



AN ETHNOHISTORY OF THE CHISANA RIVER BASIN



Norman Alexander Easton



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Published by the United States Department of the Interior
through the Government Printing Office.

Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve
Copper Center, Alaska

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Design/layout by Francis Broderick, Archgraphics.

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Norman Alexander Easton

2021

Front cover photographs (top to bottom):

Chisana Natives at Quartz Creek, Alaska, n.d. (circa 1902). Photograph by F.C. Schrader, U.S. Geological Survey.

Chindadn biface from the Little John Site. Photograph by N. A. Easton.

Aerial view of Theetsa Niign – Lower Chisana River Valley to the West, from Cheejil Niign – Mirror Creek.
Photograph by N. A. Easton.

The production of this document cost \$33,285 including costs for editing, photo acquisition, mapmaking, and publication.

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Indian and White, both live here on this earth. We got to share with you this place here, for all people, Africans, Chinese, White, and Indian. We all work together for a good life here. My grandchildren go to White school, learn to read, math, and I tell them my life and then together we gonna make this world a beautiful, beautiful place.... Then I can go on my trail to heaven.

—Bessie John

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Editor's Preface

The *Ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin* is the result of collaboration between Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and what was then called the Northern Research Institute at Yukon College (now the YukonU Research Centre at Yukon University) in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. The purpose of the project is to identify and document the early Native inhabitants of the Chisana area.

The original technical report was completed by Norm Easton in 2005 for the purpose of public education and for integration into the park's management plans and interpretive programs. We are grateful to Norm for working with park staff on producing an updated and edited version of the original manuscript to release as a park publication. Archeologist Lee Reininghaus and I took the lead on editing the manuscript. Museum Specialist Desiree Ramirez worked – undaunted by pandemic-related archive closures – on obtaining permission from archives and individuals to reproduce illustrations, and Archeologist Allyson Pease prepared new maps. We also thank the Upper Tanana people – past and present – and the early researchers and explorers of the region whose knowledge helped to inform this publication.

—Barbara Cellarius
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October 2020

Acknowledgements

Primary financial support for the writing of this document was provided by the US National Park Service (NPS), administered initially by Anne Worthington and later by Barbara Cellarius of that agency. Dean Paul Driscoll granted release time from teaching duties at then Yukon College's Arts and Sciences Division. Clint Sawicki and Elaine Austin of The Northern Research Institute at Yukon College administered the cooperative agreement with NPS.

It should be abundantly clear, however, that the principal acknowledgement for support of this document must go to the many *Dineh* people who have shared with me their time, memories, and knowledge of *Dineh Ku – The Dineh Way*, the set of beliefs, practices, and history that together comprise the culture and identity of the aboriginal people of the Upper Tanana region. They are too many to mention them all, but I would be remiss not to attempt to do so. Foremost have been the siblings Mrs. Bessie John and Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny, both of whom welcomed me into their worlds for extended periods of time, transforming my status from one of outside researcher to one of internal kinfolk, and changed my life for the better as a result.

Additionally I would like to acknowledge the following *Dineh* for also having contributed greatly to my ability to develop this document: Andy Frank, Mary Tyone, Titus David, Jenny Sanford, Robert Johnny, Teddy and Darlene Northway, Ada Gallen, Charlie Eikland Sr., William Peter, Jimmy and Lena Enoch, Louis Frank, Fred Demit, Laura Sanford, David and Ruth Johnny, Polly Hyslop, Doris Johns, Lu Johns-Penikett, Agnes Winzer, Margaret Neiman, Kenny Thomas, Jerry and Arlene Isaac, Wilson Justin, Steven John, Johnny and Cherry Nicolai, Rose Blair, Sid Vandermeer Jr. and Rickie Johns. There are, of course, dozens more who have shared their time and knowledge with me who are not listed here, but to whom I owe great gratitude.

Professional colleagues and friends have also contributed both information and support to this project, including John Ritter of the Yukon Native Language Centre and Jim Kari of the Alaska Native Language Center, previous ethnographers of the Upper Tanana Robert McKennan and Marie Francoise Guédon, and anthropologists Richard Lee, Paul Nadasdy, Glen MacKay, Julie Cruikshank, Catherine McClellan, Frederica de Laguna, Bill Simeone, Greg Hare, and Ruth Gotthardt.

A variety of additional agencies have provided financial and logistical support for the collection of information contained in this report. They have included The Northern Research Institute at Yukon College, the Arts and Sciences Division at Yukon College, the White River First Nation, Aboriginal Language Services, Government of Yukon, the Departments of Anthropology at the University of Toronto and the George Washington University in D.C., the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canada-US Fulbright Foundation, The *Yukon News*, and my Royal Bank Visa.

—Norman Alexander Easton

The World that Raven Made

In our world Raven had something to do with making this earth. He is a complicated character – he is both good and bad, helpful and trouble-making (Jerry Isaac, Tanacross, 10 Aug. 1996).

Like many indigenous people, the *Dineh* of the upper Tanana River basin of the Yukon-Alaska borderlands in which the Chisana River lies conceive of themselves as having occupied the region in which they live “since time immemorial.” Their existence as *Dineh* – People – attests to this belief; it was anthropologists that named them the Upper Tanana based on the region in which they lived and the distinct Athabascan language they spoke (see Easton 2020). To *Dineh* it is self-evident that they have been present in the region, if not at any precise location, since the settling of the world by human beings. Within their own accounting, the world that *Dineh* occupy was created in the distant past by the Creator and molded into its present form through the activities of *Taatsan* – Raven.¹ This origin belief is a variation of the widespread “earth diver motif” found throughout North America, in which the earth is made by mud brought up from the bottom of a body of water (Boas 1914; Thomson 1929).

At the beginning of creation, animals and humans could communicate, and it was largely through the efforts of Raven that they were differentiated. But becoming different also created conflict, and many accounts in *Dineh* mythology attempt to demonstrate ways in which humans and animals can get along together in a respectful way, the consequences of not doing so, or reversing/inverting contemporary roles to dramatically highlight the inherent ambiguities of existence and knowledge. Other ancient beings played a dramatic role in setting the world in its modern form. In the Upper Tanana language, it was the Culture Hero *Ts’awusha* who established additional rules for proper behavior between people and animals and amongst people themselves.

Indigenous accounts of origins are often referred to as mythology or legend, but they cannot be understood merely as fantastic speculative tales; rather, they are multi-functional prisms that reflect a variety of central cultural concerns of the people who hold them. Malinowski (1925) showed how myths provide a social charter, which serves to legitimate contemporary social beliefs and norms. Others have presented myth as a philosophical discourse examining important moral, ethical, and existential cultural concerns, just as biblical myths do (Frye 1982). Lévi-Strauss has persuasively argued in his *Mythologiques* that many indigenous accounts are not concerned with origins per se – that is, from where and at what point in chronological time people first came to some place – as much as they are with establishing the nature of the proper relationships that ought to prevail within that space (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1969, 1973). In these anthropological approaches to myth, such accounts are seen to be seeking to understand the present more than the past.²

In addition, the mythological figure of *Taatsan* is one of great depth of character. He is simultaneously the all-powerful Creator and the tragic Trickster, a “divine figure but deeply flawed and very human....[symbolizing] the frailty and human qualities of the gods and their closeness to humans” (Lee 1999:827), reflecting important elements of the structure of *Dineh* society.³

¹ Following settler English usage, many contemporary *Dineh* will often use the word “crow” to reference the common Raven, *Corvus corax*.

² See Cruikshank (1978a) and McClellan (1975) for presentations and anthropological interpretation of a series of *Dineh* myths and legends from the Yukon.

³ McKennan (1959:175-195) records a number of stories of *Taatsan* and *Ts’awusha*. Mrs. Mary Tyone (1996) has published a corpus of fourteen such stories in Upper Tanana and transliterated English. Vitt (1971:175-184) presents two moral tales, which describe the arrival of the bow and arrow and the poor boy who gains power by practicing discipline and sharing. In my own fieldwork, I was told an account of the initial creation of the world and several *Ts’awusha* stories.



Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny, discussing *Dineh Ku* – “the Dineh Way” – to students at the Little John cultural camp, June 2010. Photo by N. A. Easton.

A STORY OF THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny shared the following account of the Creation of the *Dineh* world in 1999. We were camping at the traditional village site of *Taiy Chi*, which lies in the low hills just south of the Chisana River on the Yukon-Alaskan border. Dinner was complete, and we drank tea and spoke of the time he had lived at this site during his lifetime. I asked him if he would tell me a story of how this world came to be and he replied:

How did the world start up? Okay, the very beginning, okay.

They say that this planet was just water, right? There was no ground. And so...

You see what we see today, that swan there? That swan there – gee, it's funny how things work out like that.

Fish-woman, you know, fish-girl, like fish, but here [above the waist] like woman, eh? Funny how Native people know that a long time ago, the very beginning. You don't see that in a book today.

There's that one, that Fish-woman, and a Swan. And a Crow, you see, that's the main Crow. Okay? Crow.

You see, they say Sandpiper he's got little checkered this way [around his neck], he say "Let me borrow your necklace." But Crow, tired, he's got no place to land, eh, he's Crow, like Raven, he's got no place to land. Tired, he can't float, he just drown. So he kept flying, out above the water. This earth was all covered with water.

So, he gets tired and pretty soon he sees just a little stick sticking out like that. He pull like this, he pull like that, Crow, you know? And then Fish-girl come up.

"Let's see your baby," he said. The Fish-woman, she had a little baby, eh? There was no ground, just a stick sticking out like that.

So he tell that Fish-girl, "Let me see that kid for a while," you know, Crow. So, yeah, she give it to Crow and that's a mistake, eh? That's a mistake there, yeah, because that Crow he take off, eh? He hold that baby.

That Fish-girl is got her hand out and Crow is holding the baby there. The Fish-girl say "Give me back my kid."

"No, I'm not giving it back. Give me a little mud, a little ground like this. Ground. You got to go down." Dive? Down below, she bring up ground like that and fold it like that [over the stick]. "Bring some more."

Tired, she just going down there. Pretty soon it's a little bit big, eh? Ground. It gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger, eh? See now, this is the Crow now, pretty soon he think, "Bring mud too, mud, you know mud? Under the water, bring that up too, mud. Bring this one – bring willow, you know."

He hold that baby. He got three feet, like that. He jump on it eh? The ground there? Jump on it.

The Crow there, he's holding the baby, eh? Pretty soon the ground is going out like that, right? Yup, spreading it out.

“Bring some more, bring some more, you want your baby!” The Fish-woman just half crazy, eh? She was so tired, pretty soon she’s just standing there. Crow, he keep flattening it out, going out, going out, like that, eh?

Oh, she’s so tired. “Last time, I’m going to get you some more for me. Just go down and get you maybe five.”

“Bring me up the tree,” he said, “tree.” You see the tree there? You see the trees here? “Bring me up little ones,” you know? Bring me up the five of them.”

Oh, what else? “Go down and get the willow too. Get birch. Get poplar.” He name it for them, eh?

She go down and take it off and bring it up like that, eh?

That Crow, he don’t give baby back. He take off with that kid, eh! Crow, he dancing around, his three feet, the ground is growing out like that.

Pretty soon that’s how this world is made. Crow, Crow made that!

It’s getting so big, the ground is getting so big, it grows.

The ground grows, did you know that? The ground there? It grows.

You see that lake, we see. Bill Mann there? You see – we used to look from here, big lake, like that. You come today; you see that everything is growing together, like that, cover up that lake.

You see *Dakteel*, I tell you border, before we took off? That was a lake. It’s just nothing now. That was deep down there.

Ground grows.

So, that time that everything just going like that, that Europe was just how it is today. Europe was just floating on the ocean.

Beaver. Beaver. Beaver and porcupine, they stand together like that. The one from Europe is Porcupine, right? “I want to go across there. How am I going to go across?” Because the water is just going like that [It’s wavy on top?] Yeah. So, Porcupine’s there.

“You got too many quills!” He tell Porcupine, “You got too many quills! How I’m going to give you a ride up there?” Right?

“Well, let’s figure it out,” he said.

So he said, Porcupine, “Oh, quills eh?” So he plucked himself like that, he plucked himself like that, eh? Yeah, from his belly.

O.K., you’re not going to get no quills. So, where am I going to sit?”

“Right on top of my back,” Beaver say. “I’ll take you across to that island there.”

See, he’s got tough skin there, you know, fat where all Beaver is, on top there? Porcupine sit on top there. No Crow for him, eh? He went across. And he came back here, to North America.

The world was new that time, you know. The world was new them days. Just Crow, the main, the main... Native people know, He made this planet! Crow. Yeah.

Introduction

This report documents the indigenous *Dineh* use of the Upper Tanana River borderlands with a focus on the Chisana River basin. The Chisana River basin is part of the ancestral homelands of the indigenous *Dineh* – “people / human beings” in the aboriginal language of the region – who occupy the lands astride the Alaska-Yukon border in the area of the Alaska Highway. In Alaska the lower Chisana River basin is completely within the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, while the upper portion lies in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Who are the Indigenous people of the Chisana River basin? How did they come to be there? Who and where are they now? To answer to these questions is not as easy as it might seem, since the nature of identification with and use of the area is embedded in a complex network of relationships between people and place within the regional culture and society of the *Dineh*, a network of relationships developed over thousands of years of occupation and history, as the archaeological record shows. It is simply impossible to talk of “Chisana People” as some sort of discrete and distinctive group of people. It is perhaps more accurate to refer to a collection of families historically occupying the area in which the Chisana River basin lies who predominantly spoke the *Dineh* language designated Upper Tanana by linguists. But even this must be done with some caution, since the families or their individual members moved regularly throughout the seasons and their lifetimes. Furthermore, spouses came from other *Dineh* language areas to settle in the area: Ahtna speaking people from the Copper River valley, Tanacross speaking people from the south Dawson Range, and Tutchone speaking people from the Yukon all contributed to the occupation and history of the Chisana River region. And yet, despite these goings and comings, there is something discernable that we might call a *Dineh* Borderlands Identity, resulting from their adaptation to this specific landscape and shared history and cultural practices which through their long occupation has generated “a sense of place.”

Figure 1 is a map of the study area, including the major drainages and settlements referred to throughout this report. Technically the study area encompasses the Chisana River basin from its headwaters to its confluence with the Nabesna River near Northway and its principal tributaries – Mirror and Scottie Creeks – which flow into the river from Canada to the east. Note that different authors and sources, likely reflecting the common usage of the day, have used different names to refer to some of the villages shown on this map. Rather than standardizing the references in the pages that follow, the alternate names are noted here. Specifically, “Upper Nabesna” is sometimes referred as “Cooper Creek Village,” “Lower Nabesna” is sometimes referred to as “Nabesna” or “Mouth of the Nabesna,” “Tetlin” is sometimes referred to as “Tetling,” and “Last Tetlin” as “Last Tetling.”

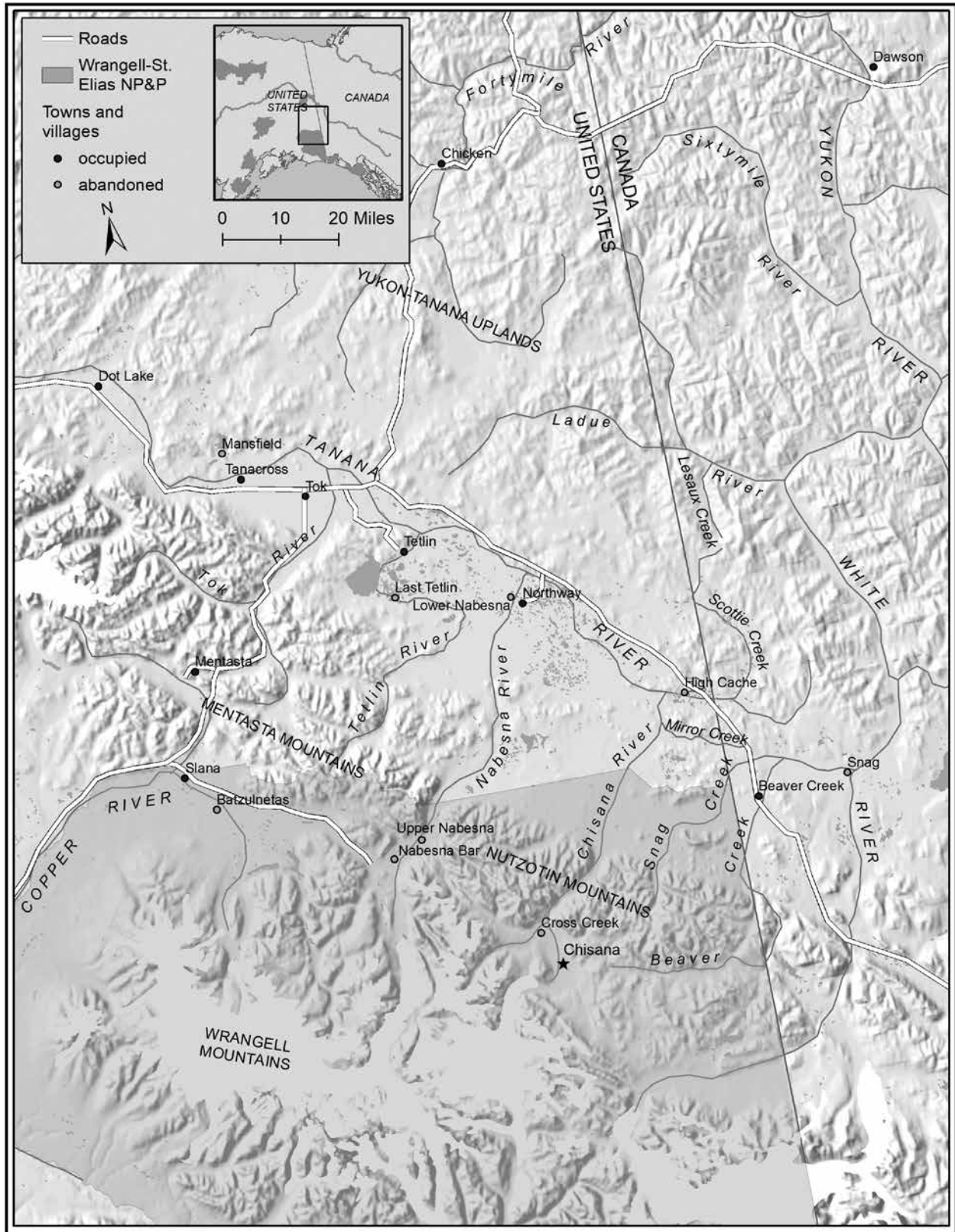


Figure 1. Chisana River Basin Study Area. Map adapted from McKennan 1981:564.

Environmental Setting

The physical geography of the Chisana River basin is a complex combination of geomorphologic features and environmental ecologies, as illustrated in Figures 2, 3, and 4. There are no extensive geographical studies that embrace the area in full detail, however an accounting of its general environmental history is possible.

PLEISTOCENE AND HOLOCENE ENVIRONMENTAL ECOLOGY

The southwestern Yukon-Alaska borderlands represent the northeastern end of the upper Tanana River catchment basin, which lies within the Alaska Plateau physiographic region (Hosley 1981a; Smith et al. 2004). The valley floor averages about 2,000 feet above sea level with hills to about 3,000 feet, while the higher mountains to the north rarely exceed 5,000 feet except along the extreme southern edge where the Nutzotin Mountains lie. Beyond these rise the 10,000 to 16,000 feet glacier-bound, jagged peaks of the Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains.

Despite its proximity to these contemporary icefields, the area consists of broad valleys bordered by rounded mountains, which suggest the region north of the Nutzotin Mountains was not extensively glaciated during the last glacial period, known as the Wisconsin glaciation (c. 70,000 to 11,000 years ago) (Briner and Kaufman 2008; Pico et al. 2020; Stilwell and Kaufman 1996). As illustrated in Figure 5, the glaciation during this time reached its greatest extent at some point between 23,000 and 18,000 years a



Figure 2. Upper Chisana River Valley, to Southeast. Top left is the headwaters of the river and the Chisana Glacier, top right the mouth of Cross Creek, location of the traditional 19th century *Dineh* village. Photo by N. A. Easton.



Figure 3. Middle Chisana River Valley, to Southeast. Nutzotin Mountains and Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains in background, the Chisana River breaking through at center, and typical boreal spruce forest and karst-formed lakes on the middle valley's glacial outwash plain. Photo by N. A. Easton.

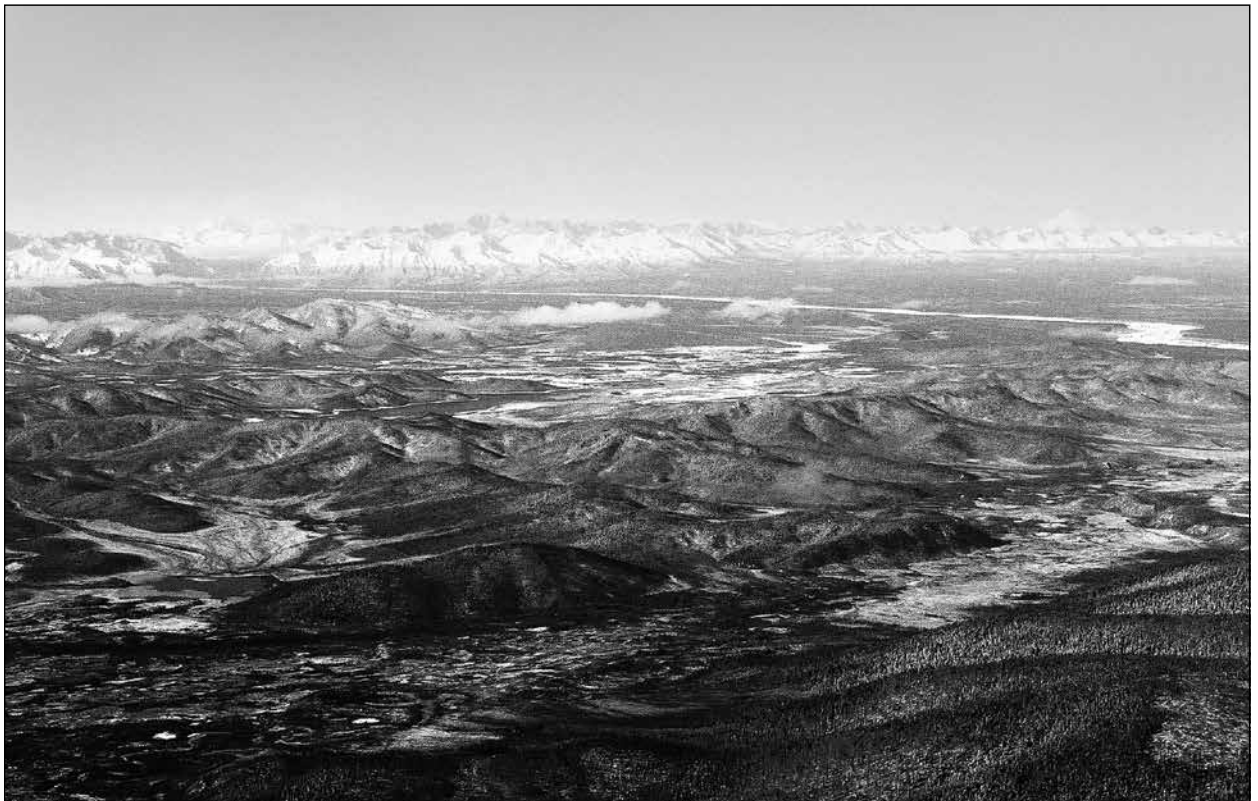


Figure 4. Lower Chisana River Valley, to Southwest. Eroded foothills of the Dawson Range in foreground, Chisana River along top right. Photo by N. A. Easton.

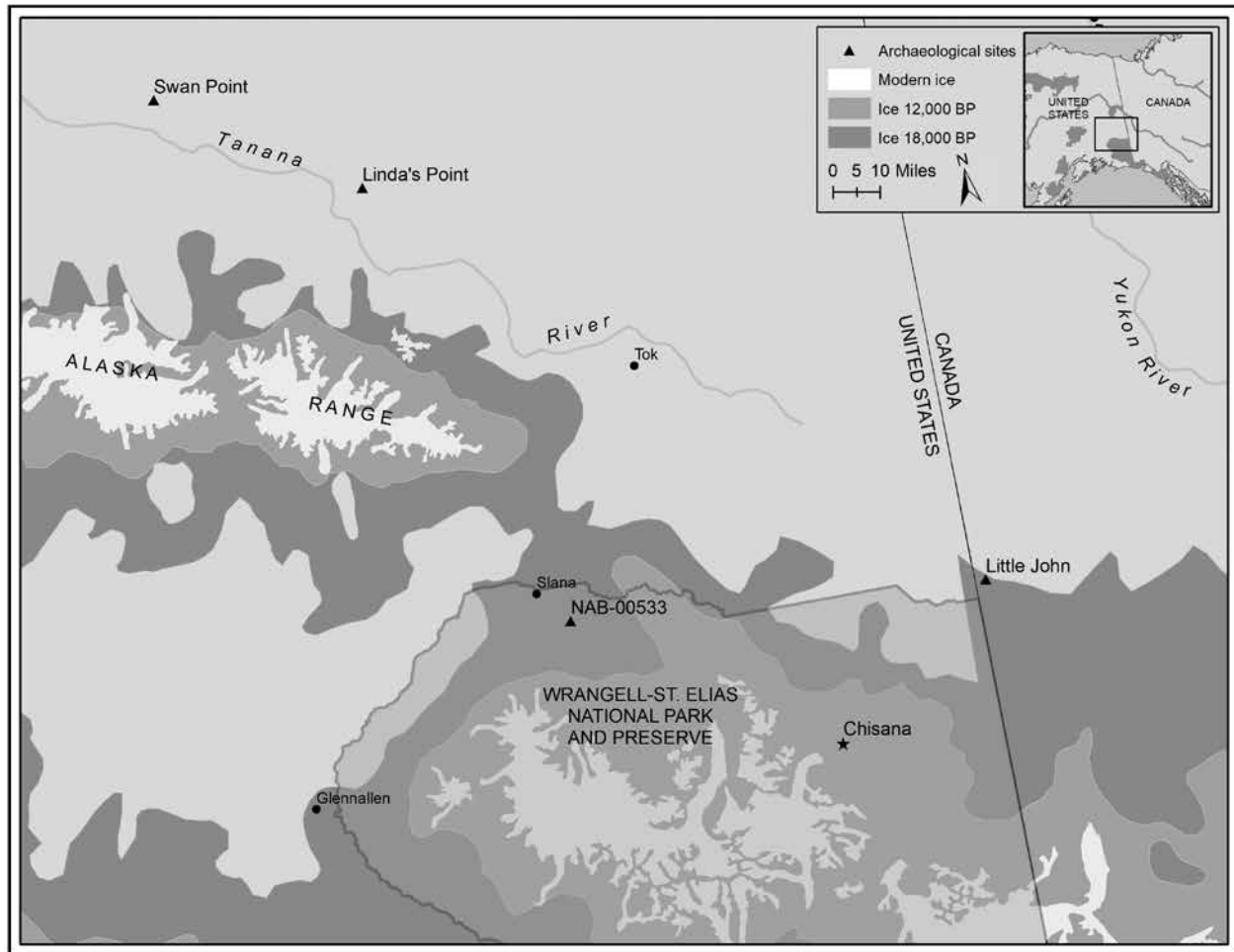


Figure 5. Late Pleistocene ice extents showing locations of archaeological sites mentioned in the text: Swan Point (Shaw Creek), Little John, Linda's Point, and NAB-00533. Ice extents in radiocarbon years before present based on Dyke, Moore and Robertson 2003.

go during a period known as the Last Glacial Maximum (Hughes and Gibbard 2014). It is suspected that dramatic environmental changes occurred after the Last Glacial Maximum, resulting in rapid decay of the ice sheets and dramatic rise of the global sea levels (Dixon 2013:22).

Several paleoecological studies have been carried out in the region, which allows for the reconstruction of the local post-glacial environmental history of the past 16,000 years or so. Rampton (1971) analyzed sediments from Antifreeze Pond, just south of Beaver Creek, while MacIntosh (1997) examined sediments from "Daylight Coming Out" Lake (Upper Tanana = *Yihkah Männ'*), just north of Beaver Creek and the uppermost lake on the Little Scottie Creek drainage, and "Island" Lake (Upper Tanana = *Cha'atxaa Männ'*), which lies just over the Alaska border and drains into Big Scottie Creek via Desper Creek. More recently, Vermaire and Cwynar (2010) resampled Antifreeze Pond and collected new cores from Eikland Lake south of Beaver Creek. The results of Rampton and MacIntosh are in general agreement, differing slightly in some aspects of dating and environmental indicators, while Vermaire and Cwynar's data show how the spread of changes in the post-glacial vegetation regimes was incremental through time from west to east following glacial decay. In combination they present us with the following paleoenvironmental reconstruction:

- **Herb-Tundra Steppe Zone**
The late glacial environment of between 18,000 to 11,000 years ago was dominated by grasses (Gramineae), sage (*Artemisia* spp.), willow (*Salix* spp.) and sedges (Cyperaceae). Vermaire and Cwynar (2010) also identify flowering plants of the rose and aster families. All agree that this represents a predominantly open, dry, herbaceous tundra steppe zone in eastern Beringia at the end of the Wisconsin glaciation.⁴ MacIntosh (1997) estimates minimum July temperatures of 41 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Birch Rise**
The period between 11,000 and 8,000 years ago is marked by a significant (up to 75 percent of the pollen record) increase in birch (*Betula* spp. – predominantly dwarf birch – *Betula pumila* var. *glandulifera*), with a slow decline in the levels of *Artemisia*. These data suggest a continuing warming climate to at least a minimum mean July temperature of 48 degrees Fahrenheit. A rise in aquatic plants and algae is also noticeable in the pollen record, suggesting increased moisture and precipitation, as well as a general reduction in erosion and accompanying stabilization of the landscape into open parkland with hydric (very wet) lowlands and mesic (moderately wet) uplands.
- **Spruce Rise**
This is a relatively short period, which is marked by the first appearance of spruce (*Picea* spp.) and alder in the region. It is also one in which different localities present different time depths. Rampton's estimates for Antifreeze Pond place the onset of spruce at about 8,700 years ago; MacIntosh's data from Yihkah M'ann' place it at between 7,400 and 8,400 years ago; and Vermaire and Cwynar's at 8,300 years ago. Birch and willows retain the high values of the previous period however, while other taxa are greatly reduced. The presence of spruce suggests a minimum mean July temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Spruce Zone**
After about 7,500 years ago, spruce becomes predominant within the pollen record in the region, with an accompanying dramatic decrease in the presence of birch and willow, representing a closed, mixed boreal forest. Sphagnum pollen also rises noticeably, with a corresponding decrease in aquatic species. These data suggest at least a maintenance of minimum mean July temperatures of 55 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Alder Zone**
A rise in alder (*Alnus* spp.) is found at about 5,400 years ago at Yihkah M'ann' and 5,600 years ago at Antifreeze Pond; both suggest an increase in relative moisture in the region at about this time to about present levels. Both Rampton (1971) and MacIntosh (1997) interpret their data as indicating the onset of an environment generally similar to that of today, with the exception of a gradual rise in mean annual July temperatures to its contemporary level of about 54 degrees Fahrenheit.

During this last period the region experienced the ash fall from two major volcanic eruptions at Mt. Churchill near the headwaters of the White River. Figure 6 shows the limits of the two ash deposits. The first, smaller eruption occurred about 1,900 years ago; most of the ash was deposited northward from the eruption. The second, larger eruption occurred about 1,250 years ago; the ash fall from this eruption was carried eastward to beyond the Yukon-Northwest Territory

⁴ There is not unanimous agreement on Wisconsin Beringian environments. The position set out by Guthrie (1990), which argues for a productive "mammoth steppe," is followed here.

border (Clague et al. 1995:1172; Lerbekmo 2008:693; Lerbekmo et al. 1975). More recent analysis of peat deposits has extended its distribution as far east as the shores of Great Slave Lake, 800 miles from the source. This expanded distribution encompasses about 200,000 square miles, representing a tephra volume of 35.3 billion cubic yards (27 km^3) (Robinson 2001).

CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ECOLOGY

From a contemporary perspective, the southwest Yukon and the adjacent Upper Tanana valley, which includes the Chisana River basin, are characterized by extensive meandering streams across boggy, largely permafrost muskeg. Though technically discontinuous, permafrost is extensive and can reach as deep as 100 feet (Rampton 1980). Loess (wind-blown) sediments and volcanic ash deposits, both of which can reach over 20 inches in depth, are also found throughout the region (Oswald and Senyk 1977).

Today the ground is covered with sphagnum mosses, sedges, blueberry, bearberry, and Labrador tea, and is dotted with remnant oxbows and a plethora of small lakes ringed with willows. Black spruce bowers and scattered growth of dwarf birch, alder, and willow crowd any rise in the valley landscape, which are often elevated frost mounds, shading ground patches of cranberry and wild rose. The surrounding hillsides support alternating patches of white and black spruce, birch,

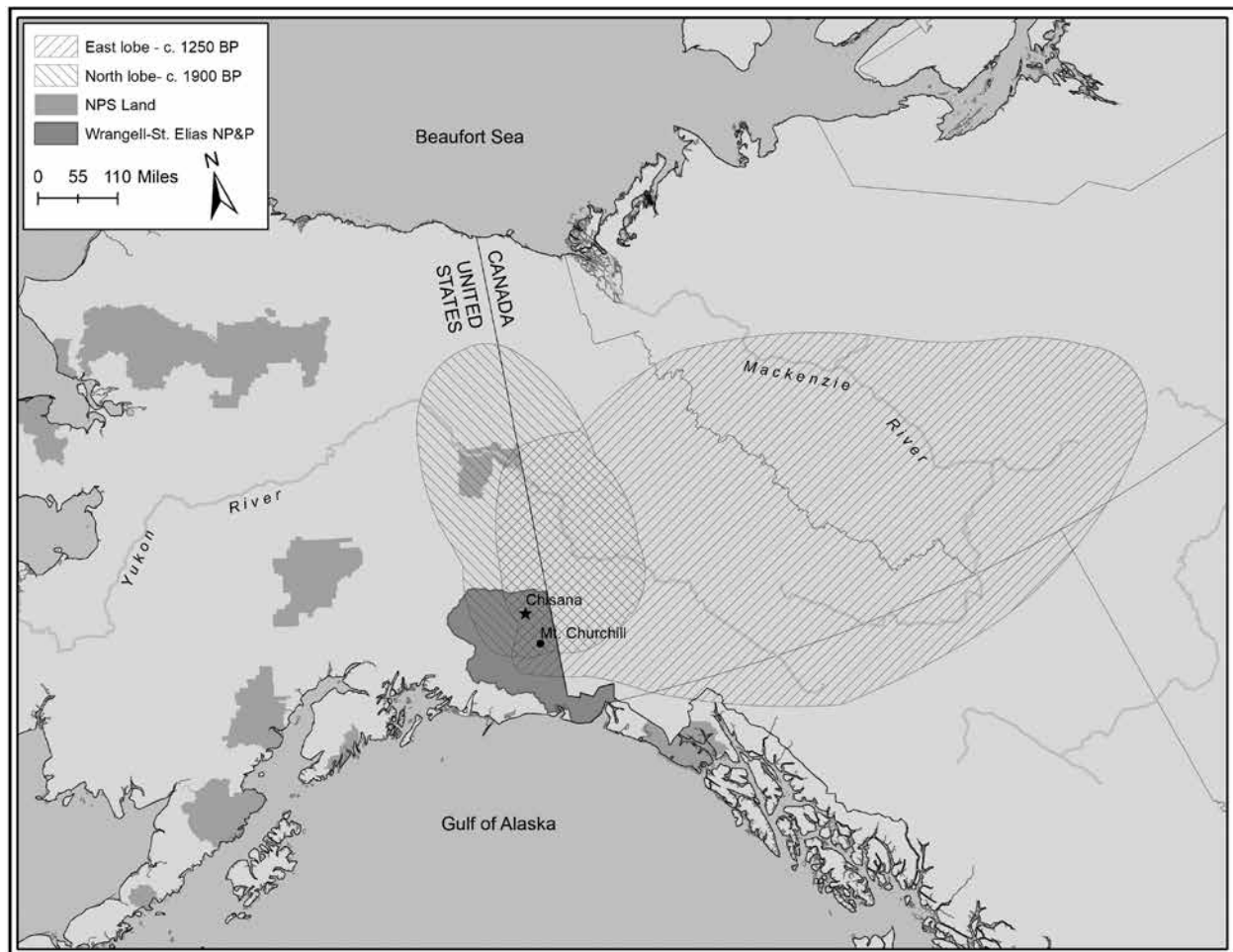


Figure 6. Distribution of the White River ash deposits, c. 1,900 and 1,250 years ago. Ash extents based on Mulliken, Schaefer and Cameron 2018.

alder, aspen, and poplar trees and a wide variety of shrubs, up to their low summits. Due to the near surface presence of permafrost, north-facing hillsides are predominantly black spruce. Many of these plants were used by the Upper Tanana (see Easton 2005).

Despite the abundance of water in the region, the humidity is low. This is because the lowland bogs are more a function of the low relief and summer solar thaw of the 20 or so inches of soil above the permafrost than of precipitation, which averages only about 12 inches per year. Seasonal variation in temperatures is extreme, ranging from -70 degrees Fahrenheit or colder in the winter to the mid-90s Fahrenheit in the summer. The mean low temperature is -24 degrees Fahrenheit in January, the mean high temperature is 54 degrees Fahrenheit in July, and the annual mean temperature is -6 degrees Fahrenheit. (The lowest recorded temperature for North America was recorded at nearby Snag, Yukon, on 3 February 1947 of -81 degrees Fahrenheit (-62.8 degrees Celsius).) Cloud coverage is relatively high, averaging overcast for 27 percent of the year and broken for 30 percent of the year (Wahl et al. 1987).

The low mean temperatures combined with the low solar values associated with the high cloud cover result in long winters with lakes and streams frozen from October to mid-May (Hosley 1981a). And while the snow is never very deep, it can come as early as September and remain on the ground until May. As a result, the seasons of spring and fall are short, while the difference between winter and summer might best be summed up as frozen or wet.

In the present, the basin supports a wide range of fish species as well as large and small mammals. It is also an important component of the interior western continental flyway. Dominant large mammals include moose (*Alces alces*), black and brown (grizzly) bear (*Ursus americanus* and *Ursus arctos*), mountain sheep (*Ovis dalli*), and caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) of the Chisana and Fortymile caribou herds. Furbearers include wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), beaver (*Castor canadensis*), muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*), otter (*Lontra canadensis*), and the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*). Pre-eminent among the fish species are whitefish (*Coregonus sp.*), grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*), pike (*Esox lucius*), sucker (*Catostomus spp.*), and lingcod [burbot] (*Lota lota*). Like the plants, most all animals were integrated into Upper Tanana culture. All retain an important social and spiritual relationship to people. Animals are culturally categorized by the *Dineh* as non-human persons, and many were important components of the aboriginal technology and subsistence systems.

Cultural History of the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands as Revealed by Archaeology

Oh yeah, special places like Scottie Creek [a tributary of the lower Chisana River]. That's old, old land there. My old people say that when the glaciers, you know, ice everywhere, all around Yukon, that place was okay. Lots of old-time animal, like elephant, cat. Scottie Creek had no glacier and that's where Indian people lived that time. They hunted elephant for food, meat like moose. That place has got lots of elephant bones and other old animal bones (Bessie John, 16 July 1996, in Easton n.d.).

The Alaska-Yukon borderland was once the easternmost extent of Beringia, a contiguous geography from the Yenisei River in Siberia to the eastern Yukon that existed during periods of Pleistocene glaciation over the past 2 million years. The vast quantities of water trapped in these continental glaciations resulted in lower sea levels worldwide, exposing a "land bridge" between northeastern Asia and northwestern America, providing trans-continental access for the movement of plants and animals between these land masses during glacial maximums and isolating them during interglacials when the sea levels rose and once more inundated the region we call the Bering and Chukchi Seas. It was by this means that horses and camels, which had initially evolved in the Americas, migrated to Eurasia and that elephants and lions moved to the Americas from Eurasia (Hopkins 1967; Hopkins et al. 1982). While the route of human movement to the southern reaches of the Americas remains disputed between a continental (Potter et al. 2018) and coastal migration (Easton 1992; Dixon 1999, 2015), there is consensus among archaeologists that human occupation of the Americas began in eastern Beringia at the end of the Last Glacial Maximum, circa 17,000 to 14,000 years ago (Goebel and Buvit 2011; Graf, Ketron, and Waters 2013).

Currently, the earliest unequivocal archaeological evidence for human occupation in eastern Beringia lies in two archaeological sites along the Tanana River drainage – Swan Point on the Shaw

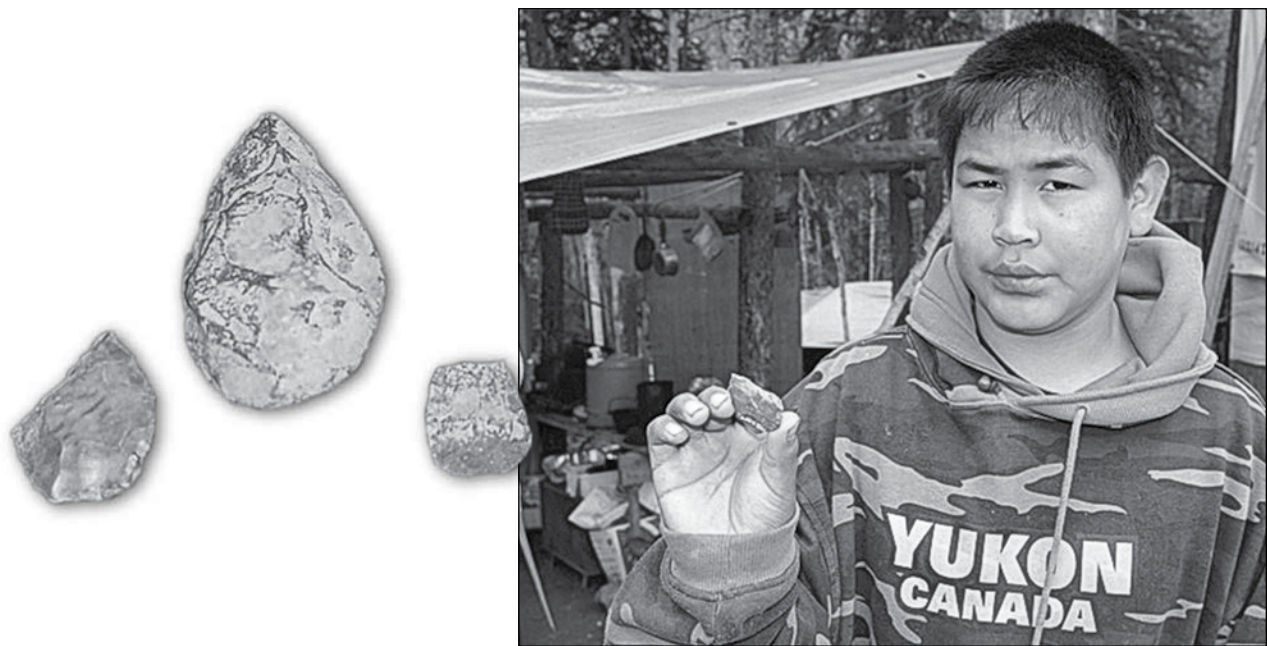


Figure 7. Eldred Johnny (Grandson of Little John) holding Chindadn biface (right); Chindadn bifaces from the Little John Site (left). Photos by N. A. Easton.

Creek tributary of the middle Tanana River and Little John on the Mirror Creek tributary of the upper Tanana River, both of which date to circa 14,000 years ago (Potter, Holmes and Yesner 2013). The number of archaeological sites in the region increased during the following millennia of the latest Pleistocene. A suite of sites near Shaw Creek, such as Broken Mammoth, Mead, and Holzman, all date to about 13,300 years ago. Closer to the Alaska-Yukon borderlands, the Linda Point site at Healy Lake, Alaska, dates to 13,100 years calibrated before present (CAL BP) (Sattler et al. 2011; Younie and Gillispie 2016); the Moose Lake site south of Beaver Creek near White River, Yukon, dates between 12,700 and 11,600 years CAL BP (Heffner 2002); and site NAB-00533, located in Alaska on Tanada Creek in the northern Copper River drainage, has several late Pleistocene components that date between 11,200 and 13,000 years CAL BP (White et al. 2020; Reininghaus 2019). Figure 5 illustrates the location of several of these sites in relation to ice field extents during the late Pleistocene.

Faunal remains from these early sites indicate that early inhabitants practiced a mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle, with relatively broad-based diets (Goebel and Potter 2016:236), often with an emphasis on sheep, wapiti, and bison (Hoffecker et al. 2016:75). Evidence from the Little John site indicates the use of a similar subsistence strategy based on the recovered remains of bison, wapiti, caribou, sheep, *canis*, hare, and swan (Easton et al. 2011:295; Yesner et al. 2011). Broad-based diets, which use large and small game, as well as fish and birds, are indicative of seasonally driven land use and mobility (Hoffecker et al. 2016).

Archaeological evidence from these early sites indicates that these early inhabitants used a toolkit dominated by lithic (stone) technology, with antler and bone also used for a wide variety of implements (Krasinski and Yesner 2008; Heppner 2017; Lanoë and Holmes 2016; Wygal et al. 2018). Various lithic materials were used, including obsidian, cherts, and volcanic rocks. Lithic materials were obtained both from known lithic sources as well as from locally available sources such as volcanic outcrops and cobbles found in river and stream channels (Easton et al. 2011:299; Handley 2013; Reininghaus 2019). Extensive human knowledge of the landscape and available resources in the borderlands during the late Pleistocene is demonstrated by obsidian sourcing of lithic artifacts from various archaeological sites in Alaska and Canada (Kristensen et al. 2019; Reuther et al. 2011). Obsidian from Wiki Peak, located in the Nutzotin Mountains near Chisana, has been identified in some of the earliest archaeological sites in Eastern Beringia (Dixon 2013:107; Reuther et al. 2011) with the earliest reported use of Wiki Peak obsidian from a location approximately 290 miles from Wiki Peak (Reuther et al. 2011:274-275). Another source of obsidian is thought to originate near the Wrangell Mountains and has also been found in many of these early sites (Goebel, Speakman, and Reuther 2008:89).

Collectively, these sites indicate that early inhabitants of the borderlands practiced a mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle, living in temporary camps while they moved across the landscape in search of resources. Although the archaeological remains at these sites are often ephemeral, they tend to follow a general geographical trend, with campsites often situated along natural travel corridors on knolls or other areas with commanding views of the surrounding landscape (Potter, Holmes, and Yesner 2013; Reininghaus 2019).

Prehistoric populations in the borderlands continued to practice a mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle through the ensuing Holocene epoch of the last 10,000 years. The archaeological remains recovered at sites on the borderlands conform with a transition to new forms of lithic technology about 6,000 years ago, in particular the introduction of side-notched bifaces, keeled side and end scrapers, and small thumbnail end scrapers representing the emergence of the Northern Archaic tradition, which is found widely throughout the western subarctic at this time period to about 2,000 years ago (Anderson 1968; Workman 1979; Esdale 2008). As documented at Northern Archaic sites elsewhere, those on the borderlands during this time period include microblade technology, as represented at Little John (Esdale 2008; Easton et al. 2018.)

