Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 18 **February 2015** **Issue 4**

Also in this issue:

Ottesen Museum Christmas Open House 2014

Christmas in Chile and Peru

by Becky DeGarmeaux

A record 54 guests came to the Ottesen Museum on December 9, 2014 to tour the Museum and learn a little about the Christmas customs in the Peruvian and Chilean mission field.

Marge Lillo signs the guest book.

In the building's board room, lists of the congregations sat alongside pictures featuring the members of the various congregations. A flyer was available which described how Christmas is celebrated in the two countries. A special feature was a video display of articles written by the English students of Miss Chelsea Dietsche who works with the mission in Chile. These students gave firsthand accounts of how they and their families spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

In the Church Basement Room, guests sang Christmas carols in Spanish. Bethany Seminary students Daniel Ruiz and Andrew Soule were joined by Bethany College students Madelaine Smith, Leah Kurth, and Olivia Lee in leading the singing of "From Heaven Above," "Joy to the World," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and "Silent Night." Between hymns, Seminarian Ruiz read portions of the Christmas Gospel in Spanish.

Of course there were treats to eat and drink as well. Missionary Tim Erickson and his wife Ellen graciously sent pan de pascua from Chile—a cross between German stollen and Italian panetone. Mrs. Kathy Bruss

provided Peruvian manjar blanco with a cooked sweetened condensed milk filling. To drink, guests had a choice between a Chilean-style fruit punch or Peruvian hot drinking chocolate flavored with cinnamon and cloves.

The tentative theme for the 2015 Open House is "ELS Christmas Celebrations Across the U.S.A." Watch for further announcements once the date and theme are formally announced.▪

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In Bjug's Footsteps Over the Chilkoot Trail

by Mark O. Harstad

During the five days of July 25-29, 2014, one grandson, three great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren of the Rev. Bjug Aanondson Harstad (1848-1933) plodded their way through environments consisting of rain forest, steep slopes, rugged boulder fields, treeless alpine landscapes, and boreal forest along the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail from Dyea, Alaska, to Lake Bennett in British Columbia. Their purpose was to commemorate and develop an appreciation for an interesting aspect of Norwegian Lutheran Church History in America, and the heroic efforts of an ancestor who demonstrated his devotion to the work which he had been called to do. The project had been promoted by the ELS Historical Society.

Some biographical information about Bjug Harstad is in order.

A Bjug Harstad Chronology to 1899

1848 Bjug was born into a large, impoverished family on a plot of ground called Gangshei, connected to a farm called Harstad near the village of Valle in south central Norway, the area known as Setesdal. His father's name was Aanond. He was baptized Bjug Aanondson.

1861 The family emigrated to America and resided first in the Fox River Settlement near Ottawa and Seneca, Illinois, and later in Harmony, Fillmore County, Minnesota. Bjug mastered English by working for American farmers as a teenager and came to speak the language without an accent.

1865 He left his home in Harmony, Minnesota, to enroll at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. On the advice of the college president he began to use Harstad as his last name instead of Aanondson. Several of his siblings adopted the same last name.

1871 Upon graduation from Luther College he enrolled at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, where his chief mentor was Dr. C. F. W. Walther, for whose influence he remained grateful the rest of his life.

1874 Upon graduation from seminary he was assigned by the Norwegian Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ("the Old Synod") to serve as missionary among immigrants in the Red River Valley of the North. Working from a home base near Mayville, North Dakota, he was instrumental in organizing 17 congregations and several schools among the Norwegian immigrants who were pouring into the area. He also came to serve as president of the Minnesota District of the Norwegian Synod.

1877 He married Guro Omlid who had come from his home village of Valle in Norway. Eleven children were born to this union, eight living to full adulthood. The youngest was ELS Pastor Adolph M. Harstad.

1880s When the theological controversy over conversion and election raged among the

Norwegian Lutherans, he remained a staunch supporter of the "grace alone" principle as taught by Dr. Walther, and defended by older Norwegian colleagues in the ministry such as U. V. Koren, J. A. Ottesen, and H. A. Preus. F. A. Schmidt, the instigator of the controversy, targeted Bjug as one of his opponents, someone to be deposed from office for opposing Schmidt's doctrinal compromises.

1891 Bjug and family moved to the Puget Sound area of the state of Washington, having been called to start a school for the thousands of Norwegian immigrant families living in that area.

