



BUENOS BARGAINS

ARGENTINA'S MONEY WOES MEAN GOOD DEALS FOR VISITORS

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They made it! Bikes on Ice team pulls into Nome

Kevin Vallely



ICEBIKERS

In the freezing cold of February, 1900, a young man named Ed Jesson began an amazing cycling expedition that started in Yukon Territory and ended on the west coast of Alaska. When he rode his bicycle into Nome on March 29, he carried with him copies of newspapers that he had packed at the start of his trip, bringing what was then the latest news to the residents of the community. Kevin Vallely, Andy Sterns and Frank Wolf (left to right in picture) left

Dawson City, Yukon, to follow the route Jesson blazed. Last Wednesday, April 23, 49 days after setting off, they completed their journey.

The day is clear, still and warm as we make our way around Cape Nome and see our destination for the first time. Back in 1900, residents of Nome surveyed the Cape with field glasses for the arrival of dog teams and were stunned to see Ed Jesson appear on a bicycle. The

reaction is similar today. Our ride into town is met with waves, honks and looks of quizzical surprise. I gaze out to the ocean and see that breakup has begun. We made it by the skin of our teeth.

Our arrival on the Alaskan coast more than a week ago coincided with a warming trend, and our trail started to melt before our eyes. We made it to the village of Shaktoolik late in the evening after a 12-hour push from the old reindeer herding station

of Egavik, but it doesn't get dark until near midnight these days and the town was still humming. "You missed it by two hours," cried principal Jim Martin from the second-storey window of the large metal-sided building that is the school here. "The first beluga of the season, it's on the beach behind the building." Beluga and walrus are still being hunted here and everyone is proudly boasting their evening's success.

"Arrived in Shaktoolik, the

lousiest looking layout I ever saw. The North wind howling and the cabin more than full as the wind had been too strong and drifted trail for them to pull out." Although an unfair description of this tiny native community today, Jesson's diary notes reflect the reality of a village perched on the edge of the world. Situated along a narrow breakwater extending 25 km into the Bering Sea, Shaktoolik is utterly exposed.

See **THERE'S NO PLACE** G7

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'There's no place like Nome'

From G1

Crashing surf washes huge slabs of ice just metres from buildings, and the only street in town is perpetually drifted with snow from the relentless ground blizzards that hammer this area. I soon understand Jesson's feelings of gloom and intimidation.

The storm that accompanied us for most of the day has abated but another is on its heels and is coming in from the wrong direction. Blowing snow and high winds wake us early the next morning as a big southwesterly makes crossing the 50-km stretch of sea ice to Koyuk a dangerous proposition. The local search and rescue squad is meeting in the school and warn us against travelling. "The wind is from a very bad direction," says one team member, "I wouldn't head out there now." This concern expressed from a guy who rides his snowmobile on the heaving edge of the ice sheet just to have a little fun.

We wait a day until the storm subsides and make a dash for a small shelter cabin 20 km away at the edge of the ice. It's on this section that Max Hirschberg, who, like Jesson, rode his bicycle on this route, nearly drowned and lost his poke with \$1,500 in gold dust.

"The days were warmer and ... water was flowing in the creeks and rivers. As I crossed the Shaktoolik River, I broke through the ice. Water was running under the surface ice, although there was still ice on the bottom of the river. I succeeded in breaking the surface ice and, hanging on to my bicycle, reached the opposite shore."

These words echo in our ears as the river is again flooded and we delicately make our way across a pressure ridge to the adjacent shore. After a few hours, we catch a glimpse of an endless expanse of white extending to the horizon; the sea ice of Norton Sound.

The weather holds and we make our crossing at first light. A north wind brings in cooler weather, leaving a hard and fast trail to the opposite shore. A narrow band of sea ice extends along the shoreline towards Nome and becomes our frequent path over the following days. Several miles



Andy Sterns, Kevin Vallely and Frank Wolf reach Nome, Alaska, the end of their 49-day Bikes on Ice Journey from Yukon.

out of Elim we notice our first arctic fox racing across the ice. Curious black blobs dot the ice and, to our surprise, one of them lifts its head and disappears below the surface. Seals and their breathing holes are everywhere.

We continue down the coast passing through the village of Elim and soon head overland to reach the sea ice of Golovin Bay. In Jesson's day, travellers would cross this sound, make another short portage and return to the shore ice for the trip into Nome. Warmer temperatures have made this route impassable for decades, so we head inland and make a long, hilly traverse through the tundra and willows of the coastal range. We approach the final ridgeline before the coast, and a lone snowmobiler appears, heading directly to us. He's read about our trip and congratulates us on our journey. "There's a grizzly bear just over the rise, it's just off the trail," he says in passing and roars off on his machine, leaving us with our mouths agape. Feigning bravery we march onwards through the slush but see no evidence of the bruin.

