

# Eskimos on Diet Get Tired Of Fancy White Man's Food

"A big bunch of caribou came by, right in the middle of the diet experiment," recalled Raymond Paneak of Anaktuvuk Pass. A tone of exasperation was in his voice. He sighed. "We helped hunt them but we couldn't eat what we got."

Last summer, four families at Anaktuvuk Pass went through an experiment for a month to see whether the radiation count in their bodies would drop if they ate foods other than caribou meat which has been their main diet all their lives.

The village on the nor-

thern edge of the Brooks Range is considered as one of the hotspots, if not the hottest, in the world for ingestion of radiation in the human body through food.

Caribou meat has always been the main diet of the people in the area. Their culture revolves around the animal dating back centuries. Eating the meat has never bothered them, nor does it seem apparent that it was bothering them now.

However, the radiation count in their bodies has been building up ever since the first experimental atom-

(Continued on Page 8)

# Eskimos Diet . .

(Continued from Page 1)

ic bomb was exploded in the atmosphere. Radioactive fallout from this, and other bombs exploded subsequently, began falling all over the world.

Although the people of Anaktuvuk Pass probably are not subjected to the fallout anymore than any other area, a unique situation stemming from their food source has caused their bodies to absorb radiation in much more quantities than people in other areas.

Caribou is an animal that feeds on lichens and sedges. These plants get their nourishment from the air and in the process, absorb radioactive fallout. It soaks into them much like blotting paper.

The Eskimos hunt the caribou for food and the radiation is passed on from lichen to caribou to man.

Last summer, four families were picked for a diet experiment by Dr. Wayne Hanson of Hanford Laboratories in Richland, Washington and they were: Simon Paneak; Justus Mekiana; Clyde Hugo; and Homer Mekiana families.

This group was given some of the finest food available that included New York and T-bone beef steaks, beef roasts, hamburger, pork chops, turkey, chicken, corn, and other vegetables; macaroni, sugar, flour and milk.

"The meat alone was worth about \$4,000," Raymond Paneak said. "At first, we enjoyed the food because it was a change but it sure was a lot different than caribou."

"Before the month was over, we got real hungry for caribou meat," said Joseph Mekiana. "In fact I kind of sneaked a piece of caribou tongue one day."

"We got tired of those beef steaks," Raymond Paneak added, "and we started to make soup out of them and they were good."

One day, Gerald Miller coordinator of Economic Opportunity Act programs for Fairbanks and the interior, came to Anaktuvuk Pass. He was invited to a steak dinner by Simon Paneak. Miller didn't know that Paneak family was on a special diet.

"I kept thinking to myself what wonderful steak caribou was," Miller recalled.

"I found out later I was eating a New York steak and it was beef."

that way. I think the old people were the ones who missed caribou most. Even when we were going to have steak for dinner, they kept talking about caribou and wished they could take big bites of meat off caribou ribs and big bites of fat."

It didn't help the dieters any when a large herd of the animals came by just as their craving for the meat increased.

What was the result of the experiment? Raymond Paneak, although he wasn't sure of the exact ratio, said, "I'm not too sure but I think I had 500 and after the experiment, it dropped to 200."

Subscribe to Tundra Times . .