

Gwich'in Tribal Council Annual Report 1995~'96



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

Ingrid Kritsch/Alestine Andre

Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute

The main objective of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute is to conduct social and cultural research and to provide programming in these areas for the benefit of Gwich'in beneficiaries.

The Gwich'in Social & Cultural Institute is currently into its third year of operation. Our head office is located in Tsiigehtchic and we maintain a small research office in Yellowknife. We will move our operations to the old community hall in Tsiigehtchic as soon as the renovations are complete. At present we have a permanent staff of two: an executive director and a cultural director. Over the next few months we will seek funding for an administrative assistant to assist with our increasing workload. Over the past year, we conducted thirteen projects and contracts.

◆ Place Name Projects

Traditional Gwich'in place names are left off most official maps, but these names are very important to us. Our place names tell us much about how our ancestors lived, where they travelled, and their in-depth knowledge of the land. Since 1992, over 300 Gwich'in and English place names have been recorded for trails, areas and geographic features in the Gwichya Gwich'in region.

In 1995, we began a major place names project with Fort McPherson Elders about the traditional land use area of the Teetl'it Gwich'in. Using information gathered in the 1970s and

1980s by John Ritter, Wm. Nerysoo Sr., John A. Charlie and Neil Colin, we catalogued and put into a computer database (information, usually about one particular subject that has been collected and entered on the computer for easy access) more than 350 place names. We were asked by Elders to continue this project by adding more place names and recording the oral history (history that is passed on by word of mouth) of each of these places. They asked us to do this soon because of their age. We were asked to include young people in on-the-land projects so that they will benefit from the knowledge of their Elders.

◆ Tsiigehnjik Ethnoarchaeology Project

In 1995, ten days of archaeological surveying (searching for evidence of human cultures) was done along the Tsiigehnjik (Arctic Red River). The survey strategy is based on oral history information provided the previous winter by Gwichya Gwich'in Elders living in Tsiigehtchic.

The survey team visited traditional sites identified by the Elders, mainly on the stretch of river between Bernard Creek and the Forks. Several important sites were recorded, including a dog-pack trail used by Gwichya Gwich'in to travel between the river and the Mackenzie Mountains to reach their traditional winter hunting grounds.

The 1996 program is designed to complete excavations at Martin House. Following completion of the fieldwork,



Photo: GGI

Mabel English talking about traditional plant uses at Gwich'in Territorial Park

we will publish a small booklet on the ethnoarchaeological (the study of a human culture in relation to historical remains) work carried out to date.

◆ Martin Zheh Field School

In the summer of 1995, a two-week archaeological and cultural field school at Martin Zheh (on the Arctic

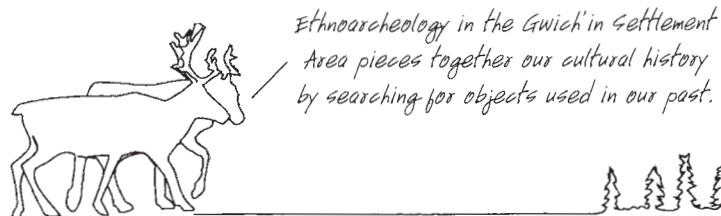




Photo: GGL

Annie Norbert also demonstrates her traditional knowledge at Gwich'in Territorial Park

Red River) introduced high school students to the basics of archaeological survey and excavation procedures, bush skills and traditional environmental knowledge (knowledge of the environment acquired through Elders or through one's own experiences). Institute staff, Elders and archaeologists collaborated on the project. Students learned about their own heritage and realized they are a vital link in preserv-

ing that history for future generations. The activities of the field school were recorded on videotape by the Media Resource Centre with the intention of producing a video for use in schools.

♦ *History of the Gwichya Gwich'in of Tsiigehtchic*

Working with the Beaufort-Delta Divisional Board of Education, we completed a draft written history of the Gwichya Gwich'in and the community of Tsiigehtchic. This history is based on information and stories provided by Gwichya Gwich'in Elders during oral history projects carried out from 1992~'95. This year we will finalize the draft so it can be used in the local schools by teachers and students. The Tsiigehtchic Community Education Council, the Gwich'in Language Centre in Fort McPherson and the Media Resource Centre are assisting with this project as well.

♦ *Genealogical Research*

In partnership with the Gwich'in Enrolment Board, we carried out genealogical research (the record of a person's family history) for the community of Tsiigehtchic. Similar work is being done for the communities of Fort McPherson, Aklavik and Inuvik. We intend to record the oral history associated with individuals and families, including stories related to the naming of individuals.

♦ *Cultural Camps*

Two cultural camps were held in the winter for grade five students. They learned about Gwich'in culture, bush and survival skills and the work required to maintain a winter camp from an Elder and two experienced bush instructors. This camp has been very popular with young students so we have decided to develop a program to encourage parents to take their own children out 'on the land'. Parents will have the chance to play a larger role in their children's education.

