

20 Year Old Discovery of Canadian Tar Sands May Be Solution For Clay Roads

FIVE hundred miles north of Edmonton, capital city of the Canadian province of Alberta, away north of the great Athabasca river, a mile wide, flows into the Athabasca lake, 5,000 square miles in area.

At McMurray, just before the river joins the lake, it widens into sand flats, heavily impregnated with tar, or bitumen. It was these sands which 20 years ago, attracted the imagination of "Bitumen Bill," sending him 2,000 miles west to Ottawa, capital city of Canada, with the news of a wonderful road-making discovery, which nobody believed, and asking for him the support which has stayed with him through all the years.

At Edmonton today, at the new modern university, scientific experts are taking "Bitumen Bill's" crazy ideas seriously. They have discovered means of extracting the bitumen from the sands of the Athabasca river, and they are experimenting on road surfaces with the extracted bitumen, and also with the bitumen sands.

The province of Alberta has hundreds of thousands of miles of roads. Most of them are only clay roads, which are quite all right when dry, but which rapidly reach a stage of utter impassability following rain or after the spring thaw. The scientists blame a mineral in the clay, which they call bentonite. When dry, it packs into a hard, chalky substance, but has the unpleasant property of taking up twice times its own weight of water when wet. Hence the bad state of the roads following rain or thaw.

Bentonite Refuses Water

The scientists have found that clay-bentonite road, when impregnated with bitumen or bitumen sand, cannot take up water, and remains practically unaltered under varying road conditions, except that the joints become soft and melt under intense heat. Today, it is said to be just a matter of laboratory experiment, until the proper application of the bitumen or bitumen sand to the clay-bentonite roads will solve the traffic problem not only of Alberta, but of all the prairie provinces in addition.

But if it is of "Bitumen Bill" himself, rather than of his discovery, that this article treats, for he has been one of those adventurous pioneer lives that trade like fiction rather than cold fact. The Klondike gold rush was at its height when Bill, reading in a New York paper that one could journey from Edmonton to the Klondike by the aerial route for about \$200, promptly set out for the land of fortune. Some 400 miles north of Edmonton, after crossing the Athabasca river, Bill decided that the New York paper was not telling the truth. With a wardrobe consisting of one worn blanket, one pair of moccasins, one shirt, and two moosehides without any feet to speak of, the wanderer returned to Athabasca landing, a boat landing on the river.

He sold his tattered blanket for a tumble-down cabin, ten pounds of flour and a frying pan minus a handle, stuck up a sign, "Klondike Hotel," and sold flapjacks to passing prospectors. Then the Klondike rush ended and the restaurant business failed. Bill promptly sold it to a half breed for a pony and \$5 in cash. The pony ran away two days afterward and the \$5 is yet to be collected, but Bill was a person of resources. A homesteader, using his

luck and had judgment in having settled down on land in such a God-sent place, and Bill and Bill bought the farm. This was not a cash transaction—he traded an old watch for the farm, covering by dirt of arctic shavings behind his back to keep the old "fucker" running until the new owner disappeared down the trail. Probably both felt equally satisfied with the deal.

More Barter

Here Bill commenced vegetable growing, packing his "spuds" on foot to Athabasca landing, where he got a fair price for them. A passing freighter offered the renowned Bill two heads of cabbage for \$2, the restaurant business was again opened, cabbage soup figuring daily on the menu. The again was not a cash deal, the cabbage being exchanged for one worn suit of underwear. Two days later Bill sold the farm and the building restaurant business for two rows and entered the ranching business on a large scale.

The cows were a failure, however, so Bill traded them for a pair of furs and set out on the big trail to Edmonton, where he hoped to realize heavily on his deal. While he was on the way down the river war com-menced, the price of furs went down with a loud bang, and Bill threw his pair of furs into the Saskatchewan river as he entered the city—brink, but still successful.

The Canadian Pacific Railway company at this time wished some information of the mineral resources of the Athabasca country, and this gave Bill his opportunity. When he returned, he carried with him, in addition to his other reports, the news of the immense tar sand beds at McMurray. The company cared little for the news, but Bill thought it was the most important find of the trip. The tar sands has been known as far back as 1703, when Sir Alexander Mackenzie made his famous voyage of exploration through the country, and the old Hudson's Bay traders knew of their existence, too, but thought very little of them as a commercial possibility.

Knowing nothing of tar sands, but sensing the immense value of the bitumen, and the wider possibilities of oil, Bill at once set out for Minnesota, where he joined an oil well-drilling gang, and worked from blacksmith through many stages as tool dresser, helper, assistant driller, and finally driller, finishing up with a course in oil at the University of Minnesota.

Lucky in Oil

Lucky speculation in oil lands netted Bill his first real fortune, and with some \$15,000 in cash, he returned to western Canada and fitted out a drilling crew to go to McMurray. His crew reached the Athabasca in 1904, and in 1906 had made good progress, but a heavy vein of salt closed down their efforts, and for the next four years Bill drilled and drilled in vain, finally deciding that luck was against him for oil finding, and that his first love, the bitumen sands, should be his last.

Then for 15 years Bill bombarded the government at Ottawa with stories of the vast possibilities of the McMurray tar sands. Nobody would listen to him, and he earned the title by which he is known today, when he pressed his claim for tar sand deposits that outvalued the famous bitumen deposits at Trinidad in value.

AMERICANS TO PAY BILLION THIS YEAR TO SODA FOUNTAINS

Prohibition Leaves No Rival for Rapidly Growing Institution.

The American soda fountain has become a national institution, and will exceed a billion this year of about \$1,000,000,000. The money spent for most luxuries in comparison with this figure seems trifling. The soda habit has been growing for years, and prohibition has served to leave it practically without a rival.

There are more than 100,000 soda fountains in operation throughout the United States. The number and variety of drinks and foods served across counters have rapidly increased in the last few months, and during the coming season will be still further expanded. The taste of the American public in soft drinks and lighter foods is being studied the country over.

The appeal of the soda fountain is attributed by some to the fact that the public, deprived of alcohol, naturally craves sugar in some form. A great variety of sweet drinks and dishes, which appeal to both the palate and the eye, has been contrived to sweeten this demand. Even in hot weather the thirst-quenching drinks such as old-fashioned lemonade, are not over-ly popular. It was predicted before prohibition that a variety of drinks would be devised for men to take the place of alcohol, but these have not endured.

Ice Cream Important Item

To the surprise of the soda water purveyors the greatest demand has been for ice cream, or drinks and dishes in which it is an ingredient. New Yorkers probably are the greatest consumers of ice cream in the nation in the world, for the annual supply is about 300 million gallons.

The American public is fond of a complicated drink, which will appeal to the eye, and is willing to pay for it. The drink with fruits, nuts, and other decorations at fancy prices is becoming ever more popular. A surprising variety of novelties in drinks and sweets is constantly served at fountains. The profit for the inventor of any novelty which strikes the public fancy is likely to be fabulous. The greatest success ever scored by one of these novelties has been that of the small brick of ice cream, tested

Slippery Roads Solved: Add Bitumen to Bentonite

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Wed, Apr 14, 2021