

CANTWELL NATIVE VILLAGE HISTORY

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**for the
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INTRODUCTION

I knew when I began this project, that it would be a difficult one. If our people had recorded our past in written form, as have other cultures, there might have been no attempt or need to involve our tribal members in this project. As it is, however, much of our history has not been recorded and remains part of the oral tradition. Ahtna history is difficult to write down due to the beliefs of the tribe. For example, once a person passed they would not be mentioned by name but would be referred to by relationship. If a person were to talk about someone who had passed on they would only refer to them as my brother or my grandmother, etc. This is still true today and so it is difficult through oral tradition to discuss individuals, although the same does not apply to stories or legends.

The very absence of written material is an example of the complex nature of our culture. What if there were no books, no institutions, and no manufacturers for tools, utensils, and clothing? What if everything you possessed you received from the earth and like the seasons cannot be saved for later, nothing you had would be either. Really nothing material to pass on to your children to help them survive, only the knowledge and skills needed to sustain life.

Today, we send our children to school in the hopes that they will choose a field of study that will afford them a happy and fulfilled lifestyle. What if school was one year long and had four seasons? Never the same curriculum and each season requiring different survival skills but success completely dependent on Mother Nature? How do you survive if the Caribou don't come? You can't try again next semester.

The Ahtna's inherent ability to adjust to changing surroundings and circumstances has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, we have acculturated in western civilization and few people continue to speak our Native language. On the other hand, despite the many changes that have occurred, the information presented in this report may help ensure some of our culture lives on.

NATIVE VILLAGE OF CANTWELL

The tribal members of the Native Village of Cantwell are members of the Ahtna Regional Corporation. The territory for the Western Ahtna included the Upper Gulkana River, Upper Susitna River, Upper Nenana River and the Matanuska River.

In historic times, three regional bands were recognized for the Western Ahtna. These were the Talkeetna Band, the Tyone Band and the Cantwell-Denali Band, also referred to as the Valdez-Creek-Cantwell Band. They are speakers of the Western Ahtna Dialect.

The people of Cantwell's line of descendancy can be dated back to the mid-1800's. Beyond this there are few written or oral records of the Cantwell-Denali Band Ahtna people.

Cantwell is located on the George Parks Highway at the West End of the Denali Highway, 211 miles north of Anchorage and 28 miles south of Denali (Mount McKinley) National Park.

The above is the description of the location of Cantwell usually given to the general public. However, if you were to ask an Elder of our village to give you an Indian place name for Cantwell, you would be told its real name is "Yedatene Na". According to Dr. James Kari, Indian place names have been used for thousands of years. There can be several interpretations for the use of "Yedatene Na"; some say it means *where the river flows smoothly*, or *where the river and canyon open up*.

The point is that the name is descriptive of the entire physical area that is known to most people as Cantwell. For instance, a long time ago, if a native person were told, "I went to Yedatene Na," the name would conjure up a picture of the entire area, including the rivers, mountains, valleys, etc. It would be just as clear a directive as giving someone directions to a store in Fairbanks using street names.

The Ahtna are the Athabascan people whose aboriginal territory is the Copper River and several adjacent streams. Like other Athabascan peoples, the Ahtna have lived and traveled extensively within their language area. Their names for places are a collection of important facts about Ahtna territorial occupation, and about how the people view and value their country and its resources (Kari 1983: v).

CANTWELL-DENALI BAND

The Cantwell-Denali Band is made up of members from Chitina, Gulkana, Tyone Lake and Valdez Creek. The fact that our ancestors were from these areas made it difficult for me to understand the separation—or, rather, the distinction—from the Tyone Lake Band, and for that matter the inclusion into the Talkeetna Band. This must have been done in the very early 1800's, because we can date our band back to at least the mid-1800's when our chiefs were young men and we know what villages or areas they occupied.

For instance, Chief Tyone of Tyone Lake died in 1927 and was said to be around 100 years old. If those dates were true, then he would have been born around 1827. He was the son of the chief of Tazlina Lake, which is quite a distance from Tyone Lake the place that many of us in the “Cantwell-Denali band” can trace back our heritage. My question for historians, then, is “when did we become known as the Cantwell-Denali Band?”

