

## Fire Legend

Having made the land with sand from the sea bottom, Raven made man next. Afterwards, he decided that man needed fire to cook with and to keep warm.

After making land, Raven decided to make man. He took clay and sand from the beach and formed the first man.

When he was done, Raven decided to fly around the entire world to see what he had created. While on this journey, Raven wondered if there was anything he should give man to make his life easier. Then he realized that he had forgotten to give man fire so that he could cook his food and keep warm.

Raven called to his friends, the other birds, and asked if they knew how to get fire. Seagull said that he had seen fire once at the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, what is now called Katmai, and so Raven asked for a volunteer to bring it to him.

Wood Owl agreed because he had a longer bill than the other birds and could safely carry a firebrand without burning his feathers.

The other birds and Raven agreed, even though they were jealous of the small owl's long bill.

So Wood Owl flew far across the waters to the Land of Ten Thousand Smokes, which is actually a large number of small volcanoes. The air was so hot that some of Wood Owl's feathers were singed.

He found a long firebrand and picked it up in his very long bill and began to fly back to where man lived. But, before he got there, the firebrand began to burn his bill. Wood Owl wanted to drop the burning stick into the sea.

Just then Raven flew close and shouted, "Don't drop the firebrand! If you do, it will surely go out in the water."

So the small owl kept flying even though his bill was being burned and it hurt very much. Finally, Wood Owl and Raven arrived at the place where man lived and dropped the burning stick so that man could cook and keep warm.

The fire had burned all of Wood Owl's bill so that only a small beak was left. The heat had singed his wings so that he could no longer take long journeys, and the smoke changed his voice so that he could make only a shrill whistle. This is how all of his descendants became as they are.

## How Raven Brought Fire

This brief story is somewhat similar to the previous one, but a hawk, instead of the wood owl brings the fire and loses his long bill.

A very long time ago, Raven, while flying, saw something floating on the water. He looked at it and thought that it looked like fire and so he flew close to it and saw that it was a burning branch.

Raven called all of the birds and they gathered on the shore to listen to the great Raven speak.

"One of you must fly out there and bring that fire to me," said the black Raven.

He looked at the birds and chose the hawk to get the fire, because in those days hawks had long bills.

"Fly out there and bring the branch to me, and if it is hot do not let it go," he told Hawk.

So Hawk flew out to the firebrand on the water and grabbed it in his long bill. Then he started to fly back to where Raven and the other birds were gathered. By the time he got back, the hot fire had burned his bill down to nothing. Only a little beak was left. This is why hawks have a short beak today.

## The Giant Who Became Mosquitos

I have collected a number of very different versions of this particularly rare legend. The early 1900's version recorded in Juneau by Livingston F. Jones is perhaps the most accurate, and thus I rely considerably upon its merit.

A long time ago, longer than anyone can remember, there lived a giant savage who was very bloodthirsty and killed many young men so that he could drink their blood.

Many men tried to kill the giant but none ever could. All who went to battle the savage were killed. Once, three brothers decided to stop it and went to the mountains where it was said to live. The oldest brother took his weapons and went to seek the creature alone. After a day he did not return and so the next brother went to kill the savage giant. He was killed, too.

Then, the youngest brother took his bow and arrow and traveled to the place where his brothers had gone.

The place was high in the mountains and there were large boulders all about. The young warrior moved from rock to rock, hiding behind each boulder as he hunted the giant.

Suddenly a shadow was cast over him and as he looked up he saw the giant man's terrible club crashing down upon his head. When he awoke, he was inside a large game bag and was being carried towards a cave in the mountainside where the savage lived.

The young man felt around in the dark and found his cutting stone and with it he sliced through the bag so that he could escape. His bow and arrows fell out, too. Instantly the young warrior grabbed them and hid behind a rock.

The giant kept walking to his cave thinking that he still had his dinner in the bag. The young man followed him, even though it was hard to keep up because the giant took such long steps.

