

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF RANDY BROWN  
CONDUCTED BY MARCY OKADA AND MAT SORUM

IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

MAY 2, 2023

ORAL HISTORY 2024-04

YUKON-CHARLEY RIVERS NATIONAL PRESERVE  
SUSTISTENCE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIBED BY LENA EDWARDS, ANSEP INTERN, YUKON-CHARLEY RIVERS  
NATIONAL PRESERVE

[REVIEWED AND CORRECTED BY RANDY BROWN AND MARCY OKADA, NPS.  
REVIEWED AND CORRECTED FOR PROJECT JUKEBOX BY KAREN BREWSTER,  
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MARCY OKADA: Okay, so my name is Marcy Okada and I work for the National Park Service. And we are here with Randy Brown, and today is May 2nd, 2023. And we also have --

MAT SORUM: Mat Sorum, I'm the wildlife biologist for Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve.

MARCY OKADA: Okay, and we're here today to interview Randy about his sheep hunting experiences in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. But, we'll go ahead and also just do introductions. Questions about how Randy first got into the country on the Yukon River.

RANDY BROWN: Okay. Yeah, this is Randy Brown, and I came to Alaska right after high school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. And went to the University (UAF) for one semester and then milked cows down in the Palmer/Wasilla area for the second half of the winter, 'cause I really wanted to move out in the woods. And then made my way to Eagle the next summer. And one of my friends from high school, Charles Brunn, he came up with me. We used to go camping and -- and hiking around in the mountains of northern New Mexico a lot. So, we were going to go down -- we had picked out Tatonduk River as the place we wanted to go to live. And on topo maps from down in New Mexico. And so we -- we went down there and met Dick Cook, who said, "No, no, no, no, you can't move in here." He had a place a little below the mouth of the Tatonduk River, and then another one about five miles up on a little island just downstream from Pass Creek. And he said, "Go explore whatever you want, but you can't come and move in here. And so, it's too close. You'll have to find your own place." So, we went up the Tatonduk River, lining our canoe, and just explored up in the mountains a little bit and fished for some grayling

RANDY BROWN  
MAY 2, 2023  
ORAL HISTORY 2024-04  
Page 1 of 41

and came back down. And Dick was -- he was talking with John McPhee. He had come out there and met Dick, and so we got to meet John McPhee at that point. That was 1976 in the summer. And um -- And we didn't know what we were going to do at that point, and we -- we just didn't have it all planned out. So, we went back to Eagle. We lined our canoe back to Eagle and went out on a fire. BLM, I think was fighting a fire up -- up Eagle Creek at the time. It was actually in Canada, but there was an agreement that we would fight that fire. And we just got hired on and went out there. And during that period, again, we were -- we didn't know what the hell we were gonna do. And so, I got to know Mike Potts at that point, and he invited me to go into the Fortymile and kind of help him finish up a cabin and watch meat while he went back to Eagle in the -- after the fall. And then he would train me for -- you know, train me how to do trapping and taking care of meat, and other things like that. He had been living out in the -- in the village for a while. He had married Adeline Juneby. And so -- so, I decided to go with him kind of as an apprentice, and Charles went mining down near Chicken with some folks. And so we parted ways at that point. And -- and so Mike really did a good job teaching me how to take care of meat. And we went hunting for a moose down on the north fork of the Fortymile. It was about a 40-mile walk in from the road. And we had walked in the high country going over Minicup and Oregon (Wallcut Mountain) and down near Glacier Mountain and then down Cliff -- down towards, I believe it was Clifford Creek. I forget the name of the streams that we were going in there. But -- but we got a moose down on the north fork of the Fortymile and then we went up -- we were going to hunt caribou up on Oregon or Glacier Mountain. Caribou or sheep. And we ended up running into a -- a grizzly sow with three big cubs that charged us. And we ended up having to shoot her. And the cubs left. And so that was the end of our -- of our hunt up into sheep mountains or the caribou mountains. So -- but we packed that meat back down to the cabin. It was about a 15-mile pack, and we did it in stages. It was a big bear. And then he (Mike) left, and so I was taking care of it.

The next year, I went with this guy, John Gaudio. We were gonna head down the Yukon River and find a place for us. We were thinking the Coleen River. We'd go down and then up the Porcupine (River) and the Coleen. Well, it turns out, you know, we stopped by Charlie Edwards who lived at Shade Creek at the time. Charlie and Cher (Cheryl). And uh -- and uh, there was Jan -- Jan and Seymour (Abel) who lived down near the Kandik River across from Glenn Creek. They were there because Jan was having a baby. So, this is the spring of 1977.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And they needed meat. They had all of their dogs and all of Charlie and Cher's dogs, and several people. And Charlie said he had just gotten a sheep up on -- near Fart Creek Bluff. So up on the hill there's a -- there's the Limestone Hogbacks that were, you know, over -- well, they were towards Hillard (Peak). And then a little beyond that, there was a big series of -- of bluffs. Just a little downstream from Fart Creek. And he had gone up there and there were sheep up there and he had shot one and wanted help packing it down. And so, we went over there in his canoe, and walked up on top of the

mountain and there was another sheep up there. And so he shot that one, too. So, there were two of these -- they were young rams. And walked 'em back.

MAT SORUM: Where -- And where? On here. I guess I'm a little unclear.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah, the f --

RANDY BROWN: So, you know where --

MARCY OKADA: The creek was --

RANDY BROWN: -- Fart Creek is, right?

MAT SORUM: No.

MARCY OKADA: Could you -- could you spell that?

RANDY BROWN: F-A-R-T. That's what everybody called it.

MARCY OKADA: Okay. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: It's the -- it's this -- this stream that comes out, kind of downstream from Calico Bluff.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And downstream of -- of Pickerel Slough. Right around that big corner before the long straight stretch to the Seventymile. And -- and there's -- It's -- it's got some sort of a sulfur deposit in there 'cause it -- it comes out with yellow overflow.

MAT SORUM: Got it.

RANDY BROWN: Every year. And if the wind is -- if the wind is drifting down, it comes out into the river and it smells like rotten eggs.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: So, everybody calls it Fart Creek.

MAT SORUM: Funny.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, and -- And so -- and so, that was -- I mean, I wasn't hunting it, but they -- we packed that sheep out. But, we got to eat sheep that spring.

MARCY OKADA: That's a good segue. You can ask questions, too.

MAT SORUM: Is -- is it -- Was that this area? (pointing to a map)

RANDY BROWN: So, um --

MAT SORUM: 'Cause here's --

RANDY BROWN: Calico Bluff is here. I'm having a hard time seeing where the river goes. Is that right there?

MAT SORUM: Mm-hm.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. So, there's the Limestone Hogback.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: Just downstream from the Limestone Hogback, there's this big cliffy area that comes -- drains down to the Yukon (River).

MAT SORUM: Got it.

RANDY BROWN: And it was up on that. It wasn't the hogback, but it was -- it was just to the - - just to the west of the hogback. It's what do they call it? It's a peak there.

MAT SORUM: And they were just -- just above --

RANDY BROWN: Adams Peak.

MAT SORUM: -- the river?

RANDY BROWN: They were -- they were actually way up.

MAT SORUM: Like a 1000 feet, 2000 feet up?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, but, they were -- they were up there. And there's sheep all over the Limestone Hogbacks, too. And over on Hillard. The back side of Hillard and the backside of the Limestone Hogbacks are just these giant cliffs that drop down to the Tatonduk River. And one of the issues with it is that it's all forested on that side of that exposure, so it's these big cliffs and forest all the way to the top on the backside. And --

MAT SORUM: On the north -- on the north facing --?

RANDY BROWN: On the north facing side. And the Limestone Hogbacks though, there's -- there's trails, there's beds, there's all sorts of different activity up there from the -- from the sheep. They use that a lot, and -- as well as Hillard. The back side of Hillard is that way. And -- and so -- I mean, a lot of people -- there was a big burn there in the '60s that went over that whole region by the Limestone Hogbacks, so there's all these big dead trees all over the place that have fallen down. And so, it's a very challenging place to go hunting. And so, so -- I don't -- There's only a few people I know that have gone up there to hunt sheep.

MARCY OKADA: So, Randy, we're going to segue now.

RANDY BROWN: Okay.

MARCY OKADA: You -- you could -- That was a very good introduction of how you got your taste of sheep meat, and you were helping other hunters, and -- And so, what year did you start hunting sheep in -- in what is now Yukon-Charley (Rivers National Preserve)?

RANDY BROWN: It was that year.

MARCY OKADA: It was 19 --

RANDY BROWN: 1977.

MARCY OKADA: '77, okay. Do you remember what that -- that first sheep hunt was like for you? And we'll let Mat chime in, too. But do you remember that first experience?

RANDY BROWN: It was with Dick Cook.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And we went downstream from there and met Dick Cook at the mouth of the Tatonduk River. And he -- he said, "We should go -- we should go hunt sheep." And so, we went up the Tatonduk River to -- there's a place -- there's a rock that has a name called Red. And then beyond Red, there's a -- a -- a pass that goes down. So from the Tatonduk River, you can walk over into Funnel Creek over this pass. And then it goes up high again in a big bluff down near the mouth of Funnel Creek. That -- that meets the -- the -- the mountains right behind the Limestone Hogbacks that comes down on that side. And so, Funnel Creek comes out in there in a kind of a canyon in the Tatonduk. But downstream from there -- and you -- it's a really tough stream to walk up. It's just this narrow *qwueh* (sound effect), heavily forested valley for about three miles to get up to where you can reach really easily going over this pass between Tatonduk and -- and Funnel Creek. And from that point, then you can walk right up Funnel Creek into that big amphitheater between Nimrod Peak and what used to be Squaw Peak (Squaw Mountain). And it's a beautiful -- beautiful place and a lot of open country in there. And

RANDY BROWN

MAY 2, 2023

ORAL HISTORY 2024-04

Page 4 of 41

a lot of sheep occupy that area. I mean, they're not always there, they can be over the top of the -- the hill. Or they can be over in Pass Creek or off at Hiyu, that other mountain that connects on the other side of -- of Nimrod. But we went up there and went hunting up in the -- in the -- towards Nimrod. Towards the pass going up to Nimrod. And -- and --

MARCY OKADA: What time of year was it?

RANDY BROWN: It was June, early June. And --

MARCY OKADA: Good weather?

RANDY BROWN: It was beautiful weather. And --

MAT SORUM: Would you go up looking for rams in June or was it it didn't matter?

RANDY BROWN: Always.

MAT SORUM: Always, yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Because they were -- they were bigger and they -- they didn't have young, so they were -- they were the choice. I mean that was -- You know, back in those days, it was -- people -- people fed themselves on the meat they got, and so there was -- there wasn't too much concern with, you know, seasons. There really wasn't law enforcement patrolling the area. We had hardly any hunters that would come in during that period. Even during the season. And it was -- it was a different time. But that was my initiation to it. And they -- they were lean then, they didn't have fat on them, but they were still very - - very good meat. So the August, you know, that's -- that's -- after that experience, it was always August because -- or September, but it -- it -- they were -- they were in such good condition. They were always fat.

MAT SORUM: At that time of year?

RANDY BROWN: No, August, yeah. And September

MAT SORUM: And the next thing I'm wondering, too, is like sheep -- you know, moose, if you shot a moose in September, or I mean in June, that's a lot of meat.

RANDY BROWN: They're totally skinny, too.

MAT SORUM: Right, but a sheep in June, that's not a lot -- as much meat, and so it's not -- you wouldn't be -- you wouldn't be losing much. Like you --

RANDY BROWN: No, couldn't --

MAT SORUM: -- wouldn't be wasting much because you'd be able to --

RANDY BROWN: You don't.

