



Gēs Tu'è' / Gyò Chúa / T'ahéeni
The archaeology of the M'Clintock region

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All photos courtesy Government of Yukon unless otherwise noted. KDFN: Kwanlin Dün First Nation

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates an unofficial place name.

Front cover: View of M'Clintock Lakes, 2010. Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Inside back cover: North shore of Michie Lake; Mount M'Clintock in left background and Augusta Mountain in right background.
John Meikle, KDFN

Back cover: M'Clintock Lakes, 2010. Adam Perdue, Matrix Research

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We used to go fishing at M'Clintock, lots of fish...

Lily Kane (*T'uskä*), Tagish Kwan Elder

Dedication

Over the last two decades, Kwanlin Dün First Nation has made significant efforts to document the history and traditional knowledge of the M'Clintock River area. The rich information provided by Elders is the foundation for much of this booklet.

This booklet is dedicated to the Tagish Kwan, whose history is preserved in the region's heritage sites and in the knowledge and stories that have been passed down through generations. It is also dedicated to the Elders of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, who have shared their stories and those of their ancestors. It was made possible through the help of the past and present staff of Kwanlin Dün First Nation's Lands and Resources office and Kwanlin Dün Cultural Society, who had the vision and passion to record and preserve the heritage of the M'Clintock region.

*Lily Kane (T'uskä) as a baby
with her mother Axhwada, near
Lake Laberge, 1911.*

Yukon Archives, E.J. Hamacher
fonds, Margaret and Rolf Hougen
collection, 2002/118 #530





Ta'an Kwäch'än Council student Clayton Kane at work at a site occupied between 5,000 and 8,000 years ago.

Adam Perdue, Matrix Research

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Introduction

Yukon residents and visitors are familiar with the M'Clintock area and its ecological and recreational values. Swan viewing, campgrounds, summer cabins and beaches draw thousands of visitors and recreational users to the area each year. Most people, however, do not know

about the history and central importance of the M'Clintock region to the culture and heritage of Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

This booklet is an introduction to the very early history of the M'Clintock region, preserved in its archaeological sites, in early historical reports and photographs, and in the stories and memories of Kwanlin Dün Elders and community members.

Above: M'Clintock Bay and Lewes Marsh. John Meikle, KDFN

Right: Fish rack at Marsh Lake belonging to John and Julia Joe, ca. 1950.

Joe Family Collection



Some of the families who made Marsh Lake and the M'Clintock area their home base were the families of John and Julia Joe, Charlie Burns, Whitehorse Billy, Frank Slim, Johnny Smith, Frank Billy and David Hammond. A few people still have homes and land in the places used for so long by their ancestors, and they continue to fish, hunt, trap and gather seasonal food there.

Above: Annie Smith with drying fish at Marsh Lake Culture Camp, 1997.

Annie Smith, Elijah Smith Elementary School Collection





M'Clintock in traditional times



Tagish Kwan people used to live around Marsh Lake all the way to M'Clintock bridge. They fished for salmon and hunted in the area.

The places that were important to the Tagish Kwan were the M'Clintock River and the mouth of the M'Clintock River, Army Beach, the north M'Clintock area (Michie Creek), Greyling Creek and the sloughs close to the Marsh Lake dam.

These are areas where many present-day Elders were born and spent their first years.

M'Clintock Bay (*Sáa Tl'áh Ní*, or “sandy beach”) was the main camp for the Marsh Lake people when Marsh Lake Jackie was their chief — that was about the time of the Klondike Gold Rush.

The name for M'Clintock River is *Gēs Tu'è'* in the Tagish language, *Gyò Chúa* in Southern Tutchone and *T'ahéeni* in Tlingit. All three names mean “king salmon river.” Biologists have noted a large number of mounded and scooped out gravel spawning beds, principally in Michie Creek, which suggest that in the past the salmon runs at M'Clintock were among the most substantial in the upper Yukon River drainage.



Left: M'Clintock River falls, obstacle to salmon.
Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Above: Lewes Marsh. John Meikle, KDFN
Above, left: The primary salmon spawning area is situated along Michie Creek.
Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Ten mile up [M'Clintock] –
that's where grandpa used to
have two fish traps.

Annie Smith (*Khukhakhēt*),
Tagish Kwan Elder



Traditional place names

English	Tagish	Southern Tutchone	Tlingit	Translation/Comment
Marsh Lake		Tàkwädàdhà Mǎn* ³		where the sand washes up on the shore
M'Clintock Bay*	Saa Tl'ah Nj* ¹		T'ahéeni Wát* ¹	sandy beach or mouth of M'Clintock River
M'Clintock River	Gēs Tu'è' ¹	Gyò Chúa ^{2,3}	T'ahéeni* ¹	salmon Creek or king salmon river
M'Clintock (Black) Lakes		Ta jenǎ tlūra Mǎn* ³		dark, black lake
Yukon River		Tágà Shǎw ⁴		great river
Lewes Marsh	Témil Chídlé* ¹			little fish net: first slough above Marsh Lake dam
	Témil Shó* ¹		Geiwú Tlein Eet* ¹	big fish net: collectively, the large sloughs in the Lewes Marsh area
Unnamed island	Shásh Aǎhí* ¹		Xutsnoowú* ¹	bear den or brown bear fort, which the island resembles from a distance
Cap Mountain	Mbésh Ta'áy* ¹		Lítaa Yak'áts'i Shaa* ¹	knife edge mountain
Sam McGee Mountain		The Duts'al Dhǎl* ³		grey rock mountain

