



BLM - ALASKA FRONTIERS

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JOHN & CLYDE'S FRONTIER ADVENTURE

For many years, Alaska was considered too remote and unpopulated to warrant building an overland highway, but the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, changed everything.

On February 6, 1942, President Roosevelt authorized construction of the pioneer road. Work began in April. Crews working east to west met at Contact Creek on September 25, with the road opening to limited military traffic in October. A ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 20, 1942 at Soldier's Summit near Kluane Lake marked the completion of the first phase of construction of today's Alaska Highway. The enormous building project is still heralded as one of the greatest engineering feats of the twentieth century.



In late 1932, former Alaska Road Commissioner Donald MacDonald II heard of a boast made by a Copper Center area trapper, Clyde "Slim" Williams (left). Slim bragged that his dog team was capable of "taking the trail and heading out for Chicago." MacDonald persuaded Williams that such a trip could promote a highway from Alaska to the Lower 48. Five months later Williams reached the existing North American Highway System, in British Columbia. Later, in 1939, Williams teamed up with John Logan (right) and their dog, Blizzard, to be the first expedition to use motorized vehicles on the Alaska Highway.

1939 road trip paves way for Alaska Highway



BLM's Don Hinrichsen (l) and KJ Mushovic (r) present John Logan (center) a copy of the interpretive panel located at the Sourdough Creek Campground near Glennallen. The panel commemorates Logan's 1939 road trip with Slim Williams.

“People told us it was the rainiest summer in 20 years,” recalled a smiling white-haired gentleman. And so begins 86-year-old John Logan’s tale of how, in 1939, he and a partner, “Slim” Williams, drove motorcycles from Alaska to the Lower 48, an event which helped inspire the construction of today’s Alaska Highway.

Recently, Logan visited the Alaska Bureau of Land Management, where he was presented with a replica of an interpretive panel being installed at BLM’s Sourdough Creek Campground. In part, the panel commemorates Logan’s 1939 trip.

In 1937, John Logan took a 2-week vacation to Alaska, and was smitten with the Great Land. Later, he was intrigued by an article by Donald MacDonald proposing a road to Asia via Alaska. Logan, with help from a cousin, contacted former territorial governor Tom Riggs, who had led the US survey team that established the Alaska-Canada boundary. Riggs recommended that Logan meet a man called “Slim” Williams who was planning to journey by motorcycle from Alaska to the Lower 48. “I said, ‘He’s going to do WHAT?’” recalled Logan.

Logan arranged to meet with then 57-year-old Williams, and after explaining his interest in promoting a road-link with Alaska, Slim asked Logan to be his partner on the proposed motorcycle trip. At first Logan hedged. “I’d never ridden a motorcycle, but I realized that I’d never be able to live with myself if I passed up the opportunity.” It turned out Williams hadn’t, either. “We’ll figure it out,” Williams assured him.

“No thanks, I’ll pass”

There were some lean times during the trip when Logan and Williams foraged for anything edible, and Logan had a very close call. “I ate some lily bulbs that were poisonous — they had a strychnine effect. I was unconscious for 12 hours, during which Slim told me later, I was so stiff, he could tip me up like a board.”

After somewhat recovering, Logan still was in no shape to manage the rugged ridges and muskeg that lay ahead. They considered building a raft, but although there were trees and they had their axe, they had no rope to hold a raft together.

Just when things looked hopeless, Williams kicked a mound of moss and discovered the remains of a rotting sled.

“He found this sled just when we needed it, a one in a million chance.” In one of dozens of examples of sourdough ingenuity, Williams was able to free the nuts, frozen in place by rust, by heating them in a fire until they glowed red, then tossing them into the cold steam nearby.

“Slim was able to just unscrew them with his fingers,” said Logan, “leaving us with 14 — and I remember the number exactly — bolts that we were able to use to fashion one of the sturdiest rafts of the several we made during the trip. The bolts proved literally to be a Godsend — we saw some whitewater that dumped us a few times.”

