

COYOTE AND THE SALMON

Many years ago there was a ravine that ran around Spokane Falls near where Main Avenue is today. This story explains the origin of that ravine and why salmon were always so plentiful just below the Spokane Falls, but why the Coeur d'Alenes had to travel a long distance to get salmon.

One hot day Coyote decided to go swimming in the Columbia River. As he floated down cooling himself he saw some people. He drifted closer and heard them saying: "We cannot eat salmon anymore because the dam has been closed up." "Why don't you go and break open the dam?" asked Coyote. "No, there are three sisters there who are man-eaters," said the people. Coyote laughed, "How could girls be man-eaters! I'll go break it up."

So Coyote floated down the river to The Dalles, where the sisters watched over a big dam which blocked up the river and stopped the salmon from swimming upstream. When he saw the three sisters, Water Snake, Killdeer, and Waterbird, he turned himself into a small baby and floated past their camp on a log. He cried out like a baby, "Wah, Wah!" When the sisters heard him, they swam out into the river and pushed the log to shore.

The baby was crying, and one of the sisters made a kind of mush



Coyote begins ditch around Spokane Falls so salmon can swim up to the Coeur d'Alenes.

of salmon for him. The baby ate it and was satisfied and went to sleep. Later on he woke up and cried again, and nothing but salmon would satisfy him. He grew very fast, and learned to crawl. When the sisters would go out to dig camas they tied him up so he couldn't crawl away. One day when the sisters were gone, the baby decided that this was the right time, and he turned himself back into Coyote.

Coyote rushed down to the river and started breaking up the dam. When the sisters returned from digging camas, one of them said, "There's a coyote over there breaking down ur dam." They rushed over and started to beat

Coyote with their digging sticks. But as they clubbed at him, the dam broke. Then Coyote sang, "Come, salmon, come!" And the salmon were released, and they went one after another upstream. The sisters wept bitterly as they saw the salmon swim away upstream. Then Coyote turned the sisters into birds.

Breaking the dam made Coyote leader of all the salmon, and he conducted them up the Columbia to all the other rivers. When Coyote came to the people upstream, he said to the salmon: "Come up here on dry land."

Then he cut a stick for a club and stunned the salmon. He built a fire and showed the people how

to roast the salmon.

When Coyote got to the mouth of the Spokane River, he lead the salmon on up over Little Falls where they could jump up through the water. Finally they came to the Spokane Falls. Here the falls were too high, and the salmon just jumped again and again and then fell back into a big pool.

Meanwhile Coyote heard about a beautiful daughter of a Coeur d'Alene chief, and he decided he wanted to marry this girl. So he went on up the river to Coeur d'Alene country and found the girl's father. He told the chief, "Give me your daughter for my wife, and I will bring salmon up

the river." The chief thought that it would be good to have salmon for his people, and he told Coyote to come back again and he would give him an answer.

Coyote rushed back to Spokane Falls, thinking about the beautiful Coeur d'Alene girl. He began to dig a ditch around the falls so the salmon could swim up to Coeur d'Alene country. Coyote finally dug a deep ditch almost around to the upper falls of the Spokane, and then he decided to hurry back to the Coeur d'Alene chief and claim his daughter for a wife.

When Coyote got to the chief's camp, the chief came out and said, "No, my daughter said that she won't marry you." Then Coyote looked around the camp, and none of the other women would marry him either. So Coyote said, "Because you all refuse me, you will not have any salmon up here." He turned around and went back to the falls where he had left the salmon. He told them not to go any farther up the river than Spokane Falls, and he turned around back down to the Columbia River again. Coyote then led the salmon up the Columbia as far as Kettle Falls. There he married Gopher, and that's why there were always lots of salmon at Kettle Falls.

—Story told by Cole Moses, with additional details added from Reichard's book on Coeur d'Alene Myths.