



Over thousands of years, the Dene peoples of the Sahtu Region have adapted to an unforgiving environment that demands highly specialised skills and knowledge. Traditional knowledge has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Some of the oral history and traditional practices have been documented by early missionaries and fur traders, and more recently by anthropologists and community researchers. Archaeologists have also documented traces of ancient human habitation in sites throughout the region. Dene communities continue to keep many of the traditional land-based practices and stories alive, adapting them to the modern context.

The pattern of traditional Dene life follows the changing seasons and movement of wildlife, with major changes marked by autumn freeze-up and spring thaw. Barrenland caribou are an important subsistence resource, and communal hunts during the fall migration are occasion for large community gatherings on the land where meat and hides are processed. This is also a good time for picking berries and harvesting herbal medicines. During the winter, families disperse to their traplines, often located in their traditional clan area. Moose and woodland caribou hunting also requires dispersal in smaller groups. The spring geese and duck migration provides another opportunity for larger gatherings. During the summer, camps are set up for communal processing of fish harvests. Dene people are experts at food preservation; dried and smoked meat and fish are prized delicacies in bush and town alike.

The four Dene peoples of the Sahtu have distinct dialects and practices. These are dynamic, informed by a long history of interaction among aboriginal peoples within the region and beyond. Linguists identify the North Slavey language of the Sahtu as part of the Athapaskan language group, which includes peoples stretching across the northwest from Alaska to Nunavut, and south to California, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and into northwestern Mexico. Linguists and archaeologists theorize that Athapaskan peoples may have migrated from Siberia across the Bering Strait, and dispersed from Alaska eastward and southward, gradually evolving distinct languages and dialects. Old time stories told by various Athapaskan peoples also tell of dispersals caused by catastrophic events.

Today the ancient relationships among the northern Dene peoples are kept alive in regional gatherings attracting people from throughout the Northwest Territories and as far away as the western Yukon and eastern Nunavut. Cooperative hunts, spiritual gatherings and family celebrations are all occasions for drum dances, hand games and storytelling. In the Sahtu Region, this tradition now encompasses a wide variety of regional events including sporting events and cultural festivals. And now more than ever in the post-land claim era, there are gatherings to make strategic decisions on matters of common interest. Young men and women are encouraged to seek marriage partners from other communities, so family relationships continue to extend across the region and beyond.



TRADITIONAL CLAN AREAS

There is a traditional Dene land tenure system in the Sahtu Region. This system evolved in recognition of the areas that extended families or clans had established for their own use.

The dispersal of Dene people in small groups was crucial for survival in the days before grocery stores, motorboats and skidoos. People had to be close to enough wildlife for subsistence. In harsh climates, wildlife tends to be dispersed at lower population densities. So it makes sense that people would spread out as well.

The clan area is an important aspect of people's sense of identity. In the old days, people would know the land of that area intimately. This would be the area where they would establish seasonal campsites. It would be where their children were born and where their ancestors were buried. Many of the family stories passed down through the generations would be set in the clan area, mapping its history.

The clan system of land tenure was not incorporated into the Sahtu Dene and Métis Land Claim Agreement. However, the clan system is still alive in a modified form. Some research has been done to map clan areas, but this has not been systematic or comprehensive.



CLAN AREAS AROUND
FORT GOOD HOPE
AND COLVILLE LAKE



CLAN AREAS AROUND
GREAT BEAR LAKE

IN THE WORDS OF OUR ELDERS

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We are Dene wá (the people). So, with our words, with our personal endeavours, we have to protect our interests. We can't ignore opportunities. It would not be right. We have to love each other. That's the way it's supposed to be. We Dene wá have survived by righteous rules, and we are courageous in helping each other, by doing good, and being happy. So by helping one another, everyone feels content.

We Dene wá have to keep what we have through our personal endeavours, and through our words. We can't ignore our opportunities. It would not be right. We have to love one another.

We Dene wá have to survive by righteous rules, and we are courageous in helping one another. We should be content with our lives. For we are Dene wá, and we have survived by helping one another. So in general, the dene feel content.

Dene k'í syllabics by elder Leon Modeste, of Deline
Narration in Dene language transcribed and translated by Alfred Masuzumi
Originally published in the Mackenzie Valley Viewer, June 2001

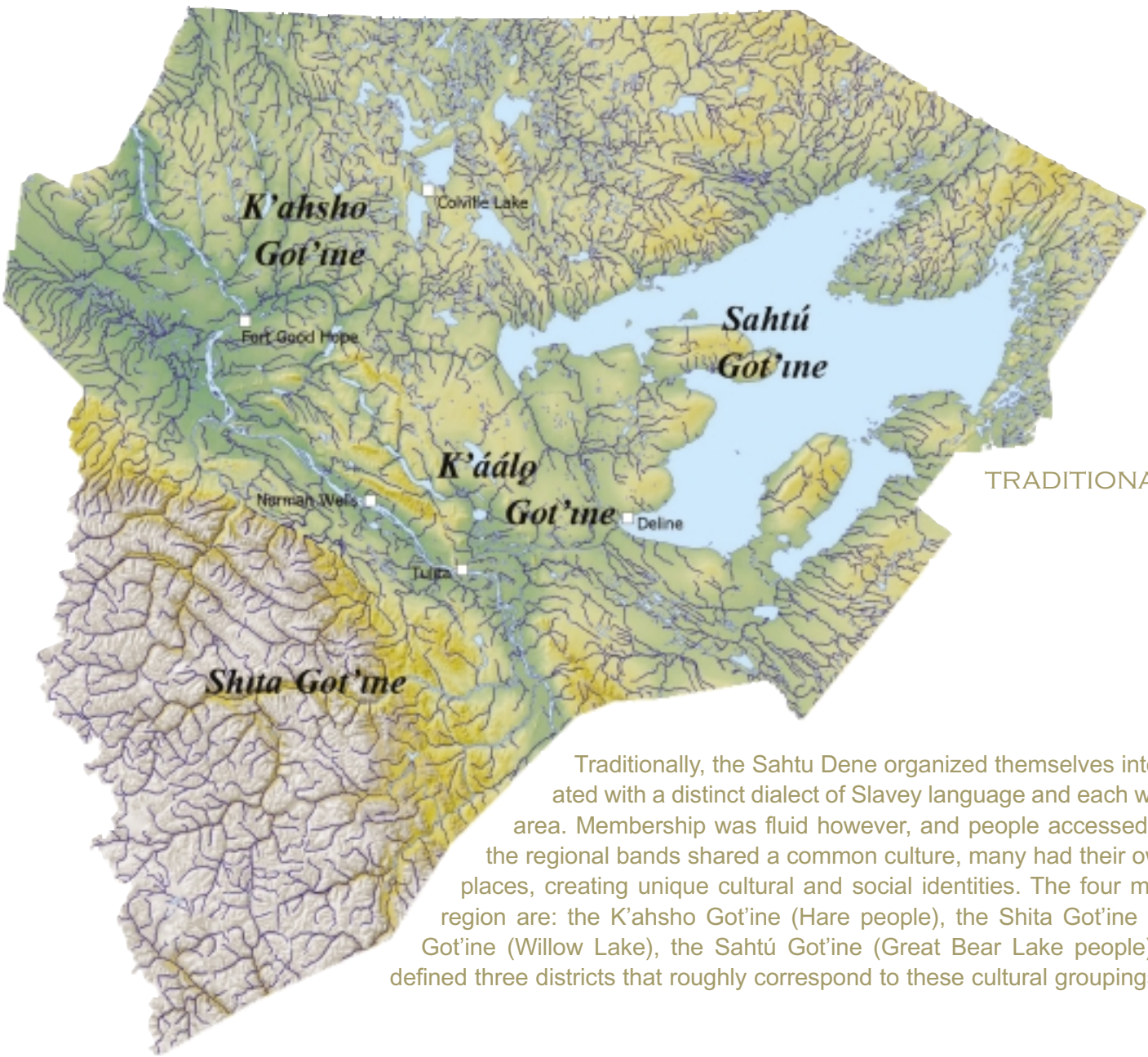


Spring hunt with Joe Modeste
Leon Modeste's father (1977)

courtesy of Leon and Cecil Modeste



Leon and Cecil Modeste



TRADITIONAL CULTURAL GROUPS

Traditionally, the Sahtu Dene organized themselves into regional bands, each associated with a distinct dialect of Slavey language and each with a particular 'home' land use area. Membership was fluid however, and people accessed the entire area. Though all of the regional bands shared a common culture, many had their own stories, culture heroes, and places, creating unique cultural and social identities. The four major cultural groups within the region are: the K'ahsho Got'ine (Hare people), the Shuta Got'ine (Mountain people), the K'áálq Got'ine (Willow Lake), the Sahtú Got'ine (Great Bear Lake people). The land claim agreement defined three districts that roughly correspond to these cultural groupings.

FUR TRADE

The people of the Sahtu were introduced to a fur trade economy by way of traditional trade routes with the Dene Sułine (Chipewyan) people, long before European traders made their way to the area. The northern fur trade era with the English and French traders began in 1670. Under a Royal Charter, the Hudson Bay Company was given ownership of the lands drained by the Hudson Bay. Over the next 100 years, trading centred in this region known as Rupert's Land. It was not until trade routes were established further north and west that traders looked to the Sahtu.

At the turn of the 18th century, fur trading posts under the North West Company were established in the Sahtu after Alexander Mackenzie's exploration of the Deh Cho River. The North West Company established a post in Deline (Fort Franklin) in 1799, in Tulita (Fort Norman) and in the vicinity of Fort Good Hope in 1804-1805. In 1821, the North West Company joined the Hudson's Bay Company. A century of relationships developed through the fur trade gave rise to the Métis Nation, a distinct people that brought together Dene and European cultures.

In the early days of the fur trade, the Dene would seldom trap a locality out. Subsisting out on the land, they would move camp often in search of game and would consequently trap lightly over a large area.

But fur was a lucrative commodity for European traders, and the trade rapidly expanded, exerting new pressures on fur-bearing animal populations. Early on, ships that delivered £650 worth of trade goods were returning to England with £19,000 worth of furs. Europeans increasingly found it profitable to enter the trade as trappers. In contrast to their nomadic Dene counterparts, European trappers brought most of their own provisions, established themselves in a chosen locality, built headquarters with small buildings and devoted most of their time to trapping to supply the market. In a few years, nearby fur-bearing populations would be exhausted, forcing them to seek new trapping areas.

As the 20th century dawned, trapping had become an established modern, market-driven activity. However, over-trapping and over-hunting were causing severe shortages of the wildlife that had been the source of survival for the Dene and Métis peoples. The tensions of those times are evoked in Dene bushman stories, which are said to be a response to the fearsome white strangers that had entered the wilderness.



Fort Good Hope trappers - courtesy of Dora Lafferty



caribou blanket

WHEN THE BUSHMAN CAME TO TOWN

By Corey Chinna, Gr 7-12, Fort Good Hope

(Originally printed in the Mackenzie Valley Viewer, February 2001)

I was just coming from my friend's house when I saw some kids riding around on skidoos. So I ran home to get my skidoo. I grabbed the skidoo from my house, and took off to follow the other kids. By the time I caught up with them, it was already dark. I just followed the skidoo in front of me.

Then I heard a weird noise coming from the engine. So I stopped to check it out. It didn't look like anything was wrong. I kicked the engine, and it went back to normal. I jumped back on and took off again.

All the kids were gone already, except one. So I followed him. He slowed down and stopped. I asked him if he knew where the other kids went. He didn't answer. I looked at his clothes. They were all hair! I remember my granny telling me a bushman was wandering around.

Then he stood up. He was about seven feet high, and hairy, too. He started grumbling like he was talking. I took off around a corner. I thought I'd lost him, so I said, "Whooo!" Then he jumped out of the bushes and covered my eyes so I couldn't see. I crashed into a ditch. When I turned around, he wasn't there. I went to the road to see if I could see him. I said, "Aah, I guess I'll go home and tell my dad about the skidoo."

Then I turned and there he was, towering over me like a giant. He grabbed me and picked me up. Suddenly something came out of nowhere and crushed the bushman. He was out cold. Later, I saw his arm move, so I ran.

He was running after me. I ran onto the river, which it wasn't very frozen. I kept running, and all of a sudden he fell through the ice. I checked to see if he fell in for sure. Then his big hand came out and grabbed my leg. I pulled out my lighter and burned his hand. Then he went back under. I ran home to warm up.

MACKENZIE'S MISTAKE

On June 3, 1789 25 year old fur trader Alexander Mackenzie, led his 12-person crew of French-Canadian voyageurs and Chipewyan guides and their fleet of birchbark canoes into the cold water of Lake Athabasca. He had every reason to believe that the voyage would lead westward to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The Pacific quest however was difficult from the outset. Progress on the Slave River, leading north was slow, and dangerous. Unseasonable ice on Great Slave Lake often brought the fragile birchbark canoes to a standstill.

