

Cariboo gold rush

In 1858, there were not many settlers of European descent in the territory that would become British Columbia.

For this assignment, you will imagine yourself in the role of a gold miner from Victoria who is trying to make it to the Cariboo gold fields.

You have fantasized about striking gold and living a life of luxury. By answering the questions below you will discover how you had to prepare, what supplies you needed, what route you would travel, and all the obstacles you would have to overcome to strike it rich.

1. In Victoria, you purchase a mining license for \$5. You are now ready to head to the Cariboo and stake your claim. Describe what claim and title mean in mining.

A claim, exclusive prospecting license, concession, right, or lease is a grant that allows a group or individual access to the mining valuables on a property.

2. Research the accommodations available for travellers and describe what they were like.

The accommodations were not extravagant by any means. Long periods of time were spent on rock hard cots, little space and severe malnutrition. Living this kind of life in this time was far from comfortable. Often cramped in with other miners in small dirty rooms or tents.

3. Research the Cariboo Wagon Road. Why were camels used? How effective were these animals?

The Cariboo wagon road was a road constructed in 1861, whose idea was Colonel Richard Clement Moody's. It was a road constructed through the Fraser River from Yale to Cariboo. The reason camels were used is because they were thought to carry more than mules. But, they didn't get along with other animals very well, and needed separate pastures. Over time, many escaped into the wild and died, and eventually stopped being used.

4. Research the equipment you will need. List three things every miner should carry.

In order to mine gold, several things need to happen. You need to be near some gold, able to dig down or sideways to find it, excavate it, and move it to a desired location. To accomplish this, miners would usually be equipped with most if not all of these: a pickaxe, candle/other form of light, a shovel, a gold panning device (a bowl used to separate the heavy gold from silt), hammers/mallets, a mining claim, chisels, spikes, maps, and even explosives. Of this list, the three most important are probably a pickaxe, gold pan, and their mining claim (if they have one).

5. Research Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie. Who was he and why was he known as the "hanging judge"?

Begbie served as the first Judge of the Supreme Court, Colony of British Columbia 1858 to 1866 and then, in the same capacity in the Supreme Court, the United Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia from 1866 to 1870. Begbie reached Fort Victoria on November 16, 1858. He was important in the court trials for the Chilcotin war and was well known for having good friendships with a number of indigenous chiefs and speaking many First Nations dialects.

6. Who were Hurdy-Gurdy girls and why did they come to the Cariboo region?

Hurdy-Gurdy were music playing troupes that came to Canada from Europe and named after a peasant instrument popular amongst bars. A typical hurdy gurdy troupe consisted of four girls, always accompanied by a chaperone (often a married couple with children), the agent, or "boss gurdy," who did the bookings and made all the arrangements, and one or two musicians. They came to the Cariboo region because of the scarcity of entertainment and women in the area. The ratio of men to women was very high. So, the pay and anticipation for one of these groups to pass by town was very high, making business very good.

7. Research mining machines. Describe three methods of mining for gold that you will use.

At first, miners relied on "panning" gold--swirling water from a stream in a shallow pan until the heavier, gold-bearing materials fell to the bottom while the water and lighter sand fell out over the rim. This was soon displaced by simple mining machines like the wooden "rocker" into which pails of water could be emptied and processed at one time. Even this minor technological advance meant that there was now an investment in equipment and methods that worked best with a team of men, not a single miner. Thus miners began to join together in formal and informal companies. Gold in and around stream beds was soon exhausted, and hard-rock miners took over, using their pickaxes to dig shafts up to forty feet deep with horizontal tunnels radiating from these shafts in search of subterranean veins of gold-bearing quartz.

8. Research towns. Describe the early gold mining towns you might encounter on your journey.

The towns you might see in the Cariboo gold Rush are newly built mining towns that aren't comfy by any means, but with merchants, entertainment, and accommodations, many miners can call them home. Some were tiny little towns with less than 1000 people, and some were massive gold mining towns like Barkerville.

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