



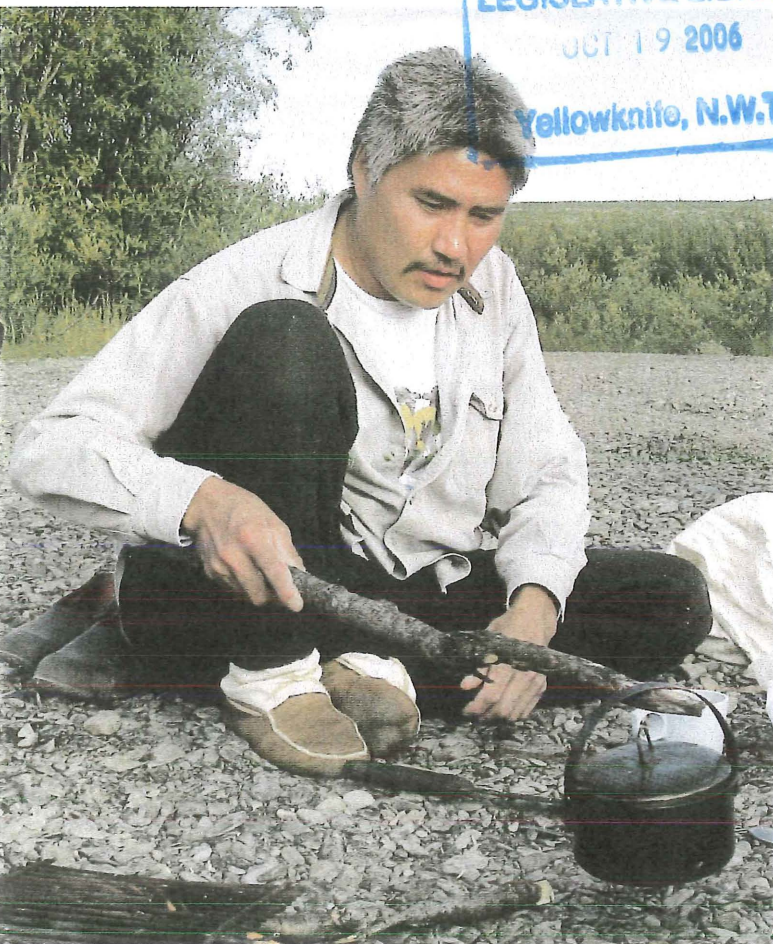
Sahtu Region

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CANOL HERITAGE TRAIL

Leadership Walk 2006 — Trip Report



Ricky Andrew

Reno the pack dog

Introduction

Four Sahtu youth had a chance to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors during the period from July 16 - 21, 2006. The four youth, accompanied by Northwest Territories Premier Joe Handley and Norman Yakeleya, the MLA for the Sahtu, had a tough five day hike over 84 kilometers of the Canol Trail.

A year or so ago Norman realized that many of today's youth in the Sahtu had little connection to the historic trail from the Sahtu into the Yukon. Over a period of several months he spoke about organizing a hike with Premier Joe Handley and, on an ad hoc basis, with several of the members of the Sahtu Park Development Committee. The Committee has received funding from the Government of the Northwest Territories to consider all aspects of the creation of a park including the impact such a park would have on the traditional use of the area by the Sahtu Dene and Metis. This is of great importance as in 1994 the Sahtu Dene and Metis Land Claim and Self Government Agreement came into being.

The Background

The route follows a traditional trail through the mountains used for hundreds of years by the Sahtu Dene and Metis. The part of the trail closest to Norman Wells has the traditional name of Do et'q which means "sheep's nest" as the mountains in this area are an important breeding area for Dall Sheep.

Intermarriage amongst the people of the Sahtu and of the eastern Yukon has occurred for a very long time. Norman's grandmother used to tell him stories about how every Spring people from Tulita would spend a month walking over to visit and trade with their relatives in the Yukon. And of course new marriages would occur. Regular travel by foot between Tulita and Ross River occurred up to a time a few years after the end of the Second World War.

Oil was found in 1920 in Norman Wells. By the middle of the Second World War the US military decided that a pipeline from there to Whitehorse, to provide oil for the war effort in the Pacific, was needed.

The US Army hired George Blondin to guide them through the mountains to lay out a trail. The pipeline was built, one of the toughest construction jobs ever in the North, but just when it was finished the war ended and the pipeline was used for less than a year. Mr. Blondin tells the story of this undertaking in his book *When the World was New*.

