

TS'IIDEꞐ GWÌNOO GWINÌN



July 4,
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Animals from long ago

This report includes Gwich'in stories and information about animals which used to roam the Gwich'in area long ago – animals which are no longer around today.

Note: Updated Gwich'in spellings/names included in letter appended to this report.

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ANIMALS FROM LONG AGO

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Report title provided by Teet'it Gwich'in Elder Bertha Francis, and the spelling provided by William George Firth of the Gwich'in Language Centre.

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INTRODUCTION

Bison used to be present in the Gwich'in Settlement Area, although have not been seen for possibly hundreds of years. Recently, a *Bison priscus* skull was found in the community of Tsiigehtchic, and will be the subject of a museum display created by the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC). For use in the display, the PWNHC has asked for the GSCI to provide Gwich'in oral history information on bison, the Crows' / Ravens' Beds in Tsiigehtchic (a landscape feature linked to a legend about Raven losing his beak), and various mythical giant creatures which used to roam the land in the distant past.

There is much more information about large creatures who used to roam the Gwich'in area than is included in this brief report.

In the Northwest Territories, the Gwichya Gwich'in of Tsiigehtchic, Teetl'it Gwich'in of Fort McPherson, Ehdiiat Gwich'in of Aklavik, and Nihtat Gwich'in of Inuvik have provided information about these large animals during previous GSCI projects. This information is stored in existing transcripts held by the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute in the institute's digital archives. Using digital search / indexing software ISYS Search Software, the GSCI identified and collated relevant information, stories, and legends. Only oral history and traditional knowledge information is included in this report, archaeological and paleontological information is not.

Gwich'in language dialects

In this report, words in the Gwichya Gwich'in dialect are marked with a GG, and those in the Teetl'it Gwich'in dialect are marked with a TG.

DACHAN TAT GWA'AAK'II | BISON

Bison are known to have lived in Gwich'in lands long in the past. Knowledge about bison can be broadly grouped into two categories:

- Oral history and traditional knowledge information about disperse bison populations hunted by Gwich'in in the NWT, Yukon, and Alaska in the last approximately 5 centuries, and,
- Legends with references to bison.

The Teetl'it Gwich'in term for bison is not well documented (see letter, appended to this report). The Gwichya Gwich'in term for bison is Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii.

Bison hunting in oral history

There are only a few tantalizing references to bison in the Gwich'in area being hunted in oral history/traditional knowledge.

Tsiigehtchic Elders Hyacinthe Andre and Gabe Andre were interviewed by a bison biologist in the 1990s.¹ They indicated that wood bison had been present, and were hunted by Gwichya Gwich'in hunters, to the north and south of the Mackenzie River in the Gwichya Gwich'in traditional use area. Bison likely disappeared from the area only 200 years ago. Hyacinthe and Gabe noted that the bison were large and capable of running through very deep snow. There has been some confusion over muskoxen and bison in traditional stories and place names. However, they noted that traditionally, a hand signal accompanied the name to distinguish bison from muskoxen, so there was no confusion.

Hyacinthe Andre [a Tsiigehtchic Elder] said he had heard “old stories” referring specifically to the Travaillant Lake area... as having once supported bison, that bison were once hunted to the north near the arctic coast, and that bison once occurred on the “barren-grounds” adjacent to the Anderson River, mentioning that bison skulls had been found there. He does not recall the Gwich'in name for bison, but notes they disappeared a long time ago and that it has been at least 200... years since bison were hunted in the region... Mr. Andre clearly differentiates bison from muskoxen, and that these animals “were powerful and could run through four feet of snow with no problem.”²

Tsiigehtchic Elder Bob Norman also recalled hearing about both muskox and buffalo north of the Mackenzie River, “there used to be muskox, I think, or buffalo ...around Travaillant Lake, a long time ago? Anderson River, around there. But now it's no more. No more buffalo, nothing. Muskox stay way down on the coast.”³ In addition, Charlie Peter Charlie, Sr. of the Old Crow Van Tat Gwich'in First Nation in the Yukon, claimed that according to his grandfather, “the people of Fort McPherson [were] killing bison across the river from the community of Fort McPherson in the 1820s” (Lotenberg 1996: 13).

Bison references in Gwich'in Legends

¹ Unfortunately, transcripts are not available at this time. Information from Stephenson *et al.* 2001.

² Stephenson *et al.* 2001: 134

³ Bob Norman. Gwich'in TK of the Mackenzie Gas Project Area 2004. Tsiigehtchic, NT, November 4, 2004. Tape 14.

There are several passing references to bison in Gwich'in legends and stories of long ago. Both relate to a buffalo (or muskox) entering a hill and making a choice about which door to leave by.

