

Franklin Bluffs Perches on Barren Vastness

By DON ALDER

FRANKLIN BLUFFS — Flying over the barren vastness of the Arctic Slope, doubt comes easily that anyone could survive in such a hostile environment. Two sharply contrasting images soon change one's thinking on that score.

First is the realization that the Eskimo people have managed an existence there for longer than anyone knows.

The second is the sight of the pipeline construction camps sitting like a lost city in the middle of nowhere.

Man has always managed to cope with his environment, but the means applied in these two examples have no similarity.

The money and technology expended to construct an "instant city" in the wilderness would be difficult to comprehend, even if one had the figures before him. Virtually all creature comforts, save the vices, have been carefully attended to.

Perched near the Sagwon River, Franklin Bluffs camp is seated upon a four-foot thick pad of gravel to lift it from the frozen tundra.

Modern pre-fabricated buildings resembling first-class hotels are linked together with "Arctic walkways," fully enclosed plywood tubes which permit occupants to walk from sleeping quarters to shower rooms, dining areas to recreation halls, and, for some, even to work without touching the ground or exposure to the elements.

A mile of pipe brings water from the river to a treatment plant, providing clean chlorinated water for showering, washing, drinking and to operate the flush toilets. An ingenious system reverses the process to provide sanitary removal of all sewage wastes.

A choice of movies is available nightly, and pool and shuffleboard tables are plentiful.

"We cannot kid ourselves that the actual construction work performed is anything but tough because work is work anywhere, but we are concerned here only with what has been done to enable the men and women of the camp to do that work more comfortably," said

a spokesman.

Fully-equipped kitchens turn out food of such quality and quantity that it is doubtful that very many could afford the diet if they had to pay for it.

Modern micro-wave communications connects the camp with other camps and the outside world. Telephone calls are free, and private.

A complete medical facility is staffed and equipped to handle any emergency and even has a four-wheel drive ambulance to transport the sick or injured to a small hospital ward. Airstrips large enough to handle heavy aircraft make possible proper supply flow to the camp, and the rapid evacuation of

medical cases needing advanced treatment in the city.

All foremen and those in charge of working groups must be first-aid trained and qualified.

News of the world arrives daily in the form of several newspapers from Fairbanks and Anchorage.

Man's method of coping with the elements has changed. It never again will be the same. The building of Franklin Bluffs camp, and the other camps as well, has proven what can be done.

If only a small part of these startling conveniences, never before known in the Arctic to the extent now enjoyed could be introduced into the small villages

of Alaska, what a dramatic change it would make!

Unfortunately, there is that one hurdle, more insurmountable than any of nature's forces. Money.