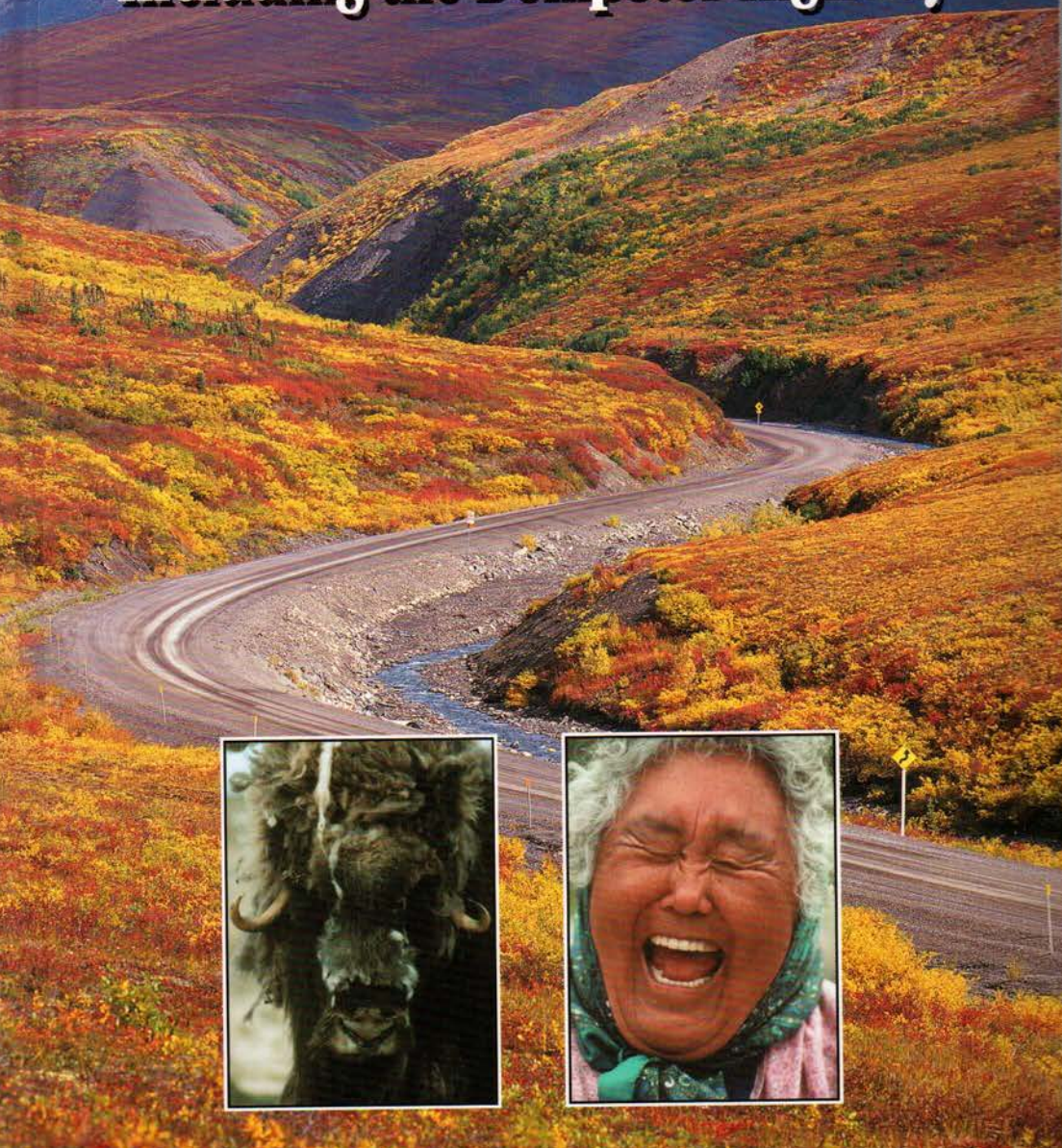


Canada's

# Western Arctic

Including the Dempster Highway



The definitive guide to Canada's Western Arctic

# **Canada's Western Arctic**

**Including  
The Dempster Highway**

*by*

**The Western Arctic Handbook Committee**



**Western Arctic Handbook Committee**

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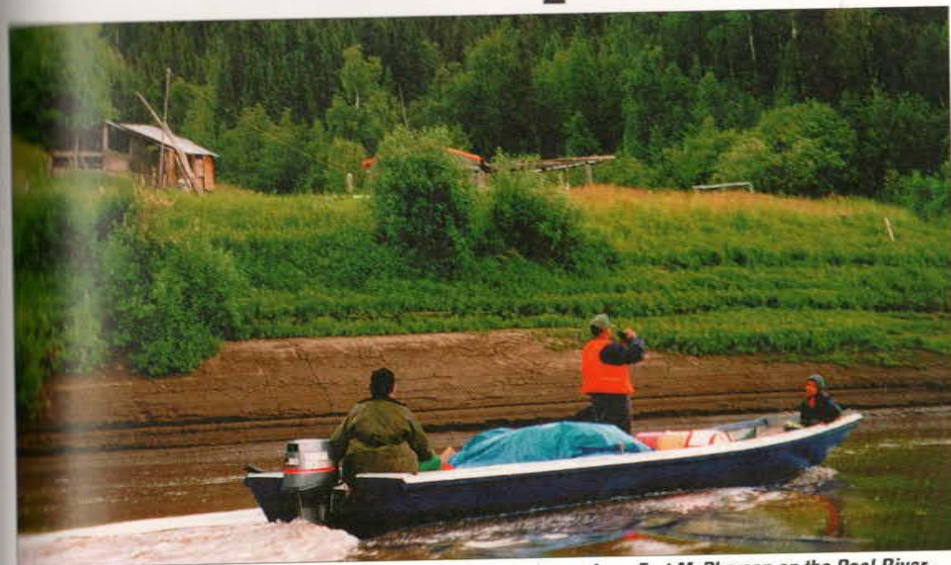
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# The People



