



*Mahsi'. Nakhwananpak qutts at chihhoopit geenjit geiwjii. (NT)*  
*Tr'ondek Hwech'in nankak nihé dāheh'e, shé t'āntay. Nān hōgo k'ānāheha. (H)*  
*Siiml'it enohjaa geenjit mahsi' nakhwat'ah'nun. (VGFN)*  
*Welcome to Our Lands*

Fall on Dempster. PHOTO: PETER NAGANO



Cloudberries and blueberries. PHOTO: TH

## PEOPLE

*"lots of people used to live here...they are just scattered all over the mountains here...that's where the caribou migrate and that's where they dry meat and get all their winter meat...that's why they live here."* ~ Walter Alexie, TG



Percy Henry was born and raised in Dempster Country. PHOTO: TH

The Dempster Highway winds through the traditional territories of eight distinct First Nations. We gather throughout the year to hunt, trade, tell stories, and visit with relatives. Family ties and relations between communities strengthen our identity as First Nations people.

*"People took care of each other. People still practice this today."* ~ Dick Nukon, VG

## LAND

*"Since the beginning of time, the Gwitchin people lived with and hunted the caribou. They never made fun of or laugh about the caribou. I never heard it. ... They were raised by eating caribou meat so they respect the animal."* ~ Edith Josie, VG



Tombstone Mountain Range. PHOTO: TH

A connection to the land is central to our identity. Land refers to much more than the ground we walk on. It includes the living environment ~ all of the wildlife and plants, the waterways and mountains, the medicines and raw materials ~ that make life possible. Respect for the land is at the core of our values.

## HUNTING

*"...they don't play around with it, what they kill. Just what they need. What they can handle...They're very careful with their herd of caribou...moose, anything. They don't overkill anything."* ~ Alfred Semple, TH



Two moose at Two Moose Lake. PHOTO: TH

The Porcupine Caribou herd migrates annually through the Dempster region. We harvest this vital resource from fall to spring. Moose, sheep, rabbit, beaver, and porcupine are all important food sources. Today First Nations people can hunt at any time in our traditional territories to provide food for our families and communities. We work hard to ensure that conservation, and public health and safety are not jeopardized.

## GATHERING

*"...they made baskets for berries. ... They put berries in the basket and put another one on top, and they sew around it and the berries will never spoil."* ~ Annie Henry, TH



Julia Morberg harvests medicines. PHOTO: TH

Plant foods, berries, medicines, and other important natural resources including birch bark, spruce, willow, mosses, lichens, and dyes are gathered throughout the year. Berry patches are often associated with families who have harvested them for generations. The region is particularly rich in cranberries, blueberries, and cloudberries.

*"...the strongest one is spruce tree...for your skin or for your cold...the whole tree is a natural antibiotic..."* ~ Julia Morberg, TH

## FISHING

*"...we get fish, we take all the fish guts, the liver and all that. Fish guts, we cut it up and we cook that up too, and the eggs too, and we put that nakal [cloudberries] in it too. ... and it used to taste so good..."* ~ Dorothy Alexie, TG



Dry fish hanging at Tsiigehtchic Flats. PHOTO: TERRY FOSTER, HSMBC

Fish such as arctic char, grayling, whitefish, salmon, coney and loche are an important part of our diet and we take great care to dry and smoke some of these fish in the summer to last us through the winter. Dog teams used for travel and on traplines are fed fish.

*"They make [fish trap] from willow. ... You sit down at night and the fish trap would move. They would take lots of fish ..."* ~ Annie Henry, TH

## SNARING & TRAPPING

*"Winter to winter we never trap in the same area. We set traps in different areas. If we trap in the same area, we will not get many animals."* ~ Alfred Charlie, VG



Peggy Kormendy shares her knowledge of trapping. PHOTO: TH

Snares are used to trap smaller mammals for both food and fur. These animals provide important sustenance in times of need. Since the 1800s the fur industry provided a new economic opportunity for our people. Many families continue to run traplines and sell fur from a variety of animals including marten, fox, wolf, lynx, wolverine, muskrat and rabbit.

## TRAILS

*"Easy to get to Rock River with a truck, couple hour, but from McPherson there with a dog team, it would take about a week them days."* ~ Alfred Semple, TH



Skidoo following the Teet'it Gwitchin traditional trail between Fort McPherson and Dawson. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI

A wide network of traditional trails wind their way through the Dempster region tying together the First Nations and Inuit that live here. The Dempster Highway north of Dawson City follows a traditional Teet'it Gwitchin trail. These trails were the means by which we accessed food and other resources needed to survive during different seasons, and to meet and trade with our neighbours. People walked these trails and later used dog teams to travel on them while hunting caribou and moose in the winter. Today we use the highway "trail" to hunt caribou from the Porcupine Caribou Herd and collect berries.

