

APPENDIX G

ORAL HISTORY RELATED TO THE JUNEAU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AND ASSOCIATED STUDY AREAS

G.1 INTRODUCTION

The following oral history information was gathered during a series of interviews between Dr. Charles M. Mobley of Charles M. Mobley and Associates, Anchorage, and the interviewees. The interviews were conducted as part of the overall Section 106 and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes related to the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Juneau International Airport. The statements below are reprinted here verbatim and have been approved for inclusion in this document by the speakers. Much of the information pertains to the use of spruce roots gathered from the spruce grove south of the Airport Float Plane Pond in the making of traditional baskets and hats. Images of the several items manufactured in modern times from roots gathered at the Airport are provided, through the permission and courtesy of Steve Henrikson and Janice Criswell, at the end of this document.

CECILIA KUNZ (TLINGIT ELDER), TALKING WITH CHARLES M. MOBLEY AND MARIE OLSON (AUKE TLINGIT ELDER), JUNEAU, ALASKA, AUGUST 1, 2001:

Henry Cropley's aunt – Jake Cropley's mother – had a smokehouse and a little cabin on Duck Creek. Koo Kwakhse' was her Tlingit name. I don't know where it was – I guess close to the septic tank, by the airplane place. She was paid a little for it. They tore it down a long time ago. At low tide the Indians went over the bar there to Douglas to put up food at Fish Creek.

At Lemon Creek, Indians didn't actually live there, but they hunted there – mountain goat, porcupine. Maybe spend a night under a tree, like at Eagle River.

ROSA MILLER (AUKE TLINGIT ELDER), TALKING WITH CHARLES M. MOBLEY, JUNEAU, ALASKA, AUGUST 1, 2001:

I was told by several people that when they dug the gravel pit at Stabler Point they found a village there. I asked to see it. The foreman said "OK, come back and I'll take you there." But when I got there, it had already been removed.

Back by the Lemon Creek prison, where Goldbelt has a gate, I think that used to be a medicine-man area. My son Frank and I had such feelings there.

DELORES CHURCHILL (SE ALASKA NATIVE ELDER), TALKING WITH CHARLES M. MOBLEY BY TELEPHONE, FEBRUARY 4, 2002:

My mother, Salina Peratrovich, used to harvest spruce roots from the trees at the airport. I've never seen that stand over-used – it takes years to over-harvest. It's like pruning a tree – the tree gets excited when you harvest and sends out more roots. I've harvested there a lot. People used to camp there – there's a lot of garbage around, and a lot of campfire rings. A Canadian artist dug up an old Hudson's Bay rum bottle there. I think during prohibition people used to hide booze there.

One time Mary Lou King and I and some other ladies were stripping in that grove, and the police came and said "Come out with your hands up!" So I sent Mary Lou out first.

The only other place to harvest is out at the Juneau Boy Scout camp, and then only when the scouts aren't there. I've gone up to Yakutat, but at that place there's a lot of military garbage and contamination. Also at Metlakatla; there's a good place, but the people had it tested and it was toxic from military debris. In the future we won't have enough spruce roots, because more and more people are learning to make baskets. It would be nice for somebody like the U.S. Forest Service to start a grove to farm spruce roots.

MARY LOU KING (LOCAL WEAVER), TALKING WITH CHARLES M. MOBLEY BY TELEPHONE, FEBRUARY 5, 2002:

You'll see spruce root baskets on the ferry, at the airport, at the museum...and chances are the roots were gotten from the Juneau airport site. There are a lot of Native women who have gathered roots there. Delores Churchill and her daughter Holly have pieces on display around the world. That place was Delores' mother's (Salina Peratrovich) favorite gathering spot. As far as I know there weren't roots gathered there until about 30 years ago. I took Salina and Delores out there their first time, when the trees were a perfect size.

One time we were pulling roots, a class of older women, all down on our hands and knees under the tree branches getting dirty. The airport police came by and shouted "Come out of the woods!" He must have been surprised when we all crawled out!

The spruce roots need to be from sandy soil, and between about 30-60 years old, and a pure stand. Otherwise other tree roots get mixed in. Salina said you could harvest every three years, but some of those trees are too old now. You need a perfect root. Probably even before the airport was built the Auke people got roots nearby, because of the sandy soil. But the trees there now have only been there since WW II. When I first went out there you'd see people camping. And hunters – shell casings everywhere. Because that's not the original tideflat, there wouldn't be anything really old there. Also because of the (isostatic) land uplift, the tide likely used to cover that a lot more.

JANICE CRISWELL (LOCAL HAIDA/TLINGIT WEAVER), TALKING WITH CHARLES M. MOBLEY BY TELEPHONE, FEBRUARY 6, 2002:

Delores Churchill took me out to the airport spruce grove there – the first place I ever gathered. I was in her class at the university. That was about 18 years ago. It was exciting. It's unique to be able to gather your own material, prepare it, and weave with it. You can't buy spruce roots in a local store. The gathering is an important part of the process. You feel very connected to the past. An ongoing tradition. It's spiritual. It's not just a mechanical process.

