

FUR TRADER

IN THAT SPRING OF 1931 I decided I was not returning to my homestead at Torch River Settlement for the summer for it seemed highly unlikely that I could make any kind of money there even if I landed some seasonal work. With three of my helpers during the preceding winter's commercial fishing, namely Tom McDougall, Bob Fred, and Fred Heinrichs, we struck out northward on the ice for Pelican Narrows, and our final destination of Flin Flon, in Manitoba. We hoped to get work in the big mine or the smelter that had been operating there for a few years before our arrival.

We took our leave of Deschambault Lake on March 28 with some furs that I had traded with the locals for extra groceries from our fishing supplies. We had made the trade while we were building a fishing cabin on Spruce Island for future use. In later years this same cabin would serve as a trading post for the Saskatchewan Government.

Our party reached Pelican Narrows after one day of travel. One of the locals had a bag of furs that he wanted to freight out to Flin Flon with his dog team. We made a deal whereby he would haul our packs and we would supply the groceries for the trip.

Arthur Jan, a free trader at Pelican Narrows, had invited us to stay at his bunkhouse any time we were travelling that way. Unfortunately both he and Mrs. Jan had left for Flin Flon shortly before our arrival. Jan however had arranged with the manager of Revillon Frères Trading Post

to put us up in the company bunkhouse, so we enjoyed a warm comfortable night. In later years, Jan Lake was named in honour of Mr. Jan.

On our way to Flin Flon, we spent the next night at Birch Portage, a tiny Cree village near Birch Rapids on the Sturgeon-weir River. We put up for the night at the home of Andrew Custer, where we spent a pleasant evening and had a good rest. Andrew's son Walter was the only one in the family who could speak English, and he interpreted our conversation with the family into the Cree language and back to English for us. Walter's Cree name was "Strong Man." We saw a photograph of him carrying seven hundred pounds of flour on his way across a portage.

Next evening, after we had arrived in Flin Flon and were looking around for a room, I met Jim Fairburn, an old friend I had not seen since we were game wardens together in 1922 and 1923. Fairburn was an old timer in the North by 1931, having been a trapper and prospector since 1914, and in the Flin Flon area when the first great mineral discovery was made. During the summer months he lived in Prince Albert. We were fortunate to meet him because after our mutual surprise at our meeting he took us to a Greek restaurant, where we found a good place to stay.

After a good wash and general clean-up, we went downstairs to eat. It was 9 P.M., and this was our first meal since noon. Our appetites were understandably robust, but we had only six dollars between us. However, we were running up a bill, so ready cash was not required. The reviving effects of that hearty meal were amazing; as we walked out, we felt fit enough to start on another one hundred mile hike!

Fairburn asked me if I had any furs to sell. On learning that I had pelts, he took me to see Mr. Quincey, a fur buyer and also the proprietor of one of the local pool rooms. I sold the furs for \$50, and we split the proceeds among the four of us.

The next morning was April 1, but it was so cold the makeshift wooden plank sidewalks of Flin Flon were held fast in the ankle-deep mud, which had been frozen solid since the first melt of the spring season.

I made enquiries as to the possibility of employment at the mine, but was informed that the mine was laying off workers as an economy measure. Fairburn and I walked over to ask Quincey about any kind of employment. Fairburn himself was getting ready to go spring trapping with a Dutch man I had met in Big River in the early 1920s.

After I had a long conversation with Quincey, he said he would introduce me to a young man named Liard Oulette. He had a good dog team—four strong dogs, said Quincey. He had no money but was a good pool player

who managed to make enough money from the employed miners so he did not starve to death. Oulette also spoke Cree. He had, according to Quincey, mentioned that he would like to freight for any trader who might be going into the wilderness to trade for furs.

I let Quincey know I would be interested in such a venture. I would go back to Birch Portage where I had stayed overnight and where I knew several native families who were trapping muskrats and beavers.

Soon afterwards, Oulette showed up in the pool room. Quincey made the introductions and we began to talk. When I proposed the freight haul, Oulette said without any hesitation, "I'm game to go."

I explained that it was some forty miles to Birch Portage. Since we had met a swing of horse teams on their last freighting trip of the season with supplies for Pelican Narrows, we would probably meet them coming back, and thus the road would be open.

"I should be able to make it to Birch Portage in half a day," said Oulette. "I'm used to running behind the toboggan."

