

# Muskwa-Kechika Youth Environment Camp



Muskwa-  
Kechika  
Advisory  
Board



Kaska  
Tribal  
Council

Weissener Lake  
Fort Ware, BC

July, 2001

*Elders are memory keepers of our traditions, stories, songs, dances, ceremonies and of our relatives.*

*It is our elders who bring this rare knowledge to the gatherings. It is our elders who help us keep our values.*



*Think about what positive qualities the elders may bring to the circles. There are people in our own nation that know their teachings.*

## INTRODUCTION

From July 15 to 28, 2001, youth from Watson Lake, Yukon, Fort Nelson, BC, Lower Post, BC, Fort St. John, BC, Mackenzie, BC, Fort Ware, BC, and one exchange student from Japan gathered together at Weissener Lake located approximately half an hour by air outside of Fort Ware, BC. There were six First Nations represented.



Youth of various ethnic backgrounds, such as Ukrainian, Danish, Irish, German, Norwegian, and Japanese, joined together with First Nation



youth that represented Kaska, Sekannie, Tahltan, Cree, Tlingit and Slavey cultures.

This camp was developed and run by the Kaska Tribal Council. The base funding for the program was provided from the Muskwa-Kechika Trust Fund. This was supplemented by donations from several Corporate and Agency sponsors. Camp staff from Kwadacha First Nation and other Kaska First Nations were assisted by resident Elders and a variety of guest speakers.



## TRANSPORTATION

Six youth arrived at Watson Lake, Yukon, after a long 14 hour bus ride. They then needed to take a float plane for an additional two hour flight to Weissener Lake. Two youth from Mackenzie flew in by helicopter. Staff and youth from Watson Lake and Fort Ware flew in by float plane. In addition four adults and five youth walked in from Fort Ware, using nine pack dogs to bring in their supplies; this took approximately two days.



## ARRIVALS

A warm welcome greets our arriving passengers. There is gear to haul, tents to assemble, daily chore groups to divide up into, and group bonding exercises all before dinner. Everyone has arrived safe and sound at beautiful Weissener Lake.



## FACILITIES

A large plywood frame building which was covered by two huge tarps served as the cookhouse and eating area. An additional tarp covered shelter which served as our main meeting area was built in two days by the local carpenters from Fort Ware. Also, there were six huge wall

tents and five pup tents for sleeping quarters. One huge wall tent was put up for our crafts and sewing sessions. Prior to setting up the camp, the area had to be cleared of brush and trees.



## BUSH TENTS

All tents were heavily brushed with balsam bough to bed and insulate sleepers from the cold damp ground at night. Also boughs were laid down in front of the tents to serve as a floor prior to entering into the tents.



At the end of the camp, all brush used was gathered and put away, out of respect for the environment and the purpose it had served.

## HEALTHY LIVING

Personal hygiene can require learning new skills in a wilderness camp. Hand washing clothes also brought out team work and unity amongst all campers. Our elder Martha Egnell, who had her trapping cabin at the other end of the lake brought down her old traditional washboard. Old fashioned clotheslines were put up to dry the clothes. This was a challenge at times due to the frequent rains.



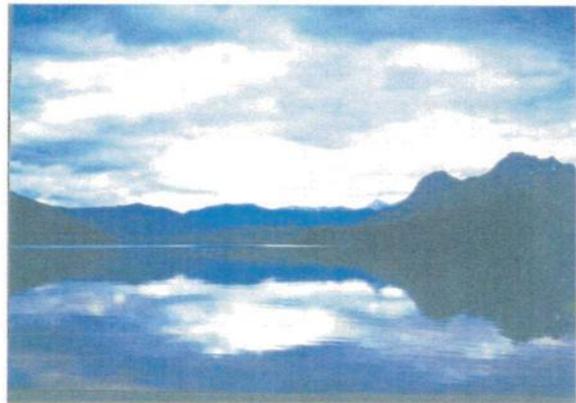
## HOME AWAY FROM HOME

For some youth this was their first time that they ever experienced roughing it out in the bush for this length of time.

