

How Deer Came to the Kodiak Archipelago

by Josh Wood

I felt nervous as I walked up the hallway to Ed Opheim, Sr.'s apartment. I wasn't sure if Ed was going to talk much, but as soon as I asked him a question I could tell he loved to tell stories. I heard Ed took part in planting the deer on Kodiak Island, so I went to him to record his story of how they got planted. Ed not only told me how he helped plant the deer, but also how the elk were planted on Afognak Island and how the rabbits got started on Spruce Island.

Knock, knock, knock. "Come in," Ed Opheim said anxiously. He was sitting back at the other side of the room by the window and he was watching the news. Ed had a weather-beaten wrinkled face and gray hair that showed he has worked a hard, long life. Ed was born in Sand Point, Alaska, on Popov Island, May 10, 1910. His father was from Norway and his mother was Russian-Aleut. On the walls in the living room were several pictures of dories, small wooden fishing boats that he has built. He is most known for his dory craftsmanship, but I chose to interview him because I felt it is important that everybody knows how and why animals got planted in the Kodiak Archipelago.

Ed sat down and got comfortable in his recliner. Then I asked him to tell me about the experience he had in 1940 planting the deer on the islands. "They were first brought up from Sitka I believe or somewhere down in there, maybe around Ketchikan—southeastern [Alaska] any-

way. They were [Sitka] Blacktail deer.

"I got a surprise one morning. A fella came up to me in Kodiak here, he asked me if I could do something with the deer and take them out somewhere away from the dogs because they were gonna take them and [let them go] around Hillside. Anyone knows the dogs would kill them off because they were so weak."

Fred Hinton, a bear guide, came to Ed and asked if he could help. "A ship came in down in the channel here and tied up to the dock and they wanted to get them over to somebody to take care of them and do something with them. Fred said, 'Oh, we got seven deer down here in crates and we got to get them out because on account they're getting pretty weak. They've been on the ship for quite a long time since they were put in crates.' Anyway I got my boat and a barge.

"It was a nice sunny day at low tide, spring of the year, the grass was just about 10 inches high, and so I got my brother-in-law, a young kid just came up from the States, to help me. A man that had this transfer outfit, he brought it over to where I had my barge and put them [the deer] aboard the barge and took them out to Middle Bay. Now I'd heard from a friend of mine a number of years before that there was a time years before they'd tried to plant deer on up there, and the winter was so severe none of them ever survived. I can't verify that, I don't know. They've got to be in the courthouse somewhere, records of whatever was

going on here.

"But anyway, we took the deer out there and landed on the beach at Middle Bay. A nice calm morning, low tide, [we] brought the barge onto the beach and set the crates down on the sand. We took the deer out of the crates, and they all ran back in the crates so we had to put the crates back up on the barge, and the little deer just stood around. They milled around amongst us. They were so tame, people been handling them, they just milled around us, you know.

"So pretty soon one of them took the lead and looked up quite a distance at a high water mark where the grass was. He started to walk real slow, and then each one of them got behind and all seven walked slowly up the beach to where the grass meets the sand and they'd smell the grass. There was a little knoll about 70 or 80 feet high. I think it's out there on the left side of Middle Bay going in. They all followed one another around that little ridge right up to the top. [When we let] them out there it was getting towards afternoon light and the sun was in the southwest. These deer walked up on that little ridge, one behind the other, and the leader and the whole works of them was riding into the skyline. [It was] the beautifullest darn picture you ever laid eyes on and nobody had a camera."

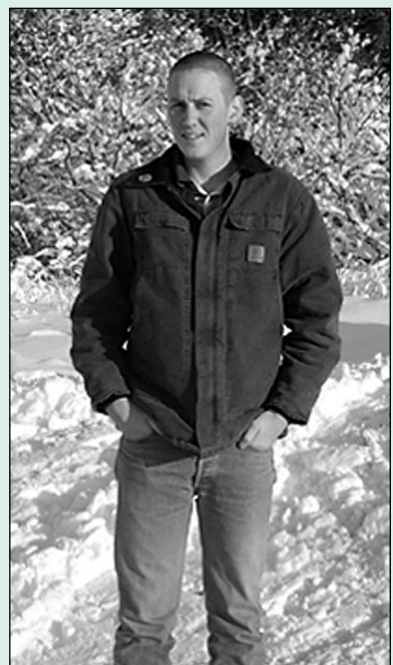
Josh Wood, age 15, is a student at Kodiak Alternative High School, Kodiak, Alaska.

Students Give Voice to Place

A high school student from Kodiak, Alaska, Josh Wood became fascinated with the question of how certain animals came to live on islands of the Kodiak Archipelago. This interview for the student magazine *Illuani* answers his question and illuminates his engagement with a community Elder. In the interview he explores the rich language of everyday speech and the relationship between humans, animals, and places. Students chose the name *Illuani* (roughly translated in Alutiiq as "the interior of it") for their oral history magazine launched on Kodiak Island in 1976. For 10 years students worked to get at the heart of the community's collective culture by interviewing Elders and long-time residents. After a long hiatus, the

magazine is back. Students from eight villages in the Kodiak Archipelago can apply to be part of the *Illuani* staff each semester. They become social science researchers in their communities, pursuing topics of interest to them. Arrangements are made with their local teachers to integrate their projects into the regular school curriculum. This project-oriented approach is an ideal fit for our small schools, which cannot offer a full range of courses like a large high school. It is another step toward moving education in our rural areas to a more community-centered model.

—Eric Waltenbaugh
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Josh Wood