

CHILKO



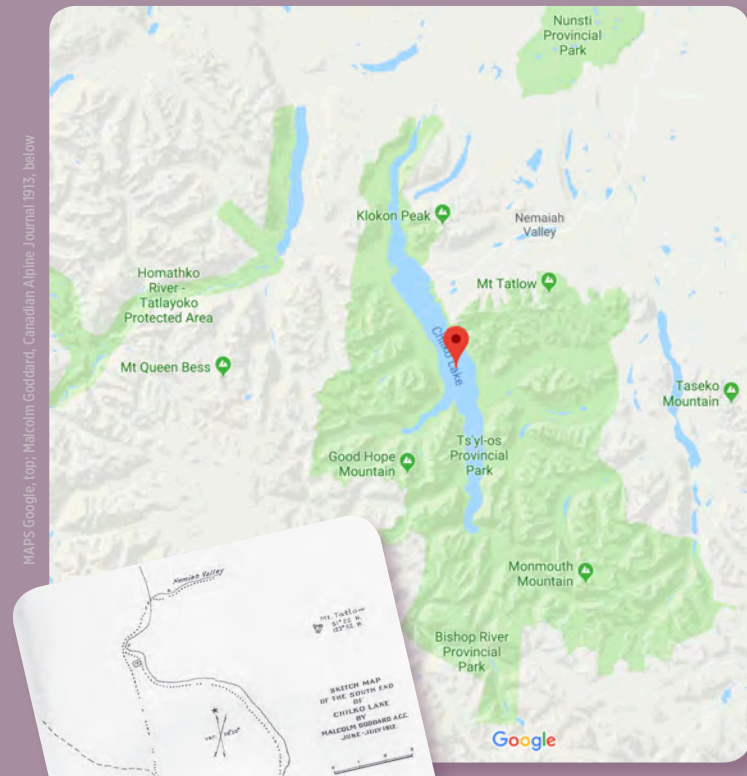
A Short History of a Mountain Lake Told by Voices Past and Present

by Heather Kellerhals-Stewart & Robyn Budd

1 Chilko Lake: the Beginnings

Long before human eyes were watching, there was the tumultuous advancing and retreating of glaciers and the uplifting of mountains that formed Chilko Lake.

The dry statistics: Chilko is a lake approximately 41 miles long, lying roughly south-to-north at an altitude of 3840 feet, just north of the 51st parallel and west of the 124th meridian in BC, close to the Divide between the Interior and the Coast.

