



GWICH'IN TRIBAL COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 1994-95



Tl'oondih Healing Camp was constructed during 1994 and 1995 by Tetlit Zeh Construction. Established by a mandate from the 1993 Gwich'in Tribal Council Annual General Assembly, Tl'oondih recently began operations under the auspices of the Gwich'in Healing Society.

Photos by Robert A. Alexie.

Gwich'in land, culture & economy for a better future

Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute

This past year has been an exciting and productive year for the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. We completed four major projects and five contracts, employing 118 Gwich'in beneficiaries in total. Much of our work provided an opportunity for Gwich'in elders and youth to work together opening up lines of communication so that information is being shared again.

Public presentations were an important part of our work. Institute staff made several presentations about the research activities of the Institute. The Institute also spoke to the Standing Committee on Legislation (SCOL) regarding new heritage legislation for the Northwest Territories. We took part in the development of the Community Wellness Strategy for the NWT.

We are now a registered charitable organization under the Income Tax Act as well as a society under the Societies Act of the Northwest Territories. In order to set the goals and directions of the Institute, we now have a Board of Directors.

Our mandate deals with a precious, non-renewable "resource" – Gwich'in culture, knowledge, language and heritage. This work will affect Gwich'in identity, heritage and land management issues for generations to come. It takes time, dedication and funding. Time, unfortunately, is not on our side. With the

death of each Elder, a way of life is disappearing along with a wealth of information and knowledge about the land, language and culture. We are fortunate, though, to be working with dedicated people who believe that this work will make a difference.

Our staff

Ingrid Kritsch, executive director, is responsible for the research and management of the Institute. She has worked for twenty years across the Canadian north, doing archaeological, anthropological and historical research. Ingrid has also worked with two other aboriginal cultural organizations in the Northwest Territories: the Dene Cultural Institute and the Metis Heritage Association.

Alestine Andre, cultural director, is a Gwichya Gwich'in from Tsiigehtchic. She has an undergraduate degree in anthropology from the University of Victoria. In the past she has worked in the administrative field with the Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement (COPE), and the Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (predecessor of the Gwich'in Tribal Council).

Historical overview of the Institute

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute is a non-profit society under the Gwich'in Tribal Council with headquarters in Tsiigehtchic, and a

DIRECTORS

of the

Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute

Mary Kendi (Aklavik)

Gabe Andre (Tsiigehtchic)

Catherine Mitchell (Inuvik)

Sarah McLeod-Firth (Inuvik)

Bertha Francis (Fort McPherson)

Eleanor Mitchell (Fort McPherson)

Grace Blake (Gwich'in Tribal Council)



Anna-May McLeod and Rita Carpenter participated in an archaeological dig at Martin House in 1994.

Photo by Ingrid Kritsch

Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute

research office in Yellowknife. The Institute was created during the Annual Assembly of 1992 in response to people's concerns about their loss of culture and language and the breakdown of their families and communities.

The primary objectives of the Institute are to document Gwich'in oral history and traditional knowledge before this information is lost forever, to promote use of this information, and to integrate it into programs within the Gwich'in Settlement Area so that it will be available for generations to come.

The Institute has joined with various Gwich'in boards, companies, and government departments on projects that meet the objectives of the Institute. These range from identifying culturally significant sites for protection and land management, to developing more relevant cultural material for teaching and tourism purposes.

Elders are the sources of oral history and traditional knowledge and give guidance in cultural matters and values. In each project, local people are trained on-the-job, while doing their own research. They learn about their culture and heritage from the Elders, often while working with professional anthropologists and archaeologists.

The three-year Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names Project recorded an extensive trail system for most of the traditional land use area of the Gwichya Gwich'in, who now primarily reside in Tsiigehtchic. Along these trails, elders

have identified over 300 Gwich'in and English place names, along with stories, legends and the locations of traditional campsites, resource harvesting locations, graves, and historic cabin sites.

The Tsiigehtchic Ethno-archaeology Project (1994) used ethnography (oral history), archaeology, and video to research and record Gwich'in traditional use and knowledge of *Tsiigehtchic* (the Arctic Red River), a recently designated Canadian Heritage River. A half hour video, *Tsiigehtchic: Life Along the Arctic Red River*, focuses on an interview with Hyacinthe Andre, the oldest elder in Tsiigehtchic. Hyacinthe speaks with his son, Noel Andre, about traditional life, place names and the people who lived up the Arctic Red River.

The Tsiigehtchic Ethno-archaeology Project (1995) includes a survey and an archaeological field school. Elders from Tsiigehtchic were interviewed about traditional sites and trails leading into the Mackenzie Mountains, in the upper reaches of the Arctic Red River. Their information helps to direct the archaeological survey of the river. Four high school students also joined the elders and staff for an archaeological field school at Martin House.

Area students participated in three

cultural camps. These camps were held during the fall, winter and spring in order to expose the students to different seasonal activities. Students were taught basic bush skills and traditional environmental knowledge.

The Institute was also awarded several contracts. The Institute provided translation services for Gwich'in items that will be displayed in the Western Arctic Visitor Centre in Inuvik.

The Institute coordinated the survey for the national Aboriginal Seniors Information Project in the Gwich'in Settlement Area. The goal of the survey was to interview aboriginal elders across Canada about their knowledge of federal government programs and services.

The Institute conducted an oral history project with Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Elders about traditional use of the Gwich'in Territorial Park area southeast of Inuvik. This information will be used in developing interpretive material for the Park and protecting the cultural resources in the Park. The Institute also provided information for interpretive material at the Nitaiinlaai Visitor Centre, eight miles outside of Fort McPherson.

Ingrid Kritsch



At a Tree River cultural camp, Gabe Andre taught Jamie Natsie and Andrea Benoit how to skin a muskrat.

Photos by Alestine Andre