

AT THE RAINBOW'S END

THE NEXT DAY OUR COURSE was set for Pelican Narrows. Our first camp was at Scoop Rapids once again, so we could catch fish for the dogs and for our frying pan. Two days were spent there prospecting on the east side of the river. It was the first day of October.

One day Jim Fairburn developed a sore jaw. When it became somewhat swollen and quite painful I suggested that we had better return to Flin Flon for medical attention. Just before we were going to leave we met three Indians, one of whom spoke English. When they saw that Fairburn's neck was swollen this Indian said that Fairburn must have come down with the mumps for many young boys were down with the disease at Pelican Narrows. When I asked Fairburn if he had ever had the mumps when he was young, he replied, "Not that I can recall, Olaf."

By this time we were all certain that he had the mumps. We then continued upstream and camped at Birch Portage that night. On the following day we were at Mirond Lake Portage and only about fifteen miles from Pelican Narrows. It was so windy that we had to camp there for the night. The next day it was still blowing hard from the north-west and getting quite cold. We skirted the west shore to have as much shelter as possible for our two canoes and one motor.

Fairburn's condition was steadily growing worse. We were desperate now to reach Pelican Narrows for his chest was beginning to swell. This

was Friday. Every Saturday was 'plane day' at Pelican Narrows so that we could put Fairburn on the plane for Flin Flon. As it happened the plane was a day early this time for when we were only six miles from Pelican Narrows the plane came in right over us and put down behind the hills to the northward, stayed there for about half an hour and then took off in the direction of Flin Flon.

The wind velocity was increasing again as we threaded the canoes through the narrows. We could see the village at last in the distance and above the rolling whitecaps. By following close to the north shore we were able to make a landing in a small bay. The wind was blowing so hard that we could not reach the dock which made it necessary to carry our loads about three times as far to the bunkhouse as it would have been from the dock.

We had been lucky to get to Pelican Narrows that evening for the wind was increasing by the hour. It felt good to get into the bunkhouse and warm up. By now we were certain that Fairburn was not suffering from mumps, but something much more deadly was dragging him down.

He was a very sick man. I went out and asked the fur company manager when he could expect the next plane.

"Next Thursday at the earliest but likely on Friday," he said.

We were now in a very serious situation. There was no two-way radio here and the plane was not due for another week. It was too stormy to take our patient by canoe to Flin Flon where the nearest doctor was to be found.

The first thing that could be done was to apply hot poultices. Vessy and I kept up a continuous vigil, changing the poultices often and regularly. The swelling was beginning to discolour and I began fearing the worst—blood poisoning. That night was the last time he was able to swallow solid food. The first night we changed poultices every two hours, by the next night it was every hour and by the following day the swelling had risen to above his ears.

Fairburn then asked me to lance the swelling in the area of one side of his neck where the trouble had begun. I went over and asked the trading post manager what he thought about the idea of me making an incision with a razor.

He thought a moment, then said very seriously, "Don't do it. He may lose too much blood and die. Then you are apt to be charged with manslaughter or even murder. Go to the mission and ask the priest for some morphine tablets."

The priest gave me three tablets. That night Fairburn slept for the first time since we had arrived.

Vessy and I continued to change the poultices around the clock.

At noon on Monday Fairburn asked for more morphine and we gave him the second one. He slept for a time but that night we administered the third tablet. This was accomplished after a great deal of difficulty as our patient was barely able to swallow the beef broth we had been feeding him. On Tuesday he begged me to give him more morphine.

I went back to see the priest.

"It is not safe to use too much morphine," he said, but he put two more tablets into my hand, one for Tuesday and another for Wednesday. We were hoping for the plane to show up on Thursday.

We still had hopes that the swelling might open up and drain and therefore continued the poultice applications. The wind blew strongly every day until Wednesday when it eased off and then became calm. We could have left by canoe that day but poor Jim Fairburn was in no condition to travel for he was near death. It was hopeless.

By Thursday morning his head and neck were grotesquely swollen and I did not think that he could live out the day.

The plane arrived about 10:30 A.M. on Thursday. No time was lost in unloading it and making a bed in the aircraft to accommodate the patient. That was our last parting. Jim Fairburn died in the Flin Flon Hospital on the following Wednesday.

