

Joanne Berg  
or  
O. Brien

Irwin Berg — Peter Berg — Wilhelm Berg  
↑  
translator

Wilhelm Berg Diary  
contained

Heinrich Tansers

Trip report

From the Volga River  
to Central Asia

Sept 1, 1869 -

May 2, 1883.

1997-024

**JOANNE O'BRIEN**  
*Real Estate Counselor*

**(408) 559-0303 V.M.#208 or 377-4447**

*November 2, 1995*

*Alvina Block  
116 Broad Bay  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
R2G 0P9*

*Dear Alvina:*

*My name is Joanne O'Brien. I am the daughter of Irwin Berg and granddaughter of Peter & Anna Berg.*

*Inasmuch as my parents, Irwin and Edna Berg, have passed away, your letter was forwarded to me by the people at their former address.*

*I am enclosing a copy of a report that my father translated from German, a dairy written by my Grandfather Peter Berg's father, Wilhelm Berg.*

*I don't know if we are related or not, but I thought maybe this would be of interest to you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Joanne O'Brien*  
**JOANNE O'BRIEN (BERG)**

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A TRAVEL REPORT OF OUR PARENTS,  
WILHELM BERG, OF THEIR JOURNEY  
FROM RUSSIA TO ASIA

On the first of September, 18~~7~~<sup>2</sup>, around 5 o'clock in the evening we left Marienthal. We had intended to leave earlier, but by the time we had gathered with dear friends and relatives for a farewell service it had become late in the afternoon.

We drove to the "Three Wells" where we made our first camp for the night. After spending a pleasant night, we had another opportunity to say farewell to a number of friends who were near and dear to us.

On September the 2nd at sunrise we continued our journey and soon came to the village of Gnadendorf. Here the last of our friends, who had accompanied us, so far, left.

Toward evening, just before our first stop at Hoffenthal, Loepp's axle broke. Rods were lashed to the axle and that way we drove into the village. On the 3rd a baby daughter was born to the T. Quirings. On the 4th in the afternoon we continued our journey and by evening we came to the village, Strassendorf where we were joined by travel companions. From our home place uncle D.H. and Johan Epp had overtaken us and remained with us thru Sunday. We accompanied them to the road, to the right of the "Three Wells".

On Monday, the 6th, we had to use tie-downs for the first time. Near Kopper the wind was very strong at our back, it was hot and so dusty that we could hardly keep our eyes open. On September 7th around evening, we reached Storsosen. This city had nothing of any special value, only night frost and a cold Northwind.

On the 8th we had planned to leave after breakfast but H. Jangens' wagon broke down. A new axle was installed delaying us until noon. We continued immediately after lunch when another trouble delayed us. The rim on the wheel of M. Hamm's wagon burst. Some of the brethren remained with him while the rest went on our way. Before we came to our stop darkness had fallen and the sky was dark with clouds. After unhitching our horses from the wagons we had to ride them a long way to the well for watering. After a considerable search we found the place. During the night the brethren who had stayed back to help Mr. Hamm arrived.

On the 9th we continued our journey. The area was desert-like and ghostly still. The roads were good and the weather pleasant. It was at this time that Br. Nikkel became ill. Continuing from here we passed by a dried up salt lake bed. This was an unusual sight for us. On the 10th nothing noteworthy happened, but on the 11th we had a heavy rain which delayed us until noon.

On the 12th a baby son was born to the C. Neumans and we stayed in a cossack village over Sunday. Our housing there was good but expensive. The weather was becoming autumn-like and colder. On Monday the 14th we came upon more hilly country. After a long trip; (much too long for Mrs. Neuman). Now, to our discomfort rain and snow began to fall.

On the 15th we took the wrong turn in the road and had to go back several werst (miles). On the 16th, around noon, we arrived at Uralsk. The city from a distance appeared real inviting. I had not expected it to be so big. It had many large impressive buildings. Here many of our group purchased fur foot-wear because the nights became quite cold. On the 17th, at eventide, we began to leave Uralsk and camped just outside the city. C. Neuman's little wagon needed a new axle.

On the 18th we broke camp early; the road was good and the men had their hands full controlling the spirited horses. On the 19th, in the afternoon, we came to a sandy area and camped, over Sunday, by a Cossack village. Monday the 10th we had much sandy road. Here the price of horses was very high and H. Janzen sold his little riding mare for 70 rubles. The heavy, sandy roads continued thru the 10th and the weather was now very warm. On the 21st we passed thru two great canyons. The vegetation here was very beautiful as we entered the Ural valley which is beautifully covered with trees in the distance. Hay was cheap but it contained a considerable amount of prairie grass. On the 22nd the road was bad; slippery and full of holes. On Mr. Bartches wagon the axle broke and some of the brethern remained with him to have a new one made. The scenery here was beautiful with much forest. The weather was pleasant.

