

**IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - JOHN AULAYE (UNALAKLEET)**

October 21, 1981  
National Park Service Office  
Anchorage, Alaska

**Interviewers:**

National Park Service Historian Robert L. Spude  
Charles Blatchford

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**OCTOBER 21, 1981 - JOHN AULAYE**

(Tape No. 1 of 1, Side A)

**INTRODUCTION**

INTERVIEWER: This is an Iditarod National Historic Trail interview with John Aulaye of Unalakleet, Alaska. The interview was conducted at the National Park Service Office in Anchorage, Alaska, on October 21st, 1981. The interview was conducted by National Park Service Historian Robert L. Spude. John Aulaye's son-in-law, Charles Blatchford of Anchorage, assists with the interview.

(Off record at Log No. 0053)

(On record at Log No. 0068)

**INTERVIEW**

Q John, will you just explain that thing the way you explained it to me yesterday?

A Yeah. With Seppala, I know the flu well, and he's a dog musher. And the first medicine he carried by himself from Fairbanks to Nome. The second one is Willis to Willis until to -- when I met him on Isaac Point, between Isaac Point and Elim.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A First place, Henry supposed to take that medicine from Shaktoolik to Isaac Point, but his team is not there. He went my place, from his house to my house, he carried that medicine, just walking, you know.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And then that medicine, I understand he traveling night and day until he met Seppala. And I'm supposed to met (sic) Seppala on Isaac Point. Henry told me keep on going if you don't see him. And I keep on going, almost to Moses Point, I met him. He had 21 dogs and 2 of them in his sled. He's a dog man. He's not big, but he's got a head trained on dogs, you know. His dogs is small and blue-eyed, and Seppala is -- I couldn't -- he's not Lap. He's a Norwegian guy, that little guy. He's a real dog man. He take care of his dogs, summer and winter.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). And you met Seppala before Moses Point?

A Yeah.

Q Where did you start from? Unalakleet?

A From Shaktoolik.

Q Oh, from Shaktoolik.

A From Unalakleet to Shaktoolik, Marsha Unaguman (ph) take care of that.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And that Kaltag to Unalakleet, Edgar -- what's his last name?

Q Kalland?

A Yeah.

Q Yeah.  
A He carry that.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).  
A Both of them drove. Edgar explained that in Nome, when he go to Nome, a little bit about that medicine, but he never mentioned my name because Henry is there. The trouble is, Henry didn't report my name, and when I met Seppala, he didn't report my name. Just like Seppala, he think I'm Henry.  
Q Oh, I see. Now.....  
A That's the trouble I had. And then when I got back, Henry told me, 'You might get medal sometime.' But nobody report my name. Sure enough, after he died, his daughter got a medal. You know.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).  
A Because even his sister, Emily Brown, make a book out of them. Emily Brown was school on -- outside someplace. Emily been school.....  
Q Yeah.  
A .....all his (sic) life.  
Q I've met her. So you were raised in Shaktoolik or in Unalakleet?  
A When I got married, I lived on Unalakleet. Before that, I live on Elim and Moses Point and Golovin. I know his folks, his parents, was live on Golovin. That's my.....  
Q Their father was one of his best friends.  
A He's a best friend of mine.  
Q Did you work at the reindeer centers there? It sounds.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Their father did.

Q .....like Elim and Golovin and all those were the reindeer ranches.  
A Anything like that, if white people, people that treats me like that, he would straighten out. He would go to Nome, here, and he would straighten out. I'm pretty sure of that. I'm pretty sure of it. He would.....  
Q What was your father's name?  
A .....straighten them out.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Charlie Blatchford.

Q Charlie Blatchford. And your name is.....  
A His name is Gaty Hawk (ph), Oscar Maneuska (ph). Two names.  
Q Two names. Oh, okay.  
A He's got two names.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

MR. BLATCHFORD: Emily Brown is my wife's great aunt.  
MR. SPUDE: Oh, okay. Are you mentioned in the book?  
MR. BLATCHFORD: No.  
MR. SPUDE: No?  
MR. BLATCHFORD: I'm just in here just for my.....  
MR. SPUDE: Yeah, this is really.....

