TEETŁ’IT GWICH’IN, GWICHYA GWICH’IN, AND EHDIIATAT GWICH’IN JOURNEYS TO OLD CROW

ORAL HISTORY ABOUT TRAILS, MEETING PLACES, AND DIVERSE TRAVELS

Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute
**TRIP TO OLD CROW**

A story of travels by Mary Vittrekwa recorded as a COPE story

When I was still staying with my grandmother, my uncle, Jimmy Kendi, died and my uncle, Julius Kendi, was a minister in Old Crow. I wanted to go and visit him, so I started over with my grandmother.

When everyone started back down from Fish Creek, I said I was going over. Everyone told me not to go but still I said I was going. Mary Francis and her husband also went with me. They went as far as head of Stony with me and they turned around. I went alone from there. I thought I would see my grandmother, Annie, along the way but when I got there I found only an empty camp. They had gone back to McPherson. I left my grandmother there alone and I went to get my meat. I made a one-day round-trip. It was a long way back.

Then I wanted to go to Little House [Zheh Gwitsal or Lapierre House] and so I went. When I got there, Jim Jackson and another woman who cooked for him were staying there. I really surprised him. He said that everyone went back town for Easter, and asked why I wasn't going down. I told him I was going to Old Crow and he told me not to go because there was no trail all the way.

Moses came back up and there was also another man, but I forgot his name. He told us to stay with him so we went up with him. We stayed up there a long time and there was a lot of caribou with us. My brother, John Kendi, also came to us and he shot lots of caribou for us. We brought all the meat home and we made lots of dry meat. By that time it was getting lots of water and everyone started taking meat down to Little House [Zheh Gwitsal or Lapierre House]. We also took our meat down. Last time everyone went up and Mary Francis and her husband came back with them. In my other story, I said I missed my country; I also missed McPherson. When they came I was really happy.

While we were there, my grandmother, Annie Itse, told me they came with no meat; everyone gave them some meat. Everyone passed spring there and everyone was going to go in Jim Jackson's boat. There was a large scow also tied at the back. They put all their meat in and also their belongings. James Francis was in charge of the boat. We left and before we were going to stop to eat, he said, "Take enough meat out so that everyone can have a good meal. Those who don't give meat, I'm going to leave here". When we were staying on the mountains we always teased him so we didn't believe him. After we made tea and ate, we started again. We made another stop at my uncle, Big Joe's, camp. When we stopped there for a while and started again, two more boats were coming down the Porcupine River. We stayed there for a while and started again. We made another stop at my grandfather Itsi's place. We stayed there for a long time.

We finally got to Old Crow and I was really happy; so was everyone else. I stayed around there all summer with my grandmother. Just about every day I walked up on Crow Mountain - not only myself, but a lot of other girls. When I went up there I set traps for groundhogs.

I thought I was going to stay with my uncle for one year, but I changed my mind and wanted to come back over. After the new year, I left my uncle and started back to McPherson and I didn't go back for a long time.
## CONTENTS

Trip to Old Crow..................................................................................................................1
Introduction and Methodology..............................................................................................4

### THEMES

- Before Old Crow and Fort McPherson existed.................................................................5
- Routes to Old Crow..............................................................................................................5
- Meeting with Old Crow people at gathering places........................................................8
- Connected by family relations........................................................................................12
- Travelling for subsistence or employment........................................................................13
- Travelling with dog teams or during winter....................................................................14
- Travels of religious leaders...............................................................................................15
- Gold Rush.........................................................................................................................16
- Dagoo Taii and the Johnny Charlie Memorial Skidoo Trip.............................................16
- Miscellaneous....................................................................................................................17

Primary Sources: Elders’ Words..........................................................................................18

- Alexie, Walter ..................................................................................................................18
- Bullock, Marka ...............................................................................................................18
- Charlie, Jane ....................................................................................................................18
- Colin, Christopher ..........................................................................................................19
- Colin, Neil .........................................................................................................................19
- Edwards, Julia ..................................................................................................................20
- Firth, Mary [Sr.] ..............................................................................................................20
- Gardlund, Sarah Ann .......................................................................................................21
- Greenland, Donald ..........................................................................................................21
- Greenland, Elizabeth ........................................................................................................22
- Kay, Caroline ....................................................................................................................22
- Kay, Johnny .......................................................................................................................22
- Kay, Peter .........................................................................................................................23
- Kendi, Mary .....................................................................................................................23
- Mitchell, Eunice ...............................................................................................................24
- Nazon, Joan ......................................................................................................................26
- Norbert, Nap ....................................................................................................................27
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This report was created from oral history information recorded by the Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute and other Gwich’in research projects dating from the early 1970s to today. Much of this oral history is stored as transcript files or in reports. A digital search program (ISYS Search Software) was used to identify all instances of the name “Old Crow”. Approximately 700 pages of text was gleaned from the original search. The results from the original search contained information on family relationships between the Gwichya Gwich’in, Teet’ł’it Gwich’in and Ehdiitat Gwich’in, Dagoo Gwich’in, and the Van Tat Gwich’in, legends and stories, historical information, Gwich’in knowledge about caribou migration, information on travelling to Old Crow, and information about gathering spots where Old Crow people and NWT Gwich’in people would meet. Historical information about the time before the communities of Old Crow and the NWT communities existed was also present. Only information specifically about travelling between NWT Gwich’in communities and Old Crow, and information about meeting places where Old Crow people were present was selected for this report. Excerpts of longer stories and longer quotations are included in the final section of the report (“Primary Sources: Elders’ Words”) and are referred to throughout the report by name and number.

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Citation:


Cover photographs:

Backdrop: Summit Lake area. Photo credit: Billy Wilson.

THEMES

A number of themes emerged from stories told about travels to and around Old Crow. Travelling to the community to visit family or to move between communities as a family were important themes. Travelling to hunt and meet with Old Crow friends and relations at various gathering locations was mentioned by numerous Elders. Elders also described the travels of gold rush miners and religious leaders. Often winter time travels over the mountains were noted.

Before Old Crow and Fort McPherson existed

Jim Edwards Sittichinli indicated that there used to be more movement between the Old Crow area and the Peel River/Mackenzie Delta area in the past before people settled into communities. He said that winter travel into the Driftwood River area was more common far in the past, by both Teet’it Gwich’in and Old Crow people (Jim Edwards Sittichinli #1). Travelling in the area before there were settled communities was mentioned by several Elders. Peter Kay discussed his father Johnny Kay’s travels from the Old Crow area to the Fort McPherson area before Old Crow existed. Johnny Kay came from the Old Crow area and settled in Fort McPherson, and people travelled both east and west to meet and start new families.

