

Pioneer Roadhouse

MCG - 009

Pioneer Roadhouse site lies on the west side of the South Fork of the Kuskokwim River about 1 mile southeast of the present Farewell Lake Lodge. The site is about 50 feet west of a small side channel of the South Fork of the Kuskokwim. Four log buildings stand in various degrees of disrepair, and the ruins of two caches lie near the edge of a clearing that measures approximately 100 feet by 75 feet (Figure 6 and Plate C-5).

Two log cabins are still standing on the site. Cabin #1, which seems to be the most recent, appears to have been in use in the mid-1930's. A copy of the Saturday Evening Post in the cabin dated December 25, 1937, provides a probable date of occupancy.

Cabin #1 is in the best condition of any of the structures at the site (Plate C-6). The sod roof, which had several young trees growing on it until it began to cave in recently, is largely intact. Now there is a hole about 4 feet in diameter on the southwestern side, and dirt and sod have fallen through to the sawed plank floor. Some time ago, several metal sheets made from flattened 5-gallon fuel cans were placed on part of the roof in an attempt to patch it. The roof is supported largely by double ridge logs. Inside, smaller poles extending diagonally from the plate logs to the ridge beam support the roof of close-set poles that rest on the ridge and plate logs and are supported by an eave log.

Logs forming the walls of Cabin #1 are slightly charred, evidence that they probably were cut from a burned-over area. Herron (1901:54) and Reed (1965:13) both mention evidence of recent large fires in the Kuskokwim Basin during the early years of the 20th century or late 19th century. Charred wood is more resistant to deterioration than is uncharred wood, which could account for its relatively good condition. Logs forming the walls vary in diameter from 6 inches to nearly 12 inches. The inside faces of the logs were hewn flat, probably with an ax.

There are two windows, the one on the end opposite the door featuring a shutter that is held in place by two poles and operated by slipping the poles in and out of vertical cleats alongside the window. Other openings in the structure include the other window on the west wall, a metal-lined hole in the roof for a stovepipe, and a 6 inch air vent at the north end of the cabin, over the door. This air vent consists of a wooden cheese box set in the wall, with an end flap for controlling ventilation.

The main furnishings of Cabin #1 consist of four bunk beds and two tables. The bunk beds, two upper and two lower, are made of poles and are attached to the wall opposite the door. The tables are built in against the walls, and one is surfaced with flattened coffee cans.

Skulls of a moose, an immature Dall sheep, and a small canine lie atop the roof of Cabin #1. Although the skulls are whitened and beginning to deteriorate from weathering, it was not possible to judge how long they

had been there. Several skulls of moose and caribou were also found between the dog barn and the shed. Bottles piled on the floor just inside the door appear to date from the 1920's or 1930's (Plate C-7).

Cabin #2 is in generally poor condition and is probably older than Cabin #1. The roof has completely collapsed, but the walls are still standing. From the similarity of construction it appears that this cabin, the shed and dog barn may have been constructed by the same individual. A modified saddle notch was used on all three structures, but not in V shape. Rather, flat log seats were prepared without a great deal of attention to detail.

There were two sets of bunks inside the cabin constructed from poles. Items found in the cabin included enameled metal plates, Oriental type stick matches, a homemade pole clothes drying rack, and fuel cans.

Another small log structure on the west side of the clearing appears to have been a storage shed or stable. It has a low gently sloping shed roof and is without windows. A harness ring nailed low on the south wall suggests that at one time it may have served to shelter dogs.

The fourth structure at this site was identified as the dog barn by the presence of small stalls and by the gnawed wood at the base of each stall. There are two doorways, one on each end of the building, and no windows. Wooden pegs in the walls indicate that there were once partitions for 20 dog stalls. Later the stalls were apparently enlarged to twice the size of the original cubicles. The roof is completely gone. The northern end of the building appears to have had a porch of sorts.

Remains of two caches were found (Fig. 6). The larger, Cache #1, had originally been elevated approximately 8 feet above the ground. Flattened fuel cans that had been wrapped around the tops of the supporting poles are still in place. One pole is still standing but the rest of the cache is in ruins. What appears to have been another cache east of Cabin #2 (cache #2) has totally collapsed.

A trash pile located near the northeastern corner of Cabin #2 shows some signs of disturbance. It is possible that the bottles inside Cabin #1 had been cached there by a collector from this source.

Near the northwestern corner of Cabin #2 a shallow rectangular depression was noted. It was impossible to determine from superficial examination if it was of cultural origin.

The clearing around the site had grown up with poplar saplings from one to 10 feet in height and a few spruce, willows, and other shrubs. The second growth trees and shrubs encroaching on the clearing were removed at the time the site was examined, in part to allow photographing and mapping, and in part to reduce the fire hazard to the structures and to allow unobstructed access to river water in case of fire.

Pioneer Roadhouse has had other names over the years. It was known as "French Joe's" after the French Canadian, Joe Blanchell, who was its proprietor for many years (Irwin 1968:15; Margaret Mespelt, pers. comm.). It is also identified as Farewell Mountain Roadhouse on the Alaska Road Commission map, 1916, and on the USGS McGrath topographic

map, 1949. Rand-McNally (1922:40) identifies it as Pioneer Roadhouse. Pioneer Roadhouse served as headquarters for Einar Carlsen and Jim Davidson while they were trapping in the area during 1928 and 1929 (Margaret Mespelt, pers. comm.).

Cabin #1 at the Pioneer Roadhouse site should be repaired and maintained, and the other structures on the site stabilized in their present condition. A firm break should be maintained around existing structures. Further archival and archeological research concerning this site would probably prove fruitful.

#### Peluk Roadhouse

MCG-011

Peluk Roadhouse site was found and examined briefly during the 1976 field season. In August 1977 the Bear Creek fire burned over the area and destroyed what remained of the roadhouse. Some of the data presented here was collected on the ground in 1976 before the fire, and the site was also revisited in 1978 after the fire.

The historic cabin site identified as Peluk Roadhouse was found on the Iditarod Trail approximately 1.5 miles southeast of where it crosses the upper end of Bear Creek. A small grassy clearing surrounded by birch trees marked the site (Plate C-9). The remains of two log structures were situated facing each other on the northwest side of the clearing (Figure 7).