Information provided in an interview with Morrie Secondchief by Eleanor Dementi explains that some members of the Talkeetna Band and their relationship to the Western Ahtna came from a sister of the Neeley's of Tyone Lake or band who moved there from Tyone Lake. Unfortunately, I found little information about this sister on how or why she chose to move to Talkeetna and, consequently, even less information on the Talkeetna Band in connection with the Western Ahtna. “Many names in the Talkeetna Mountains have been lost because the Ahtna band of the Talkeetna Mountains is now extinct” (Kari 1983: vii). There are descendants of this sister of the Neeley's from Tyone Lake but I do not have information about them for this report.

TYONE LAKE BAND

The leader of the Tyone Lake Band was Chief Tyone, the son of the Chief of Tazlina Village and who, according to oral history, was very powerful. There are Tyone's living in Gakona from a union of Chief Tyone and his second wife, while the Tyone's of Cantwell are from Annie (Gulkana) and Chief Tyone's union. Although, I found no record of Chief Tyone's date of birth, his passing in 1927 was clearly remembered by many people and was followed by one of the largest

potlatches in our history. Frank Secondchief remembers the first time he met Chief Tyone:

I was at Tyone Lake without my mother for a long time. I missed my mother. I was by myself with a man called Dayaan (chief) at Tyone Lake. We lived on fish all the time. We fished from the bridge. We didn't have any muskrat, only fish. In 1929 or 1930 my brothers came to Tyone Lake with my mother, then we went back to Valdez Creek.

ANNIE TYONE (Gulkana)

Annie was originally from Gulkana and was "Udzidyu" which means "Caribou Clan". When or why she decided to move to the Tyone Lake area is not clear. She had two brothers: Secondchief and Pete, who were both chiefs. In those days people used one name, which can sometimes cause a little confusion as often several people had the same name. For this reason, I will usually, when talking about the two Annie's, follow their names with either "Chitina" or "Gulkana" if it is not clear which one I am referring to.

Chief Tyone and Annie (from Gulkana) had one son, Pete Tyone, while she lived in the Tyone Lake area. Annie, it is said, "did not care for the Tyone Lake area and moved to Valdez Creek when the opportunity presented itself". Many of those now living in Cantwell are direct descendants of this Annie.

Annie's other children were Frank Thompson (who died in a snow-slide at Brushkana), Jake Tansy, who was born on January 2, 1906, and currently resides in Cantwell, and Tammany Monahan, who passed on in 1986, at the age of 74.

PETE

Pete was Secondchief's younger brother and Annie's (Gulkana) older brother. He married Cadillia Neeley, who was from the Tyone Lake Village and although they had several children, only one survived a TB epidemic, Jennie Peters. According

to Reckord, Pete and Cadillia spent time at “Swamp Buggy Lake” and are closely associated with that area. Jennie was the mother of Henry Peters and Alice Norton. Alice Norton’s children are Bud Carlson, Erick Carlson, Irene Carlson (Pederson), Maggie MacCafferty (Oliver) and Nellie Smith.

SECONDCHIEF

Secondchief had two wives, I was unable to find out her name for this report, but the children from this first union were Joe, Jimmy, and Dick Secondchief. They were the half-brothers of Frank Secondchief, who lives in Cantwell and just celebrated his 80th birthday on October 13th, 1999. Frank was born at Valdez Creek and when asked about where he was born stated, “They told me I was born at Valdez Creek. Everybody was born in Valdez Creek, we think... how would we know? We traveled hunting all the time, so we don’t know.”

