

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF FISHERIESEastman, Ga.
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Washington.

The following is a general summary of my work for the winter of 1916-17 in order that the Bureau may have a comprehensive outline of actual conditions in the Bristol bay region, Western Alaska.

Weather. - The weather in the Bering sea country last winter was exceptional. Not in many years has there been a season marked with such incessant freezes and thaws, cold northwest winds, blizzards, deep snows, sudden dips and equally as sudden rises of temperature and altogether uncertain weather as took place last winter. The cause of this condition is one of the mysteries buried in the meteorology of that region.

Travel conditions. - Due to the weather dog team travel was precarious with the question of reaching destinations always a matter of doubt and uncertainty, thaws and storms alike uniting to produce delays and trail hardships.

Narrative of operations. - I initiated my winter work by a trip up the Igushik river, leaving my winter headquarters at Kanakanak or Dillingham on Nushagak bay November 1, 1916. News had reached me of infractions of the fur regulations in the Igushik region, and I therefore covered the district in which the irregularities were reported.

Returning to headquarters I made a trip up the Nushagak river to the mouth of the Mulchatney river to investigate the number of the reported beaver colonies in that locality.

Following the Mulchatney expedition I was at headquarters for several weeks making daily trips out over the tundra plains.

The middle of December I went on a trip to Kulukuk bay where an Eskimo village is located and considerable trapping done, and upon returning to Nushagak bay made short trips during the month of January and until February 11th, to Snag Point, Nushagak and the Eskimo villages of the Nushagak region.

I then went to Ugashik via of Koggiung, Naknek and Egagik. Arriving home from that journey in the latter part of March I went to Togiak bay, this expedition ending the winter's travel.

It was my object to cover the entire district in a comprehensive and thorough manner and the measure of success attained was largely due to the fact that I had an exceptionally good dog team, - well cared for at all times. Had this not been the case the untoward weather conditions would have materially reduced the mileage covered.

Fur Distribution. - As compared with the previous winter, when foxes were very numerous, the Red fox in the Bristol bay region last winter was scarce. Several reasons were given for this, one being the heavy snow fall over mountains and plains alike causing, according to the belief of many, the fox to remain in its mountain fastnesses, where it breeds and finds its habitat in the summer season. Others were inclined to believe the animal suffered from infectious diseases and died in such numbers that very few remained. Distemper broke out among the dogs of the Bristol bay region and wiped out many of the finest teams in the different villages I visited and those remaining lost from a dog or so to half the team. Trappers and fur traders thought this same disease made inroads in the fox tribe. The bodies of several of the animals - dead from disease - found from time to time in different localities, apparently lent credence to this explanation of the scarcity of the animals.

The White fox appears to be growing scarcer year by year. Only three pelts were taken in the entire Bristol bay region during the past winter. Ten years ago, I am informed, from 200 to 300 white fox skins came out of this district annually.

Lynx were very plentiful in Western Alaska last winter. This animal was relatively scarce in the Bristol bay country the previous winter.

Muskrats were unusually numerous and many skins were taken.

Land Otter were in about the same numbers as the previous winter.

Ermine were very scarce and not a great many skins were secured.

Prices of Fur. - The Red fox skin brought from \$5. to \$8. during the first part of the season but later went to values ranging from \$7. to \$12.50, according to the grade of the skin.

Cross Fox Pelts brought from \$8. to \$20.00.

Lynx could be bought anywhere from \$3.50 to \$7.50.

Land Otter ran from \$5. to \$9.00.

Muskrat skins were from ten to twenty cents each.

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