

Title: 0051-Our Voices- Fish Trapping and Caribou Hunting
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Good morning. Good morning [laughing]. My name is Louis Bird and this is January, eighth no, ninth. January Ninth, 1989. This tape recording has to go about, talking about, making a documentary movies about the Cree people in Hudson Bay. Especially in the Winisk, Winisk band. Winisk band mean is a, a group of people that lived, that have lived in Winisk River, the branch the tributaries of Winisk River, and also North and East. North-West and North-East from the mouth of the Winisk River, along the Hudson Bay, Hudson Bay coast. These people, they belong to what they call Winisk Band. They have lived here a long time before the whiteman came in, and they have their own, they have their own life, they have their own skills to survive on the land, and they had a method of hunting, and they were the migrating people. Migrating people mean following the season, as the animals move around in different season. Before the whiteman, these people live in the coast in summer time to stay away from the flies, and also to hunt the waterfowl, which mean ducks and all that, while they are moving, because ducks and other different kind of ducks usually have their geese or ducklings along the coast of Hudson Bay or James Bay. So that's why the Cree people usually go hunting in the, in the bay area, besides trying to stay away from the, from the, from the flies, mosquitoes and, and all kinds. And another reason is that they, the Cree people, know the moose and caribou and other big animals will go into the coastal areas because of the same reason also, for, to stay away from the flies. The flies that we call is, bull flies, which used to drive the caribous crazy. So the caribous will go into the bay right up to the tide water and stay out there to wash those flies off their body and also live around there where the wind is strong, so to, the flies are not, not too many flies bother them. So for that reason the Cree people used to live right close to the bay, in summer time, and starting from there, in the summer time we can move on to the fall. When the flies are starting to diminish, like mosquitoes, and the sand flies, so the Native people start to move inland, because by this time the inland, up the rivers you know the mosquitoes and other flies are, mostly are gone. So they start to move inland, the Native people, the Cree people from Winisk River. They go up as far as two hundred miles, most, some of them. Some of them drop along the way, and they leave in September, they leave the, the mouth of the river to go up and find the wintering camp, where they will winterize. So it its this, those wintering camp they chose, they usually choose the creeks, the ones that's branching off the main Winisk River, and they choose this spot because they know the fish will come down the river before January, during those two months. And they choose these places where they know where most fish will come down into the main river.

So they choose that and they also set up a fish trap, that is the important thing. They say, they choose the river for the, to, to put up, to set a fish trap which will supply them, supply themselves of food and also for other reasons for fish. So they eat of the fish, they smoke them to preserve them at the beginning, and when it start to freeze, they just freeze them right directly from the water into the cash, and all these fish they, they pile them and cash them, and it last them all winter, and that's there the main diet during the winter time, when there's when they are animals are scarce or things like that. When there's no rabbits and, what so ever. So it, it was one of the most important things for the Cree people to do. So that was the idea about, about telling the story about the Cree people, not only one family but a whole bunch of Cree people who have lived here. There were mostly about twenty families who lived in Winisk River system.

Not all of them go down the bay during the summer, some of them stay in the river of in the middle or half way or up, at the headwaters, whichever, whichever the hunting area's good. And, and when the European came in, when the whitemen came in, they choose Winisk River, the mouth of the river to, to set up as a, as an outpost, trading. Outpost trading camp, they considered it this time, from Fort Severn. So that's when the Winisk River, Winisk People, started to go in the mouth of the river for different reason. That is to buy a, a gun powder and to buy a, matches, or whenever the matches came to being, mostly it was the gun powder, and matches, that also then maybe eventually they started to give them a little item as knife, and also, axes. And that's when also the fishing begin to change, that's when the, the European came in to do the [unclear] fishing, seine-net fishing, so they have their own half-breeds, they brought them down from York Factory to do that. And the local people used to hunt geese at the mouth of the river. They shoot geese for the Hudson Bay Company and they give two third of what they shoot and they keep one third what they shoot. If somebody killed twenty-five geese he would keep maybe five geese, and give twenty to the Company man. And the Company personnel will hire somebody to salt the geese and put them in the [unclear] and also make Indian people do the seine-netting and they would smoke the fish and make powdered fish, [Cree Word(s)], and [unclear]. And then after that they would ship those things to York Factory, where the York Factory hired the people from inland and they would, and they would pay them with this food or supply them for their, for their [unclear], while they were working for the Hudson Bay, all this thing. So that shows that life changes, that's when the people started to go to Winisk at the mouth of the river, just for that reason, in the fall, and they'd leave, before September's over, to go in their wintering ground. So that they go up, and then they start to worry about their own fishing. So the first fishing they do is fish-trap setting, and they do that as long as the fish swim. And, and they catch the fish and smoke it and preserve it whatever they can. And then after that, they, those who are moving around, that was first migration they'd go up the river, and they go stay there form October, no, from September usually up to march and then they'd move their camp. They'd move them to the spring camping.

Anyway, I have been, that's where this thing came from, the idea of making a documentary about fish trapping, because it was the most important thing that Cree People ever do in the Winisk River system. These people, as I said before, they were the Winisk Band. They hunted, they were XX[unclear]consideredXX and called Winisk Band later on. Nineteen-o-five when the treaty was made, and, in, in, Kashechewan these people went down there because Kashechewan was the main supply depot for Hudson

Bay Company. They moved from here to this river system to the, into the Kashechewan. And some of them did go to Fort Severn or places like that. So these are the main people who used to come and stay here in the wintertime, and when the treaty was made in Kashechewan they had some of them had the names they were considered to be Kashechewan Band members. But, actually they didn't bother to stay there, they came to stay here in this Winisk River system. And eventually they didn't go to Kashechewan because the community of Winisk was developing as three houses. One Hudson Bay store and one residence, residence and one, one, a small, small church. And that was the first European settlement. The Indian People didn't like that. The Cree Indian People didn't establish the settlement, it's Europeans.

Anyway, getting back to this migratory behaviour about the Cree People, their first migratory move was from the Bay in summer time into the wintering grounds. Where they stay up to March, and then in March they move, they move again to the places where they know where Canada Geese will be coming in or some other place where they can do the trapping, what they call "spring trapping". So they, they move away from the winter camp. And then they finish their spring trapping at, the June. And in June they move down the river, for this reason, now, to have a family union, some place along the river and also at the mouth of the river. And that's what they used to have, celebration or ceremonial dances they used to have there a long time before the whiteman. They do the, all their thing, all their things. Drummings or whatever, or snow, snow dancing or rain dancing, anything at all. And also they sort of do competing, competing, XXCanada Games[unclear]XX, Indian Games. Those games they were mostly are forgotten. Some of them that I remember they called it, what did they call, XXsporting sticks [unclear]XX, whatever. Before the wolf pack, packing, and there are many other XXgames/names [unclear]XX they used to play.

And in the same time when they were having those annual gathering, they used to arrange marriages for the young people. And also for next spring, or next winter, who was going to get married to whom. And which man is ready to get