Jim Fairburn could possibly have been saved had the two-way radio installation there not been removed in 1930 as an economy measure. I asked the post manager why this had been done.

"It was run by the government. They said that it was too expensive to maintain, what with paying a salary to the operator," was his answer.

In the 1930s it seemed that no government agency was interested in saving lives of wilderness dwellers. Not only my partner, but others I knew, were not able to get out in time. Because of the lack of communication facilities, they too lost their lives. I never got over the fact that the only two-way radio had been taken away from the Pelican Narrows community after it had been installed. I always believed in progress. Any time there are a few hundred people in one place in the wilderness and there is no doctor it seems to me that the only direct link with the outside world should be the last thing to go. In later years the two-way radio came into general use where any kind of a settlement was established and proved to be a godsend to natives and whites alike.

Vessy and I sadly left Pelican Narrows for our Jan Lake camp. We had bought another dog at the trading post to give us a team of three.

Our catch in the 1935–36 trapping season was average for fox, coyote, and lynx, but our mink pelts numbered twenty-six. In March Vessy and I trekked to Flin Flon. Vessy, it seems, had been lonely without his old partner so now he went working for a man who was doing diamond drilling. He was not coming back to Jan Lake and had most of his effects with him because was hoping to get a job at the mine. Later I learned that he did not get hired on but went to England then to South Africa, where he worked in a gold mine.

The old partnership gone forever, I went back to Jan Lake. We had all parted the best of friends. As a final closing to our years of association I sold most of my traps, as well as Vessy and Fairburn's, to the Hudson's Bay Company at Pelican Narrows.

Even Revillon Frères, our supplier of long standing, had been sold to the Hudson's Bay, who had replaced the familiar sign on the old store.

I had freighted all my effects from Jan Lake to Birch Portage by dog team, leaving only the stove and some dishes in the cabin. I did not expect to return here for the purpose of trapping. I made one trip on foot from Birch Portage to Flin Flon, gathering some ore samples on the way, and had them assayed to find they were nothing but worthless rock.

In the spring of 1936 after the lakes had opened up I left by canoe for Beaver Lake. Here I found Oliver Walker, the prospector that I had met at Hanson Lake in the previous summer. He was on his way to Deschambault Lake with Angus McKenzie as his native guide. Walter asked if I would like to join him in this prospecting venture.

"I would be glad to go with you," was my reply.

In early June our party of three set out for Deschambault Lake. By now I had become well known to anyone living along the Sturgeon-weir River and any time we met someone there was always a stop to visit. We did some prospecting along the upper section of the river, then at Mirond Lake and we arrived at Deschambault Lake in due course. We made the trip to Jan Lake, where we stayed in my camp for two days. Then, at a portage between Pelican Lake and Deschambault Lake, we spent a further two days, prospecting all the while, but found nothing of interest to anyone.

We had set out for Deschambault Lake Settlement but became wind bound, which made it necessary for us to put in at an island east of the settlement. To pass the time we went prospecting. We had walked only a

short distance when we found an old trench marked by two moss-covered claim posts. We returned to the canoe for a drill and the two jack-hammers then drilled two holes in the well-mineralized vein. Two dynamite charges were set off whereupon Walker announced, "I have seen a lot of iron ore bodies but I have never seen one with such a bright silver colour."

Oliver Walker had a Prospector's Handbook but the more we studied this volume, the less we seemed to know about minerals.

It certainly did look like silver. Right away we decided to stay and went to work with enthusiasm, drilling and blasting frequently. After every blast we saw bright silver-coloured ore. This ore could be cut with a knife but after about one day the silver sheen took on a bronzy appearance. Then we believed we had annabergite nickel ore.

After trenching for seven days a new form of mineralization turned up. This time we believed it was pitchblende (according to the Prospector's Handbook). Our imaginations told us that we were millionaires for sure because up to that time the only pitchblende of any consequence in the North had been found at Great Bear Lake.

The blasting could be heard from the village and soon we had daily visits from the Indians. They told us they were all going to Pelican Narrows for Treaty Day, an annual event when the Government of Canada handed out a pittance to each person under the terms of their treaty.

