

# The end of the trail...

By Sherry Stewart



This is it. The end of the trail.

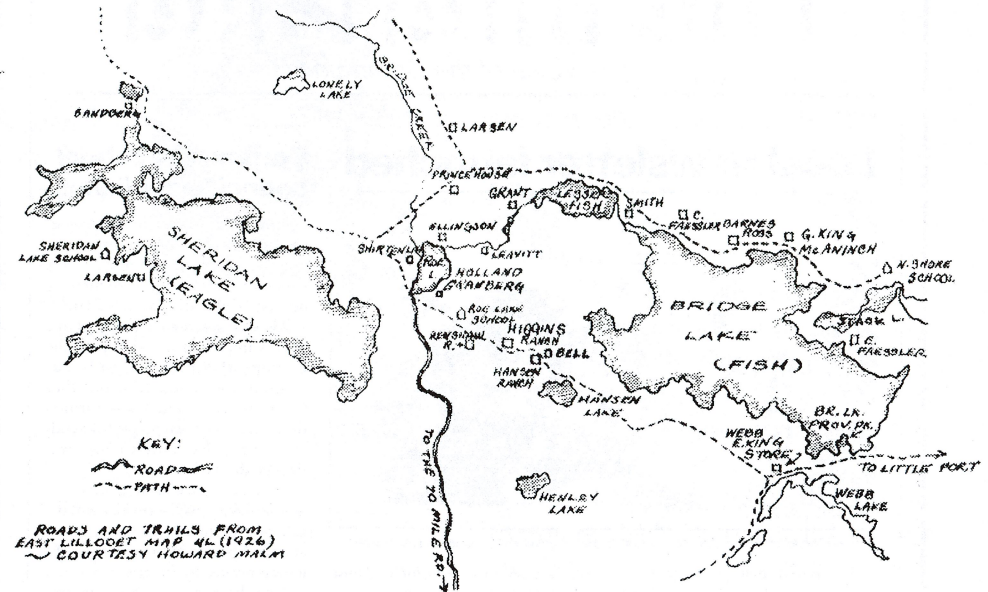
Only, now that we are here I see that, though this particular trail ends, we are

actually at a crossroads, with new trails branching out before us.

You and I have been on this trail together with our beloved pioneer families since the latter part of 2004, and I have found it an exceptional journey. As I look back along the trail, I recall stories of human courage, stoic determination, extraordinary generosity, incredible joy, clammy fear, and heart wrenching grief. And through all of them runs the thread of well-loved yarns and quirky Cariboo humour. These were not tales about strangers. These stories are about the very lives of people we knew and know, loved and love—neighbours and friends and family.

I am dedicated to writing about our pioneers because I admire their immense drive and determination, their ability to live extremely simply in harsh conditions, and their ingenuity in the face of adversity. In other words, they are an inspiration to me and give me courage to live my life well.

I drive to Bridge Lake and think of Grandpa Ed Higgins and Bill Holland cutting down the trees and fashioning the first roads for us. Karl Larson's young bride Hazel arrived here in 1945, and her most vivid impression was of the roads. "I couldn't see a hundred feet of straight road," Hazel says. "I remember being surprised by those funny fences, and snowbanks so narrow one car couldn't pass another. If you met a car in those days one of you would automatically pull off into the snowbank and when the other fellow had driven



ahead, he'd help you out."

I think back to the episode where Curly Granberg, riding with two artificial legs, finds himself on the ground, his horse having been spooked by a bear. So he is alone in the forest with a bear, his horse is gone, and there is only one way to make it the long distance home...

I recall the story of little 4-year-old Cliff Thorsteinson, lost in the forest overnight, his mother Olga (nee Granberg) riding with all the others in the search party, dry clothes for him bulging under her jacket. He was missing from morning until the afternoon of the next day. When he was finally found, she still didn't know for hours if he was dead or alive. The pilot of a circling search plane had dropped her a roll of toilet paper on which were printed only the words, "CLIFF FOUND."

Cemetery stories weave around the generosity of Ole Ellingston, who gave much of his Roe Lake land so that there could be a cemetery. And the story goes that for the rest of his life, whenever a grave needed digging, there was Ole with his shovel. Of course, there would have been no cemetery if canny Grandpa Ed Higgins had not finessed the government agent's approval in the

midst of a tragedy. The government had repeatedly turned down Higgins's request for permission to create a cemetery. Then, when young Hope Ashley was accidentally shot and killed in 1933, a government agent arrived from Clinton. The agent had done his business and was preparing to leave Roe Lake when Ed Higgins asked him, "How are you going to manage the body? We have no cemetery here." Not wanting any part of packing the body back to Clinton, the agent readily gave official government permission for a cemetery as well as road access, and Lakeview Cemetery was created.

