

The Elders do it all: potlatch, fiddle, dance, and politics



People from throughout the Interior gathered for the Denakkanaaga' conference.

Photos by Bill Hess



Berkman Silas (upper left) cuts meat for the potlatch as the crowd gathers in the Minto Community Center to celebrate what will be one of the biggest events here this year. As they wait for the young men of the village to bring their servings to them, the Denakkanaaga' Elders (lower left) join together in song. During the daytime meetings, the Elders had followed scheduled time, with limitations on the length of time each could spend addressing the others, and times set to go from one topic to another, for adjournment, and so on. The potlatch ran on Indian time. The Elders got up to speak as they saw fit, and went on for as long as they wanted. Potlatch speakers continued until early the following morning, thanking the Minto people for their hospitality, speaking of traditional ways, and urging the many young people present to listen to the Elders, and to be certain to hold on to their land.



Paul George of Nenana sings at the potlatch.



After the potlatch, local musicians such as fiddler Cerosky Charlie, took up their instruments for a "white man's dance," done Native style. The first dancers hit the floor at 2:30 a.m., and continued 'til four.