

# Slush Ice at Wales

There is only slush ice at Wales gently lapping the shores there now according to Mr. Ernest Oxereok a lifetime resident there.

"The sea ice has not formed yet this year," Oxereok said. "There has even been very little Northwest winds this fall also which would if there was a strong wind have pushed clams into the shallow waters near the shore and even wash some clams on the beach.

"We usually have fresh clams to eat at this time of the year when low tides and strong northwest winds make the seas rough. The waves would push the clams to our shore," Oxereok said.

Wales, the village, is located on the western-most tip of the North American continent at the Bering Straits. From Wales, looking west, an observer can see the Diomed Island which is the western-most United States population center. Little Diomed on the East side of the International Date Line is some 3 to 5 miles from Big Diomed Island, which belongs to the Soviet Union.

On a clear day from the lower slope of Cape Prince of Wales, an observer can look farther west to see the snow capped peaks of the mountains on the Siberian Continent.

The fall clamming is done from late September until as Ernest says, "the slush ice forms. Then if there are clams that wash up with the slush ice, we have to dig them out of the slush with shovels."

"We get red necks, butter clams, snails, sea cucumbers (kuvahlguks and amalukaks), and very small cockles and small razor clams."

Ernest said that some hunting crews are doing fall seal hunting; the crews returning with at least a couple seals and oogruks (bearded seals) on each hunt.

Hunting crews at Wales use 18 to 20 foot long aluminum boats more than the traditional skin boats which are more seaworthy. Toby Anungazuk, Roy Okpealuk, Jonah Tokienna and Roland Angnaboog own skin boats. Last

spring the crews used the skin boats for walrus hunting, but the crews use mostly the aluminum boats for hunting now. There are six or eight hunting crews in the village of about 130 residents. Presently, Tokienna's and Angnaboog's boats do not have the walrus hide hull covering the frame.

"We use the hide of the female walrus to cover the skin boat frame," Ernest said. "The female hides are easier to work with, the hides are softer than the male walrus hide which has tough skin. The women in the village split the hides in half through the thickest lengthwise. The hide is soaked in either fresh or salt water for about a week to soften it up for sewing." When the hides are ready, they are laid on the skin boat frame, moved, fitted and cut to shape. The hides are then sewn together using sinew and a double stitching for a waterproof seam.

Walrus hides will last from one to four years depending on the use of the skin boat. With heavy use the hides will last for maybe two years and with little use the hides will last three to four years, Ernest said.

The hunting crews obtain their own hides. The women in the village will split and sew the hides.

Five gallons of gasoline at Wales cost Ernest \$11.25 the last time he bought gasoline from the store there this month.

That comes to \$2.25 per gallon of regular gas. He said a quart of oil costs over \$2.00. For the kids snowmachining for fun, that's an expensive sport. For subsistence use, either on a boat or snowmachine, it's what you live with. It's a necessary expense.

I was at Wales in June of '69, the last time I was back home. I flew over Wales in March of 1978 when I was working for Kawerak, Inc., a Native non-profit corporation based in

in the village, carving, preparing for a hunt, searching the sky for signs of the weather to come, women with children, some women preparing their families share of the hunt for storage to be eaten during the winter months.

I remember my parents Ruth and Teddy both working so hard to make a living. I remember walking home with pails of water we'd get from the small stream behind the village, or walking down to the beach to pick driftwood for our stove.

## remembering

By BOB KOWELUK

Nome. I was with a television crew to video tape village life at Little Diomed and to do a story on Arthur Ahkinga, the Adult Basic Education Teacher there at the time for Kawerak, Inc. It almost broke my heart as we flew over Wales at an altitude of 2,500 feet. I kept looking back to where I was born, where I spent my first six years before moving to Nome to get my schooling.

Few names fit in my mind comfortably. With my memories of them I can see Wales people's faces at times smiling, or serious, talking with others

Like a good blue sky day I remember the men and women of the village, Mr. and Mrs. Winton Weyapuk Sr., Katie and her son Jonah Tokienna, the brothers Glen and Alfred Sereadlook, Andrew Seetook, Patrick and Clarence Ongtowasruk, Dora Natungok, Alfred Mazonna's family, the Anungazuk and Angnaboogok families.

It's been 11 years since I've been back home. Ernest said that some things have changed. The traditional kaghie or community meeting house has been torn down and over the land the original community house was

located, a new community building has been built. The old Wales Village Store, the only village store in my memory, has been reduced to a storage and warehouse. The Wales Native Store built on the north side of the old store now serves the Wales villagers.

The Thornton Memorial Church is still there. On the south west slope of Cape Prince of Wales Mountain stands the grave and tomb stone for Thornton who was killed at the turn of the century while he was a missionary at Wales. There are 18 new houses, pre-fab, provided by the Bering Straits Regional Housing Authority.

Wales now has electric light plant. The Navy station is still there and there is a new 2,500 runway just outside, west of the graveyard. At wintertime, the planes still land on the smooth ice in front of the village.

A state school there teaches kindergarten through 9th grade and are as usual, new teachers each year.

Clarence Ongtowasruk owns some 3,000 reindeer whose range is near the Potato Mountain on the east side of the Lagoon around Finger Point to York Mountain. Local reindeer meat costs \$1.92 per pound. Shishmaref reindeer costs \$1.10 and even with the air freight is cheaper Ernest said.

*Home. I must go home some day.*