Routes to Old Crow

In many cases the term “over the mountains” was used by Gwich’in Elders to describe travels between Fort McPherson and Old Crow, and Elders were aware of several key routes or trail corridors. Caroline Kay was told that far in the past, people travelled up the Rat River, and then further up Sheep Creek or Fish Creek to go to Old Crow (#1). Many other people mention travelling through Rat River, and Lapierre House more recently (Peter Kay #1, Eunice Mitchell #2, John Robert #1, Sarah Simon #1, Mary Teya #1). Others described the stopping point of Summit Lake (also known as Loon Lake and Daadzaii Van) (Mary Kendi #1, Bob Norman #1). Loon Lake drains into the Little Bell River, which is also part of the trail system to go to Old Crow from Aklavik (Alfred Semple, Ehdiitat Gwich’in Place Names Project 1999). A well-known long portage on this trail to Old Crow was along a long point between Lapierre House and Salmon Cache (Mary Kendi #2). Mary Kendi’s dad also took a scientist up the Rat River to Lapierre House on his way to Old Crow (Mary Kendi #3). Bob Norman travelled from Tsiigehtchic to Fort McPherson, stopping at Loon Lake on a trip to Old Crow (#1). In some cases Old Crow was not the end point – for example, the gold miners during the gold rush, or people travelling on to Fort Yukon would pass Old Crow (John Robert #1, Johnny Semple #1).

We travel all over ... I went up Rat River [in] 1960 ... to Old Crow. By dog team for Christmas and New Year’s, just me and William and Uncle Johnny and Jean... We even went down that Eagle River by boat. We went through there it took us five hours to get to Bell River ...from there it took us few hours anyway to Porcupine and then from there, another about 12 hours to Old Crow, a good 90 miles there. So we travelled pretty well all over. So when people talk about any area up on the land, out on the land, I know where they're talking about.

Mary Teya #1
One important old time trail for the Teet’it Gwich’in is the Dagoo Taii, which translates to 'Over the mountain people trail'. The trail was a link between the Teet’it Gwich’in and the Dagoo Gwich’in, who traditionally lived in the upper Porcupine River area. The Dagoo Gwich’in (also known as Takudh and Tukudh Gwich’in) declined in numbers in the late 1800s due to disease and the remaining members moved to live with neighbours in Fort McPherson, Dawson, and Old Crow. The Dagoo Taii is an old-time winter and summer trail, originally travelled using dog packs. It starts across from Fort McPherson on the first hill and leads into the mountains and into the Yukon, through Lapierre House and Old Crow. The trail was unused for many years until 1991, when the trail was re-opened for a now-annual skidoo trip to Old Crow (Fafard and Kritsch 2003). Mary Teya recalled hunting with her husband through this area, passing Curtain Mountain which is on the Dagoo Taii (Mary Teya #1). In recent times, people have maintained the tradition of travelling to Old Crow. “Johnny Charlie, he’s got a cabin between here and Old Crow. He always go to see, check out cabin they called it Curtain Mountain, half way to Old Crow.” (Abe Peterson, Gwich’in TK of Boreal Woodland Caribou Project 2010). Ruby McLeod recalls travelling to many places, including Old Crow, with a crew of drummers and dancers from Inuvik (Ruby McLeod, Elders Biography Project 1999).

Another old-time trail goes to Old Crow from Stony Creek via Lapierre House (Fafard and Kritsch 2003). The trail is so important that Fort McPherson elders suggested that it be given special recognition or protection (Jane Charlie, in Fafard and Kritsch 2003).

Several Elders described travels to Old Crow from regions outside of the Peel River/Mackenzie Delta areas. Two men hunting beavers floated down the Porcupine River on a raft, a ten day trip. They started from around Whitestone. “They drifted down from Blackstone... they made raft in Porcupine. Ten days from where they made raft to Old Crow, it’s day and night drifting, eh. They take shift and watch the raft... they were hunting beaver in spring through here.” (Walter Alexie, Black City Ethno-Archaeology Project 2004).

The Dene Mapping Project conducted in the 1970s and 1980s recorded hundreds of trail lines between NWT Gwich’in communities and Old Crow. These lines show major trail corridors where multiple lines coalesce into well-used routes, and they also show the multiplicity of trails across the landscape. In the map below (Figure 1), all trail lines are shown with the exception of air travel, trapping lines, and lines which were not coded as ‘travel’ lines. When the major corridors are distilled from the Dene Mapping Project lines, the map more clearly shows the preferred routes between Old Crow and NWT Gwich’in communities (Figure 2).
FIGURE 1. DENE MAPPING PROJECT TRAILS

Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap, iPC, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), and the GIS User Community.
Meeting with Old Crow people at gathering places

Gwich’in and other people would travel across the land and meet at various gathering places. Many different gathering places were mentioned by Elders where Old Crow friends and family would meet (Table 1). In the past, people were scattered widely in the winters, and in spring they would travel to gathering places to meet (Walter Alexie #1). Other Elders indicated that they would stay longer, over-wintering at the gathering places (Jim Edwards Sittichinli #2). Elder Christopher Colin recalled meeting near the Peel River after collectively hunting moose with people from Old Crow, Dawson, and Fort McPherson (Christopher Colin #1). People would also meet at commercial establishments such as Lapierre House, a trading post, where religious leaders would travel to preach (Neil Colin #1, Sarah Simon #2). Teet’it Gwich’in Elder Neil Colin was told a story about Gwich’in from Fort McPherson and Old Crow and Slavey people from Fort Good Hope meeting up the Peel River around the Snake or Bonnet Plume River, “They gather way up the Peel and they have stick game and drum dance. And after a few days, one week ... they all go back to ... Good Hope or to Mayo and back to Old Crow and back to Fort McPherson. They use to do ...that maybe in spring time, in winter time I guess.
Maybe around April ... They had to be back at the river because ... they got to make skin boat to go back.” (Neil Colin #3).

Julia Edwards recalled travelling from Aklavik to a gathering site along the Porcupine River where they stayed and made caribou drymeat. Their travels took them through gathering places at Sheep Creek (near Rat River) and Lapierrre House; some of their companions went to Old Crow for visiting. Also, Old Crow people came and set up a big tent and had a gathering with a fiddle player and a feast. Julia was not able to attend as they were too busy drying meat. They stayed out for a month before rushing back to Aklavik (Julia Edwards #1). Chief Johnny Kay, originally from Old Crow, told a story of a group of people travelling from Fort McPherson seeking caribou. They split into several groups heading in different directions. Johnny’s group found a herd of caribou and set up camp, soon to be joined by several other groups including friends from Old Crow. “Everyone enjoyed seeing friends and making new friends. People visited and gave each other gifts. My older brother was a chief at the time and he came along with the bunch from Old Crow. He gave a feast and after the feast, games were played. Everyone had a nice time.” (Johnny Kay #1).

Mary Kendi described how people would leave Fort McPherson and travel great distances, to Hungry Lake and on to a place closer to Dawson or Mayo called Chuu Ti’it. Old Crow people would also travel long distances to meet with the Fort McPherson people at Chuu Ti’it. They were all joined by other Gwich’in and Slavey people from Dawson, Eagle, Tsiigehtchic, Fort Good Hope, and Fort Liard. “They celebrate one another with all the food they gather together. They made a big feast together and they lived together.” Everyone would return home in the spring (Mary Kendi #1).