When they arrived at the cave he saw the bodies of his brothers and of many other men from his village. The giant had killed them all and drank their blood!

The giant dropped the game bag in a corner of the cavern and leaned his large and heavy club, which was as thick as a tree, against the cave wall.

When the savage turned around the young man pulled back hard on his bow and let his best arrow fly through the air at the giant's heart.

The sharp arrow hit him in the chest and he started to bleed. But before dying the giant said, "Though you killed me, I will still drink your blood."

The young man gathered wood and brush and dragged the giant's dead body to the pile and placed it on top. Then he rubbed his fire-making sticks together until the sparks made the dry kindling catch fire. Soon the whole pile was burning brightly. It burned for a long time until only ashes remained of the blood-thirsty savage.

Then the young man took the ashes and threw them high into the air. The wind blew the ashes all over the world and each piece of ash turned into a mosquito. That is why mosquitoes are hungry for blood - because they were made from the ashes of the bloodthirsty giant.

## Caribou Man

This longer Eskimo narrative is the story of a hunter, discontented with life as a man, who leaves his family in search of a better life as another animal. In the end, though, he returns to find happiness where it had been all along.

There once was a man who lived with his wife, two children, and his wife's mother. They all lived in an igloo in a small village along on the edge of the sea. The man was a fair hunter and a good husband and father, but the mother-in-law was always saying how bad he was. At night, when she thought he was asleep, she would berate him to his wife, telling her how he was such a poor husband and how he could not be compared to the other men of the village. She told her daughter that she should never have married the hunter.

The wife listened to her mother's belittling, but she never found fault with her husband. All the same, though, the hunter's life became unbearable. His life was miserable because of the mother-in-law's constant attack upon his character and abilities. Finally, he decided to leave. He told his wife and she cried and begged him to stay. But his mind was made up. So he gave instructions to the wife that his nets, spears, bow and arrows, and snares should be saved for his two sons when they grew up. He kissed her goodbye and left the village.

He walked about the tundra for a long time and became lonely and angry toward life. He was tired of being a man and believed that other animals did not have the problems that he had, and so he wished to be something else. As he wandered the barren tundra he came upon a flock of ptarmigan. All around them were berries, green plants, and seeds to eat. Life seemed so easy and simple to the birds; they appeared contented.

"Oh," said the man, "if I could only be a ptarmigan. Then I would be happy."

He watched the birds for a time and stayed close to them in hopes that they might take pity upon him and use their magic to make him become a ptarmigan. When the flock flew away to eat some place else, the hunter followed them. But every time he caught up with the flock they flew away again. He chased them like that all day until at sundown they landed just over a ridge.

When the hunter reached the place where they had landed, he found a small village of ptarmigan people. He walked into the town and straight into the kazhgie, the house where the single men lived. Inside the kazhgie were many men and boys sitting on the dirt floor.

The chief spoke to him saying, "Hunter, why have you been following my people all day upon the tundra?"

The man answered the chief, "I have followed you because I do not wish to be a man

any longer. I wish to be a ptarmigan like you so that my life will be more simple"

The leader rose from his seat and stood before the man and said, "Our lives are not as pleasant as you believe. Although we have plenty of food and stay warm in our houses, many birds in the sky and beasts on the ground hunt us to eat us. Our lives are always in danger. Surely you do not wish to be like us."

The hunter had not thought of these problems before. He was tired from walking all day and so the ptarmigan people allowed him to sleep in the kazhgie. He was so tired that he fell asleep almost immediately.

When he awoke the next morning the man looked around him and saw that the entire village was gone. It had disappeared!

He collected his few belongings and continued his aimless journey upon the arctic tundra. He had not traveled long when he came upon two snow shoe rabbits playing in the brush. He watched them chasing one another and laughing as they played.

"I believe I should be very happy if I were a rabbit," said the man to himself. "I will follow them and perhaps they will take pity on me and turn me into a rabbit."

