

Fred Wilkenson

9.28-13

Circle Mining District

2014-10-09

when start?

when I was about 10 days old, my folks lived out there. My mom had to go to Fbks for my birth and then they usually a week in the hospital - so I was about 10 days old when I came out here. I have no memory of it.

My folks moved outside after that, so I didn't come back until I was going on 12. My dad went into partnership with my uncle, Franklin Kelly. He had Hodgkins Disease kind of terminal, ~~that year~~ the next year he was even too sick to even make it and he died that fall. My dad was pretty much running it then.

? what creek?

on Miller Creek, that's just on the other side of Eagle Summit as you descend into the valley.

? How busy were things back then?

It was a different culture. We had mail once a week, either Friday or Sat night. It was at the Miller House. It was a gathering point for the miners came down from the creeks, get mail, swap stories, tell about the things that go wrong. That part hasn't changed.

you didn't get visitors on the creek then as you do now.

? you went out for the mail?

There was a freight delivery from Fbks once a week - Originally it was Oscar Bradley, and then - the last one was Bob Casey. Slim Baxter was the one in between.

(2)

He got into a freak accident, and he was apparently driving with his arm hanging out of the window in the summer time, and someone clipped his arm and that destroyed his driving career.

? Bad road?

Oh yeah. It was twisty, it would make a turn to get 90° to get over that ditch line. You could see corduroy coming through in places. Narrow, but it was accepted because it was a connection.

? Were people on Miller & Mastador at the same time?

Oh yeah. We owned all the claims - I take that back. There were 3 claims that Jack Anderson patented; my folks bought them later. He had was kind of unique. He had his claims patented. Also, his brother was drowned on the Princess Sophia, and he took over that operation. Seven claims patented there. Ed & Jenny Gelvin's place in Central was his homestead. He was smart enough to do that. Nowadays you can't hardly acquire land.

? What kind of equipment, operations did people have?

✓ We just had one bulldozer. The only mechanical equipment. We had 2 rumps which we, one was for stripping. Originally, we were somewhat down on the lower end of Miller Creek. The pay was under a bench under black muck,

? Hydraulic?

Yeah - for stripping.

(3)

cut to push in to a sluice plate. Originally, the year we came there it was - my uncle had wings on the sluice box. That was the first real development. The first one we had, it was just some rough cut 2x12s with some flattened hydraulic pipe over it on the box.

The next winter my dad built one. At that time we wintered in Seattle, north of Seattle. Had it shipped up. We used that the rest of the time.

? In the 50s?

✓ 40s + 50s. 1948 was the 1st year we were there.

? Good creek, Miller Creek?

✓ It had its good places. There were some good years and bad years. The last few years my dad did fairly good. And then, unfortunately, going upstream, you always mine upstream, you run into old workings and that's when he quit.

? Gone back to Miller Creek?

I'm planning on going back, probably when this cut is done. I've got a lot of stuff to move back, so it's gonna be a considerable time, plus, when you're on federal claims, there's so many gov't problems, I just want to get away from it.

(4)

? State Claims on Miller Creek?

No. The upper claims are fed. claims, mostly worked out. They were my grandfathers. I'm holding on to them out of sentimental... The lower ground I have patented, so I have the ~~or~~ old 3 plus 5. It's going to be selective places here and there. I'm 77, how much longer ~~farther~~ I'm going to go, who knows.

? Miller House? Send gold out?

My dad didn't. He usually took it out. In the early days there was a US mint in Seattle. After that closed, it was shipped to S.F. The mint in Seattle, they would allow him in there, you had to sell your gold to the US govt then. Anything that was stolen, they were so practiced in it, they could tell where it came from.

? what fineness of your gold?

Miller Creek run probably 81 to 83 percent. most of the rest was silver, of course, or something else, which they never identified.

Circle Digt is kind of unique because it varies all over the place. Like Eagle Creek is over 90 percent. Crooked Creek where Stan is, below the Tintina Fault. I think it runs 85-86, and above the fault it's 80. And then, clear down to Hay Dolan Creek, I've been told that's running about 88 percent. most of them run around 80, in the 80 percent range. Ketchikan, high 77's usually. It's not a high ass <sup>er</sup> ~~side~~, but it's not a low ass <sup>er</sup> creek either.

