The background of the cover is a photograph of a large, calm lake at dusk or dawn. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under a pale sky. A full moon is positioned in the upper center of the sky, and its reflection is clearly visible in the still water of the lake. The foreground shows the water's surface with some submerged vegetation or rocks visible.

# **YEAR THREE: DAGOO 2009-2010 YEAR-END REPORT**

Ch'ihilii Chik, July 2009

Submitted to  
Vuntut Gwitchin Government

Shirleen Smith  
March 2010





Making drymeat at Ch'ihilii Chik. L-R: Mary Jane Moses, Erika Tizya, Brianna Tetlich, Frances Bruce

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Photographs: S.Smith@VGFN, July 2009 unless otherwise indicated.





## YEAR THREE: DAGOO 2009-2010 YEAR-END REPORT

MARCH 2010

**Polar Continental Shelf Project #390-09  
Yukon Scientists and Explorers License #09-59 S&E**

### 1. Introduction

The Van Tat Gwich'in Cultural Technology Project has just completed Year 3 of a multi-faceted 4-year research project incorporating interpretation and education with research. The overall objectives are to conduct research with Van Tat Gwich'in Elders and other knowledgeable individuals about the cultural technology developed by Gwich'in to provide for physical and social survival; to travel with Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in knowledge holders/researchers and community members to relevant places on Gwich'in traditional lands to take part in the research in a learning environment; to produce interpretive/educational materials about the project; and to conduct training and orientation for research team members and participants. A central theme is to combine research with transmitting the information and research experience to community members to actively support cultural continuity and develop local research capacity.



Map 1. 2009 research camp locations: Ch'ihillii Chik (Whitefish Lake) and Poulton Station, in relation to Old Crow. Also shown are the two historic villages visited as part of the research: Kâachik (Johnson Creek Village) and Chuu Tl'it (Whitestone Village)





Seminars prepare Year Three participants for the locations, oral history, scientific research, technologies and research/camp protocols.



Year Three research had two foci:

## 1. *cultural technology of the Dagoo*

The Dagoo are a Gwich'in group who dispersed among neighbouring regional Gwich'in groups, including Van Tat Gwich'in, in the 1950s, due to depleted resources in their homeland, the upper Porcupine River. Researching and passing on Dagoo culture and technologies is a priority at this time. Research was centred at Ch'ihilii Chik, a large lake east of the Porcupine River south of Bell River, one of a number of lakes known as Whitefish Lake in English.

## 2. *archaeology at Poulton Station*

Poulton Station is a significant archaeological site within Dagoo territory with remains dating to the late Pleistocene Nenana culture (13-14,000 years ago). The site received scant attention prior to 2009 research. In

his report on his 2008 revisit to Poulton Station (area B on photo, page 5), archaeologist Ray Le Blanc described the site:

"First recognized in 1978 by a Geological Survey of Canada geologist, Dr. Terry Poulton, MbVn-1 represents a chert quarry located in the Ogilvie Mountains approximately 160 km by air south of Old Crow (Cinq-Mars and Gotthardt 1998). Scattered lithic debitage (common) and tools (rare) indicate quarrying and production activity spread over several tens of thousands of square metres. After its initial discovery, Jacques Cinq-Mars briefly visited the site in 1978 (CMCC site form), then again in 1997 and 1998; I was present on the latter occasion. Finally, Cinq-Mars conducted another short examination with geologist B. Lauriol, and reported finding a Chindadn point. All recognizable implements found at the site before 2008 relate to a Late Pleistocene, Nenana Complex (14,000-13,000 years ago) presence." (Le Blanc 2008)

The VGCTP and Ray Le Blanc conducted a brief site visit in 2008 during which an obsidian tool was discovered that suggested an additional factor of interest: a tie to the Wrangell Mountains in southeastern Alaska. The site and its research potential offered a unique opportunity for community participants to become familiar with the mountainous Dagoo territory, gain archaeological experience, and engage directly with the antiquity of human presence in the Yukon.

