

Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Ray Jackson
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STACEY CARKHUFF: So, this is Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Ray Jackson, today is February 27th, and we are at UAF in Gruening, room 718. Ray Jackson in a former chief of the Champagne-Aishihik Nation, and he is from the Yukon, and I'm going to be interviewing him today about the Alaska Highway. So, my initial question is, can you tell me a little bit about your family history, where you're from, and just any interesting facts about your Nation?

RAY JACKSON: I come from the Champagne Band, its about 55 miles away from Whitehorse, this side of Whitehorse, and originally our village wasn't in that situation-present place, it was north, about 40 miles which is [Guchai] this lake up there, the Native people gather around the lake or river or stream or something, so that's where my original village was. Its, we trace ourselves back to our five brothers, and their first names were [Hutsai]. So [Hutsai] Jackson was my grandfather, [Hutsai] Jim and [Hutsai] Joe, [Hutsai] Joe was a great-grandfather of Dave Joe, and nobody would ever know that we're cousins, unless we tell them. So we have this, I tell people, they should have changed it the other way around, and just call them Jackson [Hutsai] and Joe [Hutsai]. That way we could keep our last names, and people could trace the five brothers from five different family units came out of there, but they're all cousins. We have a problem with that. But after the highway came through, we weren't re-located, we re-located ourselves because of the convenience of the highway, we went to Champagne, and Champagne became our village. And Champagne is there, and we have Haines Junction, which is the center of commercial for that area, and then they built a school there, and so people moved from Aishihik which is about 75 miles north of the Alaska Highway moved to Haines Junction, and we had to move to Haines Junction because we were school age and that's the first time in history we go to public school. And then, that's why we have all our, our letter heads and references to the Champagne-Aishihik First Nations, because we never officially joined. We were just, what I called myself all the time was an administrative chief. Because it was those two villages that I was representing. At that time when I was elected, it was a regular chief in Aishihik, a regular chief in Champagne. So I can't really say I'm pushing them out of the way, I'm going to become chief. So at that time, that's why we suffered, and you see all the letter heads and all the references have made Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. And this is where I was, and I was the chief there for 4 years, I guess it was formative years because there was a lot of changes made; there was land claims, initiation, and all this type of activity that came about and, early, late '60's and early 70's. For us.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Ok, well you said you were about 3 years old when the highway came through. Is there anything specific to being from a native village and culture that you saw when the highway came, that was surprising, that you really remember, that stood out?

RAY JACKSON: Well I remember a lot of traffic on the highway. I remember one time my father had an accident, and he went upside down with both sides of a creek bed, so he was upside down on there, and we had to crawl out the back door, the back window. And I waited and the first vehicle came by and said, it was probably the lieutenant or somebody, he said, "Hey if you hang on until all this train goes through, we'll have a first aid person and also behind that person we'll have a wrecker so, we'll pull you out of the road." So I remember that. Even though I was probably three years old. And sometimes my mother don't believe me when I tell her stories, I told her one time about something that happened probably when I was less than one year old. She said "You cannot remember." I remember that, and I rehearsed the event to her, and she said, "You do remember." After that, nobody told me about that, I remember some vague things like that. And I remember Aishihik being the airfield for the highway, being 75 miles away from the highway, and 85, maybe all together by the time we get there. I remember my dad having contract to ferry some goods up to the end of the lake, so I remember having a storm come in. And so here they were, there's my dad and one of the workers in the back of the boat just ready to cut the rope if he had to. And I remember that part of it, I always remember what was going on, and why they were cutting the rope. Later on I realized that the rope would have dragged us underwater if it ever came loose or whatever in the rough water would have done some damage to the boat. So I remember that person ready to cut the rope but we didn't have to. I remember that part of it. And I don't know, that's probably 1930-40, summer sometime of '42, so I would have been, you know three years old. So I remember telling my mother this, and her saying "No you can't remember that." And also I remember my accident for my legs happening, and I was about four years old. I remember that part of it. Some things I'm glad I remember. I remember soldiers; I remember soldiers coming to Champagne and a lot of these things that would not be possible to remember, but I did. And because I was in the hospital so long really, maybe that's what jogged my mind because a lot of things that happened I rehearsed in my mind you know, what I am I missing being in the hospital for so long. And all together I was in the hospital for 12 years and I graduated from that, and I went another 12 years to school and then I graduated from that too. That's basically...What I remember.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Ok, So previous to the highway, how did you and your family travel?