1893 This year marked the onset of "The Panic of 1893," the worst economic downturn to that point in U.S. History.

1894 The first building was completed and the first students enrolled in Pacific Lutheran Academy in the fall of 1894. Financial support weakened dramatically in the economic downturn. The school faced huge debt. It appeared the whole project of starting a school would collapse in failure.

1896 Reports arrived of a significant discovery of gold in Canada's Yukon Territory. The "stampede" to the Yukon began. The wheels began to turn in the minds of many that Yukon gold could solve financial problems even for church-related schools.

1898 In February Bjug and several associates from the Tacoma area, after much planning and acquisition of supplies, set out for the Yukon by the most common route. They were among the approximately 100,000 who attempted to reach the gold fields, a significant number of whom were Scandinavians. They traveled by steamer on the "Inside Passage" from Puget Sound to the ports of Skagway and Dyea in the Alaska Panhandle. From Dyea they made the arduous 33-mile portage over the Chilkoot Trail to the chain of lakes at the headwaters of the Yukon River. From there they built boats and floated down the Yukon to the vicinity of Dawson City and staked their claims in the valleys of creeks and rivers flowing into the Yukon and Klondike Rivers.

1899 After a year and a half of effort in getting to the gold fields, staking claims, attempting to work them, and then finding ways to earn enough to make it home again, in June, Bjug took passage on a steamer headed down the Yukon River to its mouth. At the port of St. Michael he boarded an ocean-going vessel for home, surprising his family by his arrival on July 20, 1899. The goal of finding gold had not been achieved, but other benefits came to Bjug. He returned home a healthy man, and had demonstrated to creditors and others that he was committed to accepting responsibility for all that had transpired in connection with the founding of Pacific Lutheran.

The action taken by Bjug Harstad and those associated with him in attempting to solve the financial problems of a church-related school by going in search of gold is a remarkable story. It reveals that determined, pioneer spirit which characterized the generation of the immigrants. They were convinced they had a heritage worth preserving, and that no amount of effort should be spared in carrying out that work. If they didn't work at it, the result would be that they and their descendants would simply melt away into the general religious environment of America. Their distinguishing theological heritage would be lost forever. The establishment of educational institutions was essential to that work, but the difficulty of building and maintaining them in the face of economic challenges was great.

Bjug and his associates had a deep sense of responsibility for what they had done in getting a building completed, assembling a faculty, and admitting the first students in 1894. They had taken some criticism for tending toward the extravagant in the five-story building they had put up. They wanted to be known as trustworthy men of common sense with an obligation to those who had called them to do the work of getting the school started. They demonstrated that by their willingness to engage in heroic efforts to save their school.

Historians are vitally interested in how we know about any particular happening in history, how good and reliable the sources available to us are. We have a good record of Bjug's expedition to the Yukon. He wrote letters home regularly and they were published in *Pacific Herald,* a Norwegian

language church periodical. Because of the unreliable nature of the mail service in the rugged, frontier conditions of the gold trail, some of the letters were unfortunately lost. But enough remain that a very clear picture emerges for us of the experience of Bjug and his fellow gold seekers. His account can be laid side by side with many other journals and diaries of those who made the same trek, and formal accounts of the gold rush written by professional historians. A comparison of Bjug's account of his experiences with accounts written by others reveals striking similarities in detail and experience.

The letters were simply archived in personal and institutional collections for decades before much thought was given to translating them into English. In 1955 Bjug's son Oliver B. Harstad, realizing that the Norwegian language was quickly slipping away from many descendants of the immigrants, went to work translating the letters into English. But it would take still longer for the translated letters to be disseminated broadly.

In 1973, another of Bjug's sons, the Rev. Adolph M. Harstad, typed the English translation by means of an old-fashioned, mechanical typewriter onto stencils which were used on a machine called a mimeograph. (This was many years before computers and word processing.) Many copies were made. Family members and other interested parties acquired access at last to the treasure trove of letters.

A final step in the transmission and preservation of the text of the Bjug letters occurred in 1999 when Cheryl Harstad (current *Oak Leaves* co-editor) brought them into the modern world of computer word processing. A helpful map and a few pictures from the 1890s were added later.

I read my father's mimeograph edition with rapt attention in 1973. Lasting awareness of Bjug's heroic energy and action became part of my consciousness and motivated me to read a history of the Yukon gold rush. But 1973-74 was my vicar year, and with graduate studies there was not a lot of time to pursue additional study. Occasionally there was discussion among family members about organizing a trip to explore areas where Bjug had gone in 1898, but nothing ever came of it.

