Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929-1967

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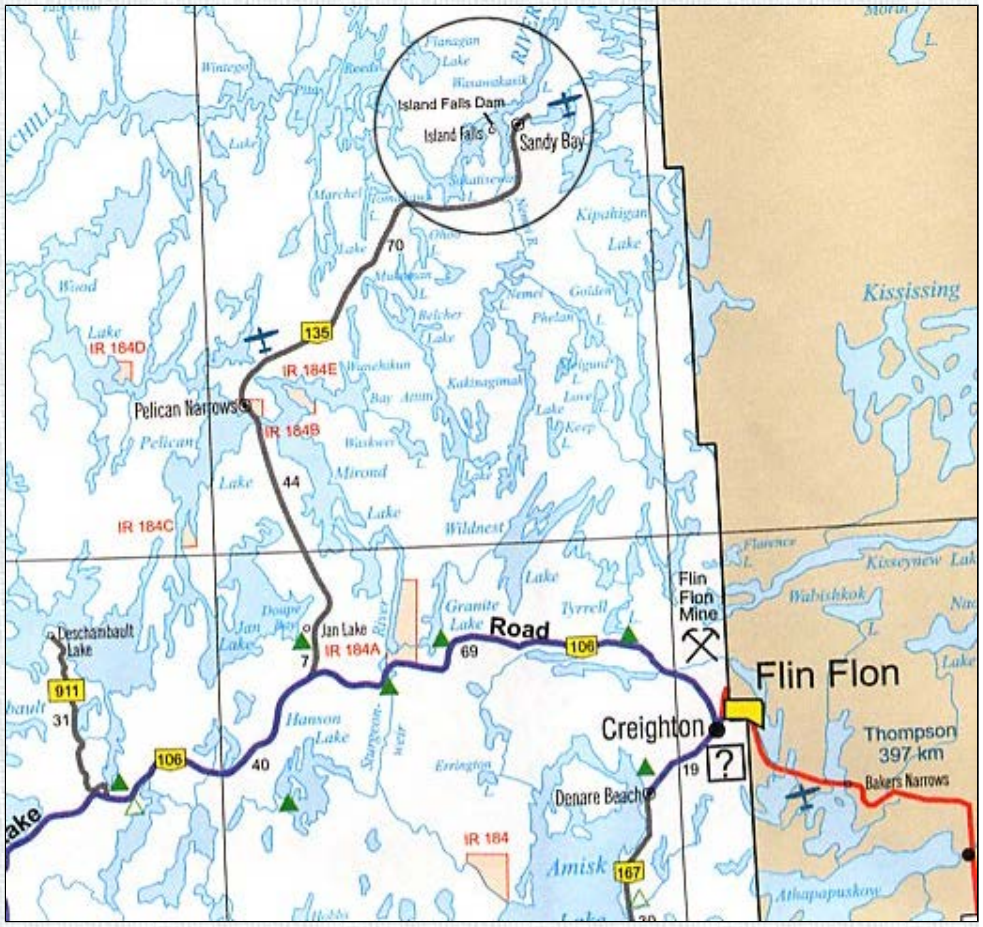
INTRODUCTION

You can find *Island Falls* on the map of Saskatchewan at 55.5º N, 102.4º W, about sixty miles by airplane north of Flin Flon, Manitoba, just west of the Manitoba border. Nowadays it is the name of a SaskPower hydro electric power station.

However, the *Island Falls* to which this website is dedicated was a small settlement of about two hundred people serving the power plant. Located on a man-made island in the Churchill River near the power plant, the settlement was called "The Camp" by its residents, the families of the operators, electricians, machinists, administrators, labourers, and men of many other skills employed by the CRP Co. (Churchill River Power Company), a subsidiary of the HBM&S Co. (Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company).



The *Island Falls* power plant was built between 1928 and 1930 to provide electricity for the HBM&S copper and zinc mining and smelting operation in Flin Flon. Thirty-seven years later, when technology permitted the power plant to be run by remote control, management decided the residential settlement was no longer needed. As a result of "Automation" in 1967, Island Falls employees and their families moved to positions in Flin Flon or into retirement.