You need a place where there's not a lot of rocks, where the roots are straight. If they're crooked they're no good. We go in the spring, when the roots are white; in the fall the roots are splotchy. You lift the moss, and dig under the soil surface. If you don't find good roots, then you move to another spot. I gather roots from tiny size – like fine wire, up to pretty big ones that we used to lash our ten-foot fish trap with. If you're incredibly lucky the root can be quite long, but you can use them even if they're only a yard. Most important is to have a consistent size from one end of the root to the other. You follow the root and clip it off. We don't collect too many at once because you still have to prepare them. Afterwards you cover the roots back up with soil and put the moss back. Delores said her mother always thanked the tree. We've never found anything of consequence, like artifacts, when digging.

Next you build a really hot fire and roast the roots on a stick, like a hot dog. You loop the root in a figure-8, but not bound too tight, because it must all be equally heated. Then you have a stick in the ground called an "enna," which is split so it pinches the root. You pull the hot root through the stick, so you need gloves. The bark should come off nicely. If you go in the fall it's harder to get the bark off. Then you wrap the bark up in a plastic bag, because you need to maintain the moisture.

Then you split the roots, air-dry them, and store them. You can't get enough roots for a basket in one trip.

It's a wonderful experience. Once someone does it they'll never look at baskets the same way. It's a huge commitment, and it takes a lot of effort to learn to split. Your baskets are only as good as the material you prepare. There's not many things you can do in life that can be done from the ground up. [laughs]

We're worried about the trees at the airport being cut down. I teach basket-making at the university, and we need to provide a lot of the material to the students. I may have from 16-30 students to supply through the year, plus myself. That grove will support that much, but only if each student makes a small basket. I've had to scale back a bit. Mary Lou King helps a lot in the collecting. Most people don't realize how important that grove is. It has easy access, which is necessary for our elders.

The Boy Scout camp is not used much any more as a source of roots because the trees are getting older, and it's getting to be quite a hike out there for older weavers. There are certainly other places to get roots, but you have to hunt around for a long

time before you find the perfect combination of soil type and the right age of the tree. You can't really use old trees, and the ground can't be too rocky or too sandy. Just finding a place like that is hard, and the weaving is so hard already. The airport is really the best location in all of southeast, and is used by weavers and student weavers from all over--Sitka, Hoonah, even Ketchikan.

Spruce root basketry is a 5,000 year old tradition in southeast Alaska, but in recent times the art is just hanging on. There are less than a dozen professional weavers working today – it takes decades to become proficient. Given the amount of time involved, they are lucky to get minimum wage for their work on the art market. It has become more of a labor of love. Spruce root basketry is an endangered art--a small number of people are keeping the tradition alive. Access to the roots at the airport is critical to the survival of the art, for the weavers of today, and critical for teaching the art to the next generation.

G.2 PHOTO GALLERY OF SPRUCE ROOT GATHERING AND PROCESSING AS WELL AS ITEMS MANUFACTURED FROM SPRUCE ROOT GATHERED AT THE JUNEAU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



Figure G-1. Gathering spruce root at the Juneau International Airport.

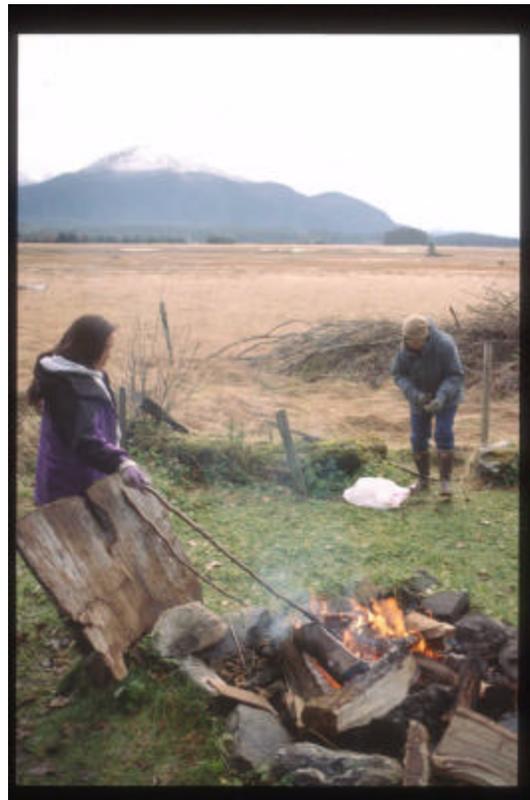


Figure G-2. Roasting roots in preparation for weaving.



Figure G-3. Weaving spruce roots.



Figure G-4. Unpainted spruce root hat.

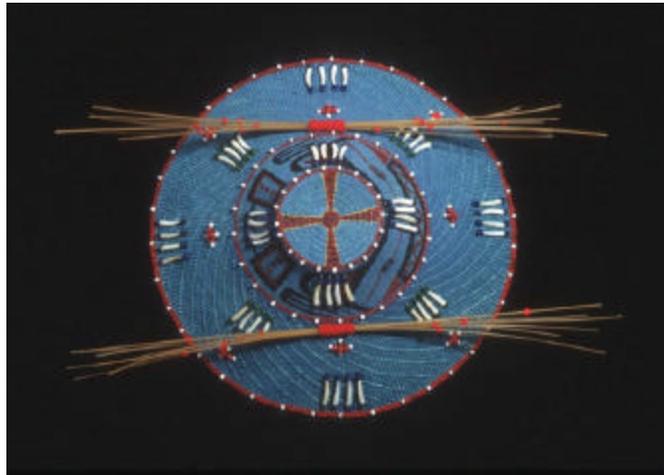


Figure G-5. Painted spruce root hat.



Figure G-6. Owl basket made from spruce root gathered at the airport.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK