

**ACTIVITIES REPORT — DECEMBER 2010**  
COVERING THE PERIOD JULY–DECEMBER 2010



## Highlights

Summer activities begin almost immediately following Yukon College graduation and the close of the school teaching programs in June. Summer 2010 was a productive and busy period for YNLC staff. Publications Officer Sheila Maissan worked assiduously to compile materials recorded during several spring literacy sessions. Northern Tutchone Specialist Anne Ranigler and Linguist Doug Hitch attended the CYFN General Assembly at Brooks' Brook, near Teslin, where they maintained a large display of YNLC publications and teaching materials. In July and August, YNLC Director John Ritter attended meetings at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and also continued his documentation of the Upper Tanana language, working for the first time with Tetlin speakers Roy and Cora David, and resumed his Tanacross work with YNLC graduate Irene Arnold, who made a follow-up visit to YNLC in December.

YNLC Linguist André Bourcier completed his technical linguistic study of the Gwich'in verbal system, which constitutes one major chapter in the doctoral dissertation he submitted in late August to Université Laval in Québec City.

YNLC's Rural Coordinator Linda Harvey and Southern Tutchone instructor Mary Jane



*Nesketahin Lake, Southern Tutchone K'ā Mān 'spawned out salmon lake', the source of Village Creek, The T'at Chūa, which flows through Nesketahin. The peak behind the lake is named after the lake, K'ā Dhāl 'spawned out salmon mountain'.*

Allison completed additional course work towards their bachelor's degrees at the 2010 Summer Session at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Both are enrolled in the Native Studies Degree Program with a concentration in aboriginal languages. This program builds on their previous work in completing the Associate of Applied Science Degree in Native Language Education at UAF.

With the resumption of the schools programs in August and September, the Centre also began its autumn schedule of training and documentation activities which continued to the Christmas break.

Collaborations with the Yukon Geographical Place Names Board continued in autumn and included a place-name survey of the early travel routes from Klukwan, Alaska, to the Neskataheen and Dalton Post area.

In October the Aboriginal Languages Initiative Innovation Fund (Heritage Canada) awarded YNLC a grant to prepare interactive online listening exercises in Northern Tutchone and Upper Tanana. Preparatory work has been carried on for a number of

years on this major project which will involve several YNLC staff members. The products will use innovative technology and be accessible on handheld devices like iPhones and Blackberries.

### Teacher Training

Two Certificate training sessions were held in the fall to accommodate newly recruited aboriginal language teacher trainees, including Gary Johnson and Norman James in the Carcross School, and Lorraine Dewhurst in the Teslin School.

The September session with returning instructors focused on language structure and listening exercises as well as teaching methods. The October workshop was designed for



*Upper Tanana speakers Roy and Cora David from Tetlin, Alaska*



*Lillian Underwood at the October session preparing language teaching materials for her program in Destruction Bay*



Angelica Green giving a demonstration lesson at the October Certificate training session

new instructors and covered a wide variety of teaching methods. A popular example was the use of puppets and flash cards for teaching language about animals.

Each trainee taught a demonstration lesson and received feedback from participants and the coordinators, and prepared materials for classroom use. We are very grateful to the elders and mentors who provided support and encouragement throughout.

## Literacy and Documentation Sessions

### Ahtna Recording Session

In early November, YNLC's old friend Katie John, a respected Ahtna Elder from Mentasta Lake, Alaska, made a return visit with her friend and collaborator Dr. Cynthea Ainsworth. In spite of limited mobility, Katie continues to participate in language documentation activities to bolster the Upper Ahtna language of her home community. During her visit to YNLC, she recorded a substantial body of Ahtna vocabulary relating to family and kinship, including sentences which will appear in booklets designed for use by young adults who wish to teach the language to younger children. This project is coordinated by Dr. Ainsworth and will eventually include samples of Ahtna language from speakers in each of the Ahtna communities.

A follow-up visit is scheduled for February 2011.



Katie John, elder and fluent Ahtna speaker from Mentasta Lake, Alaska, with her gift box quilted by Josephine Holloway



Dr. Jeff Leer and Tlingit teacher trainee Lorraine Dewhurst

### Tlingit Literacy Session

A Tlingit literacy session with 17 participants including new and experienced Tlingit instructors was held in November with guest instructor Dr. Jeff Leer from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Dr. Leer gave



*Louise Parker, Elder Mary Anderson and Tlingit Linguist Jeff Leer at the November Literacy Session*

an overview of the history of written Tlingit starting with Russian traders and missionaries in the mid-1800s and their Tlingit partners.

Participants analysed the different sounds of the Tlingit alphabet and worked on examples and exercises using several series of contrasting sounds. The session also featured Tlingit songs, both traditional and modern. Elder Sam Johnston added his encouragement and

leadership. Tlingit Elder Martha Van Heel provided thoughtful Tlingit commentary on the historic and cultural background of some of the songs. Participants found it inspiring to hear the language used so fluently and gracefully by this “Elder among Elders”, as Sam Johnston refers to her.

**Gwich'in (Tukudh) Literacy Session**

Late November featured a well-attended Gwich'in literacy session focused on the Tukudh tradition of the liturgical writings of Archdeacon Robert McDonald (1829-1913). Working with Gwich'in partners in the mid to late nineteenth century, McDonald translated many hymns (Chilig), the Bible, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and many other religious writings. The 21 participants included speakers from Old Crow, Yukon; Fort McPherson, NWT; and Fairbanks, Alaska. They studied, transcribed into Modern



*Gwich'in choir at the Tukudh Literacy Session in November*

Gwich'in and sang a number of the Chilig. In this session the participants made a special effort to sing and study some of the less frequently sung hymns. In the process, they shared stories of how the particular hymns were appropriate to certain situations reflecting community life. They also worked on two prayers, one from the Anglican liturgy and one from Rev. Oxenden's Family Prayers. YNLC recorded the participants singing Chilig, and some prayers of the Elders, and prepared a CD which was subsequently sent to all the participants.





*Choir at the Hän Literacy Session in November*

### **Hän Literacy Session**

Fifteen participants attended the December Hän literacy session, including Elders Percy and Mabel Henry and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Language Coordinator Angie Joseph-Rear. Participants included the Hän teaching staff from the Robert Service School as well as a large contingent from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation. Tanacross Elder Irene Arnold was also in attendance, her presence reflecting the long-established contact between peoples from Moosehide and Mansfield Lake.

Besides working on terms for relatives and on other vocabulary and phrases, participants worked on a story booklet, *Let's Pick Berries*, using photos of a blueberry-picking expedition near Dawson. They also recorded a CD of Hän Christmas carols, songs and prayers which was subsequently sent to all participants.



*Tanacross Elder Irene Arnold holds a Tanacross alphabet chart between YNLC staff members Jo-Anne Johnson and Linda Harvey*

### **Tanacross Recording Session**

During the week of the Hän literacy session, Tanacross Elder Irene Arnold worked with YNLC Director John Ritter and Linguist Doug Hitch to digitally record the material in her Tanacross Language Lessons, the pioneering 1994 booklet and tape which have been utilized over the years in teaching programs in the Tok and Tanacross area. Irene wished to have the materials posted on the web for easy access by her students, and made this special trip to YNLC to initiate the process. Approximately half the booklet was recorded, with additions and improvements introduced to the text. A follow-up recording session is anticipated in spring 2011.

### **Upper Tanana Recording Session**

The final organized linguistic session of the year took place just before the Christmas break. Fluent Upper Tanana speakers Jenny Sanford (from Mentasta Lake, Alaska) and her brother Patrick Johnny (from Beaver Creek, Yukon) made a special trip to YNLC to record an extensive body of teaching and learning materials for their Canadian (Scottie Creek) dialect of Upper Tanana. This remarkable brother and sister team worked

patiently over a three-day period with YNLC Director John Ritter and Linguists Doug Hitch and André Bourcier. In addition to several listening exercises (featuring glottalized consonants, semi-voiced fricatives, and tone examples), they recorded several months of language lessons based on, but not identical to, those compiled some years ago by their now late sister Bessie John, Nelnah, for whom the school in Beaver Creek is named. A follow-up session will be scheduled for spring 2011.



*The brother and sister team of fluent Upper Tanana speakers, Patrick Johnny, Beaver Creek, and Jenny Sanford, Mentasta, at the December recording session*

## Handheld Native Language Listening Exercises

In October the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Innovation Fund (Heritage Canada) approved a grant to YNLC to develop interactive online listening exercises in both Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone. YNLC intends to make identifying crucial target sounds a fun game on the electronic devices (cell phones, iPad, Blackberry, etc) that most young people enjoy and use a great deal. The grant covers new computer programming to make these exercises work in a game format on handheld devices as well as on



*YNLC Publications Officer Sheila Maissan and former Yukon artist Susan McCallum*

the web, and production of a new series of colour images by former Yukon artist Susan McCallum who has provided illustrations for YNLC over many years.

## YNLC Presentations

### **CYFN General Assembly**

Anne Ranigler and Doug Hitch hosted the YNLC display table at the General Assembly in July in Brook's Brook.

### **F.H. Collins Grade 12 Class**

Mrs. Peggy Gordon's Grade 12 class from F.H. Collins visited YNLC in November. Jo-Anne Johnson made a presentation about the Centre and its programs.