DajĠ DhakhajĠ

DajĠ DhakhajĠ ChĠ' (Bluefly killer-his hill, GG) is a traditional Gwichya Gwich'in place name referring to a steep hill along Gull Creek near Campbell Lake – see Figure 1. The hill was named after a man called DajĠ DhakhajĠ (Bluefly Killer, GG) who lived in TsiidejĠ times. In interviews during the GSCI's Campbell Lake Oral History Project in 1994 (Kritsch 1994), Hyacinthe Andre and Gabe Andre recounted a story that happened at this hill many years ago. The hill was visited by a man who had a dream about the hill. His dream seems to predict the changes that European contact would bring (Heine *et al* 2007).

They say that DajĠ DhakhajĠ went to that hill; at the foot of that hill is a cliff. He had to climb up to that place where he had seen the door. He had dreamed about the door. — So he climbed up and he got somebody to go with him. He told that man, 'Don't look up when I'm going up that hill,' but that man turned around while DajĠ DhakhajĠ was still climbing to that place. DajĠ DhakhajĠ knew it right away, because he started sliding down. So when that man turned his head away, DajĠ DhakhajĠ stopped again. He screamed at the man, 'I told you not to look at me!'

He climbed up, and he found the door. He went in. A little ways in, he saw some buffalo tied up. He passed that place, and he met a man who led him to the main door. DajĠ DhakhajĠ wanted to know if there were people there. — There were lots of people. They had everything, but he never mentioned what they ate. Well, he said they had everything, that's all that DajĠ DhakhajĠ needed to say. They gave him some things, too, to take home—a plate, I think, a plate, and a pot. But it was a plate made from steel. That's why it's funny.

And they told him that he had to leave by another door, not the one he had come in by: 'If you go through the other door, your country is going to be like it is now, forever. But if you go back the same way, some day this country will change.' But DajĠ DhakhajĠ didn't want to leave by the other door. He thought that if he left by the other door, he might not know where his partner was, and that he might not find him. That's what he thought, anyway.

So when he left, they asked him again to go through that other door, but he wouldn't go. So he left by the same door. That's why, maybe that's why we talk English now. Wouldn't sit in an office like this, if he had gone out the other door. Nothing would have changed, maybe everything would still be the same—nobody would have found this land, maybe. Since that time, lots of things have changed. At the time when he went there, there were no knives, no guns—nothing. So if he had left by the other door, everything would have stayed the same as before.



FIGURE 1. DAJĠ DHAKHAJĠ CHÌ'

DajĠ DhakhajĠ did not want to change anything, but he decided go back by the same door. That's where he ended up changing things. To prove where he had been, he got that plate and that pot. He wanted to bring something back from there, so he must have thought that the people wouldn't believe him. That's what he had said before he left. He had told the people, 'I am going to follow what I dreamed of.' Some people just laughed at him. That's why he told the people in the cave that he wanted something to prove where he had been. My mom told me that, lots of time ... two, three times, she told me that story.⁴

Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee

Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee is a large hill in the Travaillant Lake area between Nè'dinii'ee (Wood Bridge Lake), Nisheh Nġġ'ee (Sandy Lake), VanadhadlajĠ (Crossing Creek Lake), and Tànahjil (Tregnatchiez Lake, all GG) – see Figure 2. The translation of this place name is Aak'ii = bison; nihdàniinzhyee = it came inside (the hill, GG). The name is also understood to refer to muskoxen – *a muskox went into the hill*. This may also be the buffalo and the hill referred to in the story above. Antoine Andre indicated that this hill is an excellent lookout hill. In the past, Gwichya Gwich'in would watch for Eskimo from there.⁵

⁴ Gabe Andre. Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names Project 1994. Tsiigehtshik, NT, June 17, 1994. Tape 09-10.

⁵ Antoine Andre. Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names Project 1992, Tsiigehtshik, NT, July 18, 1992. Tape 3.



FIGURE 2. AAK'II NIHDÀNIINZHYEE

MAMMOTHS

There is a single reference to mammoths in available Gwich'in oral history. Teetl'it Gwich'in elder Walter Alexie recalls hearing about how a giant creature – “a big animal, some sort,” possibly a mammoth, created a river along a flats. The bones of a large animal, possibly a mammoth, were found near the spot where the river changes from being winding to having a straight channel. This suggests that the animal in the story may have been a mammoth.