The Government of the NWT is considering putting a territorial park in place along the route. Norman



Crossing a creek on the Canol Trail

Sore feet by the fire.

wanted to show this trail to some young people, to, as Norman said "honour our elders".

Trip Administration

The Tulita Dene Band agreed to administer the project funds, to receive funds from the private and public sector sponsors and contributors, and to disburse the funds as needed. The regional office of the GNWT Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment were the contact centre and attended to the day-to-day administration of the trip logistics.

The Trip

The trail is generally considered to be 222 miles (or 355 km) long. This is because Mile Zero is at Norman Wells and the trailhead at the western end is at the Mile 222 gravel airstrip.

The group gathered in Norman Wells on a Sunday afternoon. A briefing was held at the Norman Wells Heritage Centre. Then it was off to the Airport to board a North Wright Airways Twin Otter for the flight to Mile 222.

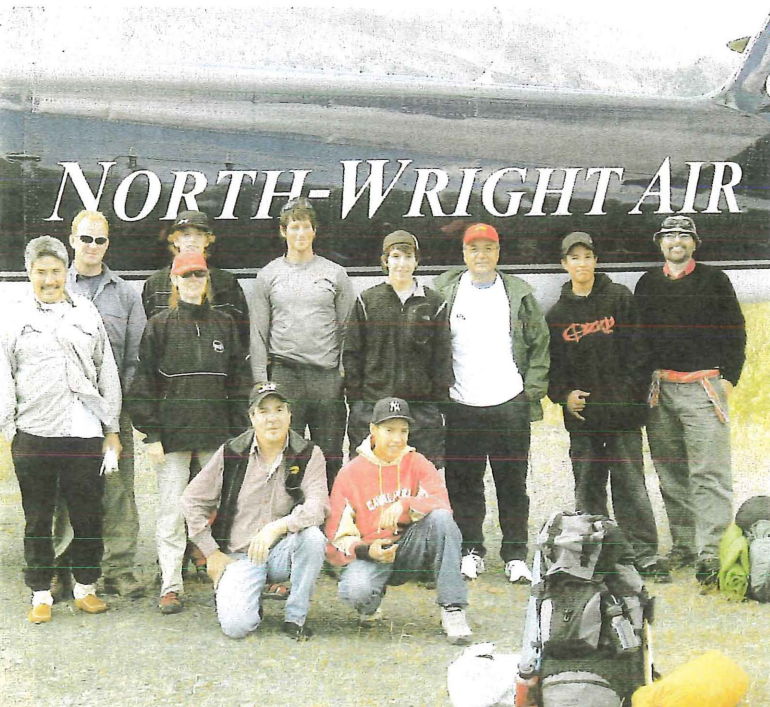
In addition to the leaders and the youth there was



a Mountain Dene guide from Tulita, Ricky Andrew, who teaches the Slavey language and culture at the school in Tulita. Ricky brought along one of his pack dogs, Reno. In his capacity as Director of Aboriginal Relations at Northwestel Garth Wallbridge accompanied the group. Micki Ruth from Yellowknife and two guides from a southern outfitting company rounded out the party.

As the trail is through rugged, remote country it was determined that some logistical support would be desirable. An outfitter from Norman Wells who has personally traveled the trail was retained to take care of trip logistics and food. That person decided that due to the size of the group he would need assistance and so he sub-contracted the work to a southern Canadian outfitting company who supplied two guides. Although these guides were experienced hiking guides and brought a level of safety to the trip there was a general feeling of uncertainty with these two fellows in so far as they had no connection to the trail. In future years local guides will be utilized.

The group traveled one km. the first day, getting to the first river crossing at about 7:00 p.m.



The group at Mile 222 about to start the hike.

Horses made the last 10 km. easy!

The following days the distances covered were:

Day 2 – 18 km.

