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Heinrich Carstens

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

Series: Sourdoughs speak

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Neville Jacobs introduces the episode. They will talk about frozen gold. Heinie Carstens talks about making his big strike when he was past seventy years old. He took his bride on a honeymoon to show her his mine. Carstens began prospecting by hand. He was known for his endurance.

He was born in Iowa in 1893. He came west in 1903. He worked in sawmills when he was eleven years old. He didn't leave for Alaska until 1922. He worked in mining and construction. He talked about his early jobs. He worked in Seward for three years for the Alaska Railroad. He returned to Fairbanks in 1926. He freighted out of Fairbanks until 1933. He worked with the Dutch Kid and Thorsen on the Porcupine River. He mined from then on. His first prospecting was on the Porcupine and he learned from the Dutch Kid. He taught him how to lay a wood fire and build a windlass. He always knew how to work. He said the Dutch Kid was the best shoveler. Carstens described how to set up a fire for thawing the ground. The next day the dirt is taken out and a new fire is laid crosswise to give them a round hole.

Neville said after the first gold rush after Felix Pedro's find many camps sprung up on creeks throughout the area. Gradually the smaller miners were replaced by large scale operations conducted by stateside corporations. In 1928 Smelting, Refining and Mining Company established a local subsidiary, The Fairbanks Exploration Company. In 1929 two dredges began operating on creeks near Fairbanks. Their tailings are still evident. The dredges were closed down in the 1960s. By 1929 over 70 percent of mining in Alaska was carried out by heavy equipment either dredging or hydraulic mining.

Carsten said Nome Creek was mined by dredging. When he came to Fairbanks Engineer and Goldstream Valleys was full of drift mines. The material was removed in the winter and proved it up in the summer. One man was going broke. He didn't have the right method. The man went to Dome Creek and hired the Dutch Kid to get him started. The man took out 30 thousand a week after the Dutch Kid's help. Dome Creek, Little Eldorado, Clearing, and Fairbanks Creeks were all drift mined in the early days. It was later opened up. It was all placer mining. The Cleary Hill Mine was hard rock mining.

Neville asked about the process of placer mining. Carsten said you had a drifting plant. You had boilers to work. One crew would drive points and another crew would work on a different section that was thawed the day before. The material would be dumped in buckets and hauled up. This was during the winter. In the summer you would timber your ground. You would crib up your hole so it wouldn't slough

off. He worked a little bit in the summer on Goldstream. He didn't like underground work. When he worked the Porcupine it was open cut work. They put in a hydraulic plant. The Dutch Kid, Dick Thorsen, Paul Minto and he paid a lot of money before they took out any gold. They built a ditch for pressure. They got 10,000 dollars out of it with their first clean up. They knew they had gold. They paid 15 percent royalty. Carsten learned that there were some locations more apt to have gold than others. He learned to look for signs of a rich deposit. He was a widower and past seventy when he began a whole new operation. He was married in 1966 to his second wife. He had wanted to get a hold of Eagle Creek. It was opened for staking. Right After he was married he heard that Eagle Creek was going to be opened up. They flew to Central and he prepared to come out before the road was opened. He took his new bride out over 27 feet of snow to Eagle Creek. Trapper Dan had a roadhouse at 101 mile and they rented out a cabin. They staked six claims on the creek. After the road was opened he brought over a caterpillar tractor and a dragline. He sunk a hole and did find fine gold, but it wasn't what he was looking for. He moved up and finally got to where his camp is located now. He found gold deep. It was twenty-five feet deep. He talked about the ground that Old Man Bartlett had ground. He started working and the 1967 flood came. It tore out his dam and damaged other equipment. His stepson came up to help him clean up the flood damage. They had to tear everything apart and repair it. He set up his boxes again and made some money. Carsten talked about Clarence Berry's mining. Carsten discussed knowing where to find gold. He said mica schist is the oldest rock in Alaska. He talked about finally finding gold where he thought it would be. He said he is one of the few miners left mining gold and knowing to look for contact creeks with mica schist and granite.