Decades rolled by and in 2003 I found myself a member of the Board of the ELS Historical Society and became involved in planning programs which might stimulate interest in the history of the ELS. We provided a variety of approaches to our program planning: traditional, research-based lectures by scholars, story-telling programs based on the writings of Synod people of bygone eras, illustrated presentations about the careers of Synod pastors and missionaries, plays commissioned by the Historical Society, events which incorporated folk music and dance into the mix, etc.

At meetings of the Board of the ELS Historical Society in November of 2012 and February of 2013, members brainstormed possible activities beyond our annual meeting programs, which the Society might promote to generate interest in our history and our organization. When the topic of Bjug Harstad's trip to the Yukon came up, board member Peter Anthony suggested organizing an expedition to hike the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail, the portage route of the gold rushers. This trail linked the Pacific waters with the headwaters of the Yukon River, which gave access to the gold fields. Peter and his wife Katey had extensive experience in wilderness camping in Alaska, and it appeared initially they might take a leadership roll.

We put out an announcement at the June, 2013 Annual Meeting of the Historical Society regarding the possibility of such a hike and asked who might be interested. Thinking and planning began to percolate over the next several months. By Christmas, 2013, several people had indicated interest in hiking the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail, and several more were interested in traveling to Alaska, but were not up for the rigors of the hike. Eventually it worked out that nine people planned to do the hike and six more planned to join the expedition for other parts of the experience.

Quick action was called for in early January of 2014 since the National Park Service maintains control over the trail and admits only a certain number of hikers onto the trail per day. Carolyn Harstad took on the task of applying to the Park Service for the necessary permits as soon as they began accepting reservations for the 2014 season. We had to take our third choice of days for the hike, July 25 to 29, 2014.

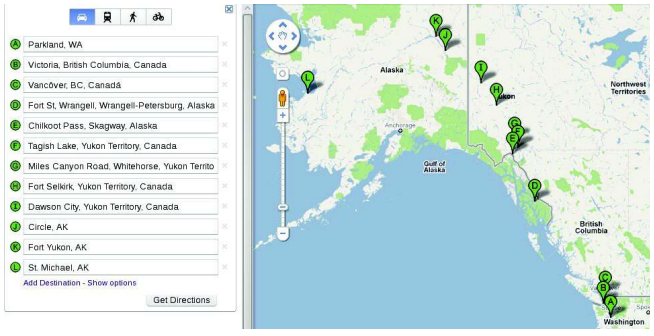
Through the winter and spring of 2014 those planning to do the hike communicated extensively. The National Park Service warns that the Chilkoot Trail is not for novice hikers, and planning and preparation need to be thorough, to say nothing of the task of getting into the necessary physical condition. The list of issues was long: appropriate clothing for chilly, damp weather conditions, light-weight cook stoves, water filters, kinds and quantity of food, pepper spray for use in case of encounters with bears (both grizzlies and black bears inhabit the region), dealing with swarms of mosquitos, tents, sleeping gear, etc.

This list is nothing compared to the preparations of the gold seekers of 1898. Each individual, in addition to the tools and equipment he would need in the quest for gold, had to prove to government authorities at the Canadian border that he had enough food to live on for a full year, or face the prospect of being turned back. It is thought the expression "a ton of goods" grew out of these requirements. The 2014 hikers carried backpacks weighing approximately 50 pounds. The gold rushers of 1898 transported about 2000 pounds of tools and provisions each. Another difference between 1898 and 2014 was this: we were doing the hike in the summer; the gold rushers did it in the winter so that they could pull their "ton of goods" on sleds. By shuttling back and forth and creating cache piles at various points along the way, they moved their possessions along, stage by stage. It is estimated the gold rushers actually traveled 1000 miles in the shuttle process to move their goods 33 miles. It took Bjug and his companions from February to June to transfer their goods from the port of Dyea on the Alaska coast to Lake Bennett in British Columbia. There they built boats to continue the journey down the Yukon River to the vicinity of Dawson City. The 2014 hikers arrived at Lake Bennett at noon of the fifth day of the hike, and then boarded a train for a two and a half hour ride back to Skagway.

By early summer of 1898 Bjug and companions had arrived at the area near the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers. His letters include references to either spontaneous or planned worship services which he conducted at various stages of the journey.

