

2015-24-02 SIDE B

Axel Edman

1970s?

Nome, Alaska?

Axel Edman said after they returned from their trip they pulled their boat out of the river and stored it for the winter. They moved to their main cabin. They started to tear down their boiler house to move it to their main cabin when there was snow on the ground. A few days later it started to snow. They went out to hunt moose. There were rabbits, spruce hens and a willow grouse. They set snares for the rabbits at night. They fed their dogs the rabbits. He described the successful moose hunt. They hauled the boiler, hoist and the logs to their main cabin. He started hauling wood. They used a sled to move the wood. He had wood for the boiler house and cabin. They started to dig another shaft and after three feet the water started seeping in. Mac suggested they wait a few days and the sides would freeze and seal off the water. In about a week they tried again and gained another three feet. They started using the hoist. They were having trouble with the boiler. Water started seeping in again. They waited two weeks and finally gave up on the new shaft. The equipment was not in good shape and they gave that project up. Mac knew of some creeks nearby where they could do some surface prospecting the next summer. It was late in December and they decided to go down to Bettles and spend Christmas there. They only had four dogs. They started in the morning from the lower cabin and made 22 miles. He talked about the cabin at Missouri Creek. They were familiar with the river by now after three trips and found one of their camps where he had left a rifle three months earlier. The rabbits had eaten the varnish on the stock of the rifle. They arrived at Bettles and celebrated Christmas. People from nearby creeks came in to celebrate and the town was crowded. There was a poker going on at all times. Every evening there was a dance. It was -40 outside so they kept the doors closed and the inside atmosphere was undesirable when you first walked in. It was still prohibition time in 1925, but every miner and trapper made their own moonshine and beer. Edman said even with all the liquor in town it was a peaceful Christmas with just a few arguments. They returned on December the 27th and there was very little daylight. The only danger in traveling was running into overflow and some unfrozen sections of the river. Their leader on the dog team was young and not experienced. They had to be on the alert at all times. They hoped to be home before there was a snowstorm. They made good time. At Missouri Creek there had been snow and they had a hard time finding trail to their cabin. Ira and the dog sled fell through the ice on the creek. Edman said he helped Ira out of the creek and ran to the cabin and started a fire. When Ira came into the cabin his clothes were frozen solid. It was snowing and blowing the next morning and they knew it would be rough going and so stayed at the cabin. Edman talked about the unwritten code of the old timers. They cut enough wood and prepared kindling for the next user of the cabin. While they were cutting wood they noticed a lot of open water on the creek. He thought the creek was fed by some warm springs and never froze in the winter. They saw small brook trout in the river and proceeded to do some successful fishing. He and Ira always carried rabbit snares with them. It was insurance for food for man and dog. They fed the dogs dried fish on the trail. The next morning the storm was even worse. Edman fished again and caught about 30 fish and they checked their snares for rabbits. The wind finally died down on New Year's Eve and they made a dash for home. The brought home mail and the

people of Bettles had given them a supply of magazines for reading. They told Mac about all the news about their trip and stayed up until 2016. Edman talked about Mac's talent for making pies.

On New Year's Day they did chores at the landing cabin and then returned to their main cabin. They had a lot of time on their hands. They set snares for lynx and never caught a thing. They snared rabbits. They decided to each make a sleeping robe out of rabbit skins. He talked about preparing the skins for the robes. They made another trip down to the Missouri Creek for more fishing.

