

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-28
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:46
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:	February 8, 2025
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.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: But I could buy just cheap as he could and I'd sell them just as quick as they did him so I bought a little outfit of my own, set up a tent and went to neckin' at the foot of the glacier. Well what I wanted to get was that gold on the other side of the glacier. Now, I better describe Valdez. When I got up in the morning, and looked out, it just looked like I was in a big pot, ah, you've seen these big pots

they put on the fire, big iron skillet. Well the mountain, you couldn't see where we come in or where we was goin' out. The mountain it is almost a circle. The bay was about five miles wide ... long ... and I'd say about three miles wide. They was probably at that land there too that was flat. But it just looked like a big pot and from the water the mountains just run almost straight up to I dunno how high but away above timber.

00:01:03

And that morning, it was cloudy, high, you couldn't see the top of the mountains so it looked like you was in a big pot and just couldn't see no top that was all there was to it. Well, when the clouds cleared off, why I could see the glacier and I could see the timber ashore but there it was about half lake and half land and just in a big pots all circled in. Now of course we'd through what they called The Narrows down at the glacier and it was just real narrow there and then we turned and when you got in, you couldn't see out so it just looked like you was in a big kettle. Well anyhow, after I got to neckin' to the glacier of course I'd bought stuff as I could and worked all I could and all the hours I could, and we'd getting' a dollar an hour, and so finally I bought me more outfit and more outfit and a tent and I was fixed up pretty good. And it must have been around a month that I had outfitted enough that I figured I could go over the glacier.

00:02:13

Well there all kinds of fellas goin', all kinds of fella comin'. The one goin' out was just discouraged to death, some of 'em even cryin'. You found men along the trail just actually cryin' because they'd give up. I mean we had all kinds of rigs. One man had three goats a drivin' em. One had a little Shetland Pony and they had dogs. They just had everything ... but most of 'em pullin' by the neck and lots of 'em quarrelin', splitin' their outfits, it was a mess, no foolin'. But I started up the glacier and all you could pull there was about 150 to 200 pound and I don't think I had over a about 500 altogether. Well, first day on the glacier I was ... see a little ... lot a men to one side, they was every place. But this is special knot, kinda interested me, there seemed to be somethin' wrong and when I got pretty close somebody said he comes Slim, he can go down. Well, I ... there I got my name again. I'd been called Slim every since I can remember and they kinda forgot it up there but there it hooked onto me. And it stayed on me from then on. I was about 6'3", weighed about 160 pound. But there was a bunch of five boys and one of 'em had fell in the glacier.

00:03:43

They'd stopped to eat a lunch and one of 'em had backed into a crevasse and the ice ... snow give away, he pretty near fell in the crevasse. He was down there and he was talkin' and ... was hurt of course, he said he was hurt, he said he couldn't get up and they'd tried to let a man down, he couldn't so they let me down, about twenty feet. Well, I had a lantern and I let that down as far as I could but I couldn't see him. He said he could see the lantern. And, we worked there tryin' to get that fella out, there wasn't a chance because he'd wedged ... he said he couldn't tie himself to a rope that he would ... couldn't use his hands and so he musta been pretty badly bruised up. But as far down as they let me, it wasn't over a foot wide I don't believe. Then it looked like it widened out below it, it was about three foot wide at the top but ... we finally give up one at a time and I went on, come back that night and there was a fella still ... one of the boys still waitin' there and he had quit, the fella down in the crevasse, he had told 'em that he wanted to go to sleep, that he was tired and wanted to go to sleep and he was sleepy. Well of course when you go to sleep in a case like that you just freeze to death.

00:05:00

And of course, that's what he done. Well they was a lot of noise along the glacier. Not long before that, they had been five boys, I think they was from Montana, and they'd got to quarallin' and the way I had it figured out, well, a lot of 'em had it figured out, this one fella had took his share of the outfit and moved it away and there was just young fellas but there was tough, and this fella wouldn't let the others fellas come to where he was. He had his share of the grub it seemed and that was all there was to it. Well, these fellas got to hollerin', the other four and said this fella stole from 'em. Well stolen ... stealin' was a hangin' offence there then and they got a miners meeting together and I think the majority of people figured this ... he had kid that had the grub got the dirty deal. But nevertheless, they passed sentence on this fella and took 'em down the glacier and hang 'em. I seen the tree lots of times that they hung him on.

