

**Fort McPherson National Historic Site Revisited:
The History and Importance of Fort McPherson
from a Teetl'it Gwich'in Perspective**



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**Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute
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Introduction

In February of 2001, the GSCI submitted a funding proposal to Parks Canada to carry out an archaeological project in Fort McPherson. The project was to take place north of the Anglican Church, where testing carried out in the summer of 2000 revealed the presence of an extensive historic (and possibly prehistoric) archaeological site. Since available funding was insufficient to carry on the project as originally planned, it was agreed with Parks Canada that the funding would instead be used to revisit the national historic site designation of Fort McPherson.

The Fort McPherson post was designated as a national historic site in 1969. In the summer of 1977, a commemorative plaque (Figure 1) was unveiled beside the Anglican Church, during a ceremony held for the occasion. On the plaque, a trilingual inscription in English (on top), French and Gwich'in explains the reasons for this designation. These are as follows: 1) Fort McPherson was, for fifty years, the principal trading post in the Mackenzie Delta region; 2) it was, after 1860, a center of missionary activity; 3) the first N.W.M.P. post in the Western Arctic was established there in 1903; and 4) it was used as a base to reach the Klondike by a number of overlanders in the winter of 1898-1899.

Despite the fact that Fort McPherson is located within the homeland of the Teetl'it Gwich'in and that these people played a very significant role in the history and development of Fort McPherson, there is no reference to them on the commemorative plaque. This is the reason why both Parks Canada and the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) estimated that it would be worth revisiting the designation of Fort McPherson from the perspective of the Teetl'it Gwich'in. A secondary objective of the project consisted in collecting information about other places or areas located on Gwich'in land, that the Teetl'it Gwich'in might like to suggest for designation. In order to meet these objectives, two trips were made to Fort McPherson in June and November of 2001, where two one-day meetings and several interviews were carried out with Teetl'it Gwich'in individuals (most of which were elders).

This report summarizes the information collected during the meetings and the interviews in Fort McPherson. The first part of the report describes the work carried out in Fort McPherson in June and November of 2001. The following section outlines the information available concerning the events surrounding the designation and commemoration of Fort McPherson in the

1970s. Two different sources of data were used for this review, including the documentation provided by Parks Canada and the information gathered from Teetl'it Gwich'in elders. The next two sections of the report present the perspective of the Teetl'it Gwich'in concerning the significance and history of the place along the bank where the old Fort McPherson trading post was located and the management procedures the elders envision for the site. Finally, the last part before the conclusion and recommendations consists of a brief description of other places within their homeland the Teetl'it Gwich'in could eventually consider for national historic site designation.



Figure 1: Commemorative Plaque for the Fort McPherson National Historic Site (photo credit: Parks Canada)

The Fieldwork

The main part of the fieldwork took place between the 17th and 26th of June of 2001 (see Appendix A for a schedule of the activities conducted during the trip). The investigators involved in the project included Ingrid Kritsch, Research Director of the GSCI, Alestine Andre, Heritage Researcher for the GSCI, Bertha Francis, Gwich'in Translator and Mélanie Fafard (author of this report), Ph.D. student in anthropology at the University of Alberta. On June 19th, a one-day meeting was held with a community steering committee composed of eight elders and a representative of the Teetl'it Gwich'in Band Council¹. The meeting was held in the *Charles Koe* boardroom at the Teetl'it Gwich'in Band Office in Fort McPherson. In the original proposal for the project, it was stated that the group meeting would last two days. However, it was decided that it would be a better idea to have a one-day meeting with the community steering committee in June and then to have another one in November in order to present the members of the committee with a draft of the final report before it is submitted to Parks Canada.

During the meeting in June, it was first explained what a national historic site is and the reasons why the Fort McPherson post was designated in 1969. Following this introduction, the members of the committee were asked if they considered Fort McPherson (and more particularly the area where the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to camp during their visits to the Fort) an important place for the Teetl'it Gwich'in and why. A discussion followed about other places and/or areas within the Teetl'it Gwich'in homeland that might eventually be proposed for national historic site designation. The committee members were also asked about which people in the community should be interviewed about these topics. It was decided that all the elders who attended the meeting would be interviewed individually. In addition, the elders provided the names of other people who could potentially be interviewed.

During the six days following the meeting (20-25 of June), 13 individual interviews were carried out with Teetl'it Gwich'in elders, both in Fort McPherson and Inuvik. Two different teams conducted the interviews, each of them including a Gwich'in person with a command of the Gwich'in

¹ The elders attending the June meeting included Robert Alexie Sr., Walter Alexie, Jane Charlie, Neil Colin, Bertha Francis, Rachel Stewart, William Teya and Jim Vittekwa. Johnny Charlie was present as a representative of the Teetl'it Gwich'in Council. Also present were Ingrid Kritsch, Alestine Andre and Mélanie Fafard.

language. The first team consisted of Ingrid Kritsch and Alestine Andre and the second, of Bertha Francis and Mélanie Fafard. All interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees and pictures of most the elders interviewed were also taken. The interviewers used a checklist to ensure that the same questions were asked of each interviewee (see Appendix B), but the interviews were open-ended, which provided the elders with an opportunity to express other ideas and/or concerns.

Information about five general topics was collected during the interviews, including: 1) background information about the interviewee; 2) what the elders know or remember about the 1969 designation of the site and the unveiling of the plaque in 1977; 3) the importance of Fort McPherson for the Teetl'it Gwich'in and stories the elders could provide about the places where the Teetl'it Gwich'in and other groups camped in the past during their visit(s) to the Fort; 4) what kind of management procedures the elders envision for the site; and 5) other places and/or areas they think could be proposed for designation. During their stay in Inuvik, Bertha Francis and Mélanie Fafard met with Robert Simpson, who was the chairman of the Settlement Council of Fort McPherson at the time the site was designated.

A slide presentation of the Peel River Ethno-Archaeology Project 2000 (which was partly funded by Parks Canada) was made at the Band Office during the evening of June 21st. The presentation was announced on CBC radio and all the people of the community were invited. Copies of the poster of the project were distributed to the organizations and individuals who contributed to, or took part in the project. Finally, it was decided that if possible, casts of some of the artifacts encountered during the test excavations last summer would be made so that they could be put on display in the cultural center, which is located in the new hotel built in Fort McPherson beside the COOP store.

Finally, a second one-day meeting was held in Fort McPherson on November 26th of 2001. The objective of this meeting was to present the Fort McPherson national historic site community steering committee with a draft of the report prepared for Parks Canada. Neil Colin was representing the Teetl'it Gwich'in Council at this meeting. This gathering was a good opportunity for the members of the steering committee² to ensure that the report reflects their perspective about the Fort McPherson national historic

² The members of the community steering committee who attended the meeting in November included Robert Alexie Sr., Walter Alexie, Neil Colin, Bertha Francis, Rachel Stewart, William Teya and Eunice Mitchell. Also present were Ingrid Kritsch, Alestine Andre and Mélanie Fafard.

site and it allowed the participants to comment on it so that the necessary revisions could be made.

Background Information

The following is a summary of the information available concerning the events surrounding the designation of Fort McPherson in 1969 and the unveiling of the plaque in 1977. The first part is a review of the documentation made available by Parks Canada whereas the second part summarizes the information collected during the meeting and the interviews held with Teetl'it Gwich'in individuals last June in Fort McPherson. It focuses on the elders' memories and impressions about the designation of the town and the commemorative ceremony that took place in 1977.

Parks Canada Documentation

The documentation provided by Parks Canada to the investigators of the project contains information concerning the events that surrounded the decision of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to designate Fort McPherson as a national historic site. A Historic Sites and Monuments Board paper of that time mentions that:

Fort McPherson was built by John Bell, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1840. It is located on the Peel River, about 24 miles south of its confluence with the Mackenzie. It became in the nineteenth century the trading centre and the religious centre of the Mackenzie Delta. In 1903 the Mounted Police established a detachment at Fort McPherson, and the settlement then became the district's legal and administrative centre as well.

