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 Editor and Proprietor

NOW YOU TELL ONE--

Following is the prize-winning story in the recent New Navada Sourdough Yarn contest for 1943. The winner was Berman M. Rinear, at present a baggage checker with the Alaskan Railroad at Fairbanks. The prize was a round trip to Hollywood, with \$500 expense money.

Moose Creek Charlie, who actually lived on Moose Creek, told me of a winter in Alaska when it was so cold that not one thermometer was

able to record the temperature. He said that the temperature dropped so rapidly that the momentum of the mercury falling in the glass pulled all the thermometers from their fastenings and dashed them to the frozen ground.

Charlie didn't mention the exact year of the quick freeze, but it must have been after the railroad was built from Seward to Fairbanks. Charlie told how the Alaska Railroad saved thousands of dollars in coal bills during the eighteen days that the cold wave hung over Central Alaska. This is how it happened.

When the cold wave hit Fairbanks, the Alaska Railroad heating plant had full steam up. In thirty seconds, every steam pipe on the line was frozen tighter than a Nenan swack on New Year's Eve. At first, railroad officials were horrified; then, gratified when they discovered a rare bit of good fortune. Bulletins were flashed from headquarters in Anchorage to all stations in the cold belt advising yardmasters to use all frozen steam on hand in the following manner:

They were to open taps on all pipes, breaking the frozen steam off in six foot lengths. These steam

logs were to be used in all the locomotives as long as the supply lasted. Each engine was to have a small pilot fire with sufficient heat to thaw out the frozen steam. Caution was to be displayed in putting steam logs in the boilers as they were explosive in their condensed form. However, in spite of caution displayed in using steam logs, fourteen locomotives blew their tops.

Although the railroad benefited in some ways from the extreme cold, it also caused many headaches. Two rails snapped simultaneously in Healy Canyon, pinning an entire train to the side of the gorge. It was there for twenty-four hours until a wrecking crew could get through from Curry.

Between Fairbanks and Nenana the ice fog lay so thick and heavy that snowplows had to precede every train to clear frozen fog from the right-of-way.

One tragedy happened on the first trip after the cold wave hit. A passenger train was en route from Anchorage, so Moose Creek Charlie said, and everything was progressing on schedule until the train came to the first tunnel north of Healy. The nose of the engine had just entered the tunnel when everything came to a screeching halt. The seven coaches and baggage car crashed off the rails, pulling the engine into the gorge after them. The top of the tunnel had been torn completely off.

Officials who witnessed the scene afterwards said that the trail of smoke left by the engine had frozen so solid that when it hooked the top of the tunnel it simply dragged things to an abrupt halt. The coaches had so much momentum that they swerved into a sweeping dive into the canyon. After this wreck, the railroad was forced to hire smokecutters who drew four dollars an hour and did nothing but cut the smoke from the stack juts before a train entered a tunnel, capping the stack until the engine emerged on the other side.

In Fairbanks, the cold wave caused near panic. On one night alone, fifty-tree persons with slow circulation dropped dead as they stepped out of the Empress theatre, frozen solid before they hit the icy sidewalk. In many instances, fled dogs froze into statues and had to be cut from the traces and left standing as mute testimony of the cold. These silent forms that were left standing beside so many trials often caused passing teams to get so entangled that some drivers spent as much as three days separating dogs from snarled harnesses.

During the cold wave there was an acute shortage of fresh milk. In fact, there was no fresh milk at all. Both Creamers and Bentley's had to resort to an emergency measure. Feeding their cows four different flavors of syrup, and labeling the four spigots vanilla, strawberry, chocolate and burnt almond, they were able to supply the town with more ice cream than it could consume. However, production difficulties resulted from causes unknown—and the labels had to be pulled off. The chocolate spigot turned out Tutti Frutti. The Burnt Almond tap, orange sherbet. The strawberry faucet produced little minnows, and the vanilla outlet gave off ice cold Rainier Beer.

Charlie said that there was such a great difference between the outside temperature and that of Fairbanks cold storage boxes that meat thawed as it hung on the racks in the freezers, hamburgers relaxed into mush, and cube steaks sagged like liver on a hot day.

Old Moose Creek Charlie was awed by the Northern Lights during this cold wave. He said that the lights were at their best on the night the temperature dropped so rapidly; the sky was curtained with huge banners of colored lights that danced across the sky in such splendor

that Charlie spoke of them with great emotion. "All of a sudden," he said, "the Aurora Borealis froze motionless in the star-studded sky, many of the spangled curtains touching the ground. People scrambled to break off pieces of the lights, and almost every home in Fairbanks had Christmas trees decorated with Northern Lights which required no electric current."

Up on Second Avenue, a few minutes after the cold wave hit, all neon signs burst and the gases of all colors froze as they sprayed above the sidewalk, making a fairyland of Second Avenue. Every electric light bulb outside froze solid instantly, and switches became useless. The lights burned day and night for eighteen days. The manager, assistant manager and two stock boys of the Northern Commercial Company retired on the revenue taken in on the excessive light bills.

Two well-oiled prospectors who were wandering down Cushman Street grew thirsty and attempted to take a swig of one hundred and ninety-proof whiskey from a bottle. Both men were rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital with punctured tonsils, for the whiskey had become a treacherous gold mine. Old Moose Creek

Charlie said that, after recovering, both men refused to take another drink, and neither went prospecting again.

Old Moose Creek Charlie is gone now, but never a winter passes that I don't think of him and the true story of the "Quick Freeze Winter."

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