Gwichya Gwich'in
Googwandak

The History and Stories of the Gwichya Gwich'in

As Told by the Elders of Ts'igtshik

revised edition
Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak
The History and Stories of the Gwichya Gwich'in

As Told by the Elders of Tsiigehtshik

—revised edition—

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Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute
Tsiigehtshik and Fort McPherson, NT
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INTRODUCTION

Background

During the summer of 1992, two of the authors of this book, Alestine Andre and Ingrid Kritsch, carried out a traditional knowledge study with Gwichya Gwich’in elders from Tsiigehtchik on land use and occupancy in the Travaillant Lake and Trout Lake areas. Traditional trails, camp sites, harvesting locales, and over 120 place names were recorded to complement the archaeological work being carried out in the area by archaeologists Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon and Luc Nolin of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

While working on this project, the Elders asked that this work be continued for the other regions of their traditional land use area. They recognized that if their knowledge was not documented then, it might be lost for all time.

In consequence, similar projects were carried out focusing on the regions south of the Mackenzie River (including the area up the Arctic Red River), and into the Mackenzie Delta, respectively, during the summers of 1993 and 1994. In addition to extensive ethnographic and historical information, these studies yielded almost 200 additional place names. Combined with subsequent follow-up research, more than 300 place names and their associated stories have been collected to date for the Gwichya Gwich’in traditional land use area.

In early 1996, further oral history research was carried out in connection with the preparation of a draft version of this book. The completion in April 1997 of an Agenda Paper for the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, nominating a part of the Mackenzie River as a National Historic Site, provided opportunity for additional work with the Elders. These oral history collections, in conjunction with the old-time stories documented by COPE in the late 1960s and early 1970s, provide the main information base for this book.

The completion of the first edition of Gwichya Gwich’in Googwandak during 2000 and 2001 occasioned renewed oral history research with the Elders. This work culminated in a public community review of the manuscript, carried out in Tsiigehtchik in late January 2000. During this review, a page-by-page reading of the draft gave the Elders and many members of the community the opportunity to review and comment on the manuscript, and to suggest additions and editorial changes. The advice received from the Elders during that week of readings has substantially widened the scope of the book. While the authors are indebted to the many people mentioned here, they wish to acknowledge in particular the special debt of gratitude owed to the Elders who participated in the community review.

This second edition of Gwichya Gwich’in Googwandak has corrected errors and added information recorded during GSCI projects carried out from 2001 to 2007.
The story told in this book

This book is based on the stories through which the Elders describe the history of the land since the earliest days of the world, and on the elders’ stories of their experiences of life on the land. These stories reach back to, and begin with, the earliest days of the land. This was a time when people and animals were equals. Animals had the power of speech and were able to change into human form, much as humans knew how to transform into animals. It was during this time that the outward shape of several animals as well as certain well-known sites on the land were created. Raven, who was involved in many of the events described in these stories, was an especially important person during these earliest days of the land.

The Elders’ stories describe the subsequent epoch in the history of the land as the time of the great travellers and medicine people. These stories accompany the great medicine person and traveller Diniižhok on his journeys across the land, and they witness the great battles between the Gwichya Gwich’in leader Atachukäl and his enemy Naagäl tsal, leader of a group of Slavey warriors from up the river.

Still closer to the present are the stories about friendly or hostile encounters with the Slavey and the Eskimo. (‘Eskimo’ is the elders’ name for the Inuvialuit. They do not use the word in a disrespectful way, but they learned it when they were young, and many elders use it to this day. Therefore, it is also used in this book.) The story of the woman Ahts’an veh’s daring escape from her Eskimo captors is one of the best-known stories describing a hostile encounter between Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo. Stories about friendly encounters, on the other hand, describe the great summer gatherings and celebrations at the Flats—gatherings that had been held since the earliest days of the land.

The stories of the immediate past, and of the present, describe the friendship and hospitality extended to the newcomers arriving on Gwichya Gwich’in lands, be it in pursuit of the riches of the fur trade, or in search of the trails leading to the gold fields of the Klondike. Other stories from this time period recall the arrival of the Oblate Fathers, and the ‘hard journey’ to the mission school in Fort Providence undertaken by Gwichya Gwich’in children after the 1920s. They describe the developments leading to the signing of Treaty 11, and—some 70 years later—the conclusion of the land claim settlement agreement, signed by the Gwich’in Tribal Council, and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories, in 1992. It is with the land claim settlement agreement and its immediate consequences that the Elders’ stories end for now. As a tool, the agreement holds great promise for the future, but everybody knows that much hard work will be required to realize the goals laid out in it. The land claims settlement agreement is only a beginning. This part of Gwichya Gwich’in history has yet to be told.

The Elders

We would like to thank the Gwichya Gwich’in elders who over the last fifteen years shared their knowledge about the traditional way of life. This book is based on their stories. These elders are: The late Antoine (Tony) Andre, Caroline Andre, Cecil Andre, Gabe Andre, the late Hyacinthe Andre, Noel Andre, Rosa Andre, Pierre Benoit, Marka Bullock, the late Billy Cardinal, Eileen Cardinal, Rose and Dale Clark, the late Edward Coyen, John Paul Kendo, Agnes (Andre) Mitchell, Bella (Norman) Modeste, Barney
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The following people also greatly assisted us in completing this final version of the book: Tom Andrews and Jean-Luc Pilon provided information on the construction of traditional houses based on archaeological evidence. Rita Carpenter was instrumental in completing the elders’ biographies. Deena Clayton (Gwich’in Land Use Planning Board) provided the base maps, and Gadi Katz produced reproductions of several of the photos used in the book.

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A note on orthography

In 1994, the official name of the community was changed from ‘Arctic Red River’ to the designation traditionally used by the Gwichya Gwich’in; the community then decided to spell the name, ‘Tsiigehtchic.’ To conform to the orthography currently in use in the NWT, the spelling ‘Tsiigehtshik’ is used in this book.

Illustrations

The maps on pages 44 and 49 are reprinted by permission of the Handbook of North American Indians from, June Helm (ed.), Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 6. Sub-Arctic. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, © 1981. The illustrations on pages 74, 103, and 115 are reprinted by permission of Yale University Press from, Cornelius Osgood, Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 14 (1936). © Yale University Press. All other source attributions will be found in the image captions; all images are used by permission of the respective rights holders. The photo on the front cover shows a Gwichya Gwich’in woman at the Flats, getting ready for the trail. It is used by permission of the Roman Catholic Diocesan Archives, Yellowknife, NT. The photo on the back cover shows Edward and Joan Nazon’s fish camp in the early 1980s. It is used by permission of the late Joan Nazon, Tsiigehtshik, NT.
CHAPTER 1

THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE LAND

Now, they say that the great Gwich’in traveller Atachuukaij was paddling down this river. He was on his way to the ocean. One day, he met Deetrin’, Raven, who was standing on a hill by the river bank. When Atachuukaij paddled by, Raven began to talk to him.

In the old days, this would have surprised no one. Raven talked and acted just like any other being. Like many animals during those days, he had the power to assume just about any shape or form. These were the earliest days of history, when animals and humans could change form and were equals.

Now, at that time he saw a Crow sitting down there, right by the shore. And he came to this Crow and he told Crow, ‘Well, it looks like you’re sad. I have come from a long ways. I just paddled around, paddled down this river, just to see what I can see, see what I can do.’ Crow told him, ‘Go to the top of that hill, way up there. I’m going to go with you—I want you to look in my head.’

— Tony Andre

Why Raven’s feet have only three toes

Raven and Atachuukaij went up the hill, but Raven seemed to sense that Atachuukaij planned to kill him. He warned Atachuukaij that he would make the people invisible if anything were to happen to him. And, as the story shows, Raven was right. Atachuukaij threw Raven down from the cliff on top of the hill, and now he was no longer able to see the people. He realized that he would need Raven’s help.

The Crow said, ‘My friend, I’m afraid you are going to throw me over the bank.’ The man said, ‘Oh no, I wouldn’t do that to you. What a way to talk.’ ‘My friend, if you kick me over the bank and kill me, I will see that you’ll have no friends like yourself. I will see to it that they all disappear.’ And he said to the man, ‘Later, as
you paddle down the river, you will see a big loche. As you go farther you will see where there is a camp and no sign of people, not only one camp but several camps … then turn back and come back to me. You will have to gather me up, every piece of me, my feathers and all, and you will have to make me whole again.’

— Eliza Andre

After he had thrown Raven down the cliff, Atachuukaij returned to his canoe and continued on his journey, but he soon found out that something was wrong. Although he could hear the people, he could not see them.

Towards the end, Crow fell asleep, and Atachuukaij threw him down. It was a straight cliff, you see? Crow fell down the cliff and he was all smashed up. Pretty soon, there was blood here and there, and pieces of beak, hind leg, head, and feet. So Atachuukaij went back to the canoe and travelled downriver again. He came close to a camp, he could hear everybody laughing there. Sometimes it seemed that they were dancing. He arrived at that camp, went into a house and—nobody! An empty house! He went to another place, then another place like that—nothing!

A little later, Atachuukaij saw a big loche from the shore; it was a really shallow shore. After a while, Atachuukaij went around the house, down to the river and behind the point. Behind him, he could hear everybody laughing again. Then he came to another place—still nobody! He said, ‘You damn Crow, now I know it’s just you. You’re the one that made medicine on me.’

— Tony Andre

He turned back and the two returned to the cliff to put Raven back together again, but Atachuukaij decided to get even. When he collected Raven’s feet, Atachuukaij only used three toes, not the four toes Raven’s feet used to have in those days. Raven’s feet have had three toes ever since. The medicine-making finally stopped, and now Atachuukaij could see the people whose talk and laughter he had heard. It turned out that Raven had changed them into loches.

He turned around and he went back up river. He passed all those places, there was laughing and talking everywhere, but he couldn’t see anybody. So he got back up to the place where he had thrown Raven down. He picked up a basket kettle (that kettle was made out of birch bark), and went up there. He picked up Raven’s head and all his feathers, but he saw that Raven had four toes before. — Raven, he had four toes on each foot, but Atachuukaij threw two away. He didn’t want Raven to have them. So he picked up only six toes, but not the rest.

And you know how he made a Crow out of that? He put that basket, that high basket, way over to the side. He pulled his pants down, he sat on top of it, and he farted, farted, farted! Pretty soon, Atachuukaij looked at Raven in the basket. ‘How are you?’ he asked him. ‘Oh, my feet, one of my toes is missing on either foot. Could you look for them up that way? Some toes are still missing.’ So, Atachuukaij went and searched up that way. He saw the toes but he didn’t want to touch them. He came back down, and said, ‘Nothing yet.’ So he kept on farting. Pretty soon, somebody hit the basket from the inside. He looked at it, and there was Raven sit-
It is true—not all animals were friendly towards people in those days. Raven liked to trick and fool people. Wolverine often destroyed caches and spoiled supplies. Bear was sometimes feared because he might attack and kill people. But there were others who showed greater kindness and friendliness. Loon is remembered for his help in saving a blind man from starvation. The old man ran out of food when his family abandoned him: Loon helped him regain his eye sight, and the old man was able to survive. This story is told on page 324.

A Giant Caribou is said to have lived on the east side of Vadzaih van, Caribou Lake. This Giant Caribou also made life easier for the people during those days. The caribou herds would visit the lake, because the Giant Caribou lived here and, for a time, Vadzaih van was a good area for hunting caribou. When the Giant Caribou died, the herds no longer came. There are several other giant land animals as well as giant fish that are known to have lived during those early days. These very big creatures are known as ‘monster’ or ‘giant’ spirit animals, chijuudiee (see page 12).

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.

— Hyacinthe Andre

Ts’ii dejį days — When people and animals were equals

When the elders describe the days when giant spirit animals lived on the land, or when they talk about the time when animals and people were equals and could talk to each other, they talk about the earliest days of the land. Those days now long past are called ts’ii dejį days, and the stories that are told about them, ts’ii dejį stories. Even the word itself, ts’ii dejį, is so old that nobody clearly remembers how it can best be translated into English. The elders know that the word describes the time that began with the earliest days of the land and that came to an end at about the time when the first European explorers arrived in the area. By then, most ani-
animals no longer had the power to speak or to change their appearance. Only medicine persons with strong dream power would still talk to the animals.

Ts'ii dejį days

That’s all a long time ago, that’s why they call it ts’ii dejį … about 500 years ago, I think—five, six hundred years ago.
— Bob Norman

It’s 500 years-ago words, that’s what we are giving you … You can’t translate it. Us, we can’t translate it. We don’t know what it is. They meant something, but we don’t know.
— Tony Andre

Many of the important events of Gwichya Gwich’in history occurred during ts’ii dejį days, but there are other stories that describe the days when things began to change. Some stories even deal with the future. All of the stories told by the elders taken together can be used to make an outline of the whole of Gwichya Gwich’in history. This outline based on the elders’ stories is described in Chapter 2 beginning on page 7.

Daii dhakhai — When things began to change

There is a place in the northern part of Gwichya Gwich’in land which is known by the name Daii dhakhai chį’, ‘Bluefly Killer’s Hill.’ This hill can be found along Gull Creek near Tithegeh van. An incident which occurred here—perhaps only some time before newcomers arrived among the Gwichya Gwich’in—involved the man Daii dhakhai, who visited the hill because of a dream he had had about it. It almost seems as if this story predicted the great changes that were to occur after the arrival of explorers, fur traders and missionaries.

They say that Daii dhakhaij 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 Daii dhakhaij was still climbing to that place. Daii dhakhaij knew it right away, because he started sliding down. So when that man turned his head away, Daii dhakhaij 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. Daii dhakhaij 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 Daii dhakhaij 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 Daji dhakhaji 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.

Daji dhakhaji 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.

— Gabe Andre

Would Gwichya Gwich’in history have followed a different path if Daji dhakhaji had made a different choice on the day of his visit to this hill? Nobody can say for sure. He left by the door that, so he was told, would open to a world of important changes. And it is true that the Gwichya Gwich’in have faced many changes. A wood chip that the people saw floating down the Mackenzie River one summer day more than 200 years ago was the first sign of these changes, although the people did not know this at the time. This story is told on page 179.

A story for the future

Atachuukaij has been travelling beyond the boundaries of the known world for longer than anyone now living can remember, but it is said that the world will not come to an end before he returns from those distant parts. Not all of the stories that began during ts’ii deji days have reached their conclusion yet.

Then he paddled out into the ocean. He went way out into the ocean singing like that. That’s what my mom used to have a song for. When he was singing the song, it meant that he would come back before the end of the world. You’re going to see him come back, before the end of this world. Until then, he said, he’d stay out there, somewhere in the ocean.

Into the sea with the small birch bark canoe—went into the ocean. Still out there, I think. Right into the ocean. Before the end of the world, he said, he’d come back. That’s what he was singing about. My dad told me that three times on the trap line, and my mom told me that about five, six times, I think.

A story for the future
He went out of sight in the end. I asked mom, ‘Did you see Atachuukaij go out of sight?’—‘No,’ she said, ‘that’s what my dad’s dad told us—generations, generations, telling one another about this story.’ That’s a real true story.

— Tony Andre

The story told in this book

Stories from the earliest days of the land, stories about the changes that occurred after newcomers arrived about 200 years ago, stories pointing to the future—they are all part of the history of the Gwichya Gwich’in as told by the elders of Tsiigeh-tshik. Their stories are told in this book.

The elders’ stories describe the traditional way of life that existed before fur traders and missionaries arrived. The Gwichya Gwich’in made their living from the land, and the stories follow the families along the trails that they travelled in order to survive. They describe life in the winter settlements and the fish camps. They make it possible to understand how the people made a living in the old days, and to learn about the clothing, equipment and tools that enabled them to survive.

The changes which occurred after the arrival of the fur traders and missionaries are also part of this story. The Oblate fathers as well as the fur traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company played an important role in the development of the community of Tsiigehtshik, or, Arctic Red River, as it was called until 1994. Gwichya Gwich’in have visited the fur trading posts that were set up on their land since at least 1806 or 1807. Although the fur trade and the trading posts played a major role in the development of Arctic Red River as a settlement, more than 150 years were to pass before many families began to break the ‘trail into town,’ where they now live throughout the greater part of the year. This change occurred as recently as the mid-1950s and early 1960s. It was made more lasting by the construction of a day school and by the arrival of housing programs developed by the government of Canada.

For now, the stories end with the land claims settlement agreement which was signed by the Gwich’in, and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories, in 1992. This agreement enables the Gwich’in to exert much greater control over their own affairs. Institutions of self-government, stewardship of the traditional lands, and in the future more control over the school system make it possible for the Gwich’in to shape their future on their own terms and according to their own plans. The land claims settlement agreement is only a beginning, and this part of Gwichya Gwich’in history is yet to be told.
The adventures of Raven mentioned in Chapter 1 are just a few of the many events of Gwichya Gwich’in history that the elders remember through their stories. Taken together, these stories explain the history of the Gwichya Gwich’in from the earliest days of the land to the present day. The land, and the people and animals living on it, were not always what they are today. The elders’ stories describe the way of life during those earlier days, and they explain how things began to change and how the land came to be as it is today.  

In this chapter, the history of the Gwichya Gwich’in as described by the elders, will be told. The story begins with the earliest days of the land, and the earliest days of history. — The table on page 37 shows which age of the history of the land each story talks about. The table on page 199 lists important dates of Gwichya Gwich’in history after Canada began to develop.

Ts’ii deji days — When animals and people were equals

The elders call the times that began with the earliest days of the land, ts’ii deji days. These days are far in the distant past and even the word used to describe them, ts’ii deji, is so old that its English meaning is no longer clearly remembered. The elders explain that the word describes the time that began with the earliest days of the land and that came to an end perhaps at about the time when the first explorers arrived in the country. Ts’ii deji days make up a very large part of the history of the land.

The earliest part of ts’ii deji days was a time when people and animals were equals. Animals had the power of speech, and they could assume just about any shape or form. It was during these days that many features of the landscape, as well as the outward appearance of different animals were created. The events that
led to these changes are remembered in a great number of stories. Raven played an important role in many of these stories. He was one of the most important beings of ts’ii dejį days.

Ts’ii dejį days — the adventures of Raven

Raven loved to play tricks, especially on those who did not suspect that something was going to happen to them. Raven’s tricks usually were successful, and often such a being’s outward appearance was changed. But sometimes things did not turn out the way Raven had planned them, and then Raven’s own appearance would also be changed. One such story has been told in Chapter 1: Raven has only three toes on each foot, because Atachuukaįį wanted to get even with him and threw two of his toes away.

The colour of Raven and Loon

Another such story is told about an encounter between Raven and Loon. They both decided that they wanted to be more fancy-looking. Each would help the other do this, but for once Raven got more than he bargained for.

That time, Raven made a mistake. This was between him and Loon. I don’t know what colour he was before this happened, but today, there is no white on him, may be just around the eyes. And Loon, I don’t know what colour he was either.
I don’t know who started it, Raven or Loon, but then Loon said, ‘I’m going to make you fancy.’ And Raven said, ‘Well, I’m going to make you fancy first.’ Well, the Loon sure was happy. And have you seen how fancy Loon is, along the back?

But the head is even more fancy. And it was Raven who did that. Aahh, shit, that’s funny. Raven, he painted Loon, it was just as if he painted him. And you know what he used? He used his own shit! You see, the Raven’s shit is just like white paint! Well, that’s what he used to make Loon more fancy.

When Raven had finished, he said, ‘That’s all, that’s good enough. You sure look fancy now!’ Loon said, ‘Me too, me too, I’m going to make you fancy.’ So Loon took some burned wood from the fire, and made a powder from it with his hands. And then he made Raven’s back fancier with that black colour. He was only going to make Raven’s back black, but then suddenly he painted the rest black too! It was all just black!

And then Loon just ran into the water—the lake was not too far away. He started to dive, and he came back up a ways out. And Raven, he didn’t know what to do, but then he saw the ashes, that small ball of ashes Loon had made to use as paint.

Even though Loon was a long ways out, Raven threw that ball. Loon didn’t want to get hit, so he just dived. Well, just before he dived, the ball of ashes just touched his head. And that’s why Loon’s head is just grey.

— Hyacinthe Andre

Raven and the Grebes

So it was Loon who changed the colour of Raven’s coat. On another occasion, it was the Grebes who were responsible for changing Raven’s outward shape, but they did not come away from this encounter completely unharmed, either. This story also explains how a landmark close to the community was created.

The story involves the Grebes who lived in a camp on the Flats. The events mentioned in the story must have occurred during the summer time, because Raven approached the Grebes’ village by canoe.

This event 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 into mourning. By jumping in and out of the flames, the grebes showed their sorrow. They 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.

— Edward Nazon

Raven was allowed to fly away, but he had become so weak that he made it only as far as his camp, Deetrin’ ehchi’ k’yt, ‘Raven’s Bed.’ This is a series of three shallow holes, made by Raven when he lay down here to recover. They are still visible south of the church.

And that is where he slept and had his camp. That’s why they call it Deetrin’ ehchi’ k’yt—he slept there all the time, you see? That’s where he was hiding himself all the time.

— John Paul Kendo

Raven soon recovered, but now he was without his beak. What was he to do? From his lookout atop Church Hill, Vik’oooyendik, he watched the goings-on among the Grebes down on the Flats. He soon noticed that his beak was guarded by an old blind woman. Raven realized that, to get it back, he would have to play yet another trick on the Grebes.

Under cover of night, Raven cautiously sneaked out of sight and travelled up Tsiigehnjik just far enough to be hidden from view. He built a raft and put travelers made from moss on it, “some standing, others in the sitting position.” Berries used as eyes, Annie Norbert explains, made Raven’s trick even more convincing. He finished the work, put the raft into the river, and silently moved back to his lookout atop Vik’oooyendik. The raft soon floated into view. A young boy was the first to notice it.

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.’ At this, great 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 meet 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 Raven had won again. Raven was having a great time, crowing at the top of his voice from a
In his haste, however, Raven did not put the beak quite in its proper position. As Annie Norbert explains, he has had to wear his beak slightly crooked ever since. This, however, was not the end of the story.

**Raven recovers the sun**

The Grebes must have been very surprised when they saw the raft float by without stopping. This annoyed them even more. They realized that Raven had fooled them yet again. In their anger, they tore the sun out of the sky. Now the land was completely dark. The sun ended up in Bear’s home, where it was used as a ball. (The stories do not describe how the sun ended up in Bear’s home.) The people soon found out that it was too hard to live in total darkness, and they turned for help—to Raven. Changing into a baby, Raven joined Bear’s family and camp. His plan was to steal the sun and put it back into its rightful place.

*The baby was crying one day. He continued to cry and cry until the Bear came to ask why it was that he carried on so. After a long talk, the baby asked the Bear if he might play with the bright ball. The Bear did not want the child to play with the sun as he feared he would not be able to guard it properly. As it was, the child cried until the Bear consented to let him play with the sun, but only if the sun was kept inside the tent.*

*The baby rolled the sun back and forth across the floor, with his grandfather watching closely. Finally, the Bear relaxed his watch over the sun. When the baby found this out, he quickly rolled the ball out of the house and it immediately shot into the air and back into its place.*

*When the Bear woke up, he saw that he had been tricked, but by this time he had gotten over his anger and was glad to see the sun back in its place. Now it is said that the baby was really the Raven who had once again tricked the Bear to get what he wanted. The Raven could not fly in the dark and needed the light of the sun. Of course, once the anger of the people had died down, they also realized that the sun should be where it was most useful to everyone. Raven was indeed wise.*

— Edward Nazon

**Chii t’iet — why Red Fox runs with a slight limp**

When he helped Red Fox at Chii t’iet, however, Raven did not plan to play a trick on anyone. Chii t’iet is a fish camp located across Nagwichoonjik within sight of the community. It was here that Grizzly Bear once caught Red Fox and tore off one of Red Fox’s arms. Red Fox howled with pain, robbing the people living at the Flats of their sleep. Raven decided to paddle across the river, and attempt to recover the arm. He took with him Ah’ ch’ee, a man who looked like a small hawk. Ah’ ch’ee was to keep the escape canoe at the ready. Raven planned to
take Red Fox’s arm, come straight back down from Grizzly Bear’s camp, jump into the canoe and get away.

Raven was sitting with Grizzly Bear; he was telling Grizzly stories. He told him many stories and eventually Grizzly fell asleep. When Grizzly had fallen asleep, Raven tied him up into a bundle. Grizzly opened his eyes while Raven was tying him, so Raven told him more stories. After a while, Grizzly fell asleep again.

Raven poked Grizzly—no movement! He grabbed Red Fox’s arm and quickly rushed outside with it. Black Bear lived across from Grizzly. Black Bear said to Grizzly: ‘Mmmmmmmy uncle, look, Raven has got Red Fox’ arm!’ he stuttered.

Black Bear kicked at the burning fire in front of his tent. Grizzly rushed outside, but Raven was paddling away; he was already way out on the river. Ah’ch’ee who was supposed to turn the canoe around, had not turned it around, but Raven paddled it anyway—they paddled across backward.

Before setting out, Raven had told the people, ‘When I sing while I am paddling, have Red Fox face towards me.’ The people were listening for Raven now. Finally he was paddling back; they could hear him sing from a little ways away. He was singing as he paddled, and before he got back, the people had Red Fox ready.

When Raven was still some ways away, he threw the arm towards Red Fox with his left hand. With a smacking sound, the arm landed in place on Red Fox. With his arm back in place, Red Fox ran off. That’s the end of the story.

— Hyacinthe Andre

In helping Red Fox, Raven had also helped the people who could once again enjoy a quiet night’s sleep. Red Fox was able to run again—although, when Raven threw the arm, it landed slightly out of joint. Red Fox has been walking with a slight limp ever since that day.

Ts’ii deji days and after — chijuudiee: ‘Giant’ spirit beings

The Gwichya Gwich’in have known since the earliest days of history that animals and humans are equals. They have known that there was a time in the history of the land when animals could change into human form. They are familiar with the habits of the animals on whom they have depended for their survival for as long as they can remember. However, there are places on the land where animals or other beings have left marks and tracks that are unlike any that the Gwichya Gwich’in have seen during the long centuries of their travels on the land.

These marks and tracks show that the animals who made them must have been of enormous size. Mostly these were animals that everybody knew—beaver, fish, or wolverine—but they were bigger than any that the people had ever seen, and they lived much longer. These giant spirit animals, chijuudiee, have inhabited the land since the earliest days, and some of them may be living there still.
Gyuu dazhoo

A giant hairy worm, or ‘snake,’ came out of the ocean and travelled up the Mackenzie and into the Peel River. He wanted to go up into the mountains, so he swallowed big rocks as he moved along. Thus the Snake River was created. That Gyuu dazhoo still lives in the area, but it has not been sighted for so long now that nobody is quite sure whether it actually lives in the mountains near the headwater of the Snake River, or in a lake beside the river (see the photo on page 87).  

Nehtruh tshi'

This is the name of an area on the bank of Tsiigehnjik, just downstream from Martin zheh, which is very distinct from its surroundings. The land here looks as if it has been torn apart. As Pierre Benoit explains, this is the work of a Giant Wolverine who came out of a nearby lake. He broke up the hills and big boulders while heading underground for Tsiigehnjik (see the photo on page 76).  

The Giant Caribou of Vadzaib van

A Giant Caribou is said to have lived in the area around Vadzaib van for some time. Because it lived there, the caribou herds moved into that area, and, for a time, this was a good area to hunt caribou. When the Giant Caribou died, the caribou herds no longer came. This story is told on page 3.  

The Giant Bluefish of Khaii luk

A giant fish lives on the east side of Khaii luk. He is so big that it is impossible to see a big hill behind the lake, when he floats to the surface. It is said that the giant fish still lives there, and that he will stay there until the end of the world. The Giant Bluefish often swims around the lake in circles, following the side of the lake. When this occurs in winter, the ice gets broken up and is piled up into a great ridge of jumbled ice.  

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 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 Jan-
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uary. 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 Teedtha. 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 Teedtha and Nihdaa thidie, from there I was going to cut straight across to Teelqaj. 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!

— Gabe Andre

Giant Beavers

Giant Beavers are known to have lived in places such as the Gull River area and Chii ghò t’ajj. Even as recently as perhaps 30 or 40 years ago, people would still see traces of such beavers, sometimes even the beaver himself. Edward Nazon once told Gabe Andre that he actually saw such a Giant Beaver around Gull River:

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.

— Gabe Andre

Another Giant Beaver lived across the river from the community at Chii ghò t’ajj. A hole which the Giant Beaver used as his house can still be seen there. Nap Norbert went to look at this hole. Inside it looks just like a beaver house. Tony Andre remembers that his parents talked to him about this Giant Beaver.

A big beaver was there for a long time. My mom and dad told me that story. You can see the bed of that big beaver. My dad used to climb up straight through and go in there. I thought he was going to fall down into that hole … The beaver slept in there. And very close to the river, he said you could hear him when he splashed the water. My dad said after the big beaver had been there for a time, he took off. ‘I think he went up the river,’ my dad said. ‘He can’t go downstream, he’s got to go upriver’. I don’t know where he went …

You walk around behind there, you see a big hole. I don’t know what that is … they say you always find stuff over there, right below it. My dad used to say that he would find willow over there, good-sized willow too, but he never saw that beaver. ‘I think he went up the river,’ my dad said, ‘I want you to know this beaver was
there some time ago. Must have gone upstream—can’t go downstream, a big beaver like that.’

So maybe he went upriver. We never saw beaver teeth mark around there. I was surprised when I saw that bed. Pretty big. It’s just straight across from here … That hole is pretty high and that stone is very slippery. I looked around real good. I was kind of scared too, if something had moved in there, I wouldn’t have had time to get out. I also tried to smell something, but there was nothing. It must have moved out long ago.

— Tony Andre

Unknown Chijuudiee

Other chijuudiee probably lived on the land during those days, as well. Nobody knows what these giants looked like or who they were, but the marks they left were so large and unusual that they could not have been made by a normal-sized being. One such chijuudiee must once have come out of a little lake south-west of K’ee’ghee chuđlači, In-and-Out Lake. Coming out, it created a wide trench which cut right through the trees. Barney Natsie explains: “There is this little lake south-west 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 followed that trench.”

Just as difficult to explain is what causes the shaking of the ground that several people have noticed in the Beaver Lake area. Sometimes the shaking is accompanied by a growling sound that comes from the lake.

That was around Beaver Lake. Leo used to stay there to trap for beaver. He was going to set a trap on that one lake. He said when he was getting close to that lake, there was just a big growling from that lake and the ground was shaking. He got so scared, he told my dad about it. My dad wanted to know about it so they went over there. Sure enough, just when they got as far as Leo had gone—there was the growling coming from that lake, and the ground was just shaking. My dad told Leo, ‘Don’t bother that, there’s something bad in there.’ So they never bothered around there, they stayed away from there.

— Rose Clark

Other beings that could be dangerous because of their size, actually were people, not animals. They are not known as chijuudiee, but it seems as if they had a lot in common with chijuudiee: They could be dangerous, they were possibly as big as chijuudiee, and they were not often seen. A hungry giant, and the mysterious people referred to as ‘bushmen,’ belong to this group of beings.

The Hungry Giant

A medicine person in the Fort Good Hope area who was very hungry once ate two big bull moose and drank a whole pail of grease, but he was still hungry. Then he
went home and ate another half of a moose that he had already prepared and roasted at home. It turned out that the medicine person ate all this food just to feed a hungry giant by medicine power. The only food that the man ate for himself was the moose roast that he had prepared at home. No wonder he was still hungry, even after having eaten such an enormous meal.

   And the man told him about this medicine person who said that he was hungry. So they started cooking for him, one big bull moose, they cooked the whole moose, and he ate the whole moose. And when he finished he said, ‘I am still hungry.’ So they cooked about that much more. He ate all that, too. They gave him a pail of grease and he drank that, too. But he was still hungry.

   Then he went home, and he had half a side of a moose hanging down in his house. So he took that down, put it to the fire. He cooked the moose and he ate all that, too. It turned out that every time he was eating, he was feeding the monster, he didn’t get anything in his stomach. When he ate the rib that he cooked at home, that was the only food he felt in his stomach.

— Hyacinthe Andre

Nanaa’j’h

Nanaa’j’h were large ‘bushmen’ who lived out in the bush by themselves. Nobody knew for sure whether they were really human. Especially during summer time, they would try to sneak into a camp to steal women and children. Nanaa’j’h were big and strong, but they were not very smart. Those who were ready and prepared when they heard a bushman sneaking about the camp, had a good chance of getting rid of him, as the following story shows: While they were out checking their rabbit snares, an old woman and her grandson could hear a bushman sneaking about the camp. They hurried back to their camp to be ready when the bushman arrived.

   By this time they could both hear someone making noise outside their camp; someone was approaching their camp, drawing nearer and nearer. Meanwhile, while all the commotion was going on outside, the old woman had gathered the hot intestines of a rabbit and waited near the doorway. Soon, the person, who turned out to be a bushman, Nanaa’j’h, poked his head into the doorway. Immediately, the old woman slapped him in the face with the hot substance. At once, the bushman jumped up having been hit with the hot substance. The bushman went tearing out of their tent, swearing painfully, holding his face, yelling.

   With this, they heard him thump to the ground outside their camp. The following morning, they went out to investigate the incident of the previous night. They found a big bushman stretched outside their camp. They did not bother to do anything to him but instead retired to their tent, not to be bothered again for a long time.

— Eliza Andre

The times of Raven and of the earliest chijuudiee were followed by the days of the important leaders and great travellers who helped shape the history of the land. Stories from this age describe the life of the great traveller and medicine person
Ts’ii dejj days—the great leaders and travellers: Atachuukajj and Ch’ii choo

Atachuukajj was one of the great Gwichya Gwich’in leaders during ts’ii dejj days. He was known as a great traveller and warrior. The adventures of his life are told in three great stories: (1) His travels along the Mackenzie River and his fight with the giant Chii choo. (2) The wars between Atachuukajj and the Slavey leader Naagajj tsal. As is explained on page 22, it was during this war that Atachuukajj changed his name to Kwan ehdan. This is why Atachuukajj is called Kwan ehdan in some of the elders’ stories mentioned in this section. (3) The story of Kwan ehdan’s (Atachuukajj’s) further travels beyond the boundaries of the known world.

Chii choo chases Atachuukajj up the Mackenzie River

It was during the early days of his travels across the land that Atachuukajj encountered the giant Chii choo. Beginning in the area around present-day Fort Yukon, the giant chased Atachuukajj across the land and then all the way up the Mackenzie River. Different stories have been told about how this adventure ended. One story explains that although Chii choo died in the end, he was not killed by Atachuukajj. This story is told on page 344. Another story describes how Atachuukajj slowly starved Chii choo to death. The ending to this story is mentioned here; the complete story is told on page 365.

Over in the Yukon, that’s where the giant Chii choo started chasing Atachuukajj. On this side of Fort Yukon, they say, there are lots of islands in the river. That’s where he started chasing him, and Atachuukajj was trying to run away from him. But the giant knew this and followed Atachuukajj. He went after him all the way from there to here, they passed through the area over there and the lands here, and went up the river. One old man in Good Hope told me that, long ago when they passed the Ramparts on the Mackenzie River, Atachuukajj left his canoe there—it is still there. It’s just a rock, turned upside down. And from there he ran ashore. The giant ran along this side of the river. He made six steps, and that created six big lakes between Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope.

Above the Ramparts, that is where Atachuukajj left his canoe. And he also sat down at the Ramparts to rest, and his seat is still marked. And one time, he wanted to go to the washroom, he peed down the bank, and there is running water in that place still, it is still a creek.

— Gabe Andre

How could Atachuukajj escape from Chii choo? The giant certainly was so strong that Atachuukajj would not be able to fight with him and kill him outright. Atach-
uuŋuṭųjį must have known this: He could not even move the big rocks used by Chii choo to block off a porcupine den that Atachuukajį had hidden in.

Chii choo met up with him. Atachuukajį came to a porcupine den, he crawled in there to get away from Chii choo—he was so scared of him. ‘I am going to block you in with a big rock,’ he told Atachuukajį, and he blocked him in with a rock. Chii choo told Atachuukajį, ‘Okay, push the rock out.’ He tried to push the rock out, but it did not move. He said, ‘Grandfather, I am coming out, take the rock away.’ Chii choo took the rock away and pulled him out, and that was that.

— Hyacinthe Andre⁵⁹

Atachuukajį starves Chii choo to death

Atachuukajį could not kill Chii choo outright, but he would try and slowly starve the giant to death. This plan eventually succeeded.

Atachuukajį did not kill him, he starved him to death. Every time he killed good things to eat, he cooked them real good, but then he wanted to go and have a good wash before he was going to eat the food. Well, every time that happened, Atachuukajį sent a whole lot of animals there to clean up what Chii choo was going to eat, so, nothing more to eat.

The giant cut a piece of his own backside off, and made pemmican from it. He should have eaten it right there! But instead he said, ‘I wonder who can freeze it for me?’ And Atachuukajį was sitting nearby, could hear this. Now he saw a rat swimming by, and he said to that rat, ‘Why don’t you go over there and freeze that grease?’ (That’s what they called it, grease.) He could have eaten it like that, I wonder why he wanted to freeze it?

The rat went over to Chii choo and said, ‘There’s a creek over here with cold water. I’ll freeze it for you.’ So he gave it to that rat, and the rat swam over close to where Atachuukajį was sitting. He took a little rock, threw it at the rat and hit him in the mouth. The rat let go of the fat, and it all floated away. So Atachuukajį went down to where the fat was floating. He took the water with that fat like that [gesture of hands scooping up water], and he drank it. And since that time people drink water in that way.

Then he went back to Chii choo, and he told him, ‘I lost that meat, it all fell in the water.’ That’s when Chii choo started crying—talking about sunrise and sunset, saying that he’d never see it again. That’s the song he sang, but I don’t know how it goes. Then at last he Starved to death. That’s how Atachuukajį was able to beat Chii choo. That’s what was told to me by the old people.

— Gabe Andre⁴³.¹⁷

It is said that after Chii choo’s death, Atachuukajį travelled into the land of the people from up the river. The Sahtú Dene know him as Yamòria. He is said to have killed the giant beavers whose skins can still be seen stretched across the rocks across from Tulít’a at Bear River.
Ts‘ii dëjj days — the great leaders and travellers: Atachuukajj and Naagajj tsal

One of Atachuukajj’s greatest enemies was Naagajj tsal (‘Little Beads’), the leader of the Slavey people from up the river. His name refers to a special quality of his jacket. It was made from small pebbles (‘beads’) which, inserted into a hardened mixture of gravel and spruce gum, were woven into an impenetrable battle jacket. No arrow, spear or dagger could cut through it.46 For the longest time, it was impossible to kill or even injure Naagajj tsal. The fighting dragged on for a very long time. It was during this time that Atachuukajj changed his name to Kwan ehdan. In this story both his names are sometimes used.

Lete‘tr’aandyaa

It is said that Atachuukajj and Naagajj tsal began to fight because they both wanted to marry the woman Lete‘tr’aandyaa. Her name means, ‘Moving back and forth.’ Depending on who had won the most recent battle, Lete‘tr’aandyaa would stay with either Atachuukajj or Naagajj tsal. Perhaps her name refers to the fact that she was forced to move ‘back and forth’ between the two groups.

This particular story is mainly about two men and a woman. At the beginning of the story, they fought often between themselves because of her. It was said that Naagajj tsal, ‘Little Beads,’ was from further up the river and Kwan ehdan, ‘Without Fire,’ centred his life around the Delta. They were to decide which of the two were to marry the woman that was involved in both their lives, so they were to gather their tribes and go to war. The decision was that whoever won the war was to marry the woman.

— Eliza Andre29

Tseenjoo kan

The battles between Atachuukajj and Naagajj tsal dragged on for a very long time. Atachuukajj finally grew tired of the fighting. He asked one of his people, a man by the name of Tseenjoo, to hollow out a hill and build a cave. This cave was to be large enough for Atachuukajj and all of his people to hide in. Tseenjoo built a cave of such size that Atachuukajj and his people were able to hide in it for one year and to carry on with their lives. Tseenjoo kan, ‘Tseenjoo’s Hill,’ can still be seen in the area east of Trout Lake. The earth that had to be removed to hollow out this hill and make the cave forms an island in a nearby lake. The island is still there.

One time the people got tired of fighting so they said they would build a hiding-place. Everybody went to work and the story says there were a lot of people those days. The whole tribe looked around for a place. They found a big hill about eighty miles east of Inuvik. While the older people and women were making the cave, the younger people, who were called warriors, went out hunting and fishing to get enough food for the winter.
They started early in the spring and continued until freeze-up. All the mud and rocks that were taken out were dumped into a lake nearby and there was so much mud taken out of the cave, that it became an island. That island can be seen to this day; also the cave. After freeze-up, everybody moved into the cave for the winter. The door of the cave was closed. Everything went fine all winter. Then came spring and the boys were getting restless so they asked the old people if they could get out and look around. The old people said to wait until the snow thawed out. That was because if anyone was around, they wouldn’t be able to see their tracks.

— Pascal Baptiste

The battles continue

The people spent a year in the cave, and they remained undiscovered for the longest time. It was only in the spring of the following year that an old man who belonged to Naagaij tsal’s people saw that his dog noticed something strange. The old man returned to his camp and alerted his people, but Atachuukaji killed all of Naagaij tsal’s people before they were even ready to attack the cave.

In the meantime, the Slavey people came back for another war, but they couldn’t find a trace or sign of the people. They travelled all over, to the mountains and the Delta, also all down along the coast, but they couldn’t find any sign of the people. Their leader, Naagaij tsal said they would go back to their country as there was nobody here. After travelling for a distance—it was very warm during the day, so their clothes would get wet—they decided to make camp for the night to dry their clothes. As they were looking for a suitable place, they came upon this hill. This was where the Gwich’in cave was.

It so happened that there was an old man who was travelling with his people and he could not keep up with them, so he had a dog travelling with him. He came to the hill where the people had rested. He sat down to rest and as he sat there, his dog kept listening and started scratching around. So the old man went after his people and told them about how the dog was acting. They figured the next day they were going to go back to the hill and make sure they searched the place.

In the meantime, the young men were still bothering the old man to get out of the cave. Finally, the old man said they could go out. They left, saw people’s tracks and came back into the cave to tell the people. The warriors got ready and went after the Slavey people. They killed every one of them. Only their leader Naagaij tsal escaped.

— Pascal Baptiste

Lete’traandyaa saves Atachuukaji

Naagaij tsal had lost this battle, but in the fall he returned with another group of warriors to avenge his defeat. It may have been during this fight that Lete’traandyaa saved Atachuukaji’s life. She seemed to sense that Naagaij tsal would attack soon, and she adjusted the laces on her snowshoes so that they
would fit Atachuukäji. This turned out to be a life-saving preparation. Atachuukäji’s own snowshoes broke when he tried to escape during a surprise attack that soon occurred, but he was able to get away using Lete’tr’aandyaa’s snowshoes. It is said that his brothers were killed during the pursuit.

Now Lete’tr’aandyaa would wake up early in the morning so as to allow herself to gather wood for the fire. One morning, after finishing her task, she took one side of her snowshoes and adjusted the laces so they could fit Kwan ehdan’s [Atachuukäji’s] feet. After doing this, she carried the snowshoes in her hand to make them available should anything suddenly come up. Afterwards, she kept pacing back and forth toward the door. Suddenly she looked through the little hole above the door of the tent. Kwan ehdan asked, ‘What is it you see?’ He jumped up and went through the hole, ran and slipped his snowshoes on quickly. In his great rush, one side of the lace busted so the woman quickly threw the snowshoes she had prepared for him. He quickly put these on and ran down the trail. His two younger brothers spotted him so they ran along after him. They went off to the mountains.

Before they reached the mountains they had to cross a big river. Kwan ehdan proceeded across the river first, running carefully from place to place to prevent himself from falling through. His other two brothers followed him in the same way. However, his youngest brother had the most trouble with his snowshoes. The ends kept catching the ice, which by now was loosened with the weight of his other brothers.

Finally all three were safely across the river. They started up the side of the mountain. Kwan ehdan spotted a place on the way up that looked like a good place to sit. He was up first so he sat down and waited for his brothers. His brother started up after him but by this time, Naagaij tsal’s tribe of people caught up with them. They started taking large willows and stuck them through the holes of the brother’s snowshoes. Gradually, they managed to pull him down and they killed him. All this Kwan ehdan witnessed.

In the meanwhile, Kwan ehdan’s youngest brother apparently still had a lot of trouble with his snowshoes. When he saw what happened he immediately started on another trail. Naagaij tsal’s tribe spotted him so the group followed him down the trail. Unfortunately, they must have killed him, too, as they were gone for a long time before returning to the place of the first killing.

— Eliza André

Atachuukäji’s people had been destroyed, his brothers had been killed, and Lete’tr’aandyaa was Naagaij tsal’s prisoner again. Winter was approaching, and no help was coming. Atachuukäji really was in great difficulties.

A winter without fire

On the day after this battle, Atachuukäji carefully made his way back to the camp that Naagaij tsal’s people had left after their victory. The only survivor still in the camp was his sister-in-law, but she was so badly wounded that she could not even walk. Atachuukäji tried to help her as much as possible, but she died a short while later. Now Atachuukäji had to survive the winter all by himself.
He drew in closer to camp and his brother’s pup ran joyfully towards him. It was said that this little incident, when the pup came running towards him, that Kwan ehdan felt a lump of sadness in his throat for his dead brother. By this time, he was very close to the camp and he was surprised to recognize his sister-in-law sitting by the fire. He was overjoyed and very happy to see her. He said, ‘Thank you, my sister-in-law, you are still alive.’ But she replied very weakly, ‘But I am badly hurt so don’t expect me to live very long. When the enemy started fighting, I crawled away under a snow bank and was unseen by anyone. After the enemy killed everyone, they walked over the snow bank under which I laid and they busted the two main tendons at the back of my ankles.’ As a result, Kwan ehdan’s sister-in-law was unable to walk.

He tried his best to help her, putting her in a little sled and the pup pulled the sled. Before they left camp, Kwan ehdan took a burning twig and with this they travelled on their way, wandering through the country. Wherever they went, he would kill rabbits and in this way he had managed to keep his dear sister-in-law alive. After some travelling, his sister-in-law said to him, ‘One of these days, when the pup is pulling me far behind and you hear the pup whimpering and howling, you will know that I have passed away. Do not bother to check on me, just keep on going.’

So after they camped three nights, he heard in the distance the howling of the pup. He did not bother to check as he was told, so instead he built a fire and after a while the pup scrambled toward him and moved on. He accidentally dropped the twig and it blew out instantly in the snow and now he was really without fire.

— Eliza Andre 29

Kwan ehdan

It would have been extremely difficult for a single person to survive the winter all by himself, under the best of circumstances. Without fire, this must have been almost impossible. “So, whenever he was hungry and he killed a rabbit, he would immediately remove the intestines and eat them while they were still warm. This was his only source of living,” Eliza Andre explains. 29 The fact that Atachuukajji was able to endure under such difficult conditions shows that he truly was one of the great leaders of ts’ii dejji days.

Towards the end of winter, Atachuukajji found an old trail. He followed it and eventually reached an abandoned camp. He found that the coals in one of the fire places were still hot, and for the first time in a long while, he was able to enjoy the warmth of a fire. However, the people who had just left the site noticed the smoke, and they turned back to find out who had moved into their old camp. It turned out that this was a group of Gwichya Gwich’in families. Atachuukajji at last was among his own people again. To celebrate that he had been able to survive a winter all by himself, and without fire, he told the people that from then on he would be called ‘Man Without Fire,’ Kwan ehdan.
He kept on travelling. Finally he came across an old trail. He followed it until he came to a fresh camp. He looked around and figured it was a very big camp and a lot of people. He also saw a little smoke where there happened to be a fire so he pushed the snow away and relit the fire. After the fire was good, and as he had not seen fire for a long time, he laid down beside it and fell asleep.

In the meantime, two old women were taking their time following the people. But just before they were going over a hill, they looked back towards the camp and to their surprise they saw smoke. They said to one another that they surely had blown out the fire. How come there was big smoke? The two rushed to the people and told the story as all the warriors went back to the camp.

Sure enough, they saw this person lying near the fire. But before they attacked him, he ran off. Even the arrows couldn’t catch up with him. He looked back and there was quite a distance between them, so he turned around and told the people, in their language, what had happened to him and that he was the only survivor from the war. The people had pity on him and told him he could come with them to the camp. But before that he told the people about all the hardships he had endured, how he had been without fire all winter, so from then he wanted to be called ‘Man Without Fire,’ Kwan ehdan.

— Pascal Baptiste

Searching for Naagaj tsal

Kwan ehdan and his people set out to free Lette’r’aandyaa and to avenge their earlier defeat. In this they were helped again by Lette’r’aandyaa herself who had been a captive of Naagaj tsal. Whenever Naagaj tsal’s group travelled, she would try to leave marks on the trail to let Kwan ehdan know which way they had gone. Kwan ehdan tracked Naagaj tsal’s people for months. Finally, and quite by accident, some young men found Naagaj tsal’s camp.

So Kwan ehdan now had a group with whom to plan avenge against Naagaj tsal and his tribe. The group travelled on and on and the weather turned warmer. One day they came upon a recently abandoned camp. They followed the people and for many days they followed the trail of their enemies. Apparently, the woman was travelling with the enemy, but her love for Kwan ehdan was greater than it was for Naagaj tsal. Along the way, she would scratch a mark on all the willows to indicate the way they were going. Where there was no willow, she would take the orange colouring from driftwood ashes and smear it under her moccasins and mark the stones on the trail. The rest of the group did not notice this.

Kwan ehdan’s people followed the marked trail for many months. Soon it was late fall and they were nearing the big lake where they held their usual meets. Here the group separated and little groups went different ways. An old man’s three sons, on a different route, had not returned and it was believed they had been killed by the enemies. The men then decided to do away with the old man. The old man told the people, ‘Many times I have spoken to my sons and given them advice. Why can’t we wait a little longer for their return?’

So within a couple of days the sons returned and had tales about sighting the enemy camp. Kwan ehdan’s tribe was happy to hear the news. The boys explained
how they discovered the enemy's camp. They had been travelling for quite awhile
and one foggy day they were on the banks of a lake and suddenly the fog had lifted
and they spotted the big encampment of their enemy. They did not know what to
do so they dug large holes in the ground and lay there. They came up with an idea.
They gathered some moss and started covering themselves with it. It took them a
good day to do a good job of creating the image of grizzly bears. The next day, they
set off for some hills near the camp and crawled around slowly. Suddenly, the peo-
ple at the camp below spotted the bears.

No one bothered them as they did not know what to do, besides, they were from
further down the river and they did not have grizzlies in their part of the country.
The only person they could ask was the woman. So they asked her, ‘How do grizzly
bears look in your part of the country?’ She replied, ‘They look exactly like those.’
Actually, she lied to them for she did not care very much for the people with whom
she was travelling. So the people believed her and they all settled down and
ignored the bears.

Meanwhile, back on the hill, the three boys disguised as grizzlies were not sure
whether they were seen or not so they went on the other side of the hill and
remained there for a day just to make sure. Nothing happened so they removed all
the moss and returned back to their camp. It was about then that Kwan ehdan’s
people decided to do away with the old man. Soon afterwards, Kwan ehdan’s tribe
packed and started for the enemy’s camp by the big lake. This took many days and
finally they reached the location and the enemy was still camped there. They had
managed to move in without being seen.
— Eliza Andre

Freeing Lete’traandyaa

Now that Naagaj tsal’s camp had been found, Kwan ehdan somehow had to let
Lete’traandyaa know that an attack would soon be staged. To do this, he used his
medicine power. He changed into a spider and entered Naagaj tsal’s camp with-
out being spotted. He found Lete’traandyaa and told her about his plans. Now
that she knew that an attack was just about to occur, Lete’traandyaa developed
an escape plan of her own. In the end, everything worked out as Kwan ehdan and
Lete’traandyaa had planned.

Kwan ehdan turned himself into a spider and during the evening went down to
Naagaj tsal’s camp. The woman had expected Kwan ehdan’s tribe about this time
of the year, so every evening she would go to the shore of the lake and sit there.
Naagaj tsal had the same feeling so he would leave the camp and not return for
days sometimes.

Kwan ehdan went to the lake shore and transferred into a man again and stood
but a short distance away from the woman. As they dared not speak out loud for
fear of getting caught, Kwan ehdan motioned to her in sign language and asked her
the shortest way around the lake to the camp. In answering, the woman filled her
hand with some water and threw it in the direction as an indication. After getting
the information, he turned into a spider again and returned to his people.
Now Naagajj tsal noticed the woman throwing the water so he approached her and asked, ‘You know that the water is cold this time of the year. What did you throw the water on?’ She answered, ‘Well, there was a mosquito flying around me, so that’s what I threw it on.’ In the meantime, Kwan ehdan reported the shortest way to the enemy’s camp. That’s where they travelled next, they moved in very close. Naagajj tsal still had the feeling that the time for war was very near and the time for his enemy’s arrival was very close. He took his daily walk and watched very closely. The woman was also watched extremely closely to prevent her from betraying them. Two men guarded her during the night. Still, she had a habit of gathering wood early in the morning.

One morning while out doing her task, Kwan ehdan came to her and said, ‘My people are very hungry. See what you can get for us, and, where is my friend?’ ‘He has gone hunting,’ and with that she picked up her pile of wood and started back to camp. On her way she tore the undersoles of her moccasins and purposely made the hole larger. Nearing her tent, she threw her pile of wood carelessly outside the door and went into the tent. She went straight to her bed where she kept a ration of dry meat and took some and stuffed it into her clothing. After she mended her moccasins, she returned to Kwan ehdan and gave him the dry meat. He then told her what to expect the next day. ‘About this time tomorrow, you will first hear the hooting of an owl and then the sound of a ptarmigan. After you hear the call you will walk outside of your tent.’

So after she returned to her tent, she asked the two men to look at the fish nets. They had a big catch and she cleaned all the fish and cut them in half and stuck an arrow through each one. During the night the fish had frozen to the arrow. She took a knife to bed with her. She pretended to be very uncomfortable and she was continuously tossing and turning in bed. As she was tossing and turning, she was also cutting the blanket down the centre and sliced as far down as her feet and was listening at the same time.

Finally, she heard an owl hooting and then she listened for a while and then heard the ptarmigan. She waited a while longer and suddenly jumped out of bed. As she was running through the door, the two men shot arrows at her but her little trick with the frozen fish worked.

Just then, Kwan ehdan’s people attacked the camp and killed all the people. During the squabble, Kwan ehdan noticed Ts’ii choo sleeping, and remembering the deal they made at the foot of the mountain earlier, he ruthlessly clubbed him over the head and killed him. Kwan ehdan then turned on Naagajj tsal’s youngest brother who started running as soon as he spotted him. Kwan ehdan chased him around the foothills of a mountain. The younger brother knew that his older brother, Naagajj tsal, was in the area but Kwan ehdan caught up with him and killed him.

— Eliza Andre

The wars come to an end

Naagajj tsal was the only Slavey warrior to escape. The battles between Kwan ehdan and Naagajj tsal only came to an end when Naagajj tsal was finally killed—
accidentally, and not by Atachuukaij or one of his warriors, but by the young orphan boy Chitaij. A stray arrow shot by Chitaij proved to be deadly for Naagaitsal. It is said that this event occurred in the vicinity of Tseenjoo kan.46

Naagaitsal, he was finally killed by a little orphan boy. The boy was fighting—fighting! He had a strange kind of arrow. The arrow head was formed just like an ice chisel. Now, Naagaitsal’s coat was made from sand and gum. Nobody could kill him. But his coat had shoulder straps which held it together.

Now the orphan boy just shot his arrow in the air. It came down, hit the straps of Naagaitsal’s jacket and cut them. Well, he just dropped! And that is why they say that the boy killed him. — That’s a hard story.
— Hyacinthe Andre46

A story for the future
Atachuukaij later probably began to travel again. He had several adventures as he made his way down the Yukon River (see page 356). In the end, he left the lands that the elders describe in their stories. It is said that Atachuukaij will return from those unknown lands before the end of the world.

Then he paddled out into the ocean. He went way out into the ocean singing like that. That’s what my mom used to have a song for. When he was singing the song, it meant that he would come back before the end of the world. You’re going to see him come back, before the end of this world. Until then, he said, he’d stay out there, somewhere in the ocean.
— Tony Andre1396

Ts’ii deji days — the great leaders and travellers: Diniizhok the medicine person

Diniizhok was an important leader, respected for his willingness to help other people—not only his own people, but those from up the river, as well. He was a medicine person who was able to travel on the land faster than humanly possible. This enabled him to help people who otherwise might have been in great difficulties. “He always travelled to where there was good to be done,” Tony Andre explains, “that’s the kind of man he was.” 1395

Diniizhok’s medicine power
Diniizhok’s travel medicine was edreechi’, the sinew from the forearm of a caribou or moose. When he was going to travel, Diniizhok would put the sinew on top of the fire. The sinew would curl up and shrink from the heat. As the sinew shrank and came together, so stops along Diniizhok’s trails moved closer together as well. Distances could now be covered in a very short time that otherwise would have required several days’ travel. Once Diniizhok reached his destination, the sinew cooled off, uncurled, and regained its original shape, and so did the land.
“He put it on top the fire. Pretty soon that sinew came together, and with that the Earth came together,” Tony Andre explains.\textsuperscript{15}

**The fastest hunter**

The people who went on a rabbit hunt with Diniizhok one day were able to see for themselves just how fast Diniizhok was able to travel and hunt. He moved ahead of everybody else so quickly that by the time the other hunters returned with their rabbits, he had already skinned and prepared his rabbits, made a fire, and cooked the meat. All the meat was ready to be eaten.

\textit{Diniizhok would jump ahead of all the people and just kind of knock down the rabbits, he was just able to club them over the head. That way he gathered a big sack of rabbits. He also passed these two wives who had rabbits. He collected their rabbits and put them in his sack and he just continued to club rabbits along the way. He then just put rabbits inside his belt by their tails, so that he was laden down with rabbits.}

\textit{Then he went across a lake and cut some dry wood to make a big fire. There was only an old lady there. She thought that she’d better be careful, because, when Diniizhok used his medicine power, he was very dangerous.}

\textit{And then he skinned all those rabbits, put them on sticks and roasted them by the fire. By the time those two young men and the other people came along, he had roasted meat for them. The hind quarters he gave to the young men and the body parts to the old men.}

\textquotesingle{Hyacinthe Andre\textsuperscript{46}}

**Rescue mission in the Fort Yukon area**

On one occasion, Diniizhok used his medicine power to save his mother and younger brothers who were visiting a camp in the Fort Yukon area. Through his dreams, Diniizhok received a warning that the people living in this camp planned to kill his mother and brothers. Diniizhok used his medicine to reach the camp quickly, and help as best he could. When he arrived he immediately began to search for his mother and brothers.

\textit{While he slept at night, they say his younger brother would be killed, at a place called Ni’i’jlee t’il’yet, way over past Dawson, and he found this out in his sleep. He found out in his sleep. He woke suddenly, early the next morning. He woke suddenly, and his wife was really busy alongside him in all that he did.}

\textit{After he woke up, he said, ‘Give me that dried moose leg sinew that is around here. She felt around and threw him sinew this long. She gave it to him. He threw it into the open fire place in front of them. It went like this [two hands motioning a shrinking]. And then he left. He made the land shrink so it was as close as between here and Six Miles.}

\textit{That country was far away. It is maybe two, three, four hundred miles away. He did this [hands coming together] to all that land far away. And then, he arrived right there. As he arrived, many people were living over there, and right there,}
there was a small house. From inside that small round house, someone was crying, saying, ‘May my children live.’ And he went towards there, there was his mother. He threw the door flap up. Right there he was, the one who used to be her oldest child.

— Hyacinthe Andre

His mother told him how the people were planning to kill his brothers. They would ask them to play the Bouncing Game, akài’, and let them fall to their death as they were jumping on the blanket. To prevent this, Dinïizhok himself jumped onto the blanket in place of his brothers.

Dinïizhok had a bone sticking right out from his elbow [the bone was sewn to his coat]. There were also bones sticking out from the front of his snowshoes. … So, from outside the group of people, he jumped onto that blanket. Nobody else could jump onto the blanket with their snowshoes on, as he did. He shot way up in the air, about 20, 30 feet. When he jumped up and down, all those bones sticking out from his snowshoe tail just scratched them, scratched them all over their faces. So they all just took off. He jumped back into the snow there and took off his snowshoe. He grabbed that blanket toss and tore it right off the trees. For the blanket toss they used a rope about that thick—maybe four or five strands—made out of moose skin, braided moose skin.

— Tony Andre

This is how Dinïizhok saved his brothers’ lives. Then his thoughts turned to revenge. He knew that wrestling matches were one of the athletic games that were often organized when the people gathered in their winter camps. He would use this game to kill one of the group’s young men—just as those people had planned to use a game to kill his mother and brothers.

Meanwhile he said to some children that were passing by, ‘Let’s wrestle.’ He said this to the children, and the children wrestled with him. Eventually, he went through the big boys, and finally, also the men. One boy who was a really proud person stood up and stepped forward. He went towards him. He said to him, ‘My relative, my relative, I have arrived here from far away, and I am very tired.’ He told him that.

Meanwhile he was walking around there with that boy. He was doing this [feeling around with one foot] on top of the ground for any round spot of hard earth that was sticking out from the ground. Finally, he found some round earth like that sticking out. And really, that young man was thrown on the round earth, on top of the round earth sticking out. That man died right there. Dinïizhok killed him.

An old woman was coming from way over here, a big old woman with whom he walked away, over there. As she walked, she said, ‘What kind of person is this that killed my child?’ He went straight beside her and jabbed her—a straight bone was also sticking out back this way, from the elbow. He did this to her [sharp jab with elbow]. She fell right there. He said, ‘Do you mean Dinïizhok?’ That was that.

— Hyacinthe Andre
After he had punished the people for attempting to kill his brothers and his mother, Dinìizhok took away many of their furs and the food they had put in for the winter. Then he left with his mother and brothers.

*He had killed an old woman, and he had killed her child. As he walked among them and around the camp, there was a lot of dried meat. He took all the meat that was good. They were really afraid of him. He was right there, acting in a very dangerous way—he had even torn up a thick rope, and after that he had killed two men.*

*So he took a lot of meat. And sometimes leather, too. If he saw caribou skin, already tanned leather which would be winter clothing, he took that also. They could not do anything to him. They were really afraid of him.*

*And then he went back over that way. His two brothers had already pulled the mother back in a sleigh. He went after them with the meat he took. He arrived back in the country around here with them.*

— Hyacinthe Andre

### Helping the people from up the river

Diniizhok was also able to help the Great Bear Lake people during a time of starvation. Using his travel medicine, he was able to reach their camp in time and let them know where help was to be found.

*One night, Diniizhok dreamed again. The Slavey up around Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, Fort Smith, all around there, they were all starving. He dreamed about it. So he asked two boys to go with him to that area to break trail. Whoever was hungry up there could come to Siveezhoo on that trail. So he used edreechi' again. He cut across country, got close to those people and told them, 'Just follow me, just follow my trail. When you get to the end, to my camp, you’ll get fish, you’ll get meat, you’ll get everything. There will be nothing to wish for.'*

*So that’s what they did all the way upriver right to Fort Smith. It was only a one-day round trip for Diniizhok. He came back to Siveezhoo, and waited. He said, ‘Build ground houses for the people.’ All of a sudden, the people came moving in, and he had a place for them already. Oh, that Diniizhok, he had about fifty, sixty men working for him. He got lots of fish. Pretty soon, everybody came and they got*
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fish and caribou meat. They ate so well, they became strong enough to go back to their country, so before spring they all took off.

They really thanked Dinìizhok, though. They had a big dance. They started dancing and when they had finished dancing, they went home.

— Tony Andre

The death of Dinìizhok

Diniizhok went on to lead a long life as the helpful leader of his people, but his old enemies caught up with him in the end. Two young warriors who had been sent ahead met him on a high cliff in the Rock River area on the McPherson side. The two warriors sat down beside Dinizhok when he suddenly grabbed them—one with his left hand, one with his right—and hurled himself and the two young men down from the cliff. Clutching the bodies of the two warriors as shields, Dinizhok was able to lessen the impact of his own fall, but at the last moment he hit a sharp rock sticking out from the ground. His stomach was cut open and he began to bleed heavily, but he was still strong enough to club and kill the two young warriors.43

It may be that Dinizhok threw himself down that cliff just to kill himself,56 but when his enemies reached him, he asked them to say that he had frozen to death, and not that they had killed him. And so Dinizhok died. It is said that his blood turned into the ochre, tsaih, that can be found near Rock River.56

Ts’ii deį́ days and after: Fights and friendly meetings with other groups

The age of the great travellers and leaders was followed by a time when fights with the Eskimo occurred more frequently. During Diniizhok’s and Atachuuk’aii’s days, most battles were fought against aachin, the ‘people from up the river.’ This fact helps to distinguish the time of Atachuuk’aii and Diniiizhok from these later days of ts’ii deį́ times: “In Atachuuk’aii’s days, there was no fighting between Gwich’in and Eskimo, only with the Slavey,” Gabe Andre explains.43:17

Therefore, stories dealing with this later time in the history of the land mention friendly and hostile meetings with the Eskimo much more often. Some often told stories describe the adventures of the woman Ahts’an veh who was captured and abducted by the Eskimo, and of the man called ‘Indian Headband.’

Ahts’an veh

The woman Ahts'an veh, ‘Grey Wings,’ was captured by a group of Eskimo. She was forced to live with this group, and it was only several years later that she was able to escape from her captors and return to her parents’ camp at Chii chyaa
Soon after her capture, Ahts’an veh was married to two Eskimo men who one day brought back the bodies of enemies they had killed during a raid. These turned out to be Ahts’an veh’s brothers. She was barely able to hide her grief, but she finally decided to attempt an escape from her captors. She developed a well thought-out escape plan.

She told them, ‘When my people make war and they win, they always make a big sports event. If you win a war, now you have to celebrate that. If you do celebrate that means you will have good luck all the time. Now we are going to do all kinds of sports and keep it up all day and all night and then we will have a big dance.’ Now she kept this up for two nights and two days. Nobody was allowed to sleep, not even the children.

The people were really tired but still she did not give up. The final sports event they had was a kayak race. So all the Eskimos took their kayaks and they had to go so far in the race. Some kayaks were very easy to paddle and were fast. (They had to be because they were used for hunting seals and whales.) She was standing on the bank watching the men and she watched to see which was the lightest and fastest kayak. She kept an eye on the kayaks until the end of the race.

— Eliza Andre

Ahts’an veh’s escape

The events of the day had tired the Eskimo out and everybody was soon fast asleep. Ahts’an veh was able to kill her two husbands in their sleep. She then damaged all the kayaks except one that she planned to use for her escape. Although this would delay the Eskimo for some time, she knew that steady paddling alone would not be enough.

She ran to the line of kayaks and cut holes into all of the kayaks except the one she was going to use. After she finished, she took off with this fast kayak. She paddled for quite a while, spotted a dead tree, pulled up her kayak and hid in the bushes waiting to see if the warriors would take after her. Sure enough, not very long after she landed, the kayaks started to come. They knew there was one kayak missing along with her. She sat there and put one twig aside for every kayak that passed until there were no more and then she waited for their return.

After a long time, they started to come back and again she started piling the same twigs until there were only two left. These she nearly left and went but changed her mind every time. After a long while, sure enough, there were the last two kayaks on their way back. Even then she stayed there for a while before taking off again. When she got to the head of that river, she left the kayak and continued her flight on foot.

It was on this flight that she ran into an army of Eskimo warriors resting and eating berries. Being a smart woman, she tore a piece of her clothing and wrapped it around a bunch of dried stakes. This made it look like another man with arrows. No one took any notice of her. She pretended eating berries until she got far
enough away to run. This she did. Once again she was on her way, this time she never stopped until she got to her parents’ camp.
— Edward Nazon

Return to the Eskimo camp

Ahts’an veh finally reached her parents’ camp at the mouth of Chii chya tshik. It was not easy to convince her family after all these years that she had come home with good intentions, but the people finally believed her and accepted her back into the camp. In time, she was married. During the subsequent year, she and her husband led a group of warriors back to the coast. They raided the Eskimo camp. Not a single enemy escaped alive.

About a year from that time, she told her husbands, ‘We will go now. I know exactly where the Eskimos are staying and we will get my son back.’ She did not go only with her husbands, but there were many other warriors with them. When they got back to the coast, these Eskimos were still in the same place where she had made her escape.

Then she looked for her son, and this is hard to believe, she knew how old her son was, here they had hung her little boy after she had made her escape. Before her warriors were going to make an attack, she told the people you hold back while I go and see my father-in-law (her father-in-law was an Eskimo), and at this time she could talk in Eskimo.

She came to his camp and told him, ‘I was looking for my people but I cannot find them so I have come back to you.’ When he heard her voice, he took a knife and started sharpening the knife and told her, ‘Come into the house, you are still welcome.’ But when she had left the warriors, she had told them, ‘Do not do anything. Just watch me and then you can attack.’ Because she was such a smart woman they listened to her. So her father-in-law invited her into the tent and when she walked into the tent she killed everybody in the tent. As soon as the warriors saw her running out of the tent, they made their attack and the Indian people achieved a great victory over the Eskimos. From there, they went back to where her dad was and this is the end of the story.

— Eliza Andre

‘Indian Headband’

The events mentioned in this story occurred at a time when Eskimo and Gwichya Gwich’in were sometimes at war, but friendly meetings occurred even during those dangerous days, as the following story shows.

An old man had lost his two daughters. He felt so sad about this that he lost his will to live. Deciding to end his life, he moved into the Delta, thinking that the Eskimo would surely find and kill him right away:

He felt so bad about his daughters that he went to the coast. At that time, the Indians and Eskimos did not get along well. He figured, why should he live any longer

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after his daughters were gone. This is why he went to the coast, to get killed by the Eskimos. It happened that the old man told this story to the Eskimos and they pitied him and took him in to keep him as if he was one of them. He stayed with them for about two years. He was a good hunter although he was old, and most of the time he killed game for the people. In the end, he was well liked by the Eskimos.

— Pascal Baptiste

Some time later, the Eskimo captured two young men. It turned out that they belonged to the old man’s camp. Because the Eskimo respected him, he was able to save the young men’s lives. They, too, joined the camp and lived with the Eskimo. Not all of the meetings between Eskimo and Gwichya Gwich’in during those days led to fights.

One day, it happened that two brothers-in-law were hunting moose. The moose ran off and headed for the coast. In those days, people were always on the alert in case of war. It happened that the Eskimos saw the two boys coming towards their camp. They all went out and captured the two boys … By this time, there was great excitement in the camp … So the old man who, as we said at the beginning of our story, was named ‘Man with a Headband,’ took a knife and went to the igloo where the boys were by this time. There were a lot of people outside waiting to kill these boys. The two heard all the noise outside and said to one another, ‘Well, I guess this is it.’ But the old man turned to the people at the door of the igloo and made a short speech. He told the people, ‘You have treated me nice, you kept me good, and with what little I had, I tried to do my share. It so happens that these two Indians are my own boys and they are good hunters and I’m sure they will follow my example. I beg you people, don’t hurt them.’ When the people heard the old man’s speech, they all clapped their hands and said, ‘We will listen to you.’ In time, they were given wives and lived with the people.

— Pascal Baptiste

Places where Gwichya Gwich’in and Eskimo met

There are other stories that describe meetings with the Eskimo that threatened to lead to, or actually resulted in, fights. These stories often describe an event that took place at a certain site. Several places exist where such meetings occurred, and through the story, the site’s name is explained. Some of these events occurred during ts’ii dejį days, others occurred during more recent times.

Guudee diitr’iniizhit chi’

Guudee diitr’iniizhit chi’—‘(a person was) chased down the hill’—is a high, steep hill located on Nagwichoonjik some six miles upstream from the community. It was here that two Gwichya Gwich’in hunters were chased downhill by a group of Eskimo. One of the two was killed, but the other escaped with the help of medicine power. He ran down the hill, threw himself into the river, and—changing into a fish—swam away underwater. He came up again at Nagle Creek, but the Eskimo
had jumped into their boat and followed him. He dove again and came back up at Pierre’s Creek. The Eskimo still did not abandon the pursuit, but the hunter changed back into human form and escaped into the bush.⁴²

**Njoh—the lobstick at Chi chyah tshik**

According to Annie Norbert, a lobstick, njoh, was a tree used to mark an important site such as a good fishing spot or berry patch. In the Delta, lobsticks used to stand everywhere, “there used to be lots of these markers,” Hyacinthe Andre remembers, “they used to be everywhere where there was good fishing spot.”⁵²

For a lobstick, a tall tree that stood apart from other trees was selected. A young man would climb up the tree and cut off all the branches near the bottom, leaving two branches; he then climbed up further and cut some more branches, just leaving the top branches.⁵²

On one occasion, an Eskimo used a lobstick standing at a location downstream from Chi chyaa tshik, to spy on a Gwichya Gwich’in camp. The Eskimo wanted to find out whether it would be safe to attack this camp. “He was sneaking around, watching the people,” Hyacinthe Andre explains.⁵² The lobstick had bent over, and the Eskimo, sneaking up behind it and hidden from view, cut off some of the branches at the top to get a better view of the camp. Hyacinthe Andre saw the cuttings made by the Eskimo before the lobstick was pushed into the river during a landslide that occurred after a forest fire had loosened up the ground.⁵²
In 1937, Pierre Benoit spoke to old Baazil’s wife Naatchuu, who was then in her nineties. She told him about the last battle between the Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo. It occurred at Chii chyaa tshik when she was a very young girl. During the month of September, when it was getting dark, the Eskimo had used a njoh near Pierre’s Creek as a lookout to see how many people were camped there. Pierre Benoit remembers seeing a njoh lying on the ground near Pierre’s Creek in 1937. This may well have been the same lobstick seen by Hyacinthe Andre. Here is what Naatchuu told Pierre Benoit:

"I have seen that tree … I know where they cut some of the brush with a knife. The Eskimo climbed up there, and then he looked at the people staying across Pierre’s Creek—a lot of people, you know, they had two big smokehouses … there was quite a bunch of them there. From there the Eskimo watched them. And when they got a chance, well, they just went across. It was dark at night, but most of the Eskimo were killed. That’s the last fight they ever had."

— Naatchuu, in Pierre Benoit’s words

**Tr’iinjoo kak gijaataii**

Because encounters with the Eskimo during those days sometimes led to fights, safety concerns could determine which trail the families would follow when they travelled towards the Mackenzie River from Vàdzaih van or Khaii luk. The men often followed the trail from Fishing Bear Lake, Shoh k’adh, to Chidalt’aii, whereas the women—to prevent a surprise attack by the Eskimo—travelled by themselves, following their own trail from Shoh k’adh to the Mackenzie River. This trail was called Tr’iinjoo kat gijaat’aii, ‘the women’s road to Chidalt’aii.’ The distance between the trail head on the Mackenzie River and Guudee diitr’iniizhit chi’ was no greater than two miles. At Guudee diitr’iniizhit chi’, as was mentioned above, a hostile encounter between the Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo once led to the death of a Gwichya Gwich’in hunter. Obviously, the concern for the women’s safety, who were travelling close to such a dangerous site, may have been well justified. Tr’iinjoo kat gijaat’aii reached the river atop a rocky hill which provided a good view of the river bank down below; this made a surprise attack less likely.

**Ge’atat dilee**

The name Ge’atat dilee refers to a section of the Kugaluk River where the river broadens out into a lake. This is a good spot for the fall fishery, when there is a big whitefish run. Because this location was so far north, the women would be left on an island in the lake. The island was distant enough to be out of range of the arrows that the Eskimo might shoot across during one of their attacks.

All of these names refer to sites where fights with the Eskimo occurred, or were likely to occur. However, not all of the meetings led to hostilities. Some stories describe friendly gatherings that were held even during those days when fights
were just as likely to occur. The old hostilities gradually came to an end altogether after the arrival of the fur traders, when the Eskimo and the Gwichya Gwich’in became more involved in the fur trade. This change occurred after the end of ts’ii dejį days. It is described in Chapter 14 beginning on page 179.

**Diighe’tr’aajil**

Although it resulted in the death of a man, the meeting that occurred at this site also was somewhat friendlier than those mentioned above. It was at Diighe’tr’aajil (‘they took everything from him’) that a Gwichya Gwich’in once gambled and lost everything he owned to an Eskimo. It was often the custom in the old days that people who met on the trail would gamble right away.

A story told by Gabe Andre describes the kinds of bets people made, but it is not certain that this meeting also occurred at Diighe’tr’aajil: A Gwichya Gwich’in and an Eskimo once met. They ate some loche together, then they started gambling. The Gwichya Gwich’in bet that he could eat the loche bones (loche bones all point in the same direction). The Eskimo in return bet that he would be able to eat hot coals from their fire. The Gwichya Gwich’in man ate the bones and was none the worse off for it, but when the Eskimo ate the hot coals, he soon died—and lost the bet.42

**Lèth kak van tsal**

Lèth kak van tsal is also called ‘Ghost Lake,’ because the Gwichya Gwich’in threw the bodies of Eskimo that had been killed during a fight at the Flats, into this lake.148 It is located just below the community of Tsiigehtshik.
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<td>Why Raven’s coat is black—why Loon’s head has a grey patch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raven and Loon decided to make each other more fancy. Raven used his own excrement (which is a whitish colour) to paint Loon white. Loon used ashes from a fire to paint Raven black, but then jumped into a nearby lake. Raven saw this and threw a ball made from the black ashes, but the ball only hit the back of Loon’s head. Loon has had a grey patch in that spot ever since. Raven has been black since that day.</td>
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<td>Why Raven’s beak is slightly crooked—why the Grebes are brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raven tricked the grebes into jumping through a fire. They singed their hair which turned brown. The angry Grebes realized that they had been fooled. They captured Raven and took his beak away. Raven played yet another trick on the Grebes and managed to get his beak back, but in his haste to escape, he put the beak back into its place slightly crooked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Raven has feet with three toes</td>
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<tr>
<td>After Atachuukajj killed Raven, the people became invisible to him. He needed Raven’s help to be able to see them again. When Atachuukajj put Raven back together, he got even. He threw away two of Raven’s toes. Raven has had feet with three toes instead of four, ever since.</td>
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<td>Why Red Fox walks with a slight limp</td>
<td>11, 343</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grizzly Bear took Red Fox’ right forearm away, and kept it in his camp at Chii t’iet. Raven visited Grizzly Bear at his camp and stole the forearm. He gave it back to Red Fox, but he did not put it back in place quite right. Red Fox has run with a slight limp ever since that day.</td>
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<td>Why Weasel’s tail is black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weasel’s tail was white until the day he met Atachuukajj. Atachuukajj hit Weasel’s tail with a piece of black coal. This coloured the tail black.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Mink’s fur is black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mink’s fur was white until the day when he encountered Atachuukajj. Atachuukajj rubbed the white fur with a piece of coal until the fur turned black.</td>
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| Ts’ii dejj days: When animals and people were equal                                  |
| The earliest days of the land—how animals got to be the way they are now |
| Why the sun is in the sky as we see it today                                        | 11, 350      |
| Raven stole the sun from Bear and brought the daylight back to the people.          |              |
| The hollows at Tsiigehtshik, Deetrin’ ehchij k’yit                                | 9, 348       |
| The hollows at ’Tsigehtshik, Deetrin’ ehchij k’yit, were Raven’s camp and bed during his adventure with the Grebes. |              |
| ‘Tseenjoo kan, ‘Tseenjoo’s Hill’                                                  | 19, 367      |
| After a long war with the Slavey leader Naagaj tsal, Atachuukajj asked the man Tseenjoo to build a cave big enough for the people to hide in. Tseenjoo built this cave in the area east of Trout Lake. The hill that Tseenjoo hollowed out to build the cave can still be seen. The earth that had to be removed to build the cave forms an island in a near-by lake. |              |

Why Raven’s coat is black—why Loon’s head has a grey patch 37
### Ts’ii dejj people:
*How people and the things they use got to be the way they are now*

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<td>A long time ago, a man climbing up into the mountains turned round and looked back towards the river. He saw that the place where Tsiigehnjik and Nagwichoonjik come together, is really flat. He called the people living there, Gwichya Gwich’in, ‘people who live in a flat area.’</td>
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<td><strong>Origin of people’s jealousy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Travelling along the river, Atachuukaij visited a woman, and drank water from her husband’s cup. The husband did not like this and started a fight with his wife. This was the first time that jealousy occurred between two people.</td>
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<td><strong>Why people use both hands to scoop up water</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Atachuukaij tricked the giant Chii choo out of some good fat. The fat floated down a river. Atachuukaij reached into the water, and scooped up water and the fat with both hands. People have scooped up water in this way ever since.</td>
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<td><strong>Why canoes sometimes leak</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A crazy old man took apart a canoe that Atachuukaij had built for himself by dream power. Atachuukaij put the canoe back together, but it was not quite as well-built as before. Canoes have leaked ever since then.</td>
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### Ts’ii dejj days and after
*The earliest days of the land—Chijuudiee, ‘Giant’ spirit animals*

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A giant hairy worm, or ‘snake,’ came out of the ocean and travelled up Nagwichoonjik and into the Peel River. He wanted to go up into the mountains, so he swallowed big rocks as he moved along. Thus the Snake River was created. The Gyuu Dazhoo still lives in the area, but nobody is quite sure whether it lives in the mountains near the headwater of the Snake River, or in a lake beside the river.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nehtruh tshi’ — A Wolverine Inside a Rock</strong></td>
<td>13, 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is the name of an area just downstream from Martin Zheh on the bank of Tsiigehnjik, which is very distinct from its surroundings. The land here looks as if it has almost been ripped apart. It is said that this is the work of a giant Wolverine who came out of a nearby lake. He broke up the hills and big boulders while heading underground for Tsiigehnjik. It is likely that this wolverine died some time ago.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Giant Caribou in Vådzaih van</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Giant Caribou is said to have lived in the area around Vådzaih van for some time. Because it lived there, the caribou herds moved into that area, and, for a time, this was a good area to hunt caribou. When the Giant Caribou died, the caribou herds no longer came.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Giant Beaver</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant Beaver are said to have lived in several places, for example at Chii ghò t’ajj, and in the Gull River area. Even as recently as perhaps 30 or 40 years ago, people would still see traces of such beavers, or even the Giant Beaver himself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A Giant Bluefish in Khaii luk

A Giant Bluefish lives on the east side of Khaii luk. He is so big that, when he floats to the surface, it is impossible to see a big hill behind the lake. It is said that the Giant Bluefish still lives there, and that he will stay there until the end of the world. The giant fish often swims around the lake in circles, following the side of the lake. When this occurs in winter, the ice gets broken up and is piled up into a great ridge.

### Unknown Chijuudiee

Nobody knows what these giants looked like or who they were, but they left tracks so big or unusual that they could not have been made by a normal-sized being. One such being once came out of a little lake south-west of In-and-Out Lake. When it came out it made a trench six feet wide; the trench was cut right through the trees. Then there is the shaking of the ground that several people have noticed in the Beaver Lake area. Sometimes the shaking is accompanied by a growling sound that comes from the lake. Because of this, some people usually avoid this lake.

### Nanaa’ih

These were large ‘bushmen’ who lived out in the bush by themselves. Nobody knew for sure whether they were really human. Especially during summer time, they would try to sneak into a camp and steal women and children.

### The Hungry Giant

A medicine person who was hungry once ate two big bull moose and drank a whole pail of grease, but he was still hungry. Then he went home and ate another half of a moose that he had already prepared and roasted at home. It turned out that the medicine person ate all this food just to feed a hungry giant. The only food that the man ate for himself was the moose roast that he had prepared at home. This explains why he was still hungry, even after having eaten such an enormous meal.

### Ts’ii dejj days: The times of the great leaders and travellers

#### Atachuukajj—Travelling along the Mackenzie River

- **Atachuukajj leaves his home**
  Atachuukajj left his family and began to travel. One story about this event states that Atachuukajj may have left his home because he accidentally killed his younger brother while practicing with the bow and arrow.

- **Atachuukajj and Chii choo**
  Chii choo chased Atachuukajj from the Fort Yukon area across the land, and then up the Mackenzie River. Atachuukajj starved him to death by asking his animals to steal Chii choo’s food.

- **Creating a stream**
  While being pursued by Chii choo, Atachuukajj stepped out of his canoe to urinate. This created a stream which still flows today.

- **Why people scoop up water using both hands**
  A rat took some fat away from Chii choo. When the rat dropped the fat, it fell into a stream. The fat floated by Atachuukajj who bent over and scooped up the fat using both his hands. People have scooped up water in this way ever since.
### Travelling into the country of the people from up the river

After the death of Chii choo, Atachuukaii travelled into the land of the Sahtu Dene. He became known among the Sahtu Dene as Yamòria. He is said to have killed the giant beavers at Fort Norman. The canoe that he used while being chased by Chii choo can still be seen as a rock in the Mackenzie River near the Ramparts. The place he once sat on when resting during the chase by Chii choo can still be seen on the land. A chain of six lakes was formed when the giant stepped across the land in the Fort Good Hope area.