For the rest of the day the man chased the rabbits hoping to speak with them. But every time he came close enough to talk, the two rabbits ran away as fast as they could. Just at sundown the two rabbits disappeared over a hill and the man ran after them as he had done the ptarmigan.

When he came over the ridge he saw an igloo sitting upon the tundra. He walked down the hill and entered the igloo. Inside were two rabbit people preparing their beds for the night. The rabbit man asked the hunter what he wanted.

"Why have you been following us all day?" he inquired.

As the hunter told the rabbit people of his problems as a human, the two gave him some dinner. When he was finished eating, he told them how he wanted to be a rabbit so that he could live carefree as they did.

When he was finished speaking the rabbit man spoke to him again, "You would not like to be a rabbit. Large birds of prey hunt us from the air and we do not see them until it is too late. Foxes and wolves hunt us on the ground and even smaller animals sometimes eat our children. Surely you do not wish to be a helpless rabbit!"

The hunter listened and soon agreed that a rabbit's life was not as carefree as he thought. The rabbit couple invited him to stay and sleep in their igloo for the night as their guest. When he awoke in the morning, the igloo and the couple had disappeared just as the ptarmigan people had.

Once more the hunter started his quest for a better life in which no mother-in-laws

berated him constantly, and in which life would be simpler.

He walked along the coastline and looked out across the sea when suddenly he saw several large bearded seals, known to the Eskimo as oogrook, swimming freely upon the surface. The hunter stopped and watched them and saw how gracefully they swam in the water. He knew that there was plenty of fish for them to eat. He thought that their life might be easy and simple and so he approached them. But every time he came close enough to speak to the seals, they quickly dived into the cold water. Finally, though! he was close enough that he could address the oogrook and they listened.

"Please, Brother Seal," he said to the largest of the three, "I have come a long way and I wish to become one of you."

The seal swam to the edge of the ice and pulled himself up beside the Eskimo and listened as the man told him the same story he had told the ptarmigan and rabbit people. When the tale was told, he thought for a moment and then spoke to the man.

"You would not like being a seal," said the oogrook. "Although our life seems fun and simple, we are very afraid much of the time. You see, whenever we come up to our air holes in the ice, we never know if a man or polar bear is waiting to kill us."

The man had not thought of that and decided that he no longer wished to be an oogrook. Because it was very late, the seals

invited him to sleep in their igloo for the night. They cooked him fish for dinner and then the man fell asleep. When he awoke in the morning the igloo and the oogrook were gone! He turned and walked back towards the tundra in search of another animal to become.

Soon the Eskimo came upon a herd of caribou grazing upon the tundra. He hid behind a thick bush and watched the herd for some time, noting how healthy and fat they were. There were so many of

them that he was certain that they must be safe. From what he could see, there was no reason why he should not want to be a caribou in the herd.

So the man started towards the herd in hopes that they might use their magic to turn him into a caribou so that he could join them. However, just as the ptarmigan and rabbit people had ran when he approached them, so too did the caribou now. As before, he chased the group for the whole day and when they finally disappeared over a hill near sunset, he followed.

When he looked over the top of the hill into the valley below he saw a village with many igloos and a large kazhgie in the center. He quickly walked down to the village and entered the kazhgie. Inside were many men of all ages.

The leader of the caribou people approached him and asked, "Hunter, why have you followed us all day?"

The hunter replied, "I have watched you and wish to become one of you."

As the man related the story of his miserable life as a human the caribou people offered him food for dinner. The Eskimo told them how he wanted to become a caribou because they seemed so safe and fat and healthy. They took pity on him and decided to make him a caribou. They promised that he would be a caribou and then invited him to spend the night in the kazhgie.

When he awoke the next morning, the village and all the igloos had disappeared. Where it had been now stood the herd of caribou grazing on the grass. He looked at himself and saw that he was a caribou, too!

