

## HAROLD VICTOR SERSON (1926-1992)

Harold Victor Serson was born in Ottawa in February 1926. He died of a heart attack while on vacation in Costa Rica in February 1992. He is survived by his wife, Ada, and daughters, Terry and Robin.

Harold first went to the Arctic in 1944 as a Hudson's Bay Company seaman aboard the *Nascopie*. Thus began a lifelong association with the Arctic. In 1945 he joined the Department of Transport as a radiosonde technician. In 1947 he transferred to the Defence Research Board (DRB) Radio Propagation Laboratory and was one of the first people to winter-over at the newly established joint Canada-U.S.A. weather station at Resolute Bay. Subsequently, he became involved in ionospheric research at the DRB Radio Physics Laboratory, the Prince Albert Radar Laboratory and the Telecommunications Establishment. As a technician and later technical officer he co-authored a number of papers on radio propagation in the auroral zone.

In 1961, Harold was asked to investigate the abandoned Soviet drifting station NP-7, then located in Baffin Bay. That experience led to a meeting with Dr. G. Hattersley-Smith, of the DRB Directorate of Physical Research, and a significant career change. Harold began working in High Arctic oceanography and glaciology and quickly established a reputation in remote arctic science operations and logistics.

Anyone who has enjoyed a visit to Tanquary Camp at the head of Tanquary Fiord, Ellesmere Island, owes a little something to Harold, who was instrumental in building the camp in summer 1963. Summer students and principal investigators alike who worked at Tanquary Camp during its heyday in the 1960s will remember Harold and his contribution to the success of their research. He had a fund of stories about the many people he met and assisted. He particularly enjoyed recalling

the pioneering airborne radio-echo sounding experiments with Dr. S. Evans, of the University of Cambridge, and his SPRI Mark II instrument, and the sea ice energy balance investigations with Dr. P. Langleben, of McGill University.

While working at Tanquary, Harold became acquainted with first snow toboggans and then snowmobiles, machines he could maintain and operate in the worst conditions and which he used for numerous long over-snow and ice traverses. Towing sleds loaded with scientific equipment, food, fuel and shelter, he made long trips doing oceanographic surveys in the channels of Nansen Sound, Tanquary Fiord and Greely Fiord and glaciological and oceanographic investigations from the north coast of Ellesmere Island to Peary Channel. During those expeditions Harold was associated with the discovery of perennial water stratification in a number of lakes and in Disraeli Fiord on the north coast of Ellesmere Island. He later assisted Dr. J. Keys in his study of the oceanography of Disraeli Fiord. The work on the north coast of Ellesmere Island naturally led to Harold becoming involved in ice shelf research, particularly the maintenance and reading of the mass balance networks on the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, and the monitoring of the ice shelves for ice island calvings. Additional mass balance work on a small ice cap near St. Patrick Bay and snowpit and ice core investigations on the ice cap northwest of Tanquary added to his contributions to glaciology.

After working on the McGill ice drift study in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the late 1960s, Harold worked on two diverse projects in the early to mid-1970s in the High Arctic, including sea ice drift and radar studies in Robeson Channel and the oceanography of Fury and Hecla Strait and other polynyas. In 1976 he moved to Victoria, British Columbia, to the Defence Research Establishment Pacific and continued working on



Harold Serson in his element in May 1985 obtaining water samples through the ice on Lake "C" adjacent to Taconite Inlet on the north coast of Ellesmere Island. Harold Serson was a member of the party that investigated Lake C in 1969 and determined for the first time that it was a density stratified lake.

glaciological and oceanographic problems in the Queen Elizabeth Islands. In 1981 he retired from government service. However, he was not the type of person who could ever properly retire and turn his back on his beloved Arctic, as I was fortunate enough to soon discover.

I was privileged to be able to work with Harold throughout the 1980s, and we had a lot of fun together working on the Ellesmere ice shelves and ice islands. Our first trip was in spring 1982, when I was introduced to those long snow-machine traverses as we travelled around obtaining ice cores and doing some limnological and oceanographic measurements. I had a great time and guess Harold did too, because we subsequently made four consecutive trips to the ice shelves and three trips to Hobson's Choice ice island. I shall always remember the experiences we had together and will always be indebted to Harold for his friendship and the knowledge he passed on to me. He was a wonderful companion and teacher in the field, quietly teaching by example and patiently showing me how to load a sled, pitch a Scott tent, put up a radio antenna, keep an old snowmobile running, and a host of other essentials. I lost a few sled loads in the early days, but Harold remained unperturbed. He would help to pick up the pieces and let me tie them all back up again.

When I first discussed my plans for ice shelf research with Harold and enlisted him to help with the fieldwork, he agreed to go to northern Ellesmere Island with me, as long as I paid his travel expenses and a princely consulting fee of \$1 per day. That was the kind of person he was — kind and generous to a fault with his time, experience and expertise. He was a resourceful and dependable person who worked hard to fulfil his own responsibilities and to ensure the success of other people's work too. That and his friendly, quiet, unassuming manner generated a lot of goodwill and friendship and ensured that he would be remembered by those who were associated with him.

Despite long absences in the Arctic, Harold was a devoted husband and father. He told many stories of family vacations, driving across Canada with his first wife, Barbara, and two

daughters to explore the western provinces or sailing, canoeing and swimming in the Ottawa River at Dunrobin, where the family lived for many years. After moving to the West Coast, Harold and Barbara spent a lot of time exploring the Gulf Islands and fishing for salmon aboard their sailing boat. Barbara's death in autumn 1988 was a sad moment, made bearable by the closeness of the family and kindness of friends. In autumn 1990 Harold remarried, and Ada was subsequently able to travel to the High Arctic with him in summer 1991 and see him in his element working as a camp manager and tour guide for Bezal Jesudason at Otto Fiord and Lake Hazen. Ada enjoyed that experience, as we all did working with Harold. His association with tourists extended to the Arctic Ocean, where he twice managed a refuelling station on the sea ice for Bradley Air Services' aircraft flying between Ellesmere Island and the North Pole. Many were surprised to land on the ice and find Harold there to welcome them with hot drink and food and ready to answer their questions about the Arctic.

Harold was a member of the International Glaciological Society, the Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society and the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA). He co-authored many papers and reports on the oceanographic and glaciological work in which he participated in the High Arctic. He was modest about his achievements, never expected any reward other than thanks, and never sought any honours. In 1988 he was elected a Fellow of AINA in recognition of his significant contributions to High Arctic research. This was the least that could be done for someone who served Canadian arctic science with quiet dedication for almost five decades. Harold will be missed but, I hope, not forgotten.

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