Afterwards, the company houses, which were very modern for their time, remained vacant but intact until the winter of 1971 when the electricity that heated them was interrupted. Water pipes froze and split, and the houses were subsequently flooded and badly damaged. In the following years, almost all the buildings were removed or demolished. Eventually, the power plant was taken over by SaskPower in 1981.

For many of us, our *Island Falls* home truly disappeared in 1988 when authorities dismantled the Community Hall which had been the social centre of The Camp and the setting of many of our fondest memories. Except for the two-storey commissary (now a staff house), all that remains are the sidewalks leading to the places where houses once stood.

The settlement of *Island Falls* has thus come and gone. From an historical viewpoint, it had a brief existence compared to the ancient and on-going presence of the First Nations people along the Churchill River. In recognition of their status, we have added a page dedicated to the people of Sandy Bay.

This website consists mainly of photographs and material collected from individuals, Saskatchewan government agencies (1), and the *Northern Lights Magazine*. Because the *Northern Lights* did not begin publication until 1941, the first eleven years of community life at *Island Falls* are not well documented.(2)

Click here to view the Main Website.

Although few of the adults who lived and worked at Island Falls are still alive, their many descendants, including myself, are scattered across Canada. It is hoped that they will continue to provide additional material for these

pages.

My thanks to the following people for contributing to this history project:

- Irene Olson
- Dick Southworth
- Bob Tanner
- Gertie Montgrand
- Trudy VerWilghen Bartley
- Wayne Huffaker
- Ed Hagberg
- Joey Barnes
- Phil King
- Diana Grayson
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- Jeff Russell
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- Keith Olson
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- Wade Bryson
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- Gary Westbury
- Jack McMurdo
- Flora Morin Smigel
- Ken Dimond
- Jill Broster Rowe
- Hazel Willey Young
- Carol Leslie Marcuk
- Karen Bailey Davis
- Sharon Brown Burr
- Guyla Wachowich Smilski
- Ada Russell
- Fred Bowman
- Roy Bunn
- Helen Davis Evans
- Sheilagh Cameron Basky
- Marian Strindlund Dodds
- Glenn Grigg
- Glenda Larson Craigie
- Kathy Bunn Matzer
- Tracey Evans Thorup
- Peter Spencer
- Margaret Cameron Ollett
- Wally Wasylenko
- Arleen Birston Peacock
- Gordon Dash
- Craig McIntosh
- Maxine Woods
- Manitoba Archives
- Richard Davis
- Walter Leslie
- John Evans
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- Gordy Wells

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1. Our special thanks to Nadine Charabin of the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tom Kaminski of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Brian Hugel of the Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan, the Island Falls staff of SaskPower, Drew Wilson of the Engineering Institute of Canada, and Gord Linnick of HBM&S for their assistance.

2. ... except for Helen Davis Evans' 1995 book, *Camp: North of 55º*, a collection of stories and photographs about the R.W. Davis family and the people of Island Falls. Copies of this book are still available at 50% of the original price.

Donations

My thanks to the following people who have given money in support of the Island Falls website. The names are listed in the order received.

- **Diane Evans Jensen**
- **Richard Davis**
- **Bob and Eleanor Tanner**
- **Tom Cameron**
- **Blair Harvey**
- **Torance Tornquist**

- **Keith Olson**
- **Pat Donaghy**
- **Gary and Janet Westbury**
- **Jim Woods**
- **Donna Pyne Martin**
- **Dennis Rusinak**
- **Tim Schwartz**
- **Marcy Robertson**

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929 - 1967 has been a costly personal project and remains an on-going expense. To help keep this website on the Internet, donations are requested. Please send a cheque or money order to:
Dave Rutherford, 3976 Latimer Street, Abbotsford, BC V2S 7K7

Or donate via PayPal (no account necessary):

Donate

Background

Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929 - 1967 is the creation of Dave Rutherford of Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada and funded, in part, by the estate of **Helen Davis Evans** and other private donors. It first went online March 12, 2002 and is now hosted by *InternetHosting.com* in Mississauga, ON.

