboo was originally simply “Cariboo”, without the definite article “the”. There are a number of speculations given to the etymology of the name but most sources agree it is related to the species of wild Cariboo (Rangifer tarandus) that inhabited the region according to seasonal migrations. For a good debate on the regions name origin see Robin Skelton They Call it the Cariboo, 11-12.
129 “Horse Fly Creek Diggings” British Daily Colonist 6 December, 1859.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
In 1860 miners prosecuted an awkward exploration deeper into the Cariboo, John Wilkinson wrote of his party’s imminent cut-off from communication: “if we go up, we do not much expect to receive any of our letter until we return in the fall…and if you do not receive any word from me for six or seven months you need not be surprised.”133 Wilkinson’s writings underscored miners’ indefinite comprehension of geography beyond Alexandria, on the Fraser River. From “there to Canal River [Quesnel] 40 miles,” he noted, “what route I cannot tell you for we know not ourselves till we get that far.”134

Productive labour at Quesnel and Horsefly Creek was directly influenced by climate. Deep snow, mud-ridden trails, and swollen rivers locked miners in or out. The distance from supply towns seemed to expand or contract based on the weather, and this intermittent isolation amplified the prices of provisions, sometimes reaching astronomical proportions. While prospecting on the Quesnel River, Wilkinson “had the pleasure at the Forks of canal of eating Flour at $250 a barrel, beans $1.25 per pound. Bacon $1.25 per pound suger[sic] $1.50 per pound other things in proportion” 135 Such prices undermined men’s chances at making their pile, thereby also contradicting the egalitarian attributes associated with gold rushes. Those who had initial capital in the gold fields were, at least for a while, better able to provision themselves, or better able to profit from the needs of the miners, and thereby extend their search for gold. Thus the winter signalled not so much an absolute end to mining as an environmentally precipitated division of classes. As food sources became scarcer, prices escalated past the point of diminished returns for different miners, at different points in the fall. As one paper reported, “Owing to there

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134 Ibid.
135 John B. Wilkinson “Letter to Brother from the Forks of Canal and Fraser’s River about 400 Miles from Victoria” April 2nd, 1860 British Columbia Archives, MS-0048 vol. 2
[sic] being snow on the banks of Quesnelle, and high price of provisions, little or no prospecting has been done, and no strikes were made of great importance. ¹³⁶

Eventually, all mining operations halted regardless of social or financial standing in the camps, however it was clear that those that held greater economic and social capital fared better in Cariboo seasons.

At certain points in the early parts of the rush the extreme isolation forced miners to the Lower Fraser. Without provisions the seasons seemed to foreclose miners' chances. In an article titled “Backward Season,” the Daily British Colonist reported:

[10 or twelve miners have arrived at Port Douglas, from the Quesnelle [sic] diggings, without a cent, having (so they say) been compelled to leave on account of the scarcity of provisions...The miners say that one thousand more will be compelled to return from the same cause — want of grub. ¹³⁷

Nature directly shaped how and whether miners could labour in the gold fields. Without provisions mining was impossible. Thus to some extent the climate challenged the entire rush. The Daily British Colonist reported that “[s]everal trains had returned to Cayoosh city, one or two had not been able to get to Alexander, on account of snow. The season was very backward.” ¹³⁸

Miners were not the only ones who wrestled with distance and climate. Packers and merchants, who mined the miners, were equally dependant on the seasons and success of the miners. Their El Dorado involved a different kind of labour, yet they remained just as connected to, and dependent upon, the rhythms of the Cariboo. Packers and merchants were also equally capable of misreading the seasons and the consequences could be equally financially disastrous. In 1860 packers and merchants discovered that

¹³⁶ “Latest From Quesnelle” Daily British Colonist 29 May, 1860.
¹³⁷ “Backward Season” Daily British Colonist 22 May, 1860.
¹³⁸ Ibid.
mining tools were worth nothing without the calories required to work them. Late spring snow and mud had delayed pack trains and left upstream miners desperate for food. A special report noted that the “trains that had arrived at Alexander, had principally shovels, picks, and whiskey. The miners were indignant and threatened if any more loads arrived without provisions they would knock out the heads of the whiskey casks.”

Packers were temporarily left holding extra capital in the form of unsellable tools, and they, as much as miners, were forced to reexamine the seasonal demands of the Cariboo.

With a relatively short mining season, few wintertime customers, and a four-to-five-hundred mile distance from urban posts, over-wintering in the Cariboo was no more appealing for merchants and packers than for miners. Yet staying at Alexandria or, in particular, Quesnel Forks did have its benefits. A miner could maximize his presence in the region by attempting to continue mining through the winter. Placer techniques were often impossible, however, because of the lack of running water. Many feet of snow and freezing temperatures translated into an inefficient use of time and capital, so participants refocused their winter labour. Some garnered wages by cooking, sawing lumber, ditch digging, gambling, washing cloths, and trading while living off scant provisions. Others attempted off-season prospecting or preparing for the coming mining season. Over wintering held the possible advantage of better preparation compared to newcomers. In these ways miners and merchants adjusted to the rhythms of the Cariboo’s climate.

139 Ibid.
140 The plethora of labour that was performed in the Cariboo gold rush is part of a larger narrative of labour in the gold rushes. Rushes in California, Australia, Klondike, Colorado or the Fraser all bear the similar stories of men working at numerous jobs through their time in the diggings, camps, and cities. For examples of labour in 19th century gold rushes see Perry, On the Edge of Empire, 35-40; Fetherling, The Gold Crusades; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, Days of Gold; Kathryn Morse, The Nature of Gold.
Still, the risks of over-wintering often outweighed the advantages. It was dangerous to men’s health and financial security. Most miners were in visitors in a foreign colony making them vulnerable to unknown environments and to a local government that felt threatened by the sudden influx of miners. This was magnified in the Cariboo winter where their numbers were low and they knew little about the land or people that inhabited the region. Thus, comparatively few miners chose to over-winter in the Cariboo preferring to flee in early October. Those who stayed were often men with means. Their capital also enabled them to place some small distance between themselves and the seasonal effects of gold mining by paying other people to work their claims and to battle the climate. Conversely, there were also miners with so little capital that they had no choice but to remain. Impecunious miners could not afford travel or face the prospect of returning to Victoria as failures. 14 Thus two groups of goldseekers, at the opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, found themselves enmeshed in a symbiotic relationship of dependency. In the winter and summer alike, they needed each other’s labour and capital to make gold mining rewarding.142

For John Wilkinson, remaining at Quesnel Forks for the winter was a difficult decision. His letters home vacillated: “I have been asked over fifty times to day [sic] if I winter here or go down. My answer has been cant [sic] say it is so hard to make my mind up on several accounts. I should like to go down, but on many others I ought to

141 For an example see Samuel G. Hathaway, “Diaries” 1862, BCARS E/B/H28 V3.
142 While no rigorous demographic work has been done speaking to the relative proportions of these two groups it can safely be noted that there were far more men without capital than those with. Claim owners like John Cameron, Robert Stevenson, businessmen and women like Andrew and Elizabeth Kelly, Janet Allen, and Francis Barnard depended on the multitude of goldseekers who had seen the elephant. Unable to stake their own claim and in need of work these men made good employees.
Wilkinson, like others, weighed the comfort, security, and company of Victoria against the chances of riches in the dangerous winter. Regardless of whether a miner or merchant stayed or left, he gambled on nature and walked a tightrope that inextricably bound miner’s work to nature’s rhythms in the Cariboo. Wilkinson eventually decided to over-winter on the Forks, investing in a ditch that would supply water. He in turn hired the remaining local unemployed miners to realize his speculation:

[W]e are now employing all good men who wish to winter here giving them their board and $50 a month for the winter it is no wages for men in this part of the world, but as they will not be able to work at mining for themselves during the winter our offer is not so bad.  

Wilkinson adjusted to the constraints of winter by focusing his labour and capital, not on direct mining but rather on the indirect infrastructures for the coming season. By fall he anticipated a very tidy sum. Seasons shaped the early labour patterns of the Cariboo gold rush into a two-season cycle that was exacerbated by the region’s isolation, but was also clear, however, that not all goldseekers experienced these factors the same way.

By 1861 prospectors had hacked and stumbled deeper into the Cariboo often led by enterprising Indian guides. The initial work of the rush was simply to establish that there was gold. Prospecting was part of the miner’s job. Some became specialists, hiring

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143 John B, Wilkinson “Letter to Brother from the Forks of Canal and Fraser’s River about 800 Miles from Victoria” April 2nd, 1860 British Columbia Archives, MS-0048 V2.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid. The reminder of Wilkinson’s correspondence suggests that his decision to over-winter and construct mining infrastructures paid-off. This allowed his to continue to work in the Cariboo for at least 2 more years.
themselves out as experienced prospectors, but early goldseekers usually subsumed the job (like most other forms of labour related to mining) under the larger category of gold miner. This was the beginning of a miner’s work that was directly related to the physical extraction of gold. Prospecting was typically a group effort. As mentioned parties could also offer to pay a Native guide. Not only were prospectors subject to the amity of Natives whose regions they explored but also on their guidance to gold bearing creeks. A prospecting party consisted of two to five men who collectively helped to reduce the physical stress and costs of provisions by truncating their labour and enhancing safety. Some cooked, guided, or were guided by Natives, some logged, and all packed provisions. Some strategically separated, with a couple miners prospecting while the remainder sought out seasonal employment elsewhere. The earnings were then folded back into the cost of outfitting the party and, hopefully, its gold-bearing claim. This was how some parties made the most of their labour between April and October.

It was important that party members recognize the nature of gold and where it was most likely located in the Cariboo. Prospectors were therefore both bit players and central to the story. Often disappearing quickly from the scene and history, they nevertheless explored the region, identified its resources, and underwrote with their

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148 As the rush progressed less prospecting was done by large numbers of men. Many did not have the skills, patience or the capital for this kind of work.

149 As noted in the early chapter prospecting in a group had been an established pattern of labour since the California gold rush.

150 Herbert, “Unequal Participants” 35. For example the Dunlevey party was led by “Baptiste” a Secwepemc man, to the Cariboo and to gold in Horsefly. There is also some evidence to suggest that his presence protected the mining party from hostile Tsilqot’in. Edith Beeson, Dunlevey: From the Diaries of Alex P. McInnes, 27-113.

151 Galois “Gold Mining and Its Effects”, 55.

152 Ibid.

153 For example see the experience of Harry Guillod and his party. There were many instances when his brother George and another member would leave camp to seek employment, company, and provisions elsewhere. Harry Guillod, “Journal of a trip to Cariboo” BCARS, E/B/G94.
labour the entire success of the rush. They also helped discover the nature of labour in the Cariboo. Prospectors were, in the truest sense of the words, in a rush. Squeezed by the dual time constraints of climatic events and competitors', they competed with nature and other miners for treasure. Like everyone, they raced the natural and social seasons of the Cariboo.

Nature produced special constraints for prospectors in which spring, late fall, and some winter months. Miners then had to learn when, in a particular season, work was possible. Bitter cold and violent floods were daunting, even life threatening, but staking and registering claims during these months was the most efficient use of time. When streams were highest was the best time to scout for placer deposits. Gold was often on or near the surface of the earth at these times and thus could be recovered with minimal capital and technology. Utilizing their knowledge of gold's heavy qualities, miners sought nuggets and flakes deposited by flowing waters in the inside bends of creeks or behind any object that interrupted the flow of water. Consequently the best time of the year to seek gold deposits was at high water, either during the spring freshet in June or just after heavy rainfall in late summer and fall.

Once a gold bearing creek or bank was identified, prospectors set camp, panned directly in the stream, or sunk small prospecting holes in the banks. While panning and prospecting, miners observed changes in the nature and quality of gold as they moved upstream. Miners eventually learned that, unlike the teachings of the Fraser, the Cariboo's best gold was not on the surface but in pre-glacial beds, or later creek beds.

