

**Repatriating Traditional Gwich'in Skills and Knowledge 2006—2007:
*Report on a Pilot Project with Gwich'in Elders from Fort McPherson***



Eunice Mitchell at the workshop

March 2007

**Prepared by:
Natasha Lyons**

Department of Archaeology, University of Calgary
Contracted to the Gwich'in Social & Cultural Institute

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Acknowledgements

We would like to warmly thank the Gwich'in Elders of Fort McPherson for their participation in this pilot project. We would additionally like to thank Eddie Wright and Sharon Snowshoe for their roles in organizing the workshop. Sharon Snowshoe and Mary Clarke graciously helped with the visuals for the workshop. Eleanor Mitchell Firth ably interpreted and transcribed the Gwich'in terms that appear in this report. A delicious lunch was provided by Ellen Wilson. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Government of the Northwest Territories Repatriation Fund, who supported this beginning phase of the project.

Introduction:

As each generation of Elders passes, knowledge about traditional Gwich'in land use and livelihood is lost. One avenue to reclaiming some of this knowledge is by repatriating skills and knowledge back to Gwich'in communities. This process involves facilitating the process of Gwich'in Elders re-learning or re-discovering skills that they witnessed or used in their younger decades, in order to re-produce traditional items and teach these skills to younger Gwich'in. Repatriating traditional skills and knowledge has been a focus of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) for several years, resulting in the highly successful, multi-year *Gwich'in Traditional Caribou Skin Clothing Project* (Kritsch 2001; Kritsch and Wright-Fraser 2002; Thompson and Kritsch 2005).

The present project has served as a pilot project to determine which traditional skills and knowledge Gwich'in Elders are interested in repatriating. The facilitators brought together six Elders from Fort McPherson, one of four Gwich'in communities, to participate in a one-day workshop. The workshop was organized and run by researchers at the GSCI, including Alestine Andre and Kristi Benson, in collaboration with archaeologist/oral historian Natasha Lyons, of the University of Calgary. The first objective of the workshop was to document Elders' interpretations and stories of different categories of Gwich'in material culture. The latter objective was to have the Elders focus on certain objects—and their associated skill set—that they would be interested in re-producing. Towards the end of the workshop, the Elders decided upon repatriating the skills and knowledge associated with caribou leg skins (a rectangle of caribou hide with short, sturdy hair that is removed from the lower leg of the caribou, generally the lower hind legs). The next phase of the project will be to develop a research design to produce a caribou leg skin bag (Edreedhoh chyah) and sled under the direction of Gwich'in Elders, and to turn involve Gwich'in youth in the process of re-learning the skills associated with their manufacture.

This report describes the pilot repatriation project, beginning with the original planning and preparation stages. It then turns to an account of the workshop. The main body of the report recounts the Elders' responses to the different categories of material culture objects and photographs that were presented to the Elders for discussion. The Elders' names for and descriptions of the items that they were familiar with are recorded, as well as a description of the materials and skills required to produce them, where known. Other anecdotal information, such as stories related to certain objects, is also recorded. The final section of the report describes the Fort McPherson Elders' decision about which items they wished to focus on, the materials and tools required to produce these objects, and an approximate timeline from harvest and processing

of materials to assembly. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the Gwich'in words used by the Elders to name the objects and their components discussed during the workshop. These were interpreted and transcribed during the workshop by Eleanor Mitchell Firth. Photographs of the workshop presented in this report were taken by Natasha Lyons. Figures from museum collections are referenced individually.

Preparation for Pilot Project

This project was inspired by the success of the *Caribou Skin Clothing Project*, and by a continuing interest by the GSCI to repatriate traditional skills and knowledge to Gwich'in communities. Originally, Kristi Benson and Natasha Lyons began a correspondence about the prospects for initiating a project that would engage Gwich'in Elders with traditional material culture objects and skills, similar to Lyons' (2005, 2006a, 2006b, forthcoming) work with the Inuvialuit. After securing funding from the Northwest Territories Repatriation Fund, Benson and Lyons began to plan for the pilot project.