When I went on to explain that at this season there could be from five to eight inches of water in places under the new snowfall lying on the lake ice, Oulette reconsidered his travelling time. He now estimated it at one full day to Birch Portage.

In the afternoon of April 2, Quincey and I went over to William Hicks' grocery store, where Quincey bought two hundred pounds of groceries and other trading supplies, including silk scarves, handkerchiefs, and beads.

Early in the morning of April 3, Oulette arrived with his four dogs and sleigh. The sleigh was shod with steel runners, appropriate equipment for spring travel. It was 2 P.M. before we got going. In the first mile we upset the load twice, so that we were forced to affix a pole across the sleigh, tying it firmly on both sides. Then we walked knee deep in snow and water, one on each side, to hold the sleigh from tipping over—a most difficult and awkward mode of travel, yet the only way to make any progress.

It took us until 11 P.M. to get to Allan McDonald's trapping cabin on Annabel Lake, only eleven miles from Flin Flon, and we were very happy to see the light in the cabin window as we pulled in. Here we caught up with Jim Fairburn and his partner on their way to Wildnest Lake. They had three dogs and a sleigh and were finding the travelling to be as difficult as we were. In fact, Fairburn and his partner had found the going so difficult they had divided their load and were hauling half loads in relays.

On the trail next morning, as we travelled on the portage between Annabel and Johnson Lakes, we met the swing of teams of horses and their drivers returning empty from Pelican Narrows. As we were having dinner with the freighters, they warned us of rough going to Birch Portage. The return of cold weather had laid a sheet of thin ice above the slush upon the winter ice. This had caused the horses to break through to the solid lake ice at each step, and the poor beasts were bleeding from cuts on their legs just above the hooves. This thin ice had all been broken down along the trail, and our outfit would be trailing along in water and slush.

We had four miles to travel on Johnson Lake. Through slush and broken ice, it was one of the hardest trips I ever made in the North. We were pulling on the sleigh to help the dogs along.

When the time came for a rest stop, I would tease Oulette about the slow travelling and asked if he still thought we could make it to Birch Portage from Flin Flon in half a day. He replied by asking how far we still had to go.

When we arrived at Granite Lake, it was only four and one-half miles to Birch Portage. After we crossed to the west side, Oulette told me that he had had enough and wanted to make camp. We were resting there for a short time when from a distance we could hear someone chopping wood. Then we laboured on, although we were both dog tired and the dogs themselves all but exhausted. Arriving at the Sturgeon-weir River, we found the going worse than on the lakes, for there was now more water than ever on the ice. I was wading in knee-deep slush while labouring with the sleigh.

Finally two Indians came along: a couple of youths who took our packs and sleeping bags to Andrew Custer's place. Then they returned and helped with the sleigh.

The people at Custer's were very happy to see us and, after an all-around handshaking, they bade us to be seated for they realized we were dead tired. They also recognized me as one of the party who had stopped there recently on our way to Flin Flon and were delighted at the supplies we had brought in.

Our stay at Birch Portage lasted for two days. During this time, we traded our entire load, so that at the final settlement with Quincey we made about \$40 for our hard work. The weather had remained very cold, which would likely extend the trapping season. I asked Oulette if he was interested in continuing to haul in supplies and trading until the end of May.

He replied, "Olaf, right now I am only interested in my girl friend in Flin Flon."

So that was that. I would have to look elsewhere for assistance. When we had left Flin Flon, Quincey had told us that if we traded the first load and got back in time to take in another with a horse team, he would finance the venture, providing that there were indications of a good muskrat catch.

I now asked the Indians if they would trade me their furs if I returned with another load of supplies. They readily agreed. I then sent Oulette back to Flin Flon in the company of Johnny Custer, who would freight in the supplies with the horses. They made it to Flin Flon in one day, for they had no load and out on the lakes the road bed had frozen solid.

Walter Custer took me to the cabin of a man who had moved in with relatives. Now I was better set up to do business, in a private cabin furnished with a stove, bunk, bench and small table.

On the third day after Oulette and Walter Custer had left, I began to look for Walter and the horse team, but no one came. On the fourth day I looked in vain again. However, on the fifth day, my supplies arrived with, much to my surprise, my former partner Fred Heinrichs and Oulette as the teamsters. They had made it from Flin Flon to Birch Portage in one and one half days with a large load, assisted by solid ice on the lakes.