For many years the hunter lived among the caribou people. He grew to be fat, strong, and fleet-footed. Although wolves chased the herd and killed many brothers throughout the years, he always escaped. Hunters from villages sometimes hunted the herd, but he managed to escape traps and spears as well. He was content with his new life.

But after many years the man began to wonder about his wife.

He wondered if she had remarried, and whether the mother-in-law was still alive. He especially wondered about his two sons. So one day he approached the leader of the caribou people and said that he wanted to return to his life as a man. The leader sympathized with the hunter and gave him instructions to follow, but he warned that it would be difficult to become a man again after being a caribou for so long.

The hunter thanked the chief and left for his village, still a caribou. It took him many days and he had to avoid traps and snares, and even hunters themselves, but he finally reached his village upon the sea.

As he walked towards his old house he stepped into a snare and was trapped.

Shortly, two young men came out and were surprised to have caught a caribou so close to their house. When they

approached to kill him, the caribou man spoke in a human voice. "Please release me and skin the fur from my head," he said. The two men were shocked. They had never heard a caribou speak before. But the caribou repeated his request again and the young men finally agreed and skinned the fur from his head. When they finished, they saw that it was a man inside the skin. The caribou man asked them to continue until he was completely a man again. When they had finished they took the man to their home. When he entered their house he was surprised, for there was his wife and she recognized her long-lost husband. She told him that she had never remarried because she had waited for him, knowing that he would return one day. The two young men who had snared him were his own two sons now grown to manhood. The old mother-in-law had died many years before. The old hunter was at last happy to be a man. He lived with his wife and they were very happy until they died of old age.

## How Light Was Brought In to The World

Almost every Alaskan native group has a myth which explains the origin of light in the world. Whereas in the Tlingit legend Raven steals the sun, moon, and stars, in this Eskimo tale it is a man who undertakes a journey and steals the sun.

In the beginning, there was only night. It was very dark and there was no light except that which came from campfires and seal oil lamps. Hunters had to hunt in darkness and the caribou had to stumble in the blackness in search of food.

One day, a brave young man decided to travel the world in search of light. When spring came he crafted the strongest and fastest kayak ever made, and filled it with dried fish and seal bladders full of fresh water. When this was all done, he pushed his kayak into the sea and paddled away from his village in search of Day. His mother cried because she was certain that she would never see him again, but the villagers waved good-bye as he disappeared in the horizon because they hoped that he would find light and bring Day into the world.

The man paddled for many days. When he became hungry he stopped to eat. When he was thirsty he drank from the bladder bags; and when he became tired, he slept. Since there was no such thing then as day to contrast night, people slept only when they grew tired.

Whenever a whale swam near him, the man asked if it knew where he would find Day. But none of the creatures of the sea knew about light.

After a very long time on the water, the man came upon an island. He pulled his boat up onto the land, ate some dried fish and whale fat, and then went to sleep. When he awoke the next morning he saw a very strange thing. A bright round ball was coming up from the edge of the ocean. As it did, it lit the sky around it and the man could even feel warmth coming from the glowing ball.

He watched it for several hours, wondering where it came from. Finally, it began to go down at the place where it came up. Once it sank into the water Night came again and it became dark.

The man decided to camp at the island and to wait until the ball appeared. Then, he decided, he would paddle in the direction until he found the sun.

The next day, when the brilliant ball came up again, the man immediately launched his kayak and paddled in the direction as fast as he could.

When he finally reached the land where the light came from, the ball had already gone down and it was dark again. The man set out on foot to find the sun. In the distance he saw a large house and a bright light was shining from within it.

Quietly, he crept up to the small opening and looked inside the room. There was a person sleeping on the dirt floor and beside him was the large, bright ball. It was so bright that the man could not look at it because it hurt his eyes.

