

PR Doherty - FBX 1936

Pat Doherty oral interview in UAF Rasmuson Library archives

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Tape H75-15: no date of interview provided

Transcribed 8/23/2010 by Ron Inouye

A = Unidentified announcer: PD = Pat R. Doherty

A: It's 7:30 on a Wednesday evening. It's time for "Here's as Pioneer", weekly presentation of the Pioneer Cab Company, East 10A. And their stand, you know, is located across from the Nordale Hotel.

This week we have a genuine old timer, Mr. Pat Doherty of Richardson, Alaska.

Mr. Doherty, how far back was it that you came to the northland? What year?

PD: In 1893 there was a panic, and I was in Butte City and the mines shut down there. The panic was caused by the depreciation of silver.

A: That was in the state of Montana.

PD: In Montana. Things were awful hard, very little work, and I had another young fellow started out and went up to Fort Macleod (Canada) then to Calgary then to Edmonton. Knocked around for quite a long time, then we (?) with Hudson Bay, to Athabasca Landing. Went down the Athabasca River to Chippewa Island, down Slave River to Great Slave Lake and around the course on the left hand side of the lake - it's a big lake - down to where the Mackenzie runs out of the Lake.

Went down there, and there was a Mission, a French Mission at Ft. Liard, and they had a little steamboat with a wheel on each side. We got in there, and were invited and wintered around Ft. Liard and (?) and prospected and hunted and trapped and one thing and another for the winter.

Drove a team, dog teams, for the Hudson Bay Company at the different posts.

A: Were you hauling their provisions then?

PD: Well, there was trading with the Indians, and they would go paying tobacco and stuff of that kind, delivered to the Indians and get their furs.

A: I wonder if you found the Indians in that part of the country much different than those over here in Alaska?

PD: Not much, very little. There was a tribe they called the "Dogribs". The Hudson Bay Company, when they went in there, first they encouraged them to dry the moose meat, put it in brine and salt it. They done that, and they had too much salt and they all pretty near died with the scurvy. So you couldn't sell an Indian in through that country any salt.

A: They wouldn't touch it.

PD: No, no.

A: How did you continue with your travel then? p. 2/6

PD: Well, then we in the following spring, the Hudson Bay bailed their furs just like they do hay with the flesh side out. I went with them, I and my partner up the Nelson River, walked the old (Mountaineer?) Trail, that's the trail that runs from the Nelson River to Ft. Saint Johns. Of course, Ft. St. Johns is in Peace River, and it's a distance of 200 or 300 miles, I don't exactly the right distance, but they got up there, and there was a bunch of little cayuses [horses] there to haul the furs across to Ft. Saint Johns.

We went out with them, and started across there. We had a little difficulties, there's not much water, there's a tableland and a lot of old stagnant lakes. Geese and ducks and everything like that on, you could smell them about 5 or 6 miles before you come to them.

So we got over there and running short of grub, and we had to kill a horse and eat it before we got to Ft. Saint Johns.

A: What kind of eating was that? Did you mind the horse?

PD: Well, we just simply built a great big campfire and threw a side of the ribs on the campfire and fried it. We didn't wait very long because we were all hungry. It was very good at the time.

A: At least you had the assurance it was fresh meat.

PD: Yeah, fresh meat. Then we went over to Ft. Saint Johns and delivered our stuff. There was a fellow by the name of Hammit (?), a half breed or a quarter breed, and he had a big raft there. They unloaded everything there, and put it in the raft and started down the river. We went back with a little bunch of horses again like the Mountaineer (?) Trail where we started from. And then we took the boats that were left there, right down toward Ft. Liard. The Nelson River runs into the Liard River above Ft. Liard. And we went down there. And then afterwards we knocked around that summer, went prospecting and one thing and another. The next fall, platting and (?). Finally in the short time we went to the NaTea (?) River, up to Ft. Nelson.

Then we went up the Peel River to the head up the Rat River, crossed over the portage to the Porcupine, and down the Porcupine to Ft. Yukon.

A: What was Ft. Yukon like at that time?

PD: Well, there was just...it was just a trading post is all.