*Gwich'in-made plywood scow on Road River, 80 kms upstream from Fort McPherson on the Peel River.*

**T**he Gwich'in and Inuvialuit are among the most northerly aboriginal peoples in North America, and have inhabited the Western Arctic for thousands of years. In more recent times, the Western Arctic has attracted people from around the world.

## **Gwich'in History and Culture**

The Gwich'in are part of a larger family of aboriginal people known as Athapaskans. Some aspects of Gwich'in culture are similar to the Slavey, Han, Tutchone and other Athapaskan groups. At the time of contact with Europeans, the Gwich'in lived in nine regional groups (bands) stretching from the interior of Alaska, through the Yukon and into the Mackenzie Valley.

In the Western Arctic, the Gwich'in number about 2,500. They include the Gwichya Gwich'in (Tsiighehtchic), the

Tetlit Gwich'in (Fort McPherson), the Ehdiiat Gwich'in (Aklavik) and the Nihtat Gwich'in (Inuvik). As well, there are the Vuntut Gwitchin of Old Crow, Yukon. They have their own dialect and settled a land claim separate from the Gwich'in in the Northwest Territories.

This section was written primarily about the Northwest Territories Gwich'in, but some sections (e.g. "Early Times") apply to the Vuntut Gwitchin as well. For more information about the Vuntut Gwitchin, see "Old Crow" (page 162).

## **Early Times**

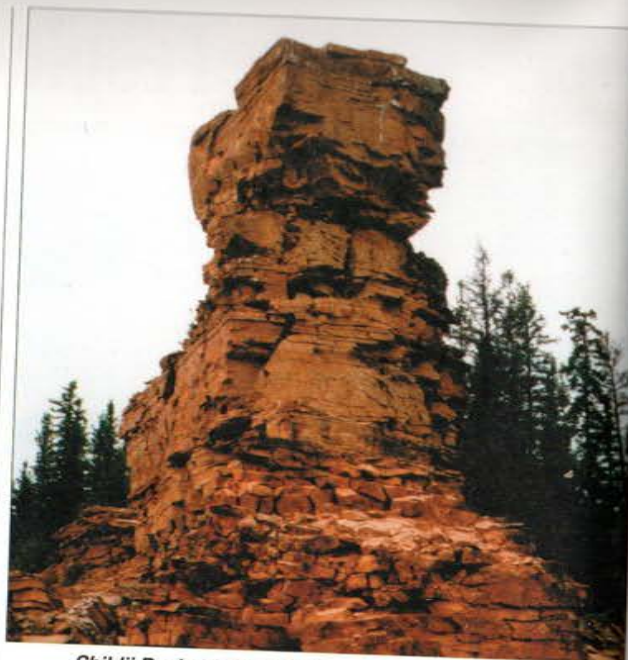
More than 500 years ago, well before European contact, the ancestors of the Gwich'in, known as the *Ts'ii deii* (stone age) people, lived on the land. They relied on seasonal resources for their food, clothing, tools, shelter and medicine, and used these resources in a respectful and sustainable way. The *Ts'ii deii* had an intimate understanding of the land and animals and moved with the seasons, knowing when and where to go from long experience, observation and stories passed down orally through the generations.



Travel was an important part of their lives, and their trails criss-crossed the land. They named important places and told stories about these places. Some names described the appearance of a landmark, such as a hill with a rounded shape. Other names reminded the traveller of past hardship (conflict or starvation, for example), indicated the presence of a spiritual being, or marked an important source of stone used for tool-making.

In the fall, small groups of families moved towards their winter hunting grounds after a summer of fishing. Fish included char, inconnu, arctic cisco and whitefish, all of which were caught along the major rivers that still run through the land—Teet'it (also spelled Tetlit) Gwinjik (the Peel), Tsiigehnjik (Arctic Red River) and Nagwichoonjik (Mackenzie River).

Some families headed up the Mackenzie River and then inland to winter at major lakes. Others headed toward the mountains, up the Arctic Red River and Peel River, paddling and tracking their birchbark canoes loaded with winter supplies. They stopped along the way to set fish traps at the mouths of creeks and to hunt small game and animals using sinew or *babiche*. (*Babiche* was moose or caribou hide with the hair removed, which was soaked, dried, cut into strips and then used like rope). After weeks of travelling, they reached the trails that led them inland or overland into the mountains. Here they would cache their canoes and start to walk. The men, women and older chil-



Shildii Rock on the Peel River near Fort McPherson

dren packed bales of dried fish, caribou skin mats, birchbark containers, boiling rocks, coils of *babiche* and other supplies in bags slung over their shoulders. They used dogs outfitted with leather packs to help carry their belongings.