The sagging spirits of the crew lifted when the next great river (Deh Cho) began to carry them westward. Soon the snow-capped wall of the Rocky Mountains in the distance appeared. But when the river itself turned north and parallel to the mountains, at Camsell Bend, the paddlers realized that their quest for the Pacific would be a failure.

On July 16, 6 weeks after their optimistic departure their fears were confirmed: their route had taken them not to the Pacific Ocean, but to the Arctic. Disappointed, Mackenzie and his guides paddled back to Lake Athabasca.

In May of 1793, Mackenzie tried a second time. This time he headed west from Athabasca, following the Peace River to the continental divide and reached the headwaters of the Fraser River which flows into the Pacific at present-day Vancouver.

His guides knowing the river's dangerous reputation advised Mackenzie against attempting to descend it. Instead, the explorer descended the Bella Coola River, becoming the first European to cross North America north of Mexico.

Adapted from Canadian Council for Geographic Education's "Mackenzie River - Wrong Turn."



THE SAHTU INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

The discovery of oil at Norman Wells in 1919 unleashed a new dynamic in the region. The signing of Treaty 11 a year later provided the legal basis for developing the oil wells. A rapid influx of southerners increased the exposure of Dene people to deadly epidemics. In 1928, a devastating flu epidemic took the lives of about 600 people in the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories, about 10-15% of each village. Tuberculosis and pneumonia spread in the wake of the epidemic, preying upon the weakened survivors. Between 1937 and 1941, tuberculosis was found in the District at a rate fourteen times the national average, and pneumonia at a rate of more than double the average. One Edmonton doctor visiting the NWT noted in 1934 that he could not find “a single physically sound individual” (quoted in Abel 1993, 208).

Bishop Gabriel Breynat was a tireless advocate for the sick and destitute Dene peoples. In 1938, he wrote an article entitled “Canada’s Blackest Blot” that was published in the Toronto Star Weekly, in which he noted that in “carefully compiled figures for 12 months during 1935-1936 (an exceptionally good year), it is estimated that the per capita income of these Indians was \$110” (quoted in Fumoleau 1996, 300).

Increasingly restrictive fur and game harvesting laws were an additional blow to Dene peoples, who already felt betrayed by broken promises in the aftermath of Treaty 11. In 1928, closed seasons on beavers were imposed, and further restrictions were added in amendments to the Game Act in 1929. This was despite evidence that non-aboriginal trappers from the south were having the greatest impact on wildlife populations.

Fortunately, the game laws probably did not have much impact on the communities of the Sahtu. Many people were not aware of the laws, and local agents and police likely recognised the futility of attempting to enforce them (Abel 1993). However, by the end of the 1930’s, the Depression was affecting the Mackenzie Valley as fur prices crashed. An era that lasted 140 years in the Sahtu was coming to a close.

Meanwhile, the discovery of pitchblende at Port Radium on Great Bear Lake and gold at Yellowknife marked a turning point in the economy of the Mackenzie District in the 1930s. The opening of the Sᓄmba K’e (Port Radium) mine on Great Bear Lake in 1933 created a new home market for oil. Production of petroleum at Norman Wells increased at a dizzying speed, especially with the additional demand created in 1937 by the opening of gold mines in Yellowknife. Imperial Oil built a new refinery, and drilled two new wells. Production went from 910 barrels per year in 1932 to over 22,000 in 1938. In 1946, mineral production exceeded fur production in value, for the first time in the north.

Today, the economy of the Sahtu Region is based on a mix of industrial resource extraction, tourism, traditional trapping and subsistence harvesting. People of the Sahtu continue to rely on the land as a source of income, food, security and identity. Many Dene and Metis people have found ways to combine wage employment in town with traditional activities in the bush. Although young people are learning modern skills in school, there is also a movement to ensure that they are provided with teaching by their elders in the skills and knowledge needed for survival on the land.



Top - Hunters travelling by dog sled
Middle - Madeline Karkagie (Tulita) smoking hide.
Bottom - Caribou meat ready for transport
photos © Norm Simmons



DEH CHO (MACKENZIE RIVER)

The Deh Cho or 'Big River', from Blackwater River in the south, to Thunder River in the north, was and remains a very important route for Sahtu Dene and Metis... As a traditional use area, the Deh Cho continues to provide domestic fisheries, moose and waterfowl hunting areas, travel access to many other locations. It is associated with numerous legends, including stories of Yamoria.



boats along the Mackenzie River

FORGING A NEW MAP: THE SAHTU LAND CLAIM

The Sahtu Land Claim Agreement was negotiated with the government of Canada to clarify land title, and to enshrine the ongoing role of Dene and Metis people as stewards of the land.

AS LONG AS THIS LAND SHALL LAST: TREATY 11

The idea of establishing land title and boundaries dates back to 1920, soon after the first oil gusher was hit at Norman Wells. The nascent Council of the Northwest Territories began planning for the development of oil and gas reserves. But the aboriginal peoples had not ceded their rights to the territory. When it was pointed out that oil and gas licenses in this area existed outside the law, the Department of Indian Affairs undertook to conclude Treaty 11. The Crown considered this to have been accomplished in the summer of 1921, during a brief trip through the communities along the Mackenzie River. According to the treaty document, Dene and Métis peoples ceded their title to 599,000 square kilometres, stretching northward from the 60th parallel to the Arctic Ocean, and eastward from the Mackenzie Mountains to Great Slave Lake. Oral testimony shows that the Dene people did not understand the Treaty to be extinguishing title to their traditional lands.

LAND TITLE AND THE MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE

Disparities between Dene and government interpretations of Treaty 11 came to light in the late 1960s, when a natural gas pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley was first proposed. In 1966, the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories launched an oral history project to determine the Dene understanding of the Treaty 11 process. On March 24, 1973, sixteen Dene chiefs put forward a legal claim of interest in an area covering more than one million square kilometres, and presented a caveat for registration under the Land Titles Act. Nearly six months later, Justice William G. Morrow presented a finding that the Dene peoples did indeed have aboriginal rights in the area. This caveat meant that no development could proceed until land title was established.

In 1974, the federal government set up a commission to investigate the “terms and conditions that should be imposed” in respect of the proposed pipeline. Justice Thomas Berger led the inquiry. Over a three year period, Berger travelled throughout the Western Arctic in an unprecedented consultation process involving more than a thousand witnesses. When the Berger Inquiry came to the Sahtu Region, people had their first opportunity to voice their opinions about the impact that such a major development would have on their land and their lives. In his final report, Berger recommended a moratorium on development until aboriginal land claims could be settled.

TAKING TREATY IN TULITA: REMEMBERING TREATY 11

The people were scared to take the treaty because they didn't know what was coming. The Treaty party couldn't just come to the town and say, “Here, we'll give you the money for nothing.” The Indians had feelings that the White people were going to take over something, that the White people were not giving the money away for nothing. They must be buying something, either the land or the people. That's how the Indians felt. So they just kept asking the White people what the money was for. They said, “You just can't give us the money for nothing. It must mean something ...” The White people kept bugging the people for treaty. They said, “You've got to take treaty.” The people said no. So everyone went home. The next day, it was the same thing again. They talked about taking the Treaty all day. They tried to force the people to take the Treaty. The people didn't want it

From interviews with Joe Kenny, Albert Menacho (Isadore Yukon, interviewer), John Blondin and Johnny Yakeleya (Bernard Masuzumi, Interviewer), and notes by John Blondin, in As Long As This Land Shall Last, by Rene Fumoleau, OMI (Toronto: University of Calgary Press, 1975, 2004). 231-232.



Dene Nation Assembly, Tulita, 2001



The Sahtu and surrounding land claim regions and territories

Recognizing unfulfilled treaties throughout the NWT, the federal government established mechanisms for land claim negotiations. The first settlement was concluded with the Inuvialuit in 1984. The Dene and Metis came together and put forward a single Denendeh land claim. By 1988, Agreement-In-Principle was reached on this claim. However, the agreement fell apart over a number of issues. The Gwich'in communities withdrew from the process, soon followed by the Sahtu communities. In 1991, the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was signed. The Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was concluded in 1993.

THE NEW LAND CLAIM MAP

The Sahtu Land Claim map involves multiple layers of boundaries: the boundary defining the region as a whole, referred to in the Land Claim as settlement lands; boundaries identifying three districts within the region; five municipal boundaries; and outside the municipalities, numerous boundaries defining federal, territorial and aboriginal land title.

The regional and district boundaries are necessarily provisional to some extent, given that there is overlap in traditional land use areas; fixed boundaries did not exist in the old clan area system. Although this issue affects all aboriginal lands in three northern territories, it is especially complex for the Sahtu since it is centrally located, sharing boundaries with the Yukon First Nations to the west; the Gwich'in, Inuvialuit and Nunavummiut (the people of Nunavut); the Dogrib of the North Slave region covered by Treaty 11 to the east, and the Deh Cho First Nation to the south .

DISTRICTS AND COMMUNITIES

The district boundaries were defined roughly corresponding with the core land use areas of the contemporary Dene and Métis communities within the Sahtu Region. Though the nomadic Dene had harvested in these areas for generations, permanent settlements were established relatively recently, in response to the expansion of the fur trade and subsequently, the development of petroleum and mining industries in the area. As the non-aboriginal population increased and wildlife became more scarce, it became increasingly difficult to sustain a wholly land-based subsistence. When the Federal government finally recognized its responsibility for the well-being of northern aboriginal peoples, they were encouraged to settle in centres established for convenient administration of services. Land use patterns shifted somewhat to accommodate a new hybrid way of life, combining town and bush.

Fort Good Hope and Tulita were both established early in the 19th century as fur trading and mission posts conveniently located along the Mackenzie River transportation route. Norman Wells, as its name implies, is a primarily non-aboriginal and Métis community founded as a result of the “discovery” of oil there in 1919 (though the aboriginal inhabitants of the area may well have known about this long before). Deline developed as a semi-permanent community on Great Bear Lake near the mouth of Great Bear River in the 1940s and 1950s with the expansion of the Port Radium uranium mine. The community achieved permanence with the closure of the mine in 1960, when the Dene residents of Port Radium were compelled to move to Deline. Colville Lake was created in 1962 as part of a movement to revive traditional trapping practices, linked to the establishment of a Roman Catholic mission there.

Although there are close interrelationships among the Dene communities, they are culturally and linguistically distinct. The K'ahsho Got'ine/Hare people are now centred in Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake. The Shita Got'ine/Mountain people have joined with the K'áálô Got'ine/Willow Lake people in the community of Tulit'a. The Sahtúot'ine are named after Sahtú/Great Bear Lake, and are based in Deline. Métis people, descendents of relationships established between Dene people and fur traders, reside in all five communities of the region.

THE BERGER INQUIRY IN FORT GOOD HOPE

The following is excerpted from the address given by Chief Frank T'Seleie at the Pipeline Inquiry during its visit to Fort Good Hope, August 5, 1975.

Mr. Berger, as chief of the Fort Good Hope Band I want to welcome you and your party to Fort Good Hope. This is the first time in the history of my people that an important person from your nation has come to listen and learn from us, and not just come to tell us what we should do, or trick us into saying “yes” to something that in the end is not good for us

It is not at all inevitable that there will be a pipeline built through the heart of our land. Whether or not your businessmen or your government believes that a pipeline must go through our great valley, let me tell you, Mr. Berger, and let me tell your nation, that this is Dene land and we the Dene people intend to decide what happens on our land....

Mr. Berger, you have visited many of the Dene communities. The Dene people of Hay River told you that they do not want the pipeline because, with the present development of Hay River, they have already been shoved aside. The Dene people of Fort Franklin [Deline] told you that they do not want the pipeline because they love their land and their life and do not want it destroyed. Chief Paul Andrew and his people in Fort Norman [Tulita] told you that no man, Dene or white, would jeopardize his own future and the future of his children. Yet you re doing just that if you asked him to agree to a pipeline through this land

Our Dene nation is like this great river. It has been flowing before any of us can remember. We take our strength and our wisdom and our ways from the flow and direction that has been established for us by ancestors we never knew, ancestors of a thousand years ago. Their wisdom flows through us to our children and our grandchildren to generations we will never know. We will live out our lives as we must and we will die in peace because we will know that our people and this river will flow on after us.

From Watkins, Ed. Dene Nation: The Colony Within. (1977: 12-17).



Dene Nation logo

NORTHERN FRONTIER NORTHERN HOMELAND: THE BERGER REPORT

Justice Thomas Berger summarized the key points from his extensive report in a letter to Warren Allmand, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, dated April 15, 1977. Below are excerpts from Berger's letter.

We are now at our last frontier. It is a frontier that all of us have read about, but few of us have seen. Profound issues, touching our deepest concerns as a nation, await us there.

The North is a frontier, but it is a homeland too, the homeland of the Dene, Inuit and Metis, as it is also the home of the white people who live there. And it is a heritage, a unique environment that we are called upon to preserve for all Canadians.

The decisions we have to make are not, therefore, simply about northern pipelines. They are decisions about the protection of the northern environment and the future of northern peoples....