The period between 2,000 and 1,000 years ago is significant to the archaeology of the region as it coincides with the two Mount Churchill volcanic eruptions that occurred at about 1,900 and 1,250 years ago. The effect on humans living in the area over which volcanic ash fell must have been considerable, as it is thought that those living in close proximity to the volcano vent would have been subject to days of darkness followed by heavy acidic precipitation (Moodie and Catchpole 1992:161; Workman 1974, 1979). The impacts to plant and animal resources were also severe. This is supported by pollen cores in the area, which indicate that it may have taken as long as 400 years for the forest to reestablish itself (Birks 1980:124, as cited in Mullen 2012:36). The impacts resulting from these volcanic explosions prompted several migrations of people residing in these affected areas, presumably to more hospitable regions (Mullen 2012). This is further supported by oral historical accounts of Scottie Creek and the village of *Leekath Niik*, which specifically document these places as areas of refuge during the time of “two winters,” and further verified by archaeological evidence and overlapping and bracketing radiocarbon dates at the Little John site (Easton et al. 2020b). Moodie and Catchpole (1992) and others (Derry 1975; Ives 1990, 2003; Matson and Magne 2007; Kristensen et al. 2019) also suggest that this may have been the impetus for the migration of the Athabascan speaking ancestors of the Navaho and Apachean peoples into the American southwest desert lands. Ives (2003:267) notes that

the clear recognition of two separate White River events enhances the tie between Athapaskan language history and volcanic history. The north lobe White River event (ca. 1900 B.P.) corresponds in time with the intermontane and coastal migrations of the Pacific Coast Athapaskans that Krauss and Golla (1981) felt took place before 1,500 B.P., while the east lobe event corresponds with the divergence of Canadian and Apachean Athapaskans after about 1,200 B.P. It seems unlikely that these two episodes of language divergence, in their correspondence with two volcanic events of stupendous ecological moment, would arise purely as a matter of coincidence.

Since the last eruption about 1,200 years ago, the region’s environment has been relatively stable, although fluvial erosion and redeposition of sediments as well as localized mass wasting of hillsides continued to occur. Archaeological remains dating to this time are designated Athabascan and represent the material culture of contemporary *Dineh* ancestors. Much of the technology is similar to past cultures but includes the introduction of copper technology, stemmed projectile points, and the increased use of bone and antler arrowheads (although it is likely that this is largely a function of better preservation of more recent organic material).

The onset of the introduction of Eurasian technologies about 200 years ago marks an interesting archaeological period, as the *Dineh* of the region began to receive items from their Tlingit trade partners obtained from Russian, British, and American maritime traders in the late 18th century and then more directly from Hudson’s Bay and American Commercial Company traders in the middle to late 19th century (Easton et al. 2013). Examples include a Chinese coin recovered in association with lithic debris at KbVo-1, located along the Alaska Highway overlooking Enger Creek, Yukon (Mooney et al. 2012), and beads, lithic debris, and two lead musket balls recovered at *Taiy Suul Sha* (KeVo-2) along middle Scottie Creek, Yukon (Easton 2002).

Finally, numerous historic archaeological site remains have been found throughout the region. These include early independent trading posts, such as William Rupe’s (KeVo-5) on Scottie Creek, John Hadjukovich’s on the Nabesna River near Northway, and Jack Dolan’s at Snag, none of which have been excavated. Scores of historic Native villages, camps, and trapline cabins have been identified as well, some of which are discussed below, along with the short-lived mining settlements of Euroamericans such as those found in the vicinity of Chisana and Nabesna mines, and camps associated with the building of the Alaska Highway in the early 1940s.



Figure 8. Wearing traditional decorated moosehide coats. Left to Right: David Paul, Titus Issac [sic], Sam Abraham, Peter Thomas, Tanacross, circa 1920s. Jeany Healy Photograph Collection, UAF-2000-181-177. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Traditional Culture

The culture of a people is comprised of their shared beliefs, values, and knowledge, which guide their personal and social action in the world. In this aspect, the Upper Tanana of the Chisana River basin share much in common with their other *Dineh* neighbors and cognates across the subarctic, a fact that helps inform the discussion that follows about some features of their culture.

The 19th and early 20th century society and culture of the Upper Tanana has been documented anthropologically in only a few cases, the earliest resulting from Robert McKennan's fieldwork in the area in 1929-30, which formed the basis for his ethnography *The Upper Tanana Indians*, published by Yale University Press in 1959. McKennan arrived at Chisana on 22 September 1929, observing and working with Native collaborators from Cross Creek, Upper Nabesna, Batzulnetas, Mentasta, Last Tetlin, Tetlin, and Lower Nabesna, before leaving the region on 9 June 1930. Mishler and Simeone (2006) provides an edited collection of his field journals from this trip. McKennan spent his first months in the region living at the Chisana village of the day. McKennan also served in the US Army Air Forces in Alaska during World War II, during which he had the opportunity to collect additional data, and subsequently returned to the Upper Tanana region several times in the 1950s and 1960s to conduct further demographic, land use, and archaeological studies (McKennan 1964, 1969a, 1969b, 1981).

Since that time additional anthropological work has been completed in the region, notably Guédon's (1974) analysis of kinship and potlatch reciprocity in Tetlin and Northway, Vitt's (1971) study of hunting practices, Pitts' (1972) thesis on changing settlement patterns and housing types, and a series of resource exploitation and management studies (Haynes et al. 1984; Case 1984; Halpin 1987). A selection of Walter Northway's recollections on his long life (he was born about 1876 in Scottie Creek

valley) was published in 1987 (Yarber and Madison 1987). Friend et al. (2008) present a comprehensive traditional knowledge study of Upper Tanana subsistence fisheries. A series of papers by Easton examine contemporary ethnicity and culture (2001a, 2001b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008), while Easton, Kennedy, and Bouchard (2013) provides an ethnohistory of the eastern and northern Canadian territories of Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone members of the White River First Nation.

Considerable place name and genealogical research has also been done. Much of this material remains unpublished, but see Tyone (1996), J. Kari (1996), and John and Yukon Native Language Centre (1994). Finally, in recent years, an increasing number of aboriginal people have been recording stories of their Elders. Currently there is an Upper Tanana glossary in the Scottie Creek dialect (John and Tlen 1997) with a specific volume on bird names and knowledge in production.

All these efforts have contributed to our understanding of the past lifeways of the Upper Tanana *Dineh*, yet many significant gaps in the documentation of their culture and social history remain. This section presents an understanding of the society of the Chisana Basin *Dineh* from the late 19th through middle 20th century. It is necessarily incomplete since many of the members of that society have now walked their Trail to Heaven, but much can be ascertained specifically of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* from a compilation of the documentary sources, archival records, and oral history in conjunction with similar records from neighboring Upper Tanana and Athabaskan-speaking groups.

Like written historical sources, oral history present similar and unique issues in terms of the cultural context, authority, and perspective on the past by the author. Contemporary sources of oral history may differ in their remembrance of the past. In particular, the specific dating of events between one recollection and another may be different. In addition, the primary actor(s) within a historical anecdote may change according to the teller and the locations of the historic action may shift across the landscape. Indeed, such embellishment in storytelling is a highly regarded skill within *Dineh* culture. As McClellan and Denniston (1981:385-86) have observed for western subarctic *Dineh* generally, “a good raconteur was much appreciated, and creative variation was condoned.... but all oral traditions were believed to be basically true.”

These are common problems experienced by anyone working with memory and history, but they are not without solutions or at least accommodations (Vansina 1985; Portelli 1991). In the end, such inconsistencies are less problematic than they seem, since it is the general flow of events that have historic value to both the Upper Tanana *Dineh* and our attempts to come to some understanding of their historic experience. In other words, despite differences in detail there remain many consistencies in general; it is less important, it seems to me, that we are able to determine whether it was person X or Y who was the central actor to the event, or whether the event took place in 1898 or 1902 or 1907, as much as the fact that the event occurred, to someone, somewhere, about that time, within their collective social past, and that the event retains historical and contemporary resonance to those that remember today.

Some of the material presented here is reconstruction based on the assumption that the documentation of traditional culture that is available for the Upper Tanana generally holds as well for the borderlands region specifically. This extrapolation seems defensible, since differences between northwestern *Dineh* were mainly a function of their specific environments. For example, the Tanana near Fairbanks exploited salmon runs, while the Upper Tanana relied more on land mammals and lake fish, as VanStone (1974) and others (McClellan 1964; Shinkwin and Aigner 1979; Shinkwin et al. 1979) have documented. Outside of these differences, there are tremendous continuities between *Dineh* groups in world view (Nelson 1983), a base technology, which relied more on artifice than artifacts (Ridington 1982, 1983), and an extensive cross-regional social network, which circulated goods, people, and ideas (McClellan 1964), resulting, as we will see with the Athabaskan language, in a general homogenization of many aspects of *Dineh* culture. McKennan (1969b:98) described the result of this social network in the western subarctic as a “a cultural continuum carried by a series of interlocking local bands whose microcultures differ in only small ways from those of their immediate neighbours.”

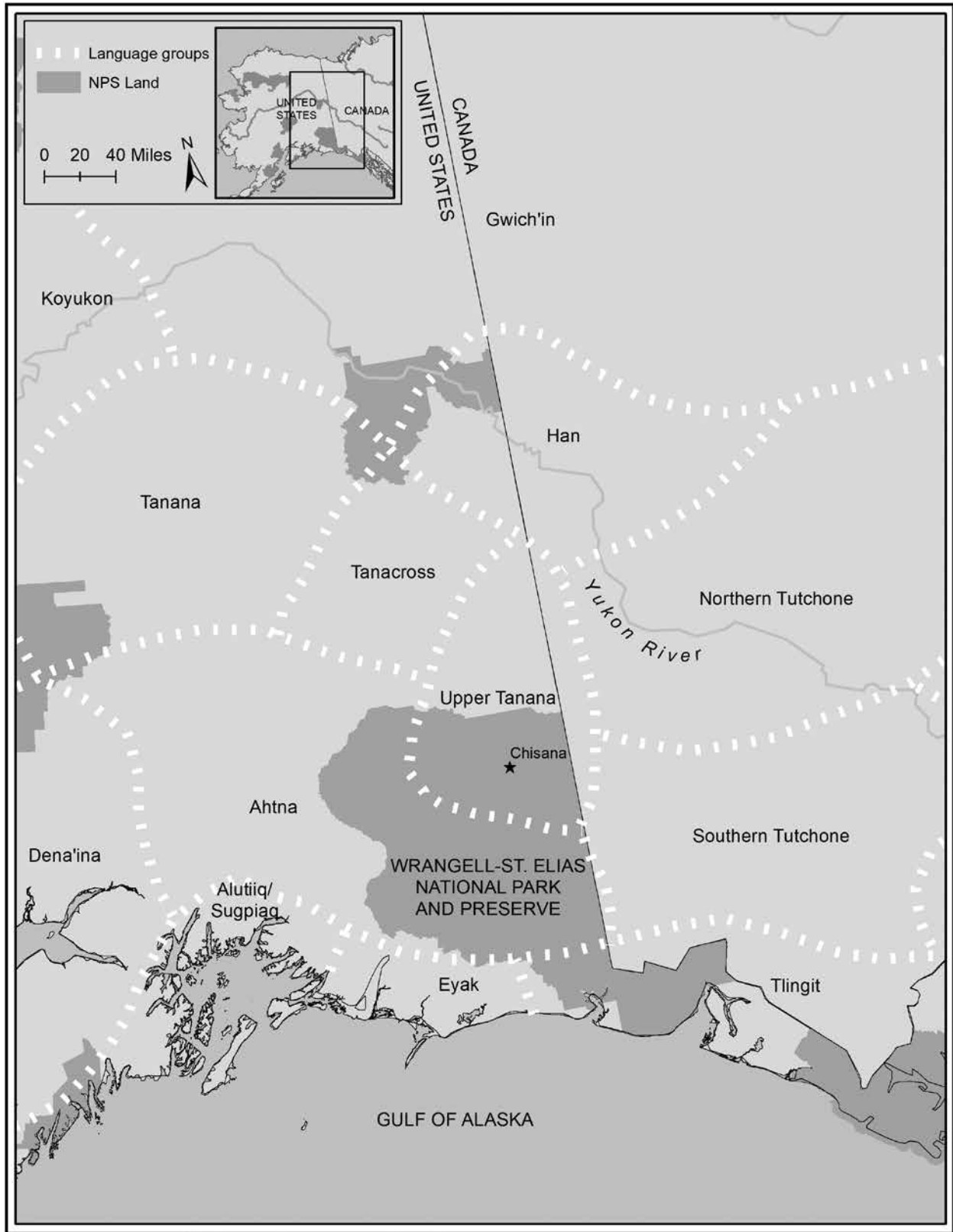


Figure 9. Aboriginal languages of the Yukon-Alaska borderlands. Language areas based on Krauss et al. 2011. Note that boundaries are approximate and permeable.

LANGUAGE

Historically, the aboriginal people of the Chisana River basin spoke several dialects of the Upper Tanana linguistic continuum, a distinctive language within the Athabascan language family and one of twenty-seven (mostly) contiguous languages spoken in the northwestern subarctic from the Bering Sea to Hudson's Bay (see Figure 9).

The Athabascan language family can be linked by historical linguistics to the Eyak and Tlingit languages of the Pacific coast to form the Na-Dene language phylum. Vayda (2010a, 2010b) has put forward the hypothesis that Na-Dene is in turn historically related to the eastern Siberian Yeniseian language family as represented by the Ket language. A multi-authored assessment and examination of the implications of this genealogical relationship evidences a consensus among linguists that if not proven the hypothesis is certainly robust and the best (perhaps only) evidence of a shared linguistic heritage between a New World and Old World population (Kari and Potter 2010). The archaeological implications of this possibility are explored by Potter (2010) and critiqued by Dumond (2010).

The Tanacross language, spoken to the east of Tetlin, and the Lower Tanana language (sometimes called simply Tanana), spoken yet further downstream along the Tanana River, are mutually distinct, though closely related, languages which combined with Upper Tanana constitute the Tanana linguistic group proper. The relatively slight differences between the Upper Tanana language and its linguistic neighbors reflect considerable interchange of speakers across language boundaries within the region. This lack of extensive linguistic differentiation reflects an important social-cultural characteristic of northern Athabascan speaking peoples in general, namely that:

Intergroup communication has ordinarily been constant, and no Northern Athapaskan language or dialect was ever completely isolated from the others for long. The most important differences among Athapaskan languages are generally the result of areal diffusion of separate innovations from different points of origin, each language – each community – being a unique conglomerate ... Between Northern Athapaskan as a whole and the band or community dialects that are its fundamental sociolinguistic units the only useful larger categories are languages, and even these are sometimes arbitrary... Whatever the language boundaries, the network of communication in the Northern Athapaskan dialect complex is open-ended... People from adjacent communities usually expect to be able to understand one another's speech, if not immediately then surely after some practice. Local dialects and languages are important as symbols of social identity, but the native expectation that these differences, even across relatively vast distances, will not be barriers to communication gives the Northern Athapaskan speaker a distinctively open and flexible perception his social world (Krauss and Golla 1981:68-69).

The Upper Tanana language is no different in this regard. While it is a distinct language, it nevertheless shares similar features with Tanacross, Gwich'in, Northern and Southern Tutchone, Lower Tanana, and Han. This indicates considerable linguistic and hence social exchanges over an area stretching from east of Fairbanks north to the Old Crow flats and east to the upper Yukon River, exchanges which the evidence suggest have been going on for thousands of years. As McKennan notes:

The Athapaskans on the Tanana and Yukon rivers, from the Tutchone to the Ingalik, do not fall easily into a number of discrete cultural or linguistic blocks; rather, they constitute a continuum of local bands whose respective microcultures and dialects differ only slightly from those of their immediate neighbors. Over a span of several bands the linguistic differences are compounded, with mutual intelligibility

diminishing in rough proportion to the intervening distance it is hard to say whether the linguistic jumps from the Minto dialect (of Lower Tanana) to Upper Koyukon and from Upper Tanana to Southern Tutchone are greater than the jump from Minto to Upper Tanana (Michael E. Krauss, communication to editors 1978). Indeed, both Tanacross and Upper Tanana speakers told McKennan that they are able to converse with Lower Tanana speakers less easily than with speakers of Han, Ahtna, and Southern Tutchone, although it is not clear whether or not this is because they have acquired some degree of competence in these languages through extensive and often intimate contact (McKennan 1981:563).

A multilingual capacity was the traditional norm amongst the western subarctic Athabascans. Bessie John, at a language workshop in Whitehorse, told how, "In the old days we were sent to another village to learn their language, when we were little we would just stay there and speak their language; then we know it." She herself learned Northern Tutchone as a young girl from her years living at Fort Selkirk, where her maternal grandmother was from, and Coffee Creek, which was shared by speakers of both Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone (John 1997). For the neighboring Ahtna, Kari has observed that:

The Upper Ahtna have an impressive tradition of multilingualism. Most Upper Ahtna Elders can speak the two distinct languages of the Tanana drainage – Upper Tanana and Tanacross – and they are familiar with the other dialects of Ahtna spoken down the Copper River and to the west. The Upper Ahtna often sing and dance with the Tanacross, Tetlin, and Northway people at Copper River potlatches.... The ... Dena'ina or (Tanaina) of Cook Inlet, and the Western Ahtna had a tradition of speaking and understanding each other's languages. Early in the period of Russian occupation the Russians employed Dena'ina as agents and interpreters as they contacted the Ahtnas and other Athapabaskans in interior Alaska (P. Kari 1985:16, and footnote 3, pp. 16-17).

Based on genealogical connections, the dialects spoken in the Chisana River basin certainly included Northway Upper Tanana and Scottie Creek Upper Tanana. There were also some speakers of the Tetlin dialect of Upper Tanana, and of the Tanacross, Ahtna, Han, and Northern Tutchone Athabaskan languages who had married into the area. Although never formally documented by linguists, there is some evidence in support of an Upper Tanana dialect (Nabesna) distinct to the upper Chisana and Nabesna Rivers.

In 1979, there were an estimated 250 fluent speakers of the Upper Tanana language, a figure that has declined with the passing of Elders over the recent decades. Tuttle et al. (2011) identified about 95 speakers in the late 2000s. There are a considerable number in the current middle-aged generation who can understand and speak the language to some extent. While it is certain that many of the more subtle features of the language associated with indigenous pre-contact culture has been lost as the Upper Tanana have adapted to non-aboriginal cultural practices within hunting, spiritual beliefs and behavior, and technology, considerable effort is being made at the community level to revitalize language competency.

KINSHIP RELATIONS

Since the Upper Tanana bands are small, every member of the group normally enjoys at least one, and often several, relationships with each of the other members.... The present [1929] Upper Nabesna-Chisana band offers a splendid example of such



Figure 10. Three Alaska Native Women, including Mother Northway (R), Lower Nabesna 1930. Robert Addison McKennan Papers, UAF-1985-98-997. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

interrelationship. The group consists of four families, those of Chisana Joe, Nabesna John, Scottie Creek Titus, and Andy Toby. Joe, John, and Corinne, the wife of Titus, are brothers and sister. Andy's dead father, Tobey Charley, was the maternal uncle of the three just named. Andy's wife is Corinne's daughter by a former marriage. Corinne's young son, Little Ed, is regarded as the future husband of Joe's little girl, Ed's cross-cousin. Thus each family is related to the other three; and Andy is related to his wife, whose mother is his paternal cross-cousin; Corinne's son is to marry her brother's daughter; and further to complicate the picture the band contains Old Mama, the mother of Joe, John, and Corinne, who is related by blood or marriage to everyone (McKenna 1959:121).

Like all other *Dineh* peoples, the aboriginal society of the Upper Tanana revolved around relations between kin. These relations between consanguines (relations by blood) and affines (relations by marriage) were the primary mechanism by which most social relationships were organized and acted upon. This included primary socialization and education of children, the formation of domestic, local, and regional residential units, subsistence and other economic activities including trade relations and potlatch ceremonies, and spiritualism. The dominance of these relations among *Dineh* is so strong that we may say that they live within a kin-based society. By this we mean that for nearly all people the family is the dominant arena of social relations throughout their lives. However, the nature of the family among the Upper Tanana was quite a bit different from the normative family in contemporary North America.

The primary difference is cultural and is derived from several factors that are distinct from western cultural standards. Among the *Dineh* of the Chisana basin, these differences include the following:

- the assignment of descent based on one's mother (matrilineal descent);
- the existence of clans, phratries, and moieties;
- the primacy of the extended family, rather than the natal family, in the formation of the domestic economic unit of the household; and
- the equivalency of the domestic economy with the public economy, in so far as groups of related households that lived together (the band) cooperatively created both the personal subsistence and public political economies – indeed their categorical distinction makes little sense from the Native point of view.

Beyond these distinctions, however, several factors make it difficult to specify the finer details of the aboriginal kinship system of the Upper Tanana. Most importantly, the introduction of epidemic and endemic European diseases, such as measles and tuberculosis, resulted in a dramatic decline in the regional population. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people died, decimating villages, destroying whole families, and reducing some lineages and clans to unsustainable levels. The survivors were incorporated into living families for the purposes of maintaining a social identity and role within this reconstituted society. A second factor is the general assimilation of Upper Tanana to western mores, particularly Christianity and western ideals of "love," which further reduced understandings of and familiarity with the aboriginal kinship system. As a result, there is considerable range between individual accounts of the nature of kinship relations as a reading of the most comprehensive attempt to elucidate it reveals (Guédon 1974). Nevertheless, we can describe briefly what seem to be enduring features of the kinship system agreed upon by most *Dineh*.



Figure 11. Bertha and Ada, Lower Nabesna, 1930. Robert Addison McKennan Papers, UAF-1985-98-998. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Matrilineal Descent

Matrilineal descent is the practice of tracing one's ancestry through the female line. Children look to their mother and her blood relatives as their consanguineal relations from whom they are descended and to whom they are most closely related. Yet not all *Dineh* observed matrilineal descent. In the Mackenzie district, for example, they are generally patrilineal, and the northern Gwich'in follow bilateral descent, while most *Dineh* in Alaska and Yukon follow matrilineal lines.

Anthropologists have documented several correlates generally found accompanying matrilineal descent, some of which are found among the Upper Tanana. These include similarly structured terminologies for kin,⁵ a preference for classificatory cross-cousin marriage, the sororate and levirate, and special relationships between children and their maternal uncles and aunts (their mother's brothers and sisters) and their maternal cousins. It is important to emphasize, however,

⁵ The kinship terminology "is bifurcate collateral for the parental generation. For ego's own generation siblings and parallel cousins were called by the same term, while cross-cousins were terminologically differentiated from siblings and parallel cousins, but not from each other – the so-called Iroquois system" (McKenna 1981:572, 574). The important feature is the distinction between maternal and paternal cousins from ego's perspective; the former being regarded as close "siblings," the latter as potential marriage partners.

that matrilineal descent does not alienate fathers from their offspring. On the contrary, close, loving relationships between parents and children is the norm.

Clans, Phratries, and Moieties

Within most of the western subarctic *Dineh* communities, people were held to be related to one another less as individuals, and more as representatives of groups of kin variously organized as “clans,” “phratries,” and “moieties.” Earlier we noted that the composition of these larger social categories has been obscured by demographic collapse due to epidemic death rates during much of the 19th and 20th centuries and that, as a result, it is difficult to reconstruct the aboriginal system in operation prior to contact due to these changes in population.⁶ Evidence does seem to suggest that the aboriginal system was a phratry organization of three sibs (Guédon 1974). Today nearly everybody, even older *Dineh*, recognize two principal clans (comprised of a number of sub-clans) within a moiety social organization, although clan identification does vary among contemporary individuals and between villages. One enumeration, provided by Roy Sam (2004) of Northway, identifies eight clans among the Upper Tanana, divided into two moieties. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Clans of the Upper Tanana according to Roy Sam

<u>Name Association</u>
CROW MOIETY
<i>Naltsiin</i> (marten)
<i>Alts'a'dinee</i> (crow)
<i>Niisuu</i> (?)
WOLF MOIETY
<i>Ts'iik'aayuu</i> (cottonwood seed in air)
<i>Tisyuu</i> (red ochre)
<i>Ch'ich'e yuu</i> (fishtail)
<i>Ch'yaa</i> (seagull)
<i>Udzih yuu</i> (caribou)

Source: Interview of Roy Sam by N. A. Easton, 16 May 2004, Northway, AK.

Moiety systems composed of exogamous, matrilineal lineages are fairly common among hunting and gathering peoples. Within such kinship systems, it is an almost regular occurrence to find that one's preferred marriage mate is one's cross-cousin, that is one's father's sister's or mother's brother's child of the opposite sex, and this too is the case amongst the Upper Tanana (McKenna 1981). Parallel cousins (father's brother's or mother's sister's children) are forbidden marriage partners in a matrilineal descent system; to marry one would break the rule of clan exogamy, since they would necessarily belong to the same clan. Conversely, cross-cousins must perforce belong to the opposite moiety and are therefore eligible marriage partners. In the modern age, the breaking of this restriction has also contributed to further social confusion regarding clan and moiety membership, particularly for children of same-moiety parents. A good number of theoretical explanations for the preference for cross-cousin marriages in such systems have been put forward over the years, but here we will just accept the fact that in smaller populations typical of foraging societies, marriage to a relative of some sort is inevitable, and to maintain moiety exogamy within a matrilineal descent system cross-cousin marriage is a viable option.

⁶ In her summary examination of matrilineal kin groups across northwest America, de Laguna (1975) suggests that rather easy and frequent clan re-alignments are a feature of matrilineal clans across the western subarctic as a whole.

Moieties also hold ritual reciprocal obligations to each other, most expressively manifest in the care of each other's dead and the potlatch ceremony.

Kinship and the Domestic Household and Political Economies

The household economy of the *Dineh* was formed through the alliance of two or more related families who co-operated in the work required to sustain and reproduce this extended family household. Several such households living at the same locality formed a village, and several such villages whose members regularly worked with each other formed the band. (To an important extent this is still true in the early 21st century.)

The importance of filial ties – that is, affectionate relations between parents and children – within the immediate nuclear family are often noted, but it is also clear that the minimal domestic or co-residential unit was some form of extended family.

These domestic units seem to have taken three principal forms:

1. two adult siblings of the same or opposite sex and their families,
2. parents and their married children, and
3. two hunting partners, who may be only distant classificatory kin.

According to McClellan and Denniston (1981:384), “in the course of its existence, any nuclear family or any other segment of a domestic group might leave to join another household unit. The system was extremely flexible, and arrangements of many kinds were worked out in terms of general expedience and personal preference.” This constant fission and fusion of local groups resulted in wide variation in the size of the group at any particular year or season, from a single extended family, to two or three families camping and hunting together, to a hundred or more people gathering for summer fishing, fall caribou hunting, or the mid-winter potlatch and gambling season. These larger aggregations might be designated “by the areas which they habitually exploited, for they were held together by their territorial as well as kinship ties” (McClellan and Denniston (1981:384), such as the Scottie Creek, Nabesna, or Chisana “bands” of the Upper Tanana. But their actual composition, that is, the specific people who made up the group at any given point in time, fluctuated widely according to the residence choices made by individuals during their life history. A single Upper Tanana individual, for example, was a member of the Chisana “band” in the 1920s, of the Scottie Creek “band” in the 1930s, of the Snag “band” in the 1940s, and of the Northway “band” in the 1950s (Easton n.d.).

What endured was the territorial range used by those living at a particular village or camp location, even though the membership of the occupants of that location was in regular flux. Thus, to ask “Who were the Chisana People?” we are faced with a task that makes little sense within *Dineh* society. And although the territorial range was roughly coeval with a linguistic form (in the case above, a distinctive dialect, it could be a distinctive language as well such as Burwash Southern Tutchone), the existence of a multilingual norm by most individuals along with their kin ties also served to facilitate “identity switching” as they moved about the landscape as circumstances and their personal proclivities ordained (Easton 2001a).

Overlap between territories was everywhere acknowledged by reciprocal access for the purposes of subsistence, facilitated by clan, cognate, or affinal relationships. Nowhere, it seems, did “large social units predicated on formal territorial claims” – that is to say, tribal political units – exist prior to European settlement. Groups recognized “a commonality of linked dialects, shared customs, and contiguous territory, but it was the Whites who gave them the overall ‘tribal’ names” (McClellan and Denniston 1981:384; see also Easton 2020; Nadasdy 2002).

Indeed, we need to recognize the formation of the tribe as one that emerged late in the historic period as a bureaucratic category of administrative convenience, whose function was to organize the extremely fluid on-the-ground reality of the politically egalitarian foraging *Dineh* into defined, circumscribed units for the purpose of their domination by the State. Subsequently, in the late 20th century, these “tribal” categories have become increasingly reified among the *Dineh* themselves, since they are the primary vector through which they negotiate their communal and personal relations with the encompassing State (Easton 2020; Nadasdy 2004, 2017).

At marriage a man would ideally live with his in-laws or affines for a period of a year or more, performing services for his parents-in-law to demonstrate his ability to care properly for their daughter and to meet his obligations to them as affines. McKennan observed that:

The Upper Tanana marry outside the band as often as they do within it, nor is there any marked tendency for a couple to settle in the district of the wife’s band or vice versa. A tabulation of the present location of the couples of the Chisana – Nabesna, Lower Nabesna, Tetlin, and Last Tetling bands gives the following results:

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Alien husband and local wife	9	34.6
Local husband and alien wife	7	27.0
Local husband and local wife	5	19.2
<u>Alien husband and alien wife</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>19.2</u>
	26	100.0

It should be remembered that the residence of none of these couples is permanent, for a pair that wintered at the head of the Nabesna in 1929 might spend the following year at Scottie Creek or at Last Tetling. The table, however, does illustrate the impermanence of matrilocality as well as the fluidity of the Upper Tanana bands (McKenna 1959:119-120).

In the past a man might also marry more than one woman and when they did it was usually in the form of sororal polygyny – a man marrying two classificatory cross-cousin sisters. A particular polygamous marriage form documented in three examples in Upper Tanana genealogies is shown in Figure 12. It is uncertain to what extent this form is normative, as it may also be a response to the collapsing demographics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to increased mortality by epidemic diseases.

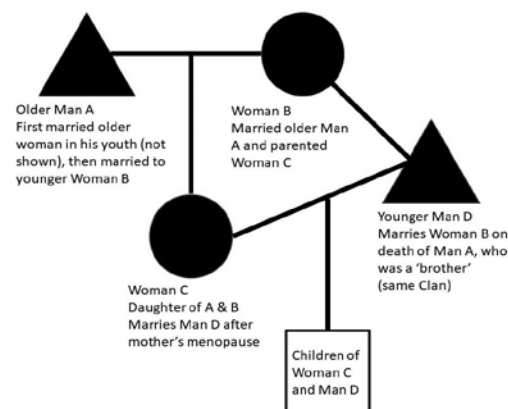


Figure 12. Upper Tanana polygamous marriage form.

As well, men often formed “partnerships” with the brother of their wife. Partners and their families often formed the nucleus of a local co-residential group, a grouping that was strengthened by the presence of “both sides” – both moieties – each of which had social, economic, and ritual obligations to the other. These included sharing game and other material resources and obligations to care for the dead of the opposite moiety. Forming bands, which combined affinal, partnership, and moiety obligations into the same unit, served to consolidate reciprocity with people one was socially close to and create a more resilient local social unit.

Genealogical records of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* provide examples of all of the above. Although polygyny is no longer practiced, I was told of several Chisana River basin men who had two wives earlier in the century. As well, even within the more concentrated sedentism of the contemporary villages of Beaver Creek and Northway, cross-cousin marriage occurs and, although non-exogamous moiety marriage has increased dramatically, it is still frowned upon socially and most people believe it is best to marry into your father’s clan. To some extent, the exogamy rule seems to have been adapted to the sedentary nucleation of permanent villages in the 20th century through the practice of village exogamy in which people from Beaver Creek seek mates in other nearby communities, such as Northway or Mentasta, and vice versa. At least two instances of the sororate, men marrying the widow of a close clan member were noted. And almost all community members we spoke to continue to trace their descent through their mothers’ lineage, despite the imposition of a patrilineal descent system by the State for its own administrative purposes.

POTLATCH, RECIPROCITY AND LEADERSHIP

Dineh culture is rich in traditions of intense sociality, occasions on which kin and friend come together to share in singing, dancing, telling stories, and speechmaking. While these activities occur almost daily in less formal gatherings, the social ritual of these activities is most intense in the potlatch, when people from all over the region will aggregate to provide social recognition of and support to their relatives and friends at times of celebration, such as graduations and marriage, and crisis, such as birth and death. Smaller social gatherings recognizing the coming of age of children or a brush with misfortune avoided, or honoring a living spouse, for example, bring the local residents together for an evening of feasting, singing, and dancing. Such gatherings are often announced as “a tea” to distinguish them from the longer, usually three-day, potlatch gatherings (McKenna 1959; Guédon 1974; Simeone 1995).

It is important to note that the social activity we know as potlatch among the western interior *Dineh* is both similar to and different from the ritual known as potlatch on the north Pacific coast. Both are occasions at which social status is enhanced by the generosity of the hosts to their guests, but the intensity of competition for self-aggrandizement is considerably reduced among the interior *Dineh*, being replaced with a sense of meeting one’s social obligation to honor members of the opposite moiety for the services they have rendered your clan.

In this sense, the *Dineh* potlatch is better understood within the overarching moral value that *Dineh* place on generosity towards others as a measure of a person’s good character and virtue, rather than the more competitive “fighting with property” subtext of the coastal potlatch (Codere 1950). In this respect, potlatch distributions are a component of the more general principal of reciprocity, which structures much of their social relations on a day-to-day basis; this is as true today as it was in the past.

Two forms of reciprocity are commonly practiced within *Dineh* communities between *Dineh* and their friends: generalized reciprocity and balanced reciprocity. Generalized reciprocity is characterized by the giving and taking of resources and services within a social group without any immediate expectation of return, but a general expectation that the giver will, in turn, sometime receive, from someone in the group, some thing or service they need (Sahlins 1965). This is typified

in *Dineh* culture by the borrowing of tools, the sharing of food, and the assistance of labor in some task such as building a residence, and in local social gambling.⁷ Balanced reciprocity is a more calculated exchange, in which the giver and the receiver keep a record (sometimes mental, today often written) of the nature of the gifts and the recipients, and the giver can legitimately expect to receive an equivalent value from the receiver, immediately or in the future (Sahlins 1965). The *Dineh* practiced this type of reciprocity during exchanges that occur in the potlatch ceremony.⁸

It is important to note that not all aspects of these reciprocal exchanges are material. They can be social or spiritual as well. In particular, respect and good feelings from the receiving member of the exchange group can be the only return a giver can expect; often it is the only return a giver desires, relying on her current generosity (particularly with food) to be rewarded by *Taatsaan* and the animal spirits through further successful hunting (Easton 2001, 2008). Alternatively, during potlatch a guest may “give” his presence and perhaps also a dance performance or song as a measure of their respect to the host, for which he receives food, hospitality, and material items, such as blankets, gloves, or camp equipment.

The English word “respect” holds several connotations in *Dineh* culture. Some of these meanings are discussed in the section on “Hunting.” Another use of the term is the feeling held for individuals who are granted leadership roles within the group. As is typical in many foraging societies, leadership is both contingent and transitory. It is given to individuals who demonstrate superior abilities in hunting, organizing communal activities, shamanic healing, generosity, historical and mythological knowledge, song and dance, and public oratory. Upper Tanana *Dineh* call such a person *Huskeh*. The Russian-derived term *Tyone* is also used, as well as the English language term *Chief*, however, the latter does not carry with it the English notion of hereditary authority. The ability to host a large potlatch is a public demonstration of these respected characteristics.

A *Huskeh*’s leadership is constrained to the role of advice and opinion, not control or coercion, although in social practice it is easy to perceive it differently without an understanding of the underlying social cultural values at play. In addition, *Huskeh* leadership is transitory, dependent on the continued social demonstration of leadership skills through acts of generosity and the other achievements listed above. And while people may regard a *Huskeh*’s brother or son as a potential leader, they must achieve the status in their own right. Abuse of authority was generally responded to by personal shunning, abandonment of the *Huskeh*’s local group, or, in rare cases which involve consistent “outrages to the public conscience,” the response could be violence or even socially sanctioned assassination (McKenna 1959:131; Easton n.d.).

CLAN MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

Historically, and quite likely deep into the past, the Upper Tanana were socially organized into exogamous matrilineal descent groups. These were clans to which you belonged by virtue of descent from your mother. In addition, you were required to choose your spouse from outside of this maternal group and to provide aid and support to your own clan and that into which you married. While this form of social organization was quite common among many western subarctic Athabaskan language groups, among the Upper Tanana its form may have been a three-group Phratry system, rather than the more common two-group Moiety system.

⁷ It was in a conversation with Paul Nadasdy that we recognized village gambling as a form of generalized reciprocity. Paul confirmed that in Burwash the attitude within the regular group of local players is one that what you lose, you eventually get back, and there are no hard feelings amongst the players whether they win or lose. The exception to this is the player who attends irregularly, wins, and does not return for some time. This is seen as greedy. For the regular gamblers, the poker game is only the social context for their sustained discussions on a wide variety of contemporary village issues.

⁸ A third form of exchange – negative reciprocity, in which each side is attempting to get more value out of the exchange than they put in – is also practiced by *Dineh* in their commercial exchanges with merchants of the external capitalist economy.

Moiety systems are “dual organizations,” so-called because they allow the division of every member of society into either one or the other of two complimentary groups. In many Athabaskan communities these two groups are associated with and named Wolf and Crow. In contrast, there appeared to be three major descent groups among the Upper Tanana in the past; social organizations of more than two exogamous descent groups are called Phratry systems.

A group called *Na'ltsiin*, commonly referred to as “Crow” in English, and another group referred to as “Seagull” seem to have been the two dominant phratries. Each of these, in turn, was comprised of a number of subsidiary matrilineal clans. These two groups were expected to marry and maintain ritual services, such as caring for each other’s dead. However, many accounts also mention a smaller third group, most often referred to as *Niisu* and/or *Tsuuk* – “Marten” people, which stood “in between” the former two, as “almost a cousin to us all.” In the historic period, however, this third phratry seems to have been absorbed into the *Na'ltsiin*, resulting in the contemporary formation of a dual or moiety organization of Crow and Seagull people, each of which contains a number of named clans (McKenna 1969a, 1969b; Guédon 1974). The social role of these matrilineal descent groups and moieties is discussed more fully in the section on “Kinship.”

Many of the clans hold stories of their origins, some versions of which are presented in Guédon (1974:67-77), collected both during her own research and from publications by McKenna and others. Yarber and Madison (1987) present a recording of the origins and movements of several clans as recalled by Walter Northway (see Appendix 2).

Places

The life and culture of the *Dineh* of the Chisana River basin are fundamentally connected to the landscape of the region, a landscape shaped by ancient and ongoing geological processes, and a long history of occupation by their ancestors. This connection is demonstrated in their intimate knowledge of their environment, the ecological subsystems it contains, how to navigate from place to place along ancient pathways, and a truly astounding repertoire of geographical place names in the Upper Tanana language. Their settlements and camps were scattered about the land, providing them with places at which to secure the resources – animals, plants, water, and minerals – on which they depended for their survival. Well-used trails ran between these settlements, facilitating travel between them, but also providing a physical metaphor for the interconnectedness of *Dineh* to each other, the land they were embedded in, and the spirit world that watched over them.

Western physical geographers often emphasize the oscillating extremes of the subarctic environment: from freezing winters to sweltering summers, animal abundance cycling into population crashes, boggy lowlands and windswept highlands, pretty to look at from afar but a harsh and unforgiving land.

While no *Dineh* would deny the hard work required to survive in this landscape, many would say that the subarctic world is not an unforgiving hostile wilderness, but instead a *giving environment*, one which nurtures and provides for *Dineh* in return for their respectful behavior. Indeed, it can be said that they hold their land with love and the land in turn shows its love for *Dineh* by the provision of its bounty (see Bird-David 1990).

NAMING THE LANDSCAPE – “WISDOM SITS IN PLACES”

A place that is named carries a complex symbolic capacity. Its name may arise from an historical event, but the name may be remembered less for the event itself as for its contemporary meaning in the construction of local identity and sense of place.

Place names can evoke not only history but complex moral positions, as the stories related to space are embodied in the name itself (Basso 1984). This observation has also been made among the western subarctic *Dineh* proper (Cruikshank 1978b, 1984; Easton n.d.). Thus, for people educated in the names of the landscape and the stories associated with them, a place name can be a powerful metaphorical tool in their communications with each other. The naming of places has prosaic value too, such as in providing navigational markers for moving across or talking about the landscape.

TRAILS

The existence of trails on the landscape provides a visceral reminder of the pathways of our lives, physically and spiritually, threading together earth and heaven, our friends and neighbors, the past, present, and future. Trails are the threads that tie together the land and the animals and the people who live on it. There are many types of trails to be found all around the *Dineh*. Some you can see quite clearly, even today, such as the trail between High Cache on Desper Creek and Big Scottie Creek village at the confluence of Scottie Creek and the Chisana River.

Other trails have been destroyed by the construction of the Alaska Highway and other modern roads, which were built over the old trails because they were the best ways across the land. Still other trails have become almost impossible to see, made obscure by lack of use, erosion by wind and rain, and the cover of plant growth.

But even these obscure trail remnants might be followed if one has some knowledge of their path and pays close attention to the signs left behind by the tens of thousands of *Dineh* travelers over thousands of years who have walked upon them. Blazes upon trees are commonly found along a trail's path, for example. New growth in old forests can often show the way. And attention to the

ground beneath your feet will warn you when you stray from the trail; the ground surfaces of trails, even when covered with sphagnum moss, are harder than the ground off the trail. And, the ground is often lower than the surrounding landscape as well.

However, some trails are always difficult to see – the trails of heaven, which parallel the trails of the earth and carry the spirits of the non-human persons of animals and the ancestors of *Dineh*. You need to develop your special “awareness” to see these trails which lie always close to your earthly pathways (Easton 2001b).

Trails are important for many reasons. They were the means by which *Dineh* stayed in contact with each other between their many villages and camps. They are still the best places to travel along to find animals, which will give themselves to you to share with your people if you are kind in action and generous in spirit. And all along the trails are places with *Dineh* names, which commemorate many important occurrences in their history.

When we listen to *Dineh* Elders speak of their life on the land, they often emphasize the importance of trails by beginning their speech with a recitation of the trails they know of and the places they will take us. These accounts demonstrate that even without maps, *Dineh* knew their land far beyond the region in which they lived their lives. They learned this landscape without an atlas or writing, but by listening carefully to their own Elders when they were children. Some of the trails they can recite they have not even physically walked, but they know where they go.

The existence of these earthly trails is paralleled in the other world, Heaven, as well. Furthermore, there are “trails to heaven,” which link this world with the other world. Stories such as “The Girls Who Married Stars” tell of humans who have traveled these ephemeral trails, and a person’s entire life can be summed up as “walking their trail to heaven,” the ultimate destination of their life’s journey (Ridington 1988).

Among the Upper Tanana, when you are walking a trail on the earth you can see that it is intersected by the trails of others, such as rabbit, muskrat, beaver, and moose; these trails intersect with the trails to heaven as well. We can see them best when we find a spider’s web across the trail with the sun ahead of you. For some *Dineh*, the intricate lattice construction of the spider’s web mimics the intricate lattice of intersecting trails of earth and heaven. It is especially good luck to peer through such a web, and then carefully step around it and allow the sunshine to pass over your shoulder and through the web. One should attempt to avoid walking through such webs; to do so is disrespectful to the life and work of spiders and neglects the importance of being careful during our passage through time and space.

In an address at the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge interpretation center, Wilson Justin, a Chisana area descendent, explained that across many parts of the landscape there were two parallel trails. Local residents used one and visitors from other areas followed the other. And the path of some trails were always closely guarded; these were the trails to places of special spiritual power, where dream doctors would go to sleep and travel into the other world in order to do battle with evil, retrieve souls to heal the sick, see the future, or gain new powers (Wilson Justin, 3 June 1999, in Easton n.d.).

TRADITIONAL VILLAGES OF THE CHISANA RIVER BASIN

A surprising number of Native villages in the region of the Upper Tanana has been documented given the presumed low population densities that most scholars attribute to a general foraging economy in the subarctic. Part of the explanation for the many locations at which people were known to have lived lies in the required mobility of foraging populations, both seasonally and over longer cycles of time, a topic discussed below in the section on “Subsistence and Trapping Seasonal Rounds.”

Yet Native consultants have consistently impressed upon western subarctic researchers, such as Robert McKennan in 1929, that “formerly their number was much greater. They said that previous to the coming of the white man great numbers of them suddenly died from disease. The earliest explorers on the Yukon all met with a similar story” (McKennan 1959:19). Thus, it may be

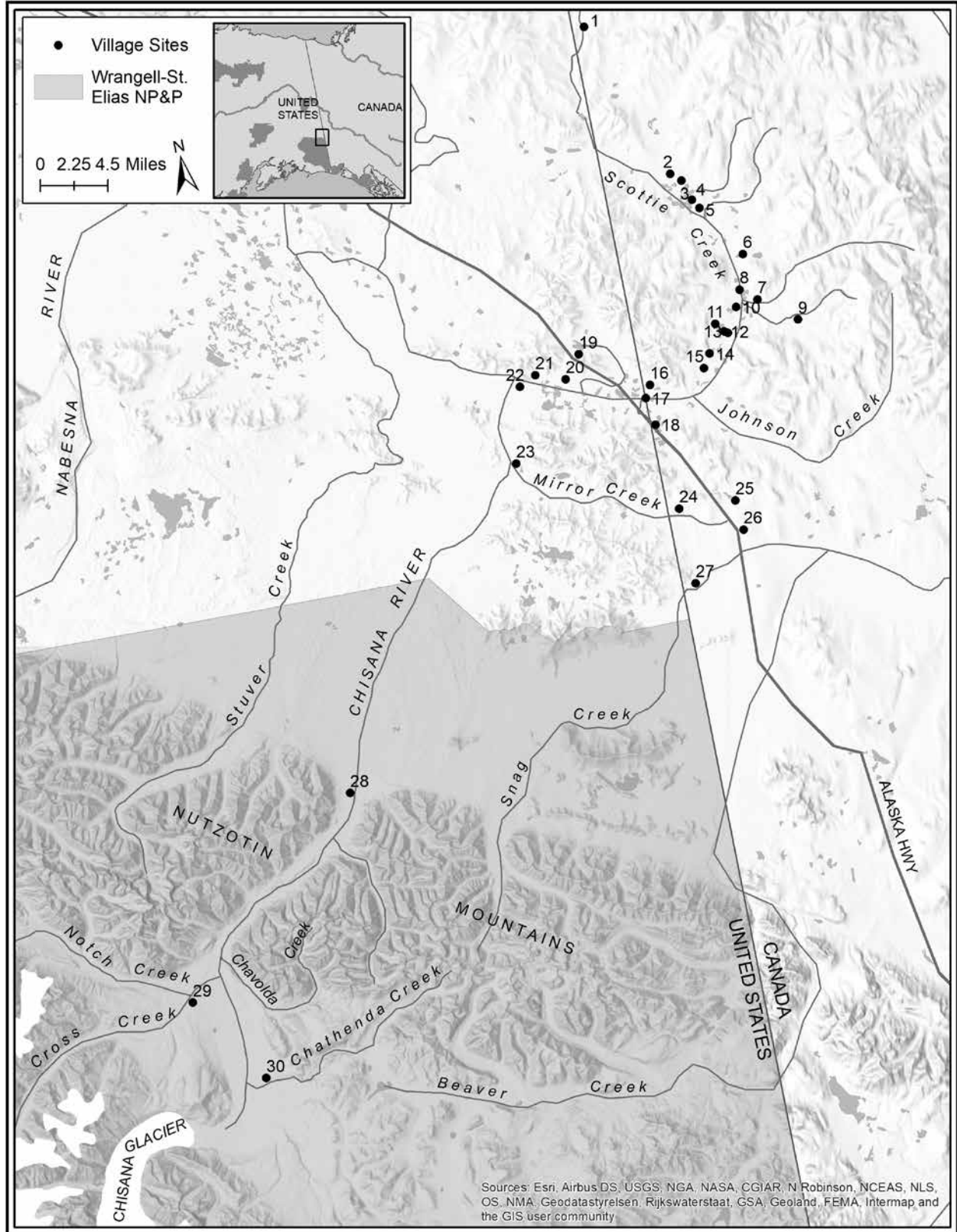


Figure 13. Villages of the Chisana River Basin.



