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Elders in Residence Collection. Elders Jimmie Toolie and Mabel Toolie from St. Lawrence Island are interviewed by students of the Alaska Native Studies 401 class at University of Alaska Fairbanks,

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Summarized by: Cecilie R. Ebsen

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Length of recording: 01.00.37

Teacher

00:00:01.74

Asks Jimmie to talk about being a reindeer herder and being a runner/athlete.

Jimmie

00:00:02.11

In 1914, when he was 12 years old, he started reindeer herding. His boss was Luka Manaia [sp?].

One year they had six reindeers: Four females and two males. The next year they had ten reindeer.

They would earmark the reindeer: different letters on left and right ear. "L" on the right ear, "V" on the left. If they were government reindeer, they had no earmarks.

[Inaudible: He mentions the names of the four herders who have government reindeer, and mentions other herders' names as well].

One year he was homesick for his father and mother and he stayed home.

Jimmie worked for four years. The first year he got six reindeer, the second year he got eight reindeer: six females and two males. The third year he got ten reindeer: six females and four males, all earmarked.

Jimmie

00:04:07.42

In the springtime when the Peterssons [sp?] come, they would buy tents, stove, flour, sugar, tea and coffee and make their home. For 25 years he was a chief herder on St. Lawrence Island. They would go around, sometimes up to eight boys, with the reindeer; they would corral them and butcher them. They used walrus or sealskin to cut harnesses for the reindeer. Sometimes they would make rope and call it a lasso used for herding/corraling the reindeer. It is hard work. They would walk for days without sleep. Some boys got sick from walking all the

time, and never sleeping or eating.

Jimmie

00:08:20.35

In October they would go to the other side of the island to corral [Show on map where they went].

They would butcher up to 300 or 400 reindeer. When the wind changed from the south they would come to the harbor and ship the harvest to Seattle. The boat was called the Northern Star.

Jimmie

00:09:24.84

In December they got money for the reindeer as they were sold in Seattle.

Teacher

00:09:47.13

Asks if that is the only time they would pay him or if he got paid during the season too?

Jimmie

00:09:47.13

He got paid 45 cents an hour from the chief herder as well.

Jimmie

00:10:56.23

He explains that he got 75 cents pr. hour when he was chief herder. He was chief herder from 1924. He started in 1914 and so he stopped around 1939-1940. By then they paid 45 cents pr. hour for the normal herders. One deerskin costs two dollars.

Student

00:12:53.30

Asks how they packed their gear, did he carry his stuff on his back or did he use the reindeer?

Jimmie

00:13:12.00

They carried it themselves.

Student

00:13:22.09

Asks how they earmark the reindeer

Jimmie

00:13:22.35

They cut the skin with a knife. They mark both ears to tell them apart. Jimmie is not sure why that is the way they do that. Sometimes mothers and babies would be separated and they would make sure that they found each other before they moved on.

Student

00:16:48.65

Asks how many families had reindeer?

Jimmie

00:16:57.10

Only four families had reindeer. Jimmie started with six and ended with over 400. Each July when they corralled the animals, they also counted the reindeer. Some had up to 700 reindeer. There were thousands of reindeer around the island. At the last corral, they counted 10,000 reindeer.

In the wintertime, they would starve and so there would be fewer reindeer. There was nothing for them to eat because the green grass or moss [I think he means lichen] that they eat would not grow every year. Jimmie learned this from Lapland and the Sami herders near Gambell. They taught the Eskimo herders about the reindeer.

Jimmie

00:21:01.69

Every spring the herd changed. They grazed all over the island. [Show on map where they stayed with the reindeer in the wintertime]. Fox and raven would sometimes kill young reindeer, so when they were around they would need to watch the reindeer carefully. Sometimes he would go by reindeer sled to Gambell and to South Whiskey [Sp?] to track the reindeer.

Jimmie

00:24:12.58

They watched the reindeer all year round. They had dogs help them watch the reindeer.

Student

00:24:46.28

How long did it take to grow a herd of 300 reindeer?

Jimmie

00:24:49.29

Ten years.

Student

00:25:23.85

Did Savoonga and Gambell people use the meat themselves?

Jimmie

00:25:39.56

Yes, all the time. In July when they corralled the reindeer, people would come from Gambell to Savoonga to help. However the Gambell people were scared of the reindeer and would jump around. The Savoonga people would tell them to not be scared. They corralled the reindeer by foot. They were about 20 men rounding up the reindeer.

