

In 1898 J.K. Martin and several companions joined the gold rush to the Klondike. Parts of five of his letters home were published as articles in the Little Falls Daily Transcript. These articles were transcribed by Sandra B. Martin without change except for the correction of typographical errors. This document is from <http://rootdigger.org>

Little Falls Daily Transcript — Thursday, February 17, 1898.

OFF FOR ALASKA

The Remainder of the Little Falls Party Will Start on This Evening's Train.

Four of the party of five from this city who will go to the gold fields of Alaska will leave on the Pacific coast passenger train this afternoon, which leaves here at 5:15. Their names are H. L. Rutgers, George Klewel, Frank Whitmore and Henry R. Baldwin, the latter a relative of H. L. Rutgers, who arrived here a few days since to accompany the party to Alaska.

The party will be joined by J. K. Martin, who left Tuesday evening, at Sentinel Butte, N.D., where he stopped two days visiting his brother, and will go direct to Seattle, where they will ship for Dyea, on the 23rd.

With no delays their train will reach Seattle about noon Sunday, and they will have about three days in Seattle to get their outfits, and make preparations for the trip from there to Alaska.

Everyone of the party bought his outfit of clothing, bedding, etc. here but they will wait until they reach Seattle before purchasing their stock of provisions. When they leave here each will be supplied with mackinaw suits, rubber boots, moccasins and rubber shoes and water proof suits, sweaters, woolen socks and other necessities in abundance. For bedding, each will have two pair of heavy, mackinaw blankets, one 8x8 foot dog skin robe and one water proof blanket.

When they reach Seattle a large tent will be purchased, and possibly two, for the party may be divided as soon as they reach Dyea. Their mining outfits will also be secured there, and will consist of a miner's sheet iron stove with its paraphernalia, picks, pans and everything that will be considered necessary for placer mining. To this will be added a supply of provisions intended to last a year, and they estimate that the weight of each one's outfit completed when they leave Seattle will be 1,500 pounds or more.

Six dogs will be taken by the party as far as Seattle, and if they there decide that they are necessary they will be taken to Alaska and if not they will be sold or given away at Seattle. It will cost \$3.60 for each dog from here to Seattle, and from Seattle to Dyea about \$8.00 more for each canine. The cheapest fare to Dyea from here is \$75, \$40 to Seattle and thirty five dollars for the steamship passage from Seattle. Beyond Dyea the members have planned but little. Should all parties decide to take the same direction from there, they will, no doubt, continue to camp together and assist each other in every way possible. But it seems that the opinions of the party differ to some extent at present as to which is the best place to strike for after reaching Dyea, but they will not decide until they reach that place. Frank Whitmore, who is the representative of a syndicate of Little Falls men, thinks that he will go to the Copper river country, and J. K. Martin and George Klewel, will probably go to

Dawson City.

All members of the party are apparently strong, healthy, determined men, who go there with expectations of enduring great hardships, and not withstanding the recent discouraging reports all are confident of making a fortune, or at least bettering their financial condition before they return. Some plan that they will be back in a year and others expect to be away longer, but none longer than one and a half years. The best wishes of the entire community are with them. And all sincerely hope that they will succeed in gaining wealth and will return safe and sound to their families and friends, who no doubt will be very anxious about them during their absence.

Little Falls Daily Transcript — Saturday, March 19, 1898.

WRITES FROM DYEA

J.K. Martin Sends a Letter to Little Falls Friends.

The Party Was at Dyea Two Weeks Ago - Ready to Start Inland.

M.V. Wetzel received a letter today from J.K. Martin, one of the party who left here for the Klondike in February. The letter was dated at Dyea, March 2, and the Transcript is allowed to take the following from it:

We are now camping about three miles from Dyea, and waiting for our freight to be transferred from the docks to Dyea, a distance of about three miles. We have been here three days and received two packages of freight but think the balance will be in tomorrow morning and then we will cart it out here. There are seven in the party now, and we have six dogs: they do fine work.

