

The *Idaa* Trail: Archaeology and the Dogrib Cultural Landscape, Northwest Territories, Canada

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This trail we are travelling is the route of our ancestors that they used before contact with the Kwet'ı̄.¹ Now we are at a crossroads where things are not like the way they were in the past. If we tell young people today the history of our ancestors, it seems they don't believe us. We do not want to abandon the old ways of our ancestors. That is why we continue to work along their traditional routes. Through the oral tradition, I know of their choice fishing spots, places where they could obtain food, and their campsites. I am past the age of 60 so I remember our history. My elders used to tell me stories. I witnessed their work and now we are travelling and working along their trails. Though our young people of today do not really know the ways of our people, we want to retain our traditional ways so that whomever survives in the future will use them. So we are in effect, working to help them (Harry Simpson, June 25, 1991).²

In subarctic Canada, the conjoining of ethnographic inquiry with archaeological research has been widely practiced for nearly six decades (see Greer, Ch. 9). Whether under the rubric of ethnoarchaeology, or more narrowly defined as "living" or archaeological ethnography (Janes 1983), the role of indigenous traditional knowledge is primary, and has made significant contributions to the interpretation of the archaeological past in the north. Archaeologists working in northern Canada are in the enviable position of being able to initiate ethnoarchaeological research with cultures whose ancestors have occupied the same territory for centuries, and to work in a landscape which has remained largely unaltered for the last 6,000 to 8,000 years. Furthermore, elders living in northern communities today have an intimate knowledge of the land, learned both from the oral tradition, and from personal experience, and collectively maintain an extensive corpus of knowledge relevant to the cultural landscape in which they reside. This situation almost begs the use of ethnographic analogy, and in the Canadian Subarctic, where archaeological remains tend to be thinly distributed and poorly preserved, it becomes an extremely valuable tool that permits archaeologists to make plausible inferences about the past (cf. Noble 1975; see Denton, Ch. 7).

Today in northern Canada, pursuit of archaeological research cannot be undertaken without reference to the political arena in which it is conducted (see Andrews et al., Ch. 17). The negotiation of comprehensive land claims has helped to stimulate an awareness of the importance and value of archaeological research among many Native groups (Greer 1993; Hanks and Pokotylo 1989; Kritsch and Andre, Ch. 8; Webster and Bennett, Ch. 18). Though this is a positive improvement, it is counter-balanced by the fact that a traditional way of life, and the knowledge it represents, is in danger of being dealt a major set-back. Dene elders living today represent the last generation to be born and raised on the land. In many northern communities, their grandchildren are raised with southern school systems, learn English as a first language, prefer community life to the rigours of the bush, and consequently are not learning the traditional ways and knowledge as they once did. From the elder's perspective this represents a critical juncture in Dogrib history—a "crossroads," to quote Harry Simpson—and many are "working to help" the youth through alternate means.

¹ Kwet'ı̄ is the Dogrib word for people of English-speaking descent. It translates as "stone or rock people" Helm and Gillespie (1981) have reported that the term is a reference to English HBC traders at Prince of Wales Fort on Hudson's Bay, a stone fortification. Younger Dogrib today say it refers to "prospectors" or "geologists" who for many decades have explored Dogrib lands for mineral resources.

² Elders quotes are from project transcripts or from the author's field notes.

The combination of exigency and awareness creates opportunities for unique partnerships that balance the needs and aspirations of both the scientific and Aboriginal communities. This paper reviews the initial results of one such partnership. The *Idaa*.³ Heritage Resource Inventory Project, designed to complete a site inventory of the traditional trail linking Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes, involved many partners. Dogrib elders from the communities of Rae Lakes and Rae, Dogrib translators, the Rae/Edzo Friendship Centre, researchers from the Archaeology Program at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, and several funding agencies combined their resources, talents, and knowledge to carry-out the project. This chapter outlines the project goals, objectives, and methodology, summarizes some initial findings, and assesses the effectiveness of the partnership approach. Before describing the project organization in detail, however, it is necessary to provide a brief ethnographic description of the Dogrib and their relation to the lands they occupy.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCH OF THE DOGRIB LANDSCAPE

The Dogrib are an Athapaskan-speaking group of *Dene*⁴ or Northern Athapaskan Indians who traditionally occupied an area between Great Slave, and Great Bear Lakes. June Helm (1981: 292) has identified six regional groups that comprise the Dogrib Nation,⁵ with a total population of over 2,500 individuals. Since the 1950s, the Dogrib have lived in the communities of Rae Lakes, Snare Lakes, Wha Ti (formerly Lac La Martre), Rae, and Edzo (see Figure 1). A small number of Dogrib also live in Yellowknife, a comparatively large mining and government centre. The Dogrib are presently engaged in comprehensive land claim negotiations with the Canadian government. More detailed descriptions of Dogrib ethnography and ethnohistory can be found in Helm (1972, 1981, 1994), Helm and Gillespie (1981), and Helm and Lurie (1961).

The Dogrib landscape is characteristic of the Canadian Shield. The vegetation is dominated by trees of the boreal forest, soils are poorly developed and thinly distributed, and the pervasive, exposed bedrock is interspersed with thousand of lakes of varying sizes. Toward the northeastern edge of Dogrib lands, the spruce trees thin to give way to the barrenlands, or tundra, characterized by low-growing, shrubby and herbaceous plants. Subsistence was traditionally derived (as it is today) from barrenland and woodland caribou, moose, small game such as beaver, muskrat, hare, ptarmigan and grouse, and from a variety of migratory waterfowl and fish species. Caribou and fish are of prime importance. Trapping, an important economic pursuit following contact, is now in decline.⁶

³ *Idaa* glosses as 'up this way', and is the Dogrib name for the trail. All Dogrib words are presented using the practical orthography of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories. The Dogrib phonemes are: unaspirated stops and affricates - b, d, dl, dz, j, g, gw; aspirated stops and affricates - t, tʰ, ts, ch, k, kw; glottalized - t', tʰ', ts', ch', k', kw'; glottal stop - ʔ; voiceless continuants - ..., s, sh, x, wh, h; voiced continuants - l, z, zh, gh, w; prenasalized stops - mb, nd; nasals - m, n; resonants - r, y; plain vowels - a, e, i, o; nasalized vowels - ʌ, ɛ, ɪ, ɔ; long vowels - aa, ee, qq; diphthong - ai; tones - high (unmarked) and low (v̄). The format was adapted from Helm (1981).