He looked away into the darkness outside and thought, "This man must let the ball out of the house sometimes. When he does, it is daytime. When he brings it back inside, it is night."

The brave young man watched for a long time. When he was certain that the guardian was asleep, he looked into the window again and then he snuck into the room towards the bright ball. He finally managed to get close enough to grab the thing called Day. Once he had it safely outside, he started to run to his kayak, still carrying the sun.

Just before he reached the boat, he heard an angry voice behind him yelling, "Stop! Give me back my light. Give me back the sun!"

But the man only ran faster and then threw the bright ball into his boat and jumped in himself. The other man did not have a kayak and so he escaped with Day.

When he finally reached his own village, the man released Day into the world. Since that time there has always been day and night so that Eskimo know when to sleep and when to hunt.

## Kajortoq, The White Fox

Raven is not the only animal to play mean and sometimes deadly tricks on other animals. In this story, Kajortoq, a hungry and witty white fox, outsmarts two animals to satisfy her hunger. In the end, though, it is Raven who outwits Kajortoq.

A very long time ago when the animals could talk, Kajortoq, the white fox, was walking along the tundra in the springtime when she saw a caribou grazing on moss. Kajortoq was very hungry and so she thought of a plan so that she could eat the caribou.

Cautiously she approached the large animal and said to it, "I know of a place where there is a big patch of tasty moss."

The caribou, who had previously ignored the small white fox, now looked up with interest and listened.

"Yes," continued the devious Kajortoq, "I saw a place only this morning with so much fresh and delicious moss that it would take days for you to eat it all."

The caribou wondered where such a place was and so asked the white fox.

"It is on a trail which runs along the edge of the cliff which overlooks the sea," she replied.

The caribou thought to itself, "This little white fox surely cannot harm me."

And so he agreed to follow Kajortoq to the food.

The small fox led the caribou to the trail which ran along a steep cliff down towards the beach below. It was a very narrow path and the small rocks on it were very loose and wet, making the going dangerously rough and slippery. Far below, the caribou could see the waves crashing upon the large, jagged rocks on the beach.

Noticing his slight hesitation, Kajortoq enticed the caribou by reminding him of the reward at the other end of the trail.

"There is so much delicious, fresh moss and lichens that it will take you days to eat it all," she reiterated.

They began to move down the precarious path. The caribou was not as graceful as the small white fox, and several times he stumbled on some loose rock and almost fell.

Frequently, Kajortoq turned around and warned her unsuspecting prey as if she were truly a good friend.

"Be careful here. You wouldn't want to fall. Don't lose your footing," and so on.

Finally, though, they came to a place where the trail had been all but destroyed by a landslide. The trail continued on the far side where the landslide had been, but it was quite a jump to reach it.

"We must jump. The food is just on the other side," she said.

But the caribou was scared and would not move.

"It is not so difficult. I easily jumped across it only this morning," lied the small, hungry white fox. "Jump quickly and do not think about it!"

The caribou did as the fox demanded and jumped. When it landed on the other side of the trail, its hooves slipped on the loose rocks which were wet from the morning dew, and he fell to the jagged rocks far below.

Kajortoq laughed as she slowly descended the narrow trail to the beach below where the dead caribou lay. She danced around the body and sang a song about how she had tricked the caribou and how she now would have plenty of meat to eat.

The meal lasted for many days, but finally everything was eaten and so she left to find someone else to trick for food.

Out on the tundra again, she came across a ptarmigan sitting on her eggs in a nest in the branches of a tall shrub.

She looked up at the mother ptarmigan and said, "Give me one of your eggs to eat."

The bird was afraid for all of her eggs and so she agreed to give up one if she promised to go away afterwards.

Kajortoq agreed and so the mother ptarmigan let one egg fall to the ground where the fox greedily devoured it and then left.

The very next day, however, the white fox returned demanding another egg.

"No!" said the mother. "I gave you one yesterday and you promised to leave the others alone."

