

Muskwa-Kechika



THE 1999 MUSKWA-KECHIKA
YOUTH ENVIRONMENT CAMP

MUSKWA-KECHIKA YOUTH ENVIRONMENT CAMP

Report by

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For

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Derek Loots, supervisor of the Muskwa-Kechika Youth Camp, on behalf of Kaska Dena Council.

Many individuals and organizations contributed to the success of the 1999 Youth Environment Camp, hopefully the first in a series of annual youth camps. We would like to extend a special thanks to the following people, all of whom helped to make the camp a reality.

Firstly, we would like to thank the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board for providing the funding for this camp.

The 1999 Youth Camp would not have been realized without the vision and enthusiasm of Dave Porter. For this, and for the guidance he provided to the camp leaders, we are extremely grateful.

Jim Walker, Ministry of the Environment, and Jim Little, British Columbia Asset and Land Corporation, were instrumental in obtaining permission of the provincial government to use the facilities at the Turnagain Guide-Outfitter Camp.

We would like to thank the many individuals who took the time to attend the camp and give a presentation: George Smith, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society; Brian Churchill, Chillborne Environmental; Roy Cunningham, Petro Canada; Malcolm Foy, LGL Limited; Norm Barichello, wildlife biologist; Steve Walsh, lawyer; Walter Carlick, Chair of Kaska Dena Council; Dennis Porter, Lower Post First Nation; and George Henry, filmmaker.

Victor Kisoun did video recording of the camp.

The following chiefs attended the camp and offered their wisdom and support: Carol Ann Johnny, Dease River Indian Band; and Daniel Morris, Liard First Nation.

Many individuals were instrumental in transportation and camp setup and these included: Ken Rich, Peter Jakesta, Sylvain Paquette, Johnnie Forseberg, and Robbie Porter. Charlie Boya assisted in camp setup and maintenance and he also taught the youth many traditional activities such as hunting, stick gambling and survival skills. Brian Churchill hauled fuel to the Turnagain River Camp on his way up river.

Fannie Vance, Temira Vance, and Yvonne Boya prepared all the meals and kept the camp attendees full of home cooked traditional and non-traditional meals.

The camp could not have taken place without the knowledge and wisdom of the following elders: Leo Johnny, Charlie Dick, Amos Dick, Alfred Jakesta, and Tom Poole. We wish to specially acknowledge the contribution of elder Mida Donnessy, who was the resident elder throughout the entire camp.

Rediscovery International provided the leadership training and Mike Lickers, leader of Ghost River Rediscovery was especially helpful in taking some personal time to travel to the Turnagain River to complete the camp assessment and help with some camp setup.

LGL Limited provided maps for use at the Muskwa-Kechika camp and assisted in the production of this report.

Shirley Laverdure of Kaska Dena Council managed the financial details of the project; Roma Tibbet of Kaska Dena Council helped with camp organization and administrative assistance; Peter Stone of Kaska Dena Council donated several items for use by the youth, including his riverboat; Desiree Jones, assisted with the logistics pertaining to organization and operation of the camp.

Key participants of this project were the camp leaders: Derek Loots, Brittane Laverdure, Blandon Donnessy and Ria Kisoun. We thank them for contributing their leadership skills to this endeavour.

Finally, we wish to thank the young people who attended the camp. Their good nature, enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about the land from the elders and others provided the most telling evidence of the success of the 1999 Muskwa-Kechika Youth Camp.

BACKGROUND

The Muskwa-Kechika Youth Environment Camp was designed to train youth, both First Nations and non-First Nations in basic traditional and contemporary land management and wilderness survival, with a view to supporting and maintaining the wildlife and wilderness resources of the Muskwa Kechika Management Area (Figure 1). The Muskwa-Kechika Youth Camp concept was developed as a youth training, mentorship, and stewardship project that would provide both First Nations and non-First Nations youth with an opportunity to learn the skills needed to contribute to the long term protection and sustainability of this complex wilderness ecosystem. It is hoped that the 1999 camp will be the first of a continuing series of annual youth environment camps in the Muskwa-Kechika Special Management Area.

It was also hoped that the camp would bring Kaska youth together and help to build leadership skills based on Kaska tradition and knowledge. The elders contribution of aboriginal philosophy is central to the learning of these traditions.

It was decided to hold the camp in a setting that was conducive to enhancing this learning process; specifically, a remote wilderness area of the Kaska Dena Traditional Territory. The Muskwa-Kechika Youth Environment Camp was held at the Turnagain Camp, which is located on the Turnagain River in the southwest portion of the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Four youth were selected to become camp leaders and run the 1999 Muskwa-Kechika Youth Environment Camp. The four youth (Derek Loots, Ria Kisoun, Brittanee Laverdure, and Blandon Donnelly), all of Kaska Dena ancestry attended a training program held by the Rediscovery International Foundation. The program started on May 29th, 1999 and consisted of two-weeks of training at the Lester B. Pearson United World College in Victoria, BC. The training program assisted the camp leaders in preparing and coordinating the activities of the Muskwa-Kechika camp and it also provided them with the first aid and safety certificates needed.

1999 marked the ninth annual training program at Pearson College, with participants from 22 different native nations and 14 foreign countries. The people who attended the program became certified in Recreational Canoeing, Standard First Aid/CPR level C, Rediscovery Leadership Workshops, Rediscovery Earth and Fire Bush Skills, and Lifesaving for Adults. The participants also got the chance to learn about many other different cultures and customs. There were many games and activities taught to the youth that would later be played and taught at the Muskwa-Kechika Youth Camp.

As part of the requirement to obtain camp insurance, one of the camp leaders was required to have wilderness first aid. Derek Loots attended the Ghost River Rediscovery Camp following the Pearson College training session in order to obtain this certification. The Ghost River Rediscovery Wilderness Skills Training program is given on traditional Nakoda (Stoney) territory, in a stunningly beautiful location on the edge of Banff National Park. Derek attended an intense 8-day wilderness skills training program, designed specifically for teachers and guides

who want to build their bush skills and develop their competence in leading both wilderness backpacking trips and cultural outdoor education programs. The program is considered to be extremely valuable to those involved in any kind of outdoor leadership. The training included: Wilderness Safety, Outdoor Leadership, Survival Skills, Ethnobotany, Bear Etiquette, and Expedition Planning.