Our grocery supply being depleted, we accompanied the Indians to Pelican Narrows for the annual Treaty Day celebrations. Our tent was set up about a mile from the settlement where we celebrated for two days and attended all the dances. Angus McKenzie from our party was one of the fiddlers. Everyone joined in the dancing, old and young. We all had fun and were happy to be part of the celebration.

After Treaty Day we resumed prospecting and staking at Deschambault Lake, but found nothing of interest. We grew anxious to have our samples assayed, certain that our fortunes had been made, and made a fast trip to Flin Flon in three days' time. The next day Walker took all the samples over to the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company office. When he got back to the hotel, I took one look at Walker and knew at once that we had drawn a blank once more.

The first words he said were, "We do not have pitchblende and the other samples will be assayed tomorrow by 4 P.M."

Next day when Walker returned from the assay office he handed me the assay sheet. All we had was iron sulphide (fool's gold) with only a trace of copper, silver and gold—and more experience.

No time was wasted on any of these claims but I made one more trip to Deschambault Lake with Walker and Angus McKenzie. I did not stay long with them after that but left for Flin Flon. Before I departed I lent Walker my big game rifle, a much-used .280 calibre Ross.

At Flin Flon I went to work for Henning on a trenching job at one of his claims with a man named Joe Zeek. One day Henning came to the site with groceries for us.

“Olaf,” he said, “When I was in Flin Flon I saw Angus McKenzie with his face all bandaged up.”

We were camped at Phantom Lake and not far from Flin Flon. I hurried to town to see what had happened to Angus. When I saw him I was greatly shocked at his appearance. I asked what had happened.

“A few days after you left I decided to clean your rifle and try it out on a target. As the shot went off the whole bolt blew out backwards and cut my cheek to the bone.”

The doctors had set his cheek bone and patched up his face but he carried a horrible scar for the rest of his life. I have often wondered how I could have been so lucky as to miss having this happen to me, who had used that same rifle for many years.

I worked for Henney until November. After the ice became thick enough to haul freight, Sudbury Drilling Company began to drill on Henney-Mahoney mining property. I obtained work firing a steam boiler on this project. The boiler was used to heat water for the drill—a necessary procedure in winter drilling. That job lasted until April of 1936.

I moved to Beaver Lake where I had left my canoe and the one that Vessy had given me when he went away. With these two canoes I spent a month guiding sports fishermen to the good fishing spots. One Sunday I had a Mr. and Mrs. Johnson as clients. They were anxious to go to a good fishing ground for a ten to twelve day holiday.

“I know the exact place to go—Jan Lake,” I told them. “I have a good cabin there and everything to make a great vacation.”

A week later we were on our way. It was July so no fish were in Scoop Rapids to be scooped out, but we made our first overnight camp there anyway. On Mirond Lake on our second day out we enjoyed the scenery of summer in the North. On the third day we tied up at Pelican Narrows for a short visit and beached at the Jan Lake camp that evening just ahead of a heavy thunder storm with lots of rain. All the next day a high wind blew but it became calm that evening and we took the canoe out, started to fish and caught several jackfish and pickerel—enough to last

us for two days. I believe that the Johnsons were among the first if not the very first sports fishermen ever to come to Jan Lake.

The last time I had trapped at Tulabi Lake I had left my sixteen-foot canoe (the first canoe I had ever bought rather than making myself) and a tent there. On a fine day I asked Mr. and Mrs. Johnson to take me to Tulabi Lake so I could portage my canoe and tent back to Jan Lake, and then pick me up at about 6 P.M. The Johnsons could then use this smaller canoe to travel among the islands, rocks, and shoals where they would experience the best kind of sport fishing.

As they left me out of the canoe at Tulabi Portage, I walked the three miles to the first small lake, followed its shore for a further three miles, then across a one-mile portage to Tulabi Lake to a spot where my canoe and tent had been cached more than one year previously. When I reached the canoe I found that a bear had ripped all the canvas off one side and part of the other. The canoe was otherwise intact except for a small piece of planking which had fallen off. The tent had been ripped also.