On the river, say, 1860 or 1850. Percy [Henry of Dawson] said the reason that, above that bridge [the path of the river] is crooked. That's where it came down. It died around there someplace. That's why, from there, the river is straight, he said. It died around the end there someplace, around the bridge, [and] from there [down] the river is straight. Above there, it's crooked, oh gee. I got dizzy coming down ski-doo. ...The way my mother said, was it came on that flat and made that river. They don't know [what kind of animal it was], they just said it's a big animal, some sort. I don't know what it is. But they said when they were around there they seen the bones. Around Ts'ok Giitl'in, around at the end around where the bridge [is], around in that part, I think. That's why they found the bones there – that's where they said it died.⁶

The creature came out of a blue lake located at the head of the Blackstone River.

OTHER CHIJUUDIEE | GIANT MYTHICAL CREATURES

There are references to other giant mythical creatures in Gwich'in oral history, known collectively as Chijuudiee ("monster/spirit animal that lives in the water", TG, GG). Some are the subject of legends, in particular legends associated with traditional place names referring to the creatures. Some are only referred to briefly in available materials. The Gwich'in are also familiar with these creature by the evidence they leave behind – tracks or signs on the landscape made by creatures larger than anything known today (Heine *et al.* 2007).

These include:

Creature	Location	Other information
Giant caribou	Vadzaih Van (Caribou Lake, translation: caribou-lake, GG)	<i>According to Hyacinthe Andre:</i> In those days, Caribou Lake used to be full of caribou. Sometimes, when you came to that lake, you saw caribou on it like ducks swimming on a lake, that's how many there were. Then the Giant Caribou died and the caribou did not bother any longer. They say these caribou went there just on account of that Giant Caribou." ⁷

⁶ Walter Alexie. Blackstone Uplands Heritage Inventory 2003, Tombstone Campground, Yukon, July 8, 2003. Interview 4.
⁷ Hyacinthe Andre. Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names Project 1992, Tsiigehtchic, NT, July 15, 1992. Tape 18, as modified in Heine *et al.* 2007.

Giant bluefish	Khaii Luk (Travaillant Lake, translation: winter-fish, GG)	<i>Nap Norbert says there is a ‘monster’ or a big fish that lives in Travaillant Lake.⁸</i> <i>According to Pierre Benoit:</i> There’s also a monster in Travaillant Lake they say. What the Old-timers call Bluefish. Bluefish, that what it is. Because they seen it. One time it came out. Long years ago they seen it came out. That is the time they find out it is a bluefish. Once in the fall time it goes around the lake back to his place and that is what time the ice move after freeze up. Ice move and then one side it is just rough pile of ice. Yah. That’s what happens they say. Monster don’t do anything to people. You don’t need to be afraid. They just make waves, that’s all.⁹ <i>According to Gabe Andre:</i> That’s a story from long ago. On the east side of Travaillant Lake you see that big hill. Pascal Baptiste’s dad stayed there in the summer. One day he looked across to the hill, it looked as if there was a big tree sticking out over that hill, and he couldn’t see that hill very well. He gave it a really good look, and it looked like something was floating up, this side of the hill, something that was much higher than the hill. And that thing floating up, that was that Bluefish. Bluefish have that fin behind, on their back, well, it was just like that—sticking up. So Pascal’s dad was doing something around there, and the next time he looked, it was gone! And he never said anything about the water moving when the fish dived. He said it was a Bluefish—chijuudiee, right there. When I stay there, you know, for me, that ice is funny. I remember that one time when Nap [Norbert] was there with me, way out, and about a mile out, the ice was broken up—and that ice is about that thick! It was about this time of year, late January. You could see a big line out there. I went out there. The ice is about that thick, but it was all piled up, as far as you could see. Later, we stayed at Tree River. From there, two of my boys, Robert and Donald, came with me by dog teams We camped below Teeddhaa. In the morning I told them, ‘I am going to walk ahead of you.’ I took off, they were going to come behind me, but they were going to stay for a while first. I crossed from Teeddhaa and Nihdaa thidie, from there I was
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⁸ Annie and Nap Norbert, . Gwichya Gwich’in Place Names Project 1993, Tsiigehtchic, NT, July 8, 1993, Tape 14.

⁹ Pierre Benoit. Gwich’in Elders Biography Project 2000, Tsiigehtchic, NT, July 7th, 2000. Tape 6.

