

Chesterfield Inlet Stories from the Journals of Don McLauchlan

1937

There wasn't any radio communication with the detachments in the north, and there was no way of knowing if anyone was sick.

Cst. D. McLauchlan sailed from Montreal early in July, on board the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Nascopie*. It traveled up the coast of Labrador, making calls at various places until it reached Port Harrison early in August. Here they found out that an RCMP officer, Boorman had accidentally shot himself on May 26, 1937 while out seal hunting. The rifle was stashed by the cabin & he reached over and grabbed it by the muzzle and pulled it towards him. As he did so it caught on something and the trigger went off shooting him through the throat. Cst. Boorman was to have been transferred to Chesterfield so D. McLauchlan replaced him.

It was off Tavanni that 'we' hunted walrus for dog food for the winter. Every night we returned to have our evening meal with the **Sam Voisey** family. Some days the weather shut in, but when it was clear, out we would go, gradually filling the hold in the boat. If it was stormy, Sam would ask us to help him out in the store, Sam was from Labrador and ran the Hudson's Bay Company store at Tavanni. When Inuit came into the store to trade, there was never any money involved. Instead, chips of wood representing 50¢ each were used and so many chips represented the value of a fox or seal pelt. As the Inuit indicated what they wanted to buy, Sam would say that the price was 'so many skins' and then brush chips out of the Inuk's pile saying "it's this many". When the chips were all gone that was the end of trading. Inuit did not leave any credit behind as the next time they came there might be a different post manager.

The non native community of Chesterfield Inlet consisted of Loftie Stewart (Hudson's Bay Company), Jack Dixon (apprentice HBC), wireless operator Hawkes and his wife, Dr. Tom Melting and his wife, Dubbie Kerr, "Robbie" and "Mac"(McLauchlan) (RCMP), Father Ducharme and 4 or 5 priests in charge of RC mission, and nursing sisters and staff at the hospital. The hospital had mainly tuberculosis patients.

"**Foxy Brown**" a trapper who lived south of us at Tavanni was a frequent visitor.

Robbie made a dog team trip to Churchill to take out the mail and bring back any that was waiting there.

D McLauchlan's (Mac's) first dog team patrol was after Christmas, hunting for caribou. They used 8 dogs and headed north towards Repulse Bay. On the first night out **S/Cst. Paaka** built the igloo. Mac looked after the dogs, helped chink the igloo and then heated up some bean stew. We continued north for about 90 miles to **Fullerton** where the RCMP used to have a detachment but had long since abandoned it. We were away about 5 days.

Around the end of March when the days were getting longer I made my next patrol, again with **Paaka** but this time to **Baker Lake**. It took "3 sleeps". I stayed at the Hudson's Bay Company post with **Sandy Luman**. Although the Baker Lake RCMP detachment had been closed it was my job to check it out. I also presented Father Rio at the RC mission there with his citizenship papers.

In the spring, **Father Schultz** landed a small plane on the lake behind our house. He said he was looking for radio communication sites for all the RC missions in the north. The Department of Transportation denied permission for this as the Hudson's Bay Company had just been granted the same thing. Nicknamed 'The flying father' he had put down 45 gal. drums of gas in many parts of the Arctic. It took the RCMP a long time to locate and empty these. It was often wondered if he was a Nazi spy setting up caches for the Germans.

All Catholic Inuit were treated at Chesterfield Hospital and all Anglican at Pang and they couldn't mix them up. While there were very few Catholic on Baffin Island there were lots of Anglicans at Port Harrison, Povungnituk and along Hudson Straits. Those were the ones who were brought by boat to Pang for treatment and really never returned. It's no wonder they were reluctant to go to hospital and preferred to stay and take their chances at home.

My dad was then posted to Kimmirut for a double posting and then to Baker Lake where he again had special constable Paaka as well as Ooyoumut. Because my dad was now married there are many more stories as my mother wrote long letters out to her family. I have given excerpts from those letters to Sally Webster and I think she intends to take

them to Baker on her next trip. I was born in Baker Lake. As there were sometimes trips to Chesterfield or visitors from Chesterfield I am including some info from that time.

1947

August

We are getting a 32 volt wind charger which will be a big improvement on the coal oil lamps.

Took down the King's picture

We are leaving here tomorrow for Chesterfield to start the walrus hunt. We can't wait as we have to take a native down to see the doctor on the Nascopie and it is due to leave there in three days.

Too stormy to leave for Chesterfield. Packed in readiness. Mac busy with rations for everyone.

Blowing too hard to leave for Chesterfield.

Saw caribou migrating so walked over on hill between James's and airport sat down and watched them for an hour walking within feet of us. Thousands of them.

Left Baker Lake at 7 am on Tuesday. The ship was loaded as there were the 2 of us, our 2 special constables (Ooyoumut & Paaka) and their wives and each had a child, plus another native and his wife who were coming to pick up their child in Chester.

There was ice in the bottom of the canoe the morning we left.

We anchored that night in a little shelter in the islands. Left the next morning at dawn.

