

Knowledge of Native Elders ANS 401

Mike and Susie Angaiak

Teresa John, Interpreter

Summary - November 9, 1989

The first part of today's class was spent describing the area that the elders, Mike and Susie Angaiak were born and raised in. Mike was born inland in a place called Kealavik and he was raised in Newtok. The land was primarily mossy wetland with lakes. Because they were inland, the people had to spend time going to the ocean to get mammals for food. The major food in that area is herring, oogruk and bearded seal. Susie was born and raised on the coast in Tununak.

The rest of the time was spent with Mike and Susie talking about traditional hunting implements and food and about the importance of dogs.

Mike noted that guns were introduced before his time and for as far back as he can remember, guns were already available and being used.

Traditionally, the people made spears for hunting the baby oogruk. The spear for this purpose was of four parts. The first two parts were made of ivory which was held together by seal sinew. The next part was handle carved out of hard driftwood. It was carved so that it could be effectively and easily held in a hand for throwing. Then attached to that were water fowl feathers. This particular style of spear was styled so that when the target was hit it could be traced in the water. Molting ducks were also a popular traditional food item in the summer and fall. A spear was used for hunting these ducks also. The arrow heads were also made of ivory but were shaped differently so that when it hits the animal it doesn't come right out. The handle on this spear was similar to the one used for hunting oogruk.

Black fish was and still is a delicacy in these parts. The implement used to catch black fish is a fish trap. Traditionally the traps were constructed out of driftwood split into little strips and tied together into tressilwork. Today chicken wire is used to make black fish traps. The trap is shaped into a tunnel form so that the end closes. The idea is to make one end wide enough for fish to swim into and the other end closed so that they get trapped. The wider the river, the wider the trap. They didn't use any bait. Because the traditional traps were made of wood, they had to be anchored to keep them under water. They were tied in the corners and mud was put on the sides for weight. The back side was held down with a stick. The traps could go as long as one week without being checked, especially in cold weather. The black fish were cooked alive in boiling water. One had to be careful not to overcook the fish because the skin would then fall off and ruin the fish. The fish were stored in gunny sack and aged which was and is considered a delicacy. Similar to the Athabascans in the Interior, the small black fish were also used as bait for burbot also called loche.

A similar trap was made and used to catch mink as well as burbut. Since there were no stores and money, the people traditionally used all driftwood for these traps. Mike doesn't recall there being beaver when he was younger; however, today there are beaver in the area. Greens and berries were also an important part of the traditional diet of that area. The spinach-like green which may be what is commonly known as sour dock was the main vegetable. It grows in the moss by the rivers. For preservation it was boiled and stored sometimes underground in containers. Special bags were twined out of grass for storing berries. The bags were water proofed by lining it in layers of greens. Once full of berries, the bags were covered, tied and put into a

lake. The greens are used in agootuk. Ice cream is often made with seal oil, sugar, and black berries. This still is a favorite food today.

There were wolves in the area when there were caribou. There are none now. There are a few wolverines. There are no bears; however, there has been a spotting recently which is unfortunate because now the people have to worry about running into a bear. They ~~are~~ no longer feel safe to travel as freely in the country. Nelson Island has 'mountains' and musk ox were recently introduced to the area. They are allowed to be hunted by permit nowadays. The only negative effect of the introduction of musk ox is the fact that now women no longer feel as safe to go anywhere to pick berries. Susie says that this might just be used as an excuse today for those that don't care to go berry picking.

Dogs were very important to the people before the introduction of snow machines and other modern means of traveling. Because survival was impossible without the help of dogs, they were treated just like people. They were used to get food, wood and for moving. The people always made sure that they were healthy and adequately fed. They were especially depended upon for long distance travel which was necessary to get supplies that were unavailable locally. It used to be dangerous and scary to not have dogs. Nowadays dogs are used primarily for sporting in areas that have dog races.

(by Agnes Sweetsir)