

Alan Benson

Well I think it was 1923 I first came in here, I had been working on some boats, coast boats for the storage in Prince Rupert. Prior to that, deep sea vessels, I was at that time about 18 years of age I guess .

Where'd you come from before?

I was born in Victoria B.C. shortly after 1901, 1902 exactly and we lived there until I was about five and then we moved to the Prairies when I was about five years of age. From then until I was oh about 18 I guess, before I moved back to the coast and I worked on the boats then. Finally ended up in Prince Rupert working for the coal storage. And when the fishing was over in March I came into the interior here and I liked the appearance of Hazelton so much from the top of the hill, that I decided to stay off and have a bit of a holiday. So that's actually what brought me in here. I've never regretted it. It's a very colorful country and I have had a number of very interesting experiences and I was married here. Of course that is one of the highlights of my life.

What in detail were the things that attracted you about this country?

The beauty of it and the setting of the town really, they were the outstanding features.

Did this country have also what you wanted in the way of livlyhood and so on  
Was it the kind of country in that respect?

Well my livelihood up to that date had never been anything to brag about, any money that we did make, we spent of course. Immediately I got down here, one of the things that sort of stood out in my memory, is that when I went in and signed the register at the hotel, I started up the stairway with my little pack and I happened to look back from the first landing. Now mind you, there were a great number of old prospectors sitting around in the lobby. I stopped at the first landing and they almost to a man had walked over to see the new signature there on the book there and one said to the other, "Benson now what do you suppose he's doing here?"

" Well now the chap says he's quite a young fellow, goodness knows what he's looking for". " Well time will tell," the other fellow said and I went on up the stairs. Well now since then I've watched that same preceeding so many times that's its become common place.

Is that a peculiarity of this part of this country?

Well it certainly was then there at that time any new comer well even among the old timers, one would be standing perhaps in the hotel, he'd see another old timer going past, so with an expression of being bent on his way sort of thing and they elbow each other and say what in the heck do you think he's doing out, what's he going down there for you see. Well they'd surmise and that's just how....

A small closed community really...

Very, Hazelton has always been that way and you know when I lived there I often wondered why it was alot of people didn't like Hazelton and since I moved out here I realize why actually. The people are very wrapped up in their own little sphere there and it isn't too or it hasn't been in the past too clean a place actually as far as buildings and that are concerned. It's certainly improving now.

I suppose these people though it was a small group of people, their work wasn't confined to Hazelton, Hazelton was a center from which they went out prospecting, lumbering or whatever it was, that the old timers were always going out through the country but always returning to Hazelton as a base?

Yes I believe you're right, there must be something to that. It was a focal point for all concern. At one time not too far distant, one of our great old timers Mr. Dick Seargent , was having his 50th anniversary in the country and of course all the old timers were there for miles and miles. I think they even came as from far as Prince George.

Each in his turn, got up on the platform in the hall, this was after the celebration and they gave a little account of their past life and so on and how they first came into Hazelton. You see at that time there were only two entrances . One from Ashcroft way and one from the Prince Rupert way up by steamboat up through the Skeena river as far as Hazelton. One of those little incidents stands out my mind is Happy Turner who is since gone, he was the liquor store vendor in Smithers for a great many years and a fine personality. And one of his little stories was the, when he came in from the east alot of the old timers up in there who were prospecting and so on asked him to," When you come back happy, bring us a couple of rolls of snuff or bring us back a new pack of overalls from seargents store and so on and say drop in at the Indian agents will you and pick out some stuff that I left there, some forms and the surveyors would want something and so on." So he wondered how in the world am I gonna find all these people in Hazelton when I get there, so he registered at the hotel. This was the Injunica hotel which has sinced burned down. A few of the old timers there. they kept going up stairs you see and new comers came in and so on and one of them said , " Are you a stranger??"Happy said , "Yea!" so he said come on up we're just having a little party up here and a hand of poker and so on so up they went. Happy went with them, well he met this chap and that chap and the Indian agent and so on, of course they were just by name and then everyone had a few drinks and played a hand of poker and so on 'til 2 or 3'oclock in the morning. Well finally in the morning, Happy thought my I must get back to my work here now and find these chaps and do these little errands that I'm supposed to do. So he looked up the government agent first I believe at that time it was Mr. Hoskins the late Mr. Hoskins and low and behold he had met him at the party the night before, then it was the Indian agent and here he'd met him at the party before and the banker and all the store keepers and so on and so he knew them all . So I suppose they just had to do that sort of thing and form their own amusement those days. That was a very splendid celebration it really was a highlight in my life to listen to those old timers.

Yes, I heard about that, can you remember any special incident concerned with this party?

No, nothing particular except what the fellows had to say, it all was very interesting, mind you they were all different characters. Mike Tooey was quite an elocutionist and he wrote his own stuff and it was always very interesting. Dick Seargent himself was splendid with his talks, you know, I mean he was extremely good although at times he had tears in his eyes.

Can you remember any of the other old characters that were there at the time , any special thing that they did? Just to give a cross section of the people that were there.

Yes, well we had the C.N.R. station agent who had been there for a great many years. Mr. Gow, he was quite a character in his own way, he's long since gone now too. Oh, George Oxton from Vanderhoof who was splendid with his recital of pass days. At one time he was the stone seller man which was the liquor vender, in other words for the Hudson's Bay here at that time in the early days before he left.

Was George Burns there?

George Burns was there and he was a character, naturally you never met him and we were very sorry to see him go. I often thought since that if anyone could hear that man on the telephone it was a masterpiece because he never completed a sentence that I know of. He would talk and talk and break his sentences in the center every time. It was really outstanding to hear him.

Did he give a feeling of confusion that he was never quite sure where he was going?

Yes, he would ultimately get the point out but my my it took him a long time and anyone listening, he would be in a booth perhaps phoning you see and the whole room would be in tears just laughing, you know, themselves to death.



Goldlum of course, the fur buyer who used to come in from Prince Rupert all the time he was there and he was a character.