Please note: * = unofficial place name

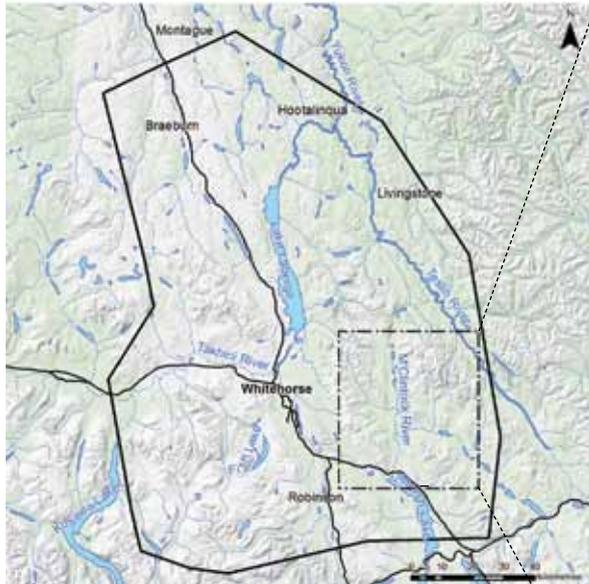
1. Angela Sidney. 1980. *Place Names of the Tagish Region, Southern Yukon*. Yukon Native Languages Project and the Council for Yukon Indians, Whitehorse.
2. Frankie Jim, quoted in Linda Johnson. 1990. *Ta'an Kwäch'än Cultural History Project, 1989*. Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Whitehorse.
3. John Ritter, pers. comm. in Ruth Gotthardt. 2000. *Ta'an Kwäch'än: People of the Lake*. Yukon Heritage Branch, Department of Tourism, Government of Yukon, Whitehorse.
4. Yukon Native Language Centre. www.ynlc.ca/culture/dakeyi/01whitehorse/map01/map01.html.

Background: View northwest of the two northernmost M'Clintock Lakes; Teslin Mountain is in the background.

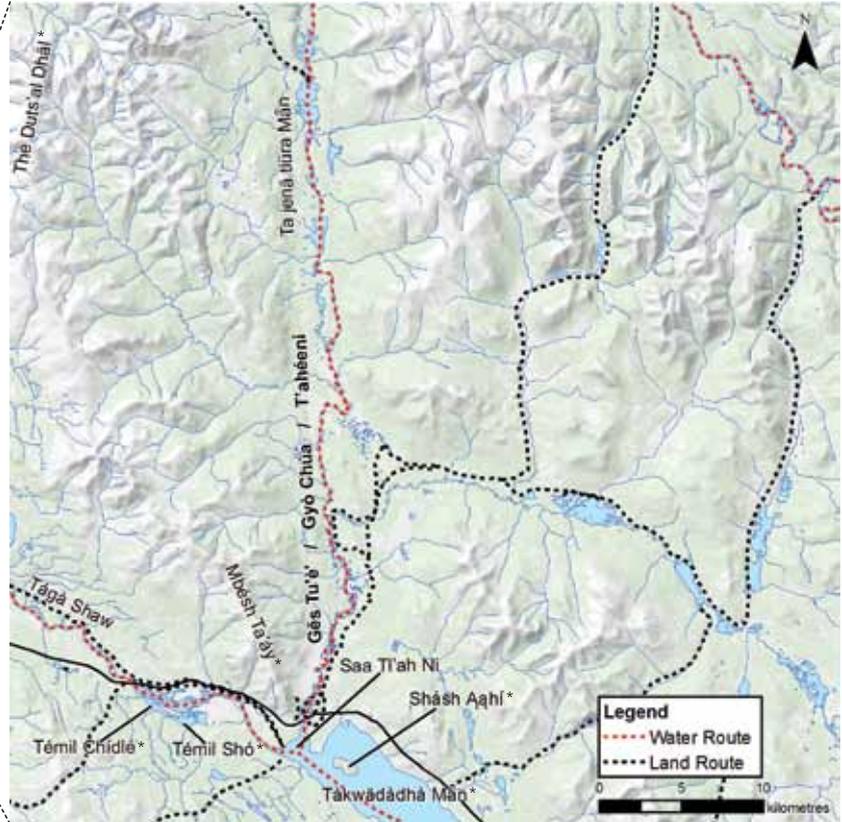
John Meikle, KDFN



Kwanlin Dün First Nation Traditional Territory



Traditional place names of the M'Clintock area





Salmon fishing

Tagish Kwan Elders speak of the M'Clintock area as being a traditional gathering place not only for Tagish Kwan but for many of their neighbours. For Carcross, Tagish and Marsh Lake people, M'Clintock was the only place they could get salmon.

[T]here were sticks in water that made a V. That's where I first found [the fish trap].

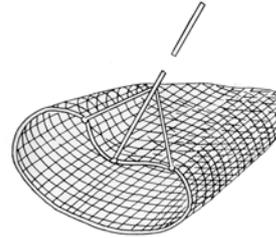
John Suits, Tagish Kwan Elder

Traditionally people set fish traps at certain places on the M'Clintock River and Michie Creek for the salmon run. Two kinds of fish trap have been described: one type consisted of long basket traps made of spruce or willow poles which were set in openings in a weir, made by pounding posts into the river bottom. The traps were removed at night to allow fish to go through to spawn.

The other type of trap was a more substantial fish weir, consisting of a fence that funneled fish into a box-shaped corral. This style of trap is still in use today at the traditional fishing location of Klukshu, south of Haines Junction.

Left: M'Clintock Bay, looking up M'Clintock River. John Meikle, KDFN

Above: Drawing of salmon dip net. F. Schwatka, *Along Alaska's Great River*, p. 258



Man standing next to a basket-style fish trap, holding a fish.

Yukon Archives, Emil Forrest fonds, 80/60 #520





Hunting

After the salmon fishing season, families went into the mountains to hunt caribou, moose, sheep, Arctic ground squirrel and marmot. After the hunt, meat was brought back to the main camps by raft, or by dogsled later in the season. In the oral history accounts, people recalled that at times in the past moose were far less common, and that caribou were once much more numerous than today.

Hunters took advantage of the predictable behaviour of caribou.

While they waiting for fish, not just camping here. Way up mountain hunting for meat...

Charlie Burns (*Ték'*),
Tagish Kwan Elder



On warm summer days, caribou could often be found on permanent ice patches in the mountains, trying to escape the flies and the heat. Ice patches on Mount Byng likely attracted both caribou and hunters in the past. The thinner summer hides of caribou were preferred for making clothing.

In fall, hunters intercepted caribou moving to their wintering grounds. During migration, caribou tend to make use of certain narrows on lakes and rivers as crossing spots; knowing these locations, people set snares or made short brush fences to capture the animals.

Right: Remains of a cache pit found at an archaeological site on Michie Creek. In past times, people stored food in below-ground cache pits lined with spruce boughs or bark. Below ground the temperature stays cool. Adam Perdue, Matrix Research



Top: Moose. John Meikle
Above: Woodland caribou.
Government of Yukon



Fishing

Late fall was the whitefish spawn. People placed pole fences in the river just before freeze-up so they would set in place with the ice. They would leave a small opening for the fish to swim through. In December, when the whitefish returned down-stream, fishers cut a hole in the ice above the opening in the fence. Large numbers of fish would congregate at the opening and could be easily speared.

