



Harvesting wild rice.

PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL SCHERMEISTER/CORBIS

Wild Rice

WINONA LADUKE

Cultivated Californian “wild rice” is very different from the natural wild rice which grows in northern Minnesota.

IT IS THE WILD RICE moon in the north country. The lakes teem with a harvest and a way of life. “Ever since I was bitty, I’ve been ricing,” reminisces Spud Fineday, of Ice Cracking Lake. Spud, with his wife Tater, aka Vanessa, Fineday, this year started ricing at Cabin Point, and then moved to

Big Flat Lake, lakes within the borders of the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. “Sometimes we can knock four to five hundred pounds a day,” he says, explaining that he alternates the jobs of “poling and knocking” with his wife.

The Finedays, like many other Anishinaabeg Indians from White

Earth and other reservations in the region, continue to rice, to feed their families, to “buy school clothes and fix cars”, and get ready for the ever-returning winter. The wild rice harvest of the Anishinaabeg not only feeds the body, it feeds the soul. It is a tradition which is generations old for these people of the lakes and