MAT SORUM: -- go through it.

RANDY BROWN: No, it's -- it's a -- It's the size of an animal that three people can eat in a week.

MAT SORUM: Wow.

RANDY BROWN: And -- when you're eating just meat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And that's what we were doing at the time. And so -- No, it's a totally -- totally do-able piece of meat. They don't keep that long.

MAT SORUM: How is the all-meat diet.? You know, when you're just eating meat for a week straight? How do you feel? Like I -- Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Great.

MAT SORUM: Great, okay. I've never -- never had an all-meat diet.

RANDY BROWN: You know, a lot of people say, "Oh, yeah, well, how do you get all your vitamins? How do you get this? You know, you can't live on just meat." And it's like, I don't know, people have been doing it for an awful long time.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And we did it and it was fine. The challenge is having the fat to go with it, and uh -- because lean meat, you'll be always hungry. Always very hungry. And you'll lose ground. But fat meat is -- it's good. It's a whole -- it's a whole diet as far as I'm concerned. And I lived out there eating just meat for four years. So, it's -- Didn't bother me a bit.

MAT SORUM: Wow. And did you -- did you add other -- veggie -- you know, local -- like, you know, okay, berries? Maybe, but like --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: I mean, but were there other, like, you know -- you know, greens that you were able to tap into?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, a little bit of greens, mostly berries, rosehips, you know, lowbush cranberries in the fall.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Blueberries in August, you know.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and sometimes in July. Cloudberries, those are always really good. You know, there was -- there was -- There was -- And we ate mushrooms at times. There was a big boletus and then coral mushrooms, and puffballs at the right -- right stage, you know, they were good, too. But it was -- it was -- And, you know, if we would go to visit other people that had other foods, we didn't have any problem eating bread or rice or things like that.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But -- Potatoes. But -- but I didn't have 'em, and so when I was out cruising the country, it was -- you know, they could be dried meat, it could be -- Beavers were always -- always had fat, so -- And they were perfect food for traveling on the rivers. They were always there.

MAT SORUM: Would you just plink 'em?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. And then -- and then just cook 'em up?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Or make fire? Or wha -- ?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, no, you didn't -- they'd -- Skin 'em out and take care of 'em just like any other meat. And, but -- There was -- there was fat, and, you know, in a frying pan, and they're wonderful.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And, you know, then it -- it -- It provides that food for your dogs, as well.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And we would -- We had fishnets.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And fishing gear. So, depending on where you were, you know, it might be some whitefish, you know, that you catch on a slough off the Yukon. Or some pike or grayling in the slough off of a clearwater stream. And so, it was -- it was one thing and another. We knew where, you know, all the lakes that had muskrats were, so they were good food, as well.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Black bears, you know, in August or September were always good, and a -- And a small enough piece of meat that you could take it in August and -- and feed yourselves and your dogs, you know, before it goes bad.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Bear meat does not keep anywhere as near as good as the ungulates, you know, like sheep or caribou or moose. But -- but it was -- It was very good.

MAT SORUM: I -- I'll -- I'll -- just one more question in this, 'cause I find it's really interesting that -- You know, I'm trying to imagine, you know, okay, we're going to take off for a few days, I'll bring some meat with me, but the plan is to, like, acquire food as you go?

RANDY BROWN: Always.

MAT SORUM: Did you ever -- did you ever kinda be like, "Ah, I'm kinda not being able to find food right now, and getting kinda hungry." And, you know. Were there moments where, you know, you didn't come into a beaver, or, you know, you didn't -- you couldn't catch a fish? Were like -- Where you didn't maybe eat for a few days or what --?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Okay, that happened?

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And -- and you were -- and that was just -- that was -- you're used to it? It was -- it was okay? You weren't -- You didn't get worried?

RANDY BROWN: No, we weren't worried. I mean it was always -- Yeah, we got the dogs if it ever comes to that.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: You know, so -- We never had to do that, but -- but it was always there in the background.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: But -- But, it was -- We were pretty good at doing -- We got pretty good at doing what we, you know, what we did, you know. We could -- we could take a .22 and walk through a big spruce grove and shoot enough squirrels for the dogs to eat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know, and so we could -- almost always you could put a gillnet out and catch some fish. Very few cases that that didn't work. There were -- there have been some flood waters in the -- in the Kandik River when we were going up the Kandik, when you couldn't find a beaver. And if you did shoot one, you probably couldn't catch it, you know.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It would go down stream. We did figure out how to tell before you shoot a beaver whether they're going to float or not. And it was just cause -- It was a crap shoot

to start with. You know, we'd shoot one and it would sink and, you know, you'd dive down to get it or you'd -- you could see it on the bottom and hook it with a fishing line to get it. Or -- It was -- it was hard. We'd lose a few. And then -- then we realized that what it was -- 'Cause we had all these theories. Said, "Well, if they're really fat. Or if they had just taken a breath before you'd pop them." You know, it's like none of that makes any difference. They got these little tiny lungs to 'em. They're little tiny miniature lungs, and has nothing to do with whether they'll float or not. What does have something to do with it is their stage digestion in their -- They've got this big diverticulum part of their gut and it fills up with air at certain times in their diet. In their digestive process. And they'll -- they will float. And -- and so, when you see 'em swimming, if you -- they -- the head is out and a good bit of the back is out, and they're going slow. 'Cause they can do that if they're motoring really fast, you know, to -- You know, even when they -- they'll sink. But -- but if they're kind of moseying around and their back is out of the water, they're going to float.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It doesn't matter whether they're breathing right before you shoot them or nothing. You know, it's -- Or how fat they are. They're going to float. And so that makes it so that in a place where you might not be able to get 'em, if they've sunk, you can just choose not to pop 'em.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. Wow, that's --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- trial and error and just observing, and talking, and just having that space and time to do that.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Right.

RANDY BROWN: 'Cause -- 'cause when we would dive down and -- and pick 'em off the bottom, you know, when they were -- When we could do that, you know, so there was a sinker, they'd never had air in their guts.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Never. And so that was what it was. And -- and once we figured that out, it became a lot more of a certain thing.

MAT SORUM: And were you always skinning 'em and -- and keeping the -- the fur? No matter the season? Did it matter?

RANDY BROWN: No, we did -- You know, in summer, they were -- they were -- they don't have really an underfur to 'em.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know, they're -- they're not -- You're not going to make anything out of 'em. You might -- you might take 'em as a -- as a seat cushion or something. You know, or a -- You know, most of the cabins that we built back then just had dirt floors, so you could -- you could take a hide and just throw it on the floor and --

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And it's just sort of have something to walk around on that you could then feed to the dogs when it, you know, got -- You know, we'd dry 'em.



MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: We'd -- we would bend these birch circles and we would lash 'em.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Out to the -- to the edges. And it took a little while, but that was -- it was a -  
- it was a nice round piece of fur that you could just, you know, sit on some -- You know,  
a -- a -- a bunk made out of poles, you know, you could lay a few on that and it would  
round the -- the edges off, you know, and -- So they -- We used 'em, but -- but they were  
-- You didn't make clothes out of 'em, or a hat or mittens or anything. So they were --  
they were more dog food and just temporary pads.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: So, going back to that first sheep hunt with Dick Cook.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Um, I'm assuming you guys were processing that meat, and you weren't  
bringing it all out, you guys were eating it?

RANDY BROWN: We ate it up.

MARCY OKADA: As you -- Yep.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. We walked up to that pass. Just about to the pass in -- in Funnel  
Creek, you know, between what used to be Squaw Peak and Nimrod. You know, just shy  
of it 'cause there was wood and there was water there. On the pass, there isn't any -- any  
wood or water. And so, we would go up hiking. You know, somebody would -- would  
hike one direction and somebody another direction. We'd see sheep on the hills over at  
Hiyu, that's a hard place to get to though. And, you know, we would -- we would spread  
out and go hunting. And we ended up getting a big ram right up the side -- the edge of  
Nimrod and brought it down. And so we ate that for a few days right there and explored  
around different caves that were full of sheep poop. And it was -- it was -- it was really  
fun just exploring.

MAT SORUM: You know, when you're on these sheep hunts, like from what I'm hearing is,  
you know, you -- you get your food and that gives you time to be in that space.

RANDY BROWN: Gives you time.

MAT SORUM: And then you just -- you got time to go explore, you don't have to worry about  
food. You can just --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And -- and -- and just -- you don't -- and you don't have any drawing you  
another direction because you -- you got what you --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- need for that time?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. And so you get to learn the country.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know, 'cause -- If you don't have -- If you can't get meat up there, then  
you've got to haul it up there. And while you can haul a beaver, you know, it'll be work,  
but you're not going to be able to stay there for more than a couple of days eating a  
beaver.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and then the dogs will be hungry. You know, I mean, there's everything about it, so, yeah, you need the meat. And -- and you hang it on these poles and put a tarp over it so it's not getting direct sun, and it's not getting rain, and it's getting air. And it'll last -- it'll last for a week or ten days, no problem. And if you catch something that's a little bit off, you throw it to the dogs.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. How many dogs in this group?

RANDY BROWN: Well, I had two, and Little John had three. And Dick had -- I don't know, he had -- must've had three or four.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: He had these great big -- great big gentle huskies up there. They were wonderful. Yeah, so we had a fair entourage.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. So, there was a lot of mouths to feed --

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- on that trip?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. And then we -- and we had some dry fish, 'cause Dick had fished chum salmon the year before, you know.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And so, we had -- the dogs had packed a bunch of that up there, too, so they had -- They had -- You know, anything we couldn't eat off of the sheep, they would eat. But they also had dried chum salmon. So --

MARCY OKADA: So that first sheep hunt, that was just the beginning of the --

RANDY BROWN: I wanted --

MARCY OKADA: You went out sheep hunting every year after that?

RANDY BROWN: Well, yeah. No, not really. But, we would try to get up there as much as we could. And -- and Little John and I, when we ended up going up the Kandik River, we met a few different people. Elizabeth and Mike Sager down on Trout Creek. We saw Dave Evans and Page -- uh, uh, Sage Patton down at Nation (River). We saw Errol (Wilson) who was over at Washington Creek. And then got down to the Kandik. And everybody was saying, "Hey, Fred lives at the mouth of the Kandik, but there's nobody up the river. And he does -- isn't very ambitious about going very far." And so we decided, let's go and take a look. And so we ended up lining all the way 60 miles up the Kandik. And what we'd do is we had one canoe and we had -- we had five dogs. 'Cause he had three, I had two. We -- we would -- one person would line the canoe, the other would walk all the spruce groves to find cabins. 'Cause we were trying to figure out are there usable cabins up here at all.

MAT SORUM: Oh, okay.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and we came across a few old cabins. Only one that was recent. And apparently John Schandelmeier had gone out with somebody from Central. I think it was Ed Gelvin had flown him and a buddy out to a place about 20 miles up the Kandik, and they had just put together this -- It was -- it was a really kind of a lousy cabin. But it was -- it was -- it was just these trees on this bank with fiberglass in between and a flat roof that you couldn't stand up in. And the table was a stump in the middle of the room with a piece of plywood nailed to it. So it was like, "Okay, well, this is pretty rudimentary." But,

it would be a good thing to have available if somebody needed it traveling along the river, so we ended up fixing that place up, too. But, we found a few. Most of the cabins were not usable. In fact, none except for that one was usable in the upper river. They had been built back 1930s, early '40s.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: Before they -- everything shut down for the war effort. And then everybody left. And so that was the -- the age of the cabins that were up there, and they -- And some things were carved in 'em like Evelyn, Bill and Dicky. You know, Evelyn Berglund Shore, you know, she married Bill Grinnell (Willard Fordyce Grinnell). He went down to Fort Yukon, and -- and they got married and came up to the Kandik River. And they had three cabins there. And, little cabins about as big as this table. You know, about 10 by 10 or thereabouts. And -- and they lived there for a while and then they had moved to Beaver Creek. But their cabins eventually caved in. They'd get a leak there where the stove pipe went through and then the wall would collapse in and the roof would -- Anyway, it was -- That stuff was just -- They didn't have plastic or metal or anything else to really do anything. It was -- it was all like tar paper.

