

2015-24-03 SIDE B

Axel Edman

1970s?

Nome, Alaska?

Axel Edman said he tried eating muktuk, but couldn't chew it. He wanted to set up the tent that evening, but the others wanted to stay in the sod igloo. He described everyone sleeping in the igloo.

The next morning they all departed. Edman went over to Beechey Point. He said when traveling through the Arctic everything is magnified perhaps because of the light. Something may appear large when it actually is quite a bit smaller. Things looked different from a distance. He told a story about an early explorer discovering an island in the Polar Regions. His observations were taken and plotted and printed on early maps. Later explorers in the same location and did not find anything. It was all a mirage. They saw the trading posts a dozen times before their arrival. They finally arrived at Beechey Point and were welcomed by Tony Edwardson and his wife who ran the trading post. He worked for the Levon Fur Company of San Francisco. The trading posts were all owned by the same company in Barrow and Wainwright. Charles Brower ran the trading post at Barrow and Jim Allan ran the store at Wainwright. A boat supplied all the trading posts once a year. When the fur prices were high the Charles B Brower ship would carry over a million dollars' worth of goods to San Francisco including furs, ivory and whale baleen. Later the company left the arctic and the traders stayed on for a number of years. They later gave up because the ship was no longer resupplying them. Another factor that contributed to the economy of the arctic was tied with baleen. When women stopped using corsets there was no longer a need for baleen. After the whaling ships left the Eskimos still continued to hunt whales. Whale meat and muktuk was a mainstay in their diets. The baleen was still sought after for the use in the manufacture of baskets and trinkets sold to tourists. The whale hunting was carried on at the edge of the shore ice. Camps were established on the ground ice. Unlike the whaling ships cruising the Arctic areas the Eskimo was limited to the immediate area. If the whaling party captured three whales in a season it was considered a good year. Edmund said he spend several days in whaling camp at Pt. Barrow. He said one can't help marvel at the patience and determination of the Eskimo whale hunters. He described the trading post at Beechey Point which included the home of the Edwardsons. There was a large storage attic above the store for the furs. The Edwardsons were good cooks and congenial. When they first arrived Edwardson thought they were thin and miserable looking. Tony got them cleaned the first day. They shaved for the first time in a long time. Sandy had given them money and they used it for new clothing. They burned their old clothing. Pete Rand was staying in Beechey Point. He owned a small trading schooner called the Orient. Pete told him that he had spent several winters traveling the arctic coast as far as Herschel Island. Pete had purchased the Orent in Nome several years before with a partner. When the partner decided to make the arctic his home they split up. When he returned in 1925 the approaching winter forced him to winter at Beechey Point. He talked about the caribou Eskimos. They were the gypsies of the Arctic. They never had a permanent camp. They followed the caribou herds. In the summer they lived in skin huts and in the summer they lived in snow igloos. While at

Beechey Point their time consisted of eating, sleeping, cooking and caring for their dogs. They had to exercise the team each day. They had to be careful about feeding the once starved dogs. They fed smaller amounts twice a day and later switched to once a day.

The Edwardsons hauled ice for fresh water. They hauled the ice from a lake a mile from the trading post. The ice had been cut earlier in the winter. Later in the winter it freezes to six feet or more and is too hard to handle and cut. It was stacked in a huge pile on top of the lake ice. This provided their team with the necessary exercise. A load of ice would be brought in from the lake every day. There was another small trading post west of the Edwardson's trading post. It was established by Captain Peterson who owned a large trading vessel. Peterson would leave all of his remaining trading goods at this place. There was always an amount of jealousy in the traders. Edwardson discouraged them from visiting Peterson's store. The Peterson store keeper was happy to see them. They spent several hours at his store. 1925 must have been a good year for furs because the shelves were almost bare.

After spending a week with the Edwardsons and their dogs being well rested they were ready for the trail again. Someone spotted a dog team came in from the west. They were coming from Cape Halkett for supplies. He brought furs for trading. When he heard they were going to Pt. Barrow he offered to travel with them. They told him about their experiences. He didn't think they could travel as far as Cape Halkett the first day considering the condition of the dogs and they would spend one night on the ice of Harrison Bay.