Within BLM’s Sourdough Creek Campground is a site identified by area residents as the location of a cabin used by Slim Williams during his trapping days in the early 1900s. The deteriorating log structure was torn down in the late 1980s as a safety precaution before its potential historical significance was realized. Now the cabin is memorialized on an interpretive panel developed for BLM’s Sourdough Creek Campground. One of the photographs used to illustrate the interpretive panel features Logan, Williams and Blizzard on their motorcycles, near the end of their 1939 trip.



On his first trip from Alaska to the Lower 48 in 1932, it took Slim Williams (right) five months to reach the northernmost point of the existing North American Highway system in British Columbia. In the state of Washington, he replaced the sled's runners with wheels and continued to the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. There, he and his dog team made a wildly popular exhibit, reportedly the favorite of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (left). After the fair closed, Williams went to Washington D.C., where he met President Roosevelt. Roosevelt set up a commission with Canada to explore building a highway to Alaska, but although the commission found the project feasible, there were still doubts about the value of such expenditure for so small a population.

Once agreed, both Williams and Logan began preparing for the unparalleled trip. Logan put money he had saved into the purchase of two carefully researched and modified British-made motorcycles. "We chose small, single engine machines because we knew we would be pushing, pulling and rafting with them. We had plates welded on the bottom and hand brakes added so we would be able to have some control when walking the machines with the engines running. Of course, there were even fewer gas stations then, so we had racks with two gas cans each in the back." They began their trip on May 14, 1939.

In Fairbanks, the pair had "help from all sides," including Donald MacDonald's son, Donald III, who helped by assembling maps and attaching them to canvas for durability. The pair was presented with a young Siberian Husky named Blizzard.

Logan and Williams didn't pack any special clothing or gear for themselves, using just the typical outdoor wear of the times. "We did make sure we had mosquito head nets," Logan recalled. "The mosquitoes were fierce. One day, I made a bet with Slim, who had big hands, over who could kill the most mosquitoes with one swat. I believe I won by getting 24 mosquitoes."

After leaving Big Delta, Blizzard ran off, evidently spooked by the noise and smell of the motorcycles.

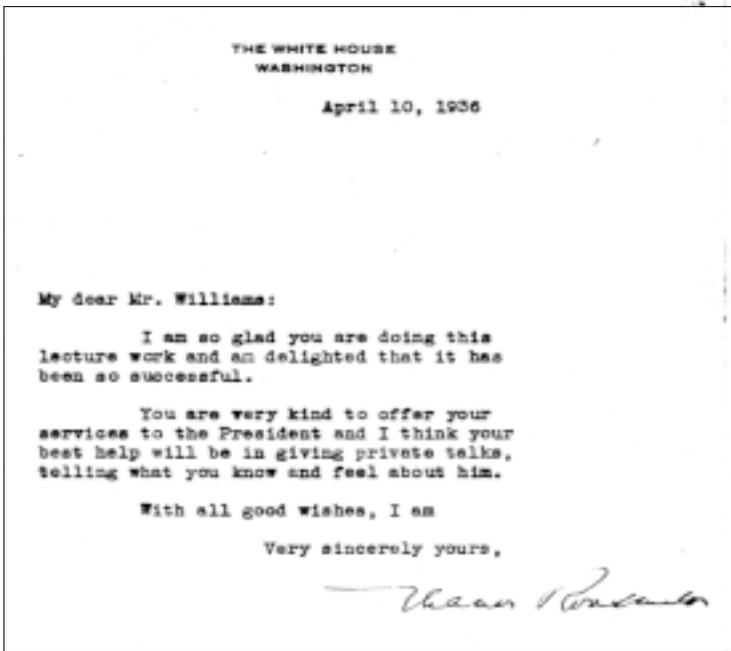
About halfway between Healy Village and Chicken, the one motorcycle the pair took on this rugged part of the trip, failed. Narrowing the problem down to either the generator or battery,

the two removed the battery and set off for Chicken by foot, carrying nothing but their .22 rifle, an axe, a small amount of food and the battery. Williams, who wandered throughout Alaska alone for decades without getting lost, indeed got lost! And with game then in short supply, the men also ran out of food. They lost track of the days because of so much daylight and overcast weather. "When we got to Chicken, we reckoned it was June 22nd, but it was already the 24th," recalled Logan.