MAT SORUM: Wow.

RANDY BROWN: Just laid on top of the poles.

MAT SORUM: Poles, yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And then dirt's on top of that.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But -- but anyway, one of the things that was around every one of these cabins, it's giant piles of caribou antlers and moose antlers from the longevity of the people that had, you know, worked out of there and fed themselves off of the land there. We thought "Oh, this is a good place, we don't need to go to the Coleen (River)."

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And so -- and so that's where we ended up staying. Well, it's a long ways up the Kandik River 'til you get into sheep country. And they're there. We've walked over the Step Mountains, and they have sheep trails and sheep poop on them. So, the Step Mountains are between the Kandik and the Nation, and yeah. And, they have sheep trails on 'em. The Union and Indian Grave Peaks, they have sheep trails on 'em. So it's there, but they're -- they're a long ways to get to. And I've never seen sheep on either of those.

MAT SORUM: Oh, you haven't? You've just seen sheep trails?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, sheep trails and sheep poop and stuff, so --

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: So, I know it's -- You know, there's caribou that go all through that country, too, or they used to. But -- but they have very different poop and trails and everything else, too.

MAT SORUM: So, you would travel between -- there would -- What would -- You -- you guys had a route between the Nation and the Kandik, right?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, on that southwest side of the Step Mountains there was a -- a pathway. And Dave and Sage, they would go from the Nation up over to the Kandik to a place that we called "Middle Manor." It was a -- it was a little cabin, beautiful cabin, on

this big bedrock thing on the Kandik River. About almost 40 miles up the Kandik. And it ended up getting destroyed in a big break-up a few years ago. It just got -- just crushed against the -- the -- It had to be a hell of a -- hell of a break-up. We thought it was going to last forever.

MAT SORUM: (points to map) So this is about 40 miles? Is that what you're saying?

RANDY BROWN: Off -- Well, I can't see where --

MAT SORUM: I know.

RANDY BROWN: Where we are on this, but --

MARCY OKADA: Sorry.

RANDY BROWN: But, there's a -- there's this big mountain right in here. And there's a stream.

MAT SORUM: Right off the river?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Right through this --

RANDY BROWN: But, yeah.

MAT SORUM: That way?

RANDY BROWN: And there's a little stream. We called it, uh, the -- What did we call it? I forget what the name of the stream was, but there's a little stream that comes off of the southwest side of the Step Mountains that flows down to the Kandik River right near the bottom of this --

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: -- thing. And -- and it's -- it's on a big bend in the Kandik and that's where we had that -- that cabin. Where four of us went and built it.

MAT SORUM: Mm.

RANDY BROWN: And that was -- Phew! That had to be '79, maybe? Summer of '79? Dave (Evans) wanted a cabin there, I wanted a cabin there, and Brad Snow came up and he took part in building. And Larry Ricketts who at that point -- Larry Ricketts came along, it -- it could have -- it had to be '79. But anyway, that was it. That was just -- It was a travel cabin. You know, it was -- it was a, I think, 10 by 10.

MAT SORUM: Shelter?

MARCY OKADA: Just a shelter.

RANDY BROWN: A shelter cabin, yeah. And it was just a well-built --

MAT SORUM: Is it -- is it still -- still standing?

RANDY BROWN: No, it got crushed.

MAT SORUM: Oh, that's the one that got crushed. And it was off -- it was on the Kandik?

RANDY BROWN: On the Kandik.

MAT SORUM: Oh the -- Oh, got it. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: It was on a -- It was on a -- There was a big bend in the river with a big bedrock thing with a nice little grove of trees, which we used up a fair number of to build the cabin. And uh -- But it, uh -- there had to have been a break-up that kind of jammed and it must have built up, and -- But it pushed it back, and it's sort of off kilter and logs disjoined, and everything, so --

MAT SORUM: And then your cabin's further upriver?

RANDY BROWN: There was a Indian Grave Creek. Near the mouth of Indian Grave Creek was one of them, and then the other one was just upstream of the park border by about a mile.

MAT SORUM: Oh, okay. Where'd you raise you kids at?

RANDY BROWN: (Points to map) This one.

MAT SORUM: That one?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. I mean we -- we had both cabins. We would go up there to hunt caribou and to trap marten. And down here, as well. (Points to another spot on the map)

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: But -- but there were always more caribou in the upper --

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: -- upper place.

MAT SORUM: Hm.

MARCY OKADA: So --

RANDY BROWN: But, so -- so we would be looking for sheep up here, but we didn't -- I didn't ever find any. I walked this ridge here, as well, and it had sheep sign on it at times. You know, the Kathul (Mountain) -- The bottom end is Kathul and then it goes up around the corner for a ways.

MARCY OKADA: Because you were living in this area off the Kandik, you were searching areas closer for sheep, and you were seeing sheep sign.

RANDY BROWN: But I --

MARCY OKADA: But, did you hit a hot spot at some point?

RANDY BROWN: I'm -- I --

MARCY OKADA: For sheep.

RANDY BROWN: I would make trips to Eagle every year.

MARCY OKADA: Oh, I see.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and if I had time, I would go up into the Tatonduk Mountains. And I have also gone back into Glacier -- Glacier Mountain. And -- exactly where it is on this map. So, this is Oregon, so Glacier is right over here. And they call it Wallcut (Mountain), but we called it Oregon. But --

MAT SORUM: You'd -- you'd make these trips into Eagle, was there a time of the year you'd would make 'em in?

RANDY BROWN: Usually August.

MAT SORUM: August. Okay and that was --

RANDY BROWN: Sometimes June.

MAT SORUM: Was that to -- to resupply?

RANDY BROWN: So, I would mush into town to -- to send fur off to the fur auctions in either Seattle or Vancouver. And that was in -- be March probably or sometimes early April. And -- and send that away. And then I would come back to get the check at some point. You know, sometimes it was June.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Sometimes it was August. And get some sort of supplies. You know, whether it would be a stovepipe or, you know, a new tarp or something like that.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: Rubber boots. They had a pretty good -- pretty good hardware store there.

MAT SORUM: So then on -- on the way back home during these trips --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, then I would take off.

MAT SORUM: You would -- if you had chance, you'd stop and just go. And that was -- Was that more like, I'll go get a sheep and then I get some time to explore the mountains? Be up here?

RANDY BROWN: Well, it's I -- I don't have -- I didn't have anything I had to do.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know. I mean, I needed to be up the Kandik River in -- you know, when the -- when moose hunting. You know, in the fall. In September.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And uh -- Because that's when they're fat and that's when we would get most of our fat for the year. 'Cause a big bull gotten in, you know, the first half of September, we would sometimes -- we would sometimes render 12 gallons of oil off him. Twelve gallons of -- of -- of rendered fat and it keeps. You can pour it into a 5-gallon bucket. You know, you can -- you gotta decant it so you don't get a bunch of impurities in it, but after it -- after it boils up, you know, one big Dutch oven after another, you'd pour it through a screen and -- and let all the stuff settle, you know. 'Cause it's nice, clear, a little bit orange. And then it'll keep -- it'll keep for two years or three years without going rancid.

MARCY OKADA: You just keep it in the bucket?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And you just pour -- scoop?

RANDY BROWN: Well, it's hard. It's brittle.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And so you jam a knife in there, and *phick* (sound effect) pop a chunk off and throw it in a pan. And -- and then, you know, in the summertime when you might have, you know, some lean meat, you got the fat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: 'Cause initially, the first summer out there, I had a 5-gallon can of fat that was rendered for dog food out of those metal buckets. And that was -- You know, I think back on it, you know, well I needed it then, but I didn't want to eat that, I wanted to eat moose fat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Or bear fat. But bear fat goes rancid. It won't keep over the summer.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And same with beaver fat, you can't keep it over the summer.

MAT SORUM: How about caribou?

RANDY BROWN: Caribou, you can.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Caribou and moose both are really hard when they -- when they cool.

MAT SORUM: But sheep wasn't -- that wasn't goal?

RANDY BROWN: It wasn't the goal. It was just go up and --

MAT SORUM: Be in the mountains.

RANDY BROWN: -- have some -- Yeah, be in the mountains and enjoy the -- the freedom that having a sheep gives you to explore. And -- and I had boundless energy at those times, and so you'd just -- you just -- you could walk all over the place.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And the dogs would carry packs, and, you know, so you could -- you could take gear for a couple of days and walk across a valley and up some other mountain. And -- and, you know, that Cathedral Creek is flowing out towards the uh -- um -- towards the Nation River, just on the backside of Nimrod. You know, right near the border. And that's absolutely wonderful down in there, too. And there's sheep all over in that country, as well. But um -- but, it's -- it's -- it's spectacular country to -- to go exploring in.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: So, that was what it -- It was -- it was an adventure.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: That's really what it was.

MAT SORUM: And I really like that 'cause the way I think about it now is, you know, sheep hunting a lot is go to the mountains, you get your sheep, and then you gotta go home. You know, and that -- you know, the you get the -- you get the thing you went for and then the trip's over. And -- and in this is like the reverse. You had to -- you had to get the sheep to continue the trip.

RANDY BROWN: Absolutely.

MAT SORUM: You know, and I think that's like a really exciting mentality and idea that, you know, it gave you this extra time to be in this country and why wouldn't you want to. Because it was -- it was kind of like -- It was like you spent all this time, you know -- you know, like moose hunting sounds to me more like you needed -- the moose -- you had to get this moose.

RANDY BROWN: Right, yeah.

MAT SORUM: And this was the work for -- to like survive throughout the winter. And it was like -- but it's also -- it's also in like challenging country and, you know, like a lot of bugs. I'm just kind of like relating my experiences. Where sheep is like, you're up in these -- you're up in the mountains and the alpine is beautiful, like, terrain and --

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- and you just, like, want it to last forever, but it can't because usually you're limited on how much --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- support you have like food or whatever. But --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- when you get that sheep, now you've got all this extra time?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: And like you said, you weren't in any rush to head back.

RANDY BROWN: No.

MARCY OKADA: You had that leisure time.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Interesting.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and, you know, in August, the king salmon had all gone past and it was -- You know, they're great. You -- you wouldn't want to miss that. I mean, now it's such low levels, you know, it's -- it's -- it's shut down, but back then, we just -- We never got shut down. It may be that somebody was going to or pronounced it, but we didn't ever know about it.

MAT SORUM: And did you -- For the Chinook, did you go down to the Yukon to catch them? Or could you --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: You -- you weren't catching them off the Kandik or anything?

RANDY BROWN: No, there were occasional Chinook salmon would be up there, but we never saw any sort of numbers. I think the most I saw at one time was three.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: In a -- just a clear pool as we were floating over. You know, they moved out of the way. But then, you know, you might go the whole trip with your dogs running the beach and they might come across, you know, one in August laying on the beach, you know, that's -- ravens have been eating on or something.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: But, it was a -- there wasn't a run of them as you would think of it.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: There may have been a handful that spawned up there.