Was Cataline around at that time?

Cataline was dead when I came here. Mr. Myers knew Cataline very very well. I'm sure that of any one in town he probably knows more about Cataline than anyone in the country.

Any other old timers, any other old women that you remember there?

Well it's very strange, I've always been very interested in women but I can't think of any women in particular, except the wives of these gentlemen that I have mentioned. The celebration was for Mr. Seargent I suppose and I connected it vitally with him instead of with the wives.

Was Wigs O'neil there?

He certainly was, and he's a wonderful gentleman that Wigs O'neil and he certainly knows the country. He has told me alot of grand stories about the steam boat days and his days as a waiter first and then of a persor of course.

I suppose Dutch Kline was there and Jim Curby and all those people?

Yes, Dutch Kline was there and Mr. Curby, they were two very outstanding gentlemen in my estimation. I remember when Dutch Kline first put the uniform on and I'm not exactly sure but I think it took him about four months to get into that uniform. Step by step deal you know and I'm sure that he tried it on alot at home but wouldn't bring it out you see. It was when the provincial police first introduced the uniform. Dutch was a man of the country with a sort of a slouch black hat on when I first remember him, a dark suit which was not too elegant and well kept. His shoes laces quite often were unlaced, so it would be hard for him to move from one to the other you know.

**Did he have a badge of any kind ?**

He never showed it much but he had it under his coat I think all the time. He used to come in always there was a card game going, if not one there'd be two, if not two, one. He would sit in and join the boys in their rummy game and everyone liked him, he was a very fine person. If there was anything that needed to be done, he certainly did it, in a hurry too. Except one time, I remember there was a chap here, quite a notorious character and it seems by the grape vine that there were quite a number of murders in the early days and they were practically all done the same way. They, that is the citizens including the natives thought that a certain person had done it and he had been tried several times and cleared of the charges. However, one day a chap came running down the hill, a native, and he was all in a flutter and he said to Dutch Kline, Dutch, so and so (meaning this man) is hanging up in one of the houses there, he has a rope around his neck, he said hurry up and come up there. Dutch said, oh don't worry about him leave him hang and I'll be up there after awhile and see how he's getting along he said. So it was quite a , everyone was happy about the whole deal I think. He went up and he was good and dead and I believe he had it coming to him.

**Do you remember what the details were which you put on his uniform?  
What was his uniform when he finally got it?**

Well it cacky you know and the same brown belt I believe and I think what bothered him mostly was this hat with the peak on it you know all flared on the top like similar to the army type. I know that everytime you went to see him, he immediately took this off and tucked it away in under the desk there or something, mind you I don't think he was ashamed of it but he couldn't bring himself to the definite change that was in air.

**The uniform was brass buttons I suppose.**

Oh yes, oh yes.

Dutch was quite a chap to mumble under his breath you know, the more emphatic he wanted to get the lower he'd keep his voice you see, so no outsider could actually pin him down to what he said. After he did put the uniform on and got sort of accustomed to it, you know it almost changed his character. I would say for the better if anything. Well he was always very human but he sort of took pride in his personal appearance from then on and it was for the good definitely. He had a friend you know, Dutch Kline was in the Boar War, for a number of years and as I hear it he became a great friend of a fellow by the name of Pete Aneick who later ran the ferry here for a great many years. They were very close friends and they met over in South Africa and either one of them had done a turn, a good turn to the other and any time that Dutch had to go out into the hills after well a body or anything of that nature he used to take Pete Aneick along with him and Pete was quite good with dogs you know, dog team and sleigh. One particular time, he went up, they went up, him and Dutch up the telegraph line to pick up a chap who had died anyway, I think he had poisoned himself. I suppose Pete had lost a certain amount of respect for the way he had died you see, anyway from fourth or sixth cabin they brought him down by dog team in the winter time and they were having trouble keeping this chaps arm which was frozen of course at the time on the sleigh, they had tied it but the brush on the trail would maul the ropes to the extent that sooner or later out would go the arm again and catch on the trees and Dutch was breaking trail ahead and Pete was minding the sleigh you see. He got tired of tying this thing up all the time and Dutch finally didn't hear the sleigh coming, so he hesitated and looked around to see how Pete was coming and Pete was using the axe on this arm you see. How true that is I don't know but it's supposed to be really true. Well of course Dutch sauntered back and stopped him in time, I think the arm was still on him by the time they got to Hazelton. But I here like Dutch and I like Pete too.

Have you any other stories of Dutch that could be told?

No, I went and did some jury duty in Prince Rupert one time and Dutch was sort of in charge of us and I certainly found him a very congenial companion and a splendid friend you know at that time I really got to know him better then in that four or five days then I had ever known him before.

What about the stories of, you'd hear from the prospectors and that?  
Do you know any good stories? What kind of yarns would go around?

Well actually, I suppose so many that I can't remember them. Among the old timers, we had an outstanding old timer here; Dave Wiggins a packer who packed for Cataline and I have listened to him many times. He was held very highly among the Hazelton people, he was a negro incidentally. He was an excellent packer. He worked on the Babeen trail here then they packed from Ashcroft in here in the early days and he worked with Cataline you see and Aurthor Hankin worked with him and a great number, Charlie Clifford who is now gone, was a great character in the early days. But I remember one little incident. Now Dave happened to be on a little drinking spree and he had, I was driving cab at that time. Dave was sitting in the back seat with a good old timer we had here, Jim Malin who is still alive living in Namimo. Jim Malin was about to marry a little Cockney girl and she was along with us and Jim was sitting in the front seat with his little girl and myself and the little girls mother and someone else was sitting in the back seat and they were talking about boiling beans at high altitudes you see and Jim said that no one can boil beans after they get five or six thousand feet and Dave Wiggins spoke up and said no I never had any trouble, he said I can boil beans at any altitude just as quickly as they can at the low altitude and this little Cockney spoke around, I think they have an expression about old bean you know she said, oh Dave you're quite an old bean yourself aren't you? Dave says ya but I'm a brown bean. So that's one of the little incidents that stood out. I remember once, I called over at South Hazelton to pick up a bunch there and I had a seven passenger car and when I got over there, there were alot of the old timers and some of the new timers at