		going to cut straight across to Teelaii. I was walking, and suddenly I saw a big pile of ice ahead of me. It was still dark. I just kept walking, walking, never stopped, then climbed up. Oh, it was high! Thick ice, too! So I climbed on top, down the other side. I stopped and look around: Gee, I heard that ice squeaking, it was still moving! So I walked a little ways to the shore, picked up a piece of willow, and put it on my trail, so the boys, when they came, would know: Don't go on that trail, but walk along the shore, follow me that way—that was a big pile of ice! ¹⁰
Giant beavers	Three at least referred to: 1. Chii Akàn (Churchward Hill, translation: Rock-its' (beaver) lodge, TG) 2. Chii Gho' Tł'ąj (translation: Rock-teeth-between, GG) 3. Gull River area	<i>"A mountain labelled Churchward Hill on maps is known to the Gwich'in as Chii Akàn or Beaver House Mountain. Chii Akàn is believed to have been the home of the giant beavers that once lived in this area; its toponym shows the Gwich'in explanation of the Pleistocene megafauna that once inhabited this area of the northern Yukon, and suggests convergence of the native oral and western scientific traditions. Chii Akàn has been registered as a heritage resource with the Territorial Government's Heritage Branch because it represents an important feature on the Dempster Highway cultural landscape. Although it is not an archaeological site because there are no material remains, Chii Akàn is a heritage resource; unique local history is encapsulated in this named landscape feature."</i> (Greer 1990: 4) According to Gabe Andre: Edward Nazon told me that story. Down around Gull River, he paddled into a creek. He saw a beaver swimming ashore, and he was going to shoot it. There were willows hanging down from the bank, and the beaver was covered by those willows. Edward paddled right through to get the beaver. He said, 'That beaver's hand was as big as my hand!' He got scared of it, he didn't want to shoot it, so he paddled back. That was the only time Edward ever saw a big beaver. This happened around Gull Creek.¹¹
Giant water bug	Khadigitr'aa'ao (Johnson Lake, translation: struggling to get yourself back up on your feet, GG)	According to Hyacinthe Andre: There is a big bug in there. There are three lakes above this place and from there it travelled over land and it went into this lake. From there, it went into that lake. And I've seen its' tracks. A water bug. It is still there, it moved there not too long ago, so it's still there.¹² <i>The bug even created an outflow and all the water drained from</i>

¹⁰ GCR 2000. Tsiigehtshik, NT. January 28-31, 2000. Tapes 01-17. As told in Heine *et al.* 2007.

¹¹ GCR 2000. Tsiigehtshik, NT. January 28-31, 2000. Tapes 01-17. As told in Heine *et al.* 2007.

¹² Hyacinthe Andre. Gwichya Gwich'in Place Names Project 1992, Tsiigehtshik, NT, July 15, 1992. Tape 18.

		<i>the lake. All that's left is an empty lake.</i>
Giant wolverine	Nèhtrùh Chì' (translation: wolverine-its' rock, GG)	<i>The legend about Nèhtrùh Chì' ...a Chijuudiee ("monster [spirit animal] that lives in the water"), describes how this unique land formation up the Arctic Red River near Martin House was formed. The Elders told us that a giant wolverine came out of a nearby lake and burrowed underneath the ground, breaking up the hill in this area as it went into the Arctic Red River. Elders who know of this place are still cautious around here because this giant creature is considered wicked and will kill any person it encounters. If people hear a noise coming from this place while travelling on the river, they avoid stopping here. On the other hand, if the area is quiet, they may stop (Kritsch et al 1994).</i> See Figure 4
Giant Hairy Snake	Gyqu Dazhoo Njik / Gyuu Dazhoo Njik (Snake River, translation: worm-hairy (caterpillar)-river, GG/TG)	<i>A giant hairy worm (snake) came out of the ocean and travelled up the Mackenzie River and into the Peel River. It wanted to go up into the mountains so it swallowed big boulders as it went along thus creating the Snake River. There are two versions to the ending of this story. One version describes the snake going inside a lake beside the river while the other version describes it as going into the mountain near the headwaters, where it remains to this day.</i> <i>This river was described by Tony Andre as being very treacherous to cross in the winter because the ice varies a great deal in thickness. To cross safely, one should only cross where there are moose trails!</i> (From Gwich'in Place Names Database; Kritsch and Andre 1993)
Giant Ant	In the lake across from the Charles Koe building in Fort McPherson	"During the time when there were giant monsters in the area there was a lake in the middle of what is now Fort McPherson. During this time a big, stinky ant crawled into that lake and died, making the lake very stinky." (Murray 2000: 10)
Unknown	A small lake near K'eeghee Chqudlajj (In and Out Lake, translation: Close together-it flows in and	According to Barney Natsie: There is this little lake southwest of In-and-Out Lake. That lake has no name. It looks as if something has come out of there. It made a trench six feet wide. The water drained out of that lake after whatever got out of it cut the trench to get out. It made a trench right through the trees. William Norman once

	out, GG)	followed that trench. ¹³
Unknown prehistoric (like dinosaur)	Tth'an Dhidlii Njik (Dalglish Creek, translation: Bone-they are scattered around- creek, TG)	<i>This place refers to a prehistoric giant creature's bones, like a dinosaur; according to Joanne Snowshoe. There are bones scattered around the area.¹⁴</i>



FIGURE 3. GABE ANDRE AND GEORGE NIDITCHIE SR. EXAMINING THE UNIQUE GEOGRAPHY OF NĒHTRŪH CHĪ' ALONG THE ARCTIC RED RIVER DURING THE 1993 GWICHYA GWICH'IN PLACE NAMES PROJECT. PHOTO CREDIT: INGRID KRITSCH

¹³ GCR 2000. Tsiigehtshik, NT. January 28-31, 2000. Tapes 01-17. As told in Heine et al. 2007.