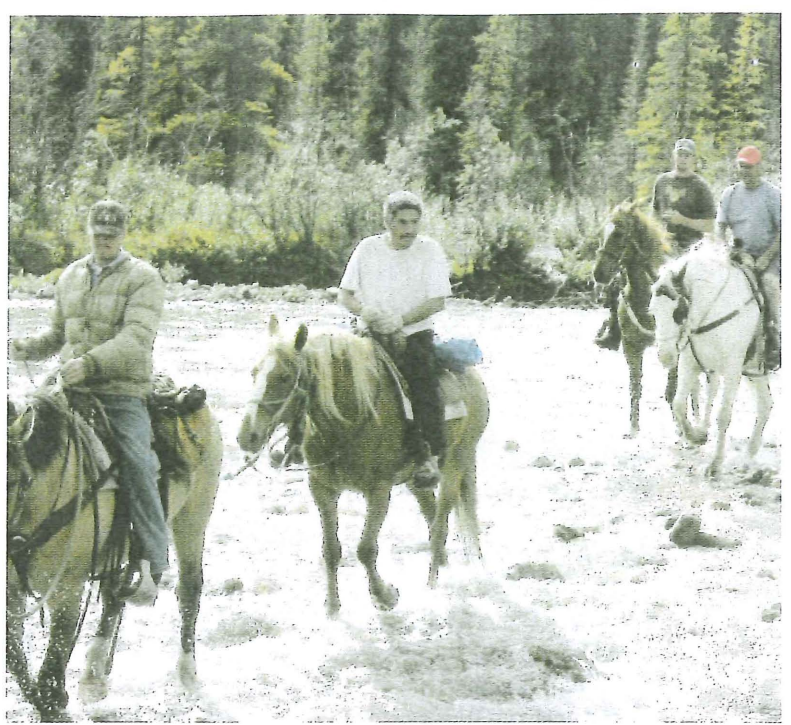
Day 3 – 17 km.

Day 4 – 23 km.

Day 5 – 25 km (the last 10 of which was with horses)

The youth took advantage of the opportunity to spend time with the leaders, asking questions and having probing questions asked of them to draw out their thoughts and ideas on current events, issues relating to land claims and self government, land use, harvesting of animals and much more. This was all done in a very relaxed manner and it seems obvious that the leaders learned as much from the youth participants as did the young people from the leaders. Day by day and hour by hour walking partners switched back and forth and this resulted in a level of interaction that could not be duplicated in any other setting.

The group carried two satellite phones for emergencies and, with a Premier's conference happening the following week in Newfoundland Joe Handley had to make a phone call every day

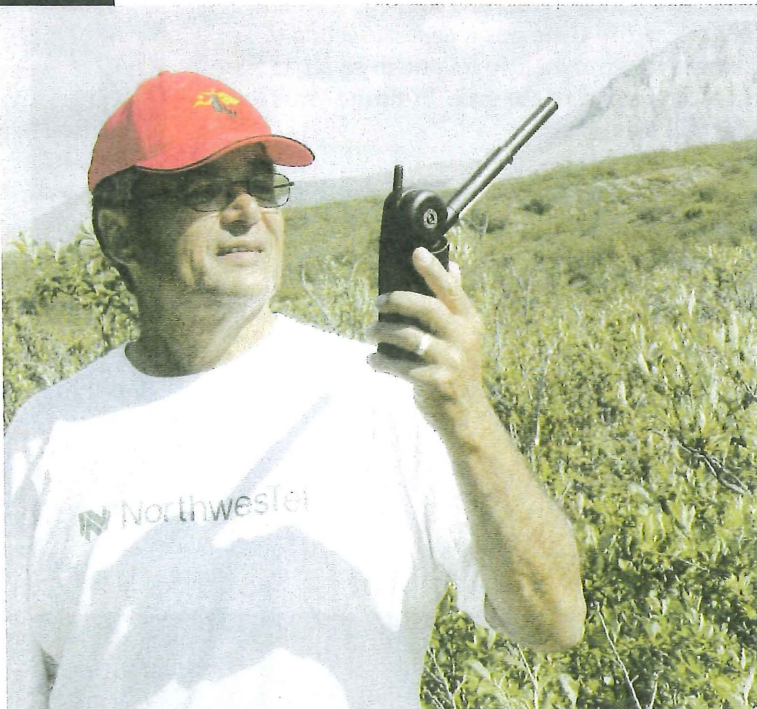


to keep in touch with the planning for that. In addition Joe and Norman did daily live trip updates on CBC radio.

There were many blisters and sore muscles but nothing more serious. Sitting around a campfire every night and every morning with Ricky Andrew was the highlight of the trip for the participants. Ricky is a very traditional man and knows so much about the culture and history of the mountains that one could easily spend many more weeks with him traveling to absorb some of his knowledge.

On the last day of hiking, at mid day, the group was very surprised, and extremely happy, to have a group of pack and saddle horses made available to them. Ram Head Outfitters run a pair of hunting camps in the area, and as they knew the group was getting close to their camp at Mile 170, were able to send out horses to help the group finish the last 10 km. of the trip.