Using *A Guide to Northern Athapaskan and Métis Collections Residing in Museums and Archives Outside of the Northwest Territories* (Kritsch and Kreps 1997), Lyons located various museum collections across Canada that housed Gwich'in ethnological and archaeological objects. For the purposes of the pilot, it was determined that copies of objects, in the form of photographs, would suffice to trigger the Elders' memories and recall of traditional objects. Lyons downloaded all available photographs of Gwich'in and Dene material culture from the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (Yellowknife, NT) and McCord Museum (Montreal) online collections. Both museum collections had photographs of ethnological objects, while the PWNHC also had archival photos from the Gwich'in region. Lyons also contacted and met with the Curator of Public Archaeology, Susan Rowley, from the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC. They spent a day together perusing Dene objects that may have derived from the Gwich'in region, but the photographs were not sent in time for the workshop.

Meanwhile, Benson and Andre located additional objects deemed to be useful for the workshop. These included a caribou leg skin mattress and a set of miniature traditional Gwich'in objects (pictured in the next section) produced by Robert Francis. Together, the facilitators planned the agenda and organization of the workshop, and, with the help of the GSCI in Fort McPherson, contacted Fort McPherson Elders, and booked the food, space, and videographer.

Pilot Project Narrative

The day-long repatriation of skills workshop was held in the council chambers of the Fort McPherson hamlet office. The facilitators included Alestine Andre and Kristi Benson of the GSCI, and Natasha Lyons, of the University of Calgary. Alestine chaired the workshop and Natasha served as recorder. Sharon Snowshoe, of the GSCI, took still photographs, and Mary Clarke, of the Gwich'in Language Project, shot a video of the session (figure 1). Eddy Wright and Sharon Snowshoe did the booking and organizing.



Figure 2. Research facilitators (L to R) Alestine Andre, Mary Clarke, Sharon Snowshoe, and Kristi Benson

Seven Gwich'in Elders took part in the repatriation workshop held at Fort McPherson, on the 22nd of March 2007. They include Mary Firth, Dorothy Alexie, Alice Blake, Eunice Mitchell, Neil Colin, and Walter Alexie. Eleanor Mitchell-Firth served as an interpreter and transcriber for Gwich'in terms (figure 2), which are listed in Appendix 1 and used in the following text. The Elders were paid a \$300 honorarium for their participation in the day long workshop. Where cited directly, the Elders' words are referenced

either by their full names or initials in the report.

The workshop began with a prayer, and then Alestine Andre introduced the pilot project. She started by discussing the steps and procedures involved in the previous *Caribou Skin Clothing Project*, describing how 38 seamstresses were involved in the production of five outfits, which are now displayed in Gwich'in communities and the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. She suggested that 'repatriation' refers to re-claiming knowledge and/or returning objects, such as Gwich'in material culture from southern museums. In the present context, it involves



Figure 2. Fort McPherson Elders Neil Colin, far left, Eunice Mitchell, centre, and interpreter Eleanor Mitchell Firth

re-learning and re-teaching skills that few (or no) people remember in Gwich'in communities.

Natasha Lyons followed Alestine's explanation with a description of the work she has been doing over the past several years with Inuvialuit. This research involves bringing archaeological artifacts excavated on the Yukon North Slope into Inuvialuit communities and having Elders identify and interpret them. This work has explored Inuvialuit conceptions of history and the material record, yielding explanations of traditional objects that are distinct from archaeological interpretations.

We next turned to the objects and photographs that had been brought to show the Elders. Miniatures (n=8, figure 3) produced by Robert Francis were passed around to the Elders one by one, so they could handle, examine, and comment on them. The Elders discussed the uses of each



Figure 3. Miniature Gwich'in objects produced by Robert Francis and used in the FMP workshop

object, named them and their constituent parts in Gwich'in, and described, if known, how they were traditionally manufactured. The Elders also told stories a number of stories that helped situate these objects in a historical context. Some of these are recorded below; all are available on videotape taken of the workshop, shot by Mary Clarke.

We discussed four of the miniatures and then broke for lunch. A delicious lunch of caribou soup, bannock, crackers, cheese, fruit, vegetables, pie, coffee and tea, was provided by Ellen Wilson. It was extremely hot in the boardroom of the Fort McPherson hamlet building, so we turned on the fan and many people went into the foyer to cool off. We re-convened at 1pm, but had several additional breaks because of the heat.

When all the miniatures had been discussed, the facilitators passed a series of thematically organized photographs around to the Elders (n=9 themes). Examples of these themes included beaded skin and 'fancy' bags, quillwork, leggings, coats etc. Some photographs were specifically of the objects themselves, others, particularly from the Prince of Wales collection, were archival photographs of Gwich'in people wearing, using, or making traditional items. Because many of these objects had been labeled generically in various museum databases as 'Dene,' the Elders had little comment on the items that were from 'upriver'. They clearly

recognized items produced in Gwich'in territory and commented on them, as described in the following section.