¹⁴ Gwich'in Place Names database.

DEETRIN' EHCHII K'IT | CROWS'/RAVENS' BEDS

The three distinct and large dips on Vik'ooyendik or Church Hill in Tsiigehtchic are known as Deetrin' Ehchijj K'it (Crows'/ravens'-bed-place, GG). The most famous Gwichya Gwich'in legend about Raven takes place here. It was to this nesting place where Raven retreated to nurse itself and to scheme how to get its beak back after it was stolen.



FIGURE 4. VIEW OF VIK'OYENDIK (CHURCH HILL) AND THREE DEETRIN' EHCHII K'IT (RAVENS' BEDS) MARKED WITH ORANGE ARROWS, MARCH 2007. PHOTO CREDIT: ITAI KATZ.

Legend of a Raven

Excerpt of a COPE story by Edward Nazon

This is a legend of the raven. There are many such legends in the memories of the Loucheux. The raven holds a high place of respect for his great ability to do many things and get by. He is known for his magic powers, his ability to be a good judge, scientist, doctor, and for his keen sense of wit. He is also known as a great deceiver. With all this the raven is also known to be a vain creature.

This legend takes place at a time when it was believed that everyone was the same -animals, birds, and humans. It was believed that a creature or human could change from animal to bird, human to animal, bird to human. It was also believed that with the change, animals and birds had the power to speak.

The raven in his vanity one day went out to get rid of his rival, the grebe. The raven was jealous of the beauty of the grebes with their fine long golden hair on their heads.

This legend began one day when a man paddled in from Point Separation to Arctic Red River. As he came nearer the settlement, he cried out that the finest family of grebes up river had perished in an epidemic. The grebes heard the news and were shocked and sad, and all went into mourning for their very fine brothers.

Wood was gathered to set the scene for the grebes to go in mourning. By jumping in and out of the flames, the grebes showed their sorrow and believed that this practice would spare the spirits of the dead grebes.

The raven watched as the family of grebes jumped in and out of the huge flames until their long golden hair had become singed and brown. This was just what the raven wanted to happen for he was the man that paddled to the settlement to bring the news of the epidemic. The raven jumped back into the canoe and cried out for all to hear, "I don't really know if the news that I brought of the death of the finest grebe is true, for it may not be the truth." Now the brown and singed grebes knew they had been tricked and became angry. They became so angry that they chased the raven until they caught him. They grabbed him by the wings, head and feet and swung him over the flames, holding him there until all his feathers had burned from his body. The raven became so baked that his beak fell off. The grebes took the beak and allowed the raven to fly off in disgrace.

A very old and wise woman was then given the responsibility of guarding the beak day and night. She was warned that she would have to be most careful as the raven was crafty and never gave up. Time went on and the raven who was a short way from the settlement thought and thought of ways that he could get his beak back. The raven went to the top of the bluff which is a landmark to this day at Arctic Red. The bluff is the place where the Roman Catholic Church now stands. To the south of the church, there are three deep round hollow places. These holes are known to this day to be the place where the crow bedded down to recover from his wounds. The people knew that the raven was suffering and this was taking all his energy. They did not think there would be much danger as long as the raven was in this poor condition, so consequently, they did not keep too close an eye on the raven's movements.

When the people were asleep, the raven took a short cut by land to the river's edge, just out of view from the settlement and there he began building a raft. Once he completed the raft, he gathered moss, with which he made forms of people, some standing, others in the sitting position. Once the raven finished his work it looked like a raft full of junk and lots of people. The raven then went back to the bluff and could see the people of the settlement and the people in turn could see him.

A young boy happened to pass by and the crow called out to him, "Pst, pst, boy, boy, my head is so very sore. Please come and sit with me." The boy did as he was asked and sat by the raven. The boy watched and was told by the raven that it was expected that some Red River people would come down the river any time. So the boy watched and finally said, "Ssh, there is a raft." The boy got up and ran down the hill to the village. When he got to the middle of the camp, he called out as loudly as he could, "There is a raft with people coming down the river." With this a great amount of excitement spread over the camp. Everyone ran to the river. The people or grebes thought that this

raft might be bringing a family who had left a full six months before and had not been heard from since.

