

When Fish were Men (Gwich'in)

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When Loche [a kind of fish, also called a burbot] was a man, Mister and Misses Loche had big family. After breakup, all the fish go up the Peel [River], as far as headwater: whitefish, herring, coney, jackfish, sucker, lots of fish. All the fish and their family go, they camp here and there, travelling all together. Men [that is, fish who are men] swap and tell each other stories. Womens too, tell each other what they will do when everything is over. Little ones have fun running and stopping to see different kinds of fish or birds or plants. They're careful they don't get hurt or hurt anybody.

But Loche stayed behind. He lived by the creek with his family. Mother Loche stand at the shore with her family, wishing she could be amongst those travelling up the river. She see her husband sleeping; she push him. He open his eyes: "Let's go, our children wants to go."

"We'll go when I'm ready. I worked all the winter. This is the only time I rest."

She walk away. He hear her mumbling saying: "He mean we'll go when it's cold, on short days? My children will be cold. They wouldn't have fun and see other animals. It will be dark and slushy and short days."

Mother Loche was very unhappy. Leaves turning yellow, leaves falling. One morning, bright and early, father Loche jumped up. "OK, OK, lets go! We'll go up the river."

Loche swims hard among the broken ice, ahead of his children and wife. They travel upstream, among the slush, going from creek to creek to creek. Finally, they arrive at the headwaters, where they stay for a while. It is spring time and now it is time to come back down again.

This story is telling us we have to be up early and do our work. Summertime, when the sun is up all day, we could do lots. We could make dry fish, pick berries and do sewing. It's no good to sleep all day. It's good when you get up early. You could do lots in one day. You have lots to do when the sun is up high.

Thank you very much.