

# THE SAHTU ATLAS

MAPS AND STORIES FROM THE SAHTU SETTLEMENT AREA IN CANADA'S NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

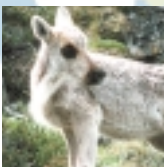
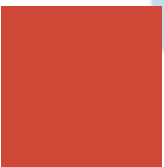
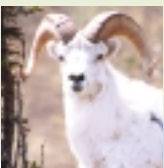
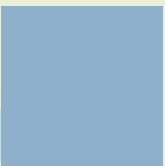
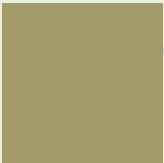


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WHAT THE SAHTU MEANS TO ME

The Sahtu means a lot to me, because my great granny and my cousins live here. At first when we moved here from Inuvik, I didn't like it. But then I stayed for while and I made lots of good friends. My friends in the Sahtu always make sure I'm okay. My mom says, "We are going to live here forever." I am fine with that.

*Dylan Ritias, Grade 4, Norman Wells*





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Northwest Territories Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development



Great Bear Lake, Deline © Robert Kershaw

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
INTRODUCTION	1
NORTHWEST CANADA REFERENCE MAP	2
THE SAHTU	3
An Ancient Heritage	4
Fur Trade	6
The Sahtu into the 20th Century	7
Sahtu Land Claim	8
Dene Knowledge	13
Transportation/Communications	15
Sahtu Communities	16
Colville Lake	17
Fort Good Hope	19
Tulita	21
Deline	23
Norman Wells	25
THE NATURAL WORLD	27
Geology	28
Climate	31
Watersheds	36
Ecoregions	38
Boreal Biome and Treeline	43
Forest Fires	44
WILDLIFE	45
Caribou: Mountain and Woodland	46
Moose	49
Sheep; Muskox	50
Bears	51
Wolves	52
Wolverine, Fox, Lynx , Marten	53
Fish	54
Birds	56
RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT	59
Oil and Gas	60
Seismic Lines and Caribou	61
The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline: History and Proposal	62
Minerals and mining, Port Radium	63
Renewable Resource Management	64
Tourism	65
Canol Trail	66
APPENDIX AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	67-68



Keele River © RWED

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An atlas, like any book, does not just appear in a library or a classroom on its own, but begins as an idea, possibly even a crazy idea. It succeeds with hard work, dedication and the co-operation of many.

The idea for the Sahtu Atlas was inspired by a comprehensive mapping and information collection process launched in 1996. The Sahtu Geographic Information Systems (GIS) project in Norman Wells is a partnership of the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board (SLUPB), the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (SRRB), and Sahtu Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development (RWED). In the summer of 2001, a gathering of the Sahtu GIS partners developed the atlas idea with the aim of sharing the collected knowledge about this region, with its rich cultures, ecology, and natural resources. It was envisioned that the atlas would aid community organisations, land use planners, government agencies, industry representatives, researchers and educators. Alasdair Veitch (Sahtu RWED) and Miki Promislow (Sahtu GIS Project) agreed to take the lead on the project. Celina Stroeder, then Superintendent of Sahtu RWED, was an enthusiastic supporter.

And so the work began. James Auld was recruited in 2002 to make beautiful, informative maps for the atlas. Translating the masses of information collected in the GIS database into graphic form is no easy task, but James persisted. It is thanks to James's efforts and determination that the original dream has been realized.

But this atlas had to be more than just maps. Statistics, explanations, descriptions and images unique to the Sahtu were needed to give context and meaning to the maps. Miki Promislow, Alasdair Veitch, Jody Snortland, Melonie Dyck, Richard Popko, and Arianna Zimmer helped select photographs, offered research data and gathered numerous scientific tidbits.

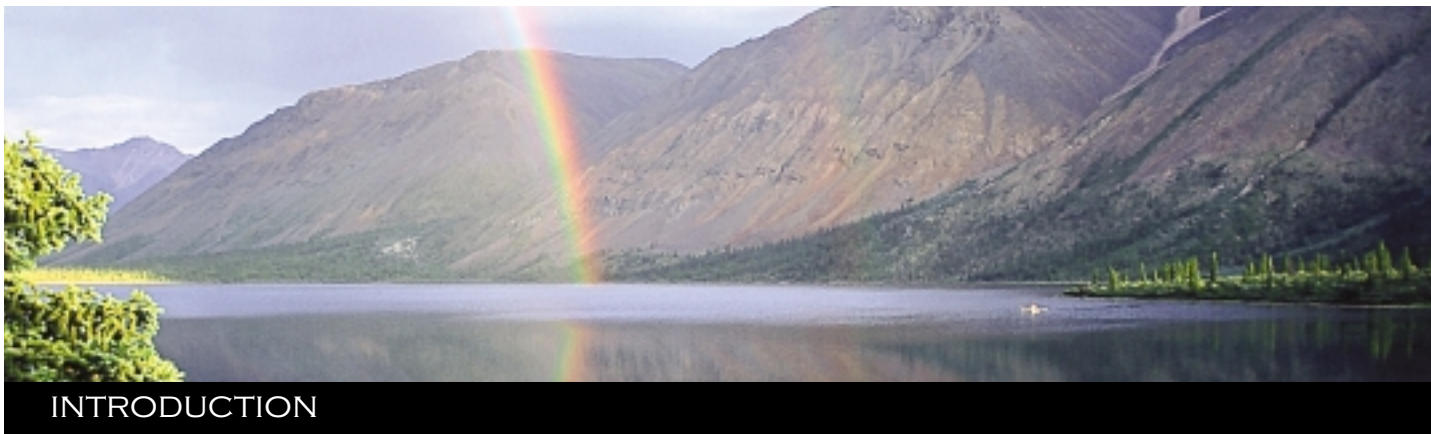
In 2003 Robert Kershaw, who had been involved with other publishing projects in the Sahtu, was brought on board to help manage the project, design the book, contribute content and oversee production and printing. As time moved along James and Robert found themselves working to keep a good idea on track as lagging spirits and personnel departures threatened to derail the project.