⁴ *Dene*, a Slavey word meaning "man" or "people" has been adopted as a group name for the Athapaskan language groups residing in the Northwest Territories. The Dogrib equivalent is *done*.

⁵ The regional groups (cf. Helm 1981) are *Tahga Got'ji* ("Follow the Shore People"), *Tsoti Got'ji* ("Filth Lake People"), *Dechjlaa Got'ji* ("Edge of the Woods People"), *Et'aat'ji* ("People Next to Another People"), *Sahti Got'ji* ("Bear Lake People"). Recently the sixth group, the *Woole Dee Got'ji* ("Inconnu River People") have chosen to exert their ancestral identity as descendants of the *T'atsot'ji* or Yellowknives (who traditionally spoke a dialect of Chipewyan).

⁶ A steady reduction in fur prices over the last ten years has been an important contributing factor in the decline, and it is widely held in the north that this is a direct consequence of the animal rights movement.

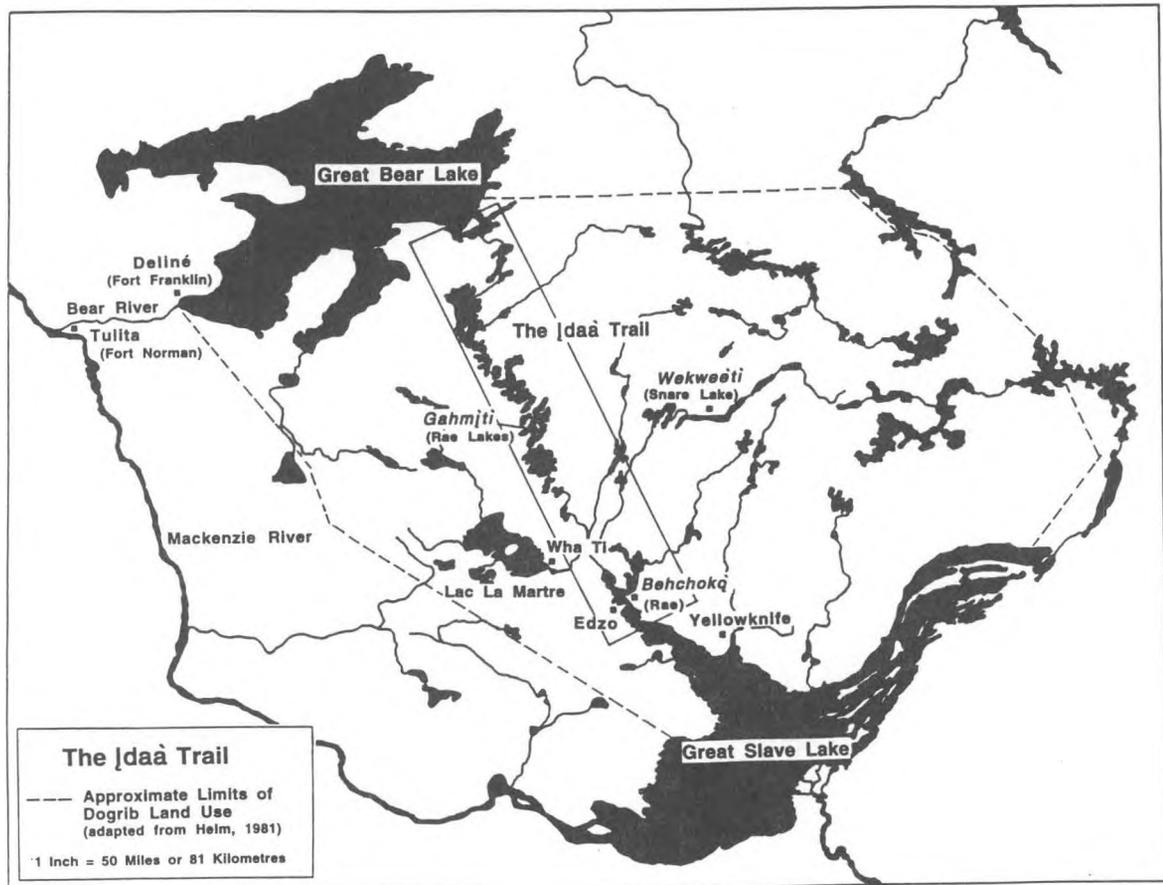


Figure 1. Map of the *Idaà* Trail showing approximate limits of Dogrib land use.

This landscape is known intimately to Dogrib elders. Trails, which are used year-round, provide access to a vast harvesting region, and link thousands of place names, each with a narrative of some form, sometimes many, inextricably bound to the place. Names and narratives convey knowledge, and in this way Dogrib culture is tied directly to the landscape. Travel across the Dogrib landscape can be easily and clearly described by reference to these names, and indeed travel narratives often appear as no more than long lists of place names (cf. Rosaldo 1980). While toponyms mark topographic features, the Dogrib also employ a separate naming system to distinguish broader physiographic regions. Though there is some overlap with the physiographic units recognized by Western geographers, the Dogrib system is more refined, and consequently more complex.

The Dogrib landscape is infused with the presence of innumerable entities, or “powers,” both benevolent and malevolent. In travelling across the landscape, one must constantly mitigate the impact of personal actions by appeasing these entities with votive offerings, and by observing strict rules of behaviour. For example, at each new water body encountered en route, offerings are left. In the Dogrib vernacular, it is said that these places, and the entities inhabiting them, are being “paid.” The offerings may be anything of value (in modern times this has typically included tobacco, matches, coins, ammunition), or simply, a garland of birch branches. These are thrown into the water (or onto the ice in winter), and in return the votary may ask to be granted



Figure 2. Detail Map of the *Idaà* Trail.