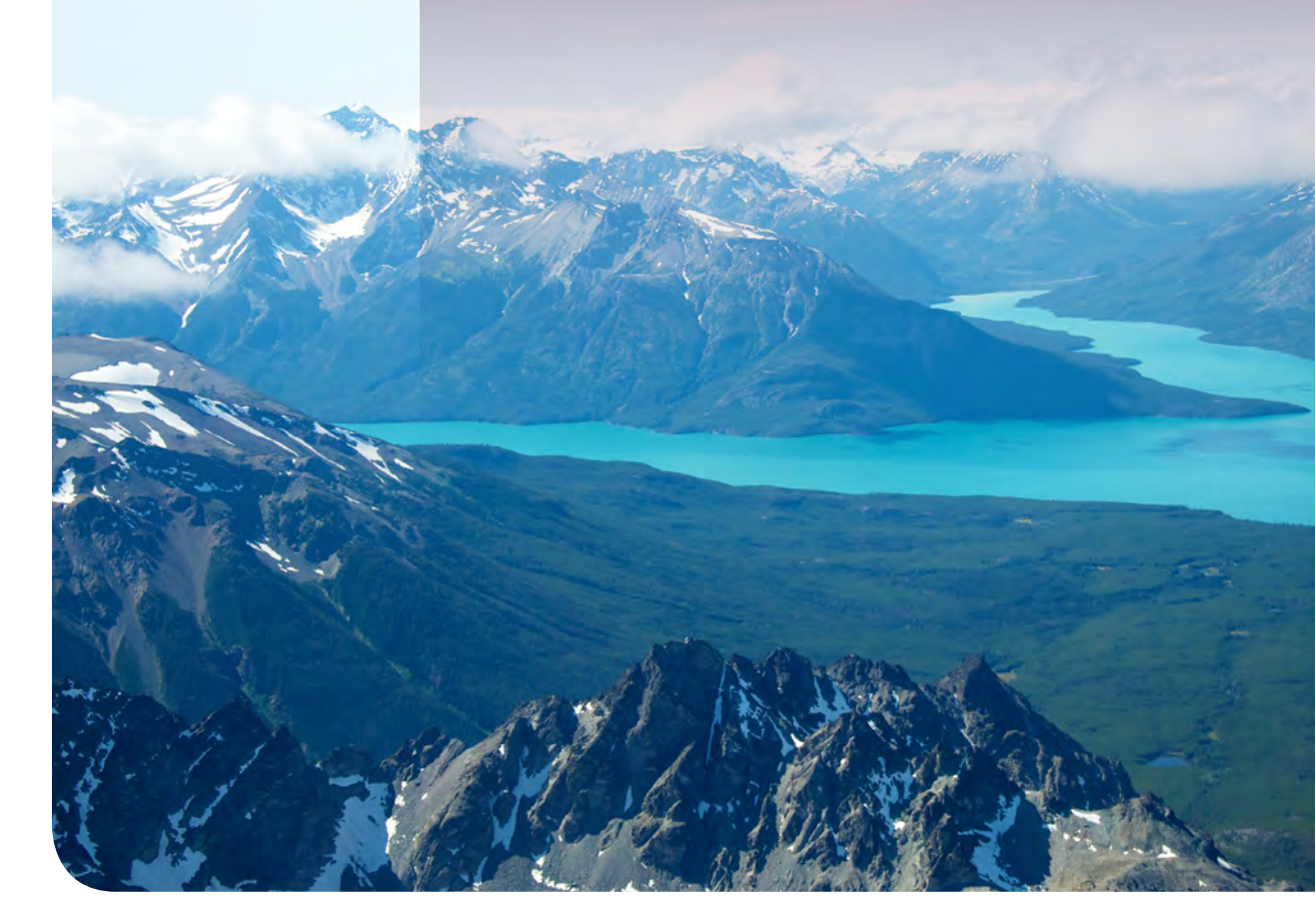


ABOVE Mapmakers Goddard and Google, a century apart

Surrounded by high glaciated peaks at the south end, rolling plateau country to the north, and in a trench so deep its water doesn't freeze over winter, Chilko's spectacular geography and attributes have captivated humans from the very beginning.

WITH THANKS TO the Kellerhals family for their stories, photos, and memories of Chilko Lake
RESEARCH & WRITING Heather Kellerhals-Stewart
DESIGN & EDITING Robyn Budd

BELOW View from Long Valley looking across Chilko Lake to Bateman Point and Franklyn Arm



RIGHT Dugout canoes were made from large cottonwood trees. (Malcolm Goddard noted only four on the lake.) This photo shows a narrow dugout canoe crossing the Taseko River.



Malcolm Goddard describes the Nemiah people's novel fishing method on horseback, in the *Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) Journal of 1913*: "The procuring of the fish by the natives is a simple matter. A basket net-work is set in a creek and a splashing cayuse drives the fish into it, where they are literally scooped out."



BELOW Wild horses of the Chilcotin, taken from the Movie Site Campground in the Nemiah Valley

2 The Chilcotin People's Lake: T̓ilhqox Biny

Hunting, fishing, food gathering and preserving were part of the daily activities of the Nemiah Valley people, the Xení Gwet'in. They made dugout canoes which they used for fishing and even for crossing the lake to access a trail leading to the Coast. This became known as a 'Grease Trail', as the much prized oilcham grease was traded there in exchange for goods brought from the Interior.

A yearly activity in the Nemiah Valley was the gathering of wild potatoes in early July. Whole families would trek on horseback and foot up to the Potato Range – a wide plateau overlooking the lake where wild potatoes grow – for a communal gathering and summer festival.