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which, over millions of seasons, had been covered by refuse, rock, and other materials. This knowledge would eventually shift the focus of mining labour, and by extension, how miners interacted with the seasons. If a prospecting party struck the remains of an older gold bearing creek, they learned to dig rather than pan. It was more likely that gold was buried under the undisturbed depositions. Digging through this rocky gravel, muck, and clay, miners were assaulted by intra-seasonal events and the knowledge that winter was fast approaching. For miners such as Samuel Hathaway, who arrived late in the season, they found themselves dependant on those who had already been prospecting. Thus when Hathaway arrived at Nelson creek on 6 August 1862, he had to partner with men who “had been prospecting on the creek for 2 months, sinking shafts...trying to hit upon the deepest part of the channel where the gold always settles.”

The reason being no other claims were available and the season was running short.

The initial finds of 1860-62 in the Cariboo set off a “staking rush” in which men scrambled desperately over great distances to file legal titles to portions of the diggings. Exacerbating the time spent legally filing claims was the location of the Gold Commissioner’s office. To secure title to discovery, miners had to register their claims. In 1860 though, Gold Commissioner Phillip Nind’s office was located in Alexandria, approximately forty miles downstream from Quesnel. As “Returned Cariboo Miner” Paul Somers noted “from Cariboo to Alexandria is four days bad travel- a miner therefore loses eight days in recording a claim as there is no Commissioner in Cariboo.” This was time a miner irrevocably lost from working a claim during the short summer and fall months. The trip to and from the Gold Commissioner’s office also required an expensive

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output of energy and provisions, thus extending the prospector's exposure to the elements and to poverty. This was not the only instance where colonial authorities influenced the mining season.

Joining in the rush to the Cariboo, colonial officials were determined to regulate, rationalize and reconstitute the landscape including the people there for gold or otherwise. Colonial authorities and goldseekers alike understood that their power to control their surroundings hinged on the work they were able to squeeze out of the Cariboo landscape. The trouble for both, though, was that nature squeezed back. Taking into consideration the exodus of miners to the low country in fall, authorities adjusted mining regulations to suit the miner's seasonal labour. During the active mining season, a claim could be legally jumped if it was not worked for a period of seventy-two hours. This three-day window began after miners had staked, registered, and begun to work their claim. However, because of the miner's rhythms, and nature's contingencies, claims were not worked in winter months, thus mooting the seventy-two hour regulation. In their attempts to control the rush and promote a productive labour force, authorities tried to rationalize the seasons by allowing claims to be laid-over for the winter months. This regulation served to reinforce the seasonal mining pattern in the Cariboo and underscores seasons' impact on mining laws. It also was the cause of considerable disturbance in the diggings.

In the season of 1862 claims were held over to June 1. If a miner did not work his claim after that date it was open to preemption. Thus goldseekers with laid over

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claims rushed to the diggings in April and May. Others looking to purchase shares, or to benefit from men who could not return punctually, were not far behind. 1862 coincided with the first large surge of goldseekers to the region. Newcomers reckoned the five-hundred mile slog was more than enough to have seen the elephant. Increasing their despondency, pack trains laden with valuable provisions, were unable to get to the Cariboo until mid June. Sensing a crisis, Gold Commissioner Nind extended the layover period to July 1. For the thousand or so miners who had arrived on schedule, this was devastating news.

Every inch of available ground on Williams, Antler, Lightning, and Lowhee Creeks, is staked off, and will remain so until July 1st, when they must either be worked or given up. The consequence is that new-comers, who would willingly prospect these claims thoroughly are, compelled to remain idle and are suffering for want of means with which to purchase the necessaries of life, and many will return.

Newcomers were indeed caught in a bind. The prices of provisions were astronomical, and there was little work to be done. They had to wait an additional agonizing and impoverishing month for claims to open. But for those who held multiple claims, Nind’s decision was a veritable blessing. They had speculated successfully, and claim owners were able to inflate their prices and sell to the highest of the increasingly desperate bidders. These seasonal speculators were not well received, and they caught

159 “Odds and Ends” Daily British Colonist 14 July 1862; “News From Cariboo” The British Columbian 11 June, 1862.
160 Later From Cariboo - News to June 7th Daily British Colonist 23 June, 1862.
161 There were few mining jobs at this time. On Williams Creek, where most men congregated, one report estimated that there was between 30 and 40 men hired between the 4 larger claims that had begun their seasonal preparations. “Cariboo Correspondent” Daily British Colonist 14 July, 1862.
part of the blame from local newspapers and disgruntled miners, while Gold
Commissioner Nind went about his duties. Thus attempts to moderate the seasons
through mining regulations, colonial authorities retarded the mining season and frustrated
many goldseekers, who now had only from July to October to work. Many goldseekers
were forced to turn back without putting shovel to earth.

Regardless of colonial missteps, races to new creeks were almost daily
occurrences from 1860 to 1862.\textsuperscript{163} One report from the Quesnel Forks described the
beginning of the prospecting seasons with excitement and optimism:

\begin{quote}
Large numbers of miners start out every hour from this town with their blankets, snow-shoes, provisions, etc., for prospecting tours in the snow clad regions. Every day men are returning from above, who state that diggings have been struck on this or that ravine, gulch or creek... These reports arouse the curiosity of others, and hence fresh parties start out, and after traveling over mountains of snow and precipitous cliffs, and descending into deep gorges, at length reach the spot where the latest prospects were obtained, and test for themselves. A fresh hegira begins\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

Some staking-rushes were “humbugs,” others legitimate. This ambiguity, and the
pressing possibility of missing a legitimate opportunity resulted in a handful of miners
separating from the seasonal exodus. They wintered in the Cariboo and piggybacked on
the prospecting of others. One such staking-rush involved the discovery of gold on Antler
Creek, one of the richer strikes in the Cariboo. W.R. “Doc” Keithley, George Weaver,
Ben MacDonald, and John Rose formed a prospecting party in fall 1860. They set off
with enough provisions and equipment to venture north of Keithley and Harvey Creeks
into “what was to become the heart of the Cariboo.”\textsuperscript{165} With the aid of snowshoes

\textsuperscript{163} Robin Skelton \textit{The Call it the Cariboo}, 56-57. For more examples see the \textit{Daily British Colonist} and \textit{The British Columbian} between the dates of October 15 and 25 of those years.
\textsuperscript{164} “Letter from Cariboo no. IV” \textit{Daily British Colonist}, 13 May, 1861.
\textsuperscript{165} Skelton, \textit{They Call it the Cariboo}, 46.
provided by local Natives the men worked their way through snow that was seven to eight feet deep, they prospected up Keithley following a narrow ravine. Here they found a new creek, the source of which was a plateau surrounded by lakes and creeks that provided a vista of a vast area yet to be prospected. Turning down one of these creek beds, the men "shoveled away the deep snow, and dug a hole a few feet deep into the bank of the creek. After reaching bedrock they washed a pan of the dirt and obtained twenty-five dollars." The second pan reportedly tripled that find. Stringing out their vanishing supplies, the men built a cabin, staked their claims, and tried to return discreetly to Keithley Creek for more provisions. Men in the camp soon caught wind of the strike. The few remaining eagle-eyed "loafers" and other residents found winter dull in the camps. With little to do, idle men sought prospects in the prospectors. The entire camp was soon scrambling to reach Antler Creek:

> Men with twenty-five-dollar-a-day claims, owners of ditches, wing-dams, etc., at which they had worked all winter to place in running order, abandoned them, (they could not find purchasers) and started for the new diggings. Traders also became infected with the fever...At last accounts, many had arrived and were employed in staking out claims preparatory to setting to work.

Once at the new creek miners began new preparations. So frantic was the rush to Antler that miners pushed their exposure to its extreme. Many were unprepared for the winter but, determined to keep watch on their claim, they stayed on the creek and burrowed into snow caves lining the stream. The gambling nature of gold rushes was starkly exposed

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166 "Letter From Cariboo! New Diggings---Great Excitement" Daily British Colonist 5 April, 1861. There are no further sources other than the sketchy, often suspect, reports from period papers that can deny or confirm the amount of gold that was panned out at the first stake of Antler Creek.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
169 Skelton, 57.
when miners were willing to lay aside their previous preparations for the coming season and gamble on the rumour of a creek that might accelerate their dreams of wealth.

Merchants also played an important role in these staking rushes.\textsuperscript{170} Caught by the same quagmire as miners, some businessmen also over-wintered.\textsuperscript{171} Unable to placer mine by November, miners who shifted to prospecting were often subsidized by merchants who grubstaked their trips.\textsuperscript{172} This was in essence a form of speculating on the speculators. Early businessmen provisioned prospectors under the proviso that the merchant received a percentage of gold from any claim that paid. Grubstaking was a seasonal investment that supported the gold economy and, with luck, enabled miners and merchants alike to turn a profit. It was also an avenue used to combat winter ennui. These agreements rarely occurred in the summer months. In the warm season miners focused their energy on deracinating streams and creeks, while most businessmen were occupied with immediate transactions rather than supplying credit. Speculation kept a handful of men occupied, established relationships (although at times tenuous), and deepened people’s knowledge about the nature of the Cariboo.\textsuperscript{173}

The staking rush to Antler unleashed hoards of goldseekers on to the Cariboo in the spring of 1862. Antler’s primary position as the richest creek did not last long as strikes had also been made in late 1861 on Lowhee, Lightning, VanWinkle, Cunningham,

\textsuperscript{170} Some 150 miners remained in the Cariboo in the winter of 1860/1861. By this time Gold Commissioner Nind’s office was relocated to Williams Lake. “Encouraging Mining News” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 22 December 1860; Skelton, \textit{They Call it the Cariboo}, 57. By this time the Gold Commissioner Nind’s office was located at Williams Lake.

\textsuperscript{171} Miner turned businessman, Peter Dunlevey, is an example of a merchant who stayed in the Cariboo during the winters.

\textsuperscript{172} Skelton, \textit{They Call it the Cariboo}, 46.

\textsuperscript{173} There are occasions when miners became merchants. It was not often the opposite unless a rich claims was stuck. For example after Peter Dunlevey’s Horsefly discovery he opened a supply store in Quesnel. He took showed business savvy by anticipating the needs of the coming rush.
and Williams Creek.\textsuperscript{174} Taking various routes into the interior, newcomers travelled by steamer, mule, horse, and, inevitably, by foot.\textsuperscript{175} One correspondent transmitted his seasonal experience to readers. In mid to late June, he warned that working in the creeks would be “sudden death…There is also more water in all the streams than there was at the same period last year, and those who were here are of opinion that the season is at least a month later.”\textsuperscript{176} Such reports added to a burgeoning compendium on seasonal mining in the Cariboo.

This knowledge was still in its infancy in spring 1861. At the time most miners still anticipated being able to extract gold by May or early June.\textsuperscript{177} By June mining preparations were indeed complete and operations ready to begin washing, but then the Cariboo spring melt dashed their efforts. Torrents of freezing water turned creeks into angry, violent rivers that destroyed miner’s preparatory labour. The \textit{Daily British Colonist} reported with alarm:

\begin{quote}
The sudden melting of the snow in the mountains has swollen the streams; a bridge has been washed away; flumes on Antler creek have gone down stream-carried off by the angry flood; and worse, than [sic] all mining operations are entirely suspended for the present…we…wait with anxiety and impatience.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

This was a serious setback that highlighted goldseekers’ deficient understanding of how nature’s rhythms could snowball into a failed mining season. It also underscored the need

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{174} The famous Williams creek was prospected in the late winter of 1861 and was initially though to be of little importance because the surface diggings were of little value.
\item\textsuperscript{175} Once miners reached Quesnel Forks most chose to travel by foot. The trails were too muddy and treacherous for horse, oxen, and mule alike.
\item\textsuperscript{176} “Letter From Quesnel City” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 2 August, 1861.
\item\textsuperscript{177} Experiences of 1861 suggested to goldseekers that leaving the lower country in April was the best course of action. “The Late Discoveries! Another Rich Gold Field” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 23 January, 1861; “Steamer News—Mines, Trade, Prospects” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 13 April, 1861; Later From the Interior” \textit{The British Columbian} 14 May 1862.
\item\textsuperscript{178} “Scarcity of Provisions and Freshet At Cariboo” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 17 June, 1861. For other examples of the spring freshet in 1861 see “Letter From Cariboo” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 24 June, 1861; “From British Columbia” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 1 July, 1861.
\end{itemize}
to compile a clearer understanding of the Cariboo environment. Compounding the death of seasonal knowledge was miners’ particular ability to withhold potentially fortuitous information from their fellow goldseekers. For many it seemed that Cariboo nature and their fellow Caribooites had amassed against them.