at that time. Sweedes, Norwegiens and so on and there were perhaps a dozen but that was the only beer parlor in the country at that time and they were very full of beer at this time and now they most go down to Hazelton, into the cafe's and the whatever highlights there were to see down there. We came down the hill, oh their conversation swung to skiing of all things and I suppose the hill brought this on perhaps and in my poor way I'll try to tell you just how the conversation went, sitting there as a quiet bystander. Oh this Canood Yargonson who all the fellows knew around here said, "Oh shut up you fellows you're making too much noise," he said, "You're talking about skiing and yimminy," he said, "I can ski hundred and fifty/two hundred feet any time." he said, "I come from Oslo, Norway that's my home and yumping is the national sport over there," and he said, "I can do it!" There was a fellow by the name of Charlie Daley there and he said, "Ah shut up you Scandanavians." he said, "You're always talking and nobody can understand you." he said, "And you don't care whether they do or not." "Now," he said "look at me. I'm an Irishman," he said, "And a dog gone good one too." Now Canood spoke up and he says, "Vell I guess you never yumped very far then." Ah shucks.

How would you say this Hazelton area has changed since you've known it first, in what way? Any part of it? Of course it is so many different pockets of different villages isn't it really?

Yes, there are the three or four Indian villages and then there are the three Hazeltons which actually I think should be one. It has changed of course but it has changed less I believe than any town that I have ever seen in British Columbia. Believe it or not there is not one single neon light in the town of Hazelton. I don't know of any town that has that distinction. I believe the town council are really honest when they say that they are trying to build the place into quite a modern town. I know they are and we have a good town council down there. It's too bad that the area's so limited and they have taken in their incorporation such a small area because there are a great many number of people living in the close proximity that could perhaps be

of great assistance to them.

What is the incorporated area?

I believe it only entails thirteen or fourteen acres which originally was allotted by the government to the Hudson's Bay there.

...going right in the centre of Hazelton itself.

Plus a small area that has been now purchased I believe the purchase has been completed from the native, from the Indian reserve.

Well then this is the only incorporated part, then all these other out lying places are not, nothing to do with it?

That is right.

That's a problem isn't it?

It is a problem, yes. I believe that if there ever comes a time when the intervening reserves which disconnect the white towns were to well perhaps be abolished or purchased or in some way fall by the way side, then I'm sure that the towns would get together. It would take along time though.

I suppose Old Hazelton couldn't grow because the reserve is around it?

Exactly, from the time that Hazelton which was called and known as Kitimax by the natives it has never had any more land than that fourteen acres until just recently.

That is why the other towns, Southtown and Newtown thought that they would grow because they were put somewhere where they were free to grow.

Ah yes, yes I can see your point and I believe you have the point there that caused that. As I have heard when it was known the railroad was to come into Hazelton, a great number of the citizens and all the business men got together and they decided that they would move to New Hazelton and apparently they all signed to say that they would. But from the time they heard the railroad was coming in until it actually did come in was a long period of time and they possibly had changed their mind and so when the time came to make the move, only about well less than a third went. Among them was our great friend Mr. Saul who was the editor of the Omineca Harold here, a newspaper for so many many years and has now passed on. He took it as a personal affront you know when his other friends didn't go with him and from that day on he printed his paper at New Hazelton and he never missed an opportunity, and I'm sure everyone will bear me out on this, to black-ball the town of Old Hazelton and I'm sure that alot of the animosity existed down through the years was kept simmering by our friend Mr. Saul's editorials.

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...Packing in between the steamboats you see in Hazelton which brought goods up the river to Hazelton and into Babeen. Now from Babeen they were put on a schooner there called the Sylvia I believe and then they went up the longest lake in British Columbia to the head waters and across the portage into Stuart Lake which is about eight miles by wagon and so on and from there they were distributed through out the whole north. Finilly Forks, and up Tackla way which was the Hudson's Bay point and into the gold fields at Madson Creek, Finilly Forks, Fort Graham, you see there were no access from Prince George in that way from Burns Lake that way from Vanderhoof that way, nor any of these towns at that time. It all had to go through here, so they had twelve to fifteen hundred head of mules and horses working here all the time. There were a great number of Spanish and Mexican packers in here at that time which taught the local people alot about packing because



those Mexicans were absolutely experts. They used to pack ninety to the hundred head of mules and horses in about forty-five minutes and not one word was spoken during the time, during the packing time. When the signal was given by the boss of the packing outfit, who was usually a Mexican, I forgot what they called him, to load the kitchen last on kitchen while they were gone and they used to bring a lot of the goods from the steam boat out here to two-mile and repack it and they considered this their starting point for Babeen. Actually there was very poor road from Two-mile into Hazelton, I understand at that time.

I guess the road went south to South Hazelton over the bridge?

Ah, not at that time it didn't and the road from Two-mile into Hazelton used to go over that hill around by the river way and it was only a foot and horsepack trail, ya. It gradually improved of course.

This was the packers centre then?

This was the packers centre and this was the centre for all gaining houses of course too you see and there were I believe five or six cafe's here at that time, and numerous bootleggers of course and a great number of, I've heard from time to time, fifty to seventy-five ladies of various stages of life and morals.

This was the wild town that there wasn't any room for in Hazelton itself?

That is correct, it is the place where there wasn't any room for in Hazelton.

It's a very staid looking community right now compared to, well it may not be under the surface.

Isn't it, a quiet looking community. Incidentally, I'm not sure about this but I believe the bar that Simon Gunanoot, the notorious Simon Gunanoot was drinking the night that he shot the two MC Intosh boys

it was at Two-mile at that time. I think the insults were handed around in Tow-mile (tape stopped and came on with this conversation)

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... almost to the height of land in between Babeen and Hazelton.

