

Part Two

CANADA'S
REINDEER HERD,
1929-1935



CHAPTER NINETEEN

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

When the Porsild brothers reached Ottawa in October 1928, there was an urgent need for them to write up their official reports on the reindeer investigation, as well as much to be done with their enormous scientific collections in the field. By mutual agreement, the bulk of the reindeer industry evaluation was left to Erling, with his talent for writing and his senior position in the investigation, leaving Bob with little to do except tidy up their plant collection once it had been transferred to the National Herbarium.

Unlike his brother, Bob Porsild showed little interest in working up the collection for publication and was soon restless at the inactivity. "We spent the winter in Ottawa while AE wrote up a full report from our diaries and the 1,100 photos he had taken," he later remembered. "There wasn't much for me to do so I took a leave of absence in the early spring of 1929, returning home to Greenland via Denmark. I visited my parents and got engaged before returning to Ottawa, January 1930." The engagement came at the end of a whirlwind courtship. While in Sorø, Bob went to see the parents of an old school chum, Svend Rothe-Hanson, and they gave him their daughter's address in Copenhagen. Elly Roth-Hanson was working as a receptionist in a steamship office when he found her. Three weeks after they met, just before Bob had to leave Denmark, she agreed to come to Canada to marry him.¹

Meanwhile, back in the Herbarium, Erling found that he had plenty of time to work up their plant collections before they were incorporated into the Flora of Arctic Canada. Both Ostenfeld and Malte were having health difficulties and their work was going very slowly. In Copenhagen, Ostenfeld had broken down from overwork at the beginning of March 1928 and had been unable to do anything until September. In Ottawa, Malte was suffering from a bad cold that left

him still feeling weak and tired long after he had got over it, but he was still in good spirits from the success of his second collecting trip to the Arctic. Earlier in the year, he had left Montreal on the Hudson's Bay supply ship, the S.S. *Nascopie*, bound for one post in Labrador and ten in Hudson Strait and the northern parts of Hudson Bay. The vessel had spent two or more days at each stop before returning to St. John's, Newfoundland, in September. Eight months after his return, he would write to Frère Marie-Victorin that since the *Nascopie* made very short stops at each port of call he had had time to explore only limited areas in the immediate vicinity of the various Mounted Police posts on his first trip to the Arctic. However, on this second trip he had realized that "collecting at a certain place at a certain time of the year in one year only may give a rather imperfect or even misleading idea of the flora." Having visited Lake Harbour on Baffin Island in 1927 when the vegetation was at its prime and yielded an exceedingly rich harvest, he was amazed to visit the same place on the same date in 1928 and find the season two or three weeks earlier, giving an impoverished impression. Fortunately, he had had more time on the second trip and was able to go further afield to add to his collections from that place.²

Malte was delighted with the botanical results of the Porsilds' reindeer investigation and immediately tried to use the situation to his advantage. Within three weeks of their return to Ottawa, the Chief Botanist wrote a memo to the Director of the Museum requesting Herbarium assistance, couching his application in terms that would allow for the hiring of both brothers if they were interested.

He began by citing the incompleteness of the national collection of Canadian flora that underlined the need for more collecting assistance since there were vast areas of Canada that were unknown botanically, e.g., the whole of northern British Columbia and practically the whole of the Yukon Territory, and it was plain that much field work was necessary to bring the botanical collections up to a state of completeness which one might reasonably expect from a National Herbarium. "It is equally plain," he said, "that having to cover a territory as large and as varied as the whole of Europe, much headway in botanical explorations cannot be expected, as long as the National Herbarium has to its disposal the service of only one permanent botanist."

Not only was there a need to collect more Canadian material but the many new records from the field work in New Brunswick and the Arctic between 1926 and 1928 meant that the Herbarium was badly in need of a thorough revision.

Such a revision not only calls for a critical examination of the material on hand but also for an extensive study of the botanical literature – in many cases – material in other herbaria, as our own may not be sufficient for satisfactory identification.... The task of revising the Herbarium and working up collections preparatory to publishing scientific papers, regional floras of Canada, and the like, is one that necessarily must take much time. Indeed, the work is so slow, that, if it is to be at all creditable to the National Museum, much headway can hardly be expected as long as only one man is engaged in the work.

I would therefore, most strongly, emphasize the urgent necessity of securing qualified assistance for the Herbarium. With qualified assistance I mean, in this connection, highly trained botanists competent to undertake, under direction, scientific research work in connection with the survey and study of the flora of Canada.³

Malte's additional request for a Herbarium Assistant to replace Miss Stewart, who had recently retired, was eventually granted, but his larger plea for help in the collecting field, and qualified assistance with his huge collection overload in the Herbarium, was denied. From a department perspective, it appears, in fact, to be an odd request, as on the one hand it asks for more collectors and collections, and on the other states that the Chief Botanist is already overwhelmed with work and unable to catch up with the material already collected. He might, perhaps, have had more success if he had merely asked for help with the Herbarium material overload but, as it turned out, for the time being at least, there could be no new offer of work at or for the Herbarium for either Bob or Erling Porsild.

There was still work ahead for both brothers to do in the introduction of reindeer into northern Canada, however. Erling presented his interim report on the reindeer investigation to Finnie on 31 October 1928:

We are satisfied that the country between the Mackenzie and Coppermine River visited by Robert T. Porsild and myself during the 1927–1928 season is nearly all good reindeer country capable of supporting vast herds of domestic reindeer indefinitely. Speaking in general terms, we found that the country compared favourably with the best grazing grounds in Alaska. Sufficient timber within easy reach of the summer range affords excellent shelter for herds during the winter, also ample

material for construction of cabins, corrals, etc. Ten to twenty miles south of the northern limit of tree growth the timber is open enough to allow efficient handling of herds. We, therefore, think it perfectly safe to bring any number of reindeer into this part of the country. The country east of the Mackenzie delta is the natural place to land a reindeer herd and to establish the first reindeer station.

He advised that the best and largest animals were to be found in the southern part of Alaska, Kuskokwim, Norton Sound, and Kotzebue Sound. From these regions, he recommended either overland transport around the coast via Point Barrow, starting after the rutting season in September and taking two winters and one summer to land the herd east of the Mackenzie before fawning season in April, or by scow up the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers after the fawning season, with one winter in the mountains after freeze up before reaching the Mackenzie. He felt that the second route would be more likely to result in stock injury and parasite infection and also would be more expensive than the overland drive which should have the advantage of insuring healthy stock on arrival. A third possible method of transport could be made by boat around the northern coast in favourable seasons. It is interesting that at no time did he mention either the pros or cons of the route that would eventually be chosen to drive the herd through the Brooks Range. He noted that nearer herds along the north coast of Alaska could not be purchased as they were all native owned and in any case were smaller animals.

Whatever transportation method was used, the Porsilds believed that purchase should include delivery. They recommended that the contract should call for delivery before fawning season at a place near Kittigazuit east of the Mackenzie delta, that the herd should consist of select, healthy breeding stock at a ratio of not more than eight bulls to one hundred does, that two picked Alaskan herders from the drive should stay on with the herd for two years, and that prices should be considerably under the quote from the Lomen Brothers of \$125 a head.⁴

To these remarks Erling later added:

It is now so long since we had any quotations on reindeer from Alaska, that I think first of all the reindeer owners in Alaska might be approached again. Since this matter was first taken up by the Department several other private companies, besides the Lomen Bros., have

acquired large herds. Some of these people might be in a position to take up the proposition, although, undoubtedly, the Lomens are the leading concern.

Several individual reindeer owners that we met in Alaska in 1926 were anxious to sell their entire herd. Some of these people would probably be able to handle a drive of reindeer into Canada successfully, but I think it inadvisable to deal with anybody but a large company with sufficient financial backing to put up some sort of guarantee for the first instalment to be paid down. A payment down when the herd had been selected and the drive organized, would be asked for and the balance to be paid when the herd is received at its destination. This first payment should not, even if a large company like the Lomens are to make the drive, exceed, say 25%. An additional payment will probably be asked for when the herd has passed Barrow. This I would not recommend as considerable difficulties are apt to arise on the last part of the drive that may seriously threaten the welfare of the entire herd.⁵

The fact that Erling already was able to foresee difficulties at the end of the drive and thus could warn the Department not to make heavy financial commitments in advance of delivery suggests that he realized that the hardest section would be across the Mackenzie River Delta where the drive was ultimately held up for two years. In their follow-up negotiations to purchase 3,000 deer, the Canadian Government heeded his advice to insist on delivery east of the delta and to pay less than \$125 a head, securing the herd for \$195,000, or \$65 a head, but agreed to three payments – the first on 1 August 1929 for \$30,000, the second on 1 August 1930 for \$82,500, and the final instalment upon delivery at Kittigazuit for a further \$82,500.⁶

Although it was suggested that Alaskan herders should stay on temporarily, Erling did not recommend looking for permanent herders from the north coast as he felt they were making good money trapping white fox and had almost entirely given up the old way of living, adopting white man's food and methods. However, noting that the RCMP had had a tendency in recent years to restrict the immigration of Alaskan Eskimos into the Northwest Territories to "save the Canadian Eskimos from too keen competition in trapping from these more advanced and energetic people," Erling made the surprising recommendation that it might be advantageous to encourage the entrance of individual

Alaskan Eskimo reindeer owners, since the country was now underpopulated due to epidemics.

Preferable to engaging Alaskan Eskimo as herders and reindeer men on a salary basis [he said] would be allowing and encouraging individual Alaska reindeer owners to move along with a future Government herd and settle on the Canadian side. Since the decline of the whaling industry on the north coast of Alaska, trapping and reindeer raising has also here largely taken its place. At present there are too many trappers there and the maximum carrying capacity of the grazing land has probably been reached. The reindeer owned by the natives on the north coast are far inferior to the stock from below. It would be an easy matter to keep any native owned reindeer separated from the future Government herd or rather to have them separated when the latter were taken over by the Government. Also several Canadian Eskimo now own reindeer in Alaska and have for years been paying herding expenses but without getting their proper increase. These people want to get their stock into Canada, but have not been able to do so. A clause could probably be put into the contract with the company to make the drive of the Government herd to take these deer along free of charge. The total of these Canadian owned deer probably does not exceed 50 head.⁷

In view of Erling Porsild's complete endorsement of the large stock-raising industry of southern Alaska and his negative attitude to the Alaska reindeer herdsmen and their animals, this was a surprising proposal and one that clearly demonstrated his ability to take a pragmatic approach. Had this advice been followed, the Canadian reindeer industry might have had a real chance of success at an indigenous level. The delta community might have had far more interest in the business of reindeer herding if the program of introduction had contained two complementary strategies, in which one part consisted of a large, experimental reindeer herd owned and operated by the Dominion Government and the other part set up to encourage a small, quiet reindeer herding migration at a natural and local level. As it stood, the Department appears to have put this suggestion aside and thus lost a valuable opportunity for success.

Far more official attention was paid to Erling's predictably frank and pessimistic recommendation, following the lines of what he had observed in the

Alaskan situation and the advice of the Royal Commission, to hire reindeer herders from Lapland to manage the Government herd:

I think it would be very good to have at least two young Lapp couples or families brought over from northern Sweden. Not because the Lapp way of handling deer is superior to the modern Alaska methods, but because the Lapps are born reindeer men and because a worthwhile white man could never be expected to remain in the North as a chief herder. I have no doubt that Alaskan Eskimos would be just as good or even better than the Lapps at first. But how good an Eskimo may be for a job like that, he is only good as long as he has a white man to keep him on the job. When things go wrong for an Eskimo once or twice, he will become despondent and give up. Also you can not make a contract with an Eskimo that he does not think himself free to break if it suits him and he thinks he can make better money by trapping. Young Lapps with a good instructor would soon learn the modern way of handling deer. They are very thrifty people and a steadily growing bank account would be the best inducement to make a Lapp stay on the job. Also by being so far away from home the Government would have much better hold on such an employee. Although the Lapps in Alaska, where they were taken by the U.S. Government, and where they have been employed by the U.S. Government and others later as herders, think themselves superior to the Eskimo, the two get along very well.⁸

Considering site requirements, Erling suggested that a corral and holding pasture should be erected prior to the arrival of the herd at a suitable place near the Hudson's Bay Trading Post at Kittigazuit. The trading post was closed or maintained as an out-post and he felt that it might be possible to buy the buildings reasonably as they were suitable for a reindeer station. A good-sized scow and tug boat would be required. He estimated the costs of 3,000 head of breeding stock landed on the delta at \$75 each would be \$225,000, and total costs for equipment, building construction, salaries, rations, and incidentals \$276,000. These figures were not to be unreasonably far off the mark but his final optimistic forecast would be viewed with increasing cynicism in later years as the costs of running the Canadian Reindeer herd grew higher and higher. Erling

felt that “a well-managed herd of 3,000 would be self-supporting after the first couple of years.”⁹

Baldwin would get his wish, even if he was soon disturbed to learn that Erling Porsild would aid in the selection of the deer. He and the Lomens feared that Erling could be “technical and arbitrary” on occasion and probably hoped to have a less critical agent to oversee the choosing of the animals.¹⁰

There was no doubt that the Lomen brothers appeared to be in the strongest position to make the sale, although Erling had supplied the names and addresses of four major reindeer companies in Alaska – the Lomen Reindeer Corporation, Frank P. Williams, Waegter Brothers, and A. D. Williams – which Palmer recommended as being capable of bidding on a shipment of reindeer to Canada. However, the Lomen family’s success carried a strong warning to the Canadian Government of the dangers of large-scale reindeer herding, a warning that would not be heeded. As Palmer put it to Erling in a letter that was circulated to Finnie and Cory in February 1929:

The Lomens are now very well capitalized and are very strongly established not only in reindeer raising but in general trading and shipping as well. They are now successfully competing against the Alaska Steamship Co. in carrying freight to Bering Sea and Arctic points. Last year they held the bulk of the freighting business. They own and operate several trading posts and to the reindeer business have added a canning plant and by-products plant. A very large increase over past years was made in meat shipment and to this was added for the first time by-products such as hides, blood meal, hair, etc. At the present stage the shipping and trading activities carries the reindeer business. In due time the reindeer industry should become self sustaining. It is the harder game of the two presenting the most difficulties. Upon the success of the Lomens in the shipping and marketing field depends the future growth and welfare of the Alaska reindeer industry.¹¹

Unaware that within a very short period of time both the Lomen Reindeer Corporation and the Alaskan reindeer industry would be in serious trouble, satisfied that the requirements had been met in order to begin the reindeer introduction program in Canada but with no apparent plans to prepare the people of the Mackenzie River delta for their arrival, the Department of the Interior was ready to go ahead with the purchase of the herd. Finnie felt that

they would have to send one of the Porsilds and “somebody like Dr. Hadwen to examine the animals with a view to securing only those which are in the best physical condition” to Alaska to make the purchase and organize the drive. Requesting permission to place the amount of the part payment, \$100,000, in the yearly estimates, on 18 December 1928 he commented to Cory: “I have taken it for granted that we will proceed with the introduction of the reindeer in the Mackenzie District and that a start will be made in the purchase and driving of a herd in the very near future, that is, within the next fiscal year.”¹²

The agreement was signed in New York 8 May 1929. The Lomen Reindeer Corporation agreed to deliver no less than 3,000 reindeer to the east side of the Mackenzie Delta at or near Kittigazuit. The drive would commence no later than 15 October 1929. Selection would have to be approved by a representative of the Canadian Government. The company agreed to furnish a bond or securities to return the money if the deer were not delivered, but excess deer would be purchased by the Canadian Government. “Time shall be the essence of this contract.”¹³



CHAPTER TWENTY

“THE BEST LAID PLANS”

Oscar Malte was in hospital by the time the contract for the purchase of Canada's future reindeer herd had been signed in May 1929. All through the winter when Erling Porsild had been able to spend time in the Herbarium looking over the collections from Alaska and the Northwest Territories, Malte said that he had felt increasingly tired, “losing all pep and having little or no inclination to work.” On May 13, Malte wrote to young Watson, who had been re-hired to be his field assistant again that summer, telling him of his illness in November and how he had hoped that he would gradually get better but instead had got worse.

Finally I did what I should have done long before, viz., see a doctor. It was then discovered that I had so-called glycosuria, which is merely a polite word for diabetes. I am glad to say, however, that after three weeks in the hospital, where, by the way, I still reside, the doctor is congratulating me on the way I am getting along. It is apparently a mild case and, if I don't take a turn for the worse, I probably will not have to take insulin. A proper diet, however, must rigidly be kept, for how long a time I do not know. Beer is taboo and for once I shall have the unique opportunity of setting you a good example. If I am making progress at the rate I am doing now, there is nothing to prevent me from going to New Brunswick with you next July. I shall probably not be able to go to places where walking is difficult or tiresome but I hope to be able to poke around a bit, leaving you to do the places which may require youth and strength.¹

Malte's fondness for beer and good companionship had won him many friends at the inn where he and Watson usually stayed in New Brunswick. He was also popular among jollier members of the staff at the Museum, as witnessed by the letter he received from Wyatt Malcolm on May 2 at the Ottawa Civic Hospital. "There is one little formality that we usually ask to be attended to by our friends who enjoy the privilege and luxury of residing in that very fine red brick building in the western part of the City – the doctor's certificate. I am enclosing forms herewith.... Without deserving to give you cause to be unduly inflated I may say that we miss your boyish rubicund countenance, your flaxen locks, the twinkle in your eye and the chuckle of your laugh around this dreary institution, and hope that you will bring them back very soon."²

While in hospital, Malte heard that Ostenfeld expected to come to Ottawa in the middle of August, bringing his wife with him, in order to work through the collection of their common Flora of Arctic Canada. Malte replied on May 13, telling him that he planned to spend some time in New Brunswick the coming summer but would be at his disposal at any time he could come to Canada. "Please arrange to take plenty of time for the stay in Ottawa, for I have a rich material from the Arctic collected 1927 and 1928 – some ten thousand herbarium sheets – which contains many things which, I venture to say, will both interest and surprise you." He told Ostenfeld about his trip to the doctor but added: "I am glad to say, however, that it is a rather mild case and that it is unlikely that the ailment will, to any appreciable extent, interfere with my normal work, providing I keep a strict diet." On May 18 he wrote again, repeating his delight about the visit and adding: "I am leaving the hospital in a day or two, feeling in first class condition." He repeated his suggestion that Ostenfeld take plenty of time in Ottawa as "I certainly have some interesting things to show you. In my last letter I believe I did not mention the Porsild collections from Western Arctic Canada, but I suppose that Thorbjørn Porsild spoke to you about them when, some time ago, he passed through Copenhagen on his way to Greenland. I shall arrange to have the Porsild brothers' collection ready for your examination when you arrive."³

Ostenfeld had received both letters when he wrote back on June 3. He was sorry to hear that Malte had been ill for such a long time and hoped his health was now quite well again. "As to my health, it has improved very much since last year, but I must be cautious and not overdo work, eating and drinking. We feel that we are getting older."