Dawson City on the Yukon River became the famous boom town of the actual gold rush area. That is where claims had to be applied for and registered with the government. The problem for those who arrived at the gold fields in 1898 and 1899 was that the best claims had been staked the previous two years. Some even gave up at this point when they realized how far their potential claims would be from what were known to be the areas where some had "struck it rich" in 1896 and 1897. Bjug and his associates did not give up. He came to own half interest in three claims and was sole owner of another. From a document preserved by the Yukon Department of the Interior we know that Bjug was actively applying for a claim along a stream called "Indian Creek" as late as June 9, 1899. He had come to dig for gold, and he was determined to do it.

By early summer of 1899 reality must have gripped the mind of Bjug. A full year in gold country had yielded no gold, and attention would have to turn to the problem of getting home again. Some of his companions had returned home months earlier. His resourcefulness had led him to set up what he called a "Lunch House" on the Bonanza River a few miles from Dawson City. There he prepared and served what were, no doubt, very basic meals for hungry miners and others. The menu at Bjug's Lunch House probably included coffee, bacon, pancakes, oatmeal, dishes made of beans and salt pork, rice, etc. Eggs and milk products were probably not readily available. In this way he was able to scrape together enough money to buy passage on a river boat that took him from Dawson City to the mouth of the Yukon River on the Bering Sea. From the port of St. Michael he took passage on an ocean steamer and arrived at his home in Tacoma, Washington, on July 20, 1899, much to the surprise of his family.



Several members of the 2014 expedition (Peter Harstad, David Harstad and Chris Meno, Tim Moldstad, and Vance and Linda Becker) went to Dawson City and located one of the claims in which Bjug was involved. They were able to locate the claim on an official plat map of the Yukon territorial government, and with help of locals they were able to get to the place. The interesting discovery was this: Today that very ground is being worked by a mining company which brings heavy equipment and modern technology to the task. That company is profitably extracting gold from what was once Bjug's claim. Members of the Harstad group were allowed entrance to "the gold house" where they saw the final steps in the technology used today, and saw gold nuggets lying in a pan on what was once Bjug's claim.

The descendants of Bjug Harstad who hiked the Chilkoot Trail in the summer of 2014 are the following:

Mark O. Harstad, grandson of Bjug, member of the Religious Studies Faculty of Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, and chairman of the Board of the ELS Historical Society.

The following great-grandchildren of Bjug were part of the expedition:

- Linda (Harstad) Becker, teacher, Mankato, Minnesota. Her husband, Pastor Vance Becker, also made the trek.
- David Harstad, real estate lawyer, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Brent Matzke, Forensic Scientist with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Bemidji, Minnesota.

The following great-great-grandchildren of Bjug were part of the expedition:

- Eric Becker, son of Vance and Linda Becker, Senior Supply Chain Planner for Asia Pacific, currently stationed in Singapore, Malaysia.
- Carol (Becker) Yenish, daughter of Vance and Linda Becker, Store Manager for Caribou Coffee, Mankato, Minnesota.
- Jonathan Scislow, Lead Project Manager - Global Market Access with Intertek Group; Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A young lady,Tegan Buckley, friend of the family, was also part of the hiking group. She is a pharmacist from St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Each of these individuals wrote a personal account of the 2014 adventure on the Chilkoot Trail. Some common themes emerged. Many of the hikers had extensive, previous experience in wilderness camping and mountain climbing, but the consensus was that the Chilkoot Trail was the most challenging hike they had ever attempted. Scrambling up the boulder field, the stretch that came to be known as "The Golden Stairway" in the days of the gold rush, to reach the summit of the Chilkoot Pass in fog and drizzle, was an experience that will not be forgotten by anyone who has done it. Another point of consensus was a sense of awe or wonderment at the energy and determination of Bjug and his companions in getting their "ton of goods" over the 33-mile trail and then continuing on to the gold fields by boat. The beauty of the Alaska wilderness with its varied environments also drew frequent comments.

After returning from Yukon Territory, Bjug stepped down from the position of president of Pacific Lutheran Academy, but he continued to be a member of the faculty and worked on behalf of the school in other capacities. New evidence has emerged that he was involved in yet another venture to gain greater financial stability for Pacific Lutheran in the World War I period. It appears an attempt to get into land speculation in Mexico involved Bjug in some kind of close brush with Mexican outlaws which benefited from a rescue mission carried out by the U.S. military. But that's another chapter from the colorful career of a remarkable man. The man's energy and imagination in support of causes he believed in seems to have been indefatigable.