On the 23rd we crossed the Ural river, the bridge is 150 feet long and now we had crossed from Europe into Asia. We camped by the little town called Geleko. On account of the rain we had to stay until noon. The scenery here again was superb; on the left the nereby trees and bushes, and on the right the wooded areas of the distant bank of the Ural river. Here we received the first real snowfall and the temperature dropped to 6 degrees. September the 24th, around noon, we arrived at the city of Orenburg. We camped to the right of the bridge in a sheltered spot.

Orenburg presents a beautiful scene from the distance and is a really great city. The Buildings are great and the streets crowded with traffic, much of it on camels. This is the business center of two major areas of the world. Many of our group bought canvas to cover our wagons because we were aware that the cold weather would set in before we ended our journey.

At this time we were undecided which way to continue; whether over Aktyubinsk or thru Orsk. A German businessman whom we had asked for advice recommended definitely the route over Orsk. Thus following his advice we broke camp early Monday morning, September the 28th to again cross the Ural in Orenburg to the European side. From Orenburg we followed the telegraph lines and the Ural river, which was always on our left; at times presenting exceedingly steep banks. At this time and place Mr. C. Neuman became ill. The road became more mountainous as we penetrated this range deeper.

On the 29th we lay still because the axle on Br. Dan's wagon was broken and had to be replaced. At 4 o'clock we resumed our journey. The sandy roadway now became a more normal way. We again arrived at a Cossack village, late that evening. Here the drinking water was bad. The mountains, which so far had appeared beautiful, now seemed to be closer, more formidable and higher. Toward evening we passed over a steep grade which had a high railing on one side to protect vehicles from going over the precipice. The descent also was very steep and some braked their wagons while others did not. The time was late when we camped.



On the 30th Br. Pauls and I climbed a hill. At first we made good progress, but soon our ascent was reduced to crawling on hands and feet. We were well rewarded for our effort by the beautiful view we saw from the top. At such a place one feels like dropping on his knees to honor the dear Lord for all his wonderful creation.

On October 1st the wagons bumped heavily over the stony road. Br. Neuman suffered severely from the rough ride. The weather was pleasant. On the 2nd, thru an unexpected event, we were obliged to remain still. Br. C. Neuman had died suddenly at 2 o'clock in the night. A few hours before he had requested the sacrament. Br. Janzen went to him and prayed for him; but postponed the Lord's Supper until the next day. The Lord called him home before daybreak. On the 3rd of October, early in the morning, he was buried, 405 steps from the telegraph line, 3 ft. or 38 inches in the hillside one werst (mile) from the Tartar village, Nickolosky.

At sunrise we travelled on. By evening we had descended a long stony hill so steep that the wheels had to be tied to brake the wagons. John Janzen's wagon overturned and on on behind us all the spokes on one wheel broke. We camped beside the Ural river.

Our horses were tied out to graze. On Sunday the 4th we observed the Lord's Supper. Sister Maria was accepted into the membership of the church. That afternoon we assembled for a (Liebes mahl) Love Feast. For me for various reasons it had been a hard day. On the 5th of October a new wheel was made. The weather was beautiful. The Ural river is rich in fish. On the 6th we drove on. The countryside became more romantically beautiful. The water was good, bubbling up out of many springs. On the 7th we had to halt while a new axle was being made. In the afternoon we drove on. The mountains appear to run together so that we sometimes wondered how we would get thru them, then, after a turn around a slope, the way appeared clear ahead. That evening we reached the summit of this mountain range. The mountains presented a spectacular view at sundown. From here on out trip was mostly downhill. In the distance we could see the city of Orsk; which we reached around noon. Here we purchased oats and supplied for the horses, 8 pud (bushels) at 55 kopecs per horse was loaded on camels. On the 11th we continued on good roads and in favorable weather. Incidentally, this was the last Sunday that the weather was good.

We camped near a small stream where we remained over Sunday. On the 12th we broke camp early. From Orsk the area is generally speaking uninhabited; almost desert-like. At noon we crossed a little stream called the Orr; where we had to rehitch our teams to cross. On the 13th we rested because a baby daughter was born to the Ewerts. We all were short on horse feed and tied them out to graze. On the 14th we continued and stayed overnight by a small lake. On the 15th a gentle rain began to fall, which later turned to sleet, and then to snow. On the 16th we arrived at Karalutak, and found a place sheltered from the wind. On Sunday the 17th clear skies, but 18 degrees. On the 18th after breakfast we continued; having first reloaded the oats, which the camels had carried up after us. The next 3 days the weather was very cold and the snow so deep that it was hard for the horses to pull the wagons. On the 22nd the weather became milder.