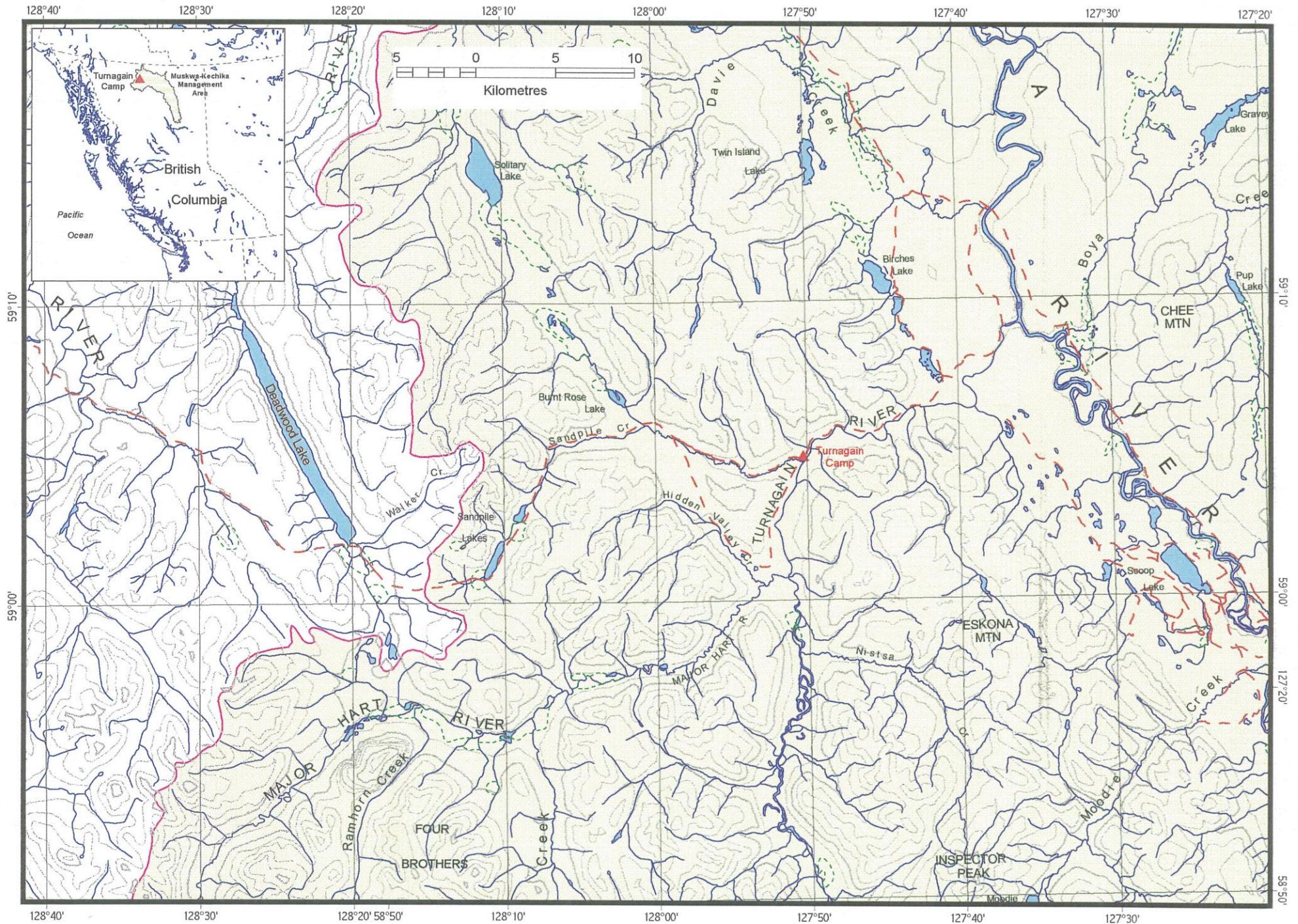


Figure 1. Location of Turnagain Camp within the Muskwa - Kechika Management Area

PREPARATION AND LOGISTICS

Public Awareness

The four camp leaders traveled to the Kaska General Assembly on July 5th to the 9th, 1999 to inform the Assembly participants about the project and to obtain their support. During the General Assembly the camp leaders kept many of the children and youth present occupied with games that they had learned at Rediscovery. It was a great chance for the camp leaders to practice their skills at leadership. The camp leaders also gave some presentations to the Kaska Nation informing the people about the Muskwa-Kechika Youth Environment Camp, what they wanted to accomplish there, a background on Rediscovery and the training they had received. The camp leaders informed everyone that they were taking names of any youth that would like to sign up for the camp.

Following the assembly the camp leaders made visits to different communities such as Upper Liard, Watson Lake, Good Hope Lake, and Lower Post. The trips were intended to supply the community with more information about the project and to help the youth fill out their supply and parental consent forms.

Derek Loots and Mike Lickers also attended a meeting that took place on July 24th with the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board members at Scoop Lake Outfitters Camp. Here they informed the Board members about the project and how things were going and asked if any of the members would like to attend the camp as guest speakers.

Selection of Participants

A letter was sent to all the chiefs in communities surrounding the Muskwa-Kechika area including Dease River, Halfway, Kwadacha, Liard, Lower Post, Prophet River and Ross River to inform them of the forthcoming youth camp.

It was decided that there would be 12 youth candidates selected for the camp, by a selection committee made up of a chief, an elder, and a youth. The youth in each of the communities were asked to submit an essay on the following:

"What concerns do you have with the condition of the environment within the Kaska Dena Traditional Territory?"

"What can the leadership of the aboriginal communities within the Kaska Dena Traditional Territory and Muskwa-Kechika do to protect the environment?"

"What do you hope to learn from participating in the Youth Environment Camp?"

Youth participants in the camp were to be selected based on these essays. This initial strategy to narrow the selection was not popular, as only a few essays were received. It was decided that the chiefs of all the communities would provide names of youth to be participants of the camp.

Logistics

After completing the training programs the four camp leaders spent the next four weeks organizing and setting up the Youth Environment Camp. The first thing to do was to find a place for the camp to be held and get permission from the proper authorities to use the area for the duration of the camp. The area that was selected was a previously owned guide-outfitter-hunting lodge located on the Turnagain River. We went through the British Columbia Asset and Land Corporation in order to get the permit and bond needed to use the area. Before we could get the permit we needed to get affiliated with Rediscovery in order to get the insurance needed for the camp. After we received our insurance, the Turnagain area was approved for camp use from July 26th 1999 to August 20th 1999, and an allowance for enough time for the camp to be setup, taken down and cleaned up.

After we received the camp permits, two of the youth leaders flew out to the camp to do an assessment and see what it would take to get it in good working order. Since the lodge and surrounding area had not been used for many years, a lot of cleaning and slashing had to be done, and some things had to be fixed. Most of the camp was in good order, however we proceeded to take pictures of the camp in the way we had found it because some of the items on the Turnagain River outfitters inventory list, from the British Columbia Asset and Land Corporation, had been missing.

The next step was to write up a camp overview on the types of activities that the camp was going to have. We put everything in a time frame and decided on the number of elders, guests, and camp attendants needed. Dave Porter helped us make up a list of potential guests and elders. We then drafted up letters describing the camp and asked the potential guests if they would like to attend the camp and what dates would be good for them. We designed the camp activities into four different weeks of different elders, speakers and activities. The weeks were designed as follows: 1st two weeks were traditional, 2nd week was environmental, 3rd week was leadership skills. Once we started receiving letters back from people wanting to be involved, we began organizing the different guest speakers for the appropriate days.

Next, we started ordering the supplies; i.e., tools for camp, living requirements, first aid equipment, safety gear, camp activity gear, traditional crafts and tools. The Workers Compensation board was contacted to find out the type of first aid gear recommended for the camp. Ken Rich helped us get a fair price on supplies and transported them from Williams Lake to Lower Post.

Camp attendants were hired to set up the camp and begin the acquisition of supplies. We asked Fanny Vance if she would do the cooking and the ordering of food. Boats were needed for hauling supplies and groceries up the river and Johnny Forsberg was hired to operate one. We ordered the fuel for the boats and the camp. Peter Jakesta and Robbie Porter were hired to help fix up the camp, run the boat, and help run the camp. We also hired Sylvain Paquette to do some of the electrical work in camp and to purchase supplies, as they were required during camp operation. Kaska Dena Council drew up contracts for each individual hired for the project. The contracts would specify their duties and duration of the contract.

For the youth participants that had been accepted into the program, we had to design a parental consent permission form which explained rules of the camp and supplies the youth needed to bring. There was also a medical history sheet to be completed so that we were aware of any medical conditions. This was very important because the camp was not located with easy access to the nearest hospital.

A GPS satellite phone system was rented to keep in contact with the outside world and to use just in case of an emergency. Emergency phone numbers for immediate evacuation by helicopter or plane from the Dease Lake, Watson Lake, and Fort Nelson districts were posted.

We also had to organize the transportation of the youth, elders, and guests to and from the camp. Transportation was supplied for the elders and youth from their residence to the airport and back. A flight plan was organized with Northern Lights Air to fly camp participants in and out of the camp. Transportation by boat from Skook's Landing up the Kechika River was also used to accommodate various guests.

CAMP PERSONAL AND PARTICIPANTS

Youth Participants

There were 13 youth that took part in the Muskwa-Kechika Camp. Four youth were female and 9 youth were male. The participants came from the communities of Upper Liard, Good Hope Lake, Lower Post, Kwadacha, Fort St. John and Whitehorse. The communities of Prophet River, and Halfway were contacted several times; however they did not submit the names of any youth interested in attending the camp. Ross River was also contacted; this community was holding its own camp at the same time as the Muskwa-Kechika camp, however, so there was a date conflict between the two camps. The youth participants were Danielle Dickson, Christopher Johnny, Christian Johnny, Agnes Denis, Fred Lutz, Ricky Vance, Valerie Sheperd, Kelly Porter, Stacy Poole, Adrian Porter, Jaramiah McDonald, Jenole Dickson, and Fred Stick.

Elders

Many of the camp activities were centred on the teachings of the respected Elders who attended the camp. The elders were very happy to be there and the youth participants were also proud of what the elders had to teach. The Elders taught the youth many things including: snowshoe making, drum making, tanning hides, hunting and survival skills, traditional medicines, Kaska language, storytelling, stick gambling, beading and sewing, ethnobotany, respect for traditional knowledge, and many other things that the youth will hold in their hearts forever.