A: Do you recall what year it was that you first hit Ft. Yukon?

PD: In '94.

A: 1894.

PD: About that time or it was...yes, in the fall of '94.

A: Did you stay there very long?

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PD: No. No, we didn't. We went back up the Porcupine region. We trapped there that winter, and then the next...when we come down there was reports - we stayed there quite a while; we had lots of grub there, we got lots of grub. And we heard about the Dawson; that's in '96,

Then, next thing, there was a little boat come up from St. Michaels, and we went on up to the Forty Mile. And stayed there. You could rock on the bars there and make from \$5 to \$20 a day there on the bars, rocking.

A: In the Forty Mile country?

PD: Yeah, in the Forty Mile; it was a good country then.

A: Then you moved on to Dawson?

PD: Then when Dawson was in the boom we went up to Dawson. And I worked there for Stanley and Warren in Eldorado there one winter. It was a lode drift. At that time the drifts were low, only about 4 feet high.

Next spring, a bunch of us fellows were kind of all bent over from not getting a chance to straighten up; we had to go out of the shaft to straighten up.

A: You put in a lot of time, working pretty hard over there.

PD: Well, they did, yes, yes, sure. I was building the fires, but you couldn't do nothing much. It was all wood fires, you see.

A: How far out of Dawson were you working?

PD: About 14 or 15 miles up to the forks. Yes, up in Eldorado..

A: How long did you stay in that vicinity?

PD: I stayed there long...we were prospecting there, 3 or 4 of us, half a dozen of us was prospecting, trying to find something for ourselves, you see. Then, when in 1902, well before that in 1901 I got a hold of a quartz mine down the Yukon, we run 300 feet of a tunnel in there, right opposite Van Biber's Roadhouse. I sold out to (?) and P. G. Wilson and Dr. Barrett. They've done a lot of work on it, and I don't know if they ever made a (great deal?) on it.

✓ Then Fairbanks - Wada, he came up.

A: Oh, I've heard of the Jap. Was he a miner?

PD: No, no. No, he was ... Barnette had a trading outfit in a little boat called the "Stella", and he started up the Tanana to trade with the Indians at Solyuaidet (?). He

came up the slough and instead of going around the main river, and he got stuck right here at the bar where Fairbanks is now, and Felix Pedro and Pete Wilson was out prospecting here on the creek. They had struck a little gold but nothing to speak of, just a few colors. They were working on the left (?), and that never was very good.

So he dumped his stuff off here, then he sent Wada to Dawson. He told all kinds of stories and the Dawson Daily News about Dan McCarty being offered \$75,000 for his claim, and old Peter refused \$125,000. Of course, everybody's excited, wanted to go to the stampede.

I and Dempsey Lewis and Louie DeWolfe and Fred Hassler and myself who had 4 dog teams, and we went down to Steel Creek on the Forty Mile and loaded up there and went up the north fork of the Forty Mile and down the Goodpaster to the Tanana. That's the time we met Billy Mitchell.

We met Billy Mitchell on the North fork of the Forty Mile, and he was out laying a direction where you could put a telegraph wire over to Valdez or in that direction.

A: He was just a lieutenant then, wasn't he?

PD: He was just a young lieutenant, a small man too, he was a little, a young fellow.

A: What sort of a man was he?

PD: He was one of the finest little fellows I ever met. Then we got to the mouth of the Goodpaster. We broke trail, you had to break trail on snowshoes. And sometimes we'd have to go ahead, a lot of us go ahead and we'd break a trail, and the next day it'd be froze and we could go right over it. But sometimes we went through deep snow, and we didn't do that.

Went down to the mouth of the Goodpaster, and along the ... Tanana sometimes it don't ever freeze. There was a boat there, an Indian boat. We had to cross all those dog teams and all this stuff and ourselves and everything else. And the boys that was with me, they never had much experience in the boat. I towed the rope. I said, "Well, I've got us some help." "Well," he said, "I'm afraid to get in, there's ice there." They didn't want to go in them.

Billy Mitchell, he said, "By God, if there's ice ... I'm a canoe man." And he jumps right in.