Eunice Mitchell travelled with many other Teet’l’it Gwich’in to a gathering place near Old Crow when she was just 12 years old. They were joined by people from Tsiigehtchic and Old Crow. They stayed until spring when people dispersed (Eunice Mitchell #2). Elizabeth Green also described an annual gathering in Old Crow, in the summer (#1).

Bob Norman remembers travelling to Old Crow through Loon Lake where a drum dance was held ‘every night’ (#1). On the same trip, Bob indicated that the place they stayed near Old Crow hosted Slavey drum dances, with ‘dancing all night sometimes’ right into the morning hours.

For holidays at Christmas, New Years, and Easter, Fort McPherson would host people arriving on dog sleds from Old Crow, Tsiigehtchic, and Aklavik. People stayed and feasted for a few days before returning to their own community. Easter was the main event for Fort McPherson, which was known for hosting an Easter Dance (Bertha Francis and Jim Vittrekwa, in Fafard and Kritsch 2003).

Jim Edwards Sittichinli also described caribou and moose-hunting places around Driftwood River and Johnson Creek, where Fort McPherson, Old Crow, Eagle River, and later Aklavik people would meet. The Mouth of Driftwood River was a large camp where people stayed in the winters to hunt (#1, #2).

According to John Ritter (1976), Chuu Ti’it means “head of the waters,” the same meaning as “Teet’l’it.” It probably refers to the area around the head of the Peel in the Ogilvie River area and may also refer to the headwaters in the Mayo area as well.
TABLE 1. SELECT GATHERING PLACES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering place</th>
<th>Communities/groups</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black City</strong></td>
<td>Dawson/Moosehide, Mayo, Eagle, Old Crow, Fort McPherson</td>
<td>Walter Alexie #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Near Peel River – at Peel Canyon?</strong></td>
<td>Old Crow, Dawson, Fort McPherson</td>
<td>Christopher Colin #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lapierre House</strong></td>
<td>Old Crow, Aklavik, Arctic Red River/Tsiigehtchic, Fort McPherson</td>
<td>Neil Colin #1, Julia Edwards #1, Sarah Simon #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Along the Porcupine River</strong></td>
<td>Aklavik, Old Crow</td>
<td>Julia Edwards #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sheep Creek</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Julia Edwards #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old Crow</strong></td>
<td>Fort McPherson, Old Crow</td>
<td>Elizabeth Greenland #1, Mary Teya #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chuu Tl’it</strong></td>
<td>Fort McPherson, Old Crow, Dawson, Eagle, Tsiigehtchic, Fort Good Hope, and Fort Liard</td>
<td>Mary Kendi #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Near Old Crow</strong></td>
<td>Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Old Crow</td>
<td>Eunice Mitchell #2, Bob Norman #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loon Lake (Summit Lake)</strong></td>
<td>Tsiigehtchic, Fort McPherson, Old Crow</td>
<td>Bob Norman #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fort McPherson</strong></td>
<td>Tsiigehtchic, Old Crow, Fort McPherson</td>
<td>In Fafard and Kritsch 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Mouth of) Driftwood River</strong></td>
<td>Old Crow, Fort McPherson, Eagle River</td>
<td>Jim Edwards Sittichinli #1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gathering places in the table above are shown on the map in Figure 3 below if their locations are known.
FIGURE 3. SELECT GATHERING PLACES

Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute 2012: Teet'it Gwich'in, Gwichya Gwich'in, and Ehdiiyat Gwich'in Journeys to Old Crow: Oral History about Trails, Meeting Places, and Diverse Travels
Connected by family relations

Numerous Elders indicated that their parents moved between Old Crow or other areas to the west and NWT Gwich’in communities (e.g. Marka Bullock #1, Peter Kay #1, Eunice Mitchell #1, Joan Nazon #1). Marka Bullock’s parents were both from west of the mountains. Her father came “from over the mountains somewhere further to the west. You pass Old Crow and from that side my father came.” He moved east and settled in Tsiigehtchic. Her father was orphaned and taken in by several families before travelling ‘across the mountains’ from past Old Crow. Her mother was also from the Old Crow area and moved to live around Tsiigehtchic. “My mother said that she too was from around Old Crow. Her parents come from further where there is many lakes to the northwest of Old Crow in the Yukon... They came across the mountains and they went to Tsiigehtchic and they ended up staying here. That’s what my mother said. My father said a few times to us that I am from Van Dhik’in. As my mother said, we are not really from Arctic Red. We are from this place over the mountains. This is what she always told us.” (Marka Bullock #1). Joseph Kyikavichik (called Johnny Kay for short) was from Old Crow. He travelled to Fort McPherson and stayed. “There was a lot of Vuntut Gwich’in people that came over the mountains to settle amongst the Teetł’it Gwich’in people” even before the community of Old Crow was established, people moved between the areas and families intertwined (Peter Kay #1). Eunice Mitchell’s paternal grandparents were from Old Crow; her father and his parents and grandparents travelled ‘across the mountains’ when he was young. “He stayed in Fort McPherson and they all began to live in Fort McPherson to trap and hunt in the surrounding areas.” Eunice’s relations on her mother’s side also came from Old Crow “My [maternal] grandmother’s father was from Old Crow” (Eunice Mitchell #1). In general, it seems that it was mostly men who travelled eastward from the Old Crow area into the Fort McPherson or Tsiigehtchic area and who moved out from Tsiigehtchic and Fort McPherson to other communities. This pattern fits with the Dene social organization ideal of band exogamy (i.e. moving outside the home group) and matrilocal (i.e. staying with the woman’s family) residence. The new husband would serve as a help until the birth of their first child, providing assistance to his wife’s family through his labour. Upon the birth of their first child, the family could move wherever they liked, although generally they would continue to live with the wife’s family or in her community. So, broadly speaking, the movement of men out of a community or family group to another region follows the traditional pattern of women staying with their family and the men travelling to find a spouse, linking regions through marriage and family ties.²

² Connections between family groups from various regions will be verified through a genealogy project that will be carried out by the Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute with Yukon, Alaska, and Sahtu groups.
Although it was a long journey, visiting family and friends in Old Crow was worth the effort. When Mary Kendi was young she travelled with her parents to Old Crow for several weeks. They returned to Aklavik for Easter (Mary Kendi #2). Elizabeth Greenland recalled also trying to make the trek to Old Crow when she was younger. They were travelling with a large load, requiring multiple trips to move supplies. However, it was close to Easter and they decided to turn back instead of making it to Old Crow (#2). Eunice Mitchell travelled through Rat River to go to a meeting place near Old Crow when she was only 12 years old (#2). Sarah Simon visited her mother’s sister and other Old Crow relations when she was newly married. She travelled with several maternal aunts and uncles during the winter (Sarah Simon #1).