## 2. VGCTP Year Three Activities – 2009-2010

### Research: Summer 2009

In preparation for our 2009 field activities, we developed a series of seminars about Dagoo history, geography and technologies, Dagoo villages, caribou fences at Driftwood River and Berry Creek, and archaeology at Poulton Station. This year we were able to incorporate the Dagoo component of the newly developed Interactive website ([vgfn.plunge.org](http://vgfn.plunge.org)) and caribou fence information from the John Tizya Centre



Jane Montgomery interviewing Elder John Joe Kyikavichik at Ch'ihilii Chik





programs. In addition, we produced new seminar packages on Ch'ihilii Chik, Chuu Tl'it (Whitestone Village), Poulton Station, and updated seminars on Interviewing, Video, and Responsible Camp (including safety).

From July 12–18 we conducted helicopter-assisted research. We set two camps simultaneously, the Poulton Station archaeological camp, led by Dr. Ray Le Blanc with a total of 4 participants, and the Ch'ihilii Chik cultural technology camp, which involved 12 participants (including one elder) and 6 others on single day trips (including 4 elders). We sought to maintain a multi-generational mix of participants to encourage exchange and learning at the camp in a culturally appropriate setting.

As in our previous years research, video filming employing youth filmmakers, interviewing and photography were used to document the presentations, interviews, demonstrations, landscapes and general project activities. We paired information compiled in advance from oral history and non-Gwich'in sources with that of Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in specialists and observations in the specific locations. The diversity of sources and kinds of information provided an enriched and participatory research/interpretive experience.

## Research activities:

### A. Ch'ihilii Chik cultural technology

The 2009 cultural technology camp was located on an island on a large lake, Ch'ihilii Chik [Whitefish Lake] in Dagoo country southeast of Bell River. A major activity at the was to construct a Gwich'in "rat canoe" (muskrat



Map 2. Detail of Ch'ihilii Chik, showing island.

canoe) modelled after those routinely manufactured and used during the late fur trade era and into the 1980s. These canoes were lightweight and portable, built from locally available hand-milled spruce with willow ribs, and covered with waterproof canvas (or regular canvas, painted to waterproof it).



Above: Harold Frost building a rat canoe around the 1960s. Left: Elder Charlie Thomas with the remains of his rat canoe in 2001. He used the canoe until 1984.

Earlier versions would have been covered with hides or bark. Gwich'in could travel to a lake overland with dog teams in the early spring and construct a canoe when it was needed after breakup. The rat canoe could be easily portaged from lake to lake by one person.

2009 was an ideal time to construct a rat canoe because a number of people recall in detail how they were built up until 25 years ago. We were presented with an excellent





Canoe construction: carpenter Bobby Netro, elder Irwin Linklater, youth Paul Josie and Marvin Frost Jr., and culture specialist Esau Schafer

opportunity to document canoe construction, reinforce this knowledge, and pass it to younger Gwich'in. Canoe construction was led by experienced canoe builders Irwin Linklater and Esau Schafer, along with carpenter and boat builder Bobby Netro. Youth Marvin Frost Jr. and Paul Josie assisted, and the process was filmed by Frances Bruce and Erika Tizya, and photographed. The lumber was hand-milled and the canoe was completed to the stage where it would be dried for a few days before being covered with canvas. The canoe frame is on display at the John Tizya Centre.

As well, at the Ch'ihilii Chik camp Heritage Researcher Mary Jane Moses instructed a group (Brianna Tetlich, Frances Bruce and Erika Tizya) in how to cut caribou meat and make it into drymeat,



Above: Bobby Netro watches Marvin Frost Jr. and Paul Josie set the net. Right: Paul Josie is instructed in backing a net by Esau Schafer.



another multi-day process. Esau Schafer demonstrated the "backing" and setting of a fish net. Research at the camp also included general bush skills like the use of moss for washing and setting a clean camp for a dozen people, facilitated by Mary Jane Moses, Marion Schafer and Elizabeth Kyikavichik. A group of elders visited



