

Alaskans visit land of 2 million reindeer

BY YURI SEMENOV
Novosti Press Agency

Reindeer breeding is the most stable branch of productive livestock raising in the Far North of the USSR. It plays an important role in the life of the Chukchis, Yukagirs, Evens, Evenks and other small peoples who outwardly and in ancient traditions resemble the American and Canadian Eskimos. For many of them the reindeer continues to provide both a reliable transport means and food (reindeer meat is very rich in calories and this explains why they stick to their eating habits in our time). They sew warm and convenient footwear, clothes and portable dwellings from reindeer hides.

In the middle of November 1977, a five-member group of American reindeer farm experts came to North Yakutia, one of the major reindeer breeding areas of the Yakut autonomous republic in central Siberia. They visited a number of scientific institutions concerned with the problems of reindeer breeding and a hunters' and reindeer breeders' settlement and had a close look at the life and culture of the Yakuts.

"This is my second visit to Siberia and it has been very interesting," said leader of the delegation Dr. Jack R. Luick, professor of nutrition at the University of Alaska Institute of Arctic Biology.

"We have become convinced that reindeer breeding in the USSR has been placed on a serious scientific basis. It can indeed be compared with sheep raising in the United States in the level and scale of development. Here, in Siberia, I think, there is a fine opportunity for our young specialists to enrich their experience and learn quite a lot."

The farms of Yakutia, a land twice the size of Alaska, have more than 360,000 reindeer (and the total reindeer population in the USSR numbers about 2.4 million). For comparison's sake: the number of reindeer in Canada and Alaska add up to 40,000.

But the distinction of Soviet reindeer breeding consists not only in the quantitative difference. Unlike the



Shown at a reindeer farm in Yakutsk, U.S.S.R., are Americans Luick, Karmun, Sheldon, Cameron, and Hensley. According to the U.S.S.R. press agency, this photo shows (left to right): "Americans Lewick, Carmoun, Sheldon, Carmeroun and Henzli in Yakutia."

photo by A. Falamov

freely grazing semi-domesticated reindeer of Alaska and Canada, the reindeer in the Soviet North is fully domesticated. With the borders of seasonal pastures clearly marked, herd grazing of reindeer precludes the excessive exploitation of pastures. Production costs are therefore lower than in the other branches of northern livestock raising. The reindeer breeders of Yakutia annually produce 65,000-70,000 metric centners of high quality meat.

"For my people reindeer breeding is not a traditional industry," said one of the three representatives of the Eskimos, William L. Hensley, president of the NANA Development Corporation, Kotzebue. "This is why we

came to Yakutia for the experience of rational reindeer breeding. We saw and learnt many interesting things in our meetings with representatives of northern peoples and workers, specialists and local executives. It is gratifying that reindeer breeders receive all-round support from the government and scientific institutions."

"It is also interesting to note," Hensley said in conclusion, "that, like our Eskimo craftsmen, representatives of the northern peoples of the USSR are virtuoso bone and wood engravers and many are famous for their fine wares from whalebone and hides. It is also gratifying that the production of exotic souvenirs in Yakutia is placed on a broad, commercial footing."