

IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - BILLY McCARTHY

September 13, 1980
Ruby, Alaska

BLM Interviewer:

Tom Beck

H83-16-17 UA oral history

SEPTEMBER 13, 1980 - BILLY MCCARTHY

(Tape No. 1 of 1, Side A)

INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER:with Billy McCarthy of Ruby, Alaska. The interview was conducted at the home of Billy Captain at Ruby on September 13th, 1980. The interview was for the Bureau of Land Management by Tom Beck.

Billy was born in 1904 near Fairbanks. His mother came to Nulato when Billy was a year and a half old, where she met Billy's stepfather. Billy's stepfather ran a roadhouse in Nulato and later ran the Slough Roadhouse 16 miles south of Kaltag on the Iditarod Trail.

Billy used to be a mail carrier and carried mail by dog team from Ruby to Nine-Mile Point, 30 miles above Kochrines. Billy carried the mail for two years for the NC Company, making two trips a week for \$150 per week. Billy was also a reindeer herder for three years for the Laplanders near Unalakleet.

In 1925 Billy participated in the diphtheria serum run from Nenana to Nome. Billy ran the segment from Ruby to Whiskey Creek.

(Off record at Log No. 0105)

(On record at Log No. 0152)

INTERVIEW

Q Okay. Where were you stepfather's roadhouses?

A Six miles from old Kaltag and one 16 miles, a place called Slough Roadhouse.

Q Slough Roadhouse was 16 miles, what, southwest?

A (Indiscernible) Slough, it was called. On the other side -- you know, it was on this side of the river.

Q What was the other roadhouse called?

A What?

Q You said he had two roadhouses. Where was the other one? Slough and what was the other one?

A Two roadhouses.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Sixteen -- or six and sixteen miles below Kaltag.

Q Yeah. The one was called Slough Roadhouse. What was the other one called?

A It was just -- just a roadhouse on the road where his fish camp and where he cut wood.....

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

Ain the summer when there was no cattle. There was lots of steamboats in them days, and the wood was in great demand.

Q Which one did he run first, the Slough Roadhouse or the other one?

A The one at the fish camp below Kaltag.

Q Six miles below?

A Yeah.

Q That -- they didn't -- he didn't have -- there wasn't a name for that?

A Beg pardon?

Q Was there a name for that one? Did they call it anything?

A No. It was just his summer residence. Fish camp and wood-cutting was his profession in those days.

Q Were both of those roadhouses on the trail there going down to -- what?

A Yeah, the one at sixteen was on the Iditarod Trail. It was over -- I know it was beyond that Slough Roadhouse. There was a lot of travel them days, either on foot, some on skis, some pulling sleigh, pulling from Yukon sleds by the neck. Some that just couldn't afford dogs.

Q What was the Yukon sled?

A Little sleds built in the states. Little flat, no rails on it -- top rails. They just packed their bedding and provisions on that sled, and they nexus over, over to the Iditarod.

Q So they used to stop off on their way from Kaltag down?

A Yeah. They stopped there for lunch, and they -- at Six-Mile, and Sixteen, they made it in one day. Their travel was coming pretty shaky, I remember. There was 16 beds in there on each side of the long log building.

Q That was Slough Roadhouse?

A Yeah. And the beds were all occupied, and on the middle of the floor the people would just lay their blankets down and just slept on that.

Q Was it all one floor, or were there two stories?

A It was one story. Log house.

Q Was there any shelter for dogs there, dog.....

A There was the dog barn. See, I remember the old man got all the (indiscernible) from Kaltag getting moose for the roadhouse.

Q He hired somebody to get the moose?

A Hmm?

Q He hired somebody to provide the moose for the roadhouse?

A Yeah. The Natives from Kaltag going -- a lot of them had dogs, take and pulled us over with dog teams, and on the way back, they'd kill a moose or two. I went over once. Their horse teams, it was a tough place to get -- to cross the river there, a steep bank on both sides. And the horse -- one horse broke his leg. You know. We got him (indiscernible), by golly, the old man, we'll just -- horse meat for the travelers. He had to. You know, we just got it up from Kaltag, and it didn't last a day or two. By golly, I remember he cooked it a long time. It was kind of tough, tough meat, but he cooked it a long time, and they ate it, and they didn't know the difference.

Q So horses used to pull the sleds then, too, huh? And wagons?

A Yeah, horse teams, they went over and they pulled their own hay and oats 'cause there was no stores over in that (indiscernible) country. And they had horses, horse teams, as high as six horses to a team, come by here, by the roadhouse there. And the mail came, was running that way,

too. Harry Lawrence, a fellow named Harry Lawrence was driving the mail from Kaltag over to (indiscernible) country.

Q Did he use horses?

A With dogs.

Q Oh, with dogs.

A These horses, they had work to do over the mining camps. They were hauling wood and stuff for the mining camps. That's where there was -- there was six horses in one -- pulling one sled, you know, pulling their -- hauling their own hay and oats.

Q Did you know Harry Lawrence?

A Yeah. I know him.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah. He was a mail carrier around Kaltag and down at Holy Cross. I know him well. He died recently at Fairbanks, oh, about 20 -- 20 or 30 years ago.

Q How often did he make that run? Do you know? From Kaltag down to Iditarod?

A He -- I believe he made on trip a month, or every 20 days rather.

Q And he stopped at the Slough Roadhouse there?

A Yeah, he stopped at the roadhouse. And from there on, I don't know whether there's any more roadhouses or not. I guess I believed there was.

Q How long did your dad run it? When did he stop running the roadhouse?

A Oh, he run it about two or three winters.

Q When was that? Do you remember?

A In 1908. The winter of 1908 is winter Iditarod Stampede was on.

Q What'd he do after that?

A We stayed around Six-Mile, kept on fishing and cutting wood for steamboats.

Q Where was your dad from?

A He was a big Swede.

Q Swede? Huh.

A He come up from Stockholm, he used to say.

Q Did he come over the Chilkoot Trail, did he, or did he.....

A What's that?

Q Did he come over the Chilkoot Trail?

A I didn't get you.

Q Did he come over the Chilkoot Trail when he come up to Alaska, or did he come by the sea?

A Oh, he probably was one of them Chilkoot Trail mushers. He came in way before that.

Q Well, when did he come in?

A I don't -- I never did learn. When he -- he used to be mining up around Dawson and that country, 40-Mile or Dawson or someplace. He was a young fellow then.

Q Did you used to help him there at -- you were probably pretty young when he had the roadhouse there.

A Oh, I was a kid about five years old.

Q Do you remember what the place looked like very well?

A What's that?