Camp Attendants

The camp attendants deserve a lot of credit because without them the whole camp would never have been possible. The staff was one of the most important parts of the whole project from the beginning to the end. The staff helped with the setting up and cleaning of the camp, the cooking,

transporting of goods, teaching the youth, and almost everything that went on in and out of the camp.

Special Guests

There were many special guests that came out to the camp and shared with the youth their knowledge and experience. Norm Barichello, a biologist, spent a week in the camp teaching the youth the scientific names and ecology of plants in the area, while the elders would teach them the Kaska names and usage. Norm also took the youth on hikes into the mountains, and would show slide shows at night.

Malcolm Foy, a biologist, also spent a week in the camp teaching the youth about how to use maps and compasses. Malcolm also taught the youth about many different plants and other types of vegetation, he provided information on scientific names while learning the Kaska names at the same time.

Another guest that had a big impact on the camp was a gentleman named Roy Cunningham. Roy was one of the first natives to receive a Master of Education degree. In Roy's presentation he talked a lot about education and planning. He talked about how getting a good education is like building a house. The first 18 years of your life are the ground floor and the foundation of the house. The walls of the house are the training and schooling that would hold up the roof. The roof was when you went out in the work force and used your skills. He also spoke about living in harmony with nature and that we were all part of one integrated system.

George Smith is the national Conservation Director for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and has been a part of the conservation campaign to protect BC's Northern Rockies. George told the youth about the Yellowstone to Yukon concept and the conservation campaign to protect the Muskwa-Kechika area. He also talked about developing relationships between conservationists and the Kaska Nation.

Brian Churchill was another speaker who spoke with passion about his concern for the Muskwa-Kechika lands and gave a presentation on conserving the natural identity of the public lands in BC. He also informed the youth about numerous environmental issues throughout the province.

Steve Walsh, a lawyer, and Dave Porter, the Kaska Nation's lead negotiator, conducted a series of interesting discussions on the history of treaties and land claims agreements throughout Canada. Their presentations also dealt in detail with the various agreements, which the members of the Kaska Nation are currently involved in throughout the parts of our traditional territory in the Yukon, NWT and BC.

George Henry, a filmmaker was present with his crew and he taught us how to properly use our video-recorder. He showed us how to get various shots, how to use the lighting etc. He also explained his profession and spoke about television and the recently designated cable television station APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network).

CAMP ACTIVITIES

There were many fun and interesting activities that went on during the camp. The youth learned a lot about Kaska traditions. The youth learned how to make snowshoes from the wood and materials provided from the environment around them. They also got the chance to tan a moose hide and use this hide for making crafts and moccasins. The youth learned about different plants that could be used as food or medicines. We played many traditional games such as stick gambling and counting coup. Many of the participants made their own drums out of wood and caribou hide. The youth then learned to play these drums and sing different Kaska songs that are used in different situations, like prayers and stick gambling. Other traditions the youth learned were how to trap, track, and skin certain animals, and the uses of the different animals. They learned many different survival skills such as building a fire using the wood found on the ground or using a flint. We taught them about bears and what types of things you should not do in front of them. They also learned how to hang a bear cache when they are camping in the woods.

The youth enjoyed activities like swimming, hiking, camping, fishing, and rafting. The participants went on a three-day camping and hiking trip up to Burnt Rose Lake. From this experience the youth learned how to rely on one another and work together. They were split into four groups and each group was responsible for their own cooking, sleeping situations, and personal safety. Each group would carry its own food and living requirements. Each day a new leader from the groups was selected to be in charge for the entire day, leading the expedition and planning. The youth spent a lot of time swimming and having fun in the Turnagain River. They also fished and boated on the river. We tried to do things with the youth like putting them in charge in order for them to develop their leadership skills.

During the duration of the camp the participants saw various types of wildlife and plants. Every morning there would be bears, elk, or sheep grazing on the mountainsides around us. We also had the opportunity to view eagles, wolves and many other animals in their natural environment.

Some mornings a camp leader and a few youth would arise at 5:00 and go hunting for moose and elk. There was one moose shot during the camp and the youth were shown the proper way of skinning and quartering the animal. The whole moose was used: the antlers, hide, and meat. The youth were also shown how to skin a beaver and rabbits. The furs were used in traditional ways; i.e., food, moccasin making, and pelts.

They also learned a lot about themselves and their fellow participants. The participants shared their thoughts with the rest of the group while sitting around a council fire late at night. Council fires were opened with a prayer. We would then pass a feather clockwise around the circle. Whoever was holding the feather had the attention of all the others, and could talk about anything that he or she wanted to. We would then finish the night off with drumming and singing.

The youth participants would also spend half an hour every day sitting alone writing in their journals, reflecting on the day and anything that was interesting that day. Some mornings the youth would arise at 7:00 and enjoy a spirit bath, where they would have a morning prayer beside

the river and then jump in the cold water without screaming or complaining. Because they did not scream they would save this energy for a time when it was needed. Most mornings we would arise and have a stretching circle, where we would all take turns telling everyone to do different stretches. We would then finish the circle off with a group hug, where all the people in the circle would go around the whole circle giving everyone a hug and telling them good morning.

CAMP CLOSE-UP

The final day before the camp would be over we had a special feast made up of many traditional foods. We sang traditional songs and had our final council fire. There were some tears and a lot of laughs. It was very interesting listening to the youth talk about how the camp had changed them and how the speakers and elders had inspired them. Many youth expressed a desire to go to school and to expand their horizons more about the outside world. It was fascinating to see how the youth had changed. For example, the quietest one was now the loudest, the smart kid was now trying to listen and settle down, the youth that was too cool in front of his friends was now singing traditional songs at the top of his lungs and participating in any activity offered. It was amazing how the camp had affected the youth.

The final day of camp was August 20th 1999. We arose that morning for our final spirit bath and group circle to say our goodbyes. The youth were sad to see each other leave. All the tents had to be taken down, cabins cleaned, inventory taken, and garbage removed.

Once back in the Lower Post we had to return all borrowed items and make sure that all the equipment and supplies were accounted for. We made an inventory list and labeled all of the camp accessories. The accessories were stored in the Kaska Dena's storage shed in Lower Post. All paper work had to be put in order and all outstanding payments were cleared up. The budget was then organized and brought up to date.

ASSESSMENT OF CAMP

The camp was a real success, the participants got the chance to learn a lot about the Kaska culture and the environment around them. They had the chance to meet many interesting people and listen to their words of wisdom. The camp opened their eyes to a larger world outside of their communities. They also got the chance to associate with each other and form strong bonds for when they come together and some day take their place as leaders of this great land. The camp also showed the participants that you don't need drugs or alcohol or any other chemical stimulus to have a good time.

Numerous good times were had by all through out the duration of the project, however, there were a few difficulties. The training of the youth leaders was very short and they did not get all of the skills needed to deal with some of the situations that arose, e.g., counseling skills. Another problem experienced by the camp leaders was how to work together as a team. There also needs to be a little more cooperation in the running and organization of the camp. We had numerous mechanical problems with the boats; it would have been nice to have a boat on hand for the youth to travel up and down the Turnagain River.

We did not get much of a response from some of the communities located in the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.

Recommendations

Additional training for the camp leaders in team management, organization and counseling skills would be beneficial for camp scheduling and internal conflicts. Counseling skills for at least one camp leader would aid in helping camp participants with self-esteem, depression or anxiety, disagreements, etc. In the long term, with more training, perhaps the camp can cater to the less fortunate or youth with social problems. The Turnagain area would be an appropriate place to introduce or re-enforce traditional teaching and healing in a safe cultural environment.

Many of the youth also expressed a desire to have more elders present and for longer time periods; therefore we recommend that future camps try to accommodate more elders. The project coordinator should try to work with the communities to determine a time frame for the youth environment camp that will minimize conflicting dates with other local camps. This way youth do not have to make a choice between camps, and valuable elders are not already engaged.

There also needs to be more guest speakers to attend the camp, especially speakers who can focus on employment opportunities. As well, there should be more representation from industry at the camp.

As part of the Yellowstone to Yukon campaign, we feel that invitations to the youth camp should extend to all the communities in and surrounding the Rocky Mountains. This will help the camp participants meet a variety of youth, which will aid in forming contacts and good bonds for future working relationships. There should be a greater initiative to involve all the communities within and surrounding the Muskwa-Kechika, i.e., more representation from Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Toad River, etc.