So-called wild horses were used extensively by the Nemiah people, probably since the mid 1700s. An ongoing study of these horses suggests they have a Spanish and even a Canadian heritage horse background – and, even more surprising, a possible link to the Yakut horses of Russia.

3 Chilko Lake's Elusive Access

Several European nations were actively exploring the Coast through the 1800s, eager to exploit the riches of what they called 'unclaimed' land.



ABOVE An 1862 watercolour by EP Bedwell shows a British ship moored in Bute Inlet

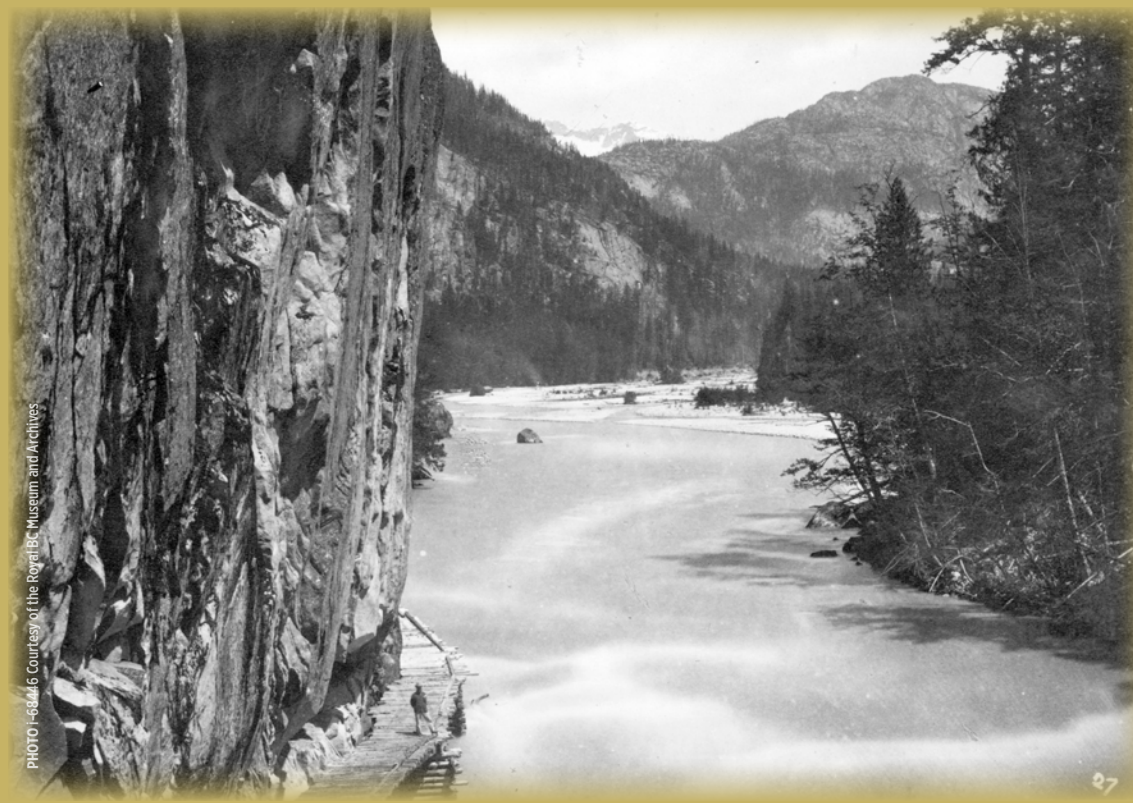
Long coastal inlets like Bute hinted at a viable route to the Interior. But attempts to build a road or railway from Bute to the gold and riches of the Interior all ended in failure. The so-called 'Waddington Road' provoked the Chilcotin War due to the mistreatment of native workers, resulting in a resentment that lingers to the present day.

Travel from the Interior was marginally easier – but still there was the Fraser River to cross until a bridge was put in, and only rough trails until roads could be built.