The group camped at the Ram Head Outfitters camp on the last day, next to a gravel airstrip that the outfitters maintain, and returned to Norman Wells by helicopter the next day.



Premier Joe Handley on the satellite phone.

Kenneth Menacho and Myles Erb on the trail.



The Participants

Premier Joseph Handley

Norman Yakeleya, Sahtu MLA

Ricky Andrew, Sahtu Dene Guide

Micki Ruth

Garth Wallbridge, Director of Aboriginal Relations, Northwestel Inc.

Tyler Etchinelle, youth from Tulita. Tyler has done all but one year of his schooling in Tulita. He took one year of school in Hay River. Next year he will be completing grade 12 in Tulita. He spent a great of time in the bush with his dad as a youngster. Tyler is a real hunter, his favorite subject at any time of day is to talk about hunting caribou. He has traveled to Edmonton, Grande Prairie and other places throughout Alberta as well as to Stratford, Ontario on a student exchange.

Kenneth Menacho, youth from Deline. Ken recently traveled to Saguenay, Quebec to present a science fair project he developed on anti-bacterial

products. Ken thinks he might like to be a member of the RCMP or maybe a pilot. Perhaps he may be able to do both at the same time, being a pilot for the police. On the way back to the Wells at the end of the trip he had his first flight in helicopter and it was obvious that this opened up new possibilities for him to consider.

Phillip Rabisca, youth from Fort Good Hope. Phillip had been in Ottawa the month before the hike to receive a Junior Trapper Award. He was recognized as one young northerner who has a strong connection to his culture and to the land. He plans to live in Yellowknife for the coming year to attend grade 10 at high school there, where he can live with an older brother.

Myles Erb, youth from Norman Wells. Myles was born in southern Canada but has lived most of his life in the Wells where he will be going into grade 10 next year. He thinks he may become a biologist or a teacher, perhaps a physical education teacher, or coach. He is very involved in many different sports

Bart Legate and Dave Polman, Blackfeather Outfitters.



Phillip Rabisca and Tyler Etchinelle on the trail.

Meeting of relatives from across the mountains. Mary Jim Dick, Kellin Frisen, Janice Sturko (Kellin's grandmother) from Haines Junction, Yukon, working at the Dechenla Lodge, all related to Norman Yakeleya and Ricky Andrew.



The Sponsors

Sahtu Park Development Committee

GNWT Department of
Municipal and Community Affairs

GNWT Department of Industry,
Tourism and Investment

GNWT Department of Education,
Culture and Employment

GNWT Department of Environment and Natural
Resources

North Wright Airways Ltd.

Northwestel Inc.

Ledcor Group

Canadian North Airlines

Tulita Dene Band

Norman Wells Heritage Centre

Ram Head Outfitters

Dechenla Lodge

Trip Wrap Up

It is to be hoped that the group can complete the trail in the next year or two. About one quarter of the trail was covered this year. Perhaps some of the same youth will be able to complete the entire trail, perhaps some additional youth will come along.

In future years, certainly for the next section of the trail, it would be ideal to have a few pack horses to carry the large loads needed to travel safely in such remote country.

Truly the goal of honouring the elders, of installing some sense of the vastness of the mountains, and of teaching some leadership skills to the youth were all realized. It is easy to imagine that some of the youth will be directly involved in the management of the trail well into the future. Additionally they will be better positioned to take an active interest and participate in all types of land use in the region throughout their careers.