Heinrichs gave me some good news. Our partner Tom McDougall had landed a job in The Pas helping Oulette's father with a draying business. Bob Fred had been hired to work under Bill Cox, a boxer and the hall manager at the Community Hall in Flin Flon, where they held dances and various sporting events.

Oulette and Heinrichs left again next morning with a bale of muskrat pelts I had traded. Heinrichs then set out for his home in Nipawin, since I had sent Quincey a note to see that Heinrichs was given enough money to get there. I did not see Oulette again until the late 1930s, when I was on the train from Sherritt Gordon Mines to The Pas. Oulette did indeed marry his girlfriend and spent many years working the northern railways as a brakeman. He certainly proved his prowess to me and to the world at large, for he was an excellent dog musher and for several years consistently won the dog derby held at The Pas each winter.

At Birch Portage I ran out of trading goods on May 1, and Roderick Custer agreed to take me to Flin Flon in his canoe. The canoe route led down the Sturgeon-weir River to Beaver Lake, (officially named Amisk Lake on the map, as *amisk* is Cree for beaver). We arrived at Beaver Lake

on the same day that we had set out, and crossed the still-frozen lake on the ice. That night we stayed with another native, Dougall McKenzie, who told us the ice was unsafe but the lake would be open in about a week.

We returned to Birch Portage, arriving there about midnight after a hard day at the paddles. At about 11 A.M. the next day, Roderick Custer and I struck out for Flin Flon on foot, following the winter road on land and skirting the lakes en route. We were packing six hundred muskrat pelts along with some other furs plus enough food to last us for two days. We walked until dark that first day and made camp on the portage between Johnson Lake and Annabel Lake. We were now twenty-five miles from Flin Flon.

I noticed that the north side of Annabel Lake was fairly level jack pine country and very good for walking, so that after a good sleep we proceeded on this course, travelling where part of the Hanson Lake Road runs today, but in that spring of 1931 there was of course no road at all. Custer and I were trying to make it to Flin Flon by the best possible land route so we were avoiding creeks and muskegs, which at that time of the year were full of water.

We made it to Annabel Creek at about 4 P.M. By the present day highway, it is eight miles from this point to Creighton, but at that particular time I estimate our trail ran for twenty miles on the devious route we were forced to take around various lakes and bays.

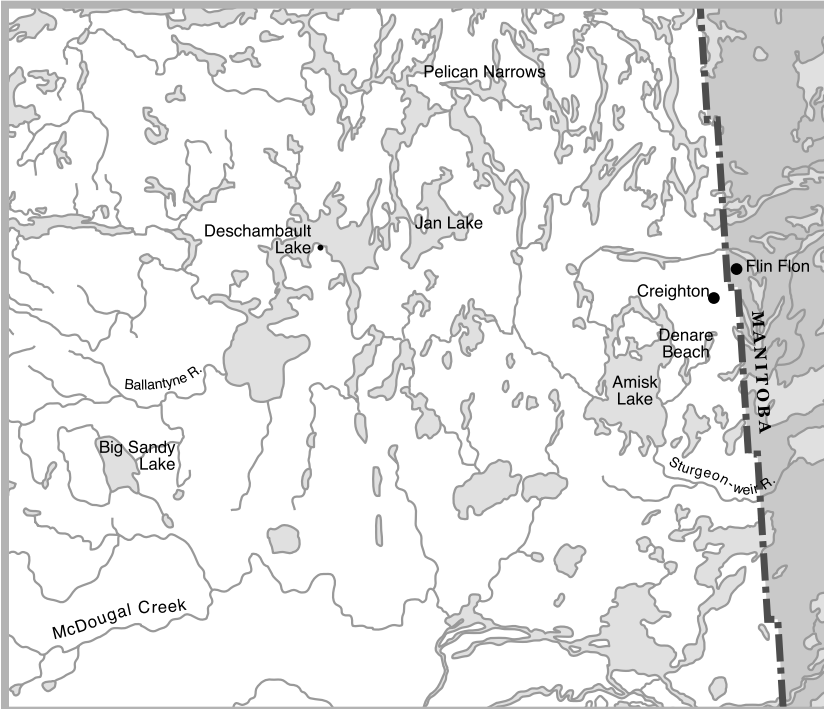
Every time we climbed to the top of a hill, Roderick would exclaim, "I see the big stove pipe!"

