

**IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - TONY GULARTE**

July 12, 1980  
John Miskovich's Mining Camp  
Flat, Alaska

BLM Interviewers:

Steve Peterson  
Tom Beck

JULY 12, 1980 - TONY GULARTE

(Tape No. 1, Side A)

INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER: .....Trail interview with Tony Gularte of Anchorage, Alaska. The interview is conducted at John Miskovich's Mining Camp near Flat, Alaska, on July 12th, 1980. Interviewers for the Bureau of Land Management were Steve Peterson and Tom Beck.

Tony was born in 1908, came over the Iditarod Trail when he was seven years old in 1915. Tony spent much of his early life in the Iditarod and Flat areas.

As the interview commences, Tony is examining a map of the Iditarod/Flat area prepared by the Bureau of Land Management showing sites and segments along the Iditarod Trail. A mechanical breakdown during the tape causes gradual deterioration of sound quality. The tape is nearly inaudible at its end.

INTERVIEW

Q Okay. Now there's Dikeman, which we're talking of Fullerton's now. We kind of assume that the trail, the old trail to Dikeman, more or less followed to the right-hand side, here, this.....

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q .....creek and then at Shermier's headed straight north?

A Now, this is -- hey, there now, have you talked to Tim?

Q No. Twitchell?

A Yes.

Q Tim Twitchell? Where's he at?

A He's up at the Pioneer Home.

Q In Anchorage?

A In Palmer.

Q Palmer. Oh. Yeah, he had the reindeer. He was a reindeer herder.

A Ah, now, Tim would know a lot about this country 'cause he was -- he had reindeer all over this country.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). You were talking -- what's this roadhouse you were talking about 35 miles up from Flat?

A Well, it'd be out of Iditarod, see.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Now, there's Shermier's.

A There's -- that's Shermier's.

Q Yeah.

A There's -- all right?

Q And there's Iditarod.

A Now, out in here about 30 or 40 miles.....

Q On the Hunter Trail?

A I don't know. I haven't ever heard of the Hunter Trail, but a hunter.....

Q Hunter. Hunter.

A Hunter. I don't know.

Q Well, it goes -- it was that shortcut from Shermier's to.....

A To Old Hook.

Q Yeah.

A Well, it had to follow there then. Here's Fritz's. Right there.

Q Yeah. And that was.....

A That -- that was the only two places.

Q Was that Shermier and Fritz's?

A Yeah. Fritz's Roadhouse.

Q I see. And then the other.....

A Now, see, Jerry.....

Q .....one up here, this cabin.....

A See, Jerry Wynn run that at the last part of the trail, and a little fella.....

Q When was that about, in the '20s?

A Yeah.

Q He ran Fritz's?

A Yeah, when did they last run the trail? You guys ever heard?

Q Well, they're still running it. I guess it's still a.....

A No, no, no, no. I mean the mail trail. When was it.....

Q '26, twenty.....

A Well, it had to be about '25.

Q When the plane started coming into McGrath.....

A Yes.

Q .....or Eielson, wasn't it? Wasn't.....

Q Yeah.

Q .....Eielson the.....

Q Late '20s.

Q Yeah.

A See, they run the mail a couple of years after the plane came in, I believe.

Q Yeah.

A And the first plane came in to Iditarod, must have been, in '25.

Q Is that right?

A A. A. Bennett.

Q Yeah, Eielson ran the one from, was it, Fairbanks to McGrath.

A From McGrath.

Q I was thinking that was about twenty-.....

A But A. A. Bennett was the first one into Flat.

Q Or Iditarod.

A Well, no, we'll say Flat.

Q Okay.

A Because he landed behind this mountain over here.

Q Oh, is that right?

A See, there was the old air. They made a little strip up there.

Q Yeah.

A This wasn't dug.

Q Yeah.

A See. Then after they dug down here, well, then they made the strip right here.

Q Was that one of the old Alaska Road Commission strips? In the mid-'20s.....

A No.

Q ..... '26, '28, they.....

A The people themselves. The people themselves made that strip up there.

Q Is that right?

A Yes. It's right in back of this noll.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A And then.....

Q They weren't paid to do it, they just.....

A Huh?

Q They weren't paid -- you know, they did it -- the Road Commission paid a lot of people to build small strips.....

A Yeah, well, no, we collected enough money and we put it in ourselves.

Q Is that right.

A Then A. A. Bennett come in, see.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A Then after that, then they fixed the field down here where it is now.

Q I see.

A And it was 800 foot long.

Q At that time.

A At that time. Yeah.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A 'Cause when old -- an old Post come in, he hit the end of the field, he hit the center field, and he hit the ditch.

Q (Laugh.)

A And that was the end of it. But if he'd landed any other place, that plane would have still been there.

Q Yeah.

A 'Cause we had everything here to fix him up, and Joe Cross had brought him a prop and there was an old fella, Patterson.....

Q This is Wiley Post?

A Yeah. And that was Patterson that had the -- was the blacksmith, and he made his strut for his landing gear.

Q Oh, is that right?