Kajortoq grew angry and yelled up at Ptarmigan, "Give me another egg or I will use my axe to cut down the tree. Then I will eat all of your eggs and perhaps even you if I catch you."

Again, the mother bird was frightened and so she let fall another one of her eggs which the selfish fox quickly ate and then left as she had done the first time.

Raven had been flying high above both times and came down to speak with Ptarmigan.

"Friend Ptarmigan," he said, "Kajortoq has tricked you. She does not have an axe to cut down your tree. You and your eggs are safe. Do not let her take any more eggs from you."

The mother bird thanked the wise Raven and waited for the fox to return.

The very next day Kajortoq returned demanding another egg.

When she refused, the white fox again threatened to cut down the tree with an axe.

"I am safe here, Fox. You cannot get me or my eggs," replied the brave ptarmigan.

Kajortoq was furious and asked, "Who has told you lies about me?"

Ptarmigan replied, "Brother Raven has spoken with me and told me that you do not have an axe and that I am safe from you."

Now angry and hungry, the small white fox walked away and made a plan to get even with Raven.

She purposely limped out into a large open area acting as if she were wounded. Then she lay down and quietly waited for Raven to come.

Raven watched from high overhead and after a time flew down and landed near the seemingly dead fox. Cautiously, he approached and then pecked at the fox's hind legs to see if she was indeed dead. Kajortoq remained still, fooling Raven into believing that she was dead.

When the great black bird walked around to the front of the fox to peck out her eyes so that he could eat them, Kajortoq quickly pounced on the bird and grabbed him in her strong jaws.

Still alive, she carried him towards her den.

Raven was worried and mad that he had been so cleverly tricked and so he made a plan to escape.

After some careful thought he asked the fox, "Why does it snow in the winter?"

The white fox thought about the question and then responded in amazement, "That is a crazy question. Why did you ask that?"

But just as soon as she opened her mouth to speak, Raven jumped out and flew away, laughing at the fox as he did so.

In anger, Kajortoq walked off muttering to herself while looking for someone else to trick.

## Skolce's, A Rabbit Tale

I first heard this Ahtna legend many years ago while visiting in the Copper Center region where my family originates. This strangely humorous tale depicts how rabbits, which once had dangerously sharp tails, got to have soft, bent, "powder puff" tails.

A long time ago, an Ahtna Indian from Tazlina went hunting along the river nearby where it empties into the mighty Copper River. He hunted all day and when it became dark he made camp along the river bank. He lay down to rest and the sound of the running water quickly put him to sleep.

After he was gone for several days, some of the other men from his village went to search for him. They followed the trail along the Tazlina River until they came to the Copper River. There, they found the dead hunter with a small, round hole cut in his throat. They took his body back to his family and thought little of the mysterious death.

After a while, though, another man went hunting in the same place and when he didn't return, the village men searched for him and found him dead with the same small puncture in the throat.

The people began to become scared. They did not know what was happening to the hunters, but they were sure that they did not want to die in the same way. The men were so frightened that they stopped hunting except in broad daylight and even then, only near the village. The food supplies began to run low. The dried salmon was almost gone and the people were getting hungry.

The problem became worse and worse until one Ahtna man, Ciil Hwyyaa, decided to find out what was happening. He left early one morning and followed the very same trail the other two men had walked. He hunted along the way and when he came to the place where the Tazlina flows into the Copper, he built a small camp.

Ciil Hwyyaa had seen nothing strange on his journey, but he knew that this was the same place where the other two men had died. Because he was a very smart man, he collected several large flat rocks from along the river's edge and placed them under his clothes; one under his clothes where his heart is, and the other he placed upon his throat. He covered it so that it could not be seen. Once he had done these things, he pretended to go to sleep. He closed his eyes but he was not really asleep. He was waiting for something to come and kill him.