**Travelling for subsistence or employment**

During WWII, people from various NWT and Yukon Gwich’in communities would travel together by dog team (Neil Colin #2). People also travelled between NWT Gwich’in communities and Old Crow for work: Karl Gardlund, husband of Sarah Ann Gardlund, was hired as an electrician in Aklavik for store owner Mr. Peffer. Karl was then called on to do electrical work in Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, and Old Crow (Sarah Ann Gardlund #1).

Mary Teya travelled to Old Crow during hunting excursions in the 1960s when times were lean. They went into the mountains hunting caribou up Stony Creek and stayed at Curtain Mountain. They also travelled to Old Crow through the Rat River, hunting caribou. There were many caribou on a 1960 trip she took with her husband and several others – they followed caribou trails as they travelled (Mary Teya #1).

Several Elders mentioned travels to Old Crow where caribou were plentiful (Eunice Mitchell #1, Bob Norman #1). Caribou were harvested and dried at camps around Old Crow.

The Hudson Bay Company used to hire people to travel between various communities to Lapierre House to transport fur from the fur trade (Neil Colin #1).

Gwich’in would also move between Fort McPherson and Old Crow for extended periods of time, for example, Alfred Bonnetplume moved to Old Crow one winter (Walter Alexie, Blackstone Uplands Heritage Inventory 2003).
Travelling with dog teams or during winter

Numerous Teet’it Gwich’in remember travelling to Old Crow by dog team. Abe Stewart used to travel by dog team to Old Crow “I went to Old Crow... lots. Yeah, we used to go to Old Crow with dogs.” (Abe Stewart, Teet’it Gwich’in Place Names Project 2008). “We have traveled all over the place. We moved through lakes and lived there. We have traveled into the Yukon and went as far as Old Crow a couple of times. We did all this with dogs. Oh, we have done lots of work throughout the years. Even though it is cold out, we still traveled around here and there” (Caroline Kay, Teet’it Gwich’in Place Names Project 2008). Neil Colin recalls being in a dog sled when he was very young travelling to many places, “I remember I used to move around when I was young, we used to be sitting in a dog sled. And used to have two team, I remember we used to move around, between Old Crow and McPherson around Fish Lake, Porcupine River, Eagle River, around ah, Lapierre House, or at head of Bell River, and also people move around Bell [?] Creek, Fish Creek, Sheep Creek or Loon Lake in ah, Rat River area.” (Neil Colin, Land Research Project/Dene Mapping Project 1974). Even though winters used to be colder in the past, Teet’it Gwich’in travelled by dog team to Old Crow with children in the sleds (Jane Charlie, in Fafard and Kritsch 2003).

Long trips between far-flung communities were not rare in the past, even when travelling with young ones by dog team; “long ways to travel by dogs. Those days we had good dog team.” (Mary Kendi #2). In the early 1940s during WWII, Gwich’in from NWT and Yukon communities travelled together by dog sled, “they used to move around with dog team with their families around... Porcupine River, Johnson Creek, Fish Lake, Rock River or Eagle River in Yukon” (Neil Colin #2). Mary Teya travelled by dog team to spend Christmas and New Year’s in Old Crow (Mary Teya #1). Eunice Mitchell describes a frightening travel experience returning from the Old Crow area to Fort McPherson when she was young and she travelled through a bad winter storm with her grandmother, mother, and two siblings. Her mother was on a dog sled in front, and Eunice was on her grandmother’s sled behind. Due to the conditions, her mother tied the leader of the second sled to her sled to ensure they stayed together. Eunice and her grandmother could not even see their leaders or the sled in front as the blowing snow made visibility very low. Eunice’s mother managed to see some willows and headed to them, where they set up a camp and waited out the storm (Eunice Mitchell #2). Sarah Simon also travelled over the mountains during the winter, early in her marriage. Immediately after New Year’s she left the Delta area with other members of her extended family, her baby, and her husband. The trip, made by dog sled through the mountains, was a learning experience for the young Sarah who had not travelled in the mountains before. She had a dog sled of her own, with her new baby riding in it. Elders had told her stories of the snow on the
mountains crashing down which gave her cause for alarm, but her husband laughed off her fears and they travelled on (Sarah Simon #1). Sarah recalled the trip back, “Long ago, in 1924, we went there with dog team. Coming back it was 10 days. ...I said when I went with dog team, I see all the places. I enjoyed everything.” (Sarah Simon, Elders Biography Project 1999).

Bob Norman remembers leaving Tsiigehtchic to travel to Fort McPherson and on to Old Crow in January, when temperatures were very cold (#1).

**Travels of religious leaders**

The trails between Fort McPherson and other Gwich’in communities to Old Crow and further were an important route for religious leaders. Reverend James Simon moved throughout the Yukon, including Old Crow, “…later on, I went to the people of Old Crow. I stayed there for three years.” (Reverend James Simon, COPE story: A Long Time Ago).

Jane Charlie indicated that Roman Catholic and Anglican missions included travels on foot from Fort McPherson to Old Crow and beyond to Arctic Village, Fort Yukon, and Dawson. “That minister and the Bishop, they walk on the land and they went right to Arctic Village on foot. To teach. They went over the mountain there” (Jane Charlie #1).

On one such trip across the mountains, Bishop Stringer got lost en route to Old Crow in the Richardson Mountains for several weeks in 1909 and almost starved to death with his companion Charles Johnson before heading back to the Peel River and finding assistance at Ti’oondih just upriver from Fort McPherson. The Bishop walked with Charles Johnson from Fort McPherson via First Hill towards Lapierre House, to head on to Old Crow. It was the end of August. Poor weather and fog rolled in, and the two were lost. Even though they almost starved, the Bishop continued to travel to Old Crow after this experience (Neil Colin #4). Sarah Simon also recalled how Bishop Stringer would travel to Lapierre House in the spring and summers, and preach to Dagoo and Han Gwich’in, as well as Old Crow people (#2).

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3 From A Pictorial Account of Family, Church, and Community By Sarah Simon. A Production of the Yukon Native Languages Project Published by the Council for Yukon Indians and the Government of Yukon. Whitehorse, Yukon 1982
Gold Rush

In the Gold Rush of the late 1800s, thousands of people travelled past Tsiigehtchic and Fort McPherson to Old Crow (Donald Greenland #1, Nap Norbert #1). They travelled from the Mackenzie Delta area into the Yukon. Donald Greenland describes the spectacle of thousands of people travelling down the Mackenzie and then over the mountains, eventually ending up in Dawson to find their fortunes in gold.

A bunch of them in scows, all kinds of white people came in all kinds of scows and other types of boats. I guess they bought their supplies in Edmonton and came down to Fort Smith. From there they had to travel from there with boats to Fort McPherson via the Mackenzie River, travelling thousands of miles I suppose. When they came to Arctic Red River, they went down 14 miles below Arctic Red River where the Mackenzie River turned around and went straight to the coast but just at the turn there was Peel River. Mouth of Peel - they went up that river 30 miles to Fort McPherson. And when they come to Fort McPherson, from there they went across the mountains with packs on their backs. It took them about three days to get across the mountains, then they hit Bell River. Down Bell River for two or three days, then hit Porcupine River and travelled 150 miles to Old Crow. After reaching the Yukon River, it took about two or three weeks to Dawson by the Yukon River (Donald Greenland #1).

