

2015-24-02 SIDE A

Axel Edman

1970s?

Nome, Alaska?

Axel Edman explains that he will leave several feet of tape at the beginning of the tape for corrections.

Axel Edman talked about a correction to the distance from Bettles to Canyon Creek. Later on in the tape he said it was fifteen miles when it was actually 65 miles.

Edman said an old timer from Canyon Creek on the John River was named Bill McCandliss. He was able to get a couple of Portland businessmen to finance a mining operation at Canyon Creek. The boat, the Tanana, was once used to carry the mail and pushed a small barge. The business partners bought the Tanana. The trip up the river was hard on the businessmen. Edman and his partner were hired to help on the boat. They were to go up to Bettles. They arrived in Nenana and they started to work on the boat. The group broke up and only one of the original businessmen stayed on, Herb Byrum. They spent a month at Nenana. They promised Byrum that they would stay at Canyon Creek for the winter. Edman said McCandliss was a wonderful cook. When they left Nenana they loaded the boat heavier at the bow to keep the draft off the stern. The river had dropped since their trip upriver. They struck their first sandbar before the town of Nenana was out of sight. The boiler used a lot of wood. Later on the Koyukuk they would cut a tree down and do the final cutting on the barge. They made a stop at Ruby on the Yukon River and then on to Koyukuk Station. The river was shallow where the Koyukuk and the Yukon converged. There were no wood camps along the river and they had to stop to cut wood. The mosquitos were very bad. They tied up at night and had to sleep under bed nets. The lower part of the river up to Hughes was fairly deep. Edman said he would take a turn at the wheel. Above Hughes the river was swifter and shallower. He described cutting down the sweepers before they hit the pilot house.

Edman said between Hughes and Allakaket they broke the propeller shaft on the boat. They dragged the stern of the boat onto a sandbar. The shaft broke inside the boat. They made repairs using a universal joint. He talked about the grayling fishing. They saw mountain sheep close to the river and decided to hunt them without success. One of the people on the boat had made several trips on the river but every break up changed the course of the river. They were having trouble navigating the river. Edman described trying to get an outboard motor started. They also had a small rowing boat. After getting stuck on another sand bar they decided to take the rowing boat with the outboard motor to Bettles. Bettles had about twenty-five to thirty people. They could hear their motor coming up the river. They checked into Jack Dodge's roadhouse and went to Sam Duggan's store for supplies. It was run by Bill English. They went back down river. They knew the river channel now. They took a couple of days to get the Tanana up to Bettles. Jack White the trader was in town. He offered them the use of a large gas driven boat. They had to leave some of their equipment and supplies and they sold some of it to Duggan's store and stored some of it in town. They ran into Otto Geist in Bettles. He had been prospecting on the Wild River and the John River. Otto offered his services to act as their guide for the fifteen miles up to Canyon Creek, but they didn't accept his offer. They lined the boat in places. They

finally arrived at the mouth of Canyon Creek. They had a cabin and brought a 10 by 12 tent. McCandliss "Mac" was living in the cabin. He had been waiting for several weeks. Mac told them where his mining claims were located. He had one shaft on the claim. His partners had left the claim because they had been short of food and one of them wasn't feeling well. The morning after they arrived they headed to the mining claims. They arrived in the afternoon. Edman described carrying a stove up to the mining claims cabin. The other prospectors had sealed up the shaft that had been dug. The shaft was in permafrost and the seals prevented the shaft from melting. Edman took gravel from the bottom of the shaft. He talked about the mining equipment on the claim. Herb Byrum wanted to uncover the old shaft and go down and inspect it. Mac told him that they had drifted where they had hit bedrock. They removed the top covering. He was alone in the shaft when they removed the poles. He started to feel funny in his head and hollered for a rope. He tied it under his arms and got most of the poles removed. He realized later that he should have mentioned his feeling because a near tragedy happened a day later. They removed debris from the shaft with a small bucket. Byrum decided to go below and take a look. Herb went down holding a candle with one hand. The candle went out and Byrum told them to hoist him up. The ropes caught Byrum's feet and he came up unconscious. Byrum said he could feel himself losing consciousness but he didn't remember falling over. They checked the shaft by lowering a candle and a bucket with oiled rags. As soon as the light came even with the collar it went out. The shaft had been closed for some time and it was air tight. Gas had accumulated in the shaft. They had to remove the gas from the shaft. They ran a pipe down and after two days of steaming they could finally lowered a candle clear to the bottom. They changed to a bucket that Byrum could sit in and he went down the shaft again. A location for a new shaft to be dug the following winter was agreed upon. Byrum decided that he would depart for Bettles to try to get the Tanana up the river before freeze up. It didn't make it far and was pulled out of the water. When Byrum left, Edman said he, Mac and Ira started making plans for the coming winter. They packed up all their supplies from the cabin at the landing to the cabin at the mine where they were to spend the winter. It took many trips. Mac had four dogs and since there was no snow they couldn't use the sled. They made backpacks for the dogs to pack supplies. They decided to take the poling boat and the outboard for some supplies. They had to drift downstream. They loaded their supplies onto the boat and had a bit of trouble with the motor. They made it up to a cabin. The next day they found out that their propeller had fallen off. They decided to unload the boat and put the freight in the cabin and drift down to Bettles to look for a propeller. They had to make some major adjustments to a propeller they found to make it work. They made several miles and ran into several problems along the way. About a mile from the Timber Creek cabin the motor quit. They left the motor at the cabin. They loaded up their boat and poled and lined it all the way to Canyon Creek. They figured it would take them about three days. They always brought their rifles with them when they made camp. They saw fresh bear tracks on the sand bars every day. Ice was starting to freeze on the river. They finally made it to their landing cabin. The dogs let Mac know that they would be arriving and he had a meal ready for them.