M'Clintock Bay in Marsh Lake is one of the first areas in southern Yukon to have open water in the spring and this attracts large numbers of ducks, geese and swans on their northward migration.



Trumpeter swans at Lewes Marsh. Approximately 25 percent of the world's trumpeter swans and more than 10 percent of tundra swans stop in M'Clintock Bay every year.

Above, left: Canada goose. Below: Muskrat. All photos: John Meikle



Early spring was also the time of the beaver and muskrat hunt. Charlie Burns recalled his grandfather, John Joe — who lived with his wife Julia at Marsh Lake for many years — used to harvest around 300 muskrat every spring along the river between the Yukon River bridge and M'Clintock Bay.



Spring was the best time to net grayling, whitefish and trout at the mouth of M'Clintock River, and along the shore of Marsh Lake.



People also set nets at sloughs along Lewes Marsh and the Yukon River to catch pike and ling cod. A large slough in Lewes Marsh, known as *Témil Shó* or “big fish net,”

was where people went for ling cod and jackfish (northern pike) in the spring. In the old days, nets were made of sinew and were set between two posts pounded into the lake or river bottom.

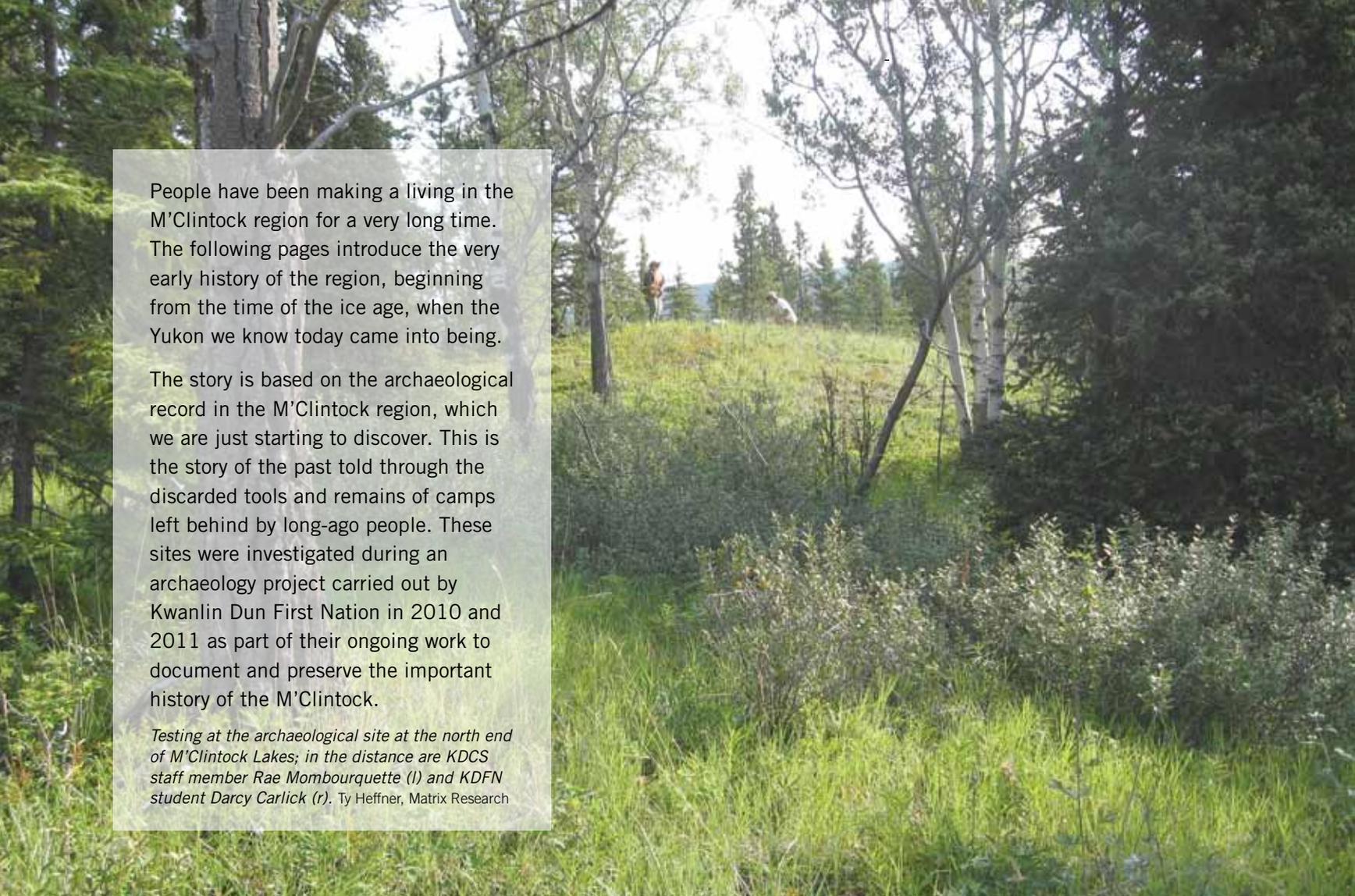
Spring was also the time when people collected bear root and other plant shoots, and stripped the bark from lodgepole pine trees to get the sweet inner bark, called cambium.

Above: People fishing with a seine net at M'Clintock. KDFN photo
Right, above: Lower Michie Creek looking upstream (east).
Adam Perdue, Matrix Research



Left: Northern pike, Tagish Lake.

Council for Yukon First Nations



People have been making a living in the M'Clintock region for a very long time. The following pages introduce the very early history of the region, beginning from the time of the ice age, when the Yukon we know today came into being.

The story is based on the archaeological record in the M'Clintock region, which we are just starting to discover. This is the story of the past told through the discarded tools and remains of camps left behind by long-ago people. These sites were investigated during an archaeology project carried out by Kwanlin Dun First Nation in 2010 and 2011 as part of their ongoing work to document and preserve the important history of the M'Clintock.

