

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MURDOCH CHARLES  
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SASKATCHEWAN  
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SASKATCHEWAN  
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INTERPRETER:  
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MURDOCH CHARLES:

Murdoch Charles is a trapper and prospector from Stanley Mission. He worked with Jim Brady for a short time.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Jim Brady as a friend.
- From his experience in the bush discusses Brady's disappearance.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Murdoch Charles is a resident of Stanley and knew Jim slightly. Tells a few details of the mining operation at Nistowiak falls. Talks a bit about what a bushman would do if he was lost.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm speaking to Murdoch Charles of Stanley Mission who was a friend of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris. Murdoch, you worked with Jim when he was prospecting, is that right?

Murdoch: That's right. One winter I went with him, went down the Churchill River close to Hudson Bay there. We were staking claims. That's after New Years. It was cold at that time.

Murray: What year would that have been, do you remember?

Murdoch: Gee, I couldn't remember. It was quite a ways.

Murray: Sixties or fifties?

Murdoch: Yeah, like that.

Murray: Late 1950s maybe?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Could you describe Jim? What kind of man was he? How would you describe him?

Murdoch: Well, the way he treated me, you know, he was a good man. And he never complained anything what we're doing. He was always satisfied when we weren't done. He always wanted to help, you know. He liked to help the native people.

Murray: Did he treat people with respect all the time?

Murdoch: Yes. That's the way I know from Jim. Every time he come to Stanley, he come to see me and...

Murray: Have a tea or something, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah, right. First time I met Jim it's way back. I didn't have any kids that time; that'd be about 22 years ago. He came to our place there at Nistowiak. So there used to be a winter camp there in Nistowiak, just below the Nistowiak Falls. And he was working here, they call the La Ronge Uranium, just down below the Stanley Rapids and that lake there. There used to be mining there.

Murray: This is near Nistowiak, is it?

Murdoch: Yeah, that's near Nistowiak. And he walked from there and then took some pictures there, Nistowiak Falls. We had lunch with him and made tea, had a cup of tea with him.

Murray: That's the first time you met him?

Murdoch: Yes, the first time I met him.

Murray: Did he work at Nistowiak all that year? How long did he work in that area?

Murdoch: Oh, until he moved down to the other mine. That's Pitching Mine there, we used to call that, you know. He works there until it's setted off.

Murray: How long do you think that would be?

Murdoch: Oh, it lasted quite a while. That's, I would say about 18 years ago.

Murray: About 1958 then?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: And it lasted from 1956 to 1958?

Murdoch: Yeah, it lasted about, I can't...

Murray: Or was it longer, four years maybe?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: From 22 years ago to 18 years ago.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: And he worked there all the time for that four years?

Murdoch: Oh yes, he worked there all the time.

Murray: Summer and winter, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah. Sometimes you know, when there was nobody working there, they look after the camp there.

Murray: So he would stay.

Murdoch: Yeah, he was staying there and looked after the camp and he had a two-way radio.

Murray: When you and he talked, what kinds of things would you talk about?

Murdoch: Oh we would ask each other, you know. He went to the army, you know, and sometimes I ask him that. He asked me a lot of things, you know, what happened, what I'm doing in the trapline. Things like that and working, you know.

Murray: He was interested in people and what they were doing, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: He was a political leader. Did he ever talk to you about native rights and native history and that sort of thing?

Murdoch: Yes, he would talk about, you know, he told me he lived in Cumberland House. He was a conservation officer there once. And he would like to help people. He was running with the bombardier, you know, that snowmobile in the wintertime there. Oh, he been around there. He liked to visit the native people.

Murray: So he visited a lot, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: From cabin to cabin?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: He had a lot of friends?

Murdoch: A lot of friends, yeah. A lot of people knew Jim.

Murray: What kinds of things would people say about him, you know, if someone mentioned Jim Brady what kind of thing might they say?

Murdoch: Now?

Murray: Well, back then, when he was visiting.

Murdoch: Back then when he was visiting, well, I guess they would ask him what he is doing. Things we asking, what's that there, things like that, you know.

Murray: Would they ask him advice about things? Was he a person who used to help people with problems?

Murdoch: Yeah. And things like that when I went with Jim we listened to him when we quit working and he'd tell us a lot of things, you know, for himself, when he went overseas.