When the Elders had viewed all of the objects and photographs, and discussed each in turn, we asked each of them each select an object or suite of associated objects that they wished to repatriate to the Gwich'in community. We compiled a list of their choices, and they noted who had the skills and knowledge in their community to re-produce these objects. We then asked them to decide amongst themselves upon an object and associated skill set to repatriate to their community. We left them alone to make their decision. Following their deliberation, we discussed the materials, tools, and timeline required to produce the object(s) they had chosen. These processes are described in more detail in the following sections.

Skills & Artifacts discussed

This section describes a series of traditional artifacts and skills discussed by Gwich'in Elders during the pilot workshop at Fort McPherson. The Elders had variable knowledge of each object or skill, discussing traditional names, components, and steps of manufacture to the best of their memories and abilities. The objects and skills are presented in the order they were discussed in the workshop. Gwich'in terms are provided for artifacts, tools, and components parts, where known.

Caribou leg skin mattress (edreedhoh chyah)

This item was brought to Alestine Andre by Sonny Blake in the fall of 2006, who had retrieved it from the Tsiigehtchic dump. It is a mattress



Figure 4. Eunice Mitchell takes a closer look at a caribou leg skin mattress

pad or rug made of approximately 80 rear caribou leg skins, 14 long by 5 wide, sewed lengthwise (figure 4). Additional leg skins are sewed widthwise along the top and bottom borders. It was sewn with babiche (thil) and sinew (khaniidoo). Elders pointed out that it was sewed from the fur side, that is, when the skins were joined, the two skin sides were sewed facing each other.

The Elders suggested that you could sleep or sit on it. Walter Alexie said you had to keep it clean and therefore removed your footwear when you came inside.

Snowshoes (Aih)

These miniature snowshoes are models of traditional Gwich'in snowshoes. The Elders

discussed the various parts. The frame is usually made of birch (aat'oo). Neil Colin said that the grain needs to be straight to make good snowshoes. To test for straight grain, you strip the bark of a birch tree and if it strips in a straight line, the grain will be straight as well. The three cross bars that provide strength to the frame are also made from birch. The inner lacing is done with 'skinny babiche' (skinny babiche), which needs to be as thin as possible (WA, DA). The foot strap (aih ch'yaa) is made from either caribou skin or the edge of a moose skin (the term Akaii laii is also used for the place where the foot goes).

There are several tools needed to produce snowshoes. These include an awl, a drill (shał), and weaving needle or shuttle (aih vał), and a curved carving knife (eg. a knife with a curved blade for shaping the frames; dachan srii) (WA). The crooked knife was used to shape the frames once they were steamed and bent; the drill was used to make holes in the frame; the needle or shuttle for sewing the lacing; and the awl for punching holes in the babiche. The frames of ladies' and children's snowshoes were often coloured with ochre (called tsaih; the Elders also noted that ochre was used to colour wolverine skin and caribou skin pants). They added that when you collect ochre, you should leave coins or matches as thanks.

Gwich'in Elder Robert Francis is still repairing old snow shoes. The Elders (particularly NC) said that hunting equipment like snow shoes could be curated over and over and thus used for a long time. These old things could also be used to show and teach younger generations how traditional technologies were produced.

Dog whip (Łaii viitrii)

The Elders talked about the process of making dog whips. The miniature model, like the larger ones, has two main parts: a braided whip and wooden handle lashed together with babiche (figure 5). The whip itself is made of several strands of leather (made from cleaned raw caribou skin, aajii), braided (diinaht'yah) at the upper end around a tube filled with shot (diik'ee ts'al) to make it heavy. This end inserts into the handle (Łaii viitrii tai') and is lashed with babiche. The tail-end of the whip grows thinner towards the end and is knotted with the end strands left free. The handle is generally made of birch (aat'oh). Some whips had coloured ribbon or wool



Figure 5. Mary Firth inspects a miniature dogwhip

(warsdit) braided or arranged around the whip-end of the handle to make them ‘fancy.’ Walter Alexie said he’d seen occasions where the handle was charred to shape it specifically for the user’s hand.