There was a sort of pass there.

Ya, you go up oh almost four thousand feet, it's above the timber line.

Must be a very beautiful trail then.

It's a very pretty trail, I took particular notice when I went in there this time as to the merits of the beauty of it you know because I have had a great number of requests to take people in just for a camping trip, right through. I realize that you can't, that if you repeat, if you come back over the same ground it's rather uninteresting perhaps. In this respect they could go down the lake to some point and back on the train or by car.

Is it much of a grove, to keep down?

Yes, at the far end, the government were very kind to us at one time. They gave us twenty-five or twenty-seven hundred dollars to clear that out and we did the best job that we could possibly do. You know a person is using a certain area, he's going to do the best he can and I would like to see them give prospectors, pay them for clearing their trails.

Well yes, another thing, the forestry should be interested in keeping things open like that, shouldn't they?

Well I believe that this (tape stopped and came on with conversation)

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...I never believed that so I hauled my horses out when we went out to sixteen mile.

The road out to the cabins, the old telegraph trail road, does that go very far up, can you go up as far a second cabin?

Well it's almost as tough to get to second cabin as it is to get right through to telegraph creek. That strange to say there was a chap went through with a couple of horses. (tape stopped and came on with conversation following)

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Alan Benson continued

...through the swamps, they were put in with three logs you know, two on the outside and one in the centre where the horses would walk you see, over these. All those logs are completely, almost completely rotten now you know and every once and awhile horses are down and into that, down to the hip with one leg, you know its just terrible. Plus all the windfalls.

Couldn't be very fun.

You know , you bet you boots it isn't. The fly's are just as bad there as they are any place else.

I just wanted to know another thing, the Kitsigas, is that a difficult trail too, is that a more or less trail around there?

Not now no, a few years ago we had a slide happened in the Babeen river it was due they believed to Mica being lodged on the sort of the bedrock, and when this fifteen or twenty feet of over burden perhaps moving slightly all the time, let loose well it simply filled the Babeen river over there. They had to build a road to get to this slide and right now they're using that road for bringing out lumber, so it's exceptionally good I think for a side road.

That goes all the way to the old sight?

Oh yes.

Is there anything in that, to see up there?

Well I haven't been there for the last, that is right there for the last few years but when I did visit there, there was a bridge that the natives built and used to use for crossing the river, it is bottled into a very narrow canyon, I think, remembering about twenty or twenty-five feet wide and it's boiling in there and they built this bridge quite a unique thing, to me it was very outstanding. It took and shoved out from each side, slightly going up into the air two huge logs and then they waited, the portion that was left on the bank with rocks and they pushed these logs out to the centre of the stream high above the water of course. Underneath these logs, close to the bank they layed another huge big log and they did the same on the other side. Now on the centre of the stream, high above the water these logs met almost you see and they waited at the far end of those also and then they put whips on lumber on that and they used to walk the horses across there you see. The horses would walk going up hill to the centre and then going down hill to the other side and I believe that bridge still exists. We didn't take our horses across, it was a little weak but we walked across on foot.

It was cantilever in fact?

It approached the cantilever type, yes indeed it did.

Was there any suspension of it, would they have a railing of any kind, a rope or anything?

There was a railing on it, yes, four or five feet high.

Do you remember what that was made of?

The railing was made of small saplings tied up with birch bark and so on the edge.

It was not, in other words was not a white man's string or wire on the thing at all?

No there was no wire on it or anything. If there was any, it's certainly been put on since. When you cross that bridge you're right at the village, the village is situated at about five or six miles from the mouth of the Babeen river and being this cannon was there, it was a great fishing spot just below this bridge and cannon you see.

I suppose they speared the fish like they do around here?

Yes, the fish would have to rest there you see before going up and they would be so plentiful that you could almost walk on them even.

You were telling me about an adventure you had up Two-mile rather to second cabin, would you like to tell that story?

Second cabin, yes, actually I've only been to second cabin three or four times but the first time I went was possibly the most interesting. Having a game guide's license you know, you're supposed to be prepared to go to any portion of the province I believe at any given time when you're commanded to do so by the authority. At this particular time I think it was about one-thirty in the afternoon when I received a phone call from the police department here and they asked me how quickly I could prepare to go up the telegraph line, how far they didn't know. I said that my stuff was already but I would at least need an hour to shoe up a couple of the horses you know and they said that will be fine, they were awaiting word from Victoria anyway, that some fellow had gone up the telegraph line who was not entirely sane and as it was getting very late in the year they didn't want him to get up in to the snow country and then possibly perish and go and have to get him later on in the winter and have a hard time finding him and so on. So they were going to stop him. So to make a story as short

as I can, the word came through, a permission and we loaded the horses up into the truck and we wheeled them up to which was at that time the old Burns ranch, George Burns ranch and was owned by Marty Allen at that time and was married to one of the Loves which is a very fine old family in this community, very highly thought of and when we unloaded which was about five o'clock in the afternoon we were royally treated by, which everyone always is, by the, this, who is primarily a Love girl and Marty Allen to a very fine supper that night and we packed up and attempted to reach seventh cabin that night which we didn't, mind you as I say the trails were tough at that time and the seven miles was quite an ordeal. However, the cabin was locked up and we crawled through the window and slept in there for a few short hours, I think we were away about four-thirty in the morning and the horse had a happy time, the feed was plentiful. We followed these footsteps of this chap all day long and he had hobnail boots on which was a blessing because it made it easier to follow and during the thirty miles between first and second cabin we only noticed one little place where he had had a fire at one time, it was a very small fire. We found later that he didn't need a fire because he, the only food he had was concentrated tablets you know and it appears that he, from first cabin there's a fork there, one goes up the Skeena river and is the telegraph line and one goes up the Kispiox river which is not the telegraph line and when they were going up, he was going up the fisheries road at least the Kispiox which we at that time called the fishery road, he met Roy M<sup>C</sup>Donald who was in charge of the fisheries department in Smithers coming down with a chap, a good friend of mine Joe Allen who is still around here and a chap, Bill (a native chap)