(5)

? most have one bulldozer then? Some of them had 2. a few of them had draglines, my dad was always gonna get a dragline, but he never made the commitment, cause when you had a tailings sump then, you had no tracks in, you ate them out pretty quick. we had to buy a new set of tracks about every other year just digging in that sump and the water and abrasions.

? Cable lift or hydraulic bulldozer?

It was a hydraulic, what they call an Issacson, it wasn't a Caterpillar. It was a D-8, my uncle bought it new in 1947, the year before we came there. He'd bought two dozen before surplus from the army, probably on the alan. It was still pretty primitive compared to today, it had an Issacson blade, hydraulic cable blades just did not dig good.

? Get to work on equipment?

Oh, yes. and drove it. the worst part of it, you had to grease all the rollers, which was - it was a real sticky, semi-thin grease. you got it all over you. It was every other day my brother and I had to clean the rollers, grease them, and fill it up.

? Learn mechanics? things to do. about every 2 years.

Yeah. about every ~~year~~ years. Not only that the seals on the final drives weren't real good. They had full yellow seals and they would go out. So, when we changed out, we'd go into each final drive. It was maybe about a week of hard work.

(6)

My dad, he never run the dozer much. The 2nd year he hired a friend of his for 2 yrs. Dad had a problem with severe hammerheads. He couldn't take sitting and bouncing in the seat that long. About that time my mother and I were about 14, 15. We'd each ~~worked~~ <sup>worked</sup> half a day. The other half was breaking rocks in the sluice box. And in between that, we were out in the cut busting rocks so they'd go through the sluice box.

? Rake rocks?

It was a shovel. You put it in. The water was going so fast, the shovel would flare it. Usually your bottom end was wet. It was semi-miserable, if it was a warm day it was all right, but if it was cold and towards fall, it wasn't much fun.

Mining has changed since then.

When I came back in '68 - well, my folks had leased to somebody, but ~~I took it~~ it had some problem with them, I took it. Never got sluing, never paid royalties, because my folks only had it for 10 years, and always an excuse. My folks turned it over to me in the fall of '68. I came back there. He'd left a lot of the equipment right in the middle of the stream during that '67 flood destroyed a bunch of stuff, and I had to rebuild the dozer. I had bought another dozer that was cable operated. I pretty much worked by myself.

In the interim years I'd worked as an equipment operator, a number of years at the

(7)

coal mines at Healy, also operating engineers all over the northern and central part, so it's most of what I'd seen in ~~the central~~ <sup>the</sup> and Circle areas, I've seen working construction not as a tourist.

? Lot of heavy equip operator?

Yeah.

? Do welding?

Yes. I don't call myself the best welder but I do it.

✓ You've got to be pretty universal: operator, decision maker, manage the books, try and make a profit, an expedite <sup>in the summer</sup>

✓ My parents - my dad <sup>like</sup> would only go to town once in the summer. Of course we had freight delivery, but not a lot. You were more self-reliant back then. Now, with everything turned mechanical, you've got so many things that break down, so you're - I don't think I ever ~~gone~~ two weeks without having to go to ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> for something.

? Shoots a whole day?

✓ A secondary reason. We grow up eating out of tin cans. I could do without that, so I like more fresh stuff. Back then we had no refrigeration. We'd get an order of meat <sup>originally</sup> from Weither Brothers, and then from Quality meats. First day we'd have steaks, 2nd day roasts, 3rd day it was whatever was left. and then back on canned stuff because that was

(8)

about the limit of things without spoilage.

? Go to the Hot Springs?

There were a couple of summers, late 70s, early 80s, I had people working for me that were pretty good swimmers and they insisted on going.

When I moved to Ketchikan, the first few years I got a season pass for over there. That kinda wore thin and I didn't do it much. After a long days work, I just want to relax.

? Did you build a place in Central that you stay in now?

No - ? Place on your claims?

You don't own ~~any~~ claims. Everything's gotta be moved out of there when you leave. I tried for 20 something years. They've got a <sup>plotted</sup> subdivision on the Ketchikan Creek Road. I can't get them to sell anything. <sup>It's</sup> The State bureaucracy you're dealing with. It's ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> as bad as the federal bureaucracy. I nominated land for sale, and now that I'm leaving, they'll probably put it up for sale.

? Do you deal with federal regs - fed. claims?

Yeah.