### Ts’ii deij days: The times of the great leaders and travellers

#### Kwan ehdan’s war with the Slavey leader Naagaij tsal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lete’tr’aandyaa</td>
<td>19, 331, 369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atachuukaii—who later became known as Kwan ehdan—and Naagaij tsal fought several battles over the woman Lete’tr’aandyaa. Depending on who had won the last fight, she would live with either Naagaij tsal or Atachuukaii.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tseenjoo kan — building Tseenjoo’s hill</td>
<td>19, 290, 368,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the fights between Atachuukaij and Naagaij tsal, the man Tseenjoo built a cave by hollowing out a hill. To avoid further fighting with Naagaij tsal, Atachuukaij and his people hid in the cave for one year. The hill is still visible. The earth removed from the hill forms an island.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kwan ehdan — Atachuukaij changes his name</td>
<td>367, 331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group led by Atachuukaij was destroyed during a surprise attack by Naagaij tsal; Atachuukaij alone escaped. After surviving a winter by himself and without fire, Atachuukaij changed his name to Kwan ehdan (‘Without Fire’).</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chitaij</td>
<td>25, 345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A young orphan boy named Chitaij accidentally killed Naagaij tsal. He fired an arrow into the air that hit the thin shoulder straps of Naagaij tsal’s battle jacket, killing Naagaij tsal instantly. The wars finally came to an end.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### The life of Dinizi Zhok

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A fast hunter and traveller</td>
<td>27, 346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinizi Zhok was able to move and to hunt faster than anybody else because of his travel medicine. On one occasion, he had already skinned, prepared and cooked many rabbits before the other hunters even made it back to camp.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A rescue mission in the Fort Yukon area</td>
<td>27, 346, 362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using his travel medicine, Dinizi Zhok travelled to Fort Yukon faster than humanly possible. He rescued his mother and younger brothers from a camp of hostile people who planned to kill them while playing the Bouncing Game, akaii’. They intended to throw the brothers off the blanket so that they would fall to their death.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starvation among the up-the-river people</td>
<td>29, 364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through his dream power, Dinizi Zhok learned that the people from up the river were starving. He used his travel medicine to reach one of their camps and let them know where they could find help. All the people moved to Dinizi Zhok’s camp and were saved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Stories told by Gwichya Gwich’in elders about the history of the land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tsaih — The death of Dinìizhok</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When two young warriors caught up with him, Dinìizhok threw himself and them down a cliff; it may have been that Dinìizhok was trying to kill himself. Although he survived the fall, he was killed by the main group of enemies when they caught up with him. Dinìizhok asked them to say that he had frozen to death, not that they had killed him. It is said that Dinìizhok’s blood changed into the red ochre, tsaih, that can be found at the site where Dinìizhok died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ts’ii dejį days and after: Friendly and hostile encounters with other groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahts’an veh — captured by the Eskimo</td>
<td>30, 339, 353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The woman Ahts’an veh was captured by a group of Eskimo. Using a clever escape plan, she was able to flee from the Eskimo camp and return to her family’s camp at Pierre’s Creek. The Gwichya Gwich’in later returned to the coast and destroyed the camp of the Eskimo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Indian Headband’ — rescued by the Eskimo</td>
<td>32, 372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An old Gwichya Gwich’in man was rescued by the Eskimo. He joined their camp and lived with them. Later he saved the lives of his two young sons who were captured by the Eskimo living in this camp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diighe’traajil—a gambling match between Gwich’in and Eskimo</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gambling match between an Eskimo and a Gwichya Gwich’in may have occurred at this site. The Eskimo lost his life in the course of this match.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tr’iinjoo kat gijąatajį — the women’s trail to Chidaltajį</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When returning from Vàdzaih van or Khaii Luk, the women used this trail in order to be safe from a surprise attack by the Eskimo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guudee diitr’inįiizhįt chi’ — how two men were chased down a hill</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hostile encounter between two Gwichya Gwich’in hunters and a group of Eskimo occurred here. One of the two hunters managed to escape by using his medicine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njoh — the hide-out behind the lobstick</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Eskimo planned an attack on a Gwichya Gwich’in camp and hid behind a lobstick to spy on the camp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ge’atat dilee — seeking shelter on an island</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ge’atat dilee is a section of the Kugaluk River as wide as a lake. This is a good site for the fall fishing, when there is a big whitefish run. Because this location was so far north, the women would be left on an island in the lake. The island was distant enough to be out of range of arrows that might be fired across during an attack by the Eskimo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van tsal</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bodies of Eskimo warriors that were killed during a battle on the Flats were thrown into this lake. That is why it is also known as ‘Ghost Lake.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Whitehead’ — stealing women</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bad man stole other men’s wives, and was killed for this by one of the husbands. This event led to warfare between the two camps.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tsaih — The death of Dinìizhok 41
# Stories told by Gwichya Gwich’in elders about the history of the land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stories of life on the land</strong></td>
<td>45 - 176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The traditional way of life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the old days, the people made a living and survived on the land by travelling on the land. Depending on the region of the traditional land use area where they lived, the families would rely more on caribou or on fish, and this influenced the ways in which they made a living. The traditional way of life is described in many stories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When things began to change</strong></td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daji dhakhajj changes the course of Gwichya Gwich’in history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daji dhakhaji visited a group of people living in cave. When he was about to leave, the people advised him to leave not by the door he had entered by, but through another door. Daji dhakhaji did not follow the people’s advice. His decision may have changed the course of Gwichya Gwich’in history. It almost seems that this story predicted the great changes that were to occur after the arrival of explorers and fur traders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cony Bay — Alexander Mackenzie</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwich’in families living in a summer fish camp at Cony Bay welcomed the traveller Alexander Mackenzie here in the summer of 1789. Mackenzie was on his way to the Beaufort Sea, travelling for the Northwest Company. This was the first encounter between Gwichya Gwich’in and Europeans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Fort Good Hope, the trading post at the mouth of the Bluefish River.</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission stations at Teetshik goghaa and Arctic Red River</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oblate father Jean Séguin built the first mission station at either this site or the mouth of the Arctic Red River in 1869. This was only the second structure built by outsiders anywhere on Gwichya Gwich’in lands. The mission built at Tsiigehtshik in 1895-96 was the first building of what was to become the community of Tsiigehtshik (called ‘Arctic Red River’ until 1994).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hudson’s Bay store</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A supply post built at the confluence of Tsigehnjik and Nagwichoonjik was the third building built in what was to become Arctic Red River. This was the second time that the Hudson’s Bay Company built a trading post on Gwichya Gwich’in lands.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The RCMP post</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Canadian Mounted Police built a station at Arctic Red River in 1926. It remained open for 50 years, and was closed in 1976.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mission school at Fort Providence</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the 1920s and even earlier, children were sent to the mission school at Fort Providence. It was operated by the Order of the Grey Nuns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaty 11 — The first Chief</td>
<td>236, 376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaty 11 was signed in the summer 1921, because the government of Canada wanted to gain control over the lands in the Mackenzie Valley after the oil find at Norman Wells. The government asked the Gwichya Gwich’in to select a Chief who would sign the treaty on behalf of all Gwichya Gwich’in. The families present at the Flats selected Paul Niditchie to be Chief.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Stories told by Gwichya Gwich’in elders about the history of the land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Dene Nation</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A political organization founded as the <em>Indian Brotherhood of the NWT</em> in 1970 to fight for the inherent political rights of the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley. The Brotherhood issued the <em>Dene Declaration</em> in 1975, and changed its name to <em>Dene Nation</em>. The Chipewyan, the Slavey, the Dogrib, the Sahtu Dene, and the Gwich’in were represented in the Dene Nation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (later the Gwich’in Tribal Council) was established in 1982 to represent the Gwich’in and Métis in the Mackenzie Delta region.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land Claims Settlement Agreement</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In April of 1992, a land claims settlement agreement was signed by the Gwich’in Tribal Council, and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Stories for the future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the story is about</th>
<th>Told on page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Giant Bluefish of Khaii luk</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Giant Bluefish has lived in Khaii luk probably since ts’ii d’eii days. He will stay there until the end of the world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atachuuk’aij’s return before the end of the world</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atachuuk’aiji is still travelling beyond the boundaries of the known world. It is said that the world will not come to an end before his return.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approximate regional territories of the northern Athapaskan peoples
The people whose history reaches back into these days long past are the Gwichya Gwich’in. They are one of several groups belonging to a distinctive Aboriginal culture now known by the general name Gwich’in. The Gwich’in are one of the most northerly Aboriginal cultures on the American continent—only the Eskimo live north of the Gwich’in. Their traditional lands extend across an international boundary (between Canada and Alaska), and two Canadian territories (the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory).

The name, Gwich’in, is used by a people who all speak the same language, namely, ‘Gwich’in,’ and who share the same traditional way of life. But this is not to say that the Gwich’in form a ‘tribe.’ A tribe is said to consist of people who speak the same language, who share the same customs, and who follow leaders or chiefs who make decisions on behalf of the whole group, or tribe. A shared language and traditional way of life unites the Gwich’in, but in the old days, their leaders were not responsible for all of the Gwich’in, as the leaders of a tribe would have been. In those days, the advice of leaders and elders applied to smaller groups, ones that inhabited a smaller region of the shared traditional lands—or perhaps even only to a number of families within such a regional group (see page 47). Anthropologists refer to such groups of families as ‘bands.’

Many names

Different names have at one time or another been applied to the Gwich’in, and to the group of northern Aboriginal cultures to which they belong. Some of these are the real names used by the people themselves. Others have been proposed by explorers, fur traders or anthropologists. Not all of these more recent names are used by the Gwich’in themselves, but others still apply them now and then.
The Athapaskan peoples

The homeland of the Gwich’in is located in the subarctic boreal forest, a broad expanse of woodland stretching across most of northern Canada and Alaska. It is replaced by the temperate forest to the south, and by the treeless tundra to the north, beyond which lies the high Arctic. The northwestern part of this territory is inhabited by a distinctive group of Aboriginal cultures. These are sometimes referred to by the term ‘Athapaskan’ or ‘Athabaskan’ (see the map on page 44).

All the Athapaskan peoples speak languages that belong to the same linguistic group. So widespread is this group of languages that even the Navajo and the western Apache of the south-western United States are included in it, although they are separated from the northern Athapaskan by Aboriginal peoples speaking languages that belong to other linguistic families. The Navajo, western Apache and other Athapaskan groups in the United States belong to the *southern Athapas-kans*, whereas the groups living in the Canadian north and interior Alaska are referred to as *northern Athapaskan* people. The Aboriginal people of northern Canada rarely use the name ‘Athapaskan’ for themselves, but it is often used among the people on the Alaskan side, where the word ‘Athabaskan’ is also common.

From interior Alaska in the west to the shores of Hudson’s Bay in the east, the traditional homelands of the Athapaskan people extend over more than 3,000km. Although the groups are spread out over this vast area, they all share similar traditional life-styles: They maintain a harmonious relationship with the land, and they survive on the land by harvesting the resources that the land provides.

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**One people, many names**

**Gwich’in**: Common name now applied to all the groups of the Gwich’in taken together. It became popular during the land claims negotiations. In the Gwich’in language itself, this word can only be used in combination with a term describing a region or area where a person, or a group of people, live.

**Loucheux**: This name was introduced by fur traders and missionaries. It was applied to those regional groups, mainly on the Canadian side, who had contact with missionaries after the 1860s. This name is still used by some elders, and also by speakers of other Athapaskan languages.

**Dinjii Zhuh**: This is the traditional name used to refer to all of the Gwich’in taken together—without referring to the regions where the different groups lived.

**Dene**: This is a Slavey word used to refer to all the Aboriginal cultures of the Northwest Territories except the Inuit and Métis. Translating into English as, ‘the people,’ it was important during the recent political struggles.

**Athapaskan**: Name for the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer cultures of northern Canada south of Inuit territory. This name is taken from the Wood Cree language. It was introduced by anthropologists. It is rarely used by Gwich’in elders on the Canadian side, but it is more common among people on the Alaskan side.
The Gwich’in belong to the group of Athapaskan-speaking peoples as do neighbouring groups such as the Slavey, Mountain, Chipewyan, and Tutchone, to name only a few. The Inuvialuit, a regional group of the Inuit, are the northern neighbours of the Gwich’in. Their language and traditions differ greatly from that of the Athapaskan people. The elders’ name for the Inuit and Inuvialuit is ‘Eskimo.’ The elders do not use it to express disrespect, but it is the name they learned when they were young. For this reason, the name is used in this book as well.

The Dene

In the Northwest Territories, *Dene* (Slavey for, ‘the people’), is a term now often used to refer to the Aboriginal people of the Northwest Territories other than the Inuit and Métis. This name has become very important during the last twenty or thirty years, when the Aboriginal people of the Mackenzie Valley united and began to fight for their inherent Aboriginal rights, that is, their rights as the First Peoples of this country. This fight was organized by the *Dene Nation* (originally called the *Indian Brotherhood of the NWT*), a political organization uniting the Aboriginal peoples that live in the Mackenzie Valley region of the Northwest Territories. The Chipewyan, the Slavey, the Dogrib, the Sahtu Dene, and the Gwich’in were represented in the Dene Nation, and they decided to use the word Dene as a name for themselves during their political struggles. A disagreement occurred between the Dene Nation and the leaders of the Gwich’in in 1990. This has greatly reduced the importance of the Dene Nation among the Gwich’in, and Gwich’in political leaders no longer use the name Dene. Why the Gwich’in leaders decided to split from the Dene Nation is described in Chapter 17.

Although it is in a sense not wrong to say that the Gwich’in belong to the group of Athapaskan-speaking peoples as well as to the Dene, the Gwich’in do not often use these names. So, what then are the names that the people themselves use to explain who they are and where they belong? In order to understand these names, the regional groups and the names that the Gwich’in themselves use for these groups have to be described—even the names show how closely connected the people are to the land: The names identify a person, and a group, by describing the region of the land where that person or group comes from.

Gwich’in regional groups

Gwich’in lands today extend from the Mackenzie Delta in the Northwest Territories west through northern Yukon Territory into interior Alaska. They are bounded to the north by the tree line, which separates the Gwich’in from their northern neighbors, the Eskimo. Gwich’in lands are divided into a number of regions, each of which is inhabited by a distinct group. The Gwich’in identify
themselves by describing in their names the region of the traditional lands to which they belong. The name of the area, in turn, often refers to one of its major rivers or some other prominent feature of the landscape.

In the Gwich’in language, the traditional names are formed by adding the name of the area that a group lives in to the word Gwich’in. The word ‘Gwich’in’ by itself translates as ‘inhabitant of (an area),’ but traditionally it was not used without also stating the name of the area where the person or group lived. These are the original names used by the people themselves. The Gwichya Gwich’in, for example, are the ‘people of the flat lands.’ The name refers to the entire lowland region around the confluence of Tsiigehnjik and Nagwichoonjik. The people living in the area around Fort McPherson call themselves Teet’il Gwich’in. ‘Teet’il’ refers to the headwaters of the Peel River, their homeland before the arrival of the fur traders. The names of the other regional groups are formed in the same way.

### Regional groups of the Gwich’in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gwich’in name</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Other names</th>
<th>Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dihaii Gwich’in</td>
<td>(‘the far people’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neets’aij Gwich’in</td>
<td>Chandalar River people</td>
<td>Gens du Large</td>
<td>Arctic Village, Venetie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dendoo Gwich’in</td>
<td>Birch Creek people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwichaa Gwich’in</td>
<td>Yukon Flats people</td>
<td>Kutcha Kutchin</td>
<td>Fort Yukon, Circle, Beaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draanjik Gwich’in</td>
<td>Black River people</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chalkyitsik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vuntut Gwitchin</td>
<td>Crow Flats people</td>
<td>Vunta Kutchin</td>
<td>Old Crow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagudh Gwich’in</td>
<td>Upper Porcupine River people</td>
<td>Tukudh, Dagoo</td>
<td>Fort McPherson, Old Crow, Dawson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teet’il Gwich’in</td>
<td>Peel River people</td>
<td>Loucheux, Kutchin</td>
<td>Fort McPherson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwichya Gwich’in</td>
<td>Arctic Red River / Mackenzie River people</td>
<td>Kutchin, Loucheux Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in</td>
<td>Tsiigehtshik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine regional groups existed at the time when the first European explorers arrived in the area around the year 1800. The table above gives an overview of the regional groups and the various names which have been applied to them. The left column lists the name used by the people themselves. Next, the English name is given. This may be, but is not always, a translation of the original name. The English names were used by anthropologists working with the Gwich’in in different communities. The third column lists other names that were introduced by...
fur traders or missionaries. The column on the right-hand side lists the names of the main communities.

The traditional lands of the Gwichya Gwich’in, Teet’it Gwich’in and Vuntut Gwitchin are within the boundaries of Canada, while the territories of the Gwichaa, Draanjik and Neets’ajj Gwich’in are on the Alaskan side. The traditional land use areas of the regional groups are shown on the enclosed map. The different regional groups will be described briefly, beginning with the western groups on the Alaskan side.

Dihaii Gwich’in
The Dihaii Gwich’in were the most westerly of the traditional groups, inhabiting the area around the north fork of the Chandalar River and the middle and south forks of the Koyukuk River. It is said that many Dihaii Gwich’in died during a time of starvation and of fighting with one of the neighbouring Eskimo groups. The survivors gradually joined the Neets’ajj Gwich’in.159

Neets’ajj Gwich’in
Early fur traders referred to the Neets’ajj Gwich’in as ‘Gens du Large,’ that is, ‘people of the open country.’ The name reflects the character of the country north of the Chandalar River which extends out towards the Brooks Range. This mountainous terrain greatly influenced the culture of the Neets’ajj Gwich’in. Other Gwich’in knew them to possess great physical strength, “as a consequence of a strenuous life.”235:171 The Alaskan villages of Venetie and Arctic Village are the main communities where Neets’ajj Gwich’in now reside.

Dendoo Gwich’in
These are the inhabitants of the area along Birch Creek, west of the upper Yukon Flats. Birch Creeks flows into the Yukon River about twenty-five miles below the mouth of the Porcupine River. Dendoo Gwich’in culture—like that of their western neighbors, the Neets’ajj Gwich’in—was shaped by the mountainous character of their home territory. An epidemic brought in by fur traders in 1863 proved to be disastrous. It devastated the Dendoo Gwich’in so severely that none now living trace their ancestry to them.117

Gwichaa Gwich’in
These are the inhabitants of the Yukon Flats area along the middle Yukon River, to about the mouth of the Chandalar River or Birch Creek. The Yukon River in this area almost appears to be a lake rather than a river. It is up to thirteen miles wide and dotted with numerous sandy islands, and therefore the people refer to themselves as ‘inhabitants of the flat land.’ The village of Fort Yukon, situated near the confluence of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers, is the main community of the
Gwichaa Gwich’in. In the old days, the Gwichaa Gwich’in were feared by their neighbors as powerful medicine people and warriors. It was in the area around present-day Fort Yukon that the medicine person Dinìizhok rescued his brother and mother from a camp of hostile people who were planning to kill them (see pages 346 and 362).

**Draanjik Gwich’in**

These are the people who traditionally lived along the banks of the Black River. The fur trader Dan Cadzow, who took over Rampart House from the Hudson’s Bay Company, referred to the Draanjik Gwich’in as ‘Cache River People,’90 a name derived from the great number of caches the people used to set up along the river. It is said that these caches served to protect the people’s equipment and drymeat from the flooding that often occurred on the Black River during break-up. The Draanjik Gwich’in now make the Alaskan community of Chalkyitsik their home.

**Vuntut Gwitchin**

The traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin extends along the middle reaches of the Porcupine River and along the Old Crow River. This river drains into the Porcupine River in the vicinity of the village of Old Crow, Yukon Territory, the main community of the Vuntut Gwitchin. Situated along the Old Crow River north of the Porcupine River is an area dotted with a multitude of lakes. These are the Crow Flats, an important ratting area that has been used by the Vuntut Gwitchin for hundreds of years.261

**Dagudh Gwich’in**

These are the inhabitants of the upper Porcupine River area, in particular the mountainous regions of the river’s headwaters. They may also have used the region around the headwaters of the Ogilvie and Blackstone Rivers. The Dagudh Gwich’in were sometimes referred to as ‘Rat Indians’ by the fur traders, indicating how important the trade in muskrat furs was for them. It is said that after an epidemic decimated the Dagudh Gwich’in during the early fur trade, some of the survivors joined the Vuntut Gwitchin, others moved into the territory of the Teet’l’t Gwich’in. Some, however, continued to make a living in the upper Porcupine area, trading with independent traders until the 1930s.147:2-3

**Teet’l’t Gwich’in**

The traditional homeland of the Teet’l’t Gwich’in include the upper reaches of the Peel River watershed. It extends along Stoney Creek, Vittrekwa, Road, Trail and Caribou Rivers into the Richardson Mountains, as well as the Ogilvie, Blackstone, Hart, Wind, and Bonnetplume Rivers towards the Mackenzie mountains. During the early fur trade period, the Teet’l’t Gwich’in slowly began to shift towards the
‘Peel’s River House’ trading post (Fort McPherson) which is now their principal community.

**Gwichya Gwich’in**

The Gwichya Gwich’in, the ‘people of the flat land,’ are the most easterly regional group of the Gwich’in. Their traditional homeland extends south up Tsiigehnjik (Arctic Red River), east towards Khaii luk (Travaillant Lake) and Viht’ii tshik (Thunder River), and north into the Mackenzie Delta. In the west, the traditional lands extend to about the Peel River where the traditional land use area of the Teet’it Gwich’in begins. The main community today is the village of Tsiigehtshik, situated at the confluence of Tsiigehnjik and Nagwchoonjik.

**How the Gwichya Gwich’in got their name**

A long time ago, a man climbed up into the mountains along Tsiigehnjik. Turning back to look down towards the river, he noticed that the place where Tsiigehnjik and Nagwchoonjik come together, is a really flat area. The man later visited the people living there, and told them that he would call them ‘the people of the flat land,’ Gwichya Gwich’in.

— Nap Norbert\(^228\)

**Neighbours**

Neighbouring peoples such as the Eskimo and the Slavey, aachin, have been friends of the Gwichya Gwich’in at certain times, their enemies at others. Atachuukaji’i battles with the Slavey leader Naagajj tsal and his warriors, and the story of Ahts’an veh’s capture by a group of Eskimo are examples of fights that occurred between the sides. Stories from ts’ii dejj days show that regional groups of the Gwich’in sometimes also fought among themselves. The medicine person Diniizhok’s rescue mission in the Fort Yukon area describes such an event.

But just as often, the Gwichya Gwich’in and their neighbours met as friends. Slavey, Gwichya Gwich’in, and later the Eskimo, gathered at the Flats during the summer to trade, to feast and to dance. In late winter, according to John Norbert, Gwichya Gwich’in, Slavey people from Fort Good Hope, families from Fort McPherson, and even people from around Mayo would meet in the mountains up Tsiigehnjik, somewhere in the area between Ddahzhit gwitsal and Ddahzhit gwicho.\(^{224:02}\) Later, trade meetings at Fort McPherson, Aklavik and Herschel Island also provided opportunities for friendly gatherings.

The tree line was considered to be a marker separating the lands of the Eskimo from those of the Gwichya Gwich’in, but some shared use of resources occurred...
even across this line. Gwichya Gwich’in hunters would travel downriver past Vadzaih degaii zheh (Reindeer Station) for the summer caribou hunt in the Caribou Hills. Other families would travel down the Kugaluk and Anderson Rivers all the way to the coast (see pages 262, 373 and 375). The Eskimo, in turn, sometimes travelled up the Mackenzie as far as the mouth of Vihtr’ii tshik (Thunder River) to collect cooking stones and flint. In the old days, this could be a dangerous journey, because nobody was quite sure whether the next encounter between these travellers and the Gwichya Gwich’in would be friendly or lead to a fight. It was for the same reason that the Eskimo would not travel up Tsiigehnjik. The river was too narrow to avoid arrows shot at their boats during a surprise attack from the river bank.43

To the east, the shift from traditional Gwichya Gwich’in lands to that of the people from up the river begins around Thunder River, Vihtr’ii tshik. According to Gabe Andre, it is possible that at some time in the distant past, Siveezhoo may also have been part of the upriver people’s territory.40 The territory of the Teet’it Gwich’in is situated to the west of Gwichya Gwich’in lands. The Teet’it Gwich’in consider the east bank of the Peel River to be a marker between the two regions.

It is within this region of the land that the history of the Gwichya Gwich’in and the story of their travels on the land unfolds. The stories of history have been described in Chapter 2. The story of the families’ travels is told in the chapters that follow.
KNOWING THE LAND: NAMES AND STORIES

The Gwichya Gwich’in have maintained a harmonious relationship with the land for thousands of years, making a living by using the resources that the land provides. These were not available everywhere or at all times of the year; to survive, the families moved to the different places where the resources could be gathered. Fish was used throughout the year. Berries were gathered in late summer and early fall. During fall and winter many families relied on moose, and caribou for their source of food. Caribou travel great distances throughout the year. When the herds moved, the people followed. The families survived by fishing, hunting, snaring rabbits or trapping beavers, and they had to move to the areas where the resources could be harvested.

Travelling on the land

*People never stayed quiet, they paddled all the time — their arm was their kicker and their engine.*
— Joan Nazon 202:35

So when Gwichya Gwich’in elders talk about the way the people used to live in the old days, they often talk about their travels. For the elders, a good map of the traditional lands would be a map showing a large number of trails. The trails link the many places where the families harvested the resources on which they depended for their survival. Some places were important during the summer fishing season, others for winter camps. The families might spend the fall at one site, and gather at yet another to celebrate the coming of summer — the trails connected them all. Many of the trails crossing the traditional lands have been used for so long that they are now deeply ground into the land. And it is not only trails that tell the story of ts’ii dejì families and their travels: They are also remembered through the names given to a great number of places on the land. 220
The many meanings of names and stories

The name given to a place or site on the land often describes what is special or important about that place. Often a story is told to explain the place's special qualities in greater detail. Some stories describe geographical features, others refer to the resources available at the site. But place names and stories do not only provide information about geographical features and resources. In interviews with Gwichya Gwich'in elders, researchers with the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute collected more than 300 place names. These names can be divided into different groups according to the names' meaning.

The many meanings of names

*Place names can be put into different groups according to the names’ meaning and the kind of information they contain.*

- names which describe a resource or resource use: Khaii luk
- names which refer to the description of a place: Ddhahzhit gwitsal
- names associated with particular individuals: Tseenjoo kan
- ts’ii deij names whose meaning is no longer clearly remembered: Naatsàk
- names referring to legendary events: Nehruh tsì’
- names referring to historical events or sites: Baazil vakaiik’yit

The names, and the stories that come with them, often describe events from Gwichya Gwich’in history. Some of these stories reach back to the earliest days of the land. They have already been mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2. Others describe historical events that occurred during a time that was closer to the present. Yet another group of stories describes events from a person’s life history. Through their stories and the names on the land that go with them, the Gwichya Gwich’in have written an account of their travels, their history, their culture and values into the very geography of the land.

A tapestry of names

Names are everywhere on the land. Names and the stories that go with them explain the history of the land and of the families who have travelled on the land since ts’ii deij days. There are not many regions within the traditional land use area where places and sites are not named, where stories do not explain the history of the land. The map on page 57, for example, shows that standing on top of Vik’ooyendik, Church Hill, one can see at least eighteen named sites on the land—up and down Nagwichoonjik, and up Tsiigehnjik.
Learning about the land

Names and stories, places and trails, history and culture, are closely connected. Understanding the meaning of place names is an important step towards understanding the traditional way of life. The children would learn about the names of places while travelling on the land, and they learned about the names’ meaning through the elders’ stories.

‘Even if I were half blind, I’d still remember’

Tony Andre remembers that when he was a young boy, parents would teach the children about the many important trails and places on the land. While the family was travelling on the land, his parents would sometimes rest on the trail and test the son’s knowledge.

You know how I know all the names of the lakes? Even if I were half blind, I’d still remember, because my dad taught me all of these trails and lakes. So suppose I am way over here someplace, and then she asks me, my mother asks me—or my dad—‘What lake is this? That lake, what’s its name?’ I have to name it right there.
Yes, he’s testing me. He’s trying to tell me some crazy word, and then … he says, ‘What’s the name of this lake?’ Well, I can’t be stuck, I just got to say it right there. ‘And what is Caribou Lake?’ he asks. ‘Well, Vàdzaih van.’—‘What is Khaii luk, right here? What is Ti’oo nadhadlaii, right here? What is Gagwijaanaii, right here?’ You see—all that is in me, it’s in my blood.

— Tony Andre

This was how parents taught their children the names of the many places and sites on the land. Edward Coyen remembers learning about the land in much the same way. “My mother always told me about that country. This was this lake—this was that. So I saw.”

‘The old people, they are willing to tell a story anytime’

The best way to learn about the meaning of the names is to listen to the stories that the elders tell about their travels and about the land. Through their stories, the elders pass their knowledge on from one generation to the next.
I remember my grandmother telling me stories about the things that were brought on to her by her people, when she was small, and also my grandfather. And I remember that the stories that were told especially by my grandfather, were told to him by the elders and their people before him.

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

Children would visit with the elders and listen to the stories told by those with the greatest store of knowledge and experiences. “When we were growing up, our parents really stressed—my grandfather and my grandmother really stressed—that I should visit the old people,” Therese (Remy) Sawyer explains. Joan Nazon also remembers that story-telling was always a part of these visits.

Whenever they visited each other, they started telling stories about way back, long ago. They started telling stories. One finished telling a story, then another one would begin … You went around, you heard story-telling all over. We never saw the old men sitting there looking through the window, not saying a word. You never saw that in those days! The old people, they are willing to tell a story anytime. They go around visiting and they tell stories right away. And that old Paul Niditchie, he can tell stories, I tell you!

— Joan Nazon

The knowledge that the elders pass on through their stories comes from the experiences of a life-time spent on the land. The elders are always willing to share their

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**Travelling on the land**

People never stayed quiet. They paddled all the time. Their arm was their kicker and their engine.

— Joan Nazon

In those days, nobody stayed in one place, like now. When I was a kid there was nobody who had a camp in one place. They’d move all winter, they were going to move around, and came spring, they kept moving too.

— Gabe Andre

I have been around Trout Creek and Trout Lake. I have been around David Lake, as they call it, stayed around there, and I’ve been all the way down … Lakes—lakes and creeks around there. Just to hunt caribou, just to see the country, same time, hunting caribou and travelling at the same time.

— Edward Coyen

You get tired of the same country, working three or four years in the same part of the country, and then you decide to go move to a different part. Well heck, look at all that country, all that big country …

— Cecil Andre

We used to travel—I don’t know, I used to like to just go travelling.

— Barney Natsie
stories, but stories were and are an important thing to give—no less so, in their own way, than the food that people were always ready to share.

*We would bring something good to the elders to eat. And so, when you got older, you know, about four, five, six years old, you did it by yourself. The parents gave you something, and you went around to the people just to listen to their stories.*

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

Joan Nazon also remembers that when the old people came to visit, they would share a meal. When everybody had finished eating, they would tell the stories of the old days: “You gave him something good to eat, right away he started telling stories … I remember there were many old people telling stories, for example Old Joe Natsie.” Sharing stories was as important as sharing food or helping each other out in other ways.

Their stories about the earliest days of the land; their knowledge of the traditional way of life; and the accounts of their travels on the land, are one of the most important things that the elders can share and pass on. The history of the Gwichya Gwich’in cannot be complete without their stories. It is for this reason that this book is based on just these stories told by the elders of Tsiigehtshik.
The trails followed by the Gwichya Gwich’in throughout the seasons led through a number of distinct regions that centred on certain sites such as lakes, streams or mountainous areas. The regions were associated with the groups of families who chose to make a living there, year after year. To refer to a region, therefore, is to refer to an area of the traditional lands and the group of families living there over an extended period of time. In all, four such regions existed:

1. The Mackenzie Delta, that is, the area north of Srehtadhadalajji (Point Separation), extending to the boundary with Eskimo territory.
2. The mountainous region up Tsiigehnjik south of Nagwichoonjik, from Tsiigehntchic up Tsiigehnjik as far south as Ddhahzhit gwitsal and Ddhahzhit gwichoo, and east to and south of Vihtr’ii tshik, including the area around Dachanhoo choo geijnjik (Tree River). The area around the lake Siveezhoo also belongs to this region. Siveezhoo was often used as a stop-over by travelers moving across the country from the mountains to Khaii luk.
3. The area around Khaii luk, that is, north of Nagwichoonjik, from Tsiigehtshik east as far as Vihtr’ii tshik and north-east to about Vidi chu’.
4. The Mackenzie River corridor from Vihtr’ii tshik to about Srehtadhadalajji. This region was important for a number of reasons. It was one of the links connecting the different regions, and most families travelled on the river at some point during the year. Many families also spent the summer season at one of the fish camps located on both sides of the river. The sites for the great summer gatherings of ts’ii dejji days were also located along this stretch of the river. So important is the river that, in Gabe Andre’s words, it is a “highway” of the Gwichya Gwich’in. 42

Some families also lived for some time as far north as the coast of the Beaufort Sea. When she was a young girl, Eliza Andre lived at the mouth of the Mackenzie
River for four years, and on the Kugaluk River for several years more. Around 1915, Pascal Baptiste’s family made their home on the Anderson River. In these regions, the land was shared with the Eskimo, and even with Slavey families who came here from upriver for the summer fishery.

‘We always travelled in a group’

The close link between a group of families and a certain region was based on the families’ informal agreement to travel together and live in the same region, for a number of years. Bob Norman, for example, explains that “lots of people, different families—all travelled together; sometimes a whole bunch of people travelled together. There used to be John Gitsee, Adû’vityè (that's Old Joe Natsie), Joe Gitsee, Pascal Baptiste, and their families ... Ramii tsal and John Baptiste (that’s Pascal Baptiste’s dad). They travelled especially into the Travaillant Lake area.”

The people travelling together often considered themselves to be partners. Partners helped each other out in any way they could, they hunted together, and they might also go out and trap together. Sometimes, a partnership would extend beyond the boundaries of the group and include a person from a neighbouring group. Atachuukaii and Naagaij tsal, for example, also were partners. Although they were at war, they would not kill each other (see page 367). Partners would always look after each other. Families who had lived in the same region for a number of years might then decide to move to a different region and to work and live with different partners.

‘We always travelled in a group’

My grandfather and us, we all lived at Bernard’s Creek, Weldon Creek—we spent one year, I think, at Travaillant, and then we moved back to Bernard’s Creek. And then we stayed one year again below Tree River, and then we moved back to Bernard’s Creek. We always travelled in a group, like my dad and my mom, my grandfather and my grandmother—always around Bernard’s Creek, Weldon Creek, around Snake River, and all those fishing lakes and all those places. Hyacinthe Andre and his wife, and Jean Tsal and his wife spent quite a bit of time staying with us up that way too, on and off.

... the people that we travelled with in those days were: My grandfather, Camelia and Paul Niditchie, they spent one year with us up that way. So we always travelled in a group or else with my grandfather, my grandmother, my dad and my mom. But there was always another family that was with your family or else my other set of grandparents.

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

62 Regions of Gwichya Gwich’in Lands
Every year we did that, for years, and years, sometimes to Travaillant Lake, sometimes to the foot of the mountains. Everybody was working ... and I and some other men, like Old Joe and some others, we had partners too.

‘Partners’—just like, our family and this other family, they went good together. Men worked together good; women worked together good. So they stayed in that area for quite a number of years—two years, three years. Then they’d take off and they’d go to different places. Those who were doing that in those days—Paul Niditchie was my dad’s partner, and Joe Bernard, who was his brother-in-law.

— Tony Andre

Different regions — different lifestyles

Groups of families who returned to a certain region year after year, were referred to by names that described these regions. Families living in the Mackenzie Delta were Ehdyeetat Gwich’in, ‘Delta people.’ Families moving up Tsiigehnjik to live in the mountains were Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in, ‘Arctic Red River people.’ Khaii Luk Gwich’in were those families who spent the winter season at the winter fish camps around Khaii luk and Vidi’ chu’. The Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in lived along the banks of the Mackenzie River.

Ehdyeetat Gwich’in

The people making their home in the Delta were Ehdyeetat Gwich’in, “Delta People,” as Therese (Remy) Sawyer explains, “they had their own area where they had their camp year after year, and they lived another life-style, like. We went in a group with other people who came to do the same thing, there were about three or four families that went.”

One of the most important sites for people wintering in the Delta was a camp site at Big Rock, Nichitsii dininlee or Chhitsii dininlee. Annie Norbert spent more than fifteen years during her youth at Big Rock; her family used to live here year-round. Once in a while, they would visit Adolphus Norris’ store, a few miles downstream from Big Rock. The store was located just above the mouth of Gull Creek, on the west side of East Channel, and the family hardly ever had to travel to Tsiigehtshik for supplies. In general, the Delta was an important trapping area. It was rich in muskrats which were harvested in the spring and after the lake ice had gone out. The Delta region was especially important during the fur trade period.

Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in

The people who moved up Tsiigehnjik during late summer and fall to spend the winter in the mountains, were known as Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in. They relied more on caribou and moose than on fish, and their lifestyle differed from that of the families living around Khaii luk or in the Delta.
So those were the Gwichya Gwich’in people who were going up the Red, and that’s what they called them—Red River people, Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in. Real hard working guys! They went into the mountains. They hunted right around Naatsàk—they hunted marten, fox, whatever they could get a hold of.

— Tony Andre

The families would leave the Flats in the fall and move up Tsiigehnjik to reach the mountain ranges around Naatsàk, Ddhahzhit gwitsal and Ddhahzhit gwíchoo where caribou would be hunted. Camp sites along the river where the families stayed on their way up were spaced about ten miles apart. This was the average distance that the families tracking their loaded canoes upstream, could cover in a day’s travel.

After about 1920, some families began to build permanent cabins at some of these camp stops. Local traders later opened stores in the area, and so Martin zheh, Bernard Creek (Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik), and Weldon Creek were transformed into temporary communities. These had been important stop-over camp sites since ts’ii dejì days, but the ways in which they were now used reflected some of the changes that occurred during this time period. The changes that occurred after the beginning of the fur trade are described on page 179.

The lake Siveezhoo, located south of Dachan choo gêhnjik, also belongs to this region (Siveezhoo is a ts’ii dejì name whose meaning is no longer remembered). It was important as a stop-over point for families travelling between Khaii luk and the mountains, but few families lived in this area throughout the year.

Khaii luk Gwich’in

The Khaii luk Gwich’in made the area around Khaii luk and Vidi chû’ their home year after year. The Khaii luk region is an area of great abundance, with many lakes and streams where fish can be caught at all times of the year. “In the fall, the fish are coming down—whitefish,” Hyacinthe Andre describes one of the most important resources of the area. Because of the area’s abundance, a number of important winter camp sites have been used here since ts’ii dejì days, and some sites were used during the summer as well. “So that Travaillant Lake is very important to us,” Noel Andre explains, “people used to travel into that area, they know there is fish there.”

Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in

The families living along the banks of the Mackenzie River were called the ‘Mackenzie River people,’ Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in. The fish camps here were especially important during the summer. During the winter season, the river was also of great importance as a travel route. The great gatherings and celebrations of ts’ii dejì days were also held at one of several sites along the river.
By and large, the families themselves decided which of the regions they would live in during a given year; many families returned to the same region year after year. An unspoken agreement emerged, and everybody would understand what the plan for the coming season would be. The elders often played an important role when the decision was made. At the end of summer, before everybody was getting ready to move away from the Flats for the fall, the elders got together to discuss the families’ travel plans for the coming year. It was they who decided where the different groups would move to.

The oldest people made up their mind. They had a little meeting, talked about it and then they decided to go. They went partners, like … way ahead of time they talked about it, and they decided at what time to go, and then they left in the fall.

— Pierre Norman

It seems that once the families travelled on the trail, decisions about the day’s travel would most likely be made by the senior member of the group—often an elder. Therese (Remy) Sawyer, who travelled with her grandfather, remembers
that he would decide when the time had come to move on, “so when we were going to leave, my grandfather always said, ‘We are leaving tomorrow, so now get ready’.” Joan Nazon states that the decisions when the family would travel were often made by her husband. “Sometimes I didn’t like it, but I couldn’t say anything.” Tony Andre, by contrast, remembers that sometimes his mother decided when the family would move camp.

Following the trails

The men often travelled ahead of the women and children, leaving early in the morning when it was still dark. “At breaking of day, the men were way ahead making trail. After daylight, the women dressed up and went with their belongings in the sled,” Julienne Andre remembers. While they were travelling, the men were constantly on the lookout for caribou and moose. The women followed behind with the families’ belongings. When the men reached a site where they wanted to camp for the night, they left a mark such as “an axe or a scarf or a glove, so the women knew where it was. The men marked out the place for the women to pitch the tent,” according to Joan Nazon. The men might then travel on to hunt, and the women would set up the tents as soon as they arrived at the site. If the men returned in time, they helped the women with this work. Families travelling in the
mountains had to set up a new camp day after day, until a caribou kill had been made. Then camp was set up in that place, and the women made drymeat.

After the men had left camp, the women got ready to follow with the families’ belongings. Sometimes, while they took down the tents and packed up the gear, the women would send the children ahead. The children could safely follow the trail broken by the men who were travelling ahead, backed up by the women who were gradually coming up behind, pulling and carrying the family’s belongings. The women would catch up with the children after a few hours, and then they would travel along together. In this way the group was able to make good headway while still allowing the children to travel at their own pace most of the time.

They used to dress us up early in the morning. They fed us, they’d dress us up and then they’d tell us, ‘Go.’ Then we’d go—I don’t know what time they used to send us—and they used to catch us up with us when it was getting sort of light.

We travelled quite a bit, we never thought of animals, we just went and we played on the way—jump in the snow, get up from there, run. But it was a good trail and you walked, you know, sometimes you’d probably walk an hour or two—seemed to me like I walked all morning, till it was getting daylight, when it started to get a little bright. And only then were they coming up behind me. And there must have been about three, four or five of us—we were all the same, they sent us ahead.

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

“We just went and we played on the way.”
Camp sites used by families travelling up the Red
Many families had spent the summer making dryfish for the winter and repairing or replacing equipment, clothing and other necessities of life. Fall approached and everyone got ready to move away from the summer fish camps located along Nagwichoonjik, at Lèth t'ìr, Teetshik goghaa or, in historical times, Nichiitsii diniinlee. The families would spend the winter up the Red in the mountains, or at one of the camp sites around Khaii luk.

The families departed, leading their pack dogs towards one of the major trails to Khaii luk, steering their canoes up Nagwichoonjik towards one of the trail heads upriver, or getting ready for the journey up Tsiigehnjik. Those who went up the Red travelled in a group consisting of up to ten families in several boats.

Before the arrival of European explorers and before the Gwichya Gwich’in took part in the fur trade, the journey up Tsiigehnjik was undertaken on foot, by canoe, and with the help of pack dogs. The dogs may also have been used for pulling the canoes upstream. It was only much later that kickers and scows were used for this part of the upriver trip. At the same time, the destinations also changed somewhat. During ts’ii dejìi days, the trip ended at the upriver trail heads of the trails leading towards the winter hunting regions in the mountains. After about 1920, the cabins built at Bernard, Weldon and Martin zheh developed into another major stopping place for families going up the Red. In this chapter, the journey up the Red and overland towards the mountains is described as it was made during late ts’ii dejìi days.

**Up the Red in the fall: 'You want to go upstream, you track'**

Families who decided to spend the winter in the mountains would get ready in late summer, or even as early as July, to start on their long journey. Since the trail
led upriver for the greater part of the way, they travelled by boat. The craft they used was a canoe made from birch bark, k’ii tr’ih. Small canoes would carry one family, a large canoe had room for two families and their belongings. These canoes could be up to 20 feet long and longer. “A big boat took two families, but sometimes they went by themselves with their family only,” according to Annie Norbert. In that case, the smaller canoe would probably have been used.

### How travelling up the Red began to change

<table>
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<th>Ts’ii dejj days</th>
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<td>• pack dogs were used where the terrain allowed</td>
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<td><strong>Downriver transportation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Speed of upstream travel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• birch bark canoes, rafts</td>
<td>• approximately 10 miles / day</td>
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<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main destinations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Speed of upstream travel</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main destinations</strong></td>
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<td>• families paddle, pole or track canoes upstream</td>
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<td>• dogs help pull the canoes</td>
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<td><strong>Speed of upstream travel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Downriver transportation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• gas boats, kickers, scows, schooner</td>
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<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
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The main route led up Tsiigehnjik and this meant that the loaded canoes had to be moved against the current. Everything had to be tracked upstream by people walking along the shore. Braided babiche was used for the tracking ropes. Sometimes the rugged layout of the shore, or trees and underbrush growing close to the shore, made tracking impossible. When such a difficult stretch was encountered, the canoes had to be poled upstream with long poles by men or women standing in the canoes—this was probably even more difficult than tracking.
Dogs were used to help track birch bark canoes up Nagwichikonik.
People had to rely on each other’s help when such a difficult stretch of river was encountered: “Suppose you had a broken paddle or your track line was busted—somebody else had a good tracking line, he would help you,” Tony Andre explains.\footnote{18 \footnote{Julienne Andre remembers that when she was young, all the different methods of getting the canoes upstream had to be used, depending on the layout of the shore line.}

The water was really strong—the current got really strong all the way up. They pushed the boats with sticks up against the current. … They really suffered as they had to track back up with ropes.

Slowly they reached each point. I was pulling too, with the other people … Only my brother and I tracked when we went on sandbars—and then we went a little bit faster. Sometimes the water went up to our knees.

— Julienne Andre\footnote{70}

It is not certain whether dogs were used to track the boats upriver during ts’ii deji days, but this may have been the case. After the arrival of the fur traders, dog teams and pack dogs became an important means of transportation, but even then, dogs were very expensive, and not many people could afford to own more than two or three. Dogs are also mentioned in some ts’ii deji stories, and they probably were just as hard to come by during those days (see page 116). Those who owned dogs, might have used them to help with tracking the canoes upriver.

In any case, as Nap Norbert explains, the dogs would have been more useful for this task in the old days than they would be today— the river shore was much smoother than it is nowadays; there are many more cut banks now.\footnote{222 Where there was a long, unbroken stretch of shore, dogs would be put in harness to help with the pulling: “You see, on a good shore, they put the dogs in harness and they got the dogs to pull them,” Tony Andre explains.\footnote{18}} Where there was a long, unbroken stretch of shore, dogs would be put in harness to help with the pulling: “You see, on a good shore, they put the dogs in harness and they got the dogs to pull them,” Tony Andre explains.\footnote{18}

Only very smart dogs were able to line the canoe along stretches where the shore was not so smooth. A smart dog would stop pulling when an obstacle on shore blocked the way. He would wait for one of the travellers to guide the tracking rope past the obstacle. Most dogs did not understand this, and things could end up in a big tangle, Hyacinthe Andre remembers.\footnote{54 Dogs who knew how to track were very useful: “These dogs were well-trained. They just went by them-}
Travelling upriver was hard work, and the families moved at a slow pace. In the old days, as Gabe Andre explains, a good dog team would be able to cover a distance of up to 25 miles per day on a good winter trail, even with a heavy load. Considering how difficult it could be to move the canoes upstream, on the other hand, it is not surprising that the families tracking their canoes up the Red thought that ten miles made for a good day’s journey. The eight or nine major camp sites which were used on the way upriver, were spaced at just about that distance from each other. “Going into the mountains, or into Bernard Creek or Weldon Creek—where there was an old camp site, you wouldn’t pass it,” Tony Andre points out. “It was getting late, and you couldn’t continue. You thought of all those ready fireplaces … and you camped there all the time.”

**Chii choo juu'ęjjī — Rock Cove**

This was the first camp site used by groups of families travelling upriver in the fall. It was located on the east side of Tsiigehnjik, about ten miles upstream from Tsiigehtshik. Billy Cardinal explains that the site is marked by a rocky point that extends out from the shore.

**Łèth jithakaii—Ernest Cabin**

Early in the morning, the families packed away their tents and equipment, and once again tackled the difficult task of poling and tracking their canoes upriver. In the afternoon, they would reach the second day’s destination, Łèth jithakaii, ‘mud slide into a creek.’ Like many other traditional place names, this name describes a geographical feature of the landscape, namely, a land slide that occurred here at some point in time. The slide was located on the east bank of the river. The traditional camp sites were located on both sides of the river, about twenty miles upriver from the Flats.

**Daats’it k’adh chihih chuudlajjī — Sucker Creek**

On the subsequent day, the families would continue on their journey. The day’s travel ended at Daats’it k’adh chihih chuudlajjī. The name refers to a steep hill that curves for about five miles along a bend in Tsiigehnjik. It is located about twenty-six miles upstream from the Flats. Sucker Creek flows into Tsiigehnjik from the east, but it is no longer known whether the ts’ii dejj camp site was located on the upstream or the downstream side of the creek mouth.
The first part of the name, Daats’it k’adh, translates into English as ‘Sucker fish-trap.’ This is one of the group of names describing a resource use. A fish trap was put into the creek mouth when people stayed over at this site. Fish traps were one of the most efficient traditional tools for the gathering of resources.

A fish trap was built directly downstream from an eddy. Long poles with their bark still on were driven into the creek or river bed in two parallel rows, and an opening was left between them. Poles with the bark stripped off were then placed horizontally between the two rows of upright poles—this was similar to a fence. A basket closed the opening at the downstream end of these two ‘fences.’ Fish swam into the eddy on their way upstream in the fall, and many would be funneled into the trap and the basket.

Like many of the traditional tools, a fish trap was not taken along when the families moved. It was constructed as required; the necessary materials were available at the site where the trap would be set.

**Daazrajj van k’adh tshik — Swan Creek**

Sometimes, the families would travel further than Daats’it k’adh chii hidh chuddlaji, finishing the third stage of their upriver trek at Daazrajj van k’adh tshik. This site—also known as Sriijaa tshik, ‘Bluefish Creek’—is located about one mile upriver from Sucker Creek, or, twenty-seven miles upstream from the Flats. It is on the west side of Tsiigehnjik at the mouth of the creek which drains Daazrajj van, Swan Lake. The name refers to an incident where a swan got caught in one of the fish traps that were set at the mouth of the creek. In her younger days, Julienne Andre saw the people set fish traps at the mouth of the creek; old Francis Bluecoat, Gabe Bluecoat’s father, was probably one of the last to set traps at this site.

The site has continued to be of importance through the years. Nap Norbert remembers that when he returned from school in 1929, his family would go out here for bluefish that came out in large numbers in the spring. The RCMP would
also come here in the spring and set nets. Work on a seismic line has blocked the creek and the fish no longer run.228

**Eltyin choo chihvyâh k’yit — Jackfish Creek**

This was the fourth traditional camp site used by the groups of families during their fall trip up the river. It is located about thirty-one miles upstream from the Flats at the mouth of Jackfish Creek which flows into Tsiigehnjik from the west. This camp site was also used frequently during the spring season, when jackfish, cony, and whitefish were particularly abundant.219

**Nehtruh tshi’ — ‘Wolverine inside a rock’**

The families continuing on their way up the river had to pass a spot which in the old days was considered to be quite dangerous. Nehtruh tshi’, ‘A wolverine inside
Nehruh tshi':
‘I went through that place too—spooky!’

Gabe Andre and George Niditchie at Nehruh tshi'
a rock,’ is the name of an area just downstream from Martin zheh which is very distinct from its surroundings.

_There used to be a monster in this lake. And from there, it broke right through the ground around it—about ten feet deep, and it went kind of downhill! … then he got on top, came out of the ground. The water just spread all over, and it washed out some trees. I went through that place, too. I walked through there. Boy! Spooky! … holly gosh, it’s just like something’s going to come out._

— Pierre Benoit

The area looks as if somebody or something has ripped it apart. It is said that this was the work of a Giant Wolverine, Nehtruh, who came out of a nearby lake. He dug underneath the ground, breaking up the hills as he crossed over to Tsiigehnjik. This wolverine was a wicked creature who would kill any person it encountered. Therefore people passing through the area during ts’ii dejí days would not stop when they heard a noise coming from this place. If no noise could be heard, however, it was safe to stop. It is said that this chijuudiee is no longer alive.

**Martin zheh — Martin House**

This was the fifth traditional camp site used by the families on their way up Tsiigehnjik into the mountains. It is located about 45 miles upstream from the Flats. A more or less continuous group of traditional camp sites existed along a two-mile stretch on the west bank of the river. Tools dating back to pre-contact times found at the site include a fish hook shaft, a bone tool (see photo at right), boiling rocks, and some stone tool fragments. One of the ts’ii dejí fire pits was used as early as the years 1425-1460. This site may have been “available for occupation over an especially long period … it contains the largest hearth in the river bank exposure and both excavated units contained large hearths indicating substantial occupation which may be the result of numerous seasonal camps along a creek near the site, over many years.”

According to George Niditchie, the traditional name for the creek near the site in ts’ii dejí days was Jah vehlej’ tshik. This name translates as, ‘a crane got caught, at the mouth [of the creek].’ It refers to a traditional resource use: Swans would be snared in this location during spring time.

After 1920, Martin zheh and Bernard Creek increased in importance and some families began to build cabins here. One of the reasons for Martin zheh’s importance may have been its central location; several trapping territories could be reached easily: “They trapped from there, it was close to the trapping territories, I guess. They could go towards the Mackenzie, they could go towards the Peel, and all those areas,” John Paul Kendo points out. The historical name now used for this area refers to a white trapper by the name of Martin. He had a cabin on the east side of the river in the 1920s. When Hyacinthe Andre travelled to Martin zheh in 1927, he saw the tents of about ten families there, but no cabins. Later, however, there were so many cabins here that the area looked almost like a ‘small town.’
Because this chapter tells the story of the families who travelled up Tsiigehnjik during late ts’ii dejì days, the story of the people who built cabins at places such as Martin zheh during and after the 1920s is told in a later section of this book (see Chapter 14).

Tateih sheii — ‘Mud flat with willows’

Tateih sheii, ‘mud flat with willows,’ is another of the group of names describing a feature of the landscape. This was the sixth traditional camp stop for the groups of families travelling up Tsiigehnjik in the fall. It is located about fifty-five miles upstream from the Flats, about half-way between Martin zheh and Bernard Creek. Tateih sheii is a low-lying area along a horseshoe bend in the river, covered with willows and small patches of timber. A portage trail led straight across this willow flats, making a short-cut across the bend in the river.

This was a good area to hunt moose. When the canoes reached this site, the time for the fall moose hunt was often drawing near already.

Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik — Bernard Creek

Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik was located about seventy miles upstream from the Flats. The traditional camp site, as the name indicates, was located at the mouth of the creek which flows into Tsiigehnjik from the west. Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik is a ts’ii dejì name whose exact meaning is no longer remembered, but the word probably refers to the appearance of the creek which is ‘shaped like a piece of string that has been bunched up and then let go.’148:23
The creek’s official name is Sainville River, but it is better known as Bernard Creek—named after the well-known trapper Joe Bernard who was the first person to build a cabin here during the early 1900s. This site has been used for a long time: “Forever people used to come around here and make their living,” Annie Norbert explains.211

Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik did not consist of just a single camp site; rather, it was a large area made up of several major groups of sites located along both banks of Tsiigehnjik as well as Bernard Creek. At least five different places where people set up camps in this area, have been described by the elders.

**Parting company, for a time**

The family groups stayed and travelled together until they reached Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik. Here they would separate to follow different trails during the winter. Before they went their separate ways, some families would stay at Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik for up to a month, waiting for the snow and making dryfish, repairing and renewing the equipment that was required during the winter. To keep the canoes as light as possible, items such as snowshoes and dog harnesses had not been taken along from the Flats. Only the babiche which the women made in the summer while working on moose and caribou skins, had been packed. It was now used to build these tools before the families headed into the mountains.

While the equipment was being made, the women would also make dryfish—the area around Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik is especially good for jackfish and white-

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**Nan ts’ee k’it**

*They made willow baskets for their dry fish. They put it in it as soon as it was dried—willow baskets as big as this table, sometimes bigger than that, and then they put it away. Sometimes they pounded dry fish too. They made it just like pemmican, itsuh, and sometimes they made big birch bark baskets as well. And they kept their pounded dry fish, itsuh, in there. It’s really good!* … this willow basket was for dry fish, but the birch bark basket was for pounded fish. My mom said that the people had no warehouse, so they dug a real big place inside the ground. That’s where they kept their dry fish and all their food for winter … And in wintertime, when the people were hungry, they went to look for their food in the pits, nothing was spoiled.

*Dryfish was put into willow baskets, pounded fish was put into birch bark containers. Skin bags made from the skin of the caribou leg, edreedhoh uhtshuh, were used as containers for fat and dry meat. Food stored away like this would keep for months. The temperature inside the pits was always low.*

— Annie Norbert217:40
fish. When enough food supplies had been laid in, the families dug out big storage pits, nan tsee k’it, where dryfish, berries, drymeat, bone grease and itsuh were stored as a backup for late winter, when it was most difficult to obtain food. Big pits would be shared by up to four or five families. “In the middle of winter when they really had nothing, they went back to their cache,” Joan Nazon explains.  

Annie Norbert was told by her mother that pits were also built along Nagwichoonjik at Diighe’traajil, Chii chyaa tshik, and Chii t’iet. 

To make the pits safe against grizzly bears and wolverines, they were sealed with layers of sand or mud, heavy logs and rocks placed on the lid. Even this was not always enough to prevent grizzly bears from spoiling a pit.

My mother used to tell me stories about this—they dug a big hole in the ground, then they used to put logs down on the floor, and that’s where they put all their meat. And on top of that you put more logs, and then sand on top of that, and on top of all that, big rocks, big stones. Sometimes the stones were so big that two men had to carry them to put them on top. You know, just to lock it away. But even then, however complicated they made their storage pits, sometimes grizzly bear or wolverine would still get at it.

— Joan Nazon

When the families had finished their work at Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik, they would begin their journey to the mountains. An important ts’ii dejį trail left Tsiigehnjik just upstream from Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik, at Gisheih jiikaii. It was used by hunters who were headed for Nhtavan dininlee—October was drawing near and the time for the fall hunt on caribou, sheep and moose had come.

Other families had not stayed over at Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik for very long, but had continued on to one of the two remaining major camp sites located upriver from here: They went to either Teetshik gwichoo or Liidljjii.

Teetshik gwichoo — Weldon Creek

Teetshik gwichoo, ‘big creek,’ is now also known by its English name, Weldon Creek. This was the eighth camp site used by the people on their journey upriver. It is located about eighty-three miles upstream from the Flats at the mouth of Weldon Creek which flows into Tsiigehnjik from the south-east.

Another important ts’ii dejį trail into the mountains left Tsiigehnjik just downstream from Weldon. After the arrival of the fur traders, some families changed their seasonal travels somewhat and spent the first part of winter at Weldon rather than in the mountains. The men alone, or sometimes the whole family, travelled to town by dog team around Christmas time, to bring in their furs and stock up on supplies. They paid off some of their debt and brought tea, tobacco and ammunition back to camp. When they returned after New Year’s, the families would break camp and move into the mountains to hunt caribou and sheep.
Łidląjį — The Forks

Łidląjį, ‘Two rivers coming together,’ is also known as The Forks. The name refers to the confluence of Tsiigehnjik and Cranswick River, about 118 miles upstream from the Flats. This was the ninth and final camp site used by the families tracking their canoes upriver.

Upriver from this site, the traditional birch bark canoes could not be used. “You couldn’t go any further, not even four miles. You came out, you had to turn around … in the spring—high water, the water is way up. The time would be right to go, but the water almost seemed to boil, so you didn’t want to go among those rocks,” according to Tony Andre.¹⁴

At the end of their river journey, the people took the canoes out of the water. They were pulled up high onto the shore so they would not be destroyed during breakup, when large blocks of ice are pushed far up the banks.

Old-time trails into the mountains started at Łidląjį, as well as downriver from Jûuk’an (‘burning’). The name Jûuk’an refers to a spot in the side of one in a series of high hills which is burning. These hills are located some five or six miles downstream from Łidląjį, and the smoke from this smouldering fire can be seen from as far away as Łidląjį.¹⁷⁶ The old-time trail to Nihtavan diniiinlee, Dehzhàh ts’at gwatat’atâjį, starts atop a hill across the river from Jûuk’an, swinging away from Tsiigehnjik in a southerly direction.

The families had reached the trail heads at Hehnyuu deet’ıyah tshik, Teetshik gwichoo, and Łidląjį. Equipment and supplies for the coming winter had been prepared, and the time for the caribou and sheep hunt had arrived. Everybody was ready to follow the trails leading to the hunting areas in the mountains.
The main trails leading into the mountains started at the Forks, at Weldon Creek, and at Bernard Creek. For families setting out from the river at Hehnjuu deet'yah tshik, the journey began with a climb of about 500 feet from the river valley to the top of the flats at Gisheih jiikaii just above Bernard Creek.

Gisheih jiikaii — ‘A Gravel Slide’

Gisheih jiikaii, ‘a gravel slide,’ is a high hill which after a mud slide looks as if a bulldozer has pushed it down. From here, the people had to walk through the muskeg in order to reach their next destination, Nihtavan diniinlee. By now, late fall had given way to early winter and the muskeg was frozen, making walking overland somewhat easier.220

Nihtavan diniinlee — Fish Lake

Once on top, the families continued overland to Nihtavan diniinlee, also called ‘Fish Lake.’ Now the dogs who had helped with tracking the canoes upriver, were used as pack dogs. Nihtavan diniinlee is an area made up of a ‘string of three lakes’ just inside the boundary of what is today Yukon Territory. The most westerly of these lakes is drained by Gyuu dazhoo njik (Snake River), the most easterly one by the Cranswick River. For this reason, Tony Andre says, they are sometimes referred to as ‘mixed-up lakes.’18:04

Nihtavan diniinlee was the last fish lake for the families before they reached the mountains. Noel Andre explains that there is a reliable fish run here just around or after New Year’s: “It’s the only lake around for those going to the moun-
tains, there is a trail along that lake. There is a fish run on it, too, just at a certain time after New Year. They run just for a few days.”

Like all of the mountain ranges, this was a good area to hunt caribou. “People went there just to get meat,” Annie Norbert remembers. Trapping was also good in this area. Deadfalls were used, “they did not carry any of their traps around.”

Some families stayed in this area throughout the winter.

A hotsprings can be found in the Nihtavan diniinlee area, it can be seen easily because of the steam it sends into the cold winter air. Because of the hotsprings, nobody would go and try to trap in this area. Billy Cardinal was told by a man from Fort McPherson not to trap around there, “close to that hotsprings. Some young boys wanted to go there for trapping, but the old men told them, ‘Don’t go there, it’s no use. The warm air freezes on the trees, everything is covered up, so there’s no marten in that area.’ That’s why the old people didn’t trap there. They stayed away from there. It was no good for trapping.”

Nihtavan diniinlee could also be reached from a trail that began at Deezhâh ts’at gwatatr’atajì, a few miles above Weldon Creek. ‘Deezhâh choo’ is the name of a high, brushy hill; gwatatr’atajì is the word for ‘trail leading to the bush.’

The trip from here to Nihtavan diniinlee in spring took about one day. People who were eager to leave the mountains after a long, hard winter, would often reach Tsiigehnjik by this trail. This was a shorter, although steeper route than the one towards Gisheih jiikai. Moreover, the muskeg and low brush had to be crossed again around Nihtavan diniinlee, but the warmer temperatures of spring had turned the area into a swamp that could be difficult to cross.

A man once tried to make passing this difficult stretch a little easier by burning the brush around Deezhâh, but things did not quite turn out as he had planned.

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**Deadfall traps — Dachan khyâh**

Yes, they only used deadfall. What other traps? There were no other traps. They had deadfall for marten. And sometimes they had a deadfall for wolverine but that was just for wolverine. I don’t know how they used to trap for mink.

— Hyacinthe Andre

The setup of a deadfall trap depended on the size of the animal that was to be trapped. The size of the log was measured in ‘fists’ and ‘thumbs,’ that is, the size of a closed fist (or fists), or the size of a closed fist + extended thumb:

- **Trap for bear:** 2 fists + 1 thumb
- **Trap for wolverine:** 1 fist + 1 thumb
- **Trap for marten:** 1 fist

— Noel Andre
One time a man who was going through that mud, through that brush in summer, set a fire to burn it. It was thick brush—and he made a forest fire. Then when he got to Nihtavan diniinlee to make camp, he had to move because the fire was coming too close!
— Gabe Andre

The area around Nihtavan diniinlee was also used by people from the Fort Good Hope area. In 1947, John Norbert met a group of Slavey families here. The Morris, Cochilley, Norris and Deya families as well as a trapper by the name of Jackson belonged to this group. They were on their way to Ddhahzhit gwitsal or Ddhahzhit gwichoo to hunt caribou. It is likely that the families from up the river were following a trail of their own that they had used since at least late ts’ii dejj days.

Families who decided not to stay at Nihtavan diniinlee continued on to Tsit davàn, the very last lake visited by the families before they reached the mountains. This narrow lake is named after a man called Ts’it. This is a good area for marten and porcupine. About 100 years ago, and probably even earlier, both were trapped in this area. Before the Hudson’s Bay traders introduced beads as trade goods, porcupine quills dyed with tsaih were used for decorating clothing.

‘They only used deadfall. What other traps? There were no other traps. They had deadfall for marten, and sometimes they had a deadfall for wolverine, but that was just for wolverine.’
Tsit davàn — ‘Tsit’s Lake’

The families headed for Tsit davàn from several directions, and a number of trails crossed at this lake. When arriving from Nihtavan diniinlee to the north, the families usually continued on southward in the direction of Naatsàk and beyond. A trail branching off in a westerly direction led towards Gyuu dazhoo njik, the Snake River. The trail in the direction of Gyuu dazhoo njik, an important caribou and moose hunting area, will be described first. The continuation of the main trail from Tsit davàn towards Naatsàk is outlined on page 87.

Gyu du dazhoo njik — Snake River

The traditional name for the Snake River, Gyuu dazhoo njik, translates as ‘hairy worm river.’ The name refers to an event which occurred during the earliest ts’ii deji days, perhaps thousands of years ago. A giant hairy worm, or ‘snake,’ came out of the ocean, and travelled up Nagwichoonjik and into the Peel River. It wanted to go up into the mountains, so it swallowed big rocks as it moved along. Thus Gyuu dazhoo njik was created. Gyuu dazhoo still lives in the area, but it has not been seen for so long now that it is hard to say whether it actually lives in the mountains near the headwaters, or in a lake beside it.152:9

As they had done since ts’ii deji days, the families mainly went to the Snake River for the winter and spring caribou hunt. The region just south of the Peel
River game preserve, especially around Guk’än choo, was particularly good for caribou. During the winter of 1927-28, Hyacinthe Andre and his parents came away from the area with three loads of dried caribou meat. Another hunter who accompanied them on this hunting trip, brought back two loads. The drymeat was packed in bales. A bale was about two feet wide and three feet high, containing the meat of about eight or nine caribou. They travelled with three dog teams and brought all the meat back to Hehnjuu deel'yah tshik. The meat was collected in preparation for the big wedding feast held on the occasion of Hyacinthe’s marriage to Eliza on July 2, 1928. The families of Ramii tsi and Paul Niditchie, and Nicola’s Norbert’s dad also lived around Gyùu dazhoo njik during that year.48:09

In winter, Gyùu dazhoo njik could be a dangerous river to cross, and the hunter planning to do so had to be very careful. The ice on the river could be extremely thin, and one false step could send the hunter through the ice. The safest way to get across was to find moose tracks crossing the river and to follow them.

Naatsàk

The families keeping to the main trail from Tsis davàn, meanwhile, headed for the next camp site, which usually was at Naatsàk. This is a distinctive looking bald hill which lies due south of Tsis davàn. Naatsàk is a ts’ii dejì name whose meaning is not remembered, but the hill might have been named after a person. This is good marten and caribou country; caribou trails criss-cross the hill throughout the win-
The hill can be seen from a long ways away, and in “the early morning it has different colors. It’s sure nice country. That’s my country,” Tony Andre says.  

In winter, the high, wide open areas of Naatsàk can be much warmer than the low-lying regions of the surrounding valleys. For example, when it is about -65°F in Tsiigehtshik, it is probably no colder than -25°F at the top of Naatsàk. For this reason, some families might decide to stay up here all winter, and hunt caribou from this camp location. Others families would continue on to Ddhahzhit gwitsal.

Ddhahzhit gwitsal — Cranswick River

This name refers to the area where the Cranswick River flows out of the Canyon Range of the Mackenzie Mountains. The name consists of the words, ‘inside a mountain’ (ddhahzhit) and ‘small’ (gwitsal). It describes the size of the river which appears small in relation to the surrounding mountains which in places rise to about 5000 feet.
The area between this site and the next one (Ddhahzhit gwitsal) was one of the main hunting areas for caribou and sheep. Hunters would enter the slopes of the side valleys which cut into the high mountain range, in search of game. The many stone axe marks and traces of old-time camp sites that can be seen everywhere around here show that this has been an important area since ts’ii deįį days.43

_Ddhahzhit gwitsal_, that’s where they used to kill all the good meat. That’s where you got all the big bales of drymeat, maybe twenty, thirty, forty, something like that.

You’d get bales about that thick, all tied up with rope, good rope. Then you’d get about two, three, maybe about eight or nine caribou into one bale. All dried up, good fat meat. That’s what they’d bring back here. It couldn’t rot.

— Tony Andre14

There were so many loads that had to be transported that the hunters had to carry them out in stages, “they’d take a load ahead, return, take a load ahead, return, take a load ahead,”14 Tony continues. By the time the bales of drymeat were carried out of the mountains, it was already getting to be spring, and the families prepared to travel towards Tsiigehnjik again. It was at this time of year that the families might meet up with Slavey families from up the river. Feasts and old-time games kept everybody busy. Spring was well underway before these families finally made their way out of the mountains and towards the river.

My mom told me that a long time ago, Arctic Red people would meet somewhere here, and then Fort Good Hope would join up, and McPherson would join up, and even Mayo people would join up. They started stick-gambling in early March. The geese came flying north, the snow was gone, and they were still gambling! They’d leave all their sleds, left with pack dogs, and split up. Some of them were broke flat! … They had all their drymeat made for the summer, but they never went—it was just like a mountain casino!

— Gabe Andre43:02

Leaving Ddhahzhit gwitsal, the families now travelled in a more easterly direction to reach the last major camp site on the winter mountain trail at Ddhahzhit gwichoo. This is the area where Tsiigehnjik flows out of the Mackenzie Mountains. The name refers to the size of the river, describing the ‘big (river) valley’ coming out of the mountains.148:48

This was the last, most southerly mountain winter camp site used by Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in. The area around and between Ddhahzhit gwichoo and Ddhahzhit gwitsal was one of the most important areas for hunting caribou and sheep. The area above Arctic Mountain House was especially good for sheep. The way of life of the families spending the winter in this area is described in Chapter 8.
A blaze marks the trail at the Forks

Spring trail to Duck Lake across from Martin zheh

Making a living in the mountains: Trails up the Red

Looking back towards the river from the trail head at Liidlįįj
Chapter 8

The Life-style of the Tsiigehtjik Gwich'in

The Tsiigehtjik Gwich’in spent the winter season in the mountains up the Red, travelling from camp to camp, following the caribou, hunting moose and sheep, snaring smaller animals along the way. The speed of travel and the length of stay in any one camp depended mainly on the success and requirements of the hunt.

Hunting in the mountains

The knowledge and experiences of many generations of Gwichya Gwich’in hunters had gone into shaping the layout and direction of the winter mountain trails. The trails led into the areas where the hunters expected to find caribou or sheep. However, apart from the powerful medicine people who often were able to predict a herd’s location through their dreams, not even the most experienced hunters could always be certain that sheep or caribou would be found (see page 97). When the hunt was successful, the people rested in the area where the kill had been made, for as long as the meat lasted. If the hunters returned from their trips with empty hands, the families had to continue on the trail, always following the caribou, tracking moose, or snaring rabbits. ‘Every day, they moved so far’—this was the life-style of the Tsiigehtjik Gwich’in.

Those were the ones who went right to the mountains … people used to make a living off the land, they say, and they used to kill moose, caribou, rabbits, and even porcupine. Every day, someone got something as they moved along. Every day they were moving. They would settle someplace until they moved again—every day, little by little. Every day they moved so far. And then, while they were moving, somebody went out and hunted a moose. They killed the moose and they camped there, and they shared all that meat amongst them. The person that the moose was given to, got the head. The rest was enough to cook for all the people at night. They made a supper for everybody. So they camped there again.
The next day the men made trail ahead—there’s lots of bad hills up the Arctic Red. Sometimes there was a cutbank about that wide, and they had to build it up with snow for the dogs to get on top, and then they portaged. During that time somebody set rabbit snares, even for just one night. The next day he’d pick up all his rabbits, and then he kept moving with the rest of the people … Finally, they came across lots of moose, and they killed about four or five moose in one day. Then they brought the meat into camp. They shared all the meat. Everybody got the same amount, nobody received more meat than the other.

They did this all winter, and they saved all the bones. They took all the meat off, and then they boiled the bones. Those bones were very precious. They had to be kept, and every time they moved, they went with the camp. Towards the end, they had a big bag full of bones.

They split those bones, and they saved the marrow and boiled it in a big pot, and once in a while they threw snow on top. All the grease came right up to the top. Then they took all that grease out, and they put it into a good-sized pot, a birch bark dish. They shared grease—whatever they made that day, they shared it.

So that’s the way the Gwich’in people lived, the Red River people. Real hard working guys! And they went to the mountains, they went right up to where the river goes into the mountains. From there they came down, moving down, and they arrived at Naatsàk. They hunted marten, fox, whatever they could get a hold of. Then around there someplace, they got a lot of moose … finally, they came across a big herd, caribou! They camped around Naatsàk, right on top of Naatsàk—there, they stayed all winter.

— Tony Andre

The hunter’s tool kit

So it was the hunters who were mainly responsible for providing meat for the families during their winter travels. So important was this task during ts’ii dejí days that the hunter’s tools as well as the ways in which he prepared for his work should be described in more detail. At the same time it has to be remembered that without the women’s help, the hunters would not even have been able to set out, before day break, on their hunting trips. But while the men would work away from camp more, it was the women who really looked after the camps. The importance of the women’s work is described in Chapter 11, but it will sometimes be mentioned in this chapter as well.

When leaving camp early in the day for the winter hunt, the ts’ii dejí hunter took his hunting weapons and the tools that allowed him to travel and survive on the land during the cold days of winter. A bow and arrows, perhaps a spear, a stone axe, snowshoes, flint and fire stones to make fire, were probably the key items in the ts’ii dejí hunter’s survival tool kit. A bow drill may also have been used to start a fire. Warm winter clothing and foot wear were also essential.
Snowshoes

Some say that, without the invention of the snowshoe, it would have been impossible for the Gwichya Gwich’in—or any other Aboriginal people—to make a living and survive on the land during the long winter. The snowshoe has been called “one of the most important inventions in the history of transportation.”101:1 In ts’ii dejj days, snowshoes, eih, were the main means of transport in a land covered by snow for eight months of the year. They made it possible to hunt in areas that a hunter travelling on foot would have been unable to reach. They allowed the families to move camp. They were sometimes even used as snow shovels when the families set up camp at a new site. Other means of transport have changed: The Gwichya Gwich’in began to use dog teams when the fur traders arrived; skidoos have replaced dog teams, but today’s hunter and trapper relies on snowshoes as much as did his ancestor during ts’ii dejj days.

To make snowshoes, the work of both men and women was required. The men selected and prepared the wood for the frame, and they built the frame. (Today, a crooked knife is used; the ts’ii dejj hunter used stone or bone tools for this work.) For the frame, either spruce or birch was used. Many hunters chose birch though some preferred spruce. It weighs less and, because it is more rigid, snowshoes made from spruce are more suitable for the slushy conditions of late winter. The front piece on a birch snowshoe will sometimes soften up, sag, and catch more of the wet snow. This is less likely to happen when spruce is used.55 The front of the snowshoe was turned up to beat down the snow. Men’s snowshoes had a gabled front, the front of the women’s snowshoes was rounded.163

The size of snowshoes depended on the purpose they were used for. Trail snowshoes were used when travelling by dog team or when the families moved camp; they were about three feet long. Hunting snowshoes, used by the hunter to run down game on the frozen snow of mid- and late winter, were six or seven feet long. The hunter used these large snowshoes almost like cross-country skis: Pursuing game, he glided on top of the crusted snow, while heavier animals such as moose, broke through the snow.55

The frame was coloured with red ochre, tsaih. Traditionally, only the women’s snowshoes were coloured.232 Tsaih was collected at a site near Rock River on the McPherson side. It is said that the medicine person Diniizhok died here, and that it was his blood that turned into tsaih (see page 30). When taking tsaih, it was important to leave something else in place. If this was not done, bad weather, or even a storm, might be caused.232 A second site for tsaih was located up Tsiigeh-
The Life-style of the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in

Hunting on snowshoes

... my Godfather’s name was Antoine Coyen. I just could remember him and that’s all. Some people said that he was a good man—powerful by strength. One man told me that his flesh was just as hard as stone and they said that he ran down a black bear in May on hard crust. Any light animal that stays on top of hard crust is hard to catch up to, so it was for that reason there was story about it. They tell about it because he used big snowshoes. Lots of good men had tried it but failed ...

Big Yesson and I were out every day trapping for beaver and rats. One day we saw fresh black bear tracks, and Yesson told me, ‘Let’s try and run down the bear.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ We both tightened our snowshoe laces and with our guns ready, we started to run. To tell the truth, I had a hell of a time trying to keep up with him since he was a tall man and long-legged. Every one step he made, I had to make two but we could catch up with the bear. By this time, the snow was melting and we sure sweated, and I tell you we sure had a long way to come back.

Edward Nazon

njik between Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik and Liidlajj. It could also be made from the ashes obtained by burning rotten drift wood.

When the frame had been completed, the women put the webbing in place. Lacing a snowshoe was complicated work, and the women were careful to do it correctly. If the lacing was not done just right, the hunter’s luck might be affected: “They always say it’s bad luck when a man is wearing shoes that are not laced just right,” Agnes Mitchell explains. “It’s got to be laced a certain way, and without mistakes. That’s what makes a good hunter—the women!”

Stone axes

The stone axe was the common working tool of the ts’ii deejj hunter. The signs of its use can still be seen everywhere. It was used to cut down trees, it was probably used to smooth the pieces of spruce or birch used for making snowshoes, perhaps even to hollow out the steps that the hunter climbed to reach the top of Gwe’eekatjilchit; it was here that the best eagle feathers used for arrows could be found (see page 95). Noel Andre remembers seeing a ts’ii deejj burial stage somewhere above Tree River. One of the items that had been placed at the foot of the stage was the dead person’s stone axe. A forest fire has since destroyed the burial site, and with it the axe, but the marks left by this important ts’ii deejj tool remain on the land to this day. A tree that has been cut with such an axe leaves behind a distinctively shaped stump. It is easy to distinguish such a stump from that of a tree cut with a steel axe.
Spears

The spear may not have been as important for the winter hunt as the bow and arrow, but it had several uses at other times of the year. Hunters would wait in their canoes at river sections that the caribou herds swam across on their spring and fall migrations. From their canoes, they would spear caribou swimming across, attempting to kill animals that were close to shore so that the current would not carry them off. Spears were also used to kill caribou that had been trapped in a caribou surround (see page 102). Lastly, spears may have been used to pull out fish that had been caught in fish traps (fish traps are described on page 74). “They all worked together and took turns, sitting at the fish trap … they probably had some kind of spear.”

Bow and arrow

Gwichya Gwich’in hunters probably began to use muzzle loaders regularly after 1825, but even as late as August 1870, they were still familiar with the old ts’ii dejį weapons. On that occasion, the hunters were forced to use their bow and arrow again, because the Hudson’s Bay trader at Fort McPherson refused to sell them ammunition for their muzzle loaders.

The strongest bow used by ts’ii dejį hunters was reinforced with raw skin. This bow was so powerful that today even really strong people would find it difficult to use such a bow. It was probably used for hunting large game such as caribou or moose. “Some of them would even kill caribou and moose with it,” Hyacinthe Andre explains. “What they called a bow and arrow was very dangerous. They would make the string so tight that even us, we cannot use it. Only they could use it. I know how strong they used to make it. They would put raw skin on the outside. This made it strong. It would never break.”

The ts’ii dejį hunter would be just as careful about choosing the materials for his arrows. For example, eagle feathers for the arrow shafts were collected at Gwi’eejakilchit in the Mackenzie Delta, far to the north of the mountain ranges up the Red. Gwe’eekajilchit—in English, ‘somebody chipped steps’—is a cliff located on the eastern shore of Gull (Campbell) Lake. (This is why the northern end of Gull Lake is really called Gwi’eejakilchit van.) Long ago, there was an eagle’s nest halfway up the cliff face. It was nearly impossible to reach the nest. In order to get there, the people chipped footholds or ‘steps’ into the rock face. The tool used for this work would likely have been the stone axe. Once the steps had been completed, the people climbed up to the nest and gathered some of the eagles’ wing feathers. The ts’ii dejį story of ‘The ungrateful old woman,’ also describes how a young hunter once climbed
up a very high cliff to reach the nest that an eagle had built at the top. The hunter had to fight the eagle in order to collect the wing feathers required for his arrows. However, the story does not mention whether this event occurred at Gwe’eekatjilchit (see page 352).

Two or three feathers were required to make one arrow. Eagle feathers were preferred. An arrow made with these feathers will be silent in flight. “They took wing feathers for their arrows, those that didn’t make any noise,” Gabe Andre says. “If you shot such an arrow, it would never make any noise. When they hunted birds with those arrows, the bird wouldn’t hear the arrow coming. That’s why they took those eagle feathers.” Another way of selecting the right kind of feather was to use only feathers from animals that dive for their food. Ts’ii dejj hunters knew that feathers from such birds will not make any noise in flight. Feathers from birds such as a raven, on the other hand, would not be used. A raven will not dive for his food, so arrows made with raven feathers will be noisy in flight. A certain kind of spruce gum was used for attaching the feathers to the arrow shaft.

Depending on the kind of animal hunted, the hunter would select one of at least three different types of arrows (see illustration on page 95). The big game arrow was made with a detachable arrow head. It broke off from the shaft on impact and penetrated the animal. A wound made by such an arrow would often mean a faster kill. In addition, because the shaft broke off from the arrow head, the shaft and feathers would be saved even if the animal got away. An arrow with a blunt head was used for birds (middle arrow in illustration). Birds hit by such an arrow were stunned and could be taken easily. The shorter arrow with pointed head (bottom arrow in illustration) was used for smaller game.

Considering how important the hunters’ weapons were for the families’ survival, it is not surprising that even medicine power was used to increase the weapons’ usefulness. As Pascal Baptiste explains, some hunters used medicine power in order to improve their shooting skills: “In the old days, when a person wanted to become a marksman with a bow and arrow, he would take some sulphur and place it at the bottom of the thumb, and once it ignited, he would let the arrow go. In this manner, they considered that the person would never miss. The person was able to knock down fast flying ducks as if he was using a rifle.”

Because medicine power was so important during ts’ii dejj days—for the hunt and for many other matters of daily life—it should be mentioned in greater detail.
For many ts’ii dejí hunters, medicine power was as important for a successful hunt as their weapons. Those who had no medicine power of their own, often relied on the advice of medicine people, dinjii dazhàn, to help them in their work.

How medicine power was obtained

Medicine power was not talked about much. Those who used it did not mention it openly very often. “You could not say anything about yourself. Suppose I had something like that, I would not tell anybody that I had it. ... It would rub away from you if you did,” Gabe Andre explains. Those who used medicine were especially careful not to talk about their dreams: “A long time ago, this boy was talking about his dreams, and the old people told him, 'Shut up! Don’t talk about it—that’s part of medicine!' That’s why the old people told him to shut up when he started telling about his dreams.”

Because medicine power was a person’s private matter, it is difficult to describe just how one obtained it, and it is perhaps best not to try and talk about it. What can be described more clearly is how this power was used, and what it was used for. This was something everybody in the ts’ii dejí camps was able to watch and observe for her- or himself.

How medicine power was used

Most people who had this power used it through their dreams (vâhzhit ga’dindâii, ‘in his dreams’). It is said that when a medicine person was dreaming, nobody else in the camp was allowed to sleep, because this might bother the medicine person.

Nobody could sleep when they did this, because, if somebody slept, he would dream about the medicine person and about what he was doing. The person would go to sleep, and in his sleep he would work with this medicine, too. That is why medicine people did not want anybody else to sleep when they were doing this.

— Gabe Andre

Some medicine people had a special animal that would help them when they were travelling by dream power, and some medicine people were even able to turn themselves into this animal. The stories told in Chapter 2 show that during ts’ii dejí days, many people as well as animals were able to do this, but in later days, only strong medicine people had this skill.

My grandfather used to be a medicine man ... One time he camped with caribou, he was part caribou. He used to have a bone, something like a bone, right on this side. My mother told me that at first she used to bother him by asking questions: 'What is that for?' He just told her, 'Oh, it's nothing, it's a bone of a caribou—caribou bone.' But it was only a year before he died that they told her that he was a medicine person. ...
He told my mother, 'I don’t think I’m going to live too long now, that animal took his bone back,' and that thing was gone. There was just nothing there. She didn’t even know it, it was just that he told her. And then, not even a year later, he died. Yeah, when he was talking about being in camp with caribou, with a whole bunch of caribou—in the evening, he got no place to camp and he walked right into the caribou, I guess he turned caribou. And he camped with them. ‘Lots to eat,’ he said. He ate good, slept good, and in the morning he woke up and he was just laying down right in the middle of tramped-down caribou tracks. It was only him laying there, the caribou were all gone.

— Gabe Andre

Medicine people did not always travel by dream power. Some might send out a small object instead. Knowing how far and where the object travelled, they found out what they needed to know just as if they had travelled themselves: “They always had something, a piece of rock or bone, for when they sent it, it was just as if they were there themselves. They would say, ‘I am going this far, I am going that far.’ Then they said what they saw, and how far it was.”

What medicine power was used for

Medicine power was used for many different purposes. As was mentioned above, medicine people were able to find out where the caribou herds were travelling; they were also able to warn the people of enemy attacks during times of war; and, lastly, they were able to locate objects that had been lost in some distant place. The elders tell many stories that describe the different uses of medicine power.

**Medicine power used in hunting.** Many ts’ii dejii hunters used medicine power when they tried to determine the location of the caribou herds. Gabe Andre remembers a story told about his grandfather who helped the families in camp during a time when everybody had run out of food.

*He could get caribou any time he wanted. Even if there were none around, he’d go out and come back with caribou meat. In the morning, before everybody got up, he was gone. Nobody knew where he went. Before daylight, he came back with a whole caribou—packed it and brought it in. Lots of people were in the camp. Nobody had anything to eat; everybody had to share.*

— Gabe Andre

Another story about medicine power used in hunting was told to Hyacinthe Andre by Gregory Shae of Fort Good Hope. He described to Hyacinthe how on one occasion he was able to kill a moose even though he had forgotten his ammunition! Without his medicine power, it would probably have been impossible for him to kill the moose. Here is Gregory Shae’s story, in Hyacinthe Andre’s words:

*One time I was in the bush and I had no shells. I saw a moose from long ways, so I cut up willows about three inches long. I made them just as long as I needed them, and as many as I needed. Those were my shells. I took my gun, took a shot, and killed the moose.*

— Hyacinthe Andre
The use of medicine power

*Medicine people didn’t have the power to make something out of nothing, but they had the power to know things ahead of time.*

— John Norbert

**Predicting the arrival of visitors.** Medicine people travelling by dream power were able to find out when a group of visitors would arrive. Being able to travel to the visitors’ camp in this way, the medicine person knew how far the visitors still had to go, and how long it would take them.

*One time, the boat used to come, not the big boat, just a boat coming down with freight, and the people wanted to know how far away it was. They asked this man to find out, so down at the Flats nobody was allowed to sleep while this man slept and dreamed about the boat … He never said where the boat was, but he said, ‘It will take that many days to come—it will be here tomorrow or the day after.’*

— Gabe Andre

Nap Norbert tells another story in which a medicine person used his power to predict the arrival of the steam boat. In this story, the medicine person did not travel by dream power but sent out an object instead.

*I heard a story about one Slavey man from around Good Hope. At that time the steam boat was running on the river, no radio, no nothing. The people did not know where the boat was, they wanted to know when it would arrive. They asked this man when the boat would arrive, and I heard it this way:*

*He put a lead bullet in his hand, and he covered himself with a blanket, and he started to sing inside the blanket. After a while he took the blanket off, that lead was just like water inside his hand. The bullet had travelled over there, and was in the furnace of the steam boat. That’s why the bullet was just like water. That’s how he found out where that boat was. It was this side of Good Hope … That bullet was round lead, about that thick. When that steam boat came, the lead went into the furnace, and when it came back to him, into his hand, it was just like water.*

— Nap Norbert

**Medicine power used in times of war.** During ts’ii dejj days, the Gwichya Gwich’in sometimes fought with the Eskimo or the people from up the river. It is said that because the Gwichya Gwich’in medicine people were considered to be especially powerful, those planning to attack would think twice before they actually risked to do so.

*My mom used to tell us that the Fort Good Hope people used to be really scared to come up this way because Arctic Red people used to have really strong medicine. … even people from up around Slave Lake, they used to fight here. They came down here to fight. And it was the same with the Eskimo, they came up here to fight with us.*
There used to be McPherson and Arctic Red, they used to be partners. They used to be strong. You couldn’t do anything against these people! The Eskimos attacked early in the morning, just before daylight—same thing with people from around Great Slave Lake, they attacked us. Lots of time they made that mistake! There were too many medicine people around here. They knew when the Eskimos would come; they saw the Eskimo when they were asleep. All that my mom told me about, that’s how I know all that.

— Gabe Andre

**Medicine for travelling.** The story of Diniizhok also shows that dream power could be used to prevent an enemy attack. As was described in Chapter 2 (page 27), Diniizhok was able to save his mother and brothers from a camp of hostile people who were planning to kill them. Diniizhok learned about this plan through his dreams. Using his medicine power, Diniizhok was able to reach the camp quickly and to help his mother and brothers. It is said that Diniizhok was one of the most powerful medicine people of his time.

**Women and medicine power**

It may not appear all that obvious, but in talking about the importance of medicine power for the successful outcome of the hunt, we are indirectly already talking about the women’s contribution to the hunt, as well. Much as some men controlled medicine power that they used for the hunt and other important matters, so it was said that women possessed special powers of their own which they had to control. The women accepted the responsibility to exercise this control and to behave in the appropriate manner; this was one of their indirect contributions to the hunters’ work. It was said that if the women failed to do their part, the hunt might not be successful.

The women took this responsibility very seriously. At puberty, a young girl would separate from her family to live in a hut by herself, for a period lasting up to one full year. During this time, men and boys were not allowed to approach her, to talk to or to even look at her (see page 276). Only the family’s older women, and in particular the grandmother, kept her company. During this time the knowledge that enabled the young girls to understand the importance of her responsibilities, was passed on from one generation of women to the next. Men did not have access to this knowledge:

… they taught me how to respect all those things that were associated with the way you lived in those years. But these things were brought to me by other women in the later years. By that time you became a woman, so now these women were telling me, I should be respecting the women, the men…

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

It was during this time that the girls learned how important their conduct was even for the successful outcome of the hunt. For example, it is said that women had to be careful to respect “the men’s hunting equipment, their clothes that were
associated with hunting and all that.” If a woman failed to show respect, the successful outcome of the hunt could be called into question. Noel Andre makes much the same point: “Even the men’s snowshoes a woman was not supposed to walk over ... and it was the same with a gun case and all their guns. If a woman saw a man’s belongings in front of her, well, she’d have to take them and put them aside, and then walk forward.” The same rule applied when the hunt had been successful. Noel continues: “When a man killed a moose, the woman was not supposed to walk over the blood, or the hair, or the feet of the moose.” The hunter’s luck might be called into question if this occurred, therefore everybody was careful not to break this rule.

These stories show that the women’s help was of great importance even for the hunt—which in ts’ii deji days really was the men’s responsibility. And, as has already been mentioned, controlling their special powers was not the only thing the women contributed to the work of hunting. Before the hunters could even set out on the trail, they had to rely on the women’s work, in a number of ways: The women made all of the clothing and some of the equipment, and they looked after the camp while the men were away. Their important work is described in Chapter 11 on page 145.

‘Partners:’ Families helping each other

Hunters relied not only on medicine power and on the women’s help. Mutual help between hunters was just as important. The mountain sheep and caribou hunt was often most successful when several hunters and their families worked together and helped each other.

Hunting sheep

Mountain sheep are very careful animals, and they were often hard to hunt for the hunter who had to approach them to within the range of his bow. Hunters therefore often helped each other to come close to the animals. This was done by pushing the herd towards the hunters: “They tried to chase them to each other and to kill them with bow and arrow,” Annie Norbert explains.212

When the sheep came down the hill to feed around the foot of the hill, the hunters circled behind them. The hunters sat right beside the trail, here and there. One man would stay behind and chase them back up the trail. Those men were still using the bow and arrow. That was another way to hunt them, use the bow and arrow.