The minutes from the May 8th and 9th 1969 Historic Sites and Monument Board meeting reviewed a number of recommendations regarding "the fur trade and Indian tribes." After considering several sites that had been suggested for national historic site designation in the N.W.T., the Board recommended that Fort McPherson be designated. A plaque was unveiled at the site on July 7th 1977. The text on the plaque was composed by staff within Parks Canada and then revised and approved by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

According to a letter sent to Reverend Hanes by Barbara B.A. Smith, the commemorative ceremony for the unveiling of the plaque was initially planned for July 17th 1976. However, due to some difficulties experienced with the construction of the monument and the production of the plaque, the event had to be postponed until the following year. Another letter sent to Reverend Hanes in March of 1977 announced that the dedication of the commemorative plaque for Fort McPherson was planned for July 7th 1977. Reverend Hanes was asked to direct the construction of the monument and to indicate where the plaque was to be erected by the employees of Kenaston Construction from Inuvik. In a last letter sent to William Teya and Charles Neyendo in May of 1977, it is mentioned that since this commemorative ceremony was planned for the people of Fort McPherson, Parks Canada “*would like to have as much community involvement as possible.*” The letter announced that Reverend T. Buckle was going to dedicate the plaque, since Reverend Hanes had left the community at the time. It also included a request for a member of the community of Fort McPherson to give a prayer in Gwich’in.

Following the commemorative ceremony of the site, a brief report on the event was produced by Parks Canada. The report mentions that the commemoration took place on Thursday July 7th at 2:00 p.m. and that “*the event was well attended and well supported by the Fort McPherson community.*” Apparently, “*just about the whole population was in attendance*” and it was estimated that about 200-250 people were present. The Hudson’s Bay store and other businesses closed their doors during the ceremony. The monument on which the plaque was mounted was not built by the Inuvik contracting company as planned, but by residents of Fort McPherson the day before the ceremony. The plaque was unveiled by former Chief Johnny Kay, Robert Simpson, who was Chairman of the Settlement Council at the time, and Mr. R. Malis, Prairie Regional Officer for Parks Canada. Following the ceremony, the women of the Fort McPherson community club offered refreshments, baked goods, bannock and fish to those attending the event.

Despite the fact that it was concluded that the ceremony was well supported by the Teetl’it Gwich’in, the report also makes reference to the difficulties encountered by Parks Canada’s employees when they tried to organize the ceremony and get the assistance of members of the community. Apparently, efforts made by telephone and letters to make arrangements for the ceremony received little or no response. Also, some posters that were sent to Fort McPherson three weeks before the ceremony in order to

publicize the event were not posted when Parks officers arrived in Fort McPherson two days prior the commemoration.

Finally, Mr. Malis wrote a cover letter in August of 1977 to the Assistant Deputy Minister, which accompanied the report mentioned above. In this letter, Mr. Malis points out that Native people are becoming increasingly aware of their contributions to Canadian heritage and he emphasizes the importance of seeking their involvement and trying to accommodate their wishes when a commemoration takes place in an area where there is a large Native population. Mr. Malis also point outs the fact that the plaque does not refer to the role played by the Gwich'in in the history of Fort McPherson. He writes:

If we are to promote national unity by developing a pride in our historic past shared by all Canadians, we cannot ignore the role of the native peoples and their contribution to our heritage. In historical events such as this, the plaque should reflect not only the native language, but also the native role. Choosing such a course will help to ensure that more and more commemorative experiences involving native people will be successful, meaningful experiences for all involved.

Information from the Elders

Most of the elders who attended the meeting or were interviewed did not know that the Fort McPherson post was designated as a national historic site and they do not think that most people in Fort McPherson know about this designation. In fact, most if not all the people with whom the topic was discussed did not know what a national historic site is and the concept had to be explained and other examples of national historic sites given before any discussion could be initiated. Regardless of this, all the elders interviewed know there is a plaque located on the bank behind the church, although very few have read it. In fact, only two elders could provide information about what is written on the plaque. Thus, before the meeting and the interviews most of the elders knew the plaque existed, but they did not know why it was there.

None of the elders were asked for input about the designation of the Fort McPherson post and none remembers having heard if other people from the community were consulted before the post was designated or the plaque erected. As Jim Vittekwa put it: *"I did not hear anything... It's just coming out right now. Before that no one told us anything about it [the*

designation of Fort McPherson].” Bertha Francis, for her part, thinks that: “...they [the people from Fort McPherson] must have been told [about the designation] but like I said [the] other day the speeches were over the heads of our people... The language is too high.” In fact, it seems that the proposed text for the commemorative plaque was sent to Fort McPherson in 1975 and Richard Nerysoo, who was 24 years old at the time, stated he was strongly opposed to its content during the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry:

The federal government has told the McPherson people that they want to create a national historic site here. They propose to put up a plaque telling some of the important history of this area. As you know, my people have lived here in this area for thousands of years and there are many events that are worthy of recognition. There are many Indian heroes and many examples of courage and dedication to the people. We have a rich and proud history.

But what events does the federal government consider history? Let me read you the text that they propose for the plaque. It is in both English and French, but I will read it in English...

"In 1840 John Bell of the Hudson's Bay Company built the first Fort McPherson... it was for over fifty years the principal trading post in the Mackenzie Delta region and, after 1860, a centre of missionary activity. In 1903 Inspector Charles Constantine established the first R.N.W.M.P. post in the Western Arctic here. In the winter of 1898-99 a number of overlanders tried to use Fort McPherson as a base to reach the Klondike."

Where are we mentioned on this plaque? Where is the mention of any of our history? The history of the Peel River people did not begin in 1840. We have been here for a long, long time before that, yet we get no mention. Does the federal government not consider us to be human too? Do they think we do not make history?...

The date on this proposed text... is July 3 1975 - not 1875, but 1975, today. Our history and culture has been ignored and shoved aside (cited in Berger 1977:91).

The elders do not know who built the monument for the plaque and are not sure who translated the text of the plaque in Gwich'in, although the

names of William George Firth, Johnny Charlie, Sarah Simon and John Ritter were suggested. During her interview, Mrs. Simon said that she did not translate the text. Johnny Charlie's daughter, Liz, saw the handwriting of the person who did the transcription and she asserted that her father did not write this text. Finally, a copy of the hand-written translation was faxed to John Ritter, who confirmed that he did not write this translation.

Eleven of the 13 elders interviewed last June said that they were present at the commemorative ceremony, although they do not remember the date or the year the event took place. The elders remember that the ceremony took place on the riverbank close by the Northern Store and that some people made a speech and the plaque was unveiled. Johnny Kay was one of those who addressed the audience; Sarah Simon said that she translated his speech from Gwich'in to English during the ceremony. Mary Teya showed us two pictures that were taken during the ceremony (Figures 2-3). The first one shows Chief Johnny Kay giving a speech; the man sitting on the left is Andrew Kunnizzi. The second picture shows four men sitting in a row in front of the plaque. They are, from left to right, Johnny Kay, Elijah Andrew, Christopher Colin and Andrew Kunnizzi. Jim Vittrekwa mentioned that Charles Neyendo fixed the plaque on the monument. Most of the elders remember that there was a little feast held on the riverbank after the ceremony. Despite the fact that a lot of people took part in the ceremony, the general impression gathered from the meeting and the interviews is that very few of the people attending fully understood the reasons of this event at the time.

Finally, the opinion of the elders about what is written on the plaque is very similar to what Richard Nerysoo stated in 1975. The elders think the actual text is fine, but all maintain that there should also be something written on the plaque about the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the role they played in the history of Fort McPherson and the area. Bertha Francis said: "*It [the text on the plaque] looks okay to me, but I'd like to see something written about the Gwich'in people that were here first.*" In her interview, Mary Teya also pointed out that the people mentioned on the plaque could not have done as much as they did without the help of the Gwich'in people. Thus, the reaction is unanimous: the contribution of the Teetl'it Gwich'in must be acknowledged.



Figure 2: Chief Johnny Kay giving a speech during the commemorative ceremony in 1977. (photo credit: Mary Teya)



Figure 3: From left to right are Johnny Kay, Elijah Andrew, Christopher Colin and Andrew Kunnizzi. (photo credit: Mary Teya).

Importance of Fort McPherson for the Teetl'it Gwich'in

The first trading post in the Mackenzie Delta area was built in 1840 about four miles upriver from the present town of Fort McPherson. The fort was moved a few years later to its present location. The elders mentioned two reasons for this move. The first is that on at least two different occasions, the Old Fort flooded because the ground was sinking due to the many tents and people that lived there. The other reason is that at that time, the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit were not on good terms and the Gwich'in could not see the Inuvialuit coming up the river to the Old Fort. Therefore, the trading post was moved to the hill at Fort McPherson, where the settlement could not be flooded and the Gwich'in could see the Inuvialuit coming from a distance.