I carried everything back across the one-mile portage to the small lake. By removing all the tent ropes and tying the tent canvas tightly around the belly of the canoe I was able to paddle my way along shore in the canoe. Each time the canoe became half full of water I dragged it to shore and dumped it for I had no receptacle to use for bailing.

I did not reach the three-mile stage of this portage until 6 P.M. and I ate my lunch when I was half way across. When finally I laid down my burden on Jan Lake's shore it was 7:30 P.M. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were waiting for me on shore with a mosquito smoke going.

To transport my canoe we placed it across the big freighter. Thus we reached the camp safely.

We freighted this canoe again on our return trip to Beaver Lake, the place of our departure. Later I re-canvassed my small canoe and sold it to the Johnsons.

Next I went to work for a man in Flin Flon who had me blast out a hole to build his new home upon. Basements in Flin Flon must be blasted rather than dug because the place is built on solid rock.

After that I met three carpenters who had been laid off at the mine. They were interested in cutting firewood and asked me if I knew of a likely location for such a venture.

"I know just the place you are looking for," I told them.

When I showed them a fire-killed jack pine stand where there were at least five hundred cords of wood, the result was a partnership of four



men including myself. Near Raymond Lake I joined in the actual cutting with axe and saw; the first time I had cut cordwood for sale since I was sixteen years old in Minnesota.

We was hauled the wood to Flin Flon on the Beaver Lake Road by truck and sold it for \$1.25 a cord. Somehow I managed to average two cords a day and we stayed at this work for most of the winter.

One day we ran out of coffee and I went to the Beaver Lake Store. Here I met Eddy Darbyshire who ran a commercial fishing operation on Beaver Lake but was anxious to go to Reindeer Lake to work for Turnbull Airways. In his absence he wanted me to operate his local fishing establishment. Fishing was more in my line than cutting cordwood and I had somehow gotten over my vow never to fish for the other fellow again. The fishing lasted for seven weeks and I earned \$260. Darbyshire sent word for me to put up ice for summer fishing. I earned extra money by hiring a man and renting a horse for hauling the ice and the sawdust to insulate it against thawing.

Beaver Lake was becoming civilized as more and more people were spending their holidays there. I cut and hauled ice for the Beaver Lake Hotel and also cut and skidded logs to be used in the building of log cabins.

All this time I was living at Darbyshire's. One night as I was cooking my supper there was a knock on the door and I called to my visitor to come in. I was very surprised to see Oliver Walker, the prospector, walk in the door. He told me that he had been trapping all winter, and had made a grubstake, as well as a deal with some miners to go prospecting. The miners would supply Walker with groceries and a canoe on equal shares should he find a mine—the usual agreement at that time.

I had had my fill of prospecting the summer before and I told Walker so, but I did arrange for one of the local native men to go with him.

A few days later, when Darbyshire returned from Reindeer Lake, he asked me to go into partnership with him for the summer fishing season. At this time there was a growing interest in raising mink because the pelts were bringing good prices. I thought his offer was a good one and accepted it.

After summer fishing we bought ten female and two male mink and began to build pens for them.

In the winter of 1937–38 I did the fishing while Darbyshire tended to

Olaf Hanson and his bride, Renee, on
their wedding day, July, 1940.

the mink. After the fishing season we cut cordwood and sold it in town. Everyone heated with wood in those days.

In the spring of 1938 I was employed on fire patrol for the Forestry Department during the summer months. To keep my fishing job as an ace-in-the-hole, I hired a fisherman to take my place, but I made no profit on that deal for fish prices were once again very low.

During the winter of 1938–39, Darbyshire and I were fishing and cutting cordwood once again. By this time we had over forty mink and we sold a few, keeping thirty of the best animals for breeding stock. In our spare time we built more mink pens. That spring I returned to the Forestry Department to fight forest fires.

There was a continuing steady development taking place along the eastern shore of Beaver Lake. Resort cabins were going up and more people were coming there to spend their summer vacations swimming, boating, and fishing.

There I first met Miss Renee Mayrand. She had originally come from Saskatoon but was employed by the General Hospital in Flin Flon. In that summer of 1939 she was vacationing at Denare Beach for a month. As we got to know each other I found out that she loved the northland and she told me that she would like to live in this country. We planned to be married in the following summer.

Renee went back to Saskatoon for the winter while I went back to winter fishing, cutting cordwood, and increasing the size of the mink ranch.

On June 15, 1940, Renee and I were married. I went back to work for the Forestry Department. That summer Darbyshire decided to start a sawmill and go into the lumber business. He asked me to sell the mink and be his third partner but I declined his offer.

At the beginning of the Second World War, fur prices tumbled. I turned everything over to Norman's Mink Ranch on half shares and in the winter of 1940–41 continued to fish and cut cordwood—a sure way to get some cash in my pocket.

In 1941 I was back with the Forestry Department. That summer Renee and I lived in a Forestry Department cabin until the fire season ended.

In the fall of that year we went to Birch Portage to trade with the natives for their furs to a man named Shorty Russick on a percentage of the profit. This was not a lucky undertaking for me. In the beginning I traded for quite a large quantity of furs, but as I had a competitor trading there, my business fell off because of the small number of trading families in the region. My competitor and I were friends and neighbours, but



Renee and Olaf on the North
Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon,
Boxing Day, 1942.

enemies as traders. My wife thoroughly enjoyed our antics as one tried to out-do the other in fur trading. In fact, she considered living in isolation to be a wonderful experience.

After the news that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour we somehow lost our interest in the race to get the most fur. Later that winter we received the disappointing news that the price of furs had dropped by fifty per cent of what we had paid. I realized that we must take a loss on this venture and the best of the fur season was over. When I saw Russick he confirmed that there would be no profit this season.

I decided to call all the natives together at Birch Portage. Since fur prices were too low and uncertain for trading, I asked them all to move closer to Flin Flon and cut cordwood for sale. Russick agreed that this would help us all. We moved to Johnson Lake, about twenty-two miles from Flin Flon, where I repaired an old cabin as a place for us to live while I continued trading cordwood.

The Indians worked well and cut some three hundred and fifty cords. In this way we were able to collect some of the credit extended and the people were able to make a living to see them through the winter, but there was still no profit on the entire trading operation.

My wife and I made our home here for two months. I was disappointed in the failure of the trading but Renee said it had been a great experience and that we should try trading again next year.

The natives did ask us to come back to Birch Portage and trade next winter but I knew that there was always a certain risk involved. There were outstanding accounts in this business that had a way of becoming uncollectible, and what with the instability of fur prices, I decided not to come back to trade.

Instead I returned to commercial fishing. In the winters of 1942 and again in 1943 I worked at Darbyshire's sawmill.

In the spring of 1943 I bought a house and leased a place to grow a garden at Beaver Lake. Here on the four-acre lease I grew a fine garden. In the two years that we lived there we grew and sold strawberries and also raised one hundred chickens each year. To try to help things along I did some commercial fishing but again this did not pay, with the result that I looked once more to the northern horizon.

In the fall of 1945 I went into partnership with Frank Ethier to operate a fishing camp at Reindeer Lake. At the end of August Renee and I left Beaver Lake for Flin Flon where we rented a suite. A month later I was on

my way to Reindeer Lake while Renee stayed in Flin Flon. Ethier moved to another camp leaving me in charge of the first.

We were in for another bad year financially. The weather was contrary from the beginning. A few days after Reindeer Lake first froze over, two feet of snow fell so that it insulated the thin ice against further freezing. By this time long-distance freighting was being done with "cat trains" on Reindeer Lake. That winter three crawler-type tractors ("cats") went through the ice. Two drivers were lost and their bodies never recovered.

I caught a lot of fish but only half the catch got to market before the return of warm weather. Even that quantity arrived too late, for by that time the market had slipped downward. The other half of the catch was caught on the road by thawing weather in March and had to be dumped. The first half paid only the wages of the fishermen I had hired.

I went trapping that spring and made more than \$500 trapping muskrats.

In November 1945 my daughter Marylin was born. I had sold my house at Beaver Lake by this time. My partner Frank Ether had stayed at Reindeer Lake to do some summer fishing to make enough money for winter supplies. I left on August 15 for Reindeer Lake where I built a new camp on Sandy Island. Today this island is the site of a landing strip for wheeled aircraft.

