

## REINDEER IN THE ARCTIC

The Reindeer Industry in the Arctic, the portion of Alaska lying north of the Brooks Range (Endicott Mountains) has reached a stage where it only needs transportation and a market to place it on a paying basis. This applies to the true Arctic region, for all the portion of the Territory lying south of those mountains is properly only sub-Arctic or Temperate in climate. In that area there are today more than a thousand head of marketable reindeer and each year sees an increase of at least thirty per cent on the breeding stock of females, which normally may be expected to increase the production of males in the same degree the second year following. Three years hence there may be shipped from Wainwright and Barrow at least two thousand carcasses for the markets of the United States.

The reindeer north of the mountains are not so large as are those farther south, the rigor of the climate being the main reason for this, to which may be added some degree of inbreeding owing to a lack of new breeding males and neglect of selection in the males kept. It is difficult to train a herdsman out of a savage in one generation and it has been little more than one generation since the first deer were brought to the Farthest North of Alaska. The weight of the mature male, as dressed for the market there, is between 135 and 150 pounds average. The deer of St. Lawrence Island, where the spring comes earlier and the winter is later, will average perhaps 25 pounds higher.

The first reindeer were brought to Alaska in 1891, only a trial shipment of 16 head being brought to Amaknak Island that year, to prove the feasibility of the project which had been questioned in Congress. This was done by private subscription on an appeal through four newspapers of the East. The next year 171 head were landed at Teller, on Port Clarence in the Seward Peninsula, where a station was established and named for the Secretary of the Interior. From 1892 to 1902 there were 1280 animals imported, all of them from Siberia, and from these have come all the more than three hundred and fifty thousand deer in Alaska.<sup>1</sup>

Reindeer at the top of the continent, however, were not

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<sup>1</sup> *Reindeer Report of Bureau of Education*, Interior Department, Washington, D. C., 1906, and other years.

brought until 1898 when a seeming misfortune proved a blessing to the Eskimo people. The summer of 1897 closed early at Point Barrow and seven whaling ships were caught by the ice within a short distance of that place, of which four were completely wrecked. When the news of the vessels being icebound reached the Capital at Washington orders were issued that officers of the revenue cutter *Bear* proceed north to the relief of the whalers who were presumably without supplies for the rigorous winter, and that they secure all available reindeer along the coast and drive them to Barrow for food for the shipwrecked people. Lieutenant D. H. Jarvis was placed in command of the relief expedition and he secured Mr. W. T. Lopp, of the Congregational Mission at Cape Prince of Wales, with his herders, to drive the deer. Most of the reindeer were from the herd of the mission or belonged to Artisarlook and his wife, the first Eskimo reindeer owners. The expedition started with 448 deer, lost or killed for food 247 animals, had an increase of fawns of 190 head, and left at Barrow the next year 391 from which the herds of Barrow and Wainwright, the most northerly stations, have increased to between 15,000 and 18,000.<sup>2</sup> The number is indefinite because there are many deer, the number not known, which are astray on the tundra, and also by reason of two of the herds being so far to the east of Barrow that reports are not received of their number.

Up to the time of the incoming of the reindeer the Eskimo people of that region were entirely dependent on the game and fish of the sea and tundra for all subsistence. They were in a strictly savage state as judged by the means of livelihood, for the whale, walrus and seal of the ocean, with the caribou of the land furnished food and clothing. They were an exclusively hunter people. The white whalers with their white winged ships had taken almost all the walrus and whale from the ocean (over two hundred and fifty ships being engaged in whaling in the Arctic Ocean in 1851) and for fifty years they combed the seas till the animals that furnished a great portion of the food of these people were swept away and the Eskimo had to turn to the caribou more and more each year. The greater burden on the caribou nearly took them from the land, in consequence the Eskimos were in dire straits for subsistence. The reindeer opened a new avenue which has alluring promises that are seemingly nearly on the verge of realization.

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<sup>2</sup> *Overland Expedition to Point Barrow*, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1900.