Everyone did great and really enjoyed their stay and some did not want to leave. We discussed many things, including family unity, respect,

team building skills, education, personal goal setting, alcohol and drugs, rights of passage, anger management, HIV/AIDS, and STD's, and positive healthy role models. Our youth are our future leaders and one day they will be the elders of their communities.

Water drawn directly from the lake and streams for cooking and drinking brought the message of our unique and unspoiled environment home to everyone.



During the evening after chores, games and crafts were done. Everyone would sit around the campfire to share stories and legends passed down by our elders.



**A break from the rain brought everyone out to the lake for baths, nice warm showers, laundry or**



**casting for some beautiful rainbow trout or char.**

## **ELDERS**

**Elders are the key people in our camps for they pass down their traditional skills to all the**



**youth. The youth served the elders their meals, tea, coffee, and snacks. Mida Donnessey from Upper Liard, Yukon, brought her vast traditional knowledge and craft skills to the camp. Whether it was beading, sewing moccasins, hauling wood**

**or working on her hides, Mida was always a very busy bee around camp.**



**Martha Egnell, an elder from Fort Ware brought her very valuable talent and knowledge to camp, whether it was stories from her personal life, her beading, or assisting Mida with the meat. When the meat was brought into camp it was cut up for babciche and Martha did not waste any time in taking care of the meat by cutting it up into beautiful sheets of dry meat.**



**Laura Seymour was also an elder from Fort Ware, who was very excited to be out at camp. Laura also shared stories, taught the youth with their sewing and assisted Martha with tending to the meat. Laura also made balsam and red alder**

medicine for everyone at camp. She also went out to gather balsam bark to dry and take back home with her. She gave talks on various traditional medicines and their use for specific ailments.



This was an opportunity for them to take time out for themselves and absorb the beauty of being out in the wilderness and to really appreciate who they are, where they come from and not to take anything for granted.



## COUNCIL FIRE

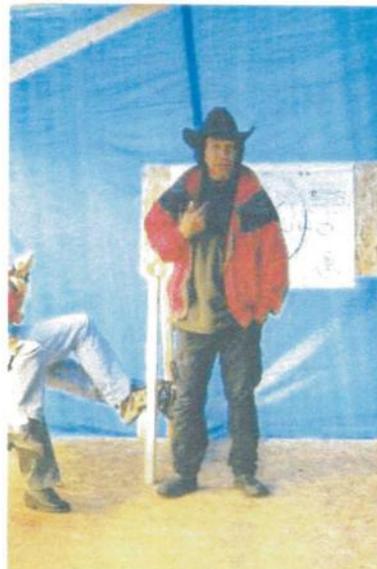
Fred Lutz and Adrian Porter were the leaders in teaching the youth the reasons for and the value of a council area. Everyone assisted in preparing the council grounds. This encouraged team work and unity amongst the youth.



During the mid day, time was set aside for participants to take part in "Spirit Spot Time".

## SPEAKERS

Several guest speakers came into the camp to make presentations to the youth participants and