RAY JACKSON: Basic transportation, mode of transportation was dogs. We had a little saddle made, dog pack and we'd put it over a dog, puff it up and they just stagger almost because of the weight, and they walked, and I walked. Another thing I remember, going to a place like that I remember walking back from [Klushu], which is southern [?] for salmon and the salmon would come through the rapids and come into [Klushu.] I remember walking in that direction, and I used to remember running ahead of everybody, and mom would be shouting at me, "Don't do that, don't run ahead." So, OK. I'd run ahead, go around a bend and come back to see if they're still coming, I still remember that, I was about three years old then. So its a lot of things that have changed.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So in terms of more recent effects, I know I've heard a lot, a little bit from you about the affects of the highway on Native culture. And in particular I

was wondering about hunting and trapping and how the highway kind of influenced white culture on Native culture and there was a lessening of cultural remembrances and traditional uses of hunting and the land.

RAY JACKSON: Prior to the highway, there was probably, say a trap line both [Canyon] Creek and Champagne would be almost 20 miles, and then that 20 miles would be pretty long- narrow and winding, really narrow say even dog trail or horse trail. But the highway made possible for us to probably speed up the process of walking, and using probably horse buggies and the occasional motor vehicle. But before that it was just mostly walking and with dogs.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Alright.

RAY JACKSON: Another thing that happened too is the access- we improved our access but it also improved the access of people that didn't need to be on our trap line, or knew the trap line or something like they can raid some things that we were doing.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So currently now, how involved do you think people of your Champagne-Aishihik I guess Nation, how involved are they in cultural practices and traditional hunting methods?

RAY JACKSON: Um, we're losing lots of it. What my bands have done is starting this year we have a cultural center built in Haines Junction and a lot of the things that were lost will be hopefully brought back and It'll probably jog the memories of some of the elders through telling stories and stuff. So it will open up a new era of information to these, to the to ourselves as well as our neighbors.

STACEY CARKHUFF: That's interesting, good. Are there any questions from anyone at this point? We can continue?

MARY EHRLANDER: My name is Mary Ehrlander, and this isn't really about the highway, but I wondered if you would tell your story, about when you were called upon to organize with the First Nations and then go to Ottawa and present your argument for Land Claims to Pierre Trudeau. That was such an interesting story that we heard last fall, and I'd love to hear it again, in fact I think everyone would love to hear it.

RAY JACKSON: Um, 12 chiefs, I've got a list of them here, 12 of them from the communities went to Ottawa on February 14, valentines day, and we presented this big card, the book was in this card, and we went there to, some of the chiefs had just never been out of Tetlin, never been outside of Whitehorse, you know, not even to Alaska. And they had to go all the way, 5000 miles to travel to see a place where they haven't seen, and leaders had only heard about it, and seen it on TV. And these, our chiefs were really different in that they haven't really, prior to the White Paper that was presented by Trudeau, which said that our constitution at that time was...Federal government would be responsible for land, for Indians and land to reserve for Indians, that's the only thing it said. From that, they had the Indian Act because they say, "Who are Indians, who are we

responsible for?" So they made a registration of all the, all the Indians they came in contact with. They missed some, probably because there was probably somebody hunting. But there's a list, the official list of the government. This is who they were responsible for. And then they put some land aside for them and these are the lands that they are responsible for. And then, then on the basis of that we presented our paper, and said, "You are responsible for us." And so we had some issues that we would like to have solved, and not necessarily solve the issues to the past, but make sure that the future would be strong enough for us to grow and be able to co-exist. And at the same time we recognize our inherent right to govern ourselves. And we went there, 12 chiefs and there's a lot of stories. One chief had never been out of Whitehorse, and the members of parliament got us all the way around the table, a big supper, and I remember I was sitting on the edge there, and the chief was sitting there, and I noticed that you know I was given this liquid. So he grabbed some salt and pepper, salt and sugar and stirred it up, and not salt, but cream and sugar and stirred it up. Same chief, he said, "I wonder why that cup has two handles?" So he put it up to his nose and he found out that it was [?] soup, you know. And so he nudged me and said, "What are you supposed to do with this?" I said, "Just leave it, they'll come around and get it." So the experiences they had were foreign to them. Completely. It was something that they had never seen and to be treated like royalty, going to parliamentary buildings and being fed, where probably the queen and things like that had been. The treatment they had was different-completely to them. We had to present this paper, and when we presented the paper we were apprehensive- not sure of what was happening. We drove ourselves completely every day for two days while we were waiting, just saying "what if he says this, what is our contrary reaction?" So we geared ourselves, and mine would be some field, and another one would be another field, and Elijah would take a present to him and stuff like that. After, when it came out, we looked in the paper and he says, "Great, we can start negotiating." Our mouths just dropped, we said "What happened?" And here, after we figured out that he has a court case, and they narrowly almost lost. And it could have gone either way, so it was just the last, their seventh judge decided not to vote, to abstain. And said there was not the forum for us to deal with this problem; let's go back to the political area. So that's why Trudeau was really anxious. Before that, his attitude was "I'm a lawyer. You prove you have rights, if you prove it in court, I'll believe you. Otherwise, don't bother me." So that was his attitude. So here we were with you know, out of the bush came 12 chiefs, and wanted to meet this guy with a brilliant mind about the law, and we're just presenting our feelings and issues. So, it was really an eye opener for me as a, one of the political ears. I'd been to Ottawa several times before that because I was an administrator and I'd go there for budgets and stuff like that, and administrative problems and so I know the area. But some of the chiefs have never been back. After that trip, so it was really an experience for the chiefs at that time.

