

North of the Arctic Circle

In Alaska it's the little people

KOTZEBUE — I was glad Linda Billington, in a recent column, mentioned sasquatch, because it reminded me I had never written about inugituvurak, the little people of the Noatak.

There is a word in Eskimo for giants: it is inugituvurak, but I know far fewer stories about the giants than about the little people.

I'VE RUN into stories about them everywhere in the north, and when I was in Anaktuvuk Pass a few years ago, Simon Paneak offered to take me out to see their abandoned houses if I would come back in the spring. I was not able to, but someday, someday, maybe.

There are many stories about the little people, and many old timers who claim to have either seen them, or their tiny pointy-heel footmarks on the sandy beaches of the Noatak.

To tell you how big they are, there is one story about a man who was driving his dogs off in the bush someplace, and who found an abandoned little people village. In the center of it was the kargi, the old-style community house, and this full-sized adult Eskimo crept in through



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doorway, and if he sat with his knees to his chin, his head bent over them, he could just fit inside.

LITTLE people are very elusive. There are not many anymore who have seen them, or even their tracks. Perhaps the new snow machines frighten them, so they have moved farther back into the hills. This seems likely, because there is another old story about why the inugituvurak (which by the way, means simply little people, with no magical ideas attached) stayed away from the full-sized people.

It seems that once, long ago, a man driving dogs along an overgrown path, noticed his lead dog snatch at something running across in front of him. A moment later, a little man stepped out in front of the team and shouted to the man to stop.

Then he said, "Kill the dog, and open its stomach; maybe there's a chance."

SO THE Eskimo did; he killed his lead dog, and upon opening its stomach found there the body of a little people child, which the dog had swallowed as it ran across the path in front of him.

"That", said the little people man, "is why we don't want to live anywhere near full-size people. It's too easy for somebody to get hurt."

On the North Coast one often hears stories about "whistlers," strange small creatures who inhabit caves and who seem to radiate a sense of evil.

I HAVE talked to a man who claims to have seen a whole family group of little people who gathered on the occasion of some special event, which I have now forgotten.

Vaguely, I think it was the red aurora of the mid-1950, perhaps, or a meteor shower or something of the sort.

This man said he was hunting out near the Will Rogers Memorial at Barrow and that this strange event drew him out of his shelter, and soon he found himself surrounded by little people. He said he could talk to them but reported nothing earthshaking.

They were as interested as I was as he was.