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**Association of Open University Graduates
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It has been a busy autumn for AOUG not only in the UK but also in Europe. In September I represented AOUG in Europe at the Versailles degree ceremony. I was joined in the official procession by Ramsey Hertzog who had travelled from England along with Jean Hertzog, the AOUG Treasurer. We were very well looked after by The Open University and were included in the official photograph with the outgoing Vice-Chancellor, Martin Bean and the Honorary Graduate, Michael Morpurgo. Sadly this was the last Europe degree ceremony owing to the costs for staging this event in Europe. You will remember that in the last Newsletter I included a form which you can use if you would like to be considered to represent AOUG at a degree ceremony in 2015. Just because there is no ceremony in Europe there is no reason why you cannot attend at another location.

It seems like only yesterday that Martin Bean arrived at The Open University. At the end of this year he is moving on. The Open University has announced that it has appointed Peter Horrocks, currently Director of the BBC's World Service, to be its new Vice-Chancellor. Professor Tim Blackman, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Scholarship and Quality), will take up the role of Acting Vice-Chancellor to lead the University until May, when the new Vice-Chancellor starts. Baroness Martha Lane-Fox was installed as the new Chancellor at the degree ceremony in September, at Milton Keynes.

In October I attended the AOUG annual Foundation for Education Awards ceremony and lecture at The Open University. The event was very well attended and four Research Awards were presented, which you can read about in OMEGA. The Lecture was given by Natalia Kucirkova who was awarded the AOUG Olga Camm Bursary in 2013. It is encouraging to see that the AOUG Bursary enabled Natalia to continue with her research, and she intends developing her subject. Once again, full information on this can be read in OMEGA and/or on the AOUG website, www.aoug.org.uk.

The Open University entered a team in to the BBC television programme, 'University Challenge'. I know that many of you do not have access to British television so I shall give a brief summary of how they fared. In the first round The Open University team took on the University of Leicester but lost with 190 points to 245. As this was one of the highest losing points, higher than several who won against other universities, they had another chance and

won against the London School of Economics with 180 points to 140. Safely through to the second round, they took on Magdalen College Oxford, losing by 130 to 225. Considering that all the other teams are able to practise on a daily basis with each other, The Open University team, coming from different parts of the country, had to manage with the usual OU situation, 'at a distance'!

This year has seen, for the first time, the AOUG Foundation for Education Award given to an Open University graduate from Europe. The award has gone to Eva Condoul who lives in Portugal. She completed her Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in International Studies and is hoping to continue studying towards a Masters Degree. We all know how much work has to be put in, particularly approaching examination time. Unfortunately for Eva, her seven year old daughter was seriously ill, but Eva managed to persevere. We send her our heartfelt congratulations and wish her daughter a speedy recovery.

We have a new contributor to our Newsletter. Ingrid Beattie has sent us a fascinating article on life in France. And once again, Patrick Noble is back, this time writing about Alaska. Several of you have sent me emails, saying how much you enjoy his articles and I am sure that Ingrid will be as well received. If I can persuade anyone else to contribute to our Newsletter, the copy date for the next issue is, Monday 16th February 2015.

So, with these excellent contributions, it just leaves me to wish you all a peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Patricia Cowling

Life in France

Sitting on the ride-on in my tee-shirt, cutting the field in cloudy but warm weather and then picking raspberries and carrots and beetroot. What could be better? Looking forward to the G&T on the terrace later!

We had a fairly poor summer but the last two weeks of August and September have been glorious. Now that we are into the second week of October, the temperatures have been lower, up to about 25 degrees and it is definitely autumnal. I'll be starting the winter clear up of the garden next week but the roses and other flowers are still out. In fact, some are in their third flowering and the horse chestnut is in flower again though most of the leaves are down!

This is what I came to France for. Lots of sun, good food, SPACE, wine (of course), friendly and polite people. I have been so lucky, I have them all. My neighbours are great and we share produce and the occasional glass of wine. They look after my house when I'm away and take in any parcels.

