

THE HANSON LAKE ROAD

BACK AT FLIN FLON I went diamond drilling for Mid-West as usual until Christmas time. Then I went prospecting until the spring breakup of 1955. The balance of the year was completed with alternate stints at prospecting and drilling.

In the winter of 1955–56 I was once more employed as a diamond driller with Mid-West but that year they sent me to one of their operations in northern Manitoba. Here I met Berry Richards, the mining engineer and geologist in charge of drilling. We became well acquainted and had many talks about the North.

One evening Richards asked me if I was familiar with the country to the west and north of Flin Flon. We both noted the lack of roads in this area and the difficulties this posed for mining, commercial fishing, lumbering, trapping, and particularly the tourist industry. At that time all roads coming into the North terminated at a dead end.

“As a tourist,” I began, “I would not be interested in going back over the same road over country I saw when I came in. Rather, I would want to keep going and return by another road.”

Then we got out our maps of northern Saskatchewan—the new detailed aerial photography maps. I took a pencil and in only a few minutes I had marked a line through the part of the country I had travelled while trapping, hunting, fishing, and prospecting and then we discussed a road that



Construction on Hanson Lake Road,
circa 1958.

would link Prince Albert with Flin Flon. Richards took a long quiet look at my pencilled line with a view that it might possibly become that link.

Going back a few years before I drew this likely route, my employer Lew Parres I had asked me to draw a map of the best location for a road to pass near the north end of Hanson Lake. At that time not enough mineralization had been found in the region to warrant a road but Parres had high hopes that one day some of his claims there would become operating mines. I also believed that the area had mining possibilities but when I sketched an access road from Flin Flon to Hanson Lake's shore I did not expect ever to see such a road, but I thought about it from time to time. My road would continue on to link up with the highway to Prince Albert. My dream included the wonderful tourist attraction such a road could become, the sports fishing and big game hunting possibilities it would afford, along with the subdued yet haunting natural beauty of the land that would bring them back time after time. Above all, the benefits to local residents and industry could be invaluable.

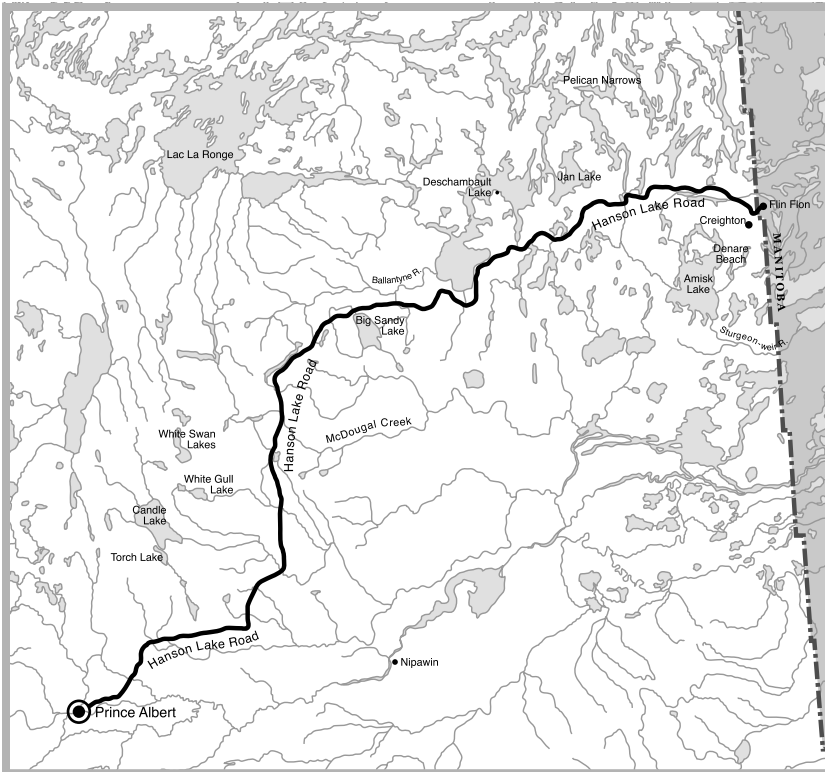
One day I read in the *Flin Flon Miner* that I had mapped such a road. In fact, my friend Barry Richards who had submitted the map had included an article to go with it. I was surprised and pleased to read his good report on the location of the road and his reasoning for such a project, which coincided with my own.