Frank’s mother was Fannie, and her Native name was “Cheland”. She was originally from Nenana. Frank’s other brothers and sisters were Tom, Jack, Dan, Sterling, Katy and Grace Secondchief. Secondchief died in 1927 and is buried at Fish Creek. According to Henry Peters, there were two potlatches held for Secondchief in 1927 or 1928, one at Tyone Lake and the other at Valdez Creek. This is clearly an indication of his importance. The following is an account of the event told by Henry Peters:

They gave a potlatch at Tyone Lake, two times. But the one in Valdez Creek is where they potlatch over him you know, I was right there at the time. I was kind of small and young at the time. It is Secondchief we are talking about. It was 1927, a long time ago. Jimmy Secondchief came down from Lucky Gulch, I think. He told everybody that the Copper River people are coming in. They wanted to make a big show for Secondchief. “They are camping up here a little ways,” he said. So the next day, we knew they were coming in you see, and sure enough they showed up, coming down across the Valdez Creek, it was only about a foot deep, frozen over. Well, they started singing before they got to Secondchief’s house.

This is how Harry Johns (from Copper Center) remembered the potlatch held for Secondchief:

A good potlatch in 1927 in Valdez Creek. A big potlatch, I guess that was the last potlatch. Nobody did it anymore after that. The potlatch was over Secondchief. Old Secondchief, Joe Secondchief's daddy. Pete Tyone also gave a potlatch for his father (Chief Tyone). Let me see it was 1927. There was all kinds of dances that time. Oh yeah, good singing, gee their voices were strong. John Nicklie had a really good voice. Dance, that Oley! That's all I know. The Eklutna people were there. They were potlatched. They are just people, from over there (Eklutna). I was really surprised, my goodness! I never heard a song like that, a real love song. Oley, he go down to the floor. Gee! I was really surprised; I wish I had a movie. Gee, I never heard like that before. We were all young kids then. Blanche (Nicklie) and her Eklutna friend, their voice was strong. Jim Mckinley was a good singer around here. They sang as good as him, same thing! Gee, they had nice songs, never learn it all, I was too young you know. They had nice sad songs. That song I sang is from people who came from over there. (Eklutna) They gave a potlatch in Eklutna first for Secondchief, then they went over to Valdez Creek. Oh, there was so much, they went on the train at Matanuska, went to Cantwell, then they went to Valdez Creek. They come from Matanuska, it was April month. They learned all their songs and danced to it. They seen them dancing at Matanuska earlier and learned it. I never seen it like that again. They were good singers. They also sang Chief Secondchief's song. A whole bunch of them, Jimmy Secondchief and all of them, they went outdoors singing to meet the people coming. Jennie Peters also sang a song, Jennie Peter's father (Pete) had made that song for his brother.

This is Frank's account of his father, Secondchief's passing. Although I am not positive, I think that there is some ritual significance involving the food being brought to someone who has passed:

My dad died in 1927. Dick and them, (Frank's older brother's) they were staying there also. Dick and Joe were there; I was still sleeping with my dad, when he died. It was the flu. He was working with Oley (Nicklie) at the time. He was sick about two days and then he died. They put him in a tent at Valdez Creek, but I didn't know about it. I thought that he was just visiting over in that tent. They would bring food over to the tent for him, so I thought that he was alive over there in that tent.

CHIEF NICOLAI

Chief Nicolai was originally from Taral where he became chief in 1884 or 1885 after the previous chief “Bacille” became too old. When the railroad went through around 1911, he and Annie (Chitina) moved to Chitina and eventually to Valdez Creek. According to Louise Mayo he passed away when her mother (Lillian Tansy) was about 2 years old. Since Lillian was born in 1914, this must have been around 1916 or 1917. Although I assume there was a potlatch held for his passing, I was unable to find out any information of it occurring or his exact place of burial. Chief Nicolai is also said to be the Chief that guided the Allen party at least to the next village of his journey. I am not entirely comfortable in stating that this is in fact the Nicolai that was married to Annie (from Chitina). I have been told that there was another brother named Nicolai but was unable to find out any information about him and only heard it from one person. Also, I went by dates of birth of Nicolai and Annie’s children and worked back from there. For example, through oral tradition I know that my grandfather’s (Dan Nicklie) father was a chief and that Annie (Dan’s mother) was from Chitina. I say Annie was from Chitina but it has been recorded that Taral was Chief Nicolai’s wife’s fish camp, which would probably have been Annie. Since Dan was born in 1898 he would have been 13 years old in 1911 when Chief Nicolai moved to Chitina from Taral. Dan was not the oldest child, so I am presuming this relationship between Chief Nicolai and Annie based on the birthdates of the Nicklie children. I should also note that there is no record of who changed the spelling of Nicolai to Nicklie other than speculation that it was around the time that John, Oley and Dan started working for the railroad.