In the meantime, however, word had reached the world and a surge of ill-prepared miners journeyed to the Cariboo. At first all they found was deep snow, mud, and treacherous trails. Pack trains were unable to follow the men until June, and then only as far as Quesnel Forks. Famine stalked the creeks, and hundreds of broken men were forced to return to the low-country. Apoplectic miners, merchants, and officials blamed each other, and the lack of provisions for pushing the season back. Few directly considered that nature itself had compounded miner’s difficulties and thus pushed miner’s desires further from their grasp. By all accounts the anxiety accentuated the tenuous grasp newcomers had on what the Cariboo climate meant for their chances of success. Over the next two mining seasons this perspective began to shift. Caribooites still constantly worried that the mining season would be pushed back, but their experiences in the Cariboo landscape and climate helped them make sense of how to negotiate the seasons.

Once established in their claims, miners began to disassemble the steep hillsides, hacking, cutting, and burning away the forests of conifers. The miners then reassembled trees into mining tools, shelter, and fire. Five hundred miles from a supply centre, essential mining preparations consumed much of their work. A group on Harvey’s Creek


180 “News From Above” The British Columbian 28 May, 1862; “Later From Cariboo” The British Columbian 31 May, 1862.
offered an example, where an observer estimated that “at least 30,000 feet of lumber in use - all of which has been sawed out this season by hand.”181 The need for timber, the labour required to obtain it, and the short mining season opened further business opportunities. In 1861 the Cariboo’s first sawmill was in operation on Antler Creek.182 Run by waterpower, the mill disgorged lumber at twelve cents per foot.183 If miners had the capital, technology could extend the miners season by truncating their work on the hillsides. On a larger scale the Cariboo’s first sawmill reflects the nature of boom economies of gold rushes. Newcomers speculated with keen eyes for profit. Unlike the goldseekers of California, Caribooites did not have comparable culinary obsessions with exotic goods as California miners.184 However, they did share inflated values concerning domestic chores and commodities that encouraged efficiency.185 Business took advantage of these needs and many made a fortune. Often these needs spoke more to miner’s values rather than actual necessity, while speculators could be vulnerable to prices that were just as unstable as the itinerant population.186 Yet often the most banal items brought the greatest profit. Nails in the Cariboo cost three dollars a pound.187 Sawmill owners had the power to charge exorbitant prices, not just because of a boom economy or even men’s distaste for the job (while these were certainly factors), rather business people were

182 “Cheering News Form Cariboo” Daily British Colonist 10 June 1861.
183 Ibid.
184 Joseph R. Conlin, Bacon, Beans, and Galantines: Food and Foodways on the Western Mining Frontier, 118-126.
185 For example of inflated prices in the California rush see Conlin, Bacon, Beans, and Galantines, 90-95; Johnson, Roaring Camp, 118-122, 124-127.
186 Conlin, Bacon, Beans, and Galantines, 102; Morse, The Nature of Gold, 138-140.
187 Samuel G. Hathaway “Diary” 1862 BCARS E/B/H28A
hedging on the great value people placed on gold. In addition mining technology, built on the premise of retrieving benefits from nature, reinforced gold’s value by offering the chance to obtain great wealth quickly and with little labour. In many ways the Cariboo economy, and experiences in a northern climate, was an intermediate step for the Klondike gold rush thirty-four years later. Caribooites illustrated that gold existed in northern frontiers, and was inherently valuable enough to strain their purses, push their exposure to nature, and observe seasonal commodification of creeks. While there was little political discourse on the nature of gold’s value, as would be at the eve of the Klondike rush, miners were just as willing to place all their faith into the ore. Cariboo miners and Klondike miners dug through the mucky earth and commodified the landscape, definite of gold’s worth. As a consequence, businessmen, like mill owners, who also believed in gold, placed their confidence in miners’ desire for particular goods and services and were often rewarded considerable latitude in the exciting, often duplicitous, boom economy of the Cariboo. Aimed at focusing miner’s work, the sawmill expanded labour opportunities. But the mill only offered temporary refuge. It too was vulnerable to freezing temperatures and freshets. No one completely escaped the hold of the Cariboo’s seasonal constraints.

Lumber in the diggings was used to construct rockers, sluices, flumes, fire, and wing dams. All of these technologies were simple and unaltered from other gold rushes. The rocker was used primarily for early prospecting, and shallow diggings. Consisting "of a wooden box mounted on rockers and was open at its lower end; riffles nailed across

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189 Ibid., 17-39
the bottom caught the gold.”¹⁹⁰ One or two persons could use it. As a miner rocked the box, typically in or near a creek, auriferous material was fed into the upper portion, called a hopper; the refuse simply tumbled out the bottom. Sluice work was more efficient and common in the Cariboo, but it required greater preparation and capital than rocker. Made from rough hewn lumber, the “sluices were a series of troughs made in sections usually of 12 to 14 feet lengths for speed in construction and convenience,” and while some “were raised above the ground on trestles, others were sunk to ground level to allow the water free flow over the box.”¹⁹¹ Earth was then shoveled into the top. Water washed over the box, depositing gold in the riffles and washing tailings out the opposite end. Flumes, man-made water channels, crissed-crossed over and under each other, draining whole creeks and exposing beds.¹⁹² Wing dams served a similar purpose. Miners placed wooden barriers partway into a creek to divert a portion of the water and energy according to the needs and location of their claims. Hydraulic operations began in the Cariboo as early as 1860.¹⁹³ By damming creeks and diverting the water through flumes and ditches, the pressure of gravity shot water through hoses to help tear down Cariboo banks and hillsides. Of course it was yearly cycles of timber growth that made lumber ready to harvest. Furthermore, miner’s deconstruction was delimited by when gold was easiest to extract. The less logging a miner had to do in the summer the greater time afforded to mining.

¹⁹¹ Duclos, Packers, Pans, and Paydirt, 8-9.
¹⁹³ Encouraging Mining News” Daily British Colonist 26 October, 1860. This date is two years earlier than most texts on the Cariboo state as when hydraulic methods first appear in the diggings.
Indeed, all the work that miners did in the Cariboo tore at the landscape. They pushed their labour and bodies to the limits to take gold from the seasons. But in doing so, they were, with greater alacrity, emulating the work that seasons did. Hydraulic pressure eroded banks, depositing tailings and silt back into streams. Dams forced water to find alternate routes of escape. Rockers and sluice boxes caught gold like the creeks. The similarity was not lost on miners. One particularly observant individual noted that their search for gold had hinged on the intersection of “those sluice-boxes of nature – the old beds of the creeks.”\textsuperscript{194}

As the rush season progressed it became clear that lessons were being learned. Men spent at least a month preparing their operations before they could begin to wash gold. An optimistic, soon to be disappointed, Mr. Pearson reported that an overwintering D. Moreland & Co. expected to have wing dams working by April.\textsuperscript{195} Once the dams were complete, water could be obtained for sluice work.\textsuperscript{196} Realistically most miners were able to begin “washing” with some consistency by mid-July.\textsuperscript{197} The work of damming was constant. These structures were ubiquitous in gold rushes, and miners in the Cariboo were constantly rebuilding theirs. They had to build them upon return to the creeks in the spring, after the spring run-off, and during the fall rain. Miner’s dams, and consequently a season’s worth of rockers, sluices, and flumes, disintegrated regularly in

\textsuperscript{194} “From Our Special Corresponent” 30 August 1862.
\textsuperscript{195} “Further Form Cariboo: Confirmatory Reports” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 6 April, 1861.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} For an example one miner detailed his schedule back to the low-country: Upon Hervey’s [Harvey’s] Creek I, with a company of five men, settled down to work. It took a month or so to get out our lumber, prepare flumes, boxes, etc. On the 25\textsuperscript{th} of July, we commenced “washing”; “Letter From a Returned Cariboo Miner” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 17 October, 1860
the violence of Cariboo nature. By mid-season Harry Guillod and his brother George had reached the Cariboo to find a sorrowful lot of tired, frustrated miners who had almost "had enough of it." Guillod reported that "parties had been working all season and got nothing having had their dams and wheels carried away." Persistent miners continued straining to reshape the creeks and work loose the gold. With the spring run-off finished, a group of Canadians toiled at "hauling timber and putting a dam into the bed of the creek; they made square frames of logs pinned together, and floating them into the creek, sunk them by filling them with stones and earth." Guillod did not elaborate whether the Canadian dams were for their own mine, or to profit from water rights. Either way their relationships with each other were bound by their labour, and the experiences they encountered, and gold they expected to obtain, and all were shaped by seasonal patterns.

Once the Canadians left the diggings these relationships would reflect an alternate, no less important, seasonal relationship with work, companions, and the land. When miners returned the next spring they sought to rebuild their dams, flumes, and sluices as well as their seasonal relationship with each other. In this respect miner’s environmental and social experiences in the Cariboo were constructed and disassembled with every season.

198 For example the Colonist reported that “the rains are heavy and frequent, and the water-courses and dry creeks would, after and hour’s rain, run full of water and be apt to damage such of the flumes or sluices as were not prepared for the flood.”; “Additional Mining News” Daily British Colonist 4 September, 1860; Also on August 18, 1862 Guillod noted that “the rains are heavy and frequent, and the water-courses and dry creeks would, after and hour’s rain, run full of water and be apt to damage such of the flumes or sluices as were not prepared for the flood.”

199 The main season for freshet in the Cariboo ended in the spring run off which usually occurred in June. Miners would then have an opportunity for lower levels until the rainy season in August.


By the summer of 1862 it was apparent that miners’ relationship with the seasons had taken on deeper meanings, literally. Ancient seasons had buried creek beds deep beneath the surface. In some cases miners had dug past a layer of thick blue-black clay to discover course gold up to eighty feet down. On Williams Creek, Billy Barker made his famous discovery below Stout’s Gulch “at a depth of 52 feet obtaining $5 to the pan.” Shaft and drift mining, however, required a much large investment of labour, capital, technology, and time. On Williams and surrounding creeks, this method was quickly adopted. Pickaxe, shovel, buckets, pumps, flumes, water wheels, windlass, lumber, and sluices were put into operation.

It was a miserable job. In the fall of 1863, Viscount Milton and his travelling partner Dr. Cheadle were given a tour of the mines on Williams’s creek. Milton, the more adventurous of the two, noted, “the galleries of the miner are very low, the roof being propped upright by timber, and cross beams wedged in above. The water is pumped out of the mines by a water wheel and chain pump...at noon, each day, the dump -boxes are emptied.” These were thoroughly oppressive conditions, what Cheadle summed up as “Wet, damp, dark & gloomy.” However, shaft mining was not as

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203 Skelton They Call it the Cariboo, 57; “News From Cariboo” The British Columbian 19 July, 1862; “Letter From Cariboo” Daily British Colonist 25 September, 1861; “Mining News” The British Columbian 6 September, 1862.

204 “Minning News” The British Columbian 6 September, 1862.

205 “Latter From Cariboo” The British Columbian 8 October 1862


207 Dr. W.B. Cheadle, Cheadle’s Journal of a Trip Across Canada 1862-63 (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers Limited, 1931), 249.
vulnerable to freshet or freezing winters as placer mining. As winter approached, some of these operations could stay open. Miners used fire in the shafts, extra roofing, and more capital to extend the mining season. This did not mean that miners relaxed in summer. Water could still sink into a claim drowning men’s efforts. Larger companies began to work their claims day and night, recognizing that fair weather no longer defined the time to mine.

Some companies, such as the Cameron claim, were able to maintain drifting operations for part of the winter. Fire, capital, roofing, and heavy labour could not contain the Cariboo seasons, however. The biting temperatures of winter still terminated operations. Wheels, winches, and chain pumps became useless and snapped under the pressure of freezing inches-thick ice. Even underground, the Cariboo’s seasons still reached a point of diminishing returns. Nature still mattered but miners had begun to learn how to extend their work within the Cariboo.