There were, of course, other aspects of Bjug's career. He took seriously the study of theology. Twice he was called on to serve as interim professor of Dogmatics at the Seminary level. Institutions should be supported because they are useful in promoting the principles one stands for. When they no longer serve that purpose, then they are dispensable.

Between about 1900 and 1917, efforts were made to bring about a grand union of Norwegian Lutheranism in America. As long as Pres. U. V. Koren was alive (up to 1910), his influence was strong enough to prevent the Old Synod from entering into a theologically compromised union. Bjug was among the staunch supporters of Dr. Koren, and he took a leadership role in opposing any church union which was not based on sound doctrine. But the tide of sentiment in favor of union based on ethnic and cultural pride, which easily tolerated theological compromise, proved to be overwhelming in an age characterized by intense nationalism.

1917 The grand Norwegian Lutheran Merger created a doctrinally compromised church body. For reasons of conscience Bjug could not be affiliated with this church body and the school to which he had devoted so much of his life's energy. He quickly became a leader among the minority of Norwegian Lutheran pastors who declined to go into the merger.

1918 In a June meeting at Lime Creek Lutheran Church just south of Albert Lea, Minnesota, a reorganized church body was launched. Bjug was elected first president of the new Synod and served in that office until 1922.

1920 Fire destroyed the Harstad home in Tacoma, Washington. Bjug lost his library and all his papers. A treasure trove of church history vanished in the smoke. The generosity of friends in the new church body made possible the reconstruction of the house on the same foundation.

1920s Through most of the 1920s the aging Bjug maintained a lively interest in the affairs of the new church body. He traveled by means of his clergy pass on the railroad back to the Midwest many times for annual synod meetings. When discussions began regarding the acquisition of Bethany Lutheran College, he was initially opposed, no doubt on the basis of his memories of the great difficulties of operating a college in economic hard times. Gradually he came around to the realization that the new church body needed its own institution to perpetuate the principles for which it stood.

1933 On June 20, 1933, Bjug died at his home in Tacoma at the age of eighty-four and a half. He never expressed any regrets over his decision not to participate in the merger church body, and to sever connections with Pacific Lutheran.

Day by Day Over the Chilkoot Trail
July 25-29, 2014

At about 3 am on July 25, 2014, an earthquake shook our hostel at Skagway. A dish or two crashed to the floor in the kitchen, but no further damage was done. The 5.8 quake was easily the biggest quake most of us Midwesterners had ever experienced. It added an element of thrill to the beginning of five memorable days.

Mark O. Harstad, ready to hike the Chilkoot Trail, posing with his brothers, Herman and Peter.

At 9 am a hired van driven by a colorful local who went by the epithet "Dyea Dave" drove our entire group, hikers and non-hikers, from our hostel to the National Park Service Chilkoot Trailhead near what was the bustling port of Dyea in the days of the gold rush. Dyea Dave kept up a constant stream of humorous and somewhat informative banter about the area throughout his time with our group. At the trailhead the hikers got into their backpacks, and a photo op followed. At about 10 am the nine hikers

stepped off. Overnight rain had ceased, but the sky was overcast and the trail was somewhat muddy.

The first day called for covering eight miles from the Trailhead to a campground at a place designated "Canyon City." According to the topographical map this first stretch of trail did not rise significantly in elevation, just a couple hundred feet over eight miles. My thinking was that this would be a relatively easy hike. It didn't take long to realize there are no "easy" parts to the Chilkoot Trail. The ground is so rugged that continuous attention is required to determine where the next footfall is to go. A rule of thumb I had worked with in hiking is that it is possible to make two miles an hour, but that an additional hour would have to be added for each gain of 1000 feet in elevation. Since there was little gain in elevation on Day One, my hope was that these eight miles could be covered in four to five hours. But we learned that an average speed of one mile per hour would be the norm for the entire trail with additional time required for significant gains in elevation.

The environment of the first segment of trail was northern rain forest. The vegetation of all kinds, from trees to shrubs to wild flowers, was luxuriant. Temperatures along the entire trail were quite consistent: 60s during the day and 50s at night.

At each of the campgrounds a cook house was provided so food could be prepared under shelter. Bear-proof metal storage bins were provided in close proximity to the cook house. On our first night on the trail at the Canyon City campground we encountered many people from various groups crowded at once in and around the cook house. During the day we seldom saw hikers other than our own group, but at the campgrounds we jostled for space with about 40 other people to prepare and consume our food, and to pitch our tents.