From their winter camps, the men walked on snowshoes to familiar areas to hunt for sheep, moose and caribou, using snares, bows and arrows, spears and caribou fences. The older people, women and children stayed in camp, collecting firewood from the surrounding area and doing the many other chores that needed to be done. When the men brought back caribou or moose meat, the women made "drymeat" and bone grease and dried the sinew for thread. Hides were scraped and tanned, then hung on high poles to soften in the wind and sun.

Sometimes animals were not very plentiful, so people went with little or no food. Men constructed or repaired snowshoes with birch and *babiche*. Equipment such as birch snow shovels, bone fishhooks, spears, arrowheads, bone awls, caribou leg skin bags and sleds were also made. Moose hair was stuffed into a moose-hide ball that could be used to play a ball game called *nehkak nichii na'trodandak* in the early summer. Ochre collected earlier that year was used to colour the snowshoe frames and other items. Women made clothing, some for everyday wear and some for special occasions. Before they left a camp, unused animal and bird parts such as hair and bones were buried or burned.



Gwich'in boys in Fort McPherson

### Travelling with the Seasons

The Gwich'in moved constantly to new fishing and hunting locations, staying longer in places where food was plentiful. In the winter, people lived in dome-shaped caribou skin lodges when hunting in the mountains.

People started their day in the early dawn hours, often moving to their next camp by starlight or in darkness. Boiled meat was prepared the night before and packed for the men. They walked ahead on their snowshoes to break trail. The children, clothed in rabbit skin suits and on snowshoes, were sent after the men, pulling caribou-hide sleds that contained light items. Women and elders stayed and took the camp down. They followed later on snowshoes, pulling long sleds loaded with gear. They walked all day until they reached a place chosen by the men, and set up camp again

for the night. Semi-subterranean moss houses were built for longer-term camps.

In early spring, birchbark containers were made to store food and willow whistles were made to entertain young children. Before the ice on the rivers started to break up, people began walking back through the trails with bales of dried meat, their belongings, and bundles of raw moose skins. Upon reaching the rivers, they used canoes stored from the previous year, or built new ones to travel to their fish camps on the Peel, Arctic Red and Mackenzie rivers. As they travelled, they fished and hunted geese and ducks, and smoked and dried fish. Before settling down at their fish camps for the summer, families and friends who had been separated all winter gathered to celebrate. Marriages took place at this time of year, and the long daylight hours were used to visit,

dance, sing, play games and tell stories. After this, families parted and travelled to their fish camps.

In summer, sprucebark houses were built and used as smokehouses or living areas. Willowbark fishing nets were set in eddies. While people worked in camp, smudges of grass were lit to control mosquitoes and flies. Throughout the summer and early fall, women and children picked liquorice root, blueberries, crowberries, cloudberry, Labrador tea and cranberries as they became available. Dark spruce gum was picked and chewed on the spot, while the clear gum was kept and used later for cuts and infections. Tea was made from spruce gum or cones, or from birch and tamarack trees. Some of the liquorice root and berries were stored in underground pits, along with "dryfish," for winter use.





*Stick gambling at "The Flats" on the river floodplain below Tsiigehtchic, ca. 1930. Gwich'in and Inuvialuit would meet here to trade in summer.*

At the camps, women worked alongside men. Babies were packed on mother's backs, while the younger children stayed with their grandmothers or older siblings. People worked until early evening, when they settled down to a meal of boiled caribou or roasted moose meat, fish, rabbit or ptarmigan. Women prepared meals for the whole camp. After the evening meal, the men gathered to recount stories about people, hunting and travelling. In the early evening hours, the women and children sat quietly and listened before they headed to bed.

### Contact with Europeans

Life continued in this way for many millennia until just over 200 years ago, when the Gwich'in first encountered Europeans. In 1789, the Gwich'in met Alexander Mackenzie on the river they

called Nagwichoonjik ("big country river"), which now bears his name.

Although Mackenzie's stay was brief, his voyage attracted many explorers, fur traders, missionaries, prospectors and other people over the next 200 years, bringing major changes to the Gwich'in way of life. The most immediate change was the establishment of a fur-trading post close to Gwich'in traditional lands at Fort Good Hope on the Mackenzie River.

Then, in 1840, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) set up a trading post on Gwich'in lands on the Peel River about six kilometres above the present-day community of Fort McPherson. The Gwich'in began to make visits to these forts a part of their seasonal cycle, initially trading meat, and later furs, for goods that would make life on the land more comfortable and efficient. They traded with many

different post managers over the years, one of the most famous being John Firth who managed the HBC post at Fort McPherson from 1893 to 1920. He was well respected and known for his physical strength and strict code of ethics. His wife, Margaret Stewart, was the daughter of the HBC trader Alexander Stewart and his Gwich'in wife, Catherine.