This was the Indian name for the gigantic smelter stack, which is visible for miles from any high hill in the entire region. Sometimes we had to walk away from the stack to get around open water. With three hundred muskrat pelts on my back, it seemed to me that we would never get to Flin Flon.

When the sun had gone down, we began to hear noises of people working around the mine site. Then we arrived at Flin Flon Lake and walked across the dam in the dark. There were several railroad tracks leading away from the area, but fortunately we took the one which led us into town.

We walked into Quincey's place at about 11 P.M. They were still up and quite surprised to see us come in at that hour. Quincey was also pleased with the quality and quantity of the pelts we had brought. When he learned that I had another five hundred and sixty pelts cached at Birch Portage, he asked how I was planning to bring them in and take out more supplies.

"I want to rent a canoe," I told him.



During the 1930s Hanson trapped and traded fur in the Jan Lake area as far north as Pelican Narrows and as far east as Flin Flon.

“I suggest you buy one at Keddie Hardware,” he said. “There’s a good one for sale there.”

By this time, Mrs. Quincey had prepared a very good midnight dinner, after which Custer left to stay with friends in town, promising to rejoin me in the morning.

I was at Keddie’s when they opened in the morning, and I bought the canoe, a sixteen-foot Chestnut, well built, with cedar planking and ribs, and an outer covering of canvas with a slick hard finish. I paid \$115 after haggling until I got two paddles included in the original price.

Next, I bought five hundred pounds of supplies and dry goods at Bill Hughes’ grocery store and had the goods packed and ready to leave for Beaver Lake next morning. I had hired a teamster to haul our outfit with his team and wagon from Flin Flon to Phantom Lake, and we would canoe and pack over the portages for the rest of the way.

The water route at this end was new to me, but Roderick Custer was well acquainted with it. He informed me that there were fourteen portages from Phantom Lake to Beaver Lake. He was a good strong packer and carried from two hundred and fifty to three hundred pounds on the portages, using a tumpline. I used a packsack and carried the canoe while Roderick was taking a turn at packing freight.

This was my first introduction to canoe travel as it had been in the north for centuries. I found it to be a pleasure, and I did not mind the packing on the portages. On the first portage I packed the canoe across, a distance of about a mile. Then I portaged our food supplies while Roderick took over the trading goods in two trips. Until now I had travelled overland and across lakes on the winter ice. When I was a game guardian, I had travelled by canoe, but I had always hired a native to take me where I was going.

The next thirteen portages were short ones, as we followed Meridian Creek down to Beaver Lake. We crossed Mystic Lake, two small lakes, then Table Lake, and reached Beaver Lake after dark.

Next morning we pulled the canoe over drift ice on the lake, one man on each side of the canoe to balance it on its keel so that the canvas would not be damaged. The ice had blocked our passage to the open lake. After we reached open water, we traversed ten miles of open lake to the south shore at a place called Beaver City. What had seemed a populous place turned out to be nothing more than a few dilapidated cabins occupied by a lone native trapper named Angus McDonald. After a short rest, we paddled on to Dougall McKenzie’s place, where we slept. The next day we paddled and poled upriver to Birch Portage.

Roderick had meanwhile introduced me to the tumpline—I had had no previous experience with this device. After my first try I had to give it up, for use of the line puts great strain on the neck muscles, in my case causing severe soreness. A good tumpline is made of strong, good quality leather. The centre of the strap is about three inches wide and rests across the forehead while the two joining straps are narrower and are usually attached to a wooden grub box, one strap on each side. On this box the packer can load as much freight as he wishes to carry. The weight lies against his back while both hands are free, but the packer frequently holds onto the straps at a height above the shoulders as he walks with the load. Indians who regularly pack in this manner load up to seven hundred pounds and develop strong oversized neck muscles. The novice must train himself gradually, increasing his load as his neck strengthens.

In the spring of 1931, the month of May remained unusually cold. The trapping season closed officially on May 15, but trapping continued unofficially that year for fur such as muskrat, and beaver pelt remained prime as long as the water was still cold. That year trappers plied their lines until June 1.

I planned to also leave Birch Portage by that date as my trading venture would be wound up for the season. All the native families except a very few were back from their trapping grounds. Those who had returned were busy planting small vegetable gardens. On the last day of May, the last family arrived, with thirty raw, unstretched muskrat pelts and nine beaver pelts.

