

Call Number: 02-00-17

Rogge Side 2, Aired 12/21/1966, No Location, No Interviewer

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Date of creation of summary: 2/15/2013

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

Two men are speaking in this discussion. The second man who is unnamed says there is no other way to open the country than with Cat train. The first man [Gene Rogge] says it's expensive but there's no other way to do it. Second man [No Name] doesn't see the feasibility at any time. Gene says it all depends on which way you go up there and he believes they will find a route up there through the Hog [Hogatza] River country. The proper place might be to go through the Manley Hot Springs, down to Tofty and hit Tanana, then Yukon, then over that log hog back then drop into Hog River country then Bornite, follow the Koyuk River follow that until the John River. Gene says once you get on the other side in the winter time you can go anywhere. They found that if they build a road up about 18 inches they didn't have to do any bulldozing after that. Man 2 asks "How many stations along the route if they were to make a permanent route?" Gene thinks three. Man 2 mainly says oil depot. Gene has ideas of how to improve technology. He says a big truck with all-wheel drive and they pull trailers and have winches. Enormous tires about 5 feet tall. The truck itself would be at about 12 feet from one side to another. Gene says it would be able to plow through snow. You could put a plow right on it.

Kennecott gave them a figure the Man 2 can recall, something like (he doesn't remember the figure) for ore. He says you need Cats for initial movement. He said there'd be no reason to have a Cat because if you had a big truck...

Gene learned a lot about how to fix roads. How simple it is to make a road. There's nothing to it, according to Gene. All you have to do is use your head. When you figure 300 tons going one way on one road is fantastic. There isn't another mode of transportation that can do something like that because there are no regulations on the road.

Man 2 asks Gene what is holding back from people using the trucks. The oil companies aren't interested in getting anything up north. There's only one that's going to be building and that's Prudhoe Bay. The second guy is thinking about getting equipment up there so people can start doing it.

Gene says the only way to get things going is to get somewhere to go up there and prove that transportation costs aren't as much overland as they are by air. The advantage is you will never have the carrying capacity by aircraft as you can by train. Plus you need really good landing fields.

Original roads were built with horses in the early 20's. The second man says they had a bunch of colored people working the roads. Gene says that was during the war. The Army Engineers had a

couple Colored [African-American] battalions and they did a lot of work up there and they built that road. The winter of 1942 and 1943 the Colored battalion was up in Northway and those poor bastards. You wouldn't believe it; Gene pulled into their mess hall, a great big tent 150 feet long a good 40 feet wide. There was no heat except for the cook stove. They didn't have plates. They ate hot cakes with syrup right off the table. Gene says those guys were tough. They moved a bunch of stuff out of Valdez in the summer up to Gakona then during the winter they moved all that gas and diesel up to Tanana crossing. They moved a lot of tanks and stuff like that. When you break down on the road and you had to leave the machine the colored fellas were scattered all the way down the road. They punch a hole in the barrel and put a match in there. Man 2 asks how many were up there at that time. Gene says about 400-500. Road building in Alaska has been going back according to Man 2. Gene says it started out first with the rabbit because the dog was chasing the rabbit. The old Richardson Highway was so crooked and is an example of the dog chasing the rabbit.

Man 2 says without roads this country is nothing. He believes the Canadians have the right idea because they say keep a gravel road. The Canadians are right.

Gene says if you look at the roads the Canadians have put in the last 12 years off of the Alaska Highway. They've got roads that go off of that highway all the way into the bush. They are not fancy but they are there.

Gene talks about the Bornite up here [not sure of the location]. He says that will be one of the richest copper mines in the world. Its ore is richer than any place that's getting mined and they know it is but they are dragging their feet.

Gene says the Army group is going to go up a couple different routes such as Livengood, Dall Pass, another group through Tanana, and up through the Hog River country. There are 4 or 5 groups that will be out. The general says he will have them scattered. Man 2 asks how far inland. Gene says they expected to go all the way into Bornite and up to the John River over into the North Slope probably not into the sea. Gene thinks there's more to it. They're working on the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line up there. If they had to they could move this stuff up there in the winter time. Gene thinks it's a good challenge for them. Man 2 says if you look across over at Siberia, the development that has happened over there. They have put in roads, railroads; they have done what they had to to get people where they needed to go.