Traditionally, two Dogrib regional bands commonly used the trail; the *Sahti Gót'ji* or "Bear

good weather, safe travelling conditions and abundant food resources. At all sacred⁷ sites, and indeed at many important cultural sites, offerings are also left. Places inhabited by malevolent entities (called *weyēēdu* or "animal-beings"; cf. Helm (1994:77), are regarded as dangerous, and consequently, always avoided. Through dreaming and the acquisition of *jk'qò*, or "medicine" (sometimes "power," "knowledge," or "luck"), one prepares to deal with the world, and the powers' inhabiting it. These traditional beliefs and practices have been syncretized with the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholicism (Abel 1986; McCarthy 1995).

The *Idaà* trail is central to the Dogrib homeland (Figure 2). Two rivers, the Marian and the Camsell, form the trail, and with a network of interconnecting trails, provided access to a Dogrib land use area encompassing some 295,000 km² (Fig. 1) In post-contact times, the trail was used to access trading posts on Great Slave Lake, Great Bear Lake, and the Mackenzie River at the mouth of the Bear River. The rivers exhibit the "puddle and drop" structure characteristic of most shield rivers where large lakes are separated by short, often violent, stretches of river. The trail was used throughout all seasons, though dog teams and canoes would not traverse identical routes. Certain segments of lakes and rivers failed to freeze solidly enough during the winter to provide for safe travel by dog team. These locations were avoided and the winter trail was safely located nearby. The dog team trail was also generally shorter, being able to traverse overland more easily, cutting oxbows and broad bends of rivers. Similarly, the canoe route made extensive use of portages (41 between Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes of varying length, the longest just over four kilometres). In traditional times, all rapids were portaged. Birchbark canoes were commonly used until the late 1940s when they were replaced by a variety of manufactured canoes and boats purchased at trading establishments. Under normal circumstances (allowing time for providing for daily sustenance en route), Dogrib hunters would take approximately three weeks to travel approximately 490 km from Rae to Déline (formerly Fort Franklin) on Great Bear Lake by birchbark canoe, and one week by dog team.

⁷ As used in this paper the term "sacred" refers to sites associated with Dogrib myth or legend (as defined by Bascom 1984), and does not necessarily encapsulate the Christian concept of sacred (cf. Kelley and Francis 1994:40). Narratives associated with these sites occur in "floating time" (see note 14). See Andrews et al. (in press) for a discussion of Dogrib sacred sites in the context of travel and the narrative tradition, and Helm (1994:77-8) for a discussion of the terms "spirit" and "power" in the context of Dogrib *jk'qò*.

Lake people” who considered the northern end of the trail and portions of the southwestern shores of Great Bear Lake as home territory, and the *Et'aat'ii* or “People next to another people” (Helm 1981: 292), who occupied the central portion of the trail, though they ranged widely, as did all groups. The trail was recognized as a major route linking the two great lakes and was used by other Dogrib regional bands on a regular basis, and by other Dene groups, occasionally. Following contact, the trail became an important travel route used by Euro-Canadian traders, explorers, and missionaries, and later by prospectors and government agents. The trail was considered the preferred route for those who wished to traverse between the two great lakes. The Mackenzie/Bear River route, a much longer way of travelling between Great Slave and Great Bear, was used during the contact period primarily to ferry heavy loads in York boats or similar watercraft.

THE *IDAA* HERITAGE RESOURCE INVENTORY PROJECT

Throughout the *Idaa* Heritage Resource Inventory Project, we worked with Dogrib elders to complete a site inventory of the traditional trail linking Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes. Elders participated in all aspects of the research, including fieldwork. During the winter, elders assisted in documenting information relevant to the trail before fieldwork began. Dogrib place names, traditional camping locations, sacred sites and resource harvesting locales were recorded, and this information was used to design a fieldwork strategy. An important component of the project was the documentation of oral narratives associated with each of the sites. Taped interviews have been translated into English and now represent an integral part of site documentation. A second component of the project was to complete a site inventory of the route. Recently, the Dogrib area has witnessed a tremendous increase in mineral exploration, driven primarily by the discovery of diamond-bearing deposits. As very little archaeological research⁸ has been conducted in the Dogrib area, the ability to adequately predict potential impacts to heritage resources is severely limited. Collaborative research presented an opportunity for the elders of Rae Lakes (*Gahmiit*) to record information that they wished to preserve, while also providing a basis for the effective management and protection of archaeological resources in the area.

Project Organization

The *Idaa* Heritage Resource Inventory began with a meeting in Rae Lakes in the spring of 1990. Elders were asked to lend their support to the project and were invited to assist in designing the research strategy. The initial project team included an elder (Harry Simpson), the project translator and co-researcher (Zoe), and the project archaeologist (Andrews). Through successive meetings, the primary objectives of the project were developed as follows:

- to complete a survey of the *Idaa* canoe trail, with particular attention to traditional sites used by the Dogrib of Rae Lakes; and
- to document Dogrib place names for the route and to record oral narrative associated with each site.

To these, the elders added several other objectives:

- to document sacred sites along the trail. The elders insisted that we visit each site and perform the ritual required at each;
- to document all graves located along the trail and repair the grave fences if possible;
- to develop a training program in archaeological methods and in the recording of oral traditions for Dogrib youth;
- to locate the site of Father Emile Petitot's cross. Petitot was the first Roman Catholic priest to travel the trail (in 1864) and had erected a large cross on Lac Ste. Croix, marking his northernmost progress; and
- to travel using traditional methods. Consequently, travel was conducted with canoes with

⁸ The research of Clark (1975, 1987) and Noble (1971) are notable exceptions. See Clark (1991), Ives (1990), and Noble (1981) for an overview of the region's pre-contact history.

little or no other support. We were careful to budget adequate time to allow for hunting and fishing throughout the course of the summer fieldwork, and in this fashion, tried to "live off the land" as much as possible.

