

## Arctic Survival

## Frenzied, Uncontrolled Dogteam Chases Reindeer Herd

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Times Editor

"When the ordeal was finally over, Dorothy and I quietly started to cry," said Ahnavuk with a burst of laughter.

Ahnavuk was recounting a fearful experience in the winter of 1937 when she and Eebruk's daughter, Dorothy, hitched up an 11-dog team to rendezvous and visit Ahnavuk's husband, Kakairnok, Eebruk's younger brother, who, with another man, was taking care of the reindeer herd some 36 miles inland from the village of Tigara.

With permission of his Uncle Koonook, Eebruk was using Koonook's trapping camp 36 miles from Tigara and about 6 miles east of Cape Thompson. Ahnavuk had been living with them while her husband and the other man herded the village reindeer herd. Kakairnok came home quite often but the rest of the time the two men camped out with the herd.

One day, some of the herd was stampeded 25 miles east apparently by a wolf, or wolves.

Kakairnok said, "We have to round them up and bring them to Ogutwurk valley. This will take three days." Turning to his wife, he said, "I think you and Dorothy better meet us on the third day."

He designated a certain location for the rendezvous.

## Trip Begins

The rendezvous point was about eight miles from the camp. The day was a beautiful one for a drive.

Dorothy had just turned ten years of age — an age when adventure and excitement became a little more special even to a young girl. She anticipated the trip — the excitement of driving eleven dogs and a small sled!

When the girls decided to hitch that many dogs, Akupiruna, Eebruk's wife, was more than a little concerned and had said, "You girls shouldn't take too many dogs with the tiny sled you are going to use. That little sled doesn't even have a brake. If you run into trouble, don't ask any sympathy from me."

Without so much as an acknowledgement, Ahnavuk and

Dorothy hitched the dogs. The little girl got into the tiny sled while Ahnavuk took her position at the handlebars. Akupiruna who had been watching, reluctantly untied the anchor rope, and the team shot forward.

The dogs had not been worked for some days. They were very frisky and anxious to go. They proved it by galloping for a long distance before they slowed into a fast trot.

About half way along, the lead dog spotted a red fox and veered to give chase in spite of Ahnavuk's commands. The team went like the wind. The leader gave up after the fox disappeared over the hill.

"What's the matter with that leader? He won't even obey me," Ahnavuk said with disgust.

"He only obeys my father," Dorothy said.

## Appointed Herders

Couple of months back, Kakairnok, along with the other man, had been appointed by the council to take care of the village reindeer herd until the does dropped their fawns in the spring. The job was not always pleasant because of the cold. Their provisions were furnished by the village along with a small amount of cash per month. They were allowed to pick some unmarked female reindeer, a bull and several young bucks that would be castrated and raised for food and clothing.

Men in the village took their turn herding reindeer. Although rather boring, it was a means to accumulate a private herd within the herd. In a few years, the nucleus acquired would multiply and that was what each man wanted. This was security for the future.

Each man's herd was identified by marks on the ears of the reindeer. Each had a distinctive mark for his animals.

## Chase Begins

The girls soon traveled the eight miles but they were surprised that Kakairnok was not where he designated he would be that day. It was apparent that he and the other herder had been delayed along the way.

They decided to drive farther eastward hoping to meet the herders. They climbed a ridge between two hills.

"As soon as we reached the crest, we saw the herd not a hundred yards below us!" recalled Ahnavuk. "We knew what was going to happen and I automatically shouted 'WHOA'."

This, of course, fell on deaf ears and the team shot forward with a great surge. All the dogs growled and went into a tremendous wild chase after the reindeer!

## No Brake!

"Right from the start, I kept shouting, 'WHOA! Dorothy was doing the same but it didn't do us any good. There was no way to stop them. We didn't have a brake!" Ahnavuk said.

The team headed straight for the center of the herd. It looked as if the herd had been hit by an explosion. It concaved where it was closest to the team and scattered in all directions. Among the milling and frightened animals, the lead dog got confused. He made sudden turns to the right or left chasing after the closest animal. The team wormed through the herd violently.

The little sled careened crazily, many times running on one runner teetering precariously. Ahnavuk held on grimly on the handlebars as did Dorothy on the side rails of the sled.

During the great confusion, a sizable bunch of reindeer started fleeing up a gentle hill. The lead dog decided to chase them.

"It was amazing how much power the dogs had up that hill. I tried to brake with my feet but the power and speed kept getting ahead of me and I got dragged for the effort," Ahnavuk related.

