CHAPTER 1

The Great Want

Caucasians, with their advanced civilization, should have been well prepared when they first undertook exploration in a region as severe as the Arctic four centuries ago; yet just the opposite was the case. The history of northern exploration is such a litany of disaster it reminds one of so many lemmings in a periodic, suicidal rush to the sea.

The roll call of the dead is a long one, peaking with the loss of one hundred thirty-five men of the Sir John Franklin expedition from sickness, hypothermia, and starvation circa 1848 and 1849.[1] Numerous subsequent expeditions, some searching for Franklin, and others, like him, looking for a route through the Northwest Passage, also lost men.

One of the worst debacles occurred in 1881 when the American-sponsored Lady Franklin Bay expedition to set up a geographical research station on

northern Ellesmere Island was cut off from its base of supplies for two years by the raging ice pack. The men were forced to walk out to a predetermined haven on open water where they could expect an emergency relief ship to look for them. The upshot was a trek that accounted for the deaths of seventeen men.

Failure to properly prepare, and survive, by amateurs in the Arctic was one thing, but how about those permanent residents of the region who supposedly thrived in the rugged environment — the Eskimos, or Inuit as they prefer to be called today, and the more northern of Indian tribes of North America? Not surprisingly, theirs, too, is a history of hardship.

The very nature of subsistence by hunting made it, at best, a precarious way of life. For example, a persistent wind from the south at the wrong time of the year could blow the ice pack far out to sea, making it impossible for the Inuit to travel across the floes in search of sea mammals upon which they lived. Starvation frequently resulted.

Similar problems, though with a different twist, plagued hunters who lived inland. Variations in the conditions of weather and vegetation could so affect the route of a migrating caribou herd, that in some years the caribou would veer off in a completely unexpected direction, many miles from their usual path. Then it was up to the hunters to find them. If they were unsuccessful, they starved. Many factors, or a combination of them, could

contribute to the change of route: fires that destroyed the lichen upon which the caribou grazed; ice conditions that prevented feeding; huge die-offs from blizzards at fawning time; a sudden proliferation of insects; or the spread of disease, could destroy or divert the herd. Unforeseen hunting pressure by predators, both man and animal, could alter the route of the caribou. Even if the caribou did come, there could be problems of harvesting them if they were not spotted immediately. Biologist Doug Wing, recently following caribou by collar radios, pinpointed a herd at one spot on a given day, and found them sixty miles away the next. Even though feeding, a herd can move along at a deceptively fast gait.

The lifestyle for those nomadic hunters who depended on caribou for survival was a vulnerable one, sometimes, it must have seemed, as unpredictable as the lives of the animals upon which they depended. These people were doubtlessly aware of the limitations of their old ways, and consequently were extremely susceptible when they were exposed to what appeared to be a more efficient life style. Little did they know that their rugged existence was the source of the hardiness and power of their race, or that the haphazard and partial adoption of the white man's culture would leave them in a position worse than either complete adoption, or total rejection, of alien customs.

The northern natives, therefore, suffered considerably when European culture and technology

collided with their way of life, commencing with the sixteenth-century intrusion of whaling ships into the eastern Arctic, and later when the same fraternity set up trade along polar coasts of Alaska and the western Arctic. In the 1800s, the barren grounds, the soft underbelly of the Arctic, was pierced by traders from the south. Intrepid adventurers floated down inland rivers such as the mighty Mackenzie which flowed north to the Arctic Ocean, and set up shop. The result of this thrust was a severe economic and sociological impact on the people of the region.

Operators of trading posts were primarily after pelts, meat, and hides, while the sea-borne trade concentrated on whales, and later, seal skins. The sailing merchants traded with the natives to supplement their limited rations aboard ship. This, in turn, gave rise to widespread barter which saw guns, ammunition, and traps exchanged with the native tribes, with predictable results. This commerce tended to destabilize the aboriginal society for a number of reasons. First, the new implements tempted the hunters to over-harvest subsistence animals, thus decimating the very resources they relied on for survival. Second, coastal traders often induced dependency by steering their native customers away from natural diets into foods traditionally unused and unneeded, such as flour, sugar, or later, processed foods. Even worse was the introduction of alcohol, which broke down the family unit because those afflicted with the habit could not

hunt, leaving their families to make out as best they could dealing with the trading posts, or whaling ships that wintered in the vicinity.

The ultimate shock for the natives came when substitute materials such as plastics and petroleum replaced the items the whalers were after — whale bone (baleen) and whale oil. Most of the whalers pulled out of the Arctic, leaving the Inuit dependent upon foods they could not replace and goods unessential for survival, yet lacking the survival skills that had atrophied during the trading interlude. Lack of bullets for a rifle with which to shoot a seal, among people who had forgotten how to use a harpoon, would lead to starvation just as surely as if the animal were not there. As a more trivial example, it is worth noting that one of the more popular items purchased by Inuit along the Arctic coast early in the twentieth century was the gramophone, a spring-operated record player.

Farther south, fluctuations in the market prices of furs, and changes in fashions, dictated the life style of the Indian peoples. The relative benevolence and intervention of government agencies and departments, too, seemed to rise and fall as inevitably as the tides.

The havoc wrought by such changeable conditions within a short time attracted the attentive eyes of those men who followed in the wake of the whalers and traders. These were the missionaries, one of whom, Dr. Sheldon Jackson, while investigating cases of famine in Alaska, sought a solution to the

vagaries of the nomadic hunters' precarious existence.

Jackson, a bewhiskered, intrepid veteran of a lifetime working with the Indian peoples of the American west, was posted to Alaska in 1877. Eight years later he was appointed the United States General Agent for Education in the new territory. He also continued his missionary work for the Presbyterian church.

In his dual position, Jackson became aware of the plight of the natives and isolated three problems he considered paramount. These were: absence of the Christian religion, the lack of education, and recurring bouts with starvation. Jackson solved the first two, since they were parallel in nature, by establishing missions and building schools.

The third objective eluded him until, by chance, he ventured north aboard the United States Revenue cutter *Bear* to visit some outlying Inuit in 1890. M. A. Healy, the hard-drinking, rugged captain of the *Bear*, brought Jackson's attention to Saint Lawrence Island as they cruised by it one hundred miles southwest of Alaska's Seward Peninsula. Healy told him the island had been devastated by a famine which had snuffed out the lives of most of the inhabitants. He was of the opinion that the solution to such tragedies could be found in Siberia, directly across the Bering Strait from Alaska. The captain pointed out to Jackson that the Siberian natives ran tame reindeer which, unlike their wild cousins, the caribou, could be husbanded like

cattle. Thus, they avoided the cycles of feast and famine experienced by caribou hunters.

Jackson immediately saw the value of a domesticated animal that could survive on the tundra, and became convinced that reindeer were the answer to the food crises experienced by the indigenous Alaskans. Employing his clout as the General Education Agent, Jackson ordered a range reconnaissance behind Port Clarence on the Seward Peninsula, the closest natural harbour to Siberia. Ample food plants were found on the tundra and 191 deer were purchased from Siberian Inuits and landed at Port Clarence in 1892. Four Siberians were brought along to care for the deer and to instruct local residents in how to herd them. However, the four did not fit in, and were replaced by six Laplanders who were brought in from northern Norway.

Jackson's reindeer mission received a boost — and international headlines — when several mining camps in the Yukon were threatened with starvation during the fabled Klondike gold rush. A herd of 538 deer was purchased in Norway and shipped, along with 118 Lapp herders and their families, half way around the world in 1898. The rumoured mass starvation turned out to be less imminent than supposed and half of the reindeer were re-routed to Unalakleet, an Inuit village on the Seward Peninsula in Alaska. A total of 1,200 reindeer were purchased in Siberia before the Czar halted shipments in 1902. Included in this number were 254 of a larger strain called *Tunguse* purchased

from the Russians in the Okhotsk area near the Tunguse mountains of south central Siberia. Special arrangements had been made by the United States government to obtain the Tunguse deer in 1901 in order to increase the size of deer already landed in Alaska by breeding-in the larger strain.

After the long sea voyage from the east coast of central Siberia, the deer arrived at Port Clarence, Alaska in poor condition, barely having survived the tumultuous trip. These deer appeared to be of little value when seen for the first time by the handlers who unloaded them. Their North American sojourn would have implications, however, several decades later when the Canadian government was looking for reindeer.