Whenever they reached it, at the close of the season, miners, merchants, and observers took stock of what they had learned. Diarists noted when freshets occurred, letters confirmed that snow remained on the creeks until mid June, and journalists reminded miners that they should be washing out by August. For various reasons, most still returned to the low country for winter. This hegira was not always rationalized just by economics. Rather, a compilation of reasoning prevailed including the desire to

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208 Galois, Placer Mining, 37. This however does not mean that shaft mining was not affected by the seasons. See for example, “Later From British Columbia” The Daily Colonist 9 August, 1862; “British Columbian News” Daily British Colonist 10 July 1862.


211 “Letter From Antler Creek” Daily British Colonist 19 May, 1862

connect to family via letters, the need for a break, a warmer climate, and in many cases a fear of being lonely or trapped. Cariboo seasons had psychological impact in the mines.

American miner, Samuel Hathaway explained on October 5, 1862:

Found the town nearly deserted, most men having gone below for the winter. I expect hard times getting out, but that does not scare me,- it is the chance of getting blocked in & frozen or starved that makes me fearful. Wish now that instead of going for grub today I had packed up & got safely over the mountain...Hard to get in & harder to get out, this Cariboo.213

By October most goldseekers in the Cariboo had begun their journey out.214

But, not all people in the Cariboo experienced the climate in the same way. For the Nlaka’pamux, Stl’atl’imx, Secwepemc, Tsilqot’in, and Dakelhne, the Cariboo’s geographical isolation, once a buffer to colonial expansion, began to show seasonal permeability. The views that goldseekers and Natives had of each other often hinged on the social and physical spaces of these two groups.215 White Europeans experienced and conceived of seasons very differently than Aboriginal groups. Rationalized technology and material wealth became their measurements of European civilization. In Making Native Space, Cole Harris argues that European ideals of progress extended to the land “because progress was seen to be manifest in the growing European ability to dominate nature.”216 Consequently, people “whose lives were tuned to the rhythms of nature, were obviously unprogressive and backward.”217 Colonial ideologies of settlement and

213 Samuel G. Hathaway “Diary” 1862 BCARS E/B/H28A.
215 See Herbert “Unequal Participants” 1-20. Herbert’s work outlines different sites of interactions between groups of people. The nature of their interaction is often defined by that site and predetermined ideas of race.
217 Ibid.
liberalism were able to quantify Aboriginal technological sophistication through a discourse of appropriation and domination of the natural world.\(^{218}\) Thus wilderness was the polar opposite of civilization, and the Aboriginal presence confirmed Native ways of life as unsophisticated and uncivilized. Wilderness equalled inferiority. Native interactions with the seasons, while perceived as uncivilized, remained a source of frustration for goldseekers who often depended on Native labour and knowledge to survive.

The inverse was rarely true. The Southern Carrier, in particular, the Nazkot’en, Lhtakot’en, and the Cariboo Mountain bands, had their own seasonal rhythms that were disrupted by the aggressive movement of the miners. These groups made seasonal rounds consisting of hunting, gathering, social and political meetings.\(^{219}\) In the summer months the fisheries drew bands to the Fraser, Blackwater and Quesnel River.\(^{220}\) There were two distinct runs of spring salmon. The first arrived in late June, the second, larger run in mid-July.\(^{221}\) Fishing sites were also located at Bowron and Quesnel Lakes that offered lake trout, white fish, and suckers.\(^{222}\) Root and berry picking filled out diets and were prepared for a winter cache as the summer months progressed, and when the leaves turned hunters focused on stalking caribou.\(^{223}\)

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\(^{218}\) In *Making Law, Order, and Authority* Tina Loo argues that the order that characterized the colony stemmed from a discourse in liberalism as European British Columbians were foremost concerned with their power of authority and their economic futures; Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority*, 3-7.

\(^{219}\) This includes the fur trade economy facilitated by the Hudson’s Bay Company. See Rev. A.G. Morice, O.M.I, *The history of the Northern Interior of British Columbia.*


\(^{221}\) Ibid, 26.

\(^{222}\) Ibid, 27.

\(^{223}\) Ibid.
Because these subsistence rhythms remained crucial to survival, Native participation in the rush was, like the newcomers, seasonal. They supplemented their seasonal rounds with newcomer capital by taking advantage of their knowledge of the region to profit from miners who were ill prepared or who considered particular labours more suited to Native industry. Some Natives did guide and mine, but their main activity was packing. Local Cariboo bands never exerted the degree of control over packing prices, as would the Tagish and Tlingit packers during the Klondike rush, but they were able to leverage significant remuneration. Most packing in the Cariboo occurred between late April and August. Native packing hit its peak from April to June. In April 1861 miners paid Natives ten dollars a day to pack from Quesnel Forks into the gold fields. By mid June, the mining season was beginning to hit full stride. As White miners soothed themselves with racial epithets of Natives as "beasts of burden," Native packers took advantage of miner’s seasonal pressures and raised their prices to an astounding fifty dollars a trip. Natives were well aware that their labour was worth more during the gold season, doubly so if it took them from their own seasonal rounds. A local correspondent noted "it was almost impossible to get provisions up, as

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224 See for example “Letter From Williams Lake” Daily British Colonist 3 June, 1861; “Letters From Antler Creek” British Columbian 17 August, 1861; Harry Guillod “Journal of a trip to Cariboo” BCARS E/B/G94.

225 “From an Occasional Correspondent” The British Columbian 11 July, 1861; “Letter From Quesnelle City” Daily British Colonist 2 August, 1861. It was not all that common to hear of Natives mining in the Cariboo, while guiding was more so. For an example of Native mining labour see Robert Stevenson, “Diary” BCARS MS-0315; There were even fewer Natives in the gold fields after the winter of 1862 when a small pox epidemic swept through the communities in the winter of 1862. Other reasons may include lack of interest, other groups removed themselves from contact with newcomers, and were seen as competition by white, black, and Chinese miners.


227 “Arrival of the Otter” Daily British Colonist 24 April, 1861.

228 “A Note From Argus” Daily British Colonist 10 June, 1861.

64
nearly all the Indians had gone on their usual fishing excursion to the lakes.”229 Still travelling miners often relied on game and fish sold by Natives.230 In such ways the busy, warmer months in the Cariboo became the confluence in which miners and Natives interacted most intensely. It was the stage upon which ideological differences about race, culture, labour, the environment, and work were contested.

For the few miners that remained in the Cariboo during the winter months of 1860 and 1861, Native assistance and technology became crucial to survival. For a handsome price snowshoes, Indian dogs, and hand-fashioned sleds allowed miners to prospect and retrieve provisions from Alexandria or Quesnel Forks.231 In short, for a price, Natives provided miners with tools and knowledge that enhanced their ability to negotiate long winter months in the Cariboo. Through packing, guiding, and provisioning Natives had goldseekers, to some extent, seasonally dependent on their knowledge and labour.

Then, Native opportunities were seriously disabled by two events both rendered by newcomers. The first was the smallpox epidemic that swept north from Victoria in early fall 1862.232 The disease devastated local populations.233 Smallpox left one, possibly two, Cariboo Mountain people as survivors.234 The rest of the Native population in British Columbia experienced similar destruction, and the population as a whole would

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229 “Letter From Beaver Lake” Daily British Colonist 11 June, 1861.
230 See for example George Blair, “Diary” BCARS MS-0185.
232 Furniss, Changing Ways, 35.
233 Furniss, Changing Ways, 35-36; Morice, The History of the Northern Interior, 300-301.
234 Ibid.
not recover until the next century.\textsuperscript{235} The second factor was the construction of the Cariboo wagon road. Begun in 1862, the seasonally constructed road was complete by 1865. This road became an artery into the backwoods of British Columbia. It eliminated much of the need for Native packing, allowing faster travel to the region over a greater portion of the year. For Natives the road removed the shield between them and the foreign miners that seasons had once offered.

As the Cariboo gold rush moved into 1863 men and women were much more aware of how the Cariboo climate could help or hinder their chances. The people who ran business learned to cater to the miner's seasonal needs, and profited from doing so.

Cariboo camps and towns had become hubs of social activity. Marysville, Richfield, Barkerville, Camerontown, Lewiston, Antler, Van Winkle, and Quesnel Forks all claimed the stature of town even if the "town" consisted of a handful of scattered tents, a single lean-to store, and the ubiquitous saloon.\textsuperscript{236} Like the diggings however, profit was rendered primarily in the warm months. Hotels, boarding houses, barbers, saloons, hardware stores, dance halls, laundry businesses, bakeries, a bowling alley, and churches competed for money, attention, and souls.\textsuperscript{237} As many of the records for these businesses indicate, the competition lasted for a season and then migrated along with the hordes of miners, down to warmer climates in the fall.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{236} Barkerville would quickly become the dominant town of the region boasting a Chinatown, multiple stores, barbers, saloons, houses, and gardens, ect.
\textsuperscript{238} For example of records that indicate the closure of business in the fall to spring see John Boyd and Family Fonds, "Ranch Book, 1863-1864" Quesnel Archives, M57.530, series 1. subseries 1; E.T. Dodge and Co. "Cariboo District Financial Records" BCARS MS-2620, box 1, file 2.; Wellington Moses, "Diaries." 1865-1889 BCARS A01046

66
Miners congregated in the town to socialize, purchase goods, be entertained, gather news from other creeks and the outside world, or supplement their wages with gambling, horse racing, or wage labour. Meanwhile, the creeks were not lonely places. Mining camps were connected to the creeks by a series of trails and wayside-houses where weary miners could sleep, eat, drink, gossip, or smoke their pipes. As George Blair noted, business was brisk when the mines were open: "There is a great deal of gambling and drinking carried on by the lucky miners."240

While a miner sought nourishment or company, enterprising people, such as Mrs. Edwards, charged fifty cents for a cup of her coffee on Van Winkle creek and was comforted by knowledge of profit from a few months' work.241 Often newcomers railed against the prices charged at these establishments: "the unfortunate wayfarer has to submit to the...fleecings of the harpies in the roadside houses, who charge an inconceivable price for a most miserable meal..."242 But miners had few options, and establishments such as Mrs. Edward's hostel remained open for as long as the miners could work and the supplies held out.243 Some places stayed in business longer than others, however. An Irish man and his Chinese cook were still in the Cariboo at the

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240 George Blair, "Diary" BCARS MS-0185
241 Cheadle Cheadle's Diary, 247.
242 "Still Later" The British Columbian 2 July 1862
243 As discussed 1862 was a difficult year for miners and businessmen alike. The late spring and early miners translated into a lack of provisions. Some business men and women were forced to sell their goods at lower rates by aggressive miners. Other miners ordered and ate their meals without payment. For example see "Later From British Columbia" Daily British Colonist 26 May, 1862; "Later From British Columbia"Daily British Colonist 11 June, 1862.
beginning of November, when camps were largely empty. It is possible the pair remained at their cookhouse to serve the hundred or so miners who remained in the diggings all winter. Many of these establishments supplemented their purchases of seasonal supplies from packers by growing their own fair. Blair commented on these gardens when he arrived at Beaver Lake noting that there was “a ranch here upon which is raised potatoes, onions, turnips, cabbage, barely, radishes, and oats.” Cultivation was difficult in the Cariboo climate, the vegetables, tubers, and grains that did grow were valuable commodities. Chinese residents, in particular, grew successful gardens and contributed the greatest amount of fresh fare. Local gardens mitigated high packing fees, and miners gobbled up their products knowing that the alternative, scurvy, could knock them out for the mining season.

Ranches and roadhouses were in turn dependant on the network of trails that connected them to the miners and the miners to the diggings. These were crucial arteries, and while blazing trails was not what men had come to do in the Cariboo, when six thousand men did arrive in 1862, with two thousand concentrated on Williams Creek alone, there was not work for all. Even as numbers began to decrease in 1863 and

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244 Ibid, 257. Most white miners tried to obstruct Chinese miners from entering the Cariboo gold fields until 1864. Many did chose to then worked the banks of the Quesnel and Fraser. See “Cheering News From Cariboo” Daily British Colonist 10 June, 1861; “Letter From Cariboo” Daily British Colonist 27 October, 1861; “Letter From Kayos” Daily British Colonist 2 May, 1861. Despite this some Chinese men did enter the Cariboo and began seasonal mining and service work. Lily Chow, Sojourners in the North (Caitlin Press Inc.: Prince George, 1996) 70-71; Chen, In the Colonies of Tang, 160, 168.

