

ORAL HISTORY 2019-01-08

Mike Dalton with Libby Dalton present

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

Series: Kathleen "Mike" Dalton Life History Recordings

Brewster asked what the connection was between the historic trails and the navigable waters. Mike Dalton said they were both part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act which was passed in 1980. They were sections of that act. The Native Claims Act was passed in 1971. There were several sections in there that were anathema to miners, trappers, cross country skiers and motorists. The first one that impacted Alaska was the section of the Lands's Act that guaranteed [affected?] anyone who had mining claims. The classic example was in Kantishna. The Act put the miners in Kantishna out of business. Hatred for the Park Service grew very fast. It took the livelihood and the value of the stake and wiped them out. It put a lot of miners out of business. Earl Pilgrim willed his estate to the University of Alaska School of Mines. He had a mill on the Savage or Kantishna River. The Park Service blew it up one weekend without any prior contact with the university or miners. The Park Service claimed they owned the land. In the Fortymile closer to the Yukon River they used RS2477 to put miners out of business. They ran them off. They used an old declared access to some mining property which they should have been able to use because of its history of use, but the Park Service said they didn't have the right. Dalton said under the Statehood Act the state owns from the high water mark on one side of a stream to the high water mark on the other side of the stream. If it isn't navigable the state can't claim access. There is a discussion about the Sturgin case. Dalton comments about the Park Service.

Brewster asked about her reporting on the oil discovery at Prudhoe Bay. Dalton said there were signs of oil up there for centuries and coal. She said the largest coal resource in the United States is on the North Slope. There were known coal provinces. There were oil seeps that people knew about including the USGS. In the early teens the USGS sent exploratory crews up here. They went out and hired people like Harry Brower to show them where the coal and oil seeps were. The early whalers knew about the oil seeps. World War came along and the Navy was looking ahead for supplies. In 1923 President Harding set aside four petroleum reserves. Teapot Dome was one and three others. One of them was in the Alaska Arctic. They knew a lot about it because the USGS had been here exploring. They did surface mapping. There were other explorers who came in who weren't government. The Episcopal Church did a lot of exploring in Alaska. Assemblies of God Church moved in in the 1950s. Catholic missionaries were up in the Arctic, too. Father Tom Cunningham was in the north. Harding came to Alaska. Eisenhower had been up here in the 1940 or 1950s. President Ford was here in 1975. Reagan came to visit in 1984. Others were here on fuel stopovers. Dalton said the oil companies had been up north doing exploration and getting readings on subsurface rocks. They knew there was oil up there. Atlantic Richfield was consistent in their efforts. In the winter they created their own airstrips on frozen lakes. They would see large cargo planes landing at the airport. They used Fairbanks as a supply base. In the 1960s there was a lot of exploration going on. They started putting stories together. The oil companies were not being

public about their activity. Dalton said they would sit next to someone at the bar and listen to the talk. The state put together a cat train to go up to help supply. They wanted to build a road but there were too many legal roadblocks. In 1968 most of the activity started up. Tennessee Miller pushed the state along. He had cat train equipment and knew what he was doing. He ran several cat trains up to Prudhoe Bay from the Nenana area. The union guys didn't like him. His equipment was burned up several times. Hickel was very interested in overland transportation. The state put together their own cat train in 1968. In 1968 Atlantic Richfield announced their oil discovery. She went on the first trip the governor went up there. Egan had some far-sighted people in his administration. They selected the lands up in Prudhoe Bay for the state. Dalton talked about the Hickel Highway. Hickel wanted to open up the oil prospects. The state had a lot of land. In 1969 they had an oil lease sale. It brought in 900 million dollars. She put a bid on a lease, but did not get it. In the mid-1960s the oil companies were pushing the state to get a road in. Flying the equipment in was expensive. The state created a cat train in the spring of 1968 and headed to Prudhoe Bay. In March of 1968 Atlantic Richfield officially showed off its well and invited people up to see Discovery Well. The governor had access to a military plane and she hitched a ride on the plane. She was working for the News miner at this time. She said Prudhoe looked pretty bare at that time. Within ten years Atlantic Richfield had a field office up there. British Petroleum had an office building up there with a swimming pool. The oil companies took very good care of their workers. They usually worked a week on and a week off. They had a huge food service. In 1968 when they visited they landed on a frozen lake. After they were established they built their own airstrip. There were other "homesteads" up there like the one from Tennessee Miller. There were separate camps owned by the contractors. She talked about the name Deadhorse. Some of the first trucks up there were the Deadhorse Haulers. Other base camps were made of Atco units. Happy Valley was the base camp for construction workers for the highway. Discussion of other camp names. When they went up to see the Discovery Well they were just there for the day. A couple of weeks later they had the lease sales. Oil companies from all over the world had representatives there. She was there as a bidder and reporter. Her husband was up near Umiat at this time. He was doing exploratory work. She wrote a lot of stories about the pipeline. BP and ARCO provided their own air service. She did a lot of pre-discovery and post-discovery reporting. She hitched a ride on a cat train. Jack Agook took her by snow machine to the cat train on the John River. She described Anaktuvuk Pass. They had sod houses and didn't have an airstrip. She rode for about four days with the cat train. She always took a big duffel bag with a mummy bag and plenty of gear. When she went into villages she would carry food supplies with her to share. The cook on the cat train had a small separate place. She knew a lot of the people on the cat train. She said there were always small planes flying up to Prudhoe Bay with supplies and she would hitch a ride going back. Usually the planes had space going south. She flew with Bruce Campbell who worked for the state Department of Transportation. She talked about her time on the cat train trip. She thought there were twenty people on the cat train. Bud Anderson and Walter Kopp were on the train. The cook was Miller. They didn't have any entertainment. They played cards. They always made sure the kitchen equipment worked. The building of the pipeline and the road was in 1974. She said it was a frenzied atmosphere. When they built the road the trucks really started moving. Most of them had pipeline pipe and other supplies. The road was built from both directions. She wrote stories about the construction of the pipeline and had mostly photographs. She said the pipeline was slow going. The welds had to last for fifty years or more. Dalton said around Atigun Pass there is a peak named after James Dalton. One time she hitched a ride from Don Johns from Anaktuvuk Pass. Johns later crashed with Nick Begich, Hale Boggs and Begich's aide aboard.