CLANS

In the Ahtna culture a person always takes his or her mother’s clan. Today, the majority of the native residents in Cantwell can trace their clan lineage back to their great-grandmothers. These women are; Annie Nicolai (Chitina), Annie Tyone (Gulkana) and Cadillia Neeley (Tyone Lake). Annie Nicolai who was originally from Chitina was “Tsaltiine” or Water Clan, Annie Tyone from Gulkana, was “Udizdyu” or Caribou Clan and Cadillia Neeley from Tyone Lake, was “Tsaltiine” or Water Clan.

The only time you would not follow your mother's clan would be if your father married a non-native; then you would assume the clan of your father. Something that I found interesting is there is no mention of /or distinction of clan lineage based on degree of blood. It seems that regardless of a person's degree of blood there is no such thing in terms of clan heritage. In other words, no matter what degree of native blood we may have, we are 100% the clan of our parent's.

MARRIAGE

I didn't find any indication that marriages were arranged. I know that my own grandparent's (Dan and Tammany Nicklie) marriage was not arranged by anyone other than each other and I have never been told that marriages were arranged.

HUNTING AND TRAVEL

Almost all of the following information is from work done by Robert C. Betts. His interviews and report contain first-hand accounts from some of our Elders. While some of this information may be recorded elsewhere, I was not able to locate it and am grateful for the work of Mr. Betts, I feel this information should be included in this project as most of it is from the words of our elders and clearly emphasizes their relationship to the territory and the subsistence lifestyle.

The following reconstruction of the seasonal movement of the Cantwell-Denali Band, or at least part of this band, has resulted from interviews with Jake Tansy, a 79 year old Western Ahtna Indian. Jake's father was a white miner working at Valdez Creek but he was brought up by his mother and her matrilineal band. At the time of the first sustained white contact Jake's mother's band had been moving in a yearly cycle between Yanert Fork, north of the Alaska Range, and the Tyone River, a tributary of the Susitna River. This band spent most of the summer on Yanert Fork where caribou and moose were plentiful. In late summer the band would travel south through the Alaska Range following Moose Creek and crossing upper Wells Creek northeast of Pyramid Peak at Thief Creek. The band crossed a divide at the head of Thief Creek and reached the headwaters of the Nenana River where they traversed the northern edge of Monahan Flat to the terminus of the West Fork Glacier to establish a fall hunting

camp near the glacier. According to Jake Tansy, five dogs were required to pack a single caribou, four for the meat and one for the skin. Dog packs were quite large and bulky but once the packs were on, the dogs were allowed to run free (Betts 1985: 5).

Once the Cantwell- Denali Band had reached the vicinity of the West Fork or Susitna Glacier they would spend late August and September hunting “fat” fall caribou which tended to stay close to the glaciers to avoid insects. This fall hunting camp near the glaciers would usually involve five or six families who would wind dry the meat obtained during the fall hunt on open racks and pack it down to the glacial outlet streams where it would be transported by skin boat down the West Fork of the Susitna River to Valdez Creek (Betts 1985: 7).

Jake Tansy reported that five or six caribou hides were needed for a skin boat. These hides were sewn over a spruce frame using spruce roots after which spruce gum was painted over the covering to seal and waterproof the hides. A double bladed paddle was used (Betts 1985: 8).

Kari (in Greiser, 1985) states that caribou were hunted throughout most of the year since they formed the Cantwell-Denali Band’s single most resource. Although the spring and fall caribou migrations were the major source of caribou meat, some caribou stayed around all winter and were snared year round (Henry Peters, Betts 1985: 9).

Butte Lake occupied an important place in the seasonal round of the Cantwell-Denali Band because it was the site of fall caribou drives in which several families would participate in order to obtain a large supply of meat, which could be dried and cached for the winter. The last major caribou drive at Butte Lake probably occurred slightly before the end of the nineteenth century (Betts 1985: 14).

