

Fuel Shortage Again at Anaktuvuk

The people of Anaktuvuk Pass were plagued with a fuel shortage for years. And now that it seems this problem has technically been solved, the 19 families there will soon be facing another shortage—this time one of money.

They need money for fuel when their free supplies run out at the beginning of the winter. The BIA which has furnished them with oil for the past three years says that it has no more funds with which to help them.

If the people themselves have to pay for the fuel out of their current income, they can do so only by lowering their living standards which are none too high to begin with. One BIA official estimated that about 40 per cent of their income would have to go toward fuel.

One solution might be to increase the level of income in the village so that the people could

comfortably absorb the new cost. But how?

Located 50 miles past the timberline in the Brooks Range on the John River, the village of about 80 people is largely subsistence. Caribou hunted in the area are used for meat and clothing.

Meager amounts are earned from the sale of masks made from caribou hides and from fighting fires in the summer.

The settlement is accessible year-round only by air. During the winter it can be reached by the Hickel Highway which passes near the village.

The proposed route of the \$120 million road to the North

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Slope will carry the traffic about 70 miles east of the village. Therefore, unless the town moves closer to the proposed road and caters to the travelers, the oil boom in Alaska might just pass them by.

The seed for this situation was planted about 20 years ago when the people of Anaktuvuk Pass, a nomadic people, decided to settle in the present village site after realizing the need to educate their children so that they could keep up with civilization.

Prior to settling down, they moved where they knew the caribou were plentiful. For fuel to keep them warm in the minus 40 and 50 degree winter temperatures, the Nunamiuts used the willows near their camps.

However, after settling in Anaktuvuk Pass, it was not long before they exhausted the supply of nearby willows and in 1967 found themselves traveling 35 to 40 miles round trip every other day for willows to heat their houses.

This pursuit cut into valuable hunting time and limited their

ability to obtain food.

That same year, the villagers considering moving to Umiat—about 75 miles south of the Arctic Ocean on the Colville River, where they were told they could use oil from a well there.

However, the village decided against the move when the BIA promised the people 50,000 gallons of fuel and the stoves for burning the oil if the people stayed in the pass.

At that time, the BIA, a spokesman of the agency said, gave the village council a choice of either giving the oil to the villagers free of charge or charging them for the oil and putting the money into the village's general fund.

If the council had taken the latter course of action, the people would now be accustomed to spending about 40 per cent of their money for fuel and the city council would have money with which to help out on the costs.

However, the spokesman added, the council voted not to charge the people, so for three years they have been receiving free fuel.

The 50,000 barrels recently paid for out of BIA funds, ran out and 3,400 more gallons were taken up in a truck to carry them over into the winter.

The BIA is now working on an arrangement to replace the present 50-gallon barrels with larger tanks capable of holding an entire winter's supply—about 15,000 to 18,000 gallons. Then the oil could be trucked to the village when the ice road is open and would not have to be flown in several times a year, which is more expensive.

But whether the village gets the new tanks or continues to use the old ones, it will still face the problem of how to pay for the fuel.