

"As a government we're committed to supporting the event in 2005 and if there's any further help needed we'll be there and willing to hear your voices. And they won't be voices in the wilderness, because this event is very much a focal point of the the community."



Extreme Bikers Head for Nome to Recreate 1900 Journey

by Dan Davidson

The Bikes on Ice team poses at Saint Mary's Catholic Church.
Photo by David Edwards



In early March three intrepid adventurers, or maybe just nuts - it's all in how you view it - set off from Dawson City to recreate an historic bicycle trip to Nome made 103 years earlier by two men, Max Hirschberg and Ed Jesson. As strange as this may sound, this was done independently by these two would be gold seekers during an era when the bicycle was seen as a perfectly acceptable mode of transportation for going long distances.

As far as the idea of winter travel was concerned, there are usually a number of people even now who keep their two wheelers in motion just about all year round.

Kevin Valley, Andy Sterns and Frank Wolf have a habit of making strange and unusual journeys. In various combinations they have ridden bicycles around the island of Java (Frank and Kevin), stopping to climb its thirteen volcanoes along the way; crossed Canada coast to coast by canoe (Frank and another buddy); sea-kayaked the west coast of Thailand (Frank and partner) and whitewater kayaked in Malaysia.

They also have a fascination for the north. Andy Sterns skied the Serum Trail in Alaska with a friend as well as racing the Iditarod twice himself as a musher and once with Kevin and another fellow on skis.

As Kevin tells it, it was the stop at Ruby, Alaska, during that last trip in 2000 that introduced them to the tale of Ed Jesson. The story was fascinating enough in oral form to make them look it up.

"We thought we were doing something amazing then," Valley said, but this was even better."

Talking to Kevin and Frank in their Dawson headquarters at Saint Mary's Catholic Church in early March (Andy had yet to arrive from Fairbanks at that point), they were both clear that it was Jesson's memoir which inspired them to travel from their homes in North Vancouver and peddle off down the Yukon River on a journey they expected to take them about 6 weeks.

"We actually found his diary. Sure enough it was a true story. His diary was so thorough and good that it was considered one of the best diaries of the Klondike era, period. Also he was inspired enough to take newspapers with him, including papers from Seattle and Dawson."

As we know from other tales of the time, anyone travelling with recent, or even old, news was an instant hit where ever he went.

"When he arrived in Nome ... the city stopped, they took one of the biggest halls in the city, the dancers were given the night off, everyone filed in there and they read the newspapers aloud. As a result he became this hero that everybody remembers."

The Bikers on Ice trio planned to take papers along with them too, especially ones in which they had been written up.

Their route plan is to follow the Yukon River to Circle and along the Yukon Flats to Tanana and back to Ruby. From there it follows the the Iditarod trail to Kaltag, after which they have to "portage" 160 km to the Bering Sea. From there it's a final 400 km to Nome.

The bikers actually left Dawson on March 3, a day when the temperature hit -35°C and they were headed into a stiff headwind. The update on their website (<http://members.shaw.ca/kvallely/Expedition%20updates.htm>) for that day recorded the event for an article by Vallely which later appeared in the Vancouver Sun.

"Thursday morning March 6th rises cold and sunny as we head down Front street to the bank of the Yukon River and the start of our journey to Nome. The -35°C temperature and strong head wind gives us a solid wake-up punch as the river takes its first swipe at us. A huge mushroom cloud looms ominously just north of Dawson City signalling open water ahead and we are sobered by the thought that the river is not fully frozen. We quietly slip down the bank to the ice below and are finally off."

Three weeks later their postings reveal that they have entered a rhythm of sleeping in trappers cabins or in their high tech tent, rising early and travelling from 10 in the morning until early evening when they settle down for a meal and sleep.

Their spirits are still high, though the trail has been both colder and tougher than they expected. They're still aiming for a mid-April arrival in Nome.



Quigley Landfill Issue Boils Over

by Dan Davidson

The City of Dawson has announced that it is tired of waiting for a series of territorial governments to follow through on promises made when the Quigley Landfill replaced the old Dawson dump half-dozen years ago. It is going to cut off some services to certain territorial buildings in an effort to get the government's attention.

At the time the landfill was set up to operate in a more organized manner than the previous dump, and it was accepted that there would be a need for increased operational costs in order to meet the demands of sorting the waste and recycling where possible. To that end, an additional landfill management fee was tacked onto the utilities bills paid by all Dawson residents.

The landfill, however, serves more than just the town. Klondike Valley residents are also able to make use of the facility, even though the town can't charge them for the service it has to pay for. That money, a sum equal to that in the utility bill, was supposed to come to Dawson from the YTG.