

ANS 401 Knowledge of Native Elders  
Tuesday, October 11, 1988  
Edward and Margaret Penatac  
by Nicholas J. Masters

Edward began the class by answering a question of one of the students. He discussed the spring hunting of walrus on King Island.

Hunting began with the opening up of the ice in spring. When a walrus was caught the people would cut up and clean it on the ice. First removing the head from the body, then the hide. Followed by the cutting of the meat, which will be stored in the cave for winter use. The hides of a female walrus are preferred for making of skin boats and clothing. The hides of the bulls are lumpy and calloused, especially at the shoulders. The flippers of male walrus were used when making "flippers".

Hunting out on the rough waters is a dangerous activity and accidents occurred occasionally. Edward briefly mentioned that when he was younger his step father was involved in an accident that sent him to the hospital in Nome.

Everyone at King Island would go to Nome in the summer for around three months. At this time they would trade and gather supplies for winter. Returning to the island at the end of September or early October.

Margaret remembers these times. While in Nome she used to order clothes for the kids and some material for cloth parkas from Sears. It was much cheaper to order things than to buy them in Nome. The shoes, they would get one size larger so the kids can grow into them. They would come in before they went back to King Island.

She recalled when she was a child, when everyone used to wear mukluks. But when they went to Nome they started to get tennis shoes. This would make the kids feel rich.

The women of King Island made hunting parkas for the men. They were made out of white canvas, which served as a camouflage suit on the ice. The ruffs were usually made out of wolverine. Traditionally the lining of these parkas were hides of young reindeer that they got from the herders in the Teller area. Squirrel skins were also used to line them. In more recent times the use of rabbit skin replaced the more efficient reindeer skins. Reindeer and squirrel skins were preferred because they were lighter and warmer than rabbit.

Trapping for squirrels was an activity that took place right outside the Nome area. They would do this in spring when the fronts of the squirrels were still white, by fall they would turn brown. Sometimes the men would trap squirrels while the women picked berries before returning to King Island.

Although increasing contact with the outside took place, the King Islanders mostly stayed together. Some of the children had to go to Mt. Edgecumbe. But when they were finished they returned to their families and homes.

When a member of the community marries someone outside of the village the husband would usually move to the wife's community. Margaret described an account of a woman who married a man from Little Diomed. He moved to King Island with his wife. Edwards older brother also married outside of the community. He married a Kawerak woman. Today this tradition is beginning to deteriorate. With people living in Nome, Anchorage and other places.

One of the students asked if they thought people would ever return to the island to live again and if they would like to return to King Island. Edward said that it is probably to late in time for that to happen. People are not used to the lifestyle of King Island anymore. They would like to return to the island but it would be too hard for them to live there. They didn't think that they would be able to climb up and down the cliffs anymore. King Island is only used for hunting walrus in the spring.

The trip to King Island takes only a couple of hours from Nome. Today people drive their 70 horse power boat on a trailer, up the Teller road from Nome to the boat launch. Edward said that not too long ago the same trip used to take around 12 hours. It would take 4 hours to get to Port Spencer or Cape Douglas. From here it would take another 8 hours to follow the coast line down to Nome.

When the people leave the Island after the hunting season they would leave the dogs at the island. They were capable of fending for themselves. They hunted for young sea birds and bird eggs for their meals. And when the people came back the dogs would recognize them right away and would meet them with wagging tails.

Snow goggles were used by the hunters on the ice to protect their eyes from the glare of the sun. Edward drew a picture on the board as he described them. They were made out of a piece of carved wood with slits to see through, a piece of rawhide tied around to secure them in place.

The ability to predict the weather was an important skill needed by the hunters. There's usually a person that people

will go to for these predictions before they went out on a hunting trip. Old man Olanna is the only one from King Island that still knows how to read the weather well.

Edwards stepfather taught him a little about reading the weather. You can tell if the water is going to get rough by the direction of the wind, formation of the clouds, if the sun looks red....

The actions of birds and animals was another way to tell if there is going to a storm. Birds will not be present if there is a north wind because it is too strong for them, and when they come back it means that the wind is going to stop.