

Wild Goose Pipeline: not forgotten



On the lonely tundra a breeze sighs through iron hoops, upright in a long row like the ribs of a huge snake. The naked ribs imprison a pile of weathered redwood slats.

At one time this was a pipeline built to carry water to miners, and this place was the scene of fevered activity—gold fevered.

Now the Wild Goose Pipeline lies alone, a relic of a turn-of-the-century gold miner's dream.

From 1899 to about 1910 the Seward Peninsula was the magnet for gold-seeking prospectors from around the world. The town of Nome was six or seven times its current size of 3,000 people.

Today the area is managed by the Bureau of Land Management's Kobuk District. Archeologist Howard Smith is writing a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the Wild Goose Pipeline and its associated ditches. The site is unique, says Smith,

because it is the only known wooden pipeline on the Seward Peninsula.

In addition, the pipe is a tangible memento of historic gold mining and the people involved in this colorful period of Alaska history.

"This project embodies the end of the gold rush on the Seward Peninsula," said Smith.

The gold rush to Nome started with the discovery of gold on Anvil Creek in 1898. Very soon afterward, Charles D. Lane arrived and bought some of the original discovery claims. Lane founded the Wild Goose Mining and Trading Company, which soon became one of the major forces on the Seward Peninsula. He also built the Wild Goose Railroad from Nome to Anvil Creek.

He decided to build a pipeline to carry water to the gold fields. The original plan was an extremely ambitious venture. In 1904 he was planning to construct a 60-mile redwood-slat pipeline from lakes in the Kigluaik Mountains to Anvil Creek and other mining areas in order to provide high-pressure water for sluicing. He had the

pipeline under construction by 1906—the trench and about one mile of pipe had been completed.

The gold rush in Nome lasted less than 10 years. In 1899, the first year of the strike, \$2.8 million in gold was taken out of the Seward Peninsula. This reached a high of \$7.5 million in 1906, then dropped in 1908 to \$5.1 million. By 1909 gold production was down to less than \$4.3 million and dropping.

Only about five miles of the Wild Goose Pipeline were ever built. The slowdown in gold production, a depression, lack of capital and competition for water slowed work on the pipeline after 1908. By 1909 the project had been largely abandoned. Sometime before 1909 Lane went blind, but no one knows how this affected the company's plans for the Wild Goose Pipeline.

"Standing there looking at those piles of redwood and the pipe just ending there illustrates better than anything how ephemeral the dreams of fortune were," says Smith.

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