

The Alaska Highway was opened in the early 1940's. It changed the tempo of many remote locales and brought jeeps, buses, trucks and aircraft to places which earlier had known only dog sleds and skis for winter transport. Canada changed and the police stopped using most of these sled-dog teams who so faithfully dashed into the snowy holocausts men knew as northern blizzards.

The last RCMP dog-sled patrol was on March 11, 1969, from the isolated Yukon Territory settlement of Old Crow to Fort McPherson, 200 miles away in the Northwest Territories. This trip was as rigorous and cold as always, but it differed from earlier missions: it was accompanied by a magazine writer-photographer team driven by native guides in snowmobiles! Years later, two of the Siberian sled dogs were mounted by a taxidermist for historical display at the RCMP Museum in Regina, Sask.²³

Tracking Dogs

One of the earliest recorded Canadian incidents where a tracking specialist was used was in the Crow's Nest Pass area in southern Alberta. In April 1908, Sergeant Major Charles C. Raven of Lethbridge and his bloodhound sought the person who had murdered an RNWMP constable in the small town of Frank, 155 miles west of Lethbridge. The team failed to find the killer but did, it is believed, pick up the suspect's trail in spite of a snowfall and the passing of two days from the incident.²⁴

In 1919, the Alberta Provincial Police purchased two bloodhound pups but they "... took distemper and died." Undaunted, in 1920, "Chief Inspector Nicholson purchased two dogs... and they... are in the course of training...."²⁵ The department's 1921 *Annual Report* noted that the bloodhound pups: "... are doing well and advancing in their training, they will be ready to be placed in each district by May 1st, 1922, and should be of great assistance in tracking criminals, and I look for good results from them...."²⁶

In 1922, there were seven bloodhounds distributed to Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Peace River, and Grand Prairie. Their work was given rave notices: "[They] have more than proved their usefulness in tracking people. They were used considerably in the southern part of the province, tracking down escaped prisoners, lost people, and were successful in most of the cases they worked on.

"They are in the best of condition and well trained. Numerous enquiries from other forces have been received concerning their work."²⁷

Similar praise was included in the 1924 *Annual Report*, but it included bad news, too. Melody, a very valuable bitch, died of poison at Peace River. Moreover, a pup that was a cross between an Airedale and a bloodhound bitch died at Lethbridge, apparently another poison victim. The report added that "... it was very fortunate that the three older hounds were locked up. Someone threw some poisoned meat into the yard, intending to poison all of them."²⁸

23. Nora and William Kelly. *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police: A Century of History 1873-1973*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1973, p. 294.

24. Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Service Dog Section*, n.d. [c. 1968], p. 4.

25. Alberta Provincial Police, *Annual Report — 1920*, p. 70.

26. Alberta Provincial Police, *Annual Report — 1921*, p. 64.

27. Alberta Provincial Police, *Annual Report — 1922*, pp. 62-63.

28. Alberta Provincial Police, *Annual Report — 1924*, p. 72.