

Slope's 'Princess and the Pea'—

People in High Places Flock to Happy Valley

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW

HAPPY VALLEY — The Happy Valley oil leak story is something of an analogy to the legend of the Princess and the Pea: Put a small object (mini-spill) under many layers of cotton mattresses (hopefully oil absorbent) and see how many people in high places (at the top of the mattress pile) react to it.

The sensitivity of people in

high places has been amply demonstrated, but they might well view Happy Valley as a burr under the skin rather than a pea under a mattress.

Shortly after news of the continued leakage broke in the Tundra Times, Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wisconsin, brought the incident to the attention of officials in Washington, D. C.

In a letter to Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, Aspin cited possible damage to

Arctic char and grayling stock prevalent in the camp creek, a tributary of the Sagavanirktok River.

"If the Interior Department can't even correct a relatively minor spill in one of Aleyska's camp sites before construction has even begun on the Alaska pipeline," said Aspin, "how is it going to prevent much larger, potentially catastrophic spills from occurring?"

During a trip to Alaska the following week, Morton made no public mention of the Happy Valley spill, but spoke instead of the importance of North Slope oil to the national security and his intent to proceed with the pipeline, once litigation is settled.

However, Secretary Morton was apparently somewhat concerned. Bureau of Land Management records in Anchorage show that Asst. Secretary Harrison Loesch was briefed on July 29, "in preparation for Secretary Morton's interest of the facts surrounding oil spill at Happy Valley."

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The Secretary himself was briefed by Curtis McVee, Director of BLM for Alaska, on July 30.

The remote camp site, some 85 miles south of Prudhoe Bay, was visited by several teams of experts in the weeks following disclosure of the spills.

There have been three separate spills: one inside a utility building in December of 1970, drainage from the waste of this spill in 1971, a new break in June of 1972, and an unknown amount dropped from a helicopter tank sometime in 1972.

Oil pollution expert Ray Morris, head of Alaska's federal Environmental Protection Agency, personally visited the site July 21 and again on July 25-27.

During this time he consulted with BLM Pipeline Division engineer Ed Waszkiewicz, BLM fisheries biologist Richard Johnson, and Alyeska project engineer Paul Shipley.

Jointly, they revised the clean-up techniques which, according to Morris, were "insufficient to adequately collect all the fuel that was coming from the saturated ground."

At the time of their visit, "oil was seeping into Camp Creek approximately 60 feet upstream from the collection ponds.

"The oil," said the EPA report, "was easily collected and four water/oil samples were taken along the bank. Mr. Morris located the point of this seep and ignited the fuel with a match. A visible sheen was also observed in Camp Creek emanating from this point source."

Two new intercept ditches were dug closer to the gravel pad on which the fuel storage bladders rest. Following a recommendation of Waszkiewicz, the break area was flooded with water to hasten the oil flow and consequently removal.

A metal oil-water separator was utilized far back from the

creek in place of the cruder dirt catch basin-pipe separator which had been in use at the time Tundra Times first visited the site.

In addition, booms wrapped with a special absorbent material were added at strategic points in the trenches and in the stream itself as a final back-up to the collection system.

Under Waszkiewicz' coordination, BLM, Alyeska, and EPA had effected a far more professional and efficient approach to the clean-up problem than was evident previously.

Restoration and reseedling of the tundra will be necessary to cover the extensive trenching, but the new methods have been largely successful in stopping seepage into the creek.

Within a few feet of the oil-soaked ditches, wild blueberries are growing in profusion, and in the opinion of both state Fish and Game expert, Harvey Yoshihara, and BLM's Richard Johnson, there has been no detectable damage to fish.

Johnson's report, dated Aug. 5, states: "Fingerling Arctic char about 1 and 1/2 inches were observed in small schools (up to 6) at various locations along the stream.

"Five Arctic char were observed swimming just below where seepage was entering the creek. These fish appeared to be unbothered by the presence of a light oil slick on the water just above them. One adult grayling was observed at the mouth of Happy Valley Creek."

"In general," the report concludes, "there is not readily observable evidence to indicate that this stream has been damaged by the fuel that has escaped into it. A more detailed quantitative study of the bottom fauna above and below the spill site may, or may not, support a somewhat different conclusion."