## RESPECT

*"...when I take an animal [I] thank that animal for giving its life so my family could live. Because it died for us to live, you have to pay respect to that animal...I give tobacco and I say a prayer right there before I touch it..."* ~ Darius Elias, VG

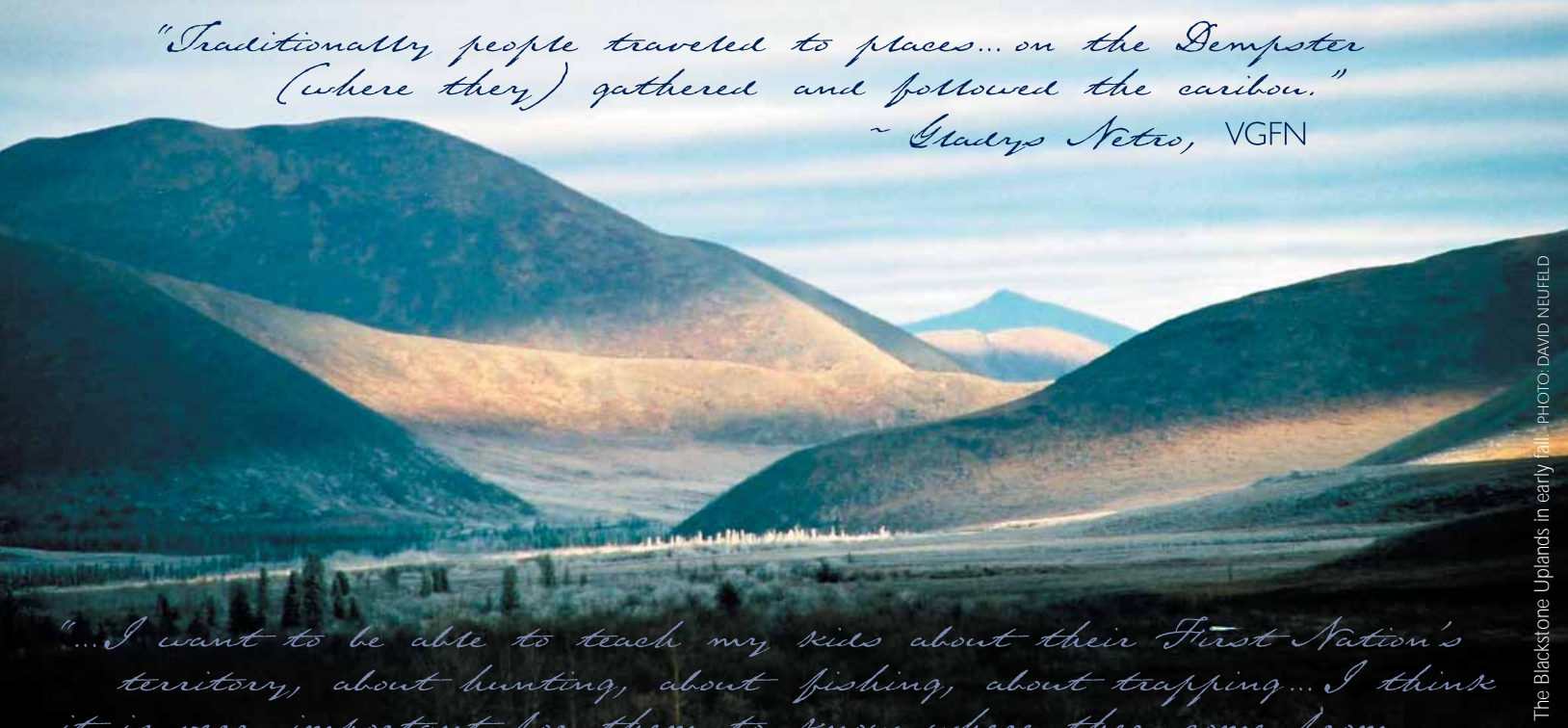


Robert Alexie butchering a beaver while camped along the Peel River. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI

When foods and other resources are harvested we often leave offerings in return for these gifts from the land. Common offerings include a prayer, tobacco, matches, or coins.