A When I met Seppala, when I give that medicine, got that big, canvas, heavy canvas, tie them up good. And they've got blue -- I mean, red ribbon, you know. Them time when you meet the team, Seppala know it. When I raise it, he stopped right now, turned around to me.

Q Oh. I see. He almost passed you then.

A Almost passed me. Good that sack had a red ribbon.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). So when you gave him the serum, did you go back to Shaktoolik, or did you.....

A No.

Q .....go ahead?

A I keep on going. It was about -- see, Puck (ph) and Moses Point, between there and -- about 13 miles only to go to Elim. So I keep on going to Elim. And when he take out, I think I had empty sled, and I see his dogs are small, blue eyes.

Q Little Siberians then.

A Siberian dogs. Well, most of the teams on the Norton Bay, I pass them. I promised myself I was going to keep on follow that guy. He always race and win. Well, I couldn't. I couldn't follow him. When he say it third time, I never forget up to this day, yup, yup, yup, yup, he's a Norwegian guy. Fast. And something like the yup, yup, yup.

MR. BLATCHFORD: That's how he commanded his dogs.

A And left them in -- (hand clap) -- go. My team, he's trained, hit the sled like this (slapping hands together) with a piece of stick. But Seppala has got to adjust his voice.

Q Oh, I see.

A When he say a third time, I hear -- I see his dogs just like a bomb.

Q Hmm.

A And I look at my dogs, just like a horse.

(Laughter)

A Like a brown bear. Just like brown bear. But his team, backbone is straight, it's just like a bomb, 22 dogs. Phew. And his dogs had no neck line, just a tow line. They was trained that much.

Q Wow. Can I ask you what type of sled and dogs you had on that run?

A I had -- mine is about 12 feet. Seppala got the real -- about the only basket about six feet only, because of the racing, racing sled.

Q Did you make your own sled or what.....

A Yeah. I make my own sled.

Q Did you.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Everybody did then.

Q That's fabulous.

A So my team was working dogs. Seppala's dogs is racing team,

no load.

Q Do you know what type of working dogs? Were they the malamute, or were they just mixed breed?

A Mine was malamute. Working dogs. And then the way, if I had my team, if I was younger, I understand those dogs, how to take care of them. Those racers, I see them. They're not -- they're smart.

MR. BLATCHFORD: He's talking about now. Right.

Q Oh, I see. Okay.

A The dogs, you got to take care of them. Those race -- how do they call that race now?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Iditarod.

A Iditarod team.

Q Iditarod.

A When they stop Unalakleet, I scratched my head. Shouldn't take care of them like that. They string them up, nothing in there. No hay or nothing never put in the barn. And every dog, when he want to leak, on the tow line, he wake the whole team.

Q Hmm. How did you care for your dogs on the trail? Did you.....

A Well, my train is, we had a barn.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And closer to barn after the traveling, they know they're going to stop in the barn, they'll run faster than before because that's going to the barn.

MR. BLATCHFORD: John, what he meant was how did you take care of them on the trail.

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: When you spent the night out there.

A Well, I'll take -- now, Iditarod, I -- they complained 'cause of my team. It's -- what do they call them now? Oh, what's the name?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Beria (ph).

A Beria (ph). My dogs was Beria (ph). He's -- because he's not take care of his dogs, they eat snow. When it got too hot, they eat snow. Seppala and Nye would take care of them soon as they get sweat. Give them piece of meat, frozen meat. When they swallow, no more thirsty. And then those Iditarod couldn't understand what didn't take care of them.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Frozen meat makes -- it cools down inside their bodies, aye.

MR. SPUDE: Oh, okay.

