

The Knowledge of Native Elders
Edward and Margaret Penetac
ANS 401
October 6, 1988
L. Brosseau

"EVERYTHING WAS HARD FOR US AND GOOD FUN"

Seal Hunting

The seals show up in the last part of November, before the winter ice comes in. Before he made his own skin boat, Edward would go out in a kayak. Ugruk didn't show up much in the winter. The hunters would use the hook of the harpoon to poke into the ice and keep the kayak steady to hunt for the seal.

After the seal is gotten, they would take it back to the village to skin (in the fall) or use dogs (or themselves) to drag it back over the ice. Sometimes the seal was skinned on the ice during the winter and the meat put in the sealskin and dragged back to the village. The women skinned the seals in the village; the guts were thrown away.

Ugruk is easier to skin than seal. On the seal, it is the hardest part to skin at the top from the eye and nose and go down, but with an ugruk, once you have passed the head the skin stretches and it is easier.

When hunting, the men would take what they needed in a leak-proof container. It would be Eskimo food, and not alot of it, as in the winter they would only hunt during daylight hours. They would also take coffee, snowshoes and line for hunting.

A seal poke was the seal skin that was used to store food in. To make one, the seal would be cut from the head with the smallest ulu to the mouth and down, trying not to cut a hole in the skin. Then the meat was cut out and the skin was turned inside out so the blubber could be cut out with an ulu. When the skin is dry, it would be blown up (the flippers would be kept on) and dried for eight days. It is made like a balloon to keep it from sinking through the ice. Seal poke was made out of harbor seal, as ugruk didn't show up much in the winter.

When meat is stored in the seal poke, seal oil was added. Seal poke was used for hunting trips and their trips to Nome in the summer. They would just put in what they needed.

One thing that was stored in the seal poke was a mixture of walrus blubber, dried young walrus meat with walrus flippers and seal oil and water. All this was boiled in a wash-tub outside with a flame underneath. After it was cooked, it was put into a seal poke with seal oil.

pg. 2 (cont'd)

Greens weren't stored in the seal poke, they were stored in wooden barrels. They were kept in water during the warm months and during the winter they were kept with seal oil in the barrels. The frozen greens were broken with a walrus tusk. It tasted good and sour when frozen and they were eaten mixed with polar bear oil and reindeer.

Walrus would start to be hunted about mid-May. They don't hunt in the winter, only in the fall. The village would take in about 150 walrus/year. At one time, the ivory was their only source of income.

A walrus skin is too thick and must be split in half. To do this it is put in the snow and torn apart from the top to the bottom. (At this point Edward drew a diagram). The inside skin would be facing up. It was the women that did the skin-splitting.

Long ago, the inside skin covered the outside of the houses for insulation from the wind, and the outside skins were used for boats. It is easier to split walrus skin on the snow.

Both Edward and Margaret's moms were good skinners. When they were children, they would go with their moms to skin and they had to bring their food and some hot tea because it took all day to skin and they couldn't leave until it was all done.

The walrus need to be skinned before it is dried. Then, it is put in the warm club house so the hairs will come off. They are then dried on the stretcher for 2 days.

On St. Lawrence Island they skin walrus differently. (again, he drew a diagram). They put the skin on the dry rocks, not on the snow and they used the inside walrus skin for the bow of their boats. Margaret told of a time when they lived in Nome and the people in St. Lawrence needed a woman to help with the walrus skinning. She said she didn't want to go because it was done so differently.

Mukluks were made by the women from the seal and ugurk hide. The women would crimp the soles with their teeth. When Margaret lost her teeth she began to use a pliers.

Sinew was used from reindeer, beluga and walrus. The belugas came by the island only once in a while, when they were going north and there was too much ice and not enough open water. The sinew came from along the back of the beluga and walrus. The chunk of meat with the sinew was cut out and cleaned with a dull blade to get the sinew off. Now, sinew is hard to get.

King Islanders ate flippers. They would let the seal and ugruk flippers sour in a warm place so the skin would come off. "They're

good before they get too strong," said Margaret. The walrus flippers were boiled in seal oil. Oil is the blubber that is between the skin and the meat of the animal. It is the insulation that keeps it warm. Walrus blubber is the thickest, then ugruk and then seal.

To make seal oil, the blubber is cut and put into a container that is not too warm. (this is in the fall). Then, it turns into oil. In the winter, the blubber is frozen and a walrus jaw is used to smash pieces off to be cooked.

Snowshoes were made from reindeer gotten in Nome, but mostly from ugruk~~ah~~ hide made from their neck-skin. They made their own snowshoes and used it on thick and thin ice, as the snow never got too thick because of the wind. The snowshoes were carried on their backs during hunting.

When kayaks were used, it was very important to know how to use them. In the old days, all the men were taught how to flip over a kayak. When doing this, they wore a waterproof parka. This was taught during hunting and at special times.

Edward tried to roll 2 times, both unsuccessfully. He said he would roll over and couldn't figure out which way to paddle. It was very confusing, so he had to slide down and out. "They tried to teach me, but I couldn't learn," he laughed.

The last one to successfully master this skill was Margaret's father. He used to do it in Nome, during July 4th when the Eskimo games were going on. Many tourists would line the seawall to watch this event. (Tourists and many locals, too). Margaret couldn't watch her father do this as she would always get scared.

One or two years before the school house was built on King Island, Margaret's father had built a house on the future spot of the school. It was the house she was born in. The B.I.A. let her father tear it down to make room for the school.

During the class, Edward and Margaret showed pictures of the village, historical houses and the house Edward was born in.