Gene says they are talking about barging this stuff down the Kobuk River, taking it out to the sea and going on about things that way. The proper way is to come through Fairbanks. He says the Kobuk won't stand the traffic because there's no water.

Man 2 says he has a good question. The biggest problem has been cost for freight per mile. If sufficient freight can be hauled in large enough quantity, will it pay off? Gene says it's got to, has to, and it will. Man 2 says by hauling large loads they will still be able to get large materials out to overcome high wages and high transportation costs. Gene says it would definitely pay off. The investor's bone of contention is can they bring enough mass of material out.

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Man 2 says that Gene sounds like he would have the opinion that lets work with what we have here in Alaska and go ahead and export material that will bring money in. He says Alaska has the resources to barter with people and still come out with a profit.

Gene says they both know when it comes to growing stuff here the cost is too much. There all sorts of minerals in the North Slope. There's iron ore. The companies would come in and this thing would get moving.

Man 2 says a lot of people say let's keep the dollar here in Alaska and that's fine but you have to keep them here first. He begins talking about the Native population. By going on the North Slope, this would create work for the Natives and give them on the job training.

Gene says he has lots of Native friends. He says you show them one thing on time and they got it. They're not reckless when they're handling the piece of equipment. If you can keep the Native out in the Bush where he belongs, he'd make a hell of a good man according to Gene. The Natives Gene hires are paid the same wages. If they go that route, they can get money from the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs). BIA will put up a good amount of money if Native are hired and trained. Gene says the Native doesn't have to be a graduate of college; all you do is just tell him this is the way you will run it. The Native is not a smart alec, he'll do what you tell him and he's a better worker than a white man.

Gene had his first experience going up the Sulatna River 50 miles off of the main road. After the first year you know how to build a winter road. The main thing is to smooth it out good. 9/10s of your ice is no good on the river. You have to find good ice. You can't just go up the river, no matter what river. Man 2 says that flotation is not the answer to the North Slope because once you get a road that's all that's necessary. A Cat with all its weight is going to get bogged down. Gene says right now in the summertime there's nothing that built so far that you could get over that country. He believes you could run from about middle of November and by doing that you might have to put a piling bridge because at that time of the year the ice isn't as strong. How are they coming at Prudhoe Bay? Gene says they haven't started drilling yet.

Gene says for river transportation, the Kobuk River doesn't work because there's no water in it.

Gene says with big enough tires you don't sink down. The only thing that's going to stick you is the tundra where there's maybe lots of times you'll fall down to five or six feet. A route would have to get picked and keep using the route and continually put gravel over it.

There was an article in the paper where they were talking about putting a smoldering in Seward. Gene says they're not so farfetched on that. If they have a mine that's big enough like Bornite, well then of course they might have to bring some of it in from outlying areas into that smelter. It's a lot better than taking all of that ore out. He bets that what will happen. Gene says it takes time build a railroad. A railroad would be a reasonable way to get the ore out of there. Since railroading first started at Whitehorse and Yukon railroad, they had a target date to finish and they overshot their target plus years

and dollars. Man 2 says if they were to start a railroad today and they had to go up to Kobuk country he doesn't think they could finish that railroad in 10 years. He says that means 30 years and in that time they could use other means to mine the ore.

Gene says the mining could be done with truck.

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Man 2 says all you need is a starting place and if people think there's only one way to do these things they are wrong. The last step in the railroad because it is the most costly to put in. By that time you're going to know whether you can have enough coming out to justify a railroad coming out of a certain area. Overall when you look at this picture of transportation in Alaska, it's more important and has more facets that you can go one way or the other. Who's to say that their mode is just the one to use? Politics says "I've got an investment" and right now they can say they've got a good return. If another mode of transportation comes in and if anyway it's going to hurt the investments he's going to fight it. What they're saying again is they are going to say they pioneered the country and if you put this mode of transportation in they are going to be hurt financially and their progress will be hurt but once you get different modes of transportation used in the right way, everyone will make money.

Gene says the way we have it set up we would welcome a railroad. If it takes 5-6 years to get a railroad in, in the meantime there's going to be more mines in the Brooks Range, the railroad isn't going to be at every spot so we just move into the hills more with our big equipment and move it to the railhead.