The aerial photo of the Power Plant on our Front page, with the communities of Island Falls and Sandy Bay in the background, first appeared on the cover of the Island Falls 1964 New Years Banquet menu. It was originally a Kodak slide taken in 1963 by **Keith Olson** from an airplane piloted by **Lowell Christensen**. The airplane, a Cessna 140, belonged to Harold Jacobson of Whitesand.

Our CRP logo is based on a design painted on the bows of canoes built for the Churchill River Power Company by **Bill Grayson**. The stencil for the logo, about a foot in diameter, could be seen hanging from a nail on the wall of Bill's boat shop.

Digital copies of many of the photographs seen on this Website are available in higher quality and larger format, without watermarks, for private, non-commercial use. Send your request to:

drutherford@islandfalls.ca

Our New Guestbook was programmed by Klemen Stirn of PHP Junkyard.

Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929 - 1967

ARTICLES

Historical Articles

A wide-ranging collection of documents from sources such as the Saskatchewan Archives.

Items of Interest

Unique news items and reports about unusual happenings at Island Falls.

Photo Gallery

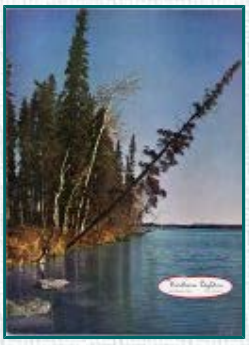
Gathered from family albums as well as government archives, our collection of photos of people and places at Island Falls is the largest anywhere.

Personal Writings

Early and more recent observations about life at Island Falls by the people who lived there.

Correspondence

Reproductions of business and personal letters by employees of the Churchill River Power Company.

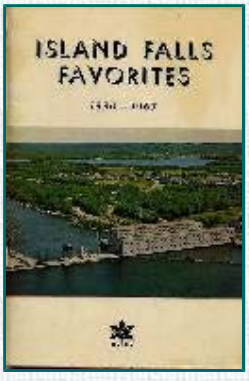


Northern Lights

The Flin Flon Heritage Project now has Northern Lights Magazines, including those with articles filed by Island Falls Correspondent, Bill Southworth.

Maps

Reproductions of original construction, townsite, and Churchill River area maps.



Special Features

Order copies of the 1967 Centennial Cookbook by the ladies of Island Falls, as well as Helen Davis's unique book *Camp: North of '55. The Story of Island Falls.*

SEARCH THIS SITE

External Links

Flin Flon Heritage Project

If you enjoy looking at this site, why not contribute $ via PayPal to help keep it on the Internet? (You do not need to have a PayPal account)

Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929 - 1967

ARTICLES

Historical Articles

- **Churchill River: General Description** *author unknown, 1924
- **Greatest Winter Job in History:** Montreal Daily Star, March 2, 1929
- **Huge Hauling Job:** Free Press Evening Bulletin, Winnipeg, March 1929
- **Tractor Trains Do Great Work:** Montreal Star, 1929:
- **What Tractors Accomplish**: The Mining News, Wednesday, April 2, 1930
- **Power Development at Island Falls, Churchill River**, by M. H. Marshall, 1931
- **General Report on the Island Falls Development**, by M. H. Marshall, 1931
- **The Island Falls Development**,* by Marvin Huffaker, 1933
- **Island Falls Development**, Article for the "ACTIMIST", Sept. 30, 1933.
- **Island Falls Power Development**, by Rees Davis and Marvin Huffaker, 1935
- **Shangri-La of the North**, by Beland Honderich, Prince Albert Herald, 1946
- **A Trip to the Northland** * by W.A. Birtles, 1947
- **Community Club**, by Harry Olson, 1956
- **The Story of Island Falls**, by Harry Olson, 1956
- **Power From the Churchill, Part I** : Berry Richards interviews
- **Power From the Churchill River, Part II** : The Churchill River
- **A Visit To Island Falls NORTH OF 54**, by W. B. "Hendy" Henderson
- **Remote control of the Island Falls plant**, by C. Humphreys

* The asterisk indicates material from Saskatchewan Archives.

