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***Peter de Ville, Alaska's Moon Country Explorer,
Tells Jack London His Story of the Luring North***

Travelers' tales — we have listened to them all our lives and we shall continue to listen to them until we die. And latest among travelers, but not least, is Peter de Ville, who at present lives at 1417 Pacific Street, where he sells fruit and vegetables and things, but who has had the call of the Far-Journeyer upon his ear and the Wanderlust lay him by the heels and drag him to the ends of the earth.

By the spoken words of his mouth he has plunged deeper into the Northland vastness than any living man, and for thirty years he has trod the unbroken and unknown trails. For months and years he has lived on straight meat and for weeks at a time on the inner bark of young trees. He has prospected the North from end to end, even crossing Bering Straits in a kayak and digging and panning along the Siberian coast. His principal stamping grounds, however, have been under the shadow of the Pole in that wild region between the Mackenzie and the Porcupine. He has suffered, and in full, all the hardships and horrors of that naked land. So badly frozen once, was his right side, that it underwent a peculiar ossification which lasted seven months. The best doctors of Europe gave him up and sent him back to California to die. Even then, his mind could not endure and for two years it has been a blank. But for his splendid physique that stands six feet two inches, with shoulders twice those of ordinary men, and has weighed 285 pounds he could never have survived his fearful experiences. Yet he did survive and has lived to return and tell the tale, and, moreover, he has brought with him a dog.

Now of dogs under the sun this dog is the most remarkable. To say the least, which, is to say a great deal, this dog is as strange as his master's tale. Picture the beast, the body of a bear, plus the forepaws of a wolf, plus the head of a Malamute dog. On that huge body, the small head, with its wolf-snout and nervously pricked ears, looks ridiculously out of place. The hind legs, heavy and thick, are decidedly ursine, and the feet have the broad, bear-sole and the long bear-claw. The body, with its thick wool-like coat, could not be mistaken for anything else than a bear. And the head is precisely that of tens of thousands of Huskies running about the Klondike to-day. They average from forty to sixty pounds in weight, yet this beast tips the scales at over two hundred and is still growing. His master has refused \$2000 for him.

But the tale of Peter de Ville.

"I was born in the island of Jersey, received my education in Paris, while yet a boy fought in the Franco-Prussian war, went through the siege of Paris and the Commune, and after that fought for half a year against the Bedouins of Northern Africa."

And this he tells as so many commonplaces, the while tilting up a vinegar cask while a female customer holds a bottle under the spigot and runs in five cents' worth of vinegar. It was after his lapse of m i n d, by the way, that he awoke to find himself in this fruit store. Customers trot

in and out throughout the interview and Mr. de Ville waits on them in the absent manner of one used to the large airs of great spaces.

“Then in the latter part of 1871 I came to San Francisco, went on to Victoria, and then on into the country about Peace River. I went beyond the last missionary and the farthest post, and wandered north for six years. Near the Porcupine I met Lush — Chief Lush — or ‘Captain Lush,’ as I called him. He had heard of white men, but I was the first he set eyes upon. We became friends and brothers, sleeping under one blanket and eating out of the one pot. With him I went over the mountains to Ice Lake, where his village was.

“Often he used to tell me of the strange country that lay to the north - ‘Moon Country,’ he called it, where were strange people and animals. The people were white, he said, and he described hairy mastodons which he had seen alive on the ice; also giant bats fifty feet from tip to tip. I did not know what to believe, but always was Lush truthful to me, and while among his people I saw great tusks with the fresh blood yet upon them. Lush told me, too, of the dogs which were like bears. But he said it was a terrible journey, and his experiences had been such I could not persuade him to try it again. He himself had not been inside the Moon Country, and he held that no one who went ever came back.

“But what do you think about the Moon Country, Mr. de Ville?” I asked.

He paused for a moment before replying.

“Well, you see, it’s this way. Up there the compass chases its tail. It goes round and round. I do not know why, unless because of great mineral deposits of some sort. So it is a hard country to travel in and very easy to get lost. Now I have seen these people of the Moon Country, and they are white, and I have often thought that they are the descendents of lost Arctic explorers who have mated with Indians and Esquimos. Who knows? Perhaps the descendents of Sir John Franklin are to be found there to-day, living and marrying and burying as a matter of course.

“As I was saying, after six years, in ’77, I turned south, and came down through the Cassiar country to Sitka and prospected the Alaskan coast. In ’79 I discovered the Paris lode, on Douglass Island, which is to-day the Treadwell, and also the Bird’s Nest, the Mineral King and the Mexico. And on Sheep Creek and Silver Bow Basin I had seventy-four locations. But I lost all my holdings - sold for a ‘consideration,’ which is still considering and in ’81 went up the Chilcat river and re-entered Alaska. Over the Copper River and down the Tanana and the Yukon I spent years of prospecting, ‘living on rabbit tracks and salmon bellies,’ as the saying goes, and coming down to the States once or twice for a breath of civilization.”

But it seems that the lure of the North gripped Peter de Ville and would not let him go.

