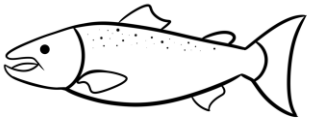
Salmon Story- A Lower Umpqua, quuiich, story

As told by Patricia Whereat Phillips, miluk Coos
A story told by Frank Drew in 1932

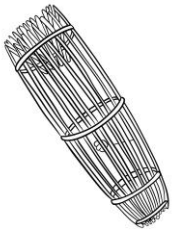


Long ago the ***qalyeq'***, salmon were always in the water.
They lived in the bays and rivers all the time and did not ever leave.



One time an old man was traveling along the waters and he wanted some fish.

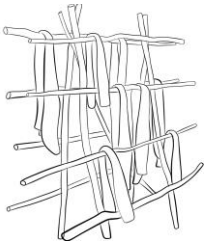
So, he built a ***kəmatɬats***, a Fish Trap Basket to put into the water to catch the ***qalyeq'***, salmon. However, it was a magical basket: It could talk and it spoke with the old man.



The old man told the Fish Trap Basket that he was going to set it up in the water and the Fish Trap Basket should holler to his when it was full of fish. "I will come and empty you out," the Old Man said.
Holler "***kəmatɬats, kəmatɬats'"*** and then I'll know there are ***ɬt'iiyai,*** salmon in you.

The Old Man got the ***kəmatɬats***, the Fish Trap Basket made and all set up in the water.

His plan was that while the ***kəmatɬats***, the Fish Trap Basket was doing all the work, he could take a rest. The Old Man just wanted to relax a bit. But, his plan did not work out. He barely got the ***kəmatɬats***, the Fish Trap Basket into the water and it just instantly filled up with fish. The Basket hollered "***kəmatɬats kəmatɬats***". The Old Man did not get a chance to rest at all.



The Old Man went to the water and emptied all the ***ɬt'iiyai***, salmon. He cleaned the fish and cut them into slices and then laid the strips on the drying rack to dry. Then, the Old Man think, "Ok, I need a little more dried fish."

"So, Basket," the Old Man said, "I am going to set you up again and you holler again when you are full." He thinks for sure it will take longer to fill the Basket with fish this time. He gets the ***kəmatɬat,*** the Fish Trap Basket all set into the water and he walks away to take a rest.

Again, he does not even get a chance to sit down-to take a rest. Instantly, the basket is full again and hollers, "***kəmatɬat kəmatɬat***". The Old Man goes back to work. Cleaning the ***ɬt'iiyai***, salmon, slicing them and laying them on the rack to dry.

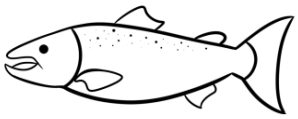
The Old Man thinks, “All right, we are going to do this again.” He puts the ***kəmatɬat,*** the Fish Trap Basket back into the water and again it quickly fills up with fish. “***kəmatɬat kəmatɬat”*** hollers the Basket. Again, the Old Man did not get to rest. Again, he cleans and cuts the fish.

The Old Man keeps doing this over and over again until the fifth time the Basket hollers, “***kəmatɬat kəmatɬat***”. The ***kəmatɬats,*** Fish Trap Basket hollered before the Old Man could even lay down to rest. Now, the Old Man complained, “I am being called too often!”

The Old Man yelled at the ***kəmatɬats, “kəmatɬats***, you yell too much too often. Just shut up! I can’t get any sleep.”

The ***kəmatɬats*** was now empty. Then, all of the strips of fish on the drying rack began to move. They curled up and rolled off the drying rack and rolled all the way to the water. The strips turned into ***ɬt'iiyai,*** salmon and swam away down the river. The bones and hearts also began to move and rolled down into the creek and swam away as whole fish down river.

And, the Old Man caught no more ***ɬt'iiyai,*** salmon for a long, long time.



Now the different type of ***ɬt'iiyai,*** salmon return to the rivers just once a year, instead of remaining in the rivers all year long.