The fieldwork was carried out between the spring of 1990 and the fall of 1993. Three summers of canoe travel on the trail were supplemented by several trips to Rae Lakes and Rae during the winter months to work with elders in the recording of oral narratives. Place names were recorded on map sheets at a scale of 1:50,000. Narratives about many of the named places were recorded during the summer field season as each site was visited, as well as during open-ended interviews with elders in Rae Lakes when general information concerning the use of the trail was provided. Test excavations, sketch maps, and photographs were used to document the extent and nature of each of the sites located along the route.

The project was funded through the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (Government of the Northwest Territories) continuing its long tradition of supporting ethnoarchaeological research (cf. Arnold 1988; Arnold and Hanks 1991; Bertulli 1986; Hanks and Pokotylo 1989; Hanks and Winter 1983, 1986, 1989; Hart 1994, 1995; Janes 1983; Pokotylo and Hanks 1989). The Rae-Edzo Friendship Centre, a partner in the research, received grants from the Oral Traditions Contribution Program (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, GNWT), and the now defunct Access to Archaeology program (Department of Canadian Heritage). The Friendship Centre assisted in developing a youth fieldwork training program and completed the translation of Dogrib audio tapes.

Analysis and report preparation are still underway. The trail work has led to several related projects, all conducted under the same collaborative framework. Recently, in cooperation with the exhibit design staff at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, we completed a small traveling exhibit on the project which will tour the schools in the Dogrib communities. In the spring of 1996, in partnership with the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, and six elders from Rae, we initiated a project to record the construction of a traditional birchbark canoe. The trail project demonstrated the importance of birchbark canoes (nearly 30 have been recorded in our work to date). As few elders remain who remember the details of canoe construction, we undertook the canoe project as a means to record important details of canoe construction, and information regarding resource collection. The canoe, now completed, will be displayed in the high school at Edzo, and we are working with the Divisional Board of Education to produce a 30 minute video detailing the construction process. Future plans include the production of a compact disk version of the exhibit, designed to provide students with a "virtual tour" of the trail. The Dogrib Divisional Board of Education has agreed to assist with this aspect of the project and production will begin in the near future.

Nearly 350 traditional Dogrib place names were documented over the three field seasons and a total of 282 archaeological sites were recorded. Lithic material was noted at over half of these sites (69 percent of sites where subsurface testing was undertaken). Forty burial locations were visited, representing 189 individual graves. Four abandoned villages, four lithic quarries, and fourteen sacred sites were recorded. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe these sites in any detail, five examples of named places will serve to represent the breadth and depth of Dogrib oral tradition in explicating the material remains of the archaeological record.

Kwezehdoo

That mountain called *Kwezehdoo* is where Yamozhah started off. That mountain is a man, an old man. It can predict your future for you. If you throw a rock into the water in the crack, it will make a noise again, and again, and again. That means you will live a long time. But if you throw a rock and it doesn't make a noise, then that means you will not live very long (Jean Wetrade, February 28, 1992).

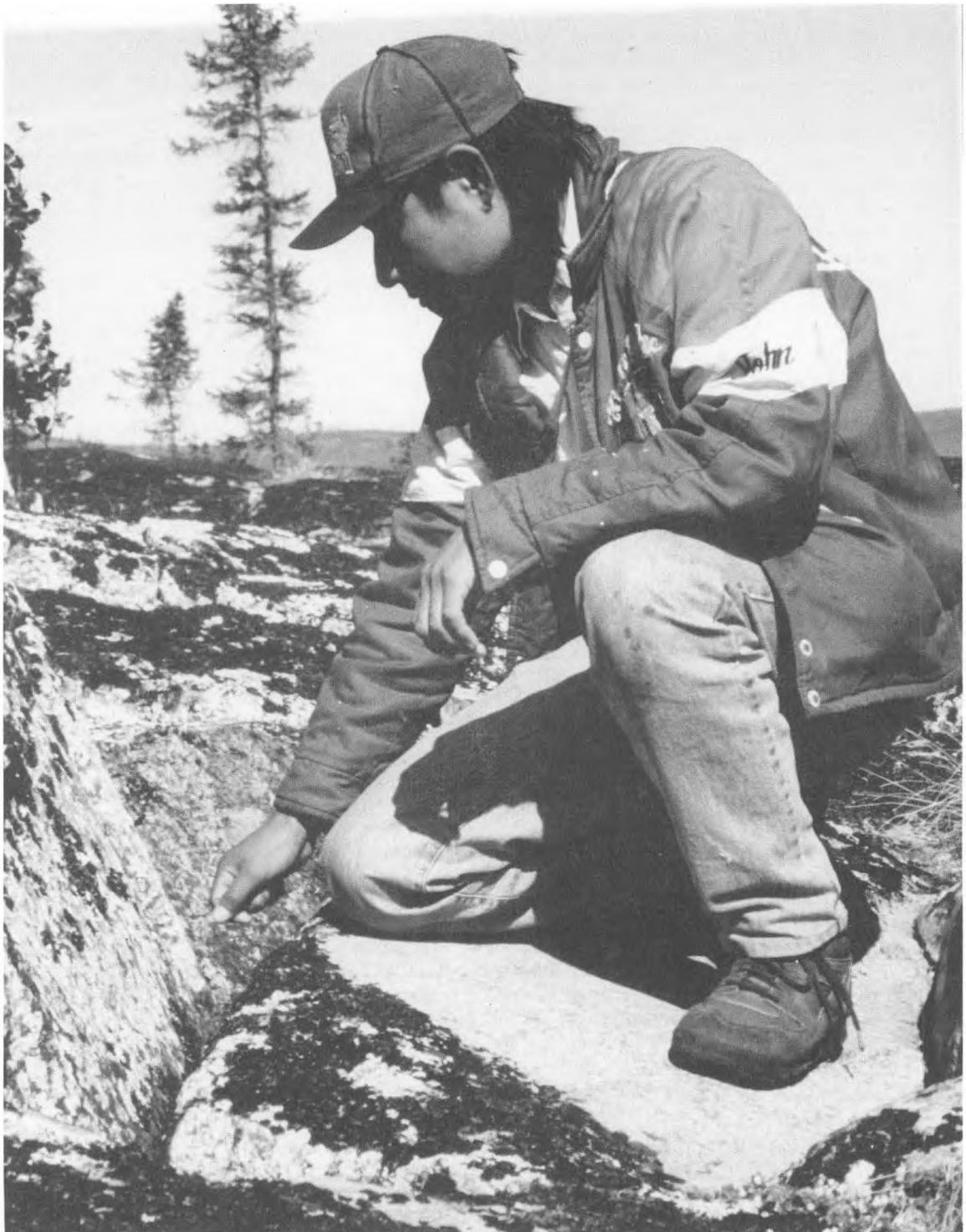


Figure 3. John B. Zoe leaving an offering at Kwe?ehdoò . (Photo: T. Andrews)