At that time beaver trapping was tightly controlled because the animals were scarce, so only a few beaver were allotted per family. They could be sold legally only to Dominion Fur Sales in Winnipeg and only by the Government of Saskatchewan. This family could sell only six beaver pelts legally. I already had four illegal pelts, so why not take three more? A police constable at Pelican Narrows was administering the beaver program in his area and keeping a watchful eye out, but it would be the same fine if I were caught with a sheep instead of a lamb.

The next day I left Birch Portage. Three packers carried my load across the portage of the same name. They loaded my canoe, eyed it briefly, and declared I could run the rapids all the way to Beaver Lake on my return trip to Flin Flon.

The first of the rapids was called Leaf Rapids and was by far the roughest of the trip, and the first that I had ever run alone. As I entered the first chute, the canoe's keel struck a huge boulder, causing the canoe to rock violently. I ran on down the rapid after shipping about two pails of

water. Below the rapid, I dragged the canoe to shore, where I unloaded everything and dumped out the water, at the same time considering myself very lucky for a greenhorn.

The next portage was at Scoop Rapids, so named because a traveller could scoop out fish with a hand net at its downstream end. Fish could not swim upstream at this spot because there is a waterfall below, in which one could see dozens of fish milling about, trying to ascend the falls. The Indians always kept a net with a long pole handle there, so that most times in the spring and again in the fall a traveller could scoop out whitefish, pickerel, and jackfish. Only in the months of July and August might one have difficulty in finding fish at this spot.

I have enjoyed several meals of fish there as I travelled the river in the years that followed. There was even a very nice camping place below the rapid where you could enjoy a scenic view while eating your fish. I always made it a point to stop there any time I travelled on that section of the Sturgeon-weir River.

I did not take the risk of running Snake Rapids, the next obstacle. This rapid is about a mile long. Roderick Custer had cautioned me that I should let the canoe down on a rope while I walked on the shore. I was a long time descending that rapid, but when I had passed through my furs were dry and safe. Finally I packed everything across Spruce Portage, the last on the river. Then I stopped to make my supper. Now I paddled down to Dougall McKenzie's cabin at the mouth of the Sturgeon-weir River on Beaver Lake, arriving there at about 8 P.M.

Since it was a nice calm evening, I began to paddle straight for Beaver City and Angus McDonald's trapping cabin one mile north of the Sturgeon-weir outlet. After I had gone six or seven miles across the lake, a breeze began to blow from the south-east so that I was now paddling against the wind. It was getting dusk, but I could still see Big Island lying just off the point of land near my destination. The head wind strengthened and the sky began to cloud over. The point of land was drawing closer, but the waves became larger as the wind velocity increased. I paddled on until I got in the lee of the point, where the waves subsided somewhat.

I was certain that I could now paddle safely to my destination. As I rounded the point for the two-mile paddle to Angus McDonald's cabin, the waves were running high against me. I kept close to shore, but the wind grew stronger. My progress grew very slow indeed, little more than a crawl. The wind, erratic for the past short while, now suddenly calmed.

I plied my paddle with increased vigour because the sky had completely clouded over. It was very dark.

Suddenly I could see McDonald's dock dead ahead. All his dogs began to bark and howl, and a light came on in the cabin. He called off the dogs while I beached the canoe and tied it fast. I walked up to the cabin, identified myself, and asked if I could stay there for the night. He came out and helped me carry my fur bales to the cabin, and we placed my equipment in a shed near the dock.

It was 1 A.M. I had been paddling and portaging since 8 A.M. and had covered forty-seven miles. McDonald remembered me from the time I had stopped there earlier and now hastened to make a pot of tea to go with the food that I had with me. While we were eating, the wind changed to the northwest, and by the time we turned in, the lake was a mass of boiling white caps as the fury of the wind bore down on this ten-mile stretch of open water. I was grateful for a safe dry bunk.

When we arose next morning, I told McDonald that I had thirty raw muskrat pelts to stretch and dry. He brought me a good supply of stretchers to do the job. After a late breakfast, I opened my bales of fur and found that three of the beaver pelts had gotten slightly wet when I had run down Leaf Rapids the day before. I spread these behind the stove to dry.

Outside there was a cold wind blowing down the lake; white caps were everywhere and there was rain. It was not a day for canoe travel on Beaver Lake. No matter, I could pass the time stretching and drying my muskrat skins.