This is a great country, and you see all kinds of funny things and I have thoroughly enjoyed myself so far. The boat trip was a corker. I wish I could tell you all about it, but the candle is getting short and I have to bathe my ankle vet. Met with an accident at Seattle, but guess I will come out all right.

(Under the succeeding date he continues.)

I have just got in from the docks with a sled load of freight. Mike and Wilson have started for the summit or top of Chilkoot pass with two dogs, and I expect them back tomorrow night., They have gone up to inspect the roads and see whether we had better hire our freight hauled or do it ourselves. We are afraid the canyon will break up, as the weather is very warm - thawing every day.

Frank Whitmore went to the post office to look for mail for us. They form in line and take their turn to get in the postoffice, same as everyone else here. If a man gets in line about 1 o'clock he will get in the postoffice about 4 or 4:30. Most any time you go by the postoffice you will see a line of men that will reach down the street a block. This town is fully two miles long, and up in the main part of town fully six or eight blocks wide, but, most of the way just one block.

Rutgers is in the tent sewing up his clothes where he ripped them this morning

packing freight. He and Baldwin brought 700 pounds from the warehouse out here this forenoon a distance of three miles. Rutgers is doing fine and seems to stand it well; all the rest of us have colds.

Wish you were here to eat with us. Rutgers and myself are cooks; fried potatoes, onions and bacon mixed, hot biscuit, butter cold ham and tea - what better could a man ask for?

I have pretty near quit smoking - but have 10 pounds of tobacco, and the duty to take it across the line is 50 cents a pound; guess I will give it away. I understand there is no duty on clothing but it will run about 25 percent on our provisions, and we must have three pounds per day to the man for one year before the officers will let us cross the line, and our granulated, evaporated and crystalized food does not count, so we have to purchase about 250 pounds to the man to make us 1100 each.

I met a man from the gold fields today, and he was purchasing provisions to go back with again - and he had the gold dust to do it with. I have talked with several business men here and they say you cannot get much out of the men who come down, but that they all have the dust. The Yukoners report the roads as being a fright, and say it is one solid iceberg, but one of the men who camped next to us has been in as far as Lake Togish, and he says the roads are fine, and that they are trying to scare everybody out.

But I am going through (even if I come back broke) if I have my health.

Little Falls Daily Transcript - Saturday, April, 2, 1898

NEAR THE SUMMIT

J. K. Martin and Party now on the Trail Beyond Dyea, Alaska

Under the date of Sheep's Camp, March 21, J. K. Martin wrote a letter to members of his family in this city, and the Transcript is allowed to publish the following, which will be read with general interest.

Have not yet received a letter and mail came in last night and I was disappointed and have come to the conclusion that the mail has gone to Alabama as Ala. is an abbreviation for Alabama. Our mail should be addressed to Dyea, Alaska, and we have made arrangements to have it brought to us at this point at 10 cents per letter, but as soon as we move to Lake Linderman it will cost us 25 cents per letter. We are getting along nicely and have all our goods about one-third the way up the summit now and if we have good weather three more days will put us on top. A person has to be awful careful, as the mountain is so steep if a person falls down he will roll or slide to the bottom, unless he can catch a rope to stop; but it does not hurt a person. We wear iron creepers with long flat calks on them to keep from slipping down, so as long as you can keep your feet you are all right. I let my sled get away from me on St. Patrick's Day with 350 pounds on it, and it flew back down the mountain at the rate of a mile a minute for 5009 feet and ran into another sled, smashed it and scattered goods all over. The deal cost me \$8.50, besides breaking my own sled.

The mountains are so steep a person can hardly ascend them and we use block and tackle and station two men at each end of the line to load and unload and we catch the

packers coming down to ride one sled down, which brings the loaded one up. Four men riding a sled down will bring up about 250 or 300 pounds and they are always glad to get a ride down. When we get our stuff all on top of the summit we take our tent and move to Lake Lindeman so we will be camped there the latter part of this week if nothing happens. We have a storm on today or we would be working, but we worked all day yesterday, (Sunday), so we can afford to lay up today. All days are alike here.