We slept on board our boat all the time as the detachment in Chester is very crowded.

We were able to scrounge some furniture for our house - a chesterfield, 2 easy chairs, a washing machine and a table. Worried that if they get too many walrus on the hunt there won't be room for the furniture on the boat!

I am staying at the Dr.'s while they go off on the walrus hunt. They left early for Rankin Inlet and Tavanni. They will only stay about 2 weeks so that if there aren't any walrus they can go up one of the rivers and get salmon. The doctors name is Moody. There is a very good wireless station here.

The Severn is here today loading mail for Churchill.

Hope there are walrus down the coast being loaded into the hold.

We went down to the Bay to watch them trade today.

Nothing is less than 50¢ and everything goes up by 50¢. A fox (worth about \$20.) is represented by a flat square block of wood and each fox is divided into the number of skins (50¢ pieces) that the Bay is paying for the skins. The skins are 1/4" square and 6" long. (?) The native say wants 3 tins condensed milk. So Sandy gets the 3 tins and

they shove 2 skins from the pile to one side. (as they sell 3 tins for \$1.) They use the "skin" pile over and over again - and as they spend each fox, the flat wooden square is subtracted from the pile. The company sells nothing less than at 100% profit. Chocolate bars and chewing gum is 15¢ package and bar. Klim (dried milk) sells at 50¢ lb bulk or \$1 a tin.

Natives have several thousand dollars each to spend each year.

Shells for hunting are 25¢ a shell.

To buy a canoe, outboard and rifle really costs a lot! Rifles are \$100. regardless of caliber. Duffle is \$5. a yard which makes parkas cost more than a fox!

Family allowance up here is very complicated.

Down south, if a child is born the parents apply and receive the money.

Up here, the police do it (when they hear about it) and the child builds up a credit until he needs food or a few specified articles. If his parents are good hunters this builds up until he is 16 and then paid off. This means they can more or less start off life fully equipped at 16.

The troubles soon start.

If one child dies the next one may have the same name. There are many with the same name - there are no second names. Complications really set in when they start switching kids. If one family has all girls they swap them for a boy or two. If one family hasn't any children will adopt some. Then one person may give away a daughter because he has two, the one left may die, so he'll adopt one from someone else. One man may have one or two wives and one man has three. He can have as many as he can support. This is confusing and in Ottawa they are so busy with untangling and knotting red tape they figure should be very simple and solved without difficulty.

Went by komatik to a camp about 2 hours from here. We had a "mug-up" in a caved in igloo. Our mug-up was tea, hard tack, jam and cookies. I was shown through the camp igloo. It had a circular snow stairway, a front porch, furnace room, living room and bedroom. The furnace room was narrow with a brisk fire on stones on a snow bench with a kettle boiling on top. The ceiling was black from smoke and had melted a hole a foot in diameter. The living room just had a large snow bed covered with skins and the bedroom contained another snow bed, small stove with chimney, ventilator, window, water barrel and general assortment of goods. In a niche was a pile of dried moss chunks that is burned in the stove.

When they are out on patrol they do not travel or work on Sundays so spend the day in the igloo.

Old Pork has decided he may not live many more winters. He has an old boat with a small engine on it. In Chesterfield lives one of his daughters who is the mother of his adopted son. Wanting to see her before he dies he decided on making the trip in his boat. His son is going with him. Also **Akumalik** and her little boy. Today was finally the big day and about 11:30 they left. Mac is sort of worried as **Pork** is an old man and his eyesight is poor and the son is only 17 and has only occasionally been on the boat.

Feb. 27/49

4 natives have died in the Chesterfield epidemic.

Feb. 28/49

Total of 11 natives dead in Chesterfield.

Mar. 2/49

Plane with 5 doctors went in to Churchill.

The doctors at Chesterfield are mystified by the illnesses as it seems to be Polio. However it is affecting the nervous system rather than the muscles and this is much more deadly and never heard of before. It will take some work back in the labs in Winnipeg before they know. We heard there are 60 cases, 30 of whom have paralysis. Baker Lake is not in quarantine but last week all of the district south of us was put into quarantine. Eskimo (Inuktitut) signs are made and as each camp sends in a team to trade he is met out on the lake by what must seem like strange antics. People jump and wave arms to get them to stop while they are some distance away. If they have to remain overnight there is an igloo for them way out on the ice. They do their trading quickly (by distance) shouting out what they want and given signs telling him not to visit any other natives or shake hands etc - and told not to return to this post for a couple of months. It is hard on them because they are not sick.

Mar. 5/49

Chesterfield had 2 more cases of polio - only of nerves rather than muscles.

Mar. 8/49

Message from **Dr. Moody** that polio might spread through here and worried about it reaching Backs River.

Mar. 9/49

Conference about Kazan quarantine.

Mar. 10/49

Natives made quarantine signs for Kazan camps.

Mar. 11/49

Team came in at noon from Kazan while Mac was out at DOT sending medical - before he returned the team had traded and left but without the quarantine signs! Natives built 3 igloos out on ice for isolationists.