

Arctic Survival—

Mice that Furnish Roots Win Hearts of Arctic People

By HOWARD ROCK

In ancient times and down through history, people have had a low opinion of mice. Learned men have devised ingenious traps and chemists have manufactured many poisons to exterminate them.

Although there are undesirable ones in the Arctic, there is one type of tiny, industrious mice that has won the hearts of Eskimos. These mice work feverently gathering food for man.

Through one of nature's bountiful and unique systems, they provide polygonum roots to Alaska natives who relish them as a delightful change in diet.

Without doubt, the resourcefulness of Arctic mice in gathering succulent roots can be compared to bees in the temperate zone that manufacture honey.

The Arctic's little mice store prodigious amounts of these roots in the tundra to furnish,

perhaps grudgingly, needed food for Arctic people.

Polygonum is a leafy plant that grows on the tundra, hugging the ground instead of growing upward. The leaves are green, shooting from the center. The tip of each leaf has a splash of rust color. Looking at the plant from above, it has the appearance of a burst of green spray interspersed with rust.

Long Roots

The main root of the plant, which grows straight down and has one or two branches, sometimes grows eight inches long. The large base of the root reaches 5/8 of an inch in diameter. Since the root grows straight down, it is quite easy to pull it out cleanly by taking hold of the leaves.

Mice gather this root for the long winter's supply of food.

To store them, the busy little animals dig just beneath the grassy tundra, a surprisingly large chamber, usually round in

shape, about a foot in diameter and a foot in depth.

Some Lazy

Some mice seem to be more industrious than others and fill this chamber full of roots. Lazier mice fill it only about half full.

Cache Hunting

In the fall women and children, go out on the tundra in search of root caches. They search carefully each likely spot, in order not to miss any cache, if possible.

The searchers walk slowly along the tundra testing the ground underfoot with each step. Presently the ground underneath a searcher's foot gives way and the mother, or one of the children, locates a root cache, then happily announces, "Here's one, right here!"

The mother then slits an opening in the cache just large enough through which to put her hand and forearm.

She pulls the roots out by

handsful. In the process of storing the roots, the proprietor mouse cuts each root into about inch-long, bite-size pieces.

Leave Some

As the mother digs out the roots, she gives her children, as Eskimo mothers have from generation to generation, this warning:

"You must never take all the roots in a mouse cache. Take about half of them and leave the rest for the mouse to eat during the winter. If you take all of them, the mouse will starve and die, and it won't be around next year to gather more roots for us."

Roots are gathered from caches until one or two good-sized seal skin sacks are full. The harvest is taken home for food.

To prepare them another way, the mother washes the roots with water, puts a heap in a wooden bowl, mixes them with a little seal oil and serves

them. Eaten in this manner, they are chewy and half sweet.

Tasty Yams

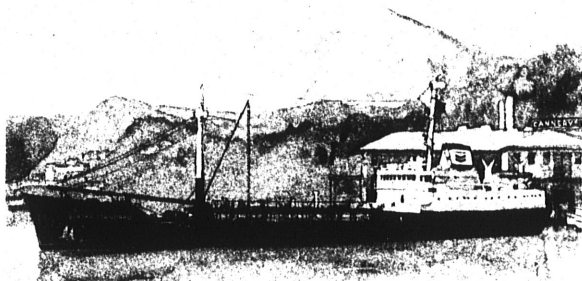
To prepare them another way, the mother of the house cooks them in boiling water. When cooked, they taste quite similar to sweet potatoes or yams.

Unique Provision

And so, the industrious little mice that gather great quantities of polygonum roots for the long winter's supply of food have been very valuable little animals to Eskimos down through the ages. They are living proof that not all of a species is bad.

The ancient Eskimo, in his search for variety in food, depend upon mice to provide this pleasant change in diet.

As one of nature's unique provisions, certainly the little mice of the far north must be credited with furnishing a novel supply of food for the survival of man in the Arctic.



With over 1/2 the total U.S. coast line, and nearly 2/3 of the national continental shelf, Alaska is one of the world's largest fishing grounds. Long a major harvester of salmon, crab, and halibut, Alaska's fishing industry is beginning to realize that additional potential harvests lie in the wide variety of species of shrimp, scallops, clams, and bottom fish available through the year.

Estimates place this total potential at ten times the current catch. With the introduc-

tion of new methods, new vessels, and improved processing techniques, Alaska fishing has a huge potential for growth.

As longtime Alaskans, Standard Oil has worked with the fishing community since before the turn of the century. When Alaska's fishing fleet went from sail to power, we were there—setting up new fueling facilities and providing technical help to accomplish the change. Now there are Chevron Marine Stations serving the fleet from Ketchikan to Dutch Harbor and beyond.

Today's boat owners and processors depend on Chevron products to perform under the most extreme conditions.

Chevron Delo Oils are famous for their performance in heavy duty marine diesels.

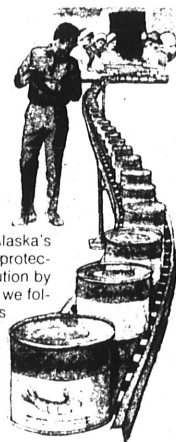
Special greases and lube oils made only of ingredients approved by FDA for food machinery lubrication are specially developed to stand up to water and heat of canning operations.

Because we understand the rugged conditions faced by Alaskan fishermen, we make sure both fishing vessels and processors get the products they need when and where they need them. Our tanker M/V "Alaska Standard", operating only in Alaskan waters, is a vital source of transportation, supplying fuels to remote

locations under the most severe weather conditions on a year-round basis. Additionally, she has been very helpful in keeping a watchful eye for vessels in distress as she makes her rounds.

We also know that Alaska's fishing grounds need protection from possible pollution by petroleum products, so we follow stringent procedures to reduce the chance of spills and discharges into streams and bays.

Ballast water, a necessity in moving tankers, is carefully pumped ashore and cleaned of residue before being returned to ocean waters. Standard Oil has safely shipped petroleum products in and out of Alaskan ports in all kinds of weather for over 50 years.



We're helping Alaska's fisheries catch more fish—all year'round.



Standard Oil is working with Alaskans everywhere, from Ketchikan to Barrow, in petroleum, fishing, mining, tourism, government, ecology, education, forest industries, construction, and transportation.

We're continuing to expand services, developing special products for Alaskan needs, and working closely with the problems and concerns of all Alaskans. We've been helping pioneer Alaska since before the turn of the century. So we know how to help.

Alaskans helping Alaskans

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