Kweʔehdoō, which means “blood rock,” is a sacred site said to be the birthplace of *Yamōzhah*,⁹ a Dogrib culture hero. The site is characterized by a large bedrock hill rising some 320 metres above the surrounding countryside. Dogrib legend maintains that the hill is actually the skull of a giant man, who was the grandfather of *Yamōzhah*. *Yamōzhah* and his evil brother *Tsʼidzqō*, are said to have killed their grandfather by cutting open the top of his skull, throwing hot rocks into his brain cavity, whereupon he turned to stone. Today, visitors climb to the top of the hill and kneel before a water-filled crack in the rock (Figure 3). After saying a prayer and leaving tobacco for the old man, visitors drop a pebble into the crack, listening for the sound of it falling down into the water-filled skull. If the sound is audible, then this augurs good fortune and long life for the visitor. This type of geomancy¹⁰ is a recurrent theme, practiced at three of the fourteen Dogrib sacred sites recorded on the trail.

Kweʔehdoō is noteworthy for another reason. During our visit to the site, a large rhyolite lithic quarry was discovered 40 metres from the top of the hill. Covering an area of nearly two hectares, the quarry detritus is deposited to depths of 1.5 metres in places. Dogrib oral tradition has not retained knowledge of the quarry; however, an elder postulated that perhaps the name *Kweʔehdoō* or “blood rock,” refers not to the violent event which took place there, but instead reflects the colour of the lithic material found at the site, which is “blood” red in colour. An examination of place names referring to some quality of “rock” or “stone” revealed three additional quarries in other locations along the trail.

Dogrib oral tradition maintains incomplete knowledge about the procurement, use, and manufacture of stone tools, though some elderly Dogrib women curate stone hide softening tools. However, the experience with *Kweʔehdoō* quarry suggests that place names serve as “archives” of ancient knowledge. Once the *Kweʔehdoō* quarry was “discovered” and explained to the elders, they were able to combine this “new” information with their knowledge of place names and identify other lithic quarries. The experience and knowledge of both the archaeologist and the elder had a role to play in identifying the association between Dogrib place names and lithic quarries, and underscores the importance of their partnership.

The association of sacred sites and lithic quarries has been noted elsewhere in the Mackenzie Valley (Pokotylo and Hanks 1989). At the Ekwi River quarry, located in the Mackenzie Mountain foothills west of Tulita (formerly Fort Norman), visitors were required to “pay” for lithic material taken from the quarry. Failure to do so would result in heavy rains (Christopher Hanks, pers. comm. 1996). Though Dogrib oral tradition did not retain knowledge of the *Kweʔehdoō* quarry, the association of a quarry and a known sacred site suggests that similar rules of “paying” for lithic material may have been part of Dogrib practice. One wonders if the water-filled crack at *Kweʔehdoō* is filled with rhyolite flakes?

Kwɪlka

Long ago, caribou were scarce. When it was getting warm, and time for them to migrate back to the barrenlands, my father told me that at this place they would make a fence [on the ice]. It's hard to cut down that many trees, but still they did that. When they start to come, the men would wait alongside the trails all night. When the caribou come

⁹ Glosses as “the one who travels.” The *Yamōzhah* myths are often collectively referred to as the stories of the two brothers. *Yamōzhah* (also *Yamōzah*) is a culture hero shared by many Dene groups, though known by different names. For example, among the Dene Dha'a of northern Alberta he is known as *Yamq̄hdeyi* (Moore and Wheelock 1990), as *Yambādēya* (also *Zhambādēzha*) by the Deh Cho Slavey (Eleanor Bran, pers. comm., 1996; cf. Williamson 1955, 1956), as *Yabatheya* by the Chipewyan of the NWT (GNWT 1993), as *Atachook̄ii* by the Gwichya Gwich'in of Tsii-gehtchic (Ingrid Kritsch, pers. com., 1996), and as *Yamq̄ria* by the Sahtu Dene and in the North Slavey dialect. Because the mythology of this important culture hero is shared widely among the Dene groups of the NWT, one of the *Yamq̄ria* legends was chosen to symbolically represent the political unity of the Dene Nation, and is reflected in their corporate logo (Andrews 1990; Hanks, Ch. 11).

¹⁰ Geomancy, as used here, is a form of divination involving the forecasting of future events by an individual “reading” environmental or geographic phenomena.

onto the lake, and as soon as they pass them near the fence, the men would imitate wolves. The caribou become scared, as they think they are being chased by wolves...

The fence has openings in it, and it is there that the snares are set. When a caribou is caught the one behind it would try another opening and it would get caught too. In between the trees on the ice they would put a piece of cloth on a stick and stand it up so that it blows in the wind. The caribou does not go through the fence because it is scared of the moving cloth. The only openings are where the snares are, my father said (Romie Wetrade, March 3, 1992).

Dogrib caribou fences were constructed on lake ice in March and April during the northward migration of the Bathurst caribou herd, and were used until the late 1930s. There is almost no mention of Dogrib fences in the historical literature, though Russell (1898: 90) reports that fences were commonly used near the end of the nineteenth century. Fences permitted large numbers of caribou to be killed at one time; once dried, the meat became an important source of sustenance throughout the spring and summer. Successful construction and operation of a fence depended partly on adequate labour, and consequently required the cooperation of several families. Spruce trees were cut and placed in the ice approximately ten to fifteen metres apart, interspersed with sticks and ribbons, forming a line or fence (often several kilometers long) that mimicked the lake shoreline. While the fence directed the caribou, the movement of ribbons blowing in the wind, and the sound of baying wolves, drove them, creating an efficient entrapment device. Snares were typically set in openings in the fence, or often near its terminus.