Following the fur traders, the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches established missions among the Gwich'in in the 1860s, competing with each other to convert Gwich'in to Christianity. Today, people in the Fort McPherson area are largely Anglican and those in Tsiigehtchic are mainly Roman Catholic. Most notable of the earliest missionaries was Anglican minister Robert McDonald, who became fluent in speaking and writing Gwich'in, and translated



*Contemporary Gwich'in bush camp in winter*

prayers, scriptures and other religious texts into Gwich'in with the help of his Gwich'in wife, Julia Kutig.

Gwich'in life started to change considerably with the coming of the missionaries. Although they continued to live on the land throughout the year, they were encouraged to come to town more often to celebrate religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter. They also began in the early 1900s to send their children away to residential schools in Fort Simpson, Hay River and Fort Providence. When children went to school, they would often stay for up to five years, returning home with little or no knowledge of Gwich'in language and culture and speaking mainly English or French. Some children never returned, having died while attending school. In later years, Gwich'in children attended residential schools in Aklavik, Inuvik, Yellowknife

and Fort Smith. The physical and sexual abuse suffered by some children while in a number of these schools has recently come to light. This abuse has had devastating effects on families and communities.

Europeans brought many new diseases, often of epidemic proportions. In 1865, Father Emile Petitot recorded that 100 Gwich'in died in the Peel River area from scarlet fever and measles. He estimated that 700 to 800 people had died of a total population of 4,000 in the Mackenzie Valley-Atabasca area in just three to four weeks. Typhus, smallpox, influenza, measles and tuberculosis also killed many Gwich'in, with the flu epidemics of 1928 and 1948 being particularly devastating. The knowledge of many Gwich'in elders died with these epidemics. Orphaned children were taken in by rel-

atives or were raised by the mission schools.

The first major influx of outsiders into Gwich'in territory occurred with the discovery of gold in the Yukon in 1896—the Klondike Gold Rush. More than 500 miners travelled from the Mackenzie River basin to the Yukon River watershed using one of three routes through Gwich'in lands: the Rat River, Stony Creek and Peel/Wind/Stewart river routes. The Gold Rush provided new trading opportunities and employment, and it was from the Klondikers that the Gwich'in first learned about the existence of money.

### The 20th Century

The early 20th century brought continued change. In 1903, following on the heels of the Klondike prospectors, the Canadian government established North-West Mounted Police posts at Herschel Island and Fort McPherson. Fur prices increased substantially



after World War I and led to an influx of white trappers to the region in the 1920s. As a result, police posts were also established at Aklavik in 1922 and Tsiigehtchic in 1926. The police depended on the Gwich'in as hunters and guides, and for many years used a major Gwich'in hunting and travelling trail to patrol between Fort McPherson and Dawson City.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Gwich'in were still closely tied to the land, and the trapping economy reached an all-time high. That was not to last. In the 1950s, the fur economy

collapsed and the government asserted its presence further into Gwich'in life by providing housing, local schools and nursing stations, family allowance and old age pensions. The Dempster Highway was completed in 1979, linking Gwich'in communities for the first time to a road system. Intensive oil and gas exploration continued from the 1960s right through to the 1980s before the "oil boom" stopped as quickly as it had started. During this time, the Gwich'in began to reassert control over their lives, and started negotiating

a land claim agreement with the federal government. A final agreement was signed in 1992.

The past two centuries have brought continuous and dramatic change to Gwich'in culture. Hunting and fishing remain important both culturally and economically, with such traditional foods as caribou, moose and whitefish still being a notable part of the Gwich'in diet. However, many Gwich'in are employed in the wage economy today, and only travel on the land when they can.

### Important Gwich'in Places

**Gwi'ekajilchit** ("chipping steps as you go") refers to a cliff on the east side of Campbell Lake in Gwich'in Territorial Park outside of Inuvik. The cliff is visible from the Dempster Highway and, if you stand on top, provides a spectacular view of the Mackenzie Delta. A long time ago, people used to climb this cliff to collect eagle feathers to fletch the ends of their arrows.

**Leth t'urh kak** ("on the mud flats") refers to the large mud flats located below the community of Tsiigehtchic. This area was used for centuries as a fish camp and a meeting place between the Gwichya Gwich'in, the Slavey and the Inuvialuit. Gwich'in oral history relates that wars in the form of ambushes and short skirmishes took place on these flats between Gwich'in people and the Inuvialuit in *Ts'ii dei* ("stone age") days. As a result of one such battle, the bodies, weapons and personal belongings of the raiding Inuvialuit were deposited

in the small lake on the flats. Consequently the lake is known as Ghost Lake and is held in great respect by the local people. Today, the flats are still used as one of several fish camp locations along the Mackenzie River. It is just one of the many sites that contributed to the stretch of the Mackenzie River between Thunder River and Point Separation being made a National Historic Site in 1998. For more information, see Nagwichoonjik, page 179.