There are several reasons why Fort McPherson, and more specifically the area along the bank and down the hill close by the Northern Store, is important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. This place has been used by many Teetl'it Gwich'in over the years. Many of the ancestors of those who presently live in Fort McPherson have used this area and some have died there and are buried in one of the two cemeteries of the town. All remember Fort McPherson as a main gathering place for the Teetl'it Gwich'in where people traveled in from all over their land at specific times of the year, to meet, camp and celebrate with relatives and friends. Fort McPherson was an important commercial center, the first trading post in the Mackenzie Delta, and trading with the HBC was, after gathering, the main reason why the Teetl'it Gwich'in came in to the fort. The trading post also represented, for the Teetl'it Gwich'in, a religious center where they could attend church services and celebrate their faith. Finally, the hill on which Fort McPherson is located is also unique for the Teetl'it Gwich'in because of the exceptional scenery it offers them.

Many features of the old Fort McPherson have historical significance for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. These include the trails that so many people have used while traveling to and from Fort McPherson. One of these is the Peel River itself, which still takes people up and downriver, to their camps and to other trails that lead to the mountains. In front of Fort McPherson, right across from the second hill on the left, there is also an old time summer trail going to the Yukon, to Lapierre House. The landing place (Figure 4), which was located down the hill below the Hudson's Bay Store, is one of the most important features of Fort McPherson. Over the years, many different kinds of boats have landed there, from the mooseskin boats and birchbark canoes

of the old days to the steamboats and schooners of more recent times. Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, Euro-Canadians and many other people have entered Fort McPherson through this particular place. The hauling trail (Figure 4) that people had to climb with their belongings in order to get up the hill after landing is another important part of the fort. So is the area where the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to set up their tents on top of the hill (Figure 5) and the sandbar down the hill (Figure 4), on which the Inuvialuit used to camp and which was also used as a camping place by the Teetl'it Gwich'in in more recent times. Finally, some buildings or the location of buildings no longer standing are also of importance to the Teetl'it Gwich'in. These include: (1) the place where the Hudson's Bay store was located on top of the hill not too far from the riverbank (Figures 5 and 6); (2) the old church which was erected about 50 feet south of the present church; (3) the dance hall, which was located in front of the present Northern Store, across from the street; and (4) the HBC manager's residence which is now located on the property of Mike Krutko (Figure 7).

Traveling to Fort McPherson

In the first days of Fort McPherson, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to come to the fort in the summer by paddling or walking, sometimes with pack dogs. In the winter, they mostly traveled with dog teams and snowshoes, and some used sleds made of caribou skin legs or birch. Mrs. Simon recalled that the men used to make small birchbark canoes and paddle, whereas the women and children walked along the shore. In the early times, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to live around the Blackstone and Hart River area during the winter. In the spring they gathered at the Wind or Snake River to make mooseskin boats. Sometimes two boats were made, each one with as much as fourteen moose skins. The men took the boats through the Peel Canyon, while the women and the children walked along a portage trail on the left bank of the river. Several families traveled in the skin boats, camping along the river during the trip to Fort McPherson. Mrs. Simon remembered seeing the boats arriving in town, while some old men were coming along in their birchbark canoes. The last time the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to McPherson with mooseskin boats was in 1927. They came with two boats captained by Chief Julius and Peter Neyando. When the Teetl'it Gwich'in became aware of Dawson around the turn of the nineteenth century, they started to get canvas and to make large wooden canoes covered with this material. Later, people started to use schooners and kickers. The first steamboat arrived at Fort McPherson during the late 1880s. Three of them came to Fort McPherson: the *SS. Wrigley*, the *SS. McKenzie*



Figure 4: Picture showing Fort McPherson in 1914. The town is located on top of the hill. From the landing place, people had to carry their belongings up the little path shown on the picture. (photo credit: Anglican Church of Canada Archives. Copied from E. Zeally's article in North/Nord, summer 1981, p.25).

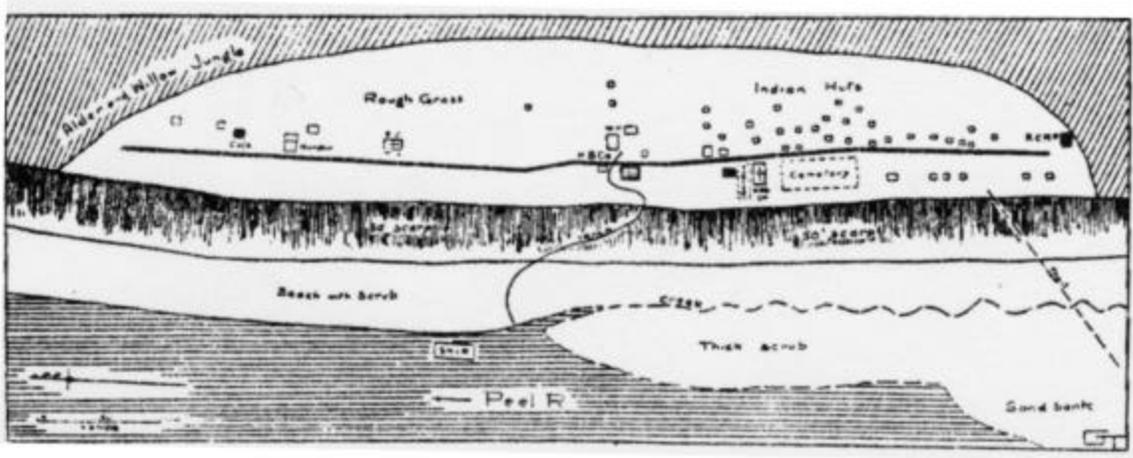


Figure 5: Sketch of Fort McPherson in 1944. It shows the location of the HBC store, the church and cemetery, and the old RCMP office. The area where the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to set their tents is also represented. (image credit: Griffith Taylor, Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol. 11 No.2, 1985, p.189).



Figure 6: According to Mr. William Firth, this picture was taken in 1903 or 1904. From left to right, it shows the old HBC Trading Store, the Manager's house, the fur warehouse and a caribou skin tent. This was the last year that such tents were used in Fort McPherson. (photo credit: C.W. Mathers (N.W.T. Archives))



Figure 7: HBC manager's house in Fort McPherson (photo credit: Ingrid Kritsch)

and the *SS. Distributor*. The *SS. Wrigley* and the *SS. McKenzie* were both owned by the HBC. The former ran from 1887 to 1907 and the latter from 1908 to 1924, when it was replaced by the *SS. Distributor* (Anderson et al. 2000:15). Some elders remember that when the *SS. Distributor* came to McPherson in the summer, it brought fresh food products that people had not seen for a year. They remember that while waiting on the hill for the boat to arrive, people could smell onion and orange fragrances from a distance. Although many different kinds of boats succeeded each other through time, they all landed at the same place, below the hill close by the Hudson's Bay store (Figure 4). People used to help each other haul their belongings or the boats' cargo up the hill, along a path that still exists today (Figure 4).

During the days when the Teetl'it Gwich'in were still making mooseskin boats up the Peel River after spending the winter in the mountains, they used to come to town in the spring, after break-up. Later on, during the elders' time, there were three main times of the year when the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to Fort McPherson. People usually came in for Christmas and New Years, although Neil Colin remembers that sometimes people were in the mountains at that time. The second time when people came into town was Easter and the last one was the First of July or Dominion Day. Families came from all over the Teetl'it Gwich'in land. Some came from their fishing or trapping camps along the Peel River, while others came from the mountains where they had been hunting for caribou. After Easter, many people traveled to the Mackenzie Delta to trap muskrats. They came back to town with their furs after the ratting season and stayed until after the first of July. After this, they went fishing on the Peel River to make dry fish so they could feed their dogs during the long winter months.

Fort McPherson: A Gathering Place

The different times of the year when the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to Fort McPherson were very important. These were the times when all the people gathered and met with one another after spending several months on the land with their family. While in town, people visited their relatives and friends and everyone went to church. People had feasts during which the chief spoke to his people and everyone ate, danced to the sound of the fiddles and guitars and played games. There was also a lot of story telling going on. The first of July was a sports day. People had foot races and football games. Football was one of the favorite games of the Teetl'it Gwich'in. The *Nehkak choo* or ball was made out of moose skin and moose hair. Two teams of ten players each aimed at getting the ball into the goal of

the opposite team. The prize for the winner consisted of tobacco or cigarettes. Neil Colin recalls that after the games on July first, the chief used to spill candies on the ground for the children.

In early historic times, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to refer to Fort McPherson as *Chii tsal dik*, which means 'On-top-of-the-lower-hill-made-of-shale'. Later on, they started to call the town *Teetl it zheh* ('Up-the-Peel-River-house' or 'Headwaters-house') or *zheh*, which means 'town'. Long ago when the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to Fort McPherson, the town used to be very small. The Teetl'it Gwich'in had no houses and they lived in tents. The first tents they used were made of skin and they had a fire in the center. Later on, after they began to visit Dawson, the Teetl'it Gwich'in bought canvas and stoves and they started to live in canvas tents. They used to set their tents together along the riverbank around the Hudson's Bay and some tents were also scattered over the whole area located between the old RCMP building and the houses of the Blake family. Apparently, in more recent times some Gwich'in also stayed on the sand bar by the creek below the hill. In these days this area was not covered with willows as it is now.