— Hyacinthe Andre53

Snares were often set right on the trail. The hunters attempted to ‘stampede’ the animals into the snares. It took about two weeks walking from Bernard Creek to the places where sheep could be hunted in this way.222
Julienne Andre also described the mountain sheep hunt of her younger days: “We lived at the mountain sheep place. They used to come down the hill so fast they looked like flying geese. Everybody was thankful ... When the mountain sheep came down the hill the people followed their trail, and when they returned they killed them all. It was good and it was fat and it was tasty.” Sheep killed in September were valued for the skins: “They came down to the river from way on top of the mountains in September, and that’s the time they got a hold of them, and they killed them especially for the skin,” Annie Norbert points out.

The sheep hunt was not the only task requiring the cooperation of several hunters. Sometimes, this was also necessary for the caribou hunt, but the method used by the hunters was more complicated, and the scale of the hunt was much larger. The animals were chased along a fence into a ‘corral’ where they were killed. This method could not be used for sheep, because sheep will not leave their accustomed trail whereas caribou scatter more easily, and can more easily be diverted towards the fence.

**Caribou fences**

A caribou fence consisted of two parts, the ‘surround’ (or ‘corral’) and two long fences, that which converged at the surround. To make a surround, posts about four feet high were set in the ground to form an enclosure roughly circular in shape. The openings between these posts were filled with brush and smaller poles to prevent the caribou from escaping, except through narrow openings about eight feet apart in which snares were set. These snares were made from moose skin babiche; caribou skin was not strong enough. One side of the surround was left open, and from here two fences stretched out, widening like the mouth of a funnel. The fences were constructed in the same way as the surround, and they led the caribou towards the actual corral.

The hunt at the caribou surround required the help of a large number of people. A group of men, women and children sneaked up on the grazing herd and attempted to chase the caribou towards the fences, where the hunters were waiting, spears and bow at the ready. Once the animals had entered the round enclosure, the hunters blocked the opening and killed with their bows and arrows those animals that attempted to turn back. The rest of the herd were chased towards the snares that were set in the fence where the remaining animals were killed. This method could yield a large harvest. Now the families did not need to follow the herds for several weeks; they could afford to rest in camp for some time.

The Oblate father Émile Petitot saw a caribou fence during one of his many journeys among the Gwichya Gwich’in, but unfortunately he does not state the fence’s exact location: “Travelling on the lake, I saw some hunting palisades enclosing a vast area of tundra and of woods, stretching to the end of the lake. That fencing is made of dead trees, roughly tangled up; at intervals along the fenc-
ing, there are openings or doors across which thongs or laces of catgut are woven [snares]. The caribou are driven towards the pound; forced to get in; forced to seek an escape by way of the webbed openings where they get tangled up and strangled by the lacing."

There are several sites where the Gwichya Gwich’in are thought to have used caribou fences in ts’ii dejji days, but not all locations are remembered with certainty. Hyacinthe Andre was told that one fence was built near the foot of the mountains up the Red, although he never did see it himself. The second site was likely due east of Martin zheh at the lake Vinih k’yu in the Tree River area. According to George Niditchie, a caribou fence may have gone out from this lake. A third fence likely ran between two lakes located almost due west of Point Separation. Both the area around a lake and a creek flowing out of another lake half a mile away, are named Tatthal nii’ee which translates as, ‘a line of fences stood.’ This indicates that during ts’ii dejji days a fence was likely used in this area. “They must have been chasing caribou between those two lakes, and they had that fence, from one lake to the other,” Gabe Andre points out. “When they chased caribou during the summer time, they had to go through those two big lakes. Maybe they had snares all the way from one lake to the other on that fence.”

The fourth fence was probably used between two lakes in the Tree River area. These lakes had the same descriptive names that were also used for the area west of Point Separation—Tatthal nii’ee choo and Tatthal nii’ee tsal. The two names taken together would describe the fence’s location, namely, ‘a line of fence running’ from a ‘big lake’ (choo) to a ‘small lake’ (tsal).

Building a fence was a task that required the help of many families, and in all of the places mentioned, the construction of the fence would have been similar to the one described by Father Petitot—the fence went out from, or ended up at, a lake. The place names also seem to confirm Petitot’s observation: The Gwichya Gwich’in may well have built just the kind of caribou fence seen by Father Petitot.

The harvest at the caribou surround was so large that the families could afford to stay in that location for an extended period of time. It was not necessary to follow the herds again immediately. What kind of shelter would the families put up during this time to protect themselves from the cold temperatures of mid-winter?

The shelter of the families who lived in the mountains and made their living by following the caribou herds, had to meet several requirements. First, it had to be highly portable. Second, it had to be light enough to be transported by pack dogs, by dog team, or by women pulling a sleigh. At the same time, it had to be sturdy
enough to provide protection from the cold temperatures of mid-winter. The caribou skin winter tent, dizhoo nìivaa, met all of these requirements.

Some of the best caribou skins for a skin tent were obtained during the summer caribou hunt in the Caribou Hills area in the Mackenzie Delta. If you wanted to have a good tent, you went there for the summer, instead of making dryfish,” Annie Norbert explains. The skins were tanned with the hair left on; about twelve or thirteen were needed to make one tent. The frame was made from willow or from spruce. Spruce was collected in the spring when it is soft and supple, and can be bent into the required shape. Spruce is also less heavy than birch, and therefore can be transported more easily. The bent poles were taken along on top of the sleigh. “My mom told me that when they loaded the poles, they were put on top of the sleigh with both ends sticking up,” Gabe Andre explains. “The ends were tied together, then they put the caribou skins in there too.” For a regular-size deezhah nihvaa, ten bent poles were required.

### Winter camp around 1900

_They made it to the place where they were supposed to build the next tent. At that time, when a tent was being set up, they had tent poles. It was a caribou skin tent. They had all the tent equipment tied on the sled. Some kids that were cold were crying and the women would be clearing the ground. In the area where they would be making fire, they chopped up the ground. They made a little base and on this they would make fire. Whoever worked the fastest, got the fire first (as they would bring the fire from house to house). There were many times when we were poor and cold. Sometimes things were done just so poor and pitiful. The tent poles were tied with string, and sometimes, when a woman didn’t have string, she would get willow, thaw it out, and use it to tie the tent poles (sometimes I did that too). Your hands got cold when you were tying, so you’d thaw them out and tie another pole. After that was done, they would put caribou skin on the outside of the poles and in the middle of the tent there was a big fire._

— Julienne Andre

### Setting up a caribou skin lodge

The women who were travelling behind the men would reach the site where the men had left a marker such as an axe. The marker indicated that camp was to be set up here. If the women were travelling with pack dogs, these would be tied up first. Then the caribou skin tents were set up. This required several steps.

First, the ground had to be cleared of snow. Then clumps of earth were removed to level the ground. The earth could then be used to build the base for the fire place inside the tent. The shovels used for clearing the ground were made either from the shoulder blade of a moose or from wood. The wooden shovels, zhoh
ch’ek, would sometimes be decorated with tsaih. Snowshoes were also used as shovels.

Next, the tent poles were untied, taken down from the sleds, and pushed into the ground in a circular shape. Sometimes, the poles had to be thawed out before they could be used. “Everything was so pitiful in those days,” Hyacinthe Andre recalls an old-time story, “my mom told me stories about it. Every time they moved camp, they had to thaw out all the willows. Every time they were going to move, they pulled out all that willow. Now it was dried out and you couldn’t use it anymore. In the new camp, you’d have to get new willow again. Now you had to thaw it out again before you could use it.”

When the poles were in place, the skin was put over top. The caribou skins making up the tent came in two sections consisting of several skins each. They were spread and pulled over the poles and tied together. “The tent came in two

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Snow removal

*If the snow was not cleared away, the heat inside the tent would gradually melt the snow underneath, and the tent would sink in. Barney Natsie remembers just such an occurrence. While travelling on the trail, he visited Noel and Gabe Andre who were camped nearby:*

I had a tent there, I used to stay in a tent a lot.—Oooh, they didn’t want to shovel snow, so they just sat on top of the brush. And one time, they set a stove in there. By the time I visited them, you had to jump down into the tent. The snow melted, the tent was set up way up on the snowbank, and now it was way down in there. — Barney Natsie
pieces,” Gabe Andre states, “after they put the frame up, one piece went on one side, the other piece on the other side. They pulled the two pieces over top of the poles; they had to meet right in the centre.”

The uppermost centre part of the dome was left open and served as a smoke hole; a draft hole was left open at the base of the tent’s back wall, across from the entrance area. This created a draft that helped push the smoke up through the smoke hole. To prevent condensation and frost built-up at the smoke hole, a piece of caribou skin was put in place to cover the area around the smoke hole. It was folded over with the hair on the inside to trap moisture and frost.

The entrance area was covered with caribou skin: “For the door, they say they put a stick across halfway down, so that the door wouldn’t fall in. It was a caribou skin door.” To keep out the wind and cold, snow was then banked up around the outside of the tent to a height of about two feet.

Now the women cut spruce boughs which they placed on the floor as insulation and flooring. Caribou skins were put on top of the spruce boughs. Father Petitot observed that the complete floor area would be covered with spruce boughs and skins. Last, a fire place, kwan k’yit, was set up in the centre of the tent. It was raised above ground level so that people sitting on the floor would come to sit below the layer of smoke—not all of the smoke escaped through the smoke hole. “They put a pile of mud [earth] on the floor … as long as they made it high enough, the smoke stayed about that high, so when they sat down, they wouldn’t be in the smoke,” Gabe Andre explains.
Inside a caribou skin lodge

While this work was going on, other women and children had fed the dogs and collected firewood. Fires were lit in the tents. Setting up the tents was complete, and the families were now ready to move in. Sometimes two families lived in one tent. Living areas existed on both sides of the fire place. "Nobody lived at the back. They had the hole there for the draft, and that’s why nobody lived at the back."43:04 This area was used as a storage area where the families stored “pots, food, and things like that.”43:04

Down the Red in the spring

The caribou skin tent was the main shelter used by the families who made their living in the mountains during winter time. As spring approached and the weather gradually turned warmer, other kinds of shelters were used (see page 135), but now the time had come for the families to move back out of the mountains, towards the river and the fish camps and the days of summer.

By spring time, the families returning from the mountains headed for Tsiigehnjik again at points between Bernard Creek and the Forks, retracing their steps along the trails they had already travelled in the fall. The ice had not yet gone out, so they camped at the river. The men hunted, and trapped beaver and muskrat along the river and at the adjacent inland lakes, while the women began to prepare the skins that had been brought back down from the mountains.
Mooseskin boats

It was during this time—while travelling down towards the river in early spring\(^{14}\)—that people such as Paul Niditchie, Hyacinthe Andre, Ramii tsal and the many that had travelled the trail before them, relayed the bales of drymeat down from the mountains. They also brought along the skins of caribou and moose that had been killed during the winter. Some of the moose skins were now used for building the mooseskin boats in which the families travelled down Tsiigehnjik to the Flats in early historic times. (During ts’ii dëjj days, this journey was made by birch bark canoe or raft.) Mooseskin boats were built at the Forks, Weldon Creek and Bernard Creek. These could be big boats indeed.

The last mooseskin boat

*The last mooseskin boat was built in 1981 at the head of Keele River. It is now on display in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. The boat was built by a group of Mountain people led by Gabriel Etchinelle. The mooseskin boats used by the Gwichya Gwich’in were likely built in the same way and to the same specifications.*

- overall length: 43 ft.
- weight: 800 pounds
- beam: 7.5 ft.
- draft: 2 ft.
- steering oarlock: 1
- power oars: 4
- moose skins: 8
- overall height: 4 ft.
- time required to build: 5 days

— builder in charge of construction: Gabriel Etchinelle, Túlt’a

Mooseskin boats were made in two sizes, big enough to hold from one to four families. The smaller boat would be made with four untanned moose skins, the bigger one with up to fourteen skins (see the photos on pages 109 and 110).\(^{220}\)

Construction of a mooseskin boat required the work of both men and women. The man in charge of construction set to work as soon as the families reached the river. First, a big spruce tree had to be selected and shaped for the keel. Spruce was preferable because it was relatively light yet stable. “They made the bottom with a big spruce. They used the biggest spruce they could find. They had to find it as soon as they reached the river. Just when they got down to the river, the man who made the boat ... had to look for good trees—a half-dried tree, a real good one that he could start working on,” Tony Andre describes some of the materials that were required\(^{1306}\) While this work was in progress, some of the other men started to cut down two more spruce trees and to split them for the gunwales. They also used spruce to fashion the ribs, and an oarlock to hold the steering oar at the back. Yet others began work on the oars. When all the pieces had been produced and bent into shape, they were lashed together with babiche.
While the men assembled the frame, the women began to cut and sew together the skins that made up the boat’s hull. Moose sinew was used for thread. The seams were sealed with spruce gum or caribou fat grease; bone grease was not suited for sealing. This was hard work, as Annie Norbert’s mother knew, who helped with it in her young days: “My mom said she helped her sisters sew the skins together. It was lots of work! They sew it together, and they sew it together, and they sew it together.” When all the parts had been finished, the skins were pulled over the frame. “Everybody went to help, women, kids, everybody. Everybody started pulling. They were pulling it just like canoe canvas, they pulled it right over the frame,” Tony Andre explains.

The hardest part of the work was now done; two or two and a half days had passed. The boat was left to dry on shore. Since there were now twenty-four hours of daylight, this did not take long. When all the skins had dried, the boat was put into the water. “Then they started loading up right away, and,” Tony Andre says, “not a drop of water, nothing.”

Waiting for breakup

As big as the mooseskin boats were, there was little room to spare aboard after the families’ equipment had been loaded: “Boy! It carried lots of things. Bales and bales of drymeat! Bags and bags of fat!” Annie Norbert recalls a story told to her by her mother. The families were now ready to start their trip downriver. It was the beginning or middle of May, and there was not much to be done but wait for the ice to go out.

Travelling downriver, the families were careful not to follow too close behind the ice, as this would have been too dangerous. It was safer to wait for one or sev-
eral days after the ice had moved out, before the boats were put into the water. On the other hand, it was easier to navigate some of the rocky upper reaches of Tsiigehnjik in boats as big as mooseskin boats during the high water levels that prevailed after break-up. Birch bark canoes were sent ahead of the mooseskin boats to make sure that the river was clear of ice. Elders who knew how to judge the ice conditions downriver by the speed with which the water level dropped further upriver, were also consulted. Tony Andre explains that some elders would also use their medicine power to find out about the ice conditions: “They watched the water dropping, and the elders could tell how the water was ahead—how the ice was going, they knew all that. Sometimes they went to sleep and they dreamed about it.” Finally, the mooseskin boats began to travel downriver.

Even though the moose skin boats were the biggest boats used by Gwichya Gwich’in in those days, the trip downriver, as Julienne Andre remembers, was not always without dangers:

*They placed the boat into a sitting position [upright] and they got the juice from spruce and put the glue on it. They spread it over the skin. No water would leak into the boat. After they made four paddles, they started. The boat started to move fast when they got it in fast water, and all the people started to cry and scream. One man named Balin knew the loon. His boat slipped and he was saved because they pulled him out. They stopped near the strong water. Balin never thought of his accident in the water. From then on the waters were good. They took the man’s boat and he rode in the big boat. They slowly travelled down-river.*

— Julienne Andre

Once they were past the difficult stretches, the families would take their time, resting and travelling at their leisure. There was no need to hurry, because the ice
in Nagwichoonjik probably had not moved yet—even those families who were planning to continue on to the Delta right away, would have to wait at the Flats.

**Travelling into summer**

Everybody enjoyed the trip downriver. The boats that had been launched the furthest upriver were joined by others that had been built at camp sites further downstream. Up to five boats might end up travelling downriver in a small group. The cold weather of winter was finally gone, the long days were bright and sunny. (The mosquitoes had not appeared yet!) Muskrat and beaver were hunted along the way, the ducks had returned, birds could be heard singing everywhere. Everybody enjoyed the change of season: “They are going downstream, so they take their time. More hunting along the way, rats and beavers,” Nap Norbert points out.

As they made their way downstream, the boats would stop again at many of the camp sites that had been used during the upriver stage of the journey. Ducks could be hunted at Tateih sheii, Daazrājvan k’adh, and the lakes around Ernest Cabin. Ernest Cabin was also a good place for fish. “I don’t know how many times I spent spring there,” Tony Andre remembers, “in the spring it’s really good for fish.” At Chii choo ju’eji, ducks could be hunted easily, beaver and muskrat could be found at Bernard Creek, at Chii choo ju’eji and Eltyin choo chihvyâh k’yit. Fish traps or nets were used at Daazrājvan k’adh and Eltyin choo chihvyâh k’yit.

The journey ended where it had begun, at the Flats. Families already camped at the Flats had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of friends and relatives coming down from the mountains, and a big welcome feast was held. Now the time had come for one of the great gatherings of ts’iideji days. The groups of families that had gone their different ways into the four regions gathered to visit, feast, dance, and play games. Slavey people from up the river steered their big birchbark canoes down to the Flats to join in the festivities. They followed the a’aalak, the oldsquaw duck, who travels right behind the ice. When this duck comes, everybody knows that there will be no more ice and that winter is truly and finally over. Later, when the fur trade brought the old hostilities to an end, the Eskimo would make their way up the river and also take part in the feasts and celebrations. Those were joyful days. They are described in Chapter 16.
Living at Travaillant River

George Cummings, William Clark, Beth Clark, Dale Clark (with rabbit skin snowsuit), Winnie Clark

Agatha Clark, Emma Moses Clark, Daria McNeely
CHAPTER

KHAI LUK GWICH’IN

While some families made their way up the Red, others travelled to Khaii luk, Tra-vaillant Lake. The name Khaii luk translates into English as ‘winter fish,’ indicating that the families who spent the winter in this area could rely on this lake for fish. Moose were hunted as well, and hunters going out for caribou could follow a trail past Aak’ii nihdaniinjee and Nè’dini’ee (Woodbridge Lake) towards Vàdzaih van.

This was a good area to spend the winter in, but the life-style of the families living here was different from that of the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in, because they relied on the resources of the land in a different way. Even the travel arrangements made by the groups of families heading into the different regions, show these differences.

For example, the families travelling on Tsiigehnjik used either big birch bark canoes or, during historical times, mooseskin boats. The mooseskin boats would have been of little use to the families headed for Khaii luk. Families who had boats tracked them up Nagwichoonjik and left them in places such as Travaillant Creek or across from Dachan choo gèhnjik (Tree River). After that, most travel occurred along overland trails. Before freeze-up, smaller birch bark canoes were used to cross the bigger lakes in the area. These canoes were so light that they could be packed along (see the photo on page 124). After freeze-up, the frozen lake surfaces were also a part of the trails.

Depending on the season, the families heading towards Khaii luk relied on different means of transport. Pack dogs would be used to haul and carry much of the families’ equipment during summer as well as winter. A great change occurred during late ts’ii dej days, when dog teams became the main means of winter transport. Now dogs were probably even more important. During ts’ii dej days, however, many families did not even own dogs. When travelling overland, they had to rely on their own strength alone. They moved their equipment on sleighs that they had to pull themselves, and this is probably how just about everybody trav-
elled during earlier ts’ii deįį days: “It was mostly walking in those days,” Billy Cardinal explains, “there were hardly any dogs.”

Mooseskin leg sleighs

Most families could not afford to own more than one or two dogs. Those who did not own any dogs and travelled in winter time, moved all of their equipment on sleighs made from the leg skin of a moose. “A lot of times I heard about people moving way out, way up to the mountains or way down to the Anderson River,” Gabe Andre explains. “When people wanted to go to town to get supplies, they used mooseskin leg sleighs. Some sleighs were made of two leg skins, and they were about 8 ft. long. The whole thing was loaded up, then they walked, they didn’t use dog teams.” During ts’ii deįį days, the sleighs were most likely pulled by the women. Although this made travelling much harder, the families were still able to cover great distances, as the following story about Bob Norman’s grandfather shows: He travelled down to the coast on foot, trapping with deadfall traps along the way. Bob Norman’s mother was a young girl then, and she pulled a mooseskin leg sleigh as they were ravelling towards the coast:

His grandfather’s name was Henry. Bob Norman’s mother was a little girl when this story happened. She started off with him, in October or November. They started out right across from here, right on top of the hill. That’s where he set his first trap, and from there he never stopped setting traps. He used deadfall traps. He set traps all the way past Jackfish Lake, all the way past north of Travailant Lake, all the way past there. And way down from there, between the coast and the treeline, there is one hill, he passed that, too. And that’s where he finally stopped. It was about Christmas time, so he turned back.

He turned back, he started to pick up his bait out of the traps. And all that time, Clara was walking with him, walking! Only with mooseskin leg sleigh, that was all. They came back across here, it was just the day before Christmas. He had all the fur he wanted! Setting traps one way, then coming back, now it was visiting time. He picked up his traps all the way back—he was finished trapping for the winter!
— Hyacinthe Andre

Pack dogs

The Gwichya Gwich’in used dogs as pack animals long before they began to hitch them up for dog teams. Big pack dogs could haul very heavy loads. For example, Hyacinthe Andre’s dogs were able to pack half a caribou each. “So I had four dogs, they could carry out around two caribou plus whatever you could carry yourself.” Some dogs were really smart with packs, but not all of them. Dog packs were often rather wide and heavy. Going through the bush, the smart dogs would
be able to tell that there was not enough space in between two trees. They would not try to go through, but would back up and go around the obstacle.

Dog teams

Families relying on pack dogs and, later on, dog teams, had to do a considerable amount of advance planning. Much of the dog feed that would be needed during the winter had to be prepared before the families left the summer fish camps along the Mackenzie. The amount of dog feed required depended on the size and number of teams that would be taken along. Each dog team consisted of about four or five dogs, but how many sleds were required to haul all of the family’s equipment? This determined the number of dogs that would be needed for the journey—the larger the number of dogs, the more dog feed would be required. All these factors had to be considered.

Looking after dogs

Dryfish was the best dog feed for long-distance travel because it was light but also highly nourishing. Split fish could also be used for long-distance travel, because it also dries out, and therefore, Cecil Andre explains, “it’s a lot lighter and you can pack more.” For daily dog feed in camp, pit fish would be used, stick fish for short-distance travel. Most of the dryfish prepared at the summer fish camps would be used for the dog teams during fall and early winter, when the families were travelling on the trail.

*They used two sleighs sometimes, one toboggan just specially for one family—the woman drove it, and probably three, four dogs. The other sleigh took all the household goods, the dry fish for the dogs, their grub, their tent, and their stove. That’s*
where the dry fish came in. They used to make lots of dry fish, that's why there used to be lots of fish camps along the river.

— Noel Andre

A hard-working dog will on average require two dryfish at the end of the day. (Dogs were always fed in the evening.) For five dogs, about 2000 fish would be required to last until the end of April: “I used to come home. Then I had to go fishing for my dogs. In one week, sometime I’d get two thousand. There used to be a lot of work to look after the dogs,” Nap Norbert remembers. Of course, the fish had to be dried as well.

How many dryfish had to be taken along when the families moved away from the fish camps along Nagwichoonjik also depended on other factors: How likely was it that a reliable supply of fish could be obtained during the cold season? Secondly, how long would it take to reach the areas where the families would pass the winter? The families living in this region knew where fish could be found in winter, and therefore they knew how much dryfish would be required for the number of dogs taken along:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ts’ii dejį stories mentioning dogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deetrin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Raven in the shape of a man pretends that he wants to marry an old woman’s daughter. The old woman owns a small dog. To please Raven, she kills it. Raven eats the dog, and later empties everything that is in his stomach on the girl. The old woman throws Raven out of the camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman and her days of bad luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A young warrior works with a medicine person who keeps two dogs. The dogs turn out to be bears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atachuukaij — Kwan ehdan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When Atachuukaij and his people hide inside Tseenjoo Kan, they are almost discovered by an old man’s dog. The dog can hear the people in the cave. The old man tells Naagaaij tsal about the dog’s behaviour. Naagaaij tsal and his warriors return to investigate, but the warriors are killed before they can enter the cave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When Atachuukaij returns to his people’s camp after an attack by Naagaaij tsal, he finds that the only survivors are his sister-in-law and her small dog. Atachuukaij looks after the small dog until it dies of starvation. This event occurred just before the winter that Atachuukaij was forced to survive without fire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They used to make lots of dryfish because they had dogs and it’s the lightest dog food that you can travel around with by pack. Supposing that you have to go from here to the foot of the mountains. From here it is about three hundred miles. How many days will that take you? About two weeks. And you need to have light dog feed. That’s where the dry fish comes in handy. And if you bring about six, seven bales of dry fish, that’s a sled load. You got to have your tents, stove and blankets and grub, and kids in there.

— Noel Andre 71:23

Fish that had somehow been spoiled or dirtied was placed aside to be used for dog feed. Fish for people was handled carefully and kept clean. “Dryfish, the ones that they were going to use for themselves, they kept real clean, they scaled it,” Noel Andre explains. “While they were drying it, they looked after it real good and made sure that it didn’t spoil, and that it dried good. That’s the dryfish they put aside, and the dog food they put on the other side. That’s the way they used to do it.” 71:24

Drowned fish, dead fish that had been left in the nets underwater for some hours, had very soft flesh. These fish were also put on the dog feed side. Live fish, on the other hand, were dried for people’s use only. Fresh fish to be used as dog feed would also be stored in pits, where they were left to rot until October or November. 221

And then you make pitfish out of all your drowned fish for winter dog food as well as trap bait. When you make rotten fish you have to look after the fish good. When you are in the bush, you can’t ignore things, otherwise things spoil on you. The rotten fish is to make sure your dogs have food for the winter time—sometimes you’re not sure you are going to have enough food for them.

In those days, dogs were very important because you depended on them. Even though making rotten fish was smelly it was dog food for the winter so you had to look after the pit good. You have to make sure no flies get in there. One fly will spoil a whole pit. Once the pit is full of fish, it has to be closed up and covered well

— Gabe Andre 43:04

They had to move around. I don’t think they had anything else. As far as I heard, the Gwichya Gwich’in never stayed in one place, the whole family moved around to find something to eat. Whatever they heard about or they dreamed about, that’s what they went for. Some year they were way down Anderson River or Travaillant Lake, the next year they were way up in the mountains.—When they moved, they walked. They used dogs in the winter, in the summer time they used them for dog packs. But it is pretty hard to know when they started using dogs. There was no other way they were going to move, in those days. If they wanted to move, they had to have something to pull their stuff. Whatever they owned they had to bring. That’s only by dogs, I guess.

— Gabe Andre 43:04
with earth so no animals can get at it. You start using the fish from the pit during the cold months: December, January, February, and by this time the fish is frozen solid. The dogs enjoy it when you feed it to them.

— Agnes Mitchell

Training dogs

Dogs not only had to be fed, they also had to be trained for work in harness. The most important dogs were the leader and the wheel dog. A good leader had to be smart. He was responsible for keeping the whole team running along smoothly, staying on the trail and helping the driver guide the team. To train a new leader, he was kept close to an old, experienced leader as much as possible. The young dog picked up the tricks of the trade from the old leader.

You always have an old leader, one which you figure is good. You keep the young dog next to your leader all the time … you talk to your leader. He sees the way you travel, he sees the dog action. So when you put him in lead, he does the same thing … When you have four or five, you pick them when they run—well, you just try them out. If a dog doesn’t work in a certain position, you change them around until they get trained in harness.

You can tell when you take them for a run. You can tell which one will be good because that one always follows you and the rest will be behind. You can just hitch them up the way they are lined up behind you. Not hard actually, not hard to train the leader. I always pick out the smallest one—if there are four or five brothers, I always pick out the smallest one. I always put it next to the lead, in less than a week I put it ahead.

I had a leader—I could stand on top of Church Hill and he’d be down the hill, I could drive it anywhere from where I was standing on top of the hill.

— Barney Natsie

Tony Andre also remembers a particularly smart leader by the name of ‘Wolf’ whose owner told Tony “that he had been up that one trail in the mountains only once before, and that had been about four years earlier. Wolf was a leader and he wanted to go right up that trail. The dog knew where he was going even after those year. Bernard let him go. That dog was really smart.”

Even today, when dog teams are not as important as they were during the fur trade days, a good leader can fetch up to $1,000 or more.

Where the leader had to be smart, the wheel dog—who was last in line, running next to the sled—had to be strong. A wheel dog’s job was tough because he had to help keep the load upright and on the trail. Very often, trails were not level but slanted to one side; this was the case on trails along the Mackenzie River. The trail usually followed the shore line, and was slanted for long stretches at a time. The driver would have to support most of his own weight on one leg, and wheel dog and driver had to work together to prevent the sled from tipping:
Long ago, when you travelled along the Mackenzie, that was the time when a good wheel dog busted its tail like that all day long! ... they were holding up, and you too, behind, you were holding them up, too. They tried to pull one side, they just knew—boy, it used to be tough long ago!
— Barney Natsie

Equipment
Considering how important dog teams were in the early days of the fur trade, it is not surprising that dogs were well looked after. It is said that you could tell a family’s bush skills by the shape the dogs were in when a man drove his team into town. A well to do man’s dogs were always in tip-top shape. Great care was taken with the equipment, as well. Often, the women vied with each other in making fancy equipment. They wanted to make sure that the men looked good when they came to town.

Dog collars were made from moose hide which was stuffed with caribou or moose hair. This made it more comfortable for the dogs to pull their load, Eli Norbert explains. The strands of a dog whip were coloured with tsaih, “the handle,” according to Pierre Norman, “was fancied with wool.” Not only the whip, but the dog blankets were decorated. Well-kept and equipped dog teams were greatly appreciated.

Not only the equipment, but the dogs themselves were carefully looked after. When the family arrived at a camp site after the day’s travel, the dogs were fed even before the tents were set up. While travelling with her grandfather, Therese (Remy) Sawyer would usually attend to this task: “It didn’t matter how late we got there, I made sure first thing I did was—even before you had hot tea—you went and took your dogs out of harness, and made a bed for them with branches. While my grandfather went out to get wood … or made fire, I was tying down the dogs, feeding them.” Dogs that were well looked after repaid the care through their hard work—this could be especially important in cases of emergency, such as the following incident which occurred in the 1930s.

What happened to Billy McNeely that one time was that he got real sick. That happened on the trap line, but he brought himself home to Travaillant Creek … From Travaillant Creek, George Hurst brought him to Tree River. In those days, there were no planes—emergency these days, you get a little plane right there, and a car on the highway. Nothing in those days.

And from there, Hyacinthe [Andre] rushed him to Arctic Red. From there he was taken to Bernard’s camp on the main channel, and Bernard took him to Aklavik. Day and night they travelled with him. Day and night by dog team. That was a strong emergency.

You can run out of gas … you can’t go any further. Today it’s like that, with skidoos, but dogs, they can’t break down.
— Annie Norbert
Having seen how important dogs were as a means of transportation, be it for dog teams or as pack dogs, the old-time trails leading into the area around Khaii luk can now be described.

**Trails in the Khaii luk area**

Setting out from the Flats, Teetshik goghaa, or one of the summer fish camps along the Mackenzie River, the families could use one of several major trails to reach the Khaii luk area; one led across from the Delta, the others from different points along Nagwichoonjik. Families living in the Delta around Big Rock would travel east past Campbell Lake, Caribou Lake, Sunny Lake, Sandy Lake, Tregnatchiez Lake, and then on to Khaii luk. For groups of families setting out from the Flats and other summer fish camps along the Mackenzie, a number of routes to Travallant Lake were available.

**Ts’ii deji tajj**

Some of these old-time trails, ts’ii deji tajj, may have been used only seasonally during summer or winter, others may have been used year-round, but most of them have been travelled for hundreds of years—these trails connect the families not only to places on the land, but also to earlier days of history. By naming places, the families have inscribed the history of their culture into the land; by following ts’ii deji tajj, they have literally ground the history of their travels into the land. The history of the Gwichya Gwich’in is also a history of travelling.

**Chidaltajj to Khaii luk**

The first of the major trails swung away from Nagwichoonjik at Chidaltajj, a few miles upstream from the Flats. The name translates into English as, ‘trail coming out of a narrow place.’ Joan Nazon’s family would sometimes set a tent there on their way to or from town. “Chidaltajj,” she remembers, “I don’t know how many times I went through there.” From Chidaltajj, the families set a course for the south side of Shoh k’adh, Fishing Bear Lake. Noel Andre, who used this trail often, explains its layout: “There’s an old trail, a winter trail, pretty hard to see now. From there, you go in a straight line to Fishing Bear Lake. There, they went around the shore and you hit the south end, that’s where there is another trail going east. You follow that for a long time.” Some people travelling to Shoh k’adh now follow a seismic line which was cut sometime after 1960.

Shoh k’adh, also called ‘Jackfish Lake,’ was the next stop for many families headed for the Khaii luk area. Barney Natsie’s grandparents were among those who used to stay in the area around Fishing Bear Lake and Whirl Lake, Ch’uut tsil...
k’adh; they lived in tents.\textsuperscript{172} Barney and his parents camped at Pierre’s Creek, and he would often travel across to visit his grandparents.

\textit{I used to camp a night or two with my grandparents, then I’d go back. One time you know how many moose I saw there? Six!}

\textit{This side is real good for moose. Every place I saw moose around that lake, I would try to get to it—and then Mike Krutko was flying over. Once he saw that, he came low. All the moose ran into the bushes. My dad asked, ‘Why didn’t you go and hunt them? They don’t run far, they just stand in the bush.’ Here I thought they’d run away so I went back to my dogs!}

— Barney Natsie\textsuperscript{173:32}

Families travelling along this section of the trail relied on fish, mainly dryfish, as food for themselves and their dogs.\textsuperscript{223} Annie Norbert remembers the advice she received from her mother: “I was curious, I asked my mother: ‘Mom, when we fish around here, do we use driftwood for under the dryfish, is that what people use?’—‘Aaah, willow! For taste and flavor, dry willow and green willow is about the best wood for under dryfish,’ my mother said.”\textsuperscript{217:40}

The next campsite reached by the families was at K’eeqhee ch’udlajj, In And Out Lake. This lake is located more than fifteen miles east of Fishing Bear Lake. This is one of the names describing a feature of the landscape, or in this case, the waterways. A descriptive translation of the name is, ‘water flows into a lake and then flows out again.’ This description refers to a creek which flows into, and out of the lake within the short distance of no more than fifty yards. The headwaters of the Rengleng River, which flows into the East Channel of the Mackenzie, are at K’eeqhee ch’udlajj. Barney Natsie used to run a trapline in the area, “we moved through there. We stayed on this lake one time, I used to trap this lake. It was the month of February—oh, it was cold.”\textsuperscript{173:33}
The next camp stop was Teevee nit’aowil, Bathing Lake. More recently, the lake has also been referred to as ‘Towel Lake.’ Teevee nit’aowil, means, ‘it looks like something is swimming along the shore,’ or, ‘fish going around the lake along shore.’ No creeks flow in or out of the lake, so the fish in the lake that have to move during spawning time will swim round and round the lake, following the shore line.93 Cecil Andre ran traplines in the area, and his winter base camp, was at Bathing Lake.27:08 Hyacinthe Andre had a tent camp at the north-east end of the lake.44:16 In the winter, this was also a good area for caribou, but, as Barney Natsie remembers, the hunters were not always lucky:

That time I stayed with Hyacinthe and Eliza [Andre]. That was the first time. From Bathing Lake we went down this way, hunting. We figured there’d be caribou, so we started. You know, we followed the caribou tracks pretty near one week. Every day we moved after it. Walked all day, came back, camped, next day moved to where we had turned back. … Pretty near one week, finally we wanted to go back, so we went that way.

— Barney Natsie172

Bob Norman explains that Teevee nit’aowil has one strange quality: Something that is put into the lake will come out clean. “It’s a funny lake, this one. You put a real rusty trap in it and it comes out shining, just shining! And your clothes, you put your clothes in there … they just come out like you have been doing laundry.”229:45 Alice Andre says that when you put an old net into Teevee nit’aowil, it came out like new.10

From Towel Lake, the trail led in quick succession past Teedaghao (Deep Lake) and Jilàa’ (Jiggle Lake), to reach the major ts’ii dej’ camp sites in the southern Khaii luk region. By the time the families reached this area, winter had already set in, and the trails were now suitable for winter travel—during and after the fur trade days, dog teams were now used instead of pack dogs.

The Eight Mile Portage route

This trail was used by families who went up Nagwichoonjik to reach the Khaii luk region. The journey began with a portage in a south-easterly direction away from Tsiigehtshik towards the river. This first section of the trail was the ‘Eight Mile Portage’ across country. The portage route avoided the big bend in the river just above the Flats. Eight Mile Portage, Zheh gwits’at gwitat’aałji was the ‘trail into the bush that leads into town. “That’s a winter portage. Everybody used it in winter who was going to go up this way,” Gabe Andre explains.39:14 The route following the bend in the river was only used in late spring when the river ice was free of snow, making travelling along this route by dog team much easier. The families travelling back down this way after breakup, on the other hand, would use rafts or birch bark canoes.
The day’s journey usually ended at either Jim Nagle Creek (Jim Nagle vêteetshik), on the river shore across from Pierre’s Creek, Chii chyaa tshik, or at Thad’s Cabin. Gabe Andre explains that Pierre’s Creek was named after his great-grandfather “who didn’t like his name and came here to be baptized, and the RC preacher just changed his name to Pierre.” The traditional name for Pierre’s Creek indicates a resource use, translating as ‘fish coming from the bottom (of the lake or creek).’ Barney Natsie and his parents used to live at Chii chyaa tshik; from there, Barney says, “I just used to walk everywhere, even go to town.”

The next morning, the journey continued in the direction of Tree River. Most families travelling along this stretch in winter time would travel on the river itself and stay close to the north shore. This was the shorter route, and it provided better protection from the cold north winds of winter, thus preventing the trail from being blown over. At Tr’ineht’ieet’iee, the trail swung away from the river in a northerly direction. From here an old-time dog trail led to Rat Lake. Back in the 1950s, Cecil Andre was part of a group who would travel through here with about three dog teams. They stayed overnight around Rat Lake in a tent, and continued on towards Grassy and Big Stone Lakes the next morning.

The next camp site was either at Tachithatroo (Grassy Lake), or at Chii choo dhidléé (Big Stone Lake). From here, the families would portage across to Loche Lake, set a course for Teevee nit’aowil, and arrive in the Khaii luk area via Deep and Jiggle Lakes. This last stage of the journey has been described above.
Chidaltaj to Vadzaìh van

Families following this trail set out from Chidaltaj and reached Shoh k’adh via Point Cut Lake. The traditional name for this lake is no longer remembered, and like many other lakes in the area, it was probably given an English name by Father Levesque. From Shoh k’adh the travellers continued on to Old Joe Lake, Achoo jal. The name translates as ‘Big person jiggling,’ indicating a resource use. Once past Achoo jal, the travellers crossed a stretch of land where there were relatively few lakes, until Rengleng River, Khajilajî, was reached. From here, the families continued to Odizen. This was an important layover point. The families had travelled more than halfway to Vadzaìh van, and everybody would stay in tents near a point at the south end of the lake. “Odizen was a popular place, because they set camp there,” according to Noel Andre. Barney Natsie also stayed at this camp. On one occasion, he went all the way to Arctic Red and came back with a load of good fish: “I was going all the way back to get some fish! Boy, my grandfather was glad when I came back about, six, seven, or eight at night. Oh, he didn’t bother about the dogs. First thing, he dug in the fish, and pulled out a big cony. ‘Oooh, I’m going to eat that now,’ he said.” — “Here I was going all the way back to get some fish, and we were staying by a fish lake!”

Annie Norbert’s mother and her family would often stay at Odizen. They started from Teetshik goghaa, and set out for Odizen, using pack dogs. A small birch bark canoe, which was light and portable, would also be taken along: “They brought a little tent and they made a teepee with k’aii [willow] for their smoke house. They got four dogs, all had a pack, and the man [Annie’s first husband, Jim Moses] carried a little canoe, and my mother used to carry a pack with a tent and a blanket; the man also packed a little stove. When they hit a lake, they went across, and the dogs, they swam. They put all their stuff in the canoe. Sometimes they paddled around the lake, and the dogs went with them.”

From Odizen, the families continued on to Sree chîj viï’edeh, Sunny Lake; this stage of the journey would take about one day. Sree is the word for ‘sun,’ but the rest is a ts’ii dejî expression whose exact meaning is no longer known. It probably describes a sight that can be observed on the lake early in the morning: it appears as if the sun is glowing in the lake. The main camp site at Sree chîj
viiʼedeh was on the south end of the lake. Families arriving from Odizen might be joined here by those coming in from Khaii luk. This was a long journey, and the camp site at Sree chij viiʼedeh was a welcome lay-over point. “These people worked and worked to get to Sunny Lake, it was too far from Travaillant to go down,” according to TonyAndre.12:04

From Sunny Lake, the family set a course for their final destination, Vàdzaih van, Caribou Lake; this stage required another full day’s travel. Joan Nazon remembers travelling between Odizen and Shoh k’adh when she was young: “Lots of days! I don’t know how long we stayed at Jackfish Lake, and then we started, we camped twice to Odizen. And then from Odizen, we made it in one day to Sunny Lake—going, that is. But coming, we camped only once. And then from Sunny Lake we made it to Caribou Lake in one day. But from the Delta we went to Caribou Lake also. I don’t know how many days it took us. One week, I guess.”203:37

Caribou Lake is located ‘in between,’ belonging neither to the Travaillant Lake area, nor is it considered to be quite in the Delta. It was, however, on the main winter hunting trail for people from the camps around Khaii luk.203:37 Caribou, in Hyacinthe Andre’s days as a hunter, would usually travel as far as Vàdzaih van during
Khail luk in mid-winter. Looking west towards Nagwichoonjik, several important sites can be seen: (1) Teeddhaa — (2) Teelaij — (3) Jilaal — (4) Teedaghao — (5) Teevee niitaowil — (6) Tfoo nadhadlaaj — (7) Cheluk goonlii — (8) Chii choo dhidlęg. Nagwichoonjik (9) and Chidaltaj (10) can be seen in the distance.
their winter migration—it is only recently that they have begun to move as far as Khaii luk. They say, as was mentioned in the first chapter, that the herds may have been attracted to Vàdzaih van by a giant caribou that used to live on the east side of the lake (see page 3).

Vàdzaih van was an important layover point for families travelling from Khaii luk towards the Delta; Tony Andre explains: “That’s a long trail. … It goes right down to above Big Rock. That’s the old-timer trail that the people used to go to the Delta.” Families staying at Vàdzaih van would hunt rather than fish, and because they had to follow caribou or track moose, they had to be more mobile. Thus there were many camp sites all around the lake, but no central sites of the kind used around Khaii luk, where these camps centre on fishing spots. During and after the 1940s, Edward and Joan Nazon stayed at Vàdzaih van several times.

In October 1940, we moved to Caribou Lake … before we left, my husband’s auntie, Marcelline Coyen, told us, ‘At the last camp to Caribou Lake, make sure you have hooks ready. Put bait on it and about five hooks,’ she said. ‘Maybe more,’ she said. ‘Have it ready,’ she said, ‘and when you hit the lake, you can always set the hooks right there,’ she said. ‘The ice is thin,’ she said. ‘If you’re running out of food, that’s what you do,’ she told us.

So we hit that Caribou Lake. Don’t know how long it took us to Caribou Lake, but we hit the Caribou Lake, and, oh, long ways to cross! First we made fire, made tea, had something to eat, then we crossed Caribou Lake. Pitched up tent, and then my husband said he was going to set hooks. He went down and set hooks …

The next morning, we got some more loche and we took off. Ooh, long ways from that Caribou Lake! We were on this side, and we were going to the south side. Pretty near all day we travelled on that lake. Finally we got to the end and then we pitched our tent. We set tent and the next day we were going to fix up the tent place real good—we dug snow out, levelled the ground, put logs around it, and we set the big tent on top. The next day he said he was going to set net. He went on the lake. At the end he was so far away, he was just a black thing on that lake. Like a small little black thing that was moving out on the middle, that was him!

… we moved to Sunny Lake, too. He walked ahead, breaking trail. There was an old trail, we followed that. We hit Sunny Lake and then we pitched up the tent. Pitched up tent again and even though it was late, we set net—in the moonlight we set net. Peter was baby-sitting his sister Emily as we set net. The next afternoon we visited our net. All kinds of fish we got. … We stayed there, we went back to Caribou Lake and back to Sunny Lake, we did that every weekend, too.

So one day he told me, ‘I’m going to break trail to Odizen.’ … So he went there early in the morning. He was gone all day, late at night he was still gone. Eeehh, while he was gone, a big wind came up! Oh, boy! Good thing we were in the shelter, otherwise I guess our tent would just have blown away … I went down to the lake, you couldn’t see anything! I didn’t know where he was. It takes long ways to cross that lake too. So I didn’t know what to do. I got all the dogs too. He was just walking—didn’t know what to do.
Close to the shore at the end of the lake there was a great big tree. Thick too! And there was a lot of dry brush there. I thought to myself, 'I'm going to do something.' So I told Peter to watch his sister good, I told him, 'I'm going to do something.' 'Don't, don't go after Edward,' he told me. 'Don't leave us behind also,' he said. 'No,' I said, 'I won't! I'm just going to cut some trees down there.'

So I was cutting lots of dry brush around there. I cut lots of it and I put it under that big tree, piled it up. And we used coal oil that time. You know you can't light a fire in too strong wind, so I put a little bit of coal oil on that. Spilled it, you see, then I threw match on it. It just burned. Holy snake! That big tree caught fire, big flames right into the sky! Well, he was on the side of the lake, just when he hit the lake I guess. It was a north wind, too. He had to face that wind, you see. He didn't know where to go, which way to go—good thing I burned that tree. He saw that light so he came right across towards that light. At first he thought our tent was burning!

— Joan Nazon

From Vàdzaih van, the families would move either west towards Nichïitsii dininlee in the Delta, or southeast towards the Khaii luk area. The trail to Khaii luk led them past Hill Lake, Fishtrap Lake, Nè'dinii'ee, and finally, Vanvee nadhadlaji. All these stops were also used by the hunters from the Khaii luk area during the winter caribou hunt.

Khaii luk: 'People used to live there maybe 500 years ago'

There are several important fall and winter camp sites around Khaii luk, including Teelaj on the north end, and Teeddhaa on the south end of the lake. Most families tried to reach the area by early November. Tony Andre points out that this region has been occupied for a very long time, “that’s where people used to camp, long, long ago—maybe five hundred years ago. All the Arctic Red River people used to go there.” In later days, during the fur trade period, the men headed out from these camp sites to trap around the east side of the lake. Annie Norbert also spent several winters in the area. This was around the year 1942. The women looked after the camp while the men went out to trap. They would be gone for up to three or four weeks at a time.

On one of these trips, Gabe and Cecil Andre, and Barney Natsie were going to take things a little easy. “We decided we were going to travel light, so we never took blankets. Gabe had a big eiderdown, but we had to keep the fire going all night to keep warm. That’s the only crazy thing we did, I think,” Cecil says as he remembers the incident which occurred around the north end of Khaii luk.

The main trail connecting the north and south ends of the lake ran along its western shore. People preferred to travel on the western side because it was better protected from snow and wind storms. People would mostly use this trail when they intended to stay overnight along the way or to set up camp. Those who were in a hurry to reach the south side headed across the lake.
Teelaji

The fish runs at Teelaji, located on the north end of Khaii luk, are so reliable that Cecil Andre, for example, had little trouble getting the fish he needed for the winter. “We fished there for about one week, and we had enough dog feed for the winter... we had two nets strung right under the ice. We had five thousand fish in five days.”

Tony Andre also noted how easy it was to gather the natural wealth provided by the land at Teelaji:

“They went to set a net—it was full already, and the fish were coming! There was no water [space] amongst them—they were coming. The net got full and he [Hyacinthe Andre] jumped over the net while they were pulling out the fish. You get across there, you throw the fish ashore, and you come back, see that net, it’s full again—you got no time!

It was just like that, back and forth, back and forth, and somebody else jumped in and he also did that. After you had a good rest, well, you jumped in. Well, in one whole day, you got over a thousand. And you got tired of it, you were going to quit, you pulled the net out...

— Tony Andre

Teeddhaa

The second major camp site, Teeddhaa, was located on the south end of the lake at the point where it flows out into Travaillant Creek. The name Teeddhaa indicates that the creek is open year-round. “It freezes once in a while maybe, when it gets too cold, but that’s it,” Noel Andre points to the site’s advantages.

Fish can be caught at this site at almost any time, because even
when it freezes, the layer of ice is no more than one or two inches thick, “it’s just like an open air hole... it still freezes sometimes, some years it freezes. It might freeze around Christmas when it’s really cold, but before that it’s just open all the time.”

There is so much fish there that usually it is not necessary to stretch more than one fish net across the creek. Pierre Benoit did not find it very hard either to catch fish at Teeddhaa: “One time I got over a thousand fish in one week right out of there—used to chase them in the net and oh! Lots of fun!”

Vidi chu’

Another site used by many families was Vidi chu’ (Trout Lake), located northeast of Khaii luk. The main trail from Khaii luk into this area led past Vanvee nadhadaaij, Echeenuut’aii (a ts’ii dejj name), and Treeadaaghaa (this name refers to a story about a woman ‘who was crying while clubbing fish’). From Treeadaaghaa, it was only a short journey to Vidi chu’.

Vidi chu’ appears to consist of two sections linked by a narrows: ‘Trout Lake Narrows,’ Vidichu’ leetak. Tony Andre describes the position of the narrows: “That’s like two big lakes on both sides, and a little river runs right through it.”

It was at this narrows where the families would set their camps and then put their nets in, as is indicated by archaeological finds as well as the discovery of remains of a birch bark canoe at this site.

This lake contains some of the biggest trout one is likely to find anywhere in the traditional land use area. They are so big that if you catch five or six in a net, the net might actually sink to the bottom, s Barney Natsie explains it: “That time, we had a net there...I’ll never get over it, you know. We had a net there, we caught one trout, and we fed three teams of dogs out of it...It was very big!”

It is said that Diniizhok may have been one of the first people to set up camp at Vidichu’ leetak.

How the Khaii luk Gwich’in used to live

The families living at the many lakes in the Khaii luk region relied mainly on fish for their survival. This fact influenced the way of life of the Khaii luk Gwich’in: Families who were able to catch enough fish in the same area over an extended period of time, did not need to travel on the land as much. Even the kinds of winter shelters used by many ts’ii dejj families living here, show that this was so. Unlike the skin tents used in the mountains up the Arctic Red, the houses used around the Khaii luk area were not intended to be taken along at all. The families who built them meant to stay in one place for some time.
These shelters should be described in more detail, because they can provide important information about the way of life of the Khaii luk Gwich'in. Such a description also provides an opportunity to describe how daily life in camp was organized. The tasks and responsibilities of camp life were by and large the same for the families travelling in the different regions, so the description applies not only to the Khaii Luk Gwich'in, but to the Tsiigehnjik, Ehdyetat and Nagwichoonjik Gwich'in as well.
Tony and Caroline Andre at Martin zheh, 1995

Edward Nazon at Chii echejz around 1970.
Below: Dale Clark's rat camp in the 1970s.

Trail's end: Camp life
Like the families travelling in the mountains up the Red, the families making their way to the Khaii luk area used skin tents along the way. When they reached their destination, they often moved into more permanent dwellings. As fish could be caught in several locations throughout the winter, there was no need to move camp too often. Caribou were hunted along trails such as the one leading to Vàdzaih van, but fish was the main source of food for the Khaii luk Gwich’in. It cannot have happened very often that hunger forced them to search for food elsewhere.

Because the Khaii luk Gwich’in did not need to move often, the houses they built were meant to last longer. Two different type of permanent shelters were used, one of these until well after ts’ii deij days.

Nee kanh

For families who did not move camp too often, the moss house, nee kanh, was a suitable type of dwelling. Hyacinthe Andre remembers living in a nee kanh when he was a child. His mother Julienne describes the use of moss houses before the turn of the century:

I travelled along with them. My brother John and I went along when they went to the lakes. All the wives would be left at the lake when there were no tracks and they would make a fire. The wives said, when left behind, they were going to build a house. They made it out of moss. That night they made a fire on a large piece of land. Even then it was cold. After the house was made, we all went into a nice, hot place. They all laughed at the men who left them behind without a house.

— Julienne Andre
250-300 year old remains of such a house have been found at Ge’atat dilee. Another one, located on the north side of Hyndman Lake, was probably built about 500 years ago, during ts’ii dejj days. 500-700 year old remains of a semi-subterranean dwelling were also found around Vidich’u’leetak. It is not always clear, however, whether these are the remains of a nee kanh or a nan kanh.

The nee kanh probably was a rectangular structure, constructed from moss and earth. The walls were about 1½ feet thick. When the moss was cut out of the ground in the fall, the top (outer) half was frozen, while the bottom (inner) half was soft. This method probably had the following advantage: The outer, frozen layer provided stability while the squares were put together, and the softer base layer made for a better fit. “That’s how you take it out, half frozen, half thawed,” Tony Andre explains. When the house was completed, the bottom edge of the smoke hole left at the top of the roof was covered with fur. This prevented the moss from drying out too much and catching fire.

These houses provided good protection from the cold temperatures of winter. They were often built in areas where food supplies were reliable and predictable: Where food could be obtained close by, people needed to travel on the land less, and they could afford to build more permanent dwellings: “There used to be a big place,” Tony Andre explains, “all winter people used to stay around there, because Ge’atat dilee means that the fish goes there.” It is said that between fifty and eighty moss houses were located around Khaii luk, around Vidi chu’ and Ge’atat dilee.

It may have been houses of just this kind that Dinizhok built for the upriver people when he saved them from starvation (see page 29). Wherever the people led by Dinizhok built moss houses, they would place his house at the camp’s centre. This showed that he was greatly honoured by his people.

Nan kanh

Not much is remembered about ground houses, nan kanh, but they probably differed from nee kanh in two respects: They were dug deeper into the ground than a nee kanh; and, secondly, dirt (or soil) was used as a building material. The following description indicates that such a house may have stood at Ge’atat dilee:

The soil which had once filled the depression was not scattered about, but appears to have been an important element in the construction of this feature. Indeed, both soil and spruce poles seem to have been combined in a carefully planned fashion. It resulted that, following use and eventual decay of the structure, the long poles were aligned parallel to the length of the depression with thick deposits of sand and gravel following the same orientation. This very clear patterning is proof that this is not a haphazard occurrence …

The semi-subterranean structure appears to have been constructed in the following manner. A large rectangular depression was dug into the ground with the
Skin tents

The traditional winter tent was made from caribou skin. It was called dizhoo niivaa. This was the portable shelter taken along when the families moved on the trail. The hair was left on and turned outside so that the white part was on the inside (see page 103). Aadzii niivaa, the summer tent, was made from smoked caribou skin.

K’aii zheh

The most flexible of all traditional dwellings was the ‘willow house,’ k’aii zheh. This lean-to like shelter was built on the spot, whenever travellers required it for an overnight stay. Billy Cardinal heard about k’aii zheh that were set up around Chii chyaa tshik: “It was a house made from leaves, they made in the summer time, from branches. They made it 10 inches thick, they used to make that kind at Pierre’s Creek, with willow leaves, I think.” Alice Andre remembers her grandfather talk about it: “It was just for overnight. They made it from branches, it was for an open camp, by the fire.” Gabe Andre explains that k’aii zheh was used “for camping out. We used it lots of time when we camped out. You take trees with branches on, bank it up with snow, sometimes you put a tarp over it, and the fire is lit in front.” This was all the shelter needed by travellers who knew that they would not stay in that place for very long.

Snow shelter

Travellers who because of bad weather or some other emergency got stuck on the trail while travelling in winter time, knew how to construct an emergency shelter from snow. Noel Andre explains that drifting or loose snow was used for this kind of shelter: “Even loose snow they would use if they get stuck in cold weather and
had to camp out. They made a snow house just for overnight. They dug it out, then they put a little fire in there, just to thaw the house a little on the inside [to glaze and firm up the walls]. After that they put that fire out. They had their main fire outside, and when they get into the snow shelter, they didn’t need fire all night. For the door, they just put up something from the inside, a jacket or something like that … They also had to make a hole in the roof for air to come through.”

It could be dangerous not to make the hole in the roof. Hyacinthe Andre remembers a story about some men who died in a snow shelter because they plugged up the hole in the roof. The shelter was airtight, no fresh air could enter, and everybody inside suffocated.

**Ahdr’ee kanh**

Although it was not used to shelter people, ahdr’ee kanh, the traditional smoke house used to smoke fish, should also be mentioned. It was a structure made from spruce bark. To gather the spruce bark for an ahdr’ee kanh required a lot of work; because of this, Billy Cardinal explains, “ahdr’ee kanh was too valuable to be used for people.” The photo on page 225 shows such a smoke house.

The bark was gathered in the spring, just when the trees began to sap. At this time it is easiest to take the bark off. “We used to see lots of that long ago, you know,” Barney Natsie remembers, “wherever their camps used to be, you saw it when you went in the bush. There were all kinds of trees where the bark had been taken off. Nice dry wood, too! …I guess they picked out pretty good trees for that. Trees with hardly any limb, you know, because I noticed that tree bark like that, boy, it used to be nice. You never saw holes in it, because the tree they took the bark off did not have a limb. It was just smooth so it must have been good trees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of shelter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nee kanh:</strong> a house made from moss and earth.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nan kanh:</strong> ground house half buried in the ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aadzii nīvaa:</strong> summer tent. Made from tanned caribou hide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dizhoo nīvaa:</strong> winter lodge. Made from caribou skin with the hair on. The hair is on the outside, the white part on the inside (see page 107).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K’aaii zheh:</strong> a lean-to made from spruce poles or willow branches with the branches or leaves on. The sides were up to 10 inches thick. Used for overnight stays when the family was travelling.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Zheh gwich’ok:</strong> a “pointed house,” that is, a skin tent or ‘teepee.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ahdr’ee kanh:</strong> spruce bark smoke house for drying fish.</td>
</tr>
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they picked out. But those people travelled lots, you know. When they travelled I guess they watched for those trees. They noticed place where those trees were growing. The next time they wanted bark, they just knew where to go.173:33

After the families had set up their shelters, they attended to the routine tasks of camp life. Food was prepared first. To cook their meals, the families needed fire.

Moss and ground houses were the largest structures built in ts’ii dejj days; a single house might have sheltered several families.11:01 A raised fireplace built in the middle of the house warmed the house. It was here that the families prepared their food.

Fire and fire-making was of great concern to the families in ts’ii dejj days. It was not always easy to make fire or to keep it going, therefore it was important enough to be shared among the families. “Whoever worked fastest,” Julienne Andre remembers, “got the fire first; then they would bring it from house to house.”70 Two different methods of carrying the fire from camp to camp, were known. First, ediniichii, a fungus that can be found on birch trees could be used. It was pounded or ground into a fine powder, which burns very slowly.72:25 Billy Cardinal explains that, because ediniichii burned slowly, it could still be used to start a fire when the families reached the new camp site: “They used to carry the fire around in it, too. It burned long.”93:08

Second, driftwood with a good outer section but a rotten core could be used. The inner rotten part was lit; it would produce slow-burning coals but no fire, and thus would not blow out. It was just such a stick that Atachuukajj used during the winter that he was forced to survive by himself. It was only when he accidentally dropped his fire stick in the snow that the coals were extinguished (page 21).43:08

In ts’ii dejj days, a good deal of preparation was necessary to maintain a fire. First, wood had to be collected. This was a daily task that everybody was responsible for. The best wood came from well-dried standing dead trees which produced less smoke when burned. When no fire stick had been brought along and fire had to be started again at the new camp site, flint was needed to produce sparks. The only site known on the land today where flint could be obtained was at the mouth of Vihtr’ii tshik, Thunder River.12:03 The families took care to gather enough flint to last them through the winter. Those who ran out of flint would have been forced to go all the way back to Vihtr’ii tshik for new supplies: “They took so much that if they lost some, they still had some. They just had to have it.”43:08 A good supply of flint was important, because it was not only used to make fire, but it also was the raw material for many tools. “That flint was tough. It was sharp and hard to break,” Gabe Andre points out.43:10
People gathering flint or boiling rocks were careful to leave something behind. Billy Cardinal explains that if this was not done, a bad storm might be caused. As was mentioned on page 93, this rule was also followed by people gathering tsaih at Rock River or up Tsiigehnjik: “You had to leave something behind at Thunder River, even if you only took stones. If you didn’t, there was going to be a storm.”

The north side of Thunder River was also one of the two places where boiling rocks could be found. The second location was up Tsiigehnjik, somewhere between Hehnjuu deel’ yah tshik and Liidlajj. Boiling rocks were placed into the fire, heated until they were red hot, and then placed into a birch bark container holding water or broth. Good boiling rocks would not crack—or worse, explode—and only rocks collected from those two places had this quality. These rocks had to be carried along wherever the families travelled. Hyacinthe Andre explains: “That boiling stone, they couldn’t leave it behind. It couldn’t break in the fire, that’s why they didn’t want to lose it.” The rocks were taken along even as far as the region around Fort Yukon. Julienne Andre describes how the rocks were used for boiling meat: “Hot rocks are red-hot from the fire and put into the pail. Then, with the heat it starts to boil. After that, more rocks are put back into the fire, and then put back into the pail until the meat cooks.”

Boiling rocks were required to cook meat or boil water. Flint was needed to start the fire used for heating the stones. Flint could not be used without good tinder and kindling. To make kindling, edinìi chii was pounded or ground into a fine powder. This was probably the best tinder available in ts’ii dejj days. Although it ignites easily, it burns slowly.

In an emergency, dried branches from the bottom of a spruce tree, didich’ajj, could also be used to start a fire. “It could save your life if you had to make a quick fire in sixty below,” Nap Norbert points out. “When you were travelling in the bush and you needed to make a fire, you broke off a bunch of twigs from that tree, put a match to it and placed it under your wood to start a fire.”

Looking after food

Once the house had been set up and the fire had been lit, the families prepared their meals. Moose and caribou meat, and fish were eaten fresh, but it was also necessary to put away supplies for the winter, or in preparation for times when food was not found as easily and the people were starving.

Meat or fish that was not eaten fresh had to be prepared for storage by drying in the summer. “Whatever they were going to use, they’d dry,” Gabe Andre explains, “they had no freezer in those days … the only way to keep things was to dry them. No way you could get frozen meat [from a store].”
Some of the dry meat or fish was also made into itsuh, or what the elders sometimes call ‘pemmican.’ “You see,” Tony Andre points out, “they made drymeat, pemmican, bone grease, everything from moose.” Pemmican consists of dried meat or fish. It is pounded and mixed with grease. Annie Norbert likes to add cranberries or blueberries for better taste. A little sugar may be added, as well. This is one of the elders’ favourite foods.

The biggest storage facilities for drymeat and dryfish in ts’ii dëej days were the big pits dug into the ground. These were constructed at places such as Hehnjuudeetak'yah tshik and Weldon up the Red, at Diighe’tr’aajil, Chii chyaa tshik, and Chii t’iet along Nagwichoonjik (see page 79). Before any dried food could be placed in storage pits, it had to be put into one of several different kinds of containers.

### Storing food

**Caribou leg skin bags.** A caribou leg skin bag, edreedhoh uhtshuh, was used to store dry meat, itsuh and bannock. Irene Kendo explains how the women used to make this bag: “They took the hair off, dried it and then they made a bag out of it. And they kept their drymeat, and their itsuh, and their bannock in it.”

Edreedhoh uhtshuh was also used for bone grease. When eaten with dry meat, bone grease was a great delicacy. “Old Moses and his family used to have that kind,” Barney Natsie remembers. “Boy I used to like it when they came in … If I was playing and I’d see them come, boy, I’d run there right away! My dad’s mother wanted to know what I’d come for. She had pulled edreedhoh uhtshuh all the way to our camp. She put it close to me—a big bag like that! Bone grease, mar-
row grease, dry meat, pounded you know. Oh, I just ate! Filled myself, then I went out and played again.” For bone grease, the bones were pounded and boiled after the marrow had been removed.

_They took the bones and they just cleaned them up, dried them up. They broke up the bones, took the marrow and pounded the bones. Then they boiled them for a day, and then they got bone grease—sometimes they got a lot of bone grease out of it. My mom used to put snow in the pot while boiling the bones. The steam melts the snow, then the grease comes right up to the top, it boils right out of the bone. They used any kind of bone, moose bone, caribou bone, didn’t make a difference._  
— Pierre Benoit

**Caribou stomach.** A caribou stomach was turned inside out and used as a container for bone grease.

**Willow baskets.** Used for dryfish that was to be stored in a storage pit.

**Birch bark baskets.** Used for pounded fish (itsuh) stored in a storage pit.

**Moose bladder.** A moose bladder was used for bone grease. Gabe Andre explains: “They took it and they cleaned it out good. Then they blew air into it, so that it turned into a kind of balloon. When it was dry, they opened up the top and poured the grease in there. Whenever they wanted grease, they chipped a little off from the side. It never got spoiled. Lots of time my mom used that moose bladder. It was like a plastic bag, something like a sealed bag—it was a ‘zip loc bag’!”

**Moose stomach.** The stomach of a moose was used as a container for moose blood. “When they killed a moose, they used the moose stomach for a bag,” Billy Cardinal points out. “They put all the blood in there, tied it up and took it home. Then they cut off pieces from that bag, however much they wanted.” The elders tell a funny story about William Norman who was preparing dog feed. He stepped outside to chip off some blood. It was dark outside, and he had to climb up onto the stage where the blood was stored among the many other things usually placed on a stage. William didn’t come back into the house for a long while. Gabe Andre explains why: “He was going to cook dog feed so he went outside to get blood. He chopped, and chopped, and chopped. Took him a long time! Then he brought it in—it was lighter inside—and his wife just burst out laughing. He had cut up one whole moose skin, he thought it was blood! ‘Gee,’ he said, ‘what’s the matter? Blood breaks off quickly, but I chopped a long time!’” The hair had been taken off the moose skin, then it had been folded and put away on the stage. Because it had been folded, its shape was similar to that of the moose stomach container. In the dark, William couldn’t see the moose skin and chipped away at it, all the while thinking that he was chipping off blood.

**Other storage methods**

Not all of the food put away for later use was put into storage pits or containers. For example, families travelling on the trail sometimes did not have time to build a
storage pit for drymeat. In this case, the drymeat could be hung up high in a willow tree and picked up when the family returned to the site.

This is a story about Mrs. Bluecoat. They had killed a moose, but they wanted to keep moving, and they had to come back the same way they were going. And she said, they hung the drymeat way up in the willows. No flies ever bothered it even though it was out in the open. And when they came back, that meat was still up there and it was still good. That’s the way they stored their food in those days.

— Rose Clark

Billy Cardinal was told that the meat of even a whole moose could be stored in this way for some time, provided that it was hung up right: “This was told to me by old Art Furlong about something he saw around Fort Norman. He used to go hunt beaver with the old-timers there. They killed a moose and they hung it up with a string so that it could turn. Then they continued to hunt. When they came back, the outside had dried out just so much, it had dried right around on the outside, and when they cut it, the inside was just fresh. It never spoiled, and the flies didn’t bother it either. That’s the way they kept the meat, he said.”

Fish caught in winter time could also be stored out in the open—but only as long as green (frozen) fish was used. Fresh fish that was piled up and frozen in this way, would spoil within a day. This was because the heat inside fresh fish was trapped by the ice and snow cover; the fish would quickly rot from the inside.

When they were going to put fish away, they could just pile it up—it had to be frozen, you see? It had to be frozen; fresh fish was no good, because it would get rotten. They used green fish, frozen fish.

To store the fish, they cleared the snow off the ice and piled it up like this, all around the fish. They covered the fish up with snow. Then they threw water on and made it wet on all sides [so that the fish was protected by a layer of ice on all sides].

You could leave it for two or three months, nothing would touch it. They left fish at Ge’atat dilee in the fall time, and later when they went back to get it, it was still there. It was covered with ice on the outside, so nothing could touch it.

— Gabe Andre

Caribou hooves were kept as emergency food for times of hunger and starvation. They were gathered and tied together in bundles of ten or twenty. They would be hung up in trees when the families left a camp site. Joan Nazon explains that “they put them into thick spruce boughs so that the animals wouldn’t touch them.”

“They just left that skin on the hoof part, a little ways back, and that big sinew,” Gabe Andre says, “they left it like that, and hung it up on a tree. Next year, when they came back, they could eat it and cook it again. It was dry, so it stayed good. All they had to do was boil it again. That was their fridge! They had to boil it for a long time, though. And first they soaked it.”
Using what the land provides

That the Gwichya Gwich’in knew of so many different ways to prepare and store food, shows how careful they were not to let anything go to waste. And the careful use of resources did not end with food. Most everything else that the land provided—every part of a moose or caribou—was used in some way or other. Much of the work involved in using these resources was the women’s responsibility. Therefore, this description of resource use is really a description of the importance of women’s work and their knowledge. Chapter 11 contains further information on the importance of women’s work.

Not only the edible parts of an animal were used in ts’ii dejį days. Bones were made into tools and weapons. Skins were used for clothing and tents, for ropes and babiche. Babiche in turn, was used for snares and as lacing for the middle part of snowshoes; thin string was used for the webbing of the snowshoe head. Caribou and moose hair were turned into insulation or to fill hand- and footballs. Moose skins were even used to build boats. Nothing was left to go to waste:

*My mom told me everything in a story about long ago when she was young, moving around—everything they got, they used. They never had anything to throw away. They had dogs and the dogs could eat whatever they wanted to throw away.*

— Gabe Andre

**Bones**

Bones were an important raw material for tools. A split and sharpened bone from the front leg of a moose or caribou was used as a scraper to remove flesh from caribou or moose skins. In the old days, bones were also made into knives. “You had a good knife and knives were precious then,” Pascal Baptiste explains, “they were made out of bone.” Bones were also used for arrow heads, for needles, knives and adzes.

The shoulder blade of a moose not only served as a snow shovel, it was also used as a ‘moose call.’ Nap Norbert remembers one occasion when he used this method up the Red, just above Weldon Creek where he was camping with Gabe Bluecoat. “We made fire, I went up the hill. I had that shoulder blade. While they made fire, I went up a side hill and looked for a spruce tree about that high. I scraped the shoulder blade—you have to do it slowly, so I started slowly. I did that twice, and then I listened: I thought I heard willow breaking, just that one noise. So I did that twice more, the next thing I heard was that noise again. Pretty soon I saw a moose coming along the bank ... You have to scrape it slowly, though, only once or twice.”

Not even the hooves and hoof bones were thrown away. They were used as emergency food, and the knuckle bones of the hooves were also used to build itsu-
htał, the Ring-and-Pin game. Bones that were left over after this were fed to the dogs. To show respect towards the animals on whom they relied for survival, the families were careful to burn anything that might be left behind when they moved camp. Very little remained at the camp site.

*My parents, when they moved around, they really took good care of moose bones and caribou bones, because they had a hard time before. So they knew—caribou and moose bones they’d really take good care of! They wouldn’t throw bones away. They gathered them in one place, and when they moved away, before they moved away, they burned all those bones. That’s how people in those days, the old people, looked after animals, for they really respected them …*

*I know because I stayed around Jackfish Lake with those old people, Old Joe [Natsie] and his wife, and old William Norman and his wife. Those people, they really took good care of fish, meat, everything.*

— Joan Nazon202:34

One of the most important resources used by families living on the land in ts’ii deįį days were caribou- and moose skins. They were used for everything from clothing and footwear to boat- and tent-building. A lot of hard work went into preparing the skins for these different uses, and this was only one of the women’s many responsibilities around camp. They are described in the next chapter.
Camp life: Women's work

Unidentified woman, 1921

Eliza Andre, 1976
While the men were away hunting, the women were in charge of the camp. They prepared meals for the families, gathered firewood and water, and kept the fire. At the same time, they set snares, tended the fishnets, and, during the summer and fall, gathered berries. They cut up fish, made drymeat and dryfish. Then they made all of the families’ clothing. All the while, there were the children to look after. Therese (Remy) Sawyer remembers from her younger days that working in camp would keep the women busy for most of the day.

Looking after the camp

The men were there to hunt, to trap, but I was always in charge of the camp. It didn’t matter how late we got there, I made sure the first thing I did—even before you had hot tea—I went and unhitched the dogs and made a bed for them with branches, while my grandfather went out to get wood or, if there was wood, he made fire while I was tying down the dogs, feeding them. You always carried dry fish or something like that out for them when you are travelling. …

And by the time I finished doing all those things, the tea was ready, I came in to start cooking … If my grandfather wanted to hunt from there, when I got up the next morning he was already gone. I had to busy myself with going out and finding a good wood patch—a good dry wood patch—cutting and getting wood all morning. I came home and had something to eat, then I hitched up the dogs and brought the wood in. Then I had to melt snow for water and then cook for the dogs.

There was always work to be done, we never sat still until maybe after you fed the dogs. Then you cooked something for supper and you ate, and if grandpa was still gone—he often never came back until 9 o’clock, he ate when he came in. Then you washed your dishes, and then that was it.
Then you settled for the night. You had your shoes or snowshoes to patch, the laces that were broken, you had to fix those. Lots of other things that we had to work at, too.

You never sat doing nothing, your day was full. The best time was when the men went out hunting and when they came back with moose or a caribou. The first thing they brought back was a pack sack and there was blood in it and you knew you could eat the best meal ever. You know, you were so happy for all the good things that you could cook and eat and that you’d have fresh meat. …

And you still needed the bones for tools in so many ways. And so everything that you went out and hunted, was used.

— Therese (Remy) Sawyer

Moose and caribou hides

The women prepared moose and caribou skins so that they could be used for their different purposes. To describe this work provides a good example of just how much the women often worked around the camp. Some of the tools mentioned in the story told by Agnes Mitchell were not available in ts’ii dejį days, but the method of working with skins has changed little over the years.

Tanning moose hides: ’I saw mom sitting there all day’

Preparations. When a moose was killed in winter, it had to be prepared so that it could be used for tanning the following summer. After the meat had been brought back to camp from the site of the kill, the women removed the flesh from the inside of the hide using a flesher made from the front leg bone of a moose. Fleshers were made by the men. The moose leg bone is very hard, and fleshers would last a very long time. The flesher was about eight inches long. Fleshing a hide would take about one day. Then the hair was removed with a long-bladed knife.

The hide was then stored away for tanning during the summer, “they would just fold it up and keep it frozen till summer time when it would be thawed out when there was water on the river.” At the same time, animal brains were stored for use during the tanning process in the summer. Some women preferred bear or lynx brain, while others would use moose brain. The brains were left to rot for several months. As long as they were well packed away and covered, nobody would be bothered by the smell.

Not only winter skins were used. Summer and inside clothing, as well as summer skin tents were made from the skins of caribou hunted in late summer. “The way I heard it,” Nap Norbert explains, “is that to get caribou skin for tents, they went down below Aklavik, in the summertime. When the caribou don’t have much hair on, those are the skins they used for their jackets and pants.” Dineedidraiį khyidh, the Caribou Hills below Reindeer Station, was another important area for
the summer caribou hunt. Rose Clark says that late August, when there are fewer holes in the skins, was the best time for the hunt.95:09

Some families also travelled down the Kugaluk and Anderson Rivers for the summer caribou hunt. Gabe Andre explains that the families “used to go to Dinee-didraii, and even down Anderson River. That’s why they got that summer trail from Travaillant Creek past Travaillant Lake; then they hit Trout Lake, and from there they paddled all the way down Kugaluk River. As soon as they hit the tree line, right there is all the summer caribou.”43:09

Before the tanning could begin, the women also had to gather dahshaa, the rotten wood that was needed for the smoke fire. “The dahshaa is the inside of the wood which has rotted, it’s brownish-looking. It has to be poplar. … Some of those poplar trees are big. They know what kind they want. That’s what they would pick and you got a pack-sack full of that. You didn’t collect it in the spring because there is still snow on the ground, and the wood is still damp on the outside.”164:16

Some of the moose or caribou skins that had been fleshed were not stored away, but were hung up in the cold winter air to dry out. Nap Norbert saw his mother do this when he was a young boy: “Lots of times my mother used to do that. First you had to clean it, scrape it. … They hung it up before they moved to the mountains—sometimes they were gone for two, three months, something like that. With the wind, the moose skin got soft, and when they came back, it was white.”228:10 Gabe Andre also remembers his mother drying skins in this way: “They spread snow on it and froze it like that; then they hung it from the neck. It stayed out in the wind, and that would make it soft. You took it down in the spring time. My mom used to do that lots of times. She cleaned it on both sides and then she hung it up outside all winter. In the spring she took it down … After she hung

Making use of everything

Even the hair taken off a moose or caribou skin was not thrown away. It could be used to stuff balls or for duffels to insulate moccasins or mitts. In an emergency, it could also replace a hunter’s parka, as a story about John Modeste shows:

John Modeste told me that he used to run after moose, so once he threw his parki off, and kept running. He killed that moose, and after he finished skinning—no parki! So he took moose hair and put it all around him, and around his back, too: moose hair all over. That’s how he made it back to his parki …

They threw off the parki when they were running. After they killed the moose, and to get back to their parki, they had to do that. If they didn’t do that, they’d freeze, because they were sweating. By the time they killed and skinned the moose, they got cold, so they used the moose hair.

— Billy Cardinal93:09
out about three skins, she said, ‘Now our camp looks like a camp.’ Maybe it was like a ‘flag’ for her, I guess.”

A good time to work. Spring and summer days were the best time to tan a moose skin. These are long and warm days, and tanning a moose skin is outside work.

Soaking the skin. To start the work, a moose hide from winter was taken out and soaked in river or lake water. It takes about one week to soak the hide thoroughly. “You place the hide in the water and put big rocks on it. Make sure that it is tied to a willow or a stick pounded into the shore [so that it does not float away].”

Scorching the hair side. When the hide had been soaked, it was ready to be wrung out, but first the hair side had to be scorched. It was easier to scrape a scorched hide, because the scorching “takes the little bits of hair off the hide.” To scorch the hide, a special frying pan was heated, then it was placed upside down on the ground. The damp moose skin was quickly moved across the hot frying pan. The skin would burn if the same section of the hide was left on the hot frying pan for longer than just a few seconds. Two or three areas of the hide could be scorched before the frying pan had to be reheated. When this step was completed, the hide was black where it had been scorched. “Now the whole hide is scraped off so there is not one black spot on it.”

Thinning out the hair side. Next the hair side around the neck area was thinned out, because this was the thickest part of the hide. This work was done with a special, long-bladed knife.

Wringing in clear water. To drain out all the blood left in the skin, the hide was wrung out and rinsed in clear water for the first time. For every rinsing, fresh water was required. The hide was rinsed several times, until all the blood had been drained out. Many women today keep a special tub or big kettle just for this purpose; it is not remembered what container was used during ts’ii dejì days.

Twisting the wet hide. To prepare the hide for twisting, small loops were cut out along the hide’s outside edge. A solid stick was placed into the ground, and about three of the loops were slipped over it at the same time. Three loops on the opposite side of the hide were slipped over a sturdy piece of driftwood about 3ft. long.

This pole was used for twisting the hide. After the hide had been twisted, it was rinsed, then twisted again. This continued until only clean water came out when the hide was twisted; this meant that all of the blood had been removed. This process could take up to three or four days.
Soaking the hide in warm brain water. To soften the hide further, it was then soaked in brain water. The skin was still wrapped around the stick used for twisting, and it was placed right into the brain water. After the soaking, it was twisted, then soaked in brain water again. This continued until brain water began to seep through the pores of the hide.

Scraping the hide on the hair side. Then the hide was draped over a pole horizontally placed over two tripods, about 5ft. off the ground. The hide was scraped on the hair side with a stone scraper to remove the brain water. After this, the hide was soaked in brain water again, twisted, and scraped with the stone scraper.

The brain water did not have to be changed, “mom would use the brain water for one whole moose hide.” While the clear water used for wringing the skin was cold, the brain water had to be just the right temperature: “You always have to make sure the water is warm, it can’t be too cold or too hot because it will damage the skin.”

Scraping the hide on the inside. The hide was scraped with the stone scraper until it was more or less dry. Next the loose, dried flesh on the inside was removed using a metal scraper. To make the scraping easier, the horizontal pole was lowered so that it was about three ft. above the ground. The woman working the skin, sat down on it to tighten it. A taut skin was easier to scrape.

Preparing the hide for smoking. When all the dried flesh had been scraped off, the hide was ready for smoking. Billy Cardinal explains that “the reason why they smoke the moose skin is that, when it gets wet, it won’t get hardened up when it dries. But when it is not smoked and it gets wet, it gets real hard when it dries. So that’s the reasons why they smoke moose skin. They used the smoked moose skin for moccasins, pants, and coats.”

To prepare the hide for smoking, first any holes in the leather were either sewn or patched up. If this was not done, the area around a hole would burn black during the smoking process. Then the strip along the edge of the skin where the loops had been made, was cut off. (This strip was later used to lace the middle part of the snowshoe that supports the foot.) Then a skirt—after ts’ii de’j days made from canvas—was sewn to the bottom of the hide; it acted as a ‘funnel’ for the smoke. The hide was then hung up on a stick several feet above the ground. The canvas skirt was fixed on the ground with a number of pegs or short sticks.

Smoking the hide. A small fire was started with rotten wood inside the skirt. Agnes Mitchell explains that the fire must not be too smoky, and that it had to be controlled at all times: “You have to sit right there. You can’t let the rotten wood, catch on fire, otherwise you will scorch the leather.” The smoking started in the morning, and continued well into the afternoon: “I see mom sitting there, starting in the morning. It is a real slow process.” The inside of the hide was checked regularly; when it was the right colour brown, the smoking was finished.
The hide was then put back on the horizontal pole. A stone scraper was used to scrape the tanned side. This served to fluff up the hide. The finished hide was hung up. Now the hide was ready for further work, mainly sewing in the winter time.

**How long did it take?** A day or two were spent in winter to flesh a fresh moose hide and to store the animal brains needed during the tanning process. A week was required to soak the hide. Rinsing and twisting the hide took at least three or four days. The other steps required an additional several days. Even women who were experienced in working moose hides thought that tanning two or three hides made for a good summer’s work.

Mom helped me one summer to tan a moose skin. It seemed to take forever. Every now and then, mom would say, ‘Go work with your leather,’ or, ‘twist it now.’ I’d do that. ‘Scrape it now.’ So I’d do that—day in, day out. … I went out and scraped it all the time, sometimes two hours in the morning, and because I knew it was nearing the end I was getting anxious so I would scrape, scrape all afternoon. I wanted it to be really soft. … Mom would tan one or two hides every summer. … The end result is beautiful, especially the smell of the leather and the rotten wood.

— Agnes Mitchell

**Using hides**

For daily use around camp and on the trail, skins were cut up and used as babiche of different strengths for ropes, twine or string. Babiche was used for snowshoe lacing, dog whips and dog harnesses, and different kinds of snares. For rabbit snares, for example, very thin twine made from caribou skin was used. Very strong babiche, on the other hand, was required for moose snares. Five or six strands of babiche made from moose skin were braided to make this snare. Babiche made from caribou skin was not strong enough; the moose might be able to break free.

Moose skin was used to make moccasins; sleighs made from moose leg skin were used for winter travel (see page 114). Barney Natsie describes how this sleigh was used: “It was shaped like a bag … they made holes in it so they could put something inside, then they tied it up like a sled. You could fill that thing up with all the stuff you had, and you could pull it all day. It wouldn’t bother you. It would just slide with you—just from the weight of the things you put in it.”

Most important, moose and caribou skins were used for clothing. In ts’ii dejí days, everybody had two suits of winter clothes. The heavier and warmer one was worn outside, when the families travelled on the trail. This coat was too warm for inside, so a lighter one was worn inside a nee kanh or dizhoo niivaa. What is more, because the outside coat was made from caribou skins with the hair left on, it could not be put into a warm place. The hair would have fallen out, and so the outer clothing was left outside.
Traditional man's caribou skin dress
Most of the clothing was made from smoked skins, because they last longer in wet or moist conditions, but there were occasions when unsmoked skins were preferred, in particular for women’s dresses. Unsmoked skins were white, and the women would wear white deer skin dresses only on special occasions. These dresses as well as many of the tools used around camp, were made more beautiful by decorating them. Porcupine quills dyed red, tsaih, and later beads were the preferred ornaments.

Decorations
During ts’ii dejį days, porcupine quills were used to decorate clothing and moccasins. During the early days of the fur trade, Gwichya Gwich’in women began to use beads for the same purpose. The Hudson’s Bay traders at Forts Good Hope and McPherson never seemed to be able to meet the demand of the Gwichya Gwich’in visiting the trading posts. “The Loucheux,” the Oblate Father Jean Séguin wrote to his superior on August 1, 1862, “measure their wealth in beads … often a man’s wife will wear the beads on her clothes.”

Porcupine quills were dyed with tsaih, then sewn onto clothing. Tsaih was also used to decorate and dye dog whips, women’s snowshoes, the front piece of toboggans, and, so Irene Kendo was told by Hyacinthe Andre, birch bark canoes, as well. Tsaih was also used for wolverine and beaver pelts, but not to make them more beautiful. Rather, Alice Andre explains, the inside of the pelt was coloured with tsaih to prevented the hair from falling out.

Rabbitskin snowsuits
In ts’ii dejį days, rabbitskin was of great importance for children’s clothing. Rabbitskin pants were one of the warmest pieces of clothing that could be made in the old days. As a young boy, Tony Andre still wore a rabbitskin snowsuit: “The whole thing was made in one piece. Some old ladies—like, they thought: ‘Oh, my son might get cold’, ” and then they would make a pair of rabbitskin pants. Joan Nazon also remembers her mother making them for her sister and brother, and both Annie Norbert and Therese (Remy) Sawyer still wore them as young children. Nap Norbert remembers wearing a rabbitskin snow suit when the family travelled. Even in cold weather, he would lay down on the sleigh and never feel cold. Rabbitskins are still used as duffels in mukluks and mitts today. The best rabbitskins were collected during the cold season, usually in December.
when they were white. Skins collected in the fall were brown in colour and not as thick. To make a rabbitskin snowsuit, the whole skin was cut into strips, lengthwise from head to tail; wet skins were used, because they were easier to work with. A little hole was made into each strip on the 'head side,' and these holes were used to weave the strips together. The strips were carefully twisted a little, but not pulled; Annie Norbert explains that these strips were easier to weave together. The strips were woven into a single piece of clothing. When the suit was complete, it was hung out to dry in the wind for a few weeks, and then it was ready to wear. “It was nice and soft” after it had dried out, Annie Norbert remembers.

Rabbit skins were also woven into blankets: “Boy, it was really nice! You could sleep in a rabbitskin blanket outside in fifty below. Yes, you didn’t feel cold,” Annie Norbert says.

Women used not only skins, bones, and stone for their work. Plants were just as important for their work. Plants could be used for many different purposes, be it for food preparation, or for healing sickness and disease. The women collecting
plants would often leave something of value as a token of their gratitude behind—this is still done today: Some women sprinkle tobacco at places where they take plants. This is done, for example, at a site across from Chii t’iet where Juniper berries were collected. It is said that not to leave something might rob the plants of their special power.

You had to put something east, south, west and north, you’d put tobacco and matches, or something like that … that’s what Clara told me. She said, ‘That’s a medicine. If you are going to take it, you’ve got to put something there in place of it.’ Well, tobacco was the first one she mentioned, matches, maybe tea, or something like that.

— Joan Nazon20235

As was mentioned above, people collecting boiling rocks and flint at Vihtr’ii tshik, and tsaih at Rock River and up Tsiigehnjik, followed a similar rule. — The stories about plant use mentioned below have been told by Annie and Nap Norbert, and by Mabel English of Inuvik.3

Black spruce

Black spruce (Picea mariana) and white spruce (Picea glauca) could be used for a variety of purposes.5 Spruce cones, dineezil, were considered to be particularly good for healing. Cones can be found around the tops of young spruce trees. About ten to fifteen cones were boiled in a pot for about half an hour. Spruce branches might also be added to the pot. To cure the common cold, about one cup of this brew would be taken every day, for about five days; people were careful not to drink too much. Those who suffered from bronchitis would take this drink for about a week.

The inner layer of spruce bark (which is white) was used for the treatment of cuts and skin wounds. The bark was chewed into a pulp and placed directly on the cut. The cut was then covered with a bandage. Nap Norbert remembers that his step-father Louis Cardinal used this medicine to treat his sister Rose when she cut her finger with an axe—the injury did not even leave a scar.

Boughs or branches of the black spruce, ah’, were used as a ground cover for the tent floor. Spruce branches were placed on the tent floor with the branches facing down. Branches were changed when they began to lose their needles, about once a week. The branches would leave a refreshing scent inside the tent.

Spruce roots, eneech’ìdh, were used to make nets. The roots look like long, skinny string. They were pulled out, the bark was peeled off, and they were soaked and softened in water. Then they were woven into a net which always had
to be kept wet. A dried-up net had to be thrown away. The inside, ‘sap’ layer of the bark could also be used to make sap nets, eneetch’ih chihvyah. “They take the sap [layer] off the tree and separate and twist it. They start making it when it’s fresh, and then they keep it damp all the time. That’s how they save the net. If it gets dry, it will crack and start breaking up. It’s no good after that, it has big holes in it,” Tony Andre explains.13:05

Red willow (alder)
The young alder willow, k’oh (*Alnus crispa*), could be used anytime of the year. For skin rash and burns, the leaves and twigs were collected and boiled in a pot until a sticky film formed at the water’s surface. The film was skimmed off and put on the affected area. For eczema, a bath was taken in the water.

