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Veteran Prospector  
TED SKONSENG MADE A LEGEND  
by Dr. Aaro E. Aho

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Ted Skonseng was much more than just one of Yukon's most colourful characters--he was a creative individualist who left much to posterity.

Born in northern Norway, he first came to Canada to visit his uncle and started studies at the University of British Columbia, which he abandoned for logging camps on Vancouver Island.

He often reminisced of those colourful days in the late '20s and early '30s in what was then a tough young industry.

In the Yukon since 1935, he logged and trapped mainly along Stewart River and up into the hinterland of its headwaters, still the most remote part of the territory, sometimes sleeping under spruce trees in 60 below zero weather.

Based in Mayo, he was also a carpenter and a miner until his interest shifted in the late 1950s to prospecting, which he pursued very competently in Yukon, southern British Columbia and Chile.

He lived in Yukon for 35 years before going "outside" for the first time in 1969. Like many prospectors, he showed the marks of his trenching by hand and dynamite, and he covered countless miles in reconnaissance, retaining enough vitality for 10 to 15 mile traverses even in his last season. He died December 27, 1973.

[Note: The police and autopsy reports show Dec. 28, 1973, as the official death date.]

He discovered many new prospectors, the last being the high-grade silver-lead veins of the Plata property near Rogue River in the most inaccessible part of Yukon, 110 miles north of Faro, with Robert Etzel in 1972.

His last season, in addition to reconnaissance between Mayo and Dawson, was spent trenching and stacking up several tens of thousands of dollars' worth of this high-grade ore working with "Frenchie" Lavoie on a bulldozer.

Aside from his participation in the Anvil mine discovery and numerous other discoveries, his last two years were probably the most satisfying. Fortunately so, for he had begun to mention that it was getting near time to move on beyond the mountain.

Largely self-educated, Ted combined skills of traditional old-time methods with the most modern; his work was always orderly, his camps neat and clean, and he loved the wilderness and environment.

He was generally kind to animals, had very appropriate comments for physical circumstances, and criticized other people constructively when they deserved it.

A sin for him was that which harmed others, including animals or the environment, and also wastefulness and careless use of equipment.

He was generous to a fault, shared whatever he had and was always willing and able to help others--what money he made was used for these purposes, often contributed with no records, rates of interest or terms of repayment.

He was talkative, sometimes to excess, perhaps because of an inner loneliness he would seldom admit, and would spin endless interesting yarns with the most colourful expressions typical of the earlier Yukoners. He was thus a most congenial companion in any camp, by the campfire, under a spruce tree, on the mountain or in a bar.

Although Ted sometimes seemed gruff, complaining, obstinate or individualistic, it was never with bad intent and he never made enemies.

He worked with, and was liked by, the Indians, and both respected each other. His basic homespun philosophy carried him creatively through life with compassion and forgiveness for his fellowmen. He managed to forget those who did him wrong but never those who helped him.

Ted represented a vanishing breed of tough old frontiersmen. His material accomplishments were of value to society. He was hard-working and thought of the end result of his work as being beneficial to the Yukon and Yukoners.

With a fast-moving society, his style of operation was out of date by the time he died. He never considered and disdained the idea of welfare and unemployment insurance, which he did not collect. He had no use for those who were not productive. He was a relic of the "work ethic". His long hours on the job, his aspirations and sense of accomplishment could not be understood by newcomers to the Yukon.

Ted's heritage thus consists not only of what he produced, the discoveries and developments he participated in, and the colourful stories and incidents, but also the intangible philosophies of life and expert bush experience that he imparted to many others.

It is impossible in the foregoing to give full credit to what was Skonseng, a character seen only briefly from time to time, and hardly known or appreciated by many people. Ted will be missed by many, and few will ever be able to replace him.

[Note: Dr. Aho, the writer of this piece, played a part in having a memorial landmark of approximate 5,500 foot (1659 metre) named in honour of his friend. Skonseng Mountain is located near the Yukon-Northwest Territories borders on the Coal River mapsheet (95D/14) in the Watson Lake Mining District.]

