



BEAD ART—Mrs. Martha James, wife of the chief of Arctic Village, is doing fine beadwork she and other interior Alaska Indian women do to supplement the income of their families.

Martha can also make everything from parkas to moccasins and mukluks.

—Photo by SPENCER LINDERMAN

Arctic Village: Crossroad in Time

By SPENCER LINDERMAN

"Arctic Village" sounds like a tourist attraction in Disneyland, but for 63 Athabascan-Kutchin Indians, Arctic Village means home.

Jim Ludwig, Program Director for KUAC-FM Radio Station at the University of Alaska, and I lived in Arctic Village for one week last October to gather material for a special program on life and changes occurring in this Alaskan Indian community today.

This program will be aired on KUAC-FM December 8 at 1:00 p.m.

We moved into a 15 foot square log cabin occupied by Jannick (Nick) Von Rosenvinge, a VISTA Volunteer, and quickly became accustomed to chopping wood, carrying water, and a heavy diet of caribou.

On the surface we saw a people who have learned the value of living one day at a time in the face of hardships they encounter.

It is commonplace to spend days in the mountains hunting caribou and caching it for the winter, fishing the clear water of the Chandalar River, trapping wolves and furbearers and killing bears that destroy the precious caches of winter meat.

The long winter evenings are spent visiting with friends, repairing a snowshoe, playing the guitar or maybe "chettrinchaw," a game of spearing caribou knuckle bones on a string.

One of the big events in the lives of these people is the mail plane, which may come two times a week depending on the weather. With the airplane, Arctic Village is no longer inaccessible, and everywhere one sees the changes brought about by the outside world.

Each year there are more snow mobiles and fewer dog teams in the village, and another new snow mobile was on the mail plane in which we arrived. Firewood now burns in stoves

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ARCTIC VILLAGE—Nestled deep in the foothills of Alaska's northeastern corner of the formidable Brooks Range, the village of Arctic Village lives its life in the Arctic version of pastoral living. Its Athabascan citizens live off the land caribou being the main source of food. The animal migrates in great numbers around the village. Idyllic fishing areas can be found around

the location of the village. Many of the men come to urban areas in summer seeking employment in seasonal construction work. Women sew beadwork and make winter wear for their men, children and themselves. The village is located about 250 miles in the northeasterly direction from the City of Fairbanks.

—Photo by SPENCER LINDERMAN

ARCTIC VILLAGE . .

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made from discarded oil drums left by surveyors.

Across the creek from the faint yellow glow of the kerosene and gas lamps of the village is the contrasting world of the B.I.A. school's electric lights and the distant sound of its generator chugging away in the night.

These things are taken for granted now, but the people are worried—worried about their children and the future of the village. We did not have to visit long to find that these problems were as much in the forefronts of their minds as the uncertainty of finding the wandering caribou herds.

They were anxious to tell their story. One man painstakingly wrote a speech which he read during a tape recorded interview so that he wouldn't forget any of the important things he wanted to say.

Arctic Village is losing its young people. They have gone away to high schools and colleges in the outside world and rarely return now. The people want

their children to come back, but a college education is of little value in the village.

Almost all of the young people, therefore, have chosen to stay "outside," and without a new generation to hunt the caribou and fish the rivers, Arctic Village may die.

Development of the village's scenic area into a recreational site for fishing and hunting offers some very real hope, but other major economic possibilities seem non-existent.

Someday, those few log cabins on the banks of the Chandalar may finally lie empty with the relentless snow and wind driving between the logs which were once chinked with mud and moss.

If this be the destiny of Arctic Village, I for one will mourn the passing of a hardy, honest and friendly peoples' way of life which once existed beyond the reaches of civilization, 118 miles north of the Arctic Circle.