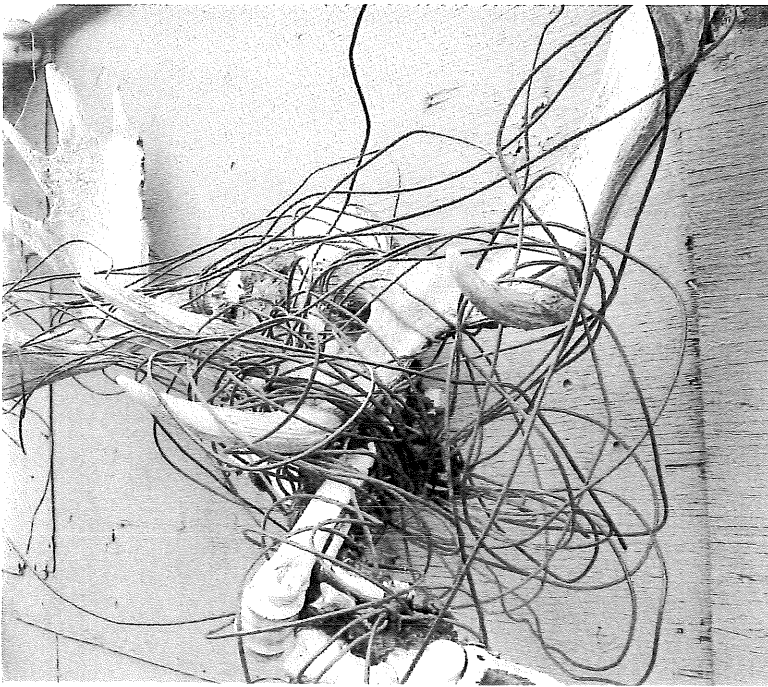
The proof of the importance of this trail to the Aboriginal people of the North was experienced when, at the Dechenla Lodge (the word means "the end of the sticks" in the Kaska language, so called because there are no trees in the area) (the same phrase for the land at the end of the sticks in the Slavey language of the Sahtu is Dichilo, obviously very close to dechenla), the group met two ladies, Mary Jim Dick, her sister Janice Sturko and Janice's grandson, Kellin Frisen, all from Haines Junction. When Ricky and Norman chatted with them they discovered that they were all related to each other, but they had never met before.

Recommendations to Improve the Trail

1. Update the GNWT official trail guide with current information about the trail.
2. Identify Aboriginal place names and ensure that these names are contained in an updated trail guide.
3. Have the two Sahtu adults on the trip, Norman Yakeleya and Ricky Andrew make contact with the Canol Management Committee, to offer their services as a resource to the committee.
4. Consider placing emergency kits at several locations along the trail to contain food, matches, first aid kits, etc. (It is easy to imagine a solo hiker, or even a group of two or more, losing their packs in a fast flowing river and ending up stranded and in serious trouble.)
5. Ensure that the proper authorities have existing emergency protocols in place to deal with emergencies along the trail, create or update as needed.
6. Effect a comprehensive cleanup of debris along the trail; loose garbage from recent users, wire and cable, fuel drums etc. keeping in mind that non-

hazardous items such as old truck bodies form an important part of the trail experience. Note: those who traveled the trail with this trip believe that there is an urgency to cleaning up old wire as soon as possible. This wire presents a very real danger to wildlife. See the attached picture of a moose that obviously died as a direct result of being tangled up in old wire laying loose on the ground along the trail.

7. Work with the GNWT to ensure that a wildlife officer is stationed at Mile 222 during hunting season. The officer should be accompanied by a community monitor from the Sahtu. The subject trip commenced the day after the official hunting season opened for the year and there was no one from the GNWT stationed at the Mile 222 camp of the government.
8. Work with the land use groups in the Sahtu to determine what should be done by way of developing regulations to control ATV use. So much damage to the land is happening at the western edge of the NWT that unless something is done soon there will be serious permanent scars on the land.
9. Have an inventory prepared of old bridges at some river crossing that have become so dangerous they ought to be removed, or at least dismantled enough to not be able to be considered for use. These represent a real danger as the temptation is to utilize them and some are so rotten the next person to cross could easily fall through and be badly injured.



Moose died from getting tangled in the wire.

Recommendations for Completion of the last 170 Miles of the Canol Heritage Trail Leadership Walk

1. Form a committee of the participants from this first walk, the government departments and corporate sponsors which were involved to effect planning for the completion of the walk over the next couple of years.
2. Prepare a business plan for the completion of the walk which may well include a part time coordinator.
3. Develop written criteria to assist with selecting youth participants.
4. Develop written lists of individual equipment required, group equipment and menus to avoid duplication, or shortages, or both.
5. Prepare waiver of liability forms for participants.
6. Develop a structured leadership program to fully engage the youth with the leaders with the goal of certain deliverables.
7. Have three Aboriginal guides with the group of eight to ten participants.
8. Consider broadening the group of participants to include community leaders, keeping in mind logistical limitations such as a dozen people and their gear make a reasonable Twin Otter load.
9. Arrange for food drops along the trail.
10. Utilize a few pack horses to reduce personal loads which are close to the breaking point for participants who are unable to spend weeks and months getting in shape for the trip.
11. Have a more thorough orientation with all participants present before trip commences and a structured debriefing for all at the end of the trip.
12. Consider the need for each participant to carry a GPS, maps and a first aid kit.

Norman Yakeleya
MLA Sahtu

