

1000 DENALI
NATIONAL PARK &
PRESERVE



1898-1998 GOLD RUSH
CENTENNIAL

EUREKA!

THE KANTISHNA RUSHES

The year 1996 began the centennial celebration that marked the discovery of gold and subsequent opening of the last frontier that is Alaska. Nearly everyone has heard of the Bonanza strike near Dawson City, and the rush to make a fortune. However, most people are unaware of the gold rushes, booms and busts that occurred within the current boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve in a place now known simply as *Kantishna*.

DISCOVERY

The year was 1903, early summer. The brunt of the gold rush in the Yukon was over; hundreds of prospectors were out of work, hanging around towns like Fairbanks waiting for word of newly discovered gold fields. During this time, District Judge James Wickersham, along with four others, took the summer to explore the region around the great mountain - Denali - with the intention of being

the first to climb it.

Although they were unsuccessful in climbing the peak, they were the first to discover gold in the area. It was the filing of these claims that captured the attention of several prospectors and opened the doors into the pristine Kantishna hills.



The Kantishna Area

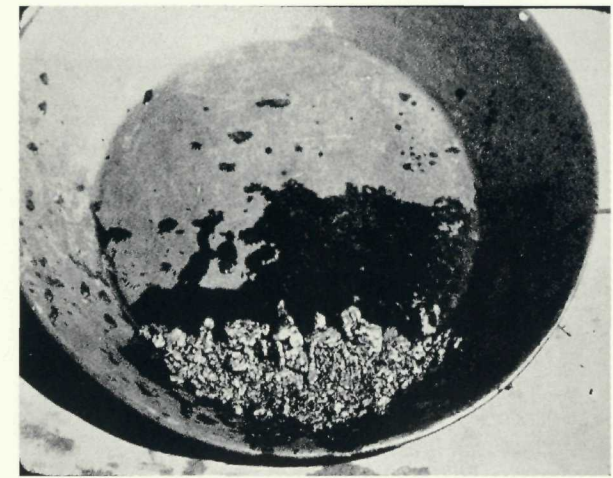
DALTON AND QUIGLEY

Among the first prospectors to venture into the Kantishna Hills were Joseph Dalton and Joseph Quigley - two men who would figure prominently in Kantishna's mining history. In 1904, Dalton and his partner successfully prospected the Toklat River basin. In the summer of 1905, Joe Quigley and his partner, Jack Horn, found gold in paying quantities in Glacier Creek.



The Kantishna Roadhouse as it appeared in 1988

After staking the creeks, they carried the news to Fairbanks, starting the first stampede into the Kantishna Hills. Within weeks, 2-3,000 gold seekers found their way up the Tanana, Kantishna, and Bearpaw rivers, eventually staking every drainage in the Kantishna Hills from head to toe. Mining towns sprang up seemingly overnight: Diamond and Glacier City on the Bearpaw; Roosevelt and Square Deal on the Kantishna; and Eureka, a summer mining camp centrally located near active pay streaks.



THE FIRST RUSH ENDS

Within six months the easy pickings were gone and the rush was over. Miners left in droves, leaving behind less than fifty inhabitants to continue placer mining. Some ventured into hard-rock mining or engaged in the mining of other minerals: silver, lead, zinc, and antimony. However, the transportation problems which would always plague the Kantishna mining district proved to be its downfall in ore production. There was no way to economically work a hard-rock mine without heavy equipment. Without roads into the area, no equipment could get in; and it was too expensive to transport overland or by boat. By 1925, mining had ceased almost completely.





FANNY QUIGLEY

Originally from rural Nebraska, Fanny arrived in the north country around 1898. She began as a dance-hall girl in Dawson City, then followed the numerous stampedes as a cook for the miners, as well as prospecting and mining for herself. The Stampede brought Fanny to Kantishna where she established a legacy of hospitality and independence still remembered today.

In 1906, Fanny married Joe Quigley, one of the original prospectors of the Kantishna Hills. The home they established was renowned for extensive vegetable and flower gardens, and a permafrost meat cellar. It is said that the small-framed Fanny could hunt, fish, and pack her share of game as well as any man; and could prepare a gourmet meal that was unsurpassed.

First and foremost, Joe and Fanny were miners. They developed gold, zinc, antimony, lead, silver and copper discoveries. The Red Top Mine, owned and operated by Joe Quigley, became the biggest ore-producing mine in the area.



KANTISHNA IN THE 1930S

The 1930s brought a series of breaks to the Kantishna mining district. President Franklin Roosevelt raised the price of gold to \$35 per ounce; the park road was completed linking Kantishna to the railroad; and the post-Depression era produced large quantities of cheap labor. Central to the second “boom” was the development of the Banjo Mine on Quigley Ridge.

The Banjo mine was the area’s first commercial-scale lode gold milling operation. It became the fourth largest lode mine in the Yukon basin, producing more than 6,000 ounces of gold and 7,000 ounces of silver between 1939 and 1941. Kantishna’s highest aggregate placer gold return was \$139,000 in 1941.

This golden era came to an end with the coming of World War II. All labor, fuel, equipment and supplies were channeled into the war effort. An order shutting down all gold mining operations non-essential to the war effort, closed the Banjo mine. It was never reopened.



Miners of the Kantishna Hills pose in front of a network of sluices.

MINING IN THE PARK

Another thirty years passed before Kantishna knew another boom, and a small one at that. In the 1970s, after the abandonment of the gold standard in the 70’s, the price of gold soared, and hopeful miners once again found their way back to Kantishna. Mining activity increased, along with environmental awareness.

In 1976, the Mining in the Parks Act passed, essentially terminating any further mineral entry and location. The law also placed a four-year moratorium on surface disturbance for mineral exploration and development of existing valid claims in national parks.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which expanded Mt. McKinley National Park by approximately four million acres. The Kantishna mining district was completely enveloped by the newly designated Denali National Park and Preserve. By the mid 1980’s, the Kantishna gold mining district ranked 27th in the state for overall production of gold. Nearly 100,000 ounces have been extracted from these hills.

KANTISHNA TODAY

Little remains of the old towns that flourished nearly 100 years ago in the heart of Alaska’s frontier. Today, the focus of activity in the Kantishna district is tourism. Only the town of Eureka, now called Kantishna, is left behind to remind us of the golden years not so long ago.



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