

H97-66-46
Warren Taylor
August 24, 1962
Fairbanks, Alaska
Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Warren Taylor first arrived in Cordova, Alaska and traveled to Chitina. He was one of the first people in Chitina. There were two tents in Chitina when he arrived. He has been to the upper Chitina River. He said there is both copper and gold in that area. Martin Hagg was one of the early mineral explorers in that area. He knew the Copper River country intimately. The first railroad started out at Katalla. There was also one coming out of Cordova at the same time and one that was started out of Valdez by the Reynolds company. There were fights over crossings. There are still signs of the start of the railroad visible near Valdez. There was a man killed near that area and a subsequent murder trial in Juneau.

Warren talked about Zeke Mullett who trailed horses from the White River area over the Skolai Pass and down to the Nabesna River. There were other packers in the area. They would winter their horses in the upper area of the White River. The horses were turned loose in the winter and survived by eating wild pea. The winds would blow hard in that area. The horses would paw off the snow and could feed on pea vine. He was in the area at the same time the horses were being rounded up in the spring. The horses had a thick coat on them. They would rub off their coat on the spruce trees. He thought that area would make good cattle country.

He talked about the headwaters of the Chitina River. Martin Harris told him about the area. Warren was prospecting at the head of the Young Creek. He thought there were good indications of gold in the area. It was at the grass roots level. Now there are buffalo in that area. Warren introduced a bill in the legislature to provide surplus buffalo to people that would develop them. He commented on the purpose of the Fish and Game in Alaska.

Another area he wanted to return to was Russell Lake at the base of Skolai Pass. He was stuck in the area because of bad weather at one time. He worked at the Kennecott Mine at one time. When he was in the Russell Lake area he could see copper in the rocks. He describes the formations in the area. He thought there was high grade ore in that area. He said that Kennecott Mine never paid any taxes despite the millions of dollars of ore. He thinks Skolai Pass would be an ideal area to mine copper.

He talked working on railroad construction on the Copper River. He also worked on the train crews and describes working on the trains in extremely cold weather. The bearings would freeze.

He enlisted and fought during WWI.

He worked on the rotary snowplows on the railroad.

He describes the Richardson Highway from Valdez to Fairbanks. Supplies were hauled over that road. There was a connecting road to Chitina. Many passengers traveled by horse-drawn sleds to Chitina and then the passengers would board the train.

Chitina was very small when he first arrived in the town. There were two tents. Johnson had one of the tents. Many other Johnsons came into town.

The Katalla Company also built a railroad. He described the construction of the Million Dollar Bridge on the Copper River. There were times when box cars couldn't cross the bridge because of the winds.

He prospected in the Copper River area for a number of years. He was prospecting at Calamity Gulch and came into the local roadhouse. He met Tony Diamond there. When he came back out from prospecting he found out that Tony Diamond had been accidentally shot. Tony eventually moved to Cordova.

He talked about the potential highway that will follow the route of the Copper River Railroad to Cordova. The Katalla railroad was never finished.

Slate Creek had some of the richest ground in the country. Jack Miller from Valdez was one of the miners. They used a pick and shovel. There were plans to move a dredge into the Slate Creek area.

There were a lot of odd characters in the area such as the Klondike Nightingale.

Someone from the audience asked about the Kennecott Mine. Warren said that labor trouble stopped work at the Kennecott Mine.

He always wanted to study law. He studied while he was working on the railroad.

The copper from the Kennecott Mine went down to smelters in Tacoma.

He had a lot of satisfaction in the jobs he had. He commented about the Tanana Yukon Historical Society preserving history.

The Copper River Railroad passed by two large glaciers. They could hear the glaciers calving into the river twenty miles away. A large wave would be produced when the ice fell into the water that would toss salmon out of the river into the willows. Bears would hang out in the area for their salmon.

Someone asked about dining cars on the railroad. Warren said they didn't have much of a dining car on the train. They would stop at section camps for food between Cordova and Chitina. It was 131 miles from Cordova to Chitina and 196 miles to the end of the line at the Kennecott Mine. There were some bridges on the railroad that had to be replaced every year. There were also trestles.

Warren was born in Washington. His grandparents came out in 1865 in a wagon train. He grew up in Bellingham, Washington. He came to Alaska when he was 18. He had one brother. He has one son, Bill and a daughter in Seattle.