

Martin Victor Writes Again, This Time from Fairbanks, In Alaska

Here is another letter from Martin Victor, written from Fairbanks, Alaska, April 23, and addressed to Mr. Paul Udell, Highland Park Press, Highland Park, Illinois:

Dear Mr. Udell: After returning from Poor Man to Ruby I stayed there a few days to treat my eyes as they were quite sore from the glare of sun on the snow. The rest did the dogs good and they made good time all along the trail.

I passed the mail team one day, which he only had an extremely light load of 100 pounds and used 17 dogs. He could not keep up with my six dogs and 225 pounds of furs. About 50 miles east of Ruby a glacier had broken and the water poured over the river, there was no escape from it and had to go through, although it was only 18 inches deep. It is no fun going through the water when it is around 40 below as the dogs freeze their feet so easily and are useless for a few days. There were natives about 30 to 40 miles apart, all of them had their fish-wheel, by

which their livelihood is made in summer. The wheel turns automatically with the current and the salmon is caught at the rate of a few per minute, the fish averaging 25 pounds. They cut the fish lengthwise, then cut the meat cross wise, being careful not to cut the skin. The fish is hung in the sun to dry, then placed in the smoke-house and smoked.

The Yukon Indians are as artistic in their beadwork, and fur-sewing as the Lower Kushkokwim natives. I have procured quite a lot of beadwork on moccasins from both districts and will show you upon return home.

I left Collards on the Yukon to reach a roadhouse called Fish Lake, at 56 miles away, about seven in the morning. It was a snappy and windy day, but the dogs were feeling fine, the trail good and hard, traveling on the river most of the time. As usual I would sit on the handlebars when such good trail is found, I would look way up and see the mountains above me. In front of me, then slowly creeping up on them, see them from the side, then behind. Occasionally a fox or wolf track was seen, crossing the trail. Everything was enjoyable, although the temperature

was 47 below. I'd sit there and whistle all the tunes I knew, then I'd sing to the top of my voice as I knew there could not be anyone around for miles to hear it and try to tell me the needle is worn out. After there was nothing else to sing about, the throat a bit hoarse I'd smoke for a while, then jump on top of the sled and ride along as a passenger. This was kept up alternating from one past time to the other until 34 miles were covered, reaching Tanana, a little busy village, and abandoned army post, called Ft. Gibbon. At this place the Tanana river empties into the Yukon. I stopped there two hours for lunch and rest the dogs. It took a while to get all my business done as there are three traders there and quite a few trappers. I started down the trail and had traveled about six miles through the timber, as the rest of the way from Ft. Gibbon would be across country to Nenana. At this point the trail forked and I was at a loss to decide which was the right trail. I examined it carefully and took the one to the right as it was used the most. It took me onto the Tanana river, after going about three hours on the ice I began to believe that I was on the wrong trail, but

perhaps it would be a short-cut and later meet the other at a bend in the river. I kept on traveling, the dogs were making fine speed and I was in a very optimistic mood. Timing the speed of the dogs, I calculated that I should have been there about 1½ hours ago, but nothing could be done about it except turning back or keep on traveling until I reach a cabin or until the dogs give out and in that case build a fire on the shore for the night. It was 7 o'clock when I reached a native cabin. Driving right up to the door, I met an old squaw, her face full of wrinkles, her chin tattooed. She scared me for a minute, I thought they were pointed up for war or something. I asked her the direction several times to Fish Lake, but she threw up her hands in the air waiving them, and talking Indian, turning her back and walked into the cabin. I followed her in and found a younger squaw, about 16 who could barely make herself understood. I asked her the same question, she told me the direction and I was off. I had an idea, but felt a lot better. I was 22 miles off the course, but had a chance of cutting across country and thereby meeting the trail again. I followed several small creeks and then into the timber and later to willow country.

The trail was new, in fact signs of only being used once, and only driven around trees, over willows, etc. It was not a blazed trail, just a short-cut. After traveling several hours the dogs were quite tired and I was just looking around for a good place to camp for the night when the dogs sighted a team ahead, coming towards us. They picked up speed and put all their energy into it. Evidently the other team experienced the same thing as we were upon each other almost immediately. It turned out to be two teams. A native with his wife. He had about 14 dogs and she drove nine. They tried to pass me, but a white man's team never agrees with a team belonging to a native. They started into a fight and it sure was one big moving mass of fur, the growling, yelling, some dogs crying with pain, some being choked in their harness, all of us shouting at the dogs, jumping into them with a chain in each hand. They soon stopped and it took quite a while to release the tangled teams. I spoke to the native of my plight and he said the trail ends another mile or so from that spot as he has been moving camp. I told him that I better stay with him, that night and get a fresh start in the morning. So we all went back to the cabin at which I stopped to get the information. I tied my dogs to trees nearby and fed them, it felt good to have a roof to sleep under, the dogs seemed to have had done enough work for the day and they had made 68 miles.

In the cabin a hot stove was roaring away and I sat down on the spruce bower-covered floor, removed my Parka and Mukloks. The room was about 8 feet by 10. The native, his squaw, two small children, the young squaw and the elder one as described formerly. We were quite a few, but we all found room to sleep on the floor. I for my part only used a single blanket, using my Parka for a pillow. The native sat down on

In a few years, electric refrigerators will probably be as common as automobiles — Why do you wait?

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