245 For example see Cheadle, “Cheadle’s Diary” 245; John Boyd and Family Fonds, “Ranch Book, 1863-1864” Quesnel Archives, M57.530, series 1. sub series 1.

246 George Blair, “Diary” BCARS MS-0185

247 The Cariboo Sentinel, 16 September, 1865; Skelton, They Call it the Cariboo, 117; Chen, In the Colonies of Tang, 176.

248 George Blair, “Diary” BCARS MS-0185.

1864, not all Caribooites could work in the diggings.\textsuperscript{250} Cutting trails was hard work, but it enabled some men to stay for the season and potentially buy into a claim. Their work had consequences. The trails benefited the miners and businessmen by improving transportation. Employed by merchants such as George Weaver, labourers' work on the trails helped to lengthen the seasons by compressing the travel time to the diggings.\textsuperscript{251} Good trails extended the Cariboo mining season.

The miners and businessmen who realized profit over the season went directly to the cities to reinvest their gains. For the less fortunate, it was straight to the roads. Often miners did not make enough money in the mining season to go unemployed in the cities during the slack season. Some were not ready to give up on their dreams of gold, while others needed the money to leave the colony. Consequently, they left the camps for the low country to build roads. Many disappointed and pauperized miners left even before the season closed. In July, a correspondent wrote he had “passed at least 250 on the road. Some were dead broke, existing on one meal a day, and were making their way to the Lytton route to get employment on the roads.”\textsuperscript{252} Some miners worked on various roads and routes in the lower country for between forty and fifty dollars a month until winter was upon them.\textsuperscript{253} Eventually they too made their way to the cities where there was plenty of liquor-fuelled entertainment. As Historian Adele Perry notes

\textsuperscript{250} Galois, \textit{Gold Mining}, 32.
\textsuperscript{251} For an example of George Weaver's tail building see “Later From Cariboo” \textit{The British Columbian} 25 June 1862.
\textsuperscript{252} “Still Later” \textit{The British Columbian} 2 July 1862.
\textsuperscript{253} Blair, “Diary” MS-0185. The main road under construction at this time was the Douglas road between Port Douglas and Lillooet. The Douglas road was advertised as being expeditious. See “Routes to Cariboo, Miners, Attention- Nearest Highway to Cariboo Via Douglas and Lillooet” \textit{Daily British Colonist} 2 June, 1862. The British Royal Engineers laid out this road, and others through the Fraser Valley.
drinking took place in all locales, but the winter and the town held a special place in British Columbia’s political economy of partying. Miners and other seasonal workers who moved back and forth between city and woods converged on Victoria for the slack season...Dance houses...according to their defenders, were a necessary space for miners’ seasonal binges.\(^{254}\)

George Blair followed this rhythm of labour and leisure for three mining seasons.\(^{255}\) By his second year in 1863, changes in transportation ensured that by fall a road had been built from Yale to Soda Creek with an express wagon running between them. From Soda Creek steamers plied the Fraser to the mouth of the Quesnel between July and October.\(^{256}\)

The ongoing construction of roads and the shift to drift mining began to transform how miners focused their labour patterns and thus, how they experienced the Cariboo.\(^{257}\)

1864 was the final peak year for the Cariboo gold rush. How goldseekers experienced the seasons was changing with the completion of the Cariboo wagon road, and capital was already beginning to consolidate control of the mines. Through his examination of British Columbian history, geographer Cole Harris explained “Europeans had begun to remake this territory in their own terms: mapping it, renaming it, claiming possession of it, bringing it within reach of the European imagination.”\(^{258}\) Cariboo gold accelerated these processes. But what miners expected often collided with the physical

\(^{254}\) Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 42

\(^{255}\) Blair “Diaries” BCARS MS-0185.

\(^{256}\) Milton *The North-West Passage*, 380-381; Cheadle “Diary” 258-259; Skelton *They Call it the Cariboo*, 69-71; Branwen Patenaude, *Trails to Gold: Roadhouses of the Cariboo*, vol 2. (Heritage House: Surrey, 1996.) 127-128.

\(^{257}\) Historian Katherine Morse discusses the different modes of technology and transportation shaped the experience of miners in the late 19\(^{th}\) century. Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 67-88.

\(^{258}\) Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 161.
realities of geography, the nature of gold deposits, the power of capital, and the rhythms of the seasons.\(^{259}\)

Indeed, miners had to considerably readjust their approach to mining. The promise of Eldorado inexorably drew people of disparate relations to each other: People who would not usually work together, much break bread together, came face to face with each other during the Cariboo mining season.\(^{260}\) Newcomers struggled to grasp at treasures and nature could easily swipe chances away. Merchants and miners were unwilling to admit that nature could impede their quest. Instead profiteering officials, boosters, and misinformed gossips were blamed. Caribooites work was shaped by seasons and accordingly a two season mining pattern developed. Never fully conceded to nature’s influence miners worked late-spring to early-fall and then fled to lower elevations. Through the mining season men began to build seasonal relationships, businesses, and sometimes families. Yet men still were the dominant demographic group in the rush. As a consequence traditionally female roles suddenly became important. For the few women on the creek their presence was enhanced by the isolation presented by the Cariboo. Shaping these gendered relationships on the creeks was the enigmatic Cariboo season.

\(^{259}\) As noted Chinese miners experienced overtly racist policies within the gold fields and were physically threatened, assaulted, and other wise refused access into the Cariboo during the early years of mining. As the *British Columbian* proudly reported in May that the goldseekers had, “passed a law prohibiting Chinese from entering this field, believing that as the white man has, by persevering energy and in spite of great difficulties, prospected and opened [sic] these mines, it would be unfair to allow “John” with his bag of rice, to step in and reap that which another hath sowed.” “News From Above” *The British Columbian* 30 May, 1861.

\(^{260}\) 19th century gold rush sites have been explored by a number of historians and geographers. Currently the historiography of the literature has been to highlight the gold fields as a space where power struggles are most evident. The act of mining for gold highlighted racial, economic, and gendered tensions and the struggle was played out through a colonial discourse. For examples see West, *Contested Plains*; Katherine Morse, *The Nature of Gold*; Johnson, *Roaring Camp*; Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*; Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi eds. *Rooted In Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
CHAPTER 3: “NATURING” GENDER

When Harry Guillod lit into the backwoods of colonial British Columbia in 1862, this young Englishman carried absolute confidence that he would reap his “golden harvest.” His ability to seek new environments, persevere through hard work, and find a fortune epitomized the Argonaut ideal. The Cariboo gold rush was the perfect space for a new kind of nineteenth-century masculinity steeped in assumptions of rugged individualism and the self-made man. Miners believed fervently in the power of self-will, yet this sense of manhood remained constrained by a seasonal rhythm that indelibly structured the nature of gendered relationships. In mastering their selves, miners also had to “face the hardships of a mountain journey, bad food and short commons, hail and rain and storm, mosquitoes and sand flies with a good heart and patient endurance.” A good miner, which is to say, a good man, had “to consider deeply whether they have got the right stuff in them, and will he be able to bivouac in wet blanket and cook a pancake in a hailstorm.” In other words, to be a man in the Cariboo, one not only had to be tough but also had to develop traditionally female skills. Conversely, one of the most frequent ways that women profited from the mines was by capitalizing on miners’ nostalgia for female influence and company. A considerable literature has emerged

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261 Harry Guillod ‘Journal of a trip to the Cariboo, 1862’ BCARS, E/B/G94, 1.
262 For a further discussion on the development of the rugged masculinity that was fostered in the Cariboo Gold rush see Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire.
263 Guillod, “Journal”, 2
264 ibid.
around the plasticity of gender among nineteenth-century miners, but little of this work considers how seasons structured gendered behaviour, how at a basic level nature was a key context for gender in mining communities.265

All miners had to pay attention to the seasons—the dry summers in the Sierra Nevada and the frozen permafrost of the Yukon—but the men and women who laboured in the Cariboo gold fields had to reckon with a particularly extreme climate that was often at odds with their goals. Miners fled before the harsh winters or faced months of snow-bound internment. Spring rains could sluice away a years’ labour in minutes. Summer heat could evaporate their ability to placer. Indeed, seasons even informed how miners conceptualized their masculinity and femininity. The Cariboo mining community’s extraordinary demography, with men often constituting over ninety percent of the local population, created conditions where sphere-swapping was not only possible but necessary for men. The dramatic imbalance between men and women also opened many novel possibilities for the very few women in the region. The result was a polyglot horde of gold seekers grasping not only wealth, but also at a way to understand their seemingly ever-shifting gender roles. Seasonality provides a window onto the gendered spaces of gold fields, casting light on how men and women structured and interpreted their behaviour within nature’s rhythms.

One way to examine how seasons shaped backwoods masculinity is through the transformations of men’s bodies. Miners were acutely aware of the effect that the harsh elements and physical labour of mining, packing, and digging had on their bodies. They noted with concern their ailments and the transformation of their appearance. Former

265 For examples of texts that speak to gender in the mines see Susan L. Johnson, Roaring Camp; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, Days of Gold; Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire;
gentlemen, common labourers, doctors, sailors, and farmers alike saw their tidy visages take on a rough and rugged look.\textsuperscript{266} A poem published in the \textit{Cariboo Sentinel} remarked:

\begin{quote}
In town when I first saw him, oh! What a heavy swell,
The envy of all fast young men, admired by every belle;
His moustache and beard so neatly trimmed, his teeth as white as pearls,
While his glossy tile sat lightly on his rich luxuriant curls;
In a neat, well-fitting costume cut in the latest style,
He sauntered up and down the streets with a self-complacent smile
When next I saw him, oh! How changed, the tale is sad but true,
He'd been six months prospecting in the far-famed Cariboo;
An angry frown I saw instead of the self-complacent smile;
An old boot-top he wore in place of the bright and glossy tile;
In a tangled mass, uncut, uncombed, his once rich head of hair,
Now mingled with his tough, coarse beard, no longer trimmed with care
His hands were hard, one blackened eye, told of a shindy recent,
While his dress, in any land save this, would I doubt be though indecent;
His unwashed face, begrimed with dirt, was wrinkled, thin and haggard,
In fact, to use plain terms, he looked a most accomplished blackguard…\textsuperscript{267}
\end{quote}

A short four to five months of prospecting drained away the desirable masculine qualities of health, vigour, and independent confidence. The Cariboo withered youthful masculinity.

This transformation betrayed the miner’s indigent nature and man’s inability to dominate nature. Stumbling into Victoria in mid-October, Guillod presented a “rather wild appearance” of long hair, torn clothes, and a missing shoe.\textsuperscript{268} He made light of his appearance, but he had seen the elephant. When Samuel G. Hathaway reached the Cariboo he was shocked by the hard life. By late June 1862, some miners were already

\textsuperscript{266} Malcolm J. Rohrbough in \textit{The Days of Gold} notes that California miners began to dress in a similar manner so as to create what could be called a miner’s uniform. He suggest that many men kept their beards long and wore worn clothing to hide the marks that hard labour and exposure had wrought on their bodies. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, \textit{Days of Gold}, 152,273

\textsuperscript{267} “A Contrast “ \textit{The Cariboo Sentinel} 15 July, 1865. The poem goes on to describe the miner’s destitution and hunger, while making sure to note that he had tricked into a hoax.