The number of reindeer in Alaska, after the modest inception of the 1890s and early 1900s, rocketed to dizzying heights by the mid-twenties. Commencing with the original stock, the reindeer population had grown from the first born, *April Fool*, to number a respectable 350,000 by 1925. No less than 110 herds were nestled along the Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean, employing, through various services, 600 Inuit and several hundred Laplanders. From 1918 to 1925, more than two million pounds of deer meat were sent from Alaska to the United States mainland. Escalation of sales was even more impressive as shipments from the Territory jumped

from 200,000 pounds in 1923 to almost 700,000 pounds only two years later.

Cattlemen in mainland United States became worried about inroads of deer meat into their market. On one occasion boycotts were instituted in Kansas and Nebraska when farmers learned that two train carloads of reindeer cuts had been shipped to grocery wholesalers in those states.

The sale of meat brought in a modest flow of cash which filtered down to the herders through the middle men and gave the Inuit a means of exchange. Raising reindeer not only provided the native people with such needs as a permanent food source, but also allowed them a way of accruing cash to purchase goods they could no longer do without, such as rifle cartridges. The fledgling industry at least presented the Inuit a chance to avoid complete dependency on the government.

A reindeer herd has substantial procreative capacities: it will double in size every three years under ideal conditions. If a native sat down and figured it out, the statistics were mind-boggling. If he cultivated a herd for fifteen years, 100 deer could increase to 3,200, or at the going rate of ten dollars a head, a value of $32,000. On the basis of the 1929 economy, the cost of production for each animal was a dollar per year!

The most important aspect in regard to the budding industry was the growth of native Alaskan ownership over the first quarter of a century. By

1925, approximately 175,000 deer had been harvested by the Inuits for food and by-products yet the number of deer owned by natives had increased to 200,000. In other words, no matter how one looked at it, the reindeer program was a success, if for no other reason than for the food it provided.

For an outside observer from a country with a disadvantaged native population, this one fact alone would be appealing. Canadian officials were aware of Alaska's success with reindeer, and viewed the industry as a possible answer to recurring problems of starvation among the residents of its northern climes. As early as 1919, a Royal Commission on Muskox and Reindeer[2] had been appointed to investigate the possibilities of establishing a reindeer industry in the Canadian Arctic. Thirty-five persons, most of whom were individuals with polar experience, had appeared before the Commission and testified that the caribou population, upon which some of the native tribes were heavily dependent, was so depleted in many northern areas that the people were literally starving to death.

The Reverend W. G. Walton, a missionary with the Church of England, filed a report with the Commission on May 24, 1920 which was typical of many such treatises emanating from the far-flung north. He tabulated some of the more celebrated encounters with famine: in the Ungava area, 150 Indians died of starvation during the winter of 1892–3 south of Fort Chimo. That same winter seven of

eight Indians on a hunting expedition near Cape Jones perished, the lone survivor having resorted to the gruesome option of living off the bodies of the others. During the winter of 1911–12 an Inuit woman and her two children died of starvation eighty miles north of the Great Whale River trading post. Eleven Indians starved to death in 1918–19 at Richmond Gulf. Yet another three died that year of malnutrition inland from the Great Whale River, and nine more died near Fort George. That winter proved to be one of the worst on record, owing to the scarcity of all wild game.

Viewed from the security of an armchair, starvation invokes visions that inspire sympathy. However, such visions are blurred and devoid of impact when read merely as statistics. Personalizing it, we are presented with a more precise conception of the agony in human terms. Peter Freuchen, one of the Arctic's great explorers, recorded the boyhood experience of an Inuit during a period which the old native described as "The Great Want".[3]

One summer the ice failed to break up, creating, in effect, a two-year-long winter. Game was scarce. The boy's father's hunting partner died and the widow moved in with the child's mother, who was her sister. The lad, who was then in his early teens, had assumed the responsibility of helping his father support the two women and their two children, as well as an elder woman. During the long periods of time his father was gone, hunger gnawed at the vitals of the women and children at home.

Several times the boy saw the women head for a burial plot with knives in hand, though he did not see what they did. The youngest child died and it became apparent they all would die if something was not found to eat.

One night the lad, pretending to sleep, heard one woman whisper to another and point to his foster sister, saying she was strong and fat. He knew they would attempt to kill her, and probably himself, if the situation was right.

The boy thought long and hard that night. He figured if his foster sister and he must die, they might as well die alone, facing the unknowns of the snow and ice, rather than certain death at the hands of the women. He told his foster sister of his plan of escape, but it could not be carried out right away because they had eaten the soles of their shoes and she would have to sew others. Finally that was done, and the boy convinced the other women that he would need his foster sister to help him hunt seals. The two then fled inland. The first day the boy managed to shoot one fox which itself was just skin and bones. The next day their total meal was one ptarmigan, which, as with the fox, they ate raw: without fat to render into fuel, they had no fire. The only way they obtained moisture was to eat snow and ice, which severely burned their lips and mouths.

One can sense the pell-mell advance toward death once the primary necessities of life were denied. Without water, dehydration sets in; without

food the muscles commence to deteriorate; and without heat, the inner core of the body cools down and before long the entire organism ceases operating. One deficiency triggers another in rapid succession. The blood pressure drops, the pulse slows down, and the extremities begin to freeze. The skin becomes thin, dry, inelastic, pale and cold. A patchy brown pigmentation may colour the affected parts. The hair becomes dry and sparse and falls out easily. The brain is also affected. Lassitude and apathy make it difficult to focus one's efforts. Irritability is common. Though the intellect may remain clear, the capacity for work is reduced. The colder the temperature, the quicker nature accomplishes its gruesome task, and once weight loss reaches fifty per cent, death is inevitable.

The third day on the move, the two youths had reached the point of no return. They were staggering from weakness. The boy wanted to shoot a dog they had brought along with them, but the girl asked him to wait. Then, suddenly, their fortune turned when the dog scented a bear which the boy tracked to its lair, flushed out, and killed. The siblings rendered the bear's fat into oil, and got a fire going. They entertained thoughts of taking meat back to the women, but they were too weak to accomplish the task and figured the women would be dead anyway. They continued on, eventually met up with another band, and were taken in.

Later the story of the women's fate came out: all had been found dead. The two younger women

were discovered with crushed skulls and all of the meat eaten off their bones. Only the older woman's body was whole, though she was emaciated.

Starvation is insidious because of the terrible option which has presented itself hundreds of thousands of times to countless groups of humans inhabiting the vast northland — a macabre choice to devour one's kin or to die.

The Royal Commission's hearings in 1919 sparked interest in reindeer, much of it generated by one of the Commission's four members, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who resigned when it became apparent there was a conflict of interest between the Commission's requirement for impartiality and his own attempts to establish a reindeer herd in the Canadian Arctic. An early attempt, with the backing of the Hudson's Bay Company, to set up a herd on Baffin Island had failed due to poor planning, but "Stef" remained convinced that viable herds could be set up in the pasturage available around the Mackenzie River delta.

Paradoxically, no one was starving in the Mackenzie delta at the time of Stefansson's recommendation. In fact, of all the places in the Arctic where the people were least likely to starve, the bountiful delta would have been it. The Mackenzie Inuit in historical times numbered around 2,200 people who subsisted chiefly on creatures of the sea, and of the barren lands and forests in the areas of the Kugaluk

and Anderson rivers, and the sprawling delta of the Mackenzie River. Caribou, moose and muskox were taken on land, and walrus, seals, and beluga whales were the primary animals taken from the sea.

Kittigazuit, with one thousand inhabitants, was the largest community in the western Arctic. For such a large cluster of nomadic hunters to be present in one place, there had to be an unusually large population of wildlife. And in the delta, the principal source of food were the beluga whales. Weighing up to a ton each, these animals were hunted in a sea version of the simple roundup method of harvesting.[4]

Spokesman for the Canadian government in the North at the time of the Commission was Oswald S. Finnie, a lean, well-groomed individual, who had been director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of Canada's Department of the Interior for five years. Born in Ontario in 1876, Finnie graduated with a degree in civil and mining engineering from McGill University in 1897. Immediately afterwards he journeyed to Dawson City in the midst of the Yukon gold rush, where he joined the staff of William Ogilvie, Commissioner of the newly formed Yukon Territory. His portfolio included service as the mining recorder and manager of the government office.