Of course many other people have had a part in the making of this atlas. First, thank you to the people the Sahtu, for generously sharing their stories of the land. This atlas is richer because of them. The stories are mainly drawn from three published sources in the Sahtu: reports on research by the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board and the Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, and stories published in the former Sahtu monthly newspaper *Mackenzie Valley Viewer* in a series of special supplements entitled *Sahtu Godé Dáhk'é/Sahtu Place of Stories* during 2000-2002. All stories are reprinted by permission of the publishers.

For their work on the traditional place names maps, thanks to researchers Irene Betsidea, Edith Mackeinzo, Marlene Tutcho, and Chuck Bloomquist, as well as Elders Alfred Taniton, and Peter Baton (Deline); Rose McNeely (Fort Good Hope), and Mabel Martin, Leon Andrew, Gilbert Horassi, David Yallee, Victor Menacho and Vivian Pellisey (Tulita). Thanks to Sam Kivi for her amazing ability to keep the Atlas project funded through its darkest days. Thanks also to Alfred Masuzumi for his wonderful artwork, and the many photographers whose images have brought these pages to life.

Finally, the efforts of Deborah Simmons are incalculable. Deborah brought knowledge, writing and editing skills and most importantly a love of the Sahtu, its people and their stories, working behind the scene to fill in the many gaps the rest of us were unable to fill.

What began as an idea, became a puzzle, a puzzle that at times challenged all involved in the project. This atlas is the result of overcoming those challenges.



## INTRODUCTION

© RWED

The Sahtu Region is a place rich in cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes and natural resources. The maps in this atlas help reveal much of its wonder. There are recent maps of the Sahtu that represent ongoing scientific research, specializing in natural history, including climate, ecology, wildlife and resource distribution. Other maps show the Region's modern infrastructure: its roads, seismic lines and pipelines. Even the boundary map, a patchwork of political and property boundaries defining Aboriginal, Crown, and Territorial jurisdictions is relatively new, created with the signing of the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in 1993.

These maps are in contrast to the traditional mapping of the original inhabitants of this land, the Dene. A fine mesh of trails over centuries of use traces a relationship with a territory that once knew no boundaries. This map shows the land to be animated by the Dene. They travel across the land. They know it, they name it. In the words of Dene researcher Phoebe Nahanni, "We have our own place names for all our camps, for the lakes, the rivers, the mountains – indicating that we know the topography of our land intimately" (from Watkins, 1977).

For the Dene of the Sahtu, the land is mapped in words. The Dene place names spread across the landscape are linked to a multitude of ancient stories that bind the people to the land in a way that is more than purely functional. The land becomes a representation of Dene history and spirituality since time immemorial, and patterns of land use and travel identify what it means to be Dene. Knowledge and skills evolved over generations for survival in a harsh climate are linked to an ongoing sense of responsibility in taking care of the land.

Since the days of the fur trade, the Dene have shared this land with their Métis relatives and neighbours. The Dene and Métis continue to maintain land based subsistence practices, but land use and mapping are now influenced by new factors. The sinuous traditional trail system has been overlaid with rectilinear seismic lines and the straight lines of political jurisdictions. Recent maps reflect conflicting visions for development and conservation of natural resources.

Methods of map making have also changed. The maps in this atlas are the product of sophisticated Geographic Information System technology, providing colourful bird's-eye views of the land. But to truly know the Sahtu we still must walk the land, ride the rivers, learn and tell the stories.

Over the past decade, the Sahtu has become renowned as a centre for Dene and Métis cultural revitalisation and research, for its internationally significant conservation areas, and as a zone of intensive petroleum and mineral exploration and development. In bringing together stories and maps, this book reveals the key challenge of the current period in the Sahtu – that of balancing pressures for development and modernization with the values of environmental conservation, and preserving the access of the Dene and Métis to their cultural heritage on the land.

*"Good quality maps can be used in support of many diverse projects such as: documenting traditional knowledge, determining shared use areas and reconciling conflicts, supporting compensation claims, negotiating co-management agreements, determining environmental impacts of development, negotiating protection and benefits from development, administering land use permits, providing baseline data for community planning and resource management, developing education curricula." - from original Sahtu Atlas proposal, 2001*

