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Anaktuvuk Pass recording with Pete Sovalik

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

A man's voice [Pete Sovalik] talks about his father who died when he was 80-something years old. Nobody knows his age because there were no calendars when he was born. He had a good memory and lots of information about people's lives in the early days. He was an inland man.

In summer time people drove caribou. They would make scarecrows by sticking niggerheads [grass tussocks] up on big rocks at so it looked like it would have been a person standing. They were made not very far apart, over on the big hills. They put the inuksuk on both side of a big hill that has a lake at the end. They saw caribou long ways away and went behind them to scare them. They were driven to inuksuks on either side. The people were standing by the inuksuks and they started to help with driving the caribou towards the lake that had people hiding with kayaks. The caribou went into the water and started swimming and the kayakers could kill them with spears.

At 3:21 the interviewer asks if Pete ever saw one of those caribou drives himself but he says he didn't. They had rifles when he was a kid so nobody was hunting by the lake anymore. The inland people killed lots of caribou at the big lakes.

They needed right fur for clothes and they used the skin for clothes. [Unclear talking.]

The interviewer asks how rifle hunting happened and if they hunted in groups. Pete says 1-3 men hunted, only a small bunch [of hunters] at the Arctic Slope in winter. Then they went to Brook's Range to hunt but didn't get enough to live on during the whole year. They got few caribou, maybe 20.

5:08 1919 was the last time Captain Petersen killed a whale up in Canada. He brought it back to Young's Island [sp?] near the mouth of Colville River. He kept the Eskimos working for him at Bank's Island. He took 2 families from Point Hope and took them to Canada where they stayed for two years while working for Captain Petersen. They were taken back from Bank's Island to Point Hope and on the way they killed a whale from the ship. They cut the whale up and loaded it into the ship. They stopped at the Jung's Island where one family stayed while the other family continued on [?]. They unloaded the whale and Pete was there at Jung's Island at that time, in 1919. They had a lot of muktuk for the whole year since there were just a few families.

7:52 the interviewer asks if there were many caribou in the Arctic Slope in 1919. Pete says there weren't many. In wintertime most of the caribou went to Brook's Range and they [the village?] had to wait until spring [to get caribou?]

The interviewer asks if Pete noticed a decrease in caribou but he says he didn't. There was caribou near the coast in summertime. When the mosquitoes came, the caribou went close to the coast [trying to avoid mosquitoes, the caribou migrate to windy places]. There weren't too many though. They got caribou meat for the whaling ship. [Unclear.] Tobacco, flour, sugar.

9:13 The interviewer says that Pete was born at the Colville River and asks when he moved from the Brooks Range –area to the coast. Pete says it was in 1913, after his mother had died. The interviewer asks if they moved to coast because it was easier hunting there. Pete says they did it for “jobbing.” His uncle's family and his father, sister and Pete stayed on the coast only for a year and went back to Colville. That was in 1912. In 1913, they went back to the coast and stayed in a house Pete's father had built out of drift wood. They left everything in Colville and in summertime they traveled to the coast with canoes and stayed there again.

In 1913 Pete's father got only 1 caribou in the fall. That was after he had built the driftwood house. Their father and uncle fished a lot and jobbed all winter [to make up for the shortage]. They went to Barrow to get some food and it took them 5 days to travel there.

11:44 The interviewer asks if many people moved from the Brooks Range down to the coast to trap foxes. Pete tells that many stayed and that many people lived by Kigalik River, Colville, Umiat, Ninoolik [sp?] River, Anaktuvuk River [the participants are perhaps looking at a map.] [Unclear] Mouth and where Helmrick was fishing, lower people stayed down there. Nobody stayed on the coast when Pete was a

kid but traveled there some times for seal hunting. That's all there is to the story as far as Pete can tell. [Break in the recording?]

13:01 Pete continues by listing places: Point Hope, Kobuk, Kivalina, Point Lay, Point Barrow, [Unclear] Island, [unclear]. There are lots of caribou in Barrow and Wainwright, Point Lay and all over. Long ago not many people got caribou in winter and very few even in summer. Even in Inuvik and Aklavik in Canada and way up Copper Mine they report lots of caribou. There are migrating caribou scattered all over, a big bunch. [Unclear sentence.]

