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Barge Notes: The Journal of a Yukon River Deckhand

Don Bell

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Barge Notes is the journal of a tugboat deckhand's experiences during one navigation season over thirty years ago on the Yukon River. Alaska, known for its pristine but wild landscape and severe climate conditions, presented challenges to the hardy individuals willing to work on these barges. These jobs offered adventure with a considerable element of danger at times but also much responsibility to those willing to make these trips providing building materials, construction equipment, fuel, household appliances and other necessities to the Alaskans living on the river. This book is taken from the author's journal and describes daily activities as they happened. The author, Don Bell, wrote down what happened every day on whatever was available at the time – pieces of paper or cardboard found on deck, and sometimes brief reminders to himself on the palm of his hand when paper was not available. He wrote in a notebook when off duty in his bunk, saving all his notes and notebooks in a large duffle bag. All these entries were then transferred during the winter to several permanent notebooks. The daily writings describe the adventure and hazards of that time on a wild river system which introduced new risks and surprises every day. The author describes his life as a deckhand in these experiences, the funny and sometimes not-so-funny perils of everyday life. Underlying these activities is his satisfaction of delivering cargo to the native people he learned to appreciate and his portrayal of the beauty of the wilderness in Alaska which became his home.

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