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Field Collection of Names in Canada, 2002 – 2007

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FIELD COLLECTION OF NAMES IN CANADA, 2002 - 2007

The following indicates some of the field work undertaken to collect geographical names in various areas of Canada between 2002 and 2007.

Alberta

In 2003, a long-term goal was reached due to the work of one intrepid summer student. This student completed the research on the available field notes and diaries of the Dominion Lands Surveyors held at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. From the page-by-page perusal of nearly 7000 notebooks and a few hundred diaries dating from the 1870s to the 1950s, some of the earliest recorded evidence of Alberta's place names was found and added to the Alberta Geographical Names Database (AGNDB). Many features that had been annotated as being in use since 1958 could now be dated from the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Approximately 5% of the names were "new" in that they had never been noted before beyond the notebooks themselves. By checking the files of the Dominion Land Grants (Homestead) files, where features had been named after early settlers, this student was able to establish the earliest possible dates for feature names from the time the homesteaders applied for their land. This research was able to supply some origin data as well, especially in the surveyors' explanatory notes and cross-referencing with crew lists noted in the field notes. Over 150 new records were added from field research completed in the 1980s.

Field work and secondary research was undertaken for the June 2006 board meeting of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation. Significant naming submissions included naming a peak after former lieutenant-governor of Alberta, Grant MacEwan, and the changing of the names Mount David, David Creek, and David Lake to Mount David Thompson, David Thompson Creek, and David Thompson Lake. Mr. Andy Korsos, a historical cartographer working on a project to commemorate the achievements of the explorer David Thompson, gave a presentation to the GNBC at its 2005 meeting, and Parks Canada was able to get the approval in principle from Banff national park authorities. The name changes for the features named for David Thompson ensures that those who see the name on maps, in documents, and on local signs and markers will know more precisely for whom the features are named.

Yukon

Gary Njootli, an Aboriginal toponymist, was hired in March 2003. One of the projects in which he is involved is a large oral history project underway in the Old Crow area of the territory, which has spanned a number of years. Elders are transported to the places where they were raised, and researchers collect the stories and names that they remember. Spelling and other language issues still require clarification.

Northwest Territories

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, with offices in Tsiigehtchic, Inuvik, and Yellowknife, has maintained an ambitious program to record and document traditional Gwich'in toponyms. They are working toward submitting a large number of names for official status. The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute also released a website (<http://www.gwichin.ca>) in 2004 exploring Gwich'in culture, in Gwich'in, English, and French. A major feature of the site focuses on traditional place names in the Mackenzie, Peel, and Arctic Red River drainages, including talking maps giving pronunciations of the traditional names.

In 2004, the Sambaa K'e Dene Band, of Trout Lake, NWT, submitted a proposal to the NWT Cultural Places Program to conduct an inventory of significant cultural places within the Sambaa K'e Dene Band traditional use area. Completed in 2005, the inventory involved extensive interviews with Elders and resulted in the documentation and mapping of over 100 Slavey-language place names. A total of nineteen archaeological sites were visited during the second phase of the project, including named sacred sites, burials, historic cabins and camps, traditional trails, and pre-contact sites. The Sambaa K'e cultural landscape represents generations of land use by the Sambaa K'e Got'ine (Trout Lake People). The routes and places that form the cultural landscape are recorded not only in the names, but also in the material evidence found in the archaeological record. Toponymy and oral narratives associated with routes and places record ancient land use practices and express the Slavey cultural understanding of the landscape. The named places themselves serve as memory aids for remembering the cultural significance of places.

Nunavut

In February 2005, the Government of Nunavut and the Inuit Heritage Trust (IHT) held a three-day workshop in Ottawa. Participants at the meeting provided information on their learning experiences while doing toponymic research and learned about place naming in Canada and internationally.

Sessions included presentations on a number of research projects underway at the time in Nunavut and with making maps during field work projects, and after completing place name studies. A presentation was also made on the software being developed at the time by the Atlas of Canada for online quality control of delineations collected for 1:1 million scale base maps. Other topics included the requirements for submitting names to the Nunavut Geographic Names Committee for approval, the best scale of maps for use in field studies in Nunavut, and mapping software available to field researchers.

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