MAT SORUM: So the timeline, you know, you -- I guess, I'm hearing, you'd go down to -- to Eagle in the summer to collect your check and then on the way back was it -- I mean, did you -- were -- were you judicious about your trips down to the Yukon and back? Like -- like did you go -- go collect your check in June, come back to your cabin, and then in August head down to go get salmon and then come back? Like how did that go down?

RANDY BROWN: Since I -- I went up the Kandik River in the fall to hunt moose.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And I had my canoe with me.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And so, I didn't -- I -- I only spent one spring up the Kandik River, and there's no birds that go through.

MAT SORUM: No waterfowl.

RANDY BROWN: There's no big south facing bluffs that bears are going to hang out on.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It's a very rough place to make a living at in the spring.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And so, I would always go down to the mouth of the Kandik River, and -- and, you know, 'cause there were the big lakes between the Kandik and -- you know, and the -- the -- on the -- on the flats beside the mouths of it, both on the south side. I mean the west side and the east side.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.



RANDY BROWN: And so they would -- And then, there were -- there were these open leads along the Yukon that would form and then the sloughs around there. So you'd get geese coming in early and some of the -- some of the dabbling ducks coming in early to hang out around those open leads until the lakes open up along the edges. And you'll get a bunch of dabblers, you know, just hanging out in those places. And then there were on, you know, on the big open south-facing hills of Kathul Mountain, there would be bears wandering all over the place. Sometimes, you'd see three or four of them at a time. Maybe a grizzly over there and a couple of black bears over here and sow with cubs over there, you know. And you'd be across the river, across the Yukon, and watching this with a scope trying to figure out, okay, which one can I get. You know, is there a way to approach this one or that one, you know, and be able to -- to figure out where you are as you're trying to walk up out of their scent, you know, and -- and when do you go -- You know, you pick out vantage points. Trees or rock outcroppings that if we go up this gully, you know, then we can move across over to there. Try to keep the dogs quiet on the other side of the river while we try to go across. Anyway, it was always a -- it was always a great adventure. But, there was a lot of food to be had down there. And then when the lakes opened in -- in May. You know, where they were totally open, you'd get these big rafts of scoters, you know, white-winged scoters and surf scoters, and -- and long-tailed ducks. And it was just this cacophony of just racket. You know, there was -- They were so wonderful to be in that situation, you know, where this big migration is going through. 'Cause none of -- Hardly any of them nest there.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: They just are going through. But they come through kind of mid-May when the -- You know, once the lakes open up.

MAT SORUM: When would you -- would you -- would you, uh -- You'd dog team down to the mouth?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: In the wi -- in -- in -- in late -- late spring?

RANDY BROWN: So, I needed to get my canoe.

MAT SORUM: So, what?

RANDY BROWN: I needed to go get my canoe. So -- so what I would do is, after that, you know, mid-May --

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: -- time, I would walk over the mountain. I would go upstream from the mouth of the Kandik towards Glenn Creek, and then walk straight up that hill and walk the ridges over to the Kandik. It was about a 17-mile walk. And drop down right near -- it's a mile and a half down from (inaudible).

MAT SORUM: (Interrupts and points to map) Right here. These ridges. And then -- Yeah, it's --

Or maybe here?

RANDY BROWN: Well, there's a stream that comes down here. We used to mush up that stream. We called it Other Creek.

MAT SORUM: Was it upstream or downstream of the big horseshoe?

RANDY BROWN: It's upstream of it.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, it's almost to -- It's just -- The border of the park is -- is just -- just upstream from that str -- from that creek.

MAT SORUM: I think it's this one. Is it? And that stream goes way, like --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, and then there's --

MAT SORUM: -- and connects?

RANDY BROWN: -- Wolf Creek on this side.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And --

MAT SORUM: That's the next pass.

RANDY BROWN: We called it Other Creek. Yeah, it's a pretty steep one for going from this side up the other way.

MAT SORUM: So, you would hike up this mountain and just walk?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, we would walk and drop down right at the mouth of that stream.

MAT SORUM: Oh, that was a handy way to do it.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: It was a great way.

RANDY BROWN: It was.

MAT SORUM: Cut down a lot of travel.

RANDY BROWN: It's beautiful high country --

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: -- up there. And -- and there were sheep sign at times, but we never ran into 'em. I think, it's -- it's -- it's rare. But I think --

MAT SORUM: Hm.

RANDY BROWN: I think -- So there were -- there were a lot of other places we saw sheep along the river, you know. Because down -- downstream of the mouth of the Seventymile, for example, there's a big shale bluff on the south side of the Yukon and there've been sheep up there. And I used to hunt up the -- When Karen (his wife, Karen Kallen Brown) was teaching in Eagle, I would go down and hunt up the Seventymile River. And uh, yeah. And -- and at the narrow place. The Seventymile, you know, it goes -- it goes up one way and then makes a --

MAT SORUM: Yup.

RANDY BROWN: -- almost a 180-degree turn. And in that narrow place, there were almost every year there's sheep sign there.

MAT SORUM: Hm.

RANDY BROWN: And they're right down on those sand bars.

MAT SORUM: Real close.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Marcy, is it okay if I mark this up a little bit?

MARCY OKADA: Sure. Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And, I mean, we never ran into 'em. But -- but I think that was -- They had to be coming from Glacier Mountain.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and then they would -- they would sometimes get onto that big bluff just downstream of the Seventymile. It must be this one right here (looking at the map). And we've seen them there in the winter as well as the summer. So, I don't know what they do. They -- they -- You know, we would think, "Well, they're gonna be afraid of wolves, so they've gotta stay up in that high country." I don't think that's the case at all. I think they do whatever they want to do and they deal with the threat when -- when they see it.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And so -- I mean, they've been on -- they've been on Calico (Bluff) before. They've been on Eagle Bluff before. I went downstream with Karen one time, and they were down on the bank on the north side across from -- across from Eagle Bluff and down river a couple of miles.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know, before you get to, you know, any of the streams down there. And -- And that's -- It's all flats.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But they're there.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: So, I don't know. They -- they go all over the place.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: We never did go up Sorensen (Mountain) or Twin Mountain. But -- but some people did that were lived along the river.

MAT SORUM: Do you know of people that would go up the Charley (River)? I mean, you've got to go a long ways up until --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, it's about 40 miles.

MAT SORUM: Right. And -- and -- and -- and then at some point, I don't know if -- I guess -- I know it gets, you know -- you can't -- you can't just go up in a jet boat, right? Like there's --

RANDY BROWN: I don't know, but none of us had jet boats.

MAT SORUM: Nobody had jet boats? Yeah. Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: That was a -- a financial decision that none of us could make.

MAT SORUM: A limitation.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: But, I mean, you know, were there people lining canoes up --

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm. Hm-mm.

MAT SORUM: -- in that country?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, but it was a little bit of a -- It was -- it was not near as desirable as the Tatonduk Mountains or Glacier Mountain, because -- because there were a -- a huge number of hunters would go in there.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: They would fly in and they would boat up with jet boats, and so there was much more of a public interface. You know, of -- of people from town.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: That would go in over there on -- on Twin and -- and Sorensen. It was just - it was just a different kind of a place.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, okay.

RANDY BROWN: And uh -- and -- and a lot of times, you know, there's angst between, you know, the river people and the, you know, the trophy hunter types. And -- and there was no getting around that, so it was kind of uncomfortable.

MAT SORUM: So, you guys kind of had to find the spaces that --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- that you could fit into?

RANDY BROWN: Feels like, you know.

MAT SORUM: And -- and --

RANDY BROWN: There was that. Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: So --

RANDY BROWN: There was that.

MARCY OKADA: So, Randy, we have a unique situation here where you -- you were hunting when you first arrived in the country. And then, now you -- You're -- When did you move to Fairbanks? And then, we're trying to -- We have a good chance here to do a comparison when you were hunting sheep and when you were living out there and then now you're going back into the Preserve and looking for sheep. And are you hitting some of those same spots? And so, we're going to try and do a compare and contrast type of interview. So you left -- ?

RANDY BROWN: In '91.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah. Okay, that's right.

RANDY BROWN: I -- I came to Fairbanks. And our kids were -- were just about four and just about eight when we moved in there. And I started going back to college. And I would go up onto the Yukon usually through Circle, sometimes through Eagle up the Seventymile to hunt moose in the fall. And then when my older boy, Jed, got big enough and wanted to -- wanted to go hunting for sheep, we started going out hunting sheep. We would go up into Tatonduk Mountains and -- and hunt sheep up there. We've been there, I think, three different times. And then we went up into Glacier Mountain one time. And --

MARCY OKADA: So, you were going back to local spots that you were familiar with?

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm.

MARCY OKADA: And taking your son there?

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm. Yeah. And then my younger boy, he and his wife came up a couple of summers ago and we were going to -- we were going to either hunt caribou out on the ridge, you know, going towards Glacier Mountain and Oregon, and -- and -- or we were going to go up on the Limestone Hogbacks. We didn't have time to go all the way up Tatonduk, but we had time to climb up there and look for sheep there.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And, it was unfortunate, but it was socked in.

MAT SORUM: Mm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: Absolutely socked in from the first day we got up on top of the -- the summit there. We went into past Minicup, and down into -- what do they call it? That alder patch just beyond Minicup, going towards Oregon. There was wood there, you know, and there was water there, and that's been a camp spot I've used in the past. But, it's -- And there were caribou. There was fresh caribou sign there, too, except we couldn't see 50 feet. It was raining or drizzling and foggy. For two days, we were out there, and it was not clearing up. And we sat on certain places, and, you know, you could see a trail, but it's 50 feet away. And so, we finally decided, well let's -- let's go and do something else. Go fishing on the Yukon or something for -- for pike, and maybe it'll clear off. And we had in mind that we might go up the Limestone Hogbacks that time. And --

MARCY OKADA: So, access was via -- your access into those areas were via --?

RANDY BROWN: Well, so the -- the -- Going out on the ridge towards Oregon, it was just -- we drove the truck up to the pass.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Well, to the summit there.

MARCY OKADA: And then you -- In regards to the limestone areas, you were --

RANDY BROWN: We went down by boat.

MARCY OKADA: You were going by boat and then walking in?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, except -- it's all clear except Hillard and the Limestone Hogbacks.

It's just totally socked in from about halfway down the mountain up. You know, we were going like, "Okay, well, that's not going to work." And so -- So it -- it -- it looked like it cleared up another day out at Eagle and we went back up onto the summit, but the summit was all fogged in again, so we didn't -- we didn't make it. But, that's sometimes what happens in the mountains.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah. So that -- That actually leads to the next question, is what are some of the challenges that may hinder your ability to go sheep hunting every year?

RANDY BROWN: Well, you know, part of it is that -- that I have a life here, and so there's the travel, and then also, I'm not in the same situation I was in back in the '70s and '80s where I do -- I don't have the leeway to go up into the mountains and just sit there and eat a sheep. And -- and I -- I -- I often take one dog with me, and just kind of as a bear guard in camp. But, uh, it's -- It's different. And so I'm in the case where you were talking about Mat, where you get it and you dry it -- you know, hang it, dry it for a day, and then you're kind of on time because it's going to go bad in August in, you know, 70, 80 degree temperature or whatever it gets there during the day, and -- or in drizzly rain and stuff. And so, if you want to save it, you got to walk it out 'cause it's a couple of days to get out of the -- those mountains. You got to walk it down and over to Tatonduk and then paddle down Tatonduk. You know, some people get up the Tatonduk in jet boats. And it's a -- it's a challenging river though. There's ways to -- ways to screw up doing that.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: There's ways to -- to -- to screw up with a canoe, too, but -- but I've done a lot of canoeing on those rivers and so I -- I fancy that I can pick out those spots that are dangerous and pull aside and walk it down or line it up or whatever.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Rather than get into trouble.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: So back then, what type of planning did you have to do in order to have a successful sheep hunt? Like was there much planning? 'Cause it -- it doesn't sound like it. You basically could just go wander into the mountains and if you get a sheep, you get a sheep.