He and his wife would be leaving Europe at the beginning of August and go straight to Ottawa via Montreal. "No doubt the young Porsilds have collected a good deal on their long trip and part of it must have been taken north of the tree limit and consequently belong to our area. It may raise the number of species a good deal and make the work more difficult. On the other hand it shall be quite interesting to see their results. I do not know anything about them, as I did not see Thorbjorn on his visit here on the way to Greenland; they are funny people, all the Porsilds."⁴

The Ostenfelds, husband and wife, arrived in Ottawa in August. Malte was still feeling under the weather since returning from the collecting trip to New Brunswick but commented enthusiastically to Watson on October 11: "Professor Ostenfeld has spent a month with us and much work on the Arctic flora has been accomplished. A critical examination of the collections, new and old, has shown that we have quite a few new species from the Arctic and a very large number of new and rather astonishing plant-geographical records."⁵

Erling Porsild was sorry not to see Ostenfeld during his visit but he had already left for a botanical and reconnaissance trip to Charlton, Akimiski, and Fort George islands in James Bay. The Department of the Interior had been inspired by the seeming success of the reindeer project and were now looking at other sources for development in the north. This time, Erling was sent to look into the possibilities for beaver farming in the James Bay islands. When asked by Gibson some years later if he thought Fort George Island would be suitable for the introduction of either caribou or reindeer, he was not hopeful for any of the islands in that vicinity, as he could not find the right forage, and the area was small and would be land-fast after freeze-up in winter so the animals would cross the ice and become lost.⁶

Erling's next letter to Malte came from Elephant Point, Alaska. It was October 1929, the month when North America was reeling from the stock market crash, when negotiations began for the selection of 3,434 animals from Lomen Reindeer Corporation at the head of Kotzebue Sound, and Erling Porsild had been called to be present on behalf of the Canadian Government to supervise the selection. The letter was written on October 26 and addressed to "My dear Oscar," indicative of the time they had spent together in the herbarium:

I have often for the last few months been wondering how you are getting along and how CHO's [C. H. Ostenfeld's] visit came off. I have also been cursing those reindeer people in New York, who thought this



Asta and Erling Porsild in their cabin, Elephant Point, Alaska, November 1929 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-101031)

drive would be organized and started in less time than it would take to say Jack Robinson. I had my suspicions at the time, but of course had to act upon the information we had been given. In fact I could quite safely have spent another six weeks in Ottawa and still been in plenty of time. The thing hasn't even started yet and here I am with no authority and nothing whatever to say, just because it was deemed necessary to have somebody representing, in case things went wrong. However, I suppose that is what K.G. [King George] is paying me for and in the end I suppose things will get going. I am putting in my time learning what I can about how to herd reindeer and am trying to get as much out of my time as possible.⁷

Surprisingly, Erling was not alone at Elephant Point in Alaska as he cooled his heels waiting for the negotiations to begin. With him was his new Danish wife, Asta. She had been Asta Kofoed Hansen, the daughter of an Admiral in the Royal Danish Navy, when they were married in Ottawa that summer. It seemed that, in 1929, between engagement and marriage, the Porsild brothers had been very busy with personal business in the winter, spring, and summer since the reindeer investigation had ended.⁸

According to Erling, things had also developed in the reindeer business during the last three years at a quite astonishing rate. "At Elephant Point, which is the largest reindeer camp in Alaska, there is a very modern plant which will butcher and pack 15,000 head of reindeer before Xmas. There has been quite a boom lately when they found reindeer meat was very good – in fact much better than cat's meat for the sausage industry and everything is now turned into sausages. I suppose we will see a tremendous increase in the cat population of N. America." He told Malte that he had had a good visit with his old friend and local botanist Charles Thornton, "the inventor of the colour classification system, according to which all yellow 'flowers' belong to one family, the blue flowers go into another family and so forth" and had typical "botanical gossip" to pass on. "He has had a good visit from the late Fr. Enander and was very sorry to hear about his demise. Enander had got him interested in *Salix*, a genus he had hitherto neglected, and Mr. Thornton had a beautiful collection of *Salix*, made this summer for Enander."⁹

Malte had run into Enander in Montreal before leaving for Hudson Bay the previous summer. He told Selim Birger in Stockholm that the man was certainly a peculiar duck.

He was then making all kinds of more or less impossible plans to visit outlying districts of this continent.... When death reached him in Victoria, British Columbia, he was, according to newspapers, on his way to California from where he intended to travel to Asia. How he met death is, as far as I know, not quite clear yet, except that he died from gas poisoning. He was, as you know, exceedingly economical and had the habit of stopping at the very cheapest and consequently very poorest hotels. He apparently did so in Victoria, but how he could hunt up a hotel without electric lights in that city is a thing that I myself hardly could have done, although I have been there a dozen times. I wonder what is to become of the continuation of his *Salix* investigations.¹⁰

In Alaska, Erling was now a complete convert to a new mode of travel. "I have seen a good deal of the country from the air since I arrived here," he told Malte. "I don't look forward to future years of travelling with pack dogs over our Canadian niggerhead tundra. One sure can see a tremendous lot in this type of country from a plane."



Standing in front of survey plane, *L to R* Andrew Bahr, pilot F. Dorbandt, Mrs. Porsild, Alfred Lomen and Dan Crowley, Elephant Point, Alaska, 1929 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-101032)

Accustomed to making vegetation surveys from the hills above the tundra and barrens around the Mackenzie delta and Great Bear Lake, Erling soon saw that it was possible to recognize important forage cover with surprising accuracy from an altitude of 1,000–3,000 feet. He had already been on a reconnaissance flight to check the route that the Canadian reindeer herd would be taking. Against his advice, the route along the coast that he and his brother had covered in the winter of 1926–1927 had been discarded in favour of a shorter inland passage through the Brooks Range. The new route was chosen by Alfred Lomen and herd superintendent Daniel J. Crowley, who had both been placed in charge of company details of the Canadian drive. Ostensibly, the Brooks Range passage would avoid the danger of mix-ups with the native-owned herds of the north slope, but it is likely that the real reason was that they felt that it would cut down the distance involved by some five hundred miles.

Erling blamed the choice of route on Andrew Bahr, the veteran Lapp herder whom Finnie had earlier recommended to do the reindeer pasture investigation and who had recently been hired by the Lomens to lead the reindeer drive to Canada. “I had strongly advised against this plan,” Erling said, “because I feared that Andrew might run into difficulties in the timbered valleys of the south slope of the mountains where deep snow would make travelling slow and

where the deer might be lost in the timber. My recommended route, and the one I had carefully surveyed in the winter of 1926–1927, was along the west and north coast where, moreover, the drive at no time would be far from villages, wireless stations, and supply centres.”¹¹

Erling’s flight over the Brooks Range brought him rather more excitement than he had anticipated. He told Malte:

I had quite an interesting experience the other day when I returned from an airplane trip to the east, where I had accompanied the Lapp Andrew Bahr on a reconnaissance trip over the route by which the trek will be made. Flying at about 1,000 feet altitude the pilot spotted a monster grizzly bear with her cubs. They were following a reindeer herd on which they undoubtedly had been living all summer. The pilot who is an old war time flier at once got up the fighting spirit. He nose-dived till his wheels or the wings scratched the bears on the back then climbed up and nosed down again. The first attack threw the bears prostrate on the ground paralysed with fear, but when we did not actually land on them, they got up and started for the hills going almost as fast as we could follow. All the while they were looking back to keep an eye on us and occasionally turning somersaults over the niggerheads. It was extremely amusing although I don’t think the bears thought so. The pilot finally went quite amuck and most of the time I didn’t know what was up and what was down. Sometimes I saw the bear over my head and sometimes they were sliding down a perpendicular skyline. How long it lasted I don’t know but all of a sudden the pilot observed that he was nearly out of gas and in fact barely had enough to take us back to camp.

I am glad I got away from Nome. It is a wicked place. Since the mining activities closed down for the winter everybody has been engaged in making what they call ‘Bolchewick.’ It has a most peculiar effect and makes you feel like I did in the aeroplane when we were chasing the bears.... P.S. I haven’t had anything but ‘Bolchewick’ since I left Vancouver, so just imagine how I feel and here we haven’t even got Bolchewick.¹²

The selection of the Canadian reindeer herd began at the end of November, and it was soon obvious that the rosy period of friendly Palmer-Lomen-Porsild



Lomen Reindeer Corporation plant, Elephant Point, Alaska, 1929 (Photo: AEP, LAC, e010933894)

reindeer initiation was over as Erling drove a hard bargain for his government. It was also quickly obvious that he did not always agree with the leader of the drive. The Lomens had signed an agreement with Andrew Bahr on July 6 for \$5 a day from the time of leaving Seattle, Washington, until reaching Kotzebue, Alaska, after which time he would be paid \$250 a month until 3,000 or more reindeer were delivered to representatives of the Canadian Government or “until said enterprise or expedition shall be abandoned by the first party” (i.e., Lomen Reindeer Corporation). He was expected to devote his entire time, energy, and ability to properly arrange all details for the gathering, herding, driving, and making delivery of said reindeer and assume the entire responsibility of equipping said expedition for which all expenses would be paid by the company. From early to mid-December 1929, the Canadian deer were chosen by Erling under the handicap of snowstorms that daily scattered the herd. Bahr complained that, not only would the heavy snows make the drive difficult from the very beginning, but: “The man was very poticly [particular] to pick the deer. I had a hard time with him too.”¹³

It was true that Erling’s insistence that only the best and healthiest animals should be chosen would lead to problems for Bahr once the drive started because the high proportion of young healthy animals tended to make the herd

unruly and excitable. It was also true that there was a problem in the overall choice of a large group artificially composed of many individuals that had been separated from their accustomed units and grazing territory, so that, when a blizzard struck, or when the new pasture proved to be poor, part or all of the herd would attempt to stampede back to the range and herd unit with which they were familiar. Another problem that was not of Erling's making was the sheer size of the new Canadian herd, which might be easy to keep together in one place with suitable terrain and pasture but quite another to control while crossing a thousand miles or more of unfamiliar mountain, coastal plain, and delta.

Added to the problems with the herd itself was the fact that the man that the Lomens trusted implicitly to lead the drive would have difficulties controlling both the herd and the hired herdsmen, and, right from the start, there was a lack of trained personnel, dogs, and sled deer. Bahr had arrived at the camp in the Napaktolik Mountains too late to break in the fifty sled deer. The dogs had been trained only to handle sheep in the Midwest states. Most of the men were new hands. Thus the drive began on December 26 with Bahr having to say: "We are now just training: Training the herd, training dogs, and training men."

The drive began by heading for the Kobuk River and the mouth of one of its tributaries, the Hunt River. From there, the plan was to take the reindeer up the Hunt River, cross the Brooks Range divide, continue down the Colville River to the north coast and then travel east to the Mackenzie Delta. The company expected that the drive would be over within a year, but the route would be fraught with difficulties from beginning to end. There would be all the problems that the Porsilds had hoped the drive could avoid by choosing the coastal route. There would be the problem of crossing rivers and vertical rocky terrain as well as the formidable distance. There would be heavy snows and wolves and bears, as well as low brush and lack of suitable forage that would make it difficult for the movement of deer, supplies, and equipment. Once over the mountains, the route would not completely avoid mix-ups with the native herds because the drive would still have to pass by some of the native herds that the Porsilds had seen along the northeast coast. Lastly, there would be the final problem of moving the huge herd across the Mackenzie River delta for delivery on the east side.¹⁴

Once back in Ottawa, it would be hard for Erling to share Finnie's optimism about the chance of the reindeer arriving at the Mackenzie delta by the following spring as the company had prophesied. However, he was glad to see

that the drive was at last on its way, and he was satisfied that he had picked out the best possible animals to start the new Canadian herd. It was now necessary for him to plan, as stated in a later 1931 report, the establishment of “the first Government reindeer station, to be built on the East Branch of the Mackenzie Delta where buildings and corrals had to be ready to receive the reindeer.” Bob Porsild returned to Ottawa in January 1930, bringing the news of his engagement to Elly Rothe-Hanson as well as greetings from their father who was spending the winter in Denmark. Since Bob had worked in the construction business in Michigan and was still under contract for the reindeer project, he and Erling were soon deep in practical planning. Materials for the station were ordered to be shipped to Aklavik that summer, together with a nine-ton tugboat, built in Vancouver to their specifications. Bob was to leave for Aklavik early in spring to supervise the building of the station, construction of corrals, driving fences, etc. To help with this he was authorized to engage local “carpenters” in the Delta.¹⁵

Erling, meanwhile, continued to work on the plant collections in the Herbarium where Malte was expecting a visitor. Ostenfeld had written on January 10: “Porsild, the father, is here in Copenhagen this winter, he is coming to you later on. He has a paper on some Greenland antennarias ready for printing and he has asked me to assist him in getting it published.” Ostenfeld “had the idea” that he would act as co-author and needed Malte’s permission to publish the new Arctic antennarias he had described that summer, as well as looking at them again. He added another idea. “What would you say if I (personally) get some assistance from Porsild for our Flora; it would help me a good deal and spare my time.”¹⁶

Malte agreed with his proposition regarding the antennarias but his letter of February 1 carefully avoided the subject of including Morten Porsild’s assistance with the work of the Arctic Flora. As the winter progressed, he was to write about *Antennaria* material and the exciting news that he had been authorized to attend the International Botanical Congress in Cambridge, England, and spend three months in Europe, of which at least two weeks could be used for study at the herbarium in Copenhagen, but he made no mention of “father Porsild” until March 20 when he added a postscript to his latest letter: “When is Porsild coming?”¹⁷

It was March 26 before he got his answer from Copenhagen, confirming his private fears that Morten Porsild’s characteristic “assistance” with the Flora might be more of a hindrance than a help. Although Ostenfeld was pleased



Downed plane on which Bob Porsild was one of the passengers, Fort Norman, NWT, 1930
(Photo: R. T. Porsild, LAC, PA-101090)

that he and Malte would meet in Cambridge that summer, and welcomed the idea of their working together on the Flora in Copenhagen as long as possible, he warned: “Porsild is going to leave us now for Canada, and you will find him full of interest and critic as usual and also full of time to have a long talk, not treating absent persons too amiably. He has assisted me to some degree in making descriptions of Primulaceae and Gentianaceae for our flora, but he wishes to take much more into the flora than we intend. Especially with regard to the Alaska he goes as far as to the Bering Islands and nearly to the south coast. Towards east he takes Labrador.” It seemed that, as usual, Morten Porsild was pushing to promote his sons’ interests, and Malte would be in for a painful spring. The last thing that he and Ostenfeld needed, between overwork and ill health, was to enlarge the Flora of Arctic Canada.¹⁸

Things were also not going very well with the reindeer drive in Alaska that March. Bahr was already having troubles with his men, and by March 22 the herd had reached only as far as the mouth of the Hunt River where it would have to remain for the fawning season. Fifteen hundred fawns were delivered. The Lomen company obviously considered that these were in excess of their delivery agreement, so a small herd of five hundred does and their fawns were driven back to Napaktolik.¹⁹

However, the Department of the Interior in Ottawa optimistically continued with their plans to receive the deer as expected the following year. As soon as the weather allowed, Bob Porsild left the capital to begin the reindeer station construction work. He was heading north in one of the two mail planes that now had a regular service to Aklavik when they hit blizzard conditions trying to land at Fort Norman. With not enough gas to turn back, the pilots of both planes attempted to land. One pilot landed without problems but Bob's plane came down about three miles from the regular landing area, breaking a tail and a landing ski, buckling both ends of the propeller, and damaging a wing. Pilots, mechanics, and passengers worked to get the plane mended and were able to take off soon after the storm ended.²⁰

Carrying on down to the delta, Bob chose a site for the new reindeer station near Kittigazuit, opposite Richards Island, where the water was deep enough for boats and the land high enough to avoid flooding. Happy to be working on practical details, he was soon hard at work. This time he could have an assistant and was able to hire a competent local man. He and Matthew Hatting cut the first logs in early spring and moved them down to the site. When they started construction, Bob had two priorities in mind and both were equally important to him. They needed to build a corral to receive the deer, and a house so that he and Elly would have a place to live when they got married.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FIELD REPORTS, 1930

In the summer of 1930, the fieldwork for the National Herbarium covered four main plant-collecting areas across the vast landscape of Canada. It would be the last summer in the Depression years when funds could be made available for the purpose of bringing in more material from the lands close to the treeline in the centre and west and from the Maritimes in the east, which were to be used for the first two Floras of Canada that had so far been proposed by Malte.

In the west, Hugh and Lucy Raup continued their work around Great Slave and Athabaska Lakes, with some discussion as to whether their forthcoming report should be incorporated with the records of the Porsild brothers and other past or future investigators. Looking east, a new man, Harrison Lewis, worked at collecting along the north shore of the Saint Lawrence, while Jacques Rousseau, a protégé of Frère Marie-Victorin in Montreal, was hired to take Watson's place in the Maritimes. Rousseau surveyed five areas in Nova Scotia until the end of July when most of his equipment and his entire collection of 1,000 sheets were lost in a fire at Musquodoboit Harbour, forcing him to collect in the same areas again for the rest of the season.¹

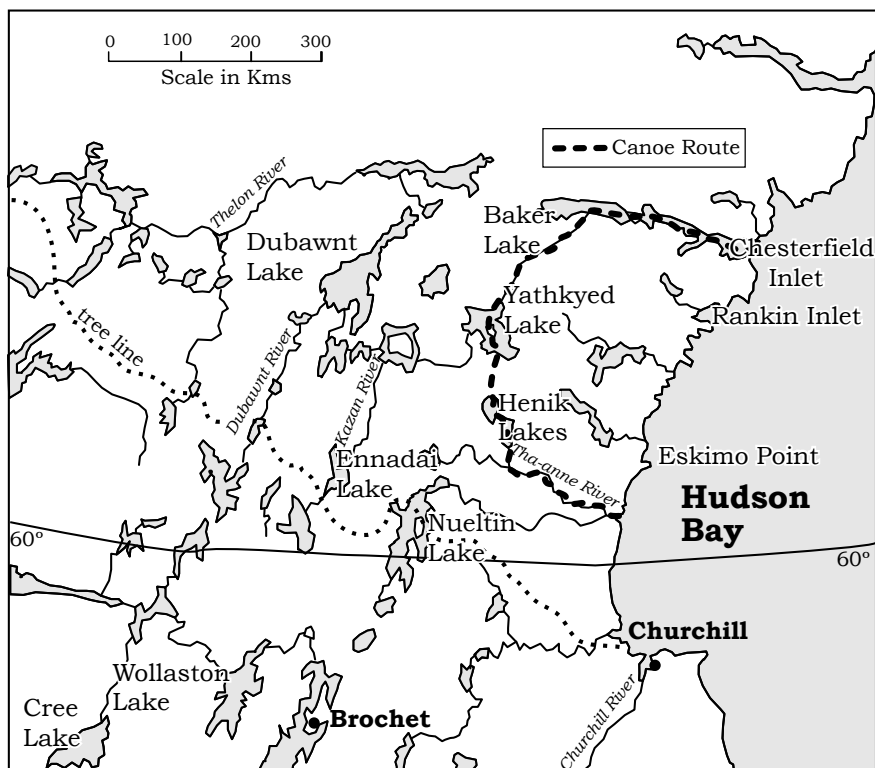
Malte had been intending to accompany Rousseau at the start of the collection period in Nova Scotia, but there was too much to be done in Ottawa before he left for England on July 30 to attend the International Botanical Congress in Cambridge. He remained in Europe until October 1, visiting Kew, Berlin, Copenhagen, and other Museum herbaria to study the material to be dealt with in the Flora of Arctic Canada. As well as spending a good deal of time with Ostenfeld in Denmark, he took a personal leave of absence for which he had applied in January and was given permission to take a month's leave with pay that summer. "I would very much appreciate the opportunity to visit my native

country, Sweden,” he said, “where my aged mother is still living and where I have many botanical friends.”²

Erling Porsild collected plants around Yathkyed and Baker Lakes in the Keewatin District that August, under the aegis of the North West Territories Branch of the Department of the Interior. Since his collections from this and the previous year were going to be identified and labelled by him “with the assistance of his father” and with the view of turning them over to the National Herbarium, it was felt in the Department of Mines, under which the Museum was placed, that possibly “an arrangement could be made with the North West Territories branch for the continuation of this work which would be contributing to another of the several of the regional Floras that Dr. Malte has in mind.” As this was readily agreed, on June 26 before he left for Europe, Malte arranged with Ralph Parsons at the Hudson’s Bay Company for the *Nascopie* to ship a small package of pressing material to Chesterfield Inlet to be delivered to Baker Lake by the middle of August.³

In the Department of the Interior, Finnie was pleased with the reports of the ongoing movement of the reindeer herd in Alaska and the preparations for the new receiving station on the East Branch of the Mackenzie River delta, but there had been much forward-looking discussion over the winter about the need to extend the pasture surveys east of the Coppermine River to Hudson Bay. The relatively unknown area of Keewatin was the part of his territory that most worried him, since it was there that he had had so many reports about starvation among the Eskimo people. Should the reindeer industry in Canada become as successful as it had been in Alaska, it was time to consider whether new experimental reindeer stations could be established across the whole northern part of the North-West Territories. It was logical, therefore, that in 1930 Erling was instructed to make a grazing survey of the central Keewatin District between Churchill and Chesterfield Inlet on the west side of Hudson Bay, west to the Kazan river.