White birch
Young birch trees, aat’oo (*Betula papyrifera*), were used as a treatment against ulcers and heartburn. To prepare the medicine the whole tree was chopped down. Stem, twigs and leaves were cut into small pieces and set to boil in a large pot. Once it had boiled, it was strained. The juice would look like tea. Half a cup would be drunk before breakfast, another just before going to sleep. This medicine would only work when drinks such as tea and coffee were given up for at least six months. As an additional measure, the sick person would chew and swallow sticky spruce gum; this helped to remove any abscess that might have developed in the stomach. Left-over juice might be stored for future use, but this medicine was made in small batches, because it would not keep for much longer than a week.

Juniper berries
Juniper berries, deetree jak (*Juniperus communis*), were used to treat colds and a bad stomach. Deetree jak and Juniper branches were boiled in a pot. The juice was used to treat an upset stomach and any cold. A woman collecting those berries would leave an offering in that place. A good place to collect them was across from Chii t’iet.202:35

Willow
Green willow leaves, k’àii t’àn (*Salix spp.*), were used to treat bee or wasp stings and skin rashes. Two or three green leaves were chewed; the paste was placed directly on the affected area. This would prevent swellings.

Prickly Rose
In English, the Gwichya Gwich’in refer to this plant (*Rosa acicularis*) as ‘rose hips.’ The pink petals, nichih t’àn, were collected in early summer, when the plant flowered. They were boiled in a pot with water and then strained. One drop of the liquid
was put into each eye to clean out any infection. The liquid was used at least once a week as a regular eye cleanser. The berries of the Prickly Rose, nichih, are sometimes referred to as ‘itchy bums’ (if you eat the small seeds, you will get an itchy bum). The berries were good for cleaning out the whole body. Louis Cardinal told Annie Norbert that eating the berries is also good for the heart.

**Licorice root**

Bear root, treh (*Hedysarum alpinum*), is also known as ‘Indian carrots,’ or ‘bear roots.’ The plant can be recognized by its long, fern-like leaves and the cluster of white pods dangling from its ends. In spring, purple flowers grow at the ends of the long stem. The root itself is white, soft, chewy and sweet-tasting. Before the root was eaten, the skin was scraped off. Some people would prefer to dip the root in duck grease or fish oil before they ate it. This root was known to cure diarrhea.

**Northern Ground Cone**

This plant is called duu'iinahsheè, ‘uncle’s plant’ (*Boschniakia rossica*). Some people also refer to it simply as ‘pipe,’ because children would try to make pipes out of it. The roots of this plant look like small potatoes. They could also be boiled; the juice was drunk.

**Crowberry**

The Crowberry, dineech’ùh (*Empetrum nigrum*), is also called ‘black currant.’ Mixed with cranberries, dineech’ùh was used as an ingredient in itsuh, pounded dryfish, or ‘pemmican’ (see page 139). The plant’s leaves were also used. The juice which was obtained from boiling the leaves was used to treat a bad stomach.

The following story about the healing power of spruce gum, is only one of the many examples describing the importance of plants and their use. Without the women’s knowledge, it would have been difficult to treat many of the illnesses that the people had to deal with in ts’il deji days—many traditional remedies remain useful even in the present, as the story told by Joan Nazon shows.

‘It just healed up like nothing’

*In 1952, I think, 1952—we were staying down in our house. We had an upstairs, and one of our sons, our oldest one, Jimmy, was playing up and down, and he fell down and he got a big cut right here! Deep! About that long, too. Right down to the skull, I guess. Oh, it was just open like that! And there was no nursing station or anything around here that time. The R.C.M.P. looked after the medicine that time.

So I brought him up to the police barracks to see if it was possible for them to stitch it. Oh, they didn’t know what to do. They tried to close it, and then they put band aid on it, but it just kept opening. I don’t know how long they worked on him, two of them. Finally they bandaged his head and brought him home. It took them one month—every day they’d come down and they’d work on it. It kept opening.*
Sometimes it closed and then, kids are rough, you know, maybe he bumped into something, and then it’d open again. Took them one month.

One day Jimmy came down and, oh, he’d undone that bandage he had on. It was open again! I told him, ‘Oh alright! If they can’t fix it, I’ll do something myself.’ So he [the RCMP officer] told me, ‘I am going to go home with you.’ So I went home with him. I went home with him, we were right in front of that barracks, there were trees, you see. I told him, ‘I’m going to take some gum from here. I’ll show you what to do after I take the gum.’ I took that clear one. I picked up some. I went back down and he said, ‘I’ll be right down there. Don’t put it on him. I want to be there. I’ll watch you,’ he said.

So I cut out a little bit of canvas, thick canvas, and I put the gum on top of it. I left it close to the stove and then it melted slowly, you see. Everything was melted. In the meantime Jimmy came; we washed his head and then cut his hair right around the wound. Really cleaned it real good and then there were two officers there. I told them: “Hold that, hold it together while I put that gum on top.” So they held it flush like that, real hard and then I put that gum right on top of the wound. Patted it down. Not even a week later, about three or four days, I told him, ‘We’re not taking this off. It’s going to come out itself. When it heals up, it’s going to come out itself. Don’t bother it.’

So one day they [the officers] came, they always sat with us, those boys. One day they came and they were having tea with us, and Jimmy was playing around and Jimmy said, ‘Mom, that thing came off my head.’ It dropped, you see, came off and dropped on the floor. He came over and we looked at it: Just healed up like nothing! They just both looked at me long time. ‘Now we know what you’re talking about.’ — See, it heals up something, even big cuts, like nothing, you know.

— Joan Nazon 202:35
The third region of the land where groups of families lived year after year was the Mackenzie Delta. The families making their homes here were Ehdyeetat Gwich’in, ‘Mackenzie Delta people.’ Their traditional land use area extended:

- South to Srehtadhadlaįį (Point Separation).
- From there west towards the mountain range west of present-day Aklavik.
- North to the coast of the Beaufort sea. In the old days, hostilities with the Eskimo may have made the families hesitant to venture too far north. Njoh njii’ee was considered to be a marker indicating the gradual change from Gwichya Gwich’in lands to those of the Eskimo. Dineedidraii khyidh, the Caribou Hills downstream from Vadzaih degaii zheh, was a traditional area for the summer caribou hunt.
- East as far as Sitrü’iyeh van, Sitidgi Lake, and Gull Lake. The official name for Gull Lake at present is ‘Campbell Lake,’ but the elders explain that Gull Lake should be the correct English name. Annie Norbert explains that the name refers to the many seagulls that nest in the cliff on the east shore opposite the willow and mud shallows that separates the lake in half. In Gwich’in, the lake is known by two names: The area to the south of the shallows is called Tithegeh van (‘Seagull Lake’) and the northern section, Gwi’eekajjlchit van. Gwe’eekatjilchit is the rock that a hunter would climb in order to obtain eagle feathers for his arrows (see page 95).

It is likely that Gwichya Gwich’in may not have travelled in this area of the land for quite as long as in the other regions. Throughout the fur trade period, many families used to go to the Delta to trap and hunt muskrat in the spring on a large scale. Before the fur trade days, however, large-scale hunting and trapping were not necessary. In tsi’i dejį days, the most important reason to go to the Delta was to hunt summer caribou in places such as Dineedidraii khyidh, in the area west of Aklavik, and also along the Anderson and Kugaluk Rivers. The skins of
these caribou was free of warble fly holes and was preferred for caribou skin tents and summer clothing. The Ehdyeetat Gwich’in would spend the rest of the summer at ts’ii dejj fish camps along the Mackenzie River and along the East Channel.

The ocean at Srehtadhåjjî

Another reason why the families may not have lived and travelled in the Delta for quite as long, is that until several hundred years ago, the ocean may have extended south almost as far as Srehtadhåjjî. The high hills of today were small islands then, and what is now the Mackenzie Delta was a part of the Beaufort Sea. Over the years, the run-off from the Mackenzie River at breakup moved uprooted trees and huge loads of gravel, soil and sand downriver. Hyacinthe Andre explains that this began to fill in the whole area. Gradually, the Delta was created:

_The Delta came way up to Arctic Red, as far as Point Separation. Right to here, past the Mouth of Peel and way up to McPherson on the other side, it was all in the Delta [submerged], right down to Aklavik. They say that, one time, all this was just water, everything! All just water. No island, no channel, nothing. Just open, just like it was the ocean. But after that, they say, the mud just filled it up. It’s all the dirt, all the mud that comes from the Mackenzie River, that’s what made the Delta._

— Hyacinthe Andre

Even much later, when the Delta already existed as we know it today, the flooding that often occurs during breakup could create the impression that the ocean extended all the way to Srehtadhåjjî—or so it seemed to the Oblate missionary, Father Petitot, in the spring of 1868:

At the head of the Delta, the river divides into four main channels. The exceptional run-off that spring had raised the water levels so much that the Delta had disappeared under an immense but shallow layer of water, which at the horizon through its vapour merged with the sky, so that the mountains to the west could barely be distinguished. The illusion that this was the ocean was complete.

— Emile Petitot

Ehdyeetat Gwich’in during ts’ii dejj days

During late ts’ii dejj days, then, the families went into the Delta as well as to the coast to hunt summer caribou, and they passed the summer at fish camps in the southern region of the area. Ts’ii dejj taij led from Nichitsii dininlee east to Sitr’ijyeh van and Vådzaih van, and on down to the Kugaluk and Anderson Rivers.

The story of Đaji dhakhaqj (page 366) also shows that the Ehdyeetat Gwich’in have travelled into the Delta since long before the arrival of fur traders and explorers. The events described in that story occurred in a cave just west of Gull Lake. After the arrival of the fur traders, some families began to stay in the area.
year-round. The most important camp for these families was at Nichïïtsïi diniinlee, Big Rock, on the East Channel. During ts’ii dejïj days, this had been a summer fish camp, and now the families made their home here for the rest of the year as well.

Nichïïtsïi diniinlee

The name Nichïïtsïi diniinlee (‘iron rock lined up’) or Chiïïtsïi diniinlee refers to three very large rocks which can be seen in the East Channel of Nagwichoonjik at this site. The elders say that Nichïïtsïi diniinlee is the older name; Chiïïtsïi diniinlee has come into use more recently. The site is also known by its English name, Big Rock. The rock that outcrops here is considered to be part of the same rock formations which make up the Campbell Hills, and which spread underground across the Delta and as far east as the Black Hills in the Richardson Mountains.149:31

Nichïïtsïi diniinlee is located about fifty-five miles downstream from Tsiigeh-tshik in the Gull Lake area. In the winter, the families travelled by dog team, in summer the area could be reached by boat within a few days.

Big Rock was one of the main summer gathering places and fish camps for about ten families who would come here year after year. The families arrived in early June right after the ratting season, and stayed until August to fish for whitefish, cony and crookedback. These were dried for winter use for people and dogs. Nichïïtsïi diniinlee is a good fishing place because of three large eddies which can be used here to set nets.

People had fished at Nichïïtsïi diniinlee during the summer since ts’ii dejïj days. In the early 1900s, several families began to live here year-round for several years. Rats, ducks and rabbits could be caught and hunted in spring, fish in the summer, and there are several good trapping areas here which were used in winter. There were at least three cabins here. Old Fabien Coyen, had a cabin on the east side of East Channel, Paul Niditchie and John Tsal each had cabins on the west side. Pas-
cal Baptiste, Pierre Tazzie and Fred Cardinal also stayed here with their families. A white trapper by the name of Zieman stayed at a creek across from Nichiitsii diniinlee during 1930-1931.89:16

When she was young, Annie Norbert lived at Nichiitsii diniinlee with her parents, Paul and Camilla Niditchie, for more than ten years. They had a cabin, a warehouse to store meat and dryfish, a stage (drah) to dry the fish, and a smoke house made from spruce bark to smoke it. Annie and her mother mainly stayed at Big Rock, while her father travelled on the land to hunt. Occasionally, they would travel to a small trading post downriver from Big Rock near the mouth of Gull Creek. The post was run by Old (Adolphus) Norris and his wife Christine.

The main winter dog team trail used by trappers ran from Nichiitsii diniinlee through a string of small lakes east of Big Rock towards the southern end of Tithegeh van. The trail followed the east shore of the lake to link up with Campbell Creek at the north end of Gwi’eekekajilchit van. The trail followed Campbell Creek for about a mile and then branched off in a north-easterly direction towards Sitr’ijyeh van. Pierre Benoit and his father would use this trail. From Sitr’ijyeh van, they continued on as far as Uudyit njik, the Miner River, to trap for marten. This trip would take about nine days return.88

Ratting in the Delta

The families leaving the Flats or Teetshik goghaa to travel towards the Delta often used birchbark canoes. The strong winds on Nagwichoonjik and Tsiigehnjik required heavier and bigger boats for safe travel. The lakes, rivers and creeks in
the Mackenzie Delta are usually protected from strong winds, and the lighter but less stable birch bark canoes could be used. The hunter or trapper who travelled to the Delta for ducks, or to trap and hunt muskrats, would need such a light craft. K’ii tr’ih, the birch bark hunting canoe, did not weigh much, and it could be portaged easily. “A lot of small canoes were used, just for hunting and fishing … the small canoe—you could pack it anywhere, it was light,” Nap Norbert explains. A small canoe weighed so little that a single person could carry it.

It has been said that when the families went ratting during the fur trade period, they would not always work as closely together as they had done before the fur trade. The trappers would go out to shoot or trap rats. They would be gone for up to three days, hunting mainly in later afternoon and at night, while the women looked after the camp. The women would also hunt rats in the area around the camp, but they did not often make overnight ratting trips.

Sometime during the 1920s, the families began to use bigger boats, such as twenty or twenty-seven foot wood-and-canvas canoes. These boats were too heavy to be portaged by a single person, and the cooperation of several men was required. Dogs were also put to work again. Nap Norbert remembers that his father, and Amos and John Niditchie hauled a boat and a canoe to Sitr’ijyeh van, “they hauled it with dogs, through the portage.” According to a story told by Pascal Baptiste, up to ten families would use this portage. They dragged twenty-four foot canoes across country to use them for fishing on Sitr’ijyeh van. The tracks left by these heavy boats could still be seen many years later, the muskeg had been ground down right to the rock. Difficult sections of the trail were crossed by placing poles on the ground and dragging the canoes across. Annie Norbert’s family also used the portage from Big Rock to Tithegeh van, and on to Sitr’ijyeh van. This was in 1931, when Annie was eleven years old. The family had a big gas boat and a kicker canoe. It took them one day to travel past Tithegeh van and reach the northern end of Gwi’eeekajilchit van. Five or six dogs were taken along; they were used to track the boats along the lakes that had to be passed on the portage route. The women stayed in the canoe, the two brothers and the father led the dogs along the shore and helped with the tracking. Some stretches of the portage were so difficult, that they used a block and tackle to drag the boats along. Here as
well, logs were put on the ground to make the trail easier along swampy sections. Even at the time Annie went through there, the logs had sunk into the ground and most of them had rotted away. There was very little left.

That was the time we hit the lake. Some of us paddled around the shore with that canoe. And my brothers chased the dogs around the lake, too. They brought some things, too—they even hauled traps. So they didn’t have to go back from Sitidgi Lake and get that stuff. When we stopped at the lake, it took five or six days to haul stuff—went back and got some more stuff, and haul that, too. And then we moved.

— Annie Norbert

The fur traders

After the arrival of fur traders and missionaries, families coming down from the mountains would briefly stop over at Arctic Red River, usually to attend Easter mass and trade their furs. They headed out by dog team shortly afterwards, to take up ratting in the Delta. Before break-up, muskrat were trapped. When the ice had gone out, the trappers would travel about in a small hunting canoe and shoot rats around the lakes. The ratting season ended around the middle of June. Some families would then return for the big gathering at Teetchik goghaa or the Flats, where the people returning from the mountains and the Khaii luk area, got together to dance, feast and play games. Others would head for Aklavik to trade their furs. After the gathering, they headed for the traditional summer fish camps. A number of white trappers and traders also settled in the Delta. The story of the big gatherings, and of the fur traders and trappers is told in Chapters 14 and 16.
CHAPTER

13

LIFE ALONG THE RIVER:
NAGWICHOONJIK GWICH'IN

The last region of the land used by groups of families year after year, was the land along Nagwichoonjik, the 'river through a big country.' The families making their home in this region were the Nagwichoonjik Gwich'in, 'Mackenzie River people.' Their traditional land use area extended along the river banks from around Teetshik goghaa and Srehtadhālijī in the west to about Viht'īi tshik in the east.

Fish camps

Just like the families living in the Delta, the Nagwichoonjik Gwich'in mainly spent the summer at ts'i dei j fish camps. Most fish camps were located at the mouths of creeks flowing into the Mackenzie. The eddies created at these points are especially good for fishing, and nets would be set just downstream from the eddies. The families living at these camps spent the summer making dryfish to prepare for the coming winter, they repaired their equipment and made new clothing.

In the summer, the people would fish on both sides of the river as far down as Point Separation. Some people would stay here [at the Flats]. They not only fished for one kind of fish, they had different nets. They had herring nets so they would fish for herring, whitefish and cony too—they would fish for all kinds of fish.

They would do this as far down as Point Separation. Big Rock was the last place. They would go down to Point Separation, to a place around there where there was a good eddy. They would travel there to fish. And then on the Mackenzie River, too: Up at Chiit'iet and at Chidalt'qijī; at Cony Bay; at Pierre’s Creek; and at Diighe'traajī. Those were the only places up the Mackenzie River where people used to fish.

— Hyacinthe Andre 51

‘They would go down to a place where there was a good eddy.’
Julius and Agnes Norbert with William Peterson at their camp at Khailik tshik.

Old Modeste and his wife Marcena on the Flats at Arctic Red River, summer 1947.
Even stories from the earliest days mention some of these camps. According to the story told on page 348, several families of Grebes had a summer camp at the Flats during the earliest ts’ii dejj days. During the same time, Raven also had a camp here, Deetrin’ ehchij k’yiit, ‘Raven’s bed’ (see page 10). Grizzly Bear is said to have lived in a camp across the river from the Flats, at Chii t’iet, at about the same time (see page 343).

Archaeological investigations have uncovered fish bones at some of the old fire places just below Vik’ooyendik on the Flats. It is about 1,400 years ago now that the families prepared the fish at this fire place. Other fire places found during this investigation are about 900 and 400 years old. The fish camp at the Flats and other important sites along the river have been used since the earliest ts’ii dejj days. Other old-time fish camps were located at Teetshik goghaa, Chii chyaa tshik, Chidal’ajj, and Diighe’tr’aajil. The explorers Alexander Mackenzie in 1789, and John Franklin in 1825, visited several of these ts’ii dejj fish camps on their journeys down Nagwichoonjik.

Tree River was also known as a good fishing area. One eddy used by the families living here was located about half a mile upstream from the mouth of Tree River, another one just across the mouth on the north side of Nagwichoonjik. This site, like many mentioned in this chapter, is used by some of the families to this day.
Islands

The families would also make use of the resources that could be gathered on some of the islands in the river. Ducks and geese were hunted on the smaller islands, and on some of the larger islands, even moose could be found.

*If they really wanted to go hunting for lots of geese and ducks, they would go across to a little island that was on the river. Just a small island, between Tree River and Tr’ineht’ieet’iee. There’s a good island there, full of willows. Well, that was a long time ago, now it’s just a sandbar. That’s where they used to hunt. They’d stay there all night, and in the mornings, they’d come back with bags, and bags, and bags of goodies—just fat geese and swans.*

*In the wintertime, they used to hunt moose on that island, they used to chase moose through that. That’s how big it was, long, big, tall willows. Moose would wander on there sometimes, and somehow they would shoot it.*

— Agnes Mitchell

'The story of the Mackenzie River'

This was the life-style of the Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in. The story of the Mackenzie River is the story of the families who spent the summer at the fish camps along the river from about Teetshik goghaa to Vihtr’ii tshik, year after year.

*They just used to set tent any place in the summer, I guess, there were no cabins.— Across from Tree River, there’s Diighe’t’aajil, that’s another number one fish camp. And from there you went across on the west side of the Mackenzie and you hit Tree River. Tree River is a good size river, a good fish camp and there are still*
about three, four buildings there. Two that are still in good shape and used yet. It’s not a winter fishing camp, but a summer fishing camp. From there you went across again on the north side, you travelled about two miles and there is another creek there, that place they call ‘Jimmy’s Cabin.’ That’s where Gabe Andre is staying, he’s got a camp there now … Jimmy’s Cabin, that’s a good fishing spot, too.

From there to Travaillant Creek, there’s one long stretch [without old-time fishing sites], but all along the shore there’s the odd place where the fishing is good. There’s one place called Benoit Creek, and there’s another place called Smith Cabin, from there the main route to Siveezhoe leaves. And from Smith Cabin, you go about a mile, there’s another creek, and that’s called Chugwich’ya.

And then from Smith Creek, you go on the same side of the river, you go up about five miles, there’s another cabin there, it’s called Chaaalee’s cabin. Just about a mile below Chaaalee’s cabin there used to be an oil company’s camp. I lived there for a couple of years. When I first moved there, there were seven little islands on the Mackenzie, so I called it ‘Seven Island,’ and the name stuck. It’s all grown back in now, no sign of that camp ….

From Chaaalee’s cabin, you go up a couple of miles, there’s a big flat, they call it Travaillant Creek Flat. There’s just a little delta there, that’s good place for rats in the spring, but it’s not a fishing spot. From there, you go across the Mackenzie on the Travaillant Creek side, and three miles below Travaillant Creek there’s the portage they call Sucker Creek Portage. There’s a good fish camp there, too. Up from there, there is Travaillant Creek, that’s another good fish camp. There’s not much room but it’s a main route for fish: Just straight across from there is this big island. The other side of that is just shallow, and so just on the Travaillant side is the place to go through. That’s why that’s a real good fishing spot. … That’s the story of the Mackenzie River.

— Noel Andre

“They just used to set tent any place in the summer, there were no cabins.’

Monica and Pascal Baptiste making dryfish at Nichitsii dininlee
Working for the fur trade

When Gwichya Gwich’in began to use dog teams during the early days of the fur trade, the summer fishery along Nagwichoonjik became even more important. Now the families fished not only for their own use, but they had to look after larger numbers of dogs, as well. Dryfish was the main dog feed, and enough dryfish had to be made to get the dogs safely through the winter (see page 115). Before they began to use such large amounts of dryfish, the families “just used to set tent any place in the summer, there were no cabins.”

Now that so much more dryfish had to be prepared and stored, more permanent camps developed at some of the sites. The switch to dog teams for travel and transportation represents an important change in the way the families lived on the land.

And they fished all summer long. They went back to their fish camps, along the Mackenzie, and down the Delta, people just took off. … Any kind of fish they get, they’d make dryfish from, and put it aside. When they piled it up, they made bales of dryfish. They used to make thirty bales of dryfish, you know, lots of dryfish, lots of fish. And they used to put twenty-five conies in one bale, that’s the backbone and all, and then about fifty whitefish into another bale—whitefish and crookedback mixed. And there was herring, they put a hundred in a bale. Just imagine, you get thirty bales of herring! That’s about three thousand fish there.

All that they saved for their dogs, for the winter. The largest number of dogs I know of, is about ten, twelve dogs. That was for a good-size family. And a single person might have four or five dogs—some of them, six. That’s what they did all summer, fish. In those days, there were no nylon or plastic nets, they used to have a cotton net, and it was in a bundle. And then you had to back [reinforce] it. Back it yourself, which you had to get, buy the net. Bundle of net, and then bundle of twine, and
then the smaller twine. Backing-twine, they called it. And then you had to cut all that net up. A bundle of net might make three long-size nets, about twenty-five yards. If you got small eddies, well, you cut them into four little, smaller, shorter net. And then you had to back the net, and you used it after that. Not like nowadays—everything’s just ready, you just take it out, string it out, and that’s it. Everything is on it, floats, sinkers. And in those days, they used to have no floats, they used wood. Wood for floats, and there would be lots of stones around, rocks. They used that, and they went fishing.
— Noel Andre

The naturalist Frank Russell travelled down Nagwichoonjik in the summer of 1894. He observed several of the fish camps that were used when the families began to work for the fur trade. Russel wrote: “I passed several tents of Loucheux Indians who were living in canvas tents or low lodges of loose skins, pitched at the mouths of tributary streams where the eddies supplied them with fish.”

A ‘highway’ of the Gwichya Gwich’in

The river was not only important for the summer fishery of the Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in, it was also a major travel route for many Gwichya Gwich’in families at different times of the year. Families who left the Flats to move into one of the regions at the end of summer, travelled on the river to reach one of the major trail heads. In winter the river itself was an important dog team trail used by families coming to town for Christmas or Easter celebrations. Families heading towards the Flats in early summer would travel on the river by raft or birch bark canoe. There cannot have been many families—during ts’ii dejį days or during the fur trade—who did not travel on Nagwichoonjik at some time or another.
Breakup on Nagwichoonjik in late May. Looking downstream from the mouth of Khairiuk jik. Srehtadhadlaii can be seen in the far distance. Travelling on the river, the distance from Khairiuk jik to Srehtadhadlaii is about 90 miles. Some of the important sites that can be seen are: (1) Srehtadhadlaii — (2) Chidaltaii — (3) Tthaadieh — (4) Yidi chu' — (5) Daats'it k'adh — (6) Sucker Lake Portage — (7) Chugwich'yaatshik — (8) Benoit Creek — (9) Dachan cho ghnjik — (10) Diighe'tr'aajil — (11) Chii chyaa tshik — (12) Jim Nagle vitezshik — (13) Taligote'kik.
That’s the way they came in for Christmas. From all over—Mackenzie, and from around Travaillant, they made portage through Jackfish Lake. They came out up the Mackenzie just above Arctic Red, about five miles up, at Chidaltaj; that’s where the trail used to come out. People from Jackfish Lake, and all the way from Travaillant Lake. From Caribou Lake, all those people came through there … They came down the Mackenzie, and then they hit Jim Nagle’s portage, eight miles the other side. They came through the portage, and they came out right behind town. And then Up-the-Red people, they came down the Red, and they came up the hill. Same with the Delta people, all of them …
— Noel Andre

Whether they travelled towards the Flats for the great summer gatherings of ts’ii dejj days, or for Christmas mid-night mass after the arrival of the missionaries, all of the families relied on and used Nagwichoonjik for their travels, at some time during the year. This is why Gabe Andre calls Nagwichoonjik a “highway” for families from all the regions of the land—the river was the link connecting the groups of families that would spend a part of the year in the different regions. This is also why trail heads for many of the major trails leading into the different regions are located along the river.

**Using Nagwichoonjik**

Long ago a great number of people have been using that river. It wasn’t only the Gwich’in people who came to the fish camps. Our elders used it for transportation—even dog teams, boats, or just tracking along the shore upstream. It has not been that long ago that bigger boats came, the steam boats, they used that river, too. And today it’s tourists who are using it—even the polar bear used it! I don’t know from where he started, but he swam all the way downriver. That’s how much we used that river.
— Noel Andre

**Trail heads**

The map on page 166 shows that many of the major trails used by the Gwichya Gwich’in during ts’ii dejj days and during the fur trade period began or ended at the river. Nagwichoonjik was the link connecting the trails leading into the different regions. By connecting the trails, the river also connected the families making a living in these regions.

**The Flats.** Families planning to reach points upriver such as Dachan choo gêhnjik would leave the Flats by the Eight Mile Portage, reaching Nagwichoonjik at Nagle Creek to travel upstream from here towards the trail head at Khaii luk tshik. The Flats were also the starting point and destination for Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in families travelling towards or out of the mountains.
**Chidaltaij.** Important trails to Vàdzaih van and Khaii luk began at Chidaltaij. Families reached the Khaii luk area via Shoh k’ad’h, K’eeghee chuudlaij, from there past Teevee nit’aowil, Teedaghao and Jilàa’, and on to the east side of Khaii luk. Families heading for Vàdzaih van would turn in a more north-easterly direction at Shoh k’ad’h, heading for Achoo jał, Odizen, and on to Vàdzaih van.

**Gwaatr’ii.** A winter trail led away from Gwaatr’ii, Adam’s Cabin, in a south-easterly direction. This trail split into two, one spur reaching Tsiigehnjik at Lèth jîthakaij, the other further upstream at Daats’it k’ad’h chii hidh chuudlaij.

**Tree River, Benoit Creek, Chugwich’yaa tshik.** Summer as well as winter trails led away from these points towards Siveezhoo.

**Travaillant Creek, Sucker Creek Portage.** These were the trail heads for two of the main trails from Nagwichoonjik to Khaii luk.

### The importance of Nagwichoonjik

Since ts’ii dëjí days, the river has been an important link in the trail system used by Gwichya Gwich’in families. For just as long, it has been the summer home of the Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in who lived at the many fish camps along both banks of the river, making dryfish and preparing for the coming winter. When the families began to use dog teams during the early fur trade, the summer fishery along the river became even more important, because now the families had to make enough dryfish not only for themselves, but for their dogs, as well.

It must have been the families spending the long, warm days of summer at the fish camps along the river who—on a day now more than two hundred years ago—saw something strange and entirely new float down the river, into their country, and into their lives.
John Franklin visits a Gwichya Gwich'in fish camp, July 2, 1826: "In the passage down the river, we were visited by several Loucheux, who, the instant we appeared, launched their canoes, and came off to welcome us. We landed at their request."
It was one of the people spending the long days of summer at the fish camps along Nagwichoonjik who, stepping down to the river bank one day, noticed something entirely new and different—something that the Gwichya Gwich’in had not seen before. A large wood chip had come to rest in between the driftwood along the shore. This in itself was not surprising, but when the people picked it up, they could not help but wonder at its large size and precise cut. At first sight, it appeared like a chip a beaver might shave off a tree, but, then, it was much too large. Someone suggested it must have floated down the river, so some people were sent upriver to find out where the chip might have come from. It was during this trip that they discovered aachin, strangers, in a camp up the river. The tool that the strangers had used to produce the astonishing wood chips turned out to be an axe made of iron or steel. This was a tool the Gwichya Gwich’in had not seen before. Neither did they know the people who used it.

**Explorers**

This wood chip marks the arrival of the first group of European explorers among the Gwichya Gwich’in. “About four in the afternoon we perceived a smoke on the West shore, when we traversed and landed,” Alexander Mackenzie noted on July 9, 1789, pulling his boat ashore at a summer fish camp in the vicinity of Cony Bay, at approximately 67°21’ N. European explorers had arrived among the Gwichya Gwich’in. The wood chips that floated downstream may have been cut by one of Alexander Mackenzie’s men.

Mackenzie and his men stepped ashore, and even this first encounter showed how greatly the newcomers’ customs differed from those of the Gwichya Gwich’in:
This happened at Cony Bay. This man was staying there with his family, and he saw those wood chips. So he got ready, made his mud house thicker... and left his family further back [from the river]. And then one day he saw somebody paddling down, there were these whitemen coming down. Before the whitemen came ashore, this man told his family to go back in the mud house. Then the whitemen came ashore, and he went to greet them. And then that one whiteman put his hand out—he was going to shake hands. They shook hands, and the man looked at his hand after that. He thought the whiteman had given him something. He looked at his hand: nothing! They didn’t know anything about shaking hands in those days.
— Billy Cardinal93:11

Fur traders

Mackenzie travelled for the Northwest Company, a fur trading company. In 1798, he founded his own company, the New Northwest Company, or, XY Company. It merged with the older Northwest Company in 1804, which, in turn, was taken over by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1821.126 For about seventy years after that date, the Bay was the most important trading partner for the Gwichya Gwich’in. It was only sometime before the turn of the last century that other traders arrived and began to compete for the furs that the trappers brought to the trading posts.

Meeting the traders

A few years after Mackenzie’s journey into the north, the fur trade began to move down the ‘Grand River,’ as Mackenzie himself had called the river that in the English language is now named after him. The Northwest Company trader Duncan Livingston began to trade on the upper Mackenzie in 1795 or 1796. The trade grew for some years, but Livingston and his three Métis guides were killed during a trade expedition down the lower Mackenzie in 1799.275:95 In 1805, the year after the merger of the NW and XY Companies, the explorer’s nephew (whose name also was Alexander Mackenzie) took charge of the companies’ combined post on Great Bear Lake. Trading posts had existed close to the headwaters of the Great Bear River since 1801, but no Gwichya Gwich’in families had visited there.126:38 The fur trading companies seemed to find it difficult to establish direct trade relationships with the Gwichya Gwich’in.

In October 1805, fur trader Mackenzie at Great Bear Lake asked the trading chief of the Sahtu Dene visiting the post, to convince Gwichya Gwich’in families to trade at the post as well.161:220 However, no visitors appeared in the winter of 1805-06, and Mackenzie decided to establish contact with the Gwichya Gwich’in himself. He left Great Bear Lake post in the summer of 1806 and travelled down the Mackenzie, arriving at the mouth of ‘Trading River’ (just downstream from the location of Fort Good Hope after it had been moved to Gwichya Gwich’in lands in 1823138) on July 1, 1806. The Gwichya Gwich’in had already participated in the fur trade indirectly,
through trading with the Bear Lake and Mountain people, and they knew that the trader would only be interested in furs. They were prepared when Mackenzie arrived at Trading River: The 188 marten and beaver skins traded during those July days probably marked the first direct trade exchange between the fur traders and the Gwichya Gwich’in. Already, as Mackenzie’s journal entry shows, beads were in great demand. However, unlike the Hudson’s Bay Company in later years, the NW Company traders offered not only beads, iron and steel tools, but also alcohol for trade—the ‘dram’ mentioned in the story below is a small quantity of alcohol, during the early fur trade days, usually rum. And even on this first visit, the trader already identified a Gwichya Gwich’in man who should act as a trade leader. The journal entry shown below is reproduced exactly as written down by Mackenzie:

*July 1ST [1806]…I embarked and at 12 OClock arrived at Trading River where we discovered tracks & found a stone axe, and wood for a Canoe…[we] found 4 of the Querellurs [Gwichya Gwich’in]…I gave them a dram & a little sugar…I sent one of them Back with four of my men to acquaint his relations that we came to make friends with them and to trade with them in about fifty minutes the Frenchman [Métis guide] returned with 30 men, women & 3 children they Camped 10 paces from our Camp—after a few words passed they began to trade Beaver and martins—188 Beavers they were all well pleased with the Ironworks & Beads they rec’d for their furs*

*2ND 12 Cannoes arrived from the opposite side of McKenzies River 18 men 8 women & 6 children as soon as they debarked we fired two Guns the report of which knocked down four of them—as soon as all of them had drawn up their Cannoes they began to dance in advancing forward to my tent which lasted for one hour…I informed them that I had plenty of goods that the only thing that I wanted to get of them was Beaver for which I would give them any of my goods Except my Guns they requested to trade…at 7 OClock am I traded their peltries. Yakiban… I made a Chief of him. I gave him a flag and informed him [of] the use of it. I gave him a few articles gratis to encourage the others to work the Beaver viz. two flints 1 awl 1 fiersteel & a piece of spunk [kindling]—and that I would come to the same place next spring to have all their peltries & provisions there …*

*4TH The Beads that are wanted for the Querellurs are Blue & White …*

— Alexander Mckenzie 161:240-2

Fort Good Hope

Fur trader Mackenzie was so pleased with the result of the day’s trade that he decided to build a trading post that the Gwichya Gwich’in could reach more easily. On July 12, 1806, during the return trip from ‘Trading River,’ he instructed “Mr Grant, Laprise & Paul Beabar” to begin construction of a trading post at the mouth of Bluefish River, in the vicinity of, and across from, present-day Norman Wells. This post was later renamed, Fort Good Hope; it was also moved several times.

The Gwichya Gwich’in soon began to visit the post at the mouth of Bluefish River. They proved to be so reliable trading partners that the post was moved downriver twice to make access easier for them. By 1823, the post was located at
a site just a few miles upstream and across from the mouth of Vihtr’ii tshik. It turned out, however, that the post was too far away from the main depot at Fort of the Forks (now Fort Simpson). Resupply was often uncertain, and the Slavey families from around Great Bear Lake complained that now it had become too difficult for them to reach the post. It did not help that, as Billy Cardinal points out, the building was also flooded out during breakup. In 1827, the post was moved back upriver again to its present location.

Trade goods

It has been said that during the earlier days of the fur trade, the Aboriginal people slowly began to use and rely on the tools and some of the food staples offered by the fur trading companies in exchange for their furs. Many families began to trade for axes, iron tools, kettles, and later, muzzle loaders and rifles. These tools made life on the land and in camp easier, but they also made it necessary for the families to spend more of their time working for the fur trade.

’Beads like diamonds, kettles like gold’

During the earliest days of the fur trade, as was mentioned above, it was not only tools and food staples that the Gwichya Gwich’in wanted to trade at Fort Good Hope; the demand for beads remained strong for many years. The trader reported that some families travelling to the fort in 1811 “were near creating an uproar … on account of a deficiency in beads.” Some families would even take their furs back with them, because the trader could not offer them beads. Beads, naagaij, were the most important trade item for the Gwichya Gwich’in during the earliest days of the fur trade, and the trader almost never received a sufficient supply. If the Northwest Company and the Bay had been able to meet the strong demand for beads that existed well into the 1850s, who knows how great their profits might have been. “Beads were just like diamonds to the people in those days,” Billy Cardinal explains, “and copper kettles, they must have been like gold to them.”

Because beads were so important during those early days, the fur traders were able to use them almost like money. The Hudson’s Bay had introduced the ‘Made Beaver’ (MB) as their standard of exchange. This standard was used to calculate how many trade items the trapper or hunter would receive for the furs and dry meat he brought to the post. The value of beads was measured by the Made Beaver standard, as well. To make sure that the amount of beads given out by the trader did not change, the beads were put on strings of a certain length that was known to everyone. The value of so many strings of beads equalled the value of so many Made Beavers. The fur trader knew how many strings of beads he had to pay for so many furs or bales of drymeat—without having to count every sin-
gle bead. The Gwichya Gwich’in, of course, had no say in how the fur traders calculated and applied the Made Beaver and String Beads standards.

Flour and tobacco

Beads were not the only trade good that always seemed to be in short supply. Other items were just as scarce, and therefore the traders were able to sell them at very high prices. For example, Fort McPherson received 400 pounds of flour per year, the Arctic Red River post 200 pounds.108:42 As Gabe Andre explains, this was so little that the trader would only sell flour by the cup: “The best trapper, the person who brought in the most furs, got more cups of flour, maybe one more cup. They took furs for nothing in those days, I know that!”43:11 It is said that the trader would sometimes even put his thumb into the cup while filling it, thus measuring out even less flour. In any case, even the best trappers in those early days could expect at most about eight cups of flour when they came to the post to trade their furs.93:11

Tea and tobacco were just as expensive. Julienne Andre remembers that most people could not afford to buy more than a handful of cigarettes for the whole year: “On the way up to the mountains we had no tobacco or tea. At that time you only smoked tobacco for one day. When you were going away for a long time you were given ten cigarettes. But who could afford that?”70

Muzzle loaders

Muzzle loaders, the first kind of fire arm used by Gwichya Gwich’in hunters, were just as expensive to buy. They were inaccurate and often dangerous, but, Tony Andre says, cheap they were not: “A muzzle loader was this high [long], you see, and when they came to buy it, they had to put up marten skins right there, pile them up like that. Right to the top, and then they pressed it down again, pile up some more. Once they got to the top of that gun with those marten skins, the guy who owned the marten, well, the gun was his—shot, powder, and the brass for pulling the trigger.”15

When the explorer John Franklin travelled through Gwichya Gwich’in lands in 1825, he noticed that very few hunters used muzzle loaders.108:42 It was not until after the 1850s that they became one of the hunters’ preferred weapons. It may well be that the high price made it difficult for most hunters to buy one. Many hunters would even make their own slugs from pieces of lead that they obtained from the trader. These slugs were expensive as well, and most hunters would reuse the slugs that they were able to find after they had fired them. Billy Cardinal was told by his dad that some hunters would use the same slug up to four times.93:12 For many hunters, the muzzle loader was as hard to use as it was dangerous:

*Everything was the hardest way. Like, my mother remembered there were no guns.*

*The only gun they had was the muzzle loader. They had to put a piece of rag*
inside, and then they got a little cup made just special for that. They filled it up with powder, and poured it into the barrel. Then they put in another rag, and then they could use it as a shot gun. If they wanted to use it for moose, they put in a round slug. They made that themselves too, they just had lead, maybe lead about that wide and about that long. They just cut it with a knife, just as big as they figured it had to be. They cut it that long and then they had a bowl—they gave them the bowl too. They put the lead in there and they rubbed a rock the size of that bowl, just rubbed it like that and made that lead real round. And after they had put that rag next to the powder, they put in that bullet, just the size of that barrel. They put that down, they put another rag in again. Now they had to put the cap right at the back where the hammer is. They put a cap there. Now it was ready to shoot. And they had to be dead [sure] shots, because if you missed, you had to reload! They say, mom said, they shot fast, they loaded real fast. Oh! Could be about one minute between shots. Some of them less than that, a few seconds … When they used it for ducks, they made small shot. Just like shot for a shot gun. There again the same thing, put rag first and then … Gee! They must have had lots of rags!

I used to have those things, but I threw everything away at Tree River, I threw it out into the river. And that was because my dad used to have that bowl to make your own shot gun shells … I was using it. I had an old 16-gauge, that’s what I was using to shoot ducks … And I guess it was wearing out, a piece of that shell came off! Something hit me here, and there was a little blood and no more. I never thought of it anymore.

But a week later, something was bothering me and something was sticking out of my skin. I took it out, it was a piece of that shell, a piece of iron about that long and thin. It was inside, underneath my skin. So I just grabbed all those tools, went right to the river and threw that gun in the river too. My mom got mad at me. ‘I told you not to use that thing,’ she said, ‘throw everything away!’

— Gabe Andre

Trading at Herschel Island

It was not until around the year 1900 that the Gwichya Gwich’in began to use shotguns and rifles. At first, these were bought from the Boston whalers wintering off Herschel Island. Captain Pederson was the boss on one of these ships. Two kinds of rifles were used, the .44 and one approximately the calibre and size of a 30/30. Gabe Andre’s grandfather bought one of these rifles from the Eskimo who sometimes acted as middlemen between the whalers and the Gwich’in. “In those days, the Eskimo would give anything for wolverine,” Gabe Andre describes what it took to buy such a rifle from the Eskimo.

Repeating rifles

The first hunter who used a repeating rifle must have really surprised those people who were still used to the shortcomings of their muzzle loaders:
“Any mother told me about it. She said the first time a guy got a rifle from down there [Herschel Island], everybody else still had muzzle loaders. And they went hunting. This guy had the rifle, he went like that—put the shell in and fired. But all the others had to reload, took them two minutes to load.

Some guys were good at it, they were fast, but this guy was faster! When they came to caribou, my mother said, this guy started shooting, and nobody else was shooting, they just watched him! They saw that empty shell fly out—now we don’t even notice it, but that time, they were scared of that empty shell, too, they thought it was another bullet!

— Gabe Andre 43:11

“And that’s where most of the stuff came from, Herschel Island,” Gabe continues. “It came from that ship. Lots of things they had never seen before.” 38:12

Red combination underwear

Trading novel and unfamiliar items with the whalers sometimes caused excitement in more ways than one. As surprised as the hunters may have been to see one of their own people use a repeating rifle, imagine how amazed we would be today to see a whole group of men mush their dog teams across country, decked out in red underwear! Visiting the ships, the men would usually buy cloth for the women and ready-made clothing for themselves. The red combination underwear was a novelty which caught the men’s fancy. This was real smart-looking clothing, they thought. They bought it and made the return trip home to their camp on the Anderson River in grand style, using the longjohns and shirts—as overalls!

My dad used to say that they used to go to the coast and see the American ships that hunted for whales. They were docked there for the winter. When the warm season came, they would once again hunt for whales.

The elders told the young hunters to hunt lots so the women could make lots of drymeat, as the men on the ship wanted drymeat. After everything was ready, the men, including my dad, would go to them with the drymeat. My dad said that when they got to the ship, they were surprised to see that it was such a big boat—with a sail on it that looked like a bunch of dried-up timber.

They traded the drymeat for flour, tea, sugar and other goods. Also, a bundle of cloth which was good for dresses, was given to them. When they were leaving, they were given undershirts. At that time they thought these were supposed to be worn like outer shirts—but they were underwear! They were two-piece things.

The men said among themselves, ‘We’ll put it on before we reach our camp.’ When they were getting close to camp, we could hear the dog bells. Everyone was yelling, ‘The men are coming back!’ There were thirty dog teams there and it was noisy, with all the bells.

When they came closer we could see that they were all wearing something red. I guess my dad was wearing the same stuff too, that’s why he was telling us the story about this trip they made. In those days, the men used to wear hats which they got from the store. Even when they were out in the bush or when they were hunting, they’d wear those hats. It was a popular hat in those days [see the photo of Old Modeste on
page 168. When the men came closer, every one of them was wearing this two-piece underwear and the hat! The women were happy that their husbands were back.

At that time, Kenneth Stewart ... was working for the Bay ... When the men saw him they told him about what they had gotten from the ship. He told them that the two-piece underwear they got was not a suit but an undergarment. Only then did they find out what it was.

In the meantime, the women were busy making dresses for themselves with the cloth their husbands got for them. There was a lot of food ... People were so happy for all this, they decided to have a feast. The older boys and girls, younger boys and girls, all got together and started digging out the snow right down to the ground, a big place, too.

After the feast they started to dance. The Slavey were the first to dance for the people. — Just the day before, the men had come back, and already most of the women had on new dresses they made for themselves, showing them off while they were dancing. The men still had their two-piece underwear on, too.

— Annie Norbert

Not to be outdone and perhaps inspired by this bold display of fashion, other men presented a quite distinctive style of their own:

When they first brought handkerchiefs into this country, the men used to wear them ... all kinds of different colours—nice silk hankies. They put them around their neck, around their head, and around their wrists. Up here and up there. And they just followed all kinds of colours.

They showed off! It was the first time that they saw that kind of nice silk handkerchief, nice flowers! Oh boy, the men just showed off! And they had three or four handkerchiefs in their pockets ... they were decorated just like a Christmas tree!

— Joan Nazon

Silk

Another item that the hunters brought back from the ships for their wives was old-time silk. Some of the women would use this silk, and not beads, for embroidery. The women knew that it would last a long time; it would never wear out:

There were not only beads, there was silk too, real old-timers silk. All that must have come from the ships. Most embroidery was done with silk, they twisted it with horse hair, too—fine silk, real fine one for twisting. Only two women were really sewing beads in the beginning, those were Pierre Tazzie's mother and Sarah Emile. Everybody else used silk, Japanese silk, real old-timers' silk. It never wore out. You don't see that anymore.

— Rose Clark

Working for the fur trade

The trade did not remain limited to fancy items such as beads, for long. The families in the camps began to use an increasing number of the tools and trade goods
supplied by the Bay. Axes, kettles, muzzle loaders and rifles, shells, tea and tobacco were in greatest demand during the early days. Sugar and flour were added to the list somewhat later. The debt system was introduced: The trader advanced supplies in the fall. The trappers came in for Christmas, or else later in the year when the trapping had been good, paid off their debts with furs, got into debt again right away by obtaining new supplies, and headed back to their camps.

The visits to the post at Fort Good Hope became a necessary and regular part of the families’ travels. The Fort Good Hope post journal mentions visits by Gwichya Gwich’in for several decades. A trading post was set up on the Peel River in 1840; several years later, it was moved a few miles downriver and renamed Fort McPherson. A short-lived post also operated on the Anderson River around the year 1860. No trading post existed on Gwichya Gwich’in lands at that time, but there was always an opportunity to visit one of the other posts. After 1902, this was no longer necessary. The Bay constructed a trading post at the Flats.

The trading post at the Flats

In 1902, the Hudson’s Bay Company decided to build a trading post at the Flats. This post was supposed to make trading with the Gwichya Gwich’in easier, and also to attract the Eskimo from the coast, many of whom went to Fort McPherson for trade. The new post was also intended to provide competition for Hislop & Nagle, a trading company that had built a post at the Flats one year earlier, in 1901. By the time the Bay began construction of the post, a mission station had already existed at the Flats for six years (see Chapter 15). The mission station had originally been built at the ‘old town site’ at Teetshik goghaa, seven miles down-stream from the Flats. According to some of the stories told by the elders, this was the site of a small ‘town,’ visited by many families during the summer. However, by 1902, the Hudson’s Bay must already have known that it would be impossible to build the new post at Teetshik goghaa. As Pierre Coyen once told Billy Cardinal, it turned out that the site was too shallow for the steamboats used by the Bay after 1887: “Then when the first boat came, they said it was too shallow for those boats to land there, so they had to move … Arctic Red [the town site at

<table>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>Post constructed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>F.G. Campbell</td>
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<td>1913-14</td>
<td>J.M. Lemouel</td>
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<td>1914-16</td>
<td>François Mandeville</td>
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<td>1917-18</td>
<td>C.T. Christie</td>
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<td>1918-24</td>
<td>William Firth</td>
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<td>1924-25</td>
<td>R.W. Dodman</td>
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<td>1926-27</td>
<td>W.A. Taylor</td>
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<td>1931-35</td>
<td>R.W. Dodman</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935-37</td>
<td>G.S. Mackie</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937-47</td>
<td>Louis Roy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947-50</td>
<td>G.P. Simpson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>E.L. Hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 August 1979</td>
<td>post closed</td>
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Teetshik goghaa] was still down there when the first boat came. The Bay must also have known that a mission station and a competing store already existed just a few miles upstream at the Flats. In the end, the decision was made to build the new Hudson’s Bay post there, as well.

**Working on the boats**

The trade vessels S.S. ‘Wrigley,’ S.S. ‘Mackenzie’ and S.S. ‘Distributor’ may have been too large to land at Teetshik goghaa, but the first Gwichya Gwich’in men working for the Bay on Nagwichoonjik, travelled in boats of a different kind—rowing boats that the men rowed and tracked upriver all the way to Fort Smith. These men worked on the York boats used by the Hudson’s Bay Company on Nagwichoonjik until 1886.

**York boats**

Each trading post had its own York boats. They were stored at the post over winter, and began the long and difficult trip to Fort Smith as soon as the ice was out on Nagwichoonjik. The men making this journey would not return to their families before the end of September. On one occasion, one boat did not make it back to Fort McPherson before freeze-up. It became ice-bound at a point about halfway between Srehtadhadla’ii and the mouth of the Peel. The boat was left there for the winter, and the supplies were moved to Fort McPherson by dog team. This site is known as Tr’ih choo iintyin, ‘where a big boat sat.’

The men rowed and tracked these heavy boats upriver for most of the way. One could almost say that they walked much of the way to Great Slave Lake. It is not surprising that their footwear wore out quickly. Gabe André’s father, who

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*Hudson’s Bay store and warehouse on top of hill; cabins and wall tents below. Arctic Red River, September 11, 1945.*
worked on the york boats, would use one pair of slippers every day during the trip upriver: “My mom told me about it. My grandfather used to go to Fort Smith. They wore out a pair of slippers, rubber slippers, in one day, tracking along the shore going up. Even when it already had a hole in it, they continued walking until they were finished for the day.”

The pay these men received after a long summer of hard work, was no better than what the trapper trading for a muzzle loader or flour, had received for a winter’s worth of trapping fifty years earlier. Billy Cardinal’s father worked on the york boats, and he described to Billy what they were paid at the end of the summer: “My dad used to be on that trip from McPherson to Fort Smith in york boats. They started in early June, and they came back in late September. And the workers got only one white shirt, a pair of pants, some powder and shells—that was their pay for the whole summer.”

Steamships

| The traders’ boats |  
|---|---
| - 1886 | york boat brigades |
| 1887-1907 | SS ‘Wrigley’ (HBCo) |
| 1908-1947 | SS ‘Mackenzie’ (HBCo) |
| 1920-1924 | SS ‘Distributor’ (Lamson & Hubbard) — sold to the Hudson’s Bay Co. in 1924 |
| 1922- | SS ‘Northern Trader’ (NT) |
| 1924-1943 | SS ‘Distributor’ (HBCo) |
| 1930s | Old man Ross’s scow |
| ? | MV ‘Pelican Rapids’ (HBCo) moves barges |

In 1887, the Bay began to use steamships instead of york boats to move supplies downriver and furs upriver. Some time later, trading companies such as Lamson & Hubbard, and Hislop & Nagle, also began to use steam boats. Billy Cardinal describes how surprised the people staying at Teetshik goghaa were to see the first steamship announce its arrival: “Pierre Coyen was telling that story, he was still a little boy at that time. When that first boat whistled, everybody took off into the bush, dogs and all.” Nap Norbert, Edward Nazon, John Remi, François Coyen, Amos Niditchie, Pierre Tazzie, Adù’ Natsie, and John Niditchie were some of the men working on the steamboats. As Gabe Andre was told, this could be very hard work:

They say there used to be lots of mosquitoes. They had to fight mosquitoes and load the boat at the same time. They only had a narrow gang plank put on shore, I think it was about that wide, and they had a little wheel barrow. The wheel was about that big, I remember that wheel barrow because I worked on the barge, too. … That was on that Pelican Rapids. That time we were still unloading with that wheel barrow. And from here they went down to McPherson, Aklavik, Reindeer Station, and Tuk. And barrels, the only way to unload them was to roll them, those were 45s.
— Gabe Andre

Working on the York boat: ‘One white shirt, a pair of pants, some powder and shells—that was their pay for the whole summer.’
Nap Norbert worked as a deckhand on the steamships from around 1935 until 1952. He and some of the men would go all the way up to Fort Smith, and then back downriver as far as Aklavik or Reindeer Station. The work at Reindeer Station could be especially hard: “Reindeer Station, we unloaded lots of freight there when I was a deckhand. I hated that place, it was a long ways to pack things.”

Cord wood

The steam ships used wood for fuel, and they required huge loads of cord wood. Some of the elders worked in the wood camps, or remember hearing stories about the men working there. Nap Norbert cut cord wood for the steamer in the 1930s. He cut 20 cords and was paid $8 for each cord.

Wood camps were set up wherever the steamships travelled—along Nagwichoonojik, and in many places in the Delta. Camps existed below Tree River, across from Diighe’tr’aajil, at Tr’ineht’ieet’iee, and across from Travaillant Creek. At every wood camp, a steamer took in between ten and twenty cords of wood. The camps could not be spaced too far apart, because the steamers had to take in wood very often, especially going upstream which required more fuel:

_There used to be cord wood all along the river. The Hudson’s Bay used to hire people to cut wood in the winter time, and they piled it where the water wouldn’t take..._
it in spring. … Nap [Norbert], he knows how many cords they took at each place, how many cords they had to load. They had to have enough wood to go out at Tuk and back up. … They needed more going upstream, and so they knew how much wood they needed to get to the next wood camp, and they put that much wood on. — Gabe Andre

Because the steamers needed so much wood, some of the men hired by the Bay spent the whole winter cutting cord wood. Pierre Benoit’s dad, for example, worked the wood camp at Benoit Cabin: “He stayed there one winter,” Gabe Andre says, “that’s why they call that place ‘Benoit Cabin.’ He used a cross-cut saw, not a swede saw. It was about ¼ inch thick, about that wide, and about eight feet long. It had big teeth about that long, and handles at the end, sticking out. Two men used it, but one man could also use it by himself. That’s what he used.”

At the end of winter, enormous wood piles could be seen high up on the river banks: “There were at least maybe hundred to two hundred cords to each pile. Some piles were maybe even two, three, sometimes four hundred cord. That’s a lot of wood—piled no end, that long! And it was not only one row. It was at least five hundred yards long, maybe five, six rows deep. I have seen the one below Tree River. It was quite long, and about six, seven rows deep.”

Other trading companies

The Bay was the biggest but not the only company trading with the Gwichya Gwich’in during the fur trade days. From 1900 until well into the 1930s, smaller com-
panies such as Lamson & Hubbard, and Hislop & Nagle, and several independent traders competed for the trappers’ furs with the Bay. By the 1930s, Gwichya Gwich’in trappers could pick between several trading companies and independent traders. Furs prices were at an all-time high. For the trapper, this must have been one of the best periods of the fur trade days. To be able to trade for as many furs as possible, the big traders would try to send their steamers downriver ahead of the competition. Thus, a Hudson’s Bay inspector reported in 1910 that “Hyslop [sic] & Nagle have an establishment here, which is in charge of Mr. Nagle’s nephew, James” (see the photo on page 194). Hislop & Nagle at that time used to run their own steamer on Nagwichoonejik, and that year, the inspector noted with regret, “it unfortunately again reached this post ahead of the Bay’s.”

However, during the 1930s, the big traders were usually beaten by Old man (Albert) Ross. He came downriver with a scow carrying nothing but eggs, oranges, apples, and vegetables. Edward Nazon, for example, remembers of the summer of 1931 that “Old man Ross … had of course arrived from the south as usual; a big scow laden with fresh food such as eggs, potatoes, onions, oranges, and apples. This is all he used to sell; he’d always come right behind the ice.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1901-12</td>
<td>Hislop &amp; Nagle</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912-38</td>
<td>Northern Traders, bought out Hislop &amp; Nagle</td>
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<td>1914-15</td>
<td>Scogale Merchants?</td>
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<td>1915-16</td>
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<td>1928-29</td>
<td>Mrs. Z. McLeod</td>
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<td>1928-30</td>
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<td>1930s</td>
<td>Old Man Ross</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939-46</td>
<td>Bill Clark, bought out Northern Traders</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944-51</td>
<td>Fred Cardinal</td>
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Old Man Ross: ‘Eggs, potatoes, onions, oranges, and apples, this is all he used to sell.’

N.T. Company’s post at Arctic Red River, 1920s
Traders on the land

These companies competed with the Hudson’s Bay until about the 1930s, but by the end of that decade only the Bay remained, everybody else had moved back south again. There were some other traders, however, who, like the families, lived on the land. Some of them worked for the Bay or one of the other big traders, some of them were independent traders who ran their own stores.

Up Nagwichoonjik and up the Red

**Ramii tsal.** The best-remembered of these traders is Ramii tsal. He ran a trading post for the Hudson’s Bay Company, first at Weldon Creek, then at Bernard Creek.²²² He was known for the big accounts book he would take with him everywhere. He wore a captain’s hat in the manner of the Hudson’s Bay traders, and carried a big carpenter’s pencil stuck behind his ear.

In the fall, when everybody was getting ready to leave for the mountains, he locked up his store with a big padlock and travelled with the families. He took some of his trade goods along which he kept in a tent. The families could trade with him for tea and ammunition even while they stayed high up in the mountains.¹⁸⁰⁴ Tony Andre explains that nobody had to travel to Arctic Red: “He moved everything with him, and when you needed something, well, you went over there, you brought one marten, and he gave you what you wanted.”¹⁸⁰⁴ Business cannot have been too good, however, as Barney Natsie says: “He had the store one year, and next year I heard, he went bankrupt … He carried a book under his arm, and a big carpenter pencil behind his ear.”¹⁷₄/₁₄
**Johnson used to freight all his stuff up to Bernard Creek. And the people—they came from these lakes, and it was hard for them to go to Arctic Red, so he had a trading post there. They just bought from there, or from Ramii tsal. Ramii tsal, sometimes his prices were high. So they argued over it, over who was cheaper, and Harry Johnson’s was the next place, so they took their stuff to him. They traded with him, instead of arguing with Ramii tsal.**

— Tony Andre

Johnson was the only white trader to trade up the Red. His trading post consisted of one cabin and two warehouses. For a while, he also had his store at ‘Little Chicago,’ and trappers such as James Simon would travel up Nagwichoonjik to get their supplies.

**Old Benoit (Coyen).** This is Pierre Benoit’s dad. He also traded at Bernard Creek. “He bought his things from NT [Northern Traders],” Hyacinthe Andre says. “They used to have a warehouse down on the bank here in front of the community. That’s where Benoit got his supplies, and then he resold it” to families coming down out of the mountains.

**Jim Nagle.** He arrived from Edmonton in the 1930s. He traded with the Northern Trading Company. He got his freight by steamboat, but during the winter he stayed in his cabin at Jim Nagle viteetshik, and he trapped from there. He married Nicola Norbert’s aunt. When she died, he later married Nap Et’u’e’s mother.
Billy Clark. This is Dale Clark’s dad. He had a store at the mouth of Travaillant Creek. He was known as a hard worker “who never stayed quiet. Even when he was 80 years old, he was still working in his garden,” Caroline Andre remembers. He later moved his store to Arctic Red River, and Bill McNeely took over the store at Travaillant Creek for some time.

In the Delta

Jack Baradad. He had a trading post on the East Channel downstream from Tom vitezehshik. He was one of the “outpost traders” who had a license to trade for fur, and he represented the Hudson’s Bay. Baradad was a Frenchman who at first worked at the mission school in Fort Providence. He then moved downriver and set up his trading post. When he did not trade for the Bay, he would go out and trap. He sold his outfit to Father Coty and returned to Europe just before the outbreak of World War II. After Baradad left, Fred Cardinal bought his outfit from Father Coty, and traded from this location for two or three years.

Billy Phillips. Billy ‘Skinny’ Phillips had a store and cabin at Lenaidlaj on the East Channel, from 1927 to 1939. It consisted of a cabin and several store houses. Edward Nazon remembers, “He had spent many years in the country and was well known all over. He had settled at Phillip’s place—what they now call Earl’s place—and had a big family … There were lots of families at Phillips’ place then, Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Coyen, Old Blazes and his wife, and Francis Bluecoat and family, and myself and my two grandmothers, Paula and Julianne.” Billy Phillips died in the hospital in Aklavik in 1935. After his death, his wife remarried and ran the trading post under the name of “Mrs. M.N. Leland.” Edward Nazon and his wife Joan built a house at this site and lived in it in the 1940s. When they moved back to Tsiigehtshik, the trapper Earl Marander fixed the house up and lived here for several years.

Ernest Lacombe. He was known to be a very quiet man. He had a store on the lower Aklavik River in the 1930s. During the spring flooding along the middle channel of Nagwichoonjik in 1938, his store was flooded out. He had to live on top of his roof for about one week before he was rescued. He lost everything in his store.

(Adolphus) Norris. He and his wife Christine established a trading post on the west side of the East Channel, about nine miles downstream from Nichiitsii diniiinlee. This site is known as Norris’ Camp. It was mainly visited by families living around Big Rock. In winter, it took about three hours to travel from Big Rock to Norris’ place by dog team. Norris’ store was not very large, because he had to haul his trade goods in from Aklavik. Annie Norbert and her parents would get some of their supplies at Norris’ store. He would trade for furs, but he was also interested in dryfish and tanned moose skins: “We went there, and they liked our dryfish. We traded dryfish, and my mother tanned moose skins. They wanted moose skin, too, so we traded for all that—grub for moose skin and dryfish.”
White trappers

The great demand for furs and the good prices that were paid during the 1930s and 1940s also attracted some white trappers to Gwichya Gwich’in lands. Some of them stayed for a long time, and some became as skillful and knowledgeable about living on the land as the Gwichya Gwich’in trappers. Some of these trappers were real characters, and the elders remember them to this day. Edward Nazon says that these “white trappers knew the bush life just as good as any of us. They knew how different animals behave; they knew how to set traps for different animals. So we shouldn’t forget them or let time drag on without saying anything about them.”

Billy McNeely. He used to trap at Thunder River, and later at Tree River. When Bill Clark moved his store from Travaillant Creek to town, McNeely ran the old store until 1956, when he moved to Fort Good Hope. He also trapped in the Delta with his partner George Cummings.

George Hurst. He settled with his family at Pierre’s Creek, and trapped up the Red with his partner Ed Marring during the mid-1930s.

Old (Clayton) McBride. Old McBride was a “small wiry guy, about 5ft. tall, or maybe less,” according to Edward Nazon. He lived about 100 miles up Nagwichoonjik. He was not known to be very concerned about his personal cleanliness. “He’d leave town,” Edward Nazon says, “and come back next spring and still have the same clothes that he left with a year before.” It seems that he looked after his cabin as little as he looked after himself. Bob Norman remembers: “My dad bought from him [paying] with foxes, and we camped with him, too. Goodness, his house was full of mice. They were running around even in his blankets, but he didn’t care. There were lots of mice in there, because he didn’t throw his scraps out. A good size table in there, a big pile of scraps on it, and everything full of mice. I never slept all night!” Bob Norman is not the only one who remembers McBride as one of those colourful characters of the fur trade days:

And there was Mr. McBride, a man undersize who, as everyone knows, was not a very clean man … I knew the old man, too, it was true though that he never spent money foolishly, sometimes even for necessity, if you can put it that way. Gabe Bluecoat and I happened to visit him one day, he had a tent pitched up by Ghost Lake at Arctic Red River, and it just so happened that he was cooking his lunch—he wasn’t making much of a lunch, just what we call bannock, and the grease he used was sort of yellow.

To satisfy my curiosity, I asked him what kind of grease that was. He said, ‘bear grease.’ I don’t know how old it was, because bear grease is clear like Crisco. I didn’t want to be too bad, he offered us a meal, but we told him we’d just eaten. He was using that lake water, there were dogs tied up close by, and all the water from town ran into it, and no one used this water. It didn’t kill the old man, though…. 

196 Explorers and Traders
One July day he went to the Bay Store and went back home, and somehow or other he lost a five dollar bill. I saw the old man on his way up the hill to the store more than once that day, and I didn’t know why … I found out he lost money, whether he found it I don’t know. Five dollars is not much to lose, but it was worth fifty dollars as far as that old man was concerned.

— Edward Nazon

Old McBride eventually found the missing five dollar bill at the Bay store. It had slipped behind a box. Edward Nazon remembers Old McBride as a particularly good fiddle player: “Whenever he saw a bunch of boys sitting around with a guitar and a fiddle, he’d go there and have fun with them, and let me tell you, that dirty little man could make a fiddle sing. This is how come I quit the fiddle, and I had played fiddle for four years before that time. I thought, ‘If I can’t play fiddle that good, no use having one’.”

Because he was so careful with his money, some people called him ‘Stingy’ McBride. It is said that he kept his money in tin cans. Bob Norman remembers seeing McBride with these tin cans once: “He went back a little ways [in the bush] and brought back cans of baking powder, big ones! One was nothing but $50s and 20s!” McBride died alone in his cabin sometimes in the late 1930s or early 1940s. Perhaps that money is still in the place where he put it before his death.

Eric Johnson. He was Old McBride’s partner for some time during the 1930s. “He was about 6ft. tall and of heavy build,” Edward Nazon remembers. “He must have weighed 200 pounds or more, and he was very powerful, some said he used to carry an engine like 24lbs. of flour. A 12hp universal engine is about 400lbs., and that is what he had. … He was a sort of jolly fellow. When he came into Arctic Red

Trappers and traders in the 1930s (left to right): Louis Cardinal, George Cummings, François Dodman, Billy McNeely, Ernie Lacombe, John Niditchie, Joe Bernard, the Bluecoat family
in the spring, he used to have lots of fun with the kids. I don’t really know where he came from, some said he was a Swede. Whatever he was, he sure was an easy-going guy. He used the word ‘yeah’ all the time, for example, he made fun of his friend McBride, he called him ‘Mac.’ He’d say, ‘Yeah, yeah, everywhere I go, McBride goes, if I go to Red River, McBride goes, if I go outside, McBride goes, yeah, yeah’.”

**Emil Larson.** He was the very last of the white trappers to quit trapping and move away from the land in the late 1960s. When Edward Nazon returned from the mission school in Fort Providence in 1929, Larson already lived around Srehtadhadlajj. His main camp was at Maazil vakaiik’yt close to Point Separation. Larson is remembered for never washing his dishes. He had a dog by the name of ‘Dishwater,’ which would lick all his dishes clean for him. He passed away sometime during the late 1960s.

**‘Shorty’ Griffin.** Edward Nazon describes him as follows: “He was a short, stocky man, complexion light. He walked with bent back, I never knew why, perhaps an injury or some sort of illness, but this never bothered the man. He was always happy. It was the last part of June 1932 when someone saw a canoe with an outboard motor going upriver, and this man—or some men—said that the driver was zigzagging when passing the other side of Arctic Red River. It was learned later that the man was Shorty Griffin. When going south for good, zig-zagging was the sign of ‘Good-bye’ …”
### Important dates of Gwichya Gwich’in history after Canada began to develop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>The explorer Alexander Mackenzie of the Northwest Company is the first whiteman to meet with the Gwichya Gwich’in. He pulls his boat ashore at a fish camp at Cony Bay on July 9, 1789.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795 or 1796</td>
<td>Fur trader Duncan Livingston of the NW Company establishes Trout River post across and downstream from the mouth of Trout River on the upper Mackenzie; this is the first trading post on the Mackenzie River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1799</td>
<td>Livingston and three of his men are killed during an expedition down the Mackenzie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>NW Company trading post established on Great Bear Lake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1802</td>
<td>Trout River post moved to the confluence of the Liard and Mackenzie Rivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>An XY Company (also called, ‘New NW Company’) trading post established on Great Bear Lake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>The Northwest Company takes over the XY Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>First direct trade exchange between a group of Gwichya Gwich’in and the NW Company fur trader Alexander Mackenzie, a nephew of the explorer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Fur trader Mackenzie establishes a NW Company trading post at the mouth of the Bluefish River; Charles Grant is post master. The post is later renamed, Fort Good Hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806 - 1825</td>
<td>Gwichya Gwich’in trade at Bluefish River post. Beads are the most important trade good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>John Franklin travels through Gwichya Gwich’in lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>The Bluefish River post is moved to Gwichya Gwich’in lands, across from Thunder River. It is now called, Fort Good Hope. This is the first house built on Gwichya Gwich’in lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>Fort Good Hope trading post moved back upriver.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Peel’s River House (Fort McPherson) established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Fort Yukon and LaPierre House established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Battle between Eskimo and Gwich’ín.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Battle between Eskimo and Gwich’ín. Three Gwich’ín warriors are killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Battle between Eskimo and Gwich’ín.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>First visit of Anglican and Oblate missionaries: Anglican Reverend James Hunter and Oblate Father Grollier travel down Nagwichoonjik, continue on all the way to Fort Yukon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Fort Good Hope: Oblate mission established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Fort Norman: Oblate mission established.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Important dates of Gwichya Gwich’in history after Canada began to develop

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Fort Good Hope: Oblate missionary Father Séguin arrives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Father Séguin begins yearly summer visits to the fish camps at Teetshik goghaa and Tsiigehtshik. A new calendar comes into use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Fort Good Hope: Oblate missionary Father Émile Petitot arrives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Fort Providence: Grey Nuns open residential school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-9</td>
<td>Father Séguin begins construction of a mission station at Teetshik goghaa in the summer of 1868. Construction is completed in the summer of 1869.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to 1886</td>
<td>York boat brigades. The boats leave Fort McPherson in early June for Fort Smith. They return at the end of September.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Fur trade: SS ‘Wrigley’ (Hudson’s Bay Company) commences service. End of the York boat brigades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Fur trade: Fur trading company Hislop &amp; Nagle established. The first independent traders arrive in the Mackenzie Valley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Starvation at Arctic Red River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 - 1915</td>
<td>Boston whalers winter at Herschel Island. Many Gwichya Gwich’in families travel to the coast to trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Starvation at Arctic Red River: Nine Gwichya Gwich’in die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Influenza at Arctic Red River: Several people die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Starvation at Arctic Red River: Fifteen Gwichya Gwich’in die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Oblate fathers withdraw from Fort McPherson to their new mission at the mouth of the Arctic Red River. Construction of this building marks the beginning of Arctic Red River as a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896 - 1915</td>
<td>Arctic Red River: Several influenza epidemics over the next few years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>First game regulations limit hunting seasons in the NWT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Scarlet fever and typhoid outbreak at Arctic Red River: Several people die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Klondike gold rush (gold was discovered in 1896).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Influenza at Arctic Red River: Several Gwichya Gwich’in as well as several Klondike stampeders die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around 1900</td>
<td>Children from Arctic Red River are sent to the residential school run by the Grey Nuns at Fort Providence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Hislop &amp; Nagle trading post constructed at the Flats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay outpost for Fort McPherson constructed at the Flats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Fort McPherson: RNWMP (RCMP) post established.</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Measles outbreak at Arctic Red River: Most of the Eskimo visiting from the Delta die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>SS ‘Mackenzie River’ (Hudson’s Bay Company) begins operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Aklavik: Trading post established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Northern Trading Co. buys out Hislop &amp; Nagle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Typhoid outbreak at Arctic Red River: Several people die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915-20</td>
<td>Steady rise in fur prices. In 1919-1920, prices reach an all-time high as result of post-war boom. The fur market collapses in April 1920.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Earlier game regulations formalized through the first NWT Game Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Oil discovered at Norman Wells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Canvas tents, scows and kickers come into use. End of travel by moose skin boats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Great trade gatherings at the Flats: Gwichya Gwich’in, Slavey and Eskimo people gather to trade, and to celebrate their culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Trading Company Lamson &amp; Hubbard begins operations. First trip of SS “Distributor” (later sold to HBCo).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Treaty 11 signed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-36</td>
<td>Paul Niditchie is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-60</td>
<td>Large-scale muskrat trapping in the Mackenzie Delta area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>RCMP post opens at Arctic Red River. It is closed in 1976.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Oblate residential school established in Aklavik.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Mackenzie Valley: Severe epidemic kills at least 600 people in all Mackenzie River communities. At least seven people die in Arctic Red River. It is spread by the HBCo S.S. ‘Distributor.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Revisions to the NWT Game Act sharpen the restrictions on hunting and trapping seasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>First airplane flies across the Arctic Circle and lands at Fort Norman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Joe Bernard works as Special Constable for the RCMP. He helps in the hunt for Albert Johnson, the ‘mad trapper of Rat River’ in 1932.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Highest fur prices of the fur trading period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay Co. takes over Northern Traders Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-44</td>
<td>Hyacinthe Andre is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Edward Coyen is Chief.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945-80</td>
<td>Hyacinthe Andre is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay steamer SS ‘Mackenzie’ makes its last trip down Nagwichoonejik.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Arctic Red River: Federal day school opens. Dick Bullock is the first teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s -</td>
<td>Fur prices drop, greatly reduced fur trade. It never recovers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s -</td>
<td>Men work on the DEW line and in construction at the new town of Inuvik.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Arctic Red River RCMP post closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Indian Brotherhood of the NWT founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Committee for Original Peoples’ Entitlement founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Arctic Red River Hudson’s Bay post closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Government housing program influences more families to move into town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Inuit Tapirisat of Canada founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Anik satellite launched. TV is beamed into the north for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Metis Association of the NWT founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Indian Brotherhood of the NWT: Caveat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Berger Inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Dene Declaration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Dene Nation emerges out of the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Dempster Highway completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-82</td>
<td>Nap Norbert is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (later Gwich’in Tribal Council) established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-90</td>
<td>Grace Blake is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>COPE/Western Arctic Land Claims Settlement signed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Dene/Métis Agreement in Principle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Gwich’in split from the Dene Nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-93</td>
<td>Peter Ross is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Gwich’in Social &amp; Cultural Institute established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-96</td>
<td>Grace Blake is Chief.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Arctic Red River is officially renamed, Tsiigehtchic (Tsiigehtshik).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-99</td>
<td>Morris Blake is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Establishment of Nunavut—division of the NWT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Grace Blake is Chief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-07</td>
<td>Peter Ross is Chief.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Father Lécuyer and unidentified man in front of the new church at Arctic Red River in the late 1920s
When Hislop & Nagle and the Hudson’s Bay built their trading posts at the Flats in 1901 and 1902, respectively, Oblate Fathers had already been living there for more than five years. They had been working among the Gwichya Gwich’in for the better part of forty years. They had maintained a mission station among the people for over thirty years, recording all marriages and births in the church register.

Missionary work among the Gwich’in and the other Aboriginal people of the western Arctic and Mackenzie Valley began with a great competition between the Oblate Father Henry Grollier, and the Anglican priests Hunter and Kirkby. Like all priests and Fathers (yahtyee’) during those days, they considered this competition to be of the greatest importance. They arrived in the summer of 1858, and, beginning in 1859, attempted to convert the Gwich’in and the people from up the river to their own faiths. Travelling in the Hudson’s Bay York boat brigades, they followed each other from post to post all the way to Fort Yukon, attempting to prevent the families whom they met at the posts, from joining the other mission’s church.

The Gwich’in men working in the york boat brigades were the first to meet the missionaries. Arriving at Fort Simpson in August 1858, Reverend Hunter had the opportunity to observe some of these men’s traditional dances: “At night the Loucheux were performing their national dances outside the fort, painted and bedecked with feathers, &c. Their dances are of a very exciting character, accompanied with singing, shouting, yelling, and beating time with their feet, making the ground almost to shake under them” (a similar dance, organized at Fort Yukon in 1840, is shown in the illustration on page 225). During the subsequent years, it would be Gwich’in men such as these who helped Reverends Hunter and Kirkby,
and Fathers Grollier and Séguin to travel down Nagwichoonjik, across the Richardson mountains, and all the way to Fort Yukon.

Most Gwich’in families in the western regions of the land eventually turned to the Anglican church, whereas many Gwichya Gwich’in families accepted the Oblate Fathers’ teachings. The Fathers soon established stations up Nagwichoonjik; the missions at Fort Good Hope and Fort Norman date back to the year 1859. No Oblate mission existed on Gwichya Gwich’in lands yet, but some families soon began to visit the station at Fort Good Hope.

The Oblate fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Oblate Fathers 268</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
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<td>1950-56</td>
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By the time the Oblate Fathers established a mission at Fort Good Hope, the families had already been regular visitors at the trading post there, for about fifty years (see page 181). The trade visits now led to contacts with the Oblate fathers, as well. Some of the visitors may also have observed the missionaries arguing for their faiths at Fort McPherson. The people’s interest in the new religion had been awakened.

Father Séguin

A missionary who would work among the Gwichya Gwich’in for almost forty years, was Father Jean Séguin. He arrived at Fort Good Hope in the summer of 1862. Stopping over at the Fort for only a few weeks, he soon reached Fort McPherson, continuing on to Fort Yukon where he spent the winter of 1862-1863. He returned to Fort Good Hope in April 1863, and commenced his regular work. 168

He received the first Gwichya Gwich’in families in the mission at Fort Good Hope in April 1864. In a letter dated June 5, 1864, he wrote to his superior that several families, numbering twelve people in all, had stayed at the Fort for several days. 260 At about the same time, he began brief but regular visits to Gwichya Gwich’in camps downriver. Once every year, during early summer, he travelled
Building the mission

By the spring of 1867, Father Séguin had developed plans for building a small mission house on the “rivière Rouge,”260 the Arctic Red River. Construction of the mission station began in July 1868. In a letter dated August 1, 1868, the Father described the station as being located “on the bank of a small river called the Red River, and in the Loucheux language, Tsiigetchig [Tsiigehtichi].”259 Four young Gwich’in men staying in a camp close-by volunteered to cut about 120 logs of 11ft. each for the building. The logs were put into the river to be floated downriver to the construction site. Much to everybody’s surprise, however, the current proved to be too strong. It was impossible to pull the logs into shore; they floated past the site and down into the Delta. It must have been difficult for Father Séguin to convince those men to start the work all over again, but in the end, the required logs were in place. While construction of the frame was underway, the Father Petitot arrived for a visit of three days, during which he also helped with the work. The frame was completed before Father Séguin returned to Fort Good Hope at the end of summer.259

He returned to “Tsikkadjig où Rivière Rouge” on June 13, 1869 to finish the work. When he left for Fort Good Hope three weeks later, the house was completed with the exception of the floor boards; a cross had also been erected.259 This was only the second building to be built on Gwichya Gwich’in lands. In his letters, Father Séguin always referred to this site as ‘Tsikkadjig’ (Tsiigehtshik). It therefore appears that the first mission station was built on the banks of Tsiigehnjik, and most likely at the Flats.

A mission now existed on Gwichya Gwich’in lands, but Father Séguin remained stationed at Fort Good Hope. He continued his two-week visits during early summer, travelling downriver with the york boat brigades. After 1886, he travelled on the steamer. He would stay at the mission house for about two weeks, then return
to Fort Good Hope. For the rest of the year, the house stood empty. During the winter of 1877-78, it was even used as a storage facility by the Hudson’s Bay trader stationed at Fort McPherson. In a letter dated July 1, 1878, Father Séguin explained that the york boats had been unable to return to Fort McPherson before freeze-up. Two of the boats froze in, probably at Tr’ih choo iintyin (see page 188), although the Father does not state the site’s exact location. The cargo was removed and stored in the mission house for some time, before it was moved to Fort McPherson.259

Problems developed in 1872, when the house was damaged during a storm. “At Tsiketchik, I found my house in ruins,”260 Father Séguin reported in a letter dated July 27, 1872. He repaired the building, only to see it damaged again during a storm two days later when the “Rivière Rouge” rose ten feet within a day and flooded out the house. Father Séguin lost all his supplies. The subsequent years also showed that the site flooded easily, and in 1875 Father Séguin asked some Gwichya Gwich’in men staying in a near-by camp to move the house “a little further away” from the bank for better protection from heavy rain and winds.259 The problems persisted, however, and in 1883, the Father decided to move the mission station to a new location, “about two hours down from Tsikketchig.”259

With the help of several Gwichya Gwich’in men, a house 15ft. by 15ft. in size was constructed. In a letter to Bishop Faraud dated February 5, 1883, Father Séguin explained that he had settled on the new location following the advice of “Mr. Wilson” (most likely the Hudson’s Bay trader at Fort McPherson).260 By 1886, Father Séguin gave the name of the new station’s location as “Trétchigwarat.”
(Teetshik goghaa). Throughout these years, the Father continued his annual visits, but he remained stationed at Fort Good Hope. It was not until 1890, when Father Grollier and Brother Lefèbvre built a mission at Fort McPherson, that he ended his annual trips downriver.

The mission station at Arctic Red River

By 1890, the Oblate missionaries had become convinced that their work among the Gwichya Gwich’in should be extended to include Fort McPherson. Father Giroux and Brother Lefèbvre constructed a mission house there, and Father Séguin visited the fish camps around Tsiigehtshik and Teetshik goghaa for the last time. The station at Teetshik goghaa is not mentioned in his letters after this time. By late 1890, the Father and Brother moved into their new mission at Fort McPherson. They followed in the footsteps of Father Grollier who had spent the fall of 1860 there.

Now Father Giroux and Brother Lefèbvre at Fort McPherson were the Oblate missionaries for the Gwich’in. They carried on the work from this mission for several years, but by 1895, they reached the conclusion that it would be better to move the mission station away from Fort McPherson again. Father Giroux left Fort McPherson on April 16, 1896, and took up residence at the partly completed mission house at Tsiigehtshik. This was the ‘Mission de St Nom du Marie.’ Consisting of three buildings, it was the first structure to be built in what would become the community then called, Arctic Red River. It was some five years later that several more buildings would be constructed here: Hislop and Nagle built a trading post at the Flats in 1901, the Hudson’s Bay Company followed in 1902.

‘Big days’ — a new calendar

The new religion introduced its own important events and special days. Assumption Day, Immaculate Conception Day, Christmas, Easter became occasions for great gatherings, as joyful as the summer gatherings of ts‘ii dejj days. These occasions were unfamiliar to the Gwichya Gwich’in, and at first they had no way of keeping track of the dates of these feasts. The ts‘ii dejj calendar followed the change of the seasons, but it could not be used to single out individual days. The families living on the land followed the seasons, and they knew how to keep track of time by look-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big days of the new calendar</th>
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<tr>
<td>August 15</td>
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<td>November 1</td>
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<td>November 2</td>
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<td>January 6</td>
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<td>March - April</td>
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ing at certain star constellations. Something different was required for keeping track of the big days of the new religion:

_They knew what month was coming, by the stars. They used the Big Dipper—there are three stars that come up when the short days start in September. And when the days become longer, two more stars come out. That’s the start of the longer days. And by the moon they could tell how many months there are in a year. And they even knew what time the sun would come up. It came up in January … that Dipper, that’s the only one they used for time, for their clock. They knew what time daylight was going to come out. They just looked at that in the morning._

_After the mission came in, the Fathers used to make a calendar on paper. For all the Sundays, they made a cross, and for Fridays, they drew a little fish. The Father used to give it to everyone who used to go to the bush. That calendar, he made it—say, if people that were going out wouldn’t come back until Christmas, he’d ask them how long they were going to go. Well, he’d make a calendar for that time. After that, when they came back, he made another one._

— Gabe Andre

Using the new calendar, everybody was able to travel to town for mass on Assumption Day, Christmas, New Year’s, Easter, and the other big days of the Christian calendar. These new celebrations became as important as the great summer gatherings and celebrations that had been held at the Flats since early ts’ii dejí days. The families gathered to visit with friends and relatives, to celebrate their culture, to dance, and to play the old-time games. “Everybody way in the bush came to town, just to go to church,” Gabe Andre remembers.

For Assumption Day, families would come into town even from Fort McPherson: “The Fort McPherson people celebrated with us, too. All night we heard kickers coming, they all came to this celebration,” Rose Clark says. Christmas was another important big day. Families travelling to town would dress up in their best
dresses and clothing. Those who really looked after their dog teams would even make their dogs look more fancy:

And by the twentieth of December, you headed to town. And some of them—in those days, you saw lots of people—every one of them dressed up: fancy mitts, wool string, fancy stroud shoes, wolverine skin around the stroud shoes, and brand new parki. Even some of their dogs were dressed up. They had dog blankets. They had little tassels at the end of each dog bell. And a brand new dog whip, that’s what they had, too.

They headed to town like that, and oh that sounded good a long time ago. You could hear those bells long ways. When a lot of teams were going together, well, heck of a racket! The fastest they could travel was about ten miles an hour—that’s going really good. Once they hit town, well, they just stayed with friends, or else some of them got their own house; they stopped there. Nobody thought of turning the furnace on. They just had everything ready there, chips and kindling, then they lit the fire in the wood stove. In no time it was hot in there. That’s the way they came into town. And whoever didn’t have a house, they stayed with friends, or parents, or relatives.

— Noel Andre

Christmas mass was said in Latin in those days, and the elders remember that Christmas carols in the Gwich’in language were also sung.\textsuperscript{38:13} Because no work was to be done on any of the big days, the men would get up early during the days before the celebration and bring in enough firewood to last for the big days. The men who went out with their dog teams would try to beat each other, getting up early and attempting to be the first coming back with a load of firewood.

The next day, what they used to do is just haul wood. Early in the morning, everybody took off for wood. Some of them, they took off around five, six o’clock in the morning. Even nowadays, some people talk about it. They say they thought they...
went out early. They would go out about seven o’clock, some people were coming back with wood already. That’s what they did, they just raced around and beat each other … Some people thought they went out early—six o’clock, I guess. Somebody else was already out there coming back with wood.

— Noel Andre

Joan Nazon also remembers these contests between the men bringing in the wood. Old Joe Natsie would often come back first and beat the other men: “Every morning, early in the morning, you heard guys hitching up dogs, dogs making all kinds of noise. Really, when I think of it, way back, it just makes me feel sad. Think of it! Early in the morning, those old people, they just hitched up dogs and went into the bush. They came back with a load of wood even before six o’clock—it was six o’clock, because six o’clock, they used to have mass in those days. It was that old Joe Natsie, we used to laugh at him for that. You couldn’t beat him, that old man. You got up around six, and he was already coming back with a load of wood.”

The families would stay until after New Year’s, then leave for their camps. Many tried to return for Easter, but the ratting season would be well underway, and not everybody was able to make it to town for the celebrations. Those who went to town, would stay for about one week. They brought in the furs gathered during the winter, got new supplies, and headed back to their ratting camps after the Easter celebrations. The families returned to town in early June to join the summer gatherings and celebrations that had been held at the Flats since ts’ii deji days. During the later days of the fur trade, Slavey from upriver, and Eskimo families coming up from the Delta also joined the celebrations (see Chapter 16). At the end of the summer gathering, the families left for the fish camps along Nagwichoonjik and returned in mid-August to attend mass on Assumption Day.

Although everybody would try to travel to town or the Flats for the great gatherings and celebrations, there was one group of Gwichya Gwich’in who for several years were unable to join the feasts and celebrations. These were the children sent to the mission school in Fort Providence after the turn of the last century.