Since Fort McPherson was, for a long time, the only trading post in the Mackenzie Delta region, the Inuvialuit also traveled to the fort in the summer, from Herschel Island and the Mackenzie Delta. They used to come to Fort McPherson in whaleboats and schooners. During their stay at the fort, they lived in tents on the sand bar down the hill or on their schooners. At night, everyone staying at the fort could hear the sounds of their drums. At first, the relationship between the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit was very hostile and on various occasions, they fought deadly wars against one another. Mary Teya remembers her grandmother saying that when the Inuvialuit came to Fort McPherson, the Teetl'it Gwich'in were cautious and neither of the groups trusted each other. With time, however, their harsh feelings faded away and both groups established friendly relationships. Fort McPherson thus also became a place of encounter for the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit. When they were at the fort together, one of their favorite activities was to play football games against one another.

During the meeting and interviews last June, the elders were asked if they had heard stories about an Inuvialuit graveyard located in Fort McPherson because people have mentioned it to the GSCI before. However, few of the elders interviewed know anything about it. According to them, the burials are located in the northern part of the town, in the area where the present day houses of Fred, Ralph and John Blake are located and around the

place where Mike Krutko used to have a store. The burials are not marked and the road and some buildings may have been constructed on top of them.

During the twentieth century, people from other communities also used to come to Fort McPherson for big reunions. Bertha Francis remembers that when she was a small child, people from Old Crow, Tsiigehtchic and Aklavik came with dog teams over to Fort McPherson for Christmas, New Years and Easter. Everyone gathered in Fort McPherson to feast and dance for a few days, before returning to their respective communities. According to Jim Vittrekwa, Easter was the main time of the year for people from these communities to come to Fort McPherson. He said people used to gather in Fort McPherson because at that time, the town was one of the best places for dancing.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the riverbank where the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to camp and gather in the old days is still a gathering place for their people today. A young man from the community mentioned, during the excavation of the site in the summer of 2000, that the area is still used by the community for feasts and other purposes (Gerald Tetlich, pers. comm. 2000). The elders confirmed this fact during the meeting held in November.

Fort McPherson: A Trading Center

In the old days, the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to Fort McPherson to trade with the HBC. During the course of their seasonal rounds, the Gwich'in gathered various products that were of interest to Euro-Canadian traders. The first things that the Teetl'it Gwich'in brought to Fort McPherson for trade were dry meat and bone grease. When people lived in the mountains during the winter months, they used to hunt caribou and make dry meat. In the spring around Easter, they took the dry meat and some bone grease to Fort McPherson and traded it with the HBC. The meat and grease were a source of food for the employees of the Company. They were also used by the Teetl'it Gwich'in who were employed by the HBC in the summer to paddle up the Mackenzie River to Fort Smith to bring supplies to the fort. This was before the first steamboat traveled to Fort McPherson. Besides these things, the Teetl'it Gwich'in also brought in tanned moose and caribou hides and marten, muskrat, lynx, mink, beaver and fox furs. In the summer, they sold dry fish to the store or to RCMP officers; the fish was used to feed dogs in the winter. After the 1930s, muskrat skins were the main item brought in by the Teetl'it Gwich'in for trade.

When the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the HBC first started to trade together, there was no money involved. The Teetl'it Gwich'in used to trade the products mentioned above in exchange for other goods. The main items they obtained from the HBC included guns, shells, twine for nets, pots and pans, tobacco and groceries such as flour, rice, sugar, tea, lard and dried food. Bertha Francis and Caroline Kay remember that long ago, the HBC trader used to measure food products such as flour and tea with a tin cup. Everyone was allowed a certain number of cups, depending on what they brought in for trade.

As mentioned previously, the Inuvialuit also came to Fort McPherson to trade with the HBC. The products they exchanged with the Euro-Canadian traders primarily consisted of furs such as wolverine and fox. Robert Alexie Sr. mentioned that the Inuvialuit likely trapped white fox on the coast.

Fort McPherson: A Religious Center

Once churches became established at the post, the Teetl'it Gwich'in also visited Fort McPherson regularly in order to go to church. They usually planned their trips to the fort according to the major religious events of the year such as Christmas and Easter. Every time they went to Fort McPherson, people attended church services and many also took advantage of these visits to have their union blessed through marriage. William Teya remembers that the last Sunday of June was called 'Rat Sunday' because in the spring, the Teetl'it Gwich'in came to Fort McPherson and they used to donate part of their muskrat skins or other skins to the Church. The furs were sold and money was obtained to maintain the church.

The majority of Teetl'it Gwich'in are Anglican today. Evangelization of the Gwich'in began in the late 1850s, with both Oblate and Anglican missionaries competing to convert Teetl'it Gwich'in to their religion. The Gwich'in initially followed both religions depending upon which missionary was in town. However, the chief finally decided that his people should adopt the Anglican faith and he told them to return the beads and the crosses the Roman Catholic priest had given them.

The Anglican Church assisted the HBC trader in Fort McPherson, Mr. Murray. Mary Teya and Sarah Simon recalled that Mr. Murray married a Gwich'in woman from Tsiigehtchic and sent her to school in Winnipeg so that she could learn to read and write. When she returned to Fort McPherson, she worked as an interpreter for the Anglican missionary.

According to Mrs. Sarah Simon, Tsiigehtchic did not have a church for a long time and the Gwichya Gwich'in used to come to Fort McPherson to attend church services. She remembered that the old church was an old log house with a bark roof. Old Vittrekwa helped Reverend Whittaker to build the old church; he hauled logs with dogs for two months. He and his wife were the first couple to get married in the church after it was built.

Fort McPherson: A Scenic Lookout

The hill where the town was first established is also important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in because of the view of their land they have from there. William Teya said, during the meeting last June: *"I like Fort McPherson because of the scenery. As far as you could see, you know? I mean, where else could you see fifty miles [away]? In what town or city? You can't."* During the meeting and the interviews, the elders remembered that from the riverbank, one could look out and know that some people were heading towards McPherson long before they actually made it to the fort. Boats could be seen coming from over a long distance, up and down the river. When travelers were coming over the mountains from the Yukon, using the summer trail starting on the other side of the river, people on the riverbank at Fort McPherson knew they were coming because they could see the smoke of their campfires from far away. There were no trees as there are now on the hills in those days. As Neil Colin said: *"...you're on a highest ground eh? You could see the Richardson Mountains, you could see up the Peel, you could see down Mackenzie Delta and you could see way down about forty-sixty miles."* Therefore, the location of the old town, in addition to its historic significance, also has an aesthetic value for the Teetl'it Gwich'in.

Future Management of the Site: the Gwich'in Perspective

The Plaque

All the people present at the meeting or interviewed during the project believe that another plaque should be made, explaining the role played by the Teetl'it Gwich'in in the development of *Chii tsal dik* and presenting their perspective concerning the significance of the site. There was some difference of opinion about whether the old plaque should be left or not. Six of the elders clearly stated that they would like to leave the old plaque and make another one that would represent exclusively the Gwich'in point of view. Two elders thought that the old plaque should be removed and

another plaque made with new text blending the information on the old plaque with that provided by the Gwich'in.

Everyone agreed that the location of the plaque should be changed. At the time the plaque was erected, its location was highly visible. However, a mission hall has been added to the church since then and as a result, the plaque is hidden behind the building. The elders think the plaque should be moved to a more visible area. Many suggested the area in front of the church (on the side of the road) as a potential location. What is certain is that the plaque should stay in the main area of the old town, since it is the place within Fort McPherson that is most important to the Teetl'it Gwich'in from an historical point of view.

Fort McPherson National Historic Site

Beside changing or replacing the plaque, the elders also expressed other concerns and/or interests about the site and the way it should be managed in the future. One of these is related to the protection of the site and the features that are of significance to the Teetl'it Gwich'in. Robert Alexie Sr. said: *"It should be protected that place. Leave it as it is. It's really important. Many people [have] seen it you know. I'd like to see that for the rest of time. How can we protect it? You gotta let the Hamlet know."* Therefore, although a historic designation does not offer any protection, there should be, as part of the management strategy of the site, an effort to reach an agreement with local authorities in order to ensure that the site will not be disturbed without consultation with the members of the community. When asked with which offices the GSCI and Parks Canada should work when managing the site, the elders mentioned the Hamlet, the Chief and Council and the Band Office. Some elders also think that the people of the community should be informed and asked for input about any decision concerning the site.

