

A Sourdough Looks Back

WHEN the gold bug bites it bites hard. It was biting both hard and often on the West Coast 60 and more years ago when it encountered a youngster named Humphris. Young Humphris never recovered from the meeting. A few weeks ago *The Listener* ran into him at the studios of 3YA, listening to a playback of one of a series of talks he had recorded about the old days on the prospecting fields of Tasmania and the Yukon. The youngster's hair was undeniably on the grey side, and he admitted he could give Sir Winston Churchill a year or two, but: "How do I feel about it now?" he said. "I'd go tomorrow if I had the chance."

"The old diggers' stories of adventure had a strong effect on the minds of youngsters, and good parents, homes, prospects or friends couldn't deter us from driving blindly into the dangers and privations of a gold rush," says Mr. Humphris in the first talk of his series, *Chasing the Pennyweight*, to be heard from 3YA at 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday, March 9. "I grew up to be with it. Before I'd left school I'd panned the bonny dust and combed the beaches of Westland for the fine gold washed up by rough seas."

Greymouth as Mr. Humphris remembers it as a boy—he was born there, in Tainui Street, in 1872—had 6000 to 7000 people: "No, it wasn't a wild mining centre, more of a country town," he assured us. "My father was a builder there; he built the first wooden house in Greymouth. I went to Grey Main School—I think I must have been just about one of the foundation pupils. I was in Grey at the time of the maritime strike, and I remember the flood of 1887. That was a flood! It washed a hole in the road as big as this room, and came up over the counter in a shop in Boundary Street. They put telegraph poles out to keep the ships off the wharf—they might have capsized on to it. And I was there when they built the Cobden Bridge, too."

Young Humphris was 14 or 15 when he first went after gold. He had a pony and used to ride out to Marsden and to Kumara and South Beach. You didn't need much experience, he said. By degrees your little leather bag of gold dust would swell, and with it the desire to become a prospector.

"The Tasmanian Minefields" is the title of the first talk by Mr. Humphris. He was about 18 when he went to Tasmania soon after silver was discovered, and he found his experience on the West Coast had just fitted him for the new country. For one thing, the place was knee-deep in mud. But Tasmania was only one episode in the long prospecting life of young Humphris, and soon he was to be off to Canada, where all roads led to the Yukon.

"I didn't go direct from Tasmania to the Yukon," Mr. Humphris said, when we asked him about his next move. "I had, first, another spell in New Zealand. I went up into the Waihi district intending to prospect, and did a good deal at different places around there, as well as working on the Waihi battery till the Klondyke rush started in 1898." The story of his adventures in the Yukon is told by Mr. Humphris in the other five talks of *Chasing the Pennyweight*.

Skagway, where Mr. Humphris went ashore at the start of his stay in the Yukon, was the scene, right away, of one of his most exciting adventures in the north. His search for the contractor who was to take his outfit over the Chilcut Pass led to an encounter with the notorious Soapy Smith, the gangster boss of Skagway. Mr. Humphris wasn't to discover till much later that it was Soapy he had met; and when, in Soapy's presence, he opened his wallet to show about £30 in English money he found himself looking down the barrels of two Colt 45's. Soapy, who was to meet his match in an encounter with a Canadian surveyor a few months later, didn't know then that young Humphris had £80 strung in a leather bag inside his trouser leg. The further adventures of that £80 provided the climax of the second talk in *Chasing the Pennyweight*.

The story of the journey over the pass and down river to Dawson City makes

exciting listening. Mr. Humphris endured almost incredible hardships. And when he reached Dawson and questioned some of the thousands of miners who crowded Main Street he found that there was no ground left to stake, no work to be had—and that 20,000 men roamed the streets day and night with nothing to do. All who were asked had the same advice to offer: "Get out while you can." But it was five and a half years before Mr. Humphris did.

Chasing the Pennyweight comes to an end where Mr. Humphris left the Yukon. But surely, *The Listener* suggested, there was something to be told after that which would round off the story for those who would be listening to him. Had he, for instance, continued his quest for gold? Or had he got married and settled down?

Mr. Humphris grinned at that: "I was married *before* I went away," he said. "My wife said she knew I'd come back. We had lots of friends between us—in Tasmania, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Cambridge—and while I was in the Yukon she kept on the move between them."

