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Frank Legrot Side 1, Aired 12/21/1966, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Interviewed by Bob Bergstrom

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Notes: Original on 5 inch reel. Master copy on CD.

An unidentified man is discussing the building of a bridge and how they pile snow up and build the center of the bridge. They poke a hole in the ice and let the ice freeze up. The Cat train was a whole bunch of tractors, 8 or 9 tractors on one train. Plow Cat and tractors, the train also carried the fuel and sleeping quarters. The rest were all freighters. They went about 5 miles an hour then they open up the governor and they get about 6 miles to the gallon. A Cat train that size carries 4,000 gallons. We're talking about old tractors (AR's) that carry about 60 gallons. The late model DA is about twice the size of the older ones. The weight difference makes a larger haul available. They use a winch to move the load sometimes. When they started the Cat trains going up north, when did they start Catting that way? 1946. Everything from Barrow came in on ships. The only wells they drilled in Barrow right around the gas well, they put the gas well down about 4 times lowest about 3 miles from Barrow Village. The catting was on the interior away from the sea. The seismograph parties would go out in the spring. They consisted of one Cat and maybe three or four Weasels. They'd take out their jet line and shoot the works. If they're going up north to put up a winter road up in the Kennecott area, near Nome, with that tundra area there, they'd have to almost make a winter road only. It'd cost a lot of money to do a permanent road. When you have muskeg and all that stuff right there you have to determine where the material is going to come from. If a Cat train were to run, they usually take off from Livengood. In 1947 or 1948, Green construction ran a Cat train from Fairbanks to Livengood. This was equivalent to the Alaska National guard who were scouting, they were a roughneck group. They went and punched the road. They're the ones who went on the Cat train. One gentleman says he seen some of them in Barrow. The last fellow Tennessee Williams, from Anchorage, says they took two Cats a few years ago and had no problems at all. They thought it was going to be a 10 day trip but it took them 6 weeks. They started at Dunbar, they loaded their sled at Livengood where they were going to take off from. They moved about 100 yards and fell into Goldstream. Pricing a route is a problem when you are crossing a river or have to go up a river. Cross country is a problem because you have to go up hills and vales. If you start sliding, you're in a bunch of trouble. 2/3 of the 90 tons traveling is useful cargo. They figured it cost about a dollar a mile to do the hauling. Wages were about \$2.20 an hour. Diesel fuel was shipped in by boat. Gas flown in from out of town cost about a dollar a gallon. The crew would have a welder and hand tools just in case something is going to break. The places they would be going usually had people there or there would be people there in 60 days or so. One gentleman heard a rumor that some Cats were just left there from cat trains. No is the answer to that rumor. Whenever Cats were just left, their seismograph parties go out in the early spring to pick them up. The teams will do all the Cat moving until they can't move the Cat anymore. The tractor will then just sit there until they can move it.

Legrot says: "They don't fight it, if this is conditions, this is conditions. You can't fight it." They'd locate all the Cats and send a weasel to go get them. The weasel seems to be the best snow buggy they've had around. At that time they were but maintenance wise it was rough. Earl Butcher at Tango Lakes tried making over the weasel and sent the idea to the supplier but they didn't buy it. If you were going to Anaconda Mines, they're inland enough from sea that they'd have to Cat in from there or here to get material in.

Rand McNally map is presented to discuss what was more feasible to Cat train or fly. They are looking for Kobuk. Koyukuk is then saying and now they are discussing Kotzebue and Nome at 15:25. The men are discussing wanting to put a winter road in and they want to put one in Livengood. They could probably go almost straight and they'd have two major rivers anywhere they go. The little rivers or springs are what bother the travels because sometimes you don't know where they are.

The last deal that went through went up to Livengood but the man speaking [name not clear] don't know where they crossed the Yukon. The men are looking at a map and discussing. One of the men says a fella brought up three Cats because a company said they would hire the Cats and he got lucky because he was being paid even though the cats were just sitting there. Another way of transporting is shipping the Cat in pieces. Legrot assembled five tractors at Umiat and assembled one on the mouth of the Colville. And two they assembled east of Umiat at Toolik and he can't think of the other place. It was about 80 miles east of Umiat. They disassembled them on the pallets then they followed them there and put them together in the boonies. Another man, Charlie Ulz, Bobby Miller hired him in Livengood and he went up all over the place with the seismograph parties. They talk about the oil companies but it's not the oil companies it's just people hired by the oil companies. GSI, Neighbors Drilling, and Bendix are some of the companies mentioned. They're starting to bore a hole in Pearl Bay at the Atlantic Refinery, that's where a man named Hawk is going. Tanning River is all game reserve they say as they look at the map. Shell Oil has a bunch of stuff at Peter's Lake.