Figure 14. Cross Creek Village, c. 1915, showing “spirit houses” constructed above graves. Lewis V. Stanley Collection, Tacoma Public Library.

that the aboriginal population levels of the region were much greater than we currently imagine, and this might also be part of the explanation for the large number of documented village sites. The following list of documented villages and camps of the Chisana River basin, including the Scottie and Mirror Creek valleys, is keyed to the numbered locations shown in Figure 13:

- 1 *Niiduu Ts'inehdayh* / lynx shot with arrow / a village at the head of the Scottie Creek valley on the flanks of *Ch'ohlt'aa* – Wienerwurst Mountain; possibly the village which Old Northway came from
- 2 *Tayh Şhiit* / hill in / younger of two villages of the same name north of Pepper (Paper) Lake
- 3 *Tayh Şhiit* / hill in / older of two villages of the same name north of Pepper Lake
- 4 *Ruup Şhah* / Rupe's home / location of the first trade post in the Scottie Creek region opened by Bill Rupe at the turn of the 19th century
- 5 *Nàhtsìqà ch'ihchuut* / wolverine grab something / Pepper Lake Village on the lake of the same name
- 6 *Enuuk Şha* / Eruk's home / the home of one of the most powerful shamans of the region
- 7 a currently un-named village location
- 8 *Tuu Tüh Tay* / water across trail / village along the trail up Scottie Creek valley
- 9 *Lèek'àth Níik* / muddy creek / village on the middle reach of the Scottie Creek valley, east side; according to oral history, the location at which *Dineh* of the region grouped together to survive after the ash fall of the White River volcanic eruption, about 1,900 years ago
- 10 *Taiy Suul Shah* / Joseph Tommy Johnny's great-grand father's house / on the southern bank of Marilyn Lake
- 11&12 *Łjì Thìitth'ànn Mǎnn'* / dog head bone lake / two villages at the lake of the same name, in the middle reach of Scottie Creek valley, occupied at different periods
- 13 *Naagāt Kàyy'* / fox den / historic and prehistoric village, in the middle reach of Big Scottie Creek valley, west side

- 14 *Tah'aa Mǎnn'* / ? / two villages at the lake of the same name, occupied at different periods
- 15 *Diah Káteèłay* / sandpiper / village at the confluence of the creek of the same name with Scottie Creek
- 16 *Tayh Chìì'* / hill point / village in the foothills of the Dawson Range overlooking the Chisana valley
- 17 *Bill Mǎnn'* / Bill (John) lake / seasonal camp on Big Scottie Creek near the border
- 18 *Ts'oogot Gaay* / ? small / Little Scottie Creek Village, on the shore of *Ts'oogot Gaiy Mǎnn'*, right on the International border below the Alcan custom station
- 19 *Ch'atxǎq' Mǎnn'* / ? / Island Lake seasonal camp at the head of Desper Creek
- 20 *Tayh Tsǎlh* / hill small / High Cache Village at the confluence of Big Scottie Creek and the mouth of Desper Creek
- 21 *Tahmìil K'èet* / fishnet place / seasonal fishing camp, between Big Scottie Creek Village and High Cache
- 22 *Tthee K'át* / rock weir / Big Scottie Creek Village, at the confluence of the Chisana River and the mouth of Big Scottie Creek
- 23 *Chinshìit* / meat cache / seasonal camp at the mouth of Mirror Creek
- 24 *Haa Tuuh Tayh* / end of the hill / '1216' seasonal hunting camp; also a significant multi-component archaeological site (the Little John site) dating to circa 14,000 years ago, and perhaps earlier based on the presence of a Chindadn Complex component
- 25 *Yihkah Mǎnn'* / daylight [comes out/reflects] lake / an often-used campsite on the trail from the Snag to Scottie Creek drainages, at the head of Little Scottie Creek
- 26 *Nìì'ìì'* / lookout [away from] / village, also known more recently as Sourdough; archaeological deposits located here date to the mid-Holocene (Northern Archaic tradition)
- 27 *Taatsaan* / raven or crow / village on the right bank of Snag Creek, near where it crosses the International border
- 28 *Taacheeg* / stream mouth / King City on the Chisana River prior to its entrance into the Wrangell Mountain foothills
- 29 *Tsay Niig Cheeg* / ochre stream / historic Cross Creek Village on the headwaters of the Chisana River
- 30 Chisana Indian Village / an earlier, pre-contact village upstream of Cross Creek, nearer the historic Chisana townsite

DWELLINGS

The Upper Tanana used a variety of house forms adapted to the circumstances of their residence. Roger Pitts produced a thesis titled *The Changing Settlement Patterns and Housing Types of the Upper Tanana* in 1972, which provides considerable detail on these forms and their construction. In this section we will briefly illustrate this variety.

Pitts (1972:179-193) lists the following forms of structures:

- Summer Bark House
- Winter Semi-Subterranean Bark House
- Winter Lodge-Pole House
- Winter Semispherical Skin Tent
- Conical Skin / Bark Tent
- Lean-To and Emergency Shelters
- High Caches
- Log Cabins

Descriptions and drawings of the principle structures are provided below.



Figure 15. Domed Mooseskin Tent and High Cache on Middle Fork of the Fortymile River, 1901. C. S. Farnsworth Collection, UAF-1972-175-00266. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. (See Figures 18 and 19.)

According to Pitts (1972), the semi-subterranean bark house (Figure 16) was built and occupied by the *Huskeh*, a man of respect and leadership whose authority was derived from his success at hunting, curing, and predicting the future. Sunk three to four feet into the ground, this dwelling could reach lengths of 20 to 40 feet and 10 to 25 feet in width. A sleeping quarters and sweathouse were located at one end and the entrance at the other (see Figure 17). Most of the interior was used for gatherings for shamanic work, dancing, storytelling, and potlatching associated with the wintertime. A smaller, above-ground structure, built similarly in other architectural aspects, was used by the general population and often housed two related families.

The domed skin tent (see Figures 18 and 19) was used by families while living at seasonal camps away from the winter village, particularly at winter hunting camps, but it could also be found within villages. One of these structures is pictured in Figure 15 above. Pitts gives dimensions of 18 feet by 8 feet by 9 feet, while McKennan suggests they averaged about 14 feet in diameter, requiring some 15 to 20 moose skins to cover one. Two families generally shared a single dwelling, usually connected through the men's "hunting partner" relationship, or brothers-in-law, or a couple and their daughter's husband and family.

Early in the 20th century, the skin-covered lodge was replaced by the rectangular canvas "wall tent," such as the one shown in the Figure 21. Both Pitts and McKennan report on the construction of a log pole house of the type illustrated in Figure 20. Pitts and McKennan also suggest that this form is a late prehistoric development, likely as a diffused form (from the coast via the Copper River?) not long before European contact.

The notched corner log cabin was introduced to the Scottie Creek drainage in 1902 by the prospector/trader Bill Rupe, and by the 1940s most of the aboriginal forms had given way to the

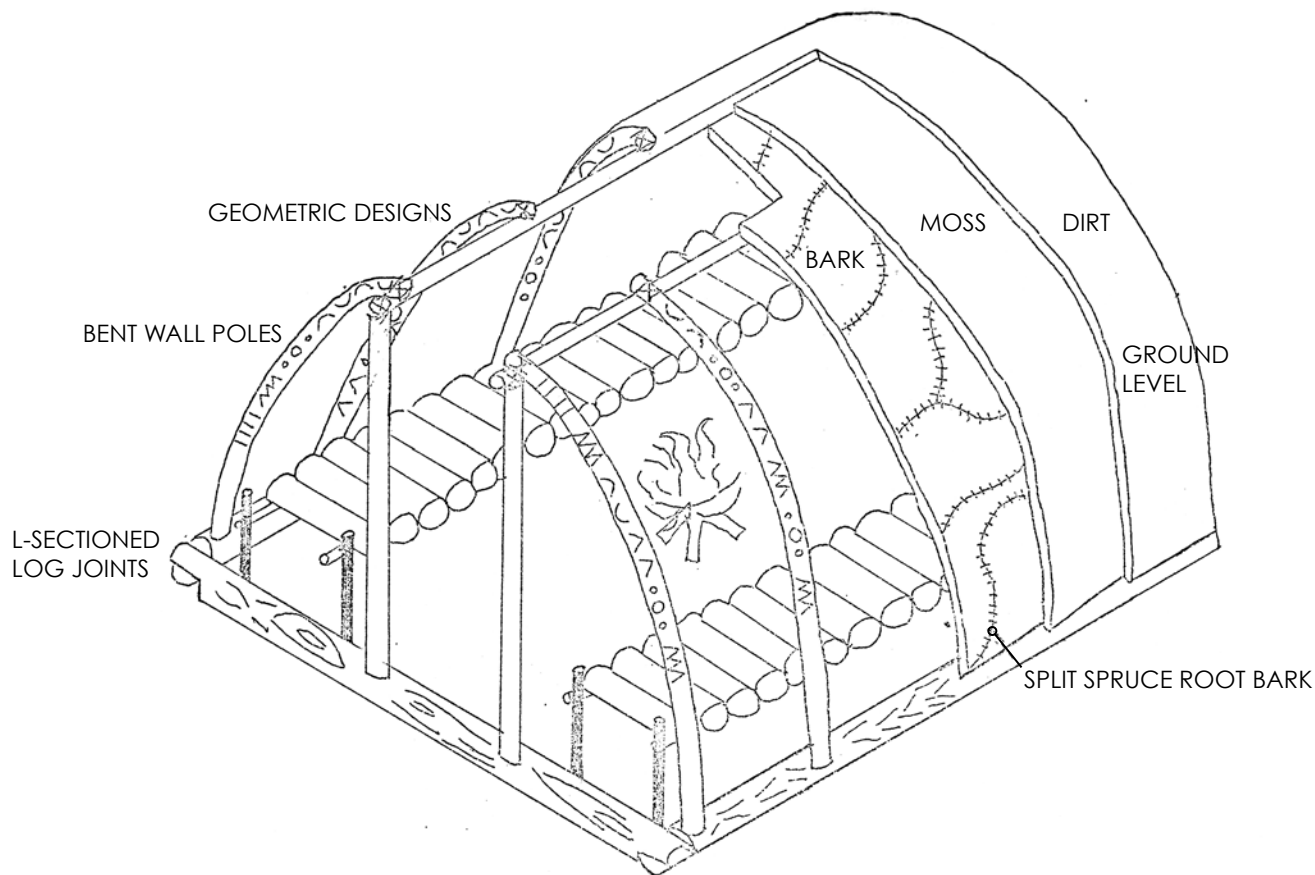


Figure 16. Section View of Upper Tanana Semi-subterranean Bark House. Pitts (1972:115). Reproduced with permission of the artist, Robert Banghart.

new style as new settlements were built and older, conservative members of the community who favored the traditional style passed on. The log cabin continues to dominate most Native villages in the region today, and log cabins are the most consistent architectural remains found during the course of archaeological survey in the Chisana Basin.

Reports on such features are available in survey reports by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for *Nach'etay Cheeg* – Cross Creek village on the Upper Chisana River (BIA 1993), *Tthiixaa' Cheeg* – Nabesna or Cooper Creek village (BIA 1996a), and *Dehsoon' Cheeg* – Nabesna Bar village (BIA 1996b). The latter two are both on the upper Nabesna River. Similar remains have been found downstream at a number of locations, including Big Scottie Creek, High Cache, *Ts'oogot Gaay*, *Taiy Chi*, *Naagat Kaiy*, *Nii'ii'*, and Snag village sites (Easton 2002). At *Ts'oogot Gaay* and *Nii'ii'* round clearings identified as former locations of domed-skinned tents are also found. The last known use of this traditional structure was by “Chief” Johnson at *Nii'ii'* in the early 1940s (Easton n.d., 2002a).

Three other structural forms are worthy of note. The first is a simple sweat bath, used for both physical and spiritual cleansing. The second is the “high cache,” a raised storage space traditionally placed in trees and historically built as a small cabin structure on poles. The last is the “ground cache” used for the storage of a variety of foodstuffs. All three of these features are commonly found at both historic and prehistoric sites throughout the region.

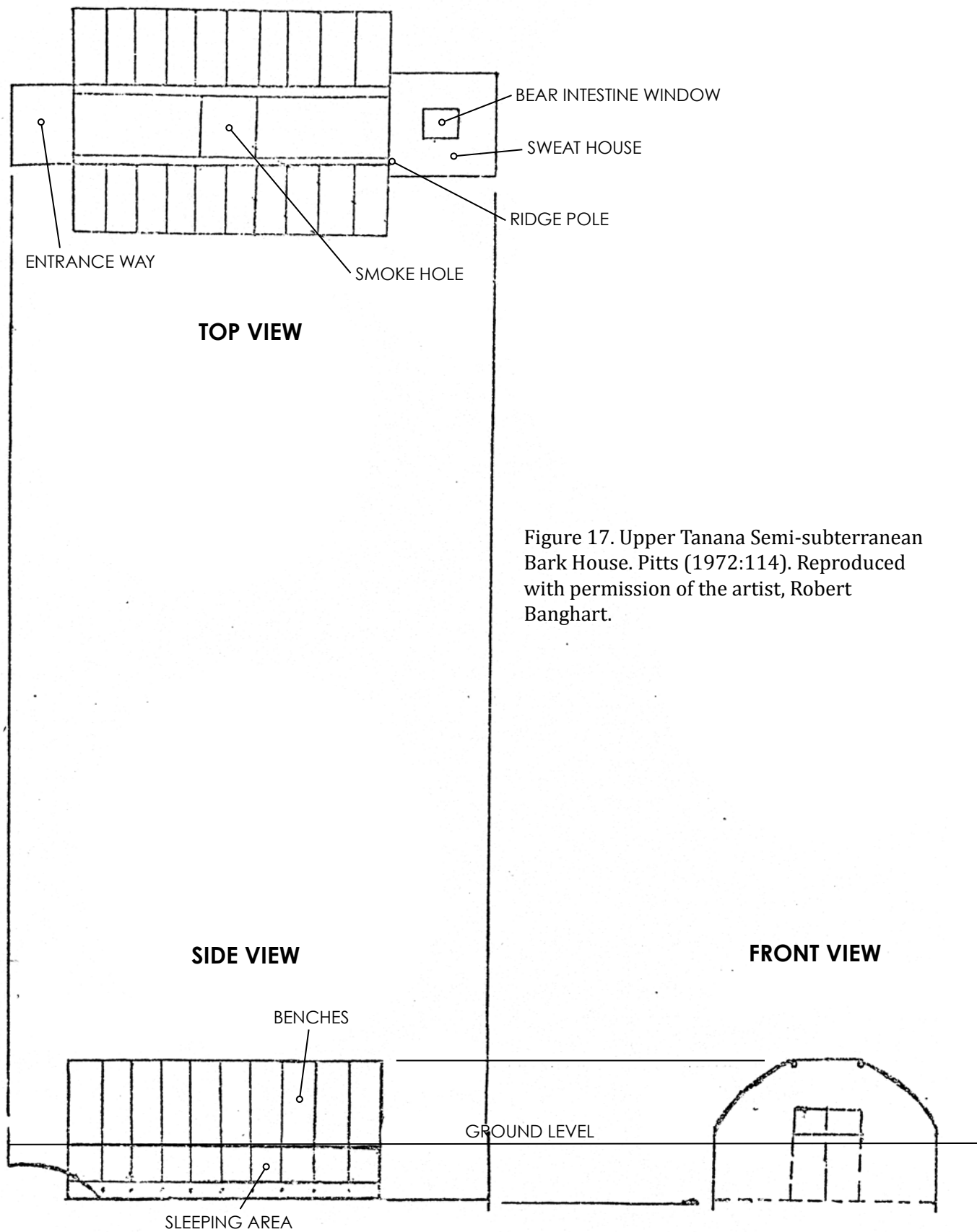


Figure 17. Upper Tanana Semi-subterranean Bark House. Pitts (1972:114). Reproduced with permission of the artist, Robert Banghart.

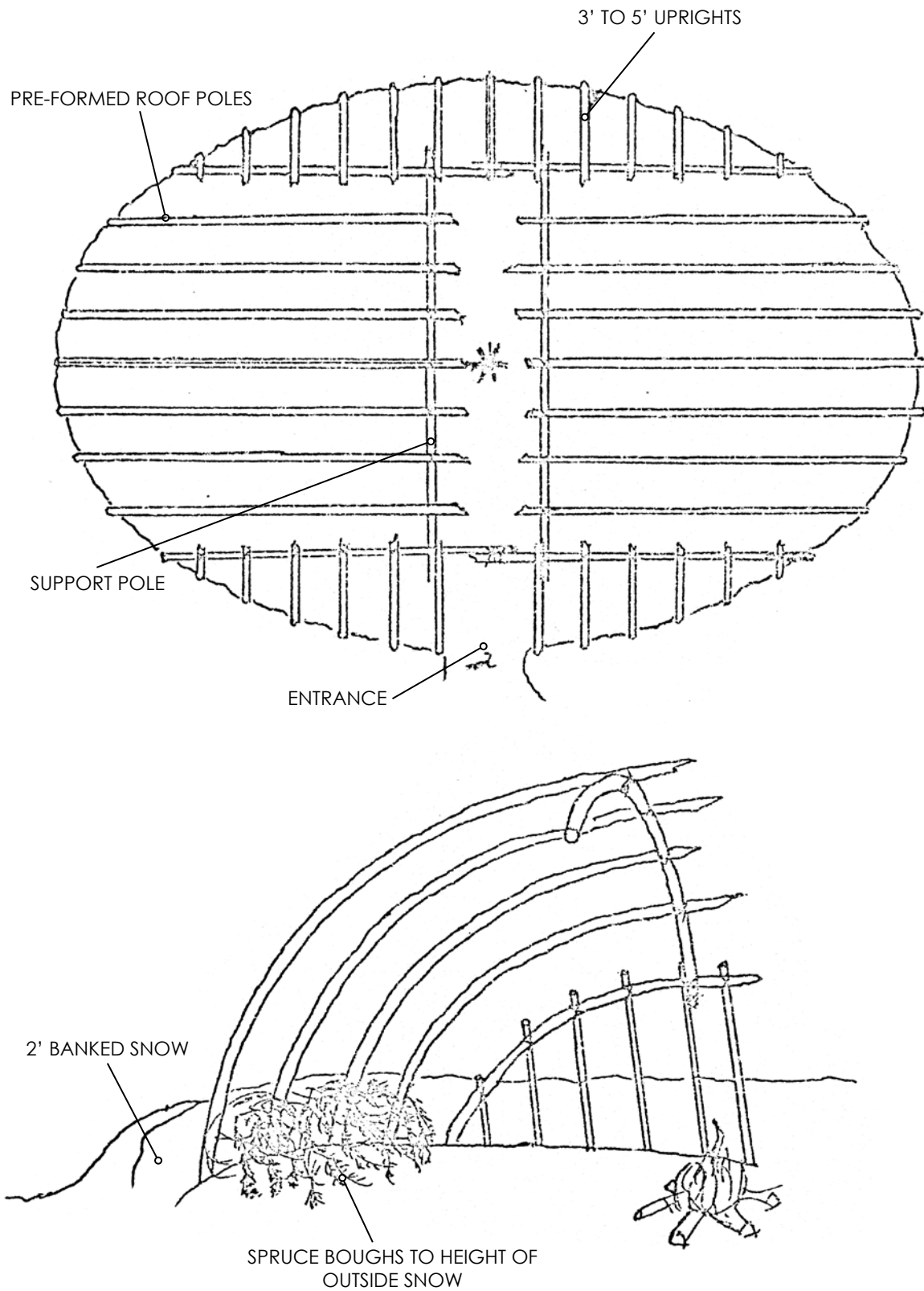


Figure 18. Plan and Section of Upper Tanana Dome Skin Tent. Pitts (1972:143). Reproduced with permission of the artist, Robert Banghart.

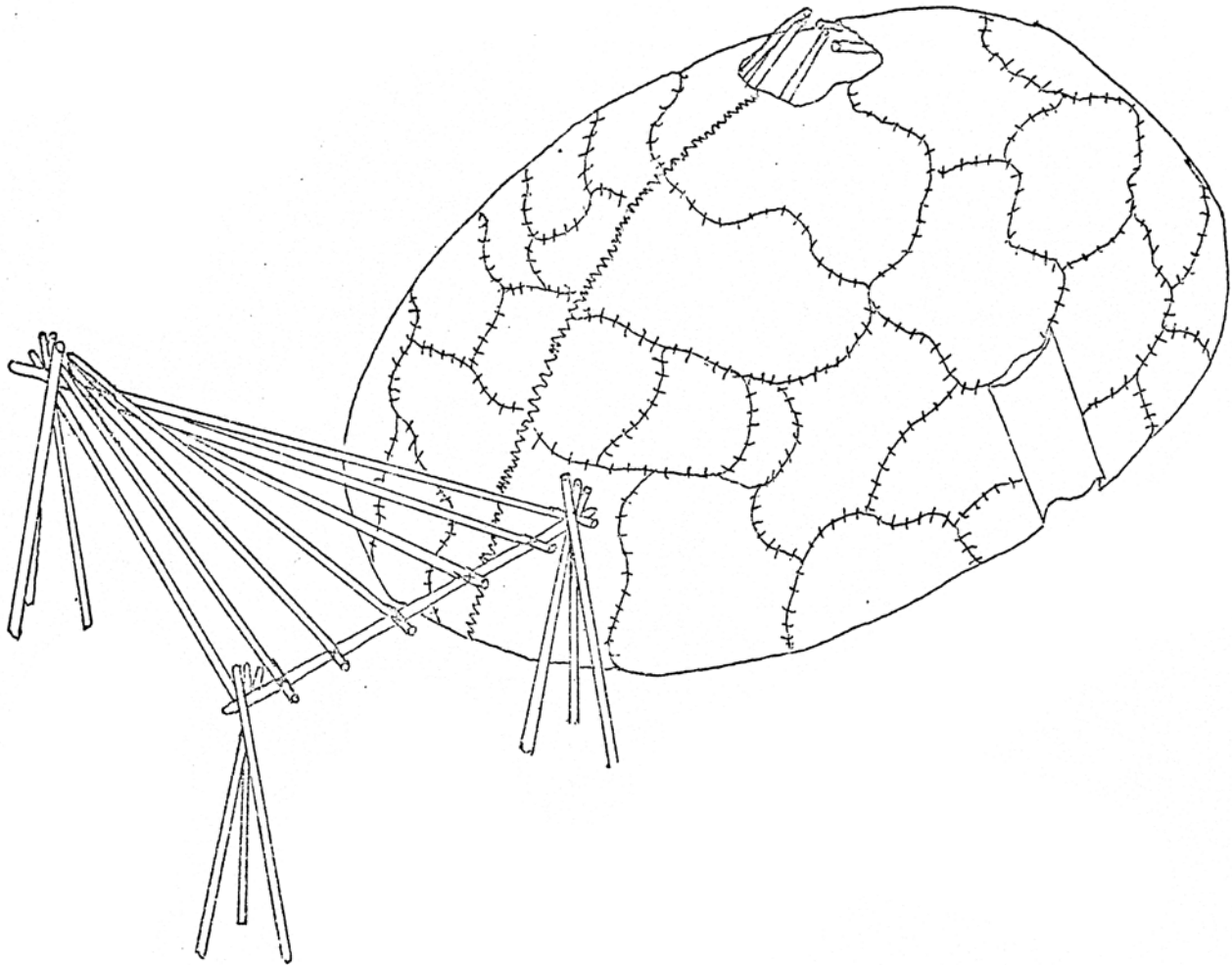


Figure 19. Upper Tanana Domed Skin Tent and High Cache. Pitts (1972:144). Reproduced with permission of the artist, Robert Banghart. See Figure 15.

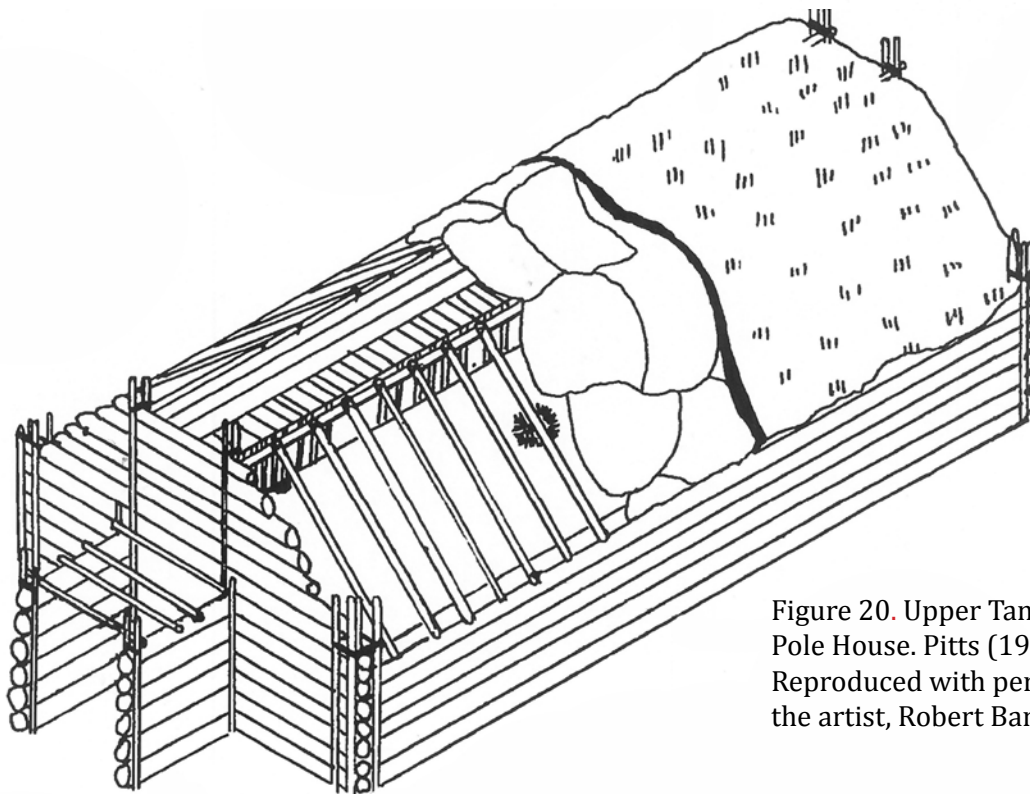


Figure 20. Upper Tanana Log Pole House. Pitts (1972:125). Reproduced with permission of the artist, Robert Banghart.



Figure 21. Matthew Paul at camp at Dog Lake (near Northway), 1936. Canvas wall tent in background. Jeany Healy Photograph Collection. UAF-2000-181-159. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Subsistence – A Life of Rhythms

The northern *Dineh* traditionally practiced a hunting and gathering subsistence pattern, which made use of virtually every edible item in their environment. Though not as extensive or all-encompassing as in the past, this pattern continues in the present to a greater or lesser degree in most communities, in the form of caribou and moose hunts, snaring of small game, fishing and fowling, and collection of wild berries and herbs (Friend et al. 2008; Halpin 1987; Nadasdy 2003; Reckord 1983; Usher and Staples 1988).

An important and enduring feature of the hunting and gathering patterns of subsistence is generalized reciprocity – the general sharing of food and resources with other members of one’s living group, as well as one’s in-law (affinal) and blood (consanguineal) relations residing in other areas. In this way disparities in hunting success due to good fortune or greater skills and regional ecological diversity in subsistence resources were overcome to ensure that everyone received what they needed to survive.

Another feature of the Northern Athabascan hunting and gathering adaptation was regular mobility between different micro-environments in order to take advantage of seasonal fluctuations in food and material resources, compounded by a careful assessment of the micro-environment’s renewable status (Nelson 1983). Subsequently, while we generally describe this mobility as a seasonal “round” it is important to realize that this does not imply the yearly return to a specific place on the landscape so much as the regular use of a similar micro-environment with the appropriate seasonal resources in exploitable condition.

While some areas, such as fishing sites, were so productive that they were returned to on a yearly basis, some seasonal camps might not be used for several years or more as the group allowed it to “lay fallow” and regenerate its resources, traveling to other similar environments within the region in the interim. Upper Tanana Elder Walter Northway’s account of his ancestors and his own history with the landscape as presented in Yarber and Madison (1987) is a good example of this lifestyle.

SUBSISTENCE AND TRAPPING SEASONAL ROUNDS

Beginning in late August people moved into upland villages and smaller camps, comprised of skin-covered domed lodges, to hunt the southerly migrating caribou, most often through the construction of barriers or fences that would either concentrate a group of animals for easy dispatch or lead them into snares. The meat was dried and stored and formed the major part of their winter food, supplemented by fish, smoked and stored from the summer and fall and caught through the winter lake-ice, and moose. Caribou skins were used for clothing and shelter, and their bones for various implements, such as skin scrapers, needles, awls, and hunting points.

Thus, people from the lower Chisana River moved upstream to hunting camps in the mountains, such as at the mouth the Chisana River canyon (Upper Tanana – *Taacheeg* – “King City”) and the headwaters of the Beaver Creek, north of the Upper Chisana village site, or northwest to the caribou fences of the southern Dawson Range, such as Kechumstuk and the upper Fortymile River, and perhaps the Upper Ladue drainage as well.⁹

In the spring, before the snow melt and the river breakup, people moved into the lowlands to favored fishing sites, traveling by snowshoes made of birch and babiche and hauling sleds carrying their possessions. At the fish camps they erected bark-covered huts, and prepared their dip nets and canoes, continuing to hunt moose, as well as muskrat and beaver. With the end of breakup, stone and willow weirs were repaired or constructed and intensive fishing began, principally of several varieties of whitefish. Some of this catch was stored in ground caches for use later in the summer.

⁹ Some Upper Tanana exploited the Ladue River drainage, but specific information on its use is sparse. Oral history accounts indicate that people including Walter Northway, Andy Frank, and White River Johnny traveled there to hunt and trap.

In late July the fish camps broke up, with most of the men moving back up into the mountains to hunt sheep with snare and bow for their meat, skins, and horns, while most of the women, children, and elderly remained in the lowlands snaring the large Arctic ground squirrel and marmots to eat and make blankets from their skins. During this phase of the seasons, both groups generally occupied temporary double lean-tos. As the cooler weather began to descend in late August, the people reconvened in the uplands to meet the caribou, and the cycle was renewed (McKenna 1959, 1981).

Upper Tanana Elder Andy Frank described a very similar seasonal round that he practiced most of his life during the 20th century, which illustrates both the seasonal and longer-term shifts in settlement patterns practiced by many Upper Tanana. During his early life he lived at a number of different village sites: *Ts'oogot Gaay*, on Little Scottie Creek near the lakes just north of the intersection of the Alaska Highway with the international border; *Tayh Tsälh T'aat* (High Cache), at the confluence of Desper Creek with Scottie Creek; *Theek'at*, "rock fishing place" (Scottie Creek Village in English), near the confluence of Scottie Creek with the Chisana River in Alaska; and *Kelt'uudn Mann'*, "water lily lake," and *Nàhtsjà ch'ihchuut*, "we grabbed wolverine" (Pepper or Paper Lake in English), located about 40 miles north of *Ts'oogot Gaay*, near the headwaters of Scottie Creek in Canada.

He and his family moved between these locations from year to year, and he recalled that the *Kelt'uudn Mann'* village was not used for many years after the early part of the century. (This was also the site of the first trading post in the region, run by Bill Rupe; see below.) *Ts'oogot Gaay* and *Theek'at* were principally spring-summer fishing villages. Although they were occupied in winter as well by some people, it was during the fishing season that many other families congregated there to fish.

Migrating caribou were taken at fences near *Kelt'uudn Mann'* before Andy Frank was born, as well as up the headwaters of the Chisana and White Rivers. During his lifetime, after the introduction of high caliber rifles, the use of caribou fences declined, since caribou could be hunted successfully without having to impound them.

The hills of the valley of Mirror Creek (a tributary of the Chisana through which the headwaters of the White River could be reached), and the higher ranges of the Nutzotin Mountains to the southwest were used to hunt sheep in the late summer. Through the myriad lakes along the lower reaches of the Chisana River and Scottie Creek, moose, beaver, muskrat, duck, as well as the occasional bear were hunted.

Through his life Andy Frank also periodically lived at other sites, including Snag village, on the middle White River in Canada; *Taatsàan* village, near the international border on Snag Creek; and Chisana for a winter. Yet he primarily lived at *Tayh Tsälh T'aat* (High Cache). Finally, in his old age, Andy lived at the contemporary village of Northway and in the city of Fairbanks, Alaska.

TRAVEL

The Upper Tanana traveled extensively in their seasonal rounds as well as to visit relatives and attend potlatches in other settlements. As previously discussed, a labyrinth of trail systems tied villages and resource localities to each other. People generally traveled by walking, although a variety of aboriginal watercraft were also used. But it also can be said that modern modes of transportation were quickly adopted by the Upper Tanana, beginning with the dog sled, canvas canoe, engine-driven plank boat, automobile, and the snowmobile. However, many places in their landscape are still accessible only by foot in summer, and many people still walk considerable distances in order to hunt, collect berries and plants, or simply get out onto the land.

The *Dineh* made a number of aboriginal watercraft forms. Simply constructed rafts for crossing river channels and lakes and travelling downstream were made by lashing together four or six logs with three- to five-ply moose skin lines. "Cut two trees and halve them, and you've got a raft," explained one of McClellan's (1975:271) informants. Rafts were often abandoned at the end of their downstream course, the passengers returning to their origin by foot.



Figure 22. Paddling a boat on George Lake. (Left to Right: John Healy, Alex Joe, Arthur Healy, and Frank Luke). Jeany Healy Photograph Collection. UAF-2000-181-15. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks

A second form of watercraft was the rawhide skin boat. The skin most often used was moose hide. The details of the framework varied according to the available raw material, the need of the vessel, and the amount of time spent building it, but they generally all held a keel piece to which the ribs were lashed. They ranged from small, hastily constructed craft to large (16-foot-long) robust frames capable of carrying “six or seven people as well as heavy loads of meat” (McClellan and Denniston 1981:380). Yet even larger ones seldom took two people more than a day to build. The framework was often abandoned at a downstream destination, and the moose hide salvaged for other uses (McClellan 1975:269).

The third and most common type of watercraft was frame canoes hulled with birch bark. They were “the accepted mode of water travel,” although they tended to be quite small (12 to 16 feet long) and shallow, holding two or perhaps three people. The bark was sewed to the frame with fine, split spruce roots, and the seams patched with prepared spruce pitch. McKennan (1959:92-93) provides some further detail to their construction (see also McClellan 1975:267-269). Of interest is McKennan’s note that “Although decking is described for most Athapaskan canoes, as a rule it covered only the forward end [while] the Upper Tanana use of fore and aft decking seems to distinguish their craft from those of their neighbors” (McKennan 1959:93). Such a craft was used by US Army surveyors of the Alaska Highway to cross Scottie Creek in 1942 (see Figure 34).

In general, the upper Chisana River is unsuitable for watercraft of any sort due to the shallow water that typifies its upper course, except during spring freshet and at mid-day when glacial runoff was at its peak. Thus, walking the trails in summer was the principal mode of transport from the lower to the upper Chisana. The walk from Big Scottie Creek to the edge of the Nutzotin Mountains usually took a long day, with the travelers leaving early in the morning, taking an extended rest through the mid-day heat, and carrying on to the base of the mountains in the late afternoon, arriving in the evening. Another day’s travel on foot brought them to either the Upper Chisana or Upper Nabesna Native settlements, although active hunting along the way might delay

the traveler by another day or two while they processed and cached their harvest. In winter hunters still often walked, using snowshoes of the long, narrow sort typical of the western subarctic *Dineh* (McKenna 1959:90-91).

The dog sled was introduced into the Upper Tanana region sometime in the middle to late 19th century and it is said to have been introduced by the white man. Dog sleds were in common use by the time of McKenna's fieldwork (McKenna 1959:92; see Figure 23). They are seldom used today, except in competitive racing, having been replaced by the snowmobile. However, it is not unusual today to see dogs being used to pack supplies during bush hunts (see Figure 24).

The gas-powered plank or fiberglass boat and the automobile are today ubiquitous throughout the villages of the Upper Tanana and have been since their respective introduction. They are used for both gaining access to resources but, perhaps more importantly, also as the principal means of transportation for socializing with friends and relatives located in other regional villages. It is an unusual day indeed in which someone from Northway does not visit Beaver Creek and vice-versa, and an evening trip between Beaver Creek and Mentasta or Chistochina occurs every few days.



Figure 23. Frank Luke and his dog team, Healy Lake, circa 1940. Jeany Healy Photograph Collection, UAF-2000-181-15. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Figure 24. Women and children with pack dogs, Lower Nabesna 1930. Robert Addison McKennan Papers. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

HUNTING

Like other northern Athabascans, the Upper Tanana *Dineh* are predominantly a hunting people. As Nadasdy (2003:63) has observed for the neighboring Kluane Lake Southern Tutchone *Dineh*, “hunting is life itself.” On the surface such a statement might seem self-evident – in the cold northern forests, a geography incapable of sustained agriculture and low floral diversity of nutritional significance, indigenous people must rely on game animals in order to gain the sustenance they need to survive. Within the *Dineh* world, however, hunting is much more than a means to an end – it is an activity that reaches into practically every aspect of their biological, social, material, intellectual, and spiritual lives. Hunting is the defining aspect of *Dineh* personal identity, social relations, and moral values, in short of their culture (Easton 2008).

To fully appreciate the importance of hunting to *Dineh* culture, we must first understand that the act of hunting is not isolated from a continuum of cultural activities absolutely vital to the moment of the kill, without which *Dineh* hunting would not be possible. In *the Dineh Way* it is difficult to separate any of the following: thinking and talking about hunting; keeping aware of the comings and goings and particular character of animals through observation of their environment and behavior; going out into the bush, tracking, and killing an animal; butchering, storing, sharing, cooking, and eating the animal; using its non-edible portions as a material resource in making additional objects, such as fleshers, clothing, and ornaments; ritually offering up portions of flesh or skeletal elements back to the bush; feeling full, content, and thankful at the end of the day; and dreaming of animals in one's sleep – all these comprise elements of *Dineh* hunting. This stands in sharp contrast to western categorizations, which normally separate most of these activities and feelings into something other than hunting; in the western view, hunting may be required to eat, but eating certainly is not hunting.

A second aspect of hunting, which arises from this integrative view and is generally distinctive from western precepts, is that hunting cannot be isolated as a male gendered activity. In the contemporary world, and certainly in the historic past of the 20th century, are found many notable and skilled *Dineh* women who track and kill moose and caribou. To what extent this reflects a shift from pre-contact practices is difficult to say. Although men clearly predominated in this activity during precontact times, there are accounts from descendants of Upper Tanana of *Dineh* women who hunted in the 19th century. Women certainly were engaged in intensive hunting of small game and fishing both in pre- and post-contact *Dineh* society. They played a role in butchering, storing, dividing, and cooking the meat.¹⁰ Women also promoted success in hunting by the observation of taboos against offending animals, such as touching a man's rifle, a practice thought to make the animal jealous and reject the hunters attempt to seduce it in a kill. As seamstresses, women were responsible for the skilled preparation of skins in ways that would please their animal owners. As Chaussonnet (1988:212) has observed:

Animal skin, transformed into a second skin for humans by the work of the seamstresses, still maintained its animal identity. From the killing of an animal, through the tanning, cutting, and sewing of its skin into a piece of clothing, the qualities and characteristics attributed to it in life were maintained and passed on to the wearer of the finished garment. This important spiritual principle linked animals, hunters, and seamstresses together in an intricate and circular set of relationships.... [which] helped reconcile humans and animals... by reinforcing the transformational relationship between them in the clothing that she made.

Other means by which hunting permeates *Dineh* social life are the practices of reciprocity and demand sharing among relatives, co-residents (in the past generally the same people), and "hunting partners." In 1929 McKennan observed that the "slayer of a large animal such as a moose or caribou does not acquire the entire carcass but receives only a hind quarter. The ribs and hide go to his partner (*kla*), while the remainder of the animal is distributed among the other members of the camp" (McKennan 1959:50). This remains a common and essential practice with many of the residents in the Upper Tanana communities of today.

For example, based on my experience living with and visiting Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny from the mid-1990s to his death in 2013, it was a rare moment when there was an

¹⁰ McKennan (1959:45) notes that, "among the Upper Tanana the cooking was formerly done by the men.... Today [1929] the former custom is falling into disuse, especially among the young people." It has generally been my observation over the past twelve years of fieldwork that men still do much of the cooking, both of country foods and store-bought foods.

abundance of meat at his borderline cabin, although he was a skilled and very successful hunter. The meat of each moose carcass, averaging about 900 pounds each, was largely distributed to others within a few days of each kill, at times leaving him with no meat at all in his camp. While the majority of the meat was taken by consanguineal relatives, some travelling from Whitehorse and Copper Center (both about 250 miles distant), a notable proportion of about 20 percent is given to more distantly related Natives who visit his camp once word of the kill is transmitted.

At first Mr. Johnny explained his generosity as an expression of how the failure of others to obtain meat through their own efforts made him feel sorry for them – “Those guys down in Northway are starving, man. They don’t get nothing.” Later he expressed his sharing in metaphorical terms; “When I eat my own meat, it tastes funny, like rags, but when I eat someone else’s, boy, that’s good.” Later, in the dark over tea one evening, he spoke at length on his relationship to the animals that he kills, how he dreams their presence and respects their offering to him by sharing the meat with others. “If you don’t do that, they [animals] know. They’re not gonna come back to you, boy, no way. If you don’t share that’ll be the last one you ever get.”

This leads us to another essential component of *Dineh* hunting – the complex of paradoxical concepts regarding the active role hunter and prey take in the hunt (Hallowell 1960; Tanner 1979; Nelson 1983; Brightman 1993; Nadasdy 2003). Brightman has typified this as a paradox between a benefactive and adversarial model of the hunt. On the one hand, *Dineh* conceive of a successful hunt to reflect the desire of the animal to give itself to a hunter who has shown the animal proper “respect” (a term itself laden with multiple meanings – see Nadasdy 2003:79-94), an act of reciprocal exchange – respect for meat. Animals also give themselves out of “pity” for the hunger of humans, as well as “love” for humans. These two impulses also imply a form of reciprocity. The poor hungry human is a supplicant for a gift of meat from the animal. The would-be lover attempts to gain favor through gifts and compliments, including the wearing of beautiful articles of clothing prepared by women, and care and decoration of hunting implements. In addition, the killing of an animal simultaneously gives renewal to its life, as its spirit is reincarnated within the newborn. “Hunter and prey successively renew each other’s lives,” writes Brightman (1993:188), “and, indeed, each seems to realize its innate nature in the transaction, the hunter as supplicant and the animal as benefactor.”

In addition, as Mauss (1967) notes in *The Gift*, every act of giving has an element of compulsion on the recipient to make a return gift. This is what Brightman (1993:189) refers to as innate “coercive and exploitative modalities that may be inimical to the creation of friendly feelings.” The experience of skillful hunters failing to kill a prey demonstrates the animal’s reluctance to die. The use of hunting fetishes, songs and spells, and divination of the whereabouts of animals, are actions independent of, and are attempting to dominate the animal’s will. Alternatively, “animals that bite, struggle, and lead their hunters on exhausting chases cannot readily be defined as voluntary benefactors” (Brightman 1993:201).

These paradoxical ambiguities of killing animals reflect important concerns of *Dineh* thought-worlds. In some respect, their opposition is complimentary and mediated by the existence of contingent uncertainties in other aspects of life, such as evidence provided by dreams and myths which demonstrate the illusory nature of our external senses, which in turn informs and reflects similar paradoxes of *Dineh* conceptions of Self and Other, such as the limit of personal authority and control.

At this point I only hope to have exposed something of the complexities of “hunting” within Upper Tanana *Dineh* culture that extend far beyond the mere provision of calories and raw materials for artifacts.

Hunting in the Chisana River Basin

Caribou were formerly the predominant source of meat for the aboriginal people of the Chisana River basin, but their depletion and regulation throughout the 20th century has led them to be replaced by moose as the principal meat by both volume and choice. Fish, which will be discussed in the next section, are probably the second most important source of food. Important subsidiary meat was and is still obtained from sheep, porcupine, muskrat, rabbits, ducks, and grouse, and formerly bear and lynx as well.

McKenna noted at the time of his fieldwork, "the economic life of the Upper Tanana centers around the caribou. Not only does the animal constitute the source of food for the Natives and their dogs, but also it supplies the material for their clothing, shelters, and boats as well as netting for their snowshoes and babiche and sinew for their snares, cords, and lashing" (McKenna 1959:47). During his stay at Upper Nabesna village in November and December of 1929 he observed the passage of some sixty or seventy thousand caribou. McKenna's field diary records a number of individual and accompanied hunts, in every case using rifles.

This area is traversed by two distinctive caribou herds: the Nelchina and the Chisana. The latter was considerably reduced in the winter of 1913-14 during the occupation of miners engaged in the short-lived "Chisana Gold Rush" of that year. Before this time both herds were hunted all along the Chisana basin during their migrations in early winter and early summer, the principal aggregations occurring in late November and mid-May. Caribou were also hunted in their summer range in the valley of the White River watershed. Caribou were hunted by individual tracking, capture in surrounds, and snares along fences. Surrounds and fences required considerable labor to erect and maintain and were the focal point for regular aggregations of normally separated residential groups on the Upper White River and the Yukon-Tanana Uplands. This technology was largely abandoned after the introduction of the high-powered rifle in the 1920s.

Moose were hunted individually and with snares throughout the region and the year and were essential during the intervals between the end of the whitefish fishery and the arrival of the caribou in late summer/early fall. Moose was also important between the consumption of the last winter caribou and the possibility of hunting muskrat and duck in the spring. Similar to the caribou, non-edible portions of the moose were used for raw material for a variety of secondary artifacts.