I had completed about ten pelts before we had lunch. Back at my work afterwards, I had almost finished when we heard the dogs begin to bark furiously. When we looked out, we saw two figures out in the heavy rain, pulling a canoe up on the beach. Needless to say, we were very surprised at this development, for it was most unlikely to see canoe travellers out in such miserable weather. From where we stood our visitors appeared to be a man and a woman, which caused McDonald to observe, "Must be some trapper and his wife."

"I had better hide the beaver pelts," I said. I had three lying behind the stove and four more hanging on the wall when McDonald went out to talk to the visitors. As he left, he assured me that only trappers stopped at his place, and these probably had more beaver pelts to sell.

When McDonald had left, I decided to hide the beaver pelts anyway. The only place that looked good for this purpose was under his bunk.

I lifted the mattress and tucked them underneath. Then I returned to my work at the pelts. Just then, the outside door opened. As I looked up, I saw a man in the uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police!

“Hello,” I recall saying to the newcomer.

I think he answered the same way. He told me he was almost frozen from battling the wind, waves, rain, and cold. Large snowflakes mixed with driving rain had pelted him and his assistant as they paddled for this landing when their outboard motor had broken down.

I was busy thinking that I was in about as awkward a position with the law as I had ever been before. Here I was, caught red-handed with thirty fresh muskrat pelts, obviously trapped during the closed season. While McDonald helped the Mountie’s assistant stow away their outfit in the shed by the dock, the Mountie himself looked at the bags of muskrat pelts and the fresh skins hanging from the rafters above his head.

He asked if I was the trader from Birch Portage. I replied that I was that person, and we introduced ourselves.

“It looks bad for me to have fresh skins in my possession at this time of year,” I began lamely.

“Well,” answered the Mountie slowly. “Are these pelts all fresh, or did some just get wet on your travels and you are re-drying them?”

“Some got wet at Leaf Rapids, but some are fresh,” I confessed.

The Mountie was warming himself by the stove.

“Let us say that you are only re-drying the lot you have here,” he said.

“Thank you,” was all I could say, as I felt very much relieved.

Then McDonald re-entered the cabin with Arthur Morin, Special Constable and Interpreter from Pelican Narrows.

Now that everything had settled down to normal, I began to worry about the seven hidden beaver pelts. The Mountie was telling us that they had broken the drive shaft in their outboard motor when the propeller had struck a rock in the Sturgeon-weir River. When the wind had changed to the northwest, they had hoisted a sail on their nineteen-foot freighter canoe and finally reached this landing while carrying five bales of beaver pelts destined for Dominion Fur Sales in Winnipeg.

McDonald had a six-horse-power outboard motor. The Mountie then made a deal with him to haul the beaver pelts to Flin Flon.

After a while, Angus McDonald went out to feed his dogs for their evening meal. I went with him so that I could tell him where I had hidden the beaver pelts, but he asked me for that information before I had a

chance. When I told him, he decided that they would be all right there until morning.

“Are you going to take the beaver pelts with you to Flin Flon?” he asked. It had been arranged that McDonald would tow my canoe and the Mountie’s—in short we were going to be travelling, camping, and portaging together.

“If you have a good hiding place for the beaver pelts, we will cache them there until I can come back and pick them up,” I suggested.

“I have a good place,” said McDonald. “My stove is sitting on the bottom of a big wooden packing box; the top is open and resting on the floor. We’ll hide them under the box.”

Early next morning, the wind was down as we were all busy loading the canoes. McDonald had advised me privately to leave my sleeping bag in the cabin until the canoes were loaded. That task completed, McDonald returned to lock the door while I trailed along to fetch my sleeping bag. As soon as we were inside, McDonald grabbed a big butcher knife and jabbed it under the edge of the box, prying up box and stove until he got his fingers under the edge. I, meanwhile, had dug the pelts out from under the mattress and tucked them neatly under the box while McDonald let it down to the floor. It was about as neat a cache as I have ever seen.

As we returned to the dock, the Mountie and Arthur Morin had already launched their canoe. McDonald pushed out his craft and tied the police canoe to the stern of his own. I tied up to the stern of the police canoe.

The weather was clear and sunny, and there was only a light breeze blowing. In forty-five minutes, we had crossed Beaver Lake and entered the mouth of Meridian Creek. However, we still had a big day ahead of us, for we faced the fourteen portages to Phantom Lake. On the portages, I carried one packsack of fur with another packsack piled on top, this one containing my clothes and two bearskins, which I had taken in trade, in a roll.