Conflicts over mining claims at the height of the gold rush taxed to the limit the patience of civil servants like Oswald Finnie. That he satisfactorily carried out his duties for eleven years under the

intense pressure of Dawson City was not lost upon his superiors in Ottawa. When the federal government created the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch to deal exclusively with the North in 1920, Finnie became its first director. Consequently, when the Royal Commission on Muskox and Reindeer finally issued its recommendations in 1925, they fell squarely within his terms of reference.

Having been in the sub-Arctic and Arctic for most of his working life, Finnie was knowledgeable of the North's many perplexing problems, not the least of which was the ever present scourge of famine. He was convinced the situation was serious enough to warrant initiation of some sort of program that would provide a permanent source of sustenance for the natives.

Another ardent supporter of this concept was lecturer and free-lance writer Henry Toke Munn, who had lived as a trader among the natives of northern Canada for eleven years. In an article which appeared in the Toronto *Star Weekly* in June, 1923, he cited Alaska's success as something the Canadian government should strive to emulate.

The retired trader argued that the Canadian government was the ideal entity by which to introduce reindeer to Canada because it alone could enforce regulations deemed necessary to preserve the herds, while at the same time instructing natives on how to care for the animals. Toke Munn envisioned development of Canada's vast northern prairies

(tundra) which he claimed were absolutely worthless for any other agricultural purposes.

Another delegate who supported the concept was Dr. Knud Rasmussen, a member of the Advisory Board of Wildlife Protection of Canada's Department of the Interior. He was a trained ethnologist, and part Inuit. He had lived among his people and could speak the Inuit dialect. Thus, he possessed the twin advantages of scientific observation and compassion for the Inuit way of life. His comments carried considerable weight.

"I believe," Rasmussen said, "the introduction of reindeer where there are no caribou would be beneficial and would provide food for the Eskimos. . . ." However, he was not without his reservations. "It will take quite a few years before you can bring enough animals into the country and teach the natives to herd them. I do not believe that herding will be taught in less than a generation," he added.[5]

Such supportive material presented Finnie with the impetus to ask Canada's Department of External Affairs to inquire in the United States as to where the government could purchase such a herd. External Affairs, after an extensive search, came up with the name of a certain Lomen and Company of Nome, Seattle, and New York, a large holder of reindeer herds in Alaska.

CHAPTER 2

A Potential Solution

Lomen and Company, through a daring advertising program promulgated in the United States, was the firm primarily responsible for the boom in the marketing of reindeer meat from 1918 to 1925. Five brothers — Carl, Ralph, George, Alfred, and Harry — had created the company, and named their father, G. J. Lomen, president.

The Lomen brothers were risk takers by inheritance. Their father had walked away from a twenty-year-old law practice in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to join his son Carl in the gold rush to Nome in 1900. Here, the elder Lomen opened another law office. The rest of the family joined G. J. and Carl, and by 1906 the clan had managed to pool their resources to purchase several businesses in the Alaska city.

The Lomens' interest in reindeer operations derived originally from exposure to the herds

around Nome, and from Carl's friendship with Walter Shields, who had taken over as chief of the reindeer program by way of his appointment as Superintendent of the Bureau of Education for the Northwest District of Alaska (Sheldon Jackson's former position), under which the project was supported. Shields, though a newcomer from Washington, D. C., saw the vast potential of the industry and strived to impress natives and whites alike with the versatility of reindeer by using them to the exclusion of dogs, for winter travel. In this way he sought to emphasize their value as draft animals.

Carl Lomen accompanied the enthusiastic Shields on five extensive trips through the reindeer camps, and to several of the annual reindeer fairs which Shields had initiated for the purpose of engendering interest in the industry. The "reindeer rodeos" featured competitive events and activities associated with herding deer (lassoing, races, tests of strength) and provided a forum for the herders to swap ideas and information.

In 1912 Superintendent Shields suggested that Carl and his brothers purchase a herd that happened to be up for sale, pointing out that entrepreneurs could play an important role in developing the industry through investment of capital sorely needed for further expansion of the business.

The herd belonged to a man named Alfred Nilima. Nilima had been among the group that sailed from Norway on their purported rescue mis-

sion to the Klondike gold miners back in 1898. When the herd was split, Nilima had gone to Unalakleet where he watched a herd on contract for the government. As payment for this service he had been offered an option by which he took the Tunguse deer landed at Port Clarence — which no one else wanted because of their deplorable condition — and drove the herd north to Buckland, fifty miles south of Kotzebue. There he had nurtured the herd for twelve years. Now the Lapp was offering for sale the entire lot, which numbered twelve hundred reindeer, at a price of thirty thousand dollars. The Lomens were game. They offered to take an option on the deer for five thousand down, with the balance to be paid in two equal installments over a period of two years.

Nilima accepted the offer, and in order to finalize the deal, Alfred Lomen crammed five thousand dollars worth of currency into a money belt and hiked several hundred miles to give the Lapp the down payment. When he offered Nilima the money, the herdsman told him he wanted a cheque rather than cash. Lomen, obliging, wrote out a draft on a wallet-worn facsimile, and gave it to the herder. The placid, methodical Lapp finally cashed the note two years later.

Stuck with the greenbacks, Alfred Lomen walked to the coastal town of Candle where he gave the cash to a sea captain and asked him to deliver it to his brothers in Nome. That he had never seen the

captain before did not help Alfred's peace of mind any, yet in due course the money was delivered.

The Lomen family sought investors to participate in a corporation they formed to underwrite the cost of the reindeer purchase. The most affluent of the creditors engaged was Jafet Lindeberg, who was the president of the Pioneer Mining and Ditch Company, Nome's largest gold-dredging concern. Lindeberg's interest in the reindeer proposal arose from the fact he had come as foreman from Norway on the same expedition as Nilima. After delivering the deer to Unalakleet, Lindeberg and two partners struck a bonanza on the Snake River, not far from Nome's present location, and had gone on to prosper.

Having acquired the deer, the company now needed a foreman to run the herd and teach the new owners the business. The Lomens selected Andrew Bahr, yet another veteran herder who had journeyed to Alaska under the same contract as Lindeberg and Nilima. His desire, too, had been to prospect for gold rather than to herd reindeer.

Bahr had actually reached the Klondike while escorting the half of the deer herd that had *not* been diverted when the relief expedition was suspended. Released from the reindeer contract, he set out down the Yukon River in pursuit of his dream, but met with a minor disaster when the raft on which he was travelling tipped over in the river and he lost most of his gear. Bahr shrugged off his yearnings

for gold and headed for Unalakleet to seek a job with the reindeer.

The Lapp was given a contract by the United States Bureau of Education to watch a small herd for six months. Bureau personnel mislaid instructions for his relief and six *more* months elapsed before they discovered the oversight. An expedition was quickly dispatched to search for Bahr who, to the Bureau's relief, was still at his post watching the animals. The deer were in good condition though they had been buffeted by a series of winter storms. Bahr's dedication and general professionalism made a strong impression on his employers, and from that time onward, he was adjudged one of the most dependable herders in the business.

After purchasing Nilima's herd, the Lomens propitiously decided to concentrate solely on sales in the "Lower 48", the United States mainland, and to leave the local economy to the Inuits. With Bahr as head herdsman, the company expanded its operations, adding to the herd and hiring more employees, all of them either Lapps or Inuits.

In 1921, the company suffered a setback when their principal backer, Lindeberg, found it necessary to withdraw his support for the reindeer venture. As a consequence, Carl Lomen left for New York to seek financing, now badly needed if the company was going to continue its expansion. Lomen was able to obtain references from an old acquaintance, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, whom he had known in Nome. After a series of near-misses

scouring Wall Street for several hundred-thousand dollars worth of financing Lomen managed to secure the backing of two foresighted attorneys in the prestigious firm of Griggs, Baldwin, and Baldwin.