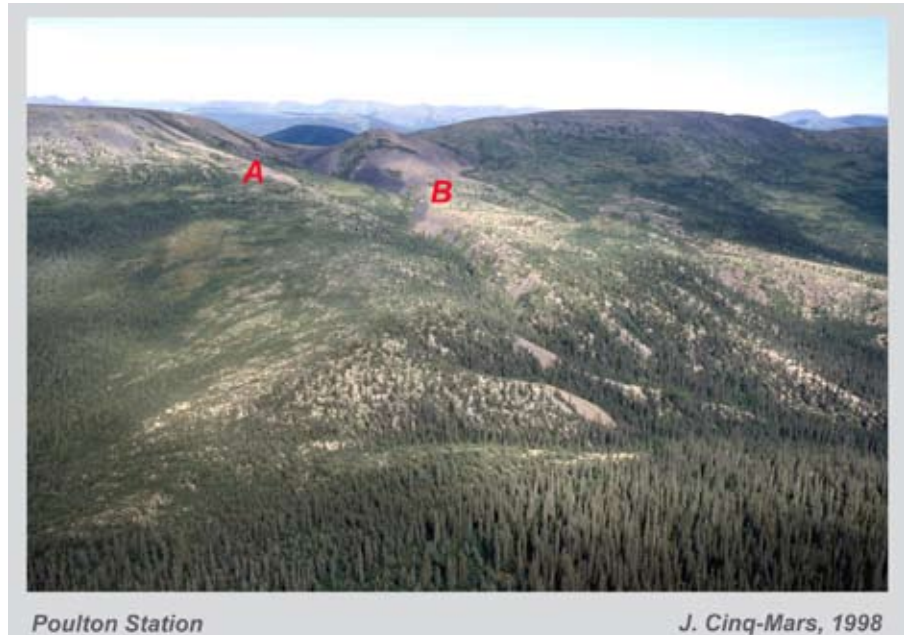




Learning to prepare dry meat.  
Mary Jane Moses (instructor), Erika Tizya, Brianna Tetlich, Frances Bruce.

the camp on day trips and were interviewed about Dagoo history, the area, and the technologies.

From the Ch'ihilii Chik camp, participants visited the Dagoo villages of Chuu TI't (Whitestone Village) and Kâachik (Johnson Creek Village, overflight only as it's now too overgrown to land), and the Jak Chahnjik (Berry Creek) caribou fence. One party also visited the Poulton Station archaeological site on a resupply and crew change visit.



## B. Archaeology at Poulton Station (MbVn-1) — 2009

A one week project was conducted during mid-July at the Poulton Station site, a quarry-workshop which is located approximately 140 km by air south of Old Crow, focussing on area A (in photo, above).

The main objective of the work was to conduct intensive surface collection of the western part of the site to add to the understanding of the locality as a Nenana Complex (c. 14,000-11,000 years ago) toolstone quarry, an interpretation that is based on brief visits in the late 1970s to the 1990s and most recently, in 2008. In addition, we wanted to locate potential areas with buried archaeological remains as well as examine a possible rock feature that may have been some type of habitation.





Part of the Poulton Station site. Red flags indicate some of the 65 areas where artifacts were found. (Photo Ray Le Blanc 2009)

We conducted intensive surface inspection and located 65 find-spots or loci with distributions of artifacts ranging from single items to clusters of hundreds of specimens. Among the most important of the finds was a broken side-notched projectile point that indicates a Northern Archaic Tradition occupation at some point around 4,000-6,000 years

ago. In addition, there were two finely made microblade cores that likely relate to the Denali Complex, which could suggest use of the area from more 10,000 years ago to as late as 2,000 years ago. A few microblades were also found, but not in association with the cores.