Testing at the archaeological site at the north end of M'Clintock Lakes; in the distance are KDCS staff member Rae Mombourquette (l) and KDFN student Darcy Carlick (r). Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



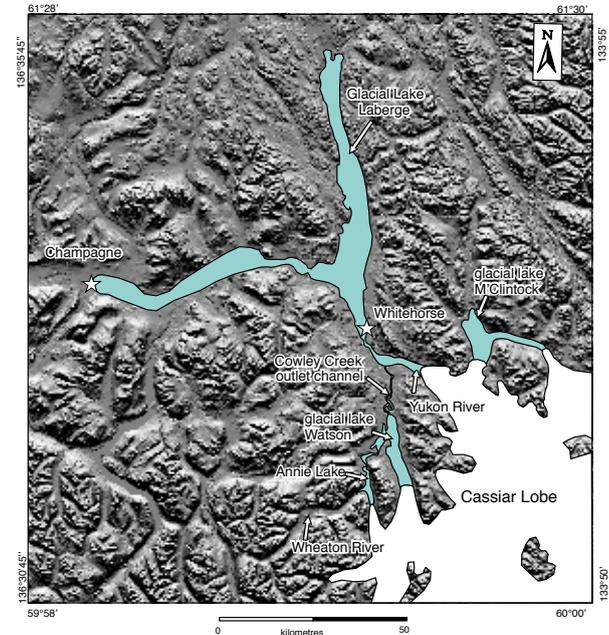
The M'Clintock region at the end of the ice age

The entire southern Yukon has been covered in glacial ice many times over the past two million years. The most recent ice age, called the McConnell Glaciation, lasted from approximately 24,000 years ago to 11,000 years ago. At the height of the McConnell Glaciation ice more than 650 metres thick covered much of the region, including the M'Clintock area.

After the ice age the Yukon's climate warmed considerably. For a period of a few thousand years, the climate was actually warmer and drier than it is now. The warming climate and melting glacial ice resulted in large amounts of meltwater. In many places, river valleys were still blocked by ice dams and the meltwater produced large "proglacial" lakes. These lakes were much larger than their modern counterparts. Glacial Lake M'Clintock, for example, covered the entire Michie Creek valley and the lower half of the M'Clintock River valley.

After the ice retreated and the proglacial lakes drained, the modern landscape began to emerge. This would have happened relatively quickly at first as plants and animals and people moved into the newly available land. The rate of change then became more gradual. The new landscape was more open and sparsely vegetated than today and likely consisted of a mosaic of forest, open grassland and tundra.

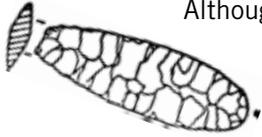
Glacial Lake M'Clintock



Map: Jeff Bond, Yukon Geological Survey



The M'Clintock region, 11,000–5,000 years ago



Although very few archaeological sites have been identified that date to this time period, archaeologists believe that people living in the M'Clintock region soon after the end of the ice age were principally caribou hunters. They likely hunted other large mammals as well, including elk and bison. Large leaf-shaped chipped stone spear points (*left*) are typical of this time period.

Left: Large leaf-shaped chipped stone spear point. Workman, W.B. 1978. Prehistory of the Aishihik-Kluane Area, Southwest Yukon Territory



By about 8,000 years ago, the way that people made their tools and weapons seems to have shifted. Composite tools of antler and wood inset with small stone slivers called microblades became common. This technology traces its ultimate origins to late ice age cultures in northeast Asia.

Left: Archaeological excavations at the Michie Lake site, where a large number of microblades were recovered.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Right: This projectile point was found on the north shore of one of the M'Clintock Lakes, adjacent to M'Clintock River. It may be more than 7,000 years old.

Eric Tourigny, Matrix Research





Microblades found at the Michie Lake site.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Microblades

Microblades represent a sophisticated method of producing tools and weapons. Made of antler, bone or wood, they incorporate a replaceable stone working edge. Microblades are made by chipping small, highly uniform flat slivers from a specially prepared stone called a core. Microblades resemble narrow razor blades in their shape, with straight, sharp edges that are suitable for a variety of cutting tasks.

Although it is extremely rare for complete tools to be preserved in the archaeological record, microblades appear to have been used as insets in slotted antler, bone or wood pieces: set in a row, they formed

the cutting or piercing edge of the tool. The large number of microblades found near Michie Lake (*see site photo, page 14*) may relate to caribou hunting in the nearby alpine areas or may have been used in fish processing knives. Microblades were most common and technologically important around 5,000 to 8,000 years ago.

Right: Microblade core found at a site on Fish Lake. Yukon Archaeology Program

Far right: Sketch of an antler spear point with microblades inset in slots along its edges, based on a point recovered at an ice patch in southern Yukon, dated to approximately 8,000 years ago.

Yukon Archaeology Program





Top: Wood bison.

Above: Alpine country around M'Clintock Lakes. Both photos: Government of Yukon

The M'Clintock region, 5,000–1,200 years ago

By approximately 5,000 years ago, water levels had fallen throughout the region to levels similar to the present, and climatic conditions became cooler and wetter.

Archaeological sites dating to this time period are found in a variety of locations, including upland, lowland, river and lakeshore sites. Compared to the preceding time period, archaeological sites are also larger and more numerous, suggesting people were returning seasonally to the same locations and were periodically gathering in larger groups for activities such as communal hunting or trade.

Unlike today, bison were likely hunted by people in this time period. Ice age bison peaked in abundance in southern Yukon around 4,500 years ago and were more numerous than the time before or since. Elk may also have been hunted, but in much lower numbers.

Caribou populations in southern Yukon reached their peak around 4,000 years ago; the number of caribou has declined since then. Moose were also present, but apparently in lower numbers than today. Soon after 4,000 years ago they began a slow but steady increase.



KDCS staff member Rae Mombourquette and KDFN student Sarina Sidney at a test excavation at an archaeological site near Michie Lake, 2010.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



Based on the locations of sites where people lived, along waterways and lakes, and on the appearance of net sinkers in archaeological sites, it is apparent that fishing becomes an important part of the seasonal round in this time period.

About 5,000 years ago the manufacture of tools made using microblades ceases almost entirely, and is replaced by chipped stone tools, including a variety of stemmed, unstemmed and side-notched spear points. Side-notched spear points (*right*) are a design innovation that was widespread throughout North America at around this time. Archaeologists speculate that new ideas or new people may be the source of this radical change in how people made their tools.

