

H97-66-52

Sam White

Tanana Yukon Historical Society tapes

Fairbanks, Alaska

November 21, 1963

Many parts of the tape are difficult to understand

Sam White was born in Maine. He came to Alaska in 1902. He had a variety of jobs in Maine before coming to Alaska. He came to Alaska to work on the Coastal Geodetic Survey. Someone from the audience talks about meeting Sam White for the first time. Sam talked about a recon mission to Eagle. They went up the south fork of the Goodpasture River. They surveyed for the entire summer. In the fall they came down the Yukon River in a canoe to Circle. He talked about the wildlife he saw. There were moose, caribou and mountain sheep. He said there used to be unbroken sheep range, but now they are split up in smaller bands. He was surrounded by caribou on a couple of occasions on the trip and one time it took a half an hour for the caribou to pass by them. Circle was a wild and woolly place. They walked from Circle back to Fairbank through Chatanika and down the Steese Highway.

The wolves didn't bother the moose very much in those days. They largely went after the caribou. The wolves kill a ratio of five cows to one bull. That is why he doesn't like to see a cow moose hunting season. The cows are easy prey for the wolves when they are heavy with calves. During the spring and summer they have their calves with them. The bears take a lot of the calves in the summer, too. When he was flying over a pasture he could see bears corralling moose in meadows. He talked about wolves taking a bull moose.

He joined the Alaska Game Commission in 1927. He started flying in 1929.

The moose started moving north in the time he came to Alaska. There have always been a few moose. The moose move in where there's alder and willow. There's a good concentration on the Colville River. In 1955 he was up in that area and there were quite a few moose. He has seen the moose out on the tundra. He has seen moose on Anaktuvuk Pass. He said the bear population has increased in that area. He has seen bears with multiple cubs in the past few years. He talked about hunting bear in Maine. He doesn't see a need for protecting black bears. He hasn't seen the same increase in grizzly bears. It takes a lot of country to support grizzly bears. He talks about seeing polar bears in Kotzebue.

Sam said he worked for the Alaska Game Commission for twelve years. After that he was mostly flying government contracts. He did fly down to Ruby in the winter.

Question about the future of game. Sam didn't think you would ever see large herds of caribou. He talked about responsible hunting for hunters. He talked about a herd of wolves near the Koyukuk River around Indian Mountain and the aftermath of a wolf kill. Question from the audience that can't be heard.

Sam talked about coming down the Chandalar one spring after a heavy snowfall. There was a wide wolf trail. He talked about his dog's behavior around the wolves. He talked about the largest wolf he ever saw. Someone asked about coyotes. Sam talked about their spread through the country.

He talked about the erratic migration of the caribou. He talked about their migration on the North Slope. They were missing from the Koyukuk area for a while and then returned. There used to be a bunch around Tanana.

He talked about learning to fly at Weeks field and the different planes he used. Noel Wien taught him to fly. He talked about the different planes he has had. He would fly for his game warden duties. He did some things that weren't appreciated by the department. He finally quit working for them. There were some anxious moments while he was flying. He talked about one of his long trips during break up.

He didn't like the idea of Rampart Dam. He said there were too many animals in the area. He's afraid that it would get rid of the wildlife.

One time he was flying to Hughes and he could hear an emergency radio call but couldn't understand it. When he landed there he found a patient that needed to be transported to a hospital. He carried a gunshot victim to the hospital in Tanana.

He talked about the advantages of certain planes.

Most of his work was civic contracts. He transported a lot of geodetic survey teams. The north of Alaska needed a lot of work. When the army came up to Alaska they needed map information so they could navigate. They needed to shoot off the stars for their surveying which meant they had to be out there in the winter. Sam said they weren't happy about the idea of sleeping in a tent in the winter. They had some difficulty with their equipment when it was very cold.

He talked about the nomadic Eskimos in Fort Yukon.