

KNOWLEDGE OF NATIVE ELDERS  
Oscar Nictune  
Summarized by: Isaac Juneby  
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Today Oscar talked about fishing or hooking as Oscar called it. He talked about how he had set line. Right now you can go fishing for grayling anywhere there is open water. Grayling is hunter's good food.

During the time he was growing up he used only bone hook, Oscar said, today we use ivory hooks. After we catch the fish, we also get the fish eggs. He told the class that some people are bad luck. What he meant was when some people get a bite, they pull too quickly and the fish will get away. If the fish bite the hook right, the hook wont come out. Some good fishermen will just let the hook drop and will catch a fish.

So they use to carve the moose bone that they make the hook out of? Yes, back in those days they didn't have automatic drill bits. They have to hone the bone, they don't do that now. Sometimes they spin the bore hole for the bone and wood. They also made snowshoes. They use chisle to make sleds too.

What do they call it in your language? Geeyaq, I dont know if I mispronounce it, but I have quite a hard time with my own language. My family don't talk to me in my language. I'm originally Eskimo, I grew up in an Athabascan country. Every time I want to talk my language I have to go to Kobuk. When I say something, seems like it has a hard time coming out. I have to think and search for the right words.

When you were in Alatna, did you use to fish for different (?) for people in the winter? Yes, you can find grayling in the river, like the Tanana River. You can catch pike, sucker anywhere now, cook it for your supper.

Did your family ever use dipnet? Yes, we use two kinds of dipnets. We use a big net, we use spruce tree and put it in the river. Put the dipnet down between the trees. Then we use cottonwood, driftwood with no limbs so it won't snap.

How big is the dipnet? The dipnet is 8-10 feet, a very big net. Put it in the water when the fish is coming down. Seems like when your bad luck, you dont seem to catch them. Your lucky if you catchd 100 pounds in one day.

What kind of catch would you say it would be? It would be a good catch, it is a big fish, shee fish eats them, nobody is fishing like that anywhere.

When you build your dam, do you build it like a V-shape? You build it from the beach straight out. You have to follow the current, if you don't it will go like this. Remember to that side current is no good, you have to use straight current, put the sick down stream.

Is there anymore questions on fishing? What kind of a line did you use? The set net is a different thing, you can use it again and again. When they made the dipnet, what did you use to make it with? It was made out of twine, they roll it around and around to make it. Never go backwards with the twine when making it. So when you net fishnet, you always go forward? Do you start at the bottom of the net? like a set net, you have to go this way all the time. When you set net for salmon, whitefish, grayling you will catch them in the mesh. The mesh size has to be small for fish

other than salmon. You can make it either whiteman or Athabascan way. What was the name of it? In those days, we used to make twine from willow bark. Did you used to help your mother do that? Yes, when it is a good bark, you can make a longer and narrower twine. It was a lot of work, you have to peel the bark from the outside, on the inside you scrape the soft stuff off, you did this until just the fiber is left, you usually use sandbar willows. When you were a child who in your family made the fishnets, was it your mother or father? Both men and women can make fishnets. Did you ever made a fishnet? Yes, both men and women take turns. Right now we just order it from Donalson Company in Anchorage. We can order it through the catalogue. After I get paid from this job I am going to buy two new rifles. I know the rifles are high priced, not like I bought one about ten years ago, I bought one for the price of \$500. I am afraid to ask for the price now. I want a small shotgun, like 20 guage, 12 guage is too big for me. The automatic if you dont watch it, you can fire 5 shots and it will push you backwards. Do you remember when you were a child if your parents had guns? My Dad had a 44 Magnum pistol, they got it from some ship, but long before that there was only muzzleloaders. One thing about them was you had to use primers and powder to reload the ammunition.

How do your people prepare their fish, grayling, and other fish? You can cook it with a stick over the fire, you can also boil or fry it. There are certain things that you can eat from the inside. When you fish for grayling, is it late fall or early spring? you catch grayling in either seasons, when there are no salmon yet. Oscar stated that they also used spares when he was a child. He described how the dogs were trained to line boats, no outboard motors during that time. We also used pack and harness for the dogs. The packs were made so that the packs hung on both sides.

When we prepare the fishheads we split them in two and boil them. We even cook or dry the fish eggs. Fish is a good food when your travelling.

When I was growing up there was no big game like moose or caribou. The moose finally came from the Yukon in 1920. We also have sheep and two kinds of bears. You have to know how to hunt them. Bears are tough and they hibernate all winter, they come out in April. When there are no caribou, the people go up to the mountains and dig out the bears. They smoke them out and cut their throats or club them as they come out. They are partly blind when they first come out. There are also ground or parker squirrels. What time of the year do you hunt these squirrels, what do they get them for? They come out in the spring and they were snared.

Of all the traditional food, what do you like the best? I was raised with fish, rabbits, spruce hen and big game.

How did they dry fish eggs, what did they put on them? They put them in an old net or drying racks.

Are there stories about caribou and moose as to why they are not there? Why did the moose and caribou come back to the Koyukok River? The caribou came back in 1919, they migrated and were looking for food. During this time they had to go a long ways to get caribou or moose, you had to to up to the head of the Koyukok River. Sometimes you have to

go to the Hog River, but there are lots of ducks and beaver locally. I hunt on the Alatna River.

When you hunt, did you go with other men or did you go alone? I went by myself most of the time. Oscar used to hunt by Annuctuvik Pass, what does that mean? Annuctuvik means a divide or caribou droppings.

When you trap beaver, did you leave enough for them to recycle? yes, we trap and take only so many from one area. When you skin beavers, you throw the parts back into the river and say come back again.