On the first portage we caught up with Dougall McKenzie and his son, who were taking in their furs to trade in Flin Flon. We were now a travelling party of six men and four canoes. When we had crossed five portages, we called a stop for dinner. We finished off the bacon and eggs the Mountie had brought from Pelican Narrows plus pork and beans and bannock from my supplies. By 7:30 P.M., we had reached the long portage into Phantom Lake. Here we cooked our supper, which was a repetition of dinner—minus the eggs.

The Mountie wanted to get to Flin Flon that night, which meant we had to get back to work at once, packing over the portage. It was black night before everything had been moved across. The policeman asked to use one of my packsacks. I handed it over, whereupon he put it on his back, placed one bag of beaver pelts across it, then another bag lengthwise across the load so he could steady it by holding on with one hand as he walked. He turned out to be an excellent packer, and I was surprised to see the way he was working. On this final portage, there was a short stretch of muskeg, where we walked on poles to avoid sinking to our knees in the bog. The Mountie was walking ahead of me, and he slipped off into the water as he began to cross on the poles. Then he began to take the bags one by one over this treacherous place. When I caught up to him, I helped him move some of his load across the mire.

As I was helping him to re-load, placing the bag of beaver skins over my packsack once more strapped to his back, I could hear the crackling of my dry bearskins, the same sound that comes from dry beaver pelts when you squeeze them together. I began to think about this, and I contemplated the possibility that he might open my packsack to investigate the suspicious sound that was not unlike that of beaver pelts.

I found out the next day that the Mountie never did look into that packsack. McDonald told me that the policeman had voiced his suspicions and asked if I had beaver pelts in that particular packsack. McDonald had assured him that I had two bearskins only, and the man of the law let it go at that. I believe the man was concerned that, if he had unwittingly carried illicit furs across the portage on my behalf and the story became known in Flin Flon, he would have to take the merciless ribbing from some of the inhabitants as well as from his fellow police officers.

Our Mountie had proved himself to be a very fine gentleman with sound judgement, and I found this to be the case with most police officers I met in the North. They were doing good work, helping the natives and whites alike. Their role in crime prevention would be difficult to record in full. They were highly respected for the struggles and hardships they had to face in those days and always helped me when I needed it.

We beached our canoes at the north end of Phantom Lake at about 11 P.M. I unloaded, draped my tarpaulin over the fur packs, and tipped the canoe over my cargo in case it should rain.

The Mountie made ready to hike the remaining few miles to Flin Flon. He instructed Morin to stay right there and camp, while keeping an eye on the beaver pelts. As he began to pack some of his effects into a suit-

case and made ready to leave, I offered to accompany him into town and carry some of his bags. He accepted with delight and offered to pay me, which I flatly refused.

We were in Flin Flon by midnight. The Greek café was still open. The Mountie took a room, where we went to wash up. Then he treated me to a steak and apple pie. He wanted me to take a room, but I was concerned about my fur packs at Phantom Lake.

When I returned there at about 1:30 A.M., everyone was asleep out in the open. I unrolled my sleeping bag on a level place and turned in. It was a beautiful clear night and too cold for mosquitoes. I was looking up at the stars and listening to the noise of the big mine when I dropped off to sleep.

When I awoke, the sun was up and Dougall McKenzie and his son were making tea over the campfire. Angus McDonald was complaining about the poor sleep he had had that night—he could not get comfortable. We all had a good laugh when we saw that he had been sleeping on some broken rocks. Morin and I were the last to rise, and we did so without any complaints.

In about an hour, a teamster drove up with his horses and wagon. The Mountie had sent him out to pick up his fur bales and our freight. As I would soon be coming back this way to retrieve my beaver pelts at McDonald's, I hoisted my canoe on my shoulders planning to cache it in a safe place away from the main trail. As I was leaving the main landing area, hurrying to avoid delaying our party, I came upon some loose boards scattered about. I did not see the rusty four-inch spike protruding from one of the boards. It plunged through the sole of my ankle rubber, moccasin, and sock, completely through my foot and up through the top of my rubber boot.

I dropped the canoe. I had to put my other foot on the board to pull my foot off the spike. Then I carried the canoe to its hiding-place.

I walked only about halfway to town when I could no longer follow the team and wagon. It had been better to walk that far, for the terrain there was very rocky. My foot felt as though I was walking on a football. When we finally arrived in Flin Flon, I hobbled painfully right over to Quincey's and said, "Get me to a doctor fast."

