

'Little people' e-mail zips through rural Alaska

An intriguing e-mail hit Bush Alaska in May. In it, a hunter from Marshall recounted how he found a boy alleged to have been abducted by the *ircenrraat*.

Ircenrraat (singular: ircenrraq; say "irrchin-hhak" with a harsh *hh* and you're getting close) are a recurring theme in traditional Yup'ik teachings and legends, "little people" who dwell in the tundra, usually underground. They disorient, discomfort and trap unwary humans.

City folk usually dismiss *ircenrraat* as superstition. Those who have lived in Yup'ik country for any period of time tend to be a little more inclined to listen. For one thing, the stories are persistent and often come from respectable observers. For another, when you're by yourself in the middle of nowhere, things happen that are hard to explain.

For instance, a few years back, on a very re-

mote solo kayak trip in the lower Yukon region, I swear I heard rocks tossed in my direction by unseen hands or whatever. Big rocks. Whoosh. Plunk. Weird. A little scary — and not particularly on target, assuming they were trying to hit me. A close inspection of the presumed point of origin showed no evidence of anything. There was nowhere for anything bigger than a squirrel to hide. I can't say it was an *ircenrraq*, but neither can

I absolutely refute those who suggest it was.

Yup'ik descriptions of the "little people" resemble those in widespread stories shared by many cultures around the world. A conference on such creatures is held every year in Twisp, Wash.

Though accounts of sightings or of inexplicable events attributed to *ircenrraat* are common in Western Alaska, they seldom receive wide circulation outside the area.

**MIKE
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AROUND ALASKA

The Internet age changed that.

I called Nick Andrew Jr. in Marshall, whose e-mail started the latest excitement. He intended it as a private message to a family member, he said, and was a little disconcerted that it got forwarded far and wide.

He confirmed the details, however, and gave me permission to use his name, requesting that I keep other names out of print.

Andrew was on a snowmachine hunting birds the evening of May 7, some distance out of town — three hours away if you had to walk it, he estimated. Preparing to return home, he decided to check a different location on a hunch.

"Stopping to look, I saw a small boy all alone in middle of the marsh," he said.

He recognized the child as a boy from the village. "I asked him where's his dad or hunting

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