

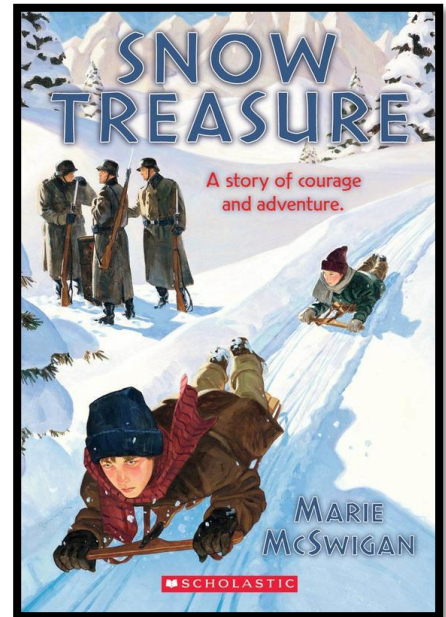
We Were There

July 25, 2022
Bergen, Norway

During the second world war my friends and I smuggled Norwegian gold through Nazi occupied territory. We careened down mountain slopes on sleds loaded with bullion, without raising the suspicion of German soldiers.

All good books transport the reader into the role of the protagonist. When I read *Snow Treasure* in about 1968, I easily transitioned from *Saskatchewan farm boy* to *Teenage Norwegian WWII Resistance Fighter*.

Snow Treasure is based on a true story. In April of 1940, gold from Norway's national treasury was smuggled out of the country and shipped to America for safekeeping. On one leg of the journey through the Scandinavian Mountains, a Norwegian teenager and his friends packed gold bouillon on their sleds and transported it down a mountain pass. Peter and the other courageous children smuggled Norway's entire treasury under the noses of Nazi soldiers.



I rode with them every slippery step of the way.

Norway was officially neutral at the start of World War II, but in the spring of 1940 Norwegian officials anticipated a German invasion. Declaration of war by Germany would allow the Nazis access to Norway's gold reserves to underwrite their war machine. Just days before the German occupation, all the gold from the treasury in Oslo was secretly moved by truck and rail to the mountain town of Lillehammer. When the German army marched into Oslo on April 9, 1940, they found no Norwegian gold to plunder.



Norway's treasury was temporarily safe in Lillehammer, but officials feared that it wouldn't be long before the Nazis discovered the location of the gold and seized it. The Norwegians urgently needed to transport 13 tons of bullion through occupied territory, to the port of Andalsnes, for shipment to America.

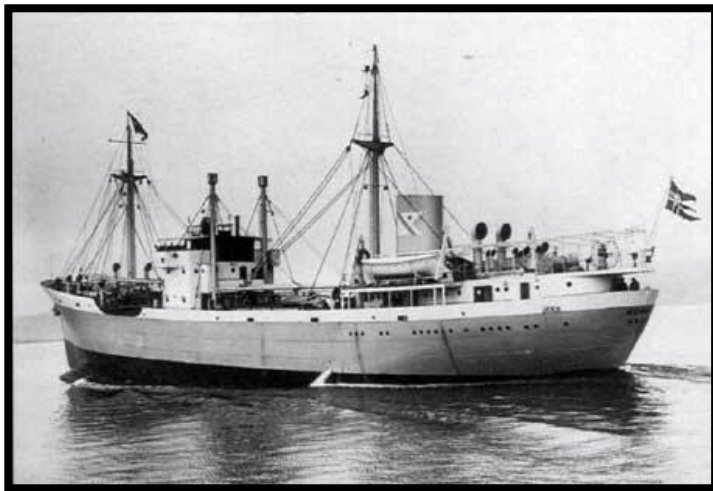
The rugged interior of Norway was sparsely occupied, but the port city of Andalsnes was teeming with Nazis. It wasn't difficult to transport the gold from Lillehammer to a secure location in the mountains 12 miles from the port, but the cargo could go no further. An ancient but friendly freighter, the *Bomma*, was docked at the port awaiting the precious cargo. The Norwegians had to find a way to transport it the final leg of the journey, past the Nazis without detection.



In the story, Peter overhears his father and other resistance personnel discussing the dilemma. Peter suggests he and his friends transport the gold by sled. Peter explains that the German soldiers are familiar with the children cruising the mountain slopes, so they would not suspect them of smuggling.

The Norwegian loyalists reluctantly agreed to the scheme. They mobilized a civilian army of children aged ten and older, to transport Norway's gold. Schools were closed for a fabricated measles epidemic, and healthy children were publicly encouraged to play outdoors.

The other Norwegian children and I took advantage of the school "holiday" to cruise the mountain slopes. We encountered sled malfunctions, curious Nazi soldiers, land mines, nose-y German doctors, and dozens of other dangerous situations, as we transported Norway's gold to safety.



On June 28, 1940, 300 million Norwegian Krone arrived in Baltimore aboard the freighter Bomma.

Snow Treasure was published in 1942. The author, Marie McSwigan, insisted that the book was based on true events, but there is a great deal of speculation about the veracity of her rendition of the story. Gold from the treasury in Oslo found its way to America, but how it got there is the subject of much discussion.

Peter and I know how it happened.

We were there.