We did a series on Women Settlers, and here are several of my favourite quotes from those articles:

"Once when Ole Larson suggested to his wife, Hilda, that it seemed she was slowing down a bit, she reportedly countered in her crisp Norwegian accent, "I've got one child in the wagon, one under the arm, one on the mantle, and one elsewhere, and you say I'm slowing down!"

Lorraine Faessler was a Bridge Lake bride in 1945. She said it was just like going back in time, learning how to make her own bread and butter. "When Charlie asked me to make butter," she says, "I told him I just didn't know what



to do. He put the cream in the churn and said, 'Just sit there and crank the handle.' So I did, and when the cream suddenly turned to butter, I was so excited I jumped up and ran out to the field where Charlie was plowing.

"I did it! I've got butter!" I told him. "Now what do I do?"

"Wash it," he said calmly.

"Wash it? I couldn't believe my ears; and I couldn't believe that washing my great achievement wouldn't melt it away!"

And Marie Monette will be remembered for saying in March of 2007, "I am so delighted that Hillary Clinton has declared her intention to run for the office of President of the United States! Then, if we have a woman run for Prime Minister in Canada, we've got it made!"

I have learned SO MUCH from my interviewees! Ask me about suicide doors. I had never heard of 'suicide doors' in my life, and then, for the June 2006 issue, I wrote about Norman and Anna Granberg. You will see a line in that article which reads: "Norman's Uncle Frank had a 1929 Chevrolet with suicide doors. Suicide doors?" I left it at that, for good reason, but now the whole tale must be told.

I had read a previously written article on Norman and Anna, published in another newspaper, which spoke of the suicide doors. The author had quoted Norman as doing very daring things in his uncle's car with the suicide doors open. During my interview with Norman I queried him about this quote. He, of course, explained to me, straight faced, that when the back door opens from front to rear, with the hinges to the rear of the car, if you were to 'fall out' you would be smacked by the open back door. Then, grinning, he told me that, sure, as young boys he and his friends had actually "leaned out of the back seat of Uncle Frank's 29 Chevy with the back door wide open and scooped up small dogs."

I might well have quoted the lovable and mischievous Norman, had I not shared the information via e-mail with a friend



It helps to have a friend, shown here with a 1929 Chevy, who knows about suicide doors

who lives near Boston, Massachusetts. My friend, not so naïve as I, cautioned me and then did some research.

The correspondence from him on this topic is lengthy, but here is a taste. He wrote from Boston:

"I went to the Lars Anderson Automobile Museum this morning and got the VIP treatment as my daughter's grandmother's brother was Lars Anderson. I was shown to the exact car that was in question in Canada and I sat in it, worked the doors, tried to tumble out, tried to act out scooping up dogs, and had in attendance several very amused automobile experts. I found it impossible to scoop anything up because the seat is so far back and the running board is in the way. They were all looking at me very strangely."

So, Norman Granberg has taught me about suicide doors and influenced dialogue (and humour) amongst antique automobile experts 3,250 miles away.

I must thank Ian MacInnes and Howard MacMillian for their very able assistance writing colourful and very informative columns for me. And how do I thank those now departed writers, like Norma Vaughn,

who have left their beautiful articles to enrich us?

And now, Dear Reader, if it were not for Beverley Neff, you would not be reading these words, and I would not have had reason to write them.

Beverley, thank you so very much! Were it not for you, I would still be sitting here at my desk in this very moment, thinking that I should start writing pioneer family histories—as soon as I finish my current projects. Because of you we have all these stories on record. You have given me the open space to create as I saw fit, and I have had the time of my life working with you. It is hard to believe that we have only met once face to face, as I count you as one of my dearest friends. As this trail ends, may you find an even greater adventure ahead, and know that we all wish you the very best.

## ON THE TRAIL OF THE PIONEERS



The Homesteading of Ree Lake and  
Bridge Lake in British Columbia

Sherry Alexandra Stewart

Watch for Sherry's new book—Interlaker pioneer stories and much more—at Storytime Family Bookstore and Amazon.ca in early spring