Tundra Times originally reported the amount spilled as an estimated 200 gallons of Arctic diesel fuel. Later estimates by Ray Morris place the amount closer to 1000 to 1500 gallons.

Senator Ted Stevens, another top-flight visitor to Happy Valley, announced after viewing the stream, that he had seen "bigger slicks from an idling outboard motor."

Stevens investigated the scene Aug. 6, three weeks after clean-up operations had been in progress.

Characterizing Aspin as an economic wolf in environmental sheep's clothing, Stevens charged that Aspin's opposition to the trans-Alaska pipeline is due to the fact that the Canadian route would terminate in the Midwest, benefitting Aspin's home state.

The Fairbanks News-Miner headlined their Aug. 8 story: "Ho-hum to Happy Valley" and found the whole incident something of a laughing matter. "There was an urge," said resource editor Ed Martley, "to laugh out loud."

In contrast, the Northern Light section of the Anchorage Daily News, commented: "It is passingly strange - or is it - that news of two oil spills at Happy Valley Camp since 1970 were not disclosed to the public until two recent issues of the Tundra Times broke the story."

"Damages and potential damages are unknown," said the publication. "They are not yet searched. These are basic questions to be answered. We await them along with the Tundra Times."

According to the present Federal Water Pollution Control Act, the quantity of oil which is determined to be harmful to the public interest is that amount

which "violates applicable water standards" and/or causes "a film or sheen upon or discoloration of the surfaces of the water or upon adjoining shorelines."

As far as water quality standards go, Morris said NO oil is allowable in drinking water. Had the spill occurred on the wrong side of Happy Valley's own water supply and treatment plant, Morris said it is quite possible noxious quantities might have been picked up.

The state of Alaska is investigating the leak and has invited Alyeska officials to Juneau to discuss the spill. Max Brewer and James Anderegg of the state's Environmental Conservation Department are currently in the process of gathering data.

Based on findings, the state may or may not file for damages against the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

A spokesman for the state said they, like BLM, are far more interested in prevention than in prosecution. In an effort to avoid similar occurrences in the future, he said: "We would like to review the camp procedures. It's our experience, that when things are in 'housekeeping' status, the operation isn't run quite the way it should be. We're going to be taking a good look at the overall set-up of those camps."

BLM has also laid down suggested guidelines for improving the fuel storage and distribution systems. On Aug. 8, a detailed list with thirteen specific recommendations was drawn up and submitted to Alyeska for consideration. The list represents an overall upgrading of safety precautions.

The draft report of the Environmental Impact Statement contained references to "the cumulative effects of smaller chronic losses," which may have "significant and persisting impact on the vista of the affected area."

In petitioning for the permit to build the pipeline, Alyeska made reference to sophisticated technology, to a finely-engineered and researched system with the utmost caution in environmental protection.

In Feb. of 1971, David Henderson speaking for that company, pledged that there would be "a fail-safe automatic system of operation and surveillance, a system of preventive maintenance to keep all facilities in order, a control system to detect leakage, block valves, etc., etc."

If the public is to give credence to Alyeska's desire for a quality system quality must be demonstrated at every level of the operation.

The present "mothball" status of the project is undoubtedly debilitating to the morale of the men who stand ready to deliver this enormously rich product to the American public. At Happy Valley, at Dietrich Camp, and at others along the route, millions of dollars of equipment stand idle - waiting.

In the interim, these same camps have experienced more than one malfunctioning of the basic fuel storage system, a simply engineered system in relation to the complexity of the engineering expertise required for the entire pipeline.

Last week, Tundra Times received news of an unconfirmed spill of 10,000 gallons at another major camp on the North Slope. The Happy Valley spill is not an isolated occurrence. It is a symptom of a system which needs refining if environmental protection is to be a reality in this project and not a popular political catchword.

How does all this concern

the Alaskan Native? The Anchorage Urban Native News recently carried the remarks of Tom Porter, of the Mohawk Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy:

"This land of North America is Indian land," said Porter. "The Creator put us here. The white man is welcome to live with us on our land only if he respects the earth, our mother,

and treats her as his own mother."

"When we have polluted the last stream, poisoned the last fish, killed the last deer, then and only then will we realize we cannot eat all the money in the bank. Our troubles come when we put ourselves above nature instead of realizing we are just a part of it. This is the arrogance of man."