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Sam White

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

Series: Sourdoughs speak

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Neville Jacobs said Sam White left Maine to come to Alaska in 1922 to work on the United States Coastal Geodetic Survey. He was later transferred Outside and shortly after he decided that Alaska was home. He returned to Alaska later to work as a federal game agent and became a well known bush pilot. He has written about his experiences. Sam White will talk about his work on the Geodetic Survey in 1924-25. He went into country which had never been surveyed. He was a reconnaissance man. He traveled on foot from Fairbanks to Eagle and down to Circle City and back to Fairbanks. The interview took place in the home of Sam White in Fairbanks.

Sam White said he walked all the way to Eagle and then canoed down to Circle. He got to Circle in October and then walked to Fairbanks. There was no Steese Highway yet. It was almost a three hundred mile walk. They sold the six horses they had with them on the trip to Eagle. He had shipped the canoe to Eagle on a steamboat so he would have it to go down the river. It was all planned ahead of time. When they left Big Delta they didn't see another soul for eight weeks. There was nobody in the country. There was a lot of game on the way. There was no market hunting up there. He saw moose, caribou, mountain sheep, bear and wolves. They shot a caribou and ate it all up, but the meat was poor so they didn't do that again. They shot a mountain sheep at the Goodpasture area and enjoyed it. They got to the Columbia Creek moose lick area where there was mining. They got a moose and shared it with the miners. It was a guaranteed place to shoot a moose at the moose lick. He talked about the moose drinking soda water which the moose seemed to prefer. The moose were wary of the wolves that came to the licks. White talked about his partner walking into a swale with their horses and running into a pack of wolves. His partner started shooting them and then left. White said his partner was a poor shot and went into the swale and found two dead wolves. They went down to Liberty Fork where John Powers had a cabin. Powers had left them hay and oats. He had also left him some eggs and lemons. White talked about their usual food supplies which had been dehydrated food. Powers was a mail carrier and a freighter. There's a road that goes through Liberty Fork now. They found other moose licks as they traveled along. One of them was in the shape of a cone. The licks had cold soda water and the moose were attracted to them. He described finding one of the licks and watched the moose coming to the lick and drinking. He could hear the moose burp after they drank. The moose were nervous while they were at the lick because of the wolves. Smith saw wolves coming into the lick, too. Their horses wouldn't drink the soda water. He tried drinking the water and said it was very bitter.

White talked about his canoe trip down the Yukon. He said it was a routine canoe trip. He described Circle City. It was a bunch of dilapidated old cabins and an old trading post. In 1890 it had had two thousand people living there. There were only about fifty people in Circle when he was there. He talked about walking through Central. There was an older man there who wanted to travel with him. He met up with a couple and they wanted to walk to Fairbanks with him, too. The older man was named Moffitt. The woman had a bad time on the walk. The older man did very well. There was about four inches of snow on the ground. There was one place on the trail where a pack of wolves had crossed. He thought there were sixty or seventy wolves in the pack and they had beaten the snow down. He could still smell their scent. The wolves were after the caribou in the area. White talked about T-Model Fords traveling over the trail. They got to the twelve mile roadhouse and went on to the Miller House. The next place they stayed was on Eagle Creek at Barry's mine. Their caretaker was Jack McCoy who welcomed them in. McCoy came to the door when the lady showed up and he had been butchering caribou. He was covered in blood and had a large knife in his hand which caused the lady to faint. The next night they found a log cabin and they let the couple stay in the cabin while they camped outside. At the next roadhouse they met up with the man who was running the roadhouse. White said the man was unstable. White said they would pay him and they wanted something to eat. White had seen some caribou meat and thought it had gone bad. He told everyone else in his party about the man and warned them not to eat the meat. The roadhouse host fixed a big pile of caribou meat and served it to everyone except White wouldn't eat it. He talked about everyone getting sick the next day while they traveled over the Twelve-Mile Summit. They didn't make it to the next roadhouse that night and had to camp out. They didn't have any food so he went out and shot some ptarmigan. They were still sick the next day so White went down Sage Creek Roadhouse and got pepper and sugar. He mixed it up and gave everyone the concoction. Jacobs said White and the others made it down to Fairbanks.