On the 23rd we entered the Irrgies valley in which we saw many camels, horses, cattle and sheep grazing. Here we also saw many huts of the Kirrgisian people.

On the 24th the weather became milder but the driving was hard. We had to cross a steep hill and some of our drivers had to hitch on extra horses. In the evening we came to Irrgies. Here we purchased enough horse feed to last until we would come to Kasalink: for each horse 10 Pfud (bushels) at 80 Kopecs; also as much hay as each one could load; since here the hay was good and the price low.

On the 27th we continued a long difficult roads and were only a few werst (miles) out of town when Br. Jacob Janzen's little wagon broke down. Some of the brethern returned to town to have it repaired. We would not continue until the afternoon of the 28th. On the 29th in the morning we had a steep grade before us and the road surface was icy. This was difficult for our horses; whose shoes had become quite worn by now. On the 30th we reached the last station before the desert, "Tereskli". The water was very bad and we had to melt snow for cooking and drinking.

By now we were in the desert proper. Irrvin lay in waves far apart. It appeared like a kind of wormwood and was the only fodder for the camels which grazed here in large herds. Travelling was now most difficult. Mr. M. Hamon who lead the caravan realized that his horses were exhausted and one mare was in such poor condition that he could not use her for some time. Saturday at noon we reached our first desert station: a bleak looking area surrounded by sand dunes. We remained here thru Sunday.

On the 2st of November, at night, and in the morning, snow, mixed with rain fell. By noon the snow had disappeared but there was considerable parkar frost that paved our way thru the desert. Water would not be available for another 1-1/2 miles. On the 2nd we continued; had to melt snow for water. At night our group was divided into 3 parts. Here there was a well in the yard. The 3rd we encountered drift sand. From here we took the Kumwasion road. The surface was covered with ice and snow. That night we camped near a salt marsh. We melted snow for ourselves and the horses were also given snow. Mr. Nikkel's illness was now at its worst.

On the 4th we had to divide into two groups because of broken axles. The Ural lake was now visible. The bottom was covered with mussels. For the night we camped one mile from the station on the Ural sea. In the evening it snowed and rained but not enough snow to melt. On the 5th, 3 miles away, in the sand hills, we found a well. A snow storm was raging. Nowhere on the whole journey have I suffered as much from the cold as I did here. For sometime we lost our way and even our Kirrgish guides were confused. One sand hill looked like the next and the storm continued. At noon we endeavored to move on and found that our wagon wheels were frozen to the ground and had to be pried loose. The road was very bumpy. Two of the smaller wagons overturned. For the night our caravan arrived in two parties. Water was 1-1/2 miles away. On the 6th we passed our station and after a tour of 10 hours we camped 1-1/2 miles from the lake.

On the 7th four axles broke and we were stopped at four different places. In the evening we purchased our first klee (bran or clover) also some (hissen?) straw. On Sunday the 8th we rested. At the Bartsches a little daughter arrived. On the 9th the weather was mild, the water good and we were camped near a lake.

Here we saw the first irrigation system. After breakfast half of our group went on to Kasalinsk. On the 10th we had planned to follow but at Aron Klassens a little son was born. Travelling was postponed until the next day. On the 11th we followed the others and arrived in Kasalinsk with eleven broken axles. All the horses hooves had to be re-shod. This was quite a task.. In three blacksmith's shops horse shoes were being made and in one new axles were being shaped. We camped at a lake about a mile out of town. The road surface was gumbo clay and very hard to traverse. The weather changed from frost to rain, to snow; and we will never forget the mud under these conditions.

Everyone was glad when all was ready to move on again; on Monday the 16th. We continued on the very muddy roads. At noon we stopped at Smardarpa. For the night we had snow water. On the 17th E. Jansen's little wagon overturned. The road had deep sand for 3 more miles. This was the most difficult part of the whole journey. All had to hitch extra horses to pull the wagons thru the sand. Night camp was made near a Kirrgiesh farm by the Snardarpa river. On the 18th the Johan Janzen's wheel broke. The road was still muddy. The 19th - a day of rest. Janzen's wheel was repaired and on the 20th at noon we were beside a river and spent the night there.