LINDA JOHNSON: I've got an Alaska Highway related question. My name is Linda Johnson. After the highway was built, as a matter of fact as part of the highway versus the building of it, shortly thereafter both the federal government and the Yukon territorial government were concerned about wildlife management issues, and what they perceived to be falling numbers of wildlife along the highway corridor and the problems there so

they created the Kluane Game Sanctuary. Could you talk a little bit about the impact of that Kluane Game Sanctuary decision on your people?

RAY JACKSON: Well to begin with, the Kluane Game Sanctuary was, federal government legislation. We have the Constitution, and they, we were governed by the federal government. But not knowing that, we don't know, we kill a moose over here, and the police come along and say, "Thank you very much." Take everything, we didn't know our rights, until someone shot a moose in a park after many years this became, that became a national park. With, just the outskirts of the park being the game sanctuary. So the game sanctuary was the territorial legislation, and the park is federal government. When they asked me about, say we have a park there, and the other time we were negotiating land claims they said, "You can have a park, but you can't call them official parks." So they call them park reserves, even today They call them park reserves. So we can hunt and fish and everything in that area without any restriction. They might intimidate you, or intimidate me, or intimidate somebody...Legally they can't. And so this really bothered them for a long time. Because the game sanctuary shouldn't have been imposed on the Indian people as much as they did. IT could be imposed upon a regular citizen not and Indian people, but they were intimidated because of that.

ASHLEY CAMARA: I have a question. My name is Ashley Camara, I was wondering how old were you when you went to present to the Prime Minister about the land claims?

RAY JACKSON: '73 minus '39. It would be about 34.

ASHLEY CAMARA: Was there anyone younger than you that went along?

RAY JACKSON: Probably, could be.

LINDA JOHNSON: If you look in the picture, there's some pretty young faces there.

RAY JACKSON: Yea, yea, and probably [Dixon]

LINDA JOHNSON: Yes, [Dixon Lutz] and Danny Joe.

RAY JACKSON: Danny Joe, yeah.

LINDA JOHNSON: Ray, maybe as part of that story you were telling, in Whitehorse in the fall you talked about going out, Elijah sending you out to round them up? Could you talk about that a little bit?

RAY JACKSON: Ok, one of the chiefs he's deceased now, but he lived in Carmacks which is 110 miles north of Whitehorse and Dave Joe phoned me up and says, "We're going to meet Trudeau on the 14th so get everybody ready." So probably, I think we're probably the 11th then. So I phoned around and made sure that everyone had come in on that certain date to make the plane, they get there on the 13th. And then we've got to make that date on the 14th. So, one of the chiefs, he was one of the chiefs that had never

been out of the territory. Probably never even to Alaska even. So he said, "Ok, I'll be ready." And I phoned at closing time, and the band manager said, "He went out into the bush." I said, "Why, I told him this morning to be ready." He said, "He took off. He all the sudden just took off." So I said, "Seeing you's next in line," I said, "You probably have to go." He said, "No. I'll find him." So he went out the road, and it was about 15, 16 miles back in the bush and caught him. By that time I told him I'm heading up there, and by the time two hours was up there, and we met. And I hang on to him so he doesn't jump out.

STACEY CARKHUFF: What was he doing?