? Corps of Engineers?

Yes, so far I've had no real problems. They give jurisdiction over wetlands. I ~~do~~ They could be a problem, but they're not. EPA water quality, but this year [2013] it switched to the state. It's hard to... Just because of Things? You can't control, you try your best. It bleed on the creek. It don't take much.

(9)

Personally, I like the old days. It was muddy where you sluiced. When you shut down, an hour later everything was running clean. It was running clean til the next morning.

? Changed to recycle sands? Big deal for you?  
On Ketchum before they did, I still had did it because Ketchum was such a low water creek. I moved there, took up Joe Vogler's ground and he let me the lease on the lower claim or two. I stripped the lower the fall of '84. I was trying to make payments for a big loan that. The last year I couldn't do it on Miller creek. It was just too - I switched there and got my loan paid off to buy some equipment. Lower Ketchum was a good creek. ~~For~~ Personally, I mined it all out.

? ~~at~~ above the Tertiary gravels?  
No, it was in granite. Granite was decomposed bedrock. It had absolutely no pay in it. Just above it was kind of a sediment layer and that was the best pay

? much overburden to strip off?  
Not a lot. It was difficult overburden, sticky, couldn't stack it. You just kept at it.

? after Miller, went to Ketchum?  
In '84 I started on Miller. I wasn't going to have good enough ground to pay that loan off, and I had a little claim on

mastodon creek and I moved over there and mined there. It was a bench claim, pretty good face pay. Of course, it didn't go into the bench very far.

Joe I was feeling kind of sorry for myself, ~~an~~ you know who Bernie Karl is, don't you? He was a miner back then. He had these hog feeds on lower Gold Dust. I was there and Joe was there, kinda telling my problems. And he says "well, why don't you try Ketchum creek?" and I was dumbfounded because so many people tried to get a lease from Joe, but he would not lease it to them, and he didn't do much mining himself. He'd go there for a few weeks, to his claims on Woodchopper for a few weeks, work on his road in his subdivision for a few weeks.

? He was generous to some people?

Yeah. I've been there ever since except I had a problem with the BLM later on over stuff. Joe wanted to - hard to explain. It was 3 of us he had leases on at that time, and he ordered us all off the creek. That was just a year before he disappeared. So, I moved off and was gonna do some mining on Upper Crooked Creek, way above where Stan is mining, above the Tintina Fault. I ~~had~~ stripped some ground and started testing, got to bedrock and started testing. It was pretty poor. So I just put the stripping back over it. That time, Joe's nephew Lynn who I'm leasing from

(11)

now, took over, originally as a guardian of the estate, and finally he inherited the property and I went back on Ketchum.

2. How many miles have you worked on Ketchum?

It's been discontinuous. Before that, I worked the right limit on the lower claims which was real good, and switched to the left limit. It was lean, but I was doing all right. And then it started getting leaner and leaner, and pretty soon nothing. So, Lynn give me a lease up above and I mined from around 2000 and finished up the year before last.

Then, I got delayed by the BLM. That road up there was an existing road, but it was too narrow, all grown in. Somehow, for an existing road I had to get a permit, and put it in 6 months ahead of time. I was planning on starting that the latter part of 2011. Anyhow, permits weren't in, they were filed in Nov. which was too late for them to OK my permit, so it cost me a lot of time. I spent a good part of last summer developing it, ~~with~~ widening that road out, ditching it. That tunnel it's about a 18 foot wide stance plus a little cushion too, you know.

I didn't get a lot done this year because of breakdowns. Should be good to go next year.

3. How did you handle that conveyor belt off there?

(12)

It's almost 60 inches wide, I brought it into town, because of rock piling, they had a mechanical splice that wouldn't hold up. Vulcanizing vice. It was hard to get a hold of people, they were busy. They do work for Fort Knox, Pogo mine. I finally got them in early summer and got it done. Then loaded up and hauled it out. I had some problems with the truck, I got in late and I was tired. When I tried to lift it off the truck, I dumped it and damaged it. I spent quite a bit of time rebuilding that. Took a bad hit.

? moving it around, you had to use an excavator?

The people below me got a new loader, ~~and~~ you can interchange the bucket and forks. I borrowed it and put the forks on. I was just too tired, it was late at night. It was something I shouldn't have done. I should have waited until the next morning, but I didn't.