The winter of 1946–47 saw one of the lowest fish catches ever on Reindeer Lake. Most fishermen ended the season with a very small tonnage and only a few made any money.

Next I went to Lynn Lake to stake claims for Lew Parres. It was the time of the Lynn Lake staking rush following a new nickel-copper discovery by Sherritt Gordon Mines. After three weeks of staking I was hired by the Saskatchewan Government to locate a better route for the winter freight road southward of Reindeer Lake. The road in use at that time had two steep hills and a very poor river crossing where thin ice caused continued problems. I completed this assignment at about the end of March.

After that I resumed my work for Lew Parres staking claims near Flin Flon to be much closer to my family. At this time I worked with Roy Leslie of Wekusko, Manitoba.

On May 2, 1947 Leslie and I left by air for Lynn Lake where we prospected all summer for Parres, the work lasting until October. Then I was home in Flin Flon until mid-December when the ice was safe enough for

freighting and we left for Lynn Lake. I worked as a helper on a diamond drilling outfit owned by Parres and MacMillan, a job that lasted well on into April 1948, when I returned to Flin Flon with Louie Mazo, a helper on our outfit.

Mazo had talked to me that winter and asked me to go prospecting with him in the Beaver Lake country. He told me that he had been searching the area since 1924 and in his opinion there was yet a chance of finding a rich mineral deposit. I, as usual, was ready to try anything, besides I wanted to be working close to my home and family.

We were looking for gold. By aircraft we were landed with one month's supply of groceries in an area that, said Mazo, had looked mighty interesting to him. During our stay there I made two trips to Flin Flon, once on the ice of Beaver Lake and once to bring a canoe closer to our camp. I took in samples for assay on both trips, but there was nothing to warrant staking.

Soon after I had brought in the canoe I was ready to give up and go to Flin Flon to look for employment. At the last moment I changed my mind and began to work in a very rusty outcropping, a place we had walked across almost every day as we followed a game trail over it.

When we blasted the first shot we knew that we had nickel and copper. Then we were trenching for three days, staked a few claims, and left for Flin Flon. The assay confirmed that we had mining ore!

On our return we staked more claims. As is usual in such a case, news of our find got around quickly and in a few weeks the country for miles around had all been staked.

Mazo and I optioned our claims to International Nickel for a \$1000 down payment so that for once we got paid for our work. Then we went to work for the company, cutting lines for water.

Following this I went prospecting at Big Island on Beaver Lake where at first I found a copper showing. There were some old trenches which also showed copper and I found more as I searched about and improved the property. These claims were optioned two different times by two different companies. But mine was the experience of many for no drilling was done on them—the only work was the trenching I blasted to hold the claims.

Early in December of 1948 I went to work for Mid-West Drilling Company and with Mazo drilled on our original copper-nickel claims north-west of Beaver Lake. The final assays of our great find showed that it would never

become a mine because the mineral content was too low. Again our hopes were shattered just as a dynamite charge shatters solid rock.

I spent some time then at line cutting but on May 1, 1949 I began work with Saskatchewan Mining and Exploration, a government agency, locating all old trenching in the Beaver Lake and Wildnest Lake regions to the eastern border of Saskatchewan.

That summer I rented a cabin at Denare Beach on Beaver Lake so that my wife and daughter could spend the summer at the resort. I remember Renee telling me how much she enjoyed living at the place where we had first met and to be able to go swimming every day.

One day in mid-July when I was away at work there occurred an incident that brought my world crashing down about me. On this day my wife and two friends went down to the beach. Renee went in for a swim and while talking to her friends from the water she suddenly sank from their sight. These ladies were non-swimmers who rushed for help at once. There were very few people about that day so that nearly twenty-five minutes elapsed before two men located her and brought her ashore. A doctor who was holidaying at the beach was hastily summoned, and did everything possible to save her, but it was too late. Subsequent examination showed that there was no water in her lungs. The cause of her sinking was uncertain, but the medical opinion was that Renee had suffered a heart attack.

