

OPINION AND SUCH

SPRING SPRANG SPRUNG

As we head into 'bear season', here is a quick look back at spring in Churchill, courtesy of the www.polarbearalley.com

Polar Bear Blog - Breaking Up is Hard to Do - June 3, 2007

We have had a lot of south winds this spring and there is still a lot of open water near Churchill, at first glimpse looking like the bay will open any day now. Of course, ice still covers about 80-90% of Hudson Bay and we are at least a month away from real break-up and the bears' return to land.

Ringed seals are starting to appear out on the ice, sunning themselves on our temporary floe edge. Lying on the ice, they spend the day in a regular pattern of sleep-wake periods. Dozing off for a few seconds, they snap awake on a fairly regular basis, scan the horizon and then drift back to sleep. A good idea when you are polar bears' favourite food.

Bears for their part, try their best to anticipate this sleep-wake schedule and stalk the seals by inching forward during 'sleep' and staying motionless during 'wake'. Once they are within striking distance - about 30 metres, their 'stalk' turns to a 'charge' and hopefully, they can grab the unfortunate seal before it flops back into the ocean.

We are about two months past seal birthing season and two months into prime seal hunting season up here - for polar bears not people. Most of the seals that polar bears eat, somewhere around 90%, are under two years of age, fat and in-



Who cares about spring! Polar bears attract around 10,000 tourists to Churchill each October and November a.k.a. 'bear season'.

experienced. In spring, the bears themselves get fatter and happier by the day.

This is why the timing of break-up is an important thing for bears. An early breakup can cut this season short by two to three weeks or about 50-60lbs lighter. Not a big deal for bears in the prime of life but possibly fatal for the very young or the very old.

Polar Bear Blog - Another Early Spring...Incredible! - June 11, 2007

Okay, I have to admit I was right. Summer did come early and then so did fall followed by winter and now again spring, except now spring is not really that early anymore.

Today, our south winds have finally returned pushing temperatures up to 14C. For the past week, northwinds have

packed the sea ice back on shore and back into the river. At one point the ice was jammed up higher than the Ithaca shipwreck.

South wind has brought birds out and about and probably a few more in and around Churchill. This morning, our Harris' Sparrow was back, along with a white-crowned sparrow and yellow warbler perched in our willows.

The yellow warbler is a neat little bird, appearing bright yellow at first glance. Of course, as with most birds, once you see them up close, a much more complex plumage is revealed. This one was a male with rusty red stripes running vertically down his breast. His wings are a dusty green that combined with the rusty streaks kind of remind me of a 1979 Datsun 510 station wagon that we used to

own (*tip of the day: don't buy one*).

Hopefully, this male is staking his territory near our cabin. Fresh off an epic migration from Central America, he is cruising around singing a song that kind of goes, 'sweet sweet sweet i'm so very sweet' although it could just as easily be 'feet feet feet i've got smelly feet' but I believe that song is only used by those warblers which end up living on their parents' couch reading Maxim and watching 'One Versus 100'.

Polar Bear Blog - Revisionist Theory - June 25, 2007

It's been a cool June, cloudy, misty, foggy, you name it. We've had some nice days, even nice hours between cloud banks, but it has been cool enough to change my little ice breakup prediction.

May looked like it heralded an early spring and it did for a bit. But now we sit at the end of June and while the bay looks completely open near Churchill, most of it remains ice locked. In fact, there is at least two, if not, three times the amount of ice remaining than at this time last year. This big pad of ice is what's keeping us cool and cloudy and unless a July heat wave hits, breakup will probably wait until the end of July as it usually does.

Visit the Polar Bear Blog - also sometimes the Pickerel Blog and the Poison Dart Frog Blog at www.polarbearalley.com

RE-INCINERATOR II: THE ORVERTING

Yes, this does remind me of a campy horror movie sequel

With it being bear season and all, the topic of garbage is naturally one that will come up. While the old Churchill dump is closed, waste is still an issue up here and one that is piling up in an old military building (L5) by the airport.

This spring, Mayor Spence along with town representatives met with both the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) and Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat to discuss options for our recycling-waste transfer station predicament, update them on progress and, pretty much, try to ensure that our funding is not revoked.

While initial efforts at establishing a sustainable recycling and waste handling program have

floundered, Churchill has embarked on an old solution mixed with new technology.

Instead of shipping waste to Thompson (as it turns out, they are seeking to close their dump as well), we will be purchasing a new fangled incinerator, dubbed the Orverter. This is a Manitoba-made product, manufactured in Elie, just west of Winnipeg. Designed to be a self-sustaining system, it burns the carbon residue of its organic fuel, which, of course, is garbage.