Dagoo Taii and the Johnny Charlie Memorial Skidoo Trip

The Dagoo Taii (old time trail from Fort McPherson to Old Crow) was unused for many years until 1991, when the trail was re-opened for a now-annual skidoo trip to Old Crow. The first trip was initiated by Chief Johnny D. Charlie, who was of Dagoo Gwich’in heritage, and William Teya and James Itsi. The annual trip is now known as the ‘Johnny D. Charlie Memorial Skidoo Trip’ (Fafard and Kritsch 2003).
In 2007 and 2008, anthropologist Peter Loovers travelled to Old Crow by skidoo for the Johnny Charlie Memorial Skidoo Trip. He took the following photos of his travels.


**Miscellaneous**

Mary Kendi’s father once guided a bird scientist (probably Lawrence Irving) through the mountains up the Rat River and to Lapierre House, from where the scientist went on to Old Crow (Mary Kendi #3).

There was a flint source between Aklavik and Old Crow used in the past, one of only two known locations for flint in the region. Flint is the raw material used to make *arrowheads, or ... knives, axes, because they don’t chip, or they stay sharp. For a long time* (Jim Edwards Sittichinli #3).

There are grave sites between Fort McPherson and Old Crow, indicating long use by the Gwich’in of even areas which seem remote and inaccessible today (Neil Colin, Land Research Project/Dene Mapping Project 1974).
PRIMARY SOURCES: ELDERS’ WORDS

ALEXIE, WALTER

(1) Oh different group of people [would meet in Black City], there was people from Dawson and Moosehide people they come around here too. And probably Mayo and Eagle, some places like that yeah. Some people come from Old Crow too, not only from McPherson, it’s all over…. In the wintertime they move place, like down river … they all scatter all over in the wintertime. And then in the springtime they gather around here, that’s why they call it Black City.


BULLOCK, MARKA

(1) My mother told me this story. My father, his mother died while he was a baby and not long afterwards, his father passed away. My father was orphaned at an early age. So my father, who was still a baby, was taken in by people. He was going from home to home so many peoples help in bringing him up. This way he survive his childhood. He was someone who grew up very poorly. He comes from over the mountains somewhere further to the west. You pass Old Crow and from that side my father came. All this we don’t know. We don’t know about who his mother was. For this, we don’t know anything about his family.

My mother said that she too was from around Old Crow. Her parents come from further where there is many lakes to the northwest of Old Crow in the Yukon. That’s where her father come from so this is the reason why she said we don’t come from here, from Tsiigehtchic. We come from there and we live amongst the people here. I do not know really how it came to be but my mother’s mother ended up coming up. They came across the mountains and they went to Tsiigehtchic and they ended up staying here. That’s what my mother said. My father said a few times to us that I am from Van Dhik’in. As my mother said, we are not really from Arctic Red. We are from this place over the mountains. This is what she always told us.

(Marka Bullock, Elders Biography Project 1999).

CHARLIE, JANE

According to Jane Charlie,

(1) Like yesterday they were saying the missionaries came first. The R.C. [Roman Catholics] came and then the mission, the Anglican [mission]. And all over I went too, they call Bishop School where the ministers all gather. I went to Arctic Village, Fort Yukon, Old Crow, Dawson. Old Crow lots of times and they always say [Fort McPherson] was the main place they talk about.
This is where the religion came from. ... That minister and the Bishop, they walk on the land and they went right to Arctic Village on foot. To teach. They went over the mountain there. Walk. And when they come back they come way up on the mount on the top there. Everybody be so happy to see this place they have. They celebrate right there and have picnic and that and... Lots of times my parents went over that way on foot too.

(Jane Charlie, in Fafard and Kritsch 2003).

**COLIN, CHRISTOPHER**
(1) I will tell you a story. A story I remember - when I was 12 years old [in 1898]. People from Old Crow, Dawson and Fort McPherson used to always go moose hunting together. Me and my mother and some of the local people (among were Big Simon, Big Francis) we used to go and do some fishing. At that time, I was a little boy. I made a bone arrow and used to shoot little birds. When everyone used to return from hunting, they all would meet down at Cannon [canyon?] by the Peel River. At that time, the food was very plentiful. No one would ever want to waste food. Plenty of dried meat was made.

(Christopher Colin, COPE story: A Long Time Ago - Part #5)

**COLIN, NEIL**
(1) Hudson Bay used to hire people to go over to Lapierre House and bring in fur for Hudson Bay. So that’s old traditional trail. So people used to gather there in Lapierre House. From Old Crow, from Aklavik, from Arctic Red or from Mayo.

(Neil Colin, Teet'it Gwich'in Place Names Project 1996).

(2) And, people ah, from Arctic Red River, McPherson, and Aklavik, and also Old Crow people, they’re the Loucheux people too, and they used to all go all together and move in one bunch, that was in 1940, I think, ’41, ’42 during war anyway. And ah, they used to move around with dog team with their families around ah, around Porcupine River, Johnson Creek, Fish Lake, Rock River or Eagle River in Yukon.


(3) The elders tell me the story. When they were way up, up the Peel around Snake River or Bonnet Plume River people from Mayo, people from Old Crow and people from here [Fort McPherson] and people from Good Hope. They gather way up the Peel and they have stick game and drum dance. And after a few days one week maybe and then they all go back to their, to Good Hope or to Mayo and back to Old Crow and back to Fort McPherson. They use to do that they say. ... they do that maybe in spring time, in winter time I guess. Maybe
around April or something. They had to be back at the river because ... they got to make skin boat to go back.


(4) [Lapierre House]... that’s where, that’s where Bishop Stringer walked there in the fall time, and one man. From, they walk from across from McPherson from that first hill there on their way to Lapierre House to Old Crow. ... end of August some time they went up across from McPherson on their way to Lapierre House and around getting into Richardson Mountain area up there and the bad weather came, and became foggy [and] they got lost.


EDWARDS, JULIA

(1) We went to Lapierre House and then from there ... when we got to Rat River, that’s the place they had Christmas there. Lots of them people was up there... Around Sheep Creek.... it’s a big camp there.... From there we started down to Lapierre House. From there everybody took, some of them went up that side. [We just stayed one night at Lapierre House as] we have to rest because we’re getting short of dog food, and not enough grub we take. So we have to rest... just below Lapierre House everybody took [off]. Some of them went up that way and some of them went down that way towards Old Crow. [We went] down to Old Crow, [as far as] Nadinii’ee.... People stay there for long time, drying meat. They start getting caribou. So that’s why they stay there. Dry meat, dry meat. Some of them, they go down to Old Crow to visit people. [We did not go to Old Crow as] we didn’t want to waste no time because we want to dry meat. Had to get it. So lots of them, they came up to and they had a dance, they had fiddle. One big tent. They had somebody put up big tent. They play fiddle and guitar. They had lots of fun, but I never go around there. They had big feast, service... they can’t, they can’t do anything on Sunday them days. They have service in the morning, service in the evening.