Their second motorcycle, left off earlier in Big Delta, was flown to an airstrip near Chicken. Happily, Blizzard, who had been captured bumming a meal where they had stayed at Big Delta, was also reunited with the pair on that same flight. "Blizzard was a great dog," recalled Logan fondly, "and a good companion, even if it did take him two encounters with porcupines to figure out to leave them alone. He was just barely full grown, and a blue-eyed beauty."

The going was a bit easier into Dawson and Whitehorse, although food was still scarce. "One fellow gave us all the moose we could carry from one he had just shot, and we shot two caribou ourselves and even ate a couple of porcupines." Even so, Logan lost up to 17 pounds and Williams about 22. Logan recalled, "As Slim used to say in his lectures, we never missed a meal, but we got pretty far behind sometimes!"

Despite their limited cargo space and primitive living conditions, Logan and Williams managed to take black-and-white photos and even color movies during their trip. Significantly, they



obtained some of the first color film footage shot of parts of Alaska and Canada. Their pictures and movies would later enhance Williams' lectures and public speaking engagements.

With other setbacks, including many difficult rivers to cross and the onset of colder weather, it was early December 1939, before Logan and Williams finally made it to Seattle. But when they did, they were hailed as heroes, and later summoned to Washington, D.C. to testify about the

success of their trip and their vision for a highway.

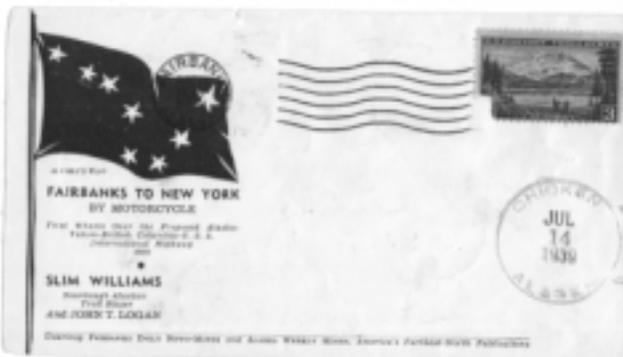
Ironically, at first no one could believe that the pair undertook the trip without monetary compensation or sponsorship. "They couldn't believe that we had just come up with the money ourselves. The driving force was that we simply wanted to demonstrate the feasibility of a highway." Logan paused, and then said firmly, "I think we did. And I kind of hated to see it end."

It was BLM-Alaska's state archaeologist, Robert King who first uncovered the link between Slim Williams and BLM's Sourdough Creek Campground, and then Logan's connection to Williams and the remarkable 1939 trip. King has been particularly interested in the Alaska Highway story since his own father helped build it during World War II.

Logan, now retired in Connecticut after a long airline career and later a fund-raiser for charities, hasn't been to Alaska much since the famous trip. In 1978, he and his wife, now deceased, traveled from Fairbanks through Chicken and on to Dawson, Yukon Territory. "Chicken hadn't changed much," he chuckled. Both west and east of Boundary, the Logans could make out wide trail markings of the rudimentary road Slim and John had traversed back in 1939.

— KJ MUSHOVIC/DR. ROBERT KING

Williams and Logan also carried custom-made commemorative stamped envelopes which they cajoled postal workers all along the way to postmark. These are now viewed as the first mail to travel the "highway" by motorized vehicles.