COMMENTS

If you have any questions or comments about this web site, please post a note in the Guestbook or e-mail Dave. **Be sure to put "Island Falls" in the subject line.**

If you enjoy looking at this site, why not contribute $ via PayPal to help keep it on the Internet? (You do not need to have a PayPal account)

Island Falls, Saskatchewan: 1929 - 1967

Churchill River General Description: Feb. 23, 1924

The following excerpt is from file "Index Div. – 6F" Dated February 23, 1924. It describes the conformation of the Churchill River at Island Falls prior to the building of the power dam in 1929, author unknown.

CHURCHILL RIVER
GENERAL DESCRIPTION (excerpt)

.... Island (Trade) lake has its outlet at Kettle Falls, which is 15 feet high, fifteen miles from Frog Portage. About two miles below Kettle Falls, the Reindeer River, the largest tributary of the Churchill, enters from the north. For a distance of twenty or twenty-five miles below the mouth of the Reindeer River there follows a stretch of swift flowing river culminating in a rapid entering Wintego lake. This lake, twelve miles in length, outlets at Wintego rapid, a short rapid with a drop of about four feet. Twenty miles below Wintego rapids is encountered another reach of heavy rapids and falls with a drop of ten or twelve feet. The next twenty or twenty-five miles, to the mouth of the Nemei river which enters from the south, is a similar stretch of swift flowing river with numerous falls and rapids, the largest of which is Island fall. This fall, situated about fifteen miles due west of the Manitoba boundary, has a drop of seventeen feet.

Power Site 6EA2 – Island Falls

An inspection of this site was made by engineers of the Dominion Water Power Branch in 1916, while travelling from Kettle falls to Bloodstone falls, and was followed in 1917 by a more detailed power survey by a private corporation interested in a suitable power site of sufficient capacity to supply the estimated power requirements of the Schist lake mining district of Northern Manitoba.

Island falls are situated some 15 miles due west of the Manitoba-Saskatchewan boundary and have a drop of 17 feet. At this site a big island divides the river into two channels. Rock outcrop is exposed all along both channels and appears to underlie the entire site. The proposed layout consists of a sluiceway type of dam across the left main channel at the crest of the rapids and falls, flanked on both sides by a rock and earth fill, the power house being placed across the right main channel at the lower falls. By raising the headwater twenty feet an average head of 37 feet may be obtained and the reservoir or pondage under these conditions would have an area of approximately 12 square miles.

The estimated ordinary minimum power available at this site is 76,000 h.p. and the estimated six-month power is 95,500 h.p.

The foregoing text is based in the main on power surveys of Kettle, Island and Bloodstone falls, made in 1916 by engineers of the Dominion Water Power Branch, Department of the Interior, from which plans and reports of the power possibilities were prepared, and on information collected chiefly from the reports of exploration surveys carried out by the Geological Survey of Canada in earlier years, more particularly those of Wm. McInnis in 1910, J.B. Tyrrell in 1896, and Thos. Fawcett in 1883. The runoff has been estimated chiefly from discharge measurements of the Churchill and Reindeer rivers made near the mouth of the latter stream by engineers of the Department of the Interior.....

Sask. Archives Board, S-A465, CRPCo. Fonds, VIII.1(2) General, 1928 - 1940

"Greatest Winter Job in History"

From the Montreal Daily Star, 1929:

Greatest Winter Job in History of North Half Done

WINNIPEG, Man., March 2.—(Star Special).—Already more than half of the gigantic task of transporting materials into the Island Falls site for the hydro-electric development projected there has been completed for Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co., Limited—a job that many believed impossible of accomplishment before spring. So far as is known, this is the largest winter hauling job ever undertaken in Canada, with upwards of 25,000 tons of freight being moved over the 69-mile trail from the end of steel to Island Falls. A notable circumstance is the fact that lack of snow early in the winter had to be overcome by complete icing of the roads which did not cross lakes, and twenty tank teams were busy at this work. Now the company has a "skating rink" 69 miles long—a little rough for skating in spots, perhaps, but a wonderful winter tote road.

