

Nechako Damsite, Key of Alcan Operations—Makes New and Modern Community

By EVANGELINE VANN

I knew the road as far as the Indian village of Stony Creek. Nine miles out of Vanderhoof, the new road begins. A sign, "This fuel for trucks, cats and shovels only," and about 15 miles out: "Warning—Road to Nechako Dam—Closed to Public" and the excellence of the road signified that I was on the way to what is probably the key to the whole Alcan operations—the damsite, 60 miles from Vanderhoof.

"We had to stop for moose on the road before the hunting season and now I seldom see one," observed my driver Jack Stewart. By now we were following a truck carrying culverts and, approaching a sign: "You are now entering Alcan Project 160, gate ahead 500 feet. Everyone stop." There, Ross Starkey, company policeman, asked me what my business was. After explanations, I added: "I expected to be 'frisked for liquor.' That ban was lifted some days ago." I was told, "But are you carrying firearms?" I was asked, after he told us it was sixteen miles to Nechako, still.

A fleet of private cars was parked on the left as we descended into the village dominated by the water tower on which was written: "Nechako, safety first."

A party of forty-seven H.S. students was departing after a visit as we arrived. Ellen Carter, secretary to J. R. Bremner, project manager, was selected to show me around during my stay. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here" did not seem at all an appropriate motto, for the girls' dormitory, when I had looked around at the bright living quarters, where each girl has a room, and there are washbasins, showers, laundry facilities and a precious person called "Mike," who mothers them all, makes their beds and does their rooms. As breakfast is at seven o'clock, and is a "must," the morning is long, starting at 7:30 and ending at mid-day—but it is necessary to synchronize office hours with working hours, and shift work. There is an hour and a half for lunch, and then work goes on until dinner at five, the second sitting at 6:30.

FINE MEALS

I had been given a complimentary weekly meal ticket, which was punched after eating, with a different punch each time. Everyone sat where they wished, and each table had permanent fittings, so to speak, catering for the tastes of every nationality. There were five kinds of cereals, innumerable sauces and condiments, tins of vegetable and fruit juices, a large assortment of preserves and jams, coffee, tea, or milk to drink, meat, fish, combination salad including olives, vegetables, dessert, fresh fruit and cookies. There is no limit in quantity, and as to quality, it is not found there if it is not the best.

The men are heavy eaters, especially of meat. It costs \$13,000 a week to feed the employees, \$5.50 a day to feed a man. He is charged \$2.50. The single girls are not charged. This policy pays, as there have been very few complaints about food. A constant turnover of staff is a costly business in transport alone, costing anything from \$200 to \$500 each to bring men in.

The office staff can be divided into three groups, the employees of Alcan, Mannix Ltd., sub-contractors of Morrison-Knudsen, and B.C. International Engineering.

M. A. Daly, office manager, gave me some particulars concerning the women's staffing, in which I was particularly interested. It is not easy to get girls

and among the guests were Max Warr, "Oly" Olson, Everett Christman and J. C. O'Connor. There are fifteen such houses and another five are going up.

Next morning "Stu" Bromley, camp manager, who looks after the sleeping, feeding and entertainment of the residents of Nechako, collected me and we first visited the hospital, where there are three beds, with J. C. O'Connor in charge.

Norma Kenney, who is a Department of Public Health nurse, looks after the women and children of the community.

"The best way to go into the kitchen is the back way," pronounced "Stu" as he shepherded me in and handed me over to Bill Cannon, chef. Here, as we were conducted through all the departments of this efficiently run establishment, I learned that from 100 to 120 gallons of milk, 125 to 150 dozen eggs, 125 pounds of bacon, 75 to 100 pounds of butter, 400 to 500 pounds of fresh fruit, and 1000 to 1500 pounds of meat a day is used. In the meat locker a germicide lamp cuts down bacteria. The oil ranges are cleaned after every meal, and garbage removed twice a day. We saw some of the two and a half tons of potatoes which are consumed weekly being hand peeled. A mixing machine takes care of sixty quarts at a time, and a toaster deals with 750 slices an hour.

MEETING THE GIRLS

I had the opportunity of meeting the girls socially as they went about the tasks preparatory to bed-time. Dorothy McNicol, up here from Vancouver for a few weeks, is operating a book-keeping machine for Mannix. Marion Hsiop is clerk and receptionist for Mannix Ltd., and Penny Cail, newly arrived, is a receptionist in the time office. Polly Rawlak and Evelyn Massey are comptometer operators for Mannix. Doris Hammond and Marion Smith are stenographers for Mannix. Janet Webb is secretary to the auditor for Alcan, Ellen Cater secretary to Mr. Bremner, project manager; Doris Cunningham, secretary to Mr. M. A. Daly, office manager; Mary Landry secretary to Harry Jominy, resident engineer; and Betty Dunlop works in the commissary as a sales clerk.

Entertaining in one of the pre-riab houses, provided fully equipped, with fuel, oil, light and water included in the rent, but without furniture were Mr. and Mrs. Black. Mr. Black is the safety director and Mrs. Black is in charge of the post office. There a party was in progress



NECHAKO ENTERTAINMENT—This amateur band, which helps to provide entertainment, for the big Alcan damsite crew. The instruments are home-made.

ment and recreational facilities around camp and pay the staff salaries. The present commissary will be moved over when the building is completed. Profits from the sale of goods here also go into the recreation fund. The guest house, Harmony House, at the end of Harmony Lake, where the quarters for married employees of Alcan and Mannix are situated, houses six guests. The skating rink will shortly be flooded. A unique orchestra, the Nechako Sympathetiques, provides appreciated music.

THE DAMSITE

Harry Jominy, resident engineer for Alcan, took me on a tour of the actual damsite itself, which is so vast that machinery which seems to be as large as prehistoric monsters when close to it on the east side, appears on the west side to be crawling round like little moles in their earthworks. We watched for a while, the pumps at work in the de-watering of the canyon where the cofferdam has been put in. Then we went past huge piles of rocks in three sizes and the screening plant, and quartz porphyry quarry, and out to where, before the road across was completed, one hundred tons of machinery had to cross by ferry. Then out to the airstrip, which we measured by the speedometer of the car to

be half a mile. A hangar is in the course of construction, and close by is to be the ski-hill, on which enthusiasts are working at week-ends.

Across, on the west side, we went up to 320 feet which is the height the dam will be above the river. Sixteen hundred feet long, and 1600 feet wide approximately at the bottom, and 30 feet wide at the top, it will be the biggest

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Rural Gossips Hurt Teacher

CASTOR, Alta. (C)—"Wagging tongues" in country districts are a factor in the shortage of rural teachers, says G. K. Haverstock, superintendent of the Castor school district in central Alberta.

He told a ratepayers' meeting here: "Most young women entering the teaching profession come from good homes. But we have nothing to offer them but one-room shacks where they must live under primitive conditions."

"If these young teachers want to take part in community life, as most normal young women do, and a young man takes them home from a social function, it is not long before vicious tongues

start wagging and stories of misbehaviour spread through the district."

The result was that many teachers either sought posts in the cities or went into business life, creating the teacher shortage most country points are experiencing.

The solution, Mr. Haverstock suggested, lay in the provision of three- or four-room teacherages where a married teacher could bring up his family under normal conditions.

MORE READERS
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