Edman said the next part of the story will be the second chapter of the book, "Joining the Wilkins arctic expedition: traveling by dog team to Point Barrow." Unknown to them while they were on the Johns River there was an expedition being organized by the Detroit Aviation Society known as the Detroit Arctic Expedition headed by Captain George Hubert Wilkins. Two airplanes had been purchased and placed on a steamship then shipped by train to Fairbanks. It was intended that Wilkins and a pilot and co-pilot would use a tri-motor airplane and fly over the North Pole to Norway. Another overland expedition was being organized in Nenana. It was headed by Alexander Malcolm Smith. They had three snowmobiles and double-end sleds. The "snowmotors" did not do well on the rough ice of the Tanana River. He talked about the problems of the machines. They also had 13 Siberian dogs from Lenard Seppala which were to be the emergency transportation for the expedition. The snowmotors were given up after a few miles from the start. They had to have additional dogs and drivers for the trip. They hired a team from Tanana. The purpose of the overland expedition was to arrive at Barrow. The expedition was to establish a weather station there and transmit weather information to Wilkins prior to his take off on his first flight to Barrow. Edman talked about the radio equipment. The equipment was loaded on a Yukon sleigh equipped with a g-pole. There was also the usual trail gear. When the expedition left Tanana there were four teams with 43 dogs. Before traveling too far they realized the loads were too heavy. Another team was purchased from Whiskey Jack and a trading sleigh. This team were all big Yukon River huskies and they were not to be trusted. Now there were 54 dogs and five teams in total. Every part of Alaska was traveled by dog team in 1926. The trails were usually on the rivers and there were cutoff trails connecting rivers and villages. The expedition cut across from the Yukon River into the Koyukuk River. They came into the Alatna village and then followed the river to Bettles. At Bettles they picked up another dog team. Some of the dogs had traveled all the way from Nenana and were slowing down a bit. They picked up another dog team at Bettles. They left Bettles and proceeded up the Johns River. They arrived at the Canyon Creek camp on March 16, 1926. Their own dogs started making a fuss in the evening. They could see the expedition coming up the river. Alexander Smith introduced himself and introduced the rest of the expedition. The men set up their tent and unhitched the dogs. Mac prepared dinner for the whole group. After dinner Smith talked about the trials and experiences of the expedition. At the summit one of the dog teams was supposed to turn back. Smith asked Ira and Edman to join the team. Ira did not want to go. Edman said he didn't have the proper clothing and sleeping gear. Smith talked him into going on the expedition. They started up the river and the traveling was slow. There were a lot of places with polished ice and the dogs had a hard time on the ice. He was not impressed with some of the expedition equipment. There were lots of ammunition and guns. There was a shortage of food and fish for the dogs. They did have cans of tallow. After they made camp on the first day he went hunting. They brought back rabbits. Edman talked about one of the dog drivers using a g-board. It was used for freighting heavy loads. The board was built like a miniature toboggan. After leaving the timberline there was a gradual climb to the summit.

They crossed over the divide and into the Anaktuvuk watershed. They made camp in a patch of willows. There were remnants of sod igloos there. The temperature dropped to -29 degrees. Smith kept records of the temperatures. Three of the drivers and two teams turned back at this point. Edman decided that the expedition was headed for a bad future. The loss of the dog team meant that the freight had to be split with the rest of the dog teams. Smith was upset when Edman told him that he would also be leaving the expedition. Edman felt sorry for him and decided to stay with the team. They decided to rest the dogs before starting out again. They sorted out the equipment. They could see mountain sheep and they decided to go hunting. He hunted with Charlie Harper. They had meat for quite some time. They fed some of the meat to the dogs. Edman said he drove the Whiskey Jack team. He had a Yukon sled with a g-pole. He thought he had the meanest team of the expedition. They traveled on the upper Anaktuvuk River. They saw an object on the river and it turned out to be a poling boat. He found out later that Jack Nygard and Jack Smith had dragged the boat over the Pass from the John River. As they left the mountain the snow depth increased. They had to have a man on snowshoes ahead of the teams breaking trail. At one point they had to have three men breaking trail. They always had to have someone stay with the dogs because of the fighting which started on the spur of the moment. If no one was there to watch over the dogs one of them could be killed or crippled. Alexander Smith was always in the team and he was in the rear with his heavy sled. [most of this part of the recording fades in and out] Edman talked about their chores in the evening including feeding the dogs.