RANDY BROWN: It was totally opportunistic.

MARCY OKADA: And uh --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Floating down from Eagle, "Hey, those mountains look pretty nice, should we go up for a week or two?" "Yeah, let's go!" We'd go.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah, versus now where it does take quite a bit of planning because you're coming from town?

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah.

MAT SORUM: And you're planning around other events?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And -- and your job and other people's lives?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. And -- and in contrast with, you know, the first year, where we went out with Charlie Edwards and then with Dick (Cook), you know, we're only looking for a legal ram right now. It's not -- it's not a sheep, it's -- it's a -- it's a legal sheep. And, you know, and I -- I suppose it should've been back then, too, but it wasn't. That was not how people were doing things.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and there wasn't -- It -- it -- It was a difficult situation, you know, to -- in order to be legal out there, too, because there was nobody in Eagle that sold licenses.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And if you didn't have a car, if you weren't going to Fairbanks, you didn't have a way to get one.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And sometimes -- Like, there was a -- there was a trooper one time and a BLM ranger that made a trip down, you know, a snowmachine trip down the river to visit with people, and -- and they offered to give licenses out to people that didn't have 'em. And -- and even if you had a license, you can't get a -- you know, a hunting tag for it. You know, for a particular species. And I wrote -- I wrote a guy at Fish and Game one time and says, "How do we do this?" He says -- he says, "Just do your best, don't waste anything." And, you know, that was his comment because he didn't have an answer either. And so, I don't know, we did our best. I mean, people didn't -- people didn't waste anything. They -- they got what they needed, and -- But they -- You know, when I was first out there, I had no idea what day it was. It's not like, "Okay, you know, hunting season starts today, you know."

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Or closes today. Or -- I -- I didn't have a calendar. I didn't -- I just didn't have it, you know. And maybe there were some people that did, but I think a lot of people were in that position. I didn't have a watch or a clock or anything either. I didn't --

MAT SORUM: I mean, you guys were living on -- in -- You were choosing where you lived because you were spacing yourselves out, so everyone had enough food?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Right? And so, there was -- It was -- it was already managed.

RANDY BROWN: Good in trapping in the mountains.

MAT SORUM: You were managing harvest.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Locally.

RANDY BROWN: Well, and there --

MAT SORUM: And that's -- that's unique.

RANDY BROWN: There was almost nobody out there at the time from Fairbanks. You know, we might, you know, see one boat go downriver. You know, a big old wallowing riverboat, you know, from somebody that was gonna try to hunt moose along the Yukon. But, there were no throngs of people out there back in the '70s. Sometime I think in the -- as the '80s got along, it -- it got to be more popular, but certainly not in the '70s. It was -- There was almost nobody there. Yeah, that whole stretch.

MARCY OKADA: So, now we're kind of going to do some questions about your observations over time.

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm

MARCY OKADA: Because you're going to some of the same spots that you used to go to when you were living out there. And then, going to those same places now, have you noticed any changes in the sheep populations or the local populations?

RANDY BROWN: No. I mean it was always -- You know, you couldn't necessarily count on there being, you know, a big herd of sheep here or a big herd of sheep there. It was always, you know, you'd -- you'd walk up a valley, you'd be looking at different places, checking out for 'em. And if you didn't see 'em, you'd walk over into another valley. You know, it was always that sort of a thing. I know we've met quite a number of hunters up Tatonduk River, in Funnel Creek and Pass Creek over -- over the last, I don't know, 15 years, you know, that -- I've gone up there five times maybe over that period of time. And -- and we've run into people every time up there. And there was a guy from Anchorage that was up there and they -- all of the people except for me are up there with a jet boat. They run a jet boat up and park it somewhere, and -- and then walk over into Funnel Creek and up somewhere. Or park it down near the mouth of Pass Creek. But Pass Creek had a big -- a big burn in it. And down towards the mouth these trees had burned really deep into the soil, and these trees just slid right down into the valley bottom. It's a nasty place right now to get by. But farther up it opens up. But it's -- it's a more difficult approach to the mountain, because the mountain is forested up a ways and -- and there's all these dead burned trees laying around on the side of the mountain. Side of -- you know, that face of Nimrod and the ridge going over towards Hiyu. And that used to be just completely walkable forest.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: You know, back in the --

MAT SORUM: Wow.

RANDY BROWN: -- in the '70s and '80s. And not anymore. And so -- so that limits how people get into there. But there was one guy from Anchorage, and he was bringing his two teenage kids along and they were going up to the pass between Nimrod and -- Sorry, I don't remember the new name for Squaw Peak.

MARCY OKADA: Jëjezhuu Tr'injàa

RANDY BROWN: Jëjezhuu Tr'injàa?

MARCY OKADA: Hm--mm.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and they were camped right on that pass. And so we run into 'em there a few times. And -- and my camp is -- You know, the camp that I have used over the years is downstream from there. It's -- it's on Funnel Creek, so there's water, there's wood. And then I just walk up into the country that way.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Either up on the -- the pass going over to Pass Creek, or, you know -- and up onto the Nimrod ridge or up the valley, and, you know, looking up on the side hills. Sometimes up the ridge right behind where my camp is -- It's a forested ridge all the way up to the top and then you're into that big scree slope of the -- of the mountain up there. And -- and all the different -- you know, these limestone towers and sheep trails going through 'em. It's a -- It's just a good place for -- to base out of in my opinion.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And uh -- But these guys up on the pass, they want Fannin sheep.

MAT SORUM: Mm.

MARCY OKADA: Oh.

RANDY BROWN: And they are not going to -- A full curl Fannin sheep and they want to make a full mount with it. And so, I've seen them there several years running, and they never get anything 'cause they're not going to shoot a white one. And, I don't know, they -- that's a -- that's a pretty narrow order.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: A full curl Fannin? Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Did you bump into Fannin sheeps in your time? Do you remember?

RANDY BROWN: Always.

MAT SORUM: Okay, you'd -- you'd find these? With --

RANDY BROWN: I've seen them all the way from straight brown to straight white, and a lot of them that have a, you know, a kind of a saddle over the shoulders, you know. Brown sides.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Dark rump.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And one time, my older boy and I were on the side of Nimrod with Funnel Creek down below and the big scree slopes on the other side, and we saw this white



sheep. And -- and I don't take a telescope along, I just look. And I've got a three to nine Leopold, you know, and I zoomed in and I look over there. There's three sheep. There's a white one and two brown ones, all rams.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And we were too far away to know whether they're legal or not, but they -- they look -- they looked big, you know. And this scree slope, you can see it running all the way across there and then there's these -- these gullies as you get towards the -- the lower end of it. And we decided we're going to go straight down off of Nimrod and then straight up the other side and see if we can get there before the sheep get there.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And we didn't, but we got there just after them. And so, we got up on -- There's these rocky ridges, you know, and then there's these swales and you could see the -- the trail going on each one of them. And we got up on this one and there's the sheep. The white sheep is on the next one over. And I always wondered how they get that -- the -- the brooming --

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: -- on the horns, because they're -- they're really tough.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Hm.

RANDY BROWN: And I'm going like, "Okay, so a tip here and a tip there and they're charging each other, is that going to break it?"

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: I don't see it, there's no --

MAT SORUM: Yeah. Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: They're just going to slip off of each other.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: This sheep is standing up by this limestone tower and he's getting up on his back legs and BAM, hitting this rock, you know, about 300 yards away from us straight across. And he's whacking this rock with his horns. Practicing, right.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And he's doing it over and over. And I thought, "That's how they break 'em." They break 'em because as soon as they get full curl --

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: -- that's the first thing that hits, is the tips. So, he's over there bashing into this rock, and so we lined up and popped him and down he went. And we're still looking for the brown ones. And so we run across on this -- on this trail, and -- Yeah, 'cause he had two -- two broomed tips, you know. And -- and we ran across on this trail and the two brown ones were just cresting this ridge between a couple of towers, but the sun was right behind them, and so we could see 'em, but we couldn't tell whether they were full curl or not. But it was like -- They're totally brown, so it was -- it was a -- It was pretty neat. But, what I've seen -- I've gotten -- I've gotten sheep that have brown on 'em up there, ones that have been all white. I don't care, one way or another.

MARCY OKADA: You're eating it.

RANDY BROWN: Sure, I'm just going for food.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Well, if they were all brown and there's a few white ones, people would be going for the white ones.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: So, you know.

RANDY BROWN: Well, so those Fannin sheep I've been seeing down in the northern Wrangells, too. There was a fella who wrote a paper back in the '70s on seeing them down there up the Nabesna River.

MAT SORUM: Hm.

RANDY BROWN: And then there's been, you know, some genetics papers showing that Stone sheep and Dall sheep are the same. They're the same species and it's just color phases along the north-south gradient. So --

MARCY OKADA: Have you noticed any changes in the -- Now that you're targeting rams, full curl rams, have you noticed any changes in the number of them when you go to these areas?

RANDY BROWN: So, there was -- there were a couple of folks that were camped on that pass between Funnel Creek and Pass Creek and down the ridge from Nimrod. And they thought that -- That year, we didn't get a -- we didn't get a sheep. It was the -- the only time I've been up there where I didn't.

MAT SORUM: And what year was this? I can't remember.

RANDY BROWN: I don't remember exactly. It was 2017, maybe?

MAT SORUM: Oh, okay. Alright.

RANDY BROWN: And they thought -- They had seen a couple of other people up there, and then one guy, you know, that was skirting around on the -- I don't know where he came from.

MAT SORUM: Sure.

RANDY BROWN: But -- but -- But, and so, there may be people that fly in and get landed somewhere. There used to be a place, a bar on the -- on the Tatonduk River where a Super Cub could land. It looked really sketchy to me, and the bar isn't supportive of that anymore. But -- but I don't know where everybody comes from. The -- the people that I've seen up there have all come by boat and -- and from up the Tatonduk, and then the walk in. But -- but these guys thought that the number of people up here has depleted the rams, the legal rams. I don't buy that for a second. If you look at the -- if you look at the Ogilvies (Mountains), this is just a tip off the edge of it, and it is just *wocccch* (sound effect) this mass as far as the eye can see of sheep country.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Big, beautiful limestone mountains all the way back this way. And all the way north, you know, going almost to the Porcupine (River). And it's -- It's this massive, big mountain range that is full of sheep and it's all inaccessible. I mean, I know there's a guy that had -- had been -- when we were out here, we knew there was a guy that was guiding with horses on the Canadian side.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Hm.

RANDY BROWN: And they were -- they would drive the horses in from the Dempster (Highway), I believe, and they operated out of Dawson (City). And they had two or three different cabins. One on the south fork Tatonduk, one on the -- a couple on the north fork, I think. And -- and they would -- they would -- they had airstrips that they would land people with on, and then they would haul 'em around with horses. And they would be hunting all sorts of stuff, you know, but including sheep. And, but, we've looked, you know, from up in the -- in the Tatonduk Mountains, we have looked out into that country and realized this is a massive population of sheep. And what we're seeing here, is just the fringe.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And so, I think they move all over the place. And I don't think that, you know, the few people that ever get up there and get a sheep is depleting it at all.

MARCY OKADA: So, are you seeing ewes and lambs and --?