Project coordinators should look at acquiring canoes or a permanent boat for use within the camp. This will enable camp leaders to provide greater variety to daily activities because hiking trips can take place from location points along the rivers. Another idea may be to have horses within the camp for daily or overnight trips. We would also prefer to have the camp attendants and more of the camp leaders trained in higher level first aid.

Since one of the objectives of the camp is to focus on leadership skills, we recommend that a selection committee be established to determine some pre-defined criteria to evaluate application forms for the camp. Qualities that the committee should look for are: motivation, respect towards elders and an interest in culture, and a willingness to go back to their home communities and teach others. Essay questions may be used as part of the selection process. If this is the case, perhaps the questions could be more general or imaginative for youth that are not familiar with the Muskwa-Kechika. However, since the Muskwa-Kechika has only recently been designated a special management area, it is important that the youth in the communities become familiar with its purpose, objectives, and goals. The selection committee could communicate

with the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board to develop appropriate criteria, depending on how the camp objectives evolve.

We propose that the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board provide a letter of support for an annual youth environment camp to be held at the Turnagain River lodge. This will be beneficial in attaining other sources of funding.

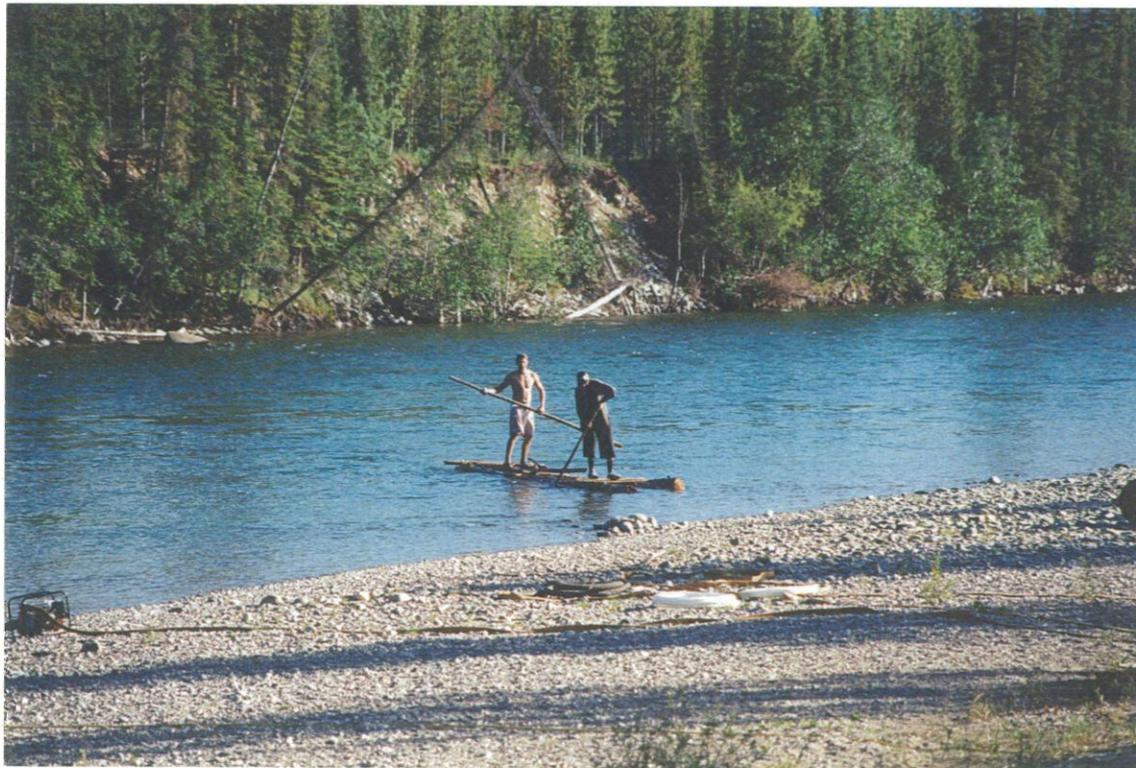
We would like the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board to consider holding its fall board meeting at the Turnagain Camp, hosted by the Kaska Dena youth.

Finally, we recommend that the proponent be informed sooner of proposal acceptance to aid in organization and planning.

APPENDIX A. PHOTOS



Riverboat on the Kechika River used to transport supplies to Turnagain Camp.



Rafting on Turnagain River.



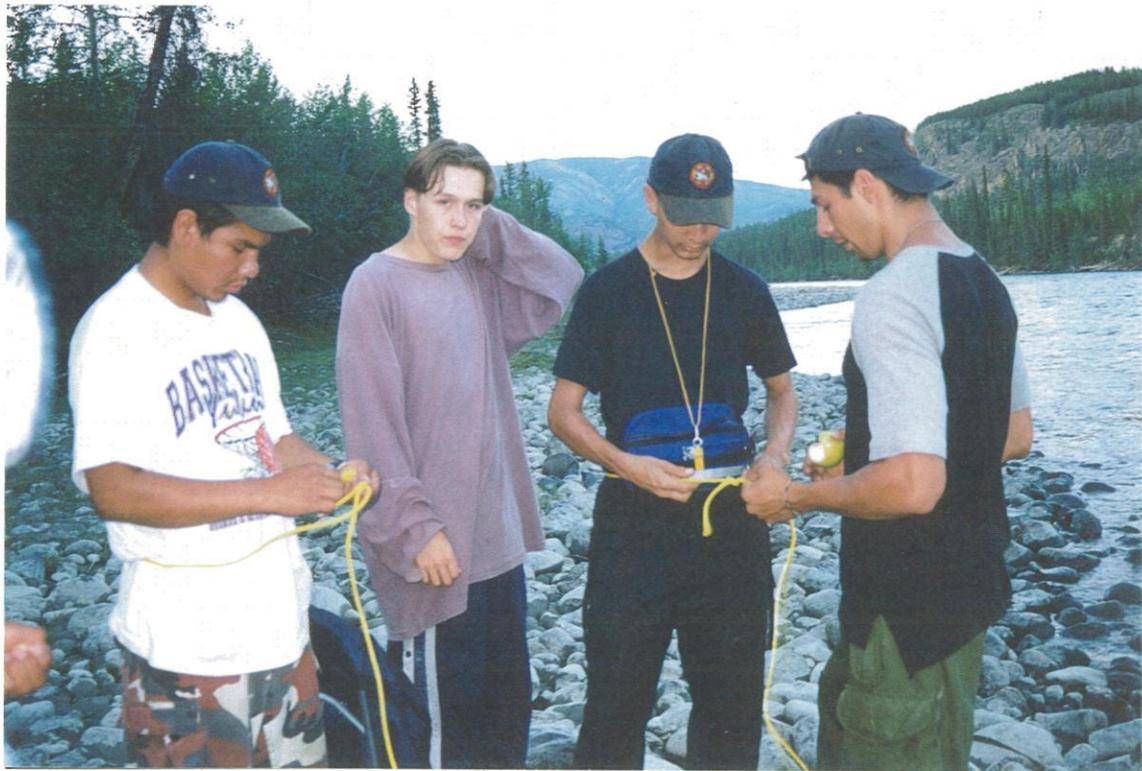
Morning prayer.



Spirit bath.



George Henry making a lacrosse stick.



Learning to tie knots.



Charlie Dick and Amos Dick teaching the youth how to make snowshoes.



(Left to Right). Charlie Boya, Charlie Dick, Derek Loots, Tom Poole, and Amos Dick.

Christian Johnny
hanging a moose
stomach lining
(a Kaska delicacy).



Mida Donnessy checking dry meat.



Elder and youth stick gambling.