**Shiidii** (also spelled Shiltee) ("sitting down") refers to a rock formation that sits on top of a hill overlooking the Peel River, upriver from Fort McPherson (see photo pg. 212). The legend associated with this place explains that a young girl broke the rules of her training and caused her three brothers and their dog to turn into stone pillars. Today, only one of the large stone pillars (one of the brothers) and a small one (the dog) still stand. Many

people are said to have died when the other pillars fell down. **Natainlailii** (also spelled Nitainlailii) ("water flowing out from all directions") refers to an area which includes a small community of fish camps 13 kilometres from Fort McPherson and a stream upriver from there, which for many centuries was one of the favourite fishing places of the Tet'it Gwich'in. It was also a well-known site for battles between the Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit. Today, this is where the ferry takes people across the Peel River as they travel on the Dempster Highway. It is locally known as Eight Miles.

**Chik gwaraii** (Black Mountain) refers to a prominent mountain located southwest of the present-day community of Aklavik. There are several stories associated with this mountain including one about the legendary Gwich'in cultural hero Atachookaii, who was known as a great traveller and adventurer.



Adult high school graduate, with her proud father and son

### The Gwich'in Land Claim Settlement

To understand the origins of the present land claim agreement, we need to go back to 1920. That's when a discovery—almost on par with the Klondike Gold Rush—was made at the present-day site of Norman Wells, creating an influx of oil prospectors and speculators. Fearing a rush into an area over which the government had no formal control, the Canadian government decided that the time had come to sign a treaty with the aboriginal people of the

months, the treaty party travelled to eight communities from Great Slave Lake to the Mackenzie Delta, obtaining signatures along the way from the leaders of each community. By the end of the summer, the treaty had been signed by all.

The treaty meetings were well remembered in Gwich'in oral history. As Johnny Kay explained:

"Mr. Conroy was the first white man who gave out money in Fort McPherson. When he arrived, he came in a gas boat. A large tent was set up on the sandbar at the beach at Fort McPherson and a flag was set in front of the tent. Tables and chairs were also put around this tent and on this table there was lots of money. All the Indians gathered by this tent with the chief, Chief Julius."

The treaty party arrived in the Gwich'in community of Tsiigehtchic (formerly Arctic Red River), on July 26. Before signing the treaty, Julienne Andre remembers her people being suspicious of what it meant and asking many questions to clarify its meaning:

"This is our land, we were born here, it is our land no one will take it from us. This white man [Conroy] and a Hudson Bay clerk 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.'"

After only half a day of discussions, Chief Paul Nid-itchie and Fabien Laloo (Coyen) signed Treaty 11 on

Mackenzie Valley. The government appointed Henry A. Conroy as the treaty commissioner to negotiate Treaty 11, but instructed him to stick to the terms drafted by Ottawa and not to offer any "outside promises."

The summer of 1921 saw a transportation boom along the Mackenzie River to Norman Wells. Travelling in this wave of activity was the treaty party led by Commissioner Conroy. He was accompanied by RCMP Inspector W.V. Bruce, two constables from the RCMP and Bishop Breynt. Over the course of two



**Chief Julius Salu**

Julius Salu was born on September 19, 1875, in the Blackstone River area. On July 7, 1898, Julius married Maggie Vittrekwa at St. Matthews Church in Fort McPherson. He was the last of the traditional chiefs and served his people in this capacity for over 45 years. In 1921, Chief Julius and Johnny Kay signed Treaty 11 on behalf of their people. Chief Julius was a well-respected and kind-hearted man, known for giving people good advice and always willing to help in any way that he could. He was much loved by children and spent considerable time talking and playing with them. Even into his old age, he could be seen playing baseball with the local kids. Chief Julius was instrumental in having a school built in Fort McPherson, a request that he made after his youngest daughter died in Hay River, and the current school in Fort McPherson is named after him.



*Gwich'in elder Sarah Simon*

**Sarah Simon**

Sarah Simon was born near Fort McPherson on May 1, 1901. She was the daughter of Martha and Charlie Stewart. Sarah spent most of her young life in Fort McPherson looking after her grandmother, Catherine Stewart. On July 12, 1920, Sarah married James Simon (son of Simon Choo and Louisa) at St. Matthews Church in Fort McPherson. Afterwards, both Sarah and James went to the Anglican school in Hay River. James was ordained as a minister at Christ Church Cathedral in Whitehorse, Yukon, on October 18, 1959.