‘A hard journey’ — The mission school

Father Séguin began construction of the first mission station in the summer of 1867. That same year, Sisters of the Order of Grey Nuns built a mission school far to the south of Gwichya Gwich’in lands, in Fort Providence—more than 900 miles upriver from the Flats. The first Gwichya Gwich’in children were sent to the school even before the year 1900: When Bishop Grouard visited the mission of St. Nom du Marie in the summer of 1900, he reported that the harmonium during mass was played by a young woman who had learned to play the instrument at the mission school in Fort Providence. Gabe Andre remembers some of the children who went to the mission school during the 1920s. There were Hyacinthe
Andre’s older sister “Angele and three brothers, they were in Providence ... Before that, there were lots of other people there. Old Pascal, he was there too, then there were Joe Bernard, Odilla, Marcelline, Pierre Coyen, Mrs. Cardinal, Delma Benoit, Pierre Benoit, Monica Pascal.” Children from Tsiigehtchik were sent to the mission school until well into the 1920s. Edward Nazon remembers the fear and uncertainty he felt when he was picked to leave the community and go to school in 1923:

*It was in July 1923 that the steamboat S.S. Mackenzie arrived, and on board was a Grey Nun weighing about 200 pounds, by the name of Sister Rose. I was only ten years old at that time and someone had told me that this Sister was going to pick up children for the Boarding School at Fort Providence.*

*Being a young lad I was very scared when I heard that, for although I had no parents at the time, I really hated to leave home. I was more scared when the boat was coming back up for we could see the smoke from the boilers way down around Point Separation, but there was no way out. I could not run away as the old Father Lécuyer had us all ready. There were several of us, right now I don’t remember their names … Sister Saint Rose picked several kids from each settlement, and on board you could hear nothing but kids crying all the time.*

*I remember this as a hard journey, homesick, we were in a different town far away from our relatives. I can see now that not only were we homesick, but also that the poor parents were saddened to see their children leave to go to school at Fort Providence, and many of them never saw their kids again.*

— Edward Nazon

Although he was travelling with his sister, Nap Norbert also remembers the growing sense of loneliness he felt when he left the community to make the journey to the mission school up the river: “My mother and dad, they went as far as Fort Simpson. From there, we went alone. I stayed there five years.”

Life at the school was often difficult for the children, because it was so different from the life they had known at home. Some of the time was spent in the class room. Edward Nazon remembers his very first day in class: “August 22, 1923, the school opened. The newcomers or Kindergarten were given slates. These slates were used until a child learned how to write and read, then came what we used to call arithmetic, this of course started with addition, multiplication, subtraction. As you got to the higher grades, you learned the fractions, division, highest common factor, cancellation, etc.”

Learning and studying for the better part of the day was something new for the children, but there was just as much to be done outside the class room. Some of this work was familiar to the children, because it was something they had done at home when they were helping their parents. They hauled water, cut wood, and helped set the fish nets. The boys also set snares for rabbits. “In October, when
“They expected the students to hold their parents way of life together. Whether it worked or not is hard to say.’

Edward Nazon remembers, “the days were long, we would set rabbit snares,” “but just the boys—fifty or sixty boys—set snares. They could get a lot of rabbits in one visit. They made us pull out our snares by the end of November. I remember, one fall we used to set 400 snares. In this way, we would eat rabbits twice a day.”

Therefore, Edward Nazon says—and this was one of the better things the elders remember about the school—“we never forgot how to trap or how to snare rabbits. By doing this they expected the students to hold their parents way of life together. Whether it worked or not is hard to say, however, I remember we ... had odd traps. Where we got them I'll never remember, the mission probably loaned them to us, only very few of us had them.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fathers and Sisters remembered in Edward Nazon’s stories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brother d’Anjou</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother Berens</td>
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<td>Sister Claire</td>
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<td>Sister LaChance</td>
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<td>Father Michel</td>
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<td>Father Leguin</td>
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### Fathers and Sisters remembered in Edward Nazon’s stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Brother Kraut</strong></th>
<th>“He had been at Aklavik and Arctic Red River before he left for the south for good.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Ste Rose</strong></td>
<td>“Sister Ste Rose, our teacher, made us read and then put us to the blackboard for arithmetic, from Grade 1 to Grade 7, one grade at a time.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Sarasin</strong></td>
<td>“She was our supervisor and later became our teacher.”</td>
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<td><strong>Sister Marie</strong></td>
<td>A Dene woman “originally from Fort Good Hope.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Brother Lavoie</strong></td>
<td>“A handy man as far as machinery was concerned.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Duport</strong></td>
<td>Sister Duport was the girls’ supervisor.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Florestine</strong></td>
<td>“She was a six-foot, well-built sister. One could tell that she was just as strong as a man, and if there was anything that she didn’t know how to cook, well, then it just wasn’t worth knowing … Alongside the Convent the Sisters owned a big garden and they had a poultry yard with 600 chickens and all these were cared for by Sister Florestine, the Cook.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Metivier</strong></td>
<td>“Sister Metivier supervised us now and then.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Brother Mark</strong></td>
<td>“He was about in his late 60s but was just as active as any young men. He had been in the country for a long time, and he knew just about everything there is to know about the north. He had been in just about every settlement up the river, so he was well-known all over … he could sure square logs, we squared logs too, but we had to use a line to do a good job, but brother Mark never used one, but his square logs were just as straight as ours. Brother Mark was one of the best men one could meet. Brother Mark as I knew him was a good caribou hunter and a good dog driver … I heard he died after a very serious illness.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sister Poulin</strong></td>
<td>“There was Sister Poulin who we used to call ‘U.S.A.’ when she was in charge of us in Fort Providence, just because she was an American.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brother Roy</strong></td>
<td>“He was the stable man, he tended to the cattle.”</td>
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Some of the other tasks were not quite as familiar to the children. The mission kept about sixty head of cattle, consisting of steers, cows, and one bull. Looking after these many animals took a lot of time, and some of the older children helped the Brothers with this work. They also helped with the potato harvest and with bringing in the hay: “June 1928,” Edward Nazon remembers. “We finished the potato field. The mission had three big fields, but they only used two of them [for potatoes]. They grew wheat on the other one.”

Just as unfamiliar to many children must have been the language used at the school. Most of the Fathers and Sisters at the school spoke French; the Aboriginal
language spoken at Fort Providence was Slavey. The Gwichya Gwich’in children could speak Gwich’in among themselves, but French and Slavey were the languages used during the school day. “They went over there, they were Loucheux,” Nap Norbert says. “When they left there and came back, they were French.”

It is not surprising that some of the children had to relearn their own language when they returned to their families and communities. Edward Nazon remembers that it was only in the fall of 1929, several months after his return from Fort Providence, that he began to relearn the Gwich’in language. He spent the fall at Khaiiluk with Old John Baptiste and his wife, and Pascal and Monica Baptiste: “It was while there that I got my Loucheux language back. Nobody spoke English. Sometimes Pascal and his wife spoke French to me and that was all. The two couples had gone to school at Fort Providence years before me.”

It was the authority of the Oblate Fathers and of the Catholic church that convinced parents and elders to send children such as Nap Norbert, Edward Nazon and many others to the mission school in the early 1920s. Returning home as young men several years later, they saw that a different kind of authority had arrived in their community: A Royal Canadian Mounted Police post had been established in 1926. For the first time, a direct representative of the Canadian government existed in the community. The Hudson’s Bay store, the mission, and the RCMP post were the core of what would become the community then called Arctic Red River.

The RCMP post

The S.S. ‘Distributor’ arrived at 4:30 in the early morning of June 22, 1926 and brought the RCMP officers, Corporal Fielding, and Constables Ewers and Salkeld, sent to build an RCMP post at Arctic Red River. They began construction of the post on the subsequent day; the building was completed by the end of August. On August 22, Constables Ewers and Brinkworth left on the first patrol from Arctic Red River. The RCMP officers were one of the most important representatives of the Canadian government among the Gwichya Gwich’in, until the post’s closure in 1969.

The RCMP post at Arctic Red River, just as several others set up in the Mackenzie Delta and the western Arctic, was built to demonstrate the Canadian government’s authority over this region—a region which the government up to that time had mostly ignored. The Klondike gold rush, and the whaling ships at Herschel Island had brought many outsiders into the area. Oil was found at Norman Wells in 1921, and an increasing number of outside trappers also began to move into the area. Concerned with the arrival of so many newcomers, the Canadian government decided that it had to demonstrate its authority and sovereignty over the area. The government claimed that its authority to enforce Canadian laws and
regulations in the Mackenzie Valley and Delta region had been defined in Treaty 11, signed in 1921 (see page 237). The government established RCMP posts to enforce Canadian laws and regulations, and impose its authority on the people.1:177

There was little crime among the Gwichya Gwich’in in those early years, and criminal investigations were not carried out very often. The Arctic Red River Detachment annual report for 1927-28, for example, states that “no crime of any kind has been reported at this Detachment during the past year.”256 The reports for the next several years contained similar entries, with one exception.

The reports describe that Gwichya Gwich’in hunters and trappers repeatedly broke one regulation—a regulation that at first was unknown to them. This was the NWT Game Act which for the first time limited hunting and trapping seasons for Gwichya Gwich’in hunters and trappers. The RCMP in the communities was generally respected in those days, but enforcement of the NWT Game Act was the one cause for disagreements: “When it came to conflicting resource needs,” the historian Kerry Abel says, “the police presence was intended to protect the interests of Canada, not of the Dene.”1:178 This was the first time that the Canadian government attempted to exercise direct control over the traditional way of life.

While the game regulations were a cause for disagreement, most RCMP officers were respected, and several Gwichya Gwich’in men worked with them as Special Constables. Without the Special Constables’ assistance, the RCMP probably would not have been able to carry out many of its duties, in those early days.

**Special Constables**

Special Constables were hired by the RCMP to help with daily work around the police post. They also guided the patrols that went up the Red, across to Fort McPherson, or into the Delta towards Aklavik. Some of the RCMP officers posted to Arctic Red River would not have been able to travel on the land by themselves,
and the Special Constables led these officers along the patrol trails. The RCMP often bought or borrowed dogs for their teams from some of these men, and hired others to hunt or fish for the post. Men such as William Norman also worked as ‘forerunners.’ Forerunners walked or ran ahead of the dog teams to break trail. Gwichya Gwich’in men assisted the RCMP officers with their work in a variety of ways.

As difficult and demanding as some of the patrols during the cold days of mid-winter must have been, much of the work was uneventful and predictable. “When I was a kid,” John Paul Kendo says, “the RCMP used to make patrols up the Red all the time, they went to see how people were doing. They camped with you, and then they went on to Jackfish Creek, and on to Martin House, to see who was staying around there.” The patrols would be travelling for one or two weeks, then

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1st 1930</td>
<td>“Csts. Pearson and Nicholson and S/Cst. Bernard fishing and cleaning up barrack square. SPECIAL CONSTABLE BERNARD ENGAGED THIS DAY AT $60.00 p. month.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 4th 1935</td>
<td>“Cst. with Police team of 5 dogs and S/Cst Cardinal with own team from McPherson at 6.45 pm.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 9th 1935</td>
<td>“S/Cst Cardinal cutting and splitting drywood, sharpening saws and general fatigue.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 2nd 1930</td>
<td>“S/Cst. Bernard fishing and setting nets.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 24th 1935</td>
<td>“Sgt. Petty ... and S/C Cardinal left here for trip to New Chicago at 9am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 5th 1935</td>
<td>“Sgt. Petty, S/Cst Ethier &amp; S/Cst Cardinal arrived here at 7 pm with 19 dogs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 25th 1931</td>
<td>“Cst. Nicholson and S/Cst Bernard arrived on patrol this 5 P.M. with 5 police dogs and 5 private dogs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8th 1935</td>
<td>“S/Cst Cardinal exercising police dogs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 14th 1933</td>
<td>“S/Cst Bernard cleaning warehouses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14th 1935</td>
<td>“S/Cst Cardinal sick. Light duty.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9th 1934</td>
<td>“Cst Melville left with S/Cst Bernard for Wood Camp with 6 Police dogs &amp; 6 Private dogs to haul out wood.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17th 1935</td>
<td>“S/Cst Cardinal painting kitchen.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
return to Arctic Red River, where routine daily work resumed. These patrols by
dog team were carried out with little variation until the early 1960s.

Joe Bernard

As predictable as much of the work was for the RCMP officers and Special Constables, there were events which provided unexpected excitement. One such occasion involved Special Constable Joe Bernard who was part of the initial patrol that encountered the ‘mad trapper of Rat River.’

In the winter of 1931, the ‘mad trapper’—whose name may have been Albert Johnson—ran a trap line in the Rat River area, living in a cabin about eight miles upstream from the site of ‘Destruction City.’ William Vittrekwa, Jacob Drymeat and William Nerysoo of Fort McPherson ran their own trap lines nearby. On Christmas Day 1931, William Nerysoo walked into the police post at Arctic Red River to report that Johnson had sprung the traps on his trap line and hung them on trees. The day after Christmas, Constable Alfred King and Special Constable Joe Bernard left Arctic Red River heading for Johnson’s cabin on the Rat River to investigate Johnson’s actions. They arrived at noon on December 28. “I spent an hour trying to get Johnson to open the door and talk, but [he] wouldn’t open at all,” Constable King later wrote to a friend. “He looked out the window at me and that’s all.” Joe Bernard and Constable King knew that if they wanted to investigate any further, they would need a search warrant to enter Johnson’s cabin. They decided to travel to Aklavik and obtain directions from the officer in charge.

In Aklavik, they were joined by Special Constable Lazarus Sittichinli of Fort McPherson, and Constable McDowell. They returned to Johnson’s cabin on December 31. King addressed Johnson, but received no answer. Walking up to the cabin, his knock on the door was answered by a bullet from Johnson’s rifle. King was hit and fell to the ground. McDowell and the special Constables immediately opened fire at the cabin to distract Johnson. King managed to crawl to the river bank, and was pulled over the bank and to safety by Joe Bernard: “He went over there to pick up the RCMP officer,” Nap Norbert says. “That RCMP officer fell down right at the door. Bernard went over there to pick him up, but there was nothing in the papers about Bernard. ... Lazarus Sittichinli was in the search patrol too. They are never mentioned in the newspapers.”

Joe Bernard
The wounded Constable was placed on one of the sleds, and the group returned to Aklavik as quickly as possible. This was a race against time, but trail conditions were so difficult that they were unable to travel much faster than four miles an hour: “The temperature was forty below zero, and twenty-knot winds had blown up.” They arrived in Aklavik twenty hours later, not stopping once, and Constable King’s life was saved. Joe Bernard returned to the cabin several days later with an even larger group of officers. A fire fight ensued, but Johnson managed to escape unharmed. The group of officers and Special Constables returned to Aklavik to obtain reinforcements. This was the end of Joe Bernard’s involvement with the hunt for the ‘mad trapper.’ Johnson was later killed on the Eagle River, and although Joe Bernard was not part of the group that finally tracked down the ‘mad trapper,’ Edward Nazon vividly remembers the excitement caused by this story:

“There was nothing but ‘Albert Johnson.’ The story, as I remember, got so bad that some people hated to go back to their trapping camps. There was no communication of any kind except by men travelling from Aklavik … every time I passed by [Shorty Griffin’s place], I used to have lunch with him, and I was his newsboy—about Albert Johnson, of course!! It was there that we heard that Johnson had injured two Signal boys, Hancock and Hersey, and later that he had shot Constable Millen stone dead. This was a real shock to Arctic Red people because everybody knew him and liked him there.”

— Edward Nazon

Louis Cardinal

Louis Cardinal was considered to be one of the most experienced Special Constables. He moved from the Prairies to the Yukon during the Klondike gold rush. He belonged to the group of RNWMP (RCMP) officers stationed at the Chilkoot Summit, controlling the stampeder heading across the mountains and into the Klondike. He later guided many patrols between Dawson City and Fort McPherson, including the patrol that in the spring of 1911 informed the officers at Fort McPherson of Inspector Fitzgerald’s tragic death. He then settled at Fort McPherson where he married Catherine Firth. When she died, he later married Nap Norbert’s mother Caroline—who was then a widow—and settled at Arctic Red River. “He moved to McPherson and he married over there in McPherson. And his wife died there so he met my mother right here while I was gone [to school in Fort Providence], so they got married. So when I came back, I had a new daddy. Well, that’s the one who brought me up,” Nap Norbert explains.

According to Anglican Bishop Charles Whittaker, Louis Cardinal was also known as a very good long-distance runner and athlete. During the early summer of 1900, he was challenged to a race by some of the best runners of Dawson City. Three races were held. On May 24, Louis Cardinal won a twenty-mile race. In early July, he was the only runner remaining at the end of a six-day race; none of
the other runners were able even to finish the race. One of the challengers then asked for a second chance to beat Louis Cardinal. On July 14, another race was held, and Louis Cardinal won yet again. During this race, the Klondike Nugget newspaper states, Louis Cardinal broke several records.\textsuperscript{133}

Closing the RCMP post

The RCMP patrols by dog team and the work of the special Constables continued to be of importance until the late 1950s. Then more families began to move into town. Dog teams were replaced by skidoos. Fur prices dropped, and most trappers found that it had become almost impossible to support their families on the money they earned after trapping all winter long. Even more families began to move into town, and the patrols up the Red and into the Delta came to an end during the early 1960s. The surprise caused by the closure of the RCMP post in 1969 shows how important the work of the RCMP had become for the life of the community. “At Arctic Red River,” Edward Nazon says, “this was a shock to most of us, everyone was against it ... they enforced the law and we respected them.”\textsuperscript{175}
Gatherings at the Flats

Tents are set up at the Flats during the summer gathering

Feast given by Emma Moses: Old Modeste, Nicola Norbert, Ramii tsal, Moses, Gabe Bluecoat, Pierre Coyen (front)
GATHERINGS AND CELEBRATIONS

The great gatherings were a time of joy, of feasting, of dancing and games. The oldest of these gatherings, as was mentioned before, were those held at the Flats in mid-summer, but gatherings and celebrations occurred in other places as well. Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in families would meet with Slavey families in the mountains up the Red (see page 89). Some Slavey families would even travel down the Anderson River for the caribou hunt. They would meet with the Gwichya Gwich’in families spending the fall in the area (see page 62).

Meeting friends and relatives

The gatherings at the Flats had been held since early ts’ii dejį days. In more recent times, the arrival of the York boat brigades and the steam boats, as well as the religious celebrations introduced by the Oblate Fathers provided occasions for gatherings and celebrations at this site.

The families arrived at the Flats from the bush where they had spent the winter. Those coming in from Khaiıl luk or Big Rock often were the first to reach the Flats. They anxiously awaited the arrival of those travelling out of the mountains up the Red. When the birch bark canoes and mooseskin boats coming down the Red finally rounded the point, the men in the boats would fire their rifles to greet those shouting and waving at them from the bank. Everybody was glad to see friends and relatives again after the long winter. In later days, the arrival of the steam boat caused similar excitement. Edward Nazon remembers the gatherings of the 1930s and 1940s as “our most joyful times.” Joan Nazon recalls how happy everybody was to see friends and relatives again: “In those days, people used to stay in the bush all the time. They always stayed in the bush, and sometimes they came for Christmas and Easter. For the month of July they stayed down
there, and after that, they all went away till next summer. I guess they enjoyed each other’s company, because they hadn’t seen one another all winter, so maybe they enjoyed one another and made feasts.”

After the mooseskin boats arrived at the Flats, drymeat, bush gear, dogs and furs were unloaded, the tents set up, and the skin boats dismantled. Now the women who had contributed the skins when the boats were built up the Red, would work and tan them. The mooseskin boats coming down the Red, however, were not the only boats travelling towards the Flats for the great gatherings.

Visitors

Slavey families from around Fort Good Hope were regular visitors at these gatherings, and they were just as eager to join the dances and celebrations. Hyacinthe Andre remembers that everybody at the Flats started to shout and sing when the Slavey birch bark canoes came around the point. The visitors quickly carried their big boats up onto shore. An old man from among the hosts who was known to like to dance, began to dance when the Slavey canoes rounded the point. An elder from among the visitors likewise began to dance as soon as the canoes had been carried ashore. The two old men slowly moved towards each other. They met halfway between Church Hill and the Flats. When they met, everybody joined in. The dancing had begun, and it would last for days. The elders remember many of the Slavey visitors who would make their way downri-
ver to the Flats: Gregory Shae; Deya Manuel; Maurice Kotchilly; Luke St. John; Alex-
son; Peter Mountain; Jack and Adele Charney; Jim and Frank Pierrot; Charlie, George
and Joe Masuzumi; Joe Saul, a well-known fiddler from Fort Norman; Jackson, who
was known as a good caller; the Tenatchie family; Noel and Jonas Kakfwi; and John
Gitse, who was originally from Arctic Red River. He mar-
mried a woman from Fort Good Hope and moved upriver.
Most of these men were accompanied by their families,
so the Flats during those days were a very busy place.

And, as Joan Nazon remembers, the excitement
drew even those who had not quite reached the Flats
yet: “We stopped across the ferry landing [the ferry
did not exist yet]. There were many tents on the Flat
already. It was in the evening, nice and calm. And you
could hear the drums from across there. So we came
across, tied up our dogs across the Red, and then we
came across. Then we landed down there ... Edward was just in a rush to go, too.
Set tent fast, I tell you!” When in the course of the fur trade, the hostilities
between Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo finally came to an end, Eskimo families
from the coast also joined the gatherings.

'There will be a dance!

The men, meanwhile, could
scarcely wait to join their
friends. As soon as the boats
had been pulled up on shore,
they headed off to join the
dances which often had started
already. If the dancing had not
begun yet, the men who wanted
to begin, would walk around
shouting, ‘There will be a dance!’

As they met people from other cultures and learned about their dances, the
Gwichya Gwich’in began to use some of these dances during their own gatherings.
Some of these dances they learned from the people from up the river, some from
the fur traders. All of these dances—be it tea dances or drum dances, jigs, or
square dances—would at some time or other be a part of the great celebrations.

Tea dances

A round or circle dance, referred to as, Lits’eitr’dinaadzoh (‘going around in a cir-

There will be a dance!’
Drums were not used in this, or any other traditional Gwich’in dances. In the tea
dance, men and women formed a circle, holding hands. They danced clockwise
and as they danced, they chanted a song. There were perhaps twenty or thirty
dancers joining hands, sometimes even more. The children sometimes sat in the
centre of the circle, sometimes they would form their own dance circle within the
larger circle formed by the men and women. Bob Norman says: “They would do
that every summer, every summer they came. … They all stayed in tents, there
were lots of tent there on the Flats! That’s where they gathered, lots of people
gathered and they all danced in a circle.”230:47

These dances often lasted several days and nights without a break. People
joined the circle, dropped out when they were tired, and rejoined again later. The
dancers changed, but the circle remained strong. Tony Andre remembers that
“they had a great time all through the night—for one whole week, it was just full of
fun! In those days, there were something like 800 people there. Well, people came
from up the river—up the Mackenzie and the Red—and all the Delta and Big Rock
people; from Travaillant Lake, people came down, too.”15

Drum dances
During the early days, drums were not used to accompany the dances. The
Gwichya Gwich’in learned the use of drums from the Slavey and the Mountain
people. In their day, Hyacinthe Andre, Gabe Bluecoat, and William Norman were
well-known drummers among the Gwichya Gwich’in. “There were three guys,” Hyacinthe Andre says, “William Norman, Gabe Bluecoat, and me. The three of us, we learned it from the Good Hope people.” Edward Nazon remembers that the people from up the river not only introduced the drum, but also the dance that comes with it. It was in the summer of 1930 that he saw a drum dance at Arctic Red River for the first time: “One early morning in the first part of July, Mr. Harris, the Indian agent who was stationed at Fort Good Hope, arrived. There were five or six men with him. They had come with kicker and canoe. Philip Rabesca was their
captain. Old Gregory Shae was one of them ... since they were staying over night after treaty, they put on a drum dance. The first time we ever saw a drum dance, at least at Arctic Red River. It was an enjoyable night.196

Fiddle dances

Fiddle and square dances were introduced to the Gwichya Gwich’in by the fur traders. Caroline Andre explains that at first these were only held during the New Year’s celebrations. Sometimes a drum dance would be held after the fiddle dance.26 Barney Natsie was told that the first fiddle dance may have been held on the occasion of John Remi’s wedding. This dance was quite unfamiliar to some of the older people:

> When my grandfather saw the people, men and women holding each other—ah, ah, ah, ah!—not supposed to do that! Victor Stewart always tells me this story ... waltzing together: not supposed to do that! I was a little kid when I saw the fiddle dance going on. My mom used to put me to bed—I couldn’t go. I used to wish—I’d look through the window, see people coming in and out of Edward Nazon’s old house. They danced every night. Me, I couldn’t go. I had to stay home.

— Barney Natsie173:33

The Gwichya Gwich’in had heard about fiddle dances well before the turn of the last century. It was only in the early 1930s that the guitar was added as a rhythm instrument for the fiddle player. Edward Nazon remembers the first time that a guitar was used in one of the fiddle dances: “July 1931. ... It was at this time that a young man by the name of Billy Laroque had come along with [Old Man Ross], they stayed in Arctic Red for two days during which time Billy, as a good fiddler, really entertained the people, and he also had a guitar. It was at this time, that a guitar was introduced in the dance. We had a nice dance that night, square dances and jigs.”198 Joan Nazon says that Fred Cardinal was a particularly good fiddler and caller: “Big dance going on in there [Pierre Tazzie’s place]. Fred having a good time, he played fiddle. He called out too. Ah, they were having lots of fun. I don’t know how many days we stayed there. From there, we left to go to Loche Creek. There, too, there was that Pascal and his wife, Fabien and his wife, and also some Slavey around there with them. They all came up too. Sometimes they danced to the fiddle, other times, they danced drum dance. We really had a good time there, too.”204:12
As enjoyable as the drum and tea dances were, they were not the only activities popular among the families gathered at the Flats. Some of the old-time games were also played during the gatherings. Two games are particularly well remembered, stick gambling with the Slavey, and football matches with the Eskimo. Both provided a great deal of excitement and entertainment.

**Stick gambling with the Slavey**

Stick gambling, udzi, sometimes also referred to as the ‘Hand Game,’ was a guessing game. Gabe Andre explains that in the Hand Game, two teams of equal numbers knelt on the ground facing each other. Hiding their hands under a blanket or between their thighs, each player on the one side, the ‘playing’ team, shuffled a token such as a coin or an empty shell, from fist to fist. This token—from which the game takes its name—is called, ‘udzi.’ The players were supported by a number of drummers who lined up behind them, drumming and singing gambling songs. After a certain time, the players stopped their movements and presented their closed fists to the caller (guesser), the ‘captain’ of the opposing team. The captain used a hand signal to call the position of the hidden tokens, against all the players on the other team at once. A correct call by the captain eliminated the player from the round. For each wrong guess, the captain threw a small counting stick across to the other team. When the captain had eliminated all players on the opposing team, the right to play (to hide the tokens) passed to his side. The team collecting all the counting sticks, won the round.

The Gwichya Gwich’in would most of ten play against Slavey teams from around Fort Good Hope, and this is also where they learned the game. On July 3, 1879, Father Séguin wrote to Bishop Clut that a group of Gwichya Gwich’in men had spent the winter of 1878-79 at Fort Good Hope. It was during this time that the visitors began to play the Hand Game for the first time. Because it seemed to interfere with his work, Father Séguin did not approve of this new pastime:

> Some of them [Gwichya Gwich’in] spent a part of the winter with the people here at Fort Good Hope. During this time, they have learned the Hand Game, and it has caused great excitement among them. You heard nothing but the drums, day and night. Those who played didn’t think of sleeping, and their shouting and singing kept all the others awake. Whenever I spoke to them, they seemed to be more dead than alive. I fairly ranted and raved, I thundered, all to no avail—their fatigue was stronger than I. They struggled to stay awake, but soon fell asleep again.

— Fr. Jean Séguin

The Hand Game is a very dramatic event. It is not surprising that the men playing at Fort Good Hope in 1879 were as passionate about the game as Father Séguin described them to be. And it was no different when the teams met at the Flats in the 1930s when they played for days and nights without a break. The players
made elaborate gestures to fool the captain on the opposing team. They taunted him when his guesses had been wrong. Then again, a strong captain might be able to eliminate several opponents with one call. All the while, the drummers sang, shouted and drummed their support. A throng of spectators gathered around the players. It was quite a spectacle.

The teams might consist of twelve or even more players. Players would join in or drop out, but the game continued day and night, sometimes for several days at a time. “They played for days,” Gabe Andre remembers. “Sometimes there were more than ten drums, sometimes fewer. Sometimes, I remember, it was late in the morning, there was only one guy drumming, everybody else who had drummed was just sleeping. And the gamblers themselves sang, too, while they were gambling. In the end, there was a big hole in the ground where you were sitting—your knees were rubbing in the dirt all the time … I don’t think they even stopped for a meal. They ate just real quick, had a quick meal, and went back in again.”

Nap Norbert remembers that in the summer of 1929, the game went on for three or four days without the drums falling silent once. Barney Natsie explains that the game often involved gambling. The men would play for tobacco, shells, even their fish nets and mittens. These things were not easily come by in those days, and the high stakes made the Hand Game even more exciting.

The teams played in a tent set up just for the Hand Game. It was not used for anything else. While the men were gambling in the tent, the women would cook outside. They did not take part in this game; it was played only by the men. The food would be served to the players by the women and the young people. “We used to watch them all night,” Joan Nazon remembers, “and we, the women, cooked fish for them at the fire outside; we made tea and stuff like that. We would bring it in to them, and we watched them play.” All the while, the women were
also still busy working the moose skins that had to be tanned after the skin boats had been taken apart.217:40

Playing football with the Eskimo

Although they did not involve gambling, the football games with the Eskimo played at the Flats, could be just as exciting as the Hand Game. The matches could be so rough and competitive that the players, as Barney Natsie explains, would strip to the waist; they did not want to have their clothes torn: “I remember they even played football ... but they didn’t wear too many clothes, because the game was rough.”173:33 The ball used for these matches was made from moose skin stuffed with moose hair (see page 142).

At one time most Eskimo families would join the summer trade gatherings at Fort McPherson rather than travel to the Flats. At Fort McPherson, football was also one of the games played at the summer trade gatherings, and the teams played so hard that fights sometimes broke out.252:50 It is said that after one of these hard-fought games the Eskimo felt treated so badly that they decided not to visit Fort McPherson any longer; they would go to the Flats instead.

At that time the Eskimo went to Arctic Red [for the first time]. They used to go to McPherson. The Eskimo and the McPherson people, they used to play football. One old man in McPherson, they say he was smart with football. He knocked down one Eskimo. Smart one! They got mad at each other. And then the Eskimos took off, they say. That’s the story I heard—just by knocking each other down. ... So the Eskimo got mad and they got beaten. And that one smart guy from McPherson, he knocked down one smart Eskimo. So, they lost at football, and on top of that, they got mad at each other. So they got mad and took off. Pretty near a war again, pretty near a war! That’s the story I heard about it.

— Nap Norbert221:19
It must have been easier to organize football games at the Flats during the 1930s and 1940s than it would be today. A storm that occurred sometime in the early 1940s pushed in the bank along the Flats, and over the years erosion has made the area much smaller. Another heavy storm in the 1970s accelerated the erosion.217:41

August 15

The steamer had come and gone, everybody had traded their furs and received new supplies. The football matches and Hand Game competitions came to an end, the drums fell silent. Some Slavey families headed back upriver, some left to fish along Nagwichoonjik; the Eskimo women paddled the families’ big umiaks back down towards the coast. Now it was time for the families to leave for their summer fish camps along Nagwichoonjik and make dryfish for the coming winter. They would be gone for perhaps six weeks, then return to the Flats to celebrate the feast of Immaculate Conception, held on August 15. The occasion for this gathering was explained to the people by the Oblate fathers, and it was just as joyful and exciting as the gatherings that had been held since ts’ii dejj days.

That was in 1941 ... we came up for the fifteenth of August. There were lots of people from Aklavik, McPherson, and the Delta. They all came up for the fifteenth of August. They had midnight mass in that big church, and while you were in the church, you could hear kickers coming up, kickers coming up. Coming, coming from all over.

The next day, they had a feast, and then they had drum dances. No fiddle dances then, just drum dances. Lots of fun, lots of people ... they all came, they
Playing for the drum dances

The Hudson’s Bay steamer travelled down Nagwichoonjik for the last time in 1947. This ended the great fur trade gatherings at the Flats, as Slavey and Eskimo families began to visit the Flats less often. It was not much later that fur prices began to drop, never to recover. This made it more difficult for the families to survive on the land and support themselves by trapping. Over the years, more families began to move into town. The great gatherings were not held as often; drum and fiddle dances were organized less frequently.

Hyacinthe Andre, Gabe Bluecoat and William Norman had been the best-known drummers among the Gwichya Gwich’in. When Gabe Bluecoat and William Norman passed away, no new drummers came forward to take up the drum. At big drum dances, often ten or more drummers would play, and it was too hard for just one drummer to sing and drum for the full duration of a gathering. When drum dances are held in the community today, drummers from Fort Good Hope travel downriver to play for the dance—as their fathers and grandfathers used to do during the great summer gatherings and celebrations.
Feast held at Arctic Red River to celebrate the election of the Chief.

Treaty days

The great fur trade gatherings gradually came to an end after 1947, when the Hudson’s Bay steamer travelled down Nagwichoonjik for the last time. Slavey and Eskimo families began to visit the Flats less often. It was not much later that fur prices began to drop. They never recovered, and it became more difficult for the families to survive on the land and support themselves by trapping. Over the years, more families began to move into town.

A federal day school opened in the community in the same year, 1947. Many parents had to face a difficult problem: Should they take their children back to the bush with them and instruct them in the traditional way of life? Or should they send them to school to prepare them for the great changes that the Gwichya Gwich’in surely must face? The parents had to confront the same difficult decision that their grandparents had to make when they sent their young children to the mission school in Fort Providence. However, the parents also had to consider the additional problem that it seemed to become increasingly difficult to support the traditional way of life while the fur trade was in decline. While in the end an increasing number of parents decided to send their children to school, there were some parents who kept their children back to instruct them in the traditional way of life first. These children began to visit school several years later, when they were already older. As the new school was a day school, not a boarding school, many parents had to stay in the community to look after their children.

The school attempted to prepare the children for the changes that began to affect the traditional way of life, but the parents were concerned about the fact that there was no place in the class room for the traditional culture and the Gwich’in language. English was the language of instruction in the school, and it was often difficult for the students to remain connected to their own language. Bush skills and the way of making a living on the land were not taught either. The school’s existence put great pressure on the traditional culture.
However, it was in just these schools that some students acquired the skills and knowledge which enabled them to enter the political conflicts and struggles that the Aboriginal peoples increasingly had to face after the 1960s. It became clear that even half a century after the signing of Treaty 11, the Aboriginal people were denied the recognition of their treaty and inherent rights. Led by young political leaders who had received some of their training in the schools, the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta began to organize in order to safeguard the recognition of their rights.

These political struggles were the most important development to affect the Gwichya Gwich’in since the signing of Treaty 11. In the end, they led to the signing of a land claims agreement between the Gwich’in Tribal Council, and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories. Treaty 11 played an important role in these developments, and the story of the land claims agreement is not complete without the story of Treaty 11. This story begins in 1920, at a place some considerable distance upstream from the Flats.

Oil at Norman Wells

In 1920, a company working on behalf of Imperial Oil drilled the first successful oil well in the NWT. This was at Norman Wells, a short journey upstream from Fort Good Hope on Nagwichoonjik. This discovery turned the Canadian government’s attention to a region of the country that it had more or less ignored up to that time. The government feared that the oil discovery might cause a boom and a rush into an area of the country over which it had not assumed formal control. No treaties had been signed with the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley and

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**Treaty 11**

_They [the Gwichya Gwich’in] said ‘This is our land, we were born here, it is our land and no one will take it from us. This white man [Conroy] told us … ‘this land is your land, as long as you live and no one will take it from you.’ The people said, ‘Are you sure no one will take this land?’ and the white people said, ‘Yes, we will not take your land.’_

— Julienne Andre

_[Conroy] said to pass this Treaty. ‘Treaty is not for the white people to bother you for anything, they won’t bother your fishing wherever you fish, and things like that: and another thing, everything that you kill in the summer, whatever or wherever you hunt and you kill anything, is free.’ … all the Indians agreed to it and said o.k., ‘and now we are going to pass a Treaty,’ he said. Then each person got twelve dollars._

— William Norman

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Delta; the Aboriginal people had not surrendered their inherent rights as First Nations within Canada. It seemed unclear what formal authority the government had over the area. The government set out to sign a treaty with the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta, almost immediately. This was Treaty 11, the last of the ‘numbered’ treaties. A Treaty Commission was established under the leadership of Commissioner Henry Conroy. They set out on their journey down Nagwichoonjik in the summer of 1921.\textsuperscript{107:152}

**The signing of Treaty 11**

Commissioner Conroy, his advisors, and Bishop Breynat, who was also a member of the Treaty Commission, reached Arctic Red River at 1.00 p.m. on July 26, 1921. There were 171 Gwichya Gwich’in present at the Flats that day. Conroy placed before them a document whose contents they were not familiar with, and whose purpose was unclear to them. The one and only time that there was any opportunity to study the terms of Treaty 11 was the afternoon of July 26, 1921. It was Commissioner Conroy’s intention to leave the Flats that same day, and to take away a signed copy of Treaty 11. Perhaps the Commissioner did not believe that more time than the afternoon of July 26 would be required to conclude the treaty. He had been instructed by the Canadian government not to negotiate any of the terms that were offered in Treaty 11. Conroy brought a treaty document, but what he offered was “an ultimatum which was beyond negotiation.”\textsuperscript{107:163}

The Gwichya Gwich’in present at the Flats did not understand why the government asked them to sign the treaty; neither did they know why Commissioner Conroy offered to pay them money. Pascal Baptiste, who was present at the Flats that day, remembers: “It was said that money would be given to the Indians. To us, it was strange that money would be given to us free, and we kind of didn’t like the idea.”\textsuperscript{82}

Many of the questions that the people at the Flats asked the Commissioner that afternoon, probably remained unanswered. That the Gwichya Gwich’in decided to sign the treaty in the end, was to a considerable extent due to the influence of Father Lécuyer and of Bishop Breynat. “Through the bishops, it was done,” Pascal Baptiste says.\textsuperscript{82}

**Chiefs of the Gwichya Gwich’in**

The Gwichya Gwich’in accepted Bishop Breynat’s advice and decided to sign Treaty 11. Carrying out the instructions he had received from the government, Commissioner Conroy requested that the families present at the Flats pick a person who would represent all Gwichya Gwich’in, and who would sign Treaty 11 on their behalf. “Before the money was given out, we had to have a Chief,” Pascal Baptiste remembers. “So Paul Niditchie was chosen for Chief and his assistant was Fabien Coyen.”\textsuperscript{82} This was the first time that the families chose a Chief to rep-
It was determined that, upon signing the treaty, Chiefs would be paid $32 treaty money, ‘headmen’ were to receive $22, everybody else received $12.00. In all, one Chief, one headman, and 169 others were paid at Arctic Red River in 1921. In addition, Chief Paul Niditchie received a copy of Treaty 11, and a medal commemorating the signing ceremony. Treaty 11 was signed late in the afternoon of July 26, 1921, mere hours after Commissioner Conroy’s arrival at the Flats. In later years, the Chief would be paid $22, ‘headmen’ $15, and everybody else $5.

The terms of Treaty 11

Before the Canadian government could assume formal authority over the area, the Gwichya Gwich’in’s title and shared ownership rights to the land, would need to be extinguished. This is what Treaty 11 was designed to achieve. It is clear that this consequence of signing the treaty was never explained to the Gwichya Gwich’in, neither on July 26, 1921, nor at any time thereafter. And even if it had been explained and stated clearly, this goal of Treaty 11 would have remained incomprehensible and unacceptable to the Gwichya Gwich’in: It was impossible for the families living the traditional way of life on the land, to relinquish their shared rights to the land. Since the land did not belong to any one person in particular, no single person had the authority to sign the rights to the land over to the government. And neither was it possible to name and designate a person—such as a Chief—to sign a treaty containing a clause that relinquished the rights to the land. Asking the Gwichya Gwich’in the impossible, that is, to relinquish their inherent rights, would have been the same as asking them to negotiate away their traditional way of life altogether.

The Gwichya Gwich’in never accepted the government’s interpretation of Treaty 11. Rather, they saw Treaty 11 as a friendship treaty, assuring both sides that they could live in peaceful cooperation while respecting the other side’s way of life. The Gwichya Gwich’in had not objected to the presence of white trappers on their land, but had freely shared the land and its resources. Surely, the government would act just as generously in return, and protect the traditional way of life.
The terms of Treaty 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government obligation</th>
<th>once at signing of Treaty</th>
<th>once at signing of Treaty</th>
<th>once at signing of Treaty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a “present” of $32 in cash</td>
<td>chiefs</td>
<td>headmen</td>
<td>“every other Indian”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a “present” of $22 in cash</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a “present” of $12 in cash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silver medal, flag, copy of Treaty 11</td>
<td>once at signing of Treaty</td>
<td>chiefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment for hunting, fishing, and trapping to the value of $50</td>
<td>once only, on or after signing of Treaty</td>
<td>each family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>payment of $22 in cash</td>
<td>chiefs</td>
<td>headmen</td>
<td>“every other Indian”</td>
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<tr>
<td>payment of $15 in cash</td>
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<td>payment of $5 in cash</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“a suitable suit of clothing”</td>
<td>once every three years</td>
<td>chiefs, headmen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ten axes, five hand saws, five augers, one grindstone, files, whetstones</td>
<td>once only, if and when a band decides to move to a reserve</td>
<td>chiefs, on behalf of whole band (tribe)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twine, nets for fishing, ammunition to the value of $3</td>
<td>once a year</td>
<td>“every Indian” who continues to hunt, trap and fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pay salaries for teachers</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“His Majesty the King hereby agrees with the said Indians that they shall have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract [of land] surrendered ...”</td>
<td>all Gwich’ya Gwich’in in the NWT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gwichya Gwich’in obligations</th>
<th>all Gwichya Gwich’in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“… to cede, release, surrender, and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for His Majesty the King and His Successors forever, all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever to the lands …”</td>
<td>all Gwichya Gwich’in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“… to name certain Chiefs and Headmen [councillors], who should be authorized on their behalf to conduct such negotiations and sign any treaty …”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Gwichya Gwich’in thought that Treaty 11 made sure that the traditional way of life would be protected—in the words of Treaty 11, that the Gwichya Gwich’in would “have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing.” It is this understanding of the meaning of Treaty 11 that is expressed by Chief Paul Niditchie’s signature.

Chief Niditchie and Fabien Coyen signed the treaty document on the afternoon of July 26, 1921, but it soon became apparent to the Gwichya Gwich’in that the
The Trail to Town

government failed to live up to its promises. The traditional way of life was not protected, and the government did not meet its obligations in areas such as education, among others. For about fifty years, the only event to remind the Gwichya Gwich’in that the government was paying any attention to Treaty 11 at all, was Treaty Day, the annual meeting where Chiefs, councillors and everybody else received their annual payment. As unimportant as this annual event may have appeared to the government, Treaty Day was a big day for the Gwichya Gwich’in. It served to express that they respected Treaty 11, and that they intended to keep their side of the bargain.

The government, so it seemed, had more or less forgotten to meet its obligations—until 1973, that is, when some of the Aboriginal leaders in the Mackenzie Valley and Delta decided that it was time for a strong reminder.

The Chiefs: ‘Caveat’

By 1973, the oil companies were in the middle of large-scale exploration in the Mackenzie Delta. Rumours abounded that plans were under consideration to construct a pipeline from the coast of the Beaufort Sea down to Alberta, right through the lands of the Gwichya Gwich’in and the other Aboriginal peoples in the Mackenzie Valley. Some of the Chiefs of the Dene attempted to stop construction of the pipeline, because the negative consequences of such a project on wildlife, the environment and the traditional culture were unknown. The Aboriginal peoples of the Northwest Territories understood that they would have to establish political organizations to make their voices heard. In 1970, the Dene of the southern NWT founded the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT, and the people of the Mackenzie Delta established COPE, the Committee for Original Peoples’ Entitlement. COPE’s initial membership included Inuit, Gwich’in and Métis of the region. When the Inuit from Coppermine and farther east subsequently joined Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (Canada’s national Inuit organization), the Gwich’in joined the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories; the Métis founded the Métis Association.
In 1973, sixteen Chiefs of the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta Region filed a *caveat* with the Supreme Court of the NWT. A caveat is a legal statement used to declare that one has a pre-existing claim to a piece of property. The declaration (caveat) is made in order “to prevent another from purchasing or holding title to that property until legal ownership has been determined.” The caveat filed by the Chiefs declared that their Aboriginal rights to the land had not been extinguished. Therefore, the Chiefs stated, no development of any kind would proceed on the lands defined in Treaties 8 and 11, without their permission.

After examining the history of Treaty 11, Justice Morrow of the NWT Supreme Court agreed with the position taken by the Chiefs. According to Justice Morrow, the history of Treaty 11 showed that the inherent Aboriginal rights of the Dene had never been extinguished. Although his decision was later overturned by a higher court, the federal government realized that the question of Aboriginal rights in the Mackenzie Valley and Delta remained as unresolved as ever.

### The Dene Nation

In 1975, the Indian Brotherhood published the *Dene Declaration*. The Declaration stated that, as a Nation, the Dene had special status under the Canadian constitution, as well as inherent rights to the land and to self-determination. The Indian Brotherhood was renamed, *Dene Nation*, a political organization uniting the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley in their political struggles. The Slavey, the Dogrib, the Chipewyan, the Sahtu Dene, and the Gwich’in joined the Dene Nation. For a time, the Dene Nation also represented the interests of the Métis of the NWT.

In 1976, the Dene Nation presented a land claim to the government for negotiation. Since the question of land ownership in the Northwest Territories was still unresolved, the federal government accepted the offer to negotiate with the Dene and Métis. The government suggested that a *comprehensive* land claim settlement agreement should be negotiated. In attempting to negotiate a comprehensive rather than a *specific* land claims agreement, the federal government acknowledged the shortcomings of Treaty 11. The federal government will negotiate comprehensive land claims only in areas where Aboriginal rights to the land have not been extinguished—which is precisely what Treaty 11 claimed to have achieved.

### The Dene / Métis Agreement In Principle

In 1988, the federal government and the Dene / Métis Secretariat finally arrived at an Agreement in Principle on the claim. A final agreement was initialled in April 1990, but at the last minute, another obstacle to a successful completion arose.
Dene Nation leaders from the southern regions of the NWT took exception to the ‘extinguishment’ clause which was part of the agreement. They argued that Aboriginal rights could not be extinguished, because they were inherent rights. At the annual assembly of the Dene Nation in June 1990 a motion was passed requesting a renegotiation of the agreement.

The Dene Nation splits up

It was at this point that the Gwich’in delegates walked out from the assembly. They argued that the extinguishment clause was not really a serious obstacle. Nobody had as yet defined precisely what an ‘inherent’ right was. And in any case, while it was true that the Agreement in Principle contained a general statement extinguishing the inherent Aboriginal rights of the Dene, it safeguarded them in another way through the detailed description of legal rights that the Dene would win through the Agreement in Principle. The Dene Nation leaders from the southern NWT refused to accept this interpretation of the Agreement in Principle.

The Dene Nation split up. The Gwich’in leaders returned home, and requested the negotiation of their own regional land claim. The federal government accepted the request, and an agreement was initialed by June 1991. The agreement was taken to the communities where 94% of the people supported it. The agreement which was signed in Fort McPherson on April 22, 1992, was largely modelled on the Dene / Métis Agreement in Principle.

The Land Claims Agreement

Broadly speaking, the Land Claims Agreement includes provisions in the economic, the cultural and the political areas:

- a self-government framework agreement;
- a cash payment of $140 million, paid out over fifteen years;
• the Gwich’in will receive a percentage share of resource royalties paid to the federal government from the NWT;
• establishment of a number of co-management boards. As a partnership between the Gwich’in and the government, these boards allow the Gwich’in to cooperate with government institutions in the management of their lands, wildlife and natural resources;
• formal transfer of ownership of land (‘fee simple’) to more than 32,000 square kilometers. Ownership of traditional lands in Yukon Territory is defined in a trans-boundary agreement. 91

The land claim document also outlines a framework agreement on self-government. Negotiations defining the scope and extent of institutions of self-government have been going on for several years.

The Gwich’in Tribal Council (GTC) is the organization responsible for implementing the agreement. The Council attempts to balance the cultural, economic and political elements of the Agreement so that one will not override the others. A number of organizations have been set up that are responsible for making the goals of the Agreement a reality: The Gwich’in Land and Resources department manages the use of Gwich’in lands; the Gwich’in Development Corporation invests in businesses on behalf of the Council; it also provides training, employment and business opportunities for land claims beneficiaries. The Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute carries out cultural, heritage and language research, and provides educational programming in these areas. 151 Following the GTC’s mission statement: *Gwich’in land, culture and economy for a better future*, all these organizations work to strengthen Gwich’in culture and society.

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**For the future**

What will the future hold? The Agreement is a victory which the Gwich’in have won through hard and persistent work. As a tool, the Agreement holds great promise for the future, but everyone knows that much work will be required to realize the goals laid out in it. To build a strong Gwich’in culture, “it will take dedicated people who are well educated in both Gwich’in and western ways of life, who care about the land, their people and their culture, and who recognize that what is done today will affect the future of generations to come.” 151 The Land Claims Agreement provides the tools that will enable the Gwich’in to strengthen the traditional culture and move it forward into the future. By assuming stewardship of the land, they will at the same time connect the traditional culture back to their ancestors’ history—the history of the many families who have made a living on the land, and who have followed the trails, since the earliest days of the land.
Dale Blake skinning a beaver at Hehnjuu deeft'yah tshik, summer 1993

Hyacinthe Andre and Alelstine Andre at Nihtavan diniinlee, summer 1993
Ever since I was small, I remember coming up the Arctic Red with my dad in the fall. We’d stay here until just before Christmas and then head back to town. We’d come back out here after New Year’s. We’d do that just about every year when the trapping was good. When I travel out in this part of the country, it makes me feel at home. You get a peace and quiet that you don’t get in town. It keeps you healthy. The knowledge and the skills that I’ve learned about the land are important to me because they have been passed on to me by my dad. I’d like to pass on all that I’ve learned and know about this river to my son and my daughter so that people will always come up here.
— Dale Blake

Talk to your children often in our language, even if they do not hear you. They listen and learn fast when they are small. Talk to them then. Ask them to give you something and ask them again and again, and eventually they will know what you mean. Even those who do not have any children should talk to a small child in our language when they see them. Maybe then our children will hear and learn our language.
— Hyacinthe Andre
Julienne was born on July 7, 1887. Her son Tony says that “she told me she was born in the Yukon around Ddhahzhit gwitsal, which is the headwaters of the Cranswick River.” Julienne, the daughter of Amy and Jerome Teh’dahcha, spent her early life travelling in the mountains with her parents.

Julienne told stories about living in moss houses, skin tents, and moving around in the mountains in search of food. She remembers that the family sometimes had to go hungry. Julienne married John Tsal (adopted son of Marka and Andre) on June 17, 1907 in Tsiigehntshik. John Tsal had came over from Fort Yukon with the mail run via Old Crow and Fort McPherson before settling down at Tsiigehntshik. They lived and travelled around the Khaii luk area, up Tsiigehnjik, around Nichitsii diniinlee in the Delta, and the Anderson River area. Their children are the late Anjel (Angela) Andre, the late Hyacinthe Andre, the late Camelle Andre, the late Barnaby Andre, the late Pierre Andre, the late Antoine Andre, the late Boniface Andre, Marka Bullock, and Gabe Andre. After her husband died in 1944, Julienne lived and travelled on the land with her son Hyacinthe and his family, mainly in the Tree River area.

She also lived many years with her youngest son, Gabe Andre and his family at Khaii luk. Julienne’s brothers and sisters were Joe Bernard, Delma Benoit, Monica Pascal, and John Jerome. Julienne spoke Gwich’in and Slavey. In her late life, Julienne continued to live and work at her camp at Tree River in the summer months. Julienne died on September 6, 1983 at the age of 96.
Eliza (Sam) Andre and Hyacinthe Andre

Eliza was born on April 8, 1908 around Nichitsii diniinlee. She is the daughter of Lucy and Sam. Eliza’s mother died when she was young. She was raised by her father and they spent her younger years in the Anderson River area. They lived at the mouth of the Kugaluk River for about four years. Here Eliza learned to speak the Inuit language. Eliza married Hyacinthe Andre (son of Julienne and John) on July 2, 1928 in Tsiigehtshik. They lived and travelled around the Khii Luk area, the Tree River area, and the Delta around Nichitsii diniinlee. In the spring of 1942, they established a permanent camp at Tree River.

Their children are Noel Andre, the late Robert Andre, the late Barney Andre, the late Lucy Andre, Cecil Andre, the late Maria Andre, the late Philip Andre, the late Winnie Andre, the late Robert Andre, Addy Politeski, Alestine Andre and Agnes Mitchell. According to Tony Andre, Eliza’s brother-in-law, “She used to tan and sew caribou leg skins together into a tent-size rug. It used to fit inside the tent just right.” In the 1970s, Eliza also helped organize a children’s drum dance group at which time she, Caroline Cardinal, and Odilla Coyen sewed traditional clothing for the young dancers. She is well remembered for her diligent work and skill at tanning moose and caribou hides. Eliza died on February 5, 1977, at the age of 68.

Hyacinthe was born at Hehnjuu deet'yah tshik on May 14, 1910. He is the eldest son of Julienne (Jerome) and John Tsal. The late Tony Andre, Marka Bullock and Gabe Andre are Hyacinthe’s brothers and sister. Hyacinthe spent most of his life on the land in the Khaii Luk area, the Tree River area, the Delta around Nichitsii diniinlee and up Tsiigehnjik. In 1923, when his brother Camelle contracted TB and had to go to the hospital in Fort Simpson, Hyacinthe travelled on the mission boat with him, and stayed to work with the Roman Catholic sisters as a cook for two years. Hyacinthe married Eliza Sam (daughter of Lucy and Sam) on July 2, 1928 in Tsiigehtshik. He established a permanent camp at Tree River in 1942-43. Hyacinthe purchased the camp from Billy McNeely when Billy took over William Clark’s store at Travailant River. Hyacinthe was Chief of Tsiigehtshik for thirty-eight years (1942-1980). He is the longest-serving Chief in the Gwich’in area. Hyacinthe provided a lot of information from his own experiences that date back to a time when moose skin boats and moss houses were still in use. He recalled overland journeys when people walked into the mountains with only their dogs, both carrying heavy packs. Hyacinthe spoke Gwich’in, Slavey, French and English. The Chief Hyacinthe Andre Cultural Centre in Tsiigehtshik, named after Hy-
Edward Nazon and Joan (Husky) Nazon

Edward Nazon was born on February 1, 1913 at Khaiilik. He is the son of Emily and Simon Modeste. Edward was raised by his grandmother, Shinaghan Nayzoo; during his youth, they lived in the area around Chii chyaa tshik. In 1923, Edward travelled to Fort Providence on the mission boat where he went to the mission school for six years.

Edward married Joan Husky (daughter of Mary and Jimmy) of Aklavik on August 3, 1940. They lived and travelled around the Odizen Lake area. In the late 1960s, Edward was involved with the NWT Indian Brotherhood who were then beginning to discuss their land claim with the federal government. Later in his life, Edward wrote columns of old-time stories and stories about life on the land, for the Inuvik Drum. In the late 1960s, he and his wife, Joan, established a permanent camp at Chii echeii on Nagwichoonjik, across from the community. Edward spoke Gwich’in, English, and French. Simon Modeste, Daria McNeely, and Vital Modeste were Edward’s brothers and sister. Edward died on May 25, 1983 at the age of 70.

Joan was born on October 26, 1913 around Fort McPherson. She is the daughter of Mary and Jimmy Husky of Aklavik. Joan spent most of her life living on the land around Aklavik and in the Odizen Lake area. Joan married Philip Ross of Aklavik in 1936. She and her husband lived in the Delta. Their sons are Richard and Peter Ross. Philip died in 1937. Joan married Edward Nazon (son of Emily and Modeste) on August 3, 1940. She has lived in the Tsiigehtshik area ever since. She and Edward lived in the Delta and travelled around the Odizen Lake, Caribou Lake and Travaillant Lake area. Their children are Emily McDonald, Margaret Donovan, the late James Nazon, the late Gilbert Nazon, the late Tommy Nazon, and Louise Lennie. Joan’s sisters and brother are the late Susie Husky, David Husky, and Bella Husky. Joan spoke Gwich’in and English. Whenever she had the opportunity, Joan would go to her fish camp to work with fish, rabbit and meat. “I just love the bush life,” she would say. Joan was known for the eloquent style in which she told her stories. Joan passed away on October 11, 2004, at the age of 90.
Nap (Napoleon) Norbert and Annie (Niditchie) Norbert

Nap was born at Deetree k’adh on January 29, 1917. Deetree k’adh is located a few miles upriver from the community of Tsiigehtshik. Nap is the son of Caroline (Smith) and Manuel Norbert. Nap worked as a deckhand on the boat, the M.V. ‘Pelican Rapids,’ from 1947 to 1958. Nap said that the S.S. ‘Distributor’ travelled the Mackenzie River for the last time in 1947. He also cut and stockpiled cord wood for the steam boats in the Chii chyaa tshik area, about twenty miles upriver from the community. Nap married Mary Madeline (Taniton) Norman (daughter of Lucy and Joseph) in 1940. They lived around the Arctic Red River area. She died in 1948. Their children are the late Caroline Norbert, Henry Norbert, Archie Norbert, Agnes Smyth, Annie McNabb, and Lucy Vehus.

Nap married Annie Moses (daughter of Camilla and Paul Niditchie) in 1952. They lived in Aklavik, the Teetshik goghaa (Six Miles) and Khaiilaii tshik (Rengleng River) areas and spent some time up Tsiigehnjik. In the 1960s and 1970s, Nap was involved with the NWT Indian Brotherhood who were beginning to discuss their land claim with the federal government. Nap was Chief of Tsiigehtshik from about 1980-1982, after Hyacinthe Andre stepped down. He also worked for his people as a member of the Elders Council and the Renewable Resources Council. Nap passed away on November 28, 2003 at the age of 86.

Annie was born on December 30, 1921 in Tsiigehnjik. She is the daughter of Camilla and Paul Niditchie. Annie spent her younger years with her parents in the Delta at Nichitsii dininlee. Annie’s father, Paul Niditchie, Tsiigehtshik’s first Chief from 1921 to 1936, signed Treaty 11 on behalf of the Gwichya Gwich’in in 1921. Annie married Jim Moses in 1939, and she and her husband lived in the Khaii luk area. Jim died in 1942, and Annie later married Nap Norbert (son of Caroline and Manuel), in 1952. They lived in Aklavik and around Teetshik goghaa. They also spent some time up Tsiigehnjik. Their children are Jim Norbert, Lawrence Norbert and Dennis Norbert. Along with raising her own children and step-children, Annie also raised the children of her brother, Amos Niditchie, and her sister, Liza Remi. Amos Niditchie, Liza Remi and John Niditchie are Annie’s sibling. Annie speaks Gwich’in and English. Today, visitors and people from the community and the surrounding area drop by for tea and a visit with Annie.
Pierre Benoit

Pierre was born on February 1, 1921 at Tsiigehtshik, on the south side of Ghost Lake, at the Flats below the community. In his early life, Pierre lived at Cabin Creek with his father, Benoit Coyen, and his mother Delma. Pierre spent most of his life living on the land in the Delta around Nichiitsii diniinlee, making a living by hunting, fishing and trapping. Pierre married Annie Koe of Fort McPherson in 1956 at the age of thirty-five. Their children are the late Joe and Clayton Benoit. Although he is unable to go on the land anymore, Pierre is always willing to share information and traditional knowledge about his life and experience on the land with organizations such as the Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute. “I can’t help with work,” Pierre says, “but I sure can help with my mouth.” Pierre speaks Gwich’in and English. Adeline (Benoit) Viglione, who now lives in Calgary, is Pierre’s younger sister. After a lifetime on the land, Pierre now lives a quiet life at the long-term care unit in Inuvik regional hospital.

Caroline (Kendo) Andre and Tony (Antoine) Andre

Caroline was born on January 24, 1935 “in the bush up the Red someplace.” She spent her younger life with her parents, Mary (Tsetetti) and Ernest Kendo, around Lëth jithakaij van (Ernest Cabin) up the Arctic Red River, and around Nichiitsii diniinlee. It is said that Caroline’s paternal grandfather, Ernest’s father, may have come from around the Mayo area. Caroline married Tony Andre in 1949, and they spent the earlier years of their marriage in the Khaii lük and Siveezhoo areas, as well as up the Red. Their children are James Andre, the late Frederick John, Ernie Andre, Beverly Moore, Linda Andre, the late Charles Norman, Loretta Andre, Richard Andre, Andy Andre, Doreen Andre, Mary Stewart, and the late Robert Andre. John Paul Kendo, Eileen Cardinal, and Thomas Kendo are Caroline’s siblings. Caroline speaks Gwich’in and English. She is known for her skill in lacing snowshoes. Tony was born in the Yukon at Nihtavan diniinlee on December 24, 1924. He is the son of Julienne (Jerome) and John Tsal. He spent most of his life living on the land in the Delta around Nichiitsii diniinlee, at Khaii lük, in the Anderson River region,
the Siveezhoo area, and up Tsiigehnjik towards the Mackenzie Mountains between Ddhahzhit gwitsal and Gyuu dazhoo njik. In 1949, Tony married Caroline Kendo (daughter of Mary and Ernest). Tony's brothers and sister are the late Hyacinthe Andre, Marka Bullock and Gabe Andre. Tony spoke Gwich’in, Slavey and English. Tony, who was known as a great story teller, loved to share stories about his life and experiences on the land with the people in the community, and enjoyed making them laugh. Tony passed away on May 7, 2002, at the age of 77.

Noel Andre

Noel was born in the Delta at Nichiitsi dininlee on October 26, 1929. Noel, the eldest son of Eliza (Sam) and Hyacinthe Andre, spent his early life on the land around Tree River and Khaii luk. Noel married Alice Niditchie (daughter of Nellie and Amos) in 1954. Their children are Mickey Andre, Phillip Andre, Nellie McDonald, and Yvonne Andre.

Noel worked with Fred Sorenson at sawmill sites up the Arctic Red for 7 years. In 1994, Noel retired as a GNWT municipal worker, after 19 years of service. Throughout his life, Noel has continued the traditional way of life, making a living in the bush by hunting, trapping and fishing. Noel speaks Gwich’in and English. He is often called upon to translate and interpret the Gwich’in language in the community, and to assist with research relating to the language. Cecil Andre, Addy Politeski, Alestine Andre, and Agnes Mitchell are Noel’s siblings. Noel and his late wife Alice fished from their camp on the Flats below the community, every summer for many years. Since Alice passed away in February 2006, Noel has continued the tradition and fishes with his daughter Nellie.

Gabe Andre

According to church records, Gabe was born at Nichiitsi dininlee on March 25, 1930. However, Gabe says his birth date is actually March 24. He is the youngest son of Julienne (Jerome) and John Tsal. Gabe spent most of his life living on the land in the Khaii luk and Tree River areas.

Gabe is the youngest of the Andre family. He lived with his parents and later with his mother the longest of all the children, which is why he is so knowledgeable about the history, the culture, and
the stories of the Gwichya Gwich’in. Besides hunting, trapping, and fishing, Gabe worked at many different jobs.

He was employed as a deckhand on the Hudson’s Bay boat Pelican Rapids for three summers. He also cut cord wood for the Bay and the RC mission. In 1952, he served as a Special Constable for the RCMP, for six months. He married Rosa McLeod (daughter of Zenaide and Dan) of Akavik in 1964. Gabe established a permanent camp at Tr’ineht’ieet’iee in the 1960s. Their children are Anna-May McLeod, the late Robert Andre, Donald Andre, Dan Andre, Julie-Ann Andre, and Jenny Andre. Gabe’s brothers and sister are the late Hyacinthe Andre, the late Tony Andre, and Marka Bullock. Gabe speaks the Gwich’in English. Until recently, Gabe was very active on the land, but recent health problems now limit his activities. Gabe was one of the first board members of the GSCI, and served for many years.

**Bob Norman**

Bob was born on October 18, 1939 at Tsiigehtshik. He is the son of Clara and William Norman. Bob says that his father’s real last name is Taniton. William came from around Fort Franklin, and for a long time stayed at Fort Norman.

When William first arrived in this area, people had asked him in Gwich’in what his name was, William answered, ‘Norman.’ Bob spent his younger life travelling in the mountains with his parents and other families in the winter. Bob said, “Around the first of April, we would start back down to the river with bales and bales of drymeat.”

From 1953 to 1955, Bob worked on the DEW line. In the 1960s, he worked with the oil companies for almost eight years. In 1973, he was part of the survey crew that worked on the Inuvik to Tsiigehtshik and later the Tsiigehtshik to Eagle Plains section of the Dempster Highway.

Bob is a bachelor who has many funny stories about his life and experience on the land with his parents. Bob speaks Gwich’in and English. Bob’s sister and brother are Bella (affectionately known as ‘BN’) Modeste and the late Charles Norman. Today Bob lives a quiet life in Tsiigehtshik.

**Therese Remy (Sawyer)**

Therese, who is also known as Terry Norwegian, was born on November 7, 1935 at Nichilitsi dininlee. She is the daughter of Liza (Niditchie) and John Remi. After her mother died, Terry lived and travelled extensively up Tsiigehnjik around Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik, Teetshik gwichoo, Deezhàh and Gyu’u dazhoo njik with her
George Niditchie 253

George was born on January 10, 1936 on the Kugluk. He is the son of Nellie (Williams) and Amos Niditchie. George spent all of his life on the land up Tsiigehnjik, trapping and hunting.

When people in the community talk about living up the Red, the Niditchie family immediately comes to mind. George’s father, Amos Niditchie, was well known for always walking ahead of his dog team and for his solo trapping life up Tsiigehnjik.

George married Bella Modeste (daughter of Rebecca and John) of Fort McPherson in 1962. She died in 1978. Their children are Ricky Niditchie, Randy Niditchie, Georgie Niditchie, Agnes Francis, and Shirley Niditchie.

George speaks Gwich’in and English. George’s sisters and brothers are the late Alice Andre, Martina Slaven and the late Joseph Niditchie. George worked as a deckhand on the ferry in the summer months for many years, and when he can, he is still active on the land.

Barney Natsie

Barney was born on June 23, 1935. Barney, the only son of Bernadette (Coyen) and Otto Natsie, spent his youth on the land in the Chii chyaatshik area with his parents and grandparents, Annie and Joe Natsie. For a few years, Barney also lived
and travelled on the land with Hyacinthe and Eliza Andre and their family. Barney married Mary Bluecoat (the daughter of Lucy and old Gabe Bluecoat) in 1964. Their children are Margaret Campbell, Joyce Natsie, Danny Natsie, Gordie Natsie, Berna Natsie, and Lucyanne Natsie.

Barney is the only person left today who knows the route of the old-time trail between Chidlaltäj and K’eeghee charuljaj, a trail that runs from Tsiigehtshik east into the Khaii luk region. Some time ago, Barney also joined up with the Canadian Rangers. Today, Barney leads a quiet life around town.

**Agnes (Andre) Mitchell**

Agnes was born on August 17, 1953 in Aklavik. Agnes spent her younger life with her parents, Eliza and Hyacinthe Andre, in the Tree River area. During this time she learned how to work in the bush and also how to sew and work with skins.

Agnes married Harold Mitchell (son of Catherine and Moise) on August 31, 1981 in Arctic Red River. They lived for a few years in Inuvik before they moved to Tsiigehtshik. Their children are Lisa, Margaret, Bryan, and Candice. Harold died in 1993. Agnes speaks Gwich’in and English. Noel Andre, Cecil Andre, Addy Politeski and Alestine Andre are Agnes’ siblings. Agnes now lives in Edmonton, working at Larga Home, a residence for patients from the north.

**John Paul Kendo**

John Paul was born on May 8, 1937 in Tsiigehtshik. He is the son of Mary (Tsetetti) and Ernest Kendo. John Paul spent most of his life on the land up Tsiigehnjik around Lèth jithakaji van and in the Delta. Lèth jithakaji van (officially known as Ernest Lakes on maps) is named after John Paul’s father, Ernest Kendo.

John Paul married Irene Koe (daughter of Julia and Charles) of Fort McPherson in 1967. Their children are John Kendo Jr., the late David Kendo, and Brenda (Kendo) Carson. John Paul and Irene spent three springs ratting in his father-in-law’s area, Baaazuuk, located on the east side of the Mackenzie Delta. John Paul and Irene continue to fish every summer from their fish camp.
located near the Fort McPherson ferry landing. John Paul speaks Gwich’in and English. Caroline Andre, Eileen Cardinal and Thomas Kendo are John’s brothers and sisters.

Cecil Andre

Cecil was born in the Khaiiluk area on February 29, 1939. He is the son of Eliza (Sam) and Hyacinthe Andre. Cecil spent most of his life living on the land around Tree River.

He went to school in Aklavik for five years and returned to resume his schooling on the land. Cecil worked with oil companies in the 1960s cutting seismic lines through the bush.

Cecil married Louisa Francis (daughter of Lucy and Brian) of Fort McPherson in 1969. Their children are Lawrence Andre, and the late Lucyanne Andre. Noel Andre, Addy Politeski, Alestine Andre, and Agnes Mitchell are Cecil’s brother and sisters. Cecil speaks the Gwich’in and English language. Every summer for many years, Cecil and his wife, Louisa, spent a month making dryfish at a fish camp across from Tree River, forty miles up the Mackenzie River. Since Louisa died in 2003, Cecil has gone fishing with his sister-in-law, Tabitha Nerysoo, at Pierre’s Creek.

Rose Clark and Dale Clark

Rose was born at Arctic Red River on March 23, 1930. Her parents are Louis and Caroline Cardinal. Her dad Louis came into the country during the Klondike gold rush, working for the RCMP in the Yukon after receiving training in Regina.

At the end of the gold rush, her father and his partner Billy McDonald came across the mountains, travelling to Fort McPherson. Here Louis went to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company. At Fort McPherson, Louis met his first wife. Catherine was the daughter of old John Firth, the Hudson’s Bay trader.

They married and had six children, but Catherine died while giving birth to the sixth child. Louis later met Rose’s mother Caroline. They married and settled at Arctic Red River. Rose’s mother attended the mission school in Fort Providence for nine years during her youth. Rose lived with her parents, until she was sent to the mission school in Aklavik at a young age. In those days, it was hard for some parents to keep their children at home, and the RC mission was kind enough to look after the
children and put them in the mission school. Rose returned home at the age of eight, and went to live with her parents on the land at ratting time. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, her parents settled at Six Mile where they had a fishing and trapping camp. Rose has three brothers and sisters. Two of them died of T.B. in the RC hospital in Aklavik in the mid-1940s, and her brother Billy Cardinal died in 2004.

Rose married Dale Clark on November 22, 1959 at East Three, the original name for the town site of Inuvik. They have four children, two girls and two boys. One of their sons died from Appendicitis at the age of ten. Rose and Dale moved to town in the 1960s. Their children went to school in town until grade 6, when they left for Inuvik to complete their schooling at Grollier Hall. Rose worked as a janitor at the school for six years. Later, she went to work for C.H.R, and after the new nursing station opened, she worked there from 1989 to 1993. Later Rose opened a bed and breakfast in her home. Rose enjoys sewing, making a lot of parkis, mukluks, mitts, and slippers. “This is my hobby,” she says.

Some of Rose’s fondest memories are about living with her parents at Six Mile. This is where the parents taught the children how to trap and live in the bush. In those days, everybody stayed on the land, and Rose remembers how nice it was when everybody came to town for the big days. “Those were the days when we came to town for the big days,” Rose says. “Talk about dances—both drum dances and fiddle dances! The dances started early and went on until six or seven in the morning.” Rose wishes that skills such as living the traditional way of life, and sewing should be passed on to the young generation.

Dale has spent many years out on the land hunting, fishing, and trapping. He has also worked at many different jobs throughout his life. He was employed by the government for some time, he maintained the power plant and the school for eleven years, and he worked for the Housing Corporation for almost seven years. Even while working at these jobs, Dale has continued to hunt, fish and trap on the land, and work in his garden.

Victor Simon and Bella (Modeste) Simon

Victor was born at Tsiigehtshik on July 10, 1934. His parents are Simon Modeste and Mary (Et’u’e). Mary’s father was a Slavey man from Fort Good Hope. Victor’s grandfather is Old Modeste. Victor spent his childhood in the different regions of Gwichya Gwich’in lands. His earliest memories date back to the time when he was
two years old: He recalls living in the Travaillant and Trout Lake areas at that time. The family then moved up Tsiigehnjik to Jackfish Creek where they stayed for about two years. When he was about six years old, the family moved to a camp below Tree River, in the Rabbit Hay river area. This is where his brother Henry was born.

From their camp at the Rabbit Hay river, the family moved into the Delta where they stayed with Jim and Vivian Koe at a camp above Aklavik, for about two years. Then the family moved up Nagwichoonjik, staying at Andy Hay’s cabin at Thunder River. By this time, Victor was about nine or ten years old. Then the family moved again, staying at Pierre’s Creek. They then returned to Jackfish Creek, where they stayed for about four years.

In 1944, when he was ten years old, Victor went to the mission school in Aklavik for four years. He speaks Gwich’in and English. After they had lived together for about two years at Travaillant Lake, Victor married Bella Norman in Tsiigehtshik on September 21, 1983. Victor still practices the traditional way of life as much as he can. Around town, Victor is known as a musician who plays the guitar and the fiddle. He tells a story about his younger days, when he upset his father by taking his violin with him wherever the family went, even when the father went out to hunt, until the day when he pulled out his violin and began to practice—just at the moment that the geese started coming in!

Bella was born at Fort Good Hope on December 17, 1933. Her parents are William and Clara Norman. Her grandparents on her mother’s side are Old Modeste (stepfather to her mother Clara) and Monica Modeste. Her brothers are Bob Manuel Norman, Charles (adopted from Tony and Caroline Andre), and Jonas (adopted from Lucy Bluecoat). Her sisters are Emma, Marie, Veronica, Bella, Rosie, and one infant girl who died so young that she did not receive a name. Her parents also adopted Noella from Adele and Jack Charney. Noella now lives in Ontario. Of all these children, only Bella and Noella are alive now. Bella and Victor have spent all their married years living in the community.

Bella spent her childhood around Jackfish Lake across the Mackenzie, and at Island Lake which is located across the Red above George Niditchie’s camp. Bella’s parents also travelled up into the mountains but she does not remember how old she was then. Bella’s parents also had cabins close to Travaillant Creek and at Little Beaver Creek, This last cabin has been washed away by a flood several years ago.
Bella attended the RC mission school, but after eight months she returned home to take care of her mother. While at the mission school, she learned reading and adding numbers; when she left, she had reached grade 3.

Later, Bella had to spend two or three years in the Aklavik hospital, recovering from T.B. After returning home from the hospital at the age of 16, Bella went on to work as a house keeper for the RC missions at Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, and Aklavik. In 1993, Bella attended Arctic College to upgrade her education. She is proud to state that she achieved grade 10 in English. While at Norman Wells, she also carried out some research for about six months.

Bella still remembers the joys of spring time, when she lived across the Red at Island Lake. The family would walk up to Island Lake for the spring hunt on geese and ducks, rats and beaver. It is a time she often thinks back to.

**Billy Cardinal and Eileen Cardinal**

Billy was born at Six Mile on October 13, 1934. His parents are Louis and Caroline Cardinal. His brothers are the late Rudolph Cardinal, Fred Cardinal, and Sonny (adopted from the Parsons). His sisters are the late Violet Jerome, the late Agnes Blake, Alice, the late Alma, and Rose.

Billy spent his childhood at Cardinal Lakes across Nagwichoonjik from Tsiigehtchik. During spring and summer, the family would move to their fish camp at Six Mile, where his father Louis kept a garden. Billy went out to trap by himself for the first time when he was 13 years old. He later said that during the three days he was gone, he had very little sleep and needed a lot of candles. Billy married Eileen Kendo, daughter of Ernest and Mary Kendo, on March 27, 1978. Living at Arctic Red River, they have raised their own eight and one adopted child. Their children are Douglas, David, Wayne, Louis, Ruby, Maureen, Alma, and Elizabeth. They also adopted the late Naomi.

Throughout his life, Billy had different jobs. He worked for the Arctic Red River Housing Office for nine years and for the Department of Public Works for more than two years. He spent the period of September to December working on the DEW line for several years, for nine months he was employed by C.N., and for two winters he also worked for Imperial Oil.

Billy once said that, while working on a DEW line station one Christmas in the early fifties, a DC-3 arrived at Cape Perry at 3 o’clock in the morning of December 22. This plane was loaded with 52 Christmas trees, one for each DEW line station. “When the cargo bay doors were opened, I could just smell the brush, which reminded me of home. So the next day I got on a plane, going to Aklavik for the Christmas holiday.”
Throughout his life, Billy practiced the traditional way of life. He had a cabin out on the land at Burnt Lake where he would go year-round, going out for beaver in February, as well as hunting ducks, geese and rats in the spring. Billy passed away on April 9, 2004, at the age of 69.

Eileen was born on October 29, 1939 at Loche Creek, downriver from Tsiigehchik on Nagwichoonjik. Her parents are Ernest and Mary Kendo of Tsiigehtshik. Eileen lived at Ernest Cabin until she was 16 years old. In her youth, Ernest Cabin was also known as ‘25 Mile.’ When she was seven years old, Eileen went to the mission school in Aklavik for one year. She received further schooling at Tsiigehtshik during the one or two months of every year that the family spent in town.

Eileen remembers that after the ratting season, the family would travel down to Arctic Red River and spend the summer in town, making dryfish for their winter supply, for up to a month. Sometimes the family would spend the summer at a fish camp at Six Miles, downriver from the community.

Eileen enjoys telling the old-time stories about Atachuukajji to her children and eighteen grandchildren. Her advice to the young people is, to listen to the elders and to do what is asked of them.
The land of Julienne Andre’s travels; the solid white line traces the possible travel route described in her stories.
I was born between Tree River and Travaillant Creek. I consider that part of the country my country—also Tree River. Now I am old and I want only my children to hunt on this land. I do not want any white man to come to take it.

Ever since I was born, my father and mother were the only people around here. Also, they lived up the Arctic Red River. They only went to Arctic Red in the spring time.

_Starvation_

I remember when I was little — maybe near two years. One winter, I remember there was no food to eat. Nobody had anything to eat. There were no dogs left, only the ones who were well off had dogs and tents. They brought the people that had no dogs and tents into their homes. During that time, a couple stayed near Arctic Red River, near Fish Lake. Everybody moved back near Nihtavan diniiinlee, a lake near the mountain up the Arctic Red. A couple stayed there and they had no food with them and the man died and his wife lived, and some of their children lived, too. When everybody gathered at ‘Lots of Loche’ Lake, I cried all night because I was hungry. Early in the morning my father went out. He killed lots of caribou. Only some of the people travelled with sticks and some of them travelled with sleds. There were no dogs. They would cut the sleds in half and put the kids in the sled head and that’s how they pulled the children. Then they brought the meat from the area it was killed. Ever since I was born, that was the only time I ever knew that we had no food.
Time passed, and then during the winter, they travelled down the Anderson River. During the summer they moved toward the mountains. They worked around the mountains; sometimes there was lots of water. They travelled with pack sacks and they dried their meat, also the dogs had pack sacks. Sometimes in the mountains all you saw were small willows. Even then they dried meat. At night they tore ground and put the fire on it. The first one awake in the morning did this and there were lots of mosquitoes. There were no white men then.

**Travelling on the rivers**

After that, they would go to Arctic Red River. They would track along the river sometimes the river was really rough. They used paddles and, finally, after a long struggle, they would get to Arctic Red River. And then up the Arctic Red—they would track up. The water was really strong—the river water got very strong all the way up. They pushed with sticks up against the current. When they were going to go to the mountains, they left their boats there. After they made dog packs, all their belongings went in them and they moved to the mountains. There were lots of mosquitoes and we really suffered. Sometimes there was nothing—no fish. On the way up to the mountains we had no tobacco or tea. At that time you only smoked tobacco for one day. When you were going away for a long time you were given ten cigarettes. But who could afford that?

After going up to the little lakes they set nets for fish. As they went from lake to lake they killed beaver, which they ate. They moved up that way while the berries still weren’t ripe. It was very hot while we travelled. That day we travelled up to the mountains and that day some of the people killed caribou. All summer we lived around there. People killed lots of mountain goats. They also dried the goats. After they dried it they stayed around there all summer. There was no tea or tobacco. No one said, ‘Gee, I wish for tea or tobacco.’ We only drank cold water and meat broth.

At that time there were no white men and nobody got sick. We travelled all year from spring through the fall and nobody got the flu or cold. We only ate fish and meat. We lived at the mountain goat place. They used to come down the hill so fast they looked like flying geese. Everybody was thankful. Nobody wondered about things they didn’t have in Arctic Red River. When the mountain goats came down the mountain the people followed their trail, and when they returned, they would kill them all. It was good and it was fat and tasty. When fall came we went back to the small lakes. They made spruce sleds and travelled with that. Even though people’s clothes were torn, nobody cared. And even though clothes were dirty, nobody cared to wash. Nobody cared to bake bread (nobody knew about flour in those days).
When the snow started falling and they had no sleds, they stayed around there and found marten tracks. They trapped around where they could be seen. There were no steel traps in those days. Deadfall traps were just as good as traps today and that is what they used. My father always went trapping in front of me. He made lots of traps and one day he’d go out and set twenty traps with bait. They trapped for marten all that time. Then they went back to the small lakes.

**Women's work**

I am big now and I am old enough that I can remember. I travelled along with them. My brother John and I went along when they went to the lakes. All the wives would be left at the lake when there were no tracks and they would make a fire. The wives (all related to each other) said, when left behind, that they would be going to build a house. They made it out of moss. That night they made a fire on a large piece of ground. Even then it was cold. After the house was made, we all went into a nice, hot place. They all laughed at the men who left them behind without a house. Two sisters-in-law had hooks to try to get some fish. They brought back ten Jackfish. They made bait out of mountain sheep’s tongue—that’s Jackfish food. They had Jackfish guts and roasted fish and had a fine time eating. They also had dry fish and grease.

The men took long returning and, at the end, the women set nets. At last the men returned. For one marten they got five dollars from the priest—it sure was a lot of money for them. They said if they caught two marten they would get ten dollars and they were happy. We were very poor. My dad brought many skins home. He never trapped with dogs.

I grew up very well those days, I was never hungry. I suffered many times. I worked very hard yet I was living well. In the bush I worked with wood. I also worked hard for my parents. When meat was killed at a far distance, I was always asked to go and get it and I would go there with dogs. Lots of times I went places by myself with dogs. Near Arctic Red my dad brought back a big bag of flour. His brother didn’t get any flour. Only my dad got flour and a big kettle. Not one man in Arctic Red River ever killed as many animals as my dad. My Uncle Tazzie (that’s my dad’s brother) came along (everywhere we went his brothers came). After they checked their traps, some of them would go back to town. And after they came back, they started their journey up to the mountain.

**Travelling towards Fort Good Hope**

They started for the mountains, towards Fort Good Hope. They had moose and caribou and set traps on their way. They travelled on. When a house was made, no
man helped. At break of day the men were way ahead making trail. After daylight the women dressed up and went with their belongings in the sled. They would harness up the dogs and start on the trail the men had made. Some of them, with not many dogs, would try to keep up with the rest. They made it to the place where they were supposed to build the next house. At that time, when a house was being made, they had tent poles. It was a caribou skin tent. They had all the tent equipment tied on the sled. Some kids that were cold were crying and the women would be clearing the ground. On the ground where they would be making the fire, they chopped up the ground. They made a little hill and on this they would make the fire. Whoever worked the fastest got the fire first (as they would bring the fire from house to house). There were many times when we were very poor and cold. Sometimes things done were just so poor and pitiful. The tent poles were tied with string, and sometimes, when a woman didn’t have string, she would get willow, thaw it out, and use it to tie the tent poles (sometimes I did that, too). Your hands got cold when you were tying, so you’d thaw them out and tie another pole. After that was done they would put caribou skin on the outside of the poles and in the middle of the tent there was a big fire.

**Travelling in wintertime**

From Nihtavan dniinlee, some people went to town. There was lots of marten money. The women never went to town and they started to travel again. It was so cold—this was in January so it was very cold. Children used to cry because they were cold. Even then, people used to hunt for meat. After camping twice on the way, they arrived at the mountain where there was meat. When daylight came they started on their way again. They went further on to where a river came from the mountain to the Red River. Way up at the mouth of the river they stopped. Then there was no tea and just a little tobacco. Even then no one went to town and just kept travelling. They stayed one place and the people would hunt in all directions. On their way to the mountain they made traps and trapped for marten. They killed a lot of marten. It started getting hot so they went back down to where they left their boats in the fall. A lot of time passed before they came back down. They stayed there and hunted for moose.

**Mooseskin boats**

They used the moose they killed for making new skin boats. They had paddles with two flat ends and they paddled down with these to Arctic Red River. The ice on the Mackenzie hadn’t gone out yet. Just as they were unloading their things from the boat, someone yelled that the Mackenzie was starting to move. From up
Travelling in the Delta

When the people from up the Mackenzie came, they were given freshly cooked meat and dry meat. We stayed there all spring. And then they all started for the mountains. The men went hunting down near Inuvik on the coast. The men killed many caribou that were on the pingos—the caribou were trying to get away from the heat. They killed nearly all the caribou in the herd. We were there all summer. There were lots of berries—below the big hole, that’s where Inuvik is now. Below there is called ‘Falls Above,’ that is Big Caribou Place (the falls is the Rock Creek). After that is the sandbar and then Big Rock. They started back up as winter was coming on. They had lots of dry meat. They really suffered as they had to track back up with string. Slowly they met each point. I was pulling, too, with the other people. They ground up the meat, used grease, and ate this separately. There was no tea, they only drank meat broth and water. Men sure lived good with it. All that time we travelled, nobody got sick. No one knew of colds or flu. Sometimes they played. At last in the fall they got to Arctic Red. They sold their dry fish for moose skins. My parents were the only ones who really liked to exchange things. They sometimes went up the Mackenzie River. They lived up the Tree River (it was not yet called Tree River, the name was Dachan choo gেhñjik). My parents, my brother, and I were the only ones who stayed there.

Trading at the Bay

The only Hudson Bay was at Fort McPherson. The Bay was small and the big boat only brought them small supplies. At that time there were no engines. We were at the Hudson Bay when they came with a scow full of supplies. We came with paddle. My father was given a lot of supplies. He was given two boxes of sugar. We had
never seen sugar before—it was too much for us. The boat left and we left also to where my father was going to hunt. 

Only my brother and I tracked when we went on sandbars—and we went a little bit faster. Sometimes, the water went up to our knees. Then we got to Fish Lake. We stayed there and hunted rabbit as there were a lot of them around. There was no place for nets. After it moved a little, my father made traps. He went out and camped and caught twenty marten. His grandfather came, and his daughter, Cecilia, stayed with us.

**Walking to town**

My dad told me and Cecilia to go to town to get tobacco. I always listened to my parents (at that time all the children always listened to their parents—the parents only had to speak once). It was in the fall, the water was going still on the river. My parents left their dogs, sled, and harness in town so we had to walk. We started out with two dogs. We packed the money in packs and pulled our food supply. We made it to Tree River by dinner and we made fire there. We had rabbit to eat. We got across the creek and started out again, walking. It was now getting dark and we sometimes ran on the hard ground, thinking we would get to town the next day. When it was just black out we saw two sleds coming in a distance. There were three people on them. We wondered who they were (I used to talk a lot but not any more). Even though they were coming we kept walking with our dogs.

When we got near we saw it was my uncle. One was Niditchie (who was a young man then) and the other was Caroline Louie’s father and there was an old man with them. They asked me what I was doing and that it was very dangerous. And they asked why I was going to town at this time (they really had pity on me). At that time I was a pretty big girl—all the people really like me (I had lots of cousins). Me and Cecilia got on their sleds, then we started out. We were going really fast and it was good for us to be going so fast. We camped on the way. We sat on their sleds all that time. We went through the bush to Arctic Red. Then when we got to some lakes they told us to walk behind them. There was no trail, so we walked in deep snow behind them.

Then we got to Arctic Red. There wasn’t any trail in the town. One man, named Round Foot, and his wife also came to town so we stayed with them. They were really nice to us (that man looked like a small boy and he had shot a moose). We were given a lot of dried meat and grease. Our aunt, who was Round Foot’s wife, was Amos’ sister. Only the priest was there. We went up to visit him. The next day I gave the Bay Manager my marten skins. At that time I didn’t know how much it was worth. We got what we had coming to us and we stayed long enough. The people who we had come to town with had already left so we had to go by our-
We only camped once and we got to Fish Lake. When we got home my father sure smoked! I thought it was silly to smoke. I wondered how he made the smoke. Now I never take my pipe away from my mouth. The only time I never smoke is when I am sleeping. Why did I do it? When I am alone and think of all the poor times, I really feel bad.

Winter time

We stayed at Fish Lake and we started to the main Fish Lake. We had two sleds, one sled had children, and one had our supplies and tents. In those days we didn’t know anything about stoves. While we travelled, my dad made traps out of wood. The dogs were very hard to drive through the hard, sharp rocks. We finally got to ‘Lots of Loche’ lake and there were a lot of fish. We stayed there all fall and winter. My father killed two moose and my mother and I made a stage. This stage was to hang meat—we also made a pit. My parents never really worked hard, only my brother and I. I only worked outside and did a lot of hard work but I was really strong. Now I am old, I am weak, but I always try to do a little work.