One complication arises in the fact that Churchill does not produce enough garbage to sustain continuous operation of this machine. It burns garbage at about 2500F, theoretically creating no smell or smoke, and requires a minimum of 100lb per hour, but preferably 500, to run efficiently. Inquiries were made by the Town of Churchill as to whether or not one could be developed to run on 50lb per hour. The Orverter burns 'ground domestic waste mixed with shredded

cardboard, wood and organic waste. Bio-waste and sewage sludge can also be burnt and grain dust from the Port can be used as additional fuel if needed.' To date, the Orverter has overted wood blocks, fibreglass, tires, waste oil, sports equipment, diapers, latex paint, wastewater sludge, animal manure and a host of other not needed things.

The estimated cost of this new project is \$1.5 million, with likely another million tacked on for equipment and the usual cost overruns. Expenditures are expected to be recovered to some degree by utilizing the Orverter to heat the Town Garage and by saving money by not shipping garbage out on our soon to be \$60 million renovated rail line, which incidentally was the entire basis of the previous recycling and waste transfer program. Sigh.

- prepare by Kelsey Eliasson

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HISTORY & CULTURE

AGAINST ALL ODDNYS

Sailing to Hudson Bay Aboard the General Store

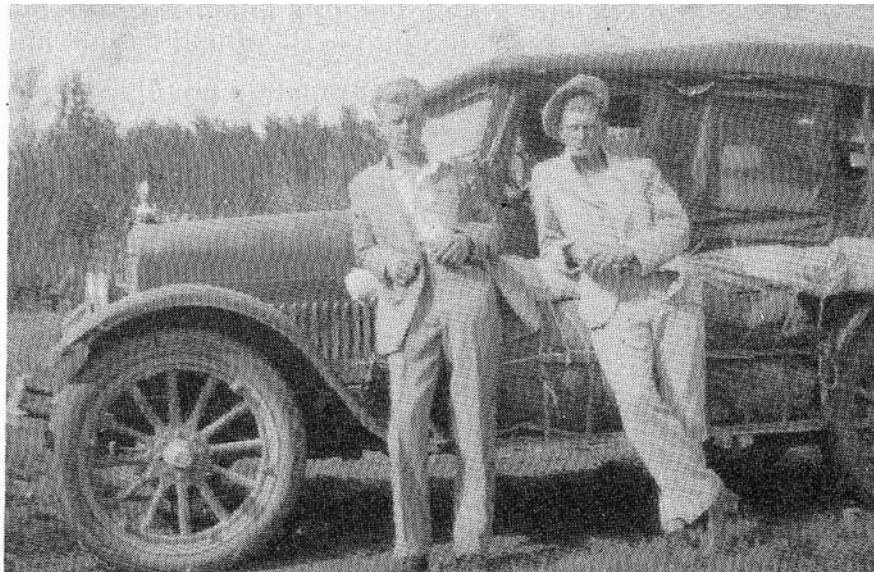
In the late 1870s, waves of Icelanders emigrated to Canada, claiming settling in Manitoba's Interlake region and even forming the Republic of New Iceland.

In 1876 as with the very early groups of emigrants Sigurdmundur Sigurdson sailed with his mother Oddny and seven of his brothers and sisters to Canada. The family settled and farmed in Arnesbyggd or Arnes for short. Arnes was a small community in the heart of the 'New Iceland'.

But, as the years passed, he eventually turned his gaze to new ventures and new horizons. The depression loomed over the farming industry and it seemed time for him and his two sons, Sigurdmundur (Oskar) and Palmi, to move on. He looked north, visiting both Edmonton and The Pas to scout out opportunity. But it was Churchill, heralded as the next major international seaport, that won out. Sigurdmundur and sons set out to move the family store from Arborg (near Arnes) to Churchill.

Churchill was a bustling frontier town. A tent city extended from the Port of Churchill across to Jockville and down towards the newly relocated townsite. Men travelled to Churchill from across the prairies to build the port, the new water pipeline from Lake Rosabella and put the finishing touches on the new railway.

There was one problem, however. Workers in Churchill needed a government issued permit to work and live in the community. This both served to weed out the 'ne'er-do-wells' that are inevitably attracted to the frontier. It, of



Oskar and Palmi and not the Oddny...

course, also served to keep 'unscrupulous speculators' and, of course, potential competitors to the Hudson's Bay Company out of town.

Sigurdmundur and Sons found that they could get a rail pass to come up to Churchill as workers not as entrepreneurs. Of course, the best way to get an Icelander to do something is to tell them they can't do it.

