



How Climate Warming Affects Nunapitchuk, Alaska

Kelsey, Janet, Cindy, and Marie
A.T.M.S, Your Grade
EDGE Program, August 10, 2006



Introduction

Nunapitchuk is a Yup'ik Eskimo village located on the Johnson River in Western Alaska about 30 miles west of Bethel, Alaska on the Kuskokwim River Delta. There are 4 villages within site of Nunapitchuk in an area known as Akulmiut (a-gool-me-yoot). Below you will find a variety of information and photos, including maps, that we hope will be interesting and informative.



Materials and methods

Nunapitchuk is getting very watery because the permafrost is melting. We might have to move to the bluffs. Some people don't like Nunapitchuk because too many waters. Some people like Nunapitchuk because they go berry picking and hunting. During the summer times, people always go camping, berry picking, and hunting. Then in winter times, we go jigging for salmon fish, pike, and other fishes. Men go hunting for caribou, moose, and other animals that yupik people eat.



Three Eskimo boys eyed the current where the salmon passed. On a long sandbar behind them stood two white canvas wall tents. A fire burned slowly under a black iron pot of beaver stew. A dozen paces downwind stood long wooden racks heavy with cut and drying fish.

This is the middle of the vast Alaskan wilderness, north of the Arctic Circle and hundreds of air miles from Fairbanks or Anchorage. A map shows no roads, but charts instead huge parks, mineral deposits and five small Eskimo villages with a population of slightly more than a thousand. While America debates the fate of Alaska's wilderness, Eskimos live with that wilderness every day. They have lived with it for thousands of years and eventually will have to live with the decisions America makes. Even now, people lobby Congress to make subsistence hunting and fishing illegal. But here in fish camp, there is no talk of that.

The boys cast lines into the current, hoping to lure a fat sheefish to the bait. Across the channel, the floats on Florence Douglas' net dipped under water. A tired salmon twisted and turned, but the gill net tangled him even tighter. He struggled for hours, only to finally hang, exhausted, tail down.

In the morning, after a breakfast of sourdough pancakes, oatmeal and coffee, Florence and her son, Eugene, loaded three washtubs into their flat-bottomed wooden boat. They motored a mile downstream to check a net there, then came back to check the one across the channel. With moves learned from years of experience, she pulled the net into the boat a few feet at a time. Still alive, the salmon struggled fiercely. A quick whack on the head ended it. Florence worked the net cord from around his sharp teeth, from out of the gills and over the fins, then tossed him into the tub. This net yielded 23. All three nets she set yielded 90 salmon, a full day's work of cutting, washing and hanging.

Camps spread along the Kuskokwim River, many in the same places Eskimos have camped for generations. Dozens of families caught thousands of fish, worth more thousands of dollars if they had to buy them. But the fish were not for sale. Kuskokwim River Eskimos cannot drive to a supermarket for supper. As the salmon run ends, the caribou migration begins. Fresh meat replaces fresh fish on the table. When caribou season ends, dried fish, dried meat and frozen foods carry them through the winter. These Eskimos have always depended on the land for their survival. It is little different today. The land and the Eskimo are the beginning and end of the food chain.

Now there are new obstacles. The National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have drafted regulations recognizing subsistence. But some worry that the regulations won't be flexible enough as game populations fluctuate or responsive enough as people's needs change. The new monuments are closed to sport hunting and so have forced hunters onto Eskimo land needed for subsistence. Environmentalists feel outboard motors, snowmobiles and rifles spoil the wilderness experience. Some urge protection for all animals. "To kill for subsistence," the Committee for Humane Legislation said, "may indeed be part of our heritage, but it is a very ugly part that is... obsolete in today's modern world. If the Eskimos want to live like their forefathers, they should hunt as their forefathers.

