

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-31
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:12
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 3, 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 [starts at 00:00:05] Well I looked around for several days after that givin' up my dogs and the ice had just about all gone out of the lake, lots of room around by now. I just decided I'd go around the lake in my boat, the thing I shoulda done in the first place. If I'd a built a boat and got that stuff down and been alright but I was too smart for that. But anyhow I just decided I'd pull around the lake. That gold you know, just over that glacier, after you got over the glacier you could pick up gold nuggets

as big as your fist all you wanted of 'em, gunny sacks full of 'em. But I got ta thinkin' about that and now by gee, maybe I could just go around that lake and I dunno why I went around the lake, I went in the other way but right up against the Alaska Range and boy they was a pretty range too. Just as far as you could see both ways was high snow peaks that was all. Beautiful peaks. No place they have mountains and beautiful scenery like they do there, it just doesn't grow that's all.

00:01:07

Well anyhow I took ... of course I took my rifle. I thought well I'll just take my rifle along, I'd ... maybe I'd get me a rabbit or something and I had a gold pan and shovel so I took my shovel and my gold pan and my rifle and started around that lake. Well a canvas boat is a dandy [inaudible] it just floats like nothin' you know. So that ... around that lake I image was 20 miles to where I went. And decided this was the place so I got out and pulled my boat up and took my rifle and started up a stream towards the mountains. I got, oh, maybe a half a mile from my boat and walkin' up a stream lookin' down see if I couldn't pick up some gold someplace and I heard a little rattle in the one side and looked over and there was three goats. Well just for a minute I thought about goats on the trail. Lord, his goats got away or somethin'. But of course I was wrong and realized it after about a second and a half and there was three goats climin' that mountain. It was steep too out of the ravine and I put it right close to 'em I wasn't over 75 yards and thinks I gee, this is somethin' so I just got the three of 'em right now you know and they rolled back down the hill and I gutted 'em, made a sling of 'em of packed 'em back to my boat and took 'em over to camp, I cut the heads off.

00:02:38

Well when I got over to camp with them the next day, I stayed there all night, because it was too late to go back, yet we had lots of daylight but I had good long row, I got back next day and boy, them fellas as just nuts for fresh meat. I was too as far as that's concerned but I've ... when I first got over why I just hung them things up and went to skinnin' 'em you know. And boy they come from all directions they wanted to buy meat, they wanted to trade for meat, they just wanted to do anything for meat. Well, I traded the meat for 50 cents a pound or pound for pound for grub. And I got a lotta grub, I must have had oh, 125-30 pound of meat. So, I was ... I thought well gee, this is just a good scheme so I tried it all over again. I went over again in 2 or 3 days and run into a moose. A small moose. I don't think it would weight over oh, 4-500 pound and I downed that and cut it up and brought it back. Well boy, I just went to town on that and I was Daniel Boone from the word go. And, gettin' a good outfit thinks I now this is somethin' and so I went back after more meat the next few days and got me two more sheep. Well, by this time ... grub had begin to grow and it was gettin' to look like I really had an outfit. But I figured I just better go get another goat or two and so I made another trip and got two more goats. Traded them off. And of course meantime I was fillin' myself up on meat I'll tell ya that. Well I had that canvas boat and about 400-500 pound of grub, a good stake, I figured it'd last me 6 or 8 months, and by gettin' plenty of meat and there was a fella there rip sawin' lumber and makin' boats to go down the river. And he sold 'em for a 100 dollars.

00:04:37

Well I looked at that old canvas boat and I looked at his boats and I just figured out that my outfit and my boat wouldn't weight anymore than his boat. And, goin' along down that river they told me it was an awful fast river, of course I didn't know, I didn't care much. But, I wasn't thinkin' about that at all, I wanted to get over to them beautiful mountains I'd seen. I wanted to get into that country that I wanted for mine, there was just ... I just didn't wanna leave and of course when I lost my outfit I was goin' have to and I was awful sick. But now I had my outfit again and boy I was rearin' to go. And, so I decided I'd go down the river in my canvas boat and I figured I get by that easier than anything else. So, I loaded up

and I started. Well I'll tell ya now that river was a fast one. It was ... I was about 45 miles I figured or 50, maybe 50 from Valdez, well it was supposed to be 90 miles to Copper Center. So, I only had 35 or 40 miles but down that river I'll tell you I dodged rocks, I come within inches a hundred times I think, that was just about a wilder river you ever want to boat with outfit I'll tell ya that. But, I was so excitin' I decided to missin' rocks and really enjoyin' the trip. And, in an exciting way and finally the river commenced to smooth out a little bit and I decided that I just tired enough and pulled ashore, no snow, it had just come ... snow was all gone by that time it was around early in May. Here I'd left 20 feet of snow on the Valdez side and here it was all bare. Well I pulled my boat up and started to make camp and here was robin's a chirpin', and crocus, gee, they have more pretty crocus there. They are, oh, 2 inches across and there would be 20 sometimes in one bunch. They are beautiful things. And that spruce trees, I've never seen anything like it, tall, white things, gee its beautiful timber.