“Then I remembered Lush,” he went on, “and determined to return to my old haunt on the Porcupine and the Mackenzie. But at Forty Mile the news came of Carmack’s bonanza strike and I went up the Yukon to Klondike. Here I staked on both Bonanza and Eldorado and gathered together \$20,000. Also I laid claim to thirty-seven miles of the rich Indian River for dredging purposes. But I was not as sharp as the business men, and the first thing I knew they had everything and I had nothing.”

Peter de Ville shrugged his shoulders as though it were of little worth, but the angry blood pounded darkly under his skin at the recollection.

“Then I was mad,” he continued. “I, who had come into the land when they were children in arms, to be so robbed! And I resolved to show them that I was yet a better man than they. This was my idea - to go to the Moon Country and get together a wonderful collection for the Paris Exposition. So I outfitted and started. By the time I reached Lush at Ice Lake my provisions were

exhausted and there I outfitted afresh - straight meat. Lush was glad to see me, but he did not want to make the trip to the Moon Country, and only consented to go in the company of many of his men.

“There were seventy-two Indians with me when I pulled out, and we had 180 dogs. Ice Lake is of very high altitude, and when we came to the Ice Mountains, which lie beyond, the air was extremely thin and we began to bleed at the mouth and nose and ears. Some of the Indians lay down on the ice and died, and many became frightened and turned back, so that when we came out of the Ice Mountains only Lush and two others remained with me.

“We were now in a great stretch of ice country -ice, ice, as far as the eye could see and as far as we could travel. We suffered terribly, and in the thin air bled day after day. So thin was the air that the swans and geese, bound to their nesting grounds in the Moon Country, flew very low, so that now and again we managed to club them for food. We had been eating our dogs, but we had only twelve left and did not dare to touch them.

“It was a nightmare, the trip from then on.”

Peter de Ville put his hand to his brow and eyes as though to brush aside an invisible veil.

“Days of cold and of hunger, when we lay down to die, and spaces of which I can remember nothing. There was much mist and drizzle, and it being summer, the sun was always with us. There was never any dark. But such was the rareness of the atmosphere, and what of the mist and drizzle, that strange reflections and mirages were produced, and often we struggled forward with three suns shining in the sky and the compass fluttering around and around.

“After ninety days' traveling, and in despair, for there was no end to the ice, we did finally lie down by our sleds to die. There it was that I froze my side, which leaves me a wrecked man to-day. But Lush roused me, pointing, and I looked and saw what seemed a ship looming large through the mist. It was no ship, but a sled, with four fur-dressed men, and dogs with the bodies of bears pulling the sled. They were tall men, and white of skin, and very friendly.

“I sat up like a dead man and tried to talk with them. I tried them with Chinook, Cree, Konana, Surn-Siam, and Thlinget, with French, English, German and Russian - all the tongues I know, and there are many, but they did not understand. They only smiled and laughed and pointed to the north.

“On their sled was a litter of the bear-dogs, born evidently while on their trip, and I made signs for them. I gave my cap, a hatchet and a knife, and they put the pups, four of them, on my sled and prepared to go. I tried to stand up to prevent them or to get them to take me with them; but I must have fainted from weakness, for the next time I looked about me they were gone. Then the nightmare settled down again. I seemed on an endless journey. I remember little, save always that Lush urged and dragged me on, and long stretches of ice with the dogs running, and the sun-blink in my eyes, and the three suns overhead.

“And so we made Ice Lake, where I grew stronger and where I said good-bye to Lush. Two of the pups had died and the third was sick, and Lush kept it, but with the fourth, the one which you see now — Here, Bob. Here, Bob! Two hundred pounds and more, you see, and he was but three pounds when I got him.”

“But how did you get back to civilization?” I asked.

Peter de Ville brushed his brow and eyes in his peculiar way and continued: “From Ice Lake to the head-reaches of the Stewart River I remember little. But there I fell in with fellow countrymen. Count Montgold and Baron Terwayne, who brought me, with my right side frozen, to Vancouver.”

“And what then Mr. de Ville?”

Again the brushing gesture: “I do not remember. For two years my mind was dim, filled with blanks. I know that the doctors could do nothing; that I was in London, in Paris, in Berlin; that I was sent back to California to die, and that here I find myself, my brain clear and life coming back again, in - in this.”

With a look of immeasurable disgust he sun-eyed the little shop and the boy assistant selling a nickel’s worth of turnips.

“And now?” I questioned, softly.

“And now I want to go back. This is not life here. I want to go into the North again. If I have to, I will sell the bear-dog to get an outfit. I want to go back to Ice Lake and through the ice lands to the Moon Country.

“And go I will,” says Peter de Ville.

Somewhere Kipling speaks of the odors of damp wood smoke, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine-cones, saying, “That is the true smell of the Himalayas, and if once it creeps into the blood of a man, that man will at the last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die.”

And so it would seem with Peter de Ville, far-journeyer and adventurer over the earth. The Northland is in his blood, and for all the ruin it has wreaked, his destiny is that he shall return there at the last to die. As for the tale he tells, I tell it as it was told to me. Explain it if you can. The man is authentic, the man is real. Alaska knows him. He has a reputation. Further, he spits Indian gutturals to the manner born, and knows more about Indian life and habits than Bancroft ever compiled. And then there is the dog at 1417 Pacific Street. Go and look at it. It has the head of a dog, the forepaws of a wolf and the body of a bear. Go and look at it and explain it if you can.