The Keewatin District was as vast as the collecting areas covered by the Porsild brothers in 1927 and 1928, but since time was pressing and the work had to be completed in only one season, the Department had arranged for two Royal Canadian Air Force aeroplanes to be made available to them during the early part of the survey. Erling had used this pasture survey technique in Alaska, and it was later used successfully in Russia for the same purpose. Erling left for Churchill towards the end of June after choosing W. H. Bryenton, of The Pas, Manitoba, known to him as “a cheerful companion and a resourceful



Canoe routes taken by A. E. Persild and R. Bryenton, Keewatin, NWT, 1930 (Cartography: Faith Carlson)

traveller of great experience in northern work,” to go with him. They spent nearly two weeks in the vicinity of Churchill while they waited for the lakes to open up in the interior. From there, they took the reconnaissance flights, covering the area from Churchill up the Tha-Anne River, east to Eskimo Point and Mistake Bay on the Hudson Bay coast, north to Rankin Inlet, then due west to Yathkyed Lake on the Kazan River. Several landings were made during the reconnaissance, and the flights were made at a fairly low altitude when flying conditions permitted.

In his talk to the Geographic Society in July 1936, entitled “The reindeer industry and the Canadian Eskimo,” Erling outlined in detail the results of his aerial survey, of which some would prove to be very disappointing.

As I had experienced on earlier flights in Alaska in 1929 it was possible from altitudes of 1,000 to 3,000 feet to recognize with surprising accuracy the more important plant formations as well as forage cover. The flights showed that, generally speaking, the area comprising the northern part of the west coast of Hudson Bay from Chesterfield south to Dawson Inlet, and inland as far west as the outlet of Baker Lake, is entirely unsuited to reindeer.

This area is a low peneplain having a maximum altitude of perhaps less than 1,000 feet. The rocks are pre-Cambrian and everywhere show abundance of glacial striation. Moraines and other forms of glacial deposits are rarely seen here. Viewed from an aeroplane, the almost total absence of soil and closed plant cover is most striking. Black rock lichens here and there lend a sombre tinge to the land, but in most places the grey or light-red colour of the gneiss and granite is dominant. North of this area the narrow fjord of Chesterfield Inlet, which is continued by Baker Lake, penetrates 200 miles into the heart of the 'Barren Grounds.' The inlet is navigable by sea-going vessels to the very head of Baker Lake.

South of Dawson Inlet the character of the country changes. The pre-Cambrian rocks are well covered by a thick mantle of glacial till, and but here and there are rock exposures seen. The country rises from the low and shallow west coast of Hudson Bay in a series of almost level prairie-like, lake-filled plains to the height of land towards the Kazan river. Viewed from the air the most striking feature of this 100–150-mile wide coastal plain is the great abundance of lakes and the total absence of well-defined drainage systems. The waters from one lake merely spill over a rocky ledge into the next lake, and even from the air it is with the greatest difficulty that the rivers can be followed. With its countless lakes, which cover more than half the surface, the country strangely resembles a tidal flat which has just been exposed by the receding tide. No doubt owing to the variation in their flora of algae and diatoms, the waters of no two of these lakes are of the same colour. Some are almost black, but most are yellowish-brown, and some even milky white. In none of them are the waters clear and transparent to a depth of over a few feet.

The aerial surveys were completed by July 30. The RCAF planes returned to their base at Cormorant Lake, Manitoba, after dropping Erling and Bryenton with their canoe, equipment and supplies at the outlet of Yathkyed Lake. Their canoe had had to be carried by air so a type especially designed for this purpose was chosen for the expedition.

This canoe fits snugly against the underside of the fuselage of the aircraft. It is 18 feet long and fairly narrow, very low, and nearly flat-bottomed. It has a square stem and is built for a light outboard engine. With a minimum of freeboard it will carry a load of 800 lbs., and with a light-weight 1½-horsepower outboard engine will make from 5 to 6 miles per hour, according to load and weather.

Due to the square stern and the absence of a keel the canoe does not paddle well. A great improvement was made on this canoe by the fastening of strips of waterproofed canvas 2 feet wide to the gunwale of the canoe. The inside edge of this canvas was provided with brass eyelets, so that when loaded the canvas could be lashed over the load leaving an opening for each of the crew. With this arrangement the canoe was made much more seaworthy, and with as little as two to three inches of freeboard was comparatively safe even in fairly rough water.

The month of August was spent in making a ground survey of the land bordering Yathkyed Lake, Lower Kazan River, and Baker Lake, territory previously covered by J. B. Tyrrell in 1894 and the Fifth Thule Expedition in 1921–24. A few white travellers, mostly officials of the RCMP, Department of the Interior, or trading companies, had traversed the territory over the winter. Yet, despite these efforts, Erling felt that “our knowledge of that country still remains fragmentary.”

“Yathkyed Lake, also known by its Eskimo name Hikoligjuaq (which means ‘large, ice-filled’) is approximately 53 miles long with a maximum width of 22 miles near its north-west end,” Erling said. He determined its elevation to be about 500 feet above sea level. Although they took no soundings in the middle of the lake, it appeared nowhere to be deeper than fifty feet.

A large island of granite cut by numerous dykes of diabase almost separates the south-eastern arm from the main body of the lake. Large numbers of small islands, some rocky and some mere heaps of

boulders, are seen everywhere in the lake. Some of the boulder islands are annular in outline, with a truncate, crater-like top. These, as well as numerous reefs and boulder walls, which in many places form the shore-line of this and other lakes on the Kazan are formed of angular boulders in which small pebbles and sand are entirely absent, and no doubt have been pushed up from the shallow lake bottom by lateral pressure....

The mechanics of this pressure are not clearly understood, but it is well known by all travellers that pressure ridges occur in all large northern lakes in certain places against the shore, or between two opposite points in the lake where early in the winter a fissure will be formed. This fissure or lead expands and contracts with changing temperature. Upon contracting the ice formed in the lead will be crushed, and at the end of the winter a pressure ridge, often five to ten feet high, is formed. Pressure ridges are formed in the same place each winter. The boulder walls' shores in Yathkyed Lake are generally 10 to 30 feet high. The side facing the lake is always entirely devoid of lichens or moss, while the inside of the wall is well covered by these plants. Disturbances in the walls are frequent and may easily be noted by the orientation of the lichen-covered face of the boulders on the inside wall.

The Kazan River enters Yathkyed Lake on the west side and flows through to the outlet on the north side through a broad channel which almost immediately opens into another lake bordered by low, grassy meadows. Past that, Erling and Bryenton found the river became narrow and swift with numerous rapids, some of which they could not navigate. The river entered another lake, twelve miles long by three to five miles wide, before passing through a range of low but very rugged granite hills at the north end. Further north of the range, the river bent sharply east and entered a long, narrow lake, thirty miles long and no more than a quarter of a mile to two miles wide, bordered on both sides by low, rocky hills about 100–200 feet high.

The only tributary of fair size enters the Kazan from the west at the head of the lake. "A short distance north of the outlet of this lake, the river drops about 30 feet through a long, cascade-like rapid," Erling reported. "Below the rapid it continues for 12 miles, and then through a series of rapids the channel contracts abruptly, and through three channels, formed by one large and one

small rocky island, the river drops over the Kazan Falls into a narrow canyon between perpendicular walls from 50 to 75 feet in height."

There was an easy portage around the falls, about three quarters of a mile down a winding stairway formed by the erosion of a soft vein of pegmatite, and they followed a "native," whom they met at the top, to the "surging maelstrom at the foot. In a deep and clear pool he showed us where the natives spear salmon trout. On the bottom of the pool we saw several of these large and beautiful fish, that ascend the Kazan from the sea as far as the falls, but according to our native informant are never taken above the falls."

Below the falls the river continues its turbulent course for about a mile through the canyon before it emerges into a broad and shallow valley and winds its way between the gravelly banks towards Baker Lake. Erling estimated that the total drop from the head of the rapid above the falls to the foot of the canyon was at least a hundred feet. He said that the current had been swift everywhere between the lakes along the Kazan, ranging from four to eight miles an hour. Apart from the portage around the Kazan Falls, they had descended all fifteen rapids encountered, of which "all but two could be navigated by lowering the canoe at the end of a line."

"A short distance below the fall the Archean rocks are overlain by a soft, bright vermilion sandstone," Erling said. "From a hill 600 feet high a short distance east of the river, Sugar Loaf Mountain on the south shore of Baker Lake was visible. The slopes of the first-mentioned hill as well as the very crest showed series of raised shore-lines formed of boulders similar to the boulder reefs observed on Yathkyed Lake. [Along] the last 20 or 30 miles before entering Baker Lake the banks of the Kazan are formed of blue boulder clay rich in marine shells."

As well as plant collecting at Baker Lake, true to form, Erling climbed "the very conspicuous and isolated Sugar Loaf Mountain" on the south shore, from which "one commands an excellent view of the eastern portion of Baker Lake and the country far to the south. On a clear day the buildings at Baker Lake post and the mouth and lower courses of the Doobaunt River are clearly visible." He argued with both Tyrell and Birket-Smith, who had given elevation readings of 1,200 and 360 feet respectively, by giving his reading as 600 feet.⁴

As he had done on his earlier investigations, he made notes of physiographic interest and collections of birds, animals, and plants that he felt added to the knowledge of the country. He found the flora strikingly young and uniform, composed mainly of plants adapted to drought in summer and lack of



A. E. Persild giving out emergency rations, Kazan River, Keewatin, NWT, 1930 (Photo: R. Bryenton, LAC, PA-101018)

snow cover in winter. Many years later, he was to comment to Professor William Hobbs in the Department of Geology at the University of Michigan, that it was a wonderful place for a Pleistocene geologist because nearly all the hills showed beautiful terracing that would “provide easy means of checking problems of isostasy.”⁵

Somewhere on the Barrenlands between Yathkyed Lake and Chesterfield Inlet, notwithstanding the meeting with the “native” at Kazan Falls where large fish were available, for the first time in his extensive surveys, Erling finally encountered starving Eskimo people. All the people that he had met and befriended along the Arctic coast, from Cape Beaufort east to Atkinson Point, had had times of deprivation, but for the most part they had done well off the country in one way or another. Fish was abundant even if the caribou had failed. The contrast in the Keewatin District was striking and desperate. Whenever and wherever he could, Erling handed out relief rations, but having seen the need firsthand it was doubly hard for him to look around at the desolate land and be forced to admit that, although most of the available pasturage could be utilized by migrating caribou, it was unsuited for year-round maintenance of reindeer because it lacked the luxuriant lichen heath and sedge tussock tundra of his earlier investigations. It seems ironic that at the very time that more than three

thousand newly purchased reindeer “for the relief of the starving Eskimos” were on their way across Alaska, it should be discovered that there could be no way that the hoped-for reindeer industry could possibly spread into the areas of greatest need, due to lack of suitable forage.⁶

Erling and Bryenton returned on the S.S. *Beothic* on her annual inspection tour of the Eastern Arctic, leaving from Chesterfield Inlet on September 13 and making a survey of Coats Island en route east. Back in Ottawa, Erling was expecting to spend the winter working hard in the herbarium on all the botanical collections made in recent years. Finnie would not be happy about the results of the Keewatin investigation, nor with the news of the reindeer drive that reached the Department in bits and pieces with little good to report as the herd continued to make its way painfully across the Brooks Range in Alaska, suffering a miserable summer of “flies,” stampedes, and predation as it headed slowly for the Colville River.

There was, however, much happier news from Bob Porsild on the Mackenzie delta. He and Hatting had accomplished a great deal of work at the reindeer receiving station that summer, although he was no longer there in the middle of September. He was standing on the wharf at Aklavik when his fiancée arrived from Denmark on the *Distributor* on September 17.

According to her grand-daughter, Ellen Davignon, Elly Rothe-Hanson had been staying with Erling and Asta Porsild in their Rockcliffe Park home in Ottawa since her arrival in Canada, and she had been taking English lessons in readiness for her new life in the North. In other ways, however, she was well prepared for what lay ahead. She was twenty-seven years old, cheerful, fun-loving, and optimistic. As second oldest in a family of nine children whom she had helped to look after, she had been a housekeeper, governess, nurse, and stenographer before she left Denmark.⁷

Years after her arrival in Aklavik, Elly was to tell the *Yukon News* what she remembered of that amazing day. She said she was met by Bob and “the whole population of whites and Eskimos”:

I shook hands with everyone, and was told to invite them all to our wedding the following day. The invitation was gleefully accepted by all. The wedding took place in the small Anglican church with Rev. Bill Murray officiating. A tall mountie in full regalia took me up to the altar where Bob and his best man, Hans Hansen, another Dane, waited. We were duly declared man and wife. When we were in signing the

register, we heard the shout “Steamboat!” and when we came out, the church was empty. Bob quickly turned me over to the bridesmaid, a nurse from the hospital, and he and Hans also went down to the boat to see if the balance of our winter’s supply had arrived and last but not least, the bottles of booze that each family was entitled to and which arrived on the last boat. All that was more exciting than a mere wedding though it was the first white one Aklavik had seen.

The owners of the only roadhouse, Mr. and Mrs. Kost, had arranged the wedding dinner for us; caribou roast with all the trimming and a wedding cake with icing so hard it took our combined efforts to cut through it. There were 30 white people and a very happy feast it was, with speeches and songs (Bob had been there a year and was very popular with all) and later, the 35 Eskimos were served, two settings, but there was plenty of food for all.

We all proceeded to an empty warehouse, its floor freshly painted. Three Eskimo fiddlers started the music and Bob and I danced the first waltz, then he disappeared to play host to our guests with the contents of some of his 12 bottles. The Eskimos were wonderful dancers, so light on their feet no matter how big and fat they were, and being a good dancer myself, I made many new friends that evening. They are a jolly people, always smiling and happy. The language barrier was no problem; smiles and nods were all that were necessary.... At midnight we were invited to the wireless station for tea and huge ham sandwiches. It just hit the spot. Bob was available again and we danced till 4 a.m.

With happy promises to come back for Christmas, the newly-weds left Aklavik the next day in their station tugboat, towing a small barge with their supplies. They were accompanied by Hans and a young Eskimo boy, Donald, who was going to help at the reindeer station for the winter. As they travelled downriver, Elly was anxious about what she thought would be her new log-cabin home but Bob had worked hard to surprise her.

Two days later we arrived in the Mackenzie Delta, where our two-storey house, built high up on the bank, awaited its master and mistress. Bob carried me over the door step as custom demanded, and with a kiss, put me down to explore my new domain. The view from the windows was grand; water for miles and miles and the mountains

in the background. There were no trees, just some wind-blown willow bushes. There were no neighbours for 15 miles, no radio, no telephone. We were alone.

At this phase of the station construction, the Department provided their food supply, as ordered, via the Hudson's Bay Company. Elly was a good cook and she enjoyed the challenge of experimenting with all the canned food (butter, bacon, meat, vegetables, and condensed milk all came in cans) as well as eggs preserved in salt and boxes of dried ingredients such as onions, potatoes, flour, sugar, and Baker's chocolate, but she thought that fresh whitefish and the occasional ptarmigan made a welcome addition to their otherwise limited menu.⁸

Bob wrote to the Andersons on November 20 to tell them that he and his wife were now "safely tucked away" in their new home "far from the buzzing world" after their wedding on September 18. He was trying to collect bears for Anderson but regretted to say that not a single bear – black, brown, or grizzly – had been killed in the area that summer. "I have told everybody about the Museum's anxiety to secure specimens of grizzlies, so hope to get whatever may be killed here." He had had a very busy summer and was hardly through yet, but at least most of the outside work at the station had been finished. "The winter is well started, and in a few days I go to Aklavik by dogteam to bring our first winter mail in."⁹

What he neglected to tell Anderson was that, just three weeks after the wedding, he had nearly lost his new wife. Early in October, the group at the station, including Elly, had taken the boat seven miles down the delta to put it up for the winter. It was decided that Hans and Donald would take Elly back home by dogsled and then go back the next day for Bob, who would stay behind to tie up all the loose ends.

Elly told the ensuing tragic story simply:

Away we went, Hans behind, Donald ahead and me sitting like a queen in the sledge. The boys decided to take a short cut over the ice; the sledge broke through and Donald and the dogs drowned. Hans and I floundered around in the ice-cold water, trying to get our hands on solid ice. We finally succeeded and half crawling, half walking, freezing and crying, we made our way back to a white-faced and horrified Bob, who quickly got a fire going so we could get dry and warm. Next morning we walked back, only stopping for a lunch of canned sardines

which we carried under our shirts to thaw them. It was a sad little trio that trudged the long way home.

Elly was to show that she was not only very brave in the face of disaster, but she was made of fine pioneer stuff. “Before the ice closed the river, we carried water up the 70 foot cutbank using a yoke and two five-gallon cans hanging on hooks. It was usually Bob’s job but I took my turn too. My pails were only half full though, otherwise, as I explained, I would spill too much. Later when the snow came, and it was my task to fill the large water barrel which stood beside our big woodstove so it would melt, that was a thankless job because it seemed no matter how much snow I dumped, there never seemed to be much water.”