The Ahtna chief who organized the last caribou drive at Butte Lake died when Jenny Peters was a young girl about six years old (Jenny Peters, Betts, 1985). This man, a great Ahtna chief and shaman, was Jenny’s grandfather on her mother’s side. This would place the last organized drive at Butte Lake sometime prior to 1900. Since Jenny’s maternal grandfather was over 100 years old and blind when he died near the confluence of Butte Creek and the Susitna River, the last

caribou drive at Butte Lake probably happened between 1860 and 1880 (Betts 1985: 15). This Chief was Cadillia Neeley's father.

Caribou drives at Butte Lake occurred in the fall, usually in August and would involve perhaps 25 to 30 people who would camp at the lake waiting for the fall caribou migration (Henry Peters, Betts 1985:15).

Jake Tansy has outlined the method by which caribou were driven into the lake from information passed on to him when he was a child. Long V-shaped "fences" with the narrow end at the lakeshore were constructed to funnel the eastward moving animals towards and into the lake. These "fences" were not continuous fences but a line of sticks or poles about as high as a man, on top of which was placed a moss cap to represent a head and hair.

Women and children would be spaced along these lines of "scarecrows" to supplement the inanimate line of sticks in order to keep the animals moving towards the lake. While the women, children and elderly members of the band drove the migrating caribou towards Butte lake Ahtna hunters waited in birch bark canoes, concealed along the lakeshore on both sides of the lake.

Once the animals had entered the water and were well out in the lake, swimming for the far shore, the hunters would break from cover and paddle out to spear the swimming caribou. Approaching the swimming caribou to spear them was a dangerous undertaking because a wounded caribou was easily capable of thrashing around in the water and kicking in the side of a bark canoe, which Jake describes as being "just like paper". Ahtna men could not swim and a sinking canoe put a hunter in serious trouble. Jake recounted a story handed down to him about a hunter who, finding his canoe destroyed, was saved by grabbing the back of a swimming animal that took him to shore.

A technique used to minimize the danger of damage to the canoe was to paddle up to two caribou swimming side by side and to reach over the closer animal to spear the outside animal, keeping the uninjured caribou between the boat and the wounded animal. Caribou were speared in the back of the head/neck region when they were

swimming. Since dead caribou do not sink it was an easy task to tow the carcass to shore behind the boat, once the wounded animal had died (Betts 1985: 17,18).

When a lot of caribou were killed, such as in a drive, everyone helped butcher the animals in camp. Jake Tansy outlined the butchering sequence he learned as a boy and continues to use. First the head of the animal is cut off, and then a medial cut is made down the ventral surface. If a young animal is being butchered, after the first cut it is possible to separate the skin from the muscle by forcing a fist between the hide and the meat and after the first cut the knife is no longer needed.

After the skin is removed the animal is quartered and the brisket and back strap meat is removed. It is handy to use the antlers to hang meat on to keep it off the ground and clean. Next the ribs that were not removed with the brisket are broken off. Fresh liver isn't eaten and liver can't be dried. The heart is cut open and dried and the tongue and head are great delicacies. The stomach can be used as a bag for bone grease storage and the brain for skin preparation. The mandible is cut in four pieces before cooking, the two lateral halves were separated longitudinally and the distal portion of each of the two halves is cut off. The tongue is considered a prized piece of meat. Marrow contained in the mandible was extracted especially during times of scarcity of food. Ribs were best for drying and caching although any kind of meat could be cached (Betts 1985: 20,21).

VALDEZ CREEK

The discovery of gold at Valdez Creek in 1903 changed the subsistence life style of the people living there. They moved to Valdez Creek on a more permanent basis, and the construction of their houses reflected the changes in their lives. It is at this time that the Native people in this area built log houses. They left their nineteenth-century villages behind and cast their fate with the miners at Valdez Creek. Once intertwined in the economic web of the Western world, there was no return to the ways of the past, and the history of the Ahtna at Valdez Creek rose and fell with the history of the placers. For 40 years the Native people lived and worked there. When they

finally left in the early 1940's, they left behind not only memories, but also the graves of parents, siblings and children. Thus no matter what historical significance scholars can ascribe to this site, the people themselves usually focus on the simple family life and events, which happened there, and the graveyards left behind (Reckord 1983:172).