A: Did he do alright?

PD: Why, he's fine. He was; he understood canoeing alright. And we crossed the whole layout. Then he had a great big dog team, 14 dogs - big malemutes. Then he went on down the Tanana to meet another lieutenant that was supposed to come up and meet him from Ft. Gibbon.

Of course we had big loads, and we was traveling slow. That's the last we sent of him then, until 1903 when they started to build the line down the Goodpaster.

So then I, we went on down to Fairbanks, and we didn't see a single soul from we left the mouth of Goodpaster 'til we got to Fairbanks. There wasn't a sign of a human being anywhere's, no white men at all, very few Indians.

A: I suppose you wanted to check up on Wada's story right away.

PD: Well, we went on down there, when we got there, and when we got to Fairbanks here there was just a few people there. Barnette had built a great big log cabin and all the goods in it. George Noble was building a cabin; he had gone down to Rampart and hauled a load of whiskey up there, and he was going to open up a saloon. He had the cabin almost completed.

A: Where was Barnette's first cabin located now?

PD: It was right along where the N.C. Company is, someplace there. I think the N.C. Company, afterwards Barnette give the N.C. Company an awful good deal in that because, at Chenoa, they thought Chenoa was going to be the town. That is the head of navigation in the Tanana, you see. But finally they got up here, the slough with the steamboats, and that settled Chenoa - it didn't amount to nothing.

A: I see.

PD: So, then, of course, we went out on the creeks to investigate the things. They had really nothing. There were 7 holes sunk on Cleary Creek. An old fellow by the name Pete Ling was working there, and they didn't have anything just a few colors was all.

They were still prospecting, and then the following fall, the fall of 1903, Al Hilty struck it on Cleary, 15 feet of pay, averaging about 10 cents to the pan, and then everything went booming up. Then they started to strike it on Fairbanks Creek and all the other places, all around.

A: Then it really began to open up.

PD: Yes, it opened up then. Yeah.

A: Didn't they try to organize a necktie party for Wada?

PD: Well, then. We went out on the creeks, and we stayed out there about a month, a little over a month, and investigated the whole thing. There was nothing there much. And when we come back in there was four to five hundred people here, and they was awful sore about the reports that come out from here about the big strike.

So, they was going to hang the Jap. They held a meeting here, and Harry Badger – he lives right over here, he's called the "Berry King of the Tanana Valley", "Strawberry King"; well he was chairman of the meeting. But it didn't amount to anything. Nobody wanted to hang him anyhow; but it was kind of a bluff. And that passed off.

So then it was getting late in the spring, and we started back, was going back up the Yukon and Dawson, the Forty Mlle. We started by Circle City; we didn't go the way we come down — we come down the Goodpaster. We were going around to Citle City and up the Yukon.

We met Judge Wickersham at Circle City. He was coming in here to name Fairbanks. In fact the (?) And his brother Ed, was marshall. When I went up there I had quite a little experience with furs and the Hudson Bay Company, and I thought I'd knock around the Indian camp and buy some furs. Then I went back to Sucker (?) Creek, Black River and down the Porcupine to Ft. Yukon. I bought about, pretty near 300 marten.

A: But, you've made your central location right around here in Fairbanks ever since, haven't you?

PD: Well, ... then ... yes. I come down in 1904, and took a lay on number 6 below on Fairbanks Creek.

A: You're living out at Richardson now.

PD: Well, then Tenderfoot and Richs (Richardson?) was struck in 1905, and I went to that stampede. Of course, been there, around there since. I got interested in claims and one thing and another and been up here every since, have headquarters there.

A: I see. We certainly enjoyed this opportunity to talk with you with 15 minutes about the old days, Mr. Doherty.

Friends, we've listened to another interview on the presentation "Here's a Pioneer", and this week's genuine old timer has been Mr. Pat Doherty of Richardson, Alaska. "Here's a Pioneer" you know, is brought to you by Joe Coble and the Pioneer Cab Company each Wednesday evening at 7:30. We remind you again that their telephone is East 10A, and they're located across from the Nordale Hotel.