

ATHABASCAN

word of the week

Meeting a surprising stranger in the woods

August 1987, Eleanor Kriska and Virginia Johnston decided to walk to the second lake at Bishop Mountain for birch bark. Birch bark is a quick way of starting a fire in the wood stove or in the smokehouse. They already had left, so I quickly got my backpack and knife and went after them. I didn't realize they had walked on the edges of the lake and I took the old trail. It was thickly overgrown. With my faithful dog, Peppy, at my heels, we went after them. Halfway to the second lake my dog began to bark. I was too busy trying to find the trail and got a little impatient with all the loud barking. I hollered at her to daalek, eehoo. It finally dawned on me to find out why she was barking. I stopped and, to my surprise, we were just feet away from a lynx. It was sitting on its hind legs looking at us. I shooed my dog away and noticed the lynx's front paw was caught in a trap. Apparently, my uncle/brother, John Jr., didn't pick

up all his traps. I ran to the lake and dropped my backpack to mark the spot. If I did not use the backpack as a marker, I would have not remembered where the lynx was.

I ran about 200 feet to the smokehouse to find my dad. He was taking down dry fish. I was all out of breath and gasped to him that I saw an animal caught in a trap. Doo' my thinking with my head didn't last long. I told him, "An animal is caught in a trap! It's not a mountain lion. It's a lynx!" My dad and brothers, Frank and Oscar, and cousin, Jeff, quickly ran back to the lynx.

They saw my backpack and came upon the poor little lynx. My dad is an expert outdoorsman who knows animals well and he found two Y-shaped sticks and, being very careful, put one stick on its neck and the other on its hip. All the while he spoke to it in a calm voice and assured the animal he was only there to help it escape. My brothers held down the sticks as dad

with the utmost care took the trap off its leg. Once he got the trap loose, he spoke softly and told the lynx it was free and he is not there to hurt it, and slowly they let the sticks up. The lynx stood there for a few seconds and dashed off into the woods.

Shortly after, Eleanor and Virginia came back with their birch bark and had missed all the excitement. Years later, everyone teases me about saying it was not a mountain lion, because we do not have mountain lions in Alaska.

— Edeyeedaadleno,
Elaine Settle of Galena/Koyukuk

Vocabulary

kkaazene	lynx
daalek	be quiet
eehoo	in vain
Yesdle T'oh	Bishop Mountain, "wolf mountain"

The Athabascan Word of the Week appears every Saturday on page A3 of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. The words are provided by Susan "K'etsoo" Paskvan of Yukon-Koyukuk School District. She is originally from the village of Koyukuk on the Yukon River in Interior Alaska. She is Tleeyegge Hut'aane, which is Koyukon Athabascan. She seeks stories and phrases from both Denaakk'e (Koyukon Athabascan) and Denak'a (Lower Tanana Athabascan), which are languages spoken in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District region. Yukon-Koyukuk School District serves the villages of Allakaket, Hughes, Huslia, Koyukuk, Nulato, Kaltag, Ruby, Manley Hot Springs and Minto. The Board of Education places a priority on teaching the Native languages within the district.