Many native residents in Cantwell are direct descendants of Pete Monahan and Annie (Gulkana). Their only daughter was named "Tammany Monahan" and was born in 1912 at Valdez Creek.

The following was told to Reckord by two of our Elders of the significance of this area:

Long before the turn of the century and probably for generations, the Ahtna Indians traveled each year to Valdez Creek from their winter villages on the Susitna River to the south. They called the place C'ilaan Na', or "a lot of game is present place" (Jennie Peters: 18 November 1975). Throughout the year, these high barren spaces attracted the huge caribou herds. In the fall, moose congregated up Valdez Creek, and blueberries grew profusely. Valdez Creek was an attractive camping place because whitefish swam in the stream, ducks nested nearby, and porcupines, a favorite fatty delicacy for the Ahtna, ambled in the brush (Lillian Tansy: 18 November 1975; Reckord 1983: 171).

By 1915 several Native families lived permanently at Valdez Creek in "big log houses"(Lillian Tansy: 18 November 1975). The Native and white communities were physically separated. Near the south bank of the creek was located "the Native side of town" and one man estimated it covered about 180 acres of land (Henry Peters: 18 November 1975). The "white side of town" was located on higher land on the north side of the creek. One man interviewed listed the family names of the people living in the Native community as Stickwan, Pete Tyone, Nicklie, Peters, (Jennie Peters' father and mother) Tansy, Secondchief, Sinyon, and Jack Ewan (Henry Peters: 18 November 1975). Denali was actually two separate cultural communities living side by side. There was the Native community composed of families who had long-term commitment to the area, and the mining community composed of single men who held short-term commitments to the area (Reckord 1983: 175).

The Native integration into the world of mining was not always smooth, as they would still tend to go back to their previous lifestyle. Moffit evidences this in the following 1915 report on the mining district (p.22):

“Some of the younger men (Indians) are employed by the miners on Valdez Creek for different kinds of work and are found to do fairly well except in the matter of attendance. It often happens that they are absent when most needed, even after they have promised faithfully to be on hand. Experience has taught the miners that Indians will not work contently unless they are given occasional opportunities to spend a day or two in hunting or fishing” (Dessauer and Harvey 1980: 55).

While this was probably true, I prefer the following opinion by Brown to be more informative of the reason native people did not particularly take to mining:

Denali-region Natives worked as wage laborers, sometimes at the mines, more often in the transportation, and supply systems that supported mining. The philosophy of the Natives' subsistence way of life was to get enough meat and other necessities for comfortable living. When wage-labor opportunities came with mining into their areas, the Indians tended to adhere to that philosophy of moderation. Money was useful to a point. But subjecting oneself to wage labor for cash beyond necessity- that is, the year's store-bought supplies- made little sense. In fact it was nonsensical, because one had to hunt and fish for the family's true necessities, and wage-work shortened time on the land for those activities. Trapping, a more congenial way of earning cash than working for someone else, also took time. The complaints of mine operators about the Indian's poor work attendance took little account of this logic (Brown 1993: 75).

This should be easily understood, since the people first introduced to the mining profession would have been raised their entire lives in the subsistence way of life. Based on the date the Valdez Creek mine opened (1903) the Indians being discussed in the above passage would have been the Chiefs and their brother's mentioned earlier in this report.

Eventually, the Native people became more involved in mining production at Valdez Creek. Dessauer and Harvey stated this in their study of Valdez Creek:

The Natives quickly learned mining techniques while working for the white miners. They were hired to work in all aspects of the mining, including placering, tunneling and hydraulicking. It is evident, however, that few Natives ever owned mining claims on Valdez Creek. Most of the creek was probably already staked by white miners before the Indians learned enough about gold mining to understand that aspect of private ownership. Leasing claims, or working them on a share basis were probably the only alternatives remaining besides working for wages. In 1927, the Natives who had worked in the mining were sufficiently capable of mining independently to lease the Folk bench claim from John Carlson (Dessauer and Harvey 1980: 56).