New ideas and technologies are often communicated through contact with neighbours and through networks of trade and exchange. Archaeological evidence shows that the people of the M'Clintock area were connected through well-established trade networks to groups throughout northwestern North America. Materials such as obsidian, volcanic tuff and dacite, which can be traced to locations in north-central Alaska, western Yukon, northwestern British Columbia (B.C.) and the western Northwest Territories, are found in the archaeological sites in the M'Clintock region.



Left: Archaeology crew member and KDFN student Chris Sterriah at a site near Byng Creek.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Above, centre: A side-notched point from Fish Lake.

Yukon Archaeology Program

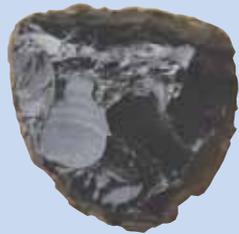
Right, above: A grey chert end scraper. It was found below the ash layer, so is more than 1,200 years old; right, below: Knife made of quartzite, found on a ridge overlooking Michie Lake. Found below the layer of White River ash, it is more than 1,200 years old.

Right, above: Eric Tourigny, Matrix Research; Right, below: Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



Obsidian

Obsidian — volcanic glass — has been a highly valued trade item throughout human history. It was prized for both its lustrous appearance and for the sharp-edged



tools that could be made from it. Obsidian occurs only in a few locations in north-west North America and was not present in the M'Clintock area. During the 2010 and 2011 archaeology project,

crew members found hundreds of obsidian artifacts, both tools and the chips produced during tool manufacture.

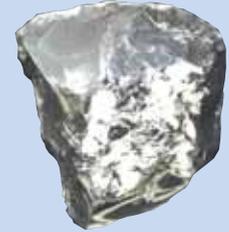
Because obsidian is a volcanic rock, it has a chemical “signature” that allows it to be traced back to its geological source. This

Above: This obsidian scraper was found near a 600-year-old hearth on the shore of a subalpine lake. The obsidian used to make this tool was traded from Mount Edziza, located 400 km southeast of the M'Clintock area. Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

chemical analysis is done through a process called x-ray fluorescence.

A sample of 22 obsidian artifacts from the M'Clintock study area was analyzed by Jeff Rasic of

the Alaska National Park Service as part of the Alaska Obsidian Database Project. He found that most of the obsidian came from Mount Edziza, near Telegraph Creek, B.C. Some came from Hoodoo Mountain in Kluane National Park, from Wiki Peak, in Alaska just west of Beaver Creek, and from unknown sources thought to be located in northern B.C. and in the Donjek River area.



Left: This projectile point is missing a corner (see circled area), which may have been broken off when it was made. It likely dates between 1,200 and 5,000 years ago. It was made from obsidian traded from Mount Edziza, B.C. Eric Tourigny, Matrix Research

Above: Recovered from within the layer of White River ash, this obsidian scraper probably dates to just before the fall of ash. It was made from a type of obsidian thought to be from the Donjek River area. Eric Tourigny, Matrix Research



The M'Clintock region 1,200–200 years ago

About 1,200 years ago, much of the southern Yukon was blanketed with volcanic ash, in some places up to three metres thick, as a result of a massive volcanic eruption which occurred near the present-day Yukon-Alaska border. This catastrophic geological event marks the onset of another time of change for the people who lived in the region.

Above: A variety of barbed arrow points made from caribou antler.

Yukon Archaeology Program

Above, right: Old lean-to near M'Clintock Lakes.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Archaeological sites dating to 1,200–200 years ago are found in locations similar to the preceding time period, but occur more frequently in river settings, suggesting that salmon fishing was becoming increasingly important in the seasonal round. Bison were present in this period, but in dwindling numbers, becoming locally extinct about 300 to 400 years ago. Elk are not known from this time. Caribou also appear to have been in decline, possibly due to the combined effects of the White River ash and a period of climate warming between about 1,300 to 800 years ago. Moose were present and their numbers appear to have increased as forests expanded.



Two major technological advances occurred soon after the White River ash fall: simple metallurgy using float copper nuggets and the introduction of bow-and-arrow weaponry. Based on the findings

from southern Yukon alpine ice patches, bow-and-arrow technology replaced the atlatl (spear thrower) as the preferred hunting tool around 1,200 years ago.

Below: KDFN member Loretta Dawson excavating at the Michie Lake site. Ty Heffner, Matrix Research





White River ash

The eruption of Mount Churchill on the Yukon-Alaska border 1,150 years ago was one of the largest volcanic eruptions in recent global history and it undoubtedly had a devastating impact on the lives of the people and animals. Ash blanketed the ground and polluted streams and lakes. All land-based and water-based animals and many plants would have been negatively affected.

Map of eruption and ash distribution



It is very likely that people had to move out of areas that were affected by the White River ash fall, at least temporarily. These population movements would have brought people into contact with new groups, and perhaps directly or indirectly into contact with newly arrived Thule culture people, the ancestors of modern Inuit people, in the regions bordering the Bering Sea and Beaufort Sea. Although there appears to be evidence of continuity in the archaeological record, in terms of technology and how people made a living, a number of new innovations — such as bow-and-arrow technology and copper metallurgy — mark this turbulent period.



The white line in this photo shows the layer of volcanic ash. It is known as White River ash, since the volcano where the ash originated is located near the headwaters of the White River.

Adam Perdue, Matrix Research



Argillite ice patch

Much of the snow that falls each winter melts every summer. Over time the remaining snow at high elevations is gradually compressed into ice. Although ice patches continue to grow in volume, unlike glaciers, they never achieve sufficient mass to flow downhill. Because the ice does not move, artifacts that are buried in it are exceptionally well preserved — they are frozen in time.



Fragments of a wooden dart shaft embedded in caribou dung at an ice patch.
Yukon Archaeology Program

Archaeologists first visited the Argillite ice patch, north of Mount Byng, in 2003. It is the only ice patch in the M'Clintock area thus far to yield evidence of past hunting. As in other archaeological ice patches, layers of caribou dung were observed melting out of the perennial ice due to warm summer temperatures in the past few decades.



A study of the dates of caribou remains and hunting weapons preserved in alpine ice patch sites in southern Yukon indicates that

caribou numbers were highest around 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. Archaeological data indicate a peak in ice patch hunting after 1,200 years ago, which coincided with the adoption of bow-and-arrow hunting technology.

