

## *Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute Report*

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) conducts cultural and language research, provides language and educational programming, and performs heritage management. Its mandate is to document, preserve and promote Gwich'in language, cultural, traditional knowledge and values. Between April 2002 and March 2003, the GSCI worked on the following initiatives:

### **Traditional Gwich'in Clothing:**

From December 2000 until March 2003, 41 seamstresses in the four GSA communities and Yellowknife worked on replicas of a man's traditional caribou skin outfit, from an original in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec. The project is a partnership among the GSCI, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC) in Yellowknife, and the CMC. Following completion of the outfits, a celebration was held in the PWNHC. Upon receipt of museum-quality display cases and mannequins, one outfit will be displayed in each GSA community, with the fifth to be displayed in the PWNHC, in a gallery now being renovated.

In September 2002, two of the project coordinators, GSCI Research Director Ingrid Kritsch and Karen Wright-Fraser, owner of Whispering Willows, presented one of the outfits, with accompanying information, at the 9th International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, in Edinburgh, Scotland.

### **Fort McPherson Archaeological Excavation and Survey:**

In August 2002, we initiated a community-based archaeology project, in partnership with the Teetl'it Gwich'in Council and PWNHC. The project was directed by archaeologist Melanie Fafard and provided seven youth from around Fort McPherson with training and employment opportunities as well as exposure to archaeology and their own history.

One component of the project was a two-week excavation of a site at Fort McPherson, where the GSCI had conducted a test excavation in 2000, and which the Teetl'it Gwich'in used as a camp site in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries when coming to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. The students uncovered animal bones, Euro-Canadian artifacts, and Gwich'in artifacts such as bone and antler spear points, a needle or awl made from antler, cooking rocks and evidence of hearths. The presence of decayed or decaying wood in significant amounts suggests the possible existence of a structure at some point. The project's other component was a survey of sites around Fort McPherson, including Nataiinlaih and the Old Fort.

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## **Nagwichoonyik National Historic Site Project:**

In the Spring of 2002, the GTC and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada approved the boundaries of the Nagwichoonyik (Mackenzie River) National Historic Site. It is the largest National Historic Site in Canada, at 175 km. in length and with a 5 km. buffer along both sides of the Mackenzie for the site's full extent. A community steering committee met with the GSCI and Parks Canada staff in February 2003 to finalize the draft Commemorative Integrity Statement and discuss the location of the plaque commemorating the designation. The plaque is located in Tsiigehtchic, with an unveiling ceremony held July 11, 2003. A steering committee with members from the Gwichya Gwich'in Council, GSCI, Parks Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage planned the ceremony.



*Headquarters of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute in Tsiigehtchic.*

## **Teetl'it Gwich'in National Historic Site Project:**

The GSCI is cooperating with Fort McPherson and Parks Canada to designate a National Historic Site within the Teetl'it Gwich'in traditional land use area. Melanie Fafard and Ingrid Kritsch are working with a steering committee of community representatives, which includes: Robert Alexie, Sr.; Walter Alexie; Wilbert Firth; Bertha Francis; Doris Itsi; Fred Koe; William Koe; Robert James Mantla; Sharon Snowshoe; Mary Teya; William Teya. Following community consultations, the committee has decided to nominate two sections of the Peel River: the Peel Canyon area; and the stretch of the Peel between the confluence of the Peel and the Mackenzie and the Trail River. The GSCI is now drafting the documents needed to submit the nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

**Gwich'in Place Names Project:** Since January 2003, GSCI Heritage Researcher Alestine Andre has been at work adding oral history information recorded under our traditional land use and Gwich'in place names projects into a computer database. She is extracting data from transcripts dating back to the early 1990s. The database will enable the GSCI to develop educational materials for schools and permit more efficient review of land use permit applications in the Gwichya Gwich'in land use area for potential effects on heritage resources.

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The GSCI is also working to ensure that all maps, photographs, video and audio tapes from the place name projects are catalogued and indexed, with the audio tapes saved in CD format. We intend to deposit the original research materials in the NWT Territorial Archives, with copies available in our Tsiigehtchic office.