Pete Brant told him that he would stay with the Edwardsons until break up and then take his schooner to Barrow. Pete told him about his past life as a merchant sailor. He had been in the U.S. Coast Guard and served on the Cutter Bear in the arctic. He got a transfer to Nome. He served several years under Thomas Ross. After his duty with the Coast Guard he traded on the Siberian coast and in the Arctic. Edmund said he lived until he was ninety.

They left Beechey Point. The Native driver prediction about their dogs was true. They transferred some of their load to his sled to make it easier for their tired team. They camped on the ice after about thirty miles. They made a hut from snow blocks. It was not too cold. The dogs started out slowly. Edmund said he was also out of shape. After a few miles they limbered up. They arrived in Cape Halkett and they stayed overnight with their guide. After dinner Joe Espe called in. He said he had a lot of furs to dispose. He wanted to join them on their trip to Barrow. From their first day out to the time they reached Barrow there was noted improvement in their dogs and progress. They stopped one day and started to cut snow blocks to build a shelter. When it was almost finished the top of the igloo fell in. They went back to a shelter with ice blocks on the sides and a canvas top. The Eskimos don't use the snow igloo. They always use the same shelter as they had been using. They arrived in Barrow on the sixth day of their travels.

He said there are some parts of the narrative needing clarification. He was often asked after his trip why they went down the Anaktuvuk River to get to the coast. Prior to leaving Nenana Sandy plotted the route along with Captain Wilkins. Edman described the route they chose. Edman wonders if the advice from the old timers in Bettles was from experience in the Endicott Range. Sandy was blamed for the near disaster of their route. Most of his experience in the Arctic was gained in Siberia. He had once been arrested there on suspicions of being a spy. Edmund said Sandy never had intentions of ever returning to Siberia although there was a newspaper report of him doing so. When they reached Barrow they stayed in a building occupied by other members of the expedition. Charlie Brower provided their meals. Fred Hopson was the cook. He had arrived on a whaling ship and settled into Barrow. Charles Brower

always carved at the table. Wilkins was not happy that they had not brought all the equipment with them. They had to explain the circumstances to him. Wilkins and Eielson made three trips to Barrow in Fokker planes. The planes had been brought to Fairbanks in 1926. Eielson had overshot the field and bent the propellers. Ben Eielson told him about his first trip to Barrow. Edmond quoted Wilkins describing time the first landing in the plane with Major Lanphier. They spent many weeks repairing the plane. While Wilkins was in Barrow he heard that the plane, The Detroit, would not perform well on their trip and would not be able to fly over the Endicott Mountains (Brooks Range). When Wilkins returned to Fairbanks he convinced his pilot and other men to continue working on the plane. Wilkins wanted Eielson to fly the plane, but did not have the experience to do this. Major T.P. Lanphier ended up flying the plane to Barrow and it was in Barrow when Edmond came in from Beechey Point.

Their guide from Beechey Point to Barrow refused pay for his services. He wanted to buy their lead dog after seeing how they performed on the trail. They offered him the whole team, but he only took the lead dog and two other dogs.