\textsuperscript{268} Guillod, “Journal” BCARS, E/B/G94
fleeing the diggings for Victoria. They were a poor and "sorrowful looking set."\textsuperscript{269} Exposed to heavy rains in late spring and early summer and snow and hail in fall and early winter, many suffered from trench foot, open and oozing blisters, fungal infections, scurvy, and gangrene.\textsuperscript{270} Others succumbed to sun exposure or hypothermia.\textsuperscript{271}

A miner’s health was important for obvious reasons. If a man was injured or sickened, he endangered not only himself, but his party and capital as well. Just as important, if a miner could not highlight his skills as a miner due to physical misfortune he was then unable to prove his masculinity.\textsuperscript{272} The mining seasons did not wait. A sick goldseeker was less of a man. Weakened by urban industrial comforts the impaired miner remained handicapped unless and until his constitution improved. Hathaway explained:

I have suffered much with my feet, but they are doing better now, and my health otherwise would be excellent, were it not for the colds I have caught, which have settled down to a troublesome cough. My long spell in the printing office made me tender; but I think I shall soon harden to it...Cariboo is no play.\textsuperscript{273}

The belief that the Cariboo required a shoring up of miners’ masculine strength combined with the spring male migration to the Cariboo translated this season as a particularly masculine season. Male goldseekers, constructing a homosocial society in the camps, gendered the spring as a masculine time. Women also contributed to this gendering of seasons by coming later in the summer. Further linking spring and masculinity.

\textsuperscript{269} Samuel G. Hathaway, ‘Diaries’ 1862 BCARS E/B/H28 V3
\textsuperscript{270} It appears the Samuel Hathaway was a victim of trench foot, which had developed late September while he was still actively mining.
\textsuperscript{271} For an example see The Cariboo Sentinel, 15 August, 1865.
\textsuperscript{272} Nancy Quam-Wickham “Rereading Man’s Conquest of Nature: Skills, Myths, and the Historical Construction of Masculinity in Western Extractive Industries” \textit{Men and Masculinities} Vol. 2 no. 2 (1999): 135-140.
\textsuperscript{273} Samuel Hathaway, “Diaries” 1862 BCARS E/B/H28 V3.
Caribooites battled a number of ills in the mines, including a typhoid epidemic, by funding and building their own hospital at Maryville in 1863.\textsuperscript{274} Disease was a serious threat. Even with Caribooites' donations, the hospital had trouble staying open. Local physicians petitioned the colonial government for support, claiming not only that many men were too ill to go without treatments but some were not well enough to work or find their way back to the low country.\textsuperscript{275} The hospital became a sanctuary for indigent and sick miners. Here men were cared for and comforted other men, a traditionally female role. Its doors had to remain open until at least late December.\textsuperscript{276} The hospital, in other words, mirrored the rhythms of the miners. Thus health and healing in the Cariboo was also seasonal. As men risked their health to fill their purses, they also revealed how masculine imperatives endangered their bodies.

The decision to travel to the Cariboo was itself beset by severe toils. Spring snow and rains resulted in freshets that exposed men, their work, and their provisions to peril, and early fall snows could entrap travellers anywhere in the mountains. The need to stake a claim, and the promise of economic emancipation, proved irresistible, however. Adding to the seasonal pressure was the threat of failure and the damage this could inflict on a miners claim to his rough-and read masculinity. But the extremes of the Cariboo continued to shape gender in the mines. Most Caribooites left the diggings in September. Those who lingered were forced either to over-winter or attempt travel in -30 C° weather.

\textsuperscript{274} Maryville was across the creek from Camerontown. For more on the Cariboo Hospital see Royal Cariboo Hospital, 1864-1949 BCARS, MS- 2566; Cariboo government agency records, 1860-1938, BCARS GR-0216
\textsuperscript{275} Royal Cariboo Hospital, 1864-1949 BCARS, MS- 2566 file 1.
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid. Furthermore, hospital provisions in the form of medicines, laundries, and food were seasonal arrivals and Gold Commissioner Chip recognized the mining rhythms in the Cariboo and moved to have the government send these necessities before the seasons got too far in advance. Royal Cariboo Hospital, 1864-1949 BCARS, MS- 2566
No matter what choice a goldseeker made in the Cariboo their decisions revealed how seasons, and the pressures exerted by ideas of nineteenth century gender expectations, shaped miner’s sock-economic pursuits.

Travel and labour in the Cariboo were incredibly difficult. Men courted injury, starvation, and death, but most did not attribute their appearance to the harsh climate. Instead, they blamed their physical and financial degradation on bad luck, predatory competitors, or the intolerably high price of provisions, which drove them to starvation and forced them back to the low country.\(^{277}\) Inevitably, most responded to their frustrations in a manner that implied that they had been duped by greedy capitalists and colonial mis-informants.\(^{278}\) As the poem of the once self-complacent miner expressed, “I’ve worked, and toiled, and slaved, and lived of every comfort shorn, Till finding all a heartless hoax, I’ve whished I’d ne’er been born.”\(^{279}\) But this did not explain why they could not see seasons as equally influential in their failing bodies or and business ventures.

The Cariboo gold rush was about material gain forged from, and expressed through, the rough and ready masculinity of the Anglo-European frontier. Miners viewed seasons through a market lens that commodified the Cariboo as an extension of

\(^{277}\) For examples of how the season could keep miners in the lower country or force them to return see “Latest From Quesnelle” *British Daily Colonist* 29 May, 1860; “Backward Season” *British Daily Colonist* 22 May, 1860.

Most miners made note of the price of their provisions. For example Hathaway listed key provisions while in the mining camp of Van Winkle: flour $1.25 a pound, tea $3.00, salt $5 for a 3-pound bag, nails $3 a pound. “Diaries” BCA E/B//H28 V3. The fluctuations of prices in the Cariboo mines can also be tracked through “The Market Report” in *The Cariboo Sentinel* first published June 6, 1865.

\(^{278}\) Captain Buckley notes that, many of the capitalists are American miners who he claims own the best land, the steamers, the hotels, and the mining equipment. While miners felt the colony of British Columbia made much money off of a gold mining tax, licenses, port fees, and tolls. All of which were seen as one of the reasons for men to fail in their quest for gold. For a more detailed account see Cecil William Buckley, “Journal of a Journey to the Cariboo Gold Mines” E/B/B85.

\(^{279}\) “A Contrast “ *The Cariboo Sentinel* 15 July, 1865
capitalism. Rationalized technology and material wealth were the germane measurements. Therefore dominating nature was important to American and Anglo-European progress. By extension dominating nature, and having the opportunity to exhibit this ability, was inextricably linked to a man's character. As the Cariboo Sentinel reminded readers that there was a natural rhythm to masculine progress.

The season has now arrived when it is the custom for the greatest amount of prospecting to be done... When one considers the heavy difficulties to be endured in prospecting in this country, it is not perhaps to wondered at that so often are willing to embark in it, but just in proportion to the difficulties it should be remembered are the prizes to be won by daring, fearless mountaineers in the enterprise.

But there was the problem in the Cariboo. Extracting gold required the deconstruction and rearrangement of nature, but miners in the Cariboo were instead constantly at odds with the region's seasonal rhythms. Manhood in the Cariboo could not be expressed as a function of the environment. To suggest as much would have been to admit a failure of progress. When seasoned prospectors counselled retreat before winter, some local merchants responded by urging the miners to remain in the Cariboo for the sake of progress.

It is with great regret that we witness lately many most experienced miners leaving for the lower country... Let us not forget that Williams creek was found by one man, and when the snow was many feet deep on the ground. The successes of the early pioneers should stimulate those who have now the means and time to go and find something new.

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280 Cole Harris, "The Struggle With Distance." In The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographic Change, 162.
281 Cole Harris, Making Native Space, 53.
282 The Cariboo Sentinel, 2 September 1865.
283 Ibid.
The region needed rugged men to subdue nature, some of whom did respond to such exhortations, but most left for New Westminster, Victoria, or San Francisco. They could not master the deep freeze and heavy snow.

Such admissions were not a rejection of this idealized masculinity of the backwoods and mining camps. Instead miners insisted that their inability to dominate the land, and the resulting damage to their bodies, were products of a capitalist scheme. One mining party of broken men were “cursing the whole affair, and saying that they had been shamefully taken in.”\(^{284}\) They damned the Cariboo as “the most awful country they had ever set foot into.”\(^{285}\) The people were insincere, the system was corrupt, and the land was deficient. The time miners spent in the gold creeks had mostly only weathered their bodies and undermined their health. In the end though, they blamed not nature, but unjust businessmen, venal colonial officials, and disingenuous newspapers for their financial failure and physical degradation. By focusing on conspiracies miners shifted the burden of masculine degeneration from nature, which enabled broken men to retain their manhood.

On his way to the diggings, Guillod encountered many miners who gave dismal accounts of the mining experience. Their physical appearance taught Guillod critical lessons about masculinity in the Cariboo mines:

It seems to me that those who had gone up earlier were too soon, as from all accounts there is nothing to be done in the way of prospecting till July or August...finding the road wretched, provisions scarce and dear and their money failing, [many] had turned back either discouraged or from necessity and a queer looking set of fellows they are; rough and dirty.\(^{286}\)

\(^{285}\) Ibid.
\(^{286}\) Guillod, “Journal” BCARS, E/B/G94
Physical wear and tear was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the challenges of masculinity. Once they reached the Cariboo, men quickly discovered that life in the backwoods required more than swinging a pickaxe or "washing out" at the end of the day. Food had to be cooked, clothes to be washed, and quarters to be cleaned. Men, in other words, had to fill roles normally occupied by women. Entering the domestic sphere, men found the limits of their masculinity yet also learned to praise women's work. As historian Adele Perry has argued, "[s]ome of the most compelling symbols of the homosocial culture of British Columbia's backwoods were those that reworked or challenged conventional gender organization."  

All miners devoted significant labour to sewing, cooking, caretaking, cleaning, and washing clothes. As one miner noted, the "man in the mines and the same man at home, with the influence of a loving mother, a wife, or virtuous sisters around him-bear no analogy to each other." Even at this juncture, seasonal distinction emerged. The peak of the mining season in the Cariboo was the summer months. During this period men's gender roles were very different than the roles that during winter months in New Westminster or Victoria. Wintering in the low-country consisted of drinking, carousing, and general labour such as road building or cutting wood, few men continued to cook or nurse each other in the cities.

Cariboo miners struggled with new skills and lamented the absence of women, but some took pride in their ability to develop these skills and provide a nurturing atmosphere in the face of a summer riddled with daunting hardships. Harry Guillod and his younger brother George tried to support fellow miners when the Cariboo had left

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287 Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 36
288 'Letters from Williams Creek' *British Daily Colonist*, 25 June 1863.
them emotionally exhausted. George took care of men’s emotional needs, while Harry took care of the men’s physical needs: “They came in very hungry, having been short of provisions... so I set to work and cooked for the lot, and need scarcely say gave general satisfaction.” Others took an interest in local biota and seasonal food sources. Frederick Dally noted, for example, that in mid-July there was “a small green berry most acid and abominably sour which perhaps might make a good pickle for boiled mutton.” Inevitably these new skills, while traditionally female, enabled some miners to flex a seasonal advantage over those who were unable, or unwilling to hone their domestic skills.

The Cariboo’s population was in part a reflection of the many men who rejected the domestic sphere. Many men that did not have the capital or the manpower to work the diggings instead chose to labour at jobs such as packing, road building, or cutting wood. Such occupations ensured that they remained closely within the masculine sphere, but the cost was moving constantly between creeks, through valleys and over mountains. Even if a man did stake a claim, the location often forced him to travel difficult distances to obtain goods or companionship. Samuel Hathaway wrote, “If anybody thinks that this is fun let them try it. 8 miles and back, over a mountain, deep sloppy mud nearly every foot of the way and big logs to straddle and climb at every 10 steps.” The brief window of the four, or at most, five-month mining season exacerbated the stress of such trips.

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289 Guillod, “Journal” BCARS, E/B/G94
290 Ibid.
291 Frederick Dally ‘Journey To Williams Creek Cariboo, 1868 BCA MS-2443, Box 1, file 7.
292 Guillod, “Journal” BCARS, E/B/G94
293 Samuel G. Hathaway, ‘Diaries’ 1862 BCARS E/B/H28 V3
Consequently, many enterprising Caribooites situated their business to take full advantage of the seasonal patterns of the highly mobile populations, and many of these entrepreneurs specialized in providing traditionally female services. For example, Sellers Ranch at Beaver Lake offered first-rate meals and clean linens. Stopping there, Captain Buckley and his party were determined to enjoy "what is called in this country a 'square meal,' at one dollar and three quarters a head."294 Buckley, who was quite sick of a miner's diet of beans, bacon, and bread, devoured the lavish multi-course meal. He noted that Sellers "particularly prides himself on it, and gave his cook, who is a first rate artist, the enormous sum of two hundred and forty dollars month."295 The simple skill of providing a decent meal enabled men such as Sellers and his cook to profit from the Cariboo's flexible gendered spaces. But men were not the sole agents in the diggings.