NPR-A subsistence advisory panel meets in Barrow

Subsistence panel members represent Atqasuk, Nuiqsut, Wainwright, Narrow, Anaktuvuk Pass, and the North Slope Borough

Members of the NPR-A Subsistence Advisory Panel met for the first time in Barrow December 16. This oversight panel was set up by the BLM to address any issues and concerns that are raised. The advisory panel will make recommendations to the BLM to help prevent unreasonable conflicts between subsistence activities and oil and gas exploration, development and production in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

The members represent federally recognized tribal governments of the five North Slope villages most likely to be impacted by activities in the BLM-managed petroleum reserve. A sixth member of the panel represents the North Slope Borough.

Members were selected based on their knowledge and experience in matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife resources found on the North Slope.

Panel members appointed by

their village governments are: Luke Kagak, Native Village of Atqasuk; Thomas Napageak, Native Village of Nuiqsut; John Hopson, Jr., Native Village of Wainwright; Charles Neakok, Native Village of Barrow; and Earl Williams, Nagragmiut Tribal Council/Anaktuvuk Pass. Representing the North Slope Borough is Arnold Brower, Jr., Special Assistant to the Mayor. Harry Brower, Jr., represented Arnold Brower at this meeting.

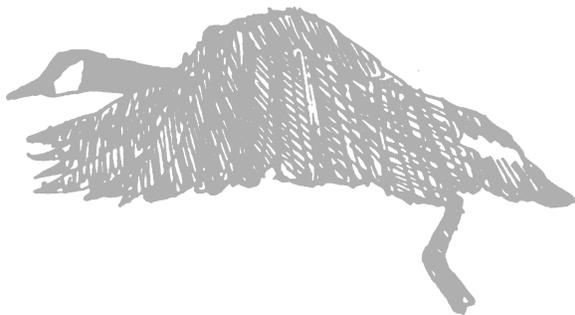
During the meeting, which was open to the public, John Hopson, Jr., was elected chairman and Thomas Napageak vice-chairman. Discussion was lively, centering on a presentation of this winter's planned operations by ARCO Alaska, Inc. Representatives of BP and seismic exploration contractors

also gave the panel a short overview of their future plans in the area.

Luke Kagak, the panel member from Atqasuk, summed up the importance of establishing the Subsistence Advisory Panel: "There are no alternatives for our animals. We have to work carefully, especially the oil companies, and we'd like to work with you. What you're talking about is our food."

The next meeting of the NPR-A Subsistence Advisory Panel will be held in Nuiqsut March 7 and 8, and will feature an ice road trip to view ARCO's drill rig and operations.

— SHARON WILSON



Historic Iditarod Trail cabin gets a facelift

Tin shingles from gas cans cover the roof of the newly restored Rohn Cabin

Before repairs, the roof of the Rohn Cabin visibly sagged. Below, the crew removes the old roof, which had originally been insulated with two tons of dirt. The new roof has vapor barriers and an ice shield.



People who stop at Rohn Cabin while traveling the Iditarod National Historic Trail this winter are in for a pleasant surprise. Located on the trail between Rainy Pass and Farewell, this 61-year-old historic structure has received major renovations and is now ready to offer shelter to winter trail users.

Employees from the BLM Anchorage Field Office determined the cabin was in need of structural help during a maintenance inspection in late 1998. In the fall of 1999, outdoor recreation planner Jake Schlapfer, aided by Steve Sandy, Bruce Seppi and Ken Higgins, ordered materials and flew out to Rohn to give the cabin some much needed repairs.

"The cabin's sill and wall logs were rotted and the roof was in bad shape," Schlapfer explains. So he and the crew

milled trees killed in the area by the spruce bark beetle for replacement logs. Then, section by section, the entire 14-by-20-foot cabin was lifted up and the new logs fitted underneath. Schlapfer said he and his crew "got really tired of moving the same dirt two or three times!"