THE MACKENZIE VALLEY

I have concluded that it is feasible, from an environmental point of view, to build a pipeline and to establish an energy corridor along the Mackenzie Valley, running south from the Mackenzie Delta to the Alberta border. Unlike the Northern Yukon, no major wildlife populations would be threatened and no wilderness areas would be violated

However, to keep the environmental impacts of a pipeline to an acceptable level, its construction and operation should proceed only under careful planning and strict regulation. The corridor should be based on a comprehensive plan that takes into account the many land use conflicts apparent in the region even today....

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The pipeline companies see the pipeline as an unqualified gain to the North; northern businessmen perceive it as the impetus for growth and expansion. But all along, the construction of the pipeline has been justified mainly on the ground that it would provide jobs for thousands of native people....

Although there has always been a native economy in the north, based on the bush and the barrens, we have for a decade or more followed policies by which it could only be weakened and depreciated. We have assumed that the native economy is moribund and that the native people should therefore be induced to enter industrial wage employment. But I have found that income in kind from hunting, fishing and trapping is a far more important element in the northern economy than we had thought.

The fact is that large-scale projects based on non-renewable resources have rarely provided permanent employment for any significant number of native people. There is abundant reason to doubt that a pipeline would provide meaningful and ongoing employment to many native people

It is an illusion to believe that the pipeline will solve the economic problems of the North. Its whole purpose is to deliver northern gas to homes and industries in the South. Indeed, rather than solving the North's economic problems, it may accentuate them.

The native people, both young and old, see clearly the short term character of pipeline construction. They see the need to build an economic future for themselves on a surer foundation. The real economic problems in the North will be solved only when we accept the view the native people themselves expressed so often to the Inquiry: that is, the strengthening of the native economy. We must look at forms of economic development that really do accord with native values and preferences. If the kinds of things that native people now want are taken seriously, we must cease to regard large-scale industrial development as a panacea for the economic ills of the North....

IF THERE IS NO PIPELINE NOW

An economy based on modernization of hunting, fishing and trapping, on efficient game and fisheries management, on small-scale enterprise, and on the orderly development of gas and oil resources over a period of years – this is no retreat into the past; rather, it is a rational program for northern development based on the ideals and aspirations of northern native peoples.

To develop a diversified economy will take time. It will be tedious, not glamorous, work. No quick and easy fortunes will be made. There will be failures. The economy will not necessarily attract the interest of the multinational corporations. It will be regarded by many as a step backward. But the evidence I have heard has led me to the conclusion that such a program is the only one that makes sense....

IMPLICATIONS

I believe that, if you and your colleagues accept the recommendations I am making, we can build a Mackenzie Valley pipeline at a time of our own choosing, along a route of our own choice. With time, it may, after all, be possible to reconcile the urgent claims of northern native people with the future requirements of all Canadians for gas and oil.

From Northern Frontier Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, revised edition (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1977, 1988). 14-29.



Proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline through the Sahtu

LAND TITLE , ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

The Sahtu Dene and Métis of the three Districts now have title to 41,437 square kilometres of settlement lands, of which 1,838 square kilometres or 22.5% includes the ownership of subsurface resources (petroleum and minerals). Sahtu Dene and Métis lands were selected according to a variety of criteria, including spiritual sites, traditional land use and harvesting areas, and some lands with resource revenue potential. In addition, a number of Special Harvesting Areas have been set aside for land claim beneficiaries.

The Land Claim provided for the transfer of settlement lands outside the municipalities in return for a Federal payment of \$75 million to designated organisations accountable to Sahtu Dene and Métis beneficiaries. Administration of Land Claim funds and activities on behalf of Land Claim beneficiaries is accomplished by way of seven community Land Corporations (including separate Dene and Métis organisations in Tulita and Fort Good Hope) and the regional Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated. Political leadership for Dene beneficiaries is provided by local Band Councils, and the regional Sahtu Dene Council.

The Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated (SSI) is the coordinating body for the seven Land Corporations and is the main contact for federal and territorial governments with respect to education, health, environment and economic development. The SSI also holds land claim funds in trust for the land corporations, and facilitates corporate decision-making at a regional level.

The local Band Councils and regional Sahtu Dene Council are the political bodies responsible for treaty matters and matters relating to the Indian Act. The Band Councils play an important leadership role in determining community priorities, and administer a number of social programs. The Sahtu Dene Council reviews and makes decisions on issues that influence the way in which Sahtu business is conducted, and provides advice to the SSI.

The Land Claim also provides for the negotiation of self-government agreements with the Federal and Territorial governments. Deline was the first Sahtu community to undertake negotiations and an Agreement-in-Principal was signed August 23, 2003.

THE FIGHT FOR A LAND CLAIM

At the time of the Berger Inquiry, George Barnaby of Fort Good Hope was an elected member of the Territorial Council representing the Mackenzie/Great Bear region. He resigned while in office, following which he was elected Vice-President of the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT (now known as the Dene Nation). He became a leading proponent of the Denendeh comprehensive land claim agreement.

“The land claim of the Dene is a claim not only for land but also for political rights. Up to this time the native people have had no say in what happens on their land. Everything has been decided by Ottawa or a few people in Yellowknife. This does not apply to development on the land only, but also in the way we live. Laws are made by people from the south that do not make sense to us, but which we have to live by. These laws are to serve the system of the south. They are not laws to protect the Dene way of life.

The land claim is our fight to gain recognition as a different group of people – with our own way of seeing things, our own values, our own life style, our own laws.

The land claim is a fight for self-determination using our own system with which we have survived till now. This system is based on community life. Whether it be a settlement or a trapping camp, whether people live by working in a wage economy or off the land, the laws we follow are concerned with all the people, not to benefit a few at the expense of the rest.”

The land claim is our fight to survive as a nation and to decide our own future.

From Dene Nation: The Colony Within, Mel Watkins, Editor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). 120-124.

SURFACE, SUB-SURFACE RIGHTS AND MUNICIPAL DISTRICTS

Settlement and Municipal Lands

Under the Sahtu Land Claim Agreement the Sahtu Dene and Metis have title to 41,437 square kilometers of settlement lands of which 1,838 square kilometers includes the rights to subsurface resources. These Sahtu-owned lands are privately owned in fee simple and not reserves under the Indian Act. Municipal lands are fee simple title lands within the municipal boundaries excluding subsurface title.

Federal Crown Lands

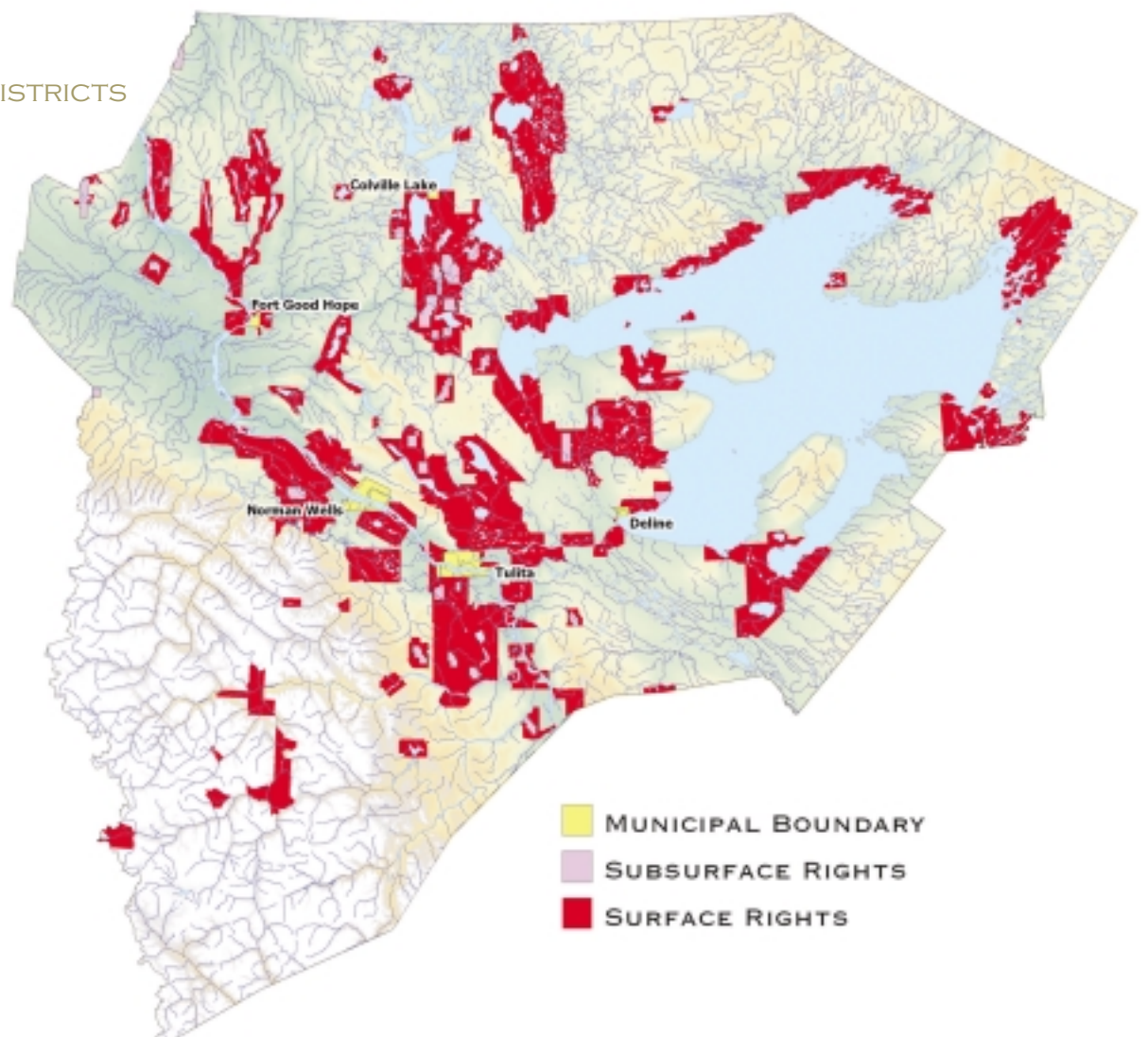
Over 80 percent of land within the SSA are Federal Crown lands. On these lands the Government of Canada owns and controls most of the lands and resources, both surface and subsurface.

Commissioners Lands (Block Transfers)

These are lands within or near municipal boundaries of communities where control of surface rights have been transferred to the Commissioners of the NWT. The Commissioner therefore acts like an owner and is able to confer interests in land to third parties.

Norman Wells Proven Area Agreement

Signed in 1944 the federal government granted Imperial Oil exclusive right to drill for and produce petroleum and natural gas from the area for three consecutive 21 year terms. This agreement is valid until 2008.



A new system of co-operative resource management (co-management) was created by the Land Claim to address the longstanding concern of Sahtu people that they be provided with opportunities to participate in decisions affecting Sahtu lands. The Claim identifies three Boards responsible for resource management, including the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board, the Sahtu Land and Water Board and the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board.

The purpose of the co-management system is mainly to ensure that Sahtu residents are able to participate in the management and regulation of our resources in a direct and meaningful way. The new system recognises the special knowledge that Sahtu residents have about the land, and accounts for their rights as land users and participants in decision-making. The co-management boards are accountable to the public in that aboriginal, territorial and federal governments nominate their directors. To ensure an equal voice for the rights of land claim beneficiaries, the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated nominates one half of the members on each of the Sahtu boards.

The new system also involves co-operation among the boards both within the Sahtu and in bordering regions to facilitate more effective and integrated resource management. The law allows the boards to “share staff and facilities with one another for the effective and efficient conduct of their affairs.”

The Sahtu Land Use Planning Board is tasked with developing a land use plan for the Sahtu that guides the conservation, utilisation, and development of the land.

The Sahtu Land and Water Board deals with water licenses and land use permits on the Sahtu. Once a Land Use Plan is in place, all licenses and permits will have to comply with the policies laid out in the plan.

The Sahtu Renewable Resources Board is the main body responsible for fisheries, forestry, and wildlife management in the Sahtu. They are guided by community-based Renewable Resource Councils.



The Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, created by the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim, was charged with the responsibility of reviewing options and making recommendations for commemoration and protection of heritage sites in the Sahtu Region. The Working Group – representatives from the Dene and Métis people of the region, and from the territorial and federal governments – submitted its report in January 2000 to the Sahtu leadership, and to Territorial and Federal ministers.

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graph TD; A[The Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated] --> B[Tulita Land Corporation]; A --> C[Fort Norman Métis Land Corporation]; A --> D[Ernie McDonald Land Corporation]; A --> E[Deline Land Corporation]; A --> F[Yamoga Land Corporation]; A --> G[Fort Good Hope Métis Land Corporation]; A --> H[Ayoni Keh Land Corporation]; B --> I[TULITA DISTRICT]; C --> I; D --> I; E --> J[DELINE DISTRICT]; F --> K[FORT GOOD HOPE DISTRICT]; G --> K; H --> K;
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The Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated

Tulita Land Corporation

Fort Norman Métis Land Corporation

Ernie McDonald Land Corporation

Deline Land Corporation

Yamoga Land Corporation

Fort Good Hope Métis Land Corporation

Ayoni Keh Land Corporation

TULITA DISTRICT

DELINE DISTRICT

FORT GOOD HOPE DISTRICT

12

DENE KNOWLEDGE

The Dene people's relationship with the land has given rise to a particular kind of knowledge that has been passed on orally across the generations, evolving through time so that each new generation can draw upon hundreds of years of Dene experience. This knowledge is articulated through the rich and specialised vocabulary of the Dene language and dialects.

