

# 'Little people' stirring new round of talk

By JOHN PLESTINA  
The Tundra Drums

**KASIGLUK** — If recent reports of sightings are any indication, the legendary little people are returning to the area.

This village, located on the tundra about 20 miles west of Bethel, and nearby Nunapitchuk are the sites of several recent reports. The bluffs near Napakiak is another area where the little people have been reported.

While none of the recent eyewitnesses would talk about their experiences, Kasigluk elders Wassilie Berlin and Teddy Brink told of beliefs and legends related to them by their elders long ago.

Both men said they have never encountered a little person because they abide by rules of conduct passed down through generations. If a person abides by the rules, they may never have an encounter with a little person, they said.

Brink said three types of beings — ircinrraq, cingssiik and egassuayaq — are



considered to be little people. "The exact size, I cannot estimate. The smallest one — the cingssiik — that's the one that is very helpful to human beings," he said.

"In the early days with the cingssiik, they were helpful in the qasgiq (a traditional men's house in villages). Men worked on fish traps. If they went out before they were finished, the cingssiik would work on the fish trap," Berlin said.

According to Brink and others, the ircinrraq like to inhabit places where high bluffs exist, and they live in the ground.

Brink related a story of several people who saw an ircinrraq near a lake west of Kasigluk. The older people went after it, and the creature went through the land into a high bluff.

There are many accounts of ircinrraq taking people from Kasigluk and several other villages and putting them into the ground.

"If you're taken completely underground, even for one minute, you find you have been underground for one year," Brink said.

"They like to take people underground as their priority, I think. They can blow in your hand to tie you up," said Levi Hoover, a teacher at Akula Elit-naurvik in Kasigluk.

"If you should bother (them) or say anything bad, that's the only time they're going to bother you," Hoover said.

Berlin said people taken

underground find three doors.

A common belief related by many Yup'ik elders throughout western Alaska is that people who venture out the top door go into space and cannot go back to Earth. "You'll be out there in the sky," Berlin said.

"If you take the last one in the bottom and exit out, you only go out underground and you wouldn't be able to go back. If you take the middle one, that is the one you should take, and that is one that will take you back on top of the ground," Berlin said.

Brink learned to never take any belongings from these little people. "There was a guy who took an ice pick from an ircinrraq, but in the hands of regular people like us, it turned out to be nothing. Just an old rotten piece of wood," he said.

In the hands of little people, anything can happen. "They can take anything and turn it into something attractive," Brink said.

The elders cautioned re-

spect for the little people.

"Even right now, never to say anything about them and never to tease them, because they could be able to hear what (you) say, even through the ground," Brink said. "If we should go out some place and say anything, they could do something in turn for putting them down.

"It has been stated that they had more power than shamans in the old days," he said.

Sometimes the little people's behavior can be surprising.

"The small people do not bother a human being that has a piece of food in their possession," Brink said.

"Little people can do strange things. They can be here this minute and the next minute they're gone, and appear there. Regardless of how fast something is going, they can beat it."

Although Brink has never seen a little person, he told of a sighting by one of

his relatives.

"My wife's sister's house is high up and her child saw some little people, and they say they had grass-weaved boots. That was in Bethel ...

"These all (the three types of little people) existed in early times, at a time they considered the Earth thin."

The belief is that when the Earth is thin, the top layer of soil does not exist. Little people believe that when the Earth becomes thin, sightings of little people begin.

Berlin said when the Earth was thin, it was a time when many different kinds of animals, including the mastodon, roamed the Earth.

Hoover said little people from the "old time" are coming back.

John Plestina is a writer who lives in Bethel. Northern Voices appears on Mondays in the Daily News.

SAVE \$38

ALL ABOARD FOR A