Mountain sheep were hunted in the summer and fall in the Upper Chisana basin, prior to the November rut and snowfall, which inhibited access to the hills. Snares were the principal means of capture before the rifle.

Bear meat and fat were more prized in the past than today, because they provided the major source of grease for consumption and other uses, such as preventing guns and other metals from rusting. Bear were generally hunted in or near their dens along south-facing hillsides. Prior to the arrival of the rifle, killing a bear brought considerable prestige to a man for his bravery, since they were usually dispatched at close quarters with spear or club.

For much of the 20th century muskrat was hunted in the spring for both its meat and its fur, and quite likely this pattern extended into the pre-contact past as well. The myriad lakes of the lower Chisana basin provided an ideal environment for muskrat, as well as beaver, which was also trapped and shot for its fur.

Of the smaller animals, porcupine, with its thick layer of fat, seem most favored, although rabbits and grouse made up more of the average diet. They were hunted and snared throughout the basin, throughout the year. The whistling marmot was a favored food to be found in the foothills of the Nutzotin Mountains, along with Arctic ground squirrels, which were snared. All these animals might also be dispatched by throwing sticks.

The millions of migrating waterfowl that settle on area lakes for the summer to breed were hunted by blunted arrows and sometimes nets placed at the end of the lake where they were ensnared landing at dusk or taking off after being startled. The importance of the fowl resource is probably under-estimated in prehistoric subsistence and it remains a valued subsistence resource by many today.

FISHING

McKenna (1959) believed that fishing was of secondary importance to hunting, especially in view of a traditional lack of gill-net or handline technology by which they might practice below-ice winter fishing. However, once white traders introduced them, the Upper Tanana quickly adapted the new technology for winter use. This ready adoption may reflect the dramatic declines in big game that followed the Chisana Gold Rush, or a more prosaic recognition of the gill net's efficacy and ease of use. Certainly, fish are an important staple of the average Upper Tanana today (Friend et al. 2008).

Prior to the widespread use of gill nets, the aboriginal method of fishing involved the use of conical fish traps and the construction of weirs across good spawning streams, the impounded fish being scooped out with willow-withe dip nets (see Figures 25 and 26). Whitefish (*Coregonus spp.*), were the principal fishery, although grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*), pike (*Esox lucius*), sucker (*Catostomus spp.*), and lingcod or burbot (*Lota lota*) were also caught.

Salmon from the Yukon and Copper Rivers was also pursued as a valuable trade commodity or received as an act of reciprocity from Ahtna, Han, or Tutchone kin, both in the more recent past and the present; and it seems likely this exchange pattern extends into prehistory as well. Some fishing localities were very much seasonal camps with only temporary dwellings, as at the Alaskan Wellesley Lakes, while others were more sedentary villages with more permanent architecture as at Big Scottie Creek.

High Cache is a traditional fishing site located on Desper Creek just before its confluence with lower Scottie Creek in the southern Chisana Basin. A wooden fish weir (in Upper Tanana called a *Kuudn*) was set here (Easton n.d. [T1999-2A-133]). Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny has seen some of the old stakes still in the mud of the bottom of the creek at low water. Mr. Johnny described the construction of the fish weir. Begin by crossing two willow poles together, like an X, and then lash them together with willow line and push them in the water, and then another and another, until the creek was crossed. You then put willow trees up against the line of poles. It was easy to construct in plan, but hard work in fact, because often you had to often drag the trees some distance. It took a day and a half to two days to construct. Then you put a platform in the middle, between four poles in a square, so that you can stand there and work the dip net. You walked out to it along the piled-up willow brush. The High Cache weir was constructed in the mid-summer, say late July, and then in August the fish start coming downstream.

People from all around went to High Cache to fish, including Titus John, Bell John, Andy Frank, Maggie John, Bessie Mason, Shorty Frank, White River Johnny, Chief Johnson, Joe John, Ernest Scott, and Frank Titus. People from Snag went there too. "They come down here with gas boat, from Tetlin, Northway, they all come here. Boat just loaded with fish. They hunt moose up that way [to the south, across the flats of the lower Chisana River], all over. They dry meat here fall time. And they stay here year round, too.... They trap up in those hills. *Thaiy Shok* they're called" (Easton n.d. [T1999-2A-114]).

Willow bark was the material used to construct the *uh*, or dip net, used to catch fish in the small passageway at the middle of the weir. When asked how this was made, Mr. Johnny did not hesitate in showing us. He explained that first you have to find a good willow tree, one which is



Figure 25. Women and children fishing from a log platform at a fish weir. Tetlin Photograph Collection, UAF-1987-114-10. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Figure 26. Women and children fishing with dip net from log platform at fishing weir. Eva Joe (woman fishing), Jenny Joe (on right), Clara Joe, and Annie Joe (far left). Tetlin Photograph Collection, UAF-1987-114-9. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

straight limbed and without branches along the trunk. Then you make a cut, about 1-1/2 inches wide, across the trunk, near the bottom, and pry this up a little with your knife. Then, grasping the cut bark firmly, you simply peel it away in as long a strip as you can before it breaks off the tree. Our efforts provided us with lengths of about 3 feet, but Mr. Johnny told us that better trees for this purpose are to be found up on the hillside, where a person would grab the cut bark and run away from the tree, stripping a length as high as the tree, perhaps 13 to 16 feet long. It is best to collect this bark in the spring, after freezing but before it gets too hot.

Once you have gathered a bundle of these strips, you must further prepare them by stripping the outer bark, which is done by running your knife along the outside while pulling the strip between the knife and a stabilizing surface, such as your leg or a log. You can also do this with your teeth. Then you are ready to begin tying the net together, which is done with the same knot that western fishermen use; you can gauge the size of the hole in the net to be as big or small as you please. A series of such knotted strips were then tied together, using the same knot, to form the entire net, which was then tied onto a hoop of willow with spruce root, which in turn was hafted onto a long pole, and the *uh* was ready for use.

Later, Mr. Johnny pointed out that such willow *uh* were stored after the fishing season by removing them from the hoop, rolling up the net, and wrapping the net in birchbark, which is then tied with willow. The net was then cached beneath some moss in a marked location. The following year it would be retrieved and set into the water to soak for about a week or ten days before it was sewed onto the hoop for use (Easton n.d. [T1999-2B-289]). Summing up his instruction of weir and net construction, Mr. Johnny observed:

We got everything. We got house here. Nature has got everything out here, but people don't know how to use it. You can build a house here, make fish net, fish trap. You can make everything here. Nature has made it – people just don't know how to use it, don't know how to go about it. Native people lived here thousands of years; they didn't need help. (Easton n.d. [JT], T1999-2A)].

There are two significant observations to be made of Mr. Johnny's description and demonstration of *uh* construction. The first is that dip net construction and use was not necessarily a gendered labor activity: since Mr. Johnny's intimate knowledge extended to the actual construction of the *uh*, a notion confirmed by a subsequent query of his older sister, Mrs. Bessie John, who indicated that she too had made such nets in the past. The second observation is that the storage method of the nets suggests that traditional forms may be found at such fishing sites beneath the moss if they are out of the way of traffic that might crush them. For example, Mr. Johnny's younger brother, David Johnny, found just such a dip net stored in a tree on his visit to a traditional fishing site in the upper Scottie Creek valley. It has been preserved and remains in the possession of the White River First Nation in Beaver Creek, Yukon. Continuing archaeological survey work at fish camps should thus include searching for such remains.

Scattered about such fish camps you will also find rectangular excavations, approximately 70 inches long, by 30 inches wide and 30 inches deep. Mr. Louis Frank identified this as a special kind of ground cache, which was used to ripen fish to improve their flavor and render their fat. Such a ground cache for fish is called *dinuh*. Its construction is simple; dig the rectangular hole and line it with willow. Whitefish were then hung down into the hole on fireweed stalks and covered up for about thirty days to ripen them. After this time, they cooked it. They did this all summer long. Ripening fish is the old people's way; they like it, because it makes them greasier.

Mr. Frank recalled that such fish had a “good flavour. It smells but it’s something good for them [old people] It’s like what they do for salmon; they keep it in water for one week then they cook it off. That’s the way you get salmon grease, you boil it off” (Easton n.d. [LF, T1999-2A]).

A ground cache keeps everything cool. “You keep meat cool. I seen my dad and mom do that. You dig about six or four feet, then you hit permafrost. You clean it out and they line it with willow. You get branches and cover it up with branches and moss and it stays cool” (Easton n.d. [TJ, T1999-2A-260]). A ground cache for meat is called *ch’el tha’*.

COLLECTING

The Upper Tanana made use of a wide variety of plants for food, technology, and medicine. Even today collecting plants to eat, to make herbs and teas for pleasure, to treat ailments, and to use in the continued manufacture of traditional crafts is a regular occurrence in every community.

Spruce was the most important plant in terms of its overall use. It was a component of much of the traditional technology. The roots were used for lines in a variety of ways, from sewing to net-making; the bark was used for siding and roofing of their habitations and to make containers; the inner cambium is chewed for medicine and food in times of shortage. The pitch is chewed as a form of gum; it is also used as an ointment for sores and cuts, and as a glue for canoes and arrows. Spruce boughs are used for bedding, and spruce needles are burned to keep away mosquitoes. Spruce wood is used to make “weirs, fish traps, fish racks, fish rafts, and boat poles. Boats, boat paddles, shovels, skin stretchers, and wedges for chopping wood are also made out of the wood” (P. Kari 1985:8). Most importantly, spruce provides a primary source of fuel to heat homes and bodies during the cold days and nights of winter and to fuel fires for cooking.

While plants do not regularly make up a large proportion of the Upper Tanana diet – meat, fish, and fowl dominate – they do provide additional nutrients and break up the monotony of the non-plant diet, especially a variety of berries. Many plants are used to treat ailments, usually in the form of a hot brew or poultice. At least 100 of the 300 or so vascular plants of the interior western subarctic have some documented use in Upper Tanana culture (Easton 2005).

History

For generation after generation, maybe for 300 years, the Indians have heard that a strange, new people were coming to kill the Indians and take away their hunting grounds. These new people would have yellow hair and pale skin. My father told me this story; his father told him; and his father told him (Peter Albert, Upper Tanana Elder, 1929, quoted in McKennan 1959:174).

As we have seen in the discussion of demography and disease, the arrival of Europeans to North America affected the northwest interior Athabascans long before any direct contact between the aboriginal and immigrant populations. These effects were transported along existing aboriginal trade networks and, although it is difficult to pinpoint in time their earliest occurrences, included the transmittal of material goods, such as metal and beads; disease, such as smallpox and influenza; and ideas, such as the use of the orthodox and Roman Christian crosses, and ground burial practices. At first these effects were introduced slowly and from afar, followed by an increase in volume as the coastal and interior fur trades escalated in intensity and expanded geographically in the latter half of the 19th century (VanStone 1974; Helm et al. 1975).

The physical penetration of the interior western subarctic by Europeans was much slower, hampered by the challenging environment of which they had little adaptive knowledge, and by shrewd Native groups who enjoyed and vigorously protected their monopoly position of mercantile middlemen in the fur trade. But by the end of the 19th century the indigenous position had been eroded by a series of forays into the interior by traders, prospectors, and government sponsored exploration parties through much of the Yukon River drainage (Hosley 1981b; McClellan 1981). Yet the territories of the Upper Tanana remained largely unexplored until the first decade of the 20th century, and access remained extremely difficult until the building of the Alaska Highway. As a result, with the exception of additional depopulation brought on by continued epidemic disease, the Upper Tanana, and especially the eastern population of the borderlands, were not affected as much as other interior Athabascans until the middle of the 20th century (McKenna 1981).



Figure 27. Chisana City Streetscape, 1914. Geoffrey Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii.

This is not to say there were no effects, nor that the ones they experienced were not significant. The imposition of the international border, the massive, though short-lived influx of prospectors and miners during the 1913-14 Chisana Gold Rush, the steady stream of new technology and commodities through trade networks, the introduction of new ideas associated with Christianity, and the educational efforts of the Alaska Native Service were all factors that directly contributed to changes in Upper Tanana culture and society. What is of interest here is the degree to which these foreign elements were adapted within the local *Dineh* culture as opposed to fundamentally altering it.

ABORIGINAL DEMOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL EPIDEMICS

They told us of a great tale of woe of how many Indians had died from which we understood that some epidemic had afflicted them (Griffith 1900).

The fact that our anthropological knowledge of the subarctic cultures must be somehow different from the “aboriginal horizon” is particularly clear within the study of the population numbers, birth, death, and illness rates and causes, and age distributions within these categories.

It is uncertain what effect, if any, postulated continental pandemics (Dobyns 1966, Crosby 1976, Boyd 1990) had on the aboriginal populations of the interior western subarctic, but they may have been considerable; epidemic diseases and depopulation are recurring themes expressed within the regional folk history (see, for example, McClellan 1975:Chapter 1, and Coates 1991:9-14).

It is more certain, however, that the Upper Tanana *Dineh* were likely affected by a series of epidemics that passed through the central interior in the mid-1800s: smallpox in 1838-39 and scarlet fever in 1851 and 1865 (McKenna 1981). The effects of these epidemics, as well as later incidences of measles at the turn of the century, a major influenza epidemic throughout the Yukon basin in the 1920s, and endemic tuberculosis through much of the 20th century (see Table 2), were undoubtedly substantial.



Figure 28. Cross Creek Village Cemetery, 1939. T. W. Ranta no. 56, USGS Photo Archives, Denver.

Table 2. Epidemic Diseases of Note in Northwestern North America

1781 ^a	Smallpox, demonstrably effecting Chipewyans and Cree
1820s ^a	Unidentified, but quite deadly, contagious disease among the eastern Dene is recorded in fur post records
1835 ^b	Epidemic among coastal Tlingit with 20 to 50% population mortality; “likely transmitted to interior during trading expeditions”
1838-39 ^a	Smallpox throughout the northwest subarctic; high mortality
1838-39 ^c	Smallpox epidemic in central Alaskan interior
1840s-1850s ^a	A number of diseases, in particular whooping cough, with high mortality among children
1846 ^d	“Great mortality” amongst the Native women of Fort Youcon reported by Alexander Murray
1848 ^b	Epidemic among the Han after visits to Fort Selkirk and Fort Yukon
1850s ^b	Smallpox among Tlingit spread up the Alsek River drainage to “various parts of the interior, decimating entire villages”
1850-51 ^b	Famine in the interior of the Yukon; diarrhea among children and incidents of pulmonary infections
1851 ^d	As many as 1/3 of the Native population along the upper Yukon river carried off by what Robert Campbell believes to be mumps
1851 ^c	Scarlet fever epidemic in central Alaskan interior
1851-52 ^b	Epidemic “scarlet fever?” and severe famine among all Indians – “One third of population dead”
1860 ^b	Scarlet fever epidemic at mouth of Alsek River and inland to upper Yukon River
1862-65 ^a	Scarlet fever
1865 ^{cd}	Scarlet fever epidemic in central Yukon and Alaskan interior; both Fort Youcon and La Pierre trading posts report 50% mortality of local Natives
1868 ^b	Epidemic at Fort Yukon
1873 ^b	Dysentery among the Han
early 1880s ^a	Diphtheria
1887-88 ^b	“Many die among the Han and Stewart River Indians”
1897 ^{a,b}	Another round of Scarlet fever; “Selkirk Indians dying off fast”
1898-99 ^b	“numerous deaths from illness among Indians” in the central Yukon
1901 ^b	Northwest Mounted Police reports great mortality among Yukon Indians due to pulmonary infections
1905 ^b	Diphtheria epidemic at Fort Selkirk
1907 ^b	Tuberculosis is considered endemic among Yukon Indians
1916 ^b	“Consumption is rife” among Selkirk people; occasional epidemics of smallpox, diphtheria, la grippe, chicken pox, and measles
1918 ^a	Worldwide Influenza pandemic crossed the subarctic
1925 ^b	Influenza epidemic throughout the Yukon

1928 ^a	An even more virulent, and mortal, influenza virus passed through the north.
1929 ^b	“Tuberculosis among Indians of Southern Yukon is present in 10 to 15% of the population, and accounts for more than 50% of deaths”
1850s – onwards to today	Endemically high rates of tuberculosis; recently resurging in a new mutated strain, which is proving to be resistant to antibiotic treatment.

Sources: a – Helm 1981; b – Gotthardt 1987; c – McKennan 1959; and d – Coates 1991. Gotthardt 1987 sources include: Hudson’s Bay Company and Church Missionary Society Archives, cited in Legros 1981, 1984; Northern Lights (various issues); Helm, et al. 1975; Marchand 1943; Bancroft 1886; Dall 1870; Archand 1966; Dept. of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1954; Northwest Mounted Police Annual Report for 1902.

Among the Upper Tanana, Allen (1900:445) records that at Last Tetlin:

Nandell had informed me that there had been many deaths among these people, and as nearly as I could understand him, he feared they might attribute them to our entrance to the country... The inhabitants around these lakes, including Tetlin’s following, were almost without exception suffering from sever coughs, and many showed unmistakable signs of pulmonary troubles.

Regarding Kheeltat’s place (Tetlin), Allen (1900:445) writes, “the consumptive look and its accompanying cough were more marked here than at the former place (Last Tetlin).”

Scottie Creek Elders all maintain that their village at *Ts’oogot Gaay* was made of several hundred people in their younger years (1880s to 1920s). Mr. Andy Frank believed that it was “1917 or ‘18 when a great number of people died in the region from ‘flu” (possibly the northern reach of the worldwide Spanish influenza?), an epidemic that was repeated in the early 1940s. In 1929, McKennan (1959:18) recorded a population of 152 for the entire Upper Tanana, distributed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Upper Tanana Population by “Band,” Winter 1929

Upper Chisana/	Upper Nabesna	Last Tetling	Tetling	Mouth of Nabesna	Scottie Creek	Total
Men	6	5	9	16	6	42
Women	5	6	10	16	7	44
Children	5	7	15	27	12	66
Total	16	18	34	59	25	152

Source: McKennan (1959:18).

McKennan suggested that:

The older Indians all stoutly maintain that formerly their number was much greater. They said that *previous to the coming of the white man* great numbers suddenly died from disease. The earliest explorers on the Yukon all met with a similar story (1959:19, emphasis added).

Guédon (1974:10) writes that:

The Natives still maintain that large villages or camps were drained of their population before or just after 'the coming of the white men.' Whether this refers to the scarlet fever of about 1868 or to other epidemics, or whether it reflects other events, this belief is basic to the Natives' view of the past. We need more information to draw a better picture of the aboriginal times, but we cannot rule out the hypothesis of a larger population during the 19th century: a difference of 20 to 50% would be sufficient to support the Native point of view. Archaeological research is needed in the who area as well as ecological studies.

The historic populations documented by the earliest known censuses capture a picture of a people in population decline due to epidemic and endemic disease, quite likely exacerbated by nutritional stress caused by erosion of their subsistence resources, both factors over which the aboriginal population had no control. Some families, villages, and entire local groups ("bands") were totally wiped out by these diseases, while others were merely devastated, depending on whether they had lost key hunters, childbearing women, children, or adolescents. As a result, fundamental adjustments were needed to adjust to the new demographic realities of the aboriginal occupants of the landscape. These changes and challenges included the following:

- a dramatic increase in the availability and size of subsistence exploitation areas;
- an effective decrease in the population available to be mobilized for cooperative hunting and other group-orientated tasks;
- an effective decrease in the number and dependability of subsistence resources (wildfowl in the 19th century; caribou, moose, and salmon in the early 20th century);
- significant changes in the distribution and availability of culturally suitable mates; and
- a dramatic increase in "adoption" of orphaned children, and subsequent realignment of their social categories through fictive kin mechanisms, effectively muddling traditional kinship relations.

These factors, in turn, led to major redistribution of populations, particularly from decimated areas, in order to avoid demographic collapse. The concentration of remaining populations to reach sustainable levels of reproduction left many areas apparently "uninhabited" to the earliest European arrivals.

THE EARLY PERIOD OF EUROPEAN TRADE

The early period of European trade is characterized by introduction of the effects of a European presence in the region without direct interpersonal contact. These effects moved along existing aboriginal trade networks, carrying along new commodities (such as beads and copper pots), new ideas (such as in-ground burial), and new diseases. Tracing the exact geographical and temporal vectors of these movements in the pre-contact period is difficult, but the material evidence generated by archaeological excavation of late pre-contact sites of the 19th century demonstrate its occurrence.

The movement of goods along the trade networks increasingly escalated during the 1800s, following the formation of the Russian American Company in 1799 and the arrival on the coast of British and American traders, and the inexorable penetration from the east of the Hudson's Bay Company in subsequent decades. Metal traps, axes, files, and nails (used for fishhooks), as well as guns received in exchange for furs altered some patterns of subsistence, but indigenous use of snares, fences, weirs, spears, and the bow and arrow continued, as did decorative arts on clothing, although the geometric designs of quillwork were supplanted by floral designs of beading (McClellan 1981).

Oral history of the Borderland *Dineh* indicate that one of the principle localities for this trade was on “North Fork” island (*Tl’oo Gayh K’it* /on white grass/) on the upper White River, where Upper Tanana met with Tlingit people every two years, exchanging furs and copper for European trade goods and coastal resources, such as dried clams and dentalium shells. Brooks (1953:123) notes that “the Chilkats... appear to have been familiar with the copper deposits in the upper White River region. They called the White River the Irkhena, which means copper.” Bessie John recalled stories of her grandfather trading at North Fork Island, bringing back the first copper pots, as well as tea and tobacco, to their village at *Taiy Chi* (Easton n.d.).

In addition to the intensification of existing trade relations, enterprising Natives explored the establishment of new ones, as with the settlement of the interior Tlingit in the Tagish region of the southwest Yukon (McClellan 1975). This period may have also promoted a stronger sense of territorial boundaries between groups in competition for scarce European trade resources, if only within discrete areas of the trapping/trading economy. This certainly seems to have been the case in the eastern subarctic where family trapping territories became increasingly reified, to the extent that some anthropologists believed they could document a well-developed indigenous system of private property amongst the northern Algonquin at the beginning of this century (Speck 1935). Leacock (1954) and others (e.g. Tanner 1979) have convincingly argued that Speck documented a post-contact phenomenon stimulated by the mercantile fur-based economy, and one which did not prevent wider use of the landscape in more typical subarctic hunter-gatherer fashion into the present. Within the western subarctic there is little evidence for the establishment of family hunting or trapping territories prior to 20th century State regulation. Writing about the Upper Tanana in the late 1920s, McKennan (1959:128) notes that “the wanderings of individual families compass such a large area that the institution of permanent hunting and trapping territories would be completely at variance with the native mode of life.” Brooks (1953:122) believed that the interior Alaskan Athabascans maintained a usufructuary right in which “a visitor from a neighboring tribe might not catch fur-bearing animals except as food. He was privileged to kill any animal for food, but the pelt must be delivered to the tribe owning [i.e., occupying] the hunting ground.”

Throughout this early period, the Russian American Company was singularly unsuccessful in extending direct contact into the Tanana River country. A number of exploration parties between 1820 and 1850 were either turned back by Ahtna or Copper River Indians or, as in the case of the eleven Russians led by Rufus Sereberinikoff, never returned. The Chilkats on the passes to the south maintained a similarly successful blockade of British and American traders until the 1880s (Allen 1887; Brooks 1953; J. Kari 1986; McKennan 1959).

While the coastal Natives were successful in preventing the movement of European traders to the interior, and restricted the movement of interior people westward, the Hudson’s Bay Company entered the northwestern subarctic overland from the east in the 1840s, establishing Fort Yukon in 1847 and Fort Selkirk in 1848 (Campbell 1958). Given their geographical range of kinship ties and travel to visit affines, it seems likely that at least some Upper Tanana came into contact with Hudson’s Bay Company personnel, either at their trading posts or on their travels about the country, an assumption corroborated by Upper Tanana oral history. There is a rich account, for example, of the Borderlands *Huskeh Taiy Suul* traveling to Fort Selkirk to trade furs and returning with the first firearm – an old musket – seen in the Upper Tanana region. This would have occurred somewhere between 1848 and 1852. Two lead shot musket balls recovered during an archaeological survey at the location of one of *Taiy Suul’s* principal encampments in the Scottie Creek valley in 2001 provide material evidence in support of the oral history (Easton 2002).¹¹

¹¹ Schwatka (1893:129), in reference to the Natives around Marsh Lake, speaks of “the stereotyped Hudson Bay Company flintlock smooth-bore musket, the only kind of gun, I believe, throwing a ball that this great trading company has ever issued since its foundation. They also sell a cheap variety of double-barreled percussion-capped shotgun, which the natives buy, and loading them with ball-being about No.12 or 14 gauge – find them superior to muskets. Singular as it may appear, these Indians ... prefer the flintlock to the percussion-cap gun, probably for the reason that the latter depends on three articles of trade – caps, powder, lead – while the former depends on but two of these, and the chances of running short of ammunition when perhaps at a distance of many weeks’ journey from these supplies, are thereby lessened. These old muskets are tolerably good at sixty to seventy yards, and even reasonably dangerous at twice that distance. In all their huntings these Indians contrive by that tact peculiar to savages to get within this distance of a moose, black bear and caribou, and thus to earn a pretty fair subsistence the year round, having for summer a diet of salmon with a few berries and moose.

In terms of the expanding European fur trade, Brooks (1953:122) writes:

when the Russians reached the coast and, half a century later, the Hudson Bay traders reached the Yukon... the natives immediately adjacent to the trading posts obtained many articles which they bartered with the more distant tribes. In time these distant natives visited the posts themselves and thus avoided the profits paid to the middlemen. Thus, even the Tanana natives used to congregate annually at the mouth of that river and barter their furs with the white traders. Those of the upper Tanana reached the Yukon and Fort Selkirk for the same purpose by a more direct route.

McKenna (1959:29) did not record any accounts of travel to Fort Selkirk during its brief existence (it was destroyed by Chilkat traders in 1852). Many of the older people he interviewed in 1929 noted that the first white men they personally had contact with were the traders Leroy McQuesten and Joe Ladue in the 1870s and 1880s. Instead of directly through white men, it seems, much of the early Upper Tanana trade was through the established intermediaries, in particular the Kluane to the east, Han to the north, and Copper River Ahtna Natives to the west and southwest.

Evidently the bulk of trade came from the Yukon rather than the Copper. Old Nicolai, however, who ranged from Taral to the head of the Nizina carried on some trade in beads and ammunition with the interior. He would leave his goods at his camp on the Chitistone, and the Tanana natives when they arrived would deposit furs in the proper amount... Chisana Joe told me that many times he had made the trip and packed back powder, beads, tobacco and tea; and Frank Sam recalled that he had seen his first white man when he hiked with his father, Old Chief Sam, from the lower Nabesna to Dan Creek via the Skolai Pass (McKenna 1959:28).

The Alaska Commercial Company established trading posts at Fort Reliance in 1874, Belle Isle (across from present day Eagle) in 1880, Fort Nelson at the mouth of the Stewart River in 1886, and Fortymile in 1887, and these posts were certainly subsequently visited by Upper Tanana Natives, as were the mining camps established in the mid-1880s at Franklin and Chicken Creeks on the Fortymile River (McKenna 1981:567; Gates 1994). However, the first incursion of a trader into the Upper Tanana region itself seems to have not occurred until about 1900, when the prospector-turned-trader, Bill Rupe, settled into the Scottie Creek valley.

EARLY EUROPEAN EXPLORERS

The Euro-American exploration of the Upper Tanana region began quite late, compared to much of the rest of the Northwest American subarctic, beginning in the 1880s. During his 1883 military expedition through the Yukon River basin, Frederick Schwatka noted that the Tanana River was "the longest wholly unexplored river in the world, certainly the longest in the western continent" (Schwatka 1893:302).

McKenna (1959:25) writes "In all probability the first white men ever to be on the Tanana were the traders, Bates and Harper, who, leaving their post at Belle Isle [across from present day Eagle on the Yukon River] in the late seventies, made their way up the Fortymile and its tributaries, crossed the height of land, and then descended the Tanana by means of a skin boat." Schwatka recorded an account of this journey in his *A Summer in Alaska*. Undoubtedly the most significant of the early explorations of the 1880s was Lt. Henry Allen's military expedition of 1885. His route took

him along through the Copper River Valley and over the Suslota Pass to the Upper Tanana valley, which he then descended to its mouth.

In 1898, Alfred Hulse Brooks, a US geologist, along with W. J. Peters, a topographer, traversed the Upper Tanana and recorded a short note on the Natives he encountered there.

These [people] were essentially meat-eaters, their only fish diet being the Arctic trout, or grayling, and a small whitefish. These highlanders, as they might be called, were the last to come into contact with the whites and hence preserved many of their original customs up to recent times. In 1898 and 1899 I found such men living on the upper Tanana who, except for their firearms, exhibited but little evidence of intercourse with the whites. Most of the men and some of the women were dressed entirely in buckskin, and their bedding was made of furs. Here I saw an Indian hunting with bow and arrow. His arrows were tipped with copper from the gravels of near-by streams. On this same stream, the Kletsandek, a tributary of the upper White River, I found a party of natives searching for the native copper pebbles in the gravels, their digging implements being caribou horns.

Fred Moffit and Adolph Knopf conducted a geological reconnaissance in the region in 1908 and also recorded a few comments on the Natives.

The total native population of the area extending from the head of the Copper River to the White is probably not far from 45 or 50. The natives are divided between three villages, if such they may be called, one at Batzulnetas, on the Copper River; one on Nabesna River, at the mouth of Copper Creek; and a third on Cross Creek, opposite the mouth of Notch Creek, in the Chisana valley. The Batzulnetas and Nabesna natives rely on the white men for a considerable portion of their food, but the Chisana natives are more independent. Their more isolated position has brought them less contact with white men, and they have retained their own manner of living to a greater extent. They depend almost entirely on game for food and lay up a good supply each fall for the winter's needs. All the natives wear clothes obtained from white men, except moccasins, which they make themselves, but they prefer the white man's footwear. Under the influence of white men they have become inveterate beggars, always asking for tea or tobacco, for which, as well as for flour and cloth, they will trade meat or leather goods, when they have them (Moffit and Knopf 1910:15).

It is important to note that their observation of "begging" by Natives of whites may have been a cultural misinterpretation. From the *Dineh* cultural perspective, this was likely more "demand sharing," typical of attempts to establish and maintain relationships of reciprocity that are central to *Dineh* social organization (Kelly 1995).

THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY COMMISSION SURVEY IN UPPER TANANA LAND

The establishment of the international boundary along the 141st meridian was the first real incursion by the State into the lands and lives of the Upper Tanana. While at first this had only a minimal effect on their lives, the existence of the border came to have profound social, economic, and cultural effects later in the 20th century.

Until 1871, when the region was incorporated into the Northwest Territories of the Dominion of Canada, the lands to the east of the boundary were granted by Britain to the exclusive use of the Hudson's Bay Company. The company regularly transgressed into the territory claimed by Russia and subsequently sold to the United States, establishing



Figure 29. Surveyor on mountain peak from the Alaska Canada boundary survey from 1910 to 1913. Alaska State Library, Asa Columbus Baldwin Photo Collection, ASL-P71-412.

Fort Yukon at the confluence of the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers in 1847, and regularly carrying out trade in the lower reaches of the Tanana River. In 1869 an American military survey determined the company's illegal occupation within Alaska and deported their representatives upriver (Green 1982). This led to further recognition by the respective states of the need to permanently establish the location of the border in order to avoid future conflicts of this sort.

First Attempts to Establish the 141st Meridian

Initial work on determining the precise location of the 141st meridian began in 1887, with William Ogilvie's astronomic observations along the Yukon River in association with the Geological Survey of Canada's Yukon Expedition of the same year (Dawson 1888; see also Easton 1987). From 1889 to 1895 several additional surveys were made of the 141st meridian in the Klondike region and in 1902 the line was extended south from the Yukon River to the headwaters of Scottie Creek (International Boundary Commission 1966). No mention is made in the reports of these surveys of any aboriginal inhabitants of the region.

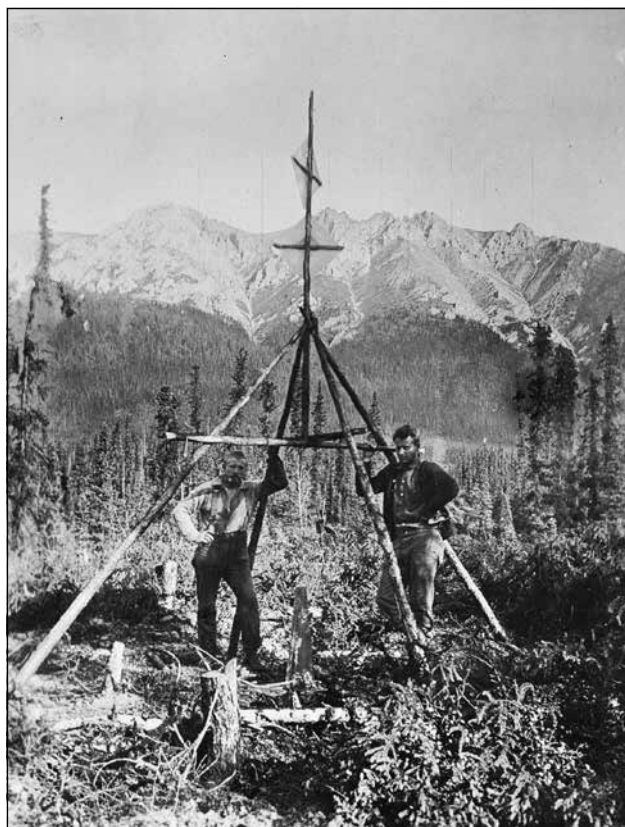


Figure 30. Survey activity from the Alaska Canada boundary survey from 1910 to 1913. Alaska State Library, Asa Columbus Baldwin Photo Collection, ASL-P71-187a.

occupying the borderlands in order to avoid raising, at a bureaucratic state level, the presence of Native occupations (and perhaps rights that might flow from their occupation) along the borderlands.

In early June 1900, W. F. King, Canada's chief astronomer, and O. H. Tittmann, superintendent of the US Coast and Geodetic Survey, arrived in Skagway, Alaska, to mark out the provisional boundary between Canada and the United States along the three main passes (the Chilkat, Chilkoot, and White Passes) from the coast to the interior gold strikes in the Klondike. As they traversed the Chilkat valley, they were approached by a group of Tlingit Natives from the village of Klukwan, who "presented a petition to the commissioners asking that they be allowed to continue to hunt, fish,

From the south, a US Geological Survey party explored the Upper Tanana territories in 1898. Little is recorded on their non-geological observations; however, a map provides some detail on their route and dates of passage through the area: 10 July at Snag, on the White River; 11-18 July along Snag Creek to the 141st meridian; 19-21 July south of Mirror Creek; 1 August at the mouth of Mirror Creek and Tanana River [sic] (United States Geological Survey 1899).¹²

Again, no mention is made of any Native people, a curious absence, since the villages of *Nii'ii'*, *Taatsàan*, and *Taatsàan T'oh* lie within a mile or two north and south of their passage over the flatlands through which the middle Snag and upper Mirror Creeks run. However, August is the time of fish camp along Scottie Creek and may account for their absence. Another explanation is that these surveys, unlike those undertaken by George Dawson, were singularly uninterested in recording Native settlements or encounters. The fact that several field journals contain reference to Native encounters and villages elsewhere contradicts this assumption. Finally, we might surmise that the official reports neglected mention of Native people

¹² The identification of the Tanana River here is a geographical error; Mirror Creek runs into the Chisana River, which in turn flows into the Nabesna River, which runs into the Tanana River further downstream.



Figure 31. Surveyor looking up a small tributary glacier, 141st Meridian, Kluane Glacier, Y.T. Canada. Dept. of Interior, Library and Archives Canada, accession number 1936-271 NPC, item Y-8-1-20, PA-044656.

and trade across the new boundary line that sliced across the Chilkat River valley about a mile north of their village. The commissioners agreed to forward the petition to the president and governor general respectively” (Green 1982:76; see also United States 1903: case appendix). No official reply to the petition has been uncovered to date.

Official Accounts of the International Boundary Commission Survey

In 1903 the establishment of the Alaska Boundary Tribunal was agreed to by Britain and the United States to adjudicate the disputed boundary between Canada and Alaska along the coastal panhandle. While the treaty negotiations were riddled with intrigues against Canadian interests (see Penlington 1972; Green 1982), the final terms of the resulting Convention of 1906 initiated intensive surveying of the border, including determining its position using astronomical observations and triangulation and cutting a 20-foot wide “vista,” as the strip cleared of trees and brush to mark the border is called, along its entire length by collaborating crews of the Canadian and American Geological Surveys. Fieldwork began in 1907 and continued until 1913 (International Boundary Commission 1918). The remaining discussion here of the International Boundary Commission survey is restricted to activities that took place in the territory occupied by the Upper Tanana.

The official accounts of the work of the boundary survey present the following general chronology:

- In 1907, the several members of the survey projected a line from the Yukon River southwards 125 miles to a point near the crossing of Snag Creek.

- In 1908, this line was continued southward past the White River crossing of the border, triangulation was completed to about 75 miles south of the Sixtymile River (near to the headwaters of Scottie Creek), topographic mapping and vista clearing were undertaken to the Sixtymile, and permanent monuments were set through to the Ladue River.
- In 1909, more than 50 men arrived at Canyon City on the White River in late spring (May 21st) to carry out the work of the survey; the majority proceeded up the White to work their way towards Mt. Natazhat in the Wrangell Mountains, while two smaller crews continued topographic surveys about the border to the north, meeting at Mirror Creek on August 24th; cutting of the vista was completed north from Mt. Natazhat to Mirror Creek.
- In 1910, the vista was completed between Mirror Creek and the Ladue River, and monuments were set from the Sixtymile River to Mirror Creek.
- In 1911, all survey efforts were north of the Yukon River.
- In 1912, additional triangulation was carried out along the upper reaches of the White River to the Skolai Pass and into the Chitina watershed south of the Wrangell Mountains.
- In 1913, a final inspection of the boundary from the Yukon River south to Mt. Natazhat was conducted, checking and numbering monuments, thus completing the work of the international boundary survey along the 141st meridian (International Boundary Commission 1918).

This account of the survey activities does not do full justice to the enormous undertaking that was completed between 1907 and 1913. The final report of the commission provides anecdotal accounts of the challenges met by the surveyors, and Green (1982) expands on this with information gleaned from archival field books and personal logs. Within all the officially published documentation, however, there are no accounts of encounters with, or observations of, the aboriginal inhabitants of the region between the Sixtymile and White Rivers. Given the low population of the area we might not find this too surprising, however my own research into the archival documents and the recording of oral history indicates that the survey did encounter Upper Tanana people.

Archival research into the original logs of the survey was undertaken at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, the Rasmuson Library Archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. That research has provided a more detailed understanding of the routes and dates of passage through Upper Tanana territory during the survey, including the winter ranges of packhorses within the White River valley, which were undoubtedly encountered by Upper Tanana hunting caribou there, and lists of men employed to support the work of the official survey members. The latter provides us with additional sources (in the form of journals, memoirs, and letters of the named participants) to attempt to document more fully the interactions between the survey members and the local inhabitants.

The final report of the International Boundary Commission (IBC 1918) includes an account of the "Chiefs of Parties and Assistants," which in 1909 numbered 14 surveyors and their assistants. The personal diary of F. H. Lambert, who acted as a chief of party for the Crown, lists by name an additional 31 men hired by the Canadian survey to cut vistas, lay monuments, cook, and handle horses (Lambert 1909). Presumably, the United States would have hired roughly the same number of people. This suggests a total contingent of about 60 to 70 men active in the region from late spring to late August of that year.

Oral History Accounts of the Border Survey

Oral history accounts provide an important further elaboration on the encounter between the boundary survey people and the Upper Tanana. They document the actual division of *Ts'oogot Gaay* village by the survey and recount the agreement that the borderlands *Dineh* would continue to have the right to occupy and use the region as they had done in the past.

Mrs. Bessie John's Account of the Border Survey

The oral testimony of Mrs. Bessie John on the border survey through *Ts'oogot Gaay* has been recorded by this study in the field and in John-Penikett and John (1989); they differ only in a few elaborating, stylistic details. The version below was presented at the Yukon Historical and Museums Association's 1989 conference on Yukon Borderlands, held at Yukon College. (Several small errors in transcription arising from Mrs. John's pronunciation of English as her third language have been corrected here.) Mrs. John's daughter, Lu John-Penikett, helped to facilitate the interview.

Mrs. John: Right now I'm going to tell you people about when the borderline go through there. There were two hundred in the village there, the place white people call Little Scottie Creek. There are lots of people buried there. All our people, things like that. At that time the borderline went through. That's the story I'm going to tell you guys right now.

This great story. My great grandpa, when that borderline go through ahead there. They got some, what they call, moose skin, caribou skin. That's the kind of tent he got right down there at customs with the borderline going through. They don't know at that time, these white people who come around the boundary line, so maybe that one guy who is the government boss, they hit my great grandfather's tent. They say, "Could you move?" He do that you see? [the surveyor waved his arm]. So, that government said, "Your tent gonna be cut. You gonna be Alaskan, you gonna be Yukon?" they tell my great grandfather, they say.

So, they make lots of moccasins to be used at that time by those boundary line people. I don't know how many wore those moccasins, but all say, "Make moccasin."

I don't know, but my mother and my great grandfather say "You know how many moose skin they need to keep warm, those Indian people?" Make moccasin, meat, everything.

After that, the government, they give all kinds of flour and rice, I guess. They don't know what's that, my great grandfather. That flour, he tried boiling all day, he said grandma. He tell his wife, he said, "That's sour water. You gonna die if you guys eat it." He boiled it all day, he said grandma. He boiled it all day and put moose fat – he throw it in there. He finished his fat piece, he said my great grandfather, my great grandma. He stirred all day, and after that he got a stick spoon. They made it out of birch bark sometimes. You used a little bit, that's all. You were his kids, they say.

That's a long time ago they do that, and I'll talk to you about a story, you guys. The boundary line go through at that time. There were lots of people at Scottie Creek at that time – about two hundred. They buried fish [in ground caches], dry meat, everything. All that stuff was cached. They put fish in there, dry meat, everything. At that boundary line, he showed it to my great grandfather and that great grandma she carried that book around a long time. I'd like to know if that book is in Ottawa. They give my great grandma and great grandfather a red book a long time ago. "This is your book," they tell my great grandfather. They carry it around a long time – it must have been about 1911 when the boundary line went through. Lots of people all just dead now. The story just grow up to us. That's why I tell you guys special story about my great grandfather."

Lu John-Penikett: So, mom, what happened when the boundary people asked him to move? Did he move or how long did they try and get him to move?

Mrs. John: Long time. They stay there. He can't move his moose skin or caribou skin tent. That's right. They give him lots of food, they say. The government people. They stay there everyday. That's all, I think.

Lu John-Penikett: So, did they move or what happened when the boundary survey...

Mrs. John: They don't move! They belong to their village. The old borderline go through. They back and forth. They move all the way down to Big Scottie Creek, all the way down to the Yukon River.

That's the right way to Indian. They feed each other, you know. They don't know boundary between Yukon and Alaska. Right now, just everything happened. It was supposed to be that they feed each other, just one trail in this country. All our country. They help each other, you know, Indian people.

Lu John-Penikett: Well, I thought you told me before that Stsii Stsool [*Tsaiy Tsuu*, Mrs. John's grandfather] didn't want to move. He didn't want to move but they kept asking him. So what happened? They got him to sign a piece of paper or something.

Mrs. John: Yeah, that government they tell him to sign a piece of paper. So, he sign paper.

Lu John-Penikett: And what did they say he was going to get from that?

Mrs. John: "You gonna be Alaskan. You gonna be Alaskan. You gonna be Yukon. Two sides of the country, all you are from," they tell my great grandfather. After that they do a book, and my great grandmother she said, "... some kind of bible." They live to sign that, my great grandfather. He can't move his tent, that's why that government do that and he sign the paper. "Two sides of the country," he say. "All your family, they are all going to grow up on two side of the country." My great grandfather know all about our country here. That's why he signed that paper (John-Penikett and Johns, 1989:187-190).

Mr. Andy Frank's Account of the Border Survey

Andy Frank, who was a young boy at this time, shared his version of the arrival of the border survey crew at the village of *Ts'oogot Gaay* in a 1994 interview:

Borderland chief [the survey chief], his name was Raeburn.

That's when he say [my grandfather] at the border that time. "Good people," he say, "what you do this, you cut the bush all the way in a line?"

"That boundary line. New law. There going to be law, nobody can't go across." That's what they [Raeburn] said, he said.

Grandpa, he said, "No," he said "I don't like that," he said. "Good people. White man good people, but tell 'em what I say," he say. "That we can go anywhere, where we got hunting ground, where we got property to get everything, we go there. You got to tell 'em," he said. "You're alright, good people, but me, I like to go anyplace where I got land," he said, my grandpa.

He like to hear our grandpa talk too, that people that time. Grandpa talk good. He called Border Chief. He got earring bead. "Why you do that?" he say that. Old time chief, borderland chief.¹³

They call the Border People [the English surveyors], that's what my grandpa told me, a long time ago. He tell that people, the Boundary Line Chief [Raeburn], my grandpa he say "No, no, no us," he tell him. They put down [the line] all through. My grandpa he go Dawson, he make meeting. Grandpa he say "What they do down there?"

"They make boundary line. You can't go other side no more."

"No, not us," my grandpa say. He tell it true. He put down [Titus John?], he tell his dad, who he put down. "Us? No way! We got proper way, we got hunt, good place to hunt we use. We go anywhere. Not us," he say. I tell everybody. I go Fairbanks. I tell you too. That book, somewhere is that book (A. Frank 1994; Easton n.d.).¹⁴

PROSPECTORS AND THE CHISANA GOLD RUSH

Bill Rupe was not the only prospector to travel into the Upper Tanana borderlands at the turn of the century. It was quite likely Jack Horsfeld's 1902 discovery of gold on Beaver Creek, west of the border, that first brought Rupe into the Upper Tanana basin. Bleakley's (2007) history of mining in the Chisana district notes that even earlier, in 1898, Henry Bratnober prospected up the White River. That same year so did Jack Dalton, who built a cabin on upper Kletsan Creek (Capps 1916:90). Bratnober and Dalton returned together to search for copper deposits on the upper Tanana River in 1903. In 1905, Henry Bratnober traveled up the Nabesna River in a gas-powered sternwheeler, establishing a winter camp for a small crew consisting of James L. Galen, Draper C. "Bud" Sargent, George C. Wilson, and Carl F. Whitham. In 1906 Aaron Johnson and un-named partners prospected lower Chathenda Creek, which would become the principal drainage of gold production in the Chisana region; however, they abandoned their efforts after a week of disappointing returns (Bleakley 2007).