00:06:52

Well I went just in the seventh heaven that's all there was to it, I was just ... I made camp and I stayed all night and I said well this is really just something and I figured I had about 10 or 12 miles yet to go. So next morning I got up and leisurely loaded my boat and got my outfit in it and pulled out from the bank. The river was quite fast but not rapids at all like it had been comin' over. And I hadn't gone a quarter of a mile, fairly close to the bank, of course we learn better them things after a while we learn to get in the middle of the river, but here was a sweeper, one of them long spruce had washed out at the roots and layin' right across the river, pretty near half way. Well I just didn't have a chance on earth. I just bound to hit it and I knew I was gunna hit, I couldn't do nothin' about it, likely pull my head off trying to stop the boat but I couldn't. Well, I hit the sweeper, upside down and me in the water. Well, I hung on to the sweeper and waded ashore, wasn't deep, I was pretty close to the bank and didn't hit me more than my waist. I waded ashore and looked at that old boat goin' upside down, down the river. Well here I was absolutely without a thing on earth but my two big fists. Well the country ... I'd got outta the mountains and the country was ... seemed to be quite flat below but it was high clay banks, clay banks probably 100 feet on either side, ravines of course comin' into it and I sit there and mourned my loss for a while and I said well, guess this won't work and ... but I did decided to climb up that bank and take a look to see ... just another look at the country before I went back. And I got up on top of the bank and across the river and below me about 2 miles, I could see Copper Center. There was a cabin there, there's quite a bit of activity and boy here I was within 2 miles of Copper Center. Well, I just decided I'd go down so I did. I was on the wrong side of the river of course. I go down there and a fella come over and got me in his boat and everyone was accomodatin' in those days. Everybody ready to do somethin' about ya. I told this fella my troubles and well he said hundreds of 'em have done that, he said there's been an awful lot outfit wrecked in that river. Said you ain't the only one. Well there I was just in my two big firsts, no bed, nothin'. And this ... nights just a little chilly. And I run into an Indian and he had a rabbit skin robe. Now they made a rabbit skin robe there, they didn't tan their hides, only very little. I think they washed 'em was just about all done in soap or somethin'.

00:09:44

I dunno how they tan them but they was clean. Then they'd string 'em on a thong and then they would just weave them and boy they made a honey of a bed and you could take one corner of it and stretch it ... you had it about 7 feet long and about 8 feet wide. And he offered me that for five dollars and boy I took it I'll tell ya that, 'cuz it just looked awful good to me and didn't weight over about 3 or 4 pound. Just what a I needed. Well, anyhow, I loafed around there for all that day and a fella lend me a fish hook and I went out on the river and caught me all the fish I wanted grayling was runnin' lots of 'em. I caught all the grayling I wanted, feed on grayling that night. Next morning a fella invited me to breakfast and I had some hot cakes and decided I just have to go back to Valdez, this was the end of it. Nobody seemed

to have any work to do or anything, it was just, well all the snow was gone and everything was kinda stalled, some of 'em pullin' up the river, the Copper with boats but nothing for me to do. So, I figure the only thing I could do was go back to Valdez. So, this fella give me the fish hook and some salt and I started back afoot up that river. Well, I'd catch me a bunch of fish and cook 'em and eat 'em and I hit the river in one place and I found a sack of beans. They was swelled up as big as three beans, somebody had wrecked and this was a little sack of beans. I think there was oh, maybe 3 or 4 pound in 'em, swellin' and all and the way they had soaked.

00:11:19

And I was gettin' a little bit tired of fish so I had a can with me and I boiled some of that ... them beans and they was pretty darn good. Well I hit the can with the head of the river and nothin' to do there and I figured I'd just have to go on. So, I went back up to the foot of the glacier one evenin', had a little bit of my beans and had some fish along with me and curled up in my rabbit robe and went to sleep. Next mornin' I woke up comfortable all night, next mornin' I woke up and I had just a good handful of beans left and they was about half cooked and so I eat them, get the little rabbit robe on my back and I started over the glacier, I was pretty near to the top, far as I could get and still be in any kinda bush at all where I can make a comfortable fire. And I started over the glacier, well I got over and down on the other side a couple of miles and I see a string of men ahead of me, oh, they musta been 20 and they was goin' awfully slow and I couldn't quite image, of course they was men goin' and comin' all the time and ... but I caught up with them in a little while and started to pass them, one, two, three at a time you know and I ... oh, pretty slow and I was travellin' at a pretty good clip, I figured I knew the glacier and I didn't need to worry about anything so pretty soon I got to the head of the bunch and here was my whiskered friend that had pulled me outta the glacier and give me that cussin' course he knew who he was I said hello he said, how are ya and whata doing back and wanted to know all about it. Well I told him my troubles and he said, well he said, why don't you come on [end of recording].