The most difficult access to Chilko Lake was, and still is, from the south. On July 26, 1893 Stanley Smith and a companion set out on a search for two men who had disappeared 'somewhere' between Howe Sound and Chilko Lake while scouting a possible rail line. After an arduous trip Smith reached the lake – without finding the missing men. Of the trek he says: "One suit will not stand a trip like this... I was wearing goatskin moccasins that I had made in the mountains, and they were worn out." (ACC Journal, 1940)



ABOVE Horses and cars share the Cariboo Road in the early 1900s



RIGHT Waddington's Road through the Homathco River Valley

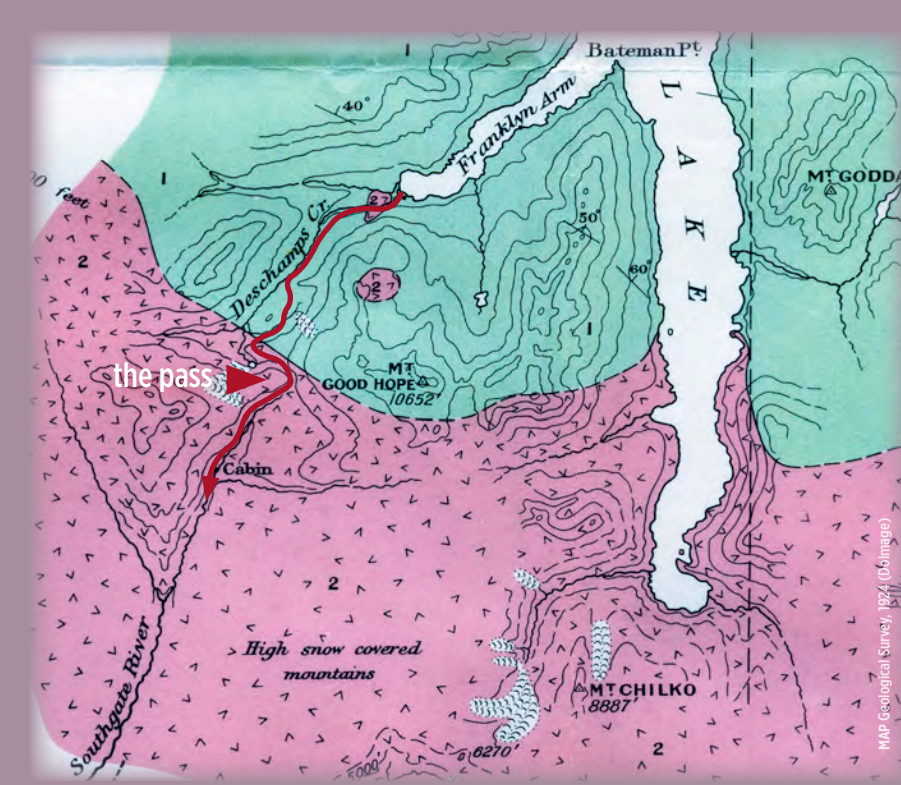
4 From Coast to Interior: Follow the Southgate

"Chilko Lake appeared to be the end point of one partially explored route." This is how William Downie, in a report to the BC Government, describes his August 1861 exploration from the head of Bute Inlet up a trail "the Indians said followed the Southgate River... presumably ending at Chilko Lake."



ABOVE The glacier below Mt Good Hope divides right to Chilko Lake and left to the Southgate River, as documented by ACC member Neal Carter in 1954.

Half a century later, Malcolm Goddard mentions the same trail in an ACC Journal entry: "Indians cross a pass from Chilko Lake and come to Bute Inlet down the Southgate River in three days..." He adds that the route "would not be a pleasure trip for a white man."



RIGHT A geological survey map shows the route from Franklyn Arm, over the pass noted by Goddard, and on to the Southgate River. A century later this trail is barely visible – but if opened up would afford a marvellous trek linking Coast and Interior!

9 1994: The Making of Tsi'l'os Provincial Park

As early as 1970 the BC Government was contemplating the potential value of creating a park around Chilko Lake. In 1990 BC Parks and the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources initiated a study of the Chilko Lake area, which was co-chaired by the Nemiah Band. After almost a year of negotiations between various and often conflicting interests, a Consensus Report was forwarded to the Government.