00:06:10

Well there was a lot of rumpus, along fellas grumblin' and ... some of these fellas wasn't like very well and it was quite a noise about hangin' this fella. Well anyhow, I went on about my business and about six or eight miles up the glacier I camped on my side and now there was just hundreds of fellas there. And there was another little tent just above me and he had the tent ... there was three dogs tied right around the tent and the dogs seemed awful friendly and I made my camp and next morning I got up and there was still no fire in the tent and the dogs was still friendly and I kinda wondered, I thought there must be somethin' wrong so I just decided I'd go over and see what was the matter. So, I went over and hollered hello and a little squeaky voice come from the in the inside he says come on in. Well, I opened the flap of the door and looked in and there was a little fella in ... under a bear skin robe all wrapped up. He had a moustache and little goatee, just as white as chalk, and he had big smile on his face and he says come on in, he said I'm sick and he said I'm just not been able to get up for a couple of days.

00:07:38

And so I went in and started him a fire, and fixed him up something to eat, and cooked up some food and feed his dogs and got myself too late to goin' down and get another load and ... but he was ... he finally got out of bed when I got him somethin' to eat and I'll swear his legs wasn't bigger than my arms, a little bitty old guy that fella and he was from Boston and he'd got sick .. he ... and he told me his whole story. He had done pretty well in life and just decided he wanted adventure and that's what he'd done. And he'd got those three dogs to pull his load but he just decided that it was young man's country and not his. He'd had enough of adventure and he wanted to go back out. And, but if I would take him back down the glacier and get him on a boat, why, all he wanted was just to ... his clothes he wore in and so he could get on the boat and go out. Well, I couldn't do much of anything else and there was three little dogs. Boy I liked them, quite and outfit, it was really twice the outfit that I had.

00:08:59

Well he said I've just got no use for that. I told him I just didn't have money enough to pay for it. Well, he said, that's all right he said you can just have it for takin' me down. Well sir he had handlebars on his sled. Mine was just flat, most of 'em was, but had rigged up handlebars on his. So, I got 'em in his ... sled and his rabbit skin robe and I hooked them little dogs up. They was single file, Brownie, Fat and ... oh gee, I forgot the other one. Well anyhow, I think that two that was in the lead was collie, they was part collie anyhow and I always thought they was brothers but Fat looked more like a bulldog and he had a short tail and boy he could wiggle that little short tail though. Best natured little dog you ever seen, Brownie. Well anyhow, I'll think of the name and get 'em to you but, I got those three dogs hooked up and they started pikin' off down the trail, pretty good clip ... seven, eight miles an hour. He had a brake on his sled and those handlebars, gee I was just doin' fine.

00:10:09

I had 'em propped up so he seemed to be enjoyin' himself and well I got inside of the bay and sure enough, they was a boat in sight. Well, I'd got pretty well acquainted with the fella that run this barge and, so when I got down there I told 'em my story and well he said I'll see when I go out what I can do and so he come back and he told he said I can get 'em on this boat so we got him right on that boat and I stayed there that night in my old camp and then I started back with my three dogs. Well, all we had to burn on the glacier was alder, green alders, some dry but it just about as bad as green because it was wet and the glacier was about a mile wide and about thirty miles up to the top of it and it was mountains run up from just almost straight up on both sides from that mile.

00:11:12

Well, we had to cut that alder and burn it in your little Yukon stoves but it was awful hard to get started so I gotta bright idea. And I cut six sticks of dry cottonwood, you know how that stuff burns, and they was about six inches through and about seven feet long and I stacked 'em up on the little sled that you know [inaudible] don't know anything and I went dangling off up that glacier with my little dogs. And, course there was fellas wanted wood, well they give me five dollars a stick for that wood and when I got to camp, why I'd sold five sticks and had one left myself and I'd made twenty-five dollars, not bad. Well, then I went to freighin' with my little dogs and boy they was three little honeys and I had two sleds and two tents.

00:12:06

And enough outfit I had figured to last me close to a year and boy I was just makin' good time up that glacier. Well, about half way up, I figures about twelve, fifteen miles up, the glacier run way to the left side and then turned and come back. Well it is real steep and not over a hundred yards, when it turned across the glacier to where it come back, you must made that trip over there about a mile and about a mile back. Well, I'd made that trip the day before and ... both ways and, next day as I was makin' it why I sized that place up, now I said why the devil can't I just go right straight down it, it's steep to pull up but you could go down it. And I thought now I'll just do that and so I cached my load and started back and when I come to that little place I hollered haul to my leader and he started down. Well I got along fine until I got about, oh, not over thirty feet from the trail. I could see the other fellas down there, they's along every place, and something happened.

00:13:22

The ice give away right from under me and I went down right between my runners and the G pole caught on the other side and my runners ... handlebars ... runners when through but my handlebars caught on the ... uh, the other side of the crevasse and I went through. Well, I hit on the other side of the glacier and knocked all the [end of recording].