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# Here Earth and Water Seem to Strive Again\*

What could be simpler than a wooded stream rippling through an unassuming valley? True, it attracts bears, brown and black, with an abundance of salmon. Other creatures, too, gravitate to its waters and banks to feast on the leavings of bears, decayed carcasses of spawned-out fish. Humans are among those attracted to the stream, Native people from past millennia and today's visitors. This is an modest creek, Anan, not so different from hundreds or even thousands of others in Southeast Alaska, Yet, by walking its trail and studying its kaleidoscope of land and water, its marine, plant, animal and human life, we can begin to glimpse extraordinary interdependence in that singular ecosystem, the salmon stream. Anan Creek is an abundant and complex place well worth knowing.

The creek is located on the northern shore of the Cleveland Peninsula, an arm of the Southeast Alaska's mainland, positioned south of Wrangell and north of Ketchikan. Anan's story begins with a clash of titans as tectonic movement led the North American and Pacific plates, slowly but inexorably over 500 million years, in a grinding, elephantine dance. Blocks of the earth's crust, some originating at the equator or further, moved northward and east. Some of this well-traveled material was subducted or forced beneath the edge of the North American plate, melting existing rock and raising mountains as it sank while accreting or welding onto the North American plate. Other blocks kept moving north.

Geologists call these successive waves of new material, unrelated to the surrounding material, terranes. They form southeast-north-



Bonnie Demerjian

*Anan Creek in early autumn.*

\* Alexander Pope, "Windsor Forest"

## Tlingit Salmon Myths

*There are several Tlingit myths that tell about how this staple food came to be.*

### Raven Creates Fish

One day, Raven called the salmon together to choose their rivers. King Salmon said “I will travel up the long, large rivers to the clear waters, where I will spawn.” Dog Salmon was next. “I, too, want the larger rivers,” he said, “but if they are filled, I will use the smaller streams.” Next came Coho. “I prefer the short, fast, clear waters for my spawning.” At the end was poor little Humpback. He looked up and softly said, “I’ll take whatever is left.” And so it is that even today, each type of salmon can be found in the streams they picked. But you will notice that there are more Humpback salmon than all the others.

— adapted from a legend told by Walter Williams, Tlingit storyteller, in *The Tlingit* by Wallace Olson



Karen Simonak

*A little interspecies conversation, perhaps?*

### Fog Woman

This story comes from the days there were no salmon and Raven had to eat other fish. One day, Raven, who was camped at Anan Creek, went out in mid-channel to fish. A heavy fog came in and he could not see. Then a woman appeared in his canoe and asked for Raven’s hat. All the fog poured into it and the sky became clear. Raven took this woman for his wife.

One day when Raven was away Fog Woman sent one of the slaves to get water in his hat and when he returned there was a salmon swimming in it. This was the first salmon and they cooked it and ate it before Raven returned. When he came home he smelled the fish on the slave’s breath and found out that Fog Woman had created the salmon. From then on there were many salmon that they caught in the stream and smoked. Soon after Raven began to forget that it was Fog Woman that had brought him his good fortune. They quarreled more and more. Then finally in a temper Raven threw a piece of dried salmon at her. She ran away from him, but, when he ran after her and seized her, his hands passed right through her body. Then she went into the water and disappeared forever, while all of the salmon she had dried followed her. After that he went to his father-in-law to beg him to have his wife come back, but his father-in-law said, “You promised me that you would have respect for her and take care of her. You did not do it therefore you can not have her back.”

Some say that Fog Woman’s daughters, the Creek Women, live at the head of every stream and the salmon each year fight their way back to see her. All die attempting this except the steelhead trout who comes back every year.

— This story is told on the Chief Johnson totem standing in Ketchikan.  
(from Keithahn, *Monuments in Cedar*)

and trollers catch smaller numbers of pinks because, though there is some overlap, different fishing methods generally target different species. The seine boat has traditionally dominated Anan Creek, where pinks outnumber all other species.

From the first, the majority of Alaskans opposed fish traps. Early canneries hired some Natives but many workers were imported from Seattle and San Francisco. Initially, canneries also purchased fish from Native fishermen. The anthropologist George Emmons stated in 1905 that about twenty-three hundred out of a total Tlingit and Haida population of six thousand were employed by the salmon industry. Around 1900, Natives began to abandon their small settlements and move to towns and scattered bays where they worked in and fished for the canneries.

The Natives had little protection against whites encroaching on their traditional fish creeks and favorite shorelines. In 1907 presidential proclamation removed the possibility of expanding the lands they had managed to keep when the Tongass National Forest was created. This put under federal control all lands not in private hands. The increase in the number of fish traps proved to be especially devastating for Native people who not only had lost control of their salmon streams, but also had become dependent on a cash economy. Native fishermen, however, vigorously continued their fishing tradition by seining pinks. Others adjusted to the tyranny of fish traps by turning to the troll fishery for kings and cohos. At the same time, as traps spread, Natives began to join the chorus of protest to the decimation of their salmon resource. Discontent on all sides centered on ownership of the fish traps. Absentee owners, the "Fish Trust", who controlled the canneries, fish tenders and traps came in for increasing wrath from most territorial residents who tried repeatedly to get traps banned. Despite continued but ineffectual federal legislation curtailing traps and fishing seasons, pink salmon harvest levels continued to fluctuate alarmingly. Fish traps became a symbol of



*Native fishermen shore seining in the early days of the 20th century. The canoe is outfitted with oarlocks and oars as well as with traditional paddles. Alaska State Museum/Historical Collections/ASL-Sitka-Indians-31.*

## Following Fish

With the rapid growth of commercial salmon fishing in Alaska at the beginning of the twentieth century came increasing uncertainty about the size of each year's run. Would it be large enough to support the canneries? Were the continuously working fish traps depleting the run? Some fluctuation was assumed to be from natural causes but the ballooning harvest began to raise the fears of Alaskans. As difficult as it is to believe today, in the 1920s it was not known whether pink salmon returned to the streams from which they had come.