The discovery of the Chisana gold deposits is credited to William E. "Billy" James, Nels P. Nelson, and Fred W. Best, however, there are conflicting accounts of the discovery. What is known is that on May 13, 1913, James and Nelson, accompanied by Matilda Wales, long-time companion of James, staked their claims on Chathenda Creek, which effectively began the Chisana Gold Rush (Bleakley 2007; Capps 1916:92; Wickersham 1918:64). According to a 1914 Alaska territorial court decision regarding the recently staked Chisana claims (Wickersham 1918), James, Nelson and Wales established a base camp at First Timber Cabin on Beaver Creek, roughly 40 miles from Chisana, in December 1912 (Wickersham 1918:64). They returned to Chisana in May 1913, and James made the first discovery of gold in the district. However, a slightly different account is documented by Capps (1916:92), who, while outwardly acknowledging the "conflicting stories" regarding the discovery, asserts that the gold placer deposits were initially discovered in 1912 when James, Nelson, and Best began prospecting on the upper White River. It was during this time, although later denied by James, that James was reportedly shown a gold quartz prospect on Chathenda Creek by Indian Joe (also known as "Chisana Joe"), as well as a placer gold deposit nearby. James, Nelson and Wales returned in 1913 to stake the claims.

The account in Capps (1916) is consistent with that provided by Knut Peterson, an immigrant from Denmark, who arrived in Alaska in 1923 and subsequently spent most of the rest of his life prospecting, goldmining, and trapping in the Alaskan interior. He spent a number of years at Chisana, where he met and worked for Nelson, and met and knew others from the Chisana Gold

¹³ The Borderland Chief was who Andy Frank called "My Grandfather" and probably Chajakta, *Huskeh* or a respected leader of the borderlands area at the turn of the century.

¹⁴ "That Book" is the red book in which Bill Rupe recorded the boundary agreement between Chajakta and Raeburn – referred to in Mrs. John's account above. Additional documentation of Bill Rupe's relationships with the Upper Tanana can be found in Easton (2007a).

Rush days. In his memoirs, he recounts the story of the Chisana discovery as told to him by Nelson (Peterson 1977). Peterson's account credits Indian Joe with showing James and Nelson the gold quartz dike that led to the discovery of the gold placer deposits. Peterson's account differs from others (Capps 1916:92; Wickersham 1918:65), however, in that he documents that they had given Chisana Joe the first claim named "Discovery."

They [James, Nelson, and Joe] named it Bonanza Creek, and the next few days they were busy staking claims. Indian Joe got the first claim, named "Discovery." Upstream two and a half miles was a small tributary, the rich baby, shallow ground and lots of gold. They named it "Little Eldorado." Nineteen hundred and thirteen was the year that James and Nelson changed their luck! (Peterson 1977:24).

Regardless of the differing accounts of the discovery of the gold deposits, after the initial discovery was staked, James traveled to Dawson to register the claims and get further supplies; he also picked up Fred Best and Andy Taylor to share in their good fortune (Bleakley 2007). Without additional collaboration, initial movement to the Chisana region was slow, that is, until Best returned to Dawson for more supplies in August and reported average returns of nearly \$300 of gold a day. After this the Chisana Gold Rush was truly on.

The Chisana Gold Rush was the last big rush in the western subarctic, drawing several thousand miners and entrepreneurs to the valley from communities all over Alaska and Yukon, as well as from further afield.

Walter Northway recalled that this was the year that he saw his first white man:

I was fourteen when I saw my first white people. My dad and I were hunting ducks by the mouth of the Chisana River. We came to that point by moose-skin canoe from *K'ehthiign*. We were hunting with bow and arrows. My dad and I were on the bank roasting duck and making tea. I told my dad that I wanted to go for a walk. While walking down by the river, I heard voices, weird voices that didn't sound like us.

I ran back to my dad and told him I heard voices and they didn't sound like us. He told me to watch for them.

They came straight to us. Their clothes were ragged, shoes torn. They were starving. They came to where we were roasting ducks.

When they saw the ducks roasting, they asked for them. My dad clapped his hands over his ears, letting them know that he did not understand them. Then they pointed to the ducks and made motions that they were hungry. Dad split the ducks in half for them and gave them tea. When Dad gave them the ducks, they were very hot. The men dipped the ducks in a puddle of water nearby to cool them off so they could eat them fast.

After they were done, I took one of the men across the river in my canoe and came back for my dad and the other white man. Then Dad and the white men walked over to *K'ehthiign*. I traveled back by boat.

Kids all surrounded the men when they got to our camp. They stayed with us until they regained their strength. They worked and helped us. Then they asked my dad if anybody could lead them to the Chisana Gold Rush. Joe Demit's dad, *K'ost'un'*, and Chief Sam guided them. After these two, white men came like ants (Yarber and Madison, 1987:36-37).

Despite the difficulties that were faced on their arrival, by October 1913 Chisana City “contained about two hundred cabins. Among other amenities, it boasted two streets, two grocery stores, and the district’s third recording office. It also possessed a post office, run by former steamboat captain Theodore Kettleson” (Bleakley 2007).¹⁵ Although many left the region for the winter, the community continued to grow. By December another two hundred cabins had been built and the “city” now had four grocery stores, two meat markets, two barber shops, two restaurants, a hotel, a boarding house, and a saloon called *The Miner’s Home*, leading one newspaper to describe Chisana City as the “largest log cabin town in the world.” Upstream at the mouth of Bonanza Creek next to the diggings was a second community, “made up mostly of tents... a few cabins, as well as four stores, two hotels, and a restaurant” (Bleakley 2007).

Gold production at the Chisana diggings never lived up to the expectations reflected in this building boom, however. Nineteen-fourteen was the zenith of production with 12,094 ounces recovered, worth a value of about \$250,000. Production declined from that point forward, with minor surges as particular claims peaked or new technology recovered additional placer deposits. By 1915 only about fifty people remained in the community over the winter. The 1920 census recorded forty-three whites and one hundred and five Natives in the Chisana district.¹⁶ In 1924 the town site was described as consisting of “452 log cabins in which one man lives alone” (Bleakley 2007). By McKennan’s visit in 1929 “the resident population of Chisana... totaled six men and one woman” (McKenna 1959:26), one of whom died that winter.¹⁷ The white population of the upper Chisana basin never grew much larger in the years that followed.

The reaction of the *Dineh* living in the area to the establishment of Chisana City seems mixed. Bleakley (2007) writes that “some of the Cross Creek Village’s twenty-five or so residents moved north or west to escape the unwelcomed impact of the gold discovery. Others, attracted by the stores and promise of cash labor, abandoned their traditional locale [at Cross Creek] and moved to Chisana City.” Presumably, those who moved “north” moved down the Chisana River to Scottie Creek and Northway, while those who moved “west” moved to the village on the Upper Nabesna River.

Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, an Episcopalian missionary of the day, viewed the emergence of the settlement with moral alarm. “It seems altogether impossible that a tribe of Indians should live in the near neighborhood of a considerable town without suffering degradation,” he wrote. “There are always white men eager to associate with them to debauch the women and make a profit of the men; insensibly the native virtues are sapped... the men grow shiftless and casual, picking up odd jobs around town and disdaining the hunting and fishing by which they used to live” (Stuck 1917:56-57).

Such disdain for hunting and fishing may have been more pragmatic than shiftlessness, since there is widespread agreement that one of the most immediate effects of the Chisana rush was a severe depletion of game in the region. Western store food was both scarce and expensive during the three boom years of 1913-15. For example, a letter from Fred Best to his parents describes prices of 40 cents a pound for flour, 50 cents a pound for sugar, and 25 cents a pound for beans in the winter of 1914 (Bleakley 2007). Hungry prospectors hunted and trapped sheep, caribou, ptarmigan, hare, and other game to the extent the Dall sheep population of the area was virtually eliminated and the Chisana caribou herd severely reduced (Capps 1916:21). In addition, many of the over-wintering miners attempted to supplement their income by trapping, reducing the population of furbearers as well. During his stay at Chisana in 1929, McKenna was told that prior

¹⁵ The townsite was originally christened Johnson City by the miner’s committee which founded it on 9 September 1913; it was renamed Chisana by the postal service.

¹⁶ They included seventeen placer miners, ten prospectors, the US commissioner, two trappers, a trader, a merchant, a blacksmith, a cook, and six wives or children.

¹⁷ McKenna’s fieldnotes, journal and letters home during his stay at Chisana provide a vivid picture of life in the community from 22 September through to 22 November 1929, when he left to continue fieldwork in other Upper Tanana communities. Its original repository is in the Special Collections at Dartmouth College Library in Hanover, New Hampshire. Mishler and Simeone (2006) provide an abridged and annotated copy of this material.

to the gold rush “Chisana [was] the best all round hunting place in the old days [for] caribou, moose, and sheep” (McKenna Papers, Series 2/Box 15/Folder 93). In his monograph he records that “the White River was practically unvisited by Indians whereas formerly it had been a popular hunting territory. The basins of the Beaver and the Chisana, formerly the best hunting territory in the area, also were much less frequented due to the depletion of the game following the Chisana stampede of 1913” (McKenna 1959:17).

Thus, it seems that the *Dineh* of the upper Chisana area had two choices – move to better hunting territories on the Nabesna and lower Chisana Rivers or seek wage labor to supplement their depleted subsistence resources with store-bought food. Though neither choice meant a complete degradation of their lifestyle as Archdeacon Stuck believed, they did necessitate a reasonable adaptation to these environmental changes.

Reckord (1983:238-39) believes that Cross Creek Village “could have been abandoned as early as 1913 when the residents moved across the river to Chisana, to which they were attracted by the store and promise of cash labor. Some even tried their hand at gold panning.” She also notes that Chisana City “attracted the Native people from villages in the region. From Cross Creek, Scottie Creek, and Cooper Creek on the Nabesna, they came to trade furs and buy supplies. They also provided services and labor. They were active in the freighting business. They delivered the mail from Chistochina by dog sled in the winter. They panned for gold on their own” (Reckord 1983:235; see also pp. 228-229).

Several of the immigrant miners who stayed in the region married into the *Dineh* community. James Galen married Ada, daughter of Walter Northway’s sister Elsie and Peter Albert. Pete Eikland, who began to work the Chisana diggings in 1921, would later marry a “niece” of Chisana Joe, Mary, daughter of *Tsaiy Suul* and sister to Lucy, wife of White River Johnny. (Old) William Blair married Tilly Enoch, with whom he sired Young Bill Blair, and later married Mary Tom Tom.

It is only about the mid-1930s that the historic record documents *Dineh* actually working claims. Chisana Joe, “worked the fraction between claim Nos. 3 and 4.... [while] an unidentified Native man worked the upper portion of Little Eldorado” in 1937 or ’38 (Bleakley 2007). A similar group of unidentified Native men mined a fraction on Bonanza in 1939 (Bleakley 2007). Johnny Nicolai, who was raised by Chisana Joe’s brother (Chisana or Nabesna) John (Justin), believes it was 1937 when he moved over to Chisana, where “they got their own little mining camp... prospecting, pan-gold, slush box workers during the summer.” He recalled “quite a few older people there, his dad [referring to another person present at the interview] Jack John and Chisana Joe, Chisana John and Chisana Billy, all them old, pretty old that time. Not very many kids that time.” It was here that he met his wife Cherry, daughter of Andy Toby. Mr. Nicolai also recalls others frequently coming from Scottie Creek and Northway on the lower Chisana River to visit and hunt, including White River Johnny, Bill John (Bell Gaiy), Titus John, Joe Mark, Shorty, Steven, and Harry Frank. Mr. Nicolai himself worked the diggings and trapped through the region from “head of Beaver Creek all the way through back into the Nabesna,” taking his fur for trade down to Slana (Nicolai 2003; Easton n.d.).¹⁸

Gold production practically stopped altogether during the Second World War, after which only a few claims were providing “meager” returns (Bleakley 2007). Big game hunting took over as the principal economic activity in the upper Chisana River region in the late 1940s, and remains its mainstay today, although a few placer claims are still held and are intermittently worked.

¹⁸ People began to trade in Slana after the trading post in Chisana closed upon the death of its owner/operator C. A. Simons in 1929 (Reckord 1983:230; McKenna in Mishler and Simeone 2006:39).

MINERS, MISSIONARIES, TRADERS, AND THE STATE IN THE CHISANA RIVER BASIN AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

The winter of 1913-14 brought both the completion of the permanently marked international boundary along the 141st meridian and the Chisana Gold Rush to the Upper Tanana *Dineh*. While these events seem to have had only a transitory effect on the lives of the *Dineh* at the time, both presaged the future. Although the majority of the several thousand white people attracted by the Chisana gold finds left the region within the year, they introduced a pattern of territorial dispossession and competitive resource exploitation, which dramatically affected subsistence and settlement patterns in the upper Chisana basin. The marking of the boundary declared the intent by the United States and Canada to assert two distinct administrative regimes over the territory of the Upper Tanana *Dineh*. While both States were initially reluctant to establish a costly physical and controlling presence within the region, the American government did so much sooner than the Canadian.

The period between 1913-14 and the establishment of the Alaska Highway in 1942-43 was one in which a three-pronged assault on the culture of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* was initiated and carried out with increasing vigor, in a clear attempt to degrade its relevancy to Native peoples and replace it with a culture of dependency originating within the State metropolis. The three elements of this strategy were agents of the fur trade involved in economic transformations, agents of Christianity involved in metaphysical transformations, and bureaucrats of the State involved in replacing the indigenous transmission of culture with a new model of social organization.

For purposes of discussion these activities have been divided into separate elements; however, it is important to realize that they are articulated, overlapping, and interdependent – fur traders are Christians too, missionaries are capitalists as well, and bureaucrats can prove as zealous in their attempts at social engineering as the most dedicated missionary. But, it is just as important for us to appreciate that the actions of any particular agent need not necessarily be in congruence with the aims of another. Thus, there were moments of conflict and cross-purpose between these agents and their actions and some opportunity for the Upper Tanana *Dineh* to exploit these differences to suit their own purpose.

The period is notable for the increased nucleation of Upper Tanana *Dineh* nomadic band society into more permanent village settlements, as a result of adopting new architectural styles and a variety of western technologies. As well, there were important differences in the early attempts by the American State to institute planned assimilation of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* through the establishment of regional economic, religious, and education programs compared with that of Canada. Within the Canadian jurisdiction, the State displayed little interest in the lives of the Upper Tanana *Dineh*, restricting its presence to the occasional police patrol and missionary excursion until the building of the Alaska Highway established efficient transportation access to their lands.

Undoubtedly, these differences between the two governments were partly a function of the differences in geography and transportation infrastructure, which made it relatively easier for American representatives to travel into the region. In Alaska, the Tanana River valley provided direct access to the region; it was possible for riverboats to ascend the stream as high as the Nabesna River. The Valdez to Eagle Trail was completed in 1903, with commercial transport from Valdez to Fairbanks initiated the following year; by 1923 it had been upgraded to carry automobiles, and renamed the Richardson Road from tidewater to Delta Junction, where it met the road on to Fairbanks and the Alaska Railway to Anchorage. As early as 1917 the Alaska Road Commission was also contributing to upkeep of several of the prospector routes (which generally followed well-worn Native trails) into the upper Nabesna and Chisana valleys, including the McCarthy-Chisana trail system, and the Slana-Nabesna trail, which it planned to upgrade to a road running further east to Chisana and then White River. Only the first portion of this road was

completed by 1933, however. The ARC also upgraded the Big Delta-Tanana Crossing trail to wagon standards in 1923-24 (Bleakley n.d. b, n.d. c).

In the Yukon, the development of a transportation infrastructure focused on consolidating access to and from the goldfields at Dawson City along a roughly north-south line that largely ignored the lands along the western borderlands (Duerden 1981). Although the Chisana Gold Rush stimulated the establishment of at least two routes into the Upper Tanana headwaters country – the Dry Creek Trail from the mouth of the Snag Creek on White River, and the Canyon City Trail from Burwash to the upper White River – both were left to decay after the short-lived rush.

Within this period, while the State busied itself with the initial consolidation of its hold over the lands and economy of the Upper Tanana, the Native people, in turn, were involved in adjusting their social organization to enable the continued maintenance of their culture and identity as *Dineh*. Their historical experience cannot simply be told as a tale of imperialist subjugation but must reflect something of the dynamic interaction of competing and complimentary values, interests, and intents.

Traders and Trappers in the Chisana Basin

The development of mining in the Chisana-Nabesna basin was accompanied by an expansion of trading establishments in the region, not just at the white communities of Chisana and Nabesna, as just described, but at other locations within the area as well. Unfortunately, beyond the general accounts given above, records of trading transactions at the Chisana store have not been recovered. However, we can reasonably assume that the type of trade that occurred there was not unlike that undertaken on the lower Chisana River, as described below.

In partnership with Andy Frank's father, William "Bill" Rupe established the first trading post in the region at the Native village of *Nahtsiq ch'ihchuut Männ'* at Pepper/Paper Lake on upper Scottie Creek just after the turn of the 20th century, possibly during the short rush to the White River District in 1902, which was stimulated by Jack Horsfeld's discovery of gold on Beaver Creek east of the Canadian border (Easton 2007a). As Andy Frank described in a 1994 interview:

My daddy had partner, Bill Rupe. No white man that time. My daddy's partner, Bill Rupe. First white man that time. He stay. My daddy just have girlfriend, that white man, he find white man. Young man. He stayed together. He no quit, no more. He see my daddy do good, so he stay around there, until my daddy show how to trap 'em, and that got lots of fur, so he tell my daddy teach him how to understand good, you know, teach a long time, teach my daddy how to talk English. So my daddy go Dawson, sell fur. He tell my dad how to do it, my daddy do it. Sell all fur, sell fur they go to Dawson, they buy boat, I guess. Come back to the Ladue, they bring stuff there. I don't know how they got those two horses there. Maybe bought from somebody, they bought from somebody. Then they started to haul freight over that high mountain [from the Ladue to the Scottie Creek drainage].

Rupe remained in partnership with Andy's father for about ten years. During this time, he fathered a daughter named Margaret, also known as Maggie, with Annie John. In 1908 it was recorded that "W. S. Rupe has a trading post situated 40 miles due West from a point 60 miles up the White River. This post is situated on a branch of the Tanana River. He also trades with the Copper Indians as well as other Bands, who come a distance of 250 miles up the Tanana River" (Anonymous 1908). International boundary surveyors G. Clyde Baldwin in 1908 and Thomas C. Riggs in 1909 both record encountering "Rupe's trading post" on Scottie Creek (Baldwin 1908:9-10; Riggs n.d.: July 1909). Rupe took his daughter to attend school in Dawson around 1912. He continued to trap and prospect from the Klondike to the White Rivers until his death in Dawson City in 1937.¹⁹ His daughter Margaret left Dawson in 1927 for Victoria, British Columbia, where she graduated from

¹⁹ "William Rupe, old-time trapper in the White River district, passed away yesterday at St. Mary's hospital after a prolonged illness. The deceased was born in Santa Rosa, California about seventy-one years ago. He is survived by one daughter, Margaret Rupe, now residing on the Pacific Coast." *Dawson News*, 31 July 1937.

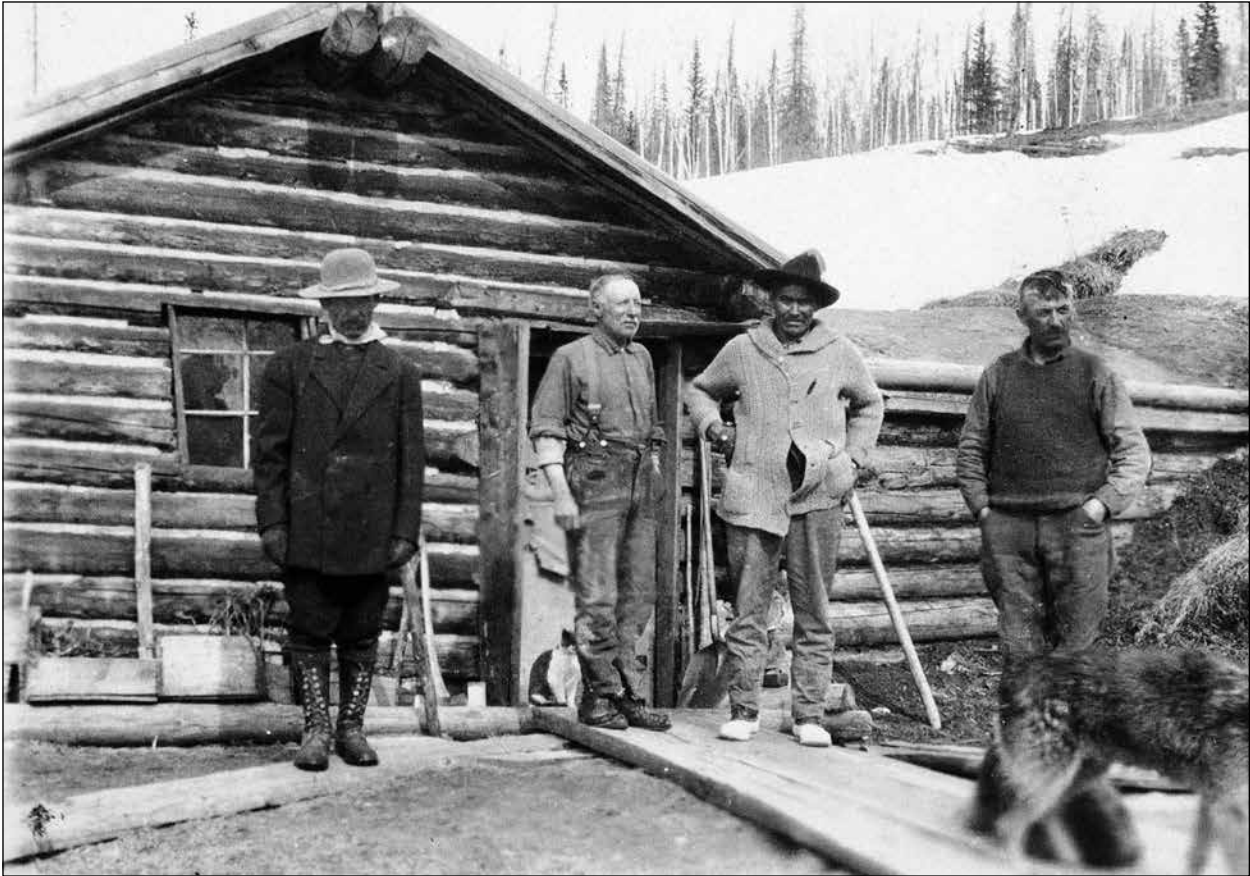


Figure 32. Chief Joe, Jack Ray, John Healy, John Hadjudovich [Hajdukovich]. Drane Family Collection. UAF-1991-46-719. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

St. Joseph's School of Nursing in 1930. She worked at the St. Joseph Hospital until 1956, rising to oversee the nursing staff of the maternity ward. Margaret married an affluent man named Arthur and retired to live with him.²⁰

In 1907 William Newton established a trading post at the mouth of the Healy River on the Tanana. In 1912 he extended his operations further upstream, establishing a post at Tanana Crossing and caches at Tetlin and the mouth of the Nabesna River. Newton sold these upstream operations to John Strelic and returned to Healy River in 1914 (Simeone 1995:28-29). Strelic worked in the region into the 1920s, traveling up as far as Chisana to trade (McKenna Papers).

A Native seasonal fishing camp / village known as *Haltäl Cheegn* at the mouth of Snag Creek became one of the staging points to the Chisana gold fields in 1913. A 2003 archaeological reconnaissance documented that the principal Native settlement and the trading post were located along the south bank of Snag Creek at the confluence with the White River, while the short-lived gold rush "city" was located on the west bank of the White River north of Snag Creek. By 1916, Snag City had contracted to two or three white men, including "A. Boulay, trader and prospector" (Tidd 1916). According to McKenna, Jack Dolan took over the Snag trading post in 1918 (McKenna Papers, "Snag – History"). Northern Tutchone *Dineh* and their families from the mouth of the Stewart River, Coffee Creek, and Wellesley Lake areas, and Upper Tanana *Dineh* from the Chisana River and Scottie Creek basins, including Bell and Laura John, Titus John, Andy Frank, and "Chief" Johnson and his wife *Lakduu*, and others made Snag a semi-permanent village around this time as well. Jack Dolan eventually "adopted" young Jimmy Enoch after the death of Jimmy's father,

²⁰ Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, Victoria, British Columbia. Personal communication from Margaret Cantwell, S.S.A., archivist, 30 Jan 1998.

sponsoring his schooling in Dawson City. Mr. Joseph Tommy Johnny believes he continued to trade here until the late 1930s, when he sold out to (Old) Bill Blair and Paul Neiman. Dolan remained at Snag until his death in 1945 (Nieman n.d.:176) and is buried at the cemetery there (Easton n.d.).

In 1908 James A. Northway made his first ascent of the Tanana River with a view to starting a trading post at the head of navigation, but only reached Tanana Crossing before freeze-up. He continued upstream the following summer, establishing a trade cache at Tetlin River. In 1910 he lost his trade outfit on his way back upstream, but he continued to return to the Upper Tanana to trade over the next few years. About this time, he met Walter Northway and his father and bestowed the name Northway on Walter's father; Walter Northway believed it to be "about 1908" (Yarber and Madison 1987:36). Walter Northway recalled that "the steamboat used to stop at the mouth of Moose Creek. I can remember seeing a lot of boats with a lot of men going up to the Chisana Gold Rush. We used to sell them moccasins and meat. Then we would buy tea, rice, tobacco, flour, and other things from them" (Yarber and Madison 1987:36). In 1913, James Northway's experience allowed him to ferry prospectors and trade goods some 25 or 35 miles up the Nabesna River before grounding on a gravel bar (Brown 1984:43-44).

Another steamboat operator, C. D. Flannigan, was more successful that year and "was the only steamboat pilot to complete the difficult and treacherous trip up the Nabesna river and was one of the few to reach Chisana" (Ferguson 2002:118). Flannigan later opened a trading operation at Tetlin, and caches at Tanacross and Northway, which he operated into the 1920s (McKenna Papers, Series 2/Box 21).

William Newton's move to Tanana Crossing in 1912 was coincidental to the establishment of a mission station there by the Episcopal Church. Margaret Graves and Celia Wright were the first missionaries. They were followed by E. A. MacIntosh, who served at the mission from 1915 through 1924 and again in the 1930s. Arthur Wright, a Tanana mixed blood, also served during this time, having been raised to be a missionary. In an attempt to curry their favor and interest, the missionaries, particularly MacIntosh, seem to have carried on some trade with the Natives as well, although Mrs. Wright later recalled that "most of the families who lived at Tanana Crossing when she lived there had come from Lake Mansfield. The people from Nabesna, Tetling and other points of the Upper Tanana River visited there on special occasions but did not settle there" (Wright n.d.:3).

Herman Kessler was another prospector-turned-trader who operated in the Upper Tanana district perhaps as early as 1916-17.²¹ Kessler operated a trading post first "up at Chisana, close to Scottie Creek. Then, he built a cabin close to Nabesna village [Northway].... Kessler traded with fifteen to twenty, maybe thirty people up there" (Hajdukovich in Ferguson 2002:74). Walter Northway recalled that "the first store here was built by Herman Kessler. He built his store at Stover [Stuver] Creek up the Chisana River. First he started his store in a tent, then he built a store in the old village across the river [from present day Northway]" (Yarber and Madison 1987). He remained active, trading in Northway into the 1950s and was buried at his request in the Native graveyard at Northway.

Mr. Louis Frank remembers both Dolan and Kessler, who would converge on the Scottie Creek and Chisana River trade from opposite directions. At the remains of his grandmother Bessie Mason's cabin at the High Cache village we found a "Yukon stove," which is rectangular in shape. "A lot of muskrat cooked in there," Louis recalled. The stove was bought from Jack Dolan, the trader at Snag. Such a stove then cost seven dollars. You could bake bread in it. When the top of the stove burned out, you could just turn it over and use it upside down. Dolan would come down to High Cache with a pack train of horses for trading. Herman Kessler, from Northway, would do the same. Kessler often camped at *They sh'ok*, the eastern point of the hills on the southern side of the Scottie-

²¹ Herman Kessler is listed as "miner, resident of Fairbanks" in the 1915-16 edition of Polk's Alaska Gazetteer (p. 228); most sources agree that his operation predated Hajdukovich's, which was started in 1919.

Desper Creek valley, just inside Canada, and then took the trail back over the border. Fred Demit, George Haley, and Bill (Mary Tyone's brother) worked for Kessler. Kessler sold round "Alaska stoves," while Dolan sold the rectangular "Yukon stove" (L. Frank 1999).

Ezekial "Zeke" Mullett worked a claim and trapped on the upper White River in 1910 and 1911, according to articles in the *Chitina Leader*. He was also reported to have worked at Chitina in 1911-12 and later in the Chisana district with his partner Percy Thornton at Skookum Creek in 1919 (Bleakley n.d. a). He subsequently set up a small fur trading post on the middle reach of the Scottie Creek valley on the shores of a lake that came to be known as *Ziik Mann'* in Upper Tanana. The remains of his cabin, which he operated off and on until the 1930s, can be found there (Easton n.d.), although it seems that he worked it half-heartedly, preferring instead the more transient lifestyle of the *Dineh*. A 1929 RCMP report on a patrol to the region found him at Wellesley Lake (on the Canadian side) and noted:

Zeke Mullett, this white man has turned to be a regular Indian, traveling around the country with the Indians and living right with them all the time. [He] has been trying to marry a daughter of an Indian by the name of Copper Jack. This Indian girl is about fourteen years of age, but will not have anything to do with this man Mullet as he is getting pretty well along in years. Mullet has paid about \$400.00 to the father for this girl. Mullett in the meantime is living with Copper Jack and his family. This white man is following the Indian mode of living (RCMP 1929).

Lawrence De Witt traded into the upper Ahtna country. Living around Tetlin, he would buy supplies from one of the Upper Tanana traders and then transport them up the Nabesna and on as far as Mentasta, exchanging commercial supplies for furs, which he would sell on his return to Northway to another of the traders (MacIntosh n.d.).

Finally, John Hajdukovich began his long association as a trader, prospector, roadhouse operator, big-game guide, and self-appointed guardian of the Upper Tanana in 1919. Several accounts of Hajdukovich's life in the region are available (Brown 1984, 1999; Ferguson 2002), as well as substantial documentation available in the US National Archives, a special Hajdukovich collection at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, and a large collection of correspondence in the Edward Mallinckrodt archives held by the Mallinckrodt Chemical Works of St. Louis, Missouri.

Hajdukovich initially established trade operations or caches at Tanana Crossing, Tetlin, and Northway. By 1926, with the assistance of Ted Lowell,

Their primary post was near the mouth of Healy River [and] they operated additional stores at Tetlin, Last Tetlin, Moose Creek, and near Gardiner Creek on the Chisana River. Each summer Hajdukovich and Lowell made six to twelve trips in freight boats to the Upper Tanana Indian villages. A trip might include a run up Healy River to trade with the Indians on Healy Lake; a brief stop at Tanana Crossing; an ascent of Tetlin River to Tetlin and Last Tetlin, and Nabesna River to Nabesna, and Chisana River to Scottie Creek (Brown 1984:61-62).

Hajdukovich also employed local Natives as freighters and traders. Walter Northway recalled:

John Hajdukovich and his brother Milo came and built a store. They built it on this side of the river before we built the village of Nabesna. The two storeowners didn't like each other. Teddy Lowell was the store manager. We used to trade fur and sewing things for groceries. Then I became fur buyer for John Hajdukovich and Teddy Lowell.

I used to go with a freight sled full of groceries to Scottie Creek and all the way to Snag. Trading groceries for fur or just buying fur all the way. One of my sons was named after Teddy Lowell (Yarber and Madison 1987:43).

In the 1920s Hajdukovich began to lobby the Territorial and federal governments to contribute money and resources to the development of the Upper Tanana region. He was particularly interested in further trail and road construction, for which he hoped to gain government contracts; the expansion of services to the Upper Tanana Indians, particularly in the areas of health and education; and the establishment of regional economic development opportunities for the Natives through reindeer herding and fur farms. In these pursuits he found allies among some wealthy and influential Eastern Establishment big game hunting clients, in particular Edward Mallinckrodt Jr. and Wendell Endicott. These efforts had an important influence on the establishment of federal Bureau of Education schools at Tetlin in 1924, and later at Northway in the 1930s, the introduction of a full-time traveling nurse to the region in the mid-1920s, and, perhaps most importantly, the establishment of the Tetlin Reserve by a Presidential Executive Order in 1930. As a result, despite souring of relations in the 1940s due to the establishment of federally sponsored Native cooperative stores in the Upper Tanana villages – which effectively put his trading operations into bankruptcy – Hajdukovich is generally remembered fondly by Elders of the region. He passed away at Fairbanks in 1965.

Undoubtedly, one reason Hajdukovich is well remembered was his refusal in all his years of trade to provide liquor; indeed, up until the early 1930s, all the Upper Tanana traders maintained an agreement of effective prohibition in the region. As Beck (1930:28-29) observed, “this is not without some personal interest in the matter... a drunken native did not produce as much fur as the same native would if he were sober all the time.”

The fur trade through the middle of the 20th century was a period of record incomes for the *Dineh* in both Alaska and Yukon. The world market generally expanded and remained strong through this period, despite three short-term falterings in 1921-22, 1931-32, and 1939-41, until a slow, inexorable decline began in 1947, which marked the beginning of the end of this way of life for most people (McCandless 1985; Coates 1991). Knut Peterson recalls the drop in fur prices, in conjunction with newly imposed game laws, as being particularly devastating for the *Dineh*.

During the 1920s, and most of the 1930s, the natives made good money on fur, and fairly good from then until almost 1950. But after that, the prices dropped and dropped. It would be hopeless for a native today to even think of supporting his family by trapping and hunting. The game laws forbid him to kill meat out of season. Besides that, Alaska is now overcrowded with big game guides, so the hunting ground has been turned over to the sportsmen. The days of the Alaskan Indians' wilderness freedom have long since come to an end (Peterson 1977:41).

The Natives of the Upper Tanana trapped or hunted a wide variety of furbearers, including lynx, fox, beaver, marten, wolverine, rabbit, bear, mink, weasel, otter, coyote, and some wolf, but undoubtedly the mainstay of their fur production was the muskrat. Families moved onto traplines around November and stayed out for three to six months. Some went as individual families, while most consisted of two or more, the most common combination being the families of a man and his son-in-law, or two hunting “partners.” By the middle of the 20th

century, each of these groups had “a generally recognized right to certain territory or area for his or their trapline. These rights traditionally pass from father to son, but actually inheritance practices vary according to circumstances” including transfer to a son-in-law, a nephew, or a daughter (Goldschmidt n.d.:62). It was also pointed out to Goldschmidt that trapping areas around the principal villages were reserved for the use of Elders who were no longer able to travel long distances. “We have to have long trap lines because we call in other Indians from the other villages to work with us. We have the old people use the short trap lines around the village. They go around the village with short trap lines because they are not able to walk and climb so far... We don’t want whites trapping here too close” (Walter Isaac of Tanacross, in Goldschmidt, n.d.:25-26).

The trapping group set up a permanent seasonal base camp and then traveled their traplines in rotation, usually with several separate lines radiating from the base. The length of these lines was variable but could reach distances of 75 to 100 miles, with small supporting cabins or tents along their transit. More plentiful game and fuel were found away from the principal village locations. All members of the family who were of age and health participated in the trapping (Burge 1938:20-23; see also Goldschmidt n.d.).

“Ratting [muskrat] season” ran from March to May. Although they are easier to catch in the fall, the quality of their fur was less and maximizing the pelt value allowed for less to be taken for equivalent financial value, thereby contributing to muskrat conservation. This approach placed the Upper Tanana Native trapper at a competitive disadvantage with itinerant white trappers who came through the region on occasion, or the efforts of overwintering prospectors. Several documents attest to incursions of such men in the 1920s and ’30s. Burge (1938:23), for example, notes that “it is not unusual for white trappers to go into an area and use every means of getting the largest number of pelts possible in a short time, regardless of the effect this might have on the future production of the area. Since they have no interest in the continued use of the particular area in which they trap, they do not practice the conservation that is common among Indians.” He goes on to note that under this influence, “one year some of the Indians of the Upper Tanana were persuaded to kill muskrats in the fall. However this was stopped by the pressure of public opinion” (Burge 1938:23). In 1946 Walter Northway regretfully admitted the following to Goldschmidt (n.d.:77):

We take care of our rats until this spring. We take care that we don’t kill them all off. We let some of them remain so that there will be some of them next year. I know I hurt myself, but this year I cleaned out all the rats. I cleaned them out because the white man will get them anyhow. Then the army people have been killing off the rats. The white people try to clean up all the game.... The Indian way is to leave something for next year and not to try to make everything at once. The white man does not care. He figures on getting rich right away. He doesn’t have to live here next year.

The Chisana River basin was a part of this regional trapping economy since before the 1913 Chisana Gold Rush. “The natives take a quantity of furs each year – fox, lynx, marten, mink, and wolverine – which they trade to the white men for provisions, clothing, and ammunition,” reported Moffit and Knopf in 1910 (p. 15). After the essential collapse of the Chisana Native village when the store at Chisana closed in 1929, trapping continued in the upper Chisana basin, primarily by residents of the upper Nabesna community, along with people at Northway and Scottie Creek, who also trapped the lower Chisana basin. As reported

earlier, the upper Nabesna residents included Nabesna John and, “the ancestors of the Alberts and Franks of Northway, and the Sanfords and Justins of Nabesna Bar, Chistochina, and Mentasta” (Reckord 1983:225), as well as the Jackson brothers, Nicholas, John, and Albert, and Oscar Jimmy of Northway (BIA 1996a:5).

In 1938 Johnny Nicolai began trapping the region as well, running a line along the foothills of the Nutzotin Mountains from Nabesna to King City, on to Beaver Creek and its headwaters, and back over into the Upper Chisana River and Nabesna. Titus John and Bell Gaiy spent the occasional season trapping in the foothills. They were “cousin-brothers” to the Justin brothers (i.e. their mothers were siblings). Joe and Martha Mark and their family continued to return to trap in the upper Chisana basin after they moved to Big Scottie Creek and Northway (Nicolai 2003). Oscar, Abraham, and Guines Albert, then residents of Northway, shared a trapline along Stuver Creek and the lower Chisana River. Oscar Albert also trapped along the Nutzotin foothills between the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers (Goldschmidt n.d.:66). Joe Demit and Andrew Jimmy Albert also hunted and trapped in this area (Goldschmidt n.d.:65). On the lower Chisana River, residents of Big Scottie Creek and High Cache villages held traplines upstream to Wellesley lake, north into the Dawson Range foothills, and east up Scottie and Mirror Creeks (Easton n.d.).

An incomplete selection of Hajdukovich’s trade records is held in the Archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks’s Rasmuson Library (Hajdukovich Papers). They contain transaction records of trade, credit, and fur bought at Tetlin, Nabesna, and Healy Lake. The earliest year seems to be 1922 and the records continue to about 1952, with the latter few years being restricted to hunting (guiding) and prospecting records. The forty-three journals do not constitute a full yearly series nor necessarily a full record for any one year, but the material provides some sense of the types of items sought by Indians and the amount of fur they were bringing in.

The 1922 ledger for Nabesna shows an extensive and varied inventory, which included the following products:

Chewing Tobacco	Sugar	Flour	Tea	Coffee	Baking Powder
Butter	Rice	Apples	Raisins	Candy	Gum
Handkerchiefs	Shirts	Pants	Suspenders	Coat & Vest	Long-johns
Overalls	Socks	Undershirts	Underwear	Stocking Hose	Dresses
Towels	Ribbon	Calico	Thread	Needles	Soap
Candles	Windows	Nails	Knives	Files	Matches
Chain	Canvas tents	Axes	.22 long shells	.22 short shells	.30 – .30 shells

In July 1922, credit was established at the Nabesna store by the Upper Tanana trappers through the exchange of nineteen moose skins and eighty-six pounds of dry fish. In late November and early December Hajdukovich purchased 243 rat skins, three mink, and one each of moose and ermine, and 142 pounds of dry fish. Noted clients from the Chisana basin included Martha Mark, Polly, Little John, Big John, Andy Frank, *Lacho*, and “Scottie Creek Bill” (likely Bell Gaiy / Bill John). Of interest is that most of these people took little in merchandise that year. *Lacho* purchased soap and tobacco and took the remaining due in cash. Little John and Bell Gaiy wanted only rifle shells

and cash. This could be a function of their commitment to traveling light or might reflect the fact that while they traded fur with Hajdukovich they bought their merchandise from another trader, perhaps closer to their home camps and villages in the Chisana basin. A number of contemporary observers noted that the competitive presence of at least six traders in the upper Tanana River region, as well as the existence of trading posts at Chicken, Salchaket, Tanana, Stewart River, Dawson, and Fort Selkirk, allowed the *Dineh* to take “advantage of this proliferation of posts by trading wherever they could get the best price for their fur” (Simeone 1995:28). Perhaps not surprisingly, the records also show that the two people who made the most purchases of commercial goods were Walter Northway and Chief Sam, who were in rivalry for *Huskeh* status within the Northway village. The goods they bought were eventually used as gifts to others within a potlatch or distributed more generally (Hajdukovich Papers, Box 1).

By 1942 the records show a marked increase in purchases by Chisana-area residents. In that year, for example, Little John (White River Johnny) exchanged sixty muskrat pelts, valued by Hajdukovich at \$75.50 (average \$1.26/pelt) for 50 lbs. of flour, 11 lbs. of Lipton tea, 40 lbs. of rice, 30 lbs. of sugar, 1 tin of baking powder, 2 lbs. of sugar, 2 lbs. of salt, 4 packages of pasta, 3 tins of fruit, 16 packs of gum, a jar of sweet pickles, a tin of Star Chew, 3 rolls of thread, a file, 3 packs of matches, a pair of wool socks, a wool shirt, 1 pair of pants, 1 pair of boy’s overalls, 1 carton of .22 long, 8 boxes of .30-.30 rifle shells, and \$11.75 in cash, from which he then drew \$1.75 to purchase a pen knife.

In that same year, Martha Mark exchanged sixty six muskrat pelts, valued at \$87.00 (average \$1.32/pelt), for 50 lbs. of flour, 20 lbs. of sugar, 20 lbs. of rice, 3 lbs. of tea, 2 cans of lard, 2 tins of baking powder, a jar of sweet pickles, 3 packages of dried peaches, 2 tins of fruit, 1 tin of Star Chew, 6 soap bars, 1 file, 5 rolls of thread, 1 butcher knife, 2 boy’s underwear, 1 boy’s overall and shirt, a pair of socks and shoes, 1 pair of dress pants, 2 pair of women’s hose, 4 packs of matches, 2 boxes of .30-.30 shells, one towel, 6 yards of calico, and 3 yards of ribbon, a value of \$50.00 (Hajdukovich Papers, Box 5).

In my discussions with various Upper Tanana *Dineh* regarding the period between the Chisana Gold Rush and the building of the Alaska Highway, it is clear these days are remembered as halcyon. The trapping economy was an easy overlay onto their traditional subsistence economy. Unparalleled technological innovations were available to them from which they could pick and choose, adapt as they pleased, or pass over for more traditional ways. One old time Sourdough wrote that his “long association among these people [the interior Athapaskans] compels me to admit (I used to be greatly prejudiced as are all who are not well acquainted with them) that their average mentality is fully equal to that of the whites. They show this in many ways. Noticeably in the canny way in which they weed out the customs of the white men. Adopting those which are practical and discarding those which are impractical” (Huntington 1927). The bathtub, for example, never really caught on before modern water systems were introduced, and even today the sweat bath still prevails with many people of the region. “White people brought problems to us, but we sure were happy you brought those pots!” declared Bessie John, while another opined of her youth in the 1930s that, “I’m not going to say it wasn’t a hard life, but it was a good life” (Easton n.d.).

Rivals such as Walter Northway and Chief Sam held rich potlatches, while others were able to undertake less extravagant potlatch acknowledgements of their husbands, wives, children, and even dog teams, in addition to fulfilling their traditional obligations to their departed kinsmen through funeral potlatches (see, for example, accounts of potlatches in MacIntosh (1918), Endicott (1928), Beck (1930), and McKennan (1959)). More prosaically, people remember White River Johnny’s cabins at Big Scottie Creek and *Taiy Chi* as the scene for near-nightly festive dances held around a Victrola phonograph, the few platters being

played over and over again, pieces of which lie still on the ground outside the berm of his *Taiy Chi sha* today. Elders today recall with some amount of awe their first peach, tomato, or orange. They speak with satisfaction of their rifles and the increased certainty of their hunting, particularly women who for the first time could live without a man and survive, as Mary Eikland chose to do for many years between her two marriages.

But even with these technological advantages, the old religious ideology held sway. People remained respectful of the natural world, carefully nurturing the viability of their traplines by avoiding over trapping. “The natives have their own rules and regulations with reference to conservation of the fur bearing animals,” reported Beck (1930:31). “When rats have been trapped heavily on one lake one spring, the following spring that area is closed.” Eight years later, Burge (1938:7) noted similarly that the Upper Tanana “practice a conservation of natural resources that is exemplary.”

So, while many outside observers have maintained that the introduction of western technology and foodstuffs created a “dependency” on these goods, which drew them further into the cash economy,²² it is equivocal to what extent this was imposed and to what extent it was chosen and integrated in such a way as to minimize its potential transformative effect on the core beliefs of Upper Tanana *Dineh* (see also Easton 2007b).

The Nabesna Gold Mine

The *Dineh* communities of the upper Nabesna River were tied closely to those of the Chisana; indeed, most *Dineh* who lived at the one also spent a significant amount of time at the other, so much so that McKennan classed the two areal communities as a single Upper Tanana “band,” although there were also intimate ties with the settlements on the lower reaches of both the Chisana River (McKennan’s “Scottie Creek band”) and Nabesna River (McKennan’s “Mouth of Nabesna band,” i.e., Northway). The upper Nabesna River “Upper Tanana” community also maintained equally close ties to Ahtna speakers of the upper Copper River valley, as McKennan (1959:21-22) observed.

Considerable intercourse exists between the people of the upper Nabesna and those of the Copper River. Of the four families camped at the head of the Nabesna when I was there [in the winter of 1929], one woman, the wife of John, was from Mentasta on the Copper River; while John’s mother, the matriarch of all four families, was from Batzulnetas. On the other hand, at Batzulnetas there was a Nabesna man married to a local girl.

There were at least four sequential villages on the upper Nabesna during the 19th and 20th centuries. The earliest known village was reported to be at the mouth of Platinum Creek, called *Dit’aan Cheeg* (hawk [creek] mouth), and was certainly occupied in the late prehistoric period but abandoned prior to 1901. According to Jack John Justin the village was used “way before white people came in. That’s old-timer people” (P. Kari 1985:63, in Bureau of Indian Affairs 1995b:4). It may be the “Indian house” Allen (1887:63) reported at the mouth of Platinum Creek. Mr. Justin recalls seeing the remains of this village in the early 1920s, which consisted of “housepits, underground caches, and sweat baths” (Reckord 1983:219). Several attempts to locate this village in the later 20th century have failed. It is assumed that the village itself has been eroded away by stream action (McKennan 1959:18), although the remains of an associated cemetery have been located (BIA 1995b).

