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Fabian Carey
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Fabian Carey introduces himself. Between 1840 and 1900 most of the trappers were Native. By the time Hudson Bay pushed into the north the beaver days were done. The best of the beaver trapping was over during the late 1830s. By the middle of the 1890s there were several hundred men in the Yukon Valley looking for gold. Many of the early prospectors combined trapping and prospecting if their luck wasn't very good. They turned to the pursuit of bear. Bears were killed for their hides. ~~Steel traps came into use in the 1890s.~~ After 1900 the country was overrun with prospectors. There wasn't enough good mining ground to go around and they turned to other things. There were about seventy-five steamboats on the river at that time and wood had to be cut. The government was busy cutting trails and building cabins throughout the country. Trapping emerged at this time. In the early 1900s there were some good trappers around that did well. Any month with an "r" in it was a good month for trapping. He talked about the different grades of fur. Not all of the interior country was suitable for trapping. The head of the Innoko was good trapping. The head of the Copper River and around Susitna was great fur country. He was most concerned with the Yukon drainage. Long before men came into the Yukon Valley to trap the coast was well known. The fur seal was pretty much low by the 1840s. By the time the U.S. took over the population was recovering. The sea otter had also been hunted almost to extermination until there were restrictions. Another aspect of the fur trade was the black fox. The black fox was common on Prince Edward Island, but rarer to the north. They started to raise them in captivity. Two brothers started to raise them. They had to isolate them once the kits were born. They were getting large amounts of money selling live pairs of fox. Inbreeding started to become a problem. There were seasonal restrictions put on fox hunting. The game commission recorded permits by the dozens for fox farming. There was a fox ranch at Wonder Lake. The ranches are all gone except for one at Petersburg. Dick Morris planned to raise muskrats about 1915. [it is difficult to understand this section of the tape] Beaver ranching was discussed. He talked about the value of an ax over a rifle for a trapper. There were certain rifles that were popular with trappers. The ax was the one tool that was used for many uses, building caches, cabins, making traps, etc. Other items were also important. Snowshoes were important. There were different patterns for snowshoes. A different design was required in Alaska. Partnerships were an interesting study for Fabian. Most of the northerners were loners. Some partnerships were good but most men preferred to work alone. In many instances there were conflicts of opinions. The writing up of trap lines was to provide equal access to the fur was complicated. The subject of who did the most work and who provided the most work would come up. Usually one would sell out to the other. Trapping isn't a field that any man can devote long years to. The wilderness can be overwhelming to a lot of men. It can be a solitary existence. It may be viewed as a mark of manliness and it is

quite a test. Some people can live with in complete isolation by themselves very well. The advent of the radio in 1923 made a big difference. The airplane in the mid-1920s made a big difference. Fabian said you do a lot of soul searching when you are living alone. He was nineteen years old when he went into the woods.

There are no requirements to living in the woods except food, shelter, and clothing. The mark of a woodsman is how comfortable he lives in the woods. There was one trapper, Sisson that came from Canada. Fabian said he was a wolverine type. He settled between Beaver Creek and Livengood. It was a rough, rugged country. A friend of Fabian's traveled with Sisson to his camp. He had a crude camp with very little for comfort. He hadn't bothered to build a cabin. He had a wikiup shelter.

It was common for some trappers to have log drives. Sisson went on one of the last drives on the Salcha. He wouldn't bother with a tent shelter he would just lie down on the river bar. Scandinavians were the best suited for trapping work. They worked hard. It was impossible to be a drinker and a trapper at the same time.

In the summer there were other occupations for the trapper. The general practice was to follow the ice out at the end of the season unless you were hunting muskrats and beaver. For years they shot beaver. They hunted them with the rifle and that stopped in the 1940s. About the fifth of June was mosquito time until about the middle of July. That would shut down the woods for most men. If they were fishermen they would go down to the larger rivers and use a fish wheel. The king salmon would be running. They would put up fish for their dogs. Sometimes a trapper would plant a garden before they left their camp. Potatoes would be left alone. Some people would fish with nets. At the end of August people would be picking berries. In the spring people would dry meat. They would trap grayling and get their moose in the fall. Some people would hunt caribou in the fall for their dog food. The meat would be put in scattered caches.

Trappers and bears were enemies. The black bear was trapped up until the 1920s. They were used for head gear during many of the European wars. Grizzlies were a real danger to the trapper.