The Lomen brothers and the Baldwins blended very well. The latter were from upstate New York, where they had been raised on a poverty-ridden dairy farm, which Arthur propounded had been the poorest in the state. One of their first business ventures as youths was selling a skunk pelt for ninety cents, which they split between them. Nevertheless, after graduation from Cornell Law School, they had gone on to set up a highly successful law practice in New York City in partnership with James W. Griggs, former Attorney General of the United States. Their firm represented such notables as Charles W. Murphy when that Irishman was head of the formidable Tammany Hall political machine and the unchallenged boss of New York. Arthur Baldwin was the individual who brought together McGraw and Hill to form the giant publishing firm of the same name. When it came to clout, the Baldwins had plenty of it.

The combination of the Baldwins' influence and the Lomens' enthusiasm was to put the reindeer operation on the crest of a wave of publicity sorely needed to advertise the product. This was exemplified by a "Reindeer Week" celebration they promoted in the mid-twenties. Jimmie Walker, New York City's vibrant mayor, was enlisted by the

Baldwins to proclaim the seven-day festival. The theme of the week was to inform the public that reindeer meat was now available at local butcher shops. Such celebrities as Stefansson; Roald Amundsen, the first man to reach the South Pole; W. C. Henderson of the United States Department of Agriculture; and nationally known food expert, Alfred W. McCann, were enlisted in the campaign.

McCann wrote a column that appeared regularly in the Brooklyn *Daily Times*, where he expressed his appreciation of the fact that reindeer cuts could now be purchased in the city's butcher shops, as well as aboard the crack trains of the Northern, the Soo, Northern Pacific, and Milwaukee railroads. Commenting on the taste of the steaks, McCann wrote: "The flavor of reindeer meat offers not the slightest suggestion of gaminess or wild animal flavor. The meat is finer in texture than beef and far more tender. It has all the juiciness of beef with the texture of lamb, but tastes like neither. It is actually delicate in flavor."[1]

Thanks to New York's media, Reindeer Week was successful in acquainting gourmets with a new dimension in the culinary field. Such promotions served to make Lomen and Company synonymous with the reindeer industry. It followed that anyone interested in raising reindeer would do well to seek out the Lomens. Canada's External Affairs Department had done this when they contacted Leonard Baldwin in New York City on behalf of Oswald Finnie.

Leonard Baldwin responded to the Canadian request by sending O. S. Finnie a booklet describing the reindeer program. At the same time, he asked the director if he could render any assistance on the subject.

Finnie replied on August 22, 1925 outlining his needs: "If it were possible to transport reindeer from Alaska . . . it seems to me this would be the salvation of these (Inuit) people." He added: "Perhaps you could give us an idea of what it might cost to herd, say, two thousand reindeer, leaving them in two herds — one in the neighborhood of the Mackenzie River, on the east side thereof, and the other in the vicinity of the Anderson or Horton River."[2]

After conferring with Carl Lomen in Seattle, Baldwin advised Finnie the Lomen Company could do the job. He said their company could deliver the deer to the east side of the Mackenzie for $150 a head. He added they would do it for $25 a head less if delivered to the west side. The company would require a quarter of the total sum as down payment, and six months' notice to prepare for the expedition.

Finnie, who did not pretend to be any sort of an expert on reindeer, forwarded Baldwin's letter to Maxwell Graham of the Wildlife Branch of Canada's Department of the Interior, for his opinion. Graham responded with several objections, one to the price and the other to the suggestion of delivery west of the river. He cited the fact that the Hudson's

Bay Company, in its venture, had purchased deer delivered from Norway for $65 a head. He felt that $75 would be more acceptable. At this point, both parties were postulating about the price; such a drive had never been attempted before, so estimates of cost were only an educated guess. Naturally the purchaser was on the low side, with the seller the opposite.

Finnie capsulized Graham's observations and sent them to Baldwin, reiterating that he was more interested in having the deer delivered to the *east* bank. The latter point highlighted one stumbling block for deer driven from Alaska; the Mackenzie could not be approached from the west without going through a thirty-mile tangle of willows, alders, and buckbrush where the tundra of the Arctic coast met the tree line of the river delta. Because this morass was impassable, the herd would have to be driven in mid-winter right out onto the bay where the river flows into the Arctic Ocean. This island-splayed sound was eighty miles across, and contained a twenty-mile-wide stretch of open ice. The deer, without food as an enticement to hold them, would be extremely susceptible to stampeding if hit by a storm during the crossing.

In the meantime, the Lomens moderated their asking price. The company would reduce the price per head to $75 for deer delivered to the west side of the river if 3,000 were purchased. Again, Finnie forwarded the terms to Graham, who saw them as

more realistic, but he still objected to the place of delivery.

At this point, Finnie's superior, Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior, W. W. Cory, advised him to defer negotiations until a proper study could be made of the grazing land in the delta area. Haggling over the price of the herd's delivery would be a waste of time if the region could not support any reindeer in the first place.

Cory was an attorney; thus he and Finnie, who was an engineer, constituted a good, pragmatic team to launch the reindeer project. Though eleven years older than Finnie, Cory had joined the Interior Department three years after his colleague, first serving in the Dominion Lands Department. He spent four summers in Dawson City, from 1901 to 1903, where the two had come to know each other well. In 1904, Cory had been named Assistant Commissioner of the Lands Department, and the following year was promoted to the Deputy Minister position.

Finnie and Cory had worked together for twenty-five years by 1925, and in the course of that time had travelled extensively throughout the Arctic, evaluating its needs. And though optimistic about the North's future, they were prudent enough to proceed with caution when it came to grandiose schemes concerning economic development. They knew the one thing a man learned in the Arctic and sub-Arctic — and that was to exercise patience in

the face of the formidable odds Nature had dealt in the implacable northland.

The two administrators agreed that an expert from the scientific community, ideally a botanist, would have to be found to take on the job of surveying the feasibility of the reindeer project. This would have to be done before the Canadian parliament could be asked to fund the program. A salary was allotted for such a position, which for budgetary reasons was labelled an "Exploratory Engineer". The pay was set at $2,700 a year with an additional $1,500 provided for a living allowance, and another $800 for expenses. Finnie suggested an assistant's position be added, as the botanist would be called on to travel long distances over the tundra, and under such circumstances could not be expected to go alone because of the risks involved. An allotment was set aside for this position as well.

Cory queried the chief of the United States Biological Survey, E. W. Nelson, for information about reindeer operations in Alaska while Finnie circulated a memo through different departments of government to see if a botanist could be obtained from one of them. Announcements were also sent to the major universities in the nation. The response to the Canadian government's request for a botanist was not overwhelming, and what few applications did come in were not acceptable. Ultimately, A. Erling Porsild was suggested for the position. He was the son of a Danish professor of botany who had set up a botanical research station in

Disko Island off the west coast of Greenland in 1906. Young Porsild had lived most of his life in this bleak environment, spoke fluent Inuit, and had handled dog teams since he was a youth. He had eventually earned a Degree in Botany from the University of Copenhagen. His older brother, Thor, who later preferred to be called Bob, had attended the same school to study biology, and was obviously a candidate for the assistant's job. Bob had been raised in the same environment, and had a repertoire of skills learned from the hard lessons of experience. He spoke passing Inuit, could forge a sled, had hunted seals and polar bear, could build a snow shelter, and above all, like his brother he possessed the scientific knowledge to go along with his other qualifications. Equally important, Bob and Erling were in their twenties, young and physically strong.

In addition, a strict, no-nonsense martinet of a father had honed them to be as tough mentally as they were physically. When they were told to do something, they did it, and they did it right. Bob was bigger and stronger physically than Erling, the latter having had a bout with tuberculosis that was cured by his mother's insistence he return to Disko Island from Denmark, where he had been in University. Erling, on the other hand, held the edge in power of will. Nothing, but nothing, could deter Erling when his mind was set on a course of action. Bob was more conciliatory and compromising than was his younger brother.

Deputy Minister Cory, when advised of the avail-

ability of Erling Porsild by M. O. Malte, chief botanist for the United States National Herbarium, contacted the younger Porsild in the state of Illinois, where the scientist was pursuing advanced studies at the University of Chicago. Cory entrained to the Windy City and was so impressed by the young Dane's qualifications that, after further consultations with Nelson in Washington, he hired both Erling and Bob, in May 1926. The deputy minister summarized his expectations of what the Porsilds were to accomplish: They were to study the myriad complexities of the reindeer industry in Alaska and learn the main principles fundamental to success. Those principles would then be applied to determine the viability of introducing the deer into northwestern Canada. The final word on the subject was dependent on their recommendations: if Erling Porsild concluded that the project was not feasible, Finnie would shelve it.