Also, in their study were some wage information given to them through personal communication. Henry Peters said in 1935, he was paid \$1.00 per hour. And the price of gold in the 1930's was \$15.00 to \$20.00 per ounce. Jake Tansy worked at the mines from 1935 to 1941, and Oley Nicklie started mining there in 1921, working 12 hours per day at \$.60 per hour (Dessauer and Harvey 1980: 56).

When the mine closed down the Native people began moving to Cantwell to work on the Railroad, from which most of them would retire.

MOUNT MCKINLEY NATIONAL PARK

Dan Nicklie and Mike Pedro both worked for the railroad and had houses at Windy section, an area that is within park boundaries. Elsie Nicklie said her family lived there with her parents (Dan and Tammany) from about 1942 to 1955 when the Windy section house was shut down. After that, both families moved to Cantwell. Although there is little information regarding the Park and interaction with her father, she stated that because they lived on the side of the river that was part of the Mount McKinley Park, her father built a very large boat out of trees (large enough to fit a large moose as well as other hunters). He would use this boat to cross the Nenana river so that he could hunt on the legal side of the river.

When I asked Elsie if she remembered whether or not her father ever talked about the park, she said no, she didn't think so. But he was aware of the laws and boundaries of the park itself.

Unfortunately, I have not been told by anyone that local Native opinion or input was sought before or during the first years after the park was established, in regards to animal control, population or usage. However, it is pretty evident that the well-being of the miners and outsiders was taken into serious consideration by the people representing them. This is obvious in the following paragraphs referencing the establishment of the park:

The price of this idyllic vision had been compromise. Delegate Wickersham had promised to protect his constituents in Alaska, and he did so. In addition to the Kantishna and northerly hunting ground exclusions (which cut into the extended ranges of Denali wildlife), the law provided that prospectors and miners could locate new mining claims within the park. They could also “take and kill game therein for their actual necessities when short of food.” But not for sale or wantonly (Brown 1993: 92).

There are many more accounts of the making of the park and in no passage did I read of any mention of the needs of the local Native inhabitants or their specific rights of usage such as were stated above. Somehow, I don’t get the impression Alaskan Natives were considered to be anyone’s constituents.

There was an instance, many years ago, where a local Native man was arrested and taken by train to jail for hunting out of season. His rifle was also confiscated, which created a great hardship for him as he had a large family for which to provide. There is still some bitterness attached to this memory and it is only compounded when we read of how the opinions of people who had been here for such a short time were sought out and taken into account, and the apparent existence of the original inhabitants of this land were not even acknowledged by park managers.

Of course, the creation of the Mount McKinley National Park is not the only instance, of this lack of inclusion and input from the local Native population regarding the management of the State of Alaska, and it is not my intention to berate the system at this late date. But it is a fact that the Native people of Alaska did not have much of a say in what rules, regulations and restrictions were placed on what was their land, yet they are the one’s who ultimately were most impacted by these changes.

At the present time, local Cantwell residents are comfortable with the park and its management. There are special committees, comprised of park officials, representatives and local individuals, which work together in making decisions that affect the people in this area. Today, local people are very involved and their needs and recommendations are taken into consideration in matters concerning the park.

There are several recorded tapes of people from this region on subsistence located at the Ahtna, Inc., office in Glennallen. Time did not allow me to utilize what I am sure is a very valuable resource. Transcription is not permitted without special permission both from Ahtna and either the person recorded or his or her immediate family. Also, no copies can be made and of course, the originals must remain under lock and key.

Another resource I recently learned of is a hand written journal by John Nicklie from the 1940's. A local person found it in the old village site at Cantwell and has offered to give me a copy, which will be very valuable to our village history. I realize that there seem to be great gaps of information about the history of the Native Village of Cantwell. Hopefully, these gaps can be filled in futures projects. Maybe someone reading this will be reminded of things important to our history that are noticeably missing in this report. I feel that there is a lot more information that I was not able to locate but that someone else may know and be able to add in the future.

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