After Christmas, all my father’s brothers came—then there was a lot of people. My Uncle Tazzie and Niditchie went to town. After that they wanted to go to the mountains. They couldn’t set nets so they took some of my father’s fish and meat as they couldn’t get any moose or fish of any kind. Then they left for the mountains. The men made the trail and the women would follow.

I was very big now. Up the Red River, near a creek by the mountains, we went down a very sharp ridge. Right there one moose was killed. It was shared among all the families there. We camped there one night and started out again. We travelled in a poor time and, because I was young, I was able to help everybody. I always made fire. We camped quickly and made houses. Sometimes our tent skins were frozen—then there were no tents. When we brought meat into the house it soon went bad. On a stove rack we had pails on the stove. Spruce oil made of pail. I only saw it once. It’s really good and tasty. Hot rocks are red hot from the fire and put into the pail. Then, with the heat, it starts to boil. After that, more rocks are put back into the fire and then put back into the pail until the meat cooks. On top it has grease. Now only when you cook good meat it has grease. That pail I described was used before my time and when I was growing up we used a pail or kettle.

To Fort Good Hope for Christmas

We then started across rough country. All the tent poles were tied on the sled again. All our neighbours did the same thing. We made it to the mountains and lots of moose were killed there. It was getting close to Christmas. We were told to
go to Good Hope, so we all started for there. My brother, Andre, and Fred’s dad, all went to Fort Good Hope. From long ago, there was a road from there made by Slavey Indians. There was a good trail. It was good as we had lots of food and money. We got to the Slavey camp and they came with us. We crossed near Big Boat Crossing near Good Hope. Near Good Hope we made a fire and one man came to us and wanted us to give him money but we didn’t give him any. We also met a priest who was going to be the priest at Arctic Red River. My brother and I gave the priest some money and meat and he gave us a bale of fish for our dogs. That priest was at Fort McPherson first—then at Arctic Red River. We waited for Christmas and the priest said there was going to be lots of people and he told us not to wait.

We left and followed someone’s trail. We met lots of people and they were laughing at us. They asked what we were doing. The priest really spoke hard to them. When we got back, our people came back from the mountains. Today nobody would do what we did. I am the only one who is still alive from those people. After we came back, they started to play a game—did they ever play it. During that time all the animals went south to where the boats were to be built. They had no boat skin but they never thought of it. All the dried meat they had was wasted. All their winter food was wasted. At last they left—since they won.

Sewing skins for a mooseskin boat

They had a hard time to reach where they were going to live. Now they were worried since they had no skins for their boats. During the spring, when it got cold during the night, they went hunting. They killed two moose and two caribou. They made boats from these skins. They also used birch and poles. My dad made a big boat and a little one. We got some spruce gum. After we soaked the boat, I sewed the skins many times. They used an awl and big thread, there were no needles. It was hard sewing while the skin was soft.

They placed the boat into a sitting position and they got the juice from spruce and put the glue on it. They spread it over the skin. No water would leak into the boat. After they made four paddles, they started. The boat started to move fast when they got it in fast water, and all the people started to cry and scream. One man named Balin knew the loon. His boat slipped and he was saved because they pulled him out. They stopped near the strong water. Balin never thought of his accident in the water. From then on the waters were good. They took the man’s boat and he rode in the big boat. They slowly travelled down-river. Some of the people still had tobacco. We stopped at Swan Lake and some people stayed there. All winter long they never heard anything from Fort Good Hope (only now they hear news by airplane). They were very happy that all the people were well.
Two men said they were going to Arctic Red by boat. They took a long time to come back and they said that the Hudson Bay supplies got all wet. At that time the store was down the Arctic Red Flats. There was high water and the store had been flooded. We started to Arctic Red. My dad was in a separate boat. We all paddled and they stopped and shot a big caribou. All day we feasted on this meat and started out again the following day. They stopped near the priest’s house and pitched tents. There were lots of mosquitoes and then there was no mosquito dope. We chased all the mosquitoes out when it was time to go to bed.

Getting married

That spring I got married and moved away and even then I stayed with my parents, helping them in every way I could. That spring we all had a good time dancing and playing games. Afterwards we headed for the mountains. We went toward the pingos near Inuvik. We went up the big hills around Reindeer Station. The dogs pulled us. When the men saw caribou they went ahead of us, and then the women would follow—the women always walked way behind. Many caribou were worked at. It rained for many days. Because many caribou were killed, it was said that was the reason it rained so much. Now there are too many white men and you cannot see that many animals today. After that they started out with their dried meat. They had a hard time drying it—there was no water. We had birch bark and big boats and a smaller boat. They had meat and skins loaded on the boat. They started to track with it. There were many sandbars and it was very hard. That winter we stayed at Arctic Red. They made lots of skin tents and the others sold dry fish. When autumn came we began to move again.

They went up the Red River to hunt meat. They never went down the other way—only the ones who had lots of money went down that way. The others went up to the mountains to hunt marten and then returned to Arctic Red River. There was no priest then. He was out on a trip but his church was there. They stayed there just to go to mass and then started out again after mass. While they were travelling back up the Red River nobody got sick. All winter and summer everybody ate just fish and meat and everyone was healthy. Now fish is not plentiful and man is always sick. In them days, as soon as the white men came, the people died off. Sometimes I think of it and most of the people in Arctic Red who lived in those days are all gone....

Living up the Red

People went to live up the Red River where the meat was plentiful. They carried all their belongings with them. When the warm weather came along, they would
throw their tent poles away. They lived in a teepee in the summer. They travelled where there was a big creek to the lakes. Sometimes they set nets and fished with hooks. They set hooks for good fish. Since they left Arctic Red they never saw any tracks or killed any meat. They still had dried meat, they had no white man’s grub. They always shared the fish they caught.

Sometimes it would get cold so they would go to the mountains. Sometimes it would blow really hard. The men would go out and cut trail and the women would follow with their belongings. Now there are many kettles. Only the ones who really liked tea had tea kettles. The only kind of clothes worn were skin clothes. They would take the hair out of the caribou skin and make things from it: pants, mitts, and the whole outfit. They had clothes for travelling and for inside. I was fairly old when I saw cloth for the first time. My dad always hunted caribou so we could have skins for clothes. We never thought we were poor—but today we’re poor (always sick, lots of people go to the hospital and are operated on—that’s the way they are poor).

Looking after children

In those days I carried two of my children in my caribou parka. My oldest son, Hyacinthe, is now an elderly man. He was always being carried in my parka for two years. I worked very hard for him and I never was tired. But today I can’t do that. The dogs were very hard to push and you would be carrying your child. Then he would want milk and you couldn’t stop to feed him because you were on the trail. Then, while you were walking, you breast fed your child. You kept walking up to the mountains and a bit of fish was taken. We camped twice on the way up and made a house. They shot three moose and saw caribou. Then the next day they went to it with their guns. In those days bullets were carefully taken care of. Only some had guns—they had muskets. Sometimes when they didn’t have a fire, they would get fire from string or from his neighbour. Lots of people were going up. Many caribou were killed and all were very happy. Now that they were close to the mountains meat became plentiful. We didn’t travel very much every day. Sometimes we stayed in one place for a few days. They would get the meat fixed good and then travel.

Gambling with the Slavey

When they got to the mountains it was hot and they would constantly be killing caribou. They would dry it and stay there all winter. The men who set traps on their way up to the mountains went back to look at them. When checking their traps, they would get many marten. In the meantime, they would go hunting for
caribou. As the days grew longer they’d go hunting for moose. When it was warmer out they would go different ways, but when it was cold they’d travel together. When they went separate ways they would set traps. No one ever got hurt. They played, and even old people played, and when they saw Slaveys, they would gamble (my—they stayed a long time!). They started to go down toward Arctic Red River to hunt for moose. They would go to a place where they wanted to camp and they would all come back together. Nobody ever got mad. No man ever beat his wife—what reason had they to get mad? Now the white man has brought some strange water to our land. That is why men always fight and are sick and get mad.

My dad went down and they killed moose and beaver. They travelled near the Slavey country. My brother, Bernard, was born around there. They wanted to go to Fort Good Hope for Christmas and Bernard was due to be baptized. So we stayed there with the old people. My aunt was sick so my mother and I kept her. The people that went to Fort Good Hope took a long time to return. At last they came back. Then an old man died. That winter when we lived in the mountains my uncle’s gun blew up. Uncle Tazzie’s gun blew up and he nearly shot his mother who was standing behind him. At that time the shells had to be made. My uncle and his mother stayed with us then. His gun also blew up. All night we cried for that old man. It was the first time I saw something like that.

All that spring I worked with skins. My mother was sick with the cold then. We went to the place called Arctic Red River. My grandfather, Pierre, came, too. Two old women came to us singing. They really made my grandfather mad. They both jumped on him and he threw them in the snow—they were my grandfather’s sisters-in-law. They just wanted to see what he was going to do. Their husbands just watched them. We went travelling through the back waters and then back into the mountains again for the summer and then my dad made a big skin boat. They went to Arctic Red River. The water was very, very rough. The waves were very high and the water made high cutbanks and left willows and trees down from the river bank. They paddled in the middle of the river and nearly tipped over because of the waves. They had started early in the morning and had reached the mouth of a creek leading into the Red River. They were so happy that they got over the rough water that as soon as they landed they started shouting and screaming—then they made a fire on the sand. Even near the bank of the river it was rough water. On the bank there were a lot of spruce trees. Some of the people stayed near the Big Creek where they landed.

They all travelled; they all paddle in a birch bark canoe. After many hours of drifting they paddled. They talked together from one canoe to the other. Francis Bluecoat lived at Swan Lake. He was very pitiful because they didn’t have any meat. He was always poor. He was really happy because we had meat. My Uncle Tazzie was with us there. We got to Arctic Red and the Mackenzie River ice still
hadn’t moved. They landed and the priest gave them some tea. They were feasting on meat and tea when someone called out that the ice was starting to move. Everybody went down to pull up the boats. The boats were very light, they pulled them way up the bank. In those days nobody every saw any tin cans or garbage around. The Flats was a very clean place, so they started to set tents. Only some had tents and others who had no tents set teepees. There were lots of mosquitoes on the flats. The women did their scraping and tanning of skins there. Then Eskimos with skin boats came. The women paddled their boats (they didn’t know how to track in those days). They wore caribou skin pants.

The Flu epidemic

That was the spring when the flu first came. Before then, the Eskimos wanted to dance for us, and then we had to dance for them. They danced all night. That night after mass they all went down to dance. A chant was sung. We really had lots of fun. Everybody danced—some rested and then took the place of the dancer. That’s when the flu came. Everybody was sick and lots of people died. Ones that were well worked with the sick. My mother and I were very sick. There was no medicine and we heard every day that someone died. And then the Eskimos left. It is said that when they reached the place where they came from they all died. After that we recovered very slowly. At Aklavik, an Eskimo man named Ovavak, and another man named Piouk, went to every house helping people. They really liked the people. They came to us and helped us. Ovavak’s wife dried some meat and my mother put it in the water and cooked it and brought the broth to us. By acting that way, the Ovavak’s saved us. We ate just a little meat, that’s how we got our strength back. My brothers and sister got well but I had a hard time getting better. All summer my left side was stiff. I was sick all summer and then, after time passed, I couldn’t see very much. I was getting well soon. The priest never slept—he worked around from tent to tent, seeing and caring for the people. Those two Eskimos left.

The big day in August my dad said that even though my mother was like this, we should go up the Mackenzie River to Tree River and maybe if she got some fresh meat, she would get well. So that’s what we did (only I helped pull the pack with my dad). We stopped at a lake so my dad could hunt some ducks. He killed a lot of ducks. I cleaned and then fed it to them. We kept getting fresh meat and fish. My dad didn’t do much fishing. We got to Pierre’s Creek and then went to the lakes for meat. We also stopped at Rat Point. My father stayed a long time at Rat Point with us. Nazon and his son came to live with us and we stayed there to hunt ducks. Again we left and came to the point near Tree River. He made snares at some rabbit point and caught a lot of rabbits. Old Nazon always lived in the bush with his children. We finally arrived at Tree River. We were happy to get there. We
set nets in the creek and I made dry fish. My mother was still very sick. That was the only time I started to make dry fish. All summer and fall we lived there. Baptiste, a Hudson Bay Manager, came down river. He didn’t have any engine. All he did was pole his way along the river. He got to Arctic Red River and he talked both Louseux and English. He was a Métis and a really friendly man and he died that winter. Nazon went to Smith Cabin. My daughter Eliza’s father lived there with his wife. His wife was very weak. After we arrived we saw them going down so we called them across (so that’s how we knew them). While travelling on the river, we never saw any people. We stayed there all winter. My dad had a hard time to go anywhere. We went to town and we met Nazon at Pierre’s Creek. My Aunt Nazon and I went to pick berries around Rat’s Point. We arrived and stayed there all fall. A big boat stopped there and we got a lot of things from them. After that, we went up to Fish Lake. That was the first time we went for a long time and we got a really lot of fish and lots of moose. We had two small boats in which they used for hunting moose.

Working moose skins

Only two men were staying with us. They came in the autumn. At that time, Niditchie was a young man. All our fish supply was gone so they started to make deadfall traps. My mother was scraping skins and that was the first time I ever worked with skins (ever since then I have been working with skins). After that, we caught many marten and went to Fort Good Hope for Christmas. Niditchie came with us. We brought fish and dry meat and they brought dog food and the sled was really heavy so we walked ahead of the sled—the rest walked behind the dogs. We camped many times before we came to a trapper’s trail—then we hit the Mackenzie by this trail. We crossed the river on a clean trail. It was good as the dogs were going really fast. Niditchie and us camped near open fire, that’s where the land was burning. It was still far to Fort Good Hope. From time to time we ran and sometimes walked with the dogs. Sometimes we walked ahead of them even though the trail was good. We made fire at dinner time and they said that we would reach Fort Good Hope soon. In those days girls worked as hard as men. We got to Fort Good Hope in the evening. There were a lot of people to meet us. Sometimes we saw ten old women walking together. We had lived all year without seeing people, so, when we got there, it seemed like a lot of people for us—there were a lot of Slavey people. Niditchie nearly stayed there but he came with us when we left. Zumbra stayed. He didn’t come to Fort Good Hope for Christmas and nobody saw him so they said they were going to look for him. They found his trail and followed it. We camped one night and the following evening we found him and really surprised Zumbra—he was really happy to see us. He had thought all his friends were in Arctic Red River. My Aunt Arthea was so happy she was cry-
ing. We stayed one day with them, then back on the trail and back down. Nobody carried tents or stoves. We camped with Zumba and then arrived back home. We went to town and then back to camp. We were gone a long time. My Uncle Tazzie came to us—he stayed with us a long time, then he went back to where he came from. All the moose that were shot were fat and there was plenty of dry meat. After Christmas all the people travelled up our way. We were living on a hill and many others were living there, too. They all lived in houses. Not long ago, before we moved up to the lake, there was a fire and the fish wasn’t too good. Even then the people fished and ate the fish from the lake. For one month we all lived there.

Hunting at Ddhahzhit gwichoo and Ddhahzhit gwitsal

After the days got longer they started to the mountains. They went to the Big Creek and killed a moose. They went up further to Small Creek. They hunted caribou around there and then brought the caribou back to the camp and then they dried the meat. Some of the people went back to Tree River and went another way for hunting. We stayed at the caribou place and trapped. At that time there were lots of marten—they killed lots and went to town with them. They didn’t make very much. My dad and Tazzie always killed lots of marten. When I hear of fur prices in those days—it was no use, all they did was steal. Lots of times my dad killed lots of marten. It was winter and they started down. We travelled where there was good water and trapped. Even through the rocks we pulled the sled. After we went up we’d bring a bigger sled. I sure worked hard. We never had a log house yet. We only lived in tents. We just got down to where we were going to stay and the Red River ice started to move. The ice moved out fast. The water went down fast so we had to travel fast. There was a lot of meat. I don’t think there was any tobacco or tea. Then we got to Arctic Red River. After all the things were packed away, the ice went. There wasn’t any high water with the ice. At that time nobody hunted rats. It wasn’t worth any money. They say that the people who came from the delta smelled of rats. We stayed at Arctic Red for a while.

Leaving the parents’ home

That summer I went away from my parents. I now had two children. My husband and I travelled by ourselves. We stayed at Arctic Red River for a long, long time. I don’t remember when, but I remember that the steam boat came down. Nobody knew about it. Anyone who wanted to go fishing would go, not like today. Again we went up to the mountains. We sure travelled a lot. Sometimes there were only willows and lots of snow. I made fire many times while it was snowing hard.
When we travelled we were poor but nobody ever thought about it. Sometimes we travelled in the rain and got all wet—travelling to the ocean was bad. I had three children when Aklavik became a settlement. We went to the Delta and our friends and relatives held us down there for a summer. Since then we have never travelled in the summer. Since then we only went up to the mountains once—where we made dry fish and did some fishing.

To Arctic Red for Christmas

After freeze-up, near Christmas, we went back to Arctic Red River by dog team. At Small Rock we camped with some Eskimos, they ate raw fish. We only looked and we didn’t feel hungry. Only after we said we weren’t going to eat frozen fish did they cook some for us. Then we went on to a camp where a white man and his wife lived. They had a boy and a girl. We camped there and at last we got to Arctic Red before Christmas. We got a stove from Fort McPherson which was brought over from Dawson. We didn’t know anything about stoves. Niditchie told his parents to throw away the stove and they did—but we kept ours. My mother told my aunt that when a moose was killed she was going to cook the meat first. We made houses all winter out of spruce branches. My Aunt Sophia and her daughter stayed with my parents. We travelled alone all the way. We started for the mountains. Whenever a moose or caribou had been killed we’d stop a day or two in order to clean the hides.

Childbirth

I had nine children—seven boys and two girls. No children were born in hospitals in those days. I had my children while travelling on the road. I had my oldest son in the morning, and in the evening I had to chop wood and make a warm place for him. Some of my children are dead; there are only five alive with me, and they have many children.

Sometimes children would cry because they were cold. We got to the caribou place and way back near the Big Creek they killed a moose and we worked with the skins. We came back above the Big Creek. Larson came to bring news to us, and they were travelling to Fort McPherson. They were travelling with five sleds which were really big. And they had five boys walking ahead of them. We were still cleaning and drying skins. In those days women had many dogs, and they would travel behind the men. They camped below us and brought all of us and our meat back to their place with them. The people from McPherson lived on sand—their skins were hard. Our house was really poor. I made a teepee and my parents stayed with us. We had a stove but others had open fire in their tents. Only after
Easter the people came back. By then there was lots of water on the river and we got lots of meat. We stayed there and the other people used up all their food. All the people started to play. The people had some time to beat the Slavey people. They exchanged bullets and the one that won got all the bullets. Niditchie wanted to go because they didn’t have any food. We went with him at last. Niditchie’s wife didn’t want to go and I cried, too. Only his wife didn’t hear, so it made things bad for her.

**Difficult travels**

Even though it was dangerous we still kept travelling. We would start early in the morning and then make camp when the sun went down. I don’t know how many days it took us. We stayed with a man—he talked our language so we got along good with him. For almost one month we kept on travelling. Even near big Creek we felt it was our land, they told us we were near our country. We went to a big lake and lived around there for a while—there were lots of caribou. We stayed with the Yukon people in their tent, and the man said he was going to get us some fish. We made fire and he returned with three big fish. Gee, we were happy! Niditchie’s wife, Emily, and I cleaned the fish and we enjoyed eating it.

They said they wanted to go across the river to make boats and kill some moose. My daughter was big and we went across. I was wondering how they were going to kill moose, so we went across and after a while they had killed six moose. After they killed one moose they heard its calf crying so they had to kill it quick because it might chase the other moose away—so they chopped off its head. They never left our meat for long, we cut if up and hung it up on poles put cross ways. I was given three skins and Niditchie had three. We started back and made a big boat. People from Dawson came, they were travelling with some Slavey. They were trapping rats. While we were sleeping they came yelling. We got up and were wondering who they were but the man from the Yukon knew them. They were glad because they had more men to bring the boat down with. The woman who was travelling with them didn’t like it. She wanted to go see the priest and she cried because she couldn’t go down. Not one of those people are alive now. I never saw any crazy people but I heard of them. They made skin boats.

One time we went somewhere and the old man was there looking after the place. Two girls were staying there with him. Those girls lived in separate spruce houses because they were big. Any girl who killed a moose couldn’t go into the house until late at night. I, too, was like that. We only worked hard all day. You didn’t look at men, you only drank cold meat broth, you couldn’t drink hot water. We started out again, and we only had two paddles. The water was very strong and we were moving very fast.
On one side, it was straight rock down and spruce trees on top. We rounded a bend where some Slaveys were living. The Slaveys were yelling and shooting their guns and the men in our boats were doing that, too. I laughed at them—just like Slaveys. They yelled at us to hurry up and land. At last we got to the shore, and they helped us carry our children. On their fish stage were dried moose bones. That night they made two big boats. They put the boat in the water and packed everything because they wanted to travel with us. After they drank tea and had something to eat they began loading again. They gave us lots of grease and threw away all their moose bones. On the way they killed a moose. They had a hard time to get it because it was in the water where there was a strong current. After they landed, the Slavey people ate the meat half raw. All I did was look and laugh at them.

My uncle had two big sons. One died last winter and one was nearly dying. When we got near their camp, the men shot their guns and we only heard one shot so we thought the son had died, too. They were living where two creeks joined one big stream. They had nice log houses and they had a garden. Not one of them are alive today. Lots of them went to Fort Good Hope. They used to play with a big moose skin ball. My aunt’s son had died and I stayed with her. They made a tent for us and even made skins for us to sleep on. We moved in that night and they even had a stove for us and they got some dry meat from the Hudson Bay Manager and we ate it. They said they were going to go hunting. My uncle’s son lived at Arctic Red River, he went to live with the Slaveys, Andre was his name; they really liked us all. Sometimes they would all come to our house.

**Travelling to Mayo**

We went to Mayo in a scow. The big boat came in while we were there. My husband said that a big steamer came down and because there were going to be lots of white men, they would have lots of things. My husband said there were many, many houses there all of different colours. Only the men went there. When they came back—I don’t remember. After they came upon one point on the river they camped. They went through a lot of boats because of the rough water. We only walked around to look at things. The Hudson Bay Manager was waiting for someone. There was a long road—then they saw someone riding a horse coming toward them and they called it a big dog. It came to them. The man said that the boat was coming. Just then the big boat, the steamer came. They unloaded the Hudson Bay Manager’s things separately from the others. They carried all the things across a piece of land. We went up to the lake where we always lived because of the fish. The Slaveys always made dry fish and then took it to the Hudson Bay Manager to trade for supplies—the Bay Manager would buy anything; he never ran out of meat. The Slaveys came to our camp. The boys went hunting and
shot one moose and they gave it to me. My sister-in-law looked after my daughter and my uncle looked after the rest of the children. They made a big fire.

That was the first time I ever played with food. I cooked some part of the stomach and told the boys they weren’t going to get any. They told me if they weren’t getting any, nobody was going to have it. So the boys made fire and kept asking me for some stomach. I turned away and cut it up, and then everybody jumped on me. I held to the stomach for dear life, nobody got a very big piece. We then went back home with the moose. The boys talked with their mothers and they told me that the boys must have suffered you. We sure had a good laugh about it. I cooked all the good parts of the moose for them.

During that time, Red Head had set nets and he got jackfish. That was the only kind of fish that was in the lake near the mountains. It was either Jackfish or Crookedback. Then everybody left again to hunt for moose. One morning I woke up early. There were no trees around there, and in the middle of the sandbar were three things like dogs. I wanted to wake up the rest when these things went back into the water. They had long ears. I think those were things from the sea. We stayed there because we expected some of our people. We started down with dogs. We didn’t do any hunting, just fished. I worked with the skins.

We went back to town. The Hudson Bay Manager was staying there. Only he and his wife were there, they didn’t have any children. She looked like a young girl but her hair was nearly all white. While I was walking with my daughter, the white lady called me so I went to her. She gave me a box full of bread. When I got back I gave all the women one, they started eating it. The next day the white lady was yelling. I went up the hill to see her and she was pointing toward the river. Maybe the men were coming. They were coming, tracking, and arrived after sunset. They brought back little supplies. There was strong water and walking was really slow. They were to go back down for supplies in the fall. There were no marten or caribou, just moose. We stayed there a long time.

Living with the Slavey

In the spring the Slaveys went to the moose place so Niditchie said we were going there, too. So we went and stayed with them. That night the dogs were barking so we all got up. Just behind us, a moose had come out and went into the water. It was half-way across the river when they shot it. They tied it up and tried to drag it but couldn’t. So they got it to shore and it was given to us. That night we cooked the head and shoulder and had a little feast with tea. Everybody ate good as the moose was fat. Everybody stayed there a long time, and then went on the land. They went on the trail below the mountains, and we went with them. We went with them to where they said there was moose. There we killed many moose.
There was one old couple. The old man (Nifie) was from long ago. He was a big man, and fat. He spoke our language. His wife, 'Went Into Willows,' and he always walked ahead of the people. We always went ahead to help these people. His wife was a strong woman, she had lots of dogs. During the fall when moose was fat, he packed it all. He was really strong. He helped us with our things. While we were going, we camped many times. At last we arrived at the place of moose. They shot many moose at night and the next day they brought it back. We cut them up and dried them. They ordered supplies from town with all the dried meat and grease. As they travelled above the town, a moose was killed, and that was dried too. They went to town to exchange for supplies. They knew all the land. Nobody ever did something behind anybody's back—everyone knew. Whenever someone killed a moose, everyone knew about it.

It was now in the winter and some of them left, and we went with some people from the Yukon. The land was really beautiful where they normally went. There were no willowy places, only nicely grown spruce trees. Only sometimes there was a bushy place. Some men went to town. They killed a moose and this one woman was very stingy. Her dogs ran after a moose that was swimming and she had a sled full of dried meat. Her husband was going to shoot the moose. She took the gun away and told him he might shoot their dogs. He really wanted to shoot the moose. His wife took his gun so they left the moose. His wife took his gun so they left the moose. Their sled got all wet, and they spent one day there to dry their meat. They got to town and sold some of their meat. They were going to stay in town for awhile. They started toward town and we stayed behind. We travelled up and we saw a hillside place with moose. Among them were two calves which they killed. We always watched them eat.

At night the dogs were barking. And on our trail someone was walking without dogs. We were wondering what was going on. It was my Uncle Neechoo. He talked to us. He said that one white man was attacked by a grizzly bear and they were going to bring him to town to where the Bay Manager and his wife was. We really felt bad because that was the first time we heard of anything like that. Those white men really liked all the people. They were young men and they were serious about making their living. Few men from our camp went after the man with their dogs. After that, someone came and told us all what happened. They brought the man to town. The two white men were trapping and one day, when one of them returned home, he found a grizzly bear eating his cached meat. The bear was sleeping and it woke up and started toward the man. The man had a powerful gun and was walking backward. He shot the bear twice. He was still walking backward and tripped on a log and fell down. The bear saw the man fall and he fell on top of him. He scratched up his face and part of his body with his claws. The man was unconscious. He came to later on and found the dead bear on top and he had a hard time trying to get out. He was full of blood and he started out on a trail. He was trying to go where people lived. Every house he passed, he wrote about what
had happened to him. He at last reached his people. He told his story and fell down. They cleaned and wrapped him up good, so they went to town with him by dogs. He still lived; all the blankets were soaked with blood. They had to make sure he didn’t bounce around. He kept yelling as the pain was so bad. They camped for a few hours and as soon as the sun came up they started out again. They brought him to town and he was taken into a room, and the manager worked on him all night. They could hear him screaming. After they saw him he was good as new and he was sitting up in bed, smiling. He surprised them. He could now walk and he went back south. We thought he was going to die, but he left for back south. When the men came back, they told us the story. We were very happy because he had recovered.

We then travelled up the land to Jackfish Lake. Some people lived there. We left some meat and skins there. We got to Arctic Red River. We spent the rest of the winter at Jackfish Lake. We really thought it was good fish, and we stayed with Slaveys. They said that two mountain sheep were seen—my husband went after them and he shot them. It was good for us as it now gave us meat—we had only fish before. Now it was near Christmas; there was no money or any tracks of moose. We lived only on grease and dry meat. We sold some dry meat and went to town. We now wanted to go back and they didn’t want to. Niditchie went to some lake and we didn’t see him since the fall. They told us we couldn’t make it through by ourselves. We didn’t get any fish, rabbit, caribou, or moose. We only got a few moose. For one whole week they told us not to go, but still we wanted to. A lot of people stayed with us. My parents were still living, and my children were always crying for their grandparents. It was easy for me to travel and if I didn’t eat for a few days it didn’t bother me. Even Red Head asked us to stay, but there was no priest there and even though we prayed, we still wanted to go to see a priest. You live good when you live in your own country, but when you live with strangers in their country, you don’t feel right. Even though I had lots of relatives, we left. They really wanted us to stay and they cried.

We met up with Niditchie. We had lots of dried meat. We got back to town and my husband went to see Niditchie. Niditchie wanted to go back with us, some other men wanted to go, too. Niditchie told us that as soon as there was no meat in his sled he was going to return, he wouldn’t travel any more. My husband never said anything but I told him that before, when he wanted to come here, we didn’t want to go, but even then we came. I told him he was bossing us once, but not anymore. But with his help we would come out of the mountains with meat. That’s what I told him; all he did was laugh. So we started out and one man came with us. It was a long, long way across the mountains. We travelled on the edge of a long creek leading from the mountain. Only near the top of the mountain there were spruce trees and on the ground there was a thick growth of grass. We had big sleds of dried meat. They killed three moose so we stayed there for a while. The
man that followed us went back. We travelled on and on and we finally got to the end of the creek. We camped at a cabin along the way. One of the men at the camp told us all about the dangers of the mountains and he sat with us one day before we left. He told us that if we saw tracks of grizzly bear, we should not camp near there. He told us to leave our guns without bullets and our axe safely put in the sled. We were going toward the moose place. That’s where you could kill moose, and you’d get out of the mountains safely. Niditchie was mad because we wanted to go back. We never said anything to him. Only his wife talked to me. At our camp, Niditchie had told us that when they hunted and he didn’t see any animals he would go back. He wanted to go back to Dawson. And we ate meat all night. I woke up really early (I sometimes used to wake up at 4:00 a.m.). Now I am poor, even though I am not sick I am weak. After my children were big I was sick for a year with headaches. There were no doctors and no medicine. I was kept good that’s why I am well today. Even though I am not working too hard, I am still weak.

I used to prepare skins in one day. The next day we put on all our new clothes and threw the old ones away. They killed five moose, which were very fat. Only white men are living there now, I guess. We camped again in a tent. They brought the moose over, and we made a stage to hang the meat on. Amos was a small boy, hardly walking. Niditchie hung a moose head over the fire and he danced around it. We were happy for him and I laughed at him. If I laughed at him, he wouldn’t think anything, but if he knew his wife was laughing at him, he would get mad. We dried all the meat, then we started out again. We came out near Fort McPherson and we were happy because it was our country. We camped many, many times.

Returning home

While around there, my son had grown to be big, but I still worked hard. There are many people who don’t work very hard today. Sometimes some children were born on frozen tree branches. We were near our country and we were very happy. We left early in the morning and sometimes the travelling was slow. We made tea at dinner time and kept going on. At last we came out of a small creek. We looked back at the mountains and were stunned. We started to see small spruce trees and small willows. My husband walked ahead of us. Everybody took turns. While we were going, my husband took his gun and went up the hill and I heard two shots; he shot two mountain sheep. They were coming down the hill side when he saw them. Niditchie was coming and they told him they shot two sheep and he said we were near Arctic Red River and wanted to know why we killed it. I told him it was good for him that he never went back to Dawson. We took one and gave the other to Niditchie. We started again and camped. We left Dawson after Christmas and now the days were getting longer. Now we got to a creek, and sometimes along the creek there was a lot of water, even then someone walked ahead of the dogs.
We still travelled toward the creek, now we were near our country—it was like near Arctic Red River—and we were very happy. We got to the mouth of the creek that night. My husband went up on the hill and we heard him. He brought a spruce branch; he said a Slavey had chopped it. They had camped here last winter and made fire up on the hill. I guess they came here to look for us. A while later they went ahead and found more camp fire. Three times someone shot. We were wondering what happened. He said two people came in winter. It was our parents. He shot two caribou and Niditchie wanted to know why he shot the caribou. They brought the caribou over and we worked on it. We roasted the heads. Before we went to bed, Niditchie said to me, ‘Whoever is most happy will get up first.’ I told him I always got up first, that it was not going to be the first time I got up before him. In the morning I was making tea and I woke them all up. We loaded up our sleds and they went ahead of us.

They stopped at the tracks and we started out after them. We went down the hill and caught up to them. A little hill around there was good for caribou. Their little girl wanted some milk so they were going to stay there for a while. We went ahead to a caribou place where people stayed. My husband was in one sled and I was in the sled behind with the children. My husband said there were tracks over there and also someone’s trail. So we started to follow it. We told that to Niditchie and he was waving his arms and dancing. We waited there for him, and when they got to us we started to follow the trail. We thought that it might be our Uncle Fred and his family. We found some branches and some bones that were eaten. There was no fireplace. We never made fire and we wanted to go on until we found them, so we kept on until we got to a small creek and rounded a bend and there they were. They had skins on a line and meat tied to the stage on poles. They were the people we had left last winter. We had told them we’d come back from the mountains. We went back to our parents and I never left them for a long time. I now have lots of children. My parents both died in my hands. My mother never said anything but my father thanked me for making tea for him many times. Keep your children and don’t cry with them. After that, I looked after my children. When my mother brought me up, she taught me never to go out to other places and not to go to dances or any place. To this day, I have stayed home. At that time I really loved my parents. I was sick many times and those parts I don’t remember.

Trail’s end

After that, we never went back to the mountains. All we did was go to Fish Lake and to Travaillant Lake. We went around there for fish. We now had a big boat—a schooner. With that we never went anywhere. Near Christmas, my husband and I went to town. He went to check his traps and after that he got sick. I tried calling the doctor but no one came. My daughter and I kept him. Before that, my oldest
daughter had died. It was Christmas so we took him to Arctic Red River. After Christmas he died. When he died and when they were putting him in the ground, I felt I had no more meaning to my life. Now I am kept in great comfort. Only five of my children are alive now. I still think often, almost every day of my husband. He died in the year 1944. We stayed in Arctic Red a long time. There was a lot of water now so we went back. We came back with tears in our eyes. Now I am weak. Maybe now my husband can do some work, but I am the only one alive with my children. I still think of my husband. Sometimes I think of him every day for a whole month. We came back to our house. My children were crying with him. All winter I looked for my husband, every day, until today, and I have never seen him yet. Today my children have many children. Sometimes I am happy, so I have to do some little work. I stay with one family during the summer, fall and winter. Ever since then I go to Travaillant where my husband used to trap. Ever since then I’ve stayed here at Tree River. For three winters I haven’t done any trapping.

When my husband was alive we had lots of things, where are they all? Lots of times we went travelling and hunting. Probably our poor times have now paid off and now I am living in a comfortable house. Every time I see skins I want to work with them; I still work with skins. I don’t know any old-timer stories. I never visited or stayed in town. Although my children stay beside me, I never go visit them. Whenever I stay in town I never visit. I only go to church and back home. Even though I am an old timer, I don’t know any stories. Sometimes I want to live at Travaillant Lake, I go there and when I want to go back to Tree River, I go there too. When I go to town I only stay there for one day. All spring, I work with skins and I make dry fish until the fish stop running and I never go anywhere from here. My son made a house for me, my grandchildren always come to visit me. They make dry fish and I help them. I make good dry fish for them to eat. They go way down to Travaillant Lake with dogs. The water flooded my house three times. All my things were taken out and put in a safe place. Even my stove which my husband got for me was moved when the water came up. No windows were broken, I still have that stove and all my future family, I hope, will still have my stove. I still make fire and it warms up all the house. My children work very hard packing wood and ice. I stay at Travaillant Lake at winter time. I never stay one place, I am always on the move. Only once in the winter did I stay in town, for Christmas only.

This spring again, my house went under water. I sat above the water and watched, but my house never floated away. I go back in it in the summer. I may go to Travaillant this winter again. Sometimes I don’t know where to live even though I am well kept. Sometimes I wish to go up to Fish Lake. When I stay at Fish Lake I am kept well. Everywhere I stay I am kept good. Even though I always wish to live at Fish Lake, I probably will never see the lake. I still walk on snowshoes; I still work at wood and set snares and do a little trapping. That’s all the work I do.

‘Every time I see skins I want to work with them; I still work with skins.’
I first went up to Fish Lake when I was a little girl. My son shot three moose there, that’s what I worked at. That was the last time I was there. Now I live at Travailant Lake. I went up to a camp where white men were to get on a plane. I have no dogs. We went to a lake and the skidoo wasn’t working very good for us. We had one dog and we stayed there at the lake in a tent. My son shot one moose. There were no dogs and we wondered what we were going to do but my son carried it over. We only took some meat and brought it back. His wife, Rosa, was very happy. So that way we got some meat; we were short on food. It was far to Travailant Lake. My son worked on the skidoo and it still wouldn’t start and as he was working on it, it started to snow and blow. At last the skidoo started. So they put me and my grandchildren on the sled and we started home. It was really cold, lots of water. Rosa’s feet were icy and everybody was really cold and tired, and she walked behind us. It started getting dark. Ever since we started the skidoo, it kept going until we got to our house. There was a lot of snow and it broke when we got home. the skidoo sat there until spring. At Christmas we were given lots of dogs and with this, my son travelled around. He set traps for lynx so he couldn’t look for some people who live way down at some lake. He killed one moose and there were no rats or beaver. He travelled a long way to hunt, but still, he never killed anything. He didn’t even see any caribou tracks. Our meat was the moose he killed and the fish we caught.

I used to know all the Slavey people and the people from Fort McPherson. I used to always see them but not any more. My husband always travelled with me among the Slavey people. One time there was this Eskimo man. Everybody went to town once and everyone was out of tobacco. We expected them every day. We were living at the caribou place. Some people went after them and they took a long time to get back too. Nobody slept at night, just in the morning. While they slept, someone started saying, ‘They are coming,’ and everybody got a hold of them and threw them in the snow—especially the one who really wanted tobacco.
I remember far back in the year 1916 when I was seven years old. It was winter time when my parents moved to this place called Travaillant Lake. At that time my oldest brother, Pascal, got married. At that time I remember I was thinking, ‘Who is that little girl with my brother?’ Our mother told us she was our sister-in-law. She became our sister-in-law but still I couldn’t understand why this little girl was with my brother. Later we all moved to Travaillant River. Earlier in the fall, my father built a cabin; there, my brother, Pascal, helped build this cabin and they made a fireplace inside, too.

I also remember from that year I started to work by setting rabbit snares with my younger brother next to me. We would visit the rabbit snares and bring home a few rabbits. I remember one day my younger brother and I were going through our snare line and a lynx was caught in the snare. We turned back and went home and told our father. He went and brought it home for us.

Fishing under the ice

My father had nets under the ice, also hooks, and in the evening when it was moonlight, I used to go with my father to see these hooks under the ice and he would bring home lots of loche. It was fun for me at that time. I remember I used to go through rabbit snares by the moonlight and would bring home one or two rabbits. As we went through our snares, I remember we used to be afraid of dark shadows in the bush. Next day, my little brother and I, we cut down some bushes that made big shadows. We told our mother why we did this; she told us that we made more shadows that way.
Later, my father and my uncle went to the village for Sunday services. They left with one team and they were gone for a long time. Finally, they came back with news that my sister-in-law, Monica, passed away. That was the first time I ever heard about a person dying. My parents moved to the mouth of the Mackenzie River; we stayed there for four years. As my parents were moving to this place, my younger brother and I would sit on the loaded toboggan.

I remember we used to get very cold and just before we reached the mouth of the Mackenzie River, my parents made camp and I was very cold but after we got inside the tent and warmed up I forgot all about how cold it was. Same time we were out of meat and nothing to eat, there was nothing to eat but that didn’t bother us. My father had gone ahead to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. He remembered that there was an Eskimo family usually staying there and my oldest brother was with us following our father.

**Starvation: Help from an Eskimo family**

Later, my father met us again. The Eskimo family also were out of food but they had given my father a dry fish and some pieces of fat. My mother boiled this dry fish, we ate it and drank the juice. They also ate the fat but me, I couldn’t eat fat.

From our camp, my parents moved to where the Eskimo family stayed. There were other families moving other directions; that’s where my Uncle John and my brother, Pascal, moved.

After we settled down by this Eskimo family, my father set fish nets. This net—we ate fish from it until spring time. Sometimes the Eskimo family gave us little meat. My younger brother and I, we would get wood and bring it home. We did this just about every day, helping our parents.

There was hunting, but no luck. From this other camp, my uncle and my oldest brother moved with families to where we were staying. My uncle and his family stayed with us that summer. That summer was very good, also the next. By that time I was a little older.

I remember that men used to go to this place and would bring home some grub. At this one time when they were making another trip for more grub, we got news that my oldest cousin, Simon, drowned. I remember my parents how much they cried for their dear one, Samo’s father.

I also remember at that time where we stayed was flooded. My brother, Pascal, was not with us when it happened. But my Uncle John and family were with us. We were in a poor place, dangerous for high water. We were on the low ground and just behind us was high ground. During the night, it started to flood. Everyone got busy moving everything to the higher ground. Dogs were all untied, too. Wading,
our parents got us all to the high ground; we were all safe. Later, while we were still on this higher ground, my uncle and my oldest brother came home.

That summer my parents, my uncle and family, and my aunt and family, we all moved to this place. Later I remember my aunt and family moved to this fish lake. My parents were still at the same place. Meanwhile, my oldest brother and family and another family moved to this fish lake. While my father stayed in one place with us, my mother was not well so it was up to me and my younger brother to help all we could. We were to go to this place. We had big canoes. We went towards this big timber island and towards this place there was a narrow strip of sandbar. About half way, we came upon lots of geese. My father shot many geese; we landed there. My brother and I, we ran over portages; there was a river there and lots of geese.

### Hunting geese

My father took his gun, shells and used his smaller canoe and went after the geese. Meanwhile, my mother started to put up the skin tent. I and my younger brother helped her put up the skin tent. She would tell us how to put up the poles for the tent. Meanwhile, we could hear our father shoot now and then. After we put up the tent our mother told us to make fire. I and my brother collected all the twigs we could get, it was on the coast so there was lots of driftwood on the shore.

While my brother and I were busy making fire, our mother was plucking the geese. She told us to put water on the fire for tea. There was a lake just behind our tent; only the lake water was good to use. After the tea was made, we helped our mother singe the geese and our mother cut them up and put them in boiling water. By the time the geese were cooked, my father returned with a canoe full of geese and ducks. My brother and I started to pack all the geese and ducks up to the camp. Helping our mother, we plucked and cleaned all the geese and ducks before we went to bed. Early the next morning, my father again went out hunting for more geese and ducks.

Meanwhile, my brother and I, we helped our mother. We made an open stage for her while she cut up the geese to dry. We helped her hang the geese up to dry.

### Drying caribou and moose meat

Later, towards evening, my father came home. He had shot caribou (a cow and a calf) and more geese. He had brought all this back in a canoe. Next day, we were all busy drying meat, too. We stayed until everything was well dried and my father made a stage and put all the dry meat and dried geese on this stage. We went on farther. My father again shot two more caribou. We made camp there, too. Then
my father and I went to get these two caribou, and we made fire. My father was roasting caribou ribs at the fire when he said, ‘While the Arctic Red River people are eating nothing but fish, here I am roasting nice fat caribou ribs at a fire.’ When we started to make tea, we saw that we had forgotten the tea so we ate the caribou ribs without tea. After that, we went up on an open place. We walked a long ways but we never saw any sign of anything, not even caribou tracks.

When we got back to our canoe, our canoe was on the ground, so we camped there. Early next morning, my father woke me up saying, ‘There’s water now, we have to leave right away.’ Getting up, yesterday, there hadn’t been a drop of water. Now there was water again. I have never seen as many fowl in my life as I did then—and I heard the sound of every kind of fowl. We got home and dried the caribou meat. Later, after the meat was all dried, we started back again. We had nice weather with no wind. We got back to our first camp where we left dried meat and geese on the stage.

In those days, my brothers and I, we never knew what sugar was or bannock and we never drank tea, we only lived on caribou meat, or fish or geese. Now, today, I know what sugar is.

We finally moved back to our camp with dry meat, dry fowl. Meanwhile, our mother had not been well—she was sick. We got back to this place at the mouth of the river. My uncle and oldest brother were gone. Later they returned from their trip getting more grub, tobacco and shells. My oldest brother had brought all these for his father. We all moved back to this place. On a certain creek they had made a fish trap; they got lots of fish from there. My father, uncle, and my oldest brother and family moved. Meanwhile, my father stayed behind with us and built a moss hut. Meanwhile, my oldest brother was building a cabin by this fish lake. We stayed there during Christmas. At that time, I remember that the first World War was over. Maybe I was around 10 or 11 years old then.

After spending our time there, my aunt, uncle and their families planned to come back south. They finally talked my father into coming, too. We had spent four years there and my mother was not well all these years. We were on our way back to our country away from the coast. My uncle and family started ahead of us and got back to where this Eskimo and family were and my uncle had killed a few moose, and had come back to meet us. From there we all moved, departing from this Eskimo and family. This Eskimo said, ‘Some day, we will all meet again.’ (Today my brother Pascal and I, we are the only ones alive from those days.)

The days were longer now and on our way, my aunt had a baby girl. At one of these camps, my uncle and my brother saw caribou tracks so they went hunting; they killed few caribou. We stayed at this camp and dried all the meat. As we travelled on I couldn’t remember the country. Finally we reached lakes and I remember seeing all these muskrat push-ups—lots of them.32
November 5, 1929. - At Traviar Lake. - We all got up very early in the morning and although the trapping season had already been underway, we only got ready this morning. We had a team of six dogs. To carry equipment and gear for two men is quite a load.

We loaded up dried fish for dog food and our food, and our blankets and extra clothes, also one tent and one stove.

We left our camp and travelled all day. I had been in this country before I went to school and I could just remember some of the spots, but not all.

We had mug-up in mid-day and arrive at Trout Lake early in the evening and pitched our tent. The day after, we were out on the ice setting nets. Did I ever enjoy this sort of life. The sun was shining, skies clear and the lakes just frosty and I could walk anywhere in the bush and on the lakes.

The next day, the same story. Take the tent down and load up. I didn’t mind so much but this day was different. I suppose my brother had intended to camp at a certain spot and we had to get there. That was just what we did. I was completely all in, or in other words, very tired. But we pitched up our tent in pitch dark, somewhere around eight or nine o’clock in the evening. I really could not take it but I did. I never knew it was the start of my miserable life some of the time.

All this time my brother never spoke to me unless for necessity and this too I could never stand. I am his pure brother, but am a different type; I like talking and joking. Probably this is the reason why I didn’t have very many enemies wherever I went. However, after two more nights, we got to a big lake. This lake is called ‘Ad-deh-chyoo.’ Since my English is poor, I could not explain this word, Ad-deh. The only way I can explain it is this way; suppose I had intended to go somewhere with
one or more people, but just because I was insulted by one or more of these people, I would not go or, giving up one’s intention just because of an insult. Or I could say I quit this or that just because of that insult, this is what the word ‘Ad-deh’ means and ‘chyoo’ of course means ‘lake.’

Anyway, back to that lake. There was a big pointed hill on the other side, and he told me that this hill is called ‘Tseenjoo kan’ which means ‘Tseenjo’s Den.’ According to the story, which is told by different people, there was once upon a time a great warrior, a great war leader by the name of Tseenjo, and after having many fights with other nations, he had decided to lay off for a year or so. So he and his army had dug a hole in this certain hill and remained there in the winter without getting out of there anytime at all.

So this was the only time my brother said anything to me. He did not tell me the whole story, but only said that this hill was the ‘Den of Tseenjo.’ Den is not the proper word for it. When we say beaver house or rat house or beaver lodge and rat push-ups, the world ‘Kan’ signifies that. This is the end of our trap line at the Ad-deh-chyoo.

* * *

December 31, 1929. - We overnighted 40 or 50 miles from Arctic Red River—weather very cold—travelled all day. The going wasn’t very bad. We hit the river six miles above Arctic Red. It was just about getting dark. We came along the river and when we got onto Ghost Lake, it was quite dark and I could see flashes of light shooting in the air. These were what they called ‘fire cracker.’ I thought to myself, this was marvellous—men and boys celebrating New Year’s Eve. In those days people who had no house to live used to pitch a tent and live their own life. As for ourselves, we were getting in late and had to stop with someone. We settled down with the late Fabien Coyen. Only his old wife is surviving at this writing. I saw people mingling and everybody was happy. I thought this was a great life.

My brother, Simon, had only 13 marten, and I had two white foxes. I don’t know where they came from but I caught them around Trout Lake. I had one superior cross fox and one red fox, also four marten. The white foxes were high and I got $60.00 apiece for them, and $80.00 for the cross. I also got $40.00 for the red fox and I don’t remember what I got for those marten. Anyway, I had quite a bit of money and really enjoyed myself.

All the trappers were in; some men from up the Red River had come in by themselves and some others with their families. Old Small Ramey [Ramii tsal], who used to trade goods for the Bay, was camping at the Bay. The late Joe Bernard, who had come down from Bernard’s Creek, was in alone. Old Francis Bluecoat and Old man Modeste Slavey were in with their families. The rest are too numerous to mention this much later.
However, the old Father Lecuyer had drowned in October and there was no church of any kind. Some of these old people had known this old priest all their life so he was greatly missed.

* * *

January 1930. - One day some way or another, word spread around that the late Father Trocellier was coming to visit the people. This priest was well-known in the Delta area. Father Trocellier was promoted to Bishop sometime in 1940.

One morning, Joe Bernard hooked up his six dogs, and left for down river. He had expected the priest to come that day and in a few hours there were four teams of dogs coming around the point. Joe had met them 12 miles downriver—Reverend Father Trocellier, Hyacinthe Cooke, who at the time was working for the RC mission in Aklavik, and old Et’u’e.

Old Et’u’e was a small wiry man, a hard man to beat. He had originally come from Fort Good Hope, had married at Arctic Red River and been around the area for a long time. After he and his wife had separated, he eventually settled in Aklavik. They had quite a number of children, and I think there is only one boy still surviving at this writing.

This boy had hurt one side of his leg. After he had spent a few years in Aklavik, he was alright enough to get out of the hospital, only he had to use crutches to get around. Although he remained thus for quite a number of years, he worked very hard and travelled with dog team and trapped. After a while, he decided he could walk without crutches, so he contacted doctors, and they said they could help him, provided that he go to Camsell Hospital [in Edmonton]. So he went to Camsell Hospital, and stayed there a few years, after which he came home and could get around without the use of crutches.

Josephine Baptiste, the sister of Napoleon Et’u’e, had married in the last part of the 1920s and after three years, her husband, Pierre Kitse, had passed away. They had a girl—I don’t remember her name, and a boy named Norbert who was adopted by his grandparents after his dad’s death.

However, these two children have since passed away. Josephine remarried in 1930 to Hyacinthe Baptiste, the brother of Pascal Baptiste. I have described this man earlier in my story, however, after three years, he also passed away. They had a boy by the name of William, who had frozen to death about 25 miles up the river from Arctic Red in the latter part of the 1940s, and a girl by the name of Rosa who moved away up river and married Norman Lafferty. She still lives up there with a family of her own.

Josephine is an old woman now, in her late 60’s living in the Old Folks’ Home in Fort Smith, I understand. She lived in Arctic Red River up until early in the 1950s when she moved to Fort Simpson, and after a few years there, she moved to Fort...
Smith. Josephine is not too small in size and a bit stout. She can speak several languages: English, French, Slavey and Loucheux.

* * *

February 1930. - Aklavik at this time was a fairly big settlement. At first, as I heard by the old people, it was just a small outpost for Eskimos, but since there were hospitals there, some of the people from Fort McPherson had drifted there just because their wife or child took ill. They would take their wives or children there for a check-up, but somehow, they seemed to like the sight of that place so they settled there for life.

Mr. James Greenland and his brother, Joe—these two brothers are well-known in the Delta area; they are originally from Fort McPherson.

My wife had told me that when she was just a small girl she remembered that her mom fell sick and they left for Aklavik to see the doctor. They never went back to Fort McPherson. Jimmy Husky and Jim and Joe Greenland passed away and are buried there. These three men are survived by many sons and daughters and these young boys and girls have families of their own. There are many others, men and their wives from Arctic Red River, who are buried there in Aklavik.

People from all over the country had been in Aklavik before anyone ever dreamed of Inuvik. Even today at Aklavik there are white people from different countries; there are Eskimos, Loucheux men and women from different settlements from up the Mackenzie River.

Anyway, one day around the first of February 1930, we left Aklavik and camped at Albert Ross’s camp which is situated about thirty miles from Aklavik. Then we went on and camped at the East Branch, and arrived back at Arctic Red River. There was hardly anybody there aside from the two fur trading posts, the RCMP, and about two or three families. Today we would call a place like that a ghost town, but not so in those days. People used to work hard and live well in the bush.

There were only three of us—my brother, his wife and myself. They had a team of dogs of their own, and I had my own team. My uncle, Andre Coyen, and his family had rented a house from my Godmother who had remarried just a few weeks before. That’s where we were lodging. Perhaps here I should describe my Godmother. Her husband, or my Godfather’s name was Antoine Coyen. I just could remember him and that’s all. Some people said that he was a good man—powerful by strength. One man told me that his flesh was just as hard as stone and they said that he ran down a black bear in May on hard crust. Any light animal that stays on top of hard crust is hard to catch up to, so it was for that reason there was story about it. They tell about it because he used big snowshoes. Lots of good men had tried it but failed.
One day, Antoine Coyen got into an argument with a man by the name of ‘Jago.’ The story does not say what this other man’s name was, but he was a man from up the river and I think some say he was a Cree-Métis. Anyway, they were going to fight, and the story says, or as I heard it, that this man was changing his shoes. He was going to put on boots and use his feet but there were men standing around and one of them told Antoine Coyen something like this: ‘It’s time to fight, what are you waiting for?’—but before they started to fight, the priest who had been nearby went over there and dragged Mr. Coyen away. This Jago, as they say, was really mad with the priest for stopping the fight, but those who knew Mr. Coyen said that it was a lucky thing Antoine Coyen listened to the priest for as they said, he could have killed that guy barehanded.

When I was very small, I was walking by a house and a man came out and took me into a house, and that was my Godfather. At that time, I didn’t even know. I don’t know how to describe him. All I knew about him later was that he was the brother of my father. So my Godfather, Antoine Coyen, passed away close to the mountains before or during my school days. I don’t really know. My Godmother drowned in the month of May, and if I remember right, in 1950. Her name was Emma, and her daughter, Bernadette, has passed away also, about mid 1960.

My father also drowned in the Arctic Red River before I went to school, and I think my mother died not long afterwards. One of my mother’s brothers is still living—Paul Voudrach, who had married a Fort Good Hope woman, before I went to school. He is still there and he has many boys and girls, some of them are married. My uncle lost his old wife just a few years back. My other uncle, Pierre Coyen, who had spent the rest of his life in the Delta at a place called ‘Loche Creek’ also passed away in Arctic Red in the late 1950s. His wife, Marcelline, passed away in Arctic Red, just a few years back. My uncle, Andre Coyen, passed away in 1944 and is survived by his wife Odilla, and baby son Michael. Uncle Pierre Coyen only had one boy also by the name of Edward, who is at this writing surviving.

* * *

It was late in March, 1930, that we were preparing to go to Arctic Red River for Easter. I don’t really remember just how much fur John Kitse and Hyacinthe Baptiste had, but I know we had beaver and rat skins. We were trapping beaver and rats; beaver trapping wasn’t too bad because you could always see the lodges. Trapping rats was over—even the least little mound of snow. We had to poke just trying to find rat push-ups. Even in the delta, where most lakes are not wind-swept, a man would have a hard time finding rat push-ups if he didn’t mark them in the Fall.

Trapping is the same as any other project. Sometimes it’s easy going, and another time it’s hard work for nothing. I know this for sure—I’ve trapped over
forty years. In other words, some trappers do not work very hard, yet sometimes they get better luck than the other hard working trapper. For example, when I set a trap for lynx, it takes me quite awhile—I’ve seen some trappers set traps for lynx any old way and hope. More than once this trapper will catch a lynx before the lynx would come close to my trap. By now we were close to Bathing Lake on the southwest side.

One day the sun rose and it was warm and clear. There were still three or four days to Easter. Anyway, this man John Kitse told us that we may as well go to town. Pascal Baptiste was also to join us at Bathing Lake. John Kitse and Hyacinthe Baptiste or “Yesson Cho” had pretty good dogs. I only had four scruffy dogs so I didn’t travel very fast. I caught up with them when they were having tea at the end of Bathing Lake. Pascal came along just about the middle of our lunch. I remember it was getting real warm. We had no trail except an old one. Nobody had been through this way since my brother and his wife left for Aklavik, as I mentioned earlier.

We left after lunch. Pascal’s dogs weren’t any better than mine, so the two teams ahead of us stayed together, and we stayed together. Along we went, but Pascal couldn’t even keep up with me, and once again I caught up with the other two teams when they had finished their lunch. This time they didn’t wait, so I stayed there making tea, waiting for Pascal at the same time. Just as I was finishing my lunch he came along. I guess he didn’t have too much fish for his dogs, therefore, his dogs were in poor shape. Pascal Baptiste and I left after he finished his lunch. It’s about eight miles to Jackfish Lake yet.

It was getting dark when I got to Jackfish Lake. No sign of anybody—it looked as though they had lunch there two or three hours ago. The stove was just warm and that’s all.

I had finished my lunch and waited for Pascal for a long time. When he finally came, it must have been somewhere around 9:00 p.m. Anyway, when he got there we got into a little argument. He wanted to overnight there. He said his dogs were all tired, but I wanted to keep going to town.

He had no choice. If I stayed, he would too, and if I went, he’d go. So I told him I had to keep going. I know I got into Arctic Red River at 12 midnight, and Pascal must have arrived one or two hours after I did. There was no one in town for Easter as yet.

My uncle, Pierre Coyen was there. He had come to get some groceries from the Delta. There were a bunch of rat trappers living at what we call “Earl’s Place” today, about forty miles from Arctic Red River. My uncle said that his sister-in-law, Philomina, was living with them and that she was not feeling very well. It happened that this man, John Kitse, was their brother, so the man came over and told
me that he had to go and visit with his sister who lived with Pierre Coyen at Billy
Phillip’s place.

The mail plane arrived on Good Friday morning. In those days we got a mail
plane just once a month, and sometimes a plane came early in the morning. In this
case even people who happened to be in bed would all jump out of bed. Even
today when an aircraft comes, people have to see it. They even go down to the air-
strip. But in those days, it was the first winter when we saw a plane once a month.

April 1930. - Stayed at Arctic Red River for Easter and there were very few people.
In other words, there were only men who came in for Easter.

However, after Easter, I left for home, but my brother, Vital, and Albert Kendo
also left with me and we stopped at Jackfish Lake, about 15 miles from Arctic Red
River. We jigged and caught lots of jackfish or pike, as some call them. We must
have stayed there two or three days just fishing and loafing around. I was too
young to worry about my trip back home.

I don’t know what happened to Big Yesson and Pascal Baptiste. They must
have left before me or whatever. I don’t recall them being with us. Anyway, I left
and got back at our hunting camp.

Big Yesson and I were out every day trapping for beaver and rats. One day we
saw fresh black bear tracks, and Yesson told me, “Let’s try and run down the
bear.” I said, “Okay.” We both tightened our snowshoe laces and with guns ready,
we started to run. To tell the truth I had a hell of a time trying to keep up with him
since he was a tall man and long-legged. Every one step he made, I had to make
two but we could catch up with the bear. By this time, the snow was melting and
we sure sweated and I tell you we sure had a long way to come back.

After a few days, Mrs. John Kitse told me to go and meet her old man. So I left
and travelled for about 25 miles and hit Bathing Lake. This lake is a big lake with a
narrow in between. I stopped there and was making tea when I spotted two black
spots on the other side. I was glad; that was old John Kitse and Fred John, a friend
of mine. He is about one year or so older than me. I was really glad to see him.
Fred was also in school at Fort Providence but he had gone up there before, and
left before I did. Just how many years he had been there I never knew. Fred was a
jolly guy and always tried to do better than his friends. So it was that after we got
back at our camp we tied and fed the dogs and went scouting around every once
in awhile. We would scuffle sometimes; he would get the best of me, or it was vice-
versa. We sure had a lot of fun. The weather was sunny and warm, and we were
young, and we never had any worries of any kind.

I could still remember when a person is young, he tries and has fun, takes
things as they come—not the least idea of what’s coming tomorrow. Fred John
stayed with us for two days and then left for Arctic Red River. The reason he had come was that John Kitse had too much of a load, and he had come to help him. We bid farewell to each other and left. I felt sort of lonely after he left but soon forgot about it when we started to move, hunting beaver and rats at the same time.

By this time it was getting late in the spring, and we had to go to Sucker Lake where we intended to stay for the spring.

Whenever I write about a place, or a lake by name, readers may look at the map of the Arctic Red River area, and he’ll see for himself where I had been. Also, sometimes there are incidents I don’t remember, but to remember exactly what happened 45 years ago will be too good to be true.

* * *

July 1931. - Old man Ross, who I mentioned earlier had of course arrived from the south as usual; a big scow laden with fresh food such as eggs, potatoes, onions, oranges, and apples. This is all he used to sell; he’d always come right behind the ice. It was at this time that a young man by the name of Billy Laroque had come along with him. They stayed in Arctic Red River two days, during which time Billy, as a good fiddler, really entertained the people, and he also had a guitar. It was also at this time that a guitar was introduced in the dance. We had a nice dance that night; square dances, jigs—there was no such dance as the twist or jive, or what not.

Anyway, Mr. Ross left for down below, I never knew if he ever called in Fort McPherson. Apparently Bill Laroque had stopped at Aklavik and finally ended up in Fort McPherson.

There were quite a lot of white trappers there too, and they enjoyed themselves. There were the late Bill McNeely, George Cummings, who had left for the south for good and the last we hear of him was that he married somewhere in Alberta. And there was a Mr. McBride, a man undersize who as everybody knows, was not a very clean man but who could make a violin sing when he took hold of it. I knew the old man too, it was true though that the old man never spent money foolishly. Sometimes even for necessities if you want to put it this way.

* * *

One of the men organized a poker game where we were staying. There were seven hands: Fabien Coyen, Ernest Kendo, Joe Bernard, Small Ramey, Hyacinthe Baptiste, Moses Adrian and Big Simon (as they used to call him). His real name was Simon Gladue. He is a Cree Indian from somewhere up the river. Anyway, Big Simon was well known for his strength. It is said that once he and his cousin, Noel Gladue, pulled a set of gangplank from the steamer. I remember it used to take all of us deckhands to move this gangplank—20 or 25 men, so you could imagine the weight of this gangplank. Big Simon was quite a guy. He was no doubt a tough
man. It is said about him that an artist boxer had him through training for boxing. The boxer tried to train him to be a boxer but Big Simon was chicken-hearted, so he couldn’t get him to lose his temper. He’d knock Simon down ten times but he would get up every time.

Anyway, back to the poker game. Old Joe Bernard was losing and anyone who remembers old Joe Bernard could imagine what old Joe would say. One deal, Hyacinthe Baptiste had four deuces and it turned out that Big Simon had a straight flush. This sort of hand very seldom happens at the same time. Old Small Ramey, who considered himself a big man, went up to the Bay many times that night to get some money.

In those good old days, the store closed only when the Manager went to bed. The fire goes out in the store when there is no one there, and everything freezes. The next morning the store was full of people buying frozen grub. But no one complained because everyone was happy and didn’t know otherwise. Today, a person would think it’s a crime if he bought something frozen that normally be thawed.

* * *

35th Anniversary - August 1975. - Edward Nazon and his wife, Joan, spent their 35th anniversary at their fish camp, August 3rd, 1975.

Fish were plentiful and they cut fish all day, like any other day, right through to midnight. There was nothing out of the way at all. However, on the 5th of August, they went to Arctic Red to do some shopping, but the Bay manager wasn’t there. Just then a car came and picked them up and then they went to Fort McPherson. They spent a few hours with their friends and then took off with the Game Officer’s charter and went up to Tree River, where Joan got off to visit with her friend. The Chief and Edward Nazon went on the Rengleng Lake to pick out a spot where a cabin was supposed to be built. They returned to Tree River, picked up Joan, and back to Arctic Red. They went to the store to pick up their mail and there to their surprise, they received a radio and a silver tray as a gift from someone in Yellowknife. Just before they went home, someone gave them a case of beer. Joan received all kinds of meats, dried, and pemmican. Funny part of it, their little kicker never ran right for a long time, but when they were going back to their fish camp, there was nothing wrong with the motor. The dogs were all tied up and everything was in order. So after all, they had a real beautiful anniversary. Thirty-five years is a long time to live with the same woman. Maybe that’s what is meant by ‘a good man is hard to find!’ It must be me!!201
Well, the story begins right after spring hunt. That’s right after June 15. Everybody went to the settlement, wherever their settlement was, everybody did that. All over the communities in the north. At that time, they didn’t go back to houses, they just used tents on the beach. Even though they got a house in the settlement, they still set a tent, because they had dogs too, and they had to look after their dogs. So they tied their dogs close by to look after them, and they had to set nets to feed the dogs. After that they went and sold whatever fur they got—spring hunt, beaver or muskrat, bought whatever they needed. And that’s about all that was done, as far as I remember, but before me they used to dance, dance and everything. They had hand games too—hand-stick gamble, they called it.

Summer

Then they stayed around until about first of July. But them days, nobody thought First of July was a holiday. Not until lately did that come out. Everybody all over the settlements had sports. Lots of fun! After first of July, well, everybody started thinking of going fishing. This fish was not for sale, that was for their dogs. And they fished all summer long. They went back to their fish camps, along the Mackenzie, and down in the Delta, people just took off, just a few people left in the settlements. Those, they fished around there too, and they made lots of fish, dryfish. Any kind of fish they got, they made dryfish from, and put it aside. When they piled it up, they made bales of dryfish. Used to make thirty bales of dryfish, you know, lots of dryfish, lots of fish. And they used to put twenty-five conies in one bale, that’s the backbone and all. And then about fifty whitefish into another bale.
Whitefish and crookedback mixed. And there was herring, they put a hundred in a bale. Just imagine, you get hundred thirty bales of herring. That’s about three thousand fish there.

All that they saved for their dogs, for the winter. The largest number of dogs I know of, is about ten, twelve dogs. That was for a good-size family. And a single person might have four or five dogs—some of them, six. That’s what they did all summer, fish. Them days, there was no nylon or plastic nets, they used to have cotton nets, and it was in a bundle. And then you had to back [reinforce] it. Back it yourself, which you had to get, buy the net. Bundle of net, and then bundle of twine, and then the smaller twine. Backing-twine, they called it. And then you had to cut all that net up. A bundle of net might make three long-size nets, about twenty-five yards. If you got small eddies, well, you cut them into four, little smaller, shorter net. And then you had to back the net, and you used it after that. Not like nowadays—everything just ready, you just take it out, string it out, and that’s it. Everything is on it, floats, sinkers. And in those days, they used to have no floats, they used wood. Wood for float, and there’d be lots of stones around, rocks. They used that, and they went fishing.

And when they fished, some of them got a permanent fish camp, but some of them, they just went anywhere they wanted and set up fish camp. Next year, it’d be a different place. And there, you needed a smokehouse tent. One of the old tents they used, they would save that for smokehouse. They just put some poles together, in the shape of a house, and then they threw this tent over, and that was it, then they made a stage. They did that every year. They started fishing, they fished all summer. First of July, they took off. In August, September, some of them were still going.

Then in August—in those days, they used to be religious people too, and they came in for fifteenth of August. They call this Immaculate Conception Day. It was a big day for the people in those days. People even from as far as Travaillant River, all the way down from Tree River, and all the rest of the people used to come to the settlement. And from the Delta too, they came up to Arctic Red. Even a few people from Mouth of Peel came up—two, three boat loads. In those days, there was no scow, no speedboat, no thirty horse Yamaha. It was just the old eight horse, twenty foot canoe, and some of them got twenty-two foot canoe. That’s what they used. But they could take a load, though.

Then they had fifteenth of August, they had their service in the morning, ten o’clock in the morning was the service. Three o’clock in the afternoon, they’d have benediction. Nobody made feast, but they started dancing, at night. Every time the music played, somebody was on the floor. Square dance, waltz, and all kinds of different dances. Nowadays a person try to make a dance, all they do is
just sit there and listen to the music. But not them days. Everybody was on the floor.

And after that, everybody took off back to their fish camps. Start, start again. The ones that got warehouses in Arctic Red, well, they just bring their fish, dry-fish, whatever they got, and they put it away. Even if it got moldy, it was okay. Well, it was dog feed, anyway. They went back to their fish camp after the fifteenth of August, and started fishing again, right till fall.

Fall—getting ready for winter

And then in the fall, they started thinking of trapping, so they had to get ready for that too. By September, they all started to go back to where they were going to trap. Some people might be way down in the Delta, or at Big Rock. Big Rock is the best place down in the Delta. I think, you could handle a hundred nets there if, if possible. Some people fished there all summer.

From there, by September they started thinking of winter. Where they were going to trap, well, they took off to there. Some of them went up the Red, some of them up Mackenzie. Once they got to where they were going to trap, well, they started getting ready, I guess. Got ready with their winter outfit, no such thing as skidoo. They took out their harness and they checked it, repaired it and their toboggan. They checked all the ropes on the toboggan. I’ve seen them testing ropes on a toboggan. They just put a stick through it and then they twisted the rope around. If it didn’t break, well, it was good. If it broke, well, they took the whole thing off and put new ropes on. That was the way they tested their line and ropes around the toboggan. If any boards were cracked, well, they got some bolts, and then they fixed that, repaired it. Same with snowshoes—anything wrong with it, they fixed it, their axe, and their traps, as well. They had everything ready. And some of them, they had a place of their own. That’s where they had cabins, and a warehouse. They had all their equipment there, especially winter equipment. It had to kept dry, and that’s what they had warehouses for, and for their traps.

Trapping in the winter

And by the first of November, they took off for their traplines. And there are many different ways of trapping. Some of them made one long line, and some of them made half of that line, but there’d be all kinds of sidelines. And they used dogs, they brought tents, they brought stoves. They brought their grub, they brought dog feed. They brought their blanket, and they brought an extra set of clothes. Brought their axe, gun, snowshoes. They’d have a little bag with their sewing material, and everything to fix little things with. Even if your snowshoes broke out
on the trapline, they had special stuff for that, babiche, a little awl, scissors, all that. And if your axe handle broke, well, you just went out and cut a birch, and made your own axe handle.

And they set traps, they set traps for marten, mink, fox, lynx. Some, of them, the ones that went up the Red, used to go into the Yukon. So they used to get Yukon licenses, too, for trapping. And up Mackenzie it wasn’t like that, you just trapped anyplace. And when you set traps, you set traps all day, and then at night, you stopped. You had to pitch a tent, and you had to dig the snow out. Put brush in there, and then set your tent. You had to get poles, five foot poles, two for the sides, and two on each side, and one ridge pole. Then they set their tent, covered the sides with snow, set their little camp stove and their pipes. And they had to cut wood with an axe. Some of them brought a little axe around, swede saw, they call it. They cut enough wood for the night.

Then they had to think of their dogs. They fed them. Whatever they brought for them, it was mostly dryfish all the time. And those traps they set, they had to have bait for them, too. So just imagine a person going out for one month, he had to have a heck of a big load. So the longest I remember is that we used to be out about three, four days; that was the longest. Some people, they went out longer than that, but that was around where they had fish lakes. They brought nets too, and then they set nets. That way, they didn’t have to haul too much dog feed. They just checked their nets, and fed their dogs out of that. You had to feed the dogs every day, once a day at night after you finish.

Some of them, they took off in the morning, and stopped around noon, made an open fire, made a pot of tea, and that was the time too, when they gave a little bit of lunch, like, to their dogs. Some of them did that. And they kept on going until night. Some of them stopped early while it was still daylight so they could pitch their tent and cut their wood, but some of them went right into the night—some of them set their tent and everything right in dark. They did that every day till it was going towards Christmas. By that time they had enough fur to go the settlement. They started thinking of Christmas around the fifteenth. Fifteenth of December, they started getting ready. That was about the last time they checked their traps. Didn’t take them long, about two, three days, and they were back from checking all their traps. And they dried their fur.

And by the twentieth of December, you headed for town. And some of them—in those days you saw lots of people—every one of them dressed up: fancy mitts, wool string, fancy stroud shoes, wolverine skin around the stroud shoes, and brand new parky. Even some of their dogs were dressed up. They had dog blan-
kets. They had little tassels at the end of each dog bell. And a brand new dog whip, that’s what they had too.

They headed to town like that, and oh that sounded good a long time ago. You could hear those bells long ways. When a lot of teams were going together, well, heck of a racket, boy. And the dogs in those days used to travel! The fastest they could travel was about ten miles an hour—that’s going really good. Once they hit town, well, they just stayed with friends, or else some of them got their own house; they stopped there. Nobody thought of turning the furnace on. They just had everything ready there, chips and kindling, and lit the fire in the wood stove. In no time it was hot in there. That’s the way they came into town. And whoever got no house, stayed with friends, or parents, or relatives.

That’s the way they came in for Christmas. From all over—Mackenzie, around Travaillant, they made portage through Jackfish Lake. They came out just above Arctic Red, up Mackenzie, about five miles up, what they call Chidualtăjį that’s where the trail used to come out. People from Jackfish Lake, and all the way to Travaillant Lake. Caribou Lake, all them people came through there, not Mackenzie. They came down the Mackenzie, and then they hit Jim Nagle portage, eight miles the other side. They came through the portage, and they came out right behind town. And then Up-the-Red people, they came down the Red, and they came up the hill. Same with the Delta people, all of them, for Christmas.

And everybody settled down. Fed their dogs, and then it was about couple days to Christmas midnight mass. That’s what everybody came in for. The next day, what they used to do is just haul wood. Early in the morning, everybody took off for wood. Some of them, they took off around five, six o’clock in the morning. Even nowadays, some people talk about it. They say, they thought they went out early. They would go out about seven o’clock, some people were coming back with wood already. That’s what they did, they just raced around and beat each other, playing around with each other. That’s all they did.

Some people thought they went out early—six o’clock, I guess. Somebody else was already out there coming back with wood. They did that for a couple of days until midnight mass. And midnight mass, the night of the twenty-fourth, everybody got ready. More fancy clothes came out! Fancy moccasins, and blue serge pants. Serge pants in those days, used to be the best pants. The most expensive pants there were those days, and they cost eight dollars. You had that kind of pants on, boy, that man had something on, they said. And suits—the older people in those days, they used to wear a suit and neck tie, and that’s the way they went to church.

And those days, they used to have all kinds of Fathers around. They even had one Father travelling around in the bush, visiting people. That’s how many priests they had those days. And two priests to each settlement. They had midnight
mass, and they used to say the mass in Latin. Still, everybody followed too. Those
days, there was no collections during mass, but they gave money to the mission
before mass. They’d give out anything—money, clothes, food, and then during
mass, before the Father preached, he named all the people that gave out some-
thing. That way he knew who gave what.

They had mass three times them days. The first one was what they called high
mass, and after that there was low mass twice. All three of them right one after the
other. The people stayed right till the end. Nobody walked out during service.

And that’s the way they celebrated their Christmas. After service was over,
everybody walked out. Sometimes it was forty, fifty below outside, and nobody
thought about it. They just shook hands outside, walked home, ate what they had
and then they went to sleep.

The next day was Christmas Day. They had one mass, and that was it. Then
some of the Chiefs used to put up a feast, on their own, nobody helped them.
They had meat, bannock—I hardly remember what they had—soup sometimes, I
think. Whatever they had, they made a feast with that. And then when Christmas
Day was over, well, on Christmas night there was always a dance, old-time dance.
Sometimes they danced until seven in the morning, and they started around nine
at night. Just imagine dancing for ten hours! And the next night, they did the same
thing again. One whole week, right through to New Year …

Then New Year came. New Year’s mass, too, was at midnight. They had mass—I
think they have it at eleven, because everybody came out of church at twelve, and
that’s the time the shooting started. Holy smokes, you heard shooting in those
days! Nowadays you don’t see that ice hanging down from the houses, because
the roof of the houses is well insulated and the ceiling is well insulated; no heat
goes through there and up there. But them days, there was no insulation and you
saw ice hanging all clean around the house, ice. The heat went up to the ceiling
and onto the roof and that’s what melted the ice and the snow on the house. It
dripped down, and it froze like that. And that’s where all the ice came from. When
the shooting started, all that ice used to break off. And that was just by the vibra-
tion of the gunshots, and the noise.

I want to tell you a little story about what happened long ago. Might have hap-
pened around 1930. Some people were staying for Christmas and New Year around
Travaillant, across Travaillant Lake on the north end, it’s called Teelâjì. They
didn’t come in [early], so they stayed there. That’s where I mean, from Travaillant
Lake they had a portage all through Jackfish Lake, to come out at Chidaltâjì, and
come to town that way.
Some people came in through there, but New Year’s night, midnight, when the shooting started, one dog, they say, ran right back to Travaillant Lake. The shooting started at twelve midnight, and that dog ran to that camp at around six in the morning. Just imagine how fast that dog could run. Those dogs got scared, I guess. That’s what happened. That dog, when it got to Travaillant Lake, it was just all frosted up, from running.

I remember what happened around 1940, the time I was a kid. Even in those days they used to shoot lots, not only at midnight. From then on, everybody stayed up, celebrating New Year. Shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot, maybe they did that about two, three hours. Finally, finally it stopped, I guess that’s the time everybody went to sleep. In the morning, they got up. First thing they did, even before they made fire, they grabbed their guns and went outside to shoot. Five empty shells. That’s what they did. As soon as you heard somebody was shooting, you knew he was up. And then around ten o’clock, everyone walked over to the Chief’s house, and the Chief picked up his gun and a bag of shells, put it on his back, and started walking. Went to the houses, and started shooting—knocked all the ice off the house. Went in, shook hands with everybody, and the man from that house walked out with these people, so that’s the way they started, going from house to house. The husband went out, whatever boys there were, went out. The women came behind, but they didn’t shoot though. They just came and followed the men, one or two houses behind. And all that time there was shooting, non-stop shooting. I remember Old Joe Bernard was Chief that time. He had a pack sack of shells, he had about fifteen, or twenty in there, I think. Well, a box of shell in those days used to be about two dollars, and they trapped all fall. They could afford to celebrate Christmas, didn’t even cost them fifty dollars. Buy all those shells, shoot them off, that’s the way they did it.

Then, after they went through all the houses, all the boys used to hitch up their dogs. They usually went down to the first point just past the ferry there. They went as far as there, and from there, they raced back with dog teams. The best team always went ahead. If he couldn’t run away from the team behind him, well, he took off to the side, and the second team took off, until they were all strung out. That’s what they did for couple of days. Dog racing for no prizes, nothing! Just for fun! It wasn’t only one or two teams, there were about ten, twelve teams. That was old time way of living for Christmas and New Year.

Ratting and trapping

Right after New Year, they started taking off again, going home, no matter how cold it was. They just went back to their trapline camp, back to wherever they lived and got their own house. … Once Christmas and New Year was over, everybody went
home, went back in the bush to check their traps and see what they had got. They trapped till the end of February, and that’s the time trapping season closed.

Now they had to think of beaver and muskrats. Before the end of February, everybody picked up their winter traps, all the fox traps, marten traps, mink traps, lynx snares, and lynx traps. They brought everything back, wherever they were staying. And after that they started thinking about muskrat and beavers, but that’s not as hard as trapping in the winter. By that time it was warm, they just went out to a good place they knew. They had to travel through the bush and find a place they knew was good for rats. They moved there, kids and all.

They moved out there and pitched a tent. They dug the snow, and by that time there was deep snow in some places. They dug the snow right down to the ground, and then set brush. Get your poles, and set a tent. Set your stove, and get your wood, all that. They got ready in about two days, I think, before they started setting traps for rats and beaver. So they start trapping rats. Ah, some of them did good. They might get a hundred rats a week, and two, three beaver. If you were lucky, you got a beaver every day. You had to set trap for it through the ice, had to chisel the ice. Muskrat too, you had to chop the house and find the bed, set a trap. You used a chisel and a little shovel. Some of them didn’t even have a shovel. In those days, they use their snowshoe as a shovel. Same with beaver trapping. They had to dig snow in front of the beaver lodge, dig snow right to the ice. And then you started chiselling, used an axe till you made a hole, and then you set a trap in there. There’s all kinds of different ways of setting traps for beavers. Unless I show you, right beside the beaver house—that’s the only way you can learn it. That’s the way they used to make their living in the bush.

**Easter**

By the end of April, well, Easter [was approaching]. Not too many people went to that. But even then some people went to the settlement for Easter service and that. After that, they just went to church for a whole week. Holy week, they call it. Right after this, everybody went back to their bush camp and started trapping rats again. And by end of April, and even around April, they started thinking of their spring camp—where they were going to pass the spring.

**Spring**

They stopped where they thought was a good place to pass spring. And that’s what they did. They brought all the spring supply. For spring supplies, you had to have a canoe, a little canoe, a .22, and enough shells. Enough shells, I mean is two, three thousand shells. That’s for around here. But some of them, they didn’t need
that many shells—with every shot they hit what they aimed at. But in the Delta, I know, they went from five thousand to ten thousand .22 shells. Some of them more, I think. That was the spring supply, as they called it. And some of those who passed spring in the Mackenzie or anyplace on the river, brought enough shotgun shells too. But they went out on the land, they just brought .22s. They brought rifles for protection against something big. That’s the way they passed spring—but most of them passed spring on the river.

Then they went out towards the inland [Delta] with their canoe. The men did that, with their canoe, and they packed everything. They packed their shells, their guns and their grub—all that, and they packed their canoe on top of that. Went from portage to portage. That’s the spring hunt. They’re just looking around for rats, beaver. Whenever they got hungry, they stopped and shot a duck, plucked it, singed it, cut it up, roasted it at the fire, and ate it there. Just left the bones. So that’s spring bush life.

The only place where they could get lots of muskrats them days used to be in the Delta. I don’t know how many rats they would kill, oh, some of them would kill two thousand rats, but I know some of them killed more than that. That’s when you really worked for it.

And after the spring hunt was over, some of them stayed on the river. They got fish too, not whitefish but sucker. They got lots of those. It’s probably still like that, but nobody goes to fish for it. And so after the spring hunt, some passed spring in the bush. They had to get to the river to be able to get back to town. Then they had to move, on bare ground. They got their tent, stove, their fur, and their grub. They moved with that. It took some of them a couple of days to reach the river. Some of them, one day. God, it was nothing for them, those days.

Hunting moose in winter

The only thing I forgot to mention is—back to winter: In the winter, anytime in winter, they hunt moose. They’d take off in the morning. Just pick up your lunch, bannock, maybe drymeat, maybe dryfish. Whatever was cooked, you put that in the sack with your tea kettle, sugar and tea, and your hunting, skinning knife, and one spoon. That was it, that was your load. And your rifle and your snowshoes.

You took off in the morning, and you just said which way you were going to go, and took off that way. That way, nobody worried about anybody. Sometimes you were gone till seven, eight at night. Pitch dark outside—you were still gone hunting, but nobody thought about you. You knew, they knew, you were going to make it back. They used to do that, some of them came back at nine, ten o’clock at night, tired. Went to sleep, had a good sleep.
By morning he was well rested, and he was back to his little sack again. Take bannock, drymeat, pick up his rifle and snowshoes, and walk again. Never thought of last night when he was tired. Never even thought of it. Walk, walk, walk, they just did that for moose, to hunt moose. They walked all day. Come back late at night. When you saw a hunter come back early, that meant he’d got something, but if he didn’t come back after dark, that meant he got nothing. So, if a hunter went out and he was coming back before it getting dark, you knew he’d got something in his pack sack. Killed something—part of guts, and the heart, some of the kidney, all those little things that’s what they brought back when they killed a moose.

When they killed a moose out there, they didn’t just kill it and leave it there. They skinned it, skinned it and butchered it, buried it in the snow. They covered it with a skin and then covered the skin with snow, so the next day somebody could go there and pick it up with dog team, and bring it back. That’s the way they used to hunt moose. But some of them, they went out, in the morning they’d go, they went until dark, pitch dark, and they camped there, open fire. I don’t know how they could do it, I’ve never done it myself. Whenever I camped out, I used to have a blanket, because my dog team was there, but I never did walk out and camp around there without a blanket yet. Never did it in my life, but I know some of them have done it. For at least two nights, I don’t know if they slept, maybe they slept sitting down, had a fire going, I guess. It’s the only way. They were gone about three days, and two nights, they slept out there. That’s all just for hunting moose. But some of them, the lucky ones, they’d get a moose and come right back, and some of them walked two, three days, but they’d get nothing.

Hunting ducks in the summer

Then in the summer, some of them would go out in the bush just to hunt ducks. They packed a canoe, too. They went from one lake to the next, to the next. I used to do that lots of times, get a big sack of ducks. And you had to pack your canoe, and your guns, your shotgun and your .22. Whatever ducks you killed, you had to pack all that.

Everybody was like that, everybody was well fitted. I know some people, they left a lake with a load, the canoe and all their stuff. They never stopped until they hit the next lake—some places about two miles. I think some people even ran with their load. I used to try and couldn’t run very far. Even in my days, couldn’t do it. I walk with canoe and load, but two miles of walking—I couldn’t run it. So that’s the way they used to live in the bush long ago, up until skidoo and TV came out.

Thank you very much if you’re listening, thank you very much.
I’ll start right at the end of spring, when everybody has gone to town.

After the ice clears up—it seems like in the springtime you’re always running out of stuff, like sugar and tea, cigarettes—all the basic needs of bush life. There’s always somebody that’s going to town right after it clears up, after the ice, the shore ice is gone. Somebody’s gone to town pick these stuff and then you’re ready to go muskrat hunting, shooting rats, shooting muskrats.

Springtime

Well, we would be spending spring, or beginning of summer, beginning of June, at Tree River. From there, we would just kind of go here and there. Just like for a day or so. Go up the Mackenzie. Go to some lakes around, across the Mackenzie, above Tree River, and then along the river too—there’s always beavers right after the ice clears, and that’s why we would get beavers, shooting beavers, mostly. By that time all the lake ice has melted, so we would spend mostly spend spring at Tree River. Beginning of summer too, we would be there, and across Tree River, there’s Diighe’t’raajil.

That’s where I remember spending spring one time, but that’s just shooting rats. Just shooting muskrats on the lakes. There’s a lot of good lakes behind there for muskrats. So it was good hunting. And even up the Tree River it was good for beaver, and sometimes muskrats—I can’t recall shooting that much muskrats up the Tree River. So that’s in the springtime, just about for two weeks. I think the trapping season ended on the fifteenth, or something, of June.
Well, so after that, we’re just getting ready to go fishing. Get prepared to go fishing. Just like, long ago, they didn’t have these nets that you’re just ready to set. They have to back the nets, you’ve to put string on them, and back the nets, and you put floats on them. Strings to put floats on them, and strings to put the anchor, or sinkers on. So there was a lot of work just even preparing a net, one net. You have to string it all out, and in the meantime, the man is usually preparing the net, and the woman would start working on leather. So that’s what was done day in, day out, you know, while you’re waiting for the fish run. In the meantime, you have a net, but there isn’t that much fish. Just enough to live by until the fish run. So a net would be set.

Where we are at Tree River, it’s set a little ways up the Mackenzie, not even a half mile up, there’s an eddy. And straight across from Tree River, there’s another eddy. Well, this was a long time ago, where these nets were set, and then from there, there’s, you go a little further down to Diighe’tr’aaqil, and there’s another good fishing spot. So nets were set there all the time, all summer. And they go through different fish runs, like herring—there’d just be a net full of herrings. I think that’s in June, or end of June, or into July, early July, sometime like that, I guess, if I can remember right.

And then it’s conies, maybe about the same time, or a little after the herring. So there’s different fish runs. And I guess the older people know what time to set what type of net, what mesh of net. And then the last one would be a white fish run where they would really get into fishing to make dryfish for the winter. Mostly for their own use. And I think everything was used. Everything was used that time. Everything of the fish. The head and the guts, were used for dogs. The backbone of the fish, was dried, and in the wintertime, you used it as dog food, or as bait for traps. When you got drowned fish, well, that was either fed to the dogs, or it was put in a pit to rot, and in the middle of winter, you had dog food there again. So fish was not thrown away just to lay around on the shore, everything was used.

