

**GWICH'IN TERRITORIAL PARK
PLANT REPORT**

Prepared by

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For

**GWICH'IN GEOGRAPHICS LTD.
INUVIK, N.W.T.**

September 1995

GWICH'IN SOCIAL & CULTURAL INSTITUTE

General Delivery, TSIIGEHTCHIC

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September 15, 1995

Bart Kreps, Manager
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XOE OTO

Re: Plants in the Gwich'in Territorial Park

This is follow up to my memo dated July 28, 1995 in which I said I would provide a more detailed report of our walk in the Gwich'in Territorial Park. The attached report describes the plants identified by the Gwich'in Elders during this walk through one of the trails in the park. You will recall the Elders were Annie and Nap Norbert from Tsiigehtchic and Mabel English from Inuvik. Also on the trip were two GRRB students: Brad Firth and Grant Sullivan and Leonard Debastien from your office.

You may edit or re-format the information in the attached report to serve your needs. This may include rearranging the categories of plants. Will photographs of the plants be included later on? If you have any questions, please call me.

Regards,

Alestine Andre
Cultural Director

GWICH'IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTE

Introduction

The following information on plants was collected during a walk along one of the trails in Gwich'in Territorial Park at the end of July, 1995. The Elders who were part of the walk were Annie Norbert and Nap Norbert from Tsiigehtchic and Mabel English from Inuvik. Some of the information was also collected at a meeting which was held at the Alex Moses Greenland building in Inuvik. At this time the Elders provided additional information about some of the plants collected by the botanist, Cliff Wallis, who had placed plant samples from the park into file folders. Catherine Mitchell and Bertha Peters from Inuvik were also part of this discussion. Leonard Debastien video taped the discussion.

The purpose of the walk through the park was to identify plants and document their Gwich'in names and their uses, if any. As we walked along the trail, the Elders stopped and pointed out the different plants and their uses. They explained whether the plants are used for medicinal purposes, eaten as food, or if they had other uses. A story sometimes accompanied an explanation.

At the start Mabel English stated how important it was for people to sprinkle tobacco at the place where they take or collect the plants as a thank you to Mother Earth. She was told that if people did not do this the medicine will not work. Her parents also told her to collect only what she was going to use, "you only take enough for what you need. If you take too much it will spoil." As an aside, Mabel also mentioned that it was especially important for people to leave something when they take ochre (tsaih) or red dye in the mountains and that, "a big wind will come up" if they did not.

It is interesting to note that the Elders only identified large sized plants during the walk through the trail. For example plants like spruce, birch, and willows were identified, named and their uses explained. The Elders mentioned that smaller plants were not used by people but they were probably eaten as food by animals. This included many of the grasses and small plants we saw along the trail.

Plant names and their use:

The plants have been grouped under four categories: trees, plants, roots, berries, and other uses. The scientific name of each plant has been included so that interested people may identify and locate the precise plant either in the field or in source books.

Trees

Gwich'in name - k'oh

Scientific name - *Alnus crispen*

Also known as - Green alder

Uses - good medicine for skin rash, sun burn, eczema.

According to the Elders, the young alder willow is used anytime of the year. For skin rash and sun burn, the leaves and twigs are collected and boiled in a pot until a sticky film forms on top of the water. The film is skimmed off and put on the affected area. For eczema, a bath is taken in the water.

Gwich'in name - Dineezhil

Scientific name - *Picea mariana*

Also known as - Black spruce

Uses - good medicine for colds, coughs and bronchitis.

The Gwich'in consider the spruce cones from this tree as "the best medicine." The cones are usually found around the tip of young spruce trees. The cones are gathered or plucked off the tree and boiled (about 10-15 cones) in a pot of water for about half an hour. The branches may also be put in to boil with the cones. For a cold or for coughs, the people would drink about one cup of this water (not too much) every day for about five days. According to Mabel English, those with bad bronchitis may take this medicine for one week.

Gwich'in name - Aat'oo

Scientific name - *Betula papyrifera*

Also known as - White birch

Uses - good medicine for ulcer

Young birch trees are used. To prepare the medicine the whole tree is chopped down. The stem, twigs and leaves are cut into small pieces and set to boil in a large pot. The juice will look like tea. After it is boiled it is strained. The people would drink half a cup in the morning before breakfast and another one at night before going to bed. It is good for ulcers or for stomach problems like heartburn. The rest is poured into jars

and used up until it is finished. More medicine is then collected and prepared. Mabel English said that, "You have to quit taking alcohol, coffee, tea, fried food, anything that will upset your stomach for six months. Take this medicine and after six months continue with it until your stomach is healed." Sticky spruce gum is also chewed and swallowed with this medicine. It will remove any abscess in the stomach. People with ulcers should continue to drink this medicine. Mabel cautions people not to make a whole batch of this medicine otherwise it will spoil. They should only make enough to drink one week at a time.

Gwich'in name - K'ii

Scientific name - *Betula papyrifera*

Also known as - White birch

Uses - good for containers or as a canoe cover

The bark from this birch is used. In the spring the bark is collected and used to make birch bark containers (k'ii ch'ek). The bark is peeled off the tree and made into dishes for berries. Sometimes larger containers are made. The bark is dried after it is collected. When it is time to use, the people would wet it. Bigger pieces are cut off the tree and used to cover a canoe. In the spring time birch sap is collected through a spout that is placed in the tree.

Gwich'in name - Ah

Scientific name - *Picea mariana*

Also known as - Black spruce

Uses - good as ground cover

The boughs or branches from this tree are used as ground cover in a tent. Collect the spruce branches and place them inside a tent with the branch facing down. Later, change the branches when they lose their needles. The branches leave a refreshing pine scent inside the tent.

Gwich'in name - Ts'eevii neech'idh

Scientific name - *Picea mariana*

Also known as - Black spruce

Uses - good medicine for cuts, wounds

The inside of this bark (which is white in color) is good for cuts and wounds. The inner bark is chewed into a soft pulp and then it is placed directly on the cut. The cut or wound is covered with a bandage. Nap Norbert said his step-father, Louis Cardinal, used this medicine on his sister Rose when she cut her finger with an axe. He said, today, there is no scar where the cut used to be.

Plants

Gwich'in name - Deetree jak t'an

Scientific name - *Juniperus communis*

Also known as - Juniper

Uses - good medicine for colds, a bad stomach .

The Gwich'in call the berries of this plant "crow berries" (Deetree jak).

The branches and berries of this plant is boiled in a pot. The juice is good for colds and for an upset stomach. The white berries turn purple later on. It is important to give tobacco, tea, or sugar when you take pieces of this plant.

Gwich'in name - Nichih t'an

Scientific name - *Rosa acicularis*

Also known as - Prickly rose, wild rose

Uses - good medicine to cleanse eyes

The Gwich'in call this plant "rosehips." The pink petals of this wild rose are collected in early summer. They are boiled in a pot with water and then strained. One drop of the water is put in each eye to clean out any infection. This water is used at least once a week as a regular eye cleanser.

Gwich'in name - Nichih

Scientific name - *Rosa acicularis*

Also known as - Prickly rose, wild rose

Uses - good medicine, also good to eat

The Gwich'in call the berries of this plant "rosehips or itchy bums." The rosehips berries are good for cleaning out your body. Louis Cardinal told Annie Norbert that it is also good for your heart. The berries are also good to eat but the Elders chuckled as they cautioned us not to swallow the seeds when eating the berries. The berries ripen in late August.

Gwich'in name - K'aii kak at'an

Scientific name - *Salix L. species*

Also known as - Willow

Uses - good medicine for stings and skin rash

One or two green leaves of any willow is chewed and the willow paste put directly on any bee or wasp sting. This will prevent the area from swelling. According to Annie Norbert, the willow paste is also good for skin rash.

Gwich'in name - At'an tsoo

Scientific name - *Arnica alpina*

Also known as - Leopard's bane, mountain tobacco, wolf's bane

Uses - good medicine for stomach

The Elders called this plant "dandelion". The flowers of this plant are used to make a tea. The Elders said it is good medicine for your stomach but they did not say for what stomach ailment.

Gwich'in name - None

Scientific name - *Erigeron grandiflorus*

Also known as - Fleabane, daisy

Uses - good medicine

There is no Gwich'in name for this plant. This plant was recognized by the Elders but no other information was collected about it.

Roots

Gwich'in name - Treh

Scientific name - *Hedysarum alpinum*

Also known as - Liquorice root

Uses - good to eat and good medicine for diarrhea

The Gwich'in call this plant "roots, Indian carrots, or bear roots". This plant is identified by its long fern-like leaves and the bunch of small white pods dangling from its ends. In the spring, there are purple flowers at the end of the long stems. The people would dig in the ground along the river bank or wherever they see this plant. The root itself is white, soft, chewy and sweet tasting. They would scrape the skin off the roots before they eat it. Some people might dip the root in duck grease or fish oil before eating it. They are good to eat in the fall too. According to Annie Norbert, the roots are also good to eat if you have diarrhea.

Gwich'in name - Duu'ii nahshèih

Scientific name - *Boschniakia rossica*

Also known as - Broomrape

Uses - good medicine

The Gwich'in name for this plant translates as "uncle's plant". They also call it "pipe" as many people remembered making pipes with this plant when they were kids. According to Catherine Mitchell, her mother would boil the roots of this plant which looked like small potatoes and drank the juice. Catherine, however did not know for what ailment.

Gwich'in name - Eneech'idh

Scientific name - *Picea mariana*

Also known as - Black spruce

Uses - good for making root nets

The roots of the spruce tree are used to make nets. The roots looks like a long skinny string. According to Mabel English, the roots were pulled out, the bark peeled off, it was then soaked in water before people made nets with it. The people would always made sure they kept it wet so that it does not dry up.

Berries

Gwich'in name - Jak zheji

Scientific name - *Vaccinium uliginosum*

Also known as - Blueberry

Uses - good to eat

Blueberries are good to eat as a food or it may be mixed in with pounded dried fish (it'suh). The berries ripe in mid to late July.

Gwich'in name - Dandaih

Scientific name - *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*

Also known as - Stone berries, bilberry

Uses - good to eat

The Gwich'in call this berry "stone berries." This berry is good to eat or it is usually mixed in with fish eggs in the fall.

Gwich'in name - Dzhii ndee'

Scientific name - *Pyrola grandiflora*

Also known as - Large-flowered wintergreen

Uses - good to eat

The Gwich'in name for this berry translates as "bird eyes". This red berry is big, round and shiny in appearance. We saw some on the trail. They are good to eat.

Gwich'in name - Dineech'uh

Scientific name - *Empetrum nigrum*

Also known as - Crowberry

Uses - good to eat, good medicine for bad stomach

The Gwich'in call the berries of this plant "black currants." This small, sweet tasting, black berry is good to eat as it is. It is also mixed in with cranberries and added to pounded dried fish (it'suh). The leaves of this plant is also brewed as a tea. The berries ripen in the middle or late July. According to Mabel English, the juice from boiling the leaves is suppose to be good for bad stomach. No specific ailment was mentioned though.

Gwich'in name - Nakàł

Scientific name - *Rubus chamaemorus*

Also known as - Cloudberry

Uses - good to eat

The Gwich'in call this berry "yellow berries." This berry which is orange in color is picked in late July.

Gwich'in name - Dinjih jak

Scientific name - *Shepherdia canadensis*

Also known as - Soapberry

Uses - good medicine to clean your body

The Gwich'in call this berry "moose berry." It is sour tasting. According to Mabel English, "In the fall time, take the red berries and put it in a pot. Stir it and stir it until it turns to foam, add a little water and stir it some more. Drink it and it is suppose to be good to clean out your body."

Other plants

Gwich'in name - Thak dachan

Scientific name - *Potentilla fruticosa*

Also known as - Shrubby cinquefoil

Uses - good for snare trigger

The Gwich'in name of this plant translates as "trigger branch." The stem of this plant is used exclusively to make a three-inch trigger which is attached to string rabbit snares. According to Nap Norbert, the rabbits do not chew this branch.

Gwich'in name - Didicheji

Scientific name - *Picea mariana*

Also known as - Black spruce

Uses - An excellent tinder or fire starter

The dried branches, usually found at the bottom of spruce trees, are used to start a fire. The Elders said, "It could save your life if you had to make a fire quick when it is sixty below. When you are travelling in the bush and you need to make a fire, break off a bunch from the tree, light a match to it and place it under your wood to start a fire." A very important thing for everybody to know when they are out in the bush in the cold winter months.

Gwich'in name - Nin'

Scientific name - *Sphagnum magellanicum*

Also known as - Bog moss

Uses - good for baby diapers, a cleaner, trail markers, insulation

The Gwich'in call this "moss". This moist moss used to be collected, cleaned, hung to dry and put in between cloth and used as a baby diaper. It is also used as a cleaner to wipe out dirty pots, to clean dishes and floors, to wipe down fish tables and also to chink log houses. According to Nap Norbert when people found this moss on the trail long ago, they would grab a handful and hang it on a nearby tree as a trail marker. Nap also said that the dry white moss which grows on rock was good medicine to give to a sick dog.

Gwich'in name - Lidii maskit

Scientific name - *Ledum groenlandicum*

Also known as - Labrador tea

Uses - good as a tea

The Gwich'in called this muskeg tea. Brew the leaves and stems into a tea and drink one cup a day for good health.

LITERATURE CITED

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1989 Discovering Wild Plants: Alaska, Western Canada, the Northwest.
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NOTE

To: Bart Kreps, Manager, Gwich'in Geographics
From: Alestine Andre, GSCI
Date: July 28, 1995
Re: Documenting Gwich'in names and uses of plants in Gwich'in Park

The following will describe the trip which was made to one of the hiking trails located northeast of Benoit Lake on Friday, July 28, 1995. The trail was easy to walk along and the weather was favorable. The calm waters of Benoit Lake can be seen to the south from the top of the hill.

The trip involved three Gwich'in Elders, two summer students, Leonard Debastian from Gwich'in Geographics and myself from the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. The Elders were Annie Norbert and her husband, Nap from Tsiigehtchic and Mabel English from Inuvik. The students were Brad Firth and Grant Sullivan. Brad and Grant picked up the people from Tsiigehtchic while Leonard and Mabel drove in from Inuvik to meet them.

The purpose of the trip was to identify plants and document their Gwich'in names and document any uses. As we walked along the trail, the Elders stopped at plants that they recognized. Grant Sullivan video-taped the Elders as they gave the name and as they explained the uses of the different plants, Leonard Debastian photographed the plants while Brad Firth noted each exposure. As we walked along, I asked the Elders specific questions and translated some of their explanation. This walk took approximately an hour. We stopped for a brief lunch before we headed back to Inuvik.

In Inuvik, we meet at the Alex Greenland building where we went through the file folders which contained the plant specimens that the botanist had collected previously, along the same trail. The Elders gave Gwich'in names and the uses of each of the specimens as Leonard Debastian video-taped this session. Brian Johnston from Gwich'in Geographics was also on hand to ask questions. The Elders then named and explained the uses of the plants which we collected on the hiking trail and which were not part of the botanist's collection. Catherine Mitchell, Bertha Peters and several young people from Inuvik were also present during this session.

A report detailing the Gwich'in name, English names, and scientific name and a description of the uses and preparation of each plant will be submitted at a later date.