*"Young people have a lot to learn from the Elders, their way of life. Things have changed now, they are more contemporary, but the ideas, thoughts and the teachings are still there."* ~ Darius Elias, VG

*"Traditionally people traveled to places...on the Dempster (where they) gathered and followed the caribou."* ~ Shadraps Netso, VGFN



The Blackstone Uplands in early fall. PHOTO: DAVID NEUFELD

*"...I want to be able to teach my kids about their First Nation's territory, about hunting, about fishing, about trapping...I think it is very important for them to know where they come from, that this [Dempster] area is their country, that it is always going to be there for them to live and practice their way of life."* ~ Sharon Reaton, VGFN

## WELCOME

First Nations and the Inuit people have lived in the Dempster region for generations. Signs on the land, including the remains of old camps and grave sites, as well as the stories our Elders share, all reflect the long and rich history of our people. Today families continue to use and care for the land in much the same way as in years gone by. Rifles have replaced older hunting tools and motorized vehicles are much more common than snow shoes and pack dogs, but the values ~ respecting the land, its wildlife, and its people ~ have remained the same through generations.

The First Nations and Inuit of the Dempster Country ~ Tr'ondek Hwech'in, Na Cho Nyak Dun, Teet'it Gwitch'in, Gwichya Gwitch'in, Nihit Gwitch'in, Ehdliitat Gwitch'in, Vuntut Gwitch'in, and the Inuvialuit welcome you to our lands. Please enjoy your visit and take care of our lands for our future generations.



Dorothy Alexie and Georgette McLeod rub moss on themselves to keep cool. PHOTO: TH

## CARING FOR OUR LAND

Respect for, and stewardship of, the land is expected of all people who travel the Dempster region. We are all a part of the land and must treat it properly. "Good ways to live" have been taught by our Elders for generations through storytelling and observation.

You can do your part by acting in a respectful and careful manner when traveling in our country.

- Respect our heritage. It is illegal to disrupt graves and cultural sites.
- Respect our land. Practice no trace camping.
- Respect people's camps. Treat them as you would your own home.
- Take photographs to ensure that future visitors can experience the beauty of our home.
- If you wish to take photos of people ask permission.
- Watch your children. Wildlife, dogs, and the physical environment can be dangerous.
- Ask for help when you need it.

*"Elders will tell the young people... The young people had to...listen to them. Because you had to learn how to look after your land, your water, your game..."* ~ Percy Henry, TH

# THE PEOPLE'S TRAIL: TRAVELING IN DEMPSTER COUNTRY



Robert Alexie enjoys tea while traveling a traditional trail in Dempster Country. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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**Nihit Gwitchin Council**  
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**Inuvialuit Regional Corporation**  
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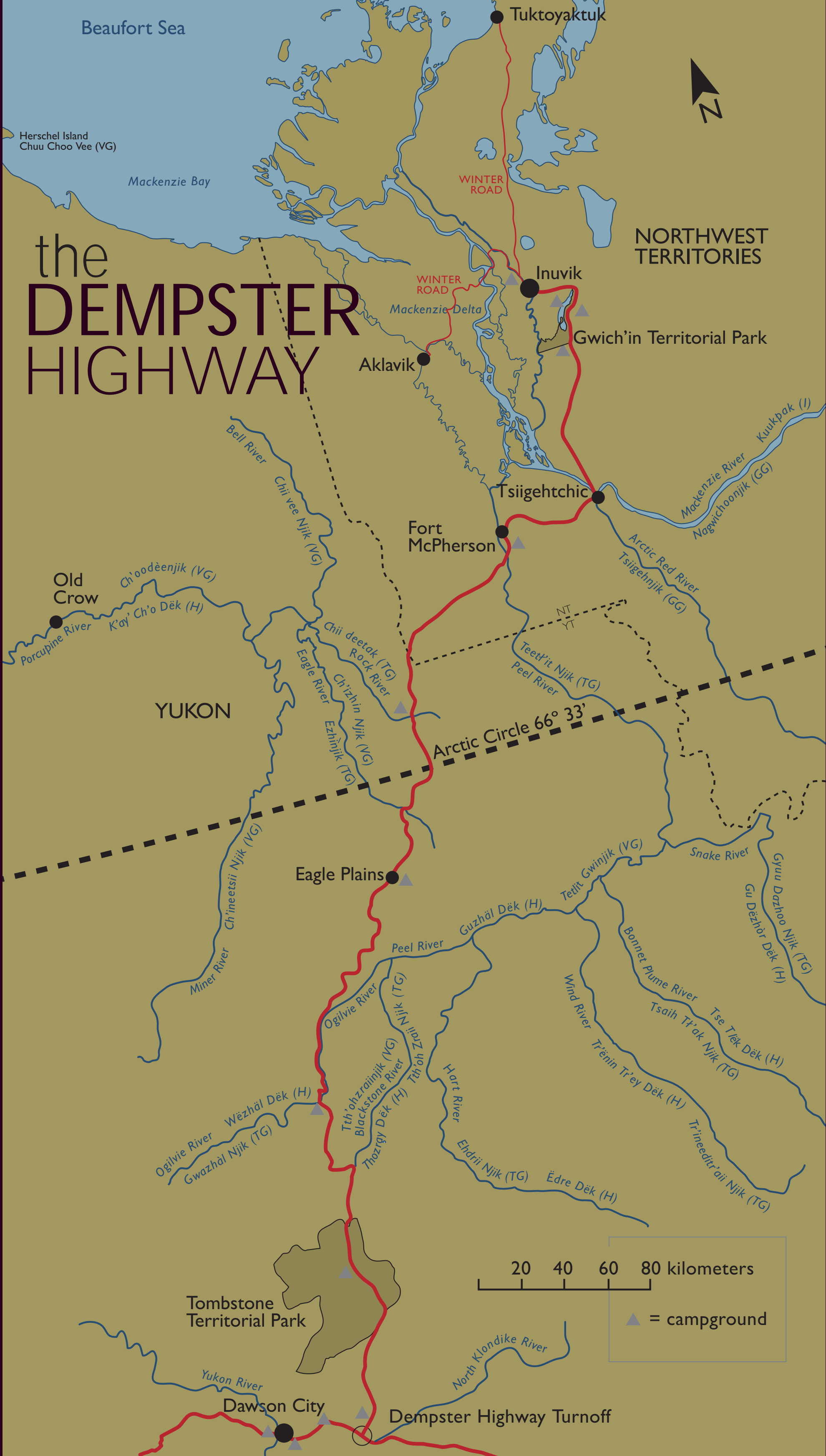