As part of the questionnaire used during the interviews, the elders were asked about their opinion about the archaeological excavation carried out at the site during the Peel River Ethno-Archaeology Project 2000. In all cases, the reaction of the elders to this work was favorable. Many of the elders believe that there is a lot of material to be found in the area of the old town. In fact, a few of them have found artifacts (e.g., beads, arrowheads) at the site and most are aware of other people who found some archaeological material there. Most elders think that archaeology may help the Teetl'it Gwich'in to reconstruct their history and that it has great potential to help teach their young people about where they are from and how their people

lived in the past. Educating the younger generation about the Teetl'it Gwich'in history appears to be a very important concern for the elders. They also expressed an interest in the artifacts themselves. People seem to be positive towards archaeology partly because it allows them to see the objects that were made and used by their people in the past. However, three elders voiced concerns about what happens to the artifacts after they are recovered from an archaeological site. One of them asked where the artifacts were taken and kept after they have been removed from the ground. The others mentioned that the artifacts should be kept in a community museum, both for education purposes and tourism. Thus, the elders approve archaeology and they would like to see more work done in the area of the old town. However, if more archaeological investigation is to take place at the site, funds should be included to make replicas of the artifacts encountered so that these can be displayed in the community. People should also be informed about the fact that the original artifacts are stored in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, where adequate facilities are in place for their protection. They should also know what kinds of treatment the artifacts receive there and how the material can be accessed by their people.

Other Potential Places for Commemoration

Part of our work in June consisted of asking the elders about places, other than Fort McPherson, that they would like to see commemorated as places of historical significance. The question the elders were asked was: *“If you think about all your land and think of other places that you would like to suggest for recognition, which one(s) would you pick?”* This question really puzzled the elders because apparently choosing one or a few particular places was very difficult, if not impossible, for them. As Robert Alexie Sr. said: *“I don't know. All over our country is important to us... lots of very important places. They're all important!”* Rachel Stewart expressed a similar feeling: *“We have lots of good place[s] lots of memory place[s] all over.”*

Something that occurred repeatedly when this question was asked during the meeting and the interviews is that the elders started to list all the places they could think of as important, along with the list of all the people they could remember have lived there over time. In fact, it seems that the main reason why these places are considered historically significant by the Teetl'it Gwich'in is that their ancestors and themselves have lived there time after time. Jim Vittrekwa said: *“You got to look at your old people. In the*

past. Now, I'm staying where the two old people used to stay. Not only me, lots of elders." Caroline Kay conveyed the same idea; Bertha Francis translated her words as such: *"She's talking about the Rat River area, to where this old couple used to be there and then, they died and then another bunch comes there and they stay there and then another bunch and... well, it's us now."* Since there are many such places known to the elders, it makes it very difficult for them to limit their selection to one place for commemoration.

Another trend that emerged when the elders were pointing to some places they consider important for their people from a historical point of view is that a great proportion of the places suggested were trails. Old time trails seem to have a very special value for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. It is easy to underestimate the amount of time the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to spend traveling throughout their land. Year after year, at particular times of the annual cycle, these trails led the Gwich'in to different areas where they harvested various resources. The trails used by the Teetl'it Gwich'in often start at places where some people had camps. Along the trails themselves there used to be places or camps where the Gwich'in used to rest, overnight or stay for some time during their trips. Some of these old time trails are not used anymore although they are well remembered. Others are still an integral part of the Teetl'it Gwich'in way of life. The elders generally felt that the beginning of their trails should be marked. Robert Alexie Sr. even suggested that the trail that starts in front of Fort McPherson and leads to Lapierre House should be re-marked.

The following is a brief description of the places the elders suggested as potential sites for commemoration. The list is long, which demonstrates how difficult it would be for the Teetl'it Gwich'in to choose only one place for commemoration. In fact, if another proposal is submitted to Parks Canada for national historic site designation, what would make more sense for the Teetl'it Gwich'in would probably be the designation of an area similar to *Nagwichoonjik* in the Gwichya Gwich'in traditional land use area. By choosing an area (as opposed to a site) that is highly significant to them in terms of history, the Teetl'it Gwich'in would not have to place one site over all the others and the relationship between all the places within the selected area would also be acknowledged. All the places suggested by the elders have been included in four categories: (1) places along the Peel River; (2) places along the Dempster Highway; (3) old time trails; and (4) other inland locations. The information about these places comes from the meeting and the interviews carried out in the context of this project. This

information was complemented from a place names report titled '*Teetl'it Gwich'in Heritage Places and Sites in the Peel River Watershed*' (Kritsch et al. 2000) and, when applicable, the corresponding number of each place name in this report is given (e.g., No.3). However, since only a brief description of each place suggested for commemoration suffice to meet the objectives of the project, not all the oral history information associated with the places is included in the following and the emphasis is placed on what the elders pointed out during the interviews.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the following is not an exhaustive list of all the places that the Teetl'it Gwich'in would consider for commemoration. The elders did not have time to give this question a lot of thought before answering. Therefore, although this list could be used as a starting point for further discussion, it should by no means be considered as conclusive. There might be other places the elders interviewed or other members of the community would like to include or remove from this list.

Peel River (Teetł it njik)

The Peel River or *Teetł it njik* is of great significance for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. It has been used for centuries if not millennia and most of the Teetl'it Gwich'in or their families have camps along the Peel River. Their parents and grandparents have used those camps before them and there are many memories and stories associated with these places. The Peel River itself is a very important trail, providing access to all these camps and to other trails that lead to different inland locations. All of the Peel River is important to the Teetl'it Gwich'in, from the Mouth of the Peel in the Mackenzie Delta up to the Ogilvie River area in the Yukon. The following description starts from those camps located in the lower Peel River and proceeds upriver.

Nagwichoo tshik (Mouth of the Peel Village)

Nagwichoo tshik (Kritsch and Andre 1994:No.41) is an old village located in the Mackenzie Delta. The Teetl'it Gwich'in used to gather there in the summer. At one point, more than forty families used the village. Fishing, trapping and moose hunting were the main subsistence activities carried out while people stayed at this place. There are many cabins still standing at Mouth of the Peel. Neil Colin is the only one who spends some time there every year.

McPherson summer and winter trails

An old time summer trail starts on the first hill (left one) across from Fort McPherson. This hill is locally known as ‘First Hill’. The Gwich’in and the HBC traders traveled on this trail when going over to Lapierre House in the Yukon. Many elders remember stories told about the travels of their parents and grandparents over the trail. There is also an old time winter trail which starts at Stony Creek. It goes from Fort McPherson over to Old Crow in the Yukon, and it passes through Lapierre House.

Nataiinlaih (Eight Miles)

Nataiinlaih (No.260), which means ‘water-flowing-out-from-all-directions’, refers to an area located eight miles from Fort McPherson. The area includes the ferry crossing on the Peel River and a small creek located in the vicinity. Many people have lived around *Nataiinlaih* before and during the elders’ time. Most people used to live on the same side of the Peel River as Fort McPherson. Up the River, about a kilometer from the ferry landing, there is a creek called *Nataiinlaih* and some people had camps (some with cabins) on both sides of this creek. There were also many people living where the ferry landing is located. *Nataiinlaih* is a fishing place and in the old days, people used to fish with a fish trap up the creek near the falls (Kritsch et al. 2000:151). Rachel Stewart mentioned that some people who were too old to travel used to stay at *Nataiinlaih* year round and go to Fort McPherson for Christmas and Easter. *Nataiinlaih* is also renowned for the several wars that were fought there by the Teetl’it Gwich’in and the Inuvialuit. Old Nell and William Husky had a cabin on the hill at *Nataiinlaih* and when William leveled the ground before building the cabin, he found arrowheads. Apparently, there used to be some burial stages at the ferry landing, where William Husky had a house (ibid.).

Nataiinlaih has been recorded as an archaeological site. It was first identified by Morrison in the summer 1983, while he was performing a reconnaissance survey in the lower Mackenzie drainage (Morrison 1983). Morrison recorded four cabin foundations and identified the place as a fish camp on the basis of the faunal evidence. More testing was carried out at the site in the summer of 2000 (Fafard 2000). Test pits were excavated around the location of William Husky’s old cabin. All the artifacts collected were Euro-Canadian items. These included shell and plastic buttons, gun shell casings, bullets, ceramic fragments, a cork stopper, a nail and metal and glass fragments. Fish and mammal faunal remains were also found.

