

MR 194-16, R

TERRITORY OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF MINES

ITINERARY REPORT

ON A FIELD TRIP TO THE KOYUKUK DISTRICT, JULY 20 TO 30, 1954

by

Robert H. Saunders

Associate Mining Engineer

March

1955

RECEIVED
DEPARTMENT OF MINES
JULY 20 1954

INTRODUCTION

144 30-1
30-19

During July 20 to 30, 1954, I made a trip to the Wiseman district to search for a reported radioactive deposit south of Wiseman and to gather information about mining in the vicinity. The search for the radioactive deposit required two-and-one-half days, and the results of the search have been described in a report that was submitted in November, 1954. A list of the operators in the district is not included here because the required information has already been given in a list of Fourth Division operators. This report describes the overall conditions in the district and gives some detailed information about those operations that have changed since they were last described.

ITINERARY

On July 20, I went from Fairbanks to Bettles and from Bettles to Wiseman with Wien Alaska Airlines. On July 21, I visited placer operations on Vermont Creek and on Nolan Creek and its tributaries; Sam Pingalo accompanied me on this trip, and we used a pickup truck owned by Joe Ulen. On July 22, I left Wiseman and travelled on foot south along the west side of the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River, reaching the Stanich brothers' placer mine on Porcupine Creek about noon on July 24. I left the Stanich brothers' camp on July 24 and returned to Coldfoot. At Coldfoot I was taken across the river by Sammy Hope, an elderly Eskimo, who lives there with his wife and provides free boat transportation across the river for travellers. I spent the

night in a woodcutter's cabin on Slate Creek about three miles upstream from the mouth of the creek. On July 25, I reached Myrtle Creek, where I met Joe Tauber and visited the site of operations of Prospectors, Inc. On July 26 I travelled from Myrtle Creek to the camp of the Slate Creek Mining Company on upper Slate Creek. I left Slate Creek on the morning of July 27 and reached Wiseman on the afternoon of July 29. On July 30 I returned from Wiseman to Bettles and from Bettles to Fairbanks with Wien Alaska Airlines.

OPERATIONS

Four new operations started in the Wiseman district this year. Of the operators that were active in 1953 and inactive in 1954, two did assessment work only and one leased his ground to a new company. The total number of men engaged in mining in the district remains about the same as in the preceding year, because the new operations starting were offset by other operations becoming idle. All of the new operations are on creeks that have been mined in previous years.

New operators are: A and S Mining Company, Prospectors, Inc, Joe Tauber, and Slate Creek Mining Company. The A and S Mining Company, which is owned by Andy Schwaesdall, T. Ackerson, and Joe Bayless, leased ground on Mascot Creek from Vincent Knorr. Mechanical equipment was hauled by tractor to Mascot Creek in the spring of 1954, and the property was mined throughout the season. In past years the claims have been mined on a smaller scale by

KX 30-14

Vincent Knorr.

KX 31-10
Prospectors, Inc is a new company formed by a Fairbanks group to purchase the ground and equipment formerly owned by the Myrtle Creek Mining Company. This season Prospectors, Inc mined one small cut - about 1200 square feet of bedrock - on the left-limit bench of Myrtle Creek and drilled a few holes on the left-limit bench. The company did not work the full season.

KX 31-15
Joe Tauber, a comparative newcomer to the Koyukuk, staked some claims on Myrtle Creek on ground formerly owned by Victor Neck. In 1954 he was sniping about one mile below the camp owned by Prospectors, Inc.

KX 30-29
The Slate Creek Mining Company, which is owned by Frank Theissen and Ed Durand, started mining this year on upper Slate Creek. Theissen has mined on Slate Creek in previous years by hand methods. At the time of my visit, the owners were having difficulty reaching bedrock with their first cut. The bedrock is uneven, and, in the cut where they were mining, there appeared to be a depression in bedrock lower than the bedrock farther downstream. I later found that they were unable to reach bedrock in part of the cut, and they started a new cut farther upstream. They are using a bulldozer and a sluice-plate. They hauled their mining equipment from Galena by tractor; the trip required two years, part of the time being used in building two airstrips for the Territory. Now that the heavy equipment is on the property, they plan to fly each season's supplies to the Myrtle Creek field from Fairbanks. Although only the two owners

were working at the time of my visit, they planned to hire another man to tend the sluice box.

^{KL 31 d} Operators who were inactive in 1954 after mining in 1953 were the Bott brothers and Frank Miller and sons, who did only assessment work on their claims this year, and Vincent Knorr, who leased his ground to the A and F Mining Company. Erling Nesland was not mining at his claims off Vermont Creek at the time of my visit, but it was reported that he planned to start mining in August.