By this time my foot had swelled to the ankle. I could no longer force it into my rubber, so I was only wearing a sock.

The doctor said it was a bad wound. He tried unsuccessfully to drain some blood from it. Then he bandaged and taped up my foot. In those times, antibiotics had not yet come to Flin Flon. I managed to hop along

to the café, carrying one rubber in my hand. I had supper and soon after crawled into my bed.

I did not sleep at all that night, however, for there was steady throbbing pain. I had to loosen the bandages for my foot was still swelling. When I examined my foot in the night, it had indeed swollen, until it looked like a football with five toes sticking out of one end.

In the morning I tried to go downstairs for breakfast, but I found that I could not put any weight on that foot at all; the pain was just too great. I did get to the washroom and managed to get back into bed.

There was another guest in the adjoining room, and he saw me hopping to the washroom. He came in and asked, "Did you get hurt while working at the mine?"

"No," I answered, "yesterday I stepped on a four inch spike, and now I am suffering for it."

After I told him the facts, he asked, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Go downstairs and get me a cup of coffee and a sandwich and charge it to my account, if you will be so kind."

He did me this favour and left. I never saw him again. When I settled my bill a few days later, I found that the coffee and sandwich were not included; apparently the stranger had paid for them. The amount, thirty cents, looked good in 1931.

The doctor had asked me to return if the swelling in my foot had not subsided somewhat by morning. Now I was thinking of doing just that. Then Jim Fairburn walked into the room, having just learned from Quincey that I had put a spike through my foot. I was certainly glad to see him again. We visited for a while, talking about my trading experiences and his trapping activities since we had last met.

Then he asked me to let him have a look at my throbbing foot.

"Looks real bad," he muttered. "Too bad I wasn't around when this happened, for then I would have had you walking around today. Don't put the bandage back on. I'm leaving right now and will be back in a few minutes to doctor this foot."

He returned shortly with a small bottle of turpentine and some clean cloths. First, he tipped the bottle over the hole where the spike had entered my foot. Next, he tipped the mouth of the bottle over the hole where the spike had protruded. He went through this performance twice. Then he padded the wound on top and bottom of the foot with turpentine-soaked cloths and bandaged everything snug with the original bandage.

“You’ll be able to walk down the steps for supper by 6 P.M.,” he said.

The turpentine took hold with a terrific burning pain, which lasted for about fifteen minutes. My foot seemed to be on fire. Quickly the pain eased off, and the foot felt much better. Fairburn brought up my dinner, so that I did not have to use the stairs. He left me then, promising to be back by 6 P.M.

Fairburn did return after he had spent the afternoon playing several games of pool. A good player, he had cashed in several times while playing pea pool, whereupon the game had broken up when the other players had all hung up their cues. Fairburn had outclassed his opponents.

Much to my amazement, I walked down the stairs that evening. The swelling in my foot had begun to subside.

“Tomorrow you’ll be wearing both your rubbers,” said Fairburn.

It was hard to believe, but I did just that. That next day, my foot began to bleed and I changed the dressing three times. I could however put my full weight on that foot with little pain. The healing process was almost complete after a few more days.

Fairburn accompanied me on my return trip to Angus McDonald’s place to pick up my hidden beaver pelts. Fairburn had also supplied two mosquito bars so we could sleep at night. The weather had at last warmed up, and the mosquitoes were hatching in their millions. We walked through clouds of them on every portage and suffered from their stings, since repellents as we know them now did not exist at that time. At night, safe under our mosquito bars, we listened to their blood-song.

Fairburn was a prospector at heart, and we spent one afternoon looking over some rock formations. He said that Beaver Lake had good indications for gold and copper. Though we spent a very interesting half day there, we found neither gold nor copper on that trip.

On the way back to Flin Flon, Fairburn packed our entire load of one hundred and twenty-five pounds, using a tumpline. I had no trouble packing the canoe by favouring my healing foot.

When I had brought in the last of the muskrats and my accounts were tallied, I discovered that I was nine dollars in debt. Then I found a furlegger who bought my beaver pelts, so I finished my trading venture twenty-one dollars ahead after I had paid for my canoe and all expenses.

I was not exactly prospering. Considering all my hard work and the hardships and risk involved, this venture had been a failure financially. As for experience and knowledge gained, my account had received a great boost.

