

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-09
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:52
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 15, 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:	Again, Slim starts off rather far away from the microphone and is at times difficult to hear but he then starts to speak in to the microphone and the rest of the recording is fairly clear.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: This cockeyed friend of mine he was a lumberjack and a river rat and always talkin' about corkin' up, and how good it'd be on the snow of course we know it don't work but well, of course it's the worse thing you can have on the snow but I got to callin' him Corks. Well, he had an idea, the Wood River, we'd just go over them little Wood River [dead air from 00:00:30 to 00:00:45]

00:00:45

And half the money that'd he'd won anyhow was mine because he just wouldn't of had it if it hadn't a been for me and we finally decided to go to the Wood River. Well, in all my life I've never seen a man on a snowshoes like that guy was. He's the first man ever I seen could turn around in his tracks. What I mean he'd take his right foot up the heel of a shoe would move out in front of 'em and then he'd turn his foot right quick and light the shoe right beside of the other but it'd be pointed in the opposite direction. And then he'd lift his, raise his left foot, give it a little jerk, strike the side of his snowshoe on the calf of his leg, that snowshoe would spin and he'd set 'em down right beside of the other one and he'd be facin' the other way just one track all. I got so I could do it pretty good meself but it took me quite a while, pretty clever stunt but anyhow he would just bound along on those snowshoes all day wear me and the dogs both out, of course we had a load, but we was tryin' to make it over one trip and we did. But he'd snowshoe out ahead just them legs a goin' like piston rods, get ahead of me, and turn around and come back to give the dogs a better trail. Boy he like those dogs. And, but finally we got to the Wood River. I think we was about two hundred, two hundred and fifty miles from Fairbanks and made a good camp. Here's where we were goin' make a big stake and one morning he was standin' around and had some glasses. And up on the mountians spied a sheep and we must go up and get a sheep. Well, I'd ever eat sheep, I'd seen 'em in the Rockies but I'd never eat one.

00:02:35

And these were [inaudible] these were the dogs. So we snowshoed as far as [inaudible] look up to the mountain about three or four miles above camp and then we took straight up the mountain and left our snowshoes. Well, that game had never been shot at of course, probably never seen a man, wasn't afraid. So we had no trouble of getting' some nice little ram and leggin' him back down the mountain. We got to our snowshoes and he was draggin' the sheep. And, he drag it up onto his snowshoe and one of it's horns caught in his snowshoe and throwed 'em and he lit with is legged crossed to rock and broke it. Boy, that was somethin'. Well, I got 'em to a tree, probably 50-60 yards, I cut the limbs off so he'd have nice dry place and built 'em a fire and then we went to work of bandagin' up that leg. Well you could feel a ridge where the bone was broke and he insisted that I push that back. Well, Lord, that hurt me worse than him I believe 'cuz he just didn't seem to mind it at all, but I gripped that thing and shoved it back until it felt smooth. Then we must put splints on. Well he'd seen that done, he knew a little about it and I knew a lot less of course but I had seen and so we went to work. We tore a parkee tail off clear to our waist and strips about three inches wide, got 'em fixed up nice to start the work, we cut the willows, or I would, and split 'em and then he'd stuck there on the whittle on them splints. He'd whittle them down 'til about a quarter of an inch thick. And, we gotta plenty of 'em. I started to wrap 'em. Well that was the time we left his sock and his underwear on but we cut his pants leg and rolled it way up and had the splints to his hip so he couldn't move the leg at all from his hip down. And we wrapped and wrapped and rewrapped and finally got the darn things, we just decided that he was alright and it was of course afterwards.

00:04:50

But had begin to get dark, and I figured I'd go to camp and get the sled, three or four miles, and so I built 'em up a good fire, with big logs and left 'em with is leg braced up on the showshoe and he didn't

complain at all, no, no, don't hurt, he laying [inaudible] alright. I started to camp. Well I never thought of my gun for start. Know how in the north it can get dark like that and my shadow, it looks awfully dark. The mountains away looks clear but close to ya it's kinda like you had a veil on or somthin'. You just can't explain it but that's the way it was that evening and when I got into camp, Mister there was the worst mess I ever got into in my life. Wolves had come down and killed every dog I had. They had just wrecked the tent in their fight. They'd even pulled a dog right out of their collar. Well, of course I'd noticed them wolf tracks and they was about three times as big as my dog tracks and my dogs weighed about 90 pound average. I had a big team but I knew them wolves must be terrific. But, of course, I found out later they weight as much as 200 pound. But I knew they were big and I'd been readin' these stories about wolves like they used to write so much about wolf kills somebody every day and I didn't know anything about wolves so boy when I run into that, it just scared me stiff.

