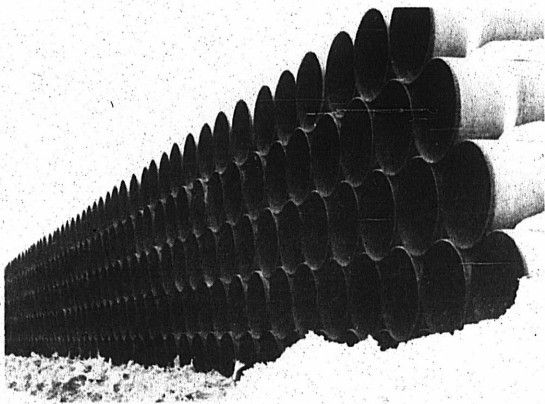


Newspeople Converge on Prudhoe



THE CAUSE OF ACTIVITY — Feverish activity is beginning to develop on the North Slope to begin to install the huge 48-inch pipeline that will transport the Prudhoe Bay oil.

— Photo By MARILYN RICHARDS

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Members of various news media from Alaska and the Lower '48 converged at the Fairbanks airport at eight one morning greeted by officials from RCA-Alascom, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. and Alaskan Arctic Gas, who were sponsoring a tour of the North Slope's facilities and operations.

It was curiously exciting wondering who was there, where they were from and what they represented. The anticipation of traveling also added to the excitement, many of the press, myself included, had never been to Prudhoe Bay before.

We left Fairbanks plus sixty some degree weather to follow the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline route in a chartered F-27, a turbo-prop jet. The Tanana Valley's rolling hills, whose leaves were just budding green were soon obscured by clouds.

Alaska is a land of simultaneous seasons. Through breaks in the clouds, we could see brown where green once appeared. Below there were countless nameless rivers and lakes. Some were partially rimmed with snow and ice. Some with their origins unknown glistened silver in the sun.

Others were brown. Some appeared lost in the mountain valleys. Some were dying — trapped with no place to come or go — Ox Bow Lakes they are called, once rivers but now

(Continued on Page 6)

Prudhoe Bay Camp . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

choked off from their other waters which changed paths.

The plane's gradual descent proved another change of scenery. The still brown land was scarred with polygons, geometric designs formed by ice wedges.

The continuous patterns of the polygons over the ice and snow that now covered the terrain made it impossible at times to distinguish whether it be water or land beneath them.

We landed at Deadhorse, which both ironically and conveniently consisted only of a terminal and bank. Inside the terminal were waiting workers who were anxious to depart on a 737 jet also at the airport. A Herc was unloading supplies nearby.

After boarding a bus, flat snow covered land was all one could see that was not sprouting with oil derricks as many in the group expected. There was no wind, which is rare, and the temperature was in the mid twenties. The air was bright with glare, the sky and earth reflecting white making a sometimes indistinguishable horizon.

The group then visited Gas Arctic's facility where pipe both above ground and buried, is tested for permafrost degradation.

Also on the agenda was RCA's earth station equipped with a 10 meter dish receiving microwave radio signals by satellite.

This station is one of three in the state. Others are at the Bartlett Earth Station, Valdez, and Nina Point.

Two more are to be built at Nome and Bethel. Louie Custrini of RCA said there would be approximately 15 more stations built at the end of the year providing "a fail safe system for pipeline construction."

About 60 miles of gravel roads are laid out on the slope. The land is so flat, it would be easy to lose direction. An Atlantic Richfield official admitted he got lost once but was too embarrassed to call in for help.

The group also saw the dock facility where barges were still frozen in the ice, the pipeline yard where 160 miles of the most photographed pipes are stored and a building where the pipe is coated for either

above or below ground special treatment.

There are also two producers which supply most of the cement for construction located on the slope.

Prudhoe Bay's "National Forest" (one tree) in British Petroleum's new \$21 million base camp, which is to open June 13, was also visited. BP's base camp is built on 40 feet of steel and concrete piling extending partially into the 2,000 feet of permafrost.

Inside the complex, which is colorfully carpeted and painted, are 140 beds, a swimming pool, sauna, theater, conference room, and recreation facilities including pool and ping pong tables among other games. The complex has its own power, sewer and water plants. It also has a glassed in sun deck 200 by 50 feet.

We ate at the Atlantic Richfield base camp, itself a \$12 million 215 bed structure with its own hanger and similar facilities at BP's. Its called the "Hilton of the Slope." Twenty-eight Eskimos mostly from the Barrow area, are non-unionized employees of ARCO. Liquor is not allowed on the Slope.

Sights along the tour also included a refinery and several ground squirrels that were probably wondering what in the heck went on during their recent hibernation.

Prudhoe Bay is divided into two sections, the western operated by BP and the eastern, operated by ARCO, for 11 other participating oil companies. It is estimated that it contains recoverable reserves of 9169.6 billion barrels of oil and 26 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Before returning to Fairbanks the F-27 followed part of the proposed gas route of Alaskan Arctic Gas, a consortium of 27 Canadian and Alaskan gas companies. Off the coastline tremendous and threatening looking pressure ridges of ice were seen.

We turned back, circled Prudhoe Bay, and returned by the oil pipeline route, passing over the icy blue and brown polygons scratched deep by the wind. We passed frozen and flowing rivers, glaciated bluffs, the pipeline road, mountains and hills. We passed from Alaska's late winter back to its early summer.