RAY JACKSON: He was out on the trap line. He was trap lining, he was going to hide there. And another thing about about him, you see a picture of him with a suit and everything, and that's the last time we saw him with a suit, except when he died. So the same is true- he wasn't about to change his ways of his dress, appearance, whatever.

MIKE KOSKEY: I was just wondering, um, this is Mike Koskey where, like, I guess how am I trying to say this. What had happened already before concerning the land claims before you guys went to Ottawa?

RAY JACKSON: Well, for one thing, the proclamation of 1763 George III made a proclamation that any new lands in the new territory must have the Native consent. So this meant that we should have a treaty. And so because of that, we, armed with that and also the constitution Indian Reserve for lands, and Indian's Reserve for lands and anyway, lands reserved for Indians. And these two documents we thought that we were a new country, we had no, no treaties, the nearest treaty was Treaty 11 which just comes into...Just about touched Watson lake. Just because Treaty 11 was there. So then what do you call it, the Northwest Territories so they followed the Liard River, and so that little bit and so then they came and saw that part of it, so we had to research and say we didn't. We're not signatory to that, none of the Yukoners are that's only one. That Treaty, that proclamation, also the constitution gave us some background on how to do it. Because there was treaties made in other parts of the area, we should have one. And we didn't say land claims at that time- we said land claims, but we know that, we come up with a treaty or something Or some type of agreement. And a lot of interpretation of how the Indian Act, one of them, we found that prior to 19, about 50's they had lands reserved for Indians. And then after that they changed it to lands set aside for Indians. Same thing, but they called it...That's what we had in the Yukon, had Indian villages with land set aside for the use of Indians. Not reserve for the Indians. So that's why they got it wrong, different. I guess because of treaties, we can't say this is reserved for Indians, because we didn't have any treaties to say this is a reserved land. And so, and then the court case of course made a change; there was a man in the legislative assembly in B.C. That said, Mr. Collier Frank Collier said, he said that we had aboriginal title, that's where we came up with aboriginal title, because he said we have aboriginal title to the land. And even thought they have reserves, and even though they treaties, but they have aboriginal title. So they proved that, this when they had the 6-3-3 and 1-1-0 neutral. So it was his court

case that one. And 70, I mean, 14 days later, we came on the scene, that's why it completely changed.

LINDA JOHNSON: I'm just going to follow up on that and say, It's Linda Johnson again, how do you think the building of the Alaska Highway and having the Alaska Highway there as a corridor, did that have an impact on First Nations people in the Yukon getting organized to promote a land claims agreement in the Yukon?

RAY JACKSON: Um, basically it was, the Alaska Highway helped us, and also other highways that came in helped us get organized. And I remember the first meetings we had, didn't have any cars in the communities. And so they came in and stayed in the hotels and that, the Yukon Native Brothers bought a suburban, we told them that we needed one, and I went around and gathered all the chiefs from their hotels and drive them in. But now if you go to meetings you have no place to park. And so the highway was, our sort of our connecting point between the villages. It was a lot faster than we used to have. And the Alaska Highway especially was a great impact on us because of the population increase and also the number of tourists that went up and down the highway. That helped us out many ways that we had disadvantages where we always look at more of the advantages as we had new customers for, and made this and everything. And able to be able to market this a lot better than we had before. And it also gave us more transportation to our remote trap lines and instead of using just the rivers and the streams we used the highway more.

STACEY CARKHUFF: I don't have a whole lot else, I was just wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit more about some of the advantages and disadvantages of Alaska Highway.

RAY JACKSON: Some of the advantages we have is that our, like we say about our transportation route, give us a new transportation route, improved communications between ourselves. Of course the telephone came in along with the highway, and we had a big, long telephone line, that went all the way from here to the other end of the highway, and so that's new communication for us. Social economic; like I say, we socialize more with other communities, also economic it helped us out. Job-wise it's helped us in getting work with the tourism industry. We're able to do some of the, many jobs of tourism like maintaining the buildings and making sure the beds and everything are made. And gassing, gas in cars and everything, so it's just some jobs like that. And it also challenged us to know that there are more jobs our there than that. That they gave us a challenge to meet some of the criteria for some of the jobs we were able to go and get an education so that we can qualify for some more job markets. And its a real thing- one of the things that we put in our original paper to the government was that we want economic development, more meaningful and more in-put from ourselves as Indian people, and also to be proprietors and owners of businesses so that we will not just be an employee. And this was a real big thing for it because our view was to see ourselves being employed. But when we say we're going to try to get a business- I did have a business in Haines Junction and it was pretty good, it was busy, but it's hard to view...At 4:30 you quit but at 4:30 when you own a business you keep on going Until the sun goes down, which it never does anymore. And so it's a different perspective, from our point of

view that we had to view ourselves as owners and proprietors and that. And be able to discipline ourselves to be an economic opportunist.

