

# Progress comes but ice harvest still lives on

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"Ice harvesting" or the cutting of large chunks of ice from local lakes was once an indispensable part of the traditional life in the Arctic villages and in Barrow. Only with these nuggets of icy water could a family drink, cook, and bathe in winter.

Long before the days of water delivery or running water, the village "ice harvester"

provided the muscle and determination needed to cut huge blocks of ice out of a frozen, glazed lake on days when the temperature hovered near -70 degrees and the Arctic winds ripped at a man's face without mercy.

In those days the "ice harvester" was aided by a broad-toothed saw or ax. If the harvester waited too long to begin cutting, the ice became too thick and made his job

even harder. In those cases, the ice "farmer" had to find a crack in the ice and try to split and pry a piece loose. A chunk of "winter water" in the old days weighed 50-100 pounds.

After a day of ice cutting, the harvester and his assistant would load the frozen booty onto his dog sled and take off for the village. Here, he would deliver the blocks to the houses of friends and buyers. In the 1950's, the crystal-

clear Arctic "ice cubes" might sell for \$1 each.

Today, the ice "farmer" is often lucky enough to use an automatic saw, which is a cross between a chain saw and a lawn mower. He is still careful in his selection of the "winter water." He still must time his "business trips" to the lake in order to cut the ice at its peak and before it is too thick to manage.

The snow-mobile and the pick-up have replaced the dog sleds, though, in Barrow. The price of the ice crop has doubled or tripled since the 50's. Water delivery has been available by truck from several

companies for twenty-five years. Most of the newer housing units have running water and the North Slope Borough is working towards providing all Barrow residences with running water in the very near future.

But, the ice harvester is still in business. People still swear that you'll never find water as tasty as those clear, cool Arctic "ice cubes."

One more thing is constant. The blowing Arctic wind is still unforgiving and on a bitter winter day it can still freeze a man's skin in minutes — whether he's delivering ice or water.