Three caribou fence locations (from a total of five documented to date for the trail [cf. Zoe et al. 1995]) were investigated during the project. In the quotation above, Romie Wetrade describes the construction and operation of a fence which was located near the present community of Rae Lakes. Harry Simpson, as a young child in the mid-1930s, helped construct a fence at *Kwijka*, or "fence narrows" (see Figure 4). He identified the five related sites that constituted the fence complex: the fence itself, a location where hunters hid waiting to ambush the caribou near the end of the fence, a "look-out" located on a high hill nearby, a butchering location, and an encampment some distance from the fence. At the ambush location, stone projectile points, bifaces, and a large quantity of debitage were noted. At the "look-out," a small amount of debitage was recorded. Several stone tent rings were noted at the encampment location, as was a small amount of flaking detritus and several scrapers. Evidence of more recent use (e.g., axe-cut stumps, ammunition casings, and tin cans) was noted at all three sites.

In this instance, the archaeological record and Dogrib oral tradition pertaining to the use and function of a related complex of sites meshed perfectly. However, two of these locations, the fence and the butchering site, had no lasting physical expression as they were located on the spring ice, and consequently are "invisible" in the archaeological record. Without reference to Dogrib oral tradition, archaeological inference about this complex of sites would be limited. Furthermore, the association of stone projectile points with these sites suggests that caribou fences predate contact, giving a greater time depth to the scant ethnohistorical literature.

Bea Ti K'i Elä ¹¹

I am from the time when we sewed the birchbark canoes together. When my father was putting the frame together we would pull spruce roots from the ground and carry large bundles of birchbark back to the camp (Madeline Drybones, March 1, 1992).

In the old days when times were hard, people would go to places where they knew there were good stands of birch. They would take what they needed. In the spring time they would help each other in harvesting birchbark and begin making canoes. Families with many children might make two canoes. They would use spruce gum. They would heat the gum and apply it carefully. The gum would harden...in the water. They would avoid pulling their canoe ashore on the rock. At a short distance from shore, they would step out of

¹¹ Translates as "Bea Lake birchbark canoes."

the canoe while it was floating and wade ashore. They handled their canoe carefully and kept it in the shade, out of the sun. That I know (Harry Simpson, June 25, 1991).

The remains of birchbark canoes are commonly found at portages and other locations along the *Idaa* trail. Elders remember vivid stories about their construction and use. An elder in Rae Lakes, Marie Mantla, recalled one such story. In the fall of 1939, after spending the summer fishing and attending treaty celebrations at Rae, Mrs. Mantla, her husband, father, and younger brother Harry Simpson, began travelling north on the trail to Hottah Lake where they intended to spend the winter, trapping and hunting. Travelling in two birchbark canoes that her father had constructed the previous spring, the party reached *Bea Ti* as the fall ice began forming on the lake. Caching the canoes for the winter, the party waited for enough snow to continue the trip by dog team.

In recounting the story, Mrs. Mantla noted that the two birchbark canoes were the last ones her father constructed, as the following spring he opted for cedar/canvas canoes from the Hudson's Bay Company at Rae. During her story, Mrs. Mantla mentioned that on the trip north to Hottah Lake, they stopped at a portage just south of *Bea Ti* and collected a length of birchbark to repair one of the canoes, noting that the scarred birch tree was still living the last time she had seen it, twenty years later. At the end of her story Mrs. Mantla asked if we would search for the canoes and the birch tree. Fortunately, Mrs. Mantla's description of the site provided enough detail that we were able to locate both the remains of the two canoes, and the scarred tree. Remarkably, the birch tree was still living and clearly showed the scar left in the fall of 1939.

Mrs. Mantla's story provided data that assisted in the location, identification, and interpretation of several related sites. It helped provide a measure for the rate of decomposition of organic remains in boreal environments, which is invaluable to archaeological interpretation of the recent past. Canoes and other objects constructed from organic matter are quickly lost in the acidic soils of the boreal forest. Furthermore, the story identified an important indicator of human

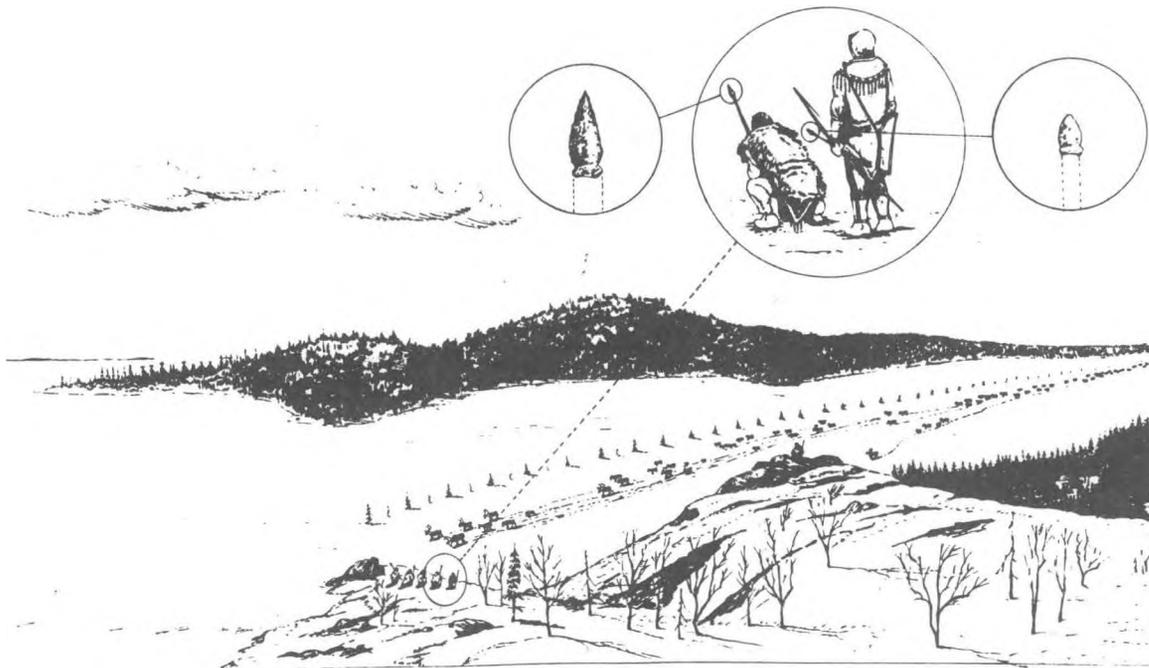


Figure 4. Artist's rendering of the caribou fence at *Kwika*. (Drawing: W. Wolfe)