Shìldu (Shiltee Rock)

Shìldu (No.80) is a rock formation located on a hill on the right bank of the Peel River, about 11.5 miles upriver from Fort McPherson. The site is a sacred place; the rock formation represents the remains of her brothers and their dog turned into stones when their sister, who was training to become a woman, broke the rules she was supposed to follow and looked at her brothers when they were coming back from their hunting trip (Kritsch et al. 2000:29). This place is significant for the Teetl'it Gwich'in because the rock formation and the story attached to it have existed for many hundreds of years. Today, only one large stone pillar (one brother) and a smaller pillar (the dog) are still standing. There is also an old summer trail going between *Shìldu* and Rock River. Although two elders suggested *Shìldu* for recognition, no move in that direction should be carried out without further consultation with the community. As mentioned before, *Shìldu* is a sacred place and some elders have told me that there should be no noise made around there. Thus, the intent and consequence of commemorating such a place (e.g., people would visit the site) should be well explained to the elders before any decision is made.

Tł oondih (Twenty Miles)

Tł oondih (No.81) or Twenty Miles refers to an area located on both sides of the Peel, upriver from Fort McPherson. Old Vittrekwa used to have a cabin on the left bank of the river. The people who used to live there are those who found Bishop Stringer and his companion after they got lost in the Richardson Mountains on their way to Dawson. Two trails start from Old Vittrekwa's camp. The first one is a winter portage trail heading towards the Vittrekwa River and the mountains, whereas the second trail is a summer dog pack walking trail that headed west towards the mountains to *Divu chì* ('Sheep Head'). Another portage trail is located on the other side of the river at *Tł oondih* where the Tl'oohdih Healing Camp is located. In 1996, a *ninkahn* or moss house was identified close to Old Vittrekwa's camp (Kritsch et al. 2000). The site was revisited and recorded during the summer of 2000 (Fafard 2000).

Tr'ineedlaih (Three Cabin Creek)

Tr'ineedlaih (No.125, 'Water-flowing-out) or Three Cabin Creek is located on the Peel River about 32 miles south of Fort McPherson. A small HBC store was located there in the early 1900s. William Vittrekwa, Ronnie

Pascal and Edward Snowshoe used to have cabins at this place and this is why it is called Three Cabin Creek (Kritsch et al. 2000:63-64).

Taa'aih khànìlnaii (Paddle Creek)

Taa'aih khànìlnaii (No.159) flows into the Peel River, between Caribou River and Snake River. *Taa'aih khànìlnaii* means 'Broken up paddles'; this name refers to an old time story that happened when the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit were warring against each other. In those times, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to live up the Peel River and the Inuvialuit used to go up that way to look for them. When they got around Paddle Creek, the current was so swift that they broke their paddles and they had to make new ones with birch. When the Gwich'in came down the river afterwards, they stopped at Paddle Creek and found the broken paddles left by the Inuvialuit. That's how they learned that the Inuvialuit had been there. Roy Wright was one of many people who used to stay at Paddle Creek and trap in the area (Kritsch et al. 2000:95).

Taiinlaili (Three Cabin Creek)

John A. Charlie and Old Robert George used to have a camp at *Taiinlaili* (No.139). There is also a trail starting close by a creek downriver from Old George Robert's camp, which is called *Old Robert viteetshik* or *Dau k aneedlau* (No.94). It is an old summer dog pack trail that heads into the mountains, up to *Tsih ddhàa* (Tsih Mountain). People used to hunt caribou and moose in this area.

Sheih tsoo njik (Sheh Tsoo Creek)

Sheih tsoo njik (No.104) refers to a creek below *Tr atr aatau tshik* (Trail River). About a mile upstream from there is an old summer trail which runs between the Peel River and the mountains, and leads to a hill called *Nyahshrii* (No.97).

Tr atr aatau tshik (Trail River)

Many people had cabins close to the mouth of *Tr atr aatau tshik* (No.105), including Bruno Wiedemann, Simon Snowshoe, Ernest Vittrekwa, Jim Vittrekwa, Peter Nerysoo, Abraham Alexie, Angus Firth and Abe Stewart. Robert Alexie Sr. and Walter Alexie also have cabins upriver from the mouth of Trail River. There is an old time winter trail that starts at Trail River and leads towards the Caribou Mountain Area, through Caribou River and down Mountain Creek up to the Peel River just below the Wind

River. Apparently, many people used this trail in the past including the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the NWMP. The latter used this trail as part of their patrol trail when going to Dawson City with dog teams. The Gwich'in used the trail to reach their caribou hunting area, or to go to Mayo or Dawson in the Yukon. The trail is still used today by people traveling to Caribou Mountain with snowmobiles (Kritsch et al. 2000:46).

Edigii tshik (Caribou River)

Edigii tshik (No.110) refers to a creek which flows into the Peel River. People used to gather in this area during the winter to hunt caribou and moose. Many people have cabins in this area (Kritsch et al. 2000:50-52).

Chuu tr'idaodiich'uu (Peel Canyon)

Chuu tr'idaodiich'uu (No.172) is a canyon located up the Peel River, just below the Bonnet Plume River. When the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to make mooseskin boats in the Wind River area and come down the Peel River, they had to go through *Chuu tr'idaodiich'uu*. Usually, the men went through the canyon in the boats whereas the women and the children walked along a portage trail up and across to the other side of the canyon. Men, women and children met on the other side of the canyon after the dangerous crossing and had a feast on the riverbank (Kritsch et al. 2000:172).

Tr'ineeditr'aii njik (Wind River)

People used to make mooseskin boats around the area where *Tr'ineeditr'aii njik* (No.182) flows into the Peel, after they came down from the mountains in the spring. They used the boats to travel downriver to the trading post (Kritsch et al. 2000:116-117).

Dempster Highway

There are several areas traditionally used by the Teetl'it Gwich'in through which the Dempster Highway now passes. Indeed, much of the Dempster Highway follows a traditional Teetl'it Gwich'in trail. The elders suggested a few places along the highway as places that are significant to them. They think that plaques could be erected at such locations so that tourists could learn about their culture. One of the main places is *Nataiinlaih* or Eight Miles, which is located at the Ferry Crossing. This place has been described above in the Peel River section. The other places suggested for commemoration along the highway are described below.

Midway Lake

Although Midway Lake would not meet the requirements for national historic site designation because it is a recent place, a few elders have mentioned it as a place they would like to see recognized as important to them. Midway Lake is a small lake located on the Dempster Highway about one hour from Fort McPherson, towards Eagle Plains. For the last fifteen years or so, people use the surrounding area in August as a place for a big gathering and music festival. Many Teetl'it Gwich'in families move there for a few days and set up their tents. The music festival includes jigging contests along with different kinds of musical performances and a nightly old-time fiddle dance. People feast, dance and visit one another. The intent of the Midway festival is for the Teetl'it Gwich'in to gather outside of the community in an alcohol and drug free environment.

Chii deetak (Rock River)

The place where *Chii deetak* (No.23) intersects with the Dempster highway was suggested for recognition. It is significant because of the ochre available there and because for many centuries, the Teetl'it Gwich'in have lived at Rock River and hunted caribou and moose in the area (Kritsch et al. 2000:11). Bertha Francis remembers that people used to set tents where the highway meets Rock River. She said that there are a lot of stumps in the area and that there are still some old log stages standing. Rachel Stewart also mentioned that there is a trail that starts at this place, close by a lake. People used to travel on that trail to go over to the mountains.

Jùuk'an' (Eagles Plains Area)

Jùuk'an' (No.46) refers to a range of hills located in the Eagles Plain area, close to the Dempster Highway. Apparently, the temperature is always warm in this area, even during the winter. The Teetl'it Gwich'in used to stay around this place for part of the cold season.

Vadzaih kan njik (Caribou River) and Vyah k'it gwinjik (Snare River)

According to Bertha Francis, other places right on the Dempster highway that could be worth commemorating are *Vadzaih kan njik* (No.31) and *Vyah k'it gwinjik* (No.37) because they are important caribou hunting areas. She said that her people traveled over all these areas when following the caribou.

Old Time Trails

As mentioned previously, trails appear to have a special significance for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. Many trails were pointed out by the elders as places worthy of recognition. The elders would like to see the starting point of these trails marked. Most of the trails which have specifically been mentioned by the elders start at camps located along the Peel River and have been described above. These include both the old time summer and winter trails that start in front of Fort McPherson and go over to the Yukon, the summer dog pack walking trails at *Tł oondih* and Road River, the summer trail at *Sheih tsoo tshik* and the old time winter trail starting at Trail River. Beside these trails, two others were suggested for recognition.

