

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-04
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:38
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	December 2024
Narrator:	Clyde 'Slim' Williams
Interviewer:	It would appear that Richard 'Dick' Morenus gave Slim Williams the Dictabelt recorder and Slim is just telling stories into the machine by himself. Dick is not on the recording at all.
Others Present:	N/A
Recording Location:	Chicago, Illinois
Transcriber:	Leslie McCartney
Transcription Date:	December 12, 2024
Access:	The dictabelts were donated to us by the great-nephew of Dick Morenus who inherited them from his mother (Dick's niece). Slim and his wife never had children so there is no next of kin. We have a signed Letter of Transmittal on file from Dick's great-nephew. For public/electronic use.
Where to Find this in Text:	These recordings were made by Clyde 'Slim' Williams so that Richard 'Dick' Morenus could write Slim's story in book form. It was published as <i>Alaska Sourdough, the Story of Slim Williams</i> by Richard Morenus (1956). New York: Rand McNally & Company. The book is available on Internet Archive https://archive.org/details/alaskasourdoughs0000rich/mode/2up or in the Elmer E. Ramuson Library, F909.M75 Alaska Collection. Where possible, the pages of where some of the transcribed stories appear in the book are noted.
Extra Notes:	Much clearer audio, he's closer to the machine.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: [dead air for first 6 seconds] Well later on that winter we was set our trap line and we had to runnin' over a ridge for about ten miles and hit the river, then we went downriver to a cabin.

Well there was a man that was trappin' about twenty miles beyond this, he wasn't much of a woodsman, he was a man of 40, 45 but he just didn't belong in the woods that's all there was to it. And one day he come into our cabin and he was goin' out, he's goin' to [inaudible] he hadn't caught anything, he just decided to got out. Well there was nothing to follow on that trail over the ridge it was just simple as can be, the wind had blowed on the river and covered up our tracks after we got off of the mountain but we never thought anything of that and so he a little pack on his back and started over the trail. Well the next time we went over the trail, just two, three days after that, why he had hit the river and he'd didn't know which way to go. Now it's a funny thing about a man gettin' lost, he get excited and he wants to run, well that man's tracks just showed where he'd run one way awhile, and he'd run the other way awhile and he'd fall in the snow. And, he would just excited and he got himself all warmed up and froze to death right there. You don't see those things there, you just can't get away. [dead air from 00:29 until 00:01:49]

00:01:49

Yeah, some odd things happened in that cabin. You know we was just building it in the fall and we went up on the lake for something and it was a kinda a pass through there that occasionally somebody come through. Well, this we found two horse tracks where somebody come through on horses. Course we didn't know who they was, we didn't know a thing about 'em, they didn't know we was there, they come down to camp and anyhow, we went back to camp, thought nothing of it and oh, several days afterwards, my partner said to me, he said, Slim there's smoke up there towards that mountain. We watched a while, sure enough we could see smoke. Well I said I'll go up and see what about it. He was gettin' some, baking bread and some cake and he was really doin' a job of cookin', he like to them, pretty good cook too. Well anyhow, I slung my rifle over my shoulder and went up and I got pretty close to the fire and I could see a man sittin' there all humped over, got up a little closer and he was long legged dude, he must have been 6'2" or 3" and quite skinny and man of 50, 55, yet his hands were over his knee around his knees and he's knees drawed up under his chin, kinda leanin' on his hands. Small fire, it wasn't cold. I walked up right opposite him out the fire, wasn't over 6 feet from him and by that time he looked up seen me. Well he let the awfulest yell out 'im, he said, hey mister. I'd like to speak to ya. Well I said, you could hear 'im for two miles, why I said, I'm right here, just go ahead and talk and well he lowered his voice down to almost a whisper, he said you got any grub on ya? Well I said no I haven't but I got some right down the camp here. Well he said, you know I haven't seen any of that enemy for about three days and he said I'm just getting kinda hungry. Well I said, come on down to camp. So he had double bitted axe and he was just crazy as a loon you know, he just talk all screwy. He seen this man way below on the river that come through with the horses and from the best I could make out he was up on the glacier and got lost and got back off again, it had been seven, eight days since he had something to eat. But he had this big double bitted axe and so I took the axe, I just didn't want anything like fallin' with a that double bitted axe, I'm tellin' ya. So I took his axe, I says let me take the axe, I'm better able to carry it than you are. Well he stumbled along and you could see that was all wore out. I got him down camp kinda [inaudible] partner about eight days that he had somethin' to eat be careful. And didn't want to feed him too much, make 'im sick, so I cooked him a little oatmeal and he had a little milk put on it, a couple of teaspoons full, gave him that and told him we'd feed him again pretty soon but he had to be careful, of yes, he was a perfect gentleman. Had it alright, knew he had to be taken of, but yet he was as loony as a march hare. My partner stepped out for something, I don't know what now, but we was cookin' some dried apples. We had a box about five pounds there that we'd been takin' 'em out of. He was sittin' on the bunk and I stepped out for something, I don't know what it was, now [inaudible], when I come back in that fella had both hands full of them dried apples and he was just stuffin' 'em in his face as hard as he could.