It was noted that whips are not generally used to whip the dogs, but to make an echoing crack and other sounds that tell the dogs when and where to move. Whips were also used for games. If the dogs were good enough, the sled-driver did not use a whip but guided by voice. Neil Colin’s mother and father used to make whips. Today, William Charlie of Fort McPherson still knows how to make them.



Figure 6. Alice Blake holds a miniature caribou leg skin bag

Caribou leg skin bag (Edreedhoh uhchuh)

Caribou leg skin bags were traditionally carried on a toboggan to hold food—such as bone grease, dry meat, and/or bannock—or other goods. The Elders suggested that the bags are normally up to a metre long by 50-70cm wide, made so they fit snug in a toboggan. Because they are made of caribou leg skins, which are stiff and sewn together hair-side out, they hold their shape (figure 6). The border is made of scraped moose skin (dinjik dhoh) or caribou skin (aajii). The lacing and strap (khah deet’yaa), made of the same, are used, respectively, to keep the bag closed and to carry it. Neil Colin suggested

that these bags were usually left outside, but should be stored high, on a stage, so the dogs wouldn’t eat them.

Caribou leg skin sled (Edreedhoh vał thoh)

Caribou leg skin sleds were traditionally used by Gwich’in to pack belongings during winter travel. Not as big as toboggans, they were often pulled by people rather than dogs. These sleds were approximately 2m in length, though Dorothy Alexie had seen one 4m in length that was pulled by dogs.



Figure 7. Miniature caribou leg skin sled

Like the caribou leg skin bags, caribou leg skin sleds were constructed with the hair-side out, which was extremely slippery on the ice and snow. The main body was made of caribou leg skins, and sometimes moose leg skins, sewn together (figure 7). The rim of the sled was made of tanned moose skin (dinjik dhoh di' nadhi'ee). The lacing at the rim of the sled (vitl'yaa) and the bag strap (khah deet'yaa) were made of raw cleaned caribou skin (aajii). The rope on the sled wrapper was made of braided babiche (tlyah nilt'yaa). People packed belongings, such as their pots and pans, in these sleds, and sometimes people rode in them. Kids enjoyed taking them sliding when empty, though parents discouraged this because it expedites the hair wearing off (this discussion reminded Mary Firth how she used to slide down snowy hills wearing her rabbit skin parka).

Snow shovel

Large snow shovels used by the Gwich'in were approximately 1.5 long. They were made of dry wood, such as spruce. A skin 'handle' was attached at the base of the shovel blade where it met the handle; this loop was made of skin. The shoveler would place one hand at the end of the handle, the other grasping the loop, when shoveling. Smaller shovels, more like scoops or large spoons, were also made of wood. These were used while people were traveling in the mountains to eat pemmican or bone grease (EM). Larger shovels were used to clear a flat spot for a tent or to dig for crystal snow (sugar snow) to be melted for potable water.

Netting needle



Figure 8. Dorothy Alexie examines a netting needle while Neil Colin tells a story

Netting needles were used for making or backing fish nets produced from twine, string, nylon, or formerly, natural fibres. Needles were made of birch or spruce, the former preferred because it is harder. The netting needle is a long thin implement with a rounded end coming to a point and a blunt end with a notch in it. The centre of the rounded end is carved out leaving a needle for looping the twine and sewing the net (figure 8).

A groove is notched partway down the implement. The net-maker wraps the twine or nylon around this notch as a measure for the net's gauge. The Elders described different net gauges for different sizes of fish. 'Three' wraps was used for whitefish and coney; 'four' wraps for herring; and '5-½' wraps for large fish such as loche and crookedback.

Antler fishhooks

Robert Francis made several traditional style fishhooks that the Elders perused. They were made of antler, formed into the shape of a whale, with an antler barb snugged into a drilled hole at the 'head' end (figure 9). Gwich'in Elders suggested that fishhooks like this were (and still are) used for 'jiggling', or ice fishing, for such species as loche. They could also be set under the ice.



Figure 9. Traditional style antler fishhook in the shape of a seal

Toboggan

This toboggan was a scale model of a traditional type pulled by dogs (figure 10). The frame and handles would have been made of birch, and the frame covered over with a moose skin wrapper. The wood would be soaked in a 10 or 25 gallon drum, and then bent into shape. The Elder suggested that you could make your wrapper 'fancy' by staining it with ochre. The dogs were harnessed single file out front with a line running down each side. This style of toboggan might be pulled by as many as 6 or 7 dogs, 'as many as you got!'