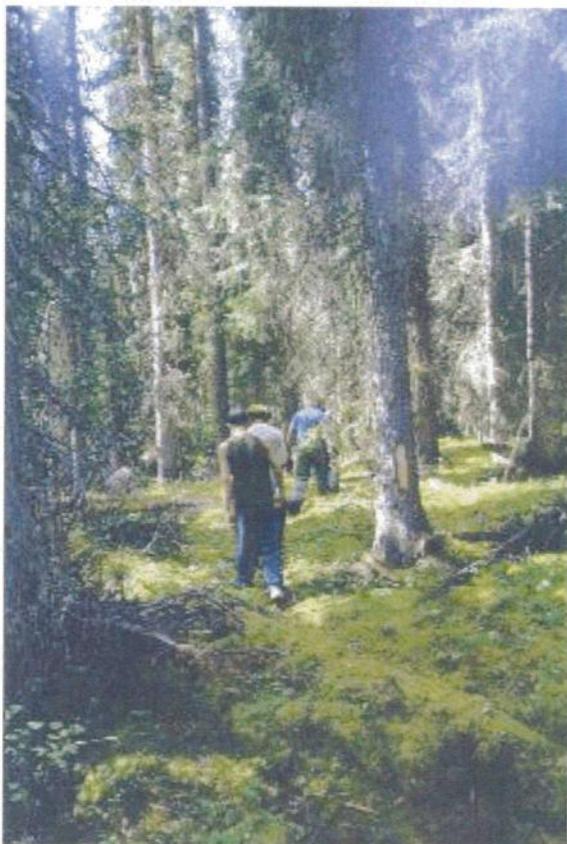
to spend a few days enjoying the hospitality of the camp and its participants. Presentations were made on subjects such as the Muskwa-Kechika Special Management

Area, traditional ecological knowledge, and

contemporary scientific knowledge and techniques.

## OVER NIGHT HIKE

Craig McCook and Dennis Porter led the youth on a overnight hike. Adrian Porter showed the youth how to create a shelter in the wilderness



out of branches, sticks and moss to serve as an insulated roof.

The hikers saw various game animals and had the opportunity to see a billy goat at very close range.



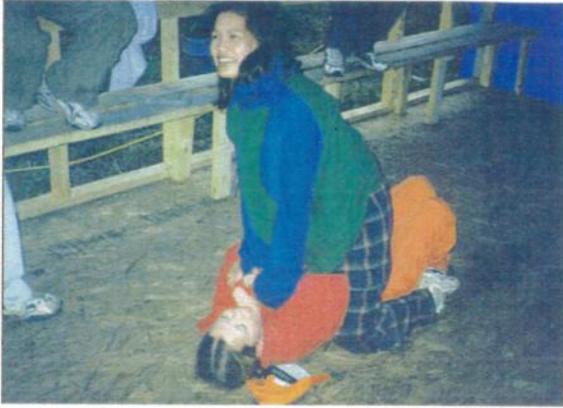
Everyone had a great time.

## FUN ACTIVITIES AND GAMES

Various traditional native games such as "Stretch for the Stick", "One Arm Pull", "Leg Wrestling", "Stump Pull", "Head and Finger Pull", and "Musk Ox Sumo" were demonstrated and played.



This truly brought out the competitive spirit in everyone. The girls jumped in and challenged the boys in various games. This created strong unity, bonding, and team work within each team grouping.



Other games shared were: "Cat & Mouse", "I Love You Darling", "Deer Ears", "Ring on a String", "Dox-en-Eye", just to name a few. As well, various card games and skip bo games were taught and played.

Some participants had never played Rummy, Gin Rummy and other card games; they had a fun afternoon choosing and playing various games.

## STICK GAMBLING

For some youth this was their first time participating in this traditional native game. As a result, they were given a very short lesson in the rules of the game and how it takes the whole team to win the centre sticks.



In the beginning we had one drum brought in by Adrian Porter. But within a few days there were three additional drums to assist with the stick gambling competitions. The youth took turns playing and drumming for the teams. This truly pulled everyone together and resulted in strong team work and unity amongst both players and drummers.

## CRAFTS

Martha and Laura demonstrated their beautiful talent and patience in teaching the sewing of moccasins, the weaving of dream catchers, etc.



Some youth who had never sewed before did very well. It took approximately seven hours to complete both moccasin tops with fully beaded flower patterns. Some beautiful work was done and you could not tell it was the first time sewing for many of the youth. This was no surprise for our youth had the best teachers guiding them.

There were four drums made with the assistance of Craig and Lena McCook and Fred Lutz. The

drums were made from Caribou hide that Mida Donnessey brought out to the camp.



Also rattlers were made out of tin cans, opened at both ends and covered with hide. Beach rocks and sand were put inside, and babiche was used to hold the hide ends together. These rattlers were used as back-up for drumming or as bear scarers.