Up to the middle of February approximately 17,000 tons of freight had gone in, and the organization is now exerting every effort to increase dally average of transport trains. A fleet of tractors is employed, consisting of ten big Lynns, six Fordsons, and three Holts. Increasing efficiency is seen in the fact that during the last ten days of January a daily average of 366 tons was transported, as against 192 tons daily during the first ten days of that month. At the present time the average has been stepped up until nearly 700 tons daily is moving over the trail, and the contract is well ahead of schedule, whereas early this year it was far behind, what had been estimated.

The site of the power plant lies across the Manitoba-Saskatchewan boundary, some 60 miles in a direct line northeast of Flin Flon itself. When fully developed the site will be capable of producing 76,000 horsepower although it is estimated that 42,000 horsepower will be ample for

present requirements, and three 14,000 horsepower turbines are all that are to be installed now. At the moment crews are engaged in the building of an auxiliary power plant of 2,000 horsepower to supply motive energy for the work of erecting the main power station. Work on this is well advanced, and it is anticipated the unit will have been completed by the end of March, so that the bigger job can start about that time.

* * *

A force of 250 men is now employed at the power site, and it is hoped that between the end of l930 and the spring of 1931 the major power plant can be completed. Preparations for this undertaking are also well in hand, with men already at work cutting timber for forms and trestles, and uncovering part of the rock that has to be blasted out.

Winter hauling from the town of Flin Flon, the end of steel, into the power site through the wilderness is essentially a problem of organization, in view of the urgent need of the work, costs, and the short length of time available to complete the job. Engineers who have studied the work, and who have had an opportunity to go into the records, say it is one of the most efficient and completely organized winter hauling jobs in the history of Canada's great north country. Tractor trains work on railroad schedule.

No factor that might hinder the task has been overlooked, even to the smallest details. Close check of the freight movement is kept by the company's staff, and by the aid of an excellently conceived system of' ‘graphs, headquarters is able to instantly find out how the situation stands. Through weekly reports from the moving columns, officials learn with a minimum of wasted time how much freight has gone, and how much is on the way. The entire traffic route is mapped out into sections, from the point of origin to the power site itself, and at a glance the 'graphs disclose whether materials in any or all sections is keeping up to, exceeding, or falling behind the schedule. In the same way, 'graphs record progress at the plants where the big turbines, etc., are being built, a telltale red line moving across the sheet as building proceeds and brings closer the shipping date.

* * *

MAINTENANCE work in the actual hauling is carried on with a high degree of efficiency. Tractors are kept in first class condition; sleds and other moving equipment are seldom laid up for repairs, with the result that tonnage is kept moving constantly in increasing volume. The working force on the freighting contract numbers around 200 men, the majority of whom are employed at the Flin Flon power siding, the starting point of the hauls.

At Flin Flon itself a similar scene of busy engineering enterprise is presented, where the initial preparations for Manitoba's great new industry are already giving employment to 350 men. The foundations have been poured for the permanent warehouses, machine shop, boiler house, and blacksmith shop, and a start has been made on the foundations for the stand-by powerhouse. Other crews are busy on the erection of bunkhouses for the men, cottages for the staff, the hospital, and various other housing needs of a large mining community.

Not much work is necessary at the mine itself, as already between 5,000 and 6,000 feet of lateral work has been done on the three horizons, chiefly on the 390-foot level, with some also on the 200 and 300-foot levels. The shape of the ore body was well defined by previous exploration, in which the diamond drill played a big part, and the tonnage figures have been established. Mining operations will commence on a broad scale when the concentrator and smelter plants are near completion.

Huge Hauling Job To Island Falls

From the Free Press Evening Bulletin, Winnipeg, 1929.

HUGE HAULING JOB TO ISLAND FALLS NEARS COMPLETION

26,000 Tons of Equipment Moved to Power Site—Work Proceeds Rapidly

(Special Dispatch to the Free Press.)