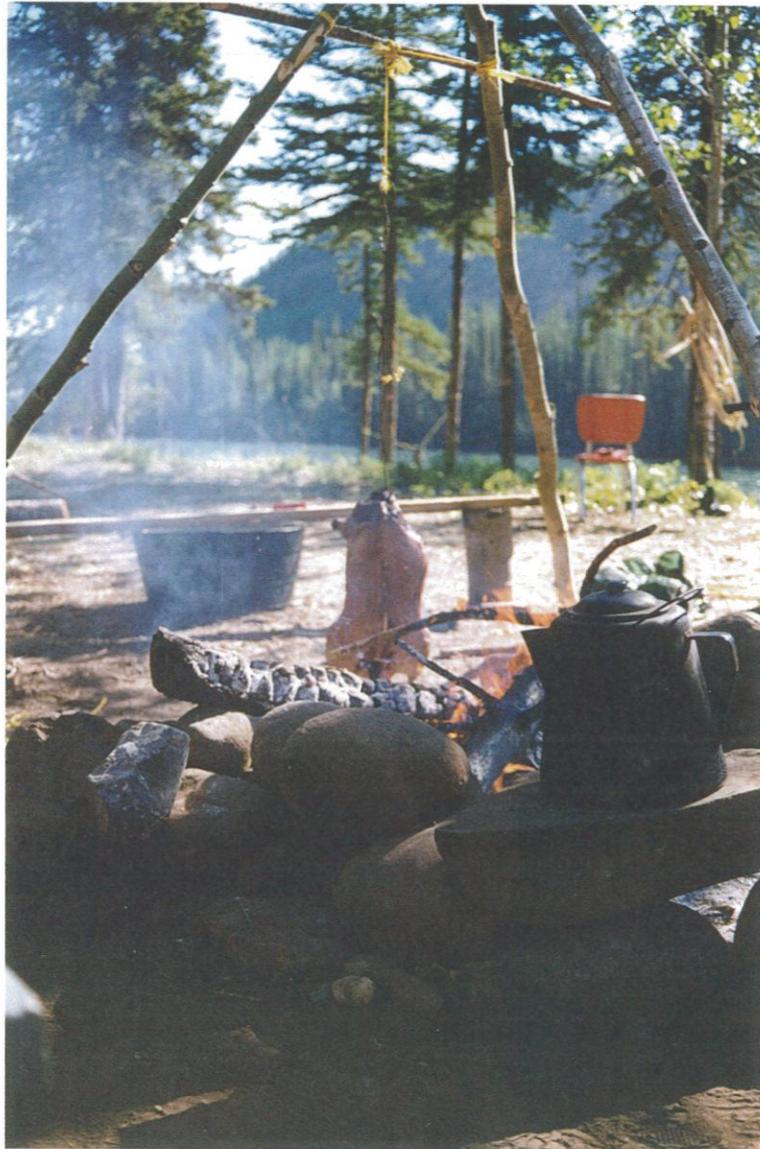


Stick gambling and drumming.



Amos Dick skinning a beaver, Yvonne Boya watching.

Beaver meat
roasting on the fire.





Charlie Dick teaching youth how to set a rabbit snare.



Charlie Dick teaching youth how to make drums.



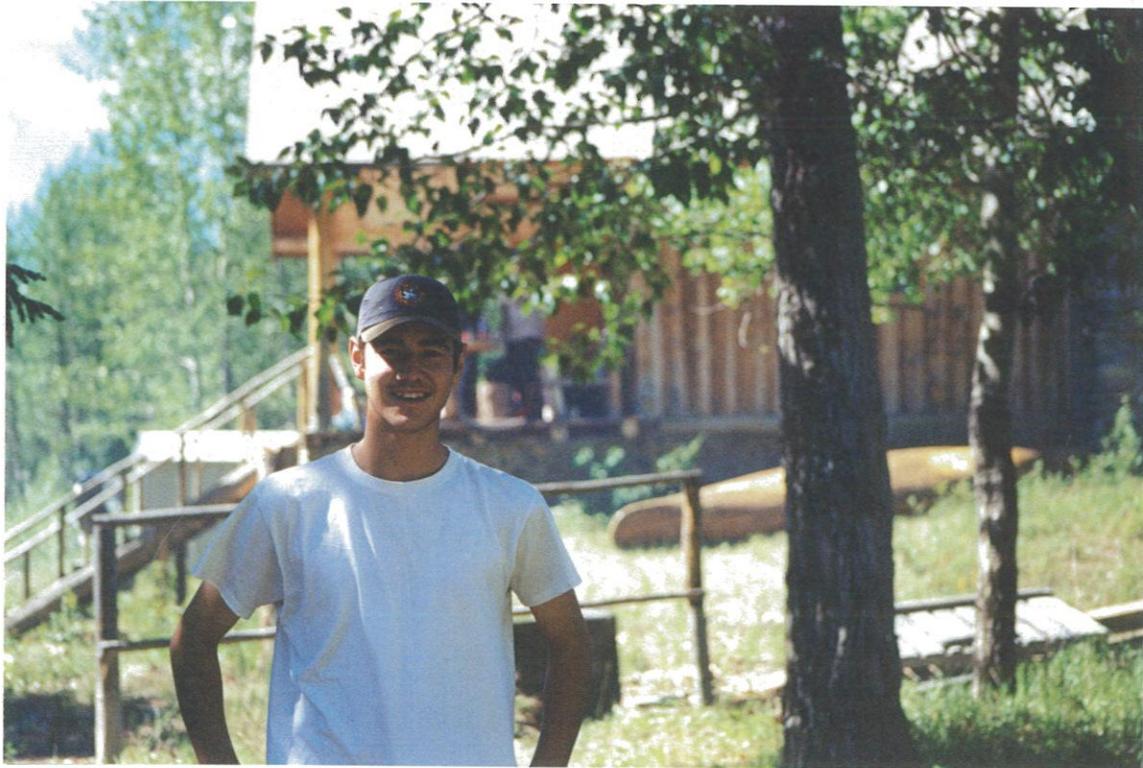
Jaramiah McDonald.



Brittane Laverdure.



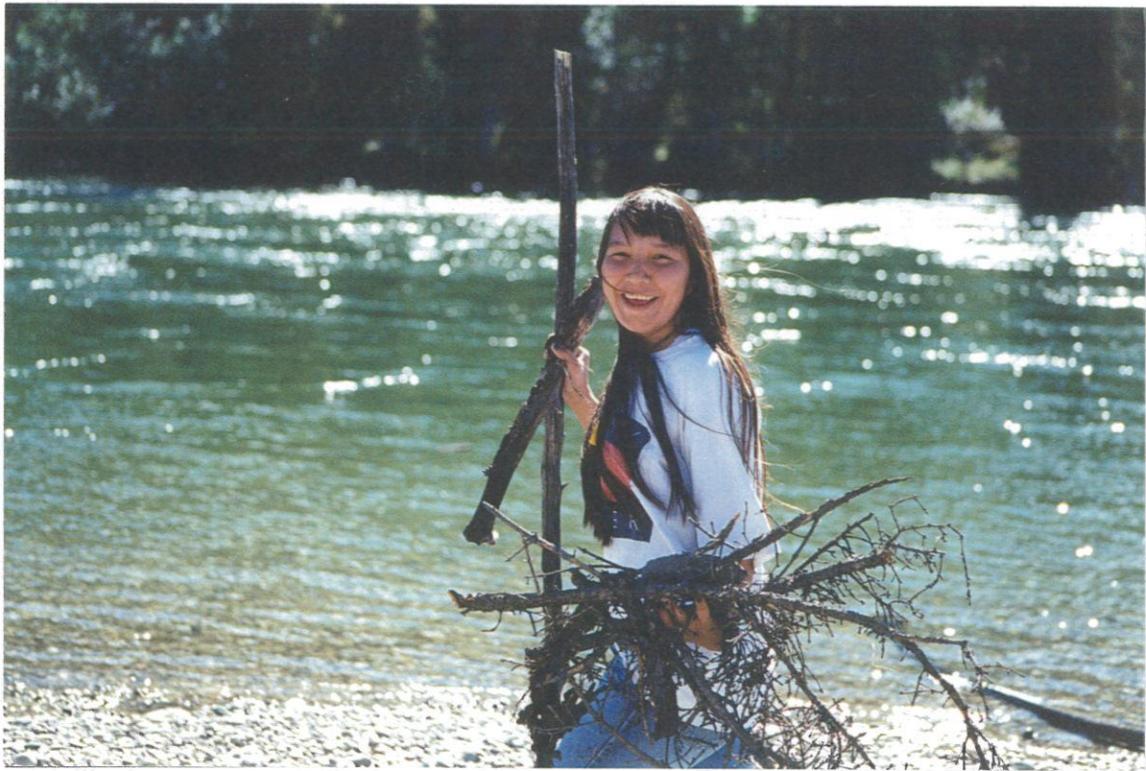
Ricky Vance.



Victor Kisoun.



Freddy Lutz making a fire.



Agnus-Lynn Dennis.



Kelly Porter.



Peter Jakesta.



