

Call number: 02-00-133-16 PT. 2

Neta Lord [and Winnie] talk with Karen and Roger McPherson about salmon fishing on the Yukon and the Tanana rivers

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

A woman's voice [Neta Lord] talks about roots and how one had to replace them all the time before [unclear, talking about making a fish wheel]. The rawhide was from moose, caribou, anything. Karen McPherson asks what kinds of things women did in building fish wheels. She tells that a lot depends on a woman. She had to cut and peel poles and work right alongside his man. Wherever he worked, she worked too.

Karen asks if she collected the fish. She tells that she used to go check the wheel. They had to do it every day, cut the fish and hang them. They had a lot of whitefish to cut and scale and hang. Then the fish had to be moved inside every day. They had to be left out overnight and then turned in the morning so they dry from the other side and by afternoon they are taken to the smoke house. They are smoked for 2-3 weeks and sometimes longer. It depends on the weather.

The wood that's used for smoking is cotton wood or alder. On the Yukon, there is lots of drift wood that they drag to the shore by hooking them with a single blade ax that's tied to a long rope. When they see a good log, they pull it in and tie it to the shore. They pile drift wood and use it in the smoke house all summer long.

02:42 Karen asks where some of the wheels were that the interviewee helped to build. She says they were in Waidai [sp?], on the Yukon. There were nutria minkrats there too in 1936-1938. They were there for 7 years in Waidai. Roger

McPherson clarifies by saying that they had 5 wheels going on at the same time. The interviewer agrees.

Then Roger asks when the fish first start running and when the people were able to start drying them. The interviewee says they start on July. They had lots of fish by 4th of July and from thereon until freeze-up. Every family had a fish wheel or a net. [Another lady says something unclear.] The other lady says that there was fish camp “on every bend [of the river]” from “here to Minto” which is around 30 miles. People had 2-3 fish wheels on every camp. Now there are snow-gos and nobody goes out to fish anymore.

Karen asks how long ago that was, and the two ladies agree it was about 30 years ago, since they have lived in Nenana for 15-17 years now, maybe 18 years ago. The other woman says the men in her family built the fish wheels and they helped by carrying poles. The first woman says that it depends on the family who is doing what. If there are no kids, the women have to help.

4:52 Karen clarifies by asking if the lady had a fish wheel that caught white fish. The ladies tell that she had a wheel where white fish run. Karen asks if it was a different kind of a wheel, but the ladies say it was the same. Another one of them says that in some places they catch white fish, but that in other places they get nothing and they have to move around. The interviewee says they had a fish wheel on the island when they were raising mink. They had tubs of white fish that they had to grind for mink food. Minks don't eat whole fish and it goes to waste and starts to stink. They give them water in the morning and water in the night, and a heaping spoonful of fish. They have to change their beds [bedding] and one can't jump around or make too much noise when they have young ones.

They pelted around 500 skins every year. They bought them from Charlie Gosty [sp?]. They tried to raise nutria because her old man read from a magazine that the fur was good. He got some \$500 dollars for being a veteran, and he spent all that money on buying South American nutria. He got two males, maybe, because they never got any young ones. They got bodies like beavers' and tails were like muskrat tails. They were horrible looking things. They were put in the back room that was used for storage and they could go into a pen outside. They fed them

rabbit pellets, but they never had young ones and finally one of them died. [Neta laughs.] This was back in late 1930s. [Break in the recording.]

7:42 Roger asks if some other people used fish mainly for the dogs. Neta tells that they ate it, dogs ate it and everybody used it. Roger notes that there are not many dogs now. Neta tells that surprisingly many people have dogs and that they have 16 dogs “up there.”

Karen asks about some ways to cook fish. Neta tells that they boil, fry, dry, or bake them and they cook and eat fish eggs. They boil the fish eggs a little bit, but not too much so they don't get too hard. Karen asks if they ever cook fish outside and Neta tells that they do all the time. Her brother-in-law used to cook fish for her and her mother. They poke [a stick?] up the head and cook it, but when Neta tries to do it, the fish falls on the ground and breaks. Her mother and brother-in-law broil fish perfectly on the stick. Neta cooks them on a grill after they have been cut. Karen asks how they keep it on the board and Neta explains that they “lean it this way” [she is probably showing with her hands]. They are put on a rough board where they stick, but one can also tie them down with chicken wire.

9:32 Karen asks what are the ways she has cooked fish. Neta tells that her kids used to eat fish out of a dog pot. [Laughter.] They were boarding dogs and cooked fish for them in a kettle that they always scrubbed clean and the fish was clean and the water was clean too.

Roger asks Winnie what her favorite fish recipe is she says she likes to bake it by campfire. She sets it up with a stick and bakes it on the fire. Neta's favorite way is the same, and a third lady agrees with this method too. They don't put anything inside the fish. One of the ladies says that after the fish is cooked, one can put salt or anything they want on it. The fish is not green [ungutted?] but it's half-dried. One can't cook green fish on camp fire unless it's put in tinfoil. They could even cook it in a big board, but it has to be turned over. Karen asks how long the fish has to dry before they can cook it. Neta [?] says it takes a couple of days. [Break in the recording.]

11:42 Winnie [?] says that the Indians before were cleaner than they are now, and healthier too. Winnie [?] had a father-in-law who died in 1963 and people said he

was 112 years old. He had never been sick either in all his life. He was raised with wild meat. He just got sick that one time and died.

Neta tells that when they were out in the camp, every time they wanted to eat, they had to go cut long, straight willows. They put fresh, green willows on ground before they could eat in the tent. Nowadays people camp right on dirt and sand. They could also use spruce boughs for floor coverings. There was no sand getting in their grub. Karen asks what they used before tents, and Neta tells that they used to use skin tents, but that was before their time, a long time ago.

13:55 Roger asks if Neta remembers the time when they first had fish wheels, but she tells that it was way before her time. They don't know when it was. Neta wonders whose fish wheel went up and tells that Kobuk Dick had a fish wheel right across from Chena. A woman's voice tells that she thinks that some white guy from the States was dip-netting and then invented the fish wheel. Dip-nets are oblong, about 4-6 feet, and they have long handles. Neta's brother-in-law, Paul Henry, is an expert at dip-netting. He used to do dip-netting for fun. He talked about it while they were on a trap-line and his father taught him how to do it. He showed Neta how to knit a net and that summer when they were in Fort Yukon, they went down with boats and canoes and watched early in the morning when the sun was up where water was shallow and calm, and watched him fish. Neta initially thought that she was knitting the net for nothing but then he found out that he [brother-in-law] was good at it.

16:23 Karen asks what she made the net out of, and Neta tells she used twine. Handle was made out of birch and he made it himself. The basket was made out of birch too. Neta tells that she learned a lot when she lived near Black River at Fort Yukon.

Her husband's partner was raised "the old way" and they used to talk a lot about how things were done in the old days. They talked a lot during the long winters.

Roger asks how he [the brother-in-law?] could see the fish in the water [water is often silty and opaque] and Neta explains that there is a little ripple. When one sees the ripple, one can know just where the fish is, paddle there and reach down with the net. Neta says she couldn't do it because she wouldn't know what to watch for.

Roger asks if that was how people in the past used to catch fish, and Neta says it is. They had nets and ladies knit them. They unraveled a heavy canvas and twisted and braided the twine into a long string. They ripped gunny sacks up and made the rope out of that. People used to work hard to keep their kids in food.

[End of the recording.]