On the 21st we noticed the unusual tombs which the local inhabitants had built for their dead. They were of varied shapes and sizes; some with high cupolas, that could be seen from a distance. Late that evening we arrived in Karamakschi. The area was very hilly and in the rough driving we broke the kettles that had been tied under our wagons. On Sunday the 22nd we rested and also attended an engagement party for E. Riesen and M. Klenberg. Fish sold at very low prices here.

The 23rd around noon we started to move on when Abr. Epps Wallauch (horse) fell. We stayed overnight before a station. This night there was an eclipse of the moon, considerable snowfall and low temperature. On the 24th we stopped by a masonry lined well. In the afternoon Ewert's horse fell. Night camp was made one mile behind the station. The water from the wall was bad. On the 28th Mr. Harms' horse fell (died?) and also Abr. Paul's brown horse. All four horses apparently died from eating klee. On the 26th we arrived at the town of Perowsk. The roads were very rutty. Our camp was made at Snardarpa just outside the town. Some axles had broken again and we stayed here several days. On the water ice was forming rapidly and on the 29th the ice solidified so that by Monday the 30th people could walk on it. The 1st of December camels were being led across the ice. The temperature stood at 18 degrees. Fish were very cheap; carp of 3 lbs. sold for 5 kopecs each.

On the 2nd a sleigh load of wild pigs and Fasans (pheasants) were being sold at 10 kopecs a piece; they were very fat and pretty especially the roosters. The hends were plainer and gray. The woods were well treed with trees like our olive and other varieties. In the evening we stopped at a station. Water was 1 mile away at the river; the temperature 15 degrees. On the 34d we made only one station because

Mr. Hamm's wife was ill. The station was damaged by water. The cabins, for the travellers were also left to the care of those who occupied them. On the 4th we left this place late because Abraham's 3 year-old son died. The terrain was very hilly and we had to make many detours. On the 5th in the morning Mrs. W. Berg needed special care because of her illness. There was a shortage of beds and also food. However after breakfast we all moved on. After a while her illness re-occurred and she was delivered of a baby boy. Three families remained behind with them. The roads were rutty and snow fell often. At this time a rear wheel of my wagon broke; but we reached Fort Shulek. The families who had remained behind now arrived at our camp; which we had made between the town and a big ranch. Barasken, a shelter made of interwoven brush protected us from the wind. In one of these shelters we had our Sunday worship; and also observed the Lord's supper. The town and the Fort were small but neat.

Here we had to make some more axles. On the morning of the 7th a little daughter of the H. Bartsches died and also a one-year old son of the Abr. Janzens. On the 9th the bodies of the dead were buried in a common grave. The graveyard was overgrown with brush and was surrounded by a wall. The entrance was a beautifully ornamented gate with two wings similar to the cemetery of Fresenheim. During this time new axles had been made for our wagons. Wood for my wheel was not available so we lashed bars to the spokes and travelled 200 miles this way. The 9th we suffered from heavy frost; which lasted all week.

We turned left onto the caravan route and at noon stopped by a well. Travel here was difficult because of the sand hills and the deep canyons. Extra horses were used to pull the wagons through the hard places. After two canyons we camped for the night. About 2 miles ahead Nikkel's wagon overturned. The temperature; 22 degrees of frost. Because there was much wood in this place we built a big fire and kept warm at night.

The 10th we came upon the open steppes. Because there was no water we melted snow. Hilly roads and a deep snow necessitated extra horses. On the 11th, Dan's wagon arms broke. Some remained with him. The roads - very rutty. H. Albert's Lindenau wagon broke an axle in several places. We arrived at the station very much disorganized not having fed the horses at noon. H. Epp's wagon had turned over. I was driving on three wheels. The fourth having been tied up with bars. On the 12th, Saturday, our departure was rather irregular. Our caravan was divided into three sections and one section was divided into two parts. The main section in which we were arrived late. On Sunday the 13th Emil Riesens wedding took place. We used the buildings at the station. The second section of 16 wagons was at the half-way point. The third section, of 12 wagons about 7 or 8 miles back. Both sections were now on the open steppes in 25 degrees of frost. This cold lasted thru the 14th.

At noon, both of the belated sections arrived at our station; from which no one departed that day. On the 15th we ran out of barley and found no caravan Hostel. At noon we left the Sardarpa. It was extremely cold and we had to make our camp beside the road. Our train dragged thru the fields with difficulty. On the 16th a little daughter was born to the M. Hamms. Nine wagons stayed with them while the rest moved on because we were low on food and horse feed.