MARY EHRLANDER: I have another question, and this is Mary Ehrlander again, in the Yukon, are, did some communities move closer to the highway and today, for instance, are most First Nations communities quite close to the highway, accessible to the highway, or are there some that are very remote like in Alaska, they can only be flown into, you can't drive there.

RAY JACKSON: We have one isolated village, which is Old Crow, and other than that we have roads. To say that some moved, like Beaver Creek used to be at Snag, and that's about 20 miles, 30 miles out north of the highway, and Snag was a staging for the airfield, so people lived out there and when the highway came through they moved to Beaver Creek because probably some of the 1957 or so they built houses to for people with children, and moved into or something like that. And Haines Junction was another one- we had two villages, Aishihik and Champagne and they both moved into Haines Junction because of the schools. And other than these ones, I guess there's no more dramatic. Another one is probably Ross River. There were across the river where the Junction of the Ross River and the Pelly River, and because of the traffic, because everything happened on the south side of the... Without a bridge they moved to another part, side of the community.

LINDA JOHNSON: And Fort Selkirk-

RAY JACKSON: Fort Selkirk is another one, yea. Fort Selkirk was on the river, between Dawson and Carmacks, but they had to move into near the highway because of different things that happened to them, given the building the school there as well.

MARY EHRLANDER: Did the communities get government help with, that would be very expensive to move your whole community or were the First Nations people rather still moving a lot and migratory? So how much of an operation was that to move their whole villages closer to the highway?

RAY JACKSON: Well for one thing, prior to you know '50's, about '57, buildings were built by themselves with their own time and effort, and after '57 when the children were allowed to go to school then they built houses for them near the school so that they built them right there. So, that's government money that was spent for families for school. And then later on when I became chief, I'd see some other people that didn't have any children and were getting older, I had to make sure their housing as well. And so the emphasis was on the families with children.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Does anybody else have any questions or things that you'd like to talk about? I don't really have any more questions, if you have anything that you'd like to talk about just on a whim or any points that you think are really important that you'd like to talk about you're welcome to.

RAY JACKSON: I think its good for us to get together to find out what happened, because prior to this time I never thought how much the highway meant to us as Native people, and also how much it affected us adversely as well as advantageously and so it just gives a good forum for us to look at the effects of different projects that happened. And probably another big one would be the Alaska Gas Pipeline, so it will keep growing, and we have to learn from some of the past.

MIKE KOSKEY: What's the opinion in Yukon, sorry this is Mike Koskey again, what's the opinion in the Yukon about the, you know the pipeline that's being built by Trans-Canada?

RAY JACKSON: I guess it's economic wise it's probably a good thing for the people, I think it's a good thing and Canadians will be building part of it and of course they have a lot of experience in this, especially in the coal and the different areas like muskeg and the [?] down at Fort St. John and at Fort Nelson so all these type of lands, problems they will be facing will be, have experienced people that will do It. In terms of objections, we don't have any objections now, probably the only objection we'd have would make sure we'd know an inventory of all the jobs it might fawn, so that we can prepare ourselves for it. But before this time, we would say "We object to this because of land-claims, and we would not let it go through unless you give us land claims." Now it's happened, it will be different. Different rules to play by.

LINDA JOHNSON: On that question, there's still the three First Nations that haven't settled...

RAY JACKSON: And two of them are...

LINDA JOHNSON: And two of them are on the highway, Beaver Creek and Upper Liard. What's your prediction there?

RAY JACKSON: They [probably have an aerial?]. I think, I think more than realize that they can see the benefits outweighing the problems it might impose, that they don't get too brave and say "We're not going to have anything unless we have land claims" that's an extreme. But if they can see the benefits and see what they can benefit from the long term, not just short term, just jobs for three years or whatever. No, but long term, to see what the benefits we can have from it. They'd weight that, I think more than we used to where we had to say we're trying to hurry the land claims up so it will help us.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Well, well we thank you for doing this interview, and we really appreciate you coming and talking, and learning from you, and it's just been a really, a nice, a nice interview to have with you. Thank you.