Murray: He'd have stories about the war, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember any of them?

Murdoch: Not very well.

Murray: It's quite a while ago isn't it.

Murdoch: Quite a while ago. I remember a few things what he told me you know. He almost got killed there.

Murray: Do you remember that story?

Murdoch: I guess they met with two partners with, what do you call those, you know those bikes with power...?

Murray: Oh, a motorcycle.

Murdoch: Motorcycles. There was two of them there. They were going to meet them there. And there was that bomber there, the airplane, you know. But I guess Jim noticed that and he hollered, you know, roll on the side there. But from that blast you know, they hit a chip of that, that hit him right on the back and sliced on his back. He had a scar.

Murray: He had a scar from that, eh?

Murdoch: And the other guy, you know, it knocked him down but he came out alright you see. Everybody came out alright. If I didn't say that then....

Murray: They all would have got it.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: So that was one of his stories.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: What did he tell you about war? Did he say that it was an awful experience fighting like that?

Murdoch: Yes. Yeah, he told me. And after that when I am hunting moose, you know, I guess that's what he is thinking, when he go to the army. That's what he told me.

Murray: He remembers having to shoot at people.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Can you remember anything else that he said about the war? What effect did it have on him do you think?

Murdoch: Oh, I don't remember much. All I remember that night you know, that's enough.

Murray: Did he talk about it quite a bit or did sometimes he not want to talk about it?

Murdoch: No, when we ask him you know, to tell us a little bit about that....

Murray: He would talk, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Did he ever talk about his experiences in Alberta with the Metis Association there?

Murdoch: In Alberta?

Murray: Yeah.

Murdoch: He never mentioned about Alberta for me.

Murray: He didn't, eh?

Murdoch: The only things there, you know, he said there is good people in Cumberland and so is La Ronge and Stanley.

Murray: He talked about Saskatchewan places mostly?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Did he ever talk to people about the need for a Metis Association? Do you ever remember him talking about that kind of thing where the Metis people should organize and fight for their rights and stuff like that?

Murdoch: No. I never heard that. We just talked a little bit and he would go back reading, you know, material. Reading materials, and writing, writing letters. I don't know where he wrote those letters.

Murray: But he was always writing or reading?

Murdoch: Oh yeah, he was always doing something, you know.

Murray: This was even when he was at Nistowiak too was it?

Murdoch: Yeah, and he has that typewriter, you know, and typing too.

Murray: He took the typewriter with him wherever he went. Would he type at night with an oil lamp or how would he...?

Murdoch: Yes, he would type with an oil lamp. Not oil lamp but those...

Murray: One of those gas, white gas lamps, eh?

Murdoch: Gas lamps, yeah.

Murray: Do you remember him sort of writing or reading almost every night?

Murdoch: Oh, almost every night. Not writing but the reading, a lot of times, you know.

Murray: Did he ever talk to you about the books he was reading?

Murdoch: No, he never told me because I read mostly comics.

Murray: You didn't ever ask him what he was reading eh?

Murdoch: No.

Murray: He'd just sort of go off to his tent.

Murdoch: I didn't want to make any mistakes with his reading material.

Murray: Right, but he had quite a few books with him?

Murdoch: Oh yes.

Murray: How many do you think he had with him?

Murdoch: In his house?

Murray: Oh, his house he had lots I guess. What about at Nistowiak? Would he have books there too?

Murdoch: Yeah, he had books but I don't remember how many he has. You know, there is quite a few books.

Murray: Did he ever talk about the government to you when you were around him? Did he ever say anything about what the government should be doing or what it isn't doing? Remember that at all?

Murdoch: He didn't say much. You mean politics, something like that?

Murray: Yes.

Murdoch: No, he didn't say much about that. I remember that, because it's quite a while back there, as I say.

Murray: How many men would there have been at Nistowiak when he was working? Who was there besides you and him?

Murdoch: Ah, there was old Daniel McKenzie and he stayed there most of the time. He worked and get more than I do because when the winter comes, you know, I go back to my trapline.

Murray: And Jim would stay there?

Murdoch: And Daniel McKenzie would stay there most of the time.

Murray: Is Daniel in Stanley?

Murdoch: Yeah, he is in Stanley. He is an old man, I guess. The guy, you know, you want to ask him more about Jim. Because I stayed there just for a couple of months and then go back to the trapline.