All Western gold rush "participants had to renegotiate their usual modes of representation," but seasons both disordered and reordered traditional gender roles.296 Indeed nature had much to do with how miners used gender to communicate that privation was not due to environmental contingencies but rather a failure of masculinity. As one intelligence reported noted:

It is an awful hard country, but it is a mighty good country... Any man who can put up with the roughest life that you can possibly imagine, and has a stout heart, a strong arm and one thousand dollars in cash in his pocket, cannot fail to acquire in a couple of seasons a handsome profit. But when men come here with an empty purse and commence bewailing the good dinners and soft beds they have left behind, the moment that they have to climb a steep mountain or go through a mud hole, then the sooner such men go back home the better297

294 Cecil William Buckley, "Journal" E/B/B85 file no.1
295 Ibid, 68.
296 Johnson, Roaring Camp, 176.
Implying that capital was directly linked to masculinity further removed miners' gendered expectations from environmental contingencies. While capital would not make the country inviting, a man who entered the diggings with astuteness, coupled with finances and a rough and ready persona, could muscle the mining seasons into submission and leave with a full purse. Those who came unprepared, with no money were hardly men to begin with. Any masculine qualities they may have held were negated by a disgruntled attitude to the region.

As they returned to the low country because of sickness, melancholy, or wretched penury, many goldseekers sacrificed not only their masculinity but apparently their humanity as well. One penman commented, “Human beings are reduced to the condition of beasts.” Indeed, George Blair observed that pack animals went no further than the Forks of Quesnel, at which point men became pack animals, beasts of burden, in the Cariboo for wages of 35 cents a pound. This kind of seasonal labour also jeopardized their status as strong independent men. The short mining season, a paucity of capital, and the remoteness of the region magnified the pressures of gendered spaces and hierarchies.

When dew turned to frost and rain to snow, men rearranged their gendered spaces for more leisurely activities. Gentlemen and labourers alike turned from exercising their bodies to cultivating their brains. They took up music, French, and history lessons. Upon suspension of the Cariboo Sentinel for winter hiatus in Victoria, the editor suggested that those who wintered in the Cariboo patronize the Cariboo Library Institute.

298 British Daily Colonist 22 July, 1862.
299 George Blair, “Journal” 1863 BCARS MS-0185. Blair was a landless farmer, with a rudimentary education, from the Kincardine settlement, Ontario near Lake Huron.
300 For an example see George Bair, “Journal” BCARS, MS-0185.
301 See for example: “French and Spanish” The Cariboo Sentinel, 7 October, 1865; “The Study of Modern Languages”, 14 October, 1865; “How it Strikes a Stranger” The Caribooite, April, 1866.
in Camerontown.\textsuperscript{302} It was a small building of a few hundred books, yet men could find there a place of respite during the long winter isolation: “We will not hesitate to assert that the Institute during the ensuing winter will be a most popular place of resort and we earnestly advise all who remain on the creek to support an institution that is calculated to confer so many advantages.”\textsuperscript{303} In the winter, gold mining masculinity took on a less rugged, more refined air. Those few that remained in the camps nurtured a pioneering masculinity that was far more genteel. Governor Seymour, eager to buttress respectable activities, also found the library a suitable gathering place for men so he made a gift to the Cariboo miners by buying and shipping a valuable collection of standard works of literature for the Camerontown library. This will be most gratifying news for those who intend remaining here all winter, and we only express the feelings of the miners...[that the] books will be a real boon and most highly appreciated by those for whose benefit the books are designed.\textsuperscript{304}

Beyond the clichéd leisurely activities of drinking, smoking and gambling, many idle miners also participated in cultural performances. It has been suggested that theatre and the arts in the Cariboo region were “the product of a society which needed leisure to combat the harsh nature of mining life.”\textsuperscript{305} This was undoubtedly true, yet it was also part of the larger narrative of the cultural frontier. The Cariboo in this sense was simply another stage for performance of the white man’s burden. But because it was the Cariboo, it also illuminates the seasonal nature of the mines’ gendered spaces. As mining slowed on the creeks, the local Glee Club prepared its members for a winter’s worth of

\textsuperscript{302} The Cariboo Sentinel, 14 October, 1865
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid. Previous to this the only other times that the library is mentioned in the paper is during the fall months, in anticipation of transition in the ways in which men organized their labour.
\textsuperscript{304} The Cariboo Sentinel, 14 October 1865.
\textsuperscript{305} Melanie Buddle, “"All the Elements of a Permanent Community”: A History of Society, Culture and Entertainment in the Cariboo” M.A. Thesis, The University of Northern British Columbia, June 1997.
art performances. In one instance, a benefit concert was held for the Cariboo Library Institute. A total of fifteen men sang, read poetry, or played music to an appreciative crowd of men.\footnote{"Concert" The Cariboo Sentinel, 30 September, 1865.} After congratulating the men of the community for attending, The Cariboo Sentinel reminded readers that it would “not be long until we have another similar performance.”\footnote{Ibid} No longer able to devote their days’ labour to the mines, men used the library, theatre, and education to fashion a different masculinity through the liberal arts.

While men dominated the Cariboo gold rush’s demography, it was hardly a “womanless frontier.”\footnote{Sylvia Van Kirk “A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1875.” in British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women Eds. Gilliam Crease and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992) 21.} Women capitalized on their rarity in many ways and found advantage in seasonal mining patterns. On his way to the diggings Harry Guillod took special notice of one of the few white women on the trail. The middle-aged woman had tired of waiting for her tardy husband and the pack train, so she struck out on her own. Guillod was impressed by her courageousness and plans to open a “house of refreshment,” a venture no doubt enhanced by her “very fine pair of legs and red petticoat, though minus crinoline”\footnote{Guillod, “Journal” BCARS, E/B/G94} White women in the colony were rare, even more so in the Cariboo, and their presence a measure used to represent a stable civilized society.\footnote{Johnson, Roaring Camp, 166; Adele Perry, “Fair ones of a Purer Caste: White Women and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia” Feminist Studies Vol 3. (Autumn, 1997):501.} Yet nobody seriously conflated all white women as the vessel for stable and civilized culture. For example, the ethnicity of a German dancing troop made it easy for their male customers to cast them as less desirable than white Anglo-American or Anglo-
European women. Hurdy Gurdy girls were rarely seen as stabilizing mates, especially by English colonial standards. Yet every season miners clamoured to the saloons, eager to pay one dollar for a dance. Particular nationalities such as German or Irish were not preferred, but the paucity of women in the camps made it possible for them to profit. Even in the mining camps, however, nationality and race were conflated with class. Guillod’s observation of the women with shapely legs was not based on nationality but on class. Her red petticoat, minus crinoline, signified that she was venturing to the Cariboo to open more than just a saloon. Prostitutes were not viewed as a stabilizing role, yet their role in the Cariboo, like in the cities and camps of California, was obvious and welcomed by many.31 As historian Anne Butler has noted, women in the West were often excluded from direct employment, especially in the mines, and so were forced to “recognize the limited scope of their own economic possibilities.” For some prostitution “best suited their economic needs and interests.” Yet even prostitutes were subject to the natural rhythms of the Cariboo. Usually working in an urban setting, these women were forced to follow their customers when the Cariboo miners performed their seasonal migrations.

Not all women in the Cariboo were in the business of selling sex. Other women owned and operated restaurants, hotels, saloons, and laundry services. They too would have come into contact not only with prostitutes but amorous miners. During the warmer

31 Prostitution in the Cariboo has not been explored to any significant degree. In “A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush” Sylvia Van Kirk suggests that there may have been a seasonal migration of coastal native women brought to the mining camps for the summer. It is unclear if they made their trips with pimps or followed their customers. Likely it was a combination of both. Sylvia Van Kirk “A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1875.”

winter months, a steady clientele of dirty, hungry and thirsty men exercised their masculine authority to drink in public and have sex with unaffiliated women. In doing so, of course, they provided enterprising women with an unusual measure of economic opportunity and freedom. Women capitalized on their own rarity in many ways and, as with men, negotiated gender within the seasonal structure that framed all human labour. One of the few women to over winter the first year of the rush was Janet Allen. Better known as “Scotch Jennie,” she became a prominent figure in the gold country. Dr. Cheadle and Viscount Milton both had the pleasure of her company in the fall of 1863. Described as “fair, fat, and forty, and the proprietor of a neighbouring house of refreshment,” Allen cooked dinner for her guests and “when that was duly set forth she yielded to popular clamour, and joined [them] at the table.” Allen had a reputation for dressing, drinking, and eventually dying, in a horse accident, like a man. Indeed some women, just as itinerant as male goldseekers, may have found it easier to emulate men in ways that went beyond business practices. Frederick Pearkes once commented with casual humour that, “at the back of our store are two ladies dressed in boys clothing”

Pearkes’ somewhat caustic comment hints at a sense of ridiculousness regarding the women’s display. The irony that women would dress as boys in a camp full of boys is not lost, but there are limits to what we can discover about them. Perhaps the women were attempting to attract a certain male clientele, maybe they were in disguise, playing at a rouse, or expressing a desire to be more masculine. One important aspect of Pearkes’s comment, though, is a greater sense of how, even in a place with as itinerant population as the Cariboo, all women, especially those dressed aberrantly, were carefully

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313 See for example, Butler, Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery, 1-4; Hurtado, Intimate Frontiers, 76-86.  
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observed. Thus female Caribooites never achieved the same degree of anonymity and movement as men. There were limits to the mines’ liberating spaces, and women could not fully escape the constraints imposed by men’s power to define the limits of female participation.

Regardless, or perhaps because of appearances, companionship, and observation we know for certain that women were excellent businesswomen. For example, during spring and summer of 1863, Janet Allen travelled the mining camps caring for the sick during a severe typhoid outbreak, called mountain fever by the Caribooites.  Her concern was undoubtedly sincere, but it was also true that her husband’s hotel did not suffer from want after the miners received Allen’s nursing. Allen was an entrepreneurial dynamo. Soon after her husband’s death, she opened the Pioneer Hotel in Centreville, and after the spring freshet, she opened a boarding house on Dunbar Flats named the Hotel de Fife.  

Florence Wilson also capitalized on the flexible spaces of the mines was. Wilson came to the Cariboo in 1864, and close behind was Barnard’s Express with a load of books with which she established the first library on Williams Creek.  The library, to which Governor Seymour had donated, served as a social space for men during the winter season, when ice and snow forced men to lay over their claims. Wanting to risk no seasonal vulnerability in her income, Wilson also opened a small saloon called The Phoenix, which was equally successful during in and winter. The Phoenix’s location,

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315 *Cariboo Sentinel*, 10 September, 1870,  
317 Ibid
next to the heavily patronized theatre further underscored Wilson’s entrepreneurial savvy.\textsuperscript{318}

Just like the male miners in the Cariboo, most women fled to the lower country once the weather turned cool. Some women played on seasonal separation to underscore, and often direct, their husband’s work as miners. After a series of angst-ridden sentences describing her sadness at going to south to Yale and leaving her husband in the gold fields, one woman tried to manipulate her mate’s nostalgia:

Dearest I will be looking with all my eyes for you...Dearest davee [sic] I ast [sic] you to grant me one request, and that is to keep the Sawmill Claim; I have great confidence in it, and it will be so nice to have a small income from the Cariboo when we get home; now dearest I know that you will grant me that one small favor and seque [sic] it for me.\textsuperscript{319}

Instances such as this reveal that women, while not legally allowed to hold claims or mine in the creeks, could use their relationships with men to gain access to the economic opportunities offered by the gold rush. Indeed, women understood that the context in which they operated rotated on the rhythmic migrations of the local mining population of which they were a vital presence. Mrs. Mary Clunes of Camerontown placed an advertisement in the Sentinel declaring a “Miners’ Ball and Concert.”\textsuperscript{320} She invited miners from near and far to join her for a “benefit ball and concert,” in late May, before the main mining season, promising the best ever given on Williams Creek. Who the Ball and Concert would benefit was illuminated on a previous page of the \textit{Sentinel}, which noted that Mary Clunes, “a poor hard working woman, with a large family of helpless children to support, and is deserving of the patronage of the community who we hope

\textsuperscript{318} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{319} \textit{The Cariboo Sentinel}, 29 July 1865.
\textsuperscript{320} \textit{The Cariboo Sentinel}, 7 May, 1866.
will be able to respond to [Clunes’s] invitation.” Mary Clunes’s Ball took advantage of the rarity of her sex in the mining camps. She leveraged her status into economic support for a less fortunate women. Instrumental to her endeavour was miners’ enthusiasm for entertainment. After what would have been a difficult winter, and isolated from regular female company, Clunes was sure to get enthusiastic patronage from miners just arriving, as well as those men who stayed in the Cariboo and would have been familiar with her situation. She also played men’s sentimental strings for a white woman in peril, and it should be kept in mind that a spring Ball was just the event to boost Clunes’s economic stagnation. Thus Mary’s position as a woman in the mining camps, and the seasonal nature of the Cariboo gold fields enabled her to capitalize on the elasticity of gender boundaries in the mining community.