At the present nearly every Eskimo man, woman, and child has an interest in the deer, parents giving their children a reindeer for a Christmas present, often before the children can walk. At the present, to avoid a multiplicity of marks and confusion of ownership, most of the deer are held by company ownership, each individual holding shares according to the reindeer he put in. Two companies hold over 11,000 deer and from these more than 4,000 fawns were born during the season of 1925.

The range is a wide, level, treeless plain, extending from the Brooks Range, so called recently in honor of Dr. Alfred H. Brooks of the Geological Survey, one of Alaska's staunchest friends during his lifetime, to the ocean shore. It is snow-covered for nearly nine months of the year, while the remaining three months it is a vast tundra spotted with lakes and covered with mosses and grasses where the white fronted goose, the eider duck, the golden plover from far Patagonia, many varieties of sand-piper, the strange phalarope, the willow ptarmigan, myriads of the Alaska longspur, countless snow buntings and many other birds find nesting places and fill the air with their love calls. Over this the deer wander winter and summer, kept under more or less surveillance by the Eskimo herders and their Lapp dogs. The driving snows of December pack hard over the land but no storm at all is dangerous to a strong, well fed deer, for it digs down to the moss with its hoofs and thrives on it fully as well as a horse or cow will do on the best timothy or alfalfa hay, and shelter seems to be a thing not at all necessary. When they have fed sufficiently they lie down, let the snow drive against them until they look like a roughly carved block of marble grotesquely outlined against the skyline, and rest until they again go in search of moss.

The herders live in little, low, roundtopped tents that they call tupeks, or in low sod houses in some parts, but more often in the tents and occasionally a snow igloo is made. The camp must be moved often for the herd of 2,000 deer soon graze over an area surrounding the camp and must be given new range. These people have reached the nomadic or herdsmen stage and are good men for the work considering the short time that they have had for absorbing the methods and traditions of the stockman's life and way of working.

Of timber there is none, except a small quantity of driftwood on the seashore, brought from the Kobuk, the Yukon, or from far Kamchatka. The willows near the sea are but a creeper, not

daring to raise their heads above the ground. The tents are warmed by a Primus stove burning coaloil, or by a sheetiron stove, made by the owner, in which he burns coal dug from the bank of the inlet where veins of six and eight feet in thickness crop out in wide reaches. The seal oil lamp is almost never used in the present day.

The fawns are caught with a lasso in the marking season but a corral is built of ice in winter where the herds are brought to be counted. Blocks or slabs of ice a foot thick, six feet long, and two feet wide, are cut in October, are brought to the place chosen, are set on end and frozen to the earth in a continuous wall which encloses an area for the deer, not a stick of wood being used in the construction. At this corral the whole Eskimo population camps during the time the counting is going on, cooking, eating, and sleeping by the side of the herd.

There is ample range back toward the mountains to accommodate the increase of the herds for many years. There are no neighbors to crowd them for it is the last place in the domain of the United States

"Where the mountains are nameless,  
And the rivers run, God knows where."

It is the last frontier, and just back of the ocean shore is many a league of level tundra which no white man has ever laid eye upon, a far, wild waste of lake and mossland, bleak and dreary, yet with a charm that is felt but not understood. The Eskimo knows how to win a living from it but there are few white men who will ever make it a home. The reindeer will, with the other natural resources of the region, make a comfortable living and afford some luxuries for the Eskimo, if the white man does not come in and crowd him off the earth as the stockman did the Indian. It is to be hoped that the Government will protect them in their grazing rights in future years.

The reindeer is to the Eskimo what the buffalo of the plains was to the Indian, and more. From its skin he gets his artegee (parka), his pants, his boots. From its flesh he feeds his family. From its sinew his wife makes her thread, and his children sleep in robes of its skin. He drives it to his sledge during its life and if it dies it baits his traps for foxes. It gives him his couch upon which he is born, and it furnishes his shroud when he dies.

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