### Barney Robinson?

No Bill Robinson who lives with Barney and Roy was a very gruff sort of person and he said, "Where are you going?" He was on foot, he had no rigging or anything. "Well," he said "I'm going up the telegraph line, I'm going to Russia to see a doctor over there, they are far better doctors over there than they are in any place in Canada or United States

So Roy says, "Where'd you come from?" And he says, "United States." Well Roy says, "You're going the wrong way, gosh." he says, "You're thirty miles or so from the telegraph line, you'd better come back with us." So they kept him there over night and he didn't sleep that night. He just sat up and leaned against the pole, the tent pole, course the others slept. They noticed he was peculiar and when they came back to the telegraph line Roy M<sup>C</sup>Donald said, "Now there's your trail you stick to that one, you can't go wrong." When Roy came into the community here he notified the police that this chap was on his way and that was the hurry I imagine. The sooner we got in contact with him, the less distance we would have to go naturally which was all tough. So anyway darkness over took us the first, which would be the second day and we followed this chap's foot marks for about seven miles by flashlight. Tony West was the constable here at that time and he was quite a horse man, in fact a good horse man and Tony was ready to quite, it was dark and we came to a huge clearing which is called the big flat and he said, "I don't think we'll go any further." He said, "We can't find this chap tonight." Well I said, "I believe that he will be at second cabin, and if we can find the cabin..." "Well go look for it" he said. So I went in this huge flat, it must be five or six hundred acres there and I rode all around in the dark, moon was showing a little light at times but I couldn't find the cabin. You see we had found this fellows tracks coming back and they turned along the trail and they had turned into this big flat.

### That's in the snow?

No there was no snow at that time, just in mud and I suggested to Tony that perhaps he had gone across the flat and caught the trail again further up. "Well" he said, "I'm beat, we'll camp here." But I didn't want to do that because I knew that we would have to cross this Culdoe river I believe it is. We would have to swim the horses there the next day and the ice was on and we would have to break it. I didn't want to do that so I suggested, "We better do it Tony, and try and see if we can't go on." and it was, "No." So I had a bottle of rum in the pack and I knew right where it was, unopened, and I just



slid my hand down in the pack and I found it. I got it by the neck and just yanked it out in the dark and I said, "Have a drink of this, Tony." Well he didn't know what it was of course so he says yes O.K, so he took a big drink of this you know. He said, "You know, my that tastes good, at any other time," he says, "it sort of bitter to me even I see to enjoy it." Well I said, "Have another." In the mean time I had had one too, so he said, "Lets carry on, we'll catch up to this guy sure enough its dark." Yea, I said, "and it's starting to rain too and we're liable to be out here wet and so on, well you take the lead for awhile." So I took the flashlight and sure enough for a short time I found out where this chap had come out on to the trail again. I had a very fine horse that smelled smoke you know, and I had no sooner go her in the lead and she started to speed up and she was walking at a terrific rate up hill and down and over these windfalls and there was danger of getting the brush in her face and everything but it was only a very few moments we went this mile and a half. Here was the little clearing with this cabin exposed right in the centre and the horses wet right to eating, that was their objective and that was it. So Tony said, "We'll march right up to the door, he may be in here." Now incidentally he had a shot gun and six shell, he had made a trade with a chap in town here who was in the second hand business, an old musket, an old muzzle loader, loading six shooter or revolver you see. So he had given him the shells and the shot gun. So Tony and I marched up, by this time it was raining quite hard, to the door. Tony had his uniform covered up with a huge raincoat but he still had his hat on so he knocked strenuously at the door and knocked again hard and I said to Tony, "You better give me your cap." Or at least I pulled the cap off his head and chucked it into the bush you see. Tony said, "Thank-you," Finally we got a voice from the interior, very weak and subdued and Tony says, "How's the chance to come in out of the rain, it's raining out here." Oh he mumbled and grumbled and finally he came to the door. "My gosh we're soaking out here," he said, "Can we come in?". "Oh. I guess so." So Tony marched in with his flashlight and he spotted the gun of course and the shells on the other side, four of them and he opened the gun and there were two shells in the the barrels, swelled in there, so he immediately got control of this

gun and we hadn't had our supper of course so we went outside, it had quit then and the moon had come out a little, we cooked up a big feed and we invited this chap to sit in there, grumbling all the while. Now he hadn't eaten nothing but these tablets for several days but he really sat in there and ate a meal. I sent him down to the creek for water which he did very nicely. Anyway, we went to bed that night, he again sat up with his back to the wall but we were very tired. Tony and I slept together and morning bright and early we had breakfast and started out, put the guns on the shelf on the pack and this chap was to walk on foot. Tony went ahead and I asked him if he would stop at the first big river, there was one big river to cross, not too deep to swim but very wide. I forgot what they call that river.

Not too deep to wade you mean?

Well no, it wasn't too deep to wade but deep enough.

You said not too deep to swim but I presume you meant wade.

Yes it took the horses up well over the belly as you know, now slightly above the river, up river there was a wire with a little seat on it where this chap had crossed before but it was quite a way up there and when I got to the river my Tony had left you see, I had planned to have dinner there. So I was in quite a hurry and I asked this chap if he would jump on the, my horse, saddle horse behind me and I would take him across the river. I might say that he was very seriously out of his mind but only on three or four subjects. If you spoke, if I spoke of an institution or women or doctors I believe it was he would immediately go off in a tangent and incidentally he never stopped talking and I would answer him casually. On the way over he said, he struck into the conversation of, he said, "I, you know, you fellows would have never caught up to me, that I was on foot and I had no rigging and so on." He called this Roy M<sup>C</sup>Donald, the fisheries man, the doctor, he said, "The night I spent with the doctor, on that other road, I could have killed those fellows, both of them and taken their equipment," and he said, "You'd have never of caught

