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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Horse-Back Riders Have Colorful Tales

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HELEN ALWOOD and Joyce Myhon are broke in Halifax, with no money to get home to British Columbia, they told a Halifax newsman this week. I talked to this interesting pair late last week, just before I left the Atlantic Winter Fair.

The two girls – both are just under 30 – decided last spring they would ride across Canada on horseback, though neither had ever been on a horse before. They are from Port Alberni.

They had many spills. “Did you fight the saddle the first few weeks?” I asked them and the quick reply was “we were fighting the ground . . . We were on the ground more than in the saddle the first few weeks”, they said with more than a little exaggeration.

They took six months and one day – April 21 to October 22, to ride the estimated 4,852 miles.

“You must have been sore at first”, then asked “how long were you sore?”

Six months and one day, they replied and we shared a laugh.

“We never did get saddle sores, if that’s what you mean” Helen explained. But they had their problems, many of them.

Lost In Rockies – Ate A Squirrel

THEY GOT lost in the Rocky Mountains once when they rode in for four days, found their way blocked by 15 feet of snow that had slipped from an adjoining slope. So they had to ride four days to retrace their steps.

“We had taken four days food supply with us, so we didn’t eat for three days. Then we shot a squirrel the fourth day, and had it for dinner” – they carried a .22 rifle, the girls explained.

The being thrown was no joke. “What else could happen when two girls who never rode a horse before, start out on two nervous horses?” they challenged. Several times they were hurt badly enough to stop, and rest a day or so.

But they averaged 35 miles a day on the days they did ride – it figured to about 32 miles per day overall.

They carried oats in their saddlebags – they had a pack horse which they sold at Kenora, Ontario – they started at six o’clock each morning, rode until noon, then let their horses graze, and rest, for four hours, before continuing their ride.

THEY SHOD their horses themselves. They nailed on 99 pairs of shoes on the two animals in the six months. When I asked “how did you shoe them?” the reply was simple:

“We dismounted, took off the saddle, lifted up a foot and nailed on a shoe. And we never nailed a shoe on wrong,” they boasted.

They “bought size one shoes and spread them.” They used No. 5 nails.

I've seen Jack Gallant spread a shoe with his clincher as he shod our horse. But Jack's a master craftsman. But those girls did the same thing along the lonely cross country trail, which went through the mountains, across the prairies at times, and through large metropolitan centres.

Scared A Million Times

GIRLS ARE usually scared when they are out alone at night, I suggested, then asked "Did you have any scares?"

"We had millions of them", they replied.

There was the time they were flooded out in the Rockies:

"Just imagine at five o'clock in the morning in the Rockies, and down in a valley. You know how the waters back up in spring. Well the creek backed up and flooded all our gear.

"When we woke at 5 a.m. it was snowing and all our gear was floating." They were sleeping on the ground – they had sleeping bags and a waterproof tarpaulin. They "were soaking wet, all of their clothes and other gear was soaking wet. Even the pack from the pack horse was flooded – it also was on the ground."

They were freezing. How did they warm up?

"We ran through the small shrubbery, breaking off small trees. We had to do something. It was either that or perish," the girls told me.

They were eight miles from the nearest population centre. It took them 12 hours before they were dried out and warm again. There was no traffic in the Rockies owing to the snow. "Finally a big plow came through and the operator gave us a big can of diesel fuel, and we ended up by lighting the biggest blasted bonfire they ever saw in the Rockies", Helen recalled exuberantly, as Joyce nodded assent with a big grin.

The girls were never molested by prowlers, though boys threw pop bottles at their horses.

"Once some persons cut our horses loose and scared them off. We took eighteen hours to find and catch them. It had rained at night and we couldn't track them on the open prairies", the girls reported.

They rode a total of 900 miles in British Columbia, after the 'lost in the Rockies' episode, and they should have made it in a little over 400 miles.

Lightning Terrified Helen

I SUGGESTED they must have welcomed the level, open Prairies. But there too, they had their problems. It rained most of the time. There were heavy electrical storms and Helen is terrified of lightening.

That's where Joyce came to the rescue. She "held Helen's hand, and generally tried to life her morale."

The pair of lonely riders were scared "millions of times". There were rats in their pack gear, and many other things happened to frighten them.

They "slept in" only a dozen nights along the way. They were in eight farm homes. They were guests of Mayor Angus Campbell, Pembroke, Ontario once, and of Mayor Nevers of Hartland, N.B., another time.

“We ate pretty good along the way”, the girls told me. They cooked over wood fires in the open. They had pots and pans but no portable stove.

They bought “such things as carrots, turnips, potatoes, meat – stuff for stews.” They couldn’t carry eggs in the saddle bags. “We never had butter, or eggs, or things like that.”

Nine Cents In Jeans On Arrival

THE GIRLS had about \$200 each when they left home. They had their parents mail them \$10 or \$15 every two weeks. “We rolled in here with nine cents left,” they told me. They were earning some money with daily appearances at the Atlantic Winter Fair. They were looking for babysitting jobs, with little result.

When I talked with them the girls were hoping to sell their two horses and buy an old car, with visions of the Royal Winter Fair at Toronto – as a paid attraction, no doubt. Then they wanted to head for Florida, then Texas, then back home to B.C.

They paid \$150 each for their horses when they left home, they thought they should get that much for them here.

“They’re the best darn horses in the world,” they agreed. They had come to really like their horses, even though the nags had bucked them off many times at first. The horses could trot five to six hours at a time without even working up a sweat, at the last of it, the girls boasted.

Proud Of Their Achievement

JOYCE MYHON and Helen Alwood were proud of their achievement. “We are the first two women in history to cross Canada on horseback, the all-Canadian route . . . Our horses are the only ones to cover 4,852 miles” – they insist that is the total mileage – “surely they are worth that much to somebody,” they urged. “We hope whoever gets them will be good to them”, they said with hopeful emphasis.

Joyce and Helen ended their ride officially at the Halifax Tourist Bureau. They had just crossed the Halifax-Dartmouth bridge, had been told there was a fee of five cents for the horses, but instead they came across free – with a police escort for the final lap of their trip that had taken them six months and one day. They’re going to write a book some time.

Now there’s the problem of getting home. But it seems to me that a pair of girls who had initiative and courage enough to ride across the country on horseback, facing so many problems and so much discouragement, will find the answer to their present problem.

Anybody want a pair of cross-Canada horses?