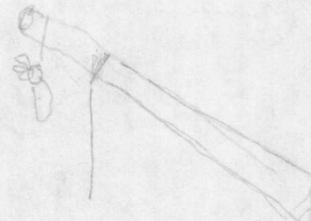
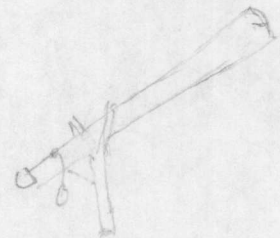


KNOWLEDGE OF NATIVE ELDERS
 ELDER: JOHNSON MOSES
 MARCH 30, 1989
 summary by: Mindy Kuehne

Johnson Moses brought in a piece of ^{Cambou} sinew ^(taken from the ^{back} shoulder area) today, this is what ~~is what~~ is used to make thread (tl'ah). ~~The sinew is taken from the shoulder area.~~ The meat is cut off and it is then hung to weather dry for maybe a week. Eliza then demonstrated how the sinew is made into thread by separating sinew into strands. Taking a strand and twisting it, then twisting (plying) together two strands. By plying on another strand of sinew, a person can have a continuous piece of thread. ^{which is stronger & lasts better than nylon thread} ~~Sinew is stronger than thread and lasts longer.~~ Eliza also showed us her sewing kit, explaining that girls are taught early to keep it with them.

Next Johnson showed us a snare made from picture frame wire and a piece of wood. The snare is placed on a spring pole, which is balanced across something, then pulled down so that the heavy end is up in the air and the other end (which the snare is attached) is about 12 inches off the ground. The key (wood piece) is latched, holding the spring pole in place, the snares noose hangs down. Brush is put on both sides of the spring pole to guide the animal into the snare.



The snare is set at different heights, depending what you want to catch - ptarmigan, rabbit, or lynx. One advantage of a ^{← spring pole} snare is that the animal dies quick, which keeps the meat fresh. Some times in the winter they set up several snares with a fence of willows between them, then a few people would walk through the brush towards the snares, hitting sticks as they went, this was to drive the rabbit towards the snares. When they got alot of rabbit ^{the} ^{skin} meat they would dry it.

To avoid getting sick from bad meat, it is important to look at the animal really close when you take off the skin. If the meat has little lumps in it don't eat it. With ducks, after you pluck it and cut it open, if it has little round white spots don't eat it.

Johnson showed us a pair of snowshoes, long snowshoes (6 foot) are used to keep you on top of soft snow when walking on long flat places; trail snowshoes are shorter ones; and there are all-around snowshoes as well.

Next he described how to make snowshoes. First you need to find ^{a birch tree with straight grain} ~~the right birch tree~~ about 5" thick, with no limbs lower than 5 1/2 feet off the ground. There are certain places to find them. ~~The tree must have straight grain.~~ To check for ^{straight grain} ~~this~~, cut a piece of bark and peel it up wards, if it peels straight it is good. (Some people cut the top ~~section~~)

of the tree to check the grain but, Johnson was taught not to cripple or kill a tree for nothing.)

Once the frame is built a long thin rock is used to sand it smooth. Then it is painted. This paint is made from certain rocks,^{which are gathered in the summer.} (To find them in this area he would look under the bluff along the Chena River.) These rocks are lighter weight than other rocks, they are round and not too big (the bigger ones don't work). ~~Summer is when the rocks are gathered.~~ Next the rocks are rolled in fish blood (kidneys from pike or greyling are cut up to make the blood) then placed in the fire, when the rocks look whitish gray, they are taken from the fire, quickly dipped in water, and set to dry. These rocks are ground into powder, which is mixed with water to make a thick paint.

After it is painted, holes are drilled to lace the filling through. It is important to start at the right place. Caribou babish is used to fill the front and tail of the snowshoe, moose babish fills the part under the foot (moose hide rope is stronger). The hide rope is dampened, then worked back and forth over a pole till it gets soft and kind of dry.

The tail of the snowshoe is filled first - it's the easy part. The front is very hard to fill, you have to come out even or there ~~are~~^{are} big spaces (some people watch carefully as an old snowshoe is unlaced then remember that pattern to put in the new lacing). Snowshoes used with mukluks have moose babish lacing under the foot area. A leather strap fastens

on the snowshoe. When it is tied the right way you can get your foot in and out quickly without using your hand (If you get caught in an over flow you've got to kick off your snowshoes quick.)

When the snow shoes are made, a strip of fish skin (or ptarmigan feet) is laced in the front part for luck.

Another thing Johnson's grandfather taught him, one should walk southward, or down stream when you leave the house, then you can go any direction. If you don't do this, you probably won't see anything.

Sleds are also made out of birch. In the old days many sleds did not have runners extending out in back, it was considered lazy to ride. People needed their exercise to be in good shape when it came time to chase down a caribou or other game. Also in those days people couldn't afford many dogs, four dogs were used to pull a 12 foot sled, holding the families gear and small children, there was a gee pull so that adults could help pull the sled along with the dogs.

A bender board was used to curve boards for runners. To get a bender board you look for a tree that has fallen over, with its roots sticking up, take a sturdy root with the right curve to use as a bender board.

To bend a runner, take fresh birch and warm it up next to the fire, tie it down to the bender board, working it with

Warm water as you go. Let it dry about one week ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ the *house* fire, when you untie it, it stays curved.

The class was brought to a close with Johnson sharing about the Koyukuk River Spring Carnival sponsored by Alatna, Allakaket, Huges, and Huslia. This year it ^{is} was at Allakaket on April 7th to 9th. During the day there ^{are} was dog races, snowshoe races, and in the evening, old time fiddling and dancing.