Figure 10. Walter Alexie and Mary Firth discuss a scale model of a traditional toboggan

The Fort McPherson Elders noted that people from Old Crow were really good at driving toboggans, and were able to guide their dogs through the trees. Neil Colin added that toboggans needed to be stored up high, such as on a stage, so the dogs wouldn't eat the wrapper.

Porcupine quillwork

A series of photographs of porcupine quillwork was passed around to the Gwich'in Elders (porcupine quills are ch'oo in Gwich'in). These are photos from museum collections that have poor provenience. They are labeled

generically, eg. as 'Dene,' and may derive may from various subarctic groups. The Elders did not recognize any of the proffered photos.

Rabbit skin parka (Geh ik) & pants (Geh thał)



Figure 11. Rabbitskin suit worn by a young Gwich'in boy (PWNHC 1979-004-0088)

This photograph, showing a small boy wearing a rabbit skin suit (figure 11), was enjoyed by the Elders, who recognized the clothing. Neil Colin's grandmother used to make these outfits, composed of a rabbit skin parka (geh ik) and pants (geh thał). Dorothy Alexie says you cut the skins into strips and knit them together. Mary Firth's mother used to knit them. Eunice Mitchell added that you cut the skins from the rabbit's eyes to its feet, tie the skin to a board, and put it in the wind to soften. Mary Firth and Alice Blake were not certain how many skins it took to make an entire outfit; Walter Alexie guessed twenty skins.

When Alestine Andre asked if anyone knew how to make these garments, Eunice described the cutting process in Gwich'in, but was not certain about manufacture. Dorothy Alexie and Mary Firth suggested that after the sewing is complete and the garment is still wet, you stretch it until it fits the body. This must be done before it is dry so it is form fit. Other Elders remembered people

making rabbit skin hats (geh ts'eh) and blankets (geh ts'at). Eunice Mitchell knew an old woman that wore rabbit skin hats.

Birchbark canoe (K'ii tr'ih)

Two photos of canoes were circulated. The Elders suggested that the canoe in one photograph—paddled by a Dene family with their dogs—was commercially manufactured. A second photo shows a rough



Figure 12. Frame for a birchbark or skin canoe (PWHNC 1979-062-0210)

frame of a canoe (figure 12). Walter Alexie mentioned that there is a good stand of spruce for canoe framing (ts'iivii) around the Peel Canyon. Walter himself hadn't built them, but people of his generation had. The canoe frame in the photograph could be used for a birchbark (birch is aat'oo in Gwich'in) or skin boat.

Moose/caribou skin leggings

The Elders recognized these garments from the photographs, saying that they had been used before their time, by their grandparents' generation. They were originally made with leather and sinew, and later with stroud (EM), a heavy woolen material traded from Europe. Men wore them in cold weather over their pants. Walter Alexie was small when he last saw leggings worn.

Caribou skin coats & pants



Figure 13. Small boy wearing a caribou skin garment (PWNHC 1979-062-0210)

Photographs of various types of coats were circulated among the Elders. One was a coat made from a Hudson's Bay blanket. Another few were buckskin coats with fringes, beading, and other adornment. These styles of coat were not recognized by the Elders. However, Walter Alexie gave a name for the caribou skin outfit worn by a small child (figure 13), calling the pants dazhoo thał (meaning caribou skin pants with skin on), and the top dazhoo ik (caribou skin top with hair on)

Working spruce roots & bark

The Elders examined a photograph of two women splitting spruce roots and bark with interest. They suggested that the women were making cord that could be used for ropes and fasteners of various kinds. For instance, such cord might be used to tie a birchbark canoe to the shore. Long ago, they added, Gwich'in also made birchbark baskets (k'ii ch'ik).

Skin and 'fancy' bags

A series of photographs of bags of different sizes, shapes, materials, and designs were circulated among the Elders. They commented on one only, a 'bunting bag' (ch'il ts'ik) to hold an infant. This bag is made of black velvet with floral beaded embroidery (figure 14; beads are nagaii in Gwich'in). The fastener or lacing is made from caribou skin. The Elders translated the Gwich'in term for this bag into English as 'skinny diaper.'

It would be used until the baby crawled. In the McCord Museum catalogue, this object is listed as a ‘moss bag.’