The second village site was known as *Daxuhtaa’ Cheeg* (flat-topped mountain mouth) (J. Kari 1986:209; Reckord 1983:224-225) and was located upstream and across the Nabesna River

²² Writing of the aboriginal occupation of the upper Chisana after the gold rush, one BIA report states, “What did occur was a dependency upon Western-manufactured items and a preference for Westernized food items.” Interestingly the next sentence reads, “When Chisana’s store closed in 1929, the community’s Indian population moved back to their former settlements and reassumed a subsistence lifestyle” (BIA 1993b:20). The two statements seem contradictory, since a state of “dependency” suggests an inability to do without or otherwise.

on the left bank. Formerly a hunting camp (BIA 1996b:4), it was occupied for a short while after the abandonment of *Dit'aan Cheeg* village but was in turn “abandoned after the death of a powerful shaman” (McKenna 1959:18).

The third village site – called *Tthiixaa' Cheeg* (brain [creek] mouth) – was further downstream, near the mouth of Cooper Creek, and along the main trail between Nabesna and Chisana. According to Jack John Justin, the name of the village came from the milky color of the water in Cooper Creek, which resembled the color of the animal brain-based solution used to tan hides (J. Kari 1986:209). *Tthiixaa' Cheeg*, which McKenna visited for several weeks during winter 1929-30, was occupied from about 1909 to 1943-1945 (BIA 1996a:16). Occupants included its founder, identified as Charley Toby's great-great-grandfather (presumably in the late prehistoric period), Nabesna John, and “the ancestors of the Alberts and Franks of Northway, and the Sanfords and Justins of Nabesna Bar, Chistochina, and Mentasta” (Reckord 1983:225), the Jackson brothers, Nicholas, John, and Albert, and Oscar Jimmy of Northway (BIA 1996a:5).

The village near the mouth of Cooper Creek was occupied during the onslaught of prospectors, miners, and entrepreneurs heading for the Chisana gold diggings, and its Native residents were involved in cash labor initially as freight haulers, then as miners and in the sale of hand-hewn lumber, as well as continuing subsistence hunting and commercial fur trapping. White prospectors had discovered gold on the upper Nabesna River in 1899, and a small mine was established about 1908 upstream of the village. In the late 1920s, the mine was substantially expanded, employing some forty to sixty miners, and some *Dineh* assisted in grading an airstrip on nearby Nabesna Bar. The airstrip became an important commercial hub for the region until the construction of the “Abercrombie Trail,” a road extension from the Richardson Highway at Slana to the Nabesna mines (now known as the Nabesna Road) in 1934. Several Native families moved to Nabesna Bar about this time, with the remaining occupants of Cooper Creek village moving across the river to Nabesna Bar in the mid-1940s. The cabins and other structures at *Tthiixaa' Cheeg* were destroyed in an accidental fire, although accounts disagree about the timing of the fire. In an interview with Jim Kari (1986:209), Jack John Justin dated the fire to 1943 or 1944. Although that account doesn't identify the fire as resulting in abandonment of the village, several authors connect the fire to move of the remaining occupants to Nabesna Bar (e.g., BIA 1996a:6). Holly Reckord (1983:231), however, suggests that the cabins at the site were used occasionally by people hunting, fishing, and trapping for another decade, before the village was destroyed by a fire in the mid-1950s.

Gold production continued at the mine site until it was banned at the beginning of World War Two due to it being deemed as competing with other industrial work directly related to the war effort, and the population of the area collapsed.

People left the Nabesna and Chisana valleys to work on war-related jobs in Alaska such as the construction of highways and airfields. Some of the Indian inhabitants of Cooper Creek Village left and moved to Northway or the northern Copper River villages. A small group composed of women and older men remained behind, trapping and living off the land. Those who left Cooper Creek returned to the village when trapping, hunting, or traveling through the area (Reckord 1983:231).

While killing the mine, the war stimulated some economic activity in the area, as the airfield at Nabesna Bar was expanded to accommodate ferrying freight from the end of the Slana-Nabesna road for the construction of the Northway airport and for service as an emergency landing for Lend-Lease aircraft being transported to Russia. When the airport was abandoned in 1944-45 as obsolete to the war effort, the remaining occupants of the Cooper Creek village moved to occupy the

buildings there and to erect new log cabins. The move may have been prompted in part by the fire at *Tthiixaa' Cheeg*; however, Nabesna Bar also had the advantage of being closer to Nabesna Road along with stores and trading posts (Reckord 1983:217, 231). In a sense the move to Nabesna Bar was a re-occupation for the *Dineh*, since it had long been a traditional campsite, known as *Dehsoon' Cheeg* ([creek] mouth).²³ Native occupants at this time included Nabesna John, his son, Jack John Justin, Lena Charley, Frank Sanford, Daisy Sanford, Johnny Nicolai, Glen Burrell, and Andy Toby, and their families. A cemetery was established at the site during its occupation; Nabesna John is buried there (BIA 1996b; Reckord 1983:231).

Like the Alaska Highway, the establishment and upgrading of the Nabesna Road had a profound effect on the lifestyle and settlement patterns of the upper Nabesna-Chisana *Dineh* occupants. "A trip between Valdez and Cooper Creek that had taken weeks in the first few decades of the century now took a morning" (Reckord 1983:231), and residents shifted their orientation from the lower Nabesna River to the Copper River valley villages of Mentasta, Gulkana, and Chistochina, where food and supplies were more economically available.

The majority of people who lived in the Upper Nabesna-Chisana region had died or moved away by the late 1960s, although the Justins continued to occupy the site until the 1990s (BIA 1996b:9-10). Jack John Justin and his stepbrothers Wilson and Calvin Justin ran a guide service for some years. Mr. Jack Justin, the last resident, moved to Chistochina in the mid-1990s due to failing health (BIA 1996b), although the area is still visited by *Dineh* today who come to hunt and, perhaps more importantly, savor the sense of their history that pervades their ancestral land.

Missionaries

Upper Tanana *Dineh* traveling to Dawson, Eagle, Tanana, or Fort Selkirk in the late 19th century would have been the first to encounter Christian missionaries stationed at these locations, and to have heard of their teachings from their relatives and friends there before families at home. Indeed, it is said that the *Huskeh* Isaac of Mansfield had been so impressed by the missionary stationed at Eagle that he traveled to Fairbanks in 1909 to petition the Episcopal Bishop Rowe to send a missionary to the Upper Tanana valley. The following year Archdeacon Hudson Stuck traveled through the region and determined that the abandoned government buildings built to support the Eagle telegraph line at Tanana Crossing provided a suitable base for a mission. The church purchased these in 1912 with a gift from St. Timothy's School and Miss Margaret Graves was assigned the task of bringing the Christian faith to the Upper Tanana. Accompanying her was Miss Celia Wright, of *Dineh* and European descent from the lower Tanana River, who could speak Athabascan (MacIntosh n.d.; Graves 1913).

By 1919, "about a dozen natives had cabins" at Tanacross; almost certainly these were exclusively people from Mansfield and Kechumstuk. The mission at Tanacross operated continuously through about 1923-24, when it was closed due to lack of funds. Intermittent visits by Episcopalian pastors occurred through to 1931, and it was during this period that the missionary E. A. MacIntosh first ventured upriver to Tetlin and then to Nabesna / Northway. MacIntosh re-opened St. Timothy's as a full-time operation in 1931 and remained there for the next decade, traveling to Tetlin and Northway to attempt conversions.

In his short memoir of these days, MacIntosh was decidedly ambivalent about the success of the missionary effort. His converts "readily accepted the Christian religion outwardly, but still pinned their faith on the Medicine making of the old men.... It has been the constant effort of the missionary to try to draw them into the Christian way, watching lest they paganize it" (MacIntosh n.d.:7). Later he writes,

²³ J. Kari (1986:208) and Reckord (1983:217) list the spelling as *Dehsoo' Cheeg* and translate the name as "good area mouth" or "clear area mouth."

Religious progress with the Indian is quite slow, anyway, as they are a gregarious people. They are so closely bound together by customs and teachings of their fathers (some of which are a hindrance to the Christian life) that it is next to impossible to get one of them to cut loose and make an individual stand. The older ones are loath to give them up and have a tendency to hold the people to those things meanwhile professing Christianity. Some gradually sluff off those things but too many either draw back or become indifferent (MacIntosh n.d.:14).

MacIntosh also grappled, albeit quite uncritically, with the effects of successful erosion of Native beliefs. "The younger people," he wrote in 1938,

are becoming enlightened and having lost faith in the leadership of their elders are becoming confused. They are coming more and more in contact with white people of various stages from being mildly interested in Christianity to those opposed to it which is also confusing. One of their greatest weaknesses is their desire to be a good sport and agreeable to those around them. Thus they are easy prey to those who have no scruples about making bad examples or spreading undesirable teaching (MacIntosh n.d.:14).

One of the great attractions for the Upper Tanana to the mission was the availability of instruction in western arts, particularly the English language as well as practical skills in math, gardening, and preparing the new foods. This desire is reflected in their petitioning for and eventually getting federal government-run schools at Tetlin (1925), Northway (part-time about 1926, full-time in 1940/41), and Tanacross (1931), although the latter school was delivered by the missionary E. A. MacIntosh's wife when it was reopened that year until her replacement in 1938.

The combination of missionary preaching and western education seemed to have been regarded as a necessary evil by many of the Tanacross Natives and certainly frowned on by the BIA Education office from the 1920s onwards. The combination was "in many ways unsatisfactory, for the educational program inevitably was strongly influenced by the policies of the mission," Burge (1938:15-16) wrote. In 1931, the field agent of the BIA's Office of Education found that most Natives of Tanacross were desirous of having a school but not one associated with mission work.

From what I could learn from the natives and others, it seems that they did not have much school when the mission was operating [in years earlier], only two or three days every month or two.... Those that did not want the mission returned frankly stated that they wanted their children to learn to read and write in preference to leaning so much about religion, as religion was not such an important thing with them as they had a good one of their own before the white men came to the country (Beck 1930:20-21).

Relations between the Episcopal missionaries and the traders were ambivalent. On the one hand, as Christians themselves, the traders had some appreciation for the positive contributions of missionary work, particularly in the areas of promoting literacy in English and providing medical care. On the other hand, villages with a mission tended to be more sedentary than those without one, and thus their hunting and fur trapping production were less. The missionaries encouraged the women and children to stay home off the traplines, particularly during the worst of the winter months, which they viewed as an unnecessary hardship. However, families that stayed in the village were enticements for the men to "make constant trips to and from his trap line to carry meat and fuel to his family. This wastes time and inevitably results in a smaller crop" (Burge 1938:21). The traders and some others took a view contrary to the missionaries.

There is no justification for the belief that any hardship is worked on these families [who go on the winter trapline]... Both the Indians with whom I talked and the field nurse at Tetlin definitely stated that the children return to the village after the trapping season in better health than at any other time of the year. It is true that extreme cold is experienced during the winter in this area, and fifty degrees below is not uncommon, but it is no colder in the hills than it is in the village, and the proximity of the fuel supply makes it easier for them to keep warm (Burge 1938).

The introduction of state-sponsored schools and nursing care in the 1930s further eroded the missionary's practical influence within the region. Indeed, by 1934 missionary proselytizing was contrary to BIA policy. Circular 2970, issued by BIA Commissioner John Collier, noted that:

There are Government schools into which no trace of Indian symbolism or art or craft expression has been permitted to enter. There are large numbers of Indians who believe that their native religious life and Indian culture are frowned on by Government, if not actually banned... [Accordingly]... No interference with Indian religious life or expression will hereafter be tolerated. The cultural history of Indians is in all respects to be considered equal to that of any non-Indian group. And it is desirable that Indians be bilingual, fluent and literate in the English language, and fluent in their vital, beautiful, and efficient native languages.... the Indian arts are to be prized, nourished, and honoured (Collier 1934).

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that Christianity was completely rejected by the Upper Tanana – there are many Upper Tanana *Dineh* today who say they are Christian. Rather it was integrated within their indigenous world view, reflecting the tolerant pragmatism of Athabascan spiritual beliefs generally. Many people I know attend what are still itinerant church services in their communities every month or so, although their indiscriminate attendance at Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Pentecostal, or “holy-roller” sideshows demonstrates that these are regarded as much as social events as spiritual ones. Many read the Bible and reflect on its stories with interest; however, they often relate these biblical stories to stories from their own mythological corpus. Having said this, there are also many *Dineh* who are unequivocal in their rejection of Christianity, particularly those who were subject to abuse at Canadian Christian residential schools. One middle-aged man introduced himself to me as he shook my hand with the declaration, “By the way, I practice my mother’s religion – is that going to be a problem?”

Perhaps most importantly, however, many remain perplexed at the distance between the spiritual teachings of white men and their behavior, at how little the teachings of the Bible seem to guide their actions, particularly in their relations with Indian people. “Indian people don’t tell white how to believe in god, how to pray,” Mrs. Bessie John once lamented to me in her smokehouse. “You guys shouldn’t tell us that either. I respect Jesus, Mary, and the Ghost. Why can’t whites respect us, our way?” (Easton 2008). I couldn’t answer her. Another man is adamant that the Christian way is the white man’s way. “Some people say they are the same but the Indian way is different. We don’t kill for no reason and we know all life is sacred. It’s a serious business to kill something.” However, another *Dineh* teacher believed she had the answer. It is because white people are not fully formed, spiritually, due to a flaw in our history. “*Ts’awusha*, you know him?” she asked me, referencing their Culture Hero who set the world straight in myth-time. “He was the same guy as your Jesus, the same person. They say he left here and kept going west, all around the world, fixing things up in Russia, India, and then there in Israel. That’s where you guys killed him. You never let him fix your world there, you just killed him. That’s why I think white men are so different and sad” (Easton n.d.).

The State and the Dineh of the Chisana Basin Between the Wars

Many of the initial explorations of the Chisana River basin were government-sponsored military and geological expeditions explicitly tasked with gathering intelligence on the lay of the land, its resources, and the nature of the aboriginal occupants in order to inform US government policy decisions. Yet, aside from these explorations and the development of a series of trail and road corridors, there was little direct State activity in the region until the 1930s. Canadian interest in the area after the establishment of the international border was even more muted. After this time there was a slow expansion of state power in the region by the United States, principally through the Alaska Native Service, until the sudden explosion of activities related to the building of the Northwest Staging Route and the Alaska Highway, which brought both State's hegemony onto the borderlands in a pincer movement from East and West.

The general history of the relationship between Alaska Natives and the US government is well documented in Mitchell (1997, 2001) and Case (1984). The initial federal government-Native relationship in Alaska was ambiguous due to the distinction made in Article III of the 1867 Treaty of Purchase between "uncivilized tribes" and other "inhabitants of the ceded territory." This resulted in "the impression that an indefinite number of Alaska Natives were not subject to the principles of federal Indian Law" (Case 1984:6). This was further complicated by the 1884 Organic Act and several subsequent statutes which stated that there was a federal obligation to protect Indian lands "actually in their use or occupation," language which was taken to imply "that Alaska Natives, unlike other Native Americans, did not have claims of aboriginal title to vast tracts of tribal property" (Case 1984:6). The Organic Act of 1884 also required that federal educational services be made available to Alaskan residents without regard to race and thus the education of Alaska Natives was assigned to the federal Bureau of Education, which established the Alaska Native Service for this purpose. The absence of a Bureau of Indian Affairs Agency in Alaska led the solicitor for the Department of the Interior to the legal interpretation "that Alaska Natives did not have the same relationship to the Federal government as other Native Americans" (Case 1984:7). Until the influx of immigrants associated with the series of gold rushes at the turn of the century, there was little political impetus for federal intervention into Native affairs in interior Alaska.

Education and the provision of other services such as health care in Alaska was segregated in practice, however. Within larger mixed communities, such as Juneau and Sitka, the white residents vigorously resisted integrated education and separate schools were set up, while schools in the outlying interior villages were perforce predominantly Native. Special programs within the Department of Education, such as the cultivation of reindeer herds initiated in 1894, were constructed specifically for application within Native communities. Thus, the passage of the 1905 Nelson Act, which specifically allowed for appropriations for the "education and support of the Eskimos, Indians, and other Natives of Alaska" and the independent funding of schools for white children upon petition, was merely a formal acknowledgement by Congress of "what had by that time become an accomplished fact – federal services provided to Alaska Natives because of their status as Natives," separate from those provided whites (Case 1984:8). The following year the Alaska Native Allotment Act extended the provisions of the 1887 General Allotment ("Dawes") Act to Alaska that permitted individual Natives to receive up to 160 acres of land as an "inalienable and nontaxable" homestead (Case 1984:8). In 1931, the work of the Bureau of Education's Alaska Native Service was transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, completing the formal federal recognition that "the Natives of Alaska, as referred to in the treaty of March 30, 1867, between the United States and Russia are entitled to the benefits of and are subject to the general laws and regulations governing the Indians of the United States" (BIA Solicitor's opinion, quoted in Case 1984:10).

The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) was amended in 1936 with specific provisions of application to Alaska, ending the allotment policy and putting in its place the ability for the Secretary of the Interior to designate lands actually occupied by Natives as new or additional reserve lands. It also provided revolving funds for economic development, permitted the establishment of federally chartered cooperatives and businesses, and promoted the formation of local Indian governments under a federal constitution. “The Department of the Interior immediately embarked on a drive to organize Alaska Native villages under IRA constitutions and business charters. By early 1941, thirty-eight Native Groups had organized under the Alaska amendments” (Case 1984:11), including the villages of Tanacross, Tetlin, and Northway. The Bureau of Indian Affairs also began to provide additional human services to Alaskan Natives under the authority of the Snyder Act in 1931, through which nursing and educational services were extended into the Upper Tanana region later that decade.

Finally, it is significant that the federal government-Native relationship in policy as well as legality in Alaska was not developed until the 20th century, after the passage of nearly 150 years of prior experience with “the Indian problem” in the lower forty-eight states. As a result, many (though not all) of the federal policies implemented in Alaska were less oriented towards the assimilationist practices of the past and more directed at the maintenance of independence through the preservation of local subsistence economies and cultural traditions (Collier 1934). Only one formal “Indian Reservation” – the Metlakatla Indian Reserve on Annette Island, established in the late 19th century – was authorized by Congress in Alaska. Instead a series of Executive Order Reserves were established for the purposes of education and economic development (e.g., the reindeer forage grounds in northern Alaska). Congress prohibited the creation of additional reserves except by Congressional action in 1919; however, the Secretary of the Interior “circumvented the law by establishing several “public purpose reserves” in Alaska that were *de facto* Native reserves,” and it was under these provisions that the Tetlin Reserve, embracing some 768,000 acres, was established in 1930 (Norris 2002:6). Six “IRA Reserves” were established and numerous others proposed (including the extension of the Tetlin Reserve eastward to the Canadian border for the benefit of the Nabesna, Northway, and Chisana basin Natives) under the authority of the Indian Reorganization Act between 1943 and 1949, after which no further Native lands were designated until the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

The Bureau of Education

William James’ 1914 letter regarding “destitution of about 15 natives in the Shushana region” is one of the earliest direct records within the Department of Interior Archives that references the Chisana River basin. The Department’s non-committal response reflects the general neglect of the region at the time. The miniscule size of the Department’s budget for a vast area, more pressing concerns elsewhere in areas of greater Indian-white contact, and the remoteness of the Upper Tanana seem to have been the principal motivations for this neglect. A 1919 report noted “There are some places in the District that are not reached by the Bureau of Education and some which are so scattered that it would be impossible to supply them with schools. The Tanana Crossing district is so remote and the people so scattered that a school there would be impractical” (Forbes 1919).

Another of the founding prospectors at Chisana, A. F. Nelson, apparently took it upon himself to provide some education to the children living in Chisana in the 1920s, but this was suspended as a result of an audit of the operations of the Seattle Office of the Department of Education – out of which ran the Alaska Native Service. The audit was extremely critical of the Seattle Office and its director Wagner, who was found to be incompetent in his job and lax in his duties and service, which was often in contradiction with many government regulations. Among the 115 recommendations for improvement or action are two of particular interest:

That cognizance be taken of the fact that numerous teachers employed in the Alaskan Service do not appear advanced in education, based on mis-spellings, grammatical errors, and formation of sentences in their reports and communications.

A shipment of school supplies, valued at less than \$150.00, was made to A. F. Nelson, U. S. Commissioner at Shushana, in July of 1925, on the recommendation of Superintendent Ben Mozee. Mr. Nelson is said to be intending to teach the natives but he is not a teacher and may be a missionary. Government supplies cannot be used for sectarian purposes so this was wrong. A commissioner is not, strictly speaking, an employee of the government but receives a commission on fees and penalties collected in the enforcement of Federal regulations, such as game laws, prospecting licenses, and so on.²⁴

Meanwhile, downstream at Tanacross, lobby for a government school to replace the struggling Episcopal school began as early as 1922 when Galen Fry wrote his friend William Lopp, then Chief of the Alaska Division of the Bureau of Education. In his response Lopp noted that he had recommended opening a school at Kechumstuk in 1907, but the teacher chosen for this work was assigned to Tanana village on the lower river. Lopp went on to say that he is favorable of the idea of a school at Tanacross and found Fry's suggestion that he offer the teaching post to W. C. Denny, a trader at Tanacross, to be acceptable. Lopp wrote to Denny the same day offering him the position and inviting him to fill out and return the appropriate forms of employment,²⁵ however nothing seems to have come from this or a subsequent recommendation, apparently approved by Superintendent Tigert in Washington, that a school be opened in the Tanacross vicinity.²⁶

Federal government attention was drawn to the Upper Tanana basin primarily through the urging of the trader and area benefactor, John Hajdukovich, and the lobby of his wealthy and influential Eastern Establishment friends William Endicott and Edward Mallinckrodt, both of whom had direct personal access to the Secretary of the Interior and the President. As a result, the Tetlin Reserve was created and funding was provided for a school and medical supplies there (Brown 1984, 1999; Ferguson 2002). The old-time prospector John A. Singleton was formally appointed to run the school in July 1924. He had been engaged for this at Hajdukovich's suggestion and Chief Peter Joe's request²⁷ and officially continued the work until his forced retirement in 1933.²⁸ In its first year of operation, the Tetlin school had an average daily attendance of 19.1 students, and operated on a little over \$50 worth of supplies.²⁹

²⁴ US National Archives, RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 154 – 1925-26 (FY), Reports and Exhibits with Reports by Inspector Trowbridge / Folder – Report by Inspector Trowbridge on Inspection of Seattle Office, 29 October 1925.

²⁵ Letter, W. T. Lopp, Chief, Alaska Division to Galen S. Fry, St. Timothy's, 17 January 1922; and Letter, W. T. Lopp, Chief, Alaska Division to W. C. Denny, Tanana Crossing, 17 January 1922. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 111 – 1921-22 (FY) Bureau of Efficiency – New Schools / Folder – New Schools.

²⁶ Superintendent of Education of Natives of Alaska to Commissioner of Education, Washington, D.C., 2 August 1923. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 119 – 1922-23 (FY), Contract Files – Seattle Office, General / Folder – New Schools.

²⁷ "At the earnest solicitation of their Chief, Peter Joe, I have agreed to teach a term here this summer and I am now endeavoring so to do.... I might also mention that I am [also] giving them instruction in gardening, etc., and that they are sawing the lumber to make benches and desks by hand." Singleton, J. A. to Sutherland, D. 11 June 1923. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806 / Box 128 / Folder – New Schools. Beck (1930:31) incorrectly asserts Singleton had been teaching for two or three years prior to the formal establishment of the school.

²⁸ US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 256 / Folder – Singleton, John A.

²⁹ US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 152 – Seattle, Reorganization of Office – Seattle Office, Financial / Folder – Seattle Office, General.

The establishment of the Tetlin school had several effects on the *Dineh* further east on the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers. Just after opening, prior to 1930, a number of families moved to Tetlin for the school year in order to provide education for their children. Yet most people found this impractical and refused to return the following year. Subsequently, Singleton traveled to the lower Nabesna fish camp during its use in June and July and held a day school there. Some Scottie Creek/Chisana families sent their children to this enterprise, but petitions during the 1920s and '30s for a school at Northway were rejected by the government with the following justification:

Investigations show that due to the migratory habits of these people it would not justify the government to establish a school here. In the summer time there is nothing to hinder them from going to Tetlin to fish and they could send their children to school at the same time. They have done this one time in the past. When I informed them that I could not recommend a school for that place, they all decided to do the next best thing, and that was, to move to Tetlin during the summer months (Beck 1930:43).

In 1934, Fred Dimler and his wife replaced Singleton. Dimler's Tetlin School reports record twelve elementary and sixteen high school students in 1935-36 and thirteen elementary and fifteen high school students in 1936-37. Among the students were children of Elisha (Jackson) Demit and his wife Bertha (most of whom were born on the Upper Chisana), Stephen and Walter Northway, and Chief Sam, whose wife Bessie was born in the Chisana basin.³⁰

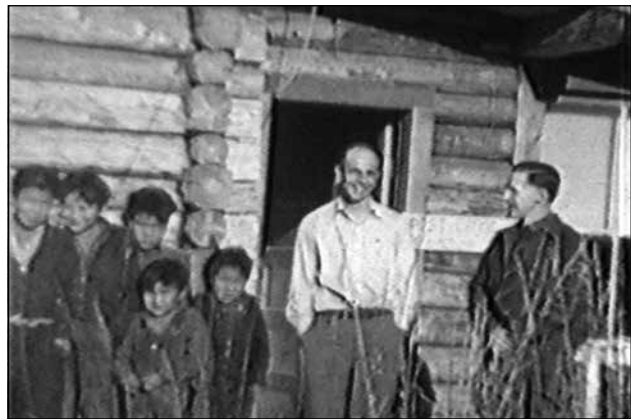


Figure 33. Lee Jennis and students at Northway School, 1943. Duesenberg Film Archive.

Burge (1938:16) found twenty children from upriver attending school at Tetlin in 1938, though attendance had both economic and social consequences. "The journey is expensive and the accommodations at Tetlin are extremely limited. To bring many children and their parents is risking serious complications and disharmony there, as well as breaking down the community life at Nabesna" (Burge 1938:16). Ivar Skarland made a similar observation in 1939 when he noted that, "some of the Nabesna Indians have with great economic sacrifice spent the winter at Tetlin in order to give their children a chance to attend school there" (Skarland 1939).

Singleton's teaching approach was an emphasis on "the three R's as well as any and all work in the Manual Arts. He believe[d] the natives should be taught such things as will best fit him to his environment, and he is doing his best to do it" reported Beck (1930:32). This approach was one of proclivity and pragmatism on Singleton's part, but it was also in agreement with the general policy of the Office of Education.³¹ Beck (1930:35) observed that:

Mr. Singleton has day school for the children and night sessions for all. At the day sessions the Chief of the village is always present. He attends for two reasons; one

Mr. Singleton has day school for the children and night sessions for all. At the day sessions the Chief of the village is always present. He attends for two reasons; one

³⁰ Annual School Census Report, 1937/38, Tetlin, Alaska. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. BIA Quarterly School Reports / Entry 818 / Box 2.

³¹ "Considerable effort is made to adapt the school program in Native schools to meet the needs and interests of the Native people served by these schools, thereby including many projects directly related to making a living in Native communities." It was policy to schedule classes during times of greatest residency in the village, regardless of the time of year, allowing for participation in subsistence activities. Alaska Narrative, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1941. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 121, Central Correspondence Files - 1940 - 1956 / Box 16 / Folder 00 - 1941 - AK - 032.

because he is chief of the village and wants to have an important part in the matters pertaining to his people and the other is, because he wants to learn to do like the white people do. His wife attends every session of school to teach the girls to sew and make clothing.... I was glad to note that he had the cooperation of the entire village in every thing he attempted and that the school was the center of all activities and to which everything else was subordinated. On Sunday evenings he has them all gather at the school house and they sing church songs, tell folk tales and usually he makes a talk on cleanliness or some other subject of kindred nature.

In the winter of 1939-40 a day school was formally established at Nabesna/Northway, that drew thirty-four students – eighteen boys and sixteen girls between the ages of 5 and 24. In his first quarterly report, Dimler wrote “Nabesna is a village in which school has never been held before.... The children and their parents were eager for the school. The boys and girls met two evenings a week for gymnastics, games, & etc. The children had simple weaving in Arts and Crafts. Their final products were square baskets.” By March enrollment had grown to thirty seven (twenty boys and seventeen girls), and the villagers had cut and hauled enough logs to construct a building specifically for the school. Three boys also made three pairs of skis.³²

As was typical throughout Alaska, the teacher provided a range of additional services to the community including special community meetings, adult classes in cooking and sewing, arts and crafts, social welfare, cooperative store and IRA-related actions, gardening, first aid, recreational activities, management of a community building shop, construction of a schoolhouse, and co-operation with other government agencies, including the Census Bureau, the Alaska Game Commission, and the Weather Bureau.³³ The net effect of these activities was to introduce and provide access to a range of government services previously unknown in the region. The timing of the school’s opening at Northway was also propitious. Within the year the region experienced the arrival of the builders of the Alaska Highway. Thus, the schools and their teachers became important vectors for negotiating the new relationships that descended on the *Dineh* of the Upper Tanana with the building of the highway.

Through the 1920s, Singleton also provided limited, but often critical, medical care to the inhabitants of the region, until a government-sponsored nurse was stationed at Tetlin in 1932. Beck (1930:36) notes that:

The medical work done by Mr. Singleton is by no means an unimportant one. He is very attentive to the natives in this respect and does everything possible to keep the well, well, and to cure the sick.... The Medicine Chest sent to these people each year by the Office of Education is a Godsend, not only for the Tetlin natives, but for villages fifty and a hundred miles away.... The villages of Tetlin, Tanana Crossing and Nabesna have no medical care whatsoever, other than that afforded by Mr. Singleton. If a native gets sick he must either do the best he can for himself or go to Fairbanks [273 miles away]. If he is very sick he will either be dead or well before he could get there in most cases. A nurse should be stationed at Tetlin. She could serve Nabesna and Tanana Crossing.

³² Quarterly School Report – Tetlin – Nabesna Day School (2 January 1940 and 1 April 1940). US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Alaska Division / Quarterly School Reports – 1937 – 40 / Entry 818 / Box 4 / Folder P1-163.

³³ Teachers were also expected to provide information, as their duties permit, “of a medical, physiological, or anthropological character in regard to the natives,” for transmittal to the Smithsonian Institute, as requested by Aleš Hrdlička (Memo, Claxton to Employees of the Alaska Division, 12 January 1920. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 806, Records of the Alaska Division, General Correspondence / Box 98 – 1919-1920 / (FY) – Natives – New Schools / Folder – Outside Relations, Miscellaneous). This directive was followed up in 1927 by a request to provide skeletal remains to the Smithsonian Institute, a practice to which neither Singleton nor Dimler, at least, assented. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Index to General Correspondence, 1910 – 1930 / Box 1927 / #122, 29 July. Smithsonian Institute, regarding their request to Alaskan teachers to send them skeletal remains.

There was little that Singleton or the nurse could do for tuberculosis – the major medical scourge of the *Dineh* in the region. In 1924, Singleton reported that “the natives are healthy.” By the 1930s, however, a variety of tuberculosis strains had become endemic in the Upper Tanana *Dineh* population, causing great discomfort to many and death to others. MacIntosh (n.d.:15) observed that, “in 1915 tuberculosis was quite prevalent at Ketchemstock and there were only a very few cases here [in Tanacross] and practically none at Tetlin and Nabesna. Now it is as bad here as it was at Ketchemstock then and nearly as bad at Tetlin and Nabesna. Together with flu and tuberculosis there were 17 died here last year from a population of 135.” At Tetlin in 1930, Beck (1930:37) found “Edna Joseph, age fifteen, and a very bright girl is afflicted with tuberculosis of the throat.... Alfred John, a tubercular native in the last stages of the disease was the only other native in serious condition at the time of my visit. Nothing can be done for him and no doubt he is dead by this time.”

Writing of the Chisana community, Beck (1930:47) observes:

This village was the center of a gold stampede about fifteen years ago. As is the case with most stampedes, it left a group of sickly, dirty, tubercular and improvident group of beggars in its wake. Mr. Robert McKennan, anthropologist from Harvard University, visited with these natives for a period of two months. He told me that he did not believe that there was a single individual in the entire village that was not afflicted with tuberculosis in some form. Attached is a list of the natives living at Chisana. Titus and Wife, 2 boys (7 – 10), 1 girl (14), Chisana John and Wife, 1 boy (23), Chisana Joe and Wife, 2 boys (2 – 4), Andy Toby and Wife, 1 boy (3).

Paradoxically, Burge (1938:18) reported that “the health of the Indians of the Upper Tanana region is comparatively good and there is reason to believe that it will improve in the future,” while Ivar Skarland reported in 1939 that:

Tuberculosis has been and still is the main scourge among the natives of this region [the upper Tanana River]; but I believe that they are beginning to develop resistance to most of white man’s diseases. That they are holding their own is due to the high birth rate.... At present the medical needs are attended to at Tanana, several hundred miles away.... People from the Upper River, having no doctor and only one nurse, seldom go to the hospital before it is too late.

Land and Political Organization

In 1915, a group of Tanana River *Dineh Huskehs* met to discuss the effects of white immigration into the Alaskan interior and to bring their concerns forward to the US government authorities. The Tanana Chief’s Conference of 1915 was held in Fairbanks to discuss land claims and educational and employment opportunities within the emerging State order. Foremost on the agenda of the representatives of the United States was the settling of the Tanana *Dineh* upon individual homesteads or collective reservations, under the terms of the 1906 Alaska Native Allotment Act, a proposition largely rejected by the chiefs who maintained “we don’t want to go on a reservation.... We just want to be left alone. As the whole continent was made for you, God made Alaska for the Indian people, and all we hope is to be able to live here all the time” (Mitchell 1997:177-78; Patty 1970). Archival research has not identified any allotments under this act being granted within the upper Tanana River region.

With the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and the Alaska Amendment of 1936, Alaska Division teachers were given the responsibility for organizing Native villages and

cooperatives.³⁴ This was done in Tetlin in 1939 and in Northway in 1942, but no effort was made to similarly organize the lower Scottie Creek villages, which were considered too small. One of the first actions by the new Tetlin Council was to request to have their Reserve extended to the Canadian boundary. The Reserve extension was requested again in 1941, enlarged to include the lands associated with the villages of Healy Lake, Tanacross, Last Tetlin, Tetlin, Nabesna, and Scottie Creek. Meanwhile the newly organized Council at Northway sent a similar petition to the government for the establishment of a Nabesna Reserve from the Canadian border to the eastern boundaries of the Tetlin Reserve and from the top of the Nutzotin Mountains to the Ladue River (Brown 1984:147-51).

Although the extension of the reserve was one of Burge's major recommendations, and the American Association of Indian Affairs lobbied for its formation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was initially against the idea, sensing that the non-Native public would be opposed, and this proved to be the case. In the fall of 1941, the Alaska Territorial Legislature appealed to the federal government to review all public land withdrawals, revoke those deemed no longer necessary, and specifically requested the dissolution of the Tetlin Reserve, which it deemed would hinder development of the upper Tanana River region (Brown 1984:151-58). Faced with this request, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began a formal investigation of the matter, sending several field agents and the anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt into the region over the next several years to determine the land use requirements of the Natives in the region.

As a result, the Secretary of the Interior signed Public Land Order 386 on 31 July 1947, which withdrew from public use 208,000 acres around Northway and 282,000 acres around Tanacross "pending further study of the lands for designation as Indian reservations." With a change in BIA policy on the creation of new reservations, the withdrawals were revoked by Public Land Order 961, 10 May 1954 (Brown 1984:170-72). The federal recognition of the Native use and occupation of the eastern Upper Tanana *Dineh* of the Nabesna and Chisana River basins would have to wait until the settlement of the statewide Native land claims by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Conclusion

The *Dineh* of the Upper Tanana were in many respects fortunate to have considerable interest generated in their needs and difficulties during the interwar period as they prepared, albeit without certainty as to when, for the inevitable penetration of their lands by increasing numbers of white men. Chief Peter Joe of Tetlin, for example, petitioned for a school at the village in a 1923 letter to the Congressional Delegate from Alaska, in order to be able to survive the changes of the future. "I want my people to learn in school" he wrote, "... I don't want my people to die.... That's all I want. I want my people try to little learn.... By and by, no fur, no game this country and I afraid my people can't live" (Joe 1923). Without the intercession of people like Hajdukovich, Endicott, and Mallinckrodt and the investigations by the American Association of Indian Affairs, which Mallinckrodt sponsored, I suspect little in the way of government services beyond Tanacross would have been extended to the Upper Tanana *Dineh* until the building of the Alaska Highway.

The establishment of the schools at Tetlin and Northway encouraged new migration and settlement patterns in the region and an increase in sedentary village nucleation. Increased sedentary village life by band organized hunters and gatherers in response to their interaction with state structures is well documented in the north and throughout the world (Acheson 1995; Asch 1988; Helm 1961). The two principle factors leading to this nucleation were initially the

³⁴ "Instructions for Organization in Alaska Under the Reorganization Act of June 18, 1934, and the Alaska Act of May 1, 1936 and the Amendments Thereto." US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Public Inventory 163 / Entry 803 Copies of letters and telegrams sent by the Chief, Alaska Section, BIA 1935-37 / Folder AK-28504-35-056-pt 2 to 63-37-066.

location of commercial trading posts and subsequently the provision of an increasing array of government services, initially education and health, followed by additional services, such as welfare and pensions.³⁵ The general result of this nucleation in many northern groups was an increased use of industrially produced commodities, including foodstuffs, clothing, and housing structures, as well as the increased tendency for local and regional identities to become focused on settlements of occupation. The migration of most of the Upper Chisana residents to Big Scottie Creek and then Northway, or the upper Nabesna River communities to the Copper Valley, due to these factors can be viewed as the final dissolution of that resident community, in the strict sense of "residency," although Chisana Joe continued to live in the upper Chisana village until his death in the early 1960s.

A final important effect of the new State order on the traditional culture of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* was the reification of band leadership. Formerly, band leadership emerged through the demonstration of personal ability in specific tasks and the more ambiguous display of personal spirit power, however the continued legitimacy of leadership was dependent on one's appropriate exercise of authority, relying on persuasion and good sense rather than coercion. Leadership could, and often did, fluctuate between individuals based on performance or the nature of the task at hand. Within Alaska, as early as 1906, contemporary band leaders were being recognized by the State as local and regional "chiefs" with considerable presumed political authority. The introduction to Alaska in 1936 of the Indian Reorganization Act (1934) coalesced further formal representative governance, establishing village Councils and elected Chiefs, a process completed in the Upper Tanana in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

THE ALASKA HIGHWAY AND THE CHISANA RIVER *DINEH*

We were here, at *Nii'ii'*, down below in the village. Chief Johnson, my dad, Lucy, Cecily, Bessie, *Lakduu*, me and some other kids. Me, I'm just a little kid, later they tell me, but I remember the noise coming through the trees. It's dark. We can see lights out there, where the noise is? Chief Johnson he go out to check it out and when he come back he put dirt from fire, you know charcoal, on his face like this, like that. His face all black. That's who's coming he tell us. They were driving the cats through the forest down below us, right there. You see those trees there? That's where they first come through, right there. I was scared. We all went up to Pepper Lake, and then down to Snag (Joseph Tommy Johnny in Easton n.d.).

Although the upper Chisana River basin was still used seasonally for hunting and trapping, by 1940 most of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* had orientated themselves to the village settlements of the lower river (Big Scottie Creek, Northway, High Cache, *Taiy Chi*, and *Nii'ii'*) or the upper Nabesna River village(s). Thus, the building of the Alaska Highway had an immediate and direct effect on the *Dineh* of the region.

The building of the Alaska Highway in 1942-43 was one of the great engineering and logistical accomplishments of the era. Built from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Fairbanks, Alaska, in just over 8 months, the road was initially intended to provide staging support for airfields associated with the transportation of war supplies to Russia and as a supply route to the Northwest

³⁵ The first record I have found for government assistance in the upper Tanana region includes two residents at Nabesna Mines and ten families at Tetlin, four of whom were relocated Chisana River people in 1941. "Families to Whom Surplus Supplies Could be Sent, 1940-41." US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 121, Central Classified Files (1940-1956) / Box 125 / Folder 53984-1941-AK-720. In 1941 the BIA also included monies for Tanacross and Tetlin for "relief of destitution." "Report on Relief of Destitution for the Alaska Indian Service, as required by the Appropriation Act for Fiscal Year 1942." US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 121, Central Classified Files (1940-1956) / Box 125 / Folder 53984- 1941-AK-720.

in defense of a possible Japanese invasion. Though the success of constructing the 1,700-mile road was a significant accomplishment, this was tempered with a considerable disregard for local and regional concerns. As noted by Yukon ethnohistorian Julie Cruikshank, “within a year and a half, a total of 34,637 men came to a relatively isolated part of the world where only a few thousand people made their homes” (1985:175).

The notion of an overland road to the northwestern subarctic was hardly new, having been proposed off and on since the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, but for a variety of reasons, principally related to international political relations, one never emerged (Remley 1985; Fisher 1985). Ironically, one reason put forward for the reluctance of the Canadian federal government to undertake the building of a road to its northwest territory was “a fear of American economic and military domination” (Remley 1985:1). The Canadian position was, however, eroded by the portrayed urgency of an overland route to Alaska in time of war, although historic documents clearly indicate that “as a strategic measure for the direct support of Alaska... the highways’ impact was... virtually negligible... it was not needed for defense. The highway was built for other reasons” (Fisher 1985:33).

Whatever the motivation for the building of the highway, the impact of an overland route through the far Northwest has been considerable. The immediate effect on the Upper Tanana was similar to that documented for the Tutchone and Kaska Athabascans to the southeast of them. The building of the road itself led to a noted increase in mortality and sickness within Native populations, particularly through dysentery, jaundice, whooping cough, mumps, meningitis, measles, and influenza. These last two diseases were particularly devastating, especially within areas outside of Whitehorse (Marchand 1943). Infant and youth mortality during construction were particularly high. The presence of military medical personnel along the route alleviated this impact somewhat, but the wide travel of the Native population and the epidemic nature of the diseases carried them much further afield than the highway corridor itself, and often medical attention was not accessible in the outlying areas (Coates 1985; Oland 1985). Thus, actual mortality rates outside of the urban centers through the Northwest were probably even higher than the medical records indicate, a fact generally substantiated by oral history accounts (Cruikshank 1985; Easton n.d.). In addition, liquor became more easily available and weakened the health of many families and communities.

The influx of tens of thousands of engineers, construction workers, and support personnel, combined with the mortality of the period, significantly altered the ethnic ratio of the region, transforming the Native population from the majority outside of the urban/village centers to a decided minority throughout much of the region. Native people declined as a percentage of Alaska’s population from 50.6 percent in 1929, to 44.8 percent in 1939, to 26.3 percent in 1950, to 18.8 percent in 1960 (Norris 2002:5, Table 1.1). The resulting competition for and increased exploitation of game animals and fish resulted in a severe depletion of Native subsistence resources along the highway corridor, which itself often followed the traditional trail system. Many Natives recall with bitterness and incomprehension an apparent tendency for highway personnel to hunt for sport and leave game to spoil.³⁶ In addition, regulations concerning the destruction of highway-related materials and foods rather than their local distribution, in order to avoid “unfair competition” with commercial sources, contributed to further alienation between Natives and newcomers. “Indians recall ‘potholes filled with hams,’ ‘bags of flour dumped in the garbage,’ and so on. Such behaviour was repugnant to people who had always made maximum use of their environment. Such waste, which the older Indians have never forgotten, seemed a betrayal of man’s obligation to share”

³⁶ There is an equivocal debate on this point. Most anthropological oral histories of the period suggest that game depletion and waste was significant (e.g., Cruikshank 1985; Easton n.d.), while documentary histories tend to underplay the effect of hunting by highway personnel (see, e.g., McCandless 1985).

(Cruikshank 1985:185). Besides food, other waste was deposited along the highway corridor in the form of sewage, petroleum, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and other defoliant chemicals, munitions, broken machinery, and general garbage, all of which introduced new environmental pollutants of danger to humans and animals alike.³⁷

The highway also significantly altered people's orientation to the landscape in several important ways. First, Natives were increasingly dispossessed from their landscape, which was in turn fundamentally altered by highway construction. The route taken by the highway and the ancillary noise, destruction, and increased human activity disturbed local distribution of game (McCandless 1985:87). The highway placement also significantly altered the regional settlement pattern, shifting demographic concentrations from villages away from the road to junctions and stations along it (Duerden 1981:33-35), a process that was apparent in the preceding period as people became orientated to trading post locations. The highway also redefined, accelerated, and consolidated this process of village nucleation and opened up the land to easy access by immigrant white settlers and migrant hunters. New hunting regulations and enforcement hampered and reduced Native subsistence hunting. Wage labor opportunities increased, but this in turn reduced both the time and need for subsistence efforts on the land. Another effect was to increase inter-community travel and communication by use of the new road system. The road was not merely a vector for the transportation of material goods, but also a line of communication to and from state metropolises, a mechanism for the consolidation of State control over this hinterland (Innis 1972; Cruikshank 1998). These effects also contributed to a growing awareness of the need and responsibility of the encapsulating State to recognize and respond to requests for aboriginal land claims.

The building of the Alaska Highway is often portrayed in histories as a "peaceful invasion" of the far Northwest. For the aboriginal people of the Upper Tanana however, who had lived in a general condition of respectful co-existence with the various streams of traders and prospectors during much of the previous hundred years, it created a tumultuous redefinition of their society. As Bill Simeone has noted, "the construction of the road completely altered these existing relationships and recast Native people as strangers in their own land" (Simeone 1992:45). The character of Native-newcomer relationships was fundamentally altered from close and personal to distant and stereotyped. "Before the war Natives and Whites inhabited an overlapping universe of shared experiences based on life close to the land and characterized by personal relationships. After the war, this universe was fragmented, and Native people became socially, economically, and politically marginalized" (Simeone 1992:50).

The Construction of the Alaska Highway

The Alaska Road Commission was tasked to construct airfields in Alaska in the 1920s, one of which was built at Tanana Crossing and another at upper Nabesna, which we discussed earlier in the context of the Nabesna Mine. Later, in the 1930s there was an interest to extend North American air travel to the Orient via a Great Circle Route through Yukon and Alaska. In support of this, additional airstrips were constructed in 1940-41, consisting of airports, airstrips, and navigation beacons stretching from Montana, through Alberta and Yukon, and finishing at Ladd Airforce Base outside of Fairbanks. Two new airstrips were built within the Upper Tanana region: at Snag, Yukon, and Northway, Alaska. Several Upper Tanana men worked on the construction of these airports.

³⁷ The full extent of these polluting deposits will probably be never known, but recently the US Army has taken some responsibility for their presence, engaging in environmental cleanups about the airports at Northway and Tanacross for example, where significant levels of PCBs and other persistent pollutants were removed; the work remains ongoing (D. Corbert, personal communication, Easton n.d.).



Figure 34. Ferry across Big Scotty Creek in birch bark canoe, June 13, 1942. Walter W. Hodge Papers, 1925-1948. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. *Walter Hodge with the US Army Engineers crossing Big Scottie Creek in a traditional birch bark canoe typical of the Upper Tanana; across the creek stands "John Little Joe," i.e. White River Johnny, who is recognizable by his diminutive size, face, and famous hat (now curated at the White River First Nation). Mrs. Bessie John recalled this event and believed it was one of the last birch bark canoes in use in the region as canvas was more commonly used for covering frames since at least McKennan's 1929 visit.*

With the declaration of war by Japan in December 1941, and the extension of the Lend-Lease armament program by the United States to the Soviet Union, the airports, now collectively known as the Northwest Staging Route, became vital strategic elements in the United States' western theatre and a supply road in support of the airports was upgraded to a major thoroughfare. The effort was staged by military and civilian construction crews working towards each other along the route.