Knowledge that draws upon lived experience and is passed on from generation to generation has become known as "traditional knowledge." Because this knowledge is highly adaptive and continually incorporates new experiential learnings, it is perhaps misleading to use the term "traditional;" some argue that it is more appropriate to refer to "Dene knowledge."

Non-Dene people have been made aware of the value of Dene knowledge since their first arrival in this region. Without naming it, early explorers and scientists recognized the value of this kind of knowledge; they almost always hired Dene people as their guides, and depended on Dene knowledge for their survival. The success of the fur trade has always been dependent on the specialized Dene knowledge of fur-bearing mammals. Dene oral traditions affirm that notwithstanding the official histories of the north, Dene knowledge was responsible for the first discoveries of the region's most profitable resources, pitchblende (radium/uranium) and oil.

In the 1970s, the value of Dene knowledge gained some level of official recognition. Justice Thomas Berger broke new ground in declaring oral testimony admissible as evidence in court. The Sahtu Dene and Métis Land Claim Agreement is founded in Dene knowledge of traditional land use, and it sets out a cooperative resource management regime that requires the incorporation of Dene knowledge in research and decision-making.

There are still significant challenges involved in integrating Dene and other knowledges. As the communities of the Sahtu Region move into an era of self-government, there will be opportunities to apply Dene knowledge to the transformation of government, education, and health and social programs, so that these institutions will be better adapted to people's needs.

DENE KNOWLEDGE RESEARCH IN THE SAHTU

Dene knowledge was never something to be researched before the arrival of the Europeans. Dene people possessed this knowledge because they were taught by their elders, and this knowledge was essential to survival on the land. Europeans arriving in this region in the late 19th century saw Dene knowledge as a subject for study. They were aware that the hunting and gathering way of life was disappearing elsewhere in the world, and felt that it was urgent to document Dene knowledge and practices before these too were lost.

This was in large part the driving force behind the history of anthropology in the Sahtu. Catholic missionary Father Petitot was perhaps the founder of anthropology in the Sahtu during the late 1800s. Throughout the 20th century, many anthropologists have followed in his path – living in the Dene communities of the Sahtu, travelling on the land with Dene families, and then publishing numerous research papers, articles and books. Some of these have made international reputations based on their research in the Sahtu. Unfortunately, the community members have often not had access to the publications; they are published in the south for southern audiences, and the research results usually have not been presented to the communities.

A new era of research was initiated in the 1970s and 1980s with the Dene Nation mapping project and other traditional knowledge research sponsored by the Dene Cultural Institute, or precipitated by the comprehensive land claims process. During this period, the first generation of Dene community researchers was trained to conduct research that was designed to fulfill Dene interests.

However, there were still parallels to the anthropological tradition in that projects tended to be designed by specialists from the outside; community researchers were provided only with the narrow technical training required to conduct interviews. This weakened the level of accountability to the communities, and their ability to effectively harness research results.

Co-operative resource management and the growing confidence of the Dene communities have given rise to new approaches to research. Communities increasingly want to be equal partners in developing and designing research projects, and evaluating results. Community members want to be trained through every phase of the research process, so that community capacity grows.

As precondition for approval of development projects, petroleum corporations are now more prepared to invest in traditional knowledge research. This presents a major opportunity for the people of the Sahtu. It also presents a challenge to ensure that community interests are served. Research must be carefully designed, that community researchers be thoroughly trained to recognized standards, and that research results be verified by the community.



Top - The Sahtu land use planning process

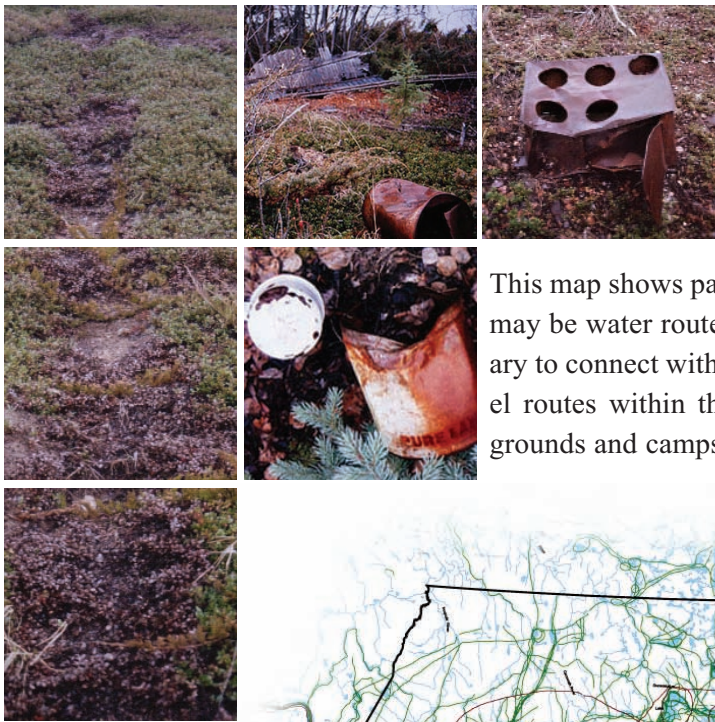


Above - Radio Broadcast Translators
(Dene Nation Assembly, Tulita 2001)



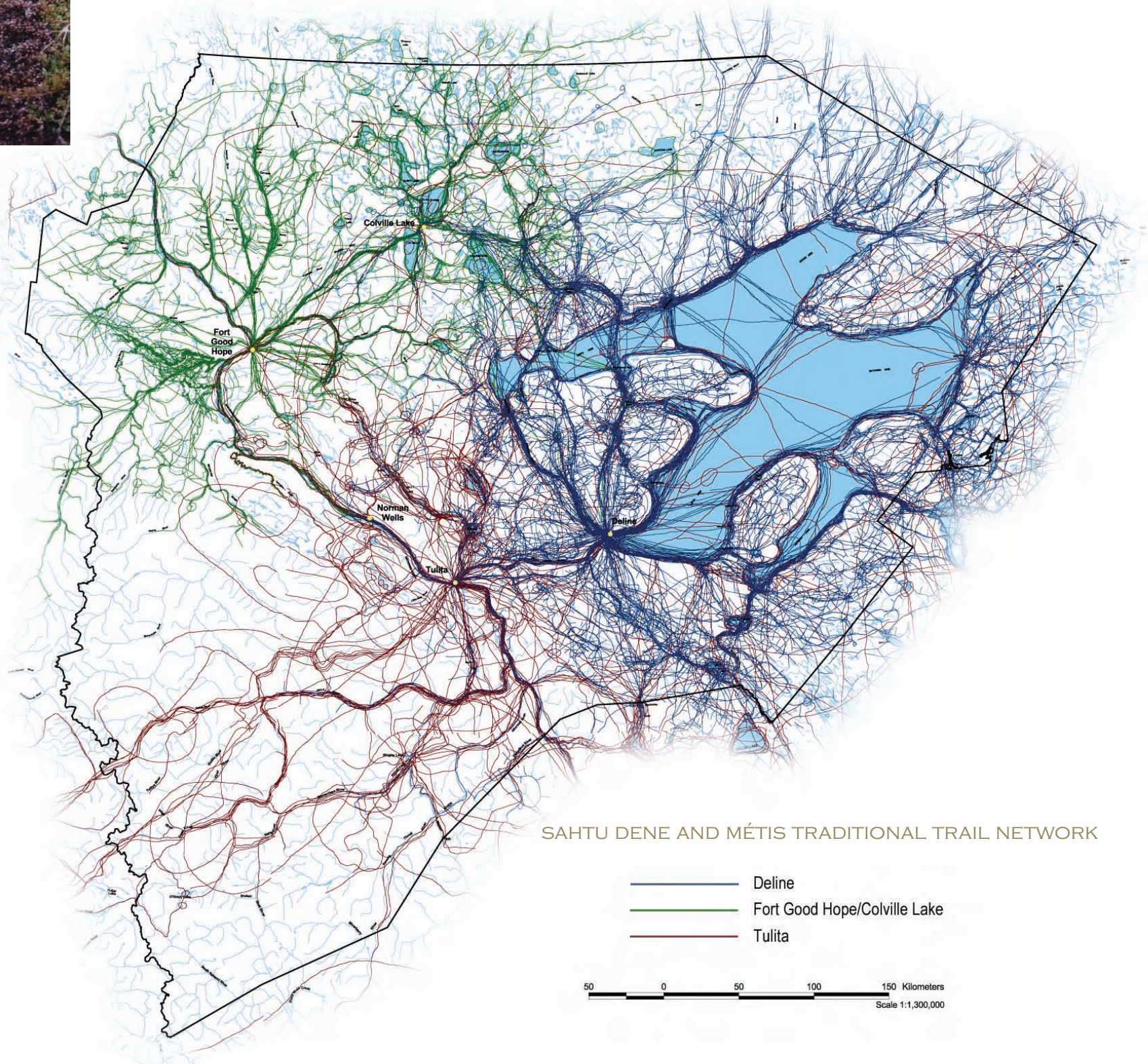
Right - Elders Marie Theresa Kenny and Rosie
Sewi participate in workshop, Deline 2003

TRADITIONAL TRAVEL



The land itself is of particular importance in transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. The Sahtu Dene and Métis landscape is known intimately to elders. Trails, used year-round, provide access to a vast harvesting region. The trails link thousands of place names, each with a story, sometimes many, bound to the place. Names and narratives convey knowledge, and in this way Sahtu Dene and Metis culture is tied directly to the landscape. The network of interconnecting trails provides access to a Sahtu land use area encompassing some 300,000 km.

This map shows patterns of land use derived through the Sahtu Dene and Métis trails mapping project. The trails may be water routes or land routes or both depending on the season, and many extend beyond the Sahtu boundary to connect with other major routes of the north. While cutlines and winter roads have opened up further travel routes within the Sahtu, some traditional routes are still used for travel to and from settlements, hunting grounds and camps.



When you put out these maps it brings back memories of long time ago. I remember one time we travelled to town walking, no dogs or skiddoo from Aubry Lake. We camped once. The next day we made it to the Hare Indian River. At that time there were no maps. There were people that were smart that made trail from Colville Lake to Fort Good Hope. *Anonymous, Dene Nation mapping project*



We used the traditional method to fool the caribou by rubbing two small tree ends together, to make them think that a caribou is rubbing his antlers onto a small tree, or the hoofs clicking together. - *Charlie Codzi*



People traditionally wore caribou hide capes, which were also used for blankets. - *Veronica Kochon*



Drying meat in the sun. The hides are also laid out to be dried and cured for blankets. - *Therese Codzi*



About 20 hides with no hair were used for the bottom section of the tipi. Hides with hair were used for the top. Raven feathers were used for decoration. - *Therese Codzi*



When the hunters carried the hides back to camp, sometimes they added light delicacies to their load, like the breast bone and other goodies. - *Veronica Kochon*



Esloa (Belé yah) leading a herd of caribou on a lake. That little caribou was raised by a human. It has a burnt colour, red-dish-brown. He didn't want his antlers to grow long, so he burned them. That's why his antlers have black tips.

There is a saying that it never leads the caribou by the shore. It leads only in the middle of the lake. It breaks trail, then circles around the herd very fast to keep it going. I saw this form myself on Loche Lake once. - *Louie Boucan*

Alfred Masuzumi is an artist and writer living in Fort Good Hope. His first book, Caribou Hide, was published in 2000 by Raven Rock Publishing (Yellowknife). Bush Life originally published in the Mackenzie Valley Viewer, 2001. Printed with permission.