Among those we saw every evening was a group of seven people, mostly in their 60s, who were led over the trail by professional guides from the Packer Expedition Company of Skagway. Two strong young men carried packs for these people which included all their food and equipment for preparing it. These young men prepared meals and snacks for their clients several times a day, and provided whatever other services their clients requested. It would be interesting to know what it would cost to be a part of such a group. The pack each individual in the group carried appeared to be small and light.

The itinerary for **Day Two** called for a hike of just four and a half miles. Once again, any thoughts of an easy day were quickly dashed by the ruggedness of the terrain and significant gain in elevation. The destination at the end of Day Two was a place called Sheep Camp, one of the most famous camps along the Chilkoot Trail, a place where Bjug and his companions spent quite a bit of time as they shuttled their goods along by stages. Sheep Camp is situated at 1000 feet in elevation, just at the point where the trail begins to rise significantly toward the summit of Chilkoot Pass. Trees and other vegetation were still abundant at Sheep Camp.

By this stage in the hike it was evident to myself and to others in the group that my body was not functioning at normal capacity, even though I had trained quite strenuously for weeks. I had no way of knowing that the symptoms of Acute T-Cell Lymphoblastic Leukemia were beginning to assert themselves. I began seriously to wonder if I could make it in view of the fact that the next two days promised to be the most physically challenging of all. The prospect of medical evacuation by helicopter, a very difficult and expensive proposition, began to go through my head. A memorable moment came when Niece Linda took me aside, looked me in the eye and confidently asserted, "Uncle Mark, you are going to make it to the end of this trail! Team Harstad is going to see to it that you do!"

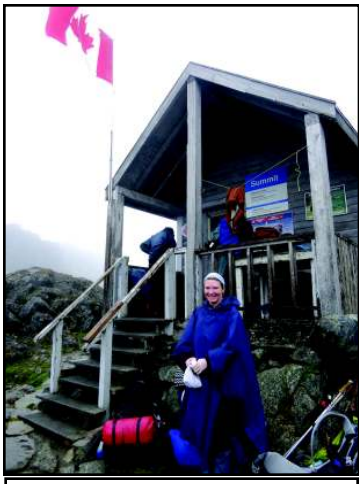
We arrived at Sheep Camp that evening in mist and drizzle. A Park Ranger gave a short presentation to the approximately 50 campers clustered around the cook houses, which in this case were

frame structures covered with canvas. The topic was the geography and history of the Trail. The campsites here were large wooden platforms. Without these structures it would have been next to impossible to find level ground on which to set up a tent. Realizing that the next day would be the most challenging, it was early to bed.

On **Day Three** we were on the trail by 7 am. Dave Harstad went ahead at his own pace. He and Brent Matzke stayed in communication by walkie-talkie. From Sheep Camp to the summit of Chilkoot Pass the elevation rises from 1000 feet to about 3600 feet in elevation. The distance is about four miles, which makes this by far the most challenging portion of the Trail. Once above the tree line, the terrain is utterly barren and rocky. By 10 am Dave radioed that he was at the summit, would leave his backpack there, and come down and meet the rest of the group.

When Dave rejoined the group, he offered to take my pack, and I did not refuse. Free of my burden, I plodded on, placing one foot ahead of the other. We reached the place called "The Scales" at about 2600 feet. The area was bestrewn with the rusted remains of abandoned equipment from the 1890s. At this point the U.S. government offered the gold seekers opportunity to weigh their provisions to make sure they had the required minimum food supplies before pushing on to the summit where Canadian officials would compel them to turn back unless adequately provisioned. The view from "The Scales" toward the summit was unforgettable—huge black boulders shrouded in mist and fog, rising another 1000 feet in elevation. The Trail from this point to the summit was simply marked by orange poles thrust in amongst the massive black boulders to indicate the general direction to be followed toward the summit. For most of the final 1000 feet of gain in elevation hikers were compelled to scramble on all fours. The angle of ascent frequently approached 45 degrees. This was the famous stretch designated "The Golden Stairway," which is pictured in every history of the gold rush.

