



Elders identify wild plants and discuss their usage.

ELDERS GATHER IN FAIRBANKS

heritage

By Luci Abeita

Native elders who are living in Fairbanks gathered together at a local church and remembered the past.

Emphasizing the importance of recording what the older people know, guest speaker Morris Thompson said, "You are the history of our Native people; the story you have to tell is important, so write it down."

"Our history wasn't passed down in school and the younger people are missing something."

Thompson told the elders, "You truly are the hope of the Athabascans, Eskimos, Tlingits, Tsimshian and Haidas."

The elders discussed traditional names and usage of plants, taboos, and hunting and fishing practices.

One Athabascan group discussed the practice of giving your first kill to an older person and having a potlach. Good hunting would come to you if you did this.

Some old-time taboos were:

- Young women were not supposed to eat bear meat so that when they had

children, the children would not die young. Only old men could use a bear skin.

- Women were not allowed to look at caribou when men were hunting.

- Women could not put on or step on men's clothes.

- Women were not supposed to eat lynx, moose



A batch of Indian ice cream.

head, fresh meat, rabbit brains or marrow, or walk around while men were eating.

It used to be considered bad luck to see a lynx swim across the river or to see flying squirrels. A crying fox was a warning to the village. Owls would speak in Native languages to tell people if someone killed their wife.

Laura Alfred explained how long ago moose were driven into snares set a certain distance apart. The

women would watch the snares while the men drove the moose.

When the salmon were running, men in six canoes with a log set across the canoes would catch the fish with a dipnet, then pass it to the next person who would hit it with an awl in the brain. If fishermen were successful, they were quiet.

A potlach held at the end of the conference featured various Indian and Eskimo delicacies.

A few of the elders made Indian ice cream. While the lard was melting, the dry meat was pounded on a rock into fine pieces. The two ingredients were mixed together until the right consistency was reached.

A potlach held at the end of the conference featured various Indian and Eskimo delicacies. It was a fitting way to end one of the first Elders Conferences in Fairbanks.