Student

00:27:41.34

Asks if Jimmie had his own reindeer pet?

Jimmie

00:28:03.43

They don't do that.

Student

00:28:52.49

When they slaughtered the reindeer, why did they slit their throats instead of shooting them?

Jimmie

00:29:56.02

They use a '22 to shoot them. They don't slit their throats anymore. They used to lasso them and then stick a knife in their heart. They did that because they didn't have guns back then.

Student

00:30:36.92

Did they trap when they lived in the reindeer camps?

Jimmie

00:30:48.96

Yes, white fox and rabbit. They sold the white fox furs for about 45 dollars a piece. Jimmie agrees that it was a better business than herding.

Student

00:31:08.48

Why did they stop watching the reindeer?

Jimmie

00:31:55.22

He doesn't know why. They stopped watching them around 1960 or 1965. They were always four boys herding. They would take turns with another four boys and go out with the reindeer for a week at the time.

Student

00:33:51.37

Did they have a beard on their neck? [Everyone seems a little confused about this question]

[Possibly the student means a dewlap, the kind of loose neck skin you see on elk]

Jimmie

00:34:16.94

[Discussion in Yup'ik] [Talk about how the reindeer skin look and show it on skin in class].

Teacher

00:35:57.01

Do they use sinew for sewing?

Jimmie

00:35:59.54

Yes.

Student

00:37:08.58

Do they boil and eat the reindeer head or anything like that?

Jimmie

00:37:27.49

They make stew. They boil the head and eat it.

Student

00:38:04.49

Before the reindeer were brought in, were there any caribou?

Jimmie

00:38:15.06

Jimmie says no. They brought the reindeer to areas where there was no caribou. They brought in a total of 30 reindeer and got the rest of the herds from those first 30.

Student

00:39:20.52

What part of the reindeer do they use otherwise? For example do they eat the heart or use the brains for tanning?

Jimmie

00:39:53.74

They use all the meat. They also eat the heart and liver. They tan the skin. They eat the brain.

Student

00:40:06.86

When the Lapps came over, did they get along with people?

Jimmie

00:40:47.51

Yes. They used a sled shaped like a kayak to go on. One time he was out on a trip by reindeer sled. The weather got bad and he had to stop and wait till it got better. He was wearing really warm clothes: born and unborn skin, deerskin pants inside and out, wool socks, skin boots, and mittens.

Student

00:42:36.87

How much did the North Star [ship] give them for the reindeer and did they sell the antlers too?

Several people

00:42:45.44

[Discussion in Yup'ik]

Jimmie

00:43:12.71

He got a dividend that he shared. [Not clear if he got paid from the North Star]

Several people

00:44:39.14

Conversation in class

Jimmie

00:44:54.24

Jimmie says it's too bad he didn't get to go to school more. He only made it to 2nd grade. He quit school to be a herder. However he did attend a young man's class in Savoonga at night for a while.

Teacher

00:45:41.83

Asks Jimmie to talk about racing

Jimmie

00:45:55.65

Jimmie wants to tell them about how he became a good runner. He didn't used to be a good runner. One morning he decided to exercise instead of watching the reindeer. Every morning for a week he went running and climbing around the mountain.

Unknown

00:46:08.52

[The recorder is muffled or turned off, comes back midsentence of Jimmie]

Jimmie

00:47:17.04

One time when Konuka [sp?] went to Gambell all the boys came with him. Konuka took him to Gambell to run. He was a very small and fast man. He told Jimmie that he should not eat when they got there. They went around town. When they were near the lake in the village, two of the boys were going faster but Jimmie kept up. Konuka told him to pass them, so he did. But then his muscles gave up and he couldn't stand up anymore. He couldn't run and almost fell down. He had to walk the rest of the way. Later Konuka asked him to run again with only one other boy this time.

Jimmie

00:53:01.61

[Shows on map which lake it was] His longest race was 30 miles. It was from Savoonga to somewhere [show on map].

Several people

00:53:53.16

[Discussion in Yup'ik]

Jimmie

00:53:58.34

Sometimes they would go around Gambell on a trip that took a couple of hours.

Teacher

00:55:08.26

Changes the subject and asks if that is the kind of harpoon they use? [Must have harpoon in class or on photo in class]

Jimmie

00:55:33.57

[Jimmie explains the harpoon's different attributes, he seems to have several difference ones]

Several people

00:57:47.26

[Class discussion and demonstration of harpoons continue for the rest of the recording/class]