

# Villages and Lands Around Them

A village in Alaska is a social center where its people dance, celebrate traditional events, a center where life is lived for the present and for the future. It has a social system its people have learned to love through generations. It gives its people a meaning of life they most enjoy. The village is home to the people in it. Not far away are the graves of the loved ones of the past. This in itself is a strong tie to the land on which the village rests.

Many villages are old—ancient. One such village is Point Hope in the northwestern part of Alaska. Its social system is strong, interwoven with many emotions. Throughout this pattern, there is humor—a lightness of spirit that makes life worth living. As in other villages, the people of that village have experienced

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bountiful years, lean years, love, sorrow, happiness and mirth. All the ingredients of life are there and the people live them to the fullest. From the experience of life through the past centuries, the people there have found their settlement worth supporting and this support has come from the land, sea, lakes, steep cliffs and rivers.

One of the important facts that should be remembered about the life of a village in Alaska is the land area it needs for its very existence. A village is not unlike some huge cities of the world. These cities reach out far afield for their existence. A city cannot support its needs within its boundaries. It has to reach out for food. Not unlike an octopus, it extends its huge tentacles a thousand miles seeking nourishment for its huge population whether that nourishment be cattle, corn, potatoes, peas, fruit, poultry or many other foodstuffs.

An Aleut, Indian or Eskimo village, although infinitesimal in size compared with great cities of the world, nevertheless needs miles in radius to support it—not five or ten miles but 40, 50, 60, 70 miles or more if it is to be supported adequately and well.

Like a great city, a village exists by harvesting its needs not by the usual cultivation but by getting wild animals for food and the by-products therefrom. This is called hunting but it is harvest nevertheless. Since these animals do not come obligingly within easy reach, the harvesters have to go scores of miles to get them. This has been a time-proven system that has worked and it was infallible to the village it supported. The land around a village is its lifeline and without it, the settlement would be doomed.