MR. BLATCHFORD: It cools it because dogs can't sweat, aye.

MR. SPUDE: Okay.

A Yeah. Can't -- and that.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Like us.

MR. SPUDE: And the frozen meat will.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: They don't perspire. It just gradually cools them.

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

A They stop thirsty and sweat, you know.

Q How big was the meat?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Smokies.

MR. SPUDE: Smokies.

A About that big.

Q About two and a half, three inches around?

A Like hamburger, you know. It was just like -- almost like a hamburger.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A Any kind of frozen meat is good for a dog when they run.

Q How did you bed them down for the night out on the trail?

A I put it on -- if I was traveling out in the country, I would put it branches.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Never touch one -- if they have no branches, they get wet, they get cold. When they got branches or hay, they never get cold. And tie them separate, not in a tow line. When they're -- each dog, when they want to take a leak, his business right there; never wake the others.

Q Did you put them tied to one central pole, or would they just stay.....

A Yeah, a pole or a willow or a tree.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Separate with a chain or.....

Q Okay.

A .....with their tuck line.

Q Did you.....

A Now.....

Q I'm sorry.

A Those Iditarod, when they're stopped, when they're overnight from their sled and tie leader over there, tie him.....

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A .....they mistake on that. They never give them grass or branches, you know -- or tree branches good too, real good. Never. When the dog laid down, roll up, they melt the snow, and they get frozen, and it's kind of hard for the dog. But

when they get branches, never melt the snow, and they sleep good.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Supposing you -- if you got tired, you need sleep. Dogs same thing, just like you and I. They got to have a sleep. Rest. And then I'll be good next day; same with the dog. Never them under the right dog I feel and.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: What he's trying to tell you is they're a bunch of damned fools bringing their dog sleds in here.

MR. SPUDE: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Where did you learn how to mush, to dog sled?

A Because I handled my dogs when I was young, up through when I quit the team.

Q Did your father teach you, or did a friend teach you?

A No, myself.

Q You taught yourself.

A Yeah, I taught my -- I am -- and I understand.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Every Eskimo teach themselves, aye.

MR. SPUDE: Impressive.

A And then I like to help Eskimo Iditarod man. A couple of my dogs started to limp.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A I look at his feet. Too long.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Toenails.

A .....toenails. Need cut. If -- when they're too long, they got a limp, you know. When I test it, fingernail (sic), I couldn't touch; he -- it was sore.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Couldn't take -- simply cut about (indiscernible) a half inch, you know, that they get -- when you cut your -- you got to cut it just so, not too much, not too long. Got to be cut just so. Same way on a dog. And then their foot here, they got to use them.

Q How did you learn that? Did something happen, or did.....

A I learn it even I -- summertime, I have to tie it on the gravel so they have a cut, pond, you know. So they -- just like blacksmith have, same way the dogs got to have a trainer, you know. How -- so when they get the sore foot in the wintertime, they get cut. Just like blacksmith's hands; they're cut.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Excuse me. I'm going to grab a cup of your tea.

MR. SPUDE: Oh, okay.

A And that's why I take care of my dogs. And I could tell --

I'm not a doctor. I would be doctor if I want to.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).  
A Because I could see that some team, my people, some team I could tell, just seeing the team, they didn't take care of it.  
Q Yeah. John, where -- did you run the mail as well when you were back there?  
A When the mail team is stuck, I run.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Relief driver.

A I take his place.  
Q Oh, okay.  
A And most the time, from Shaktoolik to -- there's only one nurse in Unalakleet. So I have to get a -- make round-trip.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).  
A Other time, would make two trips down there, out next day. But I make round-trip with my team.  
Q Out of Unalakleet to Golovin or.....  
A From Shaktoolik to Unalakleet.  
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).  
A That's the -- three times twelve is what?  
Q Thirty-six.  
A Huh?  
Q Thirty-six.  
A Thirty-six miles from -- I could make it one day. A lot of times, I make it one day.  
Q Wow. Were there any stops along the way between Shaktoolik and Unalakleet, or was there just.....  
A Yeah, there's a roadhouse there in the foothill.  
Q Oh, Foothills Roadhouse?  
A Uh-huh (affirmative).