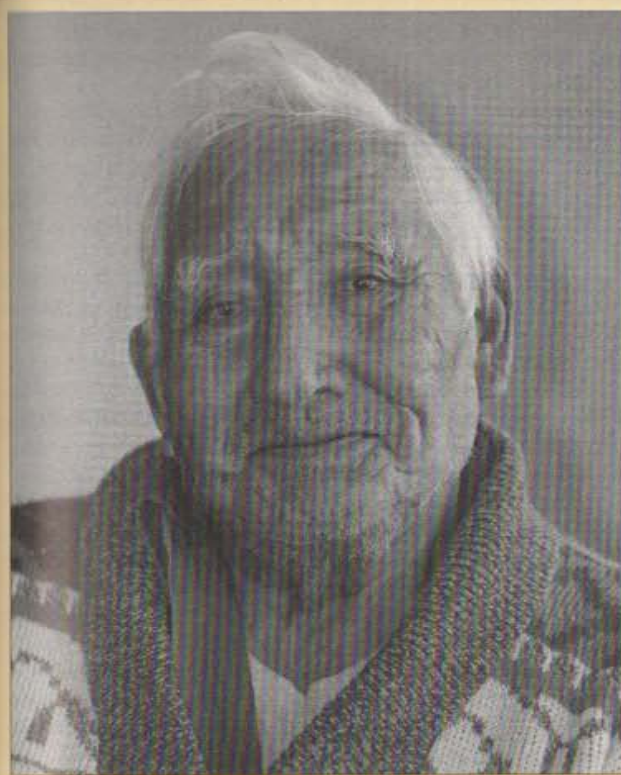
Sarah and James worked together for the church for many years in Hay River, Whitehorse, Old Crow, Aklavik and Fort McPherson. Sarah was also well known as a midwife, and during her life delivered 85 babies. Most recently, Sarah dedicated her life to translating the Bible into the Gwich'in language.

In 1982, Sarah published a pictorial history book called *Sarah Simon, Fort McPherson, N.W.T.: A Pictorial Account of Family, Church, and Community*. In 1991, Sarah was awarded the Order of Canada in recognition for her many years of service to her church and her community. As the Order of Canada award

states, "She has spent her lifetime preserving and promoting the culture of the Loucheux [old French term for the Gwich'in] people. She is a skilled linguist whose dedicated work as a translator and interpreter ensured that her people's needs were met and understood by the many officials who visited the northern communities over the years."

**Lazarus Sittichinli**

Lazarus Sittichinli was born in Fort McPherson in 1890 to Edward and Annie Sittichinli. Edward was one of the first Gwich'in ministers ordained by the Anglican church (1903). In his youth, Lazarus travelled extensively with his parents



*Gwich'in elder Hyacinthe Andre*

mountain in the Richardson range on the Yukon-Northwest Territories border, was named for Lazarus in 1973.

**Hyacinthe Andre**

Hyacinthe Andre was born up the Arctic Red River at a place called Hehnyuu Deet'yah Tshik (today, Bernard Creek) on May 14, 1910. He is the eldest son of Julienne Jerome and Jean Tsai (aka John Andre). In 1923, Hyacinthe travelled to Fort Simpson on the mission boat where he worked as a cook's helper for two years at the mission school. Hyacinthe married Eliza Sam on July 2, 1928, in Tsiighehtchic. Together they spent most of their time on the land in the Khaii Luk (Travaillant Lake) and Tree River areas, and around Nichitsii Diniinlee (Big Rock) in the Mackenzie Delta. In the 1940s, he established a permanent camp at Tree River. Hyacinthe was the longest serving chief of the Gwichya Gwich'in of Tsiighehtchic, serving his people for 38 years, from 1942 to 1980. Hyacinthe has seen many changes in his life. His early years were a time when moose-skin boats and moss houses were still in use, and families walked overland into the mountains with their dogs, laden down with packs. Hyacinthe speaks three languages: Gwich'in, Slavey and English. The Chief Hyacinthe Andre Cultural Centre in Tsiighehtchic is the home of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. He was one of the Gwich'in chiefs who was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the Gwich'in land claim, the modern-day treaty.

**Gwich'in Leaders**

- **John A. Charlie (Tetlichi)** who, in 1967, was the first aboriginal person appointed to the Legislative Council of the Northwest Territories
- **Wally Firth**, a noted photographer and fiddler and the first aboriginal Member of Parliament from the Northwest Territories in 1972
- **Richard Nerysoo**, the first aboriginal Government Leader of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

while his father preached at such places as Rampart House, Fort McPherson and Old Crow.

In 1915, Lazarus married Catherine Stewart. He spent most of his life hunting and trapping in the Peel River area near Fort McPherson and Aklavik, but also worked at Reindeer Station and as a deckhand aboard schooners in Tuktoyaktuk and Herschel Island. He was well respected for his hunting and guiding skills and became well known for the role that he played as a Special Constable for the North-West Mounted Police during the search for Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper of Rat River (see story, page 142). Mount Sittichinli, the highest



behalf of the Gwich'ya Gwich'in in Arctic Red River. From Arctic Red River, the Treaty Commission continued on to Fort McPherson. On July 28, Chief Julius Salu and Johnny Kay signed Treaty 11 on behalf of the Tetlit Gwich'in in Fort McPherson.

In the eyes of the Gwich'in, Treaty 11 was an agreement that safeguarded their traditional way of life and guaranteed them control over their traditional lands in return for sharing the land and living in peace with newcomers. Surrender of their lands was never discussed. In fact, however, the treaty was soon largely forgotten, and government steadily increased its control over Gwich'in land and communities, often allowing development to occur without the knowledge or consent of the Gwich'in.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit became concerned over the effects of exploration on their land and on their lives and wanted assurances that they would benefit from this development. Consequently, they formed the first aboriginal association in the Arctic, calling it the Committee for Original People's Entitlement. The initial membership included Inuit, Gwich'in and Métis of the region. It later changed, with the Inuit from Kugluktuk and farther east joining the Inuit Tapirisat, and the Gwich'in and Métis joining the newly formed Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories (now the Dene Nation) and the Métis Association (now the Métis Nation). These latter two organizations repre-

sented the interests of all of the Mackenzie Valley peoples (collectively known as the Dene and Métis) in their struggle with the Canadian government to take control over their lives, claim their rights and settle their land claims.