The Pas Man., March 24.— Charles B. Morgan, local contractor, has practically completed what will undoubtedly stand for along time as the most stupendous undertaking of its kind.

The gigantic task of moving approximately 26,000 tons of equipment, 80 miles, from Flin Flon to Island Falls, the site of the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting, company, power project the few remaining loads will be taken in early this week.

Many believed that Morgan, who had the contract for the work, would get little more than half the freight in to Island Falls before breakup, owing to the unfavorable weather early in the season. Excellent organization, 11 Lynn tractors and gangs of men who knew the ropes, however, overcame all difficulties and the task is completed with many days of good freighting weather yet ahead.

The round trip of 160 miles took the tractors on an average of about 40 hours to cover. There were no stops on the way, and a caboose dragged after the tractor provided the spare crew with sleeping quarters while the engine kept chugging on.

There are five camps situated along the road, but the crews seldom stopped at any of these, except in cases of breakdowns and these were few and far between.

Forty miles of the road is over lakes and the other 30 is kept well iced. A "road" gang was on the job all the time with the result that little difficulty was experienced at any time in getting through.

The record load of the season was taken in by Driver Jim Scouten on February 6, it weighed over 112½ tons. The 80 miles was covered in 28 hours, 15 minutes, and the round trip occupied 39 hours, 15 minutes.

The machinery taken in consisted mostly of small locomotives, turbines and hoists. Some 13,000 tons of cement is included in the shipment.

Work is proceeding very rapidly at Island Falls. At the present time rock is being crushed, which will be used for building the dam.

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Tractor Trains Do Great Work

Montreal Star, 1929:

TRACTOR TRAINS DO GREAT WORK IN WILDERNESS

THE PAS, Man., March 30. — (Star Special) —Virtual completion of a winter hauling job that stands without parallel in the mining history of the North Country may be announced by your correspondent after a visit to the scene of the operation, where the task of moving freight Into the Island Falls power site of the Flin Flon mine is entering its final stages. As spring approaches, a job that many believed impossible of accomplishment in the time available stands finished except for a few details.

This week the last loads of a tonnage amounting to upwards of 25,000 tons of freight will go forward from Flin Flon to the power site at Island Falls, 69 miles distant. The contract has been in the hands of Charles B. Morgan, local contractor, who has previously established some enviable records for winter transport.

As has been noted previously, the fact that early winter weather was so mild, and with little snow, the whole scheme was delayed to a point where few people believed the lost time could be made up before the break up. However, with tank gangs constantly icing the roads, and with the forming of heavy ice on the lakes it became possible to step up the tonnage handled per load. Latterly some huge loads were taken in, with the record held by Driver Scouten, who, early in February took 112 tons in his train, the distance being covered in 28 hours. Ten hours was consumed in the return trip.

Those unfamiliar with the way things are done in the North would have difficulty visualizing these big tractor trains moving through the wilderness with practically no stops. While there are camps on the route, the drivers seldom stopped, except in case of emergency. Two drivers accompanied each train, working in shifts, and rest was taken in the caboose at the back of the train—almost exactly like a railway freight train.

Forty miles of the road is over lakes, and the remainder, through the bush, was iced. With ten big Lynn (sic) tractors hauling these trains, as high as 700 tons a day was moved.

All manner of equipment has been taken in, a large part of the tonnage being cement, but there are also locomotives, turbines, hoists and all the multitude of things necessary for the construction of a power plant capable of producing 42,000 horsepower. The plant is being built for the Churchill River Power Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co., Ltd., and is expected to be in operation early in 1931.

The transportation of the big tonnage required was essentially one of organization, in view of the urgent need of the work, costs, and the limited time available to complete the job. Its successful termination is a tribute to the men responsible.

Construction ot the winter road represents an outlay of around $50,000, and it is estimated that it will coat a million dollars to transport this season's quota from Winnipeg to Flin Flon, and then by tractor to Island Falls. The costs of the winter road haul alone will run into about $600,000, according to information available. These figures give a slight idea of the scope of activities surrounding the big base metal proposition which is Flin Flon.

Big things are being done in a big way in the North.