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The Village of Women



After she told Yaabaa Teeshaay stories in Athabaskan, I asked Ellen to tell them again in English. It was very difficult for her to do, but she quickly put herself into doing it.

Oh, Connie, it's hard for me to repeat.

That wild man, he came to all over in the world.

That's his . . .

Her wife, he started walk,
and then he stopped in to this big village,
just only girls' village.

No man, no . . . man in there.

He got nothing but girls.

And he gots in there.

He give a gift to his wife
so he want wild man sleep with . . .

I really don't want talk about . . .

He sleep with every woman in that village.

And every woman have a children.

The boys. *Yaabaa Teeshaay* got bunch of son in that village.

They make it more and bigger in that village.

And *Yaabaa Teeshaay*, his wife got rich in that village
'cause he give his wife gift for her husband sleep with these woman,

to have children.

In that village, whole village,
all girls, every one of them have boys.
What he do, he trade other one her baby
and other one her baby and he traded in.¹
And they grown up to be married to . . .
Indian marriage.

And um . . . that's how in that village,
getting' so big.

Yaabaa Teeshaay go out, prepared food for them.
Whatever girl can't do,
he prepare everything
in that village for all those woman.
And he did it.²

From there, his wife started walk.
All of a sudden he asked his wife,
“What we goin' do?”
His wife give an order what to do.
He will do whatever his wife . . .
That's her wife,
go with halfway

¹ This appears to be an explanation of how the world became populated. The women exchanged babies and later took as partners men born of other women in the village.

² Traditional Indian marriages in the Upper Tanana in earlier times included bride service, during which time the husband would live in his bride's village and help her family for a few years while learning the land and becoming better acquainted all around (see Callaway and Miller-Friend 2000:xiv).

in the whole world.³

And from there,
he gots to tell his wife:
“We gotta go now.”
And his wife has so much stuff,
don't know what to do.
So he asks his wife,
“What we goin' do?”
“Oh, we make big . . . raft,
float down to on the river.”
So *Yaabaa Teeshaay* did.
He make big raft 'n all those stuff
gets in.

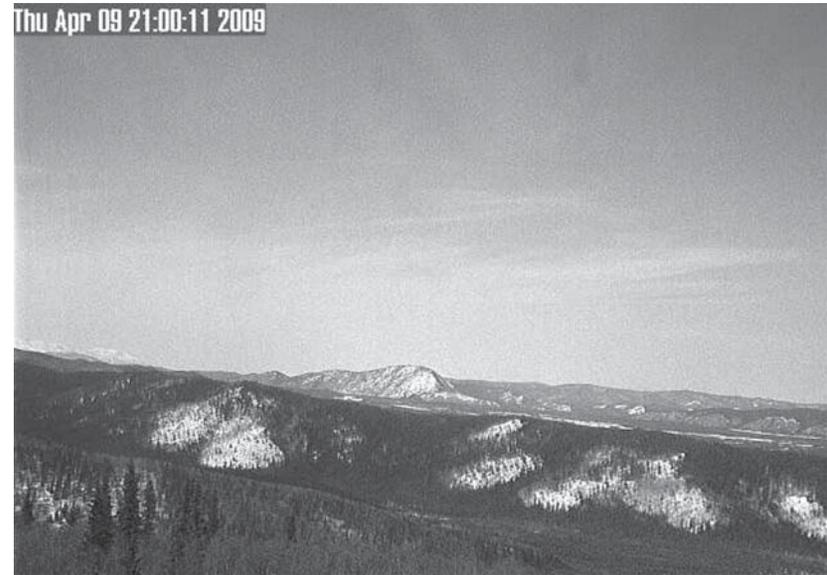
And from there, his wife tell,
“What you goin' do?”
And his wife tell him,
“Why [don't] you make mark under that big hill over
there?”⁴
He say, he say, “What I goin' do?”
She say, “Make sign.
If you think this is the end, you gotta
make sign.”

³ In standard English this would read: “That's his wife. She went with him halfway around the whole world.” Ellen's first language was Tanacross Athabascan, Healy Lake dialect. Interestingly, whenever Ellen told a story, there was a cadence to her voice that could be most readily transcribed in a poetic format.

⁴ Ellen believed this to be the hill called *Ch'inchedl* near Sand Creek. David Joe, also from Healy Lake, stated that *Tatel Ch'eeg* (another name for *Yaabaa Teeshaay*) went on to Moose Creek Bluff, nearer to Salcha on the Tanana River, where petroglyphs have been found.

Indian *seyh*,⁵
He make mark on that big hill.
For everybody know.

Right now, young children
from Healy Lake search around in there,
but they don't find yet.
I don't know if they goin' find
or not.
Maybe ground growing.⁶



***Ch'inchedl*, recorded by a Federal Aviation Administration webcam on Knob Ridge near Dot Lake**
Photo courtesy of Rick Thoman

⁵ *Seyh* is the Healy Lake word for red paint. Native craftsmen traditionally painted the edges of snowshoes and drums with this red paint. It was used in a sacred way, possibly because it had been passed forward a priori.

⁶ Ellen implies that the mark may have been hidden by many years of ground cover.