I stayed with drilling and prospecting for a time. In this period I talked to several people about the road but they were all of the opinion that I would never see its construction through that area of wilderness as published in the paper. I got to the stage where I very seldom mentioned the road to anybody.

In the summer of 1957 I met Margaret who later became my second wife. I was extremely fortunate to meet her for she is a wonderful companion and makes home what it should be. She never takes the time to complain and has been a real mother to my daughter Marylin. There is a fine family relationship between us; Margaret, Marylin, Margaret's three daughters and myself.

In the winter of 1957–1958 I was on the job freighting supplies to diamond drilling camps at various locations. I used the new vehicle that had proven invaluable for moving freight over frozen swamps, lake ice, and portages; the Bombardier.

To Lew Parres must go the credit of discovering the first commercial mine at Hanson Lake—a rich deposit of zinc, lead, and silver—which was verified at about this time.



**The Hanson Lake Road followed
Olaf Hanson's travels in northern
Saskatchewan over the years.**

During the summer of 1958 I was back in the wilderness prospecting and trenching on some of my claims. The latter part of that year I was in the employ of Archie Talbot, a diamond drilling contractor who was then working at Beaver Lake.

When I returned home to Flin Flon I heard the astonishing news that the Construction Branch of the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources was building a road from Smeaton, Saskatchewan to Flin Flon, Manitoba! Later I learned that they were starting at Creighton, Saskatchewan. Actually, they were working from both ends.

The fall of 1958 was very wet from seemingly endless rain. One day the road construction foreman and an engineer from Natural Resources paid me a visit. Creighton Creek, they told me, where they planned to cross, was waist deep in water and the banks were too wet and flooding. They asked me to come with them for a day and find a better crossing. I recalled that in the summer of 1931 I had walked around Flin Flon Lake and had crossed Creighton Creek where there was high and dry walking on either side.

With the engineer, I located the crossing. When we returned to Creighton that afternoon, among the construction equipment and trailers I met Hector Breland, project supervisor. He had just returned from Prince Albert and had learned of my locating the dry crossing at Creighton Creek. From that day until the completion of the road, I was employed by Natural Resources as Road Locator and Engineer's Helper.

I was very happy in this position. Besides locating the road from the Manitoba border to South-East Bay of Deschambault Lake, I did the drilling and blasting.

The road is now Saskatchewan Highway 106 and is named "The Hanson Lake Road." The naming of the road is an honour I never expected. I can name, and I know several others, who contributed more than I for the existence of the road. It was, however, a dream come true for me. What had begun with the pencil line on the maps that evening at the drilling camp had become a reality.

The road, when completed, seemed to follow very closely the main trend of my ramblings in northern Saskatchewan over the years. Beginning at the southern end at Smeaton (not very far from Parker's homestead) the Hanson Lake Road touches, crosses, or gives access by branch roads to such familiar geographical features as Bedard Creek, Torch River, White Gull Creek, Fishing Lakes, Caribou Creek, McDougal Creek, Little Bear Lake, Big Sandy Lake, Ballantyne River, Deschambault Lake Settlement

and South-East Arm, Tulabi Lake and Tulabi Brook, Limestone Lake, Jan Lake, Mirond Lake, Pelican Narrows, Hanson Lake, the Sturgeon-weir River near Birch Portage, Johnson Lake, Annabel Lake, and finally Amisk (Beaver) Lake.

I, who had covered these places on foot, never imagined I would see so many cars and trucks, holiday vehicles trailing pleasure boats, cars carrying canoes, and all manner of vehicles where I had mushed dogs in winter and packed canoes in summer, fall, and spring. Sometimes we had referred to walking as “using the footmobile” and it was the only way we could traverse the high rocky hills. Our only concern was tires (shoes) for the foot. Our journeys were by canoe on the rivers and from lake to lake, without the benefit of insect repellents...such preparations would be on the market of the future. We kept the mosquitoes away with smudges where we stopped to cook our meals and we always carried mosquito bars to cover our beds at night. Sandflies were particularly troublesome on the portages in the late summer heat.

Not everyone sees a dream come true during his own time. I am one of the fortunate ones who did.