A Yep. And in 13 hours he was gone.

Q I'll be darned.

A Yeah.

Q Here's your pop.

A Yeah.

Q Huh.

A Yeah.

Q You've been over these trails then, huh?

A Hmm?

Q You've been over these trails yourself.....

A Well.....

Q .....quite a bit or.....

A .....just that one time I went over the Iditarod Trail (inaudible).

Q What, you came up over the pass through.....

A Yeah.

Q .....Takotna?

Q Yeah. Yeah, through McGrath. It'd be.....

A Through McGrath, and then.....

Q .....Old McGrath.

A .....then Takotna and then up Fourth of July.

Q Oh, you came up this route here?

A Yeah.

Q The old, old route.

A Yeah.

Q And then over Moore Creek?

A Then over Moore Creek.

Q And you did that in the winter or the summer?

A Well, no, in the spring of the year, in March.

Q Is that right? So you took the old -- not on the ridge, but right down on the creek.

A Yeah. See, and well, the trail was still there in '37, '38, and '39. It was just the same as the day when we came over it.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A You know, I used to trap in that country.

Q Yeah. I know the Fullertons and Harrises were talking about all the snow they get between Manson Creek and.....

A Well, that's why they put the trail.....

Q Yeah.

A .....was on account of that snow, see. That's why they went to Ophir.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A And then they hit Jerry Wynn's warehouse there, and they hit Shermier's, and they came up to Iditarod. And then when I was a young fella, you know, well, I used to go and meet the old dog mushers at Iditarod and bring the mail to Flat so that'd give them a little rest.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A See. A day or two, see.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A Yeah.

Q Huh.

A Well, this is quite a lot of history in this country.

Q Yeah, sure is.

A There's a lot of, lot of history in Flat.

Q Yeah. This whole area.

A It was the best camp in Alaska.

Q Is that right?

A Bar none. Yep.

Q Why do you say that?

A Paid the best wages. We was getting a dollar an hour in the late '20s where the rest of them were only getting 50 cents and 60 cents.

Q Is that right?

A Yes. In the late '20s.

Q Geez. People that are about working for that anymore.

A And it was a good social town.

Q Yeah.

A I can remember when the people from Iditarod would come to Flat in big hay sleds, you know, and horses, and they would roll blankets and leave Flat -- or Iditarod and come to Flat and dance once night, come up -- see, there was a

town over here called Discovery.

Q Oh, yeah. Yeah.

A And then they would dance there that night and then go back to Flat and then go back to Iditarod.

Q Oh, is that right?

A That's right. And then they -- people in Flat would do the same thing, and the people in Discovery, the next month, would do the same thing.

Q (Laugh.)

A Yeah, always quite a social town. And they had good dance halls.

Q Is that right?

A Yeah.

Q How often did the mail come in?

A Once a week. Once a week, yeah.

Q Yeah. If you were lucky, huh?

A Yeah. Once a week they would try to make it in.

Q Was that a big occasion, when everybody.....

A Oh, no. No.

Q Yeah.

A No, nothing to me. No. You know, a lot of times it may get a little late because they had to snowshoe to break trail.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A You know, the roadhouse man would drop and break trail as far as you could, you know, and then the other boy on the other end, he would do the same thing, you know. And then the people on the trail, they'd break trail, you know. And if they didn't make it that day, well, then they went back to the same roadhouse and stayed over because that night the trail would harden up, see.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A So then the next morning, they would get right out to where they (indiscernible), and then the next day they would go on through.

Q Mmm. Did the operators actually get -- how did they pay them? Did they just get so much an hour or.....

A Well, no. You mean the dog mushers?

Q No, the roadhouse.

A Well, you paid them the same as you go to Russia.

Q I thought maybe they were on a contract or something.

A No, no, no. No.

Q Not even for the mail.....

A No, no, no. No, no, no. The roadhouse belonged to the owner.

Q I see.

A And.....

Q So there was no subsidy or anything.

A .....he charged so much for a bed and so much for your meals, you know.

Q What, did the mailman just carry money with him and pay them.....

A Oh, yeah.

Q .....and take it out of expenses?

A Oh, sure, as far as I know.

Q Yeah.

A Yeah. Well, I got a picture of a beautiful dog team on the mail run, Bill Duffy's team.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A Or, yeah, Bill Duffy and Ernie Beady were together.

Q When was this? What year was Beady.....

A Beady and Duffy.....

Q Beady and Dikeman were the ones that.....

A Huh?

Q Beady and Dikeman were the ones that.....

A No, no.

Q .....started out.....

A Beaton and Dikeman.

Q Beaton and Dikeman.

A Beaton and Dikeman. I can tell you that story, too, about it 'cause I got that from Johnny Beaton himself.

Q Is that right?

A That he -- when he discovered this. Oh, yeah, I knew Johnny Beaton well. In fact, I got pictures of him.

Q Oh, is that right?

A I got pictures of him.

Q Where do you have that? In Anchorage?

A Yes, and then there's his daughter, Jean is at the home in Anchorage, Jean Beaton.

