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Louie Black

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

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Neville Jacobs talked about Louie Black. He was German and sailed around the world many times always returning to Alaska.

Louie Black said he ran away from Germany and came to England. He made a trip to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. He stowed away on a ship to Canada. From Canada he made his way to the United States in 1903. Two years later he was in Alaska. He wanted to see the world. Black talked about an encounter with a bear family. In the fall of 1915 he was on Otter Creek in the Iditarod country. He and Billy Bristle were cutting wood for the year's mining activity. They went to the head of Otter Creek and there was a mountain range. There were little draws going up into the mountains. They surveyed the draws for timber. They took turns going up into the draws and estimating the timber stores. One time his partner went up a draw as he laid down to sleep. His partner carried the rifle with him. Black had laid down next to a clump of blueberry bushes. He heard someone calling him and he saw his partner standing about 150 feet away with the rifle pointed. His partner asked him who his friends were. Black looked around and there were five bears right alongside of him. The big mother bear was next to him and there were three cubs. Black told his partner to put the gun down and not to come near him. Black knew they were peaceful bears and if they saw the rifle they might get hostile. Black sat and watched the bears. One of the cubs came over and started playing with his foot. The bears moved away except for the cub playing with his foot. The sow came back and roared at the cub and the cub left. After a while the cub returned again and continued to play with his foot. The sow returned and swiped the cub. The sow stuck her face close to his and let out a couple of noises. He thought she was letting out a laugh. He laid back and laughed. He finally got up and returned to his partner.

Black said he came into the Circle country in the spring to assess some claims. He went up a hill for firewood. He met three bears. He walked away from them as soon as he saw them. He kept running into them for about a week. He started cutting a tree down and he noticed one of the bears just watching him. About two miles away from him there was a little mining company which had a little dining room. The cook was a friend of his. One day he started out walking with his dog. He could see a big bear walking down the trail. He told his dog to get in the barn. He continued on the trail and passed the bear and greeted him. The bear just shook his head and continued down the trail. They went their separate ways. He ran into the bear on the trail one more time a few weeks later and greeted him again. Black

said the black bear is a friendly animal if he knows you aren't after him. He wouldn't say the same thing about brown bears. He saved two black bears from being shot.

Jacobs asked Black if he had met any unfriendly animals. Black said he held off two packs of wolves. One night he was moving camp in the Chatanika country. He had one dog with him. He moved everything on a small sled. The trail was bad and it was getting dark. He noticed on both sides of him were glaring lights. He knew it meant wolves. He could see their eyes in the dark. He knew he had to take his time. You never run from wolves. He was on snowshoes. He held the dog back to keep him from running. He carried a rifle in one hand and he slowed down. The two miles took him three and a half hours. He had to be careful not to stumble. If the dog got away it would have been a disaster. Every once in a while he had to stop. When he got to base camp the snow was flattened down. Black opened the door and the dog went in sled and all. He had an old fashioned stable lantern which he lit and could see twenty or twenty five wolves. He could hear the wolves howling in the hills for about three hours after that. Another time he came down Wood River in the Bonnifield. He missed the place he was looking for and he could hear the wolves howling. He started looking for a camping place. He found a clearing near a bluff. He cut a trail through to the clearing and put up his tent and stove. He could hear the wolves coming closer. He had seven dogs. He put the tent up at the bluffs and tied up the dogs. He had a good fire going started cooking for the dogs. He could hear the wolves howling. He had some miner's candles which he burned all night. He laid down in the tent at the door and had three rifles and two axes ready. He talked to the dogs all night. The wolves ran up and down all night. As soon as the sun came up the wolves disappeared. This was in early March. Out at the riverbank the wolves had flattened the snow by running up and down all night. He loaded up his sled and went up river and found the blazes.

Jacobs asked Black if he ever saw a large herd of caribou. Black said he rode through a caribou herd of over 10,000. He was on horseback and had his dog up on the horse so the caribou wouldn't trample him. He got off the horse and filled his hat full of rocks. He threw rocks at the caribou so they would get out of the way. In 1924 he was in the Circle country to do assessment work. He was digging a bedrock train. He got down to about six feet at the head of the train. He was down in the drain when the caribou came up the creek and a large caribou bull came right up where he was working. He picked up his shovel and hit him on his rump. The caribou snorted, kicked and ran up a hill. Black described how to set up a snare for rabbits.

Jacobs said Louie Black was living at the Pioneers Home in Fairbanks.