RANDY BROWN: Lots.

MARCY OKADA: Okay. Have you noticed any changes in sheep behavior when you're out there spotting them?

RANDY BROWN: No. In general, they're not really very afraid of people. Which doesn't mean they're going to let you walk right up on 'em if they're watching you. But, you know, they'll stand up on a -- up on a ridge and watch you. And they don't -- they don't really -- They're not running away or afraid of you or anything.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah. Or planes flying over or really scatter them?

RANDY BROWN: Well, I don't know about that. I haven't seen planes up there really. But -- but I don't think that -- I don't think that we're making a dent in it.

MAT SORUM: Did you ever -- You know, do people ever come in from --

RANDY BROWN: The Nation (River)?

MAT SORUM: -- the Nation?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: It's a bit of a poke in there.

RANDY BROWN: It's like a 10-mile walk across a black spruce tussock ridge, so it's a very challenging place to go in. It gets into sheep country right away though and it's right on the border.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. But, it's a very -- You're not going to pack it out.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Of course, we --

MAT SORUM: You weren't doing it. So, was there ever any exploration? Did you guys ever -- you know -- I mean, you know, was that like, "Oh, let's go check it out on the north end over here."?

RANDY BROWN: We -- we did some exploring down across, you know, the -- Hard Luck Creek, you know, comes up and takes turns around in there. We have -- we have accessed it. I have accessed it from the Tatonduk River though. Across from --

MAT SORUM: And you just kept moving north?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Cool.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. 'Cause it's all sheep country, you know. And it's all mountains. And -  
- and, you know, in the old days, we didn't really pay that much attention to that line  
there.

MAT SORUM: That's what I was -- been wanting to ask is the --

RANDY BROWN: No, well, that's how we knew there were horse trails all over out there, is  
we went up -- we went walking up there into the north fork of Tatonduk. The south fork  
is a -- it's a -- it's a -- you -- you -- you don't get into a valley that you can wander around  
in for a long ways east. But, the north fork is a -- is a nice, you know, U-shaped valley  
with sheep mountains on both sides and forested. And there's sheep trails all over, there  
were back then. I mean, not sheep trails, there were sheep trails all over, but there were  
horse trails all over the place. And so, it was -- it was quite different and -- and there --  
there are people that go in there hunting, but it's such big country. And the impact I think  
is so small by comparison to say, you know, the Deltas or the Alaska Range or some of  
the Brooks Range places. I've been flying over -- over the Marsh Fork in the Canning  
River and seen people on, you know, four or five different bluffs all at one time.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know. Being both sides hunting sheep. And so, I think this -- -this --  
the hunting pressure here is low. That would be my guess from seeing it at that time of  
the year.

MAT SORUM: But the opposite side, you know, the Charley --

RANDY BROWN: Is different.

MAT SORUM: -- is just -- is high enough where it kept subsistence users out. They just -- they  
had to --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: -- work the margins a bit more.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and Glacier Mountain is -- is just remote enough and it's a non-  
motorized hunt, so somebody's gotta walk 20 miles to get there and not too many people  
do.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. Yeah. And were there old mining trails back in the day to get up into that  
country?

RANDY BROWN: Not really. The mining trails went from Eagle up the Seventymile and then -  
- Or up the Mission Creek and then over the Seventymile. There were some -- some  
mines down in Teddy's Fork. Teddy's Fork is where that -- that bunch of alders is on the  
-- If you take -- if you go out of Eagle to the pass, you know, it's about 12-13 miles out.  
Then the Glacier Mountain trail goes, you know, and you get up onto Minicup, which is  
that first big rise there, and then it drops down into the headwaters of Teddy's Fork,  
which is all these giant alders that used to be a disaster to get through. They're still not all  
that easy, but then it goes up onto the hill going towards Oregon and then you're up  
above timberline. There's no wood. There is a place where there's water, just one though.  
And -- and, you know, it's a clear shot all the way. It's beautiful walking, but it's up and  
down and hauling a sheep out would be really challenging.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: So, this next question is kind of looking to see if you've had to adapt in any way when it comes to sheep hunting. Like are there some challenges that expose themselves? And then have you had to modify anything or is the style of sheep hunting you do still the same as -- as you did back then? I -- I -- We talked about the lifestyle versus, you know, now living in town and going out and looking for sheep, but anything else that comes to mind about newer challenges that -- that you're having to adapt to?

RANDY BROWN: Well, my eyesight is declining.

MARCY OKADA: Oh, I didn't mean to -- Well, I mean --

RANDY BROWN: Isn't that what you meant? (laughing)

MARCY OKADA: No, I just -- I mean, I guess, you're not seeing a lot -- You're not competing with a lot of outside hunters it sounds like. Not as far as the local areas you go to. So, that's not really --

RANDY BROWN: It doesn't bother me even in the slightest.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: And I understand they're there. They're out there doing exactly the same thing I am and that's fine.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: I don't care. I'm just -- I don't feel possessive or territorial or anything, over any of it. And uh --

MAT SORUM: Was there a time that you did?

RANDY BROWN: No, I never did.

MAT SORUM: Never did?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: So, when Dick Cook said, "No, time to -- time to move on," was that -- was that -- was that surprising, or was that --?

RANDY BROWN: You know, at the time, I'm going like, "Well, how about if we get -- make sure we're at least a mile from your place, you know." I was thinking Santa Fe, right. And he's like, "No." And -- and as soon as -- as soon as I had spent a little time out there, I realized, "Oh, yeah. I was absolutely nuts." And it came from a perspective that is so different and this is -- this is a -- It's a different place.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. And do you -- so, you know, going back -- If you -- if you could have done this in Santa Fe, let's say, do you think you could have lived a mile away? Was, you know, if there was -- Was there such high game? Do you come from such a high game density area or, you know, where that would have been possible? Or was it just being you being green to kinda this lifestyle?

RANDY BROWN: Yes, I was totally green. You know, I was -- I didn't -- I didn't know what I was going to do. I mean, it was really a -- a good thing that I was able to connect with Mike Potts and go out and really be an apprentice there. Because there were some people that did come out into the woods, had no idea what they were doing. And they would build cabins that were totally non-functional. You know, they -- they either, you know, spike 'em together, and put 'em up, and then try to jam moss in which doesn't work. It doesn't -- It's not a way to, you know, to seal a cabin up. Or they would -- or they would

build on this cutbank, you know, with the river coming across just because it's such a great view. And after all, it probably has been this way for 100 years. Except no, it hasn't been that way for 100 years. And it won't stay that way for 10 years, you know. And they'd get their cabins taken off the banks and things like that, so -- It was -- it was -- And taking care of meat. You know, there were people who didn't know how to take care of meat. They'd put it in a hole in the ground. It's like, "No, don't do that." "It's colder." "I don't care, you need air in there. You need air on it. And it's not going to keep there, it's going to spoil." And so that -- you know, all of those things, I -- I learned with -- with Mike. And Adeline, she sewed me my first pair of mittens and mukluks and hat, and I used those patterns, you know, whenever they would wear out to, you know, cut and sew -- sew my own clothes, you know, when I started tanning skins and -- and things. It was -- that was hugely valuable to have that experience. So --

MARCY OKADA: So, being that sheep hunting season overlaps with moose and caribou hunting season, does this pose any challenges now that you're -- ?

RANDY BROWN: So I went up there one time, up to Tatonduk River, I was hunting with a buddy of mine, Scott MacLean, who I've -- who I've known for -- for years. And we traveled up the Tatonduk River to that -- to where that pass goes over to Funnel Creek. And this is September, I don't know, September 10, something like that. Sheep season was still open and moose season was open. And we hadn't seen a track one on the way up there, and we said, "Well, let's take a walk up in the sheep mountains." And he had a friend of his from Seattle along and that guy didn't think he could walk over the -- over the pass and up -- up Funnel Creek, so he stayed on the river and we went up there and -- and ended up getting a sheep. We saw -- Well, we went -- we went up and then climbed way up onto this one ridge, so we could look around. We'd actually seen a couple of sheep up there and we walked up there, and -- and they had disappeared. And down in Funnel Creek, there was this group of four rams that were walking right down the river. And it's -- One of the cool things about it is that it's steep enough and it's all bedrock on the bottom. So, you know, a rock will sometimes get pushed 'cause it's -- the water's really traveling fast and it'll -- it'll *clunk clunk clunk clunk*. You know, you can hear it from a long ways away. And these sheep were walking right on that bedrock so it was a *clack clack clack clack*. So we could hear it from way up the side of the mountain. And so we, again, instead of being down climbing up on those sheep that were on that trail, we -- we ran down the ridge and dropped down thinking we were going to get ahead of them if they're walking right down the stream. And they didn't show up, so we started walking one of these little, you know, limestone gullies after another going up. And we got right straight over the top of 'em, four rams. And we're like -- We're looking at 'em and there was enough noise from the stream that they had no idea we were there. We were just like 50 feet over 'em, and they were all bedded down, right next to this big cliff.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: And we were trying to figure out how do we tell if they're -- you know, if they're full curl or not 'cause you're looking straight down on them rather than sideways.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And it was -- We -- we -- we looked at 'em for a long time and we couldn't tell. And so, we started -- I started throwing these rocks down there. They totally ignored 'em.

MARCY OKADA: Wow.

RANDY BROWN: Totally ignored 'em.

MAT SORUM: Just used to rocks falling -- They're used to rocks falling.

MAT SORUM: -- their whole life.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. And so, they're sitting there chewing and sitting there looking down on the stream. And finally, one of the rocks landed a little close to one of 'em and it got up and started walking. And that one had two brooms, and so, Scott ended up taking that one and -- and the other three just stood 50 feet away.

MAT SORUM: He was the leader.

RANDY BROWN: He had to be the leader, or -- And they -- they were not full curl. None of 'em. None of those three were. But they just sat there and -- Well, stood there and watched us. And it -- so it started getting dark, which doesn't happen in August, but started getting dark and we -- we said, "Well, we gotta -- we gotta to head back." But we didn't bring pack frames to pack it out, so we just tied it on a pole, you know, so the meat was getting air. And started down to the creek. And this big full out Fannin ram, a full curl fannin ram, comes walking right up the creek. It just sees us, we were 50 feet away or so, and he walks up on the other side, stands there sideways, looking at us for a minute and then goes into the trees. And we'd -- had decided we weren't going to take him just because we were going to pack this one out and we were hoping to get a moose. Well, we didn't get a moose that year, but -- but it was -- And so -- so, again, in retrospect we were like, we should have taken him. But if we had taken him, we would have spent the night up there, and Scott's buddy was nervous about everything up there. Anyway, he came from Oregon or somewhere, but --

MAT SORUM: And he would've been nervous if you wouldn't have showed back up?

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah. But he wouldn't have been able to do anything about it, but he'd have been scared.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And --

MARCY OKADA: He was still at the river?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Still on the river. And so -- and so we just walked back.

MAT SORUM: I don't know what it is about sheep hunting, but it's almost like you're not allowed to shoot 'em before, you know, 8 pm. You know. Or, you know, it's like -- it just always happens at the end of the day, and it's always a late-night pack out. It's my experience, at least, you know.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. But let me tell you, that September sheep, the fur was so much thicker than anything in August. It was -- it was pretty cool.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And -- and all we saw up there were rams at that time. But, I mean, their rut isn't until November, so it's -- they're going to be fat for a long time. But it was -- it was a very good eating ram there.

MARCY OKADA: Have you noticed any changes in the weather over the time period you tend to go hunting now?

RANDY BROWN: Well.

MARCY OKADA: Or even back then?