The route of the highway from Tanacross to Kluane Lake had been roughly surveyed and mapped in June 1942 by Colonel Walter Hodge, guided by the Southern Tutchone Bobby Kane of Aishihik, and accompanied by a Captain Baker and Mr. McGilveray. The following extracts from Hodge's field diary record his travel through the Upper Tanana borderlands.

Thursday, June 11, 1942 – Spent day in reconnoitering for crossing at Snag. Found suitable one on Snag Creek about one mile downstream from junction of Beaver Creek. About one-half mile down farther downstream found a camp about two weeks old which had evidently been used by an army reconnaissance party.

Friday, June 12, 1942 – Crossed Canada – Alaska Boundary into Alaska at 6:32 pm, three-quarter mile north of International Boundary Commission Monument #165 at longitude 141.00 West, latitude 62.38.15 North. Passed Chief Johnson's cabin on Snag – Scottie Creek Trail and found note that Lt. Hammond, 29th Engrs. had been there May 21, 1942. Camped on border tonight next to Scottie Creek.

Saturday, June 13, 1942 – We travelled north along the Canada Alaska border for about five miles today from I.B.C. monument 165 to two miles beyond #164. Just before reaching Big Scottie Creek we came to an Indian village just a few feet over the border in Alaska. There we found six men, four women, a small boy, a small girl, and a baby boy living there. Chief Johnson was the headman. They understood and spoke very little English and did not speak the language of our guides. After a while, though, we did manage to get the information we wanted on how to get to Nabesna. We found Big Scottie Creek too deep to ford, so got Johnnie Little Joe [White River Johnny – Little John] at the village to ferry us across in his birch bark canoe. It took twelve trips to get all our equipment across and cost us \$5.00 which we paid for in food. Coffee at \$1.00 a pound and tea at \$1.50 a pound, which is standard trading post prices. We then swam the horses across and finished the ferrying operation by 10:00 pm. These Indians were the first human beings we had seen since May 30th and in one hundred and fifty miles of travel.

The Canadian Border is a straight line cut through the wilderness about twelve feet wide along the 141st meridian west longitude. On prominent hilltops and in certain valleys and it is marked by nine copper or brass cone about two feet high set in concrete with a number on and Canada on one side and United States on the other.

Sunday June 15, 1942 – Twenty miles today. Entered Tanana.

Monday June 16, 1942 – Headed Northwest all day. Crossed Gardiner Creek 2 pm. Beautiful ground and exposure ever since entering Chisana-Tanana Valley. Made about thirteen miles today. May make Northway day after tomorrow with luck. We see three to six planes passing daily overhead, but no one ever sees us. Urine still very dark and still feels bilious.

Tuesday June 17, 1942 – Followed ridge along right limit of Tanana all day and camped for night on Tanana just above point where Nabesna River flows into it. At Scottie Creek village Indians told us to build smoky fire and fire several shots. Then a boat would come and get us from Indian Village about seven miles up Nabesna. We did so, but no one came. We can hear planes of Northway seven miles away.

Wednesday June 18, 1942 – Evidently our shots were heard, because an Indian boy and man appeared at our camp at five am. They said they heard our shots and came over, thinking it was some Indian who was hungry. We invited them for breakfast then had Bobbie Cain our Indian Guide return with them to the native village to get a gas boat to ferry us across Tanana and up the Nabesna to Northway Airfield. The Indian with gas boat arrived at our camp on the Chisana River at eleven am,



Figure 35. Walter Mason's A Company 97th Engineer Regiment building a pioneer bridge. Photo by Walter E. Mason. Lael Morgan Collection, UAF-2012-71-351. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

we loaded up and took off at two pm for Northway Airfield where we arrived about four-thirty pm. The charge for ferrying us up was \$20.00, which we paid for in rations, miscellaneous food, etc., worth \$10.00 and ten gallons of gas at \$1.00 per gallon. We saw our first white people today since leaving Burwash on May 30th.

The Alaska portion of the road from the Richardson Highway to the Canadian border was the responsibility of the 97th Engineer Regiment, an all-Black unit under the command of Colonels Stephen C. Whipple and Lionel E. Robinson. The regiment arrived at Valdez on the 29th of April 1942 and assisted the Alaska Road Commission on the Richardson Highway upgrade. On the 7th of June they began what would come to be known as the Slana Cutoff, a new road from Slana through Mentasta Pass to the Tanana River, which they had completed by August 17th near the junction of the Tok and Tanana Rivers. This was 12 miles east of Tanacross village. They then crossed the Tanana River and pushed towards the border, which they reached on October 17th with the expectation of meeting the 18th Engineer Regiment coming north from Kluane Lake. Carrying on southeast, the two regiments met near Beaver Creek, Yukon, on October 25th, completing the last gap of the pioneer road (Doyle 1943). The 97th, along with several civilian contractors, were tasked to spend the winter extending and upgrading the pioneer road from the White River back to Tanacross (Duesenberg 1994:24-28).

The 97th Engineers consisted of about 1200 enlisted men and 50 officers. By October 1942, they were distributed at camps established at intervals along the highway, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Winter Camps of the 97th Engineers, Winter 1942-43

Location	Group	Structures	Capacity
White River	1 Platoon Engineers	12 buildings	100 man rest camp
Beaver Creek	1 Platoon Engineers	12 buildings	100 man rest camp
Gardiner Creek	Battalion HQ & Support Co.	31 buildings	
Gordon Lake	Regimental HQ, Battalion HQ, & Support Co.	33 buildings	
Northway Junction	1 Company	18 buildings (incl. Field Hospital)	
Midway Lake	1 Platoon Engineers	12 buildings	100 man rest camp
Little Tok River	1 Platoon Engineers	5 buildings	

Source: US National Archives. RG 94, Adjunct General's Office. WW II Operation Reports 1940-48 American Theatre / Box 31 / Folder 91-DP1 0.1 Alaskan Department – History of the Whitehorse Sector of the Alcan Highway 1942-43.

In addition, eighteen Iowa construction contractors, employing about 1,300 civilian workers, joined the 97th in the Tanana valley in August 1942. After a summer of “one exhausting move after another for... two and a half months; fifteen camps in all,” they too established semi-permanent camps at 30 locations between Big Delta and the White River, including Beaver Creek, Mirror Creek, Desper Creek, Gardiner Creek, Little Beaver Creek (just west of Northway Junction), Midway Lake, Tok Junction, and Tanacross (Duesenberg 1994:85). Finally, a variety of support and maintenance units of the War Department, Quartermasters, Signal Corps, Airport and Medical Personnel, and so on, were present, mainly stationed at the Snag, Northway, and Tanacross airports. At Northway, similar to the other airports, the air and support staff base consisted of 57 buildings by 1944,³⁸ capable of housing 70 officers and 816 enlisted men.³⁹ Altogether then, the Upper Tanana region saw an influx of about 4,000 people in 1942-43, an unprecedented number who, unlike the immigrants of the Chisana Gold Rush, remained in the area for the next three years.

Social Relations with the Highway Builders

Relations between *Dineh* and civilian contractors also seem to have been generally favorable. *Dineh* were frequent visitors to the contractor camps near Midway and Northway. *Dineh* women sold moccasins, gloves, and birchbark baskets to the workers as souvenirs, and the men supplied some game meat and acted on guides on some hunts. White workers listened to myths and stories of *Dineh* history and *Dineh* joined them for dinner. “Workers recall that the natives developed a routine of appearing along the road at the same time every day to hitch a ride.... Art Bolton, Kaser construction foreman, remembers Chief Northway came practically every Sunday to his camp for dinner. ‘He was particularly fond of our canned peaches,’ says Art. ‘We thought a lot of those people. The chief would often bring his attractive daughters who liked to dress in modern clothes. They were really nice people’” (Duesenberg 1994:147).

³⁸ Report of Excess Real Estate, Northway Airfield 13 October 1945. US National Archives. RG 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers / Entry Security Classified Subject Files 1940-45 / Box 602 / Folder 602 Northway Airport Alaska.

³⁹ US National Archives. RG 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers / Entry Security Classified Subject Files 1940-45 / Box 640 / Folder 600.1 Northwest Staging Command (2 of 4).

Sexual liaisons between the highway contract workers and *Dineh* women occurred. While some resulted in lasting relationships – the men staying on after their construction contract ran out or the women moving elsewhere with their husbands – most were more ephemeral, with the men leaving the region once their construction work was completed, often leaving one or several children behind with their abandoned “country wife.” One *Dineh* woman who lived on the lower Chisana looked off wistfully into the distance when I asked her about the building of the Alaska Highway. “The highway,” she sighed. “Lots of boyfriends then,” she added with a laugh (Easton n.d.). Another married a contract worker, and then moved away from the region in order to place their children in a larger parochial school. One of these children moved back into Northway in her 40s after living in Washington State, California, and New York, consciously working to become proficient in her Native language and working with Elders to preserve and transmit *Dineh* culture. Simeone (1995:42) has generally observed that “liaisons between Native women and soldiers produced children who were often left behind after the war, and some Native women who married soldiers left the region forever.”⁴⁰ Since the subject of illegitimacy is regarded in negative terms in white morality, they are seldom identified as such in genealogical research. Instead, following *Dineh* social custom, most of these children were simply subsumed into the local community as the woman’s matrilineal offspring and integrated into their subsequent marriages.⁴¹

Effects on Native Subsistence

Despite these relatively good relations between individuals, construction of the Alaska Highway also brought new difficulties to the *Dineh*. Disagreement among historians regarding the effect of the building of the highway on Native subsistence was noted earlier. In the Upper Tanana region, however, the impact seems to have been considerable.⁴² There were several reasons for this.

The first was the blandness of the construction worker’s diet. Rations for the 97th Engineers were particularly poor in 1942-43, since fresh foods could not be shipped due to a lack of space and so “B-rations for frigid climates” were heavily used. A report noted that “while this food was undoubtedly nourishing its sameness and lack of variety soon palled on the appetite of all personnel. The troops in the field, working 10 to 16 hours a day, were forced to eat Vienna Sausage, chili con carne, and corned beef hash, at practically every meal, until, after a reasonable time, they began to throw it away untouched. The situation was later improved [in 1943] by the shipment of certain dehydrated foods.”⁴³

The situation for the civilian contractors was little better. With the full contingent at Gulkana in July 1942, the camp required 60 pounds of flour and ten dozen eggs to make a morning meal of pancakes and 325 pounds of salmon for lunch, purchased from the Ahtna resident, Frank Ewan. As they moved into the Tanana valley, supply lines became more tenuous and less timely, resulting in loss of fresh foods, particularly meat. The men reacted predictably. “We have been without fresh

⁴⁰ Until at least the mid-1950s, official Army and Airforce policy was not to encourage or approve marriages of enlisted men in Alaska due to a lack of married quarters and low pay, a policy that led directly to Alaska Native women having children of servicemen and remaining single mothers. This caused some concern in the Bureau of Indian Affairs due to the increase in welfare and other support payments to such families. US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs / Entry 121, Central Classified Files (1940-1956) / Box 128 / Folder 9135-1948-AK-741.

⁴¹ McKennan (1959:117) records that “adoptions often take place, and the parents draw no distinction between their own and their adopted children. The latter are generally orphans or [children of single parents], although occasionally a man with no family will adopt the child of some relative who has more children than he can feed.”

⁴² Clarke (n.d.:33) “observed few signs of wildlife destruction around army and construction camps,” during his biological survey of the Canadian portion of the highway corridor north to the White River in the summer of 1943. “Some bears had to be killed and we had evidence of game hunting by Army and Public Roads Personnel were made. In one place we saw evidence that sheep had been killed illegally. Army and construction men were too busy to hunt,” he concludes.

⁴³ US National Archives. RG 94, Records of the Adjunct General’s Office. WW II Operation Reports 1940-48 American Theatre / Box 31 / Folder 91-DP1 0.1 Alaskan Department – History of the Whitehorse Sector of the Alcan Highway 1942-43.

meat nearly three weeks now, and beans were getting tiresome to most of us – yesterday afternoon the climax came; fresh meat was needed and the only answer was to go hunting. So the men leaving for the woods were bristling with rifles and wearing determined looks” (Duesenberg 1994:47).

Many workers also engaged in fishing and hunting as a source of recreation in the wilderness. The War Department encouraged this as a means to maintaining morale. “Owing to their location they have had no social or other contacts with civilization and only such recreation as could be obtained by hunting and fishing,” the Chief of Engineers was informed in August 1942,⁴⁴ although without a hunting license this was technically illegal. The military subsequently sought and obtained the liberalization of the Yukon and Alaska game laws to allow hunting and fishing privileges for military personnel in Alaska and the Yukon. The Alaska Defense Command’s General Orders “enjoined every member of the military service in Alaska to not only conform to the letter and spirit of the game regulations but to conduct himself in a sportsman-like manner and avoid any act of thoughtlessness or greed that might brand him as a game hog or unworthy citizen.” In support of fishing as a recreational activity, fishing tackle was distributed “to enable 10 percent of personnel to go fishing at one time.”⁴⁵

Civilian workers also availed themselves of the opportunity to fish and hunt as recreation as well as providing supplementary food. Duesenberg quotes one worker gleefully reporting that “there is game galore around us – bear, deer, moose, caribou, beaver, mink, wolf, ducks, and geese.” He also presents photographs of a day’s catch by some of the men (see Figure 36); strings of fifty or more fish, smaller grayling, mid-sized whitefish, and thirty-pound lake trout, are proudly held (Duesenberg 1994:164-65).

In his 1946 ethnographic sketch of Northway, Goldschmidt (n.d.:57) records that, “During the recent war an air base was established at Northway with dire results to the village. The men of the post engaged in hunting of game, which resulted in a serious reduction of the wildlife population. Natives whose very life depended upon the fur and meat animals were filled with resentment at soldiers who shot for mere pleasure, frequently not even picking up the carcasses of the animals so destroyed.” Elsewhere in his report, Goldschmidt (n.d.:26) records Chief Isaac of Tanacross complaining that, “these army people have been killing off the rats. The White people try to clean up all the game,” an observation that suggests that some military personnel were also engaged in either for-profit-trapping or merely wanton killing of muskrat for recreational pleasure in a boring landscape.

Concerns over increased pressures on game stocks in Yukon led the Canadian government to set aside virtually all the land on the southern side of the highway from Haines Junction to the international border as a Game Sanctuary in December 1942. Early the following year the Territorial Council, which held jurisdiction over hunting regulations, prohibited all hunting, even by Natives, within the preserve and for a mile on either side of the highway along its length. The conservationist ethic was stronger than the belated recognition that this would create hardships for the Native people of the Kluane Lake and borderlands region. Authorities sought to ameliorate their limited misgivings in the offering of some assistance to affected Natives in the form of facilitating the marketing of muskrat pelts and the extension of welfare benefits along the northwest portion of the highway (McCandless 1985, Coates and Morrison 1988).

The opening of the Alaska Highway to civilian traffic and the building of the Taylor Highway into the Dawson Range north of Tanacross after the War brought increasing numbers of non-resident hunters into the region. This further reduced the region’s subsistence base, particularly the Fortymile caribou herd and furbearers. In 1946, Goldschmidt (n.d.:26) heard repeated complaints

⁴⁴ Hoge to Chief of Engineers, Wa D.C., 29 August 1942. US National Archives. RG 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers / ACC #72A3173 / Box 14 / Folder Storage 611 (Alcan Highway Part 1).

⁴⁵ Annex No. 3 to G-2 Periodic Report No. 62 (24-31 July 1943). US National Archives. RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office / Entry 427 / Box 7 / Folder 91-DC1/21.

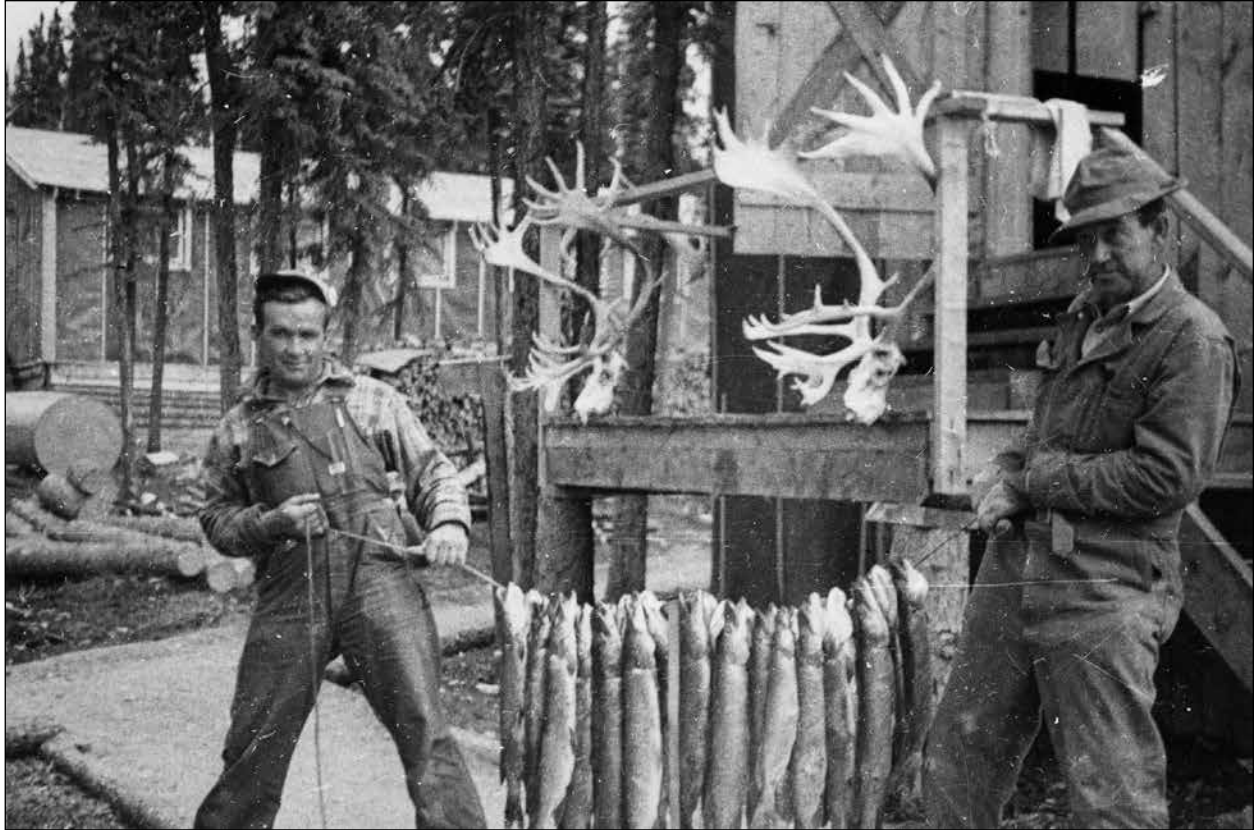


Figure 36. Duesenberg Construction Workers with a Catch of Fish. H. Milton Duesenberg Collection, Clear Lake, Iowa.

“that the Whites, who come into the area for the trapping season alone, would take all the rats from the lakes, and destroy hunting for several successive years.” Goldschmidt wrote his wife that “The Indians are anxious for some protection against the encroachment of Whites, which take their cabins and their trap lines and threaten them with shooting, then kill out all the game” (Goldschmidt 1946a). The situation was not much improved the following year when a BIA field agent visited the villages of Tanacross, Tetlin, Northway, and Mentasta Lake to:

Ascertain how the livelihood of the natives of those villages is being affected by the increase in White settlers along the Alaska Highway. It was found that the natives of all the villages except Tetlin, which has a reservation, have been bothered considerably by White encroachments on their trapping areas, and particularly by transient muskrat hunters who camp along the road, clean out the muskrats which are the principal fur animal of the area, and drive on” (Strong n.d.).

Simeone (1992:49) notes similarly that along the Taylor Highway “some non-Native hunters lined the road waiting for the caribou to cross, taking animals primarily for their antlers.” Pointing to the fact that the number of resident hunting licenses grew from about 9,000 in 1946 to 31,500 in 1955-56, stricter State game laws, which for the first time explicitly restricted Native subsistence hunting, became an inevitable response to increased competition over diminishing subsistence resources. “These regulations created an antagonism between Native and non-Native that is still apparent today in the debate over subsistence” (Simeone 1992:49).

Animals were not the only subsistence resource affected by the construction crews. Although plants were never a primary source of direct nutrition among the *Dineh*, they nevertheless were a critical component of the subsistence economy, specifically as a source of direct (in the heat and light of fires) and indirect (as insulating architectural components) *energy* required to survive the cold temperatures of the subarctic. The loss of easily accessible firewood in the vicinity of the villages was previously noted and could only have been exacerbated by the needs for both fuel and building material along the length of the highway corridor. The seemingly endless vista of a wilderness forest was in fact not endless. By May 1943 at Snag, for example, “the available supply of timber in the vicinity of the Airport has now run out and it will be necessary for Currie and Lundie to move their saw mill to the nearest available stand of timber, which is located about 25 miles from the airport.”⁴⁶ Mature spruce trees are still rare in the area today.

Wage Labor in a Hinterland Boom-Bust Economy

Another feature of highway construction that affected *Dineh* subsistence patterns was the availability of opportunities to exchange their time and labor for cash wages. While many *Dineh* took up some sort of wage labor during this period, it is uncertain to what extent it was pursued. Simeone (1992:46) writes that “some Tanacross people believe that during the highway construction the Native economy changed to approximately 50% wage labor. While hunting was still considered the ‘regular life,’ almost everyone devoted at least half of their time earning cash to purchase food.” More specifically, Simeone (1995:41) notes that “Men worked as guides for survey crews or as construction workers, while women served as domestic help or made money selling mittens, moccasins, and beadwork to the workers.” Some men worked with John Hajdukovich operating a sawmill, which provided timber to the construction effort (Brown 1984) while others cleared brush for the extension of the airports at Tanacross, Northway, and Snag (Easton n.d.).

The draw towards wage labor also motivated the abandonment of most of the villages that lay off the highway and promoted increased sedentarism in the villages along it. With rare exceptions, the residents of Big Scottie Creek, High Cache, and Scottie Creek moved to Northway and Snag. While people continued to use the Chisana River basin for hunting and fishing, this became a seasonal, short-term use during the 1940s. A few families, notably the Justin brothers (Chisana Joe and Nabesna John), Bell and Laura John’s, White River Johnny’s, Andy Frank, and Titus and Annie John, remained living “in the bush” of the basin, as these traditional areas away from the highway came to be called.

Many scholars (e.g. Simeone 1995, Strong 1972, Brown 1984) maintain that the engagement in wage labor developed an increased dependency on western manufactured foods and material goods. To the extent that this is demonstrated by the use of wages to purchase such goods, they are right, but I am not sure that “dependency” is the appropriate concept. Typical of Northern development projects, the building of the Alaska Highway and its ancillary roads produced a short-term *boom economy*, which was followed by an inevitable *bust* once the work was completed. The US government spent more than \$1 billion dollars in Alaska between 1941 and 1945. In 1943, there were about 152,000 armed forces personnel present, requiring support services from foodstuffs to entertainment. Between 1940 and 1950 the non-Native population more than doubled from 40,000 to nearly 95,000. “In short, the war was the biggest boom Alaska ever experienced, bigger than any of the gold rushes of the past. Yet at the end of the war, with the curtailment of defense spending, Alaskans once again were confronted with the problems of a seasonal economy” (Naske and Slotnick 1987:131). The reaction to the contraction in local wage labor was varied. Some people moved away to seek new jobs elsewhere, a few were able to pick up jobs associated with highway maintenance and other government infrastructure, and some returned to join others engaged in a

⁴⁶ Memo to Commanding Officer, Alaskan Wing, Status of Construction, 11 May 1943. US National Archives. RG 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers / Entry SCSF 1940-45 / Box 635 / Folder 600.914 Northwest Air Route (2 of 4).

mixed subsistence-trapping economy. In both Canada and the United States there were increased levels of government cash transfer in the form of old age pensions and welfare payments. As citizens of the emerging post-war welfare state, *Dineh* had the right to access these payments, and as economic actors doing so afforded many the capacity to continue a subsistence lifestyle congruent with *Dineh* values on the margins of the wider encapsulating capitalist economy. This is similar to former foraging societies worldwide documented by anthropologists (e.g. Easton 2001a, 2007b; Feit 1982, 1999; Lee 1992; Nadasdy 2003; Petersen 1991)

Such a perspective frequently emerges in discussions with Upper Tanana *Dineh*, who continue to regard the subsistence lifestyle, even with its limited cash input, as the most appropriate way to live a good life and follow *the Dineh Way*. This does not imply that their society has entirely rejected the drastic changes introduced with the construction of the Alaska Highway. Rather, this also suggests that the intrusion of the capitalist economy and wage labor system into *the Dineh Way* are not the only factors that have contributed to conditions of “dependency” or “impoverishment.” We must also consider the incursion of one specific commodity – alcohol.

Effects on Native Health

Alcohol

Walter Goldschmidt (1946a) summarized the health effects of the highway at Northway in 1946 as follows:

The story of Northway is indeed a sad one. It is the same story with native people throughout the nation, but it has been done in the 1940's rather than in the 1840's. The natives have been ransacked with disease, especially TB. Lately they have been getting dysentery from the water and dying of it. The whites complain that the natives haven't sense enough to boil their water. Yet it turns out that the Army built an air base upstream from the village and dumped its sewage in the river. One teacher – missionary is reputed to have pimped the native girls with the Army personnel, who probably required little of the go-between services. Liquor has come in and the old people are impatient and fearful in the face of it with their youngsters.

The widespread use of liquor in the Upper Tanana region had been effectively suppressed for many years by a “gentleman's agreement” among the traders not to import it, an agreement that began to break down in 1932 when, according to John Hajdukovich, Herman Kessler began to bring liquor and liquor-making materials into his store at Gardiner Creek. Despite this, however, the effect of liquor on Native communities in the Upper Tanana seems to have been negligible through the 1930s. Burge was able to report that in August of 1938:

According to the local whites and the Indians themselves, there is very little whiskey consumed on the Upper Tanana. There have been cases of Indians obtaining whiskey from whites, and a few instances of home distilling, but there has been no widespread drinking. They do not apparently go to any great trouble to get liquor... In general, there seems to be a strong public opinion against the introduction of liquor; during my stay, the Indians signed a petition requesting the authorities to prevent the issuance of a license for the sale of liquor to any traders operating in Tetlin, Tanana Crossing and Nabesna (p. 15).

By the time Goldschmidt visited the Upper Tanana in 1946 liquor consumption patterns had changed enough to cause considerable stress to the local Native leadership. Walter Northway

welcomed Goldschmidt to his community along with the following words: "I have tried to learn everything I can. My grandfather told me our way of doing things. He told me how to act. He told me not to use things too strong. Now the white man has brought us whiskey. Now I am losing all my own people. I am sorry about this white man business" (Goldschmidt n.d.:57-58). At Tetlin the liquor problem was considerably less. "Liquor was brought into the village for the first time this [spring], and there are just the beginnings of disaffection among the late teen and people in their early 20's. The clans have seen what has happened at Northway and Tanacross and are hoping to avoid it" (Goldschmidt 1946b). In another letter Goldschmidt (1946a) writes that "I know that I sound like an old blue nose, but the problem of drinking in these places is a nasty one."

The opening of the highway for civilian traffic and the development of Tok as a regional service center further entrenched liquor consumption and its related problems among the Upper Tanana, as roadhouses, cafes, and stores appeared all along the highway. As Simeone (1992:50) notes, with the building of the highway "Native people were exposed to alcohol on an unprecedented scale. Where alcohol had been relatively rare in the upper Tanana region before the War, it became commonplace afterward. Bars sprang up along the road, particularly at Tok. Alcohol became a health problem that has devastated Native communities over the fifty years since the highway was built."

The litany of the specific effects of alcohol has been enumerated often: poverty, child neglect, spousal abuse, fighting, and accidental deaths. Two important Chisana area residents died at this time directly from alcohol. "Skookum" Lucy John, White River Johnny's first wife, froze to death along the highway while drunk, while the wife of the recently deceased Chief Johnson, grief-struck and drunk, burned to death at Snag after inadvertently knocking over a candle in her cabin while falling into a deep sleep (Easton n.d.). However, perhaps the most recalled tragedy was the death of Jacob Isaac, a son of Chief Isaac of Tanacross. On September 8, 1945, he drowned while crossing the Tanana River from the Army field in a small boat in the company of a white soldier with whom he had been drinking (S. Boyd 1945). Some members of the Council thought it might have been murder and met with the Commanding Officer to discuss it. "Sam had asked the bar tenders in the Civilian Rec Hall not to sell liquor to our natives. He also asked the army not to sell beer to the natives. The White people criticized him for his discrimination...one councilman had taken a bag of beer away from Jacob earlier in the evening" (A. Boyd 1945). No charges were laid, but shortly thereafter the Native villages were placed off-limits to military personnel.

Disease and Illness

The influx of newcomers also brought a variety of illness and disease that were either previously unknown or in new strains to the *Dineh*. Many became sick, and some died as a result of no immunity or low resistance. Measles, dysentery, jaundice, whooping cough, mumps, and meningitis appeared in the villages, and during the winter of 1942-43 measles and influenza became epidemic all along the highway corridor in Native communities (Marchand 1943).

Tuberculosis had already become endemic in the Upper Tanana region by the 1930s, but the increased ease and speed of travelling among communities afforded by the highway embedded it further in nearly every village. Tubercular death rates for Alaskan Native people were dreadfully high, particularly when compared to the general American death rates, as shown in Table 5. By 1943, Alaskan Native health statistics showed grim life expectancy of morbidity and mortality for the average Native person, as revealed in Table 6. At particular risk from exposure to these illnesses were the young and the elderly, and many Upper Tanana *Dineh* of these ages died during the 1940s.

Table 5. Tubercular Death Rates per 100,000, 1940-1945

Year	Alaska Natives	United States
1940	367.3	45.9
1941	426.5	44.6
1942	340.3	43.1
1943	346.2	42.6
1944	362.2	41.3
1945	359.1	40.1

Source: US National Archives. RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Entry 121, Central Classified Files (1940-1956). Box 16 Folder 6219-1947-AK-032.

Table 6. Mortality Statistics, Alaska, 1943

	All Alaskans	White Alaskans	Native Alaskans	United States
Infant Mortality 1943 (per 1000 live births)	119.6	37.9	180.3	40.4
Birth Rate per 1000	22.7	18.3	29.8	
Death Rate per 1000		13.3	24.0	
General Mortality 1943	1,322	520	802	
CAUSE OF DEATH				
TB	297	17	273	409.5
Heart Disease	170	134	36	234.4
Accidents (other than car)	127	79	48	174.1
Pneumonia	117	19	98	161.3
Whooping Cough	62	0	62	85.5

Source: Foster to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 11 January 1946, re. 1943 Statistics.

According to Walter Mason, officially Army medical personnel had no responsibility for the health of Native people along the highway. However, there are several accounts of their providing medical aid to Upper Tanana *Dineh* who became ill. Of particular note is the case of Joseph Tommy Johnny, a son of White River Johnny and his second wife Cecily. Mr. Johnny had contracted a particularly virulent form of tuberculosis of the skin, and his parents believed he was dying when the Army arrived. The Army flew him out for treatment at the Native tuberculosis sanatorium at Sitka, where a series of operations and treatments cured him (Easton n.d.).

Another “hidden” activity of Army personnel was the disbursement of army rations and equipment to the *Dineh*. This was completely against all policy, however some Natives recalled how boxes of food would “fall” off a truck while in transport; in actual fact some soldiers were deliberately dropping a case or two off their trucks along the highway for the express use of the *Dineh*. In addition to food, some *Dineh* received ammunition, which was in short supply commercially during the war. Finally, *Dineh* scavenged additional food or equipment from army and civilian dumps along the road.

In late 1943 the dumping of food and other stores along the White River in the vicinity of the highway was reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In bringing this to the attention of the War Department’s Security and Intelligence Division (G-2), J. Edgar Hoover (1943) also noted he had been “advised that many Indians in the vicinity of the White River have already removed a large supply of usable articles,” including canned goods sufficient “to feed themselves and their sled dogs for two or three years.”

A subsequent investigation confirmed the existence and location of a cache “two miles down the east bank of the White River from the junction of the river and the Alaska Highway.” The cache had been observed in June 1943 by a Utah Construction Co. worker and consisted of “about two tons of canned Army meats such as Spam, Vienna sausage, meat and vegetable hash, pork luncheon meat, etc., all of this in apparent good condition and appearing as if it had been merely dumped off a truck in a haphazard fashion and not piled there.” However, “upon arrival at the above described scene, it was discovered that subject cache had been removed by some unknown person and was no longer in evidence, with the exception of a few crushed cans of meat and vegetable hash of Quartermaster origin, and broken, empty boxes which had contained Army foodstuffs.” In addition, during their search, “three other food caches containing abandoned Army supplies and some valuable road construction equipment were discovered.” The report concludes: “With regard to the mention in the basic letter of Indians obtaining large amounts of canned meats, it can be said that the local Indians had been previously offered Army foodstuffs that had become damaged in shipment and were not prone to accept them. This curious fact can be explained by the existence of much work, high wages, high fur prices and the difficulties of transporting any of the aforementioned foodstuffs. It is also notable that canned meats are not considered good fare for sled dogs and are too heavy to carry on long treks by dog team” (Whitham 1944).

A tragic unintended consequence of this practice was the death of Chief Johnson, the *Dineh Huskeh* of the Lower Chisana basin-Scottie Creek borderlands from about the 1920s until his death. Mrs. Bessie John recalled that he became terribly ill after eating a can of peaches he had gotten from an Army dump (along with a good pair of boots), and the description of his painful death at Snag corresponds well with that of contracting botulism (Easton n.d.).

A final, absurd action by the Army had a detrimental effect on some local *Dineh*. This was the destruction of the Native graveyard at Snag, which was bulldozed during the construction of the road from the Alaska Highway to the airport at Snag. The senselessness of this to the *Dineh* merely confirmed their worst perceptions of non-Native people. Such a disturbance of the resting place of their relatives, who in *Dineh* cultural belief were still alive in spirit form awaiting their opportunity for reincarnation, caused many considerable psychic pain. This act, combined with the tragic deaths of Chief Johnson and his wife *Lakduu*, symbolically presaged to many *Dineh* the great difficulties they were to face in the years to come with this new road of access to their homeland.

The Consolidation of State Authority in the Chisana River Basin

Judge Wickersham’s 1915 prediction of the overwhelming of the Upper Tanana River basin was thirty years off the mark and it was caused not by a railway but a highway. The building of the Alaska Highway transformed the borderlands region from one of difficult access to one of

direct access and facilitated the further assumption of authority by the State over the lives of the Upper Tanana *Dineh*. In the case of the Alaskan portion of the region, this was an extension and acceleration of processes of State hegemony begun in the late 1920s. In the case of the Yukon portion of the region, this was really the first time since the Chisana Gold Rush that Canadian authorities concerned with aboriginal people turned their attention towards it. The road allowed more frequent visits by a variety of government representatives, including social workers, development officers, Indian Agents, medical personnel, and educators, as well as immigrant settlers, itinerant capitalists, and a variety of missionaries. This increased access resulted in new interference into and authority over the lives of the *Dineh* in the region. In turn, the Upper Tanana *Dineh* became increasingly aware of the need to react politically to, incorporate judiciously, and resist these attempts to assimilate their society into the encapsulating states of Canada and the United States.

The concerns expressed by Walter Northway and other *Dineh* since the late 1930s regarding the need for formal recognition of the Upper Tanana land rights became increasingly pressing. In addition to describing white encroachments on Native trapping areas, BIA field agent James B. Strong's report on his 1947 trip to the region noted that two liquor dealers had set up on or within the borders of the Tetlin Reserve in order to sell alcohol to the Natives (Strong n.d.). This information, along with Walter Goldschmidt's report and the lobbying efforts of the American Association of Indian Affairs did lead to a withdrawal order of nearly 208,000 acres around Northway that year, but the withdrawal was revoked in 1954 without any designation of reserve lands for the *Dineh* of the Alaska borderlands (Brown 1984:170-172).

The subsequent resolution of the Alaskan Indian lands question over the following twenty years was a complex battle waged between Alaskan Native organizations, their real and assumptive allies in a variety of lobby organizations in the lower 48 states, the federal and state representative governments, a myriad of state and federal bureaucracies, Alaskan, United States, and international commercial and conservation interests, and innumerable individuals, the full complexity of which will probably never be able to be realized. Volumes of histories and analyses have been offered thus far, with more surely to come. Donald Mitchell's two-volume history of "the story of Alaska Natives and their lands" (Mitchell 1997, 2001), written from the perspective of having served as general legal counsel to the Alaska Federation of Natives, provides as good an initial guide to this historical labyrinth as any (but see also Case 1984 for a focus on the legal implications). It is sufficient to say that President Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) into law in 1971. Under its provisions all aboriginal rights and land claims in Alaska were extinguished and replaced with specific lands, monetary compensation, and defined and limited aboriginal rights. Among other significant trade-offs, Alaska Natives gave up any aboriginal hunting and fishing rights and were subject to the hunting and fishing laws and regulations of general application.

Activism for recognition of Native land rights in Yukon can be traced back as far as January 1902, when the Lake Laberge *Huskeh* Jim Boss, recognizing the lasting effect of the Klondike Gold Rush, wrote the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Canada to request compensation and lands set aside for the Natives of the Yukon. "Tell the King very hard," he wrote, "we want something for our Indians because they take our land." The Canadian Government's policy response for the next seventy years, with a few limited exceptions, was benign neglect of this and subsequent requests for negotiations on Yukon Native land claims.

In 1973 the Yukon Native Brotherhood published *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and submitted it to the Trudeau government of the day as their opening position in the modern land claims process. This eventually led to the territory-wide Umbrella Final Agreement between the Government of Canada, the Council for Yukon Indians, and the Government of the Yukon in 1993. It stipulated the common principles for the negotiation of individual land and self-government

agreements to be negotiated with the individual Indian Act Bands of the Yukon. Learning from the experience of their Alaskan cousins, the *Dineh* of the Yukon steadfastly insisted upon, and retained, their aboriginal hunting and fishing rights to take wild game at any time of the year, anywhere in the Yukon, for the purposes of subsistence or religious ritual.

The borderland *Dineh* of Canada, who are now politically organized under the White River First Nation, were not able to reach a satisfactory local agreement and refused to approve a proposed final agreement in 2004. In April of 2005 the Federal Parliament's approved mandate for negotiations of Native Land Claims in Yukon lapsed and formal negotiations have now ended. Thus the White River First Nation, who extended membership to many of their relatives resident in Alaska who themselves or whose ancestors had lived off the common lands of the borderlands in the past, remain without a land claim agreement and retain their constitutionally protected aboriginal Rights and claim over the full extent of their traditional territory in Canada (Easton et al. 2013).

Returning to the immediate post-highway years, *Dineh* in the Yukon were also faced with new challenges of the post-highway world. One of the most influential on the lives of the children and their parents of that era was the trauma associated with the extension of educational opportunities for the *Dineh* of the borderlands.

In 1947 the Catholic Oblate missionary order (OMI) began to operate an itinerant school at Snag village. So few attended that no federal assistance for the provision of education to Natives was sought. Nevertheless, in 1948 the Oblates established a church and school at Snag under the direction of Father Pierre Rigaud. The initial resistance of the children was overcome by providing candy to everyone who attended. "I remember very well the beginning of that school," Rigaud later recalled, "It was kind of funny."

First of all there was nobody. I rang the bell in the morning and nobody came. And then, after around eleven o'clock, I heard the screaming outside and I looked – it was Old Lucy Johnson that had Esther Tom Tom and was pushing her to the school. Finally, they reached the house and Lucy opened the door and pushed Esther in and closed the door behind. And I went to Esther and I told her, I said "Come on." But she held my hand and she bit me sound. But after a while, anyway, I gave her candy and she come down and in the meantime Lucy was getting another one. It was Agnes [Tom Tom].

[They were] the two that I started school with that morning. We didn't teach anything, but anyway I gave them candy and told them to bring the others in the afternoon. Finally, in the afternoon, the whole group came. Big boys, big girls, small boys, small girls. Everybody was coming. Then we started the school, you know, and I told them we would have some play and this and that and everybody seems to be happy. And, finally, the next day they were there and [we kept] on going like that. Especially the big girls, Alice, Bill, and Ida, they were quite helpful, I must say, taking care of the little ones and all that.

There were the big boys, there was Joe Jack, Walter too. Johnny Tom Tom was very smart at the time. He was a good kid, very smart. All of them were smart. I must say that those kids from Snag, in no time they learned how to read and their calculations, their arithmetic, addition, subtraction, in no time at all. They were very smart, I must say that.... [I] stayed two or three months with them (Rigaud 1995).

In 1949 the school was held further south, at the Native fishing camp at Edith Creek, in order to accommodate students from both the Burwash and White River areas.

In 1951, with federal funding, the Oblates opened the Lower Post Indian Residential School south of Watson Lake, in the far southwest Yukon. This ended the early era of local Native

village schools, which in the case of the Upper Tanana and Stewart River *Dineh* was short indeed. Instead, a bus was sent up along the highway, collecting all the school-age children they could find. If parents would not release them, they were told that it was the law to send their children to school and they could face fines if they did not. Furthermore, Family Allowance Benefits, which had been extended to the Yukon borderland *Dineh* a few years earlier, were directly tied to school attendance by children. Authorities had the power to cut off payment of this small source of capital, which had become increasingly important with continuing collapse of the fur trade market through the 1940s and 1950s along with the loss of subsistence hunting opportunities in the Kluane Game Sanctuary. Parents were promised that their children could return in the summer; what they were not told is that the parents would have to pay for their transportation to and from the school, nearly 750 miles away. When children could not return the following year due to the costs, some *Dineh* parents of coming-of-school-age children decided to move – either over to Alaska where there were local schools or deep into the bush away from the highway in an attempt to avoid the Oblates. Several mixed-race families, including Mary and Pete Eikland, moved to Haines Junction, where their children could attend the territorial school, but full-blood Natives were prohibited in Yukon's segregated territorial schools, a situation that did not change until the 1960s.

Ironically, as *Dineh* children were being taken from their parents in order to “civilize them through modern education,” a territorial school was opened in Beaver Creek in 1953 for children of highway maintenance workers stationed there, but it too was for white children only (Almstrom 1991; Easton n.d.). This situation effectively decimated the Yukon portion of the borderlands of young *Dineh*, many of whom were not to return until the 1960s, some of whom were never to return, leaving behind some elderly and a few holdouts, such as White River Johnny and his family, the elderly Enochs, and William Peter. Bell and Laura John, Andy Frank, and Titus and Annie John abandoned their sometimes residences in Canada and took up permanent residence on the Alaskan side, although they continued to travel seasonally up Scottie Creek to hunt and fish. It is almost impossible to imagine the challenges that the children sent to the Lower Post school faced. Many, now between their late 30s and early 60s, simply refuse to talk of their experiences, the trauma too great even now to recall. Language use was punished, Native culture denigrated as savagery, and rote mechanical behavior instilled through monotonous exercises and unforgiving discipline. (For more detailed discussions of the Indian residential school experience in Yukon see King (1967) and Coates (1984, 1987).) Many who eventually returned to the borderlands still have an unconscious prohibition against using their Native language as adults, even though in safe eliciting environments, such as in bush camps and workshops at the Yukon Native Language Centre, they demonstrate they retain a full ability to do so. Others suffer from remorseful self-abuse through alcohol, drugs, or criminal behavior, holding a deeply ingrained self-loathing for themselves and their Native culture. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the author's fieldnotes

I've seen X around Whitehorse off and on the last month or so and met him on Main Street in Whitehorse today. He told me he was doing some time up at the Salvation Army half-way house for breach of probation – drinking got him two months back in the penal home. Initially he was very comic about it, saying that “It's not such a bad life. They feed you and you got a nice bed and I can go out every day. Of course I have to be back by five o'clock, but that's dinner time anyways.” It was the first time that X had admitted his troubles directly to me and he surprised me by continuing. He's in until the 5th of June, he told me.

“Well, that's not so bad,” I offered, “you just don't want to make a career of it.”

“Oh, I'll be back...there's no doubt about it,” he replied. “It's my second home, jail. I'll always be back. I'll keep trying to stop drinking but I don't think I'll ever be able

to, not completely. I've been trying different things, new ways of trying to deal with it. They've some new programs now that they've admitted they were wrong and I'll try them and see how I do. The best is still the bush, though, hunting, camping out. No booze out there and you're doing something important, you know it, you can feel it. But it's hard to get over it. I'm suing them, and I'll keep that up. If I win, well, at least I'll have some money."

I began to understand his oblique references to "they" and "them", but not wanting to pry and wishing to emphasize the positive I tried to steer the conversation away from the latent topic. "By the time you are out Shakwak should be started up. You should be able to get a job there pretty quick and put away some good cash." The Shakwak project was the name for the Alaska Highway realignment through the Shakwak Trench, from Whitehorse to the border, which had been under construction off and on over the past decade; additional funding from the US government, which had financed eighty percent of the work to date had been announced last fall.

"I don't think so. Why work, when I've got such a good lifestyle already. Good food, warm bed. Work like that is just an excuse to drink. Up at the jail, there are three of us, all the same. The guard comes into our room and sees us sitting there, he says 'You guys got the cleanest room.' Of course we do, that's what they trained us for; you get up in the morning and you make your bed, tight as a board. At night, before you go to sleep, you tidy up your room, fold your clothes, put everything away. We all grown up now, but we still do it, like robots, every night and every morning. We're still scared, you see. That's why we all drink."

I could not avoid the topic any longer. "You were at Lower Post," I said, referring to the Catholic-run federal residential school for Indians, which operated down south near Watson Lake from 1951 to the mid-60s.

"Yeah. And that's why I drink. I know it. See that guy?" He gestured his head to a fellow walking down the street. "He used to be a great basketball player. He was over at Courdecet Hall," which was a non-denominational Indian residential school opened later in Whitehorse. "You couldn't touch him. The only way I could stop him was to trip him as he went by. That's cheating but you couldn't touch him otherwise. He hasn't played since he finished school. He's like us. I didn't see him for years. I thought he must be dead by now, but I met him last week again. "I thought you were dead," I told him. He gets out to Dawson or Pelly Crossing when he can, and takes some time off; that's why I haven't seen him. But he comes back, like the rest of us."

"I'm a grown man now, on the outside. I got a six-year-old daughter. I was talking to my wife yesterday when it was raining. She said my daughter had gotten my big parka on. "What are you doing?" "I'm taking this to Daddy," she says, "he must be cold." She wanted to bring me my coat. Here I am in Whitehorse, in the rain, and she wants to take care of me" (Interview with Anonymous, 19 May 1999, Whitehorse, Yukon, in Easton n.d.).