They were having a big time down town last night, a grand dance given by one of the saloons. Every other place is a saloon, and gambling of all sorts going on. Every thing is plenty high here as rates on packing have gone up. Wood on the summit is worth 4½ cents per pound, how would you like to burn wood at that price? Flour \$12.00 per sack, coal \$140.00, hay \$170.00 per ton on the summit, everything is proportion but of course everything is 4 cents per pound cheaper here at, Sheep's Camp, as that is what it costs to get it up there, a distance of four and three-fourth miles. We are getting along in fine shape and all fairly well, Mike Kelwel laid off one day sick, but all O.K. now. We are camped upon a hill and you would think you were in Chicago to look down on the tents all lit up at night, and the trails are just crowded with people in the day time and going up the trail on the summit. It is made like stairs and each man has to wait for the other to step before he can put his foot down.

I understand they have made some more rich strikes, one on the Big Salmon river. Nearly every day you see men coming out from that country and they all have nuggets in their pockets so they can pull out a hand full and shake it at you. A man is safer in this country with money on his person than in Little Falls or any other part of the eastern country. I haven't heard of a robbery since we left the boat and have not had my gun out of the sack yet. Well, my dear folks, I do not know of anything of interest to tell you. The Dickinson crowd that Fred is interested in arrived here a couple of days ago, and by chance I run on to them the very day they struck town. We do not find much time to read as it is usually 7 o'clock when we get in from work and by the time we get our supper eaten and clothing changed and hung up to dry its 9, and then we are all tired enough to go to bed, so we do not miss the reading matter very much, but probably will when we get located and have more time to ourselves. How is everything at the Falls and in general. Will not mention the different things as you will probably tell me about all when you write. You had better all mail your letters in one as I have to pay 10 cents for every 2 cents postage on mail I receive and will have to pay 25 cents by the time your letters can reach me. Remember me to all the people and Mr. Joss, and tell him that I saw his friend, Mr. Chester, on the boat. Some of the Eastern people got roped in on their freight in great shape. They contracted on the boat to have their freight delivered from Dyea to Lake Linderman at 15 cents per pound and the regular price is only 8 cents per pound, so they got roped in for about \$100, each on that deal. The whole Buffalo crowd got caught the same way and there were about forty of them, but they are from the East and do not seek the acquaintance of any Western men for advice as they think they know it all.

Little Falls Daily Transcript – Thursday, April 14, 1898

KLONDIKERS ARE SAFE

The Little Falls Party Were Resting at Sheep's Camp During the Land Slide.

Another Interesting Letter From J. K. Martin - Written April 2 and 3.

The family of J.K. Martin have just received another interesting letter from him from Sheep's Camp, Alaska, showing that all are well. The Transcript is permitted to publish the following:

SHEEPS CAMP, Alaska
April 2, 1898

We are still at this point, waiting for the weather to clear so we can move. We have had our goods all on the summit since last Sunday, and took a rest on Monday, and thought we would improve the time by re-packing our camp supplies and wait until April 1 before going over, as we heard the duty would be taken off at that time, but it was an April fool. We have to pay duty just the same: The weather has been so stormy we could not have gone, but will surely have a let up soon, then we will move our tent to Lake Linderman.

I feel that we have the hardest part of our work done and the most dangerous. It certainly was a fright climbing the mountain, and nearly every day someone was hurt. In fact, every day and some days two or three, but we all escaped without a scratch and I drew a great breath of relief when our outfit was landed on the summit.

We have increased our provisions until we have nearly 1,200 pounds of solid food to the man. We also have enough camp provisions to last us two months or more, so we are well supplied and have enough to last over a year, but it has drawn heavily on our cash and no small piece of work to pack over the mountains. But we are well fixed and have much to be thankful for.

The weather here is very mild, the thermometer stands about 30 degrees above and it is snowing hard. The fire melts the snow on our tent so it keeps us guessing to dodge the drops as they come through. I am getting used to this camp life and don't mind it one bit.

Mr. Baldwin just came in from down town and reports two men being hung at Lake Linderman for stealing. We have been fortunate and I do not think we have lost a thing.