Tr ih zhit tagwehdu (Rat River Summer Trail)

Tr ih zhit tagwehdu (No.370) refers to both the head of a significant summer trail on a hill up the Rat River and to Destruction City, used by Klondikers during the Yukon Gold Rush. It was the farthest point that people could travel by canoe (and later scow) and from there, they had to walk overland. According to Bertha Francis, so many people have used that trail to go up into the mountains that “*the trail is kind of deep in the ground.*”

Trail between Tsiigehtchic and Fort McPherson

There used to be a dog team trail going from Tsiigehtchic to Fort McPherson. Part of the Dempster Highway follows this.

Other Inland Locations

Zheh gwatsal (Lapierre House)

Zheh gwatsal (No.22) is an old trading post located on the Bell River in the Yukon. *Zheh gwatsal* means ‘Little or small house’. Many Teetl'it Gwich'in went over there in the old days, using the old traditional summer trail which starts right in front of Fort McPherson. Apparently, many men used to transport furs for the HBC over to *Zheh gwatsal*. Lapierre House was also a gathering place for people living in different communities, including Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Mayo and Aklavik.

Ddhah zhìt han (Rat River) Area

Many Teetl'it Gwich'in have used the area around *Ddhah zhìt han* (No.1) over time. Charlie Wilson and Alfred Francis used to have their

camp in this area. Johnny Charlie also had a camp there. Up the Rat River on the flats above Bear Creek, there is an old caribou corral. It was made of wooden poles which are now rotten and lying on the ground. The corral was not very big; it was used to hunt caribou when the animals were crossing the river. The Gwich'in chased them across the stream and into the corral

Husky Channel

Several elders mentioned the Husky Channel area as one of significance to the Teetl'it Gwich'in. There are a lot of camps and cabins in this area. Mr. Arthur Blake used to have a store at the mouth of the Husky Channel and this area is still used by the Blakes. There is a place about 25 miles down the Husky Channel that is called *Ejeegwi jàanaii* (No.322). This is where the Kay family have had their camps for a very long time. *Ejeegwi jàanaii* means 'moved, changed creek'.

Tommy Clark Place

Tommy Clark Place is a camp located on the west side of the Peel Channel (Greer 1999: No.51). There used to be a Euro-Canadian man who had a store at this location. There were two buildings on the site, including a house and a store. According to Mary Teya, many Teetl'it Gwich'in visited that place during the winter and spring to get groceries, dog food and other items they needed.

Tr ih zhit tagwehdu (Destruction City)

Tr ih zhit tagwehdu (No.370), which became known as Destruction City during the Klondike gold rush, was a village where the Teetl'it Gwich'in and the miners interacted. The city is located about 25 miles up the Rat River. The river gets shallow at this point and it is impossible to go farther with a boat. In order to get to the mountains to hunt caribou and moose, the Teetl'it Gwich'in had to abandon their canoes there and walk. When this place became a village during the Klondike, it became known as Destruction City because once they arrived at this place, the miners had to take their boats apart and carry them over the mountains up to Bell River, before rebuilding the boats and continuing their journey. Many of the miners wintered at Destruction City. Some Teetl'it Gwich'in used to work for the miners and helped them to carry their material. Neil Colin was born at *Tr ih zhit tagwehdu* when the temperature was 60°C below zero (Kritsch et al. 2000:185).

Gavanjàazhii (Eagle Plains Area)

For many years, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to go down the Eagle River up to a place located about 18 miles southeast of Eagle Plains and called *Gavanjàazhii* (No.47) ('Lakes lined up between two hills'). This was a trapping area for the Teetl'it Gwich'in.

Gyuu dazhoonjik (Snake River)

Apparently in the old days the area around *Gyuu dazhoonjik* (No.161) was a gathering place for people from Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic and Fort Good Hope. They used to meet over there in the winter and play stick games. The Teetl'it Gwich'in and people from Mayo also used to gather between the Arctic Red River and the Snake River, around a hill named *Naatsik* (Kritsch and Andre 1993: No.74).

Edigii oots' aii

Edigii oo'ts' aii refers to a place located on the other side of Caribou Mountain (*Edigii*). The Teetl'it Gwich'in used to gather at a big hunting camp in this area, which is located along a winter trail. Many people used to stay at this camp around Christmas time, to hunt caribou and moose. This place is still used today by people who travel on the winter trail with snowmobile. The camp was recorded as an archaeological site in the summer of 2000 (Fafard 2000:17, MbTv-1). Among the features and artifacts recorded were an adze-cut stump, an elevated cache, a wooden snow shovel (*zhoh chik*), a grub box and various metal containers.

Vinidiinlaid (Mount Deception)

Vinidiinlaid (No.186) is a mountain located on the west side of the Wind River. This is another place where the Teetl'it Gwich'in sometimes gathered in the spring to make skin boats before going down the Peel River to meet and trade at the post. People used to stay in this area during the winter months in order to hunt caribou.

Ts ok ùtl in

Ts ok ùtl in (No.238), means 'Spruce-standing-in-arc' or 'Spruce fringe' and refers to a hill located along the Blackstone River. It is one of very few forested places in the Blackstone River area. At the beginning of the last century, the Teetl'it Gwich'in used this place regularly for camping when traveling between Dawson and the Peel River area. Walter Alexie was

born at *Ts ok ïtl in* in 1931. Alfred Bonnetplume also used to have a camp there in the 1930s (Kritsch et al. 2000:141-143).

Conclusion

Fort McPherson National Historic Site Designation

From the information collected last June in the context of this project, it is clear that the Teetl'it Gwich'in elders who attended the meeting and were interviewed feel that their people were not included in the process leading to the designation of the Fort McPherson post as a national historic site in 1969. They were not asked for input and they do not remember anyone in their community being consulted for this designation. Most of the elders attended the commemorative ceremony, but they did not really understand the purpose of the event. When the intent of a national historic site designation was explained and the text of the commemorative plaque was read to the elders, they felt that their people should have been acknowledged on the plaque. After all, the trading post is located within the traditional homeland of the Teetl'it Gwich'in and it could not have existed without them, since they played a major role in its development and maintenance.

Fort McPherson, and more specifically the hill where the post was located in the old days, is very significant for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. However, the historical significance the Gwich'in people attribute to Fort McPherson varies from the explanation provided on the plaque. Fort McPherson is important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in because it has been a major gathering location for their people in the past. It has also been a place of encounter between the Teetl'it Gwich'in and other people such as the Inuvialuit and other Gwich'in groups. Moreover, the town was an important commercial center and the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to trade various products they gathered on the land with the HBC, in exchange for Euro-Canadian items. Religion was important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in and this is why in the past, they used to coordinate their trips to Fort McPherson with major religious events such as Christmas and Easter. Finally, the location of the old town is also important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in because of its aesthetic value. The hill overlooks the Peel River and the Richardson Mountains and provides them with a spectacular view of their country.

In terms of future management of the site, the priority for the Teetl'it Gwich'in is to have another plaque made that would reflect their participation in the life of the town and present the reasons why this place is

important to them. Most of the elders would like to leave the old plaque and make another that would represent only their perspective. They want the Gwich'in version of the text written at the top of the plaque with an English and a French version following. Everyone also agreed about the fact that the location of the plaque should be changed. The plaque is now hidden behind the mission hall; the elders suggested it could be moved close to the entrance to the church, where everyone could see it. They would put the second plaque beside the old one. The elders also expressed some concerns about the protection of the site. They would like this place to be left as it is, so that the features that are historically significant to them (e.g., the landing place, the hauling path) are preserved. Finally, the elders are very interested in having more archaeological work carried out at the site.

Recommendations for the Fort McPherson National Historic Site

- (1) A new plaque representing the Teetl'it Gwich'in perspective should be made as soon as possible to acknowledge the role played by their people in the life of Fort McPherson and the significance of this place for them.
- (2) Before a new plaque is made, further consultation with the community should be undertaken in order to decide what should be written on the plaque. It is suggested that the current community steering committee made of knowledgeable Teetl'it Gwich'in elders and a representative from the Teetl'it Gwich'in Council continue this work along with representatives from Parks Canada, the Hamlet, Anglican Church, Northern Store and GSCI. This committee could be responsible for drafting the text and then submitting it for comment to the wider community. This consultation could be carried out during community meetings, with prior notice provided through the local radio station and the Teetl'it Gwich'in monthly newsletter. Alongside the process, more information should be provided to the community about national historic site designations and the possibilities and limitations concerning this designation.
- (3) The location of the plaque(s) should be moved to a place where it would be more visible. The elders suggested the entrance to the church as a potential location. Robert Alexie Sr. also suggested that some metal poles be placed on each side of the plaques to protect the latter from collisions with vehicles such as snowmobiles.
- (4) The concerns of the elders about the protection of the site should be addressed with the relevant authorities to insure that no disturbing activities are engaged without prior consultation. For example, in 1999 a

playground was excavated north of the Anglican Church and disturbed archaeological material. No such initiatives should be undertaken before the members of the community have been informed and given a chance to voice their comments and/or concerns about the intended project.