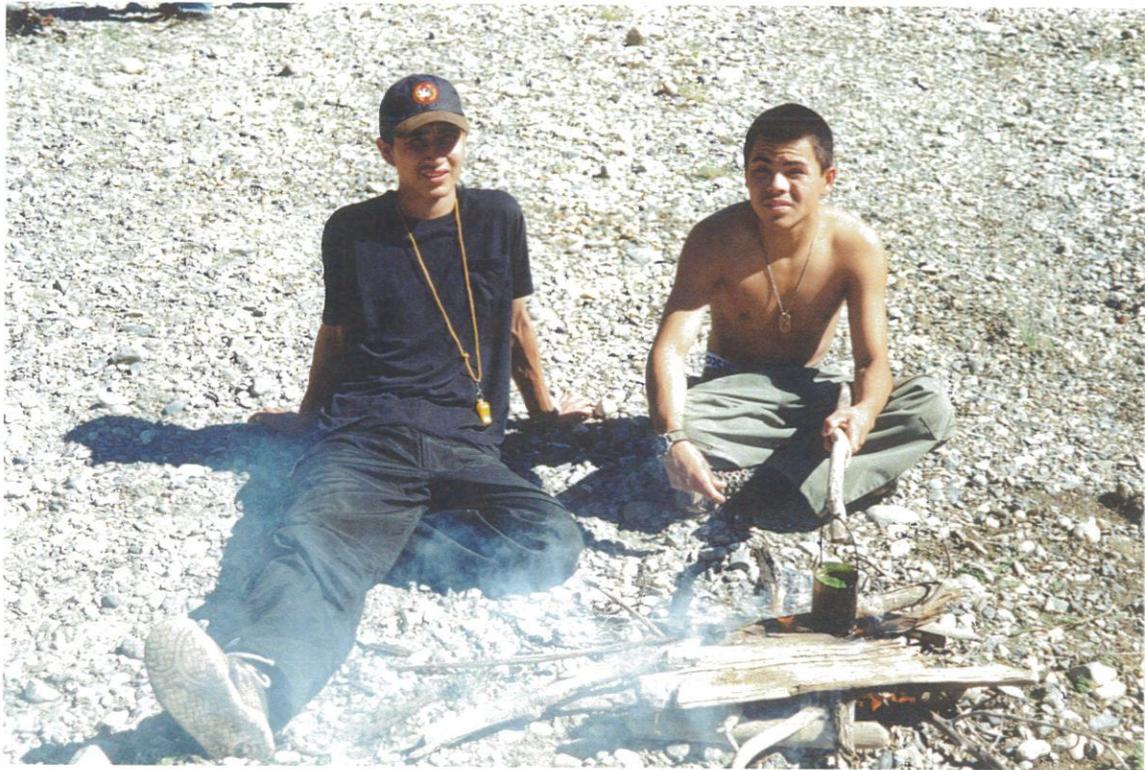
Preparing for hiking departure from Turnagain River lodge.



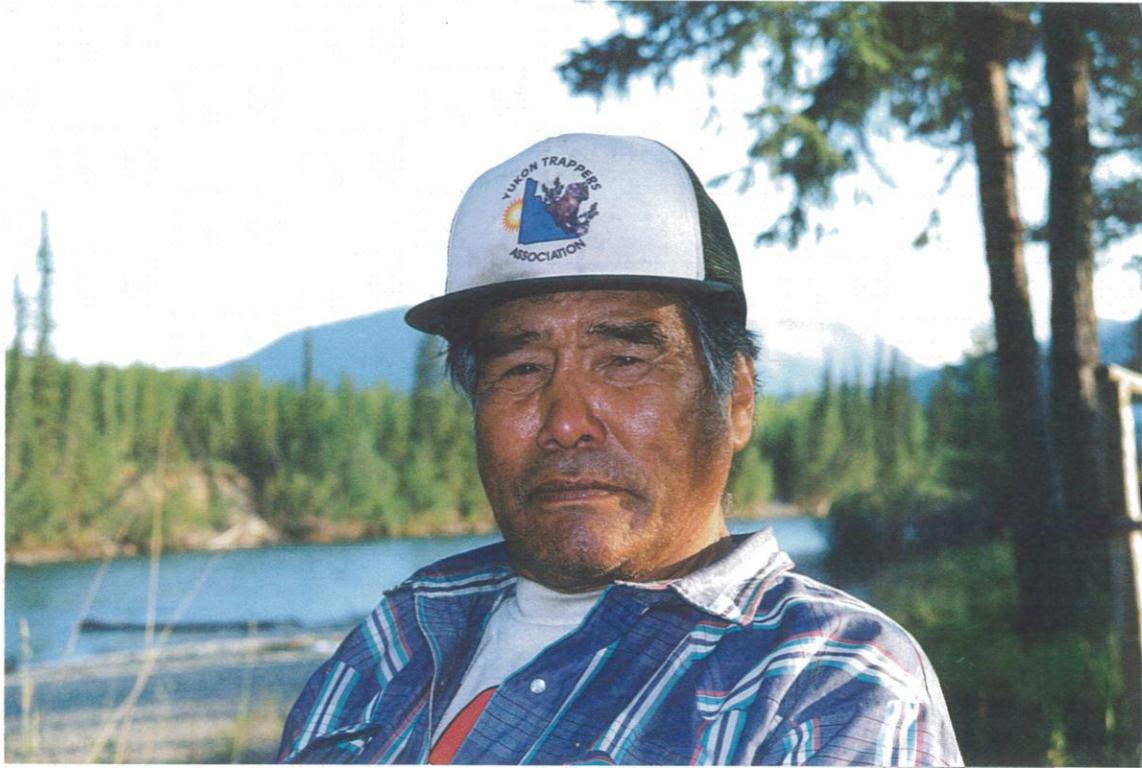
Pack dog.



Valerie Sheperd.



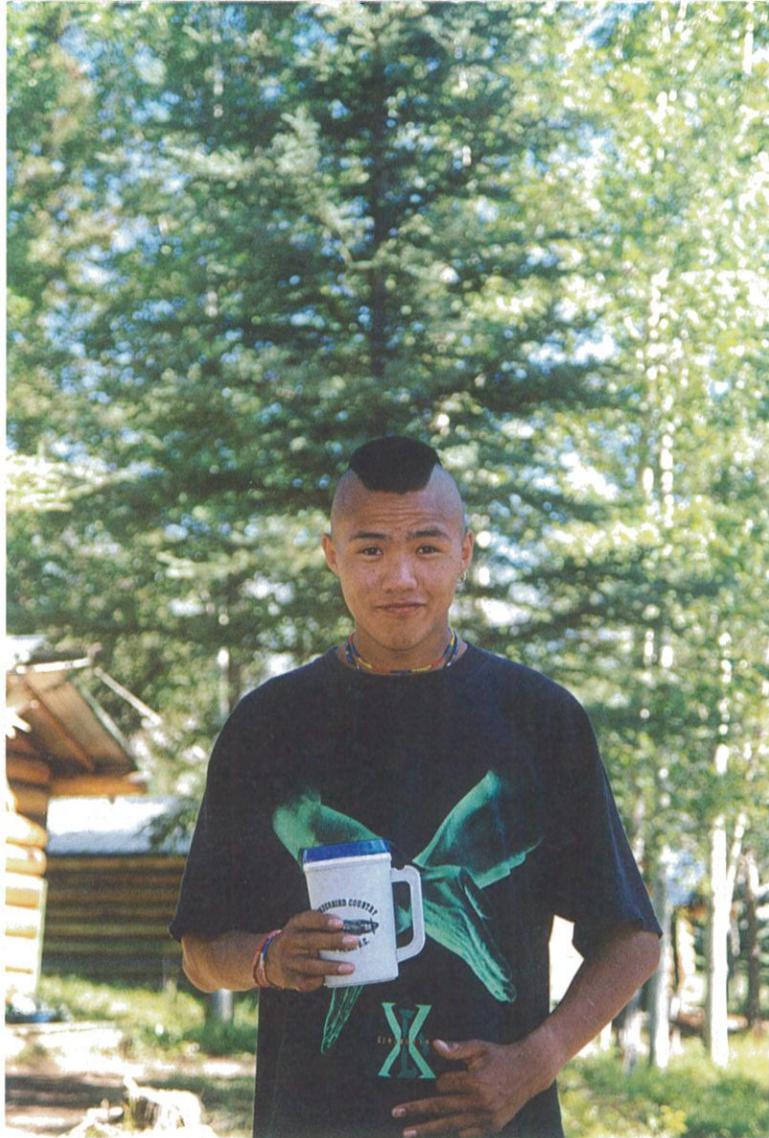
Christopher Johnny and Fred Stick making traditional tea.



