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REPORT ON PROGRESS TOWARD THE STANDARDIZATION OF
TRADITIONALLY USED NATIVE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN
CANADA'S NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

submitted by Randolph Freeman (canada)

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**REPORT ON PROGRESS TOWARD THE STANDARDIZATION OF
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In 1984 the Government of the Northwest Territories assumed the responsibility for geographical names and naming within the most northerly one third (3.4 million square kilometres) of Canada. The government of the Northwest Territories recognizes nine languages as official (English, French, Inuktitut, North Slavey, South Slavey, Dogrib, Chipewyan, Kutchin, and Cree). The majority of residents of the Northwest Territories are either Amerindian (Dene) or Inuit (Eskimo). This government's commitment to the recognition and preservation of traditional native languages has been extended to include traditionally used names for geographical features and populated places in the north. Current government policy dictates that traditional names be given president over all others. This policy has been interpreted to include the replacement, by older traditional native names, of names given since the 1500s by European explorers to northern features . Examples of some names that may change in the near future include **Mackenzie River** (named in 1821 for Sir Alexander Mackenzie), **Victoria Island** (named for Her Majesty Queen Victoria), and **Back River** (named in 1826 for Admiral Sir George Back).

Legislation

Legislation is currently being drafted that will solidify the rights of the Dene and Inuit to name geographical features. The proposed legislation provides for the creation of a public board that will advise this government on the approval or rejection of names for geographical features and populated places, the designation of historic sites and buildings, and the protection of archaeological sites.

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Orthography

Current operating procedure within the Toponymy Program calls for the confirmation of the correct spelling for each native name by the Language Bureau of the Department of Culture and Communications. Standardized writing forms either have been, or soon will be, established for all native languages in the Northwest Territories. The use of 'non-standard' diacritical marks are common in the official written forms of the Dene languages while Inuktitut is written in both Roman characters and in syllabics. Examples of how some of these names would be written are ᑭᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ Kᑦᑎᑦ , the traditional South Slavey name for the community of Fort Simpson and ᑕᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ , the traditional name for the community of Pond Inlet.

Field Studies

A number of cooperative toponymic field studies will be implemented over the next two years between cultural organizations in the Northwest Territories and the Toponymy Program. In June of this year the Inuit Cultural Institute of Eskimo Point ("Arviat" as of June 1, 1989), Dr. Ludgar Muller-Wille of McGill University in Montreal, and Dr. Robert Rundstrom of George Mason University in Fairfax Virginia will begin a three year field study of the traditional Inuit names for geographical features in the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories. The Dene Cultural Institute, based in Yellowknife, is planning a field study of the traditional native names of geographical features in the western sub-arctic. This project will likely begin in 1990.

Topo-Kits

Another means of gathering information in the field that has proven to be successful has been the distribution of what are called 'Topo-Kits'. These kits are loaned to groups or individuals who wish to volunteer their time to gather toponymic data. The kits contain maps, forms, tape recorder and tapes, camera and film, and a comprehensive instruction booklet.

Financial Contribution Program

The Government of the Northwest Territories' Department of Culture and Communications has recently implemented a program whereby community groups wishing to record oral traditions, including traditionally used geographical names, can apply for funding to

offset the cost of salaries and expenses. Up to ten projects per year will be funded under this program.

Toponymic Training

An pilot toponymic training project was conducted over the past year by the Northern Heritage Society of Yellowknife in conjunction with the Toponymy Program. The purpose of the training project was (1) to train individuals in the intricacies of gathering toponymic data in the field, and (2) to determine if training projects are an effective means for gathering toponymic data.

Two Inuks, one from Paulatuk in the western arctic and the other from Igloodik in the eastern arctic, participated in six months of comprehensive training in both oral tradition and toponymic research methodology prior to conducting six months of field research in their respective home communities. The project included training in oral tradition research because the transmission of knowledge from one native generation to the next was, until quite recently, done strictly on an oral basis.

Automation

It is anticipated that the above mentioned field studies will generate a total of 50,000 new name and name change requests over the next three years. Every possible effort will be made to record, and standardize, the estimated 100,000 to 120,000 traditionally used geographical names in the Northwest Territories by the year 1996.

Current records on 15,000 official geographical names in the Northwest Territories have not as yet been automated. Answering requests for information on these names is therefore a time consuming process. The Toponymy Program has recently purchased, from Alberta Friends of Geographical Names Society, a modified Fourth Dimension data base program. This toponymic data base program will be run on a Macintosh Plus with an 80 megabyte external hard drive. Both official and unofficial names records will be stored in this data base.

Conclusion

The move to officially recognize the 100,000 to 120,000 traditionally used names for geographical features and populated places in Canada's Northwest Territories is well underway. Many of these traditional names have been used by the indigenous people of

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the north for hundreds of years while evidence exists that some of these names have been in use for thousands of years. The Inuit and Dene of the north have made a great deal of progress towards the preservation of their traditional languages and culture and are now beginning to concentrate their efforts on the preservation of traditional native names for geographical features and populated places. In the future northern Canadian maps will give a more realistic picture of the cultural reality of the Northwest Territories.