

'Old fashioned' Eskimo remembers first wolf hunt

By JOEY MEKIANA
Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska

Modern life sure is a bore. There is no more chasing after the precious wolf with a fifty-dollar bounty on it, as it was back in the early fifties.

It used to be we had huge caribou herds to look at and enjoy their fresh meat. The caribou's tender meat was always satisfying and delicious.

I miss the little old wolverine coasting like a porcupine. I used to watch it, rather than shoot it, thinking it might be a porcupine.

I remember very well when Uncle Zacch went after my hide for that, or course, I was fifteen years old at the time, and gaining my first sightings and knowledge of the animal world.

I was about to shoot a porcupine which, in 1955, had no value at all. My first sighting of wolves was also a fifteen. It was late afternoon during November of 1955 at Agiak River. Tom Rulland and I snuck up on 18 wolves.

We saw two young wolves as we crossed the river. "Are those two foxes?" I asked Tom.

He gave a little laugh and said, "Shh. Wolves. Don't move!" The young animals disappeared up the cliffs along the river. The banks were quite high, about 400 feet.

Climbing up the bank, Tom gave me a brief lecture on the hunt. "Be prepared. Don't talk or ask questions. Just follow me. Try not to slide down the cliffs. They are slippery with snow cover," he said.

"The wolves are right above us, I think. They have just killed a caribou," he added. I agreed with his advice to be observant and very careful.

He never looked back at me as we climbed. I followed, rather close behind, perhaps a little scared of the wolves. I glanced behind us often to make sure no wolf would catch us by surprise.

As we neared the top of the bank, two young wolves appeared just five feet below us. I stopped, frozen, instantly caught by their beauty.

I loaded my gun, being afraid that I had lost any desire to kill

any wolves. I whispered to Tom, "Two wolves below us. What shall I do?"

He look at me, smiled, and said, "I don't know. There are many up here." I just sat there with my gun loaded. All excited, I kept asking what I should do.

Soon I heard a bang. Tom had shot at the wolves. My two disappeared like bullets, where, I don't know. I was excited to learn we had gotten three wolves, after we had gathered them together.

"Do you realize you cost us one-hundred dollars?" he asked. "More with the two skins." I didn't want to shoot them. They were too pretty, I told him. He laughed, understanding my first sighting of wolves at a close distance.

"Next time, you shoot," he said.

I said, "Yeah. Next Time, I shoot." It was dark as we started home. We followed the river, being afraid of lynx, and avoiding the trees and bushes.

Each time we came upon trees or bushes, we shot a few times ahead at our path. We were scaring away animals, if any, in our path. We walked, and we walked, breaking new trail all the way home. Boy, I was tired! It took us five hours to walk home. One hour for every mile.

When we got home, I was the first to hit the sack. Zacch and Tom stayed up, talking over the day's hunting stories. Occasionally, they called to me, saying, "Boy, aren't you a little tired?" I had to get used to it. We work hard in the wilderness.

I wasn't a bit disappointed when I caught my first wolf. I wasn't in need, but rather taken to be taught survival. Learning to shoeshow was tiring and burdensome. All through that winter, Tom and I stuck together.

We walked every day, except on Sundays. According to Uncle Zacch, Sunday was a day of rest for us. The game was abundant at the time. We sure enjoyed life.

Today, it is all machines, and well, I guess, the game is gone near the village. But it is still enjoyable. Life is a lot easier, and



ABOVE, ARCTIC JOHN ETALOOK AT HIS NATIVE ALLOTMENT IN THE BROOKS RANGE. BELOW, CANYON NEAR ANAKTUVUK PASS. —Photographs by JOEY MEKIANA



goodies are available.

So, I'm getting fat. Time and labor-saving devices sure spoil a person. I have kitchen devices, like a food preparer, juice maker, meat grinder, new pots and pans, corning ware sets, and an oil stove. And I have electricity, a snow machine, and....

But golly! Work is not easier. Time is now the boss, the top boss. Things sure change. It is a cash life. I have an electric coffee maker, hot tea at all times.

With supernatural goodies, it is no wonder I get fat, but not money-wise.

State, Federal, and Mayor Hopson sure fix me up nice! I have comfort, like a 170-dollar king-sized down blanket and a 179-dollar goose down parka, and 65-dollar coveralls.

We have a lot to be thankful for. My latest crisis has been a pretty nice girl proposing marriage. Golly, Mayor Hopson! Look what you've done for me!

Your dream, perhaps, has gone overboard. Where a guy handles himself to your desires, you fix me up to the girls' desires and wishes.

Which one shall I marry? All are in their 20's. You fixed me up so well, Mayor Hopson, I even attract old girls in their 60's.

I am still an old fashioned boy, minding my own business, and so are a few others. I could end up being a bachelor for being so noisy.

I am leaving the news business to concentrate on some worthwhile pursuits. I wish all Tundra Times readers a very Merry Christmas and a very prosperous New Year.