It was thought that the family had died while on a hunting trip so it was more happiness for all if this should prove to be the family they had given up hope of ever seeing. In all the activity, the raven was completely forgotten and this was just what he wanted to happen. At last, he heard someone crying out, "I must go to see the family. I must find a place to put this beak. Where can I leave it?" The old lady was so anxious to join the others she had handed the beak to the raven without thinking anything of it. Once the raven had his beak in his hand, he put it in its place and flew into the air and perched on a tree. He was making all sorts of noise getting the attention of the people, who by now knew that they had been fooled again. The crow had won again. Everyone was so mad at the old woman for being so careless that they tied her to a tree and as punishment scratched her on both sides. Everyone went up to the old woman, taking her nose between their fingers and squeezing. This was done by the young as well as the older people. While this was going on, the crow was having a great time, crowing at the top of his voice from a tree that allowed him to be clearly heard but at a distance that he was safe.

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APPENDIX 1: SEARCH TERMS

- Bison OR Buffalo
- Mammoth
- Mastodon
- Elephant
- Monster



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August 5, 2014

RE: REVISIONS TO GSCI REPORT "TS'IIDEJJ GWÌNOO GWINÌN: ANIMALS FROM LONG AGO" RE GWICH'IN TERM FOR BISON (BUFFALO) FOR STEPPE BISON EXHIBIT

Dear Tom,

We recently carried out research on the Gwich'in terms for bison/buffalo and musk-ox by making enquiries with Gwichya Gwich'in Elders in Tsiigehtchic, speaking to Athapaskan linguist John Ritter, and reviewing 19th C. and 20th C. dictionary entries by Father Emile Petitot and Archdeacon Robert McDonald. We did so with the hope of clarifying questions we had about these terms and to provide the best data possible for the steppe bison exhibit we are working on in partnership with the PWNHC. We hope this information will be of interest and use.

The attached document outlines what we know to date and revises some of the information provided to you in a GSCI report dated July 4, 2014. The major changes are that the Gwichya Gwich'in term for bison/buffalo is Dachan tat gwa'aak'ji (low tone and nasal on first "i"), and the translation of place name Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee is "buffalo-it came inside (the hill)" instead of "musk-ox – it came inside (the hill)".

This has been an interesting exercise for us. As you will see, the Gwich'in terms for bison and musk-ox plus domesticated animals such as cow and bull all have the stem "aak'ii" in them, which means "to be fat or hefty." Additional words in the string can further describe the animal referred to. Perhaps it would be of interest to include a small section in the exhibit about this as it provides some insight into Gwich'in culture including the way they have incorporated new species into their world view? Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ingrid Kritsch
Research Director

c.c. Rae Braden, Sharon Snowshoe, Alestine Andre, William Firth, Kristi Benson



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GWICH'IN TERMS FOR BISON (BUFFALO) AND MUSK-OX

The following document provides information on Gwich'in terms for bison and musk-ox (plus cow and bull) from different sources as referenced. As noted by Athapaskan linguist John Ritter¹, the common element for both bison and musk-ox (and also applied to domesticated animals such as cow and bull) is "aak'ii." In linguistic parlance, I believe he said - aak'ii is the one common lexical item within the string. He translated aak'ii as: "to be fat or hefty." – Ingrid Kritsch, July 2014

¹ during a phone discussion with Ingrid Kritsch on Tuesday July 22, 2014

Alestine Andre discussions with Gwichya Gwich'in Elders John Norbert, Annie Norbert, George Niditchie Sr., and Noel Andre in Tsiigehtchic – July 28-August 1, 2014 – see notes below

Buffalo: **Dachan tat gwa'aak'ji (Gwichya)** (trans: Dachan tat = in the bush; gwa' = from there or belonging; aa'kji = to be fat or hefty)

William George Firth provided the following Gwich'in terms on October 15, 2013 but **said they need to be checked.**

Bison: **Ti'oo tat gwa'aak'ii (Teet'it)**

Ti'oo tat gwa'aak'ji (Gwichyah)

Musk-ox: **Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii (Teet'it)**

Dachan tat gwa'aak'ji (Gwichyah)

Archdeacon McDonald "A Grammar of the Tukudh Language" 1972 (reprinted from 1911 version by GNWT)

Buffalo: **Ttlotet akki², Tutchun tet akki³**

Musk-ox: **Utthuj, vut sut trasun nintej koqlj** (trans. according to John Ritter = meat from which emanates a strong odor; Utthuj,="meat animal" (sounded like "vadzaih" when John said it and he explained that it has come to mean caribou by different Dene groups)

Bull: **Akkih-ezir** (trans: ezir=male)

Cow: **Akkih ttrigg** (trans: ttrigg=female)

Father Emile Petitot dictionary 1876

Bison: **Klô-nan-akki**

Musk-ox⁴: **Akki-zjin**

Bull⁵: **Akki**

Cow⁶: **Akki-tsig (with dot under the "s")**

² Ttlotet akki = Ti'oo tat aak'ii (in modern orthography) ?