(Julia Edwards, Ehdiitat Gwich’in Place Names Project 1999).

FIRTH, MARY [SR.]

(1) When people used to move on the mountains when it’s real cold, even old people use three dogs to go along with the rest of the people. Nobody think of arthritis or any kind of disease those days. No one is sick. People were happy in hunting or working with meat every day in winter. Sometime people from Old Crow Y.T. used to meet the people from McPherson and they use to make a feast together.
GARDLUND, SARAH ANN
Sarah Ann Gardlund recalls when her husband travelled to Old Crow from Aklavik to work as an electrician:

(1) The next thing we knew, somebody said Mr. Peffer [a store-owner in Aklavik] wanted to see Karl Gardlund, my husband. From then on Karl has a job working as an electrician. I could not tell you how much the population of Aklavik was then, but Karl put lights in most of these houses here. Then they want him to go to Fort McPherson to do this job also so that’s where he went. Then he was called to Tsiigehtchic, Arctic Red River. He went there too and put up electrical power for the people. After that, when he had done all these communities, he went to Old Crow.

(Sarah Ann Gardlund, Elders Biography Project 1999).

GREENLAND, DONALD
(1) At last news came that there was a gold rush in Dawson. We did not know at the time what the people were talking about but the next summer thousands and thousands of people came past Fort McPherson, then across the mountains.

This is the way they came. A bunch of them in scows, all kinds of white people came in all kinds of scows and other types of boats. I guess they bought their supplies in Edmonton and came down to Fort Smith. From there they had to travel from there with boats to Fort McPherson via the Mackenzie River, travelling thousands of miles I suppose. When they came to Arctic Red River, they went down 14 miles below Arctic Red River where the Mackenzie River turned around and went straight to the coast but just at the turn there was Peel River. Mouth of Peel - they went up that river 30 miles to Fort McPherson. And when they come to Fort McPherson, from there they went across the mountains with packs on their backs. It took them about three days to get across the mountains, then they hit Bell River. Down Bell River for two or three days, then hit Porcupine River and travelled 150 miles to Old Crow. After reaching the Yukon River, it took about two or three weeks to Dawson by the Yukon River. And, as I said, there were thousands and thousands of people coming day after day.

(Donald Greenland, COPE story: Memories of First Christmas)
GREENLAND, ELIZABETH  
(1) Not too long ago, there was also a gathering taking place at Old Crow. This is what happens every summer and you go to these events.  

(Elizabeth Greenland, Elders Biography Project 1999).

(2) In those years, when I was growing up, we used to travel here and there on the land. Sometimes we go to Old Crow but we have to turn back. We never actually make it there. We still have a long way to go and it’s Easter time or going close to Easter so we have to turn back. We make lots of drymeat and when we begin to travel, a load is always brought ahead, several loads sometimes. Next day or when we have brought all the loads ahead then we began to travel our self. This is the way we did. That was the way we live long ago.

(Elizabeth Greenland, Elders Biography Project 1999).

KAY, CAROLINE  
Caroline Kay was told about travels up Bear Creek from Rat River to head towards Old Crow, before her time.

(1) I recall when we went up one time and my youngest son came with us. We didn’t carry a stove; only a small tent. We walked up in the mountain towards Timber Creek and they shot some caribou that was migrating in the fall and I helped them at that time. One of my grandsons was with us and he helped me as well. We were around there for a while and then traveled back down around October 13th back to the main camp. I know it is a good place for moose as well. That one creek that people used to travel to Old Crow by, Bear Creek, and then there is Sheep Creek and others around there. It is around there that the fish spawn and come back down again. I believe that is where they spawn and then come back down. That creek is a good place to fish and get big game too. Uncle mentioned that people used to live around there years ago and go up for Sheep so in fact that could be called, Sheep Camp and that was what people went after. He remembered that his dad (Chief Johnny Kay), used to travel from there over to Old Crow. He remembers that from his dad. One time, some people went over there and hunted for Sheep and got six and pulled that back to camp.

(Caroline Kay, Teet’l’it Gwich’in Place Names Project 2008).

KAY, JOHNNY  
(1) A large group of people and myself left Fort McPherson and moved over to the mountains. Some families moved up the river and others headed through different rivers and creeks through the mountains. After many days of travelling, we came upon a good herd of caribou. We set up camp and helped ourselves to the caribou. The whole camp was busy
making dry meat. Another bunch of people came behind us and left moving further on over the mountains. As usual, the people were very happy and thankful for the large amount of meat we had. Soon people from Old Crow moved into camp. Everyone enjoyed seeing friends and making new friends. People visited and gave each other gifts. My older brother was a chief at the time and he came along with the bunch from Old Crow. He gave a feast and after the feast, games were played. Everyone had a nice time.

After staying a few days, my brother and his people moved on. He was also going to put up a feast for the other group of McPherson people that moved past our camp. After he did this, he came back to our camp and I went along with him back to Old Crow.

(Johnny Kay, COPE story: Hunting and Trapping)

KAY, PETER

(1) There was a lot of Vuntut Gwich’in people that came over the mountains to settle amongst the Teet’it Gwich’in people. Sometimes they go over the mountains to this place called Lapierre House. That was where the small village was. There was no Old Crow town yet and so they come over the mountains to visit the Teet’it Gwich’in people and sometimes marry someone here and sometimes Teet’it Gwich’in people go over the mountains to visit Lapierre House and the Vuntut Gwich’in and they marry there too. My father was Vuntut Gwich’in from Old Crow. At the time, when my father came over the mountains and had spent some time amongst the Teet’it Gwich’in, it was probably hard for them to travel those years. It was a long distance over the mountains to Lapierre House and back to where their hunting area was. It was too hard for them to return and so my father decided to stay in Fort McPherson.

(Peter Kay, Elders Biography Project 1999).

KENDI, MARY

(1) In those days there were no people [in town], everyone lived in the mountains...The people moved up the Arctic Red River and the people in Fort McPherson moved way up the Vittrekwa Creek. They would travel all the way to Hungry Lake. From there in the middle of winter, they would travel to Dawson. They would do that. The Old Crow people would travel south to there too. Not to Dawson but Chuu Tl’it, to these people, McPherson people. They meet one another, way up close to Mayo, I guess. They would all gather around there. Slavey people too. Like this, from Dawson, from Eagle and Old Crow... Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic and Good Hope and Liard. ...All these people would gather at Chuu Tl’it way up close to Mayo. And then they celebrate one another with all the food they gather together.
They made a big feast together and they lived together. In the spring time, they would move back to their homes.

(Mary Kendi, Potential Heritage Conservation Zones Project 2007)

(2) I travel a lot with my parents those days. We traveled back over that way maybe twice after that. When we went by Daadzaii Van, we went to Itihlii from there over to Old Crow for two weeks. Then we came back in April, we went back to Aklavik for Easter. Long ways to travel by dogs. Those days we had good dogteam. We also travel in the lead.