Roots were dug up and were cleaned to make bracelets, belts, or rings or hat bands.

Small miniature felt fur hat key chains were also sewn. Thus the youth were able to participate in a wide variety of crafts.

Dennis Porter, Craig McCook and John Poole, with the assistance of the youth, built a five foot skin boat. Skin boats were traditionally built by Kaska for transport along the many waterways within the Kaska Traditional Territory. This boat is being temporarily stored at the office of Kaska Tribal Council while a more suitable location is identified for its permanent display.



## FISH NET

Mida Donnessey brought a 4" mesh cotton gillnet out to camp. It took a great deal of



patience and team work to untangle it so we could set it. Hey but "WE DID IT." The youth took turns in the daily setting and checking of the net. The fish caught were cut for smoking and later fried for the next day's meal. The largest fish caught was a char, caught by rod right off the dock in front of the camp. This made a delicious supper.



## MOOSE HUNTING

Dennis Porter, Craig McCook and John Poole took youth out hunting during the evening.

A nice bull was shot and the meat and hide was brought back to camp.



The meat was cut up for drying and cooking, and this made for some fine meals. Some youth tried eating various parts of the moose that they had never tried before, including the intestines. To our surprise, they liked this new food.

Dehani, one of the youth that walked in from Fort Ware, shot his first moose and was

delighted. A small traditional ceremony was held for him by Craig McCook under the guidance of our elders.



Dried meat was given out to all our guest speakers to tide them over until supper. The youth and staff also snacked on the delicious dried meat. Now that the youth know how to make this "Indian Candy" it has become one of their goals to make their own dried meat once they go out hunting with their parents back at home.

Annie Charlie showed everyone her skills at fleshing and cleaning the hide. The brain from the moose was used to make a brine for softening up the hide prior to tanning.



## EXTRA CURRICULAR FUN

It seems it has become a ritual in camp for the girls to bring out their make-up and dress up a few of the young men. This was all in fun and everyone had a great time, with a lot of hard core laughs by the end of the night. The next morning the boys still had evidence on their faces from the girl's hard work. The next day it was the talk of the camp on who was the best dressed boy and who the natural ladies were!!

Tanner Green was the "Cave Man" around camp. The groups dressed him up with paint and charcoal on his face and chest and he had a leftover bone that was roasted by the camp fire. He was going around camp showing off his great talent. Everyone shared in the excitement and fun around camp.

## HEADING HOME

When the time came for the camp to close many of the youth did not want to leave. Grief and closure exercises were done in which it was



stressed that wherever their journey may carry them we will all be there with them in their hearts and minds. The many crafts that they took home with them will be a reminder of their "Weissener Lake family" that they created at camp.

After the youth left, the staff went through their own grief cycle using similar exercises to assist in closure.

## WILDLIFE

When the first load of students was prepared to depart, a huge cow moose swan out across the lake in from of camp. A float plane was coming in for a landing and John Poole took a couple of young men out to chase the moose across the lake so that the plane could land.

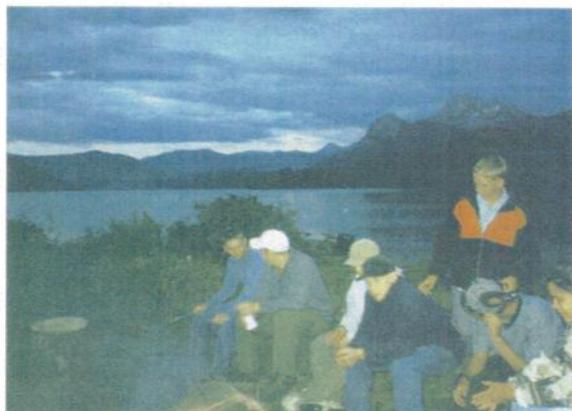


Later that evening a grizzly came out in the bay down from our camp. Sensing the respect for animals and the environment that we were taught since youth, the grizzly did not come into camp.