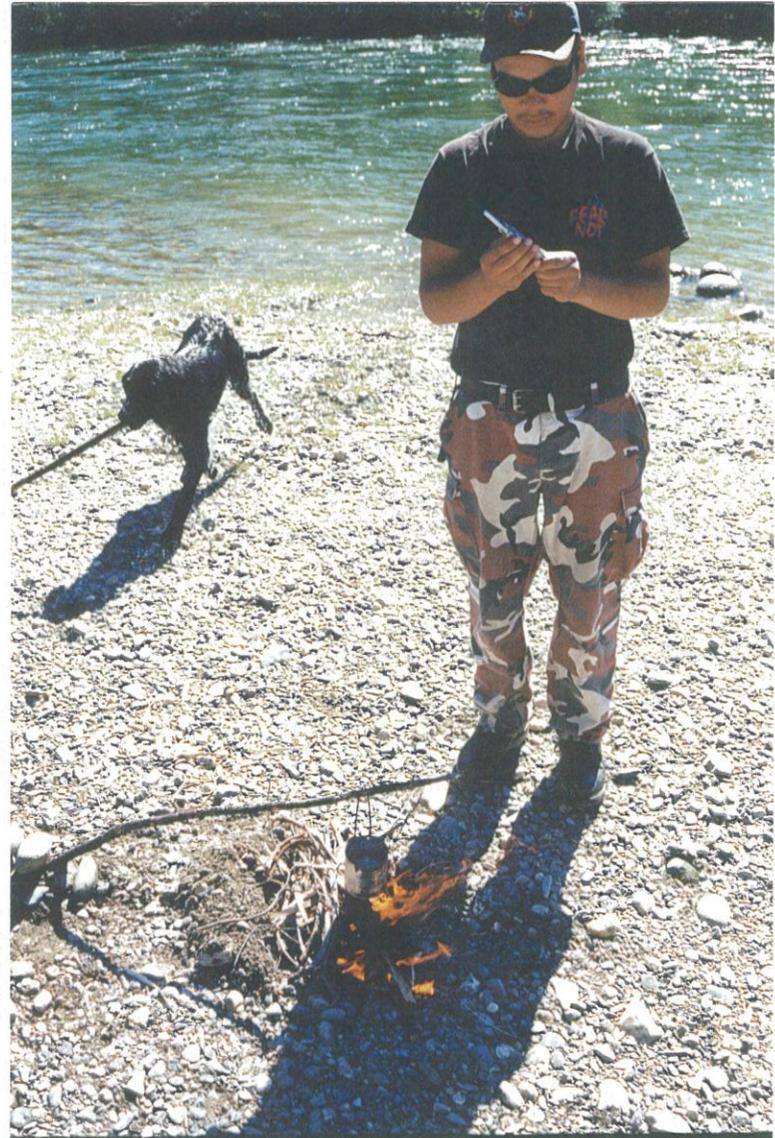
Elder Amos Dick.



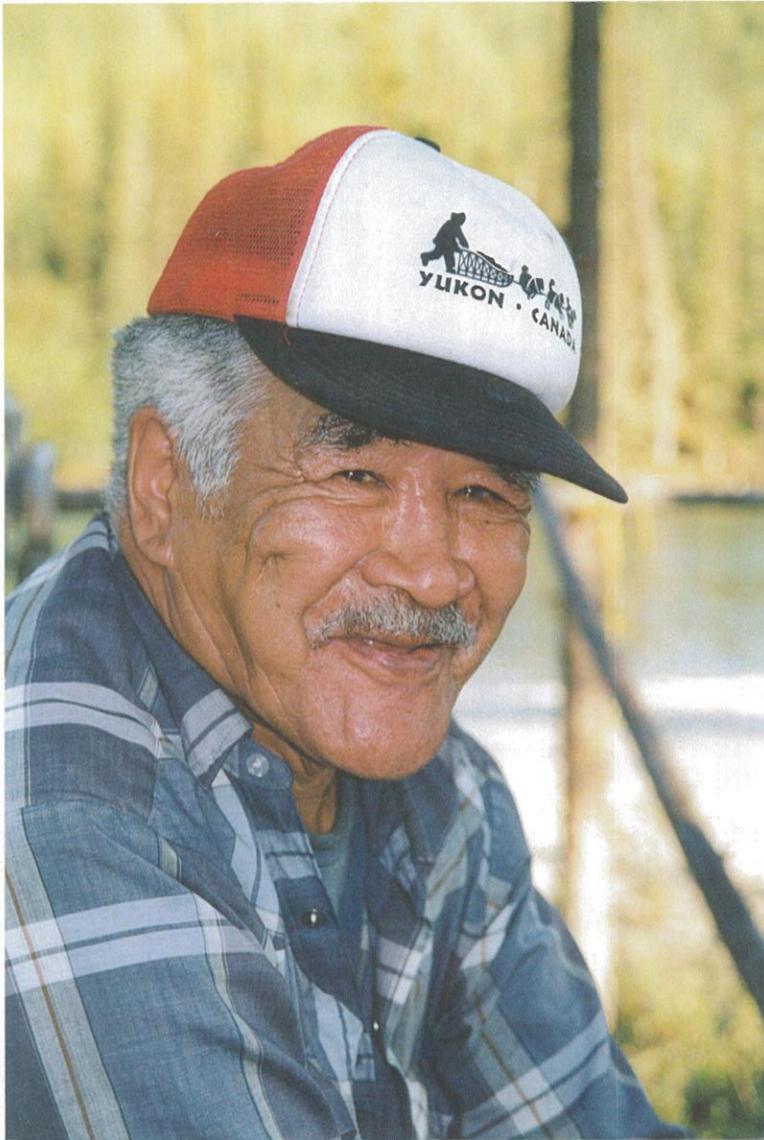
Christopher Johnny.



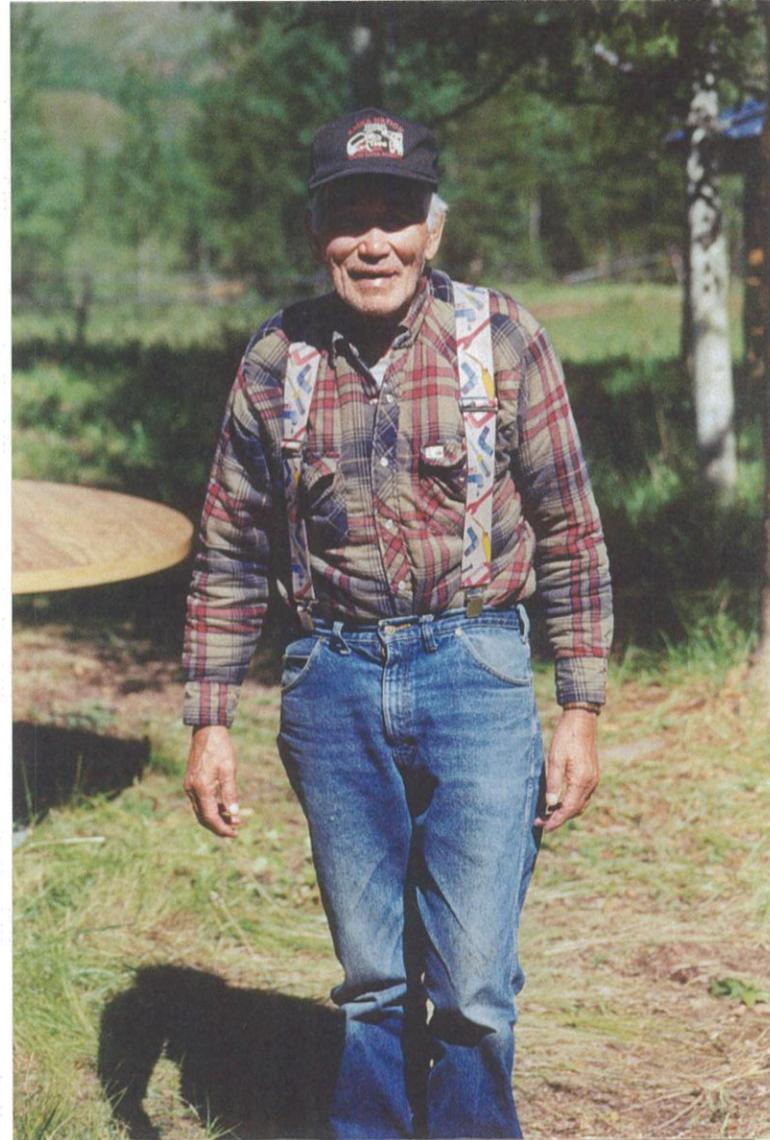
Adrian Porter.



