

# If 'Off' Runs Out, Find Birch 'Pumpkin' to Fight Mosquitos

By Edwin Simon of Huslia  
As told to  
Louis Blaine Thoreson

Long ago the big man had five or six wives and many servants. He got mad so all his wives and servants left him and went back in the brush. He begged them to come out but they would not come back.

So he figured out something. He made the mosquitos and put them in a bag. He took the bag of mosquitos back into the brush and dumped them out. The wives and servants were bothered so much by the mosquitos that they had to come back to the big man. The mosquitos followed the wives and servants back to the big man's camp.

The big man had to fight the mosquitos very hard. He tried to figure out what to do. He got a large pumpkin that was growing on a rotten birch. After the big man broke the birch pumpkin from the birch tree he held the pumpkin in his hands and said to it, "You must fight the mosquitos for me."

He brought the pumpkin inside his igloo and burned it there. All the mosquitos left. After all the mosquitos were gone from inside his igloo the big man set the burning pumpkin outside his door to chase the mosquitoes away from the camping area. Since that day the Indians have burned birch pumpkins to keep mosquitoes out of their houses and away from their camps. One pumpkin will burn for about two days.

The big man said to the birch pumpkin, "We will use



**ATHABASCAN STORYTELLER**—Edwin Simon of Huslia is widely known in his area as a master storyteller. He is pictured in his characteristic manner of storytelling sitting on a bench beside the porch of the Ingalik Kashim at the Native Village on the grounds of the Alaska 67 in Fairbanks.

you for many other things."

The Indians use the pumpkin to keep their fire alive when traveling. They make a birch bark basket and put mud or sand in the center of the basket.

At night in the sod igloo, the people cover up the smoke hole in the roof and take the fire out of the igloo. They put a burning pumpkin where the fire was. The fire burns very slowly on just one side of the pumpkin. In the morning the pumpkin is held by the part which is not burning and is shaken over dry grass and bark. Sparks fall off the burning pumpkin and the fire in the grass and bark starts to burn.

The ashes from the burned pumpkin are white. The Indians take regular tobacco purchased from the store or trader and mix it with pumpkin ashes by grinding in a wooden bowl. This ground mixture they use as a kind of snuff

to stick in their noses.

Each Indian who chews tobacco has a little bowl of these burned pumpkin ashes. When the balls of tobacco are not being chewed they are kept in these ashes. Four tobacco balls are kept in the ashes. A different one is chewed each day and then put back in the ashes, to be chewed again, four days later. In this way four balls of chewing tobacco last about

(Continued on Page 8)

# 'Pumpkin' . . .

(continued from page 3)

one month.

Mr. Thoreson adds these words of caution:

When modern man uses the advantages of the old Indian ways, he must also use the cautions and care that go with these old ways.

If you use a burning birch pumpkin for chasing away mosquitos, be sure that it is not sitting on anything which will burn. Some ground will burn—ground which has dry grass, dry roots, dry leaves and sticks, or dry peat moss in it.

Set the burning pumpkin on scraped ground, gravel, sand or campfire ashes. Set it where it cannot be knocked or kicked into the dry grass or brush.

When you leave camp, scrape away the burning part so that the pumpkin fire is out. Carry the burning or burned pumpkin in a container from which ashes or sparks will not fall.