

Northwest Alaska Residents Recall Struggle with 'Inukins'

NOATAK (AP) — It may have been 54 years ago that Kenneth Ashby had his first run-in with Inukins, but he remembers what they looked like, right down to their bowl-shaped haircuts.

Ashby, 78, recently told the Arctic Courier that he and his brother Bruce were grabbed by Inukins, the region's pose equivalent of leprechauns, while fetching water from the Noatak River one summer day in 1938.

There was quite a struggle with the

"wild people," who were dressed in caribou skins and sported their straight-bang hairdos, Ashby said, becoming more animated.

Eventually the Ashby brothers got away, but not before their grandfather tried to come to their rescue, and slipped on an icy rock, fell down and knocked himself out.

Ashby is one of a number of locals who still believe in the wee folk.

In fact, one Noatak man who said he encountered the Inukins back in 1949 wouldn't give his name because he was afraid of "them reading the story and coming after me."

But he did say he and some friends tried unsuccessfully to chase one in order to push it into the water.

"That was many years ago, and I haven't seen any since," he said, looking over his shoulder. "(But) they still might be hiding someplace."

But Ashby isn't afraid of the Inukins. He said that, also in 1938, his sister Victoria chased away a couple of them trying to steal drying salmon off her rack.

And nine years later he met up with them again while camping upriver on a hunting trip.

This time the Inukins were stomping around in the dry birch leaves and playing hide-and-seek with the hunters.

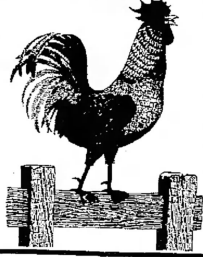
Ashby said the small people followed the hunters downriver, staying just out of reach. When the hunters arrived in Noatak, he said, they posted guards around the village to stymie the intruders, who whistled code messages to each other before falling back into the Bush.

But the man and his wife Ruth say they don't buy into everything they hear, pooh-poohing some recent talk around the village about Inukin sightings.

Ruth Ashby said she's sure the strange small folk are moving around the region and she worries about local children. But her husband has advice for fighting back.

"If you encounter them, warn them by throwing a stick or a rock at them," he said.

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Thu, Oct 18, 2018