? Describe your Trommel?

On Miller Creek - let's back up a little bit. I used my dad's sluice box, and his cat which was matched. I decided to get a D-9. There were not 9s used in mining back then. I was probably the first. Nowadays, D-10s are common.

There was no point in doing that. There would be a bottleneck for sluicing - just too much capacity. So, I built a new sluice box. The old one was 32 inches wide. I built one 64 inches wide. On Miller Creek I just jinned the dirt through. I moved a lot of dirt.

(13)

I did all right. Went to Ketchikan with no water in the granite formation with a lot of boulders, just wouldn't do. I'd run across - he was a scrap dealer in Redmond, Washington. I bought a whole bunch of used 2 1/2 inch diameter pipe that was surplus, I think from Weyerhaeuser. They had railroad tracks in it. It was a pressure vessel. I think it was a thousand feet long. He bought some of it, and was making boats out of it. But I talked him out of enough to build that trammel.

We had it built at the welding shop here in Fox. We started and finished up on the creek. I don't know how I did it because I hadn't cleared my debt - but I knew what I wanted. I designed it all and had a good <sup>drafts</sup> ~~press~~ lady draw it all up to impress the bank. That was the old First National Bank, and they went along and financed me, which I always appreciated. ~~That~~ That trammel worked out. Over the years I made changes on it. It's 25 years old now. Most of the dredges put in this country were wore out in 25 years. It's done me a lot of good.

? Set up? Grizzly?

No grizzly. The grizzly is in the trammel. It's a 2-stage that goes through a washing area about, not quite 20 feet long which scrubs it and tumbles it. and then, on the end are <sup>2</sup> long bars 2 inches apart, so what drops through goes on to screen 3/4 inch diameter. Originally, I didn't have the screens on for a couple of years.

(14)

and did get 2 nuggets that would not have gone through → a 2 1/8 ounce nugget which ended up - Joe Vogler got it for Doris, his wife. And it was a beautiful nugget. And then I got one that was, a good part of rock - it hung on to that. It was less than 2 ounces. But they would have gone through. But when you go down to 3/4 inch, the fine gold recovery improved so much as far as total value, you do better.

most of the dredges here in the Fok area just had 1/2 inch openings. The old F. E. dredges. Some of the ground was probably not nugget ground, but some of it probably was and there's nuggets in the tailing piles that will never be discovered because they're probably too deep for a metal detector and too few.

? Diameter of your trammel...?

Eight foot nine. Then the screen sections beyond that, it's about 10 feet.

? Conveyor?

Just the coarse. The fines go through the sluice box. I've experimented with sluice boxes over the years. Originally, I started out with the boxes that were in my old 64 inch one for a few years. Then I tried something they was doing in Canada, pulsating riffles. You had a rubber sled in the bottom of it. That didn't work. I was dumping gold pretty bad. Then I experimented with a travelling belt. In Ketchikan the riffles were packed. You had to clean up about every 4 days. There was a lot of time lost.

? What sparked them?

mind. I had a friend, a miner from Eureka. He travelled a lot in the winter time. He was in New Zealand and he told us about these hydraulic ripples where they injected water. He came back here. In my shop here we built 3 sets. One to Yukon; ~~change things~~ <sup>one that his</sup> ~~over their~~ <sup>his</sup> mind in Eureka. Miners, they're pretty quick to catch on to things stuff. They got pretty universal within ~~them~~ in a few years. They do a good job. You have to learn. Mining, if you close your mind to something. I know miners that wouldn't do it. I closed my mind once to one thing back when I was on Miller creek on the lower end - very fine gold. I was losing a lot of it and I tried something under my ripples, an astroting fabric called hogs hair, miterized hogs hair. And it did somewhat. A guy from the Bureau of Mines come back ~~by~~ and told about miners somewhere else using astroting. And I kinda rejected the idea because I didn't, in mind it was that green indoor/outdoor carpeting, not the true astroting. Trademark of Monsanto? And then also the 3M product, Nomad, which some miners call "miners moss." They're both good for the carpet.

? You stayed with the Hog's Hair?

For several years. I closed my mind then to try something. I didn't know exactly what it was or even where to buy it then

? Now hydraulic ripples?

