

# Anaktuvuk Pass Hunters Let Dogs Pack Game Home

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Out of the east, on a beautiful sunny day at Anaktuvuk Pass, appeared a hunter on the slope of a valley. All one could see was the upper part of his body showing above waist high growth of willows. As he came closer to the village there could be seen four dogs troddling along with him. The dogs were laden with butchered and quartered caribou meat tucked in caribou skin saddle bags. The hunter had killed three caribou and the durable malamute dogs had carried the entire quartered carcasses to the village.

## Out of the Past

The hunter had used the modern rifle to get the caribou but he was utilizing an ancient method of transporting caribou takes during summer time. The people there had adapted the malamute dog as a pack animal. The sturdy dog can carry up to 100 pounds of meat.

## Trained Dogs

The dogs have to be thoroughly trained to do this work. They have to be trained to hold their ground while the hunter stalks caribou. The first instinct of the dogs is to dash after the animals which results in the stampede of the herd. This disrupts the chances of the hunter.

"Some hunters take as many as ten dogs and take home as many as six or seven butchered caribou. I usually take six dogs and that is a good average," said Simon Paneak, president of the Anaktuvuk Pass council.

Simon Paneak, rugged, intelligent, and active leader of his people, is 63 years old. Being no different than other older anywhere, Simon lamented, "The younger generation today does not take the trouble to train the dogs. In the old days, we always had good pack dogs. They didn't run off and chase caribou herds and stampede them as they do today. Improperly trained dogs make it that much harder to hunt. Good dogs stay where you tell them to stay no matter how many caribou there are around you."

## Vital Animal

Life at Anaktuvuk Pass revolves around the caribou, the

animal that has been so vitally important in their survival. They eat and talk caribou.

As the Taseeqmiut (salt water people, as the Anaktuvuk people call the coastal Eskimos) at Barrow or Point Hope talk about whaling adventures in every detail, the men of Anaktuvuk Pass talk about their exploits in hunting of the caribou.

With the intimate knowledge of the land around them, the tellers of the adventures can relate stories telling exactly where they happened and how, therefore making them interesting to their listeners. They point out landmarks, certain bends of rivers, or a huge crag on a certain side of a mountain.

## Great Adaptation

These are the people who, perhaps, have made a complete adaptation to the caribou culture. To what extent the animal is used there is remarkable. Besides food, it is used for shelter, bedding, footwear, baby booties, snowshoe laces, tallow lamps, pack dog saddles, and many other uses.

It is little wonder that the people of the Pass have built a culture around the caribou. The Nunamiut (land people) consider themselves somewhat apart from the coastal Eskimos. In the remote past they had chosen to live in that area deep in the Brooks Range where caribou are plentiful. Building a culture around the animal was a natural thing for them to do.

## Nomadic People

The people of Anaktuvuk Pass did not always live in the present permanent settlement. They were a nomadic people. This mode of life had gone on until 1948, when they finally made steps to establish a village.

Strangely enough, science seems to have been one of the motivating forces in the establishment of Anaktuvuk Pass. In 1947, Dr. Lawrence Irving, working out of Arctic Research Laboratory at Barrow, made a trip into the Brooks Range to study birds and animals of the area.

## Birth of the Village

The group, piloted by Sig Wien, president of Wien Alaska Airlines, landed at Chandler Lake where they met Simon Paneak, Elijah Kakena, Frank

Rulland, and their families. Conversations followed on many things, including scientific research. To pursue this, it was apparently mentioned that if the Eskimos of the area would congregate in one settlement, scientific knowledge could be obtained much more readily.

Considerable income from scientists did result through the ensuing years because Anaktuvuk Pass and the area around it lent itself as one of ideal locations for scientific research.

## Stabilization

During the conversations, an airstrip was presumably mentioned. This, along with other subjects talked about, no doubt, influenced the Eskimos of the area to choose Anaktuvuk Pass as the site for a permanent village. Subsequently, an airstrip was built by Wien Alaska Airlines. A Presbyterian church was erected and later, the State established a school.

The building of these facilities had definite stabilizing influences. The resulting air freight also had much effect. Families from Tuluk Lake and other areas began to move to Anaktuvuk Pass. Soon 70 people settled in the village.

Of course, the main reason for the location of Anaktuvuk Pass was its easy accessibility to the caribou herds. Large numbers of this animal migrate through the pass.

## Apt Research Aids

From the beginning, Dr. Laurence Irving found the Nunamiut very cooperative as well as valuable research aids. He particularly praised them for their vast knowledge of many species of birds. He credits them in this manner:

"The Eskimos of Anaktuvuk Pass have been very helpful to science. This is because scientists can go in there, and live with them in a very relaxed manner, and learn the things the Eskimos already know. They have been most cooperative."

## Rugged and Charming

The people of Anaktuvuk are as rugged as the country around them but they are friendly and charming. They live in close harmony with nature that has been bountiful to them and has generously furnished their food — the

caribou.

## Great Hunters

Needing this animal for survival, the men are probably the greatest caribou hunters in the world. They have intimate knowledge of its behavioral pattern. They know how the weather influences it. They know when and how to get it. This great knowledge of the animal is a tradition passed down from generation to generation.

The importance of this animal is evident today at Anaktuvuk Pass. The training of young caribou hunters is going on there as it had since ages of the past. They have to be good, if not great hunters. They have to fit into the Eskimo philosophy, "be a great hunter and you will have the respect and acclaim of your people."

This hunting philosophy of the Eskimos is firmly established in the lives of the Nunamiut. Their very existence is geared to the taking of the caribou. To them, it is life today and life tomorrow. It's a culture — a way of life.

## Uncertain Future

Today, life at Anaktuvuk Pass faces an uncertain future. An ominous pall of radiation has become evident. The fallout, mainly from the Russian and U. S. nuclear testing, is affecting the people through their main source of food, the caribou. This animal eats lichens, the plant that gets nourishment out of the air and with it, the radioactive fallout.

## Serious and Delicate

It is obvious, that if the people keep eating the caribou, the radiation count in their systems will continue to increase if nuclear testing is kept up by the world powers. Perhaps science can solve the problem. Perhaps the world powers will refrain from further testing. Perhaps a workable plan can be conceived that will be beneficial to the people. Something will have to be done because at the present rate of radioactive fallout, the entire Arctic Food chain is being endangered.

The situation at Anaktuvuk Pass is a delicate matter, one that has the ingredients to destroy the spirit and will of the people if it is not handled with care. It is not the problem to be left alone until some harm has been done to the people.

## Confusion

There is another deplorable situation in connection with radiation. There is a persistence of conflicting evaluation by scientist's about the seriousness of the effect of radioactive fallout on human beings. Some say it is not serious and others say it needs immediate attention.

This sad situation is indeed a disservice to the people who are directly concerned with the probable adverse effect of radiation. Little people are

confused as well as the governor of Alaska, William A. Egan who recently remarked, "Whom are we to believe?"

The Anaktuvuk Pass problem calls for honest evaluation instead of silly, childish bickerings of our learned scientists who persist in saying, "Tis not neither," and "Tis too."

It seems to be about time when a fatherly hand is brought to bear upon the scientists and make them cooperate. There is no room for bickering when an apparently dangerous situation exists that threatens the great Arctic food chain. Ironically, this threat is caused by one of science's great discoveries — the splitting of the atom and its dangerous side product, the radioactive fallout.