The year 1973 was a turning point in the relationship between the Dene and the Canadian government. Chief François Paulette, on behalf of all the Dene chiefs of the Mackenzie Valley, filed a caveat in the Territorial Land Titles Office. The caveat stated that the Dene had aboriginal rights to all their traditional lands in the Mackenzie Valley, and that any decisions by the federal government had to have the assent of the Dene. Mr. Justice William H. Morrow of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories spent the summer of 1973 hearing testimony from elders, anthropologists and legal experts regarding the treaties. Morrow concluded that aboriginal title to the land had not been extinguished through the treaties and they should be permitted to put forward a claim for title

to the land. This decision and others forced the federal government to change its policy and begin negotiating land claim settlements.

During the early 1970s, oil and gas companies were fiercely lobbying the Canadian government to construct a gas pipeline that would run from the Arctic Coast south to the United States. The proposed pipeline route crossed Inuvialuit and Gwich'in lands, as well as the lands of other Dene groups in the Mackenzie Valley, and caused considerable concern among the people. To study the social and environmental implications of a pipeline, the government formed the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, with Mr. Justice Thomas Berger as commissioner. Formal hearings began in January 1975. Berger took the inquiry to 35 communities in the Mackenzie Valley and Western Arctic and listened to the evidence of almost 1,000 northerners. Given peoples' concerns, Berger recommended in his 1977 report that a 10-year moratorium be

placed on oil and gas development in the region.

Over the next 15 years, the Dene continued to negotiate a Mackenzie Valley-wide land claim agreement. Regional organizations were established to represent the separate groups in the valley. In the Gwich'in area, the Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (later the Gwich'in Tribal Council) was established in 1983 to represent local Gwich'in and Métis. In June 1990, the recently negotiated Dene-Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was presented to the Dene National Assembly of Chiefs and delegates. However, when a motion was passed asking the leaders to renegotiate the agreement because of southern Dene leaders' concerns with the "extinguishment" clause concerning aboriginal rights, some of the regional groups disagreed. The Gwich'in were among those, and walked away from the negotiations of

the Dene-Métis claim in order to negotiate their own land claim directly with the Canadian government.

Two years later, on April 22, 1992, the Gwich'in and the Government of Canada officially signed the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in Fort McPherson.

It had taken 20 years of hard work and sacrifice on the part of many people to achieve this victory. And a victory it was, representing an important step in empowering the Gwich'in to regain the control over their lives that had been eroding since Treaty 11 was initially signed in 1921.

The major provisions of the Gwich'in land claim agreement are as follows:

- a cash settlement of \$140,691,428.95 over 15 years;
- a set percentage of resource royalties to be paid to the federal government;

- a settlement area of 32,000 square kilometres in the Northwest Territories and Yukon, including 16,264 square kilometres of surface rights, 6,065 square kilometres of surface and subsurface rights, and 93 square kilometres of subsurface rights;
- the establishment of co-management boards (partnerships between the Gwich'in and government) to involve the Gwich'in in the management of their lands, wildlife and natural resources; and
- the establishment of a self-government framework agreement.

The Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC), is the organization responsible for implementing the land claim. Its mission statement—"Gwich'in land, culture and economy for a better future"—speaks to the fact that these three aspects need to be delicately balanced so that one does not override the other. Working to make this a reality are a number of Gwich'in organizations that have been established under the GTC. For example, the Gwich'in Land Administration office, the land management arm of the GTC, manages and controls the use of Gwich'in private lands. The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, the cultural arm of the GTC, carries out research and provides educational programming in the area of culture. The Gwich'in Development Corporation, the investment arm of the GTC, invests in businesses and provides training, employment and business opportunities to beneficiaries.

What will the future bring? Everyone recognizes that there

### Gwich'in Words and Phrases

**Older Gwich'in** people love to hear visitors try to speak the Gwich'in language. Here are some Gwich'in words and phrases to try out on older local people when you meet them.

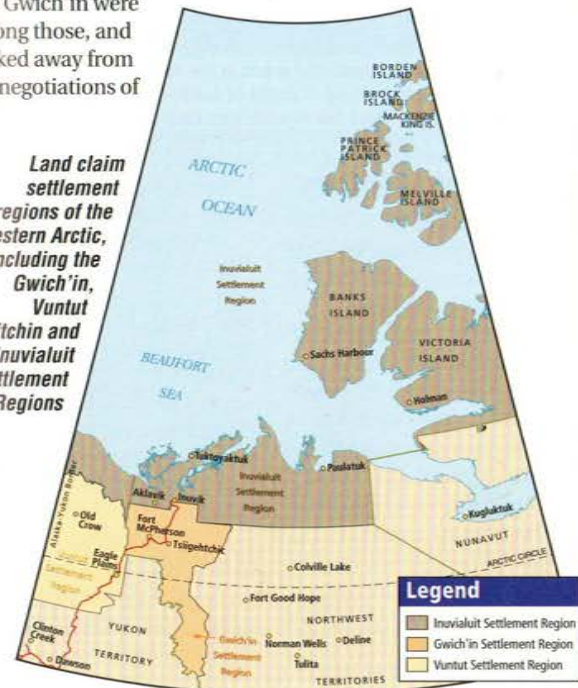
#### English

Yes  
No  
Good  
Good day  
It is nice outside  
It is not nice outside  
There are lots of mosquitoes  
Damn mosquitoes!  
It is good, there are no mosquitoes  
Thank you

