Gathering ziinzibaakwadaaboo

(Continued from page 4) They also north west winds wadaaboo as milk jugs, but are more difficult to clean.

The first boil of the collected ziinzibaakwadaaboo occurs at his iskigamizigan on a wood stove that he and some friends had hauled onto the site years ago. He usually boils 55 to 60 gallons of ziinzibaakwadaaboo to make one gallon of zhiiwaagamizigan. For mininaatig, it usually takes about 40 gallons of ziinzibaakwadaaboo to make one gallon of zhiiwaagamizigan. During the first boil, friends and family visit, sharing stories and trading jokes. Coffee, pancakes and hot dogs are cooked over the fire. Naturally, the coffee and pancakes are sweetened with zhishiigamewinzh and inininaatig. Every year, these trees sacrifice their own blood for human survival.

Before the ziinzibaakwadaaboo season, Dana and his family have a ceremony to honor the spirits. They offer a biskitenaagan (folded birch bark basket) to collect the ziinzibaakwadaaboo. Though tribal members nowadays may not make ax cuts to gather ziinzibaakwadaaboo, some still use apakwaa- naatig to make their negwaakwaanan. Dana remembers that, during his childhood, his family used apakwaanaatig to make their negwaakwaanan and coffee tips to gather ziinzibaakwadaaboo. His auntie remembers when Dana was a baby and his family brought him to the iskigamewinzh and inininaatig. He was bundled up in a dikanaaigan (cradleboard) and then secured to a tree, as everyone else worked.

He continues his family’s traditions and shares them with his children. In particular, he teaches his children the importance of showing respect to zhishigamewinzh and mininaatig. Every year, these trees sacrifice their own blood for human survival.

At the right angle, they placed a biskitenaagan, below which they placed a biskitenaagan (folded birch bark basket) to collect the ziinzibaakwadaaboo. After a few weeks at the iskigamizigan, sudden flooding can place Dana and his helpers in a serious predicament. More than once, heavy rain and fast melting snow has triggered a quick departure from the iskigamizigan, forcing everyone to slog precariously through icy water.

After the “first boil,” Dana boils the ziinzibaakwadaaboo a second time at home. This final boil requires more heat control, so he prefers to use his kitchen stove. He cans the finished zhiiwaagamizigan in Mason jars, usually producing between five to twenty gallons, depending upon the total number of trees tapped. After a few weeks at the iskigamizigan, nighttime temperatures warm, the trees start to develop their leaves and the ziinzibaakwadaaboo begins to taste bitter. Dana removes the negwaakwaanan to allow the trees to heal. Years ago, when he made his negwaakwaanan into negwaakwaanan, he actually left them in the trees to help with healing.

Before Europeans arrived, Anishinaabe made negwaakwaanan out of apakwaanaatig (staghorn sumac). They used apakwaanaatig because of the relative ease of hollowing out the soft wood center of its stems. Moreover, instead of drilling holes in the trees, they made two perpendicular ax cuts with the right angle pointing down.

The hansons of Red Cliff-based Peterson’s Fisheries raise a gillnet loaded with whitefish from approximately 180 feet below the ice. From foreground: Sean Jr., Troy, Sean Sr. and Jamie Hanson. (Photo by Charlie Otto Rasmussen)

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Near the north shore of Oak Island, Sean Hanson plucks a whitefish from a net drawn through a freshly chopped hole in the ice. Boxes of whitefish (foreground) are loaded onto sleds and hauled by snowmobile from sites around the Apostle Islands to the Wisconsin mainland at Red Cliff. (COR)