- (5) Funding should be allowed for more archaeological work to be carried out in the area of the site. All the elders interviewed are very favorable to this kind of work and think it has real educational potential. Moreover, exploratory work carried out in the summer of 2000 revealed that the site is very rich and warrants more work (Fafard 2000). The excavation of the site could provide interpretative material for the designation of Fort McPherson. The location of the site also provides an excellent opportunity to educate the Teetl'it Gwich'in about archaeology and to involve them in the reconstruction of their history.
- (6) The above recommendations should not be considered as final but as a starting point to commemorating the Fort McPherson National Historic Site.

Other Potential Sites for Commemoration

During preliminary work aimed at gathering information about other places that are historically significant for the Teetl'it Gwich'in and that could eventually be submitted for national historic site designation, the elders have suggested many places. Most of these are camps where people have lived, generation after generation, or the traditional trails through which many people have traveled. A majority of these places are located along the Peel River, although there are also several inland locations that are historically significant for the Teetl'it Gwich'in. Several sites along the Dempster Highway have also been mentioned as being worthy of recognition. This is interesting since commemorative plaques at these locations could represent attractions for the growing number of tourists using the Dempster Highway and help to educate them about the Teetl'it Gwich'in culture and history.

Recommendations

- (1) The list of sites suggested by the elders and included in this report should not be considered as final. Before any decision is taken about the submission of another site for designation, there should be more investigation done concerning places that people would like to commemorate. In this context, carrying on a place names project in the

Mackenzie Delta area and in inland areas occupied by the Teetl'it Gwich'in would be very useful. So far, information about named places and the oral history attached to them has mainly been collected along the stretch of the Peel River between Fort McPherson and the Wind River and in some inland areas (Kritsch et al. 2000). Last June, the elders made it clear that they feel it is urgent to pursue the place names and traditional land use research.

- (2) Before any step is taken towards the designation of another site within Teetl'it Gwich'in lands, it would be useful for Parks Canada to organize an information session in order to familiarize the Teetl'it Gwich'in with the concept of national historic sites. This would enable people to become aware of the intent and implications of such a designation before deciding whether or not they want to designate a site and if yes, which one(s).
- (3) If the Teetl'it Gwich'in decide they want to submit another site for designation, they need to be involved in all steps of the designation process. The whole community should also be informed about the progress of the application and given a chance to express ideas and/or concerns. The Teetl'it Gwich'in were excluded from the designation of Fort McPherson in the 1970s and special care must be taken so that they feel that this project is theirs.

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Appendix A - Schedule of the Fieldwork carried out in June

Sunday June 17th, 2001

Ingrid Kritsch and Mélanie Fafard flew to Inuvik late in the afternoon and stayed over night here.

Monday June 18th, 2001

Mélanie went to the Aurora Research Institute (ARI) in order to get the research license for the project. Ingrid and Alestine had various meetings to attend throughout the day. In the afternoon, they met with Alan Fehr at the Parks Canada Office to discuss the project, among other things. The three of them took a taxi to Fort McPherson early in the evening.

Tuesday June 19th, 2001

From 9:00 to 16:00 Ingrid, Alestine and Mélanie held a group meeting with eight elders and a representative from the Teetl'it Gwich'in Band Council at the Band Office.

Wednesday June 20th, 2001

Early in the morning, Ingrid, Alestine and Mélanie met to discuss the interview checklist. At 9:00, the three of them plus Bertha Francis went to the house of Jane Charlie to carry out the first individual interview. In the afternoon, Ingrid and Alestine interviewed both William and Mary Teya at their house. Bertha and Mélanie interviewed Neil Colin at the Band Office. The four of them had a meeting at Bertha's house in the evening, to prioritize and decide on who to interview given the time available.

Thursday June 21st, 2001

In the morning, Ingrid, Alestine, Bertha and Mélanie went with Robert Alexie Sr. to visit the place where the Teetl'it Gwich'in used to camp in the past during their annual visit to the Fort. Robert pointed different features of importance to the Teetl'it Gwich'in. Following the visit, all returned to Robert's house to conduct an interview with him. In the afternoon, Ingrid and Alestine interviewed Walter Alexie and Bertha and Mélanie interviewed Rachel Stewart. At 18:30, Ingrid, Alestine and Mélanie did a slide presentation of the Peel River Ethno-Archaeology Project 2000 at the Band Office.

Friday June 22nd, 2001

In the morning, Ingrid and Alestine interviewed Abe Stewart and Bertha and Mélanie interviewed Jim Vittrekwa. During the afternoon, Bertha and Mélanie interviewed Caroline Kay. Ingrid, Alestine and Bertha had a meeting at the Language Center late in the afternoon. Following the meeting, Ingrid and Alestine took a taxi to Tsiigehtchic, where they had some work to do for the GSCI. Mélanie interviewed Bertha Francis at her house in the early evening.

Saturday June 23rd, 2001

No interviews were carried out on this day. Ingrid and Alestine were in Tsiigehtchic, Bertha had a free day and Mélanie started to work on the transcription of the interviews.

Sunday June 24th, 2001

Bertha and Mélanie took a taxi to Inuvik in the morning. On their way, they picked Ingrid up at Tsiigehtchic. Ingrid flew back to Yellowknife late in the afternoon. Before supper, Bertha and Mélanie interviewed Eunice Mitchell in their room at the Eskimo Hotel.

Monday June 25th, 2001

Bertha and Mélanie met with Robert Simpson at the Beaufort Delta Self-Government Office in the morning. In the afternoon, they interviewed Mrs. Sarah Simon at the Inuvik Regional Hospital.

Tuesday June 26th, 2001

Bertha took a taxi back to Fort McPherson early in the afternoon. Mélanie flew back to Edmonton.

Appendix B - Individual Interviews Checklist

Mains themes

- A- Background Information about Interviewee
- B- Actual Designation of Fort McPherson
- C- Importance of Site/Stories about Fort McPherson (including Inuvialuit graveyard)
- D- Measures to be taken with the Site
- E- Other Potential Sites for Designation

A- Background Information

- What is your name?
- When and where were you born?
- What is the name of your parents?
- Where did you and your parents live when you were young?
- Did you go to school?
- Who did you marry? When? Where?
- How many children did you have?
- What is their name?

B- Actual Designation of Site

- Before the meeting, did you know that Fort McPherson was designated as a National Historic Site?
- Do you think most people in McPherson know about it?
- Do you remember why Fort McPherson was designated?
- Do you remember when it was designated?
- Did you know that there is a commemorative plaque for the town?
- Did you know where it was?
- Did you know what it says?
- What do you think about what's written on the plaque?
- Do you remember who built the monument at the place the plaque was erected?

- Did you take part in the commemorative ceremony that took place north of the church when the plaque was erected?
- What did you think about all this at the time?
- Were you asked for input about this designation?
- Do you remember if other people from the community were consulted for this designation before the plaque was erected?
- Do you remember who translated the text that is on the plaque in Gwich'in?

C- Importance of Site/Stories

- Do you remember any stories about when the Gwich'in met the White man?
- Back in those days when people came in town, where did they stay?
- Do you think this place important for the Teetl'it Gwich'in?
- Does this place have a name in Gwich'in?
- How did people travel to McPherson in those days?
- Where were they coming from?
- When and why did people come to McPherson?
- What did they bring with them for trading?
- What did they get in exchange for those?
- Are there any stories that you've heard about this place?
- Do you know anything about other groups who came to McPherson (Inuvialuit, Slavey, Mayo people)?
- Do you know something about the Inuvialuit burial (where, how many, how did they die, when)?
- Where were the Gwich'in buried in the old days? When in McPherson? When out on the land?
- Have you heard any stories about the flu epidemics?

D- Measures to be taken with the Site

- What would you like to do with this place?
- Do you think we should leave the old plaque?
- Do you think we should make another one that explains the Gwich'in perspective?

- What did you think about us digging between the church and the northern store last summer?
- Did you ever find anything there, while playing or with the school?
- What did you find?
- What happened with these things?
- Do you know of any people who found something at that place?
- Which office/organization/people should we work with about this side?

E- Other Places/Areas that could be Suggested for Designation

- If you think about all your land and think of other places that you would like to suggest for recognition, which one(s) would you pick?
- Where is it?
- Does it have a Gwich'in name?
- Who was there?
- When and why did people go there?
- Is this place still used?
- Do you remember stories about that place?
- What structures or other cultural materials (if any) are here?