While some women in the Cariboo played on seasonal rhythms, others were just as vulnerable as male miners to the Cariboo’s isolation, poor provisions, poverty, and illness. As Clunes herself demonstrated, most women were vulnerable. Sophia Cameron, John Cameron’s wife, was one of the first white women in the Cariboo, and one of the first to die in the Cariboo, in this case, shortly after giving birth. Robert Stevenson recorded the event:

Mrs. Cameron died at 3 a.m. on October 23, 1862...Cameron and I were the only persons present at the time. Poor Cameron! The morning Mrs. Cameron died was intensely cold, the thermometer standing at thirty degrees before zero, and a wind blowing at the rate of sixty miles an hour. As there were no undertakers in Cariboo, I went away and engaged Griffin to make a coffin, and Henry Lightfoot of Vankleek Hill made the case.

321 Ibid.
322 Robert Stevenson “Diaries” 1862 BCARS MS-0315.
Sophia’s body was eventually brought down to Victoria. Back in the diggings other women also struggled with social and environmental realities of the Cariboo. Women entrepreneurs were as much, if not more, also at the mercy of snow, freshet, and isolation as men, and just as busy keeping an increasingly destitute and aggressive population at bay. On Antler creek a lone French woman was compelled to sell her small stash of grub at much lower prices than other, male-owned establishments “fearing [otherwise] it would be taken by force.” Thus while many were able to profit from their status as women, a difficult season in the Cariboo could just as quickly expose the entrenched hierarchies of male-domination. The Cariboo’s seasons always posed a threat not just to labour and lives but status as well.

By October, Samuel Hathaway had been mining and prospecting in the Cariboo for nearly four months. Impoverished and exhausted, he would not make it back to Victoria alive. One of his last journal entries remains a poignant example the will driving miners toward a golden future through rugged hard work:

Bad weather now--snowing and freezing nearly all the time. Most of the men have left the creek--only four left here now, and each one living and working by himself about a quarter of a mile from each other. Today my cabin mate went away...I cannot feel justified to leave $10 a day and I am making that now with a fair show of doing so as long as I dare stay here--That cannot be many more weeks--Looks dubious now-- If a deep snow comes on it will be a serious matter for me to get out.

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323 Sophia Cameron’s story does not end with her death. In December of 1862, John struck it rich. He then began to follow though with his promise to bury his wife in Cornwall, Ontario. Sophia had an initial funeral in the Cariboo, another in Victoria where she was buried. Later in the year she was exhumed, taken to Cornwall, buried and exhumed again because of circulating rumours that her casket contained buried treasure from Cameron’s claim. Finally she was given a fourth funeral and buried for the last time.

324 “News From Cariboo” The British Columbian 24 May, 1862.


326 Samuel G. Hathaway, ‘Diaries’ 1862 BCARS E/B/H28 V3
The death of Samuel Hathaway, frozen amongst the auriferous creeks, was a morbid and perhaps dramatic example of how nineteenth-century masculinity ran up against the seasons of the Cariboo. The two-season mining pattern heavily influenced how men and women laboured in the mines, leisured in the camps, and helped define the context in which people related to each other and to the environment. Men’s bodies, weathered by exposure to summer mining and winter isolation, underscored the perils of trying to embody a masculinity based upon the idolized rugged individual. Women took advantage of men’s nostalgia to realize economic opportunities, but they too were vulnerable to the harsh nature of the Cariboo. The gold rush offered a variety of stories about nature’s rhythms and human connections, but mostly it denotes the many ways in which nature was inextricably linked to the structure of men’s and women’s gendered relationships. At a basic level, the Cariboo opens a window into the ways that the natural world shaped identity in the second half of the nineteenth century North American West.
CONCLUSIONS

By 1865 the famous Cariboo Wagon road was complete. Construction began in 1862 with contracts awarded to many enterprising individuals, but nothing was simple with this job. Every changing terrain made building the road difficult, and routes were hotly debated. Business tried to capitalize by speculating, bribing, and negotiating the road’s path. Trails became real estate. They also became environments. As the road extended farther inland, sojourners experienced the Cariboo’s seasons in new ways. Transportation via stagecoach was faster, mail was more regular, prices leveled, and by winter 1865, horse-drawn sleighs plied the road. Many miners still returned to the low country that first winter, eager to flee the winter freeze. Even the new Cariboo Sentinel shut down because the editor and staff left for Victoria. Yet even as they departed, the Cariboo road became an artery into the colony, rapidly changing people’s orientation to the gold mines. Businesses and miners reckoned by the road which had left an indelible mark on maps and minds of those eager to see the Cariboo.

Many considered the road an engineering marvel. In some spots “cribwork of huge trees, resembling in the distance the woven pattern of a willow basket, projected out over the ledges like some mountain eyrie.” Men had built the road in tune to the natural rhythms of the Cariboo. They, too, had fled the pressures of winter and

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327 Winnifred M. Futcher, The Great North Road to the Cariboo (Vancouver: Roy Wrigley Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd., 1938), 26
328 See e.g. Winnifred M. Futcher, The Great North Road to the Cariboo; Brawnwen C. Patenaude, Trails to Gold. Vol II (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing Company, 1996).
329 Anges C. Laut, The Cariboo Trail, 99
supplemented their wages by building spur roads farther downriver that would eventually link the Cariboo closer to a broader colonial network. The road truncated the time, money, and energy needed to mine the Cariboo. It physically and mentally freed Caribooites from the isolation that had burdened their quest. Seasons still shaped work and relationships on the creeks, but they were experienced in increasingly different ways.

As Rodman Paul has noted of the western mining booms, they “seem to start their life with a fanfare of flush times and universal optimism...Because in minerals nature gives but does not renew, these deposits presently begin to show signs of exhaustion. The mining country then finds itself facing either one of two fates: decay or transition.”330 The flush period in the Cariboo mines was 1862-1863. Thus the primary impact of the road was to facilitate the transition to pioneering, but here, too, how seasons and humans intermingled was part of the story. The natural rhythms continued but humans had reoriented their relationships with the Cariboo. Seasons of gold gave way to a new rhythm of people and place.

The Cariboo was as much a story about seasons as about gold. Seasons delimited the stage upon which goldseekers’ successes, struggles, failures, relationships, and ideas were formed. A poem penned by Scottish author and Cariboo resident James Anderson highlights the organic connection that seasons constructed in the Cariboo:

He thinks his pile is made.
An’s goin’ hame this fall,
To join his dear auld mither,
His Faither, friends, and all.
His heart e’en jumps wi’ joy
At the thocht o’ bein’ there,
An’ mony a happy minute
He’s biggin’ castles in the air!

Miners dreamed of returning home wealthy men, but their hopes, like Anderson’s quintessential castle builder, were usually dashed during the course of the mining season. The poet’s fall and winter were metaphors for failure. In the Cariboo, however, they were very real and powerful punctuations of success. The Cariboo was a hard place that forced goldseekers to reformulate their plans.

The region’s isolated geography presented specific difficulties regarding climate and weather. There was gold in the Cariboo, but millennia of seasons had moved earth, rivers, and creeks in ways that made miners’ jobs more onerous and often unrewarding. Caribooites learned from earlier rushes around western North America, but the Cariboo’s distinctive climate had no historical analogs. The California and Oregon rushes took place in temperate, well-supplied locations. The Fraser River rush was only partly enlightening, giving as many false clues as it did true insights into the nature of the Cariboo, and the Nez Perce rush, with its similar Intramontaine natural geography and social isolation had not happened yet.

Newcomers thus had to learn through direct, intimate engagement with the nature of the Cariboo. Men deconstructed the land with hopes of treasure, but they faced a climate that was just as busy shaping the land and their work. Goldseekers were forced

\[\text{Footnote 331: Anges C. Laut, The Cariboo Trail, 97-98.}\]
to adjust. Work in the Cariboo took on a two-season pattern. Businessmen and women, miners, prospectors, and labourers worked frantically from late spring to early fall, their efforts often undermined by seasonal events. Most refused to admit that nature impeded their progress. They worked hard to control nature’s impact on their quest. They also relied on local First Nations people to lessen their burden, who in turn leveraged their own knowledge for their own opportunities. Technologies were embraced by all who could afford their abilities to extend the mining season, but nothing could completely forestall the freezing temperatures and torrential freshets. In the end, everyone always had to reckon with the nature of the Cariboo.

Just as seasons fundamentally shaped labour in the Cariboo, labour informed gendered roles and boundaries. Nineteenth-century masculinity was steeped in the ideal of the independent, self-made man. The progress of man, and his masculinity, was based on his ability to dominate nature. Thus when goldseekers returned home physically and financially beaten they could not admit that the nature of the Cariboo got the better of them. They needed a more recognizable agent, so to save face they blamed disingenuous and colluding businessmen, colonial officials, and newspapers.

Men’s work in the Cariboo was not limited to the diggings. They also spent a considerable time learning and honing traditionally female skills. Some even developed businesses that catered to miners’ desires for domestic comforts. This much has been widely recognized for some time. As other scholars have shown, gender boundaries were permeable in mining communities, yet they followed a rhythm that was dictated in part by the seasonal nature of mining. In other words, nature inheres even in the history of
Women also took advantage of the seasonal demands of the mines. Demography had helped to make their presence a special commodity. Women such as Janet Allen capitalized on men's romantic nostalgia for domesticity to open restaurants, laundries, saloons, and hotels, yet they never enjoyed the same social liberties as men. They did not go unnoticed or unfettered, and more so than men, women, subject to a patriarchal society and legal system, were vulnerable to social and seasonal constraints.

Social and natural rhythms merged to shape the environment and lives of men and women, yet the role of seasons remains largely overlooked. This elision seems especially relevant in pivotal events such as the Cariboo gold rush. Seasons provide a lens that helps to reveal the connections between humans and nature in the past and, by extension, the present and future as well. It offers a more nuanced perspective of the environmental and social spaces of the era, and more stories to tell. As Elliot West observes, "If the environment is always helping shape and limit human understanding, people (and only people) are forever imagining new environments and trying to muscle them into being." These relationships are of considerable intellectual value. Nature's rhythms were sites of fluid interaction among disparate groups of people. The environment thus infused the past with its own contingent powers to draw people together or push them apart. From a historical perspective, seasons can help us to uncover more historical plot lines whose rhythms still beg exploration.

332 For works demonstrating the plasticity of gender in mining communities see Johnson, Roaring Camp; Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire; J.S. Holliday, The World Rushed In. For resistance see Ellen Francis Stroud, "Does Nature Always Matter? Following Dirt Through History," History and Theory 42 (December 2003), 75-81.

333 Elliot West. The Contested Plains, xxiv.
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BCARS. British Columbia Archives, Victoria, British Columbia.
QA. Quesnel Museum and Archives, Quesnel, British Columbia

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