

CLAIMS ACT STYMIES VILLAGE

Anaktuvuk Pass Folks Hear Translated Law But Came Up Puzzled

By LAEL MORGAN

Early last month the citizens of Anaktuvuk Pass gathered to hear their land claims settlement with the U.S. Government explained in Eskimo.

"The Arctic Slope will get five million acres, \$32 million and we have only five to seven per cent of the population," Riley Sikvayugak, a council member, reported.

"Can we claim a township down by the oil shale?" someone asked.

"Yes, but we don't get subsurface rights."

"Pet. 4. That's the government."

"Kind of hard to get at," Sikvayugak smiled.

"But where were our fathers before the government came in?" demanded Jack Ahgook.

"There!"

For as long as anyone in the village can remember, their fathers and forefathers considered the whole North Slope theirs. They roamed at will, following the caribou, and the only boundaries they knew were sea and sky.

Now they must talk in terms of little townships, surface and subsurface rights. It is no easy thing to accept, but those who opposed the settlement are quiet now. The whole village seems anxious to do their best by the new rules.

THE LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS

The Anaktuvuk Eskimos were the last of the independents who kept their nomadic lifestyle long after other Eskimos adopted whiteman's ways and settled down.

In the late '40s, Sig Wien picked the Pass as a good landing spot to supply Dr. Laurence Irving who was studying bird migration in the area with Simon Paneak, a local Eskimo.

Later traders encouraged settlement of Natives who sometimes camped nearby. A post office was established in the '50s and finally, in 1961, the state built a school.

Most of the adults in the area had had no chance to attend school and didn't learn English until late in life. They knew education was important but it was to cost them more than the average citizen.

Before the school, whole families camped in the winter, moving with the game and living in snug tents lined with caribou fur. Now it is not possible to take youngsters out of school to hunt and families must stay to take care of them.

SETTLEMENT CAUSES PROBLEMS

The game soon learned to detour the village and good hunting is now 40 to 60 miles off. It costs about \$8 (plus oil and

(Continued on Page 6)

ANAKTUVUK PASS AT 40° BELOW—Cold winds blow drifting snow to veil the mountains of the Brooks Range but the traditional sod huts

of Anaktuvuk Pass stay snug and warm. Winds and low temperatures brought the chill factor there to -110° at least twice this February.

—Photo by LAEL MORGAN



Claims Act Stymies...

(Continued from page 1)

maintenance) to run a snow machine for three hours so its expensive to hunt and deficit spending to come home empty handed.

The willow supply, that once seemed ample for heat, gave out in the mid-60s and fuel oil runs between \$74 and \$64 for a 55 gallon drum (which won't last the average family a month.) Anaktuvuk is colder than surrounding country and the willow supply is 40 miles away.

Air freight is 20 cents a pound from Fairbanks; 50 cents a pound to ship a snow machine. Currently a tractor needed to maintain the airstrip is being repaired in Fairbanks and the lowest estimate to ship it to nearby Bettles (to be driven in) is \$2,300.

There is confusion about the status of the airstrip. Who is responsible for maintenance? The strip lies within the township of Anaktuvuk which incorporated as a fourth class city in 1957. However, the Bureau of Land Management leased it to Wien in 1964 for 20 years at \$10 a year.

The runway is ample for Wien's small mail planes which run twice weekly, but the line can't be expected to want to maintain additional runway for large planes the villagers may charter to beat the air freight rate.

The village has no sewer system. That wasn't a problem with just a few families but today there are 134 residents and more plan to move in this summer.

There is no electricity and fuel for a Coleman lantern runs about \$2.20 a gallon.

Underlying all these woes is the problem of income. In days when they were on the move, the Anaktuvuk people had little need for money. Now, in the face of fuel and food bills with no industry, welfare seems the only option.

Atomic radiation is an additional worry. The people still live almost exclusively on a caribou diet. The caribou feed on lichens which pick up radiation from the air. In the '60s when the Russians were doing a lot of Atomic testing, the Anaktuvuk people had the highest radiation count in the United States.

Today the count is way down but the Atomic Energy Commission still monitors the village—partly, it's suspected, for public relations and partly to watchdog further atomic blasts by Russians and Red Chinese.

A PLUS FOR THE PEOPLE

On the plus side are the Anaktuvuk people themselves. They're a bright, lively group with high standards of honesty. Liquor is outlawed in the village but residents take it in good graces and there is little (if any) bootlegging.

There is also a high premium on cleanliness. An Anaktuvuk girl would sooner melt ice to wash her hair at 50 below, than let it go dirty.

Village life is friendly with lots of visiting and community activities like church, bingo and movies. Because of this, many parents feel it is a better place to raise a family than the city.

Youngsters must go outside to high school but it's hoped a ninth grade program will be established in the village soon.

Bachelors greatly outnumber the single girls in Anaktuvuk and keeping the high school misses home might help solve that problem, too.

FUTURE OPTIONS

In the mid-60s, two Anaktuvuk hunters made unique masks for an Eskimo dance out of caribou hides. Outsiders bought them and orders came in for more. Now most of the villagers have learned to make the masks. It's hoped that a central marketing agency can be found and that the industry will grow.

There's also a growing tourist trade. For the last two years, Interior Airlines has included Anaktuvuk on its North Slope tour and hunters like to visit, too. Recently David Mekiana outfitted a little house which he rents for overnight accommodation. It's small but clean and snug and he hopes to enlarge it this summer.

Lastly, there is the land claims settlement. No one's over-optimistic but there's talk of oil, gold and copper deposits which might turn up on village selections.

Under current census figures Anaktuvuk will be allowed to select three townships. If they can prove they had just three more residents than the census listed, they'll qualify for four.

The future holds a lot of "ifs". The village has been caught squarely in the huge transition from traditions that stood for centuries and the 20th century with all its red tape. But the spirit of the people is good and with a little luck they will find the best of both worlds.