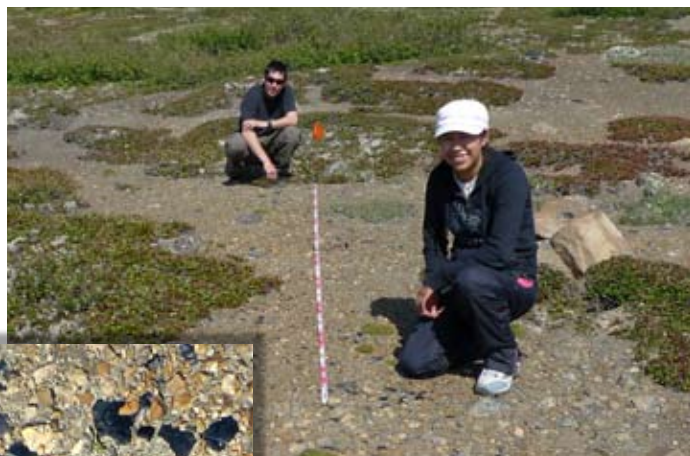


Side-notched point base found by Paul Josie, likely part of the Northern Archaic Tradition dating from 4000-6000 years ago.

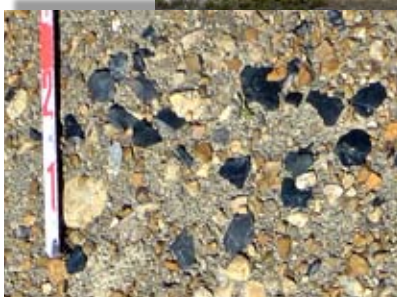
Analysis is still in progress, but several other implements have been identified. These include bifacial knives and fragments, plus preforms of the same type of tools that indicate local manufacture of these implements. Also found are burins on flakes that were used both as chisels or scraping tools for working bone, antler, and wood.

One of the find-spots (locus 65) located at about the middle of the north-south distribution had a particularly extensive cluster of flake remains covering about 6 m north-south by about 1.5 m east-west. A narrow test trench was excavated on

the north end and at approximately 15 cm below the surface, our trowels literally crunched through a dense layer of stone artifacts that extended to about 25 cm below the ground surface. The narrow trench (0.25 m east-west) was extended to the north for about 1.2 m, and the thick bed of stone flakes continued. Clearly, a much greater concentration existed in unexcavated areas adjacent to the trench. In addition to the large quantities of flakes, there was a stone hammer in direct association. The hammer is made from a worn quartzite cobble that had to have been brought to the site for tool-making, likely from the creek valley far



Above: Chelsea Charlie and Lance Nagwan indicating the location of a concentration of stone tool debris at Poulton Station.



Left: detail of debris (black flakes) by Chelsea's knee. (photos Ray Le Blanc)





to the west. The tool is about 8 cm in diameter, heavily battered on both ends, and has split in half, most likely because of intense use in working the local raw material. The association of large quantities of flakes plus the hammer that was likely used to produce them, indicates a workshop area where the pieces of the local bedrock were flaked to produce stone tools. There is no doubt that further excavation at this locus would produce much additional information on Poulton Station tool manufacturing, including the sequence of tool-making and perhaps remains of tools that were being replaced. As well, block excavations near the trench might reveal the remains of a hearth that could provide material suitable for radiocarbon dating.



(above) Archaeologist Ray Le Blanc and participants at the Poulton Station archaeological site. L-R: Irwin Linklater (visitor), Marvin Frost Jr., Paul Josie, Lance Nagwan, Chelsea Charlie, Ray Le Blanc. (left) Views of a microblade core found during 2009 research at Poulton Station. The grooves are where long, narrow and very sharp 'blades' were repeatedly removed from this core.

Although short, the 2009 season at Poulton Station was very successful. It is now clear that the quarry was used over several thousand years beginning as much as 14,000 years ago. It is also apparent that future work can now include excavation of buried cultural deposits and that this should produce considerably more information on tool production activities at the site, not to mention the possibility of obtaining organic material for dating purposes.

## Research Activities: Fall 2009 – Spring 2010

The autumn and winter following every research season is the time for processing the data: translating, transcribing, and indexing the interviews; indexing and cataloguing the video footage; and, cataloguing photographs, and, this year, cataloguing artifacts and analyzing the archaeological data (see R. Le Blanc Permit Report, 2010). We also compile results and feedback to evaluate our program and guide our further research, and prepare two annual reports detailing the research and results. During the fall and winter 2009-2010, we worked with the VGG Heritage Committee to refine research plans and produce a series of seminars and training programs for the fourth and final year of the project.