Christian Johnny making traditional tea.



Elder Charlie Dick.



Elder Alfred Jakesta.



Jaramiah McDonald and Mida Donnissy cutting babiche to use on snowshoes and drums.



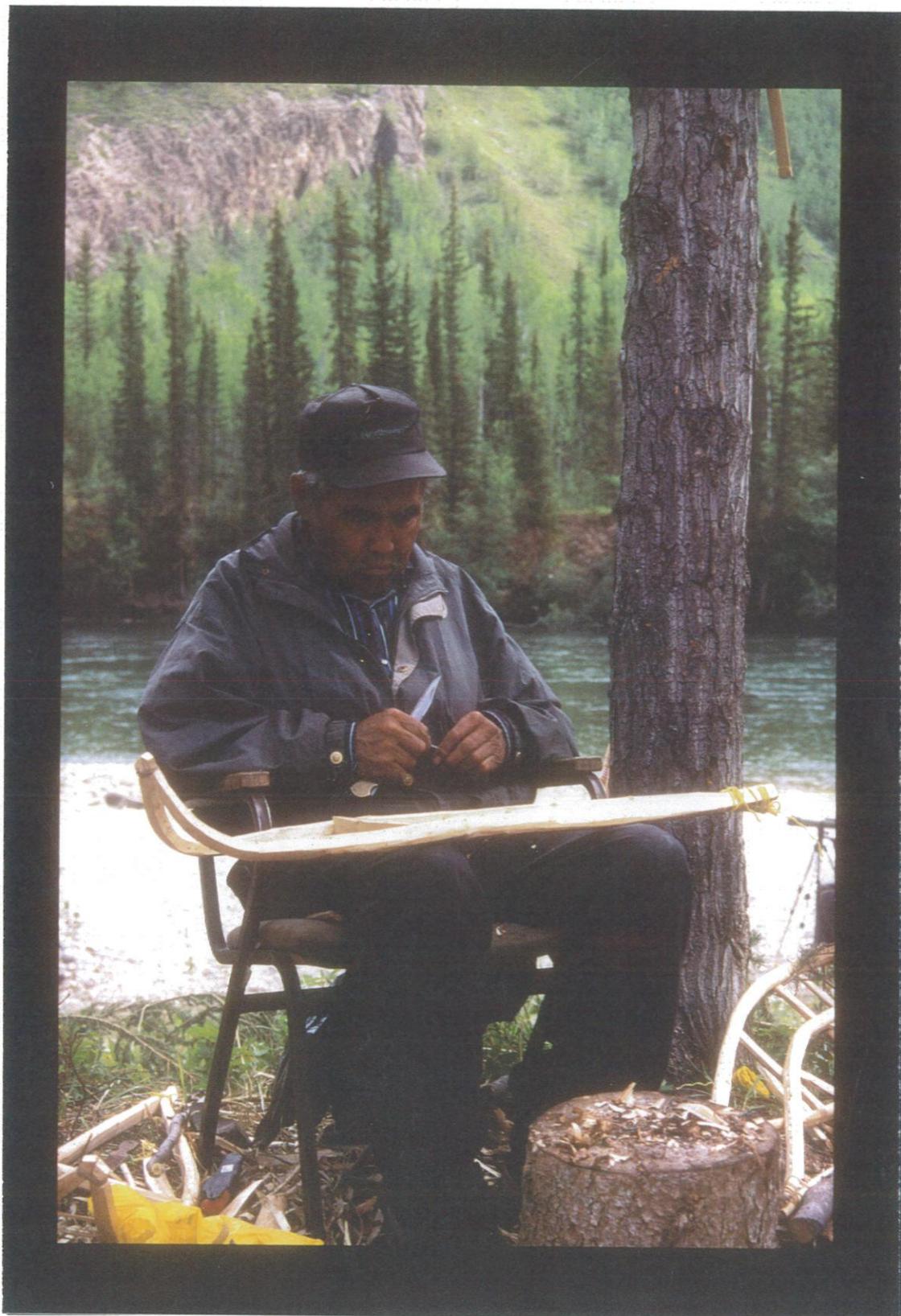
Derek Loots making snowshoes.



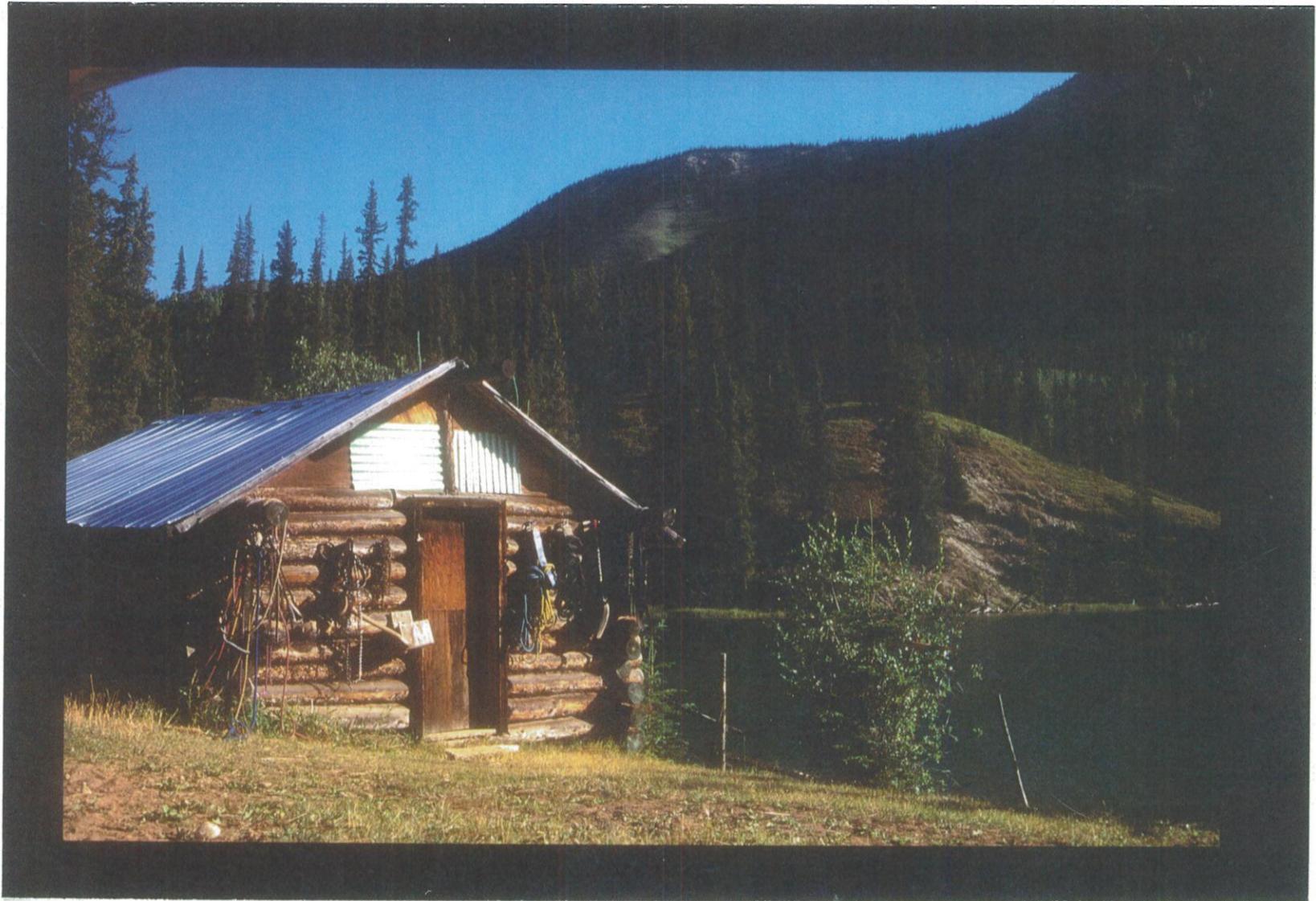
Viewing the surrounding mountains.



Ria Kisoun.



Tom Poole making snowshoes.



Burnt Rose Lake.



The last day – Mussi cho (Thank you in Kaska).