In those days also, we didn’t eat cony. Well, I guess it’s because our parents didn’t eat it. We didn’t see our parents eating conies, so we didn’t eat it. We just ate whitefish. And just once in my life I remember eating sucker. That was in the springtime, because we were hungry for fish, and got tired of meat. But that’s another season. Anyway, it wasn’t too long ago we started eating conies. Just a few years ago, I think. Before then, all we took out of the cony was a head and the, and the guts. Cooked it to fire and that was it.

So in the meantime, the woman was between cutting dryfish and all her other chores, doing the cooking, and what not. What little cleaning had to be done around the house, well, that was done by the woman—and in the middle of that, she’d be working with her leather or whatever she’s tanning, even beaver skin, or something like that to have for wintertime.
Caribou skins had to be tanned; this was a lot of work. So the woman is steady-going, as I remember my mom being. I’d see her resting, maybe once a week in the afternoon, and that was it. But I never heard them complaining that there was lots of work. Just everyday things that had to be done. Babaa cutting wood, going out, and getting wood, small driftwood for the smokehouse. That had to be done almost every day. You make sure you have lots, so you don’t run out. That way your fish won’t spoil. It has to have smoke to keep all the flies and that away.

And what else in the summertime?—Berry picking. It seems like a day for berry picking is always Sunday, to us anyway. Every Sunday, or every second Sunday, the whole family would pack up, or the whole camp would pack up. Take a big lunch along and go berry picking just across from Tree River. Across the creek is where the blueberries were, and across the river was where the cranberries were. So that was done all day long. After prayers in the morning, get ready and take off. Leave for the berries, and come back in the evening. And you were just tired after all that walking.

**Summer time**

Okay, summertime—this was quite a few years ago that I’m talking about; both my parents were alive. We were there almost every year. That’s our main camp, but this is in the summertime when just like kind of school is over—just a summer camp or fish camp. It’s a fish camp in the summertime, so that’s where my mom and dad are there, and my brothers and sisters. There’s mainly Robert, Cecil, and then my two sisters, Addy, and Alestine. Then my auntie was there from Inuvik to be fishing also in the summertime. So that’s my Auntie Marka with her children, and she had Lawrence, Bert, Sammy, John, Jane, Darlene, Evelyn, Winnie, Juliet, and Grace. And then my grandmother—I always remember her working with leather, even how old she was, working with leather. Sitting at the table making dryfish. Marka standing beside her, helping her. Some good stories were told around those fishing tables, I guess.

And Gabe, my Uncle Gabe. He wasn’t married those days, but he was always around there, helping also. And my grandmother [also helping] at that time, or till she was very old, a few years before she died there. She was still there working with leather. She was in her nineties, and she was working with leather. Her leather always turned out so nice. And us bigger kids were always walking along the shore to pick up driftwood for the dryfish, for the smokehouse, and maybe getting k’il out in the willows for making fire I guess, making fire at night, or having supper outside.

And then there’s always water to be packed, water for the garden, water for our clothes, water for our cooking, but that we didn’t find very hard. It just came natu-
ral. If we see we need water, well, we just run and get water, you know. I don’t think not once we ask for pay for all this. Even though it is so much fun, like, just being busy, you’re always doing something.

And in the evenings, it was nice, because sometimes in August, my Uncle Dick, that’s Marka’s husband, would come to Tree River. Oh, every evening while he was there, we would have a big game of baseball. I’m not talking about bat and ball, I’m talking about a stick and socks rolled up into a ball. Oh, did we ever have fun, every night, we would have a big ball game.

Oh, sometimes we get visitors too, like Joan Nazon and her husband, along with her boys, and daughter. There too again, we’d play hide-and-seek, or end up in a big war with grass. But that was only done in the evenings when we would play around like that. Otherwise, all day long we’d be working. Yes, always working. Until the evening, after supper, that’s when all the fun begins.

And then when we were growing up, too—there’s how many? Marka’s family, her children, ten of them, and then in our family, there was six of us. So every birthday that was in July, and August, we’d have a big cookout and just a biggest feast. So I think there was how many birthdays in July, two? There was Lawrence and Jane, huh? So there’s two in July. And I think two in August. That was me and my cousin. So we’d have birthday parties, and everything you want to eat is out there. You end up with ducks and everything else, beaver. Holy man! And we’d all eat one place outside. And I can’t remember it being crowded either, because it’s all outside. But we managed to have jello and cake, and all the good stuff.

So, it’s not all work, there was fun also. We always had fun. Even when you’re working, you end up having fun. You don’t think of all the hard work—and the funny thing is, you’re not stiff. You know, today you do a little thing, you’re, ‘Oh, my back.’ Maybe that’s all that work we did those days that is catching up now. Anyways, that was the summer.

Getting ready for the fall

And kind of what you’re doing in the summertime is getting ready for the fall time. When you get into September, you start smoking fish. You can’t dry it. The weather is too damp for that. To have good dryfish made in September, you end up making split dryfish. And that’s used mostly for the people’s own use, and also for the dogs. Once again you’re not throwing anything away, it’s all used. So that’s what you’re mainly doing all summer. And if you have a vegetable garden, or you have garden for fresh stuff—it’s put away, and frozen. It’s good after you thaw it out, you have some fresh vegetables. Carrots, lettuce, cabbage, potatoes, that’s all I can remember, I think. I think all the peas were eaten up by that time. Right out of the garden.
And besides that, maybe the end of August, you start picking cranberries. That too, you can store. You can store the cranberries. Good for the whole winter if it gets frozen, and you handle it very carefully. Then it’s good all winter. Then in the wintertime, sometimes you want cranberries, cooked cranberries, you cook up a batch, and it’s good with dryfish. I remember having that when we’re out traveling, going to Travaillant Lake sometime in the winter. We’d have bannock with cooked cranberries, and apples, I think.

And the first thing when we set camp—our stove is all set up and you just make fire in the stove. That pot is just ready to put on the stove, and your dryfish you just put beside the heat. It thaws out, and you have your bannock and your tea, and there you have something to eat. You know, you don’t fuss around with spices. But that’s a very good lunch till you’re all settled and ready to have a good supper.

Yeah, in the summertime, I’ll jump back to the summertime. Om, when you get too much fish and you just get pails and pails of scraps, we throw that across the creek, and that’s where we see bear almost everyday. The bear doesn’t try to come across though. It’s got lots to eat there. But, scraps from our table, and then scraps from my grandmother’s table, so he doesn’t need to come across, cause that’s so much. And sometimes maybe you try to cut open a fish, but it’s too watery, too drowned, and you didn’t know, so that goes in the pail too. And sometimes you just see the bear running up that hill with big fish in his mouth. And then into September, late August, September, when it starts getting dark, you see wolves coming around, just one. You don’t see, you don’t see a whole bunch of them. Just one you see wandering around, I guess. Once, one, one August I remember hearing little, little howls of baby wolves, I guess. Baby cubs. Wolf cubs, that’s what they’re called. Anyways they sure sounded cute, but you know later on, they’re just going to give you trouble.

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**Sundays**

The only time I think anybody rests, is Sunday. They just look at the nets and make their dryfish. I think that’s about it when they have their day of rest. They see the net in the morning, and then maybe by ten or eleven, we all gather together in one house to say Sunday prayers. After that, it’s lunch time, and then I think they see net again after lunch. Then you make your dryfish, and then you sort of lay around. You know, it’s lazy day, Sunday.

So not much is done on Sunday, except what you have to do. You have to cook, you have to make that dryfish, and that’s about it. And the only other days of rest are when it’s blowing very hard outside and it’s raining. That’s the only time they don’t see the net, or make dryfish. It’s too bad weather. So they just leave it.
that’s when you’re inside doing, you know, different things. Maybe you’re sewing, you know, you’re sewing. I remember my mother sewing all the time during that weather. Either that, or in the evening, she’d be playing cards, but my dad, I can’t remember what he did on these rainy days. I think he was mostly sleeping. Making the best of those rainy days, I guess.

But other than that, on good days, you’re busy. You’re busy day in and day out. From morning till evening and night-time. Sometimes we were sitting there eleven o’clock at night, still cutting dryfish—that’s how much fish there was sometimes, you know. You just think you finish cutting fish, and then it’s time to see the net again. Another load of fish. They’re not talking about ten, or twenty, it’s more than that, I think. The way I saw my mom sitting there all afternoon, you know. And I never thought she got tired. Until I tried it, and you sure get tired sitting there, you know, making dryfish. You get tired. So rainy days is kind of a lazy day when you’re forced to stay inside, but even then, you’re trying to collect water too, rain water, to do your washing, and that’s about all, I guess for washing.

Even how busy you get with fish, there’s always time to do other things. You know, my mom, in between cutting fish and that, she would, be working with her leather, twisting it to get all the water out or scraping it by stone. You know, there’s a process in all this. Can’t just go, be tanning leather in one day and cutting fish, too, it takes quite a while to tan one moose hide, with all the smoking, rinsing, and everything else, that has to be done to a leather.

And once in a while you catch crookedback. That, they made dryfish out of that. Sometimes in maybe September when it starts getting dark, and you’re sitting around in the house, you start making itsuh, pounded dryfish. There’s certain dryfish that is put aside, just for itsuh, and that’s mostly small little whitefish and crookedback. Big fish, big whitefish, they use for eating—eating dryfish, and sometimes it’s good to gnaw on. So mostly in September, you’re making crookedback, or making split fish.

The coming of fall

And then sometime in October—I can’t say this happens around Tree River, because we don’t fish around there. We don’t have a fish run like we have here, of whitefish. We don’t get that at Tree River. We get the loche where they go jiggling, across at Tr’ineht’ieet’iee. That’s where my Uncle Gabe has his camp. Just in front, there’s a creek there, so that’s where they go jiggling for loche. They get big loche there, too. So that’s kind of in the fall time. This would be in October. Into the first week in November, I guess, if I can remember right.

But by that time, the men are already out trapping. They’re already gone and set their marten or lynx traps. Marten and lynx, that’s the main fur they were
catching, but mostly marten, I think. But by this time too, the women are at home. They set snares for rabbits already. Mostly for eating and for the fur, which you can use as a duffle in your socks in winter, your mukluks. That’s all I can remember the rabbit skins being used for.

I didn’t sew with rabbit skins, because all that fur comes off so easy, even if you make gloves, or mitts out of it. You end up with skin, because all that fur came off! So once you wear it out, you kind of dry the rabbit skin. Turn it inside out, or wear it with the skin inside, the fur outside. You know, it keeps your feet warm. You wear that out, well, there’s another pair hanging up in the porch. You know, there’s always rabbit skins around.

Most of the time for the women, I guess, it’s just staying home and sewing. Making mukluks for the wintertime—and then you know Christmas is coming along soon, so you’re doing all your fancy work for moccasins and everything else.

In the fall time, I think you mostly start working more towards getting wood for the stove. I think that’s the main thing. As long as you have lots of wood to keep warm. That’s what you’re mostly working for, wood. Where dad used to get wood was up the Tree River, but that time I never used to help him. Just later on, but it wasn’t when I was younger. He used to do everything, even get ice and that.

You know, everything was done by him, the ice, and the wood—until later on when I started using the chain saw, but still he would go out and get the wood, and when he brought it in, I would cut it. That’s the way it went. Same with the ice, he would get the ice when we needed it, water in the house, we just go outside and get it.

But one thing I’ve never seen, I think in my whole life, is a moose. I remember one time when I was really small, I can’t remember how old I was, but I vaguely remember it: We were travelling way up, maybe towards Travaillant creek. I know we were heading up the Mackenzie, and it was on the other side. You feel it when people are getting excited. That’s how it was, we were travelling up in a boat, and my mom said, ‘There’s a moose right out here.’ It was on the river, and I started to look out, but she wouldn’t let me look. You know, I was not supposed to see these things. So I lost my good chance of seeing, even looking at a moose, that time. So that’s the way it was—I never did see a live moose. My dad came back with moose. It was all cut up. Just ready to make dryfish, or drymeat. I never did see a live moose, because everything was done by the man.

Those days, they just worked with it right away, and they just brought back what they could right there, the day that they shot it, and it’s mostly all the guts, and that. All the good stuff in there. And I always remember my mom or grandmother doing that. You know, the men bring back the, the liver, or the kidneys, and all that. And that was cooked right away. You know, you can’t be greedy, and put it away, or hide it away, but I always see them working with it right away. So
that’s what I try to do now when I get stuff like that. I make sure I cook it right away and work with it. And the fat, too, you work with it right away, hang it up, and fry it. So I always saw that done, so now I do that whenever I get stuff. That’s the way it was with me.

My dad handled everything else in front of me. Just like skinning lynx, wolves, beaver, bear, you know all these things. So I think I know how to do work like that. I will do it, because it was always done in front of me. You know which parts to take if you want to eat, beaver, and bear—if they are in good condition, you can eat them. You know, things like that. You don’t realize that as you are watching, you are learning. And sometimes things come back to me. You know, you think that person isn’t paying attention. They look like they’re not paying attention, but later on it comes back. You’re happy you were watching.

I’d see my dad bringing back a lot of fur. He’d work with it in the evenings. And I’d see how he skinned them, there’s a certain way of skinning each different kind of animal. Let’s say marten, and lynx, and maybe mink, and wolves. Those, I was not allowed to touch. But beaver and muskrats, I was allowed to skin. I don’t know why that is, but they worked for it, they had to do it. Just like him shooting, shooting a bear. He did all the work, but as children, we stood around and watched.

And as for the women’s work, it seems like it really wasn’t skinning and stretching up the fur, women were just allowed to work with certain things. Just like I said, beaver, muskrats, and rabbits. Things that she would sew with, if she needed fur for the moccasins. Well, she would tan a beaver skin. Same with muskrat, but those days muskrats were mainly for selling. We hardly used them for sewing.

It seems to me—I don’t know if other women did it—but I’ve never seen my mother working with marten, and lynx, you know those furs that they use to sell. Just my dad would handle these furs, the skinning, and the stretching, and the looking after. But with beaver and muskrats, you know it was different. We could just, like, touch them.

Winter time

In the summertime, there are always kids around there, but in wintertime, there’s myself, and my parents. And me, I’d always be sewing after supper. After all the dishes and everything is done. Light the lamp, or the lamp is already lit. I’d just be sewing, and my dad would be working with snowshoes, or making snares. Snares for lynx, or making extra snares for rabbits. And my mom, she’d be sewing sometimes, but you know, I think she likes to relax and just play cards. So she’d be playing cards. Sometimes my mom, and my dad would be playing crib. Have a game of crib. And me, I’d be reading, or sewing. So that’s how we spend the evenings in the wintertime.
It seems like most of the work involved getting wood, and the men going out and setting traps, and looking after their traps. Those were the main things, I think. That was during the wintertime, because you didn’t have that much light too, daylight. So if the men went out, you know long ago with dog teams, they’d be gone for about three or four days just checking their traps.

Skidoos

But that reminds me of what a change it was from a dog team to skidoos. That, I think, was the first year my dad bought a new skidoo. After it was all broken in, they went and set marten traps at Goonèlkak. They had their trapline behind Goonèlkak. I don’t know how long of a line it was, but when they went to see it with dog teams, it took them about three days. That fall that my dad had that skidoo, they left about nine or ten, I guess. Just at break of day, enough light to see. They left, and here we were busy in the house doing something. I was making bread, I think. My mom was doing something else, too.

Here we heard a skidoo, we looked out. Here it was Robert and dad coming up the hill. Gee whiz! What happened, they’re back so fast?! And it happened that winter, that fall, there was an oil company working around that area. We were saying, ‘Gee, maybe they lost all their traps, and everything that. Maybe they ploughed through the traps, and lost their traps.’ Here they come out, they come to the front of the house—nothing wrong, they act like nothing is wrong. Nobody looks hurt or anything. They come in. My mom says, ‘Ha, what happened, how come you’re back so fast?’ My dad: ‘Ha, we just looked at all our traps.’

So that was the difference, you know. Here we expected them to be gone a couple of days. Here they’re back that same day.

Dog teams

Well, this is before the skidoos really came into, you know, to the trapper’s life, I guess. You have to look after the dogs. The dogs were the main source of transportation I can say, I guess. In the summertime, you’re already preparing all their food. You have dried backbones, fish backbones, and then you end up with some kind of meat in the wintertime, so you end up with bones and all that. So that’s what would be fed to the dogs. You know, every day they have to eat. They have to eat to work for you. When you have a good team, it’s good, but otherwise, I
don’t know—is no good. So feeding your dogs good was very important, because they’d travel long, long ways before they stopped.

They have to carry their own food wherever they go, and that’s quite a bit, you know. Let’s say if you’re going to travel for three days, they have to carry three full days of food for themselves, plus all the camp gear, depending on how many people there are in the family, and how many dogs they got, you know. It’s quite a bit when you think about it. You know, if there’s one family of maybe three, we don’t have that many dogs, just one dog team. Well, they carry all this. Our bedding, our blankets, our food, their food, plus the tents, and stoves, you know, plus three people. That’s quite a bit.

But even then, it was good. But having skidoos, you have to worry about things breaking down, and running out of gas, and what not. You’ve got to find a spark plug, or clean the spark plug. And you can’t go up hills very well with a heavy load, not with what the dogs can carry. The skidoo can’t do the same work as the dog. And in the cold winter, you have to look after your skidoo, make sure it doesn’t freeze. The dogs, they curl up and get buried in the show, and that’s it, you know! All you have to make sure is that they get fed good everyday.

Well, after all your winter’s work is done, you know that the spring is coming on. You’re not really getting as ready as you were for the wintertime. You just take things as they come, like, just to eat every day. There’s always ducks flying over, geese flying over. I don’t think we were in a situation where we were hungry. We were just hungry for fish. That was after eating moose meat, mostly moose meat, all winter. I remember not having caribou those days, not much caribou anyway. But you get tired of meat, too. So, come springtime there’s a sucker run just after the ice moves.

They had to go up the creek, and that’s where they set a net. That’s where they caught a whole bunch of suckers. I remember my mother cutting off just the tails. Sucker really has lots of bones. Just the tail part got nothing, so that’s what she cooked up. And that’s the first time, I tasted sucker, and it tasted so good too! It tasted good, I mean, having to be hungry for fish.

And then there’s also chehluk [loche], that’s what you get, chehluk. Tree River is a good spot for it. Right at the point of the mouth of Tree River. You set a hook there, you’re sure to catch a loche, and it’s in pretty good shape, those days. That’s your springtime food. Then you got ducks, and when my grandmother was

‘The dogs, they curl up and get buried in the snow, and that’s it, you know!’
there, we always used to go looking for roots. We’d just go back in, back into the little willows, alongside of Tree River. She’d dig up roots for us, and sometimes really big juicy ones. Just thick. So we used to eat that with fish grease.

Oh, a person could live out there! Without going hungry! You just need the bare necessities. You always seem to be running out, or running low on sugar, or tea, salt. Seems like when you do run out of stuff like that, life just slows down. You just don’t feel like doing anything. Not only those, but cigarettes too. I remember running out of sugar one winter, sugar and cigarettes, because both my parents smoked. I smoked, but not that much, even that, we were without sugar, and cigarettes, and I’m pretty sure it was salt. For about one week, we were without that, and all we did was nothing! That’s right, nothing, and on top of that, I remember it was really bad weather. Blizzard every day, somebody went to town, and they couldn’t come back because of the weather. That’s why we were out of these things, but really I mean, we were doing nothing, you know. No energy.

But otherwise, it’s really good out there in the bush. The only thing making noise would be your radio. In the springtime, it would be birds. You hear all kinds of birds. It’s so nice to hear them. Once in awhile the dogs bark. Then right away you run outside. See what they’re barking at. Mostly, it’s nothing.

So that’s the spring.

Ratting season

And in the springtime too, you go ratting. Go setting traps for rats on the lakes. We used to set traps right down the flats from Tree River. Whole bunch of little lakes around there. The road just kind of connects into the next lake. We cross that, connect into another little lake, just like that. We used to come out about three miles down, I think, from Tree River. Come out of there, and walk all the way back to Tree River. Every day we do that. Holy man! Just me and my mom. So nice weather, too. But we didn’t care, every day we would be out there.

And where we get most of our geese and ducks that time was—their migrating route was over Tree River, right over our house. Our supper used to land on our house sometimes! But if they really wanted to go hunting for lots of geese and ducks, they would go across to a little island that was on the river. Just little, between Tree River and Tr’ineht’ieet’ie. There’s a good island there, full of willows. Well, that was a long time ago. Now it’s just a sandbar. That’s where they used to hunt. They’d stay there all night, and in the mornings, they would come back with bags, and bags, and bags of goodies. Just fat geese, and swans.

In the wintertime, they used to hunt moose on that island, they used to chase moose through that. That’s how big it was. Long, big, tall willows. Moose would
wonder on there sometimes, and somehow they would shoot it. Once again, I never saw a moose. I wasn’t allowed to see a moose.

One spring, we went across to Diighe’traajil, and there’s bunch of little lakes behind there. Just my dad knew all the lakes around there, so we just went from lake to lake with just what we had. We had one main camp that was above our fish camp there. You go up, you go straight up, and there’s a lake there, and that’s where we had our main tent. That’s just our tent and that. We trapped on that lake for a few days. And it’s getting hot in the springtime. You can’t work in the afternoons, you sleep in the afternoons, and then you get up in the evening. And when it starts getting cool, then you start setting your muskrat traps, and then checking them. You have to wait till nighttime. By this time, you know it’s getting to be lots of water around the muskrats push-ups.

So we stayed around there. Stayed there a couple of days, and then we went to the next lake. We did the same thing around there. We were hunting, setting traps. I think that was shortly after Easter. We did that about three or four days to a week. Then we came back again.

And then that same spring, we went out again. This time it was after, the ice moved, so we went up there with canoes this time, and .22’s. I’m talking about across at Diighe’traajil where we spend a few weeks. I think it was just shooting rats. It was really nice, because you know, you would go into a lake, and you get into your canoe, and you paddle around. That time there were lots of muskrats. You could just see them on a clear day, muskrats swimming here and across there, and on the side. It’s all that, you’re shooting. I had a single shot, and my mom had an automatic. With that single shot, you have to load up every time you shoot.

Boy, at the end, one muskrat was just getting me mad, because I couldn’t shoot it. Every time I shot, I’d have to load up again, and it would just swim in front of me. I don’t know how I kept missing it.

We were just travelling lake to lake, and landed. Sometimes we’d make fire, have something to eat. Then we’d portage into the next lake. Sometimes it’s just maybe twenty steps and we’re into another lake. I think we were just going right in a circle and ended back at where that camp was. Where we had that main tent. I think we did that a few days. I’m not sure how long, but I remember sleeping out in the open, with a big fire where we were sleeping. Oh, it would get cold in the evenings and at nighttime, and in the afternoons, it’s just hot. And so that was one year we spent around there.

Breakup

It’s spring, so it’s warming up, when you get back to the main camp. Our main camp was at Tree River. You know you start getting ready for anything that hap-
pens during breakup. You know, you don’t know if it’s going to be high water, but you put all your sleds away, and all your boats. You make sure they’re on high ground and that. I know a couple of years when I was staying with my parents there, we had quite a big flood at Tree River, once almost to where that pole for our clothes-line used to be. Our boat used to be tied to that. That’s how far up the, the ice came, or the water.

During breakup, all you do is just wait. You have to wait for the ice to clear before you go anywhere. That’s when my mom too began to work with her leather. You know, just like soaking it, and cleaning the moose hide or caribou hide. That’s when she started getting those ready to be worked during the summer.

I remember just sewing. Listening to the radio, listening to request show. So there wasn’t very much to do. I mean once you got everything ready—all your winter stuff was put away, all your harnesses, your skidoo was put away, put away good, you made sure it was covered—there was not very much to do after that. Just wait for the ice to clear, so you could go to town, and get cigarettes! So that’s how it was.

After the ice moved, you know, you got all your beaver and your muskrats skins ready. And after the ice cleared, Dad usually went to town. It’s usually just go down and come right back. Bring a whole bunch of goodies back, and that was it. Your spring was over.

It’s all kind of a circle that you work in. Only thing that is different is the seasons. Always getting ready for the next season. They all fall into place anyway.

So that’s about it. Thank you!\textsuperscript{165}
This is an old legend. In the olden days, animals could talk like human beings. The Crow, or Raven, Deetrin’—sometimes he was good and he would help the people, but most times, he was a real rascal. This one time he saw the people kill a bear so he told the people, ‘When my friends kill a bear they take its guts out and string it along so that it does not dry. But if you have lots of grease, you can start filling the bear’s guts with grease.’ The people believed this. They had lots of grease. They started pouring the grease into the bear’s guts but they could not fill it. The people became suspicious and, in the meantime, the Crow would go in the bush and sit on the other end of the gut and was drinking up the grease. The people wondered where all the grease was going. They followed the Crow and sure enough he was sitting on the end of the guts and drinking up the grease. One of the men said, ‘Throw some crushed bones into the grease and we will see what happens.’ All at once on the other end of the bear guts the Crow started screaming. He swallowed the bunch of dry bones and was choking. That is the kind of trick the Crow plays.

After this happened with the bear’s guts, he went on a little trip and met another bear and we all know that Crows have only four toes on their feet. He started talking to the bear and told the bear, ‘I am glad to meet you. Let’s greet one another with the best we have.’ He told the bear, ‘You cut off one of your feet and I will cut off one of my feet and we will roast it and we will have a little feast.’ We all know bear feet are fairly big and fat. The Crow’s feet are straight bones. Now there were two feet roasting in the fire. The bear cooked his own foot and after it was well done he gave half of it to the Crow to eat. The bear’s foot was full of grease and the Crow’s foot had nothing but dry bones. So the bear told the Crow, ‘How
come my foot has lots of grease and fat and yours does not?’ The Crow said, ‘My foot has not heated up yet and that is why there is nothing coming out of it.’ After they had eaten, the bear realized what he had done and all at once he was moaning in pain. The bear said, ‘Oh my foot!’ and instead of the Crow having sympathy with the bear, he just about killed himself laughing. This is the end of the story.33

Deetrin’
Eliza Andre

It happened that an old woman had a very beautiful daughter. She was asked by many boys if they could marry her daughter and the old woman would say, ‘No, you are not good enough to marry my daughter.’ After the boys finally became fed up with her they told the Crow all about it. They told the Crow the story of the old woman, and the Crow, as we said, was a very clever animal. The Crow asked the boys where this old woman and her daughter were. They told the Crow where she stayed. The Crow said, ‘Dress me up the best you can. Then I will ask if I can marry the girl.’ So the boys dressed the Crow up and they put him in the middle of the canoe and the two boys paddled the Crow down the river.

The old woman also had a son, just a boy, and the boy was standing outside and all at once he saw a canoe coming. He told his mother that there was somebody coming down. ‘I can see him and I sure would like to have him for a brother-in-law.’ The mother of the girl went out and sure enough, there was somebody sitting in the middle of the canoe—and all dressed up. The old woman gave in. Of course, there was lots of mud on the edge of the river so the old woman ran in the bush and got some birch bark and by the time she got back the canoe had landed. She ran down and she did not want this gentleman to walk in the mud so she put the birch bark down when he was ashore.

After the Crow landed, the mother of the girl said, ‘Come right in, we are going to give you something to eat and then we will arrange for a wedding.’ All this time she did not know that it was a Crow. The old woman had a little dog tied up in a corner. They all sat down to eat and it happened that the Crow had no appetite. He told the woman, ‘I cannot eat when I see a dog like that. Take it outside.’ The old woman got so excited that she was going to have a son-in-law that she took the dog out and hung it. Then the Crow felt a little better but still he did not eat too much at the meal. In those days, when a girl was just reaching her womanhood, they always had a place for them to sit alone so no one could see the girls. After the meal was over, the old woman told the Crow, ‘The girl is in her own teepee over there. If you want to visit the girl you can do so.’ These Crows, even today, if they see any dead animals, they would always try and get at the animal’s guts. So when he went over to see the girl, here he saw this little dog hanging up.
Of course, the Crow did not hesitate and tore the little dog’s stomach open and really filled himself well.

In the meantime, the mother of the girl was waiting for the Crow to come back. Just towards morning, instead of the Crow going into the little teepee, he had so much of this little dog’s stomach and he was so full, he had diarrhea. He leaped on top of the teepee and the girl was sleeping down below. The Crow emptied everything that was in his stomach on the girl. In the morning, when the girl woke up she really was in a mess and instead of the girl going out, she waited for her mother. Her mother came and saw what had happened but then, it was too late, the Crow had gone. The old woman felt very badly.

On her way to the teepee she found her little dog’s stomach eaten and also his eyes, so she knew something was wrong. When she found her daughter in such a mess and looked closely and found that someone with four toes had been there. There were a few people around there and she ordered everybody in camp to take off their moccasins and see if she could find out what person had done this. Everyone took their moccasins off but they all had five toes. The Crow was the last and she said, ‘You, too, must take your moccasins off.’ The Crow was sneaky and he just put a little of his feet out and she said, ‘Take your whole foot out.’ Finally he was caught and the old woman found out it was him and she grabbed him and threw him out of the camp. As soon as the Crow was thrown out, he flew off and that is the end of the story.34

An old woman and her grandson were once staying alone at their camp out in the bush. They had some snares set and were catching a great deal of rabbits. They would often go and see their snares together. One day as they were out visiting their snares, the grandson heard something in the distance. ‘Grandmother, I hear something.’—‘Grandson, what do you hear?’ asked the old woman. ‘Grandmother, back past our trail someone is making noise.’

Both listened very carefully; they again heard the same sound. At once, the old woman gathered up the rabbits they had snared, threw the bundle over her shoulder, and they both ran quickly along their trail, back to their camp. They ran into their tent and immediately the woman skinned the rabbits and quickly threw the intestines into the open fire to roast. The old woman waited until the intestines were scalding hot.

By this time they could both hear someone making noise outside their camp; someone was approaching their camp, drawing nearer and nearer. Meanwhile, while all the commotion was going on outside, the old woman had gathered the
hot intestines and waited near the doorway. Soon, the person, who turned out to be a bushman, nanaa’ih, poked his head into the doorway. Immediately, the old woman slapped him in the face with the hot intestines. At once, the bushman jumped up having been exposed to the hot substance. The bushman went tearing out of their tent, swearing painfully, holding his face, yelling.

With this, they heard him thump to the ground outside their camp. The following morning, they went out to investigate the incident of the previous night. They found a big bushman stretched outside their camp. They did not bother to do anything to him but instead retired to their tent, never to be bothered again for a long, long time.  

The Blind Man and the Loon  

Eliza Andre

A man and his wife were travelling, although the man was blind. The woman told her husband, ‘There is a moose just close by, what are you going to do?’ The blind man told her, ‘Give me my bow and arrow. Point the arrow straight at the moose.’ The woman did as she was told and the man pulled his arrow killing the moose. This woman was very mean; they had children and made camp. While this blind man was sleeping, she took the children to the spot where the moose had fallen.

When the blind man awoke, he heard no sounds, no noise at all. There was a lake nearby and he could hear the sounds of a Loon. He crawled out to the lake and called out to the Loon, ‘Please help me out!’ The Loon asked him, ‘What can I do for you?’ The man told him, ‘I am blind. My family has left me and I do not know where they are.’ The Loon told him, ‘I will swim over to you. Crawl on my back and do not let go.’

The Loon dove into the water with the blind man on his back. He surfaced in the middle of the lake, the man was still hanging on to him. He asked the man, ‘How are you?’ The man said, ‘I can see clearly now.’ Thanking the Loon, the man told the story of his wife and children leaving him and that he didn’t know where they had gone.

The Loon showed him the direction in which he was to go to find his family. He followed the Loon’s directions and sure enough, he found his family. The children saw him coming into camp, crawling, as he was pretending he was still blind. He told his children, ‘All I want is water.’ Instead of the children getting the water, his wife went to the lake to fetch the water but took her time. Finally she returned with a birch bark bowl of water for him. He opened his eyes and saw that the bowl was full of worms instead. He got mad and threw the bowl into his wife’s face asking her, ‘What have I done to you, that you treat me like this?’

He then took a club and clubbed his wife and the children to their death.
There was a certain stranger who was well liked by the people so these people gave him a woman to be his wife. They had stayed together for one year and had a child. One day they were out together and they made a camp under a large bush. During the night the child was crying and the father woke up, took a stick and started to poke his wife with it to wake her up. When he did this, there was no one there—his wife was gone, so he started to look around the camp. He saw that there were strange tracks of some kind; there were two of them. He saw that they had dragged his wife away so he followed them. Some distance away he came to a place where they had made a fire. They were cutting his wife up and he overheard them saying, ‘She is breast feeding a child. We will go back and get this child, too.’ As they said this, the husband shot both of these evil giants with his bow and arrow and he went back to where he had left his child. When he got back there, there was someone there with the child. It was a marten and he yelled at this marten, ‘What next?’ The marten said, ‘The child was crying so I let the child suck on my tongue and he stopped crying,’ so the child’s father told the marten, ‘You are doing fine, keep the child for me and take good care of it.’ So the marten became a babysitter.

It was a few years later when the child was a little older that the father took his child elsewhere. There he set snares for rabbits and it happened he made his camp near where two giants dwelled. Every time he visited his snares, he would pass these two big giants and they would try to invite him for something to eat, but he never paid any attention to them and he would go home to his son.

One morning, the boy asked his father, ‘Let me see the snares this time,’ but the father said, ‘No, you can’t because there are two big giants by my snare line and every time I pass them they would ask me to eat with them and I never go to them. If you go to check the snares they will ask you to eat and if you do, they will kill you.’ Even when the father told his son ‘no,’ the boy kept asking to go so the father gave in and he told his son, ‘When you pass these two giants, and if they ask you to eat with them, don’t do it. Just check the snares, pass them and come right straight home to me.’ So the boy went on his way to the snares. The father waited for his son to return and he was gone so long he got worried so he followed his son. As he came to this lake, he found that these two giants had killed his son and had hung his head. When he saw this he was very sad. The boy tracks were heading toward their camp. He had been going to them and would turn back and finally he had been going to them and they had killed the boy.

These two giants were living in a mud hut so the father came to their place and they were both inside this hut. He waited for them by the doorway until they came out. Later, one of them showed up and said to the man, ‘Grandson, we are
freezing. Make a fire so we can warm up.’ The father did so. He got lots of dry wood and made a big fire and one giant came out and sat by the fire to warm up. As he sat down by the fire, the boy’s father got a good size stick and clubbed the giant’s neck and he fell forward into the fire. He watched the giant burn up and the other giant was still in the hut so he blocked the doorway. Later, the other giant started to come out from the hut. He saw that the doorway was blocked and he tried every way to get out from the smoky hut but he couldn’t make it so he smothered in there. From then on the boy’s father started to hunt other giants.

He wandered on and on until he came across a track of a giant so he started to walk. Later, the giant saw a fresh track so he started to follow. He went on and on until it was getting dark. Meanwhile, the boy’s father made a fire under a high rocky cliff and waited there for the giant. By this time it was dark when finally, the giant came to the edge of the rocky cliff and called, ‘Grandson, how did you get down there?’ The man answered, ‘I came down right over the cliff.’ The giant looked down but it was too steep and said, ‘There must be a way to get down, show me where.’ The man replied, ‘I came right down over the cliff.’ The giant waited for a while and giggled to himself and took a step off over the rocky cliff. He landed somewhere below among the rocks. The man waited until morning and went down to the rocks, to the place where the giant landed. He was lying there with his gut out and had been putting his guts back in his stomach and was holding his stomach. The man came to him and said, ‘Grandfather, are you hurt bad?’ But there was no answer so this was the end of one more giant.

From then on the man began to walk on and on until he came to where there were two more giants. So he followed their tracks until he came to fire where they were cooking what they had killed. He hid himself from them and made medicine on them, so they both fell into a deep sleep. While they were sleeping the man went to them and dragged away what they were cooking and in place of that he put a big dry stump. Later they woke up and found a big dry stump and they thought their cooking had turned into a stump so they went on their way again. The man followed them and every time they killed something to eat and made a fire, the man would cast a spell on them and the two giants would fall asleep and he would then steal their food and replace it with a dry stump. He did this to them all winter long, until by spring time the two giants were starving. Finally, one giant died and there was only one to finish. The man really made this one giant suffer.

One day the man went ahead of the giant and he came to where there was a large tree bending over the water. He climbed along this tree and got to the end of it and waited for the giant. The giant came along in a canoe and as he was passing this bent tree, he noticed something in the water. It was the image of the man but this the giant didn’t know and he kept spearing at this image in the water. Finally the man broke off a tree branch and dropped it on the giant’s head. The giant looked up and saw the man in the tree. He jumped out of the canoe and began to
kill the man, but the man said, ‘Grandfather, grandfather, not that way. I am not to be killed that way. I am to be killed only with a fork stick.’ Before the giant went to get this certain stick, he went to the toilet and left his stool at the bottom of the tree and started talking to his stool. ‘You see that man, see that he doesn’t get away.’ While he went for this fork stick the man climbed down and ran off and hid himself just to see what the giant would do. When the giant returned with the fork stick he saw that the man had escaped and started to get mad at his own stool, slapping it around saying, ‘I told you to watch for me and you let this man get away.’ The giant went back to his canoe.

The man started ahead of him and made a long portage overland and hit the river again. He went to the shore of the river, undressed, covered himself with mud all over, and stood among the stumps that were along the shore and waited for the giant. There he came at last, paddling down the river. As he was passing, the giant noticed a strange thing on the shore so he pulled up the canoe and went to this mud form of a man. He walked around it and inspected it closely. It was funny for him that a muddy stump looked just like the shape of a man so he started poking it here and there. No matter where he poked, the man never moved so the giant started to spear it. At that instant the man started to run and the giant followed. The man ran to a high cut bank along the river and there was a large willow bush. He ran around this bush while the giant was chasing him. All at once the giant disappeared so the man looked for him. There the giant was setting a snare by the edge of the cut bank. He was setting a snare with his skin belt.

The man always outsmarted the giant. As he finished setting the snare he began to chase the man again. The man came running around this bush and he saw that the giant had left his pack sack by the snare. He grabbed his bag and stuck it in the snare and then jumped over the cut bank with it. As the giant ran around the bush he saw that the snare was over the cut bank. He pulled at it and it was heavy so he built a fire and cut sticks and readied all the sticks for roasting. He went back to the snare and pulled it up. All that was at the end of his line was his old pack sack so that was that.

So the giant sat down by his fire and started to cut pieces of his own flesh here and there and started roasting it by the fire. When he finished roasting his own flesh he started to make pemmican out of it. While he was doing this, the man hid himself just above him by the shore and there came a muskrat singing while paddling down the river. The man called out to him, ‘Rat, rat! Come, I have something to tell you.’ So the rat paddled to the shore and the man said to the rat, ‘There’s a giant up a little ways and he is making pemmican. I have no way of getting it. Could you in some way get it for me?’ The rat said, ‘I will do it,’ so the man advised the rat what to do. ‘As you pass this place, the giant will ask you to cool the pemmican for him, do this for him and paddle out to the middle of the river and let it go.’ The rat went on his way until he came where the giant was. The giant saw the
rat and said, 'Rat, come cool this pemmican for me.' So the rat tied the pemmican to his canoe and started out with it. The giant said, 'Don't go out too far with it, just along the shore.' The rat said, 'I just passed cold water up a little ways. I will go there and cool it faster,' but the giant said, 'No, just cool it along this shore.' Even then the rat went out to the middle of the river and said, 'Water is cooler here in the middle.' As he got to the middle of the river, he let the pemmican go and it sank. The giant really got mad and started spearing the rat but the rat dived and got away. The giant got sleepy so he went to sleep and never woke up again. That was the end of this giant. The man waited for the giant to come but there was no sign of him, but he made sure that the giant was dead.

From there on the man started again. He made up his mind that he would make a canoe and paddle the canoe like the giant, so through his medicine, he started to make a canoe from a tree and covered it with birchbark and he gummed the stitch seam with sticky gum from the spruce tree. After he had finished he put the canoe in the water and started off.

As he was paddling, he came to where a Crow was sleeping, he then pulled up to the shore and went to the Crow. He was sound asleep. The man tied the Crow's feet together and did the same with his wings and started to pack him up, farther from the shore; on the way the Crow started to wake up. When he woke up he asked the man, 'My friend, where are you packing me to?' The man answered, 'My friend, I am taking you to a better place where we will look in each other's hair.' The Crow said, 'My friend, I'm afraid you are going to throw me over the bank.' The man said, 'Oh no, I wouldn't do that to you. What a way to talk. I am only taking you where it's clear and breezy, there we are going to look in each other's hair.' As he came to a clear place he put the Crow down and the man began to look in the Crow's hair, looking for fleas. The Crow said, 'My friend, if you kick me over the bank and kill me, I will see that you'll have no friends like you. I will see they all disappear.' And he said to the man, 'Later, as you paddle down the river, you will see a big loche. As you go farther you will see where there is a camp and no sign of people, not only one camp but several camps. As you go alone, and go further and if you hear a loon calling, turn back and come back to me. You will have to gather me up, every piece of me—my feathers and all—and you will have to put these pieces of me on the blanket and make me whole again.'

The man said, 'What on earth are you talking about? What are you saying? We are only here together to look in each other's hair, don't talk like that to me.' The man kept on looking in the Crow's hair. All at once the man jumped up and kicked the Crow over the bank. As he was falling down the bank he was in little pieces—his flesh and feathers were scattered all over the place. From there the man paddled on his way. Along the way he heard noises, singing and dancing. He paddled towards this place and as he came nearer, he noticed several loche on the shore...
with big bellies but there was no sign of people. He went on paddling and he passed more camps with no signs of people.

Later on he heard a loon calling so he went back from there and returned to where he killed this Crow. From his canoe he took his blanket up to where he killed the Crow and spread it out and collected every piece of the Crow, then he folded the blanket and put it in a hollow ground and waited and waited. Then he called to the Crow, ‘My friend, are you ready?’ The Crow said, ‘Not yet, I am not whole yet.’ The man said, ‘What is it?’ The Crow replied, ‘I’m missing a toe on each of my feet. Look for them,’ so the man started looking for the missing toes. Even when he saw them he pretended he didn’t so he told the Crow, ‘My friend, I cannot find your toes.’ The Crow answered, ‘Oh well, let it go and put me in your canoe and let us go on our way.’ The man did this, he put the Crow in his canoe and then they paddled on their way. Later they came to where the big loche were and the Crow said, ‘My friend, pull to the shore.’ After landing the Crow said, ‘My friend, jump right in the middle of that loche’s stomach, split the stomach open and the people will come out.’ The man did this and the people came out. As they came to each camp that was empty, the man would do the same thing. The people were free from the loche. After they had finished, the man went on his way and the Crow went back to where he dwelled.

The man later came to where there was a woman sitting by the creek. She had a stick and the man backed away and he noticed the woman was hunting for something. He pulled his canoe up the bank and he dove into the water and turned himself into a large jackfish and swam upstream. He went on the other side of the river and went up a ways and made himself a raft to float downstream. As he was floating down the creek, the woman threw a spear at him. She speared him just behind his neck. The fish swirled and the spear handle broke into pieces. The fish swam away to the other side of the river, there he waited and he noticed that the woman stood there, waiting. She waited by the creek all day and all night. By this time the man was very tired. At last the woman started up the bank to her place. She would stop and stand and finally she went inside of her place. The man swam back to his canoe, and there he changed himself back to a man and pulled out the spear head from his neck and put it in the bow of the canoe. He started to paddle to this creek and there was the woman again sitting by the creek, waiting for the fish. As the man came up to her, she said, ‘You look like the one who swam away with my spear head,’ and this man replied, ‘Why, I’m just paddling down the river. What are you talking about?’ He stayed on a little longer and every time he talked to her, she would repeat, ‘You look like the one who swam away with my spear head.’ This was the only answer she would give him. By this time it seemed that he would have to camp with her, so he went to sleep.
Meanwhile, the woman took the man’s canoe all apart and when the man woke up, he saw the woman was taking his canoe apart. He yelled at her, ‘What are you doing to my canoe?’ and the woman answered, ‘You look like the one who swam away with my spear head.’ The man went back inside and felt very bad about his canoe and went to sleep again. Later when he woke up he went out and saw that she had put the canoe together. The man put his canoe in the water but it was leaking very bad so he pulled it to the shore and gummed all the stitched seams with sticky spruce gum and on his way he went.

As he paddled along, he came to where there was an old man staying. He said to the old man, ‘Grandfather, I am paddling on my way down this river.’ The old man said, ‘My grandson, you are landing here?’ The man said, ‘Grandfather, I will stay with you for a little while.’ The old man told the man, ‘Grandson—there’s a grizzly bear that came to the shore often but I never did do anything.’ The man said, ‘Grandfather, next time the bear comes we will kill it.’ As they were sitting together, the old man got excited. ‘Grandson! There’s that grizzly bear coming to the shore again.’ The old man said, ‘Grandson, you take this arrow,’ and the old man gave him an arrow without a head. As they were going towards the grizzly bear, the old man was right behind him. The man said, ‘Grandfather, you are too close behind me. I may not aim good. Stay further back.’ As the old man did this, the man shoved the sharp steel head on the end of his blunt arrow, aimed at the bear’s underarm and shot. The grizzly bear yelled out, ‘Father, he shot me with a sharp arrowhead.’ At that instant, the man turned and there the old man had turned himself into a grizzly bear. The man made a fast move and jumped into the river and turned himself into a small fish. He swam in between two rocks and waited there, until later, when all was clear. He swam back to his canoe and went on his journey.

On the way he came to where there were three women tanning skins. These skins had long legs. They were busy cropping these long-legged skins. The man landed and went to them. The women offered him a wooden bowl full of red pemmican. As he started to eat, one of the women whispered to him, ‘It’s human pemmican,’ so the man pretended to eat it; he was dropping it down his coat. Then the man asked for water. One woman grabbed a birchbark pail and went down to the river to get water. This woman was an otter and the man followed her and said, ‘I only drink water from a creek, just a little ways up where I passed a creek, that’s where I’d like to have water from.’

So these two otter women went along the shore and they would ask if that was the place. The man would say, no it is further up. He kept telling them to go further on till they were out of sight. This one woman, the one that warned him about the human pemmican said to the man, ‘This is what they do, they kill people and live on them.’ This woman was a mouse, she brought out nice white pemmican from a sweet root. She told the man, ‘I only live on this. I don’t eat what they do.’
The man told her, ‘From now on, live only on the things that you eat. Don’t eat like the other women.’

The man went on his way and later he came to two beavers. He killed the beavers and went on again; then he met a wolverine. Then he went on his way and he paddled a long ways until he came to where an old woman stayed. He landed there—they were a couple of giants.

The old woman was at home while her giant husband was out hunting. The old woman gave him something to eat. After he ate he asked her, ‘Grandmother, give me a little of your red dye,’ and the old woman said, ‘Ah, grandson, my husband is a mean old man. If he finds out he will be very cross with me.’ Even then the man asked again, ‘Grandmother, even that—let me have some of the red dye.’ ‘Grandson, when my old husband returns and finds out he will kill me for sure!’ The old woman kept on saying, ‘That’s right. If he kills me it will be over for you, but I will give you red dye.’ So the old woman gave the man red dye.

The man left with the dye and went on his way until he saw the old giant and his dogs, which were grizzly bears, returning home with meat. As the man paddled on the old giant called to him, ‘Wait, wait! How come I smell your grandmother’s red dye?’ The man answered, ‘I never saw grandmother. I do not know where she is. I never saw her.’ But the old giant insisted he could smell grandmother’s red dye. The man kept saying, ‘I never saw grandmother, how could I see her when I don’t even know where she stays?’ But the giant kept saying, ‘I smell red dye,’ and soon the man gave up and paddled on and on until by the time the old giant got home, the man heard a scream from the old woman. He could hear the old giant fighting his wife. Later, he came charging, knocking big rocks over the cliff. The man got frightened and turned himself into a small fish again and hid under a rock in the water. The giant was still throwing rocks. He quit that and started to wade in the water and feeling around with his hand under the water. The giant knew that the man had turned himself into a fish. He would hold his hand under water, waiting for a small fish to go in his hand. Finally the old giant gave this up and next he made a dam across the river and sat there waiting, waiting. At last the old giant got tired and went home.

The man later put his canoe back in the water and paddled away; he paddled out to the ocean and was never heard of again. This man had done many good things for his people. 31

This particular story is mainly about two men and a woman. At the beginning of the story, they fought often between themselves because of her. It was said that
Naagaij tsal, ‘Little Beads,’ was from further up the river and Kwan ehdan, ‘Without Fire,’ centred his life around the Delta. They were to decide which of the two was to marry the woman that was involved in both their lives, so they would gather their tribes and go to war. The decision was that whoever won the war was to marry the woman. Now the story begins. —

A long time ago there was a man by the name of Kwan ehdan and there was another by the name of Naagaij tsal. They both lived with the same woman and this caused many fights between the two men. Although they fought with bows and arrows and any available weapon, they never did kill each other. They finally made an agreement to settle this matter. Naagaij tsal gathered his tribe together; Kwan ehdan gathered his and they were ready for a fight. While they were going on with their plans, Kwan ehdan gathered his people and moved to a different location. On the way, he held a feast for his people.

Now the woman had a habit of waking up early in the morning so as to allow herself to gather fire wood. One morning, after finishing her task, she took one side of her snowshoes and adjusted the laces so they would fit Kwan ehdan’s feet. After doing this, she carried the snowshoes in her hand to make them available should anything suddenly come up. Afterwards, she kept pacing back and forth toward the door. Suddenly she looked through the little hole above the door of the tent. Kwan ehdan asked, ‘What is it you see?’ He jumped up and went through the hole, ran and slipped his snowshoes on quickly. In his great rush, one side of the lace busted, so the woman quickly threw the snowshoes she had prepared for him. He quickly put these on and ran down the trail. His two younger brothers spotted him, so they ran along after him. The three went off to the mountains.

Before they reached the mountains they had to cross a big river. Kwan ehdan proceeded across the river first, running carefully from place to place to prevent his falling through. His other two brothers followed him in the same way. However, his youngest brother had the most trouble with his snowshoes. The ends kept catching the ice, which by now was loosened with the weight of his other brothers. Finally all three were safely across the river. They started up the side of the mountain. Kwan ehdan spotted a place on the way up that looked like a good place to sit. He was up first so he sat down and waited for his brothers. His brother started up after him but by this time, Naagaij tsal’s tribe of people caught up with them. They started taking large willows and stuck them through the holes of the brother’s snowshoes. Gradually, they managed to pull him down and they killed him. All this Kwan ehdan witnessed.

All this time, Kwan ehdan’s youngest brother apparently still had a lot of trouble with the ends of his snowshoes and he saw what happened so he immediately backed away and started on another trail. Naagaij tsal’s tribe spotted him so the group followed him down the trail. Unfortunately, they must have killed him, too,
as they were gone for a long time before returning to the place of the first killing. As they passed the body of Kwan ehdan’s brother, they each by turn thrashed the body with a heavy stick until in the end there wasn’t any kind of a body, but only blood stains left.

At the very end of the line was a man named Ts’ii choo, ‘Big Mosquito.’ The others went on their way so he was left standing where the body used to be. Kwan ehdan told him, ‘A long time ago when all tribes were friends and you used to have the smell of dead animal so why do you, too, throw your stick where you know there’s nothing left of the body?’ Ts’ii choo answered, ‘We will deal with that later on.’ Kwan ehdan replied, ‘If that’s the way you feel, I will expect to see you in late fall when the throat of the caribou turns white and be sure to see me then on the big lake where we usually meet.’ Ts’ii choo just said ‘Ho,’ turned, and went on his way.

After some time, Naagaii tsal returned to the side of the mountain where Kwan ehdan still remained. As Naagaii tsal approached him, Kwan ehdan asked, ‘My friend, you got me in a terrible situation, what are you going to do for me?’ Naagaii tsal replied, ‘When this fight started, all I had was taken from me and here you ask me for help, in what way can I be of some help? I’ll leave my beaver skin mitts with you.’ The mitts were three-quarter length. He placed them on the ground below where Kwan ehdan was seated. At that time, whenever a tribe was at war with another, they usually built a big fire. Kwan ehdan, in the Gwich’in language, means ‘Without Fire’. Kwan ehdan explained to Naagaii tsal, ‘Should anyone forget to extinguish a fire after a big gathering, I would like to put the fire out myself.’ This would enable Kwan ehdan to carry a torch of fire with him whenever he travelled. He was also well known to travel and survive a long time without anything to eat. After a while, his friend Naagaii tsal departed and he was once again left alone.

After a while Kwan ehdan came down from the place and pulled the beaver mitts on and followed his friend. Naagaii tsal had already reached his camp where his tribe was waiting. By this time, Kwan ehdan reached their morning camp and from a distance he saw a person sitting by a huge fire. He drew in closer to camp and his brother’s pup ran joyfully towards him. It was said that this little incident, when the pup came running towards him, that Kwan ehdan felt a lump of sadness in his throat for his dead brother. By this time, he was very close to the camp and he was surprised to recognize his sister-in-law sitting by the fire. He was over-joyed and very happy to see her. He said, ‘Thank you, my sister-in-law, you are still alive.’ But she replied very weakly, ‘But I am badly hurt so don’t expect me to live very long. When the enemy started fighting, I crawled away under a snow bank and was unseen by anyone. After the enemy killed everyone, they walked over the snow bank under which I laid and they tore the two main tendons at the back of my ankles.’ As a result, Kwan ehdan’s sister-in-law was unable to walk. He tried his best to help her, putting her in a little sled and the pup pulled the sled. Before they
left camp, Kwan ehdan took a burning twig and with this they travelled on their way, wandering through the country. Wherever they went, he would kill rabbits and in this way he had managed to keep his dear sister-in-law alive.

After some travelling, his sister-in-law said to him, ‘One of these days, when the pup is pulling me far behind and you hear the pup whimpering and howling, you will know that I have passed away. Do not bother to check on me, just keep on going.’ So after they camped three nights, Kwan ehdan heard the howling of the pup in the distance. He did not bother to check as he was told, so instead he built a fire and after a while the pup scrambled toward him and moved on. Kwan ehdan accidentally dropped the twig and it blew out instantly in the snow and now he was really without fire. So, whenever he was hungry and he killed a rabbit, he would immediately remove the intestines and eat them while they were still warm. This was his only source of living.

One day he came upon an old trail made earlier in the winter. The trail was faint but Kwan ehdan and the pup travelled on until they came to the shore of a lake. From the shore, Kwan ehdan spotted a wolverine running in their direction. Before the wolverine saw them, Kwan ehdan ran on the trail a ways and grabbing the pup in one arm and a heavy stick in another, he huddled and played possum. They laid perfectly still as the wolverine approached and circled them. First he sniffed Kwan ehdan’s feet and then ran to his head and sniffed there. He again circled them. Just then, Kwan ehdan clubbed the wolverine over the head with a big stick. This hard blow killed the wolverine. Kwan ehdan immediately skinned the animal, leaving the carcass on the lake; then he travelled on. He did not stop once on his way, as he did not have any means with which to build a camp fire. He walked and walked for a long time, until he came to a just deserted camp made the same morning. As he neared the camp, he noticed that one of the camp fires was still lit. He immediately put more wood on the fire and built a huge fire, thus causing the smoke from the fire to curl high into the sky.

In the meantime, the people who had camped there earlier, had journeyed far. There was an old lady who was travelling at the end of the long line. The group had travelled up a hill and all the climbing had exhausted the old lady so she decided to sit down and rest for a while. While resting, she looked down and in the distance where their morning camp was situated, she saw the smoke curling high in the sky. Apparently, after making the fire Kwan ehdan had fallen into a deep and heavy sleep.

Later on when he awoke, he was surrounded by the group of people that had camped there earlier. He suddenly leaped up and swiftly ran down the trail. The men of the group were unable to catch up with him. So Kwan ehdan stopped and turned, facing them. He said, ‘All my people were killed and I’m alone. I have been travelling without food and had no possible way to build a camp fire. This is the
first camp that I came upon that had any fire. So after travelling for a long time in the cold weather and without food or fire, the heat from the fire felt very comfortable. My friends, you must know me, it’s Kwan ehdan.’ With this, the people recognized him and shouted with glee, ‘It’s Kwan ehdan, it’s Kwan ehdan.’ He rejoined them at the fire place and he pulled out his wolverine skin. As he showed them the pelt, he asked them, ‘Are you all willing to fight with me?’ To this matter, they all agreed. They then all returned to the rest of the group whom they left on the hillside. There they explained to the other people who Kwan ehdan was; they explained all about his misfortunes and about how Naagaii tsal had killed all his people in the spring. After joining the new people, Kwan ehdan cut the wolverine skin into narrow strips and divided it equally among the people.

So Kwan ehdan now had a group with whom to avenge against Naagaii tsal and his tribe. The group travelled on and on and the weather turned warmer. One day they came upon a recently abandoned camp. They followed the people and for many days they followed the trail of their enemies. Apparently, the woman was travelling with the enemy, but her love for Kwan ehdan was greater than it was for Naagaii tsal. Along the way, she would scratch a mark on all the willows to indicate the way they were going. Where there was no willow, she would take the orange colouring from driftwood ashes and smear it under her moccasins to mark the stones on the trail. The rest of the group did not notice this.

Kwan ehdan’s people followed the marked trail for many months. Soon it was late fall and they were nearing the big lake where they held their usual meets. Here the group separated and little groups went different ways. An old man’s three sons, on a different route, had not returned and it was believed they had been killed by the enemies. The men then decided to do away with the old man. The old man told the people, ‘Many times have I spoken to my sons and given them advice. Why can’t we wait a little longer for them to return?’ So within a couple of days the sons returned and brought news about sighting the enemy camp.

Kwan ehdan’s tribe was happy to hear the news. The boys explained how they discovered the enemy’s camp. They had been travelling for quite some time and one foggy day they were on the banks of a lake. The fog had suddenly lifted and they spotted the big encampment of their enemy. They did not know what to do so they dug large holes in the ground and lay there. They came up with an idea. They gathered some moss and started covering themselves with it. It took them a good day to do a good job of creating the image of grizzly bears. The next day, they set off for some hills near the camp and crawled around slowly. Suddenly, the people at the camp below spotted the bears.

No one bothered them as they did not know what to do, besides, they were from further down the river and they did not have grizzlies in their part of the country. The only person they could ask was the woman. So they asked her, ‘How
do grizzly bears look in your part of the country?’ She replied, ‘They look exactly like those.’ Actually, she lied to them for she did not care very much for the people with whom she was travelling. So the people believed her and they all settled down and ignored the bears.

Meanwhile, back on the hill, the three boys disguised as grizzlies were not sure whether they were seen or not so they went to the other side of the hill and remained there for a day just to make sure. Nothing happened so they removed all the moss and returned back to their camp. It was about then that Kwan ehdan’s people decided to do away with the old man. Soon afterwards, Kwan ehdan’s tribe packed and started for the enemy’s camp by the big lake. This took many days and finally they reached the location and the enemy was still camped there. They had managed to move in without being seen.

Kwan ehdan turned himself into a spider and during the evening went down to Naagaj tsal’s camp. The woman had expected Kwan ehdan’s tribe about this time of the year, so every evening she would go to the shore of the lake and sit there. Naagaj tsal had the same feeling so he would leave the camp and not return for days sometimes. Kwan ehdan went to the lake shore and changed into a man again. He stood only a short distance away from the woman. As they dared not speak out loud for fear of getting caught, Kwan ehdan motioned to her in sign language and asked her the shortest way around the lake to the camp. In answering, the woman filled her hand with some water and threw it in the directions as an indication. After getting the information, he turned into a spider again and returned to his people.

Now Naagaj tsal noticed the woman throwing the water so he approached her and asked, ‘You know that the water is cold this time of the year. What did you throw the water on?’ She answered, ‘Well, there was a mosquito flying around me, so that’s what I threw it on.’ In the meantime, Kwan ehdan reported the shortest way to the enemy’s camp. That’s where they travelled next, they moved in very close.

Naagaj tsal still had the feeling that the time for war was very near and the time for his enemy’s arrival was very close. He took his daily walk and watched very closely. The woman was also watched extremely closely to prevent her from betraying them. Two men guarded her during the night. Still, she had a habit of gathering wood early in the morning. One morning while out doing her task, Kwan ehdan came to her and said, ‘My people are very hungry. See what you can get for us and where is my friend?’ ‘He has gone hunting,’ and with that she picked up her pile of wood and started back to camp.

On her way she tore the undersoles of her moccasins and purposely made the hole larger. Nearing her tent, she threw her pile of wood carelessly outside the door and went into the tent. She went straight to her bed where she kept a ration
of dry meat and took some and stuffed it into her clothing. After she mended her moccasins, she returned to Kwan ehdan and gave him the dry meat. He then told her what to expect the next day. ‘About this time tomorrow, you will first hear the hooting of an owl and then the sound of a ptarmigan. After you hear the call you will walk outside of your tent.’ So after she returned to her tent, she asked the two men to look at the fish nets. They had a big catch and she cleaned all the fish and cut them in half and stuck an arrow through each one. During the night the fish had frozen to the arrow. She took a knife to bed with her. She pretended to be very uncomfortable and she was continuously tossing and turning in bed. As she was tossing and turning, she was also cutting the blanket down the centre and sliced as far down as her feet and was listening at the same time. Finally, she heard an owl hooting and then she listened for a while and then heard the ptarmigan. She waited a while longer and suddenly jumped out of bed. As she was running through the door, the two men shot arrows at her but her little trick with the frozen fish worked.

Just then, Kwan ehdan’s people attacked the camp and killed all the people. During the squabble, Kwan ehdan noticed Ts’ii choo sleeping, and remembering the deal they made at the foot of the mountain earlier, he ruthlessly clubbed him over the head and killed him. Kwan ehdan then turned on Naagaijt’s youngest brother who started running as soon as he spotted him. Kwan ehdan chased him around the foothills of a mountain. The younger brother knew that his older brother, Naagaijt, was in the area but Kwan ehdan caught up with him and killed him. He then undid the dead man’s hair and placed him sitting up on the trail. Soon Naagaijt came along and saw the body. He muttered to himself, ‘I have an idea of who did this, it’s Kwan ehdan.’ He jumped over his dead brother’s body and started hitting his arms. He clubbed his arm again and again until finally he broke it in half. He said, ‘If he was that tough and strong, how is it that Kwan ehdan killed him?’ While he was standing by the body, Kwan ehdan came up behind him and together they walked back to the camp. There was not a live person around so they just sat down together for a while and then they both got up and went their separate ways.29
length, he had a whole household of women, some of them had husbands, others
not. But nobody would dare say anything to him because he was dangerous.

This one time, there was a man by the name of ‘Dry Head.’ He had just built a
home and he and his wife were getting along very well. She was a nice looking
woman. This man was looking around and saw this woman who was married to
this man, Dry Head, and he told her, ‘You must stay with me.’ She could not refuse
otherwise she would have been killed right there. So she had to go with him. In
the meantime, her husband was out hunting. When he came back he found out
that this man had taken his wife. He felt very badly and so did his wife. She missed
her husband. He did not know what to do, so he went to this man and told him
that not too long ago he just was married and they were happy and had just built
a home. ‘Can I give you a present so that you can give me my wife back?’ What
kind of present we do not know, but it must have been something valuable. But
instead of handing this present to him, he put it at the man’s feet. The man sat up
and took that present and threw it away. ‘I have done this to many people and you
are the only one who is begging for your wife. You will not get your wife back, so
get out.’ This man, as we said before, his name was Dry Head. He replied to the
man and said, ‘If that is the way you think, so it shall be.’ This means that in the
near future, his enemies would kill him. So he left the tent.

In the meantime, this woman was planning to make her escape and try to get
back to her husband, which she did. As soon as the woman got back to her hus-
band they made their escape but this man did not forget. He was going to look for
this woman until he got her back. This man had many servants and every day he
would tell them, ‘Look all over the country and if you see any camps, let me know.’
They would go out but they did not look around, they only pretended. Finally, he
got fed up with this. He said, ‘I will go out myself and look all over.’ The next morn-
ning, he left his camp and the first camp he came to was that of his older brother.
His older brother told him, ‘Come in and have something to eat, then you can con-
tinue on your journey.’ Although his brother was a mean man, he still loved his
brother and he talked to him. He told him, ‘I have not seen you for a long time. We
have made you a nice coat and some clothes here, all made out of caribou skins.
We will give you these as a present and I would advise you to turn back from here
and go back to your camp. I do not want you to get hurt and ask you not to go any
further than here.’ He never listened to his brother. He took the clothes and threw
them out. He said, ‘I am still going and I am going to get them.’ So his brother told
him, ‘If that is the way you think, then do whatever you want.’

His brother happened to have three sons, all grown up. The oldest son had a
stone hammer. He told his son, ‘You can go with your uncle but do not hurt him in
any way unless he is in the wrong. Try and protect him.’ He sent his boy with his
brother to this camp. It just happened to be Dry Head’s camp that they arrived at.
As soon as Dry Head found out that this man had arrived in camp, he told his wife,
‘Go and hide yourself but not in the bush. Go down to the river and hide yourself under a river bank.’

The bad man looked all over for her but could not find her. He thought to himself, she must be hiding close to the river someplace. He walked down to the bank of the river. Just then they happened to see a muskrat swimming down the river. The people told him look at the muskrat but he did not pay any attention to the people. Finally, he looked up and sure enough there was a rat swimming on the river. As he was looking up, someone let an arrow go and shot him under the arm. He jumped into the river, but his nephew jumped in after him with his stone hammer and hit him over the head with this hammer.

After they had killed this bad man, there were steady wars. Some people had liked him, some disliked him. What they were after now were the people that liked him, they wanted to get after the people who had killed this man. All had wanted to kill his nephew because they thought that, as he had used his hammer on his uncle, he was guilty. The way they found out he had used his hammer to kill the bad man, was when they burned his body, they found his skull had been broken, so they figured the nephew had killed his own uncle with the hammer. Now they were after this boy. They had wounded him but they did not kill him. Still, he was badly wounded and could not do anything to help the people. He always said, ‘Whenever you do wrong to other people at any time, you will get the same back.’ — This is the end of the story.36

This girl’s parents happened to be staying alone and she was big enough to snare rabbits and any other small game. One day she told her parents she was going out to visit her rabbit snares. So she went out and did not return that day and also that night. The next morning her parents were very worried and they went out looking for her. They came to a place where they figured the Eskimo people had captured her, but still, they were not sure. They kept on searching for her until fall time and then they gave up.

In the meantime, she had been captured by the Eskimo people and they took her down to the coast with them. At a later date, they gave her two boys for her husbands. These boys were always going some place hunting and they were hardly ever home. So one day they went out again and it was during the summer. They came back home and told their wife go down and look at the canoe. She did not know what it was all about. Anyway, she went down and here in the canoe they had her brother’s head. She could not cry because if she had cried, they would have killed her, too. So her husbands asked her, ‘Is that any relation of the bad man killed by one of his nephews.'
yours?’ She told them, ‘No—it may be one of my people but I really do not know.’ She knew all this time that her husbands had killed her brother but she would not shed any tears because she knew that she would pay back her husbands for that. She told them, ‘When my people, the Gwich’in, make war and they win, they always make a big sports event. If you win a war, now you have to celebrate that. If you do celebrate that means you will have good luck all the time. Now we are going to do all kinds of sports and keep it up all day and all night and then we will have a big dance.’

Now, she kept this up for two nights and two days. Nobody was allowed to sleep, not even the children. The people were really tired but still she did not give up. The final sports event they had was a kayak race. So all the Eskimos took their kayaks and they had to go so far in the race. Some kayaks were very easy to paddle and were fast. (They had to be, because they were used for hunting seals and whales.) She was standing on the bank watching the men and she watched to see which was the lightest and fastest kayak. She kept an eye on the kayaks until the end of the race. At the end of the race, she told her husbands, ‘When my people achieve a victory over their enemies they always visit their nets and they have a meal of dry fish and then they go to bed.’ There was one thing about this woman—her husbands obeyed whatever she told them.

Now the last thing she told her husbands again—and this also applied to the whole Eskimo tribe—‘You have achieved a great victory over your enemies. Now you take driftwood and use it for your pillow to go to sleep but you have to lay on your back and have your head over the driftwood.’ She knew that she had played out the whole camp so she started making dry fish. She was planning on escaping from the Eskimo people. She made sure her husbands were snoring. She did not hurt anybody else. All she wanted was to get rid of her husbands. As far as the people were concerned, everybody in camp was sleeping, and there was not a sound, not even from the children. Before she was going to start her action, she went down and cut holes in every kayak she saw except the one that she had figured as a really fast kayak. After she made sure this was done, she went back home and her husbands were still fast asleep, their heads over the driftwood. She took a knife and cut their throats. Then she took the kayak and made her escape.

In the morning, when the people got up they could not find this woman; her name was Grey Wings, Ahts’an veh. She was a very smart woman. They looked for her but she was not in camp and they found the two husbands dead with their throats cut. The Eskimo people wanted to pursue her to try and punish her. They started in their kayaks but every one of them was cut on the bottom. Some of the people went in them and drowned. They never did catch her. They searched for her but never did find her.
In the meantime, her parents were still alive. She knew where her parents always made dry fish in the summer for the winter and that was a long ways but she made it back. Her old dad had set some nets in the creek and every day he would go up and visit his nets and all at once he heard a noise which sounded like half a human voice and half a bird voice. When she made a noise to her dad she said, ‘Ahts'an veh, Ahts'an veh, here I am, here I am.’ Her father could not make it out as she had been away from camp for quite a while.

This kept on for about three days. Her dad came home that time and told his wife, ‘I have been hearing this noise for the past three days when I visit my nets. Maybe someone is hungry. Have you got some dry fish made? Let us take some dry fish and hang it in the bush and when I visit my nets we will see what happens in the night.’ Next morning, the old man went to his nets and went ashore and looked for the dry fish and sure enough it was gone. This happened twice. On the third morning, the old man went to the nets and here it was his own daughter, Ahts'an Veh. The old man was so happy to see his daughter again, he told his daughter that her mother and himself were very worried, ‘as we thought you had died long ago. Tonight after dark I will come up here again and you will go home with me and see your mother, too.’

So after dark the old man went up the creek again and Ahts'an Veh was waiting. Her dad put her in the canoe and took her home. Those days, people had to be very careful because they could be sought by their enemies at any time. So instead of taking their daughter in public they had to hide her. They put her under their blankets so nobody would notice her. They had to feed her, and it just happened one day that a little boy came to the old man for a visit and they were cooking fish and they took part of this cooked fish and put it under the blanket but the little boy was watching. Of course, they gave the little boy some fish to eat and the little boy thanked them and out he went.

He told some people about what he had seen and then the people became suspicious that there must be someone in the old man’s camp. They asked him what was going on. He told them the truth. ‘A long time ago my little daughter disappeared and now she has come back,’ but the people did not trust him for saying this. They told him, ‘Bring her out for we are going to kill her.’ But, by this time, she was a grown up woman and very smart, especially for warfare. She told her parents, ‘Let me go and tell them that the first one who catches me can marry me.’ They let her out and the people started chasing her but no one could catch her. As it happened, only two boys could keep up, and they were not even close behind her, they talked to her and told her, ‘Give up because we cannot catch you.’ She told the two boys, ‘I will give myself up to you if you make war with the Eskimos, and I will be with you. Because I had a son and I am always thinking of him, I will go back and rescue my son from the Eskimos.’ They promised her all this.
About a year later, she told her husbands, ‘We will go now. I know exactly where the Eskimos are staying and we will get my son back.’ She did not go only with her husbands, but there were many other warriors with them. When they got back to the coast, these Eskimos were still in the same place where she had made her escape. Then she looked for her son, and this is hard to believe, she knew how old her son was, here they had hung her little boy after she had made her escape. Before her warriors were going to attack, she had told the people, ‘You hold back while I go and see my father-in-law.’ (Her father-in-law was an Eskimo and at this time she could talk in Eskimo.) She came to his camp and told him, ‘I was looking for my people but I could not find them so I have come back to you.’ When he heard her voice, he took a knife and started sharpening the knife and told her, ‘Come in the house, you are still welcome.’ But when she had left the warriors, she had told them, ‘Do not do anything. Just watch me and then you can attack.’ Because she was such a smart woman they listened to her. So her father-in-law invited her in the tent and when she walked into the tent she killed everybody in the tent. As soon as the warriors saw her running out of the tent, they attacked and the Indian people achieved a great victory over the Eskimos. From there, they went back to where her dad was and this is the end of the story.30

Raven and Loon

Hyacinthe Andre

That time, Raven made a mistake. This was between him and Loon. I don’t know what colour he was before this happened, but today, there is no white on him, may be just around the eyes. And Loon, I don’t know what colour he was either.

I don’t know who started it, Raven or Loon, but then Loon said, ‘I’m going to make you fancy.’ And Raven said, ‘Well, I’m going to make you fancy first.’ Well, the Loon sure was happy. And have you seen how fancy Loon is, along the back? But the head is even more fancy. And it was Raven who did that. Aahh, shit, that’s funny. Raven, he painted Loon, it was just as if he painted him. And you know what he used? He used his own shit! You know, the Raven’s shit is just like white paint! Well, that’s what he used to make Loon more fancy.

When Raven had finished, he said, ‘That’s all, that’s good enough. You sure look fancy now!’ Loon said, ‘Me too, me too, I’m going to make you fancy.’ So Loon took some burned wood from the fire, and made a powder from it with his hands. And then he made Raven’s back fancier with that black colour. But then he suddenly made the rest black too, it was all just black!

And then Loon went into the water—the lake was not too far away. He started to dive, and he came back up a ways out. And Raven, he didn’t know what to do, but then he saw the ashes, that small ball of ashes Loon had made to paint him.
Even though Loon was a long ways out, Raven threw the ball. Loon didn’t want to get hit, so he just dived. Well, just before he dived, the ball of ashes just touched his head. And that’s why Loon’s head is just grey. 

**Chii t’iet: Raven and Red Fox**

**Hyacinthe Andre**

I will tell a story about Red Fox. Grizzly was very angry with Red Fox, so Grizzly tore his arm out. At Tsiigehtshik, people did not have a good sleep, because Red Fox was screaming with pain all night long.

Grizzly had Red Fox’s arm at Chii t’iet. Deetrin’ wanted to paddle across to Chii t’iet. Raven took one man with him, the man was called Ah’ ch’ee, he looked like echiidzir (a small hawk), he was so small. Raven took him along.

They landed below Grizzly, at Chii t’iet. ‘I will go up and visit him, I will work to get that arm back. Meanwhile, turn this canoe around so that it’s facing outward,’ Raven told him. Raven intended to come straight back down and jump right into the canoe.

Raven was sitting with Grizzly. He was telling Grizzly stories; he told him many stories. Eventually Grizzly fell asleep. While Grizzly slept, Raven tied him up into a bundle. Grizzly opened his eyes at this, but Raven told him more stories. After a while, Grizzly fell asleep again.

Raven poked at Grizzly—no movement! He grabbed Red Fox’s arm and quickly rushed outside with it. Black Bear lived across from Grizzly. Black Bear said to Grizzly: ‘Mmmmmmmy uncle, look, Red Fox’s arm!’ he stuttered. Black Bear kicked at the burning fire in front of his tent. Grizzly ran outside, but Raven was paddling away; he was already way out on the river. Ah’ ch’ee, who was supposed to turn the canoe around, had not turned it around. Despite this, Raven paddled it that way, they paddled across backward.

Grizzly was viciously scratching out mounds of earth. He said, ‘I wish I could do this to you.’ Raven, too, took a sharp stick, a metal one they say, as he dipped it into the water, he too said, ‘I wish I could do this to you.’ And Ah’ ch’ee, who was sitting at the back of the canoe, too was motioning with a mouse bone tied to a piece of wood, he too was motioning. Then they paddled back across.

Before he set out, Raven had told the people, ‘When I sing while I am paddling, have Red Fox face towards me.’ The people were listening for Raven now. Finally he was paddling back; they could hear him sing from a little ways away. He was singing as he paddled, and before he got back, the people had Red Fox ready.

When Raven was still some ways away, he threw the arm towards Red Fox with his left hand. With a smacking sound, the arm landed in place on Red Fox. With his arm back in place, Red Fox ran off. That’s the end of the story.
This is a funny story about a medicine man. The people went across the mountains to the other side, the Fort Good Hope side. There were lots of people there, too. When they got there, one man wanted to know what kind of medicine these people had. Medicine men knew through their dreams. When they dreamed, they turned into that animal. ... So that man told him, ‘Don’t make a mistake around here, don’t ever say you are hungry.’

This man told him that because he knew a monster—I don’t know which kind, because there are lots of different kinds of monsters. And the man told him about this medicine person who said that he was hungry. So they started cooking for him, one big bull moose, they cooked the whole moose, and he ate the whole moose. And when he finished he said, ‘I am still hungry.’ So they cooked about that much more. He ate all that, too. They took a pail of grease, he drank that down, too. But he was still hungry.

Then he went home, and he had half a side of a moose hanging down in his house. So he took that down, put it to the fire. He cooked the moose and he ate all that, too.

It turned out that every time he ate, he was feeding the monster, and didn’t get anything in his own stomach. When he ate the rib that he cooked at home, that was the only food he felt in his stomach.\footnote{64}

There were three children, the parents went to get meat that had been killed. The children at home behind them, they were making arrows—the oldest was later to be known as Atachuukaij. The arrow maker’s younger brother put a muskrat’s dried tail at the end of his arrow, a sharp-pointed end. One of his brothers asked him, ‘Are you going to kill anything with that?’ He replied, ‘Why are you wondering what I am going to do with it?’ - ‘Well, the poke me right here with it,’ he said, lifting up his right arm towards him. His older brother did not like this, but the younger brother told his older brother again, ‘Poke me right here.’ The older brother said, ‘If I poke you there, I will kill you, you know?’ - ‘Ah, there is no way you can kill me with something like that,’ he told him. Then he poked him straight across the body, some of the arrow showing on the other side. He had killed him.

After that, he ran away into the bush. While that, Chii choo met up with Atachuukaij. Atachuukaij came to a porcupine den, he crawled in there to get away from Chii choo—he was so scared of him. ‘I am going to block you in with a big rock,’
Chii choo told Atachuukaji, and he blocked him in with a rock. He told Atachuukaji, ‘Okay, push the rock out.’ Atachuukaji tried to push the rock out, but it did not move. He said, ‘Grandfather, I am coming out to you, take the rock away.’ Chii choo took the rock away and pulled him out, and that was that. Chii choo spoke very nicely to him, ‘My grandchild, let us go.’

They left. Atachuukaji made a bed for himself under a tree, across from where he laid down, he could hear him make a noise with dried branches while he slept—he was prepared to jump up. ‘Look, grandchild, rat houses,’ Chii choo meant big beaver houses on the lake. He kicked at them, beavers spilled out everywhere, he kicked them all, while the grandson slept, he cut off all their tails.

After this, he took a crap, water spilled out all over the place, he threw the tails into this. The boy gathered all the tails from here, and washed them for a long time in water. He cleaned them all, then he cooked them on the fire. In the meantime, he slept, and after he slept, he woke up, and placed one tail near him. He was eating cooked, roasted tail, as he was eating, he said, ‘This is tasty, can I have more?’ - ‘My grandfather, there is no more, you ate them all,’ he said.

From there they left. They travelled and eventually went their separate ways. He broke a small piece of wood off his walking stick and put it in his pocket. ‘When you are going to camp, don’t camp on the ground, tie yourself to a big branch before you sleep at night. Long ago, my dogs left; they are still gone. They are bad, you know.’

Atachuukaji was sleeping, and all at once he looked down and saw all the earth’s animals. They all were Chii choo’s dogs. ‘My grandfather,’ he said southward, ‘my grandfather, your dogs are bothering me.’ Then Chii choo spoke to his dogs. The dogs heard him call and they ran south, leaving in a blaze of blowing snow …

Before they separated, Chii choo had told Atachuukaji, ‘My grandchild, when you wake up and see the dawn sky to the south coloured red, you will know that your grandfather has died. Make sure that you say, “Grandfather,” and that you cry.’ Later on he was camping somewhere; he woke up the next morning and saw the sky to the south coloured red. Alone, he said, ‘Grandfather!’ and he cried.59

Naagaï tsal, he was finally killed by a little orphan boy. The boy was fighting—fighting! He had a strange kind of arrow. The arrow head was formed just like an ice chisel. Naagaï tsal’s coat was made from sand and gum. Nobody could kill him. But his coat had shoulder straps which held it together.
Now the orphan boy just shot his arrow in the air. It came down, hit the straps of Naagájjí tsal's jacket and cut them. Well, he just dropped! And that is why they say that the boy killed him. — That's a hard story.46

Diniizhok

*Hyacinthe Andre*

Diniizhok would jump ahead of all the people and just kind of knock down the rabbits, he was just able to club them over the head. That way he gathered a big sack of rabbits. He also passed these two wives who had rabbits. He collected their rabbits and put them in his sack and he just continued to club rabbits along the way. He then just put rabbits inside his belt by their tails, so that he was laden down with rabbits. Then he went across a lake and cut some dry wood to make a big fire. There was only an old lady there. She thought that she’d better be careful, because, when Diniizhok used his medicine power, he was very dangerous.

And then he skinned all those rabbits, put them on sticks and roasted them by the fire. By the time those two young men and the other people came along, he had roasted meat for them. The hind quarters he gave to the young men and the body parts to the old men.46

Diniizhok

*Hyacinthe Andre*

I will now tell a story about the ones they called stone-age people. This is a long time ago, a long time back. The one they called Diniizhok was a really smart man. He lived someplace around here, in this part of the country. While he slept at night, they say his younger brother would be killed, at a place called Ni'jíleey tly'et, way over past Dawson, and he found this out in his sleep. He found out in his sleep. He woke suddenly, early the next morning. He woke suddenly, and his wife was really busy alongside him in all that he did.

After he woke up, he said, ‘Give me that dried moose leg sinew that is around here. She felt around and threw him sinew this long. She gave it to him. He threw it into the open fire place in front of them. It went like this [two hands motioning a shrinking]. And then he left. He made the land shrink so it was as close as between here and Six Miles.

That country was far away. It is maybe two, three, four hundred miles away. He did this [hands coming together] to all that land far away. And then he arrived right there. As he was arriving, he saw that many people were living over there, and right there, there was a small house. From inside that small round house, someone was crying, saying, ‘May my children live.’ And he went towards there,
there was his mother. He threw the door flap up. Right there he was, the one who used to be her oldest child.

She spoke with her child right away. ‘They say your younger brothers will be killed, a blanket toss has just now been put up for them over there, and at the end of the game, they will be killed,’ she said. ‘You are here while this is happening,’ she said. He asked his mother for water, she quickly handed him water in a birch bark cup. He drank that quickly, and then he went over there, without even taking off his snowshoes. As he came walking from way over there, without stopping, he jumped over there, on top of the blanket. Just like that, with his snowshoes still on. And then he did this [motion of elbows jabbing sideways]. And then a man was twirling up like this. Meanwhile they were saying, ‘Diniizhok has arrived, Diniizhok has arrived.’ There were many stories about that man—the one they knew had arrived.

A sharp bone was also sticking out from his snowshoes, and that was just like a sharp knife. He did this on top [motion of snowshoes slashing faces], sometimes slashing downward on their faces. And after that, he got down and quickly ripped apart all the ropes. What they mean is that the moose skin is this wide and it is braided, that rope. There is no way even a truck can tear it. He tore all this up.

Meanwhile he said to some children that were passing by, ‘Let’s wrestle.’ He said this to the children, and the children wrestled with him. Eventually, he went through the big boys, and finally, also the men. One boy that was a really proud person stood up and stepped forward. He went towards him. He said to him, ‘My relative, my relative, I have arrived here from far away, and I am very tired.’ He told him that.

Meanwhile he was walking around there with him. He was doing this [feeling around with one foot] on top of the ground for any round spot of earth that was sticking out of the ground. Finally, there was round earth like that sticking out. Now really, he was thrown on the round earth, on top of the round earth sticking out. That man died right there. He killed him.

An old woman was coming from way over here, a big old woman with whom he walked away, over there. As she walked, she said, ‘What kind of person is this that killed my child?’ He went straight beside here and jabbed her—a straight bone was also sticking out back this way [motions to his elbow]. He did this to her [sharp jab with elbow]. She fell right there. He said to her, ‘Do you mean Diniizhok?’ That was that.

He had killed an old woman and he had also killed her child. As he walked among them and around the camp, there was a lot of dried meat. Even that, he took all the meat that was good. They were really afraid of him. He was right there, acting in a very dangerous way. He had even torn up a rope, after that he had killed two men. And then he took a lot of meat. And sometimes leather, too. If he
saw caribou skin, already tanned leather which would be winter clothing, he took that also. They could not do anything to him. They were really afraid of him.

And then he went back over that way. His two brothers had already pulled the mother back in a sleigh. He went after them with the meat he took. He arrived back in the country around here with them.49

Spruce gum story

Hyacinthe Andre

One man fixed his eye with spruce gum. Spruce gum was going to be a medicine. This person was saying, “I wish there was a way to heal this.” From over there, someone was saying: “Me! Me! Me!” After a while, it was spruce gum, from over there. Spruce gum was saying, “Me. Me. I am a good medicine, you know.” When it is placed on an eye or anywhere on the body that is sore. Whne it is put there, when it does this (fall off) on its own, it won’t heal good. It says, “There is no way I will heal it properly. That is because I can’t see inside very good. However, if I am left on and left on for a very long time, I will be able to heal it good.” — That is all I know they said about it. 65

Deetrin'

Edward Nazon

This is a legend of the Raven, Deetrin’. There are many such legends in the memories of the Gwich’in. 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 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, 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 Raven finished his work it looked like a raft full of junk and lots of people. 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 Raven finally said, ‘Sssh, 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.

After the Raven got his beak back, the people were so angry that they took the sun from the sky and darkness set in. Once again the people had to go to the Crow for help. They were still angry but had no choice.

It so happened that the Bear had a daughter who was expecting a child. A few days passed when she had her baby. This was a most unusual child, as it could walk and talk soon after birth.

Among the weapons owned by the Bear, he kept the sun. No one dared do anything about it for the Bear was considered very dangerous. The baby was crying one day. He continued to cry and cry until the Bear came to ask why it was that he carried on so. After a long talk, the baby asked the Bear if he might play with the bright ball. The Bear did not want the child to play with the sun as he feared he would not be able to guard it properly. As it was, the child cried until the Bear consented to let him play with the sun, only if the sun was kept inside the tent. The baby rolled the sun back and forth across the floor, with his grandfather watching closely. Finally, the Bear felt the baby had understood the need for caution so he relaxed his watch over the sun. When the baby found this out, he quickly rolled the ball out of the house and it immediately shot into the air and back into its place. When the Bear woke up, he saw that he had been tricked but by this time he had gotten over his anger, was glad to see the sun back in its place. Now it is said that the baby was really the Raven and had once again tricked the Bear to get what he wanted. The Raven could not fly in the dark and needed the sun light. Of course, once the anger of the people had died down, they also realized that the sun should be where it was most useful to everyone. Raven was indeed wise.
Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife. They had two sons. The life of this family caused them to move every day searching for food. At this time, they were very unsuccessful in their attempts to find food, despite the fact that the man was out from morning until dark. He did not see any tracks and did not eat for several days. He became so weak he could barely take a step.

One day, the old lady was making camp. It just so happened that there was a bear close by which she was able to kill. Without any ceremony, the woman pulled the bear to camp, making a feast for herself and two sons. She was a cruel and selfish woman and not concerned about her husband. As a result, she hid the remainder of the meat before her husband came home. She advised her two sons not to tell their father of the hunt. The boys who had eaten well and well knew starvation were also afraid of the old woman and did what she asked.

One evening, her husband came home after hunting for several days. He was tired and hungry. That day, the old lady had greased the boys’ hair with bear grease. The old man noticed this and asked, ‘Where did you get the fat to dress the boys’ hair?’ The old lady replied, ‘What do you think it is? Why I greased their hair with willow grease.’ The old man believed his wife and said no more.

It came to pass that the old man became weak from not eating. He had many hunting trips but was still not successful. The old man had taken to his bed from starvation. One evening he heard footsteps at the front door. It was the brother of the old man. He was very happy to see that his younger brother had caught up with his family. The old man was more than half starved so he could not rise very quickly. ‘My brother, how good it is to see you. I have been without food for weeks.’ His brother replied, ‘Why do you say this, dear brother, you must have had something to eat, as I see that there is a bear skull in one of your camps.’ ‘What is that you say, brother?’ he asked as he looked at his wife. At this, she went out and brought in a whole bear rib covered with fat. As punishment, the two men threw the bear rib in the fire. This made a big flame. While the fire was in full blaze, the two brothers took hold of the cruel woman, swinging her around until she was completely burned by the flames. Her skull survived the flames and started to roll around the fire. The two brothers left without saying another word. The two small boys were left alone as punishment for their selfishness and for helping their mother to keep all the secrets of selfishness.

The two boys were very scared when they saw the skull rolling around and around the fire. They left running without caring or knowing which direction they took. Finally, they became exhausted and stopped for a minute. Their rest was not long lived as the skull continued to follow close behind them. The youngest boy
dropped a sharp object, this became a large mountain. The boys were able to make some headway for a short time. After a time, the skull again caught up with them. They dropped a second object to obstruct the movement of the skull. This turned into a rough, high mountain. The skull had difficulty in getting over the mountain this time but the strength of the skull was such that it finally climbed over and continued to chase the boys.