Mooseskin boat

The Elders perused a photo of a large mooseskin boat, like those used before the widespread use of commercially manufactured boats. Traditionally, mooseskin boats were used all over the Dene region—among the Gwich’in, Slavey, and Dogrib. Neil Colin told a story about the last use of these boats ca. 1927. He said that Chief Julius had a boat made of sixteen skins, and Peter Neyando had one made of fourteen. When the steamboat came upriver for the first time, it whistled and the people and dogs went running to hide at the sound of the noise. Later on, it would cost 50 cents to ride from Fort McPherson to Fort Smith to pick up supplies at the store, such as loose flour and tea. Neil added that William Nerysoo’s grandmother made pants for him out of flour sacks so it read ‘Robin Hood’ across his bum!



Figure 14. Historic period bunting bag (McCord Museum M4993)

After the photographs and miniatures had been circulated and discussed, we asked the Elders if any items or skills had been missed. Neil Colin had a list: fur mitts; beaver/muskrat hats; items made from wolf skin; dog’s blankets; bow and arrows; and, dog’s harnesses.

Additional items

After the photographs and miniatures had been circulated and discussed, we asked the Elders if any items or skills had been missed. Neil Colin had a list: fur mitts; beaver/muskrat hats; items made from wolf skin; dog’s blankets; bow and arrows; and, dog’s harnesses.

The Elders’ Decision

We asked the Elders and other workshop participants individually what items and accompanying skills they would like to see produced and repatriated to the Gwich’in community. Their responses are as follows:

- *Walter Alexie*: snowshoes, dog whips
- *Mary Firth*: dog harness; caribou skin mitts lined with fur
- *Dorothy Alexie*: down clothes (eg. feather pants)
- *Neil Colin*: ‘hunting gear’—(sinew-backed) bow and arrow, caribou hooves for shakers, snow goggles
- *Eunice Mitchell*: raw caribou skin bags

- *Eleanor Mitchell Firth*: dog whip (she mentioned that they could interest young boys in making these); sled wrapper with caribou leg skins
- *Alice Blake*: snowshoes (she mentioned that there are different types—hunting snowshoes, for instance, are 5 ½' long)
- *Sharon Snowshoe*: rabbit skin clothing
- *Mary Clarke*: rabbit skin clothing, moose skin boat

We next asked the Elders *who* had the knowledge and skills to produce these items in the Gwich'in community. Their responses were as follows:

- *Dog whip*: William Charlie, Robert Francis, Charlie Charlie, Johnny Charlie
- *Caribou leg skin bag*: Mary Firth, Eunice Mitchell, Tabitha Nerysoo, Alice Blake, Elizabeth Mitchell, Dorothy Alexie
- *Caribou leg skin matt/rug*: same women as above
- *Rabbit skin clothing/blanket*: No one in the Gwich'in community; Kristi mentioned that this knowledge might be held by women upstream, like the Sahtu. Eunice Mitchell knows how to make rabbit skin blankets.
- *Bunting bag*: Betty Ann Vittrekwa-Firth, Jane Charlie
- *Caribou leg skin wrapper for toboggan*: Robert Francis

After these discussions, we decided to have the Fort McPherson Elders deliberate amongst themselves and decide on an item and associated skill for repatriation to the community. After a short time, perhaps five minutes, they informed us that they'd come to consensus. They had decided on the caribou leg skin bag (edreedhoh uhchuh) and caribou leg skin sled (edreedhoh vał thoh) sewn with traditional sinew and babiche.

Materials & Timeline

We next focused on assessing the materials and tools needed to produce the caribou leg skin bag and sled, and the timeline and procedures required for collection and processing of materials, and assembly of the items.

Materials:

Caribou leg skins: an estimated 7 caribou are needed to produce a caribou leg skin bag; these can be made from the shorter front legs although usually they would be constructed from the hind legs. An estimated 40 caribou are needed to produce the sled, which requires 80

back legs (the front are too short). The caribou should be harvested in fall time, when their hair is short. September or October is ideal, when the coat is really tough.

Raw caribou skins: raw caribou skins are needed for the bottom of the caribou leg skin bag. These can be taken from the hides harvested for leg skins.

Moose skin: tanned moose skin is needed for the border of the caribou leg skin bag and sled. An estimated ¼ moose is required for one bag. This material can be purchased.