About three miles from the station there was an abandoned fortress of high walls. At noon we halted in a neat village. They had good klee. For the night we stopped at a caravan hostel. On the 17th we could see



mosques and the trees in Turkestan (city); arrived there at noon. On the 18th the parties who were following overtook us. Much snow had fallen in the city and the last part of their trip had been very difficult. About 1/3 of our group rented living quarters; the rest stayed in the Russian quarter; in a large square at the north end of town.

When the holidays (Christmas), were over we continued our journey on December 28. When the group from the northern part of town had travelled about 5 miles their horses were exhausted and most of the party had rented lodging; the last ones on the 29th.

By God's leading we remained here until the last of March. During our stay here we held regular Sunday worship services and one hour on Thursday evening; in a good sized room where school classes were held on weekdays.

Tuesday, the 30th of March, about one-third of our group drove out for about 4 miles where we camped and waited for the others who arrived around breakfast time. The road was easy now and the skies clear. We passed thru the village of Ikun at eventide. Here we purchased klee and passed on past the station because we heard that there was good water a few miles ahead. As it turned out the water was six miles away.

We made camp late, the horses were tired, and se settled in 3 parties. The first group by a bridge over a roaring stream. The 2nd group on a tributary of the stream, and the 3rd group farther back.. On the first of April we waited until noon until the last group caught up with us. In the afternoon one section crossed over the bridge and drove in water about a mile. Six horses were required to pull a wagon thru the muddy creek.

The others planned to follow late. The weather was rainy and windy, very uncomfortable, but it cleared up by evening. On the morning of the 2nd the water in the stream had risen up to the bridge. Some of the brethern had ridden to the stream to check the situation: they decided not to continue this time. On the 3rd as well as on Sunday the 4th, we remained here.

The weather was beautiful but our spirits were depressed. Some of us went to the other camp to bid them farewell because they had decided to remain a week. At noon Johan Janzen and Bartsch decided to leave but before they could hitch up, P. Epp's horse kicked Janzen's son on the head. He was carried to the wagon apparently dead. The journey was postponed until the 14th. The weather was mostly fair with some rain and pasture for the animals was plentiful. On the 14th afternoon, after a brief service, to which many brethern from the other camp came, we left in warm, 29 degree weather. The road was good at first and then became muddy. By evening some wagons were stuck. Six horses were needed to pull them out.

The 15th we were busy all day pulling our wagons thru the mud. Grazing was good here. On the 16th we had to make some detours to avoid the mud. We stopped at noon before an excavation that flowed deep and swift with water. A mile farther on we encountered another such excavation. Six horses were needed to pull each wagon and by sundown we were all thru.

The 17th we stopped because of Mr. Janzens wife, who was seriously ill. On the 18th we received guests from the border: Johan and Peter H. Janzen. On the 19th we continued on good roads under fair weather. The 20th, in

the morning, we moved on and crossed the wide and deep Schijan river. This took until noon. The area was infested with turtles. The 21st we crossed on the bridge of the Schijan. The banks were very steep and difficult. On the 22nd the area was more hilly and by noon we came to the much dreaded Ariel river. It is a wide torrential stream. We hired some Zarten guides who showed us a place where we could cross with four horses. The water came into the wagons, soaking everything that was placed on the floor.

By sundown we had all crossed the river. The evening of the 23rd we arrived in Tachenkent (Tashkent). Nothing of the city was visible until we drove into it. From the outside we saw only trees. This city presented no sights of special interest. The 23rd different opinions were expressed in our group. The brethren H. Epp and T. Hamm went to Tashkent to inquire about our situation. The 24th we stayed and the 25th was the day of rest. On the afternoon of the 26th we drove on. The brethren Bartsch and Johan Janzen left for Tashkent. The farewell caused heavy hearts. On the 27th the area was hilly. We had to apply the brakes often. There were many springs here and very good pasture. On the 28th we passed high mountains; some snow covered, and there were many canyons to cross.

On the 29th the road was very difficult because there had been a heavy rain. We left by our post road around 10 o'clock on a little travelled snow covered road that led to the place of our new settlement. This was a high plateau on which the grasslands were not as good as we had known them back home.

We continued along the plateau thru the 30th. On May the 2st the Molottschner, (people from the Molottschna colony) overtook us. They had gone to Auliatta, (maybe Alma Ata) to get their household goods. C. Wall was in their group. The rest continued on our course. Mr. Wall and two others remained with us. We desired very much to reach the place of our new settlement before night fall.

This completes the report by Heinrich Janzen, of our journey from the Volga river to Middle Asia.

*(Could be brother-in-law to Klass Epp)*