00:06:32

I got hold of my ax and backed up against a tree and I just decided I sell that life of mine for all it's worth, as many of those wolves as I could before they got me I didn't know, had no idea. Were my picture was a hundred, what's what I tell in my stories, I imagine there was probably six or seven. But anyhow I stood at bay there for a while, lookin' my situation over and I thought of my partner. There he was up there and the gun was with the sheep and the sheep was, oh, fifty, sixty yards from him and his leg broke, he couldn't get down, the sheep's blood would attract the wolves and they'd follow that scent down off the mountain and they'd surely eat 'em up before I got back. Well, I got busy and I unhooked the ties from the sled and I put myself on a neck rope and I started back. I sure didn't loose not time I just plowed snow. Well when I come up to him he looked up and said, what's the matter he says. You look like you'd seen a ghost. Well by gee I felt like I'd seen a ghost too. But I told 'em all about it and he didn't say much about it at the time but I finally wiggled and got 'em on the sled and drug him back to camp. Well then he got into camp, he just about went into hysterics. He did love those dogs and they loved him. They'd learned just to think an awful of [inaudible], more than he did a me I believe. But he would just play with them dogs and, you should do of course with dogs, but we was green, and at night, when we was on the trail, why he would make 'em all a nice spruce bough bed. Well of course they'd rather eat snow than drink water but Corks didn't know that so he would get 'em some water, and it take each one of 'em around and drink, take it around each dog and some would lap a little and some wouldn't pay no attention to him. But boy, he loved those dogs and the way he went into the air, and of course we had both the rifles and both of 'em ready for that time and so he sat and watched me. He wanted to help me.

00:08:46

There the camp was a mess and I had to get somethin' done so we started to build a cache. Well I climbed a tree about 10 feet and cut the top off so I wouldn't sway. There was two smaller trees beside that so we build a frame around that and lashed our poles to the trees and then laid smaller ones across. But as I climbed the tree I left limbs so I could climb, it would be like a ladder, and we had to cut another tree down close to it so the squirrel or what have you wouldn't jump into our cache and we had it all built up in good shape and then I started to climb in that tree with a load on my back, getting' our stuff up. I'd tie a rope to a sack of flour or whatever it was and I'd take somethin' else on my back and climb onto that cache and then I'd pull up the ropes so I'd make two trips with one. He wanted me to bring all the stuff over and drag him over so he could tie it on. But I didn't want him to do any monkeyin' around on that leg so I just left 'im where he was. Well anyhow, the last thing we put on was our dog harness. Boy, I hated that. That just, pile them dog harness up there on top of that, it kinda made me feel sick, and him too as far as that's concerned. Well anyhow, it was good daylight when I got that thing done and I was just so tired, been up on the mountain and all that work, I was just wore completely out, that's

all there was too it. And he suggest that I better take a sleep, that he swore he'd slept some that night but I know he lied to me because he sat there with that rifle all night and he suggested that I'd better take a sleep. We wanted to get out of there and wanted to hook on to 'em an drag him out right now. No, he said, you'd better sleep. So I slept about four hours I imagine. Must have about noon. We got up and got ourselves somethin' to eat. Now I musta had about 250 pound on that sled, maybe more. I had laid a canvas down and put his wolf skin robe on top of the canvas and my rabbit skin robe. So I had 'im wrapped up so it'd keep him nice and warm.

00:11:04

I wasn't worryin' about him at all. I was sleepin' and he was asleep beside the fire of course [inaudible] with a little canvas. Well anyhow, about noon we pulled out and boy that's where my neckin' in Valdez come in handy because that is a load, a 12 foot sled with 12'6" deep, he had a fairly good trail goin' back because the wind hadn't blowed, very little in a few place, and it hadn't snowed any so we had most of places, a fairly good trail. But I'm tellin' you, for the next 15 days I was just like [inaudible]. Well we got 'em in, got 'em to his cabin and I went uptown with him for a Doctor. I found one. No, he wasn't a doctor, he was a, had been an intern so I understood and he got that far and stampede come on and he just forgot the doctoring and went north after the million. Well, he looked the leg over and then bound some of it and he examined it and he decided he couldn't do anything better, we'd done a good job and let it go at that. Well by this time, Corks had got so he could get up on his crutches, fixed 'im some crutches, get around a little bit, so I left him then and went on after Will, no Silent Smith, or Windy Smith to [dead air until from 00:12:30 until 00:12:33]

00:12:33

No Dick, I'm gettin' these stories sometimes four, five years separated. But I believe we can get that straightened out when we get together. But I told ya the story about being out killin' moose and freezin' to death but I don't think I ever finished that. Now the fellas that was out with me had got a couple of moose and of course I hadn't got any. But that's what we was after was moose. Well, comin' in he had break about twenty-five miles of trail, I believe I told ya that, but we left a man in a cabin. We stopped when we come out and he insisted on us stoppin' when we was comin' back. He was a great big brute of a man but an awful nice fella, he was just a dandy. Pretty well-educated man, a Norwegian I think but he could hardly tell it, talked a little bit broken but these was a fresh water stream, one of 'em that don't thaw, right out in front of his cabin. And he was nicely fixed up and just insisted on us stoppin', everybody get a little lonesome, well the next two or three days I loaded on about a thousand pounds of moose, more than I should a of course with that [end of recording].