Murray: Can you remember any stories about Jim that are interesting stories about things that he might have done or said?

Murdoch: Oh gee, it's really hard.

Murray: It's hard to remember isn't it?

Murdoch: Yeah, it's really hard to remember what the stories, the things... So anyway, I know Daniel McKenzie would...

Murray: Would have some ideas, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that people saw Jim as just a good friend or did they see him as a leader?

Murdoch: I guess they would just see him a friend, you know.

Murray: Not so much as a leader but as a friend who would help.

Murdoch: Oh yeah.

Murray: How many people would have stayed at Nistowiak when he

was there besides Daniel? Was it Daniel McKenzie, you said?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Would there have been others who stayed all year?

Murdoch: Well, there is George Roberts at ....

Murray: Otter.

Murdoch: Otter. And Tod Hooton, that's a foreman at the mining there that time.

Murray: What was his last name?

Murdoch: Hooton.

Murray: Hooton.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Where would he live now?

Murdoch: Prince Albert.

Murray: Prince Albert, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: He was the foreman of the job.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: How would you spell his name?

Murdoch: H-O-O-T-O-N.

Murray: Hoodon?

Murdoch: Hooton.

Murray: Hooton, T. And so they, all those men left when? Were they constructing or prospecting at Nistowiak? What kind of work were they doing?

Murdoch: They were trailing you know, and blasting.

Murray: Oh yeah. And there was a mine there, was there?

Murdoch: There was going to be but I guess the company went broke.

Murray: Oh I see, you had to stop. So it stopped work?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Was the ore good enough for a mine? Was that why they

stopped? It maybe wasn't good enough?

Murdoch: Maybe they didn't find enough.

Murray: Right. When was the last time you saw Jim? Did he come to Stanley very often?

Murdoch: Oh, not very often but when I go to La Ronge you know, I go to his place.

Murray: Just to visit.

Murdoch: To visit and have a cup of tea. The last time I went there, it was in the wintertime. I went to Prince Albert and I came back and was there and I stopped for a while and then I come to Stanley and then the next summer I heard he has disappeared.

Murray: So you saw him the winter before he disappeared?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: That would have been in 1966 or 1967, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: What was he doing then?

Murdoch: Oh, the same thing you know.

Murray: Prospecting, eh?

Murdoch: Prospecting and go out and blind cutting, you know. So that's all I know from Jim.

Murray: What do you think happened to him when he disappeared?

Murdoch: Can't say. I don't know what happened to him. The way I think you know, he drowned and they couldn't find him in the lake.

Murray: They couldn't find his body.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Do a lot of people think that, that he must have drowned or something?

Murdoch: Yeah. Somehow he drowned.

Murray: Do you know if he could swim?

Murdoch: Not that I know, I don't think I ever seen him swimming. Not that I know.

Murray: So he could have drowned if he had fallen out of his boat or something?

Murdoch: He could have drowned, yeah.

Murray: You knew Malcolm Norris as well?

Murdoch: Oh, Malcolm Norris, I'd see him when he comes to Stanley. I don't see him very long. I just know him to see him.

Murray: To see him. Why would he be coming to Stanley? Would he be teaching his classes, his prospecting classes?

Murdoch: Oh, just to have a meeting with the people, you know. Sometimes he came with the fisheries and interpret for him and pick up prospectors, you know.

Murray: So it was as a government employee that he would come to Stanley, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Do you know if he ever had any meetings about politics at all or was it always to do with government? Prospecting?

Murdoch: No, I don't remember if he told any politics, that guy.

Murray: Do you remember in about 1964 or 1965, whether either Jim Brady or Malcolm Norris talked about a Metis Society or Metis Association? They were organizing one at that time and I'm wondering whether or not they ever came to Stanley to talk about that?

Murdoch: Not that I remember. No, I don't remember that.

Murray: If they had come and talked about that, you probably would have heard about it, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah. I would have heard about that.

Murray: Has there ever been a Metis Society local in Stanley that you can remember?

Murdoch: With Malcolm Norris?

Murray: Well, just a Metis Society you know, with members in Stanley. Not necessarily with Malcolm. I mean there is a Metis Society. I'm wondering whether there are any members in Stanley.

Murdoch: Gosh, I don't know.

Murray: Not very many anyway then or you would have heard, I guess.

