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Chester Seveck, retired reindeer herder ; Two reports from Canada

Jeff Kennedy, interviewer

Series: Potlatch series

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Song by Buffy Sainte Marie

Jeff Kennedy said Chester Seveck was a reindeer herder for 46 years and talks about how he got started in reindeer herding.

Chester Seveck said the government brought 208 reindeer from Nome in 1908. He was hired to herd the reindeer. Another herder Yort Omalik. Two Laplanders taught him how to herd reindeer. Jeff Kennedy asked what kinds of things you have to know in order to raise reindeer. Seveck said he had to know how to protect them from storms. They had to have reindeer moss in the winter. In the summer they would eat grass, leaves, and new leaves. They had to protect them from the wolves. They had to watch night and day especially during fawning season. Kennedy asked him how many reindeer he had. Seveck said they started with 200 reindeer and ended up with up to a thousand. He had to hire three herders, sometimes four. Each person would herd the reindeer for twelve hours. Reindeer provided food and clothing. Kennedy asked what Eskimo used reindeer for. Seveck said they use the reindeer for clothing, food and they would use the horn to make handles. His mother would cook up the bones. Kennedy asked how many reindeer it would take to feed a family. Seveck said a family would use two reindeer each month. He said in the summer they would dry some of the meat. They would dig in the ground and store some of the meat. In the winter they would freeze the meat. They would use the skin of the reindeer. They used it for clothing, sleeping bags, mittens, socks and parkas. Kennedy asked if reindeer herding would provide employment in the future. Seveck said before they started herding everyone was anxious to herd reindeer. He said some people didn't take care of the reindeer much. People wanted a job with salaries. He said he herded for 46 years. He said he is the only left that was a herder.

Kennedy said the reindeer would follow the caribou herd. Seveck said they followed the caribou away. He said he tried to protect the reindeer, but they couldn't. There were a lot of caribou coming in. Sometimes there were 10,000 caribou coming in and mixed with the reindeer. They saved a part of the herd, but most of the reindeer moved away with the caribou. He and his brother Lowell took care of the reindeer. He said there were a lot of wolves at that time, too. Kennedy asked how large the herd was now. Seveck said there are 22,000 reindeer now from Nome, Kotzebue, and Deering. Pt. Hope, Pt. Barrow, Wainwright and Kivalina no longer have caribou. The reindeer followed the caribou. Kotzebue and Buckland now have reindeer. The caribou are found more inland. Kennedy asked if he sold the reindeer and who he sold the reindeer to. Seveck said there was a good market for reindeer. He said before the caribou came there were very few wolves. Kennedy asked if the wolves should be shot. Seveck said it is hard

to do. The wolves are smart.

Kennedy said Seveck is not completely retired. Seveck said he goes to Kotzebue in the summer and is a tourist guide. He said he retired in 1954 from reindeer herding. He said a week after that Wien offered him a job. He said he could take care of tourists just like he took care of reindeer. He said he would like to retire this year. He has always been told one more year.

Song by the Yukon Starts.

Kennedy introduced a report about non-Native values affecting Native cultures in Canada by Tom Pascall. Tom Pascall said progress is often like candy - it is tantalizing and gives a rush, but in the long run it is not that good for you. He said an in depth study of an Inuit community on Baffin Island demonstrates this. They live a subsistence life including their main source of food, the common ringed seal. This area is rich in food with no reports of starvation. Progress arrived in the form of rifles, motor boats and snowmobiles. These innovations drastically changed the way of life in southern Baffin Island. The rifle allowed the Inuit to kill their game from a long distance away and allowed them to kill more game. Motorized transportation changed their nomadic way of life to a stationary one. Lake Harbor became a permanent settlement and not just a seasonal camp. The effect of changing a nomadic lifestyle into a stationary one are largely a psychological one and difficult to evaluate. The impact of the rifle is clearer. Seal live in water. These fatty animals usually float in the dense salt water. In the spring they begin to lose their fat. The salty water is also diluted from melting snow. This was not a problem when seal were hunted with harpoons held by ropes. Now when the seals are shot with rifles they often sink to the bottom during the peak hunting season June to July. Almost two out of three seals are lost this way. The long term effect of this waste will accumulate until seal hunting becomes more and more difficult. Seals no longer approach people closely and are afraid of noises made by motor boats and rifles. It is too late to return to the old days and their ecological stability and no one really wants to. The present is not stable either. Hunting problems will be overcome with technological imports and the traditional life will become more closely wed to progress.

Hunting for musk ox song by the Inuit from Chesterfield Inlet in Canada

Cathy Van Bibber, CBC Yukon Territory, said the Council for Yukon Indians wants to resume land claim negotiations with the federal government. The CYI is the umbrella organization of Native people in the Yukon formed in 1973 to negotiate land claims for all people of Native ancestry in the Territory. The question of guaranteeing Indians a place in government was a topic of considerable discussion throughout the assembly. The first recommendation was that only people who have lived in the Yukon for at least ten years would be eligible to vote or stand for elected office. This recommendation is designed to protect Indian people from being overwhelmed by an influx of transients who come North with major development projects and then leave. The second recommendation was to protect fish, game and wildlife from transient hunters and would make anyone who had not lived in the Yukon for at least ten years ineligible for hunting or fishing licenses. The assembly agreed to support these recommendations to the Berger inquiry. Indians Affairs administrator Warren Alman indicated to the counsel that the question of provincial status for Yukon could not be considered until the rights of the 6000

people of Indian ancestry in the Yukon were guaranteed.