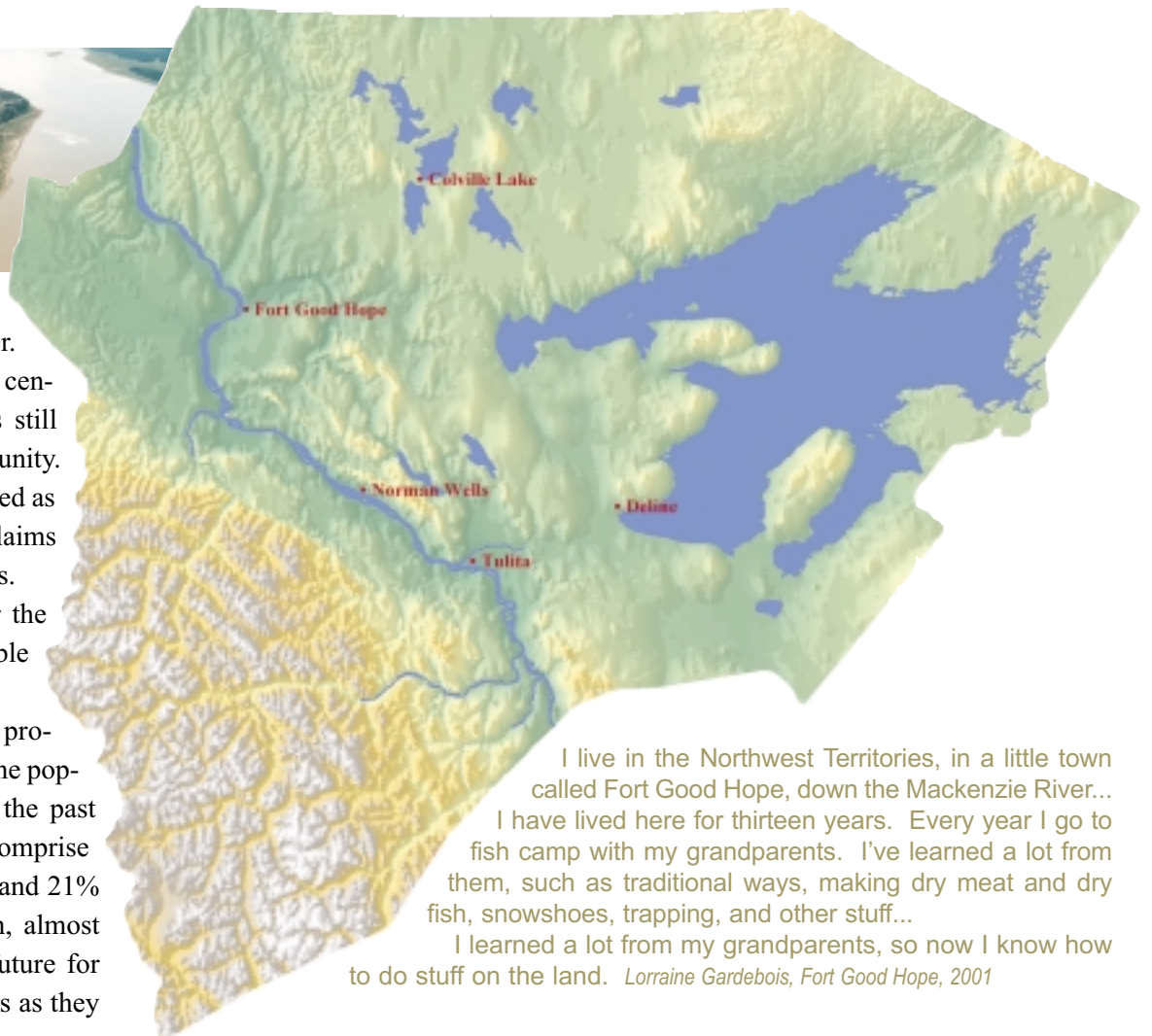
COMMUNITIES OF THE SAHTU



The Sahtu communities are all founded in the resource industry, but retain traces of their original frontier character. The four Dene communities were originally established as centres in the fur trade. The economy of Norman Wells is still based on the oil resource that first gave rise to the community. Local economies have more recently diversified and evolved as administrative centres for social services and land claims implementation, including resource management functions.

The communities have modernized considerably over the past several decades, and now boast water delivery, cable television, regular air service and winter road access.

Today, the population of the Sahtu is over 2,800 and is projected to exceed 3,000 by the year 2019. The diversity of the population reflects the changes that have taken place over the past century. As of the 2001 federal census, the Sahtu Dene comprise 71% of the total population; 7% are Métis, 1% are Inuit, and 21% are non-aboriginal. A large proportion of the population, almost 40%, is under the age of 25. The creation of a viable future for these youth in the region is a major focus of Sahtu leaders as they move toward greater control of resources and services.



I live in the Northwest Territories, in a little town called Fort Good Hope, down the Mackenzie River... I have lived here for thirteen years. Every year I go to fish camp with my grandparents. I've learned a lot from them, such as traditional ways, making dry meat and dry fish, snowshoes, trapping, and other stuff... I learned a lot from my grandparents, so now I know how to do stuff on the land. *Lorraine Gardebois, Fort Good Hope, 2001*

TRANSPORTATION

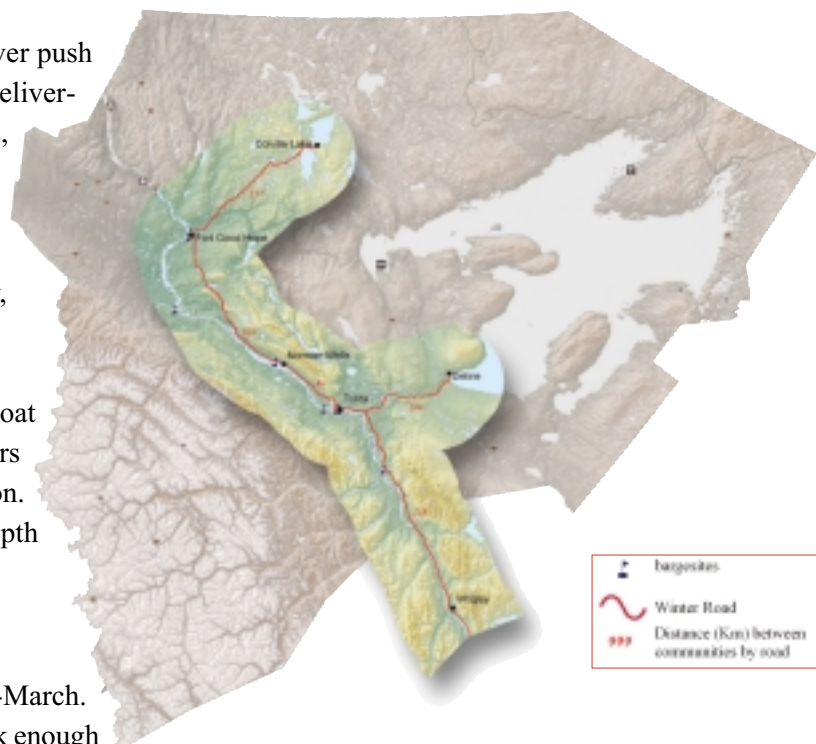
Like much of Northern Canada, the Sahtu and its communities cannot be accessed by southern methods of transportation such as all-season roads or railways. Inhabitants rely on year-round air transport, summer river barge service and ice roads in the winter to move around the Region and to ship supplies and goods.

BARGES

From mid-June to mid-October, high power tug boats launch from Hay River push specially designed flat-bottom barges up and down the Mackenzie River, delivering boats, cars, snowmobiles, heavy equipment, fuel oils, building supplies, bulk foods and other goods.

Service was originally provided by private barge companies hired by the Canadian government. Eventually competition reduced the barge companies to the single, government-owned Northern Transportation Company, Ltd (NTC). In the 1970s, as part of their land claims settlement, the Inuit became owners of the NTC's large fleet of tugs and barges.

The Mackenzie River demands expert navigational skills from the tug boat crews. The river's annual freeze up and sudden flood of water and ice scours the river bottom, changing the navigation channel from season to season. Coast Guard crews patrol the river, measuring depth using electronic depth sounders, then anchoring buoys to mark the channels for the barges.



WINTER ROADS

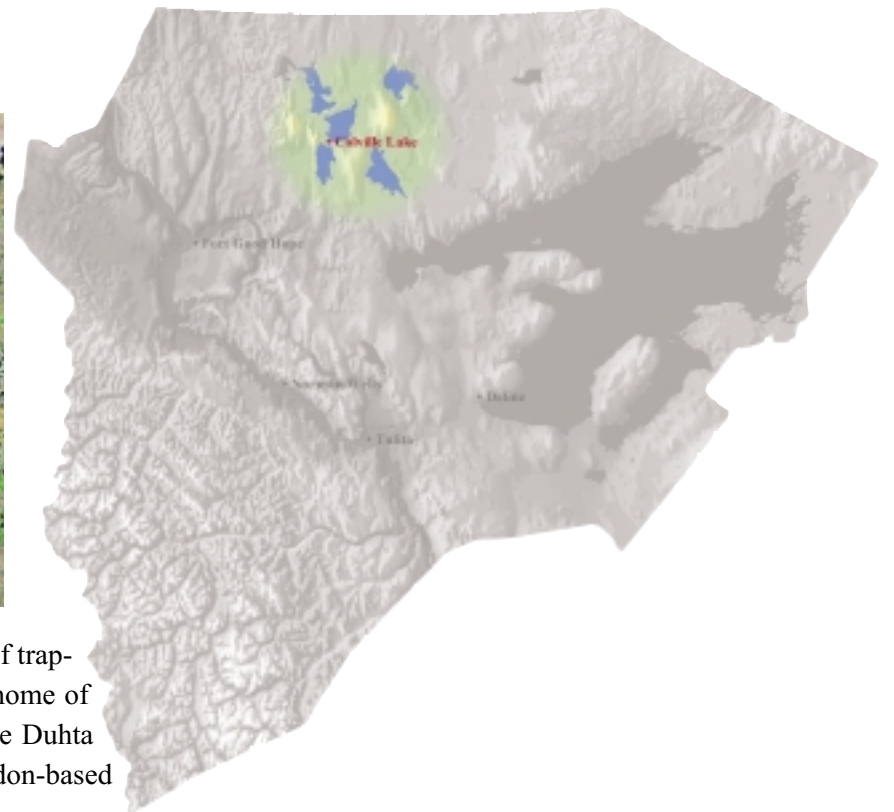
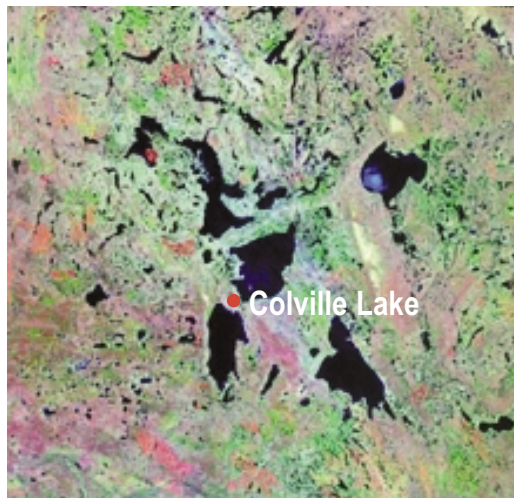
Winter roads usually open mid-to-late December and operate through mid-March. Freeze-up provides a bed of frozen ground and a coat of ice on the lakes, thick enough to allow the weight of vehicle traffic. The winter road is cleared and maintained from the termination of the permanent highway at Wrigley up along the Mackenzie Valley with an extension near Tulita going east to Deline and an extension at Fort Good Hope travelling east to Colville Lake.

For the communities along the Mackenzie River, the winter road replaces summer barge service with truck service. For Deline and Colville Lake, which do not have access to barge service in the summer, the winter road is critical for the delivery of bulk supplies such as heating fuel, electricity and other necessary goods not practical or possible to be delivered by air.



Climate and terrain challenge transportation to the Sahtu and within the region

K'ÁHBAMÍTÚÉ COLVILLE LAKE



K'áhbamítúé means “Ptarmigan Net Lake.” The name refers to the traditional method of trapping the ptarmigan that gather among the willows bordering this beautiful lake. This home of the Behdzi Ahda First Nation was also an important fish lake and trapping area for the Duhta Got'ine. The Anglo name likely refers to Andrew Wedderburn Colville, the London-based Hudson's Bay Company's governor from 1852-1856.

In the early 1960s, there was a movement to revitalize the traditional trapping economy, and a number of families along with Oblate missionary Bern Will Brown travelled from Fort Good Hope to establish a permanent community on the south edge of the lake. The Our Lady of the Snows Mission building, constructed of local logs by Dene builders with Bern Will Brown, remains a significant landmark in the community.

Until the turn of the 21st century, Colville Lake remained one of the most isolated communities in the western Arctic. Recently important natural gas reserves were discovered in the Colville Lake area, and the Behdzi Ahda First Nation leadership has negotiated terms for developing gas wells, including jobs and contracts for community members. Now a winter road links the community to Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Yellowknife and places farther south..

It is a very heavy thing for me to speak about the land... Even the school now recognizes the importance of balancing Dene culture with modern skills. When our children come with us out to the Barrenlands, they bring their books. But all day they do chores and learn survival skills. They only study in the evenings. I take young kids into the bush nowadays, and they will have put the tent up, cut brush for the floor, gathered wood, built a fire, and even gotten snow for water before dark. I know they can survive on the land. It would be extremely hard to break the traditional ways.