On January 13, 1994 Tsi'l'os Provincial Park – named after the sacred mountain of the T̓ilhqot'in People that towers over the Nemiah Valley – became a reality.

The Xení Gwet'in continue to play an active role in management of the Park. Chief Roger William was a young man and a fearless and accomplished horseback rider when the negotiations began. He is now known internationally as an equally fearless defender of First Nations rights.



ABOVE Erika and Markus Kellerhals on the Goddard Glacier, which has receded since the photo was taken in 1985.

A lake that had been held back by the glacier broke free in 1994, and the resulting flood or 'glacial burst' roared down Farrow Creek, uprooting trees and virtually destroying the nearby falls.

LEFT Rolf and Markus Kellerhals in the alpine meadows

8 1989: The Nemiah People Assert their Rights

In response to increasing pressure on the Valley, especially from the forest sector, the Nemiah Band in 1989 declared an 'Aboriginal Wilderness Reserve' to protect both the Chilko Lake area and their traditional lifestyle. A sign declaring this was posted on the road leading to the lake....



Let it be known that within the Nemiah Aboriginal Wilderness Reserve...
1. There shall be no commercial logging. Only local cutting of trees for our use...
2. There shall be no mining or mining explorations...
3. There shall be no commercial road building...
4. All terrain vehicles and skidoos shall only be used for emergency purposes...
5. There shall be no flooding or dam construction...
6. This is the spiritual and economic homeland of the Nemiah people...
7. That we are prepared to SHARE our Nemiah Preserve with the following ways:
a) With our permission visitors may come and view our Preserve...
b) We will issue permits, subject to our conservation rules, for hunting and fishing within our Preserve...
c) The respectful use of our Preserve by canoeists, hikers, light campers, and other visitors is encouraged, subject to our system of permits...
8. We will enforce and defend our Aboriginal rights in any way we see fit.

LEFT Annual horseback race down the mountain ridge above the Nemiah Valley. A young Roger William on the far left clinches third place.

UNDERPRINT Excerpt from the 'Declaration of the Nemiah Aboriginal Wilderness Preserve'

7 1960: Chilko Lake, Open for Business

Through the 1960s and 70s road access to Chilko was improved – and the people came. Fishing for rainbow and bull trout in the lake was a major attraction; hunting remained popular. Outdoor pursuits like hiking, kayaking and mountain climbing brought more and more adventurers to the area.

As a result more lodges were built, and even cabins in outlying hunting territories. Inevitably tourism bumped up against longstanding mineral claims and expanding logging interests.

Somewhat ironically it was the BC Hydro Reserve – first in the 1920s and later in 1962 – that put a halt to the development along Chilko Lake's foreshore.

In recent years, wildlife viewing has drawn more tourists than hunting: people come to see and photograph Chilko's abundant populations of grizzlies, black bears, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and moose.