And as for gold seeking, Mr. Humphris has found time between building houses in Christchurch and starting a transport service between that city and Timaru to interest himself in some developments on the Wataroa River and in a mining company at Arrowtown. We gathered from the look in his eye that it hadn't been exactly a passive interest, either. For the last 20 years or so he has lived on the hill above the sea



C. HUMPHRIS
Soapy Smith shook him down

at Clifton, Sumner. "I fix up the garden," he said, "and sometimes my building knowledge is helpful to other people. But I don't do much except stay at home."

As for *Chasing the Pennyweight*—which was edited for broadcasting by Bernard Smyth—Mr. Humphris said it was a very small part of what he had written about his prospecting adventures—enough, in fact, to make a book. "I didn't think it could be done," he said. "I tell you straight, I was always the biggest dunce in the school." On the other hand, he had always been able to write a pretty interesting sort of letter, and it was in the form of a letter that he had first started to tell his story, sitting at the foot of the bed of a sick friend who insisted that he should give it a go.

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training system to Holmer's—a stereotyped form known as interval running—and this method has also been adopted widely in New Zealand.

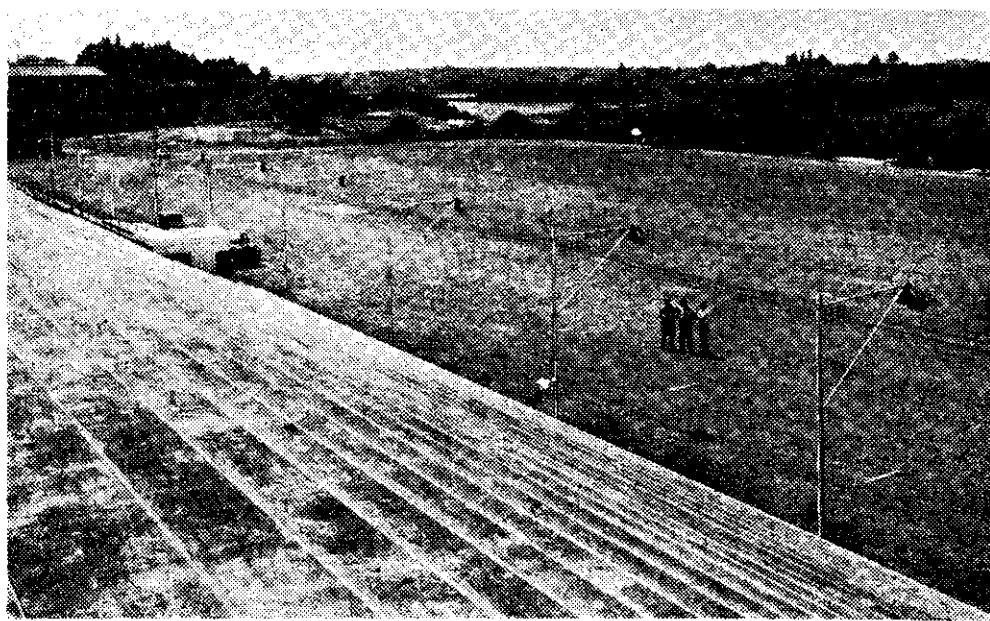
A further contribution to coaching theory has been made by Dr. Herbert Reindell, professor of physiology at the University of Freiberg in Germany. Reindell found that an athlete's training must be such that he can successfully break through what he calls the oxygen-debt barrier. Physiologically the human body is like a submarine. It can work for a time at high pressure on its reserves of oxygen, but that time is short. Only by accustoming the body to running a given distance in a given time can the oxygen barrier be passed and the time achieved.

But pace is not consistent, especially in middle distance and long distance running. Changes of pace make successive demands on the bloodstream, and with each change a fresh oxygen barrier must be passed. When a runner pulls out, labours or even collapses on the track it is not because he is unfit or has a bad physique. It is because he has not trained at the racing pace.

Human performances are steadily improving with these and similar scientific

discoveries. Psychology, too, plays a part. There is no such thing as over-training, Jim Bellwood claims. Staleness is a mental, not a physical attribute. Form is simply the particular stage of his training which an athlete may have attained.

Many New Zealand athletes have adopted the new training methods and have found their performances improving as a result. They have been able to put in more time at training throughout the year without tiring, either physically or mentally, and their performances at the British Empire and Olympic Games have caught and held the imagination of the New Zealand public. The coming national championships will prove a testing ground for more of them.



THE Olympic Stadium at Newmarket where this year's N.Z.A.A.A. championships are to be held