In addition to work specifically tied to 2009 research, we are continuing to update and manage our Oral History collections and databases. Drawing on these resources, we are developing materials for general educational use and in interpretive programs at the new John Tizya Centre. As well, the collections provide materials for ongoing film and video training and development.





## 3. Year Three Results

### Collections

During Year Two research, we added the following to our collections:

- 17 digital audio interviews
- 510 minutes digital video footage
- 311 photographs
- toponyms:

now online.

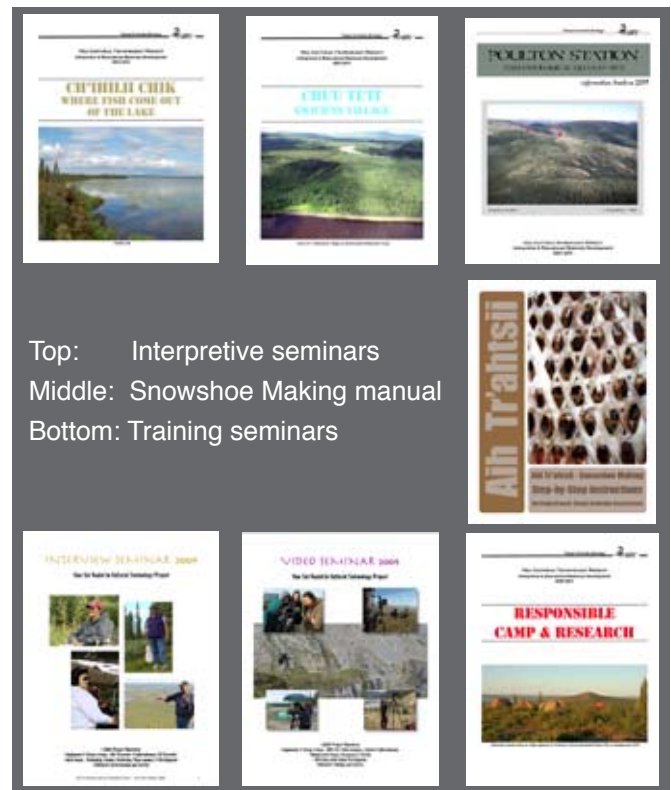
See: Yukon Planning Atlas.  
<http://199.247.233.101:8080/atlas.php> (registration required).

These materials have been added to the databases and processed (catalogued, indexed, plotted, translated, transcribed, as appropriate).



### Materials

The oral history of the Dagoo and the community of Kâachik were incorporated as part of the Interactive Website ([www.plunge.vgfn.org](http://www.plunge.vgfn.org)) in 2008-9, and we were able to utilize the site for participant orientation. As well, participants were shown the audio-visual presentation on caribou fences that is part of the John Tizya Centre programs. This year, we produced seminar packages about the locations (Ch'ihilii Chik, Chuu Tl'it), and a brochure about Poulton Station. We refined the Interview and Video training packages and the Responsible Camp booklet. The seminar packages are part of the series being developed for educational and interpretive programs, such as those at the John Tizya Centre, and the Interactive website. As well, the monograph on Van Tat Gwich'in oral history was released in January 2010 (see below, page 11).



Top: Interpretive seminars

Middle: Snowshoe Making manual

Bottom: Training seminars





## Participant Feedback

Cultural transmission is a goal of the VGCTP. We work with a diverse mix of participants and canvas them to determine what they discovered, parts of the program that were most effective, and their views of the experience. As in previous years, we use this information to evaluate our program and develop our plans for Year Four. Below is a sample of the feedback from a variety of participants.