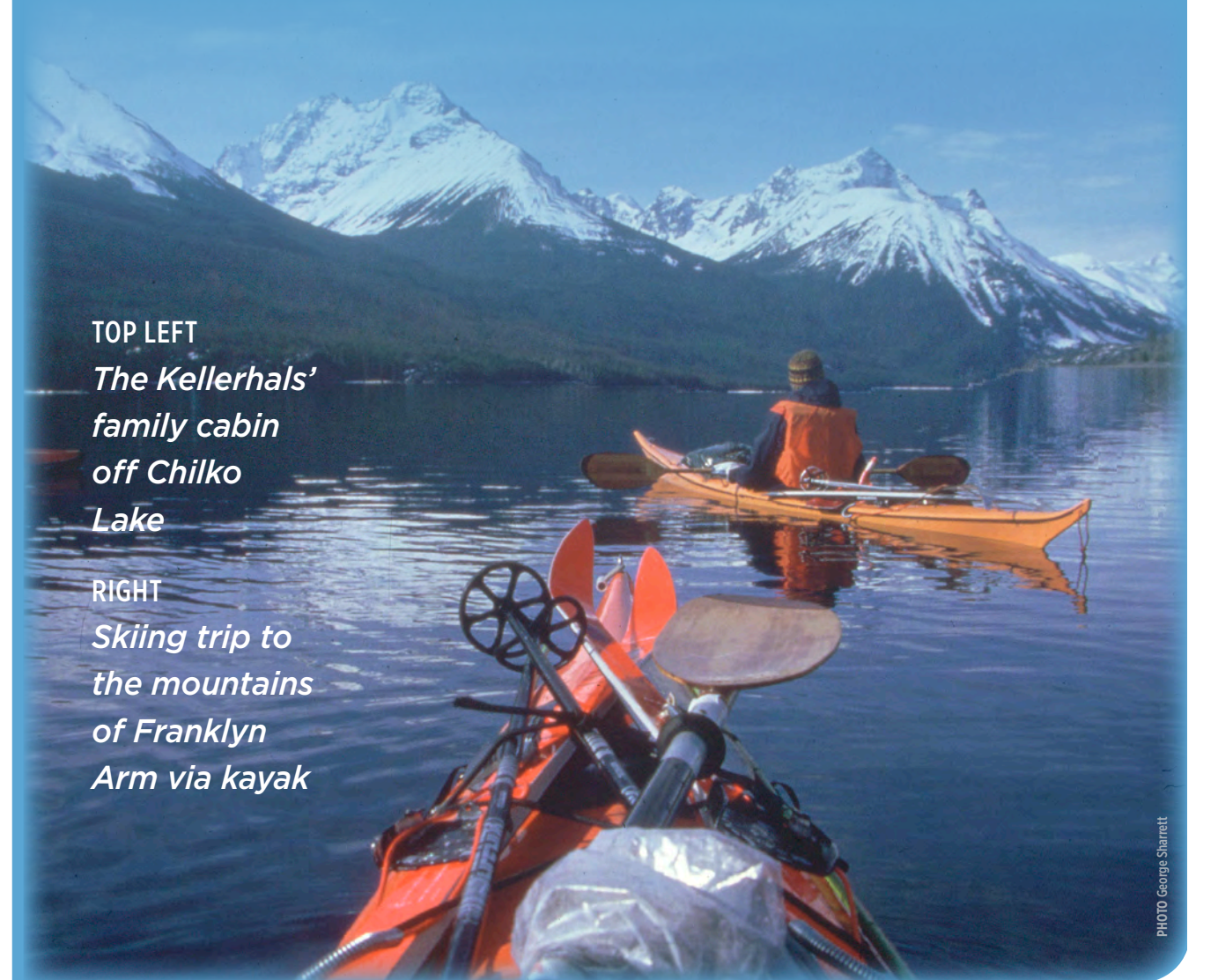


RIGHT Chilko's grizzly bears and Clarke's nutcrackers both favour whitebark pine nuts as a food source; the whitebark's regeneration depends upon nuts buried by the birds or excreted by the bears.



ABOVE Luka and Shanti Kellerhals with a bull trout snagged from the shoreline.

Sockeye salmon also inhabit Chilko Lake. Because of the long distances they travel – more than 650 kms to reach the lake's spawning beaches – they are often referred to as 'superfish.'