What I didn't know before I came was that there are 'chasse' meals in lots of the villages and boy, aren't they big meals? Earlier this year I went to one in my village where it only cost 13€ for an aperitif, amuse bouche, soup, fish, 2 meat courses, cheese and salad, dessert and as much wine and liqueur as you could want. In fact I was given one and a half left over bottles of wine to take home, and then there were all the kisses to distribute to those left behind!!

Living between Bordeaux and Angouleme affords me plenty of chances to go to brocantes. I have bought masses of things for the house for just a few Euros. One man's rubbish is

definitely another's treasure, though I do wonder how they can possibly sell off the stuff that is there: broken plates, rusty implements, dirty clothes etc. I'm amazed at the number of men who go to them, shopping has become something for both sexes. There are a lot of expat Britons, Dutch and Belgians here but I try to integrate with the villagers as that is the main reason why I came to France.

I studied French when I was a student but never spoke it until I came to France to live. I knew no one when I arrived so had to dredge the vocabulary out of the depths of my brain. I seem to manage fairly well but do wish that more people would correct me so that I can learn more quickly. I have been going to classes but it is vital to keep talking and so my way of doing this is to invite people to dinner parties. They are great fun and last for hours. I have been told that if it gets very late and your guests aren't taking the hint that you want to go to bed, you offer them a glass of orange juice!

I have nearly finished doing up my house, Scandinavian style I'm told, but am now getting itchy fingers again. There are great similarities in the modern Scandinavian and the stylish French furniture pieces though I prefer the light colours of northern Europe on the walls. I can't sell yet though as I have to make the money back that I have spent. I would love to buy the adjacent plot of land to build a swimming pool but the Euromillions' Lottery finger hasn't pointed at me yet.

The biggest problem here is the lack of flights from the autumn to the spring months. We have several airports nearby: Bordeaux, Bergerac, Limoges and La Rochelle but if you want to fly to the north of England or to Norway then it is almost impossible. Even in summer it can be difficult and talking to a few people here, we all think that the airlines would get passengers if they ran even one flight a week to those places. This means that family and friends don't usually come to visit in the quieter months.

There are so many wonderful places to see and now that I, hopefully, will have more time to spend on other things, I'll be able to visit them. Perhaps I may even take more OU courses. Every time I get to the exams I think, 'never again' but then it starts all over again. I was an 'A' student way back in 1971 when a course cost £25 and I had to get up at six in the morning to listen to the radio for a lecture. Then there was the postal strike.... I got there though and was in the first cohort to graduate in London at that time. What an innovation the OU was.

Well, blue skies outside, sun shining, lunch of crudités and assiette de charcuterie, later some Pilates and then back to the G&T on the terrace. What a life!

Ingrid Alexandra Beattie

ALASKA – THE LAST FRONTIER FROM GOLD RUSH TO OIL RUSH AND ON TO GAS RUSH NOT FORGETTING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Introduction

Alaska is situated to the north west of the North America continent. Its surface area is almost three times that of France for a population of only some 700,000 souls. To the north there is the Arctic Ocean, to the east there is the frontier with the Canadian Provinces of Yukon and British Colombia along the 141° West Meridian and along the "pan handle". To the west

Alaska is separated from the extreme point of Siberia by the Straits of Bering. To the south west the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands reach out 1,900 kilometres to Asia, even crossing the International Dateline, 180° West – 180° East. So Alaska is not only the most northern territory of the United States, but is also at the same time the most western and the most eastern!!

The first human population of Alaska came from Asia crossing the Bering Straits dry footed some forty thousand years ago, when the sea level was low due to the Ice Age. They are the ancestors of all the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Russian expansion eastwards across Siberia continued into Alaska, with small colonies established in the 18th century. In 1867 the United States bought Alaska from Russia for \$7 million, \$113 million in today's money. What a bargain! The indigenous people were not of course consulted. Alaska continued to be administered by the U.S. Government as a "Territory", until it was admitted in 1959 to the Union as the 49th state, Hawaii being admitted the same year as the 50th state. So two more stars were added to the Stars and Stripes.