When we were in Old Crow, by brother in-law John Kendi traded dogs with us. He gave us his big, funny dogs. We started back to Aklavik. We came in the last team too. That’s what people used to do long ago, when they did not see each other for a long time, they would give one another the best they have. Sometimes they gave new snowshoes, gun case, everything, shoes, mitts, anything that they made.

(Mary Kendi, Ehdiitat Gwich’in Place Names Project 1999).

Mary Kendi’s father once guided a bird scientist, probably Lawrence Irving, through the mountains and to Old Crow.

(3) … from Mouth of Peel he took my dad to guide him over, through Rat River. And they got to Lapierre House. From there they, they turn back and him he went down to Old Crow. They make ah, where it was nice timber…They cut logs, and they made a raft for him.

(Mary Kendi, Ehdiitat Gwich’in Place Names Project 1999).

MITCHELL, EUNICE

Eunice Mitchell also tells of the strong relations between Old Crow and Fort McPherson and the travels of her relatives from Old Crow to settle in Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic.

(1) My father’s parents were from Old Crow. In our Gwich’in language our name is Ga’ahdoh. His aunts, uncles and cousins are all from Old Crow. His grandfather and grandmother also came over the mountains. As a young man, he came over the mountains to Fort McPherson. He stayed in Fort McPherson and they all began to live in Fort McPherson to trap and hunt in the surrounding areas. He soon met and married a Gwich’in women whose name was Sarah. My mother, Sarah, was raised by her mother, Ellen Roderick, and her father Roderick.

I would like to tell a story about my grandmother Ellen Roderick. My grandmother’s father was from Old Crow. My grandfather’s father was from Old Crow too. His family name was Moses. There were four boys in the family. Granny’s father was from Old Crow. He was the descendent of the Moses. There are many Moses families in Old Crow. My Granny told me
the story. My Granny said her father had many brothers. They became young men and yet they still live at home. One day the mother told them boys “I am tired of sewing for you boys. You have become young men, now go out and find yourself a wife.” Two of the boys left Old Crow, they came over the mountains and one settled in Fort McPherson. The other went to Tsiigehtchic and married a Gwichya Gwich’in woman over there and lived there. But the other brother married a woman from Fort McPherson and settled here. My grandmother’s father is the one that went to Tsiigehtchic (Arctic Red River), and got married there. The name of the women I don’t know. Nor do I know any relatives, who her family was. This is the story that my grandmother told me.

(Eunice Mitchell, Elders Biography Project 1999).

(2) I’m going to tell you a story about long ago when I was young. We travelled. I don’t remember too well but I’ll do my best. In the spring my father passed away. In the fall, people were moving out in the bush and we went too. We went up the Rat River. I was twelve years old that fall.

My grandmother and my mother and loads of other people went. I really don’t remember too well about the travelling. I’ll tell you about when we settled down. We made camp among the trees not too far from Old Crow. Just about everyone from Ft. McPherson moved up there. The Old Crow and Arctic Red River people came and settled there with the McPherson people. The caribou was plentiful at times.

... Spring was coming, so everyone started moving back. Old Crow people went back over the mountains. The Slavey and McPherson people moved back this way. Everybody went ahead of us. Then a big wind came up. I don’t remember where it was, but were travelling on a grassy place. My mother had a real good leader which followed the trail of the people ahead of us. I was on the sled with my grandmother behind my mother’s team. My sister Bertha and my brother Roddy were very young then. My other sister Bella had gone away to the Hay River school. It started to blow with snow. My mother tied my grandmother’s leader to her sled so we wouldn’t lose each other. We couldn’t even see our leader or my mother. That’s how hard it was blowing with snow. We were the last people. My mother said that she thought she saw willows or trees. She couldn’t see that good on account of blowing snow. My mother was heading for the brush which she thought she had seen.

When we got there, there were green willows and dried willows. My mother and grandmother started digging snow away to set up the tent as we couldn’t travel any longer.
It was just too hard to see. We set up the tent, more like a teepee. We gathered dry willows and made a fire. It was really blowing. We camped there.

When we got up it was clear outside and the sun was shining. It was a really nice day. We moved again. Sometime we couldn’t see the trail but, my mother knew which way to go. We were having difficulty because of the wind. We managed to survive the worst of it. The people that were ahead got worried about us. We arrived at where they were. In winds with blowing snow a person can go over a cliff as you can’t see too far ahead. I don’t remember if anyone met us.

From there we all travelled together and got back here just before Easter. There were loads of people.

(Eunice Mitchell, Life Long Ago Project 1983)

NAZON, JOAN

(1) My mother is from Old Crow. They all come over the mountains, over this way to Teetł’it Gwich’in place. They came to Fort McPherson.

(Joan Nazon, Elders Biography Project 1999).
NORBERT, NAP
(1) That’s, that’s the goldrush days in Dawson. That was in 1898. That’s lots of them come down, through Mackenzie. And then they go up the Red River to Porcupine, Old Crow, down to Yukon, Fort Yukon, and then to Dawson. All the miners. So they come down with scow, made out of board, eh. Yuh. Miner. After that, I know is canoe. Canvas canoe. Freight [freighter], they call it freight.

(Nap Norbert, Tsiigehnjik Ethno-archaeology Project Lower River 1994).

NORMAN, BOB
(1) Old Crow, we went one year, that’s the one I[’m] going to tell story [about]. One time from here, January! We went over to McPherson, holy smoke it was cold too, real cold them days. Cold in January. [My] dad, all that we went over from here, ...my mom ... my sister, all that we went from here. McPherson people [too], lots of McPherson people went over too! Went up to Loon Lake that’s where everybody make drum dance every night, from there went over to the mountains. Lots of McPherson people, went over the mountain, they call them [Gwich’in name] that’s ah, he’s on the Eagle River, [Gwich’in name]. We pass that, we call them eh [Gwich’in name] ... we run into lots of caribou, holy smoke lots of [caribou] right close to Old Crow, that’s where we went. ... [And] Old Crow people lots of them came there too. Somebody went over to Old Crow from there... They went over to Old Crow. ... Old Crow people [Gwich’in] dancing all night sometimes [to] about nine in the morning, Old Crow people. Hardly never see dance like that before. Drum dance ah, Slavey dance. Holy smoke we stay there long time that’s where we stay there long time [Gwich’in name] they call it. There we make, we make dry meat, lot’s a dry meat we came back it was there, marrow... lots; [a] big bag... marrow and all that...

(Bob Norman, Gwichya Gwich’in Googwandak Project 1999).

ROBERT, JOHN
(1) [I was] twenty-two I think. I went to trip, and I went down to Fort Yukon. ... I went by Old Crow. Paddled down [to] Fort Yukon. ... Yes, I been over Rock River just, Fish Lake. Old Crow. And back... I been right through Rat River, right down into, Old Crow, it’s, up Stony Creek?