#### Gwich'in

Aaha'  
Akwa'  
Gwiizii  
Driin gwiizii  
Chiitaii gwiizii  
Chiitaii gwiizii kwah  
Ch'ii goonlii  
Ch'ii k'an!  
Ch'ii kwaa. Gwiizii  
Mahsi' chao

Land claim settlement regions of the Western Arctic, including the Gwich'in, Vuntut Gwitchin and Inuvialuit Settlement Regions





is still much work to be done in order to build a strong Gwich'in Nation and meet the goals set out in the land claim agreement. 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 lives of many generations to come.

### The Gwich'in Language

Gwich'in is the language spoken in the Gwich'in Settlement Area communities of Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic. Gwich'in people fluent in the language, and older Gwich'in speakers, refer to themselves as *Dinjii zhuh*. There are two dialects spoken in the Gwich'in Settlement Area: Gwichya Gwich'in by those who come from the Tsiigehtchic area, and Tetlit Gwich'in by those from the Fort McPherson area. The Gwichya Gwich'in dialect is different from other Gwich'in dialects in that words sound more nasalized. Gwich'in who live in Aklavik and Inuvik speak one of the two dialects.

Linguistically, the Gwich'in language belongs to the Athapaskan language group which is spoken by indigenous peoples who live in the western regions of the North American continent, from the interior of Alaska to Hudson Bay and south to the northern parts of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. There are also some Athapaskan speakers in the United States, the largest group being the Navaho in the American southwest.



*Inuvialuit woman in traditional dress at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, 1901. Her clothing is made of caribou skin trimmed with wolverine fur. Note her layered and carefully bound hair.*

### Inuvialuit History and Culture

About 4,500 years ago, the Palaeoeskimos appeared in the North Slope of Alaska. They rapidly moved eastward across the Canadian Arctic and into Greenland. They and their Inuit cousins were the first people to successfully adopt a way of life that allowed survival in the Arctic's coastal environments.

The Palaeoeskimos lived on the mainland, using delicate stone and bone tools for hunting, fishing and domestic activities. They hunted cari-

bou, fish and seal, as well as walrus and muskox.

About 2,000 years ago, changes occurred in the ways they hunted for food. New technology (floats attached to harpoons to tire the animal and keep it from sinking) made it possible for the first time to hunt sea mammals from boats. This culture is known to archaeologists as Old Bering Sea.

Roughly 1,000 years ago, a new group—the Thule—migrated eastward from Alaska to follow bowhead whales with the warming climate and dis-



*Inuvialuit repair nets and tools at a fish camp east of Kitigaaryuit, probably Tuktoyaktuk or Whitefish Station, July 1927. Behind them at the right is a complex of adjoining tents called saigu. The "teepee" was used for cooking and the other tents were used for sleeping.*

placed the original people, known as Tunit in old Eastern Arctic stories. The Western Thule culture has been dated to about 1,000 years ago.

About 800 years ago, the climate began to cool. Ice formed faster and melted more slowly. The Western Thule found it harder to move

about the sea and were forced to change the way they hunted and fished. They became more dependent on the wildlife resources of the land and returned to the techniques of ice-edge hunting of sea mammals.

The Thule were the ancestors of the present-day

Inuit. The Inuit include many closely related groups who share the tools and skills necessary to fish and hunt seals, whales (beluga and bowhead), caribou and other land animals. The Inuvialuit—meaning "the real people"—are one of the groups of Inuit.

### People Travelling Together, by Elder Agnes Nanogak Goose

"Long ago people always traveled together because that way they had a better chance of surviving in groups, helping one another when the other is in need. These large family relations traveled along the coast hunting and fishing in search for food.

"Summer came. They decided among the men to travel inland to hunt for caribou so that each family could have enough skins for making clothing. So they set off with their dogs as backpackers. Some families camped where it was good for fishing in rivers and caribou hunting. Other

families moved to other places. They would tell each other that as fall comes they would meet at the main river along the coast.

"The wives dried up caribou meat, cleaned up every usable part of the caribou. Nothing was wasted. They made caches for pick-up in the fall time. They would go out on the sea ice hunting for seals through seal holes because they needed the fat for cooking and heating in the cold winter.

"All winter long they hunted. The women sewed warm clothing for every member of the

family. They even bartered items they needed from each other. Sometimes some would get angry with each other because they didn't get a good barter. At times a bad barter could mean death. So each person had to be very careful about how to barter goods to one another.

"But all in all they tried to live in good faith with each other."

From *Inuvialuit Oral Histories Project* (Inuvialuit Social Development Program, 1992)