MR. BLATCHFORD: What's the name of that? What was the name of that place, John? Do you remember?

A That roadhouse there?

MR. BLATCHFORD? Uh-huh (affirmative).

A It -- Wayne's Evan -- Evan Roadhouse.  
Q And that was between Shaktoolik and.....  
A Unalakleet.  
Q It was in Unalakleet?  
A Yeah.  
Q Oh, okay.

MR. BLATCHFORD: No. John, that roadhouse between Shaktoolik and Unalakleet.

A Yeah, that's Foothill. Yeah, that's Evan. Wayne Evan's dad.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Right. You've got to explain yourself to him.



MR. SPUDE: Okay.

Q And in Shaktoolik, was there a roadhouse there also?

A No. Mailman -- mail from Nome, they got the ma- -- they take care of them from Nome to Unalakleet. Each -- like from Foothill to Unalakleet, they got place. And they got another place on Ungalik.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Another place in Isaac Point. And another place -- outside of that big hill, there's a roadhouse there, and Galovin. And Solomon.

Q Was there one at Portage or Walla Walla? Or was there.....

A Yeah, Walla Walla. That's the place I tried to.....

Q Okay.

A .....mention. Walla Walla got roadhouse. And from Walla Walla to Galovin, then big his grandpa.

MR. BLATCHFORD: (Inaudible comment.)

A Yeah. He's got roadhouse.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Or no, my grandfather, yeah.

Q In Galovin.

A His grandfather.

Q Oh.

A The biggest roadhouse.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: (Indiscernible comment.)

A .....in Alaska.

Q Yeah, that's.....

A But now, that building is small now.

MR. BLATCHFORD: John.

A Long ago, it was the biggest building in Alaska. Even Nome.

Q That is a -- I've seen that. It is a.....

A Yeah, it is the biggest building long ago.

Q Did you make a run, ever, to Portage, which was south of Walla Walla? You go further down the coast to Portage shelter cabin, then over to Golovin?

A Yeah. That's over the hill.

Q Was one.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Sometimes these names, though, are in Eskimo, and.....

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: .....you talk white.

MR. SPUDE: Yeah, that's true.

Q Portage, I guess, was at one time, Mr. Olson's summer fish

camp.

MR. BLATCHFORD: John Olson.

MR. SPUDE: John Olson's.

Q And I was wondering if there was an earlier shelter cabin or roadhouse there. You don't know?

MR. BLATCHFORD: I don't know. Wherever there was salmon or there was a good fishing place or a good hunting place.....

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: .....they always had a place to camp.

MR. SPUDE: Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Now, when Iditarod time, when I heard Edgar, when he'd talk on the Iditarod, I would -- if I was there, I would help him. I would explain how the Seppala he had because I heard even his voice, 'Yip, yip, yip,' you know, things like that. And I would help him. I was next to him because I carried that medicine myself. But my name is not there.

Q Yeah. That's.....

A That's the trouble.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Did.....

A I would try to explain it when I had a chance to talk.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Orgoom (sic), huh?

MR. AULAYE: Yeah.

Q Was there -- I tried to talk with a fellow in Golovin, Edwin Pugnik (ph)? Is that.....

A Uh-huh (affirmative). Panik?

Q Yeah.

A Yeah. He's a old-timer, too.

MR. BLATCHFORD: He's dead now.

A Panik, yeah. Old man.

MR. SPUDE: When did he die?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Last year.

MR. SPUDE: Oh.

A He live on the Galovin and White Mountain.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Now, did you ever run dogs with Edwin or know how he did his mail?

MR. BLATCHFORD: He was one of my father's good friends, too.