Many times, the tremendous effort of the team would bring the leader only a few feet from the nearest reindeer. This only tantalized the dogs and they went forward with renewed energy. The chase continued to the top of the hill and the pursued reindeer disappeared over the top of it.

## Downhill Chase

"When we reached the top, we could see the herd galloping madly down the hill. It was unnerving because the speed of the chase was sure to increase!" Ahnavuk said woefully.

The downhill descent began and the team surged forward as if possessed. There was little or

nothing to restrain them.

"We would hit a bump and the sled would fly through the air and land with a thump. I don't see how we managed to stay upright," Ahnavuk said.

The sled kept hitting bumps causing Ahnavuk's knees to buckle and lose her footing on the runners.

"When that happened, my legs would drag on the snow and sometimes in the air. How I managed to hold on to the sled I'll never know. Maybe it was because I didn't want to leave Dorothy in the sled all by herself."

## Nosebleed

"As we sailed down the hill, my nose began to bleed — I don't know from what. I don't remember having hit it against anything," recalled Ahnavuk.

Part way down, the pursued reindeer changed direction and started a circle around the crown of the hill.

"We almost went completely around it," said Ahnavuk.

## Sudden Surprise

Kakairnok and his fellow herder had been leisurely driving the herd when the dogteam suddenly appeared a little to the right of them. Kakairnok recognized it at once and started on the run as fast as he could to catch it.

"Sometimes, when the team changed direction," Kakairnok recalled, "I would be only a few feet from it but then it would pull away. We chased that team all over the place without success. When it disappeared over the hill, we ran up as fast as the hill would allow us. Just before we reached the top, the herd and the team appeared to our left below us."

"We dashed down as fast as we could to intercept it but it left us behind when we were 15 feet from it."

Kakairnok told his companion to go up the hill and that he would go the opposite direction of the chase thinking he might meet it if he did so. He was right.

## Team Caught, at Last

He heard the thunder of hooves and growls of dogs ahead of him. Fortunately, there was a small knoll close to Kakairnok and he ducked behind it. He peered to one side of it and saw

the reindeer galloping directly toward him.

He began to worry because the animals might trample him but they veered to the downhill side of the knoll. He could see that the reindeer were near exhaustion. Their tongues were hanging out, their nostrils distended, and the whites of their eyes showed distress.

The pursuing team was about 50 feet off the trailing reindeer and about 25 feet below the knoll. Just before the leader was opposite him down the hill, Kakairnok leaped from the knoll and dashed toward the team. The lead dog saw him and tried to skirt around but Kakairnok leaped with a tremendous effort and grabbed for the traces.

He got hold of them at the middle of the team and held on. The team dragged him on the snow for some 75 yards before it finally came to a stop.

## Exhausted Team

The dogs panted heavily, their tongues hanging far out of their mouths. As soon as they stopped most of them got on their haunches and some laid flat on their sides, exhausted. It was plain that the dogs were not going to do any more running.

Kakairnok walked back to his wife and Dorothy. Despite their pitiful condition, he did not attempt to sympathize with them but said quietly, "What made you ever take that sled?"

## Sobs of Relief

The girls did not answer. Ahnavuk got off the handlebars and walked around wearily to Dorothy.

"The little girl was a mess! Her nose had bled also and the blood had covered her chin all the way down the front of her parka. I was a mess, too, because my nosebleed had done the same thing," Ahnavuk continued.

"We looked at each other and as we did, huge tears began to run down Dorothy's cheeks. A long, low sob broke out of her. Partly from sympathy and partly because I wanted to cry. I broke into sobs. Dorothy and I wept for some time while Kakairnok tried to comfort us."

When Ahnavuk and Dorothy calmed down somewhat, Kakairnok took them home. The trip back was a slow one. The dogs had used up their energy in the feverish chase that lasted about an hour.

In the quiet of the house at the camp, the girls were mildly and indirectly reprimanded by Akupiruna. "I told them they should not take that little sled but they wouldn't listen."

"Yes," Kakairnok said with sarcasm. "And what they did to the reindeer today, it will take us weeks to round them up."

WAA Promotes  
D. R. Marquist,  
C. S. Johnson

Dennis R. Marquist, a seven year Wien Air Alaska employee, and Cleo S. Johnson with eleven years of Wien service, were promoted from the airlines general ground service.

The promotions were announced recently by Ralph Brumbaugh, Vice President of Operations and Engineering. Marquist will serve as Cargo Supervisor with Johnson as Assistant Cargo Supervisor.

"Both men have excellent records of service," said Brumbaugh. "We look forward to terrific growth in cargo handling during the next few years. We have confidence that Marquist and Johnson are the men to handle the job."

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