### **Gwich'in Elders' Biographies:**

The 2003 Gwich'in Elders' Calendar, which contains short Gwich'in and English biographies of 13 Elders interviewed in 2002, has been published and is available in several Northern book stores. Longer biographies of 24 Elders are in draft form and, in final form, will be published in a Gwich'in Elders' book or a series of booklets. We intend to complete the final drafts in 2003-04, and raise funds for publication in 2004-05.

### **Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge**

**Policy:** In preparation for increased oil and gas exploration in the GSA, the GSCI has drafted a Traditional Knowledge (TK) policy, to ensure that the collection, management and release of Gwich'in TK is conducted ethically, acknowledging and respecting the Gwich'in as its holders.

A draft was submitted to the GTC Board in the Spring of 2003, following extensive consultation, and approved in principle. The GSCI is preparing a final draft and an implementation strategy, to be followed by legal review and final amendments. When the policy receives final approval from the GTC, it will govern all TK work in the GSA.

### **Gwich'in Dictionary:**

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Gwich'in Dictionary has been published, with copies delivered to all schools in the GSA. This edition includes almost 3,000 Gwichya Gwich'in and Teet'it Gwich'in terms, almost 30 verb paradigms, and an introduction to Gwich'in grammar prepared by Mark Riepl, a Masters' student in linguistics at the University of Victoria. Copies can be purchased for \$20.<sup>00</sup> at the GSCI office and Gwich'in Language Centre.

### **Second-Language Curriculum:**

The GSCI is currently working with the GNWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Beaufort-Delta Education Council and Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre to develop a second-language curriculum for the Beaufort-Delta region.

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## **Gwich'in Mentoring Program:**

**1**998 statistics show 13% of Beneficiaries living in the NWT speak the Gwich'in language, and only 2% speak it regularly in the home, making it one of the most endangered of the Athapaskan languages in the Mackenzie Valley. The GSCI's Five Year Strategic Plan identified a number of initiatives to reverse its decline. One of these is a mentoring program in which eight fluent speakers are matched with eight learners, to meet for at least 4 hours a week to improve language skills. The program was initiated by William George Firth and Eleanor Mitchell Firth of the GSCI language staff, and ran in Fort McPherson from November of 2002 through January 2003.

## **Land Use Review and Scientific Research Licenses:**

The GSCI continues to review land and water applications submitted to the Gwich'in Land and Water Board and Lands Administration, as well as Scientific Research Applications from the Aurora Research Institute, advising them of potential impacts on heritage resources. The increased oil and gas activity in the GSA generates a higher number of License Applications.

## **Personnel Changes:**

**O**ur former Linguist Trainee, Lisa Andre, began studies in linguistics at the University of Alberta in September 2002. Her successor is Eleanor Mitchell Firth, who worked on the Gwich'in Dictionary and Teetl'it Gwich'in Place Names Project and is past coordinator of the Gwich'in Language Centre. Heritage Researcher Alestine Andre was on leave from June 2002 to January 2003, to pursue her Master's in Ethnobotany from the University of Victoria. Her thesis, on Gwich'in knowledge and use of plants for food, medicine and shelter, builds on her past work for the GSCI and Aurora Research Institute (with Alan Fehr), which resulted in the Gwich'in Ethnobotany book.

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### **Publications:**

**A** revised edition of *Gwich'in Ethnobotany: Plants Used by the Gwich'in for Food, Medicine, Shelter and Tools* is now available from the GSCI office in Tsiigehtchic, Aurora Research Institute in Inuvik, and Northern bookstores, for \$15.00 + GST.

The *2003 Gwich'in Elders' Calendar*, including portrait photos of 13 Elders, with short English and Gwich'in biographies, is available in the GSCI office, Gwich'in Band offices and Northern bookstores, for \$15.00 + GST.

**I**n December 2002, the Western Arctic Handbook Committee released *Canada's Western Arctic*, which includes a chapter on Gwich'in culture and history by Ingrid Kritsch and Alestine Andre, and sells in Northern bookstores for approximately \$29.<sup>95</sup>.

**Leslie McCartney**  
*Executive Director*

**Ingrid Kritsch**  
*Research Director*



41 seamstresses in the GSA and Yellowknife completed five replicas of a man's caribou outfit from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Photo: GSCI