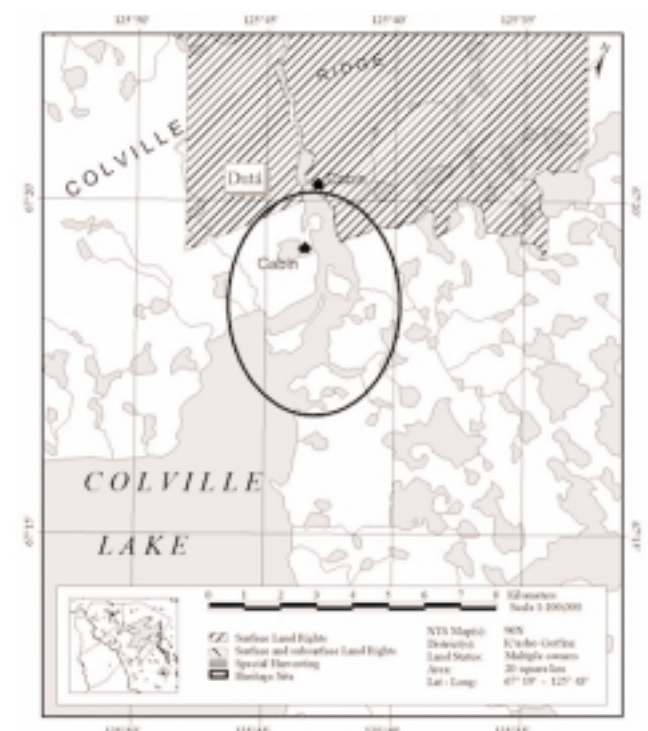
Chief Richard Kochon, from *Building a Vision for the Land Survey (Colville Lake)*. Sahtu Land Use Planning Board, 1999.



Community from surrounding hillside
Colville Lake church

Dutá / “Among the Islands”

Dutá is regarded as the home territory of the Dutá Got'ine (Among the Islands People) regional group, and is located on the northern end of Colville Lake. The main families using the site include Kelly, Edgi, and Kochon. The area is noted for fishing, waterfowl, moose hunting, and is located on a caribou migration route. There is a tourist lodge located at Dutá, operated out of Colville Lake. Local oral tradition indicates that the military maintained a training camp near here, though it is now abandoned. *From Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.*



From **Ts'ó'dun Rákoyé** (Child's Play) by Alfred Masuzumi
*I have long been told stories about the huge mountain called **Ayonikí** (Maunoir Dome)...*

Ayonikí is named after the little phalarope, who is said to have once beat the great whistling swan in a test of strength when no other animal would dare take him on. This mountain is known as the birthplace of all the Inuit and Indian nations of the country.

In the beginning, the people had the innocence of a child. They had no knowledge of what was good.They had no knowledge of what was bad. No one knew what disagreement was.There were no borders on the land.

One day, a young Inuit boy and a young Gwich'in boy were playing together, shooting arrows and chasing after them. When they came upon an owl up in a tree, they both took aim and shot at it. One arrow killed it. The owl fell out of the tree, and the boys started arguing about who killed the owl.

The Inuit boy's dad tried to solve the dispute by reaching over and taking the owl away from the boys. But as the Inuit father turned away, the Gwich'in youth shot him in the back.

Thus started a great war in which mothers turned against their mothers, fathers against fathers, sisters against sisters, brothers against brothers. The lush forest was trampled. There were piles of bodies everywhere, and a lake of blood was formed. To this day, there are no trees on Ayonikí, and a lake of blood can still be seen on top of the dome.

Finally, a truce was called. The people said "This fighting is crazy – we're all one family and we're killing each other off!" But Akaitcho was so enraged about the owl that he wanted thebloodshed to continue. There was a big council fire, and the wise ones of the family said "We can no longer live together. We must all go our separate ways."

There are two versions to the legend of Ayonikí – the human version and the animal version. In the human version, the people dispersed from the council fire. The children went east, the mothers went south, and the young men of twenty years went west. But before the young men left, they put some meat by the council fire. This was for the gray haired old man who was too old to go anywhere. The young men who went west are the Inuit people. The gray haired old man is the K'ahsho Got'ine. *Mackenzie Valley Viewer, 2001*



Fort Good Hope/Colville Lake Traditional Place Names project map



artefacts along K'abamj Tué Eht'ene

K'abamj Tué Eht'ene / Colville Lake Trail

This walking trail, linking Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake, was used every summer in June by people from Colville Lake. Travelling with dog packs, people would walk to the fort to trade their furs, and would remain in the Good Hope area fishing, taking treaty, and visiting with family, returning to Colville in August. It was used before fur trade times as well. It is known as a very long trail, noted for difficult walking conditions, thick bush, long stretches of wet muskeg, and many mosquitoes. The trail is still used in winter. The last family to walk the trail in summer was the Oudzí family in 1965, however in 1998 a team of people led by Charlie Tobac, walked the trail from Colville to Good Hope with a film crew as part of a cultural revival project.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.

RÁDEYILÍKÓÉ
FORT GOOD HOPE



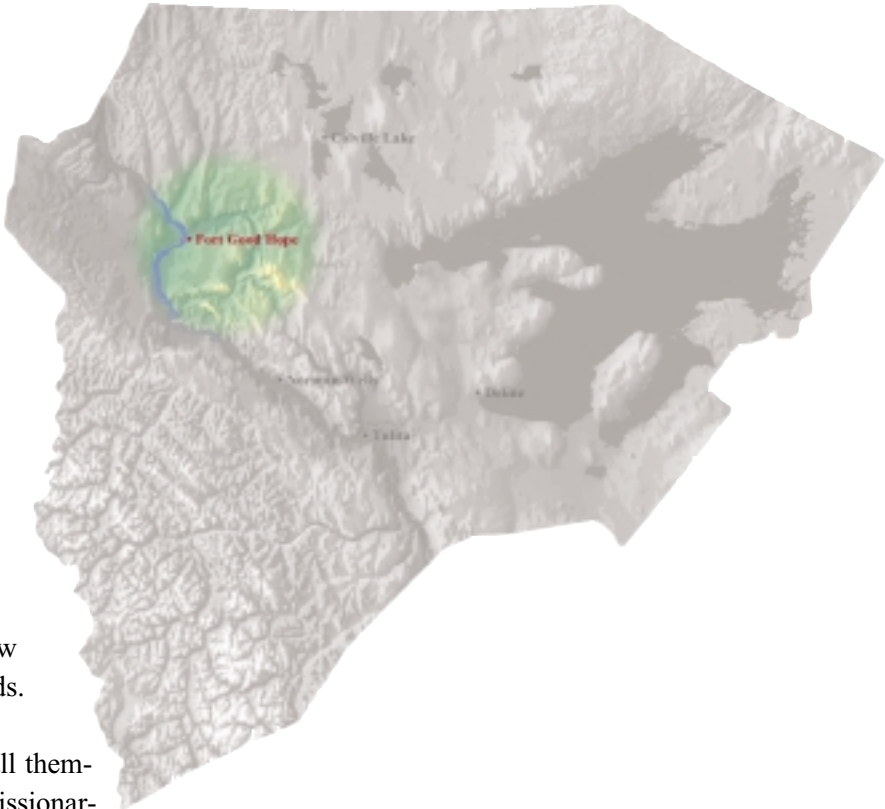
Fort Good Hope is named Rádeyilíké, meaning “home at the rapids,” for its location below the Ramparts Rapids. The Ramparts also refers to the steep walled river canyon at the rapids. Known as Fee Yee in the local dialect, this is an ancient fishery and spiritual site.

Known in anthropological literature as Hareskin people, the Dene of Fort Good Hope call themselves K’asho Got’ine, or “big arrowhead people.” This may have been confused by early missionaries and anthropologists with the Dene term for rabbit, “gah”; indeed, the people of this area were known for their skill at making woven rabbitskin clothing.

Fort Good Hope was established by the North West Company in 1805 as the first fur trading post in the lower Mackenzie Valley. Thus it became a gathering place for Shita Got’ine, Gwich’in, and even Inuvialuit people of the Mackenzie Delta who came there to trade. Fort Good Hope became the centre of a vast trading network, extending north to Herschel Island and west to Russian Alaska.

A Roman Catholic mission was established by Oblate priest Henri Grollier in 1859, and during the 1960s, Father Emile Petitot worked with local people to construct the first Roman Catholic church in the Northwest Territories. Using paints made with local fish oils, Petitot decorated the church with richly coloured murals.

Fort Good Hope came to national attention in 1975 when the community hosted a hearing of the Berger Inquiry and a documentary film was made about the event. Community members have since played a strong role in documenting traditional environmental knowledge as a basis for defining the terms of economic development, so as to minimize environmental impacts and maximize benefits for Dene and Métis people. Home of the biennial Wood Block Music Festival, Fort Good Hope has nurtured a strong culture of music, including traditional drumming, the Métis fiddle style evolved during the fur trade, and contemporary rock and roll.



There’s A Little Town Called Fort Good Hope.

By Miranda McNeely, FGH

There’s a little town called Fort Good Hope, and it is a cultural and traditional town where the Dene and Metis still live off the land.

Some families still stay out on the land. They hunt and fish. The men will set traps and hunt. The women will go about their daily chores such as making dry meat or cutting up the meat. They also cook for their families, and do sewing and cleaning. So all day, every person in the camp is busy. In the evening, they all relax and take it easy.

They would stay out there for three months or two months. When Christmas comes, they travel back by skiddoo to a little town called Fort Good Hope. It takes about seven or eight hours, but it depends where they stayed in the bush.

When they get home, the people hug their family and their kids. They’re glad to be back in a little town called Fort Good Hope.

Mackenzie Valley Viewer, 2001



photos © Robert Kershaw



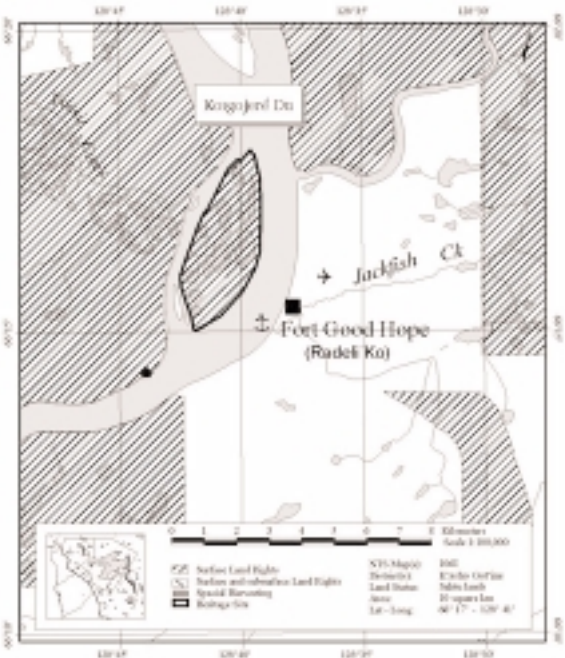
Main Street
Summer feast

Koigojeré Du / Manitou Island

Manitou Island is used by the residents of Fort Good Hope as a source of firewood, and for small game hunting. The logs for the community complex were cut and hauled from here. Together with its history as a former location of the HBC fort, the island is very important to the community.

Fort Good Hope was established in 1804 by the North West Company, and originally located on the left bank of the Mackenzie River somewhere near Thunder River (Voorhis 1930:75). In 1826, after the 1821 amalgamation with the Hudson’s Bay Company, the fort was moved to Manitou Island where it operated until 1836. Flooded, and damaged by ice in 1836, it was moved to its current location on the right bank of the Mackenzie River, across from Manitou Island.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok’é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Tsodehníline and Tuyát'ah / Ramparts River and Wetlands

The Ramparts River and Wetlands flows from the foothills of the Mackenzie Mountains east to the Mackenzie River, entering it just above the Ramparts Canyon, and the community of Fort Good Hope. The river, meandering through critical wetlands, has been an important hunting, trapping and fishing area for Fort Good Hope families for generations. Particularly important for hunting moose, beaver and muskrats, the area is also known locally as a critical waterfowl breeding site. It is also known as an excellent place to begin teaching young hunters the rules and behaviours necessary for a successful hunt.

The Ramparts River and Wetlands contains many named places including a sacred site, the Thunderbird Place.

