



Bob Koweluk/Tundra Times

With whales gone, walrus hunt begins

By BOB KOWELUK
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With ice conditions steadily becoming worse, Gambell hunters were hunting walrus last week to fill their caches with food for the coming winter.

The St. Lawrence Islanders who were the first to successfully land whales this season, have ended their whaling activities after reaching the whaling limits set for their villages in an agreement between the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the federal government last month.

Bert Oozevaseuk, of Gambell, was preparing his harpoon for walrus hunting when the Gambell villagers received word of their whaling crews towing a whale to Gambell.

"The whale was about a 50 footer," Oozevaseuk said. At a ton a foot rule of thumb measure, there should be food for the whole village.

"This was our last chance and we got a whale. Whaling is over now for our village of Gambell."

The women, Oozevaseuk said, will be very busy once the hunters begin returning home with their catches. "The women will prepare the foods to be eaten or stored for the winter," Oozevaseuk said. "We use everything from the walrus except for the bones and certain parts of the guts. I probably will need five or six walrus to feed my family for the whole year, and I will need to buy some ivory from

other hunters for my carving."

The walrus hunters use skin covered wood frame boats 25 to 30 feet in length and often travel some 25 to 30 miles or more out to sea using either sail power or outboard motors.

"The walrus hunting will probably be until June," Oozevaseuk said. "We will be hunting for the next few weeks, weather permitting of course.

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The quarry.



Savoonga hunters prepare their gear.

● Walrus

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"There are always winds here. I'm not real good at telling the weather or winds or sea currents, but, I tell you, there are winds here it seems like 99.9 percent of the year. In the winter and spring, the winds are mostly from the north, but in the summer, the winds are mostly from the south."

Subsistence hunting does not stop with the day the walrus are too far north to be reached by boats. The subsistence hunting will focus on the spotted seal during the summer months and throughout the next winter there will be hunts for ring seals.