The goal of the project was to complete repairs to make the structure sound while keeping the historic flavor of the cabin, since the structure has been determined to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

"We completely replaced the roof, which was badly rotted, and then put the original tin shingles back on," says Schlapfer. "The shingles were made from gas cans that had been left at Rohn back in the 1930s. They were opened up, pounded flat, and used as shingles when the cabin was built in 1938. We found reproductions of these cans and made shingles to replace the ones that had rusted beyond use. The floor joists were also rotted, so we replaced those with new treated logs, and then put the original floor back in."

Schlapfer says the cabin's windows, door and furniture were replaced in 1997. The last needed upgrade is a new wood stove, to be installed this year.

Rohn is one of four cabins on the Iditarod Trail managed by BLM. Rohn Cabin provides shelter to some 400 visitors a year, mostly during February and March when the Iditarod Sled Dog Race and the Irondog Snowmobile Race run through.





BLM photo

Jake Schlapfer, Steve Sandy, Ken Higgins and Bruce Seppi pause for a breath before installing the new roof.

Each year, more and more visitors use the cabins as the trail becomes increasingly popular with Alaskans, as well as visitors from Outside. “Rohn Cabin can comfortably sleep six, but I’ve seen up to 15 people strewn out on the floor during severe cold weather,” says Schlapfer.

Iditarod shelter cabins such as Rohn are not on a reservation system like most public use cabins. There is no charge to stay at Rohn or the other shelter cabins BLM manages on the Iditarod Trail. Rohn Cabin has bunks, a wood stove, and a Coleman stove and lantern. Users need to provide their own fuel and cut their own firewood.

The Iditarod Trail is one of four historic trails designated by Congress when the National Trails System Act was amended in 1978 to include a new category of trails valued for their historic and cultural significance. Trails like the Iditarod played an important role in Alaska’s history, providing critical transportation routes before railroads, highways and air travel became the norm.

—TERESA MCPHERSON

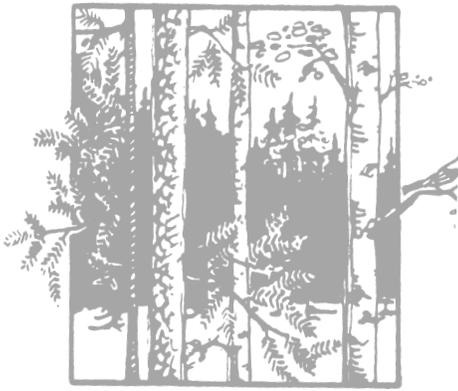


Jake Schlapfer

The fruits of their labor — the reconstructed Rohn Cabin now stands ready to offer shelter to trail users for decades to come.



For more information about the Iditarod National Historic Trail, visit the BLM Anchorage Field Office home page at: www.anchorage.ak.blm.gov.



Alaska Fire Service collects for costs of 1996 fires

The Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service (AFS) received \$400,000 as partial compensation for the cost of suppressing two fires caused by a timber company in 1996. The settlement was negotiated with the insurance company of the now-defunct Copper River Forest Products Co. Suppressing the fires cost the government a total of about \$1.1 million.

The fires occurred in May and

June of 1996, when the company was contracted to harvest timber on Alaska Native Corporation land. On May 14, 1996, firefighters responded to an escaped slashpile burning near Chitina. AFS crews managed to limit the fire to 7.4 acres, but it took more than 30 people and cost \$107,000 to suppress. The second, larger fire also occurred in logging slash near Tetlin on June 7, and burned 6,710 acres.

Investigations of the fires by the state of Alaska determined that the timber company was in violation of state laws on several counts: failure to secure a permit before burning, building a fire without clearing the ground, failure to extinguish a fire, failure to exercise due

care to prevent the spread of a fire, and leaving the fire unattended.

AFS Manager Scott Billing says the law provides for the government to seek compensation when liability for a fire is assigned. The funds collected in the settlement remain within BLM, and will be used for fire prevention and education projects.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That's certainly true where wildfires caused by human neglect are concerned," Billing says. "These fires not only burn valuable resources, but can also burn the pocketbook of those responsible. That's something we'd all like to avoid."

— ANDY WILLIAMS

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