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**‘BUT WE ARE STILL NATIVE PEOPLE’:  
TALKING ABOUT HUNTING AND HISTORY IN  
A NORTHERN ATHAPASKAN VILLAGE**

**BY**

**THOMAS FORSYTH MCILWRAITH**

B.A., English and History, University of Toronto, 1992  
M.A., Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 1995

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
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Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2007**

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(Stories, verbatim speech, and traditional knowledge are the property of the speaker  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my Grandparents:

Pearl and Lionel Bell

Beulah and Thomas McIlwraith

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to a large number of people who made my research possible and who offered me the intellectual support needed to write this dissertation. The people of Iskut Village have been incredibly welcoming and kind to me throughout several years of visiting and working in their community. Throughout my writing, I have tried to be true to the people who shared their time and lives with me; in turn, I am trying to share something of myself with them with my writing. This dissertation is evidence of my efforts to reveal myself, my interest and ignorance, to Iskut people. All mistakes and misinterpretations are mine. I can only hope that they will allow me to continue learning about their culture.

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between my data and broader scholarship on aboriginal hunting and history in ways I had not previously considered. Other faculty at UNM contributed to the success of my time in Albuquerque and to the dissertation. I thank in particular Les Field, Louise Lamphere, and Suzanne Oakdale for their interest in my work.

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I presented early drafts of some of these chapters various academic meetings or lectures. I spoke about guiding stories at the Ethnohistory Meetings in Chicago, IL, in November 2004. The Maxwell Museum Association of the University of New Mexico also sponsored a lecture in April 2005 at which I presented much of what now forms Chapter 5. I also presented a paper on hunting stories at the American Anthropological Association Meetings in Chicago, IL, in November 2003 (now Chapter 4). That paper benefited from editing and comments by David Dinwoodie, Julie Cruikshank (University of British Columbia), Sally Havard, Robert N. Diaz, and Thomas F. McIlwraith (University of Toronto). Eugene N. Anderson (UC Riverside) and Leisy Wyman (University of Arizona) took special interest in the paper, offering comments, additional references, and general support for the topic.

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My entire academic career owes significantly to conversations with my father and mother, Thomas F. and Duane McIlwraith. I would not have come this far without their interest and continuing encouragement.

And, finally, I thank my wife Mariela for putting up with all of this – including more than a year apart while I pursued this project. That is a remarkable gift.

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is a study of hunting in the northern Athapaskan village of Iskut, British Columbia, Canada. Hunting serves as a cultural system uniting Iskut people in a place where ethnic identity is not as easy to identify as outsiders might expect. Moreover, non-natives sometimes suggest that Iskut hunting activities reflect cultural and economic poverty. Still, interest in Iskut knowledge about animals and the land persists in and outside of Iskut. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is in demand in bureaucratic settings, for example, but Iskut knowledge about food and animals resists easy interpretation. I turn to the ‘ethnography of speaking’ as a way of learning about hunting and of moving beyond the fact-finding often associated with bureaucratic TEK projects. I attend to hunting stories and group history to understand why Iskut people talk about hunting with such passion. Studying talk of hunting and its etiquette reveals a wide range of lived experiences and practices at Iskut Village. It shows how Iskut people draw their history into contemporary resource conflicts. And, it illustrates a cultural system in a place where different family histories exist.

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## EPIGRAPH

### **Eṭsen' Ma 'Meat Mother'<sup>1</sup>** **Told by Sophia Stanton in an Interview**

*S̄a'e, s̄a'e story. That's the one they say, Eṭsen' Ma, Forty Mile, and Bob Quinn. Eyih ṭsigi tent. Tent dasechōsh, they say. That's why no snow all winter down Bob Quinn.*

*First they stay in Hyland Post, that Eṭsen' Ma. That woman is turned to animal. They thought it was so many. All kinds of animal born from. That's the one they call him Eṭsen' Ma, Animal's Mother.*

*Kaṭseh tl̄yaht̄l ṭsigi, dih gōse. All the animals, all kinds of animals. And where he been live up Hyland Post. S̄a'e, no snow all winter. Just that deep snow sometimes. Bare ground right around, but maybe two mile around or more. All winter just bare ground.*

*Ebehi huhtin. Now, this time snow down there. Bob Quinn too. It's away from Hyland Post. Dūda ahoye Hyland Post didinekeh. Eyinh hots'ih, he moved down Bob Quinn. In there too no snow all winter. S̄as duwe.*

*That's as far as I could know, Eṭsen' Ma. Now it's all as far as I know that Eṭsen' Ma make everything.*

\*\*\*\*\*

It's a story about a long time ago. That's the one they say, Eṭsen' Ma, Forty Mile, and Bob Quinn. Right there was a tent. Tent was put up, they say. [They did that because there was] no snow all winter down at Bob Quinn.

First they stay in Hyland Post, that Eṭsen' Ma. That woman is turned to animal. They thought it was so many. All kinds of animal born from. That's the one they call him Eṭsen' Ma, Animal's Mother.

The first animal she brought was the willow grouse. All the animals, all kinds of animals. And where he been live up Hyland Post. A long time ago there was no snow all winter. Just that deep snow sometimes. Bar ground right around, but maybe two mile around or more. All winter just bare ground.

Springtime came. Now, this time snow down there. Bob Quinn too. It's away from Hyland Post. We call it Hyland Post in our language. From there, she moved down Bob Quinn. In there too no snow all winter. No snow.

That's as far as I could know, Eṭsen' Ma. Now it's all as far as I know that Eṭsen' Ma make everything.

---

<sup>1</sup> Also 'Mother of Meat' or 'Game Mother.' See Teit (1919:230-232) or Cruikshank (1977:85-92; 1990:183-185) for other versions of this story.

## FORWARD: THE PERSISTENCE OF HUNTING

In October 2002, at Iskut Village, my opportunities to record stories with village elders increased. By this time, the first snow had fallen and the lakes were starting to freeze. Travel throughout the area was becoming more difficult. Most Iskut families were well-ensconced in their homes and had settled into the regular routines of the school year or working in the offices of the Iskut First Nation. They had largely abandoned lengthy camping trips to Stikine River fishing spots or *Tlebāne* ‘Klappan’ (open grass flats)<sup>2</sup> hunting areas. Yellow leaves of alder trees, so dramatic on hillsides in September, blanketed the ground. Winter was approaching and thoughts were turning to cold weather activities like snowmobiling, sewing, ice fishing, watching hockey on television, and hunting moose along local roadways.

One afternoon, I asked John Edwards, an Iskut elder in his sixties, to tell animal stories to a small group of seven and eight year olds at the Iskut school. My request was part of a grant-funded project to compile a book and an audio disc of stories in Tahltan, the local Athapaskan language.<sup>3</sup> The idea for the book came from Iskut First Nation’s Education Councilor and her hope was that it would be used by students in the classroom. I was, however, having a hard time finding people who were willing to talk with me in Tahltan and on tape. They always had more pressing things to do.

---

<sup>2</sup> Iskut people are, for the most part, speakers of Tahltan, a northern Athapaskan language. Throughout the dissertation, Tahltan language words are given in italics and in the local practical orthography (Carter 1991; 1994; also Leer 1985). These words are followed by the English translation as told to me by Iskut elders or the common English gloss in single quotation marks. Other information, like literal translations of the Tahltan words, is provided in brackets. See Appendix 2 for a description of the Tahltan language sound system and of the practical orthography.

<sup>3</sup> I received money from the Endangered Languages Fund at Yale University for this work.



After some discussion about the purpose of the book, John agreed to talk to the students. He also consented to having his words recorded on audio and video cassettes. The non-native teacher of the class was pleased to have a new activity for her students. Catherine James, the school's Tahltan language teacher, hoped that the session might yield some useful material for generating new teaching aids. I was relieved to be completing the terms of the grant.

John began talking from a chair at the front of a classroom. He told a couple of stories about killing moose and he reminded the children about hunting safety. The children listened quietly but, on occasion, interrupted him with their own hunting stories. When I asked John to speak in Tahltan, he told the class about a hunting trip. The account of that hunt is below.

**Transcript 1: Moose Hunting Today and in the Past<sup>4</sup>**

[The Scene: John talking with five children; two teachers and one anthropologist are present. John wears a microphone clipped on his shirt and a video camera captures the event from the back of the room.]

- |   |  |                      |                   |   |
|---|--|----------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1 | I say [said] it in English about hunting.    |                      |                   |   |
| 2 | Now I say it in our language.                |                      |                   | [John repeats a story he has already told.] |
| 3 | <u>Sa'e</u><br><i>Long time ago</i>          |                      |                   | [Conventional story introduction.]          |
| 4 | dāda ejinaṣīdel<br><i>when they all hunt</i> | kedā<br><i>moose</i> | kah<br><i>for</i> |   |
| 5 | deṣideł.<br><i>they travel</i>               |                      |                   |   |

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<sup>4</sup> In most transcripts, I follow Robert E. Moore's transcription style (Moore 1993). Moore sets transcripts into columns. Text lined up to the left represents the narrative frame used by the storyteller to talk directly to the audience. Speech in the second column from the left represents third person narration of the actions of characters or participants in the stories. And, the third column from the left contains directly quoted speech of story participants (cf. Moore 1993:219-220).

- 6            Itāde            nisādi            hōnezesikhīn.  
*Sometimes    far away        before they kill it.*
- 7            Sometimes maybe three hours walk to where they izeṣikhīn.  
*Sometimes maybe three hours walk to where they kill it.*
- 8            They call,
- 9            they say,
- 10          āk'īdi  
*kill site*
- 11          where they kill moose.
- 12          That's what they call it in our language.
- 13          Kedā            izeṣikhīn        ekuchechāh.  
*Moose            they kill it     next day*
- 14          Then, denmekahdedel.  
*Then, people go get it.*
- 15          Tlī'gwele,  
*Dog pack,*
- 16          engwele.  
*your pack.*
- 17          That's how they bring moose.
- 18          Sa'e                    za' ahute,        za' ahute  
*Long time ago        no good,        no good.*
- 19          denhoghanādiḥ.  
*place where people go (to hunt)*

20 Today we use vehicles but we still didene.  
*Today we use vehicles but we still native person.*

(ISK-22-02, October 9, 2002)<sup>5</sup>

Free Translation:

*Long time ago when they travel, they hunt for moose. Sometimes they go far away before they kill one. Sometimes maybe three hours walk to where they kill it. They call, they say, kill site where they kill moose. That's what they call it in our language.*

*The next day they kill a moose. Then they go get it. They pack with dogs and by themselves. That's how they bring moose.*

*Long time ago it was harder, where people went to hunt. Today we use vehicles but we are still native people.*

John's story is a general account of a previous hunt. I am most attracted to the final utterance in the story. It is here, with the shift from a third person to a first person pronoun, that the story becomes personal. In a nostalgic, yet purposeful, statement John concludes his narrative with this: "*Sa'e za'ahute, za'ahute / denhoganādī.* / Today we use vehicles but we still didene" (lines 18-20). (Long time ago it was harder, where people went to hunt. Today we use vehicles but we still are native people.) By speaking about changes to hunting practices while affirming his native heritage, John defies those outside of Iskut – trophy hunters, government bureaucrats, and non-natives in the nearby towns of Dease Lake and Terrace – who have been heard asking how the use of modern machinery like trucks is reconciled with continued food hunting. From John's perspective, it sounds like very little has changed over time. John establishes a connection between the past hunting practices and current technologies. The rhetoric has an underlying political tone: the adaptation to and acceptance of cultural change is

reasonable and smart (also Nadasdy 2005:315). For these reasons, this sentence seemed perfect for the title of my dissertation.

I know now that the final line in John's story exemplifies basic tensions in the lives of Iskut Villagers. Despite the changes wrought by increased participation in the Canadian wage-based and industrial economy, hunting continues to be pursued with interest and intensity. In some cases, working for a wage furthers hunting activities. It also finances trips to Las Vegas or mail order business arrangements with suppliers in Vancouver, British Columbia or Edmonton, Alberta. For some outside observers, though, Iskut people should not operate in two worlds. Modernization and acculturation are one-way processes. Traditions are better left in the past. At times, Iskut talk about hunting conveys those sentiments too. At other times, Iskut people strongly reject the stigma of labels like 'impoverished' or 'nomadic' that resonate in the words that have been written about Iskut people. Renowned big game hunter and outfitter Tommy Walker said as much in a book about life in the bush near Iskut during the 1950s and 1960s (Walker 1976; Walker Papers). John's words seem to refute Walker's book. Modernization is consistent with being a native person. Iskut people are proudly *Didene*, or native people, despite the assertions of the non-native people who come and go from northern British Columbia.

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<sup>5</sup> The tapes are indexed here (and in the Iskut Village archives) according to a numbering scheme in which ISK refers to Iskut, 02 to the year (in this case 2002), and 22 to my twenty-second recording that year. A complete index is found in Appendix 1.

**PART ONE: THEORY, HISTORY, ETHNOGRAPHY**

## 1. INTRODUCTION: HUNTING RESEARCH IN AN ERA OF 'TEK'

This dissertation is a study of hunting in Iskut Village, a small community of about 350 aboriginal people in northwestern British Columbia, Canada. It is also a description of hunting knowledge and local history and their roles in the lives of Iskut villagers. Although many at Iskut assert that the village's origins as a permanent settlement extend back to at least the 1920s, it was formally established by Iskut leaders and the Canadian government in the early 1960s. Conversations about hunting and history at Iskut only begin with debates about the origin of Iskut Village itself.

For several generations, native people at Iskut Village have reacted to suggestions by non-Iskut people that their moose hunting activities reflect poverty and an inability to survive in the British Columbia bush (eg. Walker 1976:153). Instead, Iskut people insist, they have always managed despite any hardship. Moreover, Iskut people say they have always been adept at accepting or challenging the outsiders who arrive to exploit local animal populations, and more recently mineral resources, for financial gain. Now, settled permanently onto a reserve, questions about Iskut knowledge about local lands persist. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is in demand by Iskut's own cultural researchers as well as by government bureaucrats whenever development or resource extraction projects are proposed. The ability to identify and document TEK has become one marker of Iskut knowledge about local lands. And increasingly, TEK is associated with personal and ethnic identities at Iskut as Iskut people themselves demand input on decisions outsiders make about their region of northern British Columbia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For Berkes, the study of traditional ecological knowledge involves animal classification and considers the relationships between a group of people and its environment. His definition of TEK is: "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by

Despite its prevalence in some government-sponsored reports and studies, Iskut knowledge about food and animals resists easy interpretation or prescribed forms of analysis. Any attempt to isolate TEK from Iskut talk is highly problematic because hunting knowledge is embedded in all activities Iskut people do. Moreover, it is difficult to understand the importance of moose hunting in Iskut life because it is rarely discussed in expansive or explicit discourse. I observe, in fact, that hunting knowledge is frequently presented artistically, in the form of narratives, during conversations. Sharing hunting memories, reporting animal kills, describing the follies of selfish hunters, or talking about the uses of traditional lands usually includes the deft application of ellipsis, allusion, indirection, metaphor, and allegory. By analyzing how these narrative and rhetorical devices are used, and by identifying the complex relationships Iskut people have with animals and the environment, it becomes clear that Iskut talk of the hunt challenges the images of idealized, perhaps romantic, aboriginal relations with the environment on which TEK studies are sometimes based.

My observations indicate that hunting provides the basis for a cultural system at Iskut village (cf. Geertz 1973:14; 17; below). Hunting is a constant feature in the lives and culture of villagers. Local history is debated and values are generated through hunting activities and talk. Hunting unites Iskut families who do not share common origins. Hunting remains strong despite the encroachments and ambitions of outsiders. The pervasiveness of hunting at Iskut is not always easy for outsiders to see, however, especially if superficial readings of history and ethnicity are the basis for understanding

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cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Berkes 1999:6-8). Menzies and Butler characterize TEK as knowledge that is cumulative, long-term, dynamic, historical, local, holistic, moral, and spiritual (Menzies 2006:7).

Iskut culture. Because of this, I turn to the ‘ethnography of speaking’ as a strategy for sorting out a range of hunting expressions at Iskut. The ethnography of speaking helps me move beyond the fact-mining often associated with TEK-based reports. It encourages me to focus on the expressions of Iskut identity fashioned with references to hunting. I attend to seemingly arcane information – jokes, gossip, hunting memories, and personal history – to understand what Iskut people are doing when they talk about hunting. I find that hunting activities and talk about them comprise a symbolic system through which Iskut people interpret and manage their positions in a changing world. By extension, an anthropological focus on hunting produces a detailed picture of native life on one Canadian reserve.

### **Personal Research Motivation**

I first met people from Iskut in the fall of 1997 when Iskut researchers traveled to Victoria, British Columbia, the provincial capital. They were there to learn how to use the provincial archives for studying Iskut and Tahltan history. I helped with some of the training and that led to my participation in a Traditional Use Study (TUS) as a paid researcher and consultant. The TUS identified contemporary and historical land uses by all Tahltan-speaking peoples, or, about one thousand people in three communities throughout a vast area of northwestern British Columbia. As a Tahltan research team, we conducted archival research and interviews in an effort to document where Tahltan people hunted, fished, and conducted other activities. We also recorded place names and stories. Towards the end of the project, we traveled throughout the Tahltan traditional territory by truck, boat, and helicopter photographing the places that had been identified.



In the end, we produced a report, maps depicting 1800 places, and a computer database housing details of each of one (Tahltan Joint Councils 1999).<sup>7</sup>

The TUS Program existed in the context of two important and recent events in the history of relations between the Province of British Columbia and native people. First, in 1991, the Province of British Columbia agreed to join the Federal Government of Canada and settle treaties with aboriginal peoples. This was a significant moment as most native groups in British Columbia, including the people at Iskut Village, do not have treaties with settler governments. The Province's move spurred dozens of native groups to issue statements of intent to negotiate a treaty. General research into historical land uses followed and traditional use research was part of that effort.

Second, in 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada brought down a decision in an aboriginal rights and land title case called *Delgamuukw vs. the Queen* (1997). In its ruling, which is popularly known as the *Delgamuukw* Decision, the Supreme Court admonished lower British Columbia courts for not considering oral history as legitimate evidence in judgments about aboriginal land and resource rights.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, the 1997 decision stated that British Columbia native people never ceded land to colonial or provincial officials (*Delgamuukw vs. the Queen* 1997; also Culhane 1998). The

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<sup>7</sup> The TUS was administered by the Tahltan political leadership in Dease Lake and the British Columbia Ministry of Forests in Victoria, British Columbia. While no longer operating, the provincial TUS Program provided money from the forestry industry to First Nations offices across the province.

<sup>8</sup> In the Reasons for Judgment in the 1997 *Delgamuukw* Decision, the judges wrote: "The oral histories were used [in the original trial] in an attempt to establish occupation and use of the disputed territory which is an essential requirement for aboriginal title. The trial judge refused to admit or gave no independent weight to these oral histories and then concluded that the appellants had not demonstrated the requisite degree of occupation for "ownership". Had the oral histories been correctly assessed, the conclusions on these issues of fact might have been very different" (*Delgamuukw vs. the Queen* 1997; cf. *Delgamuukw vs. The Queen* 1991:49).

*Delgamuukw* Decision sparked interest in collaborative research projects between native groups and the provincial government.

The historical backdrop to the *Delgamuukw* decision, the BC Treaty Process, and a study of hunting at Iskut Village includes racist beliefs and patronizing attitudes about native people by governments and non-native people (eg. Furniss 1999; Brody 2000; Tennant 1990; Ridington 1990b; Culhane 1998; Menzies 1994; Fisher 1977; Coates 1991).<sup>9</sup> This racism includes stereotypes of drunken Indians (Furniss 1999), beliefs that aboriginal foraging economies reflect impoverishment (Brody 2000), perceptions that native people are intellectually inferior (Culhane 1998), and ideas that the simplicity of native cultures impedes social progress and development (Tennant 1990; Carlson 1997). Moreover, historians and anthropologists have documented a systematic effort by various Canadian and British Columbia governments at marginalizing and assimilating native peoples and cultures; these are state-sponsored and legislative efforts at making ‘Indians’ more like ‘whites’ (see Coates 1991:159-160; Duff 1965). The best example of this legislation is the Indian Act which has, in its various amendments dating back to the 1870s, banned native dances and ceremonies, like the potlatch, and made it illegal for native people to pursue land claims (Tennant 1990:45; Fisher 1977:206-208; Carlson 1997:99). Many of these provisions were removed from the Indian Act in 1951 but its paternalism remains visible.

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<sup>9</sup> Furniss (1999:122) and Culhane (1998:46, note 8) use essentially the same definition of racism, and it works here too. Furniss writes: “racism [is] an ideology that distinguishes one group of people as being inherently different from others based on phenotypical characteristics and that assigns certain negatively evaluated characteristics, abilities, or behaviors, whether biological or cultural, as definitive of natural for this groups as a whole” (Furniss 1999:122).

Recent academic observations of racism towards native people are linked to the efforts of native groups to settle land claims. The ruling of Justice McEachern in the original *Delgamuukw* Decision (*Delgamuukw vs. The Queen* 1991) is widely cited as an example of the inability or unwillingness of British Columbians to see the complexity of native cultures. In this regard, Furniss writes:

[McEachern] legitimated [his dismissal of the claims to aboriginal ownership of land] by making several rather blunt assertions: that the early [native people] were ‘primitive’ people whose cultures were inherently inferior to those of civilized European society [and] that colonization had been in Aboriginal people’s best interest (Furniss 1999:202; see also Miller 1992).

Furniss is quick to point out – and this is my point too – that McEachern ruled on the basis of a conventional and widely-held view of noble and primitive natives (Furniss 1999:203).

Furthermore, Furniss (1999:13) and Tennant (1990:15) both observe paradox when it comes to understanding public perceptions of native claims. On the one hand, some say that native people should be denied land and legal rights because they never had organized societies; on the other, native claims are invalid because any social organization that they did have was lost long ago through the assimilative policies of earlier governments. In either case, having a specific name and territory are prerequisites for a land claim or, indeed, any kind of attention. Thus aboriginal rights to lands and resources are undermined by contradictory ideas that native people are too different (read: inferior) or that they are too similar (read: assimilated) to non-native people (Tennant 1990:15).

Negative attitudes towards and perceptions of native people in British Columbia are not limited to government policy. Furniss's monograph, *The Burden of History* (Furniss 1999), is a detailed account of the relations between Secwepemc (formerly Shuswap; Interior Salish-speaking peoples) native people and non-natives in Williams Lake, British Columbia. Furniss is an anthropologist and land claims researcher. She describes Williams Lake as small town, rural British Columbia where a "frontier cultural complex" – a penchant for assimilative thoughts, actions and words used to control public definitions of history – defines non-native racism towards local native people (Furniss 1999:20-21). Furniss details racism in the forms of private jokes about Indians, rituals associated with the Williams Lake Stampede, and the public debates around land claims. She concludes that racist beliefs towards native people are masked by a discourse of equality where assimilation is thought to be the only way for native people, culturally inferior because of history or genetics, to progress and become like everyone else (Furniss 1999:191).

I did not spend time working directly with non-native people but Furniss's experiences ring true for me. I too have experienced awkward dinner conversations with non-native friends about lazy Indians, native rights, and treaties (Furniss 1999:ix; also Menzies 1994:776).<sup>10</sup> I have heard the callers to radio talk shows in Vancouver complaining about native people getting too many handouts (see Ridington (1990b) for a specific example of such talk). Newer forms of electronic media, like the reader comment sections of the internet versions of national newspapers, include these

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<sup>10</sup> Menzies's research with non-native fishers in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, indicates that racism towards native fishers is often predicated on the fear that aboriginal fishing rights will take jobs away from fishers who have lived and worked in the area for generations (eg. Menzies 1994:780).

sentiments. And in 2006, in Dease Lake, British Columbia, a row occurred after a naïve newcomer to the area posted her ‘observations’ about Tahltan people on a weblog (blog). Apparently not believing the blog to be public, a post on her blog described Tahltan people as incestuous, sexually promiscuous, and addicted to drugs. Months later, the woman posted an apology on the blog and then removed it from the internet.<sup>11</sup>

The racism I encounter is often subtle and usually unintended. But it is audible on the radio in Vancouver or in the chatter in Dease Lake diners if one cares to listen. It can also be interpreted from the comments made and stories told by Iskut people as they remember the injustices of the past. The context of racism for this study is important because, as Tennant notes, non-native beliefs about native people undermine the validity of claims on rights and resources. They assume frequently that native cultures were too simple to ever have included individual rights to property ownership (Tennant 1990:14-15). And, at Iskut as elsewhere, the racist notions about the poverty of a hunting economy are perpetuated particularly for the material gain of outsiders.

The Tahltan Traditional Use Study concluded successfully under the terms of the contract with the Province of British Columbia. It left me, however, with questions about the information we had recorded and what it meant to the government, the Tahltan politicians, and the villagers who participated in the research interviews. The maps, for example, portrayed a single Tahltan people with a shared and common land base. But, the project’s methods of using Iskut people to interview Iskut elders, and Telegraph Creek people to interview people there, hinted that different Tahltan-speaking groups knew about different areas of the vast territory. The methods belied, in fact, significant political

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<sup>11</sup> The original post was dated September 5, 2006. The apology was dated December 30, 2006.

and historical divisions within the broader Tahltan community. Moreover, it seemed to me that the most interesting information to come from the research were the stories of life at the places plotted on the maps. Typically, these stories remained on the tapes because we did not have the time to make verbatim transcriptions. The dissociation of geographical information from the experiences of those who told us about it made the work seem inadequate and incomplete.<sup>12</sup>

My mixed feelings about the success of the Tahltan Traditional Use Study encouraged me to return to school. I wanted to investigate alternative ways of understanding and presenting native relationships with the land and knowledge of animals and plants. To that end, I began academic studies at the University of New Mexico in the fall of 1999 and quickly developed an interest in the methods of linguistic anthropology, particularly where ethnohistory, nature, and ‘the ethnography of place’ were concerned. In the summers of 2000 and 2001 I visited Iskut Village to participate in a geographical and genealogical study run by the cultural resource manager. While similar to the Traditional Use Study in methodology, the scope of that work was restricted to Iskut Village and its families and excluded Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake Tahltans. I used that opportunity to inquire about and negotiate the terms of my academic fieldwork, including the timing for a move to the village. All of my work with Tahltan-speaking peoples peaked in intensity during thirteen months of dissertation fieldwork in Iskut Village, between March 2002 and March 2003. After completing my formal academic field research at Iskut in March 2003, I returned to the village for three weeks in July 2003 to camp in a salmon-fishing camp on the Stikine River. I attended a funeral in

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<sup>12</sup> See Cruikshank (1998:52-53) for a comparable note about TEK databases. Dinwoodie (2002:2-5) also

September 2003. In 2004, I spent three more weeks in Iskut, fishing, camping, conducting follow-up interviews, and renewing acquaintances. I visited again with my family in August 2006.

### **The Documentation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge**

My research is rooted in dissatisfaction with the representation of native cultures and their food-gathering activities in government-sponsored research projects like Traditional Use Studies (TUS). Typically, TUS projects highlight the locations or techniques of foraging activities and ignore the meanings of these places for the people who know about them. The studies emphasize ‘dots on maps’ and use standardized and government-issued topographic maps to create a context for the locations of culturally significant places. There is little space in these administrative tools for descriptions of the social values of food-gathering or the meaning of variations in hunting techniques by different families. There is even less attention paid to the way in which hunters discuss hunting or how local history is structured verbally during such discussions. My participation in documentary projects of this sort left me considering other ways to record the richness of experiences of native people who continue to live much of their lives on the land. Traditional use research left me curious, for example, about people who are knowledgeable about local lands, animals, and fish and yet supplement sustenance practices with seemingly incongruous (and hard to map) employment in office jobs, highway construction, or education.

To answer the ethnographic and ecological questions raised by observing hunters, fishers, and gatherers practicing their skills in the modern world I turned to ethnoecology. For much of my field research, I documented plant and animal names and harvesting techniques within Iskut speech communities. In doing so, I engaged a long tradition in anthropology of ethnoscientific inquiry, or, the study of linguistically labeled categories that people use when they talk about the world around them (eg. Conklin 1954; Frake 1980 [1962]; Berlin 1966; Ellen 1986; Hunn 1990). Ethnoscience accept that cultures classify objects into identifiable and perhaps universally regular systems of knowledge called folk taxonomies or folk classifications. Indeed, argues Sturtevant in his programmatic account of ethnoscientific principles, “a culture itself amounts to the sum of a given society’s folk classifications” (Sturtevant 1964:100). Sturtevant continues, calling for the identification of local categories of knowledge and the organization of these categories into taxonomies defined by the group under study. My ethnotaxonomic research aids my interpretations of Iskut hunting practices and the way in which Iskut people speak about them.

Ethnoecologists seek cognitive categories within cultural groups in order to learn about the nature of the relationships people have with their local environments.<sup>13</sup> This move to contextualize ethnoscientific observations in broader descriptions of life reflected a critique of ethnoscience: “the assumption is made [in ethnoscience that the taxonomies] ... either comprise in themselves statements of ethnoecology or provide the information for inferring ethnoecology” (Vayda and Rappaport 1968:489). In a volume of collected essays on the subject, Nazarea elaborates and indicates a recent shift in the



research orientation of ethnoecologists. She suggests that studies of cognitive universals must give way to concerns for “how culture shapes cognition and mediates behavior” (Nazarea 1999:6). Importantly, she argues that earlier ethnoecologists missed an opportunity to link theoretical and applied environmental studies. Any refocusing of ethnoecology, says Nazarea, must include greater attention to political and economic contexts. Given the interest some Iskut people have in using traditional ecological knowledge to respond to mining activities today, I agree.

The Nazarea collection is significant, for the papers in it identify the utility of using Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to understand connections between environments and cultures. Like ethnosience, TEK research is concerned with documenting the knowledge of others in local categories. It stresses the knowledge that people hold and share about the natural environment including animals, fish, and plants. Academic applications of TEK are frequently rich presentations of this knowledge (eg. Hunn 1990; Menzies 2006). Unlike ethnosience, however, TEK has a significant position in bureaucratic projects and grey-matter reports. The documentation of TEK is seen as one way that corporations and governments in Canada can demonstrate that they have consulted with native people before development projects, like logging or mining, occur.<sup>14</sup> The bureaucratic applications of traditional use studies, for example, make them like studies of TEK. Traditional use studies document aboriginal knowledge about local

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<sup>13</sup> Ethnoecology is recognized as a subset of ethnosience (Vayda and Rappaport 1968:489; Moran 2000:63; also Nazarea 1999: vii; 1).

<sup>14</sup> In *Haida Nation vs. British Columbia*, the Supreme Court of Canada found that governments, not corporations, have a duty to consult with aboriginal peoples about developments on their lands (*Haida Nation vs. British Columbia* 2004). Still, I have observed a desire on the part of most corporations to consult with aboriginals about their development plans and that desire extends to well before the ruling in this court case.

lands and use topography as the primary means of organizing the data.

The documentation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and efforts to use it bureaucratically are widely criticized.<sup>15</sup> Two of the most important critiques come from Cruikshank (1998b; 2005) and Nadasdy (1999; 2003). Both of these scholars work with speakers of Athapaskan languages in the western Canadian subarctic and have spent careers observing interactions between aboriginal people and government bureaucrats. In “Yukon Arcadia: Oral Tradition, Indigenous Knowledge, and the Fragmentation of Meaning,” Cruikshank is concerned about the reification of traditional ecological knowledge as an object of scientific inquiry. She notes that traditional ecological knowledge is rarely recognized as a system of understanding the world in and of itself. Rather, it is studied by western scientists when additional support for biological science is demanded (Cruikshank 1998b:49). Cruikshank observes that the categories of TEK – Linnaean biological categories for example – are set by outsiders. By drawing TEK from the frameworks in which local people know it and use it, and placing it into the framework of Science, traditional knowledge appears simple.

Cruikshank extends her critique in *Do Glaciers Listen* (Cruikshank 2005). In this book, Cruikshank accepts that TEK is not inherently insidious. Her definition of the term ‘local knowledge’ points, in fact, to how I want to challenge the utility of TEK. Local knowledge is, says Cruikshank, “tacit knowledge embodied in life experiences and

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<sup>15</sup> See Menzies and Butler for a summary of these critiques (Menzies 2006:10-14). Kuhn and Duerden (1996) provide a useful history of TEK research in Canadian contexts. They also trace the intellectual history of TEK within ethnoecology, citing Durkheim, Malinowski, and Levi-Strauss as significant ancestors.

reproduced in everyday speech and behavior (Cruikshank 2005:9).<sup>16</sup> The problem is that local knowledge and TEK are frequently portrayed in government reports and many academic articles as, says Cruikshank, static and timeless (Cruikshank 2005:10). The life experiences in which the TEK is generated and used, indeed the way in which John Edwards shares it verbally with children, are forgotten or ignored as irrelevant. Like Cruikshank, I am concerned with the reproduction and sharing of local knowledge between Iskut Villagers and non-natives like anthropologists and government representatives. While it is possible to sift stories for TEK, to mine a corpus of texts for facts about the environment, Iskut knowledge of animals is embedded much more deeply in everyday life than TEK studies suggest. I have found that attention to Iskut talk about hunting produces a fuller picture of the meanings Iskut people assign to TEK.

Nadasdy's critique of government wildlife research in the southwestern Yukon parallels Cruikshank's demand that TEK be considered in the context of its production and use. Nadasdy is concerned with the way in which TEK reports reinforce power imbalances between native communities and government agencies (Nadasdy 2003:10). While most critics of TEK work note correctly that science and traditional knowledge do not mesh easily, the unspoken reality is that bureaucrats only pay lip service to TEK. Money for TEK studies is offered as a way of placating native people who insist that it be included during consultations about resource development (Nadasdy 2003:117-118). Nadasdy elaborates, saying that most scientists and resource managers "feel that ... drastic changes in the lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples have so eroded [TEK] that,

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<sup>16</sup> Geertz (1983) uses the term 'local knowledge' differently than critics of traditional ecological knowledge research like Cruikshank. Geertz says that local knowledge is local views of events set within local contexts (Geertz 1983:215). The interpretation of these events is of concern for Geertz.

effectively, it no longer exists” (Nadasdy 2003:118). Scientists only engage in TEK research to ensure that their ‘science’ will go ahead without protest or interruption.

Nadasdy’s contention is provocative. It smacks of the idea that many bureaucrats feel that native people do not have identifiable traditions today and possibly that they never did. This is part in parcel of the long-standing observation within anthropology that the identities and images of native people are created by non-natives seeking mythologies for western civilization (eg. Berkhofer (1978); Francis (1992) offers a Canadian perspective).<sup>17</sup> In Berkhofer’s terms, TEK is a characteristic of the ‘white man’s Indian.’ By extension, traditional ecological knowledge is associated with romantic ideas about natives who once lived as part of nature. But TEK is also associated with lost nobility, forgotten tradition, and the ability to express one’s history in a non-native medium. Paradoxically, TEK work assumes that native people are knowledgeable but that they are not, in John Edwards’s words, “*Didene*.”<sup>18</sup>

In my experience, hunting knowledge stored in a Traditional Use Study database means little to Iskut hunters.<sup>19</sup> TUS and TEK are tools of resource administrators in and

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<sup>17</sup> Journalist and filmmaker Larry Krotz argues that non-native people see the aspects of native cultures they want to see: “We [Canadians] seem to want Indian people to represent something abstract that is important for *our* sake, not for theirs” (Krotz 1990:18).

<sup>18</sup> *Didene* is Tahltan for ‘native person.’ John Edwards uses the word in Transcript 1, line 20.

<sup>19</sup> Nadasdy and Cruikshank would likely agree. In a recent article, Nadasdy asserts that use of TEK is problematic because the resource managers control what gets used: “Some would reply that we can make use of aboriginal people’s knowledge (based as it is on extensive experience on the land) without having to subscribe to their magicoreligious beliefs about animals. And, in fact, this kind of epistemological cherry-picking goes on all the time. ... Because scientific managers can only make use of certain types of knowledge about animals (those that can be expressed quantitatively or graphically, such as population figures and distributions), a great deal of hunters’ knowledge (all the stories, values, and social relations that transmute those animals from a set of population figures into sentient members of the social, moral, meaning-filled universe of the hunters) “drops out of the database” as irrelevant (cites Cruikshank 1998:57-58) ... retention of control by state managers over the standards of relevance by which indigenous knowledge is distilled may actually be contributing to the extension of state power over aboriginal peoples, rather than their hoped-for empowerment” (Nadasdy 2007:37).

out of native villages. To be fair, researchers documenting TEK have recorded a great deal of information about foraging peoples. And, as Nadasdy hints, native people have reasons relating to communication with bureaucrats for wanting it included in reports. It gives some native people a voice in negotiations. It is one element of an aboriginal identity in settings where outsiders demand validation of aboriginal rights. My dissertation explores the varied expressions and presentations of aboriginal knowledge in Iskut. It also investigates the talk of hunters who are, as it turns out, Iskut administrators.

### **The Ethnography of Speaking and Hunting Talk**

I am influenced by the ‘ethnography of speaking’ as a theoretical and methodological orientation for overcoming the limitations of bureaucratically-based TEK and TUS studies. The ethnography of speaking offers the possibility of understanding foraging activities when people do not speak freely or directly about them. It encourages the use of Iskut accounts of local history to understand the reasons why Iskut relationships with the land and its animals have remained constant in some cases and changed in others. The ethnography of speaking helps to identify the contexts in which traditional ecological knowledge is generated and used locally. And, it points to the reasons for its continued acceptance within government and scientific circles.

The ethnography of speaking is an approach to studying how language unfolds in social contexts. Hymes’s 1962 essay “The Ethnography of Speaking” was the first detailed program for an ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1962). In the article, Hymes called for research drawing ethnographic inquiry and linguistics together in order to use verbal behavior *in context* as a means for describing human behavior (Hymes 1962:45).

Anthropological applications of the ethnography of speaking came somewhat later from Bauman and Sherzer (1974; also 1989) and others. These writers suggest that the ethnographer of speaking must determine the “resources available to members of a speech community for the conduct of speaking” (Bauman and Sherzer 1974:7; cf. Gumperz:1972:219). From here, the differences in spoken behaviors that exist within small communities can be identified.<sup>20</sup>

The ethnography of speaking relies on examples of speech events set in the situations in which they occur.<sup>21</sup> To that end, I frequently left a tape recorder running in a hunting camp or while traveling in a truck and recorded all of the conversations between my companions over the course of an hour or two. Much of the material on those tapes is remarkable. In particular, ‘conversational narratives’ are common. In these speech events, speakers take extended conversational turns to talk about hunting and hunting-related activities like big game guide outfitting.

Conversational narratives are presented with marked creativity and variation, although some general characteristics can be identified. They are usually short in duration, lasting as long as one to two minutes or as little as thirty seconds. They are based on the experiences of the speaker and are not usually accounts of the experiences of others. Conversational narratives about hunting tend to be organized similarly by

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<sup>20</sup> While the ethnography of speaking suits my interest in the use of hunting talk in specific social events, it is not without its problems. Critics cite a lack of theoretical unity and a generally functionalist interest in explaining what speech acts and events do for individuals and groups as specific concerns (Duranti 1997:13; 290; Keating 2001:294). The ethnography of speaking encourages observers to see an association between one event and one type of spoken behavior, as if similar circumstances always produce the same kinds of talk. My work shows that there is some correlation between hunting talk and cultural identity but I am not suggesting that all Iskut people use hunting talk in the same way. Instead, it is apparent that Iskut people use hunting talk and narratives in accordance with the situations in which they find themselves. Iskut people use talk of animals and the hunt strategically.

different hunters. This common structure suggests that the events narrated in them have been shared before. This might imply that the narrated events are less relevant than simply engaging others in talk about hunting or history. This is not entirely true, however, as the narrated events include common backdrops for the discussion of individual experiences. They include points of reference for commenting on and managing social relationships within families and across family lines. By establishing connections between the participants in the stories, or between storyteller and audience, narrators articulate delicately, although often obliquely, the social networks at Iskut Village.

Speakers reference other stories or historical events in conversational narratives about hunting and guiding. Sometimes the narratives point to the past indirectly and, by doing so, imply connections between the past and present. Narratives in conversation are rarely set in myth-time. They frequently contain, however, myth-like charters for interacting with animals. They sometimes refer discretely to the power animals have to control the outcome of hunts, but the narrated events do not usually transcend ordinary occurrences in the lives of hunters. These conversational narratives are, in fact, commonplace expressions of the importance of hunting. That is why they are hard to see.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout my dissertation, I use the words narrative and story when referring to the accounts of hunting and history embedded in conversations or speeches. Iskut people are not always clear, however, about the word for narrative or story in the Tahltan language. When pressed, elder Martha James says that *hedōn desī* means ‘to tell a story.’

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<sup>21</sup> Speech events are “activities or aspects of activities that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech” (Hymes 1972:56).

During an interview, Jim Peters sketched out for me some of the different types of stories Iskut people tell. Jim identified *sa'e* stories as those accounts of animals that interacted and communicated with humans before Iskut people encountered white people. *sa'e* can be glossed as 'long time ago' and the label '*sa'e* story' is used by story tellers to identify stories that take place in the distant past.<sup>23</sup> Next, Jim identified historical narratives and offered examples of events in the recent past, just out of living memory. *Bahi* 'war' stories are historical narratives, said Jim, about raids against neighbors.<sup>24</sup> More recent events are retold as historical stories too. Accounts of working for Tommy Walker, the hunting guide who operated a business at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* 'Cold Fish Lake,' are historical stories (Chapter 5).<sup>25</sup> Finally, Jim explained that *hodi* means news and, in particular, bad news. Jim cited the example of telling that someone has died. Other people in Iskut confirmed that *hodi* was news of death. Upon further inquiry, I learned that *hodi* means 'it is said' or 'they say' and does not always connote bad news. It is possible to speak of *hodi ti'e* 'good news' (that which is said is good; *-ti'e* means 'good') although it is interesting that the word *hodi* must be marked for this meaning to be

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<sup>22</sup> My ideas about conversational narratives and what they include draw on Hymes's statement about the performance of folklore (Hymes 1981:81-82).

<sup>23</sup> Moore notes a genre of *sa'ä gudeji* 'long ago stories' stories among Kaska speakers living to the north of Iskut. (Moore 2001:41-42). Sheppard has called short references to myth-time stories "conversational retellings" following Hymes's idea that some story tellers assume responsibility for knowing the content of traditional stories but not for performances of them (Sheppard 1983b:90; cf. Hymes 1975, republished in Hymes 1981).

<sup>24</sup> Jim cites the story of a Tahltan man, *Nakdit* as an example of such an event. In this story, Nisga'a people raid a Tahltan camp but find it empty because a woman there heard the Nisga'as coming. *Nakdit* returns to the camp and upon finding blood believes that the Nisga'as have killed the woman. *Nakdit* seeks revenge and kills a Nisga'a man. The story concludes with reconciliation between *Nakdit* and the family of the Nisga'a man he killed.

<sup>25</sup> The division between myth-time and historical narratives is noted by other subarctic scholars including Valentine (1995:171) in her work on Severn Ojibwe discourse and Preston (2002:254-257) in his study of Cree narratives from northern Quebec.



conveyed. In any case, *hodi* refers to the reporting of recent events and this would include the sharing of news about hunts or driving trips around the area today.

Examples of Jim Peters's story types appear in conversational narratives. Passing references to *sa'e* stories are more common than complete retellings of them. But why are the stories abbreviated? Have people forgotten them? If the old stories have ceased to circulate, how are the rules about hunting passed on? Extended versions of these stories are sometimes told during formal interview sessions (see Epigraph). Teit's documentation of seventy-nine Tahltan stories in 1912 indicates that *sa'e* stories may have been relegated to interview settings long ago (eg. Teit 1919; 1921a; 1921b). The ethnography of speaking helps explain why such stories appear in a limited number of situations. It points to what stories about hunting sound like instead.

Historical accounts of moose hunting and big game guiding dominate my recordings. Like *hodi* 'news,' hunting and guiding stories tell a great deal about the history of Iskut Village, its families, and their origins. These stories provide instruction to young people about the proper treatment of food animals. They do not, however, have the cachet of myths in the village, bureaucratic and legal circles, or even anthropology.<sup>26</sup> They do not have a pedigree in the *Journal of American Folklore* as Teit's collection of Tahltan myth-time tales do (Teit 1919; 1921a; 1921b). The conversational narratives at Iskut sound like gossip or small talk (cf. Coupland 2003). But, by looking closely at them, my work diverges from the ethnoecology which usually ignores the way in which

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<sup>26</sup> Ridington's research is an exception to this in British Columbia. Ridington identifies the importance of hunting narratives for the Dunne-za Athapaskans (Beaver people; northeastern British Columbia). He remarks that stories like these are a form of technology that hunters carry with them to negotiate relations with environments (eg. Ridington 2006:102); also Ridington 1999). Ridington says that Dunne-za hunters label stories of this sort as 'wise stories' (Ridington 2006:97-104).

people talk *about* animals. I show how conversational narratives about hunting at Iskut *index* regional history and the changing place of animals in the local economy.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, the repeated presence of narratives about hunting and history in conversations around Iskut suggests that people tell them in order to get something done (cf. Schegloff 1997; Briggs 1993). This dissertation is largely about these narratives and what Iskut people do with them. Many of the stories I recorded at Iskut Village idealize Iskut history as significant and formative particularly in relation to the otherwise marginal place of Iskut people in Canadian society. The details of events like working with outfitter Tommy Walker in the 1950s and 1960s or of moving households from Telegraph Creek to *Luwechōn* Lake in the early 1960s are expressed orally in abbreviated form. They are shared with family members, friends, and visitors who understand enough of the history to fill in the missing details. They circulate easily, but not without variation or debate, within the village. And they indicate that relationships with animals and outsiders have changed over the years. As such, conversational narratives about personal and group history are customized by Iskut speakers. They are used to rectify hurtful comments committed to writing by outsiders who do not understand them or share Iskut

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<sup>27</sup> Peircian semiotics describes three types of connections between signs and referents (Peirce 1992:5). Icons depend on a likeness between sign and referent. Symbols are linked to their referents by convention. Indexes (indices) rely on a physical connection or the demonstration of contiguity between sign and referent. Talk of hunting guiding in Iskut is frequently indexical because it points to shared histories, myth-time relationships with animals, or challenging relationships with outsiders. For me, the excitement of these stories comes from their multivocalic nature. Sorting out the indexical relationship between story and referent reveals connections between Iskut experiences and local history. The focus on indices is consistent with the work of Brazilian scholars like Laura Graham (1995) and Suzanne Oakdale (2005). Graham notes that the interpretation of signs is tied to the life histories of Xavante individuals (Graham 1995:7). Oakdale does not dismiss the role of symbolic and fixed connections between signs and referents in Kayabi ritual but suggests that individuals create meanings and gain status as rituals are reshaped in new circumstances (Oakdale 2005:6).

interests. Sometimes, they identify variations in history that exist within the village. In all of these cases, the ethnography of speaking helps to contextualize similar and divergent accounts of the past and of hunting in northern British Columbia.

### **The Ethnography of Hunting Identities**

A central observation stemming from the ethnographic analysis of Iskut hunting talk is the tendency of speakers to cover, or obscure, their hunting heritage. This occurs when the stigma of hunting as an impoverished economy, or Iskut culture as an impoverished culture, enters into conversations (see above; also Furniss 1999). Goffman says that covering is an adaptive technique employed by stigmatized people when the objects or actions that create the stigma come into play. Covering prevents the stigma of hunting from “looming large” (Goffman 1963:102). The fact that Iskut people cover hunting talk suggests that they are uncomfortable talking about it in all situations. It also indicates that they make choices about what to say about their mode of production. These observations are hardly surprising. They are noteworthy, however, because the choices to cover or not result from the historical circumstances in which Iskut people learned that hunting was not always seen as a reputable way to live. This stigma develops during interactions with outsiders. It is evident in the books that outsiders have written about poor Indians (eg. Walker 1976; also Chapter 5). It is perpetuated by traditional use and TEK studies that encode native knowledge in non-native and scientific formats. It continues when outsiders ask why native people get ‘special treatment’ like tax breaks as wards of the Department of Indian Affairs. Native people, it is sometimes heard, should

give up their hunting economy, or relegate it to ‘tradition,’ and become more like other Canadians.<sup>28</sup>

At times, Iskut hunters cover their actions when talking with other native hunters. This may be necessary in order to set aside differences in family histories in public settings (Chapter 6). Covering also allows hunters to talk about their exploits without talking disrespectfully about their prey. It helps hunters not show off (Chapter 4). The fact that covering exists with the frequency that it does is another reminder that hunting talk is rarely explicit. The connections between hunting, history, and everyday life must be uncovered ethnographically and interpreted by close readings of texts and contexts.

Covering is balanced by talk and actions that sound like affiliation with a hunting past. Affiliation is important in political circumstances or during negotiations with resource companies. In these moments outsiders demand such talk. Knowledge of lands, animals, and resources – talking TEK – identify Iskut people as aboriginal. In turn, that talk validates Iskut rights to lands and resources in the minds of observers who do not know much else about Iskut history (Chapter 6).

Covering, affiliating, and stigma are all associated with identity maintenance. Goffman (1963) is the authority on connections between stigma and identity and I take my lead from him. For Goffman, personal identity is the product of a person’s unique biography. It is built on and asserted with the cues or “identity pegs” that others hold in their minds about an individual (Goffman 1963:56-57). Personal identity assumes that individuals are different from one another on the basis of individual experiences. A

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<sup>28</sup> The stigma of aboriginal hunting economies in northern Canada (and elsewhere) is central to Brody’s career retrospective, *The Other Side of Eden* (Brody 2000).

hunting identity is often projected in hunting narratives that display unique, but recognizable, hunting events.

Social identity is based on the perceived or actual attributes of an individual. It is similar to one's status or standing in the group (Goffman 1963:2). Observers recognize markers of social identity in others and interact with them on the basis of those markers. We frequently judge others before sorting out the discrepancies between perception and reality (Goffman 1963:41). Likewise, the hunting culture at Iskut is judged by outsiders before it is understood. The stigma of economic poverty at Iskut is rarely reconciled with the actuality cultural wealth and vitality, at least in the minds of non-Iskut people.

Personal and social identities contribute to ethnic identities (Smith 1981; 1986). For Smith, "an 'ethnic group' is a type of community with a specific sense of solidarity and honor, and a set of shared symbols and values" (Smith 1981:65). He elaborates by saying that members of ethnic communities share ideas about common origins, history and destiny. Members recognize distinctive characteristics and unique features of their group; indeed, says Smith, members feel solidarity because of these common links (Smith 1981:66). Iskut hunting talk creates solidarity particularly in a place where common historical origins are difficult to identify (Chapter 6).

Smith's observations are useful here because they reflect what bureaucrats and Iskut people themselves believe is central to claiming land in treaties or resource negotiations. To have a legitimate claim, a native group must demonstrate something like ethnic identity to the government, courts, and resource extraction companies. In my observations at Iskut, however, I saw deep ambivalence towards any idea of a unified

Iskut ethnic identity. For one thing, the origins of families living today at Iskut Village are widespread; an origin story for this group is hard to find.

As a result of the apparent conflict between a singular ethnic identity and the lived reality at Iskut, I have come to believe that hunting forms the basis of group identity and unity at Iskut most of the time. Hunting is a cultural system at Iskut. This is Geertz's phrase (eg. Geertz 1966). Geertz was concerned with understanding how ideas, behaviors, and symbols associated with common features of life (like religion, common sense, ideology, and art) provide meaning for a group of people (cf. Geertz 1973:14).<sup>29</sup> At Iskut, activities and talk around hunting contribute to a system of ideas and behaviors which bring meaning and identity to Iskut people. Hunting activities and talk transcend age, gender, and disparate family origins. The activities of everyday life at Iskut implicitly and explicitly revolve around hunting. Hunting provides people with points of connection, despite different individual experiences, which can be easily shared and understood regardless of background. And, hunting provides this more effectively than the assertion of identity based on a shared village location.

Moreover, Iskut cultural identities – those predicated on hunting practices and symbols – do not always map directly onto an ethnic identity in the terms that Smith lays out. Smith states, in fact, that a shared culture is only one part of ethnic community (Smith 1981:67). My departure from Smith is not so much terminological as it is empirical. My observations at Iskut show that the Iskut group sometimes looks like an ethnic group and at other times does not. Yet, I am hard pressed to say that the group

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<sup>29</sup> Geertz wrote four essays with titles using the phrase "... as a Cultural System." The essays discussed ideology (Geertz 1964), religion (Geertz 1966), common sense (Geertz 1975), and art (Geertz 1976).

ceases to exist at times when an ethnic identity is unclear. A shared focus exists here, but it is not the focus on a singular Iskut ethnicity that outsiders expect.

Iskut hunting talk can be, then, the basis for government-sponsored ecological research in aboriginal communities and hunting ethnography. Personal and social identities are revealed in either approach but with different results. My interest is largely ethnographic, which is to say, I document and position Iskut hunting identities within an Iskut culture dominated by concern for hunting. Moreover, sustained ethnographic research encourages me to set aside any explicit concern for a unique Iskut ethnic identity. It helps me resist the desire to scour stories for facts that demonstrate that native people know something about their environment. It encourages me instead to attend to the variety of family and personal stories heard at Iskut. The result is a picture of diverse Iskut experiences while hunting and working for wages despite the fact that this diversity is linked by shared references to the same business people and similar hunting exploits. In other words, the Iskut group – men, women, and children of all ages – is unified by an identifiable preoccupation with hunting. Cultural unity of this sort is different than an ethnic unity sought by treaty bureaucrats and negotiators. It is different than the symbols of aboriginality sought by members of the general public who want to embrace a native culture for nostalgic reasons or rally against one because of the perception that natives receive special treatment. Group definitions at Iskut are not, it turns out, based on obvious similarity with everyone else.

## **The Research Context**

I found several roles for myself during my dissertation research in Iskut Village and these allowed me greater access to some areas of life at Iskut than to others. I became associated with the elders, usually adults over the age of fifty-five years, and spent a great deal of time socializing in their circles and assisting many of them with daily activities like shoveling snow or chopping wood. This position was appreciated by the elders, I believe, and was acceptable to the band leadership. It was even encouraged by the health care staff at the Band-run clinic who understood the value of regular social activities for the oldest people in the village. It was a safe position for it allowed me to form meaningful relationships with people who, like Martha James, were not threatened socially by a young man who wanted to spend long periods of time traveling with them or visiting at their homes. For the most part, though, I worked closely with older men and recorded more of their stories than those of women. I did work with a few older women, but less intensively because it was impractical and inappropriate to camp with them. I experienced life in Iskut as a young man, to paraphrase Brody (2000:5), and my research both benefits and suffers from gender and age imbalances.

I worked closely with five or six elders. Most of these people were widows or widowers and, as it turned out, did not drive, were unable to drive, or did not own a vehicle. I spent much of my time driving with these people around the village and local countryside, talking about the places we were seeing, conducting interviews as we drove, taking pictures, and recording general conversations. My position as driver also allowed me to ask for fishing lessons in exchange for rides to the lake. I embraced the role of driver most of the time because it gave me opportunities to talk with people individually



and to learn about Iskut places. It was an expensive means of conducting research as the gas prices were high at Iskut.<sup>30</sup> The demands of driving around the area and to visit my family in Vancouver meant that I logged about 20,000 miles during the thirteen months of research. The maintenance of my truck included replacing three windshields and three off-road tires. I also learned how to change the oil and did so regularly. Other British Columbia anthropologists have commented on the value of 'research by vehicle' (Palmer 1994; Dinwoodie 2002:38) or how difficult it can be to find oneself in constant demand as driver (Brody 1988).

I spent less time with younger adults mainly because they had jobs and family lives that had little time for me. On my first day in the village, I learned that close associations with young women were problematic: I accompanied a woman from the Band Office on rounds around the village in order to introduce myself and inevitably my companion was asked if I was her new boyfriend. As my year in the village progressed, I got to know some adults better as my relationships with their parents grew. I did not conduct any formal research with children. I participated in the activities of several families, however, and I began to understand the dynamic that exists between children, their parents, and grandparents by joining extended camping trips.

I also accepted a role in the Iskut First Nation offices (The Band Office). I became a member of the 'Band Staff' and assisted with cultural projects and other tasks when an extra hand was needed. This position was natural in some ways, as I was already familiar with the Band Office, its staff, and the organization of the cultural research office from my time assisting with the Traditional Use Study and the subsequent genealogical

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<sup>30</sup> Gas was the equivalent of \$2.75-3.00 US/gallon in 2002. By August 2006, gas in Iskut was \$4.36

project. I enjoyed that work. It gave me an intimate understanding of the operations of the Band Office and allowed me to participate as note-taker and occasional researcher. Although these activities and events seem peripheral to documenting hunting practices, managing local lands and relationships with resource companies and government officials are central the involvement of some in an Iskut hunting tradition. The work in the Band Office also gave me a place to go when the older people with whom I worked were busy, sleeping, away from the village, or otherwise doing the things that people do. My position was marginal, as is that of most anthropologists, and people rarely interrupted their lives to seek me out. Instead, I tried to join in when activities were happening.

Through the course of my time in Iskut I conducted approximately thirty-five recording sessions totaling more than fifty hours of tape-recorded material. Some of these sessions were formal interviews designed to elicit animal and plant taxonomies. Others recordings captured unsolicited conversations at hunting camps or in my truck as I drove with different people. The data in both cases was different, but complementary. Unlike Sheppard (1983a:40-43) who was told to refrain from tape recording conversations during her Iskut fieldwork in 1978 and 1979, I felt no prohibition against recording people in interviews or general conversational settings. I did, like Sheppard, find it almost impossible to take notes about my observations and conversations as activities occurred. If nothing else, it felt rude to be constantly jotting ideas in a notebook. Instead, I spent many evenings and some mornings alone making notes about my experiences. I also kept one notebook specifically for examples of Tahltan and Iskut-English language use. Copies of my field notes are housed in the Iskut archives.

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US/gallon.

I use several specific conventions for referring to people and languages throughout the dissertation. I avoid using 'Tahltan' as an unmodified noun or as a non-specific adjective unless the context is clear. Thus, I comment on the 'Tahltan language,' the 'Iskut Tahltan speech community,' or, 'Tahltan language speakers.' Given the political difficulties associated with labeling groups of people as Tahltan, I avoid using the term as a generic marker in broad reference to Athapaskan peoples who claim origin at Telegraph Creek, British Columbia (unlike MacLachlan 1981).

I use the 'First Nation' only in political contexts or when a proper noun, such as 'Iskut,' requires it. The word Band is a legal term in Canada referring to a group of registered Indians (yet another legal term) under the Federal Indian Act. Some Iskut people, particularly those who work in the Band Office, use the word Band to refer to the collective group living at Iskut Village. I prefer the word 'native' or 'aboriginal' for referring to indigenous people in British Columbia and these are generally accepted terms of reference inside and outside of native communities.<sup>31</sup> I am also careful with the term 'elders.' At Iskut, elders are culturally knowledgeable people, usually over the age of fifty-five years. These people are fed first at feasts and are given specific recognition at public events. I distinguish these people from 'older adults,' men and women over the age of forty but too young to be treated as elders, and 'younger adults' who are approximately between the ages of twenty and forty years of age. All ages in the dissertation are adjusted to September 2002.

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<sup>31</sup> Unlike some places in Native North America, including in parts of British Columbia, I did not hear people at Iskut refer to themselves as Indians with any regularity.

Under an agreement with the Iskut First Nation Council, I use pseudonyms for personal names but have not changed the names of places or geographical features. The Council felt, as I do, that individual privacy should be respected by changing the names of people who participated in this study. As a marker of how times have changed politically since Sheppard obscured the village name in her dissertation (Sheppard 1983a), however, the Council determined that it was better to have Iskut identified and local places named in case my work was required to assist in the preparation of land or resource claims. As such, the places mentioned in the text are referred to by their English colloquial names and Tahltan language names wherever possible. At the request of the Council, I have not provided maps of the locations mentioned (beyond those commonly identified on topographic maps) nor do I describe how to find the spots.

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters which are framed by an Epigraph and a Forward at the beginning and an Epilogue at the end. The Epigraph is an example of a *sa'e* story I recorded during an interview. I refer to it periodically as an example of both an elicited narrative and a myth. The Forward introduces the tone of Iskut talk about hunting. The short narrative by John Edwards is characteristic of hunting talk. The situation in which John's told his story is also representative of the new contexts, a school classroom in that case, in which talk about hunting and the past is heard.

The seven chapters which form the body of the dissertation are organized into two parts. Part One presents the background required to understand the conversational narratives which illustrate in Part Two. The first three chapters present the historical and ethnographic position of Iskut Village. In them, I comment on the implications of that history for local hunting practices. Chapter 2 is historical. In it, I suggest that twentieth

century Iskut history is a period of ethnic identity formation which culminates in the consolidation of Iskut families at Iskut Village. The common histories required for this are based around several related movements of people between permanent village sites near places where opportunities to earn wages existed. I also include a sketch of life in Iskut Village as I experienced it in 2002 and 2003. In Chapter 3, I review the ethnographic literature on northern hunting. Then, I identify the activities central to the seasonal hunting round before 1960 and afterwards. A combination of symbolic identification and social analyses is most useful to my project because Iskut relationships with animals are spoken about in both of those terms.

Part Two focuses on examples of hunting talk. These chapters show that an Iskut ethnic identity is complicated by diverse personal identities and family histories. Chapter 4 describes the relationships between hunters and their prey. I present the rules for interacting with food animals and I investigate the way in which those animals are treated today. I also analyze the talk of hunters remembering past hunts to show that old ideas about animals are often close to the surface of hunting talk. In Chapter 5, I turn to the role of domesticated animals in Iskut life. I offer the transcript of one man's experiences working with horses for non-native outfitter Tommy Walker. In the stories, ostensibly about working as a hunting guide, Jim Peters comments on his treatment by outsiders as he participates in the northern wage economy. The stories also show how work animals, and the history of wage work more generally, are used as an allegory for cultural change. In Chapter 6, I turn to an example of Iskut people discussing their history directly. I present a speech by the elected chief and observe that Iskut people embrace their traditions when ethnic identities are at stake. Once again, Tommy Walker lurks in the

background. In Chapter 7, I conclude that hunting provides Iskut people with the most powerful way of expressing who they are. Finally, the Epilogue updates the political activities of Iskut people since I completed my fieldwork. It describes the blockade of mining trucks heading into the Iskut hunting areas in the fall of 2005. I wonder briefly how that event characterizes contemporary relations between Iskut hunters and mining businesses. In all of these chapters, my focus lies where Iskut interests do: on the stories and memories that Iskut people deploy strategically when interacting with each other and with non-native people.

## 2. ISKUT PEOPLE AND HISTORY IN THE PAST 100 YEARS

During the summer of 2000 I visited Iskut Village to make arrangements for my dissertation research. I also helped with genealogical documentation in the offices of the Iskut First Nation. As that work progressed, I noticed that the screen-saver on the Cultural Research Office computer read: “Susan and Mary are the proudest Bear Lakers there ever was.” Knowing something of the peripatetic history of the people now living at Iskut Village I did not find the scrolling statement strange. I noted, however, the overt acknowledgement of the connections of some Iskut families to Bear Lake, British Columbia, the location of Fort Connolly, an abandoned Hudson’s Bay Company post.<sup>32</sup> With the scrolling phrase, first cousins Susan Knox and Mary Folke asserted a heritage to an area where the academic literature about northern Athapaskans says that the Dakelh (Carrier) and Sekani languages are spoken. The phrase challenged the political and cultural connections the Iskut First Nation shares today with other Tahltan speakers at Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake, British Columbia. It also belied the energy with which the Iskut people strive to define themselves independently from their relatives at Telegraph Creek.

By choosing not to refer to themselves as Iskut people in the slogan, Mary and Susan reminded me that ‘Iskut’ is a recent label for this group. The Iskut name is probably Tlingit in origin. It is applied locally because the Iskut Village is located in the headwaters of the Iskut River. As an ethnic marker, Iskut does not have much ethnographic or historical significance either and yet the community and Iskut people individually refer proudly to themselves as the Iskut First Nation and Iskut people. In a

similar fashion, the village itself is something of an anomaly in the history of these people. Although some Iskut families have lived at the contemporary village site long into the past, the village in its *current conception and composition* was established only in 1962.<sup>33</sup>

The screen-saver phrase left me wondering who at Iskut claims an Iskut ethnicity. I also started to wonder if the idea of an Iskut ethnicity even existed in the past and, if so, how it manifested itself today. The screen-saver reminds me now that there is no single Iskut hunting tradition. Various hunting experiences and wage work opportunities inform individual, family, and village ideas about what it means to be an Iskut person. Sometimes, those identities are presented collectively. Iskut people describe themselves during some political negotiations, for example, in ways that make it clear that they are distinct from mainstream Canadians and from their Tahltan-speaking relatives and neighbors at Telegraph Creek. At other times, they embrace associations with neighbors, native and not. And in still other instances, family stories – including references to places like Bear Lake by Susan Knox (above) or Hyland Post by Sophia Stanton (Epigraph) – permeate conversations and create a number of smaller hunting and historical communities within Iskut itself. Hunting is simply a common thread.

The history I present in this chapter develops from the common elements of the Iskut past and present. I note, however, where discrepancies exist along family and individual lines. Three themes in the recent history of Iskut people and their village community near *Luwechōn* ‘Kluachon’ Lake stand out. First, participation in both

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<sup>32</sup> This is not Bear Lake, Northwest Territories. The Sahtúot’ine Athapaskans live at Bear Lake, NWT (eg. Rushforth and Chisholm 1991).



sustenance hunting and wage work dominates the recent history of Iskut people. Iskut ancestors moved in and out of a wage economy constantly, but sporadically, throughout the twentieth century. Sustenance hunting and fishing remained a significant mode of production in the lives of most Iskut people before 1962. After this date, wage work in construction and trophy hunting supplemented, but did not dominate, the bush economy.<sup>34</sup>

Second, Iskut families moved frequently in the past one hundred years. These movements included seasonal rounds from villages to camps and back. They involved families moving into and out of the area now asserted as Iskut's traditional territory. They also included the relocations of primary villages. This occurred in response to new wage opportunities and decreasing amounts of game. Not all families stayed together, however, and these relocations did not mean lasting commitments to particular places or specific wage-based employment. Participation in wage economics was often limited in duration or simply continued while Iskut workers lived in a series of places. Once

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<sup>33</sup> Prior to 1962 (and in some instances today) Iskut Village was referred to as Iskut 'Iskoot' Lake or *Luwechōn* 'Kluachon.' I use *Luwechōn* to refer to Iskut prior to 1962.

<sup>34</sup> The history of wage work at Iskut differs strikingly from some other Athapaskan groups in British Columbia. In Dakelh (Carrier) lands to the south of Iskut territory, Dakelh historians and anthropologists emphasize the total disruption of local economics and culture as a result of the fur trade and potlatch. In their work on acculturation among the Dakelh, Goldman (1941) and Steward (1960) describe how the potlatch came to central British Columbia from the Pacific coast in the early nineteenth century. The potlatch was adopted by the Dakelh because of the increased wealth available to some Dakelh individuals and families through the fur trade (also Tobey 1981). The potlatch became a primary means for the disposal of wealth after an individual's death (also Fiske and Patrick 2000). As a result of the increase in potlatching and fur trading, sustenance hunting became less important in the economic and social organization of the acculturated Dakelh (also Murphy and Steward 1956). Hudson notes, however, that there was a resurgence of bush economics and a reduction in potlatch economics once the fur trade declined. In Hudson's mind, acculturation to potlatching and wage work was never complete (Hudson 1983). Just as the fur trade of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was limited in size and scope on the Spatsizi Plateau, the potlatch never became an Iskut institution. The potlatch did find hold in Telegraph Creek, however, and Iskut people attended potlatches there.

families decided to settle permanently at Iskut, hunting formed the constant in people's otherwise disparate experiences.

Third, and as a consequence of frequent moves, the Iskut families lived together in a number of different combinations. The heterogeneous make-up of the village community today is a reflection of this. Iskut talk suggests that the varied composition of the village is a source of both internal strength and conflict. In some cases, family groups within the village find themselves vying for political standing and thus the formal responsibility for interacting with outsiders. In other cases, Iskut families act as a single community, confronting challenges derived from their association with neighboring aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups. The diverse composition of the village also manifests itself in various expressions of traditional ecological knowledge. Some families use different fish and animal names when they speak Tahltan. Ethnoecological research at Iskut is complicated by the fact that each family has experienced the local physical environment somewhat differently.

I offer here the background needed to understand and appreciate the historical references heard in Iskut hunting talk. This history gives some explanation for why hunting is a point of common connection in Iskut today. And, it shows why a dissertation on hunting is a useful way to understand the interconnections between native and non-native history in northern British Columbia.

### **The Physical Setting of Iskut Village**

Iskut Village is nestled in a narrow river valley filled with a series of lakes that make up the headwaters of the Iskut River (Figure 1). It is closest to lakes *Luwechōn*

‘Kluachon’ (big fish; ‘Iskoot’ Lake) and *Edōnetenaja* ‘Eddontenajon’ (boy under water), both of which are excellent spots for catching *t̥sabā’e* / *deghai* ‘rainbow trout’ with rods or through the ice.<sup>35</sup> The village sits in the afternoon shadow of *Tuhtseyghuda*, or sometimes *Tuhtsian*’ (Saxon 1997) ‘Loon Beak,’ which rises four thousand feet above the valley floor; out of it juts a rock formation that looks like the beak of a loon. To the east, gentle hills covered in poplar trees rise to elevations beyond which trees no longer grow because of cold winter temperatures and snow. These aesthetic qualities are appreciated by Iskut residents. They enjoy surveying the hills around the village for animals particularly in September, when the leaves of *k’is* ‘alder’ (*Alnus incana*) turn a brilliant yellow.

Iskut Village is located between the temperate and wet Coast Range and the extreme temperature variations of the interior cordillera. During my stay, winter temperatures at the village (elevation 3000’) ranged between 14<sup>o</sup>F and -31<sup>o</sup>F (-10<sup>o</sup>C and -35<sup>o</sup>C), with several feet of snow falling between October and April. The summertime weather patterns included hot sun, frequent rain, and temperatures between 50<sup>o</sup>F and 90<sup>o</sup>F (10<sup>o</sup>C and 32<sup>o</sup>C).<sup>36</sup> The region is marked by several major river systems and includes the headwaters of the Iskut, Stikine, Klappan, Skeena, and Nass Rivers. The five species of Pacific salmon found in the Stikine River can not reach the upper Stikine watershed near Iskut village due to obstructions on the Stikine and Iskut Rivers.<sup>37</sup>

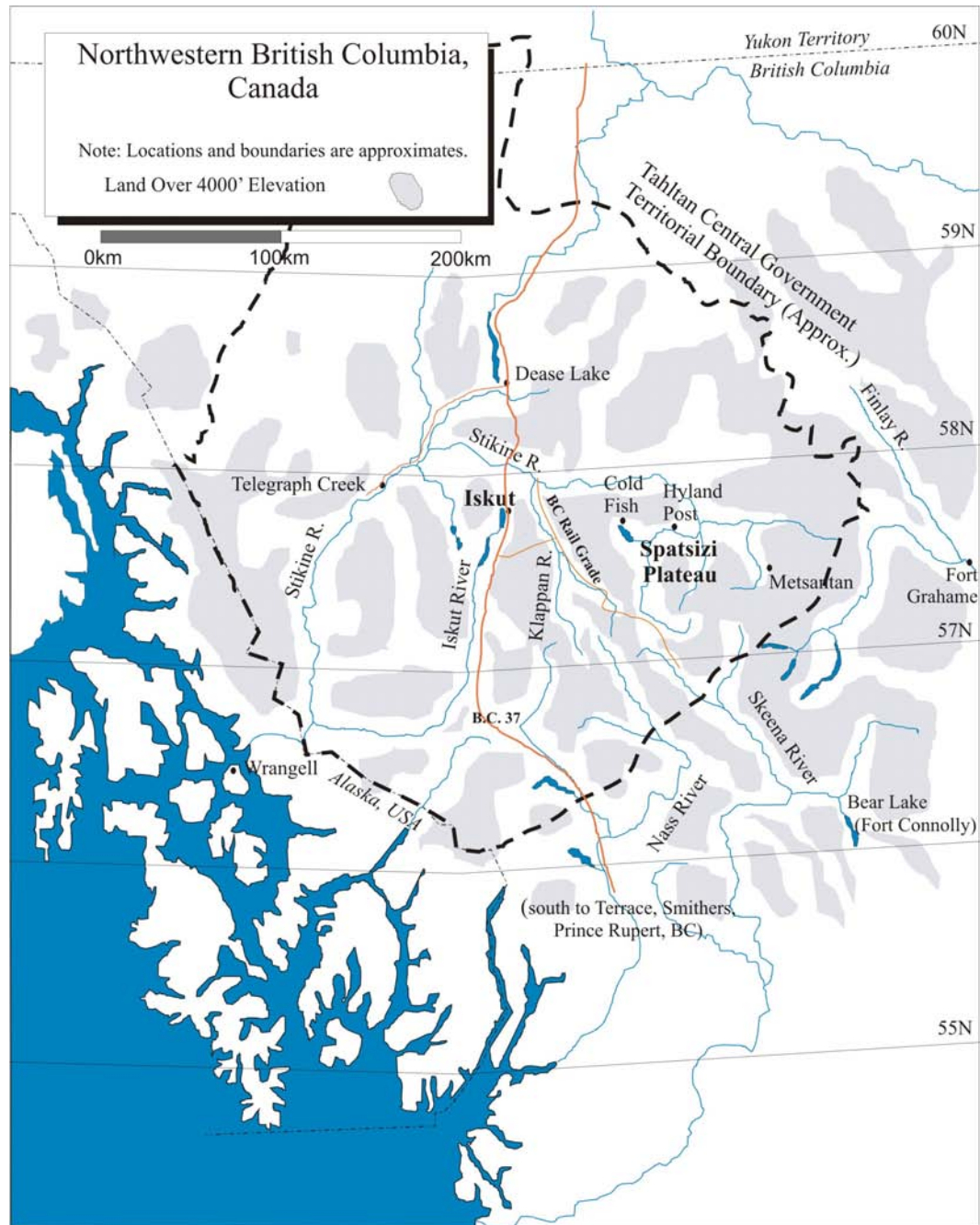
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<sup>35</sup> Depending on who you talk to, rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) is called *t̥sabā’e* or *deghai* in the Tahltan language. The difference likely stems from the place of origin of the family from which the speaker is descended.

<sup>36</sup> See Albright (1984) for a detailed description of the climate and physiography of the lands around Iskut and Telegraph Creek.

<sup>37</sup> The five species of Pacific salmon are *dek’ane* ‘sockeye salmon’ (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), *gēs* ‘king salmon’ (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), *tl’ūga* ‘coho’ (*O. kisutch*), pink/humpback (*O. gerbuscha*), and chum/dog (*O. keta*). I was not able to record Tahltan language names of the last two species.

**Figure 1: Northwestern British Columbia**



There are several physiographic regions and ecosystems accessible to Iskut people for food-gathering and recreation. These include areas with elevations below 4500', with heavily wooded river valleys and diverse vegetation suitable for harvesting medicines and some wild vegetables. The forests also provide the *gāza* 'jack pine' (lodge pole; *Pinus contorta*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), *chabā'e* 'poplar' (*Populus tremuloides*; also *P. trichocarpa* and *P. balsamifera*) and *k'is* 'mountain alder' (*Alnus tenuifolia*), all of which villagers use to heat their homes or smoke meat during all months of the year. *Kedā* 'moose' (*Alces alces*) are found in abundance in these places and they are the staple of the traditional Iskut diet.<sup>38</sup>

The food-gathering seasonal round takes Iskut people into large tracts of sub-alpine plateau lands located south and east of the village. Much of this land is called *tlebāne*, 'open grass flats' from which the historical group name *Tlebānot'ine* (*Tlepanoten* in Teit's research) is derived (cf. Teit 1912-1915a&b; 1956). Descendants of the *Tlebānot'ine* live in Iskut today and evoke that label occasionally as a way of differentiating themselves from *Tl'ogot'ine* families (Chapter 6). Starting in August, and running through much of the fall, Iskut people hunt in the valley of *Hok'az Tū'e* 'Klappan River' (filing river) and at the headwaters of the Spatsizi River. Moose remain plentiful here and are hunted by Iskut and non-Iskut people alike by truck along the never-completed British Columbia Railway right-of-way (BC Rail grade). These highland areas contain extensive grazing ranges for a large herd of *hodzih* 'caribou' (*Rangifer tarandus osborni*). Also common to this area, and sought by Iskut food gatherers, are *dediye*

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<sup>38</sup> For all species of plants, animals, fish, and birds, Tahltan language names come from my field research and from Turner (1997), Saxon (1997), and Iskut First Nation (2005); equivalent species names in English

‘groundhogs’ (marmots, *Marmota monax petrensis*, or, *Marmota caligata*), *tsili* ‘gophers’ (ground squirrels, *Spermophilus undulates plesius*), *dechuwe* ‘porcupines’ (*Erethizon dorsatum nigrescens*), *gah* ‘rabbit’ (snowshoe hare, *Lepus americanus macfarlani*) and *tsa* ‘beaver’ (*Castor canadensis sagittatus*). The mountain sides are home to a protected species of *debehe* ‘sheep’ (*Ovis dalli stonei*)<sup>39</sup> and *isbā* ‘mountain goat’ (*Oreamnos americanus columbiae*). The penchant of these white goats for rolling in the red mineral-rich sands of the Spatsizi Plateau has given the area its name: Spatsizi is a contraction of the Tahltan words *isbā* ‘goat’ and *detsīdzi* ‘red.’

The lakes in this area contain several species of fish. Iskut people comment, for example, that *Hok’ats Luwe Menh* ‘Cold Fish Lake’ contains a majority of the regional freshwater species, including *tsabā’e* ‘lake trout’ (*Salvelinus namaycush*), *deghati / to* ‘whitefish’ (*Prosopium williamsoni*, *P. cylindraceum*, or *Coregonus clupeaformis*), *hostlose* ‘ling cod’ (sometimes burbot, *Lota lota*), *tsabā’e / deghai* ‘rainbow trout’ (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and *tāshde* ‘arctic grayling’ (*Thymallus arcticus*). *Luwechōn* ‘Kluachon’ (sometimes ‘Iskoot’ Lake) is located a few hundred meters from Iskut Village. It is full of *tsabā’e / deghai* ‘rainbow trout’ and is used reliably throughout the year by rod and ice fishers. In the recent past, ice fishing here and elsewhere was conducted with nets under the ice, or with snares dropped through the ice on cords. Notably, fishing areas exploited by Tahltan-speaking peoples sit on the divide between the Arctic and Pacific oceans. This gives people at Iskut some familiarity with fish found

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and Latin are from Wooding (1997) and Albright (1984). See Appendix 3 for an extensive list of English and Tahltan fish and animal names.

<sup>39</sup> The Latin name, *stonei*, comes from the naturalist and explorer Andrew Jackson Stone, who collected specimens for the American Museum of Natural History in the 1890s while hunting between Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake (Stone 1896-97).

in the two watersheds and leads to an interesting mix of fish names; whitefish, for some at Iskut is called by its Telegraph Creek (coastal) name, *deghati*, while for others it is referred to by the interior form, *to*.<sup>40</sup>

### **A Sketch of the Iskut Reserve in 2002**

Iskut Village is located on British Columbia Highway 37, ‘the Stewart-Cassiar Highway,’ approximately 210 miles south of Watson Lake, a town on the Alaska Highway in the Canadian Yukon Territory. This road past Iskut was completed in 1976, north from Kitwanga, a Gitksan village located between Terrace and Smithers in north-central British Columbia. Highway 37 is a popular route for tourists and truckers wishing to avoid the Alaska Highway in their trips between the continental United States and Alaska.

Iskut Village is laid out on a suburban model with two main areas of homes built around a series cul-de-sacs and an arterial road. There are roughly eighty houses most of which were built in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some older log buildings are also used as houses or as warehouses (sheds) for various types of equipment related to cutting wood, hunting, snowshoeing, or tobogganing. The Band Office, school, store, and outdoor hockey rink are all located in the center of the village. The Iskut Clinic, a nursing station with a staff of native and non-native caregivers is located near the Catholic Church and rectory on the south side of *Setū* ‘Zetu’ (mountain water) Creek.

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<sup>40</sup> The fact that different families know the fish names differently highlights a problem with TEK studies that seek to reify knowledge based on village or ethnic names. Kari (2002) suggests that Athapaskan fish terms can help separate speakers of Athapaskan languages into ‘linguistic provinces’ throughout Subarctic North America; in many cases these provinces are related to the position of groups within the Arctic or Pacific watersheds.

This small brook splits the village into two, separating most homes on the north side from the former camping sites, the first Band Office, and now the health clinic.

The village population is about 350 people, perhaps twenty of whom are outsiders teaching in the school or working in the clinic. All homes and services are within walking distance of one another although most people drive from place to place. Extended families and adult siblings tend to live in houses close to one another, usually on the same street or cul-de-sac. This preference for living near siblings is an old pattern and possibly derives from early times when the primary measure of affiliation was the matrilineal family. Hawkes (1966) noticed a similar residence pattern appeared in the village after new houses were built there in the 1960s.

The dirt roads linking different parts of the village are heavily traveled by pick-ups, four wheel all terrain vehicles (ATVs; known locally as 'bikes'), snowmobiles, graders, and other work vehicles; all are encrusted with mud and many have broken windshields which hint at the amount of loose gravel found in most places people travel. Off of the main village roads, trails snake through the trees behind houses and provide access to back yards by foot, bike or snowmobile. Many Iskut yards are meticulously tidy and most have stacked wood blocks cut and piled high. Some yards are cluttered with children's bicycles and toys or an old car.

There are small campsites behind many houses. These camps replicate the bush camps I saw away from the village. They include picnic tables, warehouses, large fire pits suitable for cooking meat, and in many cases, airy plank structures for smoking fish and meat. The domestic camps illustrate the need for a place within each village residence to work on hides, cut and cure meat or fish, and to store the equipment needed



for extended camping trips. Many families also keep *tl̄* ‘dogs’ that live outside in the yards all year. Dogs have been important work animals for hunting families in the recent past, and they continue to have a role as companions and, at times, are objects of scorn (Chapter 5). Dog houses are located in the trees at the edges of yards and these small structures, partially dug into the ground, are reminiscent of the dog houses found around the edges of all the old village locations (also Albright 1984:74-75). Both ‘village camps’ and dogs are reminders of commitments to hunting and are elements the hunting world replicated within the domestic village space. Some wilder animal life is visible in the village too. *Tsesk’iye* ‘crow’ are common throughout the year; their gurgling and cawing is audible everywhere. Occasionally *sas* ‘bear’ or *nusihe* ‘fox’ are seen in the village, but large grazing animals like *kedā* ‘moose’ are not seen on village roadways.

Iskut people are influenced culturally by the coastal Tlingits through their relatives at Telegraph Creek and by Sekani-speakers (Athapaskans) from further east (Dawson 1888; Emmons 1911; Teit 1917; Jenness 1937). The use of black and red button blankets along with assertions of clan affiliations remain the most obvious connections Iskut people have with coastal peoples and a pan-native identity. Iskut people affiliate with either the *Tsesk’iye* ‘Crow’ or *Chi’yōne* ‘Wolf’ clan, and trace their clan membership through their mother’s family. These matrilineal ties are particularly important at the time of funerals when specific roles and responsibilities are assigned on the basis of membership in clans. People are aware of clan groups when they date and marriage preferences continue to show exogamous patterns. In other village activities, however, the salience of clan membership fades. Seating at community dinners is, for example, by choice. Other preferences including friendships may apply.

Some Iskut people claim ancestry with Gitksan people to the southeast (Sheppard 1983a:335; Sterritt *et al* 1998). I was told on several occasions that the founding matriarchs of the Iskut people, or at least of some families, came from the south, around Moricetown, British Columbia. Iskut ancestors certainly traded and feuded with Nisga'a groups to the southwest. The Ts'ets'aut, a poorly documented group of Athapaskan speakers on the northern British Columbia coast, are thought to have intermarried with Tahltan speakers who reside now at Iskut in the late nineteenth century (Boas 1895; Sterritt *et al* 1998). Interior Athapaskan traditions of hide tanning, sewing, and bead work are common in Iskut Village today. In some cases, coastal and interior expressive traditions are blended. At a dance presentation in July, 2003, for example, the dance troupe wore coastal style red and black button blankets decorated with beaded moose hide slippers and bags. These regional influences are not surprising except for the large number of coastal and interior cultures they represent. At Iskut Village, this heterogeneity is reflected in language use, including the possibility of a unique dialect of Tahltan (Nater 1989; Carter 1991) and the choice of words from more than one native language for some fauna, like fish. It also appears in the union of interior and coastal patterns of social organization, food-gathering endeavors and artistic styles.

### **From the Remembered Past to the Present**

Recent Iskut history is replete with movements of families across a wide area of north-central British Columbia. Families moved seasonally from villages to hunting camps and back. This pattern continues today but with minor changes stemming from commitments to school and work in Iskut. The locations of the villages and the seasonal

camps were also frequently moved, oftentimes by Iskut people seeking closer ties with new economic opportunities like mining, big game guiding, or railway and highway construction. Sometimes the moves were encouraged by government officials who believed that Iskut people would be better off living in regional centers near services like stores and schools.

The shifting residence patterns of the past one hundred years contain reference points with which Iskut people index their pride in a hunting heritage. The movements anchor Iskut traditions to a series of homes and a network of trails and, indeed, to hunting itself. They emphasize changes in the ways in which sustenance hunting was conducted; long walking trips, for example, have given way to shorter, truck-based hunting. They exemplify of the challenges Iskut people experienced as subsistence hunters living in broader aboriginal and Canadian contexts. They create the impressions Iskut people have of newcomers who provided jobs. And, the encounters between Iskut and non-Iskut people instruct others about the character of Iskut people, sometimes for the better and often for the worse.

Participation in sustenance hunting and extensive wage-based hunting and guiding is reflected in the moves several families made between three permanent habitation locations. These three places are: 1) Caribou Hide / *Me'etsendāne* 'Metsantan,' east of the current village on the Spatsizi Plateau; 2) the 'Commonage' at Telegraph Creek; and, 3) the current village site at Iskut, near *Luwechōn* 'Kluachon' Lake. While *Me'etsendāne* and the Commonage are no longer inhabited, buildings remain at both places.

Life at these places, and the subsequent moves from them, parallels a decreasing reliance on sustenance food-gathering. The moves culminate in the consolidation of

families who consider themselves Iskut people into a single and permanent village. This history is further evidence that Iskut people have always adapted to changing circumstances and embraced new opportunities when they were presented. It is suggestive of the flexibility of sustenance practices and the ease with which Iskut people incorporated new wage-earning opportunities and traditional belief and economic systems. Importantly, every family group experienced these moves differently. Yet travel throughout a wide expanse of northern British Columbia is part of the collective history that Iskut people draw on when assertions of ethnic identity are required. I turn to the history of each of the three habitation areas.

*Caribou Hide and Me'etsendāne 'Metsantan' (1920s, 1930s, and 1940s)*

The oldest Iskut residents, and the ancestors of many Iskut people, lived with their extended families at the village of *Me'etsendāne* between 1922 and 1948. In the years immediately before that, the families lived nearby at the village of Caribou Hide.<sup>41</sup> *Me'etsendāne* and Caribou Hide are located fifteen miles apart. Both places are a walk of several days east of present-day Iskut Village. A group of native people, probably Sekani-speakers, was living at Fort Connolly, the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Bear Lake, when it was closed in the 1890s. After that, the 'Bear Lake Indians' moved north into the Spatsizi Plateau (also Walker 1976:132). According to Sheppard, the Bear Lakers met two Tahltan bands, the *T'lotona* and the *Tlepanoten*, in the Spatsizi and Klappan River regions. The three groups amalgamated at Caribou Hide (Sheppard

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<sup>41</sup> Some Iskut elders refer to *Me'etsendāne* as New Caribou Hide.

1983a:335; also Friesen 1985:30-32; cf. Jenness 1937:13-15).<sup>42</sup> MacLachlan elaborates slightly, saying that some of the Bear Lake people moved to Fort Grahame and Fort Ware on the Finlay River before moving to Caribou Hide. Thus, the label 'Fort Grahame Nomads' is sometimes applied to Iskut residents too. The move to Caribou Hide, MacLachlan says, was encouraged by plans for a mine in the area (MacLachlan 1956:36).<sup>43</sup>

Caribou Hide served as a base for sustenance hunting and commercial trapping and hunting throughout the Spatsizi Plateau. The village was located centrally for trading along a well-worn trail which stretched between Hudson's Bay posts at Telegraph Creek on the navigable lower Stikine River and forts Ware and Grahame along the Finlay River. The distance between Telegraph Creek and *Me'etsendāne* was about one hundred and fifty miles. Loaded-down, it might have taken more than a week to travel between the two places on foot. In 1922, a fever caused by influenza struck the groups living at Caribou Hide. As a result of the sicknesses, the Caribou Hide people moved to *Me'etsendāne* Lake to the southeast. By 1930, eight families lived at this location (Canada, Department of Indian Affairs 1930). The first significant contacts between *Me'etsendāne* villagers and non-natives resulted from people traveling outwards from *Me'etsendāne* to fur trade posts where mercantile, religious, and governmental agents resided (Sheppard 1983a:339-340). This pattern changed quickly and Catholic

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<sup>42</sup> Sheppard calls these groups the Klappan Band and the Grassy Meadow Band (Sheppard 1983a:335). Friesen cites Iskut elders of 1980-1981 for his information about Iskut history. Iskut people today sometimes reference the two groups that were in the area. They say that the Klappan River group is the *Tlebānot'ine* (*Tlepanoten*) and that the Spatsizi group is the *Tl'ogot'ine* (*T'lotona*); see Chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> MacLachlan says the mining venture was aborted (MacLachlan 1956:36). This is, however, one example of Iskut ancestors moving for potential wage work.

missionaries began regular visits to *Me'etsendāne* via dogsled or float plane in 1933. In 1938, the priests built a church at *Me'etsendāne* (Carpentier 1938-1946).

Life at Caribou Hide and *Me'etsendāne* revolved around trapping and sustenance hunting and, occasionally, guiding foreign hunters in search of trophy game. Sustenance was achieved by the hunting of *kedā* 'moose,' *hodzih* 'caribou,' and smaller game such as *didiye* 'groundhogs' (marmots).<sup>44</sup> Trapping supplemented hunting activities. Monies earned in that industry paid for manufactured goods and dried, non-perishable foods (Sheppard 1983a:345). In interviews today, elders share vivid memories of childhood at *Me'etsendāne* and they talk nostalgically of their time living there. They describe family trapping expeditions away from the village and women remember particularly that they often remained at the village to fend for themselves and their children while men traveled to local forts to trade furs. Talk of traveling long distances is constant in the stories of this time period. Likewise, many stories include memories of small cash incomes, good food, and dress clothes. This talk refutes the notions of hardships and starvation attributed to Iskut families at *Me'etsendāne* by Walker upon his arrival in the area in 1948 (Walker 1976; Henderson 2006). Some elders admit that finding food within easy walking distance of *Me'etsendāne* became more difficult. They add that their survival was never in question.

*Me'etsendāne* was abandoned in 1948. Illnesses, declining numbers of animals, and the lure of services at Telegraph Creek may have all contributed to the departure of the *Me'etsendāne* families from the Spatsizi Plateau. Flu struck the Iskut people in 1948, or early in 1949, and was likely a cause of the death of one person (Walker to Indian

Superintendent Sampson, March 15, 1949; Walker 1976:160). At first, the *Me'etsendāne* families moved to semi-permanent camps along the trail between *Me'etsendāne* and Telegraph Creek.<sup>45</sup> In the winter of 1948-49, many families wintered at the confluence of the Ross and Stikine Rivers (Indian Superintendent Sampson to Walker, April 9, 1949).<sup>46</sup> Two Iskut families arrived at Walker's Cold Fish Lake camp on October 1, 1950 and stayed there for the winter. Some families moved all the way to Telegraph Creek in 1948 and other *Me'etsendāne* families followed by 1951 (Walker 1976:185).

The Indian Agent and the priests at Telegraph Creek pressured Iskut families to move permanently to Telegraph Creek (Walker to Federal Indian Commissioner, October 10, 1950).<sup>47</sup> Stores, services, and schools were all centralized in Telegraph Creek. Other Iskut ancestors were already living closer to Telegraph Creek at points on the main trail. A mission and school had been established at *Luwechōn* 'Kluachon' Lake in 1936 and some Iskut families were spending the spring and summer there (Carpentier 1938-1946). A village was established at Buckley Lake, on the trail between Telegraph Creek and *Luwechōn*, and the priests from Telegraph Creek had begun to serve that place too. By 1952, a new permanent village site was created for the former *Me'etsendāne* families by the federal Department of Indian Affairs. It was located opposite the town of Telegraph Creek on the south side of the Stikine River (see 'Iskut Commonage,' below). Thus, after 1948, families that now call Iskut Village home were scattered at camps between

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<sup>44</sup> The comments here are inferences made from the limited number of documentary sources about *Me'etsendāne* (such as Walker 1976, Sheppard 1983a, MacLachlan 1981, and Jenness 1937).

<sup>45</sup> Some families moved eastward to Forts Ware and Grahame in the Finlay River Valley and joined Sekani groups.

<sup>46</sup> The Walker letters in this paragraph and the next are from BC Archives MS-2784, Box 18, File 2 (Walker Papers).

<sup>47</sup> See Sheppard 1983a:14-15 for more information; also Walker Papers, Alec Jack Correspondence (BC Archives MS-2784, Box 18, File 9).

Telegraph Creek and *Me'etsendāne*. This contributes to the variations in Iskut history heard in the village today.

Simply discussing these movements in Iskut can elicit bad feelings. It causes tensions between families who remember the history differently. Many of the problems stem from the book that Tommy Walker wrote about his life and business on the Spatsizi Plateau.<sup>48</sup> Walker generated considerable resentment when he suggested that the *Me'etsendāne* families were struggling to survive when he arrived in the Spatsizi region in 1948 (Walker 1976). Without the food and employment in the guiding industry Walker provided, he implies, the *Me'etsendāne* families would have starved. Iskut people bristle strongly at any suggestion that Walker was responsible for their survival. To them, it was Walker who needed their help to keep his business running. The ire of the Iskut people was heightened further when it became apparent that Walker helped facilitate the relocation to Telegraph Creek. One elder told me that Walker discouraged them from hunting and fishing in the Spatsizi because he wanted to keep the game for himself (Roger Rivers, personal communication, July 24, 2004; also Henderson 2006).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Walker owned Tweedsmuir Lodge in the Bella Coola Valley and ran a guiding business there. He moved his business from Bella Coola, British Columbia to the Spatsizi Plateau in 1948. He writes that the move was spurred by “tales about the Cassiar” which prompted an “irresistible longing” to go north (Walker 1976: 9).

<sup>49</sup> In a review of Henderson’s book, Pynn quotes Louis Louie as saying that the starvation idea was ridiculous: “If there was no game [says Louie], [Walker] would not have been an outfitter there. He’s contradicting himself” (Pynn 2006).



*Iskut Commonage at Telegraph Creek 'Yukon Side' (1950s)*

Telegraph Creek, British Columbia was quite isolated from the rest of Canada, even in the 1950s.<sup>50</sup> Visitors to the area arrived via streamer from Wrangell, Alaska. The only alternative entry routes were overland trails or a barge along the Dease River south from the Alaska Highway to the settlement at the head of Dease Lake. A rough wagon and truck road of sixty miles joined Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake. A road linking Dease Lake with *Luwechōn Menh* 'Kluachon Lake' and Iskut was a decade away. Despite the isolation from southern Canada, native life in northern British Columbia was changing as a result of increased contact with non-natives. Wage opportunities and church-run schooling were the most obvious imports. Native people benefited from political changes in Canada, too. The Canadian Indian Act was amended in 1951 to permit ceremonial activities, including the potlatch, which had been banned since the 1870s.

Many, but not all, of the older Iskut adults today were born at Telegraph Creek on lands set aside for them by the federal Department of Indian Affairs. Known as the Iskut Commonage, these lands were never an official reserve. The Commonage was located on the south side of the lower Stikine River, across from the non-native and Tahltan villages at Telegraph Creek. The Commonage has several different names in Iskut talk and in the literature. Some call the place the Bear Lake Commonage and others prefer the Iskut Commonage in deference to the assumed origins of its inhabitants. It is also called

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<sup>50</sup> Telegraph Creek is named for its prominent location along a proposed telegraph line to from San Francisco to Siberia. Initial plans for the line date to the 1860s, but that line never got off of the ground.

‘Yukon Side’ by Iskut families and Tahltans at Telegraph Creek alike. This name contrasts directly with ‘Kaska Side,’ the name for the Tahltan community on the north side of the river (also MacLachlan 1956).<sup>51</sup> The people who lived there also acquired various appellations. In his 1956 Telegraph Creek journal, MacLachlan refers to the Commonage residents inconsistently, using both ‘Bear Lakers’ and ‘Fort Grahame Nomads’ (MacLachlan 1956). Walker does the same in his extensive correspondence. These various labels identify Iskut people as having origins elsewhere.

Hunting remained a significant sustenance activity during the 1950s. The Commonage was a decent base for hunting trips eastward and, because of the old trail networks, hunting continued in familiar, family hunting and trapping areas. Notable hunting camps included Buckley Lake (a day’s walk to the east), *Luwechōn* (three to four days walk to the east), and even at *Hok’ats Luwe* on the Spatsizi Plateau (a walk of a week to the east). Some Commonage families wintered in tents elsewhere during this time. They spent the winter of 1952-53 at *Luwechōn* and the following winter at Buckley Lake. Several families were at Telegraph Creek during the winters of 1954-55 and 1955-56 (MacLachlan 1956:18) and others lived throughout the 1950s at *Luwechōn*, *Hok’ats Luwe Menh* ‘Cold Fish Lake’ or Hyland Post on the Spatsizi Plateau (MacLachlan 1956:44-45). The elders indicate that people preferred the familiarity of inland camps and hunting during the winter to the Stikine River Valley. In turn, they appreciated the

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There was renewed interest in telegraph lines through Telegraph Creek in the late nineteenth century (see Sheppard 1983a; Neering 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Strictly speaking, Kaska people live north of the Stikine River. Their territory is located mostly in the Yukon Territory, north and north-east of Tahltan lands. The Yukon Territory itself is a few hundred miles north of the Stikine River. The precise origin of these labels is unclear although they imply cultural and historical associations with Kaska people who lived north of Telegraph Creek Tahltan hunting territories. MacLachlan uses the word ‘neighborhood’ to refer to these living areas.

riverine settlement at the Commonage during the June and July salmon fishing season. Iskut elders also describe the importance of sharing moose meat brought into the ‘Commonage’ because there were no freezers in which the meat could be preserved for long periods of time.

A home on the Stikine River, below the natural blockages of the Stikine Canyon, provided Iskut families with direct access to the massive Stikine salmon runs for the first time.<sup>52</sup> Before this, Iskut people acquired salmon through trade with Tahltan relatives who lived along the Stikine and Tahltan Rivers. Iskut families embraced this new sustenance opportunity, building smokehouses and establishing net-booming stations along ‘their’ side of the river. While only a handful of the houses remain today from the 1950s, camping sites and one smokehouse are standing at the site. Several Iskut families who do not have marriage ties to the Telegraph Creek Tahltans, and thus to their salmon fishing sites, continue to camp at the Commonage each July and catch their own supply of sockeye salmon. For Iskut families, the fact that they have their own land base on the salmon-bearing part of the Stikine River is a continuing source of pride.

Tommy Walker’s guide outfitting business at *Hok’ats’ Luwe Menh* began to meet with success at this time (also Chapter 5). Iskut men like Jim Peters and Scotty Edwards were regular guides and employees of Walker’s, returning each summer to help him show American hunters the best places to shoot big-horned sheep. Others, like Alec Jack, stayed through the winter to watch the horses. Working for Walker provided Iskut men and women with extended and extensive interactions with business people and wealthy

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<sup>52</sup> I have not explored the question of increased competition for salmon caused by an influx of people during this era. At least two conclusions are possible, however. The increased fishing might have contributed to

tourists who could afford the long trip to the hunting grounds. The stories of this era endure today, often as commentaries on the good and the bad of life in the past (Chapter 5). Peter Rivers recalls with fondness guiding a military fighter pilot. Other recollections include examples of the wastefulness of non-native hunters who wanted to shoot several animals at once. Still other accounts demonstrate both a disdain for Walker's meddling in land management and an appreciation for the work that his outfit provided.

While Iskut people talk about living at the Commonage, some do not like to go back there. They say going to the place brings up bad memories of a time when they were dislocated from familiar lands. During the course of my fieldwork, however, I was involved in a 'reconnaissance' trip to the Commonage intended to document some of the history of that place. On her first trip back to the place in several years, Martha James acted as guide and described on video which families lived in which houses and some of the typical activities that occurred there. The very idea of a reconnaissance trip, and a visit to see how the place has changed since Iskut families lived there, marks the Commonage as a place that Iskut people hold in memories but do not use frequently. This introspective trip was part of the general interest of the current Iskut First Nation leadership in recording Iskut history for use in future treaty talks or negotiations with resource companies.

#### *Luwechōn (pre-1960s) and Iskut Village (1960s – Today)*

Some Iskut families lived at the Iskut site before 1962 when the Commonage families moved there. Members of these families complain today that 'official' or Band

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the poor feelings that developed between Iskut families and Tahltans at Telegraph Creek. Or, the large run

Office (and Department of Indian Affairs) history of the village often ignores or denies this earlier habitation era. During the 1930s, three extended families camped regularly at the place. Jim Peters, remembering those days, described hauling water from *Setū* to his family's tent near the present-day location of the Iskut medical clinic. The Catholic missionaries acknowledged the regular encampment and established a school and church at *Luwechōn* in the 1930s. During the 1940s and 1950s, eleven families and perhaps one hundred people lived at *Luwechōn* while other Iskut families were building homes near Telegraph Creek (personal communication, Father J.M. Mouchet July 25, 2004; also John Edwards, August 14, 2004).<sup>53</sup> These families claim *Luwechōn* as home before the regional consolidation after 1962. They never stopped living there and assert as much.

The Commonage families moved to Iskut in 1962 because of tensions between Iskut families and Tahltans at Telegraph Creek (Sheppard 1983a:344; also Walker Papers, June 22, 1964<sup>54</sup>). People said as much to me although never in precise terms. Iskut people say that they never truly felt welcome at Telegraph Creek because they were newcomers and because they were separated from other Tahltan speakers by the Stikine River. The move to Iskut is described as a chance to re-establish independence in a more familiar place. Fur prices were increasing in the early 1960s and some wanted to live closer to Iskut traplines. The jobs and services that were promised by a move to Telegraph Creek never materialized in a way that satisfied the Iskut people. With the building of the highway, those benefits lay in a different location at the headwaters of the Iskut River. In a letter to the Ministers of Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs in 1964,

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of salmon may have been able to support the influx of people easily.

<sup>53</sup> I also interviewed Father Mouchet in Whitehorse, Yukon, on November 23 and 24, 2006. He confirmed these details about life at *Luwechōn* during conversations in Whitehorse.

the Iskut Council sought official status as an Indian Band. The councilors rationalized the move from Telegraph Creek this way:

We moved to the Iskut Lake village to bring better things for our children, to give them a chance in life ... We didn't move to be enemies, we moved so we would have a healthier and better life (Walker Papers, Mss. 2784, Box 18, File 3, June 22, 1964).

The letter emphasizes the benefits of the move while hinting at the tensions that would be left behind.

Iskut men and women continued to work for outfitting operations in the 1960s. They worked for Steele Hyland at Kinaskan Lake and Walker at Cold Fish Lake. By the 1970s, that generation of outfitters retired and the Collingwood Brothers of Smithers, British Columbia, became the big players on the Spatsizi. In the 1980s, the Iskut First Nation established its own outfitting operation which continues to attract hunters today. Road construction also continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s providing work and the fodder for more anecdotal accounts of clearing and survey work. An attempt to build a railroad to Dease Lake by BC Rail failed and, yet, triggered recent changes in hunting practices. The unfinished railway bed remains a primary access road for pick-up trucks taking families to weekend and summertime hunting areas and camps. The completion of the Stewart-Cassiar Highway from central British Columbia to the Alaska Highway in the Yukon in the 1970s finally brought regular freight shipments to the village. It now brings tourists into the area.

The Catholic Church has played a significant role in the lives of Iskut people since least the 1930s when regular missionary work began at *Me'etsendāne* and *Luwechōn*.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> MS-2784, Box 18, File 3.

<sup>55</sup> The Anglican Church has had a presence in Telegraph Creek since the late nineteenth century.

During my time in Iskut, Father Bouillard lived in the village and maintained a parish which included Iskut, Telegraph Creek, and Dease Lake. Father Bouillard became Iskut's priest in 1966 and, by most accounts, was well liked. Many people remember Father Bouillard joining hunting trips with village men. Although Sunday services are sparsely attended today, wedding and funeral services fill the small Iskut church to over-flowing. Crowds of people stand outside of the church waiting to greet newly married couples or to accompany a casket to the cemetery. Father Bouillard had a stroke in 2004 and Iskut is now without a full-time priest.<sup>56</sup>

Dease Lake has been a regional center for commerce back into the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> It exists today as a bureaucratic and sometimes economic centre for most of northwestern British Columbia. Iskut people have relatives in Dease Lake. They use the government agent's offices to do their banking or renew their driver's licenses. And Dease Lake has a sizable grocery store (by northern standards) and a small liquor store. Still, Dease Lake is outside of historical Iskut travel and hunting routes and today it holds relatively little attraction. Iskut shoppers visit Terrace or Prince George, British Columbia, a couple of times a year and sometimes more. These towns are seven and ten hours drive away respectively. They are university and college towns, each with a Wal-mart, Home Depot, and shopping centers. Iskut people have relatives in these places too. Martha James jokes that the Skeena Mall in Terrace is a 'Little Iskut' because she

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Father Mouchet, who served *Luwechōn* during the 1950s, now drives on occasion to Iskut from Whitehorse, Yukon. The trip takes seven hours. Father Mouchet turns eighty-nine years old in 2006.

<sup>57</sup> The Dease Lake Hudson Bay Post served the area between 1898 and 1901. In 1837 and 1838, Robert Campbell tried unsuccessfully to establish a post for the Hudson Bay Company. Suspicion about his motives discouraged Tahltans from the lower Stikine River (at Tahltan River near the present-day site of Telegraph Creek) from supporting Campbell's efforts at trade. Some say that the Tahltans forced Campbell to leave perhaps because of the threat the HBC posed to trade between Tahltans and Tlingits. There is

always sees people she knows there. For substantial or serious medical treatment, including child birth, Iskut people travel south to hospitals in Terrace or Prince George.

Provincial politics is a preoccupation for many people. One issue of particular interest is the alienation of Iskut people from parklands. Much of the Spatsizi Plateau area, homeland to so many Iskut families, is now enclosed within a provincial wilderness area managed by BC Parks. Significantly, Tommy Walker lobbied the British Columbia government to create the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park. It remains his legacy in northern British Columbia (Careless 1997; Loo 2006:193-201; Henderson 2006). The official designation as a park eliminated the construction of roads and other development in the area. It has not eliminated Iskut hunting there entirely and Iskut guides continue to lead non-native hunters into the area. Many Iskut people do not like the park status. It has increased the government management and bureaucracy in what they claim as their traditional lands. The Iskut leadership is working closely with British Columbia Parks to manage those lands in ways which do not prevent hunting from occurring. Still, there are perceptions of meddling by outsiders here and, certainly, parks are symbolic of the challenges the wider world poses for Iskut people.

Decisions about joining the British Columbia Treaty Process, and peripheral negotiations with resource companies over mineral and timber rights, have also dominated local politics. In Iskut, the question remains whether or not to negotiate development contracts in association with the Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake Tahltans or to act independently. Ethnic identity factors into the answers. The former option, joining with others under the umbrella of a tribal council, has been tried several times

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some evidence that Campbell and his men were on the verge of starvation in the winter of 1839 (See



with varying degrees of success. Resource and treaty negotiations are, however, often more effective when larger numbers of people, with a demonstrably large land base, make the claims. The latter, acting independently, always sounds good but often fails to gain traction. Different opinions within Iskut complicate local politics.

Since 2005, Iskut people and their Tahltan-speaking relatives at Telegraph have participated in a number of civil actions in defense of local land and resource management. Telegraph Creek Tahltan elders occupied the First Nation offices in that community for several months early in 2005 in response to what they believed was poor economic and political leadership under the elected chief (Paulson 2006). In the summer and fall of 2005, Iskut people, mainly women, blocked the road to BC Rail grade and the Iskut hunting camps to traffic from a mining company trying to explore for coal and methane gas (Carmichael 2005; see Epilogue). Protests at Iskut against resource companies continued during the summer of 2006. The civil disobedience caught the attention of Iskut's southern Athapaskan neighbors, the Wet'suwet'en. Together, many Iskut and Wet'suwet'en people are opposing development of the Klappan River and Skeena River watersheds. The desire to protect hunting traditions is central to the objectives of the groups.

Collisions between tradition and modernization have characterized the past one hundred years in northwestern British Columbia. Just ask Martha James who never wants to walk the trails between camps and village sites again. The history of these moves is evidence of both the intrusions of outsiders into the region and of the Iskut adaptation to those arrivals. Likewise, provincial politics offers an intriguing backdrop for considering

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Sheppard 1983a: 131-140).

the advantages and disadvantages of talking about hunting. The shared history, with variations for each family, is part of the larger hunting legacy stemming from life in the British Columbia north. The history provides families with a collective experience on which to base a common identity and culture. It offers points for contentious debates as well. Stories of the hunt, of work with Walker, and of regional politics, draw the past into the present. Once there, the past is reshaped in novel ways.

### **Bibliographic Note**

Several academic sources contribute to my understanding of Iskut history and culture despite the fact there is no definitive native or non-native history of northwestern British Columbia.<sup>58</sup> As a large, permanent, and easily accessible multi-family settlement, Iskut Village is a recent creation. Because of its relative youth, the Tahltans at Telegraph Creek received most of the attention by researchers trying to find a base for ethnographic investigations of Tahltan culture (eg. Emmons 1911; Teit 1906; 1909; 1912-1915a&b; 1913; 1919; 1921a; 1921b; MacLachlan 1957; Higgins 1976; 1982; Adlam 1985; 1995; 1998; Albright 1984). Early ethnographers of Tahltan culture, such as Teit and Emmons, were based at Dease Lake or Telegraph Creek and spent no time in the Spatsizi Plateau hinterland around present-day Iskut. Diamond Jenness visited the Finlay River region to the east of the Spatsizi Plateau in the 1920s. There, Jenness worked with ancestor groups

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<sup>58</sup> Georgiana Ball (1983) has done a lot of work to rectify this situation. The Ball family has a long association and presence in the Telegraph Creek area. A.G. Morice's *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (1978 [1906]) covers the history of the people and lands immediately south of Iskut and Tahltan territories; Morice worked most closely with Dakelh (Carrier) peoples. He includes a little information about Sekani people and their movement westward from Dane-za (Beaver) territories. Morice never worked with Tahltan-speaking peoples although he visited the mission at Telegraph Creek for ten days in 1902 (Carpentier n.d.).

of some Iskut families and, in his writings, he comments on the regional bands to which Iskut families trace their ancestry (Jenness 1931; 1937; also Duff, n.d.). Honigmann (1949; 1954; 1981) writes at length about the Kaska people to the north of Iskut. He offers some commentary about Kaska relations with Tahltans and Sekanis at Bear Lake. All of these works offer ethnographic descriptions of Tahltans and their neighbors while illustrating by omission the limited place given to Iskut people within the literature. Iskut people and their ancestors are usually described in relation to Telegraph Creek Tahltans or neighboring Sekanis if recognized at all.

Recent studies have considered Iskut peoples themselves, but these works are limited in number. Sheppard's dissertation about Iskut history and individual values is the most complete assessment of the history of northwestern British Columbia and the Iskut families (Sheppard 1983a). Friesen (1985) conducted an archaeological investigation of settlement patterns in the upper Stikine watershed. Hawkes (1966) collected demographic data at Iskut in the mid-1960s for comparison with Telegraph Creek housing patterns. Adlam (1985) recorded genealogical information in the village during the mid-1970s. Linguists have also worked on the Tahltan language with Iskut informants, although they tended not to stay long in the community or write extensively about their findings (Hardwick 1984; Leer 1985; Nater 1989; Carter 1991; 1994; Saxon 1997). Shaw's fieldwork is an exception to this (Shaw 1980-1983). Likewise, Alderete and Bob have worked intensively to document the Tahltan language (Bob 1999; Alderete 2005; Alderete and Bob 2005). They continue to work with Tahltan speakers.

### 3. THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF HUNTING

On a cool and drizzly afternoon in August, after a camp lunch of hot dogs and peanut butter and jam on left-over pancakes, I joined John Edwards and his almost teenaged grandsons Ross Weeks and Bobby Weeks on a trip by truck north along the BC Rail grade. We were looking for dry wood to cut for the cooking fire and wood stove at John's camp. Shortly past 'the loop,' a wide hairpin turn on the grade which also serves as an occasional airstrip, we came upon two trucks pulled over to the edge of the elevated driving surface. Two adults were standing near the trucks and four children were beginning to make their way across the willow-covered and rolling flood plain of *Tehkahche Didiye Tū'e*, the Little Klappan River (Frog-Groundhog River). One child rode a four-wheeled all terrain vehicle that had been taken from the back of one of the trucks. I learned quickly that the group included John's son Rupert Edwards, his wife Patty Edwards, and their son Andy Edwards. Rupert and Patty had been heading to camp at John's *Didini* 'Young Caribou' Camp<sup>59</sup> with their children when they had spotted a lone caribou a couple of hundred yards away. Rupert told us that his son Andy had shot the caribou and it had fallen on the far side of the river. It was Andy's first caribou kill. The discussion then turned to how best to retrieve the animal.

Over the next hour or so, John and his extended family set about dragging the caribou across the river to the trucks for butchering. At this point in its headwaters, the river is about thirty feet wide and less than two feet deep for most of its width. It was

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<sup>59</sup> According to government issued topographical maps, John's camp is near Didene Creek. Written as *Didene*, the name means 'Native Person Creek' in the Tahltan language. I was corrected by John and others that the creek should be named *Didini*, a word which means 'young caribou' in Tahltan. This is one example of lack of connection between native places names and their official British Columbia

decided that Andy and Ross would ford the river and tie a rope around the hind legs of the caribou. The other end of the rope was tied to the back of the four-wheeler, which was moved into pulling position in the middle of the river; the rope was too short to cross the river entirely. Donning a pair of blue coveralls, John moved into position to guide the rope and animal while standing knee deep in the water. Mike, the oldest boy on our side of the river, started to move the four-wheeler forward. With the help of Andy and Ross pushing from behind, the caribou was dragged across the river and onto the gravel bank on which we were standing. The kids posed for pictures with the caribou, mounting their rifle in its antlers. Everyone was quite excited, and the adults expressed pride in Andy's shot. Shortly after this, the hauling resumed. Five kids sat on the four-wheeler to counteract the weight of the heavy caribou behind; the machine still had a tendency to tip backwards as it started to pull. As forward movement resumed, the rest of us joined in behind grabbing legs or antlers in an effort to ease the animal over rocks, up small embankments, and around other obstacles. The crew stopped moving the caribou within about forty feet of the rail grade and the trucks. The caribou rested in a soft grassy hollow between a rock outcrop and willow bushes.

After retrieving a worn canvas pack containing several knives from his truck, John and Rupert took charge of skinning and butchering the caribou as it lay on its back. John removed the head first and two of the children carried it up to the trucks. Then, in about ten minutes, John and Rupert removed the hide. Andy and Ross assisted in this process by holding the caribou's legs while John and Rupert separated the hide from the animal's torso. The hide was left below the caribou as a mat or blanket separating it from the

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counterparts. This is part the reason some Iskut people want a new map produced with place names written

ground. Rupert stepped back from the process at this point and retreated to the trucks with the younger children. Rupert's wife and daughter were not present during the butchering either.

The butchering of the caribou went quickly under John's guidance and instruction. As John made different cuts, his two grandsons jumped in to remove the stomach and guts. These parts were rolled into the nearby willows and discarded. As John removed the muscle and organ meats, he laid the pieces on willow bows spread out around the caribou. Ross and Andy carried all of these meats up to the trucks. Some of the animal's fat and all of its neck were saved for dog food. For most of this work, John used a long-bladed hunting knife. To separate the ribs from the spine he used a small axe.

As I watched this drama play out before me, specific topics of conversation were apparent. First, there was a great deal of instructional talk from John directed specifically at Ross and Andy. John told them exactly what he was doing as he did it and the kids were quick to ask about or suggest what the next step should be. John also offered hunting reminders or 'tips' to the kids. At one point when the contents of the stomach began to run into the rest of the torso, John said, "Next time, don't shoot the stomach." I noted the obvious verbal instruction accompanying hands-on activities; perhaps the indirect and oblique hunting stories I heard elsewhere reflected a physical distance from animals or the kill. Surprisingly, I heard more conversation about girls and girlfriends than I had heard anywhere else in Iskut. The absence of wives and sisters might have encouraged such talk.

Ninety minutes later, the trucks were fully loaded and only the bloody hide and the stomach were left behind. We proceeded in a convoy of three pick-ups back to John's camp, ten minutes back to the south. I rode alone with John. Trying to think anthropologically, but not knowing quite how to form my question, I asked John how he and the children thanked the caribou for the gift of its life. I expected an evasive answer, for my questions like this to other hunters usually prompted vague responses. John surprised me, however, by responding directly with a reference to Christianity. John said simply that one should "pray to the Lord." He continued, saying that hunters often take some of their meat and share it with the group while everyone offers thanks.<sup>60</sup> John then described the practice of *na'edi*, by which a young person shares the meat from his first kill with the elders of the village as a way of expressing thanks to the animal (McIlwraith Field Book, 4:43. August 9, 2002).

Back at *Didini* camp, Ross and Andy hung the meat in the camp's meat cache. This area was fashioned from plastic sheeting which formed porous walls around a small stand of jack pine trees. Two by fours were nailed between the trees as well and the different cuts of caribou meat were hung on nails coming from these boards. In the center of the cache, a small fire pit held a smoldering fire of alder wood; this served to keep the flies away and worked to cure the meat. Andy pulled some of the velvet from the caribou's antlers to fry up with a dinner of caribou stew. After a few days in the cache, much of the meat was wrapped in plastic and frozen in John's generator-powered deep freeze. On a subsequent trip back to Iskut, John drove the meat to his house for use by his family or by the community at potluck dinners.

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<sup>60</sup> It is unclear who constitutes the group in this case.

## **The Symbolic and Social Structure of Animal-Human Relations**

Observing hunting in the subarctic has raised questions for generations of scholars about the way in which hunters ‘think’ about their prey. Hallowell argues that relationships between the Ojibwa and ‘other than human’ persons (animals) emulate the social relations that exist between people (Hallowell 1960:21-22). Hallowell’s observations are provocative because the Ojibwa kill animals for food and, yet, they do not usually kill each other. In *Hunters and Bureaucrats*, Nadasdy reiterates this position with reference to hunters of the southern Yukon. He asserts that Kluane hunters and their animal prey exhibit many of the same reciprocal commitments people show to each other (Nadasdy 2003:88; 94; also Nadasdy 2006; 2007). For the Kluane, Ojibwa, and indeed Iskut peoples, animals are ‘like people’ and frequently, as I show below, animals are people. As one might expect, then, human relationships with animals are embedded in the extensive social networks which entangle all people (cf. Nadasdy 2007:31). The evidence for this at Iskut comes from the way in which Iskut people talk about animals.

While the social perspective that Hallowell and Nadasdy expound is critical to my work, I also rely heavily on hunter-gatherer scholarship which suggests that the ecological (frequently economic) aspects and symbolic meanings of hunting are woven into the lives of northern peoples (see Shanklin 1985:377; Chapter 5). The scholars working on these topics observe that in Algonkian, Cree, and Athapaskan cultures, animals are thought to give themselves up as food to worthy hunters. This connection is written of variously as a gift of animal to human (eg. Ridington 1990a:111, citing Sharp 1986), a love relationship (Preston 2002; Tanner 1979:138), or a friendship established in myth-time



that extends to the present (Tanner 1979:136-140). It is frequently characterized as a sacrifice by an animal to people in need of sustenance (Brightman 1993; Speck 1945; Sharp 2001; also Martin 1978; more below). These relationships are maintained by humans acting ‘respectfully’ towards animals (Ridington 1990a; Goulet 1998:63-64; Nadasdy 2003:83-94; Tanner 1979:153-181). The connections between animals and humans, however characterized, are predictable: a hunter must treat animals properly because hunting traditions and mythology say as much. Failure to live up to these obligations results in misfortune, failed hunts, and starvation. These hunter-prey relationships exist in marked contrast to the way in which many non-native people, such as sports hunters, think about animals. For them, it is a right to kill animals because animals lack sentience (eg. Loo 2001a; 2001b).

The notion of animal sacrifice is powerful. Building from Hubert and Mauss’s analysis of sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]), Brightman says that the significance an animal’s sacrifice to hungry humans is derived from the role these animals play in mediating between the sacred and the profane realms of life (Brightman 1993:224). The image of a sacrifice unites the utilitarian aspects of food-gathering with religious reverence for food animals. The animal provides itself, its meat, as a gift to humans who – in an act of communion – celebrate the animal by eating it. By extension, the communion venerates the deities responsible for providing the animals to humans in the first place. *Etsen’ Ma’*, the Meat Mother in northern mythology, is one such deity. Her role among the Iskut people is described by Sophia Stanton in the Epigraph to the dissertation: “All kinds of animals born from [her] ... Now it’s all as far as I know that

*Etsen' Ma* make everything.” *Etsen' Ma* controls the flow of game to Iskut hunters (Teit 1919:230-232).

Relationships between hunters and their prey can also be characterized as a series of dichotomies (cf. Brightman 1993:228-229; also Sharp 1994). Animals are sacrificial victims and benevolent benefactors. Animals control the outcome of hunts by choosing to sacrifice themselves to respectful hunters. Animals are dangerous because of the power they hold over people and, yet, if they are treated properly animals are giving, caring, and loving of their human predators (also Nadasdy 2005:304). People receive animals and take them. Animals dominate the lives of humans but are also dominated by humans who must kill animals in order to feed themselves. Humans are friends with animals but are not above using coercion or trickery to kill them (cf. Tanner 1979:148). Thus, the dominance and control of animals over humans becomes submission to the eventual assertiveness of hunters. In all of this, there is an exchange which must be maintained for the animals to fulfill their purpose, humans to be fed, and deities like *Etsen' Ma'* to remain happy. A dependency exists in which the animals receive veneration and people receive sustenance. Nadasdy puts it this way: “If the hunter fails to live up to his or her reciprocal obligations toward animals ... the animals may exact spiritual retribution, causing misfortune, sickness, or even death” (Nadasdy 2005:304). Sacrifice by animals for the benefit of humans comes with very real costs to animals and humans alike.

I am aware that Tahltan mythology describes the punishment of thoughtless or careless hunters by animals (see Teit 1919; 1921a; 1921b). Still, it was on rare occasions that I heard Iskut people say that animals give themselves up to respectful hunters. No

one explained this to me, even when I asked directly. My academic expectations were not matched by the reality of the village life and hunting activities I witnessed. I did, however, find myself drawn frequently into indirect talk about being respectful towards animals and meat at Iskut (also Chapter 5). It occurred in the warnings of elders not to be stingy with the fish I caught – as if to say that I should share it with them – or the everyday items like cassette tapes I owned. And instead of hearing about animals in myth-time stories, I was inundated with stories about hunting, working as hunting guides, and butchering animals. Much of this talk included allusions to punishment by animals. The indirect references to what I understood to be important themes in the lives of Athapaskans surprised me and begged for greater clarification. Part of the problem, I learned, is that talk of sacrifice and punishment by animals does not conform to general Euro-Canadian beliefs about animals serving humans. These are hard topics to get people to discuss. A stigma is in play.

The intermediary role of humans between sacrificial animals and venerated deities also looks a little different today than it did in the past. Hunters receive animal as gifts but recent Catholic traditions in the village suggest that respect for the Catholic god may be a focus for successful hunters. As John Edwards said, he “prayed to the Lord” after each kill. Likewise, Sophia Stanton explained that *Tsesk’iye* ‘Big Crow’ (raven), the Tahltan transformer and culture hero, is actually Jesus Christ. Alternatively, spoken references to the reciprocal connections between animals and humans may not include mention of deities any longer at all. In these cases, older themes and expressions of respect remain but the exchange exists between hunter and prey only.

Newer hunting activities also allow for novel deviations from the original hunter-prey system. The guiding of non-native hunters on sports hunts and, thus, hunting for a wage is one example. In this case, the animal's gift becomes a commodity (Tanner 1979:11; also Nadasdy 2006). That commodity is sold and Iskut labor is rewarded with cash. When Iskut people talk about animal-human relationships in terms of commodities or Catholicism, they may be directing audiences away from important cultural themes. Likewise, such talk does not negate capitalistic interests or blaspheme Catholic beliefs. Depending on circumstance and audience, artful and careful talk of human-animal relationships creates distance from hunting or affirms a contemporary identity.

A speech-based approach to human-animal relations expands upon the ideas that Hallowell and Nadasdy develop about the social relationships that exist between hunter and prey. It helps me draw out the implied and subtle connections between hunting and asserting an Iskut culture. It also encourages me to attend to the economics Iskut people themselves understand to be central to their hunting. The evidence from conversational narratives suggests that talk about animals is not always religious or ritualistic in the sense of compelling sacrifice from animal spirits.<sup>61</sup> Instead, talk of animals is frequently described in terms of feeding people. Still, such talk can be both respectful and aggressive. It mirrors, interestingly enough, conversations and relationships between friends and family members within the village.

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<sup>61</sup> Goulet (1998:xxv-xxix) and Tanner (1979:108-111) both confront the awkwardness of applying definitions of religion to northern native people.

## Hunting in the Historic Past

Documenting the seasonal food-gathering activities of northern aboriginal peoples is a common ethnographic practice (eg. Honigmann 1949; Emmons 1911; Hensel 1996; Brody 1988; Tanner 1979; Albright 1984). While these food-gathering activities are often called 'subsistence' practices by economic anthropologists, I replace this term with 'sustenance,' in deference to some Iskut food gatherers who react negatively to the word 'subsistence' and its connotations of simplicity and impoverishment. Cultural resource manager Susan Folke prefers the term and describes herself as a sustenance hunter.<sup>62</sup> The roots of the words subsistence and sustenance are telling in this regard. By resisting the idea that Iskut people simply subsist on gathered food, Susan's choice of words encourages me to view these activities as sustaining the body. By extension, the rephrased terminology is applicable to the meaning of food-gathering practices more broadly: hunting sustains Iskut culture as well.

My attempt to characterize the hunting practices of Iskut ancestors in the distant past risks a static representation of Iskut life set in the amorphous ethnographic present. Still, some sense of what the oldest Iskut residents remember their parents doing, or what they did themselves as children, allows for a discussion of how hunting practices have changed. It permits further discussion of the interplay between sustenance food production and contemporary presentations and productions of local knowledge. With this in mind, the following summarizes the seasonal round of hunting activities in the

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<sup>62</sup> Sustenance and subsistence hunting are often synonymous with foraging or bush economics in the literature (see Hudson 1983).

historic past from the late nineteenth century up until about 1950.<sup>63</sup> It is based on the memories of Iskut elders and includes the kinds of hunting that took place at *Me'etsendāne* 'Metsantan' (see Chapter 2).<sup>64</sup>

In the *Me'etsendāne* era (ca. 1922-1948), Iskut men and women traveled extensively by horse, foot, and sled. They traded furs for cash and supplies at regional forts in the Finlay River valley to the east and at Telegraph Creek to the west. *Me'etsendāne* provided a base of operations for seasonal food-gathering and easy access to the mercantile and other wage-earning opportunities throughout north and central British Columbia. Thus, the availability of food resources was a consideration for Iskut ancestors when they made choices about where to stay seasonally (noted by Steward 1955; Albright 1984). The fur trade, while limited in scope in the traditional lands of Tahltan-speaking peoples, encouraged a new focus on hunting and trapping smaller, fur-bearing animals during the sustenance round.<sup>65</sup>

*Kedā* 'moose' and *hodzih* 'caribou' meat has been the preferred food as long as Iskut elders can remember. Peter James says that caribou were more common in the areas around Iskut in the past (also Emmons 1911) but in my experience moose meat is

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<sup>63</sup> The information here is supported by the major ethnographic works from northern British Columbia and the southern Yukon, including Emmons's and Higgins's work among Telegraph Creek Tahltans (Emmons 1911; Higgins 1976), Honigmann's descriptions of Kaska life (Honigmann 1949; 1954), and Jenness's Sekani ethnography (Jenness 1937).

<sup>64</sup> The literature describing Tahltan economics from this era is based largely on research conducted at Telegraph Creek, British Columbia (Teit 1906; Emmons 1911). There, Tahltan-speaking peoples spent the summer in villages along the Stikine and Tahltan Rivers and fished for salmon. Iskut ancestors and elders did not have access to these large summer salmon runs and, as a result, the Telegraph Creek Tahltan seasonal round differs considerably during the summer season from that of the ancestral Iskut hunting families living on the Spatsizi Plateau.

<sup>65</sup> See Speck and Easley (1942), Leacock (1954), Murphy and Steward (1956), Steward (1960), Goldman (1941), and Ray (1974), among others, for changes to sustenance patterns in the Canadian interior as a result of the fur trade. Just as Murphy and Steward doubt the indigenesness of Carrier potlatching, they take issue with conjectures that family hunting patterns in the eastern Subarctic predated the fur trade. It is a debate that endures (see Speck and Easley 1939).

remembered as the staple food. Some elders elaborate, saying that they prefer the taste of moose over caribou and find that caribou meat can get tiresome after too many days of it. Moose meat does not bring on the same feelings. Other northern animals fit into the traditional diet of Iskut families (see Higgins 1976:22; Albright 1984; also Honigmann 1954:38). The meat of *isba* ‘mountain sheep’ and *debēhe* ‘goats’ was appreciated, as was *sas* ‘black bear,’ *tsa* ‘beaver,’ *dediye* ‘groundhog’ (marmot), *dechuwe* ‘porcupine,’ *k’asbā’e* ‘ptarmigan,’ and *dih* ‘chicken (grouse) of several varieties. The meat of *chi’yōne* ‘wolves,’ *nusidzēhe* ‘foxes,’ *naghā* ‘wolverines,’ *kazūne* ‘otters,’ *nust’ihe* ‘marten,’ *tsēdēze* ‘fishers,’ and *tehjishe* ‘mink’ was not eaten except in times of real scarcity and necessity. *Khoh* ‘grizzly bears,’ *tīdah tli* ‘coyotes,’ *tekache* ‘frogs,’ toads, *tsesk’iye* ‘crows,’ and some water fowl were not eaten with any regularity either (cf. Honigmann 1954:38).

There are some explanations for these food preferences and choices. Otter and mink have magical characteristics which discourage their use as food. Peter James told me that eating a wolf would be too much like eating your dog. There may also be prohibitions against eating wolf meat because it is a clan totem. This did not, however, stop trappers from killing wolves, selling their fur, and claiming a bounty for their efforts. *Tli* ‘dogs’ were working animals, appreciated for their assistance during the hunt and reviled for the care and food they required. This list of preferred and ignored animals points to distinctions based on taste and tradition. It may also reflect the recent association of smaller, fur-bearing animals with the trade in furs, although the occasional eating of mink meat implies that a trapper could sell the fur and still eat

the meat.<sup>66</sup> I return to the distinction between food and non-food animals in Chapter 5.<sup>67</sup>

## **Fall**

The fall season of the historic round was marked by the hunting of big game like caribou and moose. With *Me'etsendāne* as a base, families of parents and children moved to small camps for considerable time each fall. They hunted for moose and caribou on the gentle mountains and subalpine highlands of the Spatsizi Plateau.<sup>68</sup> At this time of the year, moose are fat and their coats are thick in anticipation of winter. Iskut people prefer the taste of moose killed with a thick layer of fat across their back and thicker fur makes for better clothes and blankets (also Honigmann 1954:31; Emmons 1911:39-40). Albright also notes that moose are easier to find in late September and October because they come together to mate (Albright 1984:88). Iskut elders say that men hunted most of the big game and that the women and children hunted smaller game and birds (also Albright 1984:88). Older women like Martha James and Sophia Stanton are quick to point out, however, that they were capable of hunting moose and did so when their husbands were away trading furs. All told, hunting families might kill twenty-five

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<sup>66</sup> Sharp says Chipewyan rules for the edibility of mammals are based on what the animals themselves eat. The Chipewyan do not eat fish eating animals or scavengers. Sharp extends the point to suggest a symbolic separation of village and bush. Animals that live in the bush have, it turns out, "clean diets" (Sharp 1976:28). Sharp's chart of edible and inedible animals does not match the preferences at Iskut precisely. The Chipewyan eat, for example, wolves and, if Peter Rivers is to be believed, Iskut people do not.

<sup>67</sup> It is neither my interest nor intention to discuss the value of hunted meat in caloric and cash terms. Albright (1984:81) and Brody (1988) both provide some data in this regard for Tahltan-speaking and Dane-zaa peoples respectively.

<sup>68</sup> This pattern is different from the one documented by Albright at Telegraph Creek. There, families of twenty-five or more dispersed to hunting camps during fall-time from larger, more permanent salmon fishing settlements at the Tahltan River (Albright 1984:88).



to thirty moose or caribou per year or roughly one animal every two weeks (Albright 1984).

Moose hunting requires patience and the acceptance of regular failure. Moose are solitary animals and they move unpredictably and imprecisely. While Iskut hunters are able to tell you where moose *should* be at a given time of day or year, the animals are always elusive. Caribou, on the other hand, are more predictable because they travel in herds along the same corridors each year. Honigmann suggests that Kaska moose hunters are usually optimistic about their chances of success during hunting, despite these challenges, because “a person rarely sets out on a major hunting trip out of a sense of duty or urgency” (Honigmann 1949:63).

The techniques for hunting moose and caribou differ slightly. Moose and caribou were killed with snares and deadfall traps; spears and arrows, later rifles, were used to dispatch the animals once they were caught. Herds of caribou were, however, driven into traps with fences and killed by hunters confronting the cornered animals. Moose were stalked but not cornered within fences. Moose were also killed with deadfalls or rawhide snares after hunters steered them into those traps (Emmons 1911; Albright 1984). Given the difficulty of sneaking up on a moose in open country, driving the animals towards snares gives hunters the best chance for slowing or killing the moose. These techniques were not used actively after the turn of the twentieth century because of the improved quality of hunting rifles. Snaring techniques for catching smaller game and birds continued to be used throughout much of the twentieth century. Today, Iskut people remember these hunting strategies and sometimes replicate them for children in the context of culture camps.

Iskut ancestors had numerous techniques for preserving food. Martha James notes that once a moose was killed and butchered, pack dogs carried the meat to a camp, like the one at the confluence of the Ross and Stikine Rivers, or all the way back to *Me'etsendāne*. In either case, men and women together dried the muscle meats and the fat using salt and smoke. The same processes are used today. Surpluses of dried foods were cached in storage pits for retrieval later in the winter (see Friesen 1985; Higgins 1976:22-24). If it was cold enough, uncured meat was hung in cache houses called 'scaffolds' that stood on legs above ground. Once inside, the meat was allowed to freeze.

Sophia Stanton describes the fall season preparations for winter at Caribou Hide and *Me'etsendāne* this way:

*Sa'e hodzih utlān Caribou Hide. They kill lots that skin. Mom and them work on it. Moose, make lots of etṣen' gane utlān anhedle. Edū, edū isbā hulin. They have to go way up head of Stikine. The call it Chaba'e tahi. That's where a lot of goat in there. Where they used to go up. We camp there. Daddy kill lots isbā, and he bring isbā tṣenh everything, in Me'etsendāne. Summertime when kedā mek'āhanhode. Kedā heghan hodzih. They make tleyh utlān anhedle, scaffold k'eh, for winter.*

*Long time ago there was lots of caribou at Caribou Hide. They kill lots for the skin. Mom and them work on it. They make lots of moose dry meat. There were no goats there. They have to go way up head of Stikine. The call it Chaba'e tahi (Among the Poplars). That's where a lot of goats were found. Where they used to go up. We camp there. Daddy kill lots goats, and he bring meat everything, in Me'etsendāne (Metsantan). Summertime when moose become fat, they kill moose and caribou. They make lots of grease and hang the meat on the scaffold for winter.*

(ISK-02-31, November 16, 2002).

Fall season was also the time for preparing traps for the trapping season which began legally in British Columbia on November 15 and continued through until the end of February (Honigmann 1949:68). Traps were set along individually or family owned and registered traplines. It is unclear to me whether trapping early on was exclusively a

man's job, but certainly after the 1930s, Iskut elders describe trapping with their spouses. Trapping was a mercantile activity for the most part. Men sold the furs at Forts Grahame and Ware in the Finlay Valley to the east or at Telegraph Creek in the west. Today, Iskut men and women are usually eager to show off their traps, still stashed in the back sheds and warehouses.

## **Winter**

Hunting, trapping, and snaring all played critical roles in the acquisition of food as winter came on. Higgins says that snow conditions, including whether or not a crust has formed over the snow, contributed to decisions about long trips in search of food (Higgins 1976). Hunting in the winter required the use of snowshoes and toboggans. Dogs were used as well, often as pack animals, but also to corner animals and assist hunters in their kills. Moose were tracked by reading the condition of the snow through which they passed. Peter Rivers describes how tracking occurred and the inability of people to do it well today:

Those old timers, you can't beat them. Nowadays you can't, you go on the road. That's all you look for, it's moose. Fifty or sixty years back, they find a moose track, they track him. They track him. Winter time or summertime. Which way he go, they get him. But now adays nobody track moose. Nobody. That's all they look for, that's his body.

(ISK-02-28, Nov 5, 2002)

Still, Iskut people today always pay attention to tracks when they drive around. They read them to determine the direction in which animals are moving and when they passed.

Perhaps the most iconic comment elders make about hunting in the past relates to camping in very cold temperatures. Told to me in various levels of detail by several different male elders, the story is paraphrased as follows:

I remember hunting when it was sixty below. We did not even have tents. You'd just sleep as close to the fire as you could. Your front would be really warm and your back would be freezing. Then, you'd turn over and warm up your back. Kids today can't camp like that.<sup>69</sup>

A story like this highlights the difficulty of hunting with a dog team and minimal supplies. It is sometimes shared with children to illustrate the differences between hunting today and in the past. In the minds of the elders, young adult hunters have no concept of how hard hunting and travel once was (also Sheppard 1983a; Nadasdy 2003:68).

Talk of trapping is inevitably accompanied by a story of a memorable moment. The following is characteristic of many that I heard. Here, seventy-two year old Peter Rivers describes trapping with his father using both leg hold traps and the older, more traditional spring pole traps. He mentions making a line of traps through the woods and tells of the importance of checking the traps regularly. Peter recalls:

My dad, I trap with my dad. We make a line. Them days they using leg hold trap. So he told me, 'This line here, you check it. Every four days. So three days. I'll tell you when to check it.' I never see wolf, I never see lynx in my life.

We snowshoein', eh. Well he says, 'Time to go. Check the trap.' I put on my snowshoes. And he give me gun, eh. .3030. He say, 'If I catch wolf, shoot him.' That's all he tell me. And he got spring pole, then trap eh.

Here I look, I heard it [whizzing noise]. I look up. Here, when that pole went up with the lynx. And that lynx, he sat right end of that pole. That's only small pole like that. Right there I thought about wolf. I thought

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<sup>69</sup> Father J.M. Mouchet tells similar stories about camping in cold weather on the trails near Iskut Village (Mouchet 2002:44-45).

about wolf. I take that .3030. I shot. I couldn't take that trap out of that lynx's hand. So I drag it. I drag it all the way.

When I came back he was in the tent. 'Any luck?' I say, 'Yes, you caught wolf,' eh. Oh my god. In those days hard to get lynx, eh. He went out there and he say, 'Boy,' he cuss me ..., 'that's not wolf. That's lynx. Why you drag it?' Well I didn't know that [laughs].

(ISK-02-28, November 5, 2002).

More than simply an assertion of hunting prowess, this account is funny and told in Peter's characteristic self-deprecating but proud manner. The humor stems from a youthful Peter confusing a lynx with a wolf. Wolf and lynx were both valuable species for trappers, but it was harder to get a lynx than a wolf. Peter's father was dismayed at Peter's treatment of the dead lynx, presumably because a damaged fur would garner less money. Stories and memories of trapping like Peter's tale above are offered freely in much the same way hunting memories are shared and seem to reflect both the onetime importance of trapping in people's lives and a personal identity related to interacting with animals.

Snaring was also critical to the winter sustenance economy. Rabbits and some game birds were snared and eaten. In this passage, Catherine James discusses the snaring of food in the late 1950s while questioning the sustenance value of trapping:

Snaring like rabbits or chicken, that's also a form of food-gathering. Trapping it's a form of, like I know some people used to eat lynx, eh ... it really taste like turkey ... In January, I musta been about 9, 10 years old. And I came home from school at lunch time ... [and lynx was on the table]. It looked so much like turkey, I just ate it. Not a second thought in mind. I said, 'I want some more. Where did you get the good turkey from?' And she gave me some more. Then half way eating it, she said 'You know what that is? Do you know what you're eating?' I said 'Turkey?' She said 'That's lynx.' I thought 'Oh, my god.' ... but I enjoyed it.

So, I don't know if they would really look at [trapping as food-gathering]. Maybe a long, long time ago maybe trapping might be. You're best answer would be from Peter or maybe even Jim. That's a long time ago. My guess would be before they had fur trade and stuff. I would think that if they trapped an animal, it would probably be part of food-gathering.

(ISK-02-13, July 24, 2002)

Catherine's historical commentary hints that the system was more unified under a single food-gathering gloss before the fur trade era than it is today. Peter Rivers also says that trapped animals are sometimes eaten: "Well if you catch a beaver you eat. Some of them if they catch a lynx they'll eat it. Lynx is something like rabbits. White meat, eh" (ISK-02-29, November 22, 2002). Peter laughs jovially with this assessment.

The snaring of small animals for food was a family activity and taught to children at an early age. Sophia Stanton remembers such activities:

Edū meneslīn eghoī mama ekun tinhedē. They trap, mom and dad. Kheī ninahele. They buy me little trap. They give me kheī itsedle esghanhele. Kheī ninanle schedi. Ebā'e diṣtseze. Mom, pretty good.

*Mom and all of them went out camping. They trap, mom and dad. They set traps. They buy me little trap. They give me small traps. They tell me to set traps and catch weasel and squirrel. Mom is pretty good.*

(ISK-02-31, November 16, 2002)

Fish were also snared during the winter. Sophia Stanton describes lowering a looped cord through the ice on *Me'etsendāne Menh* 'Metsantan Lake' and slipping the loop around a fish's gills before hauling the fish out of the water. Sophia reports that this process was used in the absence of hooks (McIlwraith Field Notebook 5:70, November 6, 2002). Like ice fishing more generally, snaring fish requires considerable patience while standing over a hole in the ice. And, like many food collection techniques from this era, it is an event that it is remembered far more than it is practiced today.

## Spring and Summer

Spring sustenance hunting begins when the lakes and streams start to thaw. After this happened, hunters seek beaver meat. Beaver are trapped under the ice in March or shot in streams and ponds once the ice breaks up. Beaver meat is cooked on a fire or smoked. Goose hunting with rifles and the snaring of groundhogs also accompanies the spring thaw. Into June, bear hunting takes place. It is accomplished often by confronting the bears in their dens with dogs. Grouse and ptarmigan are taken as well, although care is used to avoid nesting birds. A range of plants are collected too, including the new shoots of ferns and the roots of *ets'ok* 'rhubarb' (*Heracleum lanatum*).

Summertime has been described as a slack season among northern British Columbia Athapaskans (Brody 1988) and this was likely true until August on the Spatsizi Plateau. Food animals that presented themselves to hunters were taken but hunting was not pursued aggressively. Food birds, like ptarmigan or grouse, were also snared during the summer and fall. To capture these birds, significantly more human intervention in the snaring event is required than for snaring rabbits. Peter Rivers remembers his mother catching ptarmigan with the aid of a snare and a song:

Well that's all, a lot of, they used to have ptarmigan too. They set snare for them. They make willow, eh. They'll go quite away. And every little ways they got a little doorway. It was open in there. That's where they set snare. And they used to sing for them. My mother used to tell me, but she never tell how that song go.

(ISK-28-02, November 5, 2002).

Peter's sister Martha sang the ptarmigan snaring song to me. It is as follows:

## Transcript 2: Ptarmigan Song

1       nebē   dedin   ādze  
         pick   eat     travel  
         ‘While they travel, they pick and eat.’

This is sung over and over again, hypnotizing the birds and luring them through the snares. The Ptarmigan Song is remembered and sung by older adults with an audience of, for example, young people in trucks while traveling. I never heard of anyone using this technique for catching ptarmigans while I was in the village. Instead, ptarmigan are shot with rifles. The song is, however, in the minds of most adults.

The snaring of *didiye* ‘groundhogs’ was a central summer-time activity up until the time that people moved to Telegraph Creek in the later 1940s. Emmons says that about the turn of the twentieth century, groundhogs were the most important meat after caribou: “Its great abundance and the ease with which it was captured insured a supply of nutritious food for the winter” (Emmons 1911:76). The snaring of groundhogs on the high subalpine grasslands was accomplished by the use of babiche snares attached to large spring poles looped around den entrances. This had the effect of lifting the animals into the air where they strangled or were shot (also Honigmann 1954:33 for a description of this activity among the Kaska). Like the search for rabbits, groundhog snaring requires that snares be set, left for a period of time, and then revisited. This type of snaring is rarely practiced today and I only heard of it in terms of showing children how it was done. Still, the technique is remembered and deemed important enough to pass on. Once again, esoteric cultural knowledge is not entirely forgotten and has become part of a repertoire of hunting knowledge that appears in specific contexts, such as during a children’s ‘culture camp’ or as part of a weekend outing. Groundhog meat remains prized as a



delicacy and despite the awareness of snaring these animals older children use rifles to kill them these days.

### **Hunting in the Present**

The seasonal round of activities I witnessed in 2002 and 2003 is exemplified by the narrative that opens this chapter. It is characterized by frequent trips by truck, snowmobile, or all terrain vehicle (ATV) to ‘see the country.’ Often a euphemism for hunting, seeing the country takes place along local roadways, trails, and the BC Rail grade. Traveling around like this is done by people of all ages. They are rarely short outings and they fill long summer days and shorter winter afternoons. Extended trips north to Dease Lake (55 miles), into Telegraph Creek (160 miles) or south to Terrace or Smithers (300 miles each) along the Highway 37 also provide occasions to watch for animals and their tracks on the side of the road. At convenient look-out points, people like to ‘glass around’ with binoculars, scanning mountain ridges, the tree line, and open taiga in search of solitary moose or herds of sheep.

Travelers take their rifles with them when they are out. They usually expect to shoot a moose, although seeing the country does not always result in fresh meat. Still, the hope of seeing an animal within range remains high and people using motorized transportation noted constantly the depth of the snow, the type, age, and direction of tracks on the roadway, changes in leaf color, ice thicknesses on lakes, and a host of other natural variations. If by chance an animal is spotted and a clear shot is not possible, the animal’s size, age, fatness, sex, and location are noted for reporting later. Smaller animals, such as beaver and rabbit or birds like ptarmigan and chicken, are also

remembered. Comparisons between the numbers of smaller animals seen on a given trip this year and in previous years are made frequently.

Upon return from a drive or upon encountering others out on a similar trip, questions inevitably arise about what animals were seen. Hoarding such knowledge is not productive in a place where meat often ends up being shared. Similarly, pride of participation comes out in these conversations. When I traveled with elder Martha James, for example, the observations she made on our trips provided her with information to share at the card table with her brothers or over the phone with her friends. She gains short term celebrity when she has such news. In some cases, this knowledge leads someone else to go out and try to locate the same moose the next day. Participation in hunting activities occurs in direct and indirect ways.

### **Annual Patterns**

Fishing, hunting, and plant gathering occur throughout the year with slightly different intensities. There is a noticeable period of higher activity when children are out of school for the summer. Likewise, more sustenance activities occur during the long daylight hours of late spring or fall and on the weekends throughout the year. In the early spring and late fall weather and thin ice on lakes prevents extensive or easy travel. Hunting in the fall is sometimes disrupted by fogs created by warm lake water meeting cold air.

Most fishing, hunting, and plant gathering take place within a day's drive of Iskut Village. Some lakes are fished more intensively than others, but most lakes in the area are full of rainbow trout. Plants are gathered and animals are hunted in *gāt'ah* 'bush' (in

the trees), in *tlābāne* ‘open grass flats,’ along roadways, and in other unnamed places. Families of parents and children or grandparents and grandchildren travel out to conduct these activities using extended cab pick-up trucks. Adult men, brothers, cousins, or friends, sometimes hunt together for moose and caribou. In both cases, hunts are day trips away from the village unless it is August and camps are set-up elsewhere. The meat from successful hunts is shared between hunters and usually with other family members and this draws non-hunters into hunting activities. Martha James’s family is typical. Her grandsons hunt together or with their father, Matha’s son-in-law. After a successful moose hunt, they take the meat to Martha’s house where her grandsons hang the meat in her smokehouse or basement. Martha cuts and salts some of the meat for dry meat jerky. She controls that production, returning some of it to her family and keeping the rest for her own use or for sale around the village.

## **Fall**

Moose hunting is the prestigious hunting activity in the village. Moose are spoken about with an energy and intensity that underscores their place in the center of Iskut food-gathering considerations (Chapter 4). There is less emphasis on other kinds of food animals, although caribou are pursued with interest and *dediye* ‘groundhog’ meat remains a delicacy. Some hunters enjoy chasing mountain sheep and goats and will undertake specific expeditions by ATV to get them. The hunting of moose and other large game is done with high caliber rifles like a .30-06 or a .30-30. Most hunters carry with them a canvas hunting bag containing several knives and a hatchet for butchering moose and other plastic or canvas bags for wrapping the meat. This bag is a throwback to

past hunting days when hunters had to carry with them all of the tools for killing and butchering an animal (also Emmons 1911).

People begin to hunt vigorously in August. At this time, cow moose have given birth and the risk of shooting a pregnant animal is gone. As the fall progresses, forest undergrowth and foliage disappear and the moose become easier to see. August hunting operations are based in family camps or out of the communal camp at *Kati Chō*. The opening vignette of this chapter, for example, illustrates the hunting and butchering techniques of three generations of John Edward's family. Later, during the same camping and hunting season, John was joined in the camp by his brother Frank and a cousin Colin. Both Frank and Colin live away from Iskut but camp with John with the specific intention of shooting a moose to feed their families for the fall. In August 2002, it took both men several trips away from the camp to shoot their moose (McIlwraith Field Book 4:57, August 12, 2002).

Children learn a great deal about hunting in these late summer hunting camps. Young children chase mice around the camps and try and trap them in ingenious ways. Children between the ages of ten and fifteen years are given relatively free reign to come and go from the camps as they please. I saw children driving ATVs regularly on a series of trails near John's camp. They search for groundhogs primarily, although porcupines and game birds like grouse are never ignored. On most of these trips, the children were successful hunters, killing groundhogs with more frequency than the adults shot a caribou or a moose. John was always quick to remind the children to clean their game before they ate or slept and certainly before they went out hunting again. Cleaning game promptly is,

according to John, a sign of respect for the animals and he oversaw the work of the children in this regard (McIlwraith Field Book 4:67, August 13, 2002).

Weekend hunting and food-gathering trips become the norm once the school year begins. Moose remain the focus of interest, although Martha James told me that during the first two weeks of October, people tend to avoid shooting *deyō* 'bull moose' because they are smelly during the rut (McIlwraith Field Book 5:7, October 1, 2002). People continue to hunt moose throughout October and November. New snow at higher elevations forces moose to seek food closer to roadways and hunting becomes somewhat easier (McIlwraith Field Book 5:95, November 20, 2002). Smaller animals like beaver and game birds are shot too. I was aware of one black bear being shot during the fall of 2002. People appreciate the meat of black bear, but it is the bear's fat, rendered into a grease, that is most appealing.

Fishing for rainbow trout continues at *Luwechōn Menh* 'Kluachon Lake' during the fall. Through October, rod fishing from shore is the usual technique. Hauls of five or six fish in thirty minutes of fishing are not uncommon. In 2002, the ice became thick enough for ice fishing during the second week of November. Just before that time, a lull in food collection activities occurs. The freezing temperatures have not yet made the lakes passable. The back roads remain muddy and not firm enough to drive safely. Likewise, there is not enough snow at higher elevations for snowmobiles to run.

The collecting of medicinal plants and the stock-piling of wood are also common activities at this time of year. I accompanied elders on expeditions up the BC Rail grade to collect, among other things, jack pine pitch (dried sap of *gāza*; *Pinus contorta*) and caribou leaves (*hodzih tlānaw*; *Artemisia tilesii*). Most leafy plants have dried on their

stalks by October making them easy to pick and ready for use. Families work hard to pile and chop wood for heating needs during the winter. This work requires a chain saw and truck. Wood is gathered from standing dead trees near the dump or along the Access Road to the BC Rail grade.

## **Winter**

The patterns of winter hunting are similar to those seen during the fall. Often, hunting by an individual or by a pair of friends or cousins is simply an excuse to be outside. Organized hunts are also conducted immediately after someone passes away. Shortly after an elder died in the Village in mid-winter, 2002, two young men headed out by truck to local trailheads and hunting grounds. There, they parked and began to walk with snowshoes into the forest in search of a moose to help feed the crowd which would assemble in the Iskut Hall for the Last Supper after the funeral. In this case, the men were unsuccessful at one of the locations but succeeded in killing a moose at another (McIlwraith Field Book 6:42, January 2, 2003).

Hunters are reluctant to shoot moose in the late winter and spring. There is always the fear of shooting a pregnant cow. Likewise, hunters say that after the winter moose are dirty and thin. According to Michael Roe, a man in his early forties, the choice not to shoot a moose is related both to the quality of the meat and to conservation efforts (McIlwraith Field Book 4:14, August 4, 2002). To be worthy of shooting, says Michael, the meat that results from the kill must be of a high quality. The best meat is found on young bull moose, one which has visibly thicker fat over the shoulders and back. Some hunters choose not to shoot a moose that looks thin or is too old. Similarly, bull moose

and caribou taken during the fall rutting season are said to be ‘dirty’ or ‘smelly’ and are avoided for this reason. Cow moose that are potentially bearing young are avoided as a measure of “conserving” (Michael’s word) the moose for future years. With these assessments, Michael combines elements of older practice, the evaluation of the quality of the meat, with what seems to be a concern for the conservation of the moose population. He talks about it in terms that conservation officers would appreciate and understand, especially because native people in British Columbia are not beholden to provincial hunting regulations (also Nadasdy 2005). Michael’s choice to shoot also stems from his ability to save the rewards of previous hunts in his freezer or, if need be, to visit the store to pick up supplies.

Michael’s comments represent one side of the meat quality debate in Iskut. For Ken James, a man in his early thirties, meat quality is important but not to the extent to which some hunters are ‘picky’ and wait for the ideal moose. Ken elaborates, turning his thoughts to mountain sheep: “I’d like to get a nice ram, or at least a decent one.” This suggests something of a hierarchy of good meat animals and Ken concedes that a decent moose is one with an inch or more of fat on it; he does not say what a nice ram might be (McIlwraith Field Book, 7:63, February 23, 2003). Martha James also challenges the notion that meat quality is the determining factor when deciding to shoot or not. She says that when Iskut families were living at older settlements like *Me’etsendāne*, Buckley Lake, or Telegraph Creek, any animal seen was taken. The need for food demanded that cows and thin bulls were shot (Martha James, personal communication, January 14, 2004). From Martha’s perspective the decision to not to shoot an animal deemed to have poor meat quality is a recent phenomenon based on, perhaps, the availability of food from

home freezers or the store. Others say that any animal available to a hunter should be received by that hunter. Even young people like Michael Roe cite this rule and, by doing so, shame hunters who admit to passing up game when they see it.

Young adults do not trap much today. I was told that fur prices were too low to make trapping financially viable. As I prepared to leave Iskut in the spring of 2003, however, Ken James told me was already looking forward to starting to trap again after a hiatus of several years in the upcoming winter. A handful of men, including Murph Johnson, trap animals and sell the fur to taxidermists. Murph Johnson is a non-native man who married into the Iskut community. He admits that trapping is only profitable in the late fall and early winter months when the coats of the animals are thick and white. In January 2003, Murph made \$1400 in one week after selling the pelts of four wolverines, four marten, and one mink. According to Murph, a wolverine pelt commands up to \$300 and a good quality wolf skin, one without holes, might fetch upwards of \$700. He noted as well that the trapping season is short and that overall profits are small because of that.

Some winter-time snaring takes place. I went snaring *gah* 'rabbit' on two occasions with elders Mark Fowler and Peg James. Mark and Peg continue to snare even those most do not because they like rabbit meat. On these occasions in late November, we went to the forest service campground at *Mochoya* 'Morchuea Lake' (big lake), about six or seven miles north of Iskut. They preferred this location to spots within walking distance of Iskut because the village dogs ran through the snares, disrupting them, or mauled the dead rabbits caught in them. At *Mochoya*, about six inches of snow covered the lightly used roadway through the campground. After identifying 'rabbit runs,' or small trails packed by the rabbits through the brush and snow, Mark set six brass wire



snares one to two inches above the snow along high traffic corridors. Mark then instructed me to camouflage the areas around the snares with small sticks, a technique with the added benefit of directing rabbits through the wire loops. With the snares set, we returned to Iskut. The next day, Mark, Peg, and I returned to check the snares. Five of the snares were empty and undisturbed, but we caught a rabbit in the sixth snare. Mark and Peg skinned the rabbit and cooked its meat for dinner.

### **Spring and Summer**

Ice fishing at *Luwechōn* and other lakes lasts into the first week of May. Another short lull in food-gathering occurs after that because the ice on the lakes is too dangerous to walk on and the water is not open enough for rod fishing. The roads are frequently impassable because of mud and partially thawed creeks. Iskut people reclaim their camps along the BC Rail grade quickly, though. Mother's Day weekend, in mid-May, is usually the time people think about cooking out and camping again. At the 2002 Mother's Day picnic near the highway bridge over the Stikine River, Ken James took a break from playing cards to search for grouse. He shot two. Ken and his family set up their hunting camp along the BC Rail grade the following weekend. By the first weekend in June, Iskut people are out 'seeing the country' by truck again. Moose hunting along the roadways picks up and the elders begin collecting medicines from the first green shoots of the new growing season. Also with the warmer and longer days, people begin working hides in the backyards of their village homes.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Iskut relatives at Telegraph Creek enjoy an earlier start to the spring warmth because of their proximity to the coast and the lower elevation of their village.

In late June and July, Several Iskut families fish for salmon. Iskut people continue to use the Commonage as a base for Stikine River net fishing. Fishing families move their gear to the Commonage or other area camps on weekends in June. Come July 1, when school ends for the summer, they relocate to the fish camps for two to three weeks. In that time, they catch a haul of salmon which will last through the fall. The salmon are caught in nets which hang from booms stuck out from the shore into eddies in the river. After about twelve hours in the river, the nets are hauled into shore. They usually contain twenty to thirty sockeye salmon and the odd king salmon and river trout. I saw men and women hauling the nets together. Men typically cleaned the fish before women cut the fish into various sized portions for preservation. The salmon is smoked and dried in smokehouses on site in much the same way Telegraph Creek Tahltans have for generations. The women I camped with at the Commonage also used a propane burner and a large pot to 'can' their fish.

### **Iskut Elders Comment on Changes to the Round**

The seasonal round of hunting activities would be familiar to Iskut ancestors and to the oldest Iskut elders remembering their childhoods. The similarities are based in large part on the unchanged biology of the animals and the predictable reactions the animals have to seasonal weather changes. Similar hunting techniques and attitudes towards animals persist. Family hunting camps are still common.

Elders told me, however, that the construction of roads changed hunting practices in some ways. Motorized travel replaced foot travel and the use of dogs and sleds, for example. The elders also believe that children understand little of how Iskut people

hunted in the past. While driving past Mosquito Mountain, a sparsely treed hill visible from the village, Peter Rivers stated that kids did not hunt there because they are unable to drive there with four-wheeled all terrain vehicles (McIlwraith Field Book, 5:85, November 14, 2002). His comments hold true as I never heard of children hunting by foot during my time in the village. That said, children have their own network of snowmobile and all terrain vehicle trails near the village, including on the flanks of Mosquito Mountain. They spent long summer evenings and winter weekends traveling them in search of grouse and small animals to shoot.

Roger Rivers agreed that people stick close to roadways today and as a result kids “have it easy” when it comes to hunting (McIlwraith Field Book, 7:44, February 10, 2003). Other elders assert that children are not learning about hunting today. They had various explanations for this, including a lack of interest, a preference for driving snowmobiles and ATVs recreationally instead of hunting with them, or involvement in other activities including watching television. Conversely, young adults complained to me that their parents and grandparents were not teaching them the proper ways to hunt and fish. Frankly, my observations suggest that ATVs and snowmobiles are indispensable hunting tools central to modern hunting practices. Hunting is rarely far from the minds of younger people even when they use these machines recreationally.

Jim Peters and Scotty Edwards are two experienced hunters in their seventies (also Chapter 5). They told me that they were out hunting “all of the time” prior to the construction of the BC Rail grade and its promise of regular vehicle access to the upper Klappan River watershed. Children today, say Jim and Scotty, do not hunt as often because they can hunt easily by truck. In addition, freezers allow for meat to be stored

and saved for leaner times. Owning a freezer means that people do not need to hunt as frequently or share as often. I suspect, however, that some people hunt more, store more food, and share it widely at community feasts because of the freezer. The freezer has essentially extended winter, or at least the preservation of food that cold weather provides. Jim and Scotty concluded that today people hunt when they have time. They gather food as it is found and the urgency to do otherwise is gone (McIlwraith Field Book, 2:47, June 3, 2002).

Other elders elaborate. In the past, hunters left a camp on foot and tracked a moose until it was found. There is enormous skill involved in tracking animals, related particularly to determining the age of the tracks. Peter Rivers demonstrated, for example, that by putting one's hand into a moose track, it was possible to determine when the print was left. If the snow is loose, the moose came recently; if, on the other hand, the track was glazed over with ice, the moose probably came past the night before (McIlwraith Field Book, 5:85, November 14, 2002). Now, in the words of one elder, "people look around for moose by truck rather than tracking them" (McIlwraith Field Book, 1:77, May 2, 2002).

Tracking skills do remain in use today even when traveling by car or four-wheeled all terrain vehicle. And, despite assertions to the contrary by elders, young adults can accurately identify tracks and are prepared to follow them short distances from a truck if they are thought to be fresh. In addition, children are tested on their identification of tracks by their parents and grandparents and taught to value that skill. Together, this is the knowledge of hunters which endures in one form or another today; they are old skills in new venues and used for a variety old and new reasons.

The increased use of lands along the Highway 37 and BC Rail Grade corridors stands in distinct contrast to the recent inaccessibility of significant historical hunting places on the Spatsizi Plateau. The completion of the trackless rail grade in the mid 1970s opened up approximately one hundred miles of poorly maintained, albeit lightly traveled, roadways for four-wheel drive trucks and all terrain vehicles, all within fifteen minutes of driving from the village. This travel corridor forms the western edge of the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park, and it is along here, within sight of park lands but always outside of the park, that Iskut families built their camps. The community culture camp at *Kāti Chō* is on the BC Rail grade, and with long hours of summer daylight, many hunters use the grade simply to look for moose. Even in the winter, I was aware that a handful of adventurous people traveled some parts of the grade using snowmobiles, although the small gas tanks on the machines prevented long distance travel. The use of the rail grade is contested as non-native resident hunters also travel the grade after hunting season opens each summer in British Columbia, on August 15. While the grade is by no means heavily traveled, after August 15 the competition for moose does increase, as do incidences of outsiders pillaging Iskut camps for wood and tent frame materials.<sup>71</sup>

## **Conclusion**

A focus on seasonal activities can obscure the relationships Iskut people have with animals. The descriptions of hunting made by Iskut people tend to refer to practices and

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<sup>71</sup> In August 2004, the rail grade received additional traffic related to Shell Oil's drilling for methane in *Dzeltse* 'Klappan Mountain.' Shell improved the condition of the road but planned to put a gate on it too, in order to control the traffic. Plans changed in the winter of 2005 when Iskut elders and leadership asked Shell to leave the area.

processes. This is the material of TEK and TUS. In these cases, attention is not directed to the sharing relationships between people or reciprocity with animals. But, relationships between animals and people are apparent. They show up in the rebukes children receive from adults for being stingy or speaking badly about animals. They appear in the comparisons elders make between past activities and present practices. This ethnographic information provides the context in which TEK is produced. It illustrates the extent to which hunting is embedded in all aspects of Iskut life. By extension, this ethnographic material is useful for understanding obscure references to punishment by animals; more analysis of such talk follows below.

The changes of the past one hundred years are subtle and I am left wondering if really much has changed. Hunting technology includes more powerful rifles and motorized vehicles. Different hunting lands are exploited now than a generation ago. Hunting still binds families, though, and is woven into cycles of wage work. Hunting is a constant in the history of this community. And, respecting animals that provide food is important. After all, if the changes in practices towards animals and thinking about them changed too much, the animals would surely know and react accordingly.

**PART TWO: CAUTION AND CARE IN TALK ABOUT ANIMALS**

#### **4. ‘DON’T SAY THAT ... DON’T TALK BAD ABOUT IT’: UNCERTAINTY AND INDIRECTION IN EVERYDAY TALK ABOUT FOOD ANIMALS**

I was told that John Edwards was one of the best people to talk about fishing and hunting because he conducted these activities regularly. Despite my attempts to be invited along on John’s hunting expeditions or fishing trips and his general agreement to such participation, however, I found myself hearing after-the-fact that John had been out. Then I learned that John was ‘moving up’ to his ‘*Didini*’ Camp for three or four weeks in August. As it turned out, I bumped into John on the BC Rail grade early in August. He was hauling wood to his camp with his grandsons. I stopped him in his truck and asked if I could camp with him later in the month; he agreed.

I drove up the BC Rail grade to John’s camp by myself on August 6. The trip from Iskut Village took about four hours due, in part, to my cautious driving on the rough and sometimes flooded gravel roadway. As I pulled into the campsite, I wondered who would be there with John and what my reception would be like. John was seated under the kitchen tarp on a homemade log stool. He was with four of his grandsons who seemed to know who I was even though I had not met any of them before now. I asked John again if I could stay and he invited me to put my tent up just outside of the main kitchen and living area of the camp. My little green nylon tent seemed feeble next to the robust canvas tents and wooden frames of the camp. I then put my food into the communal pantry boxes and the generator-powered deep freeze.

Much of my time camping with John involved mundane activities like cooking, collecting firewood, and hauling water. I was happy to help. I also joined John and his grandsons driving up and down remote sections of the BC Rail grade at dusk, looking for



caribou and moose. We spotted grouse and groundhogs frequently. John slowed his truck with each animal sighting and his grandsons reached for their rifles. Each time, the animals scurried away before the boys could get out of the truck. Those drives were a privilege for me, as I contributed only to a shortage of space in John's extended cab pick-up truck.

A few days after my arrival, John's first cousin Colin Duncan arrived in the camp. He was accompanied by two grandsons, teenaged boys who had spent their lives living in the urban setting of Terrace, British Columbia. They pitched tourist-style, self-standing tents like mine near the center of John's camp. John and Colin are members of the families who sometimes assert ancestral ties to Gitksan-speaking peoples to the south of Iskut territory. They have spent their lives in and around Iskut, Telegraph Creek, and on the Spatsizi Plateau.

Once John and Colin were together, the tenor of conversations within the camp changed. Stories about hunting, past and present, became more frequent. On the surface, the stories sounded like memories of the good days shared easily between two men who had spent a lifetime hunting together. After a couple of days, however, I began to consider that the conversations between John and Colin were not simply small-talk; the tone of them seemed serious. I contend now that these stories represent serious chatter. Serious chatter is a form of 'small talk' keyed from 'idle chatter' or 'shooting the breeze' by humor into a weightier form of discourse which still functions in large part to pass the time (cf. Mears 2002). Coupland (2003) says that small talk is designed to build rapport or credibility between speakers. Here, rapport already exists but the serious chatter is connected to discussing hunting skills with other hunters. This is different than, say,

Frankfurt's 'bullshitting' (Frankfurt 1986; also cited in Mears 2002) or Goffman's 'fabrication' (Goffman 1974:83), both of which imply that deception on the part of the teller is intended with the telling of the story. The importance of these hunting stories is indexed by the careful structure of the stories which likely results from repeated tellings (Valentine 1995:168). The more I listened to John and Colin's hunting stories, or accounts of meeting bears, the more important they seemed to be. The boys in the camp could not help but hear the stories too. But the accounts were thin on details. They sounded plausible, but when did they occur? Who was there?

It was then that I realized that other Iskut women and men had been sharing stories like these for months. I had not, however, been enough in tune with the banter to know that something important was happening when stories about animals or hunting were shared. I had been busy instead looking for the 'rules' of fishing and the 'gems' of hunting knowledge. Upon hearing the intensity with which John and Colin spoke about hunting, I knew that I had been missing the heart of the verbal action. I sensed that hunting practices and history were being debated in this talk. I became desperate to record these stories.

### **Talk About Animals and Hunting**

Hunting and speaking about hunting and acting shape connections between people and animals at Iskut Village and the ways in which people manage those relationships. For these reasons, it is worth addressing both the role of hunting stories and the place of traditional knowledge about animals within Iskut talk. Contextualizing traditional knowledge within broader conversations points further to the challenges of documenting

traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) (Chapter 1). Attention to or interest in TEK rarely explains how Iskut people interact with, revere, hunt, and understand their prey. It almost never attends to the reasons why Iskut people talk about hunting with reticence in some situations and exuberance in others. My own experience with the Traditional Use Study, for example, suggests that hunting stories are overlooked or ignored by researchers in favor of ‘facts,’ the seemingly transparent pieces of data that are sometimes found in interviews. TEK may be identifiable in surface readings of practices, knowledge, and events. But, Iskut people talk about animals using a plethora of tropes and devices including synecdoche, allusion, and indirection. It is in these devices, which themselves are found in conversational narratives, that hunting begins to appear as the central symbol in an Iskut cultural system.

What do conversational narratives about hunting sound like? Peter Rivers was my first guide in this regard. Peter’s stories are usually short and often triggered by seeing the place that they occurred. Peter shared this brief account while he and I were fishing through the ice at *Luwechōn Menh*, near the village. The story begins when he notices a rock slide area on the mountain next to the lake.

### **Transcript 3: Shooting a Moose at *Luwechōn***

[Scene: Peter Rivers, a man in his seventies, tells me about a moose he shot in 1964 as we fish for rainbow trout and move around on the ice.]

1	PR	I told you about that moose I shot.
2	TM	Yah.
3	PR	From there I walked up to the bottom of that slide [gesturing across <i>Luwechōn</i> Lake].
4	TM	Yah.
5	PR	It take me 25 minutes.
6	TM	Pretty quick.
7	PR	Yes.

8 I think that's about nineteen fifty, sixty-four [1964].  
9 Ah it's a big moose.  
10 It was in the, I think it was August [in audible]  
11 It running.  
12 I know what he's got in mind.  
13 He's gonna go in swimming.  
14 TM Yah.  
15 PR It come out other side of that lake.  
16 Halfway across that lake swimming.  
17 I nail him.  
18 Little bugger.

[PR breaks frame when he catches a small fish, which he threw back.]

19 TM Little one?  
20 PR ... my hook. No wonder, they took it off.  
21 Holy [sound of water splashing].  
22 TM [inaudible] to me.  
23 PR That's good enough.

[The sound of walking on ice is audible on the tape.]

(ISK-02-2, May 2, 2002)

This is a story of hunting success. It is told with a minor amount of vitriol for the elusive moose. Here, Peter got the animal and he does nothing to obscure his excitement about the kill.

The reporting of animal kills can provoke amusing discussions too. In the following conversation, two women comment on the successful moose hunt of one of their husbands.

#### **Transcript 4: Reporting a Successful Moose Hunt**

[Scene: Two women, sisters-in-law, talk about the hunting activities of their husband. The conversation occurs in the lobby of the Iskut First Nation offices.]

1       Janice       Dennis [Janice's husband] got a moose yesterday.  
2       Ginny        I heard. He called Gord [Ginny's husband] at lunch.  
3       Janice        He was funny about it.  
4                    He came in and said he got skunked again.  
5                    Long time since we didn't get one.  
6                    We been almost out of meat.

(McIlwraith Field Book 7:19, January 19, 2003)

The feigned failure might have had serious consequences for Janice's family. Janice admits that they have not had fresh meat in quite some time (lines 5-6). Janice's comment that Dennis acted 'funny' (line 3) reminds me of the enjoyment Iskut people got from holding information back or reporting falsehoods simply to evoke an emotional response. Presumably, Dennis reported the successful kill as a failure to tease his wife. Such teasing is part of good-natured relationships between spouses and between siblings that I witnessed time and again. Teasing, and the quiet discussion of success, has the effect of playing down the success of the hunter and, perhaps, valorizing the moose. It represents an indirect way of getting at the fact that the moose was killed. In most cases, boasting about one's accomplishments is bad form.

Children often tell stories about hunting that sound like those of their parents and grandparents. In the following account, a seven year old boy describes his hunting prowess to other children assembled in a school classroom. The children were there to listen to John Edwards's stories (Forward). Captured in the background of the John's tape, the boy's story is as follows:

### Transcript 5: Child's Hunting Story

[Scene: John Edwards, an elder, is talking with five children in the Iskut school. Two teachers and one anthropologist are present. Seizing the floor during a pause in John's talk, a boy speaks. He describes returning from a trip with unnamed people; the stated purpose of the trip is hunting.]

- 1            I shot grouse in the head.  
              Jish.  
              We were out hunting,  
              coming back from Hazelton.
- 5            Got to shoot seven shots on that chicken.  
              All of us had a shell except for me.  
              James gave me one  
              and I shot again.  
              Kachao.
- 10          Right here.  
              And he shot right here  
              and then shot again his jaw.  
              He fell down.                            [The grouse fell.]
- (ISK-02-22, October 9, 2002)

This story is an interruption of the elder's talk. In it, the shooting of the grouse culminates in onomatopoeic rifle shots (lines 2 and 9) and a fallen bird (line 13). The boy points on his body to the location of the successful shot (lines 10-12). The account includes little indication of who was involved in the hunt. James is named and first person plural pronouns are used frequently. These suggest that the narrator was not alone. Still, details about the hunt seem to be missing. There is little sense of where the episode occurred and no other information about the members of the group is given.

Talk about hunting is pervasive around Iskut. Such talk provides the basis for generating norms because it is often used to instruct others on past practices or good behavior. It is rarely explicit in detail although there are enough cues within it for informed audiences to get the point. Children have learned the speech forms. Less knowledgeable listeners, like anthropologists, learn from these accounts that hunting

occurs at Iskut and that it is a preoccupation. The stories themselves, however, reveal little directly about the ways in which hunting and animals are embedded in the fabric of life. To that end, I turn to the rules about acting respectfully towards animals and when Iskut people ignore or abide by them.

### **Talking and Acting Respectfully Towards Animals**

Beliefs about respect for and the proper treatment of animals are often delivered in straightforward statements while camping or collecting food.<sup>72</sup> Like the preceding examples of hunting talk, these statements are expressed matter-of-factly, abruptly, and rarely with additional explanation. They come up, for example, within the context of teaching children or anthropologists how best to behave in order to secure food successfully. While cutting wood with Peter Rivers and his grandchildren, one of the teenaged boys told me that whistling at rabbits makes them stop running from you (McIlwraith Field Book 1:65, April 17, 2002). A young man in his early twenties revealed that the elders taught him that an animal can be caught or shot when it agrees to give itself to you (McIlwraith Field Book 1:64, April 17, 2002). I learned that birds can lead you to a moose. While sitting on a stool in his camp, John Edwards was pleased to share a story about a ‘camp robber,’ the Steller’s jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*), that led him to moose (McIlwraith Field Book, 4:94, September 1, 2002). John elaborated only slightly, suggesting that his hunting success that day was a result of his connection with the

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<sup>72</sup> Discussions of respect for animals among northern Athapaskans are common in the subarctic literature. See, for example, Nadasdy (2003), Tanner (1979), Scott (1996), or Ridington (1988); also Chapter 3, above.

Steller's jay. In all of these cases, personal associations or interactions with some animals help with successful hunting.

Young people more than elders were also quick to remind me that once an animal appears in front of a hunter it must be taken. I encountered this rule, and a violation of it, while traveling along the BC Rail grade. A moose appeared in front of my truck. After slowing to look at it, I was instructed to drive on. We had a rifle with us and I was uncertain about why the moose was not shot. The owner of the rifle hinted, however, that he was unwilling to butcher and clean the moose that day. It was too much work, he said. I wondered if he was referring indirectly to my presence and the fact that he would have to teach me what to do. Back in Iskut, Michael Roe chastised the hunter emphatically, saying directly to him: "*Ensuge dintset*" 'You will eat your fart' (McIlwraith Field Book, 4:12, August 3, 2002). Without meat, implied Michael, the hunter and his companions were left with only their stomach gases to sustain them.

Game should be cleaned immediately upon returning to the camp. This is a sign of respect for animals and it prevents the meat from spoiling. It is difficult, however, to get busy teenagers to clean their game promptly. Another camp rule prohibits the disposal of meat in camp fires because doing so attracts bears (eg. McIlwraith Field Book 1:64, April 17, 2002). John Edwards instructed his grandsons not to do this after seeing them throw a moose rib into a camp fire. He cited the case of a hunter who did not heed this warning and soon after a grizzly bear entered his camp (McIlwraith Field Book 4:33, August 7, 2002). This belief is not held by all hunters. Elder Peter Rivers says he does not fear throwing meat in the fire because he has never seen it result in a bear's arrival. Peter's different reaction to the disposal of meat and bones indicates that the rules are



known widely but not practiced consistently. Peter may have moved away from the concerns of older days or simply be convinced that the burning of meat is not dangerous.

People of all ages know these injunctions and enforce them through direct and indirect discourse or actions. Adult hunters tell their children directly not to talk badly about animals, tease them, or play with them (also Sheppard 1983a; Nadasdy 2003:88-91). Children learn and enact these rules. I watched one evening in August 2004 as Laura Rivers and Cliff Rivers butchered a caribou in front of five young teenagers on the side of *Dzetsedle* 'Klappan Mountain' (little mountain). As Laura began to open the belly of the caribou with her knife, one boy exclaimed "nasty" in response to the warm air and smell that came from the caribou's body. Immediately and in unison, the other four kids chided their cousin: "Don't say that. Don't talk bad about it" (McIlwraith Field Book, August 10, 2004). Clearly children know these rules. The direct and indirect criticism of the actions of others keeps these rules in play (also Nadasdy 2005:306-307).

Less direct ways of controlling behavior include passing references to being 'stingy.' 'Acting stingy' is a particularly serious label meant to call attention to a person who does not share what they have (also Sheppard 1983a:538; Braroe 1975:150-156).<sup>73</sup> Being stingy is frowned upon because it indicates that people are in violation of proper social relations *between people*. The Tahltan language word for stingy is *eghādet̚sen*'. This word has nothing to do with meat, according to one elder, despite the fact that the second half of the word appears to contain the Tahltan word *et̚sen*' 'meat.' A mountain southeast of Telegraph Creek and visible from the town is called *Tsēghādet̚sen*' 'Stingy

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<sup>73</sup> On a visit to Vancouver, I heard Susan Folke say "I act stingy to myself" in reference to ending her own shopping spree. A variation on 'acting stingy' is 'acting hoggy,' as in 'to hog something.' I heard this expression infrequently.

Mountain.’ The name comes from hunters who report frequent sightings of goats on the mountain. When arriving at the spot at which the goats were spotted, however, there are never any there. In this case, the land itself acts in a stingy way and withholds food from hunters.

In times past, the phrase ‘acting stingy’ referred to people who did not share food. During food shortages, hoarding had the potential to put others at risk of starvation. Smith (2002:65) notes that among the Chipewyan, stinginess stands in contrast to animals that give themselves up to hunters selflessly. He elaborates, saying that between people “stinginess can be as reprehensible as murder, and ... it sometimes was tantamount to murder (Smith 2002:65). Avoiding stinginess behavior suggests that generosity and sharing are preferred actions (also Sheppard 1983a:563). Martha James, referring to her daughter who had eaten a half bag of *etsen*’ *gāne* ‘dry moose meat,’ said to me: “How stingy,” as a commentary on her selfishness (McIlwraith Field Book 4:11, August 2, 2002). I was often told that the arrival of freezers in the village made people stingy because freezers allow families to store meat without sharing it (McIlwraith Field Book 6:22-6:23, December 3, 2002). Just as stingy land is avoided by hunters, stingy people are vilified.

The term ‘stingy’ has acquired meanings outside of its original hunting and meat sharing contexts. The word is heard frequently around the card table. On one occasion, while playing a game called ‘31,’ Martha James and I sat side-by-side in an arrangement which required that I pass cards to her. Within the rules of the game, Martha sees a selection of cards I might pass to her, and on several occasions I chose to pass poor cards instead of cards that would help her hand. After one such pass, Martha feigned anger and

said, “You Stingy Mountain,” and then laughed aloud (McIlwraith Field Book 6:58, January 11, 2003). By invoking the name of this mountain, Martha criticized my play and hoped to influence me the next time I faced a similar card passing choice.

Peter Rivers talks frequently of the importance of being able to procure and secure food when the opportunity presents itself. The proper treatment of animals was part of his instruction. The first time he took me fishing through the ice at *Luwechōn*, I failed to catch anything. As we packed up our gear, Peter turned to me without a grin and said: “I’m not going to starve in this country, but you will” (McIlwraith Field Book 1:34, March 25, 2002). I took his comment as a light-hearted tease. I learned later that this was a common refrain used by older adults to call attention to the laziness or lack of hunting knowledge of children. It is a comment about the ability of a good fisherman to feed himself and the potential to go hungry if he fails. Then, Peter gave me two of the *deghai* ‘rainbow trout’ he had caught. The fish had not been cleaned and I motioned to cut its head off before Peter thought the fish was dead. He said, “You gotta kill it before you gut it, or they’ll punish you.” Taken aback, I whacked the fish in the back of the head with my knife as I had seen Peter do. I then asked Peter about the punishment and to whom he was referring. He responded: “How would you like to be gutted if you were still alive?” (McIlwraith Field Book 1:35, March 25, 2002). He never elaborated upon who “they” were or what the punishment would be. Iskut people rarely explain such things. Feeling much like an Iskut child, the message hit me hard enough to make sure I clubbed any fish I caught in the future hard enough to ensure that it was dead. Now, I see Peter’s message as a reminder that once a fish offers itself to you, killing it is the proper thing to do.

Martha James says that the punishment of hunters by animals does not occur today. For Martha, such talk is a vestige of the past. It also conflicts with her Catholic beliefs. Martha admits, however, that interdictions like ‘you’re gonna starve’ may be used to scare children who are wasteful with their food. Peg James also shrugs off talk of traditions like thanking animals for their sacrifice as simply a behavior from the past. “People used to thank everything,” she says. These traditions have changed, to be sure, particularly in light of Christian teachings about prayer and God as a creator. Some elders admitted to me that they believe *Tsesk’iye Chō* ‘Raven’ (Big Crow, trickster figure) who created the world and the animals is the Christian God.<sup>74</sup>

Non-native hunters are not exempt from punishment by animals. Non-native hunters are held up by Iskut people as examples of what may result when proper relations between animals and people are violated. Trapper Terry MacMillan (not a pseudonym) froze to death along the B.C. Rail grade in 1986.<sup>75</sup> This episode is interpreted as an example of both Terry’s poor planning and his mistreatment of a grizzly bear. Terry lived in a trailer just off of BC Rail grade in the headwaters of the Skeena River. He was a decent trapper, by all accounts, and was well-known to Iskut hunters. Terry was in the habit, however, of not preparing himself properly for cold northern winters. He sought food frequently at Gulf Oil’s mining camp near *Dzetsedle* ‘Klappan Mountain.’ In

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<sup>74</sup> Honigmann’s ethnographic work among the Kaska provides additional data related to changes wrought by Christianization in northwestern Canada. In his account of ‘Kaska Reactions to Nature,’ Honigmann reveals that his informant divided all animals into groups based on whether they were created by God or the devil. The result of this classification scheme is that some animals are good and others are bad, with the distinction based largely on the dangers a particular animal posed to a person (Honigmann 1949:223). These descriptions emphasize Christian dichotomies of good and evil as well as Euro-Canadian philosophies which put human beings in control of animals.

<sup>75</sup> This story was told to me on several occasions by different men including Frank Edwards, John Edwards, and Peter Rivers (egs. McIlwraith Field Book, 4:57 & 4:84, from August 2002). There is a plaque and

December of 1986, Terry was starving and cold. He left his cabin for Iskut Village, a walk of almost one hundred miles. Terry was found dead by a party of Iskut men who had set out on snowmobiles to see if he was managing in the unusually cold weather.

The details of Terry's story are revealed sporadically when driving along the BC Rail grade with the men who found Terry's body. Frank Edwards points out where certain events in Terry's last hours occurred to their children and grandchildren, such as where Terry made a small fire on the side of the grade. Like hunting stories, these accounts are reminders of the importance of being properly prepared for anything that one does. Iskut hunters blame Terry's death on a lack of preparedness for living in the bush during the winter. Terry lacked sufficient supplies to last the winter and he was foolish to try and do so.

Descriptions of Terry's fate also reveal the concern Iskut people have for treating animals properly. Terry was known to have hurt *khoh* 'grizzly bear' by attaching a plywood board with nails sticking outwards through it to the side of his trailer. Terry explained this spiked instrument was designed to protect the trailer from the aggressive bears wanting to get inside. Terry's life and the entire episode at the end of his life are marked by a large wooden cross erected just off the grade on the edge of the forest in the location where Terry was found. The memorial cross is frequently mauled by grizzly bears and large scratches are visible on the wood. Peter Rivers explained to me that this continuing and endless mauling was Terry's punishment for hurting grizzlies.

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photograph commemorating Terry's life in the Iskut First Nation offices. The picture shows Terry with a load of furs.

## Scientific Knowledge and Its Language

The explanations given for hunting successes and failures illustrate the social nature of the relationships between animals and their hunters. They also combine elements of ritual, chance, and technical expertise. Frequently, Iskut people refer to luck or biology when catching fish or hunting. These references obscure more traditional associations between respect and success or failure. Given the overall simplicity of fishing through the ice, I was amazed at how much better some people were at catching fish than others. For one thing, I was never as *lucky* as the people with whom I fished. Peg James, in contrast, was always the best fisher on the ice regardless of the location of the hole at which she fished or the type of lure she used to attract the fish. I asked Peg and others specifically about what makes a good fisher and the role luck plays in fishing. She shrugged off my question with a self-deprecating laugh. Others used the term *mechāhuja* ‘lucky’ to describe some fishers, noting that those without luck are simply poor fishers. The logic of this is easy to grasp. Still, I did not like being labeled unlucky at fishing early on in my stay at Iskut. That comment was later retracted with the statement that I needed more practice and instruction.

While poor luck is one explanation for limited results while fishing, other reasons given for failure are based on some knowledge of fish biology. On one June morning, for example, Mark Fowler, Peg James, and I headed down to *Luwechōn* to fish for *t̥sabā’ e / deghai* ‘rainbow trout’ (*O. mykiss*) with our rods. After thirty minutes, none of us had caught any fish and we gave up. Mark speculated that the fish were in the rivers spawning (McIlwraith Field Book 2:75, June 12, 2002). On other days, the air temperature at the lake is cited as a primary reason for failing to catch fish or for not

going fishing at all. In the summer, hot days cause fish to retreat from the surface to deeper water. As Mark Fowler remarked on a warm day at the lake: “It’s too hot. They’ve [the fish] all gone to deeper water” (June 13, 2002). Similarly, John Edwards explained that during extremely cold stretches in the winter, fish swim and stay in the deeper, warmer waters away from the ice. Poor fishing results are also explained by poorly placed fishing holes or fishing at midday when fish are not feeding. It is ironic that the fishers chose to fish at these times and in these spots. Frequently, it is not until failures occur that biological explanations are given.

The penchant for explaining fishing failure biologically or in terms of luck makes Iskut fishers sound like fishers anywhere in Canada. The prevalence of biological explanations for failure is based, in part, on what those seeking TEK assume to be in place: a sophisticated knowledge of the environment. I suspect they are also associated with the Canadian education system. Iskut people have been taught basic science and understand how fish behave from that perspective. Talking about fish and fishing in the register of the biological sciences is useful during interactions with resource managers or government officials. Knowing the jargon of science is helpful for understanding presentations directed at Iskut audiences. As well, Iskut people have learned that government agents do not always want ‘traditional’ explanations for disappearing animals or low fish returns. Those bureaucrats might not know how to use such information even if it was deemed reliable or acceptable.

## **A Conservation Ethic: Compliance and Non-Compliance**

Despite my observation that Iskut people are careful to treat animals properly and respectfully, I heard hunters talking about actions that contradict these cautions. While hunting with a non-native teacher in the spring of 2004, Murray Rivers shot a *detsili* ‘cow moose’ without apparent knowledge of the sex of the animal (Gord Mulliken, personal communication, May 31, 2004). Murray Rivers is forty-three years old, and when he realized that he had shot a cow at a time in the year when it might have been pregnant, he hid the animal in the bush and left it there. Murray refused to bring the animal back to the village for fear of critical comments by elders for having shot a cow. According to Martha James, Murray’s aunt, her parents and siblings never worried about killing a cow moose at any time of the year. Taking meat when it was available was always the first priority. From the perspective of an animal sacrificing itself to a hunter, Martha’s experience makes good sense: you must accept the sacrifice when it happens and ignoring the gift risks violating the social connection between hunter and prey. It also means you might go hungry.

Murray Rivers’s behavior illustrates an awareness of government-defined conservation rules, despite the fact that Iskut people are not bound to non-native hunting seasons. If Martha’s commentary is credible (and I believe it is), then no rebuke would have been forthcoming from the village had Murray returned with the cow. Nadasdy notes that northern native people expect to be consulted by government agencies about the conservation of animals. In the eyes of governments, native people are best able to play that role when they convey an acceptance of conservation principles, the “colonial



discourse of wildlife management” (Nadasdy 2005:315). In Murray’s case, then, a broader Canadian ethic of animal conservation meets the Iskut philosophy of taking what is given to you. Murray’s act of discarding the animal and wasting its meat results in a violation of both orientations. Presumably, the animals will note this, share the knowledge among themselves, and limit Murray’s hunting success in the future. And, if the government or non-native public were to find out, there might be an outcry about wasteful natives, too.

Other Iskut accounts of people who contradict the rules for the proper treatment of animals frequently involve the actions of non-natives or take place in settings where non-natives are present. Fishing for sport by non-natives, sometimes referred to as ‘catch-and-release’ fishing, is often held up by Iskut people and members of other native groups as harmful to the animals. Catching and releasing live fish is akin to playing with one’s food and is disrespectful to the fish; as such, Iskut fishermen hold that any fish caught should be kept and eaten (also Nadasdy 2003:82). When Iskut families fish for salmon, however, some edible fish species like *gēs* ‘Chinook salmon’ or *tsabā’e* ‘Dolly Varden trout’ are inevitably caught in the salmon nets and thrown back. *Dek’ani* ‘sockeye salmon’ are the preferred food fish. Others are excluded from the diet even if doing so violates the rule against needlessly killing fish. This seems to be a new practice based on fishing for taste and not for sustenance.

Apparent violations of hunting rules appear in the context of working as hunting guides. Thinking back to the 1960s, Frank Edwards told me of catching a groundhog with a spring pole and tying a string on its tail. He then played with the leashed groundhog for client hunters (McIlwraith Field Book 4:59, August 12, 2002). This

behavior violates rules against playing with animals and food but may be acceptable because the audience was not native. One would think, however, that the animals would know that it was Frank who committed the act despite the audience. In other accounts, Iskut guides are quick to mention the greed of their clients who wanted to kill more than one mountain ram or did not quit hunting when an animal escaped initial shots. Iskut hunters know better than to take more meat than is necessary or chase an animal that has clearly escaped.

Susan Knox explains that the guide outfitting and big game hunting experience of Iskut hunters is not inconsistent with traditional hunting practices despite the fact her assessment contradicts what others say. In Susan's mind, the skills of the Iskut hunters encouraged them to participate in this type of wage-based activity and, importantly, such hunting was a separate and distinct from food-gathering. In this way, participation in a wage-based economy did not violate the injunctions of a foraging-based system (Susan Knox, personal communication, February 22, 2003). Both systems of human-animal relations – Iskut ideas about sacrifice or reciprocity and non-native expressions of conservation or greed – are part of Iskut's hunting heritage. In Iskut, they are remembered for their contradictions even to the point where younger hunters today are unclear about which rules should be followed.

## Stories of Pursuing Moose

Stories about pursuing moose are common in Iskut hunting talk. They are also components of an Iskut cultural system based on hunting. The stories are examples of the way in which hunters tell each about their own hunting experience and skill. Embedded within these stories are elements of respect for animals and examples of the humor characteristic of many Iskut people. Here, I present two such stories. They are told consecutively and together they form part of a larger conversation between two first cousins, John Edwards and Colin Duncan.<sup>76</sup> They demonstrate the nature and quality of hunting talk. They illustrate cultural themes like social relationships with animals and the control animals have over the outcome of hunts. And, they offer some insights into the ways in which hunters organize and comment on social relationships within their own families.

Both John and Colin are in their sixties. John is an active and proficient moose hunter whose hunting activities punctuate a busy life of caring for grandchildren and working at a full-time job in the village. John has hunted all of his life on the lands around Iskut. The region is marked by the numerous cabins and camps he built and still maintains. The camps are the physical evidence of John's hunting prowess and his commitment to gathering food for himself, his family, and his community. Colin lives in Terrace now, but spent many years living in Iskut. He is visiting John's camp with his teenage grandsons and showing them something of the life he remembers.

The stories are shared rapidly as John and Colin sit under a kitchen tent in John's hunting camp. The stories are short – no longer than a minute – and each describes the

failure to kill a moose seen while traveling in the bush near Iskut. They are conversational narratives told in barely extended conversational turns. And, they pair nicely with the *Etsen' Ma* myth-time story (Epigraph), for despite the colloquial nature of these accounts, they are imbued with elements of Tahltan mythology. John and Colin's stories are myth-like, exhibiting obvious patterns and containing serious themes about the proper treatment of animals.<sup>77</sup>

While common in everyday talk, stories like these are also very evident on the recordings researchers make while documenting information about traditional uses of lands and animals. The question is what to do with the stories, particularly if one is interested in traditional ecological knowledge. The stories do not contain any obvious hunting rules. The descriptions of hunting practices in them are incomplete. My preference is to treat the accounts as commentaries on the continuing importance of social relationships between humans and animals. They also address relations between hunting partners and between adults and children. The stories include indirect comments about the qualities that make a successful hunter: themes of individualism, self-reliance in the bush, generosity with meat, and a respect for animals are present. The stories also provide researchers with evidence of hunting failures, a potentially dangerous result for people who relied on hunted meat for survival. In sum, these accounts of hunts describe the sacrifice that animals make to humans in every successful hunting encounter and invite hunters and researchers alike to reflect on why hunting is sometimes unsuccessful.

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<sup>76</sup> Due to remarriages, John and Colin have a common grandmother but they do not share a grandfather.

<sup>77</sup> Valentine notes that "highly structured" nature of personal experience narratives among the Severn Ojibwe is a sign that the stories have been retellings numerous times (1995:167).

## The Text

These stories were captured on tape while a tape recorder recorded conversations near John's camp fire. My presence may have affected the tone or content of the talk particularly because John was aware that I wanted to record stories of the old days. I may have been a catalyst for these discussions in much the way Father Mouchet described himself as a sounding board for discussions of hunting and history while traveling the trails with Iskut men in the 1950s (Mouchet 2002:55). Still, the large number of stories I heard like these suggests to me that Colin and John would have told these stories whether I was there or not. I did not ask for them either.

The transcript is divided into four segments. The first segment (A) is the conversation leading to the stories. It provides readers with a sense for the abrupt beginning of the exchange of narratives. The next segments (B and C) are two narratives from a larger set of four. The lines are numbered consecutively from the first through to the third segment. The transcript picks up again in the fourth segment (D). There, one of John's grandsons interrupts the conversation to ask if he can go hunting. No dialogue is eliminated from the text except for the two narratives that fit between sections C and D.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> I chose to reproduce only two of the four texts in the interest of space. The two missing stories are very similar in structure to the two that are presented.



Here I musta shoot through the [pause] weather bone, eh.  
 [laughs]<sup>80</sup>  
 JE [laughs] Weather bone.  
 CD I snowshoe around him.  
 And we keep agoin'.  
 30 And I think I'll get it up on top  
 and it'll come.  
 Big valley on other side  
 and he'll come on through.  
 Then I went back,  
 35 and uncle,  
 we had camp down below.  
 He [the uncle] make everybody look.  
 'Hey Scotty,<sup>81</sup>  
 look at that.'  
 40 Here that moose get up and run.  
 Way he go down the hill.  
 I didn't know that, you know.  
 He came out  
 and look at my moose.  
 45 It's gone.  
 I look right out.  
 It's running away.  
 [laughter with JE]  
 Then I coulda shot him again.  
 50 I just thought,  
 'ah that's good enough.' [1:10:55]

C. John Edwards Story #1 (lines 52-83)

JE That's what I did, [1:12:20]  
 son of a gun.  
 I had 30-30  
 55 and I shot moose.  
 Bīkū. [gestures, see below]  
 Bīkū.  
 Down he went.  
 He kick around, eh.  
 60 And he quit.  
 I thought he died.  
 I made trail back to my dog team.

<sup>80</sup> The withers, or, the hump on the back of the moose to which muscles are attached. Iskut hunters pronounce this feature as 'the weathers' or call it the 'weather bone.' The Tahltan word for the withers is *eghane*. The words 'weather bone' at lines 26 and 27 are said at the same time.

<sup>81</sup> Scotty Edwards, John's older brother.





## **The Structure of Pursuit Stories**

The alignment of lines within the transcript identifies the fact that most of the dialogue is overtly directed at the other person. There is almost no reported speech. The action in the stories revolves around the interaction of the narrator and a moose or, in section C, John's encounters with two moose. What is truly noteworthy about these stories is their careful structure. Beyond the dyadic conversation, a narrative exchange, each story is organized into seven structural units and revolve around a narrative turn in which the story-teller announces that the hunted moose has escaped or that the shot missed the target. I have described the units as follows:

- I. Introductory Frame
- II. Setup for the Rifle Shot
- III. The Shot
- IV. Result of the Shot
- V. Activity After the Shot
- VI. The Narrative Turn
- VII. Ending: Giving Up and Moving On

Colin Duncan starts off. He departs from the preceding conversation about a family rifle. John picks up quickly with a comparable story in lines 52 and 53, stating, "That's what I did / son of a gun" (Unit I).

Once the conversational turn is seized, each man offers basic information about the moose and minor details about the broader context of the hunt (Unit II). This information includes details concerning the type of rifle used, first appearance of the moose itself, sex of the moose, or where the story-teller was positioned when the moose was seen. The claims of personal experience established in the opening lines, combined with the specific details of the moose, authenticate the narrator's experience. The

logistical details in Unit II also establish the possibility of an unexpected turn later in the narrative. No hint of an unsuccessful hunt is given at this point.

In both stories, the rifle shot is a central feature of the narrated description (Unit III). The story-teller identifies the shot audibly and, in one case, visually with hand gestures. Colin uses the words “boom” (line 25). John is somewhat more dramatic in his first story, repeating the onomatopoeic word “bikū” twice (lines 56-57).<sup>82</sup> The result of the shot is always announced immediately after the shot is sounded (Unit IV). John says simply “Down he went” (line 58). The result of Colin’s shot is somewhat more complicated. Colin states: “Here I musta shoot through the weather bone” (line 26). John and Colin both complete the sentence, saying “weather bone” together, and laughter results (line 27). A shot through the weather bone is not always deadly to a moose and John’s ability to complete Colin’s sentence may imply that this has happened to John in the past. John’s laughter contributes to this impression and suggests that he interpreted Colin’s description of the wounded animal as the climax or narrative turn of the story. Colin was, in fact, able to maintain control of the conversational turn, build anticipation and suspense in the narrated events up even higher to reveal a more substantial unexpected moment later in the story.

After shooting at the moose, both hunters describe the activities which lead to the revelation that the moose survived (Unit V). In the narrated events, these activities include speculating that the moose is dead and preparing to retrieve it. These descriptions build suspense and delay the onset of the climax by creating narrative distance between the shot and the revelation that the moose has survived. John says: “I thought he died. /

Made trail back to my dog team. / All the way to the dogs, / back and forth” (lines 61-64). In a side sequence, John tells Colin that he had killed two moose (line 65). He elaborates, telling that he skinned a bull moose before discovering that the cow he initially pursued had escaped. In his story, Colin has already hinted that he had not killed the moose (line 26). Still, he develops his story by describing his efforts to track the fleeing animal. He mentions snowshoeing after the moose and then adds a side sequence about returning to camp and telling his cousin and uncle about the moose (lines 34-40). These extra details delay the expected climax and maintain the possibility that Colin’s hunt is ultimately successful.

The actual results of the hunts are revealed just before the end of each story (Unit VI). In both cases, the moose have left and the narrators remain behind. Laughter follows (lines 49 and 76). More than a funny moment, the turn in the story reflects the discomfort associated with revealing hunting failure. The moose got the better of hunter on these days (Unit VII). For John, the attempt at a kill had been a waste of time. It is as if the moose was never going to be killed. John’s disgust is audible: he had broken trail “for nothing” (83). Colin, too, is resigned to the failure of the hunt: “I coulda shot him again. / I just thought, / ah, that’s good enough” (lines 49-51). These final utterances in both stories offer both a denouement and a cue to the other person that the story has ended.

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<sup>82</sup> I have written this word in the conventions of the Tahltan Practical Orthography in the hopes of replicating the sound John uses when mimicking the firing of a rifle.

## **Creating Distance from the Sacrifice of Animals**

John and Colin's stories draw on significant themes in Iskut hunting culture. While appearing to be about spectacular failures, the stories are actually indirect commentaries on hunting success and its importance to family sustenance. They tell why failed shots are both moments of intense disappointment and incidents of little overall importance in a hunter's long career. They show that life goes on after failures and that it is easy to laugh at one's mistakes.

The structure of these stories suggests that stories like these are told repeatedly. The structure of moose pursuit stories is, in fact, widely known. Even children tell stories with this structure. Such a story is told by a by a seven year old in Transcript 5, above. In that child's story, the humorous or suspenseful turn is missing because the grouse was killed but the other structural elements remain. Moreover, each presentation adds serious commentary about the treatment of animals to the talk of the hunt. They index the sacrifice of food animals by pointing to powerful moose that control the outcome of the hunt. Notably, the moose in these stories do not give themselves up to the hunter. The sacrificial exchanges are underway as the stories progress but it is unfinished when the moose decide to leave each narrated scene. This begs the question of what John or Colin did to discourage each moose from giving itself up. Were they disrespectful in some way? Did they speak badly about moose? The answers to these questions are not forthcoming.

The stories give Jim and Colin an outlet for discussing respectfully, albeit covertly, the ability of moose to stymie a hunting event. The men use a humorous narrative turn to reveal their own inferiority and, indirectly, to describe their frustrations

about a moose's behavior.<sup>83</sup> To talk about moose otherwise might be deemed disrespectful and result in further hunting failures. The stories also permit extended discussion about past hunts that do not show up the other hunter through self-aggrandizement. A focus on the failure creates rhetorical distance from both the moose and a hunter's own prowess. It covers bravado.

Successful moose hunting requires hunters to be both cunning in action and careful in thought. Moose are too smart not to behave otherwise. Here, the tension between moose sacrifice and human need comes truly to the fore. Hunters must encourage, if not compel, a moose to fall to them by using traps and rifles. Yet, the decision to fall is, ultimately, entirely that of the moose. The reverence for moose and the restrictions against hurting animals helps hunters accomplish their goals; in other words, deferential talk about moose contributes to long term hunting success. I am left wondering, however, if wounding a moose during a hunting event, and seeing the moose depart, is as much a disappointment for the moose as it is for the hunter. The sacrifice has failed and the hunter remains hungry. Such an outcome might be expected as part of the reality of hunting. Still, knowing something of Iskut lives, these failures – these incomplete exchanges – do not continue into the future.

Iskut people often, if unintentionally, assign sentience to moose in less dramatic ways. They say that moose and caribou are aware of the intentions of the people they meet. Moose are, for example, more likely to reveal themselves to people who do not

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<sup>83</sup> The use of humor to deflect criticism and to level social differences is visible in many situations at Iskut. Teasing and joking behaviors mark, for example, sibling and cousin relationships during competitive card playing activities or stick gambling games. Among card players, teasing occurs over misplays, poor shuffling, and feigned attempts at cheating. During stick gambling matches, the skilled teams are able to win using distraction techniques including loud singing, boisterous dancing, and shaming.

have rifles with them. When spotting a moose someone inevitably says, “We saw that because we did not have a rifle,” or, “We would not have seen that moose if we had a rifle with us.” Interestingly, moose and caribou know the difference between cameras and rifles for they often posed for my camera despite the fact that stopping a truck and sighting through a camera lens requires the same gestures as sighting through a rifle. Moose may know, for that matter, the difference between anthropologists and hunters.

The analysis of hunter-prey relationships in moose pursuit stories, and indeed in the general rules for treating food animals, can be extended to social relationships between people in Iskut Village. The stretch of speech above begins with Colin Duncan asking John Edwards who now has John’s father’s rifle (line 1). John responds saying that he has the gun at home (line 2). John elaborates, however, indicating that his younger brother Frank had some interest in keeping the rifle (line 6). John then reports the speech of his father saying that he ‘just wanna raise you kids’ (line 8). John’s father is, presumably, referring to Frank, John, and their other siblings. John’s father’s voice appears to enter the conversation again soon after. John tells Colin that his father wanted John to keep the rifle and to kill a lot of moose with it (lines 14-15). In this short stretch of talk, John and Colin evoke their parents’s generation with reference to a family rifle. The rifle is symbolic of hunting itself, the power to take an animal’s life as John himself says. Yet around the symbol of the rifle develops family relations, the lessons fathers teach sons, and the rivalry of brothers. The stories depart from here.

The human relationships portrayed in the stories continue to revolve around families. Colin’s story includes direct reference to uncles and nephews (lines 35-37). With the short comment, Colin draws a larger family into his otherwise solitary pursuit of

the moose. Colin's failure is, in fact, noticed first by other people in the camp implying that they have an interest in Colin's activities. John's story does not include such material but his account points to another aspect of the discussion of social relationships in these storytelling sessions. John and Colin provide an audience for each other and each one clearly plays off of the other's stories. As cousins who both lived in Iskut in the 1950s, additional details are unnecessary. Likewise, the children in the camp are an indirect audience for the accounts. Just as the transcript departs from connections between a father and his children, the storytelling itself continues a tradition of sharing news and history between generations. Moreover, the stories signal the instructional and mentoring relationships older hunters share with younger boys. The immediate importance of hunting returns in the final segment in the transcript when Bobby Weeks interrupts his grandfathers to ask if he and his brother and their cousins can go hunting. A rifle is central to that talk. The stories remind listeners, including me, that senior men have obligations to teach hunting practice and how to care for animals. Doing so might be more important than actually killing a moose.

A final note: as an allegory for the way in which people should treat one another, where the relations between moose and hunters are symbolic of interpersonal relations between family members or with friends, these stories emphasize that social relationships between people are complicated. They indicate that the obligations to exchange food with one another are just as important as moose exchanging their lives for respect. Just as some moose get away, however, the sharing of food between people does not always occur. The stories instruct audiences, then, not to be stingy while also showing that stinginess is a part of life. As with people everywhere, friendships and familial relations

include disappointments which are usually rectified during future interactions. Successful hunts follow failures too.



## 5. “ROUGH RIDING ALL DAY”: WORKING ANIMALS AND RECENT HISTORY

*Are we mangy dogs to [be] kicked around? ... Are you going to haul us back to Telegraph Creek and dump us like cattle?*

Alec Dennis, Walter L. Dennis, and Francis Louie, June 22, 1964<sup>84</sup>

On a shiny day in May, Jim Peters and Scotty Edwards took me out to ‘see the country.’ We went for our drive in my noisy SUV. The men, both in their early seventies, were old friends. Their families have history in the *Tlebāne* ‘Klappan’ and at Telegraph Creek. They brought with them thermoses of tea, bag lunches, and one rifle each. We drove up the trackless BC Rail grade hoping that the summer-only road was passable this early into the spring thaw. As we traveled we watched for animal tracks, sang along to Merle Haggard on the truck’s tape player, and began the process of sorting out a new relationship between Iskut elders and an anthropologist – that is, we began the conversational give-and-take of identifying topics worthy of discussion. We also looked for animals and, if the opportunity arose, wanted to kill a moose or caribou.

On this day, we drove sixty miles up the grade in about three hours. We went past the community camp at *Kāti Chō* and into the valley of *Tehkahche Didiye Tū’e* ‘Little Klappan River’ (Frog-Groundhog River) valley before turning back because of deep, slushy snow covering the roadway. We had an enjoyable lunch of sandwiches and tea over a fire at one of Scotty’s hunting camps. After our meal, my companions set up targets and showed me how to shoot their rifles. Later, on the return trip, we spotted a lone *dih gose* ‘willow grouse’ on the road. Jim insisted that I try and shoot it. As I

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<sup>84</sup> These sentences are from a letter written by Iskut leaders to J.V. Boys, Indian Commissioner for British Columbia, Robin Kendall, Regional Supervisor for Fisheries and Wildlife in British Columbia and the Yukon, and Arthur Laing, Federal Minister of Northern Affairs (later Indian Affairs). The letter was written

struggled to keep the rifle barrel steady I was surprised at just how small the bird's head looked through the rifle sight. I missed the shot badly from about thirty feet. Jim and Scotty's friendly laughter suggested that they never expected me to hit the bird.

Throughout the day, Jim and Scotty talked at length about working for a non-native outfitter named Tommy Walker during the 1950s. Walker ran a hunting outfit on the Spatsizi Plateau, at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* 'Cold Fish Lake,' two or three days walk east of Iskut Village. Jim and Scotty worked for Walker for years as wranglers, cooks, and guides. The stories Jim and Scotty tell about their work for Walker are frequently fond memories of a different era. They include reference to client hunters, familiar trails, and work with horses. This was the era of habitation near Telegraph Creek and at *Lwechōn Menh*. Jim and Scotty traveled extensively to work for Walker (see Chapter 3). Previous conversations made me aware, however, of the mixed feelings that memories of Walker evoked in village families. Walker wrote that Iskut people were starving when he arrived in the Spatsizi in 1948 (Walker 1976; also Walker Papers; Henderson 2006:22-23) and, while Iskut people remember hard times, they resent Walker's claims that he saved them. I listened for criticism of Walker as Jim and Scotty talked and found instead that the focus of conversation was on the horses and the work.

Eventually, we made it back home, empty handed, without even a grouse. The men did not comment on that when as we drove back through the village, although I wondered if their wives questioned them sternly as they entered their houses. As I thought about our drive afterwards, I realized that some older hunters reflect on guiding work in order to comment indirectly on the changing work and food-gathering priorities

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in response to the poor living conditions at Iskut shortly after the move there by several families from

of Iskut families today. Their talk is allegorical and, as such, stories of guiding are comments on the historical and contemporary participation of Iskut people in a world that is larger than their village.

### **Domesticated Animals at Iskut**

A social model of human-animal relations at Iskut Village, a model which emphasizes the place of animals in Iskut social networks, works best when food animals are the focus (Chapters 3 and 4). The social connections between food animals and people were established in myth-time. Because of that, the social model is less able to account for the behavior and talk associated with domesticated and working animals like horses and dogs, especially when those relationships exist in the context of recent history, wage work, and permanent settlement. In her review of anthropological studies of domesticated animals, Eugenia Shanklin notes that anthropologists have preferred ecological research showing the economic value of these animals (animals as sustenance for people) or metaphors indicating how cultural conceptions of domesticated animals reflect social norms and order (animals as symbols of society) (Shanklin 1985:377; cf. Nadasdy 2007:29). In this assessment, Shanklin elaborates on the symbolic line of inquiry and the impression “that domesticated animals occupy an intermediate position between humans (culture) and wild animals (nature)” (Shanklin 1985:397). If this is true, the metaphors of society that rely on domesticated animals exist in middle ground between society and nature.

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Telegraph Creek (BC Archives, MS-2784, Box 18, File 3). These names are not pseudonyms.

In northern Athapaskan cultures like that at Iskut Village there is little obvious separation between culture and nature in local thought. For this reason, it is worth considering the place of domesticated animals in Iskut's symbolic repertoire and their role in social relationships. Are work animals truly different from food animals at Iskut? And, do stories about horses accomplish the same goals for the storyteller as accounts about moose? Or, is the use of domesticated animals symbolic of the modernization government policies sought for native people? Following Shanklin, I am curious about how all animals, moose and horses included, are "good to think with" (Shanklin 1985:379; cf. Levi-Strauss 1963:89; also Levi-Strauss 1966; Nadasdy 2007:29) particularly in the context of Iskut narratives of historical progress and wage work.

Iskut stories which describe their relationships with work animals illuminate Iskut perceptions about their participation in a wider world. Many of these stories include descriptions of or reference to guiding non-native hunters on trophy hunts. 'Covering' is also in play when accounts of hunting and history are shared (cf. Goffman 1963:102).<sup>85</sup> This is reasonable because sustenance hunting often indexes native impoverishment and an underdeveloped culture for outsiders. Walker's writings contribute to this stigma (eg. Walker 1976; Walker Papers). These discursive actions and choices are part of managing social relationships that stem from Iskut's marginal position in both native and non-native British Columbia. These stories may be part of Iskut's ethnic identity.

To elaborate, Iskut Village and its residents live in the geographical space between several different native groups. To the west, distinctive coastal traditions like those of the Tlingit, are visible. There, the ownership of resources and displays of wealth

mark social hierarchy. To the north, east, and south, Iskut exists in the social and historical space between the self-described 'proper' Tahltans at Telegraph Creek and non-Tahltan but Athapaskan neighbors. Altogether, Iskut people work hard to manage their identity and their history in a range of challenging social settings. The choices they make reveal their unique but often ignored historical experiences and outlook.

Memories of guiding shared as narratives are more than nostalgic reflections. They are statements of what Iskut people know about outsiders and how they attempt to deal with them. They are reflections on racist attitudes about removing native people from their land to towns with schools and churches. By evoking Tommy Walker's guiding business, the stories address indirectly Walker's idealized notions of pristine natural environments without native people in them; here, the only noble savage is one remembered to have lived on the land. In addition, the stories discuss behavior around domesticated animals and outsiders suggesting that these animals and people are treated in specific ways. They also address the place of horses, dogs, and meddling outsiders in village life today. For Iskut audiences, the memories are social commentaries about hunters plying their trade in new ways.

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<sup>85</sup> See also Braroe 1975:122 for the use of covering in the context of native relations with non-native people.

## Dogs and Horses

*Telegraph Creek, BC, April 8, 1951*

*Dear Mr. Walker*

*Please, could you buy another .30-30 for Charlie Quock and bring it with you when you come to Cold Fish Lake. He will pay you when you come.*

*The horses are all right except Dart who is skinny. Seal also. All the others are fine. Only three died this winter, Montie, Glassie and Belle. Old Ronny is still alive yet.*

*Thank you for your letter just received. I got short of grub and came to Telegraph. Francis is feeding the horses two times a week while I am away. We got all the oats at Hyland Post.*

*Except for the ones mentioned above, all the horses are rolling fat. The Rasmussen horses are so wild, you cannot come near them. Queen is all right.*

*Hoping to see you soon, I remain yours very truly,*

*Alec Jack*<sup>86</sup>

The place of dogs in Iskut history is not always articulated succinctly in Iskut talk or in myth-time stories.<sup>87</sup> The Tahltan Bear Dog is one of a handful of domesticated dogs indigenous to North America and its appearance in northwestern British Columbia predates living memories (Derr 1997:54). Teit describes the Bear Dog and its role in the Tahltan sustenance economy this way:

Dogs are as indispensable to the Tahltan as snowshoes, and a large number of them are kept. At the present day, they are mongrels, some of them still showing traces of the old Indian breed. When the snow is good, they are hitched to wooden sleds ... and are thus employed for transporting supplies, camp outfit, game, etc. At other times of the year, they are used

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<sup>86</sup> BC Archives, MS-2784, Box 18, File 8.

<sup>87</sup> Among the Tagish of the southern Yukon, McClellan says that “dogs occupy an anomalous position with respect to both humans and other animals” (McClellan 1975:161). This position is created by a belief that dogs are hostile to humans but also provide humans with companionship and assist in their economic pursuits. Sharp (1976) refers to dogs as “liminal creatures” among Mission Chipewyan because they eat anything (unlike most animals).

for packing, loads in proportion to the size of each dog being lashed to its back. Canvas panniers, much after the style of saddle-bags, are used for placing the load in (Teit 1906:356).

Dogs served Iskut hunters as pack, draft, and hunting animals until at least 1970.<sup>88</sup> Some in Iskut refer to the arrival of the first snowmobiles in the Village at about that time as the beginning of the demise of dogs (also Sharp 1976:26; Nadasdy 2003:35).<sup>89</sup> Besides drafting and packing, Tahltan Bear Dogs are recognized for their tenacity while hunting. Stories abound in Iskut Village about these dogs confronting bears and other animals in their dens. Sadly for many at Iskut, the Bear Dog is considered to be extinct (Derr 1997:54).

Iskut relationships with dogs are recorded in myth-time stories. The story of the 'Dog Husband' is known by Tahltans at Telegraph Creek and at Iskut Village and it is very common throughout northern Canada (see Teit 1909:318; Teit 1921a:248-250). In the Tahltan variant of the story, a woman marries a man who is really a dog. The children from this union, pups, have incestuous relationships and over-hunt the area north of Telegraph Creek. The entire family is punished for these inappropriate acts when they drown trying to cross the Stikine River. The story is memorialized in the Three Sisters Rocks which stand in the Stikine River downstream from Telegraph Creek. Each rock represents one of the characters in the story and the place that they drowned. Thus,

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<sup>88</sup> There is some debate about the antiquity of dogs as draft animals (see Sharp 1976:26).

<sup>89</sup> Sharp (2001:14; 20) says that during his fieldwork in the 1960s, dogs were responsible for a large amount of noise among the Chipewyan at Mission. Then, with snowmobiles, the sounds of the village change from dogs to machines. I would expect that the same was true in Iskut.

despite wide-spread familiarity of this story in northern Canada, it has specific and local connections to Tahltan-speaking peoples.<sup>90</sup>

In the story of *Deneka'ladiyah*, a dog is a hunting companion.<sup>91</sup> The relationship between this dog and the hunter reflect social relationships of the sort expected between hunting partners. The dog and hunter cooperate. Teit's version of the story records this clearly: "The dog ran down the goats; and when he brought them to bay, the hunter speared them" (Teit 1919:241).<sup>92</sup> As the hunt continues, however, the hunter becomes over-zealous in his pursuit of an elusive goat. The hunter scolds the goat for not giving itself up and, because of this disrespectful talk, the hunter and his dog are turned to stone (Teit 1919:241-242). The implication is that the *Deneka'ladiyah* dog and the hunter are equally guilty of impropriety.

The *Deneka'ladiyah* story is not told very often in Iskut Village although it is well-known and appreciated.<sup>93</sup> I found that most people are familiar with the events of the story and understand it as a reminder not to hurt or talk badly about animals. Most people receive the reminder simply by hearing the name of the hunter, *Deneka'ladiyah*. *Deneka'ladiyah* also refers to the rock formation into which the hunter and dog were turned. This commemorative rock is in the headwaters of the Spatsizi River and it shows the hunter, the goat, and the dog. It is visible to Iskut people traveling through the

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<sup>90</sup> Iskut ethnographer Janice Sheppard says she was present in Iskut for the conversational retelling of two versions of the story (1983b:90). Sheppard (1983b) compares and analyzes eleven versions of the story from several northern Athapaskan communities. Adlam (1995) offers a structural analysis of the Dog Husband story and notes that the Tahltan version of the story is about the roles of women. Jackson (1929) compares a number of geographically diverse number of Dog Husband stories using techniques from literary analysis.

<sup>91</sup> *Deneka'ladiyah* is made up of several morphemes. *Dene* means person. The word for spear/arrowhead is *ka'* and *la* is tip of the arrow. *Diyah* means he/she walked or ran into it. Thus, the name of the rock translates as 'Person who walked into a spear' (Angela Dennis, personal communication).

<sup>92</sup> Teit calls the hunter *Tenqalati'ya*.



Spatsizi and hunters like John Edwards say that it serves as a constant warning to hunters to act properly.

Dogs are never far from sight or mind in Iskut. Dogs come up in conversations about hunting in the old days. Some say that packing meat from a kill to a camp is far easier with dogs than with all terrain vehicles. Dogs can pull sleds or carry packs along narrower trails than ATVs and dogs can function well even if the trails are in poor maintenance. I found myself experiencing first hand the passion for dogs and trails during an ice fishing expedition in January. Scotty Edwards took me fishing at a hole across a snow-covered lake. We used snowshoes to get there. Once the fishing was done, Scotty decided I needed to learn how to 'pack a trail' like they used to do for dogs. Dogs pulled sleds behind the hunter who went ahead to pack the snow down enough to allow the sled to move through deep snow. I spent the next hour walking back and forth over about three hundred yards of the shore of the lake stomping down loose snow and trying to gain the satisfaction of Scotty. I learned quickly that packing a trail was a lot of work.

Ambivalence towards dogs continues. On the one hand, dogs are appreciated for the help they have given people in the past. The Tahltan Bear Dog is a symbol of Iskut identity. They are proud of the hearty character of the Bear Dog. They speak about breeding it back into existence by mating small dogs with tough personalities. Inevitably, a small and fierce dog in the village will be called a Tahltan Bear Dog or compared with them. The name for coyotes in the Tahltan language is also indicative of the favor that

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<sup>93</sup> I recorded a retelling of this story in an interview setting.

dogs receive. Coyotes are called *tidah tli'* 'for nothing dog,' or, an animal that is just about useless.

On the other hand, dogs are spoken of poorly in Iskut. Curse words frequently include the Tahltan and the English words for dog. It is common after a minor accident, for example, to hear someone utter *tli' tsāne* 'dog shit' in Tahltan or 'dirty dog' in English. At cards, receiving a bad hand is associated with the statement *tli'dile* 'dog deal' where *dile* represents a Tahltan pronunciation of the English word 'deal.' On the surface, it appears that dogs are treated badly too. They live outside in small shelters or under houses all year long. The dogs seem to swelter in the summer and suffer in the cold of winter. Food is fleeting and many of the dogs are scavengers. Feral dogs roam in the Iskut dump. In sum, Iskut dogs rarely hunt today despite the fact they are treated like hunting dogs.<sup>94</sup> Laura Rivers sums up the ambivalence associated with dogs in the past and present, saying that "dogs help you but you gotta feed them."

If Iskut relationships with dogs are ambiguous, connections to horses are simply unclear. Tahltan-speaking peoples may have encountered horses first during the construction of the telegraph line north from the Stikine River towards Alaska in the 1860s. Through the end of the nineteenth century, horses and prospectors heading to the gold fields in the Yukon used this trail for an overland route within Canada. Teit comments briefly on the use and knowledge of horses by Telegraph Creek Tahltans and he suggests that they are generally unimpressed by horses:

Although a number of Tahltan can ride and pack horses, having worked in white-man's pack-trains, etc., they are not a 'horse' people, and it was said

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<sup>94</sup> In his careful description of working Chipewyan dogs, Sharp notes that dogs work best when it is colder than -20°F. Sharp also observes efforts not to push dogs too hard during the summer heat and hears comments that scavenging dogs keep the reserve clean (Sharp 1976:27-28).

that the total number of horses owned by the tribe in the fall of 1903 was two only. For the conditions of the their country, dogs are considered much more serviceable, being easily kept, and able to go over muskeg and on ground where horses could not travel. Besides, the long winters, comparative scarcity of feed, and the winter trapping excursions of the Indians, all help to prevent the keeping of horses (Teit 1906:346).

Martha James says “everyone” (Iskut ancestors) had their own horse by the 1930s (personal communication, June 2006).<sup>95</sup> Outfitters like Steele Hyland and Walker brought with them the financial resources that ensured (most) horses would survive the winter in the British Columbia north. As business owners, it was in their interest to ensure that they would.

Iskut people remember Walker’s horses at *Hok’ats Luwe Menh* ‘Cold Fish Lake.’ As the letter presented above suggests, men like Alec Jack and Charlie Quock cared for and monitored the condition of Walker’s horses throughout the year. Their role was particularly important in the winter when Walker was absent and the horses needed considerable attention. They took these jobs seriously. In correspondence they referred to themselves as cowboys. Jim Peters continues to call to himself a cowboy both in reference to his work and, light-heartedly, to his rough personality. The Iskut First Nation keeps horses today. They are part of the Kluachon Outfitters, a guiding business that the Council runs under the direction of a non-native person. Caring for these horses provides work for young people. Some teenagers spend their summer moving horses from the Village to camps around the area and on the Spatsizi Plateau. And the jobs are reminders of how some elders made a living.

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<sup>95</sup> There is little ethnographic or historical record of Iskut ancestors encountering with horses. Neither Jenness (1937) nor Emmons (1911) mention horses. Naturalist Andrew Jackson Stone, who documented plants and animals in the Stikine River watershed in the 1890s, traveled by foot and horse pack train with his Tahltan guides (Stone 1896-1897).

Owning horses is predicated on wages from client hunters. Walker's horses are pack animals and they are meant to work within the outfitting business. Unlike food animals, and as the letter suggests, the horses have proper names in the tradition of farm animals and they require feed. In other letters, Alec Jack describes keeping track of and, at times, rounding up lost horses; Jim Peters's story, given below, describes these kinds of experiences. The actions of horses stand in contrast to the behaviors of food animals like moose. Horses are constrained by corrals in the bush, wear bells to identify their locations, and are rounded up and moved as humans see fit.

Unlike horses, moose find their own food. Moose punish hunters who misbehave by withholding themselves from hungry people, and in doing so control the outcome of hunts (Chapter 4; Epigraph). There are no references to horses in Tahltan mythology. As such, there is no mythological charter pointing to proper relations with these animals. The stories below show that the behavior of Iskut people around horses is different from that which is expected when pursuing or contemplating food animals. By analogy, relations with non-local people are different than with hunting partners, too.<sup>96</sup> I elaborate below.

### **Guiding Stories**

Iskut associations with horses are central to guiding stories. By extension, the stories characterize the way in which Iskut people remember, interpret, and feel about their associations with outfitters like Tommy Walker. With an obvious focus on the

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<sup>96</sup> The Tahltan language word for horse is *gemdān*, although the origin of this apparently borrowed word is unclear (John Alderete, personal communication, June 2006; Angela Dennis, personal communication,

guiding era of the recent past, these narratives acknowledge indirectly relationships with food animals and hunting in the distant past. Through analogy, they also offer commentary on events in the present like mineral exploration or hydro-electric development. These contemporary activities might be thought of as representing the Tommy Walker of a new generation. The stories point to the repeated success of Iskut people at understanding the demands of outsiders and participating in new economic activities cautiously and sometimes enthusiastically.

The following story is typical of others told by Jim Peters on this day and, indeed, of the stories men and women often told while traveling around Iskut territory. It is just a few minutes in length, but includes subplots and secondary accounts related to incidents while Jim was moving horses for Tommy Walker, likely in the 1950s or 1960s. Scotty and I form the immediate audience for this story. As is often the case, the precise details of these memories are less important than simply telling the tale. The absence of broader contextual information indicates an expectation of shared history, background knowledge, and understandings of the overt and covert meanings of the text. Jim assumes that Scotty is familiar with the places and people he mentions and does not fill in omitted or taken-for-granted details for my benefit. Jim provides just enough contextual material for a knowledgeable *pāne* ‘partner’ to follow along, react, and tell more stories.

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October 2006). Iskut people speak rarely about cattle. *Mushmush* is Tahltan for cattle. It is a cognate of the Chinook Jargon word *moos'-moos* (Gibbs 1863).

## Transcript 7: Guiding Stories

[Scene: Two Iskut elders in a small SUV with an anthropologist. Llamas come into view at the side of the road. Jim Peters is speaking unless otherwise noted.]

### Scene 1: Keyed Off of Seeing Llamas<sup>97</sup>

Jim Peters:

- 1 Dirty little animals [llamas], eh.  
2 Crazy.

### Scene 2: First Narrative – Rounding up Horses

- 3 Man horses do that.  
4 Second day. [1<sup>st</sup> Narrative Begins]  
5 They gotta go across today  
6 or they gonna get it.  
7 Man, then we run them down like this.  
8 Two of us.  
9 One on this side.
- 10 Just close to that river  
11 that leader tried to go that way. [Horse acts improperly]
- 12 Wild one:
- 13 Go ahead  
14 try to go that way. [Horse acts improperly]
- 15 We hit him. [Response to horse's decision]  
16 You [Scotty Edwards] know Black Jack.
- 17 [SE: Yah.]
- 18 That one.  
19 We hit him.  
20 And Silver too.  
21 We, boy just ...
- 22 he run to [inaudible]  
23 We hit and they too

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<sup>97</sup> A lodge owner on Eddontenajon Lake, two kilometres south of Iskut Village (1.2 miles) owns a herd of llamas which he had hoped could be used for pack trips into the bush, much like horses. Iskut people say llamas are too stubborn for such work.

24 and then I hit him hard as I can in there.  
25 After I hit side of the neck,  
26 I hit him hard as I can in the rump.  
27 He jumped right in the river.  
28 The rest jumped. [Horses get it right]

29 Creeks.  
30 They scared of creeks.  
31 Early spring,  
32 them little bit of ice on the creek.  
33 They wouldn't cross.  
34 We make them cross that day, morning.  
35 Man, I tell you,  
36 we take 101 head up  
37 just the two of us.  
38 Up to Cold Fish.  
39 I tell you, that's work.

40 And I stay at the back [trailing]  
41 and he's leading them [riding point], eh.  
42 Oh, go ahead of them.

43 Most of them got foal.  
44 Bad ones we put down.  
45 When they turn off [stop, pause?],  
46 [as it was] spring time,  
47 they can't.  
48 They can't stay quiet cause lot of bugs.  
49 They have to ring their bell, eh.  
50 I know when they get out,  
51 I get them on the road, trail again.  
52 Man, by time we get to camp,  
53 we're both played out, boy.  
54 Rough riding all day.  
55 Chasing horses.

Tad:

56 Wow. That's a lot of work.

Jim Peters:

57 It is.

[Scene summary: This is the recent past when animals require and accept guidance from humans; llamas are the horses of the current era.]

### Scene 3: Confrontation

58 One time we stayed Mink Creek.  
59 Thirteen days we stayed there.  
60 Scotty know that place, Mink Creek.  
61 Took all the horses. [2<sup>nd</sup> Narrative Begins]  
62 We took that 101 head.  
63 Bill and Johnny all help us to get there.  
64 And we supposed to look after them until they catch us up.  
65 Holy man,  
66 thirteen days we stayed there  
67 and them old people never came up.  
68 And them horses went back.  
69 We didn't know.  
70 We hunt them all over the country.  
71 I don't know how many days,  
72 My partner got bad head.  
73 'I'll get down there and take your guts out with my knife.'  
74 I go,  
75 I grab his knife.  
76 'Come on down,'  
77 I say.  
78 'Cut me open.' [Symbolically similar to moose sacrifice]  
79 Man, from there he never talk to me.  
80 I didn't say it.

[Scene summary: A hunter acts like a sacrificial moose.]



#### Scene 4: Resolution of Wrangling Problems

81 And that's the day I find them horses.

82 I went down, [3<sup>rd</sup> Narrative Begins]

83 I went up Scotty Creek.

84 I come back out.

85 I'm making tea.

86 Here I hear a bunch of horse bell coming up.

87 Bill and them got them half way, heh.

88 Westevan Creek.

89 From there they come up.

90 Man, a lot of horses.

91 I wait.

92 I just keep counting, counting.

93 The last one went by.

94 I wait a little while

95 and then I dump my tea pot

96 and I swing in the saddle.

97 I'm on my way.

98 I go behind them

99 and I holler like hell. [Addressing the herd and his companion]

100 Man I was glad I got them all.

101 We got them all again.

102 Chased them uphill.

103 I hear my partner holler ahead of me.

104 Here, he wait.

105 'Ho.'

106 We start chasing them back.

107 Man, way we go.

[Scene Summary: Hunters will manage today and into the future as they always did.]

[Jim turns in truck and comments to Scotty Edwards in back seat about the small SUV.]

108 Too small, huh, *pāne*?

(ISK-02-05, May 24, 2002)

## **Textual Considerations**

Imagine how this narrative begins. The three of us are in my noisy truck. The truck is small and somewhat uncomfortable and yet we are all pleased to be leaving the village for a few hours. The tape recorder is running and country music is on the stereo. As we round a corner on the highway within a mile of Iskut Village, llamas appear on the side of the road. They are tied to posts in the ground and are simply relaxing in the weak sun. Jim comments immediately: “Dirty little animals, eh / Crazy” (lines 1-2). Jim then launches into a story about how horses are as stubborn as llamas. Scene one blends several incongruous images, at least as conventional ideas about hunting in northern Canada are concerned. Two elders and I talk within range of a tape recorder taped to a bench in my uncomfortable truck. They accept that I am going to use the conversations for some project in the future. We spot llamas. Jim’s disgust is apparent. Moose are never spoken about this way. It is unclear why llamas are both dirty and crazy animals. Scene one establishes immediately the density of this text before the narrative patterns become obvious.

As scene two begins, llamas are fresh in our minds. The llamas are the property of a non-native lodge owner who intended to use them on trail walks with tourists. The animals often provoke snickering or snide commentary when Iskut people pass them: llamas are strange, inedible creatures that are clearly out-of-place. The llamas have never fulfilled their promise as pack animals and there is a sense that Iskut people knew better than to use llamas in a place where horses, dogs, and human effort are far more effective for all types of work. By extension, Iskut knowledge of the bush is superior to that of a non-native businessman who thinks llamas will be useful in this country.

Jim's text departs from this comparison into an account of an indeterminate trip. The story opens on the second day of that trip (line 4), and Jim does identify the second person he is with (line 8). Jim is remembering his days as a wrangler. He describes forcing horses to cross a small river when they are unwilling to do so. He conveys a great deal of the temperament and character of the horses used in guiding activities: they are stubborn, prone to individual behavior like wandering off or going their own way (line 11 and 14), and are scared of creeks. Jim's first account also reveals the relationship between wranglers and the horses. Horses are subject to harsh treatment and obvious punishment by humans if they do not behave or act as the wrangler wishes. Jim describes hitting the horses in order to get them to do what *he* wants: "After I hit the side of the neck, / I hit him hard as I can in the rump / He jumped right in the river" (lines 25-27). This part of the story finishes as it began, with further reflection back on the difficulty getting horses to cross rivers (lines 29-34). Like llamas and unlike dogs, horses are not indigenous to the area and working with them can lead to misunderstandings between rider and beast.

As scene two progresses, Jim develops a comparison between llamas and horses. By doing so, Jim begins an evaluation of the guiding era through analogy and implicit comparison with hunting for food in both the distant past and today. Both llamas and horses (like dogs as well) require care and guidance from humans. Jim makes this clear in the narrative when he states two instances of the horses acting improperly: first, Jim says "Just close to that river / that leader tried to go that way [away from the river]" (lines 10-11); and second, "Wild one: / Go ahead / try to go that way" (lines 12-14). After working at it, by hitting Black Jack for example (lines 15-16), Jim gets the horses to cross

the creek. Jim elaborates: “I hit him hard as I can in the rump. / He jumped right in the river. / The rest jumped” (lines 26-28); the horses get it right after a significant effort on Jim’s part. In sum, scene two is keyed off of the sight of llamas acting lazily. The llamas provoke comments about horses which act improperly in the recent and remembered past. A contrast is implied with hunting for food in the distant past (and possibly in the present) when food animals behaved according to rules which mirrored the respect given to them by hunters and, indeed, all consumers of animal flesh.

The second half of the second scene also focuses on the work required to move horses. Here, Jim is more specific about the task at hand. Jim is leading 101 head of horses to *Hok’ats Luwe Menh* ‘Cold Fish Lake,’ the base camp of Tommy Walker’s guiding operations (lines 38). Jim says he has one partner with him for this trip (line 37). The horses are forced to wear bells to identify their location, further differentiating these animals from moose (line 49). Similarly, Jim and his partner are responsible for putting down “bad” foals (line 43-44), by which he means sick or injured animals. The death of horses does not reflect upon a specific hunter-prey relationship here; rather, it represents a utilitarian connection between laborer and livestock. Thus, the hands control even the reproduction of horses which is something unthinkable and impossible as far as moose are concerned.

Jim provides a sense of the means by which this work is accomplished: “And I stay at the back / and he’s leading them, eh” (lines 40-41). He continues, indicating that the work is hard and tiring: “Man, by the time we get to camp, / we’re both played out, boy / Rough riding all day. / Chasing horses” (lines 52-55). Lines like these provide the audience with an indication of the efforts required to work successfully in the bush. Like

moose hunting stories, these accounts of guiding emphasize travel through the bush.

Unlike moose hunting stories, however, they represent manual and pastoral labor where horses must be moved according to the needs of the employer, his incoming clients, the animals, or the turn of the seasons.

The guiding stories are also illustrative of the ways in which Iskut people confronted the potential ideological problems, not to mention power imbalances, associated with disrespecting animals in the context of hunting for cash. The sports hunting industry was relatively new in the 1950s and unlike hunting for food the notion of killing for trophies does not appear respectful of the moose, caribou, or sheep sought as prey. Iskut hunters do not have any reservations, however, about hunting for wages. Operating as a wage hunter is, as an elder explained, well removed from working as a sustenance hunter. Hunting for a wage exists as a separate economic and spiritual domain and one that is connected broadly to a Christian work ethic and the human domination of animals.<sup>98</sup>

The third scene occurs at and near Mink Creek, a camp close to the outfitter's camp at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* (line 58). It develops quickly after I indicate my amazement at the amount of work required by employees of the guide outfitters (line 56). Jim draws Scotty into the story near the beginning by noting Scotty's familiarity with Mink Creek Camp (line 60). It is unclear if this line is stated for Scotty's benefit, or for mine; it has the effect of keeping Scotty's interest by broadening Jim's personal account to include experiences common to both men.

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<sup>98</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that wage hunters can speak badly of animals with impunity, although I do not have any textual evidence to support this assumption.

By scene three, Jim moves away from comparisons of work animals and implicit commentaries on the hunting past. Here, he confronts directly the difficulty of managing animals and his workmates. His help does not arrive: “Holy man,” says Jim, “thirteen days we stayed there / and them old people never came up. / And those horses went back. / We didn’t know, / We hunt them all over the country” (lines 65-70). Keeping track of time is an obsession for Jim, who notes twice that they were at Mink Creek Camp for thirteen days (lines 59 and 66), only to say in his next breath that he did not know how many days they were in the bush. Working as a guide required Jim to pay attention to a clock in order to meet the needs of transient client hunters and the schedules of Walker’s base camp. Jim is exasperated by the work which has not gone as they planned and his frustration is directed more at his human companions and the ubiquitous nature of clock time than at his animal help.

The story centers on rounding up horses after they escaped from Jim and his companion at Mink Creek. The men had been tending the animals while waiting for help which did not come for almost two weeks. Jim says that the horses headed back to the main camp after thirteen days at the bush camp, likely only corralled in a small and simple bush corral (line 8). The hard life associated with working in the bush comes through in this story. Jim reiterates the thirteen day duration of the stay at Mink Creek, which included several days of rounding up the horses after they decided to move back home on their own (lines 70-71). I sense some exasperation stemming from the statement that “them old people never came up” (line 67) and the fact that the searching for the horses took so many days that Jim could not remember the precise number (line 71). Later, in scene four, Jim notes that Bill and Johnny showed up, but only made it half way

(line 87); they did help recover some of the horses but Jim reiterates that there were a lot of horses on the move (lines 90-93). This is bush work, but of a new sort: Iskut men were excellent guides because they knew the bush so well. They could find animals, knew the trails, and understood how to kill and butcher game. The application of this knowledge was, however, geared towards the recreation of outsiders and the desire and need of Iskut families to participate in a local but limited wage economy.

Central to this third scene is the dialogue between Jim and his sick partner which is resolved in the dramatic knifing moment. The dialogue is an example of what Jim calls his 'cowboy life.' In the scene, Jim's partner is said to have a "bad head" (line 72). I take this to mean that the man was hung over, although it is possible that something else ailed him. Jim then reports the first the words of his partner who says "I'll take you down there and take your guts out with my knife" (line 73). Here, Jim engages the threat: "I grab his knife. / 'Come on down,' / I say. / 'Cut me open.'" (lines 75-78). This rebuttal puts Jim's partner in his place and further communication and connection between the two men cease (line 79).

Through scene four, the historical eras and changing relations between men and animals are worked out. The men get the horses going: "Ho. / We start chasing them back. 'Man, way we go'" (lines 106-108) and just as in the hunting past and in the present, the men have successfully managed changing times and new economic ventures. They are capable of significant roles in the new guiding industry and, as they assert today, it was the efforts of men like Jim and Scotty that allowed Tommy Walker to run a successful enterprise. The meanings of these scenes are subtle, but after a closer reading,

it is apparent that hunting was a successful activity in the past, guiding worked out fine in the recent past, and new activities or intrusions into the area will be managed today.

With the job done, Jim's story shifts from the first person plural to the first person singular after his confrontation with his partner suggesting that he proceeded on his own to finish up the work at hand. Jim looks out for himself and then finishes the work without direction from anyone else. It is not until after Jim fights with his partner that he finds the horses. Jim draws clearly the connection between cause and effect, indicating that the fight required resolution before success in his work. Even when Bill and Johnny arrive, Jim waits until the horses pass him before getting up: "I wait a little while / and then I dump my tea pot / and I swing in the saddle" (lines 94-96). He then claims credit for having rounded up the horses himself, before pluralizing the verb and returning to an inclusive account: "Man I was glad I got them all. / We got them all again" (lines 100-101). Jim reconnects with his partner and they begin working together again (lines 103-107). The stories speak to relationships between hands and exemplify one way in which personal history illustrates the community history of new encounters with non-natives.

The story ends abruptly with "Too small, huh, *pāne*" (line 108). The meaning of this comment is unclear, although it is directed at Scotty. The conversation shifted immediately after this line to my small truck and the awful noises it made traveling over rough roads. "Huh *pāne*" is an emphatic phrase with which Jim asserts his own observations about the truck and, possibly, seeks validation of the statement from Scotty. It may also be a request to corroborate the sorts of events in his stories from someone else who would know. Scotty did not respond immediately with a guiding or 'hard work' story of his own, but he weighed in with personal examples later on during our trip.



## **Managing the Past for a Political Present**

Iskut people debate historical and economic changes in their conversational narratives about horses and guiding. Guiding stories are largely discussions of wage-work. They describe an era when new opportunities confronted Iskut hunters and new people brought different ideas about how the land and animals should be used. They show that guiding activities were easily compared to food-gathering activities. Many of the same skills were required for both pursuits. The hunting economy of the distant past is replicated during the 1950s in guiding. Today, guiding history is conveyed verbally as a way of discussing injustices in the recent past and, as I suggest below, continuing intrusions into Iskut lands.

Guiding stories are also personal narratives of participation in big game guiding, a historically significant industry in northern British Columbia (Sheppard 1983a; also Loo 2001a&b; Loo 2006). Iskut people express their connections to the industry through these stories and, by extension, explore their family's past at a time of profound changes in local economic practices. In large part, this element of the hunting legacy is for local consumption and to the benefit of Iskut people. Stories of this sort validate individual credibility, hunting knowledge, and the collective experiences of a broader Iskut community. Evoking this past is also a measure of pride. The stories relate the important roles Iskut men and women played in the success of the guiding businesses which required their expert hunting knowledge. They also represent nostalgia for an era when Iskut people played significant roles in the northern British Columbia economy. To younger generations facing a growing range of employment or lifestyle choices today,

these stories illustrate the potential for hunting skills and the continuing value of these activities.

Jim's guiding stories index social relations within Iskut Village and outside of it. They are part of the politics of managing the past in the present. Jim directs the narrative above to his life-long friend Scotty Edwards. Jim shares similar guiding experiences in much the same way Colin and John shared hunting stories in Chapter 4. Jim and Scotty's families, however, have as widely different histories as is possible in Iskut. Jim remembers life at *Luwechōn* and married into a *Me'etsendāne* and Commonage family. Scotty's ancestors are Gitksan and his wife is from a prominent Telegraph Creek family. The shared experiences and friendships that are marked by guiding reveal a common link for people with disparate backgrounds living at Iskut. Talking about good and bad times while working in the bush is what friends do together. Such talk reminds speakers and listeners that common experiences, even fifty years in the past, are the basis for continuing relationships today.

Talk of guiding also reflects changing ideas about familial obligations. Guiding made earning cash and buying equipment important for men like Scotty and Jim. As the letter in the epigraph above suggests, guiding men realized that they had an opportunity to bring more than meat to their families. Just as acting like a cowboy is central to Jim's personal identity even today, his ability to make money enhanced his reputation during the 1950s. In this regard, my presence at Jim's presentation is notable. It was evident early on that talk about the guiding past with me was appropriate; others shared the history of Tommy Walker with in my visits to Iskut before I began my fieldwork. Parts of Jim's story may have actually been intended for me. A story of wage work reminded

me that a sustenance economy was long past in Iskut. Jim distances himself from the potential stigma of hunting for a living and, by doing so, identified himself as a modern person who enjoyed making money. Buried in the middle of the narrative was Jim's rough encounter with his guiding partner and Jim's ability to control that man. This commentary was not lost on me, even at the time. It suggests obliquely that Jim saw some other people as a threat to him and, perhaps, his ability to earn an income or to maintain a high standard of work. He told me as much in more direct terms months later when he warned me that he would stop working with me if I spent time with rival Iskut families. Jim was managing me as if I was a new guiding partner.

There is no single narrative about guiding at Iskut despite the common threads and non-native protagonists. Each teller speaks about the events of that era in light of their own experiences. These stories do generate discussion and reinterpretation through the rebuttal of individual stories with other accounts. Jim's stories are, for example, of his own experience, but the elements within this genre are consistent and Scotty can reply with his own versions. Each account has its own authority which says that an individual was there and participated. Collectively, the stories index an era in the recent past during which hunting activities, hunting knowledge, and related ritual relationships between hunter and prey were shifting from an emphasis on sustenance to wage-earning.

Guiding stories permit, then, a discussion of the past and affiliation with a common history in a place where such talk can be problematic. The contemporary configuration and composition of Iskut Village was established by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1962. Its creation was motivated, in part, by Iskut families themselves who were unhappy living in another fabricated community at Telegraph Creek, British

Columbia where they had been relocated in 1948 (Sheppard 1983a; Hawkes 1966; Chapter 2). Still, many Iskut families continued to live in tent frames at the current Iskut Village site well into the 1950s. This fact is often forgotten in official Iskut First Nation and Canadian Department of Indian Affairs documentation of village history. Where the history of Iskut Village is concerned, some voices are louder than others. The guiding stories relate common experiences and provide a sense of solidarity, to paraphrase Smith (Smith 1981), in a place where shared history is sometimes hard to see.

Importantly, interest in guiding history and stories of this era is related to memories of Tommy Walker. While this transcript only mentions Walker's Camp once, with the simple label 'Cold Fish' on line 38, each story like this is about the same place and involves an outsider worthy of commentary. Walker's impact on local lives was significant. He provided work but he also reported on the condition of Iskut people and culture a generation ago. The stories respond to Walker's views and opinions and, in most cases, refute Walker's voice and his alternate, albeit dominant written history. Thus, whether the stories are told to friends in a pick-up truck, or to an anthropologist, or by the village chief to an audience of environmentalists and provincial politicians (as was the case in July 2004; see Chapter 6), the history of guiding is played over again in a manner which validates Iskut participation and undermines official (read: published) versions of local culture (cf. Cruikshank 1998:140). The changes that came with guiding businesses are indigenized in this talk. Elements of Iskut ethnic identity are in play despite the lack of a common narrated event.

By telling guiding stories, Iskut people make their own history more visible to the larger Canadian society. The stories demonstrate, for example, the historical connections

of Iskut people to the Spatsizi Plateau and the Klappan Valley. They show that Iskut people did not give up hunting traditions simply because they started hunting for a wage. As Iskut leaders become more savvy about using their history to illustrate their claims on local lands, and to refute the claims of others, the documentation of this history is in greater demand. They understand the litigious provincial and Canadian systems which demand proof of historical ties to specific places. Guiding stories may offer this proof but they are untested in courts. Likewise, these stories may simply add to the mainstream Canadian ideas about native cultures that disappeared or changed into something else long ago. At the very least, the reflections on local history that are embedded in the stories of Jim Peters are part of explaining to others that Iskut people do not shun change.

Guiding stories are not the only ways of participating in or resisting the resource-based development of Iskut lands. Coal-bed methane gas fields are located in the *Tlebāne*, the headwaters of the Klappan River. An initial Iskut response was to consider acquiring a drilling platform in order to keep more of the royalties for themselves (Roger Rivers, personal communication). That idea was short-lived. After considering damage to hunting grounds that mining might bring, the Iskut First Nation formally asked the mining companies to leave their territory in the spring of 2005. Blockades against mineral exploration and extraction occurred along the BC Rail grade Access Road in 2005. They continued in 2006. Many Iskut people representing all Iskut families (and histories) are participating in these actions. It is not that economic development is unwelcome. Iskut people participated extensively and willingly in guiding, after all. It is more a matter of engaging the development in sustainable ways. Development must be compatible with local ideas about food animals; exploiting the land like a work animal is

untenable. Resistance to mining will continue, I expect, until respect for the land is balanced with the sacrifice the land makes of its minerals. There are no obvious mythological charters for blockades but, as I have seen, old ideas about respect are refashioned in novel ways. Guiding history is a useful metaphor for how to behave when outsiders are around. And, over time, I expect that stories of the latest intrusions – the new Tommy Walkers – into the territory will be heard.

## 6. 'WE STILL GET LONESOME FOR THIS LAND': THE POLITICS OF ASSERTING A HUNTING TRADITION

In May, 2004, a buzz went through the Iskut community. I heard about it at my home in Vancouver, British Columbia. That summer, everyone was invited to go camping at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* 'Cold Fish Lake,' in the heart of the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park. With a little digging and after receiving my own formal invitation to the trip in the mail, it was clear that the outfitting family that guides hunters in the area now, the Collingwoods, was working with the Iskut First Nation to fly Iskut families to the site of Tommy Walker's old guiding camp. The Iskut First Nation and the Collingwoods also invited thirty additional guests to attend free of charge or by voluntary donation. The group of outsiders who accepted the opportunity included government administrators and scientists, journalists, notable environmentalists Wade Davis and David Suzuki, anthropologists, historians, and well-positioned leaders from neighboring native groups.<sup>99</sup> The event was also advertized on the Collingwoods's website as an opportunity for adventure seekers and cultural tourists to meet Iskut elders and experience Tahltan culture.

I was thrilled to be invited on this trip. I had heard lots of stories and memories of *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*, Walker, horse wrangling, and of the Spatsizi in general. I wanted to see these places for myself. I was intrigued, too, about the possibility of hearing more stories about a critical era in the history of Iskut in a mixed and varied audience. I

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<sup>99</sup> Davis is an anthropologist and ethnobotanist. He worked as an employee of the British Columbia Park Service in the Spatsizi Plateau during the 1970s and maintains a lodge near Iskut Village. He has written about the Spatsizi Plateau and anthropological work with Iskut elders (see Davis 1998; 2001; 2004). Suzuki has property near Iskut Village and has been a regular in the area for years. For an example of his environmental work which includes considerations of aboriginal knowledge see Kundtson and Suzuki (2001).

suspected that being at *Hok'ats Łuwe Menh* would provoke historical talk. As it turned out, I heard direct talk about the past and much more. Iskut's hunting culture came to the surface that weekend and, as it turned out, strategies for discussing the past carefully – distancing, allusion, and synecdoche – were on display too.

### **Asserting a Sustenance Tradition**

Iskut people assert their hunting past, their traditions, proudly on many public occasions. It happens during overtly political moments, such as in a speech by an elected leader. At times like these, embracing a hunting legacy reflects the importance and value of a visible native identity in contemporary political processes in British Columbia. More and more often in court cases, political protest, and resource negotiations, native people are not derided or mocked for their experiences. Instead, are expected to express them freely as part of an aboriginal identity.<sup>100</sup> Such presentations are usually in the idiom of the courts, perhaps as traditional ecological knowledge, and say as much about the expectations of the non-native audiences to hear the voice of a noble savage as the ability (or lack of ability) of natives to talk in the register of the court (see Nadasdy 2003; Cruikshank 1998a).<sup>101</sup> At Iskut, village representatives frequently respond to requests by resource development companies for historical and traditional information in the context

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<sup>100</sup> Nadasdy (2005) notes that government officials and environmentalists in the Yukon expect native people to be conservationists.

<sup>101</sup> The attitude that native stories are not historically significant was challenged in the *Delgamuukw* case. During the first *Delgamuukw* trial in 1991, where Gitskan and Wet'suwet'en natives sued British Columbia for title to traditional lands, native chiefs entered their family stories in the court record only to find that the trial judge rejected them as evidence of past practice and land ownership on the grounds that they were not reliable and did not meet the standards of written evidence (Culhane 1998); this decision was later overturned (*Delgamuukw* 1997).



of resource development. Given the current decision to stay out of the BC Treaty Process, however, it may be some time before these discussions move into the courts.

Ironically, the recent bureaucratic interest in traditional knowledge is inconsistent with older and salvage scholarship which suggested Canadian aboriginals were assimilated into mainstream Canadian culture (eg. Murphy and Steward 1956; Steward 1960). If assimilation had been truly successful, TEK would not exist in the consciousness of aboriginal people. My investigations here are predicated on the idea that sustenance food-gathering remains central to life and conversation in Iskut despite the fact it is not always easy to see or hear. Other questions worth investigating persist. How does hunting talk change in conversations when outsiders are listening? What strategies are involved? And, why do outsiders have a hard time understanding Iskut stories? Because, to outsiders with different storytelling traditions, the stories are likely to seem threadbare and superficial.

It is possible to affiliate with past practices without being obviously ‘traditional’ – obviously hunting for food – and there may be good reasons to do so. For one, it cuts down on patronizing comments of outsiders who do not know Iskut people very well.<sup>102</sup> To help with such efforts, strategies for distancing oneself from sustenance hunting are required. Younger Iskut people hunt, but they do it with all terrain vehicles. They do it on the weekends, when school is out. To the chagrin of Peter Rivers, children do not walk to Mosquito Mountain to hunt because that place is inaccessible by all terrain

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<sup>102</sup> On my first day in Iskut, for example, a non-native teacher at the Iskut school told me that no one in Iskut knows any stories. It was a ‘between you and me’ comment which implied that traditions like storytelling were forgotten in Iskut. I learned later that the teachers were discouraged from interacting with Iskut people outside of the classroom for fear that the teacher might lose professional distance from the

vehicles. Moreover, hunting today reflects a local interest in historical legacies. It offers direct connections to territory and resources. And, it has the power to unify families with disparate origins as long as certain kinds of contextual details are omitted.

This chapter seeks, in combination with the preceding two chapters, to illustrate complementary and local ideas about hunting and history. Here, the ways in which Iskut people control their place in the Canadian north, create solidarity within the community, and manage local representations outside of it come to the fore.

### **Reunion Camps and Politics in the British Columbia North**

On the day of the trip to *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*, I went to the float plane dock at *Tatāge* 'Tatogga' Lake, ten minutes south of Iskut Village. Our plane was an 'Otter,' capable of carrying nine passengers and landing on lakes throughout the area. Some of the Iskut families had already left and others joined us for this flight. Other non-natives also filled the seats on the plane. These people included a provincial government geologist and a photographer from a popular magazine called *British Columbia Magazine*. An old friend of mine, historian and aboriginal research consultant Robert Diaz, was also on the plane. Talking with people on the forty minute trip, I learned that the Iskut people were excited about seeing a place they had heard spoken of so many times but had never visited. What struck me most about the flight was the extreme ruggedness of the Eaglenest Mountains we crossed. Having driven along the edge of these mountains dozens of times in 2002 and having heard the descriptions of elders traveling through them on foot and horseback, I was unprepared for how impassable they

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students. Furniss uses the phrase 'cautious disclosure' to refer to people who couch their racism or

looked. The need for an extensive trail network through the mountain passes was clear from above and the value of the tracking skills and knowledge of the area was obvious.

After landing on *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*, I surveyed the camp. A dozen cabins or so are set into the side of a steep embankment rising quickly out of the north end of the lake. Iskut elders and families had already claimed the sleeping cabins. The rest of us pitched self-standing, tourist tents on the highest terrace above the lake. In a neat historical reversal, this was the terrace where Iskut families had stayed at Walker's insistence during the 1950s; the Iskut families were not permitted to live in the main camp in the past and they relegated us to their former spot. BC Parks runs the camp now. A caretaker lives in one cabin during the summer months and is responsible for maintaining the sleeping cabins, a large kitchen and dining hall, pit toilets, a warehouse, and a dock.

A variety of events and activities occurred during the weekend. Family groups hiked up nearby mountains or into mountain passes with historically significant names like *Dane'hih* and Airplane Valley. Some of us went on a horseback trip facilitated by the Collingwoods. The children swam in the lake, some fished from shore, and we played stick games after dinner. I joined Iskut people playing cards each evening, as I had done so many times during my fieldwork stay. We played cards discretely, though, usually waiting until most people were in bed. Only then did we turn on flashlights and pull out sacks of quarters to gamble in the near darkness of the cooking cabin. The non-Iskut guests participated in all events as they desired. A few joined in the stick games but most watched as the Iskut children played with their grandparents. Some of them hiked together and relaxed in their own cohorts. At times, the split between native and non-

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ignorance in qualified statements like "It's an awful thing to say, but ..." (Furniss 1999:116).

native groups was very obvious, although understandable, as neither group knew the other very well.

It was apparent early on that the Iskut people were pleased about this event. Socially and culturally, it was a tremendous opportunity to take children to a place with which all Iskut families and most elders associate intense emotions and memories. Likewise, many of the Iskut adults had not been back to *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* since the provincial park was created in the mid-1970s. The trip was something of a homecoming for them. The trip also provided the Iskut leadership a chance to endorse publicly the Collingwoods and their guiding business. This increased the role of the Iskut First Nation in decisions made by the Collingwoods in the park and, by financing much of the event, the Collingwoods gained favor with the Iskut First Nation.

There were good political reasons for the trip too. It was a chance for Iskut people to take a public stage and raise community concerns like hunting rights and park access. Because the attendees included a former provincial government minister and current administrators from BC Parks, the trip gave the Chief and the Band Council a forum to remind the politicians that they had lived in the area before it was a park and, indeed, long before Walker appeared on the scene. It provided an opportunity to talk directly about the alienation from the park many in the community felt. And, it showed that they were willing to visit and use the park lands – to be a presence there – even if they felt physical and emotional distance from them on account of its provincial management. The fact that the Iskut First Nation had never relinquished their rights to park lands through any formal treaty with the British Columbia government provided a compelling background to the assertions of ownership made by their presence at the BC Parks main camp.

## **The Chief's Speech**

The formal celebrations of the weekend took place on a hot, sunny Saturday afternoon in an area of the camp that Iskut families had lived in the past. Surrounded by the tourist tents of the guests, we gathered on a large flat terrace about seventy-five feet above the lake. The spot affords spectacular views westward to a range of mountains and valleys where notable events in guiding histories occurred. The crowd formed a partial circle around a large glacial erratic that sat in the center of the terrace. The boulder was covered by freshly cut willow branches. We watched as the Iskut families marched onto the terrace wearing button blankets, singing, and beating circular moose hide drums. Over the course about an hour, each Iskut family approached the rock together and turned to speak to the crowd. These were matrilineal family groups and, in most cases, the senior woman present addressed the audience on behalf of her family. They introduced the family members that accompanied them, acknowledged husbands and other relatives who had passed on, and remembered the joys and pains of working at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*. Some of the speeches were delivered from prepared texts. Others had been memorized. The audience was left with images of small family groups centered on an adult or elder woman.

At the end of the speeches, the brush covering the rock was removed by children. Underneath was a bronze statue depicting an unnamed Iskut family traveling along a trail.<sup>103</sup> The scene was complete with rifles and hunting dogs. The statue evoked the walking and hunting that is central to Iskut history. It relied on elusive symbols of the

Iskut past for its potency – dogs and trails – that are rarely visible next to more dominant and familiar icons and symbols of aboriginality in northern British Columbia like salmon or button blankets. Plaques listing the names of all who had worked for Walker were also unveiled. Eighty-seven year old Father Mouchet, the former Iskut priest, blessed the statue. Then, the Iskut people marched off of the terrace in their button blankets and in step to the sound of the drums.

The history of Iskut associations with *Hok'ats Łuwe Menh* and, indeed, assertions of sovereignty over the park lands which now contained Walker's old camp are best summarized in the words of Iskut Chief Louis Louie.<sup>104</sup> Chief Louie has held the position of Band Chief for most of the past thirty years. He represents the community in political dealings with foreign politicians. He is also a visible representative, perhaps the patriarch, of a large family. Chief Louie was born at *Me'etsendāne* and his ancestors lived there and at Caribou Hide and Bear Lake before that.

Chief Louie addressed the crowd wearing a coastal style black and red button blanket depicting a wolf crest. The regalia marked him as a member of the Wolf Clan and, lest anyone be unsure, as a native person. Chief Louie spoke first. While the speech welcomes the guests warmly, it is also extremely serious in tone. It is an impassioned speech which notes the importance of the *Hok'ats Łuwe Menh* camp for him and his relatives. It also lays out the history of *Hok'ats Łuwe Menh*, from the distant past to the present, in the clearest terms I ever heard this history described.

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<sup>103</sup> The statue was commissioned by the Collingwood family for this occasion.

<sup>104</sup> Given the public nature of this speech and Louis Louie's role as a spokesperson for the Iskut people, it would be impossible to obscure his identity here. As such, I have not given Louis Louie a pseudonym in this chapter. I also decided against changing the names of other people mentioned in his speech for the same reason.

The speech is presented below in its entirety. In my transcription of it, I have modified Moore's text alignment technique to accentuate and emphasize the two primary historical eras referred to by Chief Louie (Moore 1993). Text aligned to the left is set in the present and addressed to the audience of Iskut people and visitors. The text indented one column to the right describes action that occurred in the guiding era of the recent past.<sup>105</sup>

**Transcript 8: Louis Louie's Speech at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh***

1 Good afternoon  
2 ladies and gentlemen, elders and children.  
3 We are home at last.  
4 After forty years absent from our home,  
5 we have returned.  
    This is the land of the *Tl'ogot'ine*  
    Our forefathers has held this land for us  
    and it's one outfitter that came in here in the first place  
    and say we had no claim to this land.  
10 We made him look good.  
    I hate to speak ill of the dead,  
    but the truth gotta be known.  
    It gotta be straightened out  
    that we were the first people here.  
15 You look around on the trails,  
    you'll find obsidian.  
    Arrowheads.  
    My son worked,  
    my two sons worked for the parks  
20 a couple of years back  
    And they brought a lot of arrowheads home.  
    And we can return.  
    We gotta preserve for our future generations  
    so they can come back here  
25 and celebrate like we done now.  
    And they are going to be in partnership with various groups of people in here,  
    so that we will always be connected to this great land.

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<sup>105</sup> I acted as Master of Ceremonies at this event. History graduate student and friend Robert Diaz recorded the speeches on video. This transcript comes from that video tape.

I spend ten years here guiding for these people in here.  
 And it's not because of the money.  
 30 I make better money working on the construction on the highway.  
 I was makin' \$25,  
 but me and my five brothers  
 came back here every summer,  
 in August,  
 35 for the country  
 and for the lifestyle.  
 We was making \$250 a month,  
 compared to \$2500 we made on the highway.  
 Just for the land.  
 40 And we all gotta remember our elders who have passed on before us.  
 Like Peter Dennis  
 who spent 30 or 40 years guiding in this outfit.  
 Jim Peters cooked for them.  
 Husband of Jenny Quock.  
 45 All the grand children are here.  
 Charles, Charles Quock. [Wind picks up]  
 Charlie Abou. [Inaudible because of wind; 8s]  
 ... only one who stayed behind with Tommy Walker  
 [Inaudible due to wind; 3s]  
 during the winter,  
 50 and guided with Tommy Walker.  
 There was one of my colleagues,  
 told me just this morning  
 wanting to get a meeting scheduled.  
 He ... say that the Tahltan has no connection to this land,  
 55 which is not true.  
 If it wasn't for our people  
 I doubt Tommy Walker would have ever reached this place.  
 And it's one of our elders that passed on too  
 he brought here.  
 60 He brought him here.  
 He was only eighteen at the time.  
 You see,  
 Tommy Walker had a lot of influence in Victoria at that time.  
 He got someone in there  
 65 with a lot of decision making on his behalf.  
 And when he went through Caribou Hide  
 and Metsantan  
 and all over here,  
 there was a lot of people  
 70 who thought he was the first white man.  
 There was numerous white man before Tommy Walker got here.



[wind subsides]  
 Hyland Post  
 and all those people up in this region.  
 Why Tommy Walker did don't want us in here  
 75 was because he saw us as competition  
 for the wildlife in this country  
 Where we live by it  
 and our forefathers lived by it too.  
 That's why they call us the nomads  
 80 because we don't stay one place.  
 We always move with the migration of the animals.  
 Now that we settle down  
 we still get lonesome for this land.  
 And I ... [sentence unfinished]  
 85 maybe it's really good idea that we can pause for a minute of silence for all of our  
 elders.  
 [Pause 13 seconds]  
 I'm sure all our elders looking at us today  
 are really glad we've come down  
 to reclaim our place in this land.  
 And I would like to thank Ray Collingwood  
 90 and all those who were involved.  
 Sally Havard.  
 And Danielle [Boissevain].  
 It took a lot of hard work to make this possible.  
 To make this a huge success.  
 95 We have more speeches coming on  
 and it's getting hot in this blanket. [Laughter]  
 Let's keep it very short.  
 Thank-you.  
 [Applause]  
 (July 24, 2004)

### Textual Considerations

The Iskut families received the speech with applause; the speeches they made later were consistent with the themes and sentiments Chief Louie expressed. The families are, in fact, the central audience for Chief Louie. Many of his statements are directed at them. Chief Louie says, for example, “Our forefathers has held this land for us” (line 7), and his use of the first person plural pronoun ‘our’ draws Iskut people into his rhetoric. Much of

the rest of the speech is built around references to the recent past and comments about specific people who worked in the guiding industry. It mixes group history with personal experience. The non-Iskut guests make up a second audience for Chief Louie. These plural pronouns serve to exclude non-natives from some of the talk; our forefathers, after all, never even visited this area. With the separation of audiences created by Chief Louie's words, each group receives different messages about land ownership and local history.

Chief Louie's flannel button blanket marks specific choices about the history and identity on display for all audiences. These blankets are ceremonial regalia from the Pacific coast. There, they are associated with potlatches and hereditary dances. They are not the sort of formal wear that Iskut ancestors would likely have used, although I have seen button blankets worn in association with Athapaskan hide and bead slippers or bags. While the blankets are physically uncomfortable in the heat (line 96), they also represent the awkwardness of using symbols of a native identity that are not precisely Iskut. The blankets reflect associations with neighbors, probably Tlingits to the west. These inter-group connections are also responsible for the matrilineal clan system and coastal mythology finding purchase in interior groups. All told, button blankets represent another example of the marginalization of Iskut people who do not have their own widely-known symbols. Still, there is pragmatism to adopting traditions. Coastal regalia are widely recognized by native and non-native people and as a pan-native symbol of aboriginality. They assist Iskut people with public assertions of their rights. And, frankly, they have been in use in Iskut for generations.

Chief Louie's speech begins and ends with standard openings and closings which would easily be recognized by all native and non-native members of the audience. Chief Louie acknowledges briefly his guests and the Iskut elders and children in line 2. By the end, Chief Louie calls attention to the heat of the afternoon, the fact that the celebratory program is just beginning and that he would like people to keep their speeches short (lines 96-98). Laughter is heard in the audience which is already growing uncomfortable standing on the uneven ground. The speech ends definitively with Chief Louie's statement 'thank-you' in line 99. The openings and closings of the speech acknowledge the reason for the gathering and the heat of the day; they are presumably directed at everyone.

Between the opening and closing a number of rhetorical techniques and narrative subsections assert the role of the Iskut families at this place. Chief Louie begins by identifying the importance of the trip to *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* with words that indicate that he (and likely others) has been thinking of this day for some time: "We are home at last. / After forty years absent from our home, / we have returned. / This is the land of the *Tlogot'ine*" (lines 3-6). Chief Louie evokes specific historical references here. Forty years ago, Iskut people moved away from the Spatsizi Plateau. That was about the time when the contemporary village at Iskut was established.

The reference to the *Tl'ogot'ine* is remarkable (line 6). *Tl'ogot'ine* means 'Grassy Meadow People,' where *tl'ogo* is grassy meadow and *t'ine* is people. The *Tl'ogot'ine* is the generally acknowledged ancestral group that lived on the Spatsizi Plateau (Teit 1912-

1915a; Jenness 1937:13).<sup>106</sup> In that short utterance, Chief Louie asserts a connection between some people from Iskut, these ancestors, and this place. The label is heard infrequently around the village today, but the use of *Tl'ogot'ine* here helps Chief Louie avoid using 'Iskut' or 'Tahltan' as an ethnic label. By doing so he ensures that his speech is inclusive of a range of people with connections to the Spatsizi Plateau. His choice of words does not restrict claims to this place only to inhabitants of the contemporary Iskut, Telegraph Creek, or Dease Lake villages.

The word *Tl'ogot'ine* does exclude Tahltan-speaking peoples without ancestry on the Spatsizi Plateau or its surroundings. This is astute too, as Iskut people sometimes find it necessary to assert a different ethnic identity from their relatives at Telegraph Creek. In this sense, the use of the term *Tl'ogot'ine* allows affiliation with an Iskut past explicitly while it creates distance from Telegraph Creek implicitly. It is an obscure reference to a specific and unique history and, as such, it is overtly inclusive of Iskut families and subtly exclusive of all others. More than this, Chief Louie's statement has the effect of reclaiming the park on the basis of an established, documented, and identifiable historical group. History like this always has weight in government and legal circles. A unified, dignified, and historically demonstrable front is presented publicly by Chief Louie's opening.

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<sup>106</sup> Teit calls these people the *T'lotona* perhaps using the Sekani reference to them. Other Iskut families speak publicly about their ancestral group, the *Tlebānot'ine*, or, the 'People of *Tlebāne* (Klappan).' This division is consistent with Sheppard's analysis of the Iskut ancestral bands (Sheppard 1983a:335). The two groups are associated with specific families and are a source of divisions within Iskut today.

Next, Chief Louie comments on the importance of the Spatsizi Plateau in *Tl'ogot'ine* history.<sup>107</sup> He moves swiftly to refute Walker's assertions of ownership or control of the Plateau by virtue of his guiding licence and outfit (lines 13-14). He then takes the audience back further by citing archaeological evidence, obsidian and arrowheads, of past human activity. The implication is, of course, that his ancestors crafted these stone tools and because of this Walker could not have been in the area first. This is a situation in which connections to the past are made directly.

Much of the second half of the speech (from line 51 forward) is directed at contemporary political concerns. Chief Louie mentions a comment he received that morning from a "colleague" (line 51) who insisted that "the Tahltan have no connection to this land" (line 54). This is dangerous talk in the era of British Columbia land claims because it hints that all Tahltan-speaking peoples, including those at Iskut, have been away from the Spatsizi for so long that their claims of being a nation lack foundation (cf. Smith 1981:69). This talk sounds, in fact, like the kinds of comments one hears from the general public in British Columbia when they complain that native people should not be settling treaties any more because they do not live on the land. Chief Louie acts quickly to refute the comment (line 55) and, by doing so, distances Iskut people further from undifferentiated Tahltans. Chief Louie continues, building a larger case against the notion that Iskut people have no standing in the Spatsizi. He evokes the absurd idea – but an idea that persists through Walker's book – that Walker would have reached the Spatsizi and been a successful outfitter without the help of the *Tl'ogot'ine*. Chief Louie

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<sup>107</sup> Smith notes that a land base or homeland is a defining characteristic of an ethnic *nation* (Smith 1981:69) but that land is not necessary for an assertion of ethnic *community* (Smith 1981:66). Nationhood includes, by definition, a sense of territoriality (also Smith 1986:164).

rejects Walker's claims to the place by suggesting that he had political allies in Victoria who helped him create the park, his ultimate legacy (line 63). He notes too that it was Walker who wanted the *Tl'ogot'ine* away from the area so he could have the place to himself (lines 75-77).

Invoking the names of elders, people with a connection to this place and to the past, is central to Chief Louie's political strategy. He does this twice. Early on in the speech, Chief Louie mentions the names of a handful of people who worked intensively for Walker (lines 40-50). At this point, the wind picks up and much of the speech is inaudible. Several people commented later that the elders were acknowledging Chief Louie's words in the gusts of wind. This raises the possibility that the wind is actually giving voice to those who have passed away. The elders were the focus of the weekend for the Iskut families. They returned to the place that the elders had lived and worked in order to remember them. The speeches of the families said as much.

### **'We Still Get Lonesome for this Land'**

I believe that Chief Louie's accounting of history, and particularly that of Walker's role in local history, is how it is known in Iskut today. Chief Louie's speech is, in fact, a performance of Iskut sovereignty. It is the most transparent account of Iskut guiding history and the emotional attachment of Iskut people to the Spatsizi that I have ever heard. Chief Louie does not mince words: people are named and specific places are identified. His admission that he does not like to speak ill of the dead belies his directness and willingness to name names (line 11). As an historical narrative, the speech is similar in content to the guiding stories told by Jim Peters (Chapter 5). Chief Louie's

frankness is, however, in marked contrast to the vague or nonexistent contextual information provided in Jim's description of the same era. Still, the speech evokes the history that Iskut people know and, like Jim Peters's guiding stories, the speech addresses political challenges of the present.

The tone of Chief Louie's speech may be attributed to the outsiders present at the gathering. They need details to make sense of the history that is being recounted and the talk that took place around the dining table or near the fire throughout the weekend. The presence of outsiders may also indicate why there is less indexical or synecdochal talk about myth-time than in other instances of historical talk. The audience is simply wrong for that. They would not understand the subtleties and complexities of opaque historical accounts, and Chief Louie wants everyone to understand why a return to *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* is so important. These are the kinds of choices all Iskut narrators make.

It is not entirely clear how the non-Iskut guests interpreted the speech or, indeed, the entire weekend. Some guests attended because of long-term friendships with Iskut people or other personal connections to the area. These people knew the history of this place and the weight of Chief Louie's words. While talking with other guests, however, several people asked me when the Iskut elders were going to tell their 'old stories' as promised on the invitations. They revealed to me that they expected an 'authentic' native and cultural experience and were disappointed by the fiddle playing, stick games, and breakfasts of bacon and eggs. Despite the fact that elders did not tell any myth-time stories, accounts of hunting experiences and guiding history abounded. I noticed them, but many of the other visitors did not acknowledge them or recognize those stories as

expressions of personal or ethnic aboriginal identities. The events of the weekend were inconsistent with their views of aboriginality.<sup>108</sup>

Understanding the weekend at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* is complicated further by an analysis of which Iskut families actually attended the celebration at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*. All Tahltan-speaking families participated in guiding work to some extent. Yet, with two exceptions, the family groups that returned to *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* and made public presentations were headed by close relatives and siblings; they represented the *Tl'ogot'ine*. Other village families planned to go on the trip but as the departure day got closer, some withdrew. Explanations were forthcoming: some said that salmon fishing on the Stikine was more important; others were discouraged by the weight restrictions for gear imposed by the pilots; still others said they did not want to be reminded of the past. Those families had connections to Walker but chose not to participate. In many cases, the non-participants were *Tlebānot'ine*. Likewise, no Tahltan-speaking families from Telegraph Creek attended the event despite their own connections to guiding and Walker. A representative from the Tahltan Central Government from Dease Lake came along and stayed only briefly. His presence might be explained by wanting to reinforce political connections with the visitors and to acknowledge that claims on the Spatsizi region extend beyond those asserted by the Iskut First Nation.

Tommy Walker is an audience for this speech despite having died in 1989. Chief Louie's words about Walker and his role in displacing Iskut families from the area are

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<sup>108</sup> Note here, again, the dual perspective on aboriginality asserted by non-native people. In his *Delgamuukw* ruling, Justice McEachern denies the legitimacy of aboriginal stories despite the overwhelming number and consistency of them. On the Spatsizi Plateau, visitors insist on hearing such stories but can not find anyone telling them. Considerations of context and audience are critical for understanding the ways in which native people are perceived of in Canada.



central to the text. They are a clear revision of Walker's published history (Walker 1976) and, in the speech, Chief Louie distances Iskut people from Walker and Walker's history. The resentment of Walker comes from the alienation from the Spatsizi created when Walker helped establish the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park. A longing to visit the Spatsizi and to travel there regularly is acknowledged by Iskut people of all ages; hence Chief Louie's suggestion that Iskut people are still lonesome for the Spatsizi. Being 'lonesome' for a place or a person is a common Iskut colloquialism. It conveys feelings of sadness and nostalgia based on separation in time and distance. People say old music makes them lonesome because hearing old songs conjures up memories of people and places. By challenging Walker, however, Chief Louie confirms Iskut control of the land and resources in northern British Columbia. The loneliness might subside at the same time.

### **History on a Sign**

One other episode at the *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* reunion camp is relevant here. It involves outsider expectations about Iskut hunting talk. I encountered a version of the *Deneka'ladiyah* story painted on a sign board and leaning against the wall in Tommy Walker's old guiding era workshop. This is the story of the hunter who disrespected a goat and was turned to stone for his foolish actions.<sup>109</sup> The story is set in the Spatsizi and a rock formation along the Spatsizi River marks the hunter's transformation. The story on the board was produced in the Iskut Band Office and it is a highly compressed version

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<sup>109</sup> I mentioned this story briefly in Chapter 5.

of the story Sophia Stanton told me and Teit recorded (Teit 1919:248-250). The new *Deneka'ladiyah* story at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* is as follows:

**Transcript 9: *Deneka'ladiyah* Story on British Columbia Parks Sign Board**

Denkladia (Den kha-la-dia) 'Man Walking With Spear'

There was once a goat that a man could not kill. He was a tough goat. The man said to him, 'I'm going to follow you 'til you go back home to your dad,' meaning that the hunter was not about to give up so easily. Then, just as he was spearing the goat he said, '*Thehe on dine.*' This means, 'Change into rock.' And the goat, the man and his dog all turned into rock.

This version of *Deneka'ladiyah* begins with the confrontation between a hunter and a goat who is too cunning to be killed. While this kind of encounter is common in Iskut hunting talk (Chapter 4), human relations with animals have changed and the hunter is now more powerful than the animal. The hunter's comments imply that the hunter will continue to hunt the goat until it returns to its father's house, potentially a safe place. In Sophia Stanton and Teit's versions of the story, the hunter scolds the goat for not offering itself up to the persistent hunter; punishment stems from speaking improperly to the goat. The difference between the versions is subtle but significant. In the new version, the choice of the goat to sacrifice itself is taken away from it because the hunter will not give up his pursuit. Still, the outcome is the same in all versions of the story. Presumably, the lesson not to talk badly about animals is the same too.

What strikes me most about this version is the power afforded the hunter who refuses to leave the goat alone. The hunter states explicitly that he will not give up. This is different than the hunters in most hunting talk and *sa'e* stories who find that they are subject to the power of animals. Remember, John Edwards and Colin Duncan both

expressed disgust at their inability to kill moose, but nevertheless let the moose go (Chapter 4). While I accept that this version might have been shortened to fit it on the sign, there is a contemporary twist here: hunters have become more powerful over time and now have the upper hand in the hunter-prey relationship. Could the message here be that after generations of being provided for by benevolent animals, Iskut people must now start caring for the animals? Has the sacrificial imagery inverted completely?

The story board is meant more for visitors to the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park than for Iskut audiences. Iskut people do not often make it that far into the Spatsizi. Perhaps the story is meant to add some aboriginal color to the camp and to authenticate the native experience for hikers from Vancouver or Seattle. For outsiders hiking in the area, the story is an expression of Iskut identity and local history in a form that sounds like a myth. It describes seemingly fantastic events like the transformation of a man, dog, and goat into rock and it is positioned in a place that non-natives will see it. Park visitors might expect to encounter this kind of native lore since the website for the Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park acknowledges native connections to the place.

More than this, the sign board story is a shared narrative at Iskut. All Iskut families claim it, tell it, and refer to it legitimately. It is not a family history or a narrative of an individual's hunting experience. For these reasons, the *Deneka'ladiyah* story can be used by the community leadership as one element the Iskut hunting legacy. The sign board also epitomizes the tendency to share contracted versions of old stories when the audience is uninformed about local history and culture, whether they be Iskut children, anthropologists, or government representatives. This version of the *Deneka'ladiyah* story provides further evidence that Iskut people use their hunting legacy strategically – for

reasons of affiliation and distancing – in new and ‘multicultural’ settings (also Dinwoodie 2002:64).

Both Chief Louie’s speech and the story board are mindful of the hunting prowess of Iskut people. They are examples of the way in which Iskut people express themselves when non-native people are listening closely. The speech addresses Iskut history and hunting activities more directly than most other hunting talk I heard. In delivering it, Chief Louie acknowledged the audience and the relationships Iskut people have with outsiders. The speech is consistent, in fact, with Iskut relationships with non-native people back in time to the guiding era. And, the speech acknowledges interpersonal relationships between Iskut people, past and present. The sign board minimizes the control animals have over people. It indicates that social connections between hunters and their prey have changed. Again, the audience is critical. For hikers reaching the center of the Spatsizi Plateau, a touch of native lore adds to their experience. It also provides an opportunity for Iskut people to express an ethnic identity. Both the speech and the sign board are crafted – and crafty – presentations of Iskut hunting heritage and knowledge. They present local issues in terms that non-native people expect and understand.

## 7. CONCLUSION: EVERYDAY TALK ABOUT HUNTING

*Today I hear lots of these young guys say 'We going hunting,' and they take four wheeler vehicle. Not our style. Walk. Track 'em down. That's what we do. Sure.*

Elder John Edwards speaking to children at the Iskut school

I still find it difficult to state categorically the meaning of hunting at Iskut. It is clear, however, that Iskut people share an interest in hunting and its practices. The meaning of hunting at Iskut Village exists in verbal expressions which identify a connection to the past and create an identity in the present. The persistence of hunting is related to its position as a moral anchor for individual behaviors. Because Iskut people frequently measure individual character with reference to hunting, I am also convinced that Iskut people would continue to hunt without the cash economy that supports these activities. Hunting unites people, places, and animals with the rules by which people must behave. And, it gives people a venue for confronting changes to those rules. This plays out when individuals make choices about shooting moose or leaving them alone. It appears in the variety of responses villagers use to confront the activities of outsiders. It is demonstrated when Iskut people cover their hunting activities or myth-time knowledge.

My intention throughout the dissertation has been to offer specific examples of the place of hunting in the lives of Iskut people. My focus has been on examples of the way in which Iskut people talk about hunting. And, I have set this talk into detailed ethnographic descriptions of how hunting occurs in Iskut today and how it was conducted in the past. Moreover, I positioned the hunting talk against a general observation that Iskut culture, and hunting in particular, has not always been appreciated as fully modern by outsiders. This has prompted me to describe or imply a number of parallels and

paradoxes throughout the text where Iskut relations with others are concerned. Iskut people recognize ties with other Tahltan-speaking peoples, but only to a point. Shared language and cultural features unite all Tahltans at marriages, funerals, during salmon fishing season on the Stikine River, and when political action is supported by large numbers (or the demonstration of a large and contiguous land base). Divisions exist within this large Tahltan group in the areas of history and how best to manage lands and resources. Iskut relationships with non-natives are equally complicated. Tommy Walker epitomizes the ire many at Iskut feel for meddling outsiders who do not fully understand the complexities of living lives as hunters. Yet, Walker brought opportunities with him which Iskut people embraced quickly and easily. The same may be said today when anthropologists (me) express an interest in traditional uses of local lands or mining companies seek (without always finding) village support for economic development ventures. And, Iskut relationships with animals exhibit many of these challenges. The spiritual aspects of sustenance hunting appear to conflict with the pragmatism of wage-based hunting and guiding. Food animals are treated differently than domesticated ones. Yet, Iskut people embrace both activities, and the animals associated with them, with enthusiasm.

Hunting is, then, a shared set of practices which includes narratives and histories. Hunting is central to a cultural system at Iskut Village where only some history unites people within the place. This cultural system relies on shared symbols which index modern practices and also the past. These symbols are embedded in conversational narratives which point to the management of personal and social identities. In other words, Iskut people express and demonstrate their concern for the group and for social

relations within the group with talk of hunting. Likewise, local values about the sharing of food or the threats that outsiders pose are inculcated in the talk.

### **Dissertation Summary**

I have formed this study around several examples of the ways in which Iskut people speak about hunting. In doing so, I have tried to show that the words of Iskut people shape their relationships with the land, animals, and each other. Those words also point to how Iskut people think about claims to local lands and resources by outsiders in both the past and the present. Part One of the dissertation provides an overview to my research problem by discussing theory, the history of northern British Columbia, and the ethnography of hunting. In Chapter 1, I show that Iskut hunting is a source of pride for Iskut people. Yet, hunting is sometimes stigmatized by outsiders with interests in the lands and natural resources of northern British Columbia. I indicate that the ethnographic inquiry into an Iskut culture was a profitable way to identify the importance of hunting to Iskut people and, thus, to offset the racism and stereotypes that are frequently associated with native lives. I elaborate by arguing that ethnoecological research and the *Ethnography of Speaking* both contribute useful methodological alternatives to traditional use studies particularly when the documentation and interpretation of the varied expressions of hunting in Iskut Village is of concern.

In Chapter 2, I sketch twentieth century Iskut history. This history includes somewhat different points of origin and hunting traditions for each of the families now residing in Iskut. The experiences of working for Tommy Walker color Iskut impressions of outsiders even today. I elaborate on the themes of sustenance hunting, wage work, and

disparate family experiences in Chapter 3. There, my goals are two-fold. First, it is apparent that hunting remains a constant throughout recent Iskut history. Techniques have not changed very much. The sharing and distribution of food along family lines is still meaningful today. Second, the general anthropological literature on hunting in northern Canada shows that Iskut relationships with animals are consistent with those of their neighbors. Importantly, the symbolism of these human-animal relations is evoked at Iskut in conversational narratives today. In turn, those narratives convey enduring cultural themes with care and artistry, but rarely with elaboration.

In Part Two of the dissertation, I turn directly to the way in which Iskut people talk about animals and hunting. The hunting stories of Chapter 4, for example, evoke the past activities of hunters in what appears to be playful bullshitting (Frankfurt 1986). Despite the funny moments in the stories, their similar forms suggest that these are serious accounts that portray significant relationships of respect with moose. My suggestion is that the reverence for food animals remains strong in Iskut. That reverence points to ideal social relationships between people as well.

Jim Peter's guiding stories in Chapter 5 exemplify one historical era with which all Iskut people identify. They offer a shared history in a place where unifying experiences seem to be lacking. Jim's stories about his days working for Walker exemplify his passion for the work. They also caution listeners that relationships with outsiders are challenging because Iskut people do not think about animals and the land in the same way as, say, Walker did. Talk of wage-based hunting for Tommy Walker epitomizes the tenor of relationships between Iskut people and outsiders. It also offers



indirect commentary about the recent political and economic activities of the Iskut Council and resource extraction companies.

Chief Louie builds on connections to the past in Chapter 6 to argue forcefully for land claims and Iskut rights in the present. At first, Chief Louie's speech sounds much like any other talk about hunting. Upon analysis, however, community divisions, the distrust of outsiders, and the importance of continuing and respectful relationships with the land and animals are all part of the Chief's talk. Tommy Walker's role in Iskut history remains close to the surface in the speech. Ethnic identity is at stake in the speech, to be sure, but largely because the Canadian public expects native people to make claims based on a shared culture and history. Thinking in terms of unity in this way creates expectations about the unity many inside and outside of Iskut imagine to have existed in the past. It is the ethnic unity that is on display at public celebrations, or so invited guests hope.

Together, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show how narratives index the social relationships within Iskut Village. The conversational narratives remind others about their responsibilities within families. Stinginess is frowned upon and friendships are valuable. Moreover, the reputation of Iskut people outside of the village is in play in these stories and speeches. Iskut people use these narratives to refute the stigma of a hunting economy and the racism associated with beliefs that native people should simply cease to be Indians.

## **Ethnography and TEK**

The range of narrative presentations of Iskut's hunting history is telling. It reflects historical realities like long-term interactions between Iskut people and outsiders. It points to how savvy Iskut people have become at describing their rights, history, and traditions in an increasingly litigious and confrontational relationship with governments and industrial developers. The casual sharing of guiding stories between cousins conveys the same disgust with Tommy Walker and other historical events as a Chief's speech in front of government representatives. The presentations are, however, different and considerations of audience are critical. In the former speech event, guiding history is shared subtly and the past is alluded to indirectly. In the latter, the Chief reshapes guiding history as a specific and continuing threat to local sovereignty with those in government looking on. Various histories, family origins, and hunting experiences do not mean that a cultural identity is lacking. Rather, a cultural coherence and logic is created around hunting, guiding, and work with outsiders.

I have tried to show that hunting rules and processes exist outside of formal interviews and myth-time stories. Conversational narratives about hunting are loaded with information about hunting practices, animal behaviors, hunting etiquette, and the importance of knowing local lands. This is TEK, if one wants to see it that way. But these conversations, these stories, show the dynamic and varied applications of such knowledge in everyday Iskut lives. *Sa'e* stories have not disappeared entirely and they contribute to assertions of ethnic nationhood particularly in the context of interviews with James Teit or me. It is unclear, however, if these stories add to an Iskut identity or to a

broader Tahltan identity. Now, *sa'e* stories are used less frequently for transmitting of local truths about animals and history. Other narratives have taken their place.

Like Iskut people themselves, I am interested in the best ways to document, record, and represent native relationships with local lands and food supplies. I assert that an ethnographic approach does less to alienate and dissociate native people from their knowledge than many kinds of traditional knowledge or traditional use research.

Originally, I thought Traditional Use Studies were inauthentic or incomplete representations of local knowledge. In some ways, they are precisely that and I still get frustrated by the elimination of individual voices in such studies. It is very hard to quantify hunting talk or to put it on maps, despite its vitality, richness, and distinctive character. I have also been concerned that TEK and TUS in bureaucratic settings idealize native people as close to nature and, perhaps, primitive.

These criticisms are not entirely fair. A TUS may be a foreign format for documenting local knowledge. Iskut people have, however, learned it, become adept at using it, and have made it as much a part of their repertoire for demonstrating their history and rights as any rhetorical or narrative strategy. My complaint is that traditional use studies and applications of traditional ecological knowledge in general are applied in research settings where other techniques, including the Ethnography of Speaking, might be more appropriate. TUS and TEK work has a place, but it should not be the end of learning about aboriginal knowledge of lands and animals. I am advocating here for nothing more than an acceptance of the fact that Iskut Villagers employ a range of responses to outsiders, development projects, or court decisions in their regular performances of sovereignty and dignity.

At Iskut, the stories of the past told openly in the present are reminders of a long and substantial association with sustenance hunting. The material importance of hunted meat pales next to its symbolic and social importance. Attending to everyday forms of speech can illuminate the differences between affiliation and covering, materialism and symbolism, and demonstrate the utility of hunting talk in a modern native community. Situations where this history is minimized point the stigma of living as hunters in an industrial world. The importance of hunting stories for Iskut people stems from their utility in a range of situations. They point to how personal relationships with animals are changing. Telling them helps Iskut people address, engage, and manage their footing in a wider world that is often fraught with interpersonal tensions, litigious actions, racism and concerns about the land.

## EPILOGUE

During the late summer of 2005, some Iskut elders and younger people blocked the road used to access the BC Rail grade, Iskut hunting camps, and hunting grounds. The blockade prevented exploration for methane gas and coal at *Dzetsedle* 'Klappan Mountain' by non-native mining companies. For two months, the protesters positioned themselves at the entrance to the Access Road and denied trucks access to the area. Then, in September, a judge issued an injunction against the protesters. The mining company prepared to move its trucks up the grade. The protesters donned their black and red button blankets and refused to leave the blockade. Thirteen Iskut people, including nine elders, were arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This was their sacrifice and an exhibition of power on behalf of animals.

I followed these events from Vancouver. I was kept up-to-date by email and phone calls with people who visited the blockade. I also consulted internet-based media including news gathering websites and a blog (web log) published by Iskut authors. The blog was used to distribute photographs and news stories from the Canadian Press. It also provided general information about the condition of the protesters, the status of the blockade, and the goals of the protest. One blog entry describes these goals this way:

Blockaders are stopping access to the Mount Klappan and the Sacred Headwaters, where the first trickles of four magnificent rivers flow — Spatsizi, Nass, Klappan and Skeena. The surrounding Stikine is a globally significant natural area and the centre of Tahltan culture. The salmon from these river and the wildlife and plants have sustained Tahltan for thousands of years (September 3, 2005; [www.tahltn.blogspot.com](http://www.tahltn.blogspot.com), accessed September 20, 2005).

This event divided Iskut families along gender and generational lines. It created rifts between the elected leadership and matrilineal leadership. The most visible people

on the blockade were women. Some of the same women who spoke at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh* a year earlier organized the protest. The wife of the elected chief was arrested along with four of his sisters (Carmichael 2005). The elected Iskut leadership publicly denounced the blockade citing instead the need for mining-related jobs. The blockaders countered with the need to manage resources in sustainable ways.<sup>110</sup> Later, the elected leadership came out against some of the exploration and development. Importantly, the protest united families across ancestral divisions. Descendants of the *Tlebānot'ine* and the *Tl'ogot'ine* worked together to protect the ancestral homes of both groups.

The ideas and methods of the protesters are compatible with those expressed in Chief Louie's speech at *Hok'ats Luwe Menh*. Both events are expressions of sovereignty over claimed traditional lands. They exist in the context of land claims in British Columbia. And, participants in both events relied on connections to hunting, knowing local lands, and being native for authority. The differences are striking too. At the reunion camp, an elected chief spoke as a representative of an established political body. Women and families had smaller voices there. The blockade was a grassroots effort, organized by young people and supported by notable women. In each instance, the Iskut hunting legacy is animated and authored by different people with different footings in the village (cf. Goffman 1981:144). Yet, the messages are similar, which is to say that the hunting past is used to assert comparable political goals. And, notably, no one in either setting turned to the Traditional Use Study for guidance or as a source of knowledge.

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<sup>110</sup> From the entry for September 3, 2005 at [www.tahltn.blogspot.com](http://www.tahltn.blogspot.com). I accessed the site on September 20, 2005.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Summary of Field Notebooks and Tape Recordings

Appendix 2: The Tahltan Language Practical Orthography

Appendix 3: Tahltan Language Animal and Fish Names

## **APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF FIELD NOTE BOOKS AND TAPE RECORDINGS**

### **Research Notebooks**

I used eight notebooks to record notes by hand during my stay in Iskut Village. References to field notes in the dissertation identify the notebook number followed by the page number as well as the date of the notation. Copies of these books are held by me and the Iskut First Nation.

#### *Field Notebooks*

These books include general observations of life at Iskut Village and descriptions of my daily routines.

Book 1: March 8 – May 6, 2002

Book 2: May 8 – June 15, 2002

Book 3: July 5 – July 30, 2002

Book 4: July 30 – September 6, 2002

Book 5: September 14 – November 21, 2002

Book 6: November 22, 2002 – January 20, 2003

Book 7: January 21 – February 26, 2003

Book 8: February 27 – March 18, 2003

#### *Language Use Notebook*

This notebook includes short but verbatim transcriptions of talk about animals or metalinguistic talk about language and language use. Notations are categorized by the location where the talk was overhead (eg. in the home, Band Office, Clinic).

Note: I made additional trips to Iskut on the following dates: June 28 – July 20, 2003; July 20 – July 26, 2004; August 8-18, 2004; and, August 7-11, 2006. Field notes exist for these trips.



## **Tape Recordings and Interview Materials**

The following list is an index to the tape recordings I made during my field work. Tape numbers beginning with ISK correspond to the numbers used throughout the dissertation. Tape numbers beginning with ELF correspond to recordings associated with a grant from the Endangered Languages Fund. I have changed informant names to pseudonyms which are consistent with the rest of the dissertation.

Rivers, Peter. May 8, 2002. *Ice Fishing at Kluachon Lake* (ISK-02-01; 1 tape). Recorded at Kluachon Lake, British Columbia.

Tape recorded at Haven Point, in the evening. There are some issues with tape quality: it was windy out; recorder was located variously in my jacket pocket and directly on the ice. This recording was conducted without stops for silences and as such there are long stretches without conversation. I also recorded our conversation in the truck driving back to the village after fishing. There is a summary of my thoughts at the end. Topics on the tape include a discussion of ice safety and of travel routes around Haven Point.

Rivers, Peter. May, 9 2002. *Ice Fishing at Kluachon Lake* (ISK-02-02; 2 tapes). Recorded at Kluachon Lake, British Columbia.

Tapes include conversations with Peter Rivers and Levis Rivers while fishing at Haven Point and Tommy Hankin' Point. There are issues with the tape quality, including fact that recorder was located variously in my jacket pocket, on the ice, and in a plastic bag. The tapes were recorded without stops for silences. There is a personal summary at end of recording (2A:050). Topics of conversation include beaver hunting and a hunting story on Kluachon Lake set in 1964 (1A).

Rivers, Peter and Edwards, Scotty. May 15, 2002. *Drive Along Rail Grade* (ISK-02-03; 3 tapes). Recorded in my truck while driving between Iskut, Peter Rivers's Klappan Cabin, and back to Iskut.

Record of travel up BC Rail grade with Peter Rivers and Scotty Edwards. We drove from Iskut to Peter's cabin at 48k and back. We paused outside of the cabin for 20 minutes and the tape recorder was not on during that time. We were joined at the cabin by Mark Fowler and Ken James who were passing by. To achieve this recording, I taped the recorder to centre console in truck. Scotty Edwards was in the backseat and Peter Rivers in front seat. Topics of conversation included: animal names; hunting stories; and, place names.

McIlwraith, Thomas, May 17, 2002. *Observations along Klappan River Access Road* (ISK-02-04; 1 tape). Spoken Notes by Thomas McIlwraith. Recorded in my truck, driving from Highway 37 to Rail Grade.

This is a recording of oral field notes as I drove from Iskut into Ken James and Lynn Rivers's camp on the rail grade. Tape includes my knowledge and observations of the road including distances to camps, wood cutting places, etc.

Peters, Jim and Edwards, Scotty. May 24, 2002. *Drive to km 96 on Access Road* (ISK-02-05; 3 tapes). Recorded in my truck.

Tape recorded conversations between Iskut and km 96 on BC Rail grade. No recording took place on the return trip. In the truck, Scotty Edwards sat in the backseat and Jim Peters was in the front. My tape recorder was taped to the centre console of the truck. Poor noise quality due to noise from rough road. Topics of conversation include: band politics; place names; regional band history; some site specific hunting stories.

Edwards, Scotty. May 31, 2002. *Drive to Between Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek* (ISK-02-06; 2 tapes). Recorded in my truck Between Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek.

This is a recording of Scotty Edwards during a drive between Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek. The rough road caused noise on tape. Topics of conversation include: loon stories; relations with animals; and, healing.

Peters, Jim. June 10, 2002. *Language Lesson* (ISK-02-07). Not Taped; Session at Jim Peters's Picnic Table in Backyard, Iskut.

This session was not taped at Jim's request because his voice was failing him. We discussed the verb 'to fish' and interrogative words in Tahltan; see field notes for further details.

Peters, Jim. June 12, 2002. *Language Lesson* (ISK-02-08). Recorded at Jim Peters's Picnic Table behind his home in Iskut.

Topics of discussion include words for geographical features and land forms.

Peters, Jim. July 9, 2002. *Language Lesson* (ISK-02-09; 1 tape). Recorded in Jim Peters's Living Room, Iskut Village.

Tape quality is reasonable; Jim's grandson is playing in living room with us and the TV is on. Tape includes Three Sisters Rock story in English and discussion of types of stories, fish words, and fish technology words.

Peters, Jim. July 9, 2002. *Trip to Eddontenajon Rock* (ISK-02-10; Video #1). Recorded at Eddontenajon Lake, British Columbia.

This tape is approximately 34 minutes long. Audio and video tapes exist. Tape includes a Tahltan language version of the Eddontenajon Rock story. This story was later translated and transcribed with the help of Martha James.

Knox, Susan. July 17, 2002. *Fishing at Cannery* (ISK-02-11; 2 video tapes). Recorded at Cannery Fishing Site, on Tahltan River, British Columbia.

Video tape is approximately 48 minutes long with sound.

James, Martha. July 20, 2002. *Trip to Iskut Commonage* (ISK-02-12; 3 audio tapes; 1 video tape). Interview by Thomas McIlwraith, Robert Diaz, and Susan Knox. Recorded at the Iskut Commonage, Stikine River, British Columbia.

Video tape is approximately 1 hour and 5 minutes long. It includes Martha James's reflections on life at the Iskut Commonage.

James, Catherine. July 24, 2002. *Language Lesson* (ISK-02-13; 2 tapes). Recorded in Catherine James's Living Room, Iskut, British Columbia.

This audio tape is a clean recording of words related to fish and fishing and a review of the verb 'to fish.'

James, Martha. July 30, 2002. *Fish Interview* (ISK-02-14; 1 tape). Recorded in Martha James's Kitchen at the Iskut, British Columbia.

Tape includes a discussion of Tahltan words related to fish and fishing.

James, Martha and Knox, Susan. August 2, 2002. *Trip from Tsetia Creek to Klappan Mountain* (ISK-02-15; 2 tapes). Recorded in truck while driving along Klappan Rail Grade, British Columbia.

This is a recording of conversations in truck as we drove between Tsetia Creek and Klappan Mountain on the BC Rail grade. The recording is not 'run time.' The recording was completed as part of an ethnographic survey to check TUS maps in light of potential new development of the coal mine on Klappan Mountain. There is lots of background noise and music.

Edwards, John. August 8, 2002. *Chatting Under Kitchen Fly at John Edwards's 115km Camp* (ISK-02-16; 1 tape). Recorded at John Edwards's Didini Camp (115km Camp), British Columbia.

Tape recorded at 2x speed under fly in John Edwards's kitchen at his Didini Camp. It was raining and the sound of rain on the fly is audible on the tape. The kids in camp are interested in the recorder. John Edwards talked for much of tape,

while making lunch between 2-3p. His voice is quiet. Side B was recorded under the same conditions between 5-6p.

Edwards, John. August 10, 2002. *Driving to Iskut with John Edwards from his 115km Camp* (ISK-02-17; 1 tape). Recorded in John Edwards's Truck Along Rail Grade, British Columbia.

Tape recorded in John Edwards's truck while traveling from 115km Camp to Iskut Village with his grandkids.

Edwards, John. August 11, 2002. *John Edwards's 115km Camp* (ISK-02-18; 1 tape). Recorded under Kitchen Fly in John Edwards's 115km Camp, British Columbia.

This tape was recorded in John Edwards's camp during the early evening. Several people were roaming around in and out of the kitchen. The kids were busy trying to fix a rifle sight. Some of the recording includes John speaking to me while others listened.

Edwards, John. August 12, 2002. *John Edwards's 115km Camp* (ISK-02-19; 1 tape). Recorded Under Kitchen Fly in John Edwards's 115km Camp, British Columbia.

Tape recording of conversation between 1:40 and 2:40p, under John Edwards's kitchen fly. Conversation included personal stories and was dominated by Colin Duncan who seemed to easily take and hold the turn.

James, Martha. October 4, 2002. *Food* (ISK-02-20; 1 tape). Recorded in Truck Driving to Dease Lake, British Columbia.

Martha James discusses Tahltan food preferences and the words for foods.

Edwards, Scotty. October 8, 2002. *Tatogga and Drive to Kinaskan Lake* (ISK-02-21; 1 tape). Recorded in Truck at Tatogga Lake and Drive from Tatogga to Kinaskan Lake.

The key part of tape is located at 1B:120, where Scotty talks about place names. He tells a story about a man who drowned at Klappan Crossing because of a river trout medicine curse. The timing on the tape is somewhat messed up: there is 20 minutes of the trip from Iskut to Tatogga Lake and then 20 minutes of the trip from Tatogga to Kinaskan Lake. Other information from a walk outdoors around Tatogga Lake is inaudible.

Edwards, John. October 9, 2002. *Hunting Stories* (ISK-02-22/ELF-1; 1 audio and 1 video tape). Interview by Thomas McIlwraith, Catherine James, and Olive James. Recorded in Classroom at Klappan School, Iskut, British Columbia.

This tape was made with funding from the Endangered Languages Fund. It documents John talking about hunting in English and Tahltan with a group of

children in the Klappan School. The episode was video taped and recorded with a microphone on audio tape. The interplay between John and the children is notable, particularly because the kids were expected to sit quietly, but could not stop themselves asking questions and sharing hunting stories in a similar vein to those John told.

Edwards, John. October 9, 2002. *Hunting Stories* (ISK-02-23; 1 tape). Recorded in John Edwards's Living Room, Iskut, British Columbia.

On this tape, John discusses the differences between hunting and fishing, and the words for various fish species and fishing technologies.

James, Martha. October 11, 2002. *Nicknames* (ISK-02-24; 1 tape). Recorded in Truck While Traveling on Microwave Road.

Martha discusses the childhood nicknames of her siblings and how those names were used.

James, Martha. October 17, 2002. *Pronunciation of Iskut Tahltan Consonants* (ISK-02-25; 1 tape). Recorded in Iskut Band Office.

Martha reviews the words used by Hardwick (1984) as a Tahltan pronunciation key in her dissertation. She did the same thing with the pronunciation key in Carter's Tahltan Conversation Book.

Peters, Jim and Peters, Julie. October 23, 2002. *Wolverine Man Story* (ISK-02-26/ELF-2; 1 tape). Recorded in Jim and Jenny's Kitchen, Iskut, British Columbia.

This storytelling session with Jim Peters and Julie Peters took place in their kitchen. As part of the Endangered Languages Fund project, Jim told the wolverine man story. Jim and Julie negotiated the telling style and were very concerned about the perfect telling of the story. Jim told the story straight through in Tahltan. This was followed by an 'interlinear telling' with Jim saying a sentence in Tahltan and Julie providing the translation in English. The story is about wolverine and why he is the way he is.

James, Martha. October 30, 2002. *Bird Names* (ISK-02-27; 1 tape). Recorded in Iskut Elders' Centre.

Martha reviews the Tahltan words for birds.

Rivers, Peter. November 5, 2002. *Fish Terms* (ISK-02-28; 1 tape). Recorded in Peter Rivers's Living Room, Iskut, British Columbia.

Peter Rivers gives the names for fish and the words for fishing technologies. The tape quality is good, although the microphone failed between 1B:000 and 1B:010. The list of fish words given at that time is recorded by hand in my notebook.

Carlick, Eva and Louie, Annie. ca. 1970. *Songs* (ISK-02-29; 1 tape). Recorded at Telegraph Creek, British Columbia.

Martha James gave me this tape of Annie Louie, and Eva Carlick singing Tahltan and Tsimshian language songs. They include some English language description and commentary. Songs include love songs, drinking songs, and the song for making Ptarmigan dance. I have transcribed the ptarmigan song with Martha James. Another song compares young girls to fish that boys are trying to catch with a net. (See transcription file of ISK-02-29.).

James, Martha. November 13, 2002. *Trapping and Tanning Hides* (ISK-02-30/ELF-3; 1 tape). Recorded in Iskut Teacherage, Iskut, British Columbia.

Martha discusses trapping with her father and the ways to tan moose and caribou hides.

Stanton, Sophia. November 16, 2002. *Stories* (ISK-02-31/ELF-4; 2 tapes). Interview by Thomas McIlwraith and Catherine James. Recorded in Elders' Centre, Iskut, British Columbia.

Sophia Stanton tells a dozen stories in a mix of Tahltan and English. Some of the stories are mythological; others are stories of life at Metsantan.

Fowler, Mark. November 28, 2002. *Fish and Fishing* (ISK-02-32; 1 tape). Recorded in Mark Fowler's Living Room, Iskut, British Columbia.

Mark reviews words for fish and provides some information about hunting at Iskut and Telegraph Creek.

James, Martha. January 15, 2003. *Cutting Dry Meat* (ISK-03-01; 1 tape). Recorded in Kitchen of Martha James, Iskut, British Columbia.

This tape was recorded as Martha and I cut dry meat. Michael Roe chats with us through much of the recording.

Stanton, Sophia. January 17, 2003. *Fish TEK* (ISK-03-02; 1 tape). Recorded in Elders' Centre, Iskut, British Columbia.

Sophia discusses fish and fishing activities, especially around Metsantan.

James, Martha. January 23, 2003. *Life History I* (ISK-03-03; 1 tape). Recorded in Kitchen of Martha James, Iskut, British Columbia.

On this tape, Martha discusses her life at Metsantan. This tape features hunting stories (1B).

James, Martha. February 18, 2003. *Life History II* (ISK-03-04; 1 tape). Recorded in Kitchen of Martha James, Iskut, British Columbia.

On this tape, Martha discusses life at Metsantan and the relationship between camps and the central village. Martha also discusses the proper treatment of animals.

James, Martha. July 8, 2003. *Tahltan Language Directions* (ISK-03-05; 1 tape). Recorded at a road-side pullout on BC Highway 37 south of Todagin Creek.

Martha identifies directional words in Tahltan.

James, Martha. July 16, 2003. *Tahltan Verbs* (ISK-03-06; 1 tape). Recorded in Kitchen of Martha James, Iskut, British Columbia.

Martha conjugates verbs 'to pack,' 'to tell stories,' and 'to talk/to say.' She also describes the characteristics of some animals.

## APPENDIX 2: THE TAHLTAN LANGUAGE PRACTICAL ORTHOGRAPHY

This appendix provides a guide to the Tahltan practical orthography and pronunciations of Tahltan words. The Tahltan practical orthography is not used widely. See Leer (1985) for background on the development of this system.

The transcripts of Tahltan words in the dissertation are written in the Tahltan practical writing orthography consistent with the system used in the *Tahltan Children's Illustrated Dictionary* (Carter and Tahltan Tribal Council 1994). The pronunciation key given here provides English language equivalents for Tahltan sounds and is based on the key developed by Carter in *Basic Tahltan Conversation Lessons* (Carter 1991:iii-v). The letters are given in Tahltan alphabetical order.

### Consonants

Consonant	English Equivalent	Consonant	English Equivalent
' (glottal stop)	no English equivalent; a stoppage of air in the throat	nh	no English equivalent; like an n with a puff of air after it
b	b in big	p	p in pup (rarely heard in Tahltan)
ch	ch in church	s	s in see
ch'	same as ch but with a stoppage in throat	s̲	th in thin; this is pronounced like s in see by some speakers **
d	d in dad	sh	sh in shoot
dl	no English equivalent; often sounds like gl in glue	t	t in ten
dz	ds in pads	t'	t with stoppage in throat
d̲z	no English equivalent	tl	no English equivalent; often sounds like kl in Klondike
g	g in good	tl'	tl with stoppage in throat
gh	g in back of throat; soft g	ts	ts in cats
h	h in head	ts'	ts with stoppage in throat
j	j in joke	ts̲	no English equivalent; similar to t followed by th in thin **
k	k in king	ts̲'	ts̲' with stoppage in throat **
k'	same as k but with a stoppage in throat	w	w in water
kh	softer k	y	y in yes
l	l in large	yh	no English equivalent; like y with a puff of air after it
l̲	no English equivalent	z	z in zoo
m	m in mother	z̲	th in then; pronounced like z in zoo by some speakers **
n	n in no		



## Vowels

Short Vowels	English Equivalent	Long Vowels	English Equivalent
a	u in cup	ā	like au in caught
e	e in ten	ē	same as e but longer
i	i in bit; sometimes ee in keep	ī	like I but longer
o	o in oats	ō	same as o but longer
u	oo in boot	ū	same as u but longer

\*\*Some consonants are pronounced differently by Tahltan speakers (Carter and Tahltan Tribal Council 1991:v). Words with s, for example, may be pronounced as a /th/ in thin or as an /s/ in sun. Thus the word for ‘long time ago,’ sa’e, could be pronounced by some as sa’e and others as tha’e. The letter s allows the writing system to identify different pronunciations where the meaning of a word does not change (essentially allophonic variation). Similar variation exists for ts, ts’, and z.

**APPENDIX 3: TAHLTAN LANGUAGE ANIMAL AND FISH NAMES**

**Animal Names**

<b>Tahltan – English</b>		<b>English – Tahltan</b>	
bedeyā	sheep, female	bat	et'anesjide
behgehyāle	butterfly	bear, black	sas
chajāne	sheep, ram	bear, grizzly	khoh
chi'yōne	wolf	bear, grizzly (2 years old)	leh chō
debēhe	sheep	beaver	tsa'
dech'uwe	porcupine	beaver, big	meti
desidi	moose, barren cow	butterfly	behgehyāle
detsīli	moose, cow	caribou	hodzih
deyō	moose, bull	caribou, bull	jihchō
didiye	groundhog	cat	dūsh
dih	grouse / chicken	chipmunk	honāzē
diṣts'eze	squirrel	coyote	tīdah tī'
dlune	mouse	crow	tsesk'ie
dlunechō	rat	deer	kuwegāhn
dūsh	cat	dog	tī'
ebā'e	weasel	eagle (white head)	tūdah
echujāne	porcupine, big	fisher	ṣēdēze
estsiye	moose, young	fox	nuṣiḥe / nuṣidzēhe
et'anesjide	bat	frog	tehkahche
gah	rabbit	goat	iṣbā
hodzih	caribou	gopher	tsili
honāzē	chipmunk	groundhog	didiye
hosteḥ	groundhog, female	groundhog, female	hosteḥ
iṣbā	goat	groundhog, young	ust'eh
jihchō	caribou, bull	grouse / chicken	dih
kāle	porcupine, young	lynx	nasdā
kazūne	otter	marten	nust'ie
kedā	moose	mink	tehjische
khoh	bear, grizzly	moose	kedā
kuwegāhn	deer	moose, barren cow	desidi
leh chō	bear, grizzly (2 years old)	moose, bull	deyō
meṣdzi	owl	moose, cow	detsīli
meti	beaver, big	moose, yearling	tī'āze
naghā	wolverine	moose, young	estsiye
nasdā	lynx	mouse	dlune
nuṣiḥe / nuṣidzēhe	fox	muskrat	tehk'ā
nust'ie	marten	otter	kazūne
sas	bear, black	owl	meṣdzi

tehjishe	mink	porcupine	dech'uwe
tehk'ā	muskrat	porcupine, big	echujāne
tehkahche	frog	porcupine, young	kāle
ti'āze	moose, yearling	rabbit	gah
tīdah tī'	coyote	rat	dlunechō
tī'	dog	raven	tsesk'iyechō
tsa'	beaver	sheep	debēhe
tṣēdēze	fisher	sheep, female	bedeyā
tsesk'ie	crow	sheep, ram	chajāne
tsesk'iyechō	raven	squirrel	diṣts'eze
tsili	gopher	weasel	ebā'e
tūdah	eagle (white head)	wolf	chi'yōne
ust'eh	groundhog, young	wolverine	naghā

### Fish Names

Tahltan – English		English – Tahltan	
āseda	steelhead	fish, generic	ḥuwe
deghai	trout, rainbow	ling cod	hostlose
deghati	whitefish	salmon, king	gēs
dēk'āne	salmon, sockeye	salmon, sockeye	dēk'āne
deṣdel	sucker	steelhead	āseda
gēs	salmon, king	sucker	deṣdel
hostlose	ling cod	sucker	tsinakay / tenek'aye
ḥō	whitefish	trout, generic	tṣabā'e
ḥuwe	fish, generic	trout, rainbow	deghai
tṣabā'e	trout, generic	whitefish	deghati
tsinakay / tenek'aye	sucker	whitefish	ḥō

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