³ Tutchun tet akki = Dachan tat aak'ii (in modern orthography) ?

⁴ Under dictionary entry - Boeuf-musqué (ovibus moschatus)

⁵ Under dictionary entry – Boeuf n. rac. sec.

⁶ Under dictionary entry – Vache n. c. fém

Alestine Andre notes on Gwich'in term for buffalo from discussions with Gwichya Gwich'in Elders in Tsiigehtchic

July 28, 2014 John Norbert:

He called buffalo, Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii. He added there used to be a lot of buffalo around Colville Lake, so much so the people lived on it. Re Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee, he added he knew it as a place where people used to trap. Although John had no name for musk-ox, he said that because musk-ox had such a strong odor, caribou tend to stay away from areas where they've been.

July 28, 2014 Annie Norbert:

When I asked Annie the name for buffalo, she did not hesitate to give me the name Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii right away which she said her mother talked about a lot. "That's all I know," she added. I did not want to press her further for the name for musk-ox as she seemed reluctant to add or give more information than she provided.

July 29, 2014 George Niditchie Sr.:

In a brief encounter with George yesterday, he called buffalo, Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii. Then today, Tuesday, I caught George at the RRC office. He sat down with me at the board table. He confirmed the name Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii for buffalo because like their name, they live around the bush. He was not familiar with the name bison and had no name for musk-ox other than to say these animals live near the coast. He confirmed Tony's statement that Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee means 'a buffalo went into the hill'. George went on to say it was rare to see dead animals on the land, and if you did see any 'it was an omen that someone is going to die'. He gave the example of seeing a cow moose and calf at a point above their camp up the Arctic Red. The next day or so they found the calf dead at the point, and shortly afterwards their grandmother died. He also said that animals know when they're going to die so they tend to burrow into the ground/earth to die. He said maybe that's the story behind Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee.

August 1, 2014 Noel Andre

On this rainy afternoon, I called Noel at home. I asked if he knew the Gwich'in name for buffalo. At first he gave me the name aak'ii, then immediately gave me the name Dachan tat gwa'aak'ii for buffalo. "That's the name for it long ago," he said. I asked if he had any information about buffalo. He said even though buffalo have short legs, they can run in deep snow. He said, "The snow flies when it takes off." In the fall time during its mating season, they can chase you. The best place to run is up a tree. They stand by the tree and never move. They finally give up and go away. The person up the tree gets down and runs home. That's the only thing he remembers being told long ago. Noel does not know the name for musk-ox and he said, "They're not from around here".

Aak'ii Nihdàniinzhyee (Gwich'ya Gwich'in place name for a hill in the Travaillant lake area referenced in July 4, 2014 report on page 6).

Our recent research clears up some confusion that we had about the translation for this hill. In our original interview with Tony Andre in 1992, he provided the Gwich'in name and story about this hill and said that it referred to a buffalo coming inside the hill. When verifying named places with John Ritter in 2011, he said that he had heard aak'ii refer to musk-ox when speaking to an elder from Tsiigehtchic many years ago, Pascal Baptiste, so we changed the translation to refer to musk-ox. I spoke to John Ritter on July 22, and during the course of the conversation, he agreed that it could refer to either animal. He hadn't known that bison were in the area up until about 200 years ago, so thought musk-ox was the best translation at that time.

Book chapter

Stephenson, Robert O., S. Craig Gerlach, R. Dale Guthrie, C. Richard Harington, Robin O. Mills, Gregory Hare. 2001. "Wood bison in late Holocene Alaska and adjacent Canada: Paleontological, archaeological and historical records." In: *People and Wildlife in Northern North America: Essays in Honor of R. Dale Guthrie*. Edited by S. Craig Gerlach and Maribeth S. Murray. BAR International Series.

Several elders were familiar with one or more Gwich'in terms for bison. Some informants indicated that one Gwich'in name for bison is Dachantèe aak'ii, which they translate as "cow in the forest." Another provided the name Dachantèe qwaak'ii, indicating it had a similar meaning. One informant described how the above terms were applied to either bison or muskoxen, and were always accompanied by a hand sign that identified the species being referred to.