**Irwin Linklater:** [Poulton Station] That was something to see. ... like I went back in my past, ha ha, seeing all that tools they made and chips from that, what they call that Obsidian rock. I could see that rock they brought from river too, it's there. That's the one they chip that thing with [hammer stone]. Yeah, you don't find that in mountain, ah, you find it at river, those kind. (VG2009-03-04)



**Briana Tetlich:** I got to go see Whitestone Village, where many of the people from Old Crow grew up there and then we flew over Johnson Creek, where my grandpa used to live... I got to watch the men over here make canoe and that was pretty interesting. Irwin [Linklater] told us lots of good stories and just sort of walked around this island and see where the people from long ago trapped and hunt. The Elders came in on Monday and they told us about this land and how they used it. ... It was just a good trip and I really enjoyed myself. The helicopter rides were good and, yeah, just happy to see where my ancestry grew up. I learnt more about it than before... (VG2009-03-16)



**Elizabeth Kyikavichik:** First of all, I am going to say, when I was a child, we always lived on the land. ...I always think about our land is peaceful. ... Now, I thought: How I would react going to Whitefish Lake, while that I wish for this which was in my mind. I really was happy when I arrived here. Here we are going to do this. We will help each other, they told me. I am happy. ... And everyone work good together and I see young people here, if we teach them they will be happy. ... Different types of animal make noise, that, we are happy. The land is peaceful where we are staying. If lots of people see this maybe they will participate, I think. For that I am happy. (VG2009-03-09)



**Mary Jane Moses:** I enjoy every summer. We come to the land with our Elders, with our youth and people of all ages, just to get a grasp of how our ancestors lived and to document that knowledge, that, the stories from our Elders, and pass those down onto the young people for their use in the future. And it's really good work, satisfying to see all the different ages of our people from Old Crow working together trying to remember, just listening from the Elders stories of how, just to imagine how it was for our people long ago and to listen to those stories especially in the Gwich'in language. (VG2009-03-12)



**Marvin Frost Jr.:** It's my first time being here and stayed here, and it was a good experience here: good weather, windy and good cook here, too. Learn pretty good, learn how to fix canoe, build it, set net and went walk around this little island, seen couple of ducks. [Poulton Station] Good view, find whole bunch of flakes, walked, hiked all over, me and Paul and Ray. Found an arrowhead. Yeah, sometime I'll probably come here when I'm little older and getting to know the land. It's my first time being here, yeah, travel the river and make canoe and paddle down. (VG2009-03-07)



**Bobby Netro:** Irwin Linklater and I, we cut down some green spruce trees and split them and cleaned them up and we kind of milled them into lumber and we started putting [the canoe] together. I think the third day Esau Schafer came and helped and it was quite a good experience cause I never actually milled anything in the bush before, so it was a little new technique for me. It took a lot longer but I learnt how to do that and we pretty well got the frame completed last night and it turned out alright. It's a really good idea like [to bring younger people to the camps]. I'm glad I came. My first trip on one of these things and I wouldn't hesitate to do it again and recommend it to other people too. (VG2009-03-06)





## John Tizya Centre Exhibit Development

In July, 2008 the John Tizya Centre was officially opened. Displays and programs at the centre are a joint project of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Parks Canada (Vuntut National Park). The Van Tat Gwich'in Cultural Technology Project has contributed materials to the Centre, and in turn made use of the facilities and programs in our seminars and orientation sessions. The JTC houses the Oral History Collections (including those from the Van Tat Gwich'in Cultural Technology Project) and facilities for visiting researchers working with the collections.