They used gasoline lamps to light the house after dark and Elly said that from November 15, when the sun disappeared, until January 19, when it came back, the lamps were in almost constant use.

At Christmas we went to Aklavik, as promised, with Hans’ dogteam, collected our sacks of mail which was a real treat since we hadn’t had any since September, and had a gay old time. Hans lost his heart to an Eskimo girl and stayed behind. We borrowed four dogs (the sledge was ours) and got safely home. The winter passed in peace and quietness; we had a gramophone and lots of records, many books, Bob’s guitar, and lots of letters to write. I learned how to make snowshoes, to make ammunition for the gun and to fire it. Once in a while we had visitors and we entertained them royally. They usually stayed overnight so we’d have a sing-song of sorts in the evening.

One group of Eskimo visitors took their borrowed dogs back for them, leaving them with eight pups to teach how to pull a sled. “Bob walked behind and I ran ahead, dangling a frozen white fish before them to make them run faster. Sometimes they weren’t hungry and didn’t respond but eventually, they learned their jobs.”

To feed the dogs and add variety to their meals, Bob shot ptarmigan – two per dog and two for themselves – with Elly’s assistance. “That was a total of 18 birds and it went like this: Bob went ahead and shot them, making sure that I noticed where they fell. Then I would pick them up and put them in a sack

which I carried over my shoulder. My steps got slower and slower; the load got heavier and heavier; I didn't even get any offer to carry them home for me. Why do women always carry the heaviest burden? I only ask."

Elly did not always put up with this male off-hand thoughtlessness meekly.

One afternoon I got offended at some trivial remark Bob had made, took my parka and went out. "I'm not going to stay with such a brute." I knew there was an empty cabin 12 miles away; that was my goal. It got darker, I didn't like it one bit and once when I turned around to see how far I'd gone, I saw the lights from the windows high up there in my home. That put an end to my attempted run-away. I went back, prepared to be forgiving but the monster hadn't even noticed I had left him. He was so engrossed in his book-keeping and was unaware of any wrong-doing on his part. It was several months before I told him the story.

After all she had gone through in her first few months in the Mackenzie delta, Elly Porsild's first year in the far north should have continued without any major trials. Winter passed and spring came without mishap, but as the days lengthened and their lives should have become easier, on June 3, at 7 a.m. on a grey and rainy morning, their beautiful first house, of which she and Bob were so proud, burned to the ground.

"It was a near disaster," Elly said, "as we lost everything and only had the clothes we had hastily donned. Bob got his face burned and his red hair singed when he tried, in vain, to get into the burning house to save something. But, as always, God looked after us as he always has. Some Eskimos came along who had food to spare and helped to get the boat out so we could get to Aklavik."

There was an urgent need for them to get to the hospital in Aklavik. Elly gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Betty, three weeks later.¹⁰



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SAD NEWS AND SUMMER IN SCANDINAVIA

The new year of 1931 could not have started worse for Oscar Malte. In a letter dated January 19, he heard from the herbarium in Copenhagen that Ostenfeld had died on January 16 after a month's illness. "To all appearances he was improving rapidly but a blood-clot caused his weak heart to give out. His death is a great loss to all of us here and especially to our Museum which through him has become one of the centrals for the exploration of the arctic flora. He no doubt leaves a large material for the *Flora Arctica*, but I don't know anything about it. I would therefore like to ask if you know how far his work had proceeded and also to ask your advice as to what we should do."¹

Stunned, Malte sent an immediate cable to Mrs. Ostenfeld, followed by a letter on February 24 in which he offered his deepest sympathy to her and her daughter:

It was sad news, indeed, and I felt the shock the more as he apparently was steadily improving and in such excellent spirits when I left Copenhagen last fall. His death is a mighty blow to botany and especially to the Botanical Museum at Copenhagen.

Ever since I got Dr. Christensen's letter I have been worried about the fate of the *Flora of Arctic Canada* on which we were working so harmoniously. I am determined to go ahead with it, but the rate of progress will to some extent depend on what disposition you care to make of the ms. Carl left in addition to what he turned over to me when he was in Ottawa in 1929. Our Museum would be glad to have it and we feel disposed to offer you adequate compensation.²

The amount of the compensation could only be determined after Malte had been able to examine and appraise the documents, so he hoped that Mrs. Ostenfeld would send all her husband's notes and papers to him for valuation. As Ostenfeld had already been paid \$7,500 for his share of the Flora to date, when the remainder was examined it was valued at only \$600. Aware of all the delays in the project from both sides of the Atlantic, on December 5, Mrs. Ostenfeld sensibly asked to be paid at once instead of waiting until the Flora had been completed. Unfortunately, her payment could not be paid in advance under the terms of the agreement, and, as it turned out, it would never be paid because Malte would also die before the Flora could be ready for publication.³

Malte was still working on the Flora two years later when he wrote to Ostenfeld's widow for the last time on January 14, 1933. He said he had been making good progress but, as always, complained that it was "of necessity somewhat slow. I have found a surprisingly large number of inaccuracies in the arctic literature, with the result that practically every species has to be investigated very carefully. Such investigations of course take time and particularly so because in many instances I have to borrow authentic specimens from other places, e.g. from Greenland, Stockholm, Upsala." It is noteworthy that Malte no longer relied on Copenhagen for his "authentic specimens."⁴

He would have company in Ottawa in the winter of 1931 while Erling worked on his collections, having been given approval to study until such time as he was needed for the reindeer work. Travel, however, was a different matter. Still under contract with the Department of the Interior, Erling needed Malte's support to write to Finnie in March: "I fully concur with Mr. A. E. Porsild that, in order satisfactorily to work up the vast collections of botanical specimens made in the north of Canada by him and his brother, it will be necessary to consult the large herbaria and botanical libraries of Harvard University, Boston, and the U.S. National Herbarium, Washington."⁵

By the end of the winter, Erling had done a considerable amount of work on the classification but there was still much more to be completed. However, it was time to leave the botanical work and turn to the reindeer business again. As he had feared from what he had seen of the beginning of the drive and the route that would be taken, the herd would be very far from arriving on time at the new receiving station.

"New and perplexing problems were encountered, due to the depth of snow in the mountain valleys and the consequent difficulty of transporting the

supplies and equipment of the expedition,” he said in his speech to the Geographical Society in February 1936:

The vendors originally had planned to use reindeer steers only for hauling the supplies. So much time however was lost in breaking steers to harness and in the daily routine of harnessing the fifty sledge deer required to haul the equipment that this plan was soon abandoned. An attempt was made to use aeroplanes for placing advance caches of supplies along the route of travel, but the hazard of flying across the but partly mapped Brooks Range during the dark period of the year, coupled with the excessive cost, put great obstacles in the way of carrying out this plan. Eventually the time-honoured dog-team transport solved the problem. For a time fifteen dog-teams were employed for relaying supplies across the divide to the Etivluk river, a tributary of the Colville river.

By June 1931, he said, “the ‘Reindeer Drive’ which started from the head of Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, in December 1929, had been ‘on its way’ for 18 months.... Such reports as we had received from the Lomen Company thus far, indicated that Andrew was making very slow progress indeed, and that he had not yet reached the north slope of Alaska. The Lomens, however, kept assuring us that all was well and that, as soon as Andrew was ‘out of the woods,’ rapid progress would be made.”⁶

In fact, the herd had reached the Colville flats on the north coast by the time of the second fawning, but with all the drive delays, the Lomens had begun to worry about what lay ahead at the Mackenzie Delta and already demonstrated their lack of faith in Erling Porsild by contacting Vilhjalmur Stefansson for his suggestions as to the best route for making the crossing. When he was unable to be helpful, they were forced to turn back to the Canadians for their assistance.⁷

Baldwin wrote to Finnie on May 7, suggesting that, “since the herd was so close to the Canadian border,” it might be advisable to send Erling “with three or four natives” to join the herd sometime in the summer to familiarize themselves with the deer and their summer handling, and to furnish Bahr with details and maps of the best route for crossing the delta. In fact, the herd was a long way from the Canadian border, and there would be plenty of time for the Porsilds to meet Bahr at a much later date. A month later, at a meeting with Finnie and Erling, Baldwin was persuaded to send word to the Lomens to do their

best to “enthuse Andrew with the idea that he is near the end of the drive, that guides and assistants and the Porsilds will meet him at the Canadian Line and help him through to his destination.”⁸

Erling would not, in any case, be in a position to join the herd at that point in time. On June 13, he left Ottawa on the train for Quebec City, where he boarded the S.S. *Empress of France*, bound for Europe. As he explained in his journal dated June to October, 1931:

Soon after the contract for delivery of the reindeer had been signed, I had made plans for obtaining experienced Lapp reindeer herders from Lapland who were to train the young Eskimo in the art of reindeer handling. I had been in correspondence with several people in Norway and Sweden who were well informed about reindeer, among them one Isaac Hatta, a veteran reindeer Lapp who had spent many years in Alaska where I had met him in 1926. He had since ‘retired’ and returned to his native town of Kautokeino in Norwegian Lapland. I knew Hatta would be a valuable man in making contacts with young reindeer in the Kautokeino district and had already received encouraging reports from him.

Meanwhile several other plans had been suggested to the Canadian Government by well-meaning ‘promoters’ in Canada, United States, and elsewhere. One was a Mr. Grimley in Norway who in some way was connected with a Norwegian outfit said to own reindeer in the mountains of southern Norway. This outfit at one time had offered to supply reindeer to the Canadian Government and, when this was declined, was now anxious to supply experienced herders to train our Eskimo.... Happily, the Department had given me a very free hand in making my own decisions and selections and I was confident that I would be able to obtain impartial advice through several of my connections in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

In Copenhagen on June 24, Erling planned to consult several people that he knew were well informed about Lapps and reindeer, among them Professor and Mrs. Godmund Hatt, Knud Rasmussen, and the Rev. H. Ostermann. Rasmussen was out of town, but Erling was able to arrange a meeting on June 26 with the Rev. Ostermann who had recently returned from Lapland. He at once put Erling in touch with his good friend the Rt. Rev. Domprost Nissen of Tromsø,

a retired inspector of the reindeer industry in Troms Fylke, who perhaps knew “every reindeer Lapp in Norway and Sweden” as he was a member of the Permanent Norwegian-Swedish and Finnish Reindeer Committee. Erling said they had a three-hour interview during which he “got much valuable information.”

In company with his younger brother Sten, who was just finishing school in Denmark, Erling took the night train to Oslo where he contacted the British Minister’s office and the Canadian Trade Commission on June 27 with regard to obtaining a permit to engage and expatriate Norwegian Lapps. The Trade Commissioner was of the opinion that it was prohibited to induce any Norwegian subject to emigrate to a foreign country. He spoke very highly of the representative of the Canadian National Railway, Mr. O. B. Grimley, who he said had already taken the matter up with the Norwegian authorities.

Accompanied by an officer from the Trade Commission, Erling called on Grimley but he felt it was largely a waste of time. As he had suspected, the Canadian Government contact was chiefly interested in providing transportation for “our Lapp herders” from Halifax to the end of steel (since the C.N.R. had no ocean transport between Europe and Canada), and the Lapps that he particularly recommended as herders were not Lapps but Norwegians, located far from Oslo, who had been unsuccessful in establishing a profitable industry in the mountains of southern Norway.

He and Sten took the train to Stockholm that night. The next morning, he contacted Lappologist Ossian Elgström, an old friend who had an intimate knowledge of the Lapps and their reindeer industry. After their discussion over lunch, he went to the Riksmuseum to meet the Director of the National Herbarium, Dr. Samuelsson, and was told that Dr. Floderus, “the world specialist on *Salix*” was anxious to meet him. He had dinner that night with Floderus, had “a most interesting talk,” then left Stockholm again on the night train bound for Narvik.

After a day and another night on board, the train stopped for half an hour at 6 a.m. on July 1 at Kiruna, the centre for the Swedish iron mines situated north of the Arctic Circle. The ore was taken from huge mountain terraces, crushed, and shipped to Narvik over more than a thousand kilometres of electric rail. Erling and Sten found themselves in a model town created by the Swedish iron king, Dr. Hjalmar Sundohm, and were surprised to see a well-built depot with a small adjoining park that contained “beautiful hedges and fair lawns and fine flower beds with geranium, begonias, tulips, etc.” They saw few conifers, but

tall white birch trees, *Betula odorata*, had been planted everywhere along the streets of the town.

They ended their train journey at Narvik at 11:03 on July 1. After a hasty lunch, they crossed the fjord by ferry and found that their motor car, arranged by Domprost Nissen, was waiting to meet them at Öfjord to take them on a 150-kilometre winding drive through magnificent mountain scenery. They saw few cars on the newly-completed macadam road, which was so narrow that in a few places one car had to stop if another was trying to pass from the other direction. Above the tree-line in places, they could see huge drifts of snow still remaining at altitudes of about 1,000 feet.

They arrived at Finseness just as their boat docked. They had reached a long stretch of coastline, over a thousand miles, between Bergen and Varanger Fjord at the Norwegian-Russian boundary east of North Cape, that was maintained by a fleet of small, fast passenger and mail boats heavily subsidized by the Norwegian government. The "Hurtigroute" service was excellent and was maintained throughout the year since no ice conditions were known along this coast. They reached Tromsø that night and went to the "Grand Hotel" where rooms had been arranged for them.

They were now further north than Point Barrow, Alaska, and the contrast between what Erling and his older brother had found there and what he and his younger brother were discovering in this high latitude of Norway was incredible. "Tromsø," Erling wrote, "is situated on a small island in lat. 70° and is a busy fishing town of over 10,000. It boasts a well built museum, 2 cinemas – one known as the 'World Theater,' an excellent harbour, a dry dock, high school and a fine large hospital, experimental farm, etc. No spruce or conifer grows here due to the damp, raw climate, but birch (*Betula odorata*), mountain ash (*Sorbus*) and several arboreous willows grow to fine sized trees, covering all lowland mountain sides and up to 6–800 feet above sea level."

They called on Domprost Nissen at 10 a.m. on July 2 and spent the day with him. Erling was highly impressed with him. "The Rt. Rev. Nissen is a man of most versatile ability. He is not only a man of great importance in the Church but is also a historian, a linguist well known in Science. Besides he holds 10 or 12 other offices and is naturally a very busy man. For 12 years he was 'Reninspektør' for Norway and perhaps knows more about reindeer and reindeer Lapps than any other Norwegian government official.... Without his advice and support I should not have been able to conclude negotiations in Lapland so speedily, or to avoid long delays due to various government red tape."

At Domprost Nissen's suggestion, they talked over the telephone to "the Herredsfogded in Karasjok and Kautokeino who told us that there were several Lapps from Kautokeino that were suitable and also likely to be willing to go. After talking things over we again telephoned Kautokeino and arranged that Isaac Hatta should come down to Bosekop and meet me there."

Several parties had been active already in that part of the country during the last year trying to secure Lapps. The local agent of the North American line had had inquiries sent out to Karasjok so Erling went down to see if by any means he could trace the source. "He first said that his company had received a request from the Can. Government but by going over the files we found that the thing had been started from Grimley in Oslo who apparently had almost engaged people and given them to understand that he was authorized to make all arrangements." The Reverend told Erling that the family chosen by Grimley were reliable people but more settled and 'civilized' than the northern Lapps.

Erling indulged himself in Tromsø by buying a pair of hiking shoes and having a bath – "a luxury that I have not been able to get for some time. Tromsø boasts a fine public bath with tubs and steam bath as well and has a saltwater swimming pool about eight × 20 ft., which of course is the pride of the town. The Grand Hotel only has one bath tub and a bath must be ordered one day ahead. The public bath is fine but, however, has the drawback that it is open once a week only!"

The brothers returned to the Hurtigroute ferry on Friday, July 4, after Erling managed to wire Finnie of his progress, and travelled north to Oxfjord, a small fishing village with a factory manufacturing oil from waste products from the fisheries. They had to wait here for a local boat to continue so they took a short walk over a narrow mountain path. Commenting on the "rich assortment of smells" also produced by the plant, Erling noted: "The population is but a few hundred rather primitive looking fisher people. It was rather a surprise therefore when passing on the mountain path I surprised a young lady sitting on a rock, with a vanity case on her lap, in the act of painting her lips."

The boat stopped at every farm house as it went to the head of Langfjord and back. They arrived at Bosekop at 8 p.m. where they found Isaac Hatta waiting. They talked into the small hours of the night. "He thinks my best chance will be to go up to Kautokeino where there are some young Lapps that he thinks would likely go to Canada."

They had made arrangements with the mail carrier to take them by car for forty-six kilometres to the end of the motor road.

He was to come at two p.m. but when he did not show up we got hold of another chap who, however, was unable to go till 20 o'clock. Still we have 24 hours daylight so it does not matter much when we go. Motored 7 km. to the next town Elvebakken, where Isaac has some business. He is going with me to Kautokeino and will, of course, be of great help in selecting the people.

At 20 the car came but now Isaac failed to show up. I had been out walking in the afternoon looking over the country and it turned out that Isaac being lonesome had got hold of a couple of bottles and was rather the worse for drink when we found him. Thought it best to get him out of town and loaded him on the car. The first 20 km. of the road is quite good but soon after commenced to get very narrow. Climbed to about 400 m. travelling near the snow limit for about 15 km. Then we dropped down into the valley of the Kautokeino River. Arrived at Solovopmi Fjeldshus, i.e. a Government roadhouse at about midnight. We had planned to walk the next ten km. cross country to the river where Isaac had a boat and then go 20 km. by lake and river to a village about half way to Kautokeino town. Isaac, however, was not in a condition to walk so I decided we had better stay at the roadhouse till next morning.

They set out on the ten-kilometre hike from the roadhouse the next morning and found the boat before noon, "a rather peculiar, very long and narrow Finnish river boat, abt. 25 feet long and 20 inches wide. This type of boat seems to be the only one in use in this country. Isaac also had an outboard motor."

The lake was long and narrow, enclosed between high, rocky, birch-covered banks. When they reached the foot of a long rapid below the village, they found two husky-looking Lapps waiting to take charge of the boat and pole it through the rapid while the Porsilds and Hatta walked the two kilometres to the village. Above the village there were about twenty kilometres of rather swift water with numerous rapids where it was again necessary to pole.

In a couple of places Isaac and I walked while the two Lapps poled the boat. We then came to a fall where it was necessary to portage the whole outfit half a kilometer. Above the falls is a narrow canyon through which the Lapps poled the boat while Isaac and I walked. At

the end of the 2 km. canyon we made coffee and here met the mail going down the river. One man was discharged here and returned to the village with the mail men.

We had then about 20 km. of swift water with many steep rapids, most of which we managed to pole using the line but twice. We then came to a long lake about 25 km. long and sent back the other man. We told him that if he would wait 3 or 4 hours the Kautokeino school teacher would be coming down on his way to Bosekop, but he answered "it is only 45 km. to the village so it would hardly be worth waiting" so he started back on foot.

Hatta had a large, fine house in Kautokeino village. They arrived at 3:30 a.m., had hearty meal, and went to bed. The house was a very well built, two-storied log cabin but Erling complained: "The windows are hermetically sealed and when the sun got on my side of the house nearly cooked me. Mrs. Isaac had been most considerate and provided me with a large heavy down quilt. It got stifling hot during the day with an occasional shower and distant thunder. Thermometer rose to 28–30° C."

