

REAA presidents and superintendents make long trip to Juneau

Getting to Juneau to attend the first meeting of school board presidents and school superintendents representing Alaska's 21 new rural school districts was no easy task for Barbara Dirks of Atka in the Aleutian Islands. And traveling within the Aleutians has been a costly, time-consuming and sometimes impossible task for Sherri Spitler, of Adak.

Dirks made the 1,760-mile trip to Juneau in 20 hours, and the cost, one way, amounted to \$2,600. She is the representative from Atka on the new Aleutian Chain school district board and was chosen to represent the board at the Juneau statewide conference June 22-24.

Spitler attended the conference as regional coordinator for the Dept. of Education.

The rural school officials

met for the first time at Juneau and were briefed on their new powers and responsibilities by members of the Dept. of Education staff.

Getting word of the conference to Dirks was a problem in itself, said Spitler, who has been helping organize the new Aleutian Chain district. Previously, radios had been set up at the Atka School and Adak School, but the Adak School was closed down and the radio is no longer being operated.

"So Atka is sitting there with a radio that works, but they can't communicate with anybody," Spitler said.

Instead of a radio message, Dirks received a written message delivered aboard the monthly Navy tug which serves the island under an agreement with the BIA.

"She had to turn right around and come out on that tugboat," Spitler said.

Dirks made the 100-mile, six-hour trip to Adak on the tug. Then an eight-seat, twin-engine, charter aircraft picked her up at Adak and flew her 600 miles to Cold Bay for the tidy sum of \$2,400. She attended a meeting at Cold Bay and then flew to Anchorage by commercial prop-jet. She then had to spend the night in Anchorage in order to make connections with a commercial jet flight to Juneau the following morning.

As part of her job as regional coordinator for the Aleutian Chain, Adak and Pribilof area,

Spitler has been traveling throughout the islands explaining Senate Bill 35 (which established the new rural school districts to replace the old State Operated School System) and helping set up new district organization.

Spitler said her primary means of transportation has been by charter aircraft. On one charter she attempted to get to the Pribilof Islands. First she had to fly to Anchorage and charter a flight to Cold Bay. At Cold Bay they waited for the weather to break, but it didn't and they were forced to return to Anchorage. The cost of the charter amounted to \$3,200 and

Spitler never made it to the Pribilofs.

"I started this job in October and it ends July 1," Spitler said. "I had to travel from October until the election in February, and I still never got to the Pribilofs."