^{KL 30-26} Since 1916 the Stanich brothers have been mining on Porcupine Creek. By ground-sluicing in the summer and drift-mining in the winter they are able to work all year. The present site of their ground-sluicing is about one-quarter mile upstream from their cabin, and the shaft last used for drift-mining is about 100 yards upstream from their cabin. The ground is five to six feet deep at the ground-sluicing cut and 27 feet deep at the shaft. A description of Porcupine Creek and the Stanich brothers' mining operation is given by Reed in a report entitled THE UPPER KOYUKUK REGION, ALASKA, 1937. The methods described by Reed are still being used for mining. The long underground drain has been extended each year as drift-mining has progressed upstream. A large volume of water flows underground in the deep channel being mined, and, if it were not for the drain, drift-mining would be impossible.

Reed mentions mining on Quartz Creek, right-limit tributary to Porcupine Creek, prior to 1937. According to the Stanich brothers, Erling Nesland tried to mine on this creek since then,

but he was unable to find any ground rich enough to mine; from this, it appears that most of the gold came down the main valley of Porcupine Creek. Near the site of the ground-slucing operations, there are tailing piles on the left-limit side of the creek that were left by someone who mined there prior to 1916.

The Stanich brothers have a greenhouse attached to one side of their cabin, and by removing a window from the cabin wall they allow heat from the cabin to warm the greenhouse. This greenhouse, a large garden that they cultivate each summer, and the primitive methods used for mining make them more nearly self-sufficient than the other operators in the district. Their manner of living and their cost of mining probably have not been affected greatly by the post-war inflation.

KX 30-7
Some placer claims on the upper part of Emma Creek were acquired during the past two years by Gus Uotilla and a partner named Macintosh. It was reported that they plan to take in some equipment and start mining next year; however, this winter they have been trying to interest Prospectors Inc in mining their claims.

KX 30-6
Oliver Chappell's workings on Thompson Gulch are about two miles from the end of the Nolan Creek road, and he is anxious to get help from the Alaska Road Commission to extend the road to his property. He said that he already has paid the Road Commission about \$150 for work on the trail and that he has done about \$400 worth of work on it himself. He has been mining on Thompson Gulch for several years and has taken out about \$40,000 in gold; He said that the Road Commission employee who did the grader work

on the roads this summer estimated that about \$200 worth of work would make the road to his property passable.

Several years ago, Alanco, Inc mined some antimony from veins on Smith Creek. The veins, which are exposed in worked-out placer cuts, cross the lower part of the creek nearly at right angles to the creek; they are three or four in number and less than one foot wide. Masses of stibnite were removed from the veins in small open-cut pits, which were about five or six feet deep. The stibnite was sacked and hauled to the airstrip at Wiseman. While the mining was in progress, the price of antimony declined, and much of the stibnite remains on the property and on the airstrip.

Bill Christy, a prospector, arrived at Wiseman a few minutes before I left. He had been prospecting with a scintillometer in the vicinity of Anuktuvuk Pass and the head of John River, but he gave no indication that he had found any worthwhile radioactive deposits. He intended to continue prospecting in the Brooks Range.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

The people living in Wiseman and vicinity are divided into two groups that oppose each other in most local issues. This situation has existed for several years, and it severely affects living conditions and business transactions in the community. Sometimes a newcomer finds that he has antagonized the members of

one group merely by being friendly toward the members of the other. The mining operations of Harry Leonard (ex-Commissioner of the Koyukuk Precinct) on Archibald Creek and Pingalo and Ulen on Nolan Creek are being delayed by a pending lawsuit over water rights. In 1954 Leonard was indicted by the grand jury of the Fourth Division for assault with a dangerous weapon after a quarrel with a prospector who is not a resident of Wiseman; the case has not yet been tried. Leonard has a small general store, but only the other members of his group care to, or are welcome to, trade with him. Members of the other group have their supplies sent in by air from Fairbanks.

The differences between these two groups have had some effect on work done by the Alaska Road Commission. One group is anxious to get all possible help from the Road Commission, and the other group objects to whatever road work is done. A few years ago Leonard's group prepared a petition requesting the Road Commission to stop doing work on the roads and trails in the vicinity. Officials of the Road Commission held a hearing at Wiseman, but the petitioners failed to appear.

The work done annually by the Road Commission includes grading the roads from Wiseman to Nolan Creek and from Wiseman up Hammond River and cutting brush on the trail from Wiseman to Porcupine Creek. The road up Hammond River has been extended to Vermont Creek as was recommended in J. A. Williams' report on operations in the Koyukuk district in 1950.