The village consisted of several groups of houses, including farms, a church, and a school, and on July 8 Erling saw several people that Hatta considered suitable. "Two of these make a very favourable impression, and, I think, may want to go. One is 26 years old and has three children – two boys and a girl. The other is unmarried, but as Isaac remarked, 'we can fix that in half an hour, lots a females around this place!' There is another man below the village who might go. He is married and has one child – a girl of seven. These people all talk Norwegian, and I have no difficulty in talking to them."

The prospective herders hung around all the next day and "we did a lot of talking. Drew up a contract form setting out in simple language the work required and the conditions I offered them are \$40 per month and \$200 worth of grub per annum plus a bonus of 50 [cents] for each fawn marked at the spring round-up, the total to be divided in equal shares between the herders that have been permanently employed at the ranch."

Aslak Mikkelsen Tornensis signed the first contract on Friday, July 10. "He lives 20 km. down the river and wants to go home to get things ready to leave. Telephoned Doctor Lund in Bosekop, to find out if it was advisable to have him come here to make a medical examination of these people. He declared, however, that there was no need for such examination since there was

no contagious disease in the district and, what I was particularly glad to know, there is no venereal disease anywhere in Kautokeino district. Of course, I shall have to get them examined before leaving Göteborg [Gothenburg].”

Once the herders had been hired, Erling planned to have the families travel overland to Karasuando on the Swedish side, from where he thought they could go to Kiruna by car and south by train to Göteborg. “These people think they can be ready in about two week’s time.... Like the Alaskan Lapps, these folk take a long time to make up their minds and do an ungodly lot of talking.”

He went with Aslak on July 11 to the office of the “Lensmand,” the local Government official who, as Chief of Police, Notary, and “Lappfoged,” witnessed the signatures and affixed his seal to make the documents legal and official. The Lensmand was also empowered to issue passports but since there was no local photographer, Erling would have to take the necessary photographs and carry them to Tromsø to have the film developed and made into prints.

Mikkel Pulk and Mathis Hatta are both willing to sign now and our only difficulty is that Mathis hasn’t got a wife and I insist that he must have one. He has a girl alright but either she is not very keen on him or else she is merely pretending to be too bashful to declare herself willing to marry with so short notice. The whole thing is most amusing, except for the bridegroom-to-be who is constantly receiving advice from all the other girls. Isaac is acting as marriage counsellor and is having long talks with both parties, both singly and together. Mathis’ younger brother Isaac Hatta junior, also unmarried, told me today that if Mathis cannot get married, he will go to Canada in his place and get married right away. Perhaps this will make Mathis’s girl make up her mind.

Erling left with the mail on July 13 and got back from Tromsø with the passport photos on July 16. In his brief absence, things had indeed worked out as he expected. “Mathis’s and Inga’s wedding date had been set and preparations for it were already under way. In fact, knowing that there would be a wedding, I had in Tromsø bought a suitable wedding dress, not knowing precisely whether it was to be worn by Inga or Sofy. It would have made little difference. At any rate Inga was delighted when I showed it to her and told her that this was to be my wedding gift. For the wedding she would actually be dressed in her native

National costume, but for the party following the ceremony, would change into the fine one I had bought her.”

In the short time that was left, the three couples needed some time to prepare themselves for the long journey to far away Canada, to say good-bye to all their friends and relatives and to dispose of such property as could not be brought to Canada, including the few head of reindeer each couple owned. It was now agreed that Sten would remain behind as Erling’s representative. He was to accompany the party travelling from Kautokeino to the nearest railroad at Kiruna, about 180 miles south, by packhorse and small river boat. The trip would take a week, during which Sten was to pay the rent of the pack-horses and boats, and the cost of food and shelter en route. Isaac Hatta was hired as travel leader and manager, and, to make sure that there would be no last-minute backing out after Erling left, a contract was drawn up in which he undertook to “deliver” all the Lapps in Kiruna or forfeit his pay.

It was now left to Erling to travel south and make further necessary travel arrangements. From Tromsø he caught the fast coastal steamer to Narvik. “Stopping over one day in Kiruna I made arrangements to have the Lapps housed and fed upon arrival and even called at the principal local store where, according to the contract, I was to buy them suitable clothing and shoes for the travel by train to Gothenburg, for the trip across the Atlantic and from Halifax to Ottawa. It now only remained for me to arrange the ocean transportation with the Stockholm agent of the Swedish America Line and, in a long telegram to Ottawa, report that thus far my mission had been successful.”

This left nearly two weeks before he had to be back in Kiruna to meet the Lapp families. Some of this time was spent in Stockholm where almost daily he visited the National Herbarium in the Riksmuseum. He also made a side trip to Lund where he claimed to have received an interesting offer from the eminent Swedish botanist [Eric Hultén] who had been making a name for himself in the Kamchatka area.

According to the introduction to Erling’s 1931 trip journal, written as late as 1939 or after, he said:

I also made a visit to Lund to see Professor Hulten who then was planning a large work on the flora of Alaska and Yukon in the preparation of which he had offered me co-authorship. It was, however, clear to me that the reindeer business would leave me very little time and opportunity for writing during the next few years, and also that,

perhaps, Professor Hultén's principal motive in making this offer was that under the agreement he suggested, I was to turn over to him now the large collections of plants my brother and I had made in Alaska in 1926–27. However, I had already done a good deal of work on this material which I hoped to publish on myself.

It is a great pity that the original journal entries concerning this visit to Lund and Hultén's "offer of co-authorship" are not included in the final typed document. 1931 was an early date for Hultén to be contemplating "a large work on the flora of Alaska and Yukon" when he had as yet done no work on the Alaskan side of the Bering Strait. Also in 1931, Erling did not expect the reindeer business to extend for much more than another year. By the time the introduction was written, around eight or nine years later, Erling had published a work on the Alaskan flora over which he and Hultén were in serious disagreement, so it would appear that some of these remarks could have been written to justify a later position.

However the interview actually went, there was certainly no resulting agreement on a co-authored treatise on the Flora of Alaska and Yukon. Hultén would continue without him on his collections in the Aleutian Islands in 1932, leading to his interest in the Beringian corridor for the spread of Arctic and sub-Arctic flora across the continental division, and Erling would continue to work alone on his and Bob's collections whenever he had time after he returned to Ottawa. Meanwhile, his main priority now was to go back to Kiruna to meet the Lapp families, escort them to the ship at Gothenburg, and see them safely to and across Canada and up to the new reindeer station on the delta by the end of summer.⁹



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DESTINATION REINDEER STATION¹

By the third week in August 1931, Erling Porsild was ready to start out from Ottawa to take a dozen people on the train heading west to Edmonton. From there, they would be travelling by various methods of transport going north towards the newly built Government reindeer station on the East Branch of the Mackenzie River delta. The group consisted of Erling, his wife Asta, and his daughter Edith who had come from Greenland to live with them, as well as the three Lapp reindeer herders – Aslak Mikkelsen Tornensis, Mikkel Pulk, and Mathis Hatta – and their wives and families. Of the four children travelling with their parents, only newlyweds Mathis and Inga Hatta had none.

The new permanent staff and family members would all need reasonable accommodation on arrival at the station, as Bob Porsild knew only too well at the receiving end of their journey. Down on the East Branch, he had been busy building shelters for over a year now, and there is no doubt that everything would have been ready for the main staff contingent if it had not been for the fire that had completely burned down the main house two months earlier. The disaster had not only slowed down the work and destroyed all of Bob and Elly's possessions and a lot of his equipment, but the happy event three weeks after the fire meant that there was also a new baby's needs to be considered at the site. Housing for both Porsild families and the newcomers from Norway was now a pressing priority.

It was the beginning of July before the *Distributor* made her first appearance at Aklavik that season and there had been no lumber for Bob on board, which meant that no building supplies had been or could have been received until her second arrival on August 16. With Erling and the rest of the incoming staff due to arrive by September, Bob spent the rest of the summer frantically



Lapp families, *L to R*: Mikkel Pulk, Nels Pulk (son), Isaac Pulk, Mathis Hatta, Inga Hatta, Anna Pulk (baby Ellen not shown on bottom of photo), Aslak Tornensis, Sussanna Tornensis, Anna Sussanna Tornensis, Ottawa, August 1931 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-100690)

at work with two carpenters and two handymen, doing what he could to build, re-build, and prepare the station while having to make do without the new and replacement material that he desperately needed.

Another Government-ordered shipment that was expected to arrive in Aklavik before the end of the season also did not arrive. During the winter, Erling had made requisitions for food, fuel, and other supplies needed for the station during the first year. These goods, approximately sixteen tons of them, were supposed to have been shipped to Aklavik during the summer by the regular Mackenzie River boats, but after he left Ottawa, on his trip to Norway to hire the Lapland herders, he found that “the procurement of these supplies somehow had bogged down.” On July 1, at Narvik above the Arctic circle, he received a cablegram advising him that it would not be possible to obtain space on the last river boat for their supplies, which, he supposed, meant that they had not been ordered in time to reach the last boat.

I was thus faced with the alternative of wintering my Lapp reindeer herders at Fort Smith or somewhere else where supplies could be

obtained during the winter, or to have a river scow built at Ft. Smith in which to bring the Lapps and our 16 tons of supplies down the river, either under its own power or with the aid of some power boat. The latter scheme, although risky, would be feasible, provided a scow could be provided early enough to make the trip in late August or early September. I did not very much like the prospect of a late trip by scow with the possibility of freezing in somewhere on the river but, on the other hand, at least some of the supplies would be urgently needed at the new stations Bob was building; also I did not much like the idea of having the herders and their families spend the winter in idleness at Fort Smith. Accordingly I had requested that a 48-ft. river scow be built at Fort Smith.

The reindeer station group arrived at Edmonton at 10 p.m. on August 23. They were met at the train by officers of the Department of Immigration who helped to escort the Lapps to the "Immigration Hall" where they were comfortably housed for the next two nights. Meanwhile, the Porsild family retired to the MacDonald Hotel where Erling and the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company sat up until 2 a.m. going over the list and requisitions that had to be filled the next day.

"Had a busy day looking after the Lapps and trying to get the hundreds of odds and ends together that we need for next winter and spring," Erling said. "With the exception of a few things of less importance which couldn't be procured in the short time available, I think we managed to get most of the things on our list."

By train, barge, boat, and car, the party finally reached Fort Smith on August 30, but not before Captain Williscroft at Fort McMurray had informed Erling that "he would have me fined if not arrested for taking these people of mine down river without having a pilot's license. Told him to study his laws and regulations, but to save later explanations sent a wire to Finnie informing him of Capt. Williscroft's actions and a wire to Edmonton authorities in order to forestall later difficulties."

Erling had earlier telephoned the District Agent, a Mr. McDougal, who arranged for the Lapps to use an empty ranger's cabin on the Government lot in Fort Smith. After installing them for the night, Erling went down with McDougal to look at the scow, now nearing completion. He was horrified by what he saw. "It is made of green, native spruce with very few bolts, perhaps less

than 1 doz. Although I definitely had expressed my desire of having it made for outboard motors, if such were to be used – the stern of it was made just like an ordinary barge, leaving no place for the motors. At both ends twelve feet were taken up by a deck leaving no place for accommodation of passengers.”

After discussing things with McDougal, who was not sure whether changes could be made because the scow was on the whole as specified by the Department, Erling asked to have at least a few alterations made. “The fore and aft decks were to be taken out and in their place a built-up top 24 inches high and completely roofed over was to be constructed for accommodation of passengers and crew.” McDougal kindly let them have one of his men who was handy with tools and who at once started making the necessary alterations, assisted by the three Lapp herders.

Two home-made pumps had been furnished for the scow, not as stipulated in the contract by the builder and neither in working condition. A new factory-made cistern pump was now supplied by the District Agent office, also necessary tarpaulin, rope, etc. A more serious problem lay with the engines. The Department had supplied two seven-horsepower engines as requested, but they turned out to be short-shafted models for speed boats and were entirely unsuitable for use on a scow. From the Supervisor’s office they could get only two long-shafted engines with a total of 5½ horsepower, a poor substitute for the more powerful combination of 14 horsepower. They also “received from mining office a 19 foot canoe and four-horsepower Johnson motor and a number of other articles as arranged from Ottawa.”

To add to his frustrations, Erling now found that all their kitchenware, which was to be supplied from Marshall Wells Store in Edmonton, had not come.

Although my requisition had gone in about July 1st, the Purchasing Division had, in spite of my earnest request for having the stuff in Ft. Smith in plenty of time, had spent the time up to my return from Europe taking tenders and the order finally was placed by telegraph the day before I left Ottawa. All the other things, however, from the H. B. Co. and Ashdowns Hardware had been shipped. Tried to get the outfit at Ft. Smith but found all the stores were almost out of hardware at the time. Managed, however, to get some of the most essential partly second hand and at prices about ten times over what the same goods could have been bought for outside.

By now, everybody was warning them against proceeding under their own power to Aklavik with the scow at this time of the year without escort. After going over the boat and cargo carefully, Erling realized that, while the boat was large enough to carry the cargo, the sheer bulk of their supplies would make it difficult to find accommodation for thirteen people as well.

McDougal informed him that Northern Waterways were going down to Aklavik with a convoy of scows as soon as their manager, Mr. York, was back from a business trip. This company had made several propositions to the Department of the Interior earlier in the summer, including one to take the complete outfit down to the delta, including meals. When York returned, he agreed to tow them down on condition that they unloaded part of their cargo which he would carry separately. Erling thought the overall price was reasonable under the circumstances, subject to Departmental approval.

The convoy left Fort Smith at five a.m. on September 5, and it was not an easy trip. York's pilots frequently refused to continue because of adverse weather conditions. For the next two weeks, nearly every daily entry in Erling's journal read "Wind" until they reached Fort Norman on September 18. He saw a number of old friends in Norman but was sorry to miss Boland who had left for the lake the previous week. Further downriver, when they reached the rapid above Fort Good Hope where he and Bob had spent so much time with the stranded riverboat in 1928, they had to make two attempts to get downstream as it was very rough at the first try and knocked several boards loose in the bottom of their scow.

At Arctic Red River on September 22, Erling said: "York wanted us to stay here and get a tug boat from here on, but when I refused, decided to go on. Wanted to leave us in a poor and unprotected place below Separation, but again when I insisted agreed to leave us behind the first island below Separation if I would act as pilot. We landed here in a well sheltered spot at about ten p.m. after travelling about 170 miles."

They were all up at 4 a.m. and had everything unloaded before daylight. "York was so much in a hurry that we did not even have a chance of checking our stuff and merely had to content ourselves with a mere count of pieces. Not very satisfactory, but there was so little freight left on his boat that I could very quickly check up on what was left. York pulled out at once. While we were loading, his men saw the opportunity of swiping our four long poles, leaving us without a stick long enough to push away from the beach."

As they re-packed and loaded the scow with the five tons of their cargo that York's men had left on the beach, they found everything intact, but now a strong west wind sprang up.

We were ready to leave at eleven a.m. but waited one hour to see if the wind would increase. It was really too strong to travel with the power we had, but I was afraid the wind might swing around to north, which would be very bad for us since we had little shelter from that direction. I hoped to be able to get into the much smaller East Branch so we pulled out.

We soon found that the water got so rough that the four horsepower motor which I had had to rig up inside the boat in the well I had cut in the bottom was not enough to give us steerage so we merely drifted sidewise with the current, dodging the sandbars as best we could. Five miles above the East Branch we finally stranded on a rough stone beach. Rigged the motor on the 19 foot canoe and took the anchor out with a long rope and in this way managed to warp the scow away from the shore.

The wind calmed down a little in the evening. "A couple of Indians were camped about a mile above. When I passed I noticed they had a small, heavy, life boat which would be more suitable for towing than our canoe. Walked back and after considerable pow wow induced one young fellow who owned the boat to come down and give us a hand towing the scow. This we managed well enough and were soon safe in the East Branch." For their help, Erling paid the Indian and his helper 1½ gallons of gasoline, 50 pounds of flour, five pounds of sugar, three pounds of lard, and ½ pound of tobacco.

There was not much further to go now that they had reached the East Branch. They travelled until an hour after dark that night, making excellent speed with the large motor on the scow and the smaller one pushing in the canoe. The next day, they increased their speed materially by rigging both motors on the canoe and travelled from daylight till well after dark. They tied up below Oniah Channel on September 24.

Erling now began to scout for new building sites for the reindeer station. Ever since he had heard of the site Bob had chosen, he had wished that it was not so far down the delta. He thought of the Kittigazuit area as being suitable for the summer corral but it lacked shelter for the winter. He had been in Lapland

when the news reached him that the main building had been completely destroyed by fire. "I at once wired Bob suggesting the new camp be moved up river into the timber to some place ... at least 50 miles closer to Aklavik where the chief market from the reindeer herd will be found. Unfortunately this wire reached Bob so late that he claims no change could be made." From the scow, Erling studied the banks carefully. "Saw many fine building sites and a good deal of fine birch for wood." He also saw many thousands of ptarmigans, mostly flying south in huge flocks, and shot about a dozen from the boat.

He was up early on September 25, their last day on the scow before reaching the station, and climbed the high bank on the east side. "Stopped at the last timber about 15 miles above Tununek and again climbed the bank. Looked for building sites. Several were found which would do but not much level ground. Sufficient timber for cabins could be gotten here but in case we did move the station I believe our logs should be taken further up where long and straight building logs could be obtained more easily. Also got a couple of Xmas trees. Bad headwind all afternoon. Arrived at the camp, which is about nine miles above Kittigazuit at ten p.m."

The new station had been built on the top of a hill about 150 feet high on the north side of a small creek which would have been readily navigable for small boats except for a sandbar closing the entrance. At extremely high water, a scow drawing two feet of water could be brought into the creek but ordinarily a loaded scow had to be unloaded by wading out about fifty feet from the shore. On the cold and windy morning of September 26, the Lapps began to move some of their immediate belongings ashore while Bob's two carpenters started making beds and furniture for their new homes.

It could not have been a happy reunion between the brothers for Erling was in as "critic" a mood as his father had been with Ostenfeld in Copenhagen. He was to devote more than five pages of his journal to his complaints:

Instead of a cabin for each family as planned, and for which lumber had been sent to be used for roofs and floors while the walls were to be logs, [only] one cabin 36 × 12 feet, divided into three rooms each 11 × 12 feet had been built.... Bob had the two carpenters on hand, and some logs which were cut early this summer for two additional cabins, before the new building programme had been received. The cabins as planned by me were to be 16 × 18 ft., one for each family. The three room apartment house is very inadequate as it only leaves each family

a small room 11 × 12 ft., and has doors opening direct out even without a storm-shed or double door to break the wind. The logs used are small 4–6 inch stuff and of course couldn't be squared or even grooved. It will be very difficult to cork the walls well and I'm afraid they will be very cold in the winter...