### **Porter Creek Southern Tutchone Language Program**

Native language instructor Mary Jane

Allison's Porter Creek High School students visited YNLC on December 8. YNLC staff members showed the students around, demonstrated our website resources and answered students' questions.

### **Yukon College Southern Tutchone course**

YNLC staff members made a presentation to the students in the Southern Tutchone language course at Yukon College in December.

### **E. J. Glave Manuscript on Travels in Southern Yukon**

Work continues on the book about the 1890-1891 travels in the southwest Yukon by E. J. Glave. Glave was an English-born explorer and journalist whose reports and notebooks contain many references to native place names, personal names, and cultural practices. His Tlingit guides were familiar with the Yukon's traditional native trading routes. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank has completed the study of Glave's published and unpublished notes.

YNLC staff have been working to interpret the unpublished sketches and maps hand-drawn by Glave. Local historians Michael Gates and Linda Johnson have been very helpful, as well as John Cloud, historian with the National Oceanic and Aeronautic Administration in Washington, DC.

In October YNLC staff linguist Doug Hitch took part in a helicopter photo shoot of southwest Yukon in an attempt to trace and document Glave's routes of travel and to recreate his images. With the assistance of pilot Delmar Washington, photographer Wayne Towriss, and Garry Njootli of the Yukon Geographic Place Names Board, YNLC may have identified the location of as many as seven of Glave's photographic or lithographic images.

### **In Memoriam**

YNLC staff and the whole Southern Tutchone community were deeply saddened by the passing of respected Elder and longtime native language instructor Irene Smith in September. Irene was a dedicated teacher of her language, heritage, and culture and will be greatly missed in YNLC sessions. Her on-line Southern Tutchone language lessons are a unique contribution to the documentation of her Lake Laberge dialect.



*YNLC Linguist Doug Hitch and historian John Cloud of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Washington, DC. John has made useful contributions to the work of YNLC in documenting Yukon First Nations history, geography and place names.*

As this Activity Report was being drafted in January, 2011, YNLC received the sad news that Vuntut Gwich'in Elder Hannah Netro had passed away. Hannah attended and contributed to Gwich'in literacy sessions for several years. She was the last surviving daughter of the famous late Old Crow Chief "Big Joe" Kyikavichik. Hannah will be greatly missed.

## New Materials

Bessie John's Upper Tanana language lessons have been edited and are now available as a print and audio CD set.

The audio CDs of songs, carols and prayers recorded by the participants at the December 2010 Hän Literacy Session and the November 2010 Gwich'in (Tukudh) Literacy Session are now available.

The joint session report from the 2009 and 2010 Southern Tutchone sessions is already in its second printing. Reports from the Tlingit, Hän and Gwich'in sessions will be ready shortly.

## Closer Integration with Yukon College

YNLC staff have been adapting its courses and evaluation methods to match Yukon College's conventions.

## Planning for Spring 2011

The Yukon Native Language Centre and individual teachers are busy planning for the spring session. Please contact YNLC for updates on scheduling.

## How To Reach Us

If you would like more information on the Centre's programs, or would like to order our publications, please consult our website, [ynlc.ca](http://ynlc.ca), or contact us by:

- local telephone at (867) 668-8820
- toll-free 1-877-414-9652
- fax at (867) 668-8825
- email at [info@ynlc.ca](mailto:info@ynlc.ca)
- mail at  
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Yukon College, Box 2799,  
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5K4



*Certificate training session participants learned language teaching techniques with hand puppets in September*

## YNLC Training & Documentation Sessions

Certificate / Diploma Course	Teacher Training	Sept 20–24
Certificate / Diploma Course	Teacher Training	Oct 13–15
Ahtna Kinship Workshop	Documentation	Nov 2–4
Tlingit Literacy Session	Classroom Literacy	Nov 16–17
Gwich'in Literacy Session	Classroom Literacy	Nov 23–25
Hän Literacy Session	Classroom Literacy	Nov 30–Dec 2
Tanacross Language Lessons	Documentation	Nov 29–Dec 3
Upper Tanana Language Lessons	Documentation	Dec 14–16

## Program Consultations

Nelna Bessie John School Visit	U. Tanana Program	Oct 6
Kluane Lake School Visit	S. Tutchone Program	Oct 7
St. Elias Community School Visit	S. Tutchone Program	Oct 8
Consultation with CAFN Community Program, Haines Junction	S. Tutchone Program	Oct 8
Kluane Lake School Visit	S. Tutchone Program	Oct 29
Eliza van Bibber School	N. Tutchone Program	Nov 1
J. V. Clark School	N. Tutchone Program	Nov 2
Tantalus School	N. Tutchone Program	Nov 3
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation	Hän Program	Nov 29



TOGETHER TODAY... FOR OUR CHILDREN TOMORROW

**COUNCIL OF YUKON FIRST NATIONS**

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