(16)

✓ Yeah. Most of them they'll use about 6 feet of hydraulic ripples, then expanded metal below that. I've got 12 feet of hydraulic ripples and 4 feet of expanded metal with carpet underneath it.

? Trommel high up so get rejects out of the way?

✓ Yeah. That conveyor is so I can push it down stream. If I was taking it across my trommel, I'd have to push across stream. You got your recirculation lines, plus when it narrows up, you've got no room. Basically, it's turning things 90 degrees.

✓ Originally, I had 125 foot radial stacker on that and it worked good down where I had room. A conveyor will develop a cone pile pretty fast, but if you've got a radial, you can walk the tail around. Cone pile, it doesn't take long to build up to a conveyor.

? Trommel on wheels? How move?

✓ Originally I started on skids. It was so heavy, unless you was on hard bedrock, it ~~you~~ would dig in. I had 2 pieces of equipment, one pushing and one pulling ~~and~~ I got some scraper wheels and tires from K & K Recycling that were off Green Construction's old 641 scrapers and used them. It makes it a lot easier.

? 3 excavators plus your D-10?

✓ I got 2 D-9s. My old TD-4 and I bought one since. I've got 3 excavators, a front loader.

- ? Front shovel? That's a 245. I had stripping & just could not put stack, so I'd haul it downstream, bought a haul truck, and then use that to load it. I had to go to Calgary to find it, Alberta, there's not a lot around.
- ? The haul truck? No. The shovel. The haul truck was here in Foks, it was ~~origin~~ from Valdez Creek mine. Then, Foks Sand & Gravel bought it... I got it off them. It's not road legal, too wide.
- ? a long day?  
 Not as long as I used to. I'm 77 now, but I'm still doing a lot more than an 8-hour work day, plus cooking breakfast and dinner on top of that. I started out, way back on Miller Creek, by myself. The first person I hired was Stan Gelvin, one fall. We worked good together. He was, he started his own mining operation up the Salcha. It didn't work out, and his Cat was trapped back in there. He couldn't - he had to wait for winter to get it out. So, he worked for me that fall, and then I started hiring people after that.
- ? Stan told me you guys staked out Crooked Creek?  
 The lower end of Porcupine Creek was open, before it joined mammoth. Henry & Helen Warner owned it. I don't like to jump in and stake. I'll ask people if it's not a problem. I asked them, so I know where the lower end of their claim was, so I

(18)

worked from there downstream and got almost to Bedrock Creek. Staked all that. It was low grade and I'd worked a week doing all that, and I was pretty tired wading through the brush and all that. Stan came by and says, "Do you mind if I start staking below you?" and I says "go ahead." He, when he got across the fault, that was good ground.

Now, mine's, at this price of gold [~\$1300/oz] mine's probably marginal. I've got somebody leasing it, and, how good they do, I don't know. I had leased it a couple of times and it just didn't pay.

? Creeks are getting harder and harder to find. ?

It's like everything else. Back in the days the old timers got everything by hand pick and shovel the good stuff. The next generation came along it was hydraulic miners and they did what they ~~did~~ could with that. And then in the late 30's the bulldozers came in and they could mine - the problem with hydraulic mining was not enough water. Sometimes they were down for a good part of the summer, like this summer was a good example. And not so much the dozers, the ability to pump and re-circulate.

? Pumps came in later?

Yeah. 'til modern diesel engines

(19)

? There were a lot of ditches for the hydraulic?

Yeah.

? Royalties now?

The general rule is Ten percent.

? Do you have enough ground to continue working?

*is right for me.*  
*in mill*  
*rep*  
*left*  
Up above we it chokes down to where it's too narrow to operate. I'll take that one out, I know what's left. I know the creek pretty well. And also, unfortunately it's federal, ~~it's~~ in the 30's my uncle worked way up at the upper end of the creek <sup>but left</sup> ~~in~~ one claim. It's narrow but it's very good.

I'm thinking it's federal claims, but I'm thinking of using that truck and just, if I mine it, just haul it down ~~to~~ patented ground. I'd have to make a good road because it's about a 3-mile haul. It's good ground but there's heavy light brown mud. I don't see how you could mine up there without getting it in the creek, haul it down below. I've got a few other good spots, too. And some low grade ground. So, I'm not worried about running out of ground.

When I left there, I was deep in debt. I'm not now, so I can - what happens, happens.

o (2/3 of side A recorded on)