Besides the above mentioned cabin for the Lapps, two frame buildings 18 × 24 ft. had been erected as per specifications, one for Bob and one for myself. The outside and most of the inside were finished but no painting had been done except one coat on the outside of both buildings. A two room cabin about 28 × 12 ft. and a small tool shop 10 × 10 ft. remained from last year. One room in the larger cabin had been occupied by Bob and his family since the fire while the other room had served as bunk house for the two carpenters and two handymen who had worked here all summer. As there are no storage facilities or warehouse I think the large cabin will have to be made into a warehouse.

Poor Elly. Instead of her beautiful house with all her lovely possessions, happily alone with Bob in their peaceful isolation, after the fire she had had to move into one cramped room with a harassed husband and new baby and proceed to cook for themselves and the work gang all summer. One of the hired men had left before the large group arrived, but now, with both Porsild families plus the two carpenters and one handyman, she would be cooking for eight people. At least Erling was appreciative that this was "Quite a job in a small 10 × 11 foot cabin with a small camp stove."

And poor Bob. While they waited for the tide to rise in order to bring the scow close to the shore, he and Erling went down to the corral, about a mile and a half from the camp while Erling continued his litany of complaints. They took the tugboat, the "Ram," that Bob designed and had built specially for the station at Vancouver, BC. Said Erling: "This boat is small, but very sturdy and heavy and looked like a good boat for our purpose, i.e., pushing scows, etc. It seems to me it is unnecessarily heavy weighing 8 tons although it is but 30 ft. long. It is equipped with a 25 horsepower Frisco Standard 2-cylinder motor, which is a heavy duty marine type but it is entirely without accommodation for crew and passengers."

The corral had not yet been built but sufficient poles for the main corral and the chute had been hauled up from the beach, also about five thousand feet of rough lumber for corral sections. The holes for the main corral, which was

circular and a hundred and fifty feet in diameter, had been dug and the poles had been carried to their places. Erling was satisfied that all that remained to be done was to put the poles in place, which would not take long. The ground had not thawed more than eighteen inches on the average, although the site was fairly dry and well drained. The chute and a number of holding pens would need to be built and two wing fences leading into the corral. Since the corral was situated about three hundred yards from the river and about the same from a two-and-a-half-mile lake, it would be necessary to put up a fence between the corral and the lake.

If Bob had Erling's grudging approval of the corral, the station site was a different story. Erling said:

As far as I have been able to gather, this proximity [to the corral] has been a determining factor in building the main camp here. In my opinion, however, this proximity is of no importance since the corral will be used only once or twice a year and then just for a few days. And when in use most likely – at least in the summer, those working in the corral at the roundups will most likely use tents rather than walk back and forth several times a day. As the present camp site is at least 15–20 miles from the winter range proper, where the herd will be the greater part of the year; as there is no shelter whatever; as water, firewood and all supplies have to be hauled up a steep hill 100–150 ft., I think the site chosen is most unsuitable for a permanent, central camp.

It is true that there are few suitable building sites on the East Branch, below Tununek, but I cannot on the other hand see why the winter camp should not be far above Tununek, right in the timber where not only building material can be obtained but where there is good shelter and plenty of firewood, and a large choice of suitable building sites.

There is, at least now, plenty of driftwood within a distance of 3–4 miles of the present camp. But not only does it involve much more work to gather this than if it could be cut right in one place and loaded on a scow [but] burning driftwood requires at least twice the amount of wood and, what is worse, the annual supply will each year have to be hauled further and further since in most years the normal quantity stranded naturally will not be enough for a camp of this size.

With all its disadvantages, Erling concluded that it was most unfortunate that Bob had not relocated the camp after the fire. He said: "I am perfectly satisfied the present site is unsuitable and that the camp will have to be moved sooner or later."

When the brothers returned from the corral, the water was high in the channel below the station and they were able, after a good deal of trouble, to haul the fully loaded scow over the sandbar into the creek. The next day was spent in unloading most of the cargo. The carpenters worked on the building while everyone else carried and unloaded freight. They carried about two tons of it to the top of the hill and put it under a tarpaulin while the rest was left below on a small sandspit. The following day, they used a team of dogs with a toboggan to help haul the last of the cargo up the hill "but even this is almost killing on the 100 ft. lift."

Bob left for Aklavik on September 29, taking his three helpers with him as they were all under contract to be brought back to their camps not later than October 1. The last summer mail was also due on that date, and it seems likely that Bob was happy to get away for a break.

After the working gang left, there was more time for Elly to spend with the baby, for the older children to explore the site and the newly arrived wives to settle themselves as best they could in their unfamiliar surroundings, while Erling took the men down to the corral and worked all day putting up fence posts. They dug holes for the wire fence from the main corral to the lake and carried green poles from the riverbank across the tundra. As they were thirty poles short for the wire fence, they had to bring them from the camp the next day, but the wire could not be stretched until the poles were securely frozen in their holes.

On the morning of October 1, the weather was fine and Erling decided to take Aslak and Mathis on a fishing trip, travelling in the big canoe and towing the five-ton flat boat. "We have no fresh fish and I wished to make an attempt of getting some although it is really too late as it may turn cold at any time. The fishing place is 4 miles past Kittigazuit on the coast, in all twelve miles from here by water." They reached the fish place with no difficulty and pitched their tent on the low sand spit, but before the tent was even up, the weather changed and it started to blow and snow from the northwest. They spent an uncomfortable night on the beach before deciding to leave in a howling blizzard and "beastly cold weather" the next day as fishing, of course, was out of the question. They managed to return to Kittigazuit where they were told that fishing

had been good for the last four days. "I wish we could have been down a few days earlier," Erling said.

When the weather turned fair, they made one last try at the fish camp. Leaving the two Lapps to set the nets and load the fish in the flat boat, Erling returned to the station for two days. Ice had already formed along the shore of the river when he and Mikkel worked at the corral digging holes and putting in poles for the chute and holding pens, placing altogether about fifty poles. Mikkel cleaned out one of the two river fishnets that they barely managed to salvage from under a mass of slush ice.

Erling was up early on October 6 as he started for the coast, with both outboard motors on the large canoe, to see how the two fishermen were getting on.

Had but little difficulty with ice until I reached Kittigazuit where I had to break ice for about one mile to get in. Lots of drifting new ice outside. Landed for a few minutes. The small river was completely frozen and the people there doubted if I would be able to reach the fishery going outside the island. It took me nearly two hours but the ice was getting more slack when an offshore wind came up. Reached the fishery and found the flat boat frozen in in the entrance to the river. The Lapps apparently had completely given up all hope. No water could be seen yesterday. They had lost two nets but managed to salvage three. Fortunately the long 90-yard net they had not set. They had caught only a few fish and, of course, were very much worried.

Erling too was worried that the river would freeze up at any minute. They managed to get the boat out and started back, pushing against the wind through slush ice, but at Kittigazuit he realized they would have to leave it below the Hudson's Bay post, securely anchored on the shelf ice where he felt it was safe for the time being.

They had no problem going back except that ice formed on the sides of the canoe. There was no sign of Bob until the next day when he arrived with the mail from the last plane, "however, not the one scheduled to arrive October first." He had found lots of snow at Aklavik and the river was partly frozen when he pulled out.

This time it was Bob's turn to complain that it was very inconvenient for the flat boat to be left at Kittigazuit, and he wanted it moved to a deep place about a quarter of a mile below the station. To get the boat out, they really

needed a winch but would have to settle for three sets of double blocks and tackle. "Bob claims this can be done," Erling said,

I do not like the scheme at all but, not knowing the local conditions, I cannot properly judge the pros and cons of the plan. Anyway, we [went] down in the p.m., put in the necessary 'dead men' and with a good deal of difficulty managed to haul the boat, which weighs eight tons, out of the water using the three sets of blocks and tackle all connected up – the large set pulling directly, the medium one pulling on this, and the smallest pulling on the medium. In this way we were able to move the boat at a rate of about 4 ft. an hour, changing blocks continuously and wearing blisters in our hands from pulling on the wet, frozen, sandy ropes.

Winter was closing in on the delta, although there was very little snow as yet. On October 9, they tore down the two cabins that they had built on the scow at Fort Smith in order to use the lumber to make three storm sheds for the Lapp cabin. While two of the Lapps worked at building the 8 × 6 feet sheds, Bob went fishing with the other one and set three nets on some lakes a few miles from camp. He had caught more than five hundred large whitefish in one of these lakes the previous fall. Erling walked about six miles cross country on Sunday, September 11, and looked over the "wood situation" on his way back. "There is quite a lot of driftwood along this beach and the best of it has been marked so it is easy to find after the first snow comes. Unfortunately, however, it has to be sawn up in suitable lengths and hauled back to camp." Again he saw "thousands and thousands of ptarmigans on the large willow island, but as usual when they occur in large flock, were very 'wild' and quite unapproachable."

The Lapps needed hay for their "komags" (shoes) which had to have a generous filling before they could be used. Also, they wanted hay for their beds, so they went across the river in the big canoe on October 12 taking scythes and rakes. They succeeded in cutting quite a supply on the natural hay-meadows there. "The hay should, of course, have been cut late in August when large quantities could be secured here quite easily," Erling said. Ever the botanist, he added, "The hay is chiefly one or two species of *Carex*, probably *C. aquatilis* and one tall *Carex* of the 'stans' 'salina' group and *Dupontia Fisheri* and one or two species of *Calamagrostis*."



Christmas with Lapp families, Asta Porsild (standing) and Edith Porsild (centre front), Reindeer Station, NWT, 1932 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-101114)

Many years later, writing to Dr. C. L. Porter at Rocky Mountain Herbarium at the University of Wyoming on May 2, 1949, Erling described the method of stuffing the Lapp shoes with what was termed “Senne-grass.” He had found that if it was properly used, it was superior to fur or wool socks, but it needed considerable skill and care to be successful.

The sedge used in Lapland is *Carex Goodenoughii* in which the leaves are long, tough and rather soft. Lapps connected with the reindeer work in Alaska and Canada have successfully used the leaves of *Carex aquatilis*, *C. lugens*, and possibly other species. The ‘hay’ is cut while the leaves are still green and after drying is carded with a comb-like tool until the leaves are split into a fine fibre. This material is then very carefully worked into the boot as a lining so as to leave an even thickness around the naked foot. This is the difficult part, for if the hay

shifts and becomes lumpy one can very easily freeze a toe or a heel. Senne-grass, too, in my experience, can only be used in the peculiar type of boots used by the Lapps (komag and skalie) and I have noticed in Alaska and Canada that when the Lapps there adopt Eskimo or other kind of foot gear, they also give up the use of Senne-grass. Incidentally, the purpose of the Senne-grass is a two-fold one (1) to provide insulation and cushioning and (2) to absorb the moisture from the foot. The grass, therefore has to be taken out every night to dry.²

Erling had another use for the material that had been gathered that October, because he wanted some of the hay for a drainage pit. "I dug a fair sized ditch through one and a half feet of frozen ground and then about two feet of thawed sand. In this ditch I made a drain and a tank to which I then lay a rubber hose connected with the kitchen sink. If the grade was sufficient and the ditch had been dug early enough I think it would be able to take care of the waste water from the kitchen all winter, since the warm water would keep the drain open in spite of the ground being frozen all around. Now I am rather sceptical but wanted to try it out anyway."

Since they were short of insulation, they were all putting up beaverboard on the inside of the roofs of the cabins. On October 15, the day of Erling's last entry in his "Lapland" journal, Mikkel helped him put up a small 8 × 8 foot room upstairs in his house using the short-changed "Celotex," which ensured that one room at least would be warmly protected.

The Lapp families would have beaverboard enough to line the inside of their roof but not the rough log walls, which would have to be chinked as well and as soon as possible against the north wind to come. They would be needing their warm hay when the temperatures dropped in the weeks ahead, and be grateful for the storm shed entrances that would keep the bitter wind out of their rooms. Their first Christmas in Canada was not all that many weeks away. In December, they would remember their festivities from Norway, and they would gather with the Porsilds around the Christmas tree that they had cut on the route down the delta and celebrate a new life in a new land far from home, with, so far, no reindeer.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE DRIVE CONTINUES

1931 had not been a happy year for the Lomen Brothers in Alaska. Their financial and other problems that had gone un-noticed by the Porsilds and the Canadian government officials at earlier times, now began to escalate. By October 15 they were anxious enough about the slow progress of the reindeer to make a second plea for Erling Porsild and his Lapps to join the drive to assist Bahr.¹

In Ottawa, Finnie was having problems of his own, with his whole department about to be swept away by the broom of a new political administration. However, looking at the request from the Lomens for perhaps the last time, he was faced with another pressing problem. He realized the implications of interfering with the delivery responsibilities of the company should he send men from the Canadian side to take over the drive, but he at last agreed to send one of the Porsilds and some of the Lapps to join the herd as long as the company continued to be responsible.²

On November 29, he learned that Bob Porsild had arrived in Aklavik to pick up the mail. Finnie at once wired him to proceed with the Lapps as soon as possible to meet the reindeer herd and render what assistance they could as far as their destination. On December 1, he received an ambiguous reply from Bob saying that "a party from Herschel Island had just reported that the reindeer were about two days travelling west of Demarcation Point and that he was leaving as soon as possible."³

Somehow this message was interpreted that Bob had made the journey to see the herd while he waited for the mail to arrive. When he returned to the station, this unfortunate misunderstanding was carried over to one between the brothers. Erling decided to see for himself what was happening, and, accompanied by one of the Lapp herders, made a two-month trip to Alaska to

find the herd. When he returned, on March 22, he sent a curt apology for his brother's unauthorized report, saying: "It would hardly have been possible for R. T. Porsild, while waiting for the arrival of the mail plane, to make a trip from Aklavik to Demarcation Point, since such a trip would have taken about three weeks, but he certainly should have stated that the report was merely based on hearsay, and that the truth of it could not be vouched for." According to Elly Porsild, the brothers were so angry about the affair that they refused to speak to each other for several months.⁴

The trip to Alaska had been a disagreeable and disappointing one for Erling. In January 1932, he and the Lapp herder left Kittigazuit and started by dog-team to meet the Canadian herd. "Owing to the scarcity that winter of dogs and dog-feed in northern Alaska we found it impossible to secure dog-feed along the route or to engage dog-teams to assist us in hauling our supplies. Leaving Herschel Island we were therefore compelled to carry supplies and dog-feed for forty days." After a three-week journey, they found the reindeer a short distance east of the Colville Delta at Sagirovirk River, about seventy-five miles southwest of Tealman Island and much further west than Bob had reported.

There were only nine hundred deer at the Lomen camp, with three native herders in charge. Bahr and the rest of the herders had left with half the herd on November 15 to search for deer that had been lost around the Upper Colville River several months earlier. They had not been seen since. Erling did not at all like what he heard about the lack of progress or camp conditions.

The previous summer Andrew Bahr ... had experienced great difficulties with his men. Of the ten Lapp and Eskimo herders that had started with the herd from Napaktolik none was left. Because of inexperienced and insufficient help during the previous autumn about one-third of the herd had wandered off. After a search of two months the missing animals had been located in the mountains far to the south, but it had not been found possible to drive them back to the Colville Delta with the number of men available. Bahr therefore decided to give up further attempts and to depend on the next year's increase to build up the remaining herd, then estimated at somewhat over two thousand head. Bahr had managed to secure a new crew of Eskimo herders from Kobuk and from the Point Barrow region, but as some of these boys were quite young and inexperienced he did not expect to make much further progress that winter.

Since nothing more could be accomplished by staying at the camp, Erling left a note for Bahr urging him to press on to the sheltered valleys behind Herschel Island for the fawning season, and to take the herd to the island for the summer pasture before proceeding to move them slowly towards the delta preparatory to crossing when conditions were most favourable after freeze-up in early November. After his return to the Mackenzie station, in his report to the new "Commissioner, Dominion Lands Branch," on March 13, he made it plain that he would take his Lapp herders to the Eskimo Lakes in the spring to familiarize them with that territory instead of returning to the reindeer camp where he had heard unsatisfactory reports of personnel problems and work conditions.

Bahr was able only to recover less than a third of his strays. When he returned to the camp at the Colville Delta, he discounted Erling's advice, which from later reports he appears to have misunderstood, and decided to remain in the area to improve herd condition and increase the numbers, despite his complaints that the country was too flat, too watery, and had no feed and lots of wolves. Even after fawning, a few months later the entire herd was counted at only 2,500 animals.⁵

The figures were so low that the Lomens began to consider buying reindeer from native herds along the way, a policy that was to prove totally unacceptable to Erling and was coldly received in the native communities along the coast. An anonymous warning was circulated to all the native owners, believed to have been done by George Morelander but unsigned and undated, that read:

Lomans sold to the Canadian Government a big bunch of deer, drove them through a pass in the Endicott mountains, and after getting them far to the eastward deserted them on one plea [excuse] or another. Now, if in time they send men to round up their deer, and if they discover, as is likely, that their deer have joined other deer, or taken unto themselves double, triple or quadruple their number of deer [belonging] to the natives of this coast, will the Lomans claim the entire number? Loudly it is whispered that this is their scheme oft times worked to the South. However, it is not impossible that even the Lomans may learn that the Northern Eskimo is of another stripe, not nearly so docile or [non-combative] as is his Southern brother, so long domineered over and harassed and browbeaten by the white man. The northcoast Eskimo is honest and wishes to be treated fairly and honestly, and will be so treated or will know the reason why.⁶

Dan Crowley was certainly aware of the situation when he joined the drive later for he wrote to Ralph Lomen on August 23, 1934, to warn him that "all the herds along the Arctic coast were circularized by Morelander, to beware of the Lomen Canadian Drive, to extend no courtesies, and to watch their herds closely or the Lomens would take them. Of course this has prejudiced the natives, and especially the herd owners, against us. They think we are a bunch of crooks and robbers. One trader and herd owner, a white man by the name of Tom Gordon located at Barter Island, says he received instructions to shoot all Lomen stray deer.... It shows the feeling that exists."⁷

The Alaskan reindeer owners were not the only ones who were unhappy with the whole drive situation. Morten Porsild told Anderson (July 1) that they had had only one letter from Aklavik, written in March, "in which Erling seems to face the possibility that the drive and the delivery of the huge herd of half domesticated reindeer may turn out to be a failure. The first consequence, he says, will be the bankruptcy of the Lomen firm, the next may be that the present Canadian Government, having removed men like Mr. Finnie and Mr. G. Mackenzie from the office of the N.W.T., will give up or postpone the whole reindeer schedule. In this case my sons have spent some years of their life to very little use which could easier have been borne if they had been given facilities to get their scientific results worked up for publication."⁸

Erling described the problems with the drive in his July 1936 speech to the Geographic Society. As he put it,

Andrew Bahr ... was an old man when the drive started; how old he does not know himself, and conditions on the north coast of Alaska were entirely unknown to him. It should be remembered also that a great many difficulties are encountered on a trek such as this, through an uninhabited and inhospitable country; that the climate of northern Alaska is perhaps the most severe on the North American continent; that in the winter months during the entire drive bands of wolves harassed the herd, at times taking a great toll and compelling the herders to remain on watch day and night.