Very late that night, when he was almost asleep, Ciil Hwyyaa heard a thumping noise coming up the trail and he opened his eyes

## The Woman Who Married The Muskrat

This Eskimo narrative from Chevak, like many Alaskan native legends, involves an animal who becomes a man and takes a human wife under the condition that she respects certain rules which hides his true identity.

Long ago there was a great hunter who lived in a village on the banks of a river just inland from the sea. He had a very beautiful daughter, and although all of the bachelor men in the village asked if they could marry her, the hunter never gave permission to any of them. Many men asked, but none were ever permitted her hand in marriage.

One day, though, a very handsome man asked if he could take her as his wife. The young woman knew of the young man and wanted very much to marry him. But the father did not permit him to take her as his wife. The daughter was so angry that she vowed never to take a husband.

After a year, even her father tried to talk her into marrying someone. But the woman was still angry because the father had sent away the only man she ever wanted to marry. Although many men asked to make her their wife, the woman would have none of them.

One day the woman was walking beside the oxbow lake just outside the village when she saw some young boys chasing something along the edge of the water. She came closer to see what it was and saw that it was a muskrat. The poor animal was scared and very tired from being chased by the boys. Although it tried to escape, it could no longer swim well and it appeared as if it would soon die.

The beautiful, unmarried woman told the boys to leave the muskrat alone and so they left it lying on the grass, near dead from exhaustion. The woman walked back to her house as well.

Several weeks later, a very handsome young man approached the woman while she was doing her chores. He was wearing a parka made of muskrat. He told her that he was from a nearby village and asked her to marry him.

There was something almost magical about the mysterious, strange man, but she agreed to marry him and soon they were husband and wife. The man was a good hunter and provided well for his wife. He always caught a lot of game and bearded seal and he was kind to her as well.

They lived together and were happy. The man had always warned that she must never take off his clothes or boots and dry them by the fire, even if they were wet.

Once, after a long hunting trip, the husband came home all wet. When he went to bed, the wife dried his very wet clothes and boots by the fire. When he awoke, he put on his clothes and boots which were now dry. He looked very surprised and after looking at

his disobedient wife, he quickly ran from the house.

The wife ran after him, begging him to stop. She followed her husband to the very oxbow lake where the young boys had been chasing the muskrat. When the man reached the lake, he immediately dove in. The woman dove in right behind him and when they both came up together, they had turned into muskrats.

The woman had disobeyed his only rule and had dried his boots by the fire. Because of that, they were now muskrats and they lived in the lake for the rest of their lives as such.

## Whitefish

Whitefish are caught with nets or hooks in spots where schools mill and pass by at certain times of year. Watching such events for many generations, the Koyukon have learned their precise timing and location, their predictable variants, and the best ways to harvest them. This is well illustrated by whitefish seining, done along certain gravel bars near the villages of Hughes and Allakaket. It can succeed only in dusky light during the last days before freeze-up, and when the water is not running high. When this is done correctly and timed well, masses of fish can be taken and then simply allowed to freeze for winter storage. I have seen the long riverboats almost gunwale-deep in the water, loaded with a single evening's catch.

Trout and whitefish are given the same respect that should be accorded all fish, but they are not treated in other special ways. Formerly, Koyukon people had a small ceremony when the first whitefish was taken in spring. They had survived another winter—cause enough for a celebration—and now the secure abundance of summer was just ahead.

The whitefish ceremony had its frivolity, as everyone in the settlement joined in a footrace. But it was also serious: The first-caught fish was cooked, and people had to eat it without disarticulating any of its bones. It was especially important to keep the ribs and backbone intact by flaking the meat off with great care. If any bones fell out of place it foretold bad luck in the season ahead. Signs like this not only forecast the future but seem to actually cause or compel the events they predict. In some cases (discussed later) the sign and its effect can be negated by doing the right thing immediately; but most omens seem fairly binding. Semisubterranean Houses of Alaska and Siberia North Alaskan Eskimo (Inupiat)