ʔiditué Dáyǰdá / The Thunderbird Place

Located on a sharp bend in the Ramparts River, the Thunderbird Place is a dangerous place. In times long ago, a giant Thunderbird lived here, and travellers were often killed by it. An elder with powerful medicine killed the Thunderbird, making river travel safe again. There are several places in the Sahtu settlement area where other water monsters live, or have lived, and these places are always considered dangerous, requiring special rituals or practices when travelling nearby. As told by an elder from Fort Good Hope, the story recounts how people still to this day feel uneasy when traveling past the Thunderbird Place:

This was in the ancient days, people who traveled this river would come to this spot and they were killed by the Thunderbird monster, which lived there. Finally, an elder decided to do something to rid this area of this monster. Maybe this man had medicine to understand what made the monster tick. He threw a rock into the water, and from then on there was no problem with it again. Some places the water is muddy and I don't feel as relaxed as when I go to other places. I always feel uneasy if I'm in this area.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Fort Good Hope/Colville Lake Traditional Place Names project map



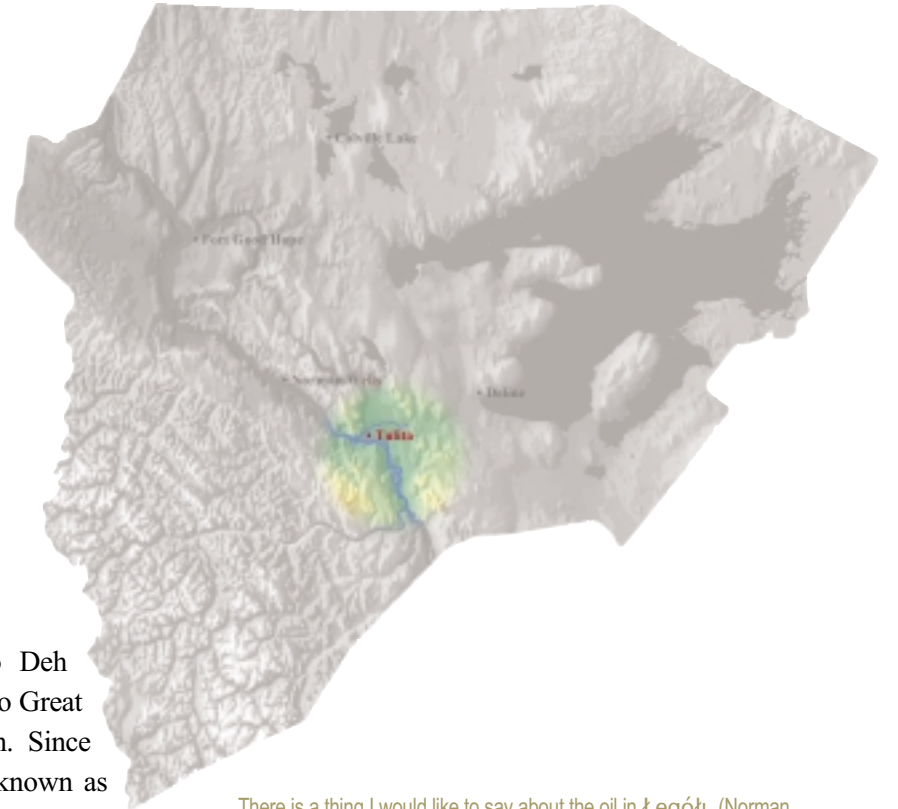
Sheep hunting up Mountain River © R. Kershaw, 2004

Faʔfa Nílne / Mountain River

An important traditional trail used by Mountain Dene from Fort Good Hope. There are many named places, camping, hunting and fishing locations and many stories associated with the river. In the old days, mooskin boats were built to float down the river in spring. Many stories recount the trials and tribulations of mooskin boat travellers attempting to navigate the many dangerous canyons on the river. At the head of the canyons, the boats would stop to let the women and children out to walk over on the portage trail. Only the men would lead the boats through. Today it continues to be an important moose hunting area, and is known as the shortest route to the highest mountains, and sheep hunting areas. Popular with white water canoeists, the river has tremendous tourism potential.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.

TULÍT'A TULITA



Tulita is named for its location where the Sahtu Deh/Great Bear River flows into Deh Cho/Mackenzie River, “where the waters meet.” Great Bear River is the Dene travel route to Great Bear Lake, where people of the Sahtu Region travel to hunt for caribou, and rarely, muskoxen. Since ancient times, people would camp at Tulita across from the huge limestone outcropping known as Kwetenı́ıáá /Bear Rock, an important site in Dene lore. The Northwest Company established Fort Norman as a fur trading post at this crossroad in 1810 to encourage trade with peoples south of Fort Good Hope and with the Sahtúot’ine of Great Bear Lake. When the Hudson’s Bay Company took over the post, it was relocated several times, but by 1851 it returned to the original site.

The Dene people of Tulita are known for having revived the traditional skill of making moose skin boats. This was the first such boat to be built in decades. It is thought that the boats came into use during the fur trade. Their construction combines the ancient design of the smaller Dene birch and spruce bark canoes, and the shallow, broad and long York boats developed by fur traders in the 19th century to navigate the inland rivers of Canada with large loads. A second moose skin boat was constructed for the documentary film *The Last Moose Skin Boat*, and the boat remains preserved at the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre.

Situated within an oil-rich district, the people of Tulita have had to become adept at negotiating with petroleum interests, and many young community members have found jobs in the industry. At the same time, the community is taking measures to protect traditional heritage sites.

There is a thing I would like to say about the oil in Łegółı́ (Norman Wells). What was the name of the man who found that oil? It was our own father, Francis Nineye. When he found the oil, he took a sample of it, put it in a lard pail and brought it out into Tuli't'a (Fort Norman). That same summer, he had an accident and died.

Now the white people turn around and claim they found the oil. My dad was the first guy to find that oil...He was staying right where Łegółı́ is now, and the Dene had about five or six log shacks. They were trapping and hunting there for a living. He took the sample of that oil in a lard kettle and brought it into Tuli't'a. He gave it to Gene Gaudet, the Hudson's Bay Manager and he sent it out on the boat, it had to be a boat, there was no planes then. We never heard of that oil again and we never got the lard kettle back. We never could do anything about it again. There is no record.

John Blondin, from Dene Cultural Institute, Dehcho: “Mom, we’ve been discovered!” Yellowknife: Dene Cultural Institute, 1989. 40.

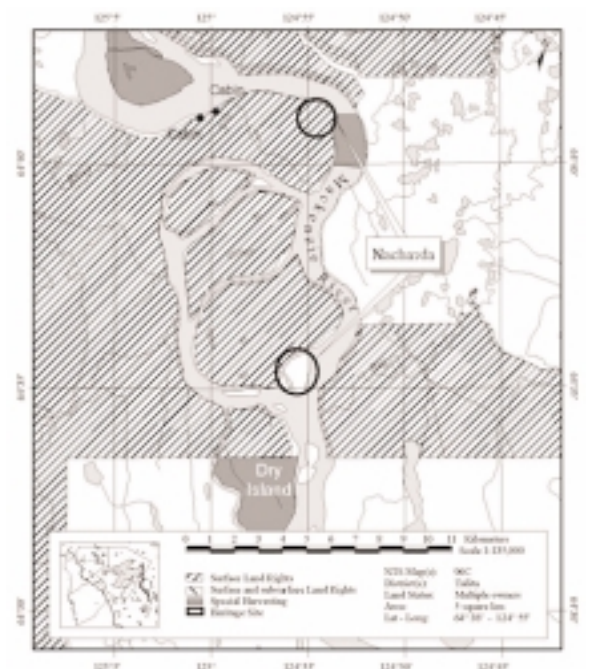


Bear Rock and winter road
Watching the Mackenzie River, Tulita © R. Kershaw

Nacha?da / Old Fort Point

Fort Norman was constructed in 1810 at the confluence of the Mackenzie and Great Bear Rivers. In 1844 it was moved about 48 km upstream to a site a few miles below the Keele River, called ‘Old Fort Point’, near the site of the old North West Co. Fort Castor. In 1851 it was moved back to its present site.

Archaeological investigations at Old Fort Point in the summer of 1973 recorded the presence of two storage cellar depressions and the remains of two stone chimney piles. The archaeologists noted that the site had undergone considerable erosion. Artifacts recovered from the site include a kaolin pipe stem, a small strip of copper, and pieces of chinking clay, as well as several fragments of moose, caribou, and beaver bones. Fort Castor, built in 1804, was never located during the archaeological survey. On the site map (below) we have marked two locations; one at Old Fort Point (the site of old Fort Norman) and a second site to the south. Local tradition indicates that this might be the remains of another post and may be Fort Castor. *From Rakekée Gok’é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.*



Tuwí Tué / Mahony Lake Massacre Site

The story is still recounted in the oral tradition of Tulita, and an excellent description of the event and trial proceedings can be found in Foster (1989). Foster (1989) remarks that the case is important to Canadian social and judicial history because “it is the only offence ever tried by a Canadian court during the HBC’s licenced monopoly over the Indian Territories, [and] stands as a little known example of how imperial law was enforced in the fur trade.

In December of 1835 three employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company Post at Fort Norman were sent to collect a cache of fish at Mahony Lake. Encamped near the lake was a Dene family who, according to oral tradition, were employed to provide meat and fish for the HBC post. Partly as a result of earlier problems between one of these men and a young married Dene woman, a terrible fight ensued, and the three Hudson’s Bay employees murdered eleven men, women, and children. One of the men was sent to London, England for trail, and was later transported to Canada. Another was tried for murder in Lower Canada (largely as a result of testimony given by one of his accomplices) and was sentenced to hang, which was later commuted to transportation to Australia. While awaiting a transportation, he was jailed in a prison hulk in England for several years, where he died. The last man was imprisoned for a short period while awaiting trial but was eventually set free after giving testimony against his accomplice.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok’é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Tulita Traditional Place Names project map

Tł Dehdele Dıdł / Red Dog Mountain

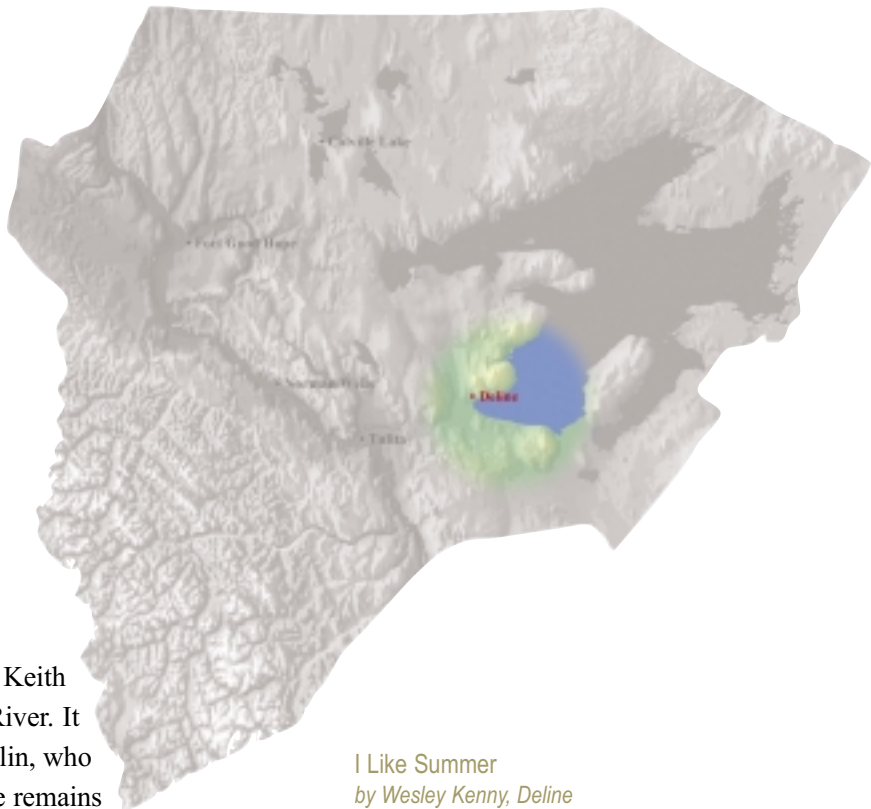
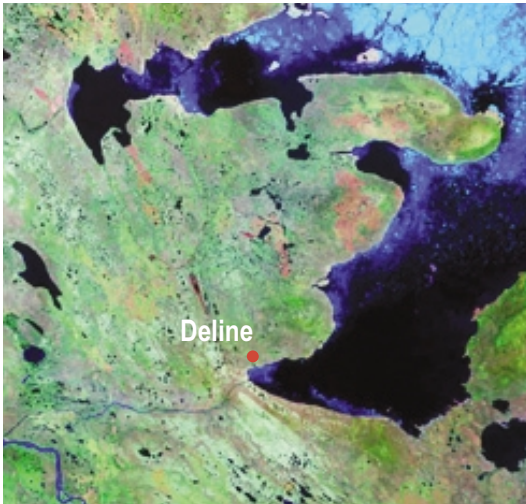
The site is a large mountain located on the Keele River, considered a sacred site by the Mountain Dene. A Tulita elder relates the historical and cultural importance of the site:

Long ago, when people went by Red Dog Mountain, they never passed the mountain on the river. They used to get out of the river and portage through the mountains and put in again below Red Dog Mountain. ... When they got to Red Dog Mountain, the men portaged because the Red Dog would take and eat them. That is why they always portaged. One time, when they were all gathered getting ready to portage when a man who had medicine and was a really good hunter said, "Give me all of your possessions." He took mitts, moccasins, weapons, and food. He gathered all of their possessions together and put them in his canoe. He then turned to the people and said I am going to go down the river past the Red Dog Mountain. He wanted to know why the mountain took people. As he started down the river a whirlpool opened before him. He started throwing all the goods into the water to pay. After he threw all the goods into the water the eddy subsided and let him go down the river. Up to that time they did not know what was living at Red Dog Mountain. When he went through the mountain he saw the Red Dog for the first time. He told the people that every time they pass Red Dog Mountain they must show respect. You must pay the Red Dog with something. So people started leaving matches and shot when they passed by on the river as an offering. One time long ago when people were passing by Red Dog Mountain, the spring that pours from the face of the mountain into the river whistled and spurted water like steam. They did not know what it meant at the time, but that year the first tuberculosis epidemic occurred. The elders knew that it was a sign that something was wrong. A few years later it whistled ... and ... spit out water again before sickness again struck the people.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok’é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Keele River



Deline, “where the water flow” is a community of about 650 people located on the west end of Keith Arm of Great Bear Lake/Sahtú, about 10 km from the outlet of the lake into the Great Bear River. It is a place thriving with wildlife. At one time, Deline was named after explorer Sir John Franklin, who built a fort there and used it as winter quarters during his second expedition in 1825-1827. The remains of the old fort were excavated in 1987. A letter from Sir John Franklin may have documented the first games of hockey at Fort Franklin in 1825, which he described as an enjoyable form of exercise for his crew.