Above all, it should be remembered that it is during but a few months each year that it is possible to move a large herd of reindeer any great distance. Whereas in northern Europe the fawns are born in May and June, in Alaska the first fawns appear early in April, and from the middle of March the cows are unable to stand the hardships of

daily moving. The fawning is over by the end of May. In July the fawns are strong enough to travel and to cross fair-sized rivers, but at this time of the year the mosquitoes and flies are at their worst and the animals have to be driven out to the sea-coast or to some high mountain in order to escape their tormentors. For a short period during August the herd may be moved if some means are available for moving the camp equipment. Towards the end of August the rutting commences and continues during the month of September. October is the month of freeze-up, but the ice is not sufficiently strong on the rivers and lakes to permit this crossing of the herd.

There remains, then, but little more than four months during which it is possible to move the herd. But on the north coast of Alaska, north of the 70th parallel of latitude, the sun is below the horizon for over two months, and because of the shortness of the days all travelling has to be done around the period of the full moon. Furthermore, because of the proximity of open water, at this time, since the Arctic Ocean is only partly frozen, December and January are the stormiest and most unpleasant months of the year. Fuel exists along the coast only in the shape of driftwood, and more often than not is completely covered by huge snowdrifts. At some distance from the coast, where the best winter pasturage is found, the traveller must content himself with the insufficient heat supplied by an oil stove, which source of heat moreover is quite unsuitable for the drying of wet fur clothes.⁹

It can thus be seen that by deciding to stay in the Canning River region during the 1932 fawning season, there would be little chance for Andrew Bahr to move the herd as far as the Canadian border before the rutting time in September and then there would be further delays and it would be another winter before he could hope to reach anywhere near the Mackenzie River delta.

Meanwhile, there was much to do down on the delta as spring turned into summer. Erling wrote to Anderson on June 9: "We are building a new camp on the East Branch above the tree line and are looking forward to a busy summer." He had just come in from a strenuous canoe trip of twenty-four hours from Kittigazuit in order to catch the first outgoing mail and was sending him one Brown Bear specimen and a lot of salted bird skins. He hoped to have more to send the Museum before the last boat, but it would all depend on how things went with the new construction.¹⁰



Bird's eye view of Reindeer Station, NWT, 1932 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-130444)

The new station would mean a shorter canoe trip to Aklavik in future. As expected, he had chosen the site to be nearer to the winter pasturage for the reindeer after they arrived and close to needed timber for fuel and shelter, and to be lacking all the disadvantages he had listed for the site Bob had chosen. It is not hard to imagine that Bob Porsild would resent the move but would be overridden by the brother in charge. At the new site, Erling built his house with the help of a hired man from Aklavik while the Lapp herders and Bob and Elly built their own. When it was finished, there was again nothing to do but wait for the reindeer, even if the time was passed in fishing and hunting for supplies and specimens for the Museum.¹¹

Nothing much was heard from the reindeer herd in the summer but in the fall, when the rutting season was nearly over, the Lomens again pressured the Canadian government for assistance with the drive. On October 21, Baldwin met with Canadian officials in Ottawa, and it was decided that Erling Porsild would be requested for the third time to join the herd with his Lapp herders and remain with them until the drive was completed. Bahr was to remain in

charge of the drive and “Porsild, subject to his reasonable direction, and Porsild’s Lapps as well.” Not surprisingly, given these conditions, Erling refused to join the drive. Eventually it was agreed that the Lapps would join the drive as it entered Canadian territory and Bob Porsild would undertake the transport of equipment and supplies.¹²

As told many years afterwards in the *Alaska Journal*, Bob duly received his instructions from Ottawa on November 15, giving him the exact location of the herd and telling him to proceed immediately for the west and do everything he could to speed up the drive so that delivery could be completed before fawning time in April 1933. He estimated that it would take fifteen or sixteen days to reach the herd by dog-team. He would take his sled and be accompanied by two Eskimos with their sleds, each of which would carry one Lapp herder as passenger, so the party would consist of six men, three sleds, and twenty dogs. They also carried bedrolls, food, and some dried fish for the dogs. Leaving on November 22, they expected to have no trouble buying additional fresh dog food from Eskimos camping en route. However, everyone they met told them of the poor hunting season for fish, seals, and Arctic fox. The further they went, the worse conditions seemed to be. On December 2, they crossed the boundary line and stopped the next night at a camp with three families on the Alaska side.

With a heavy heart, realizing how difficult it was for them to get food to feed themselves that winter, Bob asked if the families could spare a seal for their dogs, in order to be able to reach the herd a few days to the west. The leading man turned down Bob’s offer of fifty dollars (paper money would not feed his hungry family in their isolation), but with typical Eskimo hospitality, as they were his guests, he gave them “one seal for the Canadian Government.” When Bob reached the herd, he knew how he could repay his host’s generosity. He gave Andrew Bahr specific instructions that as he neared the border he was to watch out for the camp of Aklak, “The Black Bear,” and he was to leave with him two full-grown reindeer with the compliments of a grateful Canadian Government.¹³

With Bob and the Lapp herders gone from Reindeer Station without him, and having once again turned down his government’s orders to travel with the reindeer herd under Bahr’s jurisdiction, Erling was left behind to seriously consider his future with the Canadian Reindeer Project and his options if he were to leave it. On November 25, he sat down to write to Malte, enclosing a letter for the Director of the Museum in which he outlined the botanical work that had been accomplished since 1926, plus four papers that could come out of it, and

asked Collins' advice with regard to his possible future at the Museum or other scientific institutions in Eastern Canada:

I have reasons to believe, that the Department when the reindeer arrive will wish me to continue in charge of the reindeer development, in which case I shall find myself more or less permanently domiciled in the Mackenzie District. While I have always taken a deep interest in the future of the Eskimo people and perhaps better than anyone else realize the great cultural and economic possibilities of the reindeer experiment for Arctic Canada and its people, I feel that I should hardly be satisfied to give up my botanical work. Nor do I find that a prolonged residence in the North would be fair to my family or to myself.

When the herd finally arrives this winter and I have received it on behalf of the Department, I shall likely want to leave the actual management of the herd and station to somebody else. I have recently been offered a position in Alaska which is financially more attractive than anything I could reasonably expect in the Department of the Interior for a good many years to come. The work, however is chiefly administrative. Finally, when a year ago, I passed through Copenhagen, the Greenland administration wished to secure my services, should I wish to return to Denmark. I find, however, that the botanical material which I already have on hand is too important to abandon now, and also that the material should be published in Canada, if possible. Also that Canada offers so many important problems to a systematic botanist and that surely, in the future, there will be ways and means for continuing this work. Should I decide to leave the service of the Department of the Interior, I should likely wish to return to college which would likely take two or three years.¹⁴

Malte received the letter just before Christmas, while Collins was away, and hastened to reply on January 4, 1933. He urged Erling to hang on to his reindeer job for the time being and say nothing to his Department about his chances to go to Alaska or Denmark as conditions in the Civil Service were pretty bad at that time. He had lost his Herbarium Assistant and was not sure whether the position would be refilled. "I agree with you, as you of course know, that you should be given the opportunity to work up the beautiful collections you and Bob have made," Malte concurred. "It would, in my opinion, be a scientific

crime if they were allowed to go to waste.” He cautioned, however, that as things were at that time there was little possibility of his being put in a position to engage in scientific research exclusively or of being transferred to the Museum at present, although eighteen months previously when positions began to be cut in the Department of the Interior, Malte had found Collins personally in favour of transferring Erling Porsild to the Museum. As with the reindeer drive, if Erling wished to find a job in Canada, there was nothing to do but to wait.¹⁵

And wait they continued to do at Reindeer Station, although Bob made numerous trips back and forth to carry supplies to the drive throughout the rest of the winter. With all his staff absent, Erling told Anderson that he had little time for “scientific work.” In his letter of February 3, he said he was sorry that Anderson thought he had paid too much for the bear specimens he had sent to the Museum but added:

While no doubt prices in the North, compared with those of ‘outside,’ have been ‘inflated’ to some extent during the past years, one must not forget that the price of \$40.00 which I had to pay for those bear skins will buy no more flour at Aklavik than will \$10.00 in Ottawa. In other words, the purchasing power of the dollar at Aklavik, is for a number of articles, such as gasoline, flour, sugar, lumber etc. no more than one fourth of what it is in Ottawa.

I realize, of course the hopeless conditions you are up against with regard to appropriations for maintenance of the scientific collections at the Museum and for purchase of new material. Don’t you think that this may be one of the reasons why in the past, as you say, most of the Canadian material has gone elsewhere?

I think, though, that you are quite right, that there are few public-minded citizens throughout Canada, when it comes to donating specimens. I have occasionally touched upon this subject when talking to trappers and traders of the North, but have invariably been told, that the people of the North have very little reason for being ‘public-spirited.’ At the present time the poorest trapper has to pay from 10–33% fur export tax to the Government for every pelt he secures. On top of this he pays \$150.00 for his trapping license if he is non-British, \$75. if he is British, but not a resident of the District. Besides he pays the ordinary Federal income taxes, and, of course all indirect taxes. For all this he gets precious little return, besides “Police protection”

which he does not need and does not understand the need for. He has no representation in Parliament, no schools for his children.

Erling concluded that he might be able to get some specimens of bears for the Museum for less than \$40 if Anderson agreed and might be able to get some of the western brown bears for him next spring if he only had a chance to make a trip to the mountains west of the delta. "I have planned such a trip since I first came here, but have never found the time to do it. There would be a lot of valuable stuff to be had in that region, and it would not cost very much to get in there for anybody who was already in Aklavik. I wish I could take a month off from about June 15 to July 15."¹⁶

Such a trip might become possible for him if the reindeer arrived in spring, and at last there seemed some hope that this might happen. With the added help of the three Lapp herders, the reindeer finally crossed the Alaska-Yukon border and reached Shingle Point by March 7. At this point, however, contrary to Erling's insistence that the deer should be delivered immediately, before the fawning season, both Bob Porsild and Andrew Bahr decided that it was too late to make the delta crossing safely, a decision made partly by Bahr's wish to hold back and increase herd numbers before delivery.¹⁷

It was to be Bob Porsild's last major decision for the Canadian Reindeer Project. For Erling, Bob's collusion with Bahr to postpone the arrival of the deer for another whole year was almost unendurable, while the same could be said for Bob about his feeling of always being in the wrong where his brother was concerned. He made his last trip to the herd at Shingle Point in April and sent a letter to the department asking for an increase in salary and some changes to be made at the station.

In a personal letter to Oscar Malte on June 23, Erling outlined his side of the story of what had been happening at Reindeer Station, showing how far apart the brothers had grown since both of them had married and chosen different pathways:

I am sorry to tell you [Erling said] that I have been having a most unpleasant time with Bob since I came North two years ago. It seems to me that since he was married he has changed a lot, and, I think, on the whole has been a whole lot harder to get along with.... He has been of no help here whatever, and has by his most extraordinary and often

most irregular actions made things most unpleasant for everybody, including yours truly.

This spring he sent an ultimatum to Ottawa making his continued stay in the Service conditional upon the immediate fulfilment of a number of, to put it mildly, most extraordinary demands. And still he was quite surprised when Ottawa called his bluff and accepted his resignation from July 1.

While I very much regret that our association in this work should terminate in this way, I cannot help feeling it as a tremendous relief. At the same time Bob has never taken the remotest interest in this work. He has always felt that he was getting a dirty deal from Ottawa, from myself, and everyone else. He has managed to get in wrong with every person down here with whom he has had any dealings, so I really think it will be the best thing for himself to get out of it now.

His letter also carried a caution for Malte:

Bob has on various occasions intimated that he considered his contribution to our joint collection of plants from Alaska and the Northwest Territory 1926–28 his personal property. I am telling you this, because my experience with him the past two years has shown that he might wish to, *mir nichts, dir nichts*, to possess himself of what he considers his rightful loot. Naturally the entire collection belongs to the Department of the Interior, who, as you know, have promised to present it to the Museum; and the collection should, of course, at least until it has been worked up, be kept intact. The collection, as you will remember, when I left was in the process of being worked up and is therefore not in shape for examination or study by anyone not familiar with the system or with the previous work done on it. I would therefore very much prefer that Bob not be given access to the collection for the time being, even if it be for the purpose of study only.

On a happier note, Erling wished Malte well on his forthcoming trip on the *Nascopie* and told him he was hoping to make a trip to the Richardson Mountains that summer:

I had a chance this winter to look over some collections made a few years ago by an amateur, in the mountains west of Aklavik. The collector was an entomologist and the collection was originally started merely as a “collection of flowers visited by insects.” Later he decided to take everything.... I have always wanted to make a trip to those mountains and cannot help wondering if there should not be a lot more if this chap managed to get 103 flowering plants. For my work on his collection I was permitted to take a few duplicates for the National Museum. It looks though, as if my trip might materialize this summer, so I am all excited.

He closed with the note that the boat would soon be arriving with his order of six bottles of Alborg Akvavit. “By the way, how would it strike you to live in a country where you are supposed to get along on two gallons of liquor a year, ‘for medicinal purposes only’? Here is best of luck and regards to yourself, Sam and the cat (whoever she may be) As ever, Erling.”¹⁸

It would be his last letter to his and his father’s old friend, the man who had been the greatest supporter of his botanical aspirations. In July, Malte got his wish to go north again to continue his Eastern Arctic field investigations in the region of James Bay, but on August 24 a sad letter went out from the Biological Division of the National Museum, signed by P. M. Hulbert, to Professor J. E. Howitt, with whom Malte had been corresponding, at the Department of Botany, Agricultural College, Guelph, Ontario.

“Dear Sir,” the letter read. “Dr. Malte sailed on the S.S. *Nascopie* on July 10th for the Arctic to be away for three months, but took suddenly ill at Charlton Island, in the southern part of James Bay. The Doctor on board the ship advised that Dr. Malte be taken to Moosenee, Ontario, the end of steel [railroad]. From there he came by train on a stretcher to Ottawa, but passed away half an hour before reaching here on Aug. 12th. Dr. Malte had been troubled with diabetes for the last few years and with that fatal disease he also had anaemia at the last, which caused his sudden death. We have all been greatly shocked at our loss in losing Dr. Malte.”¹⁹



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE END OF THE PROJECT

Erling Porsild had never been more alone than he was in the summer of 1933. Within the space of a few months he had lost the three men who had been closest to him throughout the reindeer investigation period. Although he and his brother had had their disagreements at the station, they had worked together loyally for the years beforehand. In the Department of the Interior in Ottawa, O. S. Finnie had been a rock of support with all the reindeer decisions, and at the National Herbarium he had always been able to look to Oscar Malte for encouragement and assistance with working up his botanical collections. Rudolph Anderson was now the only person left in Ottawa with whom he could share his honest thoughts about his uncertain future as they exchanged letters about collecting specimens for the Museum. For the rest, he would have to fight for support of his hopes and decisions with officials who would be far less understanding, and far less personally involved in helping him.

His parents had been sad to learn about Bob's departure from Reindeer Station. Writing to Anderson later that year, Morten Porsild said "We are all well here but somewhat concerned about our son Robert's giving up his service for the Government. I had hoped he would accomplish the Reindeer task so Erling could be relieved. I hope he shall not repent this step too bitterly."¹

Anderson's reply to Greenland on December 13 was full of cheerful news to allay their fears as he told the story from Bob's perspective:

Your son Robert turned up rather unexpectedly at Ottawa in August and was here for a week or two straightening up his affairs with the Dominion Lands Administration. Apparently he was not satisfied with the way things were running, and resigned, and the resignation was accepted. He seemed rather cheerful about coming out, as he did

not like government work and thought it was a good time to get out and into private business. We hear that he has gone into marine insurance in Vancouver, and with his knowledge of coast shipping, and of the North, as well as knowledge of Scandinavians who are largely interested in shipping on the West coast, he will at least be able to make a living, and the prospects are not very good for doing more than that in Government service. As he was apparently not very much interested in the reindeer, and did not intend to make it a permanent life work, probably he did the best thing for himself by getting out.²

Meanwhile, for Erling, it had been another waiting summer, with the drive stalled on the west side of the delta. They had moved to Kay Point but by June things were not going smoothly at the Lomen camp. The Lapp herders deserted the herd, claiming the reason as unsatisfactory conditions, with Bahr out of control and having made no serious effort to speed up the drive the previous winter. Although sympathetic, Erling reprimanded them for leaving, and persuaded them to return to the camp.

He was concerned enough about Bahr to wire his department, however:

PERSONAL CONTACT WITH BAHR WHO IN APRIL VISITED STATION ONE WEEK CONVINCES ME THAT HE IS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE OR HANDLING SITUATION /STOP/ WHEN DRIVE STARTED WAS TOO OLD AND SINCE HAS AGED SO MUCH HE IS NOT EVEN CAPABLE OF CARRYING ON INTELLIGENT CONVERSATIONS.³

The relay via Ottawa of Erling's remarks about Bahr brought a wave of anxiety and anger to the Lomen brothers, who were already not only worried about the drive but were having increased financial difficulties as well as being in the midst of a legal battle facing charges against their reindeer business practices. Their original drive planner, Dan Crowley, had left their employment, but they decided to contact him and see if he would join the herd and take over if Bahr's condition warranted it.⁴

Carl Lomen wrote to his brother Ralph in Seattle in July, expressing the Lomen family's position regarding Erling Porsild:

The last mail brought copies of Andrew's letters written during March and May of this year; we consider these letters very good from Andrew's

viewpoint, and they do not show that he has weakened in any way. On the other hand, Porsild has always been opposed to Andrew, and long ago notified the Canadian government that we had made a poor selection in our leader. Again, Porsild has made recommendations to Andrew which if followed would have cost us the larger number of the deer now on the drive. The officials at Ottawa are not sold on Porsild, but are in the same position as we are unable to change their leader at this time.... We feel that Porsild is a stubborn Dane and that he will continue to oppose Andrew, lining up his Lapps against our people, and this might cause great losses to the herd and to us....

Advise Dan that Porsild recommended crossing the delta of the Mackenzie during the fawning season, refused to make the trip across the line to meet Andrew a year ago because of hazards, and does not stand well with his own government officials. Caution Dan not to be guided by Porsild's recommendations unless he fully agrees with his point of view. We are banking on Dan's judgment and not on Porsild's. If he considers that Porsild has been an agitator, Dan should notify him to return to his headquarters, together with any of the Lapps lined up with him as opposed to our people, and there await the coming of the herd. There is a chance that Porsild has made statements to the Canadian government and is trying to prove his case, even to the detriment of the drive.⁵

It is obvious that the Lomens had been misinformed about many of their suspicions, for Erling Porsild had certainly not recommended that the herd be taken across the delta during the fawning season nor did he refuse to join Bahr because of "hazards" and he had never encouraged his herders to oppose Bahr, whatever he thought of him, but the Lomens' belief in their leader remained unshakeable and they seem not to have realized that many of the delays and personnel problems of the drive were caused by their chosen man.

