**Ken Weyaus Sr Springtime Sugarbushing**

The “sugarbush” is an English translation of the way the Ojibwe people describe the trees and the land where we make maple syrup and maple sugar in early spring.  Sugarbushing usually begins in February or March, when there is still snow on the ground.  We’ve been sugarbushing for a long time, and it’s something we still do today and teach our children.  Here’s how:

Traditionally, about 50 to 100 people would go out to the sugarbush camps.  These were groups of families, and all of the family members would help out.  The whole tribe wouldn’t go sugarbushing because not everyone knew the process and some of them might accidentally waste the sap.  So only the people who knew what they were doing would go out.  This way, they didn’t waste anything.  The ones who didn’t go sugarbushing would go hunting, and they would trade furs and meat for sugar cakes and syrup.

Usually the maple sap runs around about February or March.  How much sap there is depends on how the winter was.  Not much snow means not much sap.

The sap is not in the center of the tree – it is in the inner bark of the tree.  Traditionally, our people would tap the maple tress with a hatchet.  They would make a groove in the bark and fit a wooden spigot into it.  Today, we use augers to drill holes before we put in spigots.

The sap from the trees you have tapped drips into buckets or birchbark containers under the spigots.  Periodically you check to see how far the containers have filled up.  How fast does the sap come out?  It depends on the weather.  It needs to be nice and warm.  If it’s too cold, the sap won’t run.  Some days, the buckets will fill up in half a day, other days it takes more or less time.

When the buckets have filled up enough, you take what’s there and put it in a bigger container.  When you have enough of these, you take the bigger containers of sap and put them into big iron kettles.  The Indians first got these kinds of kettles from fur traders.  Then you start making the sap into maple syrup, maple candy, and maple sugar.

The process is done in three stages.  First, the sap is boiled down to syrup.  That takes about seven to eight hours.  You can leave some of the syrup at this stage to use for cooking, sweetening tea, and other things.

Some of the syrup can also be put into birchbark containers that are shaped like ice cream cones.  This hardens into maple candy that will last for years.

During the third stage, the syrup can be put into a wooden trough.  It is worked with a paddle and mashed down.  You work it and work it until it becomes maple sugar.

Sugarbushing lasts about a month.  You don’t boil the sap when it’s raining, because the wet weather would just make it take longer to boil.  You only do it on nice days.