Q Oh, is that right?

A But it's not her -- Beaton now; it's -- Syzmanski (ph) is her name now. Yes, her -- that was her dad.

Q Is that right?

A Yeah, and his son is down at Golden Creek.

Q Hmm. Now, where is that at?

A That's 30 miles or 40 miles below Tanana, down there with Joe Ramstead.

Q Yeah.

A Yeah. But he's a fly-by-nighter.....

Q (Laugh.)

A .....for the airport. Yeah. No, Johnny, Johnny made a lot of money in those times. (Inaudible comment.)

Q Is that right?

A You know, it's hard to realize how many little outfits has done this in mining.

Q Well, there's been quite a few, but probably nothing like it used to be.

A Yeah, but no, no. Yeah, but in their league, they usually know. This prickly -- peppered with little individual miners.

Q Yeah.

A You know. Same as Flat Creek, there was miners there. Same with Willow Creek and then Chicken Creek was pretty well one mine, and French Creek was pretty well -- French Creek didn't get worked until Adolf went there (inaudible).

Q Well, their dad -- their father's been here quite a while too.

A Oh, yeah. He was an old-timer here. Good Lord, I knew him back in 1918, 1919 very, very well (inaudible).

Q Well, we've been saying what we've been trying to do is locate these trails to.....

A Mm hmm (affirmative).  
Q .....see how accurate they are and.....  
A Mm hmm (affirmative).  
Q .....when they existed, when they stopped, you know.  
A Yeah.  
Q All of them. It's really quite a honeycomb. We were just talking to the Fullertons about the -- you know, the section that goes south here down Bonanza Creek over to Crooked Creek.  
A Oh, yeah.  
Q And then the old highway survey that went to Georgetown.  
A Now, this boy here is in Anchorage too. He's -- he can tell you all about this country.  
Q At Willow Creek?  
A No -- well, I mean, he's from -- he was born and raised in Crooked Creek.  
Q Oh, is that right? <sup>Parent</sup>  
A Yeah. That's Sam Parrott.  
Q Okay. Well.....  
A Sam Parrott, he could tell you all about that part of the country and about the trails. He can tell you all about that, these trails, because he's took many a hundred dollars between here and Crooked. His dad had a store over there, and they used to board dogs in the summer.  
Q Is that right?  
A Yes.  
Q Oh, yeah. That's Alice -- Alice Harris and.....  
A That's right.  
Q .....Josephine.....  
A That's his -- that's her brother.  
Q That's her brother.  
A That's her brother, old Sam.  
Q Yeah, we talked to the Dons (inaudible).  
A (Inaudible.) Sam (indiscernible), yeah. Sam's.....  
(Inaudible comment)  
A Well, he knew Balls; he knows Donnelin, and he knows all that country.  
Q Did they board dogs for like people that ran out of Flat.....  
A Well, yeah. See, like if you had five dogs, instead of you taking care of them for somebody.....  
Q Yeah.  
A .....Sam and his dad would come over and take a hundred dogs over.  
Q All right.  
A And then they would board them for \$5 a month.  
Q Is that right?  
A Yeah.  
Q That's not (indiscernible) money.  
A And then in the fall of the year, they would bring them back, see.  
(Indiscernible comments)  
Q Do you know Jack Morris?  
A Over in McGrath?  
Q Yeah.



A I just knew him going through.  
Q He showed up.....  
A He had the roadhouse.  
Q He came up to Takotna (inaudible).  
A Well, he did.  
Q (Inaudible comment.)  
A Oh, he run the roadhouse up there, yeah, up in the '40s.  
Q Yeah, I think he came in in the early '30s.  
A Yeah, the '30s, but (inaudible).  
Q Yeah (inaudible) 21 years ago. That's my (inaudible).  
A Yeah.  
Q Now, whether he ran the roadhouse.....  
A I don't know.  
Q He ran the old one (indiscernible).  
A Well, then there's Eve Eberts over there at that greenhouse. She's been around that farm for 20-some years. Well, and then the hardware store -- right out of his cabin.  
Q Is that right?  
A Yeah. (Inaudible.)  
Q Tom McGrath.  
A Tom McGrath and (inaudible). And then the Markson brothers (inaudible).  
(Inaudible comments)  
A Yeah, well, they've been around that part of that country quite a while. And there's another old-timer over there (indiscernible). He's been around that part of the country too. (Indiscernible comment.)  
Q Is that right?  
A Yeah.

(Tape indiscernible at about halfway on Tape No. 1, Side A)  
(Tape inaudible due to mechanical failure per log notes)  
(Tape Change - Tape No. 1, Side B, Approximate Log No. 0270)

A But it boosted a little bit everything else. About the time when World War II came along (inaudible), we all had (inaudible).

(Tape indiscernible/inaudible starting at Log No. 0283)  
(Log No. 1162)

A When he got to Nushagak, you know, in the Dillingham area there, why old Baranof sent a longboat out with nine men on it.

(Tape inaudible at Log No. 1185)

(End of Tape at Log No. 3272)