Alaska is blessed with mineral resources, which have marked its recent history, giving rise to periods of frantic activity and economic boom, first the Gold Rush, 1897 to 1910 and then the "Oil Rush" materialised in the construction of the Trans Alaskan Pipeline during the early 1970s. Looking to the future, during the coming decade or two, we are probably going to see a "Gas Rush". To complete the picture we must mention the Second World War, which was also a boom time for Alaska.

In the American psyche the word "frontier" is not just a line traced on a map, it is above all a place where man finds himself face to face with nature, savage and difficult to tame. The days of the "Far West" are over, but Alaska is perceived as the "last frontier" due to its harsh climate, vast distances, difficult communications, sparse population and rugged terrain.

The Gold Rush

Already in the 1880s and 1890s gold was being found in the river beds of Alaska and the Yukon in modest quantities by intrepid individuals, but it was in 1896 that vast and very rich deposits were discovered on the Klondike River in the Yukon, very near the border with Alaska. Other important deposits were discovered about the same time in Alaska. The news spread like wildfire across the world, making headlines in the newspapers on all continents, so that very soon tens of thousands of men, some accompanied by their wives, poured northwards in a wild frenzy, probably 100,000 in total. A few of them were "forty niners", seeking their fortune once again in their old age. They were transported from San Francisco and Seattle by specially chartered steamers. As the demand shot up, the price of a ticket shot up with it. Passengers were packed like sardines in a tin.

Once disembarked from the ship, there were several different routes to arrive in the gold fields, but the ones most used were either taking a river boat up the Yukon River or going overland from the port of Skagway. The first of these options involved a much longer sea passage, then a 2,000 kilometre trip up the river. This was much too expensive for most

people, so the majority landed in Skagway. From there they had to climb the very difficult White Pass to enter Canada then continue on foot for another 100 kilometres to arrive at a tributary of the Yukon River. After felling trees to construct boats or rafts, they descended the river system over 600 kilometres to arrive in Dawson City. They had to bring with them their food and equipment. They did this against a background of harsh climatic conditions, snow, ice and permafrost. Not surprisingly many died on the way, were discouraged and turned back, or found themselves stranded.

For those who arrived, they had to first select a zone, stake it out and register their claim. Late comers found that the good plots were already occupied. Food and necessities were in short supply and prices subjected to ever increasing inflation. These men (and some women) had come to make their fortune, but few of them really did so. There were some who struck it rich, but many returned home penniless and quite a few died and were buried in what are now long forgotten graves. The ones that did profit from the gold rush were those who were not directly involved in mining, but instead were providing services (at a high price) to the miners. These included shop keepers, restaurant and hotel owners, building tradesmen, transporters, bar owners, not to mention the good time girls. (See below).

The population of human settlements exploded. For example Dawson City in the Yukon had 500 inhabitants in 1896, rocketing to a peak of 40,000 in 1898, then falling to stabilise at 2,000 in 1912, with about 1,600 inhabitants today. The population of Skagway in Alaska followed much the same trajectory. They became ghost towns of which there are many in North America, but today they have found a new vocation and a renewed prosperity as historical sites, presenting the romance and adventure of the Gold Rush to tourists, American, Canadian, European and Asiatic.

The Good Time Girls

Inevitably the potential wealth of the gold rush attracted members of the oldest profession in the world. They came onto the goldfields in their hundreds, perhaps thousands, but this was not the puritan America of the “48 states down below”. They were very visible, very much part of the show, enjoying the appellation of “good time girls” rather than “prostitutes”. They were for the most part very gutsy women, they had to be to endure the hardship of getting there in the first place, then to survive in the mining camps and towns. Some of them accumulated considerable wealth and even married into prominent families and over the years became respected and respectable members of the community. One of these *belles de nuit* even married a businessman, who eventually became the mayor of Fairbanks, and with her husband acted as hosts to a presidential visit.

The Second World War

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on the 7th December 1941 brought the USA into the war on the side of the Allies. Several of the most westerly of the Aleutians Islands were captured by the Japanese, which resulted in an important military, naval and air build up to retake them. During 1942 the Alaska Highway was constructed in Alaska itself and in British Columbia to connect Alaska with the contiguous USA. Alaska was also an important staging

post for the delivery of aircraft to the Soviet Union. The presence of large numbers of military personnel and the extensive works undertaken was a tremendous boost to the Alaskan economy, but with the end of the war in 1945, the boom time was finished.