We spend our final night at the small shelter cabin that sits on the edge of the "gold-lined" beach that stretches all the way to Nome; the one that brought the thousands here in a quest for gold. Anchored to the ground with cables and with a beacon on the roof, the Topcock cabin has saved many lives. Storms packing hurricane force winds regularly batter this coastline and words of thanks

are scrawled all over the inside plywood walls of this five-metre by four-metre shelter. "Blowing like hell, 60 knots or better," and "Been here 4 nights and we're running out of food" are just some of the hundreds of notes covering the walls.

We spend only a few hours at the cabin and are on the trail by 4 a.m. The riding is fast and a tail wind comes on the outskirts of Nome before we have a chance to reflect on exactly what is happening. Off in the distance is the city that we've been struggling to reach for 49 days. Unlike Jesson and Hirschberg, Nome for us is simply the end of our journey, not the reason for it.

Ed Jesson was hailed as a hero when he reached Nome because he brought newspapers from the outside world to the ice-bound residents of the city. Musicians in the big dance hall were given the night off and people took turns reading the papers aloud to the news-hungry crowd. "It was a wild night and later they read the *Seattle P.I.* telling of all the boats being fitted for the trip to Nome." As a fun twist, we carry a copy of *The Vancouver Sun* and the *Seattle P-I* and give the papers to the city of Nome as a commemoration.

We made it, it's only dawning on me now. Satisfaction and relief are mixed with a tinge of sadness that this great experience has come to a close. The city slogan is "There's no place like Nome," but, to be honest, I'm looking forward to heading home.

Earthweek: A Diary of the Planet



BY STEVE NEWMAN
TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

'Superbug' Warning

A drug-resistant "superbug" first seen in hospitals has now been observed infecting healthy people. MRSA, methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, normally enters the wounds of patients weakened by disease or injury, often in hospitals. But a new strain that can be transmitted by skin contact, and poses a risk to healthy people, has emerged. Infections first occurred in the United States, where thousands of people have already been affected. Infections usually appear as sores that resemble insect bites. If not treated properly, abscesses and boils can develop, requiring repeated use of antibiotics or surgery.

Mutant Worm Sex

Scientists studying worms in the highly irradiated ground of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster zone have discovered the creatures are having far more sex than their counterparts living elsewhere. The team of biologists from the Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas in Sevastopol found that nearly a quarter of irradiated worms are seeking out partners to reproduce sexually rather than asexually, compared to about five per cent in less-radioactive areas. It appears sexual reproduction allows the worms to transmit their most radioactivity-resistant genes to their offspring, giving them a better chance of surviving the harsh environment, according to biologist Guennady Polikarnov.

Man-Ape Water Conflict

A violent struggle over scarce water supplies has erupted between thirsty baboons and residents of eastern Kenya's Isiolo District. A young girl was left bleeding after being attacked by baboons while she was walking back to her village with three friends. The apparently thirsty baboons wrestled containers from the girls and drank the water after chasing away the children. Isiolo County Council Chairman Ebrahim Halake Fayo said wild animals have also moved to near water sources used by residents due to the acute drought plaguing much of East Africa.

Tropical Cyclones

The outer rain bands of former typhoon Kujira brought the most significant rainfall that parts of Taiwan had received in months. It was feared major reservoirs on the island could run dry before the usual June start of the typhoon season. Tropical storm Ana, the first of the 2003 Atlantic hurricane season, formed well off the U.S. eastern seaboard.

Pre-Monsoon Storms

At least 40 people were killed and nearly 2,000 injured by a severe pre-monsoon storm that devastated parts of India's northeastern Assam state. Most fatalities occurred when families were buried under the debris of collapsed homes, brought down by fierce winds. The storms also lashed neighbouring Bangladesh, where at least 16 people were killed, including several who

were on two separate ferries that sank during the tempest.

Earthquakes

A magnitude 4.8 tremor rocked the western Turkish province of Izmir, causing a brief panic but no casualties. The epicenter was in the town of Urla.

Earth movements were also felt in north-central Iran, northeastern Japan and Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula.

Guangdong Twister

A rapidly moving squall line in southern China's Guangdong province spawned a tornado that injured at least 29 people, according to the official Xinhua news agency. It said the twister damaged 423 homes and wrecked 793 others. Eye-witnesses said the tornado touched down near Leizhou City, where it uprooted large trees, knocked down walls and sucked furniture and other articles into the sky.

Champagne Frost Losses

Up to half of France's 2003 champagne crop may have been lost due to late-season frosts that producers described as the worst in almost 50 years. Early reports said Chardonnay grapes were the worst affected, with about 80 per cent of that vintage lost due to a freak cold snap April 7-11. The French Champagne Producers' Federation said April is the month in which buds burst on the vines and green shoots appear, making them most vulnerable to frost.