RANDY BROWN: I think it's always really variable --

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: -- up in those mountains. It was really funny though, a little after Windfall Mountain started smoking like crazy, I went up there. When that was? it was 2015, maybe. '14. It was 2014. I went up there with my cousin and her boyfriend. She comes from down in Gustavus, and she had never been sheep hunting before, and so we were going to go up in the mountains and see -- see what we could find there. And so, we're -- we're motoring up in that -- I've got a 19-foot Grumman (canoe) with a little 8-horse (outboard motor) on it and we're -- we're motoring up the river there and it's -- it's kind of high water, and so I can motor up most of it. And we get beside Windfall, and Windfall is just pouring out smoke, and it's blowing like crazy, and there's a lightning storm on top of Nimrod. And we're like, you know, I'm thinking now this sounds like Middle -- Middle Earth.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, totally.

MARCY OKADA: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It's the Lord of the Rings. Frodo. Anyway -- Yeah, it was -- it was pretty wild. So, that was a -- that was a wild scene.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: So how -- how do you process it? Do you just gut it out there and then when you said you had it hanging from a pole and you guys were walking it out, what -- how -- what do you guys do to process it that way?

RANDY BROWN: Well, so -- So that was -- You're talking about the September hunt?

MARCY OKADA: Yeah, that one you did with your --

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: With the two other guys.

RANDY BROWN: Well, we just went back there the next morning.

MARCY OKADA: Oh, I see. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: We walked back and gut -- We -- we brought back enough to eat.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: You know, for a -- for a treat that night.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And then we went back and -- first thing the next morning.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

MAT SORUM: Has the way you clean animals changed?

RANDY BROWN: Not really.

MAT SORUM: Since -- not since -- Yeah, okay.



RANDY BROWN: I've -- From the first time that Mike Potts showed me. Demonstrated how to -- to butcher animals, I've done it that way ever since. You know, you skin back one side, you take a shoulder, a back leg, the ribs, the belly, you take the guts out, flip 'em over, do the other side. And I do that with sheep even. I mean, you don't need to with sheep, but it's the best, cleanest way to do it.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: In my opinion.

MARCY OKADA: Okay, Randy, we're going to close out with some questions that all kind of mesh together. But please share the importance of sheep and sheep hunting to you and your family.

RANDY BROWN: Well, it is not a, you know, a fundamental aspect of like getting a winter supply of meat. And it -- it never has been. It's much more of an adventure up in the mountains. A good excuse to get in the mountains and walk. It's a, you know -- It's vigorous. It's spectacular. I guess it's -- it's -- You know, I like the country they're in, so it's much more of a -- much more of an adventure than it is -- You know, like, for example, moose hunting has -- moose hunting fills the freezer, and sheep feeds the soul, I guess, if you will. And that's how it is for me.

MARCY OKADA: So that -- that leads into what motivates you to -- to go sheep hunting?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. And that's what it is, is feeding the soul. You know, getting up in the mountains. I've -- I've never been one to climb mountains just to get to the top. You know, it's a -- I mean we did that a little bit when we were kids. And but -- And my brothers -- both of my brothers in my family. There were three of us. And they both are -- are mountain climbers and climb cliffs and things like that. Or have. I'm not sure how much they do it anymore. And -- and my older son is a mountain climber, and he climbs cliffs and climbs, you know, big snow mountains and everything else. I go where there's -- where there's sheep. I don't know, I like a purpose. And maybe that's what kind of spoiled me when I was living out here (points to the Yukon-Charley map) is that -- is that I -- I like doing things when there's something to be had at the other end. You know, if I'm going to go -- For example, snowshoeing, I want it to be for a purpose. I'll go snowshoeing in to, you know, to pack a dog trail back into a place where I'm going to cut firewood or get big birches to make sled runners or bowls out of or something like that. You know, I don't do much just as recreation. You know, and -- When I came to town, I never skied -- Nordic skied at all out in the woods. I -- It -- it just wasn't functional. You know, I couldn't make a dog trail for it. The boots that they had back in the '70s, I -- I never saw any that would keep your feet warm. And -- and it was like, I -- this doesn't make any sense for out here. When I get to town and everybody's doing the Nordic skiing around Birch Hill and out on, you know, wherever trails they have around Fairbanks. I -- I got some skis and my kids were into it at the time, or my older boy anyway. And so I -- I started doing it, but it never clicked with me. Because there was -- I wasn't -- I was doing it for exercise sake, and I -- I did a lot of exercise out in the woods, but it wasn't for exercise sake. And so, I still try to keep busy with firewood or with, you know, sheep hunting or moose hunting or things like that where I'm doing exercise, I'm

working, staying in shape, but it isn't, you know, like going to a health club or going -- doing the same round over and over and over up at Birch Hill.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It just never clicked with me. And, you know, I used to enjoy downhill skiing and I don't do it anymore, but it was just plain fun, you know. And -- and Nordic skiing for me wasn't. So, it was -- I don't know. I like a purpose. And so, you know, just climbing in the sheep mountains, if you didn't have something you wanted to do there, if you weren't looking for sheep, it might be a totally different thing. I mean, I -- I don't -- It's not going to make or break the trip whether we come back with a sheep or not, but it's always nice and it gives a purpose to it. But --

MARCY OKADA: So, what do you think is important to share about the land where you go sheep hunting? How important is this land to you, which is now a preserve and other land jurisdictions, but --

RANDY BROWN: I don't know, it's just -- it's been a real pivotal thing for me, you know, as a -- as a young man. And even now, I love it. I love getting up in those systems. You know, the rivers and the mountains. Even dealing with brush and downed trees and everything else, it's part of the landscape. And one thing, you know, I learned, and pretty much everybody that lived out there learned, is that there's no easy way to go about some of this. You know, I mean, you may pick the right, you know, tree line going across the flats to be able to stay out of the big tussocks, but -- But, it's all going to take work to get out there. But, it's really -- You get a campfire with driftwood along the river, or being up in the mountains when a storm goes through, these are just wonderful -- wonderful things. So, I think it's -- I think it's just spectacular country. You know, it's not -- it's not like, you know, going into Denali (National Park) and going up on, you know, some of these, you know, big giant mountains, but it's -- it's still got its -- its attraction.

MAT SORUM: Hm-mm.

MARCY OKADA: Anything else you want to ask?

MAT SORUM: I think we covered it pretty good.

MARCY OKADA: Yes.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. I've really enjoyed the stories and, you know, relating this -- your -- your -- what sheep hunting was for your subsistence lifestyle. And, you know -- And it really kinda -- I guess what hit home for me was that, you know, it was this -- it was all part of -- You know, subsistence just isn't eating. You know, it's being there, too. And -- and it would allowed you to be there. And I just think that I hadn't thought of it in that way.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: So, I think that's my takeaway from this. It's like really exciting. And so relatable to -- to today, you know, in ways.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MARCY OKADA: Thank you, Randy. We really appreciate your time.

RANDY BROWN: Well, you're welcome.

RANDY BROWN: So -- so back in 2000, it was the -- it was the worst Chinook salmon run we've ever had. Until recently. And in 2000. And -- and -- the state -- and it was the first year when federal co-management of the fishery was going to be happening. And the guy

that was the federal manager, was my boss from just upstairs, his name was Monty Millard. And they were doing the YR DFA (Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association) teleconference and the state had opened up three different commercial fisheries. And in those days, the commercial fisheries would -- would take 100,000 to 150,000 Chinook salmon in the delta and -- And he had opened three fisheries: two in Y1 and one in Y2. Y1 is kinda like downstream from -- from -- You know, it's just the delta region.

Downstream from --

MARCY OKADA: It's that first section?

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, that first section of the river. And then Y2 is the next section that goes out, mm, I don't know how far up it goes, but from like the Andraefsky (River) up a ways. Anyway, not to Holy Cross.

MARCY OKADA: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: But in that stretch of river. So, he opened three, and -- and he said on the YR DFA conference that he was -- this was -- Tom Vania, that was the Fish and Game manager. And he was -- he was going to open a fourth commercial fishery in Y2, which was the second in Y2. And -- and at this point, you know, none of the indices of abundance -- they were doing test netting and they had Pilot Station (sonar station), but it was high (water) and there was driftwood (in the river), you know. And you've got Andraefsky River, but it always gets a late run. But nobody had a clue whether it was going to be a good run or not. And so -- and so Monty, on this teleconference there, where people up and down the river are all on this teleconference, he says to Tom Vania that he's going to -- he's gonna shut the fishery down until we get some quantitative information on how many fish there are coming in the river. And that -- it generated -- It was the first time a federal manager had been there to coordinate with the state. The state hated it. Tom Vania hated the idea of it, and so it -- it caused this giant uproar that involved Canadians and the governor. Everything. They finally realized that it's a terrible run and they shut down subsistence. Well, you can't shut down subsistence after you do a commercial fishery.

MAT SORUM: No.

MARCY OKADA: You can't do it.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, it's --

RANDY BROWN: You know, your -- your priority is escapement, subsistence, and then commercial. And it goes exactly the opposite in practice, right?

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But they'd already harvested fifty or seventy thousand fish in that -- in that commercial fishery. And it turned out to be a good thing that they stopped, but Monty didn't know any better than they (the state) knew.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Whether it was going to turn out to be a good run. It just always had been in the past. And so -- anyway, it was shut down in the upper river. The whole subsistence was shut down. And Dick Cook, he -- it's possible he never knew about it, because we didn't for a long time. And he didn't have a radio, he didn't -- you know, know what was going on in the bigger world. And he was setting his net upstream from Tatonduk River.

And, up -- it was a -- I believe it was a Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement saw it flying by with a float plane, and went down and pulled his net out of the water and left him a note that it's a closed season. Well, he gets back down, and he sets it right back in the river. He was living up at Pass Creek, up the Tatonduk River at the time. And -- and so, the next day, the law enforcement guy came by again, and pulled his net out, cited -- gave -- gave a citation to Dick for putting it in during closed season, and took the fish out of it, and the net, and gave the fish to somebody else in some community. You know, I don't know where he -- where he did that with. Well, Dick -- Dick was pissed, because it was his position that you can't always make things even by shutting down subsistence.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And that Title 8 of ANILCA says, "No, you have to -- if there is a shortage, you have to set up like a Tier-Two system." You know, where your priority is individuals, you know, who have been -- you know, live in the remote area and everything else. So -- so he (Dick Cook) sued them with this -- this lawyer here in town. What was his name? I've got the legal case, they put. But they sued -- they were going to sue, I think -- I think Fish and Wildlife Service for -- even though it was on -- you know, in the -- in the park area.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Because they're the ones that cited him. So, he's -- he's suing for a violation of Title 8. And -- and -- there was a court hearing going to happen in 2001. So that (the citation) happened in 2000, the suit was filed I think that fall or early winter. And then there was going to be a court hearing in Fairbanks in -- in, I think it was June of 2001.

MAT SORUM: Okay,

RANDY BROWN: And Dick was living up at Pass Creek at the time. And he had a bunch of chickens and he had 4 or 5 dogs, so he put all the chickens in these plastic buckets with holes drilled in 'em, and he was going to drop them off at -- at Last Chance -- I think it's Last Chance Creek where -- where -- What's their names? I forget their -- their names. But those folks that live at Last Chance Creek. Up there. They were gonna -- he was gonna give his -- have his chickens and his dogs be cared by Scarlett and --

MARCY OKADA: Oh, Wayne --

RANDY BROWN: Wayne Hall.

