

When its Nunivak picking time in Gambell

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There is a green plant that grow on the mountains and other places here in St. Lawrence

Island that we call in native language, nunivak. We eat this along with meats we have whole winter, frozen and in late summer when it is ready to be eaten.

Around the first week of July, this plant is ready to be picked, so lots of women be out picking. As a child I use to go with my grandmother. She and I would excitedly get ready to go in the early morning hours, when it has not been raining the day before. My grandmother would take one 50 lb. flour sack one or two smaller ones, food, ulu and some strings. Here on St. Lawrence Is., we have little different ulu then that of

mainland, we call it, ulaaq. When it has been raining, it is no good to be picking, as the nunivak grow on the mountain side, there is danger of slip and slide also it is wet. So when all the grass and ground is nice and dry we would be on a trip to the mountain a nice steep wall of about 300 ft. at the highest peak.

It stands so strong and steep on the side of the village and neatly facing the sea in a rectangular shape. And what many historical places and names it bears. There is a path that we would follow on the gravel very little earth along the way from the village to the mountain.

Then after some hard climbing and a few stops for a breath, we would be on the top. Although there are many, many places where nunivak is found we would take a trip to the other side of the mountain, just to be there for pleasure. On the top of the mountain we would follow the path, sometimes it is hard to find it because it is rocky, nearest one so we go to are about a mile at the top to and then to climb down

and do our picking. There are many places where we pick, from there we could see Savoonga hills, some 40 miles. But that, mountain is some five miles to the other end and it gradually get lower and lower and at the end it is to the sea level. All along there are many historical camps, it is very pleasant, to take this long walk. And the places still bear the names of ancient tribes, when one digs ivory and stone tools are found anywhere.

But to start picking, we first select a good place for our our picking would start, using our kaspak as a large apron. Whole morning and noon hours, we would fill the first fill. Then they would decide to stop for a lunch.

Happily I would agree, as it grow not too interesting at times. Right after the lunch, picking would start again. In the late afternoon lots of nunivak is picked, so the bags to take home will look good and hard. Around 5 p.m. the women would be wanting to go home. Once more we would come back to the bags and our stuff. During the emptying, there would be much lau-

ghter and talking. It is so much fun to be out picking. Then we soon would be on our way back with bags full of nunivak, carrying them on our backs with ropes.

Sometimes the load carriers would arrive before we ever start home, the boys. They are the boys from the village, who like to carry the bags home for the women, especially the older women. Now they come to the foot of the mountain with hondas and chapperals, the vehicles to get the bags. In those days though, we use to walk all the time.

As soon as we get to the very edge of the steep side, the village is then be seen, so pleasantly located at the very close to the sea. The sea, lays there so vast and so far reaching. One could see Siberian hills some 40 miles to your north-west, some though far and so far away that they are in a blue in color in haze. I could just stare at them some more, day dreaming of going there and think about people as we stop for rest a while. Then we would descent.

Oh it is so tiresome going down, some would just dash down in zig zag way though. Then from the foot of the mountain the gravel walk would start. Long the walk may be, but we always enjoy it.