me and I'd have made Russia without any trouble." So I said, "Well." He had his arms around my body and this four or five feet of water in this creek you know this river and I didn't enjoy it so I asked him if he would take his hands around, off my body and I turned half way around and he like a gentleman did so and I just, we made shore and Tony wasn't there so we kept on going. So I was happy to get across safely anyway. He was only about my size you know and I could handle him face to face probably but anyway Tony had misunderstood me and he had gone on quite a number of miles and stopped there and waited for us. Oh we had our lunch and then we went on a little further and darkness was going to set in and there was no feed for the horses there, but we thought we better camp before dark rather than fool around in the dark trying to find feed for the horses and so on, only one more night out anyway wouldn't hurt them much. So I said, "You give me a hand to put this tent up." To this crazy fellow. Oh yes, he was quite willing. Tony said, "I'll look after the horses," There was a little creek there and an old old gate that the packers had used and put a few bars in there to keep the horses into this little clearing and I was putting the tent up and had it well under way and I had the crazy fellow inside holding the pole and I looked out of the corner of my eye and Tony had turned my horses loose and this horse I speak of is a homebody, a barnwatcher or whatever you want to call her. She was off like a flash and went through those briers just flying and I managed, I dropped the tent of course, I managed to grab the pack horse. Well I mounted the pack horse and tried to catch my saddle horse and the last I remember of this crazy fellow, he was inside the tent, he must have been a, what's the term there? Claustrophobia? But he was having an awful time in there. Beating his way around in that tent you see and Tony was outside trying to control him and get the tent off him and everytime Tony would pull the tent one way, the man would go the other you see yelling and beating this thing and me up the hill trying to catch my saddle horse and of course riding the pack horse, he had done nothing for years but follow and I couldn't get him past that horse. She'd trot, he'd trot or he'd trot she'd trot, he galloped, she galloped.

Finally it came to a windfall, where we had to go around and I cut across and got in front of her and she was very docile when we came back. I met Tony coming up and he said, "I'm very sorry." He'd lost his hat and I'd lost my hat in the mean time. Anyway we got back to the chap and he was sitting there against the post again munching some of these flat tablets. Cooked up a big feed and got away early the next morning and the poor guy's feet got blisters you know and I tied a rope around his body to sort of help him up some of the hills and tied it to the saddle horn, it did help him **except the trail is full of mud** you know and he's jumping from one side to the other and believe me, I answered more questions during that little session than, and talked more actually. I think Tony was smart, he went on ahead a little bit and he didn't have to answer these questions. Finally I put him on the horse and I walked a little. We finally got back to the truck and it was a very interesting experience anyway, I enjoyed the company, if I do say it. He was quite intelligent you know otherwise except those three or four.

Well when did you tell him that you were after him? Soon after you went in the cabin?

Yes, we informed him that he would have to come back to us, with us. That he was not, would not be allowed to go up over the telegraph line at that time of the year.

Was he willing to come down?

All evidence was that he was.

( Second tape started with new conversation )

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Alan Benson continued

...the detail of it is pretty interesting because after all he was a major \_\_\_\_\_?

Would you describe what George Burns did?

Yes all right Bob, George Burns was packing in a large was when I came to the country and I used to envy him quite a bit and watch him. Now he was packing the products and produce up to the telegraph line to the various cabins up there of which there were nine I believe and two men in each cabin, so there was a lot of goods to go up there each year. He used the Mexican type of apparel, it's known as. It's an elaborate affair, very easy on the horse and a packer using an apparel can pack at least twice as much on an apparel as he can on the little saw-buck type of pack rigging. I can't describe it to you very well, they are more or less fitted to the individual horse. It's leather on the outside, leather on the inside with a matting made of hemp that goes on top of the blanket which covers the horse. That's made of rope matting or hemp matting so that it, so that the pack will not slip as readily. Actually I have a new apparel downstairs and then the ribs of this which cover the ribs of the horse are fitted with willow sticks, green, which bend to the form of the horse and then underneath of that is the, filled with this round slew hay which has an air deposit in the centre and which never exactly packs, it's always filled with air more or less. That's where they get the easy packing type but they pack anywhere from three hundred to five hundred pounds on those mules, oh yes and higher than that, six to seven hundred pounds on some of the mules, I understand.

That's very interesting, what is the shape of this thing, now could you describe it? What was leather, what was leather inside and outside and so on?

It's a heavy saddle leather, type of leather and it's about three feet long and it covers both sides of the horse running from the withers back almost to the flank and down on the sides almost half way or better than half way down the sides. Therefore, it protects the horse entirely from any rubbing or scruffing of the boxes or anything like that, and it's made of heavy leather so that it will stand the gaff. They use a different kind of hitch to tie the goods

on that tupe of a saddle pack rigging. You have to do what they call the apparel hitch and these old packers, I've only seen it done once or twice. They use two men on each side of the horse, now one man on one side and two men on the other and they place their hands on top of the pack that's to be loaded and incidentally those horses carry the same pack every day, they're caught up about two in the morning, breakfast is over, certainly not, and they're packed before three o'clock in the morning before the flies get to the mules you know and make them fussy so that you can't handle them. They get that pack on and then they go an hard as they can go in a walk for five hours straight. They might find their camp spot at eleven o'clock in the morning and the rigging and packs all come off and they spend 'till two o'clock the next morning right in that camp. Everybody rests and sleeps and the Corigadoor gives the word, he's the boss of the show and the Seeyadoor comes under him, he gives the orders to the men. I mentioned before I believe that not a word, it's tradition that there is not a word to be spoken as soon as them animals are ready for pack and they ring a bell and the mules and horses usually come into their positions and it becomes such habit that they almost come to their own ring you know like a cow to its stall without fail. When the word is given, when they load those packs, turn and lift you see and they turn that pack on its side and up it goes and then as it goes on the horse it's turned again and I believe the fellow on the other side makes it fast and then one chap holds the weight so that it doesn't pull the rigging over on one side. The other chap goes and helps and the other side and the same procedure there. Once the packs are evened up of course they, then they stay. Then they throw the diamond on, the two man diamond and if it 's a hard pack to hold or a round backed horse they might throw an extra diamond on or even three diamonds on there. They tighten three times say a half mile from camp, and then another mile and then their way. They never touch a pack after that for five hours. It was got down to a science.