MARCY OKADA: -- Hall

MAT SORUM: Wayne

MARCY OKADA: The Halls.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, the Halls.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. And anyway, Dick doesn't show up. He wrecked his -- he wrecked his boat and his -- and his -- and his chickens all drowned and went downriver. His dogs were running the bank, and they were all fine. But he got -- he ended up being in a drift pile with his boat and -- and died. And the river was a little on the high side and was a little turbid, so Wayne and Scarlett, he doesn't show up there, right? So they go into town and they talk with Park Service, and said, "You know, Dick didn't show up. There's a -- there's a problem." And, you know, they're going like, "Why would we be concerned with the schedule of Dick? You know. We haven't ever been in the past." He goes, "No,

RANDY BROWN

MAY 2, 2023

ORAL HISTORY 2024-04

Page 36 of 41

he's got a court date where he's suing the federal government over this, and he was going to bring his chickens and his dogs." And they said, "Well, we'll fly over and see what we see." So, they flew over. I think they took a helicopter and flew over the Tatonduk and they saw these buckets and they saw his dogs at the cabin up the river and -- and he was not there. And so they mobilized a -- a kinda of -- of a search for him, and ended up finding him in that -- in that drift pile. But, apparently, there was a whole big contingent of folks from Eagle that went down there to walk through the delta, and then they got lost. And the Park Service had to rescue a few people. Anyway, it was a mess. And it's not a very easy river to -- to move around in or get up past the delta. But, in any case, after that was all -- the court case was no more because the person most affected -- So there were a lot of people. A lot of the down and out and conspiracy theorists in Eagle thought that Fish and Game killed him. 'Cause they don't distinguish between federal and state.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Fish and Game killed him.

MAT SORUM: Oh, my gosh.

RANDY BROWN: To keep him from this lawsuit. My buddy, John Burr, you know, when I told him that, he says, "You corrected them, right? It's Fish and Wildlife Service." I said, "No, I didn't correct them."

MARCY OKADA: They keep thinking that.

RANDY BROWN: So --

MAT SORUM: I know.

RANDY BROWN: Anyway, so --

MARCY OKADA: Did he want to be buried out there?

RANDY BROWN: He -- he got cremated.

MARCY OKADA: And scattered?

RANDY BROWN: And -- and so his daughters, he's got two adult daughters, right, and they're going to inherit his -- his scene in Eagle and out there. And they wanted to go up to Pass Creek to spread his ashes, to the -- to the cabin up there. And so, they -- but they couldn't get anybody to take 'em up there, right? And finally Wayne and Scarlett said, "We'll take you up there." How hard could it be in their 19-foot Grumman?

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: So, they go -- they go cruising up the Tatonduk River, flip the boat.

MAT SORUM: Oh, my gosh.

MARCY OKADA: Oh, wow.

RANDY BROWN: And all of the ashes are gone.

MAT SORUM: Oh, my gosh.

RANDY BROWN: Scarlett and one of the -- one of the daughters on one side and Wayne and the other (are on the other side) and Scarlett is yelling at Wayne. And they were -- Anyway, that -- they never got up there. But, it's a -- it -- Even somebody skilled in boating along the Yukon, that little river is -- and any of 'em. It's totally different.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And uh --

MAT SORUM: What's the key? How do you get up these little --? What do you do to --? I mean, you know, bring in a canoe. Like, what's -- ?

RANDY BROWN: Well, I -- You know, I'd line up.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: I -- I can line up. Or I take my -- my canoe with the little eight horse on it. But you have to be aware of -- You know, if you've got two people, you've got some different options because you can start up a riffle that you can't make it out the top end of, and if you start bumping, the guy in the front can come out and grab it.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But if you're the only one in there, you can't do it.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You'll flip your boat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Because as soon as you start hitting, there's no way out.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, and you've -- And all of a sudden, if your -- your -- your front will get pulled one direction.

RANDY BROWN: It'll get pulled one way or the other and you're gonna -- you're gonna roll it. And so, you have to know beforehand, you know, is this -- if you're one person in a boat, am I going to be able to make this or not? If it's a clear yes, you can go. If it's not a clear yes though, you have to stop and line it up.

MAT SORUM: Okay. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: You just have to do it.

MAT SORUM: Got it.

RANDY BROWN: And so, lining and poling, you know, or paddling is always going to be part of the mix. And -- and some people don't know how to -- how to line.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know, but it's a -- You know, do you want a keel on the boat? And these little motor canoes have a keel, so, you know, you have a line one end on one side and the farther out it is to the current, you know, the farther out from shore it's going to be. Walk up.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But, it's a -- If you have a motor, then, you know, any place where it's deep enough, you're cruising.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: You know.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But, uh --

MAT SORUM: When you've gone up the -- the Kandik, moose hunting, can you go up most of it without lining it?

RANDY BROWN: It's -- it's variable.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: And it's a water level dependent thing.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: But, you know, if you're like medium -- medium high water and, you know, if -- unless you see it through cycles, you don't know what that is. But -- But, generally, you know, there's only a handful of places that I have to line it up. Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Man. I went -- So last year, I went up the Kandik to go pick up -- We've got a -- we have a wolf den up there by Easy Moose (Creek). Do -- do you ever --

RANDY BROWN: That's been there for a long time.

MAT SORUM: Have you walked into it?

RANDY BROWN: Oh, yeah.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, yeah. Cool.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, we've seen 'em. And they have a spruce grove that's just totally packed down in the spring.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: With all these little trails.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, that's it. Yeah. So, we went up there last year and got some -- put a camera up at the wolf den and then also did -- tried to record some howling so we howled at the -- the wolves. They weren't there, the adults weren't there, but we got the pups to come to us. They ran to us, and we have videos of them running.

RANDY BROWN: Oh, really?

MAT SORUM: Running by. And then they -- they kind of figured out something was wrong, and then they just ran back to their den, you know. So, that day ended kind of early for us. We had stayed at the -- the mouth there. At the Kandik, the cabin there. And so, we had a -- we had a collar, a moose collar. A moose died just past Three-mile Creek.

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm.

MAT SORUM: And -- and we got up on that -- What's this? Is this Kandik? Kandik Peak. The Kandik Peak?

RANDY BROWN: I don't know that one.

MAT SORUM: Really? Oh, it's funny 'cause it's on the -- it's on the -- It's called like -- Like, let's see, where is --? Grabs map)

RANDY BROWN: Is it up Three-mile?

MAT SORUM: Three-mile. Yeah, so -- So, Kandik Peak is like right here.

RANDY BROWN: Hm-mm.

MAT SORUM: And we popped up on this ridgeline and walked this ridgeline back. And it was -- it was -- We ended up, I think it's right here is where we got the collar. But, it was -- And it had been like a 13-mile day, and we -- we, you know, I -- We started, I think, at like 2:30 in the afternoon and got back to the boat at like eleven, twelve (at night), you know. And then -- and then boated the rest of the way down.

RANDY BROWN: Well.

MAT SORUM: You know. And -- and I remember boating down thinking -- 'cause I'd bumped into you moose hunting, and thinking I would not want to go over this section with a moose in a canoe.

RANDY BROWN: That was when we were -- Yeah, that was when we were headed down.

MAT SORUM: It was a couple of years before.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And I was -- Anyway, it made me think about you, and like -- You know, I was -- You know, I have a nice little -- this, you know, old little John boat that the Park Service has down there.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And that does great with a 30-40 (outboard motor) on it. But it's still like a little like, you know, you know, I guess, you're going over these falls.

RANDY BROWN: Well, those -- that Three-mile reef is a tough place right now.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: It can -- it can block the -- the jet boats from going if it's low water. It doesn't stop the canoes from going through, but -- but still it's kind of a dicey thing bringing a moose down through it.

MAT SORUM: Did you -- Yeah, how did you --? Do you float through it or do you -- you line it down?

RANDY BROWN: I line it down.

MAT SORUM: Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Line it or -- Or have a -- You know, with a moose in it, I'll get out there on the -- on the -- as you're going downstream on the right side, and with a single rope to the front, you know, and just sort of allow it to go down. And then, you know, usually John Burr or Scott MacLean, you know, whoever is with me, you know, has a little rope off the side so that once it gets down to a point where it can get pulled to shore, where we can jump in again, they'll pull it over to shore.

MAT SORUM: Got it.

RANDY BROWN: And so -- No, but that's a tough place.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. It was dark. It was getting dark, and I wasn't reading the river real well. And, you know, all of a sudden -- 'Cause I went up it, no problem. Like, and I think, we just -- I just went up over the falls. And I don't really remember what I did, but when I came back I was a little surprised, 'cause that it was going over like these rock walls. You know, right down the middle of it and you just kind of had to go.

RANDY BROWN: You must have had pretty high water, 'cause lower water, you wouldn't have been able to do that.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, and it was spring. I mean, it was -- Oh, well, it was -- You know what it was, it was -- it was mid-June. And it was hot, so there was, you know -- I guess it probably would've been melted out. Melting out. So there still would have been a little higher water.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MAT SORUM: It wasn't very high, but it was --

RANDY BROWN: So, in the past, that was -- the river was actually shifted, if you're going upstream shifted way over to the left. And so, there was a reef that even in -- in the -- in the lowest water, it only covered about half of the river.

MAT SORUM: Oh, okay.

RANDY BROWN: And the river has since moved that way, so that it covers the whole thing in low water. And in high water, you can get by. There's a big channel on the -- on the, you know, left side going up.



MAT SORUM: Okay, going -- left side going up? Okay. Okay.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: Gotcha. And then -- and then immediately you'd take that right, right? As you're going down. Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah.

MAT SORUM: And that's what I remember, you know, just drop -- going over these and then - - and then immediately having to skirt right.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, yeah. There was a guy out of Central one time, and there were a whole bunch of jet boats lined up right there below the reef 'cause it was kind of low water, you know. And this guy had gotten up through it. He had -- he had a blue tarp over his cab and then just like plastic window plastic as his -- as his front thing. Kind of a rudimentary thing in this -- this old boat with a jet unit on it. And his dog. He had this black kinda lab dog. And he had -- he had decided he's just going to go for it, you know. And so, everybody else is sitting down there. He goes over and his -- and his -- he makes it up, but his -- his engine hit at the last bit and popped out of the -- out of the thing, you know. So, it's this -- it's this jet engine just going *wccheooooow*. (sound effect)

MAT SORUM: *Wheeeee!* (sound effect)

RANDY BROWN: Yeah, and -- But anyway, he went up and we ran into him up 10 miles up the river and he had his dog, you know. And he would be motoring and his dog would be right out on the front of the boat.

MAT SORUM: Yeah.

RANDY BROWN: Well, we ran into him later. He had -- he had run out of fuel and decided -- or was running out of fuel and decided to go back down to the Yukon. And so, going down through the reef, he just -- he just gunned it. Well, he ends up hitting this rock right on and busts in the front of his boat. His dog goes rocketing off the front.

MARCH OKADA: Oh, gee.

RANDY BROWN: And lands in the water down below the reef. And all these guys in the jet boats are watching this thing. And somebody from the Boat Shop (boat repair business in Fairbanks) was there, and they actually helped him, you know, 'cause he just slams into the front of the boat, too.

MAT SORUM: Oh, my god.

RANDY BROWN: But, they ended up helping him get off and put some, I don't know, carpet on there with rivets and something. A little bit of a -- a very liberal use of silicone.

MAT SORUM: Yeah. Hm-mm.

RANDY BROWN: To get it good enough for him to get down the Yukon. But -- There's some -- there's some crazy stuff, I'll tell you what.

MAT SORUM: Yeah, interesting. Cool.

RANDY BROWN: Yeah. Anyway --

MAT SORUM: Well.

RANDY BROWN: -- too many stories. Yeah.