However with the Cold War, Alaska became of strategic importance once again. The installation and operation of early warning radar stations gave some economic benefit to the local economy.

The Oil Rush

In 1968 oil was discovered in large quantities at Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean coastline. How could it be transported when the Arctic was for most of the year frozen over, preventing maritime access? The only solution was to build a 1,300 kilometre pipeline north-south across Alaska to Valdez, a warm water port on the Pacific coast, where the crude oil would be shipped away in tankers. Although it was much simpler and cheaper to extract oil from the oil fields of the Middle East, the Alaskan project had the geo-strategic advantage of being completely under American control, and not dependent on the caprice of some dictator or Arab prince. With the arrival of the first oil crisis, there was huge political pressure to launch the project. Construction started in the spring of 1974 and the first oil was pumped through the pipeline in the summer of 1977.

From the technical and logistics point of view, this was a gigantic, innovative and mind-boggling project carried out in a hostile environment. Roads had to be constructed along the future pipeline route. Over 100,000 elements of steel pipe, 40 feet (12metres) long, 48 inches (1,220 millimetres) in diameter and of 0.6 inches (15 millimetres) wall thickness were brought from Japan in 120 ship loads and distributed along the route. They were joined together by 100,000 welds by teams of welders working under appalling conditions. The pipeline was mounted on 78,000 supports and was wrapped in insulating material over much of its length. There were 34 major river crossings and 500 minor ones. Eleven pumping stations were constructed. 29 construction camps were built along the route, the largest with 1,650 beds, as well as 14 airfields.

During the period of construction billions of dollars were injected into the Alaskan economy. The high salaries attracted tens of thousands of workers from all over the United States, with a large proportion of Texans and Oklahomans (“Okies”), necessary because of their previous oil industry experience. Besides the construction workers spread along the pipeline, there were thousands of other persons, working on administration, logistics and engineering, stationed in the towns of Fairbanks, Anchorage and Valdez. This later town for example went over night from 1,000 to 8,000 inhabitants. We can imagine what happened to prices to buy or rent a house or an apartment. Many Alaskans resigned from their jobs to go and work on the pipeline for three times their normal salary. There were problems with law and order because most of the police force left to go and work on the pipeline as private security men. Then the workers came from their camps into the towns, for a few days of “rest and recreation”(R&R) with a lot of money in their pockets. The bars and night clubs did a roaring trade and of

course the good time girls were back in business. In fact they had never gone away, but now they did not have to be so discreet.

At first the Alaskans were happy at the prosperity that the pipeline brought, but little by little there was a “clash of civilizations” between the Alaskan established population and the outsiders. Stickers were put on cars for all to see - “Happiness is 10,000 Okies going south with a Texan under each arm”.

Eventually the pipeline was finished and most of the Okies and Texans did go home and the boom lost its vigour. However revenue from the oil pipeline enabled the government of Alaska to accumulate enormous wealth. Ordinary citizens benefited through the abolition of income tax and VAT. Furthermore the legend of the oil rush of the 1970s has taken its place with the nostalgia of the 1898 gold rush, attracting more and more tourists, helping the economy and creating jobs.

The Future Gas Rush

Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic coastline is also the site of huge deposits of natural gas, for the moment unexploited. There are two alternative projects to bring the gas down to the forty eight states as follows:-

- A pipeline passing into the Yukon and British Columbia, then crossing the Canadian / US border to feed the Mid-West. This would require the assent of both governments.
- An all-Alaskan, hence all-American project, comprising a pipeline parallel to the existing oil pipeline to Valdez, where the gas would be liquefied and transported by gas carrier ships down to the US west coast. Some of the gas could also be used in Alaska.

Many Alaskans favour the latter project as it will bring another boom time, but will they be happy to see the Okies and the Texans coming back once more? One thing is sure, the goodtime girls will welcome them with open arms.

Patrick Noble