Deline is also known as an important spiritual centre, birthplace of the prophet known as Ehtséó/Grandfather Ayha. Ehtséó Ayha’s life spanned 1858-1940, a critical period of contact with non-aboriginal outsiders. These included fur traders, missionaries, and opportunists seeking to profit from the rich radium/uranium pitchblende that was discovered on the east shore of Great Bear Lake in 1930. Ehtséó Ayha’s wisdom and prophecies are commemorated annually at a Spiritual Gathering in Deline attracting people from across the Northwest Territories, and as far away as Kugluktuk, Nunavut.

The trauma caused by the realization of the possible impacts of uranium mining on the land and people has been a catalyst for positive action by the Sahtúot’ine, the Dene people of Deline. In addition to reviving spiritual practices, the Sahtúot’ine have taken strong initiatives in researching the impacts of the mine, protecting the land and achieving self-government. As a result of hard work and years of persistence, the community succeeded in achieving the establishment of Grizzly Bear Mountain/Saoyúé and Scented Grass Hills/Ehdacho, Canada’s largest National Historic Sites in 1998. Deline is a leading community in the negotiation of terms for self-government.



Deline youth © Robert Kershaw, 2004
Fort Franklin site marker © Morris Neyelle

I Like Summer
by Wesley Kenny, Deline
Mackenzie Valley Viewer, 2001

I like summer because of...
Going for boatrides...
or picking berries...
or going hunting...
Or playing soccer...
Or going to the bush...
Or going fishing...
Or going for a bike ride...
Or camping...
Or going for a trip to Yellowknife...
Or playing in the new playground...
Or playing kick the can at the church...
Or playing games at the old campground...
...With my friends.
Or playing boards with my friends...
Or playing football...
Or baseball...
Or taking jumps around with my friends...

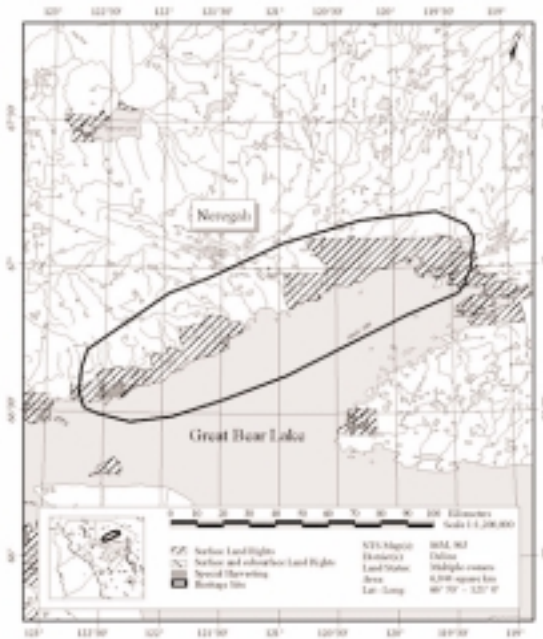
Then we go to the Northern and buy pop...
because we are thirsty.

Then we might play soccer again.

Neregah / North Shore of Great Bear Lake

The north shore of Great Bear Lake (from McGill Bay, east to Greenhorn River) is a very important traditional use area, associated with many stories and named places. From the north shore Sahtu Dene gained access to caribou and musk ox hunting, and barrenlands trapping. Many of the stories talk of contact with the Inuit who were met inland, northward from the north shore. It is still used today as a traditional use area.

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, *Rakekée Gok’é Godi: Places We Take Care Of*.



DELINE TO KUGLUKTUK TRIP

Our first stop for the night was at the point of ?ehdachō (Scented Grass Hills). The next stop was at the south shore of ?ehdajila (Caribou Point) where we spotted caribou, so we shot it and made fire for tea.

We had one problem on the way to Hornby Bay and that was one of the skidoos from Deline developing a mechanical problem. It was a good thing one of the visitors from Kugluktuk was an experienced skiddoo mechanic, because he fixed that skiddoo right on the spot.

Once we got on land, the visitors from Kugluktuk led the way and it seemed like there was no trail to follow because the trail wasn't going straight. The trip took a couple of overnight camps and one was at one of the many small cabins.

The return trip was a bit harder because the weather was turning warm and snow was starting to melt from the rocks. Most of the travellers from Deline were travelling with box sleds or fibreglass sleds from the store, and some of them broke apart easily from all the rocks. The people from Kugluktuk loaned some komatiks (Inuit sleds) to the visitors, and almost all their sleds had steel sliders.

The return trip was okay, until they got to the top of ?ehdajila, where we could see Great Bear Lake. The trail barely had any snow. Whenever you mix steel and rock together, you would get a loud screeching sound and that means, you are not getting anywhere. And that's exactly what happened. Instead of a normal two hour trip to the lake, it took six or seven hours. By the time we got to the lake, it was two or three in the morning.

We arrive back in Deline the next day, safe and sound. *Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.*



Turil / Johnny Hoe Fishery

Deline Traditional Place Names project map

An important place for the elders of Délne, **Turil** is known as a traditional domestic spring fishery, and is considered the traditional territory of the Turil Got'ine. Elders say that in the old days, at the mouth of the river, the Dogribs would begin building a fish weir from the east side, and the Slaveys from the west. When they met in the middle the event would be celebrated by a feast. Historically it was associated with the war between the Yellowknives and the Dogrib: a place where Edzo (chief of the Dogribs) killed a group of Akaitcho's people. The trail from Fort Rae is near here, crossing the base of Grizzly Bear Mountain.

The area is known for prime winter caribou hunting and for year-round moose hunting. Elders instruct young hunters from Délne to watch for caribou in the area in early winter. If the caribou are left alone for a short while after they first arrive they will cross the base of Grizzly Bear Mountain and take up winter foraging in the area west of the Johnny Hoe River, where they can be hunted all winter. If the hunters disturb them too early then the caribou will abandon the area. Consequently it is a very sensitive area. It is also an important spring hunting area for beaver and muskrat. There are seven cabins located there today. One of the cabins, on an island, was built by a White trapper and is named after him— Archiewa Du. He died many years ago and was eaten by his dogs.

In recent times it was discovered that the fish in the Johnny Hoe River are contaminated from natural-source mercury, causing many in the community of Délne to abandon this important domestic fishery. *Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.*

TŁEGÓHLI
NORMAN WELLS



Both the English and Dene names for Norman Wells refer to the oil on which the local economy is based. The existence of oil seepages was known by Dene people passing through the area, and explorer Alexander Mackenzie noted these in the 18th century. But it wasn't until 1919 that the first well, called "Discover," was drilled. And it wasn't until the opening of the uranium mine at Port Radium in 1932 that it became economically feasible to commence production. Norman Wells benefited from a second boom during World War II with the construction of the Canol pipeline to Whitehorse, but this was short-lived.

After the war, the size of the Norman Wells operation followed expansion of the oil and gas industry. In the mid-1980's, a pipeline was completed to Zama, Alberta. The population grew to a peak of about 3,000, the majority of whom were fortune-seekers from the south. With highly skilled, high wage jobs available, Norman Wells still has one of the highest average income populations in Canada.

The town became a regional hub with jet service north and south and a number of regional government offices. A strong Métis community also took root in Norman Wells, and increasing numbers of Dene people from the Sahtu communities now are finding seasonal employment there.

Oil reserves at Norman Wells are now in decline, and the population recently shrunk to less than half its earlier size. However, development of adventure tourism diversified the economy, and oil and gas developments elsewhere in the region are providing new opportunities for growth.



The Town I Live In

My town
Norman Wells
lying in the valley
between two
mountain ranges.
A wide, fast river,
passing by the town.
Our main transportation
source in the summer.
The summers are hot
with the sun never setting.
Hot, sizzling, dry heat
Everywhere.
Cold, blinding winters.
Rushing winds everywhere.
The northern lights
sparkling like diamonds
or dancing fireflies.

by John Bounds, 13 years
Norman Wells, 2000

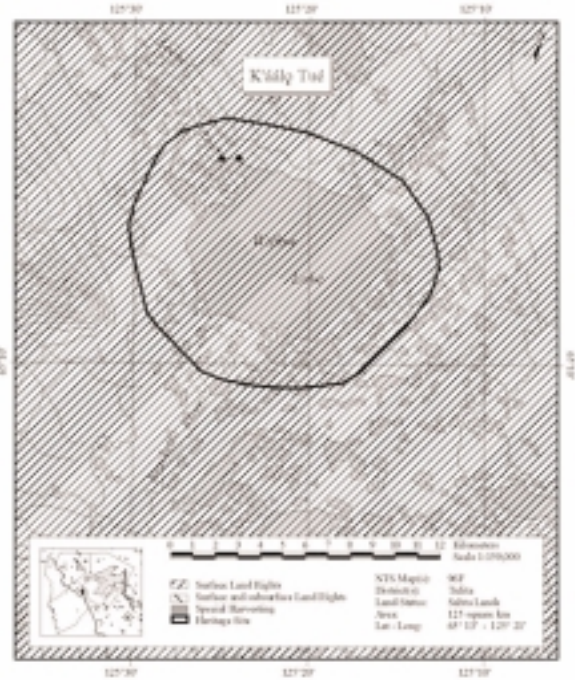


Historic Centre in Norman Wells
Drilling Islands on the Mackenzie River

K'áálq Tué / Willow Lake (Brackett Lake)

Willow Lake (called Brackett Lake on the official maps) is the site of an important seasonal camp, and is considered the home of the K'áálq Got'ine, or 'Willow Lake People'. The area is important for hunting, fishing and trapping, and the lake and wetlands nearby support large populations of animals. A small community of several cabins is located on the lake. The oral tradition records many stories, which tell of the importance of this lake. In the story below, Yamoria, who was pursued by an elderly couple and his angry father-in-law, uses Willow Lake to avoid capture. In so doing he creates an important subsistence fishery on the lake [adapted from Hanks 1993:39-41]

Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Yamqga Fee / “Yamoga Rock”

A large, bedrock ridge visible on the flight path from Good Hope to Norman Wells, Yamqga Fee is an important sacred site to the people of the region. The story of this site tells of the battle between a culture-hero named Yamqga and his enemy Konadí. After skirmishing over an entire winter, they met in a final battle at Yamqga Fee. An elder from Fort Good Hope recounts the story:

After Konadí survived the winter, he managed to gather a group of people again and they started their hunt for Yamqga again around Nofakóde Tué. They were on a creek when they found a wood chip floating in the water. They followed this creek called Táwalin Niline, until they came to a dwelling where they found a man by himself. Konadí already knew that he was Yamqga's nephew. He told him "you're as good as dead unless your uncle gives up before he comes back to camp." The boy told them that his uncle would yell 'Sah?á' (meaning 'sebá', 'my nephew'). They asked him what signal he would give in return. They boy said "wihoo". If the reply were different then Yamqga would know that something was wrong. After the boy had taught them this they killed him. They had a youth with them who they told to be ready with the reply to Yamqga's signal. They left this boy in camp and his group followed Yamqga and his group. They made sure they left no tracks that could be noticed and they hid along both sides of the trail they expected Yamqga and his men were using to hunt.

It must have been warm during the day for Yamqga's group because their footwear was wet, but towards evening their footwear froze. Yamqga told his men to change their footwear but it was said that they didn't. If they had done this, they would be in a better way to defend themselves against Konadí's attack.

Yamqga gave his signal from atop that mountain, "Sah?á!" The boy at the camp without thinking gave the wrong signal. Yamqga knew there was trouble. He yelled at his men and told them. They should have listened to him when he asked them to change to dry shoes. Yamqga had a skinned and deboned beaver that he had frozen into the shape of a club. He fought with this but he was wounded badly. He went to the highest point of that cliff. Konadí and his men didn't want to leave him because he was wounded and there may be a chance that he would survive. They sent two young men after him and told them to throw Yamqga off the cliff if they found him. The two young men did find him and tried to throw him off the cliff, but he got hold of both of them and jumped off the cliff with them. He landed on a ledge but the two young men ended up going over. Yamqga turned himself to stone, and it can still be seen today. Below him are two trees. These are said to be the boys that fell off with him. Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of.



Norman Wells Traditional Place Names map