use and occupation—scarred birch trees—that we had not previously recognized. Some sites are readily noticeable because of the number of scarred birch trees still growing on them. The story also provides important ethnographic details concerning the methods of birchbark collection. Birchbark was an important resource, and given the northerly latitudes of the Dogrib landscape, was a slow growing one. Consequently, the trees had to be conserved, and when bark was removed, it was done carefully so that the tree continued to live.

*Njdzika Kögölaa*¹²

Here on Faber Lake there is a place called *Njdzika*. Long before treaty signing in 1921, our people came here. There were houses here, some older than seventy or eighty years old. Generation after generation of people came here. That area was very significant to the survival of our people. They would live here summer and all winter, raising their children. They taught their children the ways of the bush; choice fishing spots, how to make things from wood, how to make canoes and toboggans. We want them to learn these things so we are recording this knowledge for them (Harry Simpson, June 25, 1991).

The man they call *K'aawidaa* he was a middleman for the fur trader. So when he goes to Rae by boat to bring his furs, people would help him haul his supplies back. His supplies would be in huge bundles... *Behcho K'aawi* had a house there too... He was made a *K'aawi* (middleman) after they came back from Rae. He was chosen to trade for things like babiche, dry meat and tongue (Amin Tailbone, February 27, 1992).

The village of *Njdzika Kögölaa*, the largest of four abandoned villages on the trail,¹³ is located on Faber Lake. All four villages were abandoned shortly after the winter of 1928/29, following an influenza epidemic that began the previous summer and had decimated the village populations. Associated with an important historical figure known today as *K'aawidaa* ("for the trader"), the village was first established sometime during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The foundations of sixteen log structures can be seen at the site. At least twelve of these were probably cabins, as evidenced by the remains of large stone fireplaces associated with them (Figure 5). Four cabins, dating to later occupations of the site still stand, though in an advanced state of decay. The villages were used primarily in the winter and occasionally in other seasons.

K'aawidaa, who is known in church records as Francis Yambi (sometimes Eyambi), and in fur trade records as Bear Lake Chief, was a Dogrib who became a "middleman" or "trading chief" for the *Sahti Got'ji* and the *Et'aat'ji* sometime after 1872. Yambi built cabins at three locations on the trail and used them as temporary trade centres. Yambi traded in fur, while his Dogrib contemporary, *Behcho K'aawi* (literally "big knife trader," probably a reference to his preferred trading post at Rae, known in Dogrib as *Behchokö*, or "big knife place"), traded only in secondary commodities, such as babiche and dry meat, as noted above by Amin Tailbone.

These villages, an early expression of what Helm and Damas (1963) have termed "contact traditional all-Native communities," represent an important era in Dogrib post-contact ethnohistory. In one sense they are experiments with alternate forms of the architecture that the Dogrib had observed in nearby trading posts. The roles of trading chief, middleman, and post hunter were all essential, and stories about them relay important ethnohistorical data about the nature of the fur trade economy, the social relations necessary for the successful conduct of commerce, and Dogrib adaptation to changing socioeconomic conditions. The abandoned villages provide unique opportunities for investigating spatial patterning and architectural development of early all-Native

¹² Glosses as "the village beside *Njdzji*". The place name *Njdzji* cannot be translated directly to English, but has the essence of meaning "good place".

¹³ The other villages are *K'agootu Kögölaa*, located on the northern end of Hislop Lake, *Deta?aa Ts'ahu Kögölaa* on a small lake approximately 45 kilometres north of Rae, and *Xaelji Whaedoo Kögölaa* located on the northern end of Marian Lake. The modern seasonal fishing village, known as *Xaeji* is located nearby.

communities, which, from the perspective of historic archaeology, may lead to important inferences about Native influence on site patterning and development at post-contact trading posts and forts (cf. Janes 1983).

Hodoödzo

Since long before the coming of the *Kwet'it*, when the land was new, that place has been called *Hodoödzo*. Nobody ignores it and passes by this place called *Hodoödzo*. In the past when people were travelling to *Its'eeeti* (Hottah Lake) in spring or summer, they came here to slide. Nobody travelled past without stopping.... The hill was used to predict future events. People would slide down the hill and if they slid all the way down, straight, and without spinning around, then it was said that they would live a long life. If, on the other hand, the person spun around halfway down the hill then he would be told that he would not live to see his grey hair, because the land was unhappy with him. According to our ancestors, events happened as foretold. That is the story (Harry Simpson, June 25, 1991).

The final example is *Hodoödzo*, which means "sliding." This is one of many sacred sites associated with *Yamözah*, and another where geomancy is practiced. Located on a large bedrock ridge, the site consists of a "slide," only a metre wide and 30 metres in length, where the lichens



Figure 5. Stone chimney remains at the village of *Nidzika Kogolaa*. (Photo: T. Andrews)

encrusting the bedrock have been rubbed off. According to Dogrib legend, in a time long ago,¹⁴ *Yamòzhah* made *Hodoòdzoo* safe for humans by killing a large wolverine that used to trap and eat people there. Today, visitors to the site break off the top of a spruce tree to use as a "sled." Sliding down the hill straight, without tumbling or twisting, is said to augur a long life for the slider. In the words of Harry Simpson, it means that "you will see your grey hairs."