These terms appear to be the most well known Gwich'in terms for bison; the first translates as "muskox among timber" and the second "the hefty one among timber" (J. Kari, pers. comm.). The Gwich'in term for muskoxen is aak'ii, which appears to originate from the verb theme "to be hefty, meaty" and is literally "the one that is hefty" (J. Kari, pers. comm.). Another Gwich'in name for bison is said to be Ch'itthay dighan, which describes a large, humped animal or "humped game" (R. Mueller, pers. comm.), or "humped meat" (J. Kari, pers. comm.). A similar term, Ch'atthaii daghan choo, was provided by another elder (O'Brien pers. comm.). One elder provided the name Nan'aak'ii choo, indicating it meant simply, "big animal." Nan'aak'ii choo translates as "big hefty one on the land" (J. Kari, pers. comm.).

Gwich'in terms for bison appear to be a lexical innovation perhaps coined at a time when the animal was already scarce, and after a more ancient term had become obsolete. The term for bison is not as widely distributed in northern Athapaskan languages, and is not as ancient as, for example, terms for moose or caribou, which are cognate terms. The apparently limited contemporary linguistic terminology related to bison in Alaska may reflect the fact that wood bison have been absent from the region, and culturally obsolete, for some time. (J. Kari, pers. comm.).

Different linguists transcribe and gloss Gwich'in Athapaskan words in different ways. For example, one may transcribe bison as "Dachantèe aak'ii", another as "Dachantèe akii." The observed variation may reflect lexical, phonemic, dialectical, geographic, or idiosyncratic differences. We are unable to clarify all linguistic issues, but simply present them here as they have been interpreted for us." P. 129

...According to Rev. Salmon, Gwich'in names for bison include Dachantèe aak'ii which he translated as, "cow in the forest", and Ch'atthaii daghan choo, which he translated as "large animal with a hump." He indicates these terms could be applied to either muskoxen or bison, emphasizing that only bison occurred on the Yukon Flats. Rev. Salmon explained that these two animals were distinguished in conversation on basis of the distinctive shape of their horns, and clarified any ambiguity regarding the name Dachantèe aak'ii. He describes the characteristic downswept horns which "cover the head" of a muskoxen,

contrasting them with the upwardly curving horns of bison. When referring to muskoxen the speaker would typically place an open palmed right hand above the ear, move it gently downward over the ear and then out and up in an arc, indicating the downswept curve and upturned end of the horn. When referring to wood bison a hunter would extend and slightly curve the first and second fingers, placing them against the upper temple, indicating the outward and upward curve of wood bison horns. The phrase "Dachantèe aak'ii viji viki noijnjik" means "cow in the forest with the horn that sweeps downward to protect the head." In contrast, the phrase Dachantèe aak'ii viji neekwaii gwanlii" means "cow in the forest with two short horns turning upward." Rev. Salmon stated that even during the early 1900's hunters discussing bison or muskoxen would qualify the term with hand sign, adding that Gwich'in people in a large region extending from Fort McPherson to Fort Yukon commonly used the term Dachantèe aak'ii, accompanied by hand sign, to denote wood bison. It is interesting that this hand sign for bison is identical to that used in the traditional hand sign language of Plains Indians, as well as other indigenous peoples in North America (T. O'Brien, pers. com.). "P. 130

"...Mr. Hyacinthe Andre, age 86, and his younger brother Gabe Andre, of Arctic Red River, NT provided information regarding the occurrence of bison in this area (Figure 1). They are most familiar with the lower Mackenzie River area near Arctic Red River. Hyacinthe Andre spent much of his life in the Anderson River country to the east, between the Mackenzie and Horton rivers. The Andre brothers referred to oral tradition as describing the former occurrence of bison in this area. Hyacinthe Andre said he had heard "old stories" referring specifically to the Travaillant Lake area east of Arctic Red River as having once supported bison, that bison were once hunted to the north near the arctic coast, and that bison once occurred on the "barrengrounds" adjacent to the Anderson River, mentioning that bison skulls had been found there. He does not recall the Gwich'in name for bison, but notes they disappeared a long time ago and that it has been at least 200 hundred years since bison were hunted in the region north of Arctic Red River. Mr. Andre clearly differentiates bison from muskoxen, saying the bison were much larger than muskoxen, and that these animals "were powerful and could run through four feet of snow with no problem.

Gabe Andre adds that bison also occurred adjacent to the Mackenzie River near Arctic Red River, including the area near the Ontaratue River south of the Mackenzie. He recalls one story that describes how the bison disappeared after a bison head had been sent south to be examined. An account presented by Lotenberg (1996) indicates that bison were hunted near Fort MacPherson, about 30 miles west of Arctic Red River, in the 1820s. These accounts appear to be consistent with the presence of late Holocene bison remains along the arctic coast near Cape Bathurst, on the Old Horton River Channel, and Harowby Bay, about 250 miles northeast of Arctic Red River (Table 1; Figure 3). As described below, one of these specimens is radiocarbon dated at 420 ± 65 years BP. P. 134