Right, above: One wooden artifact recovered from the Argillite ice patch, 1200 years old, has an unknown function. Possibly it is a very small atlatl or throwing board. Yukon Archaeology Program
Right: Argillite ice patch. Caribou go to alpine ice patches in late summer to cool off and avoid insects. This made ice patches a predictable place to hunt. Ty Heffner, Matrix Research





Archaeological research

In 2010 and 2011 Kwanlin Dün First Nation sponsored an archaeology project in the Michie Creek and M'Clintock River watershed. The project was conducted for two weeks each year, with a crew of local archaeologists and members of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. The purpose was to locate and document heritage resources throughout the M'Clintock region. This was followed by more intensive research at the Michie Lake site to learn more about how people had lived there.



Many sites are identified through careful inspection of the ground. If artifacts are not visible on the surface, archaeologists must carefully dig down and screen the soil to find what has been left behind by past people. At some sites, archaeologists may carry out detailed excavation. This involves carefully scraping away the soil layer by layer to expose artifacts and features such as the remains of cooking hearths or structures.

Above: This heavy-duty chert scraper was found broken in four pieces. Found at the Michie Lake site, it is more than 1,200 years old.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Much of the archaeological record in Yukon is comprised only of stone tools and the chips and flakes that result from making stone tools. In the acidic soils of the boreal forest organic materials are not preserved. Ice patches sites are the exception: hunting weapons and plant and animal remains at ice patch sites have in many cases remained frozen over thousands of years. Wood, sinew, hide, antler, bone and feathers are preserved in the ice, providing important information about throwing spear and bow-and-arrow technologies of the past.



KDFN students Winston Smarch and Sarina Sidney at an archaeological site.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



KDFN student Darcy Carlick working at a site north of M'Clintock Lakes.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



Archaeological sites

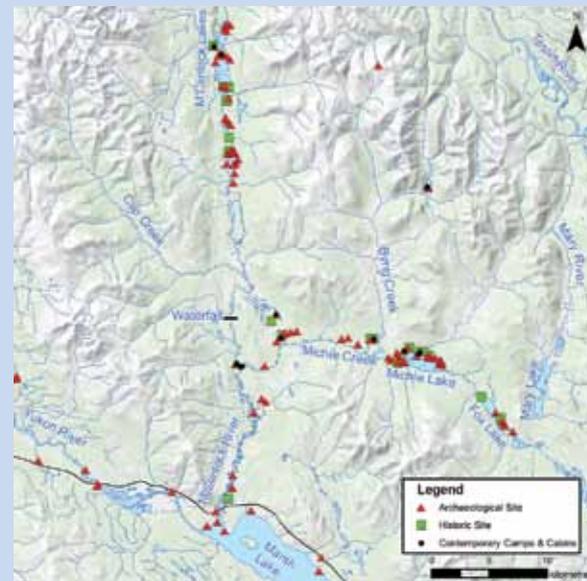
Despite a large survey area and limited access, the archaeology crews succeeded in identifying 98 previously unknown sites related to the history of the M'Clintock region. These sites range in age from 19th and 20th century cabins to ancient camp sites containing stone tools that are likely as much as 8,000 years old. Heritage sites have been identified throughout the study area, from lowland areas to alpine and subalpine settings.

By far the largest, and one of the oldest, archaeological sites discovered during the fieldwork in the area was the Michie Lake site, located on a prominent ridge overlooking the outlet of the lake. Crew members excavated a total of ten units there, each measuring one square metre. The site contained a large amount of archaeological material. The most common artifact type found was the microblade; the crew found almost 400 of them. Along with other artifacts recovered,



these microblades indicate that people used the site at various times over a period of around 8,000 years.

Map of archaeological sites



Left: KDCS staff member Rae Mombourquette holding a chert projectile point, 2010.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



Above: KDFN student Winston Smarch points to the cut marks on a CMT, where the cambium was removed.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research

Right: Close-up of a CMT, showing knife marks on the bark.

John Meikle



Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs)

Collection of pine cambium (the layer below the bark, or inner bark) was an important springtime activity in the past. Lodgepole (jack) pine sap runs in the spring, when young trees grow rapidly and the bark becomes pliable. People stripped off the outer bark to harvest the cambium, which would have been a welcome sweet after a long winter of dried foods. Cambium had many uses, including flavouring food and medicinal purposes. Collecting cambium was a sustainable process; trees could be stripped without being significantly harmed or killed.

Bark stripping creates distinctive scars that are easy to identify. Archaeologists refer to these bark-stripped pines as Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs). The archaeology crew recorded 19 CMT sites in the M'Clintock area — and some of the sites contain more than 100 CMTs.

The age of the tree and the bark-stripping scar can be determined by counting tree rings in core samples. The oldest CMT recorded during the heritage inventory was bark-stripped in 1895 and the youngest was modified in 1946. The record that these trees leave behind lets us know that people harvested bark in the area for at least 100 years, and probably for far longer than that.



Chinese coin

A fascinating find during the archaeological investigations at the Michie Lake site indicates the extensive networks of trade that linked the Tagish Kwan to the wider circum-Pacific trade region in early historic times. A Chinese coin was found on the ground on the final day of archaeological fieldwork. It was exposed by the downdraft caused by the helicopter rotors; crew members had been coming and going for several days at the same location.

Archaeologists Todd Kristensen, James Mooney and Keary Walde carried out research into the origin of the coin. Its markings indicate that it was cast in the Yunnan Province of southern China during the

Qing Dynasty in the reign of Emperor Shi Zong (1723–1735). The inscription on the front of the brass coin is *Yong Zheng tong bao* and the back of the coin is inscribed with Manchu characters for the word “treasure” and an abbreviation for Yunnan Province. Distinctive marks indicate that the coin was cast at the Zhanyi mint between 1724 and 1727.

Chinese coins were common on the Northwest Coast, imported by the barrelful by American schooners trading directly with Canton. At the height of the North Pacific fur trade, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Chinese coins were often sewed onto clothing as decoration by the Tlingit, who were trading directly with the American ships on the Gulf of Alaska. It is quite likely that the coin was traded to a Tagish Kwan person at M'Clintock during one of the annual trade meetings and was subsequently lost.