By noon we had all made it to the summit. Some began to sing "O Canada" when we saw the maple leaf flag at the border. My gloves were sopping wet. Exertion kept us warm under our



Carol Yenish, at the summit.

rain suits. The Canadian government maintains a warming house at the summit supplied with hot water and various instant drinks. The nine of us crowded into the steamy environment along with many others. We took time to have a group picture taken on the steps of the warming house. Then it was time to move on. We still had another four miles to go to our next camp site.

A chilly drizzle followed us aways beyond the summit. Gradually the precipitation let up, the fog lifted, and we found ourselves in a beautiful alpine environment. Rushing rivulets carried runoff from snow fields and rain down to streams which fed into clear, alpine lakes. This area was still well above tree line. Some of the streams and rivulets had to be crossed by stepping carefully from rock to rock. The result for those whose boots were not absolutely water tight was some wet socks. The trail on the Canadian side was marked by orange triangles mounted on aluminum poles, and in some places simply by rock cairns.

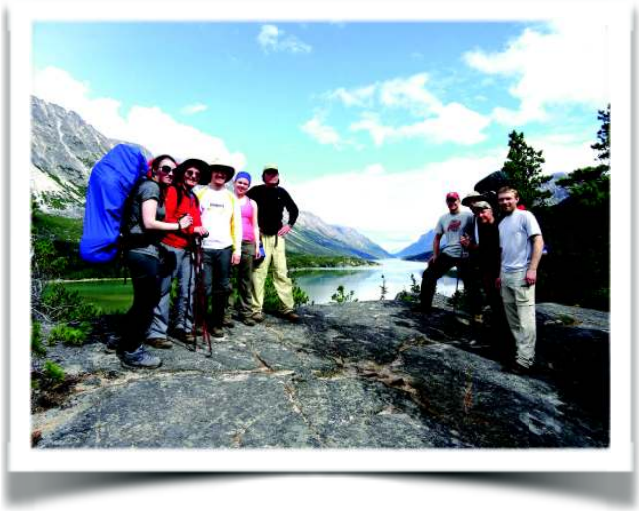
By about 7 pm we arrived at the most aptly named campground on the Trail, "Happy Camp," at an elevation just under 3000 feet. After a twelve hour day, we were happy to be there. The usual cook house was crowded with people. Lines were strung across the room and were laden with wet

gear. We pitched our tents on platforms high up on the rocks above the cook house and bear-proof metal storage bins.

Day Four called for us to cover another eight and a half miles. This was difficult right after the strenuous nature of Day Three. The redeeming feature of the course on this day was that we dropped more than 1500 feet in elevation over those eight miles. Gradually the tree-less alpine environment gave way to boreal forest. Parts of my pack load were redistributed to strong nephews, which was a huge help to me in my weakened state. Interesting abandoned objects were frequently to be seen along the trail: cooking equipment, shoes, a metal frame for a boat over which canvas would be stretched, etc. The trail paralleled the shore line of long and narrow Lake Lindeman for a good stretch. The gold rushers took good advantage of the frozen surface of Lake Lindeman by piling as much as 500 pounds of goods onto their sleds, and then rigging makeshift masts and sails onto the sleds. The result was that a large quantity of goods could be transported in comparative ease, at least for a few miles.

We took a break in the afternoon to look at historical displays near Lake Lindeman. The sun came out for a while. One member of the group spotted a black bear near the trail. Then we trudged on to our last campground at Bare Loon Lake. Some members of the group braved the chilly waters for a quick bath. The wooden platforms were again necessary for our tents. Huge boulders along the lake made it impossible to pitch a tent on the ground. An open log shelter provided a nice venue to prepare and consume our evening meal and breakfast the next morning.

On **Day Five** we were on the trail by 8 am. The experienced guides with the Packer Expedition Co. assured us we could make Lake Bennett and the end of the trail by noon. The rugged nature of the trail in the early going had me wondering, but gradually it became easier, until finally one could call the last couple of miles an easy hike on a sandy trail. We arrived at a beautiful outlook over Lake Bennett just before noon. Many pictures were taken of the whole group, sub-groups, and individuals with a spectacular view of the lake in the background, the very lake where Bjug and thousands of others built their boats to continue on down the Yukon River to the gold fields.



Then on to the train station. We sat on the platform, ate sandwiches, and celebrated our achievement. The train rolled in with Carolyn Harstad, Herman Harstad, and Peggy Harstad from the non-hiking part of the group on board. Peter Harstad and Tim Moldstad were in Skagway making dinner preparations. The hikers were not allowed to ride in the same cars with the "civilized" passengers. It had something to do with five days without a shower. We threw our backpacks into a box car and found seats in special reserved cars. It was not difficult to drift into a nice nap, even sitting up in strange postures in rigid seats.