It was then that the two boys got to the shore of a big river. When they got to the beach, they saw a little bird swimming around. ‘Little bird,’ said the boy, ‘please help us and take us across the river to the island that we see in the distance.’ The bird obliged the two boys and offered his back to them. They left for the island and to safety from the skull. The boys thanked the bird for his kindness. This was not the end to the problems. After the boys came to the islands, the younger brother cried constantly, so finally the older brother made a playing ball. They played day after day until a bear came for a visit. They ball bounced away from the brothers, rolling toward the bear. The bear picked up the ball and would not give it back, not matter how hard the boys tried to fool him. Finally the bear said, ‘Come and get it yourself.’ The older brother jumped into the bear’s canoe to get the ball. Before he could get back on to the shore, the bear pushed the canoe away from shore and paddled out to the bay. When the bear came to his home, he pulled up the canoe and turned it over, overtaking the boy. The bear called his daughters, ‘Girls, girls, I have a present for you.’ When his two daughters heard this, they ran to the canoe and turned it over and found the very handsome boy. As was the custom, the marriage ceremony took place and the boy acquired two wives.

Meanwhile, the younger brother who was left on the island became very sad for he knew that he would never see his dear brother again. He called out to the sky, ‘Brother, I shall become a wolf from this moment.’ With this, the big brother heard the howl of the wolf. Therefore, he had been warned.

One day, the bear asked his son-in-law to perform some dangerous tasks. It appeared that the bear was seeking a way to destroy the boy, even though he was married to his daughters. The boy made himself a bow and arrow. He did not have any feathers for the arrows so he asked the old bear where he could find some. It was not the intention of the bear to make it easy so he sent the boy for the feathers to a place over a high cliff where the eagles made their nests. It was a dangerous task indeed as the boy would either have to kill an eagle or be killed himself. The nest jutted over the cliff and the boy carefully climbed over the rough edges reaching the nest. An eagle fought to keep his place but the boy was lucky and was able to kill an eagle. He returned with the feathers to the old bear. Next, it was important to get just the right kind of spruce gum to fasten the feathers to the arrow. Again, the bear directed the boy to a place where he might find some of this gum for his arrows. The boy had travelled many miles over rough terrain until
he came to a place where he found a large hole in the ground. From the hole, a sticky gum substance boiled continually. The heat from the boiling gum was intense. The oozing mass threatened to splash on the boy when he tried to get close enough to get a small amount of gum he needed for his arrows. It so happened by chance that the boy picked up a large stick and aimed to the centre of the hole. When the stick hit the gum, it stopped boiling almost immediately. The gum cooled, allowing the boy to get close enough to get what he needed.

The bear was furious when he had heard of the boy’s success. The bear had thought the magic of the boiling gum would draw in his son-in-law to its core and burn the boy to death. The bear did not think the boy was smart enough to figure out the way to stop the gum from boiling. Now the boy had all he needed to complete the bow and arrow, allowing him to be fully equipped to hunt. Of course, he had to ask the bear where to hunt. The bear told the boy that he knew of an island where the hunting was good.

The bear and the boy left for the island, however, the bear did not stay. As soon as the boy got on shore he pushed the boat out into the water and left the boy on the shoreline. He thought that once he had left the boy, he would not be able to come to shore. As it happened, the boy turned into an eagle and flew to the boat and the old bear. He grabbed the bear by the hair of his head, lifting it far above the boat and to the open water. Once he got to a place that was very deep, he dropped the bear into the sea. The bear drowned and the boy continued on his way home. The boy’s wives asked after the bear, or as it was, the old man. But they were only told that the bear was not seen since he had left the island much earlier than the boy. It is only good to live so long if you make it a practice to be cruel for no reason at all.178

The story of Ahts’an veh, or Grey Wings, is of a battle between Eskimo and Gwich’in Indians. The battle was won by the Eskimo and Ahts’an veh was captured. Just how long she lived in captivity is not told, but the story mentioned a child, so she must have lived in captivity roughly two or three years.

One day the Eskimo warriors returned from a battle; they brought back several heads. They asked Ahts’an veh if she could recognize any of the heads. She looked and saw the head of her brother and wept secretly. Someone noticed the tears in her eyes. She was asked why she had tears in her eyes. She only said, ‘I got smoked out while in the smokehouse.’ So they believed her. Ahts’an veh told the people how her people always celebrated after a victory by playing all kinds of games. The Eskimos agreed that this was a good idea so the event started one
morning. There were so many games to play that they started very early in the morning. Ahts'an veh was the manager. There was a feast, foot races, dancing, wrestling; the games went on all day. The canoe race was the final event. The idea of this was to get everyone exhausted. Sure enough, by late the next morning after a big meal, men, women, and children found themselves sleeping wherever they laid down. This is what Ahts'an veh wanted.

First of all she kept track of the canoes. She knew the fastest kayak and she knew exactly where it was. Everybody went to sleep as she had anticipated. Her two husbands went to sleep, their heads sticking out of the bag that they went to sleep on. In this Ahts'an veh cut their throats wide open and shoved fresh fish eggs so as not to make any noise. Then she came back in her tent, her little boy was sleeping in the swing. She kissed him and laid a beaded necklace around his neck then she ran to the line of kayaks and cut holes into all of the kayaks except the one she was going to use.

After she finished, she took off with this fast kayak. She paddled for quite a while, spotted a dead tree, pulled up her kayak and hid in the bushes waiting to see if the warriors would take after her. Sure enough, not very long after she landed, the kayaks started to come. They knew there was one kayak missing along with her. She sat there and put one twig aside for every kayak that passed until there were no more and then she waited for their return. After a long time, they started to come back and again she started piling the same twigs until there were only two left. These she nearly left and went but changed her mind every time. After a long while, sure enough, there was the last two kayaks on their way back. Even then she stayed there for a while before taking off again. When she got to the head of that river, she left the kayak and continued her flight on foot.

It was on this flight that she ran into an army of Eskimo warriors resting and eating berries. Being a smart woman, she tore a piece of her clothing and wrapped it around a bunch of dried stakes. This made it look like another man with arrows. No one took any notice of her. She pretended eating berries until she got far enough away to run. This she did. Once again she was on her way, this time she never stopped until she got to her parents’ camp.

One morning, her old dad was visiting his nets just below the camp and he heard what he thought was a bird saying, ‘Ahts’an veh—Ahts’an veh,’ or ‘Grey Wing—Grey Wing’. The old man never said anything and went home. He told his old wife that he heard a bird saying, ‘Ahts’an veh—Ahts’an veh.’ This made his old woman cry and the people noticed that. They cried all the time since they had lost their daughter. The next day, his wife told the old man to put out a piece of dried fish which he did. When he went back later the dried fish was not there. Then he cried out loud saying, ‘I have lost my girl long ago—what does this mean?’ Just then, from nowhere, someone embraced him from behind. He turned around and there was his long lost daughter, Ahts’an veh.
But his daughter told him not to say anything but to go home and hide her from others. Since she had lived in captivity, the warriors might kill her for being a spy. So her father wrapped her up in grass, bound her. When he came back home he pulled up his canoe and turned it over with Ahts’an veh and all. Later in the evening, after dark, he packed her up and hid her behind their blankets and they stopped crying. People around them noticed that they cried no more in those war years. Things like this were noticed right away and investigated. For that reason, people close by sent a young stuttering boy over to the old people. It just so happened that they were eating when the boy came in at the same time. He saw the old lady give a plate to someone under the blanket. He also noticed that the hand that reached for this place was tattooed and decorated with beads. After lunch, the boy went home and he was asked if he noticed anything and he started to say, ‘I-I-I-I...’ but before he said the second word, someone slapped him in the mouth and everybody rushed out and headed for the old people’s tent. Ahts’an veh—being a woman of war—knew what was coming when she heard the noise. She asked her parents to release her. This they did and even before anyone got anywhere near the camp she was once again on her way with all the warriors behind her, but no one was fast enough to catch up with her. Two boys were not far behind her. They asked her to give herself up to them. To this she agreed if they would go on the warpath with her. This was agreed upon and the two boys married her right there.

After the ceremony, all the men went on the warpath right to the coast from where Ahts’an veh had fled. After a long journey they were close to the camp where Ahts’an veh had lived in captivity. The road leading to the camp was full of excitement, it was on this road that Ahts’an veh saw a boy hanging in between two trees, dead and dried up and she recognized her little boy. This made her very angry and she decided her army would clean up the camp. When the army got to the camp, she went straight to her parents-in-law’s camp saying, ‘Ahts’an veh has returned.’ The old people replied, ‘Yes, sit down.’ Her father-in-law started to sharpen his knife when Ahts’an veh slashed the knife from him and killed everyone in the tent before anyone was able to move. After she finished, she looked around—there was no one in sight—no one was left in the camp.

How the Gwichya Gwich’in got their name

A long time ago, a man climbed up into the mountains along Tsiigehnjik. Turning back to look down towards the river, he noticed that the place where Tsiigehnjik and Nagwichoonjik come together, is a really flat area. The man later visited the people living there, and then he told them that he would call them ‘the people of the flat land,’ Gwichya Gwich’in.
Crow Story
Annie Norbert

Crow was no good, you know. In the olden days, they say all the animals are human beings, men and women. And Crow likes to fool the people and cheat them too. He gets kicks out of it, you know. Sometimes he would scream and make all kinds of noise. Well, I guess he made everybody tired. They couldn’t sleep because he made so much noise, especially at night. So, the men grabbed him and they took his beak so that he couldn’t talk anymore. They hurt him. He was really suffering, his mouth was sore. He made a plan to get his beak back. He went up the Red, not very far from here and he made a raft with wood. Then he made people out of moss and placed them on top of it. He picked berries and he made their eyes too. Then when he was on top of Vik’ooyendik, he got a little boy to look in his hair for lice. He told that little boy, ‘Watch for raft.’

All of a sudden, that little boy said that a raft was coming. Crow told him that the people on the raft were coming from the mountains. But he fooled the little boy, he lied. They say Crow is bad to make medicine. Crow told the little boy to go down to the Flats and tell everybody that people were coming from up the Red. Everybody ran to the bank to meet the people, except for a blind old woman who was looking after Crow’s beak. She wanted to go to the shore, too, but she didn’t know where to put the beak. The old woman said, ‘Gee, I don’t know where to put this beak?’ That’s when Crow lifted up a corner of the tent. ‘Give it to me,’ he said. ‘Give it to me.’ The old woman was blind so she couldn’t see that Crow was speaking. She gave the beak to Crow. Crow put his beak on so fast, that he put it on crooked! That’s how Crow fooled the people so that he could get his beak back.213

Atachuukai
Tony Andre

Atachuukaij was the man ‘who lost his compass’ and got completely lost, but finally he found the Yukon River to paddle—a paddling man. He got completely lost and then he started down the river and he paddled all the way. He met lots of people along the Yukon River.

He came to two old ladies. He passed them and he turned around, and he said, ‘Gee, I might as well get a good story out of them.’ So one fell asleep, she was so old, she fell asleep and got to sleep at night. During the day she was up too long, so she fell asleep. Just one, that’s all. They had berries for him, and water or something to drink, and then he kept paddling.

He kept paddling down the river, down the Yukon River, and then he met two people, a small little girl and an older man. The girl was the old man’s daughter.
The old man was too old to shoot an arrow, so the girl did all the hunting. When Atachuukajj got there, the old man said, 'Well, you know what,' he said, 'there's a grizzly bear every night, and the only thing we use is a birch bark arrowhead. When we use the birch bark arrowhead, we can kill him, but when we use the brass, we cannot.' Atachuukajj took off after the bear with stone or brass arrowheads—something like a sharp stone. That's what they used that at the end of the arrow. 'If you use that,' the old man said, 'you can't kill him. He'll keep on coming, but you'll kill him with that birch bark arrowhead.'

So the old man he told this to Atachuukajj, and he went to sleep. He didn't care. All that time, this old man had really been the bear. He went to sleep and then he got up, and said, 'heh, heh, heh.' And that little girl, she was running: Grizzly bear was coming out of the bush! Grizzly bear was coming out of the bush! Atachuukajj jumped up. He took his arrow and he knew that this old man was gone. Only the girl was there. Well, he used that birch bark arrowhead, the one that kills. He was going to kill the grizzly with that, but a brass or stone arrowhead would never kill it, the bear would just get more mad. That's what the old man had told him.

So he put that arrowhead on, and he kept on walking towards this grizzly bear that was coming. It was not too far, so he took this fur parka off and took this bone arrowhead. Well, that grizzly bear was not very far, and Atachuukajj just took one shot, and that grizzly bear just turned around and fell down. Before the grizzly bear died, he told his girl, 'He hit me, but not with a birch bark arrowhead.'

That's how they killed people, by fooling them into using birchbark arrowheads which would not work—nobody had ever passed that place other than Atchuukajj; he passed because he killed the bear. And the bear didn't know what to do. He said, 'My daughter, my daughter, he shot me with a bone arrowhead, and he killed me. Now you, too, you go after him.' So there was a little grassy pond on the other side of the camp, she noticed that. So she jumped up, she ran over there, and that little girl too, started to be a grizzly bear. She too chased this man, Atachuukajj.

So Atachuukajj started running, and he went right into the water. He became a jackfish about that long. A jackfish, and he stayed way down underneath a log, way down where you couldn’t find him. So, this grizzly bear saw this, saw the water, tried to drink all that water. He was going to look for whatever jumped in that river, that little lake. So pretty soon the grizzly bear was getting bigger and bigger. All that water was in him, you see?—Still drinking water. So this Atachuukajj, he told this little bird flying around there, he told him to go to that grizzly bear and tell him, 'I want to get some hair from underneath your arm where it's really soft, it’s good for the nests.' That little bird's little kids were growing up, they were cold. So this little bird went to this grizzly bear and he told him that. 'Go ahead, take whatever you want.' 'While you do that,' Atachuukajj had told the
bird, ‘you just poke him. Once you go through his stomach that water will tear him open.’ That’s what he said. The little bird poked right through him, through the stomach, tore him open and killed him. Atachuukâjî had killed both of them. One got killed by being split in half by the water, and the other one with the arrow.

After that, he turned into a man again and came back. He went over to that other grizzly and he took his arrow back, he threw the shaft away, and the end he kept. Washed it good. Then he paddled again.

Way down there, he came around a corner. He came around a corner, somebody was looking for jackfish, trout. The old man who was looking for fish paddled into the river, he was coming upstream and went right by the shore. He would spear the fish with a bone spear. The old man just about hit that fish, just about hit a fish, but that fish kept getting away. Well, that fish was Atachuukâjî turned into a fish. Should the old man hit him, Atachuukâjî would twist the fish spear and take that bone away.

He did that in the end. The old man tried to spear him. Atachuukâjî came up, they came real close, and this old man speared him, but Atachuukâjî twisted this edeedâjî—that’s what he called it, edeedâjî—and he went away with it, went into the water. He just pulled out the stick, that was all.

So right away he went back to his boat, and put that edeedâjî, that spear, way in the bow of his canoe. He hid it, he thought he hid it real good, and he kept on paddling, paddling. He came around a corner and this old man told him, ‘Heh, you’re the guy who’s got edeedâjî. You’re the guy who twisted my spear.’—‘No,’ he said, ‘I paddled all the way down. I never saw anybody.’—‘No, I know it’s you.’ This old man, he knew. He knew that Atachuukâjî had his spear, you see.

‘There’s a good bed over there, you can sleep if you want to,’ the old man said. Well, Atachuukâjî was tired, he pretended to be real tired. He pulled his boat right beside him. Here, he made this boat by dreaming about it. You know, he went to sleep, and when he got up, the frame, the gunwale, everything was already made and he went back to sleep. After a while, he got up again. All the birch bark was ready to put on, and he went to sleep again. He got up, the canoe and paddles, and everything was right there. He was doing this in his sleep—and there was no water in it.

He fell asleep right there beside that old man. This old, crazy old man, he took the canoe of Atachuukâjî apart and right inside the bow, right there underneath the gunwale, that’s where he found that edeedâjî, that spear. He pulled it out and he said, ‘You see that?’ Then Atachuukâjî rebuilt his boat, but not quite the same as before. That’s why there’s water in a canoe. Now that there’s water in a canoe, he said, it’s going to be like that with people. Whoever has a boat in the water, will have water inside. Before that, it was dry.
Now, at that time he saw a Crow sitting down there, right by the shore. And he came to this Crow and he told Crow, ‘Well, it looks like you’re sad. I have come from a long ways. I just paddled around, paddled down this river, just to see what I can see, see what I can do.’ So Raven told him, ‘Go to the top of that hill, way up there. I’m going to go with you—you look in my head.’

Well, at that time, another Crow was supposed to come back, but he never found this Crow. ‘That’s why I’m sad,’ Crow said. ‘You look in my head.’ Inside his head there were lots of bugs. Atachuukaij pulled all the bugs out. Towards the end, Crow fell asleep, so Atachuukaij threw him down. It was a straight cliff, you see? Crow fell down that way and he was all smashed up. Pretty soon, there was blood here and there, and little pieces of beak, hind leg, head, and feet.

Oh, Atachuukaij went back to the canoe and travelled downriver again. He came to a camp, everybody was laughing down that way. Sometimes they were dancing. He came to a camp and went into the house and—nobody! An empty house! Went to another place, and another place like that—nothing!

Meanwhile, Atachuukaij saw a big loche from the shore; it was a really shallow shore. After a while, Atachuukaij went behind the house, down to the river and behind the point. He heard everybody laughing behind there again. He came to another place, another place like that—nobody. He came to another place, same thing. He said, ‘You damn Crow, now I know, it’s just you. You’re the one that made medicine on me.’

Well, Atachuukaij turned around and went back up river. He passed all those places. There was laughing and talking everywhere, but he couldn’t see anybody. So he got back up to the place where he had thrown Raven down. He picked up a basket kettle (that kettle was made out of birch bark), and went up there. He picked up Raven’s head and all his feathers, but he saw that Raven had four toes before—Raven, he had four toes but Atachuukaij threw two away. He didn’t want Raven to have them.

So he picked up only six toes, but not the rest. And you know how he made a Crow out of that? He put that basket way to the side, that high basket. He pulled his pants down, and he sat on top of it, and he farted, farted, farted.

Pretty soon, Atachuukaij looked at Raven. ‘How are you?’ he asked him. ‘Oh, my feet, one of my toes is missing on each foot. Could you look for them up that way? There are still two toes missing.’ So he went and searched up that way. He saw the toes, but he didn’t want to touch them and came back down. He said, ‘Nothing yet.’ So he kept on farting. Pretty soon, somebody hit the basket. Well, he looked inside it, and there was Crow sitting up. He came out, ‘So what are you going to do now?’ Atachuukaij asked. ‘Bring me down river,’ Raven said. ‘I’m going to see my people.’
Atachuukajj put Raven in the boat and paddled downriver. He put him in the bow. They went down river, came to this one place—boy, there was lots of fun. Everybody was dancing all the time, but he didn’t see anybody. ‘Well,’ Crow said, ‘get to shore and hit those loche.’ So he hit the loche. Holy cow, all those people were just coming out of the water! Every loche he got was a person. Pretty soon there were lots of people.

He came to other places like that, then he kept paddling. He didn’t want to stay with those people, he just kept going. He left Crow around where he had first seen those people coming out. He didn’t want to stop, he just kept going.

Well he came around a corner, and he saw a cabin way up the hill, the door was wide open. There was a man far below it, walking uphill. Atachuukajj walked up that hill. He came to the door. There was an old woman sitting there and he told the old woman, ‘Where is my granddaddy?’—‘Since when do you have a granddaddy?’—‘My grandfather, where is he?’—‘Oh, he’s gone downriver, hunting.’ She said, ‘Don’t touch anything that belongs to that old man because he’ll know. He’ll know.

But Atachuukajj, he grabbed one of the wooden dishes, he took a cup—something like a scoop or cup—he took that, dipped it in water and put it on top of the open fire, burned it. Drank that hot water and took off. He just threw the dishes everywhere. Maybe the old woman put them back, but still! On his way down, he passed that old man coming up. The old man came real close to him, he knew already. Atachuukajj told him, ‘Well, I’m going to the sea.’ So he kept on paddling.

Pretty soon he heard an old woman screaming up that way. That’s where the first jealousy started. That old man started a fight with his wife—the first jealous one. He killed that old woman because Atachuukajj drank water from his cup, and maybe he thought Atachuukajj had fooled around with that old lady too. So the old man killed her and then he created a big storm.

So Atachuukajj pulled his canoe way up inside the hills, right up to the top, in this sheltered place. Pretty soon, the water was going up, going up, going up—big storm! Snow! And the water was coming up pretty close to him, maybe seven or eight feet away—the water was still coming. Finally it stopped. Stayed like that. After a while, it started to go down. Dropped way down in the end. So he waited two, three more days and he went back down to the water. Pulled his canoe back down, put it in the water and went on downriver.

And as he was going downriver, he saw somebody else. There were two old ladies. They lived in one teepee by themselves. This side was nice looking lady. And that side was mice. When Atachuukajj got there, gee, this one was otter, otter! She was otter—Otter Woman, and that one the Mice Woman. Leader of mice, I think. And then he told her he was thirsty for water, coming a long ways from upriver, paddling and meeting people, meeting this and that. ‘I got no place, but
not very far up from here I passed a creek with nice cold water.’—‘Well, why didn’t you drink water that time?’

So this old lady, this Otter Woman, really liked this Atachuukaij, and she said, ‘Well, I’m going to get water for you. It’s not very far up from here.’ Well, earlier, Mice Woman had told him the story: Otter Woman would do that, and then she killed people, and made pemmican from them. People’s meat she made pemmican from and then she gave it back to other people. That’s the kind of woman she was.

So, he went up to that creek. Otter Woman screamed: ‘Right here in this creek, you mean?’ Atachuukaij said: ‘No, it’s another one.’—‘This creek, you mean?’ she screamed at him. And he said, ‘No, I mean another creek.’ So after a while, the mice grew roots, and from that Mice Woman gave everything to Atachuukaij to eat. She fed him real good with mice. All the while she told the story about Otter Woman and about what she did. Finally Otter Woman screamed again from a long ways away. You could barely hear her, but Atachuukaij heard her. ‘This creek you mean?’ ‘No,’ he shouted, ‘above that. One more creek right there. That’s where there’s all good water running out.’ He just wanted her to be further away, so he could paddle away, you see?

And he was getting close to the mouth of the Yukon River near the Bering Sea, not very far from there. He was going out into the ocean. There’s lots of islands there. Well, he started off. He told those little mice, ‘Thanks very much for a good feed,’ and then he took off. This Otter Woman, she came back, ‘Where’s that man?’ ‘Gone already.’

So, when he hit the ocean, he went around the islands, around the islands. Tried to find a good hiding place. Finally he got so damn tired, he just went to sleep ashore and here he was sleeping. Here he fell asleep after he ate something, I think, at the edge of the ocean, because he couldn’t see islands, nothing. He could see just water and sky, that was all. So he fell asleep.

On his way, he killed two beaver and was just too tired to bother, so he just put them underneath willow, and left them like that. He went to sleep and when he woke up in the morning, gee, all that beaver meat was gone. He looked up—it was right there. The beaver skins were tanned already. The beaver meat was all dried.

All that time Otter Woman had been sleeping right across there, right across the fire. She, too, had fallen asleep. So he grabbed a willow about that long and poked her belly. That willow was so hot, there was just steam coming out from it. It was real hot, and he just burned her right out. The damned stick came out right in Otter Woman’s mouth. And in that way, Mink came out through Otter Woman’s mouth, Mink came out. Atachuukaij grabbed the coals and rubbed Mink’s fur. It was white when Mink came out, but when Atachuukaij was through with him—he rubbed the back with coals—just black Mink ran out. And from Otter’s arsehole the Weasel came out. Ran this way. Atachuukaij grabbed a coal, he hit him, and he
hit the Weasel’s tail end. You see, that Weasel, he’s got a black tail like that, that’s where Atachuukaij hit him with the coals. He was so fast.

Then he paddled out into the ocean. He went way out into the ocean singing like that. That’s what my mom used to have a song for. What he was singing was that before the end of the world, he was going to come back. You’re going to see him come back, before the end of this world. He’s going to come back through there and come back out. Till then, he said, he would stay in there, in the ocean.

Into the sea with a small birch bark canoe. Went into the ocean. Still gone, I think. My dad told me that three times on the trap line, and my mom told me that about five, six times, I think. Same story. Right into the ocean. Before the end of the world, he said, he would come back. That’s what he was singing about.

He went out of sight in the end. I asked my mother, ‘Mom, did you see Atachuukaij go out of sight?’ ‘No,’ she said, ‘that’s what my dad’s dad told us, generations, generations, telling one another about this story.’ — That’s a real true story.13:06

Dinìizhok

Tony Andre

So one day Dinìizhok dreamed that his mom and brothers were way down in the area where the people were staying. His mother and brother ran into them, and they were taken as slaves. He dreamed this one night, and he didn’t like what he dreamed about. Whatever work had to be done—Dinìizhok’s brother or Dinìizhok’s mom had to do it. So these people were just sitting around and somebody else was working for them.

Dinìizhok saw all that, and finally those people put the blanket toss up for them. After they’d finish playing the blanket toss, they were going to kill the three. Dinìizhok knew this, so he got up and he asked his two wives to go out and get that dry sinew, moose or caribou sinew—right down to the toe. It’s just like this: When you take it out, it is made like a shoe. That was his medicine to walk, to walk across country. He got up, he was ready to go. When he told his wives to go look for edreechi’, they knew that their husband was going to go someplace. They got edreechi’ for him, and then all his clothes.

Well, by the time he got all his meat and everything outside and ready, there was ice on the lake already, so the travelling was good. Then he threw the edreechi’ and started walking. He went through that edreechi’. You see, the edreechi’ just shrunk, and then it was about that big. And Dinìizhok was in there someplace and he got over there. That’s how he travel. He cut across country from Siveezhoo down to Fort Yukon. He came to the camp where his brothers and mother were staying. They were slaves.
He got there, and he heard his mom crying in the ground house. ‘I wish my two
boys were safe, I hope they make it through. I wish they’d make it through. Why
did they pick my boys, to be condemned like that? Why me?’ Then she cried.
Diniizhok came near while she said that. He opened the door and said ‘Mother!’
The old lady looked up—holy smoke!—there was the man she had hoped for! ‘No
use crying,’ he said. ‘Give me water, Mom, give me water.’ Well, he had come a
long ways. He was thirsty, so she gave him water, cold water, right away.

‘Where are my two brothers?’ he asked his mom. ‘Your two brothers are down
there, playing the blanket toss. When they finish playing the toss, they’re going to
kill them. Now come on, hurry up,’ she told him. So he walked down there.

Diniizhok had a bone sticking right out of his elbow. There were also bones
sticking out from the front of his snowshoes. When he got close to the people,
they said, ‘Oh, Diniizhok gah hah, Diniizhok gah hah,’ ‘Diniizhok is coming,
Diniizhok is coming.’ They were all scared. ‘Let’s see what you are going to do,’
they said. Since they had started using his mom and two brothers as slave, they
had been waiting to see what Diniizhok was going to do. They wanted him down
there alone, so they’ could kill him—kill him, his two brothers and his mom. That
would be the end of Diniizhok. But when he got there, well …

So, from outside the group of people, he jumped onto that blanket. Nobody
else could jump onto the blanket with their snowshoes on, as he did. He shot way
up in the air, about 20, 30 feet. When he jumped up and down, all those bones
sticking out from his snowshoe tail just scratched them, scratched them all over
their faces. So they all just took off. He jumped back into the snow there and took
off his snowshoe. He grabbed that blanket toss and tore it right off the trees. For
the blanket toss they used a rope about that thick, four or five strand, made out of
moose skin, braided moose skin.

Now there were two little kids there. He said, ‘You guys wrestle, let’s see who is
the better wrestler.’ That one kid was real smart and won, and then they’d get
down to the older people, about 25, 30 years old. They would wrestle against each
other to see who was the strongest. And Diniizhok challenged this one man who
wore good clothes. He was going to kill that man, because those people had taken
his mother and his brothers as slaves. He grabbed this man and they wrestled. All
the while he was looking for round hard earth sticking out—you know, round hard
earth sticking out from the ground inside the snow, he was looking or feeling for
that. After a while, Diniizhok pretended to be very tired, then all of sudden he felt
some hard earth sticking out underneath, grabbed the man and killed him. Blood
was just shooting right out of his mouth! Killed him right there. Everybody was
trying to run away. They ran back to their houses.

An old lady came along, saying ‘Are you called Diniizhok? Why, why do you put
my boy through this shit?’ she asked. So, you see Diniizhok had these bones stick-
The Elders’ Stories

One night, Diniizhok dreamed again. The Slavey up Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, Fort Smith, all around there, they were all starving. He dreamed about it. So he asked two boys to go with him to that area to break trail. Whoever was hungry up there could come to Siveezhoo on that trail. So he used edreechi’ again. He cut across country, got close to those people and told them, ‘Just follow my trail. Just follow my trail. When you get to the end, to my camp there, you’ll get fish, you’ll get meat, you’ll get everything. There will be nothing to wish for.’

So that’s what they did all the way upriver right to Fort Smith. It was only a one day round trip for Diniizhok. He came back to Siveezhoo, and waited. He said, ‘Build ground houses for the people.’ All of a sudden, the people came moving in, and he had a place for them already. Oh that Diniizhok, he had about fifty, sixty men working for him. He got lots of fish. Pretty soon, everybody came and they got fish and caribou meat. They ate so darn good, they became strong enough to go back to their country, so before spring they all took off.

They got all kinds of meat in their sleighs, and some of them even took a load ahead. They’d move and take load ahead, then move, take a load ahead again and move. That’s what they did, they went back to their country. They really thanked Diniizhok, though. They had a big dance. They started dancing and when they had finished dancing, they went home. 13:05

Diniizhok
Tony Andre

Helping the people from up the river.

Returning home.
That’s a story from long ago. On the east side of Travaillant Lake, you can see a big hill. Pascal Baptiste’s dad stayed there in the summer. One day he looked across to the hill, and it seemed 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 in the water on this side of the hill, something that was higher than the hill. And that thing floating up, that was a Bluefish. Bluefish have that fin behind 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—chiujudiee, 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 going to cut straight across to Teelajji. 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!43:16

Over in the Yukon, that’s where the giant Chii choo started chasing Atachuukaji. On this side of Fort Yukon, they say, there are lots of islands in the river. That’s where he started chasing him, and Atachuukaji was trying to run away from him. But the giant knew this and followed Atachuukaji. All the way from there to here he went after him, they passed through here and over there, and up the river. One old man in Good Hope told me that when they passed the Ramparts on the Mackenzie River, Atachuukaji left his canoe there—it is still there. It’s just a rock,
turned upside down. And from there he ran ashore. The giant ran along this side of the river. He made six steps, and that created six big lakes between Norman Wells and Good Hope.

Above the Ramparts, that is where Atachuukaj left his canoe. And he also sat down at the Ramparts to rest, and his seat is still marked. And one time, he wanted to go to the washroom, he peed down the bank, and that place is still running water too, it is still a creek.

Atachuukaj did not kill Chii choo, he starved him to death. Every time Chii choo killed good things to eat, he cooked them real good. But then he wanted to go and have a good wash before he was going to eat that good food. Well, every time Chii choo did that, Atachuukaj sent a lot of animals in there to clean up what Chii choo was going to eat. So Chii choo never had anything to eat.

At last, the giant cut a piece of his own backside off and made pemmican from it. He should have eaten it right there! Instead of that he said, ‘I wonder who can freeze it for me?’ And Atachuukaj was sitting over there not too far away, so he could hear this. Now he saw a rat swimming by, and he said to that rat, ‘Why don’t you go over there and freeze that grease?’ (That’s what they called it, grease.) Could have eaten it like that, Chii choo, why did he want to freeze it?

The rat went over there and said, ‘There’s a creek over here with cold water. I’ll freeze it for you.’ So Chii choo gave the fat to that rat, and the rat swam over into the creek. Atachuukaj was sitting there. He took a little rock and threw it at that rat and hit him in the mouth. The rat let go of the fat, and it all floated down. So Atachuukaj went down to where that fat was swimming, and he took the water with that fat like that, he scooped it up with both his hands and he drank it. And since that time people drink water in that way.

Then he went back to Chii choo, and told him, ‘I lost that fat, it all fell in the water.’ That’s when Chii choo started crying and singing—something about sunrise and sunset, and that he’d never see it again. That’s the song he sang, but I don’t know how it goes. Then at last he starved to death. That’s how Atachuukaj was able to beat Chii choo. That’s what was told to me by the old people.43:17

That man’s name was Daji dhakhaji. He wanted to go to a place that he had dreamed about, but he wanted to take one person along. So he went to the foot of that hill and he told the man he’d taken along, to sit away from that hill, turn that way, so that the hill was behind him—and Daji dhakhaji, he told him, ‘Don’t look at me.’ And he got half way up, just about to that door and the guy must have
looked, because he slid down right away. He just screamed at him, ‘Don’t look!’ So he kept on going.

He came to that door, he opened it and he went in. There was a cow tied up there. It’s what in those days they called Dachan tat gwaa’aak’ii. Aak’ii they called it. Must have been buffalo, I guess—couldn’t have been musk-ox. So he went and passed that buffalo, and then there was a person standing there too, after he passed that cow. And he asked him what he wanted. Dājj dhakhajj said, ‘I’ve come to see somebody, come to visit one guy,’ so he let him go by. And he went in and those people told him, ‘After you leave here, you are going to go out the other door,’ but he didn’t want to. Then they gave him some things. Like, he got a plate, and he got something else, too. I forgot what it was, but anyway, he spent quite some time with them. He said he looked all over, all their rooms, and they had lots to eat, too. I don’t know where, but they had everything.

‘If you leave by the other door,’ they said, ‘this land is going to be as it is now for all times, but if you go out by this door, someday this land will change.’ They didn’t tell him—change how? They just told him it was going to change. But him, he didn’t want to go back out by the other door. He wouldn’t know where he’d come out. So he wanted to go back the same way he came in.

That’s where he should have left by the other door! Me, I always think of that—why he should have. He knew the country and he—I don’t think he would have got lost. If he had been a hundred miles away from that same door, that might be different, but it could have been maybe only twenty miles, something like that. Should have gone out that way.

So that’s when they told him to go out the other door, and he didn’t know what to do himself—didn’t know which way to go out. Then he left by the same door and he took that stuff, just to prove that he’d seen somebody. That’s when he came out by the same door, and he went back to his partner and they went home.

That’s why this story is about Dājj dhakhajj. That’s what they mean when they say, ‘Fly killer went down to,’ just like he went to town to get supplies, it’s pronounced that way anyway in Gwich’in. That’s where he came back out, the same way, and he went home. He should have told the story about where they were living at that time. Maybe they left that stuff there. And that’s the end of the story.41

Kwan ehdan

Pascal Baptiste

A long time ago the people used to fight a lot. It happened that the Gwich’in and the Slavey people were fighting each other. There were two men who were very smart in hunting and in fighting. They were also leaders of their people. Once in a while, they would get into a fight but they could never kill each other. They called
each other ‘partner.’ Anyway, this one time the people from here got tired of fighting so they said they would build a hiding place. Everybody went to work and the story says there were a lot of people those days. The whole group looked around for a place. They found a big hill about 80 miles east of Inuvik.

While the older people and women were making the cave, the younger people, who were called warriors, went out hunting and fishing to get enough food for the winter. They started early in the spring and continued until freeze-up. All the mud and rocks that were taken out were dumped into a lake nearby and there was so much mud taken out of the cave, that it became an island. That island can be seen to this day; also the cave. After freeze-up, everybody moved into the cave for the winter. The door of the cave was closed. Everything went fine all winter. Then came spring and the young men were getting restless so they asked the old people if they could get out and look around. The old people said to wait until the snow thawed out. That was because if anyone was around, they wouldn’t be able to see the young men’s tracks.

In the meantime, the Slavey people came back for another war, but they couldn’t find a trace or sign of the people. They travelled all over—to the mountains and the Delta, also all down along the coast—but they couldn’t find any sign of the people. Their leader, whose name was Naagaii tsal, ‘Little Beads,’ said they would go back to their country as there was nobody here. After travelling for a distance—it was very warm during the day, so their clothes would get wet, they decided to make camp for the night to dry their clothes. As they were looking for a suitable place, they came upon this hill. This was where the Gwich’in cave was.

They rested there for a while and left for another place to camp. It so happened that there was an old man who was travelling with his people and he could not keep up with them, so he had a dog travelling with him. He came to the hill where the people had rested. He sat down to rest and as he sat there, his dog kept listening and started scratching around. So the old man went after his people and told them about how the dog was acting. They figured the next day they were going to go back to the hill and make sure they searched the place.

In the meantime, the young men were still bothering the old man to get out of the cave. Finally, the old man said they could go out. They went out and saw people’s tracks and came back into the cave and told the people. The warriors got ready and went after the Slavey people. They killed every one of them. Only their leader Naagaii tsal escaped.

The following winter, the Slavey people came back to kill some of the people. In the meantime, Kwan ehdan was out hunting. When he came back, he saw what happened, but his partner, the leader of the Slavey people, was waiting for him. The Gwich’in leader was the first to talk and said, ‘Partner, you have repaid me for what I said. The only thing I request of you is to make a fire for me and then you
can go.’ So his partner made a fire for him and also left him a pair of beaver mitts and they left one another. He had warned his partner to keep his eyes open during the following fall. After his partner left, he was warming himself. He heard a voice calling him saying, ‘My brother-in-law, I am alive. I hid under the snow but I am hurt very bad as one of my feet is almost cut off. So, I won’t live very long.’ It was his sister-in-law who was calling him.

They both started travelling; the man would break trail, then go back and help her. After a few days, she told her brother-in-law, ‘I will be coming after you but if this dog catches up to you, don’t look back, that is the sign that I will never see you again.’ So it happened. From there on he travelled alone for many days, without fire. He came to a big lake but before he went on the lake, he saw something moving. He looked at it again and it was a wolverine coming toward him. So he hid in the snow bank. As soon as it came close enough, he jumped up and killed the wolverine. He skinned it and cut it into small strips. In those days, wolverine hides were very valuable because if you wanted to make war, the warriors had to get paid after killing the wolverine.

He kept on travelling. Finally he came across an old trail. He followed it until he came to a fresh camp. He looked around and figured it was a very big camp and a lot of people. He also saw a little smoke where there happened to be a fire so he pushed the snow away and relit the fire. After the fire was good, and as he had not seen fire for a long time, he laid down beside it and fell asleep. In the meantime, two old women were taking their time following the people. But just before they were going over a hill, they looked back towards the camp and to their surprise they saw smoke. They said to one another that they surely had blown out the fire. How come there was big smoke? The two rushed to the people and told the story. All the warriors went back to the camp.

Sure enough, they saw this person lying near the fire. But before they attacked him, he ran off. Even the arrows couldn’t catch up to him. He looked back and there was quite a distance between them so he turned around and told the people, in their language, what had happened to him and that he was the only survivor from the war. The people had pity on him and told him he could come with them to the camp. But before that he told the people all the hardships he had endured, how he was without fire all winter, so from then he wanted to be called ‘Man Without Fire,’ Kwan ehdan. After settling down, he gave all the men a strip of wolverine skin so he hired the men to go to war with him. He also took a wife from the tribe who was as smart as he was because she went to war with her husband. Her Gwich’in name was Lete’traandyaa, which means ‘Living in Captivity.’ She was well known for her smartness. Sometimes the Slavey people would capture her, but she always fought for her people and her beloved husband.
Now, not long before she was captured by the Slavey, she also knew her husband was going to come back as the man had said to his partner. Except the following fall, the time had come to the scene of the camp. Her husband had let her know he was back. All this was done in secret. The time had come so he told his wife, ‘Tomorrow morning, when it’s just getting daylight, you will hear some kind of birds making noise. Then be ready. That is when we will attack.’ It happened that no one escaped the battle, except Naagaiitsal. He was out hunting when all this took place. He had to wait for his partner in case he needed help. He left a pair of mitts for his partner and after talking a while, they left one another and the Slavey never came back down to this place or this part of the country again.85

Lete’tr’aandyaa is captured by a group of Slaveys.

Man at the end of an island

Pascal Baptiste

This old man always fished at the end of an island. He continually carried a caribou skin blanket to cover himself and also carried a spear to fish. This man had two wives, one was an old woman, the other was young. Since he was a dangerous man, his wives were afraid of him.

One day, while his wives were working outside they saw something across the river. They were not sure whether it was an animal or a man. The old man’s wives suggested that it looked like a man crawling over to their camp, so he told them to take a sled and pick him up and bring him into their camp.

When they reached the man, he was in a very poor state and almost starving to death. They could not feed him very much at the time because of his condition. They had to give him some meat and fish broth to drink. They had him on this diet until he was able to walk around to get his strength back.

Later, he told them that he was with a number of people but they had all starved to death and that he was the only one who survived. He also told them that he knew they stayed there and because of this he made it to the old man’s camp.

They did everything they could to get his strength back. After a length of time, when he was strong enough, he told the old man he would help him to fish. The old man gave him his spear and told him to take the caribou skin blanket as well. With that, the old man warned him not to spear the first big jackfish he saw. When the actual fishing time came, the stranger was so nervous that he forgot the old man’s warnings and speared the first fish he saw, which happened to be a big jackfish. It turned out that the jackfish was the old man himself!

Fortunately, the old man’s wives were watching, let out a warning that he had speared the old man. They were smart enough to fix up his wounds. Almost every-
thing was back to normal except that the stranger was still nervous; the old man was mainly to blame for that since he was a medicine man.

Things were working out okay, however, the stranger was getting restless, so he told the old man, ‘I got a bow and arrow but I need some snares.’ The old man gave him the snares so the stranger went off.

The next day the stranger went to visit his snares and caught a big catch—more than he could carry home—so he made a food cache. Toward evening, the stranger also went off to hunt moose. He was so lucky that he managed to get two moose. He then started packing meat home to the old man and his wives. As he was a single man, the women did not cook for him and since they helped in his distress, he felt that he owed them more than that. The stranger ended up cooking for them all. In this method, he knew he was repaying them back slowly.

Shortly after this, he went out hunting again and caught two more moose. That night he brought home more fresh meat for all to eat. In the meantime, the old man did not talk very much to him unless he had to. The old man did not let on that he liked him. When the stranger got home that evening there was no place for him to sleep. He looked around and saw that the elderly woman was sitting near the old man; the younger was sitting a little ways from them. The stranger got a little angry at this so he went over and sat near the young woman. This move made the old man very happy. He had planned from the start that if the man behaved himself and proved himself a good hunter, he would give him his young wife. Next morning, the old man said to him, ‘You and your woman move camp to where you killed the two moose. In the meantime, the old woman and I will go back to our camp and make sure everything is okay.’ Shortly afterwards, the two families left each other.

A couple of days had passed and the old man and his wife came back with a new sled, a caribou skin tent, and parkas for the new couple, as well a pair of brand new snowshoes. The old man gave these presents to the man and his new wife. The new husband went off hunting once more and was lucky to kill a bull moose. With the bull moose that he caught, he was now well stocked for the season with moose and rabbits. Towards spring, they made a lot of dry meat and after that, they moved back to their main camp. Although a medicine man, the old husband was unable to hunt or work—he always needed assistance.

In those days, the men lived off the land and had no luxuries such as sugar, tea or tobacco. Transportation was also a problem; whenever the old man needed to go some place, he always built himself a little raft. The young man, being healthy and intelligent, had saved one of his hides from the bull moose that he had killed and made a canoe out of it. Transportation was not too much of a problem for the young hunter.
In the old days, when a person of that particular tribe wanted to become a marksman with a bow and arrow, he would take some sulphur and place it at the bottom of the thumb and once it ignited, he would let the arrow go. In this manner, they considered that the person would never miss. The person was able to knock down fast flying ducks like he was using a rifle.

At their main camp, the four people would try and get enough fish, as well as meat for the winter ahead of them. In those days, they used fish traps to get all the fish they wanted. To preserve the fish they would make dry fish. To make the dry fish, you had a good knife and knives were precious then; they were made out of bone and flint stones.

All summer long they had to get everything ready for the coming winter. Although he was a powerful medicine man, he depended on the young man to work and hunt.

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**A man called 'Indian Headband'**

*Pascal Baptiste*

Once upon a time there was an old man and an old woman who had two daughters. This old man loved his daughters dearly but like anywhere else, the old man and woman did not get along in life. They would always quarrel. It happened to be just freezing up in the fall as the old man went out hunting and killed some caribou. He came home late that night and told his daughters that he had killed some caribou. The girls got excited and told their dad that they would go out and bring in some meat. The old man told them the ice was very weak and that they would have to cross a big lake. He also told them to wait for a couple of days until the ice was strong enough but they wouldn’t listen to their dad.

So they went early in the morning. They camped out the next day and at noon, the old man started to get worried, and went after the girls. It was a big lake and after travelling for some time towards the other end of the lake, he saw something black on the ice, so he went and saw the place where the girls went through the ice. He picked up what is called today an ‘Indian Headband.’ One of the girls had always worn the fancy headband. Afterwards, he was named by the Indians ‘A Man with a Headband.’

He felt so bad about his daughters that he went to the coast. At that time, the Indians and Eskimos did not get along well. He figured, why should he live any longer after his daughters were gone. This is why he went to the coast, to get killed by the Eskimos. It happened that the old man told this story to the Eskimos and they pitied him and took him in to keep him as if he was one of them. He stayed with them for about two years. He was a good hunter although he was old,
and most of the time he killed game for the people. In the end, he was very well liked by the Eskimos.

One day, it happened that two Indian brothers-in-law were hunting moose and the moose ran off on them and headed for the coast. In those days, people were always on the alert in case of war. It happened that the Eskimos saw the two boys coming towards their camp. They all went out and captured the two boys. The first boy yelled to his brother-in-law and told him that he would get killed any time and told him to try and escape, but the boy told him, ‘Why should I run if you are going to get killed? I will get killed with you!’ So the people took the boys back to the camp and put them in an igloo and covered them with a caribou skin blanket.

By this time, there was great excitement in the camp. It so happened that the old man who went down to the coast two years before made friends with the Eskimo people. He also happened to be a medicine man and had heard about the capture of two of his own kind. The people thought of this old man as a Chief and he was respected. So the old man who, as we said in the beginning of our story, was called ‘Man with a Headband,’ took a knife and went to the igloo where the boys were by this time. There were a lot of people outside waiting to kill these boys. The two heard all the noise outside and said to one another, ‘Well, I guess this is it.’ But the old man turned to the people at the door of the igloo and made a short speech. He told the people, ‘You have treated me nice, you kept me good, and with what little I had, I tried to do my share. It so happens that these two Indians are my own boys and they are good hunters and I’m sure they will follow my example. I beg you people, don’t hurt them.’ When the people heard the old man’s speech, they all clapped their hands and said, ‘We will listen to you.’ — In time, they were given wives among the people and lived with the people.83

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This story is not too old. Anyway, it happened that the people were moving around in the Arctic Red River region. Everybody was getting very low on meat and fish and there was a lake in that country called Travaillant Lake and that was a very good lake for fish any time of the year. It happened that the people were trying to set nets and for the first time at that lake the ice was too thick. So the people talked it over and they said they knew of a white man by the name of Frank William staying at a place called Little Chicago; he had a little trading post. Also, he had a lot of fish so the people said, ‘The only chance for survival we have is to go to this white man and try to get some fish from him.’ When they got there he told the people, ‘Yes, I have lots of fish.’ He sure was willing to help them out. The man told him, ‘We brought a little fur and so we are not taking the fish for nothing.'
We are going to buy the fish from you.’ The man agreed and told them to load up
their sleighs and told them if they wanted more, to come back.

After the people got some fish from the trader, they stayed around that lake for
quite a while. But then it was time for them to move so they all separated. There
was one person who was really sick and they were trying to take care of him and
wherever they moved, they would move him also. They were getting low on
ammunition but we had a cache on the Anderson River and we were trying to get
to that cache. Meat was getting very scarce and the weather was getting cold.
Although we were facing starvation, we still had to be really careful and try and
save what little we had until we got something to eat.

Those days, people were tough but it is not like that today. You can get any-
thing you want out of the store but those days were very hard. You had to live off
the country and the only thing you could get from the store was a little tobacco,
tea, flour, a little ammunition and clothing. So this is why children are taught
ever to throw anything away, especially something to eat, never throw it away.

The people all split up and went in different directions. People would stay
together and make it that much harder. Some went different ways but we were
lucky, for at that time, my dad was still alive and he was a fairly smart man. He had
a good rifle. One day my dad went out hunting for a long time and for the first time
that fall my dad shot two moose.

There was nothing at home and we hauled these two moose to our camp and
that was a lot of meat for us, but then we were worrying about other people. So we
had to try and be very careful not to use up the meat right away. There were a few
rabbits and a few ptarmigans, but when the weather was cold, they were very
hard to get. From one of the camps, one of the men followed our trail and came to
our camp. He told us that they were having a very hard time and he had come
after us to see if we had any luck. We gave him some meat and told him that we
also had been getting short but lucky enough, just the other day we got two
moose. They were staying quite a ways from us and we told him that when he got
back to his camp he was to tell the people to come down and stay with us for a
while.

By this time, it was getting towards spring and not too far from Easter Sunday.
We were lucky in our camp, we did not get much caribou but we got a lot of
moose. Those days, people were always trying to help one another and that was
how we used to live in those days. Today it is not the same, but still, if you people
move into the bush you still do the same thing, but nobody moves into the bush.
Everybody stays in town because they know they get aid from the government
and they figure they do not have to move around in the bush like they used to. I
have not got too much to say right now because my time is up but I will tell you
more about that story later on. This is the end.
One of the men that had moved the other way happened to be my dad’s older brother. He always talked of his brother and wanted to see him very much. One day he thought he would visit his brother to see how he was doing over that long winter. My uncle was also thinking the same thing. In the places around here, some rabbits turned up and in other places there were none. Instead of coming to our place, my uncle went in the opposite direction. The place that he went to was called Thunder River. We do not know how he got the news that my dad was going to his place but he had another brother who was in very poor health, so he went to Fort Good Hope and still another man was following him. So there were two people following my uncle and three people on the trail. On their way up, there was another river called the Copper River. The two people that were following my dad’s brother’s trail saw a woman’s tracks. It was getting close to Easter so they kept on going to Fort Good Hope. As they were walking the last long stretch they saw a sign on the river bank. One of these guys said to the other, ‘Let us see what is up there,’ but the other guy said, ‘No, it is too far away.’ They said they would talk about it when they reached Fort Good Hope.

When they came to the town they saw this trader named George Slader and they asked him if he had seen a stranger in town. He told him that there was this woman and they told him about the sign on the river bank. Everyone went down and found the first person on the trail frozen to death.

This is just a little story to tell you how hard it was in those days when we did not have white man’s food to depend on. Today it is different. Nobody starves up here but these are the kind of stories we tell our young so that they might understand what kind of hardships their parents and grandparents went through.84

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I think I will tell a story that happened in the year 1913. That was a year before I got married. I was still a young boy and I stayed with my dad. We were staying around the Anderson River trapping and hunting but we got short of stuff, such as grub and tobacco, so the only place we could go was Kittigazuit. When we got back we found out we did not have enough ammunition for the spring. Then the old people had a meeting and said we had to send for ammunition. By this time it was getting really warm and there was lots of water. So another boy and me, we were chosen to go. All we had was very little ammunition; also, I had a 30-30 rifle and a few shells and I had to be sure when I fired that it was a sure shot.

On our way we came across a small lake. It happened that there was a swan swimming on the lake. I took a shot at the swan and I was lucky to get it. We were happy because we knew we were going to eat. After we ate, we kept on going and

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Living with Eskimos
Pascal Baptiste
we came across a creek called Willow Creek. We did not know how to get over because the creek had opened up—no more ice. We built a raft and we came across an old camp. About six or eight years before, we heard there was a white man missing in that area. There were clothes hanging on the line but all the lines were rotten so we figured it was his camp.

We still kept on going and we came to another creek called Martin Creek. By this time, we were getting short of something to eat. When we came to the creek it happened to be on a Sunday, so my partner told me, ‘We will stay here and dry our clothes and fix our shoes.’ So we stayed for the day. From there, we kept on going and by this time there was plenty of water and lots of ducks, but no ammunition. What could we do! We did have a fish net. So we came across a lake and a creek ran from the lake and we saw some fish in the creek, so we set the net but the water was so clear the fish could see the net and we only got one fish but we sure had a good feed.

We had a hard trip but we enjoyed it in spite of the fact that we still had a long ways to go. By this time, we were getting hungry again. Also, there was no ice. I was so hungry. We came across a small lake and it was full of fish, mostly pike, but we still enjoyed it for it kept us from starving. From there, we still had to go to Arctic Red River and after travelling all day, we came to the Mackenzie River. We saw some people. We sure were glad to see them and even before we got to Arctic Red River, we were well treated by our people. This is why I found out—be kind to everybody and you can always get help. This is the end of the story.

The signing of Treaty 11

_Pascal Baptiste_

I will tell you about the signing of the treaty. First a white man arrived, his name was Mr. Conroy, and another man by the name of Jimmie Sibbeston. Two bishops were with them. They arrived at Arctic Red River. It was said that money would be given to the Indians. To us, it was strange that money would be given to us free and we kind of didn’t like the idea, but through the bishops, it was done. The people went inside the tent. In those days, there used to be lots of Indians. Nowadays, it is not like that.

I was among these people listening to what was said in this meeting. We were told that this money would be given to us and would be given to our family every year. ‘This is why we are here. We are not here for doing wrong, and when it is said against the law, it will only be for white men. And if you are treaty, the law will have nothing to do with the Indian people.’ This is what he told us and he went on saying, ‘In a few years, there will be a hospital for you. If you get into an accident or get sick in any way, you will be treated with care and if you stay in hospital you
will not have to pay for all this. If you do not accept this treaty, you will live like white people and have to pay for yourself if you land in the hospital. You will have to pay for your operations and pay for your medicine and have to go by law like the white people.’

Before the treaty money was given out, we had to have a Chief. So, Paul Niditchie was chosen for Chief and his assistant was Fabien Coyen. Mr. Conroy told the Chief to ask for what he needed and about what he wished to be done. Fish nets and ammunition would be also given besides the treaty money. That’s the way it was but for the last few years we haven’t seen any fish nets or ammunition. Old people like me need stuff like fish nets and ammunition, but nowadays, they cost so much. Now we need help for all these things and this was taken away from us a few years ago. We still get our treaty money, but food and things we need most, cost so much—but one thing is, we still have hospital care free.82
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Abbreviations

AIP [Dene / Métis] Agreement in Principle
CGLP Committee for Original Peoples’ Entitlement, Gwich’in Language Project. Transcripts on file with GLC
CLOHP Campbell Lake Oral History Project. Interviews by Ingrid Kritsch, William Greenland, Agnes Mitchell, and Billy Day. Interview tapes 01-11 deposited with GSCI
CMC Canadian Museum of Civilization
COPE Committee for Original Peoples’ Entitlement
CVA City of Victoria, BC, Archives
DEW Distant Early Warning System (line)
DIAND Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
GCR Googwandak Community Review Meeting. Tsiigehtshik, NT. January 28-31, 2000 Tapes 01-17 deposited with GSCI
GGBC Gwichya Gwich’in Band Council
GGPN 1993 Gwichya Gwich’in Place Names Research 1993. Names up the Arctic Red River and south of the Mackenzie River. Interviews by Alestine Andre and Ingrid Kritsch. Interview tapes 01-16 deposited with GSCI
GLC  Gwich’in Language Centre, Fort McPherson, NT
GLWB  Gwich’in Land and Water Board
GOHR  Googwandak Oral History Research. Interview transcripts on file with GSCI
GRRB  Gwich’in Renewable Resource Board
GSA  The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, ON
GSCI  Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute, Tsiigehtshik & Yellowknife, NT
GTC  Gwich’in Tribal Council
HBCA  Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB
HBCo  Hudson’s Bay Company
MV  Motor Vessel
NHSOHR 1997  National Historic Site Nomination, Oral History Research 1997
NAC  National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, ON
NOGAP  Northern Oil and Gas Action Program
NT  Northern Traders [Northern Trading Co.]
NWT  Northwest Territories
NWTA  Archives of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife, NT
PAM  Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB
RCMP  Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCYK  Roman-Catholic Diocesan Archives, Yellowknife, NT
RNWMP  Royal Northwest Mounted Police
SS  Steam Ship
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This section explains the words and names used in this book. Names begin with an uppercase letter, words with a lowercase letter. The ➤ arrow points to entries providing additional information.

A

‘a’alak - 111: The oldsquaw duck. It travels downriver immediately following the ice. When it arrives, everyone knows that winter is truly and finally over.
aachin - 30: ‘Strangers,’ this word is used for both the Aboriginal people from up the river and the European explorers who travelled through Gwichya Gwich’in lands.
aadzii niivaa- 134: Summer tent made from tanned caribou hide.
aat’oo - 155: Young birch tree.
Achoo jał - 124: Old Joe Lake. One of the stop-over sites for families travelling from ➤ Chidaltajj to ➤ Vådzaah van.
Adù’vityè - 62: Old Joe Natsie.
ah’ - 152: Spruce branches or boughs.
Ah’ ch’ee - 11: The name of a man who looked like a small hawk. He helped ➤ Deetrin’ steal Red Fox’s arm from Grizzly Bear.
ahd’ree kanh - 136: Spruce bark smoke house for drying fish.
Ahts’an veh - 30: The woman Ahts’an veh (‘Grey Wings’) was abducted by a group of ➤ Eskimo. She developed a clever escape plan and was able to return to her parents’ camp at ➤ Chii chyaa tshik.
akåii’ - 28: The ‘Bouncing Game.’ This traditional game was similar to the trampoline.
Alexander Mackenzie - 177: The first European explorer to travel through Gwichya Gwich’in lands. On July 9, 1789, he arrived at a fish camp in the vicinity of ➤ Cony Bay.
Arctic Red River: ➤ Tsiigehnjik, ➤ Tsiigehtshik.
Atachuukajj - 1: One of the earliest Gwichya Gwich’in travellers. He was also known as ➤ Kwan Ehdan.
Athapaskan - 46: Name for the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer cultures of northern Canada south of Inuit territory. The Gwich’in belong to this group of cultures. The name is taken from the Wood Cree language. It was introduced by anthropologists (➤ Dene, ➤ Dinjii Zhuh, ➤ Loucheux).
B

Baazil vakaiik’yit - 55: Old Baazil, also called Maazil, and his wife Naatchuu built a cabin at this place in about 1932.

Baazuuk - 254: A region located on the east side of the Delta.

babiche - 142: Rope made from thin strips of moose skin.

Bathing Lake: Teevee nit’aowil.

Beaver Lake - 15: A chijuudiee may have lived around this lake.

Bernard Creek: Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik.

Big Rock: Nichïitsïi diniinlee.

Bouncing Game: akàii’.

bow drill - 92: May have been one of the tools used by the ts’ii dejj hunter to make fire.

bow and arrow - 95. One of the most important hunting weapons of the ts’ii dejj hunter.

bushman: nanaa’ih.

C

caribou fence (corral): tthał.

Caribou Hills: Dineedidraïi khyidh.

Caribou Lake: Vâdzaih van.

chehluk - 315: ‘fish at the river bottom,’ loche.

Chidalt’ai - 120: The trail head of an important old-time trail leading from Nagwichoonjik to Khaii luk.

Chii choo - 17: Name of a giant who chased Atachuuk’ajj up Nagwichoonjik.

Chii choo dhidlêç - 123: Big Stone Lake.

Chii choo juu’ëji - 73: Rock Cove. One of the ts’ii dejj camp sites used by Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in travelling upriver in the fall.

Chii chyaa tshik - 30: Pierre’s Creek.

Chii echejï - 248: A site on Nagwichoonjik, across from the community. Edward and Joan Nazon established a camp here in the late 1960s.

Chii gho t’ai - 14: A giant beaver (chijuudiee) is known to have lived in this area.

Chii t’iet - 11: A ts’ii dejj camp site located across the river within sight of the community. It was here that Grizzly Bear once kept Red Fox’s arm. The arm was later stolen by Deetrin’ and returned to Red Fox.

Chiiitsi diniinlee - 63: Another traditional name for Nichïitsïi diniinlee (‘Big Rock’).

chijuudiee - 12: Giant beings that have lived on the land since ts’ii dejj days. Some chijuudiee may still be living there.

Chîtaï - 26: Name of the orphan boy who killed the Slavey leader Naagâj tsal and ended the long wars between Naagâj tsal and the Gwichya Gwich’in leader Kwan ehdan.

Church Hill: Vik’ooyendik.

Chuñ tsoil k’adh - 120: Whirl Lake. This was one of the stop-over points for families travelling from the Flats to Khaii luk through Chidalt’ai.

Cony Bay - 179: The site of the first encounter between Gwichya Gwich’in and European explorers. It was here that Alexander Mackenzie pulled his boat ashore at a summer fish camp in the summer of 1789.

corral (caribou fence): tthał.
Cranswick River: ➞ Ddhahzhit gwitsal.
Crossing Creek Lake: A lake located northwest of Khaii luk.
Crowberry: ➞ dineech’uh.

D

Daats’it k’adh chii hidh chuudlajj - 73: Sucker Creek. The first part of the name, Daats’it k’adh, translates into English as ‘sucker fish trap.’ It is one of the group of names describing a resource use. This was one of the camp sites used by Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in families travelling upriver in the fall.
Daazrąj van k’adh tshik - 74: Swan Creek. One of the camp sites used by Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in families travelling upriver in the fall. This site was used by families who decided to continue past ➞ Daats’it k’adh chii hidh chuudlajj.
Dachan choo gẽnhnjik - 113: Tree River.
dachan khyə - 84: Deadfall trap. The trap was made from spruce wood. Its setup depended on the size of the animal that was to be trapped.
dahshaa - 145 The rotten wood gathered by women working hides. It was burned for the fire used to smoke the hide.
Dąjj Dhakhajj - 4: Name of a man who entered a cave and changed the course of Gwichya Gwich’in history. Dąjj Dhakhajj chi’ - 4: Name of the hill containing the cave visited by Dąjj Dhakaći.
Ddhahzhit gwichoo - 89: The area where Tsiigehnjik flows out of the Mackenzie Mountains. This was one of the main hunting areas for the families spending the winter up in the mountains.
Ddhahzhit gwitsal - 88: The area where the Cranswick River flows out of the mountains. This was another important hunting area for the families spending the winter in the mountains up the Red.
deadfall trap: ➞ dachan khyə.
Deep Lake: ➞ Teedaghao.
deeetre jak - 155: Juniper berries.
Deetrin’ - 8: Deetrin’ (Raven) was one of the most important beings of the earliest days of the world. He was responsible for creating many features of the landscape as they are known today. He also helped shape the outward appearance of several animals.
Deetrin’ ehcji k’yit - 10: ‘Raven’s bed,’ a series of three shallow indentations where Raven lay down to recover after his encounter with the Grebes.
Dehzhàh ts’at gwatat’atąj - 81: Name of an old-time trail leading from Tsiigehnjik to Nihtavan dininlee. It starts about five miles downriver from ➞ Liidłaći.
Dene - 46: A Slavey word used to refer to all the Aboriginal cultures of the Northwest Territories except the Inuit and Métis. It was important during the recent political struggles (see ➞ Dene Nation).
Dene Nation - 47: A political organization formed by the Aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie Valley in the 1970s to fight for their inherent Aboriginal rights.
didich’ąj - 138: Dried branches from the bottom of a spruce tree. Used in an emergency when a fire had to be started quickly.
Diighe’traajil - 36: This name (‘they took everything away from him’) refers to a gambling match between an Eskimo and a Gwichya Gwich’in man that once occurred here. The Eskimo won the match and took everything away from his opponent.
dineech’uh - 156: Crowberry.
Dineedriaid - 146: ‘Scratched down hills,’ the Caribou Hills below Vàdzaih degaii zheh. The families travelled to this site for the summer caribou hunt.

dineezil - 154: Spruce cone.

Diniizhok - 26: One of the most powerful medicine people of ts’ii dejì days.

dinii dazhàn - 97: A medicine person; this is a ‘danger word’ (see also ➤ vàhzhıt ga’dindàiì).

Dinjii Zhuh - 46: Name used by a Gwich’in speaker to refer to all of the Gwich’in in all the regions. Today, the word ‘Gwich’in’ itself is used in this way.

dizhoo niivaa - 104: Winter tent made from caribou skins.

drah - 163: A stage used to store drymeat and dryfish.

dream power: ➤ vàhzhıt ga’dindàiì.

duu’iinahshee - 156: ‘Uncle’s plant,’ the Northern Ground Cone.

E

Earl’s Place: ➤ Łenaidlàiì.

Echeenuut’aii - 129: The name of a lake passed by families travelling from ➤ Khaii luk to ➤ Vidi ch’u’. The meaning of this ts’ii dejì name is no longer remembered.

echiidzir - 343: A small hawk. The man ➤ Ah’ ch’ee, who helped Deetrìn at Chii t’iet, looked like echiidzir.

edeed’aii - 95: A fish spear made from bone. ➤ Atachuukàiì may have used such a spear.

ediniichii - 137: A fungus found on birch trees. Pounded or ground into a fine powder, it was used as a fire starter.

edreechi’ - 26: The sinew from the forearm of a caribou or moose. This was the travel medicine used by the medicine person ➤ Diniizhok.

Ehdyetatat Gwich’in - 159: The ‘Mackenzie Delta people,’ groups of families who would make their home in the Delta year after year. Big Rock (➤ Niciitsii diniinlee) was one of the most important camp sites of the Ehdyetatat Gwich’in.

Eight Mile Portage: ➤ Zheh gwits’at gwitatr’aatàiì.

eih - 93: Snowshoes, the main means of transportation for winter travel during ts’ii dejì days.

Eltyin choo chihvyàh k’yit - 75: Jackfish Creek. One of the camp sites used by the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in on their journey up the Red in the fall.

eneech’ìdh - 154: Spruce roots, used to make fish nets.

eneech’ìdh chihvyah - 155: Sap nets, made from the inner (‘sap’) layer of spruce roots.

Ernest Cabin: ➤ Łeth jithakaiì.

Eskimo - 30: The name used by the elders for the Inuvialuit, a group of the Inuit.

F

Fish Lake: ➤ Nihtavan diniinlee.

fish trap - 74: A fish trap was put into the creek mouth when people stayed over at this site. Fish traps were one of the most efficient traditional tools for the gathering of resources.

Fish Trap Lake - 127: A lake passed by families travelling from Vàdzaih van towards Khaii luk.

Fishing Bear Lake: ➤ Shoh k’adh.
Flats: ➔ Lèth t’îr.
Forks: ➔ Liidlajî.

G

Ge’atat dilee - 35: A section of the Kugaluk River that broadens out into a lake. This was a site for the fall fishery. To be safe from an attack by the Eskimo, the women stayed on an island in the middle of the lake. The island was so far away from the river bank that arrows shot by the Eskimo during an attack, would not reach it.

Ghost Lake: ➔ Lèth kak van tsal.

Giant Beavers - 14: Giant Beavers belonged to the group of beings called ➔ chijuudiee. Giant Beavers are known to have lived around Chi’ghò t’âji, and in the Gull River area.

Giant Bluefish - 13: This giant fish belongs to the group of beings called ➔ chijuudiee. It has lived in Khaii luk since the earliest ts’ii dejj days. It is said that the Giant Bluefish still lives in Khaii luk and that it may stay there until the end of the world.

Giant Caribou - 3: This caribou belongs to the group of beings called ➔ chijuudiee. It used to live in ➔ Vâdzaih van. It is said that while the Giant Caribou lived there, the caribou herds would visit this region, and for a while, Vâdzaih van was a good area to hunt and live. When the Giant Caribou died, the caribou herds no longer came.

Gisheh jiikaii - 83: An important old-time trail (➔ ts’ii dejj t’âji) from Tsiigehtnjik to Nihtavan dininlee began at this site, located just upstream from Hehnjuu deet’îyah tshik.

Grassy Lake: ➔ Tachithatroo.

Grebes - 9: A camp of Grebes existed at the Flats during ts’ii dejj days. On one occasion, ➔ Deetrin’ tricked the grebes into singeing their coats. The grebes’ coat has been brown since that day.

Grey Wings : ➔ Ahts’an veh.

ground house: ➔ nan kanh.

Guk’an choo - 87: The name of an area just south of the Peel River game preserve. This was a good area for the winter caribou hunt.

Gull River - 14: A giant beaver, one of the group of beings called ➔ chijuudiee, is said to have lived in the Gull River area.

Guudee diitr’iniizhit chi’ - 33: This is the name of a high steep hill located on Nagwichoonjik about six miles upstream from the community of Tsiigehtshit. Its name, ‘(a person) was chased down a hill,’ refers to an incident when two Gwichya Gwich’in hunters were chased down this hill by a group of Eskimo who were trying to kill them.

Gwe’eekatjîlchit - 94: The name of a cliff located on the eastern shore of Gull Lake. Ts’ii dejj hunters would climb up this cliff to an eagle’s nest at the top, and collect the eagle feathers they needed for their arrows.

Gwi’eekajîlchit van - 95: Gull Lake, the northern part of the lake now called ‘Campbell Lake.’

Gwich’in - 45: Common name now applied to all the groups of the Gwich’in (➔ Dinjii Zhuh) taken together. The Gwich’in are one of the most northerly Aboriginal culture on the North American continent. In ts’ii dejj days, the Gwich’in consisted of nine regional groups whose traditional lands extended from the Mackenzie Delta region east across Yukon Territory into interior Alaska.


Gwichya Gwich’in - 3: The most easterly regional group of the ➔ Gwich’in.
Gyùd dazhoo njik - 86: The ‘hairy worm river,’ in English, Snake River. The name refers to an event that occurred during t’si’i dejj days. A giant hairy worm, or ‘snake,’ came out of the ocean, and travelled up Nagwichoonjik and into the Peel River. It wanted to go up into the mountains, so it swallowed big rocks as it moved along, thereby creating Gyùd dazhoo njik.

H

Hand Game: ➤ udzi.

Hehnjuu deet’yah tshik - 64: Bernard Creek. One of the camp sites used by the families on their way up Tsiigehnjik in the fall. After the 1920s, several families built cabins at this site.

Hill Lake - 127: A lake passed by the families travelling from Vàdzaih van to Khaii luk.

Hislop & Nagle - 189: A fur trading company that competed with the Hudson’s Bay Company for several decades after 1900.

Hudson’s Bay Company - 180: The most important trading partner of the Gwichya Gwich’in until the end of the fur trade period.

I

In And Out Lake: ➤ K’eegee chudlaají. ‘in his dreams:’ ➤ wáhzhit ga’dindài.

itsuh - 139: ’Pemmican’ made by pounding drymeat or dryfish and mixing it with grease. This is one of the elders’ favourite foods.

itsuhtal - 142: The Ring-and-Pin game

J

Jackfish Creek: ➤ Eltyin choo chihvyàh k’yit.

Jackfish Lake: ➤ Shoh k’adh.

Jah vehlèj’ tshik - 77: This is the traditional name for ➤ Martin zheh. The name translates as ‘a crane got caught,’ describing a resource use.

Jiggle Lake: ➤ Jilàa’.

Jilàa’ - 122: Jiggle Lake. This was one of the lakes passed by the families travelling from Chidaltàjj towards Khaii luk.

Jim Nagle viteetshik - 123: Jim Nagle Creek. One of the stopover sites for families travelling from the Flats to Khaii luk across the ➤ Eight Mile Portage.

John Baptist - 62: The father of Pascal Baptiste.

Jùuk’an - 81: ‘Burning.’ The name refers to a spot in the side of one of a series of high hills below ➤ Lid-làjjí. An important old-time trail from Tsiigehnjik into the mountains started across from Jùuk’an.

K

k’aii t’an - 155: Green willow leaves.

k’aii zheh - 135: Willow house. A lean-to like shelter that travellers would build wherever required. K’aii zheh was the most flexible of the traditional dwellings.
K'eegeh chuídlaj - 121: In and Out Lake. One of the lakes passed by families travelling from Chidalţaj to Kháiiluk.

k’oh - 155: Red Willow (Alder).

Khaiiluk - 113: This name translates as ‘winter fish,’ indicating a seasonal resource use. The lake is also known by its English name, Travaillant Lake.

Khaii luk Gwich’in - 113: Groups of families making their homes in the Kháiiluk area year after year.

Khajilaj - 124: The Rengleng River. One of the stop-over points for families travelling from Chidalţaj to Vâdzaih van.

Kwan ehdan - 23: ‘Without Fire,’ the name ➤ Atachuukajchose for himself after he survived a winter without fire.

kwan k’yit - 106: The raised fire place inside ➤ dizhoo niivaa, ➤ nan kanh, and ➤ nee kanh.

L

Lamson & Hubbard - 192: A fur trading company that competed with the Hudson’s Bay Company for some time during the 1920s.

Lenaidlaj - 195: Earl’s Place or Phillip’s Place. The traditional name, ‘waters flow together again,’ refers to the area where Rudolph Channel and East Channel flow together. Several people stayed here year-round during the 1920s and 1930s.

Lete’t’raandyaa - 19: Name of the woman fought over by ➤ Naagaj tsal and ➤ Atachuukaaj during their long wars. Her name means, ‘Moving back and forth.’ Depending on who had won the most recent battle, Lete’t’raandyaa would stay with either Atachuukaaj or Naagaj tsal. Perhaps her name refers to the fact that she was forced to move ‘back and forth’ between the two.

 Lêth jithakaii - 73: This name translates as, ‘mud slide into a creek,’ describing a feature of the landscape: At some point in time, a mud slide occurred at this site. It is also known by its English name, Ernest Cabin. This was one of the camp sites used by the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in on their journey up the river in the fall.

 Lêth kak van tsal - 36: Ghost Lake, a small lake situated just below the community of Tsiigehtshik. The bodies of Eskimo killed during a battle between Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo were thrown into the lake.

 Lêth tìr - 69: The Flats just below the community of Tsiigehtshik.

Liidlaj - 81: The Forks, the confluence of Tsiigehnjik and the Cranswick River. This was one of the camp sites used by the families travelling up Tsiigehnjik in the fall.

Lits’eitr’dinaadzoh - 225: ‘They are moving around in a circle.’ The name of one of the traditional dances.

Little Beads: ➤ Naagaj tsal.

Lobstick: ➤ njoh.

Loche: ➤ chehluk.

Loon - 8: Loon was responsible for changing the colour of Raven’s coat.

Loucheux - 46: A name for the Gwich’in on the Canadian side introduced by the missionaries and fur traders. It is still used by some elders.

M

Mackenzie, Alexander - 179: The first whiteman to visit the Gwichya Gwich’in. He arrived at a fish camp in the vicinity of ➤ Cony Bay on July 21, 1789.
Mackenzie Delta people: Ehdyeetat Gwich’in.
Mackenzie River: Nagwichoonjik.
Mackenzie River people: Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in.
Made Beaver - 182: Exchange standard introduced by the Hudson’s Bay Company during the early fur trade period.
Martin zheh - 64: One of the camp sites used by the families travelling up Tsiigehnjik in the fall. After the 1920s, several families began to build cabins at this site. Its traditional name is Jah vehljej tshik.
medicine person: dinjii dazhàn, vâhzhit ga’dindâii.
Miner River: Uudyit njik.
Mission de St Nom du Marie - 209: Name of the Oblate mission at Arctic Red River.
moss house: nee kanh.
‘Moving back and forth:’ Le'tr'aandyaa.
MV ‘Pelican Rapids’ - 189: A motor-powered trading vessel used on Nagwichoonjik. It was used to move barges downriver as far as Reindeer Station and Aklavik.

Naagaj tsal - 17: ‘Little Beads,’ the name of the Slavey leader who fought with Atachuukajj over the woman Le'tr'aandyaa. His name describes a special quality of his battle jacket. It was made from small pebbles (‘beads’) which, inserted into a hardened mixture of gravel and spruce gum, were woven into an impenetrable battle jacket. No arrow, spear or dagger could cut through it. Naagaj tsal was accidentally killed by the orphan boy Chitajj.
Naatchuu - 35: Old Baazil’s wife. She may have seen one of the last fights between the Gwichya Gwich’in and the Eskimo.
Naatsâk - 87: This is the ts’ii dejj name of a high hill south of Tsiit davân. Families hunting in the mountains up the Red would camp atop Naatsâk during the winter.
Nagwichoonjik - 167: The ‘river through a big country,’ Mackenzie River.
Nagwichoonjik Gwich’in - 167: The ‘Mackenzie River people,’ groups of families who made their homes along Nagwichoonjik year after year.
nan kanh - 134: The ground house, a permanent dwelling partly dug into the ground.
nan tsee k’it - 80: Big storage pits, dug into the ground for storing itsuh, drymeat, dryfish, and bone grease.
nanaaj’i'h - 16: ‘Bushmen,’ beings who mostly lived by themselves in the bush. They would try to steal the women and children in the camps.
Nè’dinii’ee - 113: Woodbridge Lake, one of the lakes crossed by hunters travelling from Khaii luk towards Vádzaih van for the caribou hunt.
nee kanh - 133: The moss house, a permanent dwelling built on top of the ground. The wall were made from slabs of moss cut out of the ground.
Nehtruh tshì’ - 75: ‘A wolverine inside a rock.’ This is the name of an area up Tsiigehnjik that is said to have been ripped apart by a Giant Wolverine.
Ni’jlee ty’et - 27: This was the site where the mother and brothers of Dinìizhok were held captive.
nichih - 156: The berries of the Prickly Rose.
nichih t’àn - 155: The pink petals of the Prickly Rose. In English, the elders refer to this plant as ‘rose hips.’
Nichïitsìi diniinlee - 162: ‘Iron rock lined up.’ The name refers to three very large rocks that can be seen in the East Channel of the Mackenzie River at this point. This site, also known by its English name ‘Big Rock,’ was an important camp site for the Ehdyeetat Gwich’in.

Nihtavan diniinlee - 83: ‘Fish Lake.’ This was the last fish lake used by the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in before they reached the mountains.

njoh - 34: Lobstick. These markers were used to mark a good fishing spot or berry patch. A lobstick was made by selecting a tree that stood by itself and by chopping off all the branches except those at the top.

Norris’ Camp - 195: The site of the trading post of Adolphus and Christine Norris, about nine miles downstream from Nihtavan diniinlee, on the west side of the East Branch. It was established around 1927.

North West Company - 178: One of the first trading partners of the Gwichya Gwich’in during the early days of the fur trade. The explorer Alexander Mackenzie was one of the partners in this company. It was later taken over by the Hudson’s Bay Company.

O

Odizen - 124: Name of a lake south of Vàdzaih van. Annie Norbert and her parents used to live at Odizen during Annie’s youth.

Old Arctic Red: Teetshik goghaa.

Old Joe Lake: Achoo jał.

Old Man Ross - 192: During the 1930s, Albert Ross was the first trader to travel down Nagwichoonjik after breakup. He had a scow that was loaded with fresh fruit, vegetables and eggs only.

oldsquaw duck: a’aalak.

P

partners - 62: Men who travelled together and helped each other out, especially when they went out to hunt or trap.

pemmican: itsuh.

Pierre’s Creek: Chii chyya tshik.

Point Separation: Srehtadhdlajj.

R

Ramïi tsal - 193: One of the men living up the Red after the 1920s. He ran a small trading post for the Hudson’s Bay Company around Bernard Creek.

Red Fox - 11: Grizzly Bear once tore out Red Fox’s forearm and kept it at his camp at Chii’tiet. Deetrin’ stole the arm from Grizzly Bear and returned it to Red Fox.

Reindeer Station: Vadzaih degaii zheh.

Rengleng River: Khajílajj.

Rock Cove: Chii choo juu’ejj.

S

Shoh k’adh - 120: Fishing Bear Lake, also called ‘Jackfish Lake.’ This was one of the stop-over points for families travelling from Chidaltajj to Khaii luk.
Sitidgi Lake: ➔ Sitr’ijyeh van.
Sitr’ijyeh van - 159: Sitidgi Lake. A large lake situated in the land of the Ehdyeetat Gwich’in. Families travelling from Big Rock towards the coast would pass this lake.
Siveezhoo - 53: A ts’ii dejj name whose English meaning is no longer remembered. This lake was an important stop-over site for families travelling from the mountains towards Khaii luk.
Snake River: ➔ Gyûu dazhoo njik.
snowshoes: ➔ eih.
snow shovel: ➔ zhoh ch’ek.
spear: 95.
Sree ch’ii vi’edeh - 124: Sunny Lake. This lake is situated between Khaii luk and Vàdzaih van. It was used as a stop-over site by families arriving from Chidaltajj as well as by families travelling between Khaii luk and Vàdzaih van.
Srehtadhadlajj - 61: Point Separation, the point where Nagwichoonjik separates into four separate channels, marking the beginning of the Mackenzie Delta.
SS ‘Distributor’ - 188: Name of a steam boat moving freight on Nagwichoonjik during the fur trade days.
SS ‘Mackenzie’ - 188: Name of a steam boat moving freight on Nagwichoonjik during the fur trade days.
SS ‘Wrigley’ - 188: The first steam boat moving freight on Nagwichoonjik. Used by the Hudson’s Bay Company from 1887 until 1907.
stick gambling: ➔ udzi.
stone axe - 94: The common working tool of the ts’ii dejj hunter. It was used for everything from chopping down trees and cutting wood, to chipping steps into a steep cliff face that the hunter had to climb on certain occasions (see ➔ Gwe’eekatjilchit).
Sucker Creek: ➔ Daats’it k’adh chii hidh chudlajj.
Sunny Lake: ➔ Sree ch’ii vi’edeh.
Swan Creek: ➔ Daazrajj van k’adh tshik.

T
Tachithatroo - 123: Grassy Lake. One of the stop-over sites for families travelling from the Flats to Khaii luk across the ➔ Eight Mile Portage was located at this lake.
Tateih sheii - 78: One of the campsites used by the Tsiigehnjik Gwich’in on their way upriver into the mountains.
Tatthal ni’ee - 103: This name translates as ‘a line of fences stood.’ It refers to an area located almost due west of ➔ Srehtadhadlajj. Both the area around a lake and a creek flowing out of another lake half a mile away, are named Tatthal ni’ee. This indicates that during ts’ii dejj days a fence was likely used in this area.
Teedaghao - 122: Deep Lake, one of the lakes passed by the families travelling from Chidaltajj to Khaii luk.
Teeddhaa - 128: A ts’ii dejj winter camp site on the south side of Khaii luk.
Teelajj - 128: A ts’ii dejj winter camp site on the north side of Khaii luk.
Teetshik goghaa - 69: This name, describing a feature of the landscape, translates as ‘a bundle of creeks flowing into another creek.’ The site, also known as ‘Old Arctic Red,’ was the location of the first Oblate mission station built on Gwichya Gwich’in lands, seven miles downriver from the Flats on the east bank of Nagwichoonjik in 1868. The site known as Teetshik goghaa today, is located one mile upstream from the old site.
Teetshik gwichoo - 80: Weldon Creek. One of the camp sites used by the Ts'ii gwich’in during their journey up the Red in the fall.

Teevee nit'awil - 122: Bathing Lake. One of the lakes passed by families travelling from Chidaltaaj to Khaii luk. The name translates into English as ‘it looks like something is swimming along the shore,’ or, ‘fish going around the lake along shore.’ No creeks flow in or out of the lake, so the fish in the lake that have to move during spawning time will swim round and round the lake, following the shore line.

Thunder River: ➤ Vihtr'ii tshik.

Towel Lake: ➤ Teevee nit'awil.

Travaillant Lake: ➤ Khaii luk.

Tr'ih choo intyn - 188: This name, translating as, ‘a big boat sat,’ refers to a site about halfway between ➤ Srehtadhadlaaj and the mouth of the Peel River. The york boats returning from Fort Smith once did not complete the return trip before freeze-up. The boats froze in, and were left at this site for the winter.

Tr'innjoo kat giiaçãoj - 35: The ‘women’s road’ to Chidaltaaj. When heading for Nagwichoonjik from Shoh k'adh, the women would follow their own road to be safe from an attack by the Eskimo.

Tr'ineht'ieet'iee - 123: This is the camp across from ➤ Dachan choo gëhnjik where families travelling along the Eight Mile Portage route, turned inland and away from Nagwichoonjik towards ➤ Khaii luk. Gabe Andre established a permanent camp at this site in the 1960s.

Tree River: ➤ Dachan choo gëhnjik.

Treedaaqhaa - 129: The name of this lake refers to a story about a woman ‘who was crying while clubbing fish.’ This lake was passed by families travelling from Khaii luk to ➤ Vidi chū'.

treh - 156: Bear Root.

Trout Lake: ➤ Vidi chū'.

Trout Lake Narrows: ➤ Vidichū' leetak.

Ts'ii choo - 25: ‘Big Mosquito,’ the name of one of ➤ Nagajj tsal’s warriors. He was killed by ➤ Atachuukaaj.

ts'ii dejj days - 3: The oldest days of the land. These were days when animals and people were equals. Animals had the power of speech and could assume animal or human shape or form.

Ts'ii dejj tajj - 120: Ts'ii dejj trails, trails that have been used for hundreds of years, so that they are now ground deeply into the land.

Tsaih - 93: Red ochre, used to colour items such as snowshoe frames. It can be found in two places on the land, up Tsiigehnjik between Hehnjuu deet'jah tshik and Liiddlaj; and at Rock River on the McPherson side.

Tseenjoo - 19: The man who built ➤ Tseenjoo kan.

Tseenjoo kan - 19: Tseenjo’s cave. This is the cave that the man Tseenjo built for Atachuukaaj and his men. They all hid in this cave for one year to be safe from Naagajj tsal and his warriors.

Tsiigehnjik - 10: The Arctic Red River.

Tsiigehnjik Gwich'in - 69: Groups of families who made their homes in the mountains up Tsiigehnjik year after year.

Tsiigehchtic: Spelling of the official name of the community of ➤ Tsiigehchtik.

Tsiigehchtik - 6: A Gwichya Gwich'in community located at the confluence of Nagwichoonjik and Tsiigehnjik; until 1994, its official name was ‘Arctic Red River.’ An Oblate mission station was the first building to be constructed here; it was completed in 1896.

Tsit davàn - 86: ‘Tsit’s lake,’ named after the man Tsit, said to have been famous in his day.

Tthal - 102: A caribou fence (corral).
U
udzi - 229: Also known as ‘stick gambling’ or the ‘Hand Game.’ A game of strategy and guessing in which the captain of one team attempts to determine the location of a small token that each of the players of the opposing team hides in either hand.
Uudyit njik - 163: Miner River.

V
Vadzaih degaii zheh - 52: Reindeer Station.
Vàdzaizvan - 3: Caribou Lake. A Giant Spirit Caribou (chijuudiee) is said to have lived here at one time.
vâhzhit ga’dindàii - 97: ‘In his dreams.’ This expression refers to the way in which many medicine people (dinjii dazhàn) used their power, that is, through dreams.
Vidíchú' leetak - 129: Trout Lake Narrows. Vidi chû' appears to consist of two lakes that are linked by a narrows; this link is Vidíchû' leetak.
Vihtr’ii tshik - 137: Flint Creek, officially known as ‘Thunder River.’ One of only two sites on the land where flint, and boiling rocks could be found.
Vik’ooyendik - 10: ‘Church Hill,’ in the community of Tsiigehtshik. This was Raven’s lookout during his encounter with the Grebes.
Vinih k’yù - 103: A lake in the Tree River area. A caribou fence (ththal) may have gone out from it.

W
Weldon Creek: Teetshik gwichoo.
Whirl Lake: Chû’ tsil k’adh.
willow house: k’aii zheh.
Wolverine inside a rock: Nehtruh tshì’.
Women’s road to Chidaltâi: Tr’îinjoo kat gijaatâi.
Woodbridge Lake: Nè’dinii’ee.
wood camp - 188: Camps that supplied the huge amounts of wood needed by the steam ships travelling on Nagwichoonjik and in the Delta. The men working in some of these camps would cut many hundred cords of wood during a single winter.

X
XY Company - 180: The company that employed Alexander Mackenzie when he travelled down Nagwichoonjik in the summer of 1789. It was later taken over by the Northwest Company. Also called the ‘New Northwest Company.’

Y
yahtyee’ - 205: Word used by the elders for the Oblate Fathers.
York boat - 188: Wooden rowing boats used by the Hudson’s Bay Company until 1886. York boat brigades moved furs upriver to Fort Smith in early summer, and returned with supplies for the trading posts along Nagwichoonjik, in the fall.

Z

zheh gwich’ok - 136: A skin tent or ‘teepee.’
Zheh gwits’at gwitatr’aatįį - 122: The Eight Mile Portage. The name for the first section of a trail used by families travelling from the Flats towards Khaii luk. The journey began with a portage in a south-easterly direction away from Tsiigehtshik towards Nagwichoonjik. This first section of the trail was the ‘Eight Mile Portage’ across country, Zheh gwits’at gwitatr’aatįį—the ‘trail into the bush that leads into town.’
zhoh ch’ek - 104: Wooden snow shovel.