Above: Crew member Todd Kristensen holding Chinese coin, 2011.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research





The historical period

The next period of change for the people living in the M'Clintock region was underway by the late 1700s. The intensification of the trade between the Coast Tlingit and the interior Yukon people brought Yukon into the global economy for the first time. With the Tlingit as intermediaries between the Russian and later Anglo-American traders in the Gulf of Alaska, Russian,

Tagish houses, spring 1897. These are a later style than the Tlingit style of house observed by Schwatka in 1883. Alaska State Library P34-068



European and Asian trade goods made their way inland. In turn, Yukon furs were transported to distant markets in Russia, China, England and America. M'Clintock was one of the established trading sites visited annually by the Tlingit traders who came over the Chilkoot Pass.

Direct contact with the newcomers came for M'Clintock people in the 1880s when the first prospectors crossed the Chilkoot and began to head north in search of gold.

The first documented exploration of the region was carried out by U.S. Army Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka during his



1883 survey on behalf of the United States military. During this expedition Schwatka made observations on local geography and people, with a notable mention of “*Tahko*” [Tagish] Lake, located just south of Marsh Lake, where he observed an “Indian house” on the bank and met the “*Tahk-heesh*” [Tagish people] at Marsh Lake.

Above: Cabin remains near Byng Creek.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research



The joint expeditions of William Ogilvie and George Dawson during their 1887–88 explorations for the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada provided the next glimpse of the M'Clintock area in the historical record.

During their expeditions, Dawson and Ogilvie both observed Tagish people at Marsh Lake. Like Schwatka, Ogilvie reported houses on Marsh Lake that

were similar in structure to those of coastal First Nations. Dawson noted several graves at the lower end of Marsh Lake, near the mouth of M'Clintock River. His description of the Tagish people and their traditional territory is the first written record of the Tagish Kwan.



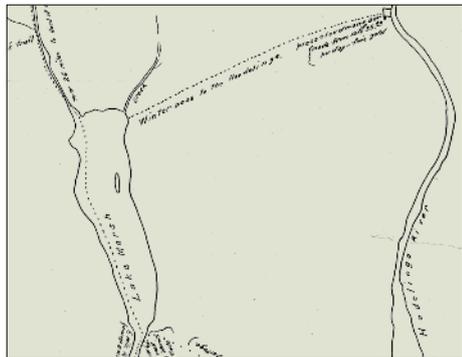
several large elevated log “fish caches” nearby.

From his description, these are already in the historic style, made with steel axes. After his inspection of M'Clintock River, St. Cyr reports stopping overnight “at Macintosh’s main camp near the mouth of the river.” It is interesting to note that as early as

In 1897, Arthur St. Cyr, on behalf of Canada’s Department of the Interior, travelled through Tagish Kwan territory in his survey of the Teslin River area. On Michie Creek, about half a mile above its confluence with the M'Clintock River, St. Cyr provides the first written record of the main Tagish Kwan fish camp and reported

1897, outsiders were beginning to make their homes in the M'Clintock region and becoming known to the Tagish Kwan.

Above: Grave houses, Marsh Lake, ca. 1960s. Yukon Archives, Richard Harrington fonds, 85/25, #237
Left: Map of the M'Clintock area, 1887 (cropped), drawn by William Ogilvie. “Hodalinga River” is the Teslin/Hootalinqua River. Yukon Archives, Map H-779





Early routes

Kwanlin Dün Elders have described the large network of trails and travel routes that M'Clintock people used in the past to travel to their fish camps and hunting and trapping areas, and to visit with their neighbours, attend potlatches, sell furs, and to pick up supplies. The Elders described the M'Clintock valley as a good route for getting through to the Teslin River and beyond, and from places on the Teslin River through to Marsh Lake, Tagish, Dog Salmon Slough, Winter Crossing, and from the Teslin, on to the Big Salmon River, Robinson and Whitehorse area.

In the more distant past, many of these same routes were also important trade corridors, connecting the Tagish Kwan directly or indirectly with sources of valued trade items. Obsidian from Hoodoo Mountain or Telegraph Creek, and copper nuggets from the upper White River came through trade with neighbouring groups. Eulachon oil, dentalia and abalone shell ornaments, and items of European manufacture were brought in by the Tlingit traders from the coast.

Trail along Michie Creek escarpment.

Ty Heffner, Matrix Research





Raft navigating Miles Canyon, ca. 1898.

Yukon Archives, Vancouver Public Library coll. #2174

Water routes

The importance of water routes for travel in the southern lakes area was noted by Frederick Schwatka in 1883: “[c]ommunication ... is effected by means of rafts and canoes” and “many of their journeys up the swift stream are performed by the natives on foot, carrying their limited necessities on their backs. Upon their return a small raft from two to six or eight logs is made and they float down the current in the streams, and pole and sail across the lakes.”

Schwatka’s report of 1883 includes a map showing a route going up M’Clintock River, with a portage across the divide to Open Creek and then down to Teslin River. This was the most direct route for prospectors to travel to the Livingstone

Creek gold fields. Klondike stampeders also used this route to bypass the dangerous obstacles presented by Miles Canyon, Whitehorse Rapids and Lake Laberge. Once over the portage travellers could float down the relatively calm Teslin River to Hootalinqua, where it flowed into the Yukon River, and then

continue down the Yukon River to Dawson City.

Right: This map shows a route up M’Clintock River, over Teslin River to the Big Salmon River as an “Indian Trail.” This trail likely corresponds to the route mentioned by Elders, and differs from Schwatka’s water-based route.

Yukon Archives, Map H-1761

Left: Tagish Kwan Elder Joe Suits with remains of an object, possibly a raft, found on the bank of the M’Clintock River, 2004. Yukon Archaeology Program





Above: Construction of the Marsh Lake dam in 1924.

Yukon Archives, E.J. Hamacher fonds, Margaret and Rolf Hougen coll., 2002/118 #857

Top: Gold rush boats between Marsh Lake and Whitehorse, 1898.

Alaska Historical Library, #ASL-P41-183

Late 19th and 20th centuries

The most significant changes for M'Clintock people came within the past 100 to 125 years. The Klondike Gold Rush brought tens of thousands of newcomers to the territory, and saw new settlements established in Tagish Kwan territory at Canyon City (at the upstream end of Miles Canyon) and at Whitehorse in 1897. At the mouth of the M'Clintock River, a Northwest Mounted Police post operated between 1898 and 1901.