We are getting good reports from the gold fields, and were in hopes to be able to go through on the snow and ice as far as the Big Salmon and Watch creeks which are about 200 miles from here. They are reporting good finds on both, and we are thinking seriously of two of us going through light and try and get claims and let the other five bring the provisions.

Mr. Rutgers is still doing the cooking and does nicely. We have hot biscuit, soups, Irish stew, beans, potatoes, onions, oat meal, corn meal mush, hot pancakes, fresh meat, bacon, salt pork, rice and raisins, apple, peach and apricot sauce, and pies. Of course, not all at one meal, but we are living well, and have decided to let Mr. Rutgers do the cooking.

I have forgotten to say that I have received your letters up to March 12.

Evening of April 3, 1898.

This has been an exciting day and a sad one to many. The snow slides have been the worst this country ever knew. You have, undoubtedly, seen the reports in the papers.

There is no telling how many people are buried under the snow. They have dug out about thirty so far and over half of them are dead. I saw fifteen dead bodies today and they are still digging. I expect the newspapers will have everyone buried alive. We were on the point of telegraphing you through Mr. Olds at Seattle, for fear you would see the reports in the papers and worry about us.

I took two Kodak shots at the scenes as the men were at the rescue work. I can scarcely write as I cannot get my mind off the scenes of today. It was so terrible. Three men were pulled out of their tent in their sleeping bags, dead, evidently killed during the night. The people on the trail were coming down from the scales to keep from being buried, as some had already been covered up, up there. There were about seventy-five of them – got hold of a 200 foot rope and started down for safety, but they only got about one third of the way down when overtaken with the snow slide. Two on the rear end of the rope escaped and came down and gave the alarm. I believe there must have been 3000 people on the scene at one time after the slide, but they were mostly all afraid of another slide and did not linger long. But lots of brave men stayed to rescue the unfortunate.

Do not worry about us; we are all safe; are camped and on good ground and out of all danger. It has been snowing continuously for the last three days, and good and hard all the time, but the first fine day that comes – we will pull up tent and fly for the other side.

Little Falls Daily Transcript — Friday, June 24 1898

FROM THE KLONDIKE

Letter of Interest From J.K. Martin Describing Shooting the Canyon.

H.H. Tanner has kindly permitted us to publish part of a letter received this week from J. K. Martin. A later letter received June 8 by Mr. M's family states that the second boat of the party was successfully taken through the rapids.

Lake Bennett, B. C.,
May 31, 1898

My Dear Bert – We are commencing to move after a long siege of it at Linderman, but luck has been bad to some extent and still I don't know but what we can consider ourselves lucky. We broke camp at Linderman Thursday at 8 p.m., and thought we could make the head of the canyon at foot of Lake Linderman before morning, but the ice commenced moving and at midnight we were forced ashore, in a cove, and at 2 a.m. the wind came up strong and the ice piled up all around, and we had to hustle to get our goods ashore. We got part of our goods out and put a lever under the edge of the boat and pried it up over the rocks and the ice forced them out. The wind whipped the ice all to pieces, and Monday morning we loaded our boats and arrived at the canyon at noon, and hired our outfit, all but a ton, hauled, (Those are the boys that make the money – ten dollars a ton for 3¼-mile haul and just all they can do) which we were going to have put through in the boats, as the pilot said he would line them through if we would put a thousand pounds in each boat so that it would pay him to take time, and we thought it would be best to do that and not take chances on smashing our boat by shooting the rapids, but the “bugger” came around this morning and said he could shoot the rapids all right with it and asked me to go down with him and

help hold it off the rocks, and show him where our goods were, so as to land.

Well, we made the start alright, but only got about two-thirds of the way through when we run the bow smash into the solid rock bank, which set us spinning, and we brought up a little further down on some rock, knocking the back corner out of it, and we had a great hustle to get our goods ashore. The boat sank right down and wet the goods in great shape, but luckily the water was only up to our hips, so we were able by the aid of a line to wade and carry our goods ashore. That happened at 6'clock this morning, and our boat is still there, badly wrecked, and it is now 8 p.m., but we expect to raise it yet this evening or early tomorrow morning. It's most too dangerous a place to work in while the boats are shooting by.