SEMPE, JOHNNY  
(1) I been, through Fort Yukon. Ah, Old Crow and then go through to Fort Yukon, up the Yukon, to get back Dawson. And charter plane, and come back to Snare River, to trapping again, that fall. All my life I’m hunting and trapping.

(Johnny Semple, Land Research Project/Dene Mapping Project 1974)

SIMON, SARAH  
(1) In the winter 1924 it was the first time I went to the mountain. I didn’t know the mountains but of course I see far. I see mountains far away but not really close. I want to go with the people traveling to Rat River. They all told me that my mother’s older sister is living in Old Crow and I wanted to see my auntie. They are Old Crow people and I wanted to see my auntie. So in 1924 after New Year everybody moved away, and all my auntie and everybody, quite a few families going over through Rat River over the mountains. One of my Auntie told me, “I don’t like going this way, but were going to visit my sister.” She said, “I never seen my sister since I was small.” Another one of my Aunties said the same thing. Three of my Aunties, my uncle Johnny Kay and my Uncle Joseph Kay they were all going.

… First, I was scared to go to Old Crow by dog team. I was so scared of mountain. James got big load and four dogs. I got three dogs and my baby is in the sled. I just look at that mountain. Ah, I was scared! All at once James is way far ahead of me. He just do that to me. “Hurry up,” he said! So I came close. He ran back to me. “What’s wrong with you?” he say. I said, “James, that mountain - you think it will come down because I hear old people tell young people that be careful when you go around.” At bottom of mountain sometime it big snow slide. When it settles down it just freeze up like ice and it kill people and kill animal. I heard that. He told me, “Ever since the world began that mountain was made. How come now just when you come here there is going to be a slide? You silly thing …

(Sarah Simon, Elders Biography Project 1999).

(2) Bishop Stringer used to come here summer and spring time. They taught and preached when people gathered here. He used to go to Lapierre House using dog packs. The Hudson Bay used to have a store at Lapierre House. The Dagoo and Han Gwich’in use to trade there. The Old Crow people too. When they gathered.

(Sarah Simon, Teet’it Gwich’in Place Names Project 1996).
SITTICHINLI, JIM EDWARDS

(1) Now, again I have another map here, which is ah, Big and Small Crow Flats. And also, Driftwood River. Now this, ah, this part ah, we don’t use it just as much as we used to, in many years ago. Now, this was used mostly by winter. It’s mostly used during winter, the roads that I have here. Now, the Old Crow people use it quite a lot. They come up from Old Crow to hunt caribou, right up to Driftwood, even right up to Johnson Creek. But ah, these trails that I have here are from ah, it used to be from Peel River. Then later on from Aklavik. Number one, that’s, I got it here, it’s a trail which is used by people from ah, Eagle River, ah Porcupine River, Johnson Creek. And Driftwood River. Are the places where people used to hunt moose and also caribou on the flat land, both side of the river. Winter trail from mouth of Johnson Creek to Old Crow.


(2) Now, mouth of Driftwood. Troo Choo Njik Gwitshik. Now that used to be a big camp here! People from Old Crow used to camp there, so people from McPherson used to go down there and ah, meet with them people. ...That’s ah, winter trail, mostly winter trail, all these are mostly winter trail. People from McPherson, Arctic Red River, and Aklavik used to go into this Yukon area when the mission had boarding schools in Aklavik.


(3) Now all along the Richardson Mountain, in this northern region, there is only two places where people used to get flint rock. There’s one up on the mountain, on the Peel River, in the mountain country. And one, up here, above Aklavik. It’s some place between Aklavik and Old Crow. Now these rocks, flint rocks, were also used for ah, making arrowheads, or use for knives, axes, because they don’t chip, or they stay sharp. For a long time.


TEYA, MARY

(1) ...my late husband and another guy they went hunting back over, through Rock River and on other side in the mountains, they kill all the caribou they need. So they’re here and there and we just kind of follow them around. We even stayed [at] Curtain Mountain over towards Old Crow. Up Stony, we’ve been through there and we stayed around Curtain Mountain, and from there we move up on the other side of the mountain right to Rock River and those places. We travel all over, we, I went up Rat River and, 1960 we were even went over by, to Old Crow. By dog team for Christmas and New Year’s, just me and William [Teya, her husband] and Uncle Johnny and Jean. And around there too there was a lot of caribou, we
just travel on caribou trails. We even went down that Eagle River by boat. We went through there it took us five hours to get to Bell River and then from there and then I don’t know. I don’t remember how many hours, but from there it took us few hours anyway to Porcupine and then from there, another about 12 hours to Old Crow, a good 90 miles there. So we travelled pretty well all over. So when people talk about any area up on the land, out on the land, I know where they’re talking about.

(Mary Teya, Gwich’in TK of Boreal Woodland Caribou Project 2010).
**BEAVER AND MUSKRAT**

A Gwich’in Legend by William Nerysoo Sr. recorded as a COPE story

I will tell you an old time story about the beaver and the muskrat. The beaver and the muskrat were travelling up the Porcupine River and that is when the beaver changed himself into a man.

The beavers landed at Old Crow where the muskrat was living. They told the muskrat that they would be having a meeting. In the meeting they asked the muskrat to search for a good place for them to live along the Old Crow River. The beavers waited a long time for the muskrat to return. Meanwhile, the muskrat did see a nice place for the beavers to live amongst the lakes but became selfish and didn’t want to tell them. This place is now referred to as ‘Iinliitshik’. The muskrat then saw all the mountains and made his way there. On the way, he scratched his feet and it was very sore from walking on all the sharp rocks. After being gone from the beavers a long time, he returned.

When he returned he told the beavers, “My friends, I did find some lakes but they are full of rocks and it’s not fit to live there.” So the beavers would believe him, he showed them his feet. After believing him the beavers went on their way. They passed the Crow River and on their way they found a huge lake where other beavers lived. Some beavers decided to live there and so they did. From there, after travelling a few more days, they arrived at Aghoo Tshik (Egg Creek). This seemed to be a nice place to live so some of the beavers decided to live here... Meanwhile the others travelled onto Gwashhal Njik, which is now referred to as Ogilvie River, where the last group of beavers decided to put up camp. It was at this time that beavers informed muskrat that he was too small a person for such a huge tail and asked to trade tails. The muskrat was very hesitant about trading. The beavers told the muskrat, “Why do you have my tail? It will be good for when you swim amongst the grass.” Finally the muskrat fell for the beaver’s story and ended up taking off his tail and giving it to the beaver and the [beaver] did the same. The muskrat was very happy for his smaller tail as it was a lot lighter than the heavier tail which he had given to the beaver. As they were swimming away from each other the beaver slap his tail very hard on the water and the muskrat went flying through the air from the waves the beaver made. The muskrat was very angry because he had made the trade but since they both agreed on the trade the muskrat could do little about getting back his tail.

This is how the muskrat and beaver traded tails back when the world began.
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