Edman said Captain Wilkins appointed him helper to Major Lanphier and Charles Wisely working on the tri-motor Fokker. Prior to landing the right engine had started to lag. Lanphier had to fight to control the plane the last hour they were in the air. Edman described how he helped and how the two men and Wilkins did not get along. He talked about Amundson flying over the area and scaring a Native hunter out on the ice with his dog team. Wilkins was getting to be restless. The ice was beginning to melt and could not support the weight of the airplane. He described the plane trying to take off. They cleared the snow off from an area 60 feet wide and 1200 feet long. Everyone in Barrow helped. Edman described the take off. The plane was damaged and repaired. During the night strong winds drifted snow on the landing strip and the snow had to be cleared again. Some of them agreed to stay in Barrow until the summer. Edman said he did not want to take a trip over the mountains in a crippled airplane. Wilkins, Lanphier, Wisely, Smith and Rosley went on the plane. He watched the plane clear the snow at the end of the runway by two feet. Washkie, Anderson and Edman stayed behind. The New York Times had dispatched a reporter to cover the flight of the North by the name of Lyons and a radio operator by the name of Bundy. They traveled by dog team up the coast. Wilkins told his group not to associate with the journalists, but after Wilkins left they spent many pleasant days together. After storing all the gear belonging to the expedition they had nothing to do. They were waiting for the Cutter Bear scheduled to arrive the first part of August. They were to take the Bear to Nome. Charles suggested they take a trip to Wainwright to visit the store keeper, Jim Allan. They could return on the Charles Brower trading ship in July. The shore ice was good and they traveled by dog team. Jim was happy to hear they would be staying in Wainwright. Shortly after they arrived the Eskimos killed a whale and plans were made for a big celebration. The whale meat was laid out and everyone in the village helped themselves. They had Eskimo dances, wrestling and high kicking. Edman described Eskimo wrestling and high kicking. In July the ice pack moved off the beach at Wainwright and it could be seen several miles offshore. One day a Native came into the store and told Jim Allan that walrus had been seen. They were invited to join the hunt. Edman said they left in the morning in umiaks. Jim was named captain of their ship which meant he had first shot. They approached within 50 feet of the hundreds of walrus on the ice. Edman said caution and quiet had to be maintained at all times. There was always a big bull acting as a look out. When the bull raised his head and looked around all paddling stopped. As soon as the bull was down again the paddling resumed. When they were close enough all the guns fired. There was a mad scramble of the huge animals and the noise sounded like a tornado. One big wounded bull headed for one of the

skin boats. The bull punched a hole in the boat with one of his tusks. The boat was kept from sinking by one of the hunters plugging the hole with his foot. The hunting party landed on the ice flow and counted 15 killed walrus. Two additional wounded walrus were pursued and killed. The Eskimos started cutting up the meat at once. It was necessary to make several trips to bring in all the meat. Edman said in order to make a clean kill the hunter must shot at the head or neck or the animal will take to the water and then be lost. When they stopped for lunch the Eskimos cut open the stomachs of the walrus and ate the clams in the stomach. Edman and Herb both tried this delicacy. They left the rest of the walrus on the ice overnight. The next morning the Bureau of Indian Affairs boat was anchored offshore. The captain offered to help the Natives move the rest of the meat.

Herb and Edman helped Jim Allan prepare the contents of the warehouse for the arrival of the Charles Brower ship. Three miles south of Wainwright there was a small trading post established by Roald Amundsen with large amounts of merchandise left over after one of his arctic expeditions. It was operated by a man named Dick Hall. Herb and Edman decided to walk down for a visit. Jim tried to discourage them from going. A snowstorm came up and they couldn't return. They had to spend the night with Dick Hall. They sat up all night listening to his stories. Hall said as soon as the merchandise at the trading post was gone he would head south. When the Charles Brower arrived they left on it for Pt. Barrow. The schooner Bayshimo (?) arrived at Barrow. It was sailing under British flag and was the supply ship for the Royal Canadian Mounties east of the Canadian border. The schooner also handled supplies and furs for traders in the Mackenzie River area. The ship was well known for their hospitality. A few years later the Bayshimo was caught in pack ice. The crew made their way to shore and all the valuable cargo was left.

The Charles Brower boat was large and had to anchor offshore and the cargo lightered to shore. The Cutter Bear arrived in Barrow on August 14, 1926 and was commanded by Captain Cochran. Edman said he had spent a pleasant summer at Barrow and Wainwright but he missed the luxuries of civilization. The accommodations on the Bear were somewhat crowded since there were eight people leaving Barrow. Pete Brand had arrived from Beechey Point and decided to return to Nome. The crew on the Bear all slept in hammocks. He described getting into a hammock. He found it to be very comfortable.