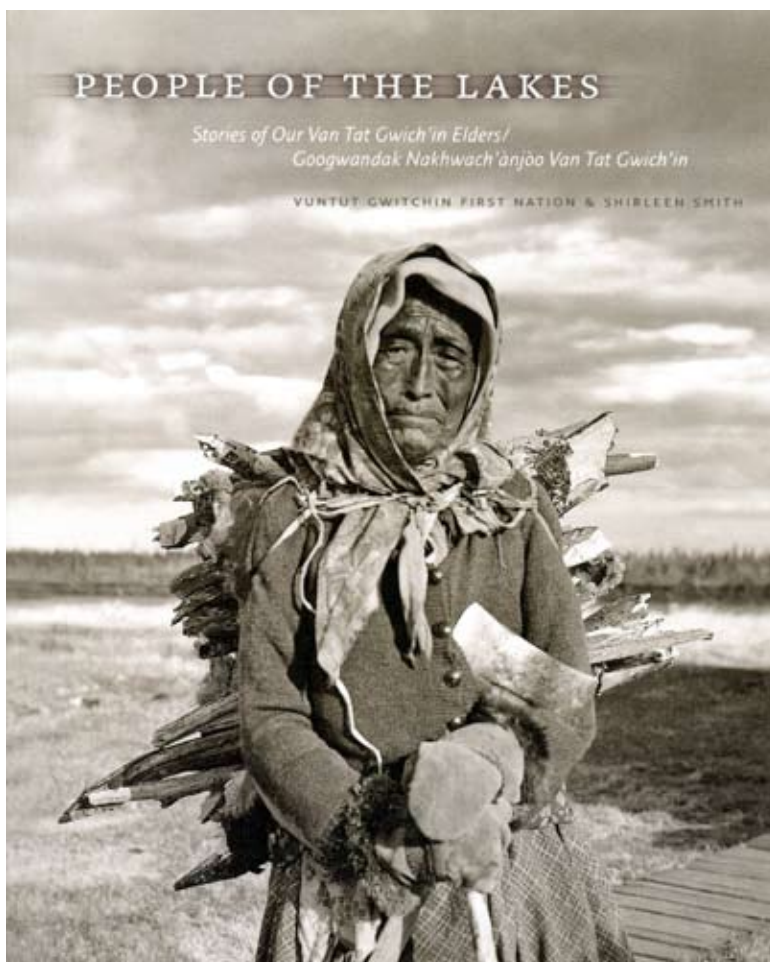
Exhibit area at the John Tizya Centre.

Our 2009 research is integrated in programming at the centre as part of a range of recent activities and products which include: production of a snowshoe-making manual (currently ready for testing), initial documentation of a manual about hide tanning, and display of the rat canoe constructed at Ch'ihilii Chik.



Diverse visitors to the John Tizya Centre, along with VGG Heritage Manager Megan Williams (far left) and JTC Interpreter Dorothy Frost (left).





(Top) Chief Joe Linklater talked about the importance of the Elders' legacy;  
(Below, l-r) Elder Dick Nukon, Heritage Committee members Marion Schafer, Mary Jane Moses, Heritage Manager Megan Williams, Jane Montgomery, Robert Bruce Jr., and collaborating author Shirleen Smith.

## **People of the Lakes Publication and Launch**

In January 2010, the publication *People of the Lakes, Stories of Our Van Tat Gwich'in Elders/Googwandak Nakhwach'anjoo Van Tat Gwich'in* was released. The 391 page book, published by University of Alberta Press, was jointly authored by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and Shirleen Smith and is based on the stores of Van Tat Gwich'in Elders collected during oral history, cultural geography and cultural technology research projects since 2000, as well as material assembled from previous VGG research and that of other researchers. On 9 February 2010, the book was officially launched in Old Crow.



(Left) Taking books to the launch to present to each household in Old Crow;  
(Centre and Right) Community members receiving and perusing the book.





Cairn on Ch'itsal Dik north of Van Tat, overlooking Ch'itsal Dik Geek'ii.  
Photo M.Williams 2006 ©VGFN

## 4. 2010-2011 Research Planning

2010-2011 research, currently in the planning process, is projected as another 2-pronged research program: to investigate the trade and travel routes north, west and east of Van Tat (Crow Flats); and archaeological research in the Rock River area. The general theme is trade and travel: Gwich'in have always traded with neighbours and oral history records the exploits of particularly distant travellers. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Van Tat Gwich'in traded at Herschel Island and guided RCMP patrols there using dog teams, and have the journey more recently by snowmobile. As well, they maintained well established travel routes from Van Tat to Rampart House and LaPierre House, distinct from travel to these locations from Old Crow, where most travel is based today.