It's better than a circus to sit up on the high banks and watch them come down through the canyon. About every fifth boat is more or less damaged, but I know of only two outfits being lost, as nearly everybody put their boats through light, or nearly so. I wish our other boat was down, as we will surely feel that fate is against us if that gets smashed. A person has just about all he wants to do to stay in the boat coming through. Saw several thrown over-board today. One man caught a large rock and got on top of it, and caught the next boat that came by close enough – kept him there over two hours – and another man that went overboard caught the rear end of his boat, and as it was a long pointed boat he would change from one side to the other, as it would sheer toward a rock, finally he succeeded in swinging himself in. He was a regular acrobat.

The boys are all down on the rocks now watching the boats go through. It's one of the most exciting scenes, I ever witnessed, and the banks are just crowded with people gazing, sometimes breathless, and at other times cheering.

I was in hopes to hear from you before leaving this section of the country. Mail is very slow and uncertain here. The last letter I received was one written by my folks on April 3, and it will probably take longer the farther in we get. My next address will be Dawson City, N. W. T. My, but we have been a long time getting this far, when we told people before leaving that it would take two and a half or three months to make the journey they could hardly believe it and here we have been nearly four months on the road already and I understand there is 5 or 6 feet of ice on Lake Togish yet, but I hardly believe it. At any rate we will know inside of 3 or 4 days as we are going to pull out of here about day after tomorrow if we get our boat fixed up. I am anxious to go up and ride down through the canyon a few more times it was just fun but I guess I will let the job rest as a person cannot afford to take too many chances in this country, for if one should get badly hurt he would have to turn back and that would not be very nice after getting in this far and spending so much time and money.

So far we have been very fortunate and all keep hearty and comparatively well considering the hardships and exposure we have been subject to. Mike and I have not slept inside of a tent for a week now, some times on the boats and other times on top of a brush heap or in between rocks where the moss is good and soft. We have only pitched one tent this last week and two nights not any, but there is no night in this country at present as we only have about an hour or two of darkness, but it will undoubtedly be the reverse this winter.

Everything is hustle and bustle in this country, men seem to be working night and day, but so far we have not hurt ourselves, but am inclined to think we will have to turn over a new leaf or we will never come out with our pockets filled with nuggets.

I wish I had this thing to do over again. I would come in all together different. Two men come in with two good horses and two good oxen, when we did, could have made a mint of money, but now the tramway knocks that out now between Dyea and the summit. I

know men that made from \$30 to \$40 per day with one small ox and sold the ox for \$125. Horse teams were making from \$70 to \$80 per day.

Two men came in to Linderman last January and cut and skidded 500 logs in two months by hand and sold for \$3 each or \$1,500 in two months, of course a person can't always strike these chances. Well, Bert I have no more time to write tonight. H. L. just came in and reports two more boats all smashed up. I wish our other boats were through. I will write some more when I send the other film, which will be in a few days. Remember me to all the boys and tell them I will write as soon as I get time. I have not had a letter from them yet. Best regards to all your folks and same to you.

Yours Sincerely,
J.K.M.

June 2, 1898

Well, Bert as I did not get a chance to mail your letter will add a few more lines. Yesterday was a wild day at the canyon. There must have been at least a dozen boats smashed, but very little goods lost as they were nearly all light, some boats were broken square in two, one half going each way down the canyon. Frank Whitmore tried to shoot his boat through and stove a hole in the side eight feet long and two and a half feet wide. He got thrown into the canyon and swam ashore his partner staid with the boat until it rolled over, and some men threw him a line and pulled him ashore. I had the luck yesterday to lose my Kodak with eight of the best views I have taken. How it got out of my pocket is a mystery to me. We got our boat out and fixed up, so that it is about as good as ever, and if the wind goes down we will leave here tomorrow morning. Best regards to all your folks, and love to yourself.

Yours etc.,
J. K. M.