In 1929 Dr. Frederick Davidson of the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries began studying pink salmon in Anan Creek and Olive Creek (also called Snake Creek) on Etolin Island, to answer this question. The Bureau expected to use the information gathered to help regulate escapement and thus protect the runs from overfishing.

Davidson clipped the adipose fins of young salmon, then watched for their return in the following years. He trapped the mature fish in weirs, examined and returned them to the creeks to spawn. He also studied the scales of pink salmon in the two creeks to determine their age. As with trees, scales are laid down in concentric rings that mark the rate of growth. In spring and summer the fish grows more rapidly than winter. This phenomenon was first described in 1912 and Davidson confirmed it. In a final report to the *Wrangell Sentinel* in 1933 he warned that the intensity of the commercial fishery "has contributed to the variability and size of the pink salmon run." What had been obvious to common sense was now proven by science, though it would take decades longer to translate his warning into meaningful change. Dr. Davidson's research continues to be referenced in salmon studies today. (Bonar et al.)

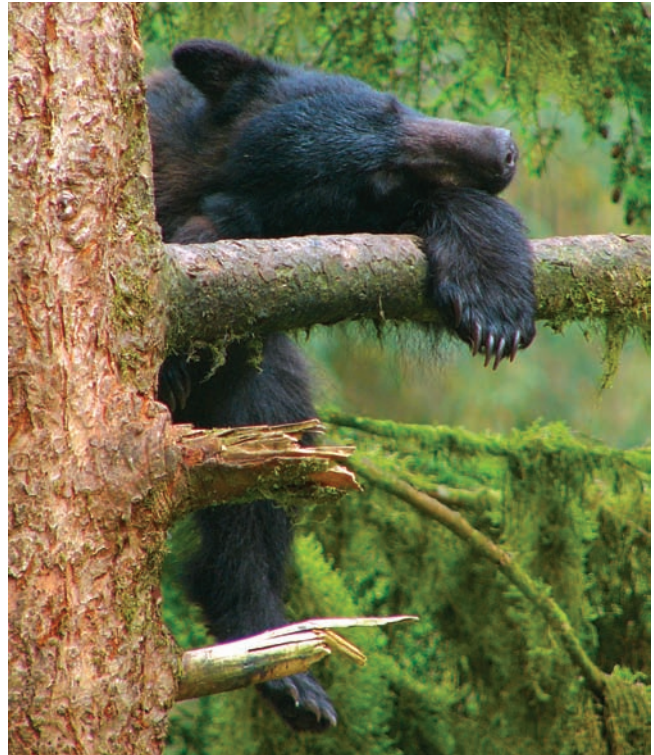
## Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)

Research has identified two major lineages of black bear, coastal and continental, that apparently diverged from each other in Asia as much as 1.8 million years ago. The continental lineage includes black bear from locations across North America – central Alaska, Alberta, Montana and Pennsylvania. The coastal lineage comprises all the Pacific coastal subspecies including those in Southeast Alaska north of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Further study has found, however, that both lineages occur in Southeast Alaska, an indication of the region’s complex history.

Though it is called black, the species can be brown, cinnamon, blond, a rare bluish black or nearly white. In Alaska black is the norm. Their body is compact and stout with massive legs and feet. A black bear’s fairly straight facial profile contrasts with the brown bear’s dish-shaped profile. The lips are mobile, all the better to manipulate its varied diet. Males usually reach full growth at seven to eight years, females at five. Adult females weigh about two hundred fifty pounds while males vary between one hundred fifty and four hundred pounds.

Black bears are commonly thought to have poor eyesight but recent studies say otherwise. Evidence shows that their eyesight is comparable to ours while their night vision is superior. They can also distinguish shades of color, learning hue discrimination faster than chimpanzees and as fast as dogs. Hue discrimination serves bears well when berrying. Misconceptions about their vision may have arisen because bears do not always react to what they see. They rely more on their noses than eyes to give them the information they need. Alaskan biologist John Hechtel believes our human-biased experience often causes us to misinterpret bear behavior because we trust our vision more than our sense of smell while bears put more confidence in noses than eyes. Bear noses are truly superior organs – they can sniff out carrion a mile away – and they have other surprises in store. Despite their lumbering appearance, black bears can run up to thirty-five miles an hour and are competent swimmers. They can climb trees easily with their sharply curved claws, a legacy from their forest origins.

This bear, named Virginia, has been identified each year since 1997. A bear gets a name when all interpreters are reasonably sure they can pick it out as an individual. Before that they are tagged with a number corresponding to the date they first arrive at the creek. Names are chosen to reflect a bear’s physical trait, Virginia’s from her ear notch that one interpreter thought resembled the state of Virginia.



Ivan Simonek

*Black bears are very comfortable in trees. See?*

Ivan Simonek