With the completion of White Pass & Yukon Route railway in 1900, Whitehorse quickly became a bustling frontier town with a rail terminus, shipyards, banks, shops and a newspaper. Opportunities for wage labour increasingly drew Tagish Kwan away from their traditional way of life to work on the sternwheelers, or as woodcutters, surveyors or guides, or as railway workers.

New developments also had an impact on traditional activities. The construction of the Marsh Lake dam in 1924 reduced the once thriving muskrat populations in Lewes Marsh. More impacts came with the completion of the Alaska Highway in 1944, which brought a second wave of newcomers to the area and accelerated residential and industrial development in Tagish Kwan territory.



Mary Laberge and Big Salmon Pat at Winter Crossing (Hootalinqua), circa 1915. Big Salmon Pat worked on the sternwheelers.

Yukon Archives, Violet Storer fonds, 82/386 #1



Many of the Tagish Kwan traditional lands were too close to town or residences to continue to be used for hunting. Some areas became the sites of recreational properties, and new fences and other barriers discouraged traditional hunter-gatherer activities. Construction of the Whitehorse dam in 1958 saw the decline of the traditional salmon fishery at M'Clintock, and Tagish Kwan people increasingly dispersed to communities such as Whitehorse, Carcross and Tagish.

The M'Clintock area, however, remains the heart of the original Tagish Kwan territory and continues to be a place where traditional pursuits can be practised and passed on to the next generation. Together with the stories and traditional knowledge from the Elders, the physical traces left on the landscape — the cabins and ancient camp sites — tell the story

George Dawson, holding a bow, with John Joe at Marsh Lake, ca. 1980.

Joe Family Collection



of where people came from and how they lived long ago. For the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the M'Clintock remains one of their important places to be preserved for future generations.

Right: House and cache of John and Julia Joe, Marsh Lake, ca. 1950.

Joe Family Collection

Right, above: Irene Smith scraping a hide, ca. 1998; Travis Smith in the background.

Annie Smith, Elijah Smith Elementary School Collection





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Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council staff and students, along with Yukon Government and Matrix Research archaeologists, preparing for a day of helicopter survey in the M'Clintock region.

Government of Yukon

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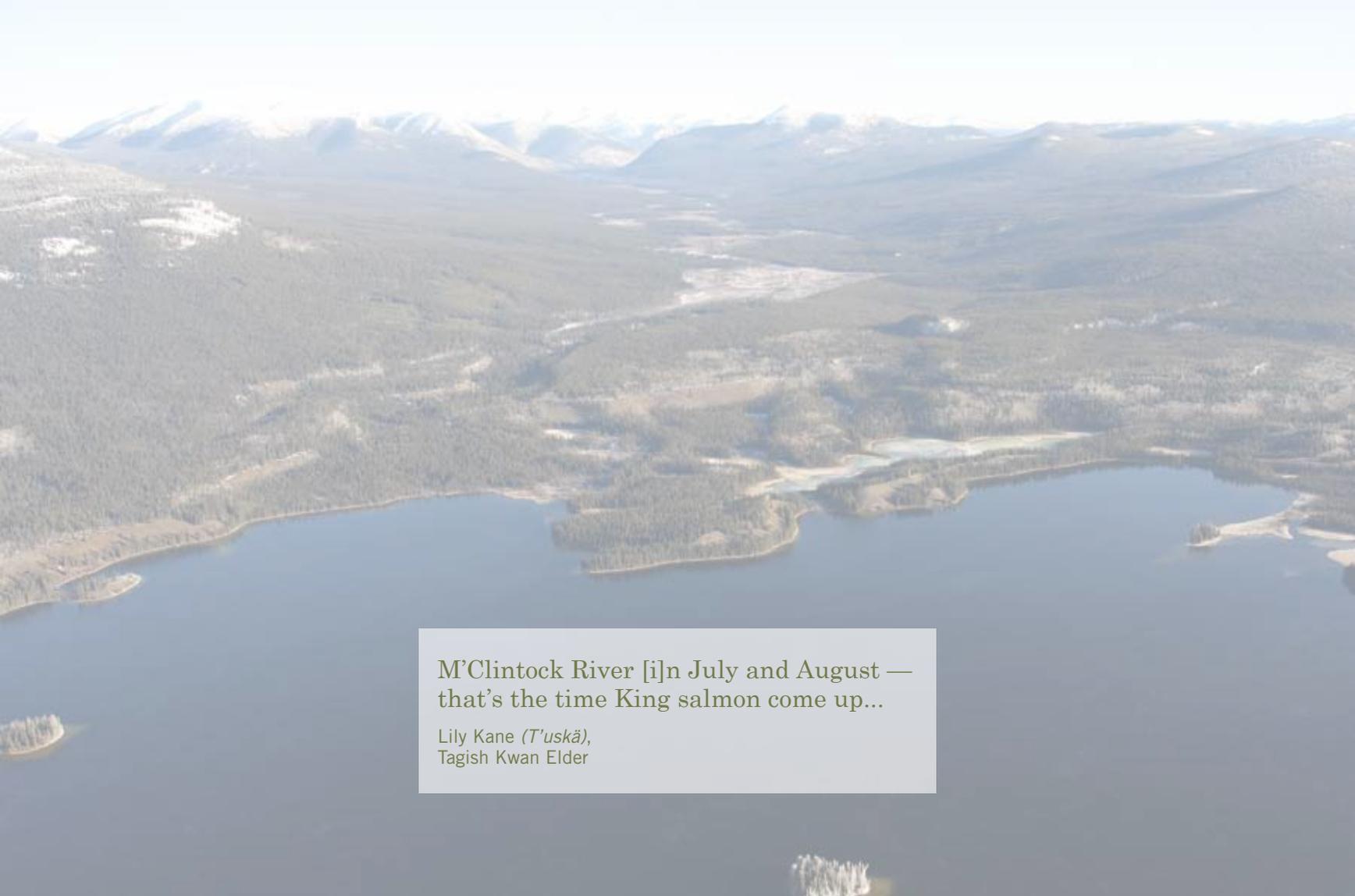
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M'Clintock River [i]n July and August —
that's the time King salmon come up...

Lily Kane (*T'uskā*),
Tagish Kwan Elder

My dad tell me lots of stories when I
was growing up, and he talks about
M'Clintock... This is a Tagish Kwan
area here. That's a big nation.

Louie Smith (*Injeátà*), Tagish Kwan Elder