This is very interesting.



Now if they had camp an eleven which is fairly early in the morning or early in the day, they would, the meal time comes on of course. The kitchen is unloaded immediately and the cook goes to work and they have a big meal and then they sleep all afternoon or if they have bathing to do , have a bath in the creek and so on, wash. They do sew, or a little rigging to do like their socks to fix up and so on. They do that but they sleep most of the afternoon and most of the few hours in the evening like and at one-thirty the bell rings again and they're up for breakfast and their horse rangler gets out and gets them in. Two o'clock the packs are ready to put on and they're away again. They do everything in the cool of the morning, the cool of the night you know when the flies are dormant sort of .

They're doing eleven hours, no that's nine hours a day?

Yes, the horse rangler was doing more than that of course, he's never quite finished, he's always got his ear cocked you know to what's going on among the horses and how the bells are, they have bells on one or two or three of the horses which gives them indication as to where they are you see.

Just lit them roam?

Oh yea, they have to. They'll hobble the odd one that a sort of, sort of a leader you know but the horses become so that they like it very much too you know. They work ten miles a day and that's all and the packers are so good that they never have a sore back or a thing and the horses get so that they like it, it's a short day for them and the feed is luscious and good and they enjoy it.

How many men would be on, would each horse have to be saddled, have to be loaded, the pack put on, these three men on each horse would they move from horse to horse and all the way down and get them ready or would there be other men working on other horses?



I don't know how many they used to have in an outfit, yes there would be other teams you see working on various other horses.

But I suppose each team of three men would be in charge of a certain number of horses?

Yes, yes.

The horses, the bell would ring, the horses might line up and then the word was given by what, the Corigadoor, was he the leader, the Corigadoor?

I'm not absolutely sure as to the pronunciation of that but I believe they called it the Corigadoor,

A Corigadoor is a head, a village or a leading man actually in the Spanish.

I see.

It could be the equivalent of a mayor and the other one is a Seevadoor?

Seevadoor I believe. That's the way I heard it.

Seevadoor, ah yes that's a packer, that's a packer yes. That's on the boats, Seevadoor is on the boats.

Oh, I see, yes you are right Mr. Stevens.

Seevadoor was a packer and the corigadoor was the chief person?

Yes.

And then the chap who was watching the horses, what was his name?

Well the horse rangler .

Would he be the same as the Corigadoor?

No, I think he would have alot of authority where it came to the horses alone but not to the picture in general. I think the Corigadoor actually would be over him.

Each train had a cook?

Ah, yes definitely.

And he had his own horse, his own pack horse?

That's right.

Just one pack horse for all the cooking ...?

Well now I couldn't answer that one, no I imagine that they would have more than one. They used to make the trip into Babeen in five days and come out in three so that would give them eight days of food you see and the equipment so he'd have to have his little, well his little stove I imagine he had there and you have to have some sort of a flat top to get up a quick meal you know and all those meals are pretty well quick and abundant.

That was the first thing that was unloaded and the last thing that was loaded?

It was the first thing that was started 'cause as soon as they got to camp they just flew at that.

What would they bring out from Babeen? I mean they'd take in provisions would they come out unloaded?

They would come out more or less unloaded that is if one didn't consider the rum that came out with them I guess.

They would bring skins sometimes wouldn't they?

Ah, yes now you correct me, certainly that is true, they would bring out skins. The Sikinee indians used to sell their skins at Babeen and they would bring those out.

What would these loads that they carried with them, would they be in boxes or in sacs or how would they be?

Of various nature, I believe flour in those days was in sort of a round container. I remember telling me about putting one of these hundred and fifty pound containers on each side of a horse and then they would put one of these two hundred pound wagon wheel on top leaving room between the centre for the hub you know and then perhaps if they had a whole wagon well then four of those characters, those horses would carry the four wheels you see.

Would they be taking a wagon for when they got to the road?

To use perhaps on the portage over there from the head of the largest lake in B.C. , Babeen over to Stuart Lake you see.

This stuff, these things were balanced, were they tied to a ring or something across in the back saddle at the other side or were they diamond hitched to each other so to speak?

Well they through this , well the apparel lash rope you see is used first and it's put on in a fashion, they call it the apparel hitch on that type of rope and then the tarps would go over which cover the pack and then the diamond goes over that.

That's to tie it all down?

Yes, so you use the same diamond no matter what kind of packer you've got, you use the same diamond hitches, mind you there are three or four ways of tying them. The same hitches but you, on this lash rope you use a different hitch on that when you're using apparel or Mexican rigging than you do if you're using the common sauvuck type of pack rigging.

Mexican rigging is another name for apparel?

Yes, yes.

Do you use this now a days at all or do you use it much?

I use the sauvucks mostly, they're a little handy and I don't like to load my horses too heavy and usually I'm packing alone too and therefore I can't lift up too much but I do have one apparel that I use.

Are apparels used much now, anywhere else?

I don't think there's one in the country you know that.

Did you make this one yourself?

No, I had a chap, rig it for me. It was brand new and it had hung in Seargent's store down in Hazelton for forty-two years, old Dick told me and when they, Dick had no further use for it and there was no sale for them you know I asked him one day what he wanted to do with it because it had been chewed a little bit by rats on one corner just a bit but it was as good as new. So he said, "I have no further use for it Alan, you take it, if you can use it take it." So I did and I'm very proud that I did because every time I look at it now I think of old Dick Seargent. Speaking of old George Burns, when he came back from his trip up the telegraph line, he had sixty or seventy on that outfit too and George was a grand person but he never could control his men and you know how men are when they come in with

a pack outfit, the fastest way they can get to town is the best and they used to throw this rigging down in the manure and the mud or anyplace they could get to put it and then George would let them do it, or allow them to do it and he used to use an awful pile of rigging every year and buy alot every year. That stuff would spoil you see. So when the season was finished just before George died, he had an awful bunch of these apparels and they were still very good but again the packers through them down in the wet and rain and mud, they just went to pot you know and there wasn't one that was worth saving hardly the next year.