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Tombstone lookout. PHOTO: CHERA HUNCHUK



Caribou in early winter. PHOTO: YTG

### PLACE NAMES AND LANGUAGES

The mountains, rivers, and important sites in Yukon and the Northwest Territories all have original First Nations names. These names all have stories attached to them that include important information about the land and the people of the north. In recent years most of these names have been replaced by English words with little association to the original names. Today we are working hard to ensure that the original names are brought back. This map includes First Nations place names for rivers in the area. Many of the lakes, hills, mountains and other geographic features that you will see while driving also have traditional names and stories attached to them.

There are four distinct languages, in addition to English, spoken in the Dempster region: Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in speak Hän; Na Cho Nyak Dun speak Northern Tutchone; the Teet'it, Gwich'ya, Nihtat, Ehdliat, and Vuntut Gwich'in speak three dialects of Gwich'in, and the Inuvialuit speak three dialects of Inuvialuktun. Languages used throughout this brochure are noted according to the following legend:

Hän ~ (H); Northern Tutchone ~ (NT); Teet'it Gwich'in ~ (TG); Gwich'ya Gwich'in ~ (GG); Vuntut Gwich'in ~ (VG); and Inuvialuktun ~ (I).

### ACCESSING OUR COMMUNITIES

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Na-Cho Nyak Dun  
Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation  
Gwich'ya Gwich'in  
Teet'it Gwich'in  
Nihtat Gwich'in  
Ehdliat Gwich'in / Inuvialuit  
Inuvialuit  
Inuvialuit

Dawson City, YT  
Mayo, YT  
Old Crow, YT  
Tsiigehtchic, NWT  
Fort McPherson, NWT  
Inuvik, NWT  
Aklavik, NWT  
Inuvik, NWT  
Tuktoyaktuk, NWT

Road, Air  
Road, Air  
Road, Air  
Road, Ferry/Ice Bridge  
Road, Ferry/Ice Bridge, Air  
Road, Ferry/Ice Bridge, Air  
Air, Winter Road  
Road, Ferry/Ice Bridge, Air  
Air, Winter Road



Robert Alexie at a family member's grave. PHOTO: TH



Elders in Inuvik. PHOTO: IRC



Alice Vittrekwa sewing at a Peel River Science Camp. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI



Inuvialuit drum dancing. PHOTO: IRC



Christine Blanchard learns about the area's plants. PHOTO: TH



Steven Kormendy and Waylon Nagano at the Black City Heritage Site. PHOTO: TH



Walter Alexie driving his snow up the Peel River. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI



George Niditchie prepares tea along the Arctic Red River. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI



Alana Taylor at target practice during First Hunt. PHOTO: TH



Blanket toss in Inuvik. PHOTO: IRC



Eunice Mitchell preparing bannock at the Peel Canyon. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI



Hannah Alexie traveling by sled. PHOTO: INGRID KRITSCH, GSCI