00:05:19

Well, it scared me, I knew he couldn't eat a lot of them dried apples, I couldn't eat many but I grabbed 'im and shook 'im and finally shook 'im loose from the dried apples and he apologized, well that was alright but he just couldn't hardly help it and so we fed him about every hour until long bed time and figured that better sleep awhile and get the man some rest so I took 'im to bed with me. And I tied his wrist to mine. Well he'd wake up in the night and he'd let some of the most unearthly yells out of him you ever heard. Boy, he would just ring the woods with them yells you know. And I'd jerk him and get 'im to himself and boy, he's sorry and he'd lay down again, got up several times during the night and feed him. After two or three days why his mind kinda cleared up and he got to be pretty good. After about a week why he was just in fit condition so we took him about six miles, we turned 'im out onto a trail and he got out alright. He left us a note at the Post Office [inaudible]. [dead air for a few seconds]

00:06:39

Later on that winter I got the tooth ache and boy did I have a tooth ache. Well I had some pliers and stuck 'em in the stove and I'd get 'em hot and I'd pound them and get them hot some more and pound them some more, file them and finally I got what I thought was a pair of [inaudible] to pull that out tooth. And I give 'em to my partner and I said now pull 'er out. Oh no, nothing doing, I'd get blood poison, might break a jaw, he'd heard of such thing, no he wasn't gonna pull it. Well, I couldn't talk 'em into it and I just well let 'im alone so I put on my snowshoes and I head off down country and about fifty miles I run into a couple of trappers. Well, I give 'em my pliers, want this tooth out. Ah no, nothin' doin' couldn't see it that way. No tellin' what would happen. No, they couldn't pull the tooth. Well, nothin' for me to do but to go on about another sixty miles to a roadhouse. Four or five fellas there. And they had a pair of [inaudible], I don't know how, old rusty things I don't know how they could have 'em there but they did and I tried to get them to pull the tooth. Nothin' doin' they wouldn't pull that tooth. No. Well it is still 150 miles to where I can get it pulled and I didn't wanna go on that far. Finally, a great big strappin' young kid come in, he'd weighted 250 pounds I believe, he was a moose of a kid. And, wasn't too smart anyhow and I said here kid pull this tooth. Alright he'd pull it. So he got a hold of that tooth with them [inaudible]. Well boy he just drugged [dragged] me all over that house and twisted and pulled and yanked and no tooth come out. Finally let go and he said I can't do it. So I said oh boy, this was just runnin' me nuts. I drug up the [inaudible] again and I said try it again kid. And he did. He grabbed a hold of it again and he squeezed and he jerked and finally he cut if off, or it broke off right at the gum, just smooth. Well that pulled the nerve out and it quit achin'. Boy, it felt better.

00:08:45 (this next story appears on page 102-103 of the book)

Well I started back home and got up to this cabin and the thermometer was down 65, 67, 68, 70, 71 and I said ah, I wanna get back to my trappin', ah, that's wrong. Can't be. I'm going on. Well I started. Well I hadn't got very far and I knew I was wrong. Because she was cold. I pulled my parkee over my face the best I could but that didn't help much and there was a cabin about 12 miles up north, it wasn't a cabin, it was built up of logs about 3 feet and then there was a tent on top of that was about 3 feet walls. Well they was a good stove in there and there was a rack above the stove that somebody had built to dry their socks and footwear on. And about the time I got there a breeze started blowin', not a hard wind but just a breeze and boy it whistled through them logs and just froze my legs. I'd build that fire up just hot as I could then I get up on that sock rack and get above the logs and into the canvas where ... and then I was up above where the heat was and I get along. I'd get down a little bit and fill up the stove and then crawl back up on the rack again. And that's what's the matter with my voice now. I frosted my lungs.

00:10:17 (this next story appears on page 103 of the book)

And ah, but the next spring I went out to a doctor. Just like I'd had a bad cold all the time. And I went out to a doctor, gruff sorta fella I'd know very well and he examined me and he jerked me around for about two days and he said well Slim, he said, I don't know. He says you know when a dog freezes his lungs he dies right now. He says when a horse freezes his lungs he dies the next spring. He says I don't get when you're gonna die but he said I've heard you talk about some sisters you had out in Californy, said if I were you I'd just go and see 'em. Well that wasn't very much consolation but there's just so much country that I wanted to see that I just went on seein' 'er out I'll tell ya that. Got alright I guess, voice don't sound so good but then otherwise I think I'm healthy. [dead air to ...]

00:11:14

The next spring it found us, you know when you have a lotta different partners in the north country especially when you stay there as long as I have. You have one partner will take a notion to do something else and I played a lone hand an awful lot. But when I found a fella that was a good partner well I preferred to him. Well this year I found a partner, just a dandy. We had to tow up the Copper River for about twenty miles, well you do that you hook your dogs on a tow line about 100 feet long. What I like to do that with is a piece of walrus hide. You know, walrus hide is the strongest hide there is. You can take a piece of that as big as a number 9 wire and it's pretty near as strong. Well this piece I had was about twice that size and plenty strong so I'd hook my dogs on in front of it on this long lashing then you would tie a long pole to the nose of your boat and the dogs would pull whether you would hold the boat out away from the shore, not too much, you had your pole tied so in case your boat started to slip away and go out into the river, while you could pull it back because your dogs just couldn't. You would just pull your dogs right into the river if it ever started to turn around. So you had to be pretty cautious about what you done, but I had dogs that understood their business and we'd go up the river [inaudible] and we'd come to a bank and then we would load dogs, everything into the sled and cross the river and go up the other side. Get along fine, do about twenty miles a day that way. Well we come to the Sanford River. Well now the Sanford is a wild cat in the summertime, it's strictly a glacier stream and in summertime on a hot day when there's enough water comes out of like a steamboat of it a stream, strong enough but when fall comes, it gets down to a very quiet little stream. Well down close to the Copper it just didn't get split up and we couldn't take our boat. So, we packed our stuff up about five miles and towed the boat up empty. Well we made a camp and we was a wonderin' [end of recording].