Fortunately, Crowley's arrival on the delta at the end of August brought a welcome reduction in tensions all round. He enjoyed meeting Erling and his wife in Aklavik and discussed the best route for crossing the delta with him. Dr. Urquhart, the medical officer in Aklavik who would have a great deal of influence later in the reindeer program, told him that he had visited the reindeer camp a week earlier and found Bahr in better spirits than he had been in the spring. On reaching the reindeer camp on September 8, Crowley had



Reindeer herd in vicinity of Shingle Point, Yukon, 1933 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-130443)

encouraging words to say about Bahr and how everything was being run, and continued to send optimistic reports to the Lomens as they headed towards “the big jump,” pushing for the earliest possible crossing.⁶

His optimism that the drive would soon be over was short-lived, however. According to Erling, it was the coldest, stormiest winter ever recorded in the Mackenzie Delta. In January 1934, the drive to cross the delta began when

... an ill-fated attempt was made to make a non-stop dash across Mackenzie Bay from Shingle Point to the north end of Richards Island. In a straight line the distance is but 50 miles, but it was thought that the deer, then in good shape, would stand the trip without food and without rest.

Half-way across, a gale sprang up. The temperature was 48 degrees below zero, and when the herders had travelled for a day and a half without rest and without food they were compelled to give up the drive and save their own lives. In the blizzard the herd split up into numerous small bands. After the storm two hundred reindeer were thought to have perished on the ice due to the cold and to exhaustion, and the rest were scattered over a distance of 50 miles along the west side of the delta. Bahr and his Eskimo guide lost their way and very nearly froze

to death, whilst three of the herders had their hands and feet severely frozen. When three weeks later the herd had again been rounded up the animals had become so poor in condition that further attempts at crossing the Mackenzie that winter had to be abandoned.⁷

Bahr blamed Crowley for not waiting until the weather was suitable. Crowley wired the Lomens that the crossing was much more difficult and complicated than he had anticipated, that he had left too much to Bahr's organization but now agreed with Erling Porsild that Bahr lacked the ability to plan and organize the crossing. Next year, he vowed, it would be handled differently if he were in charge. He proposed a staked trail and feeding stations for men and sled deer even though Bahr opposed the idea as expensive and unnecessary. The Lomen reply was succinct: "YOU PLAN ANDREW EXECUTE."⁸

Another hopeless winter, another year of waiting for the deer to arrive. At the end of March, still hoping that he would be able to come out in the fall after the reindeer had been delivered, Erling boarded a plane leaving Aklavik and headed for Ottawa, where he spent a month having interviews with Dr. W. H. Collins, Acting Director of the National Museum, and Dr. Charles Camsell, Deputy Minister of the Department of Mines.

Anderson told Morten Porsild on July 31 that they hoped that something could be done for Erling at the Museum so he would have a chance to work on his arctic plants when he came south in the fall, "however, there is nothing at all definite." He was answering an earlier letter from Greenland regarding the vacant position in the Herbarium after Malte's death:

I am sorry to have to say that it has been impossible to do anything about appointing a successor to the late Dr. M. O. Malte. As you know, the field of systematic botanists in this country is very limited and the policy is not to make haste in making selections. Furthermore, the necessity for economy is very great, and when a position becomes vacant the tendency is to let it remain unfilled until great urgency compels something to be done. For the present fiscal year, no appropriation was made for payment of any salary for the position of Chief Botanist, and naturally no appointment can be made to the position.⁹

He did not tell the elder Porsild that during the time Erling was in Ottawa he "voluntarily stated that he did not feel qualified to fill Dr. Malte's position, but

would like work as assistant to another qualified man, suggesting Dr. Raup as the best man he knew for the position,” an interesting suggestion as Raup would later be seriously considered for the appointment.¹⁰

In the Herbarium, Erling found things much as Anderson had described to Raup:

Things are moving rather slowly in the Museum. We have not been able to do any field work, except a small amount of local work at our own expense, for two or three years. We are trying to bring office and laboratory work up to date. It is hard to do much with the Herbarium without Dr. Malte, whose sound advice on many subjects outside of botany has been very much missed. No active steps have been taken to fill the position. We have one herbarium assistant, Miss Harkness, who has been with us nearly a year, and while she is not a trained botanist, she is an industrious and careful worker, who is doing good work mounting and filing specimens.¹¹

Professor Fernald had been there for a few days in February and was editing some of Malte's manuscript on Arctic plants for publication in *Rhodora*.

Back at Reindeer Station after his trip, on August 9 Erling wrote to Anderson: “We have had a very favourable summer, with practically no rain. I made one trip to the coast as far as Kay Pt. and have two more trips to make. While the flies have not bothered us here at the Reindeer Station, which is well up the East Branch, the flies on the coast were as thick as I have ever seen them. In spite of the flies I managed to get a fair-sized collection of plants from this part of the District which fills in a gap in my previous collection. One species at least is new and several are new to Canada.” He was happy to tell him that his bird catalogue was steadily increasing in volume, and should, when completed, give a fair list of the birds of the Delta. He had a reasonable collection of bird skins, partly his own and partly ones given to him by a Mr. Lang who had become keenly interested in birds but was holding it until he could get the Eskimo names for some of the species during the winter. He was sending him some skeletal material and, as an experiment, a few mice placed in strong brine to see if this kind of temporary preservation of small animals was practical. All were taken at the Reindeer Station during July that year.¹²

Anderson, it seems, was keeping in touch with all the Porsild family. Bob Porsild had passed through in August, leaving a Greenland kayak at the

Museum which he expected them to purchase. On October 12, Anderson told Bob that Mrs. A. E. Porsild came to Ottawa that week, although they had not seen her yet. "She has put Edith in school somewhere and I understand that she is going to Europe for a visit." He hoped that Bob was doing well in the wharfing business in Vancouver. Mrs. Anderson was happy to hear from Elly that she was enjoying the life and surroundings of Vancouver.¹³

There was no possibility that Erling would be getting out of the reindeer project in the fall as he had hoped, but as winter began to settle into the delta, all the preparations were made ready for the final reindeer push from west to east. Dan Crowley had followed up with his new plan with admirable thoroughness. Every precaution that might ensure success had been taken. Caches of food for the herders, as well as great piles of reindeer 'moss' for the train of sledge deer that were hauling the camp gear, had been established at short intervals along the proposed route across the edge of the Mackenzie Delta. Unfortunately, freeze-up came so late that it was impossible for the crossing to be made in November. Erling said:

The winter of 1934–35 was exceptionally mild, and the Mackenzie river delta froze a month later than usual. The weather remained pleasant and settled throughout November and December, and everything looked as though the herd might finally reach "the promised land." Everything was ready for an early start the first week of December, when a foehn or chinook changed everything. For a fortnight the temperature remained above freezing. All the snow disappeared from land and ice. Although the sun had disappeared below the horizon the willows along the river banks dropped their bud scales. On the sea a narrow rim of ice remained along the shore to the edge of the shallow water, but here as well as on the rivers it was smooth and slippery and entirely impassable for hoofed animals. Farther out the sea was clear of ice as far as one could see from an aeroplane flying at an altitude of 5,000 feet. New snow eventually fell, but it would not stick to the smooth ice. Nothing could be done but wait. Any one who has to deal with reindeer must, like the Lapp, possess an infinite stock of patience. Whether this is natural to the Lapp or whether the trait has been developed through countless generations of reindeer herders I am not prepared to say. The fact however remains that the Lapp possesses an



A. E. Persild in front of main building, Reindeer Station, NWT, 1935 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-130437)

amazing capacity for waiting, and in this quality even surpasses the stoical Eskimo.¹⁴

All January they waited. While Erling waited with less than stoical patience, a paper he had written on the nesting areas of the Mackenzie Delta waterfowl was being read at the American Game Conference, January 21–23, in New York, indicative of the importance he placed on his bird and mammal studies in the delta and his anxiety to be relieved of the reindeer situation in order to give full priority to his scientific work.¹⁵

“Finally in February an abundance of snow fell,” he said, “and on February 18 the drive across the delta commenced. In record marches the herd crossed without incident in three days; but it had taken two years before conditions were ideal for such an undertaking.” They were just in time to catch the only available window in the weather that year. “One week later gales again swept the ice, leaving it snowless for the remainder of the winter.”¹⁶

On February 25, Crowley wired Carl Lomen triumphantly:

ARRIVED RICHARDS ISLAND TWENTY FIRST VERY SUCCESSFUL CROSS-
ING SIXTY HOURS EN ROUTE STORMY TOUGH TRIP BUT ACCOUNT

PRELIMINARY WORK DONE AND SHELTERED ROUTE NO MISHAPS DEER
CAME THROUGH FINE SHAPE BUT WEAK NOW /STOP/ CARRYING MANY
ON SLEDS TODAY NECESSARY REMAIN HERE ONE WEEK BEFORE PRO-
CEEDING KITTIGAZUIT.¹⁷

It took another two weeks to rest the herd and move it slowly to the corrals at Kittigazuit where on March 6, 1935, Erling Porsild, Superintendent of the Department of the Interior Reindeer Station, officially received 2,370 reindeer from the Northwestern Livestock Corporation of Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. "The great day had arrived," said Erling, "the day that marked the end of this long and trying journey which had been so fraught with disappointment, had caused so much waste of time and effort, and which had so often taxed our patience almost to the point of breaking – an Arctic Odyssey which had ended happily." Of the 2,370 reindeer received, 1,500 were females. Only one-fifth remained of the original stock selected at Napaktolik five years earlier. Some of the missing deer had been returned to the home range or had strayed away while others had fallen prey to wolves, blizzards, starvation, or other accidents. The other four-fifths were young animals born during the trek, and Erling could think of no better guarantee that the animals received were strong and healthy, truly 'a survival of the fittest.'¹⁸

Said Anderson on March 11, "We were pleased to read in the papers last month that the reindeer drive across the Delta had been successful, and with few casualties among the reindeer. The *Ottawa Citizen* had quite a long account, and my wife sent copies of the paper to your wife and daughter, as we knew they would be interested. One may be inclined to doubt whether the Eskimos have all been sitting around with bated breath waiting for the 'thundering herd' to arrive and save them from imminent starvation, but I have no doubt that in the future they will be glad to have the reindeer in the country."¹⁹

It would be the end of summer before Erling could finish the work at Reindeer Station and hand it over to a new Supervisor. An area east of the delta had been set aside as a grazing reservation for the first experimental reindeer herd. Known as the Kittigazuit Reindeer Grazing Preserve, Erling said it covered roughly 6,000 square miles and was surveyed in the summer by oblique aerial photographs. "The reindeer herd, following delivery in March 1935, was placed in the new Grazing Preserve, where it has since been maintained under close supervision. Until the herd has become well established and the homing



Part of female reindeer herd, Kittigazuit, NWT, May 1935 (Photo: AEP, LAC, PA-130436)

instinct developed, herders are watching the movements of the deer day and night.”

About one thousand fawns were born in the first fawning season at Kittigazuit. Erling anticipated that in a few years the herd would increase to about five thousand, which number was sufficient to provide a surplus of a thousand steers annually. Not being gifted with a telepathic view into all the reindeer problems of the future, he was only thankful that the herd had finally arrived and was successfully established, and he was free to leave with the satisfied conclusion that “under the tuition of experienced reindeer herders in the Government service young Eskimo apprentices are being taught to take care of the reindeer, and when they gain skill and experience the next stage will be entered upon in the development of the reindeer industry.”²⁰

At last, Erling could turn his thoughts south to his future in the botanical field, although nothing definite had been decided about working in the National Herbarium for any length of time. On reaching Ottawa in October, he was forced to spend the month writing reindeer reports, but on October 19 he sat down to write to Hugh Raup at the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, to ask if he could come and see him:

I returned from the Mackenzie Delta a short time ago and am now winding up my business with the Interior Department. I went up to see Dr. Camsell and from his remarks I gather that you know what they plan to do with regard to the herbarium. For the balance of the present year I am being "loaned" to the Mines Dept. I have about three and a half months holidays coming and both departments advise me to take it now. My wife who was with me for three years in the North went back home last year due to failing health and has been in the hands of the doctors since – so I am anxious to go back to Europe for a trip during my holidays. There are, of course, a number of things I want to look up while I am over there. With regard to the herbarium there are a great many sides to the question that I am rather a bit doubtful about. You have been good enough on earlier occasions to discuss matters and I believe could give me some very valuable advice. Would you be able to spend a few hours with me if I came down before going to Europe?²¹



Hugh Raup (Photo: James Soper)

Raup's reply on October 21 was both sympathetic and welcoming. "I am sorry to hear of your wife's illness, and hope that nothing serious will develop from it," he said. "If there is anything that I can contribute toward the solution of your problems with regard to the herbarium, I shall be only too glad to do so, and quite apart from that, both Mrs. Raup and I would be delighted to see you and talk over our northern botanical experiences. We had an intensely interesting trip this past summer in Lake Athabaska. If you would care to stay in our house while you are here we would be most pleased."²²

Anderson told Raup on November 4 that “Mr. Porsild” had only been over to the Museum for an hour or two before leaving for Denmark. He was due to sail from New York on November 7 and was not expected to return until the middle of February when he would be able to work in the Herbarium on a temporary basis. This was the only plan that could be approved at that time, “partly because something was due to him for making a large collection of arctic and sub-arctic plants while on reindeer investigations for the Department of the Interior, and secondly (probably most important) because while he would be finished with the reindeer business this autumn as expected, the Department of the Interior is paying his salary until next April 1st.”

Anderson said that their Department was asking that Erling be approved as an Associate Botanist for next year, giving him a chance to make a report on his arctic collections:

I was told that he was given to understand that this did not mean that he was considered eligible timber for Chief Botanist, unless he was able to take some more advanced work and get credit at some University for it to meet the requirements of the Civil Service regulations. He accepted these conditions, but I do not know whether he has much chance of filling the bill.... Personally, I think he is torn between two fires ... he wants to come back and finish his report on Arctic botany, that is, he feels that he has spent nearly ten years without getting any scientific results to his credit if he does not work up the botanical material.... On the other hand, there is a possibility that he may get a good offer from the Danish Government to go to Greenland. He spent many years of his life in Greenland, knows the language and the natives, and has been successful as an administrator in the field over here, and there has been talk about Greenland being a suitable field for reindeer. He will of course come back here to finish his year with the Department of the Interior, and he will be free to leave as his position has never been made permanent. The question is whether the Greenland job will pay enough to make it more attractive than a doubtful temporary position in the National Herbarium.

Anderson had had a long conference with Mr. F.C.C. Lynch, Economic Director of the National Museum, about the status of the Herbarium and its prospects. He wrote to Raup:

He told me that it is the intention of the Department to keep the National Herbarium as an essential part of the National Museum, partly from historical reasons, as the Department of Mines has built up the National Museum, and partly because it is a natural history museum, and botany is an important branch of natural history. However, he is fully aware of the necessity of getting a botanist in very soon to "hold the fort." He remembered you very well and was favourably impressed with you during your interview with him in September, saying that you had given him a "mild scolding" about the National Herbarium, which he took in very good part, as he was sure that you knew what you were talking about.

If Porsild does not care to stay here after next spring, our Department has nobody in view for the Herbarium, and it is very undesirable to have no botanist here, and I am informed that the sentiment may not be very pronounced against bringing in a botanist from the United States in the emergency. This has often been done in the past, when a suitable candidate was not available in Canada.... Prof. Thomson knows of your work very well, and spoke very highly of it, saying that you were well known to the botanists of Canada, and that you have shown your interest in Canadian botany by working so many years in Canada that he thinks the leading botanists of Canada would approve of you coming here as Chief Botanist. The nationalistic feeling is not so strong among scientific men, and the University botanists are keen about getting a thoroughly qualified man in to look after the National Herbarium, no matter where he comes from. Many of them think that a botanist from the United States, if a Canadian is not available, would be much better than a botanist from overseas, as an American would be more familiar with North American botany, which is more or less the same on either side of the International Boundary line.

Mr. Lynch suggested that I might sound you out, and see if you would be available for carrying on field work for the National Herbarium next summer, perhaps in continuation of the work you have been doing. He is trying to get an appropriation for carrying on field work next year at least on the scale of normal years in the past. This could be carried on whether we get anybody else in here or not. Another suggestion made by him is to find out whether you would consider

coming up here next summer and make suggestions for the future of the National Herbarium, perhaps overhaul it, and do what you can to put it on its feet. If you could take a temporary job like this, and make a success of it as I know you could do, it might lead to your being appointed to a regular position on the staff if you wanted it. I may say that Prof. Fernald recommended you as the most suitable man for the position when he was up here last year, and a number of others have come around to that viewpoint since that time. It is understood all around that a botanist in this position should have at least one or two scientific assistants, in addition to a herbarium assistant for mounting plants, and a stenographer, and if we can get a man in who will boost for it, the additions will probably come in time.²³

Raup replied to Anderson's "informative and suggestive letter" on November 12 that he had known for some time through roundabout channels that he was being considered for Dr. Malte's position, "but the questions raised by it are none the less difficult of solution." He would be pleased to make suggestions concerning the herbarium and he would think about the propositions for work there and in the field:

I am very much interested personally in the position of Chief Botanist. I think it offers rare opportunities for the development of Canadian botany. With the material at hand, and with a little organization, I believe it would be possible to develop a group of young collectors and students which would advance our knowledge of the flora of the dominion very rapidly. Also there are excellent opportunities to make a popular showing in a short time through the national parks. The herbarium itself, as you know, needs to renew its contacts with other institutions, straighten out its exchange accounts, and clear up its loans. The specimens need study and in many cases redetermination.

Raup felt that he had to balance the offer against the fact that his present situation at Harvard was rather a promising one, and one that he liked very much. "The libraries and collections, and the host of people with whom I come in contact, both in my own and other fields, are constant sources of stimulation. Also there is abundant outlet for my energies in research along ecological lines as well as in systematic botany and plant geography." All he could say at that

time was that he was quite undecided which course to pursue and needed a good deal of time to think it over and get a clearer understanding of reasonable prospects in either case.

Raup continued:

It may interest you to know that Porsild stopped here on his way to New York, and I had some long talks with him concerning his plans. In fact, he was here when your letter came, but I rather carefully avoided letting him know anything about it. As you say, he appears to be undecided as to what he will do. He wants to work up his northern material, but I do not think that he intends to go further with the academic work which an advanced position in the herbarium would require. He is entirely frank in discussing his suitability or unsuitability for the place, and recognizes quite clearly his lack of training. All of which is in his favor.²⁴

When Erling Porsild returned from Denmark in the winter of 1936, having turned down the offer to go back to Greenland, he would need all the patience that he should have acquired from the reindeer wait while he waited again for the decisions that would seal his fate at the National Herbarium in Ottawa. By this time, Raup had decided to stay at Harvard and suggested that they should look at the possibility of hiring Porsild instead. Anderson sent a note to Raup on May 6: "Mr. A. E. Porsild came back from Europe late in February, and his reindeer work being finished, presumably, he has continued in his old title of 'Investigator,' and allowed to work in the National Herbarium, beginning March 31st, 1936. He has begun sorting his large collection of arctic and sub-arctic plants."²⁵

Note: Erling Porsild had always been referred to as "Mr. Porsild" or "Porsild" in Ottawa, but out in the field there had been the need to differentiate between the two "Mr. Porsilds," sometimes using initials as Anderson had done. With Bob Porsild out of the picture, from now on, there would only be one brother working for the Herbarium, where he was always referred to by his surname as was customary at that time. For convenience, even if somewhat awkward at times, the use of his Christian name has been continued in the text.