According to Legrot, there was a nutty dude who was working at Bogger Island. He was going to go to Schroeder Lake. He wanted to fly there and build a cabin in the winter. Actually, it was through Hulahula Lake. He was going to go up there in the winter and do all this stuff and he doesn't even belong there. There was timber around Jack Franz and he knows about the area because he's married to an Eskimo girl. The guy came from St. Louis. He was in his 50's. Some member of the military hid the guy for a week because he could have been running from the law. Jules Thibedeau was going to fly him back there but he had to go to town to get skis. Jules is unpredictable as a March wind. They had to bring chow from the mess hall to feed the guy from St. Louis and he had no business being there at all. Jules comes back and lands on the strip. They come down and the military says "What's that airplane doing there?" He picked that guy up and took him over to Hulahula Lake. They said he should bring a rifle or a dog. The guy says he doesn't need a pet and they all told him "not as a pet, you might have to eat him." He either starved out or froze out because he wasn't there very long and ended up at Schroeder Lake.

Another man tells a story of flying into Cedar Lake and there's an inlet going into Schroeder lake and there's good fish. He got grayling just by using a hook alone. But ARL keeps a small cabin there with a

generator and they keep a food supply that would probably last a couple people a year without any sweat.

They started the DEW line in 1953. They had an R and R camp up at Schroeder Lake.

The man speaking says when he thinks about it Frank, He could see where to move bulk into the interior and set up, there's no other way but a Cat train for huge bulk. Another suggests you could disassemble it and fly it. Frank says you can hire a pilot and he is trying to think of a capacity of a plane but a train cabin carries 7 tons. It figures out to \$1.65 a ton mile.

Frank is asked what the huge tired vehicle the army set up was. Frank says it was designed for sand. Nothing with tires works unless you have a road.

Another man says some guys in Fairbanks were contemplating taking the Nodwell Trail north. They wanted someone to come up with some cable Frank believes. Frank believes they should open up the county for transportation.

Frank says sledding was faster than Cats but they couldn't carry the capacity. He says the first time going through you should travel light to get the roads down then travel heavier. Sometimes if you get on a river or follow a coast line you can follow right along. If you get on a lagoon it's usually a straight shot because there are about 4 feet of water and 3 feet of ice.

A Cat train traveling across country prefers to stay on water. They discuss the different variations of sleds that are used for transporting. It's not common to break up an engine or gear box. The tractors they make now are a really refined machines compared to the ones in the 1940's. They don't leak like they used to.

D9 tractors were used to punch the road through. Winter road could be done if the thing is smooth and maintained. Pingo Beach has a road that is roughly 130 miles long from Pingo Beach to Umiat that Neighbor's Drilling was using. Because they came up the Caldwell River as far as they could go with barges then from there they went to East Quebec in 1963.

Legrot tells another story. The Cat trail went almost to Wainwright and they could follow the tower at Wainwright. The crew got out on the trail but they came to a snow bridge and the tracks on an LBT are wider than a tractor. The tracks are spinning and they can't move. So Legrot says he's going to see how deep the thing is and lost a bar trying to see how deep it went. They went to sleep in their sleeping bags and they woke up and water starting seeping up everywhere. They picked the radio up and went to what they thought was high ground. They could see the water rising. They put all their tools and radio up. They moved about 4 times 100 yards from that place and the next day there was barely any of that rig left. They kept a little log or diary. Right in there it says things must been getting desperate because he hears Howie talking to God. From Wainwright going from the Meat River coal mine they had a weekly flight so the crew piled up oil barrels to light on fire so the pilot would see them. Derrick [no last name] writes in a diary, "so much smoke in the sky that the planes were grounded." Marion Nicholson

was a pusher. When he got stuck he asked how much pennies are we supposed to get. Derrick says we might as well let them know what we expect so he put down 24.

Everyone was fishing or seal hunting. Legrot doesn't know how far from land but there was a shipwreck so they were jumping from log to log to get from island to island. One guy was named Beans. He was quite a guy. A fish and wildlife guy got aboard his boat while he was fishing and beans just started cutting the guys button off his coat with a sheath knife. Sounds like something that Damien Runyon would write about, right out the book. Beans was hard as nails. Usually what breaks up first when on a slope is the hitches. Then you have to decide how long the deal is going to be until a plane would come.