Though overgrown with lichens from disuse, a second slide was used at this site in the past. Wishing to know if young pups would be worthy sled dogs, owners would throw them down the slide, hoping that they, too, would slide straight. According to Dogrib elders, people would travel to *Hodoòdzoo* at any time of the year, though it was usually done in conjunction with moose hunts at a nearby salt lick. Visitors were permitted to slide only once at each visit, though the site may be used many times during an individual's lifetime.

Without belabouring the point of archaeological invisibility, sacred sites of this nature are often extremely difficult to identify, and virtually impossible to interpret without reference to the oral tradition. Often these sites fall outside the definitions of *archaeological site* or *historic site* found in existing heritage legislation, and point to the need for expanded definitions of these resources (cf. Downer 1989).

DISCUSSION

...this convinced me—that in passing through a strange country it is a saving of time to trust to the local knowledge of your guide in preference to your own—though his way will not be so direct yet it will be more convenient and without any risque (George Back, September 8th, 1820, from Houston 1994: 91).

In societies where knowledge is transmitted orally between generations, the landscape can be a powerful mnemonic device (Vansina 1985:45). The conjunction of place and narrative in oral tradition has been well documented for hunter-gatherer societies (Berndt and Berndt 1989; Denton, Ch. 7; Harwood 1976; Kahn 1990; Rosaldo 1980) and among some non-hunter-gatherer societies (Fox 1979; Gaffin 1993). Among both Northern Athapaskan (Andrews 1990; Cruikshank 1990; Greer 1990; Kari 1989a, 1989b, 1996; Kritsch and Andre 1993, 1994, Ch. 8; Kritsch et al. 1994; Ritter 1976), and Southern Athapaskan societies (Basso 1984, 1988; Downer 1989; Downer et al. 1994; Kelley 1986; Kelley and Francis 1994), it has been well established that place names function as mnemonic devices ordering a variety of narratives that transmit and preserve culturally-relevant information. It is also generally accepted that this knowledge exhibits both a great time depth (Cruikshank 1981; Hanks, Ch. 11; Moodie and Catchpole 1992) and an empirical basis (Cruikshank 1981; Helm and Gillespie 1981; Vansina 1985), and consequently can be valuable in supporting archaeological interpretations of the material record. The role of place names, trails, and narrative in explicating the archaeological record has been clearly demonstrated, especially in the Mackenzie Valley, due largely to the work of Hanks and others (Andrews and Hanks 1987; Hanks and Pokotylo 1989; Hanks and Winter 1983, 1986, 1989; Pokotylo and Hanks 1989), elsewhere in the Canadian subarctic (Greer 1993; Denton, Ch. 7; Gotthardt 1993) and in the Arctic (Hart 1994; Nagy 1994a, 1994b).

As part of a knowledge system, traditional place names serve as memory "hooks" on which to hang the cultural fabric of a narrative tradition. In this way, physical geography ordered by named places is transformed into a social landscape where culture and topography are symbolically fused (Andrews 1990: 8). From the perspective of Dogrib cosmology, neither can exist inde-

¹⁴ Helm and Gillespie (1981: 9-10) note that the concept of time as reflected in Dogrib oral tradition consists of two temporal eras: "floating time" and "linear time." The former describes a vast temporal era where myths, legends, and stories are told without reference to time or each other. These stories are usually said to have occurred "thousands of years ago." Linear time succeeds floating time and describes the more recent past. Stories from linear time are "conceived as falling into a temporal succession." The legends of *Yamòzhah* bridge the transition between floating and linear time.

pendently: culture and landscape are inseparable, as stories cannot exist without their physical context. This was brought clearly into focus during the work as often the elders would talk of stories as though they “lived at,” or occupied a place. Indeed some elders refused to provide details of the stories associated with a place until it was visited during the summer fieldwork. Not only does place anchor narrative, but together they inextricably link the orator to the cultural landscape, because without the story-teller, the stories would never be voiced. This underscores the importance of the visual, mnemonic role of “place” (cf. Yates 1966), where named topographic features become memory aids which assist both the telling, and learning of stories. Dogrib toponymic practice is largely metaphorical in nature, consisting of mapping narrative prose onto the landscape, and thus can be regarded as a tenet of Dogrib ethnogeography.

Providing more than access to harvesting areas, trails, named places and their associated narratives present a record of land use over time, recording generations of experience with a cultural landscape. Traditional place names and trails are emic categories in Dogrib culture. They are a focus of activity, stories, and ritual, and as such, hold tremendous potential for ethno-archaeological research. However, the inventory of these sites is far from complete. It has been estimated that less than five percent (Charles Arnold, pers. comm., 1994) of the extant sites in the Northwest Territories have been documented to date. With increasing pressure from mineral development (as witnessed most recently with the discovery of diamonds in the Northwest Territories), heritage resources are becoming increasingly endangered. The communities are at an important crossroads. As fewer and fewer young Dene and Inuit choose traditional lifestyles, the knowledge relevant to life on the land is being lost. Elders in many communities have expressed grave concerns that their knowledge is not being adequately preserved through traditional means, and are increasingly looking towards other means of recording their oral tradition. As Harry Simpson notes below, there is much to be done.

Through partnerships such as the one described here, two distinct knowledge and value systems can be integrated to address a common research objective, where the specific interests of both parties can be addressed. Partnerships help bring new perspectives to old problems and permit all participants to benefit through an exchange of knowledge and experience. More importantly perhaps, partnerships force an examination of the biases inherent in our respective world-views, and permit us to modify these to meet changing circumstances. Partnerships commit both parties to work together creating an often challenging, though rewarding relationship that can be focussed on addressing common objectives.

It is called *Weyiits'at'aa* [“they went in”]. You can see that hill from Rae... There are many stories about that hill, so when we get there I will tell stories about it. There will be many stories, many stories. We'll have to check all the areas mentioned in the story, and we will have to climb to the top of it. When we get to the hill there will be lots of work to be done (Harry Simpson, March 2, 1992).

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