In Pete's memory, he was into reindeer herding in 1925 when he was a young boy of 4 years. James Tukpuk [sp?] took the reindeer herd from Point Barrow and drove it east of Colville [River] to Cape Barrow, Savelik and all around. They had about 600 reindeer in one herd and in only 4 years they got more than 1,000. One female gave birth to 5 calves [?] who got ear marks so they would know who the reindeer belongs to. There were female calves that were grown up in one year and on second year they had their calves. Every year they had calves. Male calves were kept for breeders and some they were castrated or eaten. Some were shipped to other villages.

18:55 They tried to keep the males for their herd. They also castrated some males for killing them after they'd get fat. They left enough breeders to breed all the females in September and in April-May they got calves. The calves needed to learn to move around quick or they would freeze to death at night.

Pete thinks that reindeer herding is hard work. In summertime it's hard since the reindeer will move all over looking for fresh, green food.

The interviewer asks someone if he was a reindeer herder and if he saw reindeer in the old days. [Unclear talking.] Two years ago Pete [?] got one bull and put a mark on it [unclear]. The interviewer wonders how they can distinguish reindeer from a caribou. Pete tells the caribou are smaller. [Break in the recording.]

21:23 The interviewer asks about the caribou drive that came from Kotzebue. [Break in the recording.] Pete tells there was a drive from Nome in 1872. The government bought reindeer from Siberia. Bear Cutter [U.S. Revenue Cutter, Bear, a ship] was the first to come to Alaska. It came to Alaska from Siberia to help Alaskan people with the reindeer. The ship loaded the reindeer from Siberia and went to Nome and unloaded there, going back and forth bringing more caribou. That's how the reindeer came to Alaska. Then they started reindeer herding in Nome and nobody knew about

herding in Alaska. Three men from Siberia, Laplanders, started teaching Alaskans how to reindeer herd. He doesn't know how many years it lasted.

24:28 Some of the Nome reindeer were taken to Barrow. Pete's wife's father Philip Panianuk [sp?], Ujalo [sp?] and Poliuna [sp?] went to Nome to get the reindeer and drove them to Barrow. They got only 100 reindeer but they bred more and more every year until they had a big herd. From that herd they drove some reindeer to Wainwright. Wainwright people got about 100 reindeer too. From there they went onto Point Hope and when they had enough reindeer in several years they took reindeer to Kivalina. That's how there are herds all over. From Barrow they drove reindeer to James Tuhkpuk's [sp?] herd. Billy drove reindeer to Colville.

James Ita [sp?] took another herd from Barrow and [unclear]. James Ita is a chief herder and James Tuhkpuk is a chief herder of another herd. Billy [unclear] is a chief herder of yet another herd. Tom Brower took the reindeer from the Barrow herd to start a herd and he's a chief herder too. That's how the reindeer spread from Barrow.

At 27:38 the interviewer asks Pete to tell about the Wainwright herd and how large it got. Pete tells that after he got to Wainwright, they had a herd but nobody herded it during summer. In early fall they started again and got the reindeer together with dog sleds and they drove to Wainwright Village. The last time, in 1937, they had 16000 reindeer at the time but wolves came from Canada and scattered the reindeer all over since there were no reindeer herders in summer.

Lots of wolves started scaring reindeer all over. Reindeer also mixed with the caribou and people couldn't get them back. Caribou were migrating all over Alaska and the reindeer were all gone. "The wolf and the caribou take them away."

29:57 The interviewer asks if there are reindeer left in Alaska or rather in the Arctic Slope. Pete says there aren't in the north anymore but there are in Kotzebue and near Nome. He only knows two herders there and the only other herd he knows is in Nunivak Island.

The interviewer tells he has heard Pete talking with other men that they kill a reindeer every so often. He asks how they know it's a reindeer when they kill it. Pete tells it's easy to tell. He's been reindeer herding for 10 years, driving them up to Wainwright for counting in the fall. The reindeer is a different color from caribou. The hair is dark color and the belly is almost always dark and not like caribou that have white bellies. Fur inside is lighter and the bodies are longer [talking about caribou]. They also have longer legs and the hind legs that are differently shaped.

Sometimes a bull caribou comes into their herd and they can spot it right away. They kill them quick. It's easy to spot a caribou from 1,000 reindeer because they look different. They have different footprints too. One is shorter. Reindeer are smaller and with shorter legs.

At 33:36 a woman's voice asks about antlers right when Pete is saying that the horns are shaped differently. Reindeer antlers are bigger than caribou's. They have short antlers, even the bulls, but they are much wider.

[End of the recording.]