Murdoch: No.

Murray: I'm wondering if you could tell me, was he a hard worker when he worked?

Murdoch: Boy, I'm telling you, he was a good worker, you know. Sometimes he put too much, you know, in the bush.

Murray: So he could keep up with everybody else real easy, eh?

Murdoch: Oh yes.

Murray: Was he a good bushman?

Murdoch: Yeah, he was a good bushman.

Murray: He's not the kind of man that would get lost in the bush?

Murdoch: No.

Murray: If he got lost, he would be able to find his way out?

Murdoch: Oh yeah. He knew what he was doing in the bush. I miss Jim, you know, when I heard about that you know.

Murray: Pretty awful isn't it?

Murdoch: Yeah. It don't happen that many times in the north.

Murray: No, not with Indians anyway.

Murdoch: He was with that Cree Indian, you know.

Murray: Halkett.

Murdoch: How can they get lost? They were both good bushmen.

Murray: One man could maybe get hurt and not be able to walk but two men it seems...

Murdoch: One should know where to find the camp.

Murray: Yeah, and one could help the other if they got hurt.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Have you ever known, in the bush, of anybody being attacked by a black bear? Could that have happened, do you think?

Murdoch: Yeah, downstream here there was two people, a man and his wife. That's way back. But they were fooling around, you know.

Murray: They were being stupid.

Murdoch: Yeah, they were taking pictures, you know, these young cubs.

Murray: Did they get badly hurt?

Murdoch: He was badly hurt in his leg but they came out of those alright. They came to the (?) Falls camp there and radioed in and took them to the hospital.

Murray: Have you ever heard of a black bear killing anybody?

Murdoch: Not in my life.

Murray: So you don't think that, that probably wouldn't have happened to them, eh? There were lots of bears in the area apparently.

Murdoch: Yeah, there is a lot, what I hear. The black bear ate the body. He was around, a prospector there around the (?) Rapids, around the other side there. I heard that.

Murray: That someone drowned and the bears got him and ate him?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: But they found him did they? After, they found his bones?

Murdoch: Yeah, they found the bones. And it was on the shore I guess. Towards the fall and then the water always went down.

Murray: Does it seem strange to you that they never found the bodies?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Usually, if a man died in the bush, you would eventually find him, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: Be on a game trail or something?

Murdoch: Yeah, I remember that searching party there in that camp there where Jim Brady was camping. I guess they stayed quite a while. The La Ronge people know that. That's mostly La Ronge people went there.

Murray: Yeah, right. Yeah, I've talked to quite a few people. I don't know the bush and I'm trying to find out from people who do what, you know... what would you do if you were lost in the bush like that? What would be the first thing you would do?

Murdoch: Well, I would just stay in one place.

Murray: You wouldn't try and walk out?

Murdoch: If I don't know where to go, I'd just stay in one place and build a fire and not let my fire go out, you know, and just keep the smoke...

Murray: So that someone could see you?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: So you wouldn't try and walk to the Churchill River or somewhere. What would most trappers do? Would they stay in one place and set a fire so that people could see them?

Murdoch: Well, they could. Oh I don't think they would get lost.

Murray: Indian people don't get lost.

Murdoch: No.

Murray: They would find their camp again.

Murdoch: Oh yeah.

Murray: If you were four or five miles from your camp and realized that you were going in the wrong direction, would the first thing you would do is go back and look for your camp?

Murdoch: Yeah, the first thing I would do the next morning, if it's clear, I would climb up a tree or something like that, near my fire. Or if the trail there, you know, have something to mark the place where I go. With my axe or something like that.

Murray: So you can follow your way back. Do you think most prospectors, if they were leaving their camp and going for a distance of three or four miles, would make blaze marks on trees?

Murdoch: Sure.

Murray: That's something you do all the time, eh?

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: You'd never go anywhere without making some marks.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: So you can find your way back.

Murdoch: Yeah.

Murray: And Jim and Halkett were experienced enough that they would have done that if they were in the bush. They would mark

the trees or break a branch or something, eh?

Murdoch: Oh yes.

Murray: Is that what they do? Would they break branches or would they just knock the bark off trees and hope.

Murdoch: And you know, which hill, you know. They were all different, you know. They are not the same, you know.  
(Inaudible)

Murray: Yeah.

(End of Side A)

(End of Interview)

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