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Fabian Carey

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

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Neville Jacobs said some say that the Alaska wilderness is being threatened. Fabian Carey believes there are still parts of the Alaska land that are still inviolate. He has been trapping in the Alaska wilderness since he arrived in 1937. He traps marten. As fur prices have fallen for the past few decades there have been few men continuing to trap as a vocation. Carey continues to run a trapline. He has been trapping since he was a boy in Minnesota. He decided Alaska would be a good place for trapping so he bought a steerage ticket and headed north. He ended up in Fairbanks. Carey said he got a job with the FE Company. He met a trapper who was interested in getting a partner. Carl Holt operated in the Kantishna River area. Holt had a well established trap line about a hundred miles above the Kantishna River mouth. In those days there was a trapper about every twenty river miles. There were a lot of men in the woods. The Depression didn't affect people in Alaska like it did in the lower forty eight. There were a lot of people left over from the mining days and there was the choice of trapping. There was enough money in it to make a living of sorts.

Carey and his partner went up the Kantishna River to a location about halfway between the Toklat and the Bear Paw Rivers which are tributaries of the Kantishna. Their trap line was known as the Hindenburg Line. It was started by a German named Karl Nagel who trapped from 1914 until 1918 and then he was interned as an enemy alien. In the Foster Collection there is a picture of Nagel. Nagel put the name Hindenburg on his cabin. Nagel was removed from the woods and never returned to Alaska. One of Nagel's friends was an old timer at the mouth of the river. Clarence Boatman was a 98er. Boatman was a very patriotic man and served in the cavalry to avenge the death of Custer. Boatman served around Miles City.

Carey said the country was pretty well known by various men who have gone over the country. He said there were a few places where he felt he was one of the first people in an area. He would see an old dead fall or an old blaze grown over. The Indians had been there because they were hunters. White man was limited where they could go by boat or sled dog travel. In some areas they had to cut trail. He talked about an area off the southwest area of the park that was considered some of the last wilderness. He thought it was too wild for most men today. Most of the trappers are gone and there are occasional guided hunts there. He still has several trap lines and cabins. He has cut seventy miles of trail through thick spruce forest. There was a lot of work cutting the trails. He discussed the difficulty working in the area. He likes nine miles between cabins. He talked about setting 60-75 traps per day and trap houses.

He said cabins are set 9-12 miles apart. If they are too far apart then too much time is occupied with traveling. There are seven or eight visits in the season for the trap line. He puts out 60-75 miles of traps. If he walks it is about 15 miles a day. He said a trapper spends a lot of time with a needle. With dogs he gets a lot more area covered. He can rotate his trap lines and rest an area for a year. Years ago there were many more trappers in an area. The lines were smaller and the trapping areas were shorter. The prices for the furs was more. They had closed seasons. Carey said the fur sustains itself better now because of factors such as a decline in trapping interest. He thought if the prices go up for the fur there would once again be more pressure on fur. After he got out of the Army and returned to Fairbanks he had a gas boat. He loaded the scow up in September of 1946. He went up the Kantishna. Up above the Bear Paw River the river was narrower and swifter. He was taking another man up to Birch Creek. They got a moose along the way. At the same time they got a couple of caribou, too. The Mud River is seventy miles long. The Mud, McKinley and Birch Creek meet together at the head of the Kantishna River. Two of them are slack water streams and the McKinley is a glacier fed terrifying river. At the junction with the other two rivers it comes crashing in and rolls against the bank. He said there is a chute there several hundred yards long. When there are slack points in the current then you can forge ahead a little. The Mud River is a twisty mud-bank stream. He compared the trail miles to the actual river miles. The stream had a ratio of five to one. Jacobs asked him what he thought about being alone for many months. Carey said it isn't lonely until the day you think it is. He said it is a case of how much you can draw on yourself and it must have been a torment to some. The first winter on the trapline he only saw one man in eight months. It was all new to him and time flew by. He talked about what it was like being alone. He said as long as you love the life there is no problem. He usually didn't have a partner. He said economically it is a precarious life. Some partnerships worked well. Some people built separate cabins right next to each other.