From Lake Bennett down to Skagway is a two and a half hour ride by train on the White Pass and Yukon Route. It is one of the

most spectacular train routes in the world. It is maintained as a tourist attraction today. The construction of this narrow-gauge railroad was an amazing piece of engineering in the late 1890s. When it was completed in 1900, it was too late to be of much use to those headed to the gold fields. The "rush" was over by that time, but it continued to be used by mining companies for many years.

The tracks parallel the White Pass route between Skagway and Lake Bennett, the route also used by some gold rushers to get from the ports on the coast to Lake Bennett. It is longer than the Chilkoot Trail by several miles, but it wasn't nearly as steep. But that didn't mean it was easy. During the gold rush a reporter from San Francisco traveled both routes and wrote an article to provide information for others useful in deciding which route to take from the coast to Lake Bennett—the Chilkoot Trail or the White Pass route. His assessment was: "The one route is hell, the other is damnation. No matter which one you pick you will almost certainly wish you had taken the other." Horses were used extensively on the White Pass route. Thousands of abused animals died along the way.

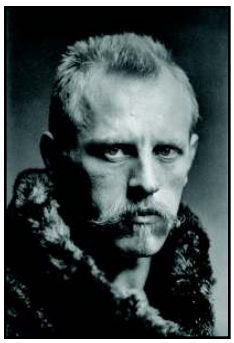
Our group enjoyed great satisfaction in accomplishing the hike. This was an experience to be recalled fondly for a lifetime. Our respect for the energy and determination of Bjug was enhanced. The spectacular train ride to Skagway, followed by a salmon dinner back at the hostel supplied by Tim Moldstad, provided a great conclusion to a memorable experience. At the dinner that evening each member of the hiking group offered comments and observations on the whole experience. Vance Becker's contribution to the after dinner entertainment was to confer awards and honors on the nine members of the hiking group.

Concluding Note

On July 31, this writer was admitted to the hospital in Juneau, Alaska, because of difficulty in breathing. The initial diagnosis was atrial fibrillation (irregular heart beat) and congestive heart failure. Upon returning to Mankato, further testing which included biopsy of lymphatic material and bone marrow extraction revealed the full magnitude of the problem: the onset of Acute T-Cell Lymphoblastic Leukemia, or ALL for short.▪

Fridtjof Nansen
Norwegian scientist, explorer and humanitarian worker

(**Note:** All information is from Wikipedia. This is the initial summary of Nansen's life.)



Fridtjof Nansen (10 October 1861 – 13 May 1930) was a Norwegian explorer, scientist, diplomat, humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. In his youth a champion skier and ice skater, he led the team that made the first crossing of the Greenland interior in 1888, cross-country skiing on the island, and won international fame after reaching a record northern latitude of 86°14' during his North Pole expedition of 1893–96. Although he retired from exploration after his return to Norway, his techniques of polar travel and his innovations in equipment and clothing influenced a generation of subsequent Arctic and Antarctic expeditions.

Nansen studied zoology at the Royal Frederick University in Christiania (Oslo), and later worked as a curator at the Bergen Museum where his research on the central nervous system of lower marine creatures earned him a doctorate and helped establish modern theories of neurology. After 1896 his main scientific interest switched to oceanography; in the course of his research he made many scientific cruises, mainly in the North Atlantic, and contributed to the development of modern oceanographic equipment. As one of his country's leading citizens, in 1905 Nansen spoke out for the ending of Norway's union with Sweden, and was instrumental in persuading Prince Carl of Denmark to accept the throne of the newly independent Norway. Between 1906 and 1908 he served as the Norwegian representative in London, where he helped negotiate the Integrity Treaty that guaranteed Norway's independent status.

In the final decade of his life, Nansen devoted himself primarily to the League of Nations, following his appointment in 1921 as the League's High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1922 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on behalf of the displaced victims of the First World War and related conflicts. Among the initiatives he introduced was the "Nansen passport" for stateless persons, … . He worked on behalf of refugees until his sudden death in 1930, after which the League established the Nansen International Office for Refugees to ensure that his work continued. This office received the Nobel Peace Prize for 1938. Nansen was honored by many nations, and his name is commemorated in numerous geographical features, particularly in the polar regions.▪

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