In Year Four we intend to repeat the successful collaboration with archaeologist Dr. Ray Le Blanc, this year in the Rock River area. The opportunity to share information and perspectives has proven valuable to participants and researchers alike, and afforded Van Tat Gwich'in the opportunity to take part in archaeological research and become familiar with archaeological resources and lifeways of the distant past on their traditional lands. As with our previous research, we selected the themes of trade and travel and archaeology at Rock River to maintain the historical and cultural links to the area and to take youth, elders and other participants to locations that are currently difficult to access.

Our research will be based at two camps during July 2010: one in the Ch'itsal Dik area north of Van Tat, and the other in the Rock River area. We will investigate a number of different physical and cultural resources in these areas (Timber Creek and Black Fox Creek caribou fences, archaeological sites, current and historic camp sites in Van Tat, fisheries, routes to Herschel Island, ochre sites in the Rock River area, etc.). As in our previous research, we will maximize the experience of participants by involving them in many aspects of the research at a number of different locations.





## 5. Project Supporters

We are pleased to acknowledge the logistical, cooperative and financial support of a number of agencies:



### **COUNCIL OF YUKON FIRST NATIONS (for CANADIAN HERITAGE) ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE INITIATIVE**

Amalgamated funding sources to support Aboriginal languages

- Objectives: CYFN/Canadian Heritage Aboriginal Language funding is devoted to strengthening Aboriginal languages in the Yukon. Support for the Cultural Technology Project is directed toward enhancing and transmitting Van Tat Gwich'in language skills through recording technological, geographical and other information and disseminating this to the community, younger generations, and the wider public.

### **GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, MUSEUMS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**



Canadian  
Heritage

Patrimoine  
canadien

\$75,000

- Objectives: The Aboriginal Museum Development component of the Museums Assistance Program helps aboriginal organizations enrich and preserve their cultural heritage. This component also seeks to increase public awareness and understanding of the rich and diverse cultures of Aboriginal peoples. The MAP program funded the research of the Cultural Technology project to develop and communicate Van Tat Gwich'in cultural heritage.

### **GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, POLAR CONTINENTAL SHELF PROJECT**

33.83 hours helicopter support [value @\$2317.50/hour = \$78,400]

- Objectives: The Polar Continental Shelf Project provides critical logistical support for arctic research. The PCSP funded the Van Tat Gwich'in Cultural Technology Project under its Traditional Knowledge Program and its commitment to support research relevant to northern Aboriginal communities which fosters development of their research capability.

### **VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION**



Vuntut Gwitchin  
First Nation

in kind: salaries, office space and facilities, project management

- The VGG is directing the Cultural Technology Project, providing office facilities, meeting and storage spaces, arranging accommodation for researchers and other project personnel, providing the services of the VGG Heritage Manager, Heritage Researcher and seasonal Heritage Department personnel, facilitating Heritage Committee meetings which direct the project, and general logistical and administrative support.





## 6. Project Participants



In loving memory, with very special thanks and recognition: Edith Josie (1922-2010), Charlie Thomas (1917-2009) and Lydia Thomas (1916-2008)

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the contribution of all the participants:

### Resources: Elders

Irwin Linklater  
Alfred Charlie  
John Joe Kyikavichik  
Donald Frost  
James Itsi

### Resources

Robert Bruce Jr., culture specialist  
Jane Montgomery, Gwich'in language specialist  
Mary Jane Moses, Heritage Researcher  
Bobby Netro, master carpenter  
Esau Schafer, culture specialist  
Marion Schafer, language specialist  
Dr. Shirleen Smith, Research Coordinator  
Megan Williams, Heritage Manager

### Research collaborator

Dr. Ray Le Blanc, archaeologist

### Participants

Frances Bruce  
Chelsea Charlie  
Marvin Frost Jr.  
Paul Josie  
Elizabeth Kaye  
Lance Nagwan  
Brianna Tetlich  
Erika Tizya

### Filmers

Frances Bruce  
Mary Jane Moses  
Erika Tizya

### Logistics

Bob Ungar, Gwich'in  
Helicopters  
Victoria Blake, Leila Sumi,  
Megan Williams, baking  
Faye Elias, catering (feast)  
Elizabeth Kaye, caribou (feast)