

2015-24-03 SIDE A

Axel Edman

1970s?

Nome, Alaska?

Axel Edman said for some unknown reasons the thermometers broke. They guessed the temperature. Each one would go outside and guess the temperature and then they divided the sum by five. They had run out of toilet paper and used snow. They were eating only one meal a day. They had two stoves and a good supply of kerosene. There was very little wind on the Anaktuvuk River. His homemade sleeping robe often froze to the snow. During very cold nights his sleep was limited. They were losing a lot of weight. They had used up the oatmeal and cornmeal on the dogs. They used their rice sparingly. He talked about the extreme predicament they were in. They had to wear sunglasses at all times. They were cooking up the last of the cornmeal for the dogs. They decided to kill one of their dogs to eat it. They told everyone else that they had killed a snowshoe rabbit. Despite their constant use of sunglasses they all suffered from snow blindness. On cloudy days it was even worse. They found out that used tea leaves could be used as a poultice on their eyes.

One day they came on a grove of cottonwoods. It was on an island in the river. They didn't see cottonwood any other place on the river. They did not cook for the dogs anymore. When a dog died they carried the carcass on the sled and then fed it to the other dogs. Sandy made a decision while they were at the cottonwood grove. He assembled everyone and told them that they were down to two teams of dogs. They picked out eleven of the best dogs. Sandy and Herb were to leave together. They were to build snow igloos at night since they wouldn't be taking a tent. Sandy had heard that there were Eskimos living at the Colville River. They were camped not too far from the confluence of the Anaktuvuk River and the Colville River. They planned on killing caribou and returning to the cottonwood camp. Sandy was hopeful of getting supplies from the Eskimos. Edman said the Eskimos on the coast were great hunters and usually had a good supply of seal and walrus meat. Sandy told Edman that he felt good about leaving him in charge of the camp. If they weren't back in seven days they were supposed to start for the coast. Edman said when it seems like everything looks hopeless some people give up. He was the one to take charge and take care of business. He felt that it was not a duty placed on him, but a responsibility for the other two men. He was suffering from snow blindness. He was determined to live. He went out to look for dry wood. He heard a noise and found ptarmigan. He returned to camp and picked up his gun. He applied snow to his ailing eyes. He fired the gun into the flock and killed three birds. He recovered the birds which were camouflaged in the snow. The weather had turned warm during the day and they started to cook for the dogs again. He kept himself busy around camp. He said they had quite a supply of dog harnesses. They had lost more than twenty dogs up to that point. He got rid of the extra harnesses and tow lines. He tried hunting again but did not see any more signs of ptarmigan. They were down to twenty-one dogs including the dogs who went to the coast. Some of the dogs were getting very weak. On the afternoon of the sixth day Sandy and Herb returned to camp with an Eskimo and a team of nine dogs.

Edman told the story about Sandy's trip to the coast. Sandy and Herb traveled on the Colville River. There was a lot of overflow. They camped in a snow block shelter. They started out the day after having a cup of tea. They found a cache of fish which they ate and fed their dogs. Sandy and Herb arrived at the

Itkillik Village at the mouth of the Itkillik River. He believed the village was later abandoned. Sandy and Herb were welcomed by the chief. He described the igloo they slept in. Their clothing was mended by the women while they slept. Sandy was given supplies when they left the village. Someone volunteered to go to the reindeer camp and brought back reindeer carcasses for them. One of the Eskimos volunteered to go on the return trip and guide them. They were told to help themselves to the fish cache. After Sandy and Herb returned to the cottonwood camp with the supplies. They cooked for the dogs. Several of the dogs were beyond help. They were left with fourteen dogs. The dogs reacted to their change in diet as did the men. Sandy brought a reindeer skin sleeping bag for Edman. Sandy decided to cache the radio equipment. They split the dogs into two teams. They left for the coast the next morning with the Eskimo helping to guide them. Sandy planned to return later for the cached radio equipment. They arrived at Itkillik and Sandy decided to hire another dog team. He was told that there were no available dog teams at Beechey Point. Herb and Edman were to stay at the trading post at Beechey Point. They were to wait until the dog team had recovered and then they would continue their trip to Barrow about two hundred miles away. They waited at Beechey Point for ten days. It was the month of May. He didn't know what happened to the equipment that was left behind.

Edman returns to the story about their trip. They left with their two dog teams and couldn't keep up with the Eskimo team. They arrived at the fish cache and enjoyed the frozen fish. They arrived at the village of Itkillik. They all stayed in the chief's igloo. He described the conditions in the igloo. They ate stew cooked by the chief's wife. This was the first time they had seen muktuk.