

Knowledge of Native Elders
Tatiana Saunders
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During the first half of the class, Tatiana spoke of methods for preparing Moose and Caribou hides. She also demonstrated how the webbing of snow shoes is made. The second half of the class was devoted to recalling stories of hunting, trapping and tragedy. It was not clear from the tape if the stories all took place within a short period of time. As a time reference, she did say that the moose story was in 1963.

The class was begun by demonstrating how sinew is twisted into thread and then used for the webbing of snow shoes. She emphasized that the strands of twisted sinew are of unequal length when spliced together. She said that an alternative to using the sinew is to use the skin of the belly of a moose. The thick part of the moose hide is used for the foot area of the snowshoes. It also need to be wider. The sequence of steps of preparing the hide were detailed by Tassie. 1) The hide is draped over a green birch log 12" in diameter and about 4 feet long. It has to be completely smooth. Any bumps left on log can cause a cut in the skin. Using a large butcher knife, clean all the meat from the skin. There should not be any meat left on the skin. 2) Cut all the hair or fur from the skin. 3) Strip the skin down to a desired thickness which is just right for working. 4) The skin is stretched tightly in water while it is stripped. This step takes a long time. 4) Once stripped down it is wrapped tightly around trees or post to dry. The drying is done outside in the wind. If done inside the skin will become too hard.

To tan the skin steps 1-3 is followed, it can then be dried to tan later. The dried hide is soaked in a solution of water and King Salmon head. It is soaked for a week. The hide is draped over a pole between 2 posts, the skin is stretched tight to get all the water out. It will dry in 2-3 days. When working on the skin at this point, you should'nt drink any water, coffee or tea.

The skin is then tanned or colored. Old spruce logs is used for the smoke. It should be crumbly and the right color (dark enough). Sew the hide together lengthwise. Make a T at the butt end and the head end. Leave about 20" open on the belly, then create a skirt by sewing a piece of canvas around the opening. It is important to build a tight structure so that smoke can't escape. The skin needs to be closely watched during this time. The smoke has to be kept going, just right, this takes hours to do.

Sears Roebuck and the Three Skins

One year Tassie ordered a solution from Sears which could be used for tanning hides. She and her husband were going to check their fishnet when she thought she noticed

some other people coming down the river. After they had been in the boat for a short while she realized that there wasn't a sound of a kicker boat coming. It was a moose *swimming* standing in the middle of the river! "Let's strangle it!" she said. Her husband complains that they only have a .22. They poled over to the moose, Tassy puts the rifle in the moose's ear and kills it with one shot. This was at or near the 9 Mile camp. *bank*

The next morning they were getting the boat ready when she saw another moose in the river, a cow moose. Her husband shoots it but in their excitement to get the moose Tassie forgets to retie the boat and it drifts to the other side of the river. Later that fall she decides to try out the Sears solution. It is like paste and she folds up the covered skin and puts it under her bed. She started working on another moose hide from a moose she shot another time in the woods with her single shot rifle. She shoots him in the butt saying this is the softest part of the moose or of any animal. Days later she remembers the hide under the bed and discovers that it looks like no other hide she has ever seen. It is white, soft and fluffy. She *trapped* another hide using the solution and ~~the third one the traditional way~~. A visitor can't believe that the things hanging are moose hides, he thinks that it must have come from somewhere far away. *learning the traditional way method*

Dog Teams and Trapping

Tassie then tells of the dog team which she and her husband used to trap with. They could make it to Kaltag in 2 hours. The dogs were a quarter wolf and were the best team she ever had. After only 2 years of owning them, she lost the entire team to distemper. When they trapped they made a big circle, going from Nulato to the flats and then back to 9 Mile Camp. In Kaiyuh they had a cabin, on the flats they lived in a tent, and back at 9 Mile Camp, they had a cabin. It was hard work and they would often walk for the entire day. One spring while at camp she trained some puppies to pull a sled. She would grab the dog by the ears and twist his head to the left while yelling, "Gee!" and then the opposite way yelling, "Haw!". This seemed to teach the puppies so she thought she would try the team out, and away she sped with her new team.

Tragedy At 9 Mile Camp

During the spring the family was at 9 Mile Camp they were hunting. A friend was with them who has some puppies. Tassie's youngest son was 2 years old at the time and was just beginning to walk around. One night she had a horrible dream which told her someone would be in an accident that next day, her boy would be the one. She was in the house making stew when she realized that her boy wasn't close. She ran outside to see him toddling towards the puppies. He was holding a sharp stick, he fell forward onto the stick while the puppies rushed by him. The stick sliced open his *the mother of*

head in a neat cut which completely severed the top part of the scalp. Tassie quickly replaced the scalp and took the screaming infant inside. With her daughters help, they bandaged the boy. On two occasions, Tassie found herself away from the boy, seemingly oblivious to what was going on. Each time she would rush back inside to help her son. This was a very religious experience for Tassie. She continuously said the rosary and then suddenly, the boy stopped crying. He then made the sign of the cross. Tassie took this as a direct sign from God and then prayed aloud, asking that if the boy is to die then take one of them with him. A helicopter arrived shortly thereafter. Her son survived after a long stay in the hospital.