After the construction of the highway, the village at the mouth of Snag Creek became the principal Native settlement in the Yukon portion of the borderlands, having attracted a number of Upper Tanana-speaking *Dineh* from the lower Chisana River basin to the west and Northern Tutchone-speaking *Dineh* who exploited the area to the east and north of the White River. The extension of road access from Whitehorse to Mayo in 1950 led the Hudson's Bay Company to close its trading post at the mouth of the Stewart River, and some of the Northern Tutchone *Dineh*

who lived in that area moved to take up residence along with other *Dineh* at Snag village, after the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs amalgamated the Stewart River and Snag Indian Act Bands (Easton et al. 2013), beginning the contemporary integration of these two language groups within a single community. These people became the core ancestors of the modern Indian Act Band of the White River First Nation of Beaver Creek, but not before a twenty-five year period of forced assimilation with the Native settlement at Burwash in order to reduce the administrative costs of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs.⁴⁷ This experience was to have lasting effects on the internal social relationships between these *Dineh* and their external political relationships with the federal government (Easton et al. 2013; Nadasdy 2004).

The highway also allowed for the regulation of border crossings for the first time. However, since the American customs was stationed at Tok and the Canadian station was on the highway about a mile south of the Snag Creek bridge, enforcement was intermittent until the establishment of the ALCAN border station on the 141st meridian in 1972. As a result, some *Dineh* continued to pass back and forth from the lower Chisana River basin up the Mirror and Scottie Creek tributaries to hunt and fish. But not all: Customs agents visited the villages to inform the residents that if they were living on one side or the other of the line they were not to cross it to trap or hunt, and many *Dineh* began to self-restrict their movements under the fear of being caught and punished. The Snag customs station was close enough to the border for Canadian agents to patrol it with regularity and prohibit cross-border entry of a variety of goods, including county foods and potlatch gifts (Easton n.d.). This was a one-way prohibition, however; traditional Native commodities of truck and barter were allowed freely into the United States from Canada under a provision of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation (the Jay Treaty), which the United States yet recognizes. Canada has always refused to recognize the application of the Jay Treaty provisions since its federation, maintaining its Parliament has never approved it, a technical point based on the fact the 1794 treaty was between the United States and Great Britain (Case 1984; Isaac 1999).

Another serious effect of the increased accessibility of the borderlands by state representatives was the enforcement of new regulations to manage fur trapping and recreational, commercial, and subsistence hunting and fishing, a topic of enormous complexity and significant differences on either side of the border. In general, however, the *Dineh* on both sides of the border felt similar effects.

Subsistence hunting allowances for aboriginal people had been allowed in both jurisdictions during most of the 20th century; however, the sale of wild game had been managed in Alaska since the first Alaska Game Act of 1902 and restricted to the periods of open season hunting specified in the Act's regulations. In Yukon there was little regulation of market hunting until its sudden prohibition in 1947, thereby ending a source of capital and goods for *Dineh* since the initiation of contact with whites in the previous century. Trapping regulations and trapline registration were introduced earlier in Alaska (1920) and enforced with more vigor. In Canada little was done to interfere with the principal foundation of the Yukon Native's peripheral relationship with the external capitalist economy – the federal government position being that they were “best left as Indians” (Coates 1991) – until the introduction of trapline registration in 1949 and enforcement of additional trapping regulations in 1950. (Mitchell 1997:179-192; McCandless 1985).

The post-highway restrictions of the game market were not entirely a conservationist reaction to over-hunting but had a commercial element embedded in them as well. The improvements in the efficient transport of foodstuffs, which the highway allowed, stimulated commercial interests in expanding commodity sales in the Yukon. Newly emergent notions of the superior sanitary and health benefits of industrially produced foods, lobbying by merchants, and conservation concerns enmeshed into an unrecognized collusion of interests in closing the wild game market in Yukon and combined with the new paternalism of actively working to change the life ways of Yukon Natives to more closely mimic that of the expanding post-war white community.

⁴⁷ Draft Statement of Claim by the White River First Nation on “Wrongful Amalgamation” to the Government of Canada. White River First Nation, Beaver Creek. No date.

The recognition of traplines had been asked for by Native trappers for some years previous in an effort to protect their traditional fur harvest areas from encroachment by non-Native trappers. Its implementation, however, had precisely the opposite effect. Registration came with requirements, in particular paying annual registration fees and demonstrating continued use. Failure to meet these requirements would lead to the trapline being regarded as lapsed and open for registration to another interested party. Some traplines were lost when the Native users failed to register them, pay their fees, or provide evidence of use to the central bureaucrats in Whitehorse (Coates and Morrison 1988:266-268). Restrictions were also introduced to hunting, fishing, and trapping within the areas granted to commercial big-game hunting operations, and the enforcement of provisions of international conservation treaties, such as the Migratory Bird Treaty, was expanded into the borderlands (McCandless 1985).

Several Upper Tanana *Dineh* recall their fear during continued use and occupation of the lower Chisana River after the highway made increased enforcement of hunting regulations possible. They camouflaged the roof of the high cache at High Cache with branches, for fear that planes flying overhead were game wardens looking for Native hunting camps. Another said that for years he only ate moose meat in the bush and in the dark, since it had been obtained out of season and was illegal; he would cache it some distance from the village and sneak out at night to eat (Easton n.d.).

Besides stricter hunting regulations, the increased pressure brought to bear on wild game by non-Native transient hunters led to the establishment of parks, game preserves, and wildlife refuges during the subsequent decades. The Kluane Game Sanctuary southeast of the White River was converted into Kluane National Park in 1972, while the area to the northwest of the White River to the international border remained designated a game sanctuary. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, encompassing the upper course of the Chisana River, and Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, which embraces the lower course of the river, were established in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), bringing land management of the entire Chisana River basin under the purview of the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The main exceptions were Native Allotments and Native Corporation lands conveyed under the provisions of ANCSA; however, these lands represent a paltry proportion of the total area (Bleakley 2002).

Title VIII of ANILCA provided for preferential subsistence hunting rights to be granted to "rural Alaska residents" on federal public lands in Alaska. "In some sense ANILCA is a 'settlement' of Alaska Native fishing and hunting rights, because it affords the predominately Native population of rural Alaska a unique set of protections and preferences for off-reservation subsistence uses of wildlife. However, ANILCA is unique in the field of United States Indian legislation because it also extends these same protections to non-Native rural residents who participate in the predominately Native subsistence economy" (Case 1984:26). What ANILCA did not anticipate was the near impossibility of integrating this federal legislation with politically defined Alaska citizen interests as represented by the State of Alaska, a contest that remains unresolved to this day (Norris 2002). In sum, the post-highway period introduced a wide variety of political, legal, social, and economic factors that combined to dramatically reduce the availability of wild game and fish in support of Native subsistence needs.

A final post-highway effect has been continued military activity in the area after the Second World War, as a variety of training ranges were established in "the wilds of Alaska." This has led to a number of problems, including restricted access, regular large- and small-scale military exercises, the disposal of unused munitions and other harmful pollutants across the landscape, and affront to Native spiritualism in the case of exercises being held in areas of importance within clan mythologies. Recently, some effort has been made to address some of these issues by the American military (Diane Hansen, personal communication).

In conclusion, the building of the Alaska Highway dramatically affected the lives of the Upper Tanana *Dineh*, not the least of which was the assumption of authority by the State over the lands of the Chisana River basin and the lives of its traditional inhabitants. Perhaps the most bitter

recollection of the ability of the State to enforce its administrative authority is the failed potlatch for Mary Eikland in 1981, when hundreds of blankets and other potlatch goods were seized by Canadian Customs agents as illegal importations from American resident relatives and friends travelling to her funeral potlatch in Beaver Creek, Yukon. As a result, the Upper Tanana have not held a proper potlatch ever since on the Canadian side, and a few elderly American *Dineh* never returned across the border again. The loss of one of the defining elements of their cultural identity as *Dineh* is heavily felt in Yukon. Fortunately, ever resourceful in developing the means to sustain, confirm, and celebrate their unity as a distinctive *Dineh* society and culture they have adapted to the new circumstances by holding this important ceremony for Canadian resident Upper Tanana *Dineh* in Northway or Tanacross, where the tradition continues to flourish.

CONCLUSION

My people help each other. Someone there [in Alaska] wants to bring me fur coat, shirt, that's what I like. Rabbit skin, martin, potlatch food. They [customs] want tax. It hurts my heart.... Where do government people think I came from? A hole in the ground? ... Who is that Queen Elizabeth anyway? Who made her? We are Queen here, we all are Queens, Native people. (Bessie John, speaking to representatives of Canadian Customs in Beaver Creek).

The existence of the international border dividing the land and people of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* between two different nation-states remains a vexing issue for the descendants of the aboriginal occupants of the Chisana River basin. The resentment of the arbitrary imposition of the boundary between Canada and the United States upon the lands of the Upper Tanana *Dineh* is deep, separating as it did "Our Great People" from each other with different laws, education, and regulations over their activities. Today, many *Dineh* work hard to maintain their filial and clan relationships across the border, travelling or telephoning regularly between Beaver Creek, Northway, Tanacross, Tetlin, Mentasta, Chitina, Whitehorse, Fairbanks, and other places where relatives and friends have settled, bringing gifts of the land, sharing memories and contemporary experience, and consolidating a continued ethnic identity as the *Dineh* of the borderlands, whose territory encompasses the Chisana River basin.

And while their dispersal from the Chisana River basin, by the variety of factors described in this report, has resulted in a serious erosion of contemporary knowledge of the area's history, use, and potential among many younger *Dineh*, considerable contemporary attachment to this land remains. It is embodied in the practices of the *Dineh* who still live on and off the land in the area of the borderlands in order to "keep the land open," of parents who take their children regularly out to the borderlands for evening walks "just to look around," during which they are told their *Dineh* history and taught *the Dineh Way*. Much of this contemporary attachment and practice is invisible to the casual outside observer, non-Natives believing that the integration of television, automobiles, homeboy fashions, and hip-hop music demonstrates the final assimilation of the *Dineh* into western capitalist consumer culture. But the image is a chimera, unreflective of the social, cultural, and spiritual beliefs and practices which, though unarguably changed by history, remain unalterably *Dineh* in nature (see also Easton 2007b).

In July of 1994 I sat with Mrs. Bessie John outside her home in Beaver Creek, passing the afternoon working spruce root I had collected for her the day before into



Figure 37. Bessie John trimming Spruce Root, Beaver Creek, Yukon, 2004. Photo by N. A. Easton.

basketry thread in the old way, using knife, tooth, and fingernail. Along the way we talked about the education of the young, although in retrospect I realize she was also talking about the education of people like me. Indian people need to teach their young themselves at home by talking their language and sharing their knowledge, she said. By way of example, she told me how the night before her granddaughter had come over to ask for some medicine for her mother. The young girl spoke to her in English. Bessie replied in Upper Tanana – “I don’t understand you. Speak my language” – at which her granddaughter repeated her request in a halting Upper Tanana. Bessie then got up and hugged her, told her how good she was, and got medicine for the mother.

“This is the way my great people taught their children. Grandma, grandfather, mother, father, all speak their language to their kids at home. They put them in bed early and tell them stories. If Indian people did that our children would be all right.”

After a moment of silence, she said, “There is lots of White people who are dead in this land now,” she said, meaning, I think, that the “English” were here to stay.” There’s two now,” placing her hands together and then opening them and moving them a little away from each other, “Indian people and English,” raising each hand in turn for emphasis and then laying them open, palm up on the table side by side. “Both together are here and our children need their ABCs from school and I teach my grandchildren here.”

“Indian and White,” she repeated, now holding her hands apart and then bringing them together to join as an intertwined clasping of her fingers, “both live here on this earth. We got to share with you this place here, for all people, Africans, Chinese, White, and Indian. We all work together for a good life here. My grandchildren go to White school, learn to read, math, and I tell them my life and then together we gonna make this world a beautiful, beautiful place.... Then I can go on my trail to heaven.”

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Appendix 1 – Census Records of the Upper Tanana Basin

The geographic isolation of the Chisana basin prior to the construction of the Alaska Highway in the mid-1940s has left us with an imperfect accounting of the region's Native population in official government censuses. Fortunately, early explorers, missionaries, traders, and anthropologists conducted a variety of censuses during their time in the region.

The use of these records is not without problems, however. Among these are the following:

- The use of English equivalents of Native names, or no name at all, such as recording simply "Wife," "four children," or "Old Mama," for example.
- The use of different names for the same people or the same name for different people. Among the Upper Tanana *Dineh*, any one individual was known by a variety of both personal names and nicknames. In addition, the appropriate name to call an individual was informed by kinship relationships. A man might be called X by a younger man from another clan, Y by his maternal niece, and Z by his male cross-cousin of similar age with whom he hunts, for example. As well, many people were known by a variety of English names as well. The last resident Upper Tanana *Dineh* of the upper Chisana basin, for example, has been variously recorded as "Scottie Creek Joe," "Chisana Joe," "Joe Justin," and "Joe Austin."
- The recording of children as birth children of the person they are living with, rather than their adoptive status. At a social level this is not a particular problem, since adoption of orphaned children and the "giving" of an infant to childless couples or couples deemed more capable of raising the child in the case of young unwed mothers was a common social practice among the Upper Tanana and resulted in the creation of a fictive kinship linkage socially recognized as legitimate.
- Inconsistencies in date and place of birth. The inconsistencies in birthdate can be accounted for by the general disregard in recording precise numbers of years in Upper Tanana culture; people were infants, children, adults, and Elders, standing in relative older or younger status with any other person. The inconsistencies in birthplace can be accounted for by a number of factors. A principal factor must be differences in place of birth, place of childhood, and place of current residence. To ask the question "where are you from" of a nomadic people who live at many different places in the course of a year, let alone over the course of a lifetime, is extremely problematic. Another source is the lack of correspondence between English and Upper Tanana geography. For example, an individual may be identified as being born at "Scottie Creek" in one record and at "Chisana" in another. This might mean they were born at Big Scottie Creek village, which lies on Scottie Creek at its confluence with the Chisana River, or one of several camps or villages along the east side of the lower Chisana River, or simply a difference between where one was born and where one was principally raised. Finally, as the mapping of primary villages shows, there were a number of villages along Scottie Creek, none of which would have an English name and thus all of these villages are possible candidates for actual location of birth.
- Inconsistencies between numbers in tables and summary totals: The numbers in the pages that follow are reproduced from the cited source documents. In some cases, there may be inconsistencies between the numbers in the tables and the summary totals. This reflects inconsistencies in the source documents.

Despite these problems, the records contain much that is surely accurate or relatively so, and they are of considerable interest as a result.

1A – Census of Upper Tanana, Collected by Robert McKennan, winter of 1929/30

The Robert Addison McKennan Papers in the Archives at the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks consist of field notes, mostly torn out of a small flip book (approx. 7 by 3 1/2 inches) and cut or torn to be re-arranged in topical files, generated by his fieldwork in the region in the winter of 1929-30 and a second, shorter trip through the area in 1964, as well as letters and notes collected from other sources.

The following represents his record of census for the area, which he collected in 1929/30.

Upper Nabesna – Chisana

1. Old Mama
 2. Joe – Polly 2 small girls
 3. John – Lucy Jack = grown son
 4. Titus – Corrine Ed = 14 year old son Charley = grown son
 5. Andy – Lily Belle 2 small children, 1 male, 1 female
- Men = 6 Female = 5 Children = 5 Total = 16

Last Tetling

1. Old Albert
 2. Old Lucy Daughter, son
 3. Old Lady
 4. Chief Luke – Helen
 5. Alfred – Lucy one small boy
 6. Bill – Helen 5 children = 2 male, 3 female
- Men = 5 Women = 6 Children = 7 Total = 18

Tetling

1. Old Joseph 2 grown daughter 2 small daughters
 2. Martha Titus – grown son
 3. Andrew David and Lucy 3 children (2 female, 1 male)
 4. Walter David and Lena 1 child (male)
 5. Big John and Jessie 1 son
 6. Joe John and Jessie 2 children (female)
 7. Paul Joe and Annie 4 girls
 8. Chief Peter and Eva adopted boy
 9. Jimmie Joe and Jennie 1 child (female)
- Men = 9 Women = 10 Children = 15 Total = 34

Mouth of Nabesna

1. Old Lady grown daughter
2. Mrs. Northway Maggie (grown daughter) Lee Northway
3. Bill Northway and Liza 1 grown girl 1 adopted girl
4. Walter Northway and Lily 4 children (1 male, 3 female)
5. Steve Northway and Edna 2 children (female)
6. Chief Sam and Bessie 3 children (2 male, 1 female) Fred Sam
7. Frank Sam and Annie 3 children (2 male, 1 female)

1B – List of Residents of Nabesna and Scottie Creek, 1937, by the Episcopal Church

This list of residents of Nabesna and Scottie Creek was compiled for the Episcopal church, quite likely by Miss Lucy Wright. It may be the basis of the census in McKennan's field archives, but it differs in both detail – listing specific children of parents, for example – and in facts (some people do not appear in both lists). Together the two provide a fairly comprehensive census of the region in the winter of 1937-38. The list of birthdays is from the same archival source.

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
Albert	[Peter?]	1887(?)	Nab			
wife?	Elsie			Old Northway	Anna Northway	
Albert	Pauline	April, 1911	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Oscar	10-8-18	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Northway	1-10-20	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Ada	12-25-23	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	12-24-23, from Ada Gallon
	Daniel	12-10-25	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Abraham	12-10-25	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Alice	12-6-27	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Kenneth	9-6-29	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Jennie	8-15-33	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	Roger	4-1-37	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
	16 children	altogether	includes Lily	Dick, and others	from Ada G.	
Albert	Oscar	10-8-18	Nab	[Peter?] Albert	Elsie	
wife	Mary	Oct 1919	Last Tetlin	Dawson Luke	Lucy	
Albert	Mary Jean	4-4-37	Nab	Oscar Albert	Mary	

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
Demit	Elisha	1867 (?)	Kechemstuk	Jack Demit		
wife	Bertha	1897	Scottie Crk	John	Annie John	
Demit	Fred	9-1-24	Nab		Bertha	
Demit	Jessie	11-30-28	Nab	Elisha	Bertha	
Demit	Palace [Polly]	8-30-31	Nab	Elisha	Bertha	
Demit	Herbert Allen	9-5-35	Nab	Elisha	Bertha	
Demit	Doriss	11-2-36	Nab	Elisha	Bertha	
Demit	Esau	1912		Charlie Demit	Mary Sam	died 11-1- 38
Demit	Joe Charlie	3-7-10	Nab	Charlie Demit	Mary Sam	
wife	Laura (Eliza)	1910	Last Tetlin	Old North- way	Anna Northway	
	Louise	2-4-28	Last Tetlin	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	
	James	2-3-30	Last Tetlin	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	
	Carl	3-15-32	Gardiner Crk	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	
	Carrie	1-19-35	Nab	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	
	Eula	11-23-37	Nab	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	died
	Joslyn	2-27-38	Nab	Joe Charlie Demit	Laura	
Isaac	Follet (Philp)		Mansfield	Chief Isaac		died 11-6- 38
[wife?]	Pauline	April 1911	Nab	Peter Albert	Elsie Northway	
John	Annie	1862	Scottie Crk	John		
	Bertha Demit					
	Martha Demit					

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
	Pauline [Polly]					in Shushana with 2 children
Kye	Andrew		Scottie Crk	Bill Kye	Laura	
wife	Maggie	11-8-14	Nabesna	Old North- way	Anna John	
Kye	Dora	11-13-38	Nab	Andrew Kye	Maggie	
Mark	Joe		Mansfield	Big Mark	Agnes J.	
wife	Martha [John]		Scottie Crk	John	Annie	
Mark	Agnes	5-8-33	Chisana R.	Joe Mark	Martha	
Mark	John	12-17-36	Nabesna	Joe Mark	Martha	
Mark	Pauli Flushman Joe	12-8-38	Nabesna	Joe Mark	Martha	
Northway	Anna		Scottie Crk	John		
Northway	William			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	Walter			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	Stephen			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	Elsie			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	Laura Demit			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	Maggie Kye			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
Northway	William	1884	Nab	Old Northway	Anna [John]	
wife	Laura (Eliza)	1887	Tetlin	Big John	Jessie Tega	
	Sarah	Jan [?]				
Northway	Walter	1885		Old Northway	Anna [John]	

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comment
wife	Lily [John]		Scottie Crk	John		
Northway	Eva	6-6-19	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Celia	11-2-23	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Ena	7-10-25	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Harry	11-15-27	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	died 1938
Northway	Martha	Nov 1931	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Selina	2-6-33	Ladue Crk	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Theodore	10-26-35	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Lee	1-6-38	Nabesna	Walter N.	Lily	
Northway	Stephen			Old Northway	Anna [John]	
wife	Edna			B. Mark	Agnes	
Northway	Arthur	12-27-28	Nabesna	Stephan	Edna	
Northway	Alfred	2-7-30	Ladue Creek	Stephan	Edna	
Northway	Avis	2-12-31	Ladue Creek	Stephan	Edna	
Northway	Ester	12-13-23	Tanacross	Stephan	Edna	nurse
Northway	Aubrey	1-27-35	Nabesna	Stephan	Edna	
Northway	Harley	[no entry]				
Northway	Harold	5-5-37	Nabesna	Stephan	Edna	
Titus	Frank	1914	Scottie Crk	Titus	[no entry]	
wife	Emma	1914	Nab	Charlie D.	Mary Sam	
Titus	Bernice Pauline	6-12-36	Nab	[Frank] Titus	Emma	
Titus	Kathleen	25-8-37	[no entry]	[Frank] Titus	Emma	
John	Titus	about 60 [1877]	Scottie Crk	Titus	[no entry]	
wife	Lucy (dead)	1884	Nab	Albert	[no entry]	
br	Frank					see above
	Lena					
Titus	Lena	[n.e.]	Scottie Crk	Titus	Lucy Albert	
Titus	Albert	[n.e.]	Scottie Crk	Titus	Lucy Albert	
Titus	Laurence	[n.e.]	Scottie Crk	Titus	Lucy Albert	

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
Sam	Chief	1863	Nab			
1st wife	?	died 1937		Frank		
2nd wife	Bessie	about 38 [1900]	Scottie Crk			16 when married
Sam	Helen	11-21-18	Nab	Chief Sam	Bessie	
Sam	Mary	10-8-21	Nab	Chief Sam	Bessie	
Sam	Andrew	3-5-28	Nab	Chief Sam	Bessie	
Sam	Silas	2-11-31	Nab	Chief Sam	Bessie	
Sam	Frank	1885	Nab	Chief Sam	Bessie*	
wife	Annie	c. 31 [1906]	Tetlin	Big John	Jessie Tega	
Sam	David	9-1-25	Nab	Frank Sam	Annie	
Sam	Susie	9-12-27	Nab	Frank Sam	Annie	
Sam	Julias	9-4-28	Gardiner Crk	Frank Sam	Annie	
Sam	Samuel	10-3-30	Nab			
Sam	Roy	6-1-34	Nab	Frank Sam	Annie	
Sam	Adam	12-23-36	Nab	Frank Sam	Annie	
Sam	Harry	1-7-39	Nab	Frank Sam	Annie	
Charlie	Peter		Mentasta	Mentasta Charlie	?	
wife	Mary	10-8-20		Chief Sam	Bessie	
	Alice Marie	10-26-38	Nab	Peter Charlie	Mary	

* Frank Sam was son of Chief Sam's first wife, not Bessie (Ruth Sam to N. A. Easton, 3 July 2003).

Scottie Creek

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
Austin	Bill (Chisana)		Scottie Crk			
wife	Maggie		Scottie Crk			
	girl child	died 1938				
Frank	Andy		Scottie Crk	Frank	Sc. Crk	
wife	died					
Frank	Celia	1934	Scottie Crk	Andy Frank		
Frank	Alfred	1936	Scottie Crk	Andy Frank		

Last Name	First Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Father	Mother	Comments
Kye	Bill	1895	Scottie Crk	Kye	--	
wife	Laura	1898	Scottie Crk	--	--	
	Andrew	1918	Scottie Crk	Bill Kye	Laura	
	Percy	1932	Scottie Crk	Bill Kye	Laura	
	Mary	1936	Scottie Crk	Bill Kye	Laura	
John	Little	1885	Scottie Crk	John		
wife	Old Lucy	(1862)	Scottie Crk			
wife	Celia	1914	Scottie Crk	Old John	Lucy	2 children
John	Joe	1916	Scottie Crk	Little John	Lucy	died 1938
John	Bessie	1927	Scottie Crk	Little John	Lucy	
John	John	1937	Scottie Crk	Little John	Celia	

Source: Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, 1887; Subgroup III Parish Records, 1896 - ; St. Timothy's Mission Records, 1937-1976, Miscellaneous Records, 1937-1972. Series 2/Box 2/Folder 2 - Census, Upper Tanana River, St. Timothy's Mission, Tanacross Alaska, 1937 1939.

1C – Elder’s Birthdays and Indian Names Collected by the Episcopal Church

The two tables that follow were drawn from handwritten letters from Miss Lucy Wright to Mrs. MacIntosh, wife of the Episcopalian missionary at Tanacross, which are found in the Episcopal Church records from St. Timothy’s Mission. The first table comes from a letter about the need to get information in order to apply for old age pensions for Natives of the region and provides a list of Elder’s birthdays. The second table provides a list of Elder’s *Dineh* language names. The notes in the “Comments” column are my own.

Letter to Mrs. McIntosh from Lucille Wright, Tanacross, 23 Nov 1937:

“The following is a list of the ages as I have them on my census:”

Name	Born	Place	Father	Mother	Comments
Anna Northway	1857 ?	Scotty Creek	Scotty Creek	Scotty Creek	
Annie Johnie	1862	Nabesna	? Mrs.	Northway’s	Sister ?
Old Joseph	1862	Last Tetlin	?	?	
Big John	1865	Tetlin	?	?	
Little John	1854	Last Tetlin	?	?	
Ada Paul (Sutah)	1857	Mentasta	?	?	
Chief Sam	died Oct 16				
Old Albert	1861	Tetlin			
Old Sam Thomas	1862	Mansfield	?	?	1859 older than Paul
Big Frank	1863	Minto	Minto	?	
Chief Henry	1872	Good Pastor	Good Pastor	?	older than big John
Gert Johnathan	?	Mansfield			oldest
Lucy John	1862	Mentasta			next to Gert
Old Paul	1859	Wood River			
Julia Paul	1861	Mansfield			
Bessie Walters	1871	Mansfield			

- 4 or 5 years between Old Paul and Big Frank

- Old Laura older than [?"henry" or "harry"] and Bessie Walter

Letter to Mrs. McIntosh, from Lucille Wright, 15 Dec 1937:

"Chief Peter and Chief Luke have given me the names"

Name	Place	Indiann Name	Age	Comments
Little John	Last Tetlin	Dah teel'	83	
Gert Tega Albert	Last Tetlin	O tes ' a	70	[Tabessa Jean (Titus David)]
Old Albert	Last Tetlin	Tul ' sno	76	
Ada Paul	Last Tetlin	Sutah '	80	[hu, died 1934 (TD)]
Joseph	Tetlin	Da gin ' di tahk	75	
Big John	Tetlin	Kay nish' sta ni	72	[see tape with TD]
Annie John	Nabesna	Tsay'ni gag 'a	75	
Anna Northway		Tsaw ' cheel '	80	
Big Frank	Tanacross	Tsay gay' tahk'	74	
Old Paul	Tanacross	stut ' tahk		
Julia Paul	Tanacross	Na to ' sie	76	[David Paul's mother (TD)]
Old Gert Johnathan		Sing Sang' (Cheth Tsing')		
Old Eva		Sing ta sah (Cheth tha')		
Sarah Bob		Chok ni'		
Old Lucy John		Tah tsis' nah'	75	
Bessie Walter		Te talse'		
Old Sam Thomas		Gehl' tahk	80	
Grandma Healy		Jah habe'ma		
Josie Healy		Hutnah	70	
Old Saline		Thek thas'		between 65 and 70
Blind Jim Healy		Je Thu'nth' ta		65 - 70
Little Old Whiteman		Na ji jah'		90 - 100

Name	Place	Indian Name	Age	Comments
Bessie Thomas		Delth Thu ne' na		
Annie Thomas		The thus ka		

Notes: Annie John and Anna Northway were sisters. Anna Northway was Ada's mom's mom, i.e., Ada's maternal grandmother. Her name was Ts'ok klay. (Ada Gallon to N. A. Easton, 15 November 1997.)

Source: Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, 1887; Subgroup III Parish Records, 1896 - ; St. Timothy's Mission Records, 1937-1976, Miscellaneous Records, 1937-1972. Series 2/Box 2/Folder 2 – Census, Upper Tanana River, St. Timothy's Mission, Tanacross Alaska, 1937 1939.

1D - Census 1937-38 for Scottie Creek, Nabesna, Tetlin, and Last Tetlin, 1938

The following tables present an unattributed record of census for the Upper Tanana area found in McKennan's field notes, dated 1938.

Nabesna: Population=79

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birtplace	Comments
Albert, Peter	1887	Anna Northway	Old Northway	Nabesna	
wife Elsie					
10 children	1911-37				
Albert, Oscar	1918		Old Albert	Nabesna	
wife Mary	1919	Lucy	Dawson Luke	Last Tetling	
1 child	1937			Nabesna	
Demit, Elisha	1867?		Jack Demit	Ketchumstock	
wife Berta	1897	Annie John	John	Scotty Creek	
5 children	? - 1936			Nabesna	
Fred John	1924		Nabesna		
Demit, Easu	1912	Mary Sam	Charlie Demit	Nabesna	
Demit, Joe Charlie	1910			Nabesna	
wife Laura Eliza	1910	Anna Northway	Old Northway	Last Tetling	
6 children	1928-38			L. Tetling 2, Gardener Crk 1, Nabesna 3	
Isaac, Follet			Chief Isaac	Mansfield Lake	
wife, Pauline	1911	Elsie Northway	Peter Albert	Nabesna	
John, Anne	1862		John	Scotty Creek	
3 children					
Bertha Demit					
Martha Demit					
Kye, Andrew		Laura	Bill Kye	Scotty Creek	
wife, Maggie	1913	Anna John	Old Northway	Nabesna	
1 child	1938			Nabesna	
Mark, Joe		Agnes J.	Big Mark	Mansfield Lake	

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
wife Martha		Annie	John		
3 children	1933-38			Nabesna 2, Chisana R. 1	
Northway, Annie	1867			Scotty Creek	
6 children				Nabesna	
Northway, William	1884	Anna	Old Northway	Nabesna	
wife, Laura Eliza	1887	Jessie Tega	Big John	Tetlin	
1 child					
Northway, Walter	1885	Annie	Old Northway	Nabesna	
wife Lily			John	Scotty Creek	
8 children	1919-38			Nabesna	
Northway, Stephen	1906	Anna	Old Northway	Nabesna	
wife Edna			Big Mark	Mansfield Lake	
6 children	1928-1937		Tanacross 1, Ladue Crk 1, Nabesna 4		
Titus, Frank	1914		Titus	Scotty Creek	
wife Emma	1914	Mary Sam	Charlie Demit	Nabesna	
2 children	1936-38				
Titus, John	1880		Titus	Scotty Creek	
wife Lucy	1884		Albert	Nabesna	
3 children					
Sam, Chief	1863			Nabesna	
1st wife, Lou Frank					
2nd wi, Bessie	1897			Scotty Creek	
4 kids	1918-31			Nabesna	
Sam, Frank	1885	Bessie	Chief Sam	Nabesna	
wife Annie	1907	Jessie Tega	Big John	Tetlin	
6 children	1925-39			Nabesna	
Charlie, Peter				Mentasta Lake	
wife, Mary	1920	Bessie	Chief Sam	Nabesna	
Jackson, Elisha					

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
wife, Bertha Johnnie					
5 children	1928-36				

Scottie Creek: Population=14

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
Austin, Bill (Chisana)				Scotty Creek	
wife, Maggie					
Frank, Andy	(widower)			Scotty Creek	
2 children	1934-36				
Kye, Bill	1895			Scotty Creek	
wife Laura	1898			Scotty Creek	
3 children	1918-36			Snake Creek	?snake = snag?
wife Eliza	1910				
John, Little	1885			Scotty Creek	
wife, old Lucy					
3 children	1914-27				
2 grandchild	1937				

Tetlin: Population=81 (including Last Tetling)

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
David, Martha	1893			Tetlin	
David, Titus	1909			Tetlin	
wife, Jessie	1909	Maggie Demit	Walter Isaac	Ketchumstuk	
4 children	1932-38			Tanacross, 3	
David, Andrew				Tetlin	
wife, Lucy	1896	Jessie Tega	Big John	Tetlin	
4 children	1926-38			Tetlin	
1 child	1917	Maggie Luke			
David, Lena	1913	Jessie Tega	Big John	Tetlin	widow of Walter David
2 children	1931-38			Tetlin	
David, Kitty		Gert Tega		Last Tetlin	widow of Peter David
2 children	1922-25			Tetlin	

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
David, Ada			Albert	widow of Charlie David	
1 child	1913				Tetlin
David, Helen	1925	Susie	Paul David	Chena	
David, Patrick	1932	Susie	Paul David	Chena	
John, Big	1865			Tetlin	
wife, Jessie Tega	1869			Chisana River	
6 children	1913-18			Tetlin	
Joe, Chief Peter	1876(?)			Copper River	
1st wife, Eva				Copper River	
Paul	1890	Eva	Peter Joe	Tetlin	
Lily	1915	Eva	Peter Joe	Tetlin	
2nd wife, Annie	1906			Last Tetlin	
6 children			Last Tetlin 2, Tetlin Lake 4		
Joe, Jimmy			Chief Joe	Tetlin	
wife Jenny		Chief David	Tetlin		
2 children	1924			Nabesna	
		1930			Tetlin
Joseph, Old	1862			Last Tetlin	
wife Mary					
2 children	? & 1923			Tetlin	
Mark, David	1912			Mansfield	
wife Jessie	1902(?)	Lucy	Dawson Luke	Last Tetlin	
2 children	1934-36			Nabesna	
Paul, Titus	1911	Julia	Old Paul	Mansfield	
wife Agnes Joseph	1915				
1 son	1937			Tetlin	
Joe, Paul					
wife Annie	1906				
5 children	1927-36			Tetlin	

Last Tetlin

Name	Birthdate	Mother	Father	Birthplace	Comments
Adams, Alfred	1895	Anna	Charlie Adams	Tetlin	
wife Lucy	1902	Helen	Chief Luke	Last Tetlin	
6 children	1922-38			Tetlin 1, Last Tetlin 5	
John, Little	1854			Last Tetlin	
2 children	1910 & ?				
Luke, Chief	1867			Mentasta Lake	
wife Helen	1882			Last Tetlin	
Paul, Little				Tetlin	
wife, Ellen				Last Tetlin	
7 children	1919-1932			Last Tetlin	
Paul, Ada	1857			Mentasta Lake	
Albert, Old				Tetlin	
wife, Gert Tega	1867	Tega		Chisana River	Mo may be "Lega"

Source: Robert Addison McKennan Papers. Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Series 2 /Box 12 / Folder 2.

Appendix 2 – Walter Northway’s Account of His Clan History

In recording his family’s history as he knew it, Walter Northway identified the origins of several Upper Tanana *Dineh* sib or clan groupings. This excerpt from his life history is included as a separate Appendix for that reason. Additionally, it is an excellent portrayal of the continuous movement of *Dineh* individuals and families as they search for better subsistence opportunities and appropriate spouses to marry, the initiation of social relations with strangers and their maintenance with kin, and a general curiosity for the world external to their immediate experience (a curiosity which I believe is reflected in the *Dineh* interest in the supernatural world as well).

Clans

My [paternal] grandfather, *Natuu*, came from way up in Canada. The people had a talk among themselves to decide their clan name. They started in a place in Canada called *Xaaguu*. As they walked through the top of the Wrangell Mountains (we call them *Theetsqq T’aat* [“copper (rock) headwaters”]), they stopped to build a fire on a small hill to have tea. A silver fox came running into camp where they were making tea. One of the men killed the fox.

After they killed the fox, my grandmother and great-grand mother asked for the tail of the silver fox to use as a swatter to keep the mosquitoes away. This is how my grandmother and great-grandmother’s clan got their name, *Naagat Ts’qiy*, meaning Silver Fox.

They [another group, representing Walter’s maternal grandfather] started off from a mountain in Canada that stands alone, *Shya’ Naaltaat* [meaning “where the lice shoot down” – M. Tyone], located six miles from Burwash Landing Lake [Kluane Lake]. As they were walking, they picked up a half-eaten fish tail. They carried it around. This is how my grandmother’s and great-grandmother’s people got their real clan [moiety] name, *Ch’qq* [meaning “clan”], which includes Wolf, Swan, and Sea Gull. [There are different kinds of *Ch’qq*. *Ch’qq ch’ikeemaan* means outlying *Ch’qq* clan. *Ch’qq ch’itoonyaa* means middle or highest *Ch’qq* clan – M. Tyone.]

They left the place where they found the fish tail and went on to a place called *Niith’uu*, located farther down from *Shya’ Naaltaat*. As they were traveling from *Niith’uu*, they stopped to make a fire. Suddenly they heard voices coming down the river. Most of the men hid in the woods. My grandfather *Tsuut Ta’*, also known as *Stsaaiy Tsuut*, was the only one that stayed by the fire. He heard the voices coming closer. Grandfather *Tsuut Ta’*, mother’s father, went down to the river and saw *gahchaa’*, something like a piece of rabbit fur, floating down the river towards him. It looked like the cotton that floats on the river. There were voices talking and yelling inside the fur.

Grandfather *Tsuut Ta’* cut down a branch and made a hook. As the *gahchaa’* came closer to the bank, Grandfather hooked it and pulled it out. The voices stopped. Then he called for the rest of the people to come down to the riverbank. They started taking it apart. They cut and unwound it to take it apart. People that look like us came out of that piece of rabbit fur.

The *gaachaa’iin* [“piece of rabbit-skin people”] were very mad and wanted to fight. Grandfather said to them, “Wait! We are few. Let us put our name together as one. We want to be as one family. That is why we pulled you ashore.” That is how they got their name as one clan [moiety]. From there they left together and became one big clan.

They traveled and stayed with *Enoak's* father in Canada. After leaving there, they came to a nice place to make a camp, called *Theek'at*. After they stayed for a while, some of the people moved and made camp farther down near a creek. They sent word back that there were a lot of fish in the creek. Men started gathering rocks and took them down into the creek to make a rock fence or fishing weir. Meanwhile the women started pulling roots to make a fishnet. This is how that place became known as *Theek'at*, meaning rock fishing place. In our language *'kat* means "fish trap." You may know this place today as Scottie Creek Village. And the creek *Theek'at Niign*, where they built the *'kat*, is half of Scottie Creek. They also made another camp, known as *Ts'oogut Gaaiy*, meaning "little twisted spruce tree," the name for Little Scottie Creek located near the Canadian border. Not too far from this place is another camp, called *Ts'oogut Choh*, meaning "big twisted spruce tree," or Big Scottie Creek as you know it. Some families stayed at *Ts'oogut Choh*, while the rest went on to *Ts'oogut Gaaiy*. My [maternal] grandfather went to a place called *Lji Thi' Th'an Nah'ijh*, meaning "looking at the dog's skull or head bone." They made camp there for a while. Then they went on and made a camp called *Kelt'uudn Mann'*, meaning "water Lily lake." Another name for the lake is *Nahtsiq' Ts'ih-chuut*, meaning "we grabbed wolverine." This is the lake in Canada known as Paper Lake.

As my grandparents were coming down towards Northway, my grandmother gave birth to my mother and her brothers and sisters. She named mother *Ts'attleegn*, later known as Anna...

Andy Frank and Bill John's fathers were from a place near Tanacross called *Dihthaadn*, meaning Mansfield. They moved to Canada, where they married and built their homes. They became the *Tsisyuu* clan.

My dad, *T'aaiy Ta'*, and his older brother went up into Canada to visit relatives. *T'aaiy Ta'* found a girl whose name was *Ts'attleegn*. He told his dad, "I found a girlfriend in Canada who wants me for her husband."

He stayed with his dad for a while, then decided to go back to Canada. Grandfather *Natuu* told my dad, "I want you to watch her and see how well she can work. See how well she can do everything."

My dad then went back and lived near her family. He did all the work for her family and kept an eye on her for almost one year. Grandfather wanted to know how well she worked before he would let my dad marry *Ts'attleegn*.

Dad went home and told my grandfather, "She is a good worker. She doesn't do anything wrong, she sews a lot, and she weaves snowshoes."

My grandfather was satisfied. They were ready for marriage.

My dad went to Canada and brought her back to his village. Mom and Dad moved to *K'ehthiign*, the old-time village at fish camp where she gave birth to Bill, Lee, Walter, Elsie, Danny, Laura, Stephen, and Maggie. These are our English names we received later.

K'ehthiign, meaning "lake or stream outlet" and the name of the creek between Charlieskin Creek and Moose Creek, was not originally our village. It was the village of lots of old people. *Tsee K'ee Keltseh* was our village, but Jimmie Joe and those old people all moved to different locations from *K'ehthiign*. Then my dad and others moved in and became the second generation there.

My uncle got married and moved to a place called *Xaal*. This was located near the Moose Creek bridge near fish camp. He moved there and made a village because there were a lot of fish. From there they moved to *K'ehthiign*. Then to *K'qiy'*

Daathhiign, the place that Charlieskin Creek, Moose Creek, and *K'ehthhiign* come together. They also moved to *Chqq̄taiy*, known now as Charlieskin. My father then moved to Charlieskin, too. This is when my mother and her relatives of the clan *Ch'qq* were marrying my dad's relatives.

From Nabesna into the Yukon

Theetsqq T'aat, meaning "rocky area" ["copper headwaters"], is the name of the Wrangell Mountains. This was my grandfathers' name, or the name that has come down from my grandfather.

My dad's two nephews got married up in Nabesna area. They were told who to marry. The women were not their choice. From there *Jisht'iin* married my dad's niece. They had two children. Of his sons, two of them lived in the Copper area near the Wrangell Range, where my uncle Alfred stayed. He was Bertha Demit's dad. He had a daughter, who had Mary, who later married Huston Sanford. They had two children who now live in Mentasta. This is how we started scattering out from *Naateel* at the head of Copper River and on. An old woman named *Ch'ihihjee* lives there. Also another old lady, named *T'a' Suus*. These were their old-time Indian names. This is how my mom's clan mixed with their clan up in Nabesna.

From there along the mountain were *Huh Shii Ta'* and his dad. There were four families. Then on along the mountains is a place called *Tahth'qiy*, meaning "lots of wood or dry wood sticking up in a lake or river." From that area they are intermixed with my mom's clan and Lilly Northway's clan. Their names intermixed with each other and they were adopted as one clan [moiety].

My grandma and my mother and other women went to the upper Chisana or *Theetsqq' T'aat*. They were all dressed up and had on dentalia shells. They were dressed very well. People in that area did not like them showing off with their best. This was against their custom. Because of this, the women were punished. The people got together to poke a copper awl through the earlobes of the women that dressed up, as a punishment.

From there one of the clan's grandchildren moved to the Dot Lake area with my grandma's clan name. From there my grandpa, nicknamed *K'ost'un* [meaning "short neck"; his real Indian name was *Ts'isdaalees*, meaning "carry rocks" – M. Tyone], traveled on to Eagle and no one knew which way he traveled. He ended up in Mentasta and settled there, making a village. From surrounding areas they joined him. The Elders told him, "If they ask you what your clan name is, you tell them *Ts'exaatneeiy*, meaning 'we settled down at a place.'" His uncle gave him this name representing them.

My grandpa's niece is Katie John's mother. She had Katie and from there Mentasta grew again. In the Copper area, from the same family, they are growing again stronger. They are intermingled with *Tsisyuu* [*Ch'icheel* is another name for the same clan – M. Tyone] from his dad and his relative Katie John. *Baak'aa'nakaah Ta'* and his brother *Ts'ildiil Ta'* were among the old people who left *K'ehthhiign* and went towards Valdez. *Baak'aa'nakaah Ta'* was the leader of the people who moved to Mentasta.

The youngest brother went to Tazlina. His name was Douglas. Then between those two brothers was a brother named *Dihts'it Ta'* who used to stay in Gulkana.

One brother stayed in Tetlin. This was Chief Peter's dad.

K'ost'un's son, *Yiikaatla*, is from Dot Lake. His son is *Xaal Ta'*. Someone set fire to

his cache, so he moved to Tanacross. After this, they all moved to different locations, and Chief Isaac moved into Dot Lake.

Three places are known for Chief Isaac, *Teegucheegn* [Kechumstuk], Dot Lake, and *Dihthaadn* [Lake Mansfield]. His mom's clan and his dad's clan from that area are still strong. The other clans from before are not strong there anymore.

Chief David's father moved to Tetlin from *Nat'aaiy Yaat*, the mountain up on the other side of Chisana. That is how Tetlin became Chief David's home.

My uncle's nephew was married into Dawson. Somehow from there came Alfred Adam.

Then they intermixed into clans, which made the clans stronger. No one can say that they are stronger than us. Dawson, Yukon, Tanacross, Dot Lake, Mentasta, Tetlin, and through Copper Center to Valdez. All from one family – *Natuu* and my grandmother *Ts'ist'e' Dishin* [meaning “old woman medicine person” – M. Tyone]. The clan mixed from Yukon to Northway, Dot Lake to Mentasta through Copper area. The highest person, recognized as the chief, stayed at Moose Creek, which is Northway.

After everyone scattered from Grandfather and Grandmother, many stayed in *K'ehthiign* near Northway Village of today. Many years later many of the people had died. The village again started up by only eight adults and I don't know how many children. The adults were my mom and dad [*T'aaiy Ta'* and Anna], my brother Bill Northway, my sister Elsie Albert, Chief Sam's sister, Chief Sam, Frank Sam, and me.

Bill Northway married Eliza John. They had children, but only Sarah Gabriel is alive today. They were traveling to Dawson, only one day away, when they lost their little boy. They brought him back to Northway to bury him.

I married Lilly John. From there the village grew again. I was born June 10, 1876, near Moose Creek, where we call it *K'ehthiign*. I was the third child out of eight. I had three sisters, Elsie, Laura, and Maggie. I had four brothers, Bill, Lee, Danny and Stephen. My grandmother was *Ts'ist'e'*, meaning “Old Medicine Woman.” My father was *T'aaiy Ta'*, meaning “Strongman.” Later he was called Northway. My mother was *Ts'attleegn*, a nickname meaning “funny blanket,” because when she was born they wrapped her in a ragged blanket. Her real name was *Ts'atch'iil*. Later she was known as Anna.

(From Yarber and Madison 1987:29-36. Reprinted with permission of Yvonne Yarber Carter and Curt Madison.)



Titus David, Tetlin, Alaska, 1995. Photograph by N. A. Easton.

...the Dineh of the upper Tanana River basin of the Yukon-Alaska borderlands conceive of themselves as having occupied the region in which they live "since time immemorial." Their existence as Dineh—"People"—attests to this belief.... To Dineh it is self-evident that they have been present in the region, since the settling of the world by human beings. Within their own accounting, the world that Dineh occupy was created in the distant past by the Creator and molded into its present form through the activities of Taatsan—Raven. This origin belief is a variation of the "earth diver motif" in which the earth is made by mud brought up from the bottom of a body of water.

—Norman Alexander Easton
Quote abridged