They were quite expensive, you said?

I think they ran up as high as a hundred and fifty dollars at that time.

Would there be special people that made them?

I think most of them were made in Mexico prior to the fact that some were made in Canada and the United States, some outfits began, some of the saddle outfits began making them. They're very nicely put up.

What are the qualities of a pack horse?

Well it's nice to have them without the rolling back, the round back you know. It's nice to have them with sort of a high whither but at the same time you usually find one with with a rolling back is a short back and short back is very much to be desired because they can seem to, stand up under the strain much better than the long backed horse but it's certainly nice to have the whithers on them because their packs don't turn nearly so readily and so on but a medium sized horse around, well anywhere I'll say from one thousand pounds to twelve hundred. There are certain things that you love to get on these twelve hundred pound horses.

As between a horse and a mule, would the mule preceed to be much the same?

Mule outpack a horse half again as much. A mule is a very intelligent animal you know and they sure have certain characteristics that a horse never has. For instance a horse will go to a oat sack and he'll kill himself eating oats and mule won't, a mule will not eat a poison plant ever a horse will.

Have you heard of this , I'm talking about Parson Tompkiss, this mountain up in the interior there where so many horses died on the trail, was that a legend or is that fact?

It is not a legend but I have a very fine friend , practicing law in state of Delaware now. He spent a year here taking movies. He sold them later to the national film board. He's a very fine chap and he arranged to go into this poison mountain with me last year but when he came we didn't have the time to go and back, he had to be back to his court at a certain time and being as the trail was so tough we didn't have time to make it by horse so we had to go in by aircraft. We took him up on this poison mountain and up on several other mountains around there. Did a little prospecting also, he had the opinion that perhaps some of this poison that these horses had gotten several years prior and for quite a number of years consecutively that there might be a mineral that was producing that poison you see and that was very much sought after by our modern type of explosives and jet propelled machines and that was his objective going up in there but from all the packers that I've asked since and before, none of them mention that at all. They all tell you that it was only a certain time of the year and the early spring and it was done by wild parsnip and this birdock and poisons from plant life and I'm inclined to believe that that is true.

Did you see there the pack trail during the trail of '98, alot of horses apparently died there?

It's supposed to be piled with bones and things like that, are there?

Well no, there aren't any piles of bones there, there are bones but they're all scattered from kingdom come. You do run into them all right. Jaw bones and horses and that, teeth but it was a very nice trip for me, very exciting.

This chap sold this stuff to the film board, was it a sixty minute metre he was taking?

Yes it was.

What year was that?

You know he was a character that fellow. The year the war stopped he came here, in '46 and he had planned this you know he was in the navy. Very long headed type of chap and I found since that that remark is more than true..' What will I do when I get out of the navy, I have saved my money." He decided that he would buy two hundred rolls of colored film and he would, he pin pointed the Hazelton as where he was going, how hie did that I don't know, he told me once. So he came and he was the most conscientious type of person I ever saw. For instance if he wanted the, to take a picture of the making, the manufacturing of a snow shoe by a native, he would spend time unlimited to get that and live right with them, you know a native when he makes snow shoes it's going to take him a long time. So he'd even have to get them up in the morning to do it you know but he got some beautiful pictures of those. That Skeena River Trapline is an outstanding picture and it's in the library. He made another film, People of the Skeena, which was very, very good. Not quite as good as the other, I thought but for an amateur he certainly did fine work.

What was his name?

His name is Howard Enis, Howard Enis was his name. In order to take this picture, The Skeena River Trapline, he went out and layered with



a very fine character, who is a very fine friend of mine, Ben M<sup>C</sup>Kenzie. He is a native and he still holds his native rights for which I give him great credit. I have spent many, many nights and days in his cabin and some of them very recently and he's on the Babeen trail and he was a fine subject for the pictures and he lived with him and followed him around from camp to camp and out in, and slept in the little lean two and so on and had him cooking his meals and setting his traps and skinning his game, shooting a deer which was quite outstanding I thought. I am very proud of my association with Howard Enis, he took a picture and gave it to my wife and I.

( New conversation just got started )

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The Babeen river of course, where the slide occurred is a long extending canyon and it's deep. A couple of hundred feet to a say of canyon and then it flares out on each side with sloping hills which are fairly steep too and one of these hills simply slipped right down into this two hundred foot canyon and left a terrific over burden above as well. Anyway they had to build a road to it which passed the village of Kitsigas and that was done with bulldozers, modern equipment and they followed the Skeena to the Babeen and then up the Babeen river of course to the slide. When they got to the slide they were a long way above the river so they had to make a road down into the river and then they imported some large Uke trucks you know these big gravel hauling trucks and they ran them down to the river and then they ran them in the water, in the river, at low water and up the river a mile or so to the slide in the river bottom. Then they had their diesel shovels shoveling it into these big Ukes you see and then they would run it down the river again to the turning point and then back up and climb this huge hill and make the dump back behind the hill so that it would be entirely out of their way you see. Well they couldn't work steadily, the water rose and fell of course all the time and then they'd have the odd break down but it was an ordeal and they had a beautiful camp there. They set it up as a permanent, more or less permanent camp with their freezers and walk in freezers and so on with their electricity and all the trimmings because it did take them about a year and a half I guess to do the whole thing you know.

That's an interesting story, the reason why it happened and the reason why they had to do it. How many years ago was that?

About nine now, nine years ago.

That is something that could be told from fisheries, the fisheries department?

Yes, that's why it's called today the fisheries road, everyone calls it the fisheries road.

And it would be from their records, we could do a radio documentary on it because today we can't photograph the doing of it, therefore it isn't a T.V. thing.