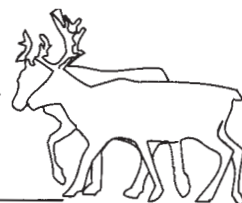
♦ *Strategic Planning*

The Government of the Northwest Territories provided funding to the Institute to assist us in preparing a five-year plan, and to identify potential long-term funding. Using the funding, we wrote a document called, "Into the Next Millenium: the Five-Year Plan of the Gwich'in Social & Cultural Institute 1996~2001." This document informs people about the Institute and is used as a fund-raising tool.

♦ *Gwich'in Themes Contract*

Under contract to Parks Canada, we compiled a detailed list of 545 sources about the Gwich'in which will be relevant in interpretive programs for tourism. This work is the beginning of a long-term program which will help visitors to the area understand Gwich'in culture, while protecting heritage resource sites and promoting Gwich'in traditional knowledge of the land.

Traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) is information passed to people and communities through their ancestors' experiences.



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♦ Peel River Watershed Contract

The Peel River Watershed Advisory Committee awarded a contract to Gwich'in Geographics Ltd. in 1995 to co-ordinate the compilation of baseline environmental information on the watershed. (Baseline environmental information is the standard we use to detect environmental changes. A deviation from the baseline alerts us to changes.) The Institute was one of several partners in this venture and was responsible for preparing a detailed list of anthropological and ethnohistorical literature relevant to the Peel River Watershed. The list has nearly 600 published and unpublished items on various subjects.

♦ Northern Athapaskan & Métis Collections Contract

In 1993, under contract to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, the Institute designed a survey to acquire information on Northwest Territories Athapaskan and Métis historical objects and records. The survey was sent to 169 heritage institutions around the world and in 1995-'96 we compiled the responses to the survey and produced a report to assist government, Athapaskan and Métis organizations in getting these important collections returned.



Photo: Firth Damkjjar

Smoking caribou meat at Martin Zheh Field School, 1995.

♦ Gwich'in Territorial Park Contract

During 1995, the GSCI staff participated in both archaeological and oral history studies of the territorial park area. The information from these studies could be used in developing interpretive materials for the park. Two sites are likely precontact Gwich'in sites and it has been recommended that park development proceed with minor modifications in order to avoid disturbing these two sites.

The traditional plant study was carried out with Elders from Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic in 1995. This project provided information about the traditional use of plants, trees, roots and berries that are encountered on one of the hiking trails being developed in the Park.

♦ Gwich'in Environmental Knowledge Project

The Institute is taking an advisory role in this project, which was initiated by the Gwich'in Renewable Re-

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The Board meets four times annually.



source Board. This project is documenting Gwich'in knowledge about a selected number of fish and wildlife species in the Gwich'in Settlement Area, their uses, spiritual values and ethical principles associated with their use and conservation.

♦ *Delta Science Camp*

This summer, ten high school students from Inuvik, Aklavik and Fort McPherson will spend nine days at a science camp. They will gain first-hand experience in both the traditional and western scientific traditions through work with Gwich'in Elders, a biologist, geographer, and archaeologists. This year's camp will be located at the site of a traditional Teetl'it Gwich'in fish camp called the Mouth of the Peel.

♦ *Conclusion*

Our Elders are crucial to our research and programming because they are the sources of traditional knowledge and can give guidance in terms of cultural matters and values. We encourage our Elders and our youth to work together, so that communication and respect are fostered and maintained. In this way we hope that our traditions, cultural values, and the social well-being of our people will be carried into the next millennium.

Staff Members

Ingrid Kritsch — Executive Director
(Research Office - Yellowknife)
Alestine Andre — Cultural Director
(Head Office - Tsiigehtchic)

♦ *Funding*

An annual stipend from the Gwich'in Tribal Council covers approximately 30% of our administrative expenses. The other 70% is raised through grants, contracts and donations to cover administration, research and programs.

This year, funding was provided by the following agencies: Parks Canada, GNWT Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment, Gwich'in Tribal Council, Gwichya Gwich'in Council, Tsiigehtchic Community Education Council, Hamlet of Fort McPherson, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, GNWT Dept. of Economic Development and Tourism, Beaufort/Delta Divisional Board of Education, Science Institute of the NWT, Gwich'in Enrolment Board, & Gwich'in Geographics Ltd.

Status

Non-profit society under the Gwich'in Tribal Council with charitable status.

Mandate

To document, preserve and promote the practice of Gwich'in culture, language, traditional knowledge and values.



Photo: Tom Andrews

*Martin Zheb Field School excavation.
Front-back: Jenny Andre, Eric Damkjar,
Yvonne Andre, Alestine Andre, Rita Carpenter,
Erika Kritsch, Ingrid Kritsch.*

*Gwich'in heritage resources give a record of
Gwich'in use and have spiritual, cultural,
religious and educational importance.*

