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SASKATCHEWAN  
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SASKATCHEWAN  
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DATE OF INTERVIEW: FEBRUARY 11, 1974  
INTERVIEWER: ALPHONSE LITTLEPOPLAR  
INTERPRETER: ALPHONSE LITTLEPOPLAR  
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mrs. Osecap, granddaughter of Chief Strike-Him-on-the-Back, was born in 1881 and died in April 1975. She has brought up six children and lived on various reserves in Saskatchewan. (For complete biography, see IH-066, p.2).
- Memories of childhood hunting expeditions for rabbit, gophers, duck.
- A Sundance that was stopped by the police.

When I was young, the people on Sweet Grass Reserve used to organize rabbit hunts. These hunts were unique. It was done by many people, men, women and children and dogs.

A long narrow bush was selected. Snares were hung along one end of the bush. The men and children would then come marching from the other end of the bush and scare the rabbits toward the snares where the women waited.

Some of the men and boys carried bows and arrows. A few rabbits were shot before the snares were reached. Some of the rabbits would then be caught in the snares, where the women would tap them on the head and take them off the snares. The snares would then be reset and the whole procedure repeated

again. The men and boys would be heard shouting war cries as they chased rabbits toward the snares. The rabbits were then skinned and the hide was stretched. They would later be made into warm blankets. Big pots of rabbit meat were cooked over a campfire. It seemed in those days we were always hungry for meat. The rabbits not cooked were hung on racks over the campfire to smoke and dry. The skins from rabbits killed in the summertime did not make as warm a blanket.

When the mating season arrived for prairie chickens, the people would snare them in great numbers on their mating grounds. The person snaring prairie chickens would cut young willows, perhaps two feet long and a shade over half an inch thick. He would cut as many of these as he had snares to set. Then he would sharpen both ends of these willows. The willows would then be bent into a U-shape, with sharpened ends six or seven inches apart. It was then pushed into the ground, leaving a half circle around the ground. Rows and rows of these were pushed into the ground, and snares hung on them. The mating prairie chickens would be caught in these snares in great numbers. The feathers were used for pillow-making and for making feather mattresses.

One day, my mother and Fineday's wife, Ton-Toh, my sister, and I climbed Drumming Hill. We walked south on the west bank of Drumming Creek. We walked and walked. After walking south a long way, we went to another creek. This creek is not far from where the Gallivan store is now.

Below a bank beside this creek grew many maple trees. With these maple trees grew many wild rhubarb. After a lunch and a good rest, we cut the rhubarb, putting it in neat piles.

Then we tied it up in four bundles and headed for home, each of us carrying one bundle. It was a long way home. We were good workers then. Today, I don't think the young people know what wild rhubarb is. Nowadays, they do not care to eat things like that. Wild rhubarb was very good when added to soup. It was first peeled, then cut up in short lengths, then added to the soup and boiled for a while. It was very delicious. To make the trip worthwhile, we would carry as much rhubarb as we could carry.

It was hard work and we rested many times before reaching home. When we arrived with the rhubarb, we passed it around, as was the custom in those days. People were many and only a little could be given to each family, but they were pleased and happy with what we gave them. Today, when I think back, I am amazed that we were such good walkers. Nobody walks today. We dug many wild turnips and wild onions, and we did it all by walking. Both grew in profusion on the side of Drumming Hill. They were free for the taking and we did not hesitate, picking what we could.

Gophers were hunted in much the same manner as rabbits. "We are going on a gopher hunt," someone would say. I was into

everything when I was young. I went along on one of these gopher hunts. We would go back to the east of our camp. Below a big flat beside the creek; this is where we would go to hunt gophers. It was towards Battleford, and it was a long, long ways away. We would walk over there, carrying the things we would need on our backs. We would carry pots and pans, cups and plates, knives and forks. We would also make traps for the gophers, and big pails for drowning the gophers. We would kill many gophers and they were fat.

Not so long ago, I had an occasion to pass by this place where we used to hunt gophers. The land is now like a slough. It has changed. We cleaned and cooked the gophers over there, right where we had killed them. Then we would all have a big meal of boiled gophers. It was a nice meal and we all enjoyed it. We would then kill more and clean them so we could take them home for the people who weren't able to come with us on the hunt.

Then towards evening we would start for home, carrying our traps and pails and other things besides the gophers. There was just one road at the time to Battleford and we used this road when we hunted gophers. It was a long walk over there and back. The people were very good at walking in those days.

Duck hunting was also a much looked forward to event in those days. A duck hunt would be organized in early summer when the baby ducks were big, but not big enough to fly. The women would wade in the water, walking abreast, scaring the young ducks onto dry land. The men would grab them and wring their necks. The women would catch some in the water too. Sometimes women would grab garter snakes by mistake. This caused much squealing and some giggling by the spectators. In this way, I caught many ducks myself. The people at the time also had many good hunting dogs. The dogs brought many ducks each to the owners. The people were destitute, and many things were done to put food on the tables.

Early in the spring many duck eggs were gathered by the people. I have gathered a lot of duck eggs myself. The feathers from these duck hunts were saved for making pillows and other useful things. Late in the summer, another duck hunt was organized, this time when the ducks were moulting and could not fly.

South of Sliding Hill are numerous sloughs. These were full of water and ducks in the early days. This is where we hunted ducks, and in the creek, a little to the south. There were no trees or bushes around there at the time. Only along the creek, there was the old clump of willows. Otherwise it was all prairie. Porcupine were also used as food. Dogs were not skinned. The hair was burned off.

There were many deer at the time and people were not

stingy. When someone killed a deer, he gave most of it to his friends and relatives, leaving very little for himself. The intestines were given to the old people who knew what to do with them. Nothing was wasted. My uncle, Two on Two, used to collect deer horns and he made all sorts of things with them. He once made a deer horn chair, which he sold for a good price.

The women helped with the haying. They used a forked stick in place of a hay fork. There were no forks on the reserve at the time. There was maybe the odd fork around, if a man was well-to-do. He was considered rich.

There were no Sundances when I was growing up because the white man did not allow it. My uncle once prepared to make a Sundance on Strike-Him-On-The-Back Reserve. Many tents were there on camping day. We came to this Sundance from the east. We crossed the Battle River, east of the reserve, where there is now a bridge. We then moved west along the southside of the river. Then we met a man who said to us, "You must hide. Policemen are at the Sundance site and they say more are on the

way." My uncle was doing this Sundance, and people were already there, and a lot of them were hiding in the bushes. We also pulled off the road, travelling over rough country and through some bushes, hiding as we went. Come to think of it, we lost a pillow, hiding from the police as we went. We never found our pillow!

There was no Sundance that year. Instead we had a steam bath ritual. Post holes were already dug for the Sundance lodge. Again the police came and kicked the dirt back in the holes. The police were mean. They also told my uncle they would put him in jail if he persisted in going through with the Sundance. Later in the evening, after the police had left, we came out of the bushes and camped there that night. All the cloth and tobacco offerings which were to be used at the Sundance were placed in the sweat bath lodge and left there. The policeman who kicked the post holes shut did not have long to live. On their way home, he was thrown from his horse and died instantly, so that was the end of that.

Early next morning, camp was broken and the people moved home. In those times we had many berries. There were saskatoons, chokecherries, cranberries and pin cherries. The young girls used to pick the very best pin cherries. They were good eating berries. They were eaten without being cooked. At the foot of the hill by the school were a lot of raspberries and cranberries. All these berries were picked. They were dried and put away for future use.

The policemen did wrong when they came and put a stop to our Sundance. That was the only time they did wrong that I know of.

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