TOP LEFT The Kellerhals' family cabin off Chilko Lake

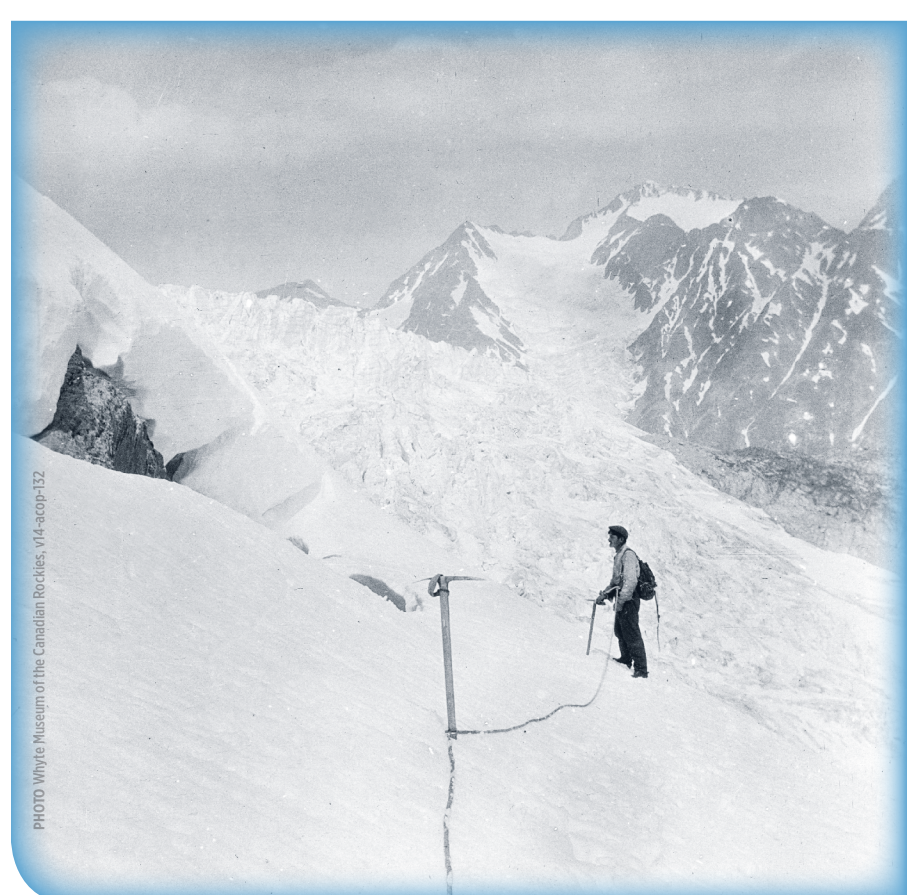
RIGHT Skiing trip to the mountains of Franklyn Arm via kayak

5 The Summer of 1912: The First Chilko Climbing Expedition

While the Rocky Mountains were being actively explored and climbed in the 1800s and early 1900s, the mountains in the Chilko Lake area remained virtually unknown to the newcomers.

In the summer of 1912 Malcolm Goddard and his First Nations companion, Kese, set out to circumnavigate Chilko Lake in a dugout canoe.

On July 2, 1912 they climbed Mt Chilko and recorded the feat by leaving a note in a brass Alpine Club tube on the summit: "July 2, 1912 First ascent of Mt Chilko by Malcolm Goddard, San Francisco, accompanied by Keese, a Nemaia Valley Siwash Indian. Ascent by arete bet, glaciers on East. 8 hours from lake."



ABOVE Kese on the north icefall of Mt Chilko. Goddard used a 1910 map from the BC Bureau of Mines, Victoria, noteworthy for its many blank spaces identified only as "High Mountains, Unexplored."

RIGHT One of Goddard's and Kese's camps on the shores of Chilko Lake

6 Chilko Lake in the 20s: Competing Interests

As the new century progressed, the push on Chilko was coming not from mountaineers but from government surveyors in search of minerals, an overland route to the Interior, and a way to divert Chilko Lake for hydro electricity.

In the early 1920s RP Bishop and Victor Dolmage were scouting the area for minerals – but as Dolmage notes, somewhat prophetically, in his report: "It would be difficult to imagine a more delightful camping ground than the shores of Chilko Lake."

Richard C Farrow's journal, written in 1929 while he was surveying a Chilko Lake diversion scheme, echoes accurately and humourously down the years. Of Chilko's notorious winds he writes: "It was maddening, I was now 7 days behind my schedule."

Farrow had hired a First Nations man to transport horses by raft to Franklyn Arm and down the Southgate River to tidewater. The raft was twice broken in two by high winds and waves.

The water diversion project was never built.



LEFT View of a storm from the relatively sheltered beach at Farrow Creek



MAP Two proposed water diversion schemes by well known surveyor Frank Cyril Swannell