A few beavers, otters, geese and loons showed their beauty in front of camp for everyone to see.

## **COUNCIL FIRE FEAST**

**When leadership and guest speakers arrived we had a feast as part of camp closure. After supper everyone gathered around the council fire to share speeches, traditional songs and modern musical harmonica tunes for our guests.**



**After the opening speech was given by Veronica Bob, it was only right and appropriate that Lena McCook lead off the traditional song sharing before the youth sang their traditional songs.**

**At our very first night sharing songs around the council fire the head cook, Lena McCook, really wanted to learn and find out about her own peoples' songs. She stated that no-one knew any songs back home and she was encouraged to make her own songs up as that's how it was done years ago. She was told that even translated nursery rhymes or various songs and passages from the Bible could be used in a song. This was all the encouragement she needed and she shared "You Are My Sunshine" sung in the**

**Sekanni language. This was very inspiring to have witnessed.**

**All the youth participated in a few songs that they learned in camp. These songs brought inner peace and calmness over everyone.**

**Camp staff and the youth shared their own personal words of encouragement and their positive experiences at camp.**

**Diane Jefferies, a youth from Fort St. John, wrote a letter to Kaska Tribal Council expressing her deepest appreciation on behalf of herself and others for the opportunity to attend this 2001 Muskwa-Kechika youth-environment camp.**

## **YOUTH PARTICIPANTS**

**The following youth attended the camp:**

**Janelle Badine – Fort Nelson  
Isaiah Behn, Fort Nelson  
Amanda Crossland – Mackenzie  
Jessica Fletcher – Fort St. John  
Tanner Green – Fort St. John  
Diane Jeffries, Fort St. John  
Mari Isozaki – Japan  
Lyle McCook – Kwadacha  
Shannon McCook – Kwadacha  
Bobby-Faye Moon – Lower Post  
Todd Pawlyshyn – Fort St. John  
Clayton Smith – Mackenzie  
Harmony Tibbett – Lower Post  
Shian Wolfe – Watson Lake**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the 2001 Muskwa-Kechika youth camp was attributable to the contributions of many individuals and organizations. We are extremely grateful for their assistance and offer our heartfelt thanks.

Base funding for the camp was provided from the Muskwa-Kechika Trust Fund. Additional funding was provided by Western Geco, Slocan Group, Anderson Resources Ltd., and SNC Lavalin. The Belvedere Hotel and Northern Rockies Air Charter Ltd. provided services at reduced rates.

We wish to make special mention of the contribution made by Abitibi Consolidated. Abitibi provided materials for the camp, provided helicopter transport for the materials, and assisted in the building of the camp facilities. Needless to say, the camp could not have been held without this major contribution. We extend our deepest thanks to Mike Lowe and the employees of Abitibi Consolidated operations based in Mackenzie.

We also wish to thank Charlie Boya, Dennis McCook, and George Massettoe,, all from Kwadacha, for assisting in the set up of the camp.

The success of a camp such as this is heavily dependent on the quality of the food, and in this regard, we were most fortunate. The food was excellent, thanks to the impressive culinary skills of Lena McCook, the Head Cook, and her assistants, Martha Egnell and Candice Vance.



Several people helped in running the camp. Veronica Bob, the Program Director, was assisted by 3 Camp Councillors — Fred Lutz Jr., Dana Van Sommers, and Adrian Porter. Johnny Poole, Craig McCook and Dennis Porter were Camp Attendants. Corrine Porter was responsible for the initial camp organization and logistics. And we wish to extend our deepest thanks to the Camp Elders — Mida Donnessey, Laura Seymour and Annie Charlie.

We wish also to express our thanks to the guest speakers — Dave Porter, Wayne Lewis, Dave Crampton, Sean Sheardown, and Anna Pugh — who freely shared with us their knowledge and experience. And finally, we wish to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the vision of Dave Porter who is the driving force behind the Muskwa-Kechika youth-environment camps.