

Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Polly Hyslop
Northway, Alaska, October 10, 2008
H2009-07-03

POLLY HYSLOP: I was working for the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, Norm Easton and a couple of guys, one was from Northway, one is from Canada, Beaver Creek, Tommy John and another guy, Louis Frank. We went out looking for our trails that were traditionally walked before the road came through. And I just can't...I always call this my spiritual experience, so if I start crying, please forgive me because I do. This is something that really touched me in a way that I was never touched before. We were actually my 10 year old son was there, he was 10 at the time I don't know if he actually felt it or noticed it, because it was so instantaneous, it just happened. But it left such an impact on me. We were following a trail, it was a rough trail, but it was still a trail. A remnant of a trail. We had got kind of disoriented because the trail had veered off into just brush and so Tommy was saying, "I know it's around here somewhere, I know it's around here somewhere." And then he said "There it is." And then when I looked, it was like a, like it had been waiting for us. I don't know how to explain it. But it had two notches like they were like birch trees, like there was kind of a trail. It was as clear as like somebody had, like somebody had walked it the day before, it was just there. And um, it's a wonder that we couldn't see it, it was like it appeared out of nowhere. But there were two notches on the trees just that somebody had put in years earlier to blaze it so that they knew, so that whoever was a walker would know that that was the trail. And he said, "Here it is." And when I looked at it, I just, I don't know what happened, I can't explain it. It was like my spiritual experience. It was, this is a trail that my ancestors walked. It is a trail that my mother walked until the road came through. There's a trail there, and I probably would have never known, until, unless we sought it out. So it had been waiting for us for over 50 years. And I don't know who walked it since, or who walked it now, but there was something that was so powerful about it at that moment for me, and for the two guys that were there. And I'm speaking for them now, and I hope that if they ever hear it that they're not offended, but I just...it felt, it opened up something that they had either covered up over the years or had not talked about but, but it opened up something about how they walked that trail. They and stories about it, and they started laughing. One of the guys I had never seen as laughing and open as he was then. It was just re-connecting to something that we gave up, in essence. That we gave up when we accepted the road. And that had to be the change because it was either the road or the trails.