

Gwich'in Renewable Resources Workshop

Inuvik, March 3, 2022

LEGENDS AND STORIES

Survival Challenge

The following questions reflect conditions that existed for early Gwich'in people. Imagine you have been transported back to this early time, long before any form of modern technology was in place. You are on the land with only the natural resources in place. You are part of a family group travelling the trails. Answer the following questions and see how well you would have survived.

1. It is winter, and your group needs to cross the Snake River. The ice on the river is generally very thin and one false step would send a person to the bottom of the river. How would you determine where to cross?
2. In winter, walking or running on the snow was a key part of everyday life. What tool, material or equipment would you need in order to walk or run in the snow? What are 2 important things to keep in mind with this adaptation so that you are able to run and move?
- 3 You hunt birds and animals with a bow and arrow. Do you think you would use the same kind of arrow for both animals? If no, why not, and how would they be different?
4. You travel with your dog team and need to keep them fed with fish. What is the best way to travel with this type of food? How should it be prepared?
- 5 Bone grease is an important part of your survival. You do not have bags or pots to carry the grease during this time. What would you use to safely carry necessary food such as moose grease?
6. You need to heat the water in you birch bark container. How would you heat the water without burning the birch bark?
7. You have been caught in a snow storm and need to build a snow house. What must you make sure to include when building this house so that no one suffocates?
8. You are building a moss house. Is it best that the moss be soft, frozen or a bit of both and why?
9. You need to start a fire that lasts a long time and could be restarted if this was required. You have very little kindling available. What would you use to start a fire that burns slowly and will last?
10. You have cut that needs bandaging and have no first aid kit available. What could you use to treat the cut?

Source: Adapted from Gwich'in Cultural Studies program.GTC

Reference: Heine, M, Andre A., Kritch I. Cardinal, A. *Chapters 8-11 in Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak*, Revised edition. Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. 2007

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Answers

1. It is winter, and your group needs to cross the Snake River. The ice on the river is generally very thin and one false step would send a person to the bottom of the river. How would you determine where to cross? **Response: Watch for the path that the caribou or other larger animals take to cross, as this probably represents a location that is safe.**

2. In winter, walking or running on the snow was a key part of everyday life. What would you need in order to do this? What are 2 important things to keep in mind with this adaptation? **Response: Snowshoes would be the best to wear. The snowshoe would have to be the right shape for the type of snow..wet or fluffy snow. The size would also have to be connected to the purpose it serves. Trail snowshoes were used when travelling with dogs.**

3. You have to make a bow and arrow and need to attach feathers to the shaft. What would you use to attach the feathers? Would the shaft always be attached to the arrow? Yes or no? Explain your answer. **Response: Spruce gum was used to attach the feathers. No, the shaft would separate so that if the animal ran, the whole arrow would not be lost.**

4. You travel with your dog team and need to keep them fed with fish. What is the best way to travel with this type of food? How should it be prepared? **Response: Dry fish is best as it is light and nutritious. It would be prepared in the summer. It should be prepared in the same way it is for people, but rotten or drowned fish can also be used. It is important to make sure there are no flies, or it may spoil. It can be put into pits.**

5. Bone grease is an important part of your survival. You do not have bags or pots to carry the grease during this time. What would you use to safely carry necessary food such as moose grease? **Response: A moose bladder.**

6. You need to heat the water in you birch bark container. How would you heat the water without burning the birch bark? **Response: There are stones that you put in the fire and heat up. Only certain stones work as some break apart so you have to use the right kind of stones. These are put in the birch bark container.**

7 You have been caught in a snow storm and need to build a snow house. What must you make sure to include when building this house so that no one suffocates? **Response: A hole in the ceiling or roof so the smoke can go out and there is fresh air.**

8. You are building a moss house. Is it best that the moss be soft, frozen or a bit of both and why? **Response: It is best when partially frozen as it is easier to cut into shapes.**

9. You need to start a fire that lasts a long time and could be restarted if this was required. You have very little kindling available. What would you use to start a fire that burns slowly and will last? **Response: You would search for ediniichii, a fungus that grows on birch trees. Then pound it into a fine powder.**

10. You have cut that needs bandaging so that it heals quickly and does not leave a scar. What could you use to treat the cut? **Response: Chew the inner layer of spruce bark, place the pulp mixture on the cut and seal with a bandage.**

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2. Gwich'in Tribal Council Department of Culture and Heritage

The GTC Department of Culture and Heritage website provides links to language revitalization publications, photographs, reports and program resources. A link to publications is listed here along with two examples that reflect traditional practices and wildlife.

Website: <https://gwichin.ca>

Publications and Research Projects

The Institute offers an extensive range of publications related to Gwich'in language, culture, geography, natural resources, archaeological projects and traditional knowledge. The following two publications represent the projects and reports available on the website.

1. Yeenoo Dài' K'ètr'ijilkai' Ganagwaandaii: Long Ago Sewing We Will Remember – The Story of the Gwich'in Traditional Caribou Skin Clothing Project.

Thompson, Judy and Ingrid Kritsch

Published by Mercury Series Ethnology Paper 143. Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2005, ISBN 0-660-19508-9

A three-year collaboration between the Gwich'in, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre results in a revival of skills and knowledge employed in making traditional clothing of caribou skin. Over 40 seamstresses create five reproductions of an elegant nineteenth-century summer outfit from the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. This richly illustrated book is an indispensable resource on Gwich'in culture and heritage, and on modern partnerships between museums and First Nations.

Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge and Rat River Dolly Varden Char

https://gwichin.ca/sites/default/files/gsci_benson_2010_rat_river_dolly_warden_char.pdf

Report prepared for the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, Inuvik
March 18, 2010, Gwich'in Social & Cultural Institute. Available in download.

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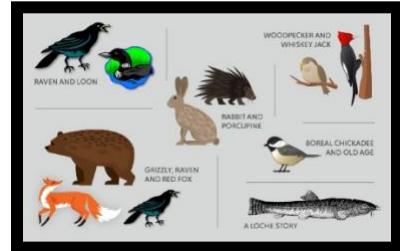
3. Legends, Stories, People and Animals

Legends are part of Gwich'in culture and have been used to track the timeline depicting the changing relationship between man and animals. Several of these legends are found in the book, *Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak*. (Heine, M., Andre, A., Kritch, I., Cardinal, A. and the Elders of Tsiigehtshik, 2007).

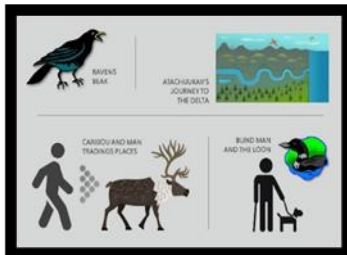
(Available at www.gwichin.ca)

Timeline: Legends and Stories

The Gwich'in have been around since time immemorial. Their legends depict this. The first set of legends began during the time that only animals were interacting and communicating with one another. Some of the legends that reflect this time are:



- Raven and Loon
- Woodpecker and Whiskey Jack
- A Loche Story
- Grizzly, Raven and Red Fox
- Boreal Chickadee and Old Age
- Rabbit and Porcupine Stories



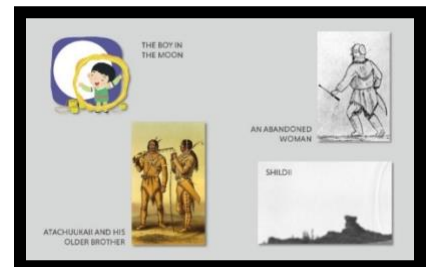
The second set of legends depict the time animals and humans began interacting with one another. The legends that reflect this time are:

Raven's Beak
Caribou and Humans Trading Places

The Blind Man and the Loon
Atachuukai's Journey to the Delta.

The third set of legends includes only human beings. The legends that reflect this time are:

- Shildii
- Atachuukai and his Older Brother
- An Abandoned Woman
- The boy in the Moon.



Credits: *Alestine Andre*. *GSCI*. Source: <https://gwichintribal.ca/historical-timeline>

Tshyaa srii zhit dhidii = **The boy in the Moon** / story by Sarah Simon ; illustrated by Billy Wilson & Arthur Mitchell ; transcribed by the Gwich'in Language Centre Staff, Effie Blake ... [et al.] ; edited by William George Firth & Eleanor Mitchell.

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Gwich'in Language Teaching & Learning Centre, c1994. 19 p. : ill. Aurora College

Legend of Man and Animals

Beaver and Muskrat

By William Nerysoo.

This story started over one hundred years ago when the beaver was a man. They started from the Yukon coming up the Porcupine River - lots of beaver. When they got to the mouth of the Old Crow River, the rat was travelling with the beaver. When they landed at the mouth of the Old Crow River, then the beaver told the rat, "We are all played out, we will stay here and have a rest. You can go up the river and look at the country."

The rat went up the creek and was gone for a long time and then came back again. He told the beaver, "We found a bunch of lakes at the end of this creek, but it is not very good to stay there as it is a stony country and I hurt my feet really bad. I came back and had a hard time, no good to stay there." But the rat was a little bit crooked and he hid the place, a good place for the rats but he had told the beaver it was no good to stay there. Then the rat stopped and the beaver stared off again up the Porcupine River. Then they travelled way up there into the land of the mouth of Little Dowe River. Just around a place called Fish Creek, they landed - everybody landed there and they lived on that land among the lakes. They found a little bit of good lake. So some beaver stopped there. That's the land of the beavers today.

Another bunch went up ahead to the Porcupine River and they got up to the mouth of the river. Some beaver went up the creek so they settled there. There are some beaver there right now today. The last big bunch went up ahead of Porcupine River and it was not a very good place to stay so they made a portage over the big hills to the head of the Peel River. Right there was a good place, good river - there was lots of food, good everything, so everybody settled down. I know that country. It's a really good place for beaver (lots of beaver there).

It was long after the beaver and muskrats settled down that they exchanged tails. At first the beaver had a very thin, long tail, like the muskrat today and the muskrats had the wide, flat tails. The beaver told the muskrat, "Let's change tails as you would travel easier in the grass with my tail". So the muskrat believed him and the muskrat gave his tail to the beaver, and he had the tail and swam out in the lake and found he could swim better, too (with the beaver tail). The beaver also went out into the water and his tail made such a loud sound that he got scared and was also very angry. p. 390

Source: COPE Stories (Committee of Original Peoples Entitlements. Department of Culture and Heritage

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4. Giant Animals and Landforms

Geography, Giant Animals and Spirits or Chijuudiee.

Introduction

Legends and stories are a rich source for various writing activities. One area that students may wish to explore includes the stories that describe *Giant Animals and Spirits* or **chijuudiee**. These have been part of Gwich'in history dating back to the earliest of times. The stories are also the source of explanations for various landforms, as well as the place names assigned to them.

A Story from the Arctic Project

The Gwich'in creation story tells that long ago, the Gwich'in and the caribou were one. As they separated into two beings, they became relatives and made an agreement. The land would sustain the caribou and the caribou would sustain the people. They would each keep a piece of the other's heart within themselves. In that way their lives and well-being would be forever connected.



Gyuu Dazhoo Njik OR Gyuu Dazhoo Njik

This Gwich'in place name is associated with a legendary story. During the early days of the land, a giant hairy worm (snake) came out of the ocean, travelled up the Mackenzie River and into the Peel River. Because of its desire to go into the mountains, it swallowed large boulders as it travelled and created the Snake River.

The snake is believed to have either gone inside a lake beside the river or into the mountain near the headwaters of the river, where it remains to this day.

Some people believe these giant animals or spirits still exist today. Many look to the existing landforms in support of these beliefs.

Throughout the areas occupied by the Gwich'in people there are a number of unique landforms. These topographical features have long been associated with Giant Animals who were believed to have existed centuries ago. These are stories of the ts'iidejji **days**.

Recorded Legends: NWT Archives and Prince of Wales Heritage Centre:

<https://gnwt.accesstomemory.org/informationobject/browse?sort=referenceCode&sq0=&sf0=&collection=%2F197&levels=&onlyMedia=1&findingAidStatus=©rightStatus=&materialType=&topLod=0&rangeType=inclusive>

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“Did giants roam Canada’ Northwest Territories-or do they still?”

“While many comments are made for amusement, they are steeped in lore that goes back millennia and form the rich culture of the land's first inhabitants.” A lot of this is still revered and adhered to. People use these stories and legends to guide their lives,”



Photo from plane flight Whati to Inuvik Andrew P. Beaverho

"Some are very serious, but some of them are for entertainment as well. It's a very rich description of how things used to be and an explanation for how our land was shaped.

“These marks and tracks show that the animals who made them must have been of enormous size. Mostly these were animals that everybody knew — beaver, fish, or wolverine — but they were bigger than any that the people had ever seen, and they lived much longer...” “These giant spirit animals, chijuudiee, have inhabited the land since the earliest days.” Alestine Andres, Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak. **CBC report**

Source: “Did giants roam Canada’ Northwest Territories-or do they still? **CBC**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/giants-lakes-footprint-mythology-1.4309431>

The information in this section includes stories connected to areas around Tsiigehtchic, Ft. McPherson and various lakes within the Gwich'in land. The stories tell of the giant animals- muskox, buffalo and animal spirits that were believed to have roamed in these areas. As students read through the Gwichya Gwich'in Googwandak book and the resource report-TS'IIDEIÏ GWÏNOO GWINÏN (Animals from Long Ago) they will find many other locations associated with similar stories. The link to the report is provided below.

Resource: https://www.gwichin.ca/sites/default/files/gsci_benson_2014_bison.pdf

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Giant Animals, Chijuudiee, and Place Names

NÈHTRÙH” means ‘Wolverine’

In 2011, the GSCI (Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute) and GRRB (Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board) began the study of the wolverine based on the traditional knowledge of Gwich'in hunters. The names of those who contributed their knowledge are indicated in the study. Their names should be acknowledged in recognition of the information they shared as part of this project.

The full report is detailed in the link listed below. As one of many species at risk, the study of the wolverine revealed the presence of the wolverine in stories, legends, place names and its significance as a wildlife resource. The photo to the left shows Gabe Andre and Niditchie Sr. examining the unique land formation and geography of the place known as, NÈHTRÙH CHÌ' located along the Arctic Red River in 1993. *Photo credit to Ingrid Kritsch.*

Here is one of the stories that explain this formation.

Nèhtrùh Chì' (Wolverine-its' rock). This place name refers to an area up the Arctic Red River, and is associated with a legend: The legend about Nèhtrùh Chì ...a Chijuudiee ("monster [spirit animal] that lives in the water"), describes how this unique land formation up the Arctic Red River near Martin House was formed. The Elders told us that a giant wolverine came out of a nearby lake and burrowed underneath the ground, breaking up the hill in this area as it went into the Arctic Red River. Elders who know of this place are still cautious around here because this giant creature is considered wicked and will kill any person it encounters. If people hear a noise coming from this place while travelling on the river, they avoid stopping here. On the other hand, if the area is quiet, they may stop. Other versions of the legend indicate that the creature stopped before the Arctic Red River, on the hill. One Tsiigehtchic Elder recalls being told by his father to avoid the area in the winter because of the dangerous terrain in this area, "in case he fell down there." (**Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge: Nèhtrùh, 2014, pg. 16**)



www.britannica.com 1

Wolverine Glacier and Wolverine Lake. The wolverine was used extensively for its furs, as the meat is considered inedible except under circumstances of starvation. As noted in the interviews collected by GSCI and GRRB,

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“Wolverine fur is particularly prized for trimming parkas. It is very insulating when around the face, and unlike other kinds of fur, it does not freeze up. It is considered to be the nicest fur for this purpose. A wolverine trimmed parka “really looks good, boy. They got wolverine parky on, and all trimmed up and little tassels here and ...you’re greatest looking person.” Sometimes the claws on the trim are painted red. Their furs are particularly easy to tan. The tails were also used on a lead dog’s harness as decoration, on the standing iron.”(Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge: Nèhtrùh, 2014, pg. 8)

Catherine Mitchell noted one time use of the gall bladder for medicinal purposes. (Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge: Nèhtrùh, 2014, pg. 9)

Full Report: Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge: Nèhtrùh (Wolverine)

<http://www.grrb.nt.ca/pdf/wildlife/Wolverine%20report%20Final%20April%202014.pdf>

5.Caribou: Resources

Gwich'in Knowledge of the Bluenose West Caribou

<https://grrb.nt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Gwichin-Knowledge-of-Bluenose-West-Caribou.pdf>

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, now known as the Department of Culture and Heritage in collaboration with the GRRB conducted a study to gather and present Gwich'in Traditional Knowledge of the Bluenose-West Caribou herd in 2014 and 2015.

The report provides extensive information on,

- Features of various species
- Language in reference to caribou
- The cultural significance of caribou
- Hunting and shooting and what not to do
- Distinguishing features
- The entire animal being used
- Caribou migration, life cycle and reproduction

The report combines factual information with the traditional knowledge and experiences shared by the Elders.

Resource:

<https://grrb.nt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Gwichin-Knowledge-of-Bluenose-West-Caribou.pdf>

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Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board

www.grrb.nt.ca

GRRB Mandate:

We are the main instrument of wildlife, fish and forest management in the Gwich'in Settlement Area (GSA). We act in the public interest, representing all the parties to the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (GCLCA) – the Gwich'in, the people of the Northwest Territories and all Canadians.

Porcupine Caribou Management Board

<https://pcmb.ca/>

In 1985 an agreement was adopted by the Porcupine Caribou Management Board that there would be no commercial harvest of Porcupine Caribou in Canada. This important agreement paved the way for the development of a comprehensive plan for the management of the herd.

Hunting best practices information and video: <https://pcmb.ca/hunting-best-practices/>

Migration: <https://pcmb.ca/migration/>

Harvest for tomorrow:

✓ Shoot a bull.



Not as many bulls are needed in a healthy population.

✓ Let cows live.



Cows produce calves. Their calves grow into adults and produce more calves.

On average, a cow that lives 10 years could result in 23 more caribou.



The scientific and research information made available through satellite collars:

<https://pcmb.ca/satellite-collars/>

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Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM)

<https://accwm.com>

The Committee's mandate includes the following trans-boundary responsibilities:

- The development and implementation of a management plan for the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West, and Bluenose-East caribou herds;
- The development of sub-plans for different aggregations of caribou within these herds;
- The discussion of total allowable harvests;
- The discussion of non-quota limitations on harvesting;
- The discussion of measures for the protection of calving and post-calving grounds.

The ACCWM meets, at minimum, once per year (usually in November) to discuss the status of the three caribou herds and coordinate management actions across their ranges.