Caribou skin babiche: moose or braided caribou skin babiche can be used for the laces and pull-strap of the caribou leg skin sled. This can be made from the fall caribou harvested for leg skins.

Sinew: sinew is required to sew the leg skins together and assemble all the parts for both the bag and sled. Sinew can be produced from the backstrap of caribou harvested for leg skins. The meat needs to be cleaned off and then the backstrap cut very carefully. It needs about a week to dry before it is worked. With a group working together, the Elders estimated that the sinew might take a couple of days to produce.

Tools: The Elders specified the following tools needed for processing and assembly of the caribou leg skin bag and sled: glover's needles, thimbles, scissors, files, and small paring knives.

Timeline:

The entire process from harvest to production of the caribou leg skin bag and sled could be accomplished in a single fall and winter. In the fall time, a call would be put out to hunters for forty caribou. A person would be hired by the project to prepare the hides. A least one bull would be needed to produce the raw skins for the bottom of the bag and the rope/fastener. The caribou skin legs, after preparation, need to be hung outside to dry for about a week. It was generally agreed that this would be a good step to begin involving Gwich'in youth in. Once the leg skins are dry, sinew can be produced. Babiche can also be made once the skin is brought in from outside. Finally, the caribou leg skins are prepared and sewn.

Project Directions

The next step of the repatriation project will involve planning the second phase of the project and securing funds to carry it out. As with the pilot project, the Elders' oral histories will be recorded, and later transcribed and translated. As with the *Caribou Skin Clothing Project*, the repatriation

process of the caribou leg skin bag and sled could be presented in a colourful, plain language book.

This research is intended to bring traditional skills and knowledge back to Gwich'in communities. This pilot project is just the start of the present project. In the next phase, we hope to bring Gwich'in Elders and youth together to produce the chosen objects and repatriate the skills back into Gwich'in communities. Our hope is that this research will form part of ongoing repatriation efforts in the Gwich'in community.

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Appendix 1. Gwich'in Terms used in the report

The following Gwich'in terminology was interpreted and transcribed during the pilot project by Eleanor Mitchell-Firth, and subsequently typed for this report by Kristi Benson of the GSCI.

Edreedhoh chyah – caribou leg skin bag
Thil – babiche
Ch'ih – sinew/thread
Khaniidoo – sinew
Edreedhoh kaiichan – caribou leg sin shoes
Edreedhoh uhchuh – caribou leg skin bag

Aih – snowshoes
Aat'oo – birch
Tsaih – red ochre
Akaii laii – foot place
Thil ts'ik – skinny babiche
Aih ch'yaa – foot string
(unknown) – cross piece
Dachan srii – carving knife, knife with curved blade
Shał – curved carving knife/drill for making holes inside frame
Aih vał – weaving needle
Ts'iighoh –

Łaii viitrii – dog whip
Aat'oh – birch
Łaii viitrii tai' – dog whip handle
Warsdit – wool to put on dog whip handle
Tsaih – red ochre
Diinahtl'yah – braiding
Diik'ee ts'al – shots
Aajii – raw caribou skin (cleaned)
Edreedhoh uhchuh – caribou leg skin bag
Dinjik dhoh – moose hide
Adhoh –
Khah deetl'yaa – bag strap

Vał thoh – sled
Edreedhoh vał thoh – caribou leg skin sled
Dinjik dhoh di' nadhi'ee – tanned moose skin used at the rim of the skin sled

Vitl'yaa – strings
Aajii – raw cleaned caribou skin
Tlyah niltl'yaa – braided babiche for rope on sled wrapper
Edreedhoh uhchuh – caribou leg skin bag
Dinjik dhoh – moose hide
Adhoh –
Khah deetl'yaa – bag strap
Ch'oo – porcupine quills

Geh ik – rabbit skin parka
Geh thał – rabbit skin pants
Geh ts'at – rabbit skin blanket
Geh ts'eh – rabbit skin hat

K'ii tr'ih – birch bark canoe
Aat'oo – birch
Ts'iivii – spruce (frame) for birch or skin boat

Dazhoo thał – caribou skin pants (with hair on)
Dazhoo ik – caribou skin top/dress (with hair on)
K'ii ch'ik – birch bark basket

Ch'il ts'ik – baby bunting bag
Nagaii – beads

Dizhoo dzhirh – caribou skin mitts with hair

Edreedhoh uhchuh – raw caribou skin bag
Neezhin – eye infection caused by a small bug getting in the eye