

# Last Journey to Wilderness Paradise



ERIC IRVINE PHOTO

*"The place known as Ben-My-Chree began with a search for gold.  
In the end however, what was discovered was  
a treasure infinitely more precious: the gift of a couple's example to others.  
So remarkable was the gift that it reached out across the world,  
embracing surprising numbers of people, many rich and famous..."*

**CY PORTER, KLONDIKE PARADISE—CULTURE IN THE WILDERNESS**



MR & MRS. O.H. PARTRIDGE. BEN MY CHREE



PHOTOS: ERIC IRVINE, CY PORTER, YUKON ARCHIVES

## THE STORY OF BEN-MY-CREE

Tucked up against towering mountains, Ben-My-Chree was the idyllic home of an English couple, Otto and Kate Partridge. Otto named their "oasis in the wilderness" Ben-My Chree which means "girl of my heart" in the Manx-Gaelic language from the Isle of Man where Otto grew up, before he returned to marry his cousin Kate. They came North, attracted like many others, by the famous Klondike Gold Rush.

During the 1920's, despite its remoteness, Ben-My-Chree was considered a key place to visit among the social elite of the world and part of a must-do world tour. Up to 9000 people visited Ben-My-Chree per season until the 1950's.

Many wealthy people including the Prince of Wales, President Roosevelt, and numerous silent picture movie stars made the long journey. They came to experience the paradox combination of rugged untouched wilderness with true English culture and flourishing formal gardens.

The tour of the magical flower gardens, including an elegant ceremonial English tea party with Kate and Otto Partridge, was an exceptional highlight of these excursions. Kate, dressed in long velvet gown, was playing the organ and Otto told Gold Rush stories to the visitors.

Today the wilderness is slowly reclaiming the area. Several buildings still stand, the wishing well is still there and arctic poppies grow in abundance. Very few people make the challenging journey down the lake to this fabled and world-famous oasis in the wilderness.

## THE FILM

*Last Journey to Wilderness Paradise* documents the journey of Cy Porter, who, at 87 years of age, leaves the comforts of his home on Vancouver Island and journeys North one more time to visit Ben-My-Chree and to share little known parts of the unique culture and history of this retreat in the wilderness.

Despite his age, Cy Porter takes on the lengthy and emotional trip deep into Canadian wilderness. This is very likely his last journey to this extremely remote place at the end of Tagish Lake in the isolated northern corner of British Columbia. His journey offers a chance to experience the story of Ben-My-Chree through the eyes of an insider.

The film unfolds in different times: the story of the founders, the time until Cy Porter bought the property, activities around Ben-My-Chree with the Porter family and the present, with the new owner letting nature take back large parts of the site. Archival materials (photographs, film, written notes) including a detailed diary from Kate Partridge illustrate Ben-My-Chree's history. Cy Porter is opening the window into the past for us.

## THE STORY OF CY PORTER

Cy Porter was working as a young steward on the sternwheeler *Tutshi* when he first fell in love with Ben-My-Cree's beauty and culture in 1938. He promised himself that one day he would own this special place.

In 1970's he suddenly had the opportunity to purchase Ben-My-Chree and came to enjoy this unique piece of wilderness for many years together with his family. The longer Cy Porter lived at Ben-My-Chree, the more attached and caught up he became in its history.

Cy Porter has done extensive research on the founders and is a valuable source of interesting anecdotes, stories and humor. During the finishing touches of his book, *Klondike Paradise-Culture in the Wilderness* he made an emotional discovery at the Yukon Archives. Cy Porter, who had been adopted as a child, found out that he and Kate Partridge were related by birth name.

## AUDIENCE

This inspirational film is of interest to audiences from Canada (in particular British Columbia and Yukon), Britain, Isle of Man and United States of America. Viewers with interest for Canada's North will be surprised to see the combination of British culture with wild rugged wilderness.

**With Broadcaster support, this project is eligible for up to \$35,000 from the Yukon Film Development Fund, and for up to \$500,000 from the Yukon Film Production Fund.**

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