MR. SPUDE: Oh.

MR. BLATCHFORD: One of his good friends.

MR. SPUDE: Oh.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Yeah. Go ahead, John, tell him about Panik.

Q What type of dogs did he run?

A What's that?

Q What type of dogs did Edwin run?

A I know that the -- Edwin Panik?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

MR. BLATCHFORD: Old man Panik from Golovin.

A Well, I never -- I see it a couple of times, his team, but I don't know, when he get old, maybe he got rid of them. When -- he's older than me, Panik, I think, because he's -- when -- the last time when I see him, he use a cane and hardly.....

Q Yeah.

A Was slow. He's -- I don't know his age. He's not too far from me. Now maybe Edgar (sic) one year older now. I was born in 1900 and.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Panik must have been born about 18 -- between the 1850s, huh -- or 1880s. Somewhere in there.

A Yeah.

Q Yeah. When you were in Unalakleet, what did you do with your dogs in the summer?

A Tie it on the sandbar on the river, or move it from the barn to gravel so they can have a big, good feed. You make them tough, you know, got to have a gravel, not dirt. When they're.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: To get their paws toughened up. Howgoom (sic), John. We'll go in a little while, huh?

MR. AULAYE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: We say enough.

MR. SPUDE: Okay. Well, thank you. I was -- one more question.

Q We talked about the run from Unalakleet to Golovin. Did you ever make the one from Unalakleet to Kaltag, and what stops might be along the way there?

A That -- we could make it one day, but mail carriers make it two days.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A They got place to stop halfway, Ten -- they call it, from

Old Woman, Ten-Mile. They call it Ten-Mile because it's 10 miles from Old Woman to Ten-Mile. They got a place to stay. Middle of Unalakleet and Kaltag.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A From there. Mail carriers, they get -- sometimes they get big load. They have to take it two days if they go Unalakleet. But without load, a fellow could make it one day. I make it one day. I had two ladies in my sled.

Q That's great.

MR. SPUDE: Well, thank you for coming in. Thank you.

MR. BLATCHFORD: And thank you.

MR. SPUDE: Could I.....

MR. AULAYE: I hope we got sled.

(Interview concluded)

(Off record at Log No. 2402)

(On record at Log No. 2406)

MR. SPUDE: Yes.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Yeah, but they do have a tourism coordinator down there now.

MR. SPUDE: In the city?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Mm hmm (affirmative). And that has made, I think, a big impact.

MR. SPUDE: Who is that?

MR. BLATCHFORD: Oh, I don't know, but they're putting out like a newsletter. Cullenton.....

MR. SPUDE: Huh.

MR. BLATCHFORD: .....and that's real -- that seems to be a pretty straightforward approach to let the people know what's going on and give a little bit of communication.

MR. SPUDE: Mm hmm (affirmative).

MR. BLATCHFORD: Talks about the -- what we're doing as well as the private sector's doing. And I think that guy's pretty much responsible for getting all these boardwalks in.

MR. SPUDE: And done.

MR. BLATCHFORD: And we've got Spiff Elliot (ph) for city manager. I think that helps.

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: He's racing around here, make my job (inaudible).

MR. SPUDE: That's true. You know, take -- the best way to take the fire off is having somebody else.....

MR. BLATCHFORD: Well, that's why the management and planning is coming (inaudible).

MR. SPUDE: Yeah.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Really, the main reason that thing has worried us so much, it (indiscernible) the city as much as it is just to get the decisions made. So why -- we just -- we used it through the HSRs.

MR. SPUDE: Mm hmm (affirmative).

MR. BLATCHFORD: Some of the things we.....

MR. SPUDE: Well, this and this.

MR. BLATCHFORD: Mm hmm (affirmative).

MR. SPUDE: And it would have happened. And a lot of trouble, you know, just.....

(Off record at Log No. 2625)

(End of recorded portion)