In the late 1920s, leaving their families in the south, they travelled to Mile 412, the northernmost point accessible without a railpass, still about 100 miles south of Churchill. Here, with the assistance of a boat builder named Rasmussen also from the Arnes area, Sigurdmundur and his sons built their own Peterhead Boat, christened the Oddny in honour of his mother who after all had made the boat journey to bring him to Canada. The Sigurdsons would trade in Churchill, railway be damned.

The next year, they sailed up the Nelson River and out into Hudson Bay, destined for Churchill. For the next few years, they would haul freight, travelling each

year from Churchill to trade at the York Factory treaty days.

By 1933, Sigurdmundur had gained a permit and lease to establish a general store in Hudson Square. He soon arranged to bring the rest of his family up to Churchill, including his daughters Svana, Sigrun and Helga.

Sigurdmundur got a permit and lease to build a store on Hudson Square so he moved the rest of the family from Arborg in 1933 - including his daughters Svana, Sigrun and Helga.

Sigurdmundur would unfortunately pass away the next year and Sm Sigurdson General Store closed. His sons, Oskar and Palmi would spend the next few years trapping and trading north of Churchill, covering the regions around Long Point, Seal River and North River. Oskar fluent not only in Icelandic but also Inuktitut enjoyed a fair degree of success in the final years of the fur trade.

By 1938, Oskar and Palmi along with Fred Martin established the Maguse River Trading Post, sixteen kilometres

outside of Arviat, and Hiwalik Trading Posts in what is today Nunavut.

In the winter, supplies and furs would be shipped in an out by dog team and snowshoe but each summer, the Oddny would continue to run freight north along Hudson Bay.

Maguse Trading Post shut down in 1950 and the buildings eventually sold to the Eskimo Gospel Mission. Through the 1940s, the U.S. and Canadian military presence in Churchill had become a going concern and the store had reopened in 1947. Oskar, Sigrun and Fred Martin focused their efforts on the newly reopened store, christened the Sigurdson & Martin Supermarket and Ship Chandlers Emporium.

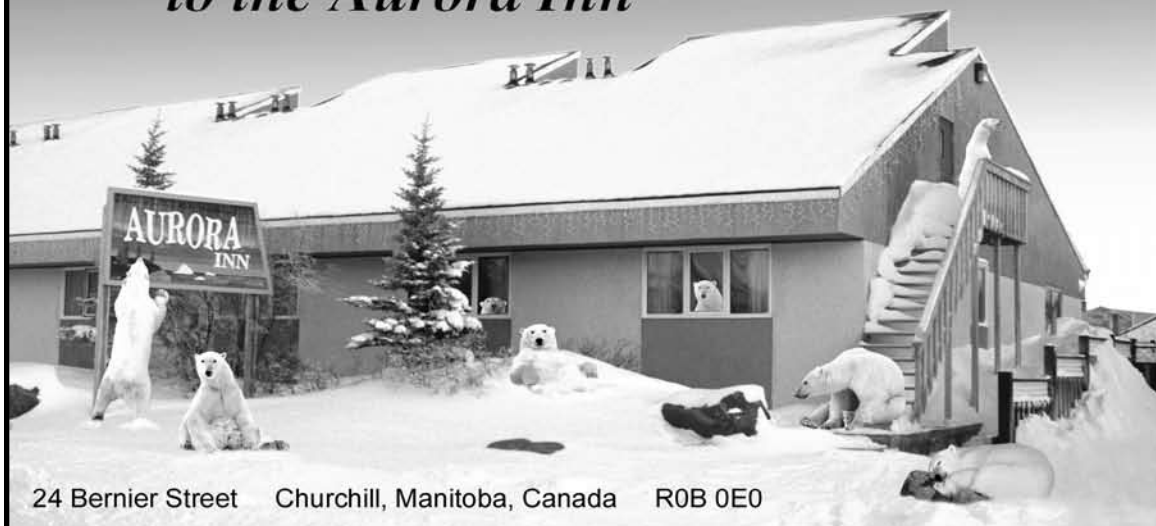
Oskar and Palmi still worked the land, heading north to Seal River to prospect and still following their traplines through much of the winter. But with Maguse was closed and the days of the fur trade in decline, this became more and more of a 'recreational' trip.

As for the Oddny, without supplies to run north, she would eventually come to rest on the Flats, near the Adananc Whaling Plant. After sitting drydocked for several years, the Oddny was sold to the Rankin Inlet nickel mine and headed north.

The Sigurdson & Martin Supermarket ran for many years and still stands in its original location facing Hudson Square. It has been shut down for a couple years now but in a town that has been declared dead many times over, you never know when the next 'Oddny' carrying a stubborn speculator is around the corner.

- prepared by Kelsey Eliasson

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