Erling and Bob were of a kind, with a proper respect for the Arctic environment, a youthful enthusiasm, and a vast capacity for learning. Nelson of the U. S. Biological Survey made arrangements to show them around Alaska, suggesting that Erling and Bob observe a number of different herds, beginning that August, in order to see the practical applications of grazing techniques. This meant attending roundups as well, where they would learn how to capture, corral, and care for the

deer. They studied the methods of notching the deer's ears to prove ownership; Arctic conditions and the deer's peculiar skin made branding impractical.

The Porsilds were taught that deer, like people, have their own idiosyncrasies. Reindeer will mill (circle) when agitated, either one way or the other in a corral, but not both ways. In other words, if a particular herd circles clockwise, it will never go in the opposite direction. Therefore a herder wanted to make sure the ears of the reindeer were marked on the side that could be seen from the fence. Even the structure of the corral depended on the direction the deer milled. Funnel-shaped holding-pens inside the corral were built with their wide end facing the direction of milling, so that the deer would naturally run *into* the separating pens, rather than sweep by the opening, missing it. The tendency to mill is the clue to another typical difficulty in working reindeer — once they are disturbed, it is difficult to calm them down again.

Erling and Bob viewed one of the preferred corral designs at the Buckland camp. The compound was circular and exceptionally large, so that the heat from the bodies of the tightly packed deer would not melt the surface snow, which might then later freeze to an icy glaze. The secret to the success of this type of paddock was the construction of separating pens, or pockets, located on either side of the exit from the main corral to the chute through which the animals passed individually to

be treated. These pens allowed the herd to be divided into small bunches and put through the chutes as needed, thus avoiding the old method of lassoing each deer for de-horning, castrating, or to examine them for ownership, disease, or other purposes.

Other elements of corralling learned from the hard voice of experience were passed on to the Porsilds. If, for example, reindeer were processed too slowly, deer held outside the corral could decimate the forage by undue trampling. In addition, the ground would become contaminated with excrement and a magnet for parasites.

Starvation was always a possibility if the deer overgrazed the surrounding tundra. There were no feasible ways of importing food from neighbouring regions as could be done in cattle-raising areas. For this reason portable corrals were designed. They could be moved periodically, thus controlling the area in which the deer fed and affording the deer a bountiful food supply without destroying the tundra.

Herdsmen were quick to point out to the two Danes that a grazing range might be appropriate in the summer, but vagaries of climate could make the same area a death trap for deer at other times of the year. Coastal areas were acceptable locales in the warm months because ocean breezes kept warble flies and mosquitoes at bay. However, in winter, these places were susceptible to chinooks which blew in warm air, bringing rain and unseasonal

thaws. If the ensuing carpet of water froze to a deep enough thickness, the deer would starve to death because they could not paw through the ice to feed on the lichens trapped underneath.

Such conditions demanded that the deer be moved to higher ground in order to avoid the ice problem. But herding in interior pastures had drawbacks as well. Deprived of an access to the sea coast, the deer's only means of escape from insects was on the higher mountain tops. If there were no mountains high enough and sufficiently exposed to cool breezes, that region was considered a poor one in which to run deer.

Erling and Bob learned that reindeer, though they resemble cattle on the range, actually banded together like sheep. They were also similar to horses in that they nervously trampled the range, grazing as they went; but unlike horses, they travelled against the wind rather than with it.

One of the biggest problems of management arose from the deer's homing instinct. In open-range country as found in Alaska, where natural barriers were relatively few (though still more than in Canada's northwest), this gave rise to all sorts of disputes and charges, not the least of which was rustling. Often, when reindeer were sold or transferred from one herd to another, the animals would return to their former owner, sometimes passing through and drawing off animals from other herds along the way.

Yet another problem involved the social aspects

of a reindeer's nature. Inevitably, they were attracted to a larger group. Thus, if a large caribou herd migrated through an area, deer in a smaller group would drift off with it.

It seemed every time Erling and Bob turned around they discovered something new. Erling summed up his observations when he wrote: "Even if we have not gained the skill of trained reindeer men, we have learned enough to ascertain for ourselves if a herd is handled correctly and efficiently or not."[3]

The brothers finally wound up their investigations at Kotzebue, and in December 1926 plotted their route to the Mackenzie delta for the next phase of their study. The path would take them along the northwest coast of Alaska to Barrow, then along the shores of the Arctic Ocean across the Yukon Territory to Aklavik, in Canada's Northwest Territories. The route along the coastline, though a little longer than a direct overland route, would avoid the interior mountains and keep them closer to coastal settlements. Erling felt this trip would also afford them an excellent opportunity to study reindeer herders in another environment, that of the Arctic coast where there were few white men. The Inuits' prosperity in this region — or lack of it — would give the Porsilds a good indication of how feasible the concept of herding reindeer would be in Canada. Another objective of their scouting was to search for forage that would sustain a large herd on a trail drive. Winter forage consisted

of various mosses such as heath, pad, reindeer, fern, bunch, and Iceland. Berries such as the mountain cranberry also lay frozen under the snow. Summer plants they would search for included willows, birch, vetch, dock, gentian, blueberry, crowberry, and such grasses as water buttercup and fern weed.

The Porsilds' trip back to Canada was itself an accomplishment of major proportions, mushing through fifteen hundred miles of some of the most inhospitable land on earth. Barely a week out on the trail, the two brothers rounded Cape Beaufort only to be walloped by a blizzard from the far reaches of Siberia. The men managed to find refuge in an Inuit pit-cabin already occupied by four native families numbering fifteen people. They bivouacked here for ten long days. The unintentional roommates were soon relegated to eating fish the scientists had brought along to feed their dogs. Four of Bob's animals and one of Erling's died of starvation and exposure.

Several weeks later, after reaching Beechey Point, the dogs again exhausted to the point of uselessness, the two men decided Erling should continue eastward alone leaving Bob to catch up whenever he felt his dogs were fit enough to travel.

Even under ideal conditions, to make a solitary journey through one of the most treacherous areas of the globe as Erling was about to do tempted fate to the utmost. Almost any unexpected mishap, however apparently minor at first, could endanger a wayfarer's life. If a man fell off his sled and missed

grabbing on to the safety line that normally trailed behind, there was the chance his dogs would keep running and disappear in the distance, possibly attracted by the enticing whiff of caribou from an offshore wind. Thus stranded, the musher might die of exposure, starvation or a combination of the two. Even *with* his team there was always the possibility of the musher falling into an open lead of water, or of breaking an ankle, or of wrenching a knee, or of experiencing any number of ailments such as influenza, that could render him incapable of continuing or extricating himself from his predicament.

Erling travelled safely across the Yukon–Alaska border, but soon after, the botanist found out that he was not immune to mishaps. In hefting the heavy sled after the half-ton load had tipped over, he wrenched a groin muscle, and by the time he reached Herschel Island two days later, he was in intense pain from a hernia. As a result, the police inspector at Herschel detailed a constable to take him the rest of the way to Aklavik, where Porsild arrived April 9, 1927. His brother reached the delta community a week later, completing a trip few explorers could have achieved as competently.

The journey left the Porsilds with a nagging worry over the efficiency of Inuit herders because of sloppy techniques they spotted. Of one Erling wrote: "He himself, when his herd was not doing well, at once lost interest in it and though he was known as a very good reindeer man before, the herd suffered sadly from mismanagement."[4] This herder's case was not unique, and the same scenario was repeated again and again in Alaska. Erling stressed that Inuits could be good men when under the supervision of a white man, but if left to themselves they tended to neglect the herd when increases in the number of animals, and profits, were not up to expectations.

All the blame, however, was not laid on the Inuits. Erling cited the fact that white fox furs were selling at a premium, and consequently, pursuit of the furs caused them to neglect the deer.[5]

These evaluations were to be of extreme importance relative to the ultimate recommendations Erling would make on whether or not a reindeer herd should be initiated in Canada. As far as he was concerned, it would be all right to help the Inuit, but if the native people were reluctant to assume the burden and responsibility of managing a herd of deer, some other arrangement would have to be made, such as hiring Lapps, pending a change of attitude. Otherwise, the program would have to be nixed altogether.

After a few months' rest, the brothers set out again in July 1927 to accomplish the formidable task of examining the prospective range lands of the Mackenzie delta. Travelling by gas boat, they went as far east as the Anderson River, north to Richards Island, and south to Eskimo Lakes.

Their research revealed the forage in the area to be viable and actually better for sustaining rein-

deer than much of the range in use by herders in Alaska. According to the estimates of the Porsilds, the area that included Richards Island and the mainland was capable of supporting 250,000 reindeer.

Erling wired their findings to Finnie at the conclusion of the trip in September 1927. His message read: "Returned east eleventh instant having completed . . . traverse approximately 15,000 square miles of reindeer pasture ranging in every respect with best types found in Alaska."[6]

When Finnie received the telegram, he sent a note to representatives of the American government, and to Deputy Minister Cory, advising them of the optimistic statement on the grazing potential. Perhaps a deal could be struck after all.

Erling Porsild's terms of reference required that he carry out additional range reconnaissance. In December, he and his brother made a quick trip by dog team to investigate winter grazing conditions over the same area they had covered that summer. Returning in January 1928, they rested for a month, and then launched another dog-sled trip to check out winter grazing conditions that took them as far east as Great Bear Lake. They concluded this journey in time to catch the last boat up the Mackenzie River in September 1928, and reached Ottawa soon afterwards.

Erling then filed his formal report. In it, he took pains to advise Finnie of the many problems which could arise in respect to establishing a reindeer

industry in northwestern Canada. He recommended where to purchase range stock, routes the proposed reindeer drive should take, the type of facilities needed to receive the deer, and a variety of other details that would have to be included in any contract negotiated for purchasing the deer.

Erling enumerated four basic requirements that would have to be fulfilled before any agreement could be signed. These called for: Delivery of the heard *east* of the Mackenzie River *before* fawning season; steers to be accepted only at a much lower price than breeding stock; two experienced reindeer men to stay on with the herd for at least two years; and the prime cost of the deer should be considerably under that of one hundred twenty-five per head sought by the Lomen brothers.

The botanist displayed little confidence in the prospect of letting Canadian Inuits handle the deer on their own for the first two years. Instead, he opined that besides the two Alaskan herders, two young married Lapps be brought over from Norway to handle the herd. Their services would suffice until the local inhabitants learned how to handle the job.

Porsild attached a proposed cost sheet for initial expenditures which totalled $276,000. Summarizing the potential of the project, he pointed out that the reindeer operation could expect an increase of sixty to seventy-five per cent per year on females, though the actual ratio of males to females at birth was even. Females were to be retained at the same

percentage level as their increase. Surplus males would be castrated and eventually killed for meat. Porsild estimated a well-managed herd of three thousand deer could supply five hundred to seven hundred and fifty steers a year for the local market in the Mackenzie delta, which he felt was adequate to absorb the kill, and thus be self-supporting after the first couple of years of operation.

The Porsilds' journey had been reported by the major papers of North America. Newsmen were generally supportive of initiating a reindeer industry in their articles concerning the reindeer venture. The Montreal *Gazette's* editorial of December 19, 1928, was representative of the majority when it wrote: "If success can be achieved after the reindeer have been introduced . . . a new era may be opened up for Canada's northland. A meat industry of great proportions may be developed. . . . "

CHAPTER 3

Preparations

Early in 1929 Erling Porsild penned a memo to Finnie in which he noted that a long interval had passed since the government had been in correspondence with Alaska's reindeer men. He suggested that new quotations be solicited on the price of a herd. Finnie agreed this would be a good idea, and asked for recommendations on those companies that could best supply reindeer.

Porsild's United States contact, L. J. Palmer, recommended the Lomen brothers on the basis of superior herds, better organization, and more encompassing commercial interests in coastal shipping than other ranchers in Alaska. The Lomens also owned several trading posts, as well as a canning plant and a reindeer by-products plant.

The Canadian government, therefore, focused its attention on the Lomen brothers. Erling Porsild

gave Deputy Minister Cory a thorough briefing before he entrained for New York to review the final positions of each party. Porsild reiterated that any offer considered by Cory should require the herd to be delivered east of the Mackenzie River. He also advised that the down payment should not be more than twenty-five per cent of the cost. He stressed that a secondary installment be avoided completely "as considerable difficulties are apt to arise on the last part of the drive that may seriously threaten the welfare of the entire herd."[1] By this he meant the crossing of the Mackenzie delta, which was recognized by all parties as a formidable obstacle. In other words, if the Lomens were paid the extra increment and lost the herd on the crossing, the Canadian government would be the loser.

The conference of Cory and Baldwin went off without a hitch in New York City, and the final contract was signed on May 8, 1929. The Canadian government agreed to pay the Lomen Reindeer Corporation a total of $195,000 with $30,000 down on August 1, 1929, another payment of $82,500 a year later (ignoring Porsild's advice), and the balance when three thousand deer were delivered on the east side of the Mackenzie delta. Other "housekeeping" details provided that the drive must be launched on or before October 15, 1929, and that a price of $20 a head be set for all deer delivered in excess of 3,000.

The Lomens agreed to furnish a bond that guaranteed restitution of funds advanced by the

government if, for some reason, the herd was not delivered. This clause, and the fact that the wealthy and philanthropic Leonard Baldwin was the guarantor, was one of the principal reasons for Canada choosing the Lomen organization.

Signing of the contract sent both parties into a whirlwind of activity. Finnie dispatched the two Porsild brothers to different destinations: Erling departed for Kotzebue to observe selection of the herd, while Bob was assigned the difficult task of choosing a site for a reindeer station at the final destination. Once that was accomplished, he was to build housing facilities for personnel, and erect corrals and chutes to handle the deer.

While the Porsilds went about their assignments, the Lomen Company put into motion its own plans. Alfred and Carl met with Dan Crowley at their office on the waterfront in Seattle. Dan was a robust man in his fifties, with a wide Irish smile and an easy mien. He had first landed in Alaska in 1900 in search for gold but had had little success in his prospecting venture. He became a merchant in Nome, but left that enterprise when the Lomens offered him the job of field superintendent shortly after they purchased their herd. With regards to the drive, the Lomens decided that Dan should be the communications link between them and the herd's "ramrod," who was yet to be chosen.

The Lomens and Crowley were hard put to select a foreman for the drive. They were in agreement that their choice would have to be either a Lapp or

an Inuit, as men of those two ethnic groups were generally the best qualified by experience. The Lapps particularly possessed the patience needed to successfully complete the reindeer trek. Herding was a tedious business, *especially* with reindeer. To move a herd ten miles was considered an exceptional day. Slow travel and customary twenty-four-hour shifts could make a mental wreck of an inexperienced man in a matter of weeks.

Carl Lomen called a general meeting of former herders — most of them Lapps — who lived in the Seattle area. He sought their advice about the choice of a leader for the drive, and their suggestions as to how the operation could best be carried out. After discussing the various problems that would have to be met, Lomen finally asked the men in attendance who they thought would qualify for the task of leading the drive. After a moment of silence, Andrew Bahr spoke up:

"Why don't you offer me the job?" he asked.

The question came as a shock to Carl Lomen. Though he realized Bahr was a good herder, he also knew the Lapp was at least fifty-five years old, maybe even sixty.

Lomen, on recovering from the impact of Bahr's query, realized that he could do worse. As far as Carl was concerned, no one was better qualified, both mentally and physically, despite the Laplander's age. If Bahr had any weakness, it was in his capacity to lead men. The sometimes taciturn Lapp was more inclined to supervise by example — that is, by

just doing it himself — than by force of personality, but his overall demeanour and capabilities were too valuable to ignore. Carl looked around the room to see if there were any frowns from the others present, and seeing none, told Bahr the job was his. Andrew nodded his acceptance.

Bahr had retired after almost twelve years as foreman of the Lomens' herds in Buckland, Alaska in 1926, and had moved to Seattle. He had been thrifty and saved enough money to take advantage of a land boom that swept many areas of the United States at that time by investing in two apartment houses located at the foot of fashionable Queen Anne Hill in Seattle. Bahr also purchased a comfortable home for himself where he lived with his Lapp wife, Marith, and twenty-four-year-old daughter Margaret. Times were prosperous in the United States from 1926 to 1929, and Bahr seemed to be living a life of ease.

Andy Bahr's affection for reindeer herding, however, was not yet out of his blood. Though for three years he had been relatively inactive, he was ripe for such an offer for a number of reasons. He felt he could help his friends, the Inuits, who were in dire straits on the Canadian side of the line, at least according to most reports he had read in the newspapers. And he figured the money he would make would be a cushion for his own debts on the apartment houses.

Bahr was certainly fit. He exuded health from every pore. His blue eyes danced and twinkled like

distant stars, giving evidence of the alert mind that functioned behind them. His face, though lined by years of exposure to the elements, reflected the glow of youth. He was a stocky man, but his tread was soft as a wolf, yet as springy as the deer he had watched over.

The middle-aged Laplander was the epitome of a good reindeer man; he knew the tricks of the trade, and acknowledged that "deer run the herder" rather than the other way around. Honed by half a century outdoors in Norway and Alaska, there was little he did not know about the every-day necessity of being able to survive in the northern wilderness in which he had grown up. Once, when Bahr was caught in a blizzard which cut visibility to less than a yard while he searched for his base camp at Buckland, he suddenly stopped, calculating that he must be near the community. He unhitched the draft deer, tied them to the side of his sled, and went to sleep wrapped in a robe with the storm howling around him. The next morning he awoke to the pealing of the Buckland school bell. Bahr had pegged his sled dead-on in the centre of the village.

Another time, he and an Inuit lad were trapped by a furious snow storm that seemed to have swept in from nowhere.

"We're lost," the boy cried.

Andrew turned almost haughtily to the youngster and asked, "Can you see me?"

The boy nodded.

"Well," Bahr said, "as long as you can see me, you're as good as home."[2]

Mike Nilluka was selected as second-in-command to Bahr. Mike had been superintendent of a herd owned by the Lomens at Golovin, east of Nome. He was a forthright individual, not known to be the most diplomatic of characters.

With the problem of leadership settled by the selection of the two Lapps, another had to be resolved: the route of the trail drive. Surprising as it seems, even though four years of negotiations had preceded the signing of the contract, the Lomens had not yet settled on the route, though they did know which one they would *not* take. This was the coastal path followed by the Porsilds on their reconnaissance trip, straight north from Kotzebue along the western coast. The Lomens were afraid that Inuit herds along the coast would be drawn off by the Canada-bound animals. If this happened, they would incur the enmity of the natives. This meant the only alternative was to take an inland route and cross the dreaded spires of the Brooks Range, which spread in a convex crescent, isolating the Arctic Ocean coastal plain from the rest of Alaska. To take a more southerly route was impossible, since that would have meant getting tangled up in the tree line, and in any case, would have taken them too far from potential supply depots on the Arctic coast.

With the help of crude maps they possessed, Alfred and Carl plotted a route from Naboktoolik

where the drive would start, to Kittigazuit on the East Channel of the Mackenzie delta. Noting the awesome obstacles that lay in between, the Lomens estimated the drive would have to be undertaken in four stages. First, the deer would have to be driven to the Kobuk River, a short stage to get both deer and herders accustomed to the procedures. Then, across the Brooks Range to the Colville River, almost halfway to their destination. From there the herd would go north-east to the Arctic coast, and finally, the fourth stage would see them along the long stretch to the Mackenzie delta.

Since the maps were vague, the trail boss would have to find his way along as he went, taking advantage of what few identifiable features there were.

The uncertainties of direction, terrain, and the restricted time frame allotted, posed further perplexing riddles for the expedition's planners. How much food, clothes, and camping gear should they allocate when they had only vague notions as to how long the expedition would last?

The Lomens, Bahr, and the Porsild brothers estimated the drive might take from eighteen months to two years, based on some minor moves previously made by herds in Alaska. Yet simple logistics limited them to toting supplies for only a six-month period. After that, food staples would have to be shipped by air, or on trading ships that plied the coast of the Arctic Ocean during the short summer season.

The main task of moving the camp supplies and equipment was to be accomplished by using

upwards of twenty to thirty reindeer to pull forty freight sleds. Depending on the load, a deer could pull several sleds in tandem. Since the sleds could be crafted in Seattle, artisans were put to work on them immediately. The sleds were then shipped north as soon as the ice floes had released their grip on the Bering Sea. Carl and Alfred Lomen, along with Dan Crowley, left for Nome on June 5, 1929, and a month later Mike Nilluka and Andrew Bahr sailed north to Kotzebue.

If you look on a map, Kotzebue, Naboktoolik, and the point of intersection of the Hunt and the Kobuk Rivers form the points of an almost equal-sided triangle. The distance from the staging grounds at Naboktoolik to the mouth of the Hunt is slightly longer than the other two arms of the triangle — one hundred miles or so — but was the most direct overland route for the first leg of the drive.

Bahr figured he could save time and hardship by shipping the bulk supplies not needed to begin the drive along another arm of the triangle: direct from Kotzebue via the Kobuk River to its junction with the Hunt. In this way he would avoid the extra work of first relaying material by sled along the third arm (that is, from Kotzebue to Naboktoolik), only to have to take it then along on the first part of the drive. Hiring a boat, he and Nilluka made several trips from Kotzebue up the Kobuk to store provisions in a cache near where the Hunt met it.

The period immediately prior to the scheduled launch of the drive was tense with pressure on Bahr to put the final preparations in place. October 15, 1929 was the announced date the expedition was to move out, but as that departure time approached, it became obvious the herd would not even be rounded up, let alone ready for the trail. There were two reasons for this failure — the weather, and logistical problems. Unseasonal warmth left the boggy tundra unfrozen, making it next to impossible for herders to tramp across it to round up the reindeer. The second reason was that Bahr became overly preoccupied with assembling the cache on the Kobuk with the result that he neglected other aspects of the preparation, and so missed the scheduled departure date.

Canada's representative, Erling Porsild, reached Nome on September 13, but due to poor weather was forced to bide his time in that community for a week prior to flying to the Lomen reindeer camp at Elephant Point. This station was the largest of its kind in Alaska; three different herds were managed from this complex. The reindeer were so numerous and scattered over so wide an area, the Lomens used planes to locate the deer at roundup time. The aircraft saved the firm hundreds of hours that would normally be spent by herders in searching for the animals. Porsild's purpose in visiting Elephant Point was to observe the facilities, and to inspect and approve selection of the reindeer being assembled for the drive.

Bahr finally moved to Naboktoolik at the beginning of November. This camp, situated forty miles straight east from Elephant Point, was not an unfamiliar location to the old Lapp; in fact, he was the one who had originally set it up in 1908 while in the employ of Alfred Nilima as a herder. The name of the place, translated from Inuit, meant "place where there is timber". Though scattered, the timber was a prerequisite in reindeer ranching; it was needed for building corrals, supply and storage sheds, and living quarters, and as a source of fuel.

Lingering uncertainty over exactly which route to take may also have contributed to the postponed starting date, for the details still had not been confirmed. This applied specifically to the paths to be taken across the Schwatka Mountains that divided the Kobuk and Noatak rivers, and farther on, across the Brooks Range from the Noatak to the Colville River.

Bahr and Porsild conferred at Elephant Point and decided to make use of a pilot based there to trace a route across the two formidable land barriers. Frank Dorbandt, flying a Pacific Alaska Airlines plane, took them across the Kobuk delta to the Hunt River, along which they flew looking for a viable pass through the mountains, but the plane was socked-in by bad weather and they returned without verifying a route.

Porsild then accompanied Bahr by dog team to Naboktoolik where Bahr's crew of nine men was just completing enlargement of the corral prior to

processing the herd through the chutes. Erling's presence was required under the terms of the contract. It was up to him to ascertain if the deer were healthy, and to make sure the proper ratio of females to males was upheld by the Lomens, though the exact ratio was not stipulated in the contract, but was left to the buyer. Initially, Andrew Bahr had estimated that there were enough deer in the vicinity to provide for the Canadian herd, but by mid-November he realized he was going to come up short. Most of the deer contracted for were to be does, but in actuality the men would have to round up almost twice that many reindeer because males and females each numbered roughly fifty per cent in the uncut herds.

Bahr notified Dan Crowley in Elephant Point of his problem, whereupon Crowley dispatched another herder to drive his animals to Bahr's reindeer camp. They arrived in the last week of November.

No sooner were these deer counted and the animals finally assembled than a vicious storm blew in off the Bering Sea. The onslaught of hurricane-force winds and snow descended on the camp so quickly the herders were barely able to make it to shelter, and were forced to leave the deer to their own devices. The storm ripped apart the corral, and the deer, with the barriers down, fled with the storm, scattering in all directions. They were not rounded up until early December when they again had to be counted through the corral. By the time this was done, the timetable for the commencement of the drive was already two months behind schedule.

The rampant incursions of bad weather bode ill tidings for the drive. Events in another part of the world did nothing to detract from this portent of bad luck.

On October 29 the stock market collapsed in the world's financial capitals. Forever to be known as "Black Tuesday" on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, this event was to indirectly affect everyone in North America, including the Lomen Company, their employees, and Andy Bahr. The economic nightmare that followed the crash saw prices tumble not only on stocks, but also on such commodities as beef. This forced down the value of deer meat as well, and later threatened the entire industry.

Another disaster, albeit a local one, cast a pall over the drive. Pilot Ben Eielson, president of Pacific Alaska Airlines, and his mechanic, Earl Borland, disappeared on a flight near the Siberian coast while engaged on a contract to transport furs from a ship stranded in the ice pack.[3] The search for Eielson delayed the arrival of W. B. Miller at Naboktoolik. Miller, an assistant to Doctor Palmer at the Fairbanks Experimental Station, had planned to travel with the trail drive while it was in Alaska, to make observations on the mammoth reindeer drive for their own future reference.

Miller was delayed several weeks in Nome because all available planes were involved in the

search for the missing men. Ultimately, Miller was able to obtain passage, though he might have been better off walking. His journey graphically illustrated the hardships of air travel at that time: it took Miller seven days to "fly" three hundred miles! During the trip, he and pilot Alger Graham were forced down by weather, ran out of gas once, and finally, crashed on take-off when the landing gear of the plane collapsed. The harried passenger then took to the more traditional mode of travel, a dog team, and mushed the remaining ninety miles to the reindeer camp, arriving there on Christmas Eve, 1929. The short "flight" had rendered him exhausted before he even started out on the drive.

The initial crew picked for the journey was comprised of five Lapp and five Inuit herders, a physician, Dr. L. E. Benson, and a dog musher hired for the first few days. The observer, Miller, was slated to accompany them for an indefinite period.

The Lapps, besides Bahr and Nilluka, were Andrew Bango, Tom Nakkala, and Ivar West, who had come over to North America in the same expedition as Bahr in 1898. Bango, at twenty, was the youngest, born of Lapp parents in the community of Nulato, Alaska. The Inuits selected were earnest, hard-working young men in their twenties with experience in all phases of herding reindeer. Three of them, Shelby David, David Henry and August Ome, were from the community of Golovin east of Nome, and the other two, Sam Segeok and Theodore Kingeak, were from the Kotzebue area.

Three of Bahr's crew were well known in a number of cities in mainland United States from having participated in Santa Claus promotions at Christmas. Nilluka had been to Portland, Oregon; Theodore Kingeak to Brooklyn, Newark and Atlanta; and Bango to Philadelphia. The promotions involved local newspapers and department stores and thus served to bring the herders' names before the public.

Bango experienced an amusing incident on one of his trips to the "City of Brotherly Love". He was in charge of several reindeer which a large department store had leased from the Lomen Corporation for a Christmas promotion. A competing merchant brought in animals as well, advertising them as "reindeer". Bango's hosts threatened to sue, claiming the other store was hoodwinking the public because their "reindeer" were really elk. The competitor strategically withdrew the elk.

Wages varied, the inequities of which were to cause problems from the onset. Bahr, as trail boss, was to receive $4,000 a year, Nilluka, Nakkala, and West, classed as "experienced" were to receive $2,400, and Bango, $1,800. The Inuit herders were all classified in one salary slot at $1,200 per year, $600 less than the lowest Lapp salary.

Allowance for a physician, L. E. Benson, was $4,000 a year, and for a musher and his dog team, $3,000. Notable by its absence was any allocation for a cook.

The vague aspects of distance and time made it

difficult to estimate the need for such items as clothing and food supplies. The variety of simple footwear, for example, reflected the extremes of weather and terrain that Bahr and his men expected to encounter. The Inuit have at least five different words for boots or their parts: *tuttulik* (caribou soles), *ugrulik* (seal soles), *kaglik* (waterproof boots), *paunjaak* (rubber boots) and *kamik* or *mukluk* (caribou-skin boots).

Each man was given two pairs of knee-high fur boots, one pair of ankle-length boots, one pair of seal-skin boots, ten pairs of mukluks, one pair of moccasins, and six pairs of insoles. In addition, the Lapps sometimes used their own style of boots into which they stuffed tundra grass to absorb moisture and thus insure warmth. In seeking adequate footwear, material was required that was at once supple enough for flexing one's toes (to maintain circulation), yet also allowed for evaporation. Mukluks made out of caribou or reindeer skins filled this need, and were irreplaceable in deep, dry snow at forty-below-zero temperatures.

Overflow caused by a rising river, fast-flowing springs that never froze, slush ice, water from hot springs, and unseasonal thaws were conditions that made waterproof foot gear necessary. Sealskin boots were commonly favoured in such emergencies, as against rubber boots in which one's feet sweated, and then were in danger of freezing.

Other clothing was equally important. Lapp and Eskimo women sewed reindeer-skin parkas, fur

underwear, and fur pants for the herdsmen. A caribou- or reindeer-skin sleeping bag with a canvas-drill cover provided maximum warmth, and enabled a man to obtain proper rest. Blankets were packed for summer use.

The list of gear was a long one. Any of the minor items, if forgotten, could invoke a crisis. Each man was provided with two pocket knives, a compass, match box, pocket lighter, flashlight and twelve batteries, thermos bottle, belt axe and sheath, large belt knife, rifle and rifle case.

Prices indicated the times. A rifle cost $35, sleeping bag $45, compass $5, flashlight $2, and batteries 25¢. Skis were $2 a pair, and snowshoes $12 a pair.

The herders took along skis which they would don for trailing deer over the snow. The slats were longer and wider than those used today — more like "boards" worn in ski-jumping contests. Pine tar was one of the concoctions utilized in providing a running surface for them. Other mixtures used were beeswax and paraffin.

Snowshoes were needed as well. Around camp, a man would not bother to strap on skis to do his chores. Snowshoes were simpler and easier to manipulate among the sleds, ropes, and piles of supplies. They were also valuable in breaking trail for sleds in deep snow.

Forty deer sleds, 60 harnesses, and 100 halters were stocked for the journey. Assorted lariats for staking sled deer, and for pull lines and repairs, were a necessity.

Five tents were packed, including one special double-walled rig for extremely cold weather. Six rectangular "Yukon" stoves were included to heat the tents, complemented by six alcohol-burning primus units. The latter were to be used in treeless areas.

Cooking kits, ammunition, lanterns, axes, cow bells, watches, and miner's candles were part of the vast array of incidentals not to be left behind. The list seemed endless; never before had an expedition of this nature taken place. Assembling, partitioning, and packing these items for ease of distribution could only be accomplished by men such as Bahr who had spent a lifetime so engaged. Yet even he had never attempted a drive for so long a period as was projected for this one.

The budget reflected the magnitude of the venture. The Lomen estimate for food per man was $1,095 or $13,140 a year for 12 men. Personal gear was estimated at $12,000 for the drive. The total cost, including salaries for two years, was budgeted at $97,000. This included the purchase of five sheep dogs from ranching magnate Andrew Little of Boise, Idaho, and incorporation of three dogs trained with deer in Alaska.

The herd that was finally assembled totalled 3,442 semi-wild young reindeer, most of which were one- and two-year-olds. They were more apt to survive the